

# Design for All



*Africa Origin Designer Year*

*Guest Editor: Dr. Samuel mwituria Maina  
University of Nariobi*

**January 2021 Volume 16 Number 1**

**Table of Contents**

**Guest Editor..... 2**

**Editorial..... 4**

**STRUCTURE OF DESIGN FIRMS WITHIN NAIROBI: CASE STUDY OF A+ PLUS  
INTERIORS, AVOCADO CREATIVE STUDIOS AND DALBERG DESIGN..... 14**

**TRANSITIONAL ITINERARY OF VERNACULAR BASKETRY IN EAST AFRICA  
.....41**

**RELATIVITY OF INDIGENOUS EAST AFRICAN DESIGN CHAMPIONS: JACQUE  
NJERI, MARC VAN RAMPELBERG AND WAMBUI KAMIRU COLLYMORE...75**

**HAIR THEN, HAIR NOW: AFRICAN STYLING BECOMING LEISURE FOR ALL  
.....112**

**CONTEXTUALIZING CULTURAL SCULPTURE INTO PUBLIC SPACES FOR ALL  
.....146**

## Guest Editor



***Dr Samuel mwituria Maina is a product designer with a passion for ethical design. Spanning 29 years now, Maina’s design career has been a convoluted one. This has been occasioned by the changes in policies governing educational and industry management in Kenya. It has ranged from production of leather goods, weaving fabrics and spinning yarns to woodwork and interior design. With a background in textile technology, Dr Maina is a senior lecturer of industrial design at the School of the Arts and Design, College of Architecture and Engineering of The University of Nairobi, Kenya. Apart from involvement in management duties, Maina has lectured over time in Ergonomics and Anthropometry, exhibition and display, analysis of history of design and research methods. He also teaches and serves as external examiner in other institutions and universities in Kenya including but not limited to Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, the Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi Institute of Technology and Kenya Medical Training College among others.***

***He has contributed more than 40 articles in academic journals on eco-design, eco-ethics, and construction and sustainability. Apart from this volume, Dr. Maina has also authored course books on ergonomics, research methods, Design materials and processes and communication skills. Among other interests, Maina has researched on glass as a design material, recycling of solid waste and human factors for interior design. He has also been involved in several consultancies and exhibitions individually and in collaborations.***

# Editorial

## Confronting a process imposed on craftspeople oblivious of the academic design process

When young designers plunge into professional practice for the first time, they find themselves in a wandering trajectory. Bubbling with enthusiasm borne of freshness, dare and energy, they are soon confronted with a stark reality. Academic design is not real design. I have been shouting "the design process" for a long 29 years now, yet I know out there it is not reality. Why do I do so?. If I relent in the studio, I noticed, students use a mismatch of process that end up confusing as in the process of learning they need to feed of each other.

The concept of design for all, thanks to this journal is a call to an awakening of this reality. To me, it subtly whispers "*stop being selfish, you are not the consumer*". The period of mismatch, which I allow is to let them to experience first hand how designers can create chaos in the absence of a unified process and design language. When i finally call them to order, I emphatically state that the design process must be followed. And this, after immersion, offers a relieve to all as they realise comparative trends which are different at a personal level. Harmony in a distinct design language is achieved.

Coming from a background of eco-ethics in design which is my raring call to designers, my mind is rarely settled on a clear path for the design process, which state I also find weird. In my PhD, the thesis advanced is the current local and global environmental ethics issue in product development policies within the framework of the ever

growing customer demands. The study explored the current urgent need for appropriate product design structures, practical tools and eco-awareness among stakeholders in the product design process and throughout the entire product life cycle. I am still in the quest for the ideal.

The reality in professional practice is however totally different. I learnt this myself when, as a fresh graduate of product design started by designing leather bags for sale. Alone in the field of non-designers, I finally discovered the futility of the design process imposed on craftspeople with limited knowledge of the academic process. Prior to my bag endeavour, I had taken part in a collaborative project with *teranuova*, an Italian NGO specialising in improving informal sector production processes.

In this collaboration, we were to work on projects with small informal workshops in the slums. They (the artisans) had never been challenged about quality. Their clients were happy they agreed. With such closed mindsets, it took a strong heart and cajoling to reopen their faculties. This not without subtle conflict and resistance. To open up, it became a reality that one has to demonstrate the alternative to gain their confidence and acceptance as someone with a higher insight to be listened to.

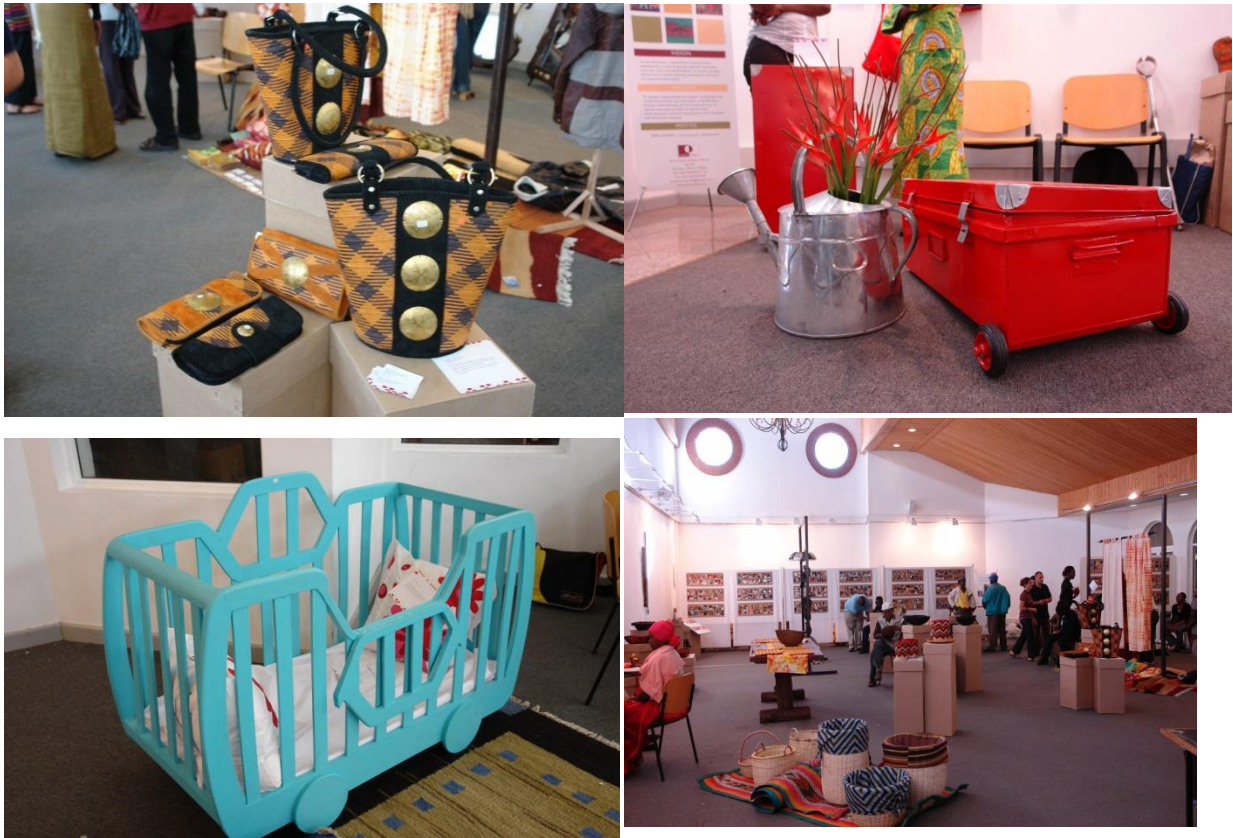
Various stakeholders had come together to conceptualize, analyze and commercialize new products. Through the effort of *Terra Nuova* (the facilitating agency), *School of the Arts and Design (StAD)* (providing designers), *Aid to Artisans and Institute for the Development of Local Industry (IDIL)*, *Undugu Kenya* and artisans in both Kenya and Mozambique, a number of new products were

**developed. The artisan's works in difficult circumstances in many parts of Africa such as Mozambique and Kenya.**

**Most artisans provide technical and entrepreneurial inputs in the enterprises and are therefore invariably referred to as artisans and entrepreneurs. They support their families from proceeds of the enterprise. From the interaction, it became apparent that, often, they do not pay attention to detail and not enough attention to product quality. Customers buy from the artisans because their prices are fair. The entrepreneurs understand the customer tastes in terms of colour and form, and the entrepreneurs provide easy payment terms and are available or easily accessible to them. Their profitability and growth projections however remained stunted. Every artisan was suffering and desperation weighed heavily on them and their dependents.**

**Eventually, after several small and gradual alterations of their designs, the results looked likeable and better. Finally we managed to convince them that robustness and differentiation was key to better product and therefore a bigger market share. The following are some of the resultant products from the interaction of our attempt at design for all.**





**Fast forward, my bag business was suffering the same ailments the artisans encountered for the following reasons:**

***1 They (artisans) didn't believe in design drawing prior to production***

***2 They had a phobia for technical drawings***

***3 They had limited knowledge of reading and interpreting drawings***

***4 They found this step as a waste of valuable time***

***5 They were used to copying an already existing product which they degraded accordingly***



***6 They feared a cute, finely finished product will put of clients with limited cash despite the fact that the sale of my products was none of their business.***

**To circumvent this, I made paper prototypes and avoided presenting to them the design drawings. So their business was to just trace the templates and stitch them up along the edges. Convincing them to then go on and scrutinize each of them for quality control seemed repetitive and was resisted. I stood my ground. I wouldn't pay for shoddy work. Amid the push and shove, I started to reevaluate the design process as is taught in University. It occurred to me that the academic process is far apart from the reality in practice.**

**I wish to thank the chairman and editor, Professor Sunil Bhatia for giving me this opportunity as guest editor of the esteemed journal to tell this story to sundry and all in the design profession about my life experiences in practice. I don't seek to be believed but to elicit debate on this issue lest I am the lone voice in this corner of Africa. I also don't trust myself.**

**Today, while I insist on the design process in the formative years of the course, I gradually relent towards the final year of study. It has happened that in the process of instilling design dogma in our students, accidentally we reproduce ourselves in them. We deny them, albeit unknowingly, the opportunity to develop their own personal styles. They end up being expenders of their lecturer's creed. So what to do if you are the lecturer to avoid these?**

**The last theory unit in the design course at the school of the arts and design before graduation is called Application of design theory. I enjoy handling this unit immensely. This is because I use it to deconstruct their mindsets. It is liberation time. My experience in**

**the field taught me that contrary to academic teaching, the design process is not as straightforward as following cooking recipes. Design rules often describe goals rather than actions. They are purposefully very general to make them broadly applicable, but that means that their exact meaning and their applicability to specific design situations is open to interpretation. Complicating matters further, more than one rule will often seem applicable to a given design situation. In such cases, the applicable design rules often conflict, i.e., they suggest different designs. This requires designers to determine which competing design rule in the process is more applicable to the given situation and should take precedence. Design problems—even without competing design guidelines—often have multiple conflicting goals and ends.**

**Design in the arena of culture and social economic setting presents a mismatch, toing and froing process that is debilitating to a fresh graduates mind. They find themselves surrounded by myriad processes born of culture, shortcuts, wickedness, corruption and innuendo devoid of any discernible process. It therefore opens the young mind to reevaluate themselves to survive in the field.**

**It is in this dire situation that I use the last unit at college to prepare the students for. It is not evil to break the rules if one finds the situation unyielding. Much better, start with the point of consensus with the artisans wherever it falls in the academic process. You become like the proverbial law breaker who always used to be caught due to ignorance of the law. Eventually he realized he had to study the law to break it effectively. He didn't have to leave his profession, breaking the law. He became a law bender instead with minimal consequences. A good trade off eh?**

**The bombshell! Break the regulations if you have to, Period. Ignore me and the other lecturers! They are also in the process of discovering the ideal process for design for all. You were looking for grades in the studio. From now on, you will be looking for money. This will determine what you become in future. Some will say that you sold your soul, but there is no soul without a human body. And probably vice versa. Nurture your profession to maintain a soul that allows you to maneuver in a competitive profession with shifting dispensations.**

**Of course the foregoing is shocking to students, especially knowing how strict you have been about the design process. You look and sound suspicious. They leave with lots of doubt. The ones I have met after some years in the field however end up attesting to their naivety as fresh graduates and how my final words have rung in their minds. Avoid the dogma! Be yourself! Change if you must! I invite debate on these.**



***Mike Kemboi Chesaro***

***Mike Kemboi Chesaro is a passionate interior designer who has experience in both teaching and practicing fields of interior design. He is interested in waste minimisation and sustainability in the same field. Furthermore, he is interested in how waste minimisation strategies can be used by interior designers in their design process to minimize waste throughout the lifecycle of their projects. He seeks to work with academicians, students and interior design practitioners.***



***Daniel Munyaga***

***Daniel Munyaga is designer who has a passion for creativity, innovation and empathy. He is interested in enhancing communication using his artistic and design skills. He is experienced in visually enhancing communication for a wide range of audiences so that it is more comprehensive, attractive and impactful especially in low literacy settings. He is also an experienced fine artist known for his peaceful nature paintings that enhance interior spaces.***



**Arisi Mounde**

***Arisi Mounde is a graphic designer working in Nairobi. He holds a masters degree in design. His interests range from health, poverty eradication to education. His methods rely upon HCD to tackle complex challenges. With a highly collaborative approach, Arisi seeks to work with experts in engineering, health, education and agriculture infusing design for social change.***



University of Nairobi

**STRUCTURE OF DESIGN FIRMS WITHIN NAIROBI:  
CASE STUDY OF A+ PLUS INTERIORS, AVOCADO  
CREATIVE STUDIOS AND DALBERG DESIGN**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Design is evolving and today there is as much emphasis on the processes as there is on the product. **Problem:** A great deal of research on design projects has been looked at, but very little has been conducted on how “design firms” actually function in Kenya. Every design firm has a unique company structure and the way they operate. This varies from company to company. For instance, the company structure of an interior design firm is different from graphic design firm while some components like having designers in similar in both companies.

**Objective:** This paper looked at design practice in Nairobi's design firms.

**Design:** It used a case study method through observations, desktop research, literature review and interviews.

**Setting/Scope:** Three Design firms which included A+ plus Interiors, Avocado Creative Studio and Dalberg Design in Nairobi.



**Subjects/Respondents:** Creative directors, managers, designers, accountants and managers.

**Results:** This study sought to understand and highlight the company structure of three design firms stated. The results points to a generic structure with minimal divergence of systems. **Conclusion:** Every design firm has its own special company structure. However, regardless of what type of company structure is used in a firm, the structure should be clearly defined. The goal should be to build the fewest management level and have the shortest chain of command, the unit staff needs to be able to see where their tasks fit into common tasks of the organization, and the organization structure should enhance and not impede communication

**Key Words:** *Interior Design, Company Structure, Design Practice, Graphic Design, Participatory design, multidisciplinary*

## **Introduction**

A design practice is a firm; small or big that brings together designers with diverse capabilities to provide creative solutions to common social and industrial needs.

A+ plus interiors is a private interior design company located along Mombasa road at vision plaza, Nairobi. According to the director and founder, Mr. Charles Kyeti, the company was started back in 2011 when the director was still in third year at the University of Nairobi. It was called Skiza interiors and it had two partners. Although the company was at its beginning stage, they had several jobs including painting Christmas deco's, graphic design and landscaping jobs. The

founders at that time did not have much knowledge about the industry and where they could begin when they were given a project. Between 2012 and 2013, Mr. Kyeti joined Design forty an interior design company within Nairobi. This is where he had experience on how to market, meeting new clients and negotiating with clients. A+ plus company was officially launched in 2015 where Kyeti was a sole proprietor acting as the director as well as the marketer or the company.

Avocado Creative Studio is a design studio, located in Karengata Business Park, Karen, Kenya. It is a creative firm that comprises of a permanent staff of five: two directors, one account manager and two graphic designers. Avocado was started in 2013, by two partners; Katya Kuzi (Managing Director and Co-founder) and Mikhail Kuzi (Creative Director) out of Mikhail's bedroom. Started as a freelance firm, there initial work was events, and printing. The firm grew from its humble beginnings to a studio that boasts the international clientele as their major source of revenue.

Dalberg design is a multidisciplinary design firm that works with underserved communities all over the world to come up with solutions aligned to their needs. They work in a wide range of different fields including but not limited to; health, agriculture and food security, humanitarian assistance, education and employment and cities and urban development. They have a multidisciplinary team that has designers, behavioral scientists, product designers and illustrators among others. They also offer a variety of solutions; design labs, product and business prototypes, service and program design and innovation strategy and capacity building.

## **THEORY**

### **CASE STUDY 1: A+ PLUS INTERIORS**

#### **A+ Company structure**

The company is a registered company under the Laws of Kenya under the Act of businesses and companies. The company is comprised of the following company structure-:

#### **The director**

Mr. Kyeti is the CEO of A+ interiors. He also holds the position of the main marketer of the company. As chief executive officer (CEO), he has numerous roles to play including being the highest-ranking executive in the company. His primary responsibilities include making major corporate decisions, managing the overall operations and resources of a company. Furthermore, he acts as the main point of communication between all the other members of the company. He is also the public face of the company. Other responsibilities held by the CEO in A+ interiors is such to hire and to fire the staff, He also comes up with strategies to grow the company.

#### **Accountant**

The company has one permanently hired accountant. The accountant has the following primary roles including performing financial functions related to the collection, accuracy, recording, analysis and presentation of the company's financial operations, financial data collection and entry as well as report generation. The accountant also pays the salary of the staff and also filing the company tax returns. Furthermore he also deal with third parties, such as vendors, customers and financial institutions.

## **Auditor**

The auditor is not a permanent employee at A+ plus interiors. They come three times annually for the auditing purposes. They work closely with the accountant and they report to the director. The main objectives of the audit of financial statements by the independent auditor is the expression of an opinion on the fairness with which they present, in all material respects, financial position, results of operations, and the company's cash flow in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles. The auditor's report is the medium through which he expresses his opinion or, if circumstances require, disclaims an opinion. In either case, he states whether his audit has been made in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. These standards require him to state whether, in his opinion, the financial statements are presented in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles and to identify those circumstances in which such principles have not been consistently observed in the preparation of the financial statements of the current period in relation to those of the preceding period.

## **Project manager**

A+ plus interiors has one project manager. The Project manager coordinates and oversees the interior design construction part. He manages projects from conception through construction to completion. These project manager develop construction plans, assist in evaluating and selecting the craftsmen (carpenters, plumber, electricians etc.) and also coordinate the work of the project and designs teams, as well as the numerous contractors who contribute to facilities projects.

## **Interior designers**

**A+ interiors has three permanent interior designers. They have the following roles as members of the company: Interior designers typically do the following:**

- 1. Determine the client's goals and requirements for the project***
- 2. Consider how the space will be used and how people will move through the space***
- 3. Sketch preliminary design plans, including electrical and partition layouts***
- 4. Specify materials and furnishings, such as lighting, furniture, wall finishes, flooring, and plumbing fixtures***
- 5. Create a timeline for the interior design project and estimate project costs***
- 6. Place orders for materials and oversee the installation of the design elements(at times)***
- 7. Visit the site after the project is complete, to ensure that the client is satisfied***

**The Interior designers work closely with project managers and construction laborers to determine how interior spaces will function, look, and be furnished. They read blueprints and must be aware of building codes and inspection regulations. Although the preliminary sketches are freehand, the final projects and presentation use computer-aided design (CAD) software for the majority of their drawings. Throughout the design process, interior designers often use building information modeling (BIM) software to create three-dimensional visualizations that include construction elements such as walls or roofs. Some of the drawings they produce include interior designers produce 3D design renders, plans, and drawings for construction and installation. These may include construction and**

demolition plans, electrical layouts, and plans needed for building permits. They also work closely with the interns.

## **Social media marketers**

The social media marketer plays a vital role of marketing. He is one of the permanent employees of A+ plus interiors. He works closely with the director in the marketing of the company. The social media marketer combines marketing and social media management skills to enhance company social media presences, including interacting with customers, promoting brand-focused interactive and engaging content, and expanding opportunities for revenue.

**Social Media Marketer Duties include:**

- 1. Creates marketing and social media campaigns and strategies, including budget planning, content ideation, and implementation schedules*
- 2. Collects customer data and analyses interactions and visits, plus uses this information to create comprehensive reports and improve future marketing strategies and campaigns*
- 3. Reports progress to the director who also works as the senior marketing personnel*
- 4. Grows and expands company social media presence into new social media platforms, plus increases presence on existing platforms including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram*
- 5. Researches and monitors activity of company competitors*
- 6. Creates and distributes engaging written or graphic content in the form of e-newsletters, web page and blog content, or social media messages*

## **Interns**

The interns at A+ plus interiors are not permanent. They stay for a period of 3 to 6 months. They work closely with the interior designers in order to learn the roles of interior designers. In an interior design internship job responsibilities may include: assisting in client presentations, resource updating, assisting designers, and participating in brainstorming of the design teams. They report to the Director.

## **Craftsmen / Artisans**

The craftsmen at A+ plus interiors are normally employed on contract basis. They include the team of carpenters, plumbers, electricians etc. They work almost entirely by hand to create beautifully unique pieces. From artwork and ceramics to doors and coffee tables, craftsmanship is displayed in any piece of work that is passionate and diverse. The key to choosing the right furnishings is selecting items which have been loved from conception all the way to execution and delivery. The care and attention are only half the story – it's also about creativity and individuality. They work closely with the project manager in the built part of interior design.

## **Client**

At A+ interiors the client is the heart of the company. Without the client the company would not be existing. All the members of the company from the director to the craftsmen work hand in hand in order to meet the clients need. The clients work closely with the director and the project manager. The director report to the client.



## Company structure of A+ plus Interiors

Summary A+ plus interior design company, in its quest to fulfill the

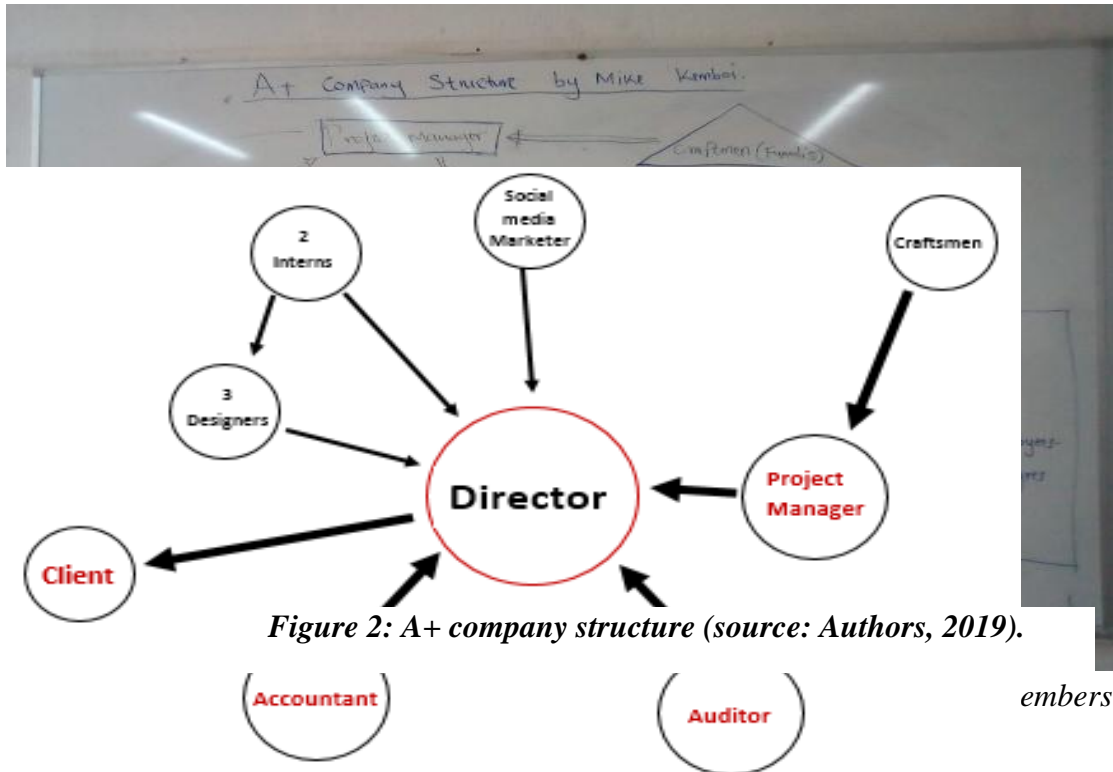




Figure 2: A+ company structure (source: Authors, 2019).

embers

companies vision of becoming a global interior design brand, combine the effort of the director, accountant, auditor, project manager, interior designers, interns, social media marketer and craftsmen to meet their client's needs. The client is the heart of this company as without them they cannot be existing. The author has successful brought an illustration of A+ interiors company structure by showing the relationship between every member of the company.

<b>KEY TO THE DIAGRAM</b>	
	Weak Relationship
	Strong relationship / Arrow points the person reported to

## **CASE STUDY 2: AVOCADO CREATIVE STUDIO**

### **General Layout of a Graphic Design Firm: Case Study of Avocado Creative Studio**

#### **Start Up Financing and Sustainability**

Avocado is a partnership that was fully financed by the business partners. The initial capital was obtained from savings of the partners. They opted to start small and plough back the company's capital for growth. After three years in business, the partners acquired a commercial loan to finance the company's expansion. They brought in additional staff starting with an account manager and a couple of graphic designers.

#### **Business Structure**

The Business Director also doubles as the managing director of the company. She runs the business side of the firm while the creative director handles the creative side of the business.

#### **Managing Director**

The managing director (MD) manages revenue, expenses and external financing to maintain the consistent growth of the business. She monitors the cash flow to keep the firm in business.

**It is the responsibility of the MD to regularly refine the company's product vision and often has frequent interactions with the clients. She calls for monthly meetings with the team to review and reinforce Avocado's vision. As a creative firm team building is at the core of the practice. From time to time she organises company trips and teambuilding activities**

**Avocado's managing director also doubles as the marketing and sales lead, and will be often tasked to bring in new business to the firm.**

**She also handles the salaries and promotions of the team. At Avocado, it's the role of the MD to prepare the payroll and submit the taxes and remittances on behalf of the employees. However, there are plans to bring in an HR manager as the company grows.**

**The managing director, in consultation with creative manager is also in charge of the recruitment and firing of the employees.**

### **Creative Director**

**At Avocado, the creative director conceives and implements concepts, guidelines and strategies in various creative projects and oversees them to completion.**

**He also collaborates with account executives to obtain knowledge of the clients' requirements and leads the brainstorming/creative sessions to generate ideas.**

**The creative director doubles as the copywriter, writing and designing unique and well-crafted copy that meet clients' needs as well as the firm's own. He revises content and presentations, approve/reject ideas, provide feedback to the team.**

**He is in charge of internal skills growth: trains and guides the subordinates into accomplished professionals. It's his role to monitor results of team efforts and propose actions for the future.**

### **Account Manager**

**The account Manager at Avocado, handles communication between the client and the agency. She organizes and attends client meetings, creates a creative brief from the client that is then passed over to the creative.**

**The account manager fills out job requests and organizes meetings with the creative, production and media team depending on the scope of the project. She also prepares weekly client status reports.**

**The AM is tasked to build and maintain strong, long-lasting client relationships, overseeing client account management. That includes negotiating contracts and agreements to maximize profit.**

**She also collaborates with sales team to identify and grow opportunities with new and existing clients. She works with the marketing manager to bring in new business.**

### **Graphic Designers**

**Avocado has two graphic designers, one senior designer and a junior designer. The senior graphic designer also doubles as the agency's web and UX/UI designer.**

**The designers develop design briefs that suit the client's purpose, thinking creatively to produce new ideas and concepts and developing interactive design using innovation.**

## Outsourcing

Avocado outsources different professionals, from time to time when need arises. Large projects often require additional personnel; Copywriters, Bloggers, User experience & Interface (UX/UI) designers, Web designers, Media buyers, Brand and Digital strategists, illustrators, Project managers and Front and backend programmers.

The firm also outsources consultants from different fields, Business development, Design strategy, Psychologists and even Anthropologists as per project demands

### AVOCADO DESIGN PROCESS Design Process



### Brief (Discovery)



Figure 3: Avocado design process (Source: Author, 2019)

The agency receives a client brief from a potential client. The agency analyses if the job is right for them. This is done through a thorough background check. The brief is discussed to gauge the strengths, weakness, Opportunities and Risks for the project. If the project deliverables are achievable in the stipulated deadlines the Account manager accepts the job and organizes for a client meeting to discuss the project in detail. If the project or the client does not meet the threshold or is outside Avocado's competencies, the agency

**declines the project and recommends another firm that can handle the project.**

**A typical client brief spells out the challenges and limitations to the project, the brand strategy, the deadlines and the budget for the project. This will often guide the design process.**

### **Research (Analysis)**

**After locking down the client brief, the designers at avocado conduct an in-depth research on the particular project, the target audience, the competition, the demographics to gain knowledge on the particular field and the general network.**

### **Brainstorming & Ideation (Creative Brand Refresh)**

**The creative then come up with random ideas that can solve the client problem. They then brainstorm and sieve out those that are the least applicable and pick the best three that are sketched and proceed to development stage.**

### **Development (Brand Application)**

**The designer will actualize the designs, through the use of Adobe software (Adobe illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop or any appropriate software). The designer generates finished designs that are then sent to the client for selection and approval.**

### **Market Plan & Evaluation (Feedback)**

**The proposed designs are then sent to the client. Client feedback is then incorporated to come up with the final designs for publishing (Digital or printing). In some cases, the product is taken to the market for initial testing before the final product is created. For instance, the Cancer booklet was tested at KNH and the results were incorporated into the final booklet and charts.**

## Business Administration

### New Business

Avocado's main source of new clients is through referrals. Satisfied clients will from time to time refer other interested clients to the company. As a result, the firm invest heavily and will often go out of their way to make their clients happy.

The agency also gets business from Request for Proposals (RFPs). This when a company requests the agency to send a proposal, showing the work they have done. Some of the largest NGO jobs that Avocado has done were obtained this way.

The agency also gets a considerable amount of jobs from their digital assets (Social Media and their website). Smaller clients contact them via social media (Facebook, Twitter and Behance) for their services.

Networking and Sales is also a major source of work for the agency.



Figure 4: The government of Kenya Cancer booklet (Source: Avocado Creative Studio, 2019)

Attendance of design and industry events enables the agency meet captains of industry and a potential source of future work. This helps the sales and marketing director to touch base with the decision makers.



## **Hiring Process**

The agency rarely places adverts on social networks, instead they leverage on their networks to get reliable employees and consultants for different projects. They make use of agencies like Yusudi to get new personnel.

The firm will often require the potential employee to send their portfolio as proof of work. This helps them gauge the candidate's level of competence. On the interview day, the interviewee is often subjected with a practical brief to gauge their ability.

New employees will undergo three months of probation before they get absorbed on permanent basis. They also offer annual and temporary contracts depending with the firm's needs. The employees are entitled to different allowances and the company often covers their remittances and submits government taxes alongside NHIF and NSSF dispatches.

## **Services**

Avocado offers a variety of services. Some of this include; Brand Development, Graphic Design, Strategy, Social Media Management, Photography, Illustration, Copywriting, and Consultancy.

## **Target Market**

Avocado's primary market is Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Multinationals. They however also do a lot work of small and medium sized companies. They from time to time work with promising start-ups and companies that require a refresh or a change of corporate strategy.

## **Flexi-Design**

**Avocado creative studio applies a concept of design that new in Kenya and globally as well. This way of working involves working remotely without being in the office at all times. It allows the staff to work from different areas only meeting when need be.**

**Flexi-design in this case is a system that allows employees to vary the time that they start or finish work, and work remotely provided that they deliver the work on time adhering to deadlines.**

## **Company structure**

**At Avocado creative studio, the employees, consultants and outsourced personnel work from home following the freelance model, with meetings with client taking place at restaurants or at the clients. They however meet as a company monthly to share notes, and plan for the following months projects. In projects that require group participation, plans are done prior for the meeting areas or use of video conferencing tools like Skype and What Sapp.**

**Flexi design not only saves the company on overhead cost but also allow the employees to work in environments they are comfortable working in. This in turn enhances their creativity and innovation with relatively little or no supervision and facilitation.**

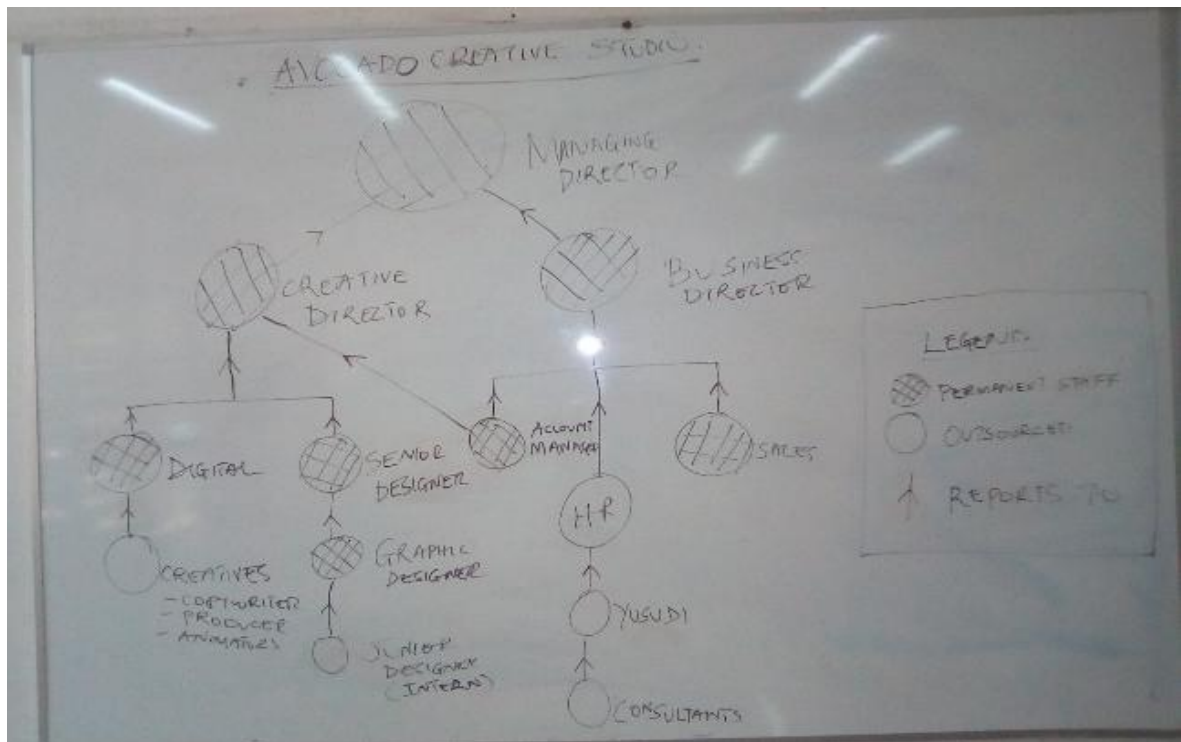


Figure 5: Avocado company structure (Source: Author, 2019)

## Method

Data used to write this paper were collected through desk research. The paper seeks to document aesthetics as a philosophy of art and design. The thematic scope of the study is Kenya.

## CASE STUDY3: DALBERG DESIGN

### Research Design

The research was qualitative researcher conducted interviews with a designer at Dalberg Design, the research was supplemented by desktop research and literature review.

### Design approach

They use a human centered design approach called participatory design.

They strive to engage the ultimate users of the product in the design

process. For example in the case where the solution could be a mobile application, the designer will engage the users live as he sketches the user interface of the application getting real time feedback and iterating the design without the need of going back and forth from the studio to the field. To collaborate with the ultimate users, they engage the community in co creation activities and workshops especially in the ideation stage which involves a lot of brain storming. At times collaboration means going to where people are; in their homes and farms.

### **Participatory Design**

According to Fisher (2003) participatory design supports diverse ways of thinking, planning and acting and the results of the product resonate with human needs. Designers and the ultimate users of the product work together and collaborate to have a greater insight on the usability of a product. This approach is more focused on a design process that involves different stakeholders at different stages of the design process. This approach is democratic whereby the users and other stakeholders have a right on the design process and product. Schuler & Namioka (Eds.) (1993) also agrees with this idea of democracy. He says that the people affected by the product should have a right to influence and this right is exercised by participating in the design process.

The overall quality of the design is likely to be better especially when there is effective participation as compared to leaving out the participation of affected stakeholders. When people participate they also build relationships and it easier for the ultimate users to buy in the product, Schuler & Namioka (Eds.) (1993).

According to Schuler & Namioka (Eds.) (1993) the intended users of a product play a critical role in the design process. Traditionally the

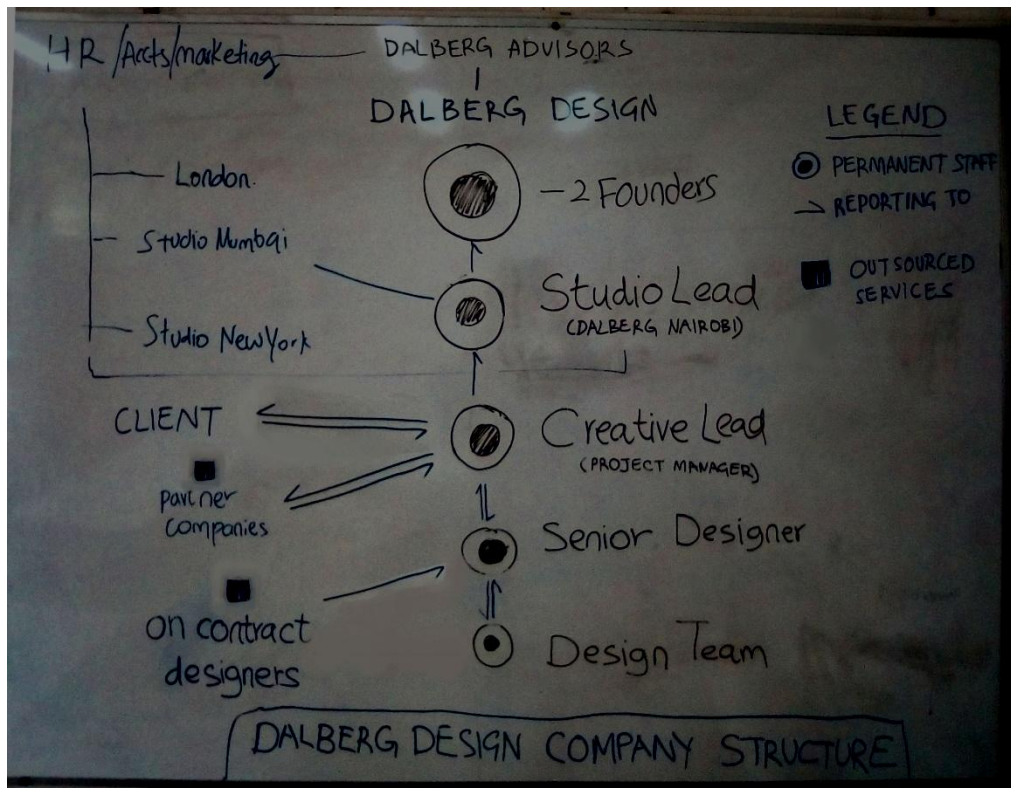
**intended user had no say on the process and would be seated idly waiting for a solution from the designer, however in this case the user is considered an expert in his own sense; he knows what he needs and wants. Designers act as consultant and the success is celebrated by both. Leaving out the user in the design process is undemocratic and also dangerous and could have serious consequences on the user.**

### **Design process**

**When a client comes with a problem, the first step is to broaden the challenges of the client and look at the problem holistically and from different perspectives. This involves going to the users and doing a research to better understand the behaviors, challenges and the need of the client's users. This step is crucial as it helps in understanding the problem and identifying opportunity areas. Sometimes the problem stated by the clients is not the root problem and the research helps clarify the root problem to avoid solving the symptoms instead of the real problem.**

**When going to the field, the team goes with an open mind so that they are not swayed by their assumptions. They go to the field not as experts but as learners so that their solutions are based on the understanding of the specific problem and not solely on their expert knowledge of things. The main idea is to observe and capture insights. At the end of the day there are sessions where the team comes together for the team to align their findings and start classifying their findings into themes.**

After aligning their findings into themes they start identifying possible solutions and then they start designing concepts and solutions. After coming up with the possible solution they partner with an external firm that would make the actual product or service.



*Illustration 1: Dalberg Design company structure*

## Company structure

Dalberg Design is a sister company of Dalberg Advisers. Dalberg advisers handle the human resources part of Dalberg Design. Dalberg Design is headed by two founders and it has four design studios; in Nairobi, Mumbai, New York and London. Each design studio in the four countries is led by a studio lead. The studio lead is responsible for heading the business and engaging clients and the general welfare of the studio. Then there is the creative lead who leads the research of the project. The creative lead is the design

**manager and acts as the project manager (See Ill. 1).**

**After the creative lead there is a senior designer who engages the clients and leads the research. He also directs the development of deliverables of each project. This position is held by different people depending on projects from project to project. The senior designer is also responsible for internal initiatives and creating an environment where designers can interact so that they can learn, improve and create resolutions. The senior designer heads a design team whose work is to support research efforts by creating research materials and tools, mapping and conducting out the actual research. Sometimes when the project demands more resources they hire contractors on a project basis.**

## **Summary**

**Participatory design approach requires a mind shift from traditional design where the voice of the end users was hardly heard by the designers and their ideas barely seen on the final product. In participatory design all the involved stakeholders are engaged in the process and the result is easily owned by the users since it was a collaborative effort. The company structure is an important ingredient for a successful design firm. It is necessary to have a multidisciplinary team since problems have a wide range of solutions; cultural, technical and behavioral. It is important to also have a team that is hireable on contract basis. It is also important to have third party companies so that the designers can focus on immersing themselves in the research and recommend appropriate solutions.**



## **ANALYSIS**

### **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE COMPANIES**

#### **Similarities**

##### **1. Directors**

In the instance of A+ Plus interiors, the director is the owner and manager of the company. The company is registered under sole proprietorship. Avocado Design Studio has three directors at different levels. They include managing director, Creative director and Business director. Managing director is the overall and the head of the firm. Dalberg Design has two founders who are the owner as well as the general directors of the company. The directors are elected or appointed to manage a company's business and affairs.

Their obligations include:

- *determining and implementing policies and making decisions*
- *preparing and filing statutory documents with the Companies Office or other agencies*
- *calling meetings, including an annual meeting of shareholders*
- *maintaining and keeping records*
- *Binding the company to contracts with suppliers, lenders and others dealing with the company amongst other roles*

##### **2. Designers**

Designers play a complex role in any design firm. Designers not only create useful products and images, but they also produce and reproduce cultural meanings through those products and images. Many misinterpret the designer's work to be simply deciding upon

some sort of representation based on an artistic rendering. In fact, that is only one small part of a designer's final work product. The real work of a designer involves a process that brings forth the greatest possible outcome despite imposed limitations (Hill, 2019).

### **3. Accountants**

The major role of accountants is to provide financial information to management by researching and analyzing accounting data, preparing reports. (<https://hiring.monster.com/employer-resources/job-descriptiontemplates/accountant-job-description-sample/>)

Other roles played by the accountant include:

- *Prepares asset, liability, and capital account entries by compiling and analyzing account information.*
- *Documents financial transactions by entering account information.*
- *Recommends financial actions by analyzing accounting options.*
- *Summarizes current financial status by collecting information, preparing balance sheet, profit and loss statement, and other reports.*
- *Substantiates financial transactions by auditing documents.*
- *Maintains accounting controls by preparing and recommending policies and procedures. Among other roles.*

### **4. Human resource management**

Human resource management office engages in employing people, training them, compensating them, developing policies relating to them, and developing strategies to retain them (Frasch, Shadovitz, &

Shelly, 2009).

## **CONCLUSION**

**Every design firm has its own special company structure. However, regardless of what type of company structure is used in a firm, the structure should be clearly defined. The goal should be to build the fewest management level and have the shortest chain of command, the unit staff need to be able to see where their tasks fit into common tasks of the organization, the organization structure should enhance and not impede communication, the organization structure should facilitate decision making that results in the greatest work performance and most importantly, the staff should be organized in a manner that encourage informal group to develop a sense of community and belonging.**

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# TRANSITIONAL ITINERARY OF VERNACULAR BASKETRY IN EAST AFRICA

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Basketry is the oldest and most varied plant-based crafts found around the world. The skill required in the production of these objects is often associated with factors such as people's perceptions of the environment, conceptions of the self and means of economic interaction, social hierarchy, and division of labour (Novellino, Ertu, 2019).

**The sisal baskets produced in the Taita Taveta County of Kenya are regarded by many as regional treasures, a cultural expression and an economic enterprise. These unique baskets are produced according to the traditional art by local women who have passed down the skill from generation to generation. Apart from sisal, there are various trends in basketry coming up in East Africa. Not only do designers use the original design, they have also come up with their own 'signature' look in basketry. Problem:** These artsy baskets however face eventual extinction due to competition from cheap imported lookalikes. **Objective:** This study looked at this creative enterprise from a cultural and creative perspective. Its objective was to identify, examine and document transitive trends and style delivering the art to contemporary utilitarianism. **Design:** Using a

*case study methodology, data was collected through observation, interviews, focus group discussions and key informants.*

***Setting:*** The study was conducted in Nairobi and Taita Taveta Counties. ***Subjects:*** Local traditional craftswomen, users, buyers and sellers and local administration. ***Results:*** the results showed enthusiastic female craftswomen, a robust design trend, increasing market and trendy new futuristic designs fulfilling contemporary market needs. ***Conclusion:*** A transition is surely happening, though subtly, taking the traditional basketry into the future. There is a great potential in commercialization and fulfilling of livelihoods for craftswomen, designers and artists in the basketry industry in Kenya.

***Keywords:*** Basketry, Vernacular, East Africa, Design

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is of economic and cultural concern that an indigenous industry like basketry should be threatened with extinction in this era. Particularly so to world intellectual property organization (WIPO) who, in cooperation with the Japan Patent Office (JPO), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Kenya Industrial Property Institute (KIPI), under the One Village One Product Program (OVOP) Kenya, and the Taita Taveta County Government who have identified this great threat and the possible ruin to livelihoods.

Basket weaving is the process of weaving or sewing pliable materials into two or three dimensional artifacts such as mats or containers. Craftsmen who have specialized in the skill of basket



making are known as basket makers or basket weavers (WIPO, 2019). Basketry is made from a variety of fibrous material that includes pine straws, willows, oak, vines, animal hair or grasses. People from the olden days are renowned for their basket making skills. They traded the baskets for goods or used them for religious purposes (Crowfoot, E. 1982).

According to Catherine Erdly (2007), basket weaving is classified into four types;

- *Coiled basketry*
- *Plaiting basketry*
- *Twinning basketry*
- *Wicker and splint basketry*

There are various materials used in basket weaving. Some of them may include rattan core also known as reed; it is the most popular material since it is readily available.

This include flat reed which is used for most square baskets; oval reed which is used in round baskets, and round reed which is used to twine. An advantage of reed is that it can be dyed to look like oak or hickory. Water hyacinth is also being used as a base material. Basketry in east Africa is the main source of income for many women in the rural areas (WIPO, 2019).

## **THEORY**

### **HISTORY OF BASKET WEAVING IN EAST AFRICA**

Basket making in Africa and East Africa in specific is an ancient skill that has survived to this day. Not only does it continue to play an integral part in modern community life but in some countries it has

evolved to a highly expressive contemporary art form (Bronwen Evans, 2020)

African basketry is a dynamic craft, altered by social changes and shaped by both environmental and economic factors. Traditionally, shapes and weaves were determined largely by the uses for what the baskets were intended. Regardless of the methods of basket making being used, the materials have significantly changed from natural fibers to include man-made creations like plastic, wire and recycled products. Historically, baskets have been used for agricultural practices such as winnowing and sifting and the collecting and carrying of crops as well as portage of produce to markets (Bronwen Evans, 2020).

Household usage included storage and serving of food and beverages and filtering beer during its production process. Spices and tobacco were stored in basket containers. Other uses for traditional basket containers include money banks, jewelry boxes and divination vessels. These normally have lids and can be quite complex in design which reflect their significance. They are often decorated or have stepped lids, footed bowls and sometimes are strengthened with leather or bark to ensure longevity of use.

For a bride's dowry in places like Guinea and Liberia, rice storage stacks were used. Woven basket fiber products include sleeping and eating mats and fish traps, hand bags and carry baskets. Figure 1 illustrates a woman making her basket out of grass.



**Figure 6: woman in Rwanda using spiny grass to weave her basket**

**Source: contemporary-aafrican-art.com 12/11/2019**

**Size, shape and features of the basket are determined by the end usage. A vessel can be circular, oval, square or conical, occasionally even multi chambered. It can have an open bowl, be a tray or a pannier, and exhibit a foot, a lid, a handle or an extra appendage for hanging (Basketry, n.d.) Figure 2 illustrates a man weaving.**



**Figure 7: a man weaving a granary basket, Botswana**

**Source: contemporary-african-art.com 12/11/2019**

**For extra strength, the basket design can have addition leather or bark strips woven or sewn onto the walls or base. Sometimes, baskets have embellished (fig 3) rims or are adorned with shells, beads or seeds. In order to make the basket waterproof, it can be**

covered with clay or packed with mud or resins and fat (Bronwen Evans, 2020).

Before the actual weaving can take place, the fiber has to be prepared which according to the character of the twine can be an extremely lengthy process. This is especially so if it needs to be dyed as well as made pliant. A fiber such as sisal needs to be stripped, cleaned and spun by hand, a process which can take up to 16 hours for a medium size basket (Folrino, 2020.)



*Figure 8: Flower Design basket*

*Source: contemporary-african-art.com 12/11/2019*

The design of the basket is created by weaving with different colours (see figure 3). Dyes are obtained from natural sources like roots, barks, fruit and berries, leaves, clay, dung or various combinations of the above. Figure 3 above illustrates a basket of different colors.

**Patterning can be in the form of decorative bands or geometric shapes; lozenges, triangles, diamonds, star or flower shapes, zigzags, swirls or chequerboard motifs.**



*Figure 9: Hutu woman, Rwanda, 1958*

*Source: contemporary-african-art.com 12/11/2019*

**The design of the pattern can be emphasized by the use of different contrasting colours or the fiber can be left in its natural state producing lovely textural effects as shown in figure 4. Weaving an intricate design into the basket can be equally lengthy a task as preparing the fiber. A 'master weaver' in the community to exhibit the following consistent qualities, he or she will have acquired the highest skill in fiber preparation and dyeing as well as in weaving and will. Tightness of weave, intricacy and smooth transition of pattern and design, good design spacing, ability to shape large bowls, create unusual forms and most of all, pull at the same pressure ensuring an even basket (Wyk, 2015)**

**While a community will have hundreds of weavers, only a handful will acquire this status and they will be almost wholly female. There is hardly a country in Africa that does not have an indigenous group of people that exhibit some form of basket craft. Basketry is a form**

of employment for many African women and elevates their status and power base within their social environments. There are many organized workshops and institutions that help these women successfully market their product (FAO,2020)

Basketry cooperatives bring income to rural areas and keep the craft traditions alive. Given this wide dispersal of product, bright, colorful commercial dyestuffs have been applied to widen their appeal and make them 'market-friendly'. One can argue that this takes away from the authenticity of the product but, African basketry is a dynamic thing and this is just one of the ways that it has moved forward.

Basket weaving in Kenya is being practiced in Eastern and central Kenya. One of the weavers includes the Kenya Basket Weavers of Yatta, Located in the arid region of Machakos County. This time-honored process is passed down through generation of women and remains largely unchanged today. Figure 5 and 6 shows the women from Yata-Machakos County, Kenya (<https://www.acaciacreations.com/2020>).



*Figure 10: Elderly women from Yata weaving Baskets*

*Source: Googlephotos-Kenyan women weaving/12/11/2019*





*Figure 11: a group of women weaving baskets*

*Source: Googlephotos-Kenyan women weaving/12/11/2019*

## **PRODUCTION PROCESS: MAKING BASKETS**

Traditional fibers used in basketry reflect the local habitat. They include illala palm, sisal leaves and fiber, raffia (African bamboo), fibrous tree and plant roots such as makenge, vines, leaves (banana and fan palm), cane, bark wood and papyrus. Two types of vegetative fiber are normally used to make a coiled basket, one for the inner coil and one for the wrapping of the coils. For example, in Uganda and Rwanda, baskets are woven from raffia or papyrus wrapped and stitched around a coil of banana leaf stems. Grass is often used for the core of the coils (Evans, 2020.)

The parts of a basket are the base, the side walls and the rim. A basket may have a lid, handle or embellishments. Most baskets begin with the base that can either be woven with reed or wooden. The production processes of basket making include:

### **Coiling**

Thin strips are wrapped around coils of grass and sewn together in a spiral fashion. The basket spirals upwards from a central point at

the base, the coils being held in place by the stitching material to form a basket. The coiled basket can be densely made so that they are capable of holding water. The materials swell up when wet making the basket even watertight. This technique naturally lends itself to round and oval shapes with gently curving and flowing side. Coiled baskets consist of single strand and bundled coils, around which different coiling are done (<https://pacon.com/>) For single stranded coiling system, wrapping of weft, knotted weft around spiraling coil, and a cycloid weaving are possible variations but bundled coils need to be sewed in order to keep the basket strong. Under this category, there are four possible variations. They are, lazy squaw sewed, sewed braid coiling, beeskep coiling and furcate or split stich coiling. The images below show some of the coiled baskets found in East Africa. Figures 7,8,9 and 10 shows how coiling is done and some of the end-products.



**Figure 12: a woman using coiling weave technique to make a basket.**  
Source: Googlephotos/12/11/2019



**Figure 13: coil-woven basketry end-product.**  
Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019





**Figure 14: Coil-weave technique**  
**Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019**



**Figure 15: woven basket.**  
**Source; Googlephotos/12.11.2019**

## **Weaving Technique**

**Stakes and weavers, also known as warp and weft, are identical materials. They are woven together at right angles in either diagonal, or horizontal and vertical orientation in plain or twill weave. The weaving can be open checker work or closed work.**

**The weaver use a material that is, or can be made into a long strip for example palm leaves, bamboo, birch bark or split cane. Weaving can be closed or open depending on the purpose of the basket. There are 3 types namely plain weave, diagonal weave and cross warp or hexagonal weave. Plain and diagonal weave consists of checker work and twill weave work. In checker work, warp and weft are of**

uniform size and pliability, and each element passes over one and under one of the other, thus forming square or rectangular checks. Closed checker work gives compactness and strength to the baskets. Diagonal weave is a variant of plain weave, where propagation of warp and weft elements are diagonal to normal direction. When square base is made of diagonal elements, side wall tends to move diagonally, making warp and weft indistinguishable (SURABHI HEBBAR, 2015). Cross warp weaving is done using inclined warp elements interlinked by horizontal wefts passing over and under the inclined warps. These horizontal wefts can be separated co-axial rings or continuous weft spiraling forming rhombic structure. Variations could be achieved in hexagonal weaving by either:

- a) *Changing ratio between elements and spaces between them*
- b) *Changing the inclination of warp elements*
- c) *Introducing additional elements parallel to basic elements.*

According to Hebbbar (2015), when it comes to three dimensional weaving, the technique itself makes the form. From a plain over one, under one square plaited base the same weavers can be turned vertically upwards. Extra weft strips can now be woven horizontally between them. If the corners are creased well a square box or can be made, if not the form at the top will be rounded.

For an oblong the base is extended. In a more complex arrangement the corner element cross over each other to make a diagonal weave with no extra weavers required for the sides. Long strips are needed as they have a long way to travel. In more complex diagonal plaiting complex twills and herringbone patterns are possible developments. They are woven together at right angles in either diagonal, horizontal and vertical orientation in plain or twill weave. Splint

materials are flat weavers that have been pounded from a log of a native hardwood like ash or maple (Nuss, 1999.). Materials used in plaiting include paper, birch bark, and flat reed.

Figure 11 illustrates various plaited baskets;



*Figure 16: Variety of plaited basketries.*

*Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019*

## Twining

This is achieved when two or more flexible materials are used to encircle another base element. When two weavers are used, the technique is called pairing. When three or more elements are twisted it is known as wailing. One can achieve variations by twining two rows tightly row upon row or leaving an open warp, crossing the warp or wrapping the warp. Materials used in twining include; cedar bark, elm bark, rabbit brush or roots. The materials are soft and the density of the weave is much greater, since the stakes are very much closer (Nuss, n.d.). The structure produced can be of similar quality, appearance and texture to a woven fabric. When passing from warp to warp these elements are twisted in half turns on each other so as to form a two-ply or three-ply twine or braid. It produces a dense weave, with ribbed and distinctive diagonal twist to wefts. In closed twining baskets, Warps usually get concealed by wefts.

Twining of basket consists of 3 major categories. They are two strand twining, three strand twining. Two strand twining can be further divided into four variations namely, plain twining, twill weave twining, lattice twining, wrapped twining and cross warp twining. Three strands consist of plain twining. Nuss, (1999) also advances that these twinings can be done open or closed depending on the purpose of the basket. When soft materials are used for items such as bags and pouches twining could be viewed as closer to a textile than a basket. The colorful imported Kenyan sisal baskets is an example, since they are all twine

Simple two strand twining are most commonly used, both "open" and "closed" depending on the spacing between the weft rows. Materials for twining usually consist of grass fibers or cane materials. In case of bamboo, it is split into very thin split so as to get the flexibility in while twining. Its fineness allows for detailed color or textural patterning as shown in figures 12 and 13.



*Figure 17: how twining is done and end-product.*

*Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019*

## **Stake and strand techniques**

**Vertical stakes around which are worked horizontal strands. The materials used in this type of weaving need to be rigid for example cane and bamboo. The base of the basket is generally made separately, starting with two sets of sticks that are arranged at right angles, tied together with a weaver and then opened out into a circle as the weaving progresses. If the materials are flat, such as bamboo or split wood then they will be arranged to lie on top of each other like the spokes of a wheel. The base may be round, oval or square. For oval work the round base set up is elongated and there is also a version that is constructed underfoot. For square work a set of sticks is inserted vertically into a block and these are woven into a flat square or oblong using finer rods. In order to weave the sides stakes or uprights are inserted into or attached to the base. The side of the basket is then woven up to the desired height using finer graded material so as not to distort the uprights (Nuss,1999). When using willow care is taken to even out the effect of the taper of the rods. Various weaves have been developed to suit different parts of the basket and though these are common all over the world local differences make for a fascinating study.**

**In willow work, the 'upset' (rows at the bottom) usually consists of a strong waling (three or four strand) weave that helps shape the flow of the basket. Other common weaves are: Randing - a simple over one, under one weave. Slewing - a band of three and up to five or even seven rods worked together continuously, adding new rods on top as rods on the bottom taper out. This creates a strong**

weave that progresses the work quickly. At the top of the work the uprights are bent down to form a border. For willow work the basic tools required are; a shop knife, bodkins (for making spaces in the weave) and a rapping iron (to beat the work level and close up gaps). Nowadays a pair of secateurs replaces the picking knife that was used to trim untidy ends. Willow can also be used since it provides a long, tapering rigid elements with few or no side shoot therefore suited for this technique as shown in figure 14.



**Figure 18: flower basketries made from twining.**

**Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019**

## **TRENDING BASKETRY IN EAST AFRICA TODAY**

### **KIONDO**

This is a handwoven handbag made from sisal with leather trimmings. It is indigenous to the Kikuyu and Kamba tribes in Kenya (Admin, 2020).

### **PRODUCTION PROCESS**

Kenyan weavers begin by stripping the sisal plant's outer layer, leaving the plant still able to grow. The weaver then lets the threads



dry out for a day and then uses them in pale colored form, to make a bag.

The weaver boils the thread to be used with water and dye sets the bag's color. Two single threads are twined to form one strong thread (Admin, 2020). It is from these threads that a sisal bag is made. It takes about two to three weeks to complete a bag since most weavers are farmers and housewives. Most kiondos are exported to western countries where they continue to be popular. Below are some of the kiondo designs available in the market (figures 15, 16 and 17).



**Figure 19: women weaving kiondoo**  
**Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019**



**Figure 20: a sample of a kiondoo design**  
**Source: Googlephotos/12.11.2019**

## **Philosophies of Kiondo**

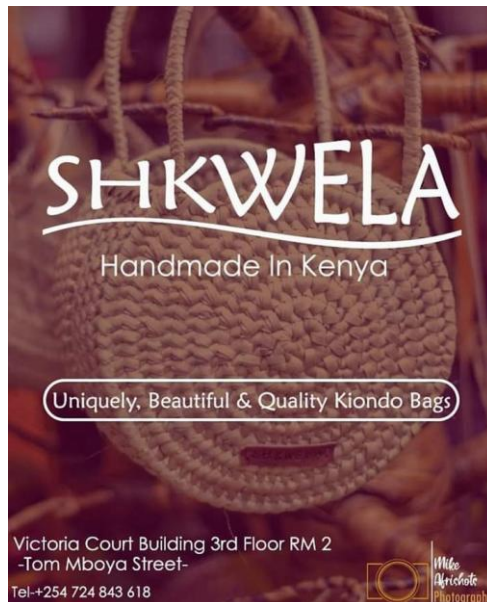
- 1. For anyone to be able to understand anything, they have to go back to the roots, the beginning. Kiondo is woven by joining several strands of sisal and thread to form the kiondo (Kendi, 2018). It teaches us that history is important because we get to go back to the very beginning. The beginning has a bearing on the present (Kendi, 2018.).***
- 2. Kiondo encapsulates completeness since it is a circle. Circles are important in African Culture; they represent continuity and completeness.***
- 3. Kiondo is woven by interdependent threads and sisal strings. It teaches us about interdependence, as expressed in the African philosophy of the Ubuntu; a belief that one becomes human amidst of others and that all of nature (human is also considered part of nature) is interconnected. It teaches us respect, responsibility and need to cultivate a peaceful co-existence.***
- 4. It is a good representation of reciprocation. In many cultures the kiondo is used to carry gifts/offering when visiting someone. The person being visited also puts something for the visitor in the kiondo before leaving.***
- 5. Nourishment since it is a carrier for food. The kiondo is used in the farm and also the market place. Food production and associated practices are arenas of knowledge production.***
- 6. Environmental consciousness; the kiondo is made from elements of the land, sisal, wool and leather.***



## Basket weaving in east African today

New basket designs have come up in the recent years. The current generations are in need of classy yet pretty designed bags. For the purpose of this study, we look at two organizations/brands; a fashion brand by the name Shkwela-Eco-friendly fashion brand located in Kenya and Rubona basket weavers association in Uganda.

### SHKWELA: ECO-FRIENDLY ACCESSORIES FASHION BRAND



**Figure 21: Shkwela Fashion Brand poster**  
**Source: Google photos/12.11.2019**

The company is run by a lady by the name Wanjiku Njenga, who was born and raised in Isiolo. She always had a passion of venturing into a business that would help the local community around her (Ambani, 2019).



**Figure 22: Photo of Wanjiku Njenga at a sale.  
Source: facebook.com/shkwela; 12/11/2019**

Even though she studied law with the aim of helping her community, the creativity in her never left her alone. She would leave school to do voluntary work at numerous non-profit organizations. Not until 2017, when the government banned the use of plastic bags that it dawned on her that she could make environmentally friendly bags for the everyday woman.

She officially launched her line in the year 2018 under the brand name Shkwela; made from sisal and leather. It was not easy for her at the beginning since Kiondos were meant for the elderly. "The modern day woman wants something chic and classy. A bag is a very important accessory for women and it has been used to make a fashion statement all around the world." (<https://nation.africa/Wanjiku Njenga>, 2019).

She decided to come up with new designs that never existed in the market before. Her best seller has been the round bag made from sisal that is dyed in different colors. She also makes sling bags that come in two designs: one can be used as an everyday bag while the other is more of beachwear. The picture below shows the sample of the round bag;



**Figure 23: a picture of Wanjiku's round bag.**  
**Source: facebook.com/shkwela; 12/11/2019**

**Sling bags made out of sisal are not ideal for the beach since they easily get ruined by the water. Sling bags designed for the beach are made out of palm leaves as shown in the figures 38 below:**



**Figure 24: a sling bag made out of palm leaves.**  
**Source: facebook.com/shkwela; 12/11/2019**



**Figure 25: a sling bag made out of sisal and leather.**  
**Source: facebook.com/shkwela; 12/11/2019**

**Her inspiration was to create something that shouted Kenyan and kiondo was the ideal product since it is associated with Kenyan heritage; all round the world. Also, most of the materials used are locally sourced.**



**Figure 26: shkwela eco-friendly kiondo bags samples.**  
**Source: facebook.com/shkwela; 12/11/2019**

**She also makes household items; wall decor and laundry basket (figure 41). She also sells basket kiondo for the lovers of houseplants and loves to add an African touch.**





*Figure 27: flower and wall baskets.  
Source: facebook.com/shkwela; 12/11/2019*

## **RUBONA BASKET WEAVERS ASSOCIATION- UGANDA**

A classic Ugandan basket coils its way into your heart. Most baskets are made from local fibre taken from a type of palm leaf called raffia; which is wrapped around long strips of banana leaf stem. Artisans also make a range of baskets that use a combination of banana fibre and raffia wrapped over coils of banana leaf stems. Some traditional baskets in Uganda include;

- 1. Ntemere-Ndiro**
- 2. Nubian Tabaga**
- 3. Nubiankuta**
- 4. Natural baskets**
- 5. Banana fibre**
- 6. Gufu**

The women at the Rubona Basket Weavers Association are well-known for their distinctive, beautiful naturally dyed baskets, made with raffia, millet straw, and banana fiber. They have a variety of weaving techniques and they also come up with their own natural dyes.

At Rubona Baskets the process of basket weaving starts with growing the materials themselves. Raffia grass is grown over several months. The grass is harvested and dried and then dyed different colors with natural dyes made of ground flowers. The dyed

grasses are then hand woven into intricate patterns. Each basket can take 1-2 weeks to complete (Oliver, 13 April 2011).

The project began in 2005, when an Austrian man trained local women in natural dye techniques - reviving some dye practices that women had been using for years. It has grown to employ over 200 local women. An article on the dye process in the association had the following steps (Oliver, 2011):

- *First they boil the raffia to soften it:*
- *Then the ingredients are prepared:*
- *For this case, the Omfoka leaves (fresh; used for making green or black)*
- *And the Akalamata root (fresh or dried; used for making red)*
- *Amarwa gempunu roots (fresh; used for making maroon and yellow)*
- *The amarwa gempunu is pounded in a big mortar:*
- *For color, Cosmos flower (fresh or dried; used for making orange and red) is added as an ingredient.*
- *The boiled product is then mixed in wood ash:*
- *Raffia is then let to dry:*

Their main market is the chain of Banana Boat stores, an upscale Kampala craft outlet. One aspect of Rubona's business model is their approach to design innovation. Many craft producers get ideas for new product designs from their marketers. The Rubona basket designs, however, come directly from the women.

Each month Rubona holds a design contest for all the basket weavers. Creators of the top designs win prizes, which are generally practical home and kitchen items. In this way, Rubona encourages design innovation and creativity and actively avoids the problem of

product stagnation. Their final products are as shown in figure 51 below;



**Figure 28: Rubona Basket Weavers Association's basketry products**

**Source: Rubona Facebook page./12.11.2019**

## **METHODS**

A multiple case study research design was used. The objective was to gather data to document types and techniques found around Nairobi and online. The study applied mostly library research,

desktop data mining methods, focus group discussion and key informants for the study. A research assistant was remotely conducted to collect primary data in Taita-Taveta County, Kenya. This was due to very limited time frames and scarcity of resources to travel to all the sites. The study was therefore mostly confined to Nairobi city, Kenya and specifically conducted under the auspices of the School of the Arts and Design of the University of Nairobi. Two focus group discussions were held at diverse dates. One was to help identify a rich source of information and appropriate case to study while the other was to clear technical issues related to techniques and genres. Where available, samples were sourced and observed and documented through photography around Nairobi. The Masai market, a weekly open air market in Nairobi was invaluable towards this end.

Results were presented and discussed at the School of the Arts and Design to faculty, students, and experts and stake holders of the craft industry from Kenya. From the study it emerged that basketry in Kenya has been dwindling but is currently on revival by interests in the counties. It has been identified as a key employment and income generating sector that is bound to be mainstreamed going forward.

## **DISCUSSION**

From the study, it emerged that more than any other craft; basketry has dominated world cultures over millennia of years. It represents the finest combination of environment, culture and technology. In Africa, commercial marketing and an increase in tourism has had a tremendous impact on the design, quality and quantities of these crafts.



Traditional fibers used in basketry reflect the local habitat. They include illala palm, sisal leaves and fiber, raffia (African bamboo), fibrous tree and plant roots such as makenge, vines, leaves (banana and fan palm), cane, bark wood and papyrus.

Generally, two types of vegetative fiber are normally used to make a coiled basket, one for the inner coil and one for the wrapping of the coils. For example, in Uganda and Rwanda, baskets are woven from raffia or papyrus wrapped and stitched around a coil of banana leaf stems. Grass is often used for the core of the coils.

The production processes of basket making include:

- *coiling, in which thin strips are wrapped around coils of grass and sewn together in a spiral fashion*
- *plaiting*
- *twining*
- *cross or chequerboard* weaving techniques

A vessel can be circular, oval, square or conical, occasionally even multi chambered. It can have an open bowl, be a tray or a pannier, exhibit a foot, a lid, a handle or an extra appendage for hanging. The following are some of the tribes that have basket making existing as an integral part of their community for social, spiritual or functional use:

- Tutsi, Rwanda
- Kuba, Pygmy, Lele, Mangbetu and Bwaka, DRC
- Pende, Angola
- Chokwe, Lozi, Tonga, Zambia

- **Buga, Guinea and Liberia**
- **Sara, Chad**
- **Zulu, South Africa**
- **iSwati, Swaziland**
- **Barotse, Twana, Botswana**
- **Tonga (Binga), Shangaan, Zimbabwe**
- **Gurune, Ghana**
- **Tusyan, Burkina Faso**
- **Bamileke, Cameroon.**

**In east Africa, Both men and women, bu mostly the latter make many kinds of baskets and mats out of plant materials such as wood, palm leaves, reeds, grasses, and roots. From the study, it emerged that they decorate their baskets with patterns of differently colored and textured materials or with leather stitched onto the basketwork. Generally, there are two basic basket-making techniques. The two are plaiting/ twinning and weaving. In plaited basketry, strands of plant fiber are soaked and then twined, woven, or twisted together. In woven basketry, a thin strip of continuous material—usually grass—is stitched onto itself in a coil. Some baskets made this way are so tightly sewn that they hold liquid.**

**The study also showed that the handicraft industry has an generally positive impact on individuals working in the sector, their families and communities, particularly rural inhabitants, those with little or no formal education and other marginalised people. The fact that the craft is on a revival trajectory points basically to benefits for individual producers and enterprises in rural areas that are greater than in urban areas. Consistent purchasing by formal craft**

**organisations or by tourists benefit the producers the most. Social and cultural benefits derived from craft activities are greater than from non-craft activities, while producers' incomes are comparable. From literature, it emerged that the craft sector shows higher economic efficiency than the non-craft sector, although the latter has higher average profitability.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**From the foregoing, it can be concluded that basket weaving was and is still one of the main sources of generating income in East Africa, especially in the remote areas since there is the availability of the resources and land to grow some of the materials. Over time, there is the introduction of various design styles in the fashion industry. Fashion stylists and designers have come up with variety of styles that would suit the 21<sup>st</sup> century woman. Though the original design is still in use but the need to own a design, and also the presence of competition in the design world, makes it necessary for the designer to come up with new designs and styles of basket weaving. There is also introduction of new, materials used in basket weaving. For instance, the banning of plastic bags in 2017, created an idea of weaving baskets out of the plastic bags instead of burning or littering them all over. One can easily purchase these bags in the market today.**

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**NYAKIIGE NDUGU**

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**Samuel Mwituria Maina PhD**

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***He has contributed many articles to academic journals on eco-design, eco-ethics, and construction and sustainability. Apart from this 6<sup>th</sup> volume, Dr.Maina has also authored course books on design materials and processes volume 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5, Introduction to ergonomics- a learner's manual, Qualitative & Quantitative research methods simplified, How to Write a Good Proposal and communication skills for college and university students. Among other interests, Maina has researched on glass as design material, recycling of solid waste and human factors for interior ambience. He has also been involved in several consultancies and exhibitions individually and in collaborations.***



**RELATIVITY OF INDIGENOUS EAST AFRICAN  
DESIGN CHAMPIONS: JACQUE NJERI, MARC VAN  
RAMPENBERG AND WAMBUI KAMIRU COLLYMORE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper focused on the comparative qualities of contemporary design champions who are re-defining Kenyan design in various sub specialties. Their artworks represent where the creative economy (Design) is heading. Conducted in Nairobi, this study sought to exemplify contemporary design champions redefining East African creative scene. It applied a case study research methodology. The three cases were: Jacque Njeri, Marc van Rampelberg and Wambui Kamiru Collymore, all based in Kenya. The study gathered information through interviews, focus group discussions and desktop research. The focus group included erudite faculty, design stakeholders and students of the school of the arts and design. This was done through seminars and presentations. The comparative study results yielded various similarities than differences amongst the champions. The three champions of contemporary inclinations also represent the individualism in their expressions. The researcher discovered that their sense of individualism is what brought them together and is what makes them exemplify design trends today.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Contemporary design, Champions, Kenya, Design, Independence*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In his seminal treatise on "The role of champions in product innovation, Alok k Chakrabarti (1974) asserted that, the primary reasons for lack of innovation in design and in organizations are (1) inertia in putting forth the idea, (2) fear of criticism if the idea is offered, (3) feeling of futility about the likelihood that the idea will be well received or acted on, (4) lack of attention paid to the idea at early stages. Alok quotes Marvin Bower, Managing Director of McKinsey & company who advocated that successful innovation requires attention of the top management and a nurturing atmosphere. Alok (1974) further on the issue quotes Peterson. Quoting Peterson, Alok advances that "From his experience as the chief executive of Bell and Howell, Peter G. Peterson concluded that the following three conditions are necessary for successful innovations in an organization: (1) some amount of flexible structure is necessary for defining the problem and need of the client and the organization: (2) a minimum number of people to prevent mangling the idea: and (3) a moderate amount of humility toward intellectual ability is needed to generate some willingness to experiment with the creative idea".

Alok's analysis of both Bower's and Peterson's observation led to the point that new ideas-products or other innovations-require some kind of protective nurturing (Champions) before they become viable (Alok k Chakrabarti, 1974).

From the foregoing, it is important on all design projects that there are designated creative client champions, '...to take responsibility for design quality throughout the project. This may be the departmental champion with a responsibility for all

the organisation's design projects or an individual assigned the role specifically for the project Achieving Excellence Guide 9 (2007)

It can be appropriate to appoint a number of design champions:

- *A senior design champion might be appointed to ensure that schemes do not proceed until they achieve an acceptable level of design quality.*
- *A project-level design champion might become more involved in the detail of the design.*
- *Special interest champions, might represent the interests of particularly important aspects of the project.*

*Special interest design champions could be appointed to represent:*

- *Design quality.*
- *Client interests.*
- *Staff interests.*
- *Information technology.*
- *Change management.*
- *Sustainability.*
- *Facilities management.*

A soft landings champion to ensure the design optimizes operational performance and that there is a smooth transition from design to model to product.

The role of champions might include:

- *Articulating the vision for the project.*
- *Articulating the client's design quality aspirations.*
- *Ensuring that design objectives are clearly described in briefing documents.*

- *Evaluating design quality throughout the design process.*
- *Chairing user panels relevant to their particular area of responsibility.*

**It is important that design champions are appointed as soon as possible so that they can play a part in establishing the vision for the project. This will make them more likely to defend the vision.**

**The three contemporary design champions featured showcase an array of present-day productions of east African design. All of them practice in Kenya, an east African country; leading in new ways of showcasing the creative economy in a new light. They are considered champions due to their outstanding prowess, processes and productions that captivate many. They are refreshing in their approach to design. Decisively, they include Jacque Njeri, Marc van Rampelberg and Wambui Kamiru Collymore.**

## **THEORY**

**Their individual creative design processes are discussed below.**

### **JACQUE NJERI**

**Jacque Njeri is a Kenyan Graphic designer who creates artworks stimulated by the African perspective. She graduated from the University of Nairobi with a B.A. Design in 2013. Her design series 'Maasci' led her to global recognition leading her work to be featured by British Broadcasting Corporation and Cable News Network. According to Africultures (2019), the series was also featured at the Other Futures conference in Amsterdam. Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic, philosophy of science, and philosophy of history that explores the developing intersection of African Diaspora culture with technology (Dery,1993). She describes her work as afro-futurism;**

**the African experience being told from an African perspective and the African experienced re-imagined from an African lens.**

### **Maa Sci Series**

**In this series, Jackie was inspired by Star Wars' futuristic approach and rough textures to tell the story of the Maasai in space. The play on word 'Maa-sci' represents Maasai; The Nilotic community located in Northern Tanzania, Southern and central Parts of Kenya, and sci-fi; the film genre that focuses on science fiction and imaginative story lines with advanced technology and humanistic approaches such as societies, genetic capabilities and forms of governance. The series reflects the placement of the Maasai people in Tatooine city- a fictional sparsely inhabited desert planet from the movie series star wars. They are depicted in their traditional mode of dressing and applying their culture. From an interview with Quarts Africa (2017), she states that she would wish to change the image portrayed of Africa in the media and she wishes to take back the story telling power and showcase Africans in a victorious manner. Previously, scenes and stories of futurism and sci-fi barely had black people or any other race other than Caucasian as casts or as real life participants in space exploration. From her interview with Design Indaba (2018), she further elaborates the need to seek social progression through the application of technological advancement. The images are captivating due to the juxtaposition of African culture and science fiction in a way that makes the viewer challenge themselves. It leads to questions such as; why shouldn't the Maasai exist in a world of Sci-fi? The misrepresentation of African peoples in such narratives leads to the awe of the visuals (Design Indaba, 2018).**

Njeri has managed to start a new approach to futuristic approach of East African design where the results are not as predictable and the results are also those that captivate and challenge the normalcy of misrepresentation and total exclusion of Africans from supernatural stories. The retention of the Maasai culture is also deliberate in eliminating the narrative that African perspectives are backward and regressive. The design captures the co-existence of African identity and futuristic theories. Figure 1, represents Maasai women representation in positions of leadership such as leading in space exploration as astronauts. The vibrant Maasai colours in contrast with the rough neutral coloured terrain creates clear focal points and visual contrast that makes the imagery even more captivating and vibrant. The reflective aqua colours in Figure 2 emphasizes the sci-fi feel and brings forth a feeling of surrealism and freshness.



**Fig1: She- story- female Astronaut; MaaSci**  
**Source: [www.qz.com](http://www.qz.com)**



**Fig2: Maasci series**  
**Source: [www.qz.com](http://www.qz.com)**



**Fig 3: Maasai men riding space ship**  
**Source: [www.designindaba.com](http://www.designindaba.com)**



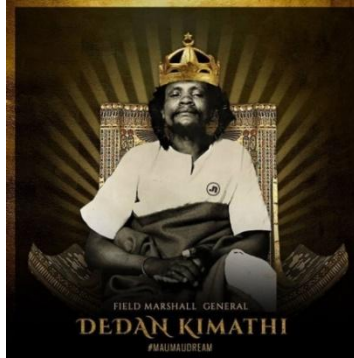
**Fig 4: Maasci series**  
**Source: [www.designindaba.com](http://www.designindaba.com)**

From an interview with the Design Indaba (2018), Njeri describes how figure three represents Maasai men in their traditional regalia in a supernatural setting has been a missing narrative in the works of sci-fi. She further emphasizes that the use of traditional subject such as figure 4 in these kinds of narratives elevates African art and gives Africans representation in areas they have been excluded from. Njeri sees a futuristic Africa with the retention of the rich culture of the Maasai people.

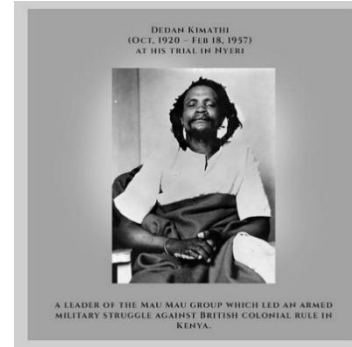
### **The Mau Mau Dream Series**

The Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1960), also known as the Mau Mau Rebellion, the Kenya Emergency, and the Mau Mau Revolt, was a war in the British Kenya Colony (1920–1963) between the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), also known as Mau Mau, and the British colonists (Blakeley, 2009). Africultures (2019) assesses the work as a journey back in time and re-imagining the Mau Mau and independence heroes in a present day context. She edits iconic imagery to achieve an aristocratic and regal appearance of Jomo Kenyatta, Dedan Kimathi and Waruhiu Itote. She is successful in the depiction of the icons with character and dignity as seen in figure 5. Most of the imagery represented in the archival media is of the leaders in capture; either during their hearings or in handcuffs in colonial government custody. In figure 5, Njeri recreates the iconic photograph (figure 6) of the captured Dedan Kimathi to give him an aristocratic appearance and persona. The image carries shades of brown and gold which echo modernity and royalty. The image used for the series is an iconic image that was released by the British colonial government to assure the public of his capture and it was used as government records for filing. The colonial government's intent to intimidate the movement and tame the charged indigenous

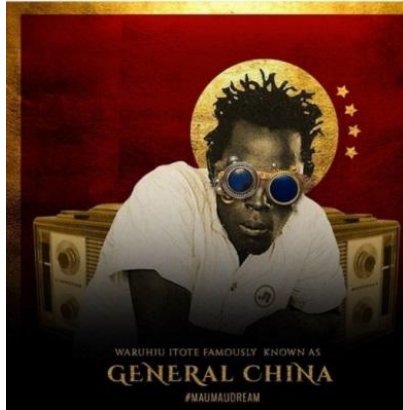
public through imagery and Njeri's approach of re-affirming the aristocratic image of the fallen hero is an evidence of how important it is for Africans to share their perspectives of their culture.



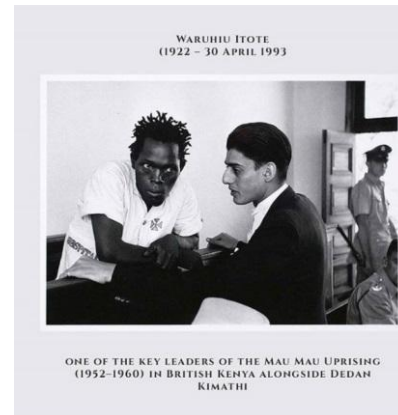
**Fig 5: Mau Mau dream; 'King Mathi'**  
Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com).



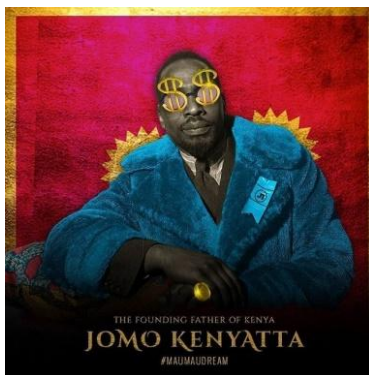
**Fig 6: A captured Dedan Kimathi**  
Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)



**Fig 7: Mau Mau dream; General China**  
Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)



**Fig 8: Waruhiu Itote**  
Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)



**Fig 9: Mau Mau dream; Kenyatta**  
Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com).



**Fig 10: Young Jomo Kenyatta**  
Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)

The Mau Mau surge was fueled by the increased agitation of Africans from the invasion of Europeans. The colonialists, according to



**Newsinger (2017), had displaced over 120, 000 kikuyus into reserves that were infested with poverty, diseases and deplorable living conditions. The push for reclamation of the land and freedom had become a matter of life and death of the continuity of the Agikuyu community. The revolt against the unfair treatment by the colonial government led to the emergence of great leaders who are highlighted in the series. The two generals featured; Dedan Kimathi and General Waruhiu represent the foot soldiers who abandoned usual life to manifest the greatest guerrilla warfare in Kenya. Dedan Kimathi died in 1957 for the great cause and his grave is yet to be traced till this day Kejitan, (2019).**

**Dedan Kimathi remains as an iconic figure not only to the Agikuyu community but to the whole nation of Kenya. The iconic imagery of Dedan Kimathi has been captured on printed material such as screen-printed T- shirts, street art and on a statue that stands in the central business district at the junction of Kimathi Street and Mama Ngina Street.**

**General Waruhiu Itote, also known as General China, is an iconic Mau Mau general who got the chance to experience Kenya post-independence. David (2005) describes Itote as a powerful organiser and oath administrator of the Mau Mau. He led Mau Mau soldiers to settler territory in Nyeri though he was eventually captured in 1954. The image used in the series, that is figure 7 currently copyrighted by Magnun photos, shows Waruhiu in court together with his lawyer, Saeed Cockar during his trial in the same year he was captured. He was arrested and later in prison interacted with Jomo Kenyatta; they forged a relationship after Itote saved Kenyatta's life from an attempted stabbing by Kariuki Chotara. After independence, he was appointed as the assistant director of the National Youth Service up**

to 1984. He supervised farm work in Ol Kalau before his death in 1993.

Itote has been branded a traitor to the movement because he negotiated a deal to assist the colonial government in exchange of his life after being arrested. Blumenkrantz (1993) eulogizes Itote clarifying that Itote did not compromise the Mau Mau movement but rather he wrote letters to its leaders pleading for their retreat in order to save his life. He explains that some of the leaders such as Kimathi received the letters with fury, General Mathenge was seemingly neutral and a handful of Kikuyu leaders empathised with the captured leader.

Njeri's imagery of Itote represents personality through the addition of trendy sunglasses. She converts a moment of life and death into a relaxed and poised moment representing the young Itote as fashion forward and artistic in figure 7. The imagery represents what young Kenyans, especially those from the Mount Kenya region, did not get to experience due to the oppression they endured from the colonialists and the prioritisation of Independence from their oppressors through joining Mau Mau. Njeri describes her design of Itote's photograph on her Instagram account as reminiscent of the popular Jamaican musician Shaba Ranks; she transformed the historical moment into contemporary graphic design as seen in figure 9.

Jomo Kenyatta was the first president of Kenya. He was born Kamau wa Muigai in the 1890's. Kenyatta then took the name Kamau wa Ngengi (Archer, 1969) after his father died because his mother was inherited by his uncle Ngengi. He later changed his name to Jomo Kenyatta. He was an anti-colonial icon that concocted a balance between politics and activism. Though controversial, He was able to

participate as the Kenya Central Association as its secretary, precarious of Colonialists' temperaments, he handled his role with caution. He was observant and strategic; as stated by the African American Registry, he was a part of the young Africans that formed the Pan African Association according to Evans, (2019)

Other than his publications such as Muigwithania, he was a part of the Kapenguria six alongside Bildad Kaggia, Achieng' Oneko, Paul Ngei, Kung'u Karumba and Fred Kubai. Though Kenyatta's role in Mau Mau are obscure; according to the History website, Jomo Kenyatta played very little role despite being arrested along the other nationalists. Njeri depicts Kenyatta as a young carefree youth in a trendy furcoat and jewellery in figure. Her depiction is not as far reaching as the other two depictions due to Kenyatta's flamboyance in the original picture. The researcher synthesizes the imagery of the series to be trendy and representative of modern graphic design with an Afro-futuristic approaches. The work can be seen to be successful in its depiction of the icons in a new light. The designer captures good use of colour and form to generate graphic imagery that is impressive and creative.

### **The Genesis series**

Jacque Njeri explores the origins of the Agikuyu and Mumbi daughters and re-imagines them in an afro-futuristic setting. She shows the genesis of the Agikuyu community and the series also brings out the roles of the individual clans in the society. Every Kikuyu states that the clans of the tribe are nine, but at the same time he enumerates ten names. Some of them will be unable to explain their incoherency: somebody else says: "Meherega ne kenda eyoire" -The clans are nine with the fill: - what explains the whole

thing. The number ten is complete, and if they said plainly that the clans are ten, they would feel as they omened the end of the tribe. They result therefore to a paraphrase (Cagnolo, 1933).

The costumes and colour selections in the series are reminiscent of the regalia of the traditional Agikuyu women; the presence of the brown colours and metallic accessories. The designer describes the series as a modern futuristic interpretation of a matriarch inspired by the Gikuyu myth of origin. The eldest daughter of Gikuyu and Mumbi, Wanjiru, is the matriarch of the Anjiru clan. She is depicted in figure 14 as the fore seer and prophet. The third daughter, Wacera aka Njeri is the matriarch of the Acera clan: She is depicted as the smooth talker and the traveller in figure 13. The fifth daughter, Nyambura in figure 12 is the matriarch of the Ambura clan and the rainfall and atmosphere controller. While the lastborn daughter, Wangui in figure 11 is the matriarch of the musical clan Angui. Njeri believes in empowering young Africans with skills sufficient for them to be in charge of their future and heal negative ideas and notions regarding Africa. The other Gikuyu daughters that have not been mentioned in the series include Wambui, Wangari, Wakiuru, Wangeci, Wairimu and Wamuyu.

The colour scheme applied by Njeri is similar to the original regalia of the Agikuyu. The noted difference includes choice of fabric; the imagery captures the matriarchs in shiny fabric as noted by Gikuyu Documentation Centre in Mukurwe-ini (2018)



**Fig 11: Wangui; the music matriarch**  
**Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)**



**Fig 12: Nyambura; rainfall controller**  
**Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)**



**Fig 13: Wacera; the traveller**  
**Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)**



**Fig 14: Wanjiru; the foreseer**  
**Source: [www.Instagram.com](http://www.Instagram.com)**

## **MARC VAN RAMPELBERG**

According to an interview with the researcher (2019), Marc Van Rampelberg was born in Belgium in 1949 and was raised in middle-class post-war poverty Belgium. The name Rampelberg coincidentally means the curve at the beginning of a mountain; which defines his curvilinear style. Marc was discouraged from training as an artist despite the fact that he was very skilled in

**solving design problems for family and friends. He opted to study teaching. The desire for adventure led him to Kenya, Sudan, Egypt and Zaire. He stayed in Africa volunteering as a teacher for six years before he went back to Europe. While in Europe, he worked as an apprentice for renowned Belgian sculptor Rik Poot. In Rampelberg (2001), he narrates how he learnt about 3-dimensional art from Poot. He learnt about the lost wax technique and bronze casting. He also opted to do a lot of side jobs at theatres; assisting with set design and prop design as well. Marc came back to Africa, settling in Kenya in 1980. There he met his wife Chelenge, a Kenyan sculptor. They have three children together; Rosie, Naomi and Rik.**

**Rampelberg (2001) describes how he worked in Kenya as a French teacher, making furniture on the side. Soon enough, he created a client base making one of a kind designs. He rented space out in Industrial area where he created a collection that he show cased at Goete Institute. In Githuku (2017), Rampelberg states that his designs are reminiscent of natural forms though he doesn't wish to directly mimic nature rather his curves are mimicry of geometry.**

**During his interview with the researcher, he describes his work as minimalistic. "My work may share the curve with the Art Deco style, not however the serpentine curve. My curves are more geometric in nature; like a circle. The geometric shapes are combined together to create various forms." "Moreover, my designs are stripped of any applied decoration. Look at that (points to a stool as seen in figure 14) I want the volume to speak through a line which draws its inspiration from geometrical shapes." He describes his inspiration as without a doubt the human body, particularly the female form. Marc clarifies during the interview that he grew up during the Art Deco era in Europe so it is possible that these visions subconsciously**

rubbed up on him, though his intent is to create minimalistic works as seen on figure 15.

During the interview with the researcher, Marc emphasizes that his creations are timeless pieces that capture simplistic natural beauty. His work is striking as it captures African aesthetics and Western ideals at the same time. His work is a unique interpretation of East African design, even though he was not born here. His team comprise of East Africans. Marc is a firm believer that local wood should be harvested and consumed by local designers other than the prioritization of foreign markets. He believes that this will improve the quality of products and control reforestation of the cut down trees. He imports majority of his timber from Congo.



**Fig 14: Bar stool**

**Source: The researcher**



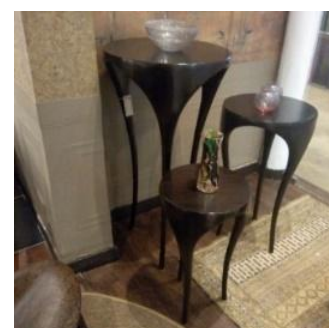
**Fig15: Side stool**

**Source: The researcher**



**Fig 16: Items in Ruaraka reception store**

**Source: The researcher**



**Fig17: Iconic side stools in village market**

**Source: The researcher**



**Fig 18: Display in village market store**

**Source: The researcher**

**Rampel designs represent a Kenyan brand that would flourish as a high-level production company with the right policies in place. It is to place machines, tools, accessories, labourers and raw materials in the process at the right place (Treesat, 2002) The designs showcase how diverse and unique contemporary design is in Kenya as seen in figure 16 and 17; yet most contemporary designers are facing similar challenges.**

**From a site visit made by the researcher in 2019, Rampel designs is currently located in Ruaraka where they have a go down workshop where they make the furniture as seen on figure 16. There are offices and a showroom as well. The space is perfect for their activities and their machinery is quite impressive. They have one large machine that slices the large timber pieces and two band saws that slice the smaller pieces. In one godown, there is the large slicing machine where carpenters prepare the large pieces and carpenters polishing complete furniture pieces with natural wax. In an adjacent go-down, the researcher observed carpenters slicing small pieces of wood and others smoothening the furniture pieces. The second go-down also has a lot of joinery being done. The first floor of the second go down has Marc's office, a reception area with his secretary Mary, who has worked for him since he started Rampel**



designs in 1987. There is also a large show room with attractive furniture arrangement.

The researcher visited the village market store. It showcases the array of furniture in the various designs as seen on figure 18. The store is managed by an attendant. Furniture pieces have price tags; with pieces ranging from Ksh.870, 000 (8,430\$) to Ksh. 178,000 (13,484\$). The pieces are well displayed as seen on figure 19 and 20. The main clients are locals and expatriates. The designs have the signature curvilinear look even when upholstered as seen in figure 21 and figure 22



**Fig 19: Display in village market**

**Source: The researcher**



**Fig 20: Furniture display**

**Source: The researcher**



**Fig 21: Sofa design in village market**

**Source: The researcher**



**Fig 22: Seat design**

**Source: The researcher**

## **Design process of the furniture**

**Marc describes the design process to the researcher as a simplified process with very little machinery. The designs start from a sketching process with relevant notes then developed drawings and 1/1 templates are made by Marc himself. Then a skilled foreman works with the 1/1 templates to come up with a silhouette as seen on figure 25. The carpenter cuts the large pieces using the machine as seen in figure 23. The small mosaic pieces are also further cut by the band saw as seen on figure 24.**

**The next step involves refinement and smoothing of the curved-out furniture as seen on figure 24. After the various parts are refined as seen on figure 27, they are joined together and refined further as seen on figure 28. Soon enough the bespoke piece is complete and it is polished using natural wax as seen on figure 29. Marc elaborates during the interview that he has received better results by paying the carpenters a monthly salary than paying them per piece. The carpenter works on each piece by himself from start to finish for accountability and a sense of attachment.**

**Marc believes in empowering his staff and he ensures that human dignity is never compromised upon. He states that "Dignity is the biggest thing". He believes that a large part of his success has been his ability to keep a great team. Rampel designs enjoys a large and very exclusive client base; he has worked with Safaricom on the CEO's desk, the presidential suit at Serena Hotel and the mercury lounge at the ABC among others.**



**Fig 23: Large cutting tool pieces**  
**Source: the researcher**



**Fig 24: Carpenter using band saw for small pieces**  
**Source: the researcher**



**Fig 25 Making the frame**  
**Source: the researcher**



**Fig 26: joining the mosaic pieces to create a shape**  
**Source: the researcher**



**Fig 27: Refining the shape**  
**Source: the researcher**



**Fig 28 Assembly of the various pieces**  
**Source: the researcher**



**Fig 29: Polishing the furniture with wax**  
**Source: the researcher**

## **WAMBUI WAMAE KAMIRU- COLLYMORE**

**According to Githuku (2017), Wambui Kamiru is an installation artists and founder of the Arts Space. She graduated from Oxford University with a masters in African studies. She is a leader in the installation industry; having set up successful installations at Kuona Trust, Arts Space amongst other large exhibition spaces. Installation art is an artistic genre that showcases three-dimensional art that transforms the perception of a space. These set ups are applied to interior design to convey an image or send a message. The media used are experimental and bold; they are usually cross media and may involve sensors, which plays on the reaction to the audience’s movement when looking at the installations. By using virtual reality as a medium, immersive virtual reality art is probably the most deeply interactive form of art (Nechvatal, 2009).**

**#Your name betrays you series**

According to an interview she had with figure studios in 2015, this series was born after a famous Kenyan politician told a journalist that his name betrays him because of the question he asked during a press briefing. The collection was in honour of Terrance Ranger, a personal friend who passed away. Terrance believed that the categories Africans place themselves in were instigated by colonialists. She initially tried painting boxes but the boxes fell apart; so she got cabinets from Odds n Ends that were in vibrant colours. She then painted them black and white because of the symbolism of categorising people and each compartment has writings of stereotypes given to various communities as seen in figure 31 and figure 33.

There are forty compartments in total each representing a different tribe. There was very little grey area on the installation with the intent to capture how there is usually very little gradient when stereotyping people. Wambui says during the interview with figure studios, " I want people to walk in to this exhibitions and to ask themselves the difficult questions, I want them to ask themselves what their stereotypes are, who fed them those stereotypes and in what ways that they are giving life to those stereotypes."

Large chair is the structure that is believed to have formed cultural distinction and tribalism forming how people should be for a tribe. There is also a projector, showing historical imagery of the colonialists addressing the indigenous peoples. There is also a book on a desk with the title 'Kenya burning' as seen on figure 30. This references the extremities that have been experienced due to the use of tribalism to categorize people in Kenya. The book Kenya Burning is a compilation of the aftermath of the 2007 general elections held in Kenya. The Prestige bookshop website highlights

that the compilation features graphics by Yasuyoshi Chiba and Boniface Mwangi. It was published by the Go down Arts Centre. Wambui also uses tags on each cabinet drawer; to represent the various tribes.

Githuku (2017) analyses Wambui's exploration of the origin of ethnicity using current literature on the invention of culture and tradition. The exhibition received raving reviews when it was showcased at the Kuona Trust. Wambui remains a leader in this genre and her expressions continue to challenge the way we think and interact with our space and environment. In the installation, there were whispering sounds that represent how stereotypes are gossip material to compartmentalize human behaviour in a way that does not fully represent the victim of the whispers. The imagery of Kenya pre colonialism is projected on a screen, giving a glimpse of how the various peoples were as the stereotypes were being initially formulated.

In an interview with Kass International (2015), Wambui explains how explorers who first visited Kenya described Maasai as hostile and nomads, later on when the missionaries came to Kenya, they referred to the explorers' description thus categorised the Maasai as hostile and don't like education. When the colonial government settled in Kenya, they gave Maasai men the role of being guards due to the notion that the Maasai would be brave in that role and also because of the stereotype that the Maasai had no liking education, the colonialists thought that the Maasai will not bother them all the time asking for a job. These stereotypes have been solidified years later, and unfortunately, have influenced the trajectory of opportunities for some people in this community. Wambui clarifies that the stereotypes typed on the write ups in the drawers are not



her own stereotypes but a collection of stereotypes that she collected from interviews and from the internet. In her interview with Kass International (2015), Wambui challenges us to evaluate stereotypes before applying the impressions to be true.

Wambui applied minimalism in her installations by using simplistic furniture designs as seen on figure 32. The chairs have simple geometric lines and are in black, white and beige. Wambui also ensures that there is use of dominance through the use of the large chair and the application of unity through colour scheming and the similarity of the geometric silhouettes. The setup has an appropriate scale except for the intentionally large seat. Installation art can be associated with interior design; Installations are achieved by applying interior design despite the fact that the end products are more expressional than functional. Her chosen genre is indeed effective and multi-dimensional, just like any other creative form.



**Fig 30: Kenyan burning on the table**  
**Source: Visual Voices by Githuku**



**Fig 31: Wambui working on cabinets**  
**Source: Visual Voices by Githuku**



**Figure 32: Kenyan burning on the table**  
**Source: Visual Voices by Githuku**



**Figure 33: The cabinets with tags**  
**Source: Visual Voices by Githuku**

## **# Harambee 63**

**In 2003, Wambui created an experimental installation on Pan Africanism, Harambee 63 at Kuona Trust, Nairobi, where her studio was based. It was also shown at the University of Wits, South Africa (2014), the Trapholt museum of Modern Art, Denmark (2016). Harambee 63 (# Harambee 63) places the period of independence, specifically 1960-1963 as a key marker of the global movement against the oppression of coloured and black people (Githuku, 2017).**

**Wambui captures how the liberation of Kenya from the British was not a sole effort but rather, the mood of black people around the world was unilateral. The series demonstrated how the activities here in Kenya towards colonial freedom, such as the Mau Mau movement, was a part of the puzzle to the larger problem. The installation set up captures a recreational space of a bar area. The set-up of the bar as seen on figure 35 is intentional because this space was the key interactive point for black people, other than religious spaces, where they could have open conversations about politics without worrying over the preying eye of their oppressors (Githuku, 2017).**

**Most of these bars were not fancy at all, but they were places of solace and a place that black people could claim as their own. The installation also features sixty three gumboots, each with a stencil of an iconic figure who contributed to the liberation of black people during colonisation in Africa. The imagery varies a lot, including African leaders and leaders from other continents. During an interview with David Kamiru, Wambui states that she used**



**gumboots because gumboots are tools of resistance; in South Africa, they were used by the miners and they created a coded language of tapping the boots, one leg on the other, as a means of communication in the dark caves and as defiance as they were restricted from talking to one another (figure 36). The second reason is because gumboots were developed for war fare, in Europe, the Duke of Wellington had developed these gumboots during the battle of Waterloo where he defeated Napoleon as recorded in the History website**

**The third reason is because in African guerrilla warfare, the soldiers usually do not afford the appropriate uniforms, so they use gumboots instead. Using graphic stencils and video, Harambee63 introduced 63 faces of the global war against racial oppression that happened most extensively over a period of five years – in the period leading to Kenya's independence in 1963. The faces represented include Angela Davis, Robert Mugabe, Che Guevara, Mahatma Gandhi, Miriam Makeba, Patrice Lumumba, Muammar Gaddafi, Martin Luther King Jr, Frantz Fanon, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti amongst others as seen on figure 34**

**The sixty-three faces are used to show Kenya did not become decolonised through sole efforts. According to World History project, in May 1893, while Gandhi was on his way to Pretoria, a white man objected to Gandhi's presence in a first-class carriage, and he was ordered to move to the van compartment at the end of the train. Gandhi, who had a first-class ticket, refused, and was thrown off the train at Pietermaritzburg. Shivering through the winter night in the waiting room of the station, Gandhi made the momentous decision to stay on in South Africa. He stayed in South Africa for twenty one**

**years, preparing for the liberation of his people in India from British colonisation. He influenced other Indians such as Jawaharlal Nehru who later became the first president of India. Nehru's efforts inspired Kwame Nkrumah, who became the first Ghanaian president and a strong influence of Pan African culture that fueled leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta and Mau Mau leaders.**

**The Mau Mau revolution inspired leaders such as Fidel Castro and Malcom X. One of the most popular quotes by Malcom X includes, 'We are African, and we happened to be in America. We're not American. We are people who formerly were Africans who were kidnapped and brought to America.' And 'We need a Mau Mau in Alabama, We need a Mau Mau in Mississippi.' Through the bravery of the civil rights movement, that Malcom X was a part of, John F Kenedy passed Affirmative action laws that give equal rights to African Americans. Che Guevara also visited Africa to learn more about Guerilla warfare. A year before his fateful Bolivia mission, Che Guevara led a group of guerrillas to support the Congolese liberation movement in 1965 (Galvez &Guevara, 1999). Artists such as Josephine Baker and Miriam Makeba, who sang Aluta Continua dedicating the song to Samora Machel played a key role in motivating the revolutions. A total of seventeen countries attained independence in the 1960's Rosenberg, (2018).**



**Fig 34: Stencils of the revolutionaries**  
**Source: Githuku (2017)**



**Fig 35: The installation**  
**Source: www.wambuikamiru.com**



**Fig 36: The stencil gumboots. Source: www.youtube.com**

## FINDINGS

From the findings, the researcher concluded that that the contemporaries share individualism in common and the desire to create excellent forms applying themes that are close to them. The champions also expressed themselves in a well thought through

process. They have infused a contemporary angle into artifactual cultures of the east visual language.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **SIMILARITIES AMONGST THE CONTEMPORARY CHAMPIONS**

The application of contemporary design ties all the champions together; the use of what is present and relevant whilst maintaining their own individuality. Wambui's installation Harambee 63, applied stencilling, which is a contemporary application here in Kenya; as seen on Matatu art and t-shirts. Rampelberg applies minimalistic approach to his designs; sticking to monochromatic colour schemes and geometrical patterns. Njeri's art work in the Mau Mau series emulates contemporary visions for past leaders, by applying jewellery in her graphics that resemble what would be worn by the youths of the current time. They all approach contemporary design in a refreshing manner; all seemingly pioneers and champions of individualism.

They have all referenced the past in their executions. In order to move forward, you have to reference the past. The contemporaries have gone back in time; Wambui and Njeri have referenced Kenya's independence journey while Rampelberg describes his reference to the past to the researcher as 'Art Deco was all around me when I was growing up; if it did rub on to my creations now, I would not be surprised though it was not intentional'. The productions seem nostalgic of the past and mirror the need to learn from it. They have all expressed the need to preserve what is identifiable as Kenyan in the creation of new approaches.

The contemporaries have managed to create individualism that has led to making the practice a financially viable experience. Wambui has showcased her artwork across the globe and according to an interview she had with Kass international, she was able to secure a grant from Kuona trust for her installation, your name betrays you. Njeri has an active account on behance where she has displayed her work for purchase. Her work has been showcased on the Kenyan Airways magazine, Msafiri.

Her designs have also been sold at Alliance Francaise in Nairobi, selling memorabilia wall art at around one hundred and fifty US dollars. Rampelberg's target market is the affluent who would afford his pieces though his approach is to make products that are valuable and durable as seen on figure 34. In an interview with the researcher, he states that his furniture pieces have been showcased not only in his studio in Ruaraka but also in Village market. He also expresses that he can just look at a piece of furniture and state 'This cannot be sold for less than such and such amount'



*Fig 37: Rocking chair. Source: The researcher*

The contemporaries also share their interest in improving the local creative economy. They all emphasize the need to improve the

industry through empowerment of artists and designers and the creation of policies and structures. According to Afrifutures (2019), Njeri believes in young artists taking their rightful place in the narration of African tales. In an interview with the researcher, Rampelberg iterates the need for proper government policies on the exportation of Kenyan hardwoods. He believes proper policies should be strategized in order to improve the sector and curb deforestation by creating organized reforestation and solving the local timber needs. Wambui, in an interview with Kass International, explains the need to look deep within our hearts to find out what instigates negative stereotypes and learn how we can remove ourselves from such inclinations in order to improve our country, thus creating a stable nation.

The contemporaries share similar application of elements and principles of design. Their works appear to have a pleasing balance and an intentional approach to unity. Wambui's stencilled gum boots and Njeri's Afro futuristic compositions all use human imagery; applying scale and proportion to achieve graphic design. The works also share the commonality of representing revolutionary figures in the liberation of Kenya. The two also share a distinct appreciation of the Mau Mau movement, referencing it as a part of the design inspiration. The furniture pieces used for #your name betrays you series applies the use of natural wood colours, reminiscent of Rampel's pieces. The furniture pieces also apply geometrical shapes; Rampel opting for curvy lines and Wambui opting to use straight lines.

## **DIVERGENCE AMONGST THE CONTEMPORARY CHAMPIONS**

The artists apply different media and forms in the execution of their work. Afro futurism is different from mosaic furniture design as it is different from installation art. Each method has its own set of design procedures and desired output. The contemporaries in essence are not bound in their creative identity.

The contemporaries vary in their production systems due to the simple fact that they are creating different merchandise. The consumable properties of Njeri's graphic imagery highly varies from the momentary installations executed by Wambui. Rampelberg creates hardwood furniture that can stand against the test of time, whereas Wambui creates to evoke emotions and thoughts for a given moment in time. Indeed their production strategies will vary to suit the intent of the final product and the desired lifespan of the tangible design

## **METHODS**

This paper forms a series of annual workshops and symposia on insights into the arts and design of east Africa. The workshops bring together faculty, students at masters and above and erudite stakeholders of east African art and design. Decisively, the papers form partial fulfillment of the requirement of the student's respective degree. Conducted in Nairobi, the study utilized desk research, focus group discussions and presentations. The methods used by the researcher to collect data include interviews, observation during site visits, reading books and desktop research. Results are presented in continuous prose due to the historical and qualitative nature of the research.

## **CONCLUSION**

**The comparative study of the three exemplars yielded more similarities than expected. The creative economy is so diverse yet very similar in its challenges and inward desires and intent. The three contemporaries are all trying out new approaches to creativity to solve everyday solutions. They all desire to create an income for themselves and those that work with them. Unity is a principle used in design to create oneness; contemporaries have managed to be a piece of a larger puzzle that unifies to create the image of the creative industry of our growing nation**



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***He has contributed many articles to academic journals on eco-design, eco-ethics, and construction and sustainability. Apart from this 6<sup>th</sup> volume, Dr.Maina has also authored course books on design materials and processes volume 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5, Introduction to ergonomics- a learner's manual, Qualitative & Quantitative research methods simplified, How to Write a Good Proposal and communication skills for college and university students. Among other interests, Maina has researched on glass as design material, recycling of solid waste and human factors for interior ambience. He has also been involved in several consultancies and exhibitions individually and in collaborations.***



### ***Cyprian Kavita Kiswili***

***Born in Machakos, Kenya, Kiswili works predominantly in the medium of painting and digital illustration and aims to depict beauty and sophistication through a combination of colour, texture and shape. He works as a product designer in a reputable shoe production enterprise in Nairobi. Cyprian Kavita Kiswili, who is studying for a Master's Degree in Art and Design at the school of the Arts & Design, University of Nairobi, was among the young designers who competed in the Czech Republic at Bata Fashion Weekend 2019, held at Prague's historic Zofin Palace.***

***The winning design creates a striking balance between fun and seriousness, taking symbols and icons and expressing them in the form of fashion and is also heavily inspired by illustrations and cartoons. Kiswili winning shoe nicknamed 'Blossom' draws rich inspiration from the cheerfulness, playfulness and fullness of the bushy Savannah land.***

# HAIR THEN, HAIR NOW: AFRICAN STYLING BECOMING LEISURE FOR ALL

*Samuel Mwituria Maina PhD, Mwituria@yahoo.co.uk  
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## **Abstract**

**Background:** *The idea of leisure connoting free time makes it synonymous with laziness and wastefulness which does not fit very well within African traditional thought. In the colonial era, the idea of leisure was seen as alien to the Africans and in the post-colonial era, some people associated it with idleness and irresponsibility. A deeper dig however in history, shows the African man and woman kept themselves entertained on specific occasions whenever they were not working. These pastime activities included dance, bull fighting, games, drawing and even hair styling. Problem: there exists a deep rooted misconception that African hairstyles are without local aesthetic content or value. From the western view, the African was thought to have no sense of leisure. Objective: the objective of this study was to establish the role and the reasons for varied hairstyles donned by Africans then and now. Design: the study used desktop and library research methods*

**Setting:** *the study was conducted in Nairobi Kenya under the auspices of the school of the arts and design of the University of Nairobi. Its scope however spanned Africa and the diasporic dispensations all over the world. Subjects: Prominent hairstylists were interviewed. Anthropologist gave their views while experts in*

*fashion and fads were involved in a focus group discussion. Results: it emerged that African artistic expression through hair styling persists even in the era great neo-colonial influence from the west. Today, new styles have been infused with the old to forge new expressions away from the traditional ones of aesthetic, entertainment and rebellion. Notable are the Rasta and the hair extensions popular in the Americas among people from Africa and the ex-slave descendants. Conclusion: Several African scholars have explored the history of hair making from pre-colonial Africa to contemporary times (Byrd, 2001). Prior to the colonial times, Black hair denoted cultural and spiritual meanings for both men and women. While some of the hairstyles that were donned by Africans during this period are still worn today, including twists, braids, Zulu knots, Nubian knots, and dreadlocks, the manner and occasions in which they did this will always remain different from modern time's hair making. Standards of beauty have varied enormously according to time and place. Yet as long as people have ordered their social relations, hairdressing has had a role in the struggle for status and reproduction.*

**Keywords:** *Hair making, Leisure, Styles, Plaiting, African comb*

## **INTRODUCTION**

***"To be able to feel leisure intelligently is the last form of civilization."***

**Ambani (2016) writes that historical perspective of leisure in Africa can be traced to the earliest kingdoms and states that were established where the kinship was to be entertained through songs and dances by the kinsmen. It also entailed the celebrations conducted during weddings, circumcision, and good harvest. Leisure time was also spent by indulging in**

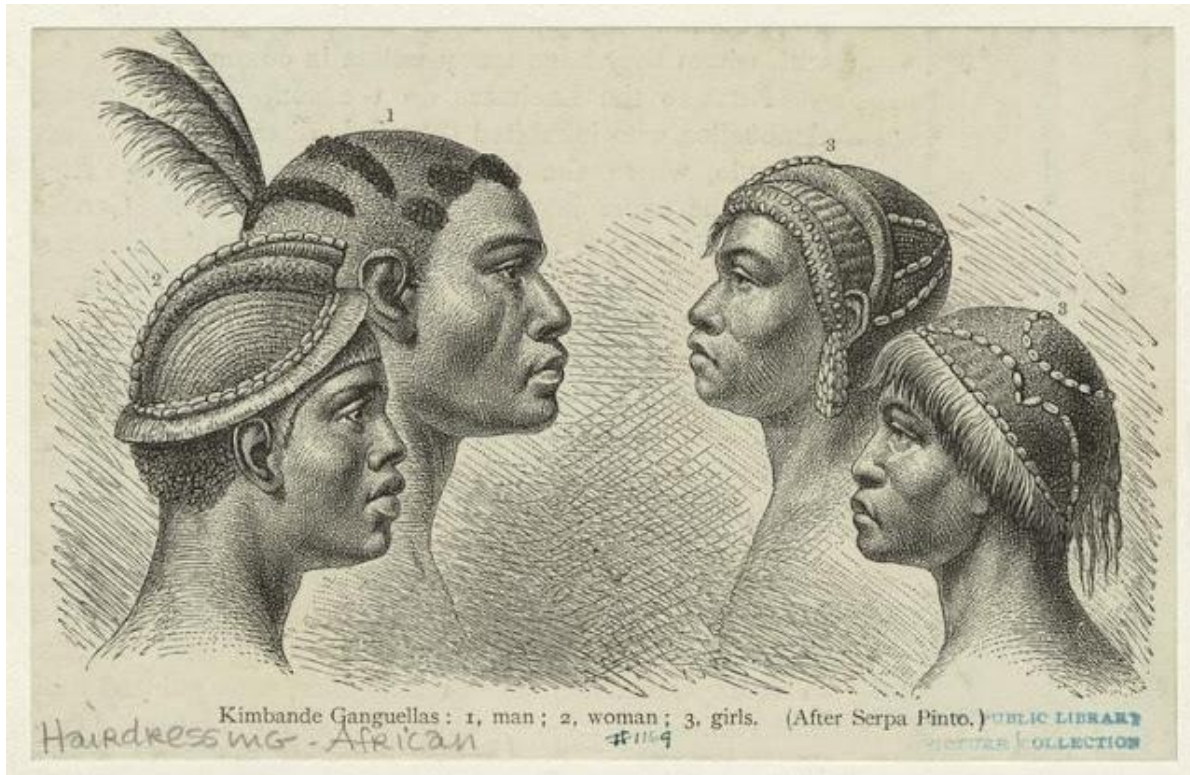
**other social activities for example wrestling and hair styling. Some people viewed leisure as a period of time they called free or unobligated time. For others, leisure was related to recreational activities such as competitive sports, cooperative games, outdoor endeavors, and cultural pursuits and socializing. This paper looks at Hair styling and making as a leisure activity both in traditional and modern African society and the products used in the activity.**

## **THEORY**

### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LEISURE**

**The historical perspective of leisure in Africa can be traced to the earliest kingdoms and states that were established where the kinship was to be entertained through songs and dances by the kinsmen. It also entailed the celebrations conducted during weddings, circumcision, and good harvest. Leisure time was also spent by indulging in sporting activities for example wrestling (Jollah, 2013). In examining the historical perspective of leisure in general, the writer looks at Hair making as a past time.**





**Figure 1 Serpa Pinto, Alexandre Alberto Da Rocha De, 1846-1900, artist**  
**Source Title: History of Mankind, by Friedrich Ratzel, translated from the**  
**second German edition by A. J. Butler, with an introduction by E. B. Tylor,**  
**Publisher: New York: Macmillan, 1896-1898.**

**Hairdressing in Africa (fig 2) was always the work of trusted friends or relatives. In addition to the amiable social aspects of the event, the hair, in the hands of an enemy, could become an ingredient in the production of a dangerous charm or "medicine" that would injure the owner. This then made hair making a very sacred and important leisure activity in traditional African societies.**

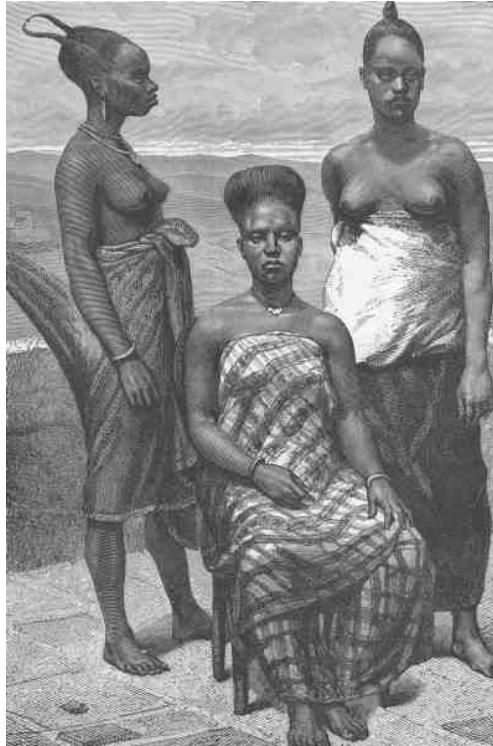


**Figure 2: Women hair making in Namibia - Photo dated: Anneliese Scherz, 1990's**

## **HISTORICAL ROLE OF HAIR**

**To comprehend the real importance of hair and styling to African people one must do so through the eyes of an African worldview and cosmology, only then will the full scope of its importance be thoroughly understood (Nomonza, 2010). Throughout the ages, from the Ancient Nile Valley civilizations to the movement West and the establishment of Western African empires, hair has maintained a spiritual, social, cultural and aesthetic significance in the lives of African people. Historically, hair has held significant roles in traditional African societies, including being a part of the language and communication system. For instance, during**

the 15<sup>th</sup> century, African people such as the Wolof (as seen in fig 3), Mende, Mandingo, and Yoruba used hairstyles as means to carry messages.



***Figure 3 Fante women of Elmina (Edina) in Gold coast (Ghana) with their hairstyle - a wooden engraved drawing (1800-1895).***

One of the unique features of African textured hair is its ability to be sculpted and molded into various shapes and forms. Hence, while hair may play an important role in the lives of people of all races, for people of African descent, this role is amplified due to the unique nature and texture of Black hair. Since antiquity, Black hairstyles have been known for their complexity and multifaceted nature, a notion that remains true today (Bellinza, 1992).

## **SYMBOLISM**

According to Mozinba, (2000), hair was and continues to be

used as a marker of various cultural indications. In Africa hair was used to denote age, religion, social rank, and marital status as well as other status symbols (fig 4). For example, during the Medieval African period (12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century), a young Wolof girl would partially shave her head to point out that she was not of marrying age. The extent of social messages in hairstyle choices did not end on the continent of Africa.



*Figure 4: historically, hairstyles symbolized certain things. Girl with traditional hairstyle and tribal scarring, Sirigu*

As late as the 1980's, Black men wore a style known as the high top fade (fig 3), a hairstyle where the sides of the head are shaved with the top portion growing upwards and as high as possible. The style conveyed various cultural and political messages such as images of

**Africa, corporate logos, partner's names, and other symbols were etched into the hair or onto the scalp.**



***Figure 5: The late 80's black hair High top fade (Kane, circa 1980s. Al Pereira/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images***

**The high top fade was a modern day method of illustrating the multifaceted symbolism of Black hair—a thing that can be used as the message itself or to state a particular message. Additionally, true to African epistemology, spirituality has played and continues to play an essential role in Black culture. Consequently, because of its integral function, hair has been and continues to be used to increase the potency of medicines and indigenous healing potions. It is an understatement to suggest that hair is merely part of African cultural identity, as hair and identity are inseparable. For both African men and women hair is intricately connected to cultural identity, spirituality, character make up, and notions of beauty.**

**Of particular importance to this leisure activity that was conducted mostly in the afternoons after long hours in the fields, the tools used such as the comb. The comb had cultural meaning that indicated one's particular group and other spiritual symbolism, personal history, and class status long before Europeans engaged in the mass enslavement of Africans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Men carved these symbols and spiritual demarcations into their combs that were specifically designed with long teeth and rounded tips to untangle African textured hair. These iconic combs are known today as the Afro combs.**

## **HAIRSTYLING TOOLS**

**A primary tool for shaping and teasing the hair is, of course, the comb. (Schmidt, 1926) notes that "the comb is found among every people of the world, and appears in numerous forms," and that "treating the hair with butter or vegetable oils is a widespread practice, and so is rubbing with earth or lime". To dress the hair, African people used oils and agents such as camwood, clay, and ochers, and devices such as extensions of human hair (from spouses or relatives), vegetable fiber, sinew (Fig. 6), and, more recently, locally spun or imported mercerized cotton**





**Figure 6: Two women whose braids have been lengthened to their ankles through the use of sinew (eefipa) extensions, Mbalantu of Wambo group, Namibia, Africa Photo: M.Schettler, 1940's**

## **THE AFRO COMB**

**The Afro comb has long been the product that is used to create eye-catching and cultural relevant hairstyles for men and women of African descent. The Afro comb serves as a status symbol in many African societies and has for centuries. The comb has also come to denote affiliation with certain groups or tribes and can signify one's religious beliefs or rituals. In ancient society and in modern times, the handles of the combs are adorned with objects that artistically showcase a person's status. These include human figure, motifs and pictures of elements in nature. Spiritual artwork is often depicted on Afro combs as well as can be seen in (fig 7).**



**Figure 7: These four combs were intended as love gifts. Clockwise, upper left: Fante or Asante male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. Gift of Henry H. Hawley III. Public domain. Upper right: Akan male artist, Ghana, early 20th century Gift of Dr. Nii and Martina Y. Lower right: Akan male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. Lower left: Asante male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Willi Riese to the Jennie Simpson Educational Collection of African Art.**



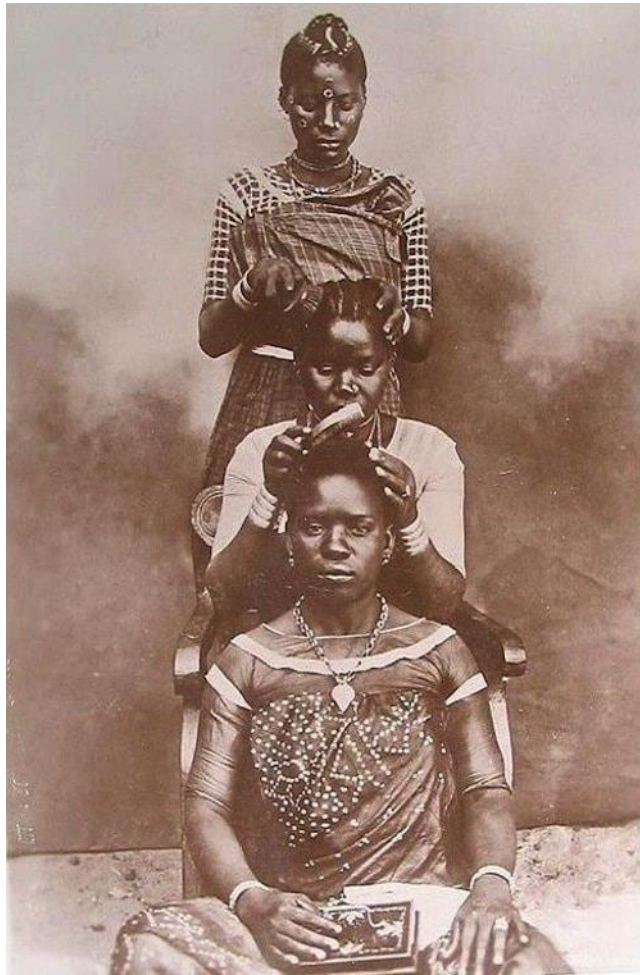
There are also archaeological burial records that indicate that some variation of the Afro comb has been around for thousands of years. Studies show that the comb is around 6000 years and originated in Africa before re-emerging in Britain, the Americas and the Caribbean. (H., 1996)



*Figure 8: Antique East African Swahili Carved Ebony Hair Comb*

## **SOCIAL HAIR STYLING SIGNIFICANCE**

“In the early fifteenth century, hair served as a carrier of messages in most African societies” (K. Anjyo, 1992) These Africans--citizens from the Mende, Wolof, Yoruba, and Mandingo—were all transported to the “New World” on slave ships. Within these communities, hair often communicated age, marital status, ethnic identity, religion, wealth, and rank in the community.



**Figure 9: Women plaiting and braiding during their leisure time – Simon Knurenza Archives**

**Hairstyles could also be used to identify a geographic region. For example, in the Wolof culture of Senegal, young girls partially shaved their hair as an outward symbol that they were not courting. (H., 1996) “And the Karamo people of Nigeria, for example, were recognized for their unique coiffure—a shaved head with a single tuft of hair left on top” (Fig 10). Likewise, widowed women would stop attending to their hair during their period of mourning so they wouldn’t look attractive to other men. And as far as community leaders were concerned, they donned elaborate hairstyles. And the royalty would often wear a hat or headpiece, as a**

symbol of their stature (Kwekudee, September, 2012).

For the Himba tribe (Northern Namibia), hair indicated one's age, life stage, and marital status. The tribe lives in the northwestern region of Namibia.



**Figure 10: The Karamo hairstyle - Photo: Herbert Lang Expedition**

The ethnic group members used a mixture of ground ochre, goat hair, and butter to create their dreadlocks. They also included hair extensions when weaving their dreadlocks.

Teenage girls would wear braid strands or dreadlocked hair that hanged over their faces. Doing this symbolized that they'd entered into puberty (Babou, 2008). Married women and new mothers wore Erembe headdresses made from animal skin. Young women who were ready for marriage tied their dreadlocks to reveal their faces.

Bertoia (2002) advances that hair making and styling was not only common among women only but also men. In the Himba tribe for example, unmarried men wore a single braid to show their status. Once they got married, they covered their heads never to unveil them in public again. They removed their head covering at funerals only. Often men (Fig 11) shaved their heads bald or in a specific fashion as a symbol of masculinity and their caste or class. In Kemet (ancient Egypt), many men would butter their hair down with goat butter or oil until it hung down in a bob.

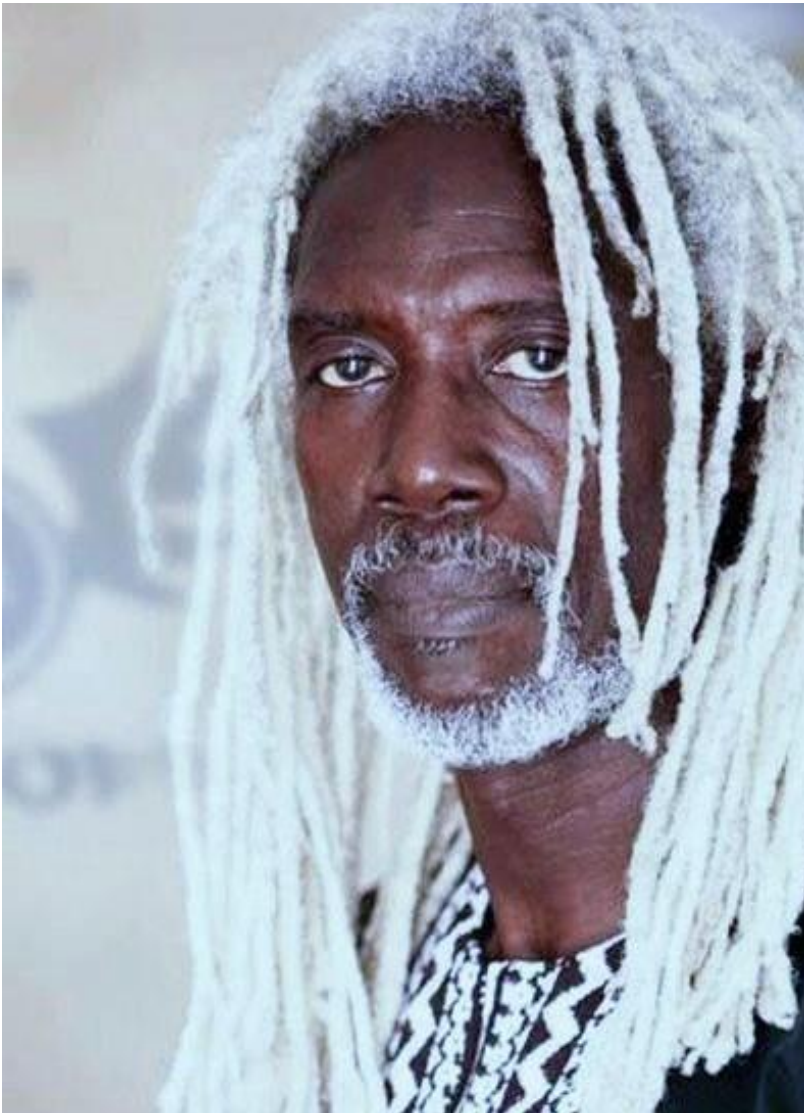


**Figure 11: Men's hairdressing, Sango, Upper Mobangi River, Democratic Republic of Congo - Photo: The Minister of Colonies, Belgium, early 20th century.**



## DREADLOCKS

Dreadlocks (Fig 12) have often been perceived as a hairstyle associated with 20th century Jamaican and Rastafarian culture, but according to Dr. Bert Ashe's book, *Twisted: My Dreadlock Chronicles*, one of the earliest known recordings of the style has been found in the Hindu Vedic scriptures.



*Figure 12: African man in dreadlocks Picture Library/Getty Image*

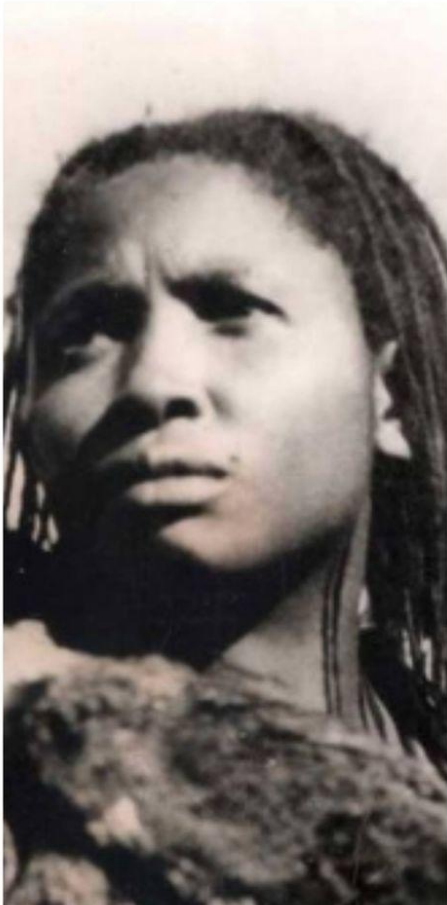
## HAIR STYLE AS POLITICAL EXPRESSION

Mau Mau, militant African nationalist movement that originated in the 1950s among the Kikuyu people of Kenya.

**The Mau Mau (origin of the name is uncertain) advocated violent resistance to British domination in Kenya; the movement was especially associated with the ritual oaths employed by leaders of the Kikuyu Central Association to promote unity in the independence movement.**

**In 1950 the Mau Mau were banned by British authorities, and in October 1952, after a campaign of sabotage and assassination attributed to Mau Mau terrorists, the British Kenya government declared a state of emergency and began four years of military operations against Kikuyu rebels. By the end of 1956, more than 11,000 rebels had been killed in the fighting, along with about 100 Europeans and 2,000 African loyalists. More than 20,000 other Kikuyu were put into detention camps, where intensive efforts were made to convert them to the political views of the government—i.e., to abandon their nationalist aspirations. Despite these government actions, Kikuyu resistance spearheaded the Kenya independence movement, and Jomo Kenyatta, who had been jailed as a Mau Mau leader in 1953, became prime minister of an independent Kenya 10 years later. In 2003 the ban on the Mau Mau was lifted by the Kenyan government.**

**Field Marshal Muthoni. She was the only woman field marshal in the Mau Mau. The Mau Mau had three field marshals 1. Field marshal Dedan Kimathi 2. Field marshal Musa mwariama 3. Field marshal Muthoni Below the field marshals, were generals like Baimungi, matejagwo, kahu itina etc**



*Field Marshal Muthoni wa Kirima at 20 years and later as an old woman*

**Muthoni wa Kirima was born in Central Province in 1931. Being born in the colonial era meant Muthoni, as a young girl, saw the injustices committed against native Africans by the colonialists. Having never had a formal education and with parents who worked in a European farms, Muthoni nursed the dream of Kenya becoming independent one day.**

**Muthoni, aged about 20, became a spy for the Mau Mau fighters who had camped in the forest in 1952. During the war, many women were used as spies by the fighters or supplied food to them. For Muthoni, spying and bringing food was not enough, she wanted to fight. She wanted to be right where the action was. Muthoni convinced Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi to allow her into the forest as a fighter. Muthoni proved a gallant soldier.**

**Fighting next to Dedan Kimathi and proving herself to be a valuable soldier, Muthoni was promoted to field marshal and became the only woman to have ever reached that status. Muthoni was injured on many occasions and at times looked death in the eye. She had two miscarriages which left her unable to bear more children but her fighting spirit never died. Sporting the signature dreadlocks worn by all the fighters, Muthoni stayed in the forest and fought for the freedom of her country.**

**One Mau Mau General calls himself Kahiu Itina literally meaning 'Knife in the arse', symbolizing what he does to the enemy.**

**Field Marshal Kimathi himself has the code name 'Matemo', meaning 'the one who cuts'. This suggests that he is the keen cutting edge that keeps the colonialists on edge.**



**General Mathenge** has the code name 'Kirema - thahu', meaning 'the one who cannot be touched by evil'. The fact that he is fighting on the side of justice suggests that no evil can harm him and that no matter the might of the colonial armies, he is indestructible.

**Captain Vido** is also known as Ndururi Gititika the latter name meaning 'one who pushes something burdensome'. The burden here is obviously the colonialists and Vido views himself as one who has the task of pushing them out of the black man's country.

**Sergeant Kana Kehoti** is one of the young forest fighters. His name means 'a child who is able to take care of himself' and therefore amply captures the fact that though he is very young that has not prevented him from volunteering for combat duty.

**Brigadier Mai Maruru's** name means 'bitter water', symbolizing the fact that metaphorically the enemy finds him very "bitter".

**General Kirihinya's** name on the other hand means one who is strong; symbolic of the fact that he is strong enough to contend with the enemy. **General Matenjagwo's** name means 'one who is not shaven', referring to the trademark Mau Mau dreadlocks.

From the foregoing, it is evident that hair gave the mau mau an identity of political resistance. Although it happened by accident due to lack of shaving facilities and the time for grooming, when it hit the international media, it was quickly adopted in Jamaica and the caribbean as a resistance style due to the romantic nature of the mau mau war. In that war, a

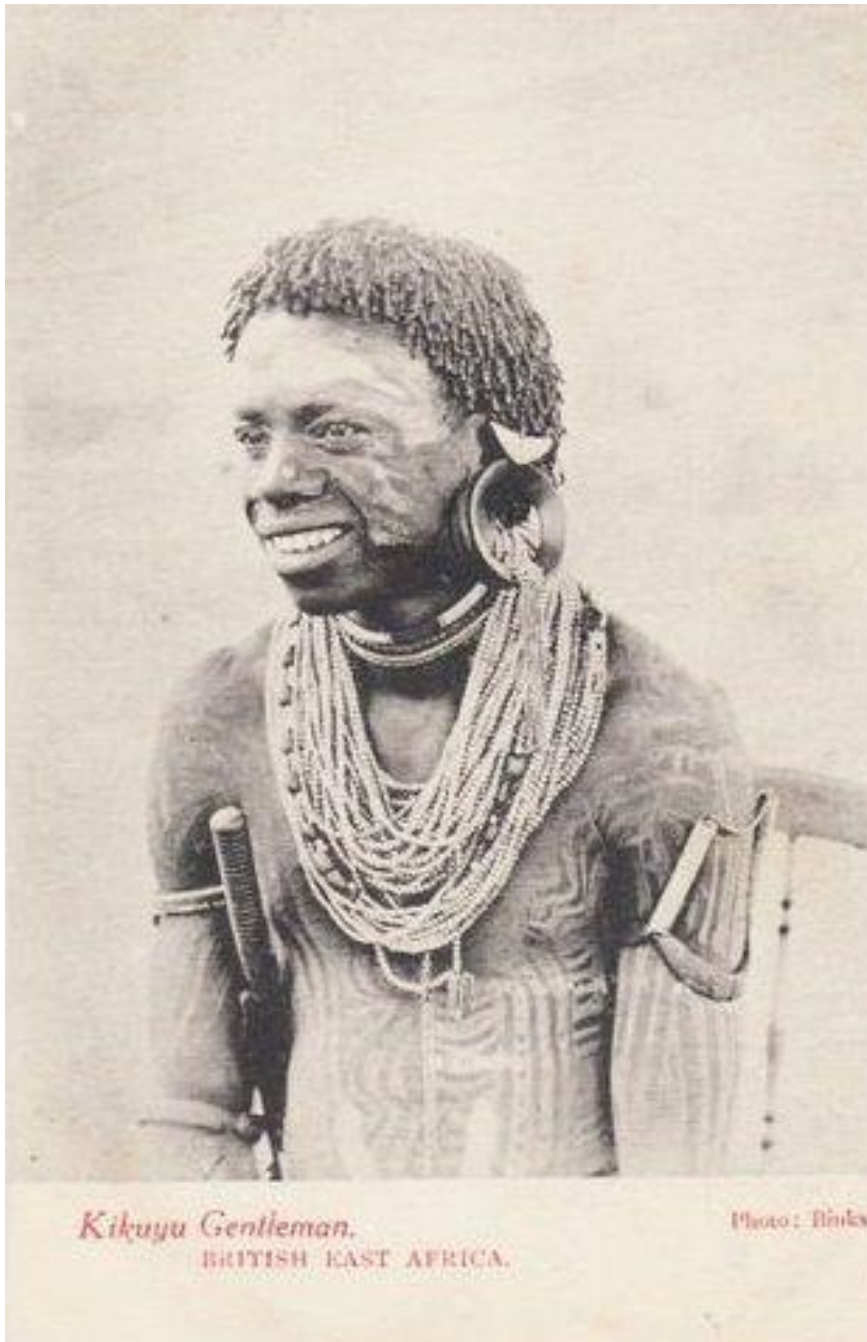
small tribe in Kenya had taken a superpower head on militarily. Every oppressed community identified with the Mau Mau gallantry. The following are some images depicting what became of hairstyles of resistance during the Mau Mau.



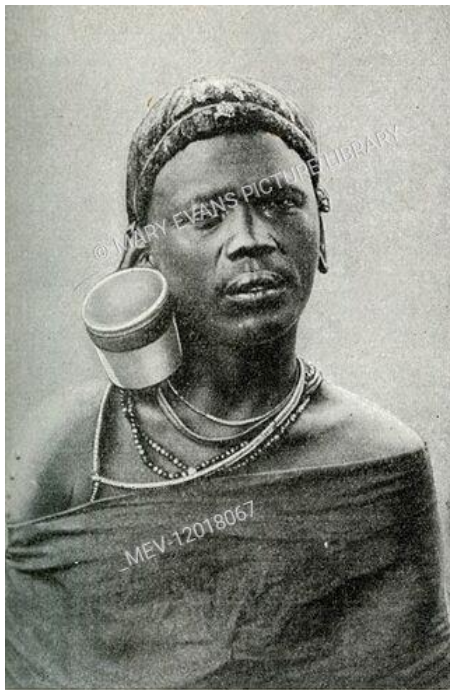
**Field Marshall Musa Mwariama:** His real name was M’Kiribua M’Muchir. He was the only Mau Mau top brass who was never captured, surrendered or killed and survived unscathed with his 2,000 strong fighters. **Field Marshal Musa Mwariama, EBS (1928–1989)** was a Kenyan revolutionary leader of the Mau Mau in Meru and the highest-ranking Mau Mau leader who survived the war without being killed or captured. Together with Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi, they comprised the core Mau Mau leadership. Mwariama was the highest ranking leader among the Meru side of the uprising.

By the time he left his bases in Mount Kenya and Nyambene Hills on the equator, he had about 2,000 fighters who had survived Operation Anvil in Kenya.

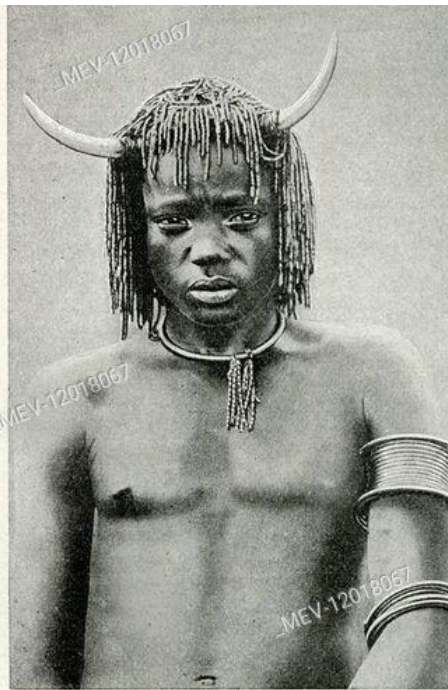
**Styles that were influenced by the Mau Mau war**



**Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/Access> 19/11/2020**



The Kikuyu, natives of the Nairobi District, stretch their ear-lobes with weights and jampots



Buffalo headdress of Masai dandy whose hair has been arranged with fat and red mud



<https://www.agefotostock.com/Access 19/11/2020>

**Stock Photo - Native fashions of Kenya (then a British colony), East Africa -- a Kikuyu man of the Nairobi district (top left) with a stretched earlobe; a Masai man (top right) with buffalo headdress and plaited hair; a Masai woman (bottom left) with heavy rings on her earlobes and round her neck, and bangles on her arms; and a Kikuyu warrior (bottom right) with a stretched earlobe**



## HAIR STYLING TODAY

With the world rapidly becoming a big global village, hairstyling today in Africa is done under many influences. In the 1980's hair making amongst both Men and women was not only a leisure activity but also a wave of popularism grew it to a key fashion statement. In the past, this leisure activity was done at home but at some point it became a community activity and particular people were given the role of hair making and styling. This later on grew to become a business venture for these talented people. Today, we have salons and barber shops where men and women go to have their hair done or cut. (Mercer, 1990)

(Willet, 2000) writes that one of the key influences in recent times on hair styling was the 1980's introduction of Hip hop. This wave had a huge cultural influence on style especially on the Black people. One of the modern hairstyles today is known as the fade, popular mostly amongst men. Black Barber shops had perfected the fade but the '80s allowed them to blossom with more forms of creativity and expressionism. Afros were shaped up with the sides cut short for a hi-top fade, and cornrows were braided in with flairs of individuality.



*Cornrow braids hairstyles [new styles]: women are more beautiful with braids - opera news*



**Ponytail | Cornrow hairstyles, Cornrow ponytail, Cool braid hairstyles  
pinterest.com**



**Trending 2019 Amazing African Braids Hairstyles – YouTube,  
youtube.com**



**Cute Tapered Natural Hairstyles for Ladies | Jessy Styles - YouTube |  
Natural hair styles, Hair styles, Tapered haircut black, pinterest.com**



***On trend braided up pony #OnTrend #AvedaIbw | Braided hairstyles, Feed in braid, African braids hairstyles pinterest.com***







**Cornrows Hairstyles for Black Women. cornrows, cornrows braids, braids, tribal braids, braided hairstyles, bana... | Cornrow ponytail, Hair styles, Braided hairstyles, pinterest.com**



**Amazing Braids Styles: Latest Hairstyles You Simply Must Try - Zainey's Blog | Latest braided hairstyles, Braid styles, gr.pinterest.com**





**Small feed in ponytail | Small feed in braids, Braided ponytail black hair, Feed in braids ponytail, pinterest.com**



## **AFRO COMBS TODAY**

**Around the 20th century, Afro combs started to take on a definite cultural and political meaning. For example, in America, the “black fist” was added to the bottom of many Afro combs, which is a reference to the Black Power salute that was made popular by the Black Panthers. The Black Fist comb was introduced in the 1969 by Samuel H. Bundles, Jr. and Henry M. Children (Tulloch). In addition to using it as a**

styling tool, many black men and women wore the picks in their Afros as a way to express their cultural pride. The decade was also a time when more black women were deciding to wear their hair in its natural state, instead of pressing it and attempting to conform to a European standard of beauty. Another variation of the Afro comb, the folding comb, was introduced in 1970 and patented in 1971 (Byrd, 2001).

Today, Afro combs are often viewed as collector's items. However, many black men and women who wear their hair in its natural state used wide-tooth combs and Afro picks to detangle the hair and help it keep its shape. The combs are truly a work of art, and have recently been featured at several Museums all over the world.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is a historical research that was seeking to investigate and explain a phenomenon that has already occurred. This study relied heavily on previously written and documented material. Books and articles inscribed by other researchers and professionals in this field of design availed a deeper understanding of hair styling as a leisure activity in Africa and the tools used in the practice. Key informants were interviewed while professional barbers were consulted on their most favoured hairstyles.

A focus group discussion was held in the school of the arts and design involving postgraduate students, lecturers and stakeholders in the field of fashion and beauty.

## **Discussion**

**From the study it emerged that the African tradition of hairstyling as leisure and beauty has never ceased. It was evident that the effect of colonialism and changing lifestyles has propelled the art into modernity not without consequences. Among them the commercialization of the art leading to segregation of access to desirable beauty encounters.**

**Apart from the internationalisation of the styles, African hairstyling is also borrowing heavily from the international arena. Hair styling has been used as a means of expression for various reasons, among them political agitation, religious expression, juvenile deviance and identity seeking behavior. The latter is evident in Jamaica where they believe for example that rasta hair style connects them to their African heritage despite being far from Africa itself.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Indeed, as observed in this paper, leisure was a major component of the socio-economic development of Africa. Women can be said to have been the greatest beneficiaries of these leisure activities which included hairstyling and hair making. This is evident even to date. Ask almost any black woman and she will probably tell you that her relationship with her hair is similar to a love affair. Whether it's the long hours spent waiting at the hair salon, the pain endured from pressing or braiding, or the amount of money spent—hair is truly an obsession and not only a leisure activity. Today, hair is extremely significant and often synonymous with identity. And many individuals, such as Don King, Bob Marley, and Angela Davis have used their hair to make a statement.**

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***He has contributed many articles to academic journals on eco-design, eco-ethics, and construction and sustainability. Apart from this 6<sup>th</sup> volume, Dr.Maina has also authored course books on design materials and processes volume 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6, Introduction to ergonomics- a learner's manual, Qualitative & Quantitative research methods simplified, How to Write a Good Proposal and communication skills for college and university students. Among other interests, Maina has researched on glass as design material, recycling of solid waste and human factors for interior ambience. He has also been involved in several consultancies and exhibitions individually and in collaborations.***

# CONTEXTUALIZING CULTURAL SCULPTURE INTO PUBLIC SPACES FOR ALL

*"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people." but popular gathering spots are where people have voted with their feet- William-H.-Whyte (Hine 2013)*

## **Abstract**

Sabouri et al, in their study titled "Role of urban sculptures in Beautification and Improvement of quality of urban spaces (case study: Fuman County)" concluded that urban spaces are the places in which citizens' civil and social life occurs. Hence, attention to design of these spaces causes improvement of quality and realization of urban life and interaction between citizens and city. In their study, arrival of urban sculptures to public spaces has been mentioned as one of the suitable solutions for beautification and improvement of quality of urban spaces. **Problem** In Nairobi, there are many open spaces suitable for such sculptural expression. Unfortunately, the spaces are at best neglected, bare and devoid of recreational ambience. **Objectives** Hence, the present research sought to examine role of these sculptural elements in beautification and Improvement of quality of urban spaces. **Design** Library study, case study and distribution of questionnaire have been used as the research method. **Setting:** the study was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya under the auspices of the school of the Arts and Design of The University of Nairobi.

**Subjects:** visitors to the park, Nairobi county staff of the environmental department, key informants and seasoned sculptors.

**Results:** Art of sculpture at public spaces directly associates to

people, causing improvement of citizens' visual culture and improvement of quality of urban environments. Urban sculptures in addition to beautifying urban spaces can undertake positive and important features such as identity-building in urban spaces, building mental image, transferring valuable messages, transferring culture and history within community, causing more interaction of citizens at urban spaces through creation of interesting and high-quality spaces. **Conclusion:** from the study, it was proved that the volumetric elements such as sculpture have a positive effect on urban spaces. Ultimately, several suggestions have been proposed to improve this art and expand it.

**Keywords:** *Public art, Sculpture, Culture, Public spaces*

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Public urban open spaces are public land that have been developed and are managed by public authorities for the recreational and environmental or visual benefit to the community (City of South Perth, 2012). Over time their quality has continued to deteriorate with current trends observing that in many cities globally there is increasing degradation of existing urban green spaces (Greenkeys, 2008). Urban parks in Kenya are likewise suffering from lack of attention, poor maintenance, lack of development and underutilization (Rabare, Oketch, & Onyango, 2009). A study by Makworo and Mireri (2011) titled, "Public open spaces in Nairobi City, Kenya, under threat" concluded that public open spaces in Nairobi City have been increasingly threatened by congestion and deterioration as a result of the rapid rate of urbanization, poor planning, weak management and illegal alienation. This study was at best very general. There is hence a need to evaluate the design



measures and structures in place to ascertain which factors contribute to its ineffectiveness. The expected outcome would be the development of a Self-sustaining visually appealing model of an ideal urban park.

In the words of William H. Whyte (1998), "A well designed open space encourages outdoor activities and social communication". Many factors could influence the use of each single space resulting to a variety of visitors. Sculptures in public spaces could therefore achieve visual appeal and improve the quality of spaces to the required standards. Along the development of the human society, urban sculpture is an aspect that gradually attracts people's attention with an increasingly wider role in the landscapes. It has a unique function that cannot be achieved by other art forms. Citing an article by Elham shahhosseini (2015), "One of the most important functions of urban sculpture is creating a defined sense of place, induce a specific spirit to the space or reinforce sense of space". In the process of creating a harmony between the sculpture and the environment and enhancing the visual integrity of the environment, a sense of place will be enhanced and citizens get satisfaction.

This study sought to establish the convergence of sculpture and culture in achieving such satisfaction and social harmony in open spaces (parks) in Nairobi County, Kenya.

## **THEORY**

Information for this review was collected from the various books, magazines, journal articles, internet reports and publications. The research also studied various works done by different designers, design concepts and various theories to support the works. From the

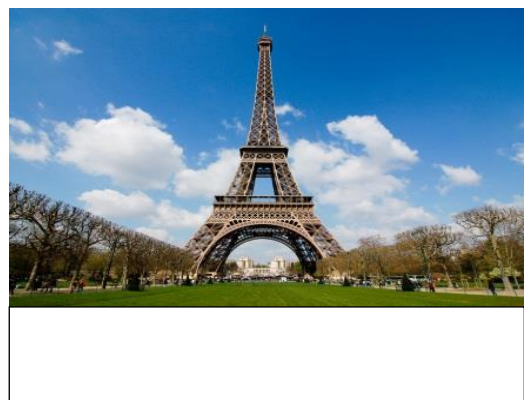
review, it emerged that urban parks have been critical sites of cultural, political, and economic life from early civilizations to the present day by enabling achievement of sustainable urban development agreeing with Greenkeys (2008).

## **URBAN PARKS**

They are culturally constructed as sites of aesthetic reflection and specific social practices to improve the natural ecological environment and enhance the city's charm (Sirong, 2012, Stanley et al 2013). They should hence remain in the public domain as they are undeniably a core public service. Large patches of natural vegetation protect aquifers and low order streams, provide habitat for small and large home range species, permit natural disturbance regimes such as forest fires to occur in which many species can interact and evolve, maintain a range of microhabitat proximities for multi-habitat species, act as noise buffers and reduce the urban heat islands effect (Rao, 1997), (Wesley et al 2011). Considering the high level of global urbanization, urban parks are imperative for maintaining and improving public health by increasing physical activity through recreation which reduces stress and mental disorders besides increasing satisfaction of the living environment and social interaction (Konijnendijk et al 2013, Wesley et al 2011, IFPRA).

## **UNDERSTANDING URBAN SCULPTURE**

Historically, sculpture has been characterized as "the art of representing observed or imagined



**objects in solid materials and in three dimensions". In further detail, it could be defined as a three dimensional object, volumetric form possessing measurable height, width, a depth and occupies real space or according to the Cambridge English dictionary, as the art of forming solid objects that represent a thing, person, idea.**

**According to Melbourne prize trust (an organized committee in Melbourne formed to stimulate the economy and cement the city's international significance), urban sculpture draws a link between the built environment, art and the public that compose of the urban environment. The urban environment being inclusive of the spaces in which the citizens' civil and social life occurs. Taking care of these spaces causes improvement of quality and realization of urban life (Sabouri 2015). Therefore, urban sculpture can be termed as public work of art that is produced by an artist/ designed for public space. Normally it occurs out of doors and is accessible to all persons (Armajani 1978).**

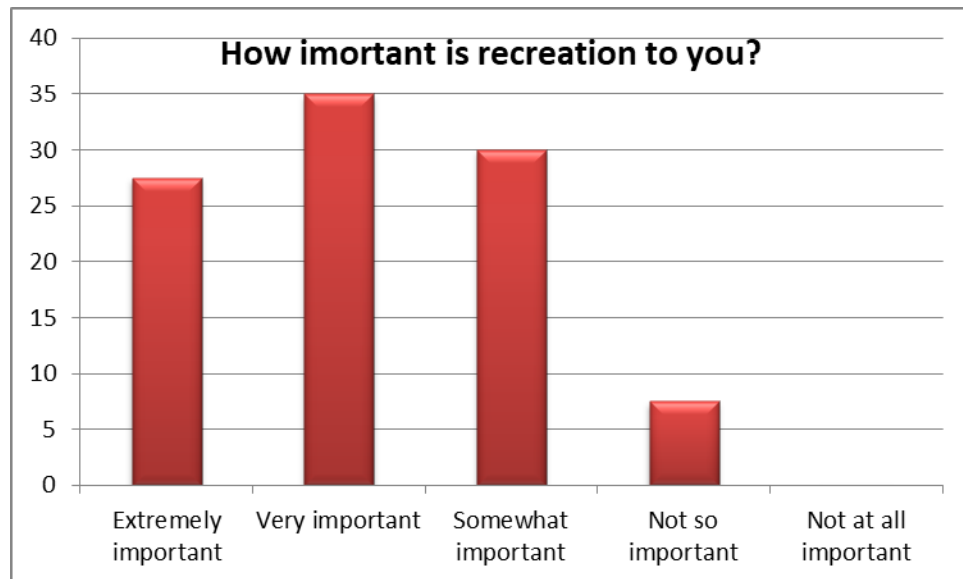
**The notion of 'public art', as an alternative to gallery art, emerged in 1960s, and its aim was to revitalize urban space. Gradually, the most characteristic feature of public art became an opportunity to express current issues and to communicate with its environment and its recipients. However, over the years, fashions and trends have influenced public art. On the postmodern metropolitan urban scene, new elements constantly emerge, claiming the status of public art, like: urban sculpture, urban furniture, lighting, graffiti and even commercial art.**

**Under urban sculpture today, many new forms have emerged representing new technologies and materials resulting in installation sculptures, light-based sculptures, and other forms of sculptural**

expression. An example of public art around the world is The Eiffel Tower (Fig1), a global icon of France constructed 1887-1889, and arguably the best-known example of public art worldwide.

## **ROLE OF PUBLIC SCUPTURES**

The charm of a good urban sculpture work lies in its role of forming a visual focus in the urban landscape and coordinating the spatial environment with its visual tension and integrating into the urban landscape, which achieves the effect of beautifying the environment by providing people with a pleasant visual space. Other features of



urban sculpture are compatibility with the surrounding environment and closeness to cultural atmosphere, considering principles and fundamentals of the visual arts, understanding the relationship between space and volume (shahhosseini 2015) and its close relationship with the installation place and location.

The aim of this cooperation beside those of the functional considerations is to create most visual pleasure for observers

**(Ramezani 2008). In fact, the art of sculpture, to an extent provides a basic definition about the nature of public space. With all its power, it induces to citizens' awareness about their environment and by its rapid changes and by general mobilization, establishes the city's emotional reactions as a common property. Urban sculptures, with beautiful shapes and smooth lines, have enabled people to aspire for a better life (F.mazinani 2007). Liu Kaiqu, a great artist, once said, "The sculptures standing both on the streets and squares and in the parks may always send forth artistic rays at both day and night in all seasons." The urban sculptures, once constructed, may exert substantial and everlasting bearings on people's life.**

**The researchers sought to establish the importance of recreation to citizenry of the city of Nairobi. These were people found already in the park. The results shown in table 1 indicated that citizenry take recreation to be very important generally. Even without going to specific sculptural elements, it was evident that they were congregating around a monument or large constructed form. This was either for shelter, a good background or strategy of location.**

**In China, urban sculptures are increasing together with the rising development of urbanization (Wang 2013). Urban sculpture not only embodies the culture, but also beautifies people's living environment.**

## **URBAN SCULPTURE: IDENTITY, MEANING, VALUE**

**The study by Elham Shahhosseini aptly tackled this issue. Among his finding is that urban sculpture is among the important physical factors which urban designers can use to help the human and social manifestation. These three issues can be analyzed from several**

**perspectives and context. This means that the purpose of designing and implementing an urban sculpture is to realize one of human values. Memories and flashbacks, or sign of a tradition, culture and faith are more important to a man for orientation to modern art. The identity and tradition should present values in the form of tradition or modernity. The identity and tradition should present values in the form of traditional or modernity - Relevant location is the first thing which should be considered in applying sculpture in the city. Sculpture in the right place can be used as an element for the creation of beautiful or special meaning for citizens. Other features of urban sculpture are compatibility with the surrounding environment and closeness to cultural atmosphere, considering principles and fundamentals of the visual arts, understanding the relationship between space and volume (Elham shahhosseini, 2015)**

**The role of urban (fig 2) sculpture in shaping the meaning of identity in contemporary urban planning should be to put emphasis on national and cultural characteristics and pay attention to the aesthetics of the sculptor.**

## **SCULPTURE AND ARCHITECTURE**

**J.T. Kin in his 2019 paper titled "Relationship Between Sculpture and Architecture" posits that the lines between sculpture and architecture have always been blurred. He sees architecture, like sculpture, as concerned with three-dimensional form. In his words "Sculpture has**



long been closely related to architecture through its role as architectural decoration and the level of design". Both have a critical responsibility to address the physical space and consider tenets of form, scale and material.

From his generalization, Kin concluded that although the central problem in the design of buildings is the organization of space rather than mass, there are styles of architecture that are effective largely through the quality and organization of their solid forms. Such are like the ancient styles of stone architecture, particularly Egyptian, Greek, and Mexican. These styles of stone architecture tend to treat their components in a sculptural manner. Moreover, most buildings viewed from the outside are compositions of masses.

## **CULTURAL MEANING OF ART AND MENTAL ANCHOR-POINTS**

The purpose of a piece of art is to retain and convey existential meanings. Humans on the other hand, through perception and understanding the symbol, exposes themselves to an act of identification which consequently gives some meaning to their individual existence. The meaning revealed by art in a particular place determines the



character of the place. For this reason, unique works of famous architects and artists can now be found in every part of the global village. In The Hague for example, municipal authorities made a great deal of effort to replace the pulled down churches with architectural and sculptural landmarks in order to construct a

modern network of anchor-points. The difference between visual landmark and collective anchor point lies in mental acceptance and social identification with the artwork. Sometimes inconspicuous sculptures and fountains become city symbols.

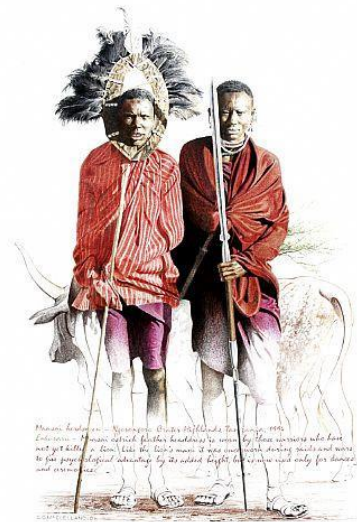
The significance of commemorative art, highlighted by many authors provides the urban space with the historical continuity and integrates local communities. Sculptural architecture of some monuments and memorials, such as the Jewish Museum (Fig 3) by D. Libeskind and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe by P. Eisenman, both located in Berlin – once Nazism's capital, constitute a worldwide symbol of collective memory. Their expressive form and size is as total as Holocaust and shredded like its victims' individual tragedies. The spatial arrangement of the memorials allows gathering and alienation at the same time. Collective participation in commemoration events builds the feeling of integration based on cultural membership, historical consciousness and social bonds resulting from common moral values.

Combining various research ideologies, the effect of social integration can be achieved via public art (sculptures) by different means:

- 1) Collective participation in commemoration events;***
- 2) Spatial arrangement of interactive artworks, which encourages interpersonal relations;***
- 3) Social engagement and collaboration on cultural projects.***



Here in Kenya, a similar use of the cultural lines and mental anchor points could be achieved by designing sculpture that talk about Kenyan cultural, historical and memorable events or situations. This could draw attention to African symbolism in a bid to uphold the now fading cultures with the emergence of the new urban attitude from upcoming generations. It is worrying to imagine a future that does not look back at its history or cultural values.

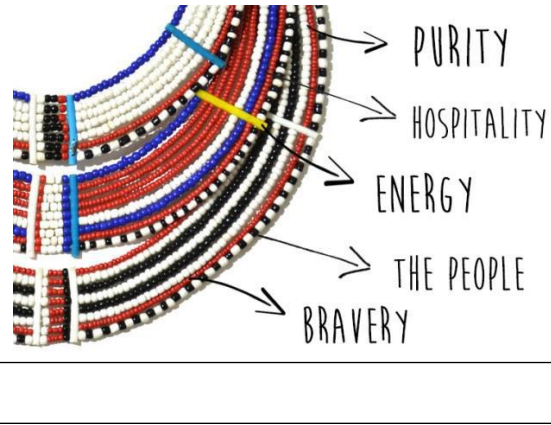


SHOWING CHILL ABOVE THE SERENGETI

## AFRICAN SYMBOLISM AND ICONOGRAPHY OF THE MASAI

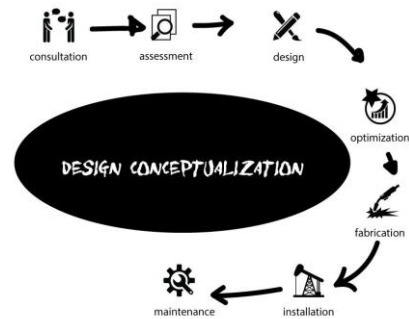
Predominantly a warrior tribe, the Maasai is a semi-nomadic group whose lives revolve around cattle. They cherish these animals so much so that “*I hope your cattle are well*” is regarded a common greeting among the Maasai (Fig 4)i. They speak ‘maa’, a language family related to Dinka and Nuer and they also have a common ancestral tie to the Samburu and the Njemps. The Maasai have a strong belief that God entrusted cattle to them and therefore to them, wealth is measured by how many herds one owns. This very belief is what has resulted to many cattle raids among the ‘maa’ speaking groups as they believe that stealing from other tribes is okay believing that cattle was given solely to them by the creator.

The Maasai are not only known for their traditional beliefs but also for their exquisite artistry. A promotional article by Kenya wildlife service of 2013 dubbed "Kenya's cultural symbol; the



Maasai tribe" aptly capture the cultural symbolism of this tribes artistry. At a glance, it appears simply as fashionable but what many do not know is that beading to the Maasai is actually symbolic. This tribe has about 40 types of bead work (Fig 5) that mostly feature the colours red (*colour of the Maasai*), blue (*Godly and reflecting the colour of the sky*) and green (*colour of God's greatest blessing, fresh grass after rainfall*). The bead work is done by the women but is worn by both genders of the community. Unmarried women adorn

one of the beautiful pieces created; a large flat disc that surrounds the neck, made up of rows of beads threaded onto wire, secured and spaced with cow hide strips. Married women on the other hand, wear long blue beaded necklaces, and also decorate their earlobes with long beaded flaps. This amazing bead work has gained the Maasai a large market for their creations with locals as well as tourists serving as big customers.



This study adopted this rich symbolism to extract motifs suitable for sculptural expression. The aim was to demonstrate the possibilities of achieving contemporary sculptures from non-conventional sources to create an indigenous cultural identity

## **DESIGN PROCESS**

The process is an activity of determining the work flow, equipment needs, and implementation requirements for a particular process. Design process (Fig 6) is a problem solving process, one that requires substantial creativity, innovation and technical expertise. An understanding of the client's product or service and goals, their competitors and the target audience is translated into a visual solution created from the manipulation, combination and utilisation of shape, colour, imagery and space. As stated by Connor Design Group (Cory Connor Designs 2018) the design process is presented as a series of steps that you go through in developing an idea or product. Companies begin the design process when they want to develop a new brand or refine the existing brand, create new visual communication systems, refine or create an existing product (Design Council, 2005). However in sculpture, according to John Koelher, does not necessarily require a design process. Inspiration, creativity and mood just take over. He follows short basics to come up with designs which are- Brainstorm, sketch all the possibilities, refine the design, then build.

## **EXEMPLARS IN THE SCULPTURAL ART**

### **MANNEKEN PIS**

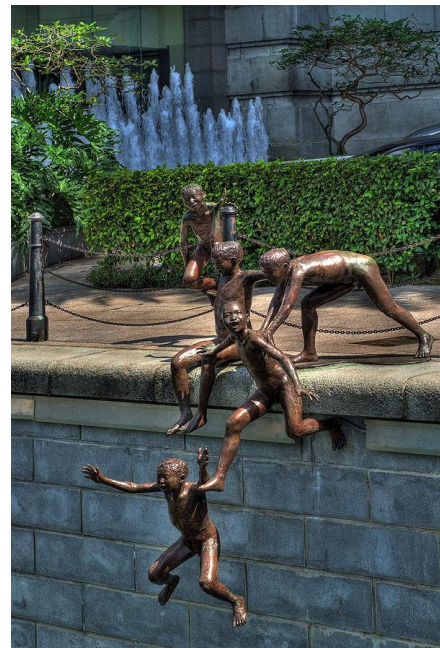
The name of this tiny statue simply translates to 'Peeing boy' – while the French version, Petit Julien, literally means 'Little Julien'. The statue (Fig 7) most probably started out as a public fountain, with the peeing boy as homage to the tanners, as medieval tanners let children and street urchins pee on leather to make it suppler

**(Wikipedia n.d.). Time passed and people forgot how the statue got there in the first place, so incredible legends started to explain its origins. The most popular story states how the little peeing boy saved the capital. In this tale, Brussels was surrounded by enemies. One day they seemingly retreated, but had really put tons of gunpowder under the city. A little boy saw the burning fuse and quickly peed on it. In another well-loved tale the peeing boy is actually a historic figure, Duke Godfrey III of Leuven. As a child, he was put in a basket in an oak tree to encourage the knights fighting in his honor. According to Catherine E. Marson (Marson 2016) Manneken-Pis was at first a fountain that played an essential role in the**



**(<https://en.wikipedia.org/>) Culture, Celebration and Conflict in Brussels. In Catherine E Merson s' (October 2016, Pages 640–641, 28) paper titled "former distribution of drinking water since the 15th century" The system was well-known in all of Europe. Towards the end of the 17th century, the statue became more and more important in the city life. It was also a survivor of the bombardment of Brussels in 1695. Manneken-Pis became a precious good and enjoys a ceaselessly growing glory. During big events, the sculpture is adorned with luxurious clothes. In the 18th century, Manneken-Pis was dressed at least 4 times a year. Since he lost his main function in the network of water conveyance of the City in the 19th century, Manneken-Pis gradually became an image and symbol of the Brussels folklore, the joy of the**

inhabitants and their capacity of selfmockery and a symbol of defiance from a small city with a strange sense of humor. The statue is interesting and it no doubt captured the hearts of its residents, and is still relevant today (Pixabay/PixelAnarchy n.d.). To illustrate how important Manneken Pis is to the Brussels residents, in 1747 French grenadiers from Louis XV of France's army thought it would be funny to steal the ridiculous statue. Threatened with a huge riot, Louis severely punished the jokers and gave Manneken back to the city, dressed in expensive brocade, embroidered with gold and decorated with the cross of Saint-Louis. That wasn't the only war and abduction Manneken Pis survived — he has been stolen, retrieved, destroyed and remade several times throughout history. The little peeing boy made it through the terrible bombardments of 1695 that leveled a good chunk of the city, and was unscathed during the world wars. In 1914, after German troops had invaded Belgium, a cartoon of the little Manneken peeing on German soldiers was seen on the cover of a satirical newspaper. While the face of Brussels may change, the little peeing boy is still a well-loved icon as well as a symbol of defiance and resilience — an 'up yours' to every danger that threatens the city (Manneken Pis-Pixabay/PixelAnarchy Manneken Pis, Brussels)



## **THE FIRST GENERATION BY Chong Fah Cheong (Art trail 2018)**

The sculpture, titled "The First Generation" was made by Chong Fah Cheong, a local sculptor well known for his life sized and massive bronze public sculptures (Fig 8). His work is one of the series of sculptures done by various sculptors and installed at historically significant sites along Singapore River promenades. It is a sculpture which freezes the motion of five young boys, jumping naked and freely in the river. From a distance, the sculpture looks almost real-like because of its life-sized dimensions. It depicts a re-enactment of a favorite local past time. Swimming along the river is a sport regularly practised by children of the first immigrants to Singapore. To these children, the river was like one giant swimming pool and the source of simple pleasure and high adventure alike. The sculpture which was unveiled in 2000 indeed honours the first immigrants and the major role the river played in their lives. Supported by The Singapore Board, the aim of the sculpture is to chart and preserve some of the country's past and colourful river scenes among river dwellers. As Singapore thrives as a globalizing island, such sculptures will remind its people of immigrants who contributed much to Singapore's social and economic growth.

## **BRATISLAVA STATUES**

Some of the most photographed attractions of Bratislava (Fig 9) are its sculptures in human size located all over its Old Town. These statues add a modern touch to the historical center of Bratislava in Slovakia Beef Nuggets and make it even more attractive. As they are eye catching and so interesting, there are always tourists taking pictures of and with them or having fun around. Statues and



sculptures in our Kenyan landscape should take a benchmark of such an attraction site. One nice statue also stands on Obchodná Street in Bratislava. It is a statue of two girls leaning on a post box, taking a break from skateboarding. The post box is a real one and ready for the use (Bratslavia n.d.). It is a perfect example of the combination of form and function.



### **PAPARAZZI by Radko Mačuha, Slovak sculptor**

This guy looks like he's about to shoot a photo of the people around. He used to stand on the corner of Radničná and Laurinská Streets, where a restaurant called Paparazzi used to function. Unfortunately when the restaurant closed down, the owners took the statue with them as it was in their ownership. Currently the city is negotiating to get it back as it is a popular tourist attraction. For the time being, it can be found in the UFO restaurant.



## **PUBLIC ART FURNITURE**

**Public art is art in any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. Public art is significant within the art world, amongst curators, commissioning bodies and practitioners of public art, to whom it signifies a working practice of site specificity, community involvement and collaboration. Public art may include any art which is exhibited in a public space including publicly accessible buildings, but often it is not that simple. Rather, the relationship between the content and audience, what the art is saying and to whom, is just as important if not more important than its physical location.**



## **THE CASE STUDY SITE**

### **Uhuru Park, Nairobi**

**Uhuru Park is a 12.9 hectare recreational park adjacent to the central business district of Nairobi, Kenya. It was opened to the general public by the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta on 23 May 1969. It contains an artificial lake, several national monuments, and an assembly ground. It is while doing research on public spaces that the researcher came across an article about the proposed new Uhuru park vision<sup>1</sup> (Ujenzi Bora 2018). The researcher noted that very little attention had been given to public sculptures a fundamental element in public spaces which aroused more spirit to design solely for park sculptures at the park. However, not to disguise the**



proposal, it bears information essential towards realizing the future of modern public spaces in Kenya and guidelines that the researcher find useful.

## **METHODS**

This study was exploratory in nature. It used multiple case study and exemplars to anchor on a solid design ground. Primary Data was collected using desktop data mining methods while primary data was gathered through observation, photography and questionnaires and key informants.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective was to establish methods of applying sculptural public art inspired by Maasai culture to enhance the visual appeal and improve the quality of public spaces at Uhuru Park in Nairobi, Kenya. the specific objectives was to investigate how sculptural public art can affect the aesthetic and functional aspect of public spaces and to propose sculptural forms ideal for contemporary public spaces.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The landscape of most public spaces in Nairobi has not fully maximized on its potential as a social place and attraction site. The artistic impression which is one major element in check is not as appealing to the public. Most public spaces in the city have public furniture, sculptures and monuments that are poorly maintained and not strategically positioned. This problem is specifically most manifested at Uhuru Park, a major public space in Nairobi city.

## **DISCUSSION**

**The general public in Nairobi requires a conducive and appealing space for recreation. Uhuru Park being an ideal space that is within the city and has adequate space was found as the most ideal space to develop the ideal space. The people in Nairobi want to enjoy parks as a place filled with tranquility, peace of mind and relaxation. Underlying this work is a central assumption that public spaces are beneficial to a community and have a significant importance to people and society at large. As such, public art should be a central strategy in development and design schemes, but it cannot be assumed that public space initiatives should be undertaken solely as an intuitive process or a leap of faith. Knowledge of the underlying motivations and projected outcomes of a public space initiative is an important step to developing a strategy that will deliver desired results. For this reason community collaboration and dialog between government, cultural planners, designers and community members is important to the success of a public urban spaces. Drawing back to the objectives of this study, it emerged that a landscape designer would need:**

***-To engage the public to create personal leisure and entertainment and extraordinary experience in public spaces***

***-To establish how the landscape of public spaces in the city to a contemporary level.***

***-To uphold fading cultures through work of art***

***-To investigate how sculptural public art can affect the aesthetic and functional aspect of public spaces for instance lighting.***

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The researcher hereby recommends that a fraction of the landscape within Uhuru Park could be face lifted to act as the directive role for further development of the park. The designer could also adapt a singular theme that will resonate across the establishment.**

### **The Design Framework**

**The framework involves the identification of cultural elements, Identification of need, analysis of these elements in line with meaning and use, translation of the element to design and thereafter integration of this element in product design. The approach is recommended on the basis of the union of traditional and contemporary areas of knowledge to come up with the designs. From literature, Jewelry Researchers also recommend the assimilation of Kenyan cultures to create objects that are not only aesthetically appealing but also meaningful to the user. It also emerged that despite form following function, the products should in all ways tell a story or educate. The research therefore recommends the use of the durable materials to be used in the creation of jewelry pieces. Proposed materials are cement, leather, resin and metal.**

### **Sculptural elements**

**The study also found out that sculptural forms in Kenya are majorly statues of leaders, saints in church, Maasai women and Maasai moran statues. Decorative sculptural forms are majorly sculptural forms of Maasai woman with child or moran (worrier) with spear. Visual appeal is normally brought about by innovation and a twist in form or character. Based on these findings, and borrowing from the rich Maasai art and artifacts, the researcher recommended that the**

sculptures should be innovative and have features that facilitate user acceptance via the presence of function, character and theme, identity, traditional meaning and spiritual bonding and they should connect emotionally with users. The sculptural forms are proposed to be created using metal, leather, resin, fiber glass and cement. Using these materials will create long-lived products. The Researchers further concluded that sculptural forms can be in form of lighting, functional street furniture such as trash bins, public seats etc.

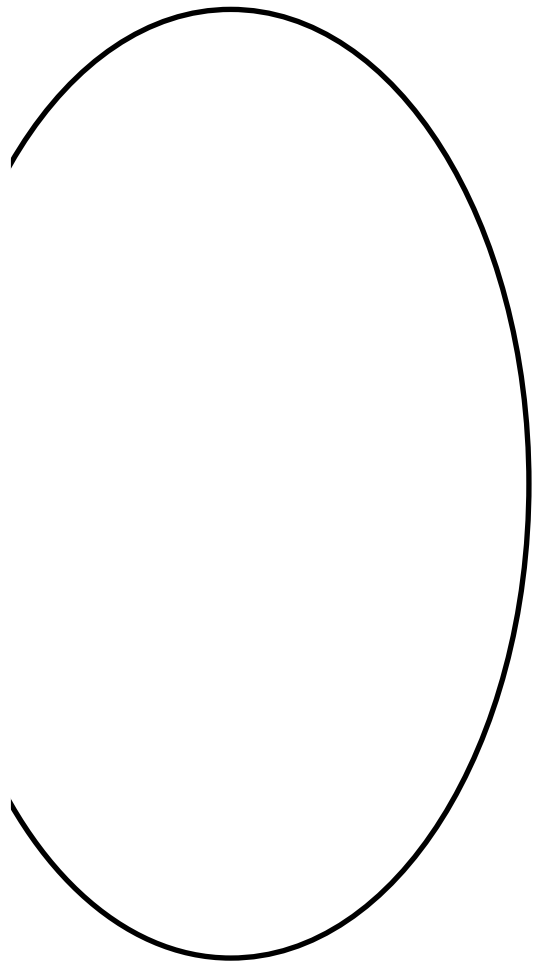
### **Leatherwork**

The use of hide in Kenya has been upheld for decades. Long before contemporary attire existed, hides and skins were used as forms of clothing. This use cuts across all cultures in Kenya. Hides and skins were also used decoratively as wall hangings, table mats and floor mats. After close visual analysis, the researcher recommends continuity in this tradition whereby leather can be used as an element in furniture upholstery, mats or other park furniture. But to how leather is used as material, a narrative should be present. This he recommends may be in form of writings, engraved stamps, burnt stamps or a motif in the Maasai community culture. Besides the design suggestions floated to be implemented in the park, the researcher recommends a revamp of the landscape of the space in order to suitably blend with the elements to be installed.

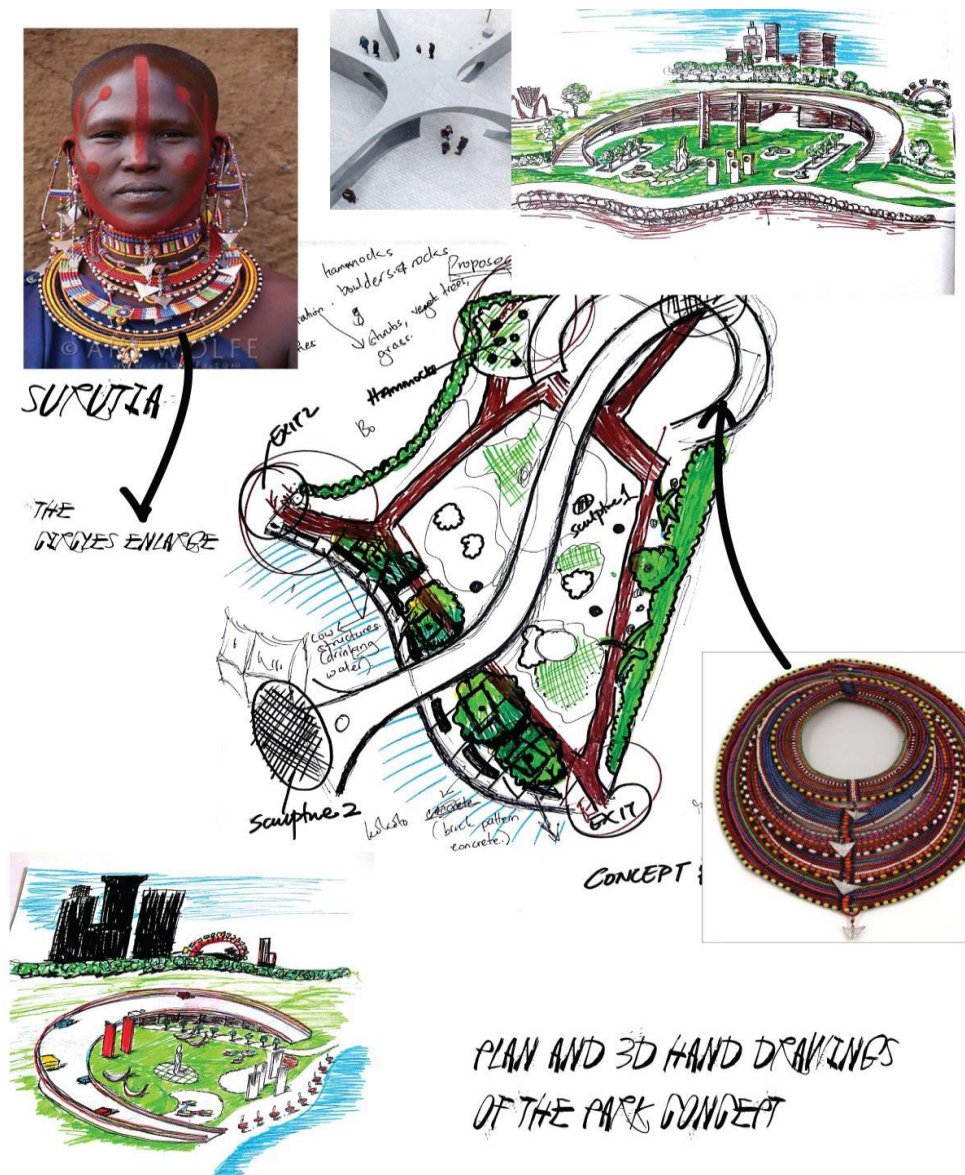
### **DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR LANDSCAPE DESIGN**

- 1. Focal Point – the main emphasis of the design***
- 2. Line – leads the viewer’s eye throughout the landscape***

- 3. Form** – upright, weeping, horizontal, round, or conical shapes that suit the theme of the landscape
- 4. Texture** – plants or structures in a landscape can add different textures to unify the landscape. Fine textures tend to recede and make the space appear larger while coarse textures tend to make the space more intimate.
- 5. Color** – influences the moods of those interacting with the landscape, such as, warm colors are bright and make the space feel more full, while cool colors seem further away
- 6. Balance** – formal balance is a symmetrical design where one side mirrors the other and more straight lines tend to be used and informal balance is asymmetrical with more curved lines and a different layout on each side of your design
- 7. Repetition** – can be essential in unifying the planting or hardscape scheme, but use carefully as to not overdue the repeating elements
- 8. Variety** – mixing different lines, forms and colors within your design for an interesting landscape
- 9. Simplicity** – less is more and it is the essence of a good design when combining different elements
- 10. Grouping** – create mass in your landscape design by grouping odd numbers of the same types of plants (<https://www.calloways.com/>)



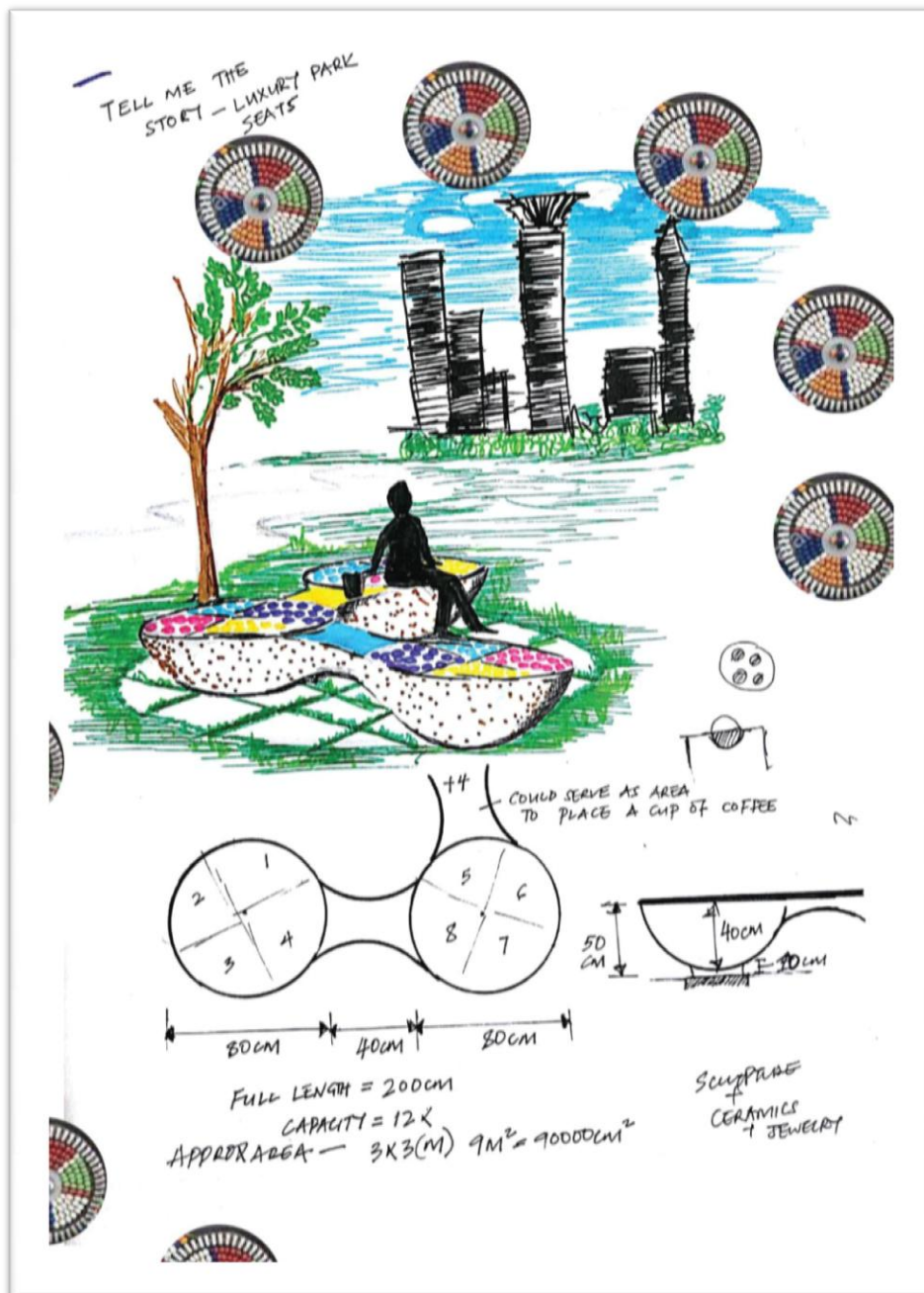
From the source of inspiration, concepts were drawn artistically from Maasai





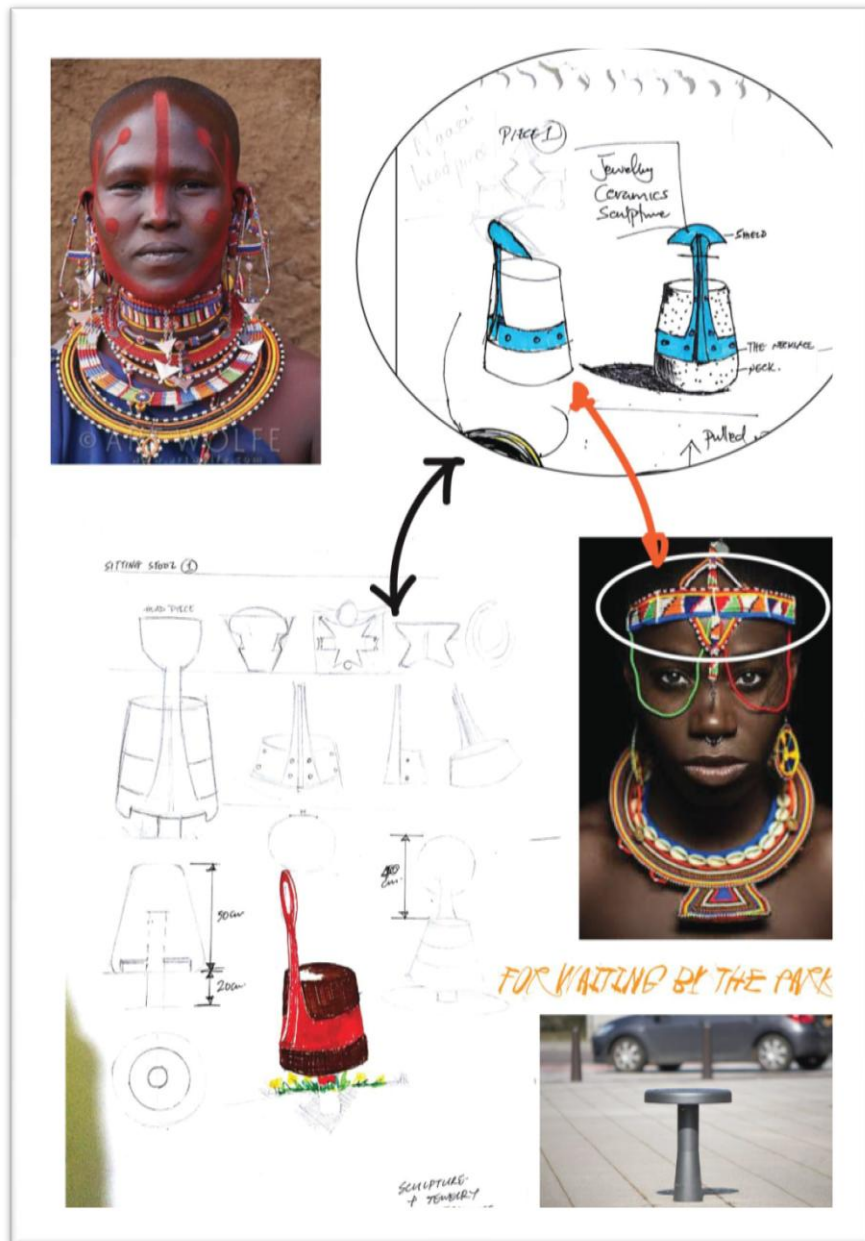
art and design to achieve elements for motifs. The following are the results.

Plan and 3D drawings of the park concept. Shape, colour and placement among others were important elements informing the final concepts.

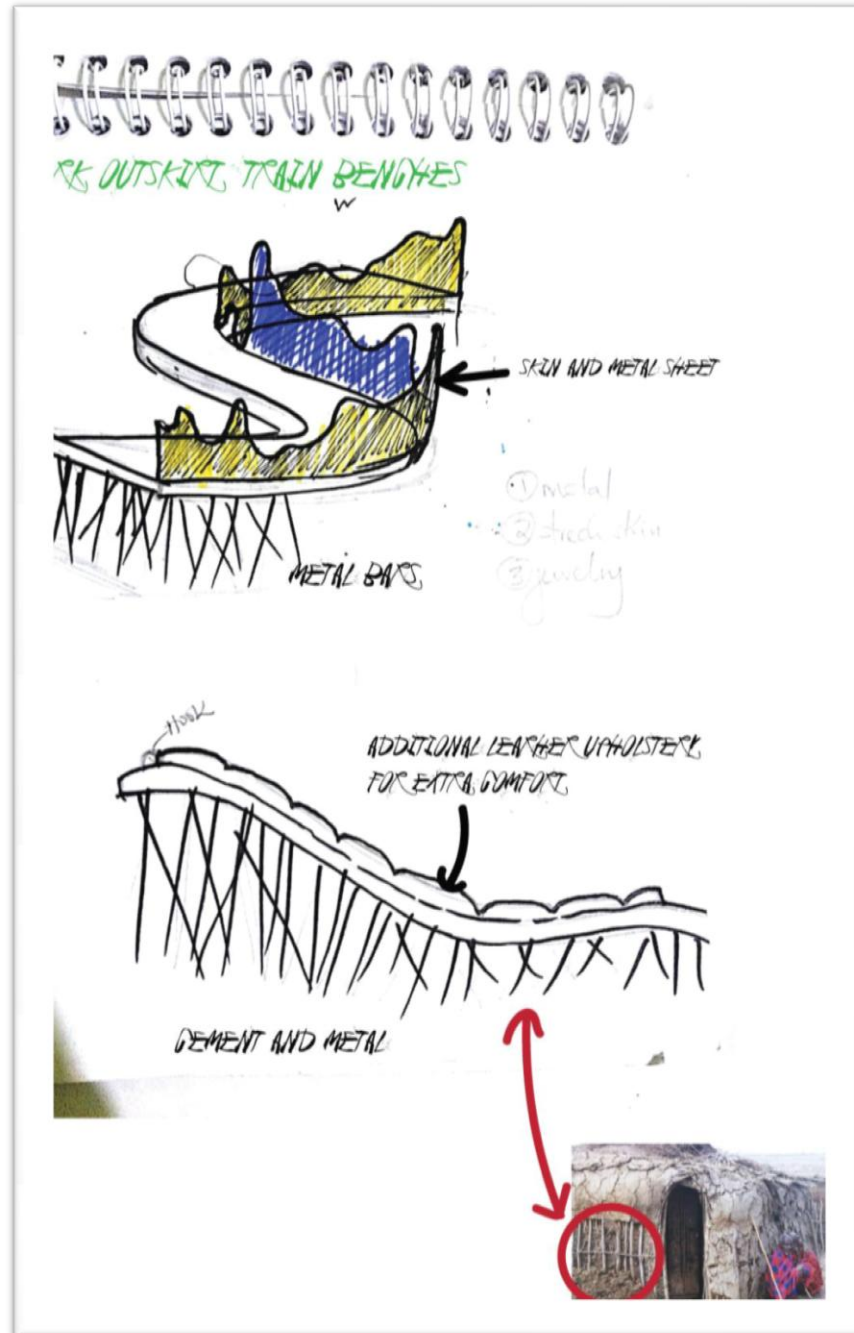




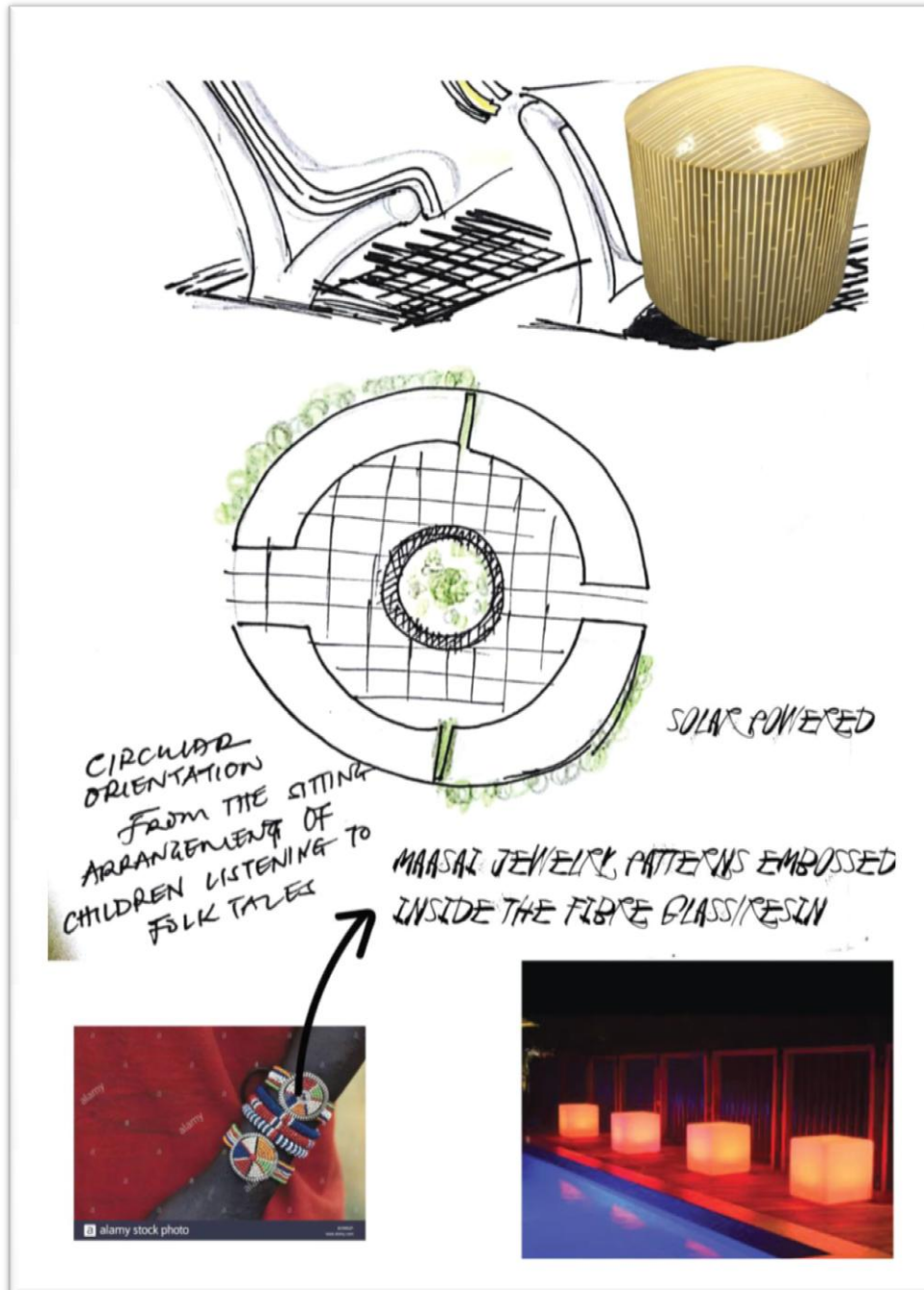
Combining elements from Maasai artifacts with the existing landscape icons of Nairobi, the designer came up with the layout above. He borrowed colour, shape and scale.



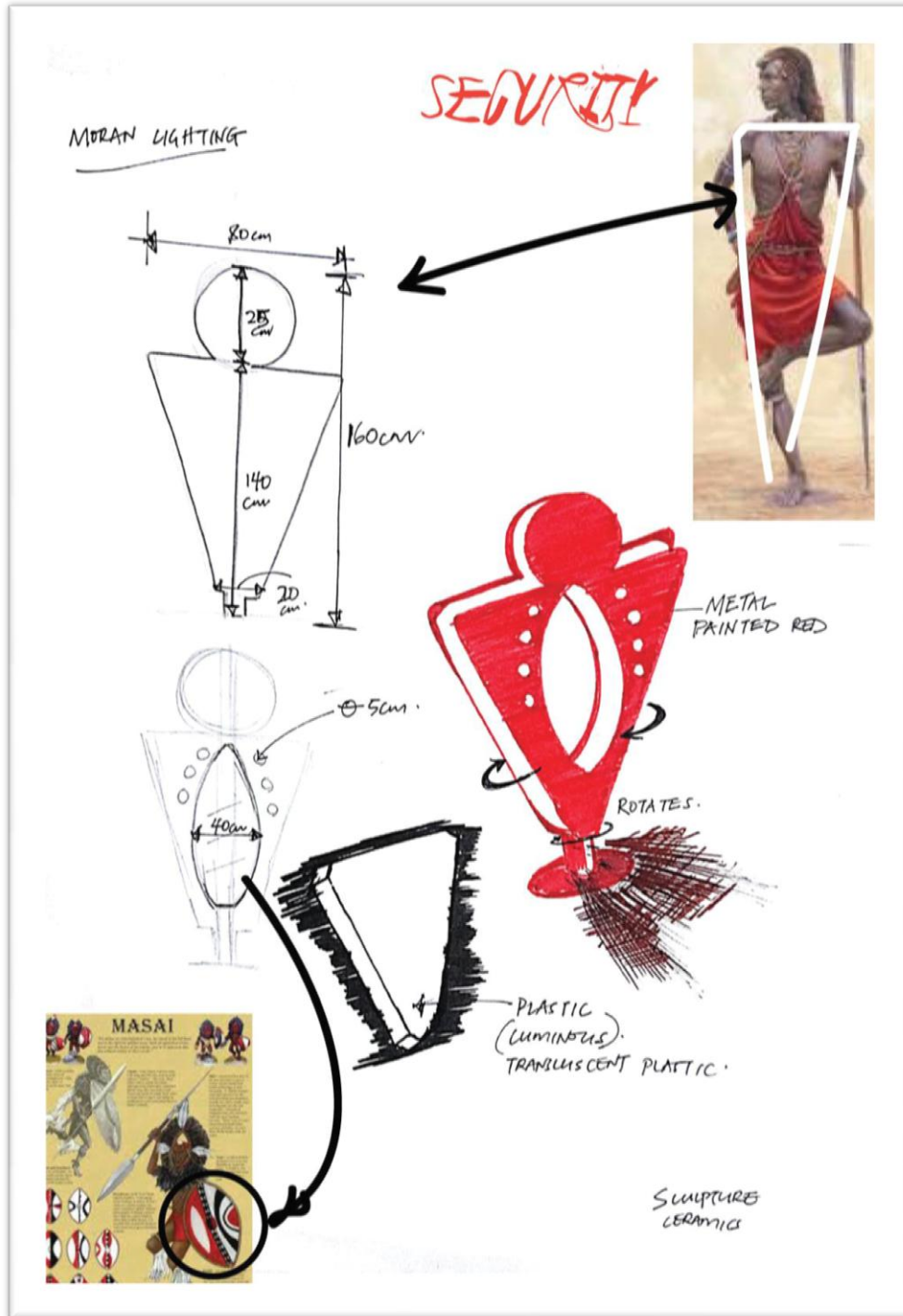
This Maasai woman body adornment presented a rich source of elements for landscape sculpture. There are circles, rectangles, repetitive curves, rich earth colour and symmetrical alignments. The results are as shown in the circular layout.



**Webbing on the Maasai hut presented design elements that could not be ignored. They appear sturdy and strong, giving form to an otherwise fragile material, clay and cow dung. It was therefore ideal element to create a foot bridge.**

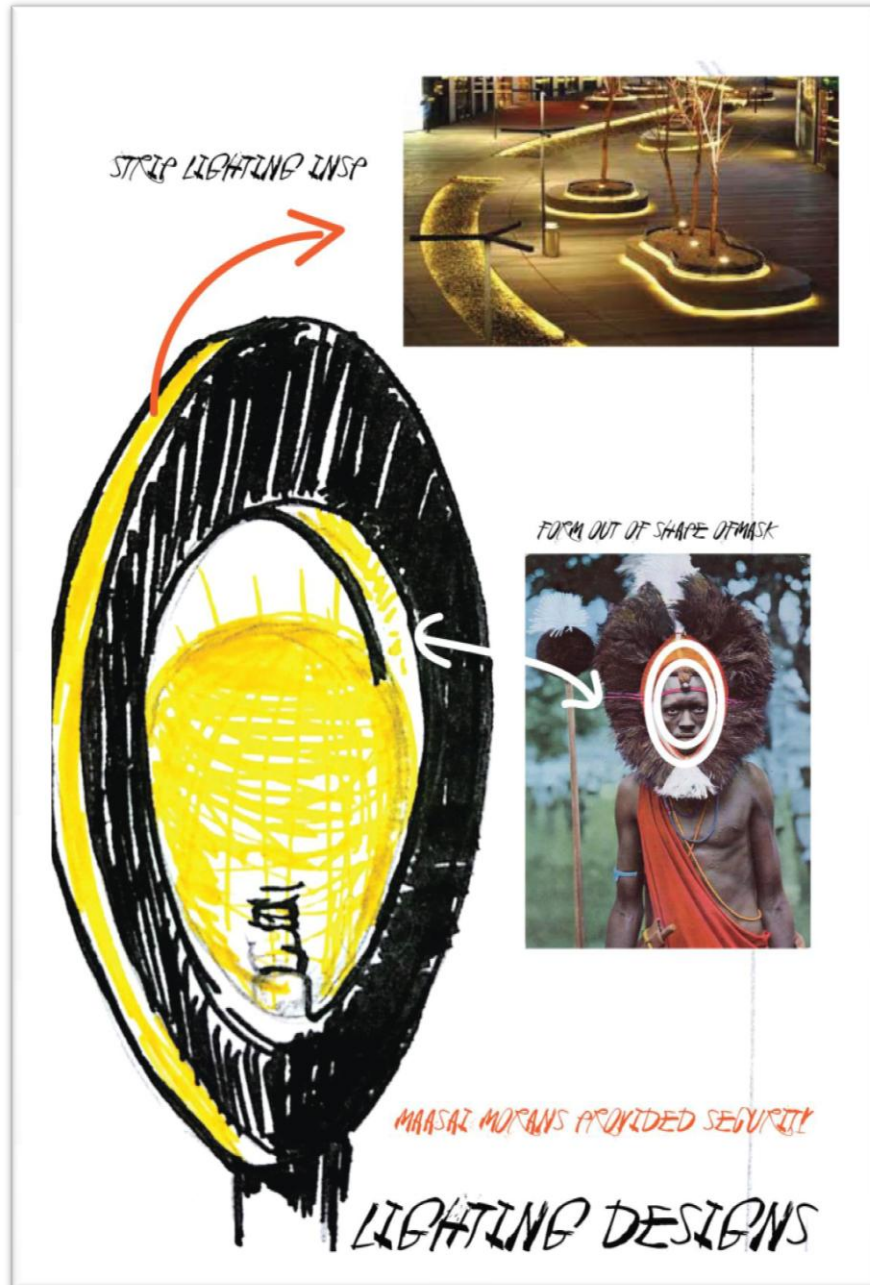


Even though small, this Maasai bracelet offers many elements suitable for sculptural design. It is rich in colour and geometrical and curvilinear elements. Derived motives were used to design a seat and table surface for outdoor use.

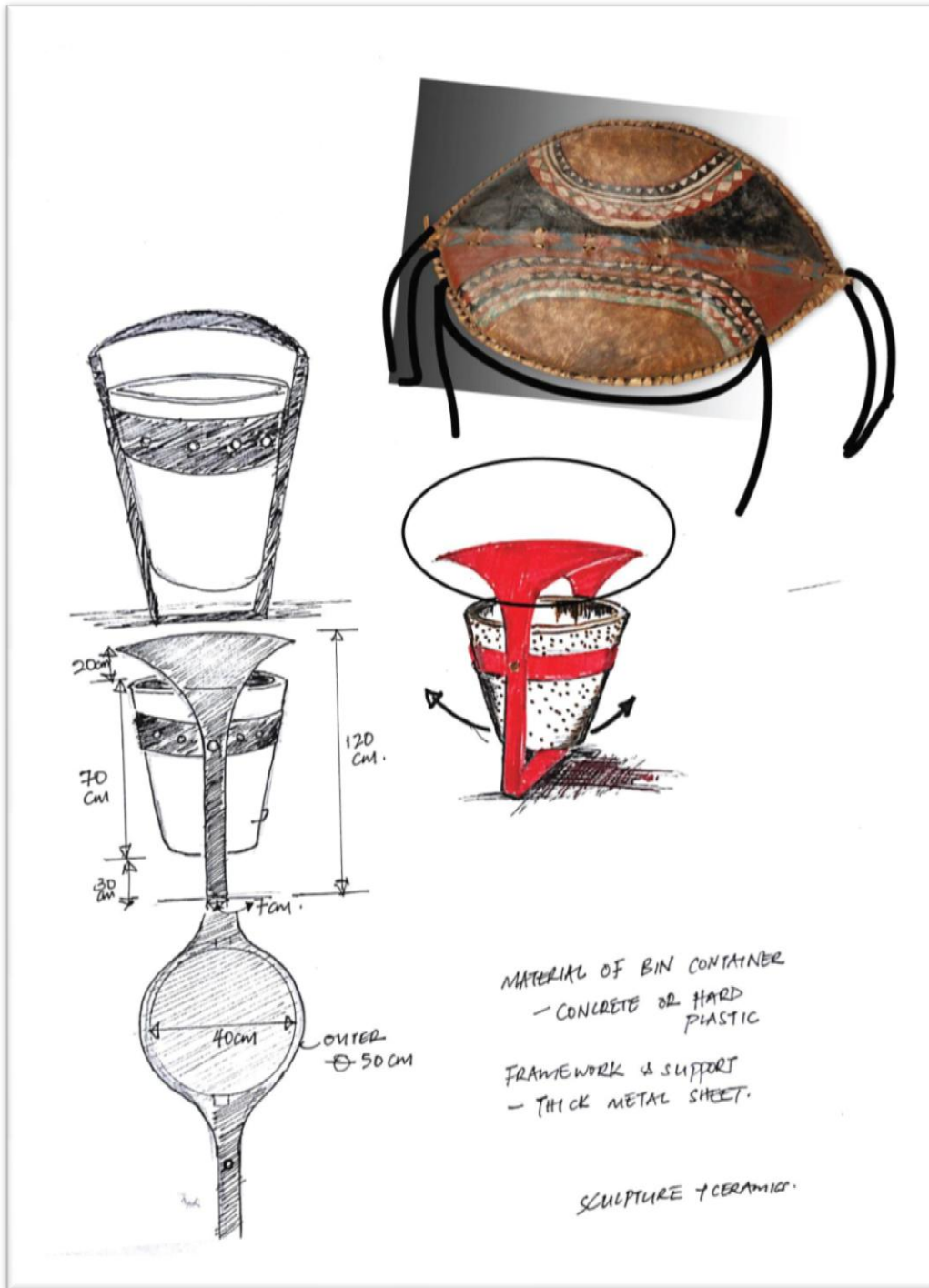


The body posture and shape, the elements on the Maasai shield were borrowed here to design a sculpture for the public park.

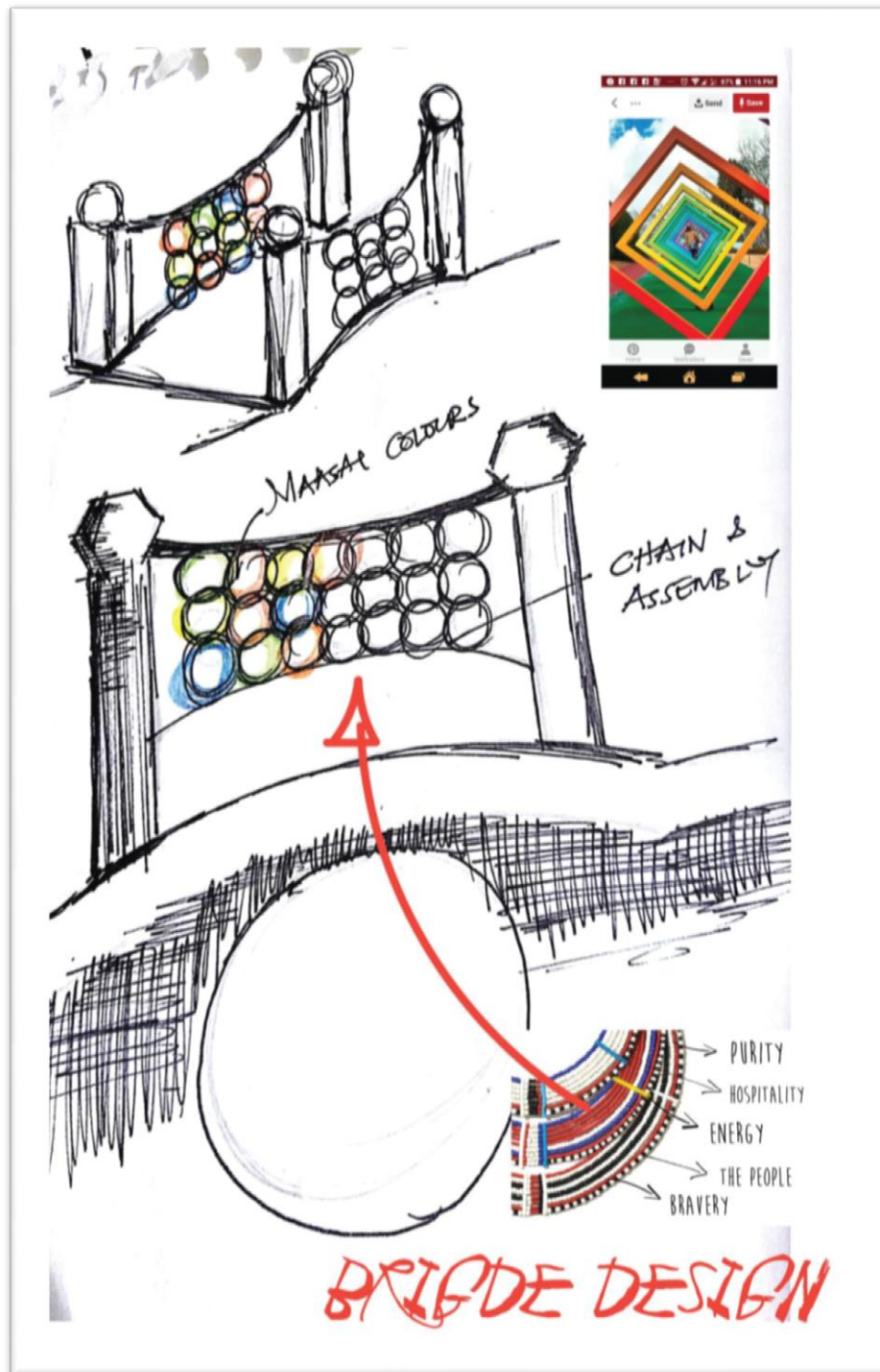




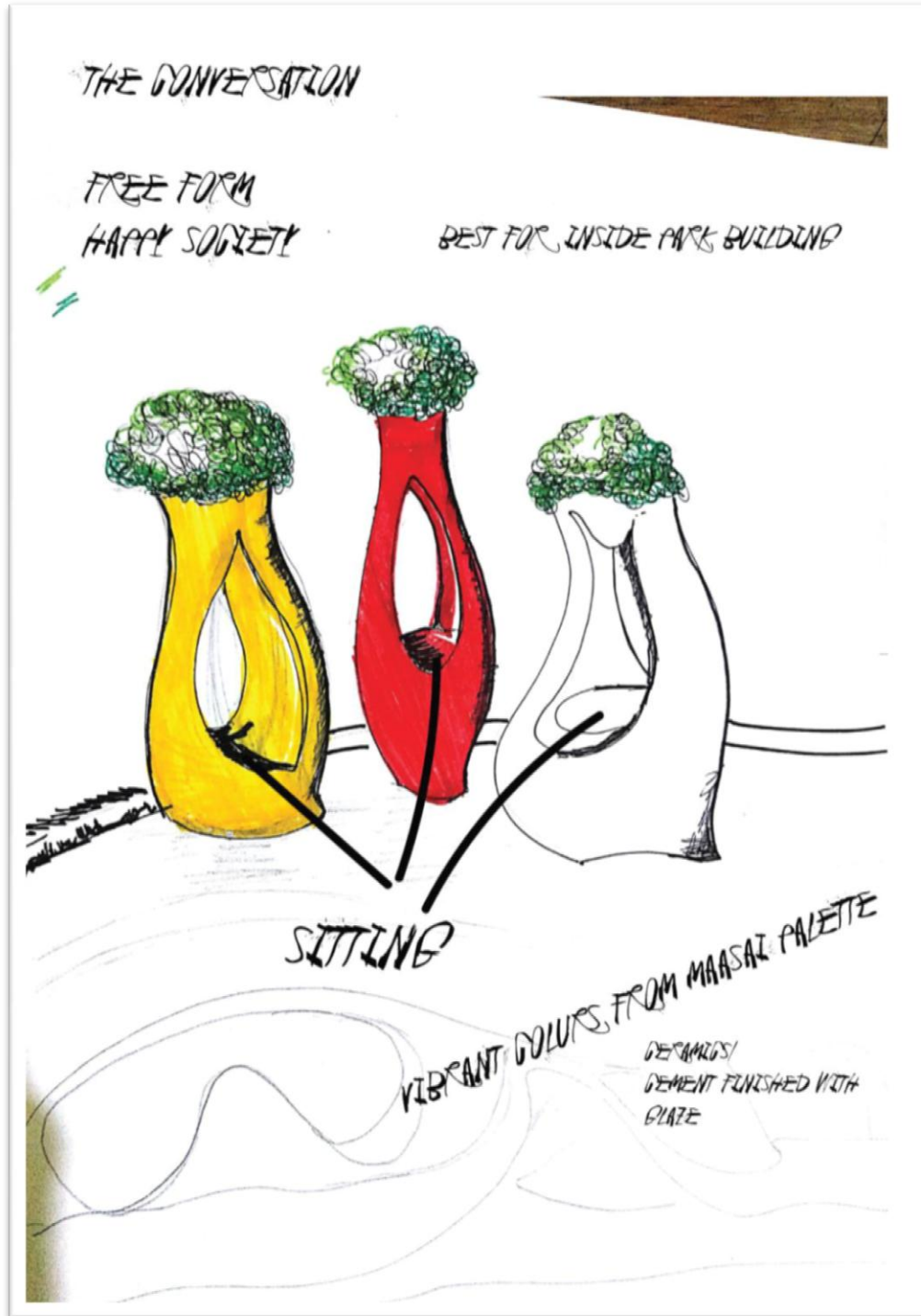
**This circular feather bead and wire formation is worn by a moran (warrior). With predominantly circular elements, it was a rich source of motifs for lighting layout and design. Colour was also achieved from its subtle glow against a black background.**



The Maasai shield is rich with curvilinear elements. They were adapted as illustrated above. The product is a bin container.



The aspects of purity, hospitality, energy, the people and bravery as captured in these necklace offered excellent elements for a bridge design. It resulted in a chain and assembly design for a foot bridge.



Sensuous lines from Maasai a combined helping of artifacts were used to design these sculptural seating design based on traditional pallet of colours.



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