THE BODY, STYLE AND ETHNIC VALUES

Introduction

The discourse that follows consists of four independent essays that are connected by a few tenuous threads. The links are less in the subject-matter than in my approach, which has been to dissect the components, i.e. lines, marks, signs or building-blocks, with which my chosen artists have constructed their images. The sources of artists' imagery in their personal and social experience are legion, but the breakdown of their images into components does allow a few useful connexions to be made between social environment and image. I examine my subjects from the view-point of a fellow artist, interested in the process, part-technical part-ideological, whereby an image is built. The origins of any process go back to early and progressively simpler states which may, in practice, be overlain, obliterated, abandoned, elaborated or modified by later developments.

The sequence I shall follow begins with primary school-children's drawings and ends with a very complex and technically elaborate art form, the contemporary carvings of the Makonde in Tanzania. This is not to suggest an ontogeny in the subject-matter but rather a development of my own ideas. Thus each successive discussion has been attached to a more complex but quite different situation. Nonetheless there are common features in the subject-matter. The first is that each derives from eastern Africa, where it first caught my interest. Each seemed to me to be amenable to a sort of 'structural dissection' and each iconography focused on the human

---

This article is based on a lecture given in the series 'Art and Anthropology' held at Wolfson College, Oxford in Trinity Term 1985.

body. There will therefore be a parallel to my practice as a zoological anatomist, but I shall try to dissect human images rather than animal bodies. The analogy can be taken further in that an organism's fitness to function is often best expressed in some specialized detail of its anatomy rather than in its generalities. In children's art, stereotyped ideograms of the human figure have such wide currency that it is easy to assume that differences are mere variations on universal themes, but the more abbreviated and primitive the ideograms the more potentially significant small differences will be. I also hope to show that senses and functions of the body can not only be depicted as attributes of a recognizably human image, but sensory or conceptual feelings can be so integral to an image's meaning that they mould its character, dominate its 'style' and are a major factor in making the image and its subject intelligible to the uninitiated. As the 'initiates' for my subjects are obscure or disappearing, I have set out to be a partial spokesman. Works by four different classes of African artists are examined, and in each case there are alien observers or patrons within our purview. However shadowy, their presence is an integral thread of the discussion.

It is generally accepted that most established cultures impose, however cryptically or unconsciously, a wide variety of disciplinary mechanisms or assumptions upon artistic production resulting in a recognizable style. Here I shall discuss some of the implications for work made in Tanzania and Uganda during a period of great social change when limitations on what an artist could or could not do had become weak or absent. I hope to show that in bypassing or ignoring some of the cultural filters that might have conditioned their artistic production the artists came up with peculiar and surprising results. Any dominant preoccupation in the mind or psyche of an artist is likely to surface as subject-matter. Less obvious is such influence upon structural formats, but it is commonly assumed that intense consciousness of the body or sexual symbolism may be evident in the building-blocks of which an image is made, for example 'phallic' or 'vulval' forms are commonly seen in sculpture and drawing and explained in this way.

Children's Drawings

I begin with some drawings by African children which were collected by Mrs J. Allen, the wife of a colonial civil servant, while giving basic literacy classes to children who would otherwise have had no education and might never have attempted to draw. She called these her 'ragged schools'. The children's parents were mainly illiterate servants on her husband's outpost. Drawings were made as light relief in-between classes in writing, reading and arithmetic. The children were not provided with models nor did they get any teaching or criticism, but Mrs Allen generally suggested the subject and showed real interest in their productions. The drawings can be examined bearing the following points in mind. The children's

Figure 1. Tracings (approximately half-size) of pencil and chalk drawings made in Mrs Allen's 'ragged schools' in Tanzania and Uganda between 1943 and 1965 (A in Tanga; B in Arusha; C-H in Nyakatanga; I-L in Makerere). From top left by row: A) by Bondei children, names not known; B) by a single child, name unknown; C) by Ashia, a Haya girl; D)-H) by Haya children, names not known; I) by Omara, an Acoli boy; J)-L) by Ugandan children, names not known.

first need is for a framework, a format that is acceptable to others as a representation or symbol. Whether the child finds acceptance or not will be a major determinant of forms and subsequent development. The youngest or the visually least experienced children tend to rely on very simple geometrical units as pictorial building-blocks. Children in an organized school will find formats that are already being used by other children. These generally resemble simplified models of the more developed iconography current in the larger society. Mrs Allen's classes were distinguished by the absence of such traditions, and so highly individual or eccentric techniques for constructing their images were invented by the children. The outcome of their efforts can be conveniently labelled as primary ideograms.

The simplest drawings representing people consisted of lines extruding from a circle (see Figure 1A). The four figures shown here were traced from pink chalk drawings on small blackboards; they were made by young Bondei children while Mrs Allen was in Tanga. The centre figure typifies a basic format which is only remarkable for the prominence given to the ears. That the top right figure is female is suggested by two dots signalling breasts. The subject of the lower right drawing is concerned with hairdressing, and a comb is indicated by the pronged lines above the circles which stand for head and ears. Extra importance for the arms and hands in this activity is given away by the care to enumerate five digits, emphasize the lower arm and even suggest a palm. Mouth, nose and legs are not considered important for this subject. The problems posed by trying to depict a different sort of human are evident in the drawing on the left which shows a European eating. In 1943, when this drawing was done, hats and shoes were almost universally worn by Europeans; neither were much used by Wabondei. Apart from these symbols it is the length of nose or face and pale eyes that signify a white. Depiction of these peculiarities has demanded the invention of a different conformation to that used in the other drawings.

In Arusha (see Figure 1B), somewhat different conventions appeared in Mrs Allen's classes, among them jagged profiles which were made up from letter-like units, C, M or W. Similar use of letter-like forms turned up in Nyakatanga, western Tanganyika (Figure 1C). This sheet includes a B converted into a car. By contrast all the human figures depicted in Figure 1D are made from an open loop like an undulating inverted U. Notwithstanding their abbreviated form a pipe-smoking man in baggy shorts and a killer of snakes succeed in being remarkably expressive. Another convention (shown in Figure 1E) is also 'open', but instead of being sinuous is sharply angular. Yet another figure (1F) from the same school consists of a loop for the head above a cross made into two triangles with arms and legs looping out of the corners. A similar cross can indicate scissors. A square with a loop over it signifies a house, the same with circles on each corner signifies a car and so on.

The use of different methods to depict people in different circumstances is shown in Figure 1G. A group of children playing football are summarily drawn using the 'C3' formula, two dots one

above the other stand for eyes and vocalizing is shown by a dash sign for the tongue. By contrast, the frontal view of a man in a fez or tarboosh is drawn quite differently. Figure 1H was done in the same school and shows that the 'C3' formula was widely used, but with many variations; images are repeated in much the way that letter exercises are, and the formula of two loops like the figure '3' repeats itself over and over again. Every now and then the mechanical rhythm of the hand making the loop seems to run on and make a third loop. This seems to have become a playful elaboration of 'method' in Figure 1I, drawings by a ten-year-old Acoli boy called Omara, drawn in an informal class for the children of employees on Makerere campus, Uganda. The resemblances in style are striking. Other drawings from the same classes show other variations on the 'C3' formula, and two rather Picassoesque variants; Figure 1J uses an 'S' form to enclose the eyes; Figure 1K combines a side view with frontal eyes, like a flatfish.

It is scarcely surprising that letters and number-forms should dominate the children's imagery when learning the alphabet and numerals takes up so much of their time. Examples from other schools in East Africa occasionally show similar reliance on letter forms. These examples have demonstrated that a pictorial structural formula has derived from a dominant preoccupation, in this case figures and letters. Mrs Allen was surprised that children in five widely disparate stations came up with very similar stereotypes. She interpreted an indented oval for the face as 'a mango man' and suggested that the children's acquaintance with and love of mangoes had spilt over and come to dominate their imagery. Another drawing (Figure 1L) was given to me in support of this idea. It certainly evinces relish for this king of fruits, but the circular head of the child contradicts the contention. My own interpretation is that the children relied more on simple additive geometric components and seized on letter forms as mnemonic devices.

A methodical formula-based approach to drawing (or carving) has obvious attractions for the maker. Older children can be quite articulate about their procedure, and the drawing (Figure 2A) of a head by J. Mulira, a Muganda secondary-school pupil, was accompanied by notes which showed that after his first demarcation 'to show the forehead clearly' he proceeded to draw in what he called 'cheek bones' and jaw, taking care to make them 'stick out'. In the artist's mind it would seem that the position of arcs on the periphery of the facial place implied physical prominence. They are an odd mixture of conceptual components with anatomical ones. He considered that the eye-sockets, nose ('with deep parts e.g. the nostrils') and lips should be shown, and made to look solid. The organization of units in this drawing is remarkably similar to a West African Toma mask (Figure 2B), and subdivisions of this type turn up in masks and carvings from as far afield as Hudson Bay (see Figure 2C).

Yet another structural principle is evident in drawings (Figure 3A) which were chalked on a blackboard in Mrs Allen's class by a twelve-year-old girl from the Uganda/Sudan border area whose father had come to work on the Makerere campus as a servant. She was described as precociously adolescent, wild and unruly. The

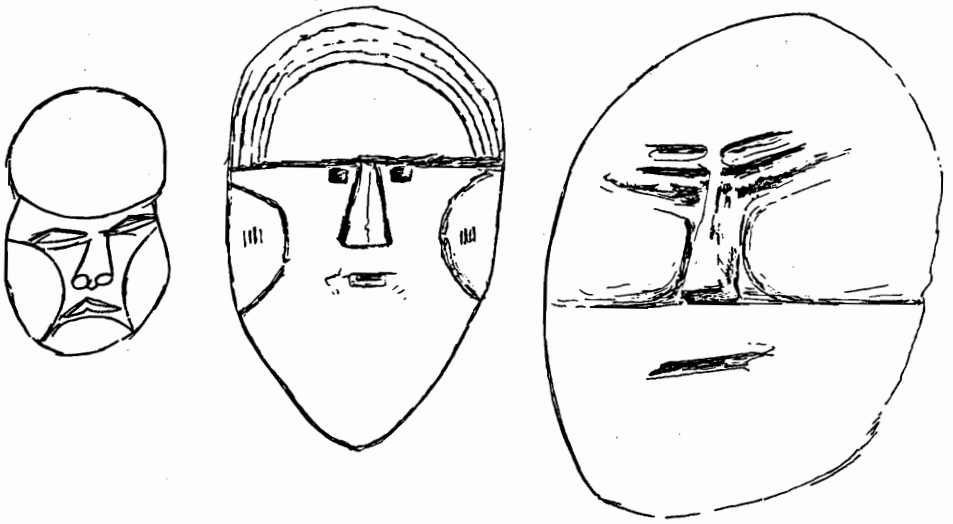


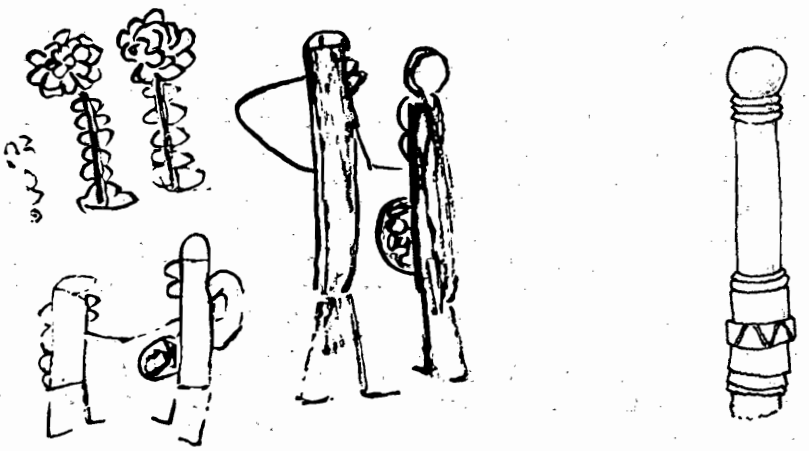
Figure 2. From left: A) tracing (approximately half-size) of drawing by J. Mulira, a Muganda Secondary-School boy; B) author's drawing from a photograph of the facial plane of a Toma mask; C) author's drawing from a photograph of the facial plane of a soapstone head by the Inuit sculptor Tiktak.

---

phallic connotations of these images are obvious but I was unable to ascertain whether the drawings reflected her developing sexuality or derived from memories of carved post images (Figure 3B) from

---

Figure 3. From left: A) tracings (approximately half-size) of chalk drawings by a twelve-year-old girl at Makerere 'ragged school'; B) author's drawing from a photograph of an Agar Dinka carved post.



her traditional Nilotic background. I incline towards the latter derivation. A directly Freudian interpretation leaves out of account the bridging of idea and image. In the process of seeking technical solutions to the problem of representation, children generally look to objects and artefacts that present themselves ready-made within their surroundings. There is not only less effort required than actual invention but such images carry a certain measure of social acceptability, even authority, by virtue of their existence. In other words, they are already a part of the culture's visual vocabulary and have the advantage of being easy to construct. If this is the case here, there has been a translation from three-dimensional artefact to two-dimensional chalk drawing. One implication would be that in her mind's search for a structural 'principle' on which to build up an image her memory of carved posts provided a starting-point. To a simple column accretions could be attached so as to distinguish one subject from another. On the right a woman is distinguished by the appendage of a belly (with baby inside) and two broad shallow loops for breasts; her head is drawn as a separate circle in contrast to the male whose capped head is not differentiated except by the attachment of two loops to suggest lips and perhaps nose. At first sight the smaller drawing is a variant of the same theme, but it seems that the lower extrusion has become a gigantic penis, and the other figure has a series of decorative loops down her back possibly suggesting scarification or flowery prints on a cotton dress. Above this couple, some flowers are drawn according to the same 'accretion on a stem' principle.

Directly sexual or visceral sources of imagery undoubtedly exist, but I am more concerned here to present a rather literal illustration of the special difficulties posed by sudden exposure to the concepts of anatomy and physiology. Mr Dormer, an expatriate teacher in a Gulu school, introduced some Acoli primary-school children to the subject of how their body worked and then asked them to illustrate their knowledge. In the near-absence of any visual aids as guidance (they may have seen, but not learnt to 'read' text-book diagrams), and with little but their experience of slaughtered livestock to go by, they were faced by many problems of representation. The results were exceptionally varied and individual (Figure 4). They can be seen as charts of the mind grappling with new or little-understood concepts. Furthermore they may have had to rely on a graphic vocabulary which, if the previous examples are any guide, probably had comparably arbitrary beginnings. The purposes to which the expatriate teacher was asking his pupils to apply their drawing was largely alien. For some the act of drawing was itself unfamiliar but few would be unacquainted with the act of scratching in the dust or other ephemeral surfaces as a part of childhood play. Drawings such as these are the outcome of a peculiar form of cultural hybridization. They also exemplify lines being employed to follow temporal sequences as well as delineate objects in space. A drawing by an 18-year-old boy in this primary school (Figure 4, lower right) is one of the most interesting in that his single trailing line stood, in his mind, for a progression from mouth through throat and stomach to gut and anus. These

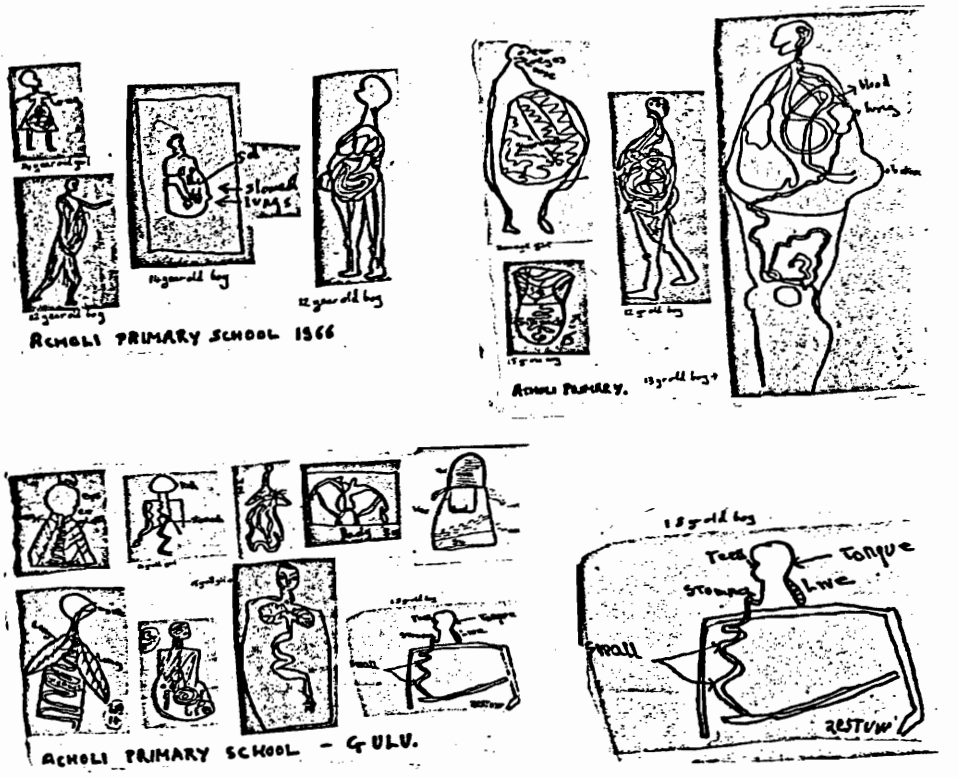


Figure 4. Photostat (reduced) of drawings by Acoli children at Gulu Secondary School, Uganda, 1965-66; drawing at bottom right by an eighteen-year-old boy.

---

children do not typify a definable coherent culture, but if their background and assumptions are influential then it is useful to remember the variety of construction formulae used by very young children in their first efforts at depicting people. It is also instructive to consider alternative concepts to those implicit in the Western practice of drawing. I am unable to illustrate this in an Acoli context but I can demonstrate that drawings, as such, have been produced elsewhere in East Africa in social circumstances and with intentions that are almost diametrically opposite to those found in a modern school.

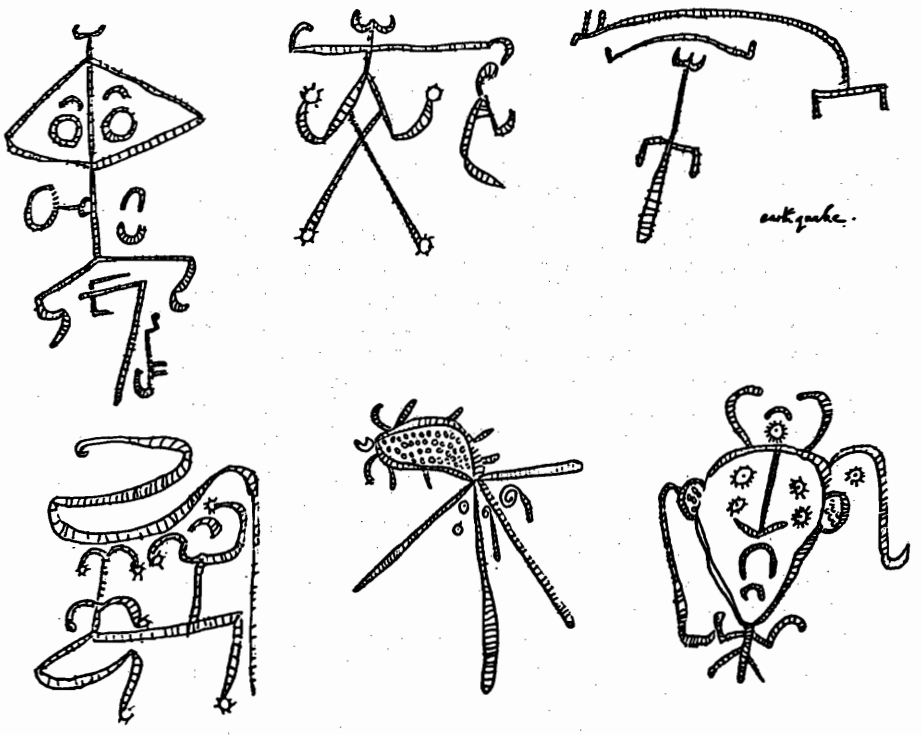
Sukuma

The connexion I am about to make is a purely arbitrary one in that I happened to have been acquainted with two anthropologists who collected two sets of drawings in mid-western Tanganyika. They allowed me to trace their collections and gave me what information they had. There the matter stood. I thought I had lost these tracings until they came to light recently in a spring-clean. On reflexion I thought that interesting and important points could be made about the different assumptions that underlie the act of drawing in certain untutored contexts and the highly structured and functionally directed practices of modern schooling. Furthermore, the interaction of differing cultural practices can result in productions that are in themselves revealing.

Hans Cory was government anthropologist in Tanzania and an old family friend. In the course of a discussion on African art in 1961 he dug out some drawings and notes he had collected in the 1940s. He subsequently wrote a short piece on them for a journal of which I was the editor (Cory 1962). These pencil drawings were

---

Figure 5. Tracings (approximately half-size) of pencil-drawn versions of sand-drawings by Sukuma secret-society initiators. From top left by row: A) Kusole*; B)* Chicken Sacrifice*; C)* Earthquake*; D)* The Food Arrives*; E)* Igele*; F)* Face.



made by secret-society members as direct copies of sand pictures that the same artists had scratched on the specially sanded floor of the initiation hut. One drawing (Figure 5A) was called *Kusole* by the artist. *Kusole* is the name of an animal which disturbs novices sleeping in the *ntanda* initiation hut and is so integral to initiation that an older man is detailed to go through the hut growling and pushing sleeping initiates - escaping before they wake up. The image is of a sleeping initiate with the *kusole* represented by a single circle with nippers on a stem. The nippers reflect the etymological root, *kusola*, which means 'take hold of'. Between the initiate's legs are two further figures which were called 'the distant thunder' by the artist. Cory did not know but presumed that they represented symbolic beasts linked with virility or fertility. The spatial concept is of the human body subjected to two quite separate hidden forces. The symbol for *kusole* has a temporal connexion with the ceremonial of initiation in which the drawing was made. By contrast, the distant thunder implies a potential hidden beneath the initiate and encompassed within his thighs. The total drawing therefore implies present and future, the seen and the unseen. Like the children's drawings examined earlier, the figure of the initiate only includes a few relevant features, eyes and brows and a horn-like projection above the head, while the splayed legs form a frame for the second concept of distant thunder.

Connecting two components in a drawing, whether in time or space, involves problems of representation and interpretation (indeed the invention of perspective could be said to have been a response to this challenge). In Figure 5B there is a very interesting implication built into the pictorial device and linking its two component parts. It depicts a spirit agreeing to accept the sacrifice of a chicken. The spirit's power is symbolized by horns and by pronged circles which are in the position of hands and feet. Acceptance of the chicken is implied by the hook on the right while the crossbar links the two concepts. Implicit in the spirit's acceptance of the chicken is its acceptance of a judicial role and the resolution of particular problems. It seems possible that the asymmetrical hook on the other end of the link line could symbolize the balancing reciprocity involved in such sacrificial practice. When Cory saw this drawing being made his immediate response to its superficial structure was to see it as a balance, so he told the artist about the Europeans' symbolism for the spirit of justice. Cory described the artist being thrilled when he learnt of this totally fortuitous interpretation - he accepted his drawing as one of political significance as a symbol for weighing guilt and innocence. However, the crossbar was clearly a conceptual link and did not represent any solid structure. It is interesting that Cory did not explicitly recognize the extent to which his own perceptions were dominated by Western conventions and that he was not content to let the artists and their ceremonial setting be his guide and source of appreciation. He could not resist following what he called his intuition, the 'impressions' he received from looking at the drawings.

Horns or tusks as symbols of power recur in another sand drawing (Figure 5C) entitled *Earthquake*, where a hidden force buckles

the earth from below. This force is symbolized by the horned body. Hidden and double meanings were given by the artist to the focal points in this sand drawing. The pronged circles denote protective medicines that are buried beneath the floor of the *ntanda* hut where initiates learn lore connected with the Sukuma snake-cult. These circles and their position also resemble the hands and feet of the spirit depicted in the Figure 5D, but the connecting limbs are more agitated and serpentine. The dominant sinuous shape seems to provide an essential frame of reference for this drawing, as the artist described it as the *ntanda* hut, implying its purpose which is to give shelter to people dealing in snake-lore. However, his title was *The Food Arrives*; food might be symbolized by the small arc centre-right, but Cory thought that the drawing was concerned with the pleasure of anticipation and that the digestive canal was the most appropriate vehicle for this emotion. Implicit in the title and subject-matter is the suggestion that the appetites of fasting initiates are heightened. The Acoli schoolboy who labelled his trailing line 'tongue, teeth, stomach and intestines' as a representation of his own anatomy may have had a concept of what he was doing comparable to that of this Sukuma artist.

In a drawing such as Figure 5D there are several layers of implicit meaning. In the context of initiation it is obviously important that the drawings have predictive, anticipatory as well as didactic, ceremonial and entertainment functions. Inevitably there is considerable scope for ambiguity in drawings with multiple functions and built-in time-warps because they rely on such extremely simple pictorial elements. The artist's presence and the context of the drawing's production alone determine what particular meaning be given to a circle, squiggle or floating line and it is remarkable that Sukuma drawings show few signs of standardization, relying instead on the authority of the artist's statements. Ceremonial which emphasizes solidarity will not seek to criticise representations or symbols. Cory remarked that viewers considered it to the artist's merit that he made a tree or bird the object of his efforts, irrespective of similarities. No idea of value was ever attached to the product; it was not preserved so there was never any model by which subsequent production could be measured.

The central point of reference for Sukuma sand drawings is the human being, and the linking of body parts with the socializing function of ceremonial is, according to Cory, evident in a drawing (Figure 5E) where the *ntanda* hut encloses the novices for their rite of passage. The artist called the drawing *Igele*, which means 'a group of people', and the *ntanda* is shown as a distorted oval surrounded by magic pegs. Cory (1947-48: 165) reported the initiation hut being directly compared with a womb, and he described this drawing in those terms, with the novices emerging from initiation as if newborn.

Another sand drawing (Figure 6A) is a most compelling image in which a vaguely anthropomorphic structure contains the central symbols of fertility. The artist called the picture *Rain*. According to Cory the two horns above and the falling arrows are male elements, while the 'breasts' below are among the female elements and represent hills receiving the rain. The appendage below car-

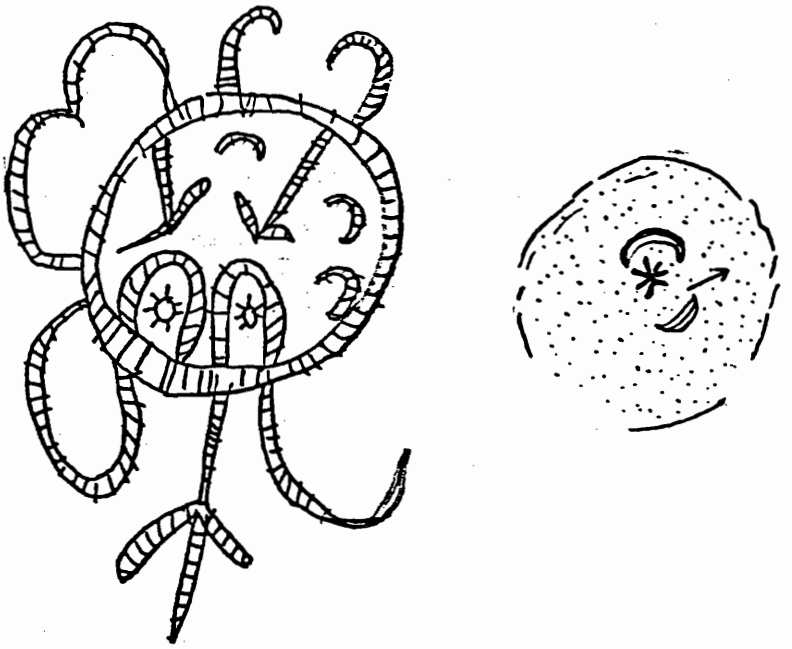


Figure 6. From left: A) (details as for Figure 5) Rain*; B) tracing (approximately half-size) of pencil drawing,* A Good Rainy Season*, by Juma Ndamulo.*

---

ries symbolic antithesis still further; it is a peg with wings which carries the breasts. Among the arches may be representations of rainbows. Although this structure contains a complex set of abstract associations, its iconography is partially borrowed from a simpler ready-made format. This can be deduced by comparing it with one peculiar representation of a human face in Figure 5F. Unfortunately Hans Cory was so carried away with his own interpretation of this as 'a lonely outpost official' that he failed to record the artist's own title and explanation.

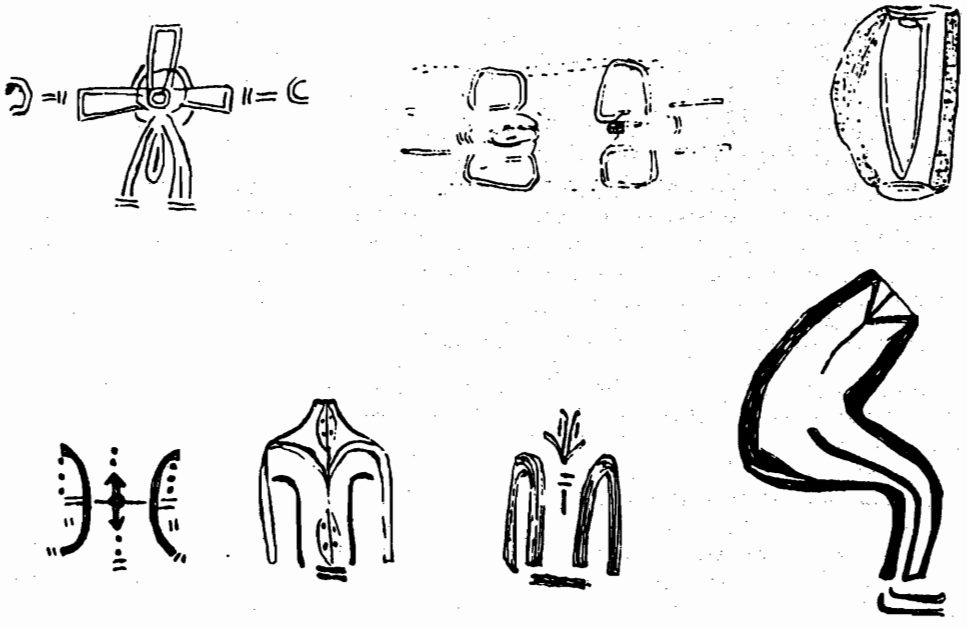
Juma Ndamulo

These latter drawings were directly associated with traditional ceremonies and probably show little external influence. It is instructive, therefore, to compare them with some pencil drawings made in the 1950s, at the request of his District Commissioner Ralf Tanner, by a Sukuma boma messenger. This man, Juma Ndamulo, also used arches, lines and arrows, presumably remembering drawings similar to those collected by Cory, but he subtly changed their nature. Where the traditional drawings were ceremonial charts, Ndamulo's

drawings imparted more the character of a hieroglyph. The function and context of such drawings, even if drawn from similar sources, is fundamentally different.

Ndamulo was drawing for a foreign employer who was curious about him as an individual, peculiar for his skill and willingness to draw. As an urbanized Sukuma, Ndamulo would have absorbed a variety of external influences, perhaps most evidently in his glyph for the concept of 'worship' where people gather beside a cross raised above an arch (Figure 7A). His glyph for a 'good rainy season' (Figure 6B) looks like an extremely abbreviated and ill-remembered version of the sand drawing (Figure 6A); notice, for example, the containing circle, vestiges of arrows and arches - perhaps rainbows. In another glyph entitled 'marriage' (Figure 7B) there are the bold arches typical of Sukuma sand drawings, and these seem to symbolize pelvises or buttocks on either side of genitalia that are almost clinically illustrative and quite different in nature from the sand drawings. Consciousness of the body is paramount in Ndamula's sign for 'plenty' (Figure 7C). Here the stomach is shown distended with food, and the stippling was explained as representing skin. Bellies are also the base for Ndamulo's glyph for 'happiness' (Figure 7D). Two short dashes are signs of a full stomach and dots are signs for laughter. Two flanking bodies (bold arches) contain happiness which escapes, chased into the outside world by two arrows. In a second glyph entitled 'to be happy'

Figure 7. Tracings (approximately half-size) of pencil drawings by Juma Ndamulo. From top left by row: A) Worship*; B)* Marriage*; C)* Plenty*; D)* Happiness*; E)* To Be Happy*; F)* To Be Angry*; G)* To Jump.



(Figure 7E), the heart is portrayed sending happiness up into the head. Another chest-like format signifies 'to be angry', but the arrow cuts into the heart (Figure 7F). His most representational glyph is 'to jump' (Figure 7G) which also uses arcing lines but succeeds so well that it almost looks like a photographic detail of a jumping athlete. Ndamulo's drawings suggest a coming together of elements from different sources, among them his tribal background. His drawings were elicited in response to a foreigner and need to be seen in that context. Inasmuch as the activity of drawing is traditional, its focus has made a significant shift from a confident, shared affirmation of group knowledge and solidarity towards a more solitary initiative. A stranger solicits a statement and thus challenges the artist's individual ability to articulate an identity that is no longer confined by tribal limitations and conventions.

Makonde

Comparable situations are being faced by many artists and art movements in Africa, and I wish to end this discussion with a brief look at contemporary sculpture made by the Makonde of Mozambique. The switch from drawing to carving will seem less perverse when it is realized that both types of artists have mixed observed structures with abstract concepts and readily construct linear links between disconnected units using inscribed lines or carved wooden bridges or struts.

An important feature of Makonde work and something they have in common with Ndamulo is that although the bulk of the ideas and iconography are drawn from traditional sources, the economic incentives and cultural setting for contemporary work has been provided in a transplanted existence to the north in Tanzania. The making of masks and figurines was a well-established tradition in Makonde tribal custom, but among the Wazaramo close to Dar-es-Salaam the Makonde encountered a flourishing trade in ebony carvings for the tourist market, and individuals seem to have tried augmenting their earnings from carving as early as the 1920s, a practice that gathered momentum in the early 1950s. Most of their production is handled by middlemen so they seldom come into contact with their foreign patrons. The work tends to be made in a social setting, often in bachelor communities close to the sisal plantations that originally attracted large numbers of Makonde migrant workers. As is so often the case in all-male relationships, joking and ribald sexual fantasising are prominent in their conversation. The making of sculpture provides a functional focus for these men. Furthermore there is a direct association of this activity with themes that are central to the daily conversation and reminiscences that reinforce their sense of solidarity as a distinctive people far from home. Skills and talents are well recognized among the carvers, but I found no deprecation of less competent carvers. The market is a large one and has little discrimination, so the number

of carvers runs into hundreds, even in the immediate vicinity of Dar-es-Salaam. Modern Makonde carving as a whole is probably the production of a thousand or more carvers.

Mass production and bafflement as to 'what it means' has inhibited analytical appraisal and appreciation of this extraordinarily vital and imaginative art form. I cannot claim to have researched the material in any detail, but I have discussed work with several carvers at the sites where they worked. My intention here is to discuss a few examples which seem to me to resemble the sand tracings and the children's drawings for their selection of a few key forms which have numerous and haptic references to parts of the human body. (They also relate to a rich animal pantheon.) Although modern Makonde work is purely secular and is recognized as an opportunistic response to tourism, it has its roots in initiation rites comparable to those of the Sukuma sand drawings. Wood carvings used to be made as illustrations of proverbs that would entertain as well as make the initiates think. In the practice of commercial carving there may remain an element of replaying initiation as the most intense period of learning in their lives.

Initiations involved songs, dancing and innumerable tests of knowledge - hunting, ethno-botany, tribal history and folklore together with social education on manners, respect for the mother (the Makonde are matrilineal) and some elaboration on the potential and humour of sex, which Makonde see as a field for much experiment and surrealistic entertainment. What is certain is that the carvings' subject-matter and mode of production serve to reinforce their *émigré* sense of identity and solidarity. Exile from their homeland and exposure to a world in which non-Makonde values are dominant has been a very long, protracted process which has led to a steady erosion of tribal knowledge and practice. For instance, carvers recognize that belief in spirits has declined; some claim it has disappeared. With this decline there is less knowledge of traditional symbolism and greater readiness to assimilate new folklore picked up from Christianity, Islam and from other tribes. Thus a complex interacting pantheon of spirits and mythic figures, each of which was once associated with a time, place, animal, state of mind or social condition tends to filter out into a rag-bag of *shetani* and *djinn* (both deprecatory words borrowed from Swahili). Crude sculptures of *shetani* have long been a part of Ramadan celebrations. The Makonde acceptance of verbal denigration of their own spirit images has possibly facilitated tolerance of their work and practices within the potentially hostile Muslim and Christian milieux.

For some forty years or more their art has reflected the changing relationship of the Makonde with their traditions and with the new world in which they find themselves. It is also possible to see the retention, and in some respects possible development, of certain ethnic concepts and values that are peculiar to the Makonde. These are made all the more distinctive by being associated with a valuable material, ebony, and a rare technical virtuosity that excites admiration in its own right. The Makonde therefore find some confirmation of their own values in the marketability of their carvings and in the surprise, fascination and admiration which they elicit in others.

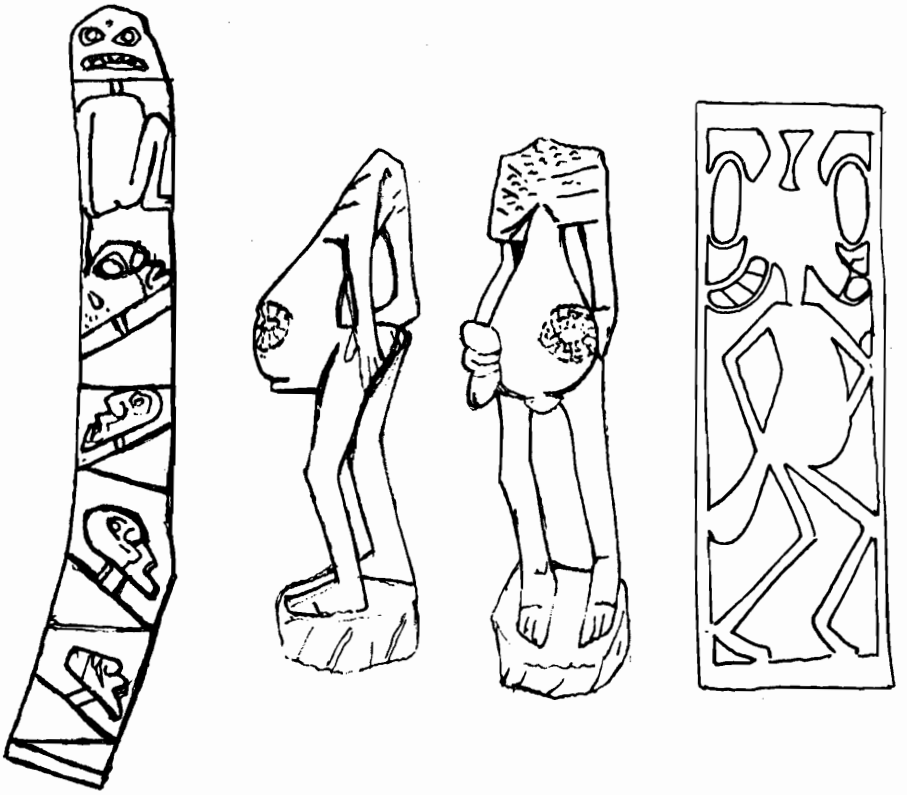


Figure 8. Tracings of photographs of Makonde sculptures. From left: A) an ebony bullroarer; B) and C) light-wood traditional carving - two views; D) ebony slat representing a hermaphrodite.

Some of the Makonde ideas are given shape by processes that are analogues of those governing the drawings that were examined earlier. For example, a bullroarer, shown in Figure 8A, is decorated with geometric shapes and heads almost as abbreviated as the children's drawings shown earlier. A one-armed figure (9A) also resembles a child's drawing in that it eliminates all but the simplest expressive elements. Figures 8B and 8C illustrate an enigmatic headless sculpture which may not be of very great age but was certainly carved to serve the Makonde's own purposes rather than to sell off. Significantly, it is not carved in ebony but in a commoner light wood. It represents a female figure with swollen body and breast and no head, but it can also be read as a capped head on legs with one eye and a navel as nose. Where the neck might be expected there is an area of chiselled texture and a similar texture covers a large opening cut in the belly. Both these areas have been painted blood red to increase the viewers' sense of shock and surprise. The figure seems to be extracting dung from its anus. It is difficult to believe that a mythical figure with such assertive and memorable symbolism was not carved to play some important

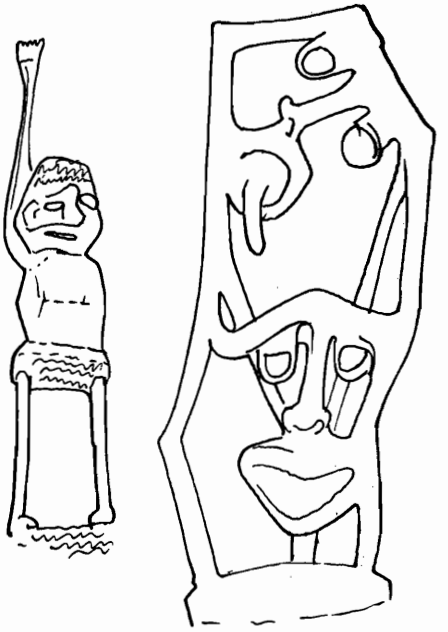


Figure 9. Tracings of photographs of Makonde ebony sculptures. From left: A) one-armed figure; B) double-entendre *face/figure carving.*

structured role within the traditional pantheon. The figure may be an initiation carving or a travel talisman and it seems to represent a class of spirit called *Kutumbo* or *Shautumbo* which go about with the gut exposed and symbolize greed or unbridled appetite. For the time being my modern Makonde sources seem unable to take the significance of this figure any further.

Spirits remain a major source of inspiration for Makonde artists. A hermaphrodite (Figure 8D) is effectively 'drawn' on a thin slat of ebony, below it is a childlike figure and its head is the flat assemblage of a pair of horns, two large eyes with male and female organs where the mouth should be. This is an appropriate position to symbolize hermaphroditism because the Makonde often synonymize vulva with mouth and penis with tongue. They also use a mouth-like structure, complete with 'teeth', as one of several conventions for female sex organs.

Figure 10A was carved in the mid-1960s by a Makonde artist called Manjema. He used a narrow slab of ebony but it has been opened up and carved from both sides to explore sensations during the act of sex. The sculpture combines the overall structure of a head with eyes and nose in roughly appropriate positions and a headless figure with shoulders and coiled contorted legs. The nose is repeated at the base where two rows of teeth flow in towards flared opened nostrils. This symbolizes the smell of sex. A labiate slab down the sides represents sound, and at the point where this elongated ear lobe meets the 'waist' there are two eye-like structures, one facing down, the other upwards. These eye-like conventions were described to me as 'taking things in', and in different sculptures seem to stand for a wide range of active perceptions or sensations, in this case auditory, tactile and genital,

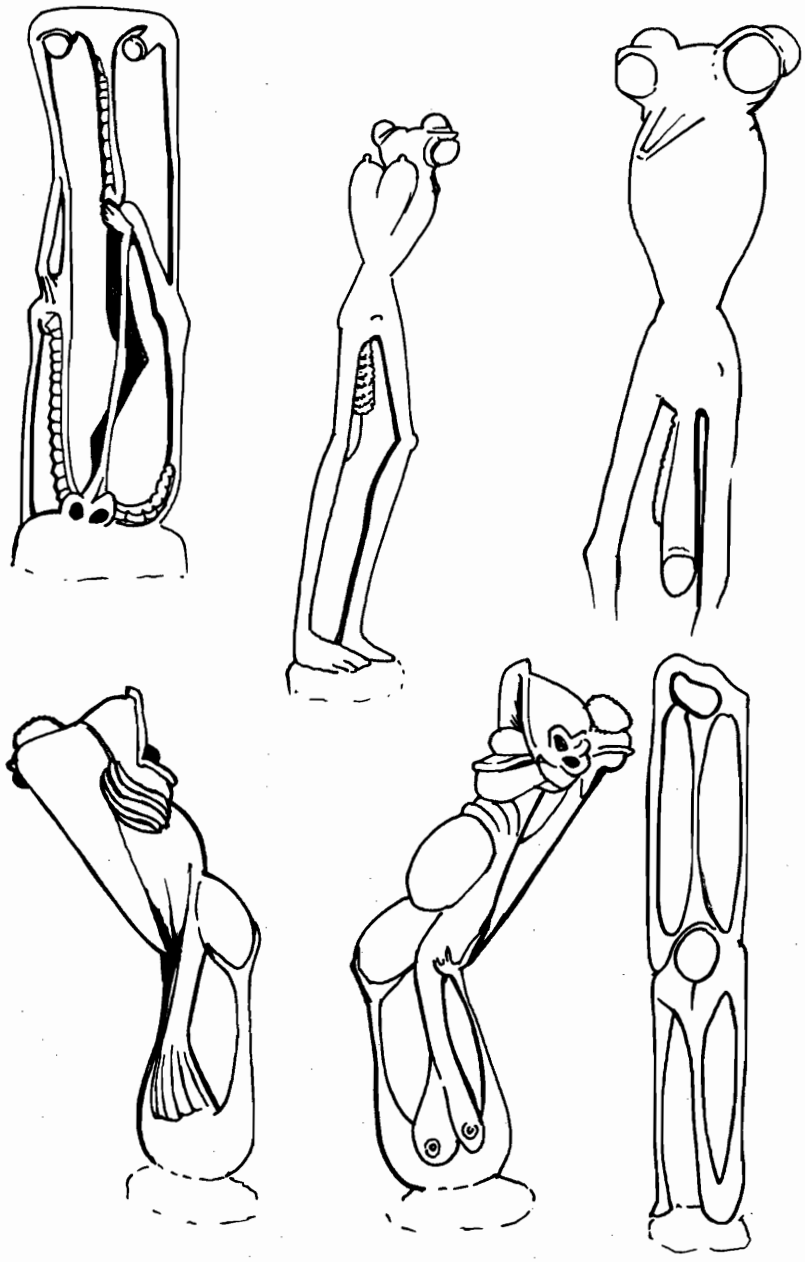


Figure 10. Tracings of photographs of 'openwork' Makonde ebony sculptures from Dar-es-Salaam. From top left by row: A) Sexual Sensation *by Manjema, c. 1965; B) and C)* Copulation *by Chanuo, c. c. 1968 - two views; D) and E)* Mermaid (Mamedi) *by Chanuo, c. 1969 - two views; F) untitled sculpture by an unknown artist, c. 1974.*

since the three eyes are linked with an ear, hands and clitoris. One leg of this figure is firmly planted on the base but between it and its pair, which faces upwards, is a double loop which encompasses the open vagina. This inverted log stands for the active principle so that whereas the vaginal symbols are outside the open nostrils on the sculpture's base, they are contained inside the column of the nose above and so represent a later stage of sensation. The eyes, which become breasts when the sculpture is read as a figure, are bulging; this describes a feeling of pressure in the eyeballs at the moment of orgasm. There is therefore a temporal implication to this sculpture which travels up from the base and culminates at the top.

Graphic three-dimensional explorations of sexual themes were very popular with Makonde carvers in the 1960s and they vied with each other in daring, imagination and inventiveness (see Figure 9B). Another figure (10B), by Chanuo, also celebrates copulation but is more of a straightforward assemblage of male and female organs mounted on legs - like the last example it culminates in bulging eyes. The same artist took a non-Makonde theme for a piece which concerns the mermaid or sea siren (Figure 10C). The sculpture links elements of fish and woman and brings erotic feelings, in the form of hands supporting and caressing buttock or breast, with slithery fish forms. The prominent nose suggests that the fishes' smell may also be part of the equation. The example of a mermaid joining the mythic inventory of Makonde subject-matter is but one aspect of rapid change and stylistic development.

Makonde transplated to Uzaramo or Kenya have been both witnesses of, and participants in, rapid social change. Beginning as a sizeable part of the labour force on plantations, they have over a relatively short period of time created an economic niche for themselves as carvers with an unassailable ethnic identity. When Wakamba imitate Makonde work, which they do, their efforts are crude and obvious copies. What are less easy to assess, in a still living and contemporary art form, are the stylistic changes and developments which are initiated by the young and talented artists in second or third generations of carvers. These men grow up with an established market and practice, and those in touch with richer clients or middle men encounter some pressure to develop further originality of style or subject-matter. It is obvious that respect and the incentive for originality exist within some Makonde communities, but the expression of this in an upgraded price tag depends upon non-Makonde who have no or very little personal contact with the carvers. In this situation one might expect mannerism to set in. This may actually be happening, but there is a characteristically subtle Makonde twist. The commercial success of their carving has, for some carvers, engendered such a confidence in their technical skill and imaginative daring that they can even dispense with a subject. Once conventions have been elaborated and have acquired some currency they become subtly transformed and Figure 10D illustrates that process. Bought in the 1970s, it suggests that the medium had begun to be the message. Eye-like conventions for the

perception of sensation have ceased to be adjuncts of a more complex story and have become the subject of the sculpture. It simply declaims 'Look! - listen! - touch!'.

JONATHAN KINGDON

REFERENCES

CORY, H. 1947-48. 'Jando', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. LXXVII, no. 2, pp. 159-68; and Vol. LXVIII, no. 1, pp. 81-94 and Plate III.

... 1962. 'African Drawings', *Roho: Journal of the Visual Arts in East Africa*, no. 2 (June 1962), pp. 42-5.