



Pillars of Rectitude: Women Artists of the 1960s in East Africa is a project created by Njabala Foundation. The aim of this project is to reclaim the work of female artists of East Africa in the 1960s. Draw connections between discrimination against women in the 1960s and 2020s. Open spaces to rethink forms of curation that will break a cycle of erasure and instead cherish and protect women artists' voices in Contemporary East Africa.

This project is also supported by Rights for Time and Archives of Women Artists Research & Exhibitions.

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Cover Image Front Page:

Betty Manyolo, "African Fable", Linocut, 15 1/2" x 22"

Cover Image Back Page:

Betty Manyolo, "Death in the Forest", Linocut, 23" x 35"



PILLARS OF RECTITUDE  
WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE 1960S IN EAST AFRICA

**BETTY MANYOLO**  
A LIFE IN IMAGES AND WORDS

BY  
CHARITY ATUKUNDA



Betty Manyolo, "African Fable", Linocut, 15 1/2" x 22"



1.

## THE WORDS OF HER CHILDREN

When I first saw a print by Betty Manyolo I felt an immediate connection. The first image I saw by her was a linocut titled “African Fable” the sharp contrast of black and white lines, the whimsical folkloric image, the intricate patterns and the way she approached composition reminded me of my own work and made me want to know more about her.

When I reached out to her children, they immediately made a whatsapp group and welcomed me. They welcomed my questions and together they filled in the missing gaps of my research, allowing us to see a more intimate portrait of Manyolo. I share with you in Section 1 of this zine, answers to my questions from the children of Betty Manyolo.



CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR MOTHER'S  
FAMILY BACKGROUND?

Estella Betty Babirye Nakayemba Manyolo, along with her identical twin sister Margaret Nakato, was born in December 1934, in Kampala. She was the seventh child among ten children. Her father, was a trained teacher who received his education at Makerere College, presently known as Makerere University. Her mother was a vernacular and hygiene teacher.



## WHAT WAS HER CHILDHOOD LIKE?

“During their childhood, the twins, Babirye and Nakato, spent their holidays at the palace of King Muteesa II, the reigning king of the Buganda Kingdom at the time. In Buganda culture, the twins held a special role as delegates of the Lion clan to the kingship.

Betty had the specific responsibility called “Kationsanze,” and her twin sister Nakato served as her assistant, known as “Lubuga” in Luganda. They were tasked with monitoring and regulating the access of unfamiliar women to and from the king’s bedroom. Betty cherished her time in the palace and often spoke fondly of the lifestyle of the pre-independence royal family.”

I READ HER BROTHERS WENT TO SERVE IN THE WAR,  
IF ANYONE KNOWS, HOW DID THIS IMPACT THE  
FAMILY?

Yes indeed, her brothers did serve in the war. They were the first two children of her parents, our uncles Sserwadda & Ntale.

One direct result of their time in Asia during the 2nd world war was the fact that Uncle Sserwadda learnt magic arts which he practiced till his death. He made money by staging local village "magic" shows. Uncle Ntale also ended up becoming practitioner of african magic arts. I don't think that this was connected to his service in the war.

## **PLAYED VITAL PART East African Support For Britain**

(Rec. 10 p.m.) RUGBY, Dec. 14.

Figures are now available of the number of Africans serving in the Eastern African Forces. At the virtual conclusion of the campaign in East Africa last June, Kenya had roundly 39,000 Africans, Uganda 18,000, Tanganyika 18,000, Northern Rhodesia 7000, Nyasaland 9000 and Zanzibar 5000. In addition to these the territories contributed to forces 5000 British personnel and 2200 Indians. The majority of both came from Kenya and Uganda.

During the first eight months of this year the Kenya and Uganda railways and harbour carried 133,000 military passengers in special trains, apart from many thousands carried in ordinary trains, and handled 5,000,000 tons of military freight at ports and on the railway. This achievement is over and above the getting away of the heavy Uganda cotton crop and all the ordinary commercial traffic by a staff which has given 60 of its European members to the military service. During this period, also engineering and constructional work to the value of £188,000 was done by the railway for the War Department. During 1940-41 the railway has given as a rebate £600,000 to the military and lent £500,000 free of interest to his Majesty's Government.

Food supplies produced by Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika for local military consumption since the outbreak of the war have been worth several million sterling. Hundreds of thousands of articles of clothing and equipment have been made in East African territory, including bombs, leather requirements and blankets.

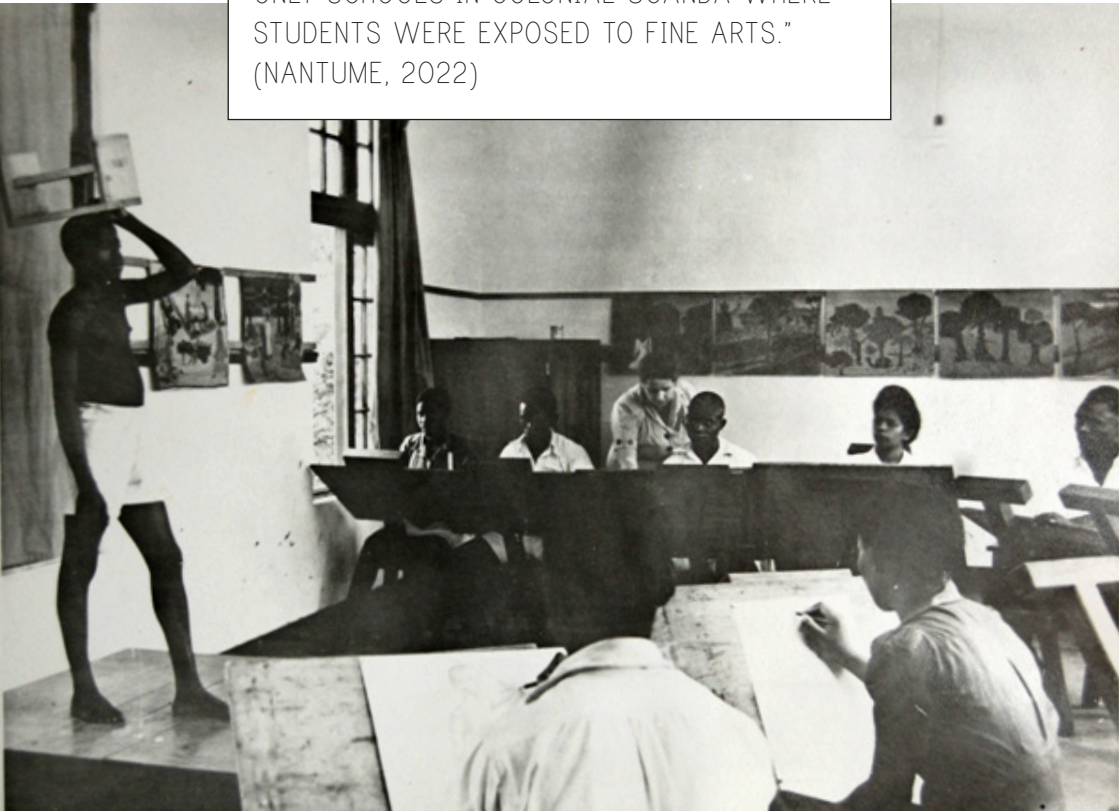
## CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT HER EDUCATION?

Betty attended Gayaza Primary School along with her twin sister and it was challenging for the authorities to distinguish between them. They would occasionally switch places for certain tasks like compulsory housework, taking advantage of the authorities' inability to tell them apart.

After completing primary school, Betty continued her education at Gayaza High Secondary School where, in 1953, she obtained her Junior Secondary School Certificate. In 1955, she also achieved an Overseas School Certificate from Cambridge University through the same school.

In 1956, Betty enrolled at Makerere College, which was the University College of East Africa at the time, to study Art at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art. She obtained a Certificate in Fine Art in 1958 and went on to earn a Diploma in Fine Art in 1960 at the same school.

"BEFORE THE FOUNDING OF THE RENOWNED MAKERERE ART COLLEGE BY MARGARET TROWELL IN 1935, GAYAZA, MENGO SECONDARY SCHOOL, AND KINGS COLLEGE BUDO WERE THE ONLY SCHOOLS IN COLONIAL UGANDA WHERE STUDENTS WERE EXPOSED TO FINE ARTS."  
(NANTUME, 2022)



Life Class in Session at the Makerere Art School in 1947 with Margaret Trowell.

## WHAT WAS HER LIFE LIKE AFTER GRADUATING FROM MAKERERE?

A few years after, Betty fell in love and got married in Uganda. She, her husband (SANGOWAWA) and young children soon relocated to Nigeria – his home country.

In Nigeria, Betty taught art at Aunt Ayo Private School from 1968 to 1969. The couple later moved to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire where Betty ran a private practice as an interior decorator, specializing in painting pictures. In order to fit better in the society, she took French lessons in Abidjan as well as at the Alliance Française in France. In the early 1970s, she and her family lived in Washington D.C., USA.

Upon returning to Uganda, Betty worked with the Ministry of Health from 1973 to 1977. She served as a commercial artist in the Government Press during this period and operated a fashion business in Entebbe.



## WHAT DID SHE DO AFTER WORKING FOR THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH?

In mid-1977, Betty relocated to Nigeria once again and joined the Nigerian Television Authority as an Art Design Supervisor at Grade Level 8. She dedicated 12 years of service to the Nigerian Television Authority, gradually rising to the position of Principal Designer at Grade Level 12.

As Principal Designer, Betty oversaw the entire design department, which encompassed various units such as illustration, animation, graphics, set designing and decoration, set construction and carpentry, stage assistants and properties, and costume, puppetry, and makeup. She allocated tasks, conducted staff meetings, collaborated with other department heads, procured materials, and implemented directives to enhance TV programs.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ARTWORKS SHE CREATED  
IN NIGERIA AND IN HER CAREER, ARE THEY WITH  
FAMILY ?

This is one of the most painful questions!

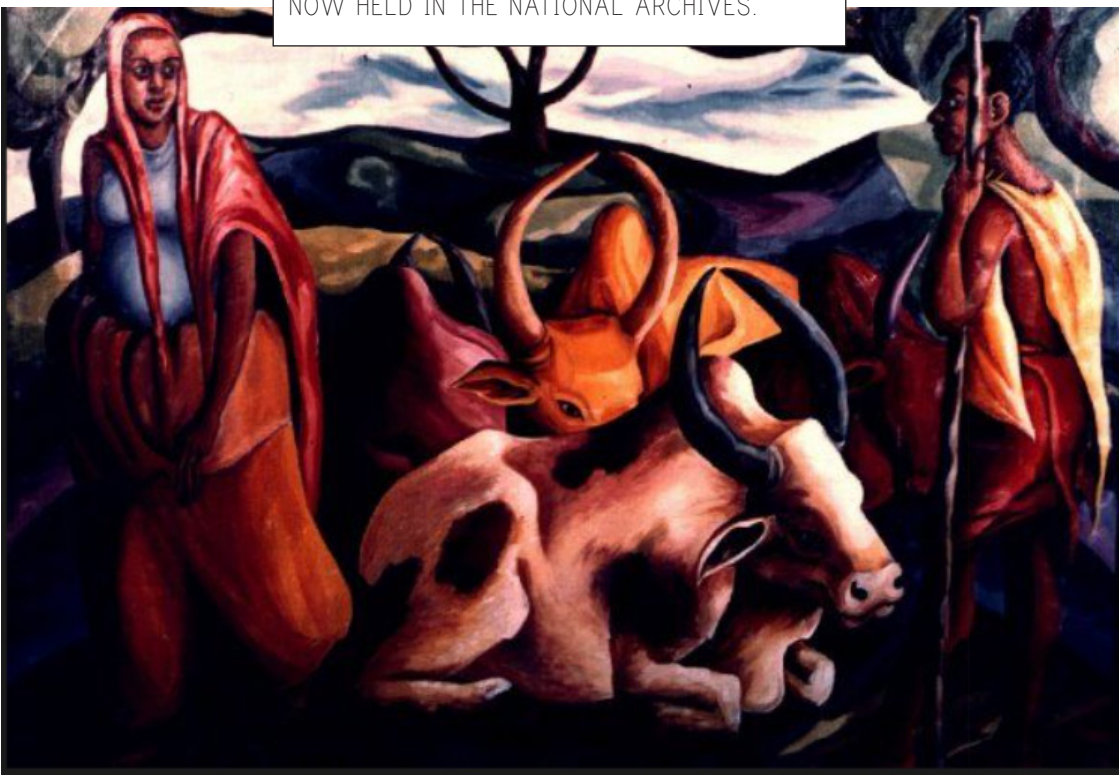
After resigning from the Nigerian Television Authority toward the end of 1989, Betty returned to Uganda. Many of her artworks created during her tenure remained in the archives of the Nigerian Television Authority.

Our mother did many paintings and artworks in her lifetime but due to various circumstances we only have a handful as a family.

Quote from one of us:

“I hardly have any of mum’s work....and yet I saw a lot of it unfold in front of my eyes. As a child, on several occasions, mummy would ask me to pose in a certain position/ posture so that she could sketch a child in a given context.” Nevertheless, we can never forget her artistic, colorful and creative mind. It was undeniable and unforgettable.

SEVERAL OF HER PRINTS AND THE PAINTING  
"THE CATTLE PEOPLE," WERE PURCHASED  
BY THE HARMON FOUNDATION A NONPROFIT  
PRIVATE FOUNDATION ACTIVE FROM 1922 TO  
1967 BASED IN THE UNITED STATES. THEY ARE  
NOW HELD IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES.



Betty Manyolo, "Cattle People", Oil on Canvas, 48" x 36",



## WHAT INSPIRED HER TO PURSUE ART AS A CAREER ?

This is a question that never occurred to either of us to ask her while she was still alive. Nevertheless, we know for sure that she was gifted and that this gift was further developed through her school pathway.

Also, it should be noted that the Manyolo family is clearly naturally gifted in the artistic field. A great majority of Betty's siblings were into music or something artistic in one way or another.

Two of her older brothers had already received some level of training at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art prior to Betty's attendance. Uncle Charles Ssekintu ended up being the first indigenous curator of The Uganda Museum & Uncle John Kisaka, also studied Art.

We even find that this beautiful gift has passed down the generations to the children and grandchildren in the family line. We probably have Betty's mother to thank for this. She was a musical person, into sewing, crafts and sang for her church choir into her 90s.

## CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CHALLENGES SHE FACED IN HER CAREER?

Upon her return to Uganda in 1990, Betty sought employment at Uganda Television (UTV), but she was turned down due to being over experienced. Consequently, she struggled to find stable employment in the art sector and resorted to freelancing in art and sewing to sustain herself in Kampala.

She undertook artwork for organizations like World Vision Uganda and contributed to a periodic magazine edited by the late Marjorie Kavuma.

Excelling in a male dominated field in the 60s, 70s and 80s was not always an easy feat. While in Nigeria, she always sought to have access to the latest and the best technology and materials.

This became difficult when we went back to Uganda...there was limited access to many of the materials that she was used to making use of.

COULD YOU TELL ME, WHAT KIND OF PERSON SHE WAS...WHAT MADE HER HAPPY ?

Betty was a woman full of life and character who had a sunshiny smile that could light up a room. She was beautiful inside and out; loved people and could adapt to various environments.

She commanded respect and liked to keep her personal life private. She loved her children fiercely and did her very best to raise them well and ensure that they were all educated.

There was something charismatic about her that made her stand out wherever she was. Even the way she talked was memorable and somewhat funny at times. She constructed her sentences in a most unique and unapologetic fashion. She believed in striving to be the best YOU that YOU were created to be. She was kind, caring and gentle yet firm and clear.

Our mother was always drawing and creating in one capacity or another – big or small. Helping kids with art projects and so on. It all came naturally to her and it was pure joy. She only stopped drawing when cancer shook the very foundation of her physical being.

During the last segment of her life, in Uganda, she was a “committed Bible reader”...serious with the things of God, more so than in prior years. She would make every effort to be at a good Bible-teaching conference.

At her funeral, her youngest son courageously and lovingly played her favorite song on the piano while the rest of her children and the entire church sang. A most touching goodbye to a most memorable woman, our mother – Betty Manyolo Sangowawa.

2.

## ON STYLE AND INFLUENCES

"IT WAS THE DARKNESS OF EMPUKU, THE HOLE IN WHICH THE BLIND GRUB BLUNDERS. I HEARD A SOFT THROB AS FROM THE THROAT OF A THREATENING ANIMAL. STINGING FINGERS HELD ME ALL OVER, HAIR, SPINE, SHOULDERS, EVERYTHING. PANIC."

-Betty Manyolo

Words and "Dance of Death" Linocut print  
published in "Origin Africa" by Kingdon, Jonathan





Betty Manyolo, "Dance of Death", Linocut, 15 1/2" x 22"

Betty Manyolo drew inspiration from indigenous Ugandan arts, she was inspired by the graphic patterns and styles of the Bahima people of western Uganda. The Bahima would create paint by mixing black ashes, ghee, and cow dung, For the color white they would use white ashes and ghee or kaolin a white clay mineral.

Their murals, painted on the walls of their huts were made by the old women of the tribe, they would have vegetal, animal, and hairstyle motifs interpreted into abstract designs. The motifs were decorative and carried different meanings about their mythology, astrology, personal objects, and more.



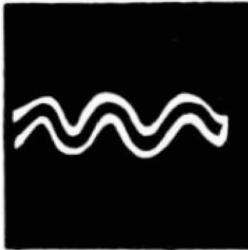
"Okwezi n'akakaaga," the moon and the Pleiades



"Enganzi y'okwezi," the favourite of the moon.  
Representing the planet venus



"Eizooba kyakira", an eclipse, literally: the sun is dark or "ekizooba kyeshereka," the sun hides, or "ekikaari ky'okweezi," the halo of the moon, literally: the enclosure of the moon.



"Omugyera," brook



"Enkukuuru," euphorbia, a type of cactus

Excerpt and images from 'Wall Patterns of Himas Huts' by C. M. Sekintu (a brother to Manyolo) and K.P. Wachmann





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She was inspired by the rock paintings found in mainly Eastern Uganda, in the areas of Nyero and Kakokoro. It is not known what some of the rock art represents. Some are abstract in nature and feature concentric circles and other patterns.

Dr Catherine Namono's research reveals that the rock art was created by the pygmy tribes in Uganda they can be found all over East and Central Africa. She theorises that the concentric circles may represent the 'Pygmy Cosmos' which speaks to their own philosophy about their relationship with the forest and how interconnects with all aspects of their life.

"HER [MANYOLO] HAPPIEST PRODUCTS ARE...LINOCUTS  
WHERE HER SENSE OF DRAMA, BOLD DESIGN AND  
EFFECTIVE USE OF PATTERN AND TEXTURE ARE MUCH  
IN EVIDENCE."

- Cecil Todd, Professor &  
Head of Margaret Trowell Art  
College Makerere 1958

Cattle People is Manyolo's most well known painting but her most striking works are her linocut prints. One can see where her imagination lay, She explored folk tales as subject matter within her work. Her black and white linocuts are rich, full of detail, forms interwoven together guiding the viewer to every area of the composition.

A masterful use of negative (in white) and positive (in black) space.



Decorative tree trunk and floral elements unite the composition and keep the eyes moving all around the image.

The use of patterns, is not only a means of decorating the image but also to convey texture and value.

### 3. LEGACY OF BETTY MANYOLO

Alongside her successful career in Nigeria working for the Television Authority and the Ministry of Health in Uganda. Manyolo illustrated books for several writers such as Janet Nsibirwa Mdoe. They collaborated on "Awo Olawatuuka" a Luganda children's book filled with folklore and her illustrations.

She also collaborated with Y. R. K. Mulindwa illustrating for the book "Ebikoiky" (1961) featuring stories, proverbs and folklore in Runyoro/Rutooro. Her illustration "Dance of Death" was featured in "Origin Africa: A Natural History" by Jonathan Kingdon (2023).

From 1961 to 1968 Manyolo's work was exhibited in many different institutions in America and in East Africa. Her pieces were included in the Harmon Foundation's publication titled "Africa's Contemporary Art and Artists," by Evelyn Brown. She was the only Ugandan woman to be featured in this publication and have her work also featured in the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibit of Contemporary African Printmakers from 1966 to 1968.

Throughout her adult life, Betty's faith and personal relationship with Jesus Christ held a central place. Her faith provided her with strength and joy, even during difficult times. Sadly, on January 9, 1999, Betty lost her battle against breast cancer, after fighting for three years. Manyolo is survived and her memory is deeply cherished by five children and ten grandchildren residing in the USA, UK, and Nigeria.



# EBIKOIKYO

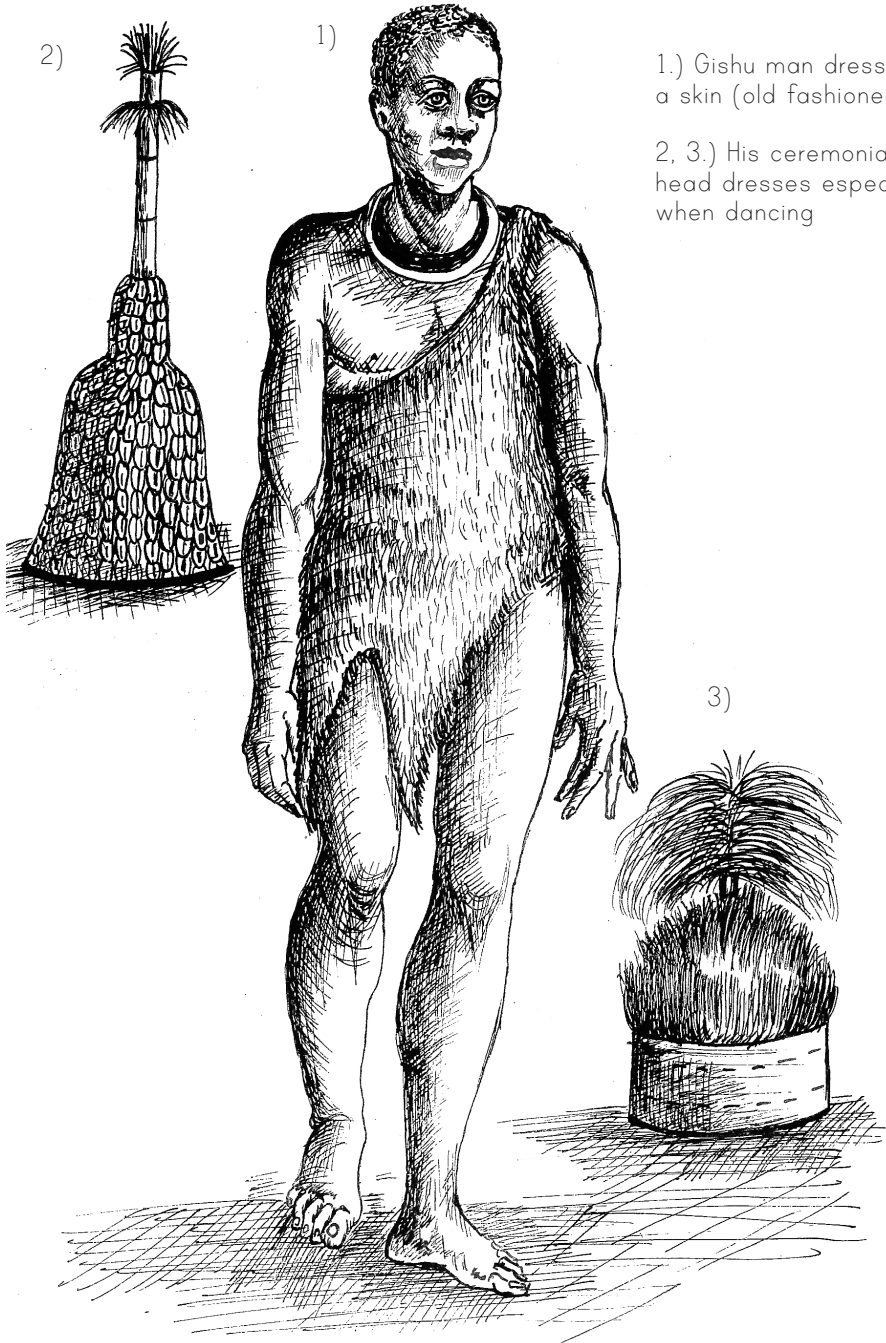


Y. R. K. MULINDWA ★ OMUHENDO Sh. 1/50

"Ebikoikyo" book cover, illustrated by Betty Manyolo

A reoccurring theme in Manyolo's work is that it aims to preserve culture, through images and through her imagination. It can be seen in her collaborations with writers to illustrate books in local languages or in her own personal work exploring african folklore and pulling influences from her upbringing and other traditional cultures.

Her thesis "Clothing in Western Buganda and Eastern Provinces of Uganda" provides detailed illustrations and accounts on how traditional dress was created, customs unique to different tribes in Uganda, cultural practices of Buganda and how Ugandans came to adopt western fashion.



1.) Gishu man dressed in a skin (old fashioned)

2, 3.) His ceremonial head dresses especially when dancing

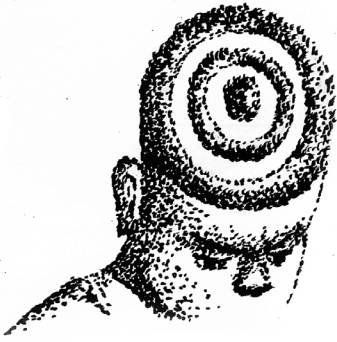
1.)



2.)



3.)



Hairstyles  
Tusi men and women ridged  
hair (old fashion)

- 1. Men
- 2. Young boys
- 3. Women

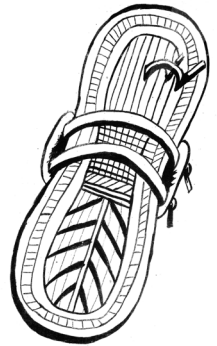


Hima man with long hair  
cut in ridges - very old fashion



Diagrams showing the early stages  
of Busuti

- 1.) The inner petticoat (tomsikita)
- 2.) Suuka for young girls
- 3.) Suuka for married women



The old ganda shoe  
(men)

Masks



Soga

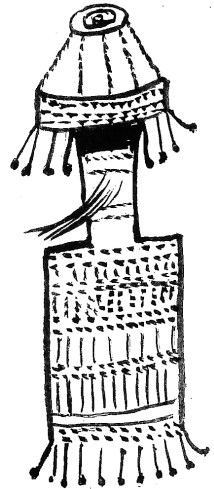


Gwere

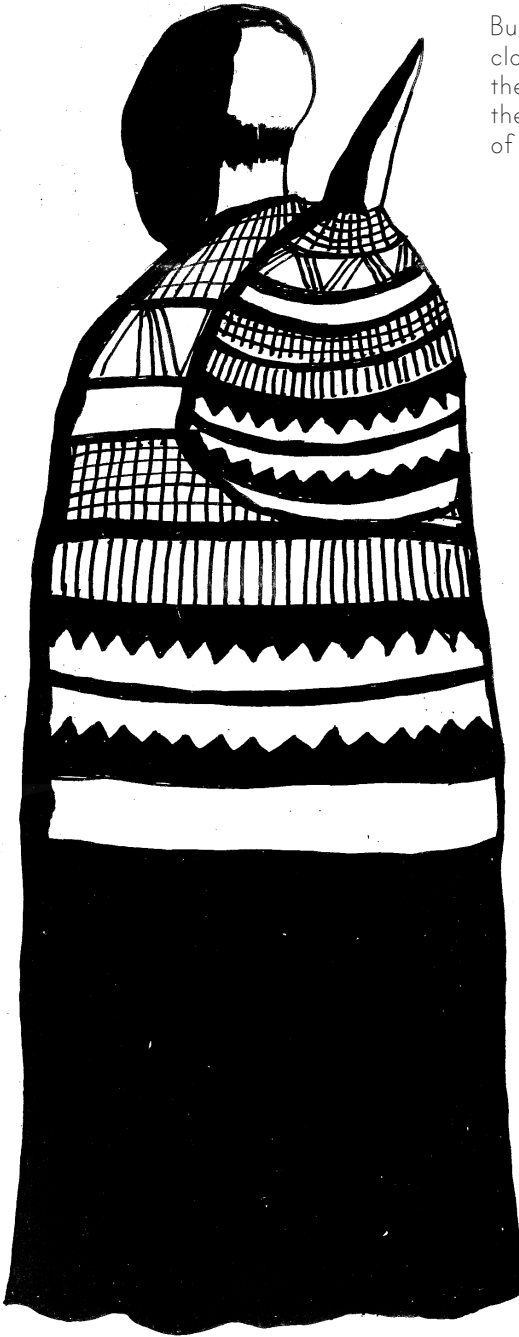


Soga

Tusi



Nyoro



Busoga chief in his bark cloth dyed black. Notice the design almost done the same way as those of Baganda.



Manyolo led a truly unique life, it can clue us in on what was happening in the imaginations and lives of the artists, creatives and thinkers of Uganda at such a pivotal time. Some things have not changed, Uganda still struggles with providing ample employment to its artists and success is still often found by one having to leave the country. While the number of women has increased within the field of Fine Arts it is still a heavily male dominated industry. It is imperative to create more platforms that focus on women.

The question of identity is still at the core of our practices as we resist and decolonize ourselves and our work. We are also still searching and trying to preserve our culture on our own terms for the stories that have been written about us are not our own and much of our history is still held in the form of archival materials and art in Europe and America. We must change that for the future generations to come.

## CITATIONS:

1. Cover Image Front Page, Page 2:  
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2. Illustrations Featured, p3, p7, p17, p19 p21:  
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3. Illustrations p30, p32 - p34  
Manyolo B, (1960) "Clothing in Western Buganda and Eastern Provinces of Uganda." BA (Fine Art) Thesis, Makerere University.
4. "Life Class in Session at the Makerere Art School in 1947 with Margaret Trowell", Photograph, Courtesy of Makerere University Library, <https://90.mak.ac.ug/timeline/margaret-trowell-school-industrial-and-fine-arts-mtsifa-opens>.
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6. Manyolo B, "Cattle People", Oil on Canvas, 48" x 36", U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Harmon Foundation Catalog.
7. Manyolo B, "Dance of Death", Linocut, 15 1/2" x 22", U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Harmon Foundation Catalog.
8. C. M. Sekintu & K.P. Wachmann, (1956) "Wall Patterns of Himas Huts," Trustees of the Uganda Museum.
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11. Cover Image Back Page:  
Betty Manyolo, "Death in the Forest", Linocut, 23" x 35", Harmon Foundation Catalog, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.
12. Todd C. (August 1961), Correspondences to the Harmon Foundation. Artworks by African Artists, 1947 -1967, Harmon Foundation Catalog, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

13. Manyolo B. (October 1966), Correspondences to the Harmon Foundation. Artworks by African Artists, 1947 -1967, Harmon Foundation Catalog, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration
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15. Perrin L, Nantume, V, "African Modernism in America, Manyolo Betty Estelle," (October 25, 2022). United Kingdom:American Federation of Arts, p 144
16. Kingdon, J. (2023) "Origin Africa: A Natural History", Princeton University Press, p. 201

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