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| Makerere Art School |
| The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA) |
| The Makerere Art School started informally in Mulago, Kampala, Uganda, in 1937, with a handful of students who turned up one evening at the porch of Mrs. Margaret Trowell’s house. Trowell was not the first person to teach painting in the region – Mary Fisher, also a Briton, had two years earlier been posted to Gayaza, a girl’s school near Kampala, as an art teacher, and indeed some art classes were being conducted in other missionary schools. But it was Trowell who raised the profile of art education in the region when she convinced the principal of Makerere College to include art among the college’s subjects in 1940. In the years leading to the First World War, Makerere was developing into a major institution for higher education in the region. Trowell is also credited for steering the art school during turbulent times when its closure seemed inevitable. For example, when Makerere was considering entering into a special relationship with London University in 1949, Trowell rejected the arrangement, as she feared her art school would lose the African identity she had scrupulously nurtured for over a decade. She directly negotiated with the Slade School (also under the University of London) for a diploma, which ensured that a foreign qualification did not affect the African features of her curriculum. |
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For example, when Makerere was considering entering into a special relationship with London University in 1949, Trowell rejected the arrangement, as she feared her art school would lose the African identity she had scrupulously nurtured for over a decade. She directly negotiated with the Slade School (also under the University of London) for a diploma, which ensured that a foreign qualification did not affect the African features of her curriculum.  Trowell’s retirement in 1958 coincided with the award of the art school’s first diploma, and as a gesture of appreciation for putting together a formidable art Institution, Makerere Art School was named after her. Unlike Trowell, her successor, Cecil Todd did not pay much attention to past traditions in the development of a modern African Art School. He placed emphasis on a detailed consideration of technique and art history as an academic discipline; he had been appointed to institute a 1940-50s Western Art School structure. He expanded the School by introducing new courses and recruiting new staff, largely form the UK. As student numbers increased, drawn from the East African region and beyond, the School achieved international fame and respect.  Makerere’s optimism and rapid progress waned when Idi Amin captured state power in 1971. Amin’s regime was brutal and anarchic, forcing many people, particularly the educated, into exile. Todd left the country in 1972, Jonathan Kingdon succeeded him but he too left after only two years. Ali Darwish became the new head and in 1975, handed leadership over to George Kakooza, who was the first Ugandan to head the School. F.X. Nnaggenda took over from Kakooza in 1981, but gave up the job after one year because he wanted to concentrate on his studio practice. It is noteworthy that in spite of the repressive political conditions of the 70s and early 80s, Makerere Art School survived and students created graphic but veiled images that expressed disgust for their leaders. Amin was deposed in 1979 and Uganda staggered from one confused regime to another, until 1986 when Yoweri Museveni took over power and restored political stability. Within a few years, the economy improved powered by the private sector.  With Musango as its head (1986-89), the school entered a new phase of hope and renewal. Morbid subjects were replaced by formal content and experimentation. When P. Ssengendo took over from Musango in 1989, he furthered Musango’s interest in academic art. However, he slightly differed from his mentor in moving to return to some aspects of Trowell’s philosophy by advocating for a revisiting of the local cultures for inspiration. Ssengendo is also acknowledged for steering the School to new administrative heights. In 1994, the School was granted a faculty status and its name changed from School of Fine Art to the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA), with three departments: Painting and Art History, Industrial Arts and Design, and Sculpture and Drawing. In this new format, the School was able to design new courses that responded to both the rapidly changing market and the government’s call for industrialization. Furniture design, fashion, jewellery, and advertising design are some of the new courses that were established.  Besides teaching and research, the School renewed its liaison with local communities. For example, a training program aimed at improving the performance of local artisans was implemented from 2008-2009. Women affected by HIV/Aids, recruited from different parts of the country, were re-skilled in ways that would help them use their weaving tradition as a means of openly discussing the HIV pandemic. The School has maintained contact with these women through its students, who spend time with them as interns. Introduced in 1996, the internship program has strengthened the School’s ties with the community and private sector. Students contribute to the ethos of the host institutions as they themselves (students) learn about the dynamics of art related labour market. They bring back Internship Experience Reports, which are assessed and thereafter fed into curriculum review processes that are periodically carried out.  Several graduates of MTSIFA have established notable careers. Daudi Karungi (2000) is the proprietor of the most successful commercial art gallery in Uganda, while Francis Taga (1990) is focused on preserving Ganda cultural heritage. Taga’s publication, *The Ganda Totems,* exhibits in depth research into the culture and traditions of Buganda. Brother Musaazi (1996) and Dr. Kizito Maria Kasule (2000) have both, individually, founded private art schools that offer diplomas validated by Kyambogo, a government public university. Furthermore, over 8 departments of art have been established by MTSIFA graduates in new private universities around the country. These developments are not only indicative of the expanding scope and prospects for art in Uganda, but also demonstrate the influential role of MTSIFA in Uganda’s art scene.  In 2010, a major restructuring of academic institutions was carried out at Makerere, amalgamating closely related disciplines. Because of its industrial orientation, MTSIFA merged with the Faculty of Technology. Three schools, including the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts and Built Environment and Engineering, now constitute the new college of Engineering Art Design and Technology (CEDAT). The merger created opportunities for internal adjustments, MTSIFA now runs three programs: Fine Art, Industrial Art and Design, and Visual Communication Design, offering a more comprehensive training to students.  The College formation created an opportunity for the Makerere Art Gallery to gain legitimacy and to expand. From its opening in 1969, the gallery was not allocated any formal establishment. The need to create an Institute for Research in visual culture at Makerere was the stimulus for upgrading the Makerere Gallery into an Institute of Heritage Conservation and restoration. Its collection is the finest and most exclusive in the country, having been systematically collected over a period of 50 years. It includes art works produced by staff and students of Makerere Art School. With funds from the Dutch (2005) and American (2012) Embassies, this collection has been carefully documented and its storage space improved.  Support has also been extended to other sections of MTSIFA. The Japanese (2005) government funded a pottery lab where indigenous knowledge in pottery has been re-evaluated along modern lines. Relying entirely on local materials, a new pottery language has emerged, transcending the narrow rural usage of a pot to national and international recognition. Both masters and PhD researchers have extended information on local clays and other aspects Uganda’s visual culture. The increasing number of articles and theses written about the way in which Uganda’s art is locally constituted has stimulated intellectual debates on African art at MTSIFA and beyond.  With no strong tradition of visual culture to draw from, artists in Makerere have relied on their inner resources to develop visual representations that express a sense of nationalism as they respond to the changing social and political climate. Throughout this encounter, they have had to grapple with tensions between tradition and modernity.  [File: Makerere.jpg]  Figure 1 Makerere Art School (Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts) Copyright of photo, Margaret Nagawa. (photo taken in 2010) |
| Further reading:  (Kingdon)  (Kingdon, Makerere Art School)  (Kyeyune, L'art modern a l'university de Makerere Ouganda)  (Kyeyune, Uganda's Visual Environment)  (Ntiro)  (Ssekamwa)  (Kasfir)  (Trowell) |