

2.4 Conclusions

Art, Crafts, and Everything in Between

In this chapter I introduced the situatedness of art, art education and artistic handicraft in contemporary debates on art and craft in Uganda. I further displayed how, at least since the early twentieth century, artistic practices, and art education in today's Uganda have been interwoven with colonization and evangelization through which new hierarchies were established and through which especially people living in rural areas were downgraded, inclusive of their ways of living and meaning making, social and political structures. Especially the legacy of Margaret Trowell, the founder of the art school at Makerere College (now Makerere University), continues to impact the discourse on art in Uganda. While she challenged Europeans to think outside their normative assumptions about art from Africa and to consider cultural and societal differences when viewing artistic handicraft objects, she also promoted the idea of a local peasant society with appreciation for manufactured everyday items produced by local artisans that would foster the economic development of the Ugandan Protectorate.

After her return to Great Britain in 1958, her successor Cecil Todd began to modernize the art school to the dismay of Trowell's protégées around Sam Ntiro, Eli Kyeyune and Gregory Maloba, who, one after the other, left the art school after the curriculum was altered significantly. At the same time, Ugandans worked towards independence. During anticolonial and independence movements, the establishment of cultural identity, at times symbolized through particular aesthetic features such as wearing barkcloth, had become important for the development of individual and collective identity. After independence, Uganda's first president Milton Obote sought to use culturally significant symbols, artefacts and art objects for the creation of a national identity through *the Uganda Crafts Emporium*. Craft centers and markets were created alongside a catalogue, which was distributed among high commissioners and in embassies abroad, and for the first time it was particularly women who were encouraged to become handicraft artists.

Throughout all those developments, the separation of visual arts in higher art education and artistic handicrafts as a part- or spare-time activity – one being art and the other being craft – grew. It was during the brutal dictatorship of Idi Amin during which the lecturers left at the Makerere art school began to re-explore working with local raw materials in larger numbers as paint, tools and painting grounds were difficult to get and became very expensive. During this period, Francis Nnaggenda became a leading artists and lecturer in Uganda, for he was among the few artists who had already explored the use of unconventional materials in his large sculptures. This development reached a peak during the nineteen-nineties and after Yoweri Museveni had come to power. His regency led towards an influx in official development assistance (ODA) in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties, a rise in

the number of (western) NGOs and project funds, and in 1995 towards the re-establishment of the monarchies as cultural institutions.

Around the same time, several young artists began to seek inspiration by studying their own cultural history, and sought to bridge the gap between indigenous or traditional/historical art objects, musicking and dancing and contemporary visual art. Yet, the relationship of indigenous art forms in contemporary art for formalized trained artists continues to remain challenging. For several artists and in art-oriented social projects, artistic handicrafts and culturally relevant symbols and everyday objects considered indigenous, are used when working with people with a low income and little or no formal education, with refugees, or individuals and groups considered as underprivileged because of other demographic markers. Those initiative generally aim at socio-economic empowerment of the people understood to be underprivileged.

However, artists do not necessarily make use of what is considered traditional or indigenous artistic methods in their own artistic practice. Artists such as Acaye Kerunen, Fred Mutebi or Sana Gateeja, who work together with handicraft artisans and further use the handcrafted products in their artworks, continue to remain few in numbers. The difficulties in maneuvering and integrating the 'indigenous' with the 'contemporary', equally regarding both as art with cultural and social importance also to people outside Uganda's art world, continue to play an important role in the Ugandan discourse on art and craft, on history and contemporaneity, on socio-cultural responsibility and individual desires to express oneself freely.

The Cultural Turn in Development, in the scientific discourse primarily situated among international organizations that shape development organizations and among funding organizations historically primarily located in countries of the Global North, brought forward different notions of the meaning of culture in, for, and as development. For this study, the questions of *authentic* artistic cultural expression, of heritage protection and promotion, and of sustainability within the negotiated (civic) spaces of the *new art* and the *old art* as well as the references to Margaret Trowell and her conceptualizations of art and craft are important sensitive concepts. Therefore, in what follows, I turn to the discussion of those civic spaces within which such negotiations are partly situated.

