

Theresa Musoke, East Africa's Top Female Artist, has Carved out a Niche in Wildlife Paintings (Her Brush Tames Wildlife)¹

Edris Kisambira

While many Ugandans left the country in the 1970s due to political persecution, Theresa Musoke's exile was for a different reason. Hers is what you would refer to as professional exile. "I had to go. There was a scarcity of materials like paint — the basics an artist would need to survive. One had to make orders from Nairobi and this would be followed by a lull in time before they would arrive," she says.

While she was away, Musoke succeeded in carving a niche in wildlife paints. She is actually referred to as East Africa's top female artist.

Musoke's paintings are impressionist and have been extensively exhibited abroad, because hers is a style that appeals to modern art lovers and collectors.

In one of the reviews of her Nairobi exhibitions, she was described as a painter who thinks big because most of her canvasses

are large. With smaller paintings, she still manages to create an illusion of space with her use of light and surprising colours.

While in Nairobi, she divided her time between her work as a painter and a teacher. She taught at Kenyatta University and the United States International University.

She exhibited in all the major galleries and cultural centres in Nairobi, including the former Tryon Gallery in International Life House, the French Cultural Centre, Gallery Watatu and the former Donovan Maule Theatre.

Her most exceptional works include the murals of giraffes and acacia trees that offer splendour and brilliance to the walls of the New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi. These, she says, were a special assignment in preparations for the 1982 meetings of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Another magnificent mural graces the VIP lounge of Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. In Uganda, there is a huge painting of leopards at the International Conference Centre (ICC), Kampala. There is another piece of her work at Entebbe Airport.

She says she completed the one at Entebbe Airport in 1975, a year before the famous raid by the Israeli Airforce over a kidnap. Upon her visit back to Entebbe (old airport), Musoke says she was delighted to see that the commandoes had left her ostriches still standing. "Women simply are not encouraged to be artists. Several stereotypes still linger and if women are not expected to stay at home, cook and produce children they are allowed to pursue more conventional careers such as teaching," she says.

When Musoke graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Makerere University in 1965, now the Margaret Trowell School of Fine Art, she was one of two women to do so.

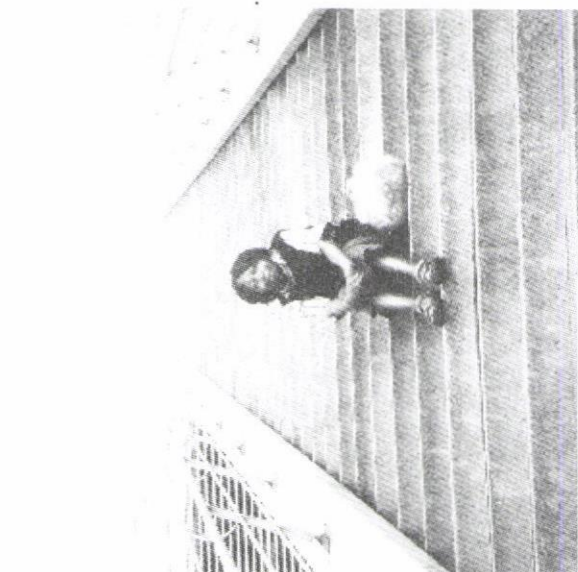
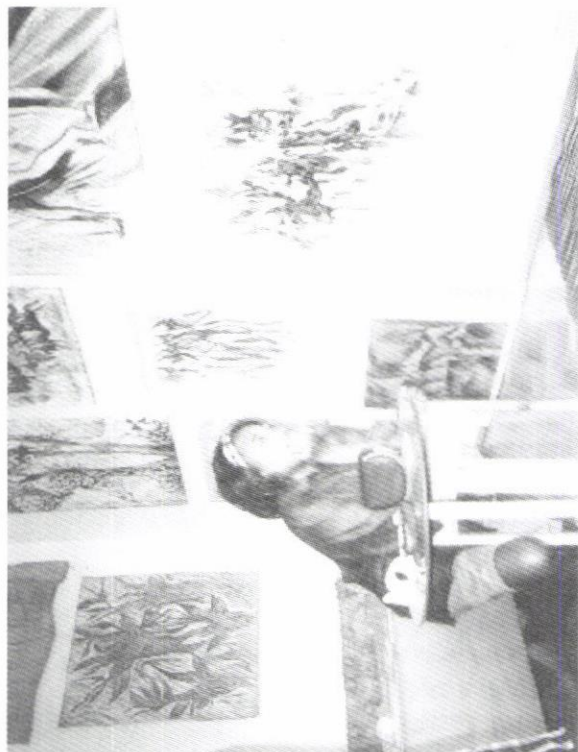
Musoke's genius is in the unique combination of oil on tie-dye canvas with the use of a final wash technique. But she has also come up with some equally impressive watercolours, using gold as the primary medium.

Musoke, born in Kampala, began her schooling at Kisubi boarding Primary School and then went on to Trinity College, Nabingo before joining Makerere University. She received a postgraduate scholarship to attend the Royal College of Art in London from 1966 to 1968.

In 1969, Musoke attained a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to attend the Graduate School of Fine Art and Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, USA from 1969 to 1973.

NOTES

1. First published in *Vision Weekend / Art & Theatre*. Uganda.



BLACK AND BLACK WOMAN

Anna Lúcia Florisbela dos Santos

The whip cracked - I screamed, wept, struggled,

But they called my resistance cowardice

Indolence

They attacked me and locked me up

I'm black, still black, but only in colour

I've tried my best to become white

As white as you like

Black and white, right?

Today the whip is my wage

The belt which I must fasten tighter

I scream, weep, struggle

But they call my resistance insurrection

Outrage

They turned me against myself, made me white

But I'm black, still black, and not just in colour

I know I'll get out, out of madhouses and hospitals

Of prisons and youth detention centres

I'll escape from the kitchen and the streets

I'll win, I'll be black

As black as you don't like

Black and black, Zé!