

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ART IN ZAMBIA

Early History

Early stages of human development in Zambia are well documented, and some of the artifacts have been preserved. The earliest forms of man-made articles were stone tools. These included hand axes and cleavers, and later, wooden tools like digging sticks and clubs. By the late Stone Age decorative art forms had developed – bone tools, bow and shell ornaments, as well as rock paintings using natural colors such as ochre. Nicholas Katenekwa, director of national heritage conservation commission and archeologist, researched rock paintings and engravings. He suggests that the naturalistic paintings of game and hunting are concerned with a form of magic which would give the hunter power over animals, and which would increase the fecundity of the game. He further suggest that the schematic markings made by later iron age peoples could have been associated with the weather, or an early form of counting system.

The earliest rock art dates from 10,000 BC and is ascribed to the Twa people. In the Eastern province some caves with the cinamwali pictographs are still used for ceremonial purposes. Rock paintings in the Thandwe Rock shelter in Eastern province date from late Iron Age 500 years ago, and have been added to at different times.

During the Early Iron Age, pole and mud houses appeared, as well as pottery for cooking and storage. Migrations to Zambia during the third century BC brought skills of smelting, cultivating and herding. During the eleventh century migrants carried with them other styles of pottery and more intensive cultivation and developed smelting skills reflected in their copper and gold jewellery. Findings of cotton cloth, beads, copper crosses, gold bracelets and leather amulets, during fourteenth century suggest evidence of trade in the region.

In the 17th century migrants established the Lozi kingdom in the north, and during the 18th century the Bemba and Lunda chieftaincies. Chieftaincies involved complicated rituals and intricate ceremonial artifacts. In the 19th century the Ngoni and Kololo invaded the east and west from the south, and Arab, Portuguese and European settlers brought more changes to Zambia.



From Independence to Art Today

Pure art forms continued to be created for ceremonial purposes in the villages, rather than for the commercial market. There were virtually no painters in western tradition, as artists lacked paints and the tools necessary for production of conventional pictures. Art in the European sense was not taught, and the artists of this region used earth colors and natural dyes as done for centuries.

The arrival of European settlers brought influences from western painting traditions and growing access to materials from that region. During the 1940's and 1950's outside influences made their mark on the local art scene. In Southern Rhodesia, the Cyrene school of painting was developed, in the 1940's the Mission art school was founded by Canon Ved Patterson, as well as a school for sculptors in Salisbury which came to influence Zambian sculptors such as Tubayi Dube and his students. Congolese Katanga painters were influential during independence, their characteristic use of palette knife, romantically stylized trees and flat color was emulated by artists in Zambia.

Tavern art- murals painted on walls of taverns and eating-houses patronized by local people – depicted tavern scenes and folklore stories. The most common subjects of these paintings were the mermaid, soccer matches, chess, and satirical scenes. The image of the mermaid came with the Portuguese via Congo, and the depictions of rats and monkeys represented people of different origins. Old tavern art influences can be seen in today's modern day barber and hair salon signs, as well as in the works of more established artists such as Stephen Kappata.



In 1957 Rhodes national Gallery opened in Salisbury under curator frank McEwen, this gallery became the shop window for art from Central Africa to the rest of the world.

McEwen encouraged experimental paintings in vivid colors, bringing Zambian artist Yoltam Likito, Henry Tayali, Richard Gregory, Bernice Schwartz, Bente Lorenz and Tubyai dube to the notice of overseas collectors.

In 1969 The Art Center Foundation was established, financed from a government grant. It was a philanthropic society, making no profits, dedicated to promotion of all plastic and graphic activity in Zambia. During the 1970's the art scene was growing and expanding in Zambia.



Godfrey Setti, Cinamwali.



Flinto Chandia, Here I am.

