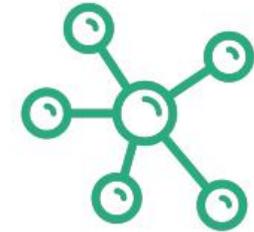


Cultural tradition in art – Artist spotlight: Richard Kimbo



Quick summary



Although not much is known about Richard Kimbo himself, or his early life, he is an example of a highly talented African folk artist. Kimbo has created many colourful **batiks** which he sells himself in the streets of a suburb just outside of Nairobi, Kenya. He has been creating folk art for at least 50 years and spends his week producing his batiks for three days and then selling them for the remaining part of the week. Kimbo is known to be dedicated to his craft and is well known both locally and around Kenya’s capital. In fact, it is said that if you are in a traffic jam in Westlands, the suburb where he lives and works, all you have to do is stick your head out of the window, call his name and he will appear!



Media and materials

The technique of batik cloth dyeing actually **originated** in Java, Indonesia. The process involves drawing dots and lines on cotton with beeswax using a tool called a **canting** or printing with a copper stamp called a cap. The applied wax resists dyes and so the artist can apply colour by soaking the cloth in one colour, removing the wax with boiling water, and repeating if more colours are required. Many African batik artists, like Richard Kimbo, use a thick paste made from rice, or even mud, instead of wax as their form of resist or protective layer.



Process

Richard Kimbo started selling his batiks in 1969 after learning the skill from a teacher at the Paa Ya Paa Gallery (now an arts and cultural centre). Paa Ya Paa means ‘the antelope rising’ in **Swahili** – wood carvers regularly used antelopes for their subject. Symbolically, Paa Ya Paa is a spiritual **calling** and the gallery owners hope that new open-minded creative artists will express themselves and their traditions through art – just like Richard Kimbo over 50 years ago. Kimbo himself says that he decided to produce and sell batiks simply because he needed an **occupation** and money.



Styles and periods

The famous President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, was well known for wearing batik during his lifetime. He regularly wore loose-fitting patterned shirts (as seen on the right) to business and political meetings, instead of a formal suit. His batik clothing became known as the Madiba shirt, named after his **clan**.



Visual language

Each of Kimbo’s batiks, like the example above, are handmade one-offs. He uses a variety of deep and vivid colours with much detail and a dramatic style. The batik above is a bustling traditional African village scene with images of people trading fruit and vegetables in a market.



Vocabulary

batiks: cloths that have been printed with a batik design where wax or similar is used on areas not to be coloured by dye
originated: started, came from
canting: a pen-like tool used to apply liquid hot wax
Swahili: an East African language, officially used in Kenya and Tanzania
calling: a strong urge to follow an occupation
occupation: a job or profession, something you spend time doing
clan: a group of related families



Media and materials



Techniques



Process



Colour theory



Emotions



Artists and artisans



Effects

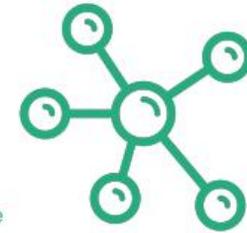


Visual language



Styles and periods

Cultural tradition in art



Quick summary



Artists are a product of the culture and society in which they grew and are therefore influenced by the customs of, and what is normal for, their society. Often, their artwork reflects upon and depicts the objects, ideas and customs that their society values. Looking at the artwork of different cultures can give us insight into these valued traditions and inspire us to reflect on our own cultural values.

When discovering and comparing art from different cultures, viewers of the art can identify the unique qualities that relate a work of art to the time and place it was created. From painting, jewellery making, sculpture and pottery to architecture, the art of a particular culture in history or today can reflect how colourful that culture is and how it has shaped and influenced art in other times and places.



Emotions

Many cultures have used art to tell stories. These stories may be fictional, mythological or historical, but the art is an important record and can be used to create different emotions such as pride and strength, for example, when showing victories in battle. The art of the ancient Maya culture was based on a writing system that used images – a form of art telling stories and recording events. Art can therefore be an important way for information to be recorded and preserved.



Styles and periods

Folk art was first used as a term to describe art made by craftsmen and working class people in the 1700s and 1800s. These artists had little or no training but had practical skills, often learned while working. Folk artists today continue to create impressive works of art based on experience, community and heritage which is deeply rooted in tradition. Without formal training, they may use simple techniques but create art as a means of self-expression rather than creating art that is 'correct'. Folk art is often described as art of the human spirit.



Visual language

Indian folk art, as seen in the example above, is based on ancient stories passed from one generation to another. The themes are adopted from epic stories, often involving gods and goddesses and depicting images of flora and fauna. Older Indian folk art used natural colours, with mud, charcoal and leaves used to paint on canvas and cloth. The example above is called Madhubani art which was often used to decorate the walls of ancient huts.



Effects

Many examples of art based on cultural traditions, from tribal folk art to Islamic religious art, involve colourful patterns. Although they may look complex, these designs can be created quickly by untrained artists using repetition of shapes such as circles, raindrops, loops, waves and crosses.



Vocabulary

customs: common or traditional activities and events
insight: an accurate and deep understanding of something
heritage: the qualities, traditions and features of life that have continued for years and been passed on through generations
formal: organised at a place of education like a college
epic: poems or stories expressing early traditions of a people or nation
flora: plants
fauna: animals
tribal: describing things relating to or belonging to tribes and the way they are organised



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