

## Anita Sitta: Showcasing East African Art

ITM London

**For the past 11 years, Anita Sitta has been promoting East African art through her gallery in Stone town, Zanaibar and through the internet.**



She calls her gallery “Real Art”, because all the works on display have been brought to the gallery by the artists themselves. “Some customers complain I don’t give them a discount but I can’t because I am working on behalf of the

artists”, Sitta explained.

The elegant, self assured African woman from Mwanza, Lake Victoria would like to develop her own career as an artist. “I would like to join an art school and do more drawing and photography. I

The ceremony



want to be a professional artist". But for the time being her dreams are deferred because there is no one suitable to take care of the art gallery.

"Selling art is not like selling peanuts", Sitta emphasised. Her business has been affected by the financial crisis. "Before the crisis everything was going well. Now things are not so good".

Sitta's husband, himself an artist, introduced her to well known artists. "He wanted me to work with artists and to sell their art. They needed me as there was no where for them to sell their art. When I first moved to Zanzibar I discovered that the existing tourist shops usually only sell uninspired craft work. I immediately understood there was an



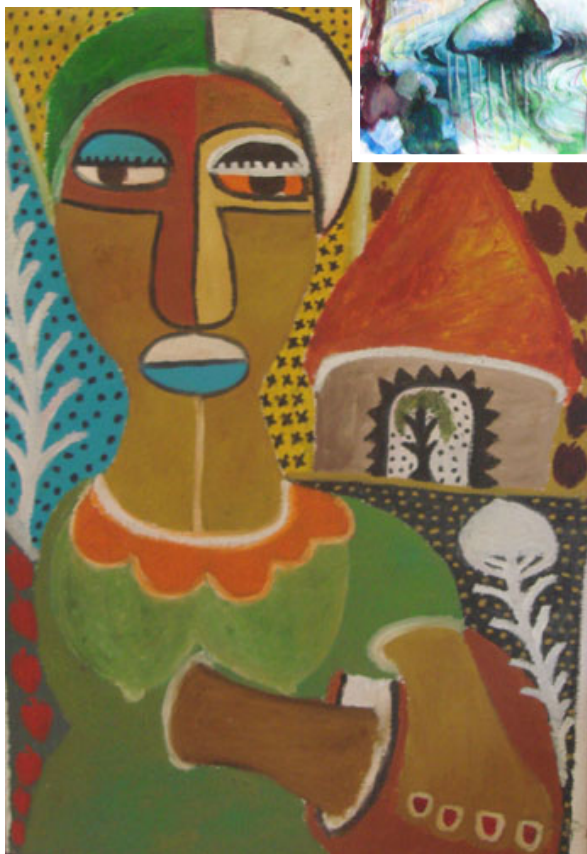
Mashetani Devil



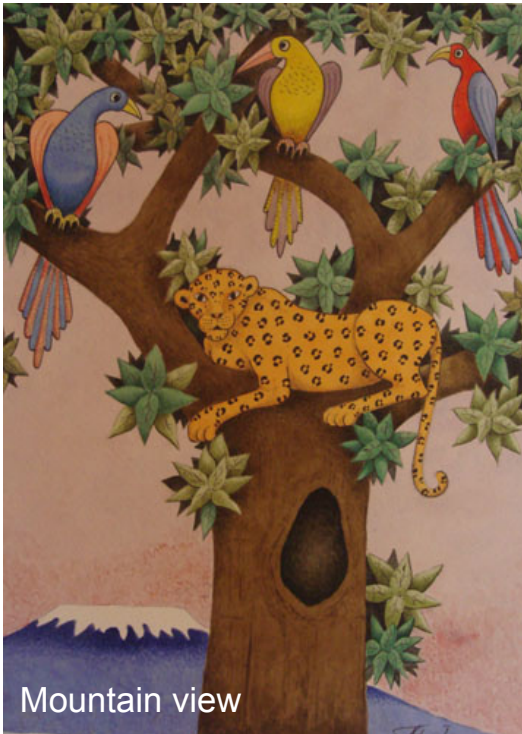
Cashimiri Matayo Man & elephant sculpture



The river



Traditional woman  
oil painting Cartoon  
Jospeh



Mountain view

opportunity to establish a real art gallery. I started my art gallery in 2002 and it has been a great success ever since. I decided to promote artwork with artistic qualities only, mostly of renowned artists from the East African region. The artists I represent made it internationally but are little known within their own country.

“My art knowledge has grown through personal research. I am a very motivated autodidact art lover and my search for the best work or the next great master is never ending. I feel that although a lot of



Protection - oil painting by  
Cartoon Joseph

art is produced in East Africa, only a few artists manage to produce work of an internationally acceptable artistic standard. It's my main mission to find and present this level of work”.

The Real Art Gallery is in an ideal location behind the old fort. The shop has two stories jam packed with high quality art works from 27



artists. On display are carvings, oil paintings, etchings, ink drawings, hard paper drawings, wood cuts and cloth paintings.

Sitta believes the famous Makonde sculptures are a traditional art form which has no rival.

The Makonde are an ethnic group in southeast Tanzania and northern Mozambique best known for their wood carvings. The last Makonde master carver was the late Cashimiri Matayo . He was

born around 1935 in Mueda - Cabo- Delgado in Mozambique. His father was woodcarver who worked in light softwood until he switched to ebony for his naturalistic carvings . Kashimiri and his brother Yoseph Francis went to Tanzania in 1955 and they easily sold all the carvings they produced to Indian curio shops and art dealers in Dar Es Salaam.

Oil painting is popular with African artists. There is a large selection of oil paintings in the Real Art



Carvings and  
oil paintings



Gallery many by Cartoon Joseph who started drawing when he was still in primary school. Art and craft was his favourite subject besides history and agriculture. After completing his secondary education, he met the artist Shine Tani and through him his talent in art was revived again.

“I feel we have been isolated at the tip of Africa for a long time”, Sitta said. “ I believe this is changing. With more media attention, people overseas are

more and more interested in what comes out of Eastern and Sub Saharan Africa, so our artists are more able to become involved on an international level and take a cultural and or political stance and in so doing show their true cultural identity. There is also much more freedom of expression, so more and more artists are beginning to speak out and change the way the world sees Eastern Africa. We are the voice of expression and we have to speak out, as artists have





Real Art Gallery in Zanzibar



Village dance



always revealed more honesty and truth about their environment or society in which they live. It is the truth or the search for truth that drives us and lives on through our art. Our story is usually about real things”.

In 2005 Sitta visited Rome where African art has been popular since the 1970s. “Books are being written about African art and the authors are not from Tanzania or Africa”.

Sitta is optimistic about the future.

“ The African art market is growing bigger every year and collectors, individuals, art galleries and museums from all over the world are getting more and more interested in what the excellent African artists have to offer. Throughout the world, people are organizing African art exhibitions in order to show the great variety and diversion of the many very skilled, professional and talented artists that are living and working on African soil”.



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