

Tinga Tinga Arts Co-operative: An Inspiring Introduction to African Art

ITM London

The Tinga Tinga Arts Co-operative Society in Oyster Bay, an affluent neighbourhood of Dar Es Salaam is a serious but friendly place. Artists work diligently creating unique, colourful paintings and talk to visitors about their work and ambitions.



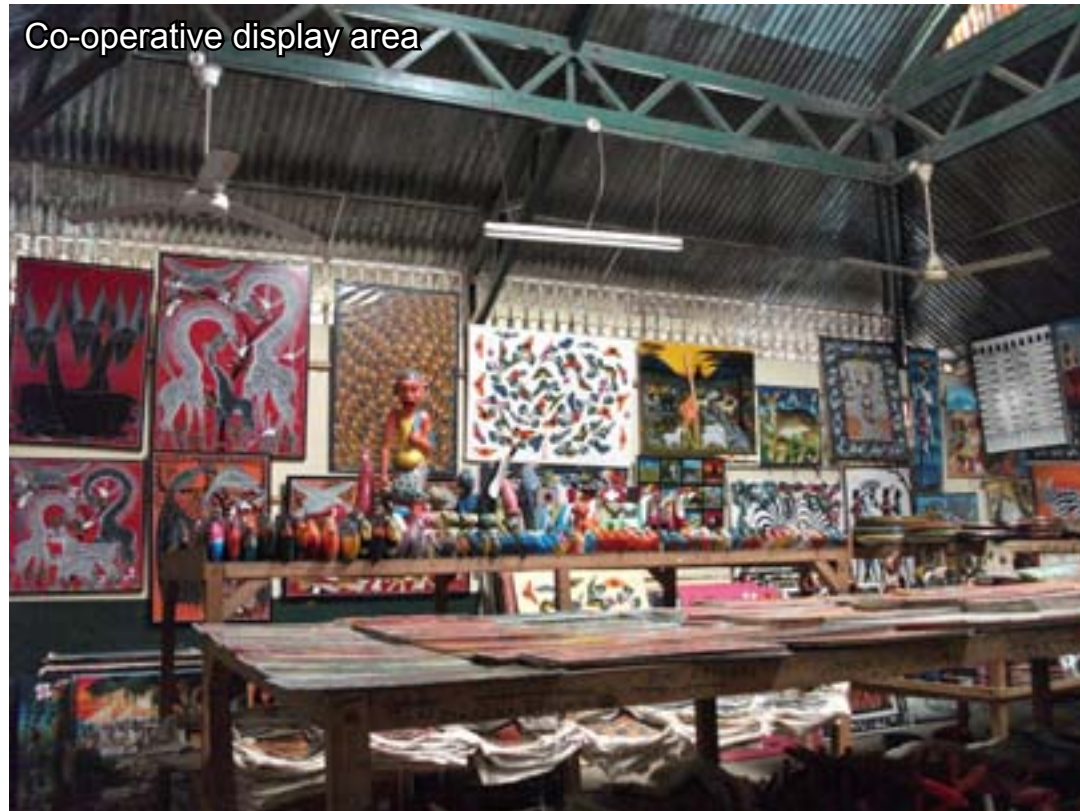
Art work in the co-operative

From a purely technical standpoint, painting on masonite using bicycle
Tingatinga art can be defined as paint. The paintings can be as

small as ceramic tiles, while the biggest paintings are hanging above thousands of family room sofas. Market limitations have prevented artists from working in larger formats. A majority of the buyers have been foreigners wanting to transport the images out of the country by airplane. From that perspective, Tingatinga is a genuine form of "airport art" - cultural art from developing nations that has been adapted to the special requirements of long-

distance travelers, including size. The choice of motifs in Tingatinga art has often been adapted to the purchaser's expectations of what should be included in an African painting.

The heart of Tingatinga art is centered on coastal east African design, where the decorative vines and patterns of the Swahili culture cover delineated spaces that are never allowed to remain completely empty. It is reminiscent of the



Edward Saidi Tingatinga

beautiful, archetypal medieval wooden doors, found in the trading cities along the east African coast, as well as the many modern printed cotton fabrics in the form of kitenges and kangas. The flat, lush surface decorations can even be found in revolutionary illustrations from early 1970s political pamphlets, which were produced in Tanzania by the exiled Mozambican freedom fighters.

The life story of the founder of Tingatinga, Edward Saidi Tingatinga (1932 – 1972) reads like a fairy tale – he painted under Baobab tree in Dar es Salaam. But the fairy tale has a tragic ending. He was accidentally killed by a policeman who mistook him for a fugitive.

The African Contemporary Art

Gallery tells the story of his life noting that unlike most Tanzanian artists, who had specialized in ebony, E.S. Tingatinga was a painter. He had no formal art training, and did not go to art school. His painting resulted simply from his desire to express himself through the media of hardboard, paint and brush. His work was straightforward; its message transmitted to everyone because he focused on universal images.

Tingatinga painted animals, birds, people, and a score of other things. He was born of peasant parents in 1932 in the remote village of Mindu, in southern Tanzania's Tunduru District on the Mozambique border. He received a rudimentary education during two years spent attending the local school. The rest of his early years were spent helping in the general duties of the home, learning various crafts, and most importantly, cultivating the land which is the major means of subsistence.

In 1955 E.S. Tingatinga decided to try his luck and travelled to Dar Es

Salaam to look for a job. He managed to find work as a domestic servant in a colonial civil servant's home, where he remained until 1961 when Tanzanian independence arrived and his employer left. During those six years Tingatinga had occasion to watch the work of the government painters who periodically came to paint the government house in which he stayed; each time he marvelled at the ceiling boards, the bright colors and the graceful brush strokes of the painters. He longed to try his hand at the job,



but his regular duties left no time for it. When his job ended in 1961 he became desperate. He found work here and there, but it was never permanent, and his life became increasingly difficult.

Tanzania's independence brought in painters, mainly from Zaire (formerly Republic of the Congo) who produced inexpensive pictures for sale along the city's main streets. This new turn of events sparked Tingatinga's

former urge to paint; he managed to get some household paint and a brush from a friend, located a piece of crude ceiling board and created his first picture. He displayed it outside the Morogoro Stores in Dar es Salaam, where it eventually fetched him some 10 shillings! That was the beginning of his new career. He bought more material and concentrated on painting as much as possible. Artist friends advised him on supplies, and he soon changed

from household paint to a better type. Subsequently, Tingatinga found a permanent job with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare at Muhimbili Hospital where he worked as a nursing assistant while devoting as much

time as possible to his art. When Tingatinga was not at the hospital, he could be found painting at his home, a room in one of the poorer houses in Msasani, a Dar es Salaam suburb, where he lived with his wife and two children.

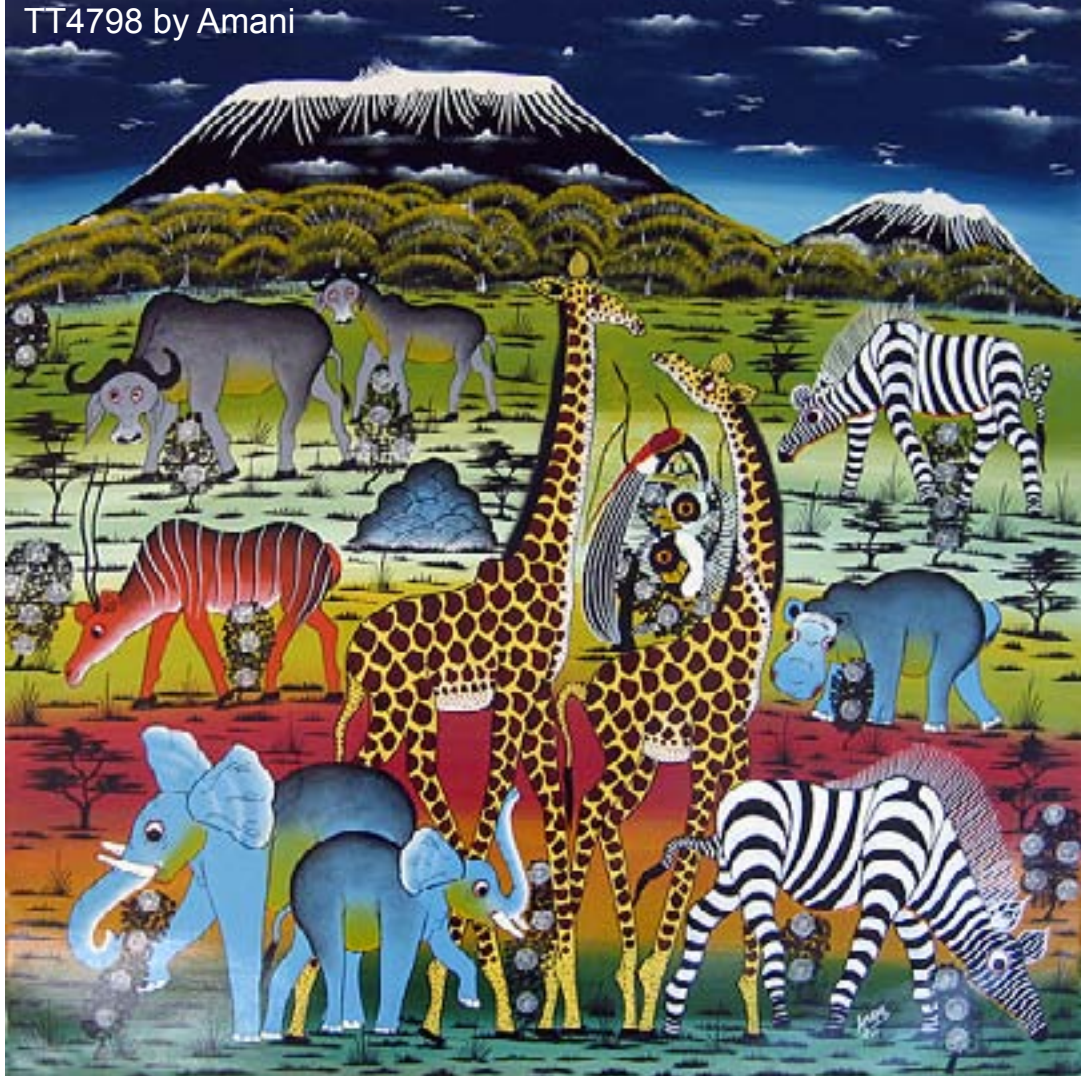


Just before he died, the National Arts Council, a subsidiary of the National Development Corporation, decided to exhibit his

works in their display rooms in the city center and again later in their pavilion at the 1971 Saba Saba International Trade Fair. This helped him greatly as he gained a contract with the National Arts Council, who provided him with material and handled the sale of

his paintings. Tingatinga felt that he was far from being a polished artist. Although, his works were still somewhat artistically crude, he nonetheless said, "All the same they are good; this is why people buy them. They must somehow be meaningful."

TT4798 by Amani



The tradition of Tingatinga's work is being preserved and nurtured by his family who registered the Tinga Tinga Arts Cooperative Society (TACS) which produces and sells popular art products under the trade name Tinga Tinga

and has been licensing its intellectual property worldwide for more than 20 years.

The decision to form a Cooperative was not straightforward. After Edward Saidi Tingatinga's tragic



TT4802 by Bakir

death he left behind only six students: Simon Mpata, January Linda, Adeus Matambwe, Kasper Henric Tedo, Abdallah Ajaba and Omari Amonde.

As the co-operative's website notes the artists were disorganised until Mr. Salum Mussa (Mzee Lumumba) came up with the idea

to form a Tinga Tinga Partnership. Among those who attended the first meeting were Omary Amonde, Hashim Mruta, Saidi Chilamboni and others. Under the umbrella of the Tinga Tinga Partnership the work of the artists expanded and in 1990 it was time to form a stronger organisation - The Tinga Tinga Arts Cooperative Society.

The Tinga Tinga community in Tanzania consists of around 700 painters who paint every day on the streets of Dar es Salam, near the beaches of Zanzibar or under the highest African mountain Kilimanjaro. A few painters have gone to Kenya, and South Africa while others have reached Europe, Japan and America. They are linked together either by family or friendship.

The Tinga Tinga Arts Cooperative Society with almost 100 artists is in the center of the Tinga Tinga movement and one of Oyster Bay's main attractions. There have been problems with breaches of copyright due to the universal appeal of the exuberant paintings which have acquainted the world with African art.