



MUSAU MULINGE (b1924)
 Carver, entrepreneur, standardized repertoire & training 1950's
 Interviews 2006, -09, -10 video 2011

Sculpture NDULA drummer for a ceremonial dance, c 1930 artist unknown, query if by Musau's father MULINGE WALI (d1939)

Song **MAVISA NIMASUYA** 2005
 by Kilunda aka Sammy Wambua (d 1996)

Akamba *Mavisa*: Carving a local art world in East Africa & beyond



GIKOMBA, Nairobi Aug 2011: L: reprise for *Ndula* with dancers;
 R: Vice-chair of the Nairobi Handcrafts Co-op Cosmos Mwangela carving a large order of elders; increase in Heritage themes since 2006

COMMEMORATING THE PAST, CREATING THE FUTURE_KENYA'S HERITAGE
 CROSSROADS Cultural Production, Representation & Local Engagement
 9 Sept 2011, British Library

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 Kamba translation: Munuve Mutisya, Kyanzasu Peace Museum

KEY POINTS

1 - Akamba art/craft carving is a large, dynamic, local, ethnic movement that employs their carving (*suvawa*) traditions, e.g. stools, staffs, occasionally *kithitu* a power object.



2006: Hazina: Traditions, Trade and Transitions in Eastern Africa. Nairobi: NMK, pp38-40.

2 - It has maintained a distinctive, expressive practice for nine decade and is amongst the oldest and largest ?80,000 of such modern movements in Africa -- in the world (Cunningham et al: 2005).

3 - The Akamba movement had/has positive relationships with colonial and national authorities while keeping control of training and trade. Its socio-economic system is characterised by camaraderie, discipline, productivity, flexibility; gender specificity.

(Photo Wamunyu 1985)



4 - The carvers have developed their own representative imagery *mavisa*, associated with their lives, local cultures and nationhood. Their work is accessible and appreciated by Kenyans and recognized internationally.

The Akamba movement is an art world (Becker:1982/2008, Danto:1962 Glissant:2010).

5 - The 21stc poses serious challenges: shortage of wood & problems with 'good wood' , over-production, international markets declining, diversification (Choge & Cunningham:2005).

My ART EDUCATION STUDIES in Wamunyu: mid-1980's about drawing/MAVISA in schools and homesteads. From 2006, research into EFFECTIVE NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ART - carving skills (herein), apprenticeship, repertoire, innovation, professional support... MET LOCAL PERSISTENCE TO ENGAGE WITH THEIR CORE AND OTHER NARRATIVES – indeed what should be the source of art education.

STAGES IN CARVING PRODUCTION IN WORKSHOP/ SHED; STEPS BY TECHNIQUE & TOOL in KIKAMBA

1-3 >Kwatua preparing wood:
selecting, cutting >*ithoka* axe, >*musumeno* saw,
measuring >*kithimo kya metho*: eyes & hands

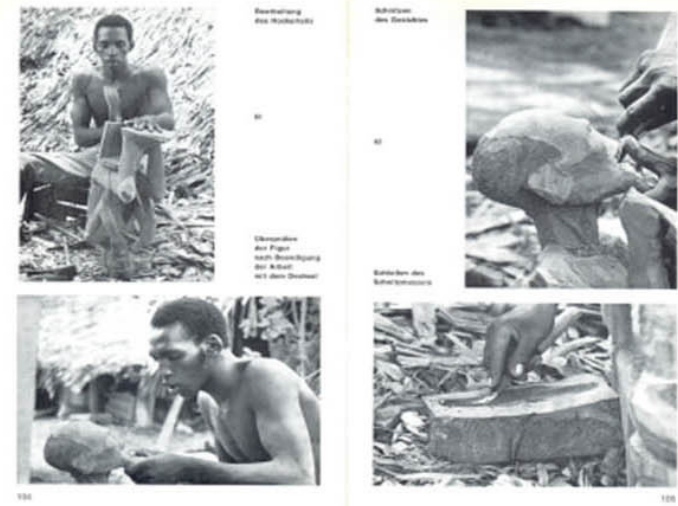
4-5 >Kuvaka roughing out object:
>*ngomo nene*: big adze, roughing out form

6-9 defining the object:
>*kumba* create, >*kuvuthuanga* carve,
>*ngomo nini*, >*ngomo ntheke*:
small & skinny adzes,
>*tuva* file, >*kavyu* knife;
>*kwasuvya* smooth

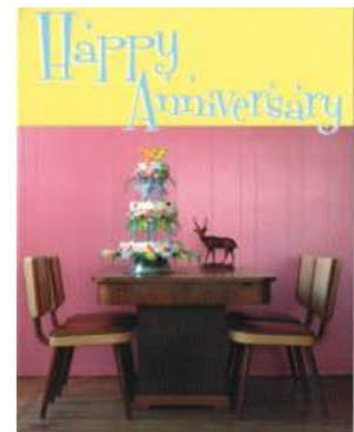
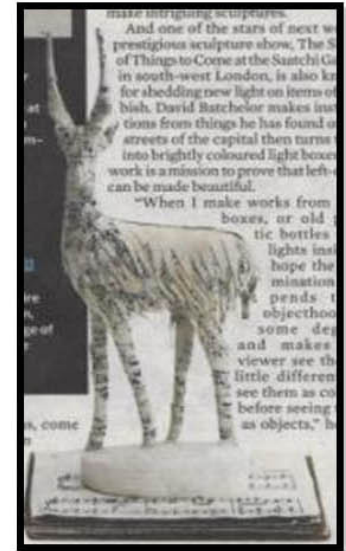
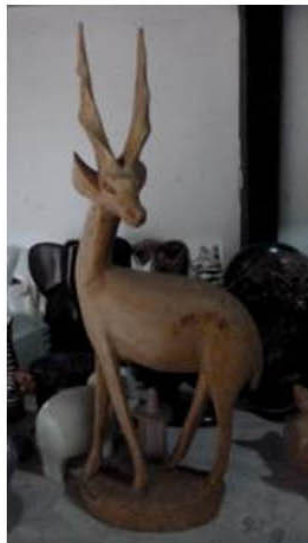
10-12 finishing the object:
can be carried out by non-carvers
>*musasa* sanding, >*kuvaka mauta* polishing,
> *kukuna langi* colouring



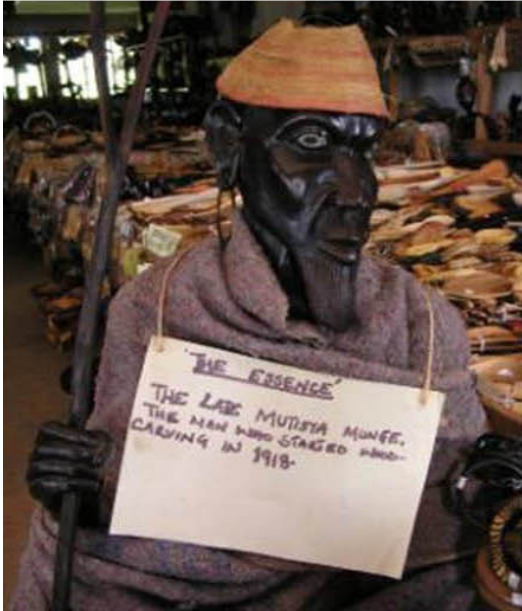
Tools of Moses Muthusi *vundi vya* Wamunyu 2006. Similar stages = Joseph Muli, Mombasa, photo: J Agthe 1975 and Machakos, K M Trowell 1937 for 1929-30+



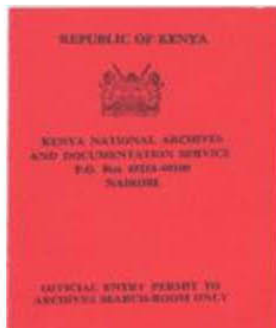
BRAND KAMBA: Collections: Pitt-Rivers 1920-30's (BM, KNArchives: Murumbi Collection); giraffes - rosewood 2006 by J Munyao, Wamunyu; Flip Flop Ecounique 2011 by J Mbatha, Gikomba; amongst Kisii stone, KISCAC 2011; vintage appropriation *Musical Score* by J Hummel-Newell (Venice Biennale 2011)



VARIETIES OF EVIDENCE



MUTISYA MUNGE: MM
commemorative sculpture by
Muya Ndile (b.?- d 2008) Co-
operative, Showroom Wamunyu
[photo: 2006].



Objects, their documentation > 1920's and
iconography

<<Oral tradition: narrative of origin
Mutisya Munge Carrier Corps WW 1

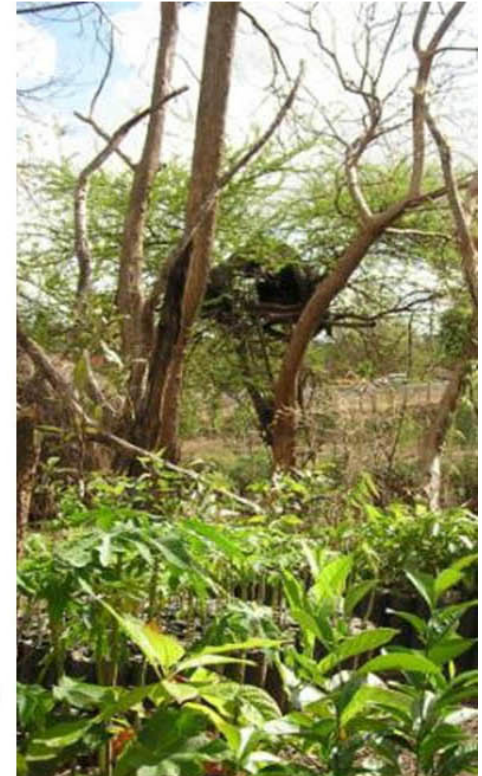
Critical studies & consultancies: ethnography,
art, art history, development – innovations –
resources, products, trade

Newspaper, other reportage from 1930's

Records - Kenya National Archives District
Reports: nil mention 1917-27, regular mention
1949-53 [cite letters 1949, 1953 re skill,
individualism] then sparse; need to check Co-op
records; accounts

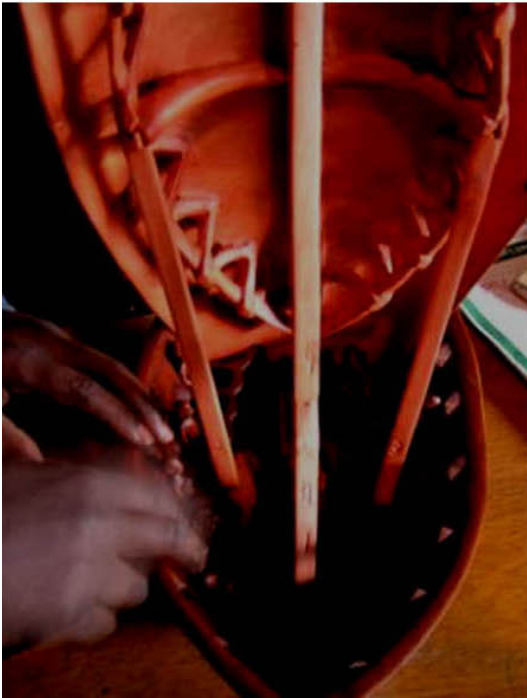
Interviews

Contemporary re-tellings – increased ethnic
themes in objects, songs, scenarios >>
proactive with Heritage awareness



MM did his carving up in a
tree *kitau*, watch tower
for security and privacy
2009, + a model dwelling;
iterant sales often by
wives.
Narrative: *mzee* Ikwya wa
Nguku, b1922.

Product development at the shed of Kimunya bothers David & Sammy, Gikomba



***Indian Ocean Slave Dhow* Kimunya David 2006 only 1 sold/11 remaining and dusty, while Noah's Ark is most popular item –now available in several scales 2011;**

Good Wood used for Jacaranda-theme bowl by Kimunya David 2005

**Kimunya Sammy artisan/2 students collaboration with KU Fine Arts/Northumbria England-Africa Project re fabrication of a prize-winning baby cot, 2011 - Grant 1.8mKS from KU Innovation Incubation Centre!
(Information & photos of cot: Prof J Guille, U Northumbria)**



Now in the Murumbi Collection, Nairobi 1989, now Kenya National Archives, early 1930's, similar style in the collections of the BM. Recall stools on display in the NNM.



^Mama Mzee
Joseph Ndambo
Wamunyu, 2009,
private collection;

<Laughter
Kisii, 2011
John Masese



With gratitude & many thanks to the Ford Foundation 2006 and to African Stones Talk Symposium, Kisii - UNESCO IFCD 2011 for travel grants to Kenya which enabled this research.

COMMENTS/AGENDA

1- Akamba art carving is a remarkable, sustainable and flexible local aesthetic movement in a national context, with a very large scale of operation.

2 – Why? Because of Akamba fine skill, productivity & narrative in combination with ‘classic’ heterarchy, long distance trade, tolerance, hospitality, energy. Query invisibility?

3 – The Akamba system of specialized education in art is effective: why not institute a means for it to be accredited in the formal system? Formal system in flux. Address gender specificity.

4 - Query existing scholarship – fragmented, delimited to tourist/airport art; *Jua Kali* aesthetic; recycling of dated often inaccurate texts, apart from ecology.

5 – Clear chronology: •origins c. WW I,
•between the Wars,
•following WW II,
•Independence
•growth & peak of tourism,
•21stc challenges and change

The critical issue is the lack of systematic research and a published history – from Kenyan perspectives.