

" TRADITIONAL AFRICAN GRAPHIC DESIGN IN KENYA  
(Form Content Appreciation and Communication) "

BY

SYLVESTER J.M. MAINA

B.A. (Fine Art).

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis constitutes a study of an important aspect of some traditional communities in Kenya. It tries to find out how far their daily lives were affected by traditional art forms such as graphic design. For example, in their daily living, they communicated through various ways and signs and symbols must have been used. This study was motivated by the general appreciation of traditional influences in relation to some aspects of art forms, that is - communication through words, signs, symbols and graphic design. Traditionally different art forms such as graphic design, have been manifested in numerous ways according to different tribal life styles and customs. Various forms of expression have been demonstrated in the forms of, e.g. masks, decorative surfaces, symbols both geometrical and representative, pattern designs, body markings, monuments, murals, figure paintings, carvings, sculptural forms, etc.

It has been the intention of this study to try and examine the lifestyles and customs of various ethnic groups in Kenya in respect of the range of artistic expression and meaning which

existed or still exist both traditionally and as now manifested in the present era of rapid change. Such an examination can be carried out according to the following specific environmental areas of influence; (a) physical, (b) climatic, (c) occupational and (d) social and cultural. This study has tried to link the above with the following selected main groups: (a) Hamitic, (b) Nilotic, (c) Nilo-Hamites, (d) Bantu-speaking and (e) Coastal Arab influence-Swahili.

However, it has been noted that some tribal communities ought to be studied in respect of particular groups, for example, (a) Rendille, Somali-Hamitic; (b) Luo-Nilotic, (c) Kalenjin, Maasai-Nilo Hamites; (d) Kamba, Embu, Miji-Kenda, Kikuyu, Meru, Luhya-Bantu; (e) Swahili, Bajun-Coastal Coastal Arab influence.

This study has considered some design areas for specific examination. The following have been considered to be important:- (a) Form: This is the overall composition and usual element which compound to make the whole design or art form. (b) Expression: The character and personality of images. (c) Content/Meaning: The nature of content and human response in terms of meaning and beliefs arising out of the art form. (d) Material and

Techniques: This is the analysis of local materials and their influence upon different art forms and the techniques used in producing different art forms; (e) Context: The above design areas are studied in the following main contexts:

ONE: mystic, religious and secular - in essentially traditional term.

TWO: The above areas are manifested in contemporary examples - arising out of the influence of change.

However, it is necessary to look into detail some of these contextual elements of traditional art forms.

There are many research possibilities. These have been mentioned. Also some conclusions have been arrived at, and some recommendations have been made.

For a study of this nature, it was necessary to visit tribal areas to examine and experience visual forms and to get sensitised in respect of expression and meaning, through discussion with individuals and groups. Also to collect artifacts as examples for study and illustration later, as well as use for teaching aids, sketching and photography.

It is noted however, that the traditional societies of Kenya have to a very great extent abandoned their traditional life styles, art forms, dances, dresses, etc., and that any remaining authentic examples are disappearing fast. This necessitated looking for other reliable sources of knowledge. It was therefore necessary, to visit museums, libraries, archives etc., for background information, comparative studies, philosophies, basic information and illustrations.