



Kirita, Massai woman with cow's flock, 1992, batik, 80 x 100 cm. Photo: Dionisio. Courtesy: CIDAF, Madrid.

KIRITA'S BATIKS

IRAIDA CANO

Estomik Samuel Kirita was born at the foot of the Kilimanjaro in 1956. He went to the Seeta Art College in Uganda where he was taught by master Lwanyanga Musoke. Since 1974 he has worked in Arusha, the most important city in north Tanzania. He is presently in charge of the Kan Art Work Centre, where he teaches and works as an artist. It is the only state centre that teaches and encourages the diffusion of this traditional technique that is characteristic of Tanzania, for it represents the only chance of artistic expression that is available to the country's artists, using as media cotton cloth and natural pigment. It is only possible to get oils and acrylic paint through friends or foreign artists, as neither of these are produced in the country, and their cost price would be inaccessible to people who live on a bread line economy.

Following the steps of traditional transmission, the young artists begin their experience next to the "master" who instructs them in the use of materials, pigments, treatment of the cloth. Only when he masters technique does the pupil break free to look for a personal style. What differentiates Kirita's work from other artists in Tanzania is the meticulousness and delicacy of his technique, with an overall finish of great quality and the application of very pure colour. We are talking about a genuine artist who is motivated by personal sensibility and quality, despite the debatable fact of his commercial sales in tourist circuits. His paintings reflect his immediate environment, the Kilimanjaro or the Mountain of Greatness as the Massai Call it, for they believed it was covered with gold and silver: the legendary,

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noble massai accompanied by their cattle, a present of the God Engal, according to their tradition, which they own legitimately and exclusively; the colourful local markets, a hallmark of everyday life; the musicians, dancers, and the dark, stylized entwined figures inspired by Makonda sculpture. His is a familiar world, of local dimensions, of the everyday, of the expression and stylization of life, wholly alien to external influences.

I'm astonished how the work of the batik artists reflects such end intense and immediate space. A zanzibar painter will reproduce almost exclusively images of the beaches and of this picturesque city, being completely indifferent to the snow-capped peaks of the Kilimanjaro. This is the first time that Kirita exhibits individually outside his country. That it has been in Madrid we have to thank the CIDAF, (Centre for African Information and Documentation) for its generous collaboration, where we have been able to appreciate a selection of thirty batiks of varying size by the tanzanian artist.



Kirita, Women in the fountain, 1993, batik, 126 x 126 cm. Photo: Dionisio. Courtesy: CIDAF, Madrid.