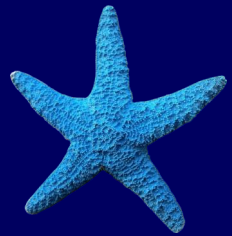




The Starfish

The magazine of Malvern Transformers



GameChangers

World Art

This Week:
The Art of Sub-
Saharan Africa

Masks—Sculpture—
Jewellery—Textiles

Plus

Influence of African Art
Art from Rubbish
Stolen Art



Issue 25 — 10th November 2020



WELCOME

Africa is a continent made up of 54 countries, into which it was divided during European colonization. These countries are divided by the United Nations into Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (below the Sahara desert). In this *Starfish*, we shall be looking at a selection of art forms from the 46 sub-Saharan African countries.

Rosemary

Click on the Starfish!



If you see a starfish click on it for a link to a short YouTube clip

Who are the Transformers in the masks? Can you guess? Answer on page 11.

Guess Who?

TEDEd

If you see the **TEDEd** symbol, click on it for extension material on a particular topic



What are these shoeboxes doing in the fridge? Answer on page 11.



Word Alert!



Words in bold are explained further in the Glossary on page 12.

Back issues of *The Starfish* are available on Padlet—click on this Padlet symbol



Masks

Masks are a very important part of the culture of sub-Saharan Africa and are worn for spiritual purposes. They are associated with all kinds of rituals from weddings and funerals to asking for success in battle or a good harvest.

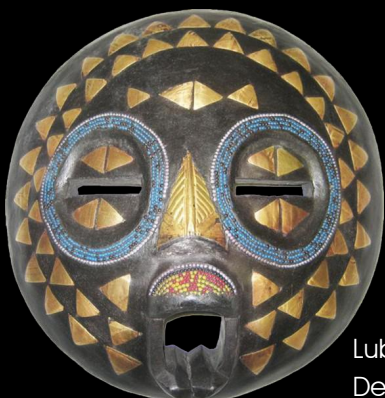
The wearer goes into a trance (often using music and dance) to bridge the gap between the spirits and the living and becomes possessed by the spirit represented by the mask.



Democratic
Republic of
Congo



Kenya



Luba people,
Democratic Republic of
Congo



Usually masks are made of wood and are worn either applied to the face, as a hat or as a helmet (for those cut from hollow trees). The more important the spirit, the more complicated the mask.



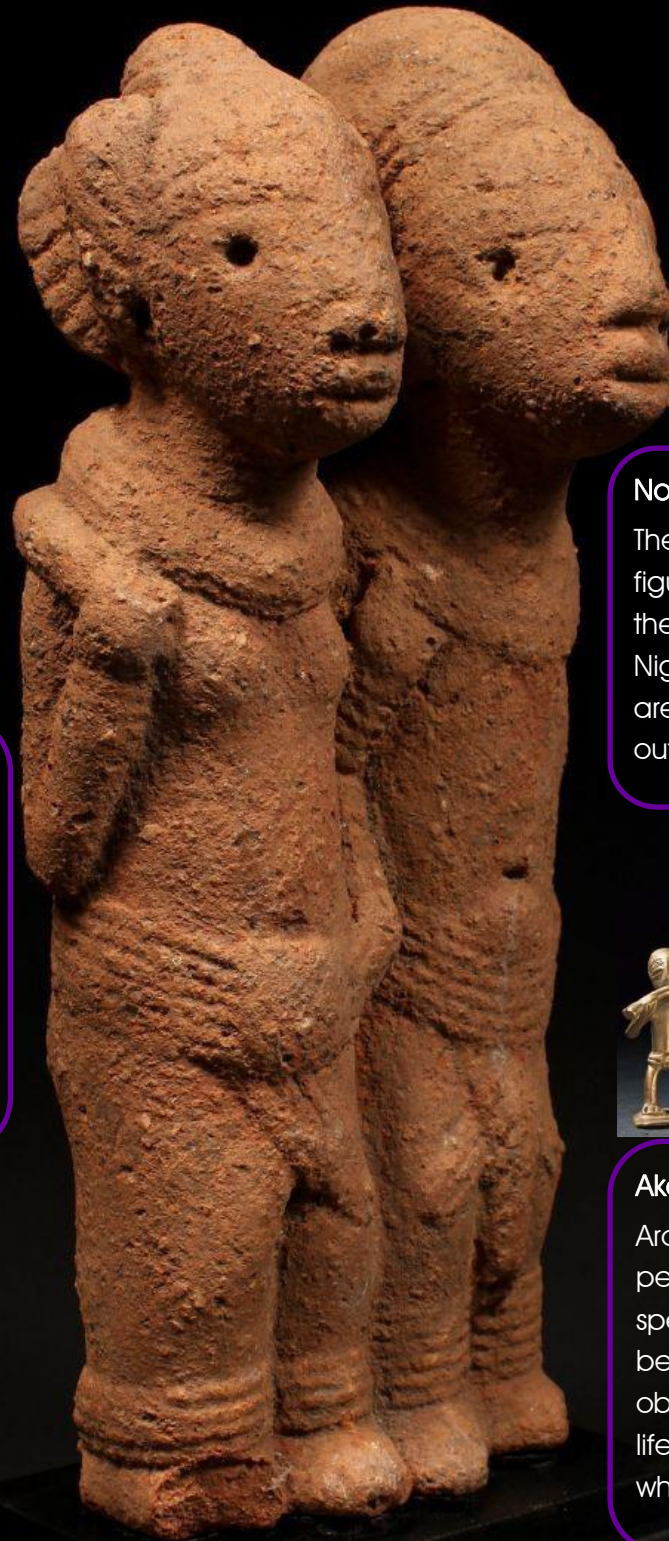
One person in a village who is the mask maker will have had the skills of mask making passed down to him by his father. He will understand the *symbolism* as well as the carving.



Sculpture and painting

Sculpture

The preferred material for African sculpture has always been wood, which accounts for the lack of ancient sculpture that now exists (wood deteriorates). Some significant examples made from clay and metal have survived.



Nok statuettes

These life-sized *terracotta* figures (*left*) dating back to the Iron Age were found in Nigeria. The human figures are deliberately stylized and out of proportion.

Benin Bronzes

These 15th century plaques made from melted down Portuguese brass depict scenes including Portuguese soldiers dressed in uniform. (*see front cover*)



Video



Video



Akan gold weights

Around 1600 the Akan people of West Africa used special brass weights beautifully carved to look like objects from everyday life to weigh gold dust, which was their currency.



Video

Sculpture and painting



Ethiopian church art

A variety of art including paintings, crosses, *icons* and illuminated manuscripts dating back to the 11th century can be found in Ethiopian churches, although there is evidence that paintings decorated churches as early as the 7th century. The paintings have a distinctive style—the figures are simplistic with large almond-shaped eyes and the colours are very bright.



Video

Jewellery



Beautiful intricate jewellery for men and women has been an important part of African culture for thousands of years. Jewellery is often used to symbolise power and wealth and is worn on special occasions.

The Fulani people wear long gold earrings, the length signifying the wealth of the owner.

Traditionally, *organic* materials like shells or wood would have been used, but nowadays glass or ceramic beads from Europe are preferred.



The Maasai women in Kenya spend much of their time making beaded jewellery for themselves but also to sell at local markets. It is part of their culture but also a source of income.



African jewellery is now gaining popularity across the world and various ethical companies now connect the artists to buyers in other countries.



Textiles

The people of Africa have developed diverse ways of weaving and dyeing cloth including some cultures that use bark and *raffia*.



One of the most famous of these fabrics is probably the Adire fabric of Nigeria, which is dyed with indigo (the colour used to dye jeans) using a resist technique. Either tying the fabric with rope, stitching with raffia or using wax can be used to create patterns.



Another famous fabric is the Kente fabric of Ghana, which has its own folktale associated with it.



Kente means basket and refers to the checkerboard pattern of the cloths. Ewe Kente cloth includes patterns representing proverbs. The colours are also significant.

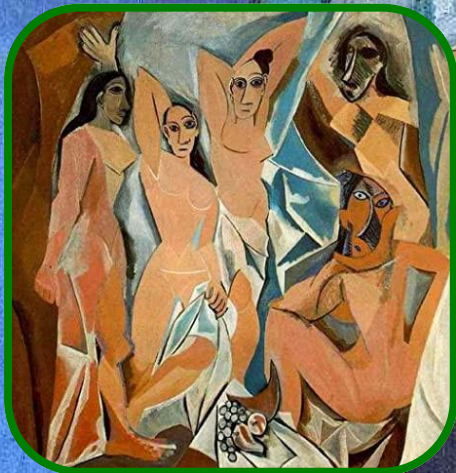


The influence of African art on other cultures



African art had a very significant influence on the 20th century Modern Art movement in Europe.

As the French colonized parts of sub-Saharan Africa, they sent back artefacts from the area to French museums where they inspired artists like Matisse and Picasso, who enjoyed mimicking the primitive yet sophisticated features of African masks.



The 'cubist' movement, which began in 1908, was also greatly influenced by African arts. It involves showing different views of things, usually objects or figures, together on a single picture like 'Demoiselles D'Avignon' by Picasso. The ladies on the picture have angular features like those on African masks.



Video

Art from Rubbish

Painting with recycled plastic

The South African artist, Mbongeni Buthelezi, has made a name for himself painting with recycled plastic, which he melts using a heat gun. He grew up in a poor neighbourhood surrounded in waste plastic and so this seemed like a normal material for him to use. He uses his artwork to draw attention to environmental and social issues like the problem of waste and obesity.

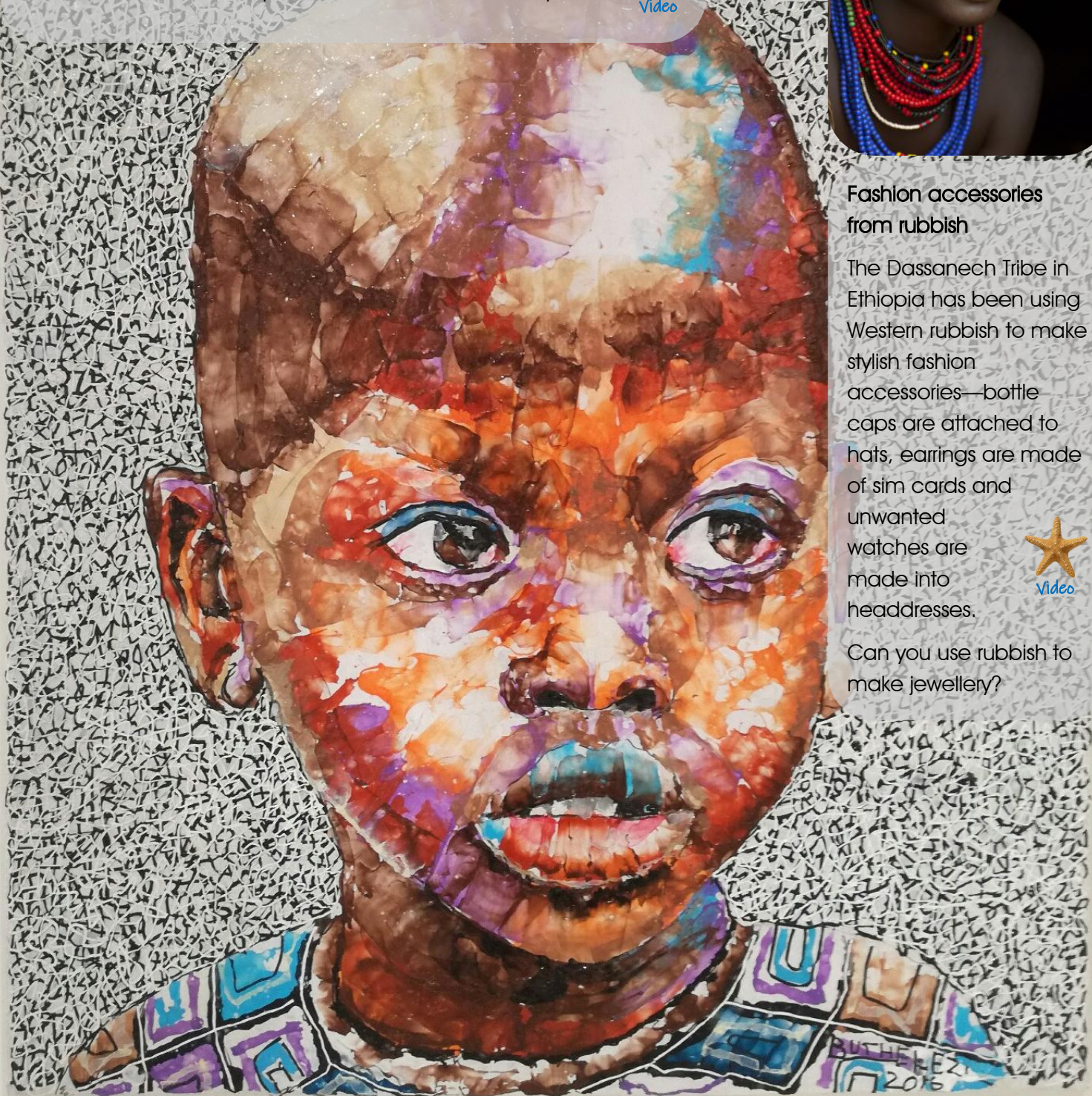


Fashion accessories from rubbish

The Dassanech Tribe in Ethiopia has been using Western rubbish to make stylish fashion accessories—bottle caps are attached to hats, earrings are made of sim cards and unwanted watches are made into headdresses.



Can you use rubbish to make jewellery?



Stolen Art

The Brutish Museums



The Benin Bronzes,
Colonial Violence and
Cultural Restitution

Dan Hicks

A new book by Dan Hicks called *The Brutish Museums* draws attention to the fact that during colonial times the British, along with the French, Dutch, Spanish and others, plundered treasures and culture from the lands that they colonized and put it on display in their museums.

Hicks cites the case of the Benin bronzes (see page 4 of this *Starfish*) which were made by the Edo people and looted by British forces in 1897. He recommends that they should be returned to Africa immediately to allow their rightful owners to celebrate their own cultural heritage. It would also force the British to come to terms with the atrocities they committed during colonial times.

Such a process is already beginning in France with the permission of President Macron.



What do
you think?

Last
week . . .

Did you guess what was in the two shoeboxes? It was our two tortoises. **Teresa** and **Georgina**, who have just gone into lockdown for the winter. Here is Teresa going to bed.



Guess
What?

Who are the Transformers in the masks? That's right. It's **Greta** and **Sophie** with their beautifully decorated Day of the Dead masks. Did you guess correctly?

Which one is which?

Guess
Who?



GLOSSARY

Benin: a republic in West Africa.

Icon: a devotional painting of Christ or another holy figure, typically on wood and used ceremonially in the Eastern Churches.

organic: relating to or derived from living matter.

raffia: the fibre from the leaves of the raffia tree (a

palm tree native to tropical Africa) used for making items such as hats and basket.

symbolism: the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.

terracotta: a type of fired clay, typically of a brownish-red colour and unglazed, used as an ornamental building material and in modelling.

Meet the Artist: Chéri Samba

Chéri Samba or Samba wa Mbimba N'zingo Nuni Masi Ndo Mbasi is a painter from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is one of the best known contemporary African artists, with his works being included in the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His paintings almost always include text in French and Lingala, commenting on life in Africa and the modern world. Samba lives in Kinshasa and Paris.

Originally, Samba's name was David Samba, but in his country there was a banning of keeping/giving people a Christian first name, so he decided to change it to Samba wa Mbimba N'zingo Nuni Masi Ndo Mbasi.



Next Issue

European Art

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