



Africa: A Continent Reimagined

An exhibition of work by students in year 8 & 9 at Diss High School,
inspired by a visit to the Sainsbury Centre.

Curated by Vasavi Koka, Head of Art, Diss High School.
with Becca Sturgess, Learning Programme Manager for Schools and Outreach,
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

Introduction

My enthusiasm for the luminous continent of Africa, with its rich and diverse cultures, and breadth of art and craft, has long been something that I hoped to engage my students in. Having travelled extensively in Southern and East Africa, I feel drawn to the Sainsbury Centre's remarkable world art collection, and aware of the valuable insight it has given me into the wide-ranging cultures that can be found in the continent. I decided to develop a scheme of work for my Key Stage 3 students, to allow them the opportunity to glimpse this for themselves.

In the Autumn of 2019 I planned a visit to the Centre to see the African objects in the Sainsbury Collection, and the exhibition ***Magdalene Odundo: The Journey of Things***. I wanted the students to be able to study artefacts first-hand, and to participate in an artist-led gallery tour and a practical workshop in the Learning Studio.

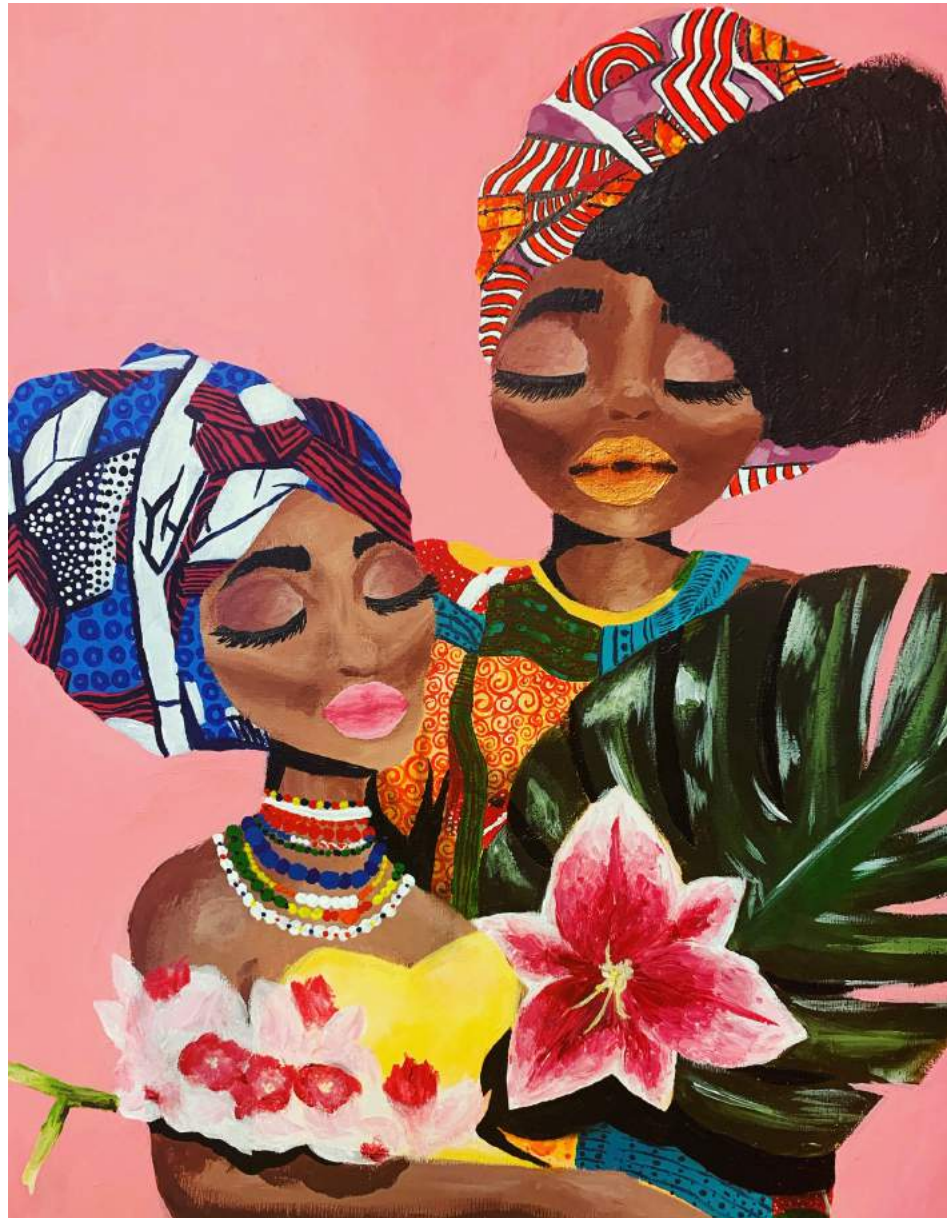
The experience of working with Ali Hewson enabled the students to see the collection and exhibits through the eyes of an artist, and to gain insight into the creative practices of writers, fashion designers, curators, and collectors. The students' response to the wide range of visual stimuli which they encountered, was the creation of a wonderful collection of objects, sculptures, prints, and designs of their own.

The visit to the Sainsbury Centre gave the students the opportunity to look at a wide range of historical objects, alongside modern and contemporary paintings and sculptures. They were able to surround themselves with art works which challenged their perception of contemporary African art and culture. Embedding the gallery visit in to an in-depth project at school allowed year 8 and Year 9 students to critically examine and respond to different aspects of the cultures and arts traditions from all over Africa. They worked with sustained effort to better understand some aspects of the continent's artistic traditions, and this undoubtedly left an indelible impression on them.

I do hope that the variety of works represented here in this virtual exhibition will provide our community with a sense of the impact and value of the African continent's visual culture. The work presented is also indicative of the impact that a museum such as the Sainsbury Centre can have on students' ability to develop critical thinking and the ability to interpret the world around them. The variety of forms that the work takes, from fine art to fashion, jewellery and product design, is testament to the conscientious efforts of our students as well as the staff in the school art department and at the Sainsbury Centre. It really is an exhibition which celebrates what teachers and students can learn from deep and imaginative engagement with cultural organisations.

Vasavi Koka

**Untitled (Two African female figures),
Year 8 student,
Acrylic Paint on Board,
Dimensions: 420 x 594 mm.**



Women

This vibrant painting beautifully depicts not only the bold printed fabrics and colourful beads that the two women are wearing, but also conveys their ease in each other's company, perhaps the tenderness of their relationship.

Within the Sainsbury Collection, there are numerous representations of African women. There are examples of female headdresses, and ritual dolls, as well as cups, bowls, and combs which take their form.

Although most of the African objects in the collection are nowhere near as colourful as this student's painting, with close looking many do feature similar jewellery, other body adornment, and elaborate hairstyles.

Among the African objects in the Sainsbury Collection there are several examples of Mother and Child sculptures – women feeding, holding, and carrying their babies.

From Left to Right:

Mother and Child group, Angola Zaire Democratic Republic of Congo, Created 1900-1999, UEA No 534

Female figure with child, Western Africa Ivory Coast, Created 1900-1999, UEA No 572

Shrine figure of a mother and child, Nigeria Oshogbo, Created 1850-1950, UEA No 598





*"Thank you for your message...
I am flattered to be part of your
student's inspiration."*

Liz Ogumbo

**Garment,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media: Textiles
Dimensions: variable**

This innovative garment item has been inspired by fashion designer Liz Ogumbo's deep engagement with African society and female empowerment. After exploring the African collection at the Sainsbury Centre and taking further inspiration from artists such as El Anatsui, this student has discovered, through the creation of her garment, what an artist's perspective can bring to issues of sustainability, recycling/upcycling, style innovation and most importantly, self-expression.





Elongated Figures

This student upcycled two figurines using Liz Ogumbo-inspired fashion garments. They have a strong physical presence due to the bold use of colour and the complexity of the geometric designs. The sculptures are also a response to the intriguing concepts behind Magdalene Odundo's work, and the striking form of her vessels.

The elongated figurines call to mind the silhouette of many of the African sculptural forms in the Sainsbury Collection, including horns, trumpets, and ceremonial staffs.

**Female figurines,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media,
Dimensions: 420 x 597 mm approx**



From Left to Right:
Trumpet with standing figure, Cameroon Nigerian border Created 1850-1950, UEA No 742
Standing figure, Tellem Dogon, Created 15th/16th century, UEA No 928
Female figure, Mali, Created 1780, UEA No 1094

Faces and Heads

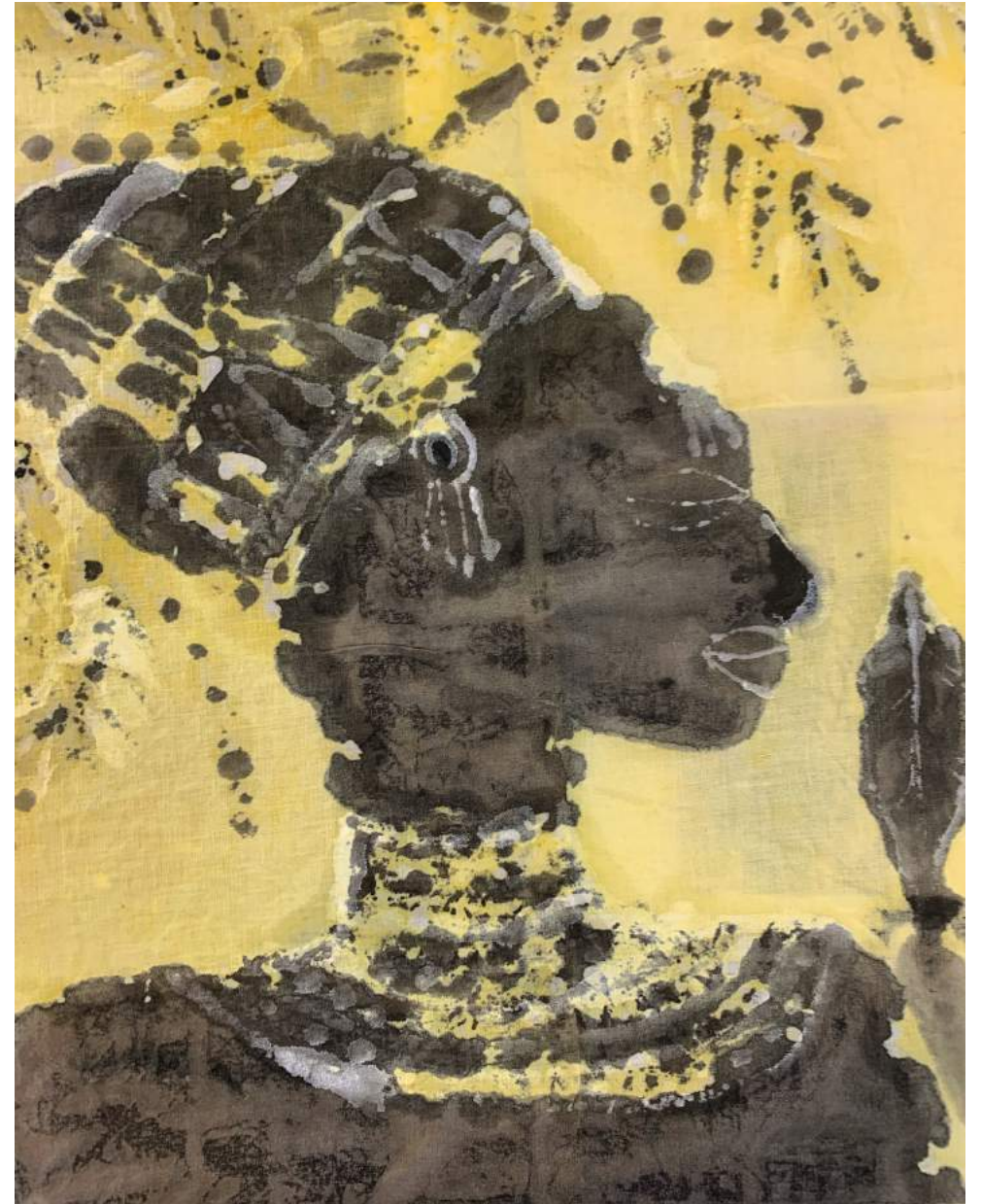
**Kenyan Head,
Year 8 Student,
Batik,
Dimensions: 297 x 420 mm**

This student's carefully controlled batik drawing takes its inspiration from the artist Heidi Lange – forming a unique portrait that provokes ideas of the beauty of the female form.

The strong profile is reminiscent of one of a male head from Sierra Leone in the Sainsbury Collection.



Male Head
Sierra Leone
Created: 1400-1599
UEA No 205





**Mask,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media: clay, plaster, paint.
Dimensions: 210 x 297 mm approx.**

This mask was created soon after the students' trip to the Sainsbury Centre. Heavily influenced by what she saw, the student created a confident and bold response, an amalgamation of four different African masks in the permanent collection which she had photographed.

Referring to the photographs as memory aids whilst she worked, the student's final sculpture is a hybrid, a mask which explores and combines the variety of features found on masks from across the continent.



From Left to Right:
Dance Mask, Ivory Coast, Guro: Yaure, Created 1800-1950, UEA No 213.
Male Mask, Ivory Coast, Baule, Created 1800-1999, UEA No 216.
Mask, Congo Republic, Kwele, Created 1850-1999, UEA No 246.
Mask, Liberia / Ivory Coast, We, Created 1850-1950, UEA No 211.



**Ghanaian Woman,
Year 9 Student,
Mixed media: Textiles
Dimensions: 297 x 420 mm**

Fascinated by the narrative element behind many of the artefacts in the Sainsbury Centre's African collection, this sculpture is worth a closer look. The elaborately crafted headdress and mixed media surface reveals a complex narrative about a continent shrouded in mystery, conflicted and shaped by its relationship with its past and present.

Pattern and Decoration



This heavily embellished mask in the Sainsbury Collection was part of the inspiration for beaded jewellery created by the students.

Dance Mask,
Democratic Republic of Congo / Zaire,
20th Century,
UEA No 594.



Congolese Kuba inspired jewellery.
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media,
Dimensions: 210 x 297 mm

**Kuba-inspired Jewellery,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed Media: Beads, Thread
Dimensions: 90 x 70 x 90 mm approx**

Studying first hand the Sainsbury Centre's Kibango ceremonial staff resulted in the student developing a fascination with the intricacies of many pieces of Congolese art. The extraordinary details found within the jewellery they created is testament of the impact of this unparalleled experience, and the indelible impression that engaging with cultural artifacts can leave on the viewer.



From left to right:

Armlet, Nigeria, Created mid 18th century, UEA No 652.
Ceremonial Staff, Zaire Democratic Republic of Congo, Created 1850-1899, UEA No 266.



**Rwandan Imigongo – inspired paintings,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media: Plaster, Modroc
Dimensions: each piece 210 x 297 mm approx**

Bucket Man by John Davies has always been a great conversation starter with my students. Fascinated by the medium used by this artist, we decided to interpret traditional Rwandan cow dung paintings using plaster and mod-roc. The material was versatile allowing students to create a sense of three-dimensional relief in the geometric designs.

John Davies,
Bucket Man,
England,
1974,
UEA No 597.



Animals

Elephant

Year 8 Student

Mixed media: Breeze blocks

Dimensions: 570 x 450 mm approx

This sculpture represents the iconic form of an African elephant. The weight and solidity of the material are entirely appropriate to the scale of the massive animal, and the carving technique used references the many carved African objects in the Sainsbury Collection. The fact that the material was reclaimed further connects this sculpture to the objects at the Centre created from whatever was to hand.





**Recycled Elephant,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media: Beer bottle tops,
Dimensions: 420 x 594 mm approx**

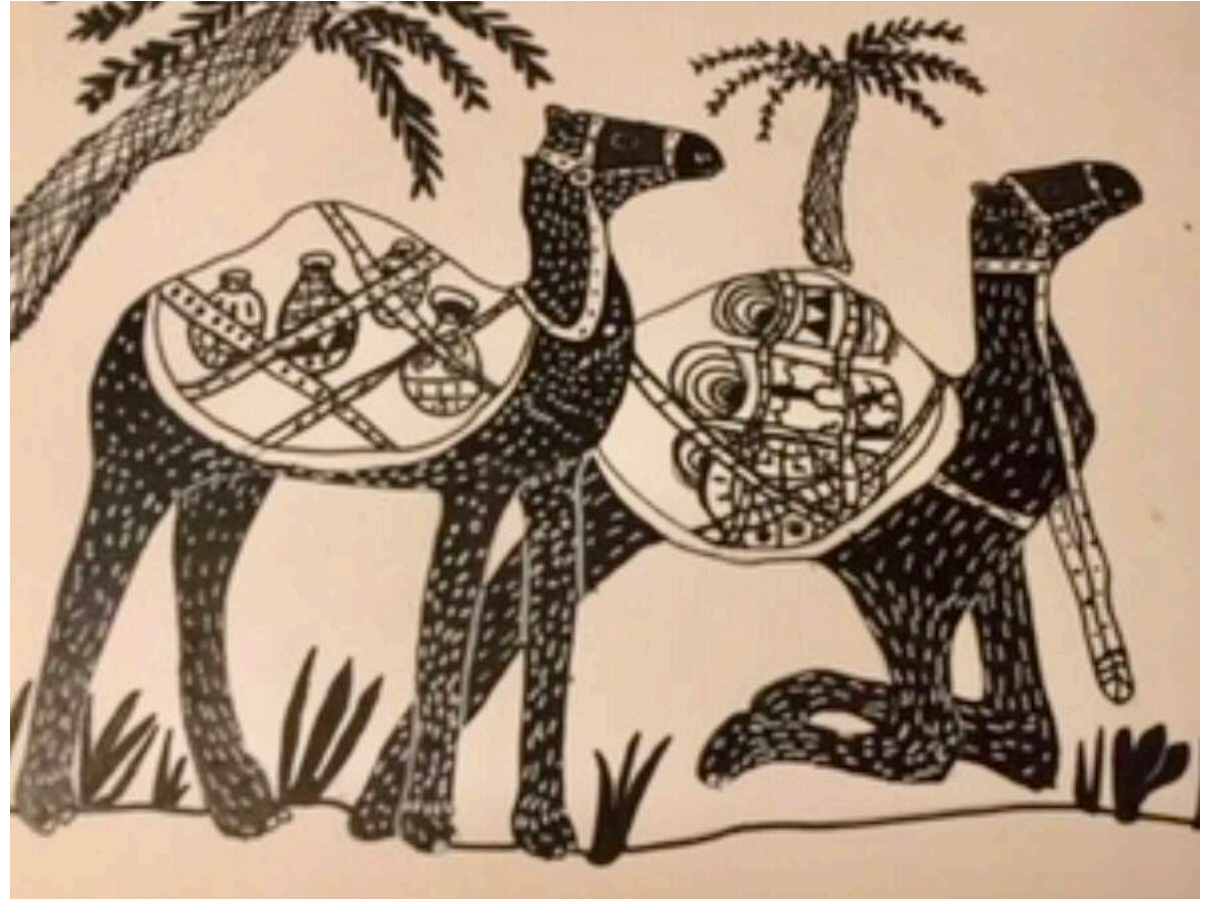
Ghana-born, Nigeria-based sculptor El Anatsui is renowned for transforming mundane objects such as bottle caps into dynamic and intricate tapestries. The inclusion of Anatsui's work in ***The Journey of Things***, was the inspiration for this wonderful collage of an elephant.

From Left to Right:
Leopard head hip mask, Nigeria Benin City, Late 18th – early 19th century, UEA No 233.
Mask of a cow, Nigeria Benin City, Created 1700-1770, UEA No 569.



Screenprint
Year 8 student,
Screenprint
Dimensions: 297 x 210 mm approx.

The student was inspired by the artist Heidi Lange to create this print, and also referenced Odundo's creative journey and the inter-related narratives that are present in her art. He used a camel as a metaphor for this as they originate from East Africa.





The stylised animal form of this functional object, combined with its dark stain finish make it a great companion for the year 8 student's Wild Dog.

Heddle pulley holder for weaving,
Ivory Coast,
Created 1900-1999,
UEA No 201.



**Wild Dog,
Year 8 Student,
Mixed media sculpture: foam, paint,
Dimensions: 297 x 420 mm approx**

Endangered wild dogs lie on the dusky plains of the African savannah. Discarded foam lies on the floor. This student states that she uses foam as it allows her to create a sculptural form with a realistic degree of accuracy. Her work explores how art can raise awareness of endangered animals and the mass extinction of wild dogs – a term that describes the disappearance of these iconic creatures from the African continent.



From Left to Right:
 Skull, Congo Bakongo province, no date, UEA No 245.
 Mask, Zaire Democratic Republic of Congo, Created early 20th Century, UEA No 269.



**Untitled (Skull and Heads),
 Year 9 Student,
 Mixed Media Sculpture:
 Dimensions: 220 x 300 mm approx**

This intriguing sculpture was born of the student's research into the diverse and elaborate patterns found in many of the African sculptures in the Sainsbury Centre's collection. The final assemblage conveys her interest in sculptural form. The student remarked that working in this way has allowed her to create a surface that is not only sculptural, but also painterly with intricate marks and textures.

Cartography
Year 8
Digital Print
Dimensions: 210 x 297 mm



Vessels



Detail of the underside of the vessel

**Small vessel,
Year 9 Student,
Mixed Media: Fabric,
Dimensions: 297 x 420 mm approx**

This small fabric vessel is partly inspired by Odundo and by the huge variety of vessels in the Sainsbury Centre collection. The student reflects on the importance of the relationship between the tactile surface and form of her work.

The Sainsbury Collection features numerous pots, bowls, and dishes from all around the world. A great many of the African vessels are anthropomorphic. The playful, and perhaps surreal fusion of human and animal body parts with hollow forms is very clear in the examples here, and although less obvious, the consideration of the human body as a vessel is also a key interest for Magdalene Odundo.



From Left to Right:
Cup supported on male figure, Nigeria Benin City, Created 1800-1950, UEA No 235.
Cup on foot, Democratic Republic of Congo Zaire, Created 1900-1950, UEA No 566.
Divination cup with caryatid support (depicting mother and child), Nigeria, Created 1850-1950, UEA No 228.
Drinking cup with figure, Democratic Republic of Congo Zaire, Created early 20th century, UEA No 256



**Large Fabric Vessel,
Year 9 Student,
Mixed Media: Fabric
Dimensions: 594 x 841 mm approx**

This fabric sculpture, a mixed-media vessel pays homage to the distinctive sculptural forms created by Magdalene Odundo. Amorphous in shape yet resembling some of the ambitious attributes of Odundo's ceramics, this unique sculpture serves as a vehicle for thinking about the intrinsic relationship between the human body in relation to the space which surrounds it.

**Pots,
Year 9 students,
Mixed Media: Modroc
Dimensions vary from 297 x 420 mm to 420 x 594 mm**

After carefully scrutinising the form of the unglazed, hand burnished pots displayed within the exhibition ***The Journey of Things***, the students also analysed the distinctive colours which characterise Magdalene Odundo's hand-built ceramics.

Created with Modroc, each of the students' vessels has been constructed and manipulated by hand. After refining the shape once the material had hardened, each was carefully painted to emphasise the form, and to reference Odundo's pallet.





**Recycled Coil Pot,
Year 9 Student,
Mixed media sculpture: Newspaper and PVA,
Dimensions: 290 x 200 mm approx**

This exquisite lidded vessel with confident clarity of form was made with punctilious folded coils of paper, informed by Magdalene Odundo's coiled-clay construction method, and her ongoing exploration of hollow sculptural forms.

This striking and ambitious vessel has undeniably been inspired by visiting the Magdalene Odundo exhibition. However, despite being constructed with a very different method and in a readily available material, it is comparable in its refinement and fragility.



Vessel,
Year 9 Student,
Mixed Media: Newspaper,
Dimensions: 594 x 1000 mm approx.

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