

PIONEER WOMEN OF THE ARTS

The PIONEER GALLERY inside the NAIROBI GALLERY at the OLD PCS OFFICE, NAIROBI, will feature **nine leading pioneer women of the arts from East Africa** from September 9th to December 8th, 2018.

In researching these women, I have found how interrelated many of the early artists and art educators were at the time of independence. They were mostly centered around the fledging Makerere College which became the most prestigious Institution of higher learning in East Africa, **Makerere University**, with its ground breaking **School of Fine Arts** (which has gone through many name changes).

The vital force behind this unique art school was **Margaret Trowell**, whose written works on the arts of Africa and early formal art education are still the classics, ie "African Arts and Crafts and Teaching in African Schools" (1937), "Tribal Crafts of Uganda" (1953), "Classical African Sculpture" (1954), "African Design" (1960), "African Tapestry" (autobiographical). These remain invaluable source materials for those in the arts of Africa. What a great service it would be if Makerere University would join with other institutions and republish all of Margaret

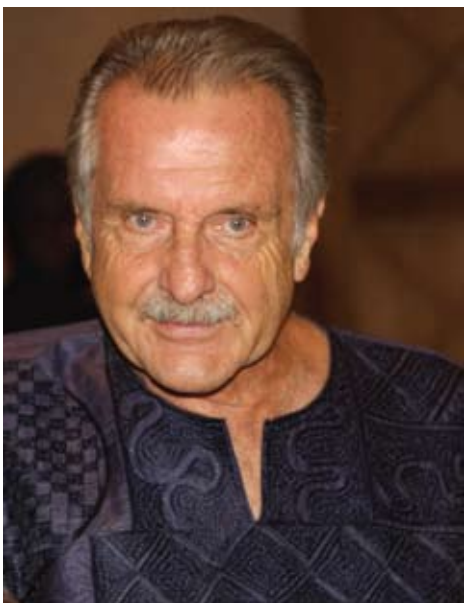


Illustrations by Margaret Trowell, 1934

Trowell's books in one volume or a set of volumes, as most are now out of print. Her work spanned Nigeria and the Congo as well as Kenya, where she lived and worked in Machakos and Nairobi from 1929 to 1935 when she moved to Kampala. There, she divided her time as curator for the National Museums of Uganda and teaching at her School of Arts. Among the objects she donated to the British Museum, are Ugandan graphite-burnished ceramics that inspired the world famous Kenyan ceramicist, Magdalene Odundo.

As a result, the **Makerere Department of Fine Arts** was renamed the **Margaret Trowell School of Fine and Applied Arts** and is now the **Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA)**. MTSIFA has three departments plus the Gallery that is now **The Institute of Heritage**.

One of the these nine pioneer women artists, Rosemary Karagu, had the honor of being the first woman to attend the Makerere University Faculty of Fine Arts (1950-52) which later became the Department of Fine Arts. Another of the outstanding pioneer women in this exhibition, Prof Magdalene Odundo from Kenya studied in secondary school under Rosemary Karagu, who recently celebrated her 90th birthday. Others including Theresa Musoke and Geraldine Robarts have taught at Makerere. One thing in common with these pioneering women of the arts is that all are both artists and teachers in schools, universities or workshops – art do-ers and art-teachers. "Their sharing of art, their experimentation, outreach, so much inclusion, generosity, institution- building are noted as we celebrate their life long careers in art-making and active engagements to share art as a way of knowing, being, and literally making a better world."*



*Elsbeth Court. With thanks for her research and article printed below.