

## YONY WAI-TE



*Painting by Yony Wai-te at the Kampala Serena Hotel*

YONY WAI-TE is a name to be reckoned with in the arts of East Africa. She was born in the USA and grew up on the Pacific Island of Guam. She studied Oriental brush painting in Hong Kong and Japan. After living in Somalia she moved to Kenya in the 1960's where she is now a citizen. She has painted and installed art works in many hotels and other commercial buildings in East Africa, especially within the Serena Hotels and Lodges.

She has lived for the past decades on the Athi Plains of Kenya and has an artist's workshop and a guesthouse in Lamu. Through her Wildebeeste's Workshops she has worked and trained many East African women's groups and artists.

Yony is most famous for establishing the first major contemporary art gallery in East Africa, Gallery Watatu with David Hart and Robin Anderson. The gallery quickly became the leading contemporary art gallery in East Africa and it held numerous exhibitions. Yony has had many exhibitions in various parts of the world including a collaborative master work *'The Lamu Story Snake'* that was created for the World Rio Ecology Summit in 1992 and travelled the world for most of the 1990's. Most recently she held a retrospective exhibition of her works at the Pioneer Gallery called **Ecce Homo – an encounter with early machismo and migrants forever?**

She tells the story: "50 years ago, Joseph Murumbi, the former Vice President of Kenya, walked into the newly opened Gallery Watatu and bought my first painting on sale there. Now that painting is part of the permanent collection of the Kenya National Archives of Kenya, which together with the National Museum, the Nairobi Gallery houses major examples of Murumbi's lifelong passion – the arts, literature and priceless examples of Kenyan and wider Africa's cultural treasures.

The past 50 years has seen this region grow from being a home of fiercely creative people famous for their iconic handmade crafts to becoming one of the hotbeds of global contemporary art. During that fresh post-independence era, one of the most pivotal meetings was between a young, prescient, enthusiastic collector of Pan Africana, Alan Donovan, and the larger than life Joe Murumbi, also an avid collector and especially a dedicated bibliophile.

Generally, Murumbi was misunderstood and under-appreciated during his political life, but it was indeed a blessed day for Kenya when he met and joined forces with the talented young Alan Donovan, equally passionate about Africa. Joe, his wife Sheila, and Alan created the now world renowned African Heritage Collections...."