SWAHILI PAINTINGS

LAMU ISLAND
PAINTING MEDIA
SWAHILI CULTURE
INDIGENOUS PLANT-BASE PIGMENTS

WANYAMA OGUTU

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Photo: Pictorial tests assessed different surfaces, binders, techniques, styles, genres, trends, designs, and compositions to develop the depictions

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PROJECT SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study addressed the growing concern over the erosion of Swahili culture and the underutilization of natural plant in artistic practice due to modernization. It has documented essential cultural aspects such as traditional modes of transport, music, dance, clothing, marriage, and Swahili's motifs which reflect the Swahili community.

The research established that natural plant pigment is a painting medium linked with a cultural significant such as cooking, medicine, and body adornment. The natural plant pigments were created through a hybrid method of traditional soaking and modern laboratory extraction.

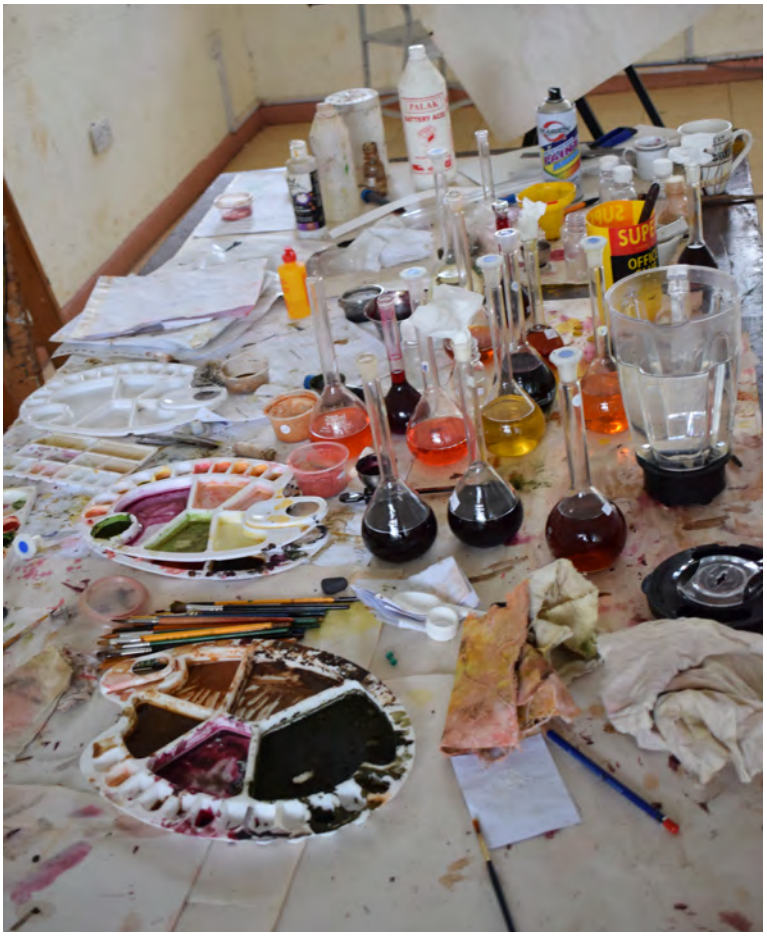
The study confirmed that though experiment, natural plant pigments possess colors for visually depicting cultural aspects of Swahili. The final depiction successfully demonstrated that natural plant pigments preserves Swahili culture.

THE RESEARCHER

Mr. Wanyama Ogutu was a scholar in the Master of Arts (Fine Art - Painting) at Kenyatta University. He is also a practicing artist specializing in drawing, painting, and sculpture in Nairobi, Kenya.

His study focuses on Painting, its' philosophy, education, and extension to African Art. Most of his artworks focus on interaction, the environment, culture and education.

The lab process of sonication was used to extract the maximum amount of pigment. This was paired with natural extraction in the studio



Pictorial tests assessed different surfaces, binders, techniques, styles, genres, trends, designs, and compositions to develop the depictions

THE FINAL DEPICTIONS

SHEREHE YA NIKAL (SWAHILI WEDDING CELEBRATION)

The depiction captures a joyful moment in a Swahili wedding celebration. A father expresses his happiness as his daughter prepares for marriage. The father is between Rukia (his daughter), and her mother. Marriage in Swahili is rooted deeply in Islamic traditions based on family. The families come together to arrange the union and discuss the dowry. The composition reflects Swahili marriage tradition and rich cultural rites.

Media
Vulgaris, Solanum Lycopersicum, Coffea Canephora, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Curcuma Longa, Camellia Sinensis, Hibiscus

Surfaces
Watercolor paper and cartridge paper

Binders
Local alcohol and water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The dark-effect background was created by soaking the surface in a salt and sugar–water mixture, then scraping it out to achieve a dark texture

Facial expressions were rendered using a flesh-tonal blending technique with *Coffea Canephora* and *Camellia Sinensis*

The *kofia* was created using impasto fine pastes and the masking-fluid-out technique to highlight the floral designs

The buibui was created using gradient layers and sprinkled with salt, producing a stippled decorative effect on the dress

Decorative elements on the buibui were created using the splattering technique with *Solanum Lycopersicum* and *Eragrostis Cilianensis*

The cut-out technique was used to create the impression of a *white kanzu* with intricate decoration

MACHO ZA BABU (SPIRIT OF THE LAMU EYE)

The *Lamu Eye* is a revered spiritual symbol believed to protect the island from evil spirits of the sea. The depiction captures the dhow, a traditional Swahili sailing vessel, sailing through the sea carrying people. The people in dhow are safe because of the watchful eye against evil spirits of the sea.

Media
Curcuma Longa, Camellia Sinensi, Lawsonia Inermis, Coffea Canephora, Hibiscus, Red and Orange Capsicum

Surfaces
White polyester cotton canvas

Binders
Distilled water and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The atmosphere of the sea was created using soaking techniques on the white polyester cotton with laboratory ethanol

Wet-on-wet application of *Curcuma Longa* and *Red Capsicum* evoked the serene atmosphere of the deep sea

The dhow was depicted using impasto techniques with *Coffea Canephora*, *Red Capsicum*, and *Lawsonia Inermis*

People aboard the dhow were illustrated using block techniques with *Lawsonia Inermis* and *Jamun Fruit*

The wind propeller was rendered with flat washes of *Curcuma Longa* and *Camellia Sinensis*

The iconic *Lamu Eye* symbol was outlined using the blocking technique of *Jamun Fruit* to represent its spiritual significance

The dhow's sail was achieved with dry-brush techniques using *Lawsonia Inermis*, *Orange Capsicum*, and *Red Capsicum*

Distant architectural buildings on the sea were depicted with overlaying washes of *Camellia Sinensis*

Atmospheric effects were created using scrumbling of *Camellia Sinensis* and *Coffea Canephora*

MASHINDANO YA PUNDA (DONKEY RACE)

The donkey race is a cherished event among the Swahili festival held in Lamu Island.Other key cultural festivals that display donkey race includes Maulid, Yoga, the Shella Dhow Race, Ramadhan, and Eid. The donkey race competition draws spectators across Kenya and beyond to celebrate Swahili culture.

Media
Curcuma Longa, Coffea Canephora, Red and Orange Capsicum, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
Jinja cotton canvas

Binders
Laboratory ethanol and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The sky was created by soaking *Hibiscus* and *Curcuma Longa* onto the Jinja canvas using laboratory ethanol

A combination of wet-on-wet and soaking techniques produced a bright, sunny atmospheric effect

Men riding donkeys and spectators cheering were rendered using the impasto paste technique with *Curcuma Longa, Coffea Canephora, Orange Capsicum, Red Capsicum, Eragrostis Cilianensis* and *Hibiscus*

Dry brush and wet-on-dry techniques with *Eragrostis Cilianensis* created atmospheric texture and depth for the donkey race

The composition was further defined using gradient layers of *Jamun Fruit* and *Coffea Canephora*

Shadows were rendered with overlaying techniques of *Coffea Canephora*, enhancing the contrast and light effects

FUNDI WA NGALAWA (BOAT CONSTRUCTOR)

The depiction highlights maritime activities on Lamu Island, such as the construction of *Ngalawa* (traditional outrigger canoes used by fishermen). Men are building the vessel as other boats float on the ocean. The scene is set against the coastal mangroves, tidal flats, and textured beaches. The construction of these vessels represents cultural craftsmanship that is passed down through generations.

Media
Lawsonia Inermis, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Jamun Fruit, Camellia Sinensis, Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus

Surfaces
Ivory paper

Binders
Laboratory ethanol, distilled water, and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The sky was soaked with a mixture of ethanol and distilled water, then washed with *Curcuma Longa* and *Hibiscus*

The mangrove forest was formed using impasto techniques with *Eragrostis Cilianensis* on the background, then scraped out to create atmospheric perspective

The sea was created using the wet-on-wet technique with *Curcuma Longa*

The blocked-layer technique with *Jamun Fruit* and *Lawsonia Inermis* illustrated the men working on the *Ngalawa*

The foreground land was rendered using the leaving-white-space technique and thin flat washes to suggest the shoreline

The foreground textures were created using an impasto technique combining *Curcuma Longa*, *Hibiscus*, *Salt*, and *Sugar* with solvent adhesive

Crystallized Salt contributed to the gritty texture of sand and beach stones

JIONI
(SUNSET IN LAMU ISLAND)

The depiction captures the golden hour of the evening on Lamu Island. The scene reflects the tranquil rhythm of island life. The depiction shows girls in *Buibui* making their way to the mosque for prayer. It shows Swahili houses with carved doors and shaped windows that are influenced by Indian and Arab design. The man riding on the donkey adds life to the golden atmosphere.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Camellia Sinensis,
Coffea Canephora, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Curcuma Longa

Surfaces
Watercolor paper

Binders
Laboratory ethanol, local alcohol, and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
Flat washes and the leaving-white-space technique created the overall composition of the evening scene at the mosque

The sea was rendered using the wet-on-wet technique with *Curcuma Longa* to create wave and water effects

The atmospheric sky was achieved through thin-layer wash techniques

The wet peeling-off technique using *Red* and *Orange Capsicum* with laboratory ethanol

The trees were created using the scribble technique with *Eragrostis Cilianensis* and distilled water

The mosque was illustrated by leaving white spaces and applying thin-layer washes of *Curcuma Longa* and *Red and Orange Capsicum*

The sunset was highlighted to cast warm light on a man riding a donkey and girls in *buibui* walking to the mosque

The ground was textured using dry-brush and wet-on-dry techniques with *Camellia Sinensis*, *Coffea Canephora*, and *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, creating detailed textures throughout the compostion

NGOMA KWA FORTE (DANCE AT LAMU FORT MUSEUM)

Dance is a vital cultural expression in Swahili celebrations, and it is performed in open spaces. The dances known as *Ngoma* are accompanied by rhythmic drumming. It depicts men and women participating in traditional Swahili dances during the Lamu Festival. It captures the joyous communal spirit of the Swahili people.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Camellia Sinensis, Coffea Canephora, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
White polyester cotton canvas

Binders
Laboratory ethanol, water, and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The sky was created using a soaking technique of *Curcuma Longa* onto polyester cotton canvas with laboratory ethanol

Wet-on-wet technique of curcuma longa evoked the sunny atmosphere over Lamu fort

The fort's walls were rendered using dry brush and wet-on-dry techniques with *Camellia Sinensis* and *Coffea Canephora*, adding textured details to the surface

Architectural features such as windows and doors were outlined using block techniques of *Jamun Fruit*

Dancers were depicted with overlaying layers of *Coffea Canephora* for flesh tones and the blocks of *Jamun Fruit*

Red and Orange Capsicum and *Curcuma Longa* highlighted the costumes of the *Ngoma* dancers

Shadows on the fort were created using thin, flat layers of *Camellia Sinensis* and *Coffea Canephora*

Leaving white space provided tonal variation throughout the composition and subjects

NGOMA DANCE (SWAHILI DANCE)

Music and dance are central cultural expressions in Swahili celebrations. The music is often accompanied by traditional instruments such as drums, flutes, and *siwas*. These instruments play key roles in performances like *Goma la Barani* and *Kirumbizi* (stick dancing) by men, while women dance to *Vugo*, *Lelemama*, and *Chama*.

Media
Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus, Red and Orange Capsicum, Camellia Sinensis, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Coffea Canephora

Surfaces
Primed canvas

Binders
Distilled water, laboratory ethanol, and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The background was created using crosshatching and flat overlaying techniques with *Curcuma Longa* and *Hibiscus* on primed canvas

Scribbling techniques with *Eragrostis Cilianensis* achieved rhythmic Swahili pattern designs around the dome-shaped structure

The negative space of the dome was rendered using the blocked-layer technique with hibiscus shades applied via wet-on-wet technique

Fabric on the ground was depicted using crosshatching with *Red Capsicum* over thin layers of *Curcuma Longa* and *Hibiscus*

Musical instruments were illustrated with blending techniques using *Hibiscus*, *Red and Orange Capsicum*, *Camellia Sinensis*, *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, and *Coffea Canephora*, forming a still-life composition of drums, flutes, and *siwa*

MISIKITI WA FRIDAY
(A FAMOUS MOSQUE KNOWN AS FRIDAY)

The Friday Mosque of Lamu Island is a landmark that reflects the history of Islamic, Indian, and Arabic influences. It is a meters tall with intricately carved windows. One is able to view the islands of Manda, Pate, and Lamu through the carved window. Friday mosque was constructed with coral stone and mangrove wood. The depiction captures the mosque's majestic presence on Lamu Island.

Media
Lawsonia Inermis, Curcuma Longa, Camellia Sinensis, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit, Coffea Canephora, Hibiscus

Surfaces
Primed canvas

Binders
Laboratory ethanol and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The sky was rendered using finger techniques to blend solvent adhesive with Hibiscus and *Curcuma Longa*

Leaving white space created tonal variation in the cone-shaped source of light

Adjacent buildings were depicted with flat washes and finger blending with solvent adhesive, suggesting the interplay of light and shadow

Foreground bushes and trees were created using a scribbling technique with *Hibiscus*, *Camellia Sinensis*, and *Curcuma Longa*

Tonal variation was achieved using *Jamun Fruit, Coffea Canephora*, and *Hibiscus*

The blocking technique with *Jamun Fruit* was employed to depict the windows and doors of the Friday Mosque

MISIKITI WA NABII MOHAMMED (PROPHET MOHAMMED MOSQUE)

Prayer is the central spiritual practice among the Swahili community of Lamu Island. The mosque is a sacred site believed to be a place where the Prophet Mohammed once prayed. The depiction captures the solemn atmosphere of prayer and highlights the mosque's architectural beauty. Religious practice defines daily life in the Swahili culture.

Media
Coffea Canephora, Hibiscus, Red and Orange Capsicum, Jamun Fruit, Curcuma Longa

Surfaces
Jinja cotton canvas

Binders
Distilled water and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
Sky was created using a soaking technique of *Curcuma Longa* onto Jinja canvas with laboratory ethanol

Wet-on-wet technique of *Curcuma Longa* with laboratory ethanol evoked a sunset atmosphere

The mosque structure was formed using the impasto technique with *Coffea Canephora* and solvent adhesive as a binder

Floral designs on the mosque walls were rendered with a scribbling technique of *Jamun Fruit*, adding intricate detail

Leaving white spaces created designs on the dome windows and arch doors of the mosque

Muslims praying outside the mosque were depicted using blocking and blending techniques

Shadows were rendered using gradient blocking techniques of *Jamun Fruit* to differentiate individuals within the congregation

ALLAHU AKBAR
(CALL TO PRAYER AT LAMU MOSQUE)

Mosques are key religious and cultural landmarks along the coast of Lamu Island. It symbolizes the central community and affiliation to the religion of Islam. The depiction depicts the serene moment of the call to prayer from a tall minaret. The mosques are famous for their beautiful architecture in Lamu Island town.

Media
Hibiscus, Orange Capsicum, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
White polyester cotton canvas

Binders
Nitric acid and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The atmospheric sky was developed using a soaking technique with nitric acid on the white polyester-cotton canvas

Wet-on-wet application subtly toned the canvas, evoking the spiritual resonance

Allahu Akbar call from the mosque's tall minaret is created by *Orange Capsicum*

Impasto techniques using *Eragrostis Cilianensis* defined the architectural forms of the mosque, including the minaret and intricately designed dome doors

White space techniques were used to inscribe Swahili decorative motifs on the minaret and dome-shaped doors, highlighting cultural details

Surrounding trees were rendered using a scrumbling technique with *Hibiscus* and *Jamun Fruit*, creating a lush, natural environment around the mosque

KICHOCHORO (NARROW PATHWAY)

The depiction captures a scene of *kichochoro*, a narrow way along the Swahili houses in Lamu. The pathway routes shared by Lamu pedestrians and donkeys transporting goods. Most houses along the route have textured surface walls that show the centuries of survival.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Coffea Canephora, Camellia Sinensis Cinnamomum Verum, Lawsonia Inermis, Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
Cardboard and ivory paper

Binders
Local alcohol and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The floral door designs were created using an expressive scribble technique with *Lawsonia Inermis* on cardboard and solvent adhesive

The door edges were built up using the impasto technique with *Cinnamomum Verum* applied onto cardboard with solvent adhesive

The man loading and riding a donkey was illustrated with thin wash layers and overlaying techniques using *Red and Orange Capsicum*

The atmospheric building was rendered using thin wash techniques of *Red and Orange Capsicum*

Leaving white spaces allowed the light to be reflected on the buildings

Gradient washes of *Coffea Canephora* and *Camellia Sinensis* illustrated the donkey in the *kichochoro*

Thin wash techniques using *Jamun Fruit* achieved tonal variation, shadow, and contrast within the composition

KIZAZI
(A NEW GENERATION)

The depiction demonstarte the deep cultural value of children in the Swahili community. A father holds his newborn to symbolize the continuity of the family. The *kofia* (head cover) on the child shows that they are raised within the frameworks of Islamic values. The depiction is set against architectural designs of Swahili to express fatherhood bond across generations.

Media
Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus, Red and Orange Capsicum, Camellia Sinensis Coffea Canephora, Solanum Lycopersicum, Eragrostis Cilianensis,

Surfaces
Watercolour paper and ivory paper

Binders
Distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The facial expressions of the man and child were rendered using a flesh-tone blending technique with *Coffea Canephora* and *Camellia Sinensis*, expressing the emotion of a father passionately holding his son

The *kofia* was created using the impasto technique with *Orange Capsicum* and *Solanum Lycopersicum* pastes

The outline was achieved with a masking-out technique to highlight the decorative patterns

The clothing of the man and child was achieved using a flat-wash technique with *Orange Capsicum* and *Solanum Lycopersicum*, creating a colourful garment

The edges of the doorway and interior architecture were decorated using rhythmic scribble techniques with *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, inspired by Swahili design

The cut-out technique integrated the figures with floral motifs inspired by Swahili designs, creating a unified composition

CHUMBA CHA PILIPILI (PROCREATION ROOM)

Chumba Cha Pilipili is a traditional Swahili procreation room that symbolize intimacy, fertility, and marital blessings. This sacred room is part of the Swahili interior design that is adorned with carved wooden furniture. It is arranged with classic seats such as *Kiti Cha Enzi* and *Kiti Cha Jeru*. The door and window frames styled with antique designs.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Coffea Canephora, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Lawsonia Inermis, Curcuma Longa, Camellia Sinensis, Colanum Lycopersicum

Surfaces
Watercolor paper

Binders
Laboratory ethanol and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The composition was rendered using a range of gradient-layer wash techniques with laboratory ethanol

The curtain and bedsheet were created using *Red and Orange Capsicum* and *Colanum Lycopersicum* with wet-on-dry techniques and laboratory ethanol

The walls of the room were created by blending *Camellia Sinensis*, *Hibiscus*, and *Red and Orange Capsicum* using dry brushwork with distilled water

Dark design elements on the wall were created using layers of *Jamun Fruit* and distilled water

The carved wooden bed was illustrated with blended layers of *Coffea Canephora*

White spaces were intentionally left to highlight light effects with distilled water

The *Koran* resting on a circular table was outlined with tonal variation, leaving white areas to suggest light

The table was rendered with a blend of *Coffea Canephora* and *Camellia Sinensis*, using negative space techniques to establish depth and shadow

MSAFARA WA SIKUKUU (SWAHILI FESTIVAL PROCESSION)

Processions are a popular walk during Swahili festivals such as Maulid, Eid, and Ramadhan. These events are typically accompanied by music and dance as people walk along the edge of the sea to the old town. Men often dressed in elaborately designed *kanzus* lead the celebrations. The is a key cultural aspect exhibited by the Swahili of Lamu Island.

Media
Curcuma Longa, Coffea Canephora, Hibiscus, Red and Orange Capsicum, Camellia Sinensis

Surfaces
Jinja cotton canvas

Binders
Distilled water, laboratory ethanol, and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The atmosphere was created using a soaking technique on Jinja cotton canvas with laboratory ethanol

Wet-on-wet application of *Curcuma Longa* and *Hibiscus* evokes the sunny atmosphere of Lamu Island

The leaving-white-space technique reflects sunlight on the crowd and kanzu garments

Floral decorative designs on the kanzu necklines were rendered using a scribbling technique with *Red and Orange Capsicum*, adding intricate details to the garments

Faces of the people were painted using a flesh-tone blending technique with *Camellia Sinensis* and *Coffea Canephora*

KAWAHA TUNGU (SWAHILI COFFEE)

The utensils play a big role in Swahili culture and food preparation. The *sinia* (platter) is used to serve Swahili dishes such as *Pilau*, *Biryani*, and *Biringanya*. The small bowls are used to serve flavorful goat meat soup, and cups for the hot drink (*Kahawa Tungu*). The composition reflects a serene moment of breakfast or late afternoon.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Coffea Canephora, Solanum Lycopersicum, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
Watercolor paper

Binders
Laboratory ethanol and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The leaving-white-space technique created three-dimensional forms of jars, a *sinia* (large serving plate), small bowls with cake, and traditional cups using distilled water

The scribble technique formed rhythmic pattern designs on the small cups, sinia, jar utensils, and the wall

Food wrapped in green foil was depicted using a dry-brush technique with *Eragrostis Cilianensis*

The background was illustrated with thin-layer washes of *Curcuma Longa*, with shaded highlights of *Hibiscus* and *Jamun Fruit*

Cake cream was illustrated using a wet-on-dry technique with *Solanum Lycopersicum*, leaving white spaces for bright highlights

Dark design elements were created using the blocked-layer technique with *Hibiscus* and *Jamun Fruit*

MAGOFU YA LAMU (THE LAMU RUINS)

The ancient ruins of Lamu Island include the Takwa Ruins on Manda Island and the ruins on Pate Island. The ruins are primarily made from coral rag, a type of fossilized coral stone that was commonly used along the coast of East Africa. In 12th century, the Swahili people of Lamu Island utilized coral for constructing mosques, tombs, houses, and city walls.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit, Camellia Sinensis, Coffea Canephora, Curcuma Longa

Surfaces
Art paper

Binders
Distilled water and solvent adhesive

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The ruins were treated with a fusion of solvent adhesive, distilled water, and salted pigments of *Curcuma Longa*, *Hibiscus*, and *Red and Orange Capsicum*

The dome-shaped window was created by cutting and scraping layers of *Hibiscus*, *Curcuma Longa*, *Red and Orange Capsicum*, *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, and *Jamun Fruit* to produce textural effects

Burnt effects were added to simulate warfare and the ruins' deterioration

The dome-shaped strip was cut from art paper to emphasize the Swahili designs

The ruins were further textured using an impasto mixture of salt, solvent adhesive, and pigments from *Curcuma Longa*, *Hibiscus*, *Red and Orange Capsicum*, *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, and *Jamun Fruit*

Crystallized salt was applied to create the gritty texture of the coral walls of the Lamu ruins

DAILY LIVING (CHA SIKU TU)

Donkeys symbolize resilience, local economy, and daily routines in the Swahili culture of Lamu. In town, they are classified as motor vehicles, and the person riding them is considered a driver. Donkeys carry construction materials and deliver water, transporting market produce and household goods.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Curcuma Longa, Lawsonia Inermis, *Camellia Sinensis, Coffea Canephora, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit*

Surfaces
Art paper

Binders
Local alcohol, solvent adhesive, and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The surface was soaked with *Curcuma Longa* and *Hibiscus* using distilled water to establish the base atmosphere

Lawsonia Inermis was scraped onto the surface to create textured effects in the background

The man's traditional attire was created as cut-outs of art paper to depict the dressing code

The donkey was illustrated using a blending technique combining *Curcuma Longa*, *Camellia Sinensis*, *Coffea Canephora*, *Hibiscus*, *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, and *Jamun Fruit*

Tonal variations on the donkey were achieved through a flesh-tone blending of *Jamun Fruit* and *Hibiscus*.

The rider's trousers were rendered using overlay techniques with *Red and Orange Capsicum* and *Curcuma Longa*

The ground was depicted using a scrumbling technique with *Curcuma Longa*, *Hibiscus*, *Red and Orange Capsicum*, *Eragrostis Cilianensis*, and *Jamun Fruit* to convey texture and depth

UVUVI KISIWANI (FISHING AT THE ISLAND)

Fishing is a sustainable economic activity for both young and old men in the Lamu Island. The depiction captures a fisherman dressed in a *kofia*, colorful T-shirts, and shorts returning from the sea. The composition highlights their daily economic activities on the island.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Curcuma Longa, Camellia Sinensis, Coffea Canephora, Solanum Lycopersicum, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
Ivory paper

Binders
Local alcohol and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The sea was rendered using the wet-on-wet technique with *Curcuma Longa* and water

The foreground wall was created using gradient layers and dry-brush techniques with *Camellia Sinensis* and *Coffea Canephora* mixed with alcohol

The fishermen carrying fish were illustrated using a flesh-tone blend of *Coffea Canephora*, *Camellia Sinensis*, and *Jamun Fruit*

Leaving white spaces to create tonal variation

The fishermen's clothing was illustrated with thin layers of *Red and Orange Capsicum*, *Curcuma Longa*, and *Solanum Lycopersicum*, also leaving white spaces

SHONA KOFIA
(CRAFTING ISLAMIC CAP AT LAMU FORT)

The depiction portrays everyday craftsmanship activities scenes on Lamu Island. The composition features a man deeply focused on weaving a traditional *kofia* for his customers. He is dressed in a patterned *kikoi* and Islamic *kofia*. The depiction celebrates the quiet dignity of labour and the timeless value of handmade Swahili art.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Camellia Sinensis, Hibiscus Coffea Canephora, Solanum Lycopersicum, Jamun Fruit Cinnamomum Verum, Eragrostis Cilianensis, Curcuma Longa

Surfaces
Ivory paper

Binders
Laboratory ethanol, distilled water, and local alcohol

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The background buildings were created using a gradient wash technique with *Coffea Canephora*, *Camellia Sinensis*, and *Cinnamomum Verum*, producing a lighting effect on the structures

The foreground wall was rendered using dry-brush and wet-on-dry techniques to create texture

The man sitting on the slab was illustrated using overlaying techniques combined with scribble techniques using *Hibiscus*, *Coffea Canephora*, and *Jamun Fruit*

Facial features and hands were created using a flesh-tone blending technique with *Camellia Sinensis*, *Coffea Canephora*, and *Jamun Fruit* to achieve natural skin tones

Clothing was created using thin-layer techniques with red and orange capsicum and *Curcuma Longa* to give the impression of Swahili attire

Kikoi and *kofia* decorations were produced using scribbled patterns inspired by traditional Swahili designs

MASHUA
(TRADITIONAL SHIP CROSSING THE SEA)

The *Mashua* is a traditional dhow used to transport goods and people across the waters between Manda, Pate, and other islands off the Kenyan coast. The *Mashua* is traced back to the 14th century by Arab traders who visited the Swahili coast. The vessel signifies the seafaring spirit of the East African coast.

Media
Coffea Canephora, Camellia Sinensis, Lawsonia Inermis, Curcuma Longa, Hibiscus, Jamun Fruit

Surfaces
Ivory paper

Binders
Local alcohol, solvent adhesive, and water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

Techniques
The sky was created using the masking-fluid-out technique with a *Hibiscus* and *Curcuma Longa* wash mixed with local alcohol

The impasto-paste technique of *Lawsonia Inermis* illustrated a stick holding the fabric of the *mashua*

The sail fabric was rendered using an overlaying wash technique of *Camellia Sinensis* with water

The mashua was illustrated using block-impasto techniques of *Lawsonia Inermis* and coffea canephora with solvent adhesive

The sea was created using the wet-on-wet technique with *Hibiscus* and *Curcuma Longa*a mixed with water

The shadows of the *mashua* were highlighted using the dry-brush technique of *Camellia Sinensis* with water

MAEGESHO
(BOATS PARKING YARD)

Boats are parking at the edge of sea in Lamu Island. Boats such as *Mashua*, speed boat and fibre boats are used for economic activity. Alot of young and old men use boats for fishing in the sea and transporting passages and goods.

Media
Red and Orange Capsicum, Coffea Canephora, Curcuma Longa, Camellia Sinensis

Surfaces
Watercolour paper

Binders
Local alcohol, ethanol, and distilled water

Size
44 cm × 56 cm

The book documents Swahili paintings made with indigenous plant-based pigments from Lamu Island. This studio practice showcases paintings that depict various cultural aspects of the Swahili people. The artwork includes descriptions collected from the residents of Lamu Island and utilizes indigenous plant-based pigments as the medium for each painting. Swahili paintings preserve indigenous knowledge through the use of their own resources.

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