

# THE LEGACY OF TINGA TINGA ART; THE ANALYSIS

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# The Legacy of Tinga Tinga Art; The Analysis

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Tinga Tinga, named after its founder Edward Saidi Tingatinga, is an informal art and design style and art movement that began in the second half of the 20th Century in the Oyster Bay area, Tanzania. It is a unique and visually stunning art style that later spread throughout the rest of East Africa. (Chris, 2019) “His ubiquitous style has been met with great popularity by audiences outside Tanzania who love the unique style and the story behind the brand.” (TingaTinga African Art, 2018) **Problem:** Trajectories of development and changes in tinga tinga art style is barely understood or fully documented. **Objective:** The main objective of the paper was to establish the inspiration of Tinga Tinga art, its movement and its legacy. **Design:** The study used qualitative methods to obtain relevant data for the research and used thematic analysis methods to break down themes and nuances. **Setting:** The study was carried out in Nairobi city while desk and library research was done at the University of Nairobi located in Nairobi, Kenya. **Subjects:** The subjects of this study are Edward Saidi Tingatinga and the Tinga Tinga art movement. **Results:** There was a certain endearing charm to his work with its lack of sophistication, fresh approach, vibrant colours and cheerful subject matter that drew in many. (Contemporary African Art, 2018) **Conclusion:** This paper concludes that the Tinga Tinga art style and movement is a force to be reckoned with and does not seem to be slowing down anytime soon. The Tinga Tinga art movement, and its art as a whole, has had an impact on not only East Africa’s art and design scene but internationally as well in various mediums. The art has also inspired a lot of young painters and designers. The researcher recommends further study on Tinga Tinga’s legacy as an art and design movement and how future generations can keep its legacy alive.

**Keywords:** tinga tinga, legacy, East African art, Design, Tanzania

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

Tinga Tinga, named after its founder Edward Saidi Tingatinga, is an informal art style and art movement that began in the second half of the 20th Century in the Oyster Bay area, Tanzania. It is a unique and visually stunning art style that later spread throughout the rest of East Africa. (Chris, 2019) Tinga Tinga Art (2018) states, “His ubiquitous style has been met with great popularity by audiences outside Tanzania who love the unique style and the story behind the brand.” Despite the style evolving over the years with changing art landscapes and artists adding their own twists and nuances to the style, the art style still manages to retain its unique, recognizable identity, as seen in figure 1.



Fig. 1: Leopard by E. S. Tingatinga

### 1.1 Objective

The main objective of the paper is to discuss Tinga Tinga art, its movement and its legacy.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Edward Saidi Tingatinga

To understand the Tinga Tinga art style and movement, it is imperative to start with a look at its founder and pioneer, Edward Saidi Tingatinga (pictured in figure 2), a painter. He was born in 1932 in a village called Namochelia, now known as Nakapanya, in the Tunduru District of Ruvuma Region in southern Tanzania, on the border of Tanzania and Mozambique. (TingaTinga African Art, 2018) He was born in a family of subsistence farmers. His father, Saidi Tingatinga, was from the Ndonde ethnic group and a Muslim while his mother, Agnes Binti Ntembo, belonged to the Makua ethnic group and was a Christian. (Contemporary African Art, 2018).

In 1953, Edward moved to Dar es Salaam, in search of work, where he did odd jobs and worked as a ward attendant at Muhimbili Hospital. (True African Art, 2017) He also worked as a gardener in a colonial

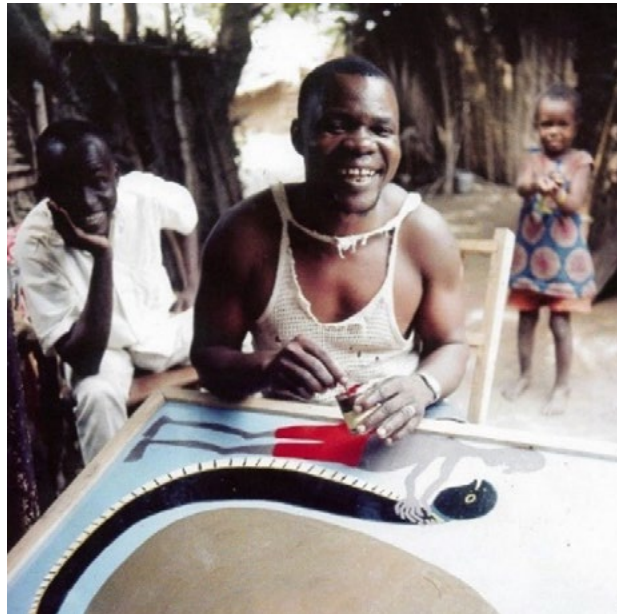


Fig. 2: Edward Saidi Tingatinga

Source: <https://cdn.shopify.com> – Retrieved: 09/01/2022

civil servant's home until independence arrived in 1961 and his employer left. During his time there, he was able to watch the work of the government painters who periodically came to paint his employer's house. He was fascinated by the ceiling boards, the bright colours and the graceful brushstrokes of the painters. (African Contemporary, 2006)

Following the country's independence, artists from Zaire (currently the Democratic Republic of the Congo) were selling their inexpensive artwork to foreign tourists along the city's main streets and roadsides. (African Contemporary, 2006) Seeing this, Edward's urge to paint bubbled up once more and he decided to try his hand at painting once again. Initially, he was unable to purchase materials for painting, however, he improvised and used scavenged materials and painted on discarded ceiling boards using dregs of bicycle enamel—from his early career as a bicycle repairman—household paint and old paintbrushes. (Indigo Arts Gallery, 2021) As time went on, he managed to start his own studio and buy more materials such as Masonite boards and commercial paints. (Contemporary African Art, 2018) He started his own unique style that later was named after him.

When Edward was not working at the hospital, he would be painting at his home, where he lived with his wife and two children. (African Contemporary, 2006) As time went on, his paintings sold well and demand grew causing him to enlist the help of other painters, mostly his family members, who went on to carry on his training and craft following Edward's unfortunate passing. (True African Art, 2017)

In 1971, the National Arts Council, a subsidiary of the National Development Corporation, showcased his work in their display rooms in the City Centre and their pavilion at the 1971 Saba Saba International Trade Fair. Edward made a contract with the National Arts Council, who provided him with material and handled the sale of his paintings. (African Contemporary, 2006)

In 1972, Edward Saidi Tingatinga died after being shot by a police officer in a case of mistaken identity. (True African Art, 2017) His students and fellow painters continued to paint in the Tinga Tinga style and formed the Tinga Tinga Arts Cooperative Society in his name. (Indigo Arts Gallery, 2021)

Due to his short life, Edward left behind a relatively small amount of paintings that are highly sought after and recognized by collectors and visitors. (Contemporary African Art, 2018) He had doubts in his artistry as he felt he was not a “polished artist” but he still went on to say, “All the same they are good; this is why people buy them. They must somehow be meaningful.” (African Contemporary, 2006)

## 2.2 His work, style, themes and influences

Edward’s lack of formal training led to a “simple, direct and naïve approach to natural subjects, lacking in nuance and detail but bursting with exuberant life, whimsy and colour.” (Indigo Arts Gallery, 2021) His style was naïve, humorous and bordering on surrealistic due to the exaggerated forms of his subjects. (TingaTinga African Art, 2018) The paintings were often colourful, vibrant and at times crowded and flat with a lack of perspective and even lacking depth in a few, as seen in figure 3. (Contemporary African Art, 2018)



Fig. 3: Group of paintings by E. S. Tingatinga.

Source: <https://www.contemporary-african-art.com> – Retrieved: 11/01/2022



Fig. 4: Untitled (Twiga) by E. S. Tingatinga

Source: <https://artauctioneastafrica.com> – Retrieved: 11/01/2022



Fig. 5: Untitled (Kifaru/Rhino) by E. S. Tingatinga

Source: <https://artauctioneastafrica.com> – Retrieved: 11/01/2022



The subjects for his paintings were drawn from anything and everything around him. From birds to animals such as cheetahs, hyenas, leopards, giraffes, elephants, gazelles as seen in figures 4 and 5. His work also depicted scenes of village life, as seen in figure 6, and landscapes such as that of the savannah. (Another Africa, 2011).



Fig. 6: Untitled (Women washing clothes by the lake) by E. S. Tingatinga. Source: <https://circleartagency.com> – Retrieved: 11/01/2022



Fig. 7: Wall paintings in Ngapa, the village of E. S. Tingatinga's father



Fig. 8: Wall paintings in Ngapa depict animals in a naïve style that might resemble Tingatinga art  
Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org> – Retrieved: 11/01/2022

Edward drew his inspiration from his genetic heritage such as folklores from Ndonde or Makua culture and exterior mural wall paintings done on huts by villagers of his tribe such as in figures 7 and 8. (Indigo Arts Gallery, 2021).

There was a certain endearing charm to his work with its lack of sophistication, fresh approach, vibrant colours and cheerful subject matter that drew in many. (Contemporary African Art, 2018)

### 2.3 Tingatinga Arts Cooperative Society (TACS)

Following Edward's death, his students and some of his family members came together to form the Tingatinga Partnership, later renamed and registered as the Tingatinga Arts Cooperative Society (TACS) on 28th July 1990. (Tingatinga Art, 2019)

The society acted as a painting school for the Tinga Tinga art style and as a means to make, promote and sell the artworks of artists in the society. It enabled their members to earn a living from their work. (Tingatinga Art, 2019) This is still the case today.

The first generation of artists from the Tingatinga School essentially reproduced the works of Edward. Some key artists from the first generation include Omari Amonde, Mohamed Charinda, Maurus Malikita, Hashim Mruta, Damian Msagula, David Mzuguno and Peter Martin. (Contemporary African Art, 2018).

In the 1990s, the second generation of artists from the society took inspiration from the new transformations in the Tanzanian society after independence to create new trends in the Tinga Tinga art style. The subjects of the paintings started to include the new urban and multi-ethnic society of Dar es Salaam and even the use of perspective was introduced here and there. (Mrs. Lundgren's Art Room, 2017) Currently, almost one hundred painters are working in the cooperative, including a few women. The mission of the cooperative is to create a sustainable livelihood for the painters and to make their African-style paintings globally accessible. They also strive to empower African artists and their families to break the cycle of poverty by providing access to education, healthcare and financial inclusion. (TingaTinga African Art, 2018).

#### 2.4 Features of Tinga Tinga Art

Tinga Tinga art has evolved—as seen in figures 9 and 10 which feature the same subject of a peacock in a tree, with figure 10 being a more contemporary approach to Edward Tingatinga's original style—over the years according to changing trends and an artist's own nuances and styles infused. However, at the core, there are common features of the art style that still prevail.

The paintings often involve nature with its core subject matter as animals, some often depicted in an exaggerated manner. The animals include hornbills, antelopes, giraffes, leopards, zebras, elephants, peacocks, amongst others as seen in figures 11, 12 and 13.



Fig. 9: Peacock by E. S. Tingatinga  
Source: <https://www.contemporary-african-art.com> – Retrieved: 13/01/2022



Fig. 10: Peacock in a tree by Kilaka. Source: <https://www.contemporary-african-art.com> – Retrieved: 13/01/2022



The paintings are simple and flat with vivid and bright colours, such as reds, oranges, blues, greens, yellows, to name a few being used across the paintings. The backgrounds, if not a landscape, usually consist of gradient backgrounds, as seen in figure 14, or sometimes single solid colours.

There is a sense of naivety, surrealism, humour and sarcasm in the paintings, and oftentimes it is explicit



Fig. 11: Untitled by Mwamede  
Source: <http://www.tingatinga.ch> – Retrieved: 13/01/2022



Fig. 12: Punda Milia Baba na Mama by Rubuni. Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org> – Retrieved: 13/01/2022



Fig. 13: Untitled by Zuberi  
Source: <https://www.flash-frontier.com> – 13/01/2022

as seen in figure 15. (TingaTinga African Art, 2018) The animals are particularly painted in unique poses, such as in figure 16, that add to the caricature of the animals and some are characterised with dots or circular spots on their bodies as in figure 17, if they usually have spotted skin or fur.



Fig. 14: Untitled by Mkumba  
Source: <http://www.tingatinga.ch> – Retrieved: 14/01/2022



Fig. 15: Aspects of a Tiger by Omary  
Source: <https://www.contemporary-african-art.com> – Retrieved: 14/01/2022





Fig. 16: Untitled by Mwamedu  
Source: <https://www.facebook.com> – Retrieved:  
14/01/2022



Fig. 17: Untitled by Rubuni  
Source: <https://www.anotherafrica.net> –  
Retrieved: 14/01/2022

## 2.5 Tinga Tinga Tales

Tinga Tinga Tales is a children's television series that aired in 2010 and was aimed at four to six-year-olds. (TVTropes, 2012) It was commissioned by the BBC for its CBeebies channel and by Disney Channel for its Disney Junior block. (TVTropes, 2012) The show is based on traditional African folk tales and the animation takes inspiration from Tinga Tinga art, as can be seen with the show's poster in figure 18.

The show was produced by Tiger Aspect Productions in conjunction with Homeboyz Animation in Nairobi, Kenya. (BBC, 2010) The music was produced by Kenyan singer-songwriter Eric Wanaina. (BBC, 2010)



Fig. 18: Tinga Tinga Tales. Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk> – Retrieved: 15/01/2022

### 3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher used qualitative methods to obtain relevant data for the research and used the objective to guide the process. Qualitative methods were used to obtain optimal results.

The study was carried out at the University of Nairobi located in Nairobi, Kenya. The subjects of this study are Edward Saidi Tingatinga and the Tinga Tinga art movement.

Data was collected from existing sources of data such as data from the internet, various libraries and archives, magazines and newspapers.

The data collected was then analysed using content and visual analysis. Content analysis is used to analyse documented information in the form of texts, media, or even physical items. (Bhatia, Your Guide to Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis Methods, 2018) Visual analysis is used to analyse content from photographs taken and images from other sources. It is the science of analytical reasoning supported by interactive visual interfaces. It combines visualization, human factors and data analysis. (Sisense, 2017)

### 4.0 RESULTS

Tinga Tinga as an art style and as a movement has left a significant impact on the African art scene and continues to do so. It has cemented its own unique definitive style that gives it its own distinction and is recognized not only in Africa but internationally.

Edward Saidi Tingatinga created an art style that creates a sense of community as seen with the Tingatinga Arts Cooperative Society (TACS) that gives artists a chance to try out their creativity and see where it leads them.

It's an art style that can shift through different mediums such as animation and as a tool for storytelling. The Tinga Tinga Tales television series is a good example of this and it not only educates young viewers with life lessons from the African folk tales but it also exposes them to a captivating, whimsical and surreal art style that pushes them to open their minds and be creative.

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the Tinga Tinga art style and movement is a force to be reckoned with and does not seem to be slowing down anytime soon. Its simplicity, naivety and surrealism allow a wider range of artists and potential artists an easier time to take up the art style whilst incorporating their nuances and styles without sacrificing either.

To keep its legacy alive, exhibitions showcasing the older works and contemporary works using the style would be a good start. Artists innovating the style with the ever rapidly evolving digital scene and finding a common ground between Tinga Tinga art and digital techniques and presentations to reach a wider audience.

The researcher recommends further study on Tinga Tinga's legacy as an art movement and how future generations can keep its legacy alive.

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