

Graffiti Artists in East Africa

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Abstract

The desire of people to leave their mark on walls has been around for thousands of years. Archaeologists have found graffiti scratched on walls in the city of Pompeii as old as 1908. This paper looks at graffiti designed by the East African graffiti artists and their works as an art and design form. It also sought to establish how they have used graffiti as a social economic impact factor to change themselves and the environment around them for the better. The study applied desktop and multiple case study research methods and confined itself to the East African region. Newspaper articles, past interviews from online documents and material from East African graffiti artists were main source of data. The paper discusses graffiti artists; Jobray from Uganda, Rao from Rwanda, Moha from Kenya and the Wachata Collective crew from Tanzania. The paper concluded that local East African graffiti artists have little diversification in design business of interior and exterior that communicate ideas and aesthetics. Governments provide inadequate support for graffiti spaces and merchandise thus minimizing work to thrive in the cities. Graffiti artists are not given adequate respect, support and recognition of their art works. Graffiti has not been used maximumly to create social awareness campaigns. The paper recommends that apprenticeship programs should be supported and artists should come up with institutions, which can be able to document techniques works and facilitate in teaching programs. Graffiti artists should use their work to inspire, express and also speak truth to power. The pioneers of this art form are also called upon to dispense their knowledge to the next generation. The paper also recommends that graffiti artists should develop their own style, expression and inspirations to create identity and authenticity in their works. Further the artists need support from their respective local governments, mentorship programmes and diversification of their services and business.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Authentic, Awareness, Local graffiti, Murals, Street Art, Visual arts.

INTRODUCTION

Graffiti has been around from millennia. From wall etchings of political caricatures during the Antiquity period in the Roman Empire to cave paintings when human beings were still living in caves. The modern aesthetic and characteristic of graffiti reached Africa in the 1970s. Across the world, especially in the developed countries where the modern art form may have begun, graffiti artists have existed and fought for their legitimacy in urban places making it a lucrative profession in some major cities. Organizations have been formed with mentorship programmes to teach the next generations. The art form has also been able to merge with other cultures, for example, the hip-hop culture and the entertainment industry.

This modern phenomenon shall be described in detail in the literature showing the different styles

around the world. The theory also describes their functions and purpose. The focus of the paper is the graffiti artists in East Africa. The main objective of the paper is to establish the challenges faced, interventions being carried out, and innovations being put in place by artists in developing the new profession in East Africa.

The paper establishes who the graffiti artists are, how long they have been in this new industry, their beginnings, artistic influence and inspirations, organizational efforts and mentorship, and who supports them. The paper examines what has made the graffiti artists pioneers in the graffiti landscape in East Africa. Further, the paper studies the support and the transitions of the industry over the years and the dominant players, social awareness of the art, effects in communication, how it is being used for income opportunities and

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the backlash it may receive.

THEORY

Despite a proliferation of contemporary arts in Africa, in the East Africa region, literature on graffiti art is scarce. Unique in form, graffiti is also called spray can art, subway art or aerosol art. This is the decorative imagery done by paint or other means to buildings, public transport or other property. Buule (2018) states that graffiti can be a writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed on a walk way or a wall or other surface in a public space. Graffiti origins have been linked to the classical Antiquity and Prehistoric times (**Figure 1**). Some scholars debate that in ancient times, graffiti displayed phrases of love declarations and simple words of thought (Buule, 2018). This came with the advent of written language and wall paintings (visualartscork, n.d.). The desire of people to leave their mark on walls however has been around for thousands of years. Archaeologists have found graffiti scratched on walls in the city of Pompeii as old as 1908. Contemporary street art beginnings can be traced to tagging, scratching initials or a name on public property in the late 1960s (Buule, 2018).



FIGURE 1
 Oldest cave painting ever discovered (4400 years old)
 Source: Lisickis 2020

Contemporary graffiti was started during the post 1960s movement, which involved decorating or defacing the urban environment by aerosol spray cans, spray cans, acrylics, stencils, paints and markers. It first emerged in New York and Philadelphia. Graffiti developed strong links together with the underground hip-hop culture (visualartscork, n.d.). Graffiti brings life to monotonous walls, conveys different kinds of messages and is a creative expression of the artist

(Wambugi, 2017). This art form became appealing with drawings of people dominating the walls of urban settings all over the world. The artworks were done on subway trains, walls, industrial wastelands, subways and billboards. Graffiti has now spread globally in major cities, and in some, it is celebrated as a work of art (**Figure 2** (visualartscork, n.d.).



FIGURE 2
 Graffiti on a Swedish subway train
 Source: u/uppn 2017

Types of Graffiti Art

There are several ways of classifying this art:-

Street gang art

This is art used to mark territories. In the early days, gangs in LA, Philadelphia, and New York; like the Savage Nomads gang, used graffiti art as shown in **Figure 3** (visualartscork, n.d.).



FIGURE 3
 New York, NY July 1972 - New York street gang "Savage Skulls"
 Source: Laffont 2017

Anarchist street art

This is the largest category of graffiti art. It is described as the work of political or social activists

with complex cultural agendas. It is also seen to be as anarchistic self-expression (Figure 4). One of the most renowned work in this category is that of the famous UK graffiti artist known as Banksy (visualartscork, n.d.).



FIGURE 4
 Banksy's Napalm done in 2004
 Source: Indrisek 2019

Political protest art

This category is seen during authentic political protest. This was mostly done before the Berlin wall and the collapse of Soviet East Germany (visualartscork, n.d.). Figure 5 shows Swift9, Kenyan graffiti artists, doing graffiti on Kenyan

political corruption (visualartscork, n.d.).





FIGURE 5
 Kenyan graffiti artists Swift9
 Source: Wesangula 2013






Types of Graffiti Art Forms

Table 1 shows the different types of graffiti art forms.

Historically, graffiti artists tended to seek anonymity as attributed to a combination of reasons. Buule (2018) explains that sometimes the graffiti makers constantly had the looming threat of facing consequences for displaying their graffiti and hence this led many to choose to protect

TABLE 1: Different types of graffiti art forms

Techniques of Graffiti Art	Examples
<p>Tagging: an act of applying a tag or signature to a surface, although these tags can be highly complex in content and calligraphic in appearance (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: libreshot 2017</p>
<p>Throw up: is larger than a tag. It is painted very rapidly in no more than two or three colors (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: Sabio 2019</p>

<p>Piece/Master Piece: is more detailed than a tag. With greater intricacy and a wider variety of colors (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: tbm_zoo 2015</p>
<p>Blockbuster/Roller: is a block-shaped work often performed with a paint-roller and executed simply to cover a large area in order to stop other graffiti sprayers from painting on the same wall (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: watchingpaintdryblogging 2015</p>
<p>Top-to-bottoms: graffiti work that covers entire subway trains (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: Ravishankar 2013</p>
<p>Stencil graffiti: using cut-outs for the rapid creation of complex shapes (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: Ellsworth-Jones 2013</p>
<p>Wild style: is a more detailed form of graffiti. Marked interlocking letters and connecting points, creating a more complex, occasionally indecipherable tag or image, characterize it (visualartscork, n.d.).</p>	 <p>Source: way 2011</p>

Source: Author 2019

their identities and reputation by remaining anonymous.

Street artists are often hassled by the city council officers, as they are considered to be ‘dirtying’ the city. The international graffiti art scene does not help either, as it barely recognizes street artists from Africa, regardless of their talent. The revolution of graffiti should be universal, not just in the western world (Wambugi, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODS

This section covers the planning of the study and how data was collected, analyzed and presented. It focuses on the data sources, methods of data collection, analysis, presentation and the limitations the researcher faced while undertaking the study. The artists selected were analyzed in the following thematic criteria through content analysis: artistic expressions, artistic inspirations, employment and consumerism, government support, private support, mentorship programs and social awareness campaigns. The artists selected will be analyzed through these criteria to explore these thematic contents in their professions.

This research study employed a desktop exploratory critical review of the different graffiti of different artists. Secondary and tertiary sources of data are used. Secondary sources include research papers, books and e-books. Tertiary sources are internet researches. Documents on the trends from already existing artifacts, online articles, newspapers, journals, websites, blog reports and online videos within the graffiti topic were analyzed and relevant data recorded. The sources of data aided in synthesize existing knowledge in graffiti in the chosen population, analyze historical trends, and identify patterns on a large scale.

Purposive sample was used to select the countries and the graffiti artists (**Table 2**). The rationale for sampling method was that graffiti art is one of the upcoming disciplines in art in East Africa, the need to understand how it is taking shape in the local context and the fact that these graffiti artists are the most prominent in the region. The study purposively sampled five diverse graffiti artists that deemed fit the criteria of graffiti artists from

East Africa in a bid to understand different artist experiences in East Africa within their countries and context.

TABLE 2: Graffiti artists (under study) in East Africa

Graffiti artists	Country
Olego Job Alomet -Jobray	Uganda
Mohamed Kartarchand Bagatiram Rala Ram- Moha Grafix (Moha)	Kenya
Wachata Collective crew	Tanzania
Rao	Rwanda

Source: Author 2019

Content analysis is a research method used to identify patterns in recorded communication. To conduct content analysis, one systematically collects data from a set of texts, which can be written, oral, or visual. Content analysis can be both quantitative (focused on counting and measuring) and qualitative (focused on interpreting and understanding). In both types, one categorizes or ‘codes’ words, themes, and concepts within the texts and then analyzes the results (Luo, 2019). Descriptive and content analysis were used to analyze the collected data.

RESULTS

Content analysis has been carried out for four graffiti artists from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. Thematic areas; artistic expressions, artistic inspirations, employment and consumerism, government support, private support, mentorship programs and social awareness campaigns are used to analyze the work of each artist.

History of Graffiti in Uganda

In Uganda, graffiti artists are not well known, neither is the public aware that graffiti is a rebellion against the government or society’s rules. Artists struggled to attain quality graffiti materials as Uganda is a landlocked country, and thus its quality of spray-painting materials is substandard. Most of its materials come from abroad via Kenya with some shops and suppliers

having limited number colors and infective spray cans (Kakatshozi, 2019). In the early 2000s, graffiti works were a growing art form in Kampala. The only graffiti artist then that was visible was Xenson, and he popularized the genre in Uganda. Today graffiti tag and commissioned murals bloom on bare walls across the capital city. They bear the names of international and Ugandan street artists (Letsbebrief, 2018).

Although there are struggles, artists and designers in Uganda consider graffiti the most powerful art movement in recent history. Buule (2018) observes that graffiti has taken up its place in the conversation of Uganda's governance, constitutionalism and democratization with messages on latest political trends becoming visible in the public spaces (Figure 6). Buule (2018) continues to add that besides political messages, graffiti can be used to carry social messages like domestic violence, child abuse and sanitation, among others.



FIGURE 6
 Paintings and messages to the public to vote Mr Robert Kyagulanyi as the Kyadondo East Member of Parliament on the Northern bypass tunnel in Bwaise, Kampala
Source: Buule 2018

Jobray graffiti artwork in Uganda

Jobray or Olego Job Alomet is a prominent graffiti and mural artist from Uganda. His tags and his distinct circular drawing style identify his work. His graffiti style favors nature inspired patterns and vibrant palettes (Figure 7). Jobray started painting in 2008. He was introduced when he joined Breakdance Project Uganda (BPU). Initially, he started with illustration and drawing. One of the graffiti artists who inspired him to join the art form at the time was Oscar Kibuuka. Oscar

was a graffiti artist before he started photography (Letsbebrief, 2018).



FIGURE 7
 Jobray at work
Source: Letsbebrief 2018

Jobray states that the graffiti artist that inspired him from Kampala was Xenson. He believes Xenson opened the way for people to do graffiti in Kampala. He was among the first with Sparrow and Mos Opten. Jobray has also been inspired by outside graffiti artists like; E-monk from Canada who he met mid-2014, Bankslave, WiseTwo, and Swift66 Graffiti from Kenya and the Collective Wachata Crew from Tanzania. A few artists that he has also met are the likes of Bobby Serrano, from Germany and Oibel from Switzerland (Letsbebrief, 2018).

Jobray's inspirations come from images projecting in his head when he thinks of something to draw. He sketches certain things from illusions or fantasies. His work is an abstraction of what does not exist and he believes graffiti is the medium that makes it come alive (Figure 8). Most of his work no longer exists because the Uganda City Council broke down a lot of structures and ghettos for development. His best work was at Design Hub Kampala; it was not like graffiti but had a similar style (Letsbebrief, 2018).

Jobray has done residences and workshops at the Millerntor Gallery in Hamburg Germany. He has also held a graffiti exhibition in Belgium titled Urban Diversity. In his collaborative works, he collaborated with East African street artists on a mural depicting the future of Africa at the Transform Africa Summit in Kigali, Rwanda. He has also been designing for many festivals, for



FIGURE 8
One of Jobray's graffiti paintings
Source: Letsbebrief 2018

example Nyege Nyege festival designs (Letsbebrief, 2018).

History of Graffiti in Kenya

The Kenya graffiti scene has grown in a span of 20 years or so. There are three main categories of graffiti in Kenya; graffiti murals, commissioned portraits and graffiti on public transport vehicles called matatus (public van). The pioneer artists in Kenya were Moha, Bankslave, Swift9, WiseTwo, Uhuru B and Smokey. These artists came up in the early 2000s with Bankslave and Moha being one of the earliest artists to start the profession in the 1990s. Graffiti on matatus occurred first with Moha being the godfather and pioneer of using stylistic letters, variety of colors, aesthetics and images in his graffiti designs (Africauncensored, 2018).

Nairobi slums are one of the inceptions of this phenomenon. Majority of the earliest Kenyan artists in graffiti had a passion of art and were self-driven. They came from poor backgrounds and saw graffiti as alternatives from poverty and crime. The cost of being a graffiti artist in the early days was very expensive. The art form was not well recognized and was not considered a source of income. Materials then were very expensive and artists pursued the profession out of a desire to express what they saw in their surrounding and to highlight social cultural issues while other artists were inspired by the growing graffiti matatu culture (Africauncensored, 2018).

With time, graffiti influence awareness

phenomenon has grown in Kenya especially gaining traction with the Kenyan youth. Artists got support from Non-governmental organizations (NGO) and the government came later on. Majority of the pioneering artists were able to go abroad to display their works in exhibitions, workshops and competitions. The artists exhibited their works in Australia, Germany, New York, Berlin, Sweden, Amsterdam, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda (Africauncensored, 2018). Artists have also started creating their own workshop centers like Graffiti Workshops Kenya Cultural Centre run by Uhuru B Brown (Gacheru, 2018).

The modern success for graffiti artists is to be attributed to support from the Kenyan youth. They have identified strongly with modern graffiti artists and their works relating with their aesthetics and local identity. The BSQ Studio (Bomb Squad) graffiti group is one of the recent new talents in the graffiti phenomenon in Kenya. The group was pioneered by Swift9, consisting of Brian Musasia (Msale), Bebuto Thufu and Kaymist (Ken Otieno) (Gacheru, 2018).

Modern exhibitions have been done in Alliance Francaise, a French institution in Nairobi's CBD, WAPI at the British Council in Upper Hill, Nairobi. Other locations included the Go Down Art Centre. The themes for these exhibitions were to be African and African American history and culture (Figure 9). Graffiti artists have also gotten support and mentorship from traditional visual artists in Kenya, such as Patrick Mukabi, a renowned Kenyan visual artist. The mentor came up with the 1st and 2nd Edition Spray Paint Dairies Nairobi Graffiti Street Art workshop at the Railway Museum. A multitude of Kenyan graffiti artist were involved in highlighting their talents (Gacheru, 2018).

In Kenya, graffiti has mainly been used for social and political awareness, social justice issues, corruption and African empowerment. Some of the most notable political awareness graffiti campaigns done by these pioneering artists includes the Ma-Vulture graffiti revolution, the Peace Train Project and the Spray for Change project with Basco Paints (Zurukenya, 2014).



FIGURE 9

Lupita by graffiti artist Banks slave

Source: Gacheru 2018

Moha Grafix graffiti artwork in Kenya

Mohamed Kartarchand Bagatiram Rala Ram (also referred to as Moha) is the leading matatu graffiti artist in Kenya presently. He is better known as 'Moha Grafix', the person behind 'Straight Outta Moha Grafix', done at his workshop in industrial area (Kasuku, 2019).

His parents died when he was young. He was left with two sisters. They struggled to make ends meet as they were still in school. They could no longer afford college and he dropped out of education after high school (Glader, 2017). Moha and his siblings had to find jobs to feed themselves (Kasuku, 2019). Moha was later employed in a company that dealt with corrugated sheets. He worked there for one year as a salesperson then went to another company dealing with paints. He was poor at selling his products (Glader, 2017). He decided to put his art skills to work by starting out small. In April of 1999, he left work and went to a garage to learn how to draw on matatu buses in Mombasa up to 2002. He started by making drawings and paintings to sell. He realized his passion was in people seeing his work in the open and the fame that came with it. His understanding was that graffiti artist who worked on walls longed the same recognition (Glader, 2017).

As time went by, Moha started getting small jobs but he was not recognized yet. The first matatu he ever did was called 'Ganja farm' in 2004, the body was brown and he drew marijuana leaves in green. He later wrote 'ganja' and then below it was 'farm'. On the rear he wrote, 'The guilty shall be punished'.

Then he tagged the work with his name, Moha. The body artwork was so good that it garnered attention. After some while, a client asked him to do a car and he had to look for someone's garage to do the work (Glader, 2017).

Eventually, he was getting a car to work on each month. He made the decision to move his workshop back home. He added employees as soon he was getting orders of up to ten cars at once. This led to him looking for an actual garage as his neighbors complained of the paint smells and the pollution. He acquired a garage near his home for a year. In 2005, he moved to his current garage in Eastland's Industrial area, Nairobi as shown in **Figure 10** (Glader, 2017).



FIGURE 10

Workers sewing in the upholstery and interior design section at Moha's garage

Source: Glader 2017

Moha believes that graffiti artwork breathes life into public transport vehicles and by extension, the towns and cities in which they roam (Aradi, 2018). As a Muslim, his principle is that he would never paint naked women and vulgar things (Glader, 2017). According to Moha (Interview, 2019), the main reason for demand for the graffiti art on 'matatu' is competition. He further stated that the 'matatu' industry is at its highest peak in competition with 'matatu' owners seeking to show wealth and prestige by having over the top designs for their cars, which would set them apart. Due to this, the industry works like the fashion industry with what is hip getting the demand and attention. This is the dominant characteristic of the 'matatu' culture (Glader, 2017).

Moha states that ‘matatu’ is like a trend of what is new. Concepts for the art can be inspired by a trending musician, football club or what the owner of the ‘matatu’ likes. This can be a sport, musician or celebrity, whatever exciting phenomenon would be trending at that moment (Glader, 2017).

Moha is self-taught and had to experiment while on the job perfecting his skill in the process. The following shows the steps Moha takes when designing an artwork for client’s ‘matatu’ (Kasuku, 2019).

Step 1: He consults the client first and gets a brief on what they want

Step 2: He inspects the condition of the vehicle to determine the scope and viability of work

Step 3: He nips and tucks the vehicle’s body before spray-painting and any other body modifications and additional accessories are done before painting commences

Step 4: He assists the client in choosing colors from a colour chart

Step 5: Spray painting begins

The time and resources spent on a particular vehicle depend on the budget and details that go into it. **Figure 11** shows one of his acclaimed jobs; the artwork for a ‘matatu’ called ‘Tazmania’, which garnered him media presence (Kasuku, 2019). **Table 3** indicates the scope and pricing for ‘matatu’ graffiti art work charged by Moha Graffix.

Then transport minister, John Michuki, first introduced the Michuki rules in 2003 (Aradi, 2018). The National Transport and Safety



FIGURE 11
 Mohammed Kartar Tazmania artwork
Source: Kasuku 2019

Association (NTSA) again put them in effect in 2018. Moha almost went out of business due to the ban on extravagant matatu features like tint, graffiti, rims and lights. The ban also meant that a majority of his employees would be rendered jobless. The laws were geared to improving road safety by authorizing all matatus to have safety belts, speed governors and not have any body art present to not distract other drivers on the road. Graffiti artists like Moha were not against the road safety rules improvement. Their problem was the relation between graffiti features and road safety (Aradi, 2018). Later, through a collective effort and public awareness by the Matatu Community, the Uhuru Government lifted the ban (Kasuku, 2019).

There has been an increase of global popularity of the ‘matatu’ culture, making Moha a talented celebrity in the industry. This is due to the ‘matatu’ character cult-like following, loud music and colourful appearance. Due to his popularity and the ‘matatu’ industry, Kenyan news organizations

TABLE 3: Matatu design pricing

Scope of work	Price
Small matatu body work; doing the spray paint work and design	Ksh.70,000
Designing the roof/sides/dash board body work	Ksh.100,000
Installing new chrome rims	Ksh.100,000
Installing LED strip lighting per the clients’ design and wiring for a music system and speakers	Ksh.70,000

Source: Glader 2017

have interviewed Moha and he has been profiled by several international publications (Aradi, 2018).

Different tourist agencies have brought tourists to his garage in industrial area, Nairobi, to see how normal vans are transformed to aesthetic lively matatus (**Figure 12**). They also go to the Nairobi streets to see and experience them in action. Moha has highlighted his work in a few countries, from China to South Africa, where he does public appearances of modifying a bus to fit the appearance of a Kenyan matatu (Aradi, 2018).



FIGURE 12
Moha displaying some of the graffiti at his garage in Industrial Area, Nairobi
Source: Aradi 2018

Moha is currently (2019) negotiating selling rights to the trademarked 'Straight Outta Moha Grafix' in Uganda. A startup in Uganda has been trying to start a similar business and the name carries a lot of weight. He has also been getting commissions for people's homes in Eastland's Nairobi area to do graffiti in their homes and offices (Kasuku, 2019).

Most of Moha's employees are contractors who step in when work gets overwhelming (**Figure 13**). Moha has started a training program to mentor the youth on new talent in apprenticeship to enable them to start on their own. He sees this as a way of creating employment in Kenya and empower the youth. Moha also belongs to a graffiti community group on Facebook and WhatsApp for matatu artists. According to Glader (2017), the groups are used to critic each other's work passing on advice and new techniques.



FIGURE 13
A worker at Moha's auto body shop molds clay, which serves as an adhesive in body modification
Source: Glader 2017

History of Graffiti in Tanzania

The youth along the coastal towns of Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Mtwara and Zanzibar started to become stowaways in ships that entered and exited the country (**Figure 14**). They tried to leave the country through these ships for greener pastures abroad in western countries. This was after the Tanzania-Uganda war that sent Dictator Idi Amin Dada into exile (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013). These youths started tagging their real names and nicknames on city walls using charcoal which was available in any homestead and was easy to use in 'leaving a mark'. This new art form was given the name 'chata', a Swahili slang term for graffiti. Spray cans were not available at that time. No one paid attention to this new art trend and it passed unnoticed by art critics, the media and government in general (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013).

Wachata Collective crew graffiti artwork in Tanzania

WCT stands for Wachata, which is taken from the English word, charter (**Figure 15**). It is also a Swahili slang term for graffiti, derived from the stowaways who pioneered the charcoal tagging style back in the day. Graffiti has been present in Tanzania since 1970s during the time of 'Ujamaa' (African



FIGURE 14
 Spray cans used by the Wachata crew
 Source: Graffitisouthafrica 2013



FIGURE 15
 Wachata crew tagline
 Source: Graffitisouthafrica 2013

Socialism). During this period, most Tanzanians had no access to western culture, the internet and computer technology (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013).

The first western graffiti artist was Zaki, a South African expatriate who did the first ever-western graffiti piece in Dar es Salaam. The piece spelt CURE. In 2004, Sela 1 graffiti from Germany did many pieces in Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Arusha as well. He used his work to commemorate the first Tanzanian messengers of graffiti. He was also honoring the past stowaways. He showed aspiring Tanzanian graffiti artists what other artists were doing in the western countries. A show dubbed Opened Eyes 2007 brought 'Words and Pictures' (WaPi), a monthly open mic event that celebrated all elements of hip-hop and graffiti. This was the beginning of Wachata and helped it to take form (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013).

WaPi was sponsored by different organizations and NGOs (Figure 16). It was able to create a foundation for underground creativity through visual arts and speech. It also enhanced confidence and excitement among the youth. In the history of graffiti and hip-hop in Tanzania, WaPi was the one and only place that offered free materials (spray cans, masks and markers) and white walls to paint on (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013).



FIGURE 16
 Wachata Collective work at the British Council
 Source: Graffitisouthafrica 2013

Four members of WaPi project, all with different art backgrounds, form WCT's inner circle (core). WCT is the only crew that is engaged in graffiti in Tanzania, the main tool used is a spray can (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013). Since WCT is a collective movement, it has other independent chapters in Mwanza city led by Edo, who is mostly engaged in tattooing, and Yuzzo, and Mizani 86 in Moshi City who make merchandise. Kool Koor, once a member of the Wachata Collective was a legendary graffiti artist from the Bronx, New York City during the 1970s and 1980s, enhanced the Tanzanian graffiti scene (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013). He introduced Wachata to Montana spray cans and shared different techniques and basics of graffiti. WCT crew is also part of Kool Koor's worldwide graffiti movement known as 'YES WE CAN' (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013).

Wachata have been involved in commercial projects with the likes of African TV, Clouds TV, TBC1, British Council and Zantel Epic Marketing campaigns (a mobile telephone company). They have also done graffiti for many hip-hop music videos in Tanzania. Apart from doing graffiti, they

design and print t-shirts to meet the huge market demand for their designs. They hold graffiti classes on Saturdays at the Makutano Arts & Crafts Centre in Oyster Bay and at Nafasi Artspace in Mikocheni. The Tanzanian audience prefers Wachata art especially in corporate advertising and advertising campaigns because of its organic and authentic feel. People refer to their work as pieces of art (Figure 17). This success has been achieved by the WCT principles of its work (Graffitisouthafrica, 2013).



FIGURE 17
 Wachata Collective in action
 Source: Graffitisouthafrica 2013

History of Graffiti in Rwanda

Graffiti in Rwanda has been a recent development. One of the most dominant phenomena in graffiti in Rwanda is *Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga* which means 'to create, to see, to learn' in Kinyarwanda. The event was started in 2013 by Judith Kaine with the idea that Contemporary Rwandan artists and community members would be brought together through public street art. Kaine after being in Rwanda for a while observed that there was an absence of local public art in Rwanda's public spaces and thus *Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga* was born. Kaine wanted it to be easy for the local people to access their art. She wanted the locals to engage in creating a new community and public context for people. Feiger (2017) explains that the art consisted of vivid murals adorning walls around Rwanda's cities that would share stories, encourage dialogue, creativity and social messages (Figure 18). *Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga* is a social enterprise that focuses on how street art can create positive social change. It also hosts workshops, artist talks,

and exhibits to promote the integration of art and activism (Feiger, 2017).



FIGURE 18
 Street scene in Kigali during the *Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga* event
 Source: Feiger 2017

Rao graffiti artwork in Rwanda

Rao, an internationally acclaimed Belgian graffiti and street artist, had visited Rwanda on a mission to promote environmental conservation through art based on activism and creative community engagement. Rao prefers using spray or acrylic paints. His artistic career started with the artist painting buildings and warehouses in his hometown of Ghent, in Belgium, before he eventually found his artistic signature with distinctive black and white style animals that examine the relationship between man and the environment. Rao typically creates animal murals based on the location he is in, for Rwanda is the mountain gorillas, especially in Kinigi. The work in Kinigi is created in partnership with Rwanda Development Board (RDB) in an effort to celebrate conservation (Opobo, 2017).

Rao is credited with creating hundreds of murals throughout Europe and other locations around the world. Some of the major cities where his works can be found include; London, New York, Warsaw, Berlin, Madrid, Moscow, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Paris (Opobo, 2017). Rao came to Rwanda under the curation of *Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga* (Figure 19). Rao also gives talks and workshops to local artists about art, activism, and conservation in Kigali (Opobo, 2017).



FIGURE 19
Rao with a hoard of onlookers during the *Kurema, Kureba, Kwigga* 2017 project
Source: Feiger 2017

In an effort to promote environmental conservation through art-based activism, Rao visited Rwanda to create five large-scale public murals depicting animals indigenous to the country. Rao's projects saw Rwanda continue its rich tradition of environmental conservation through public art, in a unique move for one of East Africa's most fascinating countries (Feiger, 2017).

The Okapi, an animal once native to Rwanda and known as the African unicorn, is an endangered relative to the giraffe. These graceful creatures still live in the Democratic Republic of Congo and right on the Rwandan border, but have not been seen in Rwanda for many years (Feiger, 2017). **Figure 20** shows the 15-metre-high graffiti of the almost mythical Okapi in downtown Kigali.



FIGURE 20
Rao's okapi mural during the *Kurema, Kureba, Kwigga* Project
Source: Feiger 2017

Rao has painted three panels in the Musanze region to be permanently displayed at the Volcanoes National Park headquarters in Kinigi. These panels feature the sunbird of Nyungwe National Park, the mountain gorilla of Volcanoes National Park, and the rhinoceros of Akagera National Park (**Figure 21**). Rao's final mural in Rwanda was created in the lively Nyamirambo neighbourhood of Kigali, and featured the endangered elephant shrew (Feiger, 2017).



FIGURE 21
Rao paints at Volcanoes National Park headquarters during *Kurema, Kureba, Kwigga*
Source: Feiger 2017

This two-week project, led by public-art-oriented and Rwandan social enterprise *Kurema, Kureba, Kwigga* and supported by the RDB Board, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium, Goethe Institute Kigali, Rwanda Mountain Tea, Brussels Airlines, and Rwanda Arts Initiative was a success. According Feiger (2017), Kaine, in an interview with The East African newspaper, stated that the murals are meant to provoke conversations about the animals, and create awareness of them and their value to humanity (**Figure 22**).

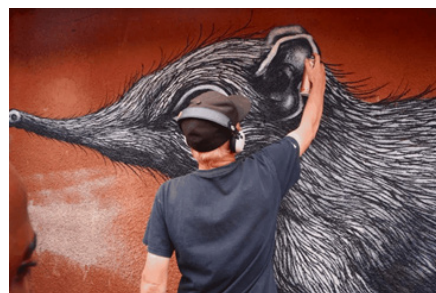


FIGURE 22
Rao paints the elephant shrew during the *Kurema, Kureba, Kwigga* Project
Source: Feiger 2017

DISCUSSION

Artistic Inspiration

The literature indicates that Jobray's graffiti pursuit started in 2008. He is inspired by native patterns and older generation graffiti artists. Moha started his graffiti 21 years ago in 1999. His inspiration comes from city life and trends in modern people's lives. He has been able to use his graffiti skills to bring to life his clients inspirations depending on the works he has been commissioned to do. Wachata Collective crew started in 2007 and inspiration come from western influence. Rao is a Belgian artist with a passion for creating animal murals. Rao represents endangered animals, such as gorillas and elephant shrews, in his graffiti artworks.

A majority of graffiti artists have been inspired by the previous generations or by artists from different localities. This shows connection and transfer of knowledge of the graffiti skill between artists is essential. It also shows that the art form has a different way of learning which is through apprenticeship from one artist to another.

Artistic Expression

Jobray drawings' abstractions, illusions and fantasies were mostly informed by vibrant patterns. His signature tagline mark is characterized as African masks. Rao's style is mostly expressed by black and white artforms. Wachata and Moha styles are mostly mainstream graffiti with an international style. Each artist has their own style and expression of their graffiti works. This easily helps one to identify and relate with an artist's work. These expressions are carried on with time and as one articulates his skills.

Government Support

The only country that has government support is Rwanda. This is due to the Kurema, Kureba, Kwigu 2013 initiative having government involvement. This shows that there lacks government support and recognition of art in most East African countries. In Uganda there is no government support, instead City Council officers terrorize the artists and destroy their works. In Kenya, graffiti artists working with transport industry were almost going out of business on the implementation of

Michuki rules.

Private Sector Support

A majority of all graffiti artists have been able to prevail due to support from private sector businesses, NGOs and International Galleries. The findings also show that the profession attracts a lot of tourism as majority funding of projects and clientele are from foreign western countries. Jobray has displayed projects in Design Hub Kampala space and taken part in workshops and exhibitions in Belgium and Germany. Moha's career has centred on the 'matatu' private sector all his life. Moha has been able to exhibit the Kenyan 'matatu' graffiti in China and South Africa. The Wachata Collective have done work for NGOs, music videos in Tanzania, and WaPi British Council which have helped them get graffiti materials. Rao has gotten support from the Belgian Embassy, Rwandan Development Board, Goethe Institute Kigali, Rwanda Mountain Tea and Brussels Airlines and Rwanda Arts Initiative.

Social Awareness Campaigns

Graffiti has shown to be favorable in creating public awareness for different causes worldwide, as well as here in East Africa. Graffiti works in delivering the message to the masses while at the same time exposing the graffiti artists and the skill itself. Jobray has done collaborative works in East Africa to show awareness on the future of Africa. Moha has done public awareness by persuading the Government to lift graffiti ban on 'matatu' community. Rao has done environmental conservation activism and social awareness to communities' endangered animals in Rwanda using graffiti as well.

Consumerism/Income Employment

Majority of graffiti artists earn from their careers through the works and projects. Moha has been able to commodify graffiti by having a business strategy behind it and diversifying it. This is possible as his graffiti walls are mainly automotive vehicles. Moha has been able to trademark his graffiti company 'Straight Outta Moha Grafix' to startups in Uganda. Moha gets commissioned to work on homes and offices, and he also offers interior and exterior modifications for vehicles and car repair services. Wachata Collective crew

get commissions from various bodies, and they also design graffiti and print t-shirts for advert campaigns.

Mentorship Programs

Wachata Collective presently have mentorship and graffiti classes' programmes. Rao has mentorship workshops under *Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga* where he highlights how he does his graffiti to upcoming artists in Rwanda. Jobray has had different workshops, which involve mentorship programmes. Moha has a mentorship programme for graffiti where new talents are taught in his garage, both on the technical aspect of the art and on how to turn it into a career. Moha believes that this grows the industry and gives a platform for new artists who are passionate but do not have an idea on where and how to start.

Mentorships are beneficial to the industry as they create structure in the theory of the art form and a channel of passing it from one generation to another. This also helps artists to know each other and establish collectives that can create schools, purchase equipment and experiment on new graffiti styles, further giving the East African style an expansive variety of identity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Graffiti firms last longer in business when they are able to diversify. This has helped the graffiti artists to grow their skills and to reach out and offer their services to different sectors. Graffiti has been made into a service which has been commoditized by designing interior and exterior spaces that communicate ideas and aesthetics thus creating jobs.

Government support is necessary to provide graffiti spaces, merchandise and support for startup artists. The revolution of graffiti should be universal, not just in the western world. Graffiti artists should be respected, supported and their art recognized by the government through government engagement, support incentives and initiatives for the youth. The government should also recognize the profession and form a body that will ensure that graffiti work thrives in the cities has a positive impact. This will help in fostering

the next generation of artists and also give power to the artists themselves. Graffiti artists should liaise with the government to form organizations which can better cater to them as artists and share their knowledge and techniques.

Graffiti can be used in social awareness campaigns. It is effective in sending messages to the masses and easily communicates and engages large audiences. Graffiti can be used to educate communities and as a tool to show social problems.

Mentorship programs are avenues for finding new talent and advancing creation of styles and techniques. These programs should be supported and artists should come up with institutions which can be able to document techniques and works, facilitate teaching programs and organize workshops, exhibitions and competitions. The pioneers of this art form are also called upon to dispense their knowledge to the next generation.

Graffiti artists should strive to have their own artistic style and technique, influences and inspirations. In East Africa, graffiti is mostly synonymous with celebration of culture and heritage. As designers, graffiti artists should be proud of culture and look to it as a source of inspiration for their work by integrating local symbols, culture and heritage into their art. Graffiti artists use their work to inspire, express themselves and speak truth to power. As such, they should be given space and avenue to express it.

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