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KENYA G70



Kenya is situated in the east of Africa. It is named after Mount Kenya, the second biggest mountain in Africa.

There are over forty different ethnic groups in Kenya. One of the most famous, the Maasai, also live in Tanzania. They wear colourful beaded jewellery. The Maasai are semi-nomadic pastoralists. This means they move around looking for grazing land for their cattle. The cattle are not only the Maasai's food but also represent their wealth. Kenya also has large, modern, multicultural cities such as Nairobi. Here large businesses have their centre. There are a colourful array of shops and markets.



Carving



Wood carvings, such as this, were originally made in Tanzania. The Makonde tribe used a tough wood called mpingo to carve out incredibly complicated pieces. It was at the end of the First World War that Kenyans began making figures . Mutisya Munge was a Kenyan soldier in Tanzania inspired by local carvings. By the 1930s he had set up a large industry producing animals and Maasai warrior figures.

The figure's shapes are typical of the carvings. The body is round, the facial features are precise, but the ears are large and rectangular. Look at the adult figure. What do you think she might have held in her left hand?



The mother is surrounded by many clinging children. This is a favourite scene because the Makonde believe that a woman was the first human. She symbolises being the mother of the world.

Mpingo is native to the dry East African coastal plains. The heart of the tree is very dense and has a deep brown to black colouring. The hardness, durability and colour make the wood perfect for sculpting. Unfortunately, it is so popular that the tree is endangered. It takes a long time for new trees to grow and it is excessively harvested for wood.

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Earrings and necklaces



The Maasai women wear beaded ornaments in their ears and around their neck. The different bright coloured beads draw attention to the wearer. The amount of orange in the designs is important. It is a colour similar to the gourds. These are filled with milk, used as cups and offered to visitors. It is because of this that the orange is said to represent hospitality. Maybe these pieces were presented by the Maasai to a visitor as a sign of friendship.

The beads were originally produced from raw materials. White beads were made from shells, ivory or bone. Black and blue beads were made from iron, charcoal or horn. Red beads came from seeds, woods or copper. In the nineteenth century, brightly coloured European glass beads arrived in East Africa. Beadworkers used the new materials to make more elaborate colour schemes.



The earrings and the smaller necklace have only a few beads on them. They are surrounded by copper. It has been lightly tapped with a small hammer. This is called texturing and creates the lovely pattern. A hammer is also used to flatten and thin the long strips. The maker has to be careful because if it gets too thin then the copper would snap.





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Basket



The basket is weaved from a strong, durable and stretchy fibre called sisal. Nairobi is one of the main producers of sisal. Sisal is made by crushing and beating the leaves so only the fibres are left.

There are loads of cowrie shells on the basket. These have a significant meaning throughout Africa. They are symbols of womanhood, fertility and wealth. Cowrie shells were even used as a form of currency.

Cheetah



This carved cheetah looks angry. Cheetahs are often confused with leopards. They can be distinguished by their tear stained eye. The cheetah is a skillful hunter with a physique which means it can run at up to 70 mph - as fast as a car. It can only do this in short sprints because the strain on the body creates a lot of heat.

Cheetahs attack their prey, which could be as small as a rabbit or as big as an antelope, by sneaking up close. Then, in a quick burst, it chases after it. The victim is grasped around the neck to choke it. After this it will rest, before eating as much as it can. Unlike most other big cats, such as lions, it will not stay for long with the dead animal. Despite its speed it is not very strong and so if another animal came to compete with the cheetah for food it would probably lose.





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Khangas

Look at how big this outfit is! It is made from brightly printed cotton fabric. The name, khanga, comes from the Kiswahili word for guinea fowl. The bright colours of the costume reminded people of the animal.



Women throughout East Africa wear the khanga when working in fields. They use it to cover their skirts and keep the dust off. It can also be made into a wrap that goes around the head.

Each khanga comes with a proverb written on it in Kiswahili. It can be used to express the wearer's feelings. This one says 'Shilingi ya ua ni maua', it means 'Money is as lovely as flowers but can kill you'. It is a warning to people who think a lot about how much money they can make.

Many young Kenyan women increasingly wear western clothing when outside but they still wear the khanga in the house and their more elaborate ones to weddings and special occasions.





Elephant hair bangle

This bangle is made from real elephant hair.





It is believed that wearing these bracelets protects the owner from illness and accident.

The elephant shed the hair by rubbing against a tree. Then it is collected and made into these complicated pieces.