

SASA ART

MASK Awards showcases power of young creativity

Engaging in art from a young age fosters visual thinking, which instils innovation



Countryside, watercolour /MERCY NABIFO, 11, NYUMBANI CHILDREN'S HOME (COGRI)

ALLA TKACHUK / Creativity, often misunderstood as merely an artistic pursuit, is emerging as a key driver of innovation, problem-solving and economic growth.

In today's rapidly changing world, nurturing creativity from an early age has never been more crucial. MASK Awards, now in its 11th year, stands at the forefront of this movement, providing a platform for young talent from around the globe and recognising their potential to shape the future.

Founded in 2007, MASK (Mobile Art School in Kenya) was born out of the realisation that while all young people are potentially creative, there were few formal opportunities to develop these skills in schools and communities. This lack of support can lead to the diminishment of creativity as children grow. What began as a programme in rural Kenya has since evolved into a global initiative, reaching 63 countries across continents.

MASK's mission is simple yet profound: to equip young people with the creative problem-solving abilities, entrepreneurial mindset and leadership skills necessary to navigate an increasingly complex world. As noted in the World Economic Forum's Fu-

ture of Jobs 2023 report, creativity is a top competence essential for future workforces to confront and solve tomorrow's challenges.

At the heart of MASK's approach is the belief that creativity is cultivated through art. Engaging in art from a young age develops visual thinking, which is key to creative thought, and instils in the young the habit of innovation.

MASK Awards have become a leading platform for showcasing youth creativity. Supported by the Star (Kenya), the UK's Rivers Foundation and The Linbury Trust, it invites young people under 25 to submit works of art or innovative solutions to major

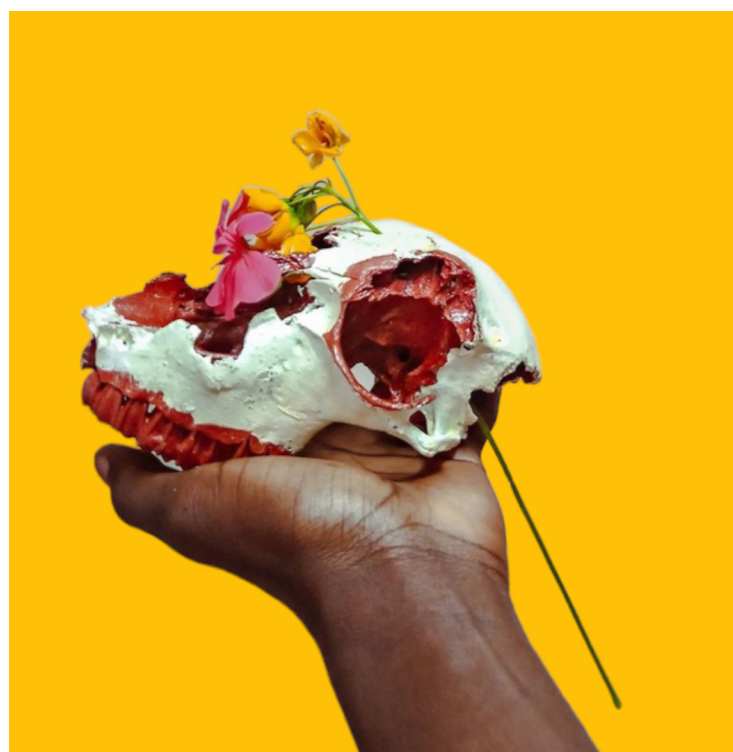
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global issues, such as youth unemployment and climate change.

To date, the MASK Awards have received more than 18,500 submissions from 6,500 individuals and 300 schools in Kenya and beyond. The programme has awarded more than 350 prizes and en-

gaged more than 650,000 people worldwide through exhibitions held at prestigious venues such as the Nairobi National Museum, the US Library of Congress and the Saatchi Gallery.

This year's edition has drawn entries from 56 countries. The



Life and Death photo /AMON KIBET

winners of MASK Awards 2024 reflect the diversity and depth of creative talent emerging from different corners of the world:

Artist of the Year 2024: Amon Kibet (Kenya)

Kibet's work, grounded in photography and film, challenges societal norms and inspires others through visual storytelling.

Emerging Artist of the Year 2024: Lydia Vaz (USA)

At just 16, Vaz is already making waves with her surreal and introspective art, focusing on themes of identity and personal growth.

Innovator of the Year 2024: Saksham Dixit (UAE)

Dixit stands at the cutting edge of the intersection between art, technology and culture, demonstrating how creativity can drive technological and social innovation.

Special Recognition Architect 2024: Lee Momanyi (Kenya)

Momanyi's visionary design for a 'School of the Future' exemplifies how architecture can blend sustainability and creativity to shape the learning environments of tomorrow.

Creative School of the Year 2024: Nyumbani Children's Home (Kenya)

Nyumbani has long championed creativity, fostering a culture of self-expression among children through its art workshops.

For more details about the winners and their groundbreaking work, visit <https://maskcreate.org/mask-awards/mask-awards-24>.

As we celebrate this year's winners, we also look ahead. The need to invest in young creativity has never been more urgent. With support, MASK can continue to provide opportunities to nurture young talents, whether through cash prizes, internships or other vital resources, such as establishing a creativity centre in Nairobi.

Interested organisations can reach out to MASK to discuss potential partnerships, which offer not only the chance to give back but also valuable exposure for your brand.

Lastly, we invite young creatives to follow MASK on social media. Stay updated on the next round of this exciting global competition at <https://maskcreate.org/>.

Alla Tkachuk is the founder of MASK. For partnership inquiries, please contact Alla at contact@maskcreate.org

SASA KINGORI'S WORRIES

Self-love spares you from your role in own suffering

Embrace the naturalness and rawness of your visage and body despite critics



WANJIRU KING'ORI/ Last Friday had to be the third time my edges were laid. Were laid, because I have no idea how to do them. Generally, I have no interest.

I don't know how people spend hours fixing up their hair. In all honestly, I admire the effort of learning and making your own hair. But as for me, my hairdresser Kinya is in charge of the dead cells on my head.

Makeup is another thing that doesn't really appeal to me. I dress up with my female friends and sisters all the time, and I wouldn't tell you what comes first; is it the foundation or the concealer? At most, I do mascara and lip gloss, but they're still not that important to me. I can live without them.

A skincare routine? All I have is a good soap, the goddess Arimis (a loyal customer since time immemorial) on my face, lotion on other body parts and recently, I started using sunscreen. But aloe vera still does the job in curbing UV damage; the more natural the option, the better. As my supervisor told me, "Kumbe we ni brathe" upon telling him this.

I'm not here to gloat. My aim is to endorse the naturalness and rawness of one's visage and body.

I recently became aware that some girls had their own mothers as their first bullies. Threw around the most hurtful words and equally threw mean comments about their appearances. My mother was the first person I can clearly remember calling me beautiful and she still does. She's definitely my biggest fan.

But for how long will we allow

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My dentition hasn't always been the best. However, it never held me back from being bubbly, expressing myself and taking photos

the past to define our present? A tweet I came across was saying, "Realise the role you play in your own suffering." My dentition hasn't always been the best. I got comments here and there. One that I remember was a 'friend' sent someone to say hi to me back in high school and his description was, "She has a bad dental formula." And did it hurt? Yes.

However, it never held me back from being bubbly, expressing myself, taking photos and the many compliments I've gotten throughout the years of how beautiful and unique my smile is. I have braces now.

I am stoic about who I am. And I agree with this Thomas Jefferson quote: "Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances."

Lastly, I wish people could stop asking me why I do not do this and that or apply this and that. For now, I don't care. Maybe some day I will or I simply never will. Yes, lots of us do exist, and my goal is to find more women who share the same sentiments as me.



SASA INTERNET



Tim Reckmann from Hamm, Deutschland

Starlink terminals sell out fast in five African nations

Demand has emptied shelves in half the African markets where it has gone live

CONRAD ONYANGO FOR BIRD STORY AGENCY/

Elon Musk's satellite Internet service Starlink has sold out in major cities across five African countries, including Zimbabwe's capital Harare, just weeks after the new entrant received regulatory approval.

Nigeria has the highest number of cities (five) where the high-speed Internet service kits have run out, according to a coverage map on Starlink's website. The cities are Abuja, Kano, Lagos, Port Harcourt and Warri.

In Kenya, Starlink terminals have flown off the shelves in Nairobi. Terminals are no longer available in Lusaka, Zambia while in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, the status is labelled 'expanding in 2025', indicating that potential customers in these markets will face a longer wait time for the kits.

The rapid sellout of Starlink terminals signals a growing demand for reliable Internet access across Africa, fuelled by a significant drop in price of the kits.

Starlink has rattled the continent's Internet market, prompting traditional providers to adapt their pricing strategies. In

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With Starlink's rapidly growing subscriber base in Kenya, Safaricom ate a humble pie and said it was open to partnerships with satellite Internet providers

Kenya, local Internet providers like Safaricom have been forced to lower their prices to compete with Starlink's competitive offering in a dynamic price war.

Starlink launched a more affordable kit and monthly plan in Kenya in September, just days after Safaricom, the country's largest Internet service provider, increased Internet speeds across its fibre offering and restructured pricing plans to remain competitive.

The new Starlink Mini kit is priced at \$208.38 (Sh26,880), down from the original price of \$347.25 (Sh44,794) introduced in July 2023, with speeds of up to 100 Mbps appealing to cost-conscious consumers seeking high-speed Internet access.

A month earlier, Starlink had introduced a monthly rental option for \$15 (Sh1,934), along with a one-time activation fee of \$21 (Sh2,708).

In response, Safaricom upgraded its services by enhancing its 10 Mbps package to 15 Mbps for \$23 (Sh2,966). Its highest-tier plan now offers a new 1 Gbps connection for \$155 (Sh19,994). Additionally, Safaricom customers on the 20 Mbps plan were upgraded to 30 Mbps at the same price. The 40 Mbps package was doubled to 80 Mbps for \$49 (Sh6,320), and the premium 100 Mbps package increased fivefold to 500 Mbps, costing \$97 (Sh12,512) per month.

Since entering the African market, the SpaceX-owned company Starlink has gained significant traction, becoming a popular choice among users, especially in Kenya and Nigeria.

Data from the Communications Authority of Kenya shows that Starlink had acquired more than 8,000 customers in Kenya by June 30, which accounts for a 0.5 per cent market share. Safaricom holds the largest market share at 36.4 per cent.

"Satellite subscriptions maintained an upward trend following the launch of Starlink services during the year, with 96.6 per cent of satellite customers subscribing to speeds between 100 Mbps and 1 Gbps," CAK said in its sector statistics report.

With Starlink's rapidly growing influence and subscriber base in Kenya, Safaricom ate a humble pie when the telco said it was open to partnerships with satellite Internet providers.

"From a satellite perspective, we have to partner with Starlink or other satellite providers to ensure that technology is integrated throughout," Safaricom CEO Peter Ndegwa said in September.

These sentiments came after Safaricom attempted to persuade the government through a protest letter to the regulatory authority, cautioning against granting independent licences to

satellite Internet providers like Starlink. Safaricom cited concerns about harmful interference with mobile networks due to 'indiscriminate permit approvals'.

However, in September, President William Ruto said at a US-Kenya Business Investment roundtable that Starlink's market entry aligned with the country's policy of enhancing Internet connectivity.

In Nigeria, Starlink had 23,897 active customers by the end of last year following its launch in January of that year. This number is approaching the 27,000 active users of Nigeria's second-largest provider, FiberOne, highlight the newcomer's impact on the market. Nigeria's largest and oldest ISP, Spectranet, reported 113,869 active customers.

In May, Starlink reached a global milestone of 3 million users across nearly 100 countries.

In Africa, Starlink has been approved to operate in Mozambique, Eswatini, Botswana, Rwanda, South Sudan, Burundi, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Malawi, apart from Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia and Madagascar.

SASA TECHNOLOGY



African telcos in a race to build green data centres

Push by giant players comes as more services move online across Africa

CONRAD ONYANGO FOR BIRD STORY AGENCY/ African telcos are racing to construct green-powered data centres as the continent's appetite for digital services grows, fuelled by the world's largest youth population.

Already, the continent is a pioneer and outperformer in mobile money, headlined by Kenya's M-Pesa and other mobile payment services, with 60 per cent of the population accessing the Internet via mobile.

By 2025, 167 million more people from sub-Saharan Africa are projected to be subscribed to mobile services, reaching 623 million users, and smartphone connections in the region are also seen more than doubling.

According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Africa's Internet economy has the potential to reach 5.2 per cent of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025, contributing nearly \$180 billion to its economy.

Major telcos on the continent are responding to this demand opportunity, supported by moves to take education, healthcare, agriculture services and governance online, by lining up data

centre projects they say will be among the largest and greenest on the continent.

In its 2024 sustainability report, Kenya's giant telco, Safaricom, has outlined plans to construct three Tier 3+ scale data centres as part of its long-term strategy to transform from a telecommunications company to Africa's leading purpose-led technology company, by 2030.

The company's Limuru Data Centres Phase 1 is already operational, with Phase 2 planned to come on stream by 2025.

"The facility is designed for future growth, with the potential to support 1,000 high density racks and an IT load of up to 20 MW within the next decade," Safaricom said in the report.

The strategic location of the data centre in the cooler Limuru region, the telco said, will enable it to deliver a Power Utilisation Effectiveness of 1.35, making it one of the most energy-efficient facilities in Africa.

"The facility is equipped with a 200 kWp rooftop solar PV plant, with plans to scale up to 2MWp. Additionally, we are exploring partnerships with renewable energy producers to

TREND IS DRIVEN BY MOVES TO TAKE EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, AGRICULTURE SERVICES AND GOVERNANCE ONLINE

further enhance our commitment to sustainability," the sustainability report said.

In June, MTN Nigeria announced it was building a 1,500-rack, Tier 4 data centre to play a pivotal role in meeting the growing data demands and digital needs of businesses and consumers in the country.

In a LinkedIn post, MTN Nigeria CEO Karl Toriola said the facility will be the largest in West Africa upon completion and will enable the telco to respond swiftly to market demands and support businesses in Nigeria.

"Ultimately, this centre will play a vital role in supporting Nigerian businesses to collaborate through cloud services, expand their capabilities and thrive," Toriola said.

"Our commitment to Environmental, Social and Governance principles is reflected in the data centre's eco-friendly design to

utilise efficient cooling systems and a combination of traditional energy sources, gas and renewable energy."

After launching a multi-million data centre business, Nxtra by Airtel, in December 2023, the telco broke ground in March 2024, what it termed one of Africa's largest data centres in Lagos, Nigeria, with plans for more across the continent.

"Through this business, we aim to create one of the largest networks of data centres in Africa, with high-capacity facilities in major cities complementing our existing sites," read Airtel Africa's Sustainability Report 2024.

"We're taking great care to incorporate modern energy efficiencies into our operations."

Africa Data Centres Association also affirms the expansion of industry due to the increasing demand for such facilities throughout the continent, citing Kenya, Morocco and South Africa as the fast-growing markets, albeit with a huge infrastructure gap to fill in.

"Africa needs up to 1000 MW and 700 facilities to meet demand and bring capacity den-

sity on a par with that of South Africa, the region's leader," according to Data Centres in Africa focus report 2024.

Africa, the report shows, accounted for less than 2 per cent of global colocation Data Centres supply, with more than half that total located in South Africa.

"The development of data centres is picking up pace due to strong demand from economic operators, as well as increasing awareness that African countries must establish their digital sovereignty in an increasingly competitive and complex world," said Ayotunde Coker, chairman, Africa Data Centres Association.

Nigeria is listed in the data centres focus report as Africa's largest digital economy, with the Internet contributing \$36.5 billion to its GDP, followed by South Africa (\$31.5 billion) and Egypt (\$26 billion).

Other large digital economies include Morocco (\$21.1 billion), Kenya (\$12.8 billion) and Algeria (\$11.9 billion).

Allied Market Research projects that the global market for DC provision will reach \$517.2 billion by 2030, up from an estimated of \$187.4 billion in 2020.

SASA DIARY OF A PERPETUAL BACHELOR

A date with semi-feminist

Not every day the bachelor meets someone who fights for right to split the bill



DAVID MUCHAI / Diary,

Today I found myself working outside my set mould. I never have a problem dating older women, by which I mean those close to my age. But that's usually because most of them are either married or looking to settle. Or they have kids who aren't averse to going toe to toe with me in a boxing ring.

Not that I'm a coward, I like to think of myself in the politically correct way – I'm a lover, not a fighter.

Talking of political correctness, my date the other day broke the said mould. She's a widow I met at a medical conference and her almost grown kids study abroad. So, not a big chance of a boxing match. Not surprisingly, she had lots to say about the "modern" woman.

"I understand the whole equality at work and asset ownership and all that," she said between bites of beef Wellington. "I mean, there are no separate degrees for men and women, right?"

"But you still have a problem with the rest of the feminism movement?" I asked, enjoying my truffle risotto.

"Not all of it, but I wonder why anyone would willingly give up a position of power."

"Excuse me?"

"Women. We've been very powerful through the ages." She got pensive. "Take me, for instance. When my husband was alive, I

stayed home to raise our two boys. A job I took seriously, and one that still got me everything I needed. I wore better clothes, I drove a better car, and once my boys were old enough for boarding school, it was like early retirement for me."

"But you can now buy yourself a better car than the one you had."

She laughed. "Not when using my own money. Do you know what full coverage on a G-Class costs?"

"I know. I, too, drive a G-Wagon."

"Seems I was more equal with you when Simon, that's my husband, when he footed the bills. I made a list; he made the money."

"You mean you're all for traditional marriage roles?"

"It's all about respect. If one respects what the other does, everything works out in the end. It's like, say, belittling a janitor yet someone has to do that job. We

can't all be CEOs, can we?"

"You know what I think? The whole movement has been bad for women because it ruined men."

"What do you mean?"

"The older generation is complaining about current young men being soft because of being raised by single mothers. I beg to differ. It's because they're growing up in an environment that insists they don't need to step up to the

plate. They're glad to sit back and ride the tide."

"You're right. Boys grew up knowing they had to carry the responsibility of a family. Now they feel free to laze it out and let the young ladies take the mantle." Then she sees me receive the bill. "What are you doing?"

"Paying the bill," I say. "Why?"

"You think just because you're the man you get to pay the bill?"



SASA ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Kenya and Egypt soak up venture capital amid cuts

There are winners even as investors shy away, focusing on mature markets



SETH ONYANGO FOR BIRD STORY AGENCY/ Kenya and Egypt have made major gains in the African venture capital stakes, sweeping up most regional funding as African startups grapple with a capital crunch that started last year.

Egypt and Kenya have raked in over half of Africa's venture capital funding for the year to date, as the continent faces a sharp annual drop in investment inflows.

Figures from Africa: The Big Deal show that the two countries collectively hauled in 75 per cent of all venture capital in the third quarter of 2024.

Egypt led with \$272 million, accounting for 43 per cent of the total, while Kenya followed closely with \$201 million, or 32 per cent, The Big Deal's figures showed.

This concentration of capital reflects changing market dynamics and the resilience of these markets amid a broader funding drought across the continent.

So far in 2024, Kenya and Egypt have together secured \$437 million and \$373 million respectively, making up 58 per cent of all venture capital raised on the con-

continent this year. It's the highest share on record for both countries since 2019, potentially marking a shift in where capital is flowing in Africa's start-up scene.

Deals in key sectors like fintech and renewable energy have helped these markets maintain their appeal to investors despite tightening global financial conditions.

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This concentration of capital reflects changing market dynamics and the resilience of these markets amid a broader funding drought across the continent

While Egypt and Kenya have been raking in capital, Nigeria — a long-time heavyweight in Africa's venture scene — has seen its fortunes change.

The country has only hauled in \$218 million so far in 2024, accounting for just 15 per cent of the continent's total.

This is a significant drop from the 35 per cent average share Nigeria enjoyed between 2019 and 2022. South Africa isn't faring much better, with its share slumping to 9 per cent this year, the lowest since 2019.

These declines hint at changing market dynamics, with tighter financial conditions and investor caution due to political and regulatory challenges driving capital away from what were previously dynamic markets. Total funding for 2024 is significantly down on previous figures. The Big Deal previously reported that the total funding raised in Africa in 2023 was \$2.9 billion, a 39 per cent drop from 2022.

Investors are increasingly looking for stability, and Egypt and Kenya seem to fit the bill. While

Egypt and Kenya see gains, other regions face a severe funding drought. Just 18 per cent of total venture capital this year has gone to Africa outside of the “big four” (Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa), with many countries failing to record significant inflows.

In Q3 alone, 38 African markets reported no major start-up funding, highlighting the growing concentration of capital in a few key markets.

There are a few bright spots outside the dominant duo. Tanzania, Ghana and Rwanda have shown some growth, but this is often due to isolated big-ticket deals.

For instance, Tanzanian cross-border payment platform Nala raised \$40 million out of the country's total \$53 million this year, while Ghana-based credit provider Fido bagged \$30 million of the country's \$64 million in 2024.

GENDER GAP

The gender gap in venture capital funding is also a lingering issue. Less than 5 per cent of the total investment in 2024 has gone to

start-ups with female CEOs, down slightly from 5.6 per cent between 2019 and 2023.

All-female founding teams received less than 1 per cent of funding this year, pointing to the ongoing challenges women entrepreneurs face in securing capital.

Despite efforts to address these disparities, progress remains elusive, and the figures show that much more needs to be done to support female-led ventures.

With tightening global financial conditions, the outlook for Africa's venture capital scene remains cautious, according to The Big Deal. Investors are becoming more selective, focusing on mature markets.

This trend of concentrated funding may well continue, but emerging markets like Tanzania and Ghana show potential for future diversification as they gain traction.

The uneven spread of capital across the continent also raises questions about whether regions like Nigeria and South Africa, just recently major players on the continent, can bounce back.