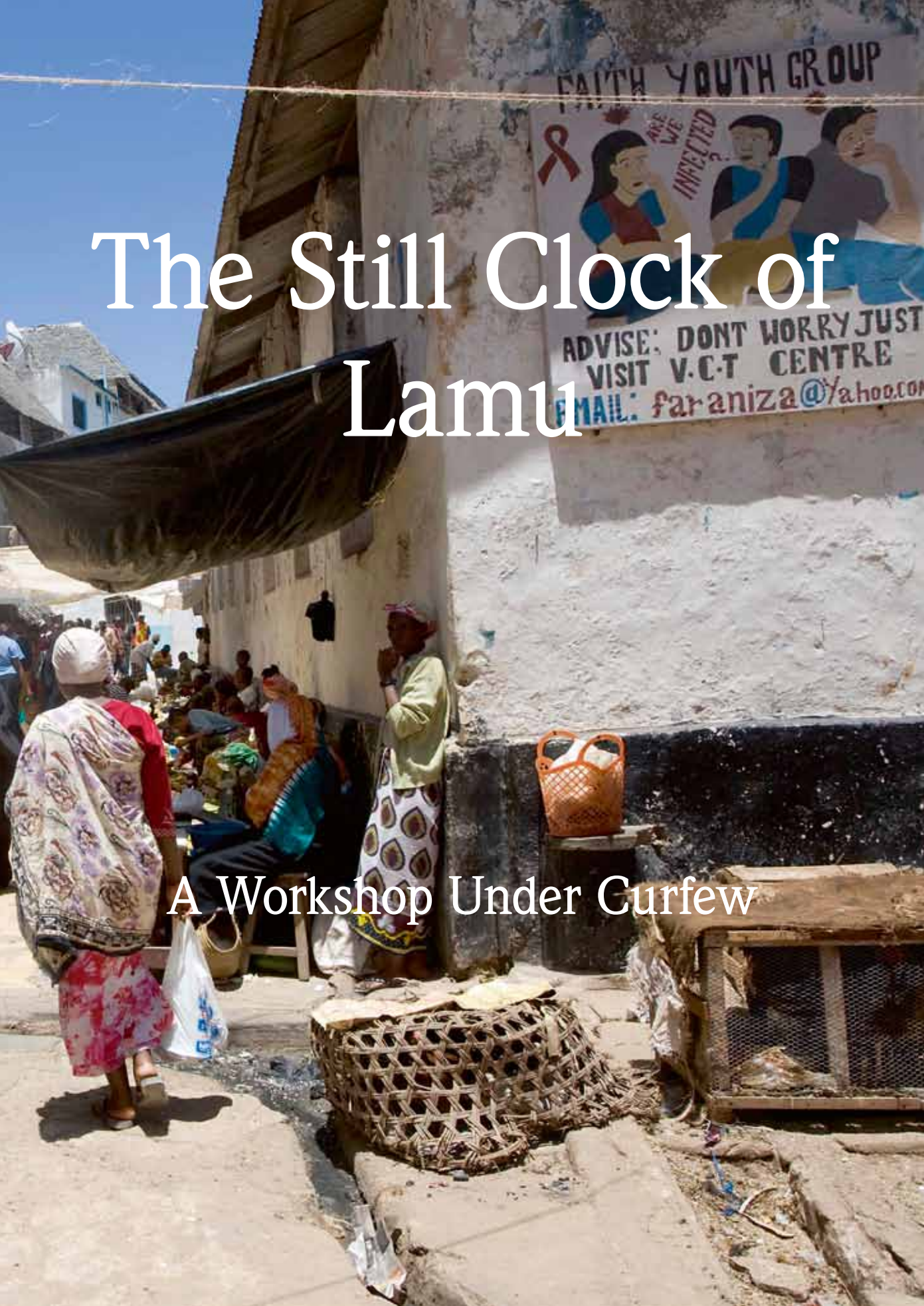


# The Still Clock of Lamu

A Workshop Under Curfew





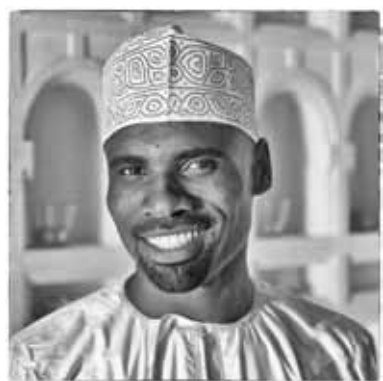




A Collaboration of  
[www.lamupaintersfestival.org](http://www.lamupaintersfestival.org)  
&  
OneOff Contemporary Art Gallery, Nairobi  
November 6th – 30th 2014

Peter Ngugi  
Sophie Walbeoffe  
Chelenge van Rampelberg  
Peter Elungat  
Timothy Brooke  
Joachim Sauter





## The 2014 Artist in Residence Program

The Lamu Painters Festival Artists in Residence Program is one of the many special ways that Lamu Island is celebrated through the eyes of artists. This year's program brought six artists to Lamu – 4 painters and 2 sculptors – who experienced island life and traditional Swahili culture and lived in the historical environment of Lamu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, for over three weeks. They became familiar with social and political issues influencing daily life in this island community. Drawing on these lived experiences and observations, the artists painted, sketched and sculpted their impressions that celebrate Lamu's unique cultural landscapes as well as depict the hardships the community currently faces.

They were charmed by the sailing dhows, donkeys and the absence of cars on the island, as well as its natural beauty of untouched beaches, mangrove forests and abundant marine life. They found a peaceful island and a friendly community offering hospitality.

Yet, close to the surface, they found people dissatisfied and grieving over the current socio-economic situation on Lamu Island. A five-month long, dawn to dusk curfew cripples the local economy. Travel warnings keep visitors away from Lamu and, to make matters worse, the government uses a hard-line approach, which many believe is unnecessary, even damaging.

Artists also learned of the national government's plan to develop a transport corridor linking oil fields in northern Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda to Lamu's mainland, where a mega-port is expected to be built less than 10 kilometres away. Many question whether this project and the interests of

international capital may be the cause of the recent violence on the mainland in places like Mpeketoni, a town situated about 40 kilometres away. The answer is opaque.

In the face of these great challenges, the artists witnessed the incredible resilience of the community – their strength, persistence and resolve – to continue their age-old way of life regardless of external threats. Lamu is known for its antiquity and old-world lifestyle that persists into the modern day. It is but one of dozens of islands, known as the Lamu Archipelago, which lies off Kenya's northern coast. In Lamu, cultural and aesthetic values and traditions dovetail Islam, the warp and weft of life in the Archipelago. So too, the community depends upon its natural environment, which has provided sustenance through fishing and trading and inspired creativity among the crafts men and women for many centuries.

Over time visitors have arrived, experienced its charm, revelled in its history and, settled here becoming part of its multi-ethnic landscape. The Lamu Artist in Residence program anticipates that artists will gain a deeper intellectual, cultural and artistic experience that will encourage links between this Kenyan island and the rest of the world. Right now, it is the best kept secret.

### 2014 Lamu Artist in Residence Program

#### Participants:

Peter Ngugi, Thika;  
Sophie Walbeoffe, Nairobi;  
Chelenge van Rampelberg, Kitengela;  
Peter Elungat, Nairobi;  
Timothy Brooke, Nanyuki;  
Joachim Sauter, Stuttgart.



Peter Ngugi, Men in Line I. Oil on canvas, 11 x 39 inches, detail



△ Peter Ngugi, Men in Line I. Oil on canvas, 11 x 39 inches

▽ Peter Ngugi, Men in Line II. Oil on canvas, 11 x 39 inches





## Peter Ngugi

Peter Ngugi starts his day at the Lamu Artist Residency running on the beach at first light when all is quiet and he has the whole stretch of an 11-kilometre beach to himself. “At first, when I saw that no one was here, I thought maybe I shouldn’t be jogging,” Peter confesses then laughs at himself. Perhaps his discomfort stems from his experience of city living where human beings are constantly rubbing shoulders and the happenstance of being alone can cause alarm. Lamu proved to be a different place, even under curfew. “I am completely comfortable here,” Peter remarks. “I am already planning to return, this time with my family.”

Born and raised in Thika, Peter’s painting techniques have been honed by meticulous attention to other artists’ work be it in art volumes or exhibitions in Nairobi. His work shows his valuable experimentation and his successful learning along the way, ultimately finding out what works for him, and, on the positive side, his audience has grown in measure.

Peter is fond of using satire in his paintings and pointing out the discrepancies in contemporary Kenyan life. In his Lamu work, he focused on the dawn to dusk curfew and its malevolent cost on the local economy – particularly the fisher folk. “I learned that fishermen often go out at night to fish and, with the curfew, they can’t fish.” This statement is Peter’s way of introducing me to his large canvases with depictions of woeful figures: heads hanging low in tired resignation, armless torsos illustrating an inability to work and boats standing idle in the water. “I want to show what is happening in Lamu because of the curfew,” Peter tells me. “How long will it last?” The question hangs between us. Both of us look again at the figures in his painting and grasp the reality ‘no work, no income’. “I think my paintings communicate what is happening here in Lamu.”





Peter Ngugi, *Waiting for Nothing to Happen*. Oil on canvas, 39 x 80 inches



Peter Ngugi,  
The Red Wallet.  
Oil on canvas, 80 x 39 inches





Peter  
Ngugi  
15.11.2014

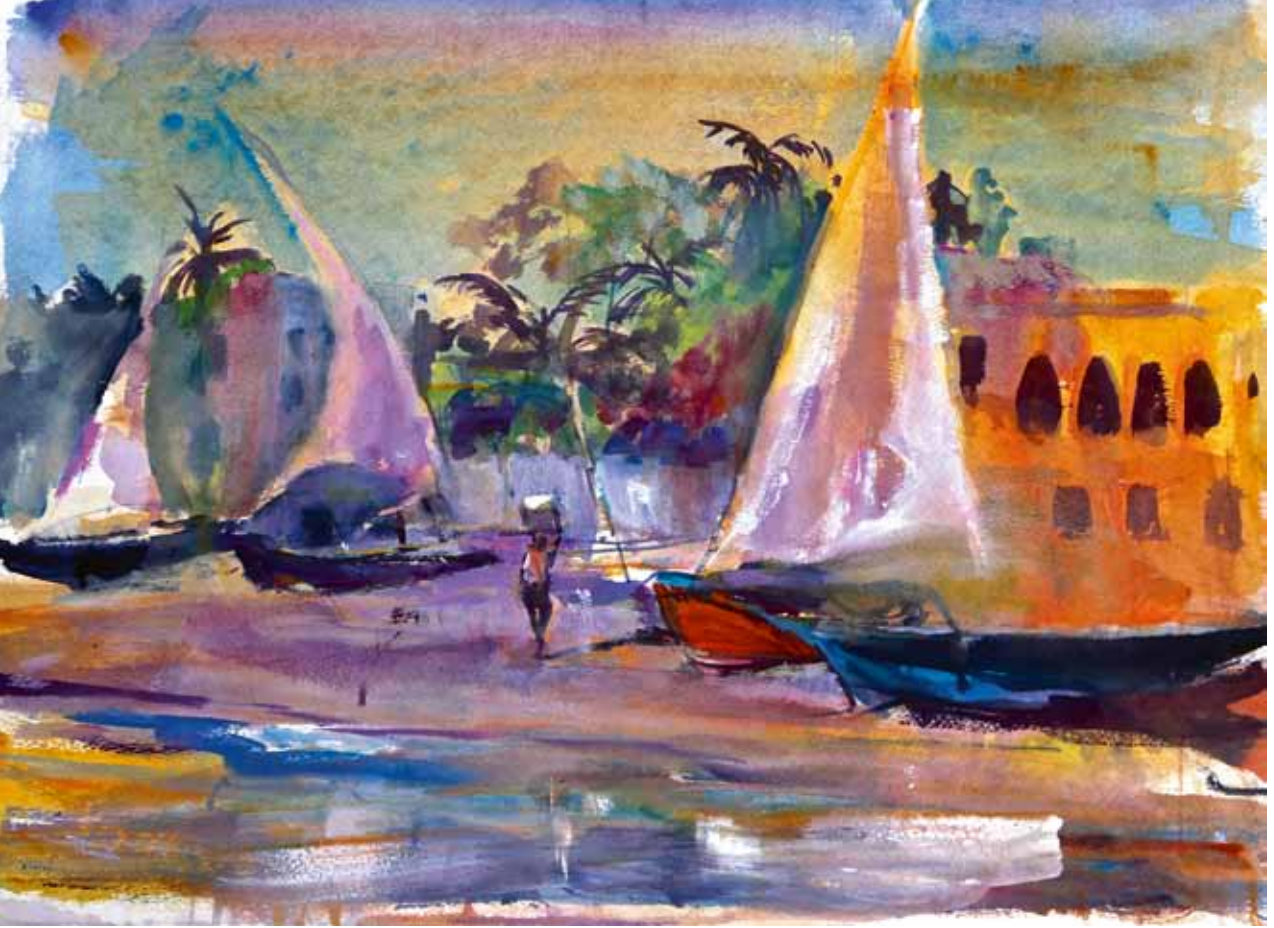
Peter Ngugi, Small Boats I. Oil on canvas, 39 x 26 inches



Peter Ngugi, Small Boats II. Oil on canvas, 39 x 26 inches







△ Sophie Walbeoffe, Dhows at Kijani Wall. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches  
 ▽ Sophie Walbeoffe, Grace in Baitil Aman Courtyard. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches







## Sophie Walbeoffe

Sophie Walbeoffe embraces the moment. Her spontaneity is apparent as she removes her sketch-book from a large shoulder bag and begins to draw, regardless of having only a moment to spare before climbing into a boat at the jetty. She has a knack of moving deftly between intense observation and vivacious participation, which makes my head spin. Yet, it works for her.

Sophie's career as an artist has spanned decades as well as continents. Her early years were spent in the UK, where she was raised and attended art school. Later she became a traveling artist, painting in the footsteps of many well-known painters in Egypt, the Middle East and Europe and throughout northern Kenya. "I have painted in fascinating places," Sophie recalls. "I don't like to winge so I embrace the differences I find and look for artists who have lived or worked here." Sometimes her search uncovers artists from past

centuries, like her paintings and etchings in Jerusalem. When this occurs Sophie is known to set up her easel at the identical location as the earlier painter. "It's a bit like being in their shadow," she explains, as well as honouring their place in history.

This is not Sophie's first time to Lamu. She first visited in 1988 and has returned many times to paint and sketch the unique cultural atmosphere of Lamu's streets, seafront and people. On this trip she found it all much easier. "In my 31 years of painting, I have never been treated so well," Sophie replies ardently after a question about painting in Lamu. "But I feel so sorry for Lamu," she adds, reflecting on the current state of affairs. "We need to bring art, love and light here." Sophie does just that in her expressive watercolours of island life.



△ Sophie Walbeoffe, Peponi Hotel. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches  
 ▽ Sophie Walbeoffe, Shela Pathway. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches







△ Sophie Walbeoffe, Lamu Town Seafront. Watercolor on paper, 28 x 100 inches (detail)

▽ Sophie Walbeoffe, Lamu Town Main Street. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches







△ Sophie Walbeoffe, Lamu Town Market. Watercolor on paper, 16 x 30 inches  
 ▽ Sophie Walbeoffe, Riadha Mosque. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches







- △ Sophie Walbeoffe, Shela Dhow Site. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches  
 ▽ Sophie Walbeoffe, Early Morning Dhows. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches













## Chelenge van Rampelberg

An avocado tree split in a storm and came down near Chelenge's bedroom. She called for assistance to chop the tree up for firewood then changed her mind and decided to leave it in three large pieces. Using crude implements, Chelenge began to cut and shape the wood. She found solace in the solitary work and respect for the grain and feel of the wood under her hands. Reflecting on these first attempts, the artist remembers that she thought it merely an exercise, a healthy way of relieving stress. In three months' time, however, she had completed three pieces that she loved. Inadvertently, her exercise of stress relief over two decades ago was the beginning of her career as a sculptor.

Born and raised in Kericho, Chelenge found a kindred spirit among the craftsmen in Lamu, especially traditional boat builders whose knowledge of woodworking is passed on from father to son. "When they saw me carving," she explains, "they brought me their tools, tools that have been handed down to them from their fathers and grandfathers." Chelenge was touched by their generosity and their eagerness to assist her. She had never

witnessed such kindness among strangers. "They even asked if they could help me to carve the wood," she told me breaking into a warm smile.

Chelenge's inspiration during her recent Lamu Residency was motivated by a visit to the stone quarries in a village known as Maweni, meaning on the rocks. The village is situated along a shallow mangrove channel on neighbouring Manda Island. There, coral blocks are cut from the ground and used for building stones locally. "We went by boat and spent hours there," Chelenge recalls. She was fascinated by the traditional methods of cutting and transporting blocks. That day she watched incredulously as porters carried mountains of cut coral stone on their shoulders, from quay side to boats anchored a short distance off shore. "It was so powerful to watch them," she explained. "It was like going back to the middle ages, a time of self-sufficiency." Chelenge's finished sculpture represents the spirit of those labourers: "It is their strength that inspired me."





Chelenge van Rampelsberg, Lamu Carrier with Love. Cedar wood, 52,5 inches





Peter Elungat, Flowers, Leaves, Hearts. Oil on canvas, 56 x 47 inches





## Peter Elungat

Peter Elungat is known for painting expansive canvases depicting his idealized woman. His style is reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite painters combined with magical realism, a term usually used to describe a modern literary genre rather than paintings. But it seems to fit here. The artist's magical realism flows from dreams in which he is carried on the back of a bird and flies over landscapes, watching from above. These visions inspire his paintings, which often have a dream-like feel to them as well – women floating in air or flying with their flowing garments caught in invisible jet streams. Explaining his work, Peter remarks, "I am not an artist who intellectualizes. I feel." And to emphasize his romance of life, he sings an inspiring solo in a strong baritone voice.

Born in Busia in Western Kenya, Peter has travelled quite widely but in his own country he found the foreignness of Lamu more real, more palpable than in other places. "Lamu is like a foreign country," the artist remarks. Here, he found his favourite subject – women – were less conspicuous than

he would like. "I long to see women," he told me. "I want to admire them, see them, but I can't." There is a wistful yearning in his words. Perhaps seeing them would kindle his dreaming, a precursor to painting. But Lamu withholds the feminine from male eyes, as it has done for centuries. Privacy guards her feminine virtue from strangers and in public she is veiled as a sign of respect to herself and her religion.

As an alternative, Peter turned to other subjects including the negative effect of the dawn to dusk curfew on social life in Lamu. His piece *Padlocks* of Lamu portrays a male musician absorbed in the revelry of music making. He holds a guitar-like instrument in his arms as his fingers strum empty space where strings should be. The promise of his sweet melody is forever silenced by a series of padlocks, locking the instrument and disabling any music from being played or heard. "There is no music because of the curfew. Music is dead," Peter explains. Hopefully, music is only sleeping and will awake when the curfew ends.



Peter Elungat, Soul of the Island. Oil on canvas, 60 x 80 inches





Peter Elungat, The Padlocks of Lamu. Oil on canvas, 47 x 40 inches



## Timothy Brooke

Timothy was born in the UK and moved to Kenya with his family when he was only seven. His childhood trips to the Rift Valley with its prehistoric landscapes have inspired his paintings for decades. The artist's abbreviated brush strokes elegantly capture its essence—the sweeping skies, the hard light and the ever present red dust rising from passing cattle or wildlife. “The Rift Valley is what I remember from my childhood,” Timothy explains. “For the past 30 years [of painting] I have been working through that.” His journey into his past has produced an incredible body of work.

Although captivated by the vistas of the Rift Valley, Timothy finds the white sands and palm trees of the coast “irresistible” for painters. He has visited Kenya’s south coast many times, but this was his first visit to Lamu. Lamu proved to be an enigma for him. He loved the traditional wooden sailboats and Lamu’s traditional medieval town.

He loved the donkeys, the palm trees and the expanse of beach stretching out from Shela. Yet he disliked the abuse of donkeys carrying loads too heavy for their backs and the presence of outboard engines on traditional boats. He also disliked the neglect in Lamu town, including the rubbish in the streets. Reflecting on this paradox, the artist comments that “Lamu is potentially very beautiful if it can conserve its traditional culture while finding its way in the twenty-first century.”

Timothy’s residency was cut short for medical reasons. The heat was too much for his red-hair complexion. “I was unhappy to leave but I forgot how bad I am at the coast,” the artist admits. But, before leaving, he had a portfolio of sketches completed: drawings of beached dhows, Swahili architecture and, of course, Lamu donkeys. These icons of Lamu are sure to make their way into his current paintings.





△ Timothy Brooke, View from the Window. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches  
 ▽ Timothy Brooke, Lamu Town Seafront. Watercolor on paper, 16 x 30 inches







Joachim Sauter, Hussein. 2013, mahogany wood, 96 inches





## Joachim Sauter

Joachim Sauter, from Stuttgart, Germany, is no stranger to Lamu. He has attended the Lamu Painters Festival art programs regularly since 2011. On his first visit, he was inspired by the labourers in Maweni, a stone quarry on the adjacent Manda Island. Joachim was particularly taken by the porters employed to carry the coral-stone blocks to dhows, traditional sailing vessels waiting offshore to carry the stones to market. He watched with awe as the porters balanced nine blocks on their shoulders, stretching over a metre high above their head. They walked barefoot with utmost precision down the sloping hill to the sea and into the water to the waiting boat.

Joachim returned to Maweni to sketch people working, from cutting stone blocks to making ballast. For weeks, he visited daily until people adjusted to seeing him, the quirky artist with pencil and sketch pad in hand. “I wanted to get an impression of how people are working and living

here,” the artist explains. Afterwards, he brought his wood-working tools and began to carve and chisel, working in situ. The result was a near life-size sculpture of a stone carrier. When completed, Joachim presented the sculpture to the community as a monument to their labour and perseverance. Today, the sculpture stands proudly on a large rock at the end of the Maweni jetty, honouring those who live here.

The rough and marked surface of his completed sculptures signal Joachim’s attempt to treat his subject relatively and not to glorify their way of life. “It is a dangerous occupation,” the artist tells me. “Sometimes people get hurt. I don’t want to idealize that.” This year, Joachim worked on his fourth life-size figure of the Maweni stone carriers. In all, he hopes to create six to eight figures that will be exhibited together—a monumental work and a fitting tribute to their incredible endurance.







△  
Joachim Sauter, Bakari.  
2014, mahogany wood, 100 inches  
(detail)

◁  
Joachim Sauter, Bakari.  
2014, mahogany wood, 100 inches

opposite:  
Joachim Sauter, Salim.  
2012, mahogany wood, 108 inches







## Traveling to Lamu

Lamu Island lies nestled along Kenya's northern coastline. For decades, Lamu has been a haven for discerning visitors looking for an authentic experience whether it is walking the labyrinthine alleyways of Lamu Old Town, visiting traditional Swahili mansions, riding donkeys, sailing expeditions in the traditional wooden sail boats known as dhows, fishing and snorkelling, enjoying the delicacy of Swahili cuisine, spending the day on the pristine beaches or catching the sight of the full moon on a rooftop. There is much to delight the visitor on a trip to Lamu.

The two main towns on the island are Lamu and Shela. Lamu is a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its medieval architecture and traditional life-style. Shela is located 2 kilometres south of Lamu Town, close to the pristine beaches that offer sun lovers a treat.

Getting here from Nairobi is quick and easy by plane and adventurous by road. You choose... and the choices are many.

### Air Travel

The quickest travel is by air of course. It is a simple 2-hour plane ride from Nairobi. The planes depart either from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport or from Wilson Airport. Check with the individual airlines for their departing airport. Passengers alight on Manda Island, where Lamu air strip is located. From there it is a short boat ride to your final destination – 10 minutes will place you in Lamu Town, Shela or Ras Kitau, and a bit longer for Kipungani and Manda Bay. Currently, 3 airlines operate to Lamu: Air Kenya, Fly 540 and SafariLink.

### Road Travel

The more adventurous may choose to go by road. Buses to Lamu can be caught in Bondeni, Mombasa or Malindi. From Mombasa, Lamu is a 6 or 7 hour ride, making a pit stop in Malindi. From Malindi, Lamu is approx. 4 or 5 hours. Buses travel daily and offer repeated departure times. The end of the line is Mokowe jetty. From there, boats will ferry you across to Lamu Island. As an added delight, you often see wildlife along the road (baboons, wart hog, antelope, giraffe, hippo and buffalo) between Witu and Hindi. The coach buses

traveling to Lamu are Pwani Tawakal, Tahmeed, Najaa and Tawil.

### Where to stay

Lamu and Manda Islands offer a variety of accommodations for visitors, including intimate hotels, lodges on the beach, guest houses and private homes. The unique architectural features found here—arched window openings, carved wooden doors and interior plasterwork designs – are in keeping with local Swahili traditions. Typically plain façades mask elegant interiors and graceful surroundings including courtyards with a pool or fountain to cool the air. Accommodations are incomplete without a rooftop terrace to catch the sunrise and the evening breezes as you take in the sweeping sea view.

### Selected Hotels, Guesthouses & Holiday Homes:

- Peponi Hotel, Shela  
www.peponi-lamu.com, tel. 07 22 20 30 82
- Lamu House Hotel, Lamu Town  
www.lamuhouse.com, tel. 07 35 87 44 28
- Banana House, Shela  
www.bananahouse-lamu.com, tel. 07 21 27 55 38
- Subira Guesthouse, Lamu Town  
www.subirahouse.com, tel. 07 26 91 66 86
- Fatumah's Tower, Shela  
www.fatumastower.com, tel. 07 22 27 71 38
- Jannat Hotel, Lamu Town  
www.jannathouselamu.com, tel. 07 14 96 98 31
- Kijani Hotel, Shela  
www.kijani-lamu.com, tel. 07 33 61 62 31
- Baitil Aman Hotel, Shela  
www.baitilaman.com, tel. 07 13 57 66 69
- Diamond Beach Village, Manda  
www.diamondbeachvillage.com, 07 20 91 50 01
- Jannataan Hotel, Shela  
www.shelalamu.com, tel. 07 22 69 80 59
- Shela Townhouses, Shela  
www.lamuholiday.com tel. 07 27 72 21 83
- Moonhouses, Shela  
www.themoonhouses.com, tel. 07 22 20 94 90
- Forodhani House, Shela  
www.forodhanihouse.com, tel. 07 18 40 74 80
- Shela Houses, Shela  
www.shelahouse.com, tel. 07 16 57 23 70

Lamu Tourist Association: [www.lamutourism.com](http://www.lamutourism.com)







[www.oneoffafrica.com](http://www.oneoffafrica.com)  
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[www.lamupaintersfestival.org](http://www.lamupaintersfestival.org)  
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Photographs on pages 2 and 30  
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