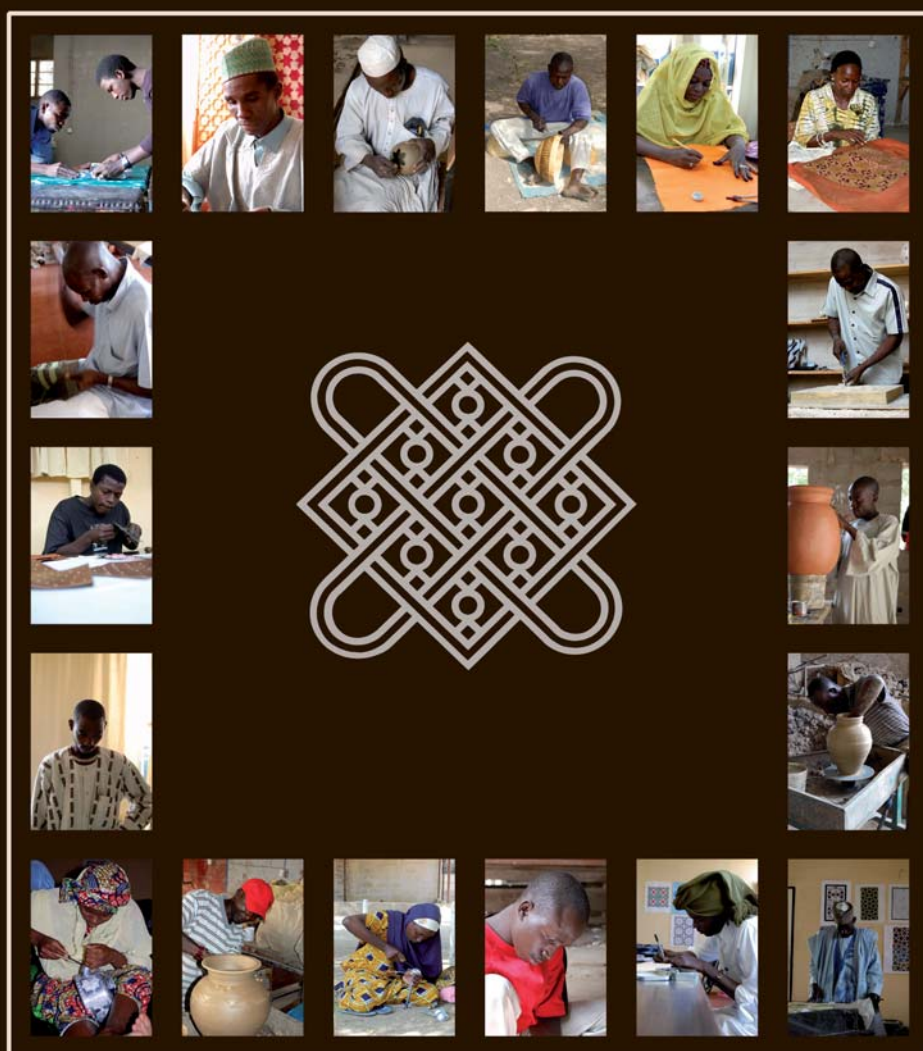


# CELEBRATING THE TRADITIONAL CRAFTS OF NORTHERN NIGERIA





# THE ARTS OF THE MUSLIM HAUSA OF NORTHERN NIGERIA

Northern Nigeria has maintained an Islamic social, religious and political culture since about 1250 when Islam made inroads via trans-Saharan trade routes from North Africa. In Kano – the central focal point of contemporary Hausa popular culture in Nigeria – Islam became a state policy in 1380 when a group of Wangara (Mali) merchant-clerics arrived in the territory and converted the then non-Muslim (but not pagan) chief to Islam. Subsequently the chief declared the territory Islamic. Arrival of more Arab traders and Fulani clerics from 1450 further consolidated the city-state as an Islamic polity, well documented and versed in Islamic literature. The Shari'a subsequently became an entrenched social and political system in most parts of northern Nigeria until the coming of British colonial administration from 1903 to 1960.

Art among the Muslim Hausa of northern Nigeria is essentially non-representational expressions of creativity – and this has been an entrenched tradition long before Islam made inroads into Hausa areas in the 13th century. Muslim Hausa artistic qualities – *gwaninta* – are displayed either in building motifs, engineered products that are the outcomes of craft skills or in other motifs on clothes due to Islamic influences. As Edward H. Madden argues,

“Islamic art is the expression of a whole culture, intimately intertwined with religious, theological, and legal commitments. It is a way of expressing and celebrating the defining ideology of a community. It is always social and traditional, never idiosyncratic or wholly self-expressive (423).”

While Madden sees the wider usage of the term “Islamic art” to include crafts and architectural designs – deviating thus from Western conceptions of art – nevertheless most African traditional Muslim communities have not been able to domesticate the Western conception of art. Within this limitation, therefore, Islamic Art is essentially reduced to figurative representations on poster artworks.

Unlike the Hebrew Bible, there is no commandment against making images of living beings in the Qur'an. But it does make clear that nothing should be honored alongside God:

“God does not forgive the joining of partners [Arabic: *shirk*] with him: anything less than that he forgives to whoever he will, but anyone who joins partners with God is lying and committing a tremendous sin” (The Qur'an, 4:48).

All the Islamic injunctions against making religious images come from the Hadith, traditions recorded by various followers about what the Prophet said and did. Although not divine revelation like the Qur'an, Hadith is considered binding when multiple trustworthy sources agree. Following are some examples of Hadith on images:

“Ibn 'Umar reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) having said: Those who paint pictures would be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it would be said to them: Breathe soul into what you have created.” (Sahih Muslim vol.3, no.5268).

“This Hadith has been reported on the authority of Abu Mu'awiya though another chain of transmitters (and the words are): Verily the most grievously tormented people

amongst the denizens [inhabitants] of Hell on the Day of Resurrection would be the painters of pictures...." (Sahih Muslim vol.3, no.5271).

"Narrated [Muhammad's wife] 'Aisha: Allah's Apostle said, 'The painter of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be said to them, Make alive what you have created.'" (Bukhari vol.9, book 93 no.646).

"Narrated 'Aisha: The Prophet entered upon me while there was a curtain having pictures (of animals) in the house. His face got red with anger, and then he got hold of the curtain and tore it into pieces. The Prophet said, 'Such people as paint these pictures will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection.'" (Bukhari vol.8, book 73, no.130).

"Umar said, 'We do not enter your churches because of the statues and pictures.' Ibn 'Abbas used to pray in the church provided there were no statues in it." (Bukhari vol.1, chapter 54).

"Aisha played with dolls while her husband Muhammad was with her. (Sahih Muslim vol.4, book 29 ch.1005, no.5981).

"Muhammad went to Fatimah's house, but turned back when he saw a figured curtain." (Sunan Abu Dawud vol.3, book 21, no.3746).

The art of the Fatimids (a Shi'ite dynasty that ruled 909–1171 AD) focused mainly on calligraphy and decorative vines, and also frequently depicted animals and humans. The celebrated lustre-painted Fatimid ceramics from Egypt are especially distinguished by the representation of the human figure. Some of these ceramics have been decorated with simplified copies of illustrations of the princely themes, but others have depictions of scenes of Egyptian daily life. It is this tradition that eventually found its way from about 1930 to Muslim northern Nigeria where posters depicting various prophets (Adam, Abraham) and religious icons (e.g. the baraka – a mystical half-woman, half-horse that carried the Prophet Muhammad on a spiritual night journey to meet God). However, non-representational art, especially expressed in form of calligraphy of the Qur'an is totally accepted, with graduating Qur'anic school pupils having their graduation wooden slates elaborately decorated with border artwork.

Thus Hausa art forms are essentially geometric patterns and lattices reproduced on a variety of media – from calabashes and gourds, textiles, metal, pottery, buildings, to writing forms.

It is in the spirit of sustaining the wonder and creativity of the Hausa art forms that the British Council and the British High Commission, in collaborative partnership with The Prince's School of Traditional Arts, instituted a project that explores the possibilities of transferring geometric designs to the crafts of Northern Nigeria. While the artists – essentially craftsmen and women – are fixed in their ways in both methodological approaches and media, the project sought to enhance their individual skills, and at the same time encourage what we call "horizontal transfer" of ideas and designs from one media and concept to another. Thus the motifs usually seen on traditional buildings are transferred on textile especially caps (huluna) and gowns (dogwayen riguna); while textile designs from caps, for instance, were transferred to wood carvings on calabashes and door frames.

The focus of the project was on young traditional craftsmen and women and the perfection of their art to bring such art to the center stage where it is seen as a credible form of art.

There was a studious attempt to move away from the "tourist/airport" art approach of creating designs for sale to tourists. The focus was on Hausa art as a functional aspect of their daily lives. This has always existed for centuries. The project is giving it a new direction.

The project has achieved tremendous success, thanks to the sheer enthusiasm of the participants, the generous funding from the British High Commission, the British Council, and Standard Chartered Bank, as well as the dedication of the programme tutors, Fosuwa Andoh and David Barnes of the Princes School of Traditional Arts, London.

Prof. Abdalla Uba Adamu  
Chairman, Centre for Hausa Cultural Studies  
Kano, Nigeria

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Congratulations.

This exhibition is the culmination of a series of workshops which began with nineteen men and women of Northern Nigeria and two tutors from The Prince's School of Traditional Arts. The project, 'Celebrating the Traditional Visual Arts of Northern Nigeria' which the British Council in Kano initiated in October 2006, is truly a celebration of their creativity, skill and talent, and above all, their vision of sustaining their tradition for future generations of local artists. Together with a group of academics and leaders of society, they have formed a forum and support group CADDAK – Craft and Design Development Association Kano – for this purpose.

We are privileged and honoured to be associated with these artists and to have facilitated the process of remembering with them the principles of their craft within the framework of universal principles found in all traditional arts. We join them in the hope of continually renewing these principles and values in the contemporary world.

We are grateful to the British Council and to Ms. Sue Mace, in particular, who was the prime mover of this initiative; the British High Commission, Nigeria; Kano Polytechnic; and other organisations and individuals who have made this project a success. We acknowledge the encouragement and support of our President, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, who visited the first workshop in Kano and met with the artists.

Dr. Khaled Azzam  
Director



The project 'Celebrating the Traditional Visual Arts of Northern Nigeria' is managed by the British Council Kano office in Northern Nigeria and co-funded by the British Council, the British High Commission, Nigeria and Standard Chartered Bank. The aim of the project is to raise the traditional design awareness and develop the design skills of nineteen young, Muslim artists/craftspeople through a series of workshops and to showcase their new work in exhibitions in Nigeria and the UK. The mixed male and female group represents many different crafts, including architectural decoration, embroidery (traditional Muslim gowns and caps), decorative gourds, pottery, leather work, calligraphy, white-smiths and textiles.

Our UK partner for the project is The Prince's School of Traditional Arts which emphasises the practical skills of geometry and their significance as a universal language underpinning the sacred and traditional arts of the world. A key activity of the school is its Outreach Programme facilitated by its alumni. The British Council Kano is delighted that the school is providing skilled tutors for the workshops.

The first workshop, 'Understanding the Language of Traditional Visual Islamic Art of Northern Nigeria' took place 19-30 November 2007. The last day of the workshop coincided with a visit by HRH The Prince of Wales. The Prince was able to talk to workshop participants about their experience and see their finished work. We are very pleased that His Royal Highness was able to celebrate the success of the first workshop with us here in Nigeria.

At the end of the workshop the participants formed themselves into a group which they have called CADDAK – Craft and Design Development Association Kano. The members meet monthly at the British Council to share ideas and support each other.



# SAID UMAR WALI

## CALLIGRAPHER



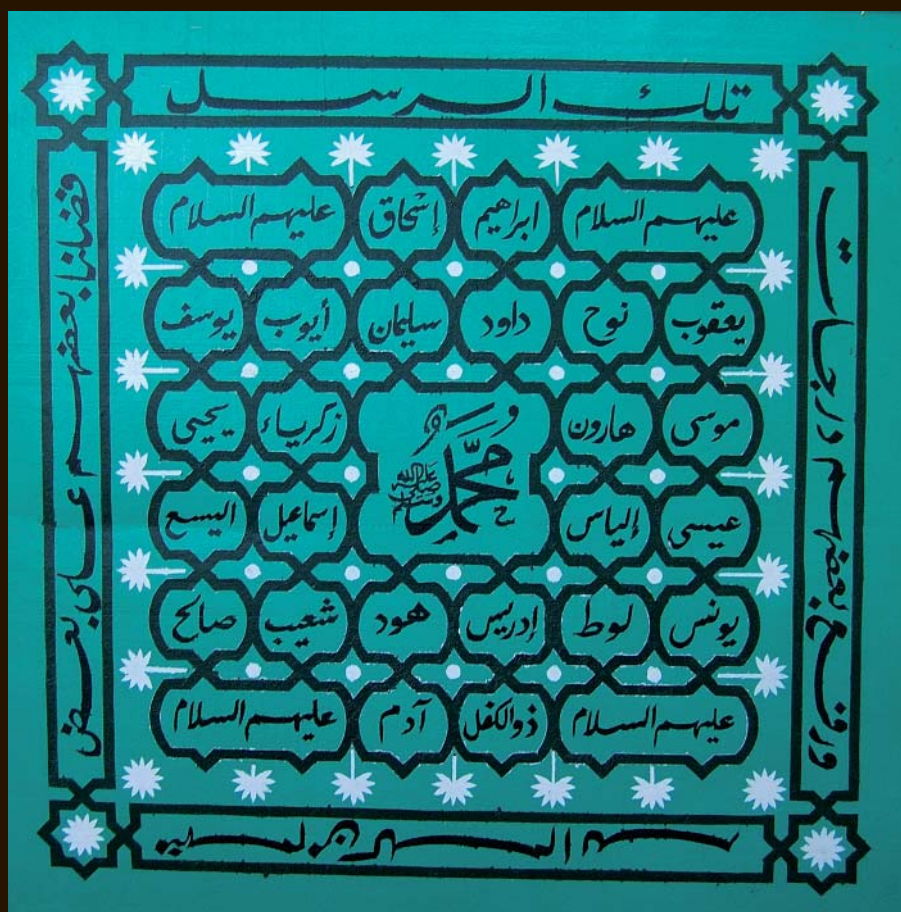
Said Umar Wali has been working with calligraphy since age seven. His love for the craft came through his father's teaching and the interest and support his community always showed him. He didn't receive formal calligraphy training, instead learned directly from his father. Said clearly sees himself in the role of keeping the calligraphy traditions of Northern Nigeria alive. In his craft Said uses both traditional local tools as well as commercial pens and inks. His main source of inspiration is from his father's work, calligraphy books and more recently the knowledge of geometry as introduced by the BC/PSTA workshops which he feels have positively influenced his work.

MY CRAFT IS EXACTLY A MIRROR IMAGE OF  
MINE, AND PART OF MY LIFE.





وهي :-  
 مِلْعَ الْأَمَانِي فِي بَيْتِ الْأُمُورِ الْأَوَّلِينَ وَحَمْدُ الْجَنَانِ  
 رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَعَنْهُمْ وَعَنْ آبَائِهِمْ، أَمِينَ



# MUSTAPHA GABARI

## CALLIGRAPHER



Mustapha first began learning his craft from his father 20 years ago. He uses local materials and states that he has recently introduced geometric forms and designs using 'compass and ruler to make perfection in the production of my craft'.

THEY USED TO CALL ME MUSTAFA CALLIGRAPHY,  
NOW THEY CALL ME MUSTAFA GEOMETRIC.







# SALISU SAID

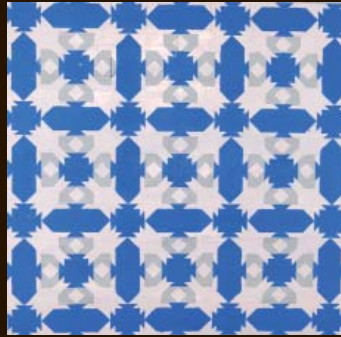
## LEATHER WORKER-DESIGNER



Salisu Said was introduced to his craft at home, and learned his skills from other craftsmen who worked leather by hand, such as shoemakers. He is enthusiastic about working with other talented people who are specialists in different aspects of traditional crafts, because they give him much inspiration and good ideas. He sees himself as part of the living traditions of Northern Nigeria and appreciates the new knowledge gained through the workshops which will help him to contribute and innovate.

IN MY WORK I TAKE CARE OF ACCURATE  
MEASUREMENTS AND GOOD COLOUR  
COMBINATIONS BY USING TRADITIONAL DYES  
LIKE ASH, SKY BLUE AND WHITE.





# SADIA & MARDIA MUDI

## WHITESMITHS



Sadia and Mardia both learned their craft within a family context which continues to inspire them. Sadia learned from her husband, Mardia from her parents. They both use local tools and observe that their work has become more marketable as they have applied their new knowledge of geometry. Accuracy and neatness are important to them as they practice this traditional Nigerian craft.

SADIA: MY WORK IS MY LIFE.

MARDIA: IN MY CRAFT I AM ALWAYS THINKING  
OF WAYS TO MAKE IT BETTER THAN BEFORE.







# BASHIR ISA ABBAS & BASHIR MOHAMMED IDRIS



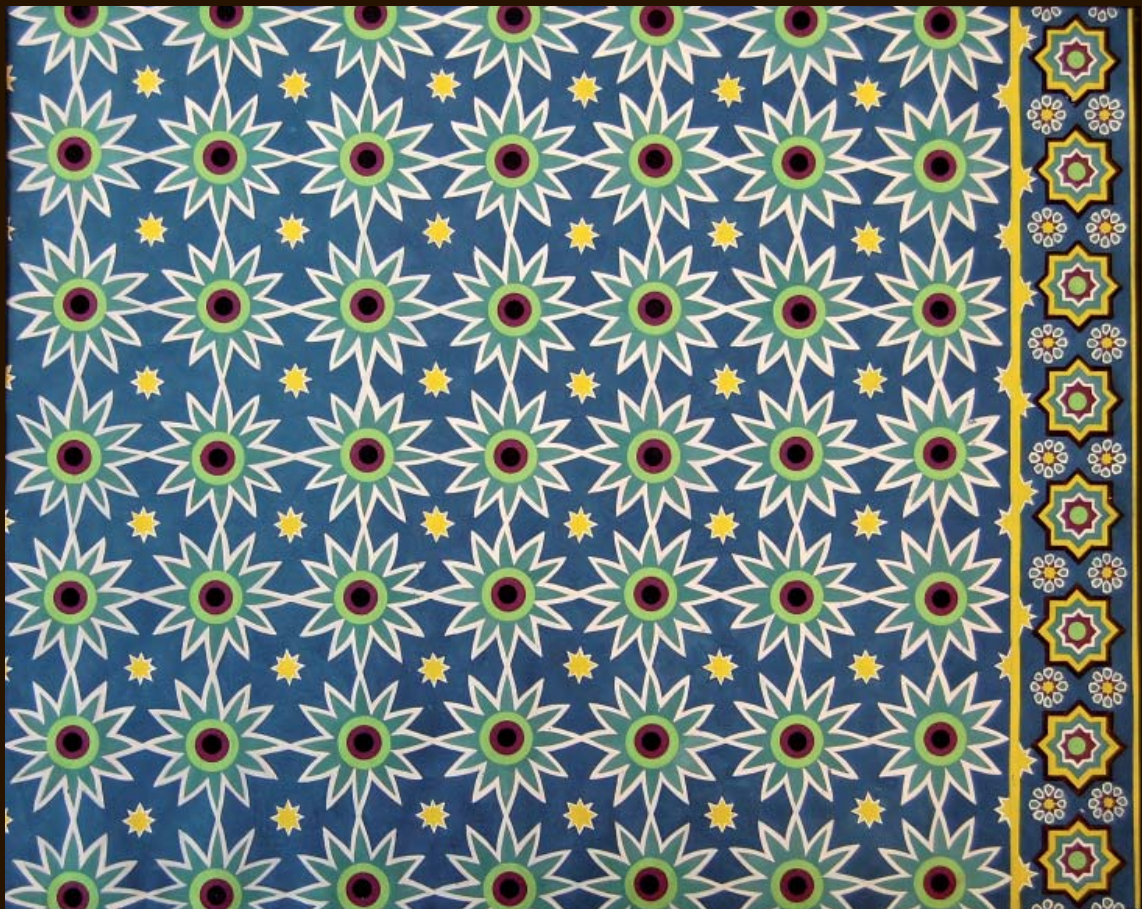
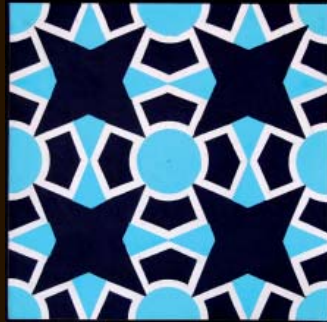
## PAINTERS & PRINTERS

Bashir and Bashir form a very fruitful partnership and share all aspects of their work. They work through their ideas in drawing and painting by experimenting with many art media. They are conscious of the need to keep the traditions of Northern Nigeria alive by exploring traditional designs. Bashir Mohammed says, 'The workshops have been an amazing experience, they influenced me body and soul'.

WE ARE INSPIRED BY NATURE AND EACH  
OTHER'S WORK.







# SADIQ ABUBAKAR ALIYU POTTER

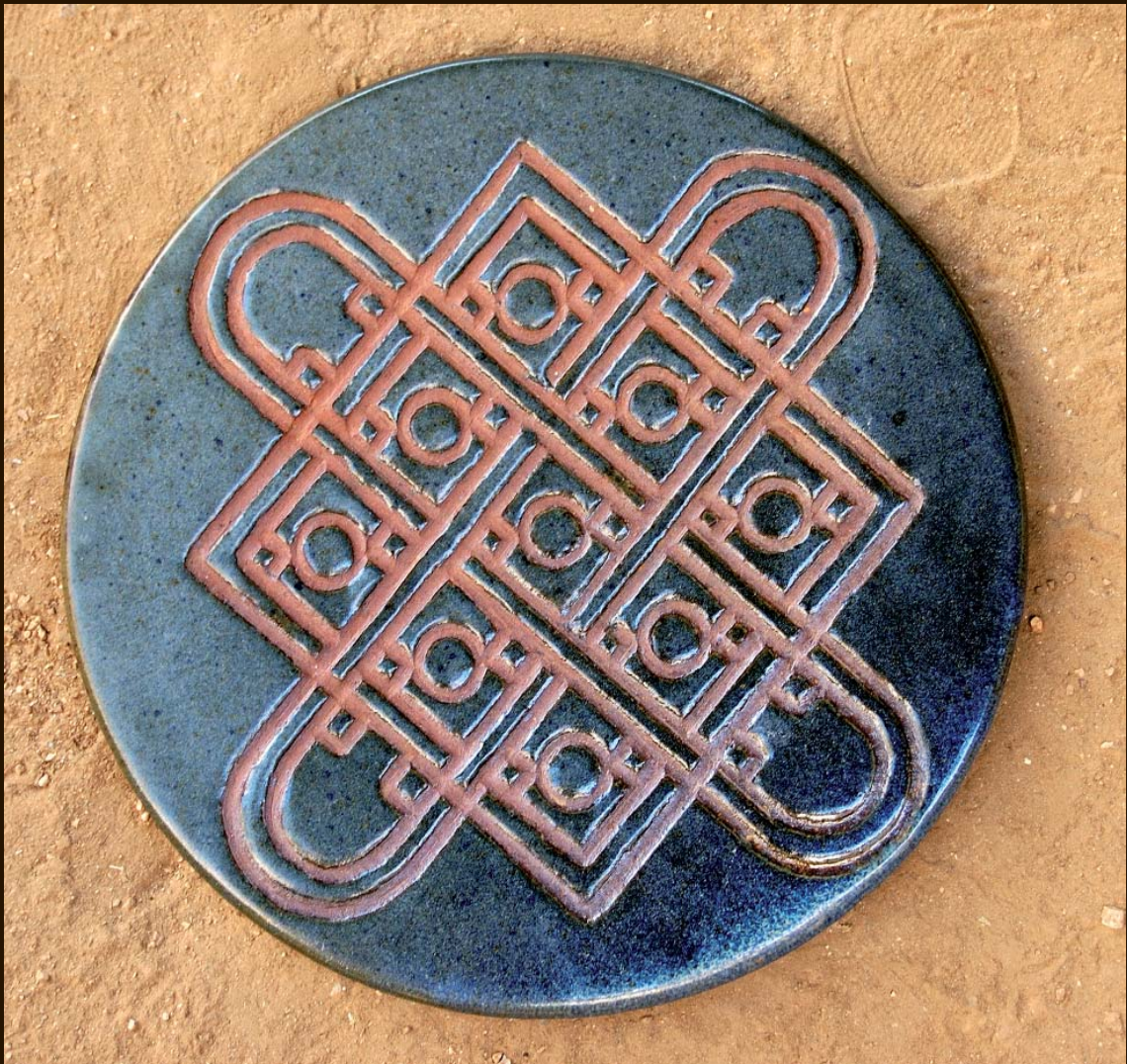


Sadiq was introduced to ceramics through a friend eighteen years ago. He uses traditional ceramic materials and a local brush to decorate his finished pieces. In his pottery, he is now exploring motifs from the recent workshops. He gets his ideas 'mostly late in the night'. He is very hard-working, values sharing his knowledge with both children and adults from his community and eventually hopes 'to get recognized not just locally but also internationally'.

I VALUE MY CRAFT A LOT. I DON'T KNOW  
WHAT I'D DO WITHOUT IT. MY CRAFT IS MY  
COMPANION.







# MURTALA DANJUMA

## POTTER



I have no formal education at all but I became interested in the craft when I saw works by other potters. Also the potter's wheel was one of the things that got me to be interested in the craft. I use geometry and animals to make my work more unique from others. My ideas come to me as I work.

I SEE MY WORK AS A MEANS OF KEEPING THE  
TRADITIONS OF NORTHERN NIGERIA ALIVE  
BECAUSE I STILL USE MY LOCAL METHODS.







# IBRAHIM MOHAMMED

## ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

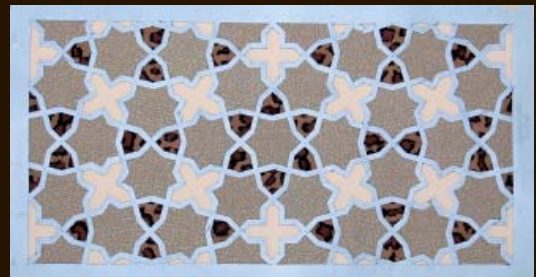
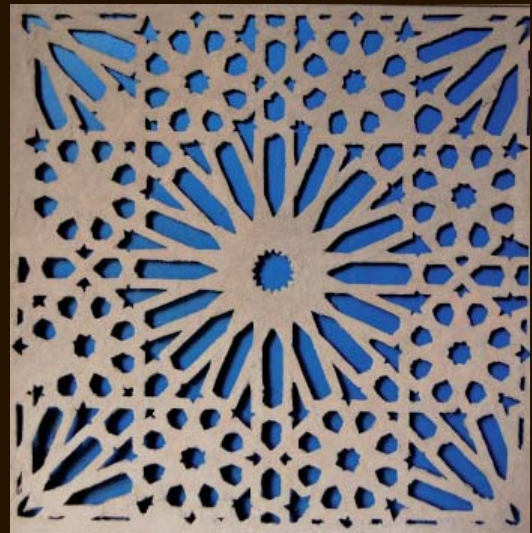
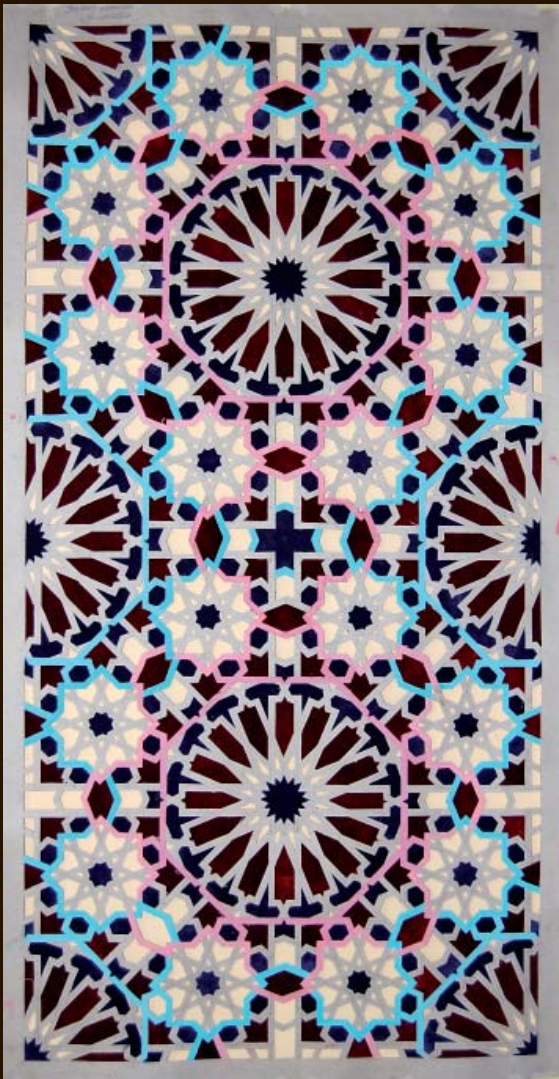


Ibrahim Mohammed was encouraged and taught by his brother who shared and recognised his love for painting. Ibrahim studied Fine Art and Craft with the School of Technology. His tools are brushes and colour as well as compasses, set squares and rulers. He recognizes that good quality and beauty in his work are essential to make it successful.

ART IS CREATIVE AND I LOVE CREATIVITY IN MY  
LIFE.







# FATIMA HALILU

## GRAPHIC DESIGNER



Fatima has achieved an HND in Graphics and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education. She is a graphic designer with a strong relationship to the processes of her craft. She loves 'to touch, to discuss, to see, to do'. She says 'it is my career, my future'. She uses cardboard, paper, pencils, gumstay, cotton and satin fabrics, trimmings, lace and embroidery threads of different colours.

MY INSPIRATION IS FROM NATURAL FLOWERS,  
WITH SLIGHT MODIFICATION AND ALTERATION.

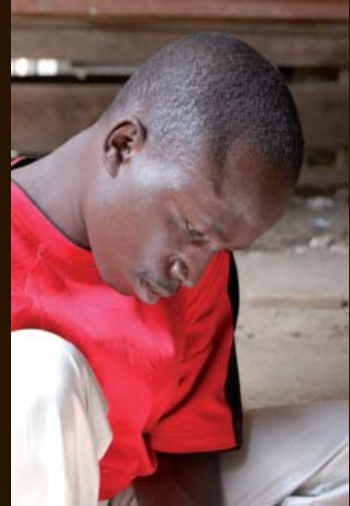






# NURA YAKASAI

## ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

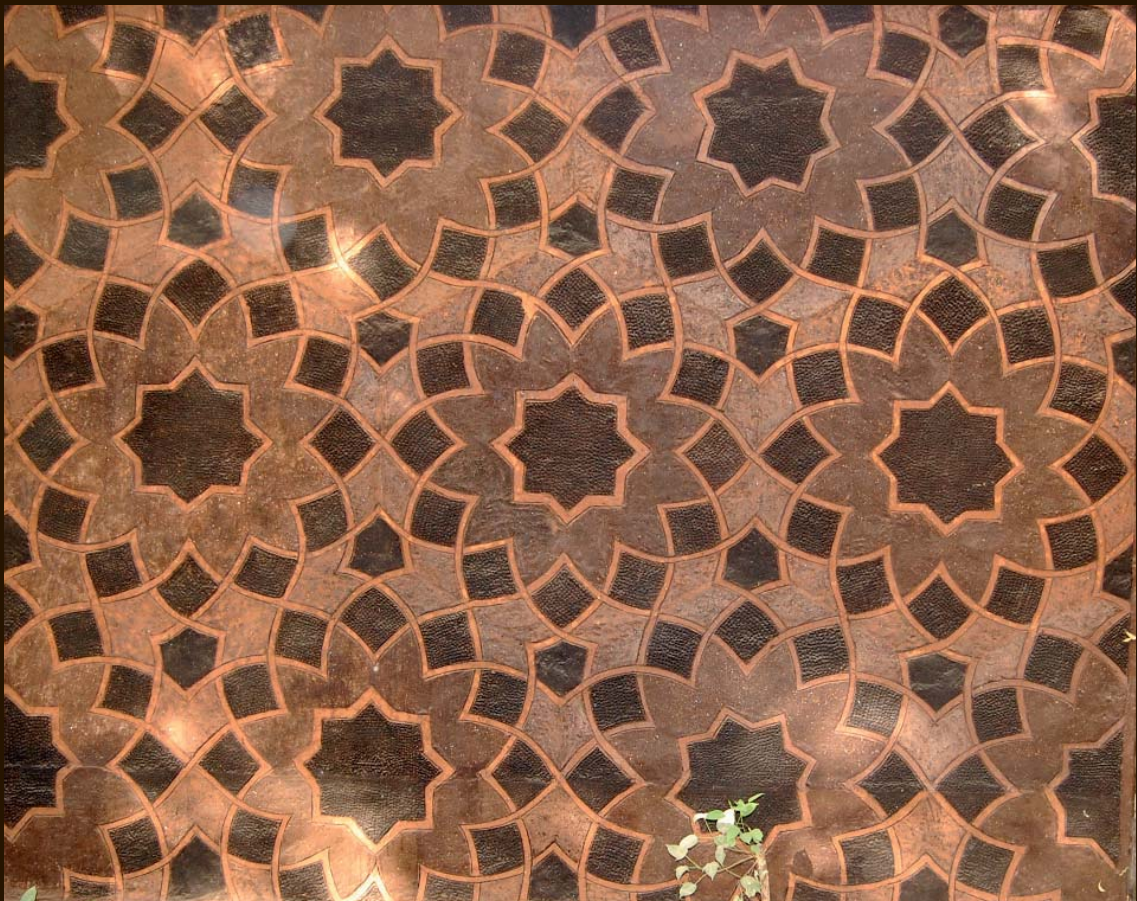


I began learning my craft in 1995 and became interested in it because it is my tradition and I don't want it to become extinct. The new skills I have make my work more attractive to the customers. Geometric designs make my work unique. I use compass, ruler and pencil. My craft is my life.

I USE OUR LOCAL MATERIALS ONE HUNDRED  
PERCENT.







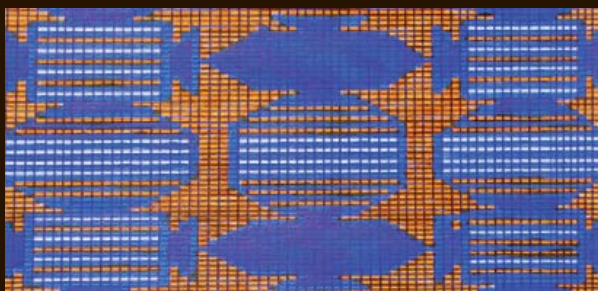
# NURA ALI

## CAP DESIGNER

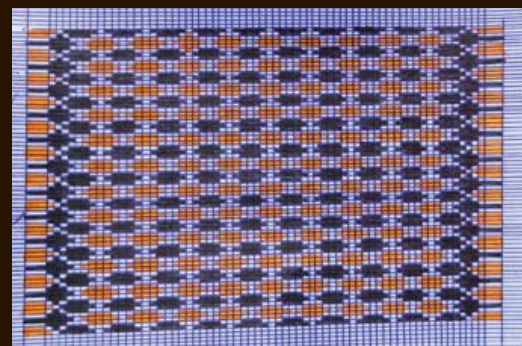


I used to help my mother when I was young. I spent six years under a small workshop owned by a skilful famous successful cap designer. He used to employ and also train people, he employed me and I learned a lot there. For the past 100 years people here in Northern Nigeria are using caps. They act as part of religious dress, but now it's not only for religion, it's become fashion and also pride. After the workshops I realize that I am now more innovative and my work is really different and special. I am making more money because where there is better work, there must be better charges! My materials are the same as they have always been, but the way you construct the design and the colour separation and introducing the new innovative one, that is really what makes a cap unique.

NOW I CAN DESIGN NOT ONLY CAPS, I CAN DESIGN CARPETS, BAGS, AND A LOT OF THINGS, AND ALSO I AM CORRECTING SOME OTHER PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE SUCH TRAINING.







# ISA ABDU

## POT DECORATOR



I began learning my craft about 20 years back by watching my senior brother who was a professional designer. I then started practising on some clay. I became interested because it is a common craft in our community and I am making some money from it. I use different types of mud and clay, a wheel and other traditional tools. I get my ideas from my colleagues and in our village. My work helps keep the traditions of Northern Nigeria alive.

PAINTING BRINGS OUT THE BEAUTY OF THE POT.







# TASIU MOHAMMED

## EMBROIDERER



About seventeen years back, I started learning this craft. I began by practicing on small pieces of cloth; now it is my livelihood. All I need is a needle, thread, and the clothes I work on. I get ideas from my colleagues and every time I see a new design I didn't know before. I have also been introducing the geometric designs I recently learnt from the workshops.

MY WORK IS NOW BETTER BECAUSE THE NEW  
GEOMETRIC DESIGNS I AM APPLYING ARE  
UNIQUE AND ATTRACTIVE.







# FAROUK MODIBBO

## CALABASH CARVER



I cannot say when I started. I was very young and taught by my Grandfather who taught all ten of us in the family. He taught us both white and black carving styles and he also taught us to be farmers. I don't know how far back, but my great-grandfather was a calabash carver too -- it is my heritage. I could have been a long-distance driver for more money, but I like to stay at home near my family, so calabash carving and farming became my life. Working with calabash gives me spiritual satisfaction and I look at my designs and know it does not come from me -- it comes from Allah.

MY BODY IS A COMPASS, WITH ANGLES  
AVAILABLE BETWEEN THUMB AND FINGERS,  
ELBOW AND SHOULDER.









# HANNATU A. HASSAN

## TEXTILE DESIGNER



I began working on my craft when I started to study Art in the university. I became interested in textile during my undergraduate degree after going through all aspects of industrial design. After two years I decided to specialize in textiles. I got my training in the university and afterwards from local craftsmen. In five years time I see myself achieving a great deal in my craft and also being recognised not just in my own local area but elsewhere.

I NOW TAKE MY ART MORE SERIOUSLY AND TRY TO  
BE VERY ACCURATE IN MY DESIGNS.







# DANLITI YAHAYA

## CERAMIC TECHNOLOGIST



Twenty-seven years ago he began learning his craft from local potters. He has also trained at Kano State Polytechnic and has achieved an extremely high standard of ceramic expertise which he shares with his community and CADDAK. He became interested by hand building and uses both local and modern tools.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE  
UNDERSTAND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND  
MATERIALS.







# MOHAMMED BELLO

## ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

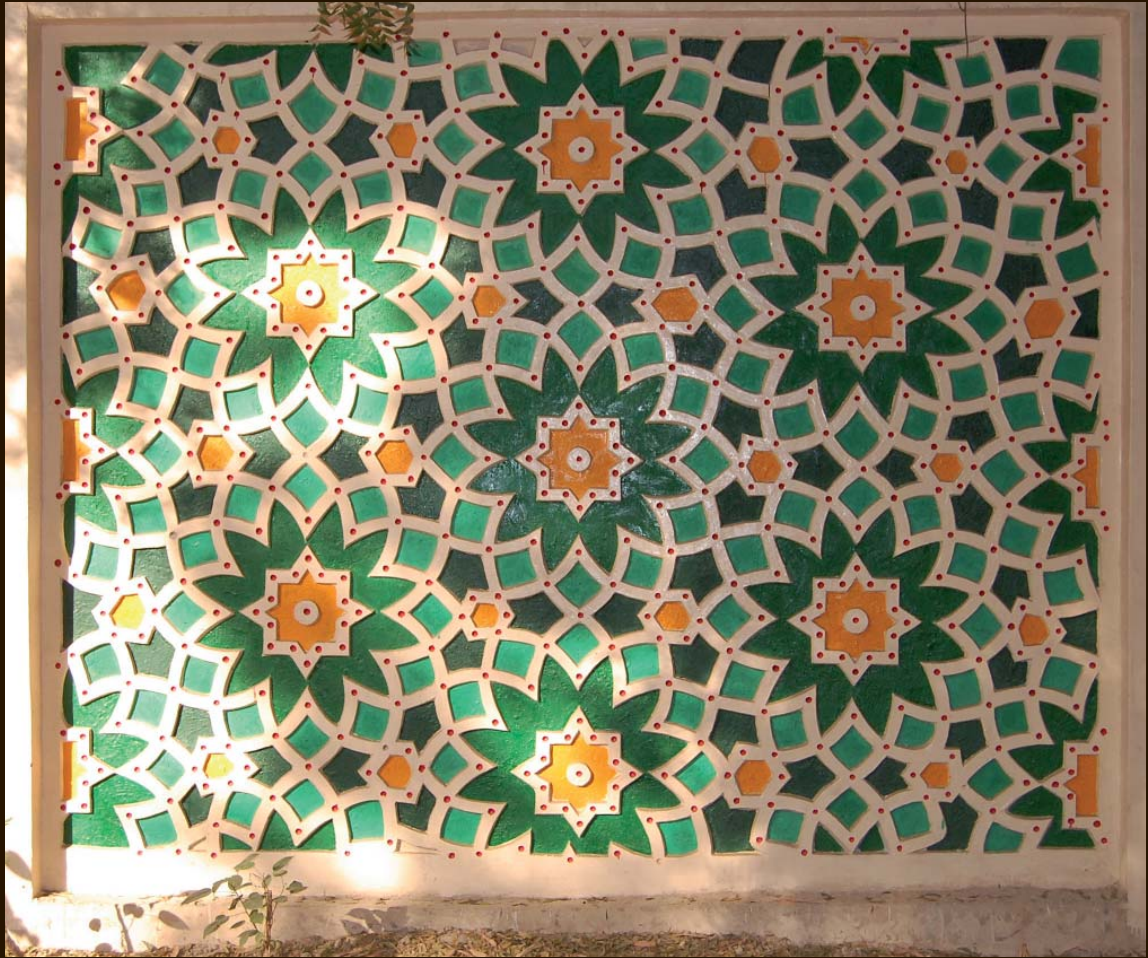


I started on my craft in 1987. It is something I inherited from my father; I grew up in it and with it. Most of the materials I use are traditional. We have added modern materials to traditional techniques to make our craft unique. My ideas come from the teachings I got from my father. The BC/PSTA workshops have really affected the way I work and I have now learned to plan, take measurements and make stencils that help to make my work easier and finer when the product is finished.

DESPITE THE ADVENT OF MODERN CRAFT, WE STILL MAINTAIN MOST OF OUR TRADITIONAL METHODS AND THIS WILL CONTINUE TO KEEP THE TRADITION ALIVE.









## WORKSHOP FACILITATORS

The Prince's School of Traditional Arts has established an outreach and community education programme to share the research and experience that it has gained in the past 25 years. The aim of this programme is to encourage various communities – including artists, youth, and craftsmen and women – to rediscover and reassess their cultural heritage and background. Outreach work integrates theory and practice, helping each participant work harmoniously with head, heart and hand.

The Prince's School facilitates workshops through teams consisting of graduates of its MA and Doctoral programmes. The alumni are practicing artists and makers with a high degree of expertise in their respective disciplines.

Two of the School's alumni, Fosuwa Andoh and David Barnes, represent The Prince's School, its philosophy, ethos and practice in this project, 'Celebrating the Traditional Crafts of Northern Nigeria'.

Fosuwa Andoh is a PhD researcher on the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts programme of the Prince's School of Traditional Arts focusing on African traditional and sacred art in the light of perennial philosophy. She was born in Sheffield, England, grew up in Sierra Leone, Ghana and The Gambia. She now lives in Leeds. Her work is inspired by the traditional and visual aesthetics of Africa's oral tradition. As an artist, she uses elements of traditional classical African art and crafts to express contemporary urban African experiences both on the local and global levels. Working with various materials including glass, batik and sand (from various parts of the world); using myths, rituals, memories, symbolism, culturally specific materials and text, she negotiates the boundaries between the traditional and the contemporary, the Sacred and the Secular, Art and Craft. Fosuwa's work honours the creative journeys of the Ancestors, maintaining the chain of transmission. This enables her to convey and reinforce not only her multiple heritage but also her spiritual journey.

David Barnes holds an MA in Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts from The Prince's School of Traditional Arts (2005). He received his BA (hons) from the University of Wales in Cardiff (1997) and holds a Foundation Degree in Art and Design from Amersham College (1994). His works have been displayed at exhibitions in the National Building Museum in Washington, DC, The Taz Palace in Cairo, Egypt, the King Abdul Aziz Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and the gallery of the Prince's Foundation in London. He was among the MA students invited to participate in the Icon Painting Summer School at the Monastery of Vatopaidi in Mount Athos, Greece in 2005. David has been a facilitator in a number of workshops of The Prince's School including workshops with Shakespeare's Globe Education for Islam Awareness Week, Skill City at the ExCel Centre, summer workshops at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, Islam Expo at the Alexandra Palace in London and most recently in an education programme sponsored by Al-Turath Foundation for a group of municipal architects, urban designers and craftsmen of the municipality of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. David is also a tutor at the Mary Carpenter Unit of Eastwood Park Prison in Gloucestershire and at the Wells Cathedral School.



The Prince's School of Traditional Arts (PSTA) is primarily founded upon the post-graduate MA and PhD programmes in the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts (VITA). The VITA programme was originally established at the Royal College of Art in 1984 and transferred to The Prince of Wales' Institute of Architecture in 1993. It subsequently became incorporated into The Prince's Foundation in 2000.

The Prince's School of Traditional Arts was initiated as a separate charity in April 2004 and is located at the Prince's Foundation premises in Charlotte Road, Shoreditch. HRH The Prince of Wales has specially appointed a body of Trustees to bring new ideas, support and momentum to the new School.

The School has since expanded its activities to include Outreach and Community Education including an international programme which extends the School's presence in Amman, Jordan; Cairo, Egypt; Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia; Kano, Nigeria; and Tripoli in Libya. In the UK it is working with Shakespeare's Globe Education, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Ismaili Centre and other similar organisations. The School also has a Design Consultancy and Product Development programme working closely with Traditional Arts Limited, a trading company that produces commercial products using designs from the School's alumni.



British Council connects people with learning opportunities and creative ideas from the UK to build lasting relationships around the world. Every year the British Council works with over 3 million Nigerians in different broad sectors (Arts, Education, Science, Governance and English). Our work in northern Nigeria is at the heart of what we do. We are placed to work with diverse groups such as The Prince's School of Traditional Arts and of course these excellent traditional artists included in this catalogue. They represent some of the best ideals of both of our communities.

The British Council's office in Kano began operations in 1949 in its present location at 10 Emir's Palace Road, inside the old city, 400 metres West of the Kofar Nassarawa city gate which is at the Gidan Murtala roundabout. Made available by the Emir of Kano, the building is a masterpiece of original traditional architecture surrounded by a mud perimeter wall on the right hand side of Emir's Palace Road if approached from Kofar Nassarawa. It was refurbished in early 2004.

Enquiries to the crafts men and women of Craft and Design Development Association Kano (CADDAK) should be directed to:

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