

Samuel Ntiro, 'Chopping Wood', 1967



Samuel Ntiro was an artist from Tanzania. He grew up in the countryside around Mount Kilimanjaro in the north, where his father was a coffee farmer. He had seven brothers and sisters.

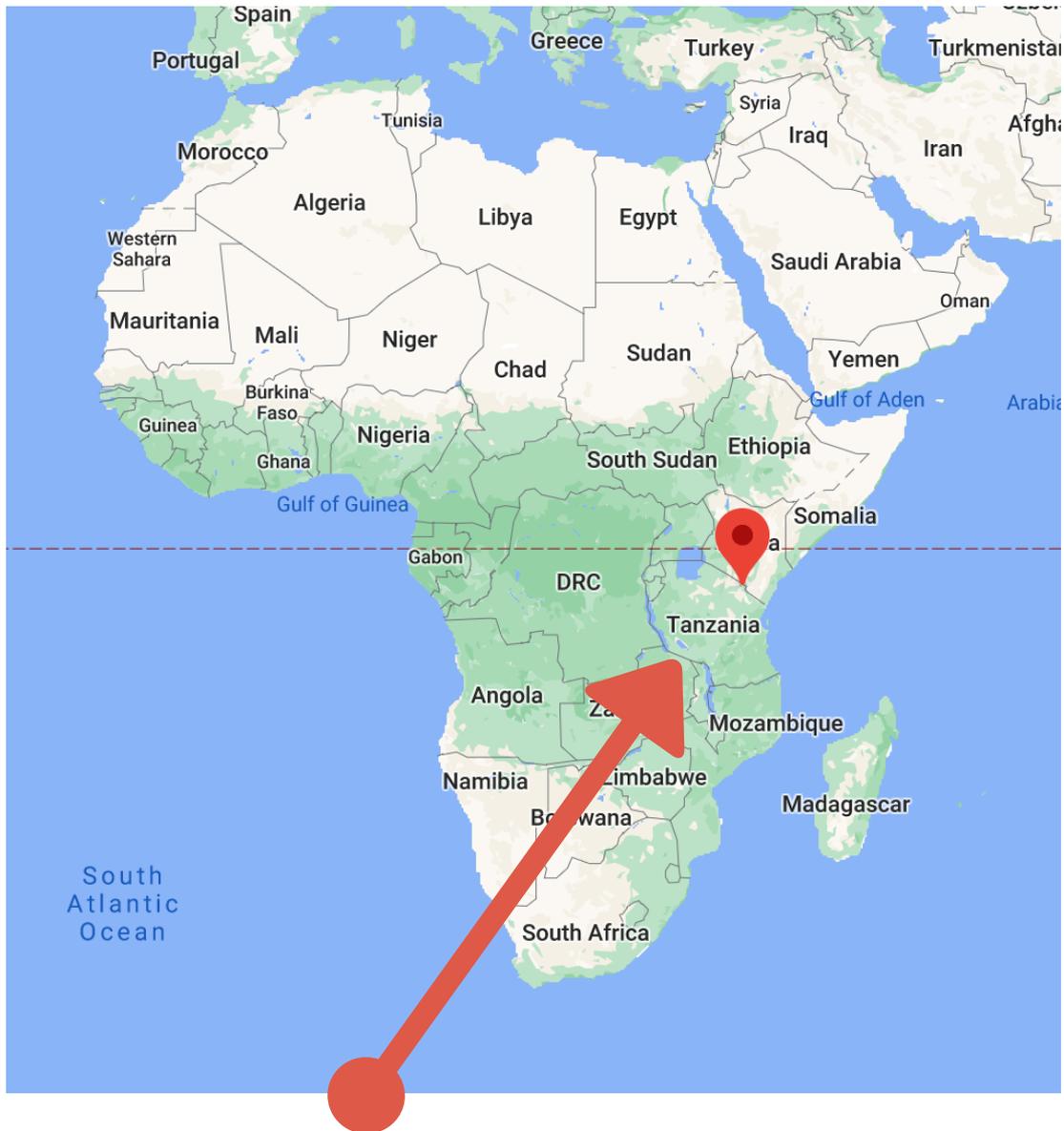
Sam's family were members of the Chagga people, a group who have been farmers around Mount Kilimanjaro for a long time.



Sam went to study art at a famous art school in Kampala, Uganda called Makerere College. He became a professional artist, and specialised in painting. Even though he moved to big cities like Kampala and Dar es Salaam, he always chose to paint pictures that recorded what life was like where he grew up. He wanted to record for history what Chagga villages, farming practices, animal life and traditions were.

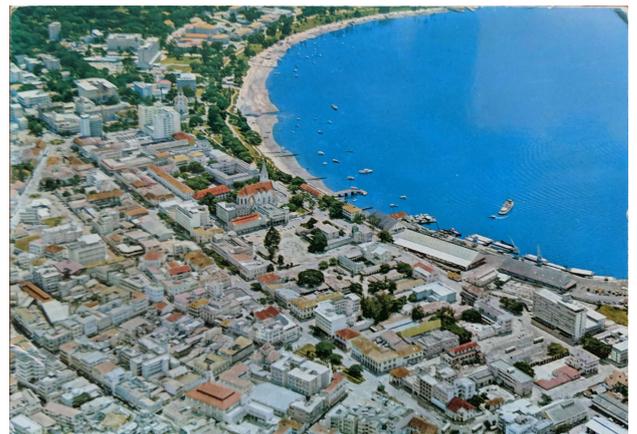
After Sam trained as an artist, he moved to Tanzania's biggest city, Dar es Salaam, where he became an important artist and a champion of Tanzanian art. The leader of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, asked Sam to be an ambassador and he came to Britain to represent his country.

When Sam was a child the place that he lived in was part of the British empire in East Africa. It was then called Tanganyika. In the 1950s, Julius Nyerere led a campaign for Tanganyika to be free from British rule. In 1961 it became independent and in 1964 it combined with the island of Zanzibar to become 'Tanzania'. So, when 'Cutting Wood' was bought for Argyll, Tanzania was a very young country and Sam was very proud of it.



This is **Tanzania** on a map. It is a big country which is also home to the famous Mount Kilimanjaro (where the red spot is) and the Serengeti National Park where you can go on safari. In the north you can visit Lake Victoria.

The biggest city is called Dar es Salaam and it is on the Swahili coast. There are lots of beautiful beaches there, as you can see in this old postcard.



Here are some other examples of Sam's work:



This one is in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It is called 'Men Taking the Banana Beer to the Bride at Night' and it shows men carrying a type of drink called *Mbege* being carried through the forest to a bride before her wedding. *Mbege* is made from very ripe bananas and millet seed. As it cooks it turns a yellowish-red colour. It is drunk by Chagga men and women on special occasions.

***Does this painting look like the painting you have in Argyll?
How is it the same or different?***



This painting is called 'Monkeys Feeding' and it is in Lakeland Arts in England.

It is unusual because Sam usually painted scenes with people in them, but here he shows a group of monkeys.

Why do you think he chose to paint them? What do you think they represent to Chagga villages



This painting is called Buguruni Village and it is in the Government Art Collection in London.

Buguruni is not near Mount Kilimanjaro and the Chagga villages that Sam grew up in, but on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam. It used to be a place of coconut plantations.

Can you see any coconuts in the Sam's painting?

This is a good example of Sam's interest in recording what places looked like back in time. As Dar es Salaam grew to be a big city, Buguruni looked less and less like a village.

Even though Sam moved away from where he grew up, he never forgot about the where he was from and the ways in which people worked together in the village.

Looking at the composition:

'Composition' means how a painting is arranged: ***what is in the background (the back of the painting)? What is in the foreground (the front of the painting)? What choices has the artist made to make a picture look a certain way? What effect does his choice of colour and style have?***

Have a good look at the painting and think about how Sam put it together. Do you think he painted the forest first and then added the men working? Sam uses a lot of different dark colours to create the effect of a dense forest or woodland. The trees fall and make criss-cross patterns on the forest floor.



The men look like they are all lifting their axes at different times, but the shapes of their bodies make them all look very similar to each other. Sam does this to give us the sense that they are working together. This is not a painting about one special person, or about celebrating the strongest man. It is a painting about a group working together as a team. ***How has Sam painted each of their shirts?*** The colours both help the bodies to stand out in the forest, but they also coordinate with each other to add to the sense of them working as a group. Look close and see how Sam has blended his colours together.

This is a photo of Sam. It was taken in New York in 1960 and it was one of a series of photographs of him as a professional artist.



When he sent his painting, 'Chopping Wood' to live in Argyll, he included this photograph because he wanted everyone to see what he looked like.

In 1967, the same year that Sam sent this photo and his painting to Argyll, he became the Cultural Commissioner for Tanzania. He was in charge of looking after and promoting Tanzania's art and culture. It was important, therefore, for him to make sure that anyone who saw his painting knew that he was a professional artist, and that the painting was a reflection of his unique and personal style.

How does Sam make clear that he is a professional and experienced artist in this photograph?

Here are some ideas of things you could make or write about using Sam's painting and his photograph:

1. Choose a something in Argyll that you do as a group (a dance, a sport or a job, like cutting down wood, perhaps). See if you can paint or draw it in a similar way to Sam: can you show a group of people working together at something? How can you use colour and composition to create a sense of teamwork?
2. If you were an ambassador for Argyll, what would you want people in Tanzania to know about where you came from? Are their special foods, clothes, dances or other traditions that you would want to share?
3. Look up Tanzania on a map: can you find Mount Kilimanjaro and Dar es Salaam? Can you work out how far they are from Argyll?
4. Write a letter to Sam's family and friends, telling them what you like about his painting. Are there things you wish you knew about this work or any of his others, or just about him as an artist?

Have fun!