

HURUMZI HENNA ART GALLERY



ZANZIBAR

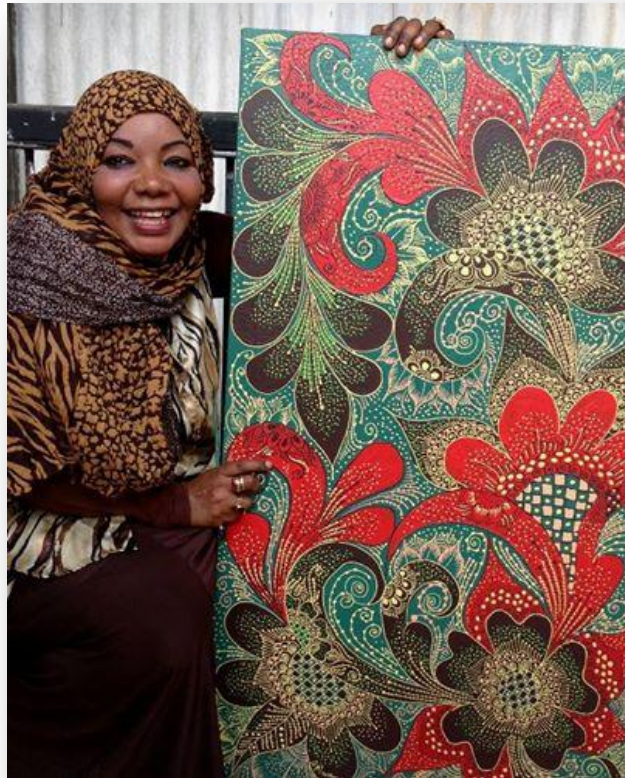
The women of Hurumzi Henna Art Gallery transform traditional henna body arts into paintings and prints. Using a centuries old tradition of adorning women's hands and feet for celebrations such as weddings and festivals, the artists translate the patterns of body art onto canvas creating a new and soon to be iconic art style through their elaborate paintings.

What began as a workshop of 10 women henna artists in 2007 became a thriving women's cooperative engendering and an entire new style of paintings.

Hurumzi Henna Art Gallery aims to change women's lives by producing a new artistic style and beneficial means of income that has improved their way of life

Traditionally, Henna is used for; celebration of special occasions like weddings, holidays & birthdays; inspiration; reminders; beauty; cosmetic treatments; medicinal uses; blessings & well-being; to be part of an ancient tradition; and an alternative or precursor to a tattoo. Henna is used as means of self-expression by the rich and poor alike. Henna application has changed over the years with new methods, equipments and designs used. This art form is always evolving;

Hurumzi Henna Art gallery is living proof that this traditional body art can be transformed into unique and beautiful master pieces on canvas



Henna in the West

Today people all over the world have adopted the ancient traditions of adorning their bodies with the beautiful natural artwork created from the henna plant. It became a very popular form of temporary body decoration in the 90's in the US and has become a growing trend ever since. Celebrities like Madonna, Gwen Stefani, Yasmine Bleeth, Liv Tyler, Xena, and many others proudly adorn their bodies with henna and show them off in public, movies, videos, etc. People throughout the west have adopted the eastern tradition in their lives by having their hands and feet painted for weddings, bellies painted while in pregnancy, heads adorned with henna while going through chemotherapy, scars camouflaged to make them unnoticeable, etc.

Origin of Henna

Henna art has been practiced for over 5000 years in Pakistan, India, Africa and the Middle East. There is some documentation that it is over 9000 years old. Because henna has natural cooling properties, people of the desert, for centuries, have been using henna to cool down their bodies. They make a paste of henna and soak their palms and soles of the feet in it to get an air conditioning affect.

They feel its cooling sensation throughout the body for as long as the henna stain remains on their skin. Initially, as the stain faded away, it left patterns on the skin surface which led to ideas to make designs for decorative purposes. In the ancient Egyptian times mummies wore henna designs and it is documented that Cleopatra herself used henna for decorative purposes.

Henna was not only a popular adornment for the rich but the poor, who could not afford jewelry, used it to decorate their bodies as well.

Henna is a dye prepared from the plant and the art of temporary tattooing based on those dyes. Henna has been used since antiquity to dye skin, hair, and fingernails, as well as fabrics including silk, wool, and leather. The name is used in other skin and hair dyes, such as *black henna* and *neutral henna*, neither of which are derived from the henna plant.

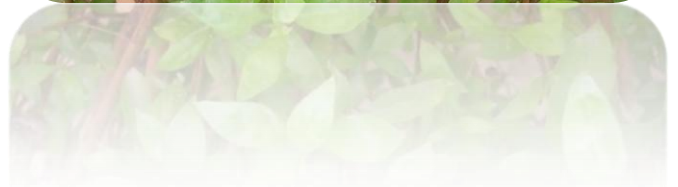


The Henna Plant

Henna (*Lawsonia inermis*, also known as hina, henna tree, mignonette tree, Egyptian privet) is a flowering plant that grows 12-15 feet high and comes from the sole species of the **Lawsonia** genus. The English name "henna" comes from the Arabic (*ḥinnā*). The name *henna* also refers to the dye prepared from the henna plant and the art of temporary tattooing based on those dyes. Henna has been used for centuries to dye skin, hair, and fingernails, as well as fabrics including silk, wool, and leather.

Henna henna was used for cosmetic purposes in the Roman Empire, Convivencia-period Iberia and Ancient Egypt, as well as other parts of North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Near East and South Asia. It can be found in other hot climates like Pakistan, India and Australia. The plant grows best in heat up to 120F degrees and contains more dye at these temperatures. It wilts in temperatures below 50F degrees. It also grows better in dry soil than damp soil. The leaves are in opposite decussate pairs and vary in sizes from approximately 2-4 cm. long. The flowers are fragrant, produced in conical panicles 10-40 cm long, each flower 5 mm diameter, with four white petals. The fruit is a dry capsule 6-8 mm diameter, containing numerous 12.5 mm seeds.

The henna plant contains lawsone which is a reddish-orange dye that binds to the keratin (a protein) in our skin and safely stains the skin. The stain can be from pale orange to nearly black depending on the quality of the henna and how well one's skin takes it. Good henna, fresh from hot & dry climates, will stain the darkest.



For body decorations, the leaves of the henna plant are dried, crushed into a fine powder, and made into a creamy paste using a variety of techniques. This paste is then applied to the skin, staining the top layer of skin only. In its natural state it will dye the skin an orange or brown color. Although it looks dark green (or dark brown depending on the henna) when applied, this green paste will flake off revealing an orange stain. The stain becomes a reddish-brown color after 1-3 days of application. The palms and the soles of the feet stain the darkest because the skin is the thickest in these areas & contain the most keratin. The farther away from hands and feet the henna is applied, the lesser the color. The face area usually stains the lightest. The designs generally last from 1-4 weeks on the skin surface depending on the henna, care and skin type.



Henna works on all skin types and colors. It looks just as beautiful on dark skin as light skin but because some people skin may take the dye better than others, it can look more prominent on one and not as much on another (even lighter skin). But nevertheless, henna is a symbol of beauty, art, and happiness and is meant for EVERYONE!



Because henna acts as a sun block, there is an added benefit to having henna designs in the summer. For those who love to get a tan it leaves tan lines! In order to benefit from this, it is best to get a henna design, let its natural color stay on for 3-5 days and then go and get a tan. This way you can enjoy the natural henna color on your body, the henna color with the tan, and then tan lines in the shapes of the design (once the henna fades away)! The tan lines last as long as the actual tan!

Medicinal Properties of Henna

Henna is considered an herb, and has long been known to have healing qualities. It is used topically and usually not ingested or inhaled. In ancient times it has been applied to the skin surface for such ailments as headaches, stomach pains, burns (including sunburns), open wounds, as a fever reducer, athlete's foot and even the prevention of hair loss. It is also a sun block and has been used on the noses of animals to prevent sunburn. Another use of henna would be to apply it to goat skin bags, after they have been salt-cured. It "insect-proofs" or "moth-proofs" the bags by making the skin poisoned or inedible.

Henna Traditions in Zanzibar and around the world

Henna is traditionally used for special occasions like holidays, birthdays and weddings in Africa, Pakistan, India, and the Middle East. The most popular of the traditions is the Mehndi (henna) Night where the bride, her family, relatives and friends get together to celebrate the wedding to come. The night is filled with games, music and dance performances that may have been rehearsed for months prior to the event by those closest to the bride while the bride gets extensive henna patterns done on her hands and feet that go to her elbows and sometimes, knees. The bridal patterns can take hours and are often done by multiple henna artists. The guests will usually receive small designs (tattoos) on the backs of their hands as well.

Today, brides prefer to have their henna designs done prior to the henna night so that they can enjoy the festivities and also have a deeper stain by the wedding day.



Tradition holds that for as long as the henna stain appears on the bride, she doesn't have to do any housework! Also, the darker the stain the better the marriage and the better the mother-in-law will be! So you can imagine why the bride would want the stain to come out dark and last as long as possible!

Swahili Henna Traditions

In the past Swahili henna designs have names and meaning in daily life. Some of the common Swahili traditional designs are:

“Barabara” (road)

“Machenza” (Tangerine)

“Msumeno” (Saw)

“Ngazi” (ladder)

Henna reflected both age and marital status. In Swahili culture unmarried girls were not allowed to apply henna, with the exception of young girls that have reached puberty.

The Bride would be separated from her bridegroom and sent off to a teacher known as “Somo” where she would be taught how to be a good wife. She was to be groomed for days and spend several hours- a-day learning about life lessons such as patience, obedience and how to manage the household. She then would return to her family home fully bejeweled in henna designs from the palm of her hands, arms and all the way to her knees in elaborate floral designs.

Henna was used as means of married women pleasing their husbands. Henna painting was viewed as ceremonious. Married women would inform their husband’s days in advance by requesting permission to apply henna this would mean sometimes even leaving her marital home for days. This time apart was to serve as a means for the husband to prepare and wait in longing for his wife’s return usually after her menstrual cycle. During this time he would buy her gifts such as shoes, traditional Swahili clothes (kanga), perfume which he would give her.



Swahili Bride decorated with henna

CHANGES IN SWAHILI HENNA APPLICATION

STAGE ONE: THE DIP

Henna plant was used by dipping the plant in hot water in a traditional wooden hollow tray known as “kisusu” or metal plate known as “siniya”. After which the applicant would dip their hands and feet into and a stain would be created on the palms of the hands and bottom of their feet. There were no patterns involved at this stage.



STAGE TWO: THE COFFEE CUP

Preservation of henna in its dry form was vital and this was done using a glass bottle or dark cotton cloth of which was wrapped with dry banana rids creating a parcel and hang usually in the kitchen. During this stage henna would be made into a paste and placed in a traditional coffee cup mixed with either/or lemon, hot water, tea and other spices such as the clove or dry jasmine. A well would be made in the centre of the paste and a little water added following which the cup was placed in sunlight. The water serves as an indication of how “good” the henna was i.e. the darker it was the better your henna would be. Women would use either their index finger or a stick to apply the henna on their hands and feet with simple designs such as “barabara”- road,

“machtenza”- tangerine

“mwezi” - moon

BELOW:

TRADITIONAL ZANZIBAR HENNA DESIGN



STAGE THREE: THE PEN

As the years progressed women began experimenting with more patterns and design. They began drawing outlines with regular writing pen. These designs would take 2-3 days to complete the process of henna drawing. Henna on the feet: the applicant would have to wait for the henna to dry with their feet slightly raised using a wooden log sometimes several women at a time would do this using one log. The outline would then be filled in with henna paste using a stick or index finger; in addition to this the applicant would have to wait for the henna to dry and return to the artist again to have the outline drawn using peacock(black dye). As you can imagine this was a long a tedious process!



FEET DRYING ON LOG



HENNA FILLING USING A STICK

STAGE FOUR: THE CONE

Now a day's most henna artists around the world prefer to use the cone or tubes of henna. Cones are made using plastic paper with scotch-tape to bind the paste into a cone shape with a hole at the end. In the same way you would frost icing on a cake, henna is decorated directly on to the applicant's body with only the artist's imagination of the finished product.

A true work of art!



MEET THE ARTISTS BEHIND THE PAINTINGS



NAJMA AMEIR

Najma feels she was born to be an artist! She is the first child in a family of five children. She completed Primary Education in 1991 and Secondary Education in 2000. She has worked with henna body drawing and braiding hair ever since attending school. In 2007 she joined the workshop at Zayaa Gallery to learn henna painting on canvas. She enjoyed the workshop and it enabled her income to increase. In 2010 she was among the students in a special workshop in which she learned how to make prints. She is grateful to all the people who taught her.



FATMA MOHAMMED

Fatma was born in Zanzibar in 1984. After finishing Secondary School at the age of 20 she started henna body drawing. In 2007 she met Hamza Ausiy who advised her to try to paint henna designs on canvas. She was the very first person to start painting henna designs on canvas! In 2010, she participated in a printmaking workshop. She is really proud and appreciative of her professional and loves to paint and to make prints. She says, "Nothing will pull me away from my art making!"



REHEMA ABDALLA

Rehema was born in 1977 in Zanzibar. She attended Primary School and finished Secondary School in 1992. In 2008 she was trained in henna painting here at gallery on Hurumzi Street. In 2010 she trained in printmaking. She has benefited from this training and it has increased her income and helped her family. Henna painting gives her recognition as an artist. She would like to thank all her teachers and colleagues for the wonderful cooperation they have among themselves. "Henna painting on canvas is unique and I my work".



KHADIJA ABDALLA

Khadija was born in 1975 and is from southern Zanzibar. She attended Primary and Secondary School in Zanzibar. She worked in tourist shop for several years where she sold art. It was this experience is what made her decide to be an artist. In 2007 she was chosen to participate in the workshop for creating henna designs on canvas. That training broadened her vision. She is now self-employed and seeks to earn her livelihood through making henna paintings. She is truly devoted to her art. "Without art there is no point to life!" she says.



ASYA JAFFAR SUWED

Asya finished her University Education in 2013 at ZIFA (Zanzibar Institute of Financial Administration) with a Diploma in Information Technology and Accounting. She learned to work with henna on canvas at the Zayaa Gallery. She believes that henna drawing is unique to Zanzibar and uses it on canvas, cloth and for making cards. She often draws ideas from her life in Zanzibar and the world around her. Many of her needs are met by selling her art. She would like to visit and learn about art in the United States. She lives with her mother and brothers and sisters.



JAMILA MZEE MATAKA

Jamila was born in 1977 in Zanzibar. She finished her Secondary Education and studied painting from 1997 to 1999 at the Institute of Art in Zanzibar. After College, she had the opportunity to use her art to make a living, and now she creates intricate henna paintings on canvas. She feels that henna body painting is her country's most beautiful women's art form and she is proud to be one of the group of women now painting these designs on canvas. She loves this kind of art. "It is the fulfillment of my life dream".



**MTUMWA JUMA
(DAMTU)**

Mtumwa Juma was born to be an artist. She can't even remember when she started drawing even as child she had a good feeling about drawing and drew at home and in school.

After completing school in 1990 she studied art at Nyumba ya Sanaa Art School in Zanzibar. In business, managing and packing art and the creative arts. She has also participated in art exhibitions in Zanzibar and on the mainland. She never wants to stop making art.

"It fills my heart and helps me to perform her duties!" she says. She expects she will benefit even more from making art in the future.



**SHARIFA JUMA
(SHERRY)**

My name is Sharifa Juma Molid. I was born in Pemba in 1972. I'm a mother of two children. I like henna art so much that started to paint henna on the body when I was 10 years old. When I finished my Secondary Education, I was lucky to get training in art through different workshops.

In 2007, there was a new idea coming up and I had the chance to participate in training to transfer henna from the body to canvas, using acrylic color. Because of my love of art I've had new ideas and have used real henna (red and black) along with natural colors to make something totally new again. I would like to say to women; we have to get up and fight for our future, and not stay at home. A woman can do it.



SAADA JUMA

A specialist in henna painting, Saada was born in 1968 and was trained in various art forms at the Institute of Arts in Zanzibar in 1989. Saada is one of the leading henna painters in Zanzibar and has participated in workshops and exhibited both locally and internationally. She has also won several art awards. Saada works part time as a henna painter and as a carving tutor, encouraging young girls in her community to embrace art and realise their creative potential.



**MWANAKHAMIS MOHAMED
(MWANA)**

Mwanakhamis Mohammed, also known as Mwana was born in 1971. She teaches Mwanakwereke Art School in Zanzibar. She learned the art from special teachers from Japan in Zanzibar's Old Fort. She has studied water color, batik and henna painting on the body and on canvas. In 2010 she received training in printmaking. She has painted since 1995. She loves art very much. "It is my life," she says.

HURUMZI HENNA ART GALLERY



ZANZIBAR