Africa Crafts

Help Us Test An Experiment

This holiday season, Africa News will send out a small catalogue of African products as an experiment in mail order distribution of African arts and crafts. The project arose from discussions with the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), whose cottage industries program is looking for overseas markets.

For many African parents, especially women, the sale of handicrafts offers their only means of feeding and supporting their families. But few producers have access to markets; most must rely on a series of intermediaries to sell and export their wares. The NCCK, and other groups working on community development issues, are working to minimize the steps between production and purchase in order to maximize income for the producer.

At the same time, organizations have sprung up in Europe and North America to help on the marketing side. Groups such as Pueblo to People, Save the Children and Equal Exchange are pioneering models for more equitable international trading patterns, where third world producers retain a larger share of the value of their products. So far, though, African crafts have not figured largely in the alternative trading movement. And there is little information about what sorts of African items will sell through a mail order catalogue.

By testing a few things on you – our subscribers – we can get a better idea of what and how much to stock for the catalogue, which will be mailed in early November.

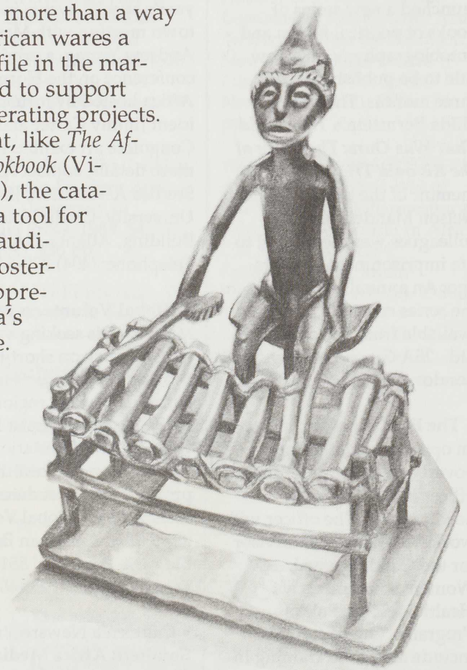
For Africa News, this venture is more than a way to give African wares a higher profile in the marketplace and to support income generating projects. We hope that, like *The Africa News Cookbook* (Viking Penguin), the catalogue will be a tool for reaching new audiences and for fostering a greater appreciation of Africa's cultural heritage.

Charms to charm you

Among the Akan people of Ghana, Akuaba dolls (pronounced ah-kwah'-bah), carved of mahogany or sese wood, were viewed as powerful aids to fertility. Ours come from the Ghana Export Promotion Council, which is working with producers to develop export markets for Ghanaian crafts. We have two sizes; the smaller has less elaborate etchings on the back. Both make a simple but dramatic display on a shelf or windowsill.

Item A1: 12.5-inch doll. $14
Item A2: 14-inch doll. $16

Worth their weight



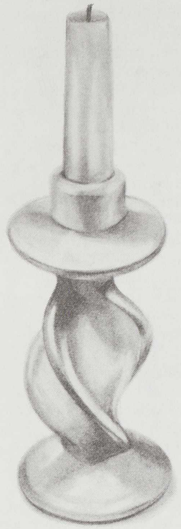
Few African arts have had as much mystique for the foreign collector as gold weights, used for centuries as scale balances to measure gold in the Ashanti kingdoms of what is now Ghana. Made of brass by the sophisticated "lost-wax" casting method, the weights themselves were works of art and today are far more valuable than the gold they once counterbalanced. Modern versions are purely decorative – although they make wonderful paper weights – but they are reminders of an African flair for making even the commerce of daily life an occasion to celebrate beauty. This xylophone player seems to be hearing his own muse – and such is his magic that you might, too!

Item B: 3.5-inch brass musician. $24

"Maridadi" means "fancy"

Maridadi Fabrics, sponsored by the Anglican Church, is the grandmother of craft cooperatives. Established in a Nairobi, Kenya slum in 1966, its members hand produce fine silk-screened fabrics and make them into a variety of enchanting products. We've used a pair of these potholders for nearly five years and have passed the bibs down from one child to the next – and the sturdy, 100% cotton fabric is still intact! Natural heat treatment and pre-washing insure color fastness without toxic chemicals. Besides being excellent holiday presents, the potholders make wonderful gifts to a host, whether you're staying the weekend or just for dinner. Bibs have cotton terrycloth backing. Potholders are bold African geometrics. Stylized giraffes grace the bibs and enchant their wearers.

Item C1: Black on teal bib. $8
Item C2: Black on red bib. $8
Item D1: Black on sienna potholder. Set of two, $12
Item D2: Black on red potholder. Set of two, $12



Shedding Light

Kenya's Kisii people carve soft stone into swirling candlesticks elegant enough for the most formal dining but equally at home in a casual setting. The color is a luminous rosey ivory, resembling marble but with a warmer, gentler glow.

Item E1: 5-inch Candlestick. $12
Special offer E2: Set of two. $20

Domesticated animals

Banana fiber products have long been a staple of the NCCK's cottage industry cooperatives. These wild animals, tamed for your home by skilled Kenyan artisans, are captivating peeping out from behind potted plants or as a table centerpiece, but children also delight in them. If they're used as toys, you should pull out the elephant's sharp "tusks;" you can easily replace them for display. Set of four – ranging from 3.5 inches to 5.5 inches in height – comes with an elephant, a giraffe, a rhinoceros and a gazelle.

Item F: Banana fiber animals. $15

Return to: **Africa Crafts**
P.O. Box 3851
Durham, NC 27702
(919) 286-0747

Ordered by: _____

Ship to: _____
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Item#	How many	Description	Size	Price	Total

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Total	Add
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$25.01-$50.....	$5.95
$50.01-$75.....	$7.95
$75.01-$100.....	$8.95

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