



# Hand Made With Love: Africa's artisans and the quest for authenticity

*Katherine Ladd*

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## **Hand Made With Love: Africa's artisans and the quest for authenticity** Katherine Ladd

Africa's craft sector is increasingly being targeted as a vehicle for economic development and social empowerment by western aid agencies, which act as go-betweens for established design companies and artisans. Craft, they say, is a beautiful and uplifting way to help poor communities prosper without compromising their traditional way of life and, unsurprisingly, western designers are keen to get involved in such work. Katherine Ladd questions the blanket acceptance of such craft/design interventions in Africa and instead poses some difficult questions. Is this kind of aid outdated; a legacy from another, less enlightened age? Do the resulting products constitute true artistic collaboration or are they simply a form of outsourcing? How does technology feature in western ideas about African craft? And what exactly does 'authenticity' mean to both the artisans and the designers? The author spent four years observing a craft charity as it was established in Burkina Faso, West Africa, from the mud-floored huts of weavers in remote countryside to the glittering design fairs of Europe and North America. Her thought-provoking, ethnographic approach examines everyone involved with an unflinching eye, including her own role as a designer.

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