

Mkombozi

Empower. Engage. Enable.



FEATURING MAX WOW @ THE ESHOP:

Former Mkombozi youth dreams about making a living through his abstract art

The “Mkombozi eShop” is an initiative for generating income that contributes to our work with vulnerable children and families in Kilimanjaro and Arusha Regions, Tanzania. Moreover, it creates a market for talented Mkombozi youth who are struggling to become self-reliant artists, helping them to transition from residential care to independent living.

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Today, Mkombozi is opening a 10-day online art auction to feature the paintings of a talented youth, Mathew Mahundi, also known as Max Wow.

Max was in Mkombozi’s care for years, always dreaming about the possibility of working as a professional abstract artist. Today he is self-reliant, living on his own in Moshi, considering painting to be his biggest passion in life. However, finding a market for art is not always easy, and Max struggles to find buyers for his work. He wishes to scale up his painting, but faces the problem of not being able to afford the expensive material which is necessary for quality work. The fact is, if Max’s income can be improved through the Mkombozi eShop, he is another step closer to reaching his personal goals.

Learn more about the artist, Max Wow, in his own words...

I was born in Northern Tanzania, Kilimanjaro region by a single mother who wasn't able to support me. My father died when I was around 5 months old and had left my mother while she was still pregnant therefore I've no recollection of him. After his death me and my 3 siblings (from a different mother) were taken to Mwanza and later to Dar es Salaam by my aunt (my father's sister). Here I had a good life, felt safe, eat well and went to school. But unfortunately when I was in the 5th grade my aunt became ill and I found out that she had been tested positive for AIDS.

My uncle offered to take us in because he knew that she eventually would die. My siblings went but I stayed behind to take care of my aunt's farm and sell milk before and after school. In the last stage of her illness my uncle came and took me to his house. He would often beat us, especially me, for little things like coming home late from school, making a mistake in exams etc. In the beginning, he hit me with a branch that he made me cut from the trees. When my grandmother tried to stop him, he beat her too.



By purchasing items in the Mkombozi eShop, you are supporting the efforts of Mkombozi’s talented youth, such as Max Wow (photo), to transition to independent living and support themselves through their work.

Eventually, my grandmother stayed away, so there was nobody to help us. My uncle soon realized that the neighbours knew what was going on every time we went to cut the branches. So he changed his style. From now on he would beat us using a wire which he bended and twisted. He would beat me with this wire until it would wear out and then pick a new wire and continue the beating. One day he strapped me to a chair by my hands and feet and beat me for 2 hours. I thought it was finally over but would soon realize that he left me on the chair while he went to rest before he would continue the harsh beating. This was the last straw for me and I decided to leave.

But it would take a long time before I could begin my life! After leaving my uncle's place I spend some nights sleeping outside bars and where ever I could find space. Then a friend of my aunt took me in. After a month or so I decided to head to Moshi to look for my mother.

I arrived in Moshi at night and didn't know the place or anyone there so I decided to go to the police station to ask for help. I knew that my father worked as a police man and thought they might know where I could find my mother. They couldn't help me but allowed me to sleep outside the station that night. The following day I met an old man who helped me to ask around in town if anybody knew of my mother's whereabouts. After walking the whole day and not getting any information we decided to speak to TV-stations and radio to get them to announce that I was looking for her. To my bad luck it was on a Saturday and they wouldn't be able to broadcast anything regarding missing persons until Thursday, which was way too long for me to wait since I knew no one and had no where to stay. We asked whether they knew of anybody who could help me. I was sent to a social worker who informed me about a center for street children that might be able to help me. I went to the center and told them my story and they agreed to take me in.

After spending a few months there an old man came to the center and said that he was my grandfather. He had heard the radio announcement about my mother and believed that I could be his grandchild and it turned out that I actually was. He really wanted to live with me and said that he would pay my way through school so I moved with him to the village. But after months of hard work and no possibility to ever be taken to school I decided to return back to the center. The center took me back and sent me to school. But after a lot of hassle from my teacher I decided not to go to school at all. At this point, I had been drawing for a long time and wished to join an arts class.

One day, a new social worker arrived at the center. I felt that this man really listened to my story and understood what I wanted to do. He promised to help me and soon after, a paint artist came to the center to change my life. I spend from morning till evening with this man painting and drawing. He showed me how to start a picture, to mix colors and which kinds of paint to use. One day we had an art exhibition where I sold some pictures and realized that I could earn money by selling my pictures.

Today, I paint because I love painting and I can pass on a message through my pictures. I use the name "Max Wow" because I wanted a fresh start from my past, but without totally forgetting where I came from. Max is short for "maximum" and Wow being short for "wonder of the world"...



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