

Tintsaba Master Sisal Weavers |  
Swaziland | Basketry, Beaded Jewelry

## Sisal binds together ancient traditions and new colors



Comprising hundreds of female artisans, many of them from rural areas of Swaziland, the Tintsaba Master Sisal Weavers collective was established in 1985 as a basket weaving business, with the purpose of holistically improving the lives of its weavers by providing them with stable income opportunities, education, and healthcare. To date, Tintsaba has engaged and trained over 1,000 crafts-women, building on traditional knowledge to take craft into the art form it is today. Tintsaba regularly attends trade fairs in South Africa and has won a number of awards.

Using ancient Swazi weaving techniques, along with ingeniously contemporary designs, the artisans of Tintsaba create brilliantly hued, meticulously woven baskets as well as jewelry. Sisal, a plant in the agave family, is a weed that grows throughout Swaziland and was traditionally used to make cattle fences. Because it is invasive, sisal is ideal for craft production since harvesting does not threaten the country's natural biodiversity.

Tintsaba has over 700 women who supplement their income by performing different aspects of the creative process, including, for example, preparing raw sisal, dyeing it, and assembling jewelry. All operations are done by hand, including the time-consuming spinning of thread from a few strands of sisal fibers. The only machines used are a drill and a polishing spindle for silver and brass jewelry components. For jewelry, Tintsaba's artisans place extremely fine, woven sisal discs within sterling silver frames. These remarkable items forge a union of age-old coiled basket weaving technique with sleekly contemporary design.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ARTIST