

Jewelry Designer Brings the Spirit of African Beads Alive

By Mingguo Sun

[Epoch](#) Times Staff Mar 3, 2009



COUTURE BEAD DESIGNS: Nasimiyu Wekesa showed her creations at the Couture Fashion Week New York on Feb. 14. (Mingguo/The Epoch Times)

Her work is inspired by the history of the beads she uses in her necklaces and bracelets, Nasimiyu Wekesa says in an interview with *The Epoch Times*. She grew up in Kenya where beads were a part of life.

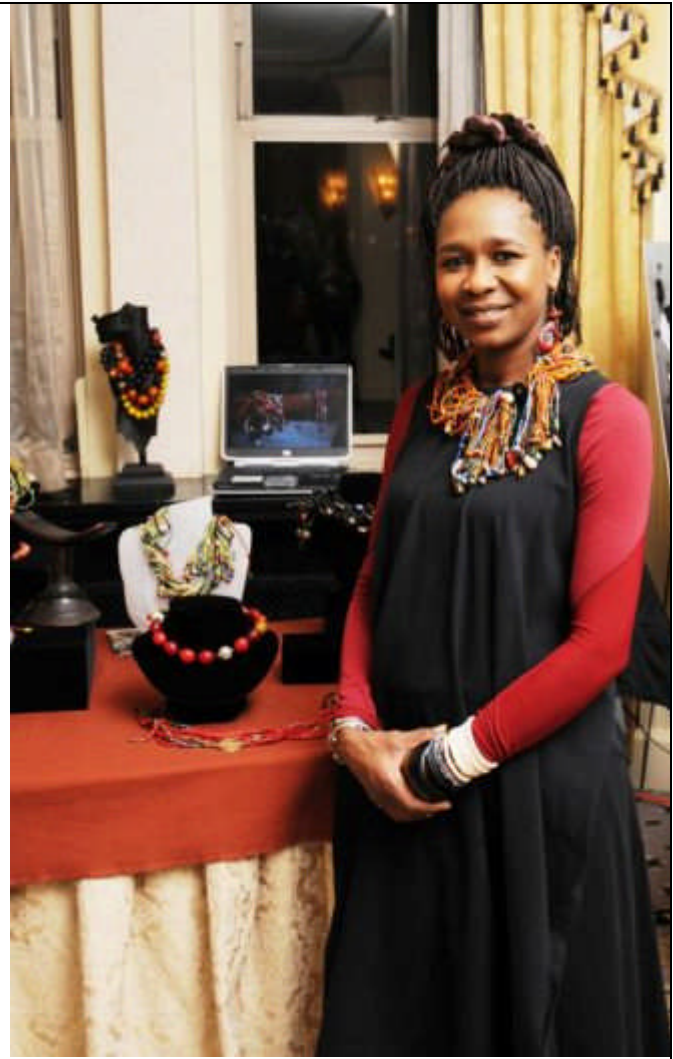
“In every ceremony everybody had beads. And we used to wear them and cherish them and we used them in different ceremonies,” she recalls. She came to the United States 15 years ago and travels back to Africa frequently, collecting trade beads for her work.

Knowing how the girls cherished the beads gives her a deep respect for them as she places them in her jewelry. “Beads were like our clothes,” she said. At each point in a girl's life, entering adulthood, getting married, she would be given beads by her grandmother, accumulating her own collection slowly throughout her life.

Wekesa says, “Beads were personal possessions in Africa, some people love them very much. Even when they die, they say, ‘You have to bury me with my beads.’”



AFRICA IN NYC: Kenyan designer Nasimiyu Wekesa offers her designs at the Couture Fashion Week New York. (Mingguo/The Epoch Times)



Nasimiyu Wekesa at the Couture Fashion Week New York on Feb. 14, 2009. (Mingguo/The Epoch Times)

She explains how her products are made: "I combine the beads myself, I use string that comes from a car tire, recycled string from a car tire. When you rip up a tire, there's some very strong string that comes out. I am bringing back the path of the answers of life together by stringing their past to the present."

Her work takes her into her deeper consciousness where she feels a connection to the beads as she works with them, she explains. "The way I do my beads is like meditating, it's a spiritual thing. You know I set up every bead and they talk to me, they tell me where they want to be. So some beads don't go here, it's not a right place."

Wekesa has spent years collecting certain beads for some of her pieces. Most of them are made from recycled bottles. Some are made of shells, brass, bronze, and there are special ones the villagers made themselves out of stones to be worn by the warriors.

As she sees it, "The history of beads is really linked to the history of people when you look at it together, they were all there." She mentions the connection with Native Americans, that part of Manhattan was bought with beads.

Wekesa wants to make life better for the children in her homeland so she donates 10 percent of all sales from her retail store to Born to Aid, the foundation she established to help lessen the suffering of the children of western Kenya who are victims of AIDS.

She reflects on her work. “I enjoy doing what I am doing. When I sit down and do this, I look at the time and it is 12 a.m. and I forgot to eat, it's like spirit.”

For more information please go to www.nasimiyudesigns.com and www.borntoaid.org

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