

# SMOLArt Soapstone

## meet the artisans—

SMOLArt is a group of artists who live in the rural village of Tabaka, Kenya, the heart of soapstone crafts. The name, a shortened version of Small, Medium, and Large Artists, refers to the size of the products the artisans make, not their stature. Established in 1990, SMOLArt is a member of the WFTO, the World Fair Trade Organization, and as such assures that the artisans are paid a fair price for their work. In addition, the organization support community development by contributing to projects that improve living conditions, education, and health of their members and the village at large.

Soapstone is mined from great pits in the area surrounding Kiisi, Kenya. The mined stone is then delivered to carvers who carve sculptures from the natural stone, the color of which ranges from cream, to pink, to brown, to yellow, to black, to a marbling of all of them. Once carved, the craftspeople smooth rough edges with sandpaper dipped in water and polish the piece to a high gloss or paint African motifs in brilliant colors with etched accents.

All of the products are completely handmade. The tools consist of household items from screwdrivers, hand drills, to switch-blades. "Pangas," sword-like tools usually used for cutting down vegetation, are used to cleave the stone in the mines.



Soapstone, while very heavy, is very fragile. It is a form of talc, so standing water will affect the carvings. The paint used may also run if subjected to standing water. Light polish keeps it shiny. Chips can be smoothed with water and light grade sandpaper. With proper care, soapstone items will last generations.



Partners in Fair Trade

# SMOLArt Soapstone

## meet the artisans—

SMOLArt is a group of artists who live in the rural village of Tabaka, Kenya, the heart of soapstone crafts. The name, a shortened version of Small, Medium, and Large Artists, refers to the size of the products the artisans make, not their stature. Established in 1990, SMOLArt is a member of the WFTO, the World Fair Trade Organization, and as such assures that the artisans are paid a fair price for their work. In addition, the organization support community development by contributing to projects that improve living conditions, education, and health of their members and the village at large.

Soapstone is mined from great pits in the area surrounding Kiisi, Kenya. The mined stone is then delivered to carvers who carve sculptures from the natural stone, the color of which ranges from cream, to pink, to brown, to yellow, to black, to a marbling of all of them. Once carved, the craftspeople smooth rough edges with sandpaper dipped in water and polish the piece to a high gloss or paint African motifs in brilliant colors with etched accents.

All of the products are completely handmade. The tools consist of household items from screwdrivers, hand drills, to switch-blades. "Pangas," sword-like tools usually used for cutting down vegetation, are used to cleave the stone in the mines.



Soapstone, while very heavy, is very fragile. It is a form of talc, so standing water will affect the carvings. The paint used may also run if subjected to standing water. Light polish keeps it shiny. Chips can be smoothed with water and light grade sandpaper. With proper care, soapstone items will last generations.



Partners in Fair Trade