

# O God of all creation

This title and first line of Kenya's national anthem, composed in Swahili as "Ee Mungu nguvu yetu" in 1963, the year Kenya became independent, serve as a backdrop for these photographs from St. Lawrence's collection. They were part of a Brush Gallery exhibition in conjunction with Reunion Weekend's 40th anniversary observances of the Kenya Program.

*Thanks to gallery director Cathy Tedford and Associate Professor of History Matt Carotenuto for their assistance with this presentation.*



## 'From Outsider Eyes'

KENYA, AMERICA, AND TRANSFORMATION

By Natasha Haverty

Reunion Weekend this year marked a big moment in St. Lawrence history: the 40th anniversary of its study program in Kenya. The first group of students travelled from Canton to Nairobi in January 1972 for a two-week program, but since 1974 it's been a semester-long experience. Alumni in attendance included two members of Kenya's National Assembly, as well as several founders and CEOs of nonprofits devoted to bettering the lives of people in Kenya.

Late in the fall of 1971, Peter French, professor of government at St. Lawrence, was in a bit of a bind. He'd wrangled the funding and gotten the administrative go-ahead to take 15 students more than 7,000 miles across the earth, to Nairobi, Kenya. The trouble was, he needed to find the students.

"Getting the first 15? Not so easy," he says, adding that it was much easier to find women. "Women are bigger risk-takers than guys," he explains.

Ann Cheney '74 was only 19 when she decided to apply. She says she'd dreamed of going to Africa since she'd seen it on a globe in her primary school classroom.

But Cheney almost couldn't go, because when she made the trip to New York City to get her vaccines, they wouldn't administer them because she wasn't 21. So she had to go all the way back a second time, with her mom. She still remembers to this day, "They said 'is this your daughter,' and she said 'yes!' And they said 'is it okay if we give her this yellow fever shot,' and she said 'yes!'"

At that time, collegiate study abroad programs were long established in countries like France and England. But this was one of the first programs to propose going to Africa.

French says once that first group of students came back, it was a much easier sell. "They remember every story," he says. "And most of them will say it's something that changed their life."

Since that first group went in 1972, some 2,000 students, a few from colleges other than St. Lawrence, have gone through the Kenya Semester.

On Saturday night, Kenya program alums fill one of St. Lawrence's gyms. Music blares from the speakers as steam rises from metal pans of food—the University's dining services staff has cooked a real Kenyan dinner.

Paul Gilbert '72 is another alumnus of the first group to go to Kenya. He landed in Nairobi in 1972 wearing a purple polyester shirt. He says the Kenyan people he met there had three big questions for him. The first two: "Why are Americans going to the moon, and how come Americans shoot their presidents? It was just over eight years after the Kennedy assassination," he points out.

Gilbert says the third question was the one he didn't really have the answer to: "Why black American students don't talk to white American students, and why the white American students

were not talking with the four or five African-American students that were travelling with us."

Gilbert says he still thinks about that experience to this day. He says it took a group of people from a completely different culture to help him notice what he took for granted in his own. "Sometimes you see things from outside eyes looking in," he notes.

Leila Mohammed '11 is one of the 70 or so students from Kenya who have come to St. Lawrence on a full scholarship. She remembers her first winter in Canton, and the first time she saw snow.

"I was like, oh goodness, there's actually ice falling from the sky—it was a good thing! I was just super-excited. People were inside; I was outside. But then after a week I was like okay this just has to go! I was putting my sweater or hat over my face and people were commenting on it."



Leila had just graduated from the University of Southern Maine with a Master of Public Health degree. She says in her whole four years at St. Lawrence, she didn't see her family once, but she was rarely homesick, because of the community she'd met.

"I'm really grateful that I've been able to work with people who are doing the right thing at the right time in Kenya," she says. "We want to be part of something that can positively impact the world, in one way or another. Whether you work in Canton or in Africa, it doesn't really matter!"

Although she had job offers in the States, in June Leila flew back to Mombasa, Kenya, where her family still lives. She plans to stay there. ■

*Adapted with permission from a North Country Public Radio story that aired on June 3, 2014.*



month-long stay in Paris, beloved of students to whom I have recently spoken, was eliminated, replaced by a two-week homestay in Norman villages, and then that too was dropped. The year-end trip to the Midi was guillotined as well, giving way to enriching and more seriously academic excursions into Senegal and Tunisia. Back on the campus in Mont-Saint-Aignan, we left the School of Letters, hazy with smoke, for the clean air of the Place Colbert; and now most of our students never experience a French professor lecturing to hundreds of students in an amphitheater. We still go to Paris and Mont-Saint-Michel and Versailles and Chartres, and we still see the Bayeux tapestry, but most groups never visit the châteaux of the Loire Valley, or have long afternoons to wander the more obscure neighborhoods of the City of Light.

And you know what else has changed? Back when students took the good ship *Aurelia* out of the port of New York, even back when they took jetliners from Kennedy International, embarking for the whole year, we went away and were truly away. We committed to a radical experiment of rupture from what we left behind. There was no flying home for your sister's wedding, or even for Christmas. Students didn't even call home that often. There was no following on Facebook or tweeting exactly what went down at last night's hockey game or campus party.

Talking this weekend to you, former students of the program, I hear variations on one central theme. France was transformative, some say; I grew up in France, say others; I became who I am in France, say others still.

My dear friends, has the transformational character of the experience in France also changed?

I am not sure. I hope to return to the next France Program affinity reunion to see the newest program veterans, and hear what you have to say about what the France Program has meant in your life trajectories.

Former students of the France Program, for your intelligence, your curiosity, your courage, and your flexibility of mind, I salute you!

*Professor Caldwell has directed the France Program six times, and served as the coordinator on campus, engaged in recruiting and orienting, for most of his 27 years on the faculty.*

## 'Solidified in the Kenyan Sun'

LESSONS FROM EAST HALL AND EAST AFRICA

By Ned Breslin '88

I pulled up to registration for the 2014 St. Lawrence reunion and paused. East Hall, where it all started in 1984, was just down the street. So I headed that way first. No need to register too fast...

I walked down Romoda Drive and smiled as memories came flooding back. The 1984 East Hall class, along with our counterparts in Sykes, was one of the earliest adopters of the "freshman experience" that evolved into St. Lawrence's First-

Year Program and has become common nationwide. Students and professors tried to imagine and execute a collective class experience that transcended any particular department, which, in hindsight, is a liberal arts education in action. We stumbled, learned, were vulnerable and made some magic.

As I approached the building, I reflected that the lesson of trying new things, being vulnerable and collaborating across disciplines had served me well when I went to Kenya, and has continued to do so for more than 25 post-St. Lawrence years.

I placed my hand gently on the East Hall entrance but then withdrew it, heading back toward registration and the weekend ahead.

Reunion was special to me because the Kenya program was rightly celebrated. I was able to reconnect with Paul Robinson, Howard Brown and David Lloyd, program directors and professors whose guidance was so crucial to me and set me on my global water and sanitation career path, visionaries whose contribution to the world and to students is immeasurable. I see their fingerprints on my path so clearly, and I celebrated that realization with them privately, and publicly on a stage at Carnegie.

And I was not alone. I saw generations of St. Lawrence Kenya alumni with that rare look in their eyes that were focused on

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influencing the world for the better. That look was solidified, in part, in the Kenyan sun.

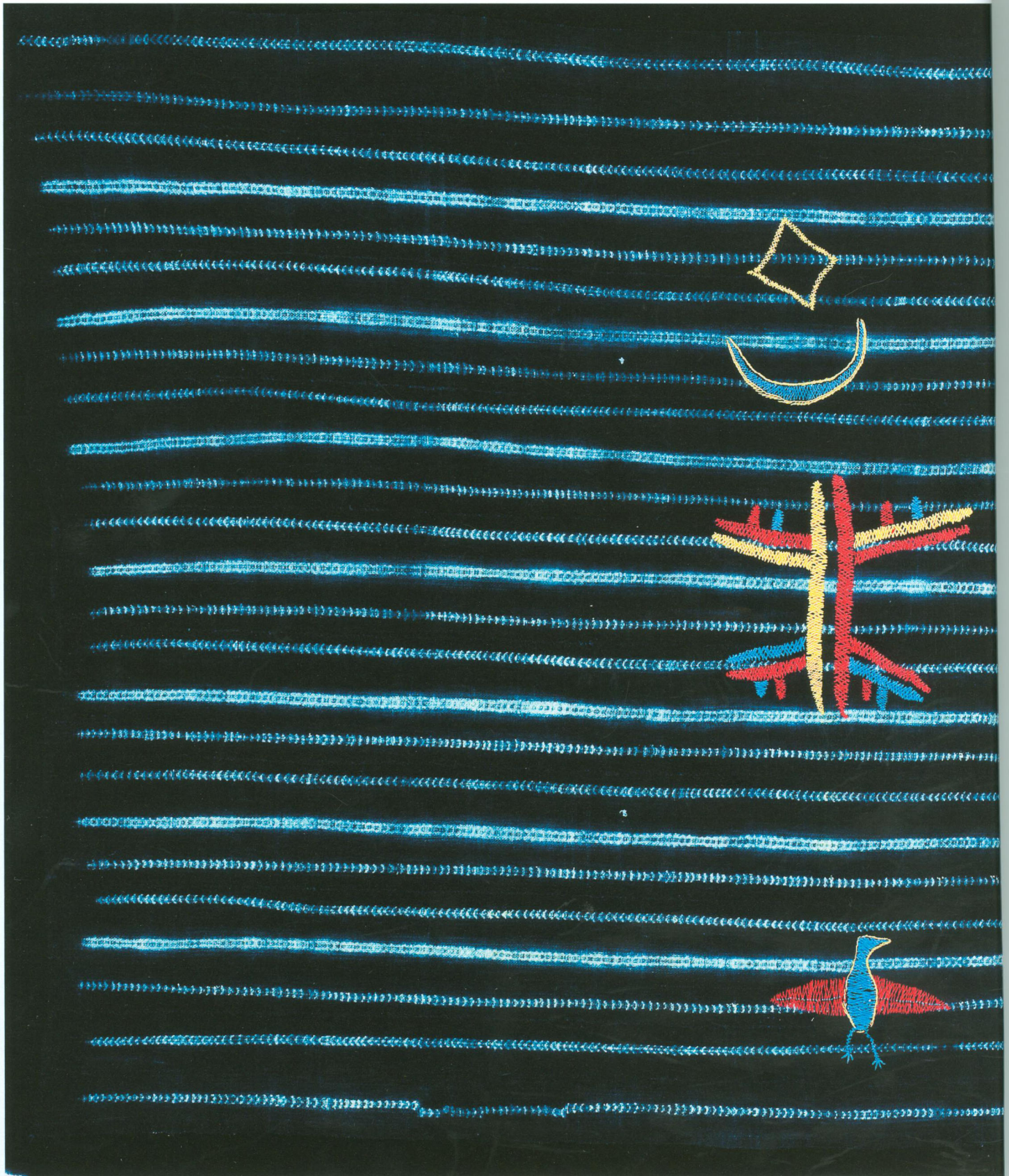
I was honored to receive an Alumni Citation and spoke openly about how St. Lawrence was central not only to my career path but also to my healing. I was perhaps one of the hungriest students ever to walk up Romoda Drive, having failed as a high school senior to get into any college, including St. Lawrence. I spent the following year resolutely focused on being accepted by SLU, hoping they would take a chance on a broken young man whose years of physical, emotional and sexual abuse at home had taken a serious toll, a toll I hid from all, as most survivors do.

St. Lawrence allowed me to breathe for the first time, and to stitch together a new narrative that propels me forward today. I opened up about this side of my past in front of hundreds of alumni at the citation awards ceremony, and was greeted with warmth and support.

I smiled, felt embraced and headed home shortly thereafter, thankful for having walked through that entrance at East Hall 30 years ago, thankful for having walked through the deserts of northern Kenya, and thankful for having been given the space to heal and grow in the North Country.

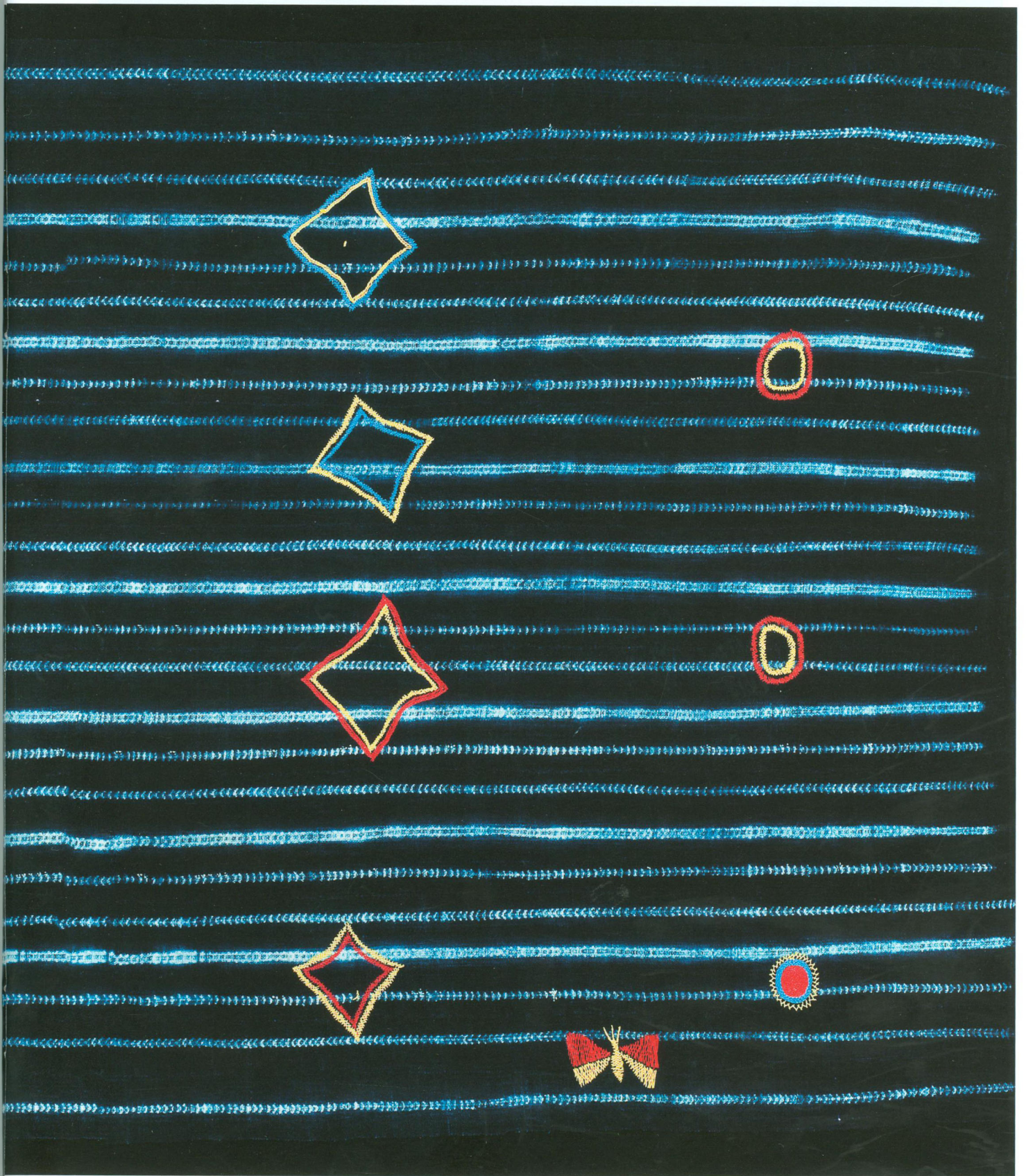
*Ned Breslin is CEO of Water for People, which works to bring clean water to Africa, Asia and Latin America. The "stage at Carnegie" appearance he mentions was for a seminar on philanthropy that he presented during Reunion Weekend.*





African textiles "are used for special occasions—funerals, initiations, marriages, and coming-of-age celebrations," says Christopher Roy '70, Professor of Art History and the Elizabeth M. Stanley Faculty Fellow of African Art History at the University of Iowa. "Both men and women weave, men on narrow-band,





horizontal warp, double-heddle looms, and women on wide-band, vertical warp, single-heddle looms." This Dafing ethnic group embroidered men's weave from Burkina Faso is from the University's Christopher Roy '70 and Nora Leonard '69 Roy Collection of West African Textiles, which the Roys gave to St. Lawrence in 2007.





**A** Rendille warrior returns to his village with his cattle, above. As the severity of drought increases in Northern Kenya, the warriors are often forced to walk for weeks in search of water and grazing terrain. **RIGHT:** Beading is the responsibility of women in Kenyan pastoral culture; they make necklaces and headdresses for themselves and for their families. COPYRIGHT BOMA / DAVID DUCHEMIN

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*The Brush Gallery exhibition is part of a larger project to create a digital archive of the Kenya Program and document the longstanding St. Lawrence-Kenya connection; see <http://digital.stlawu.edu/ksp>, where you can also learn how to upload photos and donate other documents online.*



