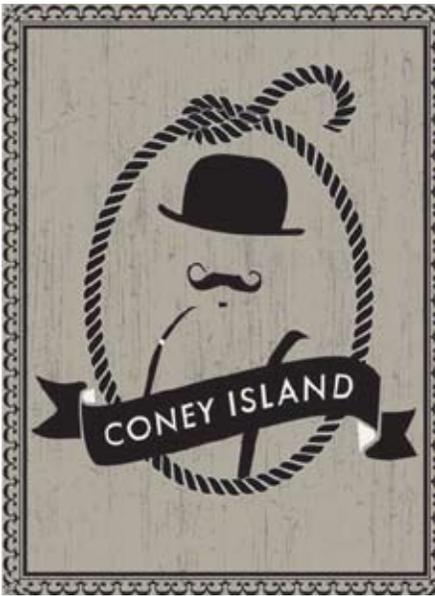


# 2010/11 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships lynda.com Award



**NJOKI GITAH**  
Graphic Design  
Graduate Student  
Yale



On my first day of school in the United States, I was flabbergasted to learn that entire portions of the day were devoted to things like playing with clay and learning music. I was born in Kenya and spent the early part of my childhood in a rural school outside of Nairobi. In a school system that operated under a British prescript, we were taught fundamentals with the goal of producing students who would be prepared to apply for selective secondary schools. There was very little attention given to arts, and when I left Kenya and started school in the States I was understandably amazed at the sudden artistic freedom I was given.

I embraced it fully, quickly developing an aptitude for art that I practiced constantly both in and out of school. When I wasn't completing projects for class I was creating fonts on my notebooks or obsessively collecting bits and pieces of appealing color and type from magazines. Art gave me confidence and allowed me to express myself and understand others in a way I had not known possible. It also gave me a chance to be involved in my community and participate in projects such as beautifying local parks, hospitals, and playgrounds. I joined virtually every arts-related club and community service activity my schools offered.



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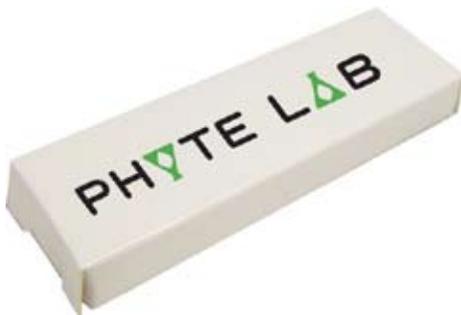


the professional association for design

But while I thrived, I noticed that I was often the only minority in those groups. Students of color were virtually nonexistent in the arts, and no effort was applied to including their culturally diverse perspectives. It was peculiar and sometimes discouraging not to encounter peers or role models who could reflect or relate to my own life experiences or heritage. Despite my feelings of relative isolation, I continued to explore my creativity. I was encouraged by supportive teachers to pursue art and other interests. In college I met a wider spectrum of people whose backgrounds were similar to and divergent from mine and whose practice of art was refined and passionate.



My decision to pursue a graduate education was influenced by these experiences but also by my intense desire to formalize my talent and give to others the support that was given to me. I have worked as a math and reading tutor and recently began volunteering with 826NYC, an amazing organization whose aim is to introduce urban students to creative writing. I've been inspired by renowned designers such as Michael Bierut, who recently spearheaded an initiative to renovate failing school libraries across Brooklyn and, with the help of talented artists, create colorful, welcoming places for underprivileged students to learn and grow.



I believe there is a long list of urgent social initiatives that need creative attention from skilled visual communicators. I am keenly aware this would not have been an option had I stayed in Kenya, and am motivated by the prospect of starting an career and being in a position, both as a mentor and employer, to pass on my experience, knowledge and support to those who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

