

LES CALEBASSES D'ISA



• CRAFT/PROFESSION

Isable OKOUE is a gourd artist, crafting artwork made from the fruit of the calabash tree. Calabashes, medium-sized trees native to Central and South America, can be found all over New Caledonia.



Isa picks the ripe fruits, opens and hollows them out by hand and then leaves them to dry for several months. She then decides what the gourd is going to become and carves, pierces and decorates it accordingly, using a hand power tool. She uses only natural materials to decorate her gourds: string, cotton thread, linen, hemp, wooden beads, glass, metal, seeds, driftwood...



• BACKGROUND

“The inspiration for my craft came from my fascination for Africa, where calabashes are part of everyday life, and from my respect for Mother Nature, who gives us everything we need” says Isa. She decided to make a move from agriculture to handicrafts five years ago.



Isa was well acquainted with African calabashes made from *Lagenaria siceraria* gourds but it was a friend who introduced her to New Caledonia's

calabash trees. And so Isa has revived a disappearing tradition by bringing her own personal touch to calabash design with her intricate carvings, a skill she taught herself and is continually perfecting.

• INSPIRATION AND ART/DESIGNS

Under the magic touch of Isa's deft fingers, calabashes are transformed into baskets, hampers, hanging ornaments, solar lanterns and lamps, all embellished with delicate decorative patterns. “It can take me from two to twenty hours to transform and decorate a gourd” says Isa, who also creates designs to order.

Nature and Indian mandalas are a key source of inspiration for Isa's decorative designs but she also draws on other motifs in her work.