

SaNsA

newsletter of the sansa international artists' association kumasi ghana

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SaNSA newsletter is intended to provide information, and serve as a forum for discussion on aspects of Ghanaian visual and performing arts practice.

Editorial Team: kari'kacha seid'ou, Pamela Clarkson, Issumaila Moro, Michael Adashie, K.B. Kissiedu, Atta Kwami

The first SaNSA newsletter is the result of a computer-training workshop led by Eben Asare-Boafo who is the Webmaster, KNUST, and advisor for SaNSA networking programme. We acknowledge his immense contribution.



KOO NIMO: ON THE ROAD

The Ghanaian musician Koo Nimo, above, and his Adaadam Agofomaa Group will tour in Germany, throughout June 2007. The programme is part of *Klangkosmos*, a network introducing 'ethnic' music in the region of North Rhine Westphalia. Nearly 70 groups from at least 60 countries of the world have been hosted by *Klangkosmos* and have presented their art and music. During his tour Koo Nimo will also participate in workshops and intercultural meetings. He will lecture and conduct master classes in schools and centres. At least 26 concerts have been booked for the Ghanaian guitar master in Bonn, Köln, Hagen, Aachen, Wuppertal, Gronau, Dortmund and other centres. The Ayeduase / Kumasi based musician has promoted children's music education through a project named *Amamresem* (Yere to nsa fre wo); we are inviting you.

Text and photographs: Atta Kwami

A TALE OF TWO CITIES (KUMASI AND ACCRA)

'A Tale of Two Cities' is the second exhibition of small works organized by FCA Ghana to coincide with the Europe Week celebrations. (May 2-14, Accra/ May 17-24, Alliance Française Kumasi). The aim of this year's show is to confront artists from both Accra and Kumasi in a visual conversation about Ghana's two major cities. We at FCA are glad to have the support of renowned artist Atta Kwami in Kumasi who has co-ordinated the collection of works from that city. 'A Tale of Two Cities' – a collective celebration and visual comment on Kumasi and Accra as seen and portrayed by a large group of the country's contemporary artists. Works will be 40 x 40 cm size and each will sell for a standard price of 1,300,000 cedis (£78 / \$146), of which 300,000 cedis will be donated to FCA to help in the promotion of the visual arts. Over 107 artists are represented. A wonderful opportunity for the public to collect the works of Ghana's most exciting artists ...



Invitation

A Tale of Two Cities

Opening of the Exhibition

Wednesday, May 17th, 2006 @ 7:00 pm
at Alliance Française Kumasi



After the success of "Small works/Big City – Artists Envisage Accra" in 2005, the Foundation for Contemporary Art Ghana (FCA) presents "A Tale of Two Cities" – a collective celebration and visual comment on Kumasi and Accra as seen and portrayed by a large group of the country's contemporary artists. Works will be 40 x 40 cm size and each will sell for a standard price of 1,300,000 cedis, of which 300,000 cedis will be donated to FCA to help in the promotion of the visual arts. A wonderful opportunity for the public to collect the works of Ghana's most exciting artists...

TRANSITIONS

KOFI DABLAH (KD ARTS): AN APPRECIATION

You don't finish your education so I learn from other masters.

Kofi Dablah (1979-2006)

Kofi Dablah is the artist in Kumasi who helped me to co-ordinate the collection of works for the exhibition, *A Tale of Two Cities* during March - April 2006. He died of typhoid fever at Komfo Anokye Hospital, Kumasi, on the day the exhibition opened in Accra (2 May 2006). Aged 27, Dablah was an experienced sign painter with a rich background in art education that enabled him to become a successful artist. In addition, Dablah was the proprietor of a leading advertising agency in Kumasi. He succeeded in beautifying roadsides with his hand-painted billboards for the city. He was innovative in using cemented surfaces by side-walks as his

supports for painting. As his clientele grew, a new branch appeared at Adum-Kumasi. Dablah thus set the pace in how a sole street painting workshop could function as a big time advertising agency in Kumasi. He set up KD Arts in 1996. KD Arts, when compared with GEROFIX, a much bigger agency, employing up to 20 full-time signwriters at Odiom in Kumasi, was a mini-power keg.¹

Dablah employed his twin-brothers, Akwete Dablah and Akwete Dablah (born 1982) as a Chief Assistant and artist. On my visit to his workshop at Sofoline in 2003, I saw one apprentice at work learning to write the entire alphabet in block lettering. Born in 1979 in Kumasi, Dablah's hometown is Dzelukope in the Volta region. His father is a pensioner soldier of the Ghana Armed Forces while his mother Ayaovi Dablah is a trader at the Kumasi central market. K.D. Arts, *The Advertising Agents*, was first established in 1996 at Bantama/Kumasi. He worked with Kwame Ofori of Simple Art during an apprenticeship that lasted one year two weeks (1994/95 to early 1996) and was also trained by Akwasi Addai (City Boys) and Francisco Sam (of Francisco Art & Sign) at Manhyia.

When I was learning from Mr. Ofori, he noticed that now I can draw as an artist.
That's when I saw that now I can draw (after about five months). When I was
in school, by that time, I knew some people were better than me.

He undertook commissions in Accra, Sunyani and Tamale. From 1999 to 2001, K.D. Arts has been involved with screen printing, producing T-shirts, handkerchiefs, billboards, lighted-signs and reflective signs and banners.

I've learned more works from other masters. Our work is like education.
You don't finish your education so I learn from other masters, things like
fabrication of lighted signs, studying how it is and putting it into practice.
My favorite firm is GEROFIX. I want to be like Gerofix. They have big-time
company.

¹ See Kwami, Atta. 2001. *A Repertory of Artists in Kumasi*, 2001, a reference work-in-progress. Glover, S.A., is the manager of Gerofix, an advertising agency, setup in 1989 in Kumasi Their current workshop is off the main Accra-Kumasi road at Odiom. Glover is a sign writer and artist who oversees twenty sign writers fully employed by the company. Gerofix handles general advertising producing mainly buildboards for companies such as Kumasi Brewery, and Nestlé and once in a while individuals. Learnt art at school 1955 – Mo Nyasunu – fine art. He was self-employed in Accra his clientele included Afromedia Delaram. He started his career around 1968 after school he practiced painting on canvas, scenes and compositions, travelled to Nigeria 1962. He worked for a private studio in Lagos – Attilac Studio. He now operates mainly in Accra and Kumasi. He has no favourite works. His favourite artist is Ablade Glover. (This information was obtained from S.A. Glover in an interview on 30 August, 1999.)

K.D's clientele includes: Frelina Health Products; KAMA Health Services. Other clients for whom he has done branding are KNUST based artists from College of Art, Gabriel Kondor and Kofi Appiah, who used KD Arts to execute the paintings of the logo (branding) for Lucky Film. The contract that lasted for a month was done in Kumasi, Tamale, Sunyani and Accra. 'I got about eight million cedis (¢ 8,000,000.) That's why I decided to advertise.'²

Kofi Dablah was a good looking man, sparsely built with a very pleasant demeanour and a focused mind. What struck me about him was that he was prepared to go the extra mile and had the intelligence to know what you wanted. He combined a visionary outlook with a business mind. The business continues under the management of Akwete Dablah, with Isumaila Moro, Director of Iss Decor and Chairman of the Commercial Artists Association, (Ashanti Region), as Advisor. He will be very much missed on the streets of Kumasi.

Kofi Dablah performed numerous tasks to further the aims of the Commercial Artists Association, (Ashanti Region). Having laboured so honourably throughout his short life, and for Kumasi, the last line from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, may make a fitting epitaph for Kofi Dablah: '... it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.'

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The late Kofi Dablah (right) with Atta Kwami, at the KD Arts and Advertising Agency, Sofoline, Kumasi, 2004. Photograph by Douglas Owusu.

² Interview with the author, Sofoline-Kumasi, December 16, 2003.



Left: The KD Arts workshop at Sofoline, Kumasi, and an apprentice, 2003. Photos: Atta Kwami

GRACE SALOME KWAMI



25 September 1923 29 August 2006

Ohhh, Its beautiful.

Grace Salome Kwami

Grace Salome Kwami (née Anku), artist and teacher, born 1923, died at the Volta Regional Hospital, Ho in August 2006 aged 82. She was wife of the late Robert Ashong Kwami, Senior Music Master, Achimota School. She was one of the few trained women artists who gained recognition before Ghana's Independence from colonial rule in 1957. She studied 1951-1953 at Achimota / Kumasi College of Technology. She exhibited alongside the late Kofi Antubam and Ernest Victor Asihene Seth Galevo and her son Atta Kwami. Grace was Art Tutor at Mawuli School, Ho, 1957-69; Women' Training College (later called Tamale Training College), 1970-78, returning to Mawuli in 1979.

Although retired from active teaching in the 1980s she spent her life making sculpture, paintings, and jewellery, especially bead work. Her work is in many national and international collections. She has exhibited in Nigeria, Britain, Zaire, Poland and Russia. Her numerous past students include, Dr. Sylvanus Kwami Amenuke, Prosper Tawia, Dr. Olivia Glime, Kofi Dawson, Gilbert Amegatcher, Sammy Fancey, Nana J.V. Owusu-Ansah, Jonas Agbo, Dr. Yao Dzamefe and others. In the mid 1950s she worked part-time at the National Museum and Monuments Board of Ghana, Legon Branch, for three years.

Her work came under the influence of Kofi Antubam during the late 1950s. Antubam who wrote about her in 1963 noted: ... *Mrs. Grace Kwami, painter and art mistress of Mawuli Secondary School, who also produces some really outstanding plaster and terracotta sculpture pieces...* In terms of skill and grasp of her subjects, Grace Kwami superseded Antubam, especially in terracotta. Her best work, perhaps her terracotta heads, achieve a quality of sublime stillness. Much of her work is featured in *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, an artist's book by Atta Kwami who survives her.

NII OOBO QUAO (1943-2006), PAINTER AND MEDICAL ILLUSTRATOR AND AUTHOR OF THE SEMINAL B.A. THESIS, UST, KUMASI: SOME CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN ARTISTS (1970).

A Brief Biography of the Late Nii Oobo Quao (1943 – 2006)

The late Nii Oobo Quao was born on March 25, 1943 to Mr. Lawrence Obodai Quao of La Anarho and Mrs. Regina Narki Quao nee (Dowuona) of Osu Kinkawe royal house, both of blessed memory.

He had his primary education at Adabraka Government School and continued with his secondary education at the West Africa Secondary School from 1958 to 1963, after which he worked for a brief period with the Bureau of Languages where he illustrated a local newspaper then called "Mansral".

In 1965, he was admitted to the then University of Science and Technology to read Fine Art, a long held passion. Nii Oobo graduated with Honours in 1970. Some of his write-ups and project works now being used at his alma mater now known as Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) as teaching aid as well as reference material for both Lecturers and students.

With a Bachelor of Arts degree, Oobo started his career at the defunct Central Advertising Agency (CADCO) of GIHOC, as a senior studio manager, a position he occupied for more than 6 years before taking up appointment on the 1st of June 1977 as a Principal Medical Artist at the Department of Anatomy, University of Ghana Medical School.

In 1982 Oobo married his dear wife Philieta Asharta Quao and their marriage was blessed with four sons, Obodai, Adjah, Torto and Annang. In that same year, Nii Oobo was granted study leave to pursue a 3-year post-graduate professional course and training in Medical Illustration at the Robin Brook Centre for Medical Education of the

Medical College of St. Bartholomew Hospital in London. Oobo again distinguished himself and also carved a niche for himself as the first black African in the history of the College to have obtained distinction in medical illustration. For this feat, he became a Fellow of the Medical Artists Association of Great Britain – (MMAA) and a member of the Institute of Biological and Medical Illustrators – IAMBI. In all these achievements his wife who was with him in London was a source of tremendous encouragement and support to him.

While still a student at the Medical College of St. Bartholomew Hospital, he was granted a scholarship by the Overseas Development of Britain - The British Technical Committee for International Co-operation administered by the British Council in London to study Audio Visuals as an additional discipline with specialisation in presentation at the Department of Education Illustration and Audio Visuals of the same College from 1985-1986. Oobo was a recipient of several awards. At a conference held in September 1985 at Aberdeen, his work was amongst the professional exhibits on the Kodak stand "Kodak Award to IMBI – The Award to Artists". Nii Oobo was a man who stood by his word, proof of which was that even though he could have stayed in London where several lucrative job opportunities awaited him, he returned to serve his employers, enduring in the process, a brief separation from his wife who later returned from Britain to join him back home.

On his return from London in March 1986, he was upgraded to the position of Chief Medical Artist and subsequently made Head of the Medical Illustration Unit, of the Medical School, a position he held until his retirement in August 2003. After his retirement, he was offered post-retirement contract for a period of two

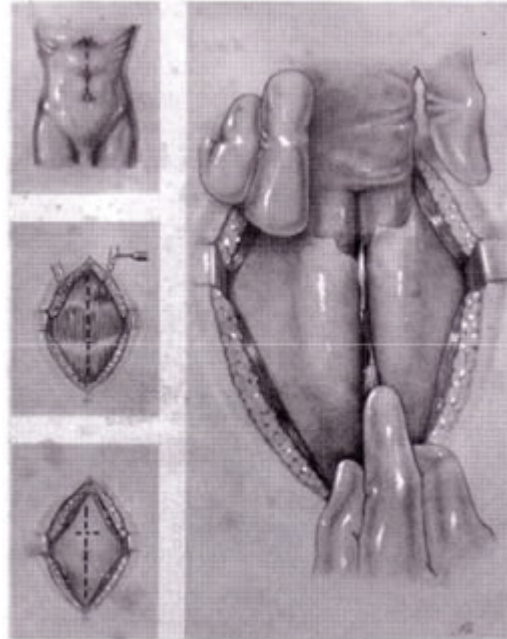
years which ended on 31st July this year, a few months before his death.

During the period that he was with the University of Ghana Medical School, Nii Oobo illustrated several scholarly publications and medical text books published in and outside Ghana. He also made numerous illustrations, which have been described as excellent for medical, nursing and paramedical personnel of the Medical School and Korle-bu Teaching Hospital, including the well known textbook "Principles and Practice of Surgery, including Pathology in the Tropics", edited by Professors Archampong, Badoe, and Jaja. He also has to his credit an unpublished English - Ga translation of the human anatomy.

In a testimony, the late Professor J.M.K Quartey of the Department of Surgery in June 1994 had this to say about Nii Oobo

"I have known Nii Oobo Quao since he was appointed Principal Medical Artist at the University of Ghana Medical School in 1977.

Since then he has been responsible for making for me personally many first class illustrations for publications in several world renowned medical journals, and for a chapter I was invited to write in a reference medical textbook being published in the U.S.A. by W.B. Saunders of Philadelphia, which is now in press."



Nii Oobo's illustrations

(1) THE ART OF MAKING WOLO (PAPER)

Wolo is the Ga word for paper, a language spoken by group of Ghanaians who live along the southern coastline of Ghana. In Akan it is called *krataa*, in Ewe they say *agbanle*, in Dagbani it is called *pakara* and in Hausa it is referred to as *pakadda*.

This shows that paper is an essential material used all over Ghana. But hardly do we stop to think of how valuable it is and how it serves our needs in many varied ways. Sometimes very simple and other times very sophisticated. Paper is said to have been made by the ancient Egyptians in Africa in about 5,000 BC (papyrus) and it was the first of its kind in the then ancient world. It all began when the Egyptians found a clever way to use a water reed named papyrus. They would cut the stalk into thin strips and line them up slightly overlapping. Another layer of strips was then placed at right angles to the first and glued on top. Then the whole thing was hammered flat and left in the sun to dry.

Handmade Paper today from plant fiber or plant cellulose is made slightly in a different way. Any plant that yields a good amount of fiber when worked on in the correct way may produce high quality paper. Recorded history has it that this kind of paper was discovered in the Far East. Other discoveries were made in South America, and it is worth mentioning that long before them [paper] reached the shores of West Africa *Kyenkyen* which can be classified as a form of basic paper was being used in Ghana. Originally this was used as bark cloth. The making of this requires soaking of the bark of the *Kyenkyen* from the *antiaris* species of trees in water and beating with a wooden mallet to three times its length and size. It is quite similar to making of *amate* by the Mexicans in South America. The name *amate* is taken from the Nahuatl word *amatl*, which means paper. *Amate* was obtained from the bark of a *fig* tree, from the *Moraceae* family.

According to the *Enciclopedia de México*, "the many species of the *Ficus* are difficult to tell apart unless a detailed examination of the trunk, leaves, flowers, and fruit is made." The *fig* can be white *amate*, white woodland *amate*, or dark-brown *amate*. Although there are no surviving evidence it could probably be said that since these were cloth traded in the region there would have been those that were dyed as well as printed with *adinkra* motives before cotton from the northern part of Ghana became more popular in every household in the south.

Michael Adashie

Kuona Trust International Women's Workshop - call for applications

We believe in giving women the opportunity to work together without the pressing demands of their everyday life. We are looking for a group of up to 20 women artists (12 Kenyan; 8 international) to share this exciting experience. To come together for 2 weeks to make art; share their experiences; to learn from each other as contemporaries in a secluded environment. To return home with renewed determination and to inspire other women artists in their country.

Kuona Trust invites applications from interested women artists of any media to reach us by the 10th January 2007.

The workshop is scheduled for end-February 2007 and will run for two weeks.

Kuona Trust will provide limited art materials, food, accommodation and local transport during the workshop. Please indicate whether you can pay your airfare. Priority will be given to those who can pay their own way.

Applicants must submit the following.

- 6 digital images of their recent works
 - * a letter of intent
 - * your c.v.

Application deadline; 10th of January.

- Send your application to smichael@kuonatrust.org.

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