

Fragments and Stitches of Ghanaian Idioms: A Catalogue of the Life and Works of Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon, An African Modernist Sculptor



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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the practice and philosophical foundation of Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon (1932 – 2018), an artist educationist of the African modernist stock, from the 1960s to the 1980s that shaped the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) artistic traditions and generally the Ghanaian sculptural representation. The study seeks to contribute to existing literature on African modernism, following up on kari'kachä Seid'ou's "J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on "Lonely Woman" which sheds light on the artist's ethos and practice in the midst of seeming erasure and wrong attributions. The study looked at the artist's three-decade practice, in mainly concrete statuary, terra cotta, wood, and metal (rarely), as part of mid-20th century Ghanaian nationalist repositioning. This is part of the African art that evolved by blending foreign materials and techniques with native African concepts in which artists used revolutionary tools and methods, along with indigenous storytelling practices, to tell their stories in various forms. The study adopted archival research and interviews of the artist as well as descriptive-analytic research methods of the qualitative approach. The study revealed that the artist's concepts and themes emerged from his personal experiences, sociocultural environment, and political events of his era. It also shows the artist's practice as commission-dependent in which personal explorations of materials (cement, metal, terrazzo, wood, clay) and techniques in life modelling, casting, and carving were prioritized. The Authors conclude that Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon was a prolific but less exposed Ghanaian modernist artist educationist, in the light of how he adopted the indigenous Asante storytelling approaches through the application of traditional and non-traditional materials and techniques.

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INTRODUCTION

Artists have created commentaries on real and abstract subjects with metaphors to convey convictions, worldviews, expressions and symbolisms rooted in collective histories, philosophies, and values.¹ Cultural knowledge is built around these ideas, expressing love, beauty, and grief through various artistic expressions. This means that artists' work is their commentary on prevailing worldviews, revealing their perspectives on the world they live in, their

¹ Ellen Dissanayake, *What Is Art For?* (University of Washington Press, 2015).

legacies and contributions to existing social and cultural systems. The documentation of these contributions ensures the survival of these perspectives by providing insight into provenance, ownership and location, as well as cultural relevance. However, not all art and artists are documented in this sense. Some artists, like Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon (1932- 2018) an artist educationist, among many others are not documented properly and are sometimes less appreciated because they belong to long-overlooked constituencies.² To correct such an anomaly, it is crucial to rediscover and document such overlooked Ghanaian artists, acknowledge their perspectives and narratives, and ensure a more inclusive and diverse Ghanaian art history that reflects Ghanaian creative experiences. This enhances understanding of cultural and social contexts and sheds light on important issues of historical significance.³ The assumption of a close and important connection between art and its maker has very real implications, especially those with certain contributions to culture.⁴ Such documentation also has the potential to inspire future generations to create meaningful art and ethical responsibility and means of recognizing wider expressions to forestall historical inequalities. It allows for as many as possible to participate in the larger art narrative, and to ensure that their contributions are not lost to history.

Various reasons may account for why Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon has not received the necessary documentation, recognition, and acceptance as a Ghanaian artist of great repute. These may include the probability that, while most of his contemporaries on the African modernist landscape like John Christopher Okyere (1912-1983), Kofi Antubam (1922-1964), Oku Ampofo (1908-1998), Vincent Kofi (1923-1974), Ernest Victor Asihene (1918-2001), Grace Salome Kwami (1923 – 2006), Saka Acquaye (1923-2007), Ablade Glover (1934-), El Anatsui (1944), Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994), Lamidi Fakaye (1925 – 2009) and others had dimensions to their practices that lent to periodic change, exhibitions, portability, foreign and institutional collections, his works by their nature and materiality were bulky and stationary, and most of the time made *in-situ*.⁵ It may also stem from the fact that his three-decade practice is spread across different countries and places that may not have produced needed impacts worthy of celebration and documentation, especially in places outside Ghana.⁶ Also, Asaku-Gyapon's times away may have been epochal (especially in Ghana), to warrant his inclusion in emergent stories, from his absence and truncated practice; more so if documentation is done by students, protégés, collectors, institutions, or researchers with specific interests. Lastly, like most of his compatriot sculptors who have not been documented yet, his outputs are seen in education. A phenomenon like this and many others, has created gaps, omissions, and erasures in the history of modern Ghanaian art that need to be revisited, for a comprehensive picture of Ghanaian art practice between 1960 and 1990. The study therefore, sought to contribute to literature on Ghanaian art practice and African modernism with particular emphasis on the three-decade practice of Kwaku Asaku Gyapon, in mainly concrete statuary, terra cotta, wood, and metal (rarely), as part of mid-20th century Ghanaian nationalist repositioning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Asaku-Gyapon has been mentioned sparingly in Ghanaian academic and literary sources. In cases where he is mentioned, he just happened to be caught in the frame of the subject. For instance, he is mentioned as one of the younger classmates of J. C. Okyere who won the bid for the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit fountain sculpture commission. In discussing direct modelling of concrete sculptors *seid'ou* catalogues some personalities who were contemporaries, like E. K. A. Azzii-Akator, K. Asaku-Gyapon, W. N. Sackitey, M. K. Vordzogbe, J. Kweku Andrews, P. Y. Mensah (Big Joe), J. K. Asare Tettey, L. F. Y. Nukpe and sundry as masters in the field.⁷ This sculpture idiom can be put in their apposite historical perspectives if references are made to such precedents as “Lonely Woman” and its kin.⁸ He was also mentioned in passing by Gilbert Amagatcher in his work about Vincent Kofi in “*Vincent Kofi, 1923-1974: A Critical Biography of an African Artist*”, as a faculty during Kofi's time at KNUST,⁹ as well as his recent *Reflections on the 1970s* with Silverman.¹⁰ It is insightful to note that, none of Asaku-Gyapon's direct-modelled cement sculpture idiom compatriots, beyond J. C. Okyere and L. Y. F. Lee Nukpe, by *seid'ou* and *seid'ou* et al, have been critically analysed. In all, these artist educators have been hidden

² Hilarie M. Sheets, “Underrated/Overrated,” ARTNews, January 1, 2005, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/underratedoverrated-2005-110/>.

³ Nii O Quarcoopome, “Art Historical Research In Ghana: Reflections On The State And Direction Of Scholarship,” *Critical Interventions* 13, no. 1 (2019): 75–96.

⁴ M Munsterberg, “The Biography—Writing About Art,” *Retirado de Http://Writingaboutart. Org/Pages/Biography. Html*, 2009.

⁵ *kaŋi'kachā sei'dou*, “J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman,” *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2015): 15–26.

⁶ *sei'dou*, “J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman.”

⁷ *sei'dou*, “J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman.”

⁸ *sei'dou*, “J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman,” 20,25.

⁹ Gilbert Amegatcher, “Vincent Kofi, 1923-1974: A Critical Biography of an African Artist” (Indiana University, 1992).

¹⁰ Gilbert Amegatcher and Raymond Silverman, “Reflections on the 1970s: An Interview with Gilbert Amegatcher,” *Ghana Studies* 25, no. 25 (2022): 108–16.

figures in Ghanaian art history and practice, alongside their mandates as educators for the next generation of Ghanaian artists.¹¹

Critical analyses of Asaku-Gyapon's renowned contemporaries act as the prevailing artistic environment and the background on which the study cast his life and practice. A lot of work has been done on the 1960s, 70s and 80s Ghanaian art, by Antubam, Kofi, Beier, Fosu, Kwami, sei'dou, Svasek, on which several artists, like Kofi Antubam, J. C. Okyere, Ablade Glover, Vincent Akwetey Kofi, Kobina Bucknor, El Anatsui are mentioned, as well as the Ghanaian art environment.¹² These authors offer a glimpse of the sociocultural backgrounds and political environment that shaped artists and their works. They look at the late 1950s and 60s Ghanaian environment and utopia promise of self-rule and prosperity, then the countermeasures and forces in the late 1960s, 70s, and 80s, creating different sociocultural and material environments that offered different contexts for artistic productions.¹³ Artists in Ghana, and like their compatriots across Africa expressed these changing times succinctly.¹⁴

In *Contemporary Art in Africa*, Ulli Beier casts a broad net to cover contemporaneous transformative practices in the previously known African cultures, producing distinct objects and practices by individual artists across the length and breadth of the continent.¹⁵ From Iba N'dyaye, Lamidi Fakaye and Vincent Kofi and Skunder Bohossian (1937–2003) in the west and east, to Ibrahim El-Salahi, Nicholas Mukomberenwa (1940 – 2002), and Sidney Kumalo (1935–1988) in the north and south as spots within a broader scope of artists and practices, each with something peculiar and contemporaneous as interpretations of Africa's current political climate and its ethnic pasts. Considered by Beier as West Africa's foremost sculptor at the time,¹⁶ Vincent Kofi sees this as "*living at that time and being able to record what was happening merged with my materials, which is how much of my work often occur.*"¹⁷ Kofi believes that "*art expresses both the tradition and aspirations of a people, what they have experienced in the past and what they consider desirable for the present and the future.*"¹⁸ Together with Kofi Antubam, Kobina Bucknor, Oku Ampofo and a host of artists, authors and political actors determined to create a distinct Ghanaian art language and aesthetics through a dispersed but coherent cultural adherence in the burgeoning 1950s to 1970s political and institutional environment,¹⁹ they evolved modes of being artistic that birthed the generation of artists that included the Ablade Glovers, the El Anatsuis, the Delaquis', the J. C. Okyeres, the Azzii-Akators, and of course Asaku-Gyapon and many more artists who all doubled as educators.

The text of Kofi Antubam's "*Ghana's Heritage Culture*" is insightful for a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political landscape of the 1960s Ghana, and the political capital derived from indigenous culture, arts and crafts. It sought to explain the importance of history, art and culture in the identity formation of the young Ghanaian state, and why certain artistic details are necessary.²⁰ Similarly, *Sculpture in Ghana* by Kofi surveys the sculptural traditions in Ghana about contemporary practices, especially his own by meaning associated with specific details represented.²¹ These two books, together with texts by Oku Ampofo and Kobina Bucknor and a few others are seminal to understanding modern Ghanaian art, especially Ghanaian social realism and sculpture. They serve as bridges between precolonial, colonial and post-colonial artistic practices, and their interrelationships. Kojo Fosu's "*20th Century Art of Africa*" biographic survey happens some 20–25 years after Beier's account. Having most of the artists Beier surveyed, it goes on to explore the evolution since 1968, and how changes on the continent have affected the individual practices, creating new artists making waves in the intervening years.²² With a dedicated section for Ghana, patrons are offered a survey of the Ghanaian art scene since the 1920s and the active participants in each stage. Atta Kwami (1956–2021) has also done some work on the artistic environment in Ghana at different

¹¹ sei'dou, "J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman."

¹² Kofi Antubam, "Ghana's Heritage of Culture," 1963; Vincent Akwetey Kofi, *Sculpture in Ghana* (Ghana Information Services, 1964); Ulli Beier, "Contemporary Art in Africa," (*No Title*), 1968; Kojo Fosu, *20th Century Art of Africa: Revised Edition* (Gaskiya Corporation, 1993); Atta Kwami, "Kumasi Realism, 1951–2007: An African Modernism," 2013; sei'dou, "J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman"; Maruška Svašek, "Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse," in *Contesting Art* (Routledge, 2020), 27–61.

¹³ Rhoda Woets, "The Recreation of Modern and African Art at Achimota School in the Gold Coast (1927–52)," *The Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (2014): 445–65; Svašek, "Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse."

¹⁴ Beier, "Contemporary Art in Africa."

¹⁵ Beier, "Contemporary Art in Africa."

¹⁶ Beier, "Contemporary Art in Africa."

¹⁷ Lawrence Grobel, "Ghana's Vincent Kofi," *African Arts* 3, no. 4 (1970): 8–80.

¹⁸ Grobel, "Ghana's Vincent Kofi," 11.

¹⁹ sei'dou, "J. C. Okyere's Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman"; Woets, "The Recreation of Modern and African Art at Achimota School in the Gold Coast (1927–52)"; Janet Hess, "Exhibiting Ghana: Display, Documentary, and 'National' Art in the Nkrumah Era," *African Studies Review* 44, no. 1 (2001): 59–77; Svašek, "Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse."

²⁰ Antubam, "Ghana's Heritage of Culture."

²¹ Kofi, *Sculpture in Ghana*.

²² Fosu, *20th Century Art of Africa: Revised Edition*.

points in time. Kwami observed that the past, present, indigenous, modern, academic, and popular environments form a contemporaneous shared subject and vocabulary for artistic practices like Asaku Gyapon, his contemporaries and contemporaneous indigenous and popular practices.²³

METHODOLOGY

The study began as an explorative journey into the life and practice of Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon, a prolific but less-known Ghanaian sculptor, despite the enormous contribution he has made in the field. The descriptive and document analysis methods of the qualitative methodology were used for the study. Information gathering was carried out using an interview guide with open-ended questions. In all, five visits were made to the artist in his residence. These visits were made to carry out interviews and discussions, observation and photographic documentation from the archives of the artist. Again, a few photographs of the artist's works were taken by the authors from public collections. The selection of works was done based on their cultural, historical and contextual attributes. The works were presented in the study based on the approximate dates of execution; beginning from early, and spanning through mid to late career. Authors analyzed and discussed these works based on their cultural, historical and contextual attributes. The artist's archive of documents, in the form of photographs of works, certificates and commission awards was used to authenticate the validity of the information obtained from the artist.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Journey into the Art Space

Even before starting any formal art training, Kwaku Asaku Gyapon was privileged to be introduced to the art of making pots and pottery crafts in general by his grandmother and uncle, who were indigenous potters and sculptors/painters respectively. Perhaps this engrained an indelible zeal to pursue art in any form at a young age. An indigene of Asumenya in Ghana's Ashanti Region, an ancient town widely credited with the custodianship of indigenous Asante history and culture, his uncle, a sculptor and painter, may have influenced him to pursue non-traditional means of expression. According to the artist, the prominence of indigenous Asante cultural expression in most of his works might have been from the influences he picked from his uncle who created many naturalistic portrayals of animals, with a focus on those related to Asante myths and totem animals among others.

*"Although I did not understand the motifs in most of the works that my uncle used in his paintings and sculptures beyond the figurative ones, their forms always had a great impact on me anytime I looked at them. At a tender age, I knew they would help me make meaning in my work one day."*²⁴

The artist after obtaining his Middle School Certificate (MSC), further trained as a teacher and taught at the elementary school level. Within that time, he studied and wrote the General Certificate Examination (G.C.E.) which paved the way for admission to the (then Kumasi College of Technology) now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (1961 – 1965), to study Art and major in Sculpture. He later obtained a Diploma in Art Education in 1966 and was an Assistant lecturer from 1966 to 1981 at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. During this time, he studied the human form, Asante mythologies and associated totem animals which he incorporated into his work.

Between 1969 and 1971, he was awarded the 'Aggrey Fellowship' by the Edward Hazen Foundation Scholarship to study metal sculpture in the United States. His introduction to metal as a sculpting medium inspired him to pursue a master's degree program at Wolsey Hall in London (UK), where he focused on metal works. Although he did not make much metalwork, the surface texture and rigidity of metalwork were replicated in most of his clay and cement works. Many of his works were experimental and inspired by concepts in African art, particularly masks. A good number of his works were commissioned.

The narrative of his personal life also influenced his rendition of smooth metal-like textures. He added that a traditional priest "Komfo" warned him at a young age not to look at shiny surfaces after visiting the shrine when he was sick. According to the artist, he avoided any reflective object until he travelled to the United Kingdom. He claimed that upon his return, he could look at reflecting objects without fear of any negative consequences. This movement in his life and practice toward a big and unknown ideal may be ascribed to his proclivity to polish his works.

Growing up within a period when the entire continent of Africa was in the quest for an African identity, African personality, the negritude etc, he also encountered in his backyard Ghana, a situation where artists, authors and political actors were determined to create a distinct Ghanaian art language and aesthetics through a diverse but

²³ Kwami, "Kumasi Realism, 1951-2007: An African Modernism."

²⁴ Asaku Gyapon (2016).

consistent cultural commitment within the rising political and institutional environment of the 1950s to 1970s.²⁵

There were also, influences in new concepts in art from the “Sankofa Art Movement”, a group made up of seasoned Ghanaian artists, such as Kofi Antubam, Oku Ampofo, Vincent Kofi and Theodosia Okoh as well as politicians who saw art as a tool for expressing the nation’s identity, beliefs, and statehood. The outlook of art by Asaku Gyapon was greatly shaped along the lines of the trends of the times.

Style and Technique

A greater part of the artistic journey of Asaku-Gyapon was within a period of national political upheaval and independence struggles. Some of his early works were influenced by the political environment and disputes between the Kwame Nkrumah-led Convention People’s Party and the opposition parties. As a student artist, he considered current issues; cultural, political, economic, and conditions among others as subjects for his creation. His type of sculpture was mainly in the round with sparsely relief works which were presented either in abstract or realistic forms. In conformity with the prevailing style and materials of his student days, most of his early works focused on direct modelling with cement. This he achieved by continuously shaping metal armature into forms and systematically building up the actual sculpture with cement. Later in his career, he experimented with diverse materials aside from his favourite clay, cement and concrete. His works saw the inclusion of materials like Plaster of Paris (P.O.P), metal, mirrors, and wood. While in Europe, he experimented with Foundry casting, however, it didn’t affect the paradigm in his choice of materials and techniques since as an artist who was well-versed in all other casting methods, he seldomly employed this technique in his career.

The works of Asaku-Gyapon reflect his interest in a wide range of subjects. They demonstrated considerable artistic ability, allowing him to work in a variety of styles. His finishing style exhibited surface roughness with surrealist features at times (figure 2). Most of his works were abstracted huge forms characterised by verticality and elongation, little heads and gracefulness (figures, 1, 3, 5, 6, 15 and 16). These are borne out of proverbial and conceptual underpinnings reinforced by experimental processes which are primarily derived from memory and imagination. His biomorphic forms borrow from formal abstract principles in linear, structural, and elemental relationships, within a wide spectrum of ideas to provoke apocalyptic concepts in strange ways. For example, the African Union (AU) commissioned work, shows a deep reflection on the artist's interest in animals in his childhood and folklore (figure 4). Asaku Gyapon's artworks communicate the idea of humanity in a circle of life; as a part of nature having a relationship with things in a universally transient and everlasting network His works, which mostly weave together Ghana's rich culture and history, extend beyond intellectual and aesthetic concerns to engage audiences in more sophisticated philosophical interpretations.

The West African subregion has a rich tradition of folklore interpretations into various artistic representations. Proverbs and aphorisms of the Akan tell stories and convey diverse insight into how the culture views its societal experiences, values and morals.²⁶ Sankofa (to return and fetch), Nkyinkyim (twists and turns on life's road), and Nyame Biribi wo soro (hope) are a few instances and their meanings. The artist’s love for nature, signified by the belief that humans are part of nature and must become connected to something all-encompassing and universal is evidenced in how he incorporated human forms, and biomorphic and anthropomorphic ideas in his works (figures 2, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16).

Theme and Craftsmanship in Relation to Specific Works

“Before I begin a work, I summon the life experiences that I have garnered over the years to help me to create a physically and spiritually artistic dialogue with the help of varied materials and techniques.”²⁷

Almost everything Asaku-Gyapon encountered in his childhood and youth influenced his artworks, from his figurative to abstract representations. As an educator and an artist, his concept that art should be accessible to all rather than just a select few is reflected in the way he sculpted, primarily in public settings. His activity extended from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, during which time he saw significant aesthetic growth and development. The artist began as a sculptor interested in the traditional medium, sometimes anthropomorphic and transitioned to abstraction in his mid and late careers. He evoked biomorphic forms in his mid-and-later abstract works (Figures 9-16). His works had their own life and form, animated and conceptualized. Despite the distortions, piercing, simplifications, and exaggeration (some parts made too big or too tiny or eliminated), they are free, stable and very interactive at the same time. Many of his sculptures are not just abstract representations of both human

²⁵ sei’dou, “J. C. Okyere’s Bequest of Concrete Statuary in the KNUST Collection: Special Emphasis on Lonely Woman.”

²⁶ B C Agyemang, A M Asumeng, and B Amponsah, “The Relevance of Ghanaian Akan Proverbs to Explanations of Contemporary Human Resource Principles and Corporate Values,” *Journal of Business Research* 9, no. 1 (2015): 16–27; M. A. Carey et al., “African Art,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-art>.

²⁷ *Asaku-Gyapon (2016)*.

and animal forms but a series of flowing lines and abbreviated shapes and forms, which suggest the figure (figures 14-16). He developed his sculptures from drawings, and maquettes (small models) before being developed into full scale. He sometimes makes twenty or thirty small models for one large-scale model. He then created a working model of intermediate size, where changes are made before working on the real full size. While some of his earlier sculptures were conventionally perforated, his later works were more abstract and directly pierced through the body. This was intended to investigate the formations' concave and convex forms. His figures' undulating contours are generally influenced by Ghanaian Akan sculptures and African art in general (Figures 1, 3, 8).

In the area of commissioned works, the artists contributed a lot to the State at various levels. Figure 1 shows a memorial work erected at the then Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in commemoration of the Silver Jubilee of the corporation's establishment. This reflects his interest in geometric shapes in his forms.

Figure 2 animates the concept of the Preventive Detention Act (PDA) which was promulgated in the early years of Ghana's independence. In the aftermath of Ghana's independence, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the then Prime Minister, introduced the Preventive Detention Act in 1958 to consolidate authority and restrain the opposition. This empowered the prime minister to hold those suspected of plotting a rebellion for up to five years without charge (Macken, 2005). The statute was modified in 1959 and 1962, and opponents of the CPP administration saw it as a gross infringement of individual freedom and human rights. The CPP administration suppressed its opponents after receiving these legal powers. Opponents considered this act a flagrant breach of individual freedom and human rights. Figure 2 interprets Nkrumah's severity toward his political opponents. The cock is the political symbol of the ruling party at the time, the Convention People's Party (CPP). The ropes connecting the figures' feet show how the CPP party used its power to enslave citizens.

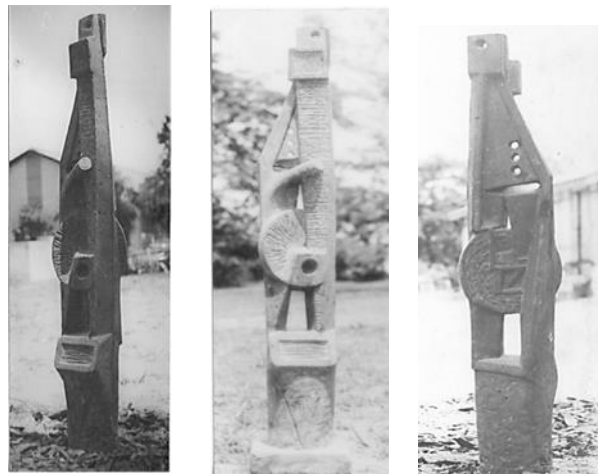


Figure 1: A Monument for a T.V. Station"1960's Black Cement Tone and Cement. 35 Inches Kumasi (Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

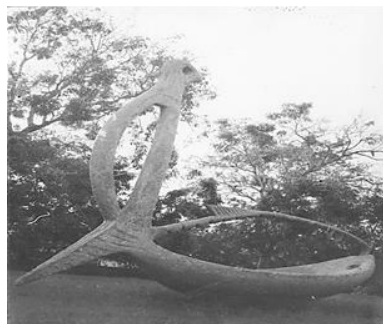


Figure 2: P.D.A. (1962) Cement, Emulsion and Black Paint. Height: 1.5 feet. Unknown Location (Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)



*Figure 3: "The farmer" (1964). Cement. 12 feet.
KNUST Museum.
(Photo Source: Kofi Adjei)*

This twelve-footed commissioned sculpture depicts a Ghanaian farmer in the real sense of the trade (Figure 3). The artist created the sculpture to communicate his experience as a Ghanaian farmer, growing up in a normal farming community. Unfortunately, this piece, which speaks directly to its viewers, was rejected because the Kumasi City Council, which requested it, did not approve of it. They expected artwork that depicted farmers and farming as a thriving job. Asaku-Gyapon believes the piece was rejected because those who commissioned it desired an idealized depiction of a farmer in the city centre. This was to show how farming can be considered a lucrative job.²⁸ The artist's work has remained current for fifty-eight years, dating back to 1964 as part of the continued discussion of the tough conditions that many Ghanaian farmers face when they leave their land.



*Figure 4: Bird and Fish (1965) Medium: Cement and granite. Height: 7.5 feet
Location: TUC Building, Accra
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)*

²⁸ Personal communication, 20th August, 2017.



*Figure 5: 'Oboutebiri', (1967) Cement. Colossal Oboutebiri, Koforidua.
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)*

A linguist (Okyeame) pours libations to call or appease the Oboutebiri deity in this artwork. This mountain protects Koforidua, Ghana's Eastern Regional capital. The figure's position depicts what happens at festivals and traditional events in many indigenous Ghanaian societies. Messages of sacrifice, offering, allegiance, communality, and culture are conveyed through the work.

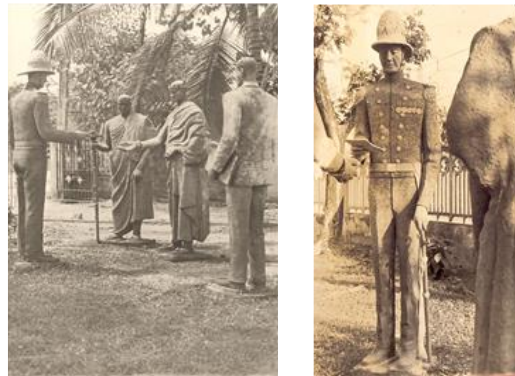


Figure 6: Foreign government handing power to the Koforidua chief.



*Figure 7: The Thanksgiving sacrifices. Monumental Cement work
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)*

The works above were commissioned by the Koforidua council to commemorate the history of the place and people to know their way of life as well. It is a theatrical sculpture which portrays two (2) scenes:



Figure 8: "Sankofa", (1968) Cement and Bronze powder. 2.5 feet
Centre for National Culture, Kumasi.
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

This piece was created for the 1968 National Art Contest, themed "Retrieved." He used the Akan Adinkra symbol 'Sankofa,' which is pronounced "se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenkyi" in the Akan Twi language. The literal meaning is 'go back and fetch,' and it is portrayed by a bird with its feet pointing forward, head turned backward, and a precious egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. According to Asaku-Gyapon, this monument represents African communal life and solidarity. As a result, they must support each other in the same way as the sword supports the pot. As a result, this signifies the necessity to reflect on the past to establish a successful future. He modelled in cement directly.

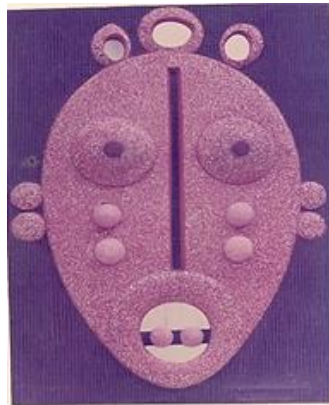


Figure 9: 'Mask', (1970's) Mirror, terrazzo and cement 11.5 inches
Unknown location
Figure 10: 'Mask', (1970's) Mirror, terrazzo and cement 12 inches
Unknown location
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)



Figure 11: "Untitled", 1970's Terracotta. 2 feet
Figure 12: Untitled Cement. 2.5 feet
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

He incorporated metal powder and mirrors to create masks and explore different forms to develop his art practice. His culture and borrowing of other African cultures also played a very important role.



Figure 13: "Aduana Clan Symbol", (1970s) Relief (Door panel). Wood. Size: 75×60cm Kokofu Chief's Palace
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

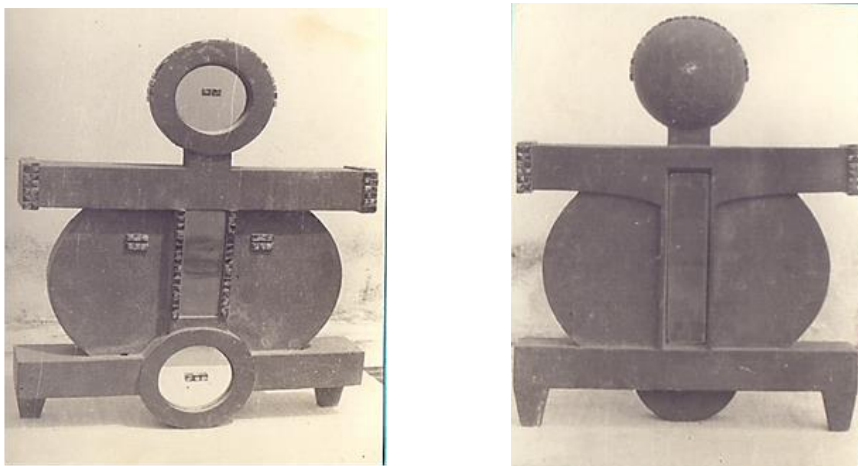


Figure 14: "Untitled", (1970s) Bronze metal and mirror. 2.5 feet. Private collection U.S.A.
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)



Figure 15: "Supplication" (1970s) Cement location unknown
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

Inspired by ancient beliefs and traditions during prayers, the artist portrayed the importance of prayer in life, particularly in traditional religions. Because eggs are prominent in their ceremony, he abstracted an egg's shape, including its head, body, and egg position. This was to create harmony and balance between people and nature. He also used the egg's symbolism to represent hope, fertility, and the cycle of life. The globe-like eggs reflect prayer's optimistic deed, and its head depicts an Adinkra symbol called *Nyame biribi wo soro*, which means "Hopeful." Prayer is a connection with God. Worshipping, performing rituals, and seeking divine grace, mercy, direction, abundance, and other benefits form the foundation of human existence. In this mysterious unknown universe, man must live a meaningful life.

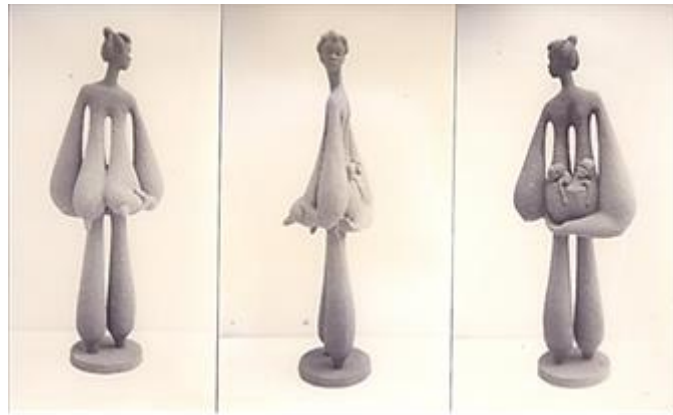


Figure 16: "Amoah Wusi", 1983 Cast red cement. 4 feet high Nigeria
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

In 1983, Ghana had been plunged into hunger and poverty due to its displaced citizens from Nigeria and a lack of plentiful harvest and so many left the nation in a drought and crisis. The public reflections on this devastating year in memory inspired Asaku-Gyapon. The theme '*Amoah Wusi, nee ɔwo abaduasa, na ɔgye abayen*' is a proverbial word of the Akans, which is literally translated as, 'the woman who has more in abundance for her children and others but due to poverty and inexperience, she is unable, desperate and she has a big burden now'.

The woman, 'Amoah Wusi' metaphorically represents Ghana and the breast-like yam represents Ghana's rich resource. She looks so desperate and frustrated while her children are suffering. Her offspring are not benefiting and they are suffering because of their attitude, mistake and their sense of nationalism. Her hairstyle is influenced by Nigerian fashion, and the subject was contemporaneously explored in Agyemang Opambour's *Ama Ghana* song just before the "Ghana Must Go" repatriation from Nigeria in 1983.



Figure 17: "Men of Piety". 1985 Cement. 2 feet. Nigeria
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)



Figure 18: "A friend". 1986 Cement. 2 feet Nigeria
(Photo Source: Courtesy the Artist)

Asaku-Gyapon wore many hats as a sculptor and expressed these variously and appropriately in terms of genre. Some of his works are influenced by his associations and relationships, especially friendships in Nigeria (figure 18). In appreciation of such relationships, he made a portrait bust for one of his friends.

Discussion Summary

The study discussion suggests that the artist's contributions should begin with his work as an art educator, in which he, as part of a generation of art educators, nurtured artists, and educator protégé whose descendants kept the mill working until recent international artistic breakthroughs and recognition. It is becoming increasingly obvious that studio art educators of post-independent Ghana, whose works were not portable enough to warrant collection by overseas institutions are seldom known. This research has alluded to the fact that artists like Oku Ampofo who also had cement fondu statuary practice, also had woodcarving, alongside his medical profession. He also belonged to an art collective called "The Akuapem Six" together with the likes of Owusu Datey, J. C. Okyere, Ayisi Bampo and a host of many others who had periodic exhibitions and publications, making them much more visible. Most of the practitioners in the cement statuary constituency, like his contemporary E. K. A. Azzii-Akator (an artist educationist), who created the iconic Okomfo Anokye statue at the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital roundabout, Bantama and the hitherto Kejetia fountain and sculpture ensemble, among other notable artists are yet to be receive deserved recognitions.

In the main, contributions of Asaku-Gyapon are in his understanding of the sculpture idiom as a mutable entity, and modes of representations he was able to evoke depending on the subject matter and the contexts of the work. Whether it is the use of mass, cavity, curves or lines, texture or orientation, Asaku-Gyapon had a subtle way of rendering that resonates with the cultural environment in which his sculptures exist. The second aspect of his contributions is found in his awareness of cultural equivalences in the indigenous as in the Western art language categories, and when to apply specific cultural idioms and media exclusively, inclusively and, or contextually. He represents the culturally groomed artist who understood the cultural self, vocabulary and tools available to him so much that his work becomes bridges across which modern artistic languages are transmitted to the Indigenous environment and vice versa. Lastly, his use of memory as an archive of artistic medium and indigenous idioms blends to give contextual forms to the various works he made. This approach became synonymous with the idiom of *semi-abstract* (partially geometric and representational art forms) that characterised Ghanaian art, especially cement statuary in the 1980s and 1990s. This stylistic approach became almost formulaic by synthesizing geometry and organic representations into composite forms sculpturally. They were novel in his time and provided ways of integrating the visual and the verbal, the usual and eccentric, as well as ethereal and philosophical.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors recommend the following from the study:

1. The entire Ghanaian modern art practice needs to be reevaluated to be more inclusive of both the modern and indigenous presentations in art making.
2. Much effort should be put into the identification and preservation of the works of Ghanaian artists whose works reflect the history and trends in the making of art in Ghana,
3. Funds should be made available for holistic documentation of the artists who are mentioned in this study and others who are relevant to the study of art in Ghana.

CONCLUSION

In this study, there has been a catalogue of contributions and works of Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon as an artist educationist who should not be forgotten when the roll is called for Ghanaian artists who made contributions to Ghanaian art language that drew on indigenous knowledge and folklore in the periods when the country was undergoing massive socio-cultural changes in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Kwaku Asaku-Gyapon is one of the early artists who understood, created, used and popularised this sculptural language because of the way he straddled the indigenous and the contemporary at the time. His works deserve more exposure and his contribution to Ghanaian art should be duly recognized.

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