

EXPRESSION OF A UNIQUE VISION

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Fine Arts

with a

Major in Art

in the

College of Graduate Studies

University of Idaho

by

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May 2014

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ABSTRACT

Exploring relationships between found and accessible objects, my multimedia sculptures and installations are inspired by multicultural iconography. Using maxim, stories and myths, I express my unique vision of both found and collected materials and transform them into sublime forms and patterns. Via my artistic process of play (collecting, assembling, deconstructing and repurposing), I meditatively make artworks that express a strong understanding of the relationship between my collected materials and socio-cultural traditions. I offer materials that are otherwise neglected a chance for a new life by creating an uncommon purpose for them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first of all specially appreciate and thank my committee members for accepting to work with me and for their time, insightful suggestions and constructive criticisms for both my studio work and thesis writing for over a year.

“You need to dig further, I know you can do it...you have creative ways of pulling together objects and sharing stories through them” Stacy would say. I thank you very much for recognizing the strengths in my works and challenging me to push them further and to explore other creative options in expanding the vocabulary of my artistic explorations.

Sometimes as a creative enthusiastic individual, I need others who would question and challenge my creative decisions and choices. This keeps me on my innovative toes and I am glad that Casey you were there to ask the questions of why..., what..., and how...? These questions have helped me to learn to step back and evaluate my work and see it with fresh eyes.

To you Erika, I would like to specially thank you for accepting to serve on my committee and for offering your wonderful technical expertise and encouragements. “I always tell my students, do whatever you want to do and be able to talk about why you did it” Erika. These words have stayed with me and have become a great tool I have borrowed from you to facilitate the verbal articulation of my work.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late father, Nana (Chief) Joseph Kofi Nyarko for investing priceless resources into my life and education and my mother Sophia Nyarko for her diverse support, encourages and prayers.

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INTRODUCTION

Through my creative exploration, I collect and create from everyday objects. As both a collector and creator of things, I challenge the human ideology of what is considered junk or art through my artistic play: finding, repurposing and organizing different materials. The objects function as metaphors that tie loose narratives into a unique whole through a clever juxtaposition and interplay with each other.

Growing up as a child in Old-Tafo; a suburb in Kumasi- Ghana, I was not good at many children's games. However, I had a company of other kids who shared in my fate and there was one common interest that always brought us together for an adventure during weekends and on holidays: collecting many different kinds of consumer waste materials. This was partly due to the fact that our houses were just a couple of blocks away from the landfills, but our playful approach to this place, helped us unearth hidden skills and talents with the many objects we found. We gathered anything we thought had the potential to become something else. Our stock included empty containers from can meals, milk tins, and plastic containers among others. We repurposed these containers into miniature dolls, cars, trucks, stick figures, cutlery etc. There were some assortments I kept just for the esthetic appearance of the material and not for what I could create out of them. By saving them, I became aware of my fascination and obsession with mundane objects and appreciated my ability to comprehensively interact and organize them into intriguing sculptural forms.

Reflecting on the artworks I create today, this experience has carried itself into my art and my creative ideas build on this allegorical juxtaposition of objects. In the context of creativity, Twyla Tharp describes this as a form of art or metaphor that involves "taking the

facts, fictions, and feelings we store away and finding new ways to connect them.”¹ This parallels what my work is also about; bringing my cultural experiences and childhood memories of the past into my present day art and engaging viewers to think about their own childlike perspectives of their material world. This allows me to be in control of my thoughts and imagining. My own childlike play shifts into a systematic organization where collecting and creating from an adult perspective unfold a better understanding of my materials.

¹ Twyla Tharp, *The creative Habit; Learn it and use it for life* (New York; Simon & Schuster Rockefeller Center, Inc. 2003)

CHAPTER 1: STORY INFLUENCE CONTENT

There were many stories, proverbs, songs, and folktales that were passed down to me as a child growing up in a traditional home in Kumasi, Ghana. Most of my sculptures take on themes connected to such narratives as they are a major source of my inspiration. Some of the accounts stress on good morals, cultural outfits and rituals to observe. There are various artifacts used in these rituals such as stools, dolls, masks, beads, costumes, etc. My work, *Rites of passage* below, is an example of how I visually organize known and unknown objects to explore complex stories.

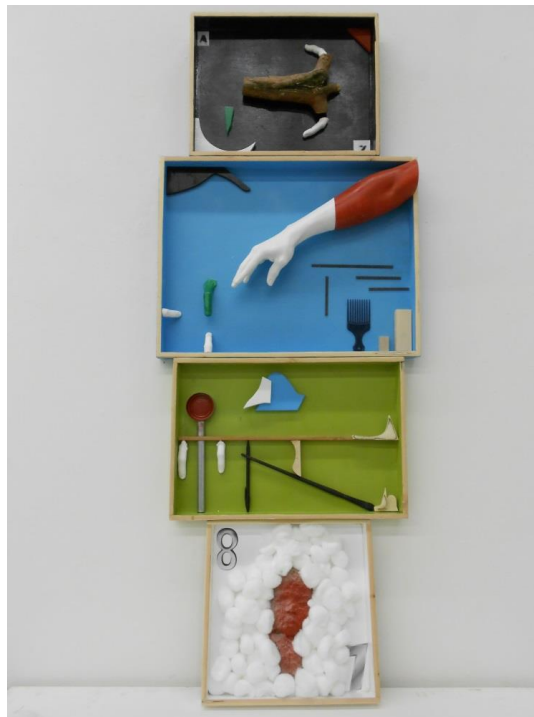


Figure 1

It summarizes the transition of life from birth, to puberty, then marriage and finally death from bottom to top respectively. Birth is considered as a point of entry for the baby coming into the world and becoming a part of a family with a unique identifying name and

purpose. Among the Akans of Ghana, naming ceremony is performed on the 8th day after the baby is born although some other ethnic groups have it on the 7th day and this is represented in the work with the number 7 and 8. White colors and costumes are used for this ceremony with the white representing victory into the world and newness of life and I used cotton balls to create a comfortable environment devoid of all the atrocity of the world for the newly born. The next stage is called Puberty.

Puberty rites are done for adolescence making the transition from childhood to adulthood. Different rites are performed for both girls and boys although many ethnic groups do not have initiation rites for boys. The green color represents growth and fertility. It is the stage for adventures; teenagers take on new challenges and learn to be productive, responsible young adults. The pen and brush is symbolic of career directions they could pursue; formal or non-formal education. Marriage is the next period after puberty and it is considered as the most perplexing, complex and yet satisfying of all the steps.

Marriage and love are associated with the color blue in indigenous Ghanaian cultures. I interpret it as “a searching stage” where young adults search for partners. The extended arm is an indirect representation of this searching stage and a “marriage comb” is usually given to the bride as a gift to remind her about being a fruitful partner. The last of the stage in this piece is death, although many Ghanaian cultures believe in the afterlife and reincarnation.

Death is a sad thing and brings mournful memories to the living. The black color and decayed piece of wood symbolically depict this grief-stricken mood and mortality of men. The objects and colors, although not all of it have been engaged in this piece; describes the uniqueness of each stage. This is my visual representation, interpretation and brief narrative of

these transitions of life among the Akans of Ghana. I find such cultural rituals inspiring and informative and share them through my art. Using everyday objects and color, I am able to clearly convey traditional tales because I believe these items are also common among other cultures and geographical locations and could easily help viewers to find connections to their own cultural experiences and that of others.

Another approach I visually communicate my cultural perspectives through proverbs, also known as maxim. It “is a simple and concrete saying popularly known and repeated, that expresses a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity”². The purpose of proverbs in a conversation is to communicate or give advice wisely and not be offensive. It is a matured and intelligent way of speaking. Examples of some African proverbs include, “war has no eyes” from Swahili which means it is better live in peace than to have conflict, because in the time of war, there is no mercy or sympathy for anybody or thing. War is blind to everything. Another one from the Ashanti’s of Ghana talks about man’s inability to know everything and comprehend all wisdom as “wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it all.” In other words, wisdom is too wide or broad to know and or have it all.

I embrace and visually represent proverbs through forms. It is easier for me to comprehend complex maxim pictorially than imaginatively because I am a visual person. In the work, *Wall persona*, I took on a folktale believed to have come up during World War II. The tale has it that, “walls have ears”. Which in other words means, be cautious about what and where you speak because somebody might be listening; your words might go out through

² Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proverb#cite_note-, 12 12/5/2013, 11:18 PM.

the “ears” of the walls. Several cultures in China, Ghana, German, Portuguese, French, and Dutch share the same proverb. I tend to think that walls must as well have other human senses like mouth, ear, eyes, and therefore could be a personality. The work evokes a visual presence of a character with a whimsical eye, nose, mouth and ear. The shapes of the features, challenge viewers to question their imagination and visual interpretation; whether they are in control of what they see or vice versa. Stories from different cultures are important; my art welcomes and visually presents such special proverbial sayings in a unique way like “walls have ears”.

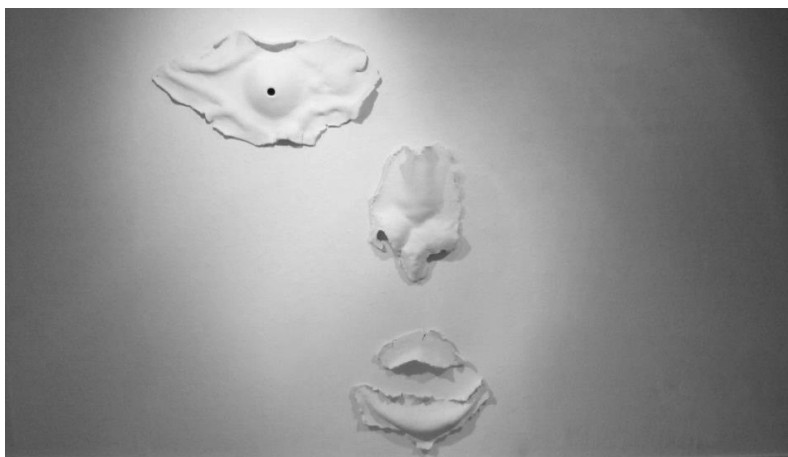


Figure 2



Figure 3

“Sankofa” is one of the adages I have used in my work. It is an Akan proverb and or language from the Akan tribe of Ghana and could directly be translated into English as “go back and pick”. When this maxim is used in a conversation, it implies the speaker can go back to mention an important point left out in that discourse. In other words, there is nothing wrong to go back to a former way of working or doing things if that works better than the current process or methodology.

In this work, a piece of wood was carved into a bird shape with a long neck which turns to the back and breaks up in the neck, reaching for an egg represented by a stone. I envisioned a birdlike shape in the wood when I first saw it. The color of the pitch and the heart of the wood suggested the face and eye of a bird to me; this is the unique way I perceive my found materials, ways that catapult viewers to my world of vision where mystery become revelation. By this, they can see beyond the scope of the physical material into understanding my perspective of what that means or stands for within the context of my culture and tradition.



Figure 4

According to Mary Stribling, “Archeologists have found the history of man in his trash heaps and Found Artist of today are rewriting the story from the same source”³. Although I do not see myself as rewriting “the story” through my art, I share my stories, feelings, experience and encounters with various cultures.

³ Mary Lou Stribling, *Art from Found Materials discarded and natural* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1972), xi

CHAPTER 2: FORM AND MATERIAL INSPIRATIONS.

By incorporating found objects in my structures and installations, I both collect, reinterpret, and redefine what I have observed. I understand my materials by taking time to study them. Duchamp describes this moment as a period he also takes “to be aware of the material’s look”⁴. Analyzing a piece of stone or wood or some found object could take me days or weeks before I realize what the object intrinsically holds. Some critical theories are of the view that, the mere fact that a found object has been moved and or represented is enough proof that the ready-made has been altered and so could be considered a piece of art.



Figure 5

⁴ Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: art in transit* (University of California Press 1995), p 97

Contrary to this assertion, my works marry the physical altering of form while still maintaining its aesthetic and visual qualities. In the work above; *Adam*, I used a block of wood in its natural state that had seemly male torso characteristics; therefore, I carved the abdominal muscles to exaggerate its masculine qualities. In this way, I released the life trapped within the material and celebrate nature's beauty. I created and installed the piece in an unexpected restroom space. The urinal is serving as a surprising location that allows me to engage my sense of humor. This unlikely space for art provokes and intrigues the viewer's perception and challenges them to confront banal objects with further curiosity.

In order to see art from everyday objects and have appreciation for it, we need to be aware of the beauty of the things that surrounds us. I would therefore like to define art not only in the context of making nor the process but also, as an awareness of all the qualities in what we see in life. It is our understanding of what is, that would bring us to what is not (and this is creativity). This picture in figure 6 was taken from the University of Idaho Campus. I was intrigued by how naturally this elephant like form seems to evolve from this tree. I am pretty sure many people have overlooked the amazing form within this tree. It looks like an elephant with a long trunk and captivating dark wide eyes. That is how I see things. Forms and materials inspire ideas for my creative work. This is my unique vision.



Figure 6

On the other hand, I also have a unique representation of portraits that look distinct from their real life forms in comparison. An example is my abstract portrait below, “*Awuraa*” which references some of my encounters with individuals; familiar and unfamiliar. I deconstructed the facial expression and features into basic geometric shapes and form through series of drawings and my own spontaneous response and interpretation. I honor this individual and create a new identity for her based on my perception of her unique personality.



Figure 7

This idea has also helped me to deal with my transition from realism into abstraction. Direct depiction of the human form seems boring to me now. We people all the time in real life and or via images. I attempt to represent them differently into how I think of them to be in my mind's eye through a series of drawings. I usually start with sketches, but sometimes the final piece turns out to look completely different from the drawing, because I respond from one shape or form to the other.

Some people have identified them as “a blend of cubism and abstraction” due to their geometric features and connect them to Picasso’s sculptures. I am inspired by organic and inorganic shapes and cubism to create forms that speak about my notion and understanding of these individuals. In my current practice, I have thought about this often and I now challenge myself to look at figures and explore their unique form and features by taking them apart and reforming them. This new approach to modeling by deconstructing and reconstructing my portraits using irregular shapes and forms opened my eyes; I was seeing unusual iconic forms from the usual through the overemphasized facial features which are more dynamic and compelling than their real forms. The expressive geometric forms suggest the dominating strength and power of my portraits that I miss in the real form. This also creates ambiguity and arouses a desire to discover more about the characters, which on the other hand is spelled out for viewers in most realistic portraits in my assessment. This expression creates life and an animated countenance that cannot be seen on the surface of the real.



Figure 8

Sometimes, when I put different collected objects from various locations together, I ask myself what those objects mean to me. To answer this question, I start organizing and rearranging the materials together. More often than not, I am able to connect them to people, events or things I have seen or used several times in my life.

The box work below titled *A Father's Life*, is an example of how items I collect revive memories associated with them into a story. In the work, the gear-like wooden form and rod revive memories of the time I use to work with my late father at his printing press. The pipe links the ties I shared with him at home and at work. The shoe reminds me of my responsibilities of polishing his shoes although this is a baby shoe and ironing cloths, and dusting of furniture. This rapport is like an unending sequence to me and the box is framing and sealing up this relationship I shared with him.

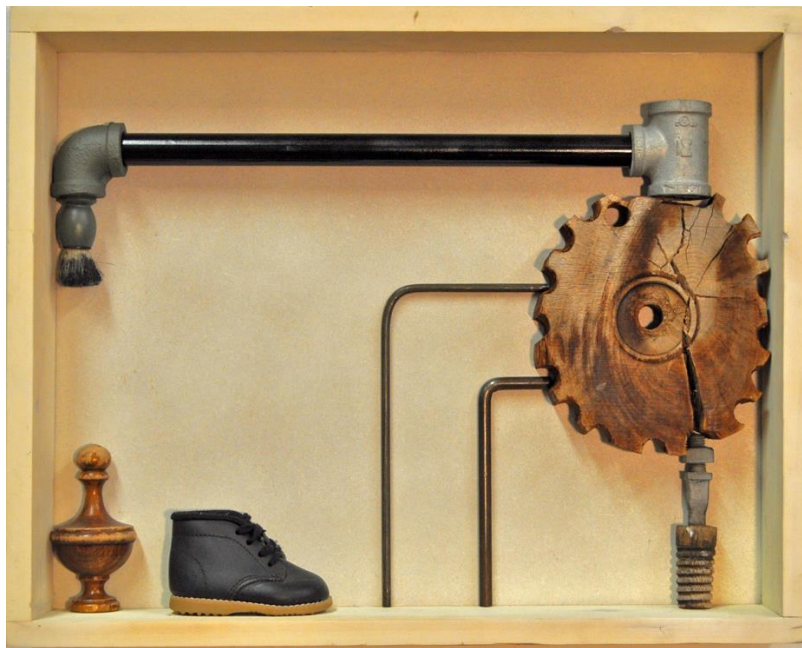


Figure 9

CHAPTER 3: STUDIO PRACTICE AND PROGRESSION

Through my dedicated studio practice, I seek to more fully observe and contemplate the commutative power of my materials. By working on multiple projects at different stages during the same period, I gain better understanding options for subject matter through my various perspective of the material. This process feels like solving a puzzle and I do not feel fully satisfied in the studio until I overcome the challenge of finding better approaches to manipulating and assembling various complex materials and forms into a unique whole. I also consider my studio space as a sanctuary; a sacred place where I meditatively become consumed in the process of making devoid of all the stress of life. Like a religious environment that has an object of worship, my materials become the object of my attention. This dedication to my materials makes me perceive my studio practice as ritualistic.

Prior to graduate school, realistic modeling of portraits in clay had been one of my strongest, more comfortable construction approaches to making art. However, with time this has become less challenging and thus, less rewarding of an experience for me. Since we see these figures all the time in real life, I question what is gained by reproducing them in clay or bronze. I suppose by replicating them, the rather fleeting persona is given permanence through the material and I do not have to dig any further beyond this fact.



Figure 10

In the work below, I expressed my perception of dominance, power and strength of this individual through a minimalistic approach of striping the content of my form down to basic shapes. Through this transformation, I honor her ambiguous self-prestige and identity by turning and slightly raising up her head and shoulder to the right side. Also, by retaining some realistic aesthetics of the people involved in these portraits, I create clues for viewers to connect with the real image. This engages them in longer contemplation and wonder; creating a sort of stronger and richer connection and meaning between the subject and its image.



Figure 11

This process has also further informed my playful assemblage of found objects. I transform conventional and non-traditional sculpture materials into glorified precious possessions. Some describe this art of uplifting a material most consider to be waste into something useful as “upcycling”. Through this process of upcycling, consumer items are reclaimed, refashioned and repurposed into new forms that are typically of better quality than the original. By upcycling my collected objects, I offer my materials both a second chance from being considered “waste” and give them a voice as objects of value and beauty.

In the bottom left work by Romuald Hazoumè, a gasoline container has been shaped to mimic a face and paired up with yarns wrapped and braided like hair. He takes an ordinary material and fashions it into indigenous African masks. The material has now gained some degree of self-importance and value and I don't see it the same way anymore as in its original shape and or purpose. This idea makes me think about materials as having this unique authority and beauty that transcends beyond our comprehension if enough time is taken to understand it.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Inspired by two musical instruments; violin and kola, I constructed the work *viola* (top right) above, merging aspects of both instruments into one unique non-functional musical tool. I assembled it from a spatula, cake pan, plywood and steel wire. By expanding on my understanding of a violin and a kola as being foreign and traditional instruments respectively, I close the boundary and create my version of a musical instrument that looks like a hybrid of the violin and kola. This form of musical instrument embraces the beauty of diversified cultural approaches to making melody by glorifying the banal objects from which the *viola* is made from.

CHAPTER 4: ALUMINUM CANS EXPLORATION

Recently, I have been investigating aluminum cans as a material for weaving fabric-like patterns inspired by the Kente cloth from the Akan tribe of Ghana. This idea started with a pile of the cans I found in a friend's studio. He had a container full of empty mountain dew soda cans. The cluster of them, the green and red visual prints and color of its physical qualities were appealing to my eyes and the first thing it reminded me of was the Kente cloth. Although that was not the first time I was seeing them, it was a eureka moment for me.

The Kente cloth of Ghana has a long mythology. It is believed that a man called Ota Karaban and his friend Kwaku Ameyaw learned the weaving from a spider weaving its web and after many years of practicing, they developed this colorful, pattern and meticulous weaving. It was later adopted as a royal cloth and worn on special occasions by the Asantehene (Ashanti Chief). However, it has been discovered that similar patterns and strips were made in Mali and the Songhai Empire.

The various colors of yarns and patterns in a particular cloth suggest its symbolic worth and function. Weavers apply the indigenous notion of colors into their weaving. For example, the color red represents love in most western cultures whereas blue is the case among most cultures in Ghana. However, red is associated to close blood relations, political and spiritual mood, danger, sacrifice and death. Yellow and gold are symbols of royalty, wealth, vitality, preciousness, supreme quality and spiritual purity. Earth colors like maroon and purple denote healing and purple is considered as feminine. Whilst the color grey is associated with ash and used in ritual cleansing and healing, white on the other hand is used

for purification and celebratory occasions. I find the ideologies behind these colors as relevant to understanding the intent of the various weaving.



Figure 14

Most people unfamiliar with the connotation behind these might miss what their presence symbolizes. However, I am curious about what these colors and patterns also mean to them and how it might be interpreted through their cultural perspective. Also, I have found out that by asking viewers the question “what do you see”, I create a platform for understanding their perspective and thoughts about what they perceive about this kind of weaving and pattern. This gives them control in what they see and I am equally interested their interpretation as much as I would like them to learn of mine.

The work below, *Erica’s Field* is part of a series of weaving I am currently developing using aluminum cans. The plain weave technique and the predominant green colors used in this piece make the cans look like a green field. Traditionally, the notion of the color green is associated with vegetation in Ghana and symbolizes growth, harvesting, prosperity and spiritual revival. The red and plain portion in the pattern provides a place in the weave for the eye to rest and concentrate. My use of red in this weaving does not follow the indigenous

notion of the red color. Rather, I used it as a warm color to create vitality in the weaving. I also relate my use of red to the energy and labor of farmers and field workers.



Figure 15

Over a decade now, the Kente cloth seems to have lost its place as a prestigious royal cloth due to mechanical mass production by foreign countries. The inferior printed samples have made the cloth more accessible to majority of Ghanaians and the outside world but at the same time demeaned the wealth and significance of the cloth to the Asante Kingdom, traditional weavers and traders. By using aluminum cans as an accessible material for weaving patterns like the Kente cloth, I make this cultural iconography accessible to a wider audience. I am also addressing the dwindling of the veneration of this royal cloth through mechanical production and trade. At the same time I am sharing the symbolism, wealth and beauty of the cloth. I pose a challenge for my viewers to confront and appreciate the beauty in the everyday object and share narratives of the Kente cloth of Ghana through it. My playful processes of collecting and fabricating mundane cans into fabric-like patterns have been summed up in the poem below with reference to the work in figure 16.

Erica's Field

The nippers are out to play
On a bright sunny day;
On sandy ground stand their feet in haste to play.

Step by step, they unearth earth's mysterious fame
By digging and searching the landfills of blame;
To collect and repurpose what later became their game...their fame.

They cut, twist and beat their tins and will not yield to calls from the field
Until their treasures from the landfills became shields;
Shields of fabric, pattern and quilt...with or without wound, by **Erica's field**.

My fascination with these cans made me also start thinking about them as interesting material for costumes. It emerged out of curiosity of creating an art work from aluminum cans; a sharp, harsh, material that has connections to our human body and how people might react or feel about it. I observed that, some people approached it as an interesting dress form, but in relation to their body, uncomfortable due to its sharp visual qualities. Others also approached it as armor and or a shield. In this way, they feel protected and yet rough at the same time. This material transformation has helped me to understand that there can be peace in chaos, hope in despair, and that I am in control of both.



Figure 16

The Veil is a form of interconnected aluminum cans tops inspired by tapestries and quilts. Using a material that has a harsh, hard and metallic physical structure, I created an artwork that replicates a fabric and depicts comfort and softness. The holes and the shadows, make me think about veils. We use veils for covering and sometimes, they become masks people hide behind either for protection or to conceal their identity. When I look at this work, I am constantly reminded of the social distance many individuals maintain. Keeping to themselves and almost perceiving others who do not share in some aspects of their life

whether it is religious faith, skin color, etc. as being a threat to their privacy and or security. I see such folks as wearing large veils made out of materials that make them feel comfortable and uncomfortable, secured and unsecured, covered and yet naked at the same time due to the harsh, sharp and armored physical structure of the aluminum from which it is made from. Due to the scale and drapery, viewers have also identified it as a veil to conceal an object whereas others also relate to it as a form of blanket and or quilt because of the installation of it on the wall.



Figure 17

In my other work below titled *Self-Portrait*, I am responding to some of the misconceptions that people usually make of introverts; they are considered shy, rude and always want to be alone. There are false impressions that they do not like people or go out in public and also do not know how to relax and have fun. In *Self-Portrait* I built a representational “pillow” and “bag” from aluminum cans and stuffed them with the same material. I am making reference the pillow as an object we put our head on to relax, reflect

and when we sleep on it, we sometimes have dreams. The bag on the other hand is serving as a form of storage container for what I possess. By stuffing the content of both the bag and pillow with the cans from which they are made from, I am trying to understand that my internal character and introvert personality make me who I am and there is no difference between them. When I paired these two unrealistic forms with the bench to sit alone in space, I am commenting on my introverted lifestyle. The pillow and bench are serving as metaphor for the idea of finding comfort, rest and peace through self-reflection and meditation.

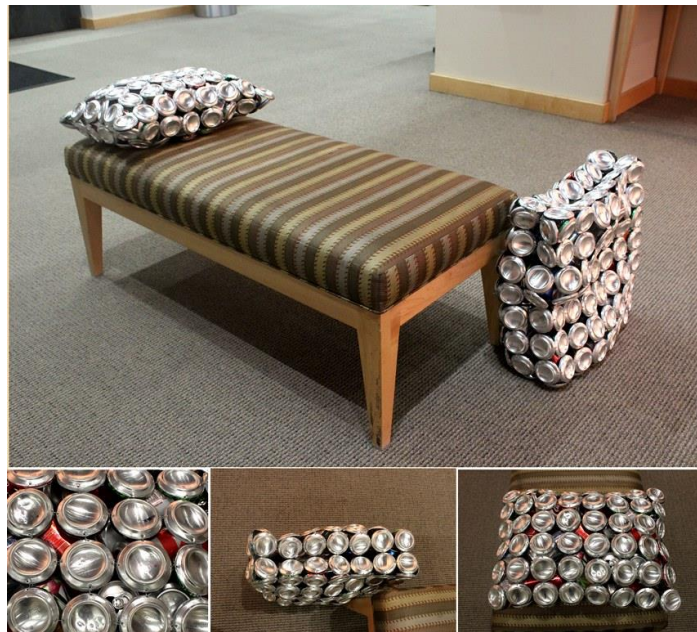


Figure 18

As an object of abundance, I am not sure that this material is the only answer for the kind of cultural narrative structures that often inspire my work, however, it is a choice I have made to investigate and understand this new material in my work. Whenever I cut, fold, staple and twist them into large sheets and forms, I gain a deeper understanding of the physical structure of the cans. This meditative- repetitive process, keeps me intimately engaged to explore the material further.

CULTURAL ICONOGRAPHY AND STORY

In trying to communicate the elegance and prestige of the kente cloth in relation to narratives, I have realized that weaving the patterns with pop cans was not enough to get this idea across. So I have explored various display options that work effectively with the message and or story connected to the cloth and culture. The works below are selected pieces from my MFA thesis exhibition. I consider this body of work to be the strongest pieces that describe the diverse stories and history that often inspire my work. They involve aspects of traditional rule, authority, symbolisms, maxim and my own cultural experiences.

In the installation below, the same work titled *Erica's field* was displayed differently. I created a throne-like scene in reference to chieftaincy and sovereignty by draping the weaving in an arc form over the stool. This format of representing the *Erica's field* is metaphorical for how chiefs and other traditional rulers arch umbrellas over their head during various ceremonial occasions and hearings. The scale of it also tells their eminence as the bigger your umbrella the higher your hierarchy and so this work could be considered as having a high rank.

As an icon of royalty and kingship, the stool symbolizes the greatness of a traditional authority, usually for a chief or a queen mother among the Akan tribe of Ghana. It is also considered as the seat of wisdom and power of the society. The center symbol in the stool is called 'Adikrahene duah' (Adinkra king stamp) which is a symbol for greatness and royalty. In relating the connections between this kente cloth, the stool and the aluminum can, I am celebrating this mundane material, shifting a viewers perception of the material and transforming it into a medium that communicates a richer culture and tradition.



Figure 19

It is interesting to me to see how sometimes society places more emphasis and preparation on a wedding ceremony which lasts for a few hours if not minutes, than on a marriage which supposedly is for a lifetime. In particular, so much money is invested into a fancy wedding garment that would only be worn for less than 24 hours and soon forgotten. In the work below, *Wedding, not Marriage*, I am addressing this discrepancy of importance. We drink from aluminum cans and trash them as quick consumable, useless objects. But through my role as a collector and creator, I revive this lost value, beauty and quality by fashioning them into something that society esteems—a wedding dress. Through my process, reverence is created from both the form and content by placing this dress on a pedestal.



Figure 20

Although the *Enthroned* and *Wedding, not Marriage* are separate works, I am thrilled to see both pieces together. They seem to be in a conversation about rank and hierarchy. Since the dress form is higher than the *Enthroned* piece on the pedestal, it reads as though it is looking down upon it. Traditionally, it is a taboo and punishable for anyone to look down

upon a ruler in any form, fashion and shape. Although chiefs and kings are enstooled into power culturally among many tribes in Ghana by the queen mother, they possess more authority and power than the queen mothers. I consider the female dress form as a representation of a queen mother that seems to be rising to a higher ranking than the *Enthroned* piece with the stool, which represents the rule of a male authority. It is therefore interesting for me to see that this kind of male and female hierarchy dialogue seems to go on between these two works. With that notwithstanding, I am also questioning sociocultural values and norms, on what is considered trash and power between male and female governance.

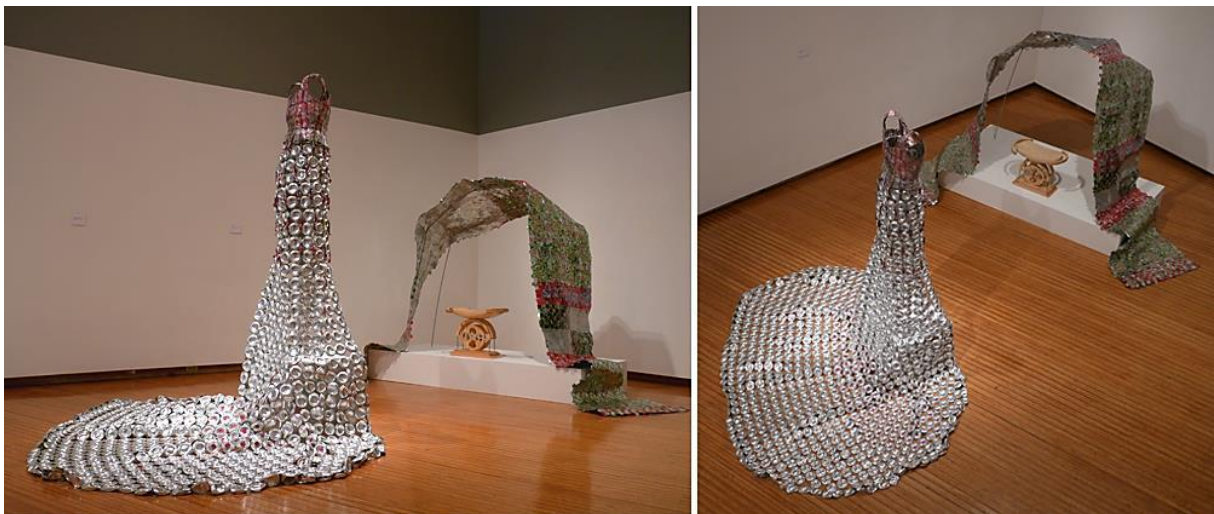


Figure 21

Passing on to the other side is considered a form of transition that we may all have to climb at some point in our existence on earth. *Owuo atwede* meaning ladder of death, is a symbol of mortality and a reminder of the transitory nature of our human existence. In the work above, the ladder, color and pattern of the weaving express this idea from a traditional point of view. Reds and blacks are colors associated to danger and death. Culturally, people

attend funeral ceremonies in red cloths as a cautionary color to show that something has gone wrong; somebody has passed away and black colors represent the fact that death, being a dark thing has fallen on the living.

This ideology has been integrated into this weaving to establish a richer context for this kind of cultural symbolism. The cloth draping over some of the rungs of the ladder creates a form of stairs that leads to the ladder. This creates movement from the draping on the floor to the ladder which suggests a form of progression from one stage to another and in this case; transition from life to death. This weak, distressed ladder with short, largely spaced rungs also symbolizes the vulnerability aspect of the human condition. The ladder creates a visual dialogue for the central theme of death and its transitory nature is emphasized through the integration of the ladder symbol repetitively in the weaving. It is also serving as a motif for this cloth. Traditionally when people see it in a cloth, they relate to it as a symbol of mortality and a reminder that they are just passing through the world and they need to live a good life to be a worthy soul in the afterlife.



Figure 22

The work below titled *Parches*, started as a way of reminiscing the beauty in putting together different pieces of cloth to create a larger piece called “*sasawa*” in Ghana. Dating back in the 1930s during the Great Depression period, women usually connected scraps of fabric pieces and mended them into blankets and dresses for their kids. This was something they did due to the fact that there was poverty and they could not afford a new and or large piece of fabric. Although this is an old practice, it has been adopted and seen in current fashion trends. Families who continued to use the parched cloth after the depression period were considered poor. Having personally used a *sasawa* cloth as a child, I am responding to this internal emotion it has resonated in me and expressing this kind of emptiness I associate the cloth with.

I consider also the ‘emptiness’ of my pop cans and plastic bottles I use as being once a storage container but now emptied of what it has to offer. I perceive this as a form of poverty in connection to the rich history behind the *sasawa* cloth. My mother made *sasawa* cloths from old dresses she had when I was a child. Sometimes she mixes them up with new scrap fabric pieces collected from tailors and different stores. Due to the fact that the scrap pieces of the cloth have different yarn qualities and strengths, they do not last very long. Apart from this, I remember wearing my *sasawa* every day; the constant overuse of it weakens the cloth causing it to fall apart after a while. However, many children will keep using the cloth even at its worse state until they get a new one.

The different fragments of aluminum cans, plastic bottles and tape coming together to form this fabric like structure that has a weak quality to it paints a picture of an old and almost fallen apart *sasawa* to me. This work also shows variety in my material manipulation; folding, coiling, taping, cutting, etc. It demonstrates diversity of new forms of texture and expresses

the idea that the cloth is falling apart in sections and pieces. The various brands of pop cans assembled and connected together is also similar to how different types of fabrics are sewn together to create the *sasawa* cloth. Typically, there is no rule on where to sew what type of fabric, brand, or color as women rely on their own intuition. This is what makes the cloth distinct from other traditional forms of fabric like the kente cloth that has very organized weaving patterns. However, my version of the cloth using the cans embodies both my intuition and emotions of emptiness.

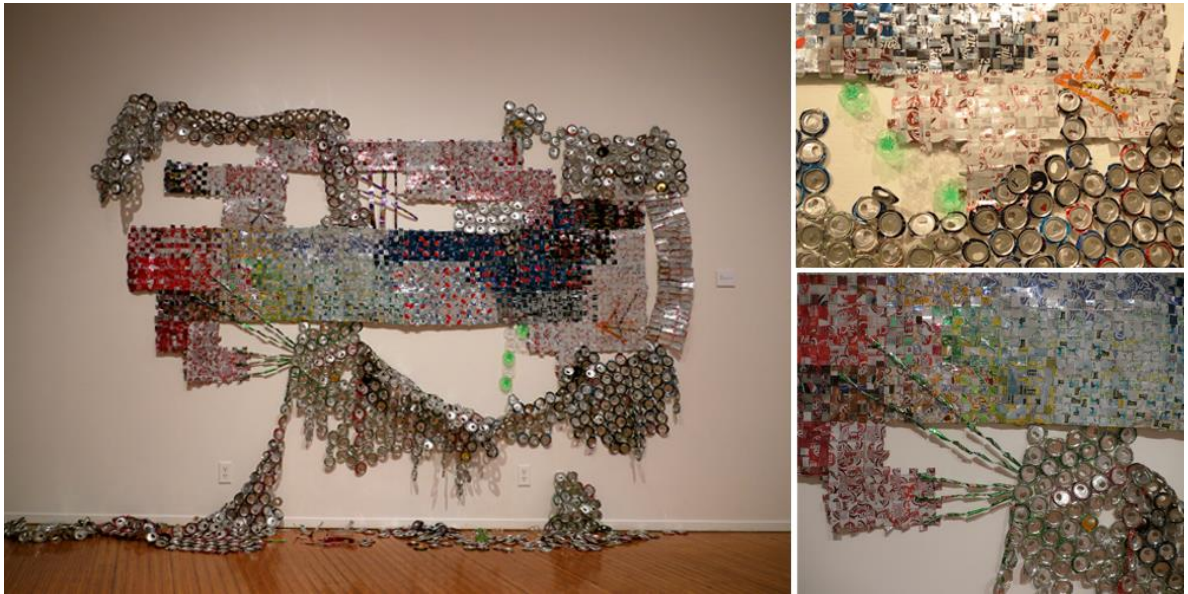


Figure 23

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In my work, I explore my creative ideas through manipulation of mundane objects and materials. These objects are assembled and constructed in a captivating way to tell my cultural story; his-tory. I make an art form that questions the complexity of what society perceives and defines as art and junk, and offers viewers the opportunity to form their own meaning and judgment.

My concept of “play” allows me to make art that keeps me exploring and experimenting with both traditional and nontraditional sculptural materials. This is one of the most satisfying aspects of my artistic practice. I equally enjoy the results of my work and the process and I do not consider that one is more valuable than the other.

I consider art as a learning process and there is no end to it. However, through consistent and persistent practice, new ideas, techniques and concepts evolve. I love the dynamism and transitions of my work and I am open to where that takes me in future projects.