

Lee Nukpe's *Nubile*: A Carving With A Shadow

karî'kächä seidou

Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University
Science and Technology, Kumasi

George Ampratwum

Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University
Science and Technology, Kumasi

Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu

Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University
Science and Technology, Kumasi

ABSTRACT

The Ghanaian sculptor Lee Nukpe belongs to the post-Independence or post-World War II generation of visual artists in Ghana whose bodies of work have not had due critical assessment, contextualization and review. The paper reviews Nukpe's late-career work, *Nubile*, a bas relief representation of a bare-breasted young woman arrayed in Ghanaian puberty rites insignia. The authors identify carryovers from Ghana's colonial and post-Independence generations such as the predominantly social realist aesthetic and veiled conservative sex and gender motifs. However, the authors also point out how the cut-and-dry cultural and formal motifs in *Nubile* are also undermined by Nukpe's ostensible double-coding. This spectral feature of *Nubile* presents it as a "text with a shadow". The authors argue that to a large extent, *Nubile* lends itself to ambivalent readings which could challenge Ghana's patriarchal definitions of woman and nubility in a contemporary milieu shot through with feminist, trans and non-binary sexual discourse.

Keywords: nubile, patriarchy, gender-conformity, double-coding, gender-ambivalence, trans identity

INTRODUCTION

The sculptor Livingstone Yaw Foli Lee Nukpe (b. c. 1950)¹ belongs to Ghana's post-Independence generation of visual artists whose bodies of work have not had due critical assessment and contextualization. Through a critical review of *Nubile* (Figure 1), a late-career bas-relief in wood carved in 2006, this paper brings the ethos of Nukpe's generation of sculptors to historical and cultural significance. The text reveals *Nubile* as an embodiment of retrospective formal devices attendant to modern Ghanaian imagery and iconography, especially, those predominant in his formative years in the 1970s and 1980s art academy in Kumasi.

The “shadow” in the title is meant by the authors to highlight the virtual sphere of *Nubile*, that is, its “unconscious” in psychoanalytical terms. This is evoked by those specters, traces or supplements — within the materialized image and its social context — which complicate, challenge and expand the typical single narrative intent of artists of Nukpe’s generation. There are at least two perspectives from which the titular “text with a shadow” gains plausibility in this review text; one issuing from the artist’s body of works, the other from the authors’ conceptual lenses, thematic tropes and writing style. On the one hand, this symbolic shadow takes material form in some graphical and formal devices which Nukpe deploys in the wooden bas-relief, albeit, with aesthetic intent probably at a tangent to our symptomatic reading. On the other hand, in the manner of the metaphorical soft shadows cast by a text facing incident light, the authors present delicate psychoanalytical hints at the persistent cultural motifs in Nukpe’s work ranging from timeworn patriarchal sex and gender constructs, objectification of the feminine body and a voyeuristic cis-male gaze implicit in Ghana’s nationalist cultural definitions of the time. The authors note that Nukpe’s image of nubility does not fully conform to the stereotypical cultural motifs on sex, gender and ability in the single narrative sculpture canon of Ghanaian modernism (cf. seid’ou 2015). Ironically, the body of ambiguities conveyed by *Nubile*’s double-coded aesthetic devices could be made to hint at those political-feminist and queer-gendered identity markers officially repressed in the body of images disseminated through African postcolonial struggles for self-determination. They present themselves as paradoxical devices which haunt, from the inside, the patriarchal order and the regime’s apparent timidity towards feminist politics embodied in the heteronormalized images, texts and representational codes of artists, scholars and cultural brokers of Ghana’s early post-colonial generation.

The authors contextualize *Nubile* within the internal logic of Nukpe’s eclectic corpus of commissioned sculpture and independent practice, respectively. Furthermore, the supporting narrative is contextualized within the bigger picture of contemporaneous sculpture traditions of the epi-colonial and humanist “art and crafts” curriculum of the late 1970s and early 1980s College of Art in Kumasi, of which Nukpe is a protégé, and its antecedent curriculum in the Achimota College tradition. Advisedly, the authors’ prose style for the review is interpretive, aphoristic and allusive in an essayist mode which caters to the symptomatic reading of art and cultural tropes.

SEX AND IDENTITY TROPES IN NUKPE’S NUBILE: A TEXT WITH A SHADOW

Thematically, *Nubile* might be best described as a visual embodiment of Roland Barthes’ celebrated phrase, “text with a shadow”². Barthes interprets the expression thus:

There are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the ‘dominant ideology,’ but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text... the text needs its shadow: this shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro.” (1973, p. 32)

Barthes fashions the phrase after the titular of Richard Strauss’ opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in which “The Empress” character is “the woman without a shadow”. Strauss’ text is itself an adaptation of a character in Danish folklore. Strauss’ *Die Frau ohne Schatten* brings to light a modicum of sex and gender politics; the shadow behind the shadow of Barthes’s thesis. Desiring to become fully human in response to demands of patriarchy, the protagonist of the opera, the young Empress, struggles to gain a shadow. On the flip side of this desire to be fully human was the desire

to become fertile, to be productive, hence to be nubile. The parallels between the patriarchal ethos of Nukpe's generation and the ethos of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* are remarkable. The Empress is presented as an incomplete human, and to escape from the condition of her lack, she desires to have a shadow, to be fertile, and therefore to be complete. The absence of a shadow and of fertility—as pertains in the ethos of Nubility rites in Ghana—was a stigma, a lack. Nukpe reproduces this lack to a large extent but the formal codes he employs present symbolic cues which undermine the consistency of this lack. Thus, à la Barthes and Strauss, Nukpe presents to us a “nubile with a shadow”, a paradoxical figure.

Nubile, a coy but lascivious-looking young woman carved in wood, is a good example of post-colonial Ghanaian sculpture with ethnographic and single narrative social realist theme. Notably, the etymological root of “nubile” (from Latin *Nubilis*, ultimately traced from *Nubere*, meaning “take a husband”) underscores a patriarchal construct of cis-femininity coded as sexual attraction to a cis-male partner. A similar interpretation survives in the assumptions behind mainstream interpretations of puberty and nubility rites in modern Ghana (Boakye, 2010; Adjaye, 1999; Huber, 1963). Some nubility rites in Ghana after which Nukpe would likely fashion his image are the *Dipo* among Krobos, the *Nugbeto* among Anlo-Ewes and the *Bragorɔ* among Akans³. However, the scene resonates well with the *klama* dance in the *Dipo* nubility and passage rites.

Notably, menstruating life is, by and large, a necessary condition for a nubile's readiness for Ghana's puberty and nubility rites. Today, this condition would be off-putting to trans men who suffer gender dysphoria as a result of lingering menstrual experience. It would also exclude trans women who live the feminine without ever menstruating. Thus, in a contemporary Liberal-democratic consensus of multi-cultural openness on sex and gender, the patriarchal, binary and cis-gendered interpretation of “nubile”—“to take a husband”—would seem to be a dated construct which promotes an image of femininity (and with it nubility) catered to a heteronormative male gaze alone. Nevertheless, there can be found markers of gender and sexual ambivalence in the network of customs within Ghana's cultural systems which appear to be governed by heteronormativity, sex and gender binaries and systemic patriarchy respectively. In the Ewe language which Nukpe speaks and its attendant patriarchy-administered cultures such as rites and performances that connect to initiation, puberty and nubility, there is a wealth of androgynous naming, performance and representation, and queer identity markers. The phenomenon of gender complexity in cross dressing and transvestism is not uncommon in rites and symbolism associated with *vodou* ceremonies, for instance (Chesi, 1980, pp. 128,133,147; Conner and Sparks, 2004, pp. 32, 33). Also, pronouns are neither gendered nor hierarchized and typify the Ewe nation's animistic ethos such that they apply equally to objects, plants, animals, humans and spirits. Thus, one omission in texts which critique African patriarchy is the extent to which androgyny, hybridity, gender non-conformity and cultural thirdspaces are in fact a latent part of African life and survive in modern society as an unconscious within seemingly conservative representations and hostile social milieu. Aspects of this analysis have been attempted by seid'ou (2015) in his commentary of J. C. Okyere's garden sculptures situated in KNUST. In the text, seid'ou identifies *Lonely Woman*, a sculptural avatar of African Personality as an androgynous figure in form but feminized in title. Va-bene Elikem Fiatsi, [crazinisT artist], an Ewe-identifying and gender non-conforming performance artist is a living example of seid'ou's analysis today who affirms the sexual ambivalence in his Ewe cultural heritage as a generator of his performative practice⁴ (Figure 6).

In Nukpe's treatment of the subject *Nubile*, conformity to sex-gender binaries and sexist patriarchal norms seem manifest most notably in the young woman's yielding gesture constructed for the visual and sexual pleasure of a presumably cis-gendered male suitor; a crypto-erotic demeanor culminating in a stereotypical objectification of the feminine body in artistic representation. If Nukpe reproduces this seeming macho-sexism and presents it as a virtue⁵, it may be partly explained quite plausibly that besides quotations of style and meaning from European art history, he also comes from an intellectual and artistic milieu in Ghana which assigned an almost incontrovertible authority to images in colonial photography and such anthropological texts as Peter Sarpong's *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti* (1977) and Kofi Antubam's *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* (1964). This milieu of source material for artists had promoted a holist, organicist and exotic patriarchy as authentic African values and custom. Attendant to this was a proliferation of representations of bare-breasted or half-nude women in the consumerist image economy circulated worldwide as markers of authentic Ghanaian culture and identity. Many of these images were typically culled from or fashioned after scenes from nubility rites, especially, the more spectacular variety, the *Dipo*, practiced among the Krobos of Eastern Ghana. In this way, the nubile became one of the most common themes in Ghana's cultural repertoire of images (Figure 2, 3, 4). From early 20th century onwards, Ghanaian artists have habitually sourced them from magazines, books, chromolithographs, post-cards, calendars, postage stamps and so forth (Figure 2, 3). Complementing them are the illustrations in romantic-primitivist anthropological texts such as Boris de Rachewiltz's *Black Eros* (1964) and the photographic essays such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Africa*, Angela Fischer's *Africa Adorned*, the latter's numerous collaborative work with Carol Beckwith such as *African Ark*, and photojournalistic images of "aboriginal" African subjects in magazines and periodicals such as "National Geographic". Today, the pool of Africanist images distributed on internet is a principal source of reference materials for decorative and touristy paintings and sculptures with stereotypical African iconography.

In spite of Nukpe's complicity in this ethos, his treatment of the feminine subject still makes *Nubile's* connotation of "passage" open-ended, paradoxically, extending meaning to regimes and values which query the male-sexist prejudice it seems to uphold. For instance, the all-over shadow which Nukpe introduces aesthetically as a contrasting device, takes the form of a halo, nimbus or aureola. It assigns the figure with a familiar feature of religious iconography such as appears in representations of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Figure 5) or Christ's Transfiguration paintings and Buddhist icons (Figure 5). The all-over halo seems to challenge the figure's overt eroticism with hints of ostensible saintliness. Here, we can imagine a reverent spectator's gaze oscillating between the mundane and the saintly. In this reading, the feminine in Nukpe's *Nubile* is not a mere passive being subject to the logic of paternal law. She wears a self-assured but restrained smile and casts her gaze to the world of the observer in a manner which challenges her objectification. She has agency which threatens the order of patriarchy and the sexual, gender and ability roles it constructs for cis-gendered women, and much less, for trans women. The double-coding or code-switching which probably emerges serendipitously from Nukpe's treatment of the subject seems to complicate Lacan's contentious axiom in the *Ecrits* (1966/2007) that in the patriarchal symbolic order, the woman *is* the phallus but *does not have* it while the man *has* the phallus but *is not* the phallus.

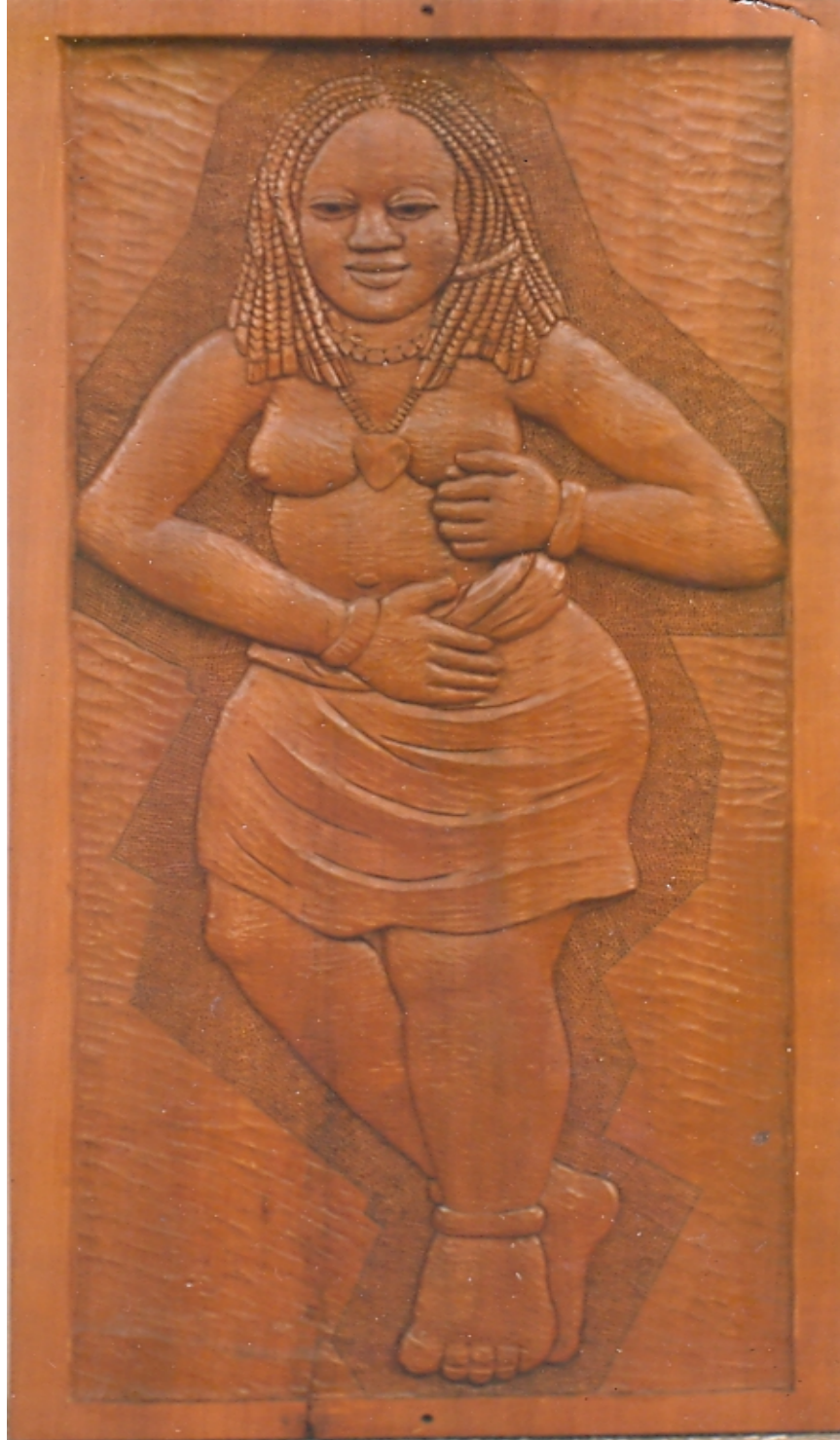


Figure 1. Livingstone Yao Foli Lee Nukpe. *Nubile*. Carved Wood (Mahogany). 2006.
Photo courtesy: Livingstone Yao Foli Lee Nukpe.

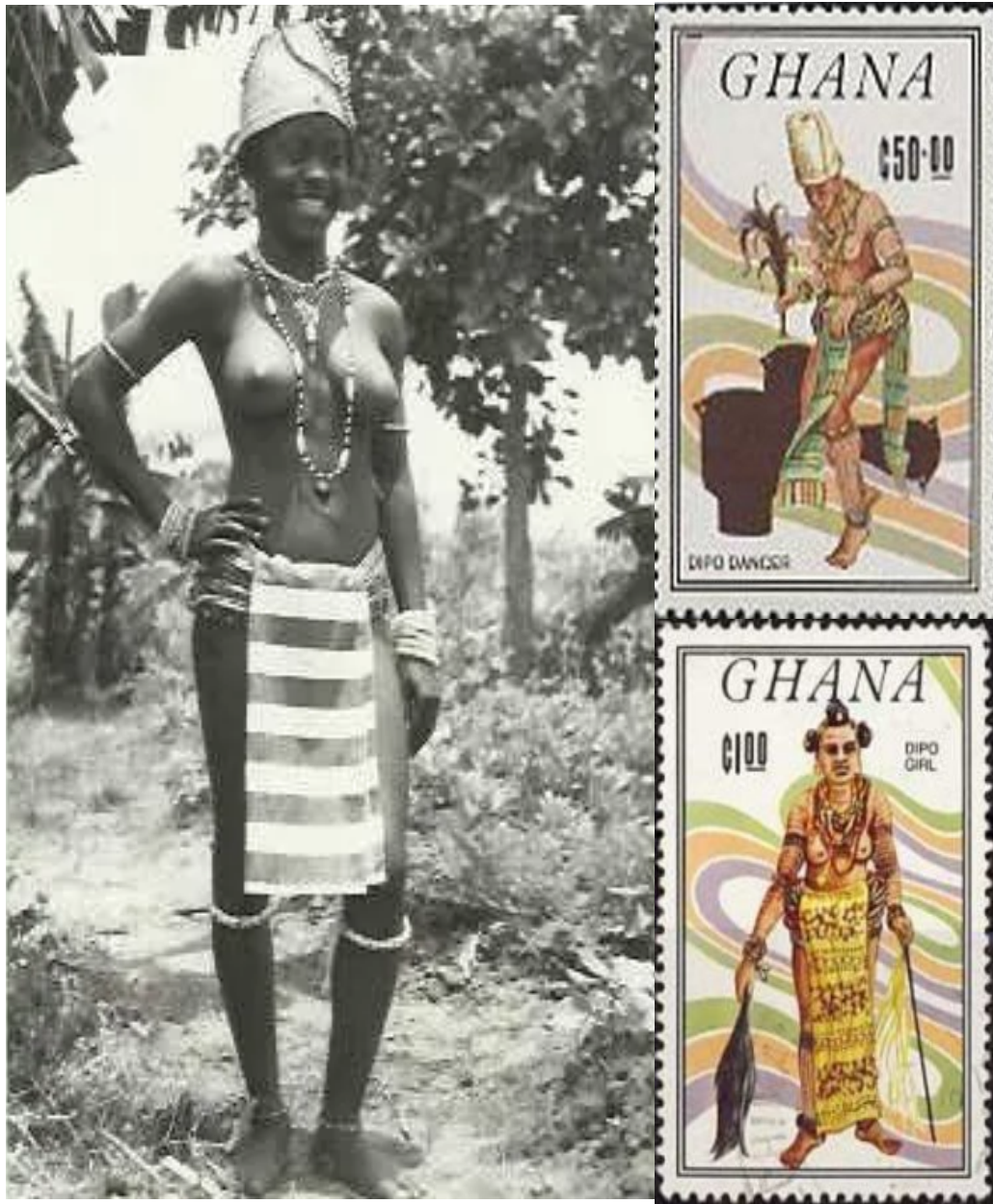


Figure 2. Typical reference sources of bare-breasted women in ceremonial pose during or after *Dipo* nubility rites.

Left: Post card of *Dipo Girl* from Ghana.

Photo courtesy <https://www.todocoleccion.net>

Right: Ghana postage stamp illustrations of *Dipo* women in ceremonial dance and pose respectively.

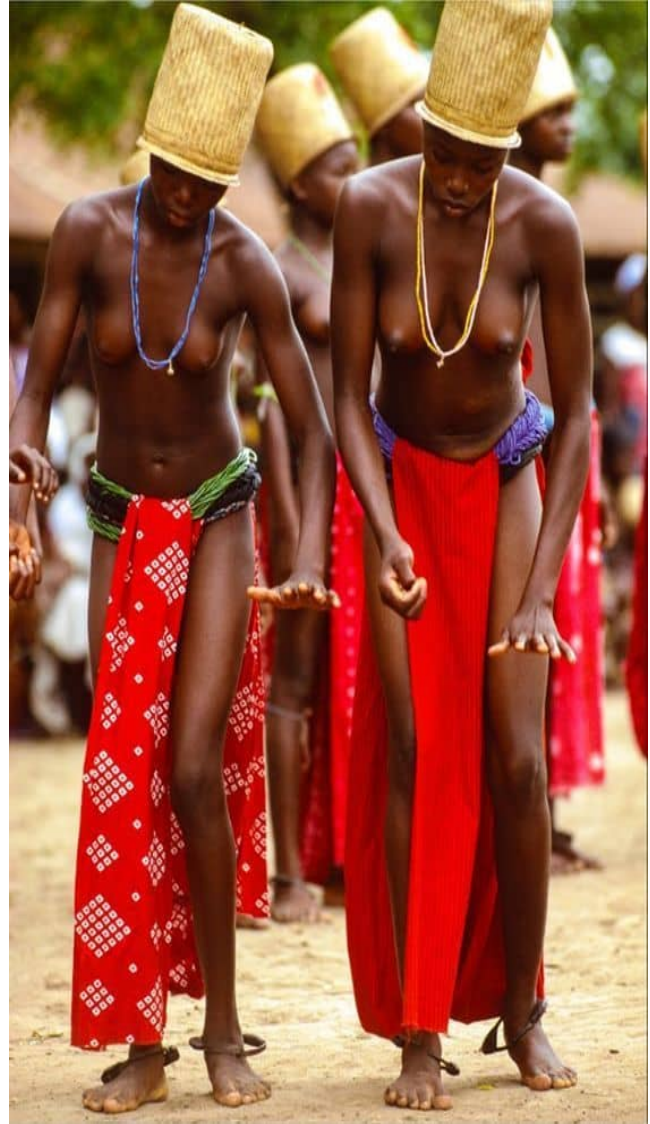


Figure 3. Left: Jeffrey Ocansey. *Dipo Dancers*, Pastel on paper, 2018.

<https://www.artmajeur.com/en/jeffreycansey/artworks/12320954/dipo>

Dipo Dancers is an adaptation of a photographic image (right) circulating on social media sources such as [silviapatriciabalaguer.tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com/silviapatriciabalaguer). It depicts *Dipo* initiates of the Shai-Krobo nation of Ghana performing the *klama* dance. 15th November 2017.



Figure 4. Nana Kofi Erskine, *Dipo Dancer* [An initiate of *Dipo* puberty rites in a ritual dance, Krobo, Ghana].

Carved in *Sese* wood and natural-dyed.

Photo courtesy: <https://www.matenate.com/shop/dipo-dancer>



Figure 5. Religious icons wearing all-over halo which is echoed in *Nubile*.

Left: Buddha icon with radiate halo and Mandorla, 5th–6th century
China (Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Turfan area). Collection of Metropolitan Museum.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/36038>

Right: Virgin of Guadalupe with all-over halo. Tepeyac Hill, Mexico City.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Guadalupe#/media/File:Virgen_de_guadalupe1.jpg



Figure 6. Va-bene Elikem Fiatsi [crazinisT artist].

Performance artist and alumnus of the new curriculum of the KNUST College of Art, Kumasi who explores gender ambivalence in performances by cross-dressing on daily basis [Photo courtesy: Dennis Akuoku-Frimpong] (left). In the next image (right), crazinisT wears a halo, suggesting a visual pun on the ostensible saintliness of repressed sexual and gender minorities such as abject feminist, trans and queer identities.

NUKPE'S NUBILE IN A LINEAGE OF GHANA'S MODERN SCULPTURE: LITERAL HUMANISM, FORMAL CITATIONS AND DOUBLE-CODING

Nukpe's *Nubile* is a sculptural analogue of single narrative painting predominant in Ghana's 20th century culturescape. Formally, as a general marker of art school-trained artists of Nukpe's post-Independence generation, or of the preceding late-Colonial generation in the former British colonies in west Africa, art was understood as an autonomous object or artefact. Typically, each one was fashioned in a uniform medium bearing a matter-of-fact representation and titling. Figurative or single narrative social realist genres were the most predominant. Even radical anti-colonial gestures which appropriated indigenous iconography, stylization, themes and imagery remained timidly festooned on canonical European post-Renaissance and early Modernist media and formats. The Eurocentric corpus of decontextualized media, formats and stylistic devices had become an economy of "frozen talismans" from which many African artists could tap or cite as alibi of their parity with other exponents of the Eurocentric "*grand* modernity"⁶ (Enwezor, 2010).

Yet, most artists resident in and practicing from the former British colonies in Africa avoided the formal complexities associated with "Late" and "Post"-modernism. Art history of the "*grand* modernity" which gave impetus to their repurposed form and genres ended with the Second World

War. In the Ghanaian variant of what Enwezor calls “*petit* modernity”, indigenous cultural motifs were manifest as themes or subject matter.

Politically, artists of the former colonies were in a struggle to create a recognisably African visual idiom and to define a uniquely African type of modern art (cf. Antubam, 1963; Kofi, 1964; Dei-Annang, 1964). Notably, the literalist and naturalist pathways which the academy-trained artists appropriated and repurposed from the British social realist and figurative schools smoothened over and even repressed the heritage of fantasy and symbolism offered by the surviving forms of indigenous African art and culture. One significant paradigm-shift in colonial social consciousness that grounds the authority of this figurative tradition is the shift from an animistic ethos to a humanistic and therefore anthropocentric one. In image making and representation, this shift also marks a shift from “enchanted” symbolism to “disenchanted” depiction, from mythology (Figure 10) to verism (Figure 1, 7). It marks the installation of a hegemonic regime of pictorial composition dominated by human models, their activities, postures, cultural objects and codes.

Among the most persistent cultural codes in this post-colonial encounter with residual colonial impetus and traditional African heritage are the heteronormative sex and gender binaries regulated by a network of patriarchal institutions and ideological state apparatuses which includes churches, the family, school, art societies and so forth. Most notable artists of Nukpe’s generation aspired to make adult-centric and able-bodied figurative images; their culturescape was firewalled against access to markers of disability, sexual and gender ambivalence. This positivist and humanistic model survived the post-colony and underpinned art study, production, dissemination and African identity fashioning for Nukpe’s generation of art-school trained artists.

It is important to emphasise that the shift from animistic consciousness to the humanistic ethos occurred most prevalently in art school traditions. For those artists who served traditional rulers and their local communities and were patronised by British primitivists such as anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray, the animistic tradition is heightened in their iconography, style and format (Figure 10). Thus, British colonial mentorship deposited at least two parallel and, sometimes, antagonistic forms of consciousness in the artist communities of Gold Coast and Ghana. While for most artists trained in art school, the established European media of the classical and modernist beaux-arts formats were fetishized in painting, sculpture practice was often shot through with “Art and Crafts” ethos. Occasionally, European classical and early-Modernist styles, media and established formats which had appeared to entail some African and non-Western provenance were often appropriated as ready-mades but also decontextualized and naturalized as the necessary skill base of authentic African Art. In the round sculpture took a more quasi-classical trajectory in plastic materials and additive media. In wood carving the Art and Crafts Movement and German Expressionist variants had provided indirect mentorship and inspiration in Ghana’s late colonial years through the curriculum of Achimota College in the interbellum. Even though the indigenous material culture of Ghana had offered a wide variety of formats, imagery and hybrid media in the traditions of symbolic relief and round sculpture as in umbrella finials, drum carving, linguist staff objects, stools and facades of shrines, temples and palaces, there was a missed opportunity to adapt their varied forms and formats by artists who studied sculpture in the art academy.

The predominance of naturalist and literalist genres in Gold Coast and Ghana had aesthetic and cultural-political aspirations similar in spirit to the literalism of the American Regionalist and Social

Realist school of the American Depression Era. The residual forms result in a hegemony of relatively conservative and traditionalist set of representational styles and codes with reassuring images of Ghana's heritage of culture some of which appealed to popular tourist sensibilities and home decor. Tourist ethnographic postcard source material and stereotypical tribal imagery of black women which have their ultimate source in colonial photography were innocent reference material. These and other cultural codes had become conventional in the Kumasi art school by the 1970s when Nukpe was studying in Art School.

Nukpe's *Nubile* therefore taps from and speaks to a tradition of sculpture-making and discourse in the Kumasi College of Art, in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)⁷. The tradition's rubrics are remotely informed by the "Art and Crafts" legacies of the early art teachers of Achimota College. The notable ones are G. A. Stevens, a student of Tonks in Slade School and a mentor to colonial art teachers of Anglophone Africa, Gabriel Pippet (b. 1880 — d.1962), who rivalled Eric Gill and Gwendoline Raverat as England's foremost wood engravers (Figure 8), H. V. Meyerowitz⁸ (b. 1900 — d. 1945), a *Gewerbeschule*⁹-trained sculptor who carved the Hyman Liberman Memorial Doors¹⁰ in Cape Town (Figure 9), and Eva Meyerowitz, a sculptor and anthropologist. Traditional Ghanaian carving was introduced to the Achimota art student by Osei Bonsu (1900-1977), a carver of Asante heritage who was H. V. Meyerowitz's assistant and official carver of three successive Asante monarchs (Figure 10).



Figure 7. L. Y. F. Lee Nukpe. *Spartan*. Carved Wood (Mahogany). Thesis Project 1982, Independence Hall.

Collection: Independence Hall (Junior Common Room), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi.

Photo Credit: kərí'kəchä seid'ou



Figure 8. Gabriel Pippet, *Stations of the Cross*, relief carving, oak. Sacred Heart Chapel, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, England

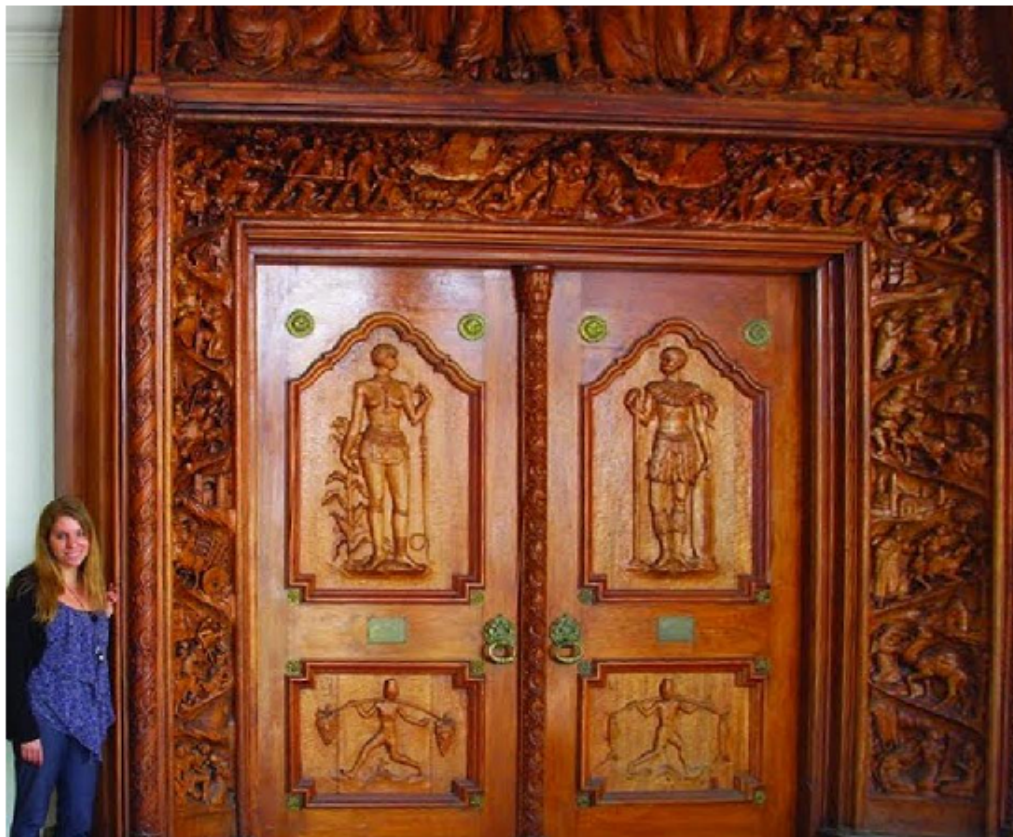


Figure 9. Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz. Lieberman Doors. Courtyard of the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town.

Photo courtesy: Cape Jewish Chronicle (1st February, 2011).



Figure 10. Osei Bonsu. Carvings depicting mythological figures in Ghanaian folklore and animist values.

Top Left *Sasabonsam*, evil spirit of the forest, wood, 1939

Top Right: *Female Dwarf*, wood, 1938.

Bottom: Roll-out illustration of relief carvings on Ntan drum depicting objects, plants animals and humans and mythological beings together.

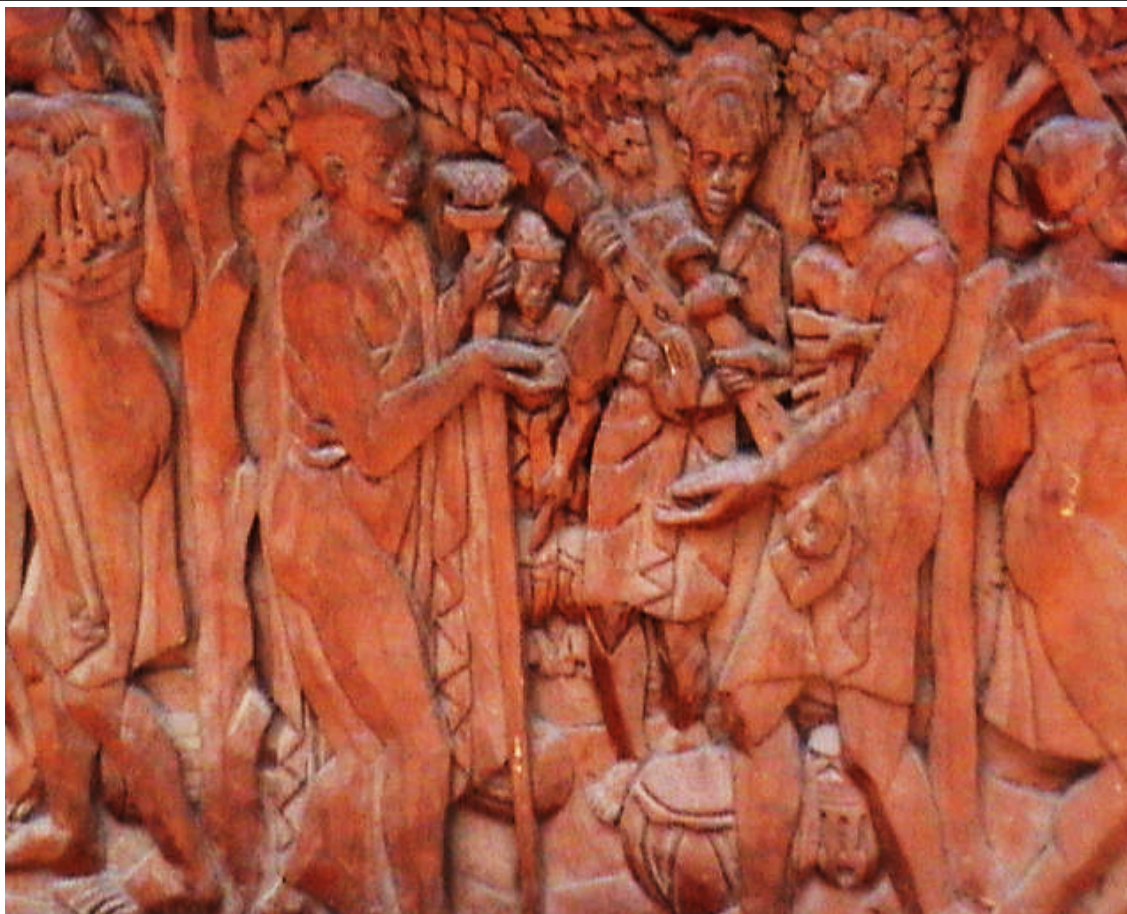


Figure 11. Kofi Antubam, an early student of H. V. Meyerowitz and Osei Bonsu, and a forerunner in Ghana's relief wood carving. (Detail).

Picture courtesy: Yaa Aduba Opare-Appiah. Collection: Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, Accra.



Figure 12. Tom MacCrorie MacNair.

Top: Model and cast relief, Prempeh II Museum, Center for National Culture, Kumasi.
Picture Courtesy: seid'ou (2015).

Bottom: Model and cast relief. Kumasi Post Office.



Figure 13a. L. Y. F. Lee Nukpe. *Honour Integrity [The Spartan]*. Painted Concrete.
Courtyard of Independence Hall, KNUST



Figure 13 b. L. Y. F. Lee Nukpe. *Honour Integrity [The Spartan]* (Detail).
Painted Concrete.



Figure 14. E. K. Azzii-Akator. *Komfo Anokye*. Painted Concrete. Bantama, Kumasi.



Figure 15 a. E. K. Azzii-Akator. *Nana Agyeman Prempeh II* [Asante Monarch]. Concrete and cement colourant. KNUST Museum Forecourt.



Figure 15 b. E. K. Azzii-Akator. *Nana Agyeman Prempeh II* [Detail].
Concrete and cement colourant.
KNUST Museum Forecourt.



Figure 16. Vincent Kofi. Left: *Dancer*, Carved Kolanut wood, 1962.

Picture courtesy: Grobel (1970)

Right: *Crucifix*. Carved Wood. 1964. Picture courtesy: Kofi (1964).

Kumasi to become the School of Art in the Kumasi College of Technology (1952-1961), the notable teachers of sculpture are ATD and NDD¹¹ trained British sculptors Tom Macrorie MacNair¹² (Figure 12), David Dobson¹³. In Nkrumah's Republican period, the School of Art became College of Art in the new Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) established in 1961. Some notable teachers of sculpture in the new University were the Ghanaian sculptors E. K. A. Azzii

Akator¹⁴ (Fosu, 1989) (Figure 14, 15a, 15b) and Vincent Kofi¹⁵ (Kofi, 1964; Fosu, 1989; Grobel, 1970; 1975) (Figure 16) respectively. Osei Bonsu was an auxiliary tutor, who introduced students to traditional carving techniques until his death in 1977. Nukpe was a student on the 4-year degree programme and graduated with a BA degree in sculpture in 1982.

Akator's literalist legacy might be read from Nukpe's public sculptures in concrete as well as *Nubile's* "naïve" naturalism and overt plasticism (Figure 1, 13a, 13b, 14, 15a, 15b). Kofi's, the more symbolic and stylized, on the other hand, seems evoked by the visible tool marks, bulbous anatomy, stocky legs and massiveness (Figure 16). Nukpe also appropriates timeworn topoi instituted in colonial and post-colonial Ghanaian art education history. The quasi-Florentine cloisonné (in this example, contour drawing and "filling in" with assemblies of "c", "u" and "v" gouge tool marks) also betrays a host of art school rubrics institutionalized in the early post-colony. The cloisonné of tool marks prevails as a technical device in some others of Nukpe's earlier carvings. This is echoed, especially, in the relief carving, *The Spartan* of Independence Hall (Figure 7). But the viewer of Nukpe's *Nubile* further encounters an unsettling morphing in the demeanor of the near-compact figure. 3-D sculptural space seems not liberated from the limitations of the plane; convexity of the constituent body parts does not quite match the convexity of the general body in several places. Essentially, Nukpe seems to map the traditional plasticist logic of clay and cement-modeled round and relief sculpture to the subtractive rubrics of wood-carving (cf. Figures 1, 7, 13a, 13b). Relief carving exists in a zone between the planimetric and the stereometric; this presents some difficulties to the carver who wishes to carve as if he were modelling in clay. It is also easy to see the anatomical difficulties in Nukpe's sculptures even though his ambition towards naturalism is obvious. It would seem in Nukpe's round sculptures that has yet to attain the 'complete plastic freedom' with which Roger Fry's classical African cubist would have conceived it but as his medieval European sculptor would interpret it. This seems to be echoed in his relief carving, too.

According to Fry the strange thing about these African sculptures is that...[w]ithout ever attaining anything like representational accuracy they have complete [plastic] freedom. The sculptors seem to have no difficulty in getting away from the two-dimensional plane. The neck and the torso are conceived as cylinders, not as masses with a square section. The head is conceived as a pear-shaped mass. It is conceived as a single whole, not arrived at by approach from the mask, as with almost all primitive European art. (1920, p.66)

Added to these formal tensions in *Nubile*, the figure fills up and struggles out of the rectangular confines of the picture frame as if charging forward or bursting into the world of the stationary spectator. The all-over halo is called to mediate again; this time it negotiates the confrontation between figure and ground, fixity and transience, advancing and retreating, compliance and obstinacy, surface and depth, frivolity and seriousness, compliance and resistance. And who says sex, gender and ability can remain stable within this matrix of oscillations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper has reviewed Nukpe's late-career work, *Nubile*, a bas relief representation of a bare-breasted young woman arrayed in Ghanaian nubility rites insignia. The authors have identified carryovers from Ghana's colonial and post-Independence generations such as the predominantly social realist aesthetic and conservative sex and gender motifs and their associated identity politics. However, the authors have also pointed out how the cut-and-dry cultural and formal motifs in

Nubile are also undermined by Nukpe's ostensible double-coding and oblique enchantment. This spectral feature of *Nubile* presents it as a "text with a shadow".

According to Lacan, symbolic lack is what produces desire, this is the logic of patriarchy. In Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009), desire is itself a productive force and thus can be mobilized to undercut the logic of patriarchy. Nukpe's *Nubile* oscillates between both elucidations. It may be a subject of symbolic lack and thus desire for symbolic fulfilment, for fertility, for the phallus and, hence, for saintliness. It is obvious from Nukpe's titling and social realist aesthetic that the *Nubile* is an affirmation of the cultural stereotype of woman's lack or symbolic castration. Yet, by being portrayed in her fullness as massive and self-assured, and emblematic of symbolic saintliness, *Nubile* is paradoxically a nubile with no lack, that is, the woman who has the phallus — a latently gender-queer figure. She embodies a radiant and productive field which questions the stability or consistency of the patriarchal order structured to exploit her designated lack and concomitant desire.

This is an alternative interpretation which *Nubile* could be made to offer if we are mindful of the legacies of contemporary sex and gender discourse and attention is paid to what the representation may conceal as supplemental traces and specters. In the KNUST Art College conditions of Nukpe's formative years, the options for medium, format and genre were limited. Nukpe continued to work within these limitations into his mature years. The sexual complexity and ambiguities decisive in his Ewe cultural foundations could not have found profound portrayal in a positivist and naturalist framework devoid of myth, symbolism, life and play. Thus, these cultural thirdspaces could only be latent or repressed underneath the surface of a regime of cultural conformity. In the 21st century Kumasi Art School, however, this limitation has been fairly overcome in the curriculum. For instance, craziniST artisT (Figure 6), an alumnus of the new curriculum and a trans identifying artist of Ewe descent, assigned male at birth, lives daily as a cross-dresser in a society still hostile to overt feminism, queerness or trans identification. Negotiating trans identity within the confines of binary gender and sex structures, craziniST artisT uses the body in pain-enduring and self-humiliating performances invested with the capacity to challenge gender and sexual conformity in perception, imaging, representation and social construction. The shadow of Nukpe's text, that is, the virtual field of specters, traces and supplements undergirding *Nubile*, has come to life but which forms of shadow does this new life cast?

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1. Livingstone Yao Foli Lee Nukpe was awarded a BA in Sculpture in 1982. He was awarded a mid-career MPhil in African Art and Culture in 1992 when he presented an anthropological thesis titled "Traditional African art and medicine as practised among the people of Goviefe-Todzi in the Central Volta Region of Ghana".
2. Barthes' use of the term is also echoed in Sidney L. Kasfir's *African Art and Authenticity; A text with a Shadow*. *African Arts*; Vol. 25, No. 2, Apr., 1992. Also in Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor's *Reading the Contemporary; African Art from theory to Marketplace*, pp. 88-113. It also appears as the conceptual framework of Jorge Silvetti's "The beauty of shadows" in *Oppositions* 9; Summer: 1977, 43-61.
3. An article on Ghanaweb compiled by David Osei-Adu describes Ghanaian nobility rites such as Dipo and Bragoro thus: Under the supervision of the queen mother of the town or village in collaboration with some female opinion leaders, young women who have had their first menstruation are secluded from the community for a period between two and three weeks during which they are taught the secrets of womanhood. During this period of seclusion [sic] the girls are given lessons in sex education and birth control. They are also taught how to relate to men properly so that they can maintain a good marriage and their dignity in society. After the period of seclusion, a durbar is held which is attended by the chief and almost everybody in the community. The newly initiated women are dressed scantily with very beautiful African beads and cosmetics showing off their vital statistics. Young men of marriageable age troupe there to feast their eyes on the young women and to select their prospective wives. https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes/puberty_rites.php
4. Taking lessons from Ewe pronouns, craziniT's preferred pronoun is "sHit", which is a portmanteau for "she, he, it". The following is taken from craziniT's website: Note: [sHe/it...] is Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi's [craziniT artistT] biopolitical pronoun. Anyone or any institution can 'responsibly' use any pronoun of their preference for craziniT artistT, otherwise just use "sHit" and "sHits" See <https://www.crazinistartist.com/biography/>
5. When discussing his sculpture with kari'kacha seid'ou, Nukpe's outline of the virtues nobility rites for a Ghanaian young woman and society conformed to the existing discourse of traditional patriarchy and binary sex and gender. (kari'kacha seid'ou: Personal conversations with L. Y. F. Lee Nukpe, 13th February, 2007, KNUST, Kumasi).
6. Okwui Enwezor: So on the one hand there is grand modernity in all its European manifestations in reason and progress, and on the other is what could be called petit modernity, which represents the export kind, a sort of quotation, which some would go as far as to designate a mimic modernity through its various European references. According to Enwezor, the export of European grand modernity was a master narrative which "became not only a justification for, but a principal part of global imperialism".
7. As a student and teaching assistant and lecturer in KNUST, Lee Nukpe undertook sculpture commissions on the University campus including Honour Integrity, a statue of a jogging athlete holding the flag of Independence Hall, KNUST. He also undertook several public sculpture commissions in Kumasi city. The sculptor E. K. Azzii-Akator who made a number of public commissions in cement in KNUST and Kumasi city, was Nukpe's influential teacher and mentor. Presently, Lee Nukpe is a retired Senior Lecturer of the same institution.
8. H. V. Meyerowitz was educated at the Stadtische Kunstgewerbe und Handwerker Schule in Berlin, and later came under the influence of the dry angular expressionist style of the Late Gothic German wood sculpture tradition of Veit Stross, his teacher Otto Hitzberger and possibly Ernst Barlach (Proud, 1992, pp. 19, 20; cf. Harrod, 1989, p. 50). His nativism, beyond Stevens', was mediated through the functionalist anthropologist, alinowski (Meyerowitz, 1943) which attempted to subvert the racial inequalities implicit in evolutionary, diffusionist and Levy-Bruhlian perspectives. On the educational axis, Meyerowitz was inspired by the Child Art Education perspectives of Franz Cizek which celebrated spontaneous creativity in child art and "primitive" art (Macdonald, 1970/2001). With this background, it is little surprising that Meyerowitz should deplore official colonial art training and the Achimota

student's unreflective penchant for European classicism with the fervour that he committed to it (cf. Svasek, 1997). Before his tenure in the Gold Coast, he had begun to question, like Stevens, Murray, Trowell and Rothenstein before him the *raison d'être* of colonial art education. One of Meyerowitz's most revered students is Kofi Antubam (Figure 11) who became the principal state artist in Nkrumah's post-Independence regime.

9. Gewerbeschule is the German trade school 18th century to early 20th century. They were forerunners of Technical schools in the region. Art instruction in Gewerbeschule was not autonomous. It mainly took the form of freehand technical drawing aimed at artisanal trades and mechanical industry. Meyerowitz's early education was in a Gewerbeschule. The trade school concept was exported to Britain after the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. Aspects of teaching in these trade schools were the core of art education in the former British colonies and Protestant Mission Schools. See seid'ou (2006).
10. The Hyman Liberman Memorial Doors, carved by Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz, honour Mayor Liberman, who championed the establishment of the gallery and was a generous philanthropist. The doors represent 'Hebrew Migration from Many Lands', 'Arrival in the Land of Peace and Prosperity' and 'Rebecca at the Well'. The bas-relief sculpture over the main entrance to the Gallery was carved by his wife Eva Meyerowitz, the famed scholar of West African art. The bas relief panels above the doors to each room were also carved by Meyerowitz in the dry angular expressionist style of the Late Gothic German wood sculpture tradition of Veit Stross, his teacher Otto Hitzberger, and possibly Ernst Barlach.
11. ATD is the erstwhile Art Teachers' Diploma of the British Education system before World War II. NDD is the National Diploma in Design contemporaneous with the ATD. The NDD gave way to the Dip. AD in the Coldstream Reform Era of the mid-1960s and the BA of the post-Coldstream-Summerfield Reform Era of the 1970s and after. (See seid'ou (2006).
12. Tom MacCrorie MacNair was a Scottish sculptor of NDD/ATD training in Glasgow School of Art who taught in the Kumasi Sculpture programme in the 1950s. He undertook many public sculpture commissions including the bas reliefs of the Prempeh I Museum, Center for National Culture, Kumasi. (See seid'ou 2015).
13. David Dobson was an English sculptor of NDD/ATD training who taught in Kumasi after Tom MacNair's retirement in the late 1950s. Like MacNair before him, he had keen interest in African antiquities.
14. E. K. Azzii-Akator was a student in the Specialist Art Programme in School of Art, KCT in the 1950s. He updated his studies in sculpture in Munich and became Professor of Sculpture in Kumasi. He was Dean of the College of Art in the 1980s and an influential teacher. Among his numerous public sculpture commissions are the Komfo Anokye statue and Agyeman Prempeh II statues in Kumasi city and the giant Cockerel of Republic Hall.
15. Vincent Kofi schooled in Achimota (1940s) and the Royal College of Art (1952-1955) (Quao, 1970; Woets, 2011) and Columbia University in New York (1957). His influences include Henry Moore, Jacob Epstein, and Ernst Barlach. He was a renowned sculptor and teacher who exhibited internationally in Africa, Europe and America. His sculpture appeared on Ghana's Cedi currency in the 1980s. In 1964, he published the influential text "Sculpture in Ghana". See Chika Okeke-Agulu (Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in 20th Century Nigeria, Duke University Press, London, Durham, 2015. Ulli Beier calls Kofi "the most distinguished sculptor in West Africa.