

# ART POLICIES & POLITICS IN GHANA

EDITOR'S  
NOTE

Since the introduction of formal education in colonial and postcolonial Ghana, the most vigorous continuation of Art education started under the tutelage of H. V. Meyerowitz, one of the expatriate teacher-artists. His effort thrived on the solid foundation of the three art-loving intellectuals namely Sir Gordon Guggisberg, the then Governor of Gold Coast (now Ghana), Rev. A. G. Fraser, a principal at Achimota College, and Aggrey, a scholar. In 1951, Kwame Nkrumah established the College of Art in the University of Science and Technology (now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology). On 25th October 1963, his opening speech at the Institute of African Studies urged students of the arts not be content with mere accumulation of knowledge in studying

the Arts, but, must conduct researches that will contribute to the development of the arts in Ghana. Nkrumah's ambitious idea was to use the Arts as a kingpin in developing Africa's Ghana but his untimely shameful overthrow engineered by American and British intelligence dwindled his forward-looking torrential ideology. Nasser says "It is now a fact backed by documentary evidence that American and British intelligence had made it their foremost priority to overthrow the government of Kwame Nkrumah and halt the bold attempt at nation building by Black African country in its efforts to lift his people out of poverty." (Africawatch, March 2011, p.29) Unfortunately, the successive political leadership after Nkrumah have paid little attention to the development of the arts.

[continued on page 5](#)

Plans to build a national art gallery spans to Nkrumah's administration and has still not been put into form. The Arts Council of Ghana (though has gone through several name changes) has been in existence since June 1958, but, up till now no National Arts Policy has been formulated.

Meyerowitz's proposed passionate agenda with which he "laid the foundation of the West African Institute of Art, Industries, and social sciences" (Antubam, 1963, p. 200) was to connect Ghanaian arts to industrial production. Surprisingly, he received vehement opposition from the British colonial administration. "It was said that the early death of Meyerowitz possibly can be led back to the strong opposed counter current [countercurrent] of the British commercial monopolies which stood against his plan..." (Heritage Culture, 1968, p. 20) This attempt is a clear manifestation of the ulterior motives of the European developed economies in the West in side-lining the development of Ghanaian arts for their own gains and to avoid industrial artistic competition. Through this, they have succeeded in manipulating Ghana's political leaders, and gained access to siphoning our rich natural resources we have collectively failed as

a nation to tap, refine and turn into beneficial tangible wealth for our own use, and export the rest to the global market. Foreign owned companies exploit our resources and determine how much we should get from our own resources. Nasser exemplifies this point when he says "There is an American oil exploration and production company called Kosmos Energy... [that] holds 23.5% stake in Ghana's Jubilee Oil Field" (Africawatch, p. 20). The world wonders why Ghana has not been able to mine her gold, bauxite, manganese, oil, feldspar and other natural resources after several years of Science, Technology, mining and Art studies. For over five decades we still import almost all our basic functional and decorative needs. Why have we failed to build on the artistic inventions and innovations of our ancestors when they succeeded in doing that under the ambit of informal education? Ghana has placed no major single visual artistic and technological invention in the creative basket of the artworld. The ancestors are asking "why?" (Kojo Fosu, personal communication, September 27, 2012). This unfortunate lethargic creative attitude peculiar to Africa is due to the fact that African universities have historically perceived most practical artistic studies as vocational stuff and rather eulogize

continued from page 4



and elevate the non-technical fields as highly academic. But no nation has ever developed without significant investments in the Arts.


It takes no academic degree to know that Ghana is really facing leadership crisis. "God did not put us on this rich land to be poor. It is bad leadership that makes us poor." (NPP Manifesto for Election 2012, p. 36) Political leaders do not have the political will to prioritize the study of the Arts by providing adequate logistics and seeing to the study of inventive and innovative design-oriented courses like product design, industrial design and transportation design through which we could provide our own functional and decorative needs.

To win votes from the electorates, political parties formulate middle-of-the-road art policies. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) partially fulfilled their 2008 manifesto promise by boosting the music industry with a two million Ghana cedis (2,000,000) package, leaving the visual and other performing arts. In 2004, the New Patriotic Party crafted the Cultural Policy Document

of Ghana. Ahead of the 2012 general elections, the two main political parties, NDC and NPP, begun with their campaign promises. The NPP promised to "create a department under the ministry of Chieftancy and Culture to oversee the development of all creative industries and the development of a national creative plan" (NPP Manifesto for Election 2012, p. 100) while the NDC also promised to "support art and craft works and other vocational skills in basic and Senior High Schools as well as polytechnics and universities." (NDC 2012 Manifesto, p. 46) Both parties failed to give specifics to how these promises would be fulfilled.

Ghana needs a non-partisan national arts policy, a road map for conscious rapid development of the arts. The policy document must provide clear direction in training and development of artistic workforce with imaginative scope, intellectual rigor and inventive skills to produce the needs of the country. Studies in the Arts must lead to production of simple and complex machinery, functional and decorative needs.

Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel



continued from page 5