

Atta Kwami



Biography

Atta Kwami (b. 1956, Accra, Ghana, d. 2021, UK) was a distinguished artist, art historian and curator, living and working between the UK and his home country, Ghana. His colourful works of vibrant geometric patterns are inspired by a wide range of influences, from Ewe and Assante cloth to jazz, the tradition of mural painting and the design of street kiosks along the roads of West-African towns. Kwami is known for expanding the notions of painting, basing his practice both in the visual world of his native Ghana and in reflections on modernism.

Atta Kwami studied, and later taught at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). In 2007, Kwami received a PhD in art history, now published as *„Kumasi Realism, 1951-2007: An African Modernism*, in which he sought to explore past and present influences on West African art, with an emphasis on street art traditions throughout Kumasi, Ghana.

In 2021, the year he died, he was awarded the prestigious Maria Lassnig prize, which recognised later career artists deserving wider career recognition, and, in 2022, The Serpentine unveiled the final public mural commission by Kwami, 'Dzidzɔ kple amenuveve (Joy and Grace)', which remains on view until September 2024.

This Spring, the Serpentine will publish a monograph about Kwami with Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln supported by The Maria Lassnig Foundation and marking the first publication dedicated to examining the breadth of Kwami's singular practice.

Kwami's work is included in major collections around the world, including the National Museums of Ghana and Kenya; the V&A Museum, London; the National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.

Solo Exhibitions

2022-24 *Dzidzɔ kple amenuveve (Joy and Grace)* mural, Serpentine North Garden, London, UK. Designed by Atta Kwami, painted by Pamela Clarkson & Andy Phil Pott

2022 *Atta Kwami*, Martin Hall Gallery, Loughborough University of Science & Technology, Loughborough, UK

2022 *Atsiafu fe agbo nu (Gateways of the Sea) & Dusiadu (EveryTown)*, Shirley Pearce Square, Loughborough University of Science & Technology, Loughborough, UK

2021 *Atsiafu fe agbo nu (Gateways of the Sea) & Dusiadu (EveryTown)*, Creative Folkestone Triennale, Folkestone, UK

2019 *Kena Hetuna, Open & Closed*, Modern Painters New Decorators, Loughborough, UK

2018 *Conversation: Atta Kwami*, Nicolas Krupp Contemporary, Art Basel, Switzerland

2017 *Thami*, Howard Scott Gallery, New York, USA

2015 *Kuduo*, Howard Scott Gallery, New York, USA

2014 *Kele (roots exist)*, Beardsmore Gallery, London, UK

2013 *Fabrication*, Galerie Vidal Saint-Phalle, Paris, France

2012-13 *Grace*, Alison Richard Building, Centre of African Studies, Cambridge, UK

2011 *An Artist's Sense of Place: The World of Atta Kwami*, Nicolas Krupp Contemporary Art, Basel, Switzerland

2011 *Susuka (Clarity)*, Gallery C.A.A.S. (Center for Afro American and African Studies), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA

2010 *Fufofo (coming together)*, Howard Scott Gallery, New York, USA

2009 *Take Time*, Beardsmore Gallery, London, UK

2008 *Africa West. Atta Kwami – Small Small*, Oriel Mostyn, Llandadno, Wales, UK

2008 *Harmonium*, Howard Scott Gallery, New York, USA

2006 *Schöner Wohnen: Elfried Huth, Atta Kwami*, Landesmuseum, Joahnerm & Kunstlerhaus, Graz, Austria

2005 *Atta Kwami*, Nicolas Krupp Contemporary Art Gallery, Basel, Switzerland

2003 *Kumasi Junction: Atta Kwami, Kumasi Street Painters*, Newtown Art Gallery, Newtown, Wales, UK

2003 *Kumasi Junction: Atta Kwami, Kumasi Street Painters*, The Lowry, Salford Quays, Salford, Manchester, UK

2002 *Kumasi Junction: Atta Kwami, Kumasi Street Painters*, Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales, UK

2002 *Atta Kwami*, Nicolas Krupp Contemporary Art Gallery, Basel, Switzerland

2001 *Atta Kwami*, Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland

2001 *Atta Kwami*, Beardsmore Gallery, London, UK

2000 *Small small; an exhibition of Paintings by Atta Kwami*, Alliance Francaise, Kumasi, Ghana

1998 *Atta Kwami: Geometiz Organiz*, presented by the Goethe-Institut Accra, National Museum of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

1997 *Atta Kwami at the Bag Factory; Recent Residency Work*, Fordsburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

1995 *Atta Kwami, Recent Paintings*, Beardsmore Gallery, London, UK

1995 *Africa '95*, School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, London, UK

1994 *Grace Kwami Sculpture: An Artist's Book by Atta Kwami*, Point of View Gallery. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. Washington DC., USA

1993 *Station Steps*, Nottingham Castle Museum, Nottingham, UK

1993 *Journey Out*, Beardsmore Gallery, London

1993 *Grace Kwami Sculpture: An Artist's Book by Atta Kwami*, School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, London, UK

1990 *Ecology, an exhibition by Atta Kwami*, Arts Centre, Centre for National Culture, Accra, Ghana

1987 *Atta Kwami: Paintings, Prints*, College of Art, University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

1983 *Exhibition of Drawings, Paintings, Batiks by Atta Kwami*, British Council Hall, Enuga, Nigeria

1980 *Exhibition of Sketches, of Paintings, of Batiks by Atta Kwami*, British Council Hall, Accra

1978 *Exhibition of Batiks by George Atta Kwami*, New Cultural Centre, Tamale, Ghana

1976 *Exhibition by George Atta Kwami*, New Chitwal Centre, Tamale, Ghana

1975 *Drawings, Paintings and Textiles by George D.A. Kwami*, Science Lecture Room, Mawuli School, Ho, Ghana

Group Exhibitions

2022-23 *Konkret Global!*, Museum im kulturspeicher, Würzburg, Germany

2022 *The Tudors: Passion, Power and Politics*, National Portrait Gallery, London, UK

2022 *The Tudors: Passion, Power and Politics*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK

2022 *Dip in the past, paintings from the collection*, Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany

2021 *The Human Touch, Making Art, Leaving Traces*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.

2020-21 *Crossing Cultures, 30 Years*, Thami Mnyele Foundation Residency Awards CBK. Centrum Beeldende Kunst Amsterdam.

2020 *Photobook Africa, Tracing Stories & Imagery*, Zentral Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich, Germany

2020 *African Arts – Global Conversations*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, USA

2019 *Graphic Feelings. Inter-Art Foundation*, Auid, Romania

2019 *Diaspora*, Salisburg Artscentre & Forge Art Space, Shere, UK

2019 *Diaspora*, New Ashgate Gallery, Farnham, Surrey, UK

2018 *Global Artists*, Leicester Museum, Leicester, UK

2018 *Inter-Art, Intercontinental Biennale of small graphics*, 8 th edition, Auid Romania (2nd Prize)

2017-18 *Art at Warapuke*, Warapuke SM International Open Printmaking Show. Kelikeni. New Zealand.

2017 *The Grid, Order in a Disorderd World*, Site III, Dallas, Texas.

2017 Aga Lab, Graphik Studios, Printmaking Residency Studio Exhibition, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2016 S.O.S. Terra Mail Art International Exhibition, Inter-Art Foundation, Aiud, Romania

2016 *The Book (re-imagined)*, The Mojo Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

2016 *Impressions on Paper*, Howard Scott Gallery, New York, USA

2016 *Artists' Books and Africa: Unique Visions*, National Museum of African Art & Smithsonian Libraries, Washington D.C

2015-16 *Inter-Art International Art Camp*, Auid, Romania

2015 *Apollo International Poster Exhibition*, Alba Lulia, Romania

2015 *Outside The Lines: Colour Across the Collections*, Present Tense: Arts of Contemporary Africa, Newark, Museum, Newark

2015 *Intercultural Links*, Palais de Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

2014-15 *Chroma*, Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

2014-15 *Prints in counterpoint*, Liverpool Counterpoint, Word Culture Galley, World Museum, Liverpool.

2014 *International Print Biennale*, Hatton Gallery Newcastle-upon-Tyne. UK

2014 *Conversations: African & African American Artworks in Dialogue*, Smithsonian Institute. Washington DC., USA

2014 *Imago Mundi: Go Go Ghana*, Contemporary Art from Ghana. Luciano Benetton Collecton, Villa Borghese, Italy

2014 *Black And White: Prints from Africa and the Diaspora* Victoria & Albert Museum, London

2014 *Paintings from the National Collection 1940-1990*. (GMMB) Ghana National Museum, Accra

2013 *Asropa*, SANTAROSA Gallery, Gunsan, South Korea

2013 *West to West, Owusu Ankomah & Friends*, Städtische Galerie, Bremen, Germany

2013 *Origins of the Afro Comb*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK

2013 *Intercontinental Mail Art Exhibition, Nations, Water, Cultures*, United Nations, New York, USA

2013 18th *Inter-Art International Art Camp*, Auid, Romania

2013 *Art Zuid*, International Sculpture Route, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2012 *Moving Into Space: Football & Art in West Africa*, National Football Museum, Manchester, UK

2011 *As It Is!*, Mojo Gallery, Dubai. United Arab Emirates

2011 *Look, Look, Listen, Listen, Celebrating the Arts of Ghana*, Madison Design Gallery, Univerity of Wisconsin, Wisconsin, USA

2011 *Art Zuid*, International Sculpture Route, Amsterdam

2010 *Huitième Triennale Mondiale de l'Estampe erde la gravure Originale*, Chamalières, Auvergne, France

2009-10 *Long Long Gone*, Leo Koenig, Jewish Museum, New York.

2009 *Hands on Art*, 3rd SANSa International Artists' Workshop. Cultural Centre, Kumasi, Ghana

2008-9 *Premier Choix: Five West African Artists: James Houra, Jems Kokobi, Atta Kwami, Tola Wewe, Siviki Ki*, La Rotunde des Artes Contemporains, Abidjan, Côte D'Ivoire

2008-9 *The Essential Art of African Textiles, Design Without End*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. USA

2008 1st African Regional Summit and Exhibition on Visual Art 'Aresuva', International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria

2008 *African Summer*, Galeri Caenarfon, Wales, UK

2007 2nd SANSa International Artists' Workshop. Kokrobite, Accra, Ghana

2007 *Amadede*, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

2007 *Vié Biennale Internationale de la Gravure d'Ile-de-France*, Versaille, France

2006 *Septième Triennale Mondiale de L'Estampes et de la Gravure Originale*, Chamaliera, Auvergne, France

2006 *4779. (km Luftlinie – Kumasi – Graz)*, Galerie Eugen Lenki, Graz, Austria

2006 *To the Edge*, small works on paper. Beardsmore Gallery, London.

2006 *A Tale of Two Cities*, Foundation for Contemporay Art (FCA), Alliance Française, Kumasi, Ghana

2005 *Small Works / Big City*, Foundation for Contemporary Art (F.C.A.), Goethe-Institut, Accra, Ghana

2004 1st SANSa Internationas Artists' Workshop, KNUST, Alliance Française, Kumasi, Ghana

2004 *Global Icons: The Role of Images in the Production of Cultural Identity in the Media*, Haus de Kulteren der Welt, Berlin, Germany

2002 *Ten*, Beardsmore Galley, London, UK

2001 *Cyfuniad 2001*. Cyfuniad International Artists' Workshop. Plas Caedon, Barmouth, Wales, UK

2000 *Open Studio*, Triangle Artists' Workshop, Would Trade Center, New York, USA

2000 *A Slice of Contemporary African Art by Ghanaian Artists*, Galleri B: Fors, Stockholm, Sweden

2000 *A Slice of Contemporary African Art by Ghanaian Artists*, Frederiksberg City Hall, Copenhagen, Denmark

2000 *Kunsthalle Bern*, Historisches Museum, Bern, Switzerland

1999 *South Meets West*, National Museum, Accra, Ghana
1999 *A Step in Africa*, 2nd Lake Naivasha International Artist Residencies Naivasha Studios, Museum Art Gallery, Kenya
1999 *A Step in Africa*, 2nd Lake Naivasha International Artist Residencies, Kivona Trust Museum Art Studio, Naivasha, Kenya
1998 *Contemporary African Art, Earthhues*, The Worldspace Art Initiative, Washington DC., USA
1998 *A View of Ghanaian Contemporary Art*, The Greensboro Cultural Centre, Greensboro, NC, USA (The Satellite Gallery of the Mattye Reed African Heritage Center)
1996 *Print Collection*, College of Art Gallery, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
1996 *Direction 1*, College of Art Exhibition, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
1996 *A Collaboration & Exchange, Ghana & Humboldt County*, The Ink People Center for the Arts, Eureka, California. USA
1995 The Artists' Book Fair. Royal Festival Hall London.
1995 Persons and Pictures, the Modernist Eye in Africa. Newton Galleries, Johannesburg, South Africa
1995 *Atta Kwami, Volatile Alliances: International Print Exchange & Installation*, Africus Biennale '95. Johannesburg Biennale, Johannesburg, South Africa.
1994 Panafest 94 (Pan African Historical Theatre Festival) Makers of Painting Civilization, National Museum, Accra, Ghana
1994 'Africa 95' 'Tenq', Workshop International des Arts Plastiques, Saint Louis du Senegal
1994 Shave International Artists workshop, Shave Farm, Somerset, UK
1992 Annual Open Exhibition 1992. Royal Overseas League. Overseas House, London, UK
1992 *A Grain of Wheat: Art Relief for Africa*, Savannah Gallery of Modern Art, Commonwealth Institute, London, UK
1991 *Prints*, an exhibition by Pamela Clarkson, staff & students of the College of Art, UST, Kumasi, British Council Hall, Accra, Ghana
1990 *The College of Art: Pafam '90*, Trade Fair Site, Pavillion A. Accra, Ghana
1989 *The Artist as Social Commentator*, Goethe Institut, Accra, Ghana
1989 *7 Artists: Ablade Glorer, Ato Delaquis, Atta Kwami, B. Offei Nyako, E.A. Asante, J.K. Nsiah, Kofi Broi* Presented by the Ghana-German Cultural Society Republic Hall, UST, Kumasi, Ghana
1988 *The Artist sees his town*, Goethe Institut, Accra
1987-88 *7 Artists: Atta Kwami, Don King Amrago, Grace Kwami, Humphrey Akplor, Kofi Allorbi, Kofi Setordji, Yaa Vordzogbe*, Centre for National Culture, Volta Region Exhibition Hall, Regional Museum, Ho, Ghana
1986 *Kofi Setordji and Atta Kwami: Paintings*, Goethe Institut, Accra, Ghana
1986 *Mother and Son: Two Generations of Artists (Atta & Grace Kwami)*, National Museum of Ghana. (GMMB) Accra, Ghana
1984 *Mother and son: Two Generations of Artists (Atta & Grace Kwami)*, Fine Arts Gallery. Ahmadu Bello, University, Zaria. Nigeria

Teaching, Lectureships and Workshop

1986-2006 Senior Lecturer, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

Awards and Merits

2021 Maria Lassnig Prize
2011 Howard Kestenbaum/Viyay Parasothy International Fellowship, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, USA
2011 Janet L. Stanley ACASA Travel Award to attend the Fifteenth Triennial Symposium on African Art: Africa and its Diasporas in the Market Place: Cultural Resources and the Global Economy, University of California, Los Angeles
2010 Philip L. Ravenhill Fellowship, Smithsonian Museum, Washington D.C.
2008 Thoyer Distinguished Visiting Scholar, New York University

Academic Record and Residencies

2012-13 Cambridge/Africa Collaborative Research Fellow and Visiting Scholar, Wolfson College, Cambridge, UK
2007 Ph.D., Doctorate on Art History, Open University, Milton Keynes
1993 P.E.P. Dip (RCA), Royal College of Art, London, UK
1992 Master of Philosophy in African Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
1980 B.A (Art) Painting, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
2011 Artist in Residence, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA; Roman J. Witt Visitor, Graduate School of Art & Design
2005 Gasworks Residency Programme (Africa 2005), Gasworks, London, UK

Collections

National Museum of Ghana
 National Museum of Kenya
 Victoria & Albert Museum, London
 The National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
 Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York
 The Newark Museum, USA

Publications

2013 *Kumasi Realism, 1951-2007: An African Modernism*, C Hurst & Co Publishers