

**SYMBOLIC MEANINGS IN THE GHANAIAN ARTS:  
A STEP TOWARDS DEVELOPING CULTURAL LITERACY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SYMBOLIC MEANINGS IN THE GHANAIAN ARTS: A STEP TOWARDS DEVELOPING CULTURAL LITERACY**

**Robert Kingsley Ayiku, Ph.D.**  
Concordia University, 1998

While the cultural policy adopted by Ghana on her attainment of political independence aims to offer the Ghanaian people opportunities to revive, preserve, and develop their indigenous culture, not much has been done in terms of documenting the Ghanaian cultural arts for both cultural record and educational purposes. This is because most of the experts of indigenous Ghanaian cultural matters are illiterates. These cultural experts depend mainly on an oral tradition for transmitting information about their culture. Communal beliefs and values, and ideas about cultural behaviours and actions, cultural symbols and images are passed on to the younger generations through stories, proverbs, and folk songs, among others. The people of Ghana have a characteristic of thinking about the world in which they live in symbolic terms. Thus, they use a wide range of symbol systems in accordance with various aspects of their social and cultural life, including the practice of their arts. Indeed, Ghanaian artistic expression is mostly symbolically oriented, serving to represent communal beliefs that are deeply rooted in historical, philosophical, social, religious, economic, and political values which form the basis of all major areas of Ghanaian cultural knowledge that gave birth to their arts. The national call for cultural revival, as well as a new urge for cultural identity among Ghanaians, today, has resulted in an urgent need for a research to document various aspects of the Ghanaian culture for use as educational and reference material to augment the oral tradition which is becoming increasingly inadequate in meeting the educational needs of the people. This study identifies and interprets the meanings of some symbolic key expressions as they are found in particular examples of the indigenous cultural arts of Ghana, namely: the visual, performing, and verbal art forms. The documentation includes the social and cultural significance (relevance) and aesthetic attributions of these symbolic artistic expressions and art forms to the people of Ghana. The documentation is done in a way that makes it applicable for arts education in Ghanaian schools.

The Ghanaian cultural arts have been incorporated as an interdisciplinary study under a curriculum enrichment programme -- a supporting content of the general education programme -- rendering instruction in them to become an ancillary activity.

This disparity between the goals of general education and arts education has resulted in the latter being relegated to the peripheries of the general school curriculum. The study, therefore proposes teaching and learning strategies for using the documented materials in the Primary, Junior Secondary, and Senior Secondary School levels of education in Ghana, using a discipline-based art education (D.B.A.E.) approach which integrates studio practice (art-making) with the historical, aesthetics, and critical domains of the arts.

The resulting body of literature on the Ghanaian arts together with the suggested approaches to teaching and learning result in an arts education programme that is appropriate for Ghanaian schools. By studying the arts in relation to their own cultural context students will understand the arts they have been living with as part of their lifestyle. Their artistic skills and practices, imaginations, knowledge, and judgement will be grounded in their own cultural assumptions. In this way, students will understand and acquire the relevant literacy for effective participation in, and appreciation of their own culture.



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background To The Study**

Throughout the ages, the Ghanaian people, like others in other parts of the world, have lived surrounded by works of art, their everyday lives being influenced by all kinds of artistic expression. Historical and anthropological evidence show that their artistic expression is so much interwoven with the way they live that it survives as a record of their thoughts, aspirations, and needs, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Basically, the arts are of a piece with all aspects of life. What this assumption implies, basically, is that in the Ghanaian society, each art form always has one or more social or cultural functions. The arts are tied to the shared behaviour of the people, that is, the sum total of the ways in which they organize their societies, as well as make a living. For instance, indigenous festivals, religious ceremonies, important occasions like child naming, puberty and nubility, marriage, and funeral rituals, involve a display of visual forms, musical accompaniment, expressive movements in dance, mimetic drama, and poetic language, among other art forms, all being organized simultaneously.

The word 'arts' as applied in this sense is not to imply the 'fine arts' as opposed to the useful arts, the popular arts, or crafts as it does in the Western sense of the term. It is a concept of the arts that in the broadest sense includes any embellishment of

ordinary living, that is, its beautification or adornment that is achieved with competence and has discernible form (Sieber, 1971). This broad concept of the arts includes the various forms of artifacts that the people make and use in embellishing their lives: the so-called fine arts, the useful arts, the popular arts, and crafts. Dissanayake reflects this view in her assertion that art is the activity of making things special: decorating the body or objects, performing exaggerated or expressive movements, or magnifying the natural voice into a song (1992, p. 15). This embellishment of life is evidenced in the purposes for which each art form is employed, that is, its uses and functions, as well as what it means to the people. It is also evident from this point of view that whenever an art form is used for a particular purpose, it is not organized arbitrarily but within a framework of meaning geared towards reflecting the significance of the situation, event, or occasion. The tendency to use the arts to embellish life (use the arts for life's sake) helps to explain why the arts are tied to historical, social, religious, and ceremonial occasions.

Viewing the arts in such a broad perspective provides a point of departure from the Modernist ideal of treating the arts as being independent from all social or cultural ramifications. Sieber suggests that:

The art-for-art's sake attitude deliberately and categorically rejects the view that the arts relate to the normative value of the culture in which they arise and that they play a useful role within that culture. The suggestion that the arts are, or can be the handmaidens of religion or prestige or politics is firmly resisted (1971, p. 207).

The consequence of this ideal has been the narrowing down of what constitutes art and the elevation of some aspects of it to mean the so-called 'fine arts'. Thus, the Modernist

understanding and response to artworks tend to be generally based only on the gratification of the componential arrangements of their literal (physical) forms.

In the Ghanaian society, as in other traditional societies, however, the function of the arts goes beyond such personal satisfactions. Tying the arts to the social and cultural practices orients them towards reflecting and reinforcing the values that are responsible for unifying the Ghanaian society. The arts as they are organized in cultural activities serve to portray the value system of the society: that is, a system of principles, ideals, or standards of life that are most cherished by the people. In order to create an orderly and meaningful existence, the Ghanaian people have reified (objectified) this system into a system of symbolic expressions that serve to signify the values they reflect. Indeed, Ghanaian artistic expression is mostly symbolically oriented, serving to represent communal beliefs about the order of the world and the purpose of life (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 16). These beliefs which are deeply rooted in historical, philosophical, social, religious, economic, and political values, are the basis of all major areas of Ghanaian cultural knowledge and doctrine that gave birth to their arts. Thus, in order to understand the Ghanaian arts properly, it is important to study their manifestations historically, socially, and culturally.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study documents some aspects of the cultural arts of Ghana. It identifies and interprets symbolic meanings as they are found in particular examples of visual, performing, and verbal art forms in the Ghanaian traditional setting. It also discusses the

significance of these meanings and art forms in the everyday life and living of the people of Ghana. The documentation of these symbolic artistic expressions is done in a way that makes them directly applicable as educational material in Ghanaian schools. The study further proposes approaches for using these documentational materials for arts education, following the model of Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.).

### **Statement of the Problem and Discussion**

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Ghana's cultural arts have suffered a great deal of setback as a result of changes occurring in the indigenous Ghanaian social and cultural structure due to foreign influences. The major foreign factors that have influenced Ghanaian artistic expression include religion such as Christianity (colonial missionary work) and Islam, as well as Western education and technology.

The effects of Christianity on the social life of the Ghanaian have been tremendous. The Christian missionaries who have taken the responsibility of pioneering Western education in Ghana have expected nothing but Christianity for the Ghanaians and a concomitant European way of life. Christian churches have rejected many indigenous Ghanaian customs, beliefs, and values because these do not conform to the Western culture which the Christian missionaries have sought to impose on the people of Ghana. These missionaries have viewed the cultural life of the people of Ghana as primitive, idolatrous, paganistic, and childish. As such, they have described the whole cultural system as "fetishistic," implying it is unreal, superstitious, and magical. The colonial

government has also supported the missionaries insofar as they continue to operate as an Anglicizing agency helping to mould the people after desirable government patterns (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975).

Like Christianity, Islam has also attacked and denounced the indigenous Ghanaian culture. It has taught "monotheism," an ideology that emphasises the existence of only one God, called Allah, and therefore condemned the indigenous religious practices as the worship of many gods. Islam does not allow figurative representation of deities in any visual art forms, a practice that is central to indigenous religious practices, and which also forms the basis of symbolic representation in the visual arts domain in Ghana.

Following their misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the indigenous Ghanaian cultural practices, Christian and Islamic religious missionaries have endeavoured to systematically indoctrinate their converts to openly reject their own culture. The consequences of these forces of acculturation are diversified but the most prominent is that most Ghanaian religious converts have become confused, thereby developing ambivalent or lukewarm attitudes towards their own indigenous culture arts. Due to Christian teaching, many Ghanaians who have received Western education have also shifted to Western types of life-styles, thus influencing the life-styles of many other Ghanaians, especially urban dwellers and the youth. The category of urban dwellers most affected by these influences are the large group of literate persons who are either in gainful employment, or are in search of greater opportunities in life. There are also those who as a result of foreign religious influences, have moved to urban areas in order to



avoid accepting or inheriting certain traditional offices, the responsibilities of which might require their participation in indigenous cultural religious practices.

Most of these elite persons, even though they may still have some hidden sympathy with their rural kinship, nonetheless show indifference to cultural activities.

Thus, we have in the cities a large number of persons who are literate but whose culture falls far short of what is desirable. . . . The existence of literacy [ability to read and write] and lack of interest in cultural activities is a strange phenomenon and the need for remedy has become desperate (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975, p. 19).

As a result of this indifference, the knowledge of the Western-influenced elite of Ghana about the essence of the traditional arts that are part and parcel of Ghanaian cultural practices is either little or nil. Among their ambivalent attitudes towards the arts, the most prominent is the tendency to look down on the indigenous arts and artists. The arts are regarded as intellectually undemanding as compared to disciplines like mathematics, engineering, science, and others, which are perceived as difficult because they require skills of abstraction, conceptualization, and computation. In light of these attitudes, most parents of this elite group encourage and persuade their children to study science or something else other than art. These attitudes can be attributed in large part to the fact that the system of school education has been such that it has not helped various sections of the Ghanaian public to understand the role of the arts in education and in human society at large.

The loss of faith by most Ghanaian elites in their own cultural arts has resulted in many Ghanaians looking down on certain indigenous cultural values to a great extent, thereby putting the preservation and development of the indigenous cultural heritage at

risk. A consequence of this situation is a tendency in young adult school and college graduates to look down on indigenous Ghanaian vocational activities. Instead, they crave non-existent "white-collar" jobs which reflect the image of Western economics and business. Once they have had Western-type education, the youth no longer find it convenient to undergo apprenticeship to learn certain indigenous crafts, such as weaving, metal smithing, pottery making, and others. And this has become one of the factors contributing to unemployment among school leavers in Ghana today.

In an attempt to rectify this situation, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Ghana, has instituted a "Curriculum Enrichment Programme" as part of the educational system of Ghana. In this programme, the Ghanaian cultural arts are incorporated as an interdisciplinary study at the basic level of education. By basic level of education is meant, from Kindergarten to the Junior Secondary School level, with ages ranging from approximately five to sixteen years old. The Primary aim of this programme, which began in 1984/85, has been to create an opportunity for the indigenous Ghanaian arts to be brought to all students through integrating them with all subjects in the school programme. This has resulted in the arts being treated as a supporting content of the general education programme and not as full-fledged disciplines.

While teaching and learning are organized with a concern for content, continuity, and consistency to enable learners to understand and achieve the rudimentary principles and basic literacy in other disciplines within the time framework of daily instruction, learning in the arts tends to be treated as an ancillary activity -- a recreational diversion from vigorous academic work. This is because there have been no specifically accepted

guidelines regarding how instruction is to be carried out so as to result in meaningful and purposeful learning for the students. Thus the potential role of the arts in assisting to expand the students creative abilities, to empathise, and to understand the value of the arts in everyday life as part of the learning process becomes lost. This disparity between the goals and priorities of general education and arts education, as well as the imbalance between instruction in the arts and other subject areas have resulted in denigrating the image of the arts, thereby relegating them to a very low status among educators, students, and the general Ghanaian public.

The foregoing problems suggest a need for a careful reexamination of the goals and priorities for teaching and learning in the arts, the role of the arts, and their implications for education in Ghana. First, there is the need for documented material that would validate the indigenous Ghanaian arts so that they can serve to build the cultural identity and self-identity of Ghanaians. Second, there is need to reexamine and find ways to alter or improve the place of arts education as it is currently practised in the Ghanaian school curriculum to raise its status from an ancillary to a full-fledged discipline, which includes the study of the production, historical information, aesthetic values, and critical literacy of the Ghanaian arts. It is, therefore, to this end that this study addresses itself.

### **Specific Objectives**

As its first objective, this study identifies and documents some key symbolic expressions as found in particular indigenous Ghanaian cultural behaviours, actions, and artifacts. Aspects of the Ghanaian cultural arts to be used for the study include the visual,

performing, and verbal art forms. The documentation includes meanings associated with the identified symbolic expressions, their significance or social relevance (that is, the circumstances or events in which they function in Ghanaian cultural activities), historical information, and relationships to aesthetic values of the culture, for example, notions of beauty.

As its second objective, the study proposes some strategies for carrying out instruction in arts education at the basic and secondary levels of education in Ghana, using these documents. The proposed strategies use the Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) model, which integrates studio practice with the study of the historical, aesthetic, and critical domains of the arts. The goal of this instructional approach is to provide the learners with a more comprehensive approach to understanding the Ghanaian cultural arts, a means to help them to acquire a sense of cultural identity and self-identity.

### **Rationale**

This study is based on the assumption that the indigenous Ghanaian cultural arts such as the visual, performing, and verbal art forms, among others, are linked and bound to the social structure of the Ghanaian society and, therefore, are central to the factors that determine the content and practices of the Ghanaian culture. In other words, these indigenous art forms are the major constituent parts, and also, the "most visible and revealing aspects" of the Ghanaian culture (Blocker, 1988, p. 13). It is through them that the ideals, beliefs, and values of the people of Ghana are expressed, communicated, and

transmitted from one generation to another. Blocker reflects this perspective by viewing the arts as agents that have "chronicled the history of civilization" (p. 13). He contends that the continuous presence and practice of the arts throughout history is evidence of the important influences they can exert on human behaviours and activities.

The concept of the indigenous Ghanaian cultural arts as agents of communication is an indication that they are constituted of "ideational expressions" (Chalmers, 1978). According to Chalmers, ideational expressions are symbols that convey ideas and express emotions, quality, and feelings. Such symbols also represent rank, status and role, as well as influence decisions of a group of people (p. 6). This understanding indicates that the indigenous Ghanaian cultural arts are essentially made up of symbol systems or structures that embody the cultural knowledge including the aesthetic percepts of the people of Ghana. Being reservoirs of the Ghanaian cultural knowledge, these symbol systems are used by Ghanaians to interpret their cultural behaviours, practices, and lived experiences. As such, they are the vehicle by which the meanings of various aspects of the Ghanaian culture are portrayed and fostered. This perspective, in turn, shows that understanding the meanings and significance of these symbol systems in the Ghanaian culture can have important implications for formulating strategies for carrying out instruction in arts education in Ghana. Bringing about such understanding, therefore, requires identifying and analyzing, or interpreting the meanings, roles, and functions of these symbol systems in the Ghanaian social and cultural behaviours and practices. This is the goal of this research.

The cultural policy adopted by Ghana on her attainment of independence is based on the notion of cultural revival. Its aim, among other things, is to reclaim and preserve African cultural ideals and perspectives within contemporary Ghanaian politics and modes of life. Reinforcing this policy is the principle of "self-reliance," an ideal that exemplifies an integrated approach to national development. It is an approach that seeks to utilize the nation's cultural heritage and resources, including the talents and creativity of her people, as a means to achieving a systematic transformation of her political, social, and economic status. The aim here is to build a contemporary modern nation "with a spirit of its own" -- a spirit that reflects confidence and pride in Ghana's cultural heritage (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975, p. 9).

While the cultural policy of Ghana seeks to offer her people opportunities to revive and preserve their indigenous culture, not much has been done in terms of documenting the Ghanaian cultural arts for both cultural record and educational purposes. The reason for this is two-fold. A high rate of illiteracy among experts of indigenous Ghanaian cultural matters has hindered recording of the cultural heritage. The major means of communicating and transmitting cultural ideals from one generation to another has been by oral tradition. Mythology and beliefs, and ideas about cultural behaviours and actions, cultural symbols and images are passed on to the younger generations through storytelling, fables, proverbs, songs (music), and drama, among others. Today, the national call for cultural re-awakening coupled with a new urge for cultural identity among Ghanaians has resulted in an increased demand on these cultural resource persons, most of whom are old and are losing their memory which is the main vehicle for the oral

tradition. Thus, the oral tradition has become inadequate in meeting the demands of recording and transmitting their knowledge to the rapidly growing Ghanaian population. It is therefore clear that written communication is necessary if these socio-cultural and educational needs of the people are to be met in a more efficient manner. Stated differently, there is need for the documentation of the intrinsic elements of various aspects of the Ghanaian cultural arts for record purposes; and for use as educational material for educating the younger generations about their culture. There is an urgency in the need for a research to document key symbolic meanings of the Ghanaian cultural arts, as many of the experts with sound knowledge about Ghanaian traditional lore are passing away without leaving behind any records. To satisfy these socio-cultural and educational needs of the Ghanaian community therefore, the onus is on arts educators, art historians, ethnographers and specialists in other related fields to identify and document various aspects of the Ghanaian culture for use as educational and reference material. This project is a contribution towards meeting these needs.

In this study, the proposed strategies for instruction and learning in the arts adopt a Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) model. By definition, Discipline-Based Art Education is a comprehensive approach to instruction and learning in the arts. It is designed to provide exposure to, experience with, and derive content from four foundational disciplines that provide knowledge, skills, and understandings that enable students to have a broad and rich experience with works of art in four different but closely related ways (Dobbs 1992, 1998). These include:

- *art production, that is, the making of art (or arts) "through skilled application of both experience and ideas with tools and techniques in various media [art materials]...";*
- *art history, that is, inquiring into the historical, social, and cultural contexts of works of art and art forms by focusing upon aspects of time, place, tradition, functions, and styles to better understand the human condition;*
- *aesthetics, which involves responding to works of art "by raising and examining questions about the nature, meaning, and value of art, which leads to understanding about what distinguishes art from other kinds of phenomena..."; and*
- *art criticism, which involves "describing, interpreting, evaluating, and theorizing about works of art for the purposes of increasing understanding and appreciation of works of art and clarifying the role of art in society . . . ." (Adapted from Dobbs, 1998, pp. 3-4).*

Originally developed for but not limited to the Kindergarten through the Twelveth Grade (K-12) level, the D.B.A.E. model (or paradigm) reflects a rationale for art in general education. Its aims as stated above are reflected in the three major objectives of art education identified by Chapman (1978) that school art programmes should facilitate the child's quest for:

- personal fulfilment through art-making experiences as a basic form of self-expression;
- understanding the artistic heritage, that is, gaining knowledge of art as a form of human achievement, how people throughout the ages have revealed themselves to us through their arts; and
- understanding the roles and functions of the arts in society, that is, the ways in which the arts are relevant to the societies and cultures that make and use them.

It is, however, essential to remark that not only does art knowledge derive from the four foundational disciplines of the D.B.A.E., its other resources can be found in such related fields of study as archaeology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and



communication studies, among others. While this is true, the four foundational disciplines in art -- art-making, aesthetics, art criticism, and art history -- are the main components of the overall body or field of arts education. In the use of the word disciplines, according to Dobbs, several assumptions are in operation, the most important being:

- that such fields constitute recognized bodies of knowledge or content;
- that communities of professionals study and perform in each discipline; and
- that characteristic procedures and ways of working exist [in each discipline] that can facilitate exploration and study (1998, p. 3).

Each discipline provides a different perspective from which to inquire, experience, and understand works of art and the circumstances leading to their creation. In short, they are the major avenues through which communities of professionals and practitioners such as artists, aestheticians, art critics, and art historians who conduct inquiries into various aspects of artistic thinking and making contribute to the overall body of knowledge and content of the field of art education.

This emphasis on D.B.A.E. is a means of bringing about a shift from the usual dependence on studio activities as the only means of education in the arts, a practice that is common in most Ghanaian primary and secondary school classrooms. Often, the Western arts have been taught in Ghanaian schools as studio- or production-oriented. This approach emphasizes students working with various art materials and techniques for the purposes of self-expression and creativity. Too often, there is little concern for developing students' knowledge and skills in other dimensions of the arts, such as the aesthetic, critical, and historical, thereby rendering their ability to appreciate the world

of art (nature of the arts) relatively limited. It is for the rectification of this unsatisfactory state of arts education that the Discipline-Based Art Education model is being proposed.

The proposed instructional strategies do not comprise a comprehensive curriculum package prescribing specific contents for the arts and the sequences in which they are to be taught. The determination of such curriculum elements is beyond the scope of this study. What the instructional strategies do suggest, however, are approaches to teaching and learning in and about the arts that offer students other modes of knowing besides the studio practice. In this context, the study of the arts is approached from diverse perspectives of artistic thinking and making and constructing art knowledge without altering the existing curriculum content. Deriving from the central goal of D.B.A.E., these perspectives include approaches to the creation, interpretation, understanding, and appreciation of art, artists, artistic processes, symbolic artistic expression, and the roles and functions of the arts in the Ghanaian culture. This is to help students understand the arts as an important part of everyone's life.

The emphasis on this integrated, contextual approach to arts education is to make explicit the significance of the arts in human life. Moreover, the aim behind situating the arts in the Ghanaian cultural context with emphasis on interpreting symbolic meanings in the cultural arts is to expose students to the tools and experience for the acquisition of cultural literacy skills. To borrow Greer's (1984, p. 213) phrase, the "educational end-in-view" of instruction in the arts should be to produce educated adults (persons) who are knowledgeable in the arts and their production and responsive to the aesthetic properties of works of art. The premise here, as Chalmers (1992, p. 17) puts it, is that it seems to

make little sense to teach a person to "appreciate" or make art, to write about art, to study art's history, or even just talk about art, if that person does not look beyond formalist aesthetic qualities and is not also helped to see that the arts relate to various social orders. The central goal of the suggested classroom principles in this study is the understanding of both the formal qualities and contextual aspects of the arts as an integrated and comprehensive approach to achieving this educational end.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following are definitions of some key terms that have been used throughout this study. The cultural arts function as the vehicle by which individual artists express the learned aspects of their cultures, which they have internalized while growing up. Such forms of expression are normally representations and/or manifestations of the artist's general 'world view'. The term 'world view' as applied here designates the ideas, concepts, values, or an image of the world and the important things it embodies as commonly shared by a people of a particular culture. In this study, the terms, cultural arts and indigenous arts are used synonymously.

The word art or arts has a range of meanings which may be obscured by the current disposition to restrict its definition to the context of this study. According to the *Encyclopedia Americana*, the word art comes from Latin *ars*, meaning 'skill'. The word 'skill', in turn, denotes dexterity, special competence in performance, or ability to do something well. From these definitions, we find skills typifying art, by reference to which useful techniques or modes of doing things and performing acts are analyzed -- for

example, 'the art of swimming' or 'the art of speaking'. Adler and Gorman (1971) also recognize that art is the root of 'artisan' as well as 'artist', or 'artifice' and 'artificial'. These range of generic meanings also exemplify art as a human creative skill or workmanship, or its application, as opposed to nature. While it still retains this original meaning, the word art has come to have a wider perspective in its usage. In its broadest sense, art also embraces the products of all human creative skills and workmanship. This idea is expressed in Adler and Gorman's words:

. . . art is both in the artist and in the work of art -- in the one as cause, in the other as the effect. What is effected is a certain ennoblement of matter; a transformation not produced merely by the hand of [human], but by his [or her] thought or knowledge (p. 65).

This viewpoint indicates that the meaning of the word art is two-fold. Sometimes art is used to signify the cause of the things produced by human beings -- that skill of mind which directs the hand in its manipulation of matter (p. 65). Sometimes also, art is used to name the effects (things) produced by human creative skill and workmanship. Ideally, therefore, the meaning of the word art includes -- art as a human creative activity (process) such as can be found in performances; and art as a product of such an activity, as can be found in the visual arts. Thus, summarily, art can be said to embrace the various branches of creative activity concerned with the production of imaginative designs, sounds, ideas, or acts -- for example, painting, music and poetry, writing (literature), dance and drama, considered collectively.

In this study, the word art or arts has been considered in its broad sense as including not only the products but also the skills, techniques, and processes employed by a people in making their tools and implements, as well as in making symbolic

statements in their ornaments, performances, and verbal traditions. From this point of view, all arts and crafts have been categorized as arts. Based upon this premise, the artist has also been considered primarily as a crafts-person. Drawing a dichotomy between the artist and crafts-person would imply a form of value judgement in favour of the former, thereby obscuring our understanding of the arts in the Ghanaian context. Thus, the words artist and crafts-person have been used interchangeably.

The term, culture, is a multidimensional concept. It has a broad range of elements resulting in various definitions. Boyer (1987) defines culture as "the learned shared values, attitudes, and beliefs of a specific group of people, which are continually being reworked and reformulated" (p. 95). The author explains that this kind of sharing and reworking provides a basis for a specialization or acculturation process, that is, the way in which cultural values are transmitted from one generation to another and becomes internalized. It also includes the sharing of mental constructs, that is, it provides strategies for dealing with an individual's perceived sense of reality. Additionally, it determines the ways in which members within a society control, embellish and maintain their quality of life.

Hatcher (1985) conceives culture as the sum of all the learned behaviour of human beings: "how they make a living, produce things, organize their societies and use language and other symbolic forms" (p. 2-3). She views culture as that which is the distinctively human means of survival; and asserts that each and every society has a more or less consistent way of life which constitutes its culture.

For Sarpong (1987), "culture is the integrated sum-total of behaviour traits that have been learned, and have not only been manifested and shared by the members of society, but also been passed on from one generation to another in an uninterrupted succession" (p. vii). Sarpong notes that in any particular society, "everybody has more or less the same ideas, beliefs, values, techniques, language, practices, ways of dressing, food", among others, that constitute the culture of the people of that society. Everybody in that society conforms to these accepted modes of behaviour that are laid down for them in their culture. Thus, it is important to note that culture is a social phenomenon that is responsible for the "continuity of thought and action" among a people (Sarpong, 1987, p. viii).

According to Simpson (1991) the idea of culture "presupposes a body of knowledge, values, and assumptions that underlies and is shared within the language and practices of a society; the enabling structure, as it were, of a community of discourse" (p. 65). Simpson contends further that anthropologists and social scientists distinguish customs, rituals, domestic relationships, distinctive language habits, political and economic systems, religious beliefs, and, not least, distinctive art forms; all these and more, under the heading of "culture" (p. 68).

In summary, culture may be defined as "those patterns of meaning that any group of people, or society uses to evaluate itself". Thus, it can be said to be "a constitutive dimension of all human action" (Bellah et al, 1986, p. 333). Such cultural patterns embrace "all the peculiar valuations, institutions, and systems of orientation and guidance (such as folkways, mores, laws, habits, customs, etiquette, fashions) which . . .

characterize - if not constitute - any social group at a given moment in its history" (Shutz, 1971, p. 92). Spradley (1980) reflects this idea when he conceives culture as acquired knowledge people use to interpret lived experience (p. 6). More simply stated, "culture" is the sum total of the ways of living built up by a group of people in any particular society and transmitted from one generation to another.

A symbol is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by accidental or conventional relation). In this study, a symbol is viewed as a material expression or form conventionally standing for an idea, a belief, process or act, figure, or sign in the Ghanaian cultural arts.

Symbolism denotes the practice of representing things in symbols, or of giving symbolic meanings and significance to objects or acts.

Cultural literacy has been defined by Efland (1984) quoting Eisner (1981) as "a generic process of being able to decode or encode the context of [cultural] . . . forms" (p. 270). It is viewed by Boyer (1987) as the "the development of . . . skills in critical dialoguing and decoding of [one's] own cultural assumptions" (p. 91). Hamblen and Galanes (1991) define cultural literacy as "the acquisition of cultural knowledge for purposes of social adaptation" (p. 15). Johnson (1989) notes that cultural literacy is "an active examination of the meanings, values, and behaviours in a culture" (p. 45).

From the point of view of these definitions, the term, "cultural literacy" can be viewed as an act or process of understanding symbolic meanings and the ability to verbalize the assumptions and values that constitute one's cultural heritage.

Arts education in the context of this study exemplifies teaching and learning of the cultural arts in Ghana which include the visual, performing, and verbal art forms that form part of the Ghanaian cultural heritage.

The Ghanaian visual arts include the material artifacts and symbolic objects used by the people of Ghana as part of their indigenous cultural arts.

The Ghanaian performing arts include those aspects of the cultural arts of Ghana that are expressed through miming and/or dramatic actions, and dance.

The Ghanaian verbal arts are a category of the cultural arts of Ghanaian which employs oratory, proverbs, storytelling, and other forms of narrative as its media of expression.

Thus, the theme of the research, "Symbolic Meanings in the Ghanaian Arts: A Step towards Developing Cultural Literacy", entails interpreting the meanings which make up bodies of knowledge and modes of action in the Ghanaian artistic forms and expressions.

The term, Sub-Saharan Africa, is used in this study to comprise West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, and South Africa. In the discussions concerning African arts here, North Africa is left out because of the profound influences of the Islamic religion which prohibits figurative representations in art, and encourages a widespread adoption of Arabian cultural practices there.



## **Arrangement of the Text**

The text of the thesis is arranged in the following order. Chapter One constitutes the introduction of the research project and a discussion centered around the need for such a study. It comprises the background, the statement of purpose, statement and discussion of the problem, objectives, the rationale upon which the thesis has been drawn, definition of terms, and significance of the study.

Chapter Two deals with a review of related literature. Two types of literature are dealt with: Works on aspects of indigenous Ghanaian symbols as they are found in the cultural arts; and also works on Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) have been reviewed in relation to the aims and purposes of this study. The information obtained from relevant literature on Ghanaian cultural arts have been used as a guide for framing the documentation portion of the study. Those on D.B.A.E. act as a guide for proposing strategies for instruction and learning in and about the arts in the Ghanaian classroom, using the documentation as resource material.

Chapter Three is devoted to discussing the field research methodology. These include the range of processes, techniques, and procedures used in this study: from the selection of respondents, the ethics involved in gaining access to the respondents, as well as strategies for data collection and its analysis. The study uses qualitative and anthropological research methods involving participatory observation. This chapter describes how I (researcher) employed mutual dialogue (conversation) with the respondents of the study, using semi-structured and open-ended questions to gather and

describe information on Ghanaian people's interpretation of the meanings of symbolic expressions in their cultural artifacts.

Chapter Four examines some general concepts held by Ghanaians about their cultural arts and their attitudes towards them. It explains what the term 'art' is to the Ghanaian people, including the types, nature, and characteristics of the arts, as well as how the arts function in the Ghanaian socio-cultural setting. The influences of Ghanaian religious beliefs on the arts, the artist, his or her apprenticeship and training, artistic traditions and conventions, and taboos associated with indigenous art-making activities have also been explored to a great extent. This chapter also discussed some basic premises of aesthetics, comparing and contrasting Modern Western formalist and indigenous Ghanaian notions of beauty (aesthetic values) in art.

Chapter Five explains Ghanaian cultural symbols as they are found in the visual, performing, and verbal arts. The lifeworld of the Ghanaian is often viewed and interpreted in symbolic terms. The ideals and values that inform Ghanaian symbolic phenomena are reflected in the ways in which they make and use their arts. This chapter reveals and makes comprehensible the value systems in relation to the symbolic meanings and functions of selected examples of artistic expression in the three domains of Ghanaian cultural arts. Some examples in the visual arts domain include: meanings of lines and shapes, and of colours; meanings of textile designs; meanings of forms in pottery; meanings of forms in sculpture; and meanings of body arts. Those in the area of the performing arts include symbolic meanings in the elements of indigenous Ghanaian dance movements, miming and dramatic activities. Examples of verbal arts include

proverbs and metaphors, libationary prayers, folktale, mythology, storytelling and riddles, and also poetry recitation involving appellations and funeral dirges.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter offers a brief but concise review of the findings of the study. It discusses the socializing effects of symbolic artistic expression on the Ghanaian people, making clear the role of the arts in their expression of who they are. The chapter also does a critical evaluation of contemporary elements in the arts and their adverse effects on the future development of both the Ghanaian cultural and artistic heritage. Central to the suggested solutions to alleviating these adverse effects is on integration of both traditional means of disseminating culture and comprehensive arts education programmes in the schools which adopt a Discipline-Based Art Education approach. A section on the roles of arts education in the future outlook for the arts suggests that arts-in-education (curriculum enrichment) programmes organized in the schools should not be substituted for arts education but should be looked upon as extra-curricular activities. Research projects directed at exploring new standards and realms of thought developing within the contemporary trends of the arts with emphasis on integrating indigenous and contemporary materials as a practical approach to training the future artists of Ghana have also been suggested.

Appendices A, B, and C explore some strategies for teaching and learning of the arts specific to the material documented in chapters four and five according to the Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) model. Each appendix is devoted to one level of education in the pre-university educational system of Ghana, namely, the Primary, the Junior Secondary, and Senior Secondary School levels. Appendix A is given to

formulating classroom principles for the Primary, Appendix B is involved with the Junior Secondary, and Appendix C, the Senior Secondary School. Central to the proposed teaching strategies is the principle of experiential approaches to learning. That is, problem-posing (questioning) and inquiry-based learning activities that engage the student in exploring various forms of art media, tools and techniques through art-making, historical investigation, aesthetics, and critical study of works of art. The major goal here is enabling students to understand the arts in the context of the human condition in Ghana.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides a body of documented literature that validates information about the indigenous Ghanaian arts that can serve as an educational material for Ghanaian schools, as well as for record purposes. A general knowledge in the Ghanaian arts would enable the people of Ghana, especially the youth, to understand and acquire the relevant literacy for effective participation in, and appreciation of their culture. This body of literature together with the proposed discipline-based approaches to arts education result in an arts programme that is appropriate for Ghanaian schools. Learners can have the opportunity to study the arts they have been living with as part of their life-style. The central role of the Discipline-Based Art Education is the development of students' abilities to understand and appreciate the arts. Its implementation in relation to the students' own cultural heritage can have important implications for learning. The

learners' artistic skills and practices, imagination, knowledge, and judgement would be grounded in their own cultural assumptions, thereby, rendering learning meaningful.

By learning about the arts in their own cultural context, students will understand how the arts are constituted: the arts present symbolic meanings that derive from cultural contexts informing both their production and perception. Students will learn that both the contents and contexts of the arts are socially constituted, thereby making explicit the relationship between the arts and their Ghanaian socio-cultural identity. Through this means, students will understand that our ability to visualize, respond, and express ourselves symbolically is a result of experience gained through culturally embedded values, attitudes, and behaviours. It is basically the notion of symbolic meanings as expressed through the arts that grounds the cultural literacy approach to arts education which this study attempts to portray.

As a benefit of a candid and positive exposure to the cultural arts, the student may discover certain personal meanings, reasoning, inquiry, knowing, and intrinsically creative values "that are a part of the process and product of the arts" (Kaufman 1966, p. 258). Such life enhancing competencies, according to Kaufman, raise the consciousness of the individual, leading to self-actualization. He views a self-actualizing person as "one who brings his [or her] own personality in his [or her] interactions or transactions with other people and the general environment to a creative fruition" (p. 258). Thus an important characteristic of any self-actualizing individual is a measure of personal fulfilment in a variety of ways. Such ways may include enhanced tendencies or capabilities for cultural participation, analyzing and synthesizing information and other

phenomena for personal meaning-making in learning situations. This, in turn, will lead to authentication of knowledge and self-expression, which the individual can apply to solving some of the problems and tensions of human existence. The contention here is that a cultural literacy approach to arts education involves the study of art forms and processes, from hands-on production, through historical perspectives, aesthetic and critical perspectives, as well as an understanding of the socio-cultural constructs which influence how the arts are practised and valued.

This study brings to light certain aspects of the Ghanaian culture that are consistent with Sub-Saharan African cultural expressions in general. This juncture does not, however, suggest that the elements comprising the African cultural heritage are entirely homogeneous throughout the continent. It does point to the fact that while particular African cultural activities may differ in terms of materials and procedures from one area of the continent to another, these often reveal symbolic interpretations and philosophical principles or ideals that are shared in many parts of Africa. Thus, while this study is focused on exploring symbolic meanings in Ghanaian artistic expressions which are only a sub-set of African cultural symbols and images, its findings can provide some important insights into the rudiments of African artistic expressions.

More often than not, the arts of sub-Saharan Africa have been viewed and considered as an aspect of religion by Western researchers such as anthropologists, art historians, museologists, and art critics. This is because in their approach to studying African arts, most Western researchers usually place emphasis on the art object or artistic act and techniques of its production, ignoring almost completely the behavioural,

historical, and philosophical aspects which constitute the evaluative basis of its creation. The result is the tendency of most Western researchers to be faced with a dilemma with regards to whether African art is 'art' or 'non art'. The problem seems to arise from the fact that these researchers often bring to the inquiry their own concepts, constructs, and definitions of the terms 'art' and 'aesthetics', which tend to fall short of the scope as far as the criteria for evaluating African arts are concerned. Because the definitions of art and aesthetic are based upon, or contain value judgements derived from Western cultural constructs, when applied to sub-Saharan African arts, cause them to be misrepresented, thereby warping their understanding. As well, since the Western definitions of art and aesthetic do not obtain among the African people, applying these to the African arts has often brought the researcher to the conclusion that African people have, by Western definition, no aesthetics.

The methodological framework of this study which is explained in detail in Chapter Three, offers some approaches to inquiring into African arts. It is, therefore, hoped that this study would help enhance its Western readers' ways of viewing some aspects of African art forms, as well as their aesthetic perception and appreciation of non-Western cultures. Additionally, individuals and participants of education (educational administrators, curriculum planners, teachers, and students) who are interested in cultural studies, or whose interests and work require them to seek information about sub-Saharan African cultural arts, would find this study useful. I hope it would lead to a better understanding not only of the Ghanaian (or African) artist and his or her works but art in general.

The proposed Discipline-Based Art Education principles which offer a more comprehensive approach to teaching and learning in the arts can serve to alter and improve the place of arts education as it is currently practised in the Ghanaian school curriculum by raising its status from the ancillary position to the position of a full-fledged discipline. On the whole, this research project offers strategies that can be used as a model for studying other aspects of the Ghanaian culture, and also, other studies towards improving arts education in Ghana.

The chapter that follows takes a critical view of existing literature on the Ghanaian cultural and artistic heritage, and also on Discipline-Based Art Education. The literature has been reviewed in relation to the objectives of this research study. The strengths and weaknesses of each work have been identified and used as a guide to formulating the conceptual framework, as well as the overall organization of this study.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

In this chapter, two different kinds of literature are reviewed in relation to the objectives of this research project, namely, literature related to the study of Ghanaian cultural symbols and cultural art forms, and literature related to models for arts education, and specifically the model of Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.).

#### **Literature Related to Ghanaian Arts**

A study of existing literature on Ghanaian culture in relation to the subject of this research project reveals that not much has been done as far as documentation of the cultural heritage of Ghana is concerned. The following works reveal attempts by some writers at portraying some characteristics of the Ghanaian culture from various perspectives.

In his work, "Ghana's Heritage of Culture", Antobam (1963) offers an account of some Ghanaian traditional values and the basic social principles in those traditions which have guided the life of the people of Ghana throughout the ages. He begins by discussing the importance of an ideology among African and all peoples of African descent, which is known as "African Personality" or "Africanness" among English-speaking Africans, and "Negritude" among French-speaking intellectuals. This ideology,

according to Antobam, places the onus on Africans and peoples of African descent to be constantly conscious of their cultural heritage as a means to cultivating and expressing their indigenous cultural identity. I agree with Antobam when he asserts that to most people everywhere in the world, one of the main purposes of existence is the establishment of a name, a distinctive identity. Thus, only through the Africans' own natural ways of life can their distinctive personality or identity be well expressed both at home and abroad among the community of nations in the world. In my opinion, this ideal should be a part of our educational agenda in Africa and, particularly Ghana.

Being both spiritual and abstract, culture has the quality of being universal in its inseparability from variable forms of human life, and the fact that it grows from the inner passions of human beings. Therefore, an effective interpretation of such a phenomenon as culture requires a profound examination of the trends and various forms of a people's life, comprised of both context and content. Some of these trends of the African culture can be found in African artistic behaviours. For example, the tendency of Africans to clothe all their cherished ideas and values in verbal and graphic symbols, and to attach meaning to all artistic expressions.

Relating the notion of African art to Ghanaian artistic expression, Antobam notes that like other Africans, the Ghanaian expresses "art for life's sake" by stressing in all forms of art the quality of significance as a criterion of beauty and virtue. This is in contrast to the Modern Western formalist aesthetic ideal that emphasizes "art for art's sake". Drawing on some views expressed at a meeting of the Ghana Society of Artists on the subject, "What constitutes a nation's art?", Antobam makes the following observations:

- That art is often associated with a country's political history, as well as with its people's traditions and their ways of life;
- That a nation's art consists essentially of all the artistic manifestations existing within that nation, the origins of which are deeply rooted in the nation's philosophy of life past and present;
- That a tradition in art is best developed by each individual artist through conscious striving and serious intellectual effort (p. 220); and
- That personality of the artist and the national temperament of his or her country affect styles in a nation's art.

It is these factors which are responsible for the artist's personality and style, and which can be termed the nation's culture.

The Ghanaian culture is evident in its people's cosmic values and beliefs, and more specifically, in their indigenous religions and religious practices as a means of seeking union with the Supreme Being. The culture is evident in the people's ideas about the presence of the spirit of God in the nature of things such as plants, animals, and inanimate objects; and it shows up also in the way the people view the personalities of their heroes and heroines, as well as their prophets and saviours in times of tribulation. Furthermore, Ghanaian culture reveals itself in the architecture, sculpture, ceramics, drawing, music and dancing, drama and literature, which can be summed up as the arts that constitute Ghanaian people's artistic heritage. Antobam views the arts at their simplest level as any expressions that arouse human emotions and/or appeal to any of the

human senses of touch, hearing, sight, taste, and smell. At their complex level, the author views the arts as:

Any expressions of emotional conceptions or ideas which a people possess about what is beautiful or ugly, wise or foolish, pleasant or unpleasant to them, of decent or indecent in all things in their environment, and of all they do in their everyday life. (p. 187).

Antobam's definition indicates that the arts actually reveal themselves in a people's way of life, the sum of which constitutes their culture. It shows also that in the Ghanaian context, these ways of life include the traditions that the people hold on to, such as customary rites of worship, and the significance or cherished values they attach to these activities. It also becomes evident from Antobam's discussion that personality or identity is an important aspect of human existence and that either of these is a direct product of human activities. This further indicates that any group of people, however large or small, has a distinctive personality or identity resulting from their ways of life, which can safely be referred to as their cultural identity. An important inference made from Antobam's work is that personality or identity varies from place to place in accordance with the geographical, historical, and philosophical circumstances that inform the value system of a person or group. Thus personality can be said to maintain two vital qualities. First, it usually maintains a considerable degree of originality; and second, it has a tendency of being unique if its bearer holds in high esteem the specific value system that gave birth to it. Antobam's emphasis on identity and personality can be attributed to the fact that his work coincided with a new surge for cultural re-awakening among the Ghanaian people after gaining their political independence.

Antobam's work has its limitations, however. Most important among these is that whereas it aims to provide Ghanaians, Africans, and peoples of African descent with a tangible approach to cultivating and expressing their indigenous culture, it fails to suggest or prescribe for them the means by which to learn about the elements of their culture. That is, the work does not offer any traditional forms of disseminating the cultural heritage, nor does it propose any strategies for incorporating the cultural elements it has discussed in the school curriculum. Without any such means of cultural dissemination to enable the Ghanaian public, particularly the youth, to understand why they practice what they do, in terms of cultural activities, an important means for establishing a cultural identity would be lacking.

Despite this shortcoming, however, Antobam's work bears some important implications for this thesis project. His discussion of culture as being central in shaping the personality and identity of a people provides some useful insights that have been adopted as a working premise or guide to this inquiry into Ghanaian culture. By exploring the arts in the Ghanaian cultural context, Antobam teaches us to see how the arts are made and used in social situations. He also teaches us what relationships exist between the arts and forms of human life in a specific society, an insight that is in direct consonance with this study.

Specializing in the performing arts, Nketia (1965) discusses how music, dance, and drama are brought together in different contexts in various Ghanaian communities.

He also explores the traditional resources of each of the above-mentioned art forms, as well as the trends of their contemporary development.

Nketia notes that music, dance, and drama are traditionally organized and practised as an integral part of everyday life in Ghana. For instance, a woman may sing while undertaking her daily chores at home. Also, a street vendor may sing to attract his or her customers. However, the most common means of organizing these arts is through group performance such as in the dance club or musical association. Organized group performances of music and dancing are common recreational activities in many Ghanaian communities.

Exploring the means of organizing music, Nketia notes that each musical group or society creates its own set of musical types. This is done in accordance with the occasions that the group considers important in the social life of its members. There are musical types for festivals, worship, and also for various ceremonies. Some musical types are performed by men's groups, while others are performed by women. However, a majority of the musical types are performed by both men and women. Musical provisions may also be made for various specialized social groups such as hunters and warriors.

Nketia observes that different dance patterns are adopted by different musical groups or societies. Though one can dance without attempting to convey any information, Ghanaian traditional dances give scope for conveying thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures and facial expressions (p. 20). Through the choice of appropriate symbolic gestures a dancer may express a

personal feeling of exhilaration, restlessness or even melancholy through dance movements. Individual or social groups may express their cooperation to their superiors, gratitude to their benefactors, or show their own estimation of themselves in the presence of their rivals, servants, or subjects.

Dance movements in which thoughts are expressed are usually performed at storytelling sessions, which provide opportunities for impersonating characters through dramatic action or expression. Other ceremonies include formal enactment of history or tradition such as commemorative festivals, installation and deposition of chiefs. Dramatic actions are also used for the enactment of traditional beliefs, or the expression of customary behaviour such as formalities governing the arrival and departure of important people.

These discussions indicate that Ghanaian traditional music, dance and drama are closely interrelated, interconnected and interdependent, each supplementing and/or complementing the other. Nketia's work also exemplifies a well organized presentation of material. This is evident in the way and manner in which he cites appropriate examples of musical and dance types in accordance with the tribes which practice them. However, while he identifies a great deal of dance types in the cultural arts of Ghana, his interpretation of the symbolic movements located in them seems rather lacking. His attempt at any interpretation of a dance movement has been merely to illustrate a point. Perhaps this seeming limitation can be attributed to the fact that the scope of Nketia's work does not include the interpretation of symbolic movements in the dance types it has described.

On the whole, Nketia's work is very informative and insightful. The identified musical and dance types associated with various tribal groups have provided a background framework that guided the framing of interview questions for the performing arts area of the current research project.

Glover's (1971) research is directed to a collection of linguist staffs, and *Adinkra*, stool symbols compiled into charts. A linguist in the Ghanaian sense, refers to a person who, because of his eloquence and wisdom, is chosen by a clan to act as the spokesman for the chief and the community at large. By virtue of his office, a linguist carries a staff, to the top of which is attached a symbol. *Adinkra* symbols are traditional motifs, logos or images that symbolize indigenous Ghanaian symbols (icons) or proverbial expressions. Usually, they are used as textile motifs, but may also be carved, cast, or moulded into three-dimensional forms and used as linguist staff and umbrella tops.

Stool symbols represent the roles played by stools not only as furniture, but also as religious and socio-political objects. The collection studied by Glover is extensive, and includes both the most popular and commonly known symbols, as well as those that have been less known to the current generation of Ghanaians. Such symbols may be in animal, human, or abstract shapes, and represent the beliefs, values, and aspirations of the entire community. A significant characteristic of these symbols lies in the proverbial expressions associated with them. These proverbs communicate historical, philosophical, social and political ideas and values, and also recall events that are relevant to the life and living of the people of Ghana. In short, the referenced symbols refer to proverbial



expressions that explain the ideals and principles that guide the life of the Ghanaian. Having been invented and composed before the advent of writing in Ghana, the linguist staff, *Adinkra* and stool symbols have acted as visual forms of communication among Ghanaians over the ages. Further more, they can be viewed as a shorthand method of recording, preserving, disseminating and fostering in younger generations, knowledge about their cultural heritage.

It is important, however, to note that although Glover's work presents the visual representations of proverbial expressions pertaining to aspects of cultural belief and value systems in the Ghanaian community, it offers no interpretation of the proverbs. This renders the symbols difficult to understand by people who are not well versed in the linguistic aspects of the Ghanaian culture, especially, the youth and tourists. The aim here, however, is not to consider this attribute in terms of a shortcoming or weakness in Glover's work. His main objective seems to lie in an attempt to identify both the popular proverbial symbols among today's Ghanaians, and also the old ones, and to classify them for quick reference purposes. Perhaps that is why he presents his work in a graphic form on charts rather than in a book form.

Considering the importance of proverbs for understanding interaction within the Ghanaian culture, and also considering the role played by language (as a medium of interaction) in any given culture, it is clear that Glover's work is an important contribution to scholarship in the Ghanaian culture. Probably, what is required is for other scholars (art educators, anthropologist etc.) to take up the challenge of studying other important aspects of Ghanaian symbolic systems that have not yet been dealt with.

This can go a long way in augmenting and/or improving upon Glover's work, thus making it more suitable for use as instructional material in the classroom. It is this challenge that has partly inspired this study.

Sieber (1973) in an article, "Art and History in Ghana", discusses his findings of a study conducted into terracotta funerary objects and their related traditions among the Akan-speaking people, with special reference to the Kwahu tribe of Ghana. The terracottas have been recovered through archaeological excavations at a place called Ahensan near Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana -- a place purported to be the previous settlement and original homeland of the Kwahu tribe. The tribe moved to its present place in the Eastern Region during the eighteenth century. His findings are a result of two separate studies done in 1964 and 1967 when the author was a teacher and researcher at the University of Ghana.

In the preamble to his work, Sieber observes that there exists the implication that the study of the so-called primitive arts has been essentially non-historical (p. 70). He explains that the implication that these arts have no history and that there have been no changes in them over the course of time is undoubtedly incorrect and misleading. A major factor in the absence of historical data for the arts in Africa can be traced to the paucity of historical research itself. A survey of literature on the arts of sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, reveals a series of styles that are not historical but geographical, with rare and often brief digression into the history of figurative objects of stone, fired clay, or brass. Useful information to the scholar concerned with the arts is usually found

in the works of anthropologists and ethnographers, but only on very few occasions in the writings of historians. Inadvertently, art historians have become trapped in an assumption underlying the great majority of anthropological writings: the fictional but useful concept of the ethnographic present (p. 70). This has resulted in two sorts of methodologies for research in the African arts, namely: stylistic studies and contextual studies. Stylistic studies tend to be surveys that are geographical in extent and tribal in focus. Contextual studies, on the other hand, portray an in-depth study of a single unit, vis-a-vis a tribal style, exploring the cultural basis and utility nature of the arts.

In a summary of his previous (1971) research findings as an introduction to his current work, Sieber observes that it is important in certain cases to study art forms from the stylistic as well as the functional or contextual points of view. Exploring the cultural context and portrait aspects of the figurine and portrait aspects of the terracottas, Sieber notes that they are used as substitutes for the actual bodies of deceased royal persons during the final funeral rite ceremonies. Because of their functions, terracotta funerary figurines and portraits often form a part of a highly consistent set of objects associated with leadership among the Kwahu and some other Akan-speaking tribes of Ghana. These objects include stools, royal swords, linguist staffs, umbrellas, gold jewellery, war trumpets, types of cloth, and crowns, among others, known as the 'regalia of kings' in Ghana.

From the foregoing context, it is evident that Sieber's work refers to a single type of art form, namely terracotta. One important limitation associated with Sieber's work is the fact that it describes only one function of terracotta figures and portraits in terms

of their use in funeral rites. Throughout Ghana, however, clay figures serve more than one purpose: they also function as abodes for the spirits of deities and in sacrifices for the incarceration of evil spirits. Perhaps, it is because Sieber's personal research interest is limited to the study of terracotta funerary figurines and portraits only. He could have found more uses to which such figures are put if his research objective had been more open-ended.

While it is rather narrow and specific in scope, Sieber's work does offer some valuable suggestions for research in the arts. His suggestion that research in the arts should, as a matter of necessity, involve both stylistic and contextual studies, and that such studies should correlate with history, offer didactic insights that can lead to constructing in-depth knowledge about art forms. He suggests that art historical inquiry into non-Western art forms should be done in accordance with the contexts of the specific societies in which the art forms are produced. This suggestion has valuable implications both for inquiring about other Ghanaian art forms in this research study, and also for the historical component of the proposed strategies for arts education. A great deal of symbolic art forms in the visual arts domain of the Ghanaian cultural arts are a part of the regalia of chiefs. Sieber's identification of some cultural artifacts in the royal regalia throws some amount of light on some of the items in the realm of the visual arts that have been documented in this study. On the whole, Sieber's work is an eye-opener to a process that can lead to the origins and recovery of some historical artifacts other than terracottas, a contribution that can enhance art historical inquiry in Ghana.

Sarpong, (1975) in his book, "Ghana in Retrospect. . .", gives an analysis of the social life of the people of Ghana. While the scope and interest of this research project is not the study of the social life of the people of Ghana, it does explore the artistic forms and expressions that are a result of Ghanaian socio-cultural activities and the role they play in the people's life. Sarpong's exposition about the utilitarian, and particularly the religious aspects of some Ghanaian artistic forms, offers some useful implications for this study.

Basing his discussion on the religious practices of the people of Ghana, Sarpong, a Catholic Bishop, observes that there is an element of religion associated with every aspect of the Ghanaian culture. According to Sarpong, Ghanaian art, a subset of African art, is entwined with myths and is therefore very expressive and eloquent. It says something to those who understand its language and unique characteristics. Normally, the indigenous Ghanaian artist (or crafts-person) follows a set of conventional ideas and utilizes traditional symbols in his or her works. Sarpong defines symbols as signs representing things that have meanings and stand for something other than themselves. In choosing an object for a symbolic representation, considerations are based on some genuine or imagined resemblance between the object and what is being symbolized, and on historical or mythical events that the people associate with that object.

The author observes that what are symbolized in various ways in the Ghanaian society are such abstract notions as power, wisdom, humility, purity, prudence, group solidarity. Thus through symbols, the people of Ghana represent abstract ideas which would normally be difficult if not impossible for them to represent directly to themselves.

This indicates that to express a mutual solidarity and support in his or her social group, the Ghanaian does so in practical terms through a convenient and comprehensible symbol that expresses the values essential to the particular group.

From these discussions, it is clear that symbolism is essentially expressive. And that frequently, there is some reason why a particular symbol is found appropriate in a particular case. Also, symbolism is essentially related to human behaviour which, in turn, is both expressive and instrumental. Since an instrumental activity is usually directed towards bringing about some desired state of affairs which often has social significance, it is important that any study of symbolism should at least be done on two levels. These should include, first, the level of meaning, and second, the level of function and/or social relevance. While Sarpong does not discuss specific Ghanaian cultural symbols and their meanings and functions, the insights gained from his allusions to understanding symbolism within the Ghanaian cultural context provide a suitable framework that has greatly influenced the methodology of this study.

Kayper-Mensah (1978) in a work titled, "Sankofa Adinkra Poems", tries to bring out the meanings of a collection of *Adinkra* symbols through the medium of short poems. *Adinkra* symbols have been defined as traditional motifs that symbolize Ghanaian proverbial expressions. Kayper-Mensah observes that most Ghanaians are often faced with a problem of interpreting the meanings of the *Adinkra* proverbial symbols and thought forms in a foreign language such as English. The problem, he notes, lies with how to begin with such an explanation. Such an interpretation could be lengthy, as it

often requires an explanation of the circumstances or events in which a symbol is used in some detail. By choosing the poetic medium to explain the *Adinkra* symbols, the author hopes to explain the ideas they symbolize in a modern, lively, and meaningful fashion.

The educational value of Kayper-Mensah's collection of *Adinkra* symbols is considerable, especially in a period such as the present when Ghana is undergoing a cultural renaissance -- reviving and rediscovering her cultural identity. It is this idea of cultural re-awakening that the author reflects in the title of his work by the word, *Sankofa*. This means "retrieving" or "rediscovering" the past. In addition, Kayper-Mensah's collection of *Adinkra* proverbial symbols can be viewed as an extension of Glover's work, and a valuable contribution towards the cultural re-awakening programme in Ghana.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the aim behind Kayper-Mensah's work is primarily a comprehensive explanation of the selected symbolic expressions. Yet the extent to which he could bring out their meanings through the poetic medium seems rather inadequate. The paucity of explanation of individual symbols offered by the poems result in an elaboration of only the literal meanings, that is, the ideas being symbolized; the deeper social meanings pertaining to the cultural significance of the symbols remain uncovered.

Normally, indigenous Ghanaian cultural symbols have at least two levels of meaning, namely, the literal and social levels. Therefore, it is important that any methodology for interpretation gives room for exploring both levels. Kayper-Mensah's

failure to take into consideration the second level of meanings in the interpretation of his collection of *Adinkra* symbols, might make it difficult, if not impossible, for a person who possesses no prior knowledge of the historical or mythological information about the symbols to interpret them to the full. Also, the poetic language used in explaining the symbols is in itself different from the language of everyday use and might not be readily understood. Thus, it might require additional interpretation alongside the symbols, if an effective understanding of the symbol is to be arrived at. These shortcomings have been thoroughly addressed in this research, particularly in the chapter presenting interpretation of symbols.

In "General Knowledge in Art for Senior Secondary Schools (in Ghana)", Amenuke and Ayiku et al., (1990) discuss history of art and art appreciation. Basic elements and principles of art as well as their practical application in various art-making processes, are also treated.

Designed with a focus on the visual arts, to meet the requirements of new national policies on education reform in Ghana, the book has two components, namely: history of art and practical components. The history of art component discusses contributions of the visual arts and artists to the social, cultural, political, and economic development of human communities. This has been done in the context of ancient or prehistoric art, as well as African and Ghanaian arts.

The book discusses ancient art from the period between 30,000 and 5,000 BC. It deals with the beginnings of art with reference to paintings, engravings, and sculpture



done in the earliest stages of development of human culture. It also discusses other forms of art such as pottery, textiles, jewellery, and metal work which came into being during the last stages of the prehistoric period. The focus of the discussions is on how ancient men and women created and used art objects. It also shows how art has served humankind over the years in its efforts to survive and develop.

The section on history of art in Africa discusses how the people of Sub-Saharan Africa reveal their cultural identity through their arts. This has been done by showing how socio-cultural needs and religious beliefs of the people influence their art making. It also explains how art, in turn, is used to promote the beliefs and values of the people.

In its discussion of the Ghanaian context of the history of art the book discusses some characteristics of the Ghanaian arts, and explores the effects of foreign influences on indigenous Ghanaian artistic expression. It identifies some contemporary Ghanaian visual artists and various styles they use in their art-making to show the Ghanaian art student and future artist how their predecessors project their Ghanaian identity into their work. On the whole, the history of art component of the book seeks to enable the student to appreciate the visual arts in the socio-cultural contexts in which they are made.

The practical component of the book aims at helping the student to acquire basic practical skills, techniques, and knowledge of tools, materials, and processes in art-making. That is to say, it is designed to help the student acquire skills in analyzing and expressing ideas through art activity. By studying the visual arts through active exploration of its materials, tools, processes, and ideas, the individual can develop an ability to think, feel, and act creatively. The co-authors derive their rationale for visual

art education from the social, historical, and general functions of education. Its central goal is to help the individual to understand the role of art in society, that is, as an integral part of everyday life. The aim behind this goal is to bring to the awareness of the individual the relationships between art and culture.

While the book comments that the contents and contexts of the various art forms -- visual, performing, and verbal -- derive from socio-cultural constructs of the human society and shows how they have contributed to human development, little of its text is devoted to the performing and verbal art domains. Although it strives to define the performing and verbal arts as art forms and cites examples of their types, the book offers no information about the modes of their expression and approaches to disseminating them.

Being a co-author of the book, I (researcher) recognize the limitations of this book as a function of its specific focus on the visual arts, as well as the design of the text set out by the Ministry of Education of Ghana. The first of its kind in the field of art education in Ghana, the book is meant to meet specific needs of students in Ghanaian Senior Secondary Schools, with ages ranging from sixteen to eighteen years old. In addition, space allotted by the ministry for the performing and verbal arts was limited. The current research study is, therefore, an opportunity to expand on the study what was begun for the book under discussion. It provides a more in-depth and extensive study into those aspects of all three domains of the cultural arts -- the visual, performing, and verbal arts -- of Ghana that were dealt with in the previous research, with more emphasis on symbolic expressions through these art forms.

Based on the aim of the documentational part of this research project, that is, the interpretation of the meanings of symbolic expressions and forms located in the Ghanaian cultural arts and their social significance, this review of literature has been geared towards finding out the extent to which each author has:

- explored the relationships between the arts and society;
- treated the expressive forms or symbols in the Ghanaian arts as elements in the network of social interactions in Ghana; and
- organized the expressive forms or symbols as contributing to understanding the socio-cultural system of Ghana.

The contents of the reviewed literature reveal that each of the authors has specialized in a distinct aspect of the Ghanaian culture. One main shortcoming of the reviewed literature is that with the exception of Amenuke and Ayiku et al., who have provided exercises at the end of each chapter of their book, none of the other authors suggests strategies of any kind for disseminating the Ghanaian cultural arts either through the traditional means or the school. In spite of this general shortcoming, each author's work shows an evidence of intensive research into his or her chosen area of study. There is also clarity in the organization and presentation of their facts. The works of Antobam, Sieber, Sarpong, and Amenuke, Ayiku and co-authors tend to reveal a process that is common to all. Each of these individual or group of authors tends to elaborate a theory of the Ghanaian society and then proceeds to analyze an aspect (or aspects) of the arts by showing its place within Ghanaian cultural activities. In each case, the author provides some useful information that fits into the circumstances of the current research project.

I have, therefore, endeavoured to effectively use aspects of these previous studies during both the fieldwork and data analysis stages of the current study.

### **Literature Related to Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.)**

The following review of literature on Discipline-Based Art Education reflects selected examples of the views of its advocates. These selected materials have been examined in terms of their significance to the development of teaching and learning in art using the Discipline-Based Art Education approach.

Tracing the roots of Discipline-Based Art Education, Lovano-Kerr (1985) notes that since its inception, the process of value clarification and of self-definition as a field of study continues to be a major focus in art education. Drawing on Efland's 1984 ideas, Lovano-Kerr notes that as a result of a federally funded 1965 Penn State Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development, a consensus was reached that art education is a discipline in its own right, with goals that should be stated in terms of their power to help students engage independently in disciplined inquiry in the arts (p. 216). Later, with a national focus on excellence in education, a resurgence dedicated to the improvement of art curriculum theory and practice at all levels came into motion once more, initiated by the J. Paul Getty Trust. A significant accomplishment of these efforts is a newly constituted curriculum model for art education descriptively named Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) by Greer (1984).

Reviewing the definition and distinguishing characteristics of Discipline-Based Art Education, the author notes that the model centres on art as a discipline. This model

curriculum in art derives its structure from the processes artists, art historians, aestheticians, and art critics, use in doing their work. Art in this sense encompasses four parent disciplines, namely: studio art, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. Using Greer's 1984 words, Lovano-Kerr states that concepts, ideas, principles, and techniques derived from these disciplines, as well as the structures and modes of inquiry of each, constitute the discipline of art, its content, and its instructional approaches (p. 217). Its goal is to educate the learner to be more knowledgeable about art and its production, and to be more responsive to the aesthetic properties of works of art. The discipline-based approach to teaching, according to Lovano-Kerr, differs from other approaches by shifting the focus of art instruction away from exploration of materials and the making of objects. This focus, the author observes, is often devoid of sequence and continuity, and primarily emphasizes art studio performance and design skills. Very little, if any, art history or art criticism content is taught, with the content of these areas being seldom integrated with the studio practice.

DiBlasio's (1985) work can be looked upon as an extension of the foregoing approach. She contends that an educational end-in-view for the D.B.A.E. approach is the comprehension of the overall concept of art, that is, an understanding and appreciation of the evolving boundaries of the discipline of art. Its goals direct us as teachers to assist students to integrate learned art concepts within a comprehensive view of the world of art. The incorporation of the four domains within a D.B.A.E. format is not merely an additive, but a synergistic transformation. Elements of the four components are brought

together in a learning situation to achieve a better educational end. The effect of this can be seen in the manner in which students' studio efforts achieve educational significance as documents of progress in specifically artistic cognitive development (p. 203). Discussing the issue on integrating the four parent disciplines within a curriculum whole, DiBlasio argues that when studio practice, art history, aesthetics, and art criticism, are taught concurrently, they interrelate to reinforce one another. The sequential organization of these domains provides for an integrated understanding of art, rather than on isolated components.

[Also], the integrative function of D.B.A.E. alerts students to the interdependence of the four domains; they come to appreciate, for example, how the criteria developed by aestheticians enable critics and historians to make appropriate judgements and assist artists in locating their efforts within the confines of art. (DiBlasio, 1985, p. 203).

According to DiBlasio, whereas the need for exploring art materials through studio production stands to be valued in D.B.A.E., a more comprehensive learning is accomplished through an integration of the four domains. Each student's work stands as an example of one phase in the mastery of an art concept, embodiment of a student's efforts to explore, to test, to develop a particular concept or convergence of concepts.

Greer and Silverman (1987/88) observe that being focused on studying art from the perspective of the artist, art historian, art critic, and aesthetician, the D.B.A.E. approach clearly differs from the traditional art classroom practice. Drawing from the four component disciplines, the D.B.A.E. model is a guide to sequential and cumulative organization of curriculum content for the arts in the same way as other academic

subjects are presented to students. Such a classroom implementation enables teachers to teach art effectively and comprehensively with a concern for developing students' understanding and appreciation of the world of art.

Sharing similar views on the place of the arts in the general school programme, Duke (1990) notes that arts education remains one of the most under-utilized assets and resources of learning in schools so that its potential to develop both the affective and cognitive capacities of the learner is often not realized. The multifaceted, comprehensive nature of Discipline-Based Art Education helps to build students' minds through activities and exercises that promote the use of language, writing, reading about imagery, problem solving, and reflection about works of art, which are an interactive base for the understanding and appreciation of art. For example, by learning to respond to art by articulating through an art vocabulary, students can develop critical judgement that makes them independent observers capable of making informed choices and reasoned judgements about art. This is the task of art criticism. By learning about the role played by artists in different cultures and the contributions of visual art to different societies of the world, students come to appreciate art in a historical and cultural context and can develop a consciousness that extends beyond their own cultural backgrounds. That is a task of art history. By learning to understand the nature of art and the purposes served by art objects, students can develop a conceptual ability to appreciate the relationships between ideas and objects. This is the task of aesthetics (pp. 43-44). These activities are

not isolated or independent, but integrated and interdependent during the learning encounter.

In a publication titled, "Discipline-Based Art Education: A Curriculum Sampler", Alexander and Day (1991) present a collection of eight curriculum units written by teams of art specialists with content derived from the designated four art disciplines: art production, aesthetics, art criticism, and art history. From the literature on the subject of D.B.A.E., the designated definition for this project is: ". . . a series of art lessons, actual written plans with objectives, motivation and learning activities, and methods of evaluation" (p. vii). This structure derives from a multiplicity of meanings of the term, "curriculum," paraphrased as: subjects offered for study; educational activities; intended learning; students' experiences; and learning outcomes. Each unit of the curriculum features a series of lessons organized on a selected theme. The lessons are sequentially organized for cumulative learning. The curriculum also provides resource materials for teachers, such as suggested procedures for conducting lessons, vocabulary, terms, and definitions, reproductions of art works, illustrations, diagrams, and evaluation strategies. Ideally, the curriculum sampler demonstrates how art specialists can design and build their own discipline-based art curricula using their own expertise and available resources.

The Discipline-Based Art Education model has not been without criticisms, however. Manley-Delacruz (1990) identifies some of these criticisms and the critics associated with them. Critics argue, among other things, that art history courses with



D.B.A.E. orientation often become so historical and factual information-centered that they lose their immediacy in the experience of art. These critics also challenge the D.B.A.E. emphasis on verbal-conceptual constructs located in the arts as a rationale for developing communication skills. The author observes that other critics, such as Hamblen (1987), compare the Getty D.B.A.E. model to traditional art education practices arguing that making art more like other school subjects does not make it better. In her argument, Hamblen draws attention to national reports on education about falling test scores and graduation rates to illustrate the failure of the academic subjects to adequately teach students.

Among its criticisms, the most prominent is to view the discipline-based orientation as having promoted a radical departure from the child-centered approach. Manley-Delacruz cites Bersson (1986) as having charged that the discipline-centered approach de-emphasizes art's individual and social dimension, and confines art to a formalistic, Western conception that cannot be conveniently practised in other cultural contexts. Similarly, Hamblen (1987) has argued, among other things, that the D.B.A.E. model focuses on the integrity of content and not the individual personality, perceptual skills, and idiosyncratic learning propensities of students. It limits conceptions of art to those selected by "the experts," values efficiency and behaviouristic, predetermined outcomes. Stated differently, D.B.A.E. lays emphasis on highly specific objectives, content, and systematic instruction without an equal concern for the student. Summed up, what the foregoing critiques imply, according to Silverman (1988), is that both art and learner will be short-changed by D.B.A.E. because of a too narrow, undemocratic

definition of what constitutes subject matter worthy of study, and lack of interest in the creative, self-expression of students (p. 13).

In spite of these critiques, this review of literature offers a series of important insights into the discipline-based approach to arts education worthy of application to the teaching and learning strategies the current research seeks to propose. In my opinion, a D.B.A.E. curriculum drawn from the four parent disciplines -- art history, art criticism, art production, and aesthetics -- exposes learners to the world of art and its vast variety of art forms. Creativity does not exist in the vacuum. It flows from a confluence of developed representational, interpretive, and analytical skills, as well as intuitive encounters with the real and imagined world, including the world of art (Silverman, 1988, p. 15). Its comprehensive curriculum gives regard to learning systematically the processes and concepts associated with the world of art, a process suited for developing the visual and aesthetic literacy of every student. Thus, the degree to which achievement in art, that is, understanding, appreciating, and creating, actually occur is dependent upon the same variables that affect instruction in other basic subjects. Such variables include resource materials, the knowledge, skill, and motivation of the teacher, administrative support, and the character or natural propensities of the student. These virtues demonstrate that D.B.A.E., when properly implemented, is not only as democratic as other approaches to art education, it also contributes to a far greater degree, to developing students' expressive abilities (p. 13).

Noteworthy among these insights is that the D.B.A.E. model, being an approach to curriculum development rather than a specific curriculum, lends itself to being

configured in a variety of ways by teachers to meet specific local circumstances, in terms of resources, goals, and curriculum traditions. Also, in that it is derived from the professional disciplines in the visual arts as organized bodies of knowledge to form the basis of art instruction in the school, the D.B.A.E. approach renders learning in the arts more meaningful and purposeful. As integrated and interdependent fields of study, each of the four disciplines of art exhibits three important characteristics. These have been identified elsewhere in this study as including a recognized body of knowledge or content; a community of scholars who study the discipline; and a set of characteristic procedures and ways of working to facilitate exploration and inquiry (Dobbs, 1992, p. 9). It is these characteristics which give greater scope to the arts as subjects within the general education programme, to be taught with a written and sequentially organized curriculum consisting of units of lessons. These lessons help students develop an understanding and appreciation of valuable and vital human meanings, processes, and historical associations within the arts, leading to understanding of significant subject matter that can be appropriately evaluated. This flexibility of its modes of application, coupled with its democratic nature, renders the D.B.A.E. model applicable to cultural contexts other than those with Western orientation.

It is these characteristics that have inspired the adoption of the principles of D.B.A.E. in the current study, to propose instructional strategies for arts education in Ghana. The proposed instructional strategies are based upon the insights gained through the study of the D.B.A.E. literature.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

By methodology is meant the series of methods or approaches which were used to accomplish this research study. It includes the series of techniques and procedures ranging from the selection of interview respondents, the ethical approaches to gaining access to respondents, and the processes of data-gathering and interpretation. It has been noted elsewhere that for the most part, the Ghanaian people portray their most cherished cultural values through the practice of their arts. In effect, then, the arts can be considered as positive, integrated manifestations of the people's existential experiences. Since human existence in general is multifaceted, it is vital that in conceiving and planning a human science research study, the context is clearly articulated. There is need to find creative approaches that are uniquely suited to the theme of the project at hand, as well as the researcher's personal propensities. The aim behind these considerations is in van Manen's words:

. . . context places certain limitations on the general applicability and acceptability of methodological procedures. . . . To the extent that we wish to speak or write about an individual [person], a particular event, a concrete practice, a specific interpersonal relationship or situation, we need to approach method always contextually, while keeping in mind the fundamental research question. These contextual considerations may have to do with personal, institutional, and substantive aspects of the research question and project (1992, p. 163).

In what follows are the contextual considerations of this research study, its theoretical framework and related range of procedural activities and methods.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework informing this study is the concept of culture as acquired knowledge people use to interpret [give meaning to] lived experience (Spradley, 1980, p. 6). This framework also views culture as a system of meanings a people attribute to phenomena. Examined from the latter perspective, culture reveals "a series of interpretations of life [that depict] common-sense understandings, which are complex and difficult to separate from each other" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1991, p. 36). These complex meaning systems, according to Spradley (1980), are what people in a society constantly make use of to organize their behaviour, understand themselves, and make sense of their lifeworld. It is this shared system of meanings that constitute their culture.

In order to study a particular culture from this perspective, therefore, it is expedient to find out what it is that enables the people of that culture "to behave appropriately, given the dictates of common sense in their community (McDermott, 1976, p. 159). Spradley (1980) points out three fundamental aspects of human experience to deal with when studying a culture. These include: what people do, what people know, and things that people make and use", and when these are learned and shared by members of a particular culture, we speak of them as "cultural behaviour, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts", all of which "are symbols with special meanings" (pp. 5 & 9). This perspective is in consonance with the goals and objectives of this research

project, the essential concern of which is the demonstration of meanings of symbolic forms and expressions and their significance as found in indigenous Ghanaian cultural arts.

Being a phenomenon of shared meanings, culture is learned and defined in the context of interaction between people. Based on this premise, I used qualitative and ethnographic methods for the documentation portion of the study. In a qualitative ethnographic study, the emphasis is on the description of phenomena, events, or situations in an attempt to understand and explain them in relation to how people of a particular culture perceive the meaning of the world around them. Implicit is the premise that it is through our lived experiences that we are able to construct a view of the world that determines how we act (Kratwohl, 1993, p. 311). In other words, a qualitative anthropological research attempts to describe, interpret, and understand "the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience" (van Manen, 1992). p. 62). This context is based on the premise that the things of the world, whether real or abstract, are always meaningfully constituted by conscious human beings (p. 10). Thus, in short, a qualitative anthropological research is the study of the essences of phenomena, events, or situations in terms of how they affect human behaviour. By essence is meant the essential or very nature of a phenomenon as meaningfully experienced by humans. In other words, it has to do with what makes some "thing" what it is and by which its true nature can be described. Thus, to question the essence of a phenomenon -- say, an aspect of human experience -- is to

make an inquiry into the essential nature of a certain way of being in the world. To borrow van Manen's (1992) idea, a qualitative inquiry can be said to be analogous to:

. . . an artistic endeavour, a creative attempt to . . . capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both wholistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive (p. 39).

The premise here is that since artists often give shape to their thoughts and lived experiences through their artistic activities, products of art and artistic acts are, in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations (p. 74). The qualitative method is inductive because it lets the meanings of the phenomena being studied emerge from the data, that is, what is said about them. Like the artist, the researcher using qualitative methods explores critically the world of the researched. He or she notes not only the literal statements during an interview but also non-verbal and gestural communication that provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning. In short, the researcher sets out to elicit and understand the participant's own meaning as a result of personal experience. The concept of culture as an acquired knowledge used by people to depict the meanings of their lived or existential experiences has much in common with the assumptions of social anthropology. This study views the Ghanaian culture as being comprised of a complex system of symbols which are meaningfully constituted based on human aspirations and experiences. This point of view shows that studying the meanings of the symbolic systems of the Ghanaian cultural arts from the perspective of anthropological inquiry would yield worthwhile results. The essential concern of this research project is a systematic attempt to uncover and describe

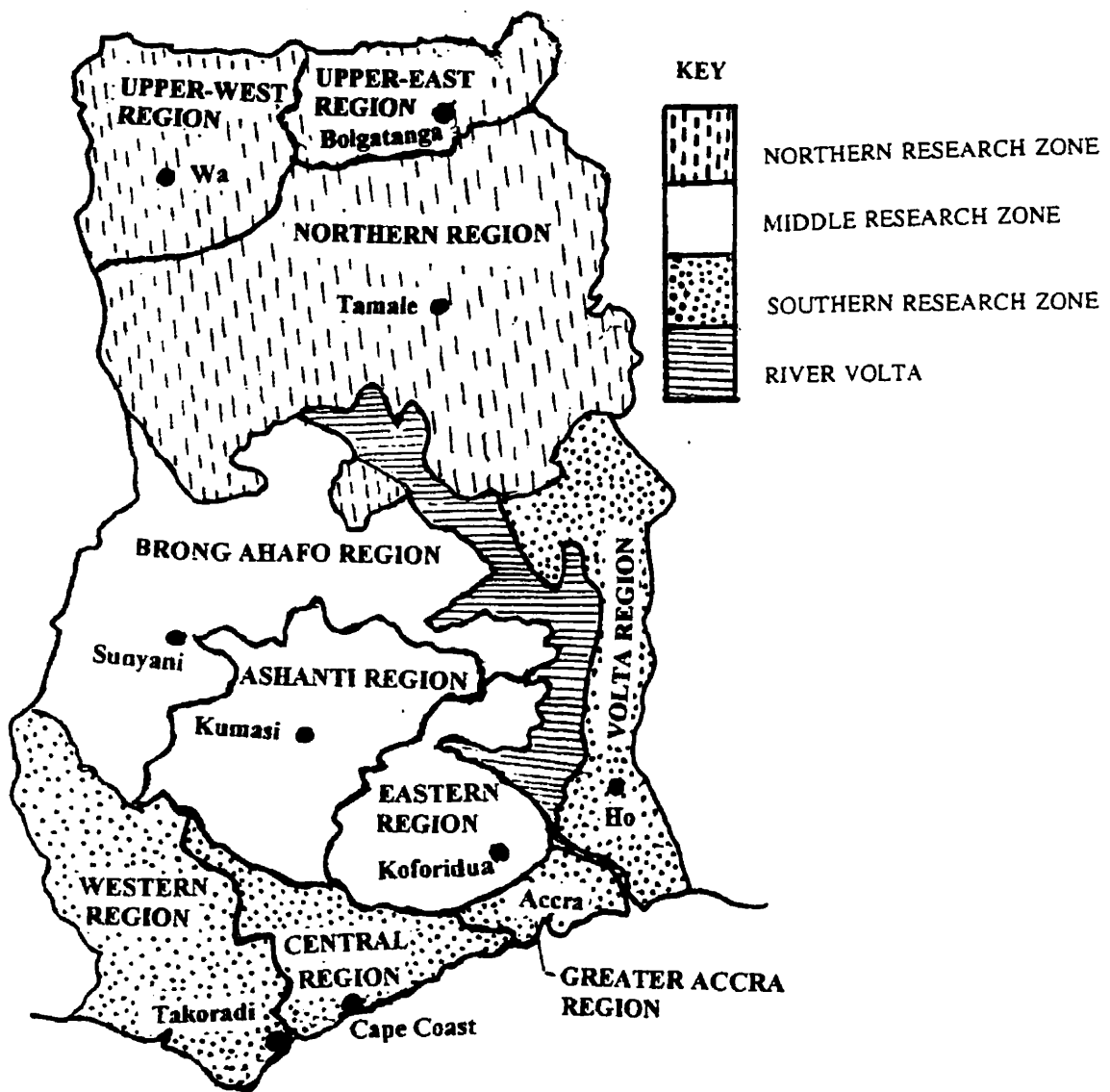
the internal meaning structures of symbolic forms and expressions and their significance in the Ghanaian cultural arts, which indicates its anthropological orientation.

### **Selection of Respondents**

The fieldwork was undertaken in Ghana. The informants and interview respondents in this study included artists-in-residence at selected districts and regional Centres for National Culture. Others are cultural experts (mostly, senior citizens) in the courts of selected traditional chiefs with paramountcy status in Ghana. The phrase, "chiefs with paramountcy", otherwise known as "Paramount Chiefs", designates Ghanaian traditional chiefs whose status and placement give them power to rule over large areas of land (or districts) made up of towns and villages with chiefs of lower ranks including sub-chiefs. Often, such areas of land are comprised of people of the same tribe, language, or traditional behaviours and are, therefore, known as traditional areas. Since all traditional areas are situated within the administrative regions of Ghana, it was found expedient to reach them through the regions to which they belong.

To achieve this end, I apportioned the country into three research zones, namely: the northern zone, middle zone, and southern zone. The northern zone embraces the Upper-West, Upper-East, and Northern Administrative regions of Ghana. The middle zone comprises of the Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, and Eastern regions. In the southern zone are the Western, Central, Greater-Accra, and Volta regions. Fig. 1 is a map of Ghana showing the research zones.





*Fig. 1: Map of Ghana Showing the Three Research Zones.*

Key respondents among artists-in-residence at Centres for National Culture were selected according to each person's field of specialization or knowledge in one or more of the three domains of art, namely, the visual, performing, and verbal art forms. Interviews were conducted in two Centres of National Culture in the northern zone namely, the Wa and Nankani-Kasena Districts. Those in the middle zone include the

Dormaa and Kumasi districts, while the Axim, Takoradi, Winneba, Ga-Dangme, and Keta-Anlo Districts were used in the southern zone. The choice of districts for formal interviews was made on a random basis, but basically because each of the districts tends to embrace a wide range of towns and villages with related traditional events. Key respondents from among the elders of the courts of chiefs were reached through the artists-in-residence of the Centres of National Culture with whom they maintain a strong contact.

Most indigenous cultural experts among elders of traditional chiefs' courts of Ghana do not specialize in knowledge about specific cultural arts. While it is not uncommon to find one cultural expert in a traditional chief's court with a sound knowledge in all three chosen fields of art, often these experts work in groups. The number of persons in each of such groups vary from one court to another. The number of persons in the groups interviewed for this study ranged from two to five. An interview with these groups took the form of seminars (group discussions), with all the participants speaking freely to the subject matter. Through this means, a great deal of information was gained about symbolic artistic forms and expressions in all three chosen domains of the Ghanaian cultural arts. One such team was interviewed in the northern and middle research zones and two in the southern research zone. A team of four tribal councillors (elders) at Wa in the northern research zone; a group of five persons at the Cultural Research Centre of the Manhyia Palace, Kumasi, in the middle research zone; and two groups of two persons each at Elmina and Prampram in the southern research zone. This brings the total number of tribal elders interviewed to thirteen. Each of the four

interviews lasted from between one and a half to two hours, thus yielding a total of about eight hours of audio tape recording. A number of artists with different areas of specialization were also interviewed. The chart that follows shows the categories of persons interviewed in the research field in terms of their areas of expertise, either as artists or tribal councillors (elders).

Fig. 2: A Chart Showing Categories of Respondents Interviewed in the Research Field.

RESEARCH ZONES	ARTISTS							TRIBAL ELDERS
	VISUAL			PERFORMING			VERBAL	
	Textiles	Pottery	Sculpture	Singing	Drumming	Dancing		
Northern Research Zone	1		1 also a weaver	2	2	2 also singers	1	4 also artists
Middle Research Zone	4	2 also singers	2			2	1 also a dancer	5 3 are also artists
Southern Research Zone	2	1	2	3 2 are also dancers	1 also a singer	3	4	4 also artists
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>

The total number of artists purported to have been interviewed as shown by this chart is thirty-six. It is, however, important to remark that the figures depicting the categories of artist respondents presented on the chart do not reflect the exact (true) number of artists interviewed in the research field. This is because most indigenous Ghanaian artists have specialized in more than one area of the arts. Therefore, some of the artists have been represented more than once on the chart in accordance with the

areas of the arts for which each artist has provided information. By estimation, however, about twenty individual artists were interviewed during the fieldwork each lasting for an average of forty-five minutes, yielding about fifteen hours of audio tape recording. This brings the overall total number of hours of in-depth interviews recorded on audio tape to twenty-three.

The in-depth interviews were supplemented with informal interviews with other persons whom I encountered spontaneously in each region, where traditional festivals were held during the research period. This approach also yielded valuable results since festivals are the major vehicles by which the cultural arts are displayed. The observations made, and the information gathered during such casual encounters, provided a great deal of stimulation and self-reflection during in-depth interview sessions, as well as in the interpretive analysis of the study.

### **Gaining Access to Respondents**

Access to potential respondents was sought in two ways. Letters of application were sent to the Heads of Centres for National Culture prior to visiting them. This was to enable me to obtain permission for access to the institutions, for observation and to hold interviews with the cultural experts and artists-in-residence. The letters explained concisely:

- what the research is about;
- the aspects of Ghanaian symbols and cultural arts that would be covered;
- the form of information the research sought to gain about those cultural arts; and

- the intended or expected end purpose of the research findings.

In the letters of application, I also sought permission to take pictures and to videotape some cultural activities and artifacts relevant to the research. In addition, I gave a promise of confidentiality and anonymity to the potential participants of the study. Copies of letters of introduction obtained from my supervisor/advisor at the Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, and also, from the Head of Department of Art Education of the host university in Ghana -- University of Science and Technology, Kumasi -- were enclosed with each application.

Access to the courts of chiefs was gained by consulting personally with the chiefs' elders who act as gate-keepers to the courts and candidly explaining my purpose, emphasizing the afore-mentioned research objectives. As custom demands in Ghana, I presented drinks, usually, a bottle each of Schnapps and *Akpeteshie* (a local gin) to the elders where necessary. This was, however, different in the northern zone where a reasonable sized pot of *Pito* (locally brewed millet beer) was presented. The gate-keepers then introduced me to the cultural experts of the court for appointments to be made for observations and interview meetings.

### **Data Collecting Activities**

The selection of symbolic forms in works of art for the study was determined by the fieldwork. Of all the symbolic forms and expressions that were identified in the field, only those that feature prominently in Ghanaian cultural activities were used for the study. These include both the symbol systems that are consciously employed during

ceremonial occasions, as well as the taken-for-granted ones that are used in the daily activities of the people of Ghana.

Data collection involved two processes which were employed concurrently because each process supplements and complements the other. One process involved my taking part directly in selected Ghanaian cultural activities, such as child-out-dooring and naming ceremonies, puberty rites, funerals, and festivals. Other such activities included communal recreational performances -- drumming and singing, dancing and dramatic expression, and storytelling. The other means of data collection was by in-depth interviews with key respondents in the cultural arts. The bench marks of both processes, however, were critical looking, listening, and asking questions.

The interviews were designed to take the form of open-ended conversations. This means a mutual or collaborative conversation with the interview respondents in which the interview process involved a dialogic way of questioning and answering with a "hermeneutic thrust" (van Manen, 1992, p. 98). I chose the hermeneutic dialogical interview method because its mutual, collaborative and interactive nature would help both the respondent and I to engage in a profound reflection on the phenomenon under study. To seek the opinions of the respondents through conversation, questions for the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. However, they were structured within a framework based on obtaining information about particular artworks and symbols and their meanings in relation to Ghanaian aesthetic values and socio-cultural contexts. The specific types of information sought by the questions were: 1) what the symbol is; 2) what the symbol means; and 3) how the symbol is used, that is, its place in the life of

the people. The attempt to express their opinions had resulted in a mutual dialogue that kept both the respondents and I constantly thinking, and making sense of the notion of the symbolic systems in the Ghanaian cultural arts and interpreting the meanings embedded in them. The interpretations were done in relation to the social significance, as well as historical and aesthetic orientations of the symbol systems in Ghanaian cultural activities.

Involving the interview respondents in mutual dialogues had also rendered the interview sessions very revealing. Certain pieces of information which were revealed through dialogue would not have been brought up by other means. For instance, a question like: "What is the purpose (or relevance) of this artistic expression?" was always first answered with the statement: "It is a part of the culture, it has been there since the time of our fore-fathers. However, asking a follow up question such as: "Why or how has it become a part of the culture?" or "What does it do to make the activity in which it is involved meaningful?" often resulted in favourable responses. Thus, within such a conversational atmosphere, most respondents became deeply involved in thinking as they tried to reflect on the things they had always taken for granted in their cultural lives in order to arrive at the "right" answers to the questions, or tangible explanations of events and situations in their own cultural practices. Sometimes counter questions from respondents seeking clarification of a question led to even deeper and more collaborative conversation situations enabling, and encouraging each respondent to invest more than a passing interest in the study. Rather than being just a giver of information, he or she

became somehow a "co-investigator" of the cultural arts working with me to build up data for the study.

The interviews were recorded on audio cassette tapes. Hand-written notes and observer's comments were jotted down in a field notebook alongside the tape recordings made during both my actual partaking in the cultural arts events and the in-depth interviews sessions. The notes were used as a reminder indicating to me the kinds of gestures and actions that were done by respondents during interviews and the observed activities. I also kept a journal in which my experiences in the research field were recorded on a daily basis. It was to remind me of my shortcomings and successes during previous interview sessions, so as to enable me to prepare appropriately for the upcoming ones. Some cultural activities and artifacts were photographed. Video recordings were also made where I was granted permission to do so. While most communal activities were allowed to be video recorded freely, there were restrictions to recording certain activities that are associated with religious and cult practices. On the whole, the field notes, the daily journal entries, the photographs, and the video tapes, have each provided me with some form of perspective from which to review, transcribe, understand, collate, and interpret the research findings.

### **Facilities in the Research Field**

Apart from Centres for National Culture and courts of traditional chiefs' palaces, the following facilities were also made use of in the research field:

- The Department of African Studies, University of Ghana, Accra.



- School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Accra.
- Ghana National Museum, Accra.
- The Department of African Art History, and library of the College of Art of the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.
- The Cultural Research Centre, Manhyia Palace, Kumasi.

### **Tools and Equipment Used**

These include: a tape recorder, audio cassette tapes, earphones, and batteries; a video camera and video cassettes; a camera and films; field notebooks and diaries; and pens and highlighters.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was commenced in the research field as an ongoing part of the data collection process. The respondents depended entirely on their memory and personal experiences as a result of participating in the cultural arts as a part of the way they live. Also, because of the dialogical conversational approach adopted for the interviews, the responses were long and rather open-ended. This led to the resulting amount of data from each interview becoming enormous. It became apparent that the work of transcribing was obviously going to be cumbersome, and rather too complex for convenient handling, if the recorded responses from different interviews were to be compiled. To avoid this problem, each interview tape was selectively transcribed immediately after the interview session, and the content organized by categories. This

involved translating units of the data, that is, the interview responses and other forms of respondent information (gestures and other body languages), to the categories identified as data topics, namely: the name, meaning, and functions of works of art or artistic symbols. Contents of the interview responses were assigned to these predetermined categories by means of charting. The chart was made up of three columns. In the first column was recorded the names of artworks and symbols identified during the interview. The second column embraced the interpretations of those artworks and symbols, and the third column, their functions or social relevance (i.e. the circumstances or events in which they are used). The table that follows illustrates how the interview responses were categorized.

Fig. 3: A Chart Showing How the Interview Responses were Categorised.

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE SYMBOL OR ARTIFACT?	INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	FUNCTIONS: HOW IS IT USED? (SOCIAL RELEVANCE OR SIGNIFICANCE)
1.....	1.....	1.....
2.....	2.....	2.....
3.....	3.....	3.....

The validity of the contents of the interviews was verified in two different ways. First, I reviewed the content of interview responses with the respondents. This was done through organizing a second meeting with each group (team) of respondents. I read the coded information to the interview respondents for their confirmation of the transcribed

data, which served as occasions for me and the respondents to reflect on the ongoing record of the interview transcript. Second, since the respondents depended mainly on their memory and personal experiences in responding to the interview questions, the salient points raised by both individuals and groups of respondents were compared with each other. This was to clarify and corroborate the similarities, commonalities, and differences among the pieces of information obtained. What became apparent was that the similarities in the responses had so much outweighed the differences that any notable differences were so small as to be safely disregarded. That is to say that the interpretations and explanations of similar artworks or symbolic expressions by a group of respondents of one research zone almost always tallied with those obtained from respondents of another zone. Any differences noted occurred not as conflicting views, but rather as extensions to viewpoints raised by other respondents. This can be attributed to the ways in which things are explained in different languages and dialects.

The results of this comparison were, in turn, integrated with the findings from my actual partaking in Ghanaian cultural activities and from casual interactions with the local participants. This was meant to clarify the similarities and/or commonalities between the verbal information and what pertains in actual practice, in order to ascertain the validity and integrity of the data obtained. A critical examination of the data gathered through this process reveals that Ghanaian cultural practices are not intrinsically identical in all traditional and tribal areas throughout the country. There are several traditional and tribal groups in Ghana, each with its own language or dialect. Certain processes and procedures, as well as materials adopted for certain customary activities, also vary from

one traditional area to the other. However, the cultural practices and their associated symbolic artistic expressions in almost all the traditional areas tend to have much in common. This can be seen in the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the various types of customary practices and artistic expressions.

A typical example is the ideal determining that child out-dooring (also known as child-naming) ceremonies take place on the eighth day after birth. This is explained as a rite of acceptance of the child as a full member of the community, having survived all seven days of the week. The functioning of these ideological principles is also evident in other rites of passage, such as puberty, marriage, and funeral ceremonies. It is particularly evident in such social activities as recreational, festival, and religious practices which have given birth to traditional cultural symbols, their meanings, and purposes. Another observable similarity in Ghanaian cultural practices lie in the fact that all the traditional areas place strong emphasis on promoting communal living among members of the community, through the participation in customary rites and ceremonies in traditional life. The commonalities and similarities in the philosophies and ideologies behind cultural practices can be attributed to the fact that there is a constant social, economic, and political interaction between the traditional areas and tribal groups. They all borrow and share various aspects and items of cultural material with one another.

The obtained data was collated and presented in light of the research objectives, using a qualitative descriptive and interpretive process. The object of qualitative description and interpretation is to develop a narrative that lays bare the meanings of daily existence of the researched. Since the objective of the documentary part of the

study is to interpret the symbolic artistic forms in the Ghanaian culture, the task of data interpretation involved locating the artistic elements in the culture that come under symbolic interpretation. This was followed by grouping all the elements that needed to be interpreted together -- basic elements of art such as line, shape, colour and others, textile elements, pottery elements, sculptural elements, and so on, all elements without which the general articulation about the works of art would be impossible or incomplete. Their meanings and socio-cultural ramifications were also determined. As part of the interpretive process, specific examples of particular artistic expressions have been cited with reference to specific tribes or traditional areas. Some selected examples of the described symbolic art forms are also illustrated by means of drawings and photographs.

The next chapter is devoted to describing the indigenous conceptions of art as held by the Ghanaian people and their attitudes towards their cultural arts.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **INDIGENOUS GHANAIAN CONCEPTIONS OF ART**

By conceptions of art is meant the general constructs, notions, or ideas held by Ghanaians about the arts and their attitudes towards them. Among the people of Ghana, art is of a piece with the rest of their social structure. Thus, any discussions regarding art in the Ghanaian context requires an understanding of the Ghanaian people's attitude towards art, as one of the many elements which make up the ethos of their social network. In other words, it is expedient to determine the way the people themselves regard their artistic works in relation to their ways of life. It requires a comprehensive knowledge of what the term, 'art' is to the people, what experts of the Ghanaian society believe art is to Ghanaians, as well as the nature of their art forms. Such a knowledge will be a great asset to comprehending what the arts mean to the people, how they value their arts, and how these arts function in their socio-cultural setting. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to explain the Ghanaian people's attitudes towards the arts they make and perform, that is, how they value these arts along with their place in the lives of the people. The types, nature, and general characteristics of the arts, the influence of religious beliefs on the arts, and the artistic traditions and stylistic conventions observed by the artist are also discussed in relation to the Ghanaian social context. Other elements dealt with in this chapter include notions of beauty in the arts, the artist, and some

important taboos associated with art-making in the Ghanaian traditional setting. Also, some premises of aesthetics are discussed, comparing and contrasting Modern Western (formalist) and non-Western notions of beauty (aesthetic values) in art.

The broad picture of what is presented about the Ghanaian cultural arts in this chapter is as perceived from the anthropological and ethnographic points of view. The bulk of the information comes from interviews with artists-in-residence of Centres of National Culture, experts on Ghanaian culture among elders of traditional councils of selected traditional areas of Ghana, priests and priestesses of the cult, and members of the Ghanaian general public. To some extent, the presentation of ideas is based on my (researcher's) own knowledge and experience as a member of the Ghanaian culture, and also as a result of an extensive research I had conducted into the Ghanaian cultural arts from 1987 to 1990 under the auspices of the Ghana Government textbook programme. Some of the ideas are also borrowed from literature related to the Ghanaian cultural arts, especially those reviewed in Chapter Two. The text that follows is based mainly on the findings of this research study and its presentation is organized to suit the specific objectives of the study.

### **General Ideas and Attitudes Towards the Arts**

Rather than viewing what art is to the Ghanaian in terms of a definition constituting of a particular verbal formation as can be found in a dictionary, what is represented here is an explanation. The intent is to give a concise and specific idea of art as held by the people of Ghana, rather than a single definition that, however valid it

might be, would tend to provide inadequate information about the indigenous Ghanaian concepts of art.

An inquiry into the ideas Ghanaians hold about art reveals that the word 'art' is an alien word reaching Ghana through formal school (Western) education. While the indigenous arts of Ghana have a long complex past, dating back to the beginnings of human life in that part of the world, the conceptual system of the Ghanaian society does not include the word 'art'. Differently put, the languages and dialects of Ghana do not have an appropriate word that can be translated or equated with the word 'art'. This is because the process of art-making is an integral part of the way Ghanaians live. Hence, their creative products are viewed as visual and physical representations that reflect the historical, philosophical, psychological, and spiritual attributes, among others, of the Ghanaian culture. Each creative product or performance is made for one purpose or another in everyday life, and hence, is referred to by its specific name such as a stool, drum, gold weight, jewellery, pot, cloth, and so on.

This, however, does not invalidate the use of the term 'art' for Ghanaian cultural artifacts; the concept of art is embedded in various Ghanaian languages and dialects in some other forms. For instance, there are words in most tribal languages that can be interpreted for the words 'design' or 'decoration', and 'handiwork' or 'handicraft'. The word *Sama*, for example, is used by the Ga, Dangme, and Fante tribes for design, designing, or decoration, *Adbu*, by the Ewe tribe for design, and *Dwini*, by the Twi speaking people. In much the same vein, there is no Ghanaian term that can be literally translated as the word 'artist'. However, there are words that mean crafts-person,



handyman, or artisan: for example, *Ngaalo*, in the Ga language, and *Dwinfo*, in Twi. Also worthy of knowing is the fact that unlike in the Western world where the word 'artist' is generally for persons who perform any of a number of artistic activities, in the Ghanaian context, specific words are used to qualify people in terms of the particular types of art activities in which they are involved such as a weaver (*Onwenefo* -- Twi, *Mamalolo* -- Ga); carver (*Osenfo* -- Twi, *Nigbolo* -- Ga); or metal smith (*Otumfo* -- Twi, *Solo* -- Ga).

A comparison with the dominant theories of art which are more prevalent among today's generation of artists, students of art, and art educators in the West, help to distinguish the Ghanaian conceptual framework of art. In these Modern Western formalist theories, art is viewed as a concept having to do with pure aesthetic contemplation. That is, something to be observed closely for specifically aesthetic pleasure; often, little or no consideration is given to its instrumental or utilitarian aspects. Viewing art from this standpoint separates it from its social and cultural contexts; from the circumstances influencing its production; and from the various purposes and meanings the artist might intend to have for it. Implicitly, therefore, these Modern Western formalist theories remove art from other aspects of life and living, making it stand for its own sake -- "art for art's sake". This view of art is rather narrow in terms of its functions and meanings, and of its place in the life of the people of the culture from which it comes.

The Ghanaian concept of art, on the other hand, is very broadly defined. Rather than art as a concept, Ghanaians view it as a phenomenon that is inseparable from life and living in their entirety. Living to some extent at tribal levels of organization,

Ghanaian people are given to fashioning their arts under the circumstances of tribal life. As in most simple and unspecialized societies, the arts are not an isolated phenomenon from Ghanaian cultural activities. Thus, there is no 'art for art's sake' in Ghana. The arts are always represented as part of the culture; they are linked up with the history of the culture, as well as the history of the Ghanaian people. Therefore, an understanding of the arts of Ghana requires a knowledge of the Ghanaian social and cultural history. Conversely, a great deal of important historical or anthropological understanding about the people of Ghana can be derived by studying the Ghanaian arts.

Art to the Ghanaian, therefore, is conceived as a phenomenal aspect of the human life and condition -- an integral part of the life force -- because each art form performs some specific functions that contribute to the maintenance and sustenance of life and living. For this reason, the Ghanaian draws no distinction between what might be termed "pure art" and "crafts" in the Modern Western sense. To the Ghanaian, all arts and crafts are simply known as arts. The implication here is that all artistic endeavours involve some creative thinking and skill on the part of the artist because art-making is usually strongly inspired by the human condition. For instance, the indigenous Ghanaian artist may be inspired by a desire to cope with or combat the forces of nature, or to express a wise saying, religious ideas, or spiritual experiences.

To the Ghanaian, art is both the product and the skill or process of its production. This implies that the Ghanaian conception of art is not only concerned with the art object, but also with the means, the act of doing or performing the creative activity that gives birth to the object in question. By seeing art not only as an object but also as an

action, the Ghanaian conception of art embraces particular activities that are artfully or artistically performed. Perhaps, it is based on this notion that the Ghanaian views the performing arts as art forms. The ingenuity, skill, and thinking used by the artist are believed to be special endowments from nature upon which all human conditions, experiences, and ideas are predicated. As such, the indigenous artist is normally accorded great respect in his or her community as one who possesses special thinking powers.

These concepts of art are very evident in the way the Ghanaian people use their cultural arts. There is a great deal of interrelatedness, interconnectedness, and interdependence in the way the cultural arts are used. It is very rare that the use or performance of one art form would take place without involving one or more of the others. For instance, music and dance usually take place together, traditional concert (drama and theatre) always includes drumming, singing or chanting, and dancing, while a stool carving process may be preceded by some poetic recitations in the form of libation pouring and prayers. In all cases, the materials and equipment used to accomplish an artistic activity such as the costume worn by the artist, the musical instruments and other items, all belong to the realm of visual arts. Often, different art forms and objects are combined for a purpose: poetry, music, dance, sculptures, and others, may be used simultaneously in the performance of a single ritual. A person doing a ceremonial dance during a durbar of chiefs, that is, a gathering of chiefs and dignitaries during a state function, for example, may wear a special costume, carry in the hand a staff of office, a whisk made from an animal tail, or a ceremonial sword, while performing some symbolic dance movements to drum music.

From this understanding, one can then safely say that the most important fact about Ghanaian arts is that they are not static products but dynamic human activities. As such, they are not created to be stored in the art museum or gallery only to be viewed for aesthetic contemplation and enjoyment, a practice which is purely Western. In Ghana, the arts are seen in a living context: each art form or type of artwork has a content, meaning, and purpose within the Ghanaian cultural context. In other words, each art form has some form of utility: they are made to be touched, handled, applied, carried, and worn during some daily or special cultural activity. The arts are not a privilege for a few people in society, such as connoisseurs who have the economic and social means to patronise art, or to produce art according to their taste for exhibition in museums and galleries or to promote concerts, orchestras, and other performances for their own personal ends.

An anthropological study of art demonstrates that in most cultures where art is integral or contiguous with living, art is created because of genuine personal and social urgencies (Feldman, 1970). As such, occasions for art-making occur in the conditions of daily life. As in other cultures where art is integral to other aspects of life, art-making among Ghanaians on the traditional level has been inspired by human needs, fears, and aspirations. The design and application of the arts in cooperative activities -- festivals, rites of passage, politics and warfare, work, recreation, sports, and others -- provide evidence for this assertion.

Because the arts are used in the living context, all members of the Ghanaian community participate in one art form or another, either as performers or witnesses. This

is especially true during community events such as child-naming, puberty initiation, funeral, festival, and recreational activities. During a festival or recreational activity, for instance, the whole community may come together to drum, sing, and dance without hindrance to anybody. In the same way, in the event that a member of the community loses a relative through death, the whole group may come together to perform, as an expression of their solidarity with the bereaved. All these activities may involve individual artistic expressions; however, ceremonial festivities are the most important opportunities for displaying what may be called the regalia of the Ghanaian artistic heritage. For example, observing a Ghanaian chief sitting in state during a ceremonial festival, one can witness the spectacle of costumes and bodily adornments, royal stools and skins, state umbrellas and swords, staffs of office, musical displays, symbolic dance movements, performance of libationary prayers, recitation of poems, dirges, or appellations. In effect, the observer is face to face with a "museum" of the art history of Ghana.

To sum up, it seems the most important fact about the Ghanaian people's conceptions of their indigenous arts lies in their view of the arts as being a bona fide part of their social and cultural fabric. By not separating the arts from their tribal lives, Ghanaian people use their arts as a device for expressing and portraying their most cherished cultural values. Thus, to them, the making and performing of the arts is a cultural behaviour. Being the basis of cultural behaviour, the arts serve as a cohesive force that holds together the components of the Ghanaian culture.

Given this explanation of the Ghanaian people's conceptions of their cultural arts, it is clear that the most appropriate definition of the word 'art' in Ghanaian terms is predicated upon the various purposes and uses for which art is made. Serving as the mirror through which the Ghanaian culture is reflected, an identification of the purposes and uses of the arts as components of the culture, brings us to a concise definition of art to the Ghanaian. Using an anthropological definition for artifacts typically made and used by tribal societies such as Ghana, Feldman (1970) portrays the arts as a device for "... recording experiences, communicating information, perpetuating traditions, displaying wealth, entertaining the community, invoking gods and departed spirits, protecting individuals against illness and catastrophe, promoting fertility, averting death in childbirth, building courage in war, renewing the life of the departed, facilitating passage from one condition to another" (p. 13). It is this practical usefulness of art -- its role in promoting cooperative activities among the people as a means of sustaining the life force, and in helping them to locate themselves within a particular culture, that foster in them an awareness of their cultural identity.

### **Indigenous Ghanaian Religious Beliefs and Their Influences on the Arts**

One important socio-cultural characteristic of the indigenous arts of Ghana is that they are ultimately connected and entwined with religion. Religious consciousness has been one of the principal factors inspiring art-making and usage in Ghana. Therefore, a discussion of the religious beliefs and practices in relation to the arts will throw some amount of light on the importance of the social functions of the arts. It will also lead to

an understanding of the circumstances leading to the development of certain art forms in Ghana. A large proportion of the indigenous Ghanaian arts are still used in religious activities today, as was the case many years ago. Most of the information on Ghanaian religious beliefs and their influences on art-making among indigenous Ghanaian artists has been provided by Dr. Dogbe of the Department of African Art History, College of Art, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

For the early Ghanaians, life and living experiences have created an awareness of the fact that the environment in which Ghanaians live is controlled by certain supernatural or divine forces. This shows a strong belief in divinities. The Ghanaian believes that these forces intervene in the lives and activities of human beings and, therefore, are capable of determining the fate of humankind either partially or wholly. These supernatural forces are believed to be manifest in such divine entities as the sun, moon, fire, rain, and storm. It is these supernatural forces which are responsible for controlling climate and weather. They provide light and warmth for good health and safety in life, as well as water, which, in turn, brings with it fertility in humans, animals, and the soil. Hence these forces are the major sustainers of the life force in all living organisms -- humans, animals, trees, and crops.

A need or desire of human beings to relate to and to bring these supernatural forces under their control, has led to the creation of certain religious practices among Ghanaians. These practices are manifest in rituals such as prayers, meditation (and miming), worship, sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies to evoke the spiritual powers of the supernatural forces to guide and help human beings to adjust to their environment.

Rituals are also practised to resist and suppress supernatural forces such as strong storms which are hostile to the environment. The desire to practice these rituals in an effective manner has resulted in the development of various religious ideas and activities among Ghanaians.

Traditionally, the Ghanaian believes that the spiritual powers working within the supernatural forces are manifested in them by God, the creator and owner of the universe to whom must be paid great reverence. The all powerful and knowledgeable God is omnipresent; that is, He is present everywhere at the same time. As such, He cannot be kept in confinement and, therefore, needs no figurative representation to act as His abode or shrine, except for the mediating spirits between Him and humans. As a custom, Ghanaians do not speak directly to their chiefs in public, but through linguists. In like manner, they deem it impolite to worship or pray to God directly, but through the means of mediating spirits, the most prominent of these being their ancestral spirits. This is, thus, the basis of the practice of ancestral veneration among Ghanaians.

The veneration of ancestral spirits is motivated by the belief that the forefathers of the human race had been endowed with special powers by God which enabled them to found human societies and families. As a result of their special powers, these ancestors had lived very close to nature. After death, their spirits have been acting as intermediaries between God and the human societies they had founded. The ancestral spirits are believed to be helping the living in all their endeavours and aspirations. Prayers are offered through them to God, and in turn, they bring back from God answers to the prayers. At the same time, they have the power to punish the living when they go



wrong. Various forms of sacrifices are, therefore, offered at periodic intervals, to honour the ancestors, in appreciation of their services to humans, and to request more help from them. Oral history has it that it is out of these periodic sessions of sacrifices to the ancestral spirits that the various annual festival ceremonies held in Ghana today developed. Shrines and temples (shrine houses as abodes for ancestral spirits) are evident in almost every tribal setting or clan in Ghana.

Diverse forms of art -- music, dance, recitation of dirges and appellations, drum language, costumes, sculptures such as terracotta, wooden, and bronze figurations, state swords, staffs of office -- are used in various ways for ceremonies pertaining to ancestral veneration. Other forms of art used for this purpose include pots, brass containers, state umbrellas, and various forms of body arts (special hairstyles, body marking and body painting and such like). Often, the priests and priestesses who keep the shrines and temples of the ancestral spirits, for example, wear special hairstyles which are usually covered, but are unveiled only during periods of sacrifices and worship; and some have special body markings and scarifications. Most priests, priestesses and special devotees to the various religious deities wear special costumes often made of white calico. Those who become possessed by the deities wear costumes of any colour, sometimes raffia skirts, and they chant special songs accompanied by special dance movements, miming and gestures during religious ceremonies.

There is need to mention, however, that the general belief among the Ghanaian people is that it is not all spirits of the dead who are regarded as ancestors. The spirits of people who in their life time were murderers, robbers, drunkards, pedophiles, rapists,

lazy, and such like, do not become ancestors because they have been social misfits. Others who are not regarded as ancestors include people who suffer and die from leprosy, epilepsy or dropsy, lunacy, tuberculosis, and small pox, which are regarded as dreadful and unclean diseases. People who die tragic deaths through suicides, accidents, or other forms of violent deaths, are thought of as not having completed their full life-span on earth, and therefore, their spirits cannot become ancestors. Also, the spirit of a chief or tribal head who has been deposed for misconduct, or whose reign is associated with marked mishaps in the lives of the people, such as war, epidemics, drought, hunger and the like, does not become an ancestor. It is tabooed to include his or her name in state ceremonial songs and appellations or in the dirges sung at royal funerals. Death at child birth on the part of women is dreaded as an abomination to the society as a whole. In some Ghanaian societies, the bodies of such people are buried in isolated cemeteries, or places designated for the purpose, known as 'evil forests'. Also buried in isolated cemeteries of their own are the bodies of leprosy patients because they are considered to be unclean. The spirits of such people are believed to be barred from entering into the ancestral world. In contrast, there is a special resting place for the spirits of cultural heroes and heroines whose ways of life on earth have been worthy of emulation, and are, as a result, qualified to be ancestors. Before a person becomes an ancestor, he or she must have lived to a ripe old age, and must have died a good (natural) death. The souls of those that are barred from entering into the ancestral world do not have any resting place, and hence, hover around as evil spirits, and are always associated with causing

misfortunes and disasters. The benevolent spirits of the ancestors are, thus, honoured through sacrifices and worship to prompt them to suppress the activities of the evil ones.

Animism is another form of indigenous religious practice among Ghanaians which has greatly influenced their art-making and usage. It is a belief in the existence of divine spirits in natural physical phenomena -- trees, rivers, and rocks -- which occupy them as their abodes. It is also believed that some ancestral spirits find their abodes in some of these items. At the same time, these natural phenomena are the principal sources from which materials such as clay, wood, and others are obtained for the moulding and carving of ancestral figures. The use of the arts in animism is similar to the way they are used in ancestral worship.

An important belief that has greatly influenced art-making and usage in the traditional setting of Ghana is totemism. The idea of totemism designates a practice in which a human group such as family, clan, tribe, or state develops a special friendship with animals. As a result of a special admiration developed by the human group for the particular species of animal's natural tendencies and qualities, they accord it great respect and adopt it to be their totem. A totem as applied here is, therefore, an animal or a bird used as an emblem of a human group, or a representation of such an animal serving as the distinctive mark by which a particular human group identifies itself.

Totemism has influenced art-making in various ways in Ghana. Where a tribe has a number of totem clans, each clan carves the image of its totem in wood and covers it in gold or silver leaf, or casts it in bronze and plates it in gold. These images, which are often associated with wise sayings and proverbs expressing the values and aspirations of

their respective clans, are normally attached to the hilts of ceremonial state swords, or to the tops of state umbrellas and staffs of office used in various socio-cultural ceremonies. Such images are carved also as the main bodies of stools serving as the thrones of the chiefs of clans, tribes, or states, especially in the southern half of the country. Chiefs of tribes in the Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana use the skin of their tribes' totems as seats (their thrones). The clan members of some tribal groups, especially the Fante, make large concrete sculptures of their totems to decorate the facades and courtyards of the clan's headquarters, known as *Prama Paado*. They also draw or print the image of the totem in flags or banners to be displayed during community activities and ceremonies. Images of totems are also sometimes carved on musical instruments, particularly drums, and some clans sing the names and descriptions of the qualities and natural tendencies of their totems in traditional *Asafo* songs during ceremonial occasions. Not infrequently, in dancing, some people may personify their totems by wearing costumes and performing dance movements and miming that are designed to dramatize or symbolize the characteristics of the species to which their totemic animal belongs. This is done to portray the legends of their clans.

Totemism has been regarded by some writers on tribal arts as a form of religion associated with ancestral worship, indicating that people who live at tribal levels consider their totems as kinsmen or the ancestors of their families or clans. Oral history shows, however, that this is not correct. Personal experience as a member of the Ghanaian culture shows that almost all clans and tribes throughout Ghana have one or more totems. It also shows that the belief in totemism does not imply considering the animals as

kinsmen or relatives, but only as friends. According to legend, since the subsistence of the earliest human beings depended essentially on hunting animals, they had learned a great deal about wildlife. They had learned about many qualities of various animals, and saw many qualities that they cherished in human nature, as well as in the animals they hunted. These qualities include high levels of sensitivity to danger, cunningness, strength, stamina, speed, and various forms of defensive mechanisms, which are very admirable and worthy of emulation by humans. This admiration had aroused a desire to imitate and appropriate the names of the animals which displayed the types of qualities and tendencies they cherished most.

In this way, families, clans, or even whole tribes chose certain animals to be their friends, and thus, had taken to refraining from killing and eating them, however much the group relished their meat. Once an animal has been chosen, its whole species becomes a friend to the clan. Other clans would treat other animals likewise and soon whole tribes were divided into groups who considered themselves friends with various animal species. By adopting an animal for a totem, members of a clan are expected to look on its species as a sort of role-model, and thus, aspire to attain its natural qualities. Underlying this notion is the aim to bring about oneness in thoughts and in deeds among a clans-people, a means of building a strong unity and cooperative basis for the clan. Like a national flag by which a country is identified, the totem or its image acts as a symbol or an emblem by which a clan or tribal group can be identified among other groups. Being a friend, a totem is not considered as a deity to worship, therefore, no sacrifices are offered to it.

## **Types, Nature, and Characteristics of the Ghanaian Arts**

The geographical location occupied by a people coupled with their general attitudes to life have profound implications for the arts they make. The geographical location is responsible for the types of materials available for art-making, while the people's attitudes to life provide the philosophical or ideological basis for their artworks -- the rationale for making the arts the way they do. These are the basic factors responsible for the nature of the arts of any particular epoch. There are three major forms or categories of indigenous arts practised in Ghana, namely, the visual, performing, and verbal arts.

### **The Visual Arts**

The indigenous Ghanaian arts, like the arts of other tribal settings, are a result of the types of materials available within the geographical area occupied by the people of Ghana. The materials with which the artist or crafts-person in the traditional setting works include vegetable fibres and dyes, clay, wood, bone, ivory, stone, animal hide and leather, rattan, bamboo, calabash and gourd, seeds, metals such as iron, silver, bronze, brass, and gold. The types of art made are as follows:

#### **Textiles**

Materials for textiles include vegetable (plant) fibres and dyes. Weaving, dyeing, printing, and applique are the major textile making activities in the Ghanaian traditional setting. Textile weaving products include various types of *Kente* and *Batakari* which are

woven in narrow strips and sewn together to any desired width. Weaving is more widely done by the people of Bonwere and Agbozume in the Ashanti and Volta Regions, respectively, and also, in the Northern and Upper Regions more than any other parts of Ghana. Dyeing of textiles involves yarn dyeing to enable the weaver to introduce colour into the structure of a fabric being woven. Plain, white cotton cloths are dyed into various colours to enhance their surfaces on to which patterns or motifs would be stamped manually. The designs used in traditional cloth printing are composed from indigenous Ghanaian pictographic forms known as *Adinkra* motifs. Applique is the term applied to the process of sewing pieces of textile cut into shapes or motifs on to an already-woven textile base to form patterns of patchwork. This practice of art-making is particularly important in attaching bundles of medicine (talismans) to the war costumes known as *Batakari Kesie* worn by warrior leaders.

### **Pottery**

This is an important art-making activity reserved for women only. The clay is processed manually, the pots are hand built using the rolling, pinching, and pulling processes, and are fired by the open firing method. Products of pottery making include cooking pots, dishes for grinding vegetables, pots for fetching water from the river, pots for storing water, and pots for storing cooking oil and drinks such as palm wine (*Nsafufuo, Kotse, Deha, or Odoka*), *Ngmaadaa* or *Ekudeme*, and *Pito*. A very important example of pottery product is the Ashanti pot for relics known as *Abusua Kuruwa*.

Among the traditional pottery makers, women of the Kwahu district make more household utensils than their counterparts in other parts of the country.

### **Sculpture**

A large proportion of the visual arts is in the area of sculpture. Some materials used for sculpture are wood, ivory, bone, stone, calabash and gourd, clay, and metals such as iron, silver, bronze, brass, and gold. Sculptural activities includes carving, modelling, smithing, and casting. Some examples of carvings are stools, state ceremonial swords, proverbial symbolic tops for staffs of office and state umbrellas, fertility (*Akuaba*) dolls, walking sticks, canoes, and *Adinkra* fabric printing stamps. Others include musical instruments such as drums, flutes and horns; and household objects, for example, ladles, Fufu mortars and pestles, basins, combs, and snuff boxes among others. Products of clay modelling are mainly in the form of terracotta funerary heads (or figures) and sacrificial figures. Metal smithing and casting specialize in making gold weights, jewellery, metal pots for storing gold dust and jewellery, as well as forging of tools, and implements. Golden or bronze funerary masks plated in gold are also made by the Ashanti. While sculpture activities are practised everywhere in Ghana, the people of Ntonso in the Ashanti Region are very well known for wood carving.

### **Leatherwork**

Animal hides and skins are the main raw materials for leatherwork among Ghanaian traditional artists and crafts-persons. Leatherwork is more popular in the



Northern half of Ghana where livestock keeping and leather tanning, among others, are major occupations of the people. Leather is also obtained from snakes such as the python and puff adder. It is either used on its own or combined with other art media to produce bags, hats, animal saddles and bridles, musical instruments (membranophones), seats and hassocks, and sandals, particularly, the type called *Oheneba* or *Ahenema*.

### **Basketry**

Various types of baskets, bags, and mats are woven in Ghana. In the forest areas, baskets for various purposes are woven from palm rachis, rattan, and bamboo, which grow in abundance in the tropical rain forest. In the grassland areas, straw grass is used in making bags and mats that have diverse uses. Baskets and mats of various types and purposes are also made from the elephant grass, sedge, bulrush, and coconut branches. The elephant grass mat known as *Zana* is used in building make-shift houses by farmers. These temporary shelters are more popular in the northern half of the country than the south, and are believed to have been invented during the days of nomadic living: a farmer could fold it up and carried it along from one place to another. Today, *Zana* is mostly used in making fences around village houses. The coconut frond mat is also used in building shelters and huts on the beaches of the sea. They are used by fishing crews as protection against the sun while mending their nets, and sometimes as temporary dwellings by those who travel from place to place on fishing expeditions.

### **Beadwork**

Beads are a form of jewellery for adorning the human body. It is used in abundance, especially during puberty and other rites of passage. The type and quality of beads worn by an initiate on such an occasion shows how wealthy the parents are. Various types of beads are made from clay, stone, bone, ivory, gold, silver, copper, shells, wood, and seeds.

### **Calabash and Gourd Work**

Use of the calabash and gourd in making art is an old practice among Ghanaian peoples. Calabash or gourd is an inedible tropical fruit resembling the watermelon: it is rounder in shape with a hard shell-like rind. When cut into two halves, the inner pulp is scooped out and the rind is dried and used as a container or drinking cup. Designs or images are carved or scorched into the rind and hung on walls for decoration. The rind is also carved into motifs and used as blocks for fabric printing.

### **Body Arts**

This involves painting and printing of designs on the human body using colours obtained from plant, rock, and earth sources. It includes various forms of scarification and body marking, and hairdo (coiffure). It is important to note that apart from painting patterns on the human body and on walls, the indigenous artist of Ghana does not paint.

## The Performing Arts

Types of art in the area of the performing arts are music, drama, and dance. Performances of music and dancing with incorporated dramatic activities as recreational and ceremonial activities are a commonplace in various Ghanaian societies.

### Music

Indigenous Ghanaian music is usually in the form of drumming, singing and chanting, and clapping of the hands. Participation in any of these activities, especially those that do not require special skills to perform such as singing and clapping of the hands, is voluntary. Ghanaians use music during festivals, worship, ceremonies, entertainment, child naming and puberty initiation rites, marriage, funeral, and communal labour activities. It may be organized in a street corner, courtyard of the royal palace, town square, market place, or even at the sea shore (fishermen use it to boost their morale while working).

Several types of locally made musical instruments can be identified with Ghanaian musicians in the traditional setting. These can be grouped into four categories. The first category comprises membranophones: these are made up of various types and sizes of drums used in creating diverse forms of pitches or tonal sound combinations. Drums are by far the most widely used musical instruments in Ghana. There are bottle-shaped drums *Atumpan*, cylindrical-shaped drums *Fontomfrom*, barrel-shaped drums *Atsimavu*, double-headed hour glass-shaped drums *Dondo* or *Donno*, and pot-shaped *Tomtom* drums. There are also gourd drums and frame drums with different names in various Ghanaian

languages. Several different techniques are used to bring out the essential tone and rhythmic potentials of each drum: some are played with sticks, others with the hand or fingers or with stick and hand (Nketia, 1965, p. 12). In addition to being used in making music, drums are used to send messages to summon members of a community together for meetings. They are also used in giving warning signals, as well as for heralding the approach and departure of important personalities and dignitaries to and from ceremonial gatherings. Speeches or important memorable sayings and clan, tribal, and state mottos or slogans are also translated into drum language and played on talking drums.

A second category of musical instruments embraces idiophones (percussion instruments) which are very widely used in combination with drums. They include metal gongs, castanets, gourd rattles, and stick or bamboo clappers. Frequently, the sounds of idiophones are augmented by hand clapping and the noise of bells, jingles, and buzzers worn on the ankles of a dancer as a result of stamping the feet. Gongs are also used by indigenous Ghanaian announcers to give signals when broadcasting news items where there is no need for members of a community to be summoned to a gathering. Unlike the above-mentioned types of idiophones, which are non-melodic, the xylophone is one type that is used in making melodious music. It consists of a series of flat wooden bars placed side by side over gourd resonators arranged in a graduated order from small to large, and held together by a wooden framework. The wooden bars, which may range from fourteen to eighteen in number, act as the keys and are struck with two gum-shod drum sticks to make melody.

The third category, aerophones or wind instruments, are comprised of elephant tusk horns and bamboo flutes *Ateteben*. In dance music, horns and flutes are played to provide background melody for drums, percussions, and other musical instruments. During ceremonies, however, horn sounds are used to provide background sounds for the human voice during the recitation of appellations and dirges. Among the people of Adukrom in the Akwapim District, for instance, a horn known as *Anadwo Sekan* is played to punctuate the statements of libation pouring and other rituals associated with annual stool purification festivals. During the night of the final rites of the *Ngmayem* festival of the Krobo tribe, the sound of a horn warns people to keep off the path followed by the High Priest of the cult and his entourage while performing rituals to purify the community, as it is believed that whoever meets them would be met with misfortunes, or even death. The elephant tusk horn is an important part of the royal regalia: in some Ghanaian communities it follows the chief during all his official outings. It is either used on its own, usually in an ensemble or orchestra of seven elephant tusk horns called *Ntamera* or *Mbenson (Mmenson)*, or in combination with drum language to announce and herald the arrival and departure of the chief. In Ashanti, it is used for the waking up ceremony of the chief at dawn. It is also used as a signal to announce the death of an important person in society, and during the solemn funeral occasions for nobility. Among the Frafra tribe, *Bummaworowa*, a long wooden horn is carved for funeral purposes only, and is blown only at funerals of elderly men (Nketia, 1965).

Ghanaian musical instruments also include chordophones (stringed instruments). Chordophones are not as widely used in Ghanaian music as the other instruments

mentioned above. They are popular only among the Talensi, Dagomba, and other tribes in the Northern and Upper Regions of the country. A typical example is the lute. It is in the form of a single-stringed guitar with a long, wooden fretted neck attached to a half gourd covered with animal skin from which the sound is resonated.

### **Dance**

Like music, there are different types of dance patterns, involving various forms of body movements. They range from very slow and simple through fast, vigorous, intricate, and complex movements. The *Dipo* nobility rite dance, for example, incorporates slow and graceful but intricate movement of the legs and arms. The body is tilted slightly forward as the dancers make forward, backward, and sideways movements in a graceful and elegant fashion. In contrast, such dances as *Kpatsa*, *Adowa*, *Kpanlogo*, *Kete*, *Takai*, and some others, involve complex organizations of basic footsteps in combination with simultaneous movements of various parts of the body, facial expressions and hand gestures. In these dances, as the feet are worked according to the beat and rhythm of the music, the body is also swayed and tilted in various ways in short intermittent movements. At the same time, the expression on the face is changed in diverse ways to show various sentiments or emotions and feelings, while the arms, hands, and head may be swung at a different pace.

There are some Ghanaian dances in which movement of certain parts of the human body tend to be more emphasized than others. This can be attributed not only to the dance type but also to the norms that a particular tribal group or dance ensemble

chooses to follow in their dance. Instead of involving movement of the whole body, some dance patterns, as in *Kple*, *Klama*, *Me*, and *Gume* of the Ga-Dangme, *Akom* of the Akan, and *Dea* of the Frafra tribes, emphasize more leg and hip movements than other parts of the body. Associated with such dances are elements of knee raising, intricate footwork, and leg gestures. In other types of dance forms, such as the *Agbadza* and *Atsiagbeko*, of the Ewe and the *Nyindogo* dance of the Dagbani tribes, the emphasis is on the movement of the upper part of the body. Usually, they involve rhythmic contracting and releasing of the shoulder blades, and upward and downward movements of the shoulders, along with the arms which are bent at the elbow.

Often incorporated into these basic movements are elements of shaking, limping, stamping, rotating, summersaulting, leaping, tumbling, stooping, and short intermittent running. According to Nketia (1965), some of these dance elements, also comprise the main characteristics or basic movements of some particular dance types, by which those dance types can be identified. Such elements include:

*Shaking*, as in *Bamaya* and *Nyindogo* dances of the Dagbani in which ripples of the body are emphasized;  
*Stamping*, a characteristic of the indigenous dances [*Kpaashimo*] of the Ga . . . [and the *Dea* dance of the Frafra people];  
*Stooping or squatting*, as in *Bawaa* dance of the Dagaba;  
*Leaping*, also a characteristic of some of the dances of the Dagaba;  
*Lifting*, as in the *Lua* dance of the Dagbani; [and]  
*Tumbling*, as in *Goglo* dance performed in the Bongo [tribal] area of Northern Ghana (Nketia, 1965, p.18).

The *Asafo*, a ceremonial war dance performed by the Ahanta, Fante, Efutu, and Ewutu are usually characterized by a combination of leaping, stooping, tumbling, and

summersaulting, apparently to demonstrate the agility and aggressive nature of the warrior in a fighting mood.

### **Drama**

In the Ghanaian traditional setting, drama differs considerably from the Western form of play for the theatre. Its organization takes on the form of enactment, demonstration, or miming of certain social, historical, and philosophical traditions. Drama is performed in a variety of ways through many activities of Ghanaian social life. The behaviours associated with the customary rites and formalities that go with the induction or deposition of chiefs and queenmothers, ordination of priests and priestesses for the cult, worship and sacrificial activities, all have dramatic orientation. Drama is also evident in the behaviours associated with the traditions and formalities involved in heralding the arrival and departure of important personalities to and from ceremonial grounds. It reveals itself in the formal enactment of tribal or state historical events and traditions such as commemorative festival activities. Drama occurs in the performance of funeral rites, particularly where the living members of a professional group, such as a fishermen's association, are paying last respects to their deceased member by enacting some fishing activities through miming. Additionally, an organization of symbolic dance movements where a dancer performs an enactment of his or her lived experiences and thoughts through miming or other meaningful gestural expressions, also takes on a dramatic form.



Nketia (1965) distinguishes between three closely related types of drama in relation to the various ways in which drama is expressed in Ghanaian social life. There is the type of drama that occurs on ceremonial occasions, which can be termed ceremonial drama. It has to do with the acts that are involved with the performance of formalities and traditions that go with the roles of particular statuses or offices in society. There are roles for chiefs and queenmothers, High Priests and Priestesses of the cult, mediums of deities, and heads of warrior groups. Usually, the performing of the acts of these roles takes the form of rituals which follow certain definite routines.

The second dramatic type is narrative drama. It is found in the expressive acts that accompany the recitation of poetic verses in appellations and funeral dirges to convey the mood of the occasion, or during a storytelling process to portray the characters in the story. Recitation of appellations and dirges, as well as storytelling, are an important forms of social interaction among Ghanaians. Dramatic expressions in narrative drama are manifest in the spontaneous actions, gestures, and body movements that take place in the course of a recital or narrative process. This means that in narrative drama, it is the narrator who does the narration and dialogue, and at the same time, demonstrates the acts that express the idea, mood, or character being portrayed. In storytelling, for instance, he or she portrays the character's mode of speaking by imitating the tone of voice and peculiar accents, choice of words, and style of expressing ideas. In so doing, the narrator employs certain accompanying gestures, body movements, and facial expressions to show the particular impressions he or she wishes to convey. Often, a story is interjected with a statement of unbelief from a member of the audience. Such

interjections are usually followed up with music to cause the narrator to briefly dramatise some interesting episodes in the story through miming. The narrator continues with the trend of the story after each interruption until he or she is done.

The third form of dramatic expression in the Ghanaian arts is dance drama. The emphasis here is on expressing of oneself in pantomime -- the use of expressive movements, gestures, or actions in dance to convey emotions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences without speech, but often to the accompaniment of music. Like narrative drama, a dance drama is usually performed to convey the mood of an occasion, such as happiness, love, fear, sorrow, restlessness, joy, and such like.

Normally, the three types of performing arts discussed above occur together. For instance, in storytelling, one can combine certain musical types with dance and drama, as these are often used to dramatise some aspects of the story being told. In some cases, especially in small communities, getting together to perform is a spontaneous process. Such events are an integral part of everyday life, and are open to the public, but often, people interested in them come together to form groups or clubs which meet at convenient times to perform for their own enjoyment (Nketia, 1965).

Musical and dance groups can be found throughout Ghana, specializing in various traditional musical types and dance patterns. Examples of these types are the *Osoode*, *Adenkum*, *Apatrampa*, *Adzewa*, and many others, in the Fante tribal areas. Those in the Ga-Dangme tribal area are *Kpatsa*, *Sonti*, *Gume*, *Kpanlogo*, *Kolomashi*, *Oduma*, *Atsang*, and *Akpasa*. Groups in Ewe communities specialize in *Agbadza*, *Tsiagbeko (Atsiagbeko)*, *Kete*, *Boboobo (Boborbor)*, and *Akpese*. Some examples in the Twi speaking areas

include *Asaadua*, while groups in the Northern and Upper Regions are identified with *Dambi*, *Jongo*, *Takai*, *Bamaya*, *Gumbe*, *Dea*, and *Bawaa*. These are but a few selected examples of indigenous Ghanaian musical and dance types. All these are recreational groups which perform at informal occasions and community leisure times.

There are other musical, dance, and drama types which are performed only during ceremonial occasions such as festivals, durbar of chiefs, and instalment of new chiefs and queenmothers. These include the *Adowa* and *Fontomfrom* among the Akan tribes, and *Obonu* and *Ogbee* among the Ga-Dangme. Some of the recreational types mentioned above such as *Takai*, *Bamaya*, *Agbadza*, and *Atsiagbeko*, are also organized at state ceremonial functions. There are certain musical, dance, and drama types which are strictly for ritual purposes. Examples are the *Dipo* or *Otufo* and *Ashimi* used during girls' puberty initiation rites of the Ga-Dangme tribes, and twin birth celebrations. Other types like the *Klama*, *Me*, *Okpli*, and *Akom*, are strictly for religious purposes, performed by priests and priestesses of the cult when possessed by the spirits of deities.

### **The Verbal Arts**

Ghanaian verbal art forms could be understood as Ghanaian peoples' distinctive ways of expression in words. Mythology, folktale (storytelling), riddles, and libation prayers are some of the major verbal art forms in Ghana. Apart from these, there are also other modes of verbal expression which take on poetical forms. While there is no written evidence of their heritage in poetry, the Ghanaian people, in their various traditional ways, often engage in diverse forms of verbal expression that share the

poetical qualities of rhythm, superimposition, and fusion of ideas common to poetry of other peoples of the world (Antobam, 1963).

Indigenous poetic tradition in Ghana shows itself through three different forms. It is presented through the medium of speech; through messages played on talking drums, otherwise known as drum language; and through verses played on elephant tusk horns. Each of these three forms of poetry presentation is either employed on its own, or in combination with one or both of the others, depending on the importance of the occasion. A state festival, ancestral stool purification rites, a ceremony of a durbar of chiefs, the funeral rites of a royal or an important person in society, for example, are occasions that call for such combinations. Ordinary occasions, such as child naming or nubility rites, involve only the verbal aspect of poetical presentation.

Ghanaian poetical tradition comprises a vital aspect of the social life of the people aimed at expressing some of their social, historical, and philosophical ideas about life and living. Poetic recitations occur in several customary practices such as libation prayers, which in themselves are a bona fide part of most social gatherings. They also reveal themselves in twin birth celebration verses, lullaby (verses in child lulling songs), nubility or puberty initiation verses, cult or religious lyrical verses, appellation or royal exaltation (praise) verses, and in funeral dirges. Antobam (1963) has observed that poetry also shows up in speeches in such state ceremonies and festivals as *Adae* of the Ashanti, *Homowo* of the Ga, *Kundum* of the Nzema, *Ohum* of the Akyem, *Odwira* of the Akuapem and Akwamu, and *Aguaseto* of the Wasa and Fante Ghanaians (p. 136). Some other tribal festivals of Ghana not mentioned here, but whose ceremonies employ poetic

traditions, are *Hogbetsotso* and *Glidzi* of the Ewe, and *Damba* of the Dagomba, the Wala, the Gonja, the Nanumba, and some other tribes of the Northern and Upper Regions. Antobam further contends that the drum language, the verse of the *Ntamera* (elephant tusk horn orchestra), the *Odurugya* or *Ateteben* (flute sayings), and folk songs, all offer a great source of oral literature, which needs to be recorded to form the beginnings of literary scholarship in indigenous Ghanaian poetry.

### **Indigenous Ghanaian Artistic Traditions and Stylistic Conventions in the Visual Arts**

The integration of works of art into the social fabric, particularly in the religious life of the people, has led to the development of certain traditions in art-making among indigenous Ghanaian artists. In other words, there are certain standards of craftsmanship, conceptions of form and beauty, and stylistic conventions which are followed by artists during art-making. Working within the framework of those artistic conventions and traditions, the artist strives to portray the essential elements of culture that are responsible for the visible forms that characterize indigenous Ghanaian works of art. It is also as a result of the efforts of the artist to achieve this objective that has led to development of some particular methods, techniques, or manner of operations, resulting in the corpus of artistic styles typical of the Ghanaian arts.

A review of the rationale for art making in Ghana would reveal that to a very great extent, the efforts of the artist is directed towards expressing the value systems of his or her society, which frequently are concerned with the problems, fears, needs, and aspirations of life. In an attempt to achieve this end, the artist tends to represent forms

in his or her art that may not necessarily depict phenomena as we see them in "real life", but rather the symbolic conceptions of them. As a result, the artworks become visual symbols that are a part of the system of world views of the Ghanaian people in relation to their adaptation to, and survival in, daily life. A conversation with a traditional carver named Kwaku Akyem at Akwadum, a village in the Eastern Region of Ghana, clearly confirms this idea. He says: ". . . when I carve a stool just for the sake of producing a stool, it only shows a stool form. People will not see anything about it, apart from its obvious use as a seat for sitting on. I try to incorporate some symbol to make the stool more meaningful. Of course, most of my clients come with their own ideas with which I work for them. It is through this means that I exhibit my excellent craftsmanship to the world. It is also through this means that I get more customers. They keep coming from far and wide, and I do my best to satisfy each person's particular wants".

From this viewpoint, it becomes clear, then, that the stylistic features characteristic of Ghanaian art forms are suggested essentially by the following anthropological factors:

- i. The nature of artistic traditions and conventions which influence and guide the thoughts of the artist through the creative process;
- ii. The characteristic nature of artworks comprising the Ghanaian artistic heritage to which the artist has been exposed;
- iii. The functions or uses for which the artwork is meant; and
- iv. The nature of the symbolic images or expressions used by the artist to convey the intended message.

The results of the artistic conventions and conditions guiding the creative activities of the artist reveal themselves, especially in sculpture, and particularly in wood carving. Sculpture making comprises a large proportion of artistic activities in Ghana as far as the visual arts are concerned. The carver believes that good craftsmanship depends on the imaginative abilities of the artist and, therefore works from memory. In order to get his or her message across in a meaningful way, the artists often emphasizes certain parts of the art object to tell a story about its purpose or significance.

As works of art are treated in this way to make symbolic statements, they tend to take on what might be termed abstract forms, because of the deviations from naturalistic forms. Such deviations are evident in the arbitrary proportions in the head, limbs, and other parts of most carved wooden figures. A typical example is the Female *Akuaba* fertility doll in which the head, neck, and hips are emphasized to symbolize the concepts of intelligence and female beauty. Abstraction is also common in the proverbial pictographic forms known as *Adinkra* symbols. As a result, therefore, even works of art of very high quality in craftsmanship usually tend to look odd, unnatural or bizarre to persons who are not familiar with such art forms. Additionally, new works often seem as if they have been copied from earlier versions, in that their forms tend to reveal a rather monotonous artistic style. Thus, ideally, this monotony in artistic style can be attributed, as Boas (1955) suggests, to the processes of artistic production being so much bound by a hard and fast style that there is little room for the expression of individual feeling or of freedom for the creative genius of artists.

While this is true, Boas observes, a close analysis of the works of art usually reveals variations in workmanship according to individual talents and personalities of artists. This is because, even though the artistic traditions are the same, much depends on the skill of the artist in terms of selection and handling of tools and materials. This then suggests that the characteristic abstractions in some indigenous Ghanaian art forms, particularly wood carvings, do not necessarily indicate artistically inferior work. They simply depict the stylistic conventions handed down from one generation of artists to another; in short, the artist's inherited way of working. It is also important to remark at this juncture that not all indigenous Ghanaian visual art forms are rendered in the abstract, or without realistic portrayal. In view of the great variety of the types of art objects made, such a generalization is rather arbitrary. Innumerable types of visual art forms, particularly gold weights, carved symbolic images attached to the tops of staffs of office, state swords and umbrellas, to mention but a few examples, are evident exemptions. Most of these artworks reveal such high levels of realistic portrayal as to make one assume with certainty that the artists work not only from memory and imagination, but also from observing nature.

Style in art may be defined as a constant or fixed form, or a fixed combination of form elements that characterize the arts of a people or an epoch. It also connotes the traditional ways or techniques used in art production activities by a people in any particular region of the world. Writing on methods of analyzing artistic styles, Gerbrands (1969) views the concept of style as comprised of two components: one of place and one of time. Expressing this viewpoint further, he writes:



European art history has taught us that a given art form, or a given "style" is conditioned by the period in which it evolved in a certain area. That is why we are able to identify a certain painting in such terms as Italian Renaissance and another as French Impressionism, in which the words "Renaissance" and "Impressionism" are, of course, time indicators. It is clear that the notion of time is based on empirical evidence, that is, once a sufficiently large number of art objects is known to be from the same region and the same period, they provide the corpus that characterize the art style of that area and the era (p. 59).

Gerbrands suggests that if style should be used in determining the geographical origin of an art object, it must be characterized by a typical combination of form elements which identifies the objects from one particular area. To be able to recognize and hence to describe and define a particular style, therefore, such combination of form elements must be fairly constant over a certain period of time. What Gerbrands' reasoning implies is that every artifact has a recognizable style. This indicates that "it was made in a specific environment; of certain materials with specific tools and techniques; the maker or makers have their own personalities and motivations, and they operated within the context of a society; the art form is related to others in time and space; each says something; and every [artifact] has some degree of aesthetic worth, depending on the criteria applied to it" (Hatcher, 1985, p. 20).

The most familiar and commonly used method in studying artistic style is the approach used in Western art historical inquiry. In this respect, the main concern of the art historian has been to know where exactly a work of art came from, and also how old it is. This has made it possible to group artworks of a particular region (place) according to the styles of different eras in a sequence of their relative evolution. In this way, therefore, the study of artistic style follows a chronological projection. That is, it traces

the path of the development of artistic styles of a particular region from the beginnings of art as a human culture until the present day.

Styles in the indigenous Ghanaian visual arts, however, do not lend themselves to being analyzed in a chronological trajectory. One reason for this is that a study of the visual arts shows a marked similarity in artistic style throughout the ages. Also worthy of mentioning is that traditionally, the Ghanaian people are not interested in studying the forms and technical qualities in their visual arts as stages in historical evolution of artistic style. Since generally the arts are to a large extent made for utilitarian purposes, most of the visual artworks meant for certain religious rituals, specifically those involving the incarceration of evil spirits, are expendable. Hence, they are usually discarded after having served their purposes.

This suggests, therefore, that an ideal historical inquiry into Ghanaian art forms, should be approached from the anthropological point of view. That is, the study should involve analyzing not only the forms and technical qualities exhibited by the artworks. It should also inquire about their social significance -- their meanings, as well as philosophical, religious, economic, educational, and political purposes in the lives of the people. This approach is called "structural analysis of art in anthropology" (Boas, 1955; Gerbrands, 1969, 1971), and "morphological analysis" (Chanda, 1992). In the views of Boas and Gerbrands, a knowledge of the attitudes of artists working within a particular socio-cultural framework is indispensable for a clear understanding of the social functions of the works of art they make. Such knowledge can be achieved by studying the forms of training to which the artists were exposed, their artistic techniques, motivations,

sources of inspiration, social position, and the social, religious, and economic frameworks within which they work. These factors, they believe, are indispensable in the shaping any given framework of artistic conventions and traditions that give rise to particular artistic styles.

### **The Indigenous Ghanaian Artist**

The concept of the artist in the Ghanaian sense designates a person who performs acts of artistry; or as noted by Hatcher (1985), "one that performs particular activities artfully". In other words, by an artist is meant the traditional carver in wood, bone, ivory, and stone, the metal caster, the textile weaver and printer, and the pottery maker. It also includes the music maker, drummer, and dancer, the linguist, and reciter of appellations and dirges, as well as narrator and storyteller working in the context of the tribal system and expressing the cultural values of the Ghanaian community. The scope of this definition does not cover the contemporary Ghanaian artist who, as a result of Western education, is open to international styles, techniques, and materials for art-making. The way-side artist or crafts-person who is involved in more or less mechanically produced imitations and forgeries of the indigenous works of some Ghanaian tribes are also not included in this definition. Their works are normally addressed to the international market as souvenirs, and hence, are mainly commercially oriented.

To understand the artist in the Ghanaian traditional context, it is essential to discover his or her training, social position, motivation, activities, working principles and

taboos as far as sharing in social values are concerned. The activities of the artist are so intimately connected with Ghanaian social values that a description of them will offer sufficient possibilities for illustrating the place and function of the arts in the Ghanaian society.

As in societies the world over, many factors can play a part in someone becoming an artist in the Ghanaian society. It may be because art-making is a family tradition, a natural talent or vocation, or a general esteem to become an artist (Gerbrands, 1971). It must be born in mind, however, that even though most indigenous Ghanaian artists perform their activities as occupations or trades, they may not usually do this as their regular professions. This implies that a sculptor or potter, for example, may be in the first place a farmer, a profession which he or she practices on a regular basis. Also, it is not uncommon to find one artist who practices wood carving, bronze casting, moulding of religious figures in clay, traditional medicine, while at the same time remaining a farmer. A female artist may be a potter, beadmaker, singer (soloist), reciter of appellations and dirges, and at the same time, be involved in petty trading.

### **Apprenticeship and Training**

Some of the indigenous Ghanaian artists claim to have developed their talents on their own through continuous practice of their respective artistic specialities, without undergoing an official apprenticeship. A person who grew up in the court of a paramount chief may become an orator as a result of continuous observation and listening to the way the elders express themselves. As custom, however, a person who wishes to learn the art

of smithing, weaving, carving, pottery making, and the like, are attached to an established artist or crafts-person to undergo a system of apprenticeship. The duration of the period of apprenticeship varies with the individual learner; it depends very much on his or her intellect, talent, and perseverance.

Normally the apprentice pays no fees, but often becomes a member of the household of the master or mistress. The apprentice partakes fully in the performing of the household chores, as well as farming and other economic activities in which the mentor is involved. Thus, in many cases, an apprentice is even regarded as a member of the mentor's family. In return, the apprentice is offered free boarding and lodging. Depending on the relationship existing between an apprentice and his or her mentor, the former may sometimes be offered some basic amenities of life, such as pocket money and in rare cases, clothing.

Learning begins with instructions on the identification of tools and the methods of keeping or maintaining them. Various taboos associated with the particular field of art being studied are also vividly outlined to the learner as working rules and ethics, the violation of which might result in misfortunes on the part of the learner or the business as a whole. Learning of the actual process of executing the work of art follows mainly 'a learning by doing' approach. Normally, the learner is made to look on while the instructor works for a period of time, apparently to make him or her acquainted with the procedures of a process. The duration of this observational period depends on the decisions of the instructor. The instructor then communicates to the learner the basic technical information needed for the process, such as the correct way of handling the

tools, before being eventually involved in any practical activity. The learner begins by imitating, copying, or following the processes and procedures being undertaken by the instructor. Learning continues in this way until the learner gains enough confidence and spontaneity in handling the tools and procedures in the work. The processes involved in constructing the required tools for the type of art being studied are taught towards the end of the apprenticeship period.

### **Tools and Implements**

These are usually very simple and few. The tools in a weaver's equipment box, for example, may include one or two simple shuttles carved from wood, spools from bamboo branches, reeds fashioned out of raffia palm branches, a hank holder made up of two crossed, flat, pieces of wood with small pegs at their four ends, a measuring stick, and a knife. A carver's tools are normally an adze or two, an axe, a cutlass and knife, a long, pointed nail-like device to act as an awl for boring holes, a wooden mallet, and a sharpening stone. The only tools for a potter may be a hoe or pickaxe for digging clay, square or rectangular wooden boards on which she builds the pots by hand, and one or two egg-sized stones which she rubs on the surfaces of her ware to make them smooth. All these tools and implements are either fashioned by the artist personally, or by local crafts-persons.

## **Working Principles**

In spite of being guided by strict artistic traditions and conventions, as well as the simplicity of his or her equipment, the working principle of the indigenous Ghanaian artist is good craftsmanship. To the artist, craftsmanship is composed of three elements, namely: knowledge, technical skill, and effort or perseverance.

Knowledge as applied here implies the artist being well versed in the artistic traditions and conventions and how his or her creative efforts (products) apply as part of the social and cultural repertoire of the society. Stated differently, the artist must be knowledgeable about appropriate artistic objects, symbols, and performances that would suit the requirements for which they are meant, following Ghanaian cultural ideals and traditions. The choice of an object or act for a symbolic representation requires a sound knowledge about its nature and the historical and mythical ideas associated with it.

Skill refers to the artist's ability, competence, expertise, or dexterity in rendering works in his or her chosen field of art. Skill in terms of good craftsmanship entails also the ability to represent appropriate cultural elements in artworks in ways that reveal their meanings.

Effort is used to mean the human energy expendable on the part of the artist in executing works of art. In the Ghanaian traditional context, elements of good craftsmanship include the ability of the artist to persevere through the artistic process with an unwavering consistency until the intended result is attained. This principle is particularly important in the area of the performing arts, where a dance pattern, for example, may be very vigorous, thereby requiring a lot of energy to accomplish. Adam

(1949) reflects this idea when he notes that the true test of an artist's power is surely that he [or she] should have a sufficient stamina to enable his [or her] first frenzy to survive the process of finishing (p. 38).

Certainly, it is in the attempt to achieve these ideals of good craftsmanship that the indigenous Ghanaian artist would always strive to embellish all artworks with some form of ornamental design to make them pleasing to the eye. The adornment of objects of everyday use such as pots, tool handles, musical instruments, canoes, combs, stools, state umbrellas, swords, and such like, are all indications of the portrayal of excellence in craftsmanship.

### **Taboos Associated with Art-Making Activities**

In general terms, the phenomenon of taboo among Ghanaians designates certain things or human behaviours and activities that are proscribed by society as improper or unacceptable. In its widest sense, the word "taboo" exemplifies a system of excluding or setting apart certain things or practices from social relations, or as sacred and hence forbidden from general use in society. Tracing its etymological origins, Sarpong (1974) notes that the word taboo derives from the Polynesian word, "tabu", which simply means "forbidden", and can be applied to any sort of prohibition. From this general explanation, the idea of taboo in the Ghanaian context can be illustrated by the prohibition of members of a clan or tribe from doing any harm to a chosen species of animal for their totem, and to refrain from using its meat as food.



Among the people of Ghana, the idea of taboo designates a sacred phenomenon rooted deeply in religious beliefs and values upon which the Ghanaian ethical code is based. Indeed, a wide range of taboos have so much been incorporated into the indigenous Ghanaian code of ethics and morality that one can safely say that it is, in fact, the taboos which constitute the system of the ethical or moral code itself. An act is either allowed or it is tabooed (prohibited). Any infringement of a forbidden act is a criminal offence, as it is held to imperil the society (Sarpong, 1974, p. 53). It is believed that the authority behind all taboos resides with the supernatural powers that control the forces of the universe upon which human life is predicated.

The infringement of any taboo as a result of performing a forbidden act is bound to incur the displeasure of the supernatural forces or ancestral spirits. The penalty consequence from such an act may result in the supernatural forces withdrawing their support and services to the individual, which in turn might bring about untold hardships in the form of protracted illness, barrenness, or even death. Depending on the seriousness of the offence, misfortunes may be brought upon the offender's family, or even the whole community to which he or she belongs. Sarpong explains this concept as he writes:

The adverse consequences of breaking a taboo may fall on the whole society both mystically and physically. It is sufficient for one fool to commit fornication with a girl under the age of puberty and there is bound to be famine in the community, unless something is done ritually to cleanse the community of the abomination. The spirits are punishing the community of the crime of an individual. It is therefore a matter of great concern for every member for the society to make sure that the more serious taboos are scrupulously observed (1974, p. 53).

The phenomenon of taboo is intertwined with all spheres of life. The foregoing discussions have thrown some amount of light on the basic concepts and ideas of taboo

as are held among Ghanaians. As it is not within the scope of this study to treat taboo in its widest sense, it is expedient to trim down the discussions to how taboos are observed in relation to art-making.

Taboos in the arts are as diverse as the different types of art forms and art-making activities. Some typical examples are as follows: It is forbidden for a narrator or poet to make gestures with the left hand alone when addressing a group of people or speaking in public places. The left hand is generally looked on as being filthy because it is reserved for cleaning all sorts of things that are considered as filth. It is, therefore, considered an insult when the left hand is used in addressing people. It is, however, acceptable when used in conjunction with the right hand. A metal smith is forbidden from hitting or slapping people with the hand unless in defence of himself or his community. It is believed that the powers endowed in a blacksmith for forging iron are strong enough to harm a human being physically. Among the Ewe and Ashanti, the major *Kente* weaving tribes, women are forbidden from weaving. The rationale behind this taboo are explained in terms of health reasons. Weaving on the traditional narrow strip loom requires long periods of sitting on a very low stool resulting in pains in the waist and lower abdominal parts of the weaver. These health problems associated with weaving are believed to have adverse effects on the reproductive system in women. Women are, however, allowed to spin and dye yarns for the weaver as these processes are not harmful to them.

On the other hand, men are forbidden from making pottery. Some women in the Kwahu District, a well known pottery making area in Ghana, hold the belief that pottery

making is an occupation assigned to women by Mother Nature herself. Legend has it that the first woman to make pots was taught the craft by some divine beings or fairies who, through spiritual means, guided her thoughts and hands to build the pots free-handed. Later on, she taught the art of pottery making to other women, who in turn, have passed it on from one generation of women to another. Since then, pottery making has been looked on as a feminine occupation. Males who would go into it would be considered by the supernatural beings as attempting to deprive women of their livelihood, and this might incur their displeasure. These are but a few general examples of taboos associated with some artistic activities.

A large proportion of the Ghanaian arts are used in religious rituals; particularly, sculptures are used as abodes for supernatural spirits. The sculptor's tools are viewed as possessing certain potentials for influencing the success of the artist's work. Hence, they are treated with great care and sacrifices may sometimes be offered to the supernatural spirits, inviting them to bless and purify the tools. Periodic sacrifices of eggs or chicken and *Eto* or *Oto* (mashed yam mixed with palm oil) for the purification of carving tools, the hearth, the forge, and other work implements, are a commonplace among smiths of iron, gold, silver, copper, and brass.

Among the sculptural arts, wood carving is one area in which the strict observation of taboos is very important. Apart from the usual tool purification sacrifices, before a carver sets out to search for a suitable tree to fell for the purpose of carving, some sacrifices are offered to the ancestral spirits to seek their assistance and guidance in the search. Before a tree is felled, offerings are made at the foot of it to appease any

supernatural spirits that may have been residing in it for depriving them of their abode. Failure to render such an appeasement would result in annoying the spirits, who in their fury might cause harm to the carver through an injury during the course of felling the tree, or at the time of carving. Such spirits are also capable of bringing untold mishaps on to the recalcitrant carver, rendering him unsuccessful in his occupation or even causing his death.

The choice of a sculptor to carve very highly religious or sacred objects such as ancestral stools, representational figures of deities, and other items associated with the veneration of ancestral spirits, depends on his personality and status in society. That is, the choice depends on how much social prestige the artist has gained as a carver among his people. It is also largely dependent upon his conduct. All these characteristics are thoroughly investigated about a carver before being selected for a commission. A person with a questionable character or criminal background is automatically disqualified, no matter how experienced and competent he might be at wood carving.

Once chosen for a commission, both the carver and his tools are passed through strict initiation processes of purification. Women and non-initiates are forbidden from seeing the carver at work; they must also not see or touch the carving tools. The reason for this is that there is no knowing which woman is in her menstrual period, which makes her unclean at that time. Likewise, non-initiates of both sexes are considered unclean and so might contaminate work-in-progress, should they see it. This would certainly displease the ancestral spirits, who might bring great harm on them, as well as reject the work in the long run. To prevent such mishaps, the carver and his tools are

both kept in confinement for as long as the carving process lasts. The Dangme tribe describe this custom as *Tigble miwom* or *Awo le tigblem*, interpreted as "initiation into the order of secrecy". While carving, the sculptor works alone in the bush; he is seen, fed, and protected by priests of the cult, and special initiates and devotees to the ancestral spirits. These people must try as much as possible to avoid entering into conversations of any sort with the carver while at work, as this might result in distracting his attention. It is taught that by working in isolation, nothing will distract the sculptor's attention, peace, and stability of his thoughts, which are indispensable for favourable results.

It is also important that the sculptor abstains from sexual relations from the period of initiation until the product of his work has been successfully dedicated for the purpose for which it is meant. The reason is to avoid contaminating himself as well as the purity of the product of the work at hand. The sculptor is also prohibited from working on a day on which he senses that there might be a rainfall, as this might affect his concentration and hence the craftsmanship of the work. The taboo also avoids exposing the sacred object to the rain, which would humiliate it and hence defile it. These taboos, together with other minor rules which have not been mentioned here, are strictly observed, and neither while going through the initiations nor while doing the actual carving, may information about the project be revealed to the general public.

### **Notions of Beauty in the Indigenous Ghanaian Arts**

To establish an understanding of what constitutes the aesthetic value and its attendant ideas about beauty of Ghanaian artistic forms, it has been found expedient to

begin the discussions here by briefly examining some ideas of aesthetics and the notions of beauty in the Modern Western sense. The Ghanaian ideas about beauty can then be presented by way of comparison to these Modern Western ideas.

### **Some Basic Premises of Aesthetics**

Aesthetics is a discipline that deals with the essence of art. Aesthetic studies help us to gain insights into the description, meaning, and value given to art. Through aesthetic education, we develop an understanding of art as an essential part of human endeavours, leading to an awareness of art, as well as appreciate its role in society. Since various human societies in different parts of the world have different tools and media, as well as ways of making and interpreting their arts, it becomes apparent that the same standards or principles cannot be applied to understanding art across all cultures. To understand art, therefore, it is essential to comprehend the aesthetic principles that are applied to it by different cultural groups. This means, understanding art within the context of any particular culture requires a comprehension of the principles of art as they are understood by the cultural group that holds them. This section explores some assumptions of the term 'aesthetics' in terms of its Modern Western and non-Western understandings as a means of establishing a frame for discussing issues in relation to the Ghanaian arts.

Tracing its etymology, Crawford (1989) states that the term 'aesthetics' was first used by Alexander Baumgarten, a German philosopher in the year 1744 to mean 'the science of the beautiful'. Crawford notes, however, that the word 'aesthetics' itself takes

its roots from the Greek word, 'aesthetikos', pertaining to "sense perception" (p. 227). Hillman (1991) also offers a useful explanation of aesthetic response and the word 'aesthetics'. Hillman observes that when you see something that is so exquisite that it arouses your emotions,

You draw in your breath and stop still. This quick intake of breath, this little hshshs . . . [or] ahaha reaction is the aesthetic response just as certain, inevitable, objective and ubiquitous, as wincing in pain and moaning in pleasure. Moreover, this quick intake of breath is the word aesthetics, *aisthesis* in Greek meaning sense-perception. *Aisthesis* goes back to the Homeric *aiou* and *aisthou* which means both 'I perceive' as well as 'I grasp, struggle for breath . . . *aisthmoai*, *aisthanomai*, I breathe in' (Hillman, 1991, p. 63).

Although philosophical reflections on the nature of beauty date from the earliest of classical times,

[the] link between the perceptual and the beautiful was clearly expressed in the 13th century by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his remarks that "the beautiful is that whose very apprehension pleases". . . (Crawford, 1989, p. 227).

Crawford also draws on Beardsley's remark that "beautiful things are those which please when seen" and reiterates that even as late as the year 1892, Bosanquet also defined aesthetics as "the philosophy of the beautiful".

Aesthetics with reference to beauty in artistic phenomena refers to the way in which the nature of an artistic form appeals to, or impresses itself on the human mind. The pleasant feeling or emotional thrill gained as a result of this sense impression is what may be termed aesthetic experience or aesthetic pleasure. Most works of art affect humans this way. Boas (1927) writing on the idea of aesthetic value in artistic phenomena, explains that aesthetic pleasure may also sometimes be released by natural

forms. The beautiful song of a bird; the pleasure in viewing the form of a landscape or the grandeur; the pleasant feeling we may get from the dramatic effects in the actions of animals: all have aesthetic value although they are not art. On the other hand, a melody, a carving, a painting, a dance, sequences of tones and forms of speech are aesthetic productions because they have been created by human activity. Boas believes that such types of activity exist among human beings the world over, and all these activities assume certain particular forms that give them aesthetic values.

An expert in anthropological perspectives in art history, Boas observes that:

In one way or another aesthetic pleasure is felt by all members of humankind. No matter how diverse the ideals of beauty may be, the general character of the enjoyment of beauty is of the same order everywhere. . . . The existence of song, dance, painting, and sculpture among [almost] all the tribes . . . is proof of the craving to produce things that are felt as satisfying through their form, and of the capability of [humans] to enjoy them (1955, p. 9).

It is conceivable, therefore, that form seems to be most intimately connected with the ideas of beauty. The truth in this assertion lies in the intuitive feeling for form during art production by artists worldwide. This makes it clear that the essence of artistic creation is primarily to produce a beautiful product.

The feeling for form in art making, in Boas' (1955) view, is inextricably bound up with technical experience. He states succinctly that since a high standard of form can be achieved only in a highly developed and perfectly controlled technique; there must be an intimate relationship between technique and a feeling of beauty (p. 11). Thus, when the technical treatment of a form has attained a certain standard of excellence, it may be judged from the point of view of formal perfection. The criteria for assessing the



aesthetic value of an artistic form are, therefore, based on the techniques used by the artist in treating such elements as lines, shapes, textures, colours, and tones, form the particular artistic product. The techniques are manifest in the way in which the artist has organized these elements to show a pattern, rhythm, balance, harmony, repetition, variety, and unity in rendering the artistic form. Determining the aesthetic value, and hence, the beauty of an artistic form using these criteria, depends on examining the physical features of the form. This shows that the feeling for beauty of an artistic creation is stimulated mainly through contemplating the aesthetic form.

### **Comparison Between Modern Western and Indigenous Ghanaian Notions of Beauty in Art**

The notion of aesthetics as the science of the beautiful tends to emphasize taste. It presupposes that there is "good" and "rewarding", or "bad" and "disagreeable" art (Silvers, 1994, p. 49). Used in reference to questions of visual appearance of artworks, aesthetics as the science of beauty suggests that every "artwork carries the signs of authorship, the implicit declaration that the item in question has been produced intentionally" (Lind, 1993, p. 4). All artworks exhibit perceivable signs that are deliberately planned and arranged or constructed by an individual artist or group of artists for that which appears to the art audience. These signs, called elements of art, are characterized as shapes or forms, lines, colours, textures, and space. The arrangement of these elements to form an artwork is guided by such principals as balance, rhythm, movement, repetition, space, and others, to make it aesthetically worthwhile. The way and manner in which the artist plans and organizes or renders these elements in any

particular art medium or a combination of different art media into a work of art depict three important pieces of information used in art appreciation:

1. They constitute the overall appearance of the formal or physical features of works of art;
2. They determine the quality, value, or beauty of the resulting work of art.
3. They depict the artistic style (the style used by the artist) which might be his or her unique way of rendering an artwork.

These three characteristics participate in the aesthetic effect of the work of art, which is thus termed, the "aesthetic statement" (Lind, 1993, p. 2).

To be in a position to interpret an aesthetic statement, therefore, art audiences (viewers) need to become knowledgeable or familiar with these elements as well as the principles that guide their organization to constitute works of art. In other words, art communicates meanings capable of being deciphered by those who are familiar with the signs and clues used by the artist (Lind, 1993, p. 4). The meaning of a thing is basically what it denotes, signifies or brings to mind by association. Therefore, it would go without saying that the elements and principles of art provide art audiences the means for analyzing visual information as they are used by the artist, and hence, the vocabulary to describe works of art. Simply stated, they provide the aesthetic language, that is, the language for talking about works of art. The method of analyzing and describing works of art based on the elements and principles used by the artist is generally known as the "formalist" or "conventional" approach to aesthetics. It is so-called because of its

dependence on the formal physical features that constitute the general appearance of works of art.

While the formalist or conventionalist approach offers the basic vocabulary for theoretical pursuits about art, its methodology tends to be limited in scope, particularly when applied to the variety of ideas that dominate art today. For instance, as already noted, the formalist position presupposes that the theoretical interpretation of works of art can only be effectively done by a knowledgeable art community -- people who are well versed in the shared system of meanings associated with the conventional signs in art works. This notion suggests further the necessity of mastering a visual language analogous to mastering a verbal language in order to be able to perceive and describe works of art. This tends to limit aesthetic perception and response of works of art to only a few elite members of society who have attained such mastery. Although artworks are symbolic codes, some of which have conventional meanings which we must learn to read and interpret an extreme formalist or conventionalist view is not tenable (Haanstra, 1994, p. 64). While mastering a verbal language is important for describing an aesthetic response, it should be noted that for one to view verbal responses as the only basis for defining aesthetics, is to narrow down its scope. It seems . . . that responses to objects, acts, or sounds which are gestural rather than verbal might be significant, that such responses need to be identified, recorded and eventually assessed as part of the aesthetic response (Sieber, 1973, pp. 427-8). This context indicates that certain gestures exist in human society, which in the courses of events are sometimes not verbalized, but which nevertheless represent aesthetic responses. These include explicit gestures of approval or

disapproval of a situation or an event. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, according to Sieber, specific indications of gestural response may range from applause to nose holding, or from snapping of the fingers or rubbing of the thighs to certain vocalizations such as chuckling or an exaggerated yes (p. 428). Sieber terms such gestural responses "unvoiced aesthetics". Such means of expressing one's feelings, emotions, or experiences as a result of an encounter with an artistic act or product are very common gestures among Ghanaians. For example, it is not uncommon for a Ghanaian to:

- doff his or her hat in an appreciation of an artistic act such as a dance performance that has pleased him or her;
- hold the mouth agape, or the head with both hands to express surprise or awe;
- rest the chin in the palm of his her hand to express melancholy; or
- hold up the first two fingers after the thumb separately to express an overwhelming feeling, reverence, admiration, or appreciation of an exquisite performance such as in dancing.

This clearly shows that aesthetic response may be verbalized or expressed by means of gestures, or both, depending on the percipient's disposition.

The concept of formalist aesthetics also suggests that there is a special frame of mind for appreciating works of art -- a "disinterested" attitude that is separate from one's own interest in the artwork, its utility, or its social ramifications (Dissanayake, 1988, p. 17). Employing a disinterested attitude in appreciating artworks implies that viewers could appreciate any art, including artworks of epochs or cultures far removed from their own, whether or not they understand the meanings the works have for the people who

made and used them. Hence, art is universal. Formalism in aesthetics assumes that there are universal aesthetic standards without taking into consideration what is culturally valued in the arts by people in various parts of the world. It is important to remark, however, that art is a vehicle by which individual artists express the learned aspects of their cultures that they have internalized while growing up. Such forms of expression are normally representations and/or manifestations of the artists' individual world views. The term 'world views' as applied here designates the ideas, concepts, or an image of the world and the important things it embodies as commonly shared by the people of a particular culture. This indicates, therefore, that art is not universal as it is purported to be in the formalist sense. It is conceptually constructed by individuals whose perceptions are necessarily limited and parochial (Dissanayake 1988, p. 19).

Another corollary of formalist aesthetics is that apart from their subject matter, works of art in themselves reflect a unique kind of knowledge. This renders the work of art a world-in-itself, made solely or primarily as an occasion for this kind of detached aesthetic experience, which is considered to be one of the highest forms of mentality. This suggests that art has no purpose but to "be" and to provide opportunities for enjoying an aesthetic experience that is its own reward; one could have no higher calling than to open oneself to these heightened moments (p. 18). In this sense, therefore, art is to be appreciated for its own sake. This is the basis for the idea of "art for art's sake". Art experiences, whether in the area of making or appreciation, could be more than pleasure when understood and pursued with a social conscience. The point of view that works of art are reflections of the sensibilities or world views of the artists who compose

them suggests that art is a complex phenomenon with multiple levels of meaning in accordance with the cultural backgrounds of various artists. In many societies the world over, especially non-Western societies of which Ghana is a part, artworks transcend the culture in which they are produced and affect human beings in a variety of ways in terms of the values each society attaches to them.

In the Ghanaian context, for example, the notion of beauty in art tends to include an additional component to the physical features of its form. Stated differently, the source of aesthetic effect or value of an artistic creation is two-fold: the one is based on form alone, and the other, on ideas associated with the form. That is to say that while the form of the creative product should be pleasing to the eye, beauty in terms of physical features of form does not necessarily refer to the optical impressions of it as observed from a given angle at a given moment. In other words, beauty is not seen as residing so much in the physical forms of artistic phenomena as it is seen in their symbolic or representational power -- their meanings, utility purposes, significance and place in the social life of the people. The Ghanaian has a peculiar custom of attaching symbolic meanings and strong philosophical significance to certain selected elements of art: shapes, lines, colours, actions and gestures found in artistic forms. The circle, rectangle, triangle, oval, wavy lines, spiral lines, certain hues of colour, and body movements, to mention but a few, all have symbolic meanings and significance deeply rooted in Ghanaian social life. Thus, within any particular artistic form are certain symbolic elements which together give it its overall meaning, purpose, and significance.

Probably, it is because the artworks are usually symbolic or representational that the Ghanaian artist follows certain stylistic traditions and conventions during art production to represent all details that are particularly important in making the artwork meaningful. A work of art is pronounced beautiful when it conveys meaning -- if it acts as a cultural symbol, or recalls historical events, philosophical principles, beliefs and values of the Ghanaian society. Certainly, a new element is added to the understanding of an artwork by a viewer if its meaning and purpose, and the circumstances surrounding its creation, are known to him or her. That is to say that in the Ghanaian context, the discernment of beauty in an artistic creation is dependent not on the artistic form alone, but also on the dynamic associations that exist between the form and the ideas held about it by the people. The artistic form and its meaning, functions, and significance are combined to designate the beauty in any artistic creation.

This point of view shows that in dealing with works of art, one is dealing with social phenomena that manifest themselves as social products or processes. Whatever constructs pertain in any particular place may not prove broad or universal enough for application cross-culturally. Thus, it is rather arbitrary to think of art as possessing a universal kind of knowledge.

Rather than assuming that art reflects a unique and privileged kind of knowledge, postmodernists point out that any "truth" or "reality" is only a point of view -- a "representation" that comes to us mediated and conditioned by our language, our social institutions, the assumptions that characterize individuals as members of a nation, a race, a gender, a class, a profession, a religious body, a particular historical period (Dissanayake, 1988, p. 19).

This context is opposed to the formalist constructs of aesthetics with its tendency to restrict the viewer to appreciate 'form' only in works of art. Specifying what to look for in an artwork during art appreciation has a tendency of making a problem when applied to the very aim of art education that seeks to help students understand the nature of art. If such understanding can be achieved by students through the appreciation of 'form' in artworks without reference to the artist and the physical and social setting that gave birth to the works, then the aim of teaching students to explore art media and tools through art-making; to investigate the historical backgrounds of artworks; and to examine artworks critically, is defeated. As well, there seems to be no use incorporating these activities in the arts education programme if it is not essential for students to know that the arts relate to the social order of which they are a part. Formalism in aesthetics also has a tendency of hampering what may be termed 'aesthetic democracy' both in and out of the classroom. Aesthetic democracy can be clarified as equality of opportunities for a right to free aesthetic expression by all people within society. This suggests that approaches to aesthetic learning should be to expose students to both 'formalism' -- the view of art in relation to its formal qualities such as lines, colour, shapes, texture, composition and so forth; and 'contextualism' -- an approach to viewing art that includes its socio-cultural context. In this way, students will be enabled to freely express themselves in their own individual ways and to make their own aesthetic choices both in the classroom and after graduating from school. The formalist aesthetics with its specialized references to 'taste' and 'beauty' as they are found in the physical features of works of art, and to the idea of 'art for art's sake', are constructs that seem to express



class interests. Such constructs are only applicable to highly specialized, modernized or advanced Western societies where the arts are specialities existing for their sake, apart from social, cultural, or ritual purposes. Moreover, the formalist approach to art appreciation has a tendency of being limited in scope when applied to non-Western arts. This is especially true of small-scale, unspecialized, traditional society such as Ghana where the arts are invariably an inseparable part of everyday life. Therefore, to claim that one can appreciate works of art from any culture, including non-Western cultures, by using the formalist constructs exclusively, is an imperialistic act of appropriation which tends to mould such artworks to Modern Western standards while blatantly dismissing or ignoring the standards of their makers and users (Dissanayake, 1988).

It is common in artistic theory that, by means of his or her artworks, the artist enables us to perceive his or her ways of seeing the world or to make us aware of his or her special vision of reality. Implicit here is the contention that the viewer of a work of art basically sees the world through the artist's eyes. While this may be true, the perceptual interest of the viewer arises out of his or her own fundamental, inborn tendencies to make sense of the world through internalized mental structures (schemata) which are integral to perception (Haanstra, 1994).

Perception is . . . an active process of fitting mental structures to selected sensory tests, thus building selective attention and schematization. What allows pictures to represent objects and layouts in the world is that we can fit schemas we have learned in the world to the patterns that are presented to the eye by the pictures themselves. (Haanstra, 1994, pp. 64 - 65).

Being a form of curiosity, perceptual interest "is the clear and distinct apprehension of the whole", that is, "determining what makes up the object of attraction" (Lind, 1993,

p. 7). It aims at addressing everything that counts as aesthetic, ranging from the most concrete formal design elements to the most abstract philosophical ideas associated with works of art. Thus, considering that perceptual interest is the bed-rock of aesthetic appreciation, then it is clear that the aesthetic includes sensuous objects, as well as ideas associated with them. Therefore, to contemplate an artwork on the basis of its visual appearance (elements of design) alone is to depend solely on objective sensitivity for its interpretation. Such an approach to aesthetics excludes subjective sensitivity. By removing subjective sensitivity -- personal reflective activity and idiosyncrasy -- from art appreciation, a viewer tends to be prevented from finding his or her own voice during the interpretive process. Without subjective thinking, a student of art would not gain access to his or her inner self, that is the affective aspect, during the learning process. The consequence would be the negation of authentic or personal reasoning and meaning-making in the interpretive process. This indicates, therefore, that the conventionalist or formalist approach to aesthetics has a tendency of making students learn about the arts in a mechanical way. One of the major purposes of education, including art education, is to reveal the ways in which the societies in which we live function. Thus, since the arts are a part of the cultural heritage by means of which the values espoused by every society are reflected, it is clear that the art classroom is an appropriate vehicle for addressing issues pertaining to the place of the arts in society with students. By isolating the arts from their social and cultural contents, the formalist approach has a tendency of failing to help students to recognize the significance of the arts in society. Students might not understand the arts as constituent parts of the social and cultural structures which

inform various aspects of their lifestyles. In other words, students might not see the arts as a means by which certain important values, beliefs, ideas, mores, and legends of their socio-cultural systems are depicted and transmitted from one generation to another. The formalist approach to aesthetics has a tendency of failing to enable students to realize the value of the arts in their lives: as agents through which to express their own cultural and personal ideals -- a means to self-discovery and portrayal of self-identity.

As can be noted, the separation of art from society has a tendency of making it a problem not only in the classroom but by way of giving it a place in the general school programme. For instance, Modern Western art's heritage of specialization and self-proclaimed irrelevance to social and cultural ramifications permits it to be considered as an esoteric frill by the general public. Perhaps, this is why some educational planners and budget makers often tend to view them as being peripheral to the general school curriculum.

### **Summary**

The discussions in this chapter have revealed that to the Ghanaian, the arts do not exist in isolation from the social life of the people, but as a necessary contribution to its fulfilment. A comparison of Modern Western and indigenous Ghanaian notions of beauty in artistic phenomena reveals some marked differences. These differences in what constitutes beauty or aesthetic values in works of art in the two societies can be attributed to the conceptions and attitudes of each society regarding the arts. These attitudes which

may be termed, the criteria for viewing art derived from each society's definitions of art and of aesthetics (the notions of beauty).

In Modern Western theories, art is something to be observed specifically for aesthetic pleasure. Art is admired for its own sake without a consideration of its instrumental or utilitarian aspects in its social and cultural contexts. On the contrary, in the indigenous Ghanaian setting, art is inseparable from its social and cultural contexts. Art is an integral part of the daily life of the individual and the community.

Notions of beauty in the Modern Western sense is based on the formal qualities of works of art. That is, the feeling of beauty for an artwork is stimulated exclusively by the physical features of its form. In the indigenous Ghanaian context, however, beauty does not reside in the physical forms of artistic phenomena only. Beauty also lies in the symbolic and representational aspects of works of art, from which the works derive their meanings, purposes, and significance in the social life of the people.

While the development of individual artistic style in the visual arts is encouraged among Modern Western artists, there are certain artistic traditions and stylistic conventions which are followed by indigenous Ghanaian artists during art-making. In following these traditions, the artist's efforts are directed at portraying essential elements of the values of the Ghanaian culture in his or her works of art. By incorporating symbolic representations that reflect the value system of the Ghanaian society, indigenous Ghanaian arts tend to be primarily conceptual. Thus, the discernment of beauty in a Ghanaian artistic creation is dependent not on the artistic form alone, but also on the relationships between the form and the ideas held about it by the people.

One way to understand and resolve the perplexing contradictions, inadequacies and confusions between Modern Western and non-Western aesthetic concepts can be to consider art in its broadest possible perspective. The idea of the arts encompasses human behaviour and activity throughout history and could be traced as far back as the palaeolithic or even earlier times. The arts have been used in perpetuating and maintaining cultural values; in making comprehensible societies' belief systems, in political, religious, and economic, as well as recreational activities in human societies throughout the world. Each society has its own ways of art-making: ways of making tools and implements for daily or ritual use and of constructing dwelling places. Each society has musical and dance types as well as language arts. These arts are social, anthropological, and culturally oriented. These also satisfy psychological and emotional needs, and have psychological and emotional effects on the people who are involved with them. When considered in this broad perspective -- including historical, socio-cultural, and psychological contexts -- the arts' real value in human existence can be realized and effectively appreciated. The assumption that historical, socio-cultural, and psychological interpretation are indispensable to appreciating artworks renders aesthetics a complex concept upon which to base our understanding of the arts and our practices of arts education.

A review of the foregoing discussions shows that in Ghana, the social side of the arts is so important that an aesthetic approach restricted to formal qualities without reference to the socio-cultural context, will not suffice for a full appreciation of Ghanaian artistic creations. The discussions have also shown that to understand the notions of

beauty in the arts requires some knowledge about their symbolic or representational and instrumental nature -- the meaning, purpose, and place in the social life of the people. The social aspects of the arts are also revealed in the discussions concerning the training of the artist and the way he or she works, as well as the ethical principles and taboos that govern artistic activity in Ghana. The chapter that follows will discuss in greater detail the symbols found in the art forms identified in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE GHANAIAAN ARTS: MEANINGS AND FUNCTIONS**

It has been established that in the Ghanaian society the arts are an intimate part of the cultural heritage. They are a part of the evidence of how the people live: they help to provide and condition the background against which the people exist. Frequently, the Ghanaian people think about and interpret the world in which they live in symbolic terms. These thought patterns are reflected in the arts they make and use. In other words, the arts survive as a record of the physical and psychological experiences of the thoughts, aspirations, and various ways in which Ghanaians reveal themselves to the outer world. That is, apart from their numerous applications in daily living, customary practices, ceremonies, and religious rituals, the arts are also used as a powerful tool of communication and interaction in society. They play a central role in disseminating the concepts and ideas held by members of the Ghanaian community about their beliefs and value systems, ideologies, traditions, and behaviours, by means of a vocabulary of artistic symbols. This chapter explains the symbolic phenomena in the Ghanaian arts. It attempts to reveal and make comprehensible the conceptual ideas -- the meanings, values and beliefs, and purposes -- which are inherent in the subject matter of some selected works of art.

The interpretation of Ghanaian cultural symbols in this chapter are mostly a result of the fieldwork interviews that are described in detail in Chapter Three. In addition, the interpretations are supplemented by my (researcher's) own general knowledge and experience which I acquired as I grew up as a member of the Ghanaian culture, as well as with more detailed studies I have conducted prior to this research. The literature dealing with Ghanaian cultural arts reviewed in Chapter Two has also been a useful source of ideas for shaping this chapter. Another important source of information about Ghanaian visual symbols is in the person of Dr. Ablade Glover, Professor Emeritus of the Glo Art Gallery, Accra, Ghana. The bulk of ideas leading to the interpretation of the meanings of the visual symbols presented here are provided by Dr. Glover based on his (1971) charts illustrating collections of *Adinkra* motifs and linguist staff tops. Others who have assisted with the interpretation of visual representations in the Ghanaian arts include Nana Owusu Ansa and a team of elders of the Cultural Research Centre at the Manhyia Palace, Kumasi; Mr. Ashong of the Kumasi Cultural Centre, the Chief *Kente* weaver and his team of weavers at Ntonso in the Ashanti Region; and Togbe Salu of Afiadenyigba and Mr. Adzie of Agbozume, both of whom are *Kente* weavers of the Volta Region of Ghana. As can be seen, the interpretation of Ghanaian cultural symbols is based largely on the proverbs that go with particular symbols. The interpretation of the meanings of these proverbs are offered by Asafoatse Adikoley and Otsiame Teye Akrong of the Prampram Traditional Council. All photographs illustrating various aspects of the text in this chapter are taken in the research field as part of my studies. All photographs of human beings are presented with the permission of the individual persons concerned.



In dealing with the Ghanaian cultural arts, two categories of symbolic phenomena become apparent, namely: symbolic forms, and symbolic actions. Symbolic forms denote art products, and have to do with the visual arts, while symbolic actions refer to the artistic acts and mimings that are found in the performing and verbal arts, respectively. The term, symbolism, has been defined as a process of communication that makes use of visible signs, images, or objects to represent abstract phenomena such as concepts, ideas, beliefs, and values. Ghanaian symbolic representations are taken from human and animal behaviours, animal parts, objects -- both natural and man-made. Symbolic interpretations and meanings are, therefore, derived through the associative connections of an art product or artistic act with concrete things in life. A key example of symbolic representation is the system of pictographs or logos, known as *Adinkra* symbols.

There is always some rationale underlying the choice of a particular image or object to represent a particular idea or concept. The suitability of an image or object to represent what it symbolizes may depend on two main factors. First, the choice may be based on some inherent qualities present in the image or object chosen for a symbol which are also characteristics of the notion being symbolized. For example, the elephant is used to symbolize strength because of its size while the antelope stands for intelligence because of its sleek behaviours. Second, an image or object may be chosen for a symbol as a result of its connection with the historical background of the culture. A typical example can be found in the use of the ceremonial state sword as a symbol of bravery and gallantry. The ceremonial state sword was an important war weapon by which Ghanaian tribal states were defended. Sarpong (1974) explains that:

The grounds for a symbol's suitability to stand for what is symbolized do vary a lot. . . . But whatever is the reason for the association between [the] symbol and symbolized, it will, as a rule, be seen that it entails some kind of aptness (p. 106).

To understand the relationship between a symbolic representation and the idea, notion, or concept it stands for, therefore, requires a thorough study of the nature of the symbol in question. Its physical features, its name, its natural qualities and tendencies or behavioural characteristics, its usage, and significance in the life of the individual person and the community as a whole, should all be considered.

The choice of an image or object for a symbolic representation is made in accordance with Ghanaian traditions, conventions, values, and ideologies, based on lived experiences and commonsense knowledge. For example, the motives behind the choice of a particular animal species for a totem as discussed in the previous chapter, are similar to those that inspire the choice of symbols. Indeed, most groups of Ghanaian cultural symbols are often represented by the images of clan and tribal totems. Symbolic acts and expressions in the cultural arts of Ghana may also reflect some characteristics and qualities believed to be inherent in or exhibited by such totems.

The word symbol has been explained as something that represents an idea. As representors, symbols are an embodiment of meanings of the ideas they stand for. It is, however, important to note that even though symbolic forms in the Ghanaian cultural arts may be likened to other conventional signs, such as are found in mathematics and traffic control, the two systems of symbols differ in the way they work. Whereas the conventional signs are designed to give specific forms of information or instruction, the interpretation of a Ghanaian cultural symbol cannot be reduced to such a simple formula.

Although it may have particular denotations, a symbolic representation or act in the cultural arts of Ghana is always a conceptual construction involving connotative and metaphoric associations or relationships over and beyond its literal aspects. In other words, a symbolic representation in its literal form stands as a signifier of some form of hidden associated knowledge embedded in the values of the Ghanaian culture. This is because the creation of such a symbolic representation is usually determined by emotions, experience, aspirations, and other conditions related to the Ghanaian people's existence in the world.

It becomes clear from this point of view, then, that a symbolic representation in the cultural arts of Ghana is pragmatic, for it is concerned with historical, philosophical, and practical considerations that must be dealt with in the process of its interpretation. That is, the interpretation must be constructed and reconstructed by the individual interpreter based on the historical and philosophical ideas, as well as the practical values of the symbolic form being interpreted. It is these values which constitute the cultural knowledge needed for interpreting symbolic representations in the Ghanaian cultural arts. In addition, it is through proverbs, the meanings of which are a part of the Ghanaian explicit cultural knowledge, that the nuances brought to the interpretation of symbols in the cultural arts of Ghana are determined. The conditions in which the use of a particular symbol is appropriate are also determined by means of proverbs. This implies that in Ghana, the significance of a cultural symbol is determined by the uses to which it is put. The proverbial sayings associated with Ghanaian cultural symbols express certain meanings and significance that are deeply rooted in the ideal cultural values that are most

cherished by the Ghanaian people. The expressive nature of Ghanaian proverbs lies in the fact that they disseminate rich mythical, legendary, or historical information about the culture's past.

To sum up, it can be safely said that approaching the interpretation of a symbolic form in the Ghanaian cultural arts by analyzing its meaning, significance, and uses can help the interpreter to represent the symbol in a manner that goes beyond what is superficially present in its physical form. What this presupposes is that the authentic value or significance of the symbolic form cannot be understood if a study of it is reduced to an analysis of its literal aspects without reference to, or associating it with the tacit cultural knowledge that has informed its creation. This indicates that the interpretation of the symbolic form is not a matter of mere decoding; it is a hermeneutic activity. The term 'hermeneutics' may be explained as a form of interpretation which is based on practical judgement and personal reflections involving deliberations, associations, and debate in the mind so as to clarify the meaning of an information, event, or situation. The interpretation of symbolic forms in the Ghanaian cultural arts is said to be a hermeneutic activity because it makes use of an implicit knowledge drawn from the cultural, historical, and philosophical beliefs and ideals of the Ghanaian people in the process of the interpretation.

As noted earlier, an important characteristic of symbolic representations in the cultural arts of Ghana is that they express ideas about the human condition within the Ghanaian community. The ideas expressed by Ghanaian cultural symbols vary greatly, but typically they include notions such as unity, power, cooperation, peace and group

solidarity, strength, bravery, courage, achievement, success, wealth, fertility, plenty, purity, sacredness, and so forth. Whereas concrete things such as a tree, a seed, an animal or animal parts, and even human figures may be used as symbols to express abstract ideas, such concrete items themselves are never symbolized. This is also true with the days of the week, events, and names of the numerals. While these may be used to symbolize certain important historical concepts or aspects of the history of a family, clan, or tribe, they themselves are not represented with symbols. For example, in spite of the fact that no symbols are made to stand for 'Tuesday', to the fishing groups along the coast of Ghana and the farming communities in most parts of the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions, the name of the day, Tuesday, is a symbol of rest, socialization, and enjoyment. For the fishermen, it also denotes preparation, for they repair their fishing gear and acquire their supplies for another week's fishing expedition. Events such as festivals are symbols of cooperativeness and unity among members of the community.

In terms of the names of the numerals, 'five', *num* or *anum*, for the Ashanti denotes a state of remorse (Sarpong, 1974). The expression *manu mehu* literally interpreted as "a state of regret", is said to symbolize bad omen. Most tribes in Ghana wait until the eighth day after the birth of a baby before giving it a name. It is believed that by living through seven days, the child has survived the seven dangers of life, each day of the week being a metaphor for one danger of life. Having survived each of the seven days that constitute a week, the child is said to have come to stay. Hence, it is accepted as a full member of the family by being given a name. In most parts of Ghana, the number 'ten' is a symbol of fullness. Therefore, when a woman gives birth to her

tenth child, this is celebrated with a grand feast: the goat or sheep used for the purpose is offered by the husband, or in his absence, the children. The name of the event, *Nyongma Too* (in the Ga language), denotes an act of making an offering to the soul of the woman for her fruitfulness. To the Ga and Dangme tribes of the Accra plains, the number 'eighty' is the symbol of the full span of human life (or fullness of life). It is generally thought that the ideal life-span that nature has blessed humans with is eighty years. It is, therefore, a further blessing for one to live beyond that age; and to die before attaining it is a misfortune. A line in one of their annual *Homowo* festival songs, *Wofee momoomo, kpaanyo anina wo*, literally translates, "may we live to be old and achieve 'eight'". The word eight used here is actually eight tens; and the song is a prayer not only for long life, but also a wish for everyone to reach nature's ordained full life-span for humans. This idea is also reflected in the way they greet each other on the day following the actual festival day, which stands for the first day of the new year: *Ngoo wala*, meaning, 'take life', or 'have life'.

Research shows that in Ghana, diverse forms of cultural symbols are created and used by various social groups such as families, clans, tribes, and dynasties. The ideas and rationales underlying each cultural symbol lead to the creation of some solidarity among members of the group. The shared interpretations, meanings, and language of the symbolic forms help to communicate the history and the wisdom behind the values of the group's cultural behaviours and practices. Indeed, it is the power of this sharing that binds together the members of any given social group in Ghana. The power of sharing is also believed to act as a point of connection between the living and the spirits of the

ancestors. Probably this is what makes the use of cultural symbols a crucial locus of social power among Ghanaians. This suggests, then, that an important key to understanding symbolic representations and acts in the cultural arts of Ghana lies in the motives behind, or the rationales underlying, their creation.

That Ghanaians think about the world in which they live in symbolic terms has led to the use of a wide range of symbolic forms in accordance with various aspects of their social and cultural life, including the practice of their arts. This chapter devotes itself to interpreting the meanings of selected examples of symbolic representations and acts within three broad categories of the Ghanaian cultural arts, namely:

1. visual arts (i.e., symbolic representations in the visual arts);
2. performing arts (i.e., symbolic behaviours in the performing arts); and
3. verbal arts (i.e., symbolic artistic acts in relation to the verbal art forms).

There is need to mention at this juncture that the interpretations of the meanings and significance of Ghanaian cultural artistic forms and symbols I have offered in this dissertation are not absolute: all the meanings are based mainly on my research findings.

### **Visual Arts**

The visual arts discussed here include textile, pottery, sculpture, and arts of the human body. The functions of specific artworks in each of these categories will be described. In all of these arts, various symbolic forms are used to convey meanings. On the most basic level, these forms include lines, shapes, and colours. On a more complex level, images of objects, animals, birds, and human beings are used to convey particular

meanings. In the following discussion, specific examples of artworks are presented to show how these symbols are used in particular art forms.

### **Meanings of Lines and Shapes**

Ghanaian traditional symbolism is often found in some basic elements of design such as lines and shapes that appear in her cultural arts. Even though they are not considered as works of art themselves, certain types of lines and shapes have symbolic meanings and significance to the Ghanaian people. Thus, while lines and shapes are mainly applied as elements for ornamenting visual art forms, this usually is done with the aim of conveying particular forms of information about Ghanaian cultural beliefs and values. It has been found expedient to begin the discussions about the visual arts with the symbolic meanings and significance Ghanaians attach to various lines and shapes in their cultural arts. Being the basic elements of design, lines and shapes appear in most Ghanaian visual art forms. Thus, understanding the symbolic meanings and significance of various lines and shapes can help the reader in understanding the interpretation of the visual arts of Ghana. While Ghanaians are particularly interested in attaching symbolic meanings and significance to forms in their arts, they also have a peculiar tendency of relating their artistic symbols to either the male or the female. Nothing of significance in Ghanaian traditional design is spoken of as being beautiful or ugly, proper or improper, unless it is related in appearance either to the male or to the female symbols (Antobam, 1963, p. 90).



The bulk of information on the types of lines and shapes (including colours) and the interpretation of their meanings and significance presented here are offered by Dr. B.K. Dogbe, Head of the Department of African Art; Dr. S.K. Amenuke, Head of the Department of Art Education, College of Art, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi; and Nana Owusu Ansah, artist and resource person of the Cultural Research Centre at the Manhyia Palace, Kumasi, Ghana.

### **Lines**

Some examples of line types that are of symbolic significance in the Ghanaian arts are the cross, zigzag lines, undulating lines, and chevrons.

**The Cross:** This is made up of two different types, namely, male and female crosses. The male cross is the type that can be described as the 'right-angled cross'. It is composed of a perpendicular line, crossed by a horizontal one at right angles. While several variations of this may be found, the basic shape of the right-angled cross is always evident. It is used to illustrate the idea of cross roads: the point of intersection called *Nkwantan* depicts a central point from which radiate four major roads. The central point stands for the seat of government, while the directions of the roads represent the four major divisional wings of the state. In Ghana, each traditional area has four divisions, called wings, administered by wing leaders (otherwise known as sub-chiefs, referred to in the Akan language as *Mpakaf*). Thus, in effect, the right-angled cross is used to signify the ruling power of the head of state.

The divisional wings of each traditional area, which are founded on the basis of defensive and warring strategies, include: 1) the Vanguard, *Adonten*, led by *Adontenhene*; 2) the Rear Wing, *Kyidom*, led by *Kyidomhene*; 3) the Right Wing, *Nifa*, led by *Nifahene*; and 4) the Left Wing, *Benkum*, led by *Benkumhene*. The word, *Hene*, derives from the word, *Ohene*, meaning, 'Chief' or 'Ruler'.

A symbol of power, the right-angled cross appears on various royal paraphernalia. It appears in the centre of the golden circular symbol pinned to the centre of the crescent moon seat of royal stools for paramount chiefs. It appears in the royal applique cloth worn by male rulers, and also in the centre of royal soul discs to symbolize the continuity of the life-force.

The female cross is that which takes the form of the letter 'X'. It is said to be used both in the structural design and in the decoration of female ancestral stools to signify old age and dignity, and also, the warmth of the love of grandmothers. Discussing the manner of sitting in public places in relation to Ghanaian cultural values, Antobam (1963) observes that because the female cross stands for old age, it is considered a bad manner, and hence a taboo, to cross one's legs at assemblies where elders and important personalities of society are present. If it has to be done, "then it must be by the most important persons present" (p. 112).

**The Zigzag Line:** It is associated with the form assumed by a snake when climbing a tree. The notion here is that it is only through a judicious application of its intellect that the snake, without legs, can climb a tree. The zigzag line is, therefore, used

to symbolize intelligence or commonsense -- the ability to apply one's intellect in taking wise decisions in practical affairs of everyday life. A male symbol, its use can be found in the decoration of staffs of office. It is, however, common in decorating items of everyday use such as pots, tool handles, walking sticks, chairs, drums, and leather products -- bags, sandals, and hassocks. Zigzag lines also have very significant use in *Kente* cloth designs.

**The Chevron:** This is basically a 'V'-shaped line representing a broken part of the zigzag line, and in Ghanaian traditional symbolism, it could be inverted or placed side up. The shape of the chevron is often varied by either widening the 'V' or making it narrow. A chevron symbolizes regeneration or rebirth. The chevron appears in the woven structure of intricately designed *Kente* cloths, and also in canoe decoration. It is also either carved onto the body of state stools, drums, chairs, and staffs of the court spokesman, or cut out from gold metal plates and attached to them as ornamentations.

**The Undulating Line:** A female symbol, the undulating line is used to represent the stream of life. It is often found in the decoration of earthenware pots for storing water and cooking, as these are believed to support the life-force. The undulating line reveals itself also in the twists imparted to the raffia necklace attached to royal soul discs, for the same reason stated above. Sometimes, it is used as an ornamentation on the hilts of ceremonial state swords.

**The Spiral Line:** Associated with the whirling or coiling nature of things, the spiral line is used to symbolize the delicacy and fragile nature of life. The course of life is not without inconsistencies: it is usually marked by phenomena that are not consistent in standards or behaviour. Hence, life must be approached cautiously and conscientiously. It is used in jewellery designs, especially in gold hair pins and earrings. A female symbol, the spiral signifies the virtue of being conscientious and cautious in one's actions within the inconsistencies of life's situations.

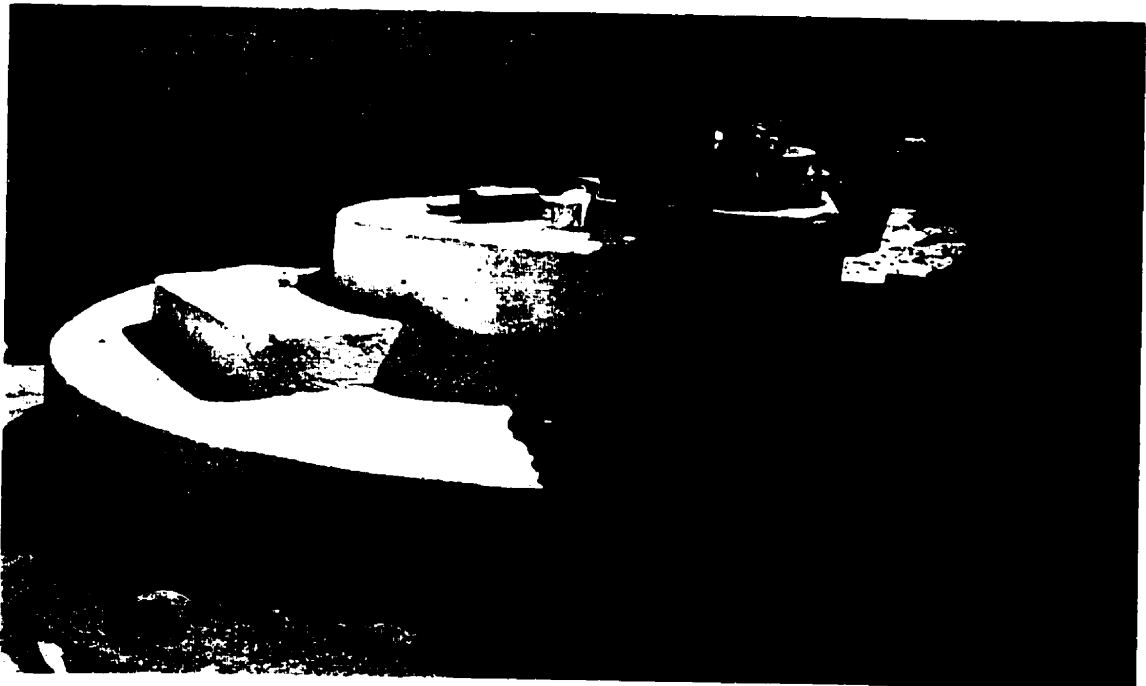
### **Shapes**

Some shapes used in the Ghanaian arts to which are attached symbolic significance are: the circle, the concentric circle, and the rectangle or square, which are regarded as male symbols; and the oval, the crescent moon, and the triangle, which are female symbols.

**The Circle:** It is associated with the full moon. It represents the presence and the power of the spirit of God in society. While the circle is not a symbol of God, for God is not represented figuratively by the Ghanaian, the smooth curvature of its shape does signify the perfect attributes of the spirit of God -- its sacredness, sanctity, and purity. Its continuous circumference also describes the cyclical characteristics of natural phenomena, signifying the endlessness of the life-force. A symbol of purity and sacredness, the circle appears in the plans of most sacred objects such as shrines and temples constructed as abodes for ancestral spirits and other supernatural deities. The

*Otutu* shrines of Prampram, Nungua, Teshie, La and other places, particularly in the Greater Accra Region, are notable examples. In terms of temples following circular plans, typical examples are those for the deities of *Dzange (Jange)* of Great Ningo, *Digbleh, Tsawe, and Gbadagbaa* of Prampram, *Ntona* of Elmina in the Central Region, *Ntoa* of Sasaman, and *Tano* of Takyiman in the Brong Ahafo Region.

In some Ghanaian communities, priests of the cult always have to make a circle with white powder, circumscribing the ground where they undertake certain rituals to sanctify it prior to the commencement of the activity. As well, all sexual and related sensory organs of the human body are symbolized in terms of circles to reflect their sacredness. As organs of procreation, they are viewed as contributing to the continuity of the life-force.



*Fig. 4a: An Otutu Shrine.*  
Owufu Shrine, Prampram.



*Fig. 4b: A Typical Temple for a Deity.  
Tsawe Temple, Prampram.*

A symbol of the endlessness of the life-force, therefore, the circle represents the soul of the society. Its presence in the plan of the circular central pillar of the stool, and in the design of the royal soul disc, both of which are a representation of the soul of the society, are key examples. The tops of most royal stools are decorated with a golden circular disc, purported to represent the personality or the ego of the reigning chief. The back-rest of the Akan royal chair, *Asipim*, must as a rule have a circle, or a variation of it, without which it is regarded as imperfect. All these are considered to symbolize the soul of the society. As well, the circle shows itself in the shape of the indigenous clay

pot for storing water, both pot and water being symbols of the continuous flow of the life-force.

**The Concentric Circle:** A male symbol, the concentric circle is a variation of the circle. Its design is believed to have derived from the structure of growth rings found in the cross-section of the stems of trees, hence, it stands for fertility and growth. For this reason, among the Akan people, the concentric circle is usually carved as a decoration on symbolic chewing sticks. During girls' nubility rites, parents and friends offer these sticks to the initiates, to wish them fertility. The concentric circle appears also in the decoration of queenmothers' soul discs (insignias of office of female soul-bearers) of the Akan royal court to wish fertility for the society as a whole. For the same meaning, sometimes concentric circles are made on the back of the head of the female fertility doll which a husband offers to his wife wishing her to have children. In some Ghanaian societies, if a man dies without fathering any child in his life time, a clay funerary head is made with concentric circles on its forehead and buried on his grave. This is to make his soul fertile if he reincarnates, and at the same, signify a warning to the soul never to return to the world again infertile.

**The Square or Rectangle:** Normally, these two shapes are equivalent to each other. They stand for the sanctifying (cleansing) power of the spirit of God at work in society, protecting it against evil and misfortune. In some Ghanaian societies, particularly the Ashanti, the square or rectangle is either embroidered on the fabric, or painted on

the animal skin -- usually in yellow colour -- to be used as a bed-side mat for a paramount chief. Thus the chief may step on it straight from bed, so as to be sanctified. The same symbol is sometimes done on the door of the royal ancestral stool house to show the sanctity of the place. For the same reason, the back-rest of most royal chairs are normally square or rectangular in shape, with a circle in the centre. The two shapes together symbolize the perfect attributes of God -- full of wisdom, justice, fairness, and mercy. A typical example of a representation of these attributes in an artwork can be found in the square or rectangular perforations made on the central circular pillar of the stool (see fig. 10a).

Ideally, these attributes are the most cherished virtues a chief is expected to exhibit. For this reason, the square or rectangle is the central motif of the gold bracelets worn by royal court councillors on the right-hand wrists, as insignias of office when sent as ambassadors on royal errands. A male symbol, the square or rectangle signifies the male strength and influence in society culminating in their collective spirit to protect and defend their state against its enemies. Hence, the shape of indigenous battle shields is mostly square or rectangular.

**The Crescent Moon:** A feminine symbol, the crescent moon stands for the general characteristics of the female in society, that is, female kindness, affection, allurements, and love, and the influence of these over life as a whole. Its use in the design of the seat of all traditional stools indicates the contributions made by females in the founding and development of societies. It usually appears in the design of the special



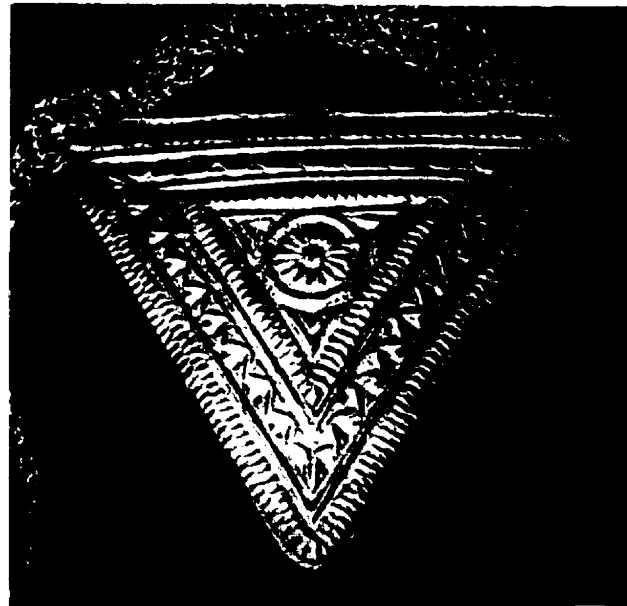
applique cloth, *Akunintam*, and also hassocks and cushions, which form a part of most royal regalia in Ghana. The crescent moon also appears in the designs on the headgear of rulers, as well as on the blades of some ceremonial state swords. Often, the crescent moon appears together with a star in a design to signify faithfulness, sincerity, and love.

**The Oval:** Associated with the shape of an egg, the oval shape is used to symbolize feminine beauty and fertility. In Ghanaian conceptions of beauty, the oval shape forms the basis of what should be the ideal shapes of the parts of the female figure. That is to say, the head, torso, buttocks, and calves should, to some extent, each reveal a resemblance to the oval shape in order to be pronounced beautiful. The egg also symbolizes life because it is itself looked on as an object containing a potential life, hence, the conception of it as a symbol of fertility. Based on this conception, the egg is usually used in rituals involving the cleansing of the human soul for the maintenance of the life-force.

**The Triangle:** Also a female symbol, the triangle is one of the most commonly used symbolic shapes in Ghanaian artistic representations. The triangle appears as one of the central motifs used in the adornment of royal paraphernalia such as chiefs' headgear, elbow bands, and sandals. It also shows up on the four upright posts of stools as shown in fig. 10a; as well, it forms the major motif used in the border decorations of royal cushions and hassocks. Perhaps its most significant use lies in its employment as the main shape for the large pectorals of gold worn as pendants over the chests of most

paramount chiefs (see fig. 5). Used in this way, the triangle signifies royalty, self-esteem, and pride. Its other uses can be found in canoe decorations. In general use, however, the triangle is said to symbolize attraction, friendliness, and admiration. A female symbol, it stands for feminine self-dignity and pride.

*Fig. 5: A Pectoral for Paramount Chiefs.*  
Cultural Research Centre,  
Manhyia Palace, Kumasi.



### **Meanings of Colours**

Like lines and shapes, the use of colour is also symbolic, for individual colours and colour groupings have symbolic meanings and significance founded on Ghanaian historical, philosophical, and spiritual values. The meaning of a colour is also derived by associating it with things in nature. Apart from the meanings assigned to them, each

colour has its own peculiar relevance in social activities. Thus, the conception of the beauty of colour in the Ghanaian traditional setting depends not on its visual qualities, but also, on the meaning and social relevance attached to it. In effect, therefore, the study of Ghanaian colour symbolism involves three approaches, each complementing the other. The first is by finding out what in nature a particular colour is associated with or represents; second, by finding out its meaning, that is, the historical, philosophical, or spiritual ideas it symbolizes; and third, by exploring its uses or social relevance. Some examples of colours used by Ghanaians in various customary activities are white, orange or yellow, blue, green, grey, red, brown, and black. While generally colours are not often used in isolation from each other, a predominant use of one of the above named colours and its variations, tells the mood of a particular occasion.

### **White**

The white colour is associated with the substance of kaolin, a type of white clay with a fine texture. When dried and ground, its fine powder is very important in religious rituals as well as in the preparation of medication for the treatment of stomach upsets. White is also considered in terms of the colour of cotton fibres. White symbolizes purity, sanctity, and spirituality, as its state of being without blemishes, signifies the faultless of the spirit of God. In addition, it stands for virginity and moral chastity. A symbol of purity, white is used for all religious purposes. It forms the main colour of clothing worn by high priests and priestesses of the cult to portray the sacredness and sanctity of their office (see fig. 6).



*Fig. 6: Some Priests for the Cult Dressed in White.  
A Religious Ceremony, Prampram.*

In general life, white expresses happiness; hence, predominantly white costume is worn on all occasions that bring joy such as child naming, puberty, marriage ceremonies, as well as victory in judiciary matters, and all forms of success. After giving birth to a baby, for example, a mother dresses in predominantly white costumes for as long as she likes, expressing her happiness and gratitude to God for her success in going through the perils of pregnancy and delivery of her child. Sometimes, predominantly white coloured cloth is worn on the occasion of the formal funeral rites of old people to indicate an expression of joy over their living to ripe old age.

**Orange or Yellow:** All shades of yellow are associated with the beauty and richness of the colour of the fat of a chicken and gold metal, one of the major mineral resources of Ghana. It connotes riches, plenty, and prosperity of individuals and the state. It also symbolizes royalty, standing for gorgeousness, pageantry, gaiety, pomp, and contentment. For this reason, gold is very significant in the ornamentation of royal regalia. Apparently, it is for the same reason that various shades of yellow are very much featured in terms of both costume and jewellery during most occasions for the durbar of chiefs. Gold jewellery is also used as body ornaments on all joyous occasions, particularly puberty and traditional marriage rites. Yellow colour in body painting is common among the Ga and Dangme people, who stamp it on the bodies of puberty initiates in beautiful patterns. On the notion of gold as a symbol of prosperity, Antobam (1963) writes:

In the olden days the burying of gold dust at the centre of the site where the first house was built, marked the foundation of a village or town. Sometimes, it was buried under the first . . . tree of the town or village square. . . . This was to bring prosperity and life to the town or village. Later on, this custom was adopted by the general public, and . . . [many] houses especially in Akan Ghanaian communities had gold dust buried in their foundations for the same reason (p. 76).

### **Blue**

The blue colour is associated with the sky and water. It signifies a state or quality of being serene, calm, tranquil, or peaceful. It stands also for fidelity, female tenderness, and other attributes pertaining to love and affection. Its association with water renders the blue colour also a symbol of fertility of the earth, humans, and animals, and hence

of life. The blue colour is very widely used in everyday life affairs but its most cultural significance is found in its use in nubility and marriage rites, and also for funerals. During girls' puberty rites, especially among the Ga, Dangme, and Ewe tribes, the bead girdles worn on the waist, arms, wrists, and neck of the initiate must, as a matter of necessity, include some special type of blue coloured beads called *Koli (Korli)*, as a symbol of love and fertility. It appears also in the beads used to adorn brides, for the same reason. A person who loses a very close relation such as a spouse, mother, father, or child, as a custom, wears a dark blue coloured cloth called *Birisi* (in Akan), *Brishii* (in Ga), and *Obrisi* (in Ewe), to indicate his or her deep love for the deceased person.

### **Green**

It is associated with the green of vegetation. The green colour is used to symbolize newness or youthfulness, vitality, and growth. It also stands for the fruitful farms and hope for plenty in terms of harvest. During puberty initiation rites and twin birth celebrations, water poured over a selected set of green herbs is used in washing the initiates, to cleanse them, and to wish them growth and vitality. Almost all forms of rituals performed for the purpose of cleansing, purification, and incarceration of evils spirits -- either for individual persons or the community as a whole -- involves sprinkling of or washing with water having some green herbs (among other things) in it. The performance of such rituals brings with it renewed hopes and contemplation of some improvement of life. People of the Ga, Ewe, and Dangme tribes do, as matter of necessity, daub the bodies of new initiates, brides, newly installed royals and officers of

the royal court, with green *Korobo (Mime)* in beautiful patterns, as a part of their body adornments. *Korobo* is an aromatic plant preparation in the form of myrrh, used as a body paint to signify the beginning of new life.

### **Grey**

The grey colour is associated with wood ash. It signifies a state of degradation and degeneration, as in old age or ill-health. Hazy and unfavourable weather conditions are also associated with the grey colour. No specific social or cultural event demands a predominant use of the grey colour in terms of costume or any other form of body adornment. However, it features significantly in agricultural practices, particularly in arable farming and fishing. Whenever the grey colour is applied in these two areas of agriculture, it is used as an antidote for unfavourable conditions such as crop diseases or calamities at sea. For example, wood ash is sprinkled on the leaves of deteriorating crops as a result of pest attacks for the purpose of helping them to survive. The use of the ash colour is also significant in the painting of the sides of canoes that are normally above the water level in order to make them visible at sea, especially at night when the moon light reflects on it. The idea here is to prevent collisions with other canoes or sea-fairing vessels. In this case too, the use of the grey colour signifies the fishermen's wish for survival. It is said that among the Akan people, if a person dies by committing suicide, or is struck by lightning, the corpse is usually laid in state at the outskirts of the town or village. Sympathizers who go to the funeral take along with them small quantities of wood ash which they sprinkle on the corpse. This funerary ritual always goes with a

short statement of regret, which in the general sense interprets as: "Sorry or pity, if this is your destiny, may yours mark the end of such disastrous deaths". Underlying this ritual also is a wish for the survival of the whole community.

### **Red**

Associated with the colour of blood, the red colour is used to symbolize states of alarm, danger, unrest, fear, anger, hatred, aggression, violence, and conditions relating to death, calamity or disaster. Indeed, there is normally a general display of red whenever there is a state of upheaval in the Ghanaian society. During periods of protestation or remonstrance against unfavourable conditions in society -- for instance, disputing against a political exaction -- the demonstrators often wear red bands of cloth around their heads and wrists to show the seriousness of their dissatisfaction with the situation. On the occasion of the death of a member of a professional group, such as the hunters or fishmongers association, his or her living colleagues also wear such bands of red cloth to declare that the death of the deceased is a great loss to them. Red is also used a sign of warning against danger: A red strip of cloth tied to a stick either on its own or together with a strip of black cloth, and displayed near a field, signifies a warning against trespassing.

### **Brown**

All shades of the brown colour are associated with the earth and soil. Brown symbolizes decay, a state of deterioration and rotteness. Specifically, it represents the



ultimate end of life and the return of the mortal remains to the soil. For this reason, the brown colour in its various shades, is commonly used in the mourning of the dead.

### **Black**

It is associated with the colour of charcoal, or the hard, lustrous black wood of the ebony, a tropical African tree. The characteristics of the black colour is imagined in terms of the darkness of the night with its attendant hidden, immoral activities of humans, as well as a myriad of nocturnal spiritual and mystical entities collectively termed, 'the devil'. Ideally, it is used to represent the mystery of death and the gloom or state of melancholy and depression it brings with it. In this vein, therefore, black is used to signify things that belong to the past, old age, and history. As such it is used to mark all royal relics and other objects of history. A typical example is found in the blackening of state stools dedicated to royal ancestors. It is also said that all war booties of the past were blackened to show that they are objects of history. The contents of most talismans worn as charms for protection against evil forces and wild animals are said to include, as a matter of necessity, some black powder prepared from herbs and other items believed to possess strong spiritual powers. When a person wears a black or indigo blue cloth, it indicates that he or she has lost a close relative such as mother, father, spouse, child, brother, or sister. The colour signifies a deep feeling of melancholy. It is worn during and after the funeral rites, often for a period of one year, to show prolonged grief over the death of a loved one.

## **Meanings of Textile Designs**

It is a common practice among Ghanaians to choose cloths with colour and motifs that bear symbolic meanings, as well as signify the moods and feelings of particular occasions. Very often, the meanings are associated with activities of everyday life, expressing the general beliefs and ideas of the people. It is the meanings assigned to particular textile symbols that indicate their significance. Three main forms of indigenous textiles can be distinguished in Ghana, namely: woven, as in *Kente*; applique, as in *Akunintam*; and printed, as in *Adinkra* cloths.

### ***Kente* Designs**

*Kente* is the general name for the indigenous Ghanaian hand-woven cloth. Oral tradition has it that the word *Kente* derives from *Kenten* (basket) or *Kete* (mat), depicting the nature of its weave structure. It is woven in narrow strips, each about ten to fifteen centimetres (four to six inches) in width. These strips are sewn side-by-side together until the desired width of cloth is obtained. The following information about *Kente* designs, their meanings, and significance are provided by a prominent *Kente* weaver of Bonwere in Ashanti and his team of *Kente* weavers, and also by two well known *Kente* weavers, namely, Togbe Salu of Afiadenyigba and Mr. Adzie of Agbozume in the Volta Region.

The design of a *Kente* may be simple, when it takes the form of warp-way or weft-way colour stripes, or a combination of the two. An elaborately designed one, on the other hand, combines an intricate arrangement of colour patterns and geometrical shapes in its weave structure. It is, thus, the intricacy of the design that suggests the

value of a particular *Kente* cloth, and hence, its symbolic significance. Even though *Kente* is woven everywhere in Ghana, the Ashanti and Volta Regions are the most known weaving centres. A study of *Kente* designs in Ashanti reveals five basic types of design patterns, namely: *Ahwepam (Ahweepam)*, *Nkyeretire (Nkyereano)*, *Akyem*, *Adwin (Dwini)*, and *Faprenu*.

*Ahwepam (Ahweepam)* means without motifs. It is made of coloured stripes running the length or width of its surface; and hence, the easiest to weave, and the most affordable.

*Nkyeretire (Nkyereano)* contains pattern or motifs, but these are concentrated only at the ends of the individual strips. When sewn together, the patterns and motifs tend to form border designs at two opposite ends of the cloth.

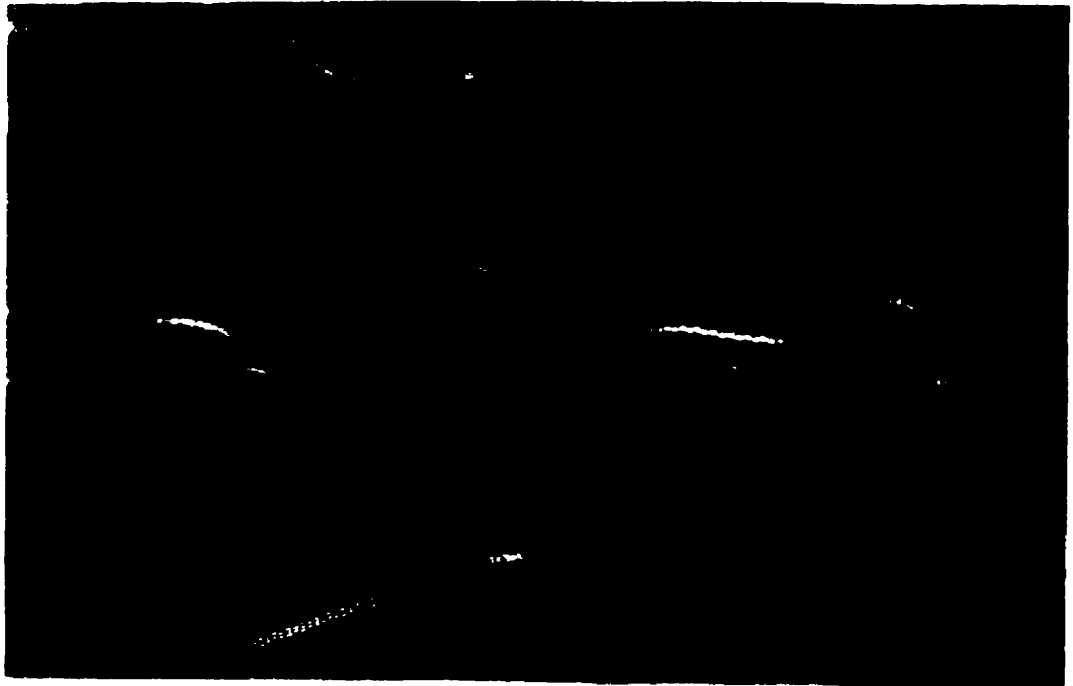
*Akyem* simply implies very rich in colour. This *Kente* type is said to have been named after a bird with beautifully coloured feathers, called *Akyem*, which is regarded as a symbol of beauty.

*Adwin (Dwini)* means designed with motifs.

*Faprenu* is a *Kente* woven from two different warp sheets put together to produce a strong and compact texture.

While each of these design patterns can be woven on its own, two or more of them are normally combined where elaborately patterned cloths are desired. This suggests, then, that they are the sources from which all other *Kente* designs are derived. It is the manner in which these weave patterns are combined and arranged into a design that determine the symbolic name given to a particular *Kente* cloth (Amenuke and Ayiku

et. al., 1991). For example, the result of a combination of *Adwin* (designed) and *Akyem* (rich in colour) is a *Kente* with a very intricate weave pattern, full of geometric ornamentation, and rich in colour called *Adwinasa*. It literally means "all designs and design combinations have been used up" or "I have exhausted my ideas in designing". The name implies that the beauty of the cloth suggests that the weaver put a great deal of thought into the design. A variation of this design is called *Fathia fata Nkrumah*. This is literally translated as, Nkrumah (President of the first Republic of Ghana) deserves his beautiful wife, Fathia". This name simply signifies the fact that it is only the great and rich in society who deserve to wear such a beautiful design.



*Fig. 7a: A Kente Cloth with Geometric Ornamentation.*  
Photograph taken at Bonwere, A Major *Kente* Weaving Centre in the Ashanti Region.

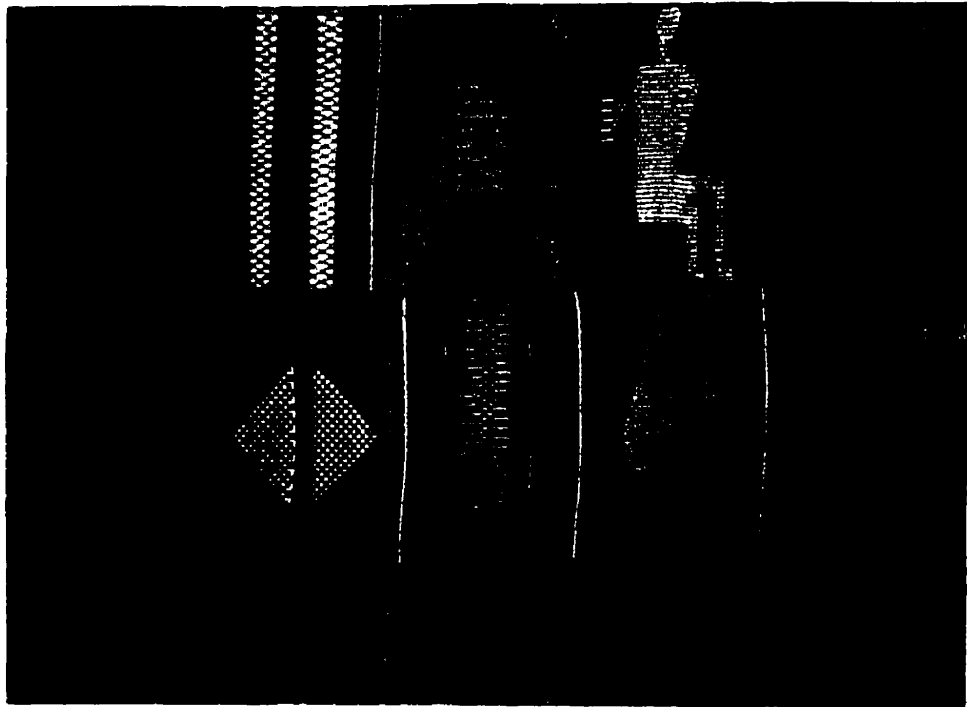
*Kyeretwie*, meaning, "ability to capture the leopard", is the name of yet another type of *Kente* design. The name suggests a distinctive power, a strong attribute signifying the might of a great ruler. Combining all the above basic designs and patterns, *Kyeretwie* is easily the most splendid and the most expensive, yet, the least popular type of *Kente*. This is because it is never produced for sale; it is woven only on state commissions by specially selected weavers for great chiefs.

In the Volta Region, the name *Adanuvo* used for hand-woven cloth depicts a cloth that is a result of imaginative and creative thinking, as well as effective manual dexterity. *Kente* designs from the Volta Region also go with symbolic names similar to those of Ashanti. For example, *Ehianaga* means, "there is need for money", implying that only the rich can afford it. *Fiawoyome* means, "second to kings" or "next to royals" (Amenuke and Ayiku, et. al. 1991, p. 157). These are considered some of the most beautiful types of *Kente*, and whoever wears one is deemed very rich. There are other design names that take on a different trend in connotation. For instance, *Afiadekemefao* means "there is nowhere that is without any problems"; *Lolozuavi* literally translates as "love has turned into bitterness". These two latter names of *Kente* designs signify the fact that one's expectations may not always be met, which in turn, suggests that one should be content with whatever one has.

Also worthy of mentioning is a particular type of *Kente*, very popular among the Ewe of the Volta Region, which incorporates both geometric shapes and representations of real images into its weave structure. Some examples of such images include:

- The stool, signifying ruling power and authority.

- The star, which stands for the possessing an outstanding quality or superior merit.
- The leaf, representing the fact that both the fresh and dry leaves are liable to falling off the tree. What this implies is that death does not spare anybody; it takes on whoever it pleases, both the young and the old alike.
- The hen or duck, standing for good parenthood, as they always cover their young ones with their wings whenever they sense any danger.
- A human being holding a mirror in one hand and a comb in the other to signify the necessity for self-reflection and getting rid of (combing off) whatever might constitute a bad habit in one's life.
- A zigzag rope, which represents the wise and cunning characteristics of the serpent, a symbol of wisdom.

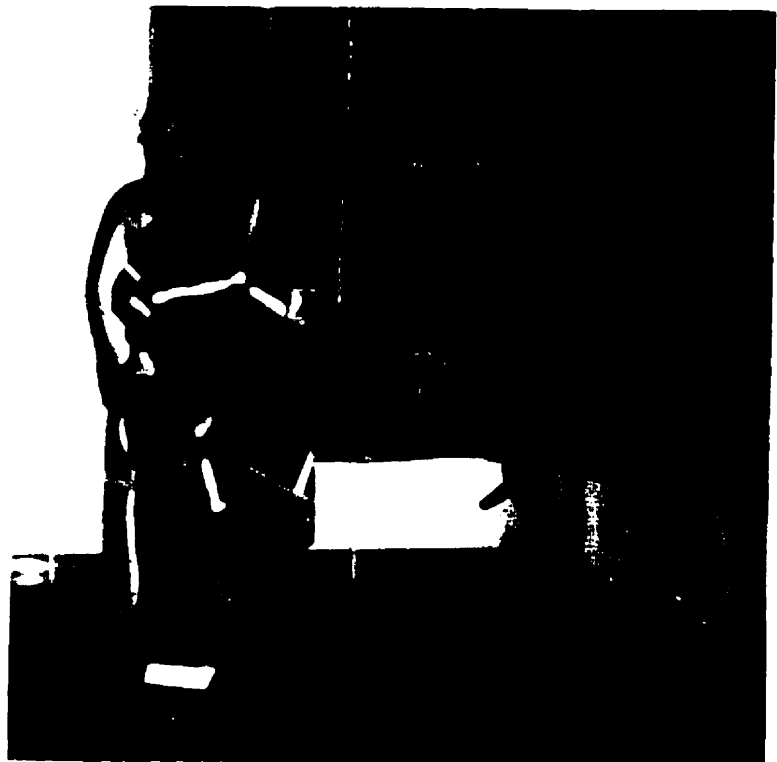


*Fig. 7b: A Kente Cloth with Figurative Ornamentation.*  
Photograph taken at Agbozume, A Major Kente Weaving Centre in the Volta Region.

## Applique Designs

The term 'applique' refers to a process of laying on of additional pieces of textile into various shapes, patterns or images to an already woven textile base to enhance it. In the broad sense of the term, applique work in the Ghanaian traditional setting also includes attaching such materials as beads, cowrie shells, gold ornaments, and talismans (bundles of medicine) to a textile base. Textile items that are appliqued include war gowns, *Batakari Kesie*, for wing leaders (chiefs), and flags with images that distinguish the different wing groups or traditional military battalions known as *Asafo* companies among the Fante. Other items include cloths, for example, royal appliqued cloths, *Akunintam*, and royal ceremonial headgears.

*Fig. 7c:*  
*An Appliqued Cloth.*  
Centre for National  
Culture, Accra.



As usual, images used in applique work have narrative forms associated with particular people, historical events, and social values. The main significance of applied cloths is that they mark the distinction and identity of those who wear them. As such, they are often associated with prestige and social class. A notable image used in applied cloth is the elephant, which signifies greatness. Other examples of images such as the crescent moon, star, triangle, chevron, square, and rectangle have been explained earlier in this chapter. A composition of a circle with two triangles attached to any opposite sides of it, however, is said to symbolize female partnership in society, while a circle with two rectangles attached to it represents male partnership.

### ***Adinkra Motifs***

The urge to convey information and to record important events through art-making has led to the development of pictographic art by the indigenous Ghanaian artist. That is, the development of symbolic motifs (designs) in the form of pictographs or ideograms popularly known as *Adinkra* symbols. The terms, 'pictograms' and 'ideograms' are applied here to denote the use of pictorial symbols to represent abstract ideas, as pertains to picture writing. From this definition, it becomes apparent that the development of pictography in the Ghanaian arts has been based on some incidental resemblances of certain objects in nature with ideas in life, which may have given the artist the impulse to take them as models. This shows that the choice of motifs or designs for *Adinkra* symbols is not arbitrary, each has an appropriate name, as well as historical,



social, or allegorical significance to the Ghanaian. The meaning of each symbol is associated with its name and the saying that goes with it.

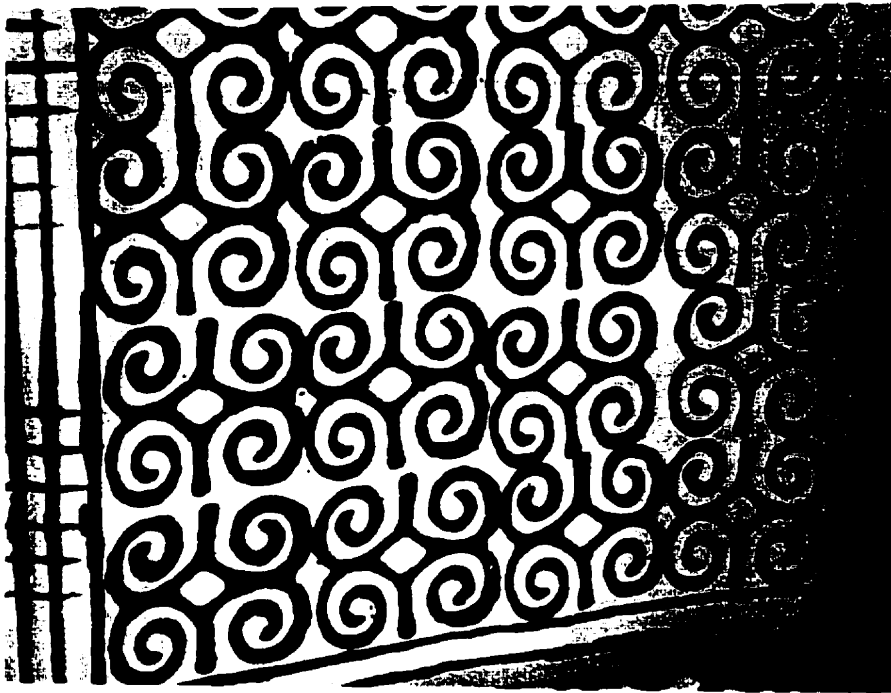
*Adinkra* means "farewell" or "good-bye", as such, the use of its motifs in textile printing is usually done for the production of a special type of cloth used on funeral occasions to bid good-bye to the spirit of the dead. The textile base on which the printing is done is either plain white or dyed cotton cloth. The motifs are cut out from pieces of calabash, and small handles made up of sticks are attached to the back of the cut-out designs, turning them into printing stamps (fig. 7d).

*Fig. 7d: Some Adinkra Printing Stamps.*  
Centre for National Culture, Kumasi.



The pigment for printing *Adinkra* cloths is prepared from a tree bark by being boiled for several hours together with iron slag, producing a thick, dark solution. To apply the designs, the fabric is spread over a flat surface that is covered with sack cloth and held in position with pins. The surface of the cloth is then marked into squares by means of a comb-like device that is dipped into the pigment and drawn directly onto the

cloth. The actual printing is done by dipping the stamps into the pigment and stamping them onto the surface of the cloth within the squares. Fig. 7e shows a typical *Adinkra* cloth.



*Fig. 7e: An Adinkra Cloth.*  
Centre for National Culture, Kumasi.

It is said that in the past, the *Adinkra* mourning cloth was used only for the formal funeral rites of royals. Today, however, it is used for all funerals, irrespective of the social class or position of the deceased person. It is also important to mention that today, *Adinkra* symbols have more diversified uses, having been adopted as logos and emblems in various realms of the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. The following are

some typical *Adinkra* symbols drawn from Glover's (1969) *Adinkra* Chart, and Kayper-Mensah's (1976) *Sankofa Adinkra Poems*.

*Owu arwedie, baako nfo*: The ladder of death is not reserved for any specific person, it is for all to climb (fig. 8a). The notion here is that death is inevitable for everybody irrespective of rank or class. Kayper-Mensah expresses this notion poetically, as he writes:

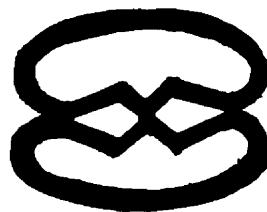
Death has such a wide ladder  
Everywhere for everyone, sad or jovial,  
Careful, careless, clean, dirty.  
No one needs to travel far  
If he [or she] has to climb death (p. 12).

*Fig. 8a: Owu Arwedie*

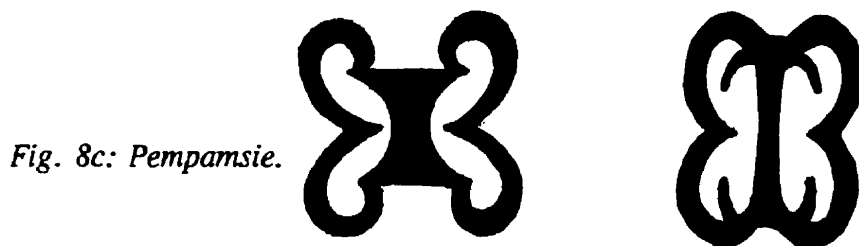


*Adwe (Dwe)*: The word, *Adwe*, means "it is cold", or "it has come to a dead end", or "it is at rest". These are some alternative statements used to describe a state of being dead. The word, *Dwe*, meaning "cold", signifies the indiscernible way in which death works. Whoever death lays its icy cold hands on, does not have any alternative than to yield to its demands and accept its rules. This symbol (fig. 8b), therefore, represents the mysteriousness of death.

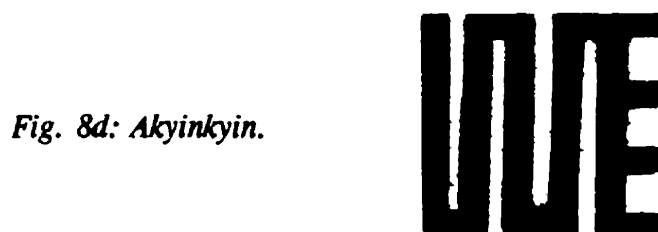
*Fig. 8b: Adwe (Dwe).*



*Pempamsie*: Literally this word means: "Keep united by stitching together". The saying associated with this symbol, *Bebirebe ahooden ne koroye*, is interpreted as: "It is within the united force of a people that lies their strength". This implies that once a people are resolved to come together in one accord and with shared hopes, the consequence is normally a strong united front. In a general sense, the symbol denotes the principle of bringing together all members of society to work with one accord to build up their state. In short, it is a call on the Ghanaian people to develop a patriotic spirit and refrain from indulging in acts that may let down their state by hindering its social, political, and economic improvement and advancement. Symbolically, therefore, *Pempamsie* stands for unity, patriotism, and nationalism (fig. 8c).

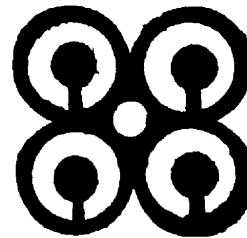


*Akyinkyin*: A motif made up of many curves (as shown in fig. 8d), *Akyinkyin* symbolizes the several changes that can occur in the course of life. To meet the challenges attendant to these changes, therefore, requires self-adaptation and being able to play many roles in life. It thus signifies adaptability and versatility.



*Matemasie (Ntesie)*: This means, "I have heard and kept it", or "I am keeping what I have heard". It is believed that there is virtue in keeping what one hears, for by so doing, one tends to build a wealth of knowledge leading to the acquisition of wisdom. Hence, it is a symbol of wisdom (see fig. 8e).

*Fig. 8e: Matemasie (Ntesie).*



*Hwemudua (Ofamfa)*: The word *Hwemudua* denotes a device for looking into, or examining things. It signifies the quality of being curious and critical in examining things so as to make a right choice. The *Hwemudua* bears the maxim *Wo hwehwe mu a, na wohu mu; wopusu mu a, na wote ne pampan*, which translates as "It is only through critical examination that one realizes what a thing is constituted of; also, it is by shaking a thing that one comes to know how it smells". This understanding presents the *Hwemudua* as a symbol of critical examination (fig. 8f). Perhaps, it is for this reason that the Standards Board of Ghana has adopted it for its logo.

*Fig. 8f: Hwemudua (Ofamfa).*



## **Meanings of Forms in Pottery**

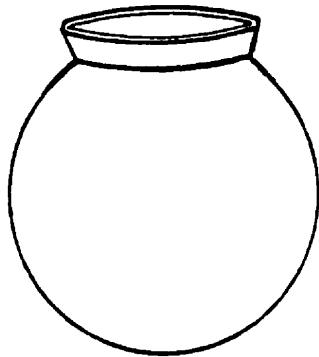
Like other authentic Ghanaian visual artworks, pottery making involves hand-building methods, following a particular set of culturally significant shapes and forms. Three basic shapes of pots can be distinguished, namely: the spherical, the half-spherical, and the oval. The spherical-shaped pot is related to the circle which signifies the presence of the spirit of God in society, as the giver of life. Since water is symbolically associated with fertility, and hence a promoter of life, the shapes of large pots for water storage are always spherical. Smaller spherical-shaped pots are used for cooking, and as containers for other drinks and medicine.

Related to the semi-circle, the half-spherical shape is looked upon in terms of the crescent moon, a symbol of motherly care and affection. This symbolic significance of the half-spherical shaped pot is reflected in its use for serving food, a factor that supports life.

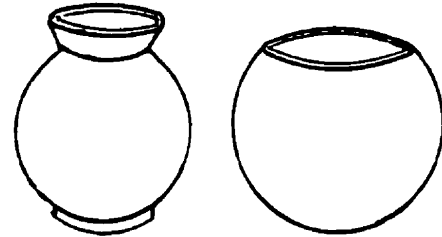
The oval-shaped pot is said to have been designed for washing and bathing, before the introduction of buckets. Until this day, it still forms a part of the paraphernalia of certain religious cults, where it is employed in rituals involving spiritual cleansing of the human soul. Symbolically, this function of the oval-shaped pot is also viewed in relation to the maintenance and advancement of life.

In summary, the main Ghanaian tradition in pottery making is to base the shapes of the pots on ideas relating to the promotion and advancement of life. The symbolic significance of the pots derive from the traditional meanings of the circle, the crescent

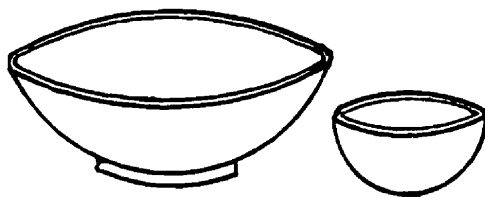
moon, and the oval, on which the shapes of the pots are based, and also from the uses for which each pot is intended.



*Spherical Pot for Water*



*Spherical Pots for Other Drinkables*



*Half-spherical Pots*



*Oval-Shaped Pot*

*Fig. 9: Some Symbolic Forms in Indigenous Ghanaian Pottery*

### **Meanings of Forms in Sculpture**

Sculpture is one of the principal forms of art in the visual arts domain in the Ghanaian traditional setting. Sculptural activities here include the carving of wood, bone, ivory, as well as metal casting and smithing using silver, gold, brass, bronze, and iron. Products of carving are: stools, state ceremonial swords (*Afena*), linguist staff tops, state

umbrella tops, the wooden *Akuaba* doll, gold weights, commemorative sculptures, and canoe decorations.

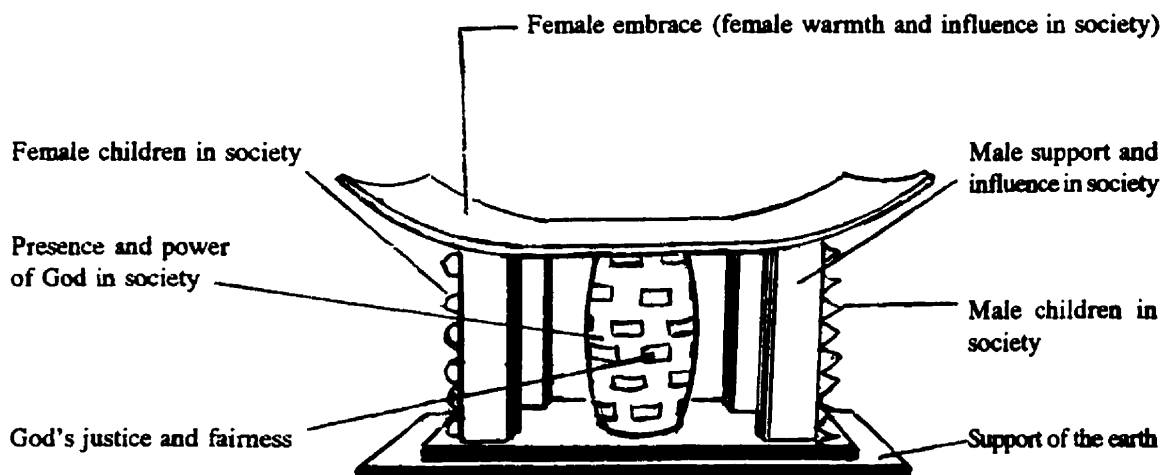
### **Stools**

The stool is carved out of a single block of wood. There are several versions of stools, but the type described here is the feminine (or female) stool, *Mbaadwa* (fig. 10a), which is said to be the first version of Ghanaian traditional stools to be created. The name 'feminine stool' does not suggest, however, that the use of this type of stool is restricted to the female only; its use is open to both women and men. The feminine stool has an arc or a concave top which acts as the seat, supported by five pillars -- a strong, hollow, central circular pillar, and four solid rectangular outer ones (at the corners). The pillars, in turn, stand on a flat, rectangular slab base.

Stools can be owned by individual persons, families, clans, tribes, and the state as a whole. Most important of all stools are those representing large groups of persons within a society such as are owned by clans, tribe, or states. Such a stool is regarded as the symbolic seat of all the members of the society which it represents; as such, it acts as the throne for the head or ruler of the society in question. The term used for a ruler in the Ghanaian traditional setting is 'chief'. A chief is regarded not only as a political administrator, but also as a spiritual leader of his people. This is because the stool which he occupies as his throne, and also of which he is the custodian, is the symbol of the soul, *Okra* or *Kra*, of the society to which it belongs. The soul is believed to be the spiritual aspect of the human personality that combines with the breath of life given by



God to make humans living beings. Because the soul is the life force derived from the spirit of God, the Creator, it is believed to be the element that links the people of the community together in one accord. Representing the souls of the people, the stool serves as the symbolic link between the overall soul of the society and its chief. Because of the powers invested by a people in their chief as their leader, the chief becomes their spokesman, and custodian of their wealth of customs, land, and so forth. The stool he occupies as his throne is, therefore, viewed as a symbol of power and authority. This renders the stool easily the most important and most treasured of the chief's regalia.



*Fig. 10a: Meanings of Parts of the Stool*

The queenmother is the person next in the order of importance to the chief, and possesses a stool serving as her symbol of office. Sharing in the role of the chief, she is regarded as the mother of the clan, tribe, or state. Her duties include advising the chief

and elders of the council. She possesses the leading right to reject dictatorial rulings of the chief; and in some communities, particularly the Akan tribes, this right extends to selecting or rejecting the next heir of the throne from the royal family after the death or destoolment of the ruling chief.

As a symbol of the collective spirit of the members of the community, the design of the stool is such that each component part of it represents one of the main ideas believed to hold together members of the society. The top arc or crescent moon-shaped seat of the stool symbolizes the loving embrace and warmth of mothers in particular, and the support and care offered by the female to society in general. The four rectangular-shaped pillars on the corners of the stool supporting the top arc represent masculinity and the influence of male support for society. They signify the strength and power exerted by the male members to support the society for its subsistence, defence, and growth. On the outer side of each of these pillars are usually an odd number of triangular projections. These are a representation of the children of the society: they signify how children are attached to their parents as well as depend on them and other adults of the society for their growth and development. If the projections are carved with pointed ends, they are meant to represent male children, while those with rounded ends stand for female children in society.

The relatively large, circular-shaped central pole of the stool symbolizes the presence of the spirit of God within society: the spirit of God is the breath of life which is responsible for the maintenance and sustenance of the life force of the society. It signifies the influence of Divine power and support of all human efforts towards

cooperative living and growth. Often, this pillar is decorated with small, square or rectangular perforations. These holes, known as *Adamedame*, symbolize the qualities of justice and fairness believed to be essential attributes of God, for which He stands in society (Antobam, 1963, p. 161). The flat, rectangular base of the stool on which the pillars stand is a symbol of stability and firmness, signifying a strong, powerful, steady, and stable society. It also symbolizes the stability of the earth which endows society with various forms of fortune and wealth upon which all life depends for its subsistence and growth. Given these meanings, it is clear that the stool not only symbolizes power and authority, it also symbolizes the spirit of oneness, cooperativeness, togetherness, and group solidarity and support. Summed up, it is a symbol of unity.

It is believed that all other designs of stools are derived from this version. Although there are many variations in stool designs, these variations are mainly in the design of the supporters between the top arc and the base of the stool, which may be carved in the form of objects, animals, or abstract symbols of proverbial significance. For example, the status of a chief and the most cherished values of his tribe are symbolized by the qualities of the type of animal that is incorporated into the design of his stool. Typical of such animals are the leopard, tiger, elephant, lion, the bush cow, buffalo, and deer. A chief and his state may be considered great and powerful when the animal symbol of their stool is the elephant or bush cow. The leopard, lion, and tiger are often used to represent strength, agility, and aggressiveness, to symbolize the war-like nature of the group. The antelope or deer may signify sleekness or smoothness in manners, and intelligence. In spite of these variations, however, the crescent moon top

and flat base are typical of all stools, rendering the overall shape constant, and therefore readily identifiable (see fig. 10b).



*Fig. 10b: Some Examples of Stools.*  
Centre for National Culture, Accra.

It is important to note that not all chiefs throughout Ghana use stools as their thrones. Among Ghanaian traditional states with stools are the various divisions of the Akan, the Ewe, the Ga, and the Dangme tribes. These states occupy the southern half of the country, comprising the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Western, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, and Volta Regions. Traditional states comprising various divisions of the Dagomba, the Wala, the Frafra, the Talensi, the Gonja, the Dagbani, and others in the Northern and Upper Regions, use skins of animals as their thrones and as symbols to

signify their authority, instead of stools. All the symbolic and philosophical values that go with stools, and their significance to the members of the society to which they belong, apply also to the skins. Fig. 10c shows a typical animal skin throne. The use of skins in the northern half of Ghana is explained by the fact that in the past, the people here were nomads. Moving from one place to another while tending their cattle, sheep, and goats, they found the skin to be more portable and easier to keep than the stool. In addition to their basic functions of acting as symbols of unity, both the stool and skin serve as a means by which members of a clan, tribe, or state relate to each other and identify themselves as a people.



*Fig. 10c: A Typical Animal Skin Throne.*  
Centre for National Culture, Accra.

### **Ceremonial State Swords (*Afena* or *Akofena*)**

Another sculptural object of symbolic significance in the Ghanaian cultural arts is the ceremonial state sword. Its name, *Afena* or *Akofena*, meaning, a 'cutlass' or 'fighting cutlass', respectively, suggests its use as a war weapon. It is made up of a curved, beaten iron blade, about 40 centimetres (1ft. 3in.) in length, with a carved wooden hilt that is often a little shorter than the blade. The hilt is rounded at the ends of the grip, and is usually covered with gold or silver leaf (fig. 11). The blade is broad at one end tapering towards the handle, and may be decorated with geometric shapes cut into it, perhaps to demonstrate the creative abilities of the artist. The sword is elaborately designed, decorated with an ornamentation of traditional symbols such as warrior's shields, trophy masks, totemic animals, animal parts, and other objects linked to proverbs and metaphors. These ornaments may be cast in solid gold, or in brass or copper and plated in gold, or in some cases they are silver-plated, apparently to portray the status or wealth of the clan or state to which it belongs. Sometimes they are carved in wood and coated with gold or silver leaf. Some examples of symbolic ornamentation used in adorning the sword include the following. It should be remarked, however, that the examples of symbolic ornamentation mentioned here are not restricted to state ceremonial swords only. Most state ceremonial sword symbols are interchangeable with linguist or court spokesman staff and umbrella tops.

**A Trophy Mask:** It is a symbol of recognition and appreciation of the prowess and commitment of a great chief or warrior to defending his people.

**A Warrior's Shield:** This shows an expression of a warrior's readiness, willingness, or commitment to going to battle in defence of his state. The shield is, therefore, a symbol of defence.

**The Reef-Knot:** This is a symbol signifying thoughtfulness, wisdom, diplomacy, and skill in dealing with difficult and delicate matters. The proverb going with it is: *Nyansapow, wode ndabrena na esane*; or *Nyansapow, wosane no badwema*. This means that it requires deep thinking to be able to undo the reef-knot. It indicates the necessity of adopting a diplomatic and tactful stance when dealing with a matter or problem of great concern to people. Such diplomacy and tact are particularly important in solving issues that have the tendency of affecting the social, economic, or political advancement of individuals, families, or the clan or state as a whole. Ideally, the reef-knot symbol is meant to inculcate in the conscience of the members of society a keen sense of how to approach conflict resolutions without being offensive to any of the parties involved.

**The Feather of a Bird:** It stands for calmness of attitude and the principle of the admission of the inevitable. A proverb of the feather goes as follows: *Anoma ntakera biara nka wim*: "A loose feather of a bird never stays permanently in space". That the feather falls eventually after suspending and floating in mid-air for some time is an indication that every condition in life has an inevitable end. It teaches humans to adopt calmness of attitude in dealing with difficult situations in life -- illness, natural disasters, and even losing dear ones through death.

**The Eagle:** It is regarded as a symbol of versatility. Its versatile nature is evident in its ability to operate both in air and on land. It avoids being preyed upon by its assailants by flying very high in the air, yet it successfully preys upon other animals on land. These abilities of the eagle render it more versatile and hence superior over other animals. It is believed that although these qualities of the eagle are natural endowments, without personal determination and perseverance, it would not have been able to make use of them to the full. This, therefore, gives it attributes of greatness, superiority, and supremacy. To attach the eagle symbol to a state sword, therefore, is to proclaim these attributes to the state which owns it.

Like the eagle, each individual person is endowed with certain natural qualities and tendencies. It is up to everyone to make deliberate efforts towards realising his or her potentials, tapping them, and using them to his or her advantage. The eagle metaphor is an encouragement to the general public, especially the youth, that the advantages in life are acquired through determination and perseverance along with some degree of versatility in doing things.

**The Puff-adder Snake:** This symbol depicting the puff-adder snake in a coiled position, stands for the principle of patience, cunningness, optimism, and possibility. The metaphorical statement that goes with it is: *Onanka bombinini da n'asaase anya owam*. It means that the puff-adder does not fly; it only crawls on the ground, yet it is able to prey on the hornbill, a bird whose abode is up in the air. The didactic implication of this



proverb is that patience and optimism are virtuous principles by which to make possible what might seem almost impossible to achieve.

**The Tortoise:** It is a symbol of fortress, fortification, self-protectedness, safety, security, self-complacency, self-sufficiency, and independence. A proverb in the Akan language says, *Hurii di akyekyere akyi kwa*. Literally interpreted, it means, "the tsetse-fly follows the tortoise in vain". It is believed that the tortoise, by nature, lives in and is protected by the fortress provided by its shell. Therefore, the tsetse-fly which follows it about to suck its blood, does so in vain. The shell covering of the tortoise is a symbol of fortress because unlike the skins of other animals, it is stony hard and difficult, if not impossible, to penetrate by the proboscis of the tsetse-fly. Underlying this proverb is the idea that it is not worth it for people to try to do the impossible or what is beyond their capabilities. In brief, it is a warning against undertaking useless and unprofitable ventures in life.

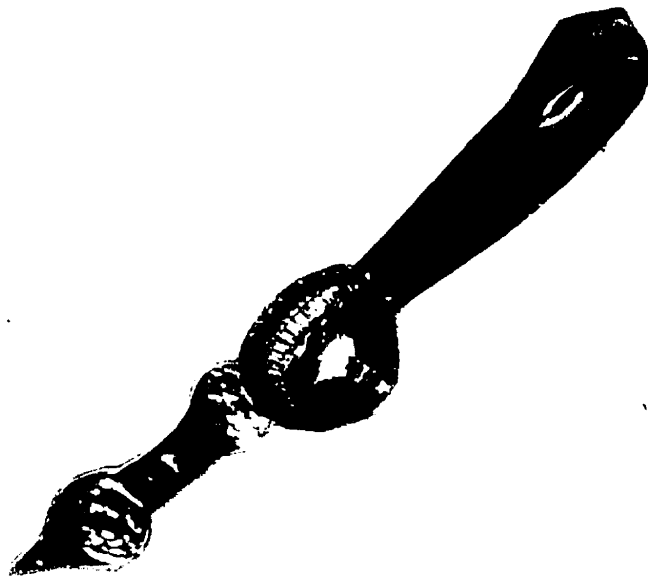
**The Chameleon:** This symbol is used to signify patience, perseverance, steadiness, hope, optimism, and persistence. The characteristics of the chameleon are expressed in two Ghanaian proverbs. The first maxim goes thus: *Obosomankotere di brebre bedu n'asoae*; "slowly but surely, the chameleon reaches its destination". The chameleon is naturally a very slow moving animal, but it does not see this as a weakness. Rather it sees it as its nature. Hence, its slowness does not make it feel discouraged from undertaking trips. It sets its mind on the journey it intends to undertake and slowly but

persistently and with steadiness in movement, it arrives at its destination. This metaphor signifies a principle of achievement through perseverance. Its didactic implication is that in life, both the most and least proficient persons are capable of achieving their life's dreams. There are, however, three important prerequisites common to achieving all forms of life's dreams, and these are: identifying one's needs; setting up a goal to achieving these needs; and following up this goal through determination and persistence to arrive at it.

The second maxim of the chameleon is: *Obsomankotere dan a, odane dea n'ani ahu, na nnye dea ewo Denkyi adaka mu*. When the chameleon is changing its colour, it changes in accordance with what it sees, and not what is concealed away from its sight (in a box) elsewhere. This is a maxim that is used to signify the principle of truth and reality. It functions as a warning against bearing false witness. The general public is by this metaphor warned that it is not forbidden for people to bear witness to what they see, but if they do, they must avail the truth.

**The Crab:** It symbolizes simplicity, humility, and peace. A maxim of the crab, *Okoto dwane a, odwane ko po mu*, means "when the crab flees from its assailant, it is in the sea that it seeks refuge". Two ideas are portrayed by this maxim. One is that, even though the crab is well equipped with its claws for defence purposes, it first runs into the sea when it senses danger. This is an indication that however strong one might be, it is expedient that one avoids a foolish display of one's strength at the least provocation. The act of seeking refuge in the sea has to do with the idea of adopting peaceful solutions to

problems. Here, the symbol of the crab signifies the notion of being on one's guard against foolhardiness. The second idea is that it is not a disgrace for the weak to seek refuge with the strong in time of danger. The notion of the sea as a refuge suggests the importance of the strong and well-to-do in society to protect the weak and support the poor and the needy.



*Fig. 11: A Ceremonial State Sword.*  
Cultural Research Centre, Manhyia Palace, Kumasi.

Symbolic ornaments on state ceremonial swords are used to express the social norms and values, as well as the social standing, of the groups or states to which they belong in terms of power, strength, and wealth. The sword is used in a variety of state functions among the Akan, the Ewe, the Ga and Dangme, and other tribes which use

stools as the throne of their chiefs. Its major function lies in its use in ceremonies of accession of paramount chiefs and queenmothers, sub-chiefs, and other office bearers of state. The sword is handed to the candidate as an emblem of office with which he or she swears an oath of allegiance to the state and other office bearers of state. (The foundations and sustenance of Ghanaian traditional societies depend on the aspirations of the people. Therefore, a new chief or office bearer of a traditional state takes a vow and swears an oath of allegiance to continue the good works that were begun by his or her predecessors, and to support and assist his or her colleagues to work towards the development and advancement of the society. If the new chief is with a paramountcy status, his sub-chiefs would use a sword to swear ahead of him that they would be loyal to him assisting him in discharging his duties).

Ceremonial state swords are also used by state courtiers, royal ambassadors, and messengers, as their insignias of office when sent on state errands. Courtiers who are responsible for announcing matters of importance such as a death in royal lineage, for instance, also bear swords. In the olden days when tribal wars were rampant, courtiers with a sword and accompanied by a herald (a royal messenger), were sent to announce the declaration of war on an enemy state. In contrast, a sword ornamented with an axe whose blade is sunk into a piece of wood, was sent by the Ashanti to announce their intention for a peaceful settlement of their differences with another state, thus averting a war. (The proverb that goes with the axe symbol is that an axe is capable of cutting through any type of wood or knot, indicating that no matter how offensive the differences between the two states was, it could be settled amicably through negotiations).

Another important use of the ceremonial state sword is that it was presented as a trophy to an old and retiring great warrior, especially among the Akan people. The sword served as a recognition of the bravery and gallantry of the great warrior. It was also meant to express an appreciation of the warrior's devotion, readiness, and willingness to lay down his life for the sake of his state. This is because it was one of the most important weapons of war with which states were defended. Being an important historical object, the ceremonial state sword has become part and parcel of the royal regalia. During important ceremonies when an Akan or Ewe chief sits in state, ceremonial state swords are either arranged or held by specially costumed swordbearers in a horse-shoe formation around the chief, to symbolize qualities such as the wealth, power, strength, and greatness, of their states. The characteristic blunt blades and the elaborate and ornate hilts of the swords underscore their function as symbols rather than as functioning weapons.

### **Linguist Staff Tops**

The linguist staff is an insignia of office borne by a special, high ranking official of the court of a chief known as *Okyeame*, meaning a linguist -- an interpreter or a spokesman. An important traditional value held in very high esteem among the Ghanaian people is to consider it improper for any person to address their chiefs directly in public. In the same vein, a chief does not, by custom, address his people directly. It would suffice, to say that the linguist, normally a very intelligent and articulate person, operates as an intermediary between the chief and the community, through whom all statements

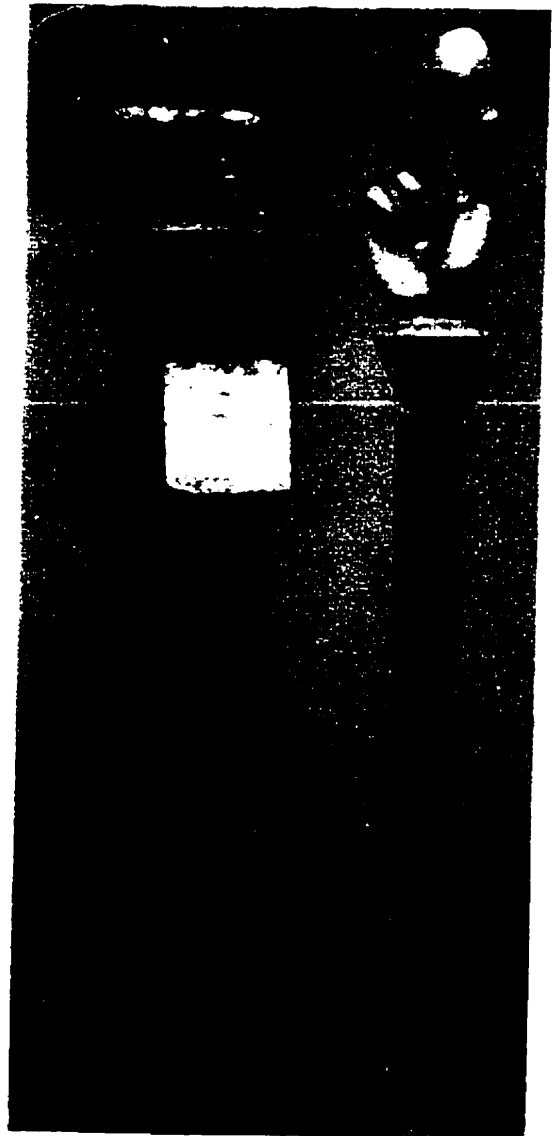
to and from the chief are addressed. Being very articulate in speech, the linguist is the interpreter of all judiciary matters for the chief and people of his society during periods of arbitration. He also acts as the spokesman for any delegation of heralds sent abroad to represent their state as ambassadors.

In his capacity as a spokesman and an intermediary between the chief and the community, the linguist works with the team of councillors of the court of the chief. He also operates as a liaison between the chief and the leaders (sub-chiefs) of the various wings of the community. As an insignia or symbol of his office, therefore, the linguist is usually identified at durbars (receptions of chiefs in commemoration of special occasions, such as festivals) and all state functions by the staff he holds (see fig. 12a).

The linguist's staff, measuring about one and three-quarter meters (five feet, six inches) in length and thick enough for convenient handling, is carved from wood and is very ornate. It is normally topped with symbols of historical significance, also carved from wood and covered with gold leaf. Fig. 12b shows a typical linguist staff with top. These symbols vary from one tribal community to another depending on the outlooks, aspirations, attitudes, or values most cherished by each clan or state. A tribe may have as many symbols as needed to express its various values and to serve various purposes. Like other Ghanaian symbols, linguist staff tops refer to wise sayings and proverbs. Items used for the symbolic representations range from human beings through animals and animal parts, trees and fruits, or a combination of humans, animals, and objects in compositions that tell stories.



*Fig. 12a: A Linguist with a Staff of Office.*  
Prampram Traditional Council.



*Fig. 12b: Typical Linguist Staffs with Tops.*  
Prampram Traditional Council.

Typical symbols of linguist staff tops are as follows.

**The Pineapple Fruit:** It is sweet and delicious in the eating, otherwise, the pineapple can be very sour and corrosive in the mouth when plucked and eaten prematurely. This means that in life, there is an appropriate time for everything: it is a

warning against rushing on life. This doctrine particularly refers to teenagers, for example, who rush into indulging in adult behaviours, since the consequences such as teenage pregnancies, for instance, can be prohibitive. A teenage boy who puts a teenage girl in the family way is faced with as much difficulties as the pregnant girl. Tradition requires him to assume full duties of a father, as there is no support in the form of social welfare funding for the pregnant teenager. This warning also goes to pedophiles: apart from the normal legal punishments for the offence, the traditional rituals involved, coupled with rejections of the culprit in various social circles, can be devastating. The pineapple metaphor is thus meant to signify the significance and necessity to do the right thing at the right time.

**A Cock (Rooster) and Hen Together:** It represents the proverb: *Akoko bedee nim adekyee ahyese, nanso otie n'akokonini ano*: "The hen knows the weather conditions that show that day break is coming, but it leaves the announcement to the cock whose duty it is to do so by crowing". This symbol signifies the need for knowing one's position, and for recognizing and respecting the status and social roles of other people in society. It also stands for advice against unnecessary interference and meddling in other people's affairs.

**A Hen with Chicks around Its Feet:** The hen often steps on its chicks amid its endless efforts to prevent them from getting into more harmful situations, such as being trampled or preyed upon by other animals. The proverb *Akoko nan nkum ne ba*, means:



"The hen steps on its chick not to kill but to protect them". The hen here is a representation of parents and other adults upon whom children depend for the acquisition of moral values, while the chicks symbolize children. The premise of this saying is that children are vulnerable to all sorts of habits and behaviours that could lead them into harmful situations. Thus, the onus is on parents to do their best to protect their children from such situations as would render them social misfits in the long run. Additionally, if the process should require parents to adopt some correctional measures that would not harm but straighten up the lives of the children, they should not hesitate to do so.

**An Antelope Standing on Top of An Elephant:** As a result of its sleek manners, the antelope is associated with intelligence, while the elephant symbolizes strength because of its size. The symbol of the antelope standing on top of the elephant indicates that while the elephant is undoubtedly the biggest and easily the strongest of all the animals in the jungle, this does not necessarily mean that it is also the most sensible. The premise of this metaphor is that the heights reached by great persons have not been attained by virtue of size and physical strength, but by intelligence and cleverness. While size and strength are very important qualities, these need to be augmented with an effective application of one's intelligence in order to reach the top. This metaphor is consistent with the old English adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword" -- a recognition and appreciation of the sensible, the intelligent, and the clever in society.

**The Monkey:** Apart from its qualities that make it adapted to the jungle, the monkey is also able to perform several activities of human beings, except talking. Its inability to speak is viewed symbolically, not as a handicap, but rather as a quality of being secretive -- a tendency to reserving any comments about the secrets behind its capabilities. The monkey is, therefore, used to symbolize the wisdom of secrecy.

**A Dog Reaching to Lick Its Owner's Lips:** *Wo gyegye wo kraman a, otafere w'ano*. This means: "It is an over-pampered dog that licks its master's lips". In other words, this symbol proclaims the fact that a freedom that knows no limits could result in contempt or disrespect. It is thought that both naturally and hygienically, a dog has no right to lick the lips of a human being. The dog here symbolizes minors such as children and ordinary people in society, while the owner represents parents and people in authority of any kind. While it is important for parents to show respect and love to their children, they should guard against over-pampering and spoiling them. The dog and its owner represent the doctrine that all people in authority should adopt some sort of diplomacy in dealing with minors so that the latter would not take their instructions and suggestions for granted.

**A Hand Holding an Egg:** The handling of power and authority is likened to the handling of an egg: when held too tightly and firmly, it might break; on the other hand, it might fall and break when held too loosely. This symbol reminds people in authority to guard against getting power-drunk, resulting in dictatorship. It is believed that

dictatorship hinders members of society from doing their best towards development, and that it must be avoided. A proverb to condemn dictatorship: *Obaako were aduro a, agu*, is interpreted thus: If one tries to scrape bark medicine from a tree single-handedly, one is liable to face difficulties in having all the shavings fall into one's receptacle. In other words, a ruler who rules single-handedly is sure to mess up the state as he or she cannot be solving problems in different places at the same time. On the other hand, rulers are reminded that handling power in a loose and careless way might bring about a state of anarchy leading to political and social disorder. The hand holding an egg, therefore, symbolizes the necessity for tact and temperateness in handling of power, and a need for the delegation of authority. In short, it exemplifies the fact that many hands make light work.

**A Hand Holding A Snake by the Head:** The proverb, *Wo so owo ti mu a, nea aka no ye ahoma*, is interpreted as: "Hold the snake by the head and what would be left of it is a mere rope". In other words, holding the snake by the head renders it defenceless. This metaphor is also expressed with an image of a hunter being trampled upon by a lion with his gun lying by. The proverb that goes with it is, *Wokyere obofo a, na ne tuo aka gyan*: "If a hunter is overpowered, his gun becomes useless". As the head is to the snake, so does the gun signify the strength of the hunter. The metaphors of these two symbols stand for the necessity of tackling problems right from their roots. They exemplify the fact that problems are solved in a more efficient manner when tackled head-on.

**Three Human Heads Carved Together:** The faces of the heads are made to look in different directions to depict the idea of unity in diversity. Another version of this symbol is two leaves put together known as *Tinta*, meaning "more than one". The proverb behind this metaphor is: *Odumankuma Nyansaboa se, tikoro nnko agyina*: God, the great custodian and giver of all wisdom says, 'one head cannot go into council'. The premise here is that it requires more than one person to constitute a council or jury: two, three or more persons are better than one. When two or more persons come together to deliberate over an issue of common interest -- for example, in matters affecting the welfare of the general public -- the decisions that are arrived at are often more effective and acceptable than when imposed by only one person. The symbol signifies the need for the recognition of the wisdom of collaboration and cooperation among members of society in decision-making for the advancement of life. The symbol stands for democracy.

**A Child Stroking a Lion:** A proverb in Akan, *Akwabea nnim gyata a, ose oye odwan*, translated as: "The innocent and ignorant child mistakes the lion for a sheep." It is only through ignorance that one would play with a dangerous animal like the lion. Didactically, this proverb stands as a reminder to the public to guard against getting involved in unauthorized (dubious) activities and behaviours, as these can be disastrous to life. It is a warning against living in ignorance.

**A Child Holding An Egg to the Mouth:** Portraying a child eating an egg, this image represents a proverb: *Obi nkyere okomfo ba nkosua di*. It means that no one teaches the child of the priest or priestess of a deity how to eat eggs: the habit is acquired through practice. Priests and priestesses of deities are used to receiving eggs from their clients for sacrifices, propitiation for wrongs done, and other rituals. Thus, it should be expected that a child who grows up as a part of the household of a priest or priestess would naturally acquire the habit of eating eggs, which are considered a delicacy. This metaphor expresses the fact that children have a great tendency to inheriting, acquiring, and learning the behavioural practices of their parents and other adults of the environments in which they live and grow. An equivalent of this metaphor can be found in another symbol -- a crab together with a bird. The maxim that goes with it is, *Okoto nwo anoma*: "A crab begets a crab and not a bird". This is to signify that offsprings are liable to inheriting and imitating the habits of their parents. These two symbols are metaphors signifying the necessity for parents and other adults in society to endeavour to sensor everything they do or say in the presence of children.

**A Person Sitting on a Heap of Stones:** The person seated on the stones is meant to represent the disabled in society, particularly the cripple or the blind. It is believed that the blind or cripple would not threaten to throw stones at a person unless he or she has got the stones ready at hand. This maxim has to do with the doctrine of guarding against taking things for granted, or overlooking circumstances and situations that have some potential to affect human life in one way or another. Every aspect of daily living,

no matter how insignificant it might seem, has a potential for either enhancing or destroying one's life's dreams or aspirations. Thus, the appearance of this symbol is a reminder of the doctrine of guarding against unfounded underestimations of life's situations.

**Two Persons Seated over Food:** Called *Adwura*, this symbol portrays two persons seated at table with a dish full of food with only one of them eating, while the other looks on. The maxim of this symbol is: *Nea ade wo no na odi, na nnye nea okom di no*. This means: "It is the owner of the food that eats it but not necessarily any hungry person". While this maxim is often used in everyday life to show that each person is entitled to his or her private life and belongings, it is normally used in matters that have to do with rightful inheritance. When applied in reference to royal inheritance, for example, the premise of this saying is that royals are born and not made. Thus, it is only the rightful heir to a royal throne that inherits it, and not just anyone who is hungry for power. It is a warning against dubious and forceful means of acquiring position, wealth and other pleasures of life. Ideally, it symbolizes the recognition of basic human rights.

To sum up, it may be worth reiterating that every Ghanaian royal stool or skin has a linguist with a staff serving as an insignia of office. The significance of a linguist lies in his being the mouthpiece of the chief: it is the linguist who puts short and proverbial statements made by the chief into eloquent speeches. Indeed, the fame of a chief is boosted to a great extent in public places by the wisdom exhibited by his linguist

through his eloquence and manner of articulation. As a rule, the linguist staff is held in the right hand, however, whenever the linguist speaks, he transfers it to the left hand in order to render the right hand free for gesticulation. It is a taboo to use the left hand in making gestures while addressing people even if the speaker is left-handed. It could however be used in combination with the right hand if both hands are free.

### **Umbrella Tops**

State umbrellas are an important part of the royal regalia, and are used for ceremonial purposes. The oldest state umbrellas, some of which are still in existence and actively in use, were made from imported silk and velvet cloths. Later on, locally woven, brightly coloured cloth was also used. State umbrellas are very large and some may measure up to about three meters (about ten feet) in diameter when opened. Like linguist staffs, the poles of umbrellas are beautifully carved and topped with gold or silver plated finials illustrating metaphors or proverbs that exemplify Ghanaian values. Some examples of umbrella symbols are as follows:

**The Silk Cotton Tree with Branches:** This symbol shows an image of a tree with branches but without leaves, as a representation of the silk cotton tree. The saying, *Wote see nyina mman koraa a, mmehyia wo*, literally means: "Even if you are as thorny as the silk cotton tree, I shall meet you in battle". Because of its thorny bark, the silk cotton tree cannot be climbed, therefore, it is used as a metaphor for a strong person

whom it would be impossible to defeat in combat. This metaphor is used, therefore, to show bravery and determination.

**A Piece of the Stem of the *Babadua* Plant:** A herbaceous plant that grows in the tropics, *Babadua* has a series of joints in its stem resembling those of the sugar-cane. It is propagated by planting the stem, which does not wither however short it may be cut. It sprouts soon after being broken or cut short, generating new branches and blooming in a more gorgeous manner. Deriving from the nature of the plant, the metaphor of the *Babadua* stands for an encouragement not to give up on the goals one has in life, despite the failures that might come one's way. It is, thus, a symbol signifying the persevering nature of the chief and people who use it as their umbrella top -- a symbol of persistence and endurance.

**The Horn of the Ram:** A proverb of the horn of the ram says: *Dwanini ye esise a, ode n'akoma, na nnye ne mmen*. It is interpreted as: "It is the heart of the ram that leads it to bully others and not its horns". Differently stated, the will of the ram to fight depends not so much on its horns as on its fighting spirit. What this implies is that it takes strong will-power and diligence at work to achieve a goal. This metaphor can be likened to the Western adage: "Where there is a will, there is a way". In effect, the symbol of the ram's horn is a representation of strong will-power and diligence. Also, in literary terms, it symbolizes the fighting spirit of the state that it represents.



**A Bird with the Head Turned Backwards:** This is known as the *Sankofa bird*. It depicts an act of picking something from behind. *Sankofa* means, "go back and fetch whatever you may have forgotten, or left behind inadvertently". The proverb *Se wo were fi na wosankofa, a yenkyi*, is interpreted as: "It is not a taboo (not forbidden) or an offence to return to fetch something that one has forgotten or left behind". In ordinary usage, this symbol serves as reminder to individuals and the general public that there is always room for correcting one's mistakes in life; that is, straightening up the crooked areas in one's life, improving upon it for a better self-image and self-esteem. Politically, it reflects the need for Ghanaians to rediscover their cultural image: that they must go back to pick up their rich cultural values which have been lost to colonialism and other forces of acculturation. In brief, the *Sankofa* metaphor is meant to show Ghanaians that knowing their own history (cultural heritage) is central to realizing their cultural identity and the values that hold them together as a people. On the whole, therefore, the *Sankofa* bird is a symbol of encouragement for the rediscovery of the past.

**An Elephant Standing by a Palm Tree:** The elephant, easily the strongest animal of the jungle, when annoyed is able to uproot any tree that happens to be in its way, except the palm tree. The inability of the elephant to uproot the palm tree is attributed to the strong fibrous roots that hold firm to the ground. The palm tree has been used here to symbolize an antidote to the great power and strength of the elephant. It shows that to any form of power, there is a limitation. The symbol is used to signify the stability of the state to which it belongs.

**A Cock Standing by Its Water Basin with Its Head Raised Towards the Sky:**

The maxim of this symbol is: *Akokonini num nsuo a, oto ne tiri wim aseda*. It means: The cock, drinking water raises its head after each mouthful to God in thanksgiving. It expresses the necessity of being appreciative of kindness or benefits received -- a symbol of gratitude.

**Two Human Fingers Held Up in the Form of a 'V':** Whenever one wants to show an appreciation of a performance by someone, in a dance -- for instance, one holds up one's fore and middle fingers in the form of the letter 'V'. By so doing, one is saying: *Me ma wo mo*, meaning "I congratulate you". A chief using an umbrella with this symbol during a state function is saying: *Me ma mo amo, me man*: "I congratulate you my people, tribe, or state". In other words, he is expressing an appreciation of his people, apparently for their cooperative and hard working spirit. It is hence a symbol of appreciation.

**A Clenched Fist with the Thumb Held Out:** This is called *Gye Nyame*, meaning: "Except God". It symbolizes the sovereign power and omnipotence of God and the fact that God alone is Supreme, deserving to be feared and honoured. In other words, it stands for the recognition and declaration of the unique and outstanding greatness of God. In short it is a symbol of submission and reverence to God.

The local name of the state umbrella, *Akatamanso*, literally means, a shed or shelter of the state. This exemplifies its usage and significance. When set over the heads

of the chiefs and elders of the society, the umbrella is viewed as a symbolic shelter of the state as a whole. Fig. 13 shows a state umbrella and a top.



*Fig. 13: A State Umbrella with a Top.*  
Photograph taken at Ashanti Town Community Park, Kumasi.  
The Umbrella is set in preparation for a Funeral Ceremony.

**Wooden (*Akuaba*) Dolls:**

Generally known as *Akuaba*, the wooden doll is carved from a type of hard, white wood of a tree of the Tropical Rain Forest locally called *Sese* in Ghana. It is finished by

being painted a dark colour obtained from a mixture of soot from the bottom of the cooking pot, albumen of raw eggs, ashes (potash) from burnt plantain peels, and iron oxide from the rust of iron. The wooden doll is of great anthropological importance to the Ghanaian people. It serves four purposes, namely: it is used as a fertility symbol, beauty symbol, charm, and children's toy. The form or shape taken by a doll depends on the purpose for which it is intended.

**The *Akuaba* Doll as a Fertility Symbol:** The *Akuaba* doll is believed to make a childless woman fertile. Among the Ghanaian people, the most cherished blessing of a married couple is to have their own children, and this is very important as far as women are concerned. A woman faced with difficulties of having her own children and expressing the wish to do so, may be offered an *Akuaba* fertility doll by the husband to make her wish come true. Often, two dolls may be offered -- one to represent a boy, and the other, a girl -- indicating that the couple wishes for children of both sexes. The woman handles the doll as a real baby, carrying it on her back as is typical of Ghanaian women, plays with it, sleeps in bed with it, and even clothes it, in order to enable her to always set her mind on the wish for a baby. She continues in this practice until she gets a baby, or otherwise, throughout her life. Should she die childless, in spite of this practice, she is buried together with the fertility doll, a means to reminding her spirit to amend this misfortune if she should she be reincarnated. Fig. 14 shows a typical *Akuaba* fertility doll.



*Fig. 14: An Akuaba Doll.*  
Researcher's Own Collection.

**The *Akuaba* Doll as a Symbol of Beauty:** During carving, the carver ensures that the doll reflects the physical features of the sex of the child being represented. The most cherished features of a male, for example, are a rounded but somewhat rectangularly-shaped head, reasonably tall stature, and a well-built body. This is known

as *Akuabanini*. The roundedness of the head depicts a wise and religious male child with a God-fearing character.

A female fertility doll *Akuababere* is carved with the characteristics conceived of as constituting beauty in a girl or woman. The head is very elaborate and is shaped in an oval, standing for an egg which is a symbol of fertility in women. Ornamentations in the form of grooves or incisions of lines made on the head may indicate a decorative hair style, or may have a religious or medicinal significance. The ear lobes may be pierced as is the custom of the Ghanaian female. The neck is reasonably long and ringed reflecting not only an aspect of beauty, but also the hard-working nature of women. Other conceptions of beauty include a fleshly, graceful, and majestic body, and a slender torso with smooth skin. The fundamental importance attached to fertility in women is expressed by the carver through elaboration of the breasts and navel. Another aspect of female beauty lies with the shape of the buttocks. Ideally, a female should have a broad waist with oval shaped buttocks -- bigger than that of the male -- and supported by strong, slightly bow-shaped legs with plump calves. The feet are rendered flat to signify stability and strength.

In some Akan communities, particularly among the people of Wasa, a husband may present to his pregnant wife an *Akuaba* doll as a wish for a beautiful child (Antobam, 1963). It is believed that by playing with the symbol of beauty in the doll, the pregnant woman would get a mental picture of it in her mind, and hence, give birth to a child having the features conceived of as attributes of beauty.

**The *Akuaba* Doll as a Charm:** As a charming object, the doll is used for various purposes. One of its most common uses is in finding missing children who are believed to have wandered away from their home and parents, and cannot find their way back. This practise is said to have been very common in the past when communities were relatively small. A missing child was believed to have been lured away by dwarf spirits. Dwarfs are spiritual entities believed to possess magical powers that enable them to take on human form, but are diminutive in nature and therefore, look like little children. Also, they can vanish into thin air at will. Dwarfs are believed to live in the bush or virgin forests not very far from villages. They may choose to be mischievous, luring children away to torment their parents for the fun of it; or they may be friendly, granting their captives (older people) spiritual powers for identifying herbs, roots, and barks of plants appropriate for curing various diseases and ailments.

When a child went missing, a doll was carved by a sorcerer and adorned in very beautiful cloths. It is then placed by any large tree near to the bush or forest, together with some unsalted mashed yam mixed with palm oil called *Eto* or *To*, and a cooked egg. Some cowrie shells or coins were also placed by the food to attract the spiritual beings, who would come to eat the food, and hence, find the beautiful doll. They would prefer a wooden child -- which would be more portable and easier to handle -- to a live one which might need to be fed and cared for. As a result, the missing child would be left to go home, or to be picked up by its parents. Dwarf spirits are still believed to be in existence today, and their assistance is used to a large extent by some herbalists in treatment of diseases.

**The Akuaba Doll as an Abode for the Spirit of the Dead:** In some tribes of Ghana, when one of a set of twins is dead and the living one often falls sick, it is believed to be caused by the spirit of the dead one. This belief is particularly common among the Ewe and Ga-Dangme tribes. A wooden doll is therefore carved by a medicine man, who invokes into it the spirit of the dead twin brother or sister. It is placed in a corner of the bedroom of the parents, believing that the spirit in it would keep the living twin company, protecting him or her from evil spirits, and hence, the frequent ailments.

**The *Akuaba* Doll as Children's Toy:** In some Ghanaian communities, particularly the Ashanti, a newly born baby is given a wooden doll to play with as a toy. As a custom, it is presented by the father of the baby, or in his stead, the baby's patrilinear relations. It is an important part of the gifts showered on the baby during its naming ceremony. The doll as a toy may not be as elaborate in design as the types used for a fertility doll and symbol of beauty.

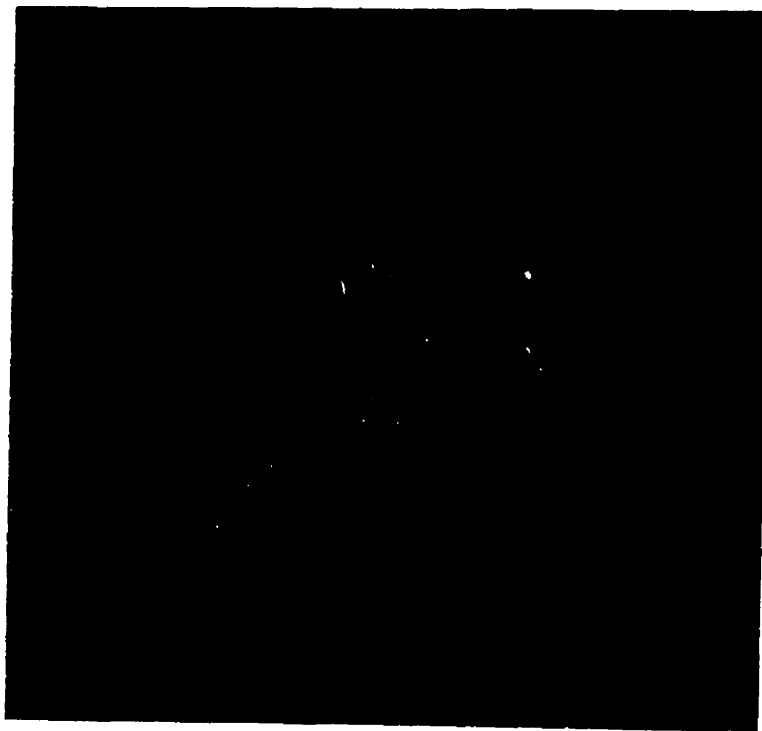
### **Gold Weights**

Gold weights, known as *Sanaa* among the Ashanti where they originated, are among the most well-known of indigenous Ghanaian sculptures. They are products of the art of metal casting. Gold played a substantial role in trade in Ghana -- formerly called the Gold Coast, because of her extensive gold deposits. Trading in gold as well as the use of it as a medium by which commerce was conducted in Ghana can be traced back to at least, the early fifteenth century (Gillon, 1988). Before then, cowrie shells, *Sedie*,



were used as currency; from this is derived the word *Cedi*, which is the name of the currency currently used in Ghana.

As the gold trade flourished, there arose the necessity for implements -- scales and balances along with weights for weighing gold dust and nuggets. This led to the casting of gold weights. To begin with, they were said to have been cast from solid gold, but later and until today, the gold has been replaced with bronze and brass. As is usual with indigenous Ghanaian artifacts, the gold weights represent figurative forms reflecting societal values. In other words, the gold weights are rendered in the form of human figures, animals, plants, and objects representing proverbs and maxims that express important aspects of Ghanaian life and culture. Fig. 15 shows examples of gold weights.



*Fig. 15: Some Gold Weights.*  
Researcher's Own Collection.

On the average, gold weights measure between five centimetres (two inches) and ten centimetres (four inches) in length each, and are either cast by the direct or the lost-wax (cire perdue) method.

In direct casting, the image or pattern to be reproduced is made of wood, placed in a wooden box, and damp sand is rammed around it to make a mould. The surface of the moulding sand is such that the image can be withdrawn without damage to the mould. The mould is then filled with the molten metal and left to solidify. When the casting is cold, it is shaken out of the mould and the surface smoothed over. This method is economical because the same image or pattern is used over and over again; however, it is not very effective for producing fine and intricate patterns.

The lost-wax method consists of making a wax image or pattern, which is ceased in sand. A small opening is made in the mould to admit the molten metal, which on contact with wax, causes it to melt out. By this process, very complicated shapes and fine detail can be cast. However, this process is expensive since the wax image or pattern has to be replaced after each casting. Some figurative representations in gold weights are as follows:

**A Fresh Shoot of the Oil Palm Frond:** If a new shoot of the oil palm frond is held, instead of a fern frond, the holder is referring to the proverb, *Abekonmoade ye fe*, interpreted as: "A new shoot of the oil palm leaf is a thing of beauty". It signifies an appreciation of novelty, uniqueness, and love.

**A Bird on Top of a Tree:** This metaphor stands for a saying, *Anoma anitefo, wosum no afiri pa no atentennoa so daa*, meaning: "A bird that is cunning is always trapped and caught only on the very top of a tree". Underlying this metaphor is the premise that it requires a great deal of cunningness and tact to solve a situation that has been created cunningly. The significance of this symbol lies in the ideal of always tackling one's problem from its source.

**A Crab Eating Palm Fruit:** A related metal object of symbolic importance is the pot or vessel (*Kuduo*) for storing gold dust (*Futuo*). These are fashioned from brass or copper sheet and gold plated. The bodies of these vessels are very ornate and the handles of the lids are made of proverbial representations, often in the form of animals. A typical example is found in a crab eating a palm fruit. The species of crab represented here is that which lives in holes in the ground near streams and feeds on the fruits that drop from the palm trees growing along the stream banks. The proverb, *Okoto da sika ho po a, otwere abe*, translates literally as: "Even though the crab is crouching on a store of gold, it still feeds on palm fruits". This metaphor exemplifies the need for guarding against affluent spending, misappropriation, and wastage of resources. In other words, it symbolizes the principle of honest living and the necessity for conservation.

**An Antelope:** It illustrates the saying, *"Me nim anka"*, meaning: "Had I known", or "If only I had known". The antelope blames itself by making this statement whenever it is caught in a trap. This maxim is used to remind humanity to be careful of any steps

taken in life, for it is not uncommon for people to blame themselves on realizing the harm caused to themselves as a result of their own behaviours and practices. The metaphor is a warning against living carelessly.

**The Rabbit:** *Adanko see, "obi gye obi nkwa"* means: The rabbit says, "someone saves another". This maxim signifies the interdependence of all people within any particular society. It exemplifies the fact that there is no individual person that enjoys a total self-sufficiency. The ideal here is for everyone to be her or his sister's or brother's keeper. Hence, it signifies the wisdom of cooperative living.

**Two Species of Crocodile Placed in a Cross-wise Form:** This is a compositional work of two species of crocodiles carved together, the one placed across the other so that they share a common stomach with separate heads and tails. The design is called *Funtumfurafu-ne-denkyemfurafu*. The first name stands for the hunchback crocodile, and the second for the slim body or even-shaped species. The symbol functions very much in Ghanaian mythology. The two crocodiles said to bear great resemblance to each other, are believed to belong to the same family group. The implication of this metaphor is that since the two crocodiles possess one and the same stomach, if one of them eats, ideally it does so for the good of the other as well. Yet, it is said that when it is time to eat, the two struggle for the food. This symbol exemplifies the fact that there are always differences among the members of any group of people. While members of a group may observe the same social and cultural values, individuals usually have different views

about specific issues, which may even sometimes conflict. This symbol is thus a representation of the idea of unity in diversity.

**A Human Being Holding a Branch of the Fern:** The fern, known in some Ghanaian dialects as *Aya*, is a nonflowering plant with a rhizome stem, from which grows fronds like those of plants of the palm family. The frond or branch of the fern, or a part of it when held in the hand or stuck in the headgear of a warrior, is meant to show fearlessness. The saying that goes with it, *Me nsuro hwee (wo)*, means: "I am not afraid of anything, or you, or anybody". It is, therefore, a symbol of bravery, defiance, and rebellion.

**A Man with a Pot on the Head, Smoking a Pipe:** The pot being carried is supposed to contain gun-powder. The maxim of this metaphor, *Yeso atuduru a, yennum abua*, literally means: "If one is carrying gun-powder, one does not smoke a pipe". This symbol has two implications. On one hand, it is a warning against taking unnecessary risks, for smoking while carrying such a highly inflammable substance can be disastrous. On the other hand, it expresses the necessity for ingenuity -- a quality of being cleverly resourceful. To be able to carry gun-powder and enjoy the pleasure of smoking at the same time involves risk-taking and therefore requires great courage, care, and cleverness to accomplish. The symbol is meant to remind people of the fact that whatever one does, without one's indulgence in some form of risk-taking, one would not enjoy the pleasure

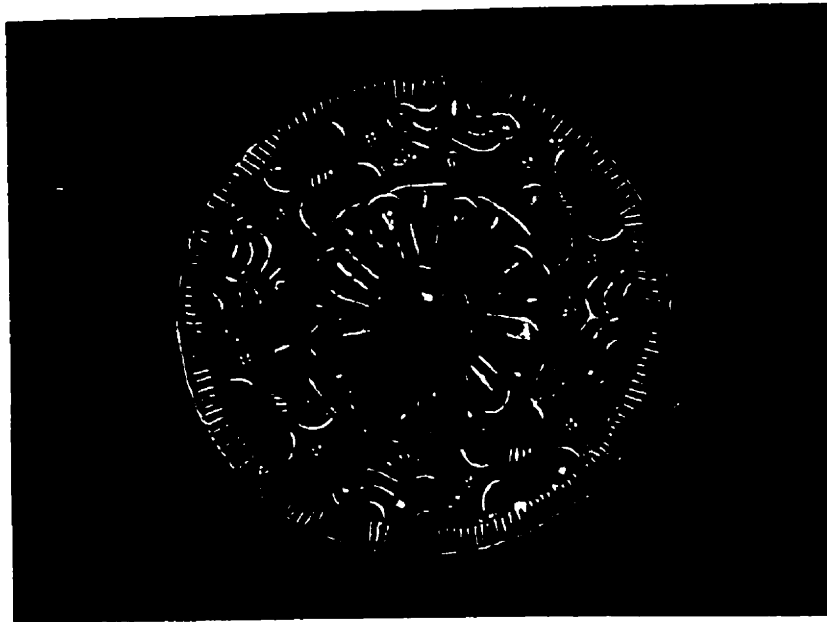
of success. It stands for the recognition and appreciation of the virtues of versatility, diversification, and diligence.

### **Commemorative Sculptures**

The Ghanaian artistic tradition is also revealed in traditional rulers' commemorative soul disks, masks, and funerary figures. As commemorative or funerary symbols, they must be durable, hence, they are never carved in wood. As a custom, the disks are made of gold, the masks of gold or bronze that is gold-plated, and the funerary figures of fired clay.

**Commemorative Soul Disks:** These are large cast-gold disks about fifteen centimetres (six inches) in diameter called *Kyere*, made in commemoration of dead rulers and believed to house their souls (see fig. 16). A general belief among Ghanaians is that there is an invisible principle or spiritual aspect of life known as the soul, *Okra* or *Kra*, given to each person by God before birth and set free from the body at death. An important aspect of the Ghanaian culture is to regard their chiefs or rulers as sacred persons. A chief's sacred person is in the soul of the community, which is believed to be manifest in the throne he occupies. The soul of a chief continues to live in the spiritual world after his death; from there he watches over his people. The soul disks act not only as the abode of the spirit of dead rulers, but also as a link between them and the community. These plaques are attached to bleached raffia chords and are worn as pendants on the chests of young men known as soul-bearers, *Akrafo* (singular, *Okrafo*),

during state ceremonies to symbolize the living extension of the souls of the dead chiefs as participants in the rituals. To become the soul-bearer of a chief, one must not only be a descendant of the extended family of the chief one represents, one must also be born on the same day of the week as the chief. The souls of persons born on the same day of the week are believed to have the same characteristics.



*Fig. 16: A Commemorative Soul Disk.*  
Cultural Research Centre, Manhyia Palace, Kumasi.

**Commemorative Masks:** Unlike in other parts of Africa, Ghanaian masks are not meant to be worn. They are made in commemoration of dead rulers, specifically as funerary symbols of chiefs. Commemorative masks are more popular among the Ashanti than any other tribe in Ghana, and they are made for the same reasons and to serve the same purposes as the traditional rulers' soul disks. Since the masks are not meant to be worn, they are usually of a reduced size, and are distinguished by their realism and close

resemblance to the human face, unlike the grotesque and stylized appearance of most African masks.

**Commemorative Terracotta Funerary Figures:** These are fired clay figurines and heads made specifically for funeral purposes. The terracotta funerary tradition is common in many Ghanaian communities. However, the Kwahu, who are cultural neighbours of the Ashanti, are very well known for the practice. A terracotta funerary figure is used as a substitute for the actual body of a deceased person during the formal funeral rites. The practice is limited to royals only -- chiefs and founders of settlements such as towns, villages or tribes. By formal funeral rites is meant funeral activities which are organized some time after the actual death and interment of the body, so that the clay figurine or head becomes a surrogate for the real corpse. A funerary terracotta is not, however, buried: it is placed near the grave or in the vault (burial chamber), beneath which the body has been buried.

### **Canoe Decorations**

Symbols also show up in canoe decorations. Frequently, indigenous Ghanaian fishermen ornament their canoes by carving and drawing on the sides symbols which communicate some social values and concepts, and which portray certain beliefs and aspirations associated with the fishing occupation. The canoe is carved from one piece of log. The log is given a stream-lined shape by tapering it from the mid-section towards the two ends as shown in fig. 17a.





*Fig. 17a: A Canoe.*  
Lower Town Beach, Prampram.

Canoe motifs are of many different types. Some of them are in the form of family or clan symbols, while others are of general usage. Some motifs are made to stand on their own, while others are rendered in groups to form compositions. The following are examples of some canoe symbols that are in common use.

**The Anchor:** This is a symbol composed of an arrow with two crescent moons, one on each side. It has an arrow head on one end with two hooks on the other, each having an arrow head at its end. It is often rendered in pairs as show in figure 10b. A very essential device among the fishing gear, the anchor is used to keep the canoe in position, preventing it from drifting with the current of the sea or river. Hence, it signifies stability.

**The Arrow:** Another device of great importance to the fishermen is the long, strong metal arrow which they use to kill big fish, as well as a weapon for protecting themselves against the attack of sharks and whales. Its symbol is represented in the form of a long arrow with an arrow head at each end of it and a circle mid-way along its stem. Around the stem of it is also wound a few loose coils of cord. The symbol is called *Akosaasan*, which literally means "go to battle and return" or "going to battle to return safely". The arrow symbol, therefore, represents a hope for protection and safety.

**The Star:** Stars are of great importance to the fishermen, especially the illiterates who do not use compasses. When they miss their way at sea, they use the stars at night to find their way back to land. Hence they represent the star as an image of hope.

**The Seagull:** It shows an image of a bird. Sometimes it is rendered simply, but often it is stylised. It is made with three heads on one body supported by a long leg and a tail that tapers into an arrow. The presence of the sea-gull hovering over a particular area of the sea is an indication of the presence of fish there. The name of this symbol, *Akotee* -- meaning "a straight and unobstructed course or direction" -- shows its significance to the fishermen as far as their occupation is concerned. To the fisherman, the sea-gull is a symbol of hope.

**Two Birds Eating from One Bowl:** This is to symbolize the attitude of sharing and cooperativeness among fishermen when at sea. The birds represent fishermen, while

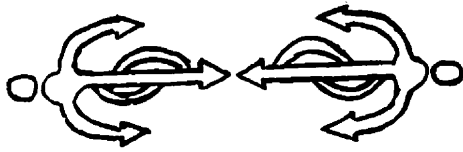
the bowl stands for the sea. Here, the sea is symbolized by a common bowl from which all fishermen eat. The implication of this metaphor is that the sea is not a private property of any individual person or a particular fishing crew. It is a natural endowment, and all who care to earn their livelihood from it are welcome.

**The Snake and Lizard:** The two images always appear together, near the stern of the canoe. Frequently, the image of the snake is rendered with the head turned backwards. The symbol is called *Dankyiwofa*, which is interpreted literally as "turn round and take". The snake is said to be waiting in ambush to pounce on its prey -- which is either the fish or the lizard. The cunningness of the snake is used to symbolize the craftiness or adeptness and dexterity of the fishermen in trapping fish at sea.

**The Heart:** The image of the heart is often made in combination with a series of triangles, to form a linear pattern towards the bow of the canoe. The heart is a very important organ upon which the human depends greatly for its existence. Hence, matters of the heart must be handled with care and patience. The triangle, a feminine symbol, is used to signify friendliness. Together, the heart and triangle stand for the patience, and also the friendly and caring nature of fishermen, towards each other, particularly at sea.

**The Arm and Hand:** Representing the hard working nature of fishermen, this symbol signifies a principle of guarding against idleness, and at the same time stresses

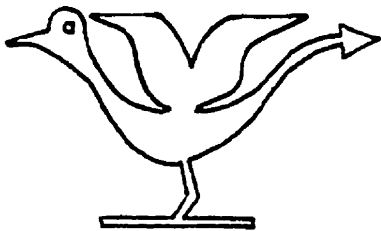
the ideal that hands and arms are meant for working with and not for making mischief.  
It symbolizes the ideal of hard work and readiness to go to work at any time.



*The Anchor*



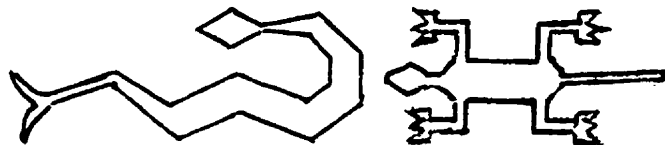
*The Arrow*



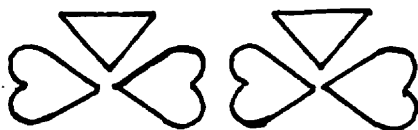
*The Seagull*



*Two Birds Eating from One Bowl*



*The Snake and Lizard*



*The Heart and Triangle*



*The Arm and Hand*

*Fig. 17b: Some Canoe Symbols.*

## Meanings of Body Arts

Decorating the human body may have been one of the earliest types of visual art forms that have survived to this day. In Ghana, as in other parts of the world, decoration of the human body takes on various forms. Some are mainly for the purpose of making the body attractive, and perhaps, appealing to the opposite sex. There are, however, other forms of body arts that are often reserved for certain particular purposes, thereby rendering them more symbolic than purely decorative. Some typical forms of body arts that have symbolic significance to the Ghanaian can be found in coiffure (hairdressing), scarification (body marking), and body painting.

### Coiffure

Symbolic hair styles in the Ghanaian culture are varied in accordance with the purposes they serve. Attendants of Paramount Chiefs and Queenmothers of various royal courts -- for example, such as bearers of stools, swords, palanquins, among others -- all wear symbolic hair styles to signify their respective offices. Most of these hair styles are indigenous to particular royal courts, and this makes it difficult to discuss them under specific categories or generalizations. What is presented here, therefore, are examples of hair styles that are commonly known to the people. The sources of the portraits presented in this section are withheld to preserve the identities of the persons represented.

*Mpesempese* (fig. 18a) commonly known as 'rasta hair' is an hair style of symbolic importance to the Ghanaian people. A couple which is not blessed with a child

might consult an oracle, and then undergo certain prescribed rituals which might help them to get a child. The resulting child has to be dedicated to the oracle. In this respect, no razor, comb, or pair of scissors might touch the child's hair, thereby causing the hair to grow into tufted strands.



*Fig. 18a: Mpesempese (Rasta Hair).*

***Takuwa*** hairdress (fig. 18b), which originated among the Fante, is typically done for a woman on a special occasion of her life, such as marriage, during the final stages of a nubility rite, and the like. It symbolizes regeneration or newness of life. Worn by

a middle-aged or an elderly woman on a happy occasion such as a birthday celebration, the *Takuwa* hairdress expresses a state of contentment.



*Fig. 18b: Takuwa Hairdress.*

*Densinkeran* (fig. 18c) is an hair-do indigenous to middle-age and older women of Ashanti, Kwahu, and Brong Ahafo in normal life to signify their social standing.

Specifically, the *Densinkeran* hair style is an indication of feminine self-esteem and dignity at old age. While this is normally the case, a younger woman or even a girl who is an heiress of a royal throne may wear the *Densinkeran* hair-do to signify her social status.



*Fig. 18c: Densinkeran Hairdress.*

*Nkomo* (fig. 18d), meaning lamentation, is the name of a hair style involving bringing together all the hair and plaiting it up into one bunch on top of the head. It is done for a widow who is still in the state of mourning her dead husband.



*Fig. 18d:  
Nkomo Hairdress.*



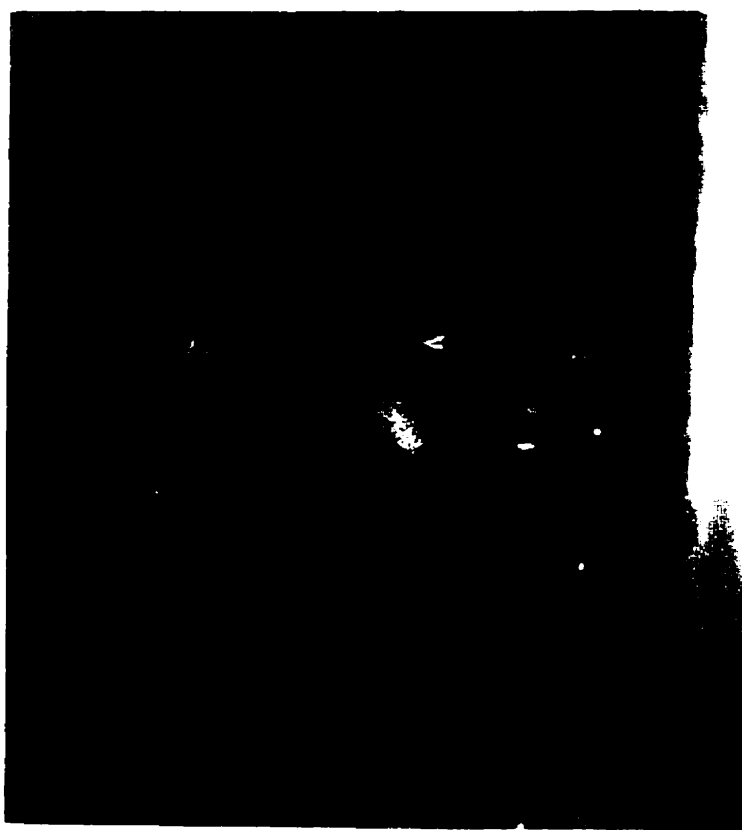
### **Scarification**

This involves making small incisions into the human skin using a sharp tool such as a knife. Scarification takes on two forms, namely, face and body marking. Many families and clans in Ghana practice face-marking, each adopting a particular form or pattern of marking the face for identification purposes. This practice is particularly typical of the Frafra tribe.

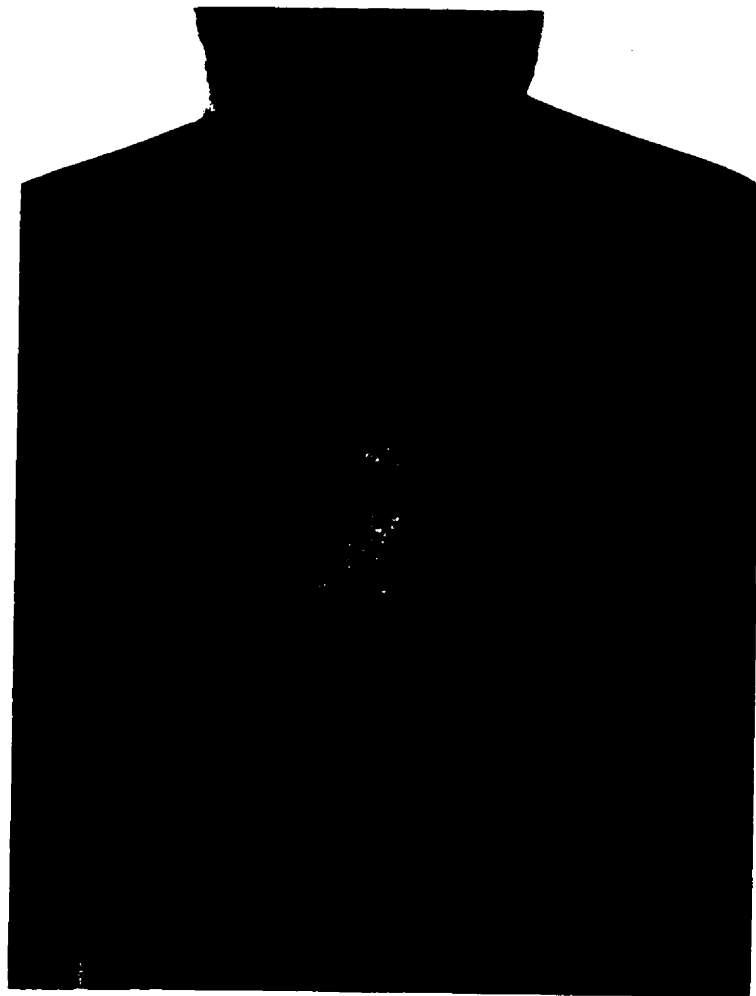
Another instance in which face-marking becomes necessary is when a couple loses two or more children to death during their infancy. When this happens, it is thought that

it is the spirit of the first dead child that continues to be incarnated over and over again. Thus, when a new child is born to the couple, subsequent to the occurrence of such deaths, its face is marked with the view of disfiguring it. Normally, three radiating marks are made at the corners of the eyes and on either side of the mouth (see fig. 19a). Persons with such face-marking are known among the Ga and Dangme tribes as *Gbobalo*, which means, "serially incarnated", but are generally referred to as *Odonkor (Donkor)*. It is believed that with a disfigured face, the spirit of the child would fail to be recognized, and therefore, would not be welcomed by its guardians in the spiritual world. As such it would live and cease tormenting the parents.

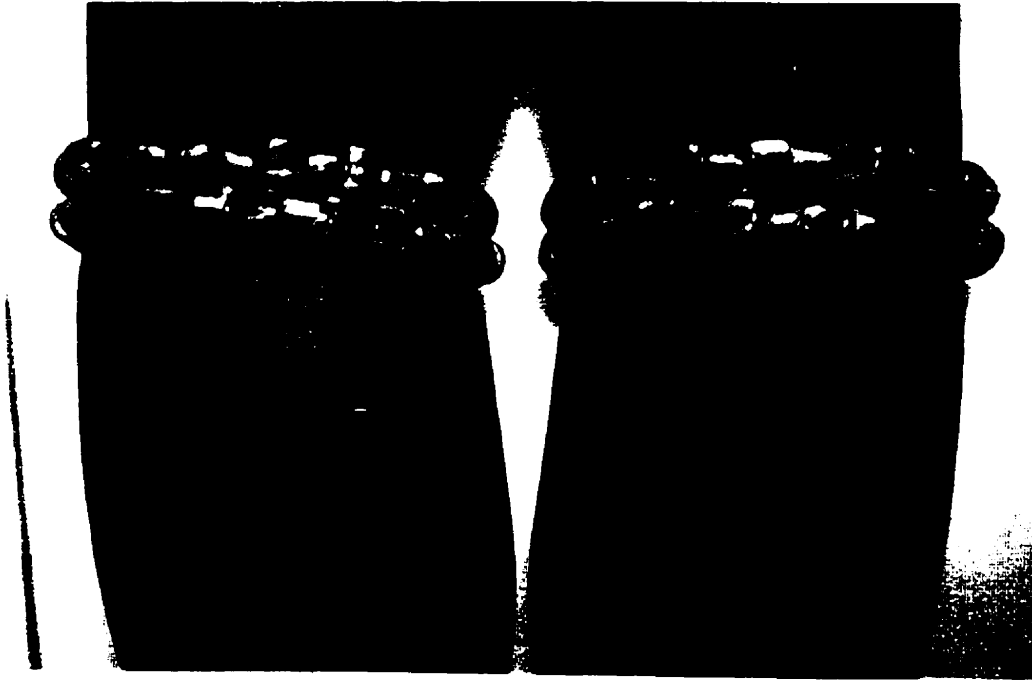
*Fig. 19a:  
Odonkor Face-marking.*



Some forms of body marking are mainly for medicinal purposes. During illness, small cuts are made on the affected parts of the body, and herbal preparations put into the cuts for curation. Sometimes however, people who wish to protect themselves against evil forces, spiritual attacks, wild animals, and such, would have their bodies marked and special medicine for the purpose put into the cuts. Figures 19b and 19c show such protective scarifications on the back and calves of a priestess of a deity.



*Fig. 19b: Scarification on the Back for Medicinal Purposes.*  
Photograph of the Back of a Priestess for the Cult, taken at Keta.



*Fig. 19c: Scarification on the Calves for Medicinal Purposes.*  
Photograph of the Calves of a Priestess for the Cult, taken at Keta.

### **Performing Arts**

To understand symbolism in the performing arts in the Ghanaian context, one needs to look at it from the point of view of a complex activities -- singing, drumming, dancing, and drama -- all taking place simultaneously. This suggests, that the symbolic significance of the performing arts lies in the ways in which music, dance, and drama are performed, and also in the meanings which the elements of each of these art forms have for the Ghanaian people.

## **Meanings of Elements in Music**

That music is organized and practised as an integral part of social life has resulted in the creation of different musical types for various purposes -- entertainment, festivals and ceremonial occasions, nubility rituals, funerals, and worship. In general, vocal music is most commonly practised, almost always forming a part of each musical type. Sung in the form of ballads, Ghanaian folk songs are often simple narratives composed in short stanzas and rather poetic in nature. Generally, the songs derive from ideas that express certain specific contexts that are considered as having important implications for the organized Ghanaian social life. In this respect, therefore, the words are usually coined to express, describe, and explain Ghanaian social values and aspirations. Historical legends, community solidarity, unity, love, morality, and current affairs, among others, are the themes for composing songs.

Accordingly, Ghanaian folk songs may be described as being topical, normally preoccupied with didactic intentions, particularly the teaching of moral lessons. Laziness, bad company, dishonesty, disobedience, disrespect for the elderly, falling into debt, and prostitution, are some examples of social vices that most of the songs are coined to preach against. So much importance is placed on the words of songs that it is not uncommon for musical ensembles to break for interludes, at intervals during the period of performance, so that the words of a song would be clearly audible to the audience. Sometimes, drum language unaccompanied by singing is used for the same purpose during a musical performance. The symbolic significance of music lies not only in its use

as a means of reflecting the mood of the moment, but also as a continuation of social dialogue.

### **Meanings of Elements in Dance and Drama**

Symbolic dance movements are an avenue of dramatic expression. To make expressions in dance more meaningful, a dancer may incorporate dramatic actions or mimed elements into the basic dance movements he or she is doing. Such elements usually appear in the form of elaborations of certain body movements used to highlight the dramatic actions a dancer intends to perform. While drama in the Ghanaian traditional setting is seen in terms of the mimetic elements occurring in various activities in social life, it is most distinctly expressed through symbolic dance movements. As far as symbolic movements are concerned, the elements of dance and drama are interconnected, the one complementing the other. This makes it expedient to discuss symbolism in dance and drama together.

Dramatic or mimetic dance movements meant to convey symbolic meanings are often inspired by the purposes of the social occasion at hand -- the attitudes, and beliefs associated with it -- and also the personal experiences and motivations of the dancer as far as those purposes are concerned. In this respect, then, as an avenue of self-expression, symbolic dance movements can be said to proceed from the deep thoughts and emotions of the dancer.

. . . traditional dances give scope for conveying thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures and facial expressions. Through . . . dance, individuals and social groups can show their reactions to attitudes of hostility or co-operation held by

others towards them. They may show deference to their superiors, gratitude to their benefactors, their own estimation of themselves in the presence of their rivals, servants, subjects and others through their choice of appropriate symbolic gestures (Nketia, 1965, pp. 20-21).

Indeed, initiates undergoing nubility rites, for instance, may perform mimetic dance movements to express their joy and gratitude to their parents, guardians, and all who helped to make the programme a success. In many societies in northern Ghana, especially among the Lobi, Dagarti, Konkomba, and related tribes, mimetic dances showing deep emotions and feelings of melancholy are performed at funerals preceding the burial of the elderly, as a tribute to them.

Since dance is a means of self-expression, an overview of the various ideas, experiences, beliefs, values, and attitudes that can be translated into meaningful dramatic or mimetic dance expressions would reveal innumerable symbolic dance movements. Some of these present intricate patterns that are undoubtedly complicated in description, and hence, to the understanding of the untutored person. However, there are others that are rather simple in their presentation, the bits and pieces of which, when put together, will lead to the understanding of the more intricate ones. The examples selected for discussion here are, therefore, symbolic dance movements belonging to the latter group.

A dancer who bends the body slightly forwards and crosses arms over the chest with the hands holding the shoulders, is expressing grief, apparently over the death of a close relative. Actually, he or she is saying: "Death has robbed me of the one who shields (helps) and protects me against the hazards of life; the loss has left me cold, lonely, vulnerable, and without any hopes; my survival in life is now at stake".

A dancer clasping his or her hands on top the head is also indicating sorrow and grief as result of finding himself or herself in a solitary and helpless disposition. One is by this symbolic act declaring that one is in need of friends or philanthropists to love, care for, and help one out of one's deplorable situation.

To stretch out one's arms in an embracing manner and then bring down both hands to touch one's chest. is to symbolically declare one's love for one's community. Specifically, it is a way of saying, "I have you all at heart". A chief or queenmother, for example, performing this symbolic movement in a dance at a state function is assuring the state of his or her love for her community.

A dancer doing the basic movements of a particular dance type may stop abruptly, and raising his or her head to look skywards, then raise one arm only with an open hand, or both arms with open hands towards the sky, is acknowledging the greatness of God. What this symbolic act implies is that: "I look up to God; I have committed my problems to God, to whom all might and power belongs, who alone deserves to be submitted to by all persons".

If a dancer clenches both of his or her hands, rolls them in an anticlockwise motion, and then, stretches the right arm with an open hand and brings it down in a sharp cutting motion, it means: "Even if I am (we are) bound with cords, I (we) shall undo them and break them into pieces". If the sharp cutting motion is accompanied simultaneously with a stamping of a foot on the ground, the dancer indicates that: "I (we) have overcome my (our) enemies by stepping over them". This dance movement may be



performed after any form of victory has been won against an opponent, enemy clan or tribe, for instance, in war, arbitration, or other judiciary matters.

To touch a spot below one's right eye with the tip of the forefinger of one's right hand in a symbolic dance movement, is to indicate the necessity for being observant. In other words, it indicates the need for a critical observation of what one sees or witnesses. To witness a situation personally or have a first-hand experience of it is always more meaningful than learning about it by means of a verbal information.

Frequently, a dancer during a state function may begin performing by placing the back of the right hand in the palm of the left hand keeping both hands open. He or she would then make a few bold strides towards the state elders (courtiers). Stopping at a reasonable distance away from them, the dancer bows slightly, or goes down on the left knee briefly bringing the back of the left hand (the right hand still resting in it) to touch the right knee. It means: "I am a novice as far as expressive dances are concerned. My intention is not to offend but to express myself. Should my actions be found to be faulty or offensive, I am begging in advance to be forgiven".

Sometimes, a dancer may interrupt a particular dance sequence being followed while at the centre of the dance arena by placing the right hand in the palm of the left hand as described above. He or she would then raise both hands together towards the east and west, and then, towards the north and south. The dancer is by this act expressing a wish to be pardoned by people from all quarters of the community whom he or she may have inadvertently offended in any way.

If a dancer dances towards a chief or an official of the royal court, bows down at his or her feet touching the feet with both hands, it signifies a plea for mercy or leniency for a wrong done. This implies that the dancer in question is guilty of an offence for which he or she would be dealt with by the state. If in like manner, the dancer goes to hold the foot of an individual person, he or she is suggesting that whatever differences existing between the two of them should be settled amicably.

Amid dramatic dance expressions, a dancer in a mock falling movement would fall with his or her back onto the laps, or into the arms of a prominent member of the community. This is to signify a recognition and an appreciation of the contributions made by such a benefactor towards the advancement of individual persons and the community as a whole. What the dancer is by this act saying to the one on whom he or she has fallen is: "You are my backbone; with you behind me, I have confidence that I shall never fall". Underlying this statement is the notion that the general public acknowledges the invaluable support it receives from this great benefactor.

Depending on the dance type and the ideas to be expressed, a dancer may hold in the hand a handkerchief, stick, whisk (the tail of a horse or bush cow), sword, spear and shield, bow and arrow, or even a gun to dramatise some dance movements. Similarly, costume also often forms a part of the movement complex. A medium (priest or priestess) of a deity, who incorporates a lot of spinning on one spot into his or her dance pattern may wear a raffia skirt, the twirling of which emphasizes the spin described by the dancer. By doing several spinning movements and stopping at the same spot after each spin, the dancer is expressing what may be termed the spiritual

philosophy of the deity of which he or she is a medium, namely: "always the same in character and consistently dependable".

Of the three types of dramatic forms that can be distinguished in the Ghanaian traditional society, what is discussed above embraces only dance drama. The symbolic or representational values of ceremonial and narrative drama operate in the actions embodied in the performances, rites, and narratives relating to important socio-cultural ceremonies. Activities associated with such ceremonies are organized in ways that make them symbolic and not mere routines. A priest or human medium chosen by a divinity to deliver a message always does so under the possession of the spirit of the deity. When this happens, the possessed person tends to impersonate the deity in question. In doing so, the person enacts a series of mimetic movements in certain sequences purporting to be attributes of the deity. These acts, which manifest the presence of the spirit of the deity working through the human agent, always precede the message.

As well, a person deputized to offer libationary prayers at a ceremony may follow defined sequences of body movements, as well as assume certain postures that are symbolic. Normally, he or she has to move a few steps away from the group. If he is a man, he removes his hat or any form of headgear he is wearing, unless it is an insignia of his office. If he is wearing a cloth thrown over one of his shoulders in the Ghanaian traditional manner, he lowers it to mid-body as a sign of respect for the ancestors and the state. He then takes the calabash or cup containing the drink for the offering in his right hand, holding it in a prescribed manner. Depending on the tradition of his tribe, he may stand, bow, kneel down, or squat in a particular way. Having done all these acts in

their right sequence, he then narrates his prayer petitions, pouring down the drink in a prescribed manner.



*Fig. 20: Scene of a Libationary Prayer*  
Photograph taken during a Funeral Occasion at Elmina.

It can be seen that dramatic activity in the Ghanaian traditional setting is a part of the process of living together. A mode of communication, drama appears also in worship, and as a means of strengthening the bonds of kinship and social life. The underlying social and cultural values providing the basic motivation for the foregoing symbolic dramatic acts can, thus, be summed up as community solidarity. In effect,

therefore, the overall symbolic significance of Ghanaian dramatic tradition is in the purpose for which it is used -- enrichment, sustenance, and continuity of life.

### **Verbal Arts**

Verbal art forms in the indigenous Ghanaian setting have been identified to include mythology, folktale (storytelling), riddles, libation and prayers, proverbs, and poetry recitations.

#### **Mythology**

Indigenous Ghanaian mythology is in the form of traditional philosophical conceptions, beliefs, and sacred stories based on themes centered around God and creation. Most of these mythological beliefs are manifest in the religious concepts discussed in Chapter Four. Summarily, it is generally believed among Ghanaians that all phenomena of the universe are controlled by divine powers which work in a hierarchical order. At the zenith is God the Supreme Being and creator of the universe and all that is in it. After God come supernatural deities, then ancestral spirits, followed by spiritual mediators believed to be existing in natural phenomena and objects. At the bottom of the hierarchy are protective charms owned by individual persons.

Ghanaian mythology also includes stories about family lineage, and how particular clans, tribes, or states were founded. Other stories are related to the benevolence of the spirits of ancestors, who in their life times were heroes and heroines, who sacrificed their lives for the welfare of humankind, moulding families, clans, and tribes into their present

forms. Stories about the existence of hostile and destructive spirits, witches, wizards, and other evil spirits in the universe which must be guarded against, also form part of Ghanaian mythology.

### **Folktale**

Popularly known as *Ananse* stories, Ghanaian folktales include legends, fables, and other forms of stories. People of all ages throughout Ghana love to hear and tell stories. The processes of organizing storytelling sessions have been discussed in Chapter Four. A major characteristic of Ghanaian folktale is that it comprises symbolic personification of animals as legendary teachers, as models of desirable human qualities, and as entertaining characters. One such character, the spider, commonly called *Kwaku Ananse*, is presented in some stories as a legendary philosopher chosen by God to be the custodian of all wisdom. Many tales also present the spider as a clever weaver, cunning hunter and expert escape artist (Heintz, 1991). At the same time, the spider's laziness, greed, gluttony, tricky nature, and skill in evading punishment, are recounted by countless tales. These attributes make the spider the central character of most folktales. It is thus no wonder that folktales are called *Ananse* stories after its name. The nymph (*Mamiwater*) who is viewed as the queen of beauty, the mischievous dwarf (*Aboatia* or *Asamanukpa*), the monster chief of devils (*Sasabonsam*), are also widely featured in Ghanaian folktales. Animals which are personified in particular folktales are chosen in accordance with their qualities, in relation to the contexts of the stories.

Folktales are known by different names in various Ghanaian languages -- *Adesa* (in Ga), *Nyazia* or *Anyazia* (in Dangme), *Anansesem* (in Akan), *Egli* (in Ewe) -- are a few examples. Although storytelling is a recreational activity and an important source of pleasure, folktales are rarely told purely for entertainment purposes. Treated as part of indigenous Ghanaian mythology, folktales are most often told to teach social and moral values, beliefs, and mores, in order to reinforce the principles underlying acceptable social behaviours. Elements of valued social behaviour emphasized through storytelling include:

**Godliness:** Giving reverence, piety, and obedience to God the Supreme Deity and provider of the life force.

**Respect:** The principle of holding in high esteem or paying proper courtesy to people in authority, and honouring the elderly in society. Authority and old age are regarded as sacred because these positions are thought of as being in close proximity to the ancestors. The customary rites for consecrating people in authority render them sacred beings. Hence, they are always given the title, *Togbui* (Ewe), *Nii* (Ga), *Nene* (Dangme), *Nana* (Akan), *Naa* (Dagomba), all of which connote the idea of grandfather or ancestor, irrespective of their ages. Old age is associated or equated with wisdom, which is believed to be a spiritual attribute of the elderly in society. Thus, showing respectful attitudes to authority and the elderly would result in obtaining their blessings for growth and advancement. Embedded in the notion of respect is the principle of humility and obedience to one's parents.

**Integrity:** Strong adherence to moral and ethical principles of society. This implies honesty and fairness in one's behaviour and actions aimed at gaining high public esteem, fame, or honour. As a custom, there is a feeling of ridicule, anger, and disgrace, or misdemeanour if one should lose one's integrity through any form of behaviour or action considered to be a vice or an anti-social act.

**Hospitality:** The principle of a sense of generosity, kindness, and honour to others, especially strangers, as through this means, one might entertain some spiritual beings unknowingly. Being hostile to strangers, therefore, might result in mistreating divine messengers who might be the bearers of one's fortunes. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, if the stranger is detected in some way to be a rogue or such.

**Gratitude:** A principle of being grateful for any form of help or gift received. While refusing a gift may be looked on under certain circumstances as an open declaration of one's dislike of the giver, to neglect showing gratitude for a gift is no less offensive. Every gift calls for a favourable reciprocal reaction from the recipient: it is thought that accompanying a gift is the giver's personality (Sarpong, 1974). Perhaps, it is this principle that is demonstrated by offering yearly sacrifices to ancestral spirits and supernatural deities to thank them for their services.

Folktales and mythological stories are coined to portray to members of society, particularly the younger generations, how these virtues are, or should be, shown in various modes of life. Stories are also used as a means of showing the kinds of social



relations that can be engendered by moral virtues. In effect, stories are a source of making social commentary and criticism.

### **Meanings of Elements in Libation and Prayer**

Libation pouring is a form of prayer: it is essentially a drink offering in honour of spiritual deities. The role of libationary prayer in indigenous Ghanaian religion and other customary practices is indispensable. Even though it is not practised as a separate religious activity in its own rite, libation is an additional element of sacrificial rites (Sarpong, 1996). Every libation consists of two elements, namely, the pouring of the drink and the verbal petitions that accompany the drink. It is this that makes it a prayer. Any kind of drink, even milk or water, is used in libation pouring. The preference of either a strong drink over soft one and vice versa, depends on the deity through which the prayers are being offered.

Occasions for libation pouring include family gatherings, state festivals, ancestral sacred stool purification rituals, and the enstoolment of chiefs. Others are the rites of passage such as child naming, nubility rites, apprenticeship, burial, and funeral ceremonies. Libation pouring also takes place during the cure of a disease, when embarking on and returning from a journey, before felling a tree for the purpose of carving, and before the clearing of virgin forest for a new settlement and farming purposes.

At ordinary social gatherings, anybody, men and women alike, can perform libation pouring. On public occasions, however, it is performed by persons deputized

especially for the purpose. Depending on type and importance of an occasion, the head or the most senior of the male members of a family group or clan, an official spokesperson of the royal court, or the High Priest of the state shrine would be responsible for the libation pouring.

The purpose of libation lies in the fact that humans depend for their living on God and other spiritual entities that are higher than themselves. Thus, humans perform libation to seek communion with God through these spiritual entities. In other words, the purpose of libation is to invoke the spiritual beings, who in turn, petition God for favours on behalf of humans.

The verbal aspects of libation performance are in the form of prayer requests. While prayer requests vary in accordance with different causes for the libation, they are normally based on such themes as security, the warding off of evils such as calamity and epidemics, good health, long life, fertility of the earth, humans, and animals, and prosperity in life. As for the actual choice of words forming the content of a libationary prayer, they are left entirely to the one designated to pour the libation in the name of the group. The phrases and sentences and length of the ritual, according to Sarpong, depend on the rhetorical ability of the person performing the libation.

Below is an example of the words of a child-naming libationary prayer among the Ga tribal group. The statements of this libationary prayer are presented in the words of Nii Amah, the *Asafo* Flag-bearer of Kwashieman, Accra.

*Agoo! awomei ke ataamei.*

*Ngmene ashi me?*

*. . . ngmene ashi Hogbaa, niime a-Hogbaa, naamei a-Hogbaa.*

*Tswa, tswa, tswa, omanyeba.*

*Jee wogbee kome.*  
*Wo sei yi ati;*  
*Wo blo yi ati.*  
*Wo bole kutuu wo kpe;*  
*Wo je bu, wo je nu no;*  
*Wo ye wo nu, wo koojii ano ajo wo.*  
*Gbo le ni ba le, eba le nine kome, womiie le nijii enyo;*  
*Esee tuu, ehie fanng;*  
*Eyi abagbo jen.*  
*Enye yi wala; etse yi wala.*  
*Wekumei ana faanii ango fa le.*  
*Eka ju, . . . eka fo;*  
*Ebatsu aha enye ke etse.*  
*Ke ena tuu le nyong ni;*  
*Ke ena futaa le ayilo.*  
*Humibi le ke kooyoo miitswa dani ewieo, ke jen shi kajee pe ekpa.*  
*Henyelo ko ni ka ehewo kule nii ni wofeo nee ekahi le, joomoi le eko aka nina le.*  
*Tswa, tswa, tswa, omanyaba.*

The group responds *Yao* after each of these statements.

This prayer translates as follows:

**Attention! ladies and gentlemen.**  
**May we know what day today is?**  
**. . . Our ancestors who granted us this great Sunday,**  
**We ask for blessings.**  
**This we ask with one voice.**  
**May our numbers be increased;**  
**May our united front be strengthened.**  
**We are gathered here with one accord;**  
**May we achieve success in our endeavour;**  
**May all our endeavour yield peace.**  
**The new member born to us, he/she arrived alone, we receive him/her double-**  
**handedly.**  
**For him/her darkness is in the past, bright is the future;**  
**May he/she live to a mature old age.**  
**Long life to the mother, and to the father.**  
**May his/her shortfalls in life be pardoned by members of the community.**  
**May he/she not become dishonest . . . or a cheat;**  
**May he/she live on the labour of his/her own hands.**  
**May he/she differentiate between doing things in the darkness which is evil, and**  
**in the plain which is life.**

May he/she be a humble and intelligent child who speaks only when it is necessary.

May our prayers not favour our enemy.

We ask for blessings.

The meaning of the response, *Yao*, at the end of each statement is: "May it be".

It is clear from the various ways in which libationary prayer is used that it is of great significance in both the religious and daily life of the Ghanaian people. The religious significance of libation lies in the fact that it brings the people into close communion with the all provident God, Supreme Being, through the spirits of their ancestors and other deities, and thereby affirms the presence and support of these spiritual beings for the human race. In brief, through libation the people express their belief in God, the ancestors, and the deities. In the general social realm, libation makes the people of a particular family, clan, or tribe realize the bond that exists between them. Through this means, they are either reminded or made aware of the fact that they belong to one and the same social group with a common historical background, social life, and hence, a common destiny. This, in turn leads to developing in them a sense of unity, friendship, hospitality towards one another, and mutual trust, resulting in social harmony. Probably, the most important significance of libationary prayer to the Ghanaian people is its use in the sealing of various forms of bonds and contracts such as in marriage and businesses.

### **Meanings of Proverbs**

Proverbs are indigenous Ghanaian sayings of wisdom that express in metaphorical terms some general truths or useful thoughts, based on common sense or practical human

experience. They are said to have been coined from diverse forms of human experience as a result of social, economic, and political situations, as well as careful observation of other phenomena affecting life in general. An indispensable part of everyday language, proverbs are used in different contexts and circumstances to specify or stress important points in speech making. They are especially prominent in statements that serve as rules of conduct. There are proverbs that talk about riches, poverty, good, evil, joy, sorrow, and other conditions of life.

Because they are employed in numerous contexts and circumstances in life, it is rather difficult to group various proverbs under specific categories. A review of some proverbs shows, however, that there are: 1) proverbs that deal with the general human condition; 2) proverbs in relation to achievement; and 3) proverbs that reflect social and moral values.

### **Examples of Proverbs that Deal with the General Human Condition**

*Lele ni ota mli le ojieo emli nu* (in Ga). Literally, this means: You bail out water from the canoe in which you travel. That is: It is one's legitimate duty to drain off water from the canoe in which one is travelling so as to prevent it from sinking. In other words, one must always do one's best to improve whatever situation in which one finds oneself.

*Adaawe mio mi ke hiawe mio* (in Dangme): "It is impossible to pull out the thorns which prick one's feet while still standing in the thorns". This implies that in order for one to be able to solve a particular problem in an efficient manner, one must be in a

position to realize what the cause of the problem is. Without this, it would be impossible to solve the problem.

*Ke godotse ko obo o, onyiewe ese ke ohe gu* (in Dangme): "If a lunatic snatches away your cover cloth in public, you do not run after him or her (the lunatic) in your nakedness to retrieve it". Avoid taking actions based on hasty decisions that would, in the long run, turn out to be foolish. In other words, in taking decisions on a particular subject, it is advisable that one takes into consideration all the useful variables that may be presented by the subject before arriving at a conclusion.

*Tin yi woga, tin mbe di tooni* (in Dagbani). Literally, that is to say that: "If a town is far, there is another town that is farther away". Stated differently, for every town that is thought of as being far away, there is always another one that is much farther than it. The contention here is that if one does not know about other people's problems, one is inclined to think that one has the most difficult problems in life. Learning about other people's problems, however, might make one realize even the more difficult situations such people might have been coping with.

An equivalence of this saying in Ewe is: *Atadi biahee ngo le eme*. "Even within the ripe hot pepper, one can find a maggot". This stresses the fact that there are diverse forms of difficult situation to be met in life. What is important, then, is for one to learn how to cope with the situation in which one is, however bad it might seem to be. These two proverbs are used to teach about perseverance in coping with difficult situations.

*Oba nyansafo wobo no be, na wonka no asem* (in Akan): "It is enough to speak to a wise child in proverbial terms and not in plain language". This implies that an

intelligent or wise person does not need to be spoken to at length before he or she understands. An Ewe language version of the same proverb, *Nyaseto meyo abakao*, means: "The ear that heeds words of advice is not as big as a basket". A word or two (and not a great deal of talking) to a wise person are enough for him or her to react positively.

*Nang barizi ngi ting tula* (in Dagbani): "A person who rides on horse back does not know that the ground is hot". Implicit in this saying is the idea that there is need for people in authority always to come down to the level of the commoners so as to share in their experiences.

#### **Examples of Proverbs in Relation to Achievement**

*Gbeke ni le ede fomo le eke onukpai yeo nii* (in Ga): "A child who knows how to wash his or her hands is allowed to dine with elders". What this implies is that through hard work, it is possible for any person to achieve success in his or her field of endeavour. This further connotes the fact that the heights attained by the great ones in society are also attainable by anybody else, but through hard work and strong determination.

*Abofra refur dua pa a, wopia n'akyi* (in Akan). This is interpreted literally as, "a child who attempts to climb a good tree must be pushed up". Actually it means a person who makes an effort in the right direction needs to be encouraged so as to enable him or her to achieve his or her goals.

## **Proverbs that Reflect Social and Moral Values**

*Nohale le ayile* (in Nzema). This simply means: "Truth is a cure". That is, learning to be truthful would always make one free.

*Detsi vivi ye hea zikpui* (in Ewe): "A tasty soup is always liable to drawing seats (people) to itself". This indicates the idea that it pays to be good and nice to people, for persons with such qualities, by nature, earn a great deal of appreciation and love from people.

*Tel dintel ninga gbele* (in Sisala): "If I fall (for you) and you fall (for me), it is fair play". The indication here is that there is need for the development of a reciprocal attitude in any kind of relationship. All persons who are involved in a particular relationship -- married couples, friends, neighbours, members of a community, and the like -- must play their part in making the relationship a harmonious and healthy one.

*Akuvianto fe agbleme da dzia vi do*: "A lazy man's farm is a breeding ground for snakes". Stated differently, a weak and irresponsible parent is liable to raising disrespectful, careless, and equally irresponsible children. It requires great responsibility and commitment to raise a good and responsible child. It also denotes that it is only by working hard that one could expect favourable results.

*Ake hingmei enyo kweee to mli* (in Ga): "It is a useless venture attempting to look into a bottle with both eyes". Underlying this saying is the premise that it does not pay to be unduly too picky and fussy about life situations, as such attitudes often bring about confusion. This same idea is expressed in a different way in the Ewe language as, *Womegba deku eve le alogo deka me o*: "It is impossible to crack two palm nuts in one's



mouth at the same time". This is to stress the principle that things must be done, one at a time, in order to yield good results.

*Woto wo bo ase na wo dwa ntatea a, wohu ne nsono* (in Akan): "With patience, one can dissect an ant and find its intestines". This means that however difficult a task might be, it could be accomplished if approached with the required zeal, diligence, and dedication. The emphasis here is on patience as an important virtue.

It should be remarked that most Ghanaian proverbs are applicable in a variety of contexts. As such, each proverb can have more than one meaning depending on the context in which it is applied at any particular time. The explanations offered here are, therefore, not final. They only illustrate some of the several meanings each proverb can have. This explains also why one proverb can be used for different situations. As well, two or more proverbs may express the same meaning, and as such, may be used for the same situation.

From the examples of proverbs discussed, it would be inferred that the values most cherished by the Ghanaian people are expressed through their proverbs. Among Ghanaians, the art of speaking is regarded very highly, and the use of proverbs is an essential aspect of the oral culture through which important points are stressed. Thus, whoever has the ability to employ proverbs appropriately in his or her speech is looked upon as a person of great intelligence and wisdom. This is because of the belief that proverbs can only be acquired by a person as a result of a great deal of exposure to the vast array of proverbial references through profound listening, observation, and learning from the wise in society. Understanding proverbs and applying them appropriately to

particular circumstances is believed to entail a great deal of intellectual activity. Probably, that is why a person who exhibits this ability is considered to be well versed with the language, knowledgeable, and a good orator.

The significance of proverbs to Ghanaian orators is that they are used to embellish speech, making it rich and more beautiful. The use of proverbs helps to make the audience more attentive, as they try to make the meanings and lessons each proverb is purported to convey. Speakers use proverbs to make short an otherwise long speech. With proverbs, the main points of the matter being discussed are brought out in brief, clear, statements, full of metaphors that have important moral implications for the audience. It could, then, be safely said that because proverbs are used to express the most cherished values of the Ghanaian, their significance is in the moral virtues they teach.

### **Meanings of Riddles**

Riddles are an indigenous Ghanaian verbal art form that involves the use of puzzles as an oral game. People of all ages, but particularly children, love to play riddles. Handed down from generation to generation, riddles do play a very important role in the oral tradition of Ghana. The game of riddles is known by different names in various Ghanaian languages. The Ga call it *Ajenugbamo* or *Ajenuloo*, the Akan refer to it as *Aborome* or *Ebisaa*, while it is known as *Salinloha* among the Dagbani. The game is a question-and-answer one. It is presented as questions designed by the questioner

basically to test the intelligence, thinking skills, and how knowledgeable the respondent is about things in his or her environment.

Two or more children can play riddles. One of them begins by posing a question; the other provides the answer, and vice versa. If the people involved are many, the game is played in teams. Each team selects a leader to do the questioning, someone who has a good knowledge about posing riddle questions, while the team members offer pieces of advice. When a question is posed, any member of the opposing team is allowed to provide an answer.

Each tribal community has a way of presenting riddles. Among the Ga, for example, the person posing a riddle begins by saying, "*Ajenuloo!*", and the respondent (opposing team) responds by saying, "*Ajenu ba!*". The Akan says, "*Apré apré oo!*", to which the response is "*Yaa!*"; while the Ewe says, "*Mise alobalo loo!*", and the response is, "*Alobalo neva!*". These introductions, meaning, "listen to a riddle", to which is responded, "let the riddle come", are meant to get the participants' attention for each riddle that is posed. Some riddles are made of direct questions, but others begin with some short statements after which follow the actual questions.

Here are some examples of indigenous Ghanaian riddles and their solutions:

**Riddle:** What animal, although created without any legs and arms, nevertheless climbs trees?

**Answer:** It is the snake.

**Riddle:** There is a type of animal used for food. When slaughtered, only its outer covering, which is not useful, is thrown away; all the rest of the body, including the entrails and bones are cooked and eaten completely. Name the animal.

**Answer:** An egg: Each egg is regarded as a whole chicken with its bones, entrails, and feathers. It is only the shells that are not edible.

**Riddle:** There is a battalion of soldiers, all of whom together wear only one and the same belt around their waist. What does this represent?

**Answer:** A broom. Traditionally, a broom is made by scraping off the leafy substance from the midribs of the palm or coconut leaves, and the strands tied together into a bunch with a cord.

**Riddle:** What kind of animal is it that never gets an headache throughout its life time?

**Answer:** It is the crab. This is because the crab is an animal that is without a head. Its eyes, nose, and mouth are attached to what acts as the stomach.

**Riddle:** Each individual human being has a very good companion, whom one cannot send on an errand by himself or herself, yet, he or she accompanies one wherever one goes. Who is this companion?

**Answer:** The human shadow.

**Riddle:** There is something that is not edible, yet whenever it touches one's fingers, one licks the finger immediately. What is it?

**Answer:** Fire: Whenever one's finger touches fire, one puts the finger in the mouth to lessen the scalding pain.

**Riddle:** There is an animal that turns into a stone whenever it senses danger.

What animal is it?

**Answer:** It is the tortoise: It plays dead by recoiling into its shell, thereby lying down like a piece of rock.

Riddles have great significance for children's learning. Apart from themselves being a source and process of learning, riddles also helps children to develop an awareness of the nature and characteristics of things in the environments in which they live. By nature, children dislike being out-done by their colleagues in answering riddles. This makes them realize that to be able to answer riddles correctly and to coin new and difficult ones, one has to learn about things in one's environment. In their curiosity to find out and to know more about things, children take to voluntarily exploring, investigating, and questioning phenomena both in their physical and cultural environments. In effect, learning about riddles offers children informal but experiential ways of knowing about and understanding their environment.

### **Meanings of Elements in Poetry**

Two main forms of poetry can be distinguished within the indigenous Ghanaian oral culture, namely, appellations and funeral dirges.

#### **Appellations**

These may be defined as titles of identification designated to each royal stool or skin that serves as a throne of a clan, tribal community, or state. Such titles often

describe the qualities as well as the most cherished values of the communities they represent, and are normally used to praise the occupants of the royal thrones. This indicates that each royal throne has its own set of praise appellations that identify it. The Ga and the Dangme refer to appellations as *Sabla*, the Akan, *Abodin*, and the Ewe, *Nkofofodo*.

The themes of most appellations reflect bravery, greatness, achievement, strength, secrecy, and other such qualities. The choice of words for appellations is based on the qualities and characteristics of certain animals and objects. Some examples of animals are the porcupine, lion, elephant, leopard, antelope, chameleon, and whale, while the objects include trees, the axe, the granite stone, and the two-edged sword, to mention but a few.

Occasions that call for the use of appellations are festivals in commemoration of ancestors, durbar of chiefs, and other state ceremonies. Appellations are also recited during the installation ceremonies of chiefs, queenmothers, and clan heads. Appellations are recited verbally, or played on drums, elephant tusk horns, or flutes. Frequently, a combination of two or more of these are employed in reciting praise appellations of individual chiefs, each with his entourage, as they arrive at or depart the ceremonial grounds in a colourful procession. As well, a particular chief or queenmother may not be invited to give a speech or perform a ritual at ceremony without his or her praise appellations being first recited or sang. Most appellations are in short verses and, as such, their recitation takes on a repetitive order. Here are examples of appellations from two Ghanaian communities.

Some Ashanti Appellations:

*Ono no!*  
*Hwae na obesen akoka no?*  
*Wokoka Osei Tutu a woanya ko*  
*Obodwema fofro*  
*Oobanin a mmanin suro no.*

Behold the Great One!  
Who dares to provoke him?  
Who ever provokes Osei Tutu invites war  
He is the creator of a new nation as solid as a fresh nut  
A mighty man feared by mighty men (Boaten, 1993, p. 13).

*Osei Bonsu a oko kyere ahene,*  
*Obanin twerebo a ne ho bon atuduro.*  
*Bonsu a oko kyere ahene.* (Nana Owusu Ansah, Kumasi).

Osei Bonsu who fights to capture chiefs (kings),  
A man, who like a cannon always smells of gun-powder.  
Bonsu who fights to capture chiefs.

Some Ewe Appellations:

*Anlo kotsi klolo,*  
*Du no eme mase emenya;*  
*Naketi deka no dzome bi mu.* (Togbe Salu, Afiadenyigba).

The Anlo who speaks using codes not understood by everybody,  
A community so conserving that her secrets are not easily known;  
That a single firewood is enough to cook a meal.

Sometimes, appellations are recited in the form of slogans. The Dagbon, for example, express their hospitality in terms of clean drinking water by the saying: *Kuli moli din vela, dini laxim nyuriba*. "If the source of a river is clean, many people drink from it". The Nzema and Ashanti (Asante) relate their defensive nature to the nature of the porcupine. The Nzema slogan: *Nzema kotokoni ba*, means: "Nzema, the child of the porcupine; to offend the Nzema is to incur the vengeance of the porcupine". The Ashanti version of the slogan is *Asante Kotoko, wo kum apem a, apem beba*. This means:

"Asante Kotoko, if you kill a thousand, another thousand will emerge (come)". The Ga also express their strong standing and ever-readiness to defend their front by the slogan: *Ashiedu keteke, ana ngme anaaa te, ana te anaaa ngme . . . !* This means: "Ashiedu the buttressed is ever ready to defend himself against any eventuality".

### **Funeral Dirges**

A dirge may be described as a song or poem of lamentation in commemoration of the dead. The Ga call dirges *Nkomoyeli yaafo*, the Ewe, *Avihawo*, the Akan, *Osu (Osunyom)*, the Gonja, *Awoba*, while the Frafra refer to them as *Bemma*. Dirges are recited or sung at funerals to praise and honour the dead.

The Ghanaian attaches great importance to the way in which the funeral of a dead relative is organized. To die without being properly mourned is an indication of one's worthlessness in one's life time. This is also considered shameful as much to the deceased person as it is to his or her family. A period of mourning is, therefore, a critical and rather dramatic event in a community where a death occurs. It is important for mourners to show their sorrow openly through songs, crying, and firing of muskets, among other activities. The recitation or singing of dirges pervades the activities of the entire funeral situation.

Reciting and singing of dirges is the duty of women as they bewail and shed tears for the loss. It is by means of dirges that funerals are announced and commenced. As a custom, it is held to be improper for men to show their grief through crying and wailing in public. Hence, their part in the presentation of dirges is seen where the playing of



musical instruments are involved. The recitation of dirges at a funeral is not restricted to any number of people. As many women as are willing can participate in expressing their feelings about the death through dirges.

Women performing dirges rarely sit down. They pace the entire funeral grounds where the corpse lies in state, reciting and singing praises and honouring the deceased person. Amid crying and sobbing, mourners tell through dirges about the good deeds of the deceased and how sad it is for the community to lose such a good person. Dirges are also looked on as the vehicle by which messages are sent through a deceased person to the ancestors. Accompanying the dirges are gestures of the arms and hands and facial expressions denoting the sorrowful situation on hand. Horns, flutes, and drum language are also used in performing dirges, especially at the funerals of very prominent persons. In most Ghanaian communities, however, no dirges of any kind are said for persons who die through suicide or accident.

The choice of words for dirges depends on the nature of the deceased and his or her status in society, and also on the rhetorical ability of the mourner. The following statements in the Fante language provide a typical example of a funeral dirge. The funeral dirge presented here is recited by Ms. Philomena Nartey and Nana Esi Akyere of Elmina.

*Owu nnye nokwarfo, owu nnye nokwarfo,  
Nokwar nye de owu nnye nokwarfo da!  
Nanaanom Nsona ebusua e-e! Asem aba! Asem aba! Asem aba!  
Se nyimpa ne mer ye kumaa bi, onkye na wahyew.  
Owu afa hen dofo pa ako awerefi mu,  
Mena Ama Etsipa a ofir Nanaanom Nsona ebusua mu a owo Dena,  
Oso ba Mena Ama Etsipa n'ebusua a n'ahye nsiw nye akonkran.  
Ama! Ama Adoma! Nana Abutakyi ne nana Ama Etsipa!*

*Sika kokoo Etsipa, sika akofi nana a-a!*  
*Sika hwedofo nana a-a! Aberewa Onyikabi nana a-a!*  
*Besia Ama Etsipa, ewo hen fa na Ebusua Panyin Naaba efi Sekonde aba na onnhu wo yi?*  
*Nokwar nye de obo pae a, wopam a onye yie: obo pae wopam a onye yie da!*  
*Nde Ama nnyi ho bio, Ama efi wiase.*

Death has never been realistic, death has never been realistic,  
 It is a reality that death has never been realistic indeed!  
 Elders and members of Nsona e-e! disaster has stricken . . . !  
 So, the human life is that short; getting used up soon.  
 Death has snatched our dear and beloved one unsuspectingly,  
 Madam Ama Etsipa a ofir Dena, a descendant of the Nsona clan,  
 A great grand child, Ama Etsipa of the clan whose totem is the crow.  
 Ama! Ama Adoma! Nana Abutakyi's grand daughter, Ama Etsipa!  
 Golden Etsipa, grand child of riches a-a!  
 Grand child of custodians of riches a-a! grand child of a prominent old woman a-a!  
 Ideal woman, Ama Etsipa, where are you, that the Clan Head Nana Kobina Naaba has arrived from Sekonde but cannot see you?  
 It is a reality that a rock that has split open can never be sewn together . . . never indeed!  
 Today, Ama is no more, Ama has given up on the affairs of the world.

*Nanaanom Nsona ebusua e-e! Ebusua a wokan hon a wonhu ano e-e!*  
*Hom ntee dzii n'ahoma atoto wo Obaa Panyin Adjoa Egyirba fie;*  
*Ahaban momon atsew; Ehum kese etu; Edupon kese ebu.*  
*Asaase apae; Munukum kese esi; Fie gya edum, fie gya edum atse.*  
*Mframa kese etu; Poma dzendzen ebu; Dua taantam ebu ahwe famu.*  
*Aberewa Ekua Tweba na Obarimba Kwesi Enyan hon enyimnyam,*  
*Ama Etsipa, abo dzin, abo mrane ye poma a oye dzin.*  
*Nde poma dzendzen a ote dem yi ebu.*  
*Odomankoma wu n'enyi ye dzen, w'agye baatan a otse dem yi efir hen nsa mu.*  
*Nde baatan pa Ama Etsipa ahom koom wo obra yi mu.*  
*Okofo Ama, okofo pa Ama! Ewie ko wo obra sar yi do.*  
*Ebusua, enuanom, mba, na okunafo se wo wu yi afa hon nfrase;*  
*Afi so, wonka den wo w'akwantu yi ho?*  
*Nanaanom, ebusua, enuanom, na mba ma wo kose! kose! kose!*

Elders and members of Nsona Clan e-e! A clan with uncountable members e-e!  
 The cord linking you together has become entangled in ancestor Adjoa Egyirba's home;  
 A fresh green leaf has been plucked off; a strong storm has arisen; a huge tree has been felled.

The earth has split open; an overcast of heavy clouds has formed; the fire of the home has quenched, it has quenched really!  
 A strong wind has blown, breaking down a strong pillar; a tree with many branches has fallen to the ground.  
 Pride of his parents Aberewa Ekua Tweba and Barima Kwesi Enyan, Ama Etsipa, a name that is also an appellation, is that strong pillar.  
 Today, a strong pillar of this sort has been broken:  
 Nature's own creation, death, whose power knows no limits has taken away from us a mother so ideal.  
 Today, an ideal mother, Ama Etsipa, breathed her last silent breath of life.  
 Warrior, Ama! Great warrior, Ama! You have ended up the war on this life's wilderness.  
 The entire clan, family, your children and widower say your death has take them by surprise;  
 As well, how would they interpret this journey of yours?  
 The elders, clan, family, and your children say take pity! pity! pity!

*Owu na n'ekyir awerehow, owu na n'ekyir awerehow:  
 Wim aye koom, fua so ahye; dem na wiadze tse?  
 Baatan pa Ama Etsipa yem yiefo ako dom owu akor wo adankyir.  
 Baatan pa Ama, Mena Ama Etsipa, edae akyer na sor;  
 Na obaatan na onyim dzaa nyimba bedzi.  
 Obi be hwe w'adze, onnkeye de wo ara ewo ho da, a-a-a!  
 Mbofra yi hon hwefo nye hwana? Hwana? Hwana? Hwana? a-a!  
 Nngyanka yi be dzi ben? e-e-e! Obra wo ewie ampa!  
 Nokar nye, nyimpa dasenyi n'ewie yi, Nyame na onyim.  
 Ama, nanaanom Nsona ebusua ma wo demirifa o-o-o!  
 Due! Due! Due na akwantu yaa yaw! Due na akwantu yaa yaw!  
 Enuanom na nngyanka ma wo kose, kose kosee!  
 Ama, nantsew yie, nantsew yie, nantsew yie, na daakye bi ye be hyia mu bio.  
 Ama yem yiefo, Nyankopon nfa wo nsi yie; Ama da yie! Da yie! Da yie!*

Death and its aftermath of sorrow:

The atmosphere is tense; it is also misty; is that how the world is?  
 Ideal mother, Ama Etsipa the kind-hearted has joined the dead in the underworld.  
 Ideal mother, Madam Ama Etsipa, wake up from this long slumber;  
 For it is the ideal mother who knows best what her children shall eat.  
 Whoever might take your stead might never be like you, a-a-a!  
 These children, who will be their care-taker? . . . I repeat, who it is? a-a!  
 These orphans, how would they eat? e-e-e! That life eventually comes to an end, is a truth.  
 The reality is, God is His own interpreter of how a human life ends.  
 Ama, the elders and members of Nsona clan give you deep sympathy o-o-o!  
 We regret! We regret your embarkment on a painful journey of this sort.

Ama, fair you well, fair you well, fair you well, for we hope to meet again one day.  
Ama the kind-hearted, may God give you a perfect rest; Ama, rest in peace. . .!

A summary of the ways in which the verbal arts function in the indigenous life of the Ghanaian reveals a unique and rich oral cultural heritage. It seems that the Ghanaian has developed this oral culture as an alternative to alphabetical writing, thus, restricting all material of historical, philosophical, and social significance of life to oral literature. This makes the oral traditions easily the major means by which customs, beliefs and usages have been handed down from generation to generation. The distinct modes of expression through a heritage of myths, storytelling, riddles, proverbs, clan and state appellations, and funeral dirges attest to this assertion. Inheritance has mostly been the basis of indigenous oral education in Ghana. Information about traditional lores and mores is passed from parent to child, from guardian to ward, from master to apprentice, and from friend to friend. The oral traditions have also been the means by which researchers in art history, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies obtain material about the Ghanaian culture.

The interpretation of symbolism in the Ghanaian arts show that indigenous artists and crafts-persons of Ghana make arts which are a part of everyday life and not set aside in museums. They use symbolic expressions in a variety of ways in art-making as powerful means of communicating social, religious, political, and economic messages to members of the culture and to future generations. These symbolic expressions in the Ghanaian arts render them a useful source for teaching vital concepts that would enlarge

students' understanding of the role of art in human culture. Such concepts include the meanings of the symbolic artistic expressions, the historical and philosophical ideas underlying their creation and usage, as well as their socio-cultural significance. To the Ghanaian, the arts are a means of achieving cultural communication through symbolic expressions that depict lived experience. This indicates that the arts should not only be considered and studied according to art styles and aesthetic systems, but also to understand them as social behaviours within the Ghanaian cultural context. Such a social or anthropological approach to study is essentially an analysis of the cultural forms and social processes which produce the arts. Because cultural anthropology is primarily oriented towards analyzing and understanding human behaviour, which includes the description and uses of cultural artifacts, it offers a comprehensive framework for considering the arts. When its methods are applied to the study of the relationships of the arts to the broad cultural matrix from which they derive, students can understand the arts within a comprehensive matrix of human experience. Cultural anthropology can thus serve as a rewarding foundation for arts education and for achieving cultural literacy in Ghana. Appendices 'A', 'B', and 'C' offer some strategies for teaching and learning in and through the arts at the Primary, Junior Secondary, and Senior Secondary School levels in Ghana, using the discipline-based approach to art education.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

This study has shown that Ghanaian conceptions of art are broadly defined. The process of art-making is an inseparable part of the ways Ghanaians live. To the Ghanaian people, art is a phenomenal aspect of the human condition, therefore they make no distinction between 'fine art' and 'crafts'. Each artistic product or performance is fashioned under the circumstances of daily life with a content, meaning, and purpose, within the Ghanaian cultural context. The specific functions of each art form are viewed as contributions to the maintenance and sustenance of the life force. In other words, the Ghanaian practices what is termed 'art for life's sake'. This conceptual framework of art is in contrast to the formalist notion of 'art for art's sake', which separates art from all social and cultural ramifications.

Used in a living context, the arts are deeply rooted in historical, philosophical, social, economic, and political values from which a great deal of Ghanaian cultural knowledge derives. The Ghanaian people usually express their lifeworld in symbolic terms. Hence, they have objectified their most cherished cultural values into a system of symbolic artistic expressions. Thus, these artistic expressions serve as a device for perpetuating the values and cultural traditions, recording lived experiences, and communicating historical information. To understand Ghanaian art forms therefore

requires a study of their historical and cultural contexts -- their meanings, as well as their philosophical, religious, political, economic, and educational significance to the people.

Teaching strategies have been suggested in the appendices that follow this chapter to demonstrate how teachers can meet these educational needs. A set of teaching goals that would foster in students the ability to relate the arts to everyday life, and to understand them in the larger human context, have been constituted following the Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) model. This includes the study of four foundational disciplines of art, namely, art-making, art history, aesthetics, and art criticism. As a result of personal fulfilment through art-making, learning to appreciate the artistic heritage (art history), studying the nature and role of art in society (aesthetics), and developing critical artistic literacy (art criticism), students can understand the socializing effects of the arts on the Ghanaian society.

### **The Socializing Effects of Symbolic Artistic Expression**

This study has explored the ways in which the people of Ghana have used art forms to perpetuate their own socio-cultural life. In other words, the study shows how the art forms help to channel the Ghanaian people's psychic energy and attention towards goals that give meaning to their life. These goals are not limited to satisfying individual persons' needs only; they also aim towards cultivating the well-being and harmony among the people at various levels of life and living. The study has attempted to understand how the Ghanaian people relate to their cultural arts: it reveals how

Ghanaians interpret meanings in their art images, as well as artistic acts and behaviours, and the place of the arts in their daily living.

What has become evident from the study, is that the potential significance of the arts is realized in the complex emotional and cognitive ideologies and spiritual ties it offers the people, which both reflect and help create the ultimate goals of their existence. Also becoming evident are the ways in which artistic symbolism is used to create and portray personal or individual group qualities and identities, as well as superiority over others. The dynamics of the social function of symbolic expression in the Ghanaian cultural arts can be described by two modalities, namely, differentiation and integration. As can be seen, throughout time and space, Ghanaians have used symbolic artistic expression to explore and project some of the purposes that animate their own individual living as well as those that bound them together or divided from each other. In brief, the cultural symbols serve a process of differentiation, emphasizing their owners' unique personalities. Or they express integration by representing dimensions of shared family descent, ethnic origin, social beliefs, values, and life-styles between the owner and others within his or her social context.

The functioning of symbolic artistic expressions as agents of social differentiation and integration are well expressed by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) in the following words:

**By either embodying hidden psychic processes or exhibiting the power or prestige of their owner, things [artistic expressions] can serve as means of individual differentiation; that is, the development of a person's traits that make him or her stand out from others. However, the cultivation of individuality serves a larger goal of integration because the intention to differentiate oneself from others still needs other people to give it**



meaning. . . . and so even differentiation has a purpose within and for the integrated life of the community (p. 33).

The study, furthermore, reveals a third level at which the integrative function of the Ghanaian cultural symbols operate. It shows that the symbols also serve to integrate the two elements -- that is, the personal and social dynamics -- with the dynamic forces of the universe. These are the sun, fire, the moon, the stars, wind, water, and the earth, which are believed to be the supernatural phenomena that control the rhythm of life. Thus, in a nutshell, the integrative function of Ghanaian cultural and artistic symbolism can be said to take place on three levels which are dynamically related to each other. These are the personal, the social, and the universal levels (Sperber, 1975). What this implies is that the socializing function of artistic symbolism in the Ghanaian culture is to help the individual person relate to his or her own self, to other members of his or her socio-cultural group, and to the universe. To relate to one's own self means, to realize or discover who exactly one is and what beliefs and values one subscribes to. It is through self-discovery that one establishes one's own distinctive personality or identity. What this distinction between differentiation and integration helps us to understand is that both processes are contributing agents for the process of social integration. As such, they are vital for cultural development and continuity.

### **Contemporary Trends in the Arts**

The cultural policy of African Personality adopted by Ghana after her attainment of political independence has been aimed at decolonization in the cultural sphere. The policy has been used to set the stage for a gradual attainment of cultural independence.

As part of the struggle for political emancipation, leaders have made a call for cultural re-awakening among the Ghanaian people -- a strong urge for a more complete, traditionally oriented cultural expression in various aspects of the life and living of Ghanaian citizens. Embedded in this call is the premise that the Ghanaian society cannot advance in its social, economic, and political development if it should continue to forsake the culture of its people for alien values. This would strengthen the people's desire to identify themselves with their cultural heritage. As well, it is a means of rescuing and revitalizing the Ghanaian culture whose integrity and vitality were being lost to the new patterns brought about by colonialism and other foreign influences.

The foregoing is to imply that the culture of present-day Ghana is not only an aggregate of diverse traditional forms but also a composite of old and new, that is, indigenous and foreign (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975). What this cultural re-awakening policy has achieved, so far, is the inculcation in the Ghanaian people of a more sympathetic and empathetic attitude towards their own secular cultural practices -- social behaviours and activities that are not concerned with Christian or Islamic religious orders. Secular socio-cultural activities, be they in music, dance, drama, or verbal forms, are no longer considered a violation of Christian and Islamic principles. There is also the realization that being attached to indigenous Ghanaian ways of life does not handicap a person's development or progress in modern (Western) schooling. The previous ambition of many a Ghanaian (particularly the educated elite) was to be assimilated into Western cultural values and identities from without; this aspiration has now been replaced by a strong critical sensitivity about which types of imported values to borrow or assimilate.

That is to say that, rather than lending themselves to being absorbed by foreign elements, many Ghanaians are now selective of only those elements that have the tendency of enriching their social and cultural life as Ghanaians.

This is evident in the ways in which contemporary artists have been employing various Modern Western art materials, equipment, and techniques alongside the traditional forms in art-making based on indigenous Ghanaian themes. In music, for instance, foreign instruments in the form of membranophones, aerophones, chordophones, accordions, organs and pianos are used side-by-side with the indigenous types. Potters wheels, cement, plaster of Paris, and chemical glazes have become a bona fide part of pottery making. Broad looms and chemical dyes also find much use in textile arts. Painting (picture making) which used to be almost absent from the indigenous arts is now one of the major visual art forms of contemporary Ghana. These are but only a few examples of Modern Western influences that have been assimilated into art-making in Ghana today.

While the arts of contemporary Ghana still reveal the old traditional forms, they reflect new forms that bear varying degrees of resemblance to the old. For example, there is the development of 'Highlife' music, which is essentially vocal in character and accompanied by instruments. Like the songs of indigenous dance groups, the words of Highlife music are based on a variety of subjects about the human condition. There are songs about morals, politics, happiness, humour, death, and sorrow. The tunes, like those of the indigenous types, are generally simple in outline such that they are easily grasped by everyone. As well, Highlife is recreational and dance oriented. However,

whereas indigenous community dance bands find their setting out of doors, Highlife bands began by walking about the streets with their music which attracted large crowds of dancers and appreciators. Today, the setting for Highlife music is the night club, town hall or community centre, or the cafe, where participants pay an entry fee.

Even though Highlife music is said to have originated in towns along the coastal regions of Ghana, it has spread over the whole the country, as an inter-tribal music. Today, it has gained an international importance, in that, it has been widely adopted in other West African countries as popular music.

There are some remarkable contemporary developments in indigenous dance forms too. Existing dance forms and patterns in the traditional setting, such as the dance of the village square and those of ceremonial and ritual occasions, are now being adopted, adapted, or recreated for presentation in a theatrical setting. This discovery of the theatrical importance of the indigenous dance forms has resulted in the performance of various dance patterns from different tribal groups and traditional areas not necessarily by traditional experts, but by anybody who has learned to choreograph the patterns of particular dance forms. This implies that traditional dances are performed outside their normal setting. The result is a new type of variety entertainment performed in theatre settings that uses the vocabulary and idiom of traditional song and dance drama, including dances for cult events that are usually performed at a shrine.

Another important contemporary development is a new form of drama for the theatre, and which is staged by Highlife bands. These bands are known as 'Concert Parties' or 'Trios'. This type of drama which is purely for entertainment, combines

music, dramatic acts, and dialogue. The emphasis of this art form is on comedy with an emphasis on farce and comic appeal. This is easily evident in the actors' choices of costume, action, use of dialogue, and even the characters they portray, apparently, to attract more audience. Nearly every drama troupe composes its own repertoire of songs based on the themes of the plays they stage. An essential characteristic of these drama troupes is that their plays are always designed to offer some form of oral teaching to the audience. This didactic function of the play is brought out not only through the dialogue and actions of the actors, but also by means of the songs and poetry recitations that are a part of the texture of the drama.

Information from the Cultural Commission of Ghana shows that there are also new developments in the visual arts domain. Some commercial concerns, particularly, Mobil Oil Ghana Limited, has shown interest in the development of this domain. In collaboration with the National Museum, Ghana Library Board, and Centres for National Culture, Mobil Oil sponsors country-wide competitions in visual arts and crafts. The aim behind these competitions is to select outstanding works to form the basis of a collection for a future national art gallery.

### **Problems of the Contemporary Trends in the Arts**

The foregoing review confirms the side-by-side existence of both the traditional arts and the new forms within the contemporary Ghanaian setting. The contemporary trends have brought with them ways of art-making that are either innovations of the traditional techniques or totally new approaches as an add-on to the indigenous arts,

thereby enhancing their growth and advancement. However, this new orientation, in the view of the traditionalist, has its own disadvantages. Practice of the arts in traditional society has always been on a community or tribal group basis, that is, a group of people sharing a common social life, or belonging to the same linguistic units, described as traditional areas. Whereas the arts are practised as an integral part of the social, ceremonial, and religious life within the traditional context, the contemporary trend is towards borrowing from artistic styles of various traditional areas and developing them as forms of expression for the theatre. The emphasis on theatre does not only commercialize the arts, it might also cause them to lose their importance as a community expression, which give them meaning and cultural significance.

Divorcing the arts from their socio-cultural ramifications poses a danger of the traditional forms losing their community support. Its other effect might be to stifle the very source from which the new artistic forms are growing. Today, these problems have become a major national concern. Culture is of such great importance that it should not be left to private enterprise which might turn it into a profit-oriented enterprise providing rather low forms of entertainment (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975, p. 41).

In response to this concern, it has been found expedient to institute a more comprehensive and meaningful approach to developing the arts on a national basis. The indigenous arts particular to each traditional area of the country are to be shared in a nation-wide cultural arts festival programme. This has led to the creation of what is now known as the National Festival of Arts and Culture, which is celebrated annually. The National Festival, however, is by no means a replacement of the community

programmes, and indigenous festivals of the traditional areas. Rather, it is to act as a natural extension of these programmes. Instituted as a means to reinforce the distinctive features of Ghanaian arts and culture, the National Festival of Arts and Culture programme aims towards bringing groups of cultural specialists and experts from different traditional areas of the country into closer contact with each other. Each group of participants is to organize aspects of the cultural arts of its traditional area together with their socio-cultural ramifications. The aim behind this programme is to enable not only the participants, but also the general public to learn something about each of the immense variety of elements that constitutes Ghana's cultural heritage, as well as its vigour and vitality. To prevent the festival from becoming just a parade of unrelated cultural events, the programme for each year is based on a central theme (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975).

The Festival of Arts and Culture has been instituted to foster the bonds of unity among the various traditional areas and to promote greater cultural integration and national understanding through the arts. Its other goal is to use the traditional social organization of the arts as a basis for a national theatre movement. Although this new development, unlike the previous theatrical movement, gives encouragement and support to the traditional community expression as its source of materials, techniques, and nourishment, it has its own adverse effects on the integrity of the arts. Certain aspects of the arts, particularly those related to religion as well as those associated with the expression of very profound emotions, might tend to be deprived of the flavour and feelings that go with them when organized outside of the original settings and

circumstances that give rise to their performance. Consider, for instance, cult music and dance forms. The original setting for their performance is the shrine, and are mostly performed by a medium possessed by a deity. The meaning and significance attached to them is provided partly by the setting and circumstances surrounding their performance and partly by the dramatic acts performed by the medium by way of imitating the qualities of the deity. When performed in the theatre, cult music and dance might tend to become stale because it is alienated from the elements that give it meaning. The same problem might occur if the wailing of dirges would be performed without a funeral. These problems, therefore, suggest that even though the new national theatrical movement is an excellent means of integrating and portraying the Ghanaian cultural arts to the world, it is important that the arts to be used under this programme are selected with great care.

### **Future Outlook for the Arts**

The traditionally oriented cultural expressions are always practised as part of social occasions. Indigenous festivals, ceremonies, customary rites, and other social events such as recreation are the main avenues for artistic production, performance, and participation. In a traditional society like Ghana, access to artistic knowledge and skills is through oral tradition and social experience. The continuity and participation of social and cultural life are essential for the preservation and development of most traditional arts. This makes it imperative for members of the Ghanaian community to be encouraged to participate fully in their indigenous cultural activities and communal events.



Of the indigenous cultural events, traditional festivals are most responsible for supporting and reinforcing the artistic values of society. Hardly is there any traditional area in Ghana that does not have an annual festival or other communal events that bring the community together periodically. The celebration of such festivals may last for a number of days up to a month or more, depending on the area and the activities that occur as adjuncts to the festival. Often, they include: enactment of historical events that led to the founding of the clan or state; rites of purification and cleansing of the land (society), ancestral stools and deities; praying, offering sacrifice, and paying tribute to ancestors; and observing formal funeral rites for the dead. All these activities involve at one point or another during their performance, some drumming, singing, dancing, mimetic or dramatic acts, libationary prayers, and recitation of appellations and dirges. The durbar of chiefs, which often forms a part of most traditional festivals, also involves a display of a vast array of visual art forms -- ornaments, textiles and costumes, ceremonial state swords, umbrella and linguist staff tops, pots for relics, and others.

The practice of the cultural arts in indigenous recreational activities is another important area for community participation. While this practice is alive and blooming within rural communities, it seems to be losing its popularity in the urban areas, especially among literate urban dwellers. The socio-cultural life of the literate urban dweller would be enriched if he or she is encouraged to participate in indigenous Ghanaian recreational activities as a qualitative way of perpetuating the community expression of the cultural arts. This is vital because it will help to rectify the discrepancy between rural and urban life. As well, it will provide the urban dweller with a way of

life that will enable him or her to attain a sense of self-affirmation while simultaneously reviving and retaining the moral and spiritual values of his or her indigenous roots.

The educated classes [elite] have a vital role to play in expanding and enriching the contents of our [the Ghanaian] cultural heritage. The co-operative endeavours of many are needed to build up a social feeling for beauty and cultural advancement. Not only the master builder but numerous associates must become wealthy craftsmen in an all out effort to raise a national cultural heritage (Cultural Policy in Ghana, 1975, p. 20).

It is important that special emphasis should be given to the study of indigenous Ghanaian languages, considered to be a vital part of the cultural re-awakening programme. This is essential, as these languages are the main vehicle for the dissemination of the cultural heritage, as well as the medium of artistic creation. Hence, they are the key to meeting the general policy of encouraging community participation as a means to developing existing forms of cultural expression. I hope the oral literature with its attendant cultural knowledge embodied in the indigenous languages will afford both students of the arts and adult artists the requisite vocabulary and idiom for their artistic expressions and articulation about their works of art. Of course, this is not to imply that the study of indigenous languages should be restricted to art institutions only. It is vital for the audiences of the arts too; they need it to enable them to appreciate the arts meaningfully. The study of the indigenous languages should, therefore, be made a part of the general school programme, at least, up to the Secondary School level. Such cultural participation activities, along with the National Festivals of Arts and Culture under the new national theatrical movement, would hopefully go a long way in reviving and perpetuating the cultural arts of Ghana.

The traditional nature of most Ghanaian societies has naturally made it expedient that a great deal of emphasis is placed on traditional means of disseminating culture. This must be augmented by the use of the mass media, namely, radio and television. Cultural and artistic expressions performed in various communities and traditional areas should be treated as documentary news items on radio and television. Interviews with cultural experts from the specific community whose programme is being broadcasted on radio and television will help bring out the meaning and purpose of the salient features of the cultural and artistic heritage, as well as the place of the arts in the life of the people. Copies of such audio and video tapes may be preserved in the library of the Broadcasting Corporation, in museums, and in Centres of National Culture for, reference purposes.

#### **Actions to Promote the Development and Re-vitalization of the Cultural Arts in Ghana**

The foregoing discussions have been based on how cultural participation can influence the growth and development of a nation's cultural and artistic heritage. It should be mentioned, however, that the Ghanaian society today is more complex and dynamic. In a world that is characterized by interconnections among cultures and individuals, it is imperative that provision be made for documenting the artistic skills, knowledge, and attitudes acquired through cultural participation for both cultural record and educational purposes -- whether these be skills and techniques in art production; historical knowledge about works of art; or knowledge and competence for aesthetic appreciation and criticism. The need for knowledge and skills to talk intelligently and critically about the arts is becoming more increasingly felt with the establishment of the

new arts festivals, new theatre movements, and new Centres for National Culture for the dissemination of the cultural arts. This is particularly important for the youth who are developing into a new generation of artists and cultural participants. It is to these needs that this study has addressed itself, both in its documentation of traditional art forms and symbols and the proposed discipline-based approach to learning in and about the arts.

It is necessary to reiterate that since the arts are mostly expressed as part of the socio-cultural life of the Ghanaian people, the proposed teaching strategies are from the contextualist point of view. Exploring the cultural ramifications of the arts in the classroom would enable students to understand how the arts function in society. Ideally, they will acquire the appropriate literacy for appreciating the arts while simultaneously drawing upon their artistic knowledge base to discuss the cultural heritage.

With the proposed comprehensive approach to arts education, curriculum enrichment programmes should no longer be substituted for, but used as a supplement to actual teaching and learning of the arts in Ghanaian schools. In other words, curriculum enrichment programmes should be given their appropriate place in the schools as extra-curricular activities. The goals behind their practice should also be appropriately geared towards educating the Ghanaian public about the unique nature of arts learning. Being a phenomenon of the mind, artistic thinking and making helps a learner improve upon his or her sense of critical consciousness, imagination, and inventiveness through explorative and creative behaviour. Such learning experiences are basic life skills which a learner exhibits as an evidence of personal meaningfulness and purposefulness of his or her education. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that a person who is equipped

with such skills would apply them in solving problems not only in art-making, but to problems arising in other areas of learning as well. Curriculum enrichment programmes should also be directed towards informing the students and general public about career potential in the arts and arts-related fields.

These objectives can be supported through public relations campaigns for the value of the arts in schools. This can be done through the organization of periodic district, regional, and nation-wide school arts festival days when students' achievement in the arts can be shown to the general public. It is important that such exhibitions are given all the potential media coverage available: newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Video and audio material related to issues in education where the arts can play a central role may be prepared for existing educational radio and television programmes. Interested resource persons and parent volunteers can become involved in making interesting and useful artistic resources in each school district. Presenting the arts in this way can help the arts and arts education regain their long-lost integrity in the eyes of the general public. Through concerted public relations efforts, arts teachers can develop a confidence, patronage, and support for the study of the arts, as a subject area with career developing opportunities.

Of course, these goals cannot be reached without the commitment and support of competent arts educators. This requires ensuring that each school staff includes sufficient teacher expertise in all key areas of the arts. To develop a unified outlook among art teachers, there is need for creating inter-teacher co-operation through the formation of an association of arts teachers. Such an association could provide opportunities for all art

teachers of all grade levels to come together at periodic intervals to discuss matters of common concern. This may be on district, regional, and national levels. While local teaching expertise and classroom experiences can be shared among teachers of the same districts or regions, co-ordinated teaching techniques at national conferences would ensure that teachers can exchange ideas about arts teaching methods. To communicate teachers' viewpoints and ideas in an efficient manner, the association could produce a journal or newsletter for the publication of issues in arts education. Opportunities should also be provided for all teachers belonging to this association of arts educators to have access to such publications.

The need for re-discovering the indigenous arts, the contemporary developments in the arts, and the arts educational demands of the people of Ghana suggests an imminent need for building a body of knowledge of the elements of various aspects of the Ghanaian artistic heritage. There is need for a collaboration between arts educators, art historians, and anthropologists to begin instituting research projects that will explore broader questions about the relationships of the arts to all aspects of the Ghanaian people and their life. Areas to be researched may include how the arts are employed in the rites of passage, traditional educational programmes, recreation, religion, politics, and work. Among the aims of the research projects may include exploring the ways in which the Ghanaian people incorporated the arts into the actual experiences of individual persons, as well as why the people relate to the arts the way they do. Such research projects involving the collection of visual forms, the electronic recording of dance patterns, and of forms of dramatic and oral traditions. The analytical studies and documentation of

these art forms should include not only their techniques, but also those abstract schemes: the historical, philosophical, political, economic, and socio-cultural elements that have led to their creation, and by means of which their interpretation and articulation are made possible.

Research studies aimed at exploring new standards, new styles, and new realms of thought developing within the contemporary trends of the arts are also imperative. There is need for such research to emphasize connections between indigenous and contemporary materials, as a practical approach to training the future artists of Ghana. It is essential that research also extend into the study of indigenous children's artistic games, by recording and documenting the elements contained in them that provide material for interpreting aspects of both the cultural and artistic heritage of Ghana.

It is by studying the arts in context that we can fully realize why the arts are made and are used in particular social situations, and what relationships exist between the art forms and various forms of human life in the Ghanaian society. The social influences of the arts as evidenced in this study point to the fact that through the arts, Ghanaians have related to the world about them in many subtle ways that are yet to be studied. Directing research efforts towards these concerns, continually examining, interpreting, and reporting the results of such inquiries, can contribute to shaping arts education theory and practice in Ghana. Such research efforts can further lead to the re-discovery of the indigenous arts; moreover, the strong knowledge base such research builds, can become an intellectual resource for the requisite vocabulary and idiom for creating, confronting, and appreciating works of art. In short, further research will help all who have access

to it to gain the requisite literacy for understanding and communicating about the arts. With such a base, it could be safely predicted that the Ghanaian people will use these resources, alongside cultural participation, to achieve training of the next generation of artists, and to ensure the development and continuity of their cultural and artistic heritage.



## **APPENDIX A**

### **ARTS EDUCATION AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL**

This section is given to suggesting approaches to teaching and learning in and through the arts at the Primary School level in Ghana, using a Discipline-Based Art Education (D.B.A.E.) approach. Prior to making any significant suggestions regarding approaches to an educational practice, however, it is useful to formulate and clarify the theoretical ideas that make plain the teaching and learning goals, as well as the philosophical assumptions and values upon which these goals rest. Such goals and philosophical assumptions should as a matter of necessity, be appropriate to the students' propensities and environment in which learning is to take place. The pages that begin this section are given to discussing a theoretical framework that is congruent with the values of Discipline-Based Art Education, as well as inform the goals for arts education in Ghana. The goals, philosophical assumptions, and teaching and learning strategies discussed here embrace three levels of education in Ghana, namely, the primary, junior secondary, and Senior Secondary School levels. The constituent areas of the Discipline-Based Art Education format dealt with at each level of education are art production, art history, aesthetics, and art criticism.

## **A Theoretical Framework for Arts Educational Goals**

Art production, otherwise known as art-making, has been a human activity since humans began to produce things to satisfy their daily requirements. Thus, it could be safely said that art-making is the process of responding to our needs, observations, thoughts, emotions, and other experiences by creating images, sounds, movements and gestures, and speech that are intended to satisfy, express, and communicate something about the human condition. The artworks that result from this process are thus the products of encounters between artists and their intentions, their concepts and attitudes, their cultural and social circumstances, and the materials or media in which they choose to work (Dobbs, 1998, p. 27). This view suggests that art-making is largely influenced by the imagination, interests, and concerns of the artist, the materials and tools at his or her disposal, and many kinds of social and cultural ideas and values.

Anderson (1985) postulates that artists may be aware or unaware of the social context of making art; yet the forms and styles developed by artists cannot help but reflect their socio-cultural backgrounds. An analogy can be found in Dewey's (1934) view of lived experience as being the catalyst for the artist's creation of works of art; in turn, art is the medium of expressing this experience in ways that are meaningful.

Discussing this view further, Dewey states:

Every art communicates because it expresses. It enables us to share vividly and deeply in meanings to which we had been dumb, or for which we had but the ear that permits what is said to pass through in transit to overt action. For communication is not announcing things, even if they are said with the emphasis of great sonority. Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to

the experience of the one who utters as well as to that of those who listen (p. 244).

To Dewey, art-making is an active, creative process of self-expression. Expression as used here, designates the particular way the artist chooses to engage in artistic making and thinking (Emery, 1989, p. 246). Whereas it is itself not a component of the art-making techniques, expression can be viewed as the driving force underlying every aspect of the process. Borrowing from Goodman's (1968) idea, Emery contends that all artworks refer to, typify, exemplify, or show certain properties or qualities which are similar to the object, idea or feeling being expressed. Additionally, the quality of expressiveness in a work of art lies within the way the artist interprets and depicts his or her experience in the work. Since a major function of art lies with the expression of ideas or concepts about the emotions and feelings of the human condition as perceived by the artist, it is clear that experience is a primary ingredient that informs the creation of works of art, as well as responding to them.

Having established the fact that the artist expresses a personal point of view about the human condition through his or her art-making, and indeed, that the arts are a reflection of culture, it is incumbent upon the art teacher to bring this knowledge into teaching art production. What is needed, therefore, is a set of teaching goals that would foster in students the ability to relate the arts to daily living and to shape their percepts about artistry. Our teaching objectives should be such that they will enable students to see the arts, not as ends in themselves, but as vehicles serving larger human purposes: psychologically, emotionally, socially, and culturally. Ideally, school art curricula should entail a thorough examination of the relationship between the cultural and artistic heritage

so that students will learn about the relationship of art to culture. As noted in chapter four, an understanding of the arts of Ghana requires a knowledge of Ghanaian social and cultural history.

### **Teaching Goals**

The basic question regarding teaching goals centres around what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are most worth aiming at. Thinking about the Discipline-Based Art Educational implications for the relationship of art and culture tends to give rise to such questions as:

- 1) How can one foster in students a sense of art-making that will be both meaningful and purposeful to them?
- 2) How can one foster students' acquaintance with and use of existing artworks, artistic traditions, and artists as indispensable points of reference within their own culture as an indication of their understanding of their artistic heritage?
- 3) How can one encourage students' insight into an understanding of the nature, functions, and appreciation of the arts in society?
- 4) How can one foster the development of critical artistic literacy in students?

Being a part of the general school programme, the phenomenon of art education can be best understood within the context of general education. In Approaches to Art in Education, Chapman (1978) identifies three primary responsibilities of general public education and, by implication, of art education. General education aims at providing for personal fulfilment, transmitting the cultural heritage to each generation, and nurturing

of social consciousness in the youth (p. 19). Out of these three concerns of general education -- the personal, the historical, and the social responsibilities -- have grown three major purposes of art education. These include:

- encouraging personal fulfilment through art experience;
- transmitting an appreciation of the artistic heritage; and
- developing an awareness of the role of art in society.

For the purpose of this thesis, it has been found expedient to change Chapman's third purpose to read as follows:

- developing an understanding of the nature of art and its role in society.

Also, to meet students' needs in the area of art criticism, a fourth purpose has been added to the three purposes identified by Chapman, namely:

- fostering the development of critical artistic literacy,

Encouraging personal fulfilment through art experience can be clarified as the use of art as a means of expressing oneself and as a way of responding to life. It implies helping students to develop perceptual awareness, that is, an ability to respond to their immediate world, using their senses -- sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste -- and to clarify their perceptual experiences and feelings and express them in their art-making. Used as a means of self-expression and as a way of responding to life, art-making becomes a source of personal fulfilment. The educational task here, therefore, should be to make students aware that at the root of the efforts we make in manipulating art media for artistic production is the intention to express or provide a message about our thoughts, perceptions, ideas, emotions, or values. This attests to the fact that art-making

is not an end in itself, but a means of analyzing and expressing something about the human condition. Art production begins in the mind and imagination of the artist: he or she begins with an idea often derived from personal observation or experience and expresses it in an art medium through an art-making technique.

The artistic heritage is broadly defined as "organized knowledge about art as well as specific works of art that have been created by artists, designers, architects, and artisans of the past and present" (Chapman, 1978, p. 20). Transmitting an appreciation of the artistic heritage can be done through art historical inquiry. Through studying the artistic heritage of Ghana, for example, students will learn how the arts are related to cultural endeavours of the past and present. If our teaching strategies are directed towards helping students to relate their artistic efforts to the artistic heritage, the entire experience of art-making and art appreciation would become personalized, and at the same time, students would learn to value the works of others.

By studying the nature of art and its role in society, students can begin to appreciate art as a way of encountering life and not view it as simply an esoteric frill (p. 19). Students will understand the nature of the arts and the meanings and values they have for the people who make and use them. Understanding the nature of the arts includes knowing about the types of art materials, tools, and techniques used in producing them, as well as the conventions guiding their production. Such an ability is acquired through aesthetic learning.

Critical artistic literacy involves understanding of the roles and functions of the arts in society and culture, the appropriateness of their usage, and their value or

significance to the people who practice them. As noted in the review of literature on Discipline-Based Art Education, learning to understand the arts in such a comprehensive manner, students can develop a conceptual ability to respond to them in meaningful ways. Students can develop the requisite literacy with which to make informed critical evaluation of artworks. This is art criticism.

It is important that our teaching efforts are directed at integrating ongoing studio activities with historical, philosophical (aesthetic), and critical talk about art. In this way, what is learned about the nature of art through talking about art (art appreciation) can be ploughed back into studio lessons to help students acquire meaningful ways of making art.

That expression in art and appreciation of art should be taught in close relation to each other is fundamentally sound; more insights will be gained in both areas when one is interrelated to the other. In addition, seizing opportunities to have one activity lead organically into another creates a sense of connectedness in the minds of students between making and perceiving art. It helps them see that what is made is also perceived and that both are mandatory parts of the communicative nature of art (Anderson, 1986, p. 5).

This also makes it clear that our teaching should be geared towards helping students to be aware of the many ways in which the artistic forms they create can mark important events and experiences in their lives. It is vital for teachers to view the teaching of art as a form of praxis, helping students to critically reflect on the nature and meaning of the types of visual images and symbols, the types of music, the forms of dance movements and dramatic performances they make, and the poetic language they utter. All these often reflect people's expressive and physical needs, experiences in every day life, as well as their individual and collective identities.

It is clear from the foregoing discussions that Chapman's art educational goals tend to embrace the ideals of the four foundational disciplines of the Discipline-Based Art Education model, namely, art production, art history, aesthetics, and art criticism. Underlying these educational ideals is the premise that teaching and learning of art should adopt a contextual approach where the learner is required to bring all past experiences to the learning situation. In turn, this suggests that school art curricula should be planned in relation to the student's background, which includes his or her age, capabilities, and socio-cultural environment, as well as his or her emotions, feelings, and experiences. Also, since the social content is intrinsic to the processes and products of the arts, it is logical that the teaching and learning of techniques and skills in the arts should, to a large extent, be socially defined. This is particularly important as far as understanding of the Ghanaian arts is concerned, as these arts derive their nature, meaning, and value from the historical, anthropological, and social constructs of the people of Ghana.

### **Some Philosophical Premises of a Socially Defined Arts Curriculum**

The approaches to teaching and learning in the arts discussed here are synthesized from Tom Anderson's (1985) philosophical principles guiding the structure of a socially defined studio curriculum. These educational principles, particularly with regards to the connections they make between the arts, society, and culture, provide philosophical underpinnings not only for the teaching and learning of studio art, but for the practice of arts education as a whole. That is to say, Anderson's philosophical principles for



studio art activities are also applicable for other art disciplines such as art history, aesthetics, and art criticism.

The first assumption is that *learning is action-oriented and that skills are best learned in relation to specific tasks based on students' needs and interests*. This assumption is in consonance with Dewey's educational philosophy of learning by doing. It also indicates that students' personal perceptions, experiences, and propensities are the phenomena that support art-making, as well as perceiving and appreciating works of art. Thus, the key to students' motivation should be to raise questions that are integrally related to their real-life situations: those events and phenomena that are experiential, and personally meaningful to the students. Raising of questions about the roles of the arts in culture and society and reflecting upon them while students are engaged in a learning process can help them to appropriately convey their thoughts, experiences, and feelings. In this way, students would gain an understanding of the direction and structure which inform their art-making. For instance, if the subject matter generated is of central import to their lives and interests, students are more likely to examine aspects of their existence and develop ideas from personal experiences. Such ideas can motivate students to not only experiment with various types of media in artistic production, but also to reflect deeply on possible approaches to expressing themselves in meaningful ways in art appreciation. In the process, students can gain technical skills, styles, and knowledge about the media they have chosen to use, as well as gain understanding about themselves and their contexts which they can utilize in various learning situations in the art classroom.

Anderson's second assumption is that *students' personal experiences offer them the most vital and contextually meaningful starting point for the making and responding to works of art*. Learning in the arts, like any form of learning activity, is frequently initiated by some form of interest, inclination, or curiosity. Such a frame of mind may be characterized as one that is in a wondering disposition, needing a solution to a problem or conflict. It is this disposition that causes the artist to find ways and means of representing or depicting ideas about his or her personal emotions, feelings, and experiences, as well as impressions or views of the world in an art form. In effect, expression in art can be said to involve searching for qualities which show how experience is lived, felt, and understood by the artist (Emery, 1989, p. 247). When students are self-motivated, a teacher may channel their pre-existing interests in the direction of his or her lesson plan. Otherwise, it is incumbent upon the teacher to create situations that will arouse students' attention, curiosity, and interest. This can be achieved by initiating a lesson through dialogical questions about current events, students' personal concerns, popular cultural and community activities, festivals, and media productions that could lead students into developing their personal connections to the art problem at hand.

The third assumption suggests a shift from *the traditional information-imparting approaches to teaching* towards *question-asking* (problem-posing) strategies. A question-asking or problem-posing method designates an interactive process in which the teacher and student participate in mutual dialogue during the learning process. The goal of the dialogic method is the orientation of the student towards personal reflection and critical

thinking and bringing his or her personal experience into the learning situation. Such experience may include the emotional, psychological, historical, political, social, and cultural contexts of the student's life that he or she can draw on during the artistic creative process. Unlike other methods where the teacher creates both the content and structure of learning, in problem-posing much of the content comes from the students' lives (Wallerstein, 1987, p.34). Because of its interactive nature, problem-posing becomes a powerful motivating factor enabling the student in finding his or her voice and personal focus in a learning situation, thereby contributing towards shaping the structure of learning. From this standpoint, it becomes clear that the major tenet of the socially defined art curriculum is the encouragement of teacher intervention during both students' art-making activities and their response to artworks. Thus, while the socially defined curriculum encourages creative self-expression to help students develop the 'self' in art-making, for instance, its principles differ drastically from the expressionist ideology of the Progressive Movement era in art education. This ideology promoted an extreme "hands-off" position that prevented teachers from interfering with students' artistic creative process; teachers served only as technical facilitators, helping students to determine the appropriate media to use in their work. Central to this expressionist ideology is the notion that individual children would use their deeply rooted creative impulses without inhibition, confident in their means of expression. As such, no special stimulation for their creative work was required (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1970). Whereas the nature of this pedagogical principle may be useful if applied therapeutically with the

goal of eliciting self disclosure from the patient, it is rather inadequate as a curriculum framework for developing cultural literacy.

. . . the concept that in art, the child (learner) is himself/herself his or her own teacher as portrayed by the "free expression paradigm" theory, is a questionable pedagogical issue in art education today. For instance, that there should be no room for formal and sequential didactic instruction or intervention in a child's artistic learning process, leaves a number of practical pedagogical oversights that require ratification. This is particularly important if the teaching and learning of art should improve up to the expectations of today's society. It is true that naturally, the child is endowed with inherent active exploratory tendencies and growing interests to achieve new interests for understanding the world. However, it should be noted that these inherent traits usually observed in a child are not ends in themselves as they are inadequate for the total development of the child. Rather, they operate as hints that afford the teacher the knowledge of the level at which the child is currently functioning so that lessons can be introduced accordingly. Thus, the key to intervention is to provide experiences and stimulations that are related to the child's current level of functioning.

It is evident from pedagogical and life experiences that no child can successfully develop independent of any influence of the society in which he or she grows . . . . This, therefore, suggests that when the implications of the assumptions of the child's inherent traits are applied to education, including art education, a number of principles of educational practice would usually come to light, which would counteract the free expression [theory] as being central to a child's learning process. It should be anticipated that at the end of an educational [programme], the learner should . . . exhibit [some] basic life skills as evidence of personal meaningfulness and purposefulness of his or her education. In addition, the learner should be able to apply these learning experiences for personal fulfilment in life, . . . identifying problems affecting human well-being and growth so as to take action to solve them systematically. It is, therefore, clear that if this rationale for education is to be met effectively, then, the need for some form of intervention to foster such a development in the learner is inevitable (Ayiku, 1993, pp. 111-112).

While the child's inborn tendencies or impulses serve as an excellent activator of the creative process, personal insights and experiences gained by the child as a result of social influences and parent or teacher intervention, are all elements which augment

his or her sensibility in dealing with an art-making problem in a personally meaningful way. Within the socially defined approach to art teaching, the teacher is more than a mere technical advisor. He or she takes on several roles, such as demonstrator, motivator, questioner, co-learner, consultant, counsellor, and role-model. The teacher's role as questioner is particularly important in stimulating and directing students' thinking, in that, he or she questions the students' individual motivations, concepts, techniques, and expressive needs, drawing from them the most each has to give (Anderson, 1985).

Beginning a lesson in the arts by asking open-ended questions directed to inquiring about the students' personal concerns can lead to the students' greater understanding of the nature, parameters, and definition of those concerns, and how they can relate to the larger human context. Questions should be planned such that the stimulations drawn from them will enable the student to enter into a constant interaction with his or her materials, tools, and work, by continually exploring possibilities and new ways of approach until he or she realizes the fruition of his or her concerns. This principle of teaching is confirmed by Emery (1989) when she writes: the student who enters the artistic task embarks on a discovery trail in which one clue leads to another so that the direction eventually becomes clear (p. 242). To Emery, in artistic making and thinking, the task is to make a formula and not to follow one. This is because artistic products should not be made according to prescribed formulae and proven recipes. Rather, the emphasis here is on reflection, exploration, or discovery by which the student would be able to imaginatively project a range of possibilities within a given medium,

idea, or problem, thereby, acquiring problem-solving skills both in art-making and art appreciation.

The fourth assumption emphasizes the *understanding of art-making in relation to the larger context of the human condition against which students would validate their own individual and personal artistic expressions*. Having learned to derive creative self-expression in art-making from their own personal emotions, thoughts, feelings, needs, and interests arising from lived experiences, students should be exposed to what already exists in the larger art world. The focus, at this juncture, should be to encourage students to develop the habit of viewing the arts, including their art-making concerns in relation to the larger human condition, in terms of what exists both within their particular cultural artistic heritage and the universal milieu. By utilizing art history, art appreciation, art criticism, and ethnography, the art teacher can share with students how ideas about human needs, interests, emotions, aspirations, feelings, experiences, beliefs, and values, have been expressed through art forms, past and present, both within their cultural heritage and cross-culturally. Teaching should emphasize the fact that an artistic product is not a result of a merely self-indulgent activity, but an appropriate and purposeful process geared towards the resolution of some form of human requirement. The anticipation here is that, while searching for a resolution between social interaction and the chosen elements of artistic representation, the student will become empathetically attuned to the artistic process (Emery, 1989). This implies that when a student's total attention is engaged within the artistic process, the entire process will become significant,

and the product will be meaningfully expressed, and hence, personally valuable to the student.

A fifth assumption is derived from this conceptualization that *by relating their individual artistic intents and concerns to the human condition in the society in which they live, students would be able to make truly creative and original works of art.* The import of this assumption is that in searching for the connections existing between the arts and the human condition, students would draw on the store of visual information that they have been accumulating throughout life. This process can involve them in a reflective thinking mode, enabling them to recall or rediscover certain facts about lived experiences that can enrich their knowledge about their social and cultural repertoire from which they can draw inspiration. Such an approach to solving problems in art-making is consistent with the notion of conceptual analysis -- a process that is necessary for learning and creativity in the arts. By recalling or discovering the connections and relationships between the artistic and socio-cultural heritage, students' works of art cannot only reflect their individual concerns and sense of place within a culture, but also develop a depth of sensibility about media, techniques, and styles necessary to express themselves adequately in art-making, and in responding to works of art.

### **Summary**

The socially defined studio art curriculum discussed so far places great emphasis upon experiential ways of learning. These ways of learning derive from individual propensities of students and their interactions with their teachers. Such interactions can

be achieved through questioning strategies designed by the teacher to activate high levels of thinking and problem-solving tendencies among students. The emphasis on the integration of interactive learning, individual students' experiences, and creative problem-solving, reflects the philosophy that . . . "children learn best through participation, discovery, and the stimulation of their natural curiosity" (Newsom and Silver, eds., 1978, p. 267). This ideal is an alternative to the media-oriented and information-imparting approaches to teaching that dominate many Ghanaian art classrooms today. In these approaches, the emphasis is on engaging students in rote learning by memorizing terms in art, as well as mechanical acquisition of the techniques involved in using various art media under the pretext of experimentation. The consequence is that while students gain some amount of psychomotor skills, the cognitive and affective aspects of learning which are central to scholarship in artistic making and thinking tend to be ignored. Perhaps this is the reason why some art students and, even mature artists, find it difficult to talk about their artistic endeavours and works of art. It follows, then, that if lessons in the arts are integrally related to real life situations -- those socio-cultural phenomena that are meaningful to the students -- each student will be better able to examine his or her personal perceptions, experiences, and propensities that support the making, perceiving, and appreciating of the arts (Anderson, 1985). Following are some practical suggestions for teaching art production from a socially defined perspective.



## **Art Production**

### **(Personal Fulfilment Through Art Experience)**

Art production involves practical or hands-on activities in the art studio. In studio practice, students are engaged in the exploration, testing, and imaginative application of art materials and tools for the acquisition of techniques and skills for expressing, interpreting, or communicating ideas and contributing to knowledge about the human condition. It is the individual's ability to express himself or herself meaningfully in this way that amounts to personal fulfilment through the arts.

### **Art-Making at the Primary School Level**

#### **The Lower Primary School Level**

It is common knowledge among arts educators that art-making is an activity which children often pursue even without being prompted by adults. Many early childhood specialists have long contended that the nature of children's experience with art, and the course of their artistic development and learning, is crucially dependent on the children's interaction with the world around them -- which includes adults, parents, teachers, peers, materials, and objects that characterize the children's environment. Underlying this conception is the belief that children's construction of knowledge evolves directly through experiences in their lives. This, in turn, suggests the key role played in a child's learning by the social context, as well as the affective or emotional content of experiences in that context, including the child's feelings about himself or herself. This ideal is consistent with the constructivist and phenomenologist conception of knowledge as being

constructed through personal experience. Learning is, then, a socially mediated process profoundly influenced by the social context in which it takes place. Early childhood educators and psychologists agree that all learning begins in awareness of a phenomenon (Thompson, 1995, p. 4). It proceeds through sensory perception, a process involving the use of the senses of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching to explore the phenomenon in question.

It has been noted that more often than not, most artistic acts and products tend to evoke, denote, or express some idea, phenomena, experience or feeling. Whether a child has to make sound patterns, shape clay, construct a dramatic improvisation, or create a series of dance movements, the basic process involves an activation of cognitive and sensory processes in order to compose, shape, or construct (Emery, 1989). Emery describes this process to suggest that all artistic making involves the changing of perceptual forms into literal or metaphoric imagery. In this way, the child becomes involved in a search for visual, aural, and kinetic, gestural, or verbal imagery with which to represent a given idea.

Before engaging children in an artistic task, the teacher can help them to make four basic decisions, namely:

- i. what ideas do I have, or what am I thinking about;
- ii. what will my ideas represent;
- iii. what materials (media), and tools do I need;
- iv. how can I construct this work of art.

By asking children to think in this way, teachers can help them to develop a sense of what they want to do. This can cue each child to enter into a frame of mind -- a disposition to wonder, or an inclination to formulate personal concepts related to the art problem on hand. In this way, the children's interests can be channelled in the direction of the planned lesson. This approach to motivating students' thought processes can be referred to as 'setting a direction'. Drawing upon, or encouraging children's own decisions, can motivate each individual child's sense of self-reflection, leading to the exploration of personal concerns from the perspective of the children themselves. This can, in turn, help the children to construct personal concepts which are unique to their individual characteristics and social backgrounds. In effect, it can enhance the children's concentration, encouraging a high degree of their involvement and participation in class activities. It should be noted, however, that this motivational approach to instruction in studio arts is important not only for little children, but to all levels of learning in artistic making and thinking. Imaginative thinking and learning activities are factors that profoundly influence creative self-expression in children. As children grow into maturity, this learning process can progress to more structured forms of inquiry, leading to the application of the skill thus acquired to solving problems in art-making. This trend of educational thought provides both support and structure to the experiential modes of artistic learning.

This assertion is by no means a tendency to view the imaginative and creative abilities of children at different ages and educational levels as being the same. Of course, it remains a fact that a child of five years of age or so would relate his or her artistic

thinking, imagination, and making to simple personal experiences. In contrast, the artistic thinking and making of adults are a result of maturity and skills that come from years of active learning, observation and experience. Thus, by adopting the suggested approach to motivation in the classroom, the teacher may be able to awaken and sustain the students' sense of imagination, personal reflection, and analytical reasoning, as well as the will to express their perceptions in relation to the art-making problem being confronted. What seems important, then, is for art-making experiences to be planned to challenge both the least able and most gifted child in the same classroom.

Personal observations show that when involved in an imaginary activity that is interesting to them, such as storytelling or listening to stories, children's involvement can be so empathetic that whatever they imagine tends to be real to them. Frequently, most children tend to express their imaginations, perceptions, feelings, and thoughts through image making. This developmental stage at which children begin to capture important features of their personal experiences through image making is referred to by Chapman as the early expressive stage in art-making. It also marks the beginning of children's first attempts at achieving personal fulfilment through art-making. This tendency of children to express their thoughts through image making suggests the need for teachers to structure sensitive questions that can enhance children's perceptions of a wide range of personal experiences.

Children usually come to know their world through exploratory play, as self-initiated or self-directed activity. This would suggest that learning can occur more naturally when introduced through play-like activities. Children are usually spontaneous

in the way they create art, focusing on one thing at a time (Chapman, 1978). This, in Chapman's view, is because in general, children's perception and thinking tend to be governed by particular events, situations, or activities that they have witnessed or experienced personally. Questions should, therefore, be so framed as to elicit an imaginary reenactment of the particular experience.

Basing art-making motivational questions on themes or topics that relate to the children themselves and their interests can provide opportunities for children to produce works of art that are personal, expressing their feelings in a detailed manner. Such themes or topics may relate to the children themselves or their families such as: I am going to school; what I love doing; my family and I; my house; my pet and me; my school; playing with my friend, and such. Sample motivational questions and instructional statements for children may include:

- How many people are there in your family?
- What does your family often do together at home?
- Where does your family often go?
- How many brothers and sisters have you?
- Are you the oldest or the youngest of your brothers and sisters?
- How many storeys is your house made up of?
- In what colours are the walls, doors and windows painted?
- Are there any trees in your compound?
- How big are they?
- What does your school building look like?

- What things can you find in your school compound?
- Where do you play with your friend(s)?
- Is your friend bigger or smaller than you?
- How many legs has your pet?

Telling stories to children based on imaginary themes or stories can provide occasions for creating art. Themes for stories may be coined in relation to Ghanaian folk tales and *Ananse* stories. Stories may be designed to teach children moral values based on basic principles of right and wrong or as means for helping them to cope with their feelings. The teacher can also draw on the children's personal and other *Ananse* stories told in their homes to develop themes for art-making. Examples of such themes or topics may include the following.

*'Ananse', the greedy chief who falls down from the top of the tall oak tree and breaks his leg while trying to hide a pot full of stolen gold belonging to the state of his clan.*

*The honest little girl who is honoured with a lot of gifts by the king for returning the money she found on the ground to its owner.*

*The disobedient child who, after deserting her home and parents, becomes a thief, and is, therefore, put into prison for stealing other people's belongings.*

*Helping the weak, old woman with her baggage.*

*Reconciling the two boys who fought in the school garden.*

*Giving to the poor.*

It is important that storytelling sessions are interjected with Ghanaian folk songs and dancing as is the custom among the people of Ghana. This is to bring to the classroom a real-life Ghanaian cultural situation. It will also involve children in play-like, active

learning activities in an environment filled with a variety of stimuli that can generate the children's participation in verbalization, music, drama, dance and creative movement, as well as image making. Involving children in various learning experiences such as these can help develop the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills that contribute to successful problem-solving in art. To motivate children to express their own ideas and feelings about a story through art-making, the teacher may ask the following sample questions:

- What part of the story is most interesting to you?
- Does the story depict a sad or happy occasion?
- How would you show the happy or sad part of the story in your artwork?
- What would you put in your work to show what you intend to say?

Basing art-making lessons on daily activities in which children are usually involved can also serve as motivation for their artistic expression. Examples of such themes may include: *sweeping my room; on my way to school; watering the garden; playing with my friend; helping my mother to prepare the food; assisting my father to wash his car; and such.* Approaching the teaching of young children from this perspective would encourage the flow of the children's individual personal inborn tendencies to the surface. Thus, the personal perceptions, experiences, and feelings, as well as the imaginative, creative, innovative, and inventive tendencies upon which the children draw ideas for artistic expression, would become active. To foster personal reflective thinking and discovery among children, the teacher may ask such questions as:

- How did you do this, or how did you make this happen?

- How can you do it in a different way?
- Can you think of another way of doing it to look more beautiful?

In general, young children are interested in manipulating things. Such activities as reaching, pushing, pulling, grabbing, stacking, touching and arranging contribute to very young children's spatial acuity, motor control, dimensional comprehension, and understanding of part-to-part relationships (Baker, 1990, p. 23). This suggests that three-dimensional activities such as working with clay and papier mache, paper and fabric folding, building with blocks of wood, styrofoam and other blocks, as well as arrangement of found objects -- empty tins, shells, little plastic containers and cardboard boxes -- should be an important part of young children's art-making activities.

Children can assist in finding some of these materials by being taken on tours of the local environment, construction sites, or scrap yards as part of the learning experience. Parents can also be involved by being requested to save such materials so that children can bring them to school. Materials should, however, be chosen with care; materials that are too difficult to manipulate can end up frustrating children's efforts at expressing themselves creatively, while materials that have sharp or pointed edges can be dangerous to handle by the children. In constructing, forming, arranging, and building activities, it may be important to make room for children to work on the floor and also in groups. The teacher should motivate children through dialogue to help them make their own creative decisions. For instance, the teacher may ask the following questions:

- What are these blocks made of?
- What other materials do you think blocks can be made of?



- Who has ever seen a block-maker at work?
- What kinds of blocks does he or she make?
- What are the blocks meant for?
- Who usually works with blocks?
- If you were to work with the blocks you have now, how would arrange them?
- Imagine that you were working in a grocery store, how would you arrange your wares?
- How would you arrange the books in your parents' reading room?
- What other things can we arrange in the store or the house?
- Why do we have to arrange things in the store, our kitchen, or sitting room?

In working with clay, the teacher should make children aware of its malleability through squeezing, rolling, pulling, pressing, pinching, and moulding into various forms of containers and sculptures. To motivate children to work with clay in a meaningful way, the teacher might ask:

- Who has ever seen a potter (pot maker) at work?
- What material does she work with?
- What kinds of containers do you know about in your home, school, or elsewhere that are made from clay?
- If you were to make a cooking pot, soup bowl, or plate for a gift, would you make it look fancy or simple?
- How would you make it look the way you want it to be?
- If you were to make a cup or cooking pot, how would the handle look?

Similar questions can be asked also about sculptures, for instance:

- If you made a pressing iron, how would you form the handle?
- If you made a self portrait out of the clay, how many eyes, ears, noses, mouths would it have?
- How many legs would your pet dog have? Would it have wings also? Why?
- Where would you attach the legs?
- Would a bird have the same number of legs as a dog?
- What also makes a bird look different from a dog?

It is suggested by Chapman to all who work with children of the kindergarten level that:

[young children] do not make "art" in the adult sense of the term -- they do not consciously produce an object with aesthetic intent or according to a set of formalized standards. Young children make pictures and construct objects that have meanings, but these meanings are, with rare exception, very concrete. . . . they [only] . . . represent the attempts of [the] children to translate their knowledge of something they see into personal symbols (1978, p. 22).

This, in turn, suggests that children's artistic efforts should not be viewed from the perspective of those of the adult artist. In Chapman's view, if any comparisons should be made between children's artistic efforts and those of adult artists, then, such comparisons should centre on similarities in the process of creating art and not products. The import here is that although it is essential that children are introduced to and guided gradually through the basic processes of creating various forms of art, teachers should avoid using adult artists' products as standards for young children to emulate or copy.

Similar strategies can be used to guide children in the performing arts. Young children often have vivid memories about their experiences as well as a high level of

imaginative abilities. In performing arts activities with young children, classroom interactions should focus on attempting to elicit imaginary reenactment of what they see during festival and ceremonial occasions. To make lessons more meaningful to children, such lessons should be planned to coincide with major community celebrations and ceremonies in the local region. In discussions about a durbar of chiefs, for instance, the teacher may ask the following questions.

- Which of you saw the ceremony that went on . . . (yesterday . . . the other day)?
- Which of you took part in it?
- How were the chief and queenmother dressed?
- If you were a chief or queen mother, what clothes would you wear?
- What did the chiefs' and queen mothers' stools look like?
- Of what colours were the umbrellas?
- What other things did you see at the durbar?
- How were the drummers and dancers dressed?
- If you were one of the singers or dancers, how would you like to perform?

On this note, the teacher may invite children to practice some folk music and dancing by asking:

- How would you like to learn to perform some of those songs and dances?  
. . . Today, we are going to learn to sing some folk songs and dances.

The teacher may begin by singing a popular folk song and invite children to join in. Songs can be drawn from the *Agbadza (Agbadja)*, *Boboobo (Boborbor)*, *Adowa*, *Bamaya*,

*Kete, Kpanlogo, Gume, Tsiagbeko, Kpatsa, Osoode*, and other Ghanaian traditional dance types. The choice of songs and dance types may be made in accordance with the local tribal area. This is to bring to the children tunes and dance patterns that they are already acquainted with. Singing can be accompanied with the clapping of the hands to create rhythms which can then be translated into body movements, dancing freely as the music suggests, feels, or indicates.

There is need for teachers to remember, however, that since most young children are still undergoing visual and motor development, they may not be able to perform certain visual and motor skills effectively. Because their little muscles are not yet fully developed, they may have difficulties in doing delicate and intricate dance movements. In trying to formally introduce some basic steps in dancing, therefore, teachers should involve children in simple leg, arm, and body movements such as forwards, backwards, sideways, up-down, left-right, sit, squat, hop, and jump.

At the lower primary (early elementary) school level, children are usually thought of as being at a higher level of their curiosity and imaginative abilities than their counterparts at the kindergarten level. They have a better flair for artistic making and thinking. They can realize the relative sizes such as the proportions of parts relative to the whole in terms of small, big, tall, short, wide, narrow, and so forth. However, they do not see such relationships of proportion and size as fixed representational concepts in art-making, for they might often unconsciously exaggerate such features as the length of

the arms and size of the hands, head, or face to give emphasis to their ideas or feelings (Burton, 1980). At this stage of development, children are:

. . . intensively curious about what makes things work, how they work, and why they work in a particular way. An important part of this thinking involves a need to figure out the intentions . . . and values of other people, what they do and why they do it (Burton, 1980, p. 61).

With this natural interest in trying to understand and interpret real world events, children at the Lower Primary School level become more observant, thus helping them in decisions as to what ideas to represent. As such, they begin to construct planned representations in their artworks, giving more attention to the parts relative to the whole. This is evident in their tendency to include many features of the parts of a given event in one work. At this stage, children have also gained greater skills in controlling their hands with enhanced body movements and experiences for various forms of art production activities. Most children of the Lower Primary School can produce straight, wavy, curved, and twisted paths while drawing, using clay, or creating dances (Chapman, 1978). They also have a better social awareness and can discuss events such as festivals and ceremonies in more meaningful ways. However, their interest in art-making still rests around themselves, people, and things in their local environment.

Here the teacher's goal should be to choose themes that are designed to increase children's ability to express themselves. His or her motivational questions and instructions in the classroom should reflect movements of body parts, social events and activities, and things used in the performance of ceremonies and rituals in children's town or village. The teacher may ask, for example:

- How do you move your body when you perform your favourite dance?

- How do people move when running, weeding, or sweeping?
- How does a person look when sitting?
- What entertainment activity in your community do you enjoy with your family, or friend?
- What community activity do you take part in performing? Where is it performed?
- What costume do you wear at the performance? How do you perform?
- What things do people hold in their hands, carry on their heads, or use during the performance?
- What types of decorations do you see on the things in your village or town (e.g. buildings, drums, canoes, and pots)?

Lessons in the verbal arts with young children should be organized to help them develop a flair for storytelling as a means of improving their narrative abilities. Teachers can gear such lessons through children's narratives about their artworks and stories they have heard. Children's narratives, like their art-making, often follows a train of thought that derives from a range of experiences, as well as the imaginary and the fantastic. Their narratives and stories become personal and detailed when children's perceptions, feelings, and thoughts are motivated by direct experiences. Children's flair for storytelling can be fostered and developed if encouraged to talk about things they see or hear in everyday life activities. For instance, a teacher may ask children to:

- observe things that are interesting to them that they can tell a story about the next day at school;
- ask their parents, friends, or guardians to tell or read stories to them which they can share with members of their class;
- tell a story about something funny they saw on their way to school; at the market or beach; during a holiday trip; what they learned at Sunday school; what happened in the streets or village or town square during a festive occasion;
- give a narrative of television programmes he or she has watched.

Young children are interested in knowing about heroes and heroines, and imagining themselves to be one of such people. Teachers can use historical sources to tell children about founders of their communities, great warriors, past chiefs and queenmothers and how they helped their people in times of crisis, and the like. Parents, artists-in-residence at Centres of National Culture, or elders from the courts of chiefs may be invited to speak to children on such themes. It is important that children are encouraged to ask questions at intervals during the lecture period to prevent them from getting bored. After each such lecture, the teacher may ask the following instructions and questions:

- Mention the names of the people that you heard about in the story (lecture).
- Which part of the story did you enjoy most? What is it about? Who performed that part?

- Mention the name of any person in the story and tell a story about what he or she did. Why do you choose to talk about that particular person? What would you do if you were him or her?
- Why do we want to tell stories to other people?
- Why do we want to listen to other people's stories?

Young children's imagination towards developing stories may also be motivated through the use of themes that lead children to talking about their wishes and fantasies. Following are examples of questions and instructions.

- Yesterday Adelaide told a story about a queenmother who built a beautiful house with silk curtains and beautiful pictures on the walls for her daughter. If you were the daughter of this queenmother, how would you use the house?
- If you won the lottery in the amount of one thousand dollars, how would you use the money?
- If you were the chief of this town or village, what would you do for the people? Why? . . . What would you not do? Why?

Basic traditional values regarding the verbal arts may be introduced to children through greetings. For instance, children may be made aware that it is impolite to greet people with the left hand or refuse to answer greetings. Classroom dialogues may be based on questions centered around helping children to learn about how to greet during different times of the day and the rules regarding greetings in the community in which they live. Here are some examples of questions to begin a classroom dialogue:



- How do people greet in the morning in your community? How do people respond?
- How do you greet in the afternoon? What is the response?
- How would you greet in the evening? How is it responded?
- What would you not do when greeting people? Why?

### **The Upper Primary School Level**

Research writings in art education (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1970 and Chapman, 1978) have shown that all the characteristics of children of the Lower Primary School apply also to their counterparts at the Upper Primary School with ages ranging from nine to twelve years old. Readings in educational psychology show that while this is true, pre-adolescents are more self-critical than their younger counterparts at the Lower Primary School level. In view of being self-critical, the pre-adolescents often suffer a psychological setback in their art-making activities, termed by Chapman as "a crisis of confidence in creating art". This crisis occurs as the students begin to judge their own works as 'good or bad'. This lack of confidence, in Chapman's view, occurs when the children's ideas and concepts about things begin to outstrip their skills in creating artistic expressions. It is apparent in such behaviour as starting over and over again, hiding a work in progress, copying, and throwing away completed work (p. 165).

To overcome such difficulties, and to restore children's confidence in art-making, teachers should encourage children's careful observation of the natural and constructed environment, guiding them to interpret or express their personal viewpoints about what

they see. This can be achieved by encouraging children to concentrate on what interests them most in their personal concepts, and try to express those concepts to the best of their individual abilities and styles. Apparently, this will enable each child to find his or her own voice and self-identity through each art-making project.

At the Upper Primary School level, most children are able to plan their work in advance, based on their own perceptions and ideas about the artistic project at hand. Others may, however, still work spontaneously. In any case, before children begin working on a project, teachers can remind them to:

- try and focus on the aspect of the theme that interests them most;
- think about what they intend to create or express, and why;
- think about the materials and tools they might need for the project;
- think about how they want to go about constructing or rendering the work of art;
- think about what purposes they want the end product to serve -- entertainment, decoration, ritual, etc.

To help children gain confidence in themselves, and to develop individual styles of working, they can be encouraged to work on the same theme or topic in different media. For example, a verbal art project can be explored through several art forms: poetic dirges and appellations can be turned into drum language or songs, accompanied by drumming, miming and gestures. Working in different media is also particularly important where pictorial work and sculpture are concerned. In pictorial work, for instance, soft pencils, coloured pencils, crayons, water-colour and tempera paints may

be useful, while building can be done with clay, papier mache, cardboard, aluminium foil, flexible wire, empty tins, and plastic containers. Carving softwood, sandstone, soapstone, bees wax, and calabash may be used for sculptural work.

Children at the Upper Primary School level have developed enough physical strength to enable them to handle simple tools for clay modelling, scissors and knives for cutting, as well as hand files, small mallets, gorges, and chisels, for scraping, scratching, and chipping off bits of material during carving. With ample demonstration, instruction, guidance, and practice, children of nine years can learn to bend flexible wire for construction purposes in sculpture (Chapman, 1978). They can do simple castings using wet sand, and do hand spinning of twine with fibres obtained from the sisal, plantain tree stem, raffia, or corn shuck. They can do simple forms of macrame such as slip-knots, interlocking of loops, as well as construct simple paper and cardboard weaves. With guidance, Upper Primary School children can cut out simple geometric shapes and line patterns on blocks of tubers -- yam, cocoyam, cassava, potato -- for making direct prints on paper. Children's technique in a medium can develop if they are encouraged to work on two or three different themes or topics using the same medium or combination of media. Often, repeating a previously-worked theme or topic can help children to improve upon a style, thus reinforcing their confidence in that particular working style.

It must be remarked that most of these art-making activities can also apply to children of the lower elementary level. What is important is for the teacher to be sensitive to his or her students' capabilities and to assign projects accordingly. An essential characteristic that seems common to all children of the elementary school level

is their keen interest in exploring the world around them. This is evident in their interest in continuously probing and trying things out, as well as their love for interactive events, particularly, birthday parties and other festive occasions. In the Ghanaian context, other events which interest children are *Ananse* storytelling sessions, traditional drumming and dancing, market-day activities, traditional concert and dramatic performances, and similar activities. These can form the basis for the development of themes and topics for studio production in the visual, performing, and verbal arts.

That children learn better from direct experiences, suggests that they should be exposed as much as possible to the real world of events, activities, and things in their social and cultural environment. It is important to offer children opportunities to see works of art, as well as artists as a means of developing the youngsters' receptivity to the Ghanaian artistic heritage. One way to achieve this end is through periodical field trips to museums and art galleries, Centres for National Culture, crafts-shops, and studios and workplaces of local artists and crafts-persons. Children can also be taken on field trips into the neighbourhood to observe some of the major social and cultural events that occur on a cooperative basis, such as traditional recreational drumming and dancing, festivities, and ceremonies. Festivities may include the annual National Festival of Cultural Arts (NAFAC), traditional festivals such as *Homowo*, *Hogbetsotso*, *Akwasidae*, *Kundum*, *Aboakyer*, *Odwira*, *Akwambo*, and others. Ceremonies may also include annual traditional durbars of chiefs, child out-dooring and naming ceremonies, puberty rites celebrations, and others. Another very effective approach to exposing children to such real-life situations is for teachers to advise parents to encourage children to observe and

participate in as many of these interactive social and cultural events as possible. Children can also be exposed to the indigenous Ghanaian arts-in-recreation such as storytelling sessions, games -- *Tuutare, Ampe, Adaawe, Tuu-matu, Oware, Otona, Dzama (Djama), Kwaani-kwaani*, and others -- as well as folk songs, traditional drumming, and dancing. For the benefit of children both in cities and rural communities, teachers can arrange for local artists and crafts-makers to visit the classroom as resource persons to show their works, demonstrate, and talk to children about their works, their artistic motivations and inspirations.

During such field trips, children can be guided to do interpretive looking by means of simple questions. In an outdoor drawing trip, for example, the teacher may stimulate children's thoughts by asking them such questions as:

- What things can you see around the compound?
- What are the walls of the school building made of?
- What does the roofing of the school building look like?
- Of what shape are the windows?
- Are the windows big or small?
- Do all the trees look the same in size, height, and shape?
- Of what colour are the leaves of the plants?
- Is the colour of the lawns the same as the leaves of the trees?
- Are the leaves of the trees of the same colour as the sky?

- Observe closely the colour of the leaves of a particular plant. What variations do you see in the colour? What do you see about the colour of the sky and of the lawns?
- How would you show these colour variations in your drawing, painting, or collage work?
- How would you make a drawing, painting, or collage of a part of this school compound that interests you most? Would you start from the sky or the ground?

It is important for the teacher to help children to discover that the sky is not always blue; that the earth is not always brown; and that the leaves and grass are not always green, but are all made up of variations of blues, browns, and greens. With these conceptualizations, children can be introduced to the processes of colour mixing.

In the area of the performing arts, the questions that can be asked to guide young children at the kindergarten level can also be useful at both the lower and upper Primary levels. In observing a festivity, the following questions may be used:

- How are chiefs, queen mothers and their subjects usually seated in state during festive activities and ceremonial occasions?
- Of what materials are chiefs' and queen mothers' jewellery made?
- What are the events that often take place during such special occasions?
- How would you describe the activities of the songsters, drummers, and dancers?
- Do you notice the beautiful patterns of footsteps exhibited by the dancers? How would you like to be one of them?

Fostering creative dance through movement education is an important means of providing children with experiences that utilize and improve upon their motor abilities. The activities of movement education, though not as free as in creative dance, have some creative aspects to them, in that the approaches to movement education stress creative thinking on the part of the children. Movement education has a tendency to help children to become more consciously aware of what their bodies do.

A combination of movement exploration activities and creative dance makes a good blend -- movement education helps make certain that the rate of perceptual-motor activities is complete and that concepts of body image are developed, and dance . . . assures opportunities for rhythmic improvisation and self expression (Hendrick, 1980, p. 57).

Hendrick's comment clearly indicates that creative movement and dance education, when well approached in combination, can foster children's perceptual-motor development. Since dance is usually accompanied by music, it is pleasurable to children, thereby rendering the learning situation less strenuous and more play-like.

To introduce children to dance movement activities, the teacher has to beware of two things that may hinder effective teaching. These are . . . 1) difficulties in getting some of the children to participate actively, probably, as a result of feeling shy; and . . . 2) losing control of the class, resulting in children merely jumping and running about. To get rid of shyness among children, the teacher can introduce his or her lesson by leading children in singing a familiar folk song. The song may also be played on a tape recorder with the teacher inviting the class to partake in the singing. The teacher may then proceed to tell children how he or she loves to dance to the rhythm of it. After a brief demonstration to stimulate the children's interest, the teacher may then invite the

class to join in the dancing. Doing a cooperative activity such as both teacher and class joining hands to form a circle at the beginning of dance movement sessions can be a good basic remedy for helping children overcome shyness.

There are several ways by which to maintain control of the class. An effective means is to begin each movement lesson by having children enter into a mood of relaxation by involving them in some simple yoga exercises. For example, taking deep breaths in and out repeatedly for two or more times, yawning, shaking the head in a gentle manner, and consciously changing the facial expression to depict happiness, annoyance, beauty, ugliness, and the like, can be excellent ways of inducing relaxation. Other relaxation inducing activities appropriate for children may include stretching the body in diverse ways. Children can alternatively make their bodies stiff and tight as a pillar, and then, relaxed and flabby as a soft doll. Such jaw exercises as holding the jaw tight and loose alternatively, or opening the mouth wide as if to say 'a-a-a, o-o-o, e-e-e, r-r-r, u-u-u', and so on, can also be used to induce relaxation in children.

Actual dance activities should begin with the group first forming a circle or semi-circle; most Ghanaian folk drumming and dancing groups normally form circular or semi-circular shapes when performing. The inner part of the circle is the dance arena. Most Ghanaian folk dances often follow patterns that are rather too intricate and complicated in their original forms for children to effectively emulate. As such, dance lessons should involve moving gradually from very basic and simple patterns of body movement to more intricate ones as children gain control over their body muscles. Using activities where the whole class will be moving together in unison can be good way of



keeping control of the class and also alleviating shyness among the children. For example, while standing in a circle, the class may be asked to:

- take two or three steps forwards or backwards alternatively;
- make alternative movements of two or three steps to the left and right;
- squat, stoop, stand, tap the feet, or move the upper part of the body only to the left and right following the rhythm of a music.

To encourage creativity, children can be asked individually to:

- demonstrate various ways in which they can move the body without moving the feet, and vice versa;
- demonstrate various ways to hop about;
- walk like a robot;
- wriggle the body while walking;
- dance to the rhythm of music with isolated parts of the body such as the arms, the head, the feet, the waist, or the face alone.

Older children can be introduced to rudimentary steps and body movements of "High-life" music, since it is invariably the most popular dance type among Ghanaians today. This can then be followed with the type of traditional folk music and dance pattern that pertains to the district, region, tribe, or traditional area in which learning is taking place.

Music contributes a great deal to the satisfaction of a dance experience (Hendrick, 1980, p. 58). One important means by which to obtain music for lessons in dance movement is for the teacher to make tape recordings of Ghanaian folk songs that fit the

various rhythms and moods required for his or her lesson plans. Recording a variety of faster and slower rhythms is useful for teaching variations in the speeds of dance movements. Musical rhythms can also be followed first by clapping the hands, and then by using body and dance movements. Such musical activities do not require sophisticated equipment. Drums can be improvised with plastic bowls, while rattles can be made by putting some pebbles into empty milk tins and pressing their open ends together. Two pieces of metal can be knocked against each other to create musical rhythms.

With proper explanation, children at the Upper Primary School can understand what is meant by the term 'verbal arts'. The goal for lessons in the verbal arts should be geared towards helping the youngsters in identifying various verbal art forms in the indigenous Ghanaian setting with their appropriate names. To achieve this objective, lessons should begin by helping children to understand verbal art as art. For example, teachers may remind children of the fact that people use the arts they make to tell stories about their feelings and thoughts and various things in life. However, the most common way to let people know what we think is by using language. We use language in different ways: to greet people, tell stories, play riddles, recite poems, and the like. The special ways in which we speak in order to make our speech beautiful or meaningful to the hearing of the listener, is known as the 'art of speaking'. Because we use word of mouth to narrate stories, present riddles, and recite poems, the art of speaking has come to be called 'verbal art'. Thus, the term 'verbal art' (also called 'oral literature' or 'spoken art'), is used to refer to a "mode of speaking". The Ghanaian people have different

modes of speaking, resulting in various types of verbal art, namely: mythology, folktale (*Ananse* stories), riddles, libationary prayers, proverbs, appellations (praise-names), and funeral dirges. The meanings of these verbal arts have been explained in Chapter Five.

At the Upper Primary School level, children do not need to be bothered with detailed explanations of these verbal art forms. What they require is a basic understanding of what each type is about. Teachers should, therefore, offer as often as possible, practical demonstrations to illustrate verbal explanations. Occasional trips to the locality to observe how these arts are performed can motivate children's understanding. Here are some instructions and questions for classroom dialogues.

- What does the term 'verbal art' mean to you?
- Give the names of the types of Ghanaian verbal arts you know.
- What do we say a person is doing if he or she is saying prayers with a drink?
- What name do we give to stories about traditional Ghanaian beliefs about God and creation, and also about our family lineage?
- How would you describe a libation pouring performance you have observed.
- During festive occasions, we hear people shouting praise-names when the chiefs and their people are coming to the durbar grounds. What other term do we use for praise-names?
- How would you imitate a person pronouncing and shouting praise-names?
- During funerals we see people crying and wailing. How would you imitate what they do and say? What term do we use for the things they say while bewailing?
- Which group of people do most of the wailing at funerals, men or women?

## **Art History**

### **(Appreciation of the Artistic Heritage)**

History of art constitutes the second area of study within the Discipline-Based Art Education format being proposed by this thesis. History of art, otherwise known as art history, is a discipline that focuses upon studying the historical context in which all artistic achievement is considered (Dobbs, 1992, p. 74). In other words, art history attempts to trace the path of the development and practice of art-making, artistic achievements, and of artists, past and present. Stated differently, it involves the study of the artistic heritage, which includes the history of art-making and the awareness of the role of the arts and artists in society. The artistic heritage is broadly defined by Chapman (1978) as organized knowledge about art as well as specific works that have been created by artists, designers, architects, and artisans of the past and present (p. 20). In brief, therefore, art history provides us with an understanding and appreciation of the arts and artistic heritage as a significant form of human achievement.

Like other disciplines, art history is shaped by a professional discourse (Freedman, 1991, p. 40). Freedman states succinctly that such discourse is based on rules that direct and guide the ways in which art historians think and make decisions about what constitutes art historical information and how such information is used. In effect, therefore, it is by those rules that the scope of the discipline is defined. Freedman also identifies two genres or ways of doing art history, namely, 'connoisseurship' and 'iconographical analysis'. A critical analysis of these genres will provide a foundation for the discussions on approaches to art historical inquiry presented in this section. While

both genres involve identifying, examining, interpreting, and documenting information about works of art, each of them presents particular methods of investigating and reporting art historical information.

The notion of connoisseurship connotes what may be termed a Eurocentric 'high culture': a superior or high social class community of learned persons considered to be knowledgeable and competent in dealing with matters requiring high degrees of cognizance and taste. Although European high culture has been in existence for centuries, the contemporary vision and theoretical considerations of the practice used by historians of art began in the latter part of the 19th century (Freedman, 1991; and Chanda, 1993). Connoisseurship in art exemplifies a competency to perceive, interpret, and pass critical judgements about works of art based on their formal and technical qualities. Being an important foundation in the development of art history as a professional discipline, connoisseurship has been the most common representation of art history in schools. The study of art history in school has been entwined with connoisseurship to aid upward social mobility, by instilling in students a desire for high culture as a symbol of gentility and grace that commands respect (Freedman, 1991). This is because it is connoisseurs who have been responsible for making recommendations about the investment values of works of art to prospective buyers.

As a model for doing history of Western art, connoisseurship methods are focused upon attributing works of art to individual artists and particular periods in time based on the works' stylistic qualities. In other words, the connoisseurship model of doing art history involves analyzing the characteristics artistic styles of individual artists and

artistic movements in a chronological order. Artistic style is determined by examining the formal qualities of artworks. Such qualities include features of the materials and techniques used by the artist, the rendering of images, forms and other elements of art and their interrelationships in the work, as well as a sense of the way in which these features express something of the artist's mind and character (Parsons, 1990, p. 141). This process is described by Chanda (1993) as 'stylistic analysis' (p. 75). It is through the process of stylistic analysis that specific artistic styles in Western art have been identified and designated by such terms as 'realism', 'surrealism', 'impressionism', 'fauvism', 'cubism', 'abstract expressionism', 'romanticism', and others. Examples of major periods in Western art are the 'classical', 'medieval', 'renaissance', 'baroque', 'modern', and 'post-modern'.

It should be noted, however, that art historical analysis rooted in the connoisseurship genre focuses upon examining, recording, and reporting only the objective facts about works of art. Investigating why the works of art of a particular time and place possess certain specific characteristics is not considered a necessary component of a connoisseur's analysis.

The paradigms [of connoisseurship], for the most part, focus on notions of individual artistic genius, of the personality of the artist as a key to understanding the work, of the anatomy of the work isolated from the cultural context, of art as the mirror of life, and of the divisions between "high art" and "popular arts".

[That is, connoisseurship has no concern for] . . . the value of the work as a carrier of meaning, a symbolic representation of a time, a place, an attitude, in short as a cultural product (Chanda, 1993, pp. 73-74).

There are several shortcomings to the connoisseurship genre. Although the connoisseurship genre provides students with art historical concepts and role-models in art making and appreciation, the scope it offers for doing art historical inquiry is rather too narrow, in that it reduces the study of art history to a study of particular artistic styles which have occurred in a particular sequence of time. The study of artistic styles is typically connected to the developmental progression of the visual arts. Students tend to understand art history only in terms of chronology -- that which had occurred in a sequential order. Teaching and learning of art history have often focused on the memorization of what art historians have written down as factual information. This way of studying art history has, however, been found to be unchallenging, boring, and unrewarding to many students and teachers. Martin (1991) writes:

Those of us who teach art history at the university level are very familiar with complaints from studio art majors (and . . . art education students) that art history is nothing more than the memorization of names and dates, is a "bookish" or "academic" set of courses, and is somehow uncreative and therefore unworthy of serious and enthusiastic attention (p. 40).

Another shortcoming of connoisseurship lies in its lack of concern for the artwork's socio-cultural context, which creates the impression that the artist had lived and grown in isolation from any societal influences that may have shaped his or her thought processes and art-making. The idea of viewing some artworks as 'high art' or 'masterpieces' which have value in all times and places is also questionable. This assertion ignores the premise that people in different parts of the world during different periods in time have valued works of art differently as a result of their cultural, social class, gender, and educational backgrounds. There is need to remark, however, that

outlining these limitations is by no means a suggestion that connoisseurship analysis is inherently a bad or wrong approach to doing art history. What it does indicate is that the connoisseurship genre of doing art history is not subtle enough for application to the arts of all cultures of the world, particularly the Ghanaian arts which are an integral part of the everyday life and living of the Ghanaian people.

While connoisseurship is still considered an important aspect of art history, many art historians have taken to a more comprehensive approach which includes "deciphering iconography in artworks and biographies of artists" in addition to stylistic analysis (Freedman, 1991). Iconography, otherwise known as iconology, designates the study or analysis of the form, subject matter, connotative, and symbolic expressions, as well as the meanings and contextual significance of artistic representations. Iconography or iconology is, therefore, a more inclusive term that embraces contextual issues with regard to art historical studies. Stated differently, iconography suggests that one needs to give attention to both the form and context of the artwork when doing an historical analysis of it. In this genre, the scope of art history includes cultural and sociological issues once assumed peripheral to the study of art (Freedman, 1991, p.42). Vital to this view of art history are the following premises:

- i. time and place are not thought of as separate issues; art history has become more concerned with structures of time and their relationship to place;
- ii. the value of a work of art is now seen as being "within" time and not "throughout" time;



- iii. rather than value emitting from a work of art, value is placed on the work by people which include artists, collectors, and historians, in relation to their individual interests; and
- iv. time is not thought of as linear; rather, it is represented as a multidimensional structure within which various cultural and socioeconomic groups influence artistic production. knowledge, and values about art exist (adapted from Freedman, 1991, pp.42 & 43).

Basic to the iconographical genre is the concept of history being more than just the representation of past phenomena. All human life is lived within historical space-time and a socio-cultural structure which locates us, shapes our shared institutions, our collective consciousness, and our day-to-day interactions. This perspective indicates that history is not static. Like culture, history is dynamic -- an ongoing phenomenon that is lived by human beings through their day-to-day activities. This suggests, therefore, that an art history inquiry should involve not only the recording, reporting, and memorizing of objective facts about artworks of the past. It should also involve interpretation of facts about works of art -- both past and present -- in relationship to the socio-cultural structures within which the works are created. Thus, while the arts of the past still influence our world today, it is important to introduce students to the potential resources, as well as new trends, that exist for doing art historical inquiry and how to use those resources creatively.

As a branch of history, art history is a discipline of discovery (Martin, 1991, p.39). As such, it requires an understanding of the arts from both historical and

experiential perspectives, informing students about where, when, and why an artwork originated (Garoian, 1988, p.34). This suggests that students should learn how art historical knowledge is generated or constructed. To achieve this end, students need to understand art history not only as a subject area with facts and information, but also as a discipline of inquiry about works of art. Thus, education in art history should be directed through the process of learning about artworks, artists, and the artistic heritage. This implies that art educators should adopt an anthropological attitude towards art history. As Calvert (1992) has suggested, doing art history should employ "a critical-reflective approach to understanding historical works of art by considering cultural factors -- functions, processes, formal considerations, and meanings -- that affect their creation and preservation" (p. 75). The contention here is that every work of art is a representation of a culture, and hence, has a socio-cultural significance that should be explored as means of understanding the work.

Analyzing the similarities between the Western art history theories and methods and those of African art of which the Ghanaian arts are a subset, Chanda writes:

Like [modern] historians of Western art, historians of African art focus on [artistic] style as a means of classifying and organizing materials, and as a means of describing and delimiting local styles. Both are concerned with the concept of interpretation as means of understanding a work of art. Both are interested in using factual information to explicate and justify the interpretation and the presence of certain visual forms, and both are concerned with the significance, the subtle, hidden implications of symbols and signs (1993, p. 74).

She argues, however, that an historical study of the tribal arts of Africa can be carried out in ways similar to those described for the iconographical approach used by the modern historian of Western art, however, this can be done only with a different

emphasis. The premise here is that in spite of the above similarities, the theoretical concepts that form the bases of Modern Western and African art studies differ in their ways of thinking about and understanding art, and in constructing art historical knowledge. For example, historians of Western art using the iconographical approach to studying artistic styles also follow a typical historical mode of inquiry, adopting an evolutionary perspective in their in classifying works of art. Evolutionary perspective as applied here designates tracing a chronological trajectory of newly evolving artistic styles, and also, of the transformations that occur in artistic styles over different periods of time. Additionally, Western art historians view evolution in art as a developmental phenomenon -- that is, they study "artistic styles to determine whether a work of art belongs to the beginning, the climax, or the end of the development of a style" (Chanda, 1993, p. 77).

In indigenous African art, however, tracing the historical evolution of artistic styles in a linear or developmental fashion is problematic. Owing to the indigenous African apprenticeship system of learning to make art coupled with taboos and stylistic conventions specific to tribal and traditional areas, there often tends to be very little or no significant change in style. This is because, more often than not, apprentices tend to inherit or adopt the styles introduced to them by their masters. As a result of this inheritance of style, unlike in Western cultures, the notion of one unique, original work of art that must be appreciated because of its uniqueness does not exist (or hardly exists) in many African cultures. Rather, as Chanda (1996) puts it, there are often multiple examples depicting similar works of art of the same concept. This can be attributed to

the fact that in traditional African art, many objects in the visual arts domain are produced specifically for institutions and associations whose specifications are based on larger societal values and stylistic conventions. Typical examples in Ghana can be found in the *Akuaba* fertility doll, Ashanti gold-weights, or linguist staff tops. Also worthy of mentioning is the fact that much of the tribal arts of Africa, and for that matter, Ghana, have not been preserved because they are made to serve specific purposes during certain rites or sacrifices (such as the incarceration of evil spirits) after which they are no longer needed and may, therefore, be discarded. It must be noted also that while most indigenous Ghanaian works of art are used in day-to-day activities and for rituals during community and societal events, these works have not been dated. Therefore, it is normally difficult to determine the periods in time to which they belong. Given these realities, and also, in light of the fact that the arts of Africa, including the indigenous arts of Ghana, are largely intertwined with the socio-cultural fabrics of the tribes that produced them, it is clear that their study can best be done from the anthropological point of view by means of structural analysis.

Structural analysis entails examining the relationships between the structural make-up of a society and the nature, functions, and significance of its repertoire of art forms. Rather than viewing the artistic style of a culture within an evolutionary and sequential perspective, structural analysis in art focuses on a systematic study of the characteristics and symbols exhibited by artworks to identify those works that look alike and classify them according to tribal, ethnic, regional, or subregional styles. Like the iconographical genre, structural analysis uses a contextual approach to doing art history.

However, the structuralist approach goes beyond just describing art forms within cultural systems as presented by the iconographical genre discussed earlier on. In addition to looking for certain repetition of images, or icons, as a way of investigating the types of works of art produced and used in a particular culture, structural analysis attempts to find out the meanings and essences of the works, as well as the circumstances influencing their production. In its attempt to achieve these objectives, the morphological or structural analysis in art history focuses on exploring all social and cultural ramifications of the works. Ideally, it examines all the symbolic forms that bear hidden and subtle implications about the social structures from which the symbols derive, as well as the thought patterns underlying the symbols, in order to fully grasp the meaning of an artwork.

The structuralist approach to doing art history described here provides a suitable model applicable for a historical study of the indigenous arts of Ghana. That indigenous Ghanaian artistic behaviours are inseparable from other aspects of the life of the people, suggests that an historical study of the arts of Ghana should encompass the whole matrix of Ghanaian society and culture. That is to say, the study should include a thorough exploration of the dominant system of values, myths, and attitudes that characterize the consciousness of Ghanaians, and which are thus reflected in the making and use of works of art. Approaching the historical study of works of art from such a stance can help students to understand not only the work per se, but also the significance of the arts in human life. To make students active participants in doing art history, they should be encouraged to bring their experiences and understanding of the arts to bear on the

learning situation. This can be achieved through individual exploratory and interpretive learning.

### **Art History at the Primary School Level**

Art historical lessons with young children can be commenced by making children understand how the arts are a natural outgrowth of the culture of people who make and use them. This can be done through the storytelling mode, since children enjoy narratives about people and places. Children can be made aware that people of all walks of life, including Ghanaians, make and use different types of art such as clay pots and dishes, drawings and paintings, sculptures, textiles, music, dance, and drama. These works of art are made to serve human kind in its efforts to survive and develop. For instance, since the beginning of civilization, clay wares have served the need for containers and other household utensils. Cave drawings and paintings, and sculptures have been used for religious and decorative purposes. Textiles and jewellery have been made for the purposes of covering, protecting, and adorning the human body, while music, dance, drama have been employed in religious and other ceremonies, entertainment, and to satisfy various human needs. After such a storytelling session, the teacher may engage students in a dialogue through instructions and questions of the following nature to ensure their understanding and appreciation of the artistic heritage.

- How do you think art-making came into being?
- We have just learnt about various types of art made to satisfy human needs.

Mention the name of any artwork that is made and used by the people of Ghana.

- Some of the artworks we have named have more than one use. Identify them and show the ways in which each of them is used.
- How do we refer to people who make art?
- Mention the name of any artist you know personally and show the type of art he or she makes.
- Tell a story about how the artist you have mentioned does his or her work, as well as what he or she does with the finished works.
- Why do you think artists are important people in our society?
- What type(s) of art would you make if you were an artist? Why?

Similar questions and instructions can be generated from children's stories, contributions, and questions for further discussions.

Children can also be informed that works of art tell stories about the people who make and use them by reflecting the ways in which they live, the items they use to satisfy the needs of daily living, how these items are used, and their significance to the people. Artists of various parts of the world, including those of Ghana, create works of art because they want to share their ideas about life and things with other people. Children should learn that the kinds of art people make depend on their beliefs and values. Therefore, people of different parts of the world with different beliefs, value systems, and ways of life might produce arts which are different from those of Ghanaian artists. Most children of the Primary School level have limited exposure to and knowledge about artistic works and the forms they take. They can, therefore, be given as much opportunity as possible to see artworks both of the Ghanaian heritage and of

other cultures. The ideal means of achieving this end is through visits to local artists and craftworkers in their studios (or workplaces). Schools in areas where such facilities as art museums, galleries, and Centres for National Culture are available may arrange visits to them. Yet another means can be by exposing children to collections of various types of visual artworks, as well as artistic performances. The collection of works should include sculptures, paintings and drawings, pottery and ceramics, textiles and macrame, leather-works, metal-works, jewellery, and others art forms, organized on the bases of their origin, subject matter or theme, and uses. Children's encounters with works of art should be planned to coincide with their own artistic efforts in the classroom so that they can become familiar with common sources of inspiration for making art (Chapman, 1978). In order to effectively assist students in exploring the social implications of a work of art, it is of utmost importance for the teacher to cultivate a thorough understanding of the relationships between the work and the life styles of the people of the place where it originates. During class discussions with children, the teacher should be the interpreter of the values underlying the works. Some questions and instructions to guide the teacher's thought during class discussions may take the form that follows.

- This artwork is a (sculpture, painting, or other). What do you see in it that tells you something about the interests of the artist?
- What tribal group in Ghana do the characteristic features of the work portray?  
What shows that?
- In what region (or traditional area) of Ghana do you think this tribal group resides?



- What story do you think the artist wants to tell about his or her tribe?
- For what occasion or event is this type of work of art used? Why?

Children can be asked to tell stories about artistic performances they have seen. The discussions to guide children's thinking can be centered around the type, setting, participants, characteristics, and feeling of the performance. Here are some sample questions and instructions for classroom dialogues in relation to the subject.

- Give the names of the types of artistic performances you have seen.
- Where did you see them? At what other places can artistic performances be seen?
- What is the name of the performing group?
- Which part of Ghana do they come from? How do you know?
- How many people were involved in the performance?
- Describe the setting of the artistic performance you have seen; and the type of costume worn by the participants.
- Name the items or instruments -- drums, gongs, clappers, flutes and horns, umbrellas, ceremonial swords, and others -- used in the performance.
- Describe how each item was used.
- What was the performance about?
- Talk about the form taken by the performance -- how it was acted. Children may demonstrate parts of the performance that were interesting to each of them.
- Why do you think the performance was presented?
- How did you feel when you saw it? Why?

## **Aesthetics**

### **(Understanding the Nature of Art and Its Role in Society)**

The word 'aesthetics' has been described in Chapter Four as a discipline that deals with the understanding of the nature of art; that is, its meaning and the role it plays in society. Tracing its etymology, it has also been noted that the word 'aesthetics' was first used to mean 'the science of the beautiful', and that it derives from the Greek word '*aesthetikos*', meaning 'sensory perception'. We have also learned that as the science of beauty, the term 'aesthetics' has been used in reference to questions of visual appearance of works of art. Today, however, the concept of aesthetics as necessarily sensuous, and thus, attributable to only the visual appearance, and to a category of what is "fine" or "beautiful" tends to fall short in its application to the ideas that dominate art appreciation. In today's world of art, the concept of aesthetics tends not to concentrate exclusively on the concept of beauty. It is conceived more broadly as a branch of philosophy dealing essentially with art. The term 'aesthetics' is conceived as an aspect of philosophy that investigates a number of questions and concepts that arise in our effort to understand the . . . "nature, meaning, and value of art, as well as the natural and humanly made environments (Smith, 1989, p. 8). Aesthetics forms the philosophical underpinnings or principal assumptions underlying the theory of arts education. In other words, aesthetics education is viewed as the most widely acknowledged philosophical orientation in the arts among arts educators today. As a philosophical discipline, aesthetics is concerned primarily with the nature of works of art as products of artistic creative activities and as the focal point of aesthetic appreciation and art criticism (Crawford, 1989, p. 228). Thus,

in ordinary use, the term, aesthetics may be viewed simply as 'the philosophy of art'. What follows explains why the concept of aesthetics has shifted, or is shifting away from being limited to theorizing about beauty and its enjoyment to embrace a broader perspective in meaning and application. Nowadays, the term 'aesthetic' is used to refer to any work of art which attracts and holds the interest of the percipient or viewer. Lind (1993) reflects this notion as he writes:

. . . nowadays, we want to call something "aesthetic" when it seizes and holds our discriminating attention. No longer understood to be limited to things that are "beautiful" or "gorgeous", the term now seems right for anything that is "intriguing" or "fascinating" in a certain special way. In this new sense, even "ugly" old hags can count as "aesthetic". . . . the expanded use of the term simply reflects the discovery that attention can be attracted and held in a variety of ways and not just by those "easier" objects of discrimination that are so readily labelled "beautiful" (p. 6).

As a branch of philosophy, aesthetics consists of discussions of the arts as a part of larger philosophical systems of thought. While aesthetics is considered mainly as a branch of philosophy, writings in philosophical aesthetics tends to also take on analytical character or scientific form. The idea of scientific aesthetics is grounded in empirical study of the arts. It derives its hypotheses from philosophical systems of thought, and its data from the analysis and history of the arts, as well as from psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies of the production, appreciation, and teaching of the arts (Smith 1989). These latter studies indicate the importance of the affective, social, and cultural aspects of the arts in aesthetics.

The basic presupposition of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy is that the socio-cultural aspects of the arts have important bearing on understanding, describing, interpreting, and evaluating the arts. Our experiences of art -- whether as creators,

historians, aestheticians, or critics -- are a reflection of our basic values. The interest in the sociological and anthropological dimensions of the arts can be attributed to the recognition that the arts are a constituent part of the larger socio-cultural fabric of the human society. It can also be said to have grown from the awareness of the fact that the social sciences bear importantly on the formulation of educational theories, including arts education. A part of the larger educational programme, arts education should reflect goals that are consistent with those of general education by addressing some of the social problems that afflict society. In its sociological and anthropological dimensions, aesthetic studies attempt to understand the relations that exist among the arts and various sectors of human society. In philosophical aesthetics, the significance of works of art to us goes beyond studying the materials of which the works are made and their formal or physical features. The appreciation of works of art goes beyond the pleasure of looking at them, it involves understanding (interpreting) their meanings as well.

" . . . in talking about a work of art, we are often not content simply to describe its physical or visual characteristics. A good description . . . would not report [only] what one sees but would also involve interpretation of what is seen -- an explanation of the work's meaning. [Such an interpretation] may be based on what is readily seen in the work but often goes beyond that by making use of information about the artist's intentions, the social and cultural context of the work, and so on" (Crawford, 1987, p. 233).

To reiterate a previous point, works of art are significant by virtue of reflecting ideas about the artists' world views, emotions, and socio-cultural values. Works of art are also significant by virtue of the types and levels of meanings they convey -- subject matter, representation, symbolism, and metaphor (p. 232). That is to say, apart from their physical forms, works of art frequently have subject matter, and also represent,

symbolize, and express something in the real world. This shows that appreciating or describing 'form' only in an artwork does not suffice as a means of interpreting it or understanding its nature. Our response to and understanding works of art can only be effective if we are in a position to effectively interpret them. The study of aesthetics involves critical reflection on our experiences of art. Implicit here is that our critical reflections during aesthetic appreciation are usually influenced by our lived experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values, and emotional dispositions, which help us to clarify issues, discriminate among options and make personal decisions and meanings.

The foregoing anthropological points of view have been used to provide us with the contextual framework within which to view and to understand the nature and value or significance of works of art. This approach to aesthetics which views artworks not only in their physical forms, but also, their social and cultural dimensions has been called the "contextualist method". Bersson (1991) explains contextualism in aesthetics as:

An approach to the understanding of art that centres on the study of art "in context", that is, in relation to the rest of life. Contextualism emphasizes the study of everything that surrounds and relates to the works of art: the viewer; the artist; the physical setting of the work; and the art, culture, and society that gave birth to it (p. 10).

While the contextualist approach is by no means an attempt to change the meaning of aesthetics, it does expand its meaning in terms of the criteria it offers for analyzing and describing works of art. In other words, the contextualist method offers us a more comprehensive approach -- a broader perspective -- for investigating questions about the nature and value of works of art. Its strong point lies in its ability to expand our understanding of artworks in relationship to the larger world.

Some didactic insights to be gained from the contextualist approach are that apart from expressing the state of mind, experience and feelings of the artist, artworks can reflect something of their time, as well as by their place in their tradition and culture (Parsons, 1990, pp. 139-40). These insights, in turn, offer us other forms of learning, namely: what is valuable about works of art; what kinds of meanings could be embodied in an artwork; what kinds of relationships exist between artworks and society (p. 137). These insights, which exist as an open-ended network, is largely affected by our individual cultural contexts and patterns of interaction during the art interpretive process.

The contextualist approach to appreciating works of art combines the points of views of the arts as formal features, and as fundamental human behaviours. The concept of the arts as formal features involves an immediate description of the artwork as held by the viewer. As fundamental human behaviours, the artwork takes on a mediated description as an expressed symbolic form. The description tends to contain a strong element of interpretation as the means to understanding the essential nature, values, and meanings of artworks. This indicates that from the contextualist point of view, interpretation is an indispensable part of art appreciation. It is these attributes which render the contextualist method effective when applied to the category of arts known as non-Western arts. These include the so-called naive arts, primitive arts, folk arts, tribal arts, and others, which are frequently representational or expressed in symbolic forms, entwined with social and cultural activities. Specifically, the contextualist method lends itself for describing and interpreting the Ghanaian cultural arts which fall within this category, and upon which this study is centered.

It should be noted, however, that earlier discussion of the shortcomings of the formalist (conventionalist) tradition is by no means an attempt to dismiss or abandon its principles as being worthless to the arts appreciation process. Those shortcomings have been identified purposely to show that the world of art of today has become too complex and multifaceted for the specific orientation offered by formalist principles for arts appreciation.

Because art is so multifaceted and can move us in so many ways, one-sided or narrow methods of art appreciation are insufficient. We need an approach that is at once more general and comprehensive. Such an art appreciation might be achieved by combining two traditionally distinct ways of seeing: formalism and contextualism (Bersson, 1991, p. 9).

In brief, while formalism focuses primarily on providing the principles and vocabulary for describing the immediate physical appearance of the artistic form, contextualism is concerned with the appreciation of art "in context", that is, in relation to the rest of life (p.10). This understanding shows that both formalism and contextualism contribute significantly to the overall understanding of the nature of artworks. It is, therefore, clear that the two aesthetic approaches, though seemingly distinct from each other, can be overlapped or treated as complementary in their concerns in the arts classroom. Arguably, this approach to the teaching and learning of the application of aesthetic principles will offer students a more comprehensive means of analyzing various forms of art and hence, a wider perspective in art appreciation. In other words, employing together the formalist and contextualist methods in aesthetic learning will go a long way in enhancing the quality of students' understanding of works of art.

## **Methods for Aesthetic Learning**

In the previous section, aesthetics has been explored as a concept which deals with how viewers interpret the nature of artistic phenomena. In the present section are some proposed methods for aesthetic learning. The central aim of these methods is to help students learn about the relationships between the arts and society. This will enable students to become aware of the various human conditions within which the arts are applied, leading to their understanding of the role and significance of the arts in human life. Such an understanding can, in turn, afford students a means for personal, authentic, and meaningful interpretation and appreciation of works of art.

### **Aesthetic Learning at the Primary School Level**

#### **The Lower Primary School Level**

One major issue facing some art educators has been the appropriateness of talking about artworks with children. Because of the abstract and complex nature of aesthetic literature, many art educators have doubts as to whether aesthetic study can be applicable to all age groups, especially young children. One point of view claims that it is inappropriate to talk about artworks with school children at the kindergarten level because they are not mature enough to benefit from such discussions. Some research writings in arts education, for example, Congdon (1986), Hamblen (1988), Johnson (1990), and Zurmuehlen and Kantner (1995) have, however, proven this position to be erroneous. With proper motivation through questioning strategies (Congdon, 1986) or examining conflicting ideas (Hamblen, 1988) individuals without formal educational



background in philosophical aesthetics can deal with sophisticated aesthetic issues. Most young children do indeed respond to, and are interested in talking about art (Johnson, 1990). Adults who witness children making art are aware that these young artists often accompany their mark making and constructing activities with narratives (Zurmuehlen and Kantner, 1995, p. 6). More often than not, children may not intend their stories for any audience in particular, nevertheless, their narratives do confirm to us the children's individual relationships with the objects and forms they have constructed. The forms taken by children's narratives may derive from the social contexts within which they live. The contexts may include daily activities and events in which the children are involved, or children's stories read or told to them by their parents, teachers, friends, relatives, or other storytellers who frequent their lives (p. 6). While their concerns may often differ from those of adults, this does not make children's responses to artworks any less meaningful or valuable than those of adults.

As with their art-making, young children's responses to artworks are usually based on their own interests and experiences. This view is consistent with Parson's (1976) claim that young children respond to familiar subject matter, and Perkins' (1988) assertion that youngsters are likely to focus on the principal content and story of an artwork during art viewing. At the kindergarten and early Primary School level, therefore, it is appropriate to approach student's response to works of art beginning with thematic content. Thematic content at its simplest level involves the overt and stated subject matter of an artwork (Anderson, 1986, p.6). Approaching children's aesthetic learning by studying first the thematic content, will enable teachers to capitalize on the

interests, drives, and abilities of the children. Such an approach is consistent with educational theories which suggest that learning activities must be planned in relation to the proclivities -- the natural or habitual inclinations, tendencies, propensities, or predispositions -- of the student. Discussing the thematic content of an artwork can also have a tendency of orienting children to some of the expressive aspects of the work. This is not to suggest that the formal contents of artworks should not be discussed with children. What it does suggest is that since foremost in children's attempt to communicate their perceptions about an artwork is the tendency to interpret its thematic content rather than its formal features, it is more appropriate to initiate children's aesthetic learning with thematic emphasis.

An effective way to develop children's positive attitudes towards aesthetic learning in the classroom is by responding to children's own artworks. During aesthetic learning, both the thematic content and formal qualities of the student's work can be discussed in relation to what the student is trying to express and how the work can be improved to further the student's artistic development. Formal content can be discussed within the thematic concerns expressed by the children in order to address more general purposes of art appreciation. The knowledge and skills gained from such discussions can then be applied in discussing other works.

Because children tend to learn more actively when they are involved in sharing ideas with each other, placing them in small groups (according to interests) can provide more opportunities for collaborative talk during aesthetic learning. Also since children learn mostly through play, it is important that strategies designed to initiate their

involvement with works of art should include play activities. Inducing children to engage empathetically with works of art can be an excellent way to facilitate their intense involvement with the works. To be empathetic with a work of art implies personification of the work, that is, projecting one's own personality into the work -- an "I-Thou" relationship with the work (Buber, 1970). This suggests that children should be guided to look, touch, smell, listen, and even taste the work where appropriate. To elicit talk from children, the teacher can engage them either individually or as a group in dialogues through open-ended but straight-forward questioning in a Socratic style such as:

- What is this? or What does this look like?
- What is it about?
- Where do we usually see this?
- What is it used for?
- How is it used? and by which group of people?
- What does it mean? or What does it say to you?
- Of what material(s) is it made?
- How do you think it was made?
- If you were to make it, how would you make it?
- Why do you or people like to make art?

Storytelling can be another way for young children to talk about works of art. Artworks depicting activities such as adventurous or dramatic scenes -- working on the farm, hunting, drumming and dancing -- can be used to illicit stories from children. Such

scenes can be created by children during art-making activities. However, they can be borrowed from contemporary local artists or art departments of Senior Secondary Schools and Polytechnics. To initiate storytelling, teachers can centre their motivational questions around the activity or action portrayed by the work of art (Newton, 1995). Examples of such questions may include:

- What is happening?
- What kind of activities do you think are taking place?
- What do you think happened before?
- Do you think the activities / actions are vigorous? Why? or Why not?
- What do you think might happen later as a result of the activities in this artwork?
- What do the actions or activities remind you of in this town / village or somewhere you have visited?

The questions can also be framed in the form of instructions, by asking children to look attentively at the work of art and:

- tell the class what they can see in it;
- describe what it is about;
- tell how it relates to a story they know;
- say how it relates to some activities that usually take place in their home, locality, village, or town; and/or
- describe or tell stories about some activities they know that relate to the theme or topic depicted in the work of art.

Employing a simulation situation in the classroom can also be an excellent way of engaging children empathetically with a work of art. This can be achieved by asking children to pretend to undertake an imaginary journey through a work of art. In this way, children can be helped to talk about the moods of artworks. Works most applicable for this approach may include some pictorial works and relief carvings in landscapes, seascapes showing fishing activities at the beach, open market and festival scenes, and such like, depicting some interiors or distances. Some appropriate questions for discussing the mood of a work might be:

- Imagining that you were to take a journey into this work to explore it, where did you begin the journey? Why?
- What means of transport did you use for the journey? Why?
- Which direction did you go?
- What did you see on the way?
- How did you feel through the journey?
- Was the journey fast or slow? Why?
- Was it smooth or rough? Explain.
- Where did you end the journey?
- Would you like to continue the journey? Why? or why not?

Children can also be asked to imagine that they are each a part, or one of the figures (or objects) in a work of art. An alternative to this approach may be to ask children to choose a favourite spot in an art object and imagine that they are there (Newton, 1995, p.82). Questions to be asked might be:

- Where are you?
- How did you get there?
- What is happening there?
- What are you doing there?
- What do you see, hear, smell, or feel?
- Does it feel hot, cold, happy, or sad in there? How do you know?
- Do you feel safe or unsafe? Why?
- What do you think might happen?

Teachers may also draw on the gestural and kinaesthetic body movements made by young children as they try to perceive works of art in aesthetic learning to explore the formal qualities in the works. Newton (1995) calls this approach "adopting kinaesthetic strategies to learning about art". Young children, according to Newton, can perceive art elements by moving their bodies to represent actual lines, shapes, movements, textures, and rhythm found in works of art before they can verbally describe them (p. 81). Such movements can be directional or shaping, in that children may move their bodies in the direction of a specific line, or to represent or describe a specific shape in a painting. By watching young children engage in kinaesthetic movements as they perceive a work of art, teachers can recognize that the youngsters are, indeed, responding to certain formal qualities in the work. Thus, with encouragement and guidance through motivational dialogues, children can be helped to verbalize and communicate their perceptions and observations.

While young children strive to describe features in a work of art, the teachers should accept all sincere responses. At the early stages, use of precise and correct art vocabulary is not as important as encouraging children to talk about what they have observed in the artwork they are viewing. Often, young children may employ connotative statements or words to describe what they see in artworks. To borrow Newton's ideas, young children may use such words as 'standing up', 'tall', 'straight', and the like, to describe a perpendicular line. In much the same vein, they may use such terms as 'lying down', 'sleeping line', 'flat', or 'wide' line to describe a horizontal line. Young children may describe a diagonal line as 'not straight', 'leaning', or 'falling over'. A zig-zag line may be described as 'up-and-down', or 'see-saw line', while the term 'round-round-round' may be used as a descriptor for a spiral line. Literature on language development shows that young children often first acquire connotative meaning during the language development process and gradually learn denotative meaning-making as they mature. By connotative meaning is meant, the emotive or affective aspects of speech which are built upon association and personal experience in contrast to denotative meaning which is literal and agreed upon by mature language users (Newton, 1995, p. 80). Though young children might not use the precise vocabulary to describe formal features of an artwork, this does not mean that their responses to the work are not appropriate. Thus, the teacher's acceptance of this wide range of responses could be capitalized upon to help children to develop an appropriate art language. This can be achieved by guiding children, especially those between eight and nine years old in Primary Two and Three,

to compile lists of the appropriate words that are generated as they respond to works of art. Genishi and Dyson (1985) refer to such word lists as 'cognitive codes'.

As children strive to describe the qualities of all the lines in a work of art, the teacher should assist the class to compose a word list, such as long, short, straight, curved, thick, thin, strong, weak. The same process can be followed to generate a word list for textures such as rough, smooth, tactile, visual, orderly, and chaotic. Shapes or forms can be described in terms of their resemblance to things in everyday life, using such statements as 'looks like', 'resembles', 'alike', 'same', and 'different from'. Names of easily identifiable colours such as 'red', 'blue', 'green', 'yellow', 'white', 'black', and 'brown' can also be learned. Other concepts of colour may include 'light', 'shade', 'bright', and 'dark', among others. Children also need to learn concepts about quantity like 'more', 'less', 'many', 'little', 'greater than', 'fewer than', and others. Additionally, children can learn 'big', 'small', 'bigger than', 'smaller than', 'larger than', 'tall', 'short', 'wide', 'narrow', and so on, as descriptors of sizes. A word list for describing movement may include such words as 'moving', 'still', 'fast', 'swift', and 'slow'. Word lists can be generated and learned in the processes of studying different types of artworks. As they study the elements in a work of art, children should be guided to use words that describe where each element is located in relation to others in the work. Concepts such as 'near to', 'beside', 'far from', 'next to', 'over', 'under', 'in', 'out', 'before', 'after', 'above', 'below', 'in front of', and 'between' can be used to describe the position of objects and figures (i.e., the use of space) in an artwork.



The development and acquisition of the language of art should be viewed as a major component of learning about art. It is, therefore proper to continue with learning of cognitive codes at the Upper Primary School level to enable children to acquire adequate vocabulary with which to effectively communicate their perceptions, thoughts, meanings, and feelings about artworks.

### **The Upper Primary School Level**

Since language is best acquired through interaction, it is important that opportunities are provided for all students to verbalize their perceptions about artworks. As they try to find ways to express themselves and communicate their ideas, each student will clarify his or her own thinking about artworks. Additionally, as they listen to each other using different but similar adjectives to describe works of art, students can each acquire new words -- a much richer art language, as well as other ways of thinking about works of art. To help children to revise and apply the cognitive codes learned in aesthetics study, the learning process can be reversed. Rather than using works of art to generate cognitive codes, children should be encouraged to take note of the vocabulary generated over time and apply them in different situations involving talking about artworks.

As they strive to identify and describe the characteristics of the features of different artworks, children can realize that all works of art are constituted of lines, textures, colours, shapes, and forms. Teachers can make children aware that it is the way in which these art elements are organized and rendered by the artist that gives works of

art their unique looks and styles. Teachers should also encourage children to adopt their own ways of using the elements of art in their own art making activities. Some appropriate instructions and questions to guide children's thinking in relation to responding to the visual arts can be the following:

- Say the type of artwork it is, eg., a drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, etc.
- Say what this artwork is about, eg., a market; working on the farm; a durbar of chiefs, etc.
- Can you see any lines, eg., pencil marks, brushstrokes, chisel marks . . . in this work? . . . Where in the work are the lines close together? . . . Where are the lines widely spaced? . . . In which parts of this artwork are the lines thick or thin, straight or curved, parallel or crossed, slanting or upright? (These questions will help children describe the characteristics of lines in the artwork. The teacher may use this as stepping-stone to engaging children in talking about textures in works of art.)
- What colours do you see in this artwork?
- What kinds of shapes or forms do the colours create? or Do you see any shapes in this work? . . . Point to one shape that you can see and say what it looks like?
- Name all the items (things) that you can see in this work, eg., human beings, animals, buildings, umbrellas, pots, etc.

To engage children in talking about the expressive qualities of the work of art, the teacher can adopt the following dialogic approach.

- What do the things -- shapes, buildings, pots, etc that you have seen in this artwork tell you about in real life?
- How are the human beings dressed?
- From the way the human beings are dressed, what do you think they doing?
- Thinking about what the human beings in this artwork are doing, what use do you think the items you see in this artwork have for them?
- On what occasion(s) in your town, village, or anywhere you know in Ghana are the items you have seen in this work of art used?
- Which group of people use these items mostly?
- In your opinion, what story is the artist trying to tell us?

In the area of the performing arts, the teacher can initiate dialogue with children as part of ongoing studio performances. Playing recorded Ghanaian traditional music from an audio cassette tape and asking children to listen attentively, the teacher can ask the following questions.

- Are the sounds you here from the music coming from instruments or human voices or both?
- Give the names of as many of the musical instruments you can here as possible.
- Give the name of the musical type, eg., *Gume, Kpatsa, Adowa, Atsiagbeko, etc.*

- Which tribal or traditional dance group in Ghana is associated with this musical type?
- If you should dance to this music, would the movements be fast or slow? What tells you that?
- Tell the class about how this dance is performed.
- On what occasion is this dance type usually performed and at what place in particular, eg., the chief's palace, town-square, etc.?

At the Upper Primary School level, some children may understand some expressive gestures in dance movements. Where children show such an aptitude, teachers may discuss with some basic symbolic forms in dance movements. Otherwise, it would be enough to make children aware that some of the movements we make while dancing have meanings and significance for our lives.

Aesthetic learning in the verbal arts domain at the Primary School may concentrate on talking about stories and riddles. Questions and instructions to initiate such discussions can be:

- What is the story / riddle about?
- Mention the names of the characters in the story / riddle.
- Which of the characters in this story / riddle is most interesting to you? Why?
- Which of the characters is most uninteresting to you? Why?
- Imagining that you are one of the characters this story / riddle, tell the class how you would have acted. Why?
- What did you learn from this story / riddles?

- Why do you think people like to tell / listen to stories?
- Why do people play riddles?

It should be noted that the aesthetic learning activities for the Primary School explored here are not exhaustive, neither are they absolute. What is presented here is meant to provide teachers with a framework within which to approach aesthetic learning with youngsters. The principal method for aesthetics education today is the "look and see" method. Invariably, looking is a sufficient condition to enable children to see the things they care about in works of art. However, if circumstances such as a systematic dialogue (questioning) direct their attention, youngsters and novice viewers in general can see more subtle features of artworks than they usually notice spontaneously (Perkins, 1987/88). It is important, therefore, that teachers involve children in as much dialogue as possible during aesthetic learning activities. While the suggested questions seem basic, they can be used with older students who are beginners in art appreciation. Also, the framework of aesthetics explored here can be used as a basis for learning art criticism.

## **Art Criticism**

### **(Development of Critical Artistic Literacy)**

The art critical method is concerned with making evaluative judgements about works of art. In other words, the study of art criticism helps us to develop critical artistic literacy with which to make reasoned evaluative judgements about artworks. An extension of the aesthetic experience, criticism forms the final phase of the art analytical or interpretive process. It occurs after an interaction between an observer and a work of

art, as well as a clarification of the meanings found in the work have taken place. That is to say, the art critical method follows the same procedural steps in the aesthetic scanning (art appreciation) process -- identification, describing, and interpreting, but passing an evaluative judgement at the end of it turns the appreciation into a criticism. Stated differently, criticism is devoted to assessing, judging, or clarifying our impressions about the qualities of a work of art. Cleary (1991) notes that the art critical process involves considerations of unity or disunity, balance or imbalance, harmony, dissonance or contrast, activity or passiveness, and intensity in an artwork (p.95). Other considerations include the suitability of the medium (art material) used and the techniques employed in the rendition of elements, forms, and symbols to express the ideas (subject matter or thematic content) intended to be portrayed by the work. In its broadest sense, particularly with reference to non-Western societies such as Ghana, art criticism goes some steps further in speculating about artworks. It entails not only evaluating what the subject matter or thematic content of an artwork says about the intentions and interests of the artist, it also examines how the artwork functions in society and how the social context in which it is used influences its meaning. In this sense, therefore, art criticism examines indigenous artistic conventions and traditions -- the ideas underlying the exaggeration of parts or forms in certain artworks, as well as proverbial symbols, and how these give meaning and significance to the Ghanaian arts. In effect, it examines how far artistic forms and symbols expressions in any particular artwork, and the meanings they convey, are suitable for the specific purpose or occasion for which it is used at any given time. In brief, then, art criticism can be said to involve critically assessing and

clarifying the significance of our perceptual (aesthetic) experience. Our response to works of art is incomplete unless we have tried to determine the significance of our experience (Chapman, 1978, p. 75).

The step-by-step approach to responding to works of art outlined earlier on suggests that it is the aesthetic experience that lays the foundation for the art critical process. In other words, the quality of any aesthetic judgement is dependent on the effectiveness of the percipient's ability to perceive and interpret both the extrinsic and intrinsic qualities of the work of art. Based on this premise, Holt Jr. (1991) believes that individuals involved with art criticism must assess artworks by experiencing them from an aesthetic point of view before making judgements. In art-critical instruction, therefore, it is important to consider the artwork from an aesthetic point of view prior to evaluating it (p. 6). Personal experience, however, reveals that frequently, teachers tend to offer students narrow ready-made judgements of art by making such value-laden claims as: this work is 'pretty' 'famous', 'excellent', 'bad,' or 'poor', and the like. By making such claims, we tend to base our judgement on personal preference. Such an approach to art-critical judgement negates our judgement of the value or significance of our perceptual experience in a larger context (Chapman, 1978). Such a statement amounts to expressing a preference and not an aesthetic judgement. Thus by making a statement of this sort in the classroom, the teacher tends to impose his or her preference on the students, thereby hampering their critical inquiry about the artwork.

It is similar to being asked what kind of ice cream one likes best. There is no right or wrong answer, nor is it even a question of aesthetics. It is simply a matter of individual preference, inconsequential except for the individual making the selection . . . (Dobbs, 1998, p. 51).

It should be noted that although one may like a particular work of art, others may not like it. In as much as one cannot rule out the fact that opinion plays a part in art criticism, the value of a work of art cannot be exclusively a matter of opinion or preference. Art criticism involves an effort to figure out why we make certain judgements about a work of art and how best to support and justify them (Dobbs, 1998). If we hold any opinions about a work of art, then as critics it is incumbent upon us to explain how and why we arrived at those opinions. The art-critical method requires us to make reasoned judgements, that is, we must create suitable rationales for the judgements we make about works of art based on the contexts of our perceptual experiences. Learning to make reasoned arguments is central to art criticism. Emphasis of teaching should, therefore, be on involving students in learning how to create such arguments.

The formalist approach to art-critical instruction also has a tendency of restricting students' concerns to attending to only to the external visual qualities of the artwork with no interest in its contextual considerations. As responding subjects, however, we should not forget that assessing an aesthetic experience is a contextual act (Horner, 1988, p. 15). That is, we need to look for clues in the artwork that guide our search for philosophical and social ideas that will lead to an understanding of what the work is about (Cleary, 1991, p. 89). Art does not exist in a vacuum (Crawford, 1989). The origin of an artwork is ultimately tied to other aspects of society and culture. This point of view is in accord with the indigenous Ghanaian arts which are inseparable from day-to-day activities of the people. In these arts, the clues leading to our understanding what a work of art is about



rests in the use of proverbial images, symbols, and acts that are incorporated into the work. Knowing the socio-cultural context of an artwork can influence the mental frameworks, attitudes, and expectations of the critic. As such, the socio-cultural context can enlarge the scope of the critic's inquiry, thereby influencing the meanings and judgements he or she attributes to works of art. Thus, by articulating his or her assessment of both the formal and contextual aspects of artworks, a critic would not just inform, but also enlighten the audience on the type of significance the work holds.

What becomes important at this juncture, therefore, is for teachers to invent a logical structure of critical thought through which their students can develop a skill in making art-critical judgements (Chapman, 1978, p. 89). In this way, students can learn to avoid using value-loaded terms such as 'beautiful', 'gorgeous', 'ugly', and the like for judging works of art, as well as accepting prejudgements made by others, without offering pieces of evidence to support their judgements.

Art education is at least in part concerned with assisting students in having aesthetic experiences with artworks (or other artifacts or nature). Art-critical instruction should include teaching students how to achieve such experience through . . . attending to the [artifact] itself, understanding how to prepare themselves for looking at artworks (Holt Jr., 1991, p. 82).

It should be noted, however, that while it is proper to introduce children of the Primary School to observing or listening to and talking about what they see or hear in an artwork, they are not experienced enough to understand how a logical structural approach to analyzing artworks might work. The following are some approaches to involving children in art critical talk.

## **Art Criticism at the Primary School Level**

### **The Lower Primary School level**

Obviously, young children cannot be expected to make reasoned aesthetic judgements about artworks. This suggests a need for the teacher to act as an intermediary between children, the works of art, and the socio-cultural environment during critical talk about art. Children's motivation for art critical talk should be directed at helping them to develop insights into how they are related to everyday life for the purpose of refining their art-making and appreciation abilities; in short, for furthering their artistic development. Using an interactive approach, the teacher can lead classroom discussions throughout art critical lessons. Since in general, children's driving concerns in art are to make images to express some idea or experience, it becomes apparent that emphasis on children's critical talk about art be centered around the expressive and thematic contents of artworks. Formal concerns of artworks can be discussed within the thematic content.

The primary concern of an art critical lesson with children should be to help them identify meanings in works of art. To achieve this end, lessons in art criticism should be directed at talking about children's own artistic endeavours as a starting point, since children's own art makes a lot of sense to them. Because children's artistic endeavours are content-oriented (thematic oriented), it is natural to relate art critical talk about them to what the child is trying to express and to examine whether the artistic form or act he or she has created really expresses the intended idea. Children can recognize the subject matter of artworks and make descriptive statements about colour, shapes, and forms seen in a work. With guidance, they can talk about the similarities and differences between

works of art and describe how some art forms are used in their homes and communities. Art-critical instruction may, therefore, range from initiating talk about different art forms, bright and dull colours, through identification of images, objects, shapes, and the like. Young children's art-critical talk may also include expressing whether a work of art makes them feel happy, excited, or sad and why. Sample motivating questions to be asked by the teacher may include:

- What kind of artwork is this?
- What were you thinking about when you were making this work?
- Is your work made of bright or dull colours or both? Point to the bright, and then, the dull colours.
- Why did you choose these colours for your work?
- Mention the name of something you know in your environment (community) that is made of the colours you have used?
- Do you know what any of the colours you have used stands for? (Teacher may ask children to find out what the primary colours are associated with in the indigenous Ghanaian setting).
- Where or on what occasion in real-life do you often see these images, shapes, or forms that you have created in your work?
- These images, shapes, or forms in your work seem to have some special meanings to you. Tell the class what they mean to you.
- What does this work mean to you?
- For what purpose did you make this work?

- With this purpose and meaning on your mind, if you should do this work all over again, how would you go about making it better? (What ideas, images, colours, or shapes would you like to eliminate, change, or add to make your work better?)

Displaying works of art that relate to children's studio assignments, teachers may use similar questions and instructions to initiate class discussions.

- What comes into your mind upon seeing this work?
- What colours can you see in this work?
- Which of the colours are most attractive to you? Why?
- Which of the colours are not attractive? Why?
- What do the things (shapes or forms) that you see in this work look like in the natural environment?
- Mention the names of the shapes or forms that you can identify in this work.
- Which of the shapes or forms are most attractive to you? Why?
- Which of the shapes or forms are not attractive to you? Why?

Children can be helped to make comparisons between two different but similar artworks or their own artworks and works that relate to their studio assignments as follows. Choosing one of the artworks after the other, the teacher can ask children to tell the class the story it tells them. Classroom dialogue can be generated by means of such instructions and questions as:

- Looking closely at these two artworks, tell the class / point to where you can see shapes or forms that look alike. What makes you think they look alike?
- Which shapes or forms in these artworks do you think look different from each other? -- Will they look alike or different if they are made of the same colour or size?

To verify their findings, teacher may ask children to:

- Draw two or three shapes or forms that look alike in different colours, and then in different sizes;
- Draw two or three shapes or forms that look different in the same colour, and then in the same size.

Thereafter, the teacher can explain to children that shapes or forms of the same colour do not necessarily look alike. The same can be said about shapes or forms of the same size. The teacher can then ask children the following questions to round off the lesson.

- From the things you see in these two artworks do you think they are telling the same or different stories? Why?

### **The Upper Primary School Level**

With older children at the Upper Primary School, the teacher may include questions such as:

- From what direction is the light coming as shown by this work?
- How do the light and dark areas contribute to the composition?

- Closing your eyes or turning away from this work, what do you most remember about it that you can tell to a friend?
- After studying the work, list the details you see about it and draw it without looking at it. Now, looking at your drawing, tell the class why you were able to remember certain details and not others.
- Is this a work you would like to give to a friend as a gift? Why? or why not?

If the work of art is a performance such as a dance or drama, the questions may be framed as follows:

- What is going on here?
- Are the movements fast, slow, or vigorous?
- What do you think this performance is meant to signify?
- Does it make you feel happy, sad, or excited? Why?
- What do you think it should be used for? Why do you say so?

Other questions and instructions for older children can be as follows:

- What did you think when you first saw this work of art?
- How would you explain this work to someone else?
- How would you describe the emotion or feeling portrayed by the work?
- Describe how you would do this performance to portray this feeling in a better way.
- In your opinion, what is the importance of this work of art to the people of Ghana?

The instructions and questions that follow can be used for class discussions involving the verbal arts.

- How does a storyteller introduce his or her story in your community?
- Why do you think a storyteller has to introduce a story before narrating it?
- What do you think will happen if the storyteller does not introduce his or her story before narrating it?
- Why do we sing folk songs when telling stories?
- Usually, stories are interesting to listen to. There are, however, some stories that are not interesting. What do you think can make a story uninteresting?
- What can one do to make one's story interesting?
- When playing riddles, how should we behave in order to hear the questions well?
- What will you do if you are not able to answer a particular riddle?

The educational concerns of the arts discussed in this chapter suggest that arts education should foster a comprehensive understanding of the arts and their importance in the lives of children. Children should experience art by both creating it and talking sensibly about it. Such an understanding of the arts can be fostered through integration of studio practice with studying the artistic heritage (art history), the roles and functions of the arts in society (aesthetics), and developing critical artistic literacy (art criticism). An integrated Primary School art programme should reveal to children the importance of cultural artifacts, symbols, and artistic behaviours to everyday life. Artistic vocabulary

development is essential for developing artistic literacy for interpreting and appreciating the meaning, nature, and value of the arts. Perceptual learning, that is, learning to perceive the relationship between works of art and activities in everyday life can help to improve upon children's understanding of the arts. Teaching should be directed towards helping children to realize the relationship between their own artistic endeavours and the artistic form that exist in society.

It is common knowledge among teachers that there is no single approach to teaching and learning that can adequately represent to children the diversity inherent in art (Chapman, 1978). However, it is envisioned that the suggested dialogical method can help children to bring their perceptions, feelings, and experiences to bear not only on their art-making, but also on responding to works of art, a useful skill to carry on to the Junior Secondary School.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **ARTS EDUCATION AT THE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL**

Youngsters reaching the Junior Secondary School level are usually at the early adolescent stage of development with ages ranging from thirteen to about sixteen years old. Existing literature on developmental studies reveals that this period of transition from childhood to adulthood is frequently characterized by a profound self-consciousness of oneself as a member of society. Usually, young adolescents show sex-based preferences in social and cultural interactions (Chapman, 1978). Alongside developing social consciousness, youngsters of early adolescence are growing more critical in their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the environment in which they live. Whereas some of them may still experience the crisis of confidence that is often faced at the pre-adolescent stage, most young adolescents have a functioning understanding of events and activities in society. They develop a conscious awareness of art and are often eager to develop artistic skills (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1970, p. 39). Because of their critical self- and social consciousness, they tend to look for models for their own work, as well as role-models to emulate. This is reflected in their artwork by often creating romanticized images of their current heroes and heroines and their most intense personal interests (Chapman, 1978, p. 203).

## **Art Production**

### **(Personal Fulfilment Through Art Experience)**

For personal fulfilment through art activities, Junior Secondary School students prefer to work on themes or topics relating to human feelings and values such as empathy and affection towards others, love, hate, loneliness, poverty, popularity, and achievement. At this stage, those who have had a continual exposure and guidance in working with various types of art materials begin to reveal personal styles of creating art. They have a larger artistic vocabulary and studio experience in the use of materials, tools, and techniques in a variety of art forms. In creative works, young adolescent students try to compose or construct works of art appropriate to the thematic content they are exploring. They tend to show detailed features of images and expressive acts in their works of art. They also make conscious choices of appropriate media to use in creating the work. The challenge of teaching young adolescents art-making, therefore, requires a focus on encouraging them to clarify their emerging concepts about the values and beliefs held in the society in which they live. Using topics based on indigenous Ghanaian legends, fables, stories, and mythology to develop themes for art-making, teachers can help their students to reflect on their lived experiences; and students can comprehend these experiences in relation to daily events, activities, and artifacts in the larger Ghanaian environment.

In pictorial work, young adolescents tend to show a more conscious use of lights and shades and colour. Teaching should, therefore, emphasize the mixing of colour to show light and shadow, as well as intermediate colour areas of objects. In a lesson about

colour mixing, discussions should be geared towards helping students to be curious about colour and its variability in everything they see. It should make students aware that every object has different shades of colour; and that such things as the grass and leaves of trees, though appearing to be green, are actually made up of different shades of green. Students should be made to understand that it is the different shades of colour that give things their volume or form. Encouraging and guiding students to observe trees, rocks, buildings, landscapes, seascapes, river valleys, and other sceneries in the environment in which we live can be a useful means of learning about the variability of colour. Questions of the following type can help awaken students' curiosity about the variability of colour of various things they see. For example, in preparation for depicting landscape comprised of trees and rocks, students may be asked:

- What is the basic colour of the trunks and branches of the trees?
- How would you describe the look of the part of the tree trunk that is towards the sun light in relation to the part that is away from it?
- Is the colour of the leaves towards the source of light the same as those that are far away from it? Why?
- Is the bark of the trees smooth or rough textured?
- Have all the trees the same colour of leaves?
- Is the colour of the undergrowth (grass) the same as those of the leaves of the trees?
- What do you see about the colour of the grass near to you in relation to its colour far away from you?

- What parts of the rocks are lighter, dark, and darkest in colour?
- How would you describe the colour of the sky?
- In what way would you show all these observations in your artwork?

Having couched the idea of colour variability in such concrete terms, students can then be guided through the procedures of mixing colours -- by adding variable quantities of white and black -- to obtain different grades of tints and shades of each colour. The terms 'tints' and 'shades' should be explained alongside practical exercises involving the mixing of colours. Students should be made aware that lights and shades are not only applicable in painting but in all types of pictorial work such as drawing, illustration, collage, and mosaic.

Through guided observation, students of the Junior Secondary School are capable of discovering the spatial relationships of objects within an environment. Lessons in pictorial work should, therefore, emphasize the placement of images in space to show depth (perspective) through variations in relative sizes and details of texture, form, and colour. Taking students out on an excursion to the school compound or making them look through the classroom window and guiding them to focus their attention on observing an area into the distance, taking note of how the road, buildings, and telegraph poles become smaller in size, can be a way of learning about perspective in art-making. The following motivational questions are suggested to stimulate students' thinking during such lessons.

- How would you describe the changes you observe in the sizes of the buildings, trees, telegraph poles, and other things as they get farther away from you?
- Why do you think the changes in the sizes of the things occur?
- Do you see as much detail of the features of the objects that are far away as of those nearer to you? Why?
- How would you explain why we do not see the parts of objects that are overlapped by other objects that are in front of them?
- How would you describe the look of the land and the sky at the farthest point that your eyes can see?
- How would you show all these in your picture-making project?

Junior Secondary School students are capable of creating various forms of linear textures, and colour patterns. This is, therefore, an excellent time to involve them in discussing the principles that guide the making of designs. This can be based on helping students discover within their own works such qualities as rhythm, unity among images, forms, shapes, and textures, colour harmony, colour contrast, repetition of forms and shapes, evidence of movement, and balance in the rendition of the composition. Students can recognize functional forms that are present in both their natural and man-made environment. As such, teaching goals should be directed to helping students to develop skills in perceiving the expressive meanings in their own works of art. In other words, teaching should involve students in discovering symbolism in such things as lines,

colours, and Ghanaian traditional motifs that appear in their pictorial works. Questions to help students probe for symbolic meanings in their works might include:

- How did you come by this motif ...or how did you develop this pattern?  
Why do you find it appealing?
- For what purpose would you use this pattern?
- How would you arrange this motif or pattern to give a beautiful design?
- If your design were to be printed in a fabric, what colours would you use for a happy occasion such as an out-dooring ceremony for a newly born baby?  
. . . What colours would you use for a sad occasion such as a funeral rite?
- What kinds of line can you use in a design -- thick, thin, perpendicular, horizontal, diagonal, slanted, spiral, zig-zag, broken?
- How would you use lines to show an action such as speeding, flowing, raining, whirling?

In three-dimensional work, young adolescents are capable of working with different materials and tools. They have a tendency to make conscious choices among available materials in relation to the ideas they want to express. At times, adolescents may exhibit great skills in making useful objects with a strong perfectionist approach, especially when working with their favourite materials. Although it is important that teaching should encourage students to make sensitive choices of media, care must be taken that this does not lead them into premature specializations in specific media. At this stage of their education, students are still undergoing development, both mentally and

physically, with a variety of interests and challenges which change as they grow to maturity. Usually, they tend to have very keen interest in, and also be sensitive to, causes and effects. These characteristics make it an excellent time for encouraging students to experiment with various art media and different art forms. Some common art media for three-dimensional work in the Ghanaian environment include clay, fibres, wood, metal, calabash, leather, bamboo, rattan, shells, seeds, and papier mache. The students' perfectionist drive should, thus, be directed by providing them with step-by-step instruction in the procedures and techniques of using specific materials. Teaching should emphasize the fact that the hallmarks of skill perfection in art are consistent practice, patience, and persistence, encouraging students to emulate these characteristics.

With guidance, students can practice indigenous Ghanaian methods for pottery making such as coiling, pinching, and scooping to make such simple household utensils as grinding dishes, food bowls, ladles, and plates. They can do sculpture using the processes of building with found objects, modelling clay, carving of soft wood, and casting of bee wax. They can learn to weave door mats by hand or on wooden frames through simple knotting processes, using fibres from coconut husk, corn shuck, raffia, and the stem of the plantain tree. Students of the Junior Secondary School are also capable of cutting out patterns from cardboard for stencil printing purposes. They can practice block printing from various surfaces such as wood and lino blocks. With proper supervision, they can learn to do resist dyeing batik, tie-and-dye, and stitchery (tritik) processes. Care should be taken not to expose students to the hazards of dyeing chemicals. To avoid any such hazards, dyes must be of vegetable, earth, or animal

origins, particularly, those that are extracted from local resources. Safe dyeing chemicals include simple fabric mordanting materials such as common salt, baking soda, lime, and iron oxide obtained by soaking iron filings in water. To foster technical skills, classroom dialogue should be centered around the identification of appropriate tools and step-by-step approaches to these processes. Sample questions and instructions for guiding students thoughts may be as follows.

- There are many materials for making sculpture in the Ghanaian environment.  
Which of them do you know about?
- Some of the materials are more appropriate for particular sculptural processes.  
Which of them do you think are most appropriate for carving, modelling, building, and casting?
- If you were to carve a stool or an *Akuaba* doll, would clay an appropriate material to use? Why? or Why not?
- What tools do you need to make a wood carving?
- Would you need the same tools in clay modelling? Why or why not?

In the area of the performing arts, teachers need to be aware of the fact that many early adolescents, because of their characteristic nature of being self-conscious, tend to be shy when it comes to dancing. Hence, the more informal the presentation of lessons in such an activity can be, the more comfortable it would be for both the teacher and student. Teachers should, however, not construe this idea to mean adopting a "laissez faire" approach to teaching where students are left to do whatever they think fit. A good



way to do away with the overall sense of anxiety that contributes to the feeling of self-consciousness is careful planning that negates regimental methods in the classroom. Such a planning should adopt an easy-going, casual, but systematic approach that offers students opportunities to practice the skills and attitudes which the lesson intends to develop.

As it is at the Primary School level, all dance movement lessons should begin with slow, casual movements. These may include swinging the arms, and then the legs across the mid-line of the body (Hendrick 1980). Lessons may also include other movements that can enhance students' ability to keep their balance, such as standing astride and twisting the body (without moving the legs) to the utmost extent to the left, and then to the right, repeating the motion while keeping the eyes shut. Other activities involving parallel and cross-section patterns of arm and leg movements, as well as backwards, forwards, and sideways movements with a variety of faster and slower rhythms, can also contribute to enhancing students' ability to keep their balance. It is thought that these activities enhance shifting control centres between the hemispheres of the brain (Hendrick, 1980, p. 55).

Once students have gained confidence in working their legs and arms freely, in time with the rhythm of the music, they can be introduced to basic movements that require leg and arm coordination. This can begin by involving them in marching and other movements that require swinging of the arms to music or poetic rhymes that emphasize response to rhythmic beat. Dancing freely to popular traditional Ghanaian music such as the *Boboobo (Boborbor)* or *Kpanlogo*, which requires free movement of

the arms and legs, can also help students to gain arm-leg coordination experience. Another means can be by asking students to pretend to be walking by alternatively lifting and lowering the feet and pumping the arms as is done when jogging, according to the rhythm and beat of a music. Rhythmic activities should be varied so as to bring about a variety of tempo.

In as much as it has often been argued that most folk dances tend to be too complicated in their original forms for outright imitation by youngsters, they can be simplified. Students should not be burdened with the intricate movements and their combinations right from the outset. Such an approach might confuse them as their efforts to imitate the movements might come to naught, thereby killing their interest. Teachers can pick one item at a time, beginning with the simplest leg, arm, or body movement and then working through it gradually. Once students have perfected it, more intricate combinations can be introduced. It can be fruitful if one or two specialists from a popular local dancing troupe, such as the Ghana Dance Ensemble or the like, are invited to demonstrate how to do some indigenous Ghanaian dance patterns and to answer questions that may be posed by students.

In terms of music, students may be invited to bring records or tapes of popular music from home to share with their peers. While recorded audio tapes are a good source of music for dance lessons, music can be provided by students using Ghanaian percussion instruments such as drums, gongs, the xylophone, rattles, and tambourines. Accompanied by Ghanaian traditional folk songs, this can be an effective way of bringing the indigenous culture to the school. At the Junior Secondary School level, many students

may have already acquired some experience in some basic traditional drum patterns and popular songs. Teacher can utilize these students as peer assistants in a participatory learning situation. Furthermore, lessons in dance movements can be more effective if assistance is sought from local drummers, soloists, and songsters to help with the teaching of drum patterns and songs. It must, however, be remembered that such lessons should begin with the simplest rhythms, following a step-by-step degree of complexity of the popular traditional beats of Ghana. This may range from simple gong beats and clapping of hands through a variety of intricate drum patterns. Care must be taken not to involve students in too many different music and dance patterns at any particular time in order to avoid confusing the students. It is also important to offer students repeated opportunities for practice, particularly when learning new dance and music patterns. The following is a sample instructional dialogue to motivate students.

- Listen to the rhythm of the leading drum pattern. What beat do you find to be predominant?
- How would you present this beat through clapping of your hands?
- How well do you think you can emulate the dance movements introduced by the dancer?
- In what ways do you think one can acquire new dance movements when dancing with friends in a group?
- In what ways can one gain competence and confidence in executing a particular dance pattern?

- Which of these do you like most; dancing alone or dancing in a group of two or more people? Why?
- Among the dance movements practised by the class so far, which particular ones have been difficult for you to execute?
- In what ways can you overcome this difficulty?
- How can one follow the rhythm of the music while dancing?
- Mention one or two Ghanaian folk songs that you wish your classmates to learn to sing.
- If your friend has a difficulty in doing a particular dance pattern in which you are well versed, how would you help him or her out?
- If you were invited to play a traditional musical instrument, which of them do you like most? Why?

Teaching and learning in the verbal arts at the Junior Secondary School should be concerned with building on the conception of verbal art as a mode of speaking. Students should be made aware that the verbal arts are constructed in terms of special formulations or usages of language within the speeches we make. The aesthetic (artistic) quality of verbal art resides in the way one uses language to express one's ideas so that this usage attracts the listener's attention in an uncommon way. Often, the special way in which one expresses one's ideas through the verbal arts suggests to the listener not to take what the words mean literally, but to interpret what is said in relation to the occasion or context within which it is said in order to grasp an understanding of the

message being communicated. Students also need to know that normally such messages are accompanied by gestures, and special behaviours, drums, and horns that collectively constitute the mode of communication. As such, verbal art is often conceived as a performance. Teaching and learning should thus be geared towards helping students to learn the processes involved in performing various indigenous Ghanaian verbal arts. Classroom dialogue may be initiated as follows.

- Much historical understanding of the people of Ghana can be derived from Ghanaian mythology. Tell a short story about a myth you know.
- Write a paragraph of your impressions (what you have learned or think) about a Ghanaian myth you have heard.
- Your family is travelling to a very distant place. Say a short libationary prayer for the purpose.
- Describe the processes involved in a libationary prayer performance you have observed.
- Members of your class will soon take part in a riddle competition. As one of the contestants, construct four riddles to use for the contest. Write down the explanation and answer to each riddle you construct.
- How are riddles introduced in your tribal language?
- We know that each royal stool or skin has a praise-name (appellation) which is assigned to the chief of the clan or tribe. What is the praise-name of your clan or tribe? What other praise-names do you know?
- Make a list of proverbs you know or heard from people.

- What are proverbs used for?
- Your class is soon going to graduate. Write a short speech for the purpose using some proverbs that suit the occasion.
- Among the people of Ghana, funeral dirges are said to be performed mostly by women. Why? Write some statements of funeral dirges you have heard.
- At what stage of a funeral are dirges recited or sung?

## **Art History**

### **(Appreciation of the Artistic Heritage)**

As has been recommended for the Primary School grades, building the young adolescent's sense of the artistic heritage can best be achieved through an experiential approach to learning. Having learnt at the Primary School about the importance of works of art to society, and why people make works of art to look as they do, students of the Junior Secondary School can be introduced to basic methods of doing art historical inquiry. Such an approach to art historical learning can be based on personal surveys of collections of works of art. An important way by which to bring students to the awareness of the artistic heritage is to select works of art that will represent the heritage. From time to time, the teacher can arrange for the student to meet and have dialogues with local artists and craftworkers, to learn about their interests, motivations, and methods of working. In addition to visits to art museums, galleries, and workplaces of artists and craftworkers, the teacher can invite to the school artists who work in varied media, so that the artists can show their works and share their ideas with students. This

is particularly important for the young adolescent student, who by nature might be looking for role models to influence his or her artistic endeavours.

Since the basic learning objective here is to expand the students' understanding of the scope of the arts in society, it is of utmost importance that chronological surveys of works of art are avoided. This is also because of the discovery that the indigenous Ghanaian arts, an aspect of African or non-Western arts, do not lend themselves to chronological studies. Furthermore, while youngsters of the Junior Secondary School can understand broad distinctions of time, for instance, between "now" and "long ago", at their level of development, their concepts of historical periods is weak (Chapman, 1978, p.195). This is not to suggest, however, that dates need not be a part of the historical study of the Ghanaian arts. While young adolescents may generally tend to have weak concepts of chronology, a knowledge of when an artwork was made (or its origin), especially if associated with a particular event in time, can expand their understanding of the work. A format for engaging students' attention in the process of studying and discussing the works of art is noted below.

Dividing the class into groups, each containing three or four students, the teacher should give each group an artwork and ask the members to choose from a collection of other artworks some works that have something in common with the one given to their group. The bases of comparison to be explored may include: subject matter (artist's concerns); interpretation or meaning; purpose; and social significance of the work. Depending on the requirements of the lesson and grade level of the class, the comparison may be based on two or more of these topics at a time. At the end of a selection period,

students of each group should describe the similarities in the works they have chosen based on the topic for the lesson. The following sample questions may be used to guide students in describing their findings.

- What features of these works would you say makes them similar to each other?
- How would you explain the similarities you have identified in these works?
- Of the works of art being studied, which two are most similar to each other?
- What features do you find in these works that you think makes them differ from each other in some way?

The findings of each group can be recorded in writing for class discussions to ascertain their validity.

Another approach is to engage students in a process of finding out the differences in characteristics among works of art. Here, each group of three students will be given three works of art marked 'A', 'B', and 'C'. It is important that each of the three works bear some resemblance to its counterparts. For instance, the works can be all collages, all carvings, all paintings, and so on. Putting side-by-side works 'A' and 'B', the students in the group should analyze the differences existing between the two. Works 'B' and 'C', and then, 'C' and 'A' should also be analyzed in like manner, and the findings recorded in writing. Questions of the same type used in analyzing the similarities among artworks can be asked at this point. For example:

- What characteristic features can you see in work 'A' that do not exist in work 'B'?
- What can you observe in work 'B' that is absent in work 'C'?



- What are the features of work 'C' that make it differ from work 'A'?
- Of the works of art being studied, which two mostly differ from each other?
- Which two of them would you say least differ from each other?

The findings here can also be read to the whole class. Each group's findings can then be discussed by the class in relation to the works to find out their validity.

Having learnt to analyze the similarities and differences in works of art, students of the Junior Secondary School can now be guided to develop their thinking, as well as modest research skills for discovering relevant and personally meaningful art historical information. A simple format for engaging students in an authentic, visually creative process in art historical inquiry should be one through which the youngsters will learn to explore some very basic questions about the 'what', 'who', 'where', 'when', and 'why' about works of art. For example, the first question raised about a work of art under this format is: What is this work of art about?

The 'what' about a work of art implies its content -- what the work is about. Ideally, content as applied here embraces the subject matter or concerns of the artist, that is, the meaning the artist intends for the work. It has been noted that underlying the creation of any artwork are ideas, feelings, or information which its author (the artist) is trying to convey to the viewer of the work. Although there is no assurance that the viewer will receive the exact meaning intended for an artwork, it is clear that through a critical study of the work, students might get at the content the artist is concerned with. Knowing the content of the work will enable students to interpret it in a meaningful way.

The second question, who made the work of art?, is basically an inquiry about the artist. An inquiry about the who authored a work of art may reveal much about the artist, his or her cultural background, social and psychological disposition, and other circumstances which influenced his or her creation of the work.

A third question of the art historical inquiry format deals with where the work was made. It has been established that people all over the world have always been making art to serve various human needs. Learning about the artist tends to place the work in a context of time and cultural influence (Qualley, 1995). Inquiring about where an artwork was made raises some questions about the relationship between the work and the culture of the society or epoch out of which it came. By exploring this relationship, the student will discover what social and cultural influences and practices surrounded the creation of the artwork. Knowing what circumstances influenced the creation of a particular work of art will lead the student to an understanding of the work. That is, the student will discover what the work's meaning, as well as its purpose and significance, were at the time of its creation. Frequently, viewing an artwork in a museum, removed from the context of its creation, may have an effect on how the work is interpreted. Thus, studying the artwork in relation to the social and cultural context from which the artwork came can help the student clarify its meaning, thereby alleviating distortions in interpretation that might occur if the work is viewed out of its cultural context.

A fourth question has to do with when the work of art was created. The use of dates is a necessary but partial answer. Dates are inadequate as far as studying the essences of artworks are concerned. The question should embrace inquiries about the

social, cultural, political, religious, and socioeconomic events of the timeframe within which the work was created. This can explain much about why the work looks the way it does. It can offer the student additional insights into the purpose for which the work of art was created, and thus, the meaning the artist may have intended for it.

A fifth question to raise in the art historical method involves why the artwork was made. Underlying the creation of any work of art are reasons why it was done. The creation of artworks, past and present, have been necessitated by various human needs. Since the purposes and significance of any artwork are connected to the reasons that lie at the heart of its production, it is by a thorough exploration of these reasons that the student will come to understand the essence of an artwork. Qualley (1995) states succinctly that an artwork is authentic and honest if it is intentional and purposeful. Thus, knowing that works of art do not originate in a vacuum, but that people throughout the world create various forms of art to serve different human needs, will influence the students' ways of looking at, responding to, and giving meaning to works of art.

By learning to answer the 'what', 'who', 'where', 'when', and 'why' questions about works of art, the Junior Secondary School student could construct an art historical understanding through personal experience.

## **Aesthetics**

### **(Understanding of the Nature of Art and Its Role in Society)**

It has been noted that while much can be learnt about works of art from their physical appearances, much of what they can offer in terms of their meanings and

significance are not salient. An effective appreciation of a work of art requires an intelligent application of perceptual and cognitive resources. Being more conscious and critical about the nature of things, young adolescent students of the Junior Secondary School can respond to more subtle features of artworks if offered a systematic guidance to appreciating works of art. It is, however vital that the structures designed to guide students' thinking when responding to artworks should foster in them abilities to: look actively, systematically, and probingly; marshal their previous knowledge and experience to ponder the puzzle a work of art presents; and make connections between the artwork and its cultural and historical contexts (Perkins, 1987/88, p. 37). The process of scanning works of art is called "aesthetic scanning" (Hamblen, 1988). Basically, this involves an examination of the sensory, formal, technical, expressive, and representational aspects of artworks. Another term used for aesthetic scanning is "perceptual learning", interpreted as "education of vision", or "learning to look/looking to learn" (Haanstra, 1994, p. 54). In this thesis, however, the terms "aesthetic scanning" and "perceptual learning" are interpreted as "education of vision and hearing" or "learning to look and listen/looking and listening to learn". The extensions have been added to the original interpretations of the terms to include the verbal arts. Following is a structural approach to aesthetic scanning (perceptual learning) consisting of four steps of activities to be followed by the Junior Secondary School student, namely: 1) identifying the artwork; 2) taking inventory of items in the artwork; 3) describing the technical qualities of the artwork; and 4) interpreting the artwork.

## **Identifying the Artwork**

The first step, identifying the artwork, embraces naming the type of work it is, for example, a painting, sculpture, or pottery, music and dance drama, then giving the title of the work of art, materials (media) used, the artist, date of production, size of the work, and place where it was made. Here are some motivational instructions and questions to guide students' thinking.

- What type of artwork is this? or What sort of event or performance is this?
- Of what material(s) is this work made? (If it is a visual art form).
- State the title of this work?
- What are its dimensions? (If it is a visual art form).
- Who made this artwork?
- When was it made? (State the date or period when the work was made).
- Where was it made?
- Where can this artwork be found, that is, where is it located, or who owns it, e.g. in the studio of the artist, in lobby of the Manhyia Palace, or the Centre for National Culture, Kumasi?

## **Taking Inventory of Items in the Artwork**

The second step, taking inventory of items in the artwork, involves naming the immediate or readily recognizable features in the work of art and describing them. These include formal elements -- dots, lines (brushstrokes, tool marks), colours, shapes, forms, textures -- in the artwork. Other items are human beings, houses, and other objects. For

instance, one may talk about a boy wearing a pair of shorts with a basket of plantains on the head and a cutlass in his right hand; a bare-chested man with a garden gun over his left shoulder, walking some distance behind the boy; a big dog running ahead of the boy; a large baobab tree in the foreground, standing by a narrow path that winds its way through a grassland and rocky terrain; in the background are a range of mountains characterized by boulders; the grassland is interspersed with trees. In the performing arts domain, one might speak about a shrine, a group of people gathered in a semi-circular formation; an arrangement of men and women with various types of indigenous Ghanaian musical instruments -- drums, gongs, clappers -- at one part of the inner part of the semi-circle; two men wearing raffia skirts, dancing within the semi-circular space; one of the dancers has a horse tail whisk in his right hand, and the other, a ceremonial state sword.

The description includes stating the characteristics or features of the items named. For instance, lines of various thicknesses are created by brushstrokes (brushwork), the lines are bold and tend to be rendered diagonally. (Students should be made aware that term 'line' or 'lines' in an artwork refers to brushstrokes as in paintings; pen, pencil, or charcoal marks as in drawings or illustrations; and tool marks as are found on the surfaces of sculptures). The continuity of the colour of the grass is broken in several parts by the colour rock surfaces and tree trunks, creating a colour pattern of greens, browns, and greys. The trees are in full bloom with fresh green leaves. The man with the gun has an animal skin waist band to which are attached small animal skin bags, a talisman, and a calabash. The half-naked boy is slim and the basket he is carrying is made from rattan. The plantain is green and fresh and the dog has brown, fluffy hair.

The description at this stage should not include the qualities, that is, how students think the artwork was accomplished. The important thing for them is to observe the work, take an inventory of what is in it, and describe what they have seen.

Some questions and instructions to guide students' thought might include:

- Observing the work, make an inventory of the elements of art you can see in it, e.g. lines, colours, shapes, etc.
- Describe the characteristics of each element you have named, that is, are the lines close together or widely spaced? Are the lines thick or thin, upright or slanted, straight or curved, parallel or crossed?
- What colours do you see? Explain what the shapes shown by the colours look like?
- Can you see any shape or form in this artwork that stands for some idea you know about in Ghanaian traditional life, e.g. *Adinkra*, linguist staff, or stool symbol? Mention its name and explain what it looks like.
- Name other items, e.g. buildings, human beings, trees, etc.
- Describe what each of these items looks like, e.g. the shrine is circular in shape and painted all white; the walls of other buildings are rectangular in shape and have black and grey patterns drawn on them; the dancers in the centre of the semi-circle have their bodies painted white with zig-zag patterns drawn on them. Also, each dancer has a bunch of amulets tied around the upper arm of his right hand, and so on.

### **Describing the Technical Qualities of the Artwork**

The third step, describing the technical qualities of the artwork, involves describing the method or range of procedures used by the artist in accomplishing the work. This aspect of description includes explaining how the artist has arranged or composed the items (elements) found in the artwork to give it its unique appearance. It involves describing the relationship existing among these items -- whether they are close together, far apart, or arranged in groups -- in the artwork. It also involves explaining whether the arrangement of these items show unity, proportion (perspective), rhythm, movement, repetition, contrast, harmony, and balance in the artwork. Some examples of motivational questions and instructions may include asking students to:

- Describe the procedural steps (methods) the artist may have followed in composing this work.
- If the artwork is a painting, from the nature of the appearance of lines (brushwork), state if the artist has applied the colour heavily or lightly, gently (carefully) or boldly, smoothly, or roughly.
- Are the colours applied raw or mixed? How do you know? For example, state whether the colours blend with each other or they stand apart from each other in the work.
- State whether the colours are bright or dull.
- If the artwork is a drawing, where do the lines stand out most clearly in the work?



- In pictorial works in general -- painting, drawing, collage -- state where in the work are the shapes, forms, and textures most clearly seen.
- If the artwork is a sculpture, describe the surface features of the work as a result of tool marks. What do the marks look like? On which parts of the work do the marks create rough / smooth textures?
- Describe the overall nature of the artwork, that is:
  - 1) In which part of the work does a particular shape, form, or texture, or a group of these elements (items) repeat themselves?
  - 2) Do these repetitions show any pattern(s) in the work? State whether or not the arrangement of shapes and forms in the work show rhythm and balance.
  - 3) State whether the items -- human beings, buildings, trees, and objects -- are drawn close together or scattered about in the work.
  - 4) How has the artist shown proportion among the items in the artwork?
  - 5) State how the artist has used the arrangement of items in the artwork to show perspective (depth or distance).

In terms of the performing and verbal art forms, giving an inventory of items in the artwork and describing the technical qualities of the work (steps one and two of the aesthetic scanning process) may be done simultaneously. This is to enable the young adolescents to concentrate on describing in an effective manner what they hear and see as the performance is in progress. The teacher may initiate class discussions using the following examples of instructions and questions to guide students' thinking.

- Make a list of the musical instruments being played.
- Describe the nature of sound (noise) you here from each instrument.
- From which of the instruments do you hear the highest / lowest tone of sound?
- Note whether or not the instruments are accompanied by singing.
- Is the singing in the form of chanting or clearly expressed in words?
- State whether or not the music is accompanied by storytelling.
- Describe how the dance type that goes with this musical type is performed, that is:
  - 1) What are the basic movements of the legs?
  - 2) How are the arms, the shoulders, the waist, and other parts of the body moved as a part of the dance pattern?
  - 3) Note if the dance pattern includes hopping, stamping, intermittent running, stooping, or shaking.
  - 4) What types of gestures or facial expressions does the dancer incorporate into the dance pattern that you think signifies something else in life or an idea, e.g. pleading for mercy, showing sorrow, and so on?

To initiate class discussions involving the verbal arts, students may be asked to listen attentively, taking note of whatever they hear. The teacher may then ask:

- What statements do you hear?
- What forms do the statements take, e.g. storytelling, riddles, or appellations?
- Are the statements accompanied by drum / horn language?

- State if the statements are long and continuous or flowing (e.g. as in storytelling).
- Note if the statements are interjected with singing, drumming, and dancing.
- Indicate if the statements are in the form of questions and answers (e.g., as in riddles).
- State if the statements are short and repetitive (e.g. as in appellations).
- Note if the statements are accompanied by crying and wailing (e.g. as in funeral dirges).

### **Interpreting the Artwork**

The fourth step of the process of scanning works of art, interpreting the artwork, has to do with recognizing representational, expressive and/or symbolic qualities exemplified by the artwork. It also includes investigating the underlying Ghanaian social, cultural, religious, economic, philosophical, historical, or political ramifications of these expressions and symbol systems. The materials for interpreting a work of art are provided by the pieces of visual and auditory evidence obtained at the second and third stages of the aesthetic scanning process, namely, taking inventory of items in the artwork, and describing the artwork. A review of the Ghanaian arts would reveal that most of them are expressed through proverbial images, symbols, and acts. Thus, the clues to understanding a particular artistic form or act rest with our ability to interpret the meanings underlying the proverbs and maxims that are associated with it. Since proverbs are dependent upon cultural expression and perception, it is necessary to base

our interpretations of them on the logical principles underlying their usage, which are meaningful to members of the Ghanaian community and guide them in their ways of life. Stated differently, to be able to meaningfully interpret proverbial sayings or maxims associated with symbolic artistic expressions, we need to understand the cultural attitudes of the Ghanaian people towards the creation and use of their proverbs and the traditional genres that are essential for their interpretation. Proverbs are not autonomous forms of speech; they are a part of the general oral tradition employed to emphasize or clarify important points in a speech, and to embellish the entire oral tradition. Students should be made aware that the decision to employ a particular proverb or maxim in a particular situation is influenced by the context of its usage. Thus, to effectively interpret and appreciate a given proverb or maxim requires an ability to find the correlation of the text of such proverb or maxim and the social situation(s) or context(s) in which it occurs. Such a correlation is indispensable if one should know the meaning and significance of any particular proverb or maxim in use. It is within such a knowledge that lies the meaning and value of the artwork with which the particular proverb or maxim is associated.

It is also important for the Junior Secondary School student to be made aware that in the Ghanaian arts, lines, colours, images, and shapes are not mere elements of design; depending on rendering, each can be a symbolic representation of an idea. Teachers should, therefore, use this opportunity to introduce students to identifying such features in works of art and finding out their meanings and significance to the Ghanaian people as part of the art interpretive process. Central to a meaningful interpretation of artworks

is that meanings put forth by students should be in accord with these pieces of visual and auditory evidence. At this stage, students become engaged in critical reflection on their lived experiences in relation to the collected pieces of visual and auditory evidence as each strives to develop a meaningful interpretation of the artwork. This renders interpretation of the artwork the most creative and rewarding exercise in art appreciation.

Teachers can foster meaningful interpretation of artworks with such questions as:

- Indicate what seems to you the important information this work of art seeks to portray, e.g. a Ghanaian way of life.
- How do you know this? This can be explained as for example, the boy carrying a bunch of plantain with a cutlass in one hand and the man with the gun over his left shoulder are an indication that the two persons are returning from the farm. It also shows that they are peasant farmers.
- What kind of general feeling does the work tend to give? Or state the general atmosphere created by the work. For instance, the freshness of the grass and leaves of the trees, the plantain and rattan basket show that the scenery is within the tropical wooded grassland zone of Ghana. The half-nakedness of both man and child is an indication of a hot day.
- How would you relate the work of art to its cultural background, that is, indigenous Ghanaian events or rites such as child-naming, funeral, festival, or religious celebration in your village or town? Here is an example. The painted bodies of the two dancers in the arena, their raffia skirts, the amulets around their arms and the animal tail whisk and ceremonial swords they are carrying

in their hands, the music and dance type, and the fact that the performance is taking place near the shrine house, all show that they are both mediums of deities performing cult music and dance during a religious ceremony.

In place of the above question, students can be asked to relate the work of art to stories they know, or personal experiences.

- What symbolic expressions, musical types, dance movements, or statements in the work of art do you use to support your interpretation? An example here may be that: the roundness of the shrine house and its white colouring (painting) indicates the sacredness and purity of the event, which is typical of indigenous Ghanaian religious ceremonies.
- State the uses or functions of the work. That is, what kind of purpose or occasion do you suggest it could be suitable for? For example, one may say, it is or can be used as part of the activities involved in offering sacrifices to the ancestors and other deities.
- What do you think the artist meant for the audience? Here, one might say, for example, that the artist portrays an aspect of life in Ghana. The items in the work show various activities and characteristics of things in the Ghanaian environment.

A lesson such as this can be rounded off with the teacher asking the students to write about their individual perceptual understanding of the artwork. The emphasis of this

narrative writing should be on the students' understanding of how the artwork relates to the cultural background of its author. It should also include the role and function of the artwork in society, that is, helping students to learn about how our social, cultural, and physical environments are revealed in our artistic endeavours. Students should be made aware that it is by relating the items identified in an artwork to the cultural background of the artist or the culture within which the work is produced that we can interpret it in an effective manner. Teachers can draw on students' interpretation of artworks as a stepping stone to involve them in doing art criticism, which follows in the next section.

### **Art Criticism**

#### **(Development of Critical Artistic Literacy)**

At the Junior Secondary School level, students are mature and experienced enough to follow a logical structure of thought by which to develop a skill for reasoned critical talk about artworks. Chapman outlines a three-phased approach to art criticism on which art-critical instruction can be based, namely:

- i. carefully observing facts of a situation (i.e., perceiving);
- ii. analyzing facts and relationships among facts in order to discover their implications (i.e., interpreting); and
- iii. stating criteria and offering reasons for our decisions about a particular art experience (i.e., judging) (1978, p.75).

Since the first two phases -- perception and interpretation -- have been duly dealt with in the previous section on aesthetics learning, this discussion is concerned with the third

phase only, namely: 'a criterion for judging artworks and offering evidence to support the judgement.

A criterion may be defined as a set of guidelines (a standard) for judging things. Choosing criteria for judging an artwork should be based on their suitability or appropriateness to the work in question, allowing us to recognize different forms of excellence in works of art. The structural approach to art-critical instruction described by Chapman centres on judgements about the **design, subject matter, use of materials, and functions** of art forms. A fifth criterion, **evaluation and judgement**, has been added as a means to helping students learn how to draw meaningful conclusions to their art-critical talks.

**Design** refers to the way in which formal elements and other explicit features of a work of art are organized, structured, or rendered to give the work its physical look. This definition holds well for the visual arts and some categories of the performing arts that are physically observable such as dance, and dramatic or mimetic acts. To embrace the verbal arts, this definition is extended to include how sounds and words are arranged and rendered by artists to give the patterns and types of music and verbal statements that we hear. Each work of art has a being of its own which consists of a dynamic integration of parts -- visual and auditory elements -- into an organic whole. It is the interrelations among these parts (elements) that constitutes the overall design of a work of art. The elements of the artwork should reveal a kind of order, that is, a deliberate arrangement and composition of lines, colours, forms, images, musical sounds, and verbal statements,



as well as relationships among them. The composition of the work should show some kind of balance, rhythm, dramatic contrast, harmony, and unity-in-diversity in the arrangement of the visual or auditory elements. In brief, the design of an artwork should be such that it would hold the viewer's attention and intensify his or her curiosity, perception, thought, and feeling. In the indigenous Ghanaian arts, the artist traditions and stylistic conventions leading to the exaggeration of parts of some figures to emphasize certain ideas, and the incorporation of symbolic expression in artistic forms and acts, are all parts of the design of an artwork. In the verbal arts, the elements of design are reflected by the entire mode of communication. This includes the mode of speaking, the gestures, miming, or acts, as well as the horn or drum language that accompany the voice message. It is by these means that the intended mood or feeling of the verbal performance is conveyed. Lessons in relation to design in artworks should, therefore, emphasize this point. An example of beginning a dialogue about the design of an artwork follows.

- Is this work of art two-dimensional or three-dimensional? How do you know?
- What would you call this artwork -- a painting, collage, carving, casting, weaving, dancing, drum music, libationary prayer, or what have you?
- Describe how you think the artist may have composed this work.
- Observe closely the arrangement of shapes, objects, or images in this artwork. Where do you see order, harmony, rhythm, contrast, counterchange, or disorder?

- What patterns do you see in the arrangement of colours, lines, textures, images, forms, symbols, movements and gestures?
- What kinds of indigenous Ghanaian artistic styles do you see in the work?
- In pattern works, describe what the arrangement of the motifs look like when viewed in the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal directions. Which of these three categories of arrangements seems most accurate?
- In music and verbal arts, state if the arrangement of sound patterns or verbal statements you are hearing (or heard) show order or disorder, harmony or disharmony. Describe the rhythm -- slow or fast, complex or simple, changing or stable?
- State if the sound is loud or soft, shrill or mellow, high-pitch or low-pitch.

**Subject matter** implies the theme, topic, or underlying idea of the work of art. Often, the subject matter of an artwork may not be stated, yet be recognizable. The subject matter of a work of art should be treated such that the realities intended to be depicted would be readily recognizable. For instance, the subject or theme of an artwork is readily recognizable if depicted through images, expressions, and proverbial symbols to provide the audience with essential clues to the meaning of the work. In Ghanaian arts, the subject matter or theme of an artwork is recognizable through the proverbial images (such as state sword, stool, linguist staff, and umbrella, and *Adinkra* symbols), symbolic dance movements and gestures, and proverbs. Additionally, a work can be viewed as successful if the subject matter expresses some amount of social experience

that would sustain the interest, as well as create a desire in the audience to discover and interpret the idea which the artist intends to portray. Some questions and instructions to help students make such discoveries in a work of art might include the following:

- Looking at the object, image, performance, or event, which parts of it are representational, connotative, or symbolic?
- How far do these parts relate to the subject matter of the work (if given)?
- If the subject matter of the work is not given, how do these parts suggest a subject matter? In other words, what indigenous Ghanaian symbolic forms do you see in this artwork that will help you in identifying its subject matter?
- Explain verbally or in writing the imagery or symbolism in this work of art. (What do the images and symbols in this art mean to you?).
- Give a short description of the subject matter, then translate it into a statement.
- From your own point of view, what should be the centre of interest of the work?
- What made this area of the work more important than the other parts?
- Based on your chosen centre of interest of the artwork, what do you suggest should be its major theme?
- How is your suggested theme similar to, or different from the original theme of the work (if stated)?
- What personal meaning do you derive from the work?
- Explain why you think your suggested theme and meaning are more suitable for the work than those originally assigned to it.

- What new images or symbols do you suggest should be put into the work to enhance its original theme and meaning?
- Explain why you think the new images or symbols you have suggested can bring out the original meaning of the work.

**Materials or media** exemplify what may be defined as the ingredients or substances of which the work of art is made. In an artwork that might be judged as successful, the rendition of the art material or medium should be such that its natural properties are clearly revealed. For example, if the medium (instrument) used in making music is the *Dondo* drum, the rendering of the sounds should be handled in such a way as to clearly portray the properties of the *Dondo* sound rather than disguise it. The same can be said about the arrangement of various sounds for a type of music, movements for a dance pattern, or reciting phrases of a libationary prayer, appellations, or funeral dirges. While the medium should not necessarily be used obtrusively, the working style of the artist should reveal consciously developed techniques to enhance the overall design, meaning, mood or feeling, function, and significance of the work. In addition, the rendering of the medium should reflect not only conventional techniques as pertains to the use of specific art material, but it should also reflect a genuine effort on the part of the artist to portray personally developed modes of applying a given medium -- the presence of originality or novelty in his or her artwork. In art activities, the application of materials is done with the aid of tools. There is a wide range of tools for the arts, including brushes, rollers, palette knives, chisels, hammers, drums, gongs, horns, tape

recorders, and others. Each of these tools is employed in certain specific art-making processes. Thus, a successful rendition of an art material or medium is dependent on the correct and judicious application of a given tool. A simple question or two may help the teacher initiate a dialogue about the materials and tools used in producing an artwork.

Following are some examples:

- Name all the materials and tools you think were used in composing this work of art.
- Looking closely at this work, make a list of all the techniques that have been used to create it.
- What other techniques could have been used to produce the same or a better result?
- Analyzing a work of art has been likened to taking it apart to study how all the component parts work together, and putting it back together again when we describe it. - How well do you think all the parts work together?
- Describe this work of art to a friend, clearly enough that he or she can recognize, as well as imitate it just from your words.
- How do you think the techniques adopted by the artist reveal or disguise the natural quality of the material used?
- How do the techniques for rendering the work influence the overall mood (feeling) of the work?

**Functions** imply the purposes, roles, or uses for which the work of art has been made. The purposes for which works of art are created vary according to the values, constructs, and concepts of the arts among people in different parts of the world. In a general sense, however, the arts serve various social, political, historical, and psychological functions. For example, monuments in general assume certain functions for the people for whom they are made to be seen: they describe social and political situations, and act as historical documents. Psychologically, the arts serve to harmonize the human desire for visual and other purposes of decoration, entertainment and enjoyment that dignify the human life. In non-Western and tribal societies such as Ghana, the arts are seen as an integral part of the larger human condition. That is to say, the arts are used in day-to-day activities in society, including religious rituals. Thus, in this sense, it could go without saying that whatever purposes works of art serve in any part of the world, ultimately their functions bear some social or cultural ramifications. This suggests that the images, actions, performances, and auditory activities within the work portray some kinds of phenomena in real life situations. As a criterion for judgement, therefore, it is essential that the particular purpose for each work of art in relation to its social or cultural context is identified. That the indigenous arts of Ghana are an inseparable part of their socio-cultural fabric suggests that a study of the functions of an artistic form or act should involve a thorough analysis of the particular cultural programme within which it is located. Such an analysis should also include the historical and philosophical ideals underlying the usage of the particular artistic form or act. It is

also important to trace the socio-cultural ramifications of the symbolic forms and acts that bear hidden and subtle implications for the life of the Ghanaian people.

It is, however, worthy of note to teachers that the criteria for the art-critical method outlined here are not exhaustive; they are only meant to introduce teachers and students to some essential parameters for judging works of art.

By basing art-critical instruction on Chapman's criteria of design, subject matter, materials and tools, and functions of an artwork, students can be enabled to develop basic ideas about the meanings of the concepts. To begin with, teaching and learning can be aimed at helping students to define these concepts. Students can be engaged in observing a variety of art forms, discussing their designs, subjects or themes, materials and tools, and the purposes for which the artworks are made. Terms like unity, balance, rhythm, harmony, repetition, contrast, and other terms used in describing the way the elements of art are rendered in artworks should can be explained and discussed in relation to various types of art such as pictorial scenes, sculptures, textiles, music, dance, and poetry. Students can also be shown the differences between two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art; and what the categories of visual, performing, and verbal art forms are about. Having understood these art terminologies, students will then be equipped for interpreting, evaluating, and clarifying their views about works of art. Sample questions and instructions for students may include the following:

- Of the various tribal groups or traditional areas of Ghana (including *Asafo* Companies), show those who use and appreciate this object, image, performance, or event.

- How is it used and what taboos affect its usage?
- For what purpose or occasion is it normally used?
- State if the use of this artwork is reserved for a particular person or persons in society. Give reasons to support your statement.
- What importance or significance does this artwork have for the people who make and use it?

### **Evaluation and Judgement**

This is the final stage of the art-critical process, where students will be expressing their personal opinions about the work of art being analyzed. Classroom dialogue should be organized such that it leads students gradually through formulating tangible reasons to support their opinions about the work of art based on the insights they have gained during the analytical process. Both objective facts and social structures surrounding a given work of art, as well as students' personal experiences with the work should be reflected in dialogues leading to a critical evaluation of that work. Following are some examples of questions and instructions to generate an art-critical dialogue in the classroom.

- What has been your very first reaction on observing this work of art?
- If you have had a change of opinion after carefully analyzing this work, explain why this change of opinion about the work has taken place.
- On the whole, which parts of the object, image, performance or event have appealed to you most? Why? Which parts least appealed to you? Why?



- Imagine that you have selected this image, object, performance, or event for presentation during an occasion. Give reasons for your choice, and describe the significance for this work of art for that occasion.
- To whom would you present this work of art? On what occasion? why?
- To whom would you not present this artwork? Why?
- Having studied this work, if you were to produce it anew, what parts would you keep or leave out? Why?
- Would you keep the same process or form, or would you do it in your own style? Why?

To conclude this chapter, it bears repeating that the Junior Secondary School occupies a special period of time in the life of the student who is often torn between childhood experiences and the uncertainties of adulthood. This transitional period in life characterizes a developmental stage at which the mind of the young adolescent student "is undergoing a change that expands the concrete sensory-functions of childhood to include the complex functions of adulthood" (Garoian, 1988, p. 35).

As a result of neuropsychological changes, the mind is now capable of performing combinations and permutations of ideas, while using sensory input. [As well], . . . the adolescent can follow a line of reasoning to its source. (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969, pp. 132 & 133).

It is apparent, therefore, that the young adolescent is capable of understanding abstract ideas, as well as using them to question, argue, and reach conclusions through deductive reasoning or inference. This active process of mental (cognitive) development of the Junior Secondary School student presents a challenge to the art teacher in terms of

meeting his or her learning needs. Teaching should be directed at helping the student to learn how to learn. This can be achieved by involving the student in learning through active participation. The mental disposition of the Junior Secondary School student provide him or her with the ability to understand abstract and subtle ideas in works of art such as the metaphors, proverbs, maxims, and allegorical thoughts that characterize the Ghanaian arts. Students should be provided with opportunities to explore artworks, to interpret their meanings, and to understand art in the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. The learning process should encourage students to consistently make reference to ideas experienced in works of art in relation to the cultural context. In this way, students can develop skills for conducting inquiry into the arts, a learning process that can be meaningfully utilized at the Senior Secondary School level.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **ARTS EDUCATION AT THE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL**

The age range of students at the Senior Secondary School level of education in Ghana is from sixteen to eighteen years old. At this stage, students normally show a great deal of conscious awareness of the arts, and are in a position to decide whether the arts are a course they wish to pursue or leave alone. Lowenfeld and Brittain refer to this period as "the period of decision". To the student, this period is important because it is the time at which the arts become a course of study requiring a deliberate effort; at the same time, it marks the beginning of his or her consideration to pursue art-making as a career.

At this stage, most students are beginning to show individual artistic preferences as well as eagerness to develop their artistic skills, particularly the technical aspects. They like to have encounters with mature artists, sometimes mimicking the art forms or styles of those whom they view as role-models. Underlying this characteristic attitude is an inherent desire or a natural urge for self-improvement aimed at social involvement, with a concern for making some impact on their peers and society at large (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1970).

The fact that the Senior Secondary School student has turned to arts courses in a free choice should remind the teacher of one important concern of education. Like

other subjects of the general school programme, the arts programme should be basically one that involves the student in the fundamental process of taking his or her place in society after graduation. If we view living as a form of challenge, then, as is expected of other subject areas, a study of the arts should provide the opportunity for meeting this challenge. A meaningful arts programme, in Lowenfeld and Brittain's view, should provide students with opportunities to face themselves and their own needs, as well as make tangible decisions about life and possibilities for continued growth. The co-authors contend that the first element to consider in order to achieve this goal is to treat the student at this stage of learning as a young adult learner: one who is the core of the programme, and one who has important contributions to make concerning decisions about his or her well-being. The implications here are that there is need for the teacher to respect the opinions of the students, realizing that they have had experiences that can be used as clues for assessing or diagnosing their learning needs.

In light of the young adults' strong desire for social involvement, the teacher's approach to motivating them should create an atmosphere in which the students' consciousness of being a part of the environment and the larger socio-cultural milieu is aroused. The notion that the arts are basic to human emotions and do not stand isolated from the culture in which they were made, or from the individuals who made them, has been strongly stressed elsewhere in this thesis. The concept that the arts are traditionally a reflection of the experiences or needs of the individuals making them, holds as true for the young adult student of the Senior Secondary School as it does for the professional artist. It is, however, important for teachers not to construe this idea to mean that the

young adult student should be expected to perform at the level of the professional artist. Nor should the teacher construe it as an object for making professional artists out of the Senior Secondary School student. The teaching objective of the arts at the level of the young adult student, as expressed by Lowenfeld and Brittain, should involve the students to such an extent that the arts become a meaningful experience for them. Teaching should enable the student to discover that the arts can be a valuable means of focusing energies into creative problem solving, not only in school but also after graduation (1970, p. 300). While art education in the secondary school may not prepare the student for a profession, it should serve to develop his or her mental, aesthetic, and creative growth. Our teaching of skills in artistic making and thinking, therefore, should be introduced with the purpose of fostering the individual's free expression of personal ideas and concerns in accordance with his or her cultural background (p. 309).

Having decided to study art, students need to acquire certain skills to offer them a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and self-confidence in art-making. This suggests that in a class of students with varying interests, several projects have to be going on at the same time to meet individual student's needs. This places an additional responsibility upon the art teacher, whose role may have been to have all students doing the same topic at the same time and ensuring that students develop the skills which he or she had decided are important to them. This circumstance suggests that the emphasis for classroom organization should be placed on the needs of the individual student in the class rather than being dictated by the teacher without prior consultation with the students. This is not to imply, however, that the teacher should not have a short- or long-

term plan, or set learning goals for his or her class. It does imply that prior to setting up learning goals and planning lessons for Senior Secondary School students, the teacher should, as a matter of necessity, consult with the students, find out their individual interests and what they intend to achieve through studying their preferred areas of art. Ideally, this should be done on a one-on-one basis.

The primary concern of the teacher, under such circumstances, should be to ensure that materials for the students' preferred areas of art are available locally, either to be purchased from an art store, or obtained from the environment. Ensuring the students' self-motivation to study the arts, as well as their will to learn, should also be of prime importance to the teacher. Additionally, there is need to ensure that students' preferred areas of the arts will involve them actively in worthwhile projects, thus providing them with the requisite skills, knowledge, and attitudes expected of them at the end of the programme.

### **Art Production**

#### **(Personal Fulfilment Through Art Experience)**

In organization an art-making class for Senior Secondary School students, the teacher has to assume several roles -- a consultant, technical assistant and advisor, as well as guidance counsellor. Although he or she should not be the one who provides the answers to students' problems, the teacher's methodology should be designed such that it would broaden the possible avenues by which decisions and actions are taken by students in solving their problems. Stated differently, in teaching these students,

classroom procedures should generate questions that would awaken their consciousness to possible ways of exploring, investigating, and developing alternative ways of solving an art problem. As young adult students, knowing where and how to obtain art materials should be an important part of the activities of learning to make art. This means that learning activities should expose students to methods of obtaining art materials through their own efforts so that they would continue to use the knowledge and skills acquired after graduation. This further suggests that classroom methodology should include demonstrations and step-by-step explanation of procedures in preparing, applying, preservation, and caring for art materials and tools, as well as unfinished and finished works of art.

Teachers are, however, advised not to take the step-by-step explanation of procedures to mean a "just follow the pattern approach" to teaching (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1970). Considerable attention should be given to technique development, which should be in accordance with individual student's needs. Through experimentation and consistent practice, each student can develop his or her own personal techniques and styles by which to express himself or herself creatively. Achieving this requires a flexible atmosphere in the art classroom, where the teacher does not view his or her presentations as absolute. Rather, it is proper that the teacher draws on the student's own spontaneous activities while working through an artistic problem, to formulate some open-ended suggestions to guide student through the procedure. This will help the student to develop his or her own personal technique and style of executing the work, which can be improved upon as time goes on.

Ideally, the Senior Secondary School student, like any young adult artist, is capable of dealing with complex art-making processes involving the use of various materials, tools, and thematic topics. Teaching objectives should, therefore, be directed to guiding students towards improving upon their perceptual acumen and acquiring accuracy in the rendition of works. Areas to be emphasized may include:

- Defining size relationships among images and objects, a means to showing proportions and perspective more accurately in their work. This idea should be discussed as means of showing students the differences between contemporary art principles and those of indigenous Ghanaian artistic traditions and stylistic conventions;
- Detailed study of shapes and forms with the primary objective of achieving accuracy in portraying light and shadow areas of objects and images. (While painting has not originally been a part of the indigenous Ghanaian arts, save drawing patterns on the human body and walls, picture-making is an important part of the school art curriculum in Ghana);
- Detailed exploration of the subtle nuances in dots, lines, colours, textures, and other elements of art as to how they work in both natural and man-made phenomena;
- Acquiring sensitivity to order, balance, rhythm, movement, unity, symmetry, or asymmetry, and others in various art forms with the aim to achieving them in the composition of their works;



- Applying the knowledge, skills, and experiences in working with the aforementioned elements and principles of art to express themselves meaningfully in art production activities in relation to the Ghanaian socio-cultural context;
- Judicious use of tools and materials to create the effects they desire in their artworks.

To meet these objectives, the onus is on the teacher to motivate the students through dialogical questioning as to: what they want to express, the purpose for which the end product is meant, what materials and tools would be used, and how they intend to go about executing the artwork. Since works of art cannot emerge from a vacuum, teachers should encourage students to precede all art-making projects with observations, sketches, making of prototypes, or rehearsals as a means of developing ideas relevant to the theme or topic being explored.

The following dialogical questions can be used in motivating young adult students towards a project in pictorial work.

- To make a picture or design depicting a given theme or topic, how would you look for inspiration and idea development?
- What other preparations would you need to make prior to beginning the actual project?
- What materials and tools would you need for the project? . . . What alternative materials do you think could be used for the same project?
- Where and how would you get the materials? . . . How would you process or prepare the materials for the project?

- What kind of story would you tell in your picture or design?
- What clues would you include in your artwork to communicate your message to the viewer?
- Based on the theme or topic you have chosen, what would you emphasize in your work to suggest the most important part of your story or intentions?
- If you use Ghanaian traditional symbolic forms, which ones do you think would be appropriate for the theme on which you are working, and how would you incorporate them in your composition to effectively communicate your message?
- Should your theme or topic require you to use colour symbolism, what colours do you think would most appropriately express your intended mood for the artwork?

In three-dimensional art activities, the Senior Secondary School student needs to know a good deal about some basic properties of the art materials they use. Such properties should include whether a material is plastic, malleable, brittle, or fibrous; whether it is burned, hardened, or melted with fire. Is it water-based or waterproof, or is it soluble in petroleum-based solvent such as turpentine? How permanent is it? Can it be coloured or dyed, and if so, should the colorant be oil-based or water-based? If it is in the form of a fibre, can it be hand-spun, braided, woven, or knitted? These are all questions to be considered about an art material if it is to be used appropriately. It must be mentioned that it is not technique alone, but also the property of materials that contribute to the final design and shape of an artwork. Teaching should, thus, be directed

towards encouraging the student to experiment with various art materials so as to enable the student to directly experience their properties and to develop a feeling for their functions and uses. This, in turn, may well offer the student a great deal of flexibility in making appropriate decisions during the planning stage of his or her work, as well as in applying the material. Some motivational questions for the student may be as follows.

- Having envisioned the sculptural work you wish to make, what material do you consider to be most appropriate for it? Why?
- What would be your alternative choice of materials? Why?
- Would your sculpture be in the round or in a relief mural form?
- Which of the four processes of sculpture (additive, subtractive, modelling, and casting) would you employ to execute the work?
- If your plan requires that you use mixed media, what other material do you consider to be most compatible with the base material you are using?
- By what means would you get all the different media to work together in an effective manner?
- Would the work be in abstract, realistic, or structural form?
- Would your work be a cultural statement, social statement, or an emotional expression?
- Would the work be symbolic or representational?
- What Ghanaian traditional symbolic forms (if any), or your own created imagery or symbols, would you incorporate into your work to effectively connote your idea or the mood of the work?

- If your theme requires you to reflect some indigenous Ghanaian sculptural traditions in your work, what techniques or styles would you adopt to bring out the intended meaning of the work?
- How would you go about making sketches for a work that would be sculpted in the round?
- Consider that you are required to make a garden sculpture. What materials would you use, and why?
- Would you use the same materials for a sculpture meant for hanging on a wall indoors? Why or why not?

In textile weaving, the classroom dialogue might be as follows.

- How would you calculate the number of warp ends (threads) per inch, or the total number of ends required for weaving a given width of cloth?
- Two heald shafts are required in weaving the simple plain *kente* (*Hweepam* or *Ahwepam*) cloth. Will the same number of heald shafts be suitable for a designed or patterned *kente* (*Adwin* or *Dwin*) cloth? How many heald shafts are required for weaving an intricate traditional *kente* design?
- How would you construct the selvedge (selvage) of a fabric during weaving?
- How would you obtain . . . 1) warp-way stripes; and . . . 2) weft-way stripes, in a woven fabric?
- How would you create a check-weave effect when weaving a fabric?

- If you were designing a simple *kente* (*Hweepam/Ahwepam*) for a funeral rite, would you use the same colours as would be required for designing a festival cloth?
- By what means could you incorporate traditional symbols and other shapes into the weave structure of a *kente* cloth during weaving?

Lessons in fabric dyeing should be centered around the methods of dye extraction from Ghanaian sources and two main processes of fabric dyeing in Ghana, namely, 'plain' and 'resist' dyeing. In plain dyeing, also known as level dyeing, the entire surface of the fabric is covered by the same colour with no patterns whatsoever. Resist dyeing as the name implies, is the form of dyeing in which parts of the surface of the fabric are resisted from being penetrated by the dye, resulting in patterns. Resist dyeing takes three forms, namely, tie-and-dye (tie-dye), stitch-and-dye (tritik), and wax-and-dye (batik). Teaching should emphasize the techniques involved in the various processes of fabric dyeing. It should include the demonstration of such practical activities as:

- techniques to adopt to prevent the occurrence of patches in a plain dyed fabric;
- various processes involved in the preparation of fabrics for resist dyeing purpose;
- how to use a heat-based dye, generally known as 'hot dye' in batik making;
- how to dewax a batik cloth.

In fabric printing, the block printing method using a tuber, lino, or wood block should be explained as having its equivalence in indigenous Ghanaian *Adinkra* printing. Teaching should help students to acquire skills in the cutting of various designs on wood,

calabash, and lino blocks. Students should also be encouraged to use other hand printing processes such as the stencil and silk screen methods in printing various designs, including the *Adinkra* motifs, studying the similarities and differences in the registration of the prints. Students can also compare the three processes -- block, stencil, and screen printing -- in terms of the speed and accuracy of each method. Below are some questions to be explored by the students.

- In preparing printing tools, which of the three -- the block, the stencil, and the silk screen -- is fastest to complete?
- Which of the three printing methods is most convenient to carry out? . . .  
Which of them is the most inconvenient to handle?
- How similar or different is the process of screen printing from stencil printing?
- What advantages do you think screen printing has over the block printing method?
- In which of the three printing processes are the motifs most clearly defined?  
. . . In which of them are the motifs least clearly defined?

The focus of studio classes in the area of pottery making should be directed towards involving students in the step-by-step techniques of processing clay. This should include the processes of washing and kneading of clay in the absence of a pugmill. Other activities can be centered on experimenting with coiling, rolling, and pinching methods of pottery making. The process of throwing may be practised where potter's wheels are available. Learning activities should also expose students to the processes involved in the

preparation of clay slip, caring for green ware, and various methods of firing using the electric kiln, firewood oven, and open-firing. Classroom dialogues may be based on:

- Why it is necessary to wash and knead clay before using it in pottery making;
- The advantages and limitations of the coiling, rolling, pinching, and throwing methods of pottery making;
- Why it is not advisable to expose green wares to the direct rays of the sun for drying;
- The importance of bisque firing, and why some clay ware has to be glazed or undergo gloss firing;
- The advantages and limitations of firing in the kiln, the oven, and in the open.

Dance movement lessons at the Senior Secondary School level should be approached with the goal of helping students acquire creative skills in dancing. The basic ingredients of creative dance experience so far discussed in this chapter are that every dance and movement education lesson should begin with some amount of warm-up and relaxation activities. Ideally, it should be accompanied by some music, particularly Ghanaian folk music. It has also been stressed that teaching should encourage the free expression of students' feelings in relation to their lived experiences as they dance to various rhythms and tempos. This approach to learning is particularly important for the Senior Secondary School student, who being an adult, has a profound understanding and capabilities for performing intricate, expressive, and meaningful dance movements.

It has often been thought that folk dances are not creative because they have a tendency of following prescribed patterns. It holds true that most folk dances follow certain prescribed patterns, and this is particularly evident in puberty custom dances such as the *Dipo*, *Ashimi*, and others. However, there is need to remark that normally, prescribed patterns in all indigenous Ghanaian dances are only basic patterns of movements adopted for different dance types. Once the basic pattern of movements of a particular dance type is acquired, meaningful expressive movements are incorporated according to the individual dancer's feelings, ideas, and needs.

Creativity in dance, as in any of the arts, involves imagination, adaptability, innovation, and invention. Teaching should, therefore, aim at fostering these characteristics in students. Using sensitive questions in class discussions to stimulate imaginative thinking in students, the teacher can then proceed to encourage them to borrow from various dance patterns, adapting them to embellish the basic movements of other dance patterns they have learned. Students need to know that popular and secular (contemporary) dance patterns are also sources from which to borrow ideas. By incorporating a variety of creative, expressive movements into any dance pattern they are doing, students can evolve their own individual choreographic techniques. As they gain the ability, spontaneity, and confidence in using the techniques that are evolving, students would be developing their own individual styles of choreography. Some introductory questions to induce imaginative thinking in relation to technical issues in dance movements may be as follows.



- How would you go about incorporating movements from one or two other dance patterns to embellish the basic dance pattern you are currently doing?
- Which movements from the various dance patterns you already know can you most conveniently fit into the current dance movements you are doing?
- In what ways do you think the choreographer could reenact an experience or feeling, or show a mood during a dance performance?
- Many artists use their artworks to tell stories. Choosing a theme and composing a choreographic plan, how would you perform dance movements that would best convey your ideas?
- In what other style of dance movements can you render the same theme?

It is important to make students aware that as they choose and arrange elements to depict their individual themes for a dance performance they take into consideration the particular age level, gender, event, or occasion they wish to represent. Involving students in a dialogue after each dance lesson can help the teacher obtain feedback from the students about how they think about the lesson. The teacher might ask the following questions:

- Would you explain how it felt working in a style that is less natural to you?
- What unexpected things happened to you when performing the activities?
- To what extent are your expectations fulfilled?

Teaching and learning activities in the verbal arts at the Senior Secondary School should go beyond the processes of performance to include the social, cultural, and

psychological factors as they relate to speech-making among the Ghanaian people. Verbal communication as a performance consists in the assumption of the speaker's ability to display to the audience communicative competence. Such a competence rests not only in the mode of speaking, but also on the knowledge and ability of the speaker to observe Ghanaian traditional norms, mannerisms, and taboos in his or her speech. That is to say, fundamental to performing the Ghanaian verbal arts is the knowledge of the speaker to express himself or herself in socially appropriate ways. For instance, the idea of not using the left hand alone in making gestures when addressing people should be made known to students. Students should be made aware that in pouring libation (performing libationary prayers), one has to bring down one's cloth from one's shoulders, remove one's sandals (and stand on them), and that one may stand, bow, or squat in accord with the rules followed in one's traditional area. The container for the drink for libation may be held either with both hands or the right hand, and should not be emptied until the last word of the prayer has been mentioned. Using the left hand to pour libation is a sign of disrespect to both the deities and the community as a whole. Students should also learn that the deities have to be mentioned in a hierarchical order beginning with the most Supreme (God) followed by mother earth, and in that sequence through the least important deity.

Speaking in socially appropriate ways also includes the speaker's intonations, how he or she punctuates each statement in the speech, and the clarity of pronunciation of words. The choice of words for a verbal art performance, particularly in the use of proverbs, should be done with great care so as to avoid being offensive. The content of

each statement should supply enough information to bring out the context and understanding of the speech. Ghanaian artistic traditions and taboos, as well as processes have been discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Such a knowledge is indispensable for the students so as to enable them to perform the verbal arts in an effective manner. If students should understand the cultural attitudes towards the creation of verbal arts, then it is necessary that our teaching methods are designed with emphasis on helping the students to learn from personal experience. This can be achieved by involving them in research activities that will bring them into close contact with experts in the verbal arts. Also, since the art of speaking is learned through practice, it is necessary to encourage students to take part as much as possible in community performances. Students may also be advised to observe closely the way and manner in which indigenous experts perform the verbal arts. In this way, students will become conversant with the nature and process of each verbal art form. The following instructions and questions may be used in initiating classroom dialogue with students.

- To guide students' thinking in finding out things for themselves, the teacher may ask: . . . What verbal art form is this? . . . Who performs it? . . . Where is it performed and when? . . . What are the procedures involved in its performance? Is it performed on its own or in accompaniment of drums, or horns? . . . What behaviours are displayed by the performer to convey the meaning and mood of the occasion? . . . How can I imitate these behaviours?
- Name any Ghanaian verbal art forms that are cast (presented) in the narrative form.

- Through association with the names of animals, spirits, or some unknown human beings in society, compose a folktale in the Ghanaian fashion that comments on the human condition. The aspect of the human condition being addressed should be clearly discerned from the content and context of the narrative.
- In what ways would you involve the audience (cause them to participate) in your narrative?
- Explain how the *Okyeame* (linguist or court spokesman) performs at social gatherings. By what means is the *Okyeame* identified at such gatherings?
- In addressing people, the Ghanaian observes certain traditions regarding gesticulations. Identify these traditions and explain their underlying norms.
- How would you organize a game of riddles between two teams of children in your community?
- Make a list of proverbs, placing them under the following categories:
  1. Proverbs that deal with the general human condition;
  2. Proverbs in relation to achievement;
  3. Proverbs that reflect social and moral values.
- Write some proverbs that show the same idea.
- Write two proverbs that show contrasting ideas.
- Find out about the appellations of many clans or tribes other than your own. Give the name of each clan or tribe in relation to its appellation. Explain the underlying notion of each appellation.

- What does the term 'dirges' entail to you?
- Write a short speech to be delivered at the funeral of the founder of your school and conclude it with a verse of dirges. The statements of the verse should reflect the lifestyle, foresight, contributions to society, and to the development of education in your community.
- Under what circumstances may dirges and bewailing not be performed at the funeral of a deceased person?

To round off the discussions on the approaches to motivating students in the studio art classroom, it should be mentioned that frequently, students may be faced with some basic problems while working on their projects. Teachers can help in curbing or alleviating such problems by offering occasional lectures to provide their students with information about methods that have been used by various artists over the years. Discussions with individual students who experience problems in executing their works appropriately should focus on encouraging them to explore the relationship between the theme or purpose of the work they are making and their best choices for media, technique or style to bring forth their aims. After completing an art project, students should be engaged in a discussion of their efforts, focusing on each person's methods of working in relation to the effectiveness of the art product.

Summarily, questions for motivating students in various art-making activities should emphasize the 'what, how', and 'why' puzzles.

## **Art History**

### **(Appreciation of the Artistic Heritage)**

At their level of development, most Senior Secondary School students are mature enough to understand and appreciate the importance of learning through personal experiences. As adolescents, they are also aware of the value of present learning experiences for use later in life. Therefore, exposing students of the Senior Secondary School to practical research experiences in doing art historical inquiry can have an integrating effect of motivating and empowering them to approach the subject with confidence. Underlying this idea is the premise that Senior Secondary School graduates, as a matter of necessity, should be able to give an oral or written historical analysis of any work of art they might confront. This suggests that teaching strategies should be geared towards stimulating the students' intellectual curiosity, awakening in them a life-long interest and skills in doing art historical inquiry, and deepening their awareness of their artistic heritage. To generate and sustain this interest implies also that our teaching strategies should offer the students a format with which they can continue to construct art historical information as adults. Such strategies should be those that will engage the students in a search for deeper and more meaningful connections that the arts have with the activities of everyday life.

An effective art historical inquiry process such as this requires a creative behaviour on the part of the student -- an ability to visually analyze works of art through speculative and reflective activity. This means that one should be in a position to draw upon the artwork's social and cultural ramifications, as well as one's own social,

cultural, and experiential resources, incorporating them into a unified structure or pattern of meaning suitable for the work.

In order to acquire these abilities, students of the Senior Secondary School, like adult artists, require a comprehensive art historical inquiry format. Such a format can build upon that which has been suggested for their Junior Secondary School counterparts. Calvert (1992) proposes a format that expands upon the basic questions about the 'what', 'who', 'where', 'when', and 'why' of works of art. Calvert's art historical model offers a method which analyzes artworks under broad headings of 'form', 'production', 'purposes', and 'significance'. This model utilizes a series of initial questions deigned to lead novice researchers to propose explanations for the form, production, purposes, and cultural significance of works of art. It has been found expedient to include 'concluding analysis' to Calvert's format to help students sum up their findings as part of the art historical inquiry process. The following examples of questions have been synthesized from Calvert's model with modifications and additional questions to guide students in their art historical inquiries.

### **Form**

1) How does the artwork look?

This requires a thorough observation of the physical features of the work of art being studied . . . What is its size? What media (materials) is it made of? Why has the artist chosen those materials? How does the artist use the materials? What processes or techniques has the artist used to accomplish this work?

- 2) What lines, colours, textures, forms, shapes, or light and shade effects do you see? How does the artist use these elements?
- 3) What objects, images, symbols, or movements and gestures do you observe in the work? Identify them by name or description. What sounds do you hear?
- 4) What moods does the artist portray in the artwork?

### **Production**

- 1) Who made this work of art? What do you know about him or her?
- 2) When was it made? Who commissioned it? What event or circumstance called for or influenced its production?
- 3) How much time did it take to make it? How much did it cost?
- 4) What information do you have about the place and time in which this artwork was made? What artistic style was in vogue at the time and place the work was made?

### **Interpretation**

- 1) What do you know about the artist's concerns in terms of ideas being expressed, subject matter, and cultural values from studying this work?
- 2) What symbols can you identify in this work? What do the symbols mean?
- 3) What interpretation would you give to this work of art?
- 4) What other meanings can you propose for this work?



### **Purposes/Significance**

- 1) For what purpose was this work of art made? . . . Is it intended to record an event? . . . explain an idea? . . . carry a message? . . . evoke a response? . . . describe a person? . . . describe a place? . . . describe a thing?
- 2) Does this work have a practical use? . . . What specifically is it used for? Who uses it? How is it used? On what occasion or event is it used?
- 4) Give a description of the purpose for which it is meant.
- 5) If this work has more than one purpose, describe its other purposes.

### **Concluding Analysis**

- 1) How far is your interpretation similar to, or different from the original meaning of this artwork? . . . How would you have interpreted this work of art if you have found it in a museum out of the context of its production?
- 2) Do some Ghanaian artists still work this way (i.e, do artists still produce works of this nature)? . . . How have their working techniques or style changed? What are the reasons for these changes?
- 3) What do you find most interesting about this work? What do you like or dislike about it?
- 4) What insights have you gained so far from studying this artwork in terms of techniques of rendition, ideas of style, suitability of subject matter, or cultural ramifications?

In a case where the author of an artwork is deceased, questions about his or her artistic interests and activities might be directed to his or her family members, colleagues, and art dealers. As students pursue questions about works of art and artists, they can immediately document the information in as much detail as possible. The explanations of their findings about the artworks and artists they have investigated can take many forms, such as journal entries, visual statements (illustrations through drawing and painting), reenactment of dramatic situations, oral presentations, or essays.

Advocates of the experiential approach to art history argue that teaching art history as a process or activity, rather than as an established chronological account, complements both the thrust towards a culturally reflective model of art historical scholarship and a focus on the component disciplines of the art curriculum (Calvert, 1992, p. 75; 1986b; Chalmers, 1978; Erickson, 1983; Feldman, 1980). By encouraging students' participation in process-oriented practices in creating art historical knowledge, studying art history can take on a pervasive character. It spreads through the domains of aesthetics, art criticism, and studio practice, bringing them into an integrated form of thoughtfulness about works of art. This process of acquiring art historical knowledge can expose students to higher order thinking skills which can be used to explore clues observable in artworks, to make personal associations and connections to social and cultural contexts, to synthesize information obtained, and to elaborate on it to make sense of the message the artist intends to convey. Furthermore, the thinking skills gained by the students can be used as an incentive to pursue their own questions about works of art. Through this means, the information about discoveries students make about works of art

can become meaningful to them, motivating in them a desire to explore the practical and creative usage of such information in their studio work.

To look at a work of art is to think. . . . Every sculpture, painting, or graphic work provides us with new mental activity which might well have the power to engage all our functions, from memory to muscular action, from seeing to touch. To be sure, such engagement requires a commitment [profound thinking] on the part of the viewer; one has to be disposed to act, but it is only from such a thoughtful personal encounter that the experience of art has meaning and sensible judgements can be made (Taylor, 1975, p. 7).

The use of actual works of art in the study of art history can have significant benefits for the students. Students can become adept at investigating many artifacts that they might encounter in everyday life, which previously they would have taken for granted or not have perceived as having any possible significance to their study of art history (Calvert, 1992). As they analyze and interpret artworks for their historical information, students might observe features of the media, techniques, colours, and forms used by the artist, as well as other details of the works, which would have been missed in a slide or print. Additionally, seeing such features easily and clearly can be a motivating factor for students in their study of works of art. On the whole, the motivation that may be accrued by students from the experiential approach to doing art history may leave in them a lasting legacy of interest in art history, as well as skills for viewing works of art in their post-school life.

## **Aesthetics**

### **(Understanding of the Nature of Art and Its Role in Society)**

At this stage, students can be introduced to studying some of the major aesthetic ideas and concepts that have been identified by aestheticians. The goal here is to help students to develop a knowledge base for confronting problems of art in their future lives. As a result of this learning, students can develop "the confidence and determination to rely upon their own abilities in working towards personally satisfying solutions" in aesthetics (Lankford, 1990, p.51). At this level of their education, students need to have access to information on the major aesthetic ideas available, in order to make informed aesthetic choices (Hamblen and Galanes, 1991). To achieve this end, aesthetic education at the Senior Secondary School level, should as a matter of necessity, begin by making students aware of the variability of meanings that plague aesthetic study. This, in turn, can be achieved through the issue-centred approach to aesthetic learning which involves examining how various world views or value systems influence the perceptions and definitions of art in different parts of the world, particularly in relation to Modern Western and non-Western principles. Some issues to be examined in relation to Modern Western principles may include: formalist aesthetics; aesthetics with reference to the 'beautiful' or 'gorgeous'; and 'art for art's sake'. In terms of the non-Western world and in relation to Ghanaian concepts of art, issues to be examined may include: contextualist aesthetics; and 'art for life's sake'. It has been noted that under Modern Western principles, the arts are practised for their own sake (art for art's sake), that is, they are not intertwined with any social, cultural, or religious rituals. This is in contrast to the

non-Western ideal of 'art for life's sake', which views the arts as being of a piece with all aspects of life. Students need to know that the term 'aesthetics' has different interpretations and meanings because of the different concepts people in different parts of the world assign to artistic phenomena. This knowledge can then be used as a stepping stone to make them understand that the definitions, assumptions, and meanings people assign to artistic phenomena are a part of their larger value systems. Therefore, it is vital that a critical examination of the social and cultural contexts of artworks be a part of the aesthetics study process. This then suggests that the content of aesthetic education in the Senior Secondary School classroom should include, among other things:

- 1) the manner in which our gender, as well as our social, cultural, political, and physical, environments are revealed in our artistic designations;
- 2) how our socio-cultural consciousness helps us in shaping our aesthetic values;  
and
- 3) how our aesthetic preferences reveal our self-identity and cultural-identity  
(Hamblen, 1988).

Such a content of aesthetic education will foster in students the requisite skills for examining the assumptions and clarifying their perceptions about art. This approach to aesthetic learning involves examining critically the socio-cultural context (or content) of the artwork, and has been called "aesthetics for social-critical consciousness" (Hamblen and Galanes, 1991). Aesthetics for critical social consciousness involves comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the various world views of art in terms of their larger social meanings, for example, the concepts of art in the Modern Western and non-Western

senses. Aesthetics for critical social consciousness deals with such questions as how art as a concept is defined, who defines it, who is excluded from the defining process, what is excluded from accepted definitions, and so on (Hamblen, 1988, p. 87; Hamblen and Galanes, 1991, p. 17). Teachers may draw on the following sample instructions and questions to motivate students in studying aesthetics for critical social consciousness.

- Show how art (the arts) as a concept is defined in the Ghanaian society.
- Examine the historical and or philosophical assumptions underlying the definition of the arts among Ghanaians.
- How would you explain the Modern Western concept of aesthetics (or aesthetics as a concept of beauty)?
- How do you understand the terms 'formalist aesthetics', 'contextualist aesthetics'?
- What do the terms 'art for art's sake' and 'art for life's sake' mean to you?  
In your opinion, should the social context or art be part of aesthetic responses?  
Why? or Why not?
- In what ways do you think our social contexts influence our definition of art and the shaping of our aesthetic percepts?
- How do you think the arts reflect the societies in which they are made and used?
- Compare and contrast the concept of aesthetics in the Modern Western and non-Western senses.
- Evaluate the formalist and contextualist approaches to aesthetics.

- Explain how the two approaches (formalism and contextualism) can be used together in responding meaningfully to works of art.
- In your opinion, should the definitions, constructs, and concepts of aesthetics be viewed as open-textured or as absolute ideas in aesthetic study?
- Formalist aesthetics is thought of as not being broad or universal enough to be effectively applied cross-culturally. Discuss.

Dealing with such questions can enable students to effectively study and understand the nature of the arts with respect to the various world views held about them. Students can also learn about how our socialized consciousness -- value system and social class -- can influence the way we formulate aesthetic ideas and concepts, as well as make aesthetic choices. Ideally, they can learn that our definitions, assumptions, and meanings of the arts are a part of our larger social system. It is as a result of these variable definitions and meanings of art that aesthetics as a concept is riddled with ambiguities. Thus, by capitalizing on these ambiguities to raise significant aesthetic issues to be studied for meaning, interpretation, and value, teachers can help students to understand diverse assumptions and world views about the arts. Their skills for examining their own aesthetic percepts in relation to the Ghanaian social world can also be enhanced.

While the goal for aesthetic learning is to help students to clarify their own aesthetic percepts, teaching should emphasize respect for the world views of different societies when comparing and contrasting various constructs, concepts, and definitions of art. The purpose of the approach to aesthetics should be to cultivate in the student a

perspective of the world that is characterized by cultural diversity, and of human beings who are characterized by different ways of viewing phenomena. Teaching and learning can, therefore, centre around the fostering of cross-cultural awareness in students by providing them with a critical understanding of the defining characteristics of cultures other than their own. Emphasis should be on the understanding of the similarities and differences among different cultures and the views they hold about the arts and aesthetics. In this regard, students can develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for expressing their aesthetic views effectively, as well as tolerating alternative views about aesthetics. The teacher may create simulation situations in the classroom to give the students "opportunities to imaginatively take the role of:

- i. an outsider in their own culture;
- ii. an outsider in another culture;
- iii. an insider in another culture" (Johns, 1986, p. 20).

During such simulation exercises, individual students may be asked to act out or role-play certain values or characteristics pertaining to cultures that are different from their own. This is to help the students to gain deeper insights into the values and world views of the cultures which they each represent, and also, to understand the perspectives of the other cultures that are represented by their colleagues while interacting with them. Although simulations are artificial situations, the feelings that may be aroused during such activities can be very real. This is because role-playing frequently has the tendency of producing some degree of emotions that can generate empathetic feelings in the actors.



To evaluate the success of the learning situation, the teacher can make use of the following:

- What did you learn from this experience?
- In what ways do you think what you have learned has influenced your outlook to other people's views and perceptions of the arts?
- In what ways can you apply what you have learned in real-life situations, that is, in appreciating the arts of other cultures?
- Discuss any occasion in your life when you had misunderstood or misjudged other people's cultural ways and outlooks about the arts.
- Have you ever had difficulties in accepting the definitions, constructs, and concepts about the arts of the people of other cultures? What do you think is the cause of this difficulty?
- Discuss any situation in which you felt that your cultural ways, beliefs, and views about the arts were misunderstood or misjudged by people of other cultures.
- How do you think our understanding of the world views of the people of other cultures affect our general outlook of the world of art?

It is anticipated that the foregoing sample questions would help to develop in the students cross-cultural empathy through the realization that people of other cultures may hold world views that diverge from their own as far as concepts of the arts are concerned. This would, in turn, help them to develop a respect for cultural diversity and for the rights of world views of cultures other their own also to exist.

The following five-phased structure for aesthetic scanning has been synthesized from Horner's (1988) model of aesthetic response and adapted to provide the Senior Secondary School student with a more advanced and detailed form of learning. His model includes: 1) fusion-dialogue (forgetting); 2) remembering; 3) deconstructing (recreating); 4) structuring (describing); and 5) interpreting. The aim behind using this model is to provide a conceptual framework of the aesthetic learning process for two reasons. It is to help students improve upon their perceptual acuity, and to understand how to make looking at and listening to works of art more meaningful.

### **The Fusion-Dialogue Process (Forgetting)**

The first phase of aesthetic scanning -- the fusion-dialogue process -- describes the phenomenal experiences which are gained as a result of one's encounter with a work of art. Implicit in any work of art is its maker's aesthetic intentions; these emerge and are actualized only through an intimate and empathetic relationship between a percipient and the artwork. This point of view stresses that the aesthetic dimension of a work of art does not reside exclusively within the work. Rather, it is the consequence of the interaction which takes place between the percipient and the work of art that attracts and holds his or her attention. Buber (1970) refers to the phenomenal nature of the aesthetic encounter and the disposition often assumed by people when interacting with phenomena as the "I-Thou" disposition. This disposition is characterized by a deep and intimate interaction in which the inner-image (inner-self or personality) of the percipient is drawn into a fusion state with the image of the work of art. Chapman (1978) describes this

situation as the percipient empathizing with the work of art. For Horner (1986), the situation is likened to a metaphoric journey through the work of art. He describes a process in which the percipient enters into a "dream experience" or a "fusion" of time-space with the work of art (p. 6). Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) refer to a similar process of fusion as the structure of the aesthetic experience (p. 18).

This process of aesthetic experience negates the principle of 'bracketing' or 'psychic distancing' in some (formalist) aesthetic theories. This principle presupposes that for an aesthetic encounter to be successful, the viewer must carefully set aside his or her natural attitudes, a process known as 'bracketing', taking on an aesthetic attitude before entering into the aesthetic process. Natural attitudes, as applied here, imply the social and cultural experiences, opinions, and predispositions that constitute the viewer's lifeworld. In contrast, rather than setting aside his or her natural attitudes, Horner's (1988) fusion-dialogue process suggests that the viewer brings to the aesthetic encounter his or her personal reservoir of predispositions, lived experiences, social, and cultural values to enable him or her to experience the work of art in a meaningful way. Supportive of this viewpoint, Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) write:

Most events in consciousness are built from culturally defined contexts as well as from personal meanings developed through an individual's life.

Sociologists . . . have reminded us that a person can never have a pure, immediate aesthetic experience -- whenever we gaze at an object our reaction to it is historically grounded, inseparable from ideologies and social values.

The aesthetic experience occurs when information coming from the artwork interacts with information already stored in the viewer's mind. The result of this conjunction might be a sudden expansion, recombination, or ordering of previously accumulated information, which

in turn produces a variety of emotions such as delight, joy, or awe (pp. 17-18).

It, therefore, becomes clear that the aesthetic experience is a very complex phenomenon. This is evident from the substantial differences that exist among the aesthetic responses of different persons, even though they might be perceiving the same work of art. Teachers can initiate the students' phenomenal responding to artworks by introducing the metaphor of a journey through the work. Some sample questions and instructions for initiating this process can be:

- In a silence disposition, imagine that you were to enter into, and travel through this work of art. Where would your entry point be?
- Which places would you stop at during the journey?
- Which places would you avoid or bypass? Why?
- Where would you like to have a rest? Why?
- Where would you end the journey? and/or where would be your exit point?
- While on the journey, take note of the details of the formal features and other things you would find on your way that you would like to talk about on your return. Keep in mind how these features and items relate to each other in the work.
- Take note also of things you do not seem to understand, or things that you would wish to ask questions about.
- Watch out for any symbolic and representational features that would help you in your interpretation of the work. For instance, what kinds of proverbial symbols, body movements, gestures, or miming do you see? What musical type

do hear? Take note of any verbal art performances such as folktales, libationary prayers, appellations, and funeral dirges.

According to Horner, during this phase (fusion-dialogue stage) of the response process (while one remains in a deep perceptual disposition) there should be no externalization such as gestures, speaking, and/or visual language, as this may interrupt the aesthetic experience. Every thought or gesture should be internalized; for example, we should do gesture in our inner-body if the artwork is a performance such as dance and theatre; speak and sing in our inner-voice if it is auditory or music; and draw and write on our inner-canvas if it is a still image. As a consequence of focusing their whole attention on the work of art, students will enter into a state of concentration that will enable them to identify and attend to its features in a wholistic manner. It is important, however, to construct a summary of our perceptual experience immediately after the fusion-dialogue process so as to keep a record of the experience. This may take on the form of a poem, figurative representation, narrative, or reenactment of salient portions of our experience in a performance. Such a summary can be used as a reminder of the perceptual experience when responding to the artistic form.

### **Remembering**

The second phase of aesthetic scanning -- remembering -- can be characterized as a process of giving order to the form of experience gained by the viewer as a result of his or her interaction with the work of art during the fusion-dialogue process.

Remembering is the process of recollecting, rearranging, synthesizing, sequencing, and recomposing the pieces of information that were recorded in the mind during the fusion stage into a story form ready for narration. This process is analogous to trying to remember a dream, or taking an inventory of the things experienced or seen on the way during a journey or an excursion. The key to remembering is reflective thinking. Teachers can initiate reflective thinking through the introduction of a role-playing idea. The following are some sample instructions and questions to be asked by the teacher.

Imagine that you have two different identities, namely: an outer-self identity (i.e., your physical self); and an inner-self identity (i.e., the other self). Assuming that your inner-self is undertaking a metaphoric journey through the work of art, your outer-self should interact with it, fetching from it information about its experiences along the way.

- Map out all the places you passed during the trip, taking note of where you stayed longer; places you stayed away from, and state why.

- 1) Make a list of what you saw, heard, or experienced at different places along the way in the order in which they happened.
- 2) Describe the characteristics of each item you saw, heard, or experienced -- specific lines, colours, sounds, movements, traditional proverbial objects, or symbols -- in the work. For example:
  - a) are the lines thick, thin, curved, perpendicular, slanted, parallel, or crossed?
  - b) are they bright or dull, hot, warm, or cool?

- c) of what tone or pitch are the sounds? Are the sounds rough or smooth textured?
  - d) is the movement pattern slow or fast, vigorous or smooth?
  - e) what do the proverbial objects or symbols look like, e.g. *Adinkra* motifs, stool symbols, umbrella tops, or ceremonial state sword symbols?
- 3) Briefly, but concisely, would you represent the highlights of your experiences verbally, or in a performance, or written form? In other words, describe how it feels being inside there (the work) -- hot, warm, cold, lonely, happy, sad, awesome -- and explain why.
- If you were unable to enter into the work or undertake a journey through it, would you describe your struggle. What do you think prevented you from entering? Why do you think so?

### **Deconstruction**

The third phase, deconstruction, involves attempting to undo, unravel, or break down the work of art into its component parts by itemising the materials or media of which it was made, as well as other elements that constitute the details of its structure. For example, if the work is a sculpture, is it made of wood, clay plaster, stone, metal, or a combination of two or more materials? If it is a painting, is it composed of oil, tempera, acrylic, or watercolour? Is the painting done on canvas, cardboard, or paper? If the work is a performance, is it a dance or dramatic activity? If it is a dance, what are the predominant pattern of movements involved in it? What expressive and symbolic

choreographic movements can you identify in it? If it is music, how are the various sound patterns rendered? If it is in the area of the verbal arts, what form do the words and phrases take, for example, are they in the form of stories, riddles, proverbs, appellations, or dirges? This process of itemising bits and pieces of the work should be directed towards encouraging students to identify the work's components using their appropriate terms.

One way to enter into the deconstruction process is to have students keep a haptic relation with the work of art through touching, smelling, and listening to the components. The class can work together taking turns in itemising the components of a work. It should be noted, however, that while this process can be easy to undertake with visual art forms which lend themselves to reviewing as many times as required, it may be met with problems if applied to the performing arts such as music, dance, and drama; or the verbal arts such as storytelling, riddles, and poetic recitation. In this case, itemising and naming of components should take place while the performance is in progress. In order to avoid any possible conflict between sounds made by describers and those of performers, naming of items should be done in writing and not verbally. An inventory of items identified by the class may later be written down on the chalk board so that students can learn about those items which they each may have omitted from their own inventories. In this way, students will build a firm foundation of terms for describing the work of art. Sample instructions and questions to direct students' thought may include:



- Of what materials and tools is this object / image / event / performance made?  
In other words, isolate the parts of this object / image / event / performance, each one unto itself, and assign to them characteristic or descriptive names.
- Which of the parts do you think have to be named first? Why?
- Reviewing the inventory, what parts may have been left unnamed or not mentioned?
- Turning your own deconstruction process into a narrative, share it with the class, either verbally or in written form. In other words, how would you describe the structure of this work?
- In what way do you think your narrative will affect your understanding of the artwork?

### **Structuring**

The fourth phase of aesthetic scanning, structuring, is an extension of the deconstruction process. It is similar to describing the technical qualities of the artwork. Having deconstructed the work of art to enable us to study its structure, structuring helps us to build a sense of the whole work by studying the patterns of relationships that exist among the deconstructed components. Specifically, it involves speculating about the possible ways in which the work was constructed. In other words, the structuring process attempts to find out the techniques and procedures used by the artist to render the artwork.

By drawing on their own art-making experiences, for instance, students can systematically analyze the process used by the artist. Teachers can encourage such analysis with the following examples of questions and instructions.

- How do you think this object, image, or performance was composed? In other words, how would you describe the rendering of lines, colours, images, musical sounds, dance movements, or words and phrases in the work? For example:

- 1) State if the nature of the brushwork or tool marks in this artwork indicate a bold or weak rendering of lines;
- 2) Are the colours thickly or thinly applied? Indicate if the colours are applied in the raw state or mixed. To what extent are the colours blended?
- 3) Are the images rendered in the realistic or abstract form? State if the images overlap or are drawn wide apart from each other. Does the rendering of the images indicate an evidence of distance (perspective) in the artwork? Explain how you think the artist has achieved this.
- 4) How would you describe the musical sounds? For example, which of the musical instruments -- drums, gongs, horns, clappers, xylophones -- give the highest/lowest pitch or tone? Which instrumental sound do you hear most/least predominantly? How far do you think the vocal aspect of the music relates to the instrumental sounds? How would you describe the rhythm of the music, e.g. complex, simple, fast, slow?
- 5) Describe the pattern of the dance movements taking note of the movement of the feet, arms, shoulders, and waist. Give a detailed description of all

expressive or symbolic body movements and gestures incorporated into the basic dance pattern by the dancer.

6) What form do the verbal utterances take, e.g. narratives, questions and answers, proverbial statements and maxims, poetic recitations in the form appellations or funeral dirges? Describe which statements were well narrated or recited with emphasis, mentioning the facial expressions and other bodily gestures accompanying these statements.

- Describe any patterns revealed in the overall composition of the artwork created by the rendition lines, colour work, tool marks, musical sounds, dance and dramatic movements, and verbal statements.
- Do the patterns show a repeated, uniform, or variable order? Explain.
- Do the patterns reveal a rough or smooth texture? Explain.
- What do you think is the particular order (procedure) followed by the artist in composing the work?
- Describe any particular type of artistic tradition, or stylistic convention, with particular reference to indigenous Ghanaian artistic traditions, revealed by the structure of the work.

### **Interpreting**

The fifth phase of aesthetic scanning, interpreting, is a process involving searching for meaning in a work of art. The meaning-making process is dependent on our empathetic encounter with the work of art and it is largely influenced by our social and

experiential conditions. In other words, ability to interpret work of art requires us to interpret our perceptual experience of that work by synthesizing our impressions as the result of the aesthetic encounter. It is from these impressions that we gain insights or clues to the possible meanings of the work of art. This means, we should draw together the discoveries (the things we perceived) while examining the work of art. We should also keep a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. That is to say, we need to be sensitive to the social, cultural, political, religious, and philosophical contexts which determine the relative significance of the things that we perceive in an artwork. Both teachers and students should be willing to speculate on alternative meanings, that is, to reflect upon the clues obtained through the perception process in order to decipher the expressive, connotative, and symbolic meanings of the artwork. By deciphering these meanings we can become more conscious of the assumptions underlying the meanings of things we perceive (Chapman, 1978, p. 70). Some sample questions and instructions to guide students to speculate about the meanings of an artwork may include the following:

- What do you think this image, object, event, or performance is about?
- Based on the things you saw, heard, and felt when examining this artwork, what message do you get from it?
- Is the message coming from the work as a whole, or from sub-parts of it?  
Identifying those sub-parts, explain your understanding of each of them.
- Name those sub-parts which you think mostly influence the message or meaning of this artwork.

- How far do the traditional proverbial objects, forms, symbols, or expressions, e.g. exaggerated body parts, colour symbolism, stool, umbrella and linguist staff symbols, in this artwork influence its message or meaning?
- What verbal statements -- proverbs, maxims, or legends -- influence your interpretation this artwork?
- In what ways do the social, religious, or ceremonial purpose of this artwork help you in interpreting its meaning?
- Relating this work to examples of other images, objects, symbolic forms, or traditional events and performances that you have seen or experienced, what things come into your mind that you think can be useful clues for interpreting this artwork?
- Summing up your understandings of the various sub-parts of the work, what would you say is the overall meaning of the work?
- Do you think your interpretation of this artwork will change its original theme? Why? and in what ways?
- How would this change affect your perception of the original work?

The discipline of aesthetics has been referred to as the philosophy of art. It is that branch of philosophy which deals with what constitutes the essence of art. In other words, the theory of aesthetics is that which examines the implicit and explicit assumptions about the nature, meaning, value (significance) of art. Philosophical aesthetics also demonstrates that there is more to an artifact than its formal qualities and that, for us to effectively interpret it, we need to seek its significance within the culture

of its generation and use. Thus, to enable us to understand, describe, interpret, and respond to an artwork in an effective manner, we need to explore the following ideas:

- 1) how people of the culture within which the artifact originates values its art forms;
- 2) the ways in which the artifact influences or contributes to satisfying the fundamental social needs and aspirations of the people who make and use it; and
- 3) how artistic traditions, stylistic conventions, and symbolic artistic expressions are used to communicate value systems and ideologies of the society that gave birth to the artifact.

Exploring such ideas and subtle issues surrounding art, when skilfully managed, can help students to think more critically when inquiring about artworks. Such an approach to inquiry about art in the classroom can also help students learn how to make informed interpretations of works of art. It is, however, important for teachers to ensure that aesthetic learning activities are planned such that they are consistent with the students' level of intellectual and psychological development. It should be noted that a well informed interpretation of art is the basis for making effective aesthetic judgements. The methods of making judgements about works of art, otherwise known as 'art criticism' are discussed in the next section.

## **Art Criticism**

### **(Development of Critical Artistic Literacy)**

The final evaluation and judgement of works of art should begin with a discussion of the work's unique qualities after analyzing it. This discussion should be used as an extension of the dialogue on evaluation and judgement at the Junior Secondary School level. At the Senior Secondary School level, students are capable of making mature and reasoned judgements about works of art. Students should be made aware that our ability to make worthwhile value judgements about works of art is dependent on how well we draw together the discoveries we made while examining the work. This process, which Chapman calls "synthesizing", enables us to reflect critically on the pervasive qualities, as well as its overriding theme or the mood created by it. It is by this means that we realize the significance of our perceptual experience.

It is important to make students aware that the discrepancies among the definitions and constructs of art in the Modern Western and non-Western sense apply to art criticism as well. This implies that as a consequence of these discrepancies, we cannot judge arts from different cultural backgrounds as belonging to the same category. While art criticism is concerned with quality, any one category of art cannot be said to be better than another (Chalmers, 1996). It would be arbitrary to say, for instance, that Modern Western definitions of art and artistic endeavours are better than those of the non-Western world and vice versa. Each culture has a right to its own definitions and interpretations of its artifacts. Each has its own artistic traditions and conventions, as well as symbolic and value systems that inform the interpretations and evaluative

judgements of its art forms. Students need also to be made aware that the creative impulses of the artist, the materials he or she uses, and the subject matter of the artifact, all derive from the socio-cultural context of the artist. As such, the meaning of a work of art does not lie exclusively in the work, but it emerges as a result of social interpretation. At the level of their maturity and development, students can deal with sophisticated cultural matters. Teaching should, therefore, make students aware of the need to explore the cultural background of artworks when making critical judgements about art. This will put them in a position to develop reasoned arguments in support of their judgements. An example of beginning dialogue with students follows.

### **Design**

- How would you describe the procedure followed by the artist to compose this artwork?
  - Identify the centre of interest in the work and give reasons for your choice.
  - Considering the use of colour, shapes, sound patterns, dance movements and gestures in this work of art, how would you describe the artist's technique or style of working? (Consider the following sub-questions as a guide).
1. How does the artist apply colour, e.g. pure/mixed, bright/dull, light/dark, warm/cool, transparent/opaque?
  2. How does the artist represent shapes and forms, e.g. realistic/abstract, regular/irregular, proportional/exaggerated?



3. Describe how the artist has arranged shapes, forms, and colour to show distance and depth in the artwork.
  4. How would you describe the sound pattern, e.g. regular/irregular, complex/simple, fast/slow, stable/unstable?
  5. How would you describe the nature of the sounds, e.g. high-pitch or low-pitch, close or distant, free-flowing or restrained, long or short, continuous or interrupted?
  6. What are the predominant movements in the dance pattern, e.g. hopping, shaking, summersaulting, stamping of the feet?
  7. What is the nature of the dance, e.g. vigorous or gentle, fast or slow, complex or simple,
  8. How would you describe the verbal statements, e.g. continuous or intermittent, flowing or interrupted, inquiring or explaining, proverbial, bewailing, or prayerful?
  9. How does the artist make use of space in terms of the arrangement of the components of the work, e.g. empty, filled, orderly, random?
- Having examined the artwork, would you say the artist has followed some indigenous Ghanaian artistic traditions or conventions? Describe the particular traditions you have observed in the work.
  - Comparing this artwork to other works of art in its category, find out the similarities and differences in the way this work is composed.

- If you were to do this work, all over again (i.e., carve it, paint it, or perform it), which parts of it would you maintain; which parts would you change or ignore?
- If you were to advise the artist (give him/her feedback) on the design or technique of the work, what areas of it would you recommend for amendment? What changes (i.e., what additions or subtractions) would you suggest to be made in the work? Why?

### **Subject Matter**

- What is the subject matter or theme of the work?
- What characteristics of the work suggest its theme, e.g. indigenous Ghanaian proverbial objects, traditional symbols, or artistic traditions portrayed by the design of the work?
- Does the theme of the work seem to be difficult or easy to identify? How would you explain your opinion?
- Is the work easy or difficult to understand? What makes it so?
- What particular features -- expressive and symbolic qualities -- offer the work its meaning or understanding?
- What do the symbolic expressions (if any) in the work tell you about it?
- Which parts of the work would you say are difficult to understand?
- What other meaning(s) would you suggest for this work of art based on the traditional proverbial symbols and other things incorporated into its design?

- From the characteristics and your understanding of this work, would you say that its original title or theme is befitting? Support your opinion.
- As a result of your impressions and understanding of this work, what alternative title(s) would you suggest for it?
- Explain why you think the title(s) you have suggested is (are) more appropriate.

### **Materials and Tools**

Looking at this work of art, make a list of the materials and tools you think may have been used in composing it.

- Why do you think the artist chose these particular materials and tools for this work?
- Discuss the appropriateness and/or inappropriateness of the media and tools utilized for this type of art form.
- From the characteristics of the techniques employed by the artist, do you think he/she has applied the tools effectively? Explain.
- Given the art form, its design, and subject matter, what other materials and tools would you use to accomplish this work?

### **Functions**

- Based on the design, subject matter, and meaning of this work of art, what would you say is the purpose(s) for which it could be used? Give reasons for your suggestions.

- In your opinion, what might be the social significance of this work of art to the Ghanaian people?
- If the work of art bears some social and cultural ramifications to the people of Ghana, find out the particular events, rituals, or traditions in which it is used, how it is used in those traditions, and its significance to Ghanaians.
- How far do you think the function of the work relates to its meaning?
- Has your opinion changed after learning something about the work of art? Why? or why not?
- Based on the relationship between the function of the work and its meaning, would you conclude that the artist has successfully achieved his or her aim? Explain your position.
- What personal significance does this work have for you, having learnt about its socio-cultural ramifications?
- If you were to suggest alternative uses for this work of art, in what other ways and on what occasions would you recommend the use of this work? Why do you think so?

### **Evaluation and Judgement**

- What would you say are the unique qualities of the work of art?
- How well is the subject of the work conveyed by the artist?
- What is the mood conveyed by the work, e.g. gratitude, peace, sadness, happiness, agitation, anxiety?

- What characteristics of the work suggest this mood? Give reasons to support your view.
- What do you think might be the aim of the artist?
- In your opinion, what might have influenced the decisions of the artist?
- What would you say is most pleasing about this work? What is least pleasing about it?
- Having analyzed the work, what characteristics of it make it valuable?
- In what ways do you think the form and presentation (rendition) of this work fits its use?
- How well do you think the artist might have achieved his or her aims?

In the area of the verbal arts, it is important to note that understanding is the key to the appreciation and criticism of Ghanaian oratory. For example, presenting a proverb through a speech in a way as to make the audience understand the proverb in its social context is indicative of the appropriateness of its usage. That is, it is when a proverb is used appropriately that the meaning embedded in it is understood by the audience. On the other hand, without being used in an appropriate social context and in relation to the theme of the occasion or circumstance to which the speaker speaks, a proverb may not be understood. It should be noted also that the understanding of a proverb, and for that matter a speech, rests not only with the speaker and his or her mode of presentation, but also with the attentiveness of the listener. Our teaching strategies should, therefore, be directed towards creating grounds for students to participate actively in making meaning

of verbal presentations, as well as non-verbal expressive behaviours that accompany them.

One way by which to promote such a participation may be to advise students to carry with them pocket notebooks in which to write unfamiliar proverbs and other sayings they hear at family or clan meetings or at ceremonies. The student can then make an appointment with the speaker or an expert to seek interpretations and explanations of those sayings and write them down. Students' aims to unearth various hidden layers of meanings in a proverb or other sayings can be achieved through carefully planned questions such as:

- What did you mean when you said this? Or what did the speaker mean by this statement?
- In what other way can such a proverb, statement or phrase be interpreted?
- How does this proverb, maxim, or statement relate to or explain the context in which you (the speaker) spoke? In what other contexts can it be used?
- How can one know that such a proverb, statement, or maxim is used appropriately?
- How can one know if a proverb or maxim is used wrongly?
- Why does a speaker use proverbs and maxims in a speech?
- When is it not appropriate to use proverbs in a speech? Why?

In this way, students would not be passive, but active listeners to what the speaker is saying, trying to figure out the message the speaker intends to convey. Recording the text of a proverb (a verbal art form) and the situation in which it occurs can provide pieces

of information for correlating the two and deriving meaning from them. The collection of interpretation(s) of proverbs is essential for the delineation of the rules regarding Ghanaian oratory, without which one would not understand how the Ghanaian people appreciate and criticise their oral arts.

The art criticism model followed here is designed with the aim of combining both critical reflection and inquiry, as well as critical dialogue. It is based on the notion that most of our perceptual distinctions are based on the memory traces that form a continuum of the feelings we get as a result of an aesthetic experience (Chapman, 1978). Since our aim is not to reach a consensus on the ideas brought forward by students during the art-critical process, teachers should refrain from dismissing students' spontaneous ideas which might not be clearly presented. Rather, students should be encouraged to clarify their views by asking them to support their ideas with reasons. Evaluation and judgement in art criticism -- a synthesis of the ideas, insights, and discoveries we have made as a result of the aesthetic experience -- should be viewed as a profound creative act involving a critical reflective process. Therefore, with guidance through sensitive questioning, teachers can offer students opportunities to build sound arguments during the art-critical process. The experiences gained through such lessons can also offer students insights in the analysis and evaluation of a variety of artifacts.

As has been noted at the beginning of this chapter, the decision of the Senior Secondary School student to study any aspect of the arts is based on a free choice, probably for career opportunities after graduation. While arts education may not necessarily aim at making a professional out of the Senior Secondary School student, the

basis of the arts programme should be the same as that for the adult individual who will take his or her place in society. Basic to the planning of teaching goals should, therefore, be the student who is in the art programme. This suggests a mutual teacher-student dialogue and exchange of ideas -- a relationship in which teacher and student cooperate in setting up learning objectives appropriate for the student's inclinations and drives. The premise here is that while the teacher is the agent who designs classroom activities and presents stimuli for learning, the actual mechanism of learning lies within the student, and thus his or her interests should be at the core of the learning situation.

The emphasis on an experiential approach to learning is to involve the student in practical problem-solving activities that involve personal reflections, inquiry, and brain storming. This is to assist the individual student to develop a realistic way of exercising his or her mind during a learning situation. Central to this instructional approach is skill development for continued learning. It is to enable the student to acquire critical thinking skills (an active and conscious mind that is capable of reasoning and making rational decisions) and a sense of self-direction in the learning situation, thereby making learning personal and authentic. Implicit here is the assumption that the student will discover his or her imaginative, innovative, and creative tendencies to enable him or her to think, feel, and act creatively towards systematic problem-solving in art both inside and outside the classroom. Such tendencies may include technical skills in the application of art materials, tools, and equipment for art production as a means of personal fulfilment in art. The student will also develop analytical skills for gathering, evaluating, synthesizing, and documenting artistic data for the construction of personal knowledge. In addition, the



student will learn to apply critical thinking skills and reflective practice as intellectual tools and essential creative bases for learning: that is, for examining, questioning, and interpreting ideas, concepts, and information about art, and gaining authentic insights into artistic phenomena before assimilating them. Implicit in this objective is the consideration of the implications of the knowledge that has been reflectively authenticated and assimilated for its real-life situations. In other words, it is envisaged that the student should be able to direct the knowledge gained from the day-to-day learning situations towards coping with life's situations. The arts made and performed by the Ghanaian people do not arise out of a vacuum; they are a part of their social institutions influencing and being influenced by Ghanaian social and cultural histories and value systems. For the student to successfully take his or her place in the Ghanaian society and to effectively meet the challenges of life through the means of the arts, it is essential that his or her aesthetic sensibilities reflect the artistic issues and needs that are shared by members of the society. In trying to identify art that matters, discussing its meanings, roles, and significance (place) in social life with cultural experts, the student will understand the arts not as institutions isolated from society, but as agents of socialization. Directing classroom dialogue at encouraging the student to constantly correlate the arts with socio-cultural issues will enable him or her to understand how the arts function in socializing not only the Ghanaian people, but the human society at large.

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## GLOSSARY

The purpose of this glossary is to explain some terms and phrases as they are used in this thesis.

Abusua Kuruwa: A pot or amphora kept by families or clans of certain Ghanaian tribes, particularly the Akan, in which relics are stored. Such relics include body parts such as bits of hair and finger nails, and also small personal objects (jewellery) especially rings, of dead members of a family or clan which are kept in remembrance of them.

Anglicize: To influence or cause a person's (or a people's) behaviours, modes of being, or ways of life to become English in character.

Arable farming: A type of farming that specializes in the cultivation of food crops.

Ballads: Indigenous Ghanaian folk songs usually composed in short stanzas.

Calico: Plain, white cotton cloth.

Cassava: A starchy, tuberous root of a shrub-like tropical plant with palmate leaves of the genus *manihot* (manioc) cultivated for food.

Cocoyam: The tuberous, potato-like root of a plant with an underground stem (a rhizome) with broad, juicy leaves belonging to the tropical rain forest area. Both leaves and tubers are used as food.

**Curriculum enrichment programme.** A school programme which is not regarded as a full-fledged discipline within the time framework of daily instruction and, therefore, is organized as an extra-curricula activity.

**Durbar of chiefs:** A reception of chiefs, dignitaries, and people of a tribal or traditional state in commemoration of important occasions such as festivals.

**Fabric mordanting material:** Any substance or chemical used in textile dyeing to fix the colouring matter onto yarns and fabrics.

**Green-ware:** A terminology used in ceramics to refer to unfired clay products.

**Iconographical analysis:** The study or analysis of symbolic artistic representations with reference to their subject matter, meanings, and significance to the society or culture that gave birth to them.

**Iron slag:** The waste matter (residue) that is left behind in the form of iron rust after iron has been extracted from its ore.

**Lifeworld:** The socially and culturally shared behaviours, conceptions, ideals, and attitudes about everyday experience as held by a particular group of people. That is, the particular ways in which the people of a particular social and cultural situation interact with each other, sharing certain kinds of behaviour and modes of living in the world, as well as of knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes about life and living.

**Myrrh:** A type of sweet-smelling, bitter-tasting vegetable gum obtained from certain hard wood plants of dry, tropical lands, used for making perfumes and cosmetics, as well as an aromatic preparation for body painting.

Ngmaadaa: An indigenous Ghanaian beer brewed from corn. It is most common among the Ewe and Ga-Dangme tribes. It is known as *Ekudeme* among the Ewe people.

Palm oil: A type of edible, reddish vegetable oil obtained from the pulp of the palm fruit.

Palm wine: A type of drinkable juice tapped from the palm tree.

Pictographs/pictograms: A series of motifs or symbols used in representing ideas as a form of picture writing. In Ghana, pictographs known as *Adinkra* symbols are employed as an indigenous way of recording certain historical and philosophical ideas that are most cherished by the people. Pictographs are also known as ideographs or ideograms.

Pito: A type of home-brewed beer made from millet. While *pito* is produced throughout Ghana, it is an indigenous product of the Northern and Upper Regions of the country, where it serves the purpose of a beverage, as well as a prophylactic against the feverish conditions associated with the heat of the sun.

Proboscis: The long, flexible snout of an insect used in feeding.

Sack cloth: A thick, strong fabric woven from spun jute fibres, usually used in making industrial sacks (bags).

Terracotta: Fired, unglazed clay-ware, usually reddish-brown in colour.

Warp sheet: A set of yarns placed lengthwise in a loom to be crossed and interlaced with filling yarns to form a fabric. The warp sheet forms the lengthwise threads in a woven fabric.

Weft-way stripes: A woven fabric in which stripes are formed in the widthwise direction as a result of using two or more different coloured weft (filling) yarns to interlace with the warp.

Yam: A large, starchy, tuberous root of a climbing, vine-like plant cultivated for food in warm tropical countries, especially in West Africa.