


Fall 2013

The Abstract Text: Adinkra Symbolism as a Narrative in Drawing

Sherae Rimpsey
SIT Study Abroad

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School for International Training
Study Abroad – Ghana
Social Transformation and Cultural Expression

Fall 2013

The Abstract Text: Adinkra Symbolism as a Narrative in Drawing

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Acknowledgements

My time here in Ghana almost feels like the stuff of legend. I have been given the gift of this experience at a point in my life when the unexpected – the inconceivable was most needed. I would like to give thanks to my grandmother, who taught me the wonders of living a fully engaged life. She guides everything that I do.

I dedicate this work to her. I would also like to thank my professors in the States whose faith in me, has been unceasing and enables me to continue asking questions of myself and the work, no matter how daunting. Professor Amegatcher, incredibly you have breathed life into this project. Your enthusiasm and encouragement sustained me in my darkest hour. Your genius lies not just in your intellectual command of virtually any topic, but also your perceptiveness and sensitivity in coaxing the unfathomable to the surface. I thank you sir.

The Boakye family was incredibly generous in their effort to impart as much practical knowledge and expertise on Adinkra cloth processes as they could. I looked forward to each day of working and interacting with them. They went to great lengths to make me feel welcome and were open to some of the more unconventional approaches to inquiry, learning, and creative expression. They fed me, regaled me with stories, and reveled in the work that we did together each day. In short, they shepherded me through this thing and I am eternally grateful to them for helping me to bring my ideas to fruition. It has been a profoundly inspiring experience. I think that the SIT staff here in Ghana has brilliantly structured the program so that we feel empowered to become “full grown mosquitoes” with a renewed sense of purpose and capacity for self-reflection. I am honored to have met each and every one of you. Yemi, thank you for being Father Christmas, your passion and commitment allow us to thrive. To Yemi, Kokroko, Yaw, Amah, Kwame, Papa Attah,

Kwakutse, and Magdalene, please know that you have a home wherever I am in this world. I look forward to breaking bread with you over the years. Lastly I would like to give special thanks to Kwame, who saw me through this every step of the way. Thank you for giving so much of your time and energy to this project. You handled my stubbornness with patience and grace. I will miss your candor, and laughter. Owusu, I am proud to know you and “*if there’s one thing I know*”...I will never be the same.

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Abstract

- 1. Title:** The Abstract Text: Adinkra Symbolism as a Narrative in Drawing
- 2. Author:** Sherae Rimpsey (soot_slr@yahoo.com; Cleveland Institute of Art)
- 3. Objectives:**
- i. Discuss the history of Adinkra textiles and its processes.
 - ii. Establish the origin and significance of Adinkra symbols.
 - iii. Situate the Adinkra symbols within Abstraction and examine its narrative potential as a non-discursive mode of communication in drawing.
 - iv. Create iconography to be in dialog with Adinkra symbols as part of a constructed narrative.
- 4. Methodology:** I utilized the three key principles of methodological research – participation, observation, and interview in order to have direct experience with Adinkra cloth processes. I felt that this was necessary in order to effectively make sense of and analyze Adinkra symbols. I interviewed several members of the Boakye family who operate an Adinkra cloth studio in Ntonso regarding their practice of dyeing and stamping (printing); and spoke at length with them about the history of Adinkra symbols and cloth production, its significance to the Asante people and their family’s role in preserving these traditions. Moreover, I interviewed citizens in the Kumasi suburb Asokwa, which had previously been thought to be the locus of the Kuntunkuni dyeing, an important aspect of Adinkra cloth production. I apprenticed with Mamey Boakye, a master Adinkra cloth dyer; Gabriel and Peter Boakye who are both master Adinkra symbol printers; and Paul Boakye a master carver for a total of 3 weeks to learn traditional Adinkra techniques, with the goal of making finished works; including carved symbols based on my own imagery. This allowed me to potentially construct my own narrative, since I would be making drawings for analysis and comparison to Adinkra symbols. As part of my research, I photographed, scanned, and enlarged the drawings and the symbols themselves to study the space in and around the lines of the forms. By isolating and enlarging portions of the symbols and drawings, I was able to proffer other ways of seeing and interpreting meaning from them.
- 5. Findings:** Isolating portions of the Adinkra symbols proved to be a worthwhile endeavor, as they opened themselves up to closer inspection. The circle, semi circle, oval, triangle, squares and rectangles, and other geometric and abstract forms are fundamental to Adinkra symbolism. The Adinkra symbols themselves are expansive in meaning without compromising any of its relevance or power. The symbols enrich, affirm, and communicate a complex set of narratives around ritual, tradition, beliefs, and codes of existence. I chose to focus on the Adinkra symbols mate masie, sunsum, and nkyinkyim. I selected these for their personal resonance in conjunction with my own drawings for constructing a narrative. The visual coherence of the traditional Adinkra symbols actually help to ground elements of the finished narrative works.
- 6. Conclusion:** My drawings are a way of negotiating meaning. Continued reflection and analysis of narrative cohesiveness in the imagery are necessary for discerning if the work is resolved.

Literature Review

Although, I've cited several important texts in my reference list, *Cloth as Metaphor: (Re)Reading the Adinkra Cloth Symbols of the Akan of Ghana* by G.F. Kojo Arthur was essential to my research and ideas situating Adinkra symbols in the realm of abstract drawing; in spite of his framing of the symbols as an extension of written language. He observes that the so-called 'verbal' component of the Adinkra cloths effectively makes them visual metaphors on several levels of discourse. The book does not really delve into Semiotics, except in passing but does emphasize how communication can be effectively imparted using "discrete graphical representation of commonly held ideas". When Arthur compares Adinkra symbols to those of African descendants in the Diaspora (Arthur, 2001) I wished that he had devoted more time to the topic. Any writing on these themes is vital to post-colonial theory and scholarship. Arthur's observations on the phenomena of 'under-coding' were particularly instructive for me in discerning and critiquing the effectiveness of the completed Adinkra cloths' intended narrative. There are elements of the black Kuntunkuni cloth that could be perceived as unresolved. The 'mumunumu' imagery may be experienced as inaccessible, and it is my responsibility as the artist and researcher to come to terms with that. I hadn't been familiar with the term under-coding, but realize that I had certainly engaged in it at one time or another as a viewer. In short, under-coding happens when in the absence of reliable interpretative rules; a person infers (unknowingly) on the basis of gesture, inflection, facial expression, context, and setting – specific core meanings in a musical score, text, performance or other mode of communication. These ideas are critical for any in depth consideration of my project work.

Introduction

The arc of my interests as an artist and student are what brought me to Ghana. I wanted to further an interdisciplinary means of working and problem solving, knowing that reconnecting somehow with core aspects of African aesthetic traditions and scholarship could expand my practice in untold ways. My BFA thesis research and work for exhibition will be in large part informed by my time here and so there is a fluid back and forth of ideas. These past several weeks have been a critical time creatively. The home stays opened up new dual private / public space and the fieldwork excursions allowed me to fully engage in the public sphere in ways that would not be possible in the States. For although we have participated in dance performances, attended funerals, and taken part in some aspect of ritual; none of these spaces have taken on the element of spectacle which is so endemic in the United States. On the contrary, the subtlety and engagement necessary for these occasions, force one to question what is the nature of public and what is the nature of private space in Ghanaian life. By that I mean what are its qualities? Even cooking takes on what could be seen as a public act, when one analyzes the making of fufu. This forces me to turn the performance (or how I had previously thought of it), inward and onto itself. Language, interestingly comes into play here I think. Ironically, I felt most compelled to speak Twi and to do so with confidence in Tamale. Obviously, the Dagomba don't speak Twi but I fell into wanting to speak Twi because my possibilities for doing so were significantly curtailed. This is how language becomes performance or something *performed* rather than *spoken*; with all of this being played out within the terrain of shifting spaces.

Drawing is the foundation of my art making, while the focus of my work ultimately comes back to how we construct and perform Place in our everyday lives. As I've come to understand it, Place isn't a physical, geographically located habitable space, but rather Place is fully realized in the interior – one's interior life – and so is mutable, expansive being constructed and performed constantly. We take it with us. What are the implications of trying to designate it as a shared space? Its viability as a shared space is contestable, and therefore we are driven to create or find some semblance of this longed for but elusive habitable space – Place. I have gone into this idea in my mini-ISP on fufu. *Place*, and the preoccupation with it, plays a prominent role in the lives of many as we wade through modernity. But it takes on special relevance in the lives of Africans living in the Diaspora. In part, *The Abstract Text: Adinkra Symbolism as a Narrative in Drawing* – attempts to bridge themes brought about by Adinkra symbols with that of my own drawings as a kind of text that functions as a narrative of place.

The Adinkra symbols, by their graphic nature and arguably ideographic structure operate both linguistically and pictorially. By framing the Adinkra symbols as a kind of abstract drawing, I mean to examine its narrative power beyond that as a collection of Asante proverbs. There is a Black American artist, David Hammons who created what he terms “spirit writing”. Hammons' *spirit writings* are a series of drawings that mimic or imply letters of the alphabet and familiar shapes. They are linear but somehow wholly non-linear and take on new meaning each time the ‘reader’ comes into contact with the compositions. I have chosen to use the Hammons work as a kind of compass for my project work, in terms of negotiating the imagery of Adinkra and my own drawings – twin narratives in dialog with one another so to speak. It seems that trying to decipher the strange code-like drawings in a literal way are not what the artist has set out for us, but rather a more

non-discursive means of engaging the viewer. ‘Non-discursive communication’ is where one may come across something that we cannot really articulate and yet we realize its significance and potentiality. The Hammons work is distinguished by its abstraction. This facet is central to the effectiveness of the ‘spirit writings’, and so too it is central to reading Adinkra symbols as a mode of abstraction. These ideas are a lot to unpack. Most especially because there is much that needs to be considered with my situating Adinkra in this way; as a kind of abstract drawing *and* as an abstract text, one in the same, a narrative within drawing. In plotting out how to begin writing, researching, and thinking about all of this I must begin with the history of Adinkra cloth. Professor Amegatcher beautifully stated that the art of Adinkra is “a deliberate act”. This is true, as one goes through the process of adinkra cloth dyeing and production. It seems to me that the labor and care that goes into making the dye and the dyeing of the cloth is integral to the rendering of the symbols themselves. An important text in my research has been *Cloth as Metaphor: (Re)Reading the Adinkra Cloth Symbols of the Akan of Ghana* by G.F. Kojo Arthur. Although, Arthur’s interest is in Adinkra, as a form of ideographic written language, his assertions surrounding the cloth being a kind of subtext or allegory are wonderful in facilitating my own theories on Adinkra symbols. Here again, the tactile aspects of the cloth dyeing processes are key – as well as the power of textiles. His main point of the significance of metaphor (symbols) in constructing meaning and in turn creating “alternative realities” is obviously narrative driven, but also gets to the heart of abstraction. For abstraction is about transgressing the *real* or what is presented to us, in search of the interior – the complexity of meaning.

Methodology

For my project research, I was based in the heart of the Asante Region. I lived in Kumasi and traveled to Ntonso 6 days a week, a town that is well known for Adinkra cloth production. I utilized the three key principles of methodological research – participation, observation, and interview in order to have direct experience with Adinkra cloth processes. I felt that this was necessary in order to effectively make sense of and analyze Adinkra symbols. I interviewed several members of the Boakye family who operate an Adinkra cloth studio in Ntonso regarding their practice of dyeing and stamping (printing); and spoke at length with them about the history of Adinkra symbols and cloth production, its significance to the Asante people and their family's role in preserving these traditions. Moreover, I interviewed citizens in the Kumasi suburb of Asokwa, which had previously been thought to be the locus of Kuntunkuni dyeing, an important aspect of Adinkra cloth production. I apprenticed with Mamey Boakye, a master Adinkra cloth dyer; Gabriel and Peter Boakye who are both master Adinkra symbol printers; and Paul Boakye a master carver for a total of 3 weeks to learn traditional Adinkra techniques, with the goal of making finished works; including carved symbols based on my own imagery. This allowed me to potentially construct an Adinkra narrative, since I would be completing drawings for analysis and comparison to Adinkra symbols. As part of my research, I photographed, scanned, and enlarged the drawings and the symbols themselves to study the space in and around the lines of the forms. By isolating and enlarging portions of the symbols and drawings, I was able to proffer other ways of seeing and interpreting meaning from them.

Findings

To Be Or Not To Be: Kuntunkuni or Badie, the Exigencies of a History



Fig. 1 Badie Bark



Fig. 2 Kuntunkuni Root

The history of Adinkra cloth is rich and far - reaching. Openi Yaw (“Nana”) Boakye, the patriarch of the Boakye clan shared with me a most vivid story of the origins of the Adinkra cloth and dye that surpass any existing documentation on the subject. I realize that there is a certain level of secrecy and Apocrypha in African art and ritual, which necessitates the tradition’s survival for future generations. In this way, the traditions are shielded from misinterpretation / misrepresentation / distortion at the hands of ethno-anthropological investigation and curiosity that has proven to be detrimental to those very traditions. What is my role in preserving or disrupting these art forms and practices by researching, writing, and presenting them as part of a newly constructed narrative? Nana Boakye is 84 years old and has been dyeing and printing for over 70 years of his extraordinary life. His account of the origins of Adinkra cloth dyeing is intimately entwined with his family’s own beginnings in Ntonso, so it is no wonder that the town is known as Adinkra Village. According to Nana Boakye, there is a tree that has grown in the North for centuries called the Bonsum Dua or “evil tree”. The tree’s branches are plentiful and the tree looms over any vegetation and is a nuisance to farmers as it generates so much shade that other plant life cannot properly grow. It is so insidious that the entire tree has to be destroyed. If a farmer cut the tree down, they then had to set fire to its roots to ensure that it would not grow again. Nana Boakye’s great uncle Kojo – the brother of his grandmother was a hunter and farmer who had to contend with the Bonsum Dua on his own farm. The day he went to cut the tree down, it sprayed its “water” all over his dokodo cloth and stained it a dark color. No matter how he tried, he couldn’t get the dark tint out of his cloth. This was quite fortuitous for him as it aided in camouflaging while hunting and he discovered that by beating the root of the tree he could extract more of its so-called *water* to dye more of his cloth and old fabric. When people saw his dark cloths, they inquired about its unique color

and he relayed to them the story about how the *evil tree* spilled its water all over him. He began dyeing cloth for his neighbors in the village as well as instructing them on how to dye for themselves and word quickly spread. They donned the cloth while mourning and this is how the funeral cloth gets the name Kuntunkuni. Before long, he was selling the dyed cloth in the market with his sister and eventually gave up hunting entirely as the fledging business became quite lucrative. Here the intricacies of the story are made vague as the origins of the Kuntunkuni root and Badie tree are deftly merged it seems, when Nana Boakye tells of how Kojo began sending bark from the tree to the sister for her to dye cloth as well. Nana Boakye learned the mysteries of the tree(s) and dyeing from his mother Akosua as a small child, and has since passed this knowledge on to all of his children. This is how traditions are retained. On the first day of my apprenticeship with the Boakye family, I learned firsthand the various processes of extracting dye from the bark of the Badie and Kuntunkuni root...

Badie

Peel the bark from the tree, don't cut it. Then scrape off the outer skin to expose the underlying layer of bark. Break the bark into smaller pieces and soak in order to make them more pliable for 2 – 4 days, depending on if it is rainy season or dry season. After soaking, it is then put into a mortar and pounded until it becomes pulp. The pounding may take up to 2 days to complete, as this is an arduous process. Once we have the pulp, it is boiled for 6 hours, and then strained off. The liquid that remains sits for 24 hours to cool and settle. Then it is boiled for another 6 hours, at which point, the liquid when cooled is a thick black tar-like substance. This is the dye! It is now ready for printing.

Kuntunkuni

Here, the root is boiled for 6 hours and the dye is immediately ready. If you want to extract more dye, one has to pound the Kuntunkuni root before boiling again to get the dye. The preferred method of pounding the Kuntunkuni is by using a short thick metal pipe with a handful of root strands laid out on a slab. I really loved the process of submerging the cloth in the dye bath, pulling it out and carefully coiling it, stacking each one in preparation for spreading them out on the earth for the sun to dry. Then doing it all over again, repeating it until the cloth is a deep, rich black. There is no limit or set parameters for how many times to immerse the cloth in dye. Mamey Boakye says that she knows it is ready just by her looking at it and seeing the distinct black that she seeks. She learned dyeing from her mother and has been dyeing now for more than 60 years. Here, the connection to the materials and their meaning are forged. One gets to know the material intimately, its physical qualities and chemical makeup, the metaphysics of transforming one material into another.



Fig. 3 Kuntunkuni dye



Fig. 4 Kuntunkuni root after boiling



Fig. 5 Pounding Kuntunkuni root



Fig. 6 Badie bark soaking



Fig. 7 Laying out Kuntunkuni cloth after dyeing

Findings

Ntamu Ntama A Gap in the Cloth: Reading Between the Lines of Adinkra Symbols

There is a great deal of speculation surrounding the origins of the Adinkra symbols. Some historians have theorized that they're derived from a range of sources – talismans and Islamic scripts being among them. One of the more widely held among Asante is the story of Nana Kofi Adinkra, king of the Gyaman (Ivory Coast) during the 19th century. According to legend, he defied the Asantehene, Nana Osei Bonsu by forging a replica of the golden stool, which led to a war between the Gyamans and the Asantes. The Gyamans were then defeated and taken captive. Some of the prisoners happened to be craftsmen who introduced the strange art of making cloth with designs stamped into them (Agbo, 2011). The Asantes further developed these patterns into what we recognize as Adinkra symbols. Other variations to the story say that the stool that Kofi Adinkra forged had symbols carved into it and these symbols came to be known as Adinkra, after the king. Two men that I interviewed in Asokwa insisted that the symbols were actually stamped into the cloth the king was wearing. The lore is vital to the survival and influence of Adinkra textile traditions, and underscores that the symbols have been in existence for millennia and certainly at least as long as the Akan (Asantes) peoples have settled in what is now Ghana. The symbols' longevity and significance today is unquestionable.

There are over 500 traditional Adinkra symbols and there is no way to definitively document them all. What's more, the Adinkra symbols themselves are expansive in meaning without compromising any of its relevance or power to a people who have carried on its tradition for centuries. The symbols enrich, affirm, and communicate a complex set of narratives around ritual, tradition, beliefs, and codes of existence that are anything but normative. This is indicated by the fact that some Adinkra symbols have precise and unambiguous meanings, while other Adinkra symbols are polysemic. The symbol "dadee bi twa dadee bi mu" (some iron can break others) is a metaphor the Akan use to express the idea that no one is unconquerable. This image derives from the use of a chisel or hacksaw to cut another metal. The "denkyem" (crocodile) symbol is used to express adaptability, because of how the crocodile lives in water, yet does not behave like fish; it breathes oxygen directly through its nostrils unlike the fish that absorbs oxygen from water through its gills. In this reading, the symbol means adaptability to changing circumstances in life. The same symbol expresses "greatness of power" given that the crocodile is able to carry its own eggs in its mouth. The crocodile's behavior is thought to symbolize the idea that the crocodile is powerful to the extent that it can swallow a stone. A king wearing an Adinkra cloth with the symbol is telling his subjects how powerful he is. There are symbols that represent the forces of nature on human beings; the role humans have in preserving life; and attitudes regarding responsibility and initiative as the Akan envision their place within the universe (Arthur, 2001). The Akan believe that while one is an organism of flesh and bone with a personality, one is more importantly an enduring unity of experiences, a self. The circle, semi circle, oval, triangle, squares and rectangles, and other geometric and abstract forms are fundamental to Adinkra symbolism. The essence of a circle is embodied in such symbols as "mate masie" (I have heard and kept it), and "sunsum" (spirit or soul).

Mate masie (also known as Ntesie) is a deceptively complex form. The symbol is recognized as four large circles with 2 smaller circles in its interior. It is punctuated by a small circle placed at its core and serves to divide the cluster. The notion of closely held secrets or the retention of wisdom is evoked by the form's configuration. This Adinkra symbol has several incarnations but they all adhere to the same basic constraints of design. The sunsum at first glance seems highly decorative because its exterior shape is evocative of a blooming flower. But this is misleading, as we analyze the form more closely. The symbol's interior is an intricate hub of line, space, and form. The 'pegged diamond' gives way to narrow slivers of light, much like a stained glass window or layering of tiles. How apropos for illustrating the soul. The formal structure of the rectangle is profoundly upended with the "nkyinkyim" (adaptability or dynamism) symbol, where the rectangle is rendered as a labyrinthine fortress with slots cut into it. The composition is extremely kinetic with the slotted form taking on an almost snake like movement. During my interview with 32-year-old Michael Kwabena "Openi" Boakye-Ade, he revealed that he began printing at age 5 and that he tends to be very quiet on the subject of Adinkra and how he feels about being a master printer. In Michael's view, people tend to choose the symbols that best reflect their state of mind at the time. He also observed that foreigners who visit his family's studio feel compelled to create a story out of the Adinkra symbols. So we always want to construct a narrative of some kind. He also spoke of how he sometimes responds to specific symbols and things he sees around him and sketches them. He says that he refines the sketches to be used as possible imagery for an Adinkra cloth he may be working on. But he doesn't keep the sketches, for future reflection or inspiration "we don't look back". I was incredulous at his assertions of cool detachment and reasoning, which I later realized was really outsized humility. What would he make of my clutter of sketches? Or the fact that I was convinced they held real resonance

only after they'd been enlarged. It was then that I could better make sense of the inner workings of my own hand and any semblance of meaning now that I could read between the lines. Isolating portions of the Adinkra symbols proved to be a worthwhile endeavor, as they opened themselves up for closer inspection. Symbols convey more than their intrinsic content. The role of metaphor is to compel us to look beyond the literal to generate connections and access new, different, or deeper levels of meaning (Arthur, 2001). The communicative power of symbols allows us to transcend time, space, and even our own bodies; which is to say that they give way to alternative realities. I have chosen to focus on the Adinkra symbols mate masie, sunsum, and nkyinkyim. I selected these for their personal resonance in conjunction with my own drawings for constructing a narrative.

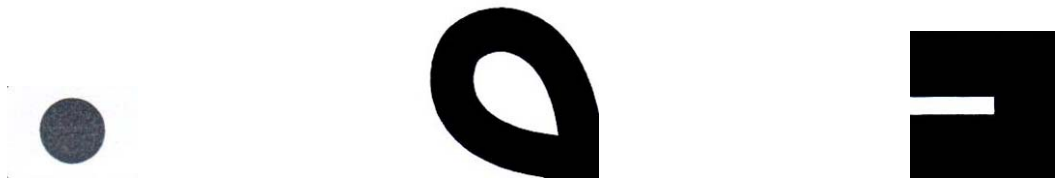


Fig. 8 Isolated portions of Adinkra Symbols: Mate Masie, Sunsum, and Nkyinkyim

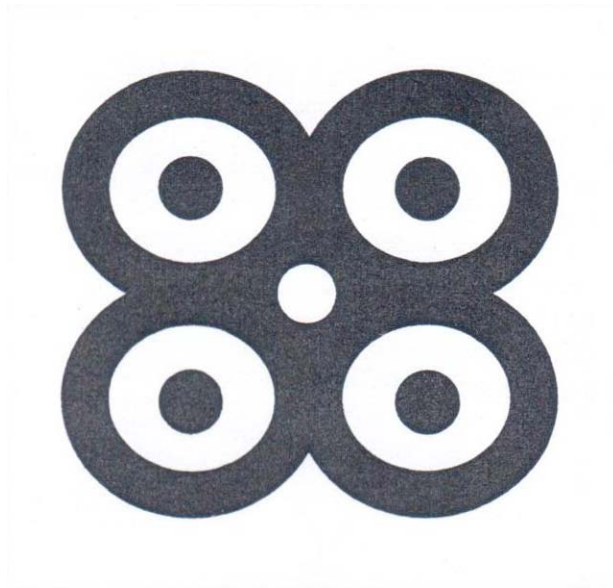


Fig. 9 Adinkra symbol - Mate Masie

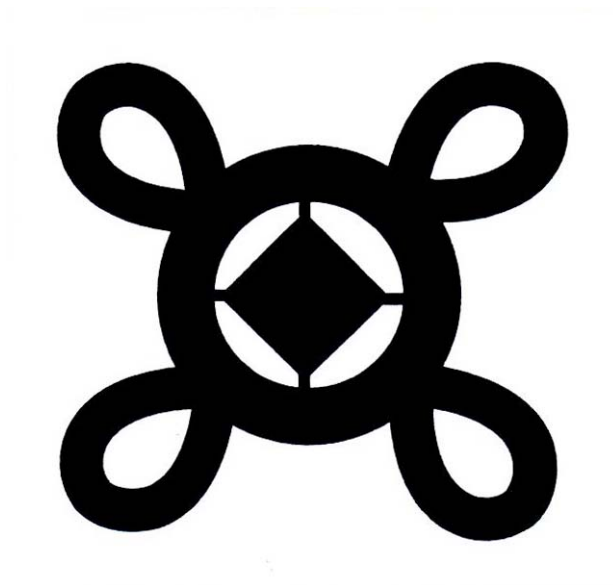


Fig. 10 Adinkra symbol - Sunsum

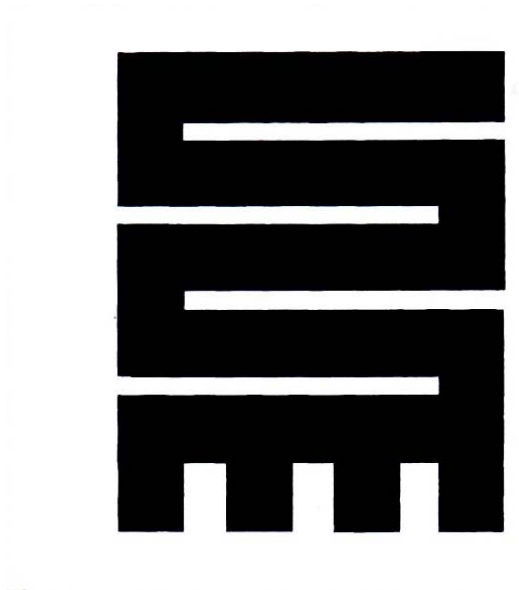


Fig. 11 Adinkra symbol - Nkyinkyim



Fig. 12 Isolated portions of my own drawings

Discussion

Ye Nkra Ntamu "Let's Talk About Leaving the In-Between"

(An Abstract Text)

Guinean writer Manthia Diawara wrote candidly on the virtues of “living in contradictory spaces...in the in-between and hybrid spaces” as an African living in the Diaspora (Diawara, 2000). He has struck something here I think. My interest in the constructing and performing of Place, as an interiorized concept acknowledges the potential for it to be a space of refusal. That to be living in the interim so to speak is really about how to navigate the agency that is redolent of a life in limbo. Place is constantly shifting and being reinvented. How is it experienced tactilely? I feel compelled to bring this notion of Place to material form. To be seen, understood, debated, deciphered, felt. This served as an impetus when embarking on the project work of making the Adinkra cloths.

Discussion

“Mumunumu” (An Indescribable Truth)

“Seeking the essence of consciousness will consist in rediscovering my actual presence to myself”.

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty



I have been drawing this form and variations of it for more than a year now. An early incarnation was a two-pronged figure, its underbelly an open bin. I called it a ‘sacramond’ and imagined that it was a sentient being that breathed and moved through the world with me, as it was occupying so much of my subconscious. As the form became more mutable, its *limbs* were shorn away and I began to focus on the portal at its underbelly. Now the form took on the qualities of a vessel or pod, but remained abstract. I’ve continued sketching the form here in Ghana, and I was intrigued by the challenge of translating it to Adinkra iconography. I worked to further simplify the image. Often when sketching, the form’s strands dangled or poked through the beginnings of another and I felt it necessary to refine it as much as possible. I settled on an iteration of the above image for carving into an Adinkra stamp. I also carved a second version of the drawing, altering the form’s

fundamental characteristic of being enclosed. By instead opening it up and reducing it to line, or rather an outline, the surface of a thing. I no longer refer to the form as a sacrament and had been at a loss in naming it. When Nana Boakye first saw the image stamped on the Kuntunkuni cloth, his bewilderment was evident. He referred to the form as ‘**mumunumu**’, which is to say *indescribable*. The images concern the interior – my interior. They come out of my trying to make sense of the world and my place in it. To somehow reveal the full complexity of one’s humanity and being in the world. How to do so non-discursively using only the pared down abstract imagery of my drawings and the Adinkra symbols in a constructed narrative? *The dynamic soul has heard and will keep it – nkyinkyim sunsum mate masie*. Interiority as agency. The interior as a liberating presence / force / having. These themes run the risk of being lost in translation, of collapsing. Particularly, when used in dialogue with *mumunumu*, something so knowingly indescribable. But, the visual coherence of the traditional Adinkra symbols help to actually ground the narrative. I also played with deviations in the narrative by using only two Adinkra symbols – sunsum and mate masie – in dialog with *mumunumu*; *the soul has heard and kept it* for the black Kuntunkuni cloth. Both narratives move through existential longing, spiritual resolve, and notions of love – a narrative of Place. My drawings are a way of negotiating meaning.

Conclusion

Part of my interest in Adinkra symbols, have to do with my efforts to delineate whether my own drawings are part of a lineage of abstraction in relation to the symbols. Adinkra symbols have already been written about and framed as an extension of written language by scholars. So my concerns surrounding them as visual data communicating non-discursively sought to depart from that. There are elements of my black Kuntunkuni cloth work that could be perceived as unresolved. The ‘mumunumu’ imagery may be experienced as inaccessible, and it is my responsibility as the artist and researcher to come to terms with that. I hadn’t been familiar with the term under-coding, but realize that I had certainly engaged in it at one time or another as a viewer. These ideas are critical for any in depth consideration of my project work. Continued reflection and analysis of narrative cohesiveness in the imagery are necessary for discerning if the work is resolved, and will steer the course of my BFA thesis work. My thesis exhibition is entitled; *I never got there, I have never been there, and I am not coming back from there* which is a line from a Hélène Cixous text called “*Ex-Cities*”. I will be writing an accompanying thesis paper *Living in the Interim: The Concept of Place Within Black Visual Culture* with both the exhibition and paper exploring the notion of Place.

Illustrations



Fig. 13 Adinkra dye from Badie bark



Fig. 14 Learning Kuntunkuni cloth dyeing processes



Fig. 15 Carved Adinkra stamps



Fig. 16 Paul Boakye carving a Gye Nyame Adinkra stamp



Fig. 17 Learning traditional Adinkra stamping techniques from Peter Boakye



Fig. 18 Learning traditional Adinkra stamping techniques from Peter



Fig. 19 Learning traditional Adinkra stamping techniques



Fig. 20 Final project work, Adinkra stamping on Calico cloth



Fig. 21 Final project work, Adinkra stamping on Calico cloth



Fig. 22 Final project work, Mumunumu stamping on Kuntunkuni cloth



Fig. 23 Gabriel Boakye screen-printing Adinkra symbols on funeral cloth



Fig. 24 Michael Boakye screen-printing Adinkra symbols on funeral cloth



Fig. 25 Peter Boakye screen-printing Adinkra symbols on funeral cloth



Fig. 26 Adinkra symbols printed on hand-woven cloth



Fig. 27 The artist's sketches of abstract forms: isolated and enlarged



Fig. 28 The artist's sketches of abstract forms: isolated and enlarged

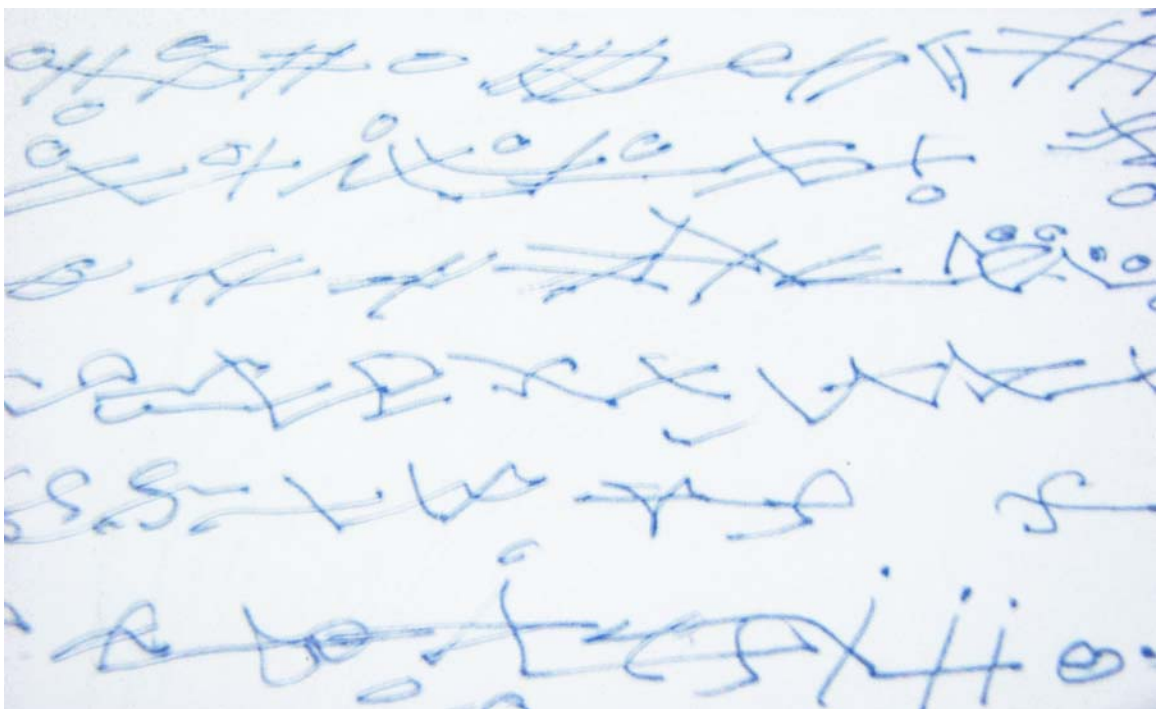
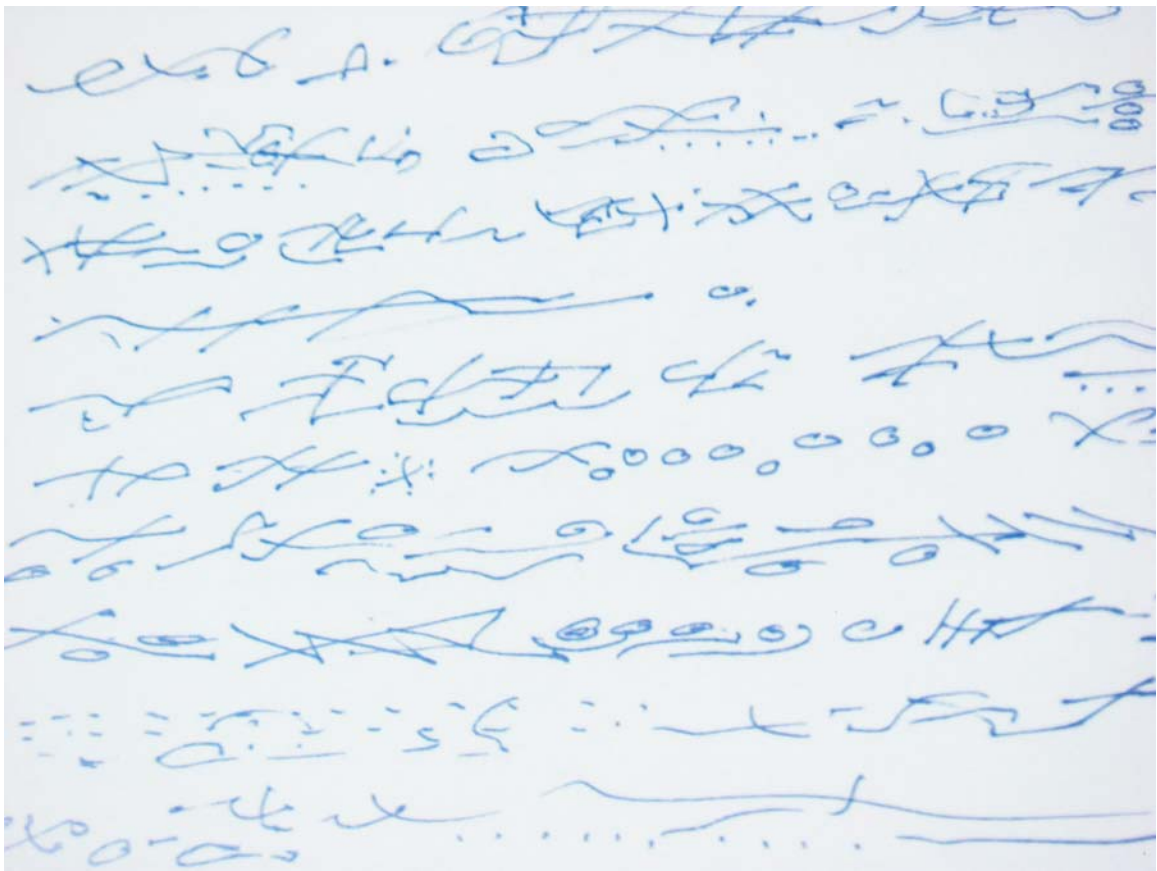


Fig. 29 David Hammons' *Spirit Writing*

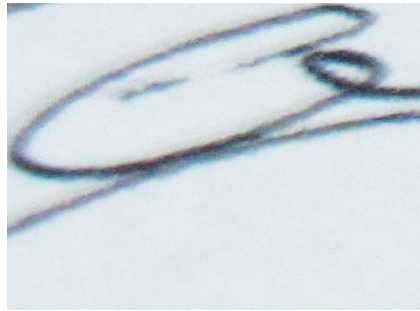
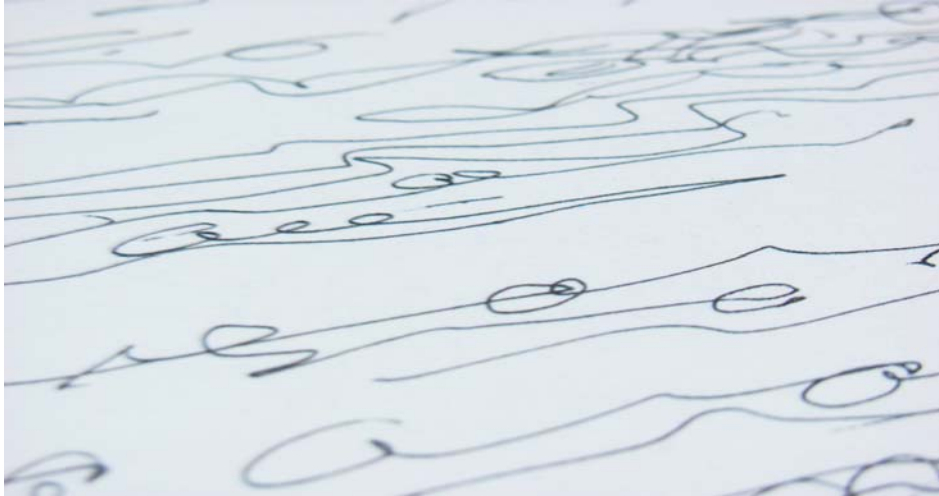


Fig. 30 David Hammons' *Spirit Writing*: isolated and enlarged

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Pyramid Complex.

Informants

Abena “Mamey” Boakye (13 NOV 13 – 30 NOV 13). *Participant-Observation* at the Boakye Family studio and workshop in Ntonson, Ashanti Region. I apprenticed with Mamey Boakye learning the traditional Kuntunkuni dyeing processes. On 15 NOV 13, I interviewed her regarding her family’s role in Adinkra cloth production. We discussed her early years as a Kuntunkuni dyer and traditional dyeing techniques. (Abena “Mamey” Boakye is a master dyer and matriarch of the Boakye family).

Yaw “Nana” Boakye (17 NOV 13). *Interview on the history of Adinkra cloth and symbols* at the Boakye Family studio and workshop in Ntonso, Ashanti Region. We discussed the origin of Adinkra cloth and dye. Nana Boakye spoke at length about his family’s personal history and role in preserving Adinkra cloth production in Ntonso. (Yaw “Nana” Boakye is a master printer and patriarch of the Boakye family).

Gabriel Kwaku Boakye (11 NOV 13 – 30 NOV 13). *Participant-Observation / Interview* at the Boakye Family studio and workshop in Ntonso, Ashanti Region. Gabriel Boakye facilitated my apprenticeships with his mother – Mamey Boakye a master dyer, his brother Peter Boakye a master printer, and his brother Paul Boakye a master carver. I interviewed Gabriel on 23 NOV 13 in his home, where we discussed the origins of Adinkra symbols, the first Adinkra stamp carvers, and his role as a master Adinkra printer with his brothers. (Gabriel Boakye is a master printer in Ntonso).

Peter Boakye (11 NOV 13 – 30 NOV 13). *Participant-Observation / Interview* at the Boakye Family studio and workshop in Ntonso, Ashanti Region. I apprenticed with Peter a master printer learning traditional Adinkra stamping / printing techniques. I interviewed Peter on 23 NOV 13 regarding the origins of Adinkra symbols, traditional vs. contemporary printing techniques, and his role as a master Adinkra

printer alongside his brothers. (Peter Boakye is a master printer in Ntonso).

Kwabena Michael “Openi” Boakye-Adu (25 NOV 13). *Participant-Observation / Interview* at the Boakye Family studio and workshop in Ntonso, Ashanti Region. I interviewed Michael on 25 NOV 13 inside Peter Boakye’s Adinkra cloth store. We discussed his role as a master printer alongside his brothers, Adinkra symbols and their meaning, and traditional vs. contemporary printing techniques. Prior to our interview, I had the pleasure of assisting Michael by holding cloth in place while he screen-printed on large Adinkra funeral cloths. (Michael Boakye is a master printer in Ntonso).

Paul Boakye (18 NOV 13). *Participant-Observation / Informal Interview* at his studio in Ntonso. I apprenticed with Paul a master Adinkra stamp carver, learning the traditional Adinkra stamp process of carving a stamp made of calabash. During my time with Paul, we informally discussed the origins of Adinkra stamp carving and Adinkra symbolism. (Paul Boakye is a master Adinkra stamp carver in Ntonso).

Kwame Kusi-Boadum (26 NOV 13). *Interview* at his home in the Kumasi suburb of Asokwa in the Ashanti Region. We discussed the legacy of Adinkra cloth production in Asokwa, the earliest known Adinkra stamp carvers, the decline of Adinkra cloth production in Asokwa, and the origins of Adinkra symbols. (Kwame Kusi-Boadum is a retired assemblyman in Asokwa).

Steven Appiah (26 NOV 13). *Interview* at Kwame Kusi-Boadum’s home in the Kumasi suburb of Asokwa in the Ashanti Region. We discussed the legacy of Adinkra cloth production in Asokwa, the earliest known Adinkra stamp carvers, the decline of Adinkra cloth production in Asokwa, and the origins of Adinkra symbols. (Steven Appiah lives in Asokwa and did not reveal his occupation).