

## **A BRIEF REPORT ON THE VISIT BY EVC DELEGATION TO GHANA**

**By Dr. Ebenezer Acquah**

### **Introduction**

On Saturday, October 30, 2021, a visiting team from Germany paid a working visit to Ghana to continue an on-going project on *Exploring Visual Cultures*. The team was made up of Ernst Wagner, Janina Balduher, Annette Schemmel, Tim Proetel and Georg Schatz.

Exploring Visual Cultures (EVC) is a joint transnational project run by universities, schools and art galleries/museums in different countries in Africa and Europe, coordinated by an Expert Panel from Germany, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, and Cameroon. The panel consists of scholars in the field of art history, visual culture and cultural studies.

The project 'Exploring Visual Cultures' focusses on visual objects such as art-works, architecture, logos, photos, and fashion among others. It addresses questions on What visual objects mean, how they are influenced or how they influence, while attempting to look for answers in global dialogues among artists, (art) educators, (art) historians, (cultural) anthropologists, and students. The discussions from multiple/diverse perspectives are shared with a worldwide community of researchers and educators through EVC website, conferences, and publications.

Exploring Visual Cultures (EVC) also pays attention to concepts of Shared Heritage, Education for Sustainable Development, and Global Citizenship Education (as defined by UNESCO). Thus, the project also looks at images and image practices through a broad inter- and transdisciplinary views within the framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), asking questions about culture, heritage and our shared globalized future.

### **The EVC German Team in Ghana**

The EVC German Team arrived in Accra, Ghana on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to interact with their Ghanaian counterparts on the progress of the *Exploring Visual Cultures Project*. They were received by their Ghanaian partners at the Kotoka International Airport and lodged at Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana.

#### *Studio Visits in Winneba township*

The next day, the EVC Team (both German and Ghana's group) visited Theophilus Mensah, an art educator and a sculptor in his studio at Winneba where he introduced the team to some of his finished works, media, inspirations, commissions, what drives him to work and motivation to students. The visit was also designed to view works of visual cultures in public space. Most of his works were life size with a few heroic forms. They were all highly realistic with respect to the concepts that defined their execution. Theo works mainly in cement and fibre glass. He has works mounted in many parts of Winneba and these works project the culture of the people of Winneba. Figures 1,2, and 3 show examples of Theo's works in public space.



*Figure 1: A sculpture by Theophilus Mensah mounted at the newly constructed *Unity Square*, calling for the unification of the rivalry Asafo Companies in the Winneba municipality.*



*Figure 2: A sculpture by Theophilus Mensah immortalising the personalities of three strangers from the Volta Region of Ghana who introduced the Winneba fisherfolks to *net-pulling fishing* which is now a very profitable venture among the indigenous Winneba people.*



*Figure 4: A sculpture by Theophilus Mensah personifying and immortalising Ofarnyi Kweegyah, a mythological character who is said to be the originator of traditional fishing art among the fishing communities in Winneba and neighbouring coastal towns.*

*Visit to the Winneba Senior High School and Experimental teaching*

The next day saw the EVC Team visiting one of the public senior high schools in Winneba – Winneba Senior High School. There was a short briefing led by Ernst Wagner on the direction of the interaction with the Visual Art students and art teachers in the school.



This was followed by an experimental teaching visual led by two of the members from the German Team, Annette and Tim. They taught the form one visual art students of the Winneba Senior High School from 10 am to 11:30am. Figures 2, 3, and 4 shows the EVC Team at the meeting.

The students were taken through a hands-on visual art lesson on image identification and development. Prior to this activity, they were presented with a painting by Goya, a Spanish painter, and were given the opportunity to explore, to develop concepts based on what they dreams about.



*Figure 4: The EVC Team with Art Teachers at Winneba Secondary School, Ghana.*



*Figure 5: Annette and Tim interacting with students in class at Winneba Secondary School, Ghana.*



*Figure 6: Tim interacting with a student in class at Winneba Secondary School, Ghana.*



*Figures 7: A display of works done by students during the interaction.*



*Figures 8: A visit to the Hall of Fame at Winneba Senior High School and an interaction with the 2021 Ghana National Best Teacher*



*Figure 9: A tour through the Hall of Fame at Winneba Senior High School*



*Figure 10: A group photograph of the EVC Team and Art Teachers at Winneba Senior High School.*



*Figure 11: A group photograph of the EVC Team, Art Teachers and Visual Art students at Winneba Senior High School.*

From Winneba Senior High School, the EVC Team paid a courtesy call on the Acting Vice-Chancellor of the University of Education, Winneba, Professor Andy Ofori-Birikorang. The delegation was led by Prof Patrique deGraft-Yankson who introduced the group to the Acting Vice-Chancellor and talked about the mission and focus of the EVC Project. The Acting Vice-Chancellor was extremely delighted to receive the EVC Team and reiterated the essence of collaboration with other universities across the globe and especially, the need to focus on curriculum development as an integral part of the project. The German delegation led by Ernst Wagner outlined their mission in Ghana and presented a concise information on the collaboration with the University of Education, Winneba which has official support from Academy of Fine Arts in Germany.



*Figure 12: A courtesy call on the Acting Vice-Chancellor of the University of Education, Winneba, Prof Andy Ofori-Birikorang*





Figure 13: A presentation to the Acting Vice-Chancellor of the University of Education, Winneba, Prof Andy Ofori-Birikorang

### Seminars

In the afternoon at 2pm Eric Sekyere Appiah, a post-graduate MPhil Art Education student made a presentation on *Design and development of image library for documentation of students' artwork in the School of Creative Arts, UEW*. Sekyere's project is relevant to the development of art education and how people deconstruct knowledge, project culture, and preserve students' (art)works.



Figure 14: Mr Eric Sekyere Appiah presenting on the *Design and development of image library for documentation of students' artwork in the School of Creative Arts, University of Education, Winneba*

Also, it addresses issues of keeping artworks for posterity and using the website as an essential means of image documentation and archiving. For art educators and designers, the project would serve as a useful material for education on the need to work with what the School of Creative Arts, UEW has to offer and understand the relevance of promoting visual culture through the (art)works. It was a wonderful presentation that caught the attention of the audience who advocated for the adoption of the proposed SCA image library by the University of Education, Winneba.

The next day witnessed a seminar presentation by post-graduate *sandwich* students reading art education at University of Education, Winneba. The topics presented span across diverse disciplines, from tourism to art-making to visual culture. There was another meeting with the Executives of the Art Teachers Association of Ghana (ATAG). The discussion focused on the objectives of the group and the interest expressed in taking part in an international art teaching competition initiated by a group from Germany.



Figure 15: A graduate student in Arts and Culture presenting

Wednesday, November 3, 2021 saw the EVC team taking a tour to the Cape Coast Castle to see the dungeons and visual imagery of the slave trade in Sub-Saharan Africa. They received first hand information from a tour guide who traced the history of slavery from the Gold Coast to its abolition. The group then left for Kumasi after mid-day.

### **Visit to the blaxTARLINES – Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi**

In Kumasi, they interacted with blaxTARLINES at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. blaxTARLINES is a group of artists and students who seek to project contemporary art/visual culture from multiple perspectives. On Thursday, November 4, there were a series of presentations on blaxTARLINES and affiliate collectives by Kwesi Ohene-Ayeh, Bernard Akoi-jackson and Alice Korkor Ebeheakey. Portfolio presentations were made by Adjo Kissar, Tracy Thompson, and Elolo Bokoso.



Figure 16: Prof Ernst Wagner making a presentation on Exploring Visual Cultures to members of blaxTARLINES



Figure 17: Prof Ernst Wagner making a book donation to the leader of blaxTARLINES, Prof qarî'kachä seid'ou

The delegation also had studio visits to Priscilla Kennedy, Jeffery Otoo, Jonathan Okoronko, Yusif musah, Frederick Okae, and Alhassan Issah.

There were also visits to Bonwire and Ntonso outside the university campus the next day. Bonwire and Ntonso are noted for the design and production of kente and adinkra cloths respectively.



*Figure 18: Some Kente Weavers at Bonwire*



*Figure 19: Adinkra Stamps used to print the Adinkra cloth*

Figure 19 also shows a picture of Ernst wearing an Adinkra cloth. All these activities and products are essential elements of Ashanti visual cultural images.

On Saturday morning, the team left Kumasi for Accra to interact with resident scholars at the Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA). The interaction focused on restitution – bringing back African artworks to Africa. As part of their project the scholars at the Institute were conducting a study in Kpando in the Volta region of Ghana to ascertain the original place/source of identified artworks. They interviewed chiefs and opinion leaders in the region under discussion. After a couple of hours of discussion, the EVC Team left for the Kotoka International Airport, Accra for departure to Germany.