



Press Release

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THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE OF GHANA ANNOUNCES GHANA'S FIRST NATIONAL PAVILION AT 58th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION OF LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

FEATURED ARTISTS: FELICIA ABBAN, JOHN AKOMFRAH, EL ANATSUI, LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE, IBRAHIM MAHAMA, SELASI AWUSI SOSU

**COMMISSIONER: MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE
CURATOR: NANA OFORIATTA AYIM
ARCHITECT: SIR DAVID ADJAYE OBE
STRATEGIC ADVISOR: OKWUI ENWEZOR**

For link to downloadable high-resolution press images: <https://bit.ly/2GOTmtn>

Ghana will present its first National Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, from **11 May – 24 November 2019**. (Preview days: 8, 9, 10 May 2019).

The first Ghana Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2019 will take place under the patronage of Ghana's President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo.

Entitled "Ghana Freedom," after the song composed by E.T. Mensah on the eve of the independence of the new nation in 1957, the pavilion examines the legacies and trajectories of that freedom by six artists, across three generations. Rooted both in Ghanaian culture and its diasporas, the pavilion exhibition will include large-scale installations by **El Anatsui** and **Ibrahim Mahama**; representation and portraiture by prominent photographer **Felicia Abban** and painter **Lynette Yiadom-Boakye**; and a three-channel film projection by **John Akomfrah** and a video sculpture by **Selasi Awusi Sosu**.

Situated in the Artiglierie of the historic Arsenale, the Ghanaian pavilion is designed by Sir David Adjaye. Each artist will exhibit in elliptically-shaped interconnected spaces, which draw inspiration, and are plastered with locally-sourced earth, from classical structures in Ghana.

In addition, the Ghana Pavilion exhibition will include a publication with a preface by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo; foreword by Honorable Catherine Afeku, and contributions by Sir David Adjaye, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Nana Oforiatta Ayim, Okwui Enwezor, Taiye Selasi, Hakeem Adam, Adjoa Armah, Mae-ling Lokko, Kuukuwa Manful, Larry Ossei-Mensah, and Mavis Tetteh-Ocloo. There will be a series of platforms during the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice, and “Ghana Freedom” will travel from Venice to Accra after the closure of the Exhibition in November.

Nana Oforiatta Ayim, curator of the pavilion, said, “It means a lot for us to have our first national pavilion at such a narrative-building event as the Venice Biennale, especially at this moment. The conversation about nations is broadening in the face of issues of migrations; of us redefining our connections to our diasporas throughout our ‘year of return’; of discussing what it might mean to have our cultural objects returned, and how we thus might redefine ourselves in the world; and of finally moving out of the ‘postcolonial’ moment into one we have yet to envision.

Sir David Adjaye says, “Being able to show the diversity and creativity of Ghana on an international scale is an incredible achievement, and one which showcases the talent that we have to offer. The commitment and inspiration shown by the President in commissioning this pavilion is a testament to what our country has to offer the art community.”

Honorable Barbara Oteng Gyasi, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture says, “This is a historic moment for us in Ghana. Arts and culture are the very soul of a nation, and with our maiden entry to the Venice Biennale, under the leadership of His Excellency, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, I can say, we have arrived.”

Ghana Pavilion, Arsenale, Venice
Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture
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58TH International Art Exhibition – Le Biennale di Venezia
#BiennaleArte2019 #MayYouLiveInInterestingTimes

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Biographies

Strategic Advisor:

Okwui Enwezor was Director of Haus der Kunst in Munich from 2011 to 2018. Over the past twenty-five years Okwui Enwezor has become internationally recognised as one of the most influential figures in the field of contemporary art and culture. A champion of artists of African and African descent, and of the global South, he has established himself as a curator, critic, publisher, historian, writer, educator, activist and public speaker whose exhibitions and writings are situated at the juncture of art, culture, politics and society. He is one of the only two curators to direct both Documenta and La Biennale di Venezia, and he has received some of the highest international honours, including the German Federal Government Order of Merit, the Hessen Prize, the Folkwang Prize, the Bard College Curatorial Award of Excellence, the Agnes Gund Curatorial Award and the Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Criticism. Enwezor was Dean of Academic Affairs and Senior Vice President, San Francisco Art Institute and the 2013 Kirk Varnedoe Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Global Distinguished Professor in Art History at New York University. His survey exhibition of El Anatsui, co-curated with Chika Okeke-Agulu, opens in March 2019 at Haus der Kunst, Munich.

Curator:

Nana Ofosuwa Oforiatta Ayim has a Masters in African Art History with a thesis on contemporary Ghanaian art, and a research degree in African Languages and Cultures with a thesis on the Ayan, a classical Ghanaian form of philosophy and history, which she has since used as the basis of her work as a writer, art historian and filmmaker. She has written for publications like frieze, Kaleidoscope, ArtNews and African Metropolitan Architecture, and is publishing her first novel, The God Child, with Bloomsbury Publishing in January 2020. She has made several films, a cross of fiction, travel essay, and documentary, that have been shown at institutions, like The New Museum, Tate Modern, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and Channel 4, UK. She is the founder of the ANO Institute of Arts & Knowledge, through which she has pioneered a pan-African Cultural Encyclopaedia, reimagining narratives from across and about the continent; a Mobile Museums project that travels into communities, collects material culture and exhibits them in those communities, creating discourse about narratives, memory and value. She has worked extensively on cultural narrative and institution building in Ghana, curating the first major exhibitions of Ghanaian artists, such as James Barnor and Ibrahim Mahama; as well digitising and archiving the work of early photographic studios. She is working on the creation of a new museum in Accra with David Adjaye, as well as collaborating with museums in the UK, Germany, and Holland on rethinking their remit. She is the recipient of the 2015 Art & Technology Award from LACMA; of the 2016 AIR Award, which “seeks to honour and celebrate extraordinary African artists who are committed to producing provocative, innovative and socially-engaging work”; and of the inaugural 2018 Soros Arts Fellowship. She has been named one of the Apollo '40 under 40'; one of 50 African Trailblazers by The Africa Report; one of 12 African women making history by Okayafrica; a Quartz Africa Innovator; and is a 2018 Global South Visiting Fellow at Oxford University.

Architect:

Adjaye Associates was established in June 2000 by Founder and Principal, Sir David Adjaye OBE. Receiving ever-increasing worldwide attention, the firm has offices in London, Accra and New York and completed work in Europe, North America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. The practice's largest commission to date, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, opened in 2017 on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Further projects range in scale from private houses, exhibitions, and temporary pavilions to major arts centres, civic buildings, and masterplans. Renowned for an eclectic material and colour palette and a capacity to offer a rich civic experience, the buildings differ in form and style, yet are unified by their ability to generate new typologies and to reference a wide cultural discourse. Completed works include: the regenerative Morning Lane Arches retail corridor in Hackney, London (2016); Sugar Hill museum and housing development in Harlem, New York (2015); the Aishti Foundation

arts and shopping complex in Beirut, Lebanon (2015); Alara Concept Store in Lagos, Nigeria (2014); Marian Goodman Gallery, London (2014); the Ethelbert Cooper Gallery of African and African American Art at the Hutchins Centre, Harvard University (2014); two neighbourhood libraries in Washington DC (2012); the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO (2010); the Stephen Lawrence Centre in London (2007); the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver (2007); Rivington Place Gallery in London (2007); The Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo (2005); and the Idea Stores in Tower Hamlets, London (2004 and 2005) – two pioneering community libraries in London’s Tower Hamlets. Some current projects include: a new home for The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; offices for the International Financial Corporation in Dakar, Senegal; a gallery for the Linda Pace Foundation in San Antonio, TX; and a regenerative cultural campus on the site of Tel Aviv’s disused former central bus station.

Artists:

Felicia Abban

Born 1935, Sekondi, Ghana

Lives and works in Accra, Ghana

Felicia Abban is widely viewed as Ghana’s first female professional photographer. At the age of 14, she became the first and only female apprentice in the photography studio of her father, Joseph Emmanuel Ansah, where she trained for four years. After marrying designer Robert Abban, in 1953, she moved to Accra, where she set up her own photography studio in the Jamestown neighborhood. Following Ghana’s independence in 1956, Abban became the personal photographer of Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, taking pictures of important political events. In addition, she continued to run her studio, documenting Accra’s many individuals and groups. From the 1950s to 1970s Abban regularly produced self-portraits before attending dinner parties and political events, which she used as a calling card for her photography studio. She became something of a celebrity, appearing on television, radio and in many newspaper articles for her groundbreaking work, and managed to train a whole generation of female photographers, taking them on as apprentices in her studio. In 2017, Abban’s work was exhibited for the first time in Accra: Portraits of a City at ANO Institute of Arts & Knowledge, Accra. It was announced on that occasion that Abban’s photography studio will be turned into the Felicia Abban Museum.

John Akomfrah

Born 1957, Accra, Ghana

Lives and works in London, United Kingdom

John Akomfrah, CBE, is an artist and filmmaker, whose works are characterized by their investigations into memory, post-colonialism, temporality, and aesthetics and often explores the experiences of migrant diasporas globally. Akomfrah was a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective, which he started in London in 1982 with the artists David Lawson and Lina Gopaul, who he still collaborates with today. Their first film, Handsworth Songs (1986) explored the events surrounding the 1985 riots in Birmingham and London through a charged combination of archive footage, still photos and newsreel. The film won several international prizes and established a multi-layered visual style that has become a recognizable motif of Akomfrah’s practice. In 2017, Akomfrah presented Purple, his largest installation to date. The six-channel video installation addresses climate change, human communities and the wilderness. That same year, Akomfrah also debuted Precarity, which follows the life of forgotten New Orleans jazz singer Buddy Bolden through archival imagery and newly-shot footage.

Akomfrah has had numerous solo exhibitions at institutions including the New Museum, New York (2018); SFMOMA, San Francisco (2018); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2018); Tate Britain, London (2013-14); and a week-long series of screenings at the Museum

of Modern Art, New York (2011). His work has also been presented at the Venice, Sharjah, Liverpool, and Taipei biennials, as well as at film festivals worldwide, including Sundance Film Festival (2011 and 2013) and Toronto International Film Festival (2012).

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

Born 1977, London, United Kingdom

Lives and works in London, United Kingdom

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye attended Falmouth College of Arts and the Royal Academy Schools. Yiadom-Boakye has had several solo museum shows, most recently at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2017); Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2016); Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2015); and Serpentine Gallery, London (2015). She was included in the 57th edition of the Carnegie International (2018) at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, winning the Carnegie Prize. Other recent group exhibitions include The British Art Show 8, traveling to four venues between 2015 and 2017; Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, and the possible (2015); The Encyclopedic Palace, 55th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (2013); The Ungovernables: 2012 New Museum Triennial, New Museum, New York (2012); and the 11th Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art, Lyon, France (2012).

Her work is included in many institutional collections, including the Tate Collection, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Miami Art Museum, Florida, the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, the Arts Council Collection, London, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the Nasher Museum of Art, North Carolina, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. Yiadom-Boakye was the 2012 recipient of the Pinchuk Foundation Future Generation Prize, which was accompanied by a solo exhibition of her work. She was short-listed for the 2013 Turner Prize and in 2016 she was awarded the South Bank Sky Arts Award.

El Anatsui

Born 1944, Anyako, Ghana

Lives and works in Nsukka, Nigeria

A pioneering sculptor, El Anatsui is a leading contemporary African artist whose work has influenced a generation of artists. After training in sculpture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Accra, he lectured at Specialist Training College, Winneba, Ghana. In 1975, he moved to Nigeria and taught sculpture and basic design at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka for four decades. A member of the Aka Circle of Exhibiting Artists and leading figure of the Nsukka School, Anatsui has participated in major international residences and workshops. His work has been presented at the Venice, Havana, Johannesburg, Liverpool, Gwangju, Dakar, Sydney, and Marrakech biennials, and at the Osaka and Paris triennials. He was awarded the Praemium Imperiale (2017), Doctor of Fine Arts (honoris causa) by Harvard University and Doctor of Letters by University of Cape Town (2016), and the Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement at the 56th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2015). He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2014) and made an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Art (2013).

Anatsui's work is in many major public collections, including the Asele Institute (Nimo, Nigeria), The British Museum (London), The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (Washington DC), Centre Pompidou (Paris), De Young Museum (San Francisco), Museum Kunst Palast (Dusseldorf), Setagaya Museum (Tokyo), National Gallery of Modern Art (Lagos), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), Tate Modern (London), among others.

Ibrahim Mahama

Born 1987, Tamale, Ghana

Lives and works in Accra, Ghana

One of the most exciting artists to emerge from Ghana in recent years, Ibrahim Mahama uses the transformation of materials to explore themes of commodity, migration, globalization and economic exchange. After receiving an MFA in Painting from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, in 2013, Mahama quickly achieved international acclaim for his large-scale installations. Often made in collaboration with others, these installations use materials salvaged from urban environments, such as remnants of wood, or jute sacks that are stitched together and draped over architectural structures. Mahama's interest in material, process, and audience first led him to focus on jute sacks that are synonymous with the trade markets of Ghana where he lives and works. Fabricated in South East Asia, the sacks are imported by the Ghana Cocoa Boards to transport cocoa beans and eventually end up as multi-functional objects, used for the transportation of food, charcoal and other commodities.

Mahama's work has been presented in numerous international exhibitions, including Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel (2017); *An Age of Our Own Making*, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen and Holbæk (2016); *Fracture*, Tel Aviv Art Museum, Israel (2016); *All the World's Futures*, 56th International Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2015); *Artist's Rooms*, K21, Dusseldorf (2015); and *Material Effects*, The Broad Art Museum, Michigan (2015).

Selasi Awusi Sosu

Born 1976, Kumasi, Ghana

Lives and works in Winneba, Ghana

Selasi Awusi Sosu discovered the medium of glass while studying sculpture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, from 1997 to 2005. Having previously studied textiles at Achimota School, Accra, Sosu started searching for a new medium of expression during the final years of her studies. More recently, she began to investigate the medium of glass through the lenses of photography, yet her photographic installations still reveal her background in sculpture.

Sosu's solo exhibitions include *Transience* at the St. Teresa's Catholic Church, Amisano, Cape Coast (2016) and *Transparencies* at the University of Education, Winneba (2015). She has participated in several group shows, including *Tracing Obsolescence*, Apexart, New York (2018); *Orderly Disorderly*, Museum of Science & Technology, Accra (2017); and *Memory and Amnesia: In the Presence of Absent Futures*, King Prempeh II Library, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (2017). Furthermore, Sosu was a special guest artist at *The Gown Must Go to Town... Of Art and Philosophical Consciencism*, Museum of Science & Technology, Accra (2015), as well as a member of the production team of *If You Love Me...* at Loco Shed, Kumasi Railway, Kumasi (2016). In 2015, she participated in the durational performance, *The Return of the Slaves*, by Elikem Vabene Fiatsi and the Ofkob Artists' Residency. Sosu currently teaches in the Department of Art Education, University of Education, Winneba.