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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

School for American Crafts

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Metal and Jewelry Design

“Reveal”

Rudith Senam Abla Akorli

August, 30th 2014

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I. ABSTRACT

The thesis work named *Reveal* is a sculptural jewelry series that has a subtle tone of contemporary fashion. *Reveal* was created by studying traditional African art techniques for adorning the head and hair. The work analyzes the symbolic meaning of various hair styles and headgears within African cultures, by specifically zooming in on different threading hairstyles and free flowing sculptural headgears.

This thesis highlights the importance and evolution of color within African cultures and how color symbolically reflects status and behavior of individuals within Africa. *Reveal* exposes the time intensive practices characteristic of Ghanaian daily life and juxtaposes them to the labor intensive process of making art works that provides a sense of satisfaction and value for work done. Finally, this thesis embodies my personal artistic flavor and how I interpret my intrinsic wisdom within *Reveal*.

II. DISCUSSION OF SOURCES AND RESEARCH

The thesis work *Reveal* is based on my perception of traditional African cultures and how these cultures influence my understanding of fashion in a contemporary way. The work in *Reveal* blends traditional African art techniques with contemporary fashion. There are four major influences on my work: The sculptural nature of traditional African hair styles, specifically, hair threading and headgears; the colorful appeal of the culture; the intensive creative process of traditional Ghanaian culture; and, my personal artistic inspiration. In this chapter, I review past works on the four themes that influenced my artistic expression.

1. **Traditional African Hair Styles**

Hair style is extremely important in traditional African communities. The beauty and quality of traditional African hair is a source of pride for Africans. Hairdo defines status and identity in an African setting. Different hairdos identify the age, sex, wealth, marital status, religion, fertility, manhood, death and geographic region of an individual. For example, young girls from the Wolof culture of Senegal shaved their hair as an outward symbol that they were not courting, Karamo widowed women of Nigeria were recognized for not attending to their hair during their period of mourning so they would not attract men, and traditional Yoruba women from Nigeria wear “*agogo*” hairstyle shown in Figure 1 to symbolize that they are married (Encyclopedia 411, Kwekudee). In the past, indigenous Africans assigned to their hair great aesthetic, social and mystical powers. “The hair in the hands of an enemy could become an ingredient in the production of a dangerous charm or “medicine” that could injure the owner” (Kwekudee). Hair was carefully groomed by professional stylists who were trusted in the community. Usually the female head of the family was responsible for looking after the hair of her household. Grooming of hair generally took place in a communal gathering where women socialized and shared different styling techniques. Complex designs and

styles were extremely important and needed to conform to societal norms, therefore such arts of grooming were not only taught but, they were also inherited and passed down to daughters (Black Girl with Long Hair).

Traditional African hair styles included, but were not limited to, braiding, threading, combing, twisting, locking and straightening with a hot comb. Grooming and styling of the hair sometimes took hours or days therefore untidy hair was usually wrapped with a scarf. The hair was also adorned with ornaments such as metals, cowries, combs, and beads as shown in Figure 2. Sometimes the wearing of headgears was another means of adornment (Kwekudee). The process of threading and the flamboyant styles of wrapping traditional African headgear played an important role in the making of the thesis work *Reveal*. I will briefly elaborate on them.



Figure 1: Yoruba woman in Agogo hair style (Backman n.d.)



Figure 2: Coiffeur adorned with cowries, beads and metal (Kwekudee 2012)



a. Threading of Hair

Most influential on my art work is the hair threading technique. Hair threading is a styling technique used in various countries in Africa. It is known to have originated in central and western Africa. Threading of the hair helped in creating hair sculptural designs with complex techniques. These designs created three dimensional forms that are aesthetically pleasing. Though most threaded styles had a purpose, they also helped in stretching the hair to aid healthy growth (Zakaria). African natural hair, which is also called nappy or kinky hair, is usually thick and hard. The hair grows upwards and

it is stiffened and made pliable by wrapping selected sections of the hair with a thread. When threading, a black wrapping wool, nylon or cotton threads were gradually wrapped or knotted evenly and sometimes unevenly around the hair to create the desired effect. Threaded hair was sometimes coiled and bent into geometric, symmetrical or asymmetrical shapes on top of the crown (“The Art of Hair Threading”) as shown in Figure 3.

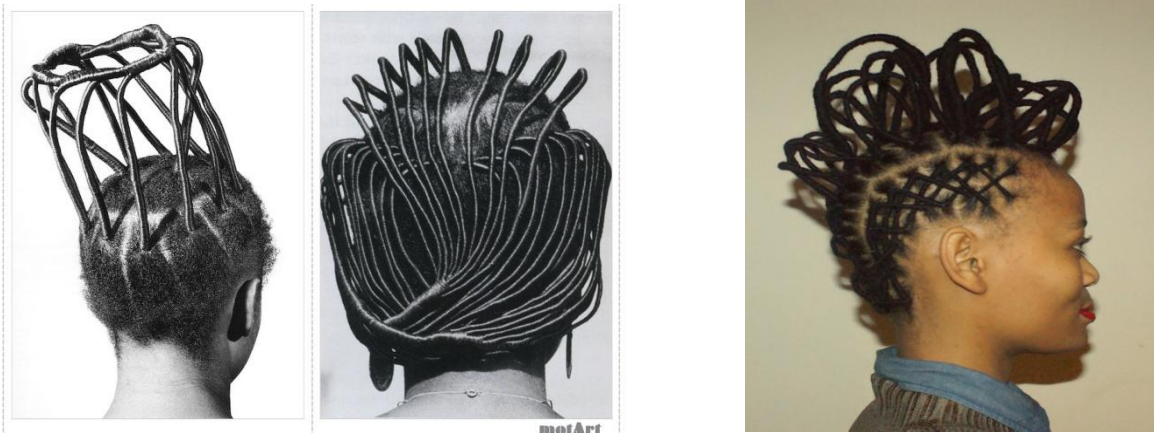


Figure3: Threaded hair style in geometric, asymmetrical and symmetrical shapes (Charriaut 2012 and SolaDunn 2013)

According to Lawal, Nigeria’s discovery of crude oil in the 1970’s and 1980’s helped the industrial, economic and artistic development of the country. In the Yoruba land, hairdressers were motivated by the use of black thread to create exceptional and detailed high rising hair coils and arches. These styles reflected the social frame of mind and landmark of that period. Each threading had a name and was symbolic. It also represented the status of the individual wearing the style. Examples of threaded style names include "Eko Bridge" (a curvilinear network of bridges in Lagos) and "udoji" (salary increase for workers). In the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria, “Wives of kings (olori) frequently distinguished themselves in public with elaborate versions of the “sùkú” style with a long knot in the middle of the head” (Ifa and Orisha). “Sùkú” traditionally means basket. This style is still very common among the Yoruba tribe and other tribes of Nigeria. Figure 4 shows images of “sùkú” styles.



Figure 4: Different versions of threaded hair styles that evolved from traditional “sùkú” braid shown on the last (right) (SolaDunn 2013 and Relentless 2012)

b. Traditional African Headgears

Adorning the head creatively by both men and women is a common practice throughout Africa. As stated by Arnoldi and Kremer, the head is “an ideal site for the aesthetic and symbolic elaboration of the body.” In the Bamana spoken language of Mali, the word “head” symbolically relates to the word for leader, ruler, highest, superior, chief, and source. Also among the Karamojong of Uganda, “head” which also means *ekasikout*, connotes a person with impeccable “wisdom, experience and moral influence (Pazzaglia 1982:96). These and similar associations in many other African languages shape the way people conceptualize and use the headwear” (22).

Headgears are made from different materials like leather, straw, cane, fabric, wood, metal, and many more. They usually come in various shapes and sizes and are sometimes made to feel and look rigid or flexible when worn. In countries like Ghana and Nigeria, some headgear is created by wrapping a strip of fabric on the head to create beautiful sculptural styles which usually look organic and free flowing. For most headgear made out of fabric, the color, shape and size of the headgear as displayed in Figure 5, could determine the status of the individual and a period of happiness or sadness. Sometimes headgear is worn by women during important rites of passage, at events like birth, puberty, marriage and death. For example in Ghana a black or white “Duku” (fabric headgear) worn on an occasion may symbolize a mourning or joyous occasion respectively (Nyamaah and Nsiah).

Typically, headgear made up of fabric is temporary, since the fabric used could be folded back into a simple cloth after serving its purpose.



Figure 5: Different Sizes, shapes and styles of fabric headgears (Curly-Natural-Me 2011, Limpt n.d. and Uribe n.d.)

Headgear that looks rigid can also be intriguing to the eye. During the 19th century, the Zulu hair fashion was traditionally made by sewing and coiling the hair upward to protrude from the back of the head as shown in Figure 6. The hair style sometimes formed the shape of a hat and could be a meter long. The coiffure gradually developed into detachable hats after the colonization of Europeans. The hat was made of palm fiber, cord, fabric, hard board, ochre and human hair. Since the hat could be removed, it was made bigger and wider by using the techniques of basket coiling, examples are shown in Figure 7a & 7b. In the 1980's when every race in South Africa was allowed to apply for transport license, the large sized hat gradually faded away because it became impractical in a minibus taxi (Isicolo).

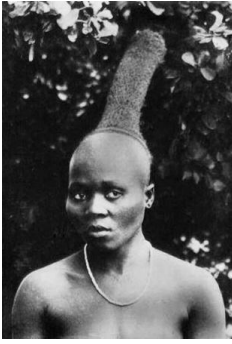


Figure 6: Zulu hairstyle
(Isicol n.d.)

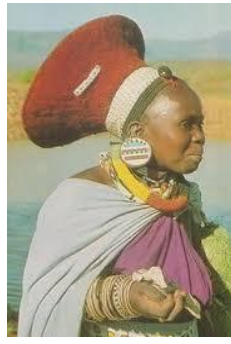


Figure 7: a) Zulu headgear
(Isicol n.d.)



7: b) Congo woman with hair style
that looks like Zulu headgear
(Karova n.d.)

2. Colorful Appeal of the Culture

I consider “color” to be the spicy ingredient that stirs the identity of African cultures. Color can be appreciated in every culture in the form of its textiles, ceramic, leather works, skin tones, food, jewelry and many more. In traditional African cultures, “Color was not manipulated in terms of intellectually conceived color theory, and it was not expressive in itself (as it was to become in the art of Van Gogh, Matisse, or Kandinsky). Rather, color was used intuitively, choices being made from available chromatic alternatives arranged to fuse visual dynamics with symbolic connotations” (Douma). Since traditional African cultures only relied on natural colors, like earth colors and extracted vegetable dyes from plants, the color range was limited during that period. Example, the color blue was extracted from indigo plants, and green was extracted from spinach leaves. Trade among African cultures helped to enhance artistic expression because products like beads, synthetic dyes and varied range of machine-printing pattern and cloth were imported into Africa. Trading actually helped traditional Africans to be more expressive. The option of more colors became significant in stimulating their emotions and creativity (Douma).

Color symbolically tells a story. It projects specific information when used or displayed at significant places or events. Throughout Africa, the symbolic meaning of a particular color changes from one culture to another. Traditionally Ghanaians wear red funeral cloth as depicted in Figure 8 to symbolize the grief for a very close relative or that of a young person, while the Massai from Kenya

consider red as blood (sacred color) which must be worn by warrior as a means of protection against wild animals (Saunders, Isiguzo) as seen in Figure 9.



Figure 8: First woman ruler of Otum, Ghana in red funeral cloth called Kobene (Quist-Arcton 2010)



Figure 9: Massai man in warrior clothing (Saunders 2012)

Another important use of color in traditional African society was to use it as a means of engaging the eye by creating patterns in cloth. The vibrant colors engaged the audience during important ceremonies. As shown in Figure 10, brightly colored clothing is usually worn by African rulers to attract attention and maintain the idea of authority. For example, the Kente cloth from Ghana is typically woven by interlacing contrasting colored threads to create geometric shapes like rectangles, squares, zigzag and diamonds as depicted in Figure 11. The colors used in weaving basically reflect the Ghanaian national flag (red, yellow, green and black). Sometimes motifs of animals, like elephant and scorpion, are symbolically woven to represent kingship and bitterness, respectively (Douma).



Figure 10: King of Ashanti in special regal cloth (Admin 2012)



Figure 11: Kente cloth with geometric shapes and brightly colored thread (Zimmerer 2011)

3. **Intensive creative process of traditional Ghanaian culture**

As a native of Ghana, I appreciate that the process of creating an art work is as important as the final product. Traditional Ghanaian culture always takes into consideration the time spent in creation. To Ghanaians, this validates the value of their work. Such time intensive practices characterize typical Ghanaian daily life, in such activities as the braiding of hair, washing of clothes to preparing of foods like “Fufu” (a starchy food made mostly from cassava and plantain prepared by peeling, boiling and pounding with a mortar and pestle into a round sticky mass) and “Ab3nkwan”/ palm nut soup (a meal processed by boiling, pounding and sieving palm fruit to extract fluid. The fluid is simmered with spices and meat for hours to thicken into a soup).

With traditional Ghanaian art works, the labor intensive process of making provides a sense of satisfaction to the customer and the artist. Work like bead making, Kente weaving, basket weaving, tie and dye, batik design, and Adinkrah cloth production shown in Figure 12, take long hours of repeated process. This process of making may also take days and weeks. For a Ghanaian, the beauty and satisfaction of an art work lies in the effortless will to achieve good results by immersing oneself into a profound ritual of repetition and production. The vibrant colors, the unique shape of motifs, and the meticulous skilful act of creation, come together to enhance the value of traditional Ghanaian art works.

Another inherent concept that I can identify within my culture is the value in which “weight” is perceived. Though weight obviously relates to the word heaviness, I can safely say that, in the Ghanaian culture, the perception of weight also relates to the concept of richness, power, value or even the importance of an artwork or an entity. Examples can be seen with the heavy weight of kente cloth worn by chiefs from the southern part of Ghana, the heavy cast gold worn as ornament by kings and queens from Ghana (see Figure 10) and the dress in Figure 13 called “Fugu”; a heavy cotton

woven smock traditionally worn by warriors and chiefs from northern Ghana. Specific smocks were conventionally worn by warriors as amulets for protection during war and by chiefs as a boost of royal power during installation of chiefs (Jasmine).



Figure 12: Adinkra cloth with stripes of Kente cloth (Adire 2013)



Figure 13: Fugu dress worn by a dancer during a festive occasion (Arku 2013)

The perception of “weight” in another way relates to the time spent and the total dedication put into the work of art. In Ghanaian culture, I can say that ‘weight’ does not only mean heaviness. It is the total effort and time put into creating an art work. Other art work that is lighter in weight like basketry, batik design and leather work, also hold enormous value in traditional Ghanaian culture.

4. **Personal Artistic Inspiration**

As a contemporary artist from Ghana, I blend traditional African techniques into contemporary fashion. My passion for innovation is heightened by the diverse cultural experiences that I share. Throughout my life, my aesthetics has been broadened by the different cultural values that I have been exposed to. Travelling to places like Brazil, Rwanda, Nigeria, Uganda, Canada and the United States has definitely enhanced my understanding of “art” because I have observed the different aesthetic cultures of each place. To me “art” simply means “stop and look.” Most art works became known and famous because there was an initial single glance which opened a new world to the viewer. I believe the viewer is also the artist that forges the path of his work. As she allows the possibilities of her innermost vision to be relived, she helps to open a new world in which other

viewers glimpse to open another world for themselves. Examples of this assessment could be noticed with the Van Gogh Shoes paintings “A Pair of Shoes” which was discussed in “The Origin of the Work of Art” by Martin Heidegger in the 1930’s (“Van Gogh Shoes”). As observed in Figure 14, the painting creates a different feeling for the observer to experience. It takes the viewer to an unknown but strangely familiar place projected by the individual’s total experience in life. Another work which is also shown in Figure 14 is the controversial work of Marcel Duchamp’s manufactured urinal named “Fountain” (Stafford). This work totally questions the statement “what is art?” and as it was stated earlier, “art” is revealed when one stops to notice the different perspective of what is being observed. I see art everywhere- It is in the way we talk, cook, write, design the landscape or even observe a simple toilet bowl to appreciate another meaning that it could hold in our lives.

My philosophical thinking has been greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger. His written words “art is the origin of both artist and work” and “Man is the shepherd of Being” (Heidegger 142, 234) makes me understand that materials at hand should guide the artist in the production of an art work and, the artist should not impose on the material but allow it to “reveal” itself in its best way.

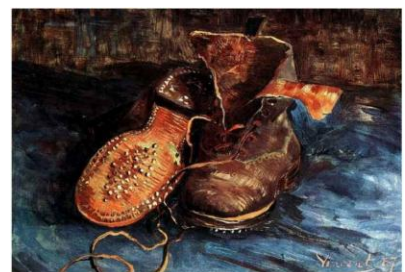


Figure 14: “Fountain” By Marcel Duchamp and images of “A Pair of Shoes” by Van Gogh respectively (Hicks 2012 and Van Gogh Gallery 2011)

As an artist, my work usually depicts the organic, free-flowing nature of materials. I try to be asymmetrical in the creation of my works to help mimic the concept “imperfection made perfect.” I

like to integrate different materials together to form an artwork. I usually work with natural materials like leather, fiber, textiles, wood, rattan, copper, silver and more. I try to work with colors that appeal to my senses and my personal aesthetic flavor. Colors in my work are chosen to help enhance and encompass the total qualities of the final product. I identify myself as “a wearable artist”, and I try to have my works project a fashionable contemporary appeal with a touch of traditional African aesthetics. I do believe that there is always an artistic plan during the process of making but, I always allow my eyes, hands and soul to coordinate my thoughts as I create any work of art. I believe planning is the vision but the actual process of making becomes the final mission. My purpose of creation is to allow the material at hand to reveal its truest nature at that specific moment of creation.

III. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The main focus of this thesis work is to depict the sculptural outlook of traditional African fabric headgears and project the intricate process of braiding traditional African threaded hair styles. The thesis work *Reveal* is a multifunctional sculptural jewelry series art work that captures the temporal nature of traditional African hair style and headgears in permanent way. The series of work is grouped into two different segments (first and second segment). In both segments, the art works are made to be very light in weight to help project the importance of weightlessness in a contemporary setting, and to elevate the idea that value supersedes the perception of weight in this contemporary era. *Reveal* is created by gradual repetitive processes. Both segments are colorful and depict free movement of materials by allowing the used materials to be expressive in their application. Color is also used symbolically to represent my own personal understanding of my culture and traditional connotations. The basic materials commonly used in both segments are thread and glue. Thread is to symbolize strength and value of *Reveal*. While the use of glue symbolically represents unity and bondage of all the elements of art within *Reveal*.

1. **First Segment**

This segment has three works, *The Fold*, *Chameleon*, and *Fiery*. The basic idea for creating works within this segment is to capture the soft but rigid outlook of traditional African fabric headgear. Mylar and copper were extremely important in the creation of works within this segment to enhance movement of material and create a successful impression of free-flowing fabric.

a. Works made of Mylar

Mylar is considered as a contemporary material. It is perfect for contemporary fashion jewelry. Jewelry made of Mylar can be made bigger and still feel comfortable to wear because of its light weight. Mylar is a transparent material that becomes flexible and malleable when heated with a heat gun or molded in hot water. When cooled in water or cold air, it becomes rigid but takes the shape of its heated form. The use of Mylar in *Reveal* helps to project the required shape needed to enhance specific aesthetic appeal. The softness of the material when heated allows smooth molding of the form to achieve flexible folds that mimic creases captured in fabric headgear. Mylar creates an illusion of weight when used for jewelries that are sculptural and bigger in size. *Chameleon* and *Fiery* are made of Mylar.

i. *Chameleon*

The word chameleon symbolically means camouflage. This meaning is adopted because the work is different from how it feels and looks (observe closely the images in Figure 15). For those who are accustomed with the malleable properties of metal works, *Chameleon* appears to be made of metal when viewed from afar. When seen closely, others who are aware that fabric could be stiffened believe that *Chameleon* is a soft textured fabric that is frozen in movement. And when touched, people wonder what kind of material it is, because it is surprising to know that tiny bits of cut brightly colored textured papers glued on formed Mylar create an illusion of flowing cloth. As shown in

Figure 15, Chameleon can be worn in different ways. The front and back of it are equally wearable. The front is paper mosaic while the back of the work is sprayed with golden brown metallic paint. The edges of the work are perforated with a drill and stitched with thread. The threads selected for the edges were chosen to help project the piece and provide a neat finish. The stitched edge mimics the selvedge of woven cloth. It symbolizes the strength that a selvedge provides to a finished cloth. The colors of paper (golden brown, dark brown and greenish blue) were intentionally used to allow the viewer to wonder around the form by moving his eyes from one fold to another, and the golden brown metallic paint helps to enhance chameleon and make it appear metallic when viewed from the back.

Influence

The idea of mosaic making was to achieve the weaving effect created during the making of Kente cloth, Fugu and basket weaving in Ghanaian society. The time spent in sticking each tiny paper and stitching the thread is to remind me that the value of chameleon is definitely in the making. The work is influenced by observing Gustav Klimt's paintings and also by having a background in mosaic making. The shades created by sticking the tiny papers are from observing how folds in fabrics create shadows, depth and movement of form. Military camouflage was also an influence on the choice of colors in this work, and the brown and green feature prominently in tropical Africa vegetation.



Figure 15: Chameleon worn from the front, back and as a head gear respectively.

ii. *Fiery*

The name fiery simply means burning intensity. This work reflects various symbolic meanings within my culture. Fiery can be worn in different ways, It is more flexible than Chameleon because of its heating and cooling process. The front and back of Fiery has a covering of gold leaf. The gold leaf is crumpled to create an organic appeal. The inner part of the work is sprayed with silver paint to give the work a contrasting look when viewed closely. The front and back of it is also lacquered to protect and create a dull greenish patina on the gold leaf. The lacquer is able to change the color of the gold leaf because of the reaction that lacquer has on the copper in the gold leaf. Tiny bits holes are drilled throughout the work and colorful threads are grouped together and sewn in various sections of the work to create a fringe-like effect on the upper part of the work. The effect that the thread has on Fiery could be compared to a beautiful landscape of grass. The inner part of the work is a mixture of the greenish looking gold leaf, silver spray paint and beautiful groupings of sewn colored thread spread all over the surface of the inner portion.

Influence

Fiery is influenced by intuitively alluding to the red, gold, green and black colors of my national flag. The gold in the flag represents the natural ore of my country, and I mimic the ore by using the greenish crumpled gold leaf to symbolize the natural resources of Ghana. The green in the national flag represents the beautiful vegetation of Ghana. This ideology is explored by using varied colored thread to create a fringe-like effect depicted in Figure 16 to represent the colorful and beautiful land of Ghana. Red represents the bloodshed of Ghanaian forefathers. This color is strongly symbolized in the meaning of the work Fiery.

Fiery alludes to the strength and beauty of my culture, and my never-ending bond with my origin. Finally, the color black in the flag is strengthened in my work by using different colored threads to represent the different skin colors and diverse cultural beauty that binds Africans as one.



Figure 16: Different ways of wearing Fiery.

b. Work in copper

Copper is a reddish-orange metal that is extremely soft and malleable. It is very common in jewelry making. It is usually added to tin and zinc to create an alloy of bronze and brass respectively. It is also added to silver and gold to improve their chemical and physical properties. Copper is easily oxidized or colored to create different shades of green, brown, red, black and many more patinas. Though Ghanaians usually use brass and bronze to sometimes replace gold when casting beads or sculptural works, copper is easily traced in most jewelry works, because copper is usually mixed with other metals to form alloys like brass, bronze and more.

i. ***The Fold***

The Fold symbolically means hidden truth. It is the source of enlightenment and inspiration in *Reveal*. The fold is the first piece created in *Reveal*. It helped me to explore more ideas with copper and

Mylar as I progressed in making this thesis work. With The Fold, I explore the properties of copper by heating, hammering and bending the form into an impression of a beautiful flower which flows like the folds in a cloth. The Fold is a neck piece that can be worn front and back as shown in Figure 17. The work is slightly textured with a hammer, and it is colored with liver of sulfur to obtain a bright dark brown finish patina on the surface of the metal. It is comfortable and aids in the posture of the body but looks rigid when worn. Copper is the only material used in this work. It is used in this work because copper transcends the past, present and future. In this cotemporary period where concepts supersede material, copper still remains an economically valuable element in jewelry design.

Influence

The fold is influenced by observing contemporary fashion runway shows, specifically wearable jewelry shows. It also influenced by observing how jewelry postures the body to reflect important expression of status, behavior and traditions within traditional African cultures. It is influenced by interpreting how heavy cast gold jewelries mirror and create a presence of power, strength and worth when worn and adorned on Ghanaian queen and kings during important festive occasions in Ghana. The Fold reflects the ridged look of traditional African headgears and how the headgears help to beautify the body in a controlled way.

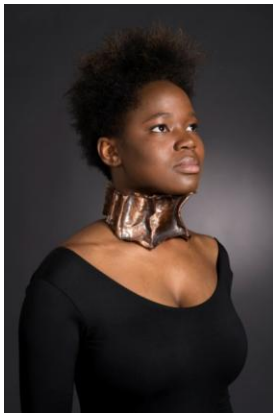


Figure 17: Front and back ways of wearing of The Fold respectively

2. **Second Segment**

Works within this segment are basically made up of thin soldered copper rods and brightly colored threads. The works are very light in weight and are all produced by gluing and wrapping threads around the soldered copper rods to create movement and rhythm of colors. The rods are bent into various sculptural forms and soldered to achieve the desired effect. Before wrapping the threads around the rods, silver or golden spray paint is applied on the surface of the copper rod to protect the rod from rusting and tarnishing. Spraying before threading also aids in selecting the best color needed for each art work within this segment. Works created in the second segment are idea developments from one work to another. The works reflect the sculptural and three dimensional outlooks of traditional African threading hairstyles and explore contemporary high fashion styles. Works in this segment relate to my artistic sensibility of colors within Kente cloth, batik and tie dye. These works allude to a long process of making works within Ghanaian culture. In this segment, 5 art works are created: *Blown by The Wind*, *Glow, But I Fly*, *Flow of Colors* and *Bold*.

i. Blown by the Wind

Blown by the Wind, is the second work produced in *Reveal*. It has very long rods that are bent and soldered together to create an enclosure. It took weeks to wrap the threads around its form. The work is made to look very asymmetrical in shape. It is worn over the head like a hat but it rests on the shoulder. This work is very light despite its large size (2ft. x1.5ft.). The round rod that rest on the shoulder is slightly bent to be stable. When worn, this piece requires the support of both the wearer's hair and the head. The work consists of only two colors, bright pink and dark mauve. Considering the images in Figure 18, the two colors create contrasting movement and rhythm in the art work which helps the viewer to move from one point to another when observing the piece. The work is very dimensional and extremely sculptural. It can create varied imageries when viewed in different angles. The work was made for high a fashion photo shoot and avant garde fashion shows.

Influence

This work is influenced by observing headgears from the Zulu culture and how these headgears elongate away from the crown of the head. This work is also influenced by observing the different sculptural looks of traditional African threading hairstyles. It is called Blown by The Wind because of how the movement of colors and rods appears to look like a “duku” (fabric headgear) blowing and flying away into the wind. When worn it represents the strength to overcome and explore the possibilities of life. The colors used in this work are chosen to depict the beautiful colors in Ewe Kete cloth (Kente cloth) from the Volta Region of Ghana. The extremely long process of making and designing certifies that the work is unique, valuable, diverse and culturally inclined.



Figure 18: Blown by The Wind in different angles showing contrasting movement of colors

ii. *Glow*

Glow means to shine or to radiate. The word is derived from the radiation observed by the dynamic movement of colors throughout Glow. The work is called Glow because of how bright the colors are and how striking the colors are against the wearer’s skin. Glow is a neck piece that can also be worn as a headgear. It is smaller in size than the other neckpieces within this segment. It is more detailed

when viewed from the back. Glow was created by gradually bending a thick wire rod around the shoulder to create an organic flowing form. The rod was then soldered and hammered to give it strength and provide a textured movement. Smaller rods were then soldered from one point to another on the thick rod to create different semi- circular forms that produced varied movements. The final imagery after soldering the rods looks very undulating and appears to have diverging movement. The work was sprayed with golden yellow and dark green colors as a final work but upon criticism, Glow (as seen in Figure 19) was subsequently threaded with deep pink, light pink and dark yellow colors to give it its present look, since the painted form did not correlate with the other works produced. The change in medium to affect the color and texture quality of Glow allowed me to fundamentally understand the theme and direction in which *Reveal* was to unveil itself

Influence

Glow is influenced by *Blown by The Wind*'s movement of colors and lines. It is also influenced by looking at contemporary ways of wearing jewelry, thus breaking the traditional way of wearing jewelry whereby prominent designs are typically seen only from the front. Glow was made to be worn sideways, backwards or as a headgear. Glow is also influenced by studying color patterns and observing how bright colors blend to create harmonious effect on both dark and light skin.

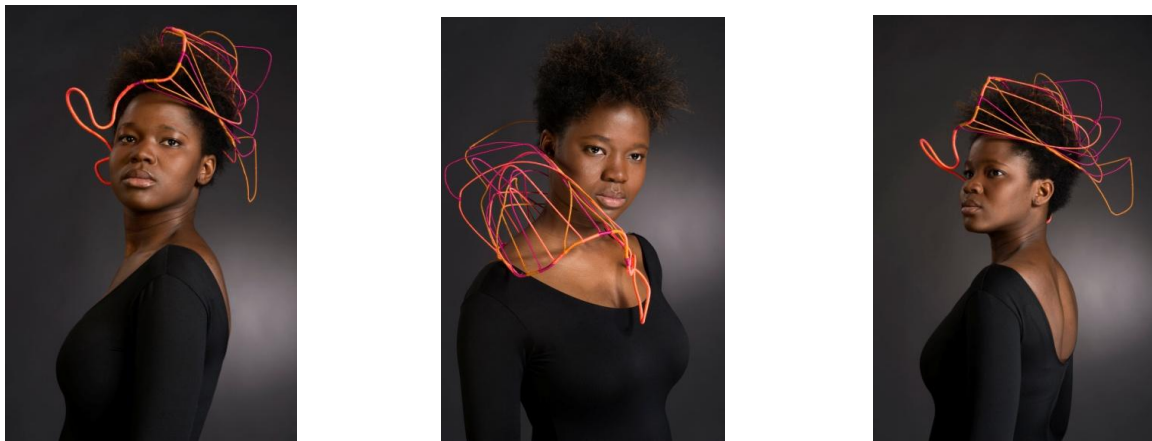


Figure 19: Different ways of wearing Glow. Threaded colors create diverging movement of lines.

iii. *The Flow of Colors*

Flow of Colors is a bracelet. It is extremely colorful with dark green, dark yellow, light pink and brown colored threads. It was made colorful to visually appreciate how varied colors come together to create visual harmony. As shown in Figure 20, it has an upper and lower part. The lower part supports the upper part. The lower part was created to support the arm when worn and to prevent the jewelry from falling. The lower part has two circular rods connected by four vertical rods made by drilling and soldering the rods to create pillars that connect the two circles. The upper part has short tiny rods connecting each other in various ways to create a circular organic movement. It also has a rod that runs across one end of the piece to the other end. The rod serves as a support for the hand if the bracelet is too loose on the arm. The shape of The Flow of Colors looks like that of an open funnel but its side view looks like the shape of fabric headgear. The work can sit by itself. The work is intentionally made to be symmetrically imperfect in order to create the idea of spontaneity and imperfection of movement.

Influence

The Flow of Color is influenced by studying how bracelets are currently made for high fashion shows by exaggerating its look. It is also influenced by studying abstract geometric shapes and lines within our environment. The work was concurrently produced by allowing my hand, eyes and mind to direct my thoughts by gradually building one form to another. As shown in Figure 19, the pillars created by the wires mimic how traditional African threading hairstyle usually develops by creating a base in the middle of the crown and gradually expanding to create movement of threaded hair.

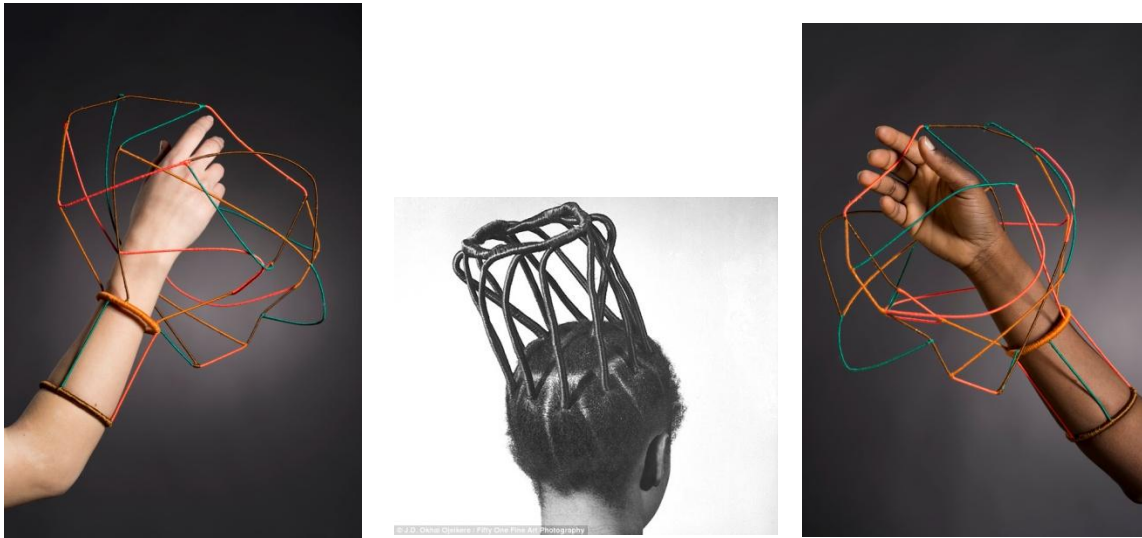


Figure 20: Different skin tones of models and different view of Flow of Colors. Middle image shows example of pillars created by threading hair. *Black and white image from (Charriaut 2012)*

iv. ***But I fly***

The name But I Fly is derived from the appearance of the work after it was produced. But I Fly represents one's ability to dream and achieve. But I Fly alludes to the word butterfly to create a playful irony. As depicted in Figure 21, the shape of the work when worn seems capable of levitating and when hanged appears to have the shape of a beautiful butterfly. The neck piece was produced by primarily soldering and bending wires around the shoulder of a mannequin down to the chest. The work was then turned upside down and soldered with thinner rods to create repetition of semicircular curves. These curves gradually increase and decrease as it moved toward the upper part of the jewelry. The work has three colors: deep pink, dark blue and yellow. These colors were directly picked from a specific Kente cloth that I had. The colored threads were selected to demonstrate how elements from my native culture could be used to create something new and unique while still retaining a trace of my origin. Finally, the colors were chosen to bring about movement and depth in the work.

Influence

The work was influenced by studying how elements from my culture evolve over time- especially how the use of Kente cloth evolved from just wrapping the cloth around the shoulder to sewing the Kente into a beautiful dress or using the Kente to produce shoes and bags. The work is also influenced by trying to pick out the elements of Kente cloth (color and thread) and completely changing the process and pattern to create something innovative.



Figure 21: But I Fly worn to look like a butterfly and to look like it is levitating respectively

v. ***Bold***

Bold is a pair of earrings that are geometric in shape. It is called Bold because of its striking outlook when worn. It has inherent basic colors that are used extensively in African cultures. Bold has yellow, red and black colored threads. The colors symbolically represent power, courage and freedom, respectively. The threads are shortly wrapped around the wire to create movement of colors and pattern from one thread to another. The earrings (as shown Figure 22) are asymmetrical and look dimensional and heavy when worn. The larger earring is made bigger than the smaller earring to create visual balance when worn. The larger earring has more short patterns of red and black threads

at the base, and yellow and black shot threaded patterns moving upward on the piece. It also has very thin wires that move across the upper part of the piece in a wavy way. Each wave is made up of one color of either red or yellow thread. The smaller earring looks totally different. It is also irregular but has fewer patterns of both black and red, and yellow and black threads. It has only one tiny curly wire that moves downward on the piece but has thicker rods that are made of plain colors of red, black or yellow threads that runs across different angles of the work.

Influence

The name Bold is derived from the beauty of African culture and how bright colors within this culture represent strength and power. It is influenced by studying and understanding the concept of visual balance and visual weight when creating an art work. Bold is created by closely studying the weaving techniques in Fugu smock and Kente cloth. It is influenced by observing how warp and weft colored threads uniquely interlace with each other during weaving to create imagery, rhythm and textures in cloth. Since the head is considered as power in some African communities, Bold is worn to bring to light the contemporary African strength and beauty of a woman.



Figure 22: Image of Bold in different skin tones showing asymmetrical qualities, movement of color and pattern

IV. EXHIBITION OF REVEAL

The exhibition of *Reveal* is extremely important to validate the thesis work and the thesis show. In order to allow my audience to understand the concept of *Reveal*, I took into consideration the total setup of the exhibition and the effect it should have on the audience. Since works in *Reveal* are very sculptural and mostly see-through, I exhibited *Reveal* in a semi-enclosed area to allow individual appreciation of each work.

The semi- enclosed area was created by moving white rectangular movable wall sections together to create angular shapes that mimicked a maze in which the audiences could move in and out from different directions to see each work. Four different walls were created by at least moving three or four wall sections together to create one wall. Walls created by moving three wall sections together looked like an open ‘V’ shape that had an extra wall section almost close to its converging point, while walls made up of four wall sections looked like an open arm in an angular form (An open ‘V’ shape that has two wall sections at its converging point). As shown in Figure 23, walls made of three wall sections faced each other in the opposite direction, while walls made of four wall sections faced away from each other in the opposite direction. The nature of the maze allowed easy and professional display of works and also allowed each work to be represented by a picture that shows how individual works can be worn.

The angular shapes allude to the symbolic meaning of triangular patterns in Kente cloth. The angular shapes represent the birth, existence and completeness of my thesis work. In order to allow the audience to appreciate *Reveal* and relate it to my culture and our cotemporary world, another person and I modeled my works and had pictures taken of each of us wearing them. The photo shoot was done by a professional photographer, and the images were printed and mounted on foam board. The mounted images were then erected eyelevel on the diagonal sides of each wall.

Some of the art works were displayed hanging in other to explore their sculptural outlook, while other works were displayed on pedestals. This approach also allows the audience to understand the jewelry and appreciate the different ways in which it could be worn. It also allowed the audience to recognize the dimensionality of the work and validate its authenticity. Finally, the different pictures with two different skin toned models helped the audience to relate to the jewelry and appreciate the cultural blend of the thesis work.



Figure 23: Different views of exhibition room and how the walls complement each other

V. CONCLUSION

Reveal which is the title of my thesis work has been an explorative name that suggests my journey to enlightenment. As I gradually expand my ideas to find the true essence of being innovative by not allowing myself to fear the unknown, I discover a path far from my normal ideological thinking. This path has helped me to understand the different ways in which art can be appreciated. As I try to produce something extraordinary, I learn that processes are usually ordinary but the total sum of these different processes is what creates an extraordinary result. The simple soldering and bending of rods, the threading of cords and the molding of Mylar are the processes that unanimously reveal the other possibilities of material.

The thesis work *Reveal* showcases my culture, my personality and my diversity. Since the thesis work was exploratory and incremental, every step taken in the creation of it helped to solidify its title *Reveal*. The gathering of information, the creation of works and the exhibition of the thesis show were a subtle journey of soul searching.

I believe that the audience understood my thesis work and related it to my culture. *Reveal* creates more room for exploration within Africa's diverse unique cultures and the field of contemporary African art. *Reveal* revolutionizes the constant copy and paste of tradition. It allows inventive reuse of elements, process and traditions within African cultures by completely disintegrating and rebuilding these cultures into something contemporary that has a subtle and profound trace of traditional root. The thesis work enlightens and expatiates upon the questions on content and concept within our contemporary era, and allows different traditional themes and practices to be analyzed and be re-invented.

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