

**IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award and
BLAC Foundation Award**

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Art Department (MFA photography)

Destination: Accra, Ghana

Departure and Return

May 31st- August 23rd, 2019

With the funds from the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award and BLAC Foundation Award, I accomplish my summer research in Ghana. I was there from May 31st- August 23rd, 2019. Through those three months, I attended and visited many areas including festivals, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Ghana, Cultural Centers, art galleries in Accra and Kumasi, historical sites; as well as meeting both traditional makers and contemporary artists, curators, and leaders.

I visited the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial. Throughout my life, I learned about Kwame Nkrumah and how he influenced many of the historical African American Civil Right Movement leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, etc. It was such an amazing experience to see his monument in person.

I attended the Wax Print Festival. They had the festival at the Untamed Empire, which is an event ground for many individuals who are emerging artists and fashion brands coming out of Accra. It included many vendors who were showcasing their arts, fashions and different Ghanaian food vendors. The event focused on generations of textiles from having weavers from Kumasi, showing the public how to weave kente; to having a fashion exhibitions to explore many types of textiles in Ghana and how fashion has been modernized through generations. These were accompanied by a screening of the film Wax Print. They also had music performances and information about the annual Chale Wote (Chale Let's Go) Street Art Festival. I had a great conversation about how the process of weaving kente with the weavers. We each shared the significance of kente cloth in Ghana and African American cultural identity use of it in the United States. I was surprised to hear how it takes 6 months to weave one complete cloth of a

kente. I had the chance to reconnect with the weaver that I met earlier at the festival at their weaving village in Bonwire (a region in Kumasi).

I attended a Year of Return conference hosted by the Heritage and Cultural Society of Africa at the Kempinski Hotel. I interacted with many scholars at the conference and heard a panel discussion about the concept of returning home, specifically from the viewpoints of African Americans and Africans who are living in Europe; such as Mr. Kweku Adoboli and other persons from parts of the Diaspora.

While I was in Kumasi, I had the chance to go to the Manhyia Palace. I deepened my understanding of the history of the power structure through chieftaincy and the symbols that are used. Kumasi was a key place to go to. It was such an amazing experience to go to Manhyia Palace where the Paramount King lives, I also visited their cultural center. The palace holds the history of the Ashanti people, their kings, queens, and leaders and showcases the riches of their history and culture to future generations. I received the majority of my research from the scholars and authors there. I learned so much about the history of the Kente cloth and the importance of umbrellas that the Kings, chiefs, queen mothers stand under. I hope to use the book recommendations that they gave me (*The Power of Gold: Asante Royal Regalia from Ghana and Engaging Modernity Assante in the Twenty-First Century*) and to keep the connections that I made within the community to further help my research through the rest of my time in graduate school. I visited the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). By talking with professors and students, I was able to find more information about the art program there.

I took an introduction to the Twi language at the University of Ghana in Legon. It was important to embrace language as an element of my research. While English is the official business language, many Ghanaian languages which includes Twi are also spoken as well. Twi is very promptly used with the country. Learning one of the many languages of Ghana will help me have a better understanding of how to even name some of my work in the future. I also took an independent course for my summer term with Professor Mary Hark. When she came to Ghana, we were able to meet and discuss my research.

I had the chance to meet the iconic photographer Mr. James Barnor. He is a Ghanaian photographer who is now based in London. He introduced Ghana to color photography during the late 1960s. His early works recorded Ghana as it headed towards independence and came to terms with modernity through new inventions, music, and fashion. I got a chance to photograph him at the Jamestown café, and that was very important because he is originally from Jamestown, and during the time of the 1970s he was making a lot of his work in that area. He introduced me to a Ghanaian art curator Mr. Allotey Bruce-Konuah and we had a fulfilling conversation about the importance of photography specifically film photography.

it was amazing to see Ghana through my eyes. For the majority of my life, I saw Ghana from the perspective of stories from my family and from stories that have been shown through media. This trip also helped me have a better understanding of my own identity of being Ghanaian and how I can further my research for my project: "**Power to my People**" / "**Tumi Ma Me Nkorɔfo**". I learn so much this summer and got the chance to have traditional objects made including the umbrellas; I can't wait to use these

resources for the upcoming semester and my Master of Art Defense show this spring. Coming to my second year as a graduate student at University-Wisconsin Madison, I hope to go back to Ghana to continue my research even more and work even closely with the community to make even bigger objects for my MFA show.