Ghanaian Scholar Creates Her Own Distinctive Sculpture

She was aptly named after the Roman goddess of the hearth, and learned early how to master fire and clay to create traditional pots and vessels. Vesta Elizabeth Adu-Gyamfi, an assistant professor of ceramics and clay works at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, is spending the spring semester in Bloomington as a Visiting Senior Fulbright Scholar.

She has been working in the School of Fine Arts studios of ceramicists John Goodheart and Tim Mather, learning the techniques for making porcelain pottery—for which facilities are not available in her home country—and creating a distinctive style of porcelain sculpture which draws its inspiration from African/Akan concepts of beauty.

In spite of her considerable talent and ebullient nature, Vesta has not always been as confident an artist as she is now. She tells of the frustrations she experienced when she first came to study in the United States in 1988 at the Rochester Institute of Technology, under a prestigious ITT International Fellowship. Her professor pressed her to examine what she was doing and to articulate the basis of her artistic philosophy, an “American” way of thinking she found quite alien to her own. But after deep introspection into the resources of her own Akan cultural heritage, she began to accept the need to understand herself as an artist, to figure out where certain recurrent artistic motifs arose from, and why they were crucial to her artistic expression.

Vesta’s current “African Woman” series of sculptures—shown here in their “green” or bisque-fired state—very clearly express her aesthetics. “In Akan concepts of beauty, nothing feeds the eye more than the female figure. I dwell on the female form, the head, neck, and torso. The head is the most esteemed shape in Akan society. Women with high domed foreheads are considered to be especially beautiful. The neck of my pots represents a stylized expression of the ideal neck [with a] series of rings or folds. The torso or base of my pieces represent well-developed buttocks and thighs which are equated with fertility and sexual attractiveness.” Her intimate understanding of form and motion, which impart an undulating fluidity to her pieces, is derived from her background as a performer of traditional Ghanaian dances.

The mother and child motif exemplifies the power of the woman as caretaker and caregiver, a power which, in the modern world, is being eroded as men are allowed to share in child-rearing. Finally, colors are highly symbolic in depicting womanly attributes. White represents joy, purity, and spiritual power; blue depicts love, tenderness, and serenity; yellow symbolizes royalty, continuous life, warmth, and prosperity; green is for fertility and vitality, important attributes of motherhood; red signals danger, violence, and dissatisfaction, a color she rarely uses.

For her IU colleagues Goodheart and Mather and their students, Vesta’s energy and presence have been a stimulating influence, bringing them into contact with a very different kind of cultural diversity. Her vitality has made her a very popular participant in the activities of IU’s African Studies Program. Before she leaves Bloomington, she will have an exhibit in mid-June of the pieces she has created while at IU. After that, Vesta will travel to the Netherlands,

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Jewish Studies Program Arranges Study Abroad at an Archaeological Site in Israel

For six weeks beginning at the end of June, Indiana University students will be joining a dig at Tel Bet Shemesh and have the opportunity to participate in an ongoing archaeological excavation in Israel.

Students will be working with Israeli archaeologists and living in nearby Kibbutz Har El. The dig offers students a chance to experience archaeology as it is actually practiced, to learn about ancient Israelite history and society, and to get a taste of life in Israel today. In addition to the daily dig, students will participate in afternoon workshops, evening lectures, and field trips.

To prepare for the trip, the IU students have been enrolled in one of two courses offered by the Department of Religious Studies at IU Bloomington: R300 “Research in Biblical Archaeology” or its graduate-level equivalent Rel R511. ✪

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where the Afrikacentrum Rijksweg will feature her work in an exhibition, “Women of Clay.”

Summing up her artistic mission, she fears that her country is in danger of losing its culture and identity to the West. Artists must “go back and fetch it,” a notion symbolized in many of her works by the stylized spiral design sankofa, named after a bird who warily circles in the air before deciding which food to eat. This notion has indeed characterized Vesta Adu-Gyamfi’s progression and mission as an artist. ✪

— R. N.

Speed Through Customs with INSPASS

Tired of waiting in long lines to clear customs? Frequent travellers who enter the United States through Newark International, JFK International in New York, or via Toronto International should be aware of INSPASS (INS Passenger Accelerated Service System). This pilot program allows individuals entering the United States through these airports to clear customs in a fraction of the time it takes for normal processing.

The INSPASS program depends on identifying “biometric” information particular to each individual. Applicants complete INS Form I-833 and then present the application at one of the INSPASS enrollment centers for an interview and to have their “hand geometry” electronically recorded. The system measures such characteristics as finger size and hand width. Approved applicants then receive an INSPASS card, which resembles a credit card and is valid for a year.

During the test period (the program began in 1993), there is no fee.

Participation is open to U.S. citizens and also to aliens from specified countries who travel to the United States in certain business visa categories.

Although entry sites are currently limited, they are expected to increase in number. A similar program is being tested in Canada and ongoing discussions with other governments have raised the possibility that several countries will have automated and universally compatible inspection programs.

For more information or an application form, contact the Office of International Services, IUB.

IU Kokomo International Day Festival

A fun-filled and educational day was in store for individuals who attended Indiana University Kokomo’s Fourth Annual International Day Festival on Saturday, April 20. The celebration of America’s multicultural heritage included ethnic food, dancing, music, and exhibits from 11 A.M to 3 P.M.

The festival featured a variety of entertaining music and dance from many lands including China, Ireland, Africa, India, Korea, Japan, and the Caribbean.

Admission to the festival was free. Visitors could purchase a “passport” to sample a luncheon of ethnic foods from six countries. The passports cost $5 each and were stamped at each ethnic food table after a customer received food. A cheaper passport was also available.

In addition to food and entertainment, exhibits of cultural artifacts were on display, and vendors of ethnic wares were selling their goods. A new attraction at this year’s festival was a herd of llamas from Kesling Farms.

The International Day Festival was coordinated by Diane Roden, finance professor in the Business & Economics Division, and Bridget Brewster, development officer in the Office of External Relations.