



ABLADE GLOVER

80th Anniversary





City Carnival (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 151 x 151 cm.



MAKING HIS MARK

Celebrating the 80th anniversary of Ablade Glover

In a career spanning over five decades as an exhibiting artist, Ablade Glover has immersed himself in a richly detailed examination of the process of painting in oils. The milestone of eighty years is traditionally called the Oak anniversary, in recognition of those qualities of stature, strength and endurance that miraculously develop with time out of the concentrated potential crammed within the acorn's miniature form. It seems only appropriate, therefore, in celebrating the artist's 80th year, to sketch a panoramic overview of the life of this quietly determined Ghanaian, who has grown progressively over time, and now stands as a towering figure adorning the world of contemporary African art.

Ablade Glover was born, in 1934, in a poor slum area in the centre of Accra, the sprawling capital of the British colony of the Gold Coast. Lively and inquisitive by nature, he was first sent to live with his father before being packed off, aged fourteen, to a Presbyterian boarding school in an attempt to channel his effervescent energies. Without the means to pay for secondary education, simple economic necessity dictated Glover's next step, as Ghana, in the early Fifties, moved towards self-determined Independence. The newly-elected Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah, himself educated in America and Britain, set about recruiting thousands of teachers to expand the emerging nation's educational system. Glover was amongst the first wave of young men to enter state-funded Teacher Training Colleges. It was at this time that the young Glover's artistic gift first attracted the encouraging eye of one of his tutors. On certification, he duly entered the classroom, and worked as a teacher for the next year. However, the tedium of a daily routine rehearsing basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills soon weighed heavily. Glover therefore applied to a two-year course in Art Education at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, containing one of the oldest, most distinguished art schools on the continent, which was affiliated to Goldsmiths College, London.

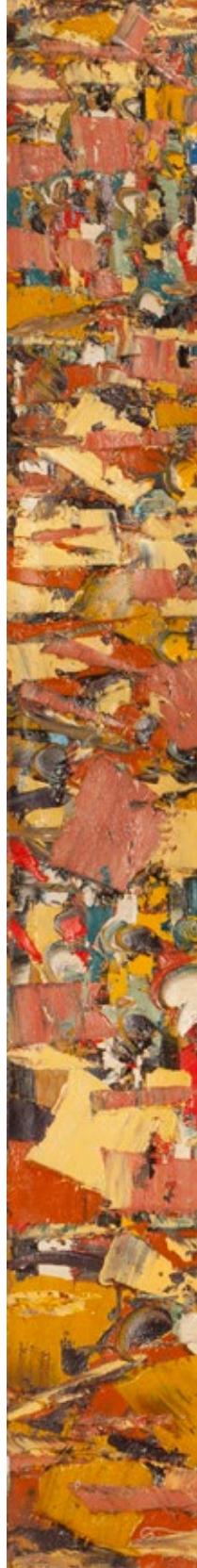
One of his teachers at KNUST, was an English textile specialist, named Mary Kirby, from London's Central School of Art and Design who, in 1956, had been appointed to a post in Achimota College, Ghana. Recognising his potential, Kirby encouraged Glover to sit the entrance examination for a place at the Central School. Without realising it at that time, Glover had made his first contact with a remarkable group of artists and educators from that extraordinary institution known simply as *Central*, which emerged out of the Arts and Crafts movement at the end of the 19th century. It was typical of the inspirational influence of someone of Kirby's stature, not only that she should spend time in Ghana pursuing research into the history of textiles, but that she would also consider it part of her mission to identify gifted individuals whom she felt should be invited back





to participate in the ongoing development of a school which has had a lasting impact on the course of British art, design and education. With Mary Kirby's help, Glover compiled his first-ever portfolio of drawings and paintings, and soon learnt that he'd been offered a place. Sadly, financial considerations again meant that he couldn't afford to seize this chance and, on leaving KNUST, he returned, once more, to teaching. Later, on learning of a government initiative to develop a textile company together with Unilever, Glover went for an interview hoping to secure a grant given to support the training of young Ghanaians abroad. When asked what and where he wished to study, his reply, that he'd already been accepted by London's Central School proved decisive: the interview was quickly concluded, Glover selected, and ample funding secured. As the Central School agreed to transfer his offer to the following year, November of 1959, saw the twenty-five year-old Ablade Glover leaving Ghana for the first time, and flying to London. There, as a student majoring in Textile Design, but nurturing a passion to pursue his minor in Drawing and Painting, a new world of opportunity opened up before him.

Landing in London when he did, on the cusp of the 'Swinging Sixties', meant that Glover arrived at the Central School during an extraordinary period of development, overseen by its post-war Principal, William Johnstone. Johnstone, himself a painter, had gathered about him an outstanding group of motivated teachers and theorists amongst whom were counted some of the finest artists of the day: Victor Pasmore, Alan Davie, Richard Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi amongst others. Like many Central students, Glover recalls the sheer impact of that bustling institution; the excited cacophony of interdisciplinary conversations; the encouragement of experimentation and the ongoing cross-fertilisations between different Design departments, which he would later recognise had changed his attitude to so many things. Amongst those teachers whose influence he particularly remembers was Anton Ehrenzweig, an Austrian émigré lawyer, now working as a professional textile designer. Like Johnstone, Davie and many others at Central, Ehrenzweig was interested in the psychological roots of the creative process, and his book, *The Hidden Order of Art (1967)*, remains a classic text of modern art theory. Another teacher was Gordon Crook, who gave Glover insight into the mechanical aspects of dyeing and invaluable guidance with his dissertation, *Africa and African Textiles*. Glover remembers Crook's insistence that: 'You cannot just put colours down on paper! Whatever you design, you *must* be able to interpret it. Any mark you make on paper, must survive going to the darkroom and, when it returns, being printed; it must carry through the whole process.' The authentic overtones of Central's insistence on the critical importance of 'Basic Design' still resonate strongly today. Glover continues: 'That really impressed me! I realised that a teacher must be a practising person, not merely someone who just talks and talks. Central's teachers were real people, and many instructors were hard-working professionals, who only taught a few days a week. You worked harder for them, because you knew they really knew what they were talking about. I remember Gordon Crook so well, because, when Gordon came to take class, everyone was very happy.' Crook, himself a former textile design graduate of the Central School, also taught at the







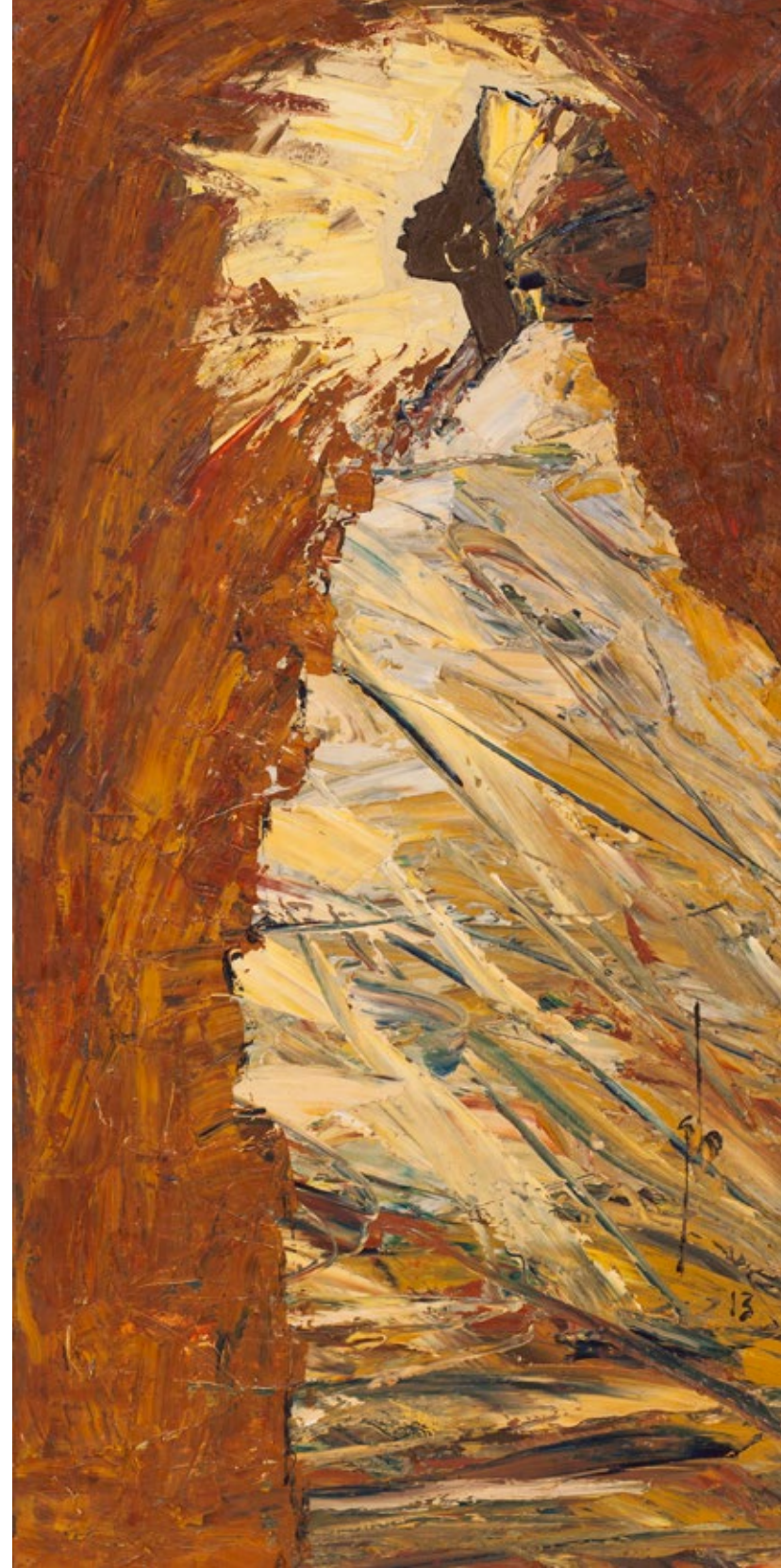
Royal College of Art before emigrating to New Zealand, in 1972. There, he worked as an artist and designer in print, paint and tapestry. Today, he is still remembered as the first among New Zealand's contemporary textile artists, with commissioned works on display in many of that country's embassies.

On graduating with his NDD from the prestigious Central School, Glover returned to Ghana in November 1962, only to discover that the textile factory, where he was to have worked, had still not been built. He began to paint seriously again, creating a sufficient number of canvases to be offered a solo exhibition at the Art Centre in Accra, in 1963. In search of someone of influence to open his first exhibition, he sought the help of the American, Shirley Graham Dubois, wife of the great civil rights activist and pan-Africanist, W.E.B. Dubois, both of whom, with Nkrumah's backing, had recently become Ghanaian citizens. Before agreeing to open his show, Mrs. Dubois, who became head of the Ghana television company (GBC TV), first asked to see the work. Glover felt embarrassed that his home was too poor for such a distinguished lady, but she insisted on visiting, and he was delighted when she finally agreed to open the show. She also offered to help find Glover a position within the GBC, but he told her that his heart was now set on returning to England, to study Art Education at Newcastle University. All he needed was to sell enough paintings during the show to be able to afford the fees and his airfare. One day, out of the blue, a car arrived from Mrs. Dubois informing him that the President wanted to see him immediately. Chauffered to the Presidential Lodge, in something of a daze, he was ushered into the presence of Mrs. Dubois, who stood casually talking with Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana. Following her introductory lead of, 'Here is the young man I told you about,' Glover, as though in a dream, chatted amicably, for a few minutes, with the great man, before he turned back to her, and said, 'Well then, everything is arranged!' He was next taken to see the Secretary, who gave him a letter from the Scholarship Secretariat for the High Commissioner in London, instructing that all his fees be paid whilst he was in Britain. After finishing the course in Newcastle, he returned to Ghana where, for the next seven years, he was content to teach Fabric Design and Printing at KNUST. Interestingly, one of the Fine Arts students at KNUST during that same time, was the young El Anatsui. Supported by his teaching position, Glover's own art practice now began to flourish, and, in 1968, he realised a long-held dream of creating a gallery to show his art, by founding the eponymous Glo Art Gallery.


Ready for change once again, he seized the opportunity for more overseas experience, moving on to graduate studies in the United States. In 1971, he arrived at Kent State University, Ohio (a year after the fatal shootings) where he received his Master's Degree, before proceeding to Ohio State University, where, in 1974, he was awarded his Doctorate, on Art in Education in Africa. The following two decades saw him put these

Left: *City Carnival II*, 2014.
Oil on canvas, 151 x 151 cm.

Right: *Mother Profile*, 2013.
Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 76 cm.







now extensive studies in textiles, design, painting and art education to efficient use, teaching at the College of Art in KNUST, where he eventually rose to become both Departmental Head and College Dean. Since Glo Art Gallery had foundered during his absence in the States, he next established the Artists Alliance Gallery, in Accra, to exhibit the work of contemporary West African artists. The demands of supervising this fledgling enterprise together with College administrative responsibilities left him precious little time to exercise his passion for painting. Only on retiring, in 1994, was Glover able to channel the pent-up energies of those intervening years into a sustained outpouring of creativity, resulting in the richly diverse paintings of the last two decades.

Glover describes his own work as developing from an attraction to certain kinds of disorder or chaos, a fascination with events that develop in ways that are unstructured or cannot easily be defined. This general statement makes more sense when looking at his recurrent interest in the subject of crowds, which examine the randomly chaotic, yet highly motivated movement characteristic of gatherings of people. These become the common theme of so many of his canvases, which focus on market-places, lorry-parks, bus-stations, beaches and city-centre scenes, in fact, anywhere providing all those unpredictable conditions of tumultuous, energetic motion that captivate his enquiring eye. Crowds display many different moods: the random browsing of city-centre shoppers; the excited activity of swimmers on beaches; the emotionally charged surges of political rallies; or the euphoria of fans at a football match. Each one suggests various aspects of the emergent behaviour of large groups of people, and all of them mesmerise Glover, proving an endless source of inspiration.

During the early years of the 20th century, artists, for the first time, began to grapple with the complexities of movement in an entirely different way. For centuries, the classical representation of people and scenery had been conditioned by the paradigm of a picture as encapsulating a discrete slice of time captured from a single place, which denoted the artist's (and, by extension, the viewer's) own perspective. The arrival of the modern camera in the 1840s and its continuing and rapid improvement had already begun to affect artists, some of whom, like Degas, were quick to experiment with the device, even as they continued their painting. The earliest cameras were totally insensitive to movement, their long exposure times ensuring that any moving thing remained invisible. Surprisingly, the first Daguerrotypes of Parisian scenes showed neither people nor vehicles, precisely because they moved, and were therefore not recorded. But with the improvement of film, the chronophotography of Marey and Muybridge and the arrival of the Lumiere brothers' invention, movement became a subject in its own right, and the early 20th century saw artists beginning to take account of the new technology's transformative vision of the world. Balla's, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912) and Duchamp's, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) are both early examples of the reaction of the visual artists. Liberated from the restrictive constraints of single points in time and space, successive waves of artists reshaped the boundaries of these freedoms as the century progressed.

Our People, 2013.
Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm.



Ablade Glover's first training was in accredited colonial schools, and having travelled to England and the United States to study, his instincts were thoroughly grounded on prevailing western categories and he was familiar with contemporary developments. Glover's fascination with the restless agitation of crowd scenes meant that a photo-realistic approach could never be of any interest to him. Since the modern camera would only freeze the scene, it eradicated, at a stroke, the ceaseless ferment that so attracted him in the first place. He needed a way to represent the endless motion that modern high-speed cameras – just like their historical prototypes – were utterly incapable of capturing. His unique approach, developed over long years of exploration, settled upon the classical medium of oil paint. His application of thick impasto daubs and swirls of paint, when further worked over with a palette knife, yielded a novel discovery: that movement is in the eye of the beholder. Glover has created a hybrid form of abstraction within representation, which in his remarkable hands becomes capable of suggesting the dynamic processes of constant flux, even after the oil paint solidifies into static, encrusted forms. The fixed perspective of a single point in time and space is itself abstracted; instead the viewer's eye is invited to wander in a hidden landscape generated by colours and shapes, and the saccadic movement of the roving eye itself, supplies the impression of movement in the fluidly shifting focus of these chaotically piled up planes. The human eye's fovea, that part of the retina with which we discern details, is amazingly narrow, and incapable of apprehending any totality. As the eye searches for details, island-hopping along the unknown archipelagoes discovered in the floating world within the picture frame, it picks out familiar figures, and discerns individual features, against a riotous sea of out-of focus shapes. The wanderer returns having mapped sufficient data with which to make sense of the complete environment, an illusion we all recognise as the entire 'scene' of the picture. Findings in cognitive neuroscience have since shown that this actually is the way that we understand any picture or indeed any scene in front of us. The human eye follows a particular 'scanpath' within the frame presented – and the brain grasps, interprets and constructs the whole without necessarily examining the profusion of details in all its variety. The way we look at a Glover painting mirrors, precisely, the way we look at crowds.

The incipient confusion in any Glover painting is calmed by a hidden structural order intuited by the peripheral vision. Once this underlying arrangement has been interpreted in spatial terms, variations in the field are then used to fill in the details in a loose, informal manner that helps both suggest and define the details in other surrounding areas. The simplest field Glover uses is a uniplanar

wedge, suggestive of a crowd so large that it escapes beyond the containing borders of the frame. Here, larger repeated shapes fill the canvas's lower foreground area, gradually reducing in size towards an imagined horizon lost beyond the topmost limit. This basic effect, of a pulsating throng of humanity extending 'as far as the eye can see', is employed in *Our People* (2013) and *The People III* (2014) to represent the millions of ordinary people whose lives are subject to the social, economic and political realities of the day. Another example of implicate spatial structuring shows how this same definition of planar space, seen from above and stretching into the middle distance, can be cut through by a sinuous shape, winding like a river towards the lower edge of the frame. Here, the eye ascribes the coloured lozenges of varying sizes, to buildings, or to the market awnings providing protection from the sun, through the centre of which, snakes a bustling crowd of figures, their heads and arms defined by little more than black dots and angular lines, their clothes, effectively suggested by simple, notional splashes of vibrant hue. This signature market scene, the technique of which dates back to early in Glover's career, is still to be found in this current exhibition, where canvases such as *Market Corridor* (2011) and *Open Market* (2013) conform to this effective yet endlessly variable arrangement.

More recently, a new set of elements has begun to emerge, foreshadowed in earlier works like *Carnival Colours* (2001), but found, already fully-formed, in the remarkable *Wet City Centre* of 2001. Here, the entire canvas is given a novel arrangement of four distinct shapes, two triangles at the top and bottom, the latter often truncated by the frame, and two variable quadrilaterals, one on each side, all of which meet at a point close to the centre of the canvas. If the crowd disappearing towards the central point is easily recognisable, and the topmost triangle diminishing towards that same vanishing point is understood to be the sky, the question remains as to how the eye should interpret the two quadrilateral planes on either side, which seem to imply unexpected vertical surfaces. Works such as *City Carnival*, *Night Carnival* and *Celebrations I and II* – all from 2014 – exhibit this structure and their titles provide our strongest clue to a firm reading. In 2010, Ghana was enthralled by the exploits of its national football team competing, in the World Cup, in South Africa. Having passed through the group stages, they were controversially eliminated on penalties, in the quarter-finals. Had this talented young team progressed – as most Ghanaians still believe they should – they would have become the first African team ever to contest a World Cup semi-final. These paintings reflect the euphoria of sustained celebrations that gripped the entire country at that time. The side panels, suggesting vertical planes, would seem to indicate a shift



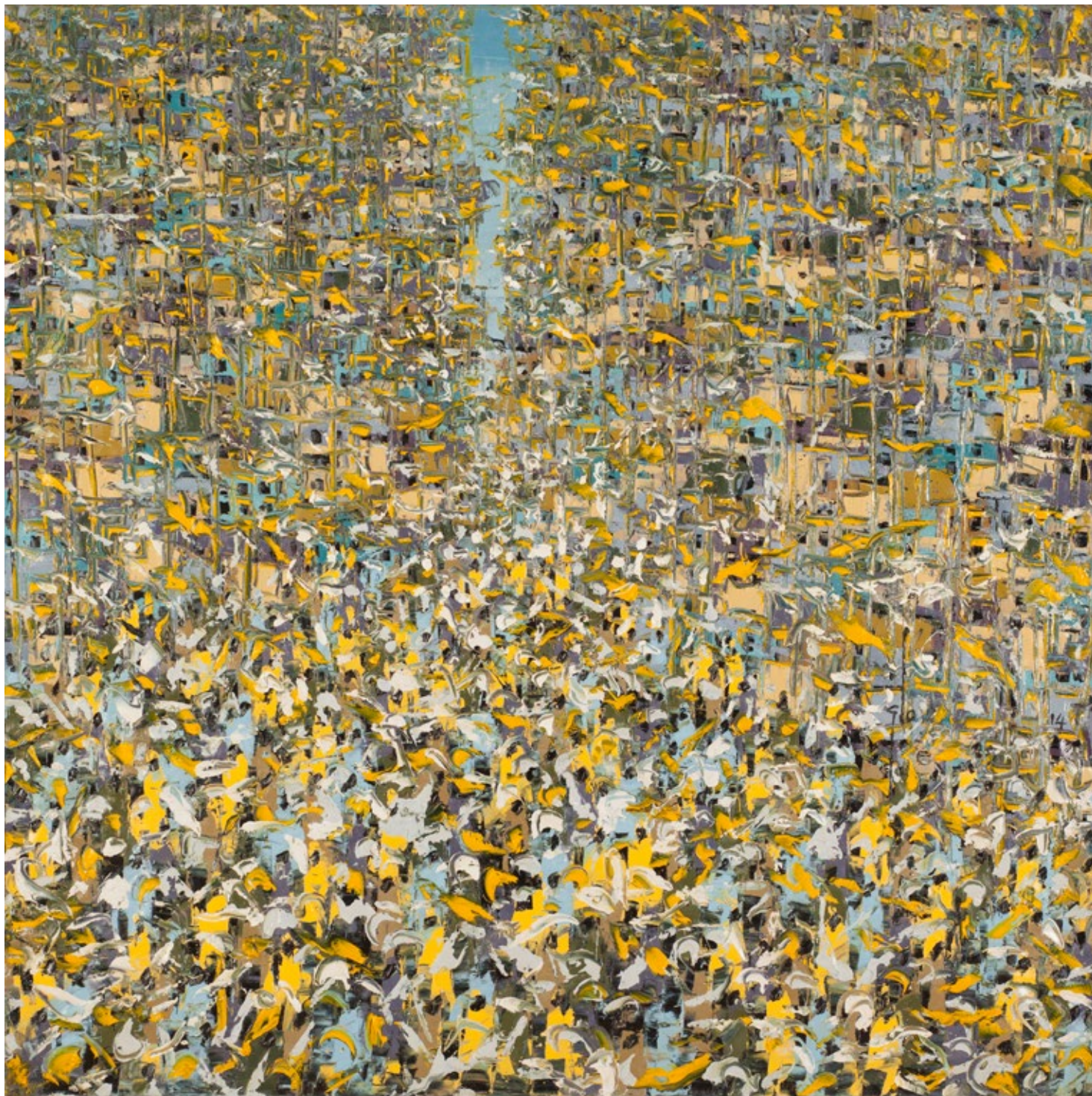
in the horizons of Accra, as the urban environment undergoes architectural changes, altering from a two-storey residential centre to a modern, high-rise, urban cityscape. That these paintings are predominantly in greens and gold with occasional red highlights (together with black, the colours of the Ghanaian flag) seems to confirm that the all-night parties greeting the *Black Stars'* string of victories are at the origin of these works. The flags draped from the balconies of each and every building in the city, seem to flutter over the ecstatic throngs of people excitedly jamming the streets below. One can almost hear the jubilant, cacophonous music.

In essence, Glover's painting practice is an impossible quest in search of the ineffable; that pataphysical moment that exists only once and will never again be exactly repeated. Like Canute on the beach commanding the waves, Glover continually rehearses a well-known scene, trying to hold time with the lightest of grasps, without preventing it from moving on. His life's work has been a courageous attempt at replicating the irreproducible, and therein lies its magic - and its importance. At the start of his ninth decade, Ablade Glover retains elements of the bright inquisitive young student that he always has been. His works are all 'unfinished' paintings, or rather they remain 'studies' of the miracles of the natural world: crowds of human-kind; flocks of birds in flight, the trees in the depths of the forest. Yet, rather than the individual tree itself, it is the foliage which enthralles him; the myriad leaves swaying in the breeze; the flickering of light and shade; those ephemeral moments of transient sensation that only a fool – or a sage – would ever attempt to capture in paint. In some sixty plus years of painting he has hardly changed his tune, nor ever needed to find a new subject for study. His oil paintings are haunting paeans in praise of the wonders of the simplest of things that surround us. Shimmering ephemera appear, move on, and are constantly vanishing before our very eyes. He doesn't just put colours down on canvas; but very deliberately makes his mark, whilst leaving the interpretation up to others. His remarkable practice doesn't attempt to stop the water flowing through the fingers of his hand. But, nor can he stop himself, over and over again, offering to others generously scooped handfuls of the imaginatively coloured waters he envisions in his waking dreams.

Gerard Houghton



Market Corridor, 2011. Oil on canvas, 140 x 109 cm.



Night Carnival, 2014. Oil on canvas, 101.5 x 101.5 cm.



Sunrise, 2013.
Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm.

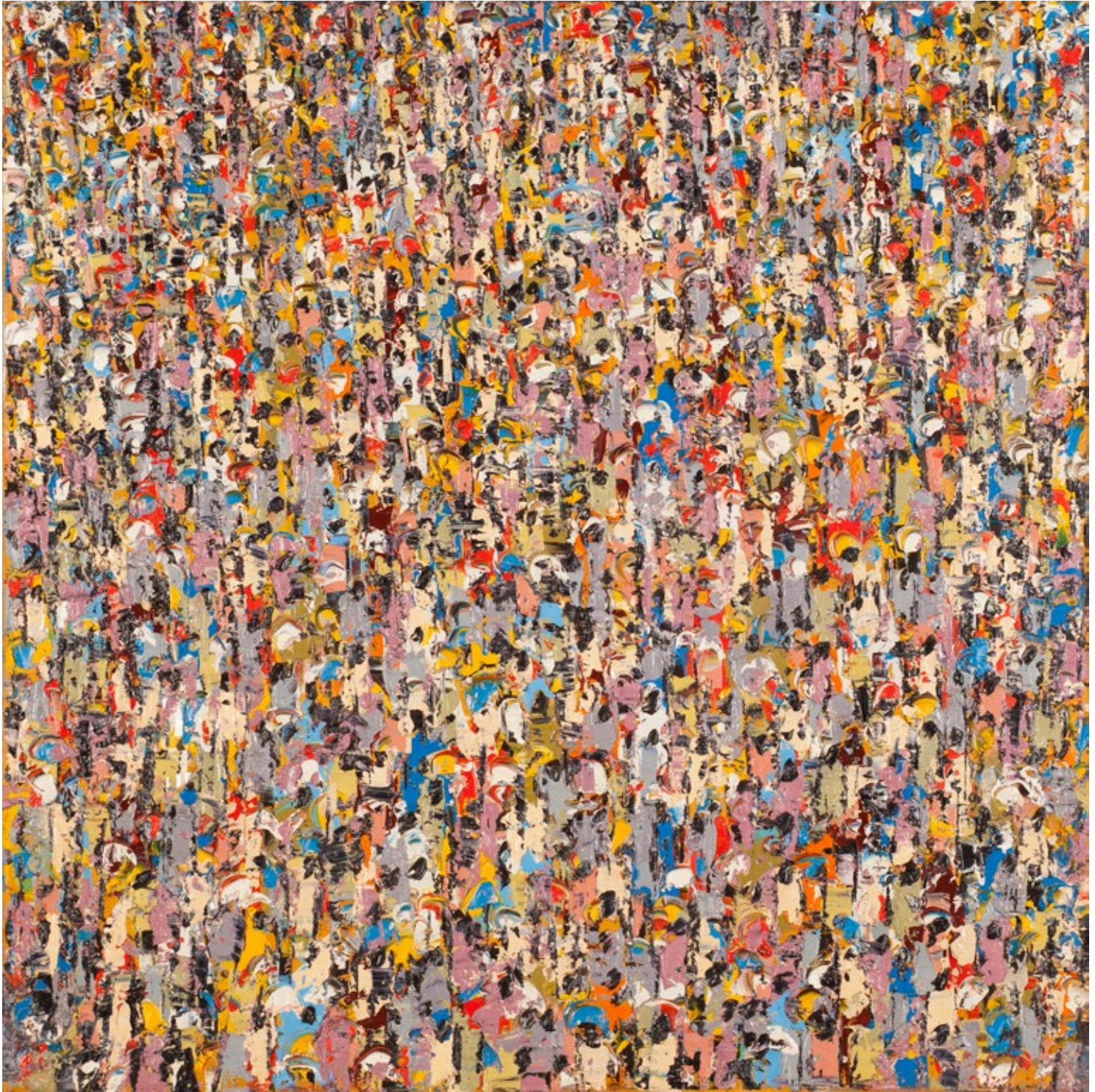


Sunset, 2013.
Oil on canvas, 120.5 x 152.5 cm.





Market Intrigues (detail), 2010. Oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm.



Above: *The People III*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 101 cm.

Right: *Celebrations II*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 151 x 151 cm.





Above: *Market Manoeuvres*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm.

Right: *Market Intrigues* (detail), 2010. Oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm.







Left: *Red People in Red*, 2012. Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm.

Above: *Open Market I*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 120.5 x 151 cm.

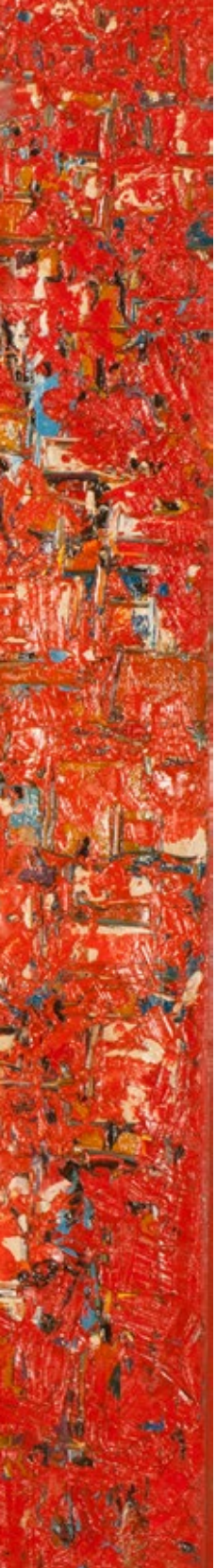


Celebrations I, 2014. Oil on canvas, 151 x 122cm.



The People IV, 2012. Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm.





Left: *Forest in Reds*, 2007. Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm.

Above: *Red Forest*, 2011. Oil on canvas, 122 x 121 cm.



Left: *Red Townscape IV*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm.



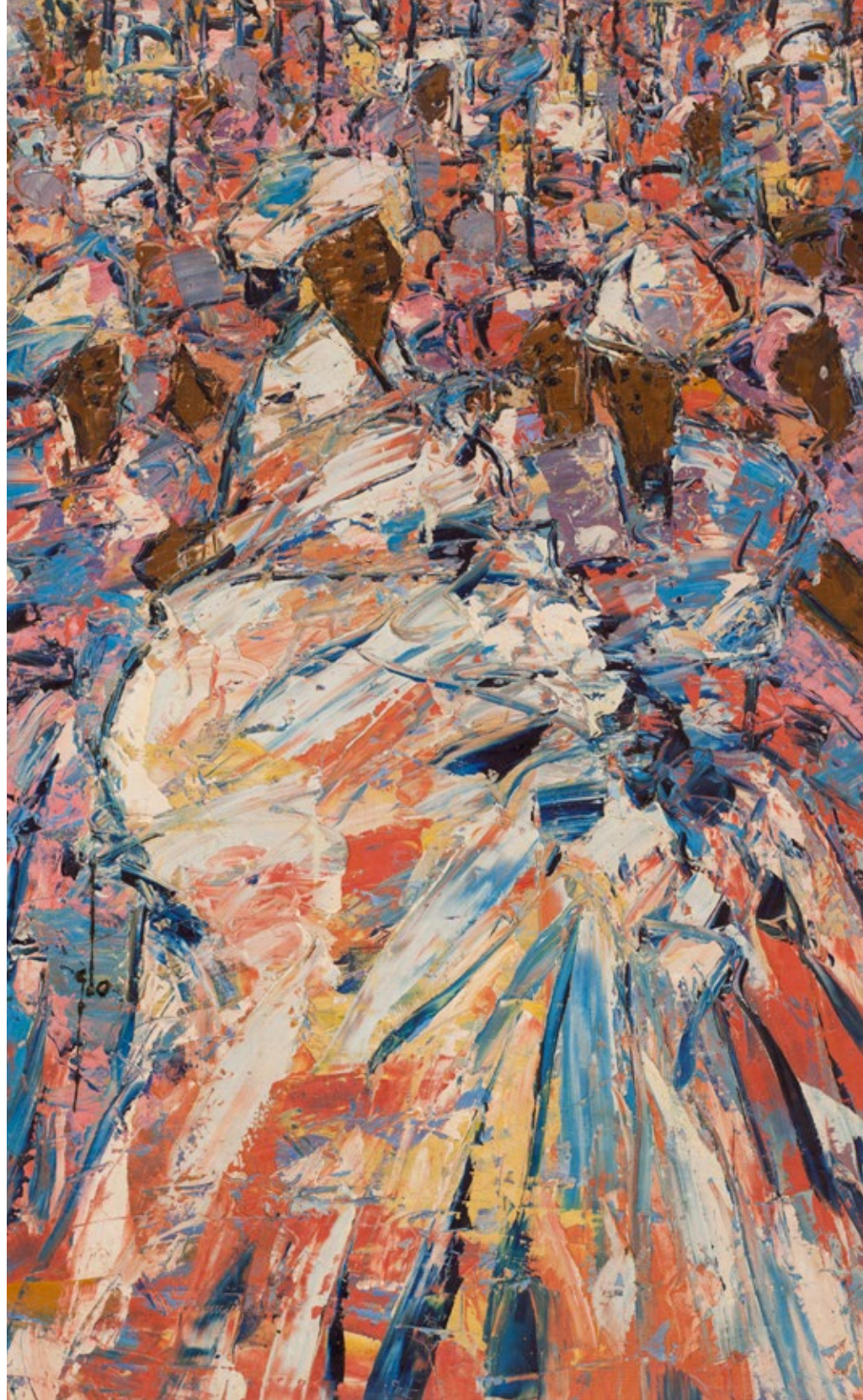
Above: *Red Townscape V*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm.



Left: *Market Profile*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 101.5 cm.

Centre: *Flamboyance*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 76 cm.

Right: *Mother* (detail), 2009. Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 101.5 cm.



Prof. ABLADE GLOVER

NDD, ATD, MEd, PhD, FRSA, FGA (b. 1934, Accra, Ghana)

Trained in Ghana, Britain and the United States, Dr. Glover has earned a number of distinctions, which demonstrate his importance as an artist and an enthusiastic educator on the national and international art scene. Until 1994, he was Professor and Head of the Department of Art Education and Dean of the College of Art at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. The foundation of Glover's Artists Alliance Gallery in 1993, brought international attention to traditional and contemporary African art. In 1998, he was awarded the Flagstar Award (the highest award for Arts in Ghana) by the ACRAG Ghana; the Distinguished AFRAD Alumni Award by the African-American Institute in New York; in 2007 the Ghana Order of the Volta (Member) and in 2010 the Millennium Excellence Award. He is a Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in London and a Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is listed in *Who's Who in the World: Dictionary of Contemporary International Artists*; and *Who's Who in Art and Antiques*.

EDUCATION

1957 - 58	Kumasi College of Technology, Kumasi, Ghana
1959 - 62	Central School of Art and Design, London, UK
1964 - 65	Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
1971 - 72	Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, USA
1972 - 74	Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1980	National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos, Nigeria
1980	National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria
1963 / 68 / 70 / 72	Art Centre, Accra, Ghana
1982 / 84 / 87	October Gallery, London, UK
1982	Hotel Mammy Yoko, Freetown, Sierra Leone
1982	Africa Centre, London, UK
1983	The Commonwealth Institute, London, UK
1984	UCLA International Students Centre, Los Angeles, USA
1986	Galerie Go, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
1986	National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe
1989	British Council, Accra, Ghana
1990	Galerie Arts Pluriels, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
1991	Biz Art Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
1998	City Hall, Toronto, Canada
1998	City Hall, Hamilton, Canada
2000	Galerie Arts Pluriels, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
1995 / 99 / 01	October Gallery, London, UK
2009	75 th Anniversary, October Gallery, London, UK
2013	Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE (with Nubuke Foundation)
2014	80 th Anniversary, October Gallery, London, UK

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

1985 / 97	IFA Gallery, Bonn, Germany
1985	Studio Museum, Harlem, New York, USA
1989	World Bank Art Society, Washington DC, USA
1992	WIPO, Geneva, Switzerland
1993	French Cultural Centre, Cotonou, Benin
1993	<i>Six African Artists</i> , October Gallery, London, UK
1995 / 96	Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (touring)
1998	City Civic Center Hamilton and Toronto, Canada (touring)
1998	<i>Colours of Africa</i> , Civic Center, Winnipeg, Canada
1999 / 00	<i>Transvanguard</i> , October Gallery, London, UK
2008	<i>Visions & Dreams</i> , Tasneem Gallery, Barcelona, Spain
2008 / 09 / 10 / 11	Joburg Artfair, Johannesburg, South Africa (with October Gallery)
2010	<i>I See You</i> , Tasneem Gallery, Barcelona, Spain
2012	<i>Transmission Part 2</i> , Tasneem Gallery, Barcelona, Spain
2014	Art 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Somerset House, London, UK (with October Gallery)

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

AAI African American Institute Head Office, New York, USA
Africa Centre, London, UK
Ashanti Goldfields Company Headquarters, Accra, Ghana
Arts Council of Ghana, Accra, Ghana
Barclays Bank Ghana Ltd., Accra, Ghana
Commonwealth Foundation, London, UK
Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, Accra, Ghana
ICC International Conference Centre, Accra, Ghana
Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, California, USA
Kosmos Energy, Texas, USA
Mobil Oil Ghana Ltd., Accra, Ghana
National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos, Nigeria
National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe
O'Hare International Airport (mural), Chicago, USA
Ohio State University International House, Columbus, USA
Royal Collection of Prince and Princess Takamado, Tokyo, Japan
Standard Chartered Bank Ghana Ltd., Accra, Ghana
Tullow Oil PLC, London, UK
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France
Visiting Arts, London, UK
World Bank, Washington DC, USA



This catalogue was published on
the occasion of the exhibition

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80th Anniversary

at the October Gallery
3rd July – 2nd August 2014

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