

JAPHETH ASIEDU-KWARTENG

2022 Marshall Dulaney Pitcher Award Winner

The Wonsook Kim School of Art is pleased to present the 2022 Marshall Dulaney Pitcher Award to MFA student Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng. This award honors outstanding students in the visual arts who demonstrate exceptional artistic talent, dedicated studio practice, and academic excellence.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

[Japheth Taah Asiedu-Kwarteng](#) (b. 1987, Ghana) is an artist, educator, and instructor working primarily in ceramics and mixed-media. He holds a BA in Industrial Art (ceramics option) from KNUST, Ghana, and an MFA (expected 2022) in Ceramics from Illinois State University, USA. Asiedu-Kwarteng is a member of Artaxis and National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA). His work has been included in several prestigious solo and group exhibitions in Ghana and the United States, including the 2022 and 2021 *NCECA Annual* and *Multicultural Fellowship* exhibitions.

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Asiedu-Kwarteng's sculptures and paintings are inspired by traditional Ghanaian symbolism and the history and materiality of Kente. Through his work, he explores the potential of textiles to communicate the complexities of the diaspora: separation, belonging, perception, anxiety, stress, adaptation, assimilation, fear, rejection, love, nostalgia, racism, and appropriation. The works are his visual vocabulary for discussing the experience of entering and leaving the United States. The titles of his work are influenced by thoughts of his family, conversations with them, and acknowledgments of their pain due to his absence.

Asiedu-Kwarteng's work encompasses an interdisciplinary approach melding the fields of ceramics, painting, and sculpture. These works are a component of continuous research to expand the boundaries of ceramics by infusing non-ceramic materials and techniques from other areas of art.

VOCABULARY

- **Diaspora:** the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland¹
- **Identity:** how we perceive ourselves—our identities change based on our experiences
- **Jute cloth:** also known as burlap, jute cloth is made of woven plant fibers and is often used to transport goods
- **Kente:** colorful patterned cloth from the Ashanti region of Ghana, traditionally reserved for royalty and limited to special social and sacred functions²
- **Symbol:** an image or object that represents something else, such as a dove for peace or a heart for love



Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng, *Teacher Madam*, 2022. Porcelain, Kente, American flag, jute cloth, epoxy, screws, nuts, bolts, and wood. Courtesy of the artist.



Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng, *Teacher Madam* (detail), 2022. Porcelain, Kente, American flag, jute cloth, epoxy, screws, nuts, bolts, and wood.

ART MAKING ACTIVITY

CONNECT

Asiedu-Kwarteng uses Kente cloth, the American flag, ceramics, and discarded pallet wood to make artworks that address the many aspects of his identity. For example, Kente cloth is a fabric with a layered history in Ghana, where Asiedu-Kwarteng is from, while the American flag points to his experience as an exchange student in the United States. The colors, patterns, and materials in these works reference Asiedu-Kwarteng's personal history, his homeland, and how his time in the United States has impacted his identity.

RESPOND

As a class, in small groups, or individually, analyze *Teacher Madam* using the following questions.

- Look closely at the colors, shapes, symbols, and patterns in Asiedu-Kwarteng's work. What thoughts and feelings are evoked by what you see?
- Describe the materials in Asiedu-Kwarteng's artworks. Based on these observations, how do you think the works were created? Why do you think Asiedu-Kwarteng decided to make his art in this way?
- Asiedu-Kwarteng's artwork relates directly to his lived experiences and his cultural background. What do you associate with the symbols, patterns, and materials used in his work? Can you find any connections to your own life experiences?

Encourage students to share their responses in a class discussion.



Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng, *Teacher Madam* (detail), 2022. Porcelain, Kente, American flag, jute cloth, epoxy, screws, nuts, bolts, and wood.



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CREATE

Invite students to create a series of works in response to the question:

- What life experiences have reinforced or altered how you understand your identity—such as living in one place your whole life, moving somewhere new, or being introduced to cultural traditions outside of your own?

Prompt students to consider creating mixed-media "tiles" with materials they associate with people, places, and spaces important to them. They could make texture rubbings of surfaces in their living spaces or form sculptures in response to their traditions and celebrations. Suggest weaving drawings, fabric, and/or found materials together, as seen in Asiedu-Kwarteng's use of Kente cloth and the American flag in *Teacher Madam*.

PRESENT

Collaboratively identify an appropriate exhibit space.

- Consider indoor or outdoor settings, temporary or permanent forms, and physical or digital formats.

Guide students to curate installations using the works in their series. Assist with preparation of supplementary materials such as labels, artist statements, and an exhibition title.

¹ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Diaspora. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora>

² Micots, C. (n.d.). *Kente cloth (Asante and Ewe peoples)*. Khan Academy. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-africa/west-africa/ghana/a/kente-cloth>