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| Antubam, Kofi (1922-1964) |
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| Kofi Antubam was an influential and pioneering modern artist in Ghana. His realistic, narrative scenes of idealized African life, depicted in wall paintings and mosaics, influenced many artists after him. In 1957, Antubam was appointed as an official state artist following Ghana’s independence; an unsurprising development given Antubam’s firm belief that artists should contribute to national pride and development, representing Ghana in their art work as a modern nation with a unique past and culture. |
| Kofi Antubam was an influential and pioneering modern artist in Ghana. His realistic, narrative scenes of idealized African life, depicted in wall paintings and mosaics, influenced many artists after him. In 1957, Antubam was appointed as an official state artist following Ghana’s independence; an unsurprising development given Antubam’s firm belief that artists should contribute to national pride and development, representing Ghana in their art work as a modern nation with a unique past and culture.  Antubam received his art education at Achimota School, in Accra, and Goldsmith College, in London. He exhibited his work both in Ghana and internationally in cities such as London, Paris, Rome, Düsseldorf, and New York. Antubam challenged contemporary African artists to use the skills honed from their European based art training as tools in painting cultural portraits of ‘traditional’ African culture. A representational art style, he argued, was only a vehicle to express what lay within. Assimilation was the key concept for Antubam in the development of a national and African identity that, he argued, would remain distinct from East and West despite the assimilation of foreign elements.  During his school years in Achimota, Kofi Antubam painted cultural scenes on the walls of his college. Many murals and paintings would follow; most of them romanticized scenes of everyday (village) life, or royal depictions of chiefs with their linguists. Artistically, traditional concepts of royal institutions and beauty inspired Antubam, reflected in his portrayal of oval shaped heads, majestic repose, and rounded figures. Antubam’s paintings depict prosperous, culturally rich villages seemingly undisturbed by colonial encounters or by the modernisation projects of president Kwame Nkrumah.  [File: HowMuch.jpg]  Figure Kofi Antubam, *How Much* (detail), oil on board, 1954. Collection: National Museum in Accra/ Ghana Museums and Monuments Board Ghana. Photograph taken by author.  Antubam was an early proponent of using adinkrasymbols in the fine arts, which he used in works commissioned by the newly established government of the early sixties. Adinkra, a set of local symbols imprinted on cotton cloth and mostly worn at funerals, were used by Antubam in multiple works, including the panelled doors of the legislative assembly in Accra, and three chairs for state ceremonies. In all of these nationalistic objects, Adinkra are decorative designs representing Kwame Nkrumah’s national and Pan-African ideals. Antubam died of a stroke at the age of 42 and was granted a state burial.  [File: chair.jpg]  Figure Kofi Antubam, *Chair of State*, 1960. Collection: National Museum in Accra/ Ghana Museums and Monuments Board Ghana. Photograph taken by author. |
| Further reading:  (Antubam)  (Bedu-Addo)  (Fuso)  (Mount) |