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| AMPOFO, Oku (1908-1998) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Oku Ampofo, a significant sculptor in Ghanaian modernism, was also a medical practitioner. Ampofo was born in Mampong, Akwapim in Ghana. His father Chief Kwesi Ampofo, founded the village of Amanase and started the first school there. Ampofo attended the Swiss School at Anum and proceeded to Mfantsipim School in 1926-1929; Ampofo attended Achimota to train as a teacher, reading Inter-Arts at the same time. However the first award of a Gold Coast medical scholarship was made available and he switched to Science, undertaking part of his training locally before travelling in 1932 to Edinburgh to study medicine. There he took evening art classes privately. Ampofo re-discovered the power of African art displayed in galleries and museums abroad. Ampofo completed his studies in Europe with a continental tour of great collections of African art at the Tervuren, The British Museum, and Musée de l’Homme. Ampofo was also the founder of the first modern art society, ‘The Akwapim Six’. Ampofo sought to impart his new vision of art through this society. A significant modernist, he became the Chair of the Ghana Institute for Art and Culture and the first president of The Arts Council of Ghana. Ampofo was an important early influence in local modernist art education. In 1963, he served as external examiner at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. |
| Oku Ampofo, a significant sculptor in Ghanaian modernism, was also a medical practitioner. Ampofo was born in Mampong, Akwapim in Ghana. His father Chief Kwesi Ampofo, founded the village of Amanase and started the first school there. Ampofo attended the Swiss School at Anum and proceeded to Mfantsipim School in 1926-1929; Ampofo attended Achimota to train as a teacher, reading Inter-Arts at the same time. However the first award of a Gold Coast medical scholarship was made available and he switched to Science, undertaking part of his training locally before travelling in 1932 to Edinburgh to study medicine. There he took evening art classes privately. Ampofo re-discovered the power of African art displayed in galleries and museums abroad. Ampofo completed his studies in Europe with a continental tour of great collections of African art at the Tervuren, The British Museum, and Musée de l’Homme. Ampofo was also the founder of the first modern art society, ‘The Akwapim Six’. Ampofo sought to impart his new vision of art through this society. A significant modernist, he became the Chair of the Ghana Institute for Art and Culture and the first president of The Arts Council of Ghana. Ampofo was an important early influence in local modernist art education. In 1963, he served as external examiner at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.  File: Study of a Market Woman  Figure Oku Ampofo, Study of a Market Woman, 2008. Carved by Christopher Agbolosu  Source: Collection of Atta Kwami and Pamela Clarkson  Photographed by Atta Kwami 2014.  Ampofo’s figural sculpture is characterised by expansive form, stark and graceful lines and expressive faces.  The resolution of Ampofo’s modernist sculpture is defined by the limitations of the cylindrical form; the form of the tree trunk played an important part in this. The figures with a pots, or elaborate hair style and elongated necks with arms bending backwards and upwards to support the pots represent a physical impossibility but an artistic solution which is totally credible. Ampofo realised that the town crier or gong-gong beater is still the most effective means of communication in Ghanaian society today. Ampofo’s talent and reputation won him state commissions in the 1950s and 1960s.  File: Untitled Head - symmetry  Figure Oku Ampofo, *[Untitled Head - symmetry*  Source: Collection of Atta Kwami and Pamela Clarkson  Photographed by Atta Kwami 2014.  Much of Ampofo’s work embodied the artistic processes of hybridity or a search for a sense of identity. Ampofo’s modern cement and terrazzo work, *Struggle with Tragedy*, 1955 is situated near the entrance to the National Museum, Accra, *Study of Three Market Women*, 1958 was donated to the Arts Council of Ghana after an exhibition at the Ambassador Hotel in 1960. Artists such as Ampofo employed their skills and creativity towards promoting a sense of national identity for Ghanaians whilst fostering the idea of nationhood, selfhood or unity. This pertains to the notion put forth by historian of African art, Sylvester Ogbechie that “Contexts owe their canonical forms to reciprocal appropriations engendered within an international context of modernity.” In reference to *Struggle with Tragedy*, Ampofo stated: “In this kind of sculpture as in all cement and terrazzo works, I build up the kind of figure I want in stages around iron and wire armatures placed horizontally on the ground. When the basic structure is built, the figure is raised to stand, […] In this figure, the raised arms around the head region is traditionally indicative of sorrow or deprivation, misery or despondency.”  File: another view of market woman  Figure Oku Ampofo, Study of a Market Woman, 2008. Side view. Carved by Christopher Agbolosu  Soure: Collection of Atta Kwami and Pamela Clarkson  Photographed by Atta Kwami 2014.  In 1991 Ampofo wrote that he ‘… felt that creative art in Ghana was as important as political freedom and the two should go together to establish our identity as people.’  In 1944 Ampofo organised the ‘New African Art’ exhibition. Ampofo wrote of the achievement and promise of his contemporaries whose works were exhibited in 1945 in Ghana and in England in 1949. In 1946 Ampofo formed a guild bringing together craftspeople and artists who were from the Akwapim area to mount annual exhibitions (1948, 1950, 1955 and since 1961 under the Ghana Institute of Art and Culture/The Arts Council of Ghana). The ‘The Akwapim Six’ society grew from six to over twelve members, representing a number of different art forms and practices.  File: Struggle with Tragedy  Figure Oku Ampofo, *Struggle with Tragedy*, 1955, terrazzo  Source: National Museum of Ghana, Accra, Photographed by Atta Kwami 2013.  Ampofo served as external examiner at the Art Faculty, KNUST, Kumasi and was important early influence in modern art education in Ghana, along with Kofi Antubam, Ernest Victor Asihene, Vincent A. Kofi, Grace Salome Kwami, K. Addo Osafo and Kate Ofori. Ampofo, also a practicing physician, contributed the first written publications by a Ghanaian artist and wrote a book, *My Kind of Sculpture* (1988), which acknowledged the work of Christopher Agbolosu (b. 1940) as a collaborator.  He served on several governmental committees and represented Ghana abroad. Ampofo’s wood sculptures, *Asase Due (Mother Earth, Condolences to You),* inspired by the assassination of  President John F. Kennedy, was donated to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. He served as the Chairman of the Arts Council of Ghana from 1969-72.Ampofo’s *Study of Three Market Women* (1958) was donated to the Arts Council of Ghana after an exhibition at the Ambassador Hotel in 1960. Ampofo received the Grand Medal (GM) from the Ghana Government in 1968 and an honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters (D.Litt) from University of Ghana in 1976. |
| Further reading:  (Ampofo)  (Fosu)  (July) |