

Boy.Brother.Friend



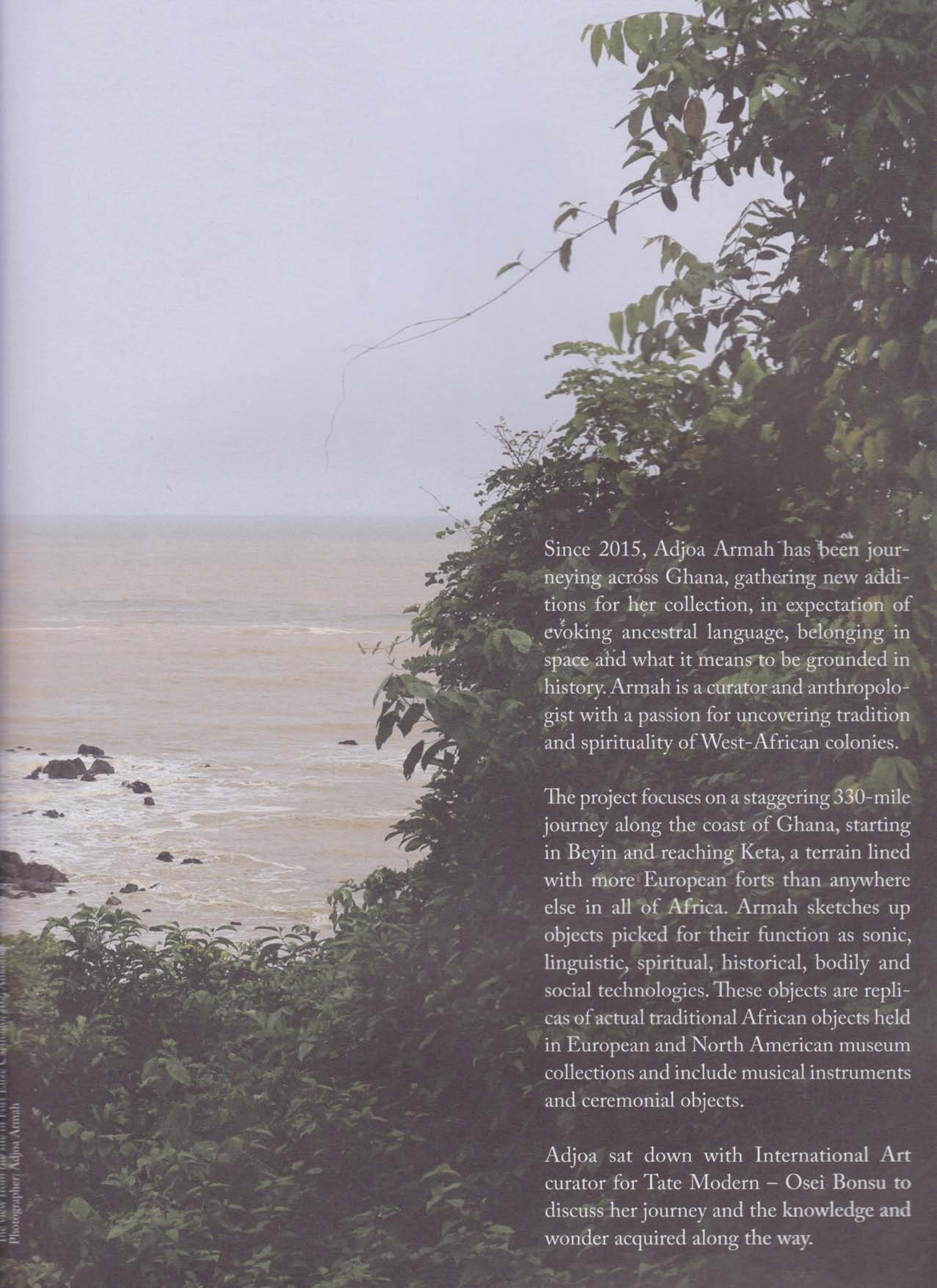


# The Sea, the Shores and its Memories

PHOTOGRAPHY  
ADJOA ARMAH, JACOB QUAYE MENSAH,  
KOBENA AKORFUL  
AND PHOTOGRAPHIC CITY AGBOZUME,  
COURTESY OF SAMAN ARCHIVE  
& AUTO ITALIA - HENRY MILLS

TEXT  
OSEI BONSU





Since 2015, Adjoa Armah has been journeying across Ghana, gathering new additions for her collection, in expectation of evoking ancestral language, belonging in space and what it means to be grounded in history. Armah is a curator and anthropologist with a passion for uncovering tradition and spirituality of West-African colonies.

The project focuses on a staggering 330-mile journey along the coast of Ghana, starting in Beyin and reaching Keta, a terrain lined with more European forts than anywhere else in all of Africa. Armah sketches up objects picked for their function as sonic, linguistic, spiritual, historical, bodily and social technologies. These objects are replicas of actual traditional African objects held in European and North American museum collections and include musical instruments and ceremonial objects.

Adjoa sat down with International Art curator for Tate Modern – Osei Bonsu to discuss her journey and the knowledge and wonder acquired along the way.









Courtesy of Human Archive, 1990s, Apam  
Photographer: Kibera Akorful



**Osei Bonsu:** I think where I wanted to start in relation to this show is that, from what I understand – it comes from a research grant that you had in relation to work on the Black Atlantic? Correct me if I am wrong.

**Adjoa Armah:** So, the work that I am doing with the Black Atlantic is for Afterall Art School, for a funded digital research project. I mean I am the editor of Afterall, so this was basically the transfer soul mapping of Black British Art History and the social conditions of artistic production. And that is supposed to be a pedagogical tool for an online art school to make it viable as a beautiful learning space. But the exhibition came from another grant, from the Graham foundation.

**OB:** Right.

**AA:** That grant was to do research on the forts that line the Ghanaian coast. And as I was collecting for Samen, I was spending a lot of time along the coast and I just developed interest in these sites and I liked meeting people like Dionne Brand, Cyndia Hartmann and there seems to be, as much as I really admire and respect Hartmann, kind

of a gap in the address, in who was being spoken to. The level of literacy about Africa, who was being spoken to and Black history was being interrogated, so I felt it was important that we started speaking from these sites in a mode of address like those who passed through, and those who did not it was like, a lot of the addresses were for those who passed through the door of no return. I was interested in understanding those sites from the other side of the planet.

**OB:** But if we start from the point of view of you as a researcher, thinker, artist trying to gather this information – first from an archive and through your work with the Samen archive, trying to, in a way, re-articulate or re-animate certain historical moments, but finding yourself to be confronted with gaps and absences like the ones that you've just addressed. Where does a show like this begin to manifest? Where does the genesis begin? Does it begin in the archive? Or does it begin with your imagination?

**AA:** It begins with me in the archive, because my relationship has always been trying to find a way to work between the content and condition of its buildings. So, the journey of

creating the archive, my own documentation, the relationships being built with photographers and the acquisition of this material has always been as important to me as the actual content and photographic negatives. So, it began with that, it began with me developing this ability to attune to site or to place, and building a relationship with the Ghanaian

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The ruin of the old prison, encountered while searching for Fort Fort Kongenstein, 2021, Ada.  
Cape Coast Castle, 2021, Cape Coast. P  
photographer: Adjoa Armah

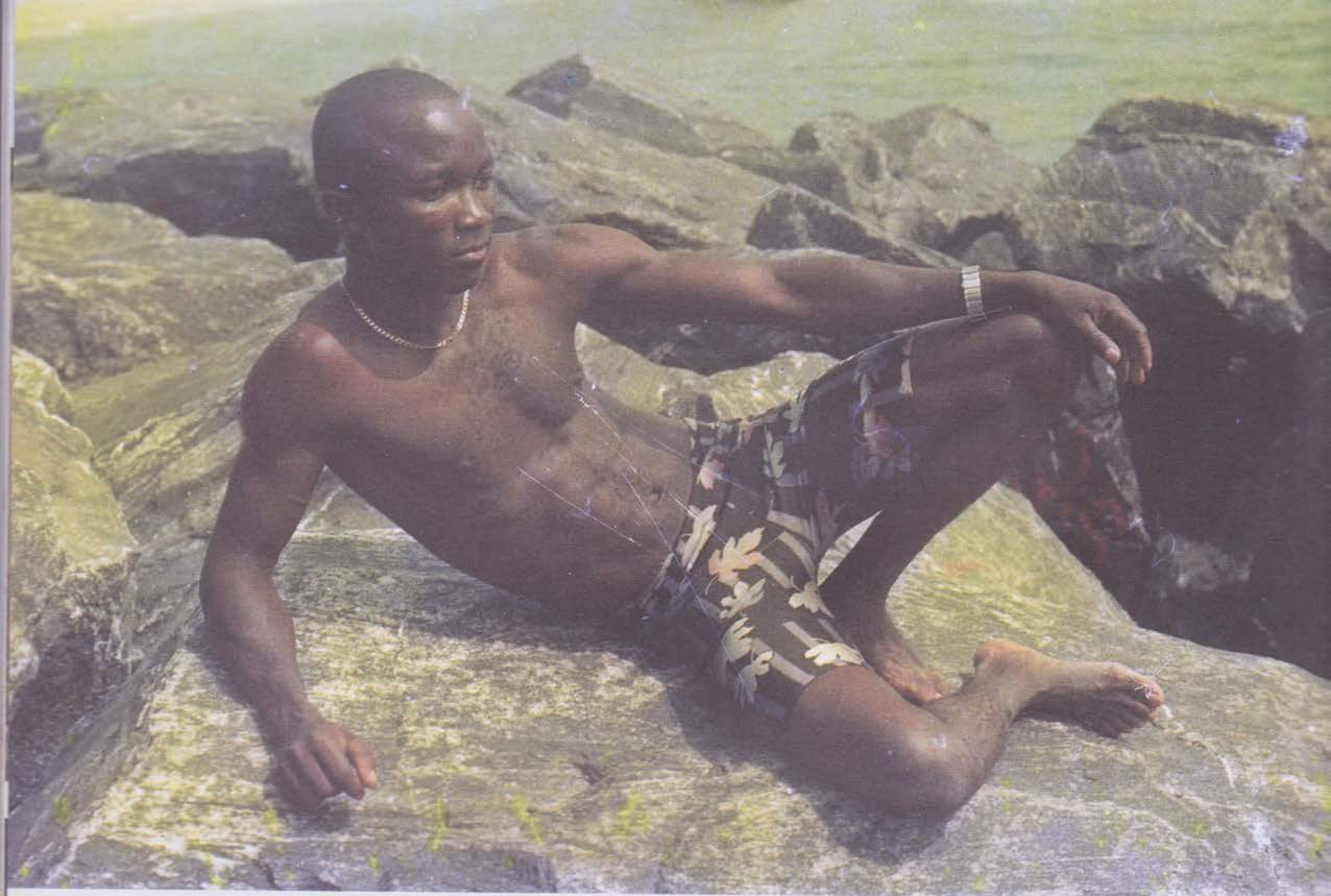




Fort William Lighthouse, 2021, Cape Coast.  
Outside Fort William, 2021, Anonabu.  
Photographer: Adjoa Armah







landscape. Also thinking about what it takes to move around the country... I only learnt to drive last year, and I didn't have a driver so I was literally going up and down the country, collecting, mostly in tro-tros.

**OB:** It's amazing you're still here based on that. Because my experience with Ghana is that not being able to drive or being without a driver, it is almost impossible to traverse certain spaces. I'm thinking of that journey between Kumasi and Accra which is the one many of us know. I mean you have gone way beyond that, I'll be curious to know about the physicality of undertaking that research because obviously the archive is one thing, but this work talks about the 330-mile journey that you traveled. I don't know if you clocked those miles?

**AA:** That is just an estimate.

**OB:** I think what's fascinating is to try to understand what your initial encounter with those European forts meant to you, both biographically and intellectually, because I think for so many Ghanaians these ideas, like the door of no return, have become a kind of threshold to try to understand what it would have meant to be situated in these contexts, that are fraught with emotional trauma, and with a sense of historical loss or absence that cannot be redeemed. I remember having a visible experience of Elmina castle when I was about 10. It was very immediately obvious to me that it was very important to my parents that I gained that lesson earlier on, but I am curious to know what your first encounter was.

**AA:** My first encounter with the fort was in the Cape Coast, in the male dungeons at the Cape Coast. Having been to these





dungeons before, you probably know the place where Nana Tabire shrine is?

**OB:** Yes

**AA:** I have been to Elmina, and at that point I had been to Anamabu, I have been taken to Keta, but I have always had a really anxious relationship with that place in particular. And then I found, when I started doing the mapping, I started describing it as a spiritual mapping because I found out at the shrine that Nana Tabire was known as an agent of the trade during the Transatlantic Trade. He was known for loving red wine and cheese and stuff that was imported from abroad.

**OB:** Goods!

**AA:** Exactly! Then he becomes a deity that some African Americans, black people

from the other side of the Atlantic – when they go back and they want to pay respect to the ancestors – what happens is that the entity that they are paying respect to is also an agent of the trade. And I found that to be such a violent thing, and I was just really bitter and I was like I don't need to publish my beef with Nana Tabire, but I just feel it is really important to be much more delicate in how we engage with this history and to make this history present. Because that felt to me to be such an ongoing violence. I just think that we need better strategies to deal with our relationship with those sites

**OB:** So, from what I understand, Cape Coast Castle was actually built on a rock that was sacred and there are still people that go on a pilgrimage and I think again from the diaspora and not so much from Ghana to that site to





pay respect. I can't remember that specific God or deity that is referred to in the context of that rock, but it is fascinating to me that there would be this idea of pilgrimage, which has, first of all, been so much part of the language of our nation, specifically embedded in the concept of privileged diaspora, the idea that you get to return and you get to live, you get to negotiate your relationship to homeland. But I think that what you have chosen to do is not only situate your practice within Ghana to an extent, but kind of carefully and meaningfully unearth what it is to understand these histories from the perspectives of oral histories as mentioned in here. The linguistic, the sonic, the historical and bodily. I'm curious to know, in terms of the archive that you spoke about before, at what point did you realize that actually beyond the photographic – which is obviously the

crux of your archival practice – there needed to be some kind of experimentation with objects or with these physical entities that have a separate life from the archive, you could say?

**AA:** I think when I started realizing that the maps that I was drawing around Ghana were as important as the photo negatives themselves, I developed this preoccupation with this suffix-graphy. Like in cartography, and ethnography... It comes from my anthropology background. The various modes of describing the descriptive signs and what the descriptive signs imply about our relationship to knowledge itself. Our epistemological orientations. Now it's about how we find the best way to describe certain phenomena, or describe certain data, or attend to the gap between the thing itself and the description, so I think the gap between the land and the map or



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the gap between the event and the image or between the event and it's telling. Because I was encountering many oral histories that had been distorted by the colonial encoun-

*"It's just like there's been something of this colonial encounter that's distorted how people are relating with history and this is actually very interesting to explore."*

ter. Every time I've spoken to an elder in Keta, over every migration story, you go back to Noje in Togo, if you go further back, you're in Ile-ife, learning about divination and then you go back and you're in Sudan, then you go back and suddenly, you're in the biblical story and then it's just like there's been something of this colonial encounter that's distorted how people are relating with history and this is actually very interesting to explore. But then, because I was interested in how to describe different types of data, and words didn't feel like enough. So, I got to the point and thought: what are things that might be enough to kind of hold adequate space, in order to get to some of the difficulties that I am struggling to get to? You know? The objects I am interested in are all mediation objects. I am very, very self-conscious about the fact that I don't want to do this kind of work alone, or the fact that I shouldn't be a single voice. So finding objects that attend to that, that allowed me to call out to other people and signal to people I want to be in conversation with became really, really important.

**OB:** Is there an element of the objects we are looking at in this space being

performative in this sense? Or would you rather for them to rest ultimately as objects in space, because there is a sense that you have put them on platforms that suggests both a kind of musicological tension, but also a performative tension. I don't know how to conceptualize the blue platforms that you have placed them upon!

**AA:** I am performing in July, and I haven't decided if I am going to

be interacting with the objects or if I am just going to be on the stages, because both platforms are like hybrid objects between the traditional stage, as you will probably understand it within a context of western performance.

**OB:** Yeah

**AA:** But then also, I am really interested in the context within west Africa where performance will happen. There is this Senegalese philosopher, Mamuse Dian, who writes about epistemology and writes about the role of dramatization in oral telling, and the ways in which dramatization can serve as a pedagogical support within those relative knowledges. So I am interested in dramatization being a central part of how to do historiography, and then the stages themselves are a hybrid between stage – as most people would understand it – and then also the platforms that lead up to the various areas in the shrine house. I spend a lot of time looking at what these spaces mean, within the Ghanaian context where the performance will happen. So, these shrine house structures are built around the quadrangle. There is one private space, which is the



shrine itself, but then there are three open spaces for drumming and singing and for cooking. So, I was interested in how to take those sites as a model in which the performative encounter could happen.

**OB:** Exactly, there's that and there is also the question of the re-inscription of the archive in the way that you are using objects that it mentions here are connected to European and North American museum collections. I think there has been an ongoing discussion around restitution; often it seems to rest with this idea of the importance of the original objects as carriers of sacred forms of knowledge. This has been incredibly important, but I am curious to know the way in which you are using these objects. Is it a critique of the very structures of mesological display or ethnological display, and anthropological background?

**AA:** I've got a lot of thoughts about where the conversation on restitution is, because within anthropology and design there is our understanding of African material culture, which involves a lot of talk about the idea of the prototype. There the Nkisi N'kondi power figure is about a set of agreements or contracts or promises or relationships. So, or me, when we are having conversations about the return of objects, I am less interested in the idea of taking the Akan drum that is in the British Museum back from the British Museum and putting that back into another space that is another museum in the African context. For me, the conversation is much more interesting when I am kind of thinking beyond "let's just get the stuff from one landmass into another landmass". How do we actually create the condition where the objects and the relationships surrounding them are able to function in a way or be treated in a way that honors their history?

**OB:** What I think is really interesting for me, is that you have talked a lot about the space in between cartography and photography, the space between all of these objects that have a function in a way, in another realm entirely... There's a sound element to the work, the seabird song, and a sort of narration... I guess I wanted to ask you a question about agency, because I think part of what it means to go from being in the role of an achiever, or let's say, a kind of keeper of these materials, to a documentarian of sorts, to becoming an artist is, in a way, there's a kind of vulnerability to what your handle on these histories really is. But to do so in a way that's not just about organizing that research but actually doing something with it. And I've just been curious to know about this question of the artist's own narration. What it means and the importance of narration in your practice more broadly. Because it is, I think in a sense, the moments where archives become so much more interesting, it's in the moment where they become personalized and they move out in the cold space of a kind of seemingly objective history to becoming someone's archive or someone's history.

**AA:** Part of me feels like the narration, or what the narration in this show, should have been, should have been my voice in a chorus. I'm kind of like going back to someone like Walcott, or even someone like Ampatipa, and the idea that the histories I'm interested in, it isn't about saying: "I'm so important and I came out to just like voice this thing", but it's just like – oh, this sentence is already being uttered, or, someone started the sentence and I ended the sentence. Or we're speaking together. I had so many



incredible conversations with elders the whole way along that coast and as I was travelling, it was really important for it not to be something that I did on my own. So I invited friends, other artists, linguists, poets and researchers and we did the trip together. So, it's not just me who carries this journey, I carry this journey with various fellow travellers, and basically, I didn't record any of the conversations on the road properly, so, when the time came to create the sound piece, all I could do was listen to the recordings and then kind of meditate with my own voice. So, there is a problem with the narration, in that it becomes about the singular voice and it was never supposed to be about my voice.

**OB:** Right, right, but it is, in a way, your artistry, your sensibility, that is at the centre of this exhibition, and I'd be curious to know about that relationship to elders because it comes up so often in African diaspora households about respect towards elders. But this idea will serve a kind of continuity, around what

you could say are pre-colonial forms of spirituality. I'm curious to know – because it's something that I've not really encountered in Ghana partly because of the Christianization of my own family – to what extent was it difficult for you to explain to those who perhaps had a grasp of your research that you wanted to kind of move beyond these more fixed spaces that one would expect to find African diasporans in when in Ghana. I think, to an extent, there isn't a sense in Ghana, at least now, that we're always mindful or respectful of the ways in which you could say a certain kind of negotiation happens when we first choose to return, to recover our history but also what we bring with us and what we take back. And for so many people, it's the usual family photographs, or it's a stool, or a cloth. It seems that for you, it was really important to return multiple times but I'm curious to know whether in your family, that's something that was expected or is it just something that you decided to just take on because there



Courtesy of Saman Archive, 1990s, Apam.  
Photographer: Jacob Quayaye Mensah  
Walking to Elmina, 2021, Brenu Akyinim.















comes a part where it's like – How deep does that duel want to go, you know what I mean?

AA: Yeah, I mean, it's definitely not something that was expected and I'm sure

*“At some point, I was just like I’ve got a hundred thousand photographic negatives and I’ve got dozens of photographers who are keeping thousands of more negatives and I’ve got hundreds of hours of recordings, and it’s just like – if I’m going to keep doing this, then I need to do it properly”*

that my mother would much rather that I just stuck to doing strategic research for luxury brands.

OB: And your family are Christians, right?

AA: Yeah, yeah

OB: So, is that something that you also felt like you had to negotiate – this understanding that you were seeking out something else, perhaps?

AA: I mean, for a long time – I wouldn't say I was scared of the research, but I was apprehensive of it just because I didn't want my mother to be worried. But then, there's a point where you just need to be honest about what you're finding. For me, that

question of how deep does that duel want to go – at some point, I was just like: “I’ve got a hundred thousand photographic negatives and I’ve got dozens of photographers who are keeping thousands of more negatives and I’ve got hundreds of hours of recordings”, and it's just like

– if I'm going to keep doing this, then I need to do it properly and I can't half-ass it. I have to follow the questions fully. Because the Saman archive is an incredible fashion archive. It would've been very easy for me to be like: “I'm going to publish loads of really beautiful studio photographs”, and that would've probably built my career much quicker and it would've been much easier and would have caused me much

less stress in my life, but at some point, you're just like: “I want to really, really listen to what I'm being told and I want to really follow these questions through”.

OB: Yeah, it makes sense, and I'm curious then, to know if we could get more into the specific objects about this idea of the “Shrine-House”. So, in this exhibition, there is a sense that you're kind of bringing together numerous objects that have various significances and I think you spoke earlier about the importance that they were first kind of, utilitarian objects that had a function but had acted as vessels that allowed you to commune with a kind of collective whole, that it wasn't just about your individual person. But I think it would be more helpful because some of them



seem oddly familiar, but I don't recognize them all. We can talk about them one by one.

**AA:** So, do you know Pregota?

**OB:** It looks familiar, but no

**AA:** So, this is a member of the pea family. It's used in a lot of cooking in Ghana, and also more broadly in West Africa. So, it's used to spice palm soup, that kind of thing, and it's also used for other dishes, and you can make teas with it. It can also be used similarly to Sage or Palo Santo... So, I burn it to cleanse the space. It's kind of known to clear bad spirits from a place, to make a positive or safer space for you to occupy.

**OB:** There was a percussion instrument you played at the beginning of the talk, yesterday.

**AA:** Yes. That's called an 'Agogo' in Yoruba. It's called 'Gan-gan', but different versions of it at different scales appear across West Africa. Both of these are instruments, I've taken their other names. I had a lot of back and forth about how much information to give. Whether I should refer to the museum collections that I'm getting these objects from, or if I should name the objects themselves. In the end, I decided not to have any information and just allow people to come to the objects with whatever literacies they have. But both of these musical instruments are used with a secular context. They're both part of these various musical ensembles. So, I'm interested in all these musical instruments as part of an ensemble and the ensemble being understood as part of a family. I love the idea that you can always constitute a family in many different ways. As well as being used in secular music, they're both used to keep pace,

during processions just to make sure that people are keeping the right rhythms and are in tune with each other. All the musical instruments are used to either kind of clear space for ancestors or deities, or to seek permission or to call on ancestors or deities.

**OB:** It's interesting because they all have underneath them a kind of a fragment of a mirror, and I think that obviously, mirror in ethnographic history has a very long usage but it's also worth mentioning that there are other contemporary artists that think about the ethnic-African relation to the mirror. I'm thinking specifically about Kedara Tia's work around 'Repair', and I'm curious, what was it about the mirror? Because for some, it's about the kind of phantasmagoria that makes objects that might be incomplete whole again in a sense. That it will also be referred to as a kind of 'Mirror World' which is beyond what the eye can see. This idea of extending into another dimension... But I'm curious to know about your aesthetic use of the mirror.

**AA:** My interest in the mirrors actually started with my interest in mercury as a material. All of these are antique, mercury-backed mirrors. And my interest in mercury came from my time in Keta. The fort in Keta, about two-thirds of it has been taken by the sea. The fort used to be in the middle of the town, it used to be this really incredible, vibrant town over the last hundred years. It's the kind of place where you go and it feels like it's been emptied out. In the first falling of Maya Angelou's autobiography, she describes going to Keta as she describes the particular feeling of familiarity and having this interaction with this woman there who insisted that





Installation view of 'The sea, it slopes like a mountain',  
2022, Adjoa Armah at Auto Italia, London.  
Photographer: Henry Mills









Walking to Elmina, 2021, Brenu Akyinim.  
A watery commute, 2021, Ada.  
Photographer: Adjoa Armah



Boy, Brother, Friend







she knew Maya Angelou. Like, she insisted that Maya Angelou was one of her relatives and she needed to see an American passport to be like “Oh, well you’re not family, but you feel like family”, and Angelou writes that the woman she was talking to looked like the grandmother that raised her. Her stature, her face, the timber of her voice. There was this moment of kind of kinship across distance. I think Keta is a really special place. Like this feeling of being somewhere, this grand place that’s been emptied out. This feeling that I have about it is also the feeling that other friends that have travelled to Keta have about it. So, anyway, two-thirds of the fort has been taken by the sea, and the story about the fort is that when they built it, repeatedly, powerful people with spiritual acumen from nearby communities ended up being captured and then dumped in the dungeon of that fort. And what they would do is that one person would link arms with two people and then those two people would link arms with two other people and then they would just disappear from the dungeon and appear back home. I was just speaking in terms of efficacy and technology, I’m really interested in magic. I want to know the role between magic and how black people narrate or conceptualise freedom, so I’m thinking of the stories of the flying Africans in the US, or even a couple years ago on twitter, there was this viral thing of: “Okay, on this day, black people are going to get our magic powers”. I’m really interested in these technologies, outside the Western bourgeoisie. How they prevented people from escaping from the fort is that they line these metre-thick walls with mercury. Because mercury is understood as something that can both enhance and block spiritual acumen. So if the walls of the fort were lined in mercury, then the story goes that when the sea was coming to take the fort, there were

the remains of people who tried to escape and were trapped by mercury, so I’m just very interested in mercury, and then I’m also very interested in Keta. So much of the coastline has been taken, and the sea in that part of Ghana is kind of understood as an agent of vengeance. As well as taking parts of the fort, the sea took all these grand, beautiful colonial houses and the sea defences went up and kept life a little safer. So, I was really interested in mercury – its potential – and also mercury in terms of it being ‘Quicksilver’, the thing that you use to access gold or access wealth. When you’re somewhere like Aksi, and you stand on the beach and as far as the eye can see, the sea is literally brown because of the illegal mining. So, I was interested in the significance of mercury in terms of resource extraction. It’s significance in terms of being able to extend certain capabilities as well and then you have mirrors that were used as these key trade objects at the forts. So, someone would get a mirror and then someone else would get a person.

**OB:** What I think is extraordinary about this project so far is how your research is animated throughout the exhibition. Within each object, you are thinking about the multiple possibilities that might have located an object in space, but also located it beyond itself as something that provides a kind of portal to a possible elsewhere. And I think that comes through in your archival research as well. I’m curious about one aspect of your research, because you just spoke about this reference to twitter and this idea of thinking beyond the black bourgeoisie subjectivity. I guess the kind of problematic sometimes we have around this idea of framing blackness within the Ghanaian context because obviously, Ghana is a black majority



country, so the issues around blackness might be felt differently there, and I am curious to know about you locating that term 'blackness' within the context of Ghana. Are there certain kinds of tensions that come to bear partly because you're thinking about it, both as a diasporan but also as a Ghanaian and trying to kind of locate where you situate that blackness in relation to a country within reach that might be less of a concern.

**AA:** My interest in the fort was, more than anything, this idea of: "I'm standing in the fort as something that made blackness exist." So, I'd say that "blackness" conceptually isn't something that is African, it wasn't something that was invented by us and I'm interested in having gotten that far in this part of the research, but I have conversations with friends in Ghana all the time about the difference between "black" and "tu-tum". Right, so how do you understand black as an English word, and how do you understand "tu-tum" and the relationship between skin colour and culture and also how people got to be presented or how people understand what is beautiful. Because, not everyone wants to be "tu-tum" in the context of Ghana...

**OB:** Is that to be understood as "dark-skinned"?

**AA:** Yeah

**OB:** Interesting, okay. There's so much to unpack there. I also feel like there's something important about the way in which you're fundamentally taking that kind of historical potential of these objects and then saying actually that there is another way to conceptualise them that doesn't necessarily rest within the kind of Western epistemology that

so often, when these museological artefacts were even brought into or categorized, or in a way – intellectually written about, it was through a western gaze. So, is this also an aspect of reclaiming the cultural heritage that feels as if it's on the cusp of being forgotten? Is there something about these objects that you feel to be close, almost to the archive in the first instance, that they generate an alternative archive out of new material?

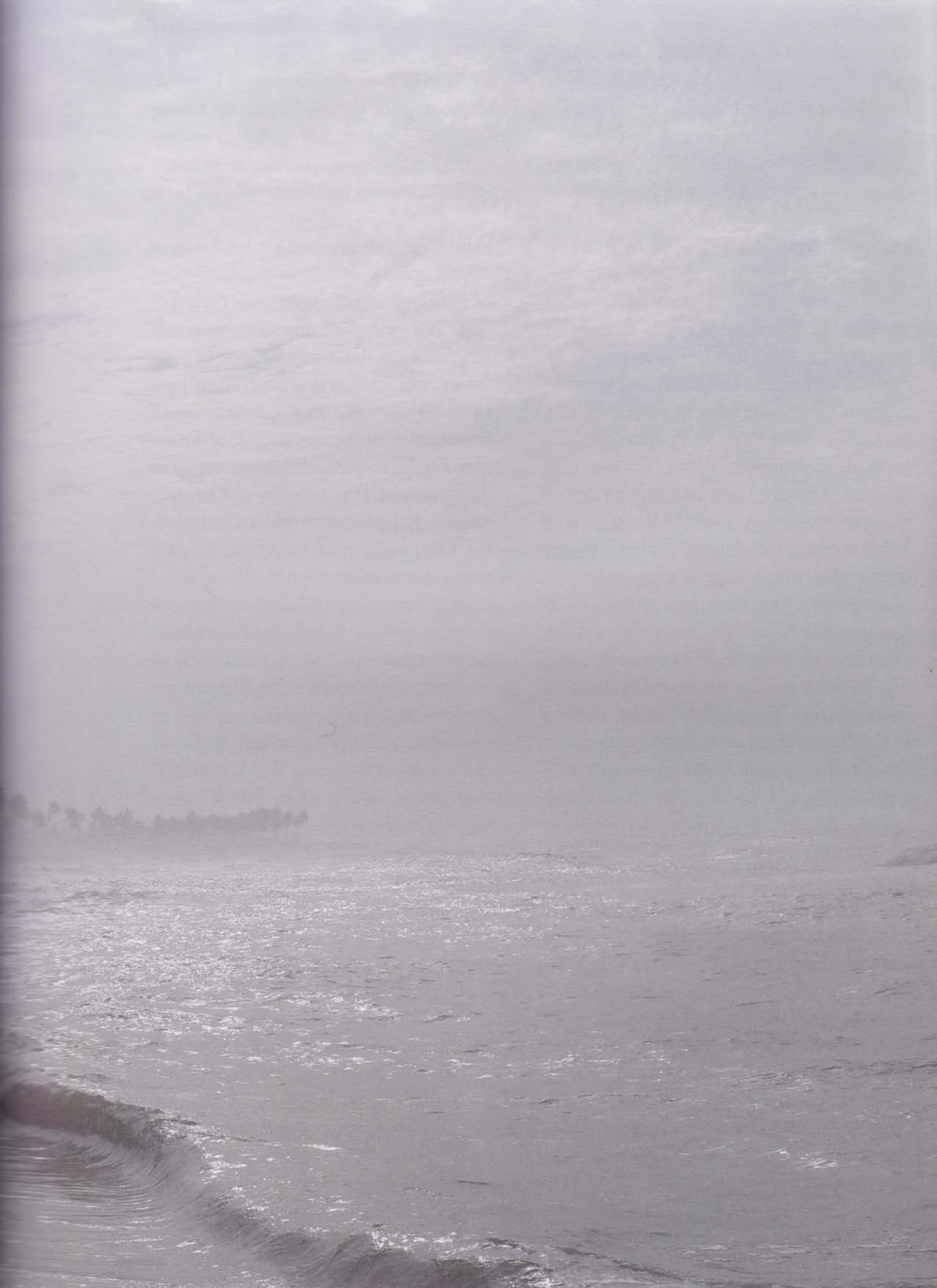
**AA:** Yeah, yeah. I mean definitely because in terms of thinking about tradition or how tradition is being stewarded or how history is being told in the Ghanaian context. There are loads of examples. The traditional chiefs are supposed to function in theory as a checks and balances to the state, but kind of what happens is that people retire from one mode of government and then there are these takers of traditional seats of power. So, what happens is that the person who is stewarding tradition isn't the person with this kind of long relationship with history but the person with a relationship with the mechanisms of the state. So, that's how culture ends up being used, how it becomes an object that can be used to generate or position people within certain economic systems. Tradition doesn't become a thing in itself, it becomes a tool, like another resource that is available for sale. So, I'm really interested in how we find a relationship with these traditional objects that could take, or resist this impulse of placing traditional objects closer and closer to certain economic systems or certain value systems. Systems in which a Mchana staff is something that we can use to sell our culture as a particular thing, but it's less about how you think about the relationship between ordinary speech and the language of the dead and kind of how we think





Walking to Elmina, 2021, Brent Akymim.  
Photographer: Adjoa Amah







about the relationship between people and their deities or how we think about a proverb. For example, my interest in Sankofa, I find that really interesting because it's a term that is overused to the point of cliché now. It gets taken up a lot. Like during the year of return, there was a bank account called the Sankofa bank account and it was available for members of the diaspora to come and deposit their pounds and dollars. I'm interested in what happens when we take these cultural objects and cultural ideas, and not use them as resources to be exploited. Actually, I'm interested in what happens when you take Sankofa, not as a brandable thing, but really take Sankofa seriously as an epistle. What does that idea demand of us? And how do I honour that in the way I engage in research? Because, how I think about the Saman Archive, there's the archive, which started as an archive of photographic negatives, but what it is at this point is an archive, a research centre, a publishing space. So, if I take something like Sankofa, and I'm interested in building an institution around the Saman archive, if I'm building an institution around the Saman as a research participant or kind of a research guide, as an entity that tethers me to a relationship with history, what do all of these ideas look like in terms of how I think about institution-building? So right now, I'm in the process of trying to set up a residency in Cape Coast and it's not an "output-based" residency, it's called "Offa Home", and I'm just thinking of it as a soft place to land. So, I'm trying to figure out how to resource a residency space in Ghana where there's not really that many resources being allocated for artists anyway. Where it's just like, you don't have to produce anything, you can just turn up and sleep, and read, and there's a lot of land and the only contribution you need to make is maybe do an hour of farm work every day. So, you

contribute to the upkeep of the community or the land and then the rest of the time is for yourself and you don't need to prove productivity. So, things like really taking certain concepts seriously and then saying: "Okay, what does this look like in an institution built around these values?"

**OB:** Well, your practice has been deeply rooted in the archive, now this exhibition becomes a point of departure for another way of intellectualising that research. I'm thinking about possibilities beyond the archive and yet it seems you still see so much potential in the possibility of preservation and conservation of histories and the responsibility you take up in doing that both as an artist and beyond, and I'm just curious to understand what, for you, is the kind of forward-direction in travel in terms of the life of these objects beyond the exhibition? Because there is a sense in which art, particularly as a material culture, particularly as it's understood within the Western art world – they're either objects of sale, or objects of historical value, and that renders them, in a way, part of the unseen mechanism of exchange. But it seems that the very type of ethics you're asking for goes beyond that. So, what would be the lifespan of these objects beyond this exhibition and the lifespan of your research beyond this exhibition?

**AA:** The lifespan of these objects and the lifespan of my research are like completely opposite ends of the scale because, for me, I think of the objects I've made as prototypes. Because, in the beginning, I was like: "Okay, I'm going to try and make exact copies of particular objects", then, at some point, I remember thinking: "I just want to build a relationship with the making of the objects". And also, these objects don't



travel very well, so for the UK show, I'm going to remake different versions of it. I want to just make and remake and really just keep reiterating my vision with these objects. Thinking about the prototype, not the thing itself. The thing that makes the thing possible, allowing the objects to live in that space where you're approaching something, and you're kind of really connected to that

approach to something rather than making the final object. However, I'm also really interested in sand as a material like in that business sort of thing, so there's no communication structure, we have nothing without sand. The Quartz that makes up the sand has particular spiritual properties that I'm interested in, but then I'm also interested in this question of transformation and how to make glass objects with sand, so I feel like for now, I want to just play with the sand itself but at some point, again, to think about how do I resource the things I need to do and how do I make it sustainable? I will likely reach a point where I'm making glass objects out of sand and it's sourced from each of these locations and those could be available for sale but that would have to be after the point where I feel like I have exhausted my means to figure out my relationships with the objects.

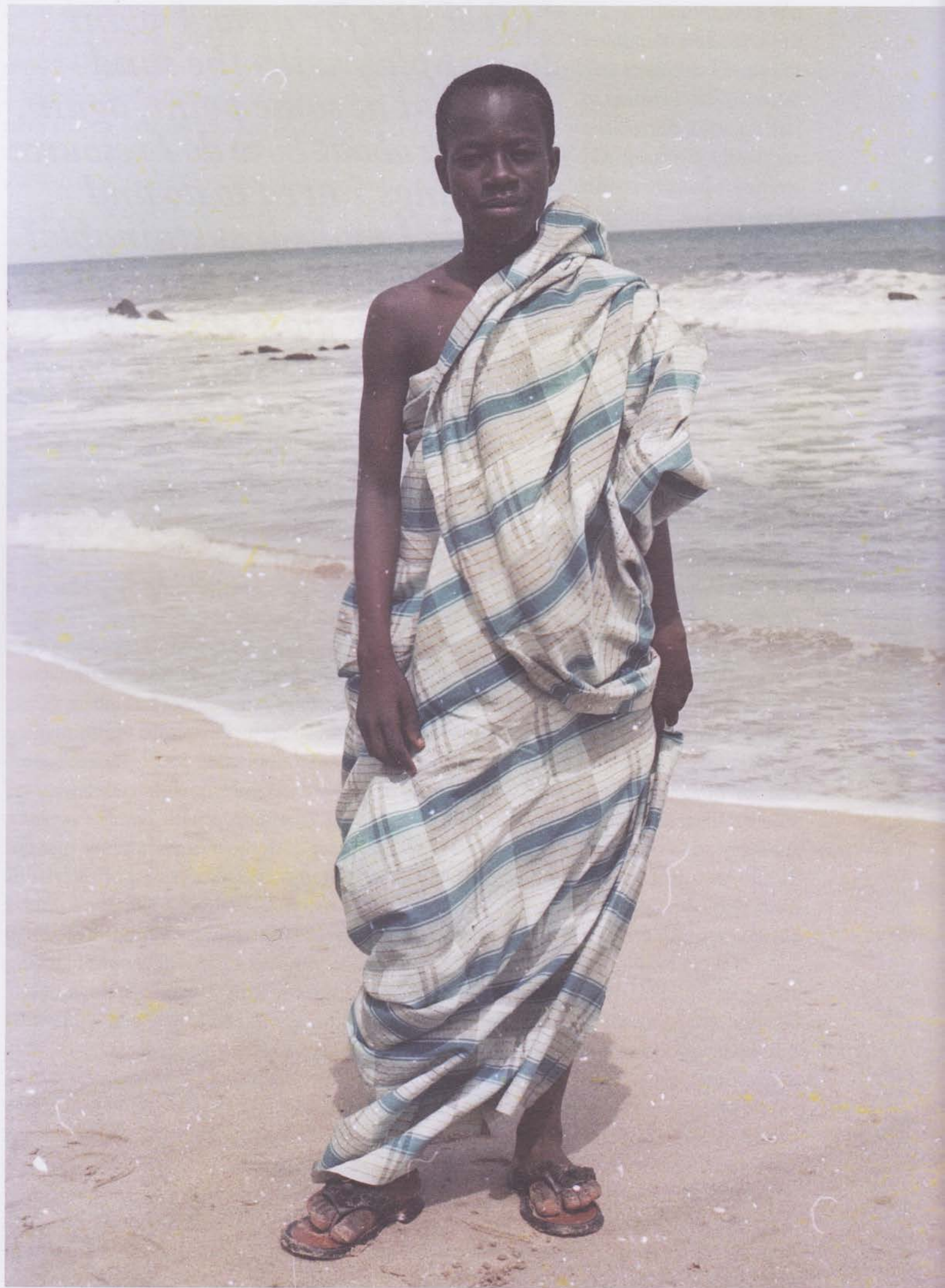
**OB:** In terms of the archive in relation to the residency, what does the future look like there?

**AA:** At the moment, we've got a five-room house in Cape Coast, it's called 'Offa

*"I feel like for now, I want to just play with the sand itself but at some point, again, to think about how do I resource the things I need to do and how do I make it sustainable? I will likely reach a point where I'm making glass objects out of sand and it's sourced from each of these locations"*

Home'. So, there's a room for the archive and the library, there's a kind of gallery space, there's a studio space for artists and there's a living space for the artists. The library of the archive is open for everyone, it's open for researchers who are interested in doing research. And I'm interested in this question of fellow travellers. I think to begin with, it would just be a case of not making open calls but inviting people into the space that I want to think with and I want to build a relationship with because actually, the thing with the overall morality, that I'm very interested in too, is kind of the chains of transmission. The knowledge needs a relationship in order to be transmitted and I want to spend a little bit of time allowing the residency to be a holding space for building certain relationships, and then we'll see what happens after that!













Courtesy of Saman Archive, 1990s, Apam.  
Photographer: Jacob Quaye Mensah









Inside Osu Castle, 2021, Accra.  
Photographer: Adjoa Armah









Courtesy of Saman Archive, 1990s, Apam.  
 Photographer: Kobena Akorful  
 Photographer: Jacob Quay Mensah  
 Photographer: Kobena Akorful



