

# TIMES WEEKEND

## Celebrating Ghana's cultural excellence

**G**HANA is a "site of cultural excellence" but there is low recognition of this in Ghana says a new non-governmental organisation, Art in Social Structures (AISS). It has therefore set itself the task of putting things right, beginning with two cultural projects next week.

The first is an art exhibition on September 13 and the second is a workshop for journalists on art criticism, Senam Okudzeto, founder and president of AISS, told *Times Weekend*.

Giving the background to the projects, AISS explains that during this year of Ghana's 50th Independence Anniversary, one fact which has emerged globally is an acknowledgement, particularly by the world's press that many of the foremost cultural producers in the world are Ghanaians.

Two examples are that: "One of the most popular contemporary architects, David Adjaye, is a Ghanaian", and, "The most lauded African Artist, El Anatsui, who makes remarkable textile-like sculptures from recycled bottle tops and rusted tins, is a Ghanaian".

AISS notes that there are a host of popular musicians, artists, writers, authors and architects whose work abroad continues to advertise Ghana as a site of cultural excellence. These individuals, such as architect Joe Addo, painter, Owusu Ankomah and Booker prize-winning author and Architect Leslie Lokko are internationally lauded as global leaders in culture, but remain virtually unknown in the country of their origin.

"Even more distressing, is that many local talents who have remained in Ghana, such as artists Agblade Glover, Victor Butler and Kofi Settopee receive little attention from the lo-

cal media in Ghana, and so find themselves arguably better respected abroad than in the communities that they strive to serve.

"It is urgent that Ghanaian citizens are made aware of the achievements of their artists both at home and abroad".

This is what prompted the formation of AISS, Ms Okudzeto explained. The aim was to encourage a creative and practical discourse about art and contemporary life. Vice presidents are Godfred Donkor and Smruthi Gargi Eswar.

"AISS and its members believe that the role of art is fundamental to all civil societies. "It is important that a community's creative resources are preserved and nurtured for its own growth and for future generations".

This NGO is a unique organisation, she told *T.W.* as it is the only one of its kind, founded by, funded and run solely by African artists.

AISS's many artist members are successful and internationally active; they joined the organisation in order to demonstrate their social consciousness through acts of charitable giving and educational mentoring programmes.

At present AISS organises exhibitions, cultural and educational exchange programmes and university scholarships for students in Ghana.

For its first two cultural projects in Ghana, AISS will be presenting first, an art exhibition, by artists from Ghana and abroad, resident in Accra, taking place on



Senam Okudzeto

Thursday September 13, from 6:00pm onward, at the Alliance Française.

It is open to the public from Friday, September 14 to Sunday 16.

The second project will be a "Journalists'

Art Criticism Workshop" designed to encourage professional journalists with little or no art training to become engaged with Visual Culture, "it will be very intensive but also lively and informative", she said.

## 'If the city dies, we all die'

By Clement Atagra

"If the city dies, we all die", is the title of a concept in the form of a drama developed to highlight the battle against sanitation problems in the country's major cities.

It appeals to the conscience of the people with real life situations and in the case of Accra, there is video footage of the Mayor, Stanley Adjiri Blankson, cleaning the gutters with the ordinary people and advising them to take up the issue of good sanitation seriously.

The concept, developed by Ben Imoro, a film director and writer, makes a strong case on the need for attitudinal change and communal spirit in the country's efforts to rid its major cities of filth.

The 30 minutes drama presents a cast of Ga speakers with Ataa Lartey being the protagonist who can best be described as the Biblical Saul who will not take kindly to any advice to take part in cleaning the community.

Ataa Lartey loves and adores two things, his only daughter and his maize farm but loses both eventually and the cause of his losses is as a result of sanitation related issues.

His daughter dies of malaria and his crops do not grow well because the seeds were sown in an area that had a lot of polythene bags buried in it.

The frustrated Ataa Lartey searches for answers to his calamity only to realise that insanitary conditions have been his greatest enemy and causer of so much pain to him and his family.

He becomes a crusader for clean environment and leads the whole community to take their destiny into their own hands by keeping their surroundings clean.

The film attacks the issue of superstition and emphasises that a change in attitude is the only way to live a healthy and productive life.

There will be similar productions in eight other local languages for the other communities in the country.

The film is set to be launched in due course and will later hit the screens.

## Kenyan award-winners visit the BBC in London

"For years I have heard the words This is the BBC from Bush House, and suddenly there it was in front of me this huge imposing building" recalled award-winning Kenyan journalist, Esther Mbondo, on her first sighting of the home of BBC World Service.

"I stood and admired the size, the beautiful carvings high above, the two large pillars guarding the entrance and the Roman Bush House lettering above the doors - it took my breath away"

Esther was in London as part of her prize for winning News Journalist of the Year at the first ever BBC Africa Radio Awards in May this year.

Alongside her was fellow award-winning Kenyan journalist, James Wokabi, who received the Sports Journalist of the Year trophy.

"I had been warned that London is big and cosmopolitan but when I arrived I realised this place is huge," said James adding, "from the winding roads, tall buildings and intertwining flyovers to the sheer diversity of its

people - a real culture shock. Even my first London Underground train ride was exciting, packed full of people, fast and noisy, but a thrill all the same".

For two weeks Esther and James sat alongside producers and presenters

from BBC World Service African News & Current Affairs department whose English-language programmes are listened to by up to 19 million Africans each week.



Esther Mbondo (left), BBC News Journalist of the Year and James Wokabi, BBC Sports Journalist of the Year with Vera Kwakofi (centre), the Ghanaian Project Manager of BBC Africa Radio Awards