

An ephemeral cooperation; Ghana — Germany exchange

By Nantume Violet

edited by Emma Wilson

Nantume is a former student of HFBK and central organizer of the 2019 Ghana - Germany exchange project, an exchange between the Hochschule für bildende Künste, Hamburg (University for Fine Arts, HFBK) and the College of Art and Built Environment of the Kwame Nkrumah University for Science and Technology, Kumasi (KNUST). She is an artist and works as a curator at UNDERGROUND Contemporary Art in Kampala, Uganda.

PREFACE

The text is a recount of the Ghana - Germany exchange project, a research trip made by students of the Hochschule für bildende Künste, Hamburg (HFBK) and the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the College of Art and Built Environment of the Kwame Nkrumah University for Science and Technology, Kumasi (KNUST). Beginning with a visit by HFBK students to Ghana in March 2019, followed by a return trip to Germany by students of KNUST in September of the same year, it was an attempt at starting a long term student exchange program between the two institutions that was nipped in the bud. The decision was taken by HFBK to cancel the exchange before it even truly began, seemingly not due to any inherent failure with the project model or issues with the intentions and objectives of the conveners and stakeholders.

This text comes after I have taken the time for some considerable reflection on how an already fruitful collaboration, enormously beneficial for students by offering them the chance to engage across continents, could be suddenly abandoned.

It has been a difficult process for me personally, having been intimately involved with the initiation and implementation of the first stage of the project. However, I have also had to accept my naivety for hoping that HFBK's ongoing silence on the matter was just a phase; that the university would eventually amicably resolve the misunderstanding by taking responsibility for their part in

the breach and subsequent failure in communication between all invested parties. As of yet there has been no public statement released by HFBK concerning the cancellation of the exchange, nor any attempt to contact participating students from KNUST, despite the project having been announced in a speech by the president of HFBK at the semester opening in Autumn 2019.

This is indeed even more disheartening given the fact that the students who come after us will not, at least for now, have the opportunity to benefit from the exchanges and encounters that the project enabled. I write this to share with them the exhilaration and memories derived from an experience that defied distance and the availability of resources to actualize inspiring collaborations. These encounters motivated further cooperations that provided spaces and platforms in which to directly confront our own practices, to question arts education, and to reflect on the individuality and concepts of fellow participants. The inability of HFBK to properly acknowledge the contributions of KNUST's College of Art and Built Environment, or to even inform our colleagues, the professors and students in Kumasi, of what transpired after our exhibition and their time in Hamburg, shows little respect for them or the collaboration.

As a first step, before giving my account of events, I would like to rectify this in my own small way by honoring the efforts of each and every one

who, both outwardly and behind the scenes, added a building block and made this exchange worthwhile; to illustrate the constellation that formed over time through networking, connecting, listening and communicating afresh in so many moments; to commend those who appreciate and enjoy complicated situations! People that appreciate what it means to be on ever shifting planes in ever switching positions of power, who know that it comes with the burden of multiplicity of perceptions, spaces and places; to thank everyone that participated to turn differences into positive intercultural explorations.

I am writing this in honor of fellow students from HFBK and KNUST that have been handled like mere pawns, who were the actual material with which this exchange was built: Nurgül Dur-sun, Jeongah Eom, Yan Yan, Kastania Waldmüller, Kuno Seltmann, Samantha Gora, Christina Marie Pietsch, Shroom!, Emma Wilson, Marthe Marie Fock, Julia Gyemant, Adjo Kisser, Jonathan Okoronkwo, Tracy Naa Korshie Thompson, Nichola Ofori, Kelvin Haizel, Kwasi Ohene Ayeh, Selom Kudije, Benjamin Okantey, Robin Riskin, Kezia Owusu Ankomah, Akwasi Bediako Afrane, Frederick Botchway, Frederick Ebenezer Okai. In big and bigger ways, all of these people were a part of the initial exchange.

I want to acknowledge the people and organizations in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale who welcomed us: Victoria Cooke at Gallery 1957; artist God-

fried Donkor; artist Larry Otoo; Accents Arts; artist Constance Swanikers; Artists' Alliance Gallery; Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art; artist Nyor-nuwofia Agorsor; Prof. Dr. karî'kaçhä seid'ou; Prof. Dr. Dorothy Akpene Amenuke; Bonwire/Adanwomase; blaxTARLINES KUMASI; and all the students and staff of the Department of Art at Kwame Nkrumah University. And in Hamburg and Berlin: Björn Lux and Marleen Linke at M.Bassy; Dr. Johanna Wild at MARKK; Dr. Bettina Steinbrügge at Kunstverein Hamburg; Elena Conradi at Galerie Conrad; Sfeir-Semler Gallery; Catharina Rahlff-Mackeprang at Produzentengalerie; Sam Gora at Gängeviertel; Malte Roloff at DAAD Galerie; Christoph Tennert and artist Hajime Mizutani at Künstlerhaus Bethanien; Nadia Pilchowski and Gabriela Seith at Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien; and Antonia Alampi at SAVVY Contemporary.

This acknowledges all of the collaborators working in pursuit of the collective and like-minded goals of reflecting on production, negotiating art, cultural history and power by extending the boundaries of canons, content and agency. To Julia Gyemant, who did the immensely tiring but rewarding work of communication between HFBK, KNUST and the Goethe-Institut Accra, coordinating the second visit to Hamburg and contacting art institutions in Hamburg and Berlin. Within the extremely short period of six months, you put together a successful group exhibition and program.

NOT ANOTHER TICKET TO AN AFRICAN COUNTRY YOU HAVE VISITED

To Professors Dr. Bernard Akoi-Jackson and Kwaku Bofo Kissiedu a.k.a. Castro, for your humility, commitment and care, for treating your students as equals. Until your presentations, we could not tell students and professors apart. You have the ability to teach things without imposing explanations. To Professor Sam Durant, for being a competent and wise leader. You are a knowledgeable teacher and excellent enabler. You participated in setting the stage for your students to take ownership of this project.

Many thanks to all the former and current students who found themselves in similar predicaments, but whose efforts to question were frustrated by a structure that protects your institution's say. Thank you for sharing your experiences. To Emma Wilson, who agreed that this must be interrogated and pointed me towards so many other students who, in one way or another, were engaged in trips to African countries from HFBK. To Dorothea Nold, Rebekka Seubert and Lisa Sperling.

[1] Àsikò is a nomadic international program by the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos. Principally targeting African artists working on the continent, it focuses on critical methodologies and histories that underpin artistic practice. Using the format of part art workshop, part residency and part art academy, it benefits people interested in thinking through the conception and execution of work, artists who are curious and interested in experimenting with modes of practice and thought outside of the traditional modes of working but not to its total exclusion. "Archive 2013," Àsikò CCA, Lagos International Art Programme, accessed March 29, 2020, <https://ccalagosinternationalartschool.wordpress.com/art-school-archive/>.

We had applied for and received a class trip grant.

It was another grey, boring, almost tipping-into-sadness kind of November day. As I sat in my bedroom at a reading table overlooking a rainy Kurfürstenstraße in Berlin, I thought of Accra. I responded to an email from Sam Durant's class. Apparently, classes could apply to HFBK for funding to travel anywhere. I suggested the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, and sent a proposal to my classmates with a promise of somewhere nice, somewhere warm.

Mahama Ibrahim, a friend, former student and now a teacher at KNUST, had suggested two viable destinations for our research trip; the university in Kumasi and his newly constructed studio and art centre - the Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art in Tamale. While Mahama felt positively about hosting our class, his frequent travels did not allow him to. For an intense engagement and supposedly a better experience, he introduced us to the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the College of Art and Built Environment at KNUST, putting us in touch with Prof. Castro and Dr. Akoi. I had previously met Dr. Akoi in 2013 when he was a facilitator at the Àsikò Art School,¹ a study program in Accra organized by Adwoah Amoah, Ato Annan and the late, highly acclaimed curator Bisi Silva.

KNUST's College of Art and Built Environment, always enthusiastic about the prospect of mutually beneficial institutional and research-oriented cooperation, had also hosted the participants for three days of the program in Kumasi.

During this time, we learnt of the concrete research plans underway at KNUST, aiming at critically rethinking the ideological structures and rewriting the content and vintage legacies from colonial rule of the university's arts education curriculum.² It is from this same process that a masters and PhD program focused on starting local discourses in curating was established. Spearheaded by Dr. Karî'Kachä seid'ou,³ Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu, Dr. George Bodjawah and George Buma Apratwum, it aspires to produce independent and relevant knowledge in arts practices in Ghana, and institute focused, critical research based training of art thinkers, artists and producers. Consequential to the whole art scene, the form of the curriculum has been transformed and expanded away from dependence on the individualistic and overtly human-centered European traditions. These characteristics are now offset by values of multiplicity and universality, moving towards a space that is common to all, appealing to every person at every moment, and that is not predestined property of any race, gender, group nor state.⁴ The extended curriculum pays attention to the critical methodologies and histories that underpin cultural practices from Ghana's artistic and intellectual

[2] "For decades the curriculum in the College of Art was premised on decontextualised and unexamined assumptions, some of which date back to the British colonial time. We try as much as possible not to flog dead horses. In recent years, we have had to reinvent our modes of learning and frames of reference, in order to stay in tune with radical shifts and transformations in discourses of art and knowledge. The question is not so much whether our pedagogy is decolonial or alternative, but how to get students to critically think and grow."

Curatorial team of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) quoted in Aïcha Diallo, "Department of Now." *Contemporary And*, July 4th, 2014. <https://www.contemporaryand.com/en/magazines/past-present-and-future-about-art-in-kumasi/>.

[3] For further information see: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Karikachae_Seidou.

[4] Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh, "The Age of blaxTARLINES KUMASI" - I.U.B., accessed March 4, 2020, <https://iubeey.wordpress.com/2018/07/05/the-age-of-blaxtarlines-kumasi/amp/>.

[5] blaxTARLINES KUMASI is a project space and infrastructure that came out of the Emancipatory Art Teaching to sustain ethos of radical experimentation and transform them into long-term practice through collective movement. The team of collaborators, artistic directors and curators is a loose network of practicing artists and art professionals. Diallo, "Department of Now."

perspectives. The process works with narratives outside of the master canons or geographies instigated by post-colonial schemes, looking instead towards a version of the world that deliberately reflects us and our experiences.

Six years later when we visited the university in Kumasi, Akoi was a professor and a doctor. The research had progressed into a revised curriculum, a collective project space called blaxTARLINES KUMASI,⁵ and a Masters and PhD program was now open to students from the region as well as other parts of the world.

The initial request from Hamburg to engage in a research trip, however, was met with questions about our level of commitment. I was made aware of certain tendencies of some foreign institutions to contact KNUST in order to get an invitation through them into the country, only to sidestep their program and succumb to the seduction of beach hotels in Accra. It was not lost on me that institutions feign African "collaboration" with plans that end once the funding is secured. When that is done, communication is completely cut off and, if the trip is even made, it is never to participate in the programs organized by the host art institution.

The truth is even the best cooperations are daunting as they require absolute commitment and relentless consciousness in order to be carried through to completion. In the case of Europe where I situate this experience, the whole idea of

collaboration is an ambivalent one. In my opinion, this is because Europeans would prefer to trade on familiar ground for it often comes with lower risks – something I find ironic because they raided many parts of the world unfamiliar to them, but only by exposing themselves through these actions did they gain the many economic advantages still enjoyed in Europe today. It is an understatement to say that collaborations bear a risk of the unknown - in both their formations and in their final outcomes. More so when partnerships are formed from the perspective of diverse multiplicities, as the outcomes of such alliances can only be vaguely predicted and not scripted. This subverts the operational structure of most things “German” where each and every step is, more often than not, exhaustively planned.

VISIT TO GHANA

In the beginning, when we discussed the project together as Sam Durant’s class, the proposal consisted of only a first trip to Ghana. We agreed this was a research visit with the hope that it would turn into something more durable. This position allowed space for us to explore the dynamics of our proposed partner, to put feelers out and test the waters so to speak, and gauge the prospect of working

together. We did not (or so I hope) imagine a flattened world that rests on the foundations of uniform processes, lest we imposed ourselves. We looked forward to meeting the histories of Accra, Cape Coast, Kumasi and Tamale with all their diversities. And so, when we set off to visit the Painting and Sculpture Department at KNUST, or when KNUST visited HFBK Hamburg, our collaboration was born of a shared, two-way commitment.

Encounters can be characterized as organic formations, evolving from and intensified by the multiple positions each participant comes with. This diversification creates an opacity, as in each individual position is an alterity that is unquantifiable, a diversity that exceeds categories of identifiable difference. These differences brought about have to be explored when we begin to entangle with one another. In a multi-relational world, recognizing difference does not mean understanding otherness by making it transparent, but accepting the unintelligibility, impenetrability and confusion that often characterize cross-cultural communication. The right to opacity is therefore an act of protest that could recalibrate or shield against biases and stereotypes. To create environments of non-coercive engagements, listening and learning are required in animating and imagining grounds of relating.⁶

Anyway, we made it to Accra – I a week earlier than my classmates. On our first day in Accra we drove through the city, visiting the Kwame Nkru-

[6] Edouard Glissant, “Poetics of Relation.” (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189-190.

mah memorial on the way to our first appointment with Victoria Cooke at Gallery 1957. We met Godfried Donkor in his studio who shared his process for preparing his upcoming solo show that September, carrying on to Larry Otoo's home studio and offices, and ending our tour in Kaneshie at Art Ascents' workshop, a company owned by artist Constance Swaniker. Afterwards, some of us proceeded to Makola Market while the rest went to explore other places of interest. Early next morning, we drove to the Cape Coast, an entirely different landscape of architectural styles compared to those in Accra. Here, we visited Elmina town and were taken on a tour of Elmina Castle, the first trading post built by the Portuguese in 1482 that became a historic slave trade harbor. We spent the afternoon at Coconut Groove beach resort, before driving back to the city to prepare to leave for Kumasi in the early hours of the next morning.

From March 18th to 24th, the group engaged in an extensive program put together by the students and staff of KNUST. We attended studio visits with MFA and PhD candidates who presented their independent research, a drama night in the university's Great Hall where we watched Dr. Agyemang Ossei's adaptation of Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *Osiris Rising*, as well as artist talks and lectures by professors Sam Durant and Dr. karî'kächä seid'ou. We took part in portfolio presentations moderated by Dr. Akoi which mashed together the practices of

students from the different institutions. Each round had a panel of four presenting with two students from each university, followed by an open Q&A discussion where the artists could further elaborate on their creative processes. Emma Wilson had this to say:

Though the groups were allocated at random, in many cases direct lines could be drawn between the research interests and practices of students from different institutions. These parallels gave the talks a fluidity, and the open discussions that followed were amazingly productive - such a good rhythm developed so quickly it was hard to believe we had really only just come together.⁷

[7] Emma Wilson, in conversation with the author, Feb 2021.

Stepping out of the university, the city and site program *Go to Town! Reading the City/Curating Kumasi/Drawing Sites* introduced us to Kumasi as a cultural venue. This saw us visit Suame Magazine, Adum, Kejetia Market, Dr. Dorothy Amenuke's studio in Parkoso, and the Kente weaving towns of Bonwire and Adanwomaso. On the final day in the area, we travelled to Ntonso - Pankrono artisans and Lake Bosomtwi.

We spent the 23rd and 24th March in Tamale, where Mahama Ibrahim gave us a tour of his studio

– then under construction – and introduced his vision for founding art spaces in local communities, and hosting local and international residencies. We closed the program with a memorial event for Bisi Silva and Okwui Enwezor and a visit to Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art, to see the retrospective exhibition of Ghanaian modernist Kofi Dawson in *Pursuit of something beautiful, perhaps...* Our visit came to an end with a presentation entitled *Imagine that... On Disturbed Methodologies and Points of Ellipses* by Dr. Bernard Akoi-Jackson. The trip proved to be highly successful, providing deep, firsthand insights into the artistic discourses and work processes from both sides.

We had the opportunity to experience a new artistic environment and learn about its characteristics, strengths as well as its challenges. We encountered a complex and dynamic contemporary art scene. Ghanaian artists as direct designers for this environment: young emerging artists and curators shaping their work context by putting their critical, multifaceted art education into practice. ⁸

[8] Julia Gyemant, in conversation with the author, April 2020.

made between our art practices through professional and personal interactions were blossoming. No one anticipated the moments where our experiences crossed on various levels, materially and intellectually. It was mutual respect that led to our unanimous decision to work together in the near future.

VISIT TO HAMBURG

As we returned from our trip to Ghana at the end of March 2019, a number of HFBK students had a new rush of energy, enthusiastic for further cooperation with the students from Kumasi. Collectively, we considered ways in which to continue providing a framework for the movement of students between the two universities, in order to build a sustainable exchange program allowing many more students to benefit from the acquired insights. As Sam Durant's class was quite big, only a small percentage of us made it to Ghana, but those who had not travelled were already in the know about the details of the trip. So, when a suggestion to invite representatives of KNUST to Hamburg was put on the table, the class regrouped, putting their weight behind the next phase of the project and committing their time, resources and contacts. Efforts were combined to host our comrades with as much care as possible,

to try and match the hospitality and openness they had accorded us in Ghana.

A proposal to HFBK's Freundeskreis project fund was submitted by the class through the office of Sabine Boshamer, Personal Aide to the President, Press Officer and Director of the Artistic and Cultural Orientation Program. The application for a one week long stay in Hamburg for KNUST students turned out not to have been aimed towards the right pot of money. Fortunately, it was redirected over to the International Office, where it was brought to the attention of the President of HFBK, Prof. Martin Köttering. As part of the application, Prof. Sam Durant describes the quality of work and level of discourse in the art and curatorial practices at KNUST:

The level of teaching in the College of Art and Built Environment matches or surpasses any that I have seen in Europe or the U.S. The level of work the students at KNUST are doing easily surpasses that of comparable institutions in Europe and U.S. The level of sophistication and development is just extraordinary. The KNUST College of Art and Built Environment is truly a special place in the world, it would be a top program

where the best students would compete to attend if it were located in North America or Europe. I saw at least ten artists who should be showing in the biennales and top galleries, at least five curators that could be working in the top museums.

With Prof. Köttering showing immediate enthusiasm, the proposal was launched into action. HFBK committed to providing major funding to cover all return flight tickets for six students, return flights and full board for two professors, as well as a flight for me from Kampala as I had returned to Uganda after my graduation in July 2019.

With the flights dealt with, we had to source funds to cover the rest of the budget. Julia Gyemant undertook this responsibility, in addition to coordinating the visit to Hamburg. She managed the correspondence on behalf of the class and HFBK, as well as the group exhibition *Umstand der Dinge: A State of Affairs*⁹ – which certainly intensified the preparations. The final program consisted of shared seminars, talks and presentations in Hamburg and Berlin, with visits to art centers, galleries, cultural sites and the Art School Alliance (ASA) studios – all put together with the support of the class. Julia successfully applied to the Goethe Institute Accra who co-funded the project and expressed interest in bringing the exhibition to Accra in 2020.

[9] *Umstand der Dinge: A State of Affairs* was a collaborative exhibition between the Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Kumasi and Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg. It featured works by students from both universities and was held on 23rd October in the winter semester of 2019. *Umstand der Dinge: A State of Affairs* was curated by Julia Gyemant and Dr. Akoi and hosted at the two exhibition spaces in HFBK, Galerie der HFBK and Folgendes. Opening with a talk by Dr. Bernard Akoi-Jackson and Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu in the Hörsaal, the group show took play as a serious point of departure and showcased fifteen artists intertwined in curious ways as they form volatile landscapes expanding between the virtual, the physical, the imaginable and the utterly strange.

This trip hoped to deliver grounds for collaborations between artists on both sides. The main objective for the return visit was for KNUST's professors and students to experience Hamburg for themselves. Additionally, the trip provided an opportunity for the professors from Kumasi to meet with HFBK president and other representatives with the new aim of initiating a long term exchange between their respective Masters and PhD students.

KNUST already had two exchange programs in Germany; with the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main and the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Karlsruhe. The idea was that HFBK did the same annually, with a couple of students from HFBK spending a semester at KNUST and vice versa. Included in the funding application for the return trip to Hamburg were the poignant impressions and reflections of Marie Pietsch, a student of HFBK who took part in the initial trip to Ghana:

When I analyse my own approach and maybe some works that I see around me I can range them in a tension between two poles: Some works dig into their (mostly) Western tradition or state of society to point out or create a very distinct, isolated reference. That engages with a particular historical, maybe political or personal level. This approach most often dresses in a form of craft, or references a form of craft; the works suggest a type

of art making that is very hands on. On the other end of the spectrum I see works that are in one way or another engaged with creating surfaces which are slick, which are very unapproachable (because clean and digitally generated) in their aesthetic and material. I feel that these types of work resemble a coldness and derive from displacement of the individual in the course of industrialisation (and the upcoming industrial revolution) and omnipresent media. The works may be engaging with outbursts of mass produced goods, waste of materials that suggest high obsolescence, digital workflows invading everyday life etc.

Swaying in this spectrum and observing, I generally feel a sense of displacement. Intellectually but also in the environment that I work in. I feel that I don't belong in a certain space, that everything is very temporary, very dislocated but very connected. I'm (at best) informed but I vaguely reflect on the European tradition that my practice is based upon. Both geographically and also on my European education.

And then: We travel to Ghana.

There we get to experience a sense of space that I've never encountered before. It's

been very impressive to see a space being so obviously relevant to producing works of art.

It may manifest in everyday materials that are infused in the context of producing contemporary art. We looked at works that are referencing traditions of craft that are happening in everyday life and are not relics of another world order. Materials and craftsmanship appear very contemporary because you actually encounter them in everyday life. Also, this sense of space seems emphasized by a very hands on development of the local art scene. If somebody is coming up with a format for exhibiting, it will actually matter because there is so little happening and therefore so much attention on what is taking place.

Many of the works that we encountered also evoked a sense of warmth but not in a literal sense. I had a feeling that works gain certain depth because the materials may be second hand of a life that is led by many people. In Ghana you will find less brand new products to buy, objects not only carry some dust but also shapes and surfaces of history (clothes, cars, tools). Through our studio visits and many presentations that we got to be part of, we had the chance to encounter and learn about the very profound and significant way that the space (Ghana as a

region) plays a role in art works.

In exchange with the students of KNUST in Kumasi I had an overall feeling of proximity. Maybe not only in the way that we had shared interests/questions but that we might share ways of asking questions or approaching art making. We got an insight into an exceptional practice of engaging with theoretical works alongside producing works. This results in a very elaborate vocabulary on each individual practice.

For me this approach showed responsibility of artists towards their work intellectually. Meaning that this responsibility is not up for grabs for critics and other writers but for the artists themselves to actually write and tell »their story«.

It showed me that there is nothing in our cultures that we are not responsible for through the way we react to it or do not react to it. Being educated in Europe and born into its cultural tradition of schooling and thinking and art making over the centuries, sometimes evokes the impression that the way we work and study is a given, and that it's not something you choose and therefore take responsibility for.

I had thought that HFBK became interested in a long term partnership with KNUST on the basis of the

positive testimonies from their students such as this one. On looking back, given the subsequent disregard for student experiences and cancelling the exchange, I realize it cannot have been the motivation.

With two flight cancellations and a delay totaling 48 hours, KNUST students and professors from Ghana finally arrived in Hamburg. I give these details to contextualize our experiences and show the support we had for each other through the various challenges we faced, to make clear the investment made by the participants and real impact of the project's cancellation. These are details that the role of an administrator typically allows no time for, as it is much easier not to deal with the nitty-gritty specifics to avoid time consuming emotional encounters, deemed to slow progress. It provides a buffer for those higher up; if they are not affected by the real-time challenges they can ignore them. The attitude being, "if I don't see or acknowledge the problem, it does not exist." Innately, the German reality also functions almost mechanically, giving no space for humans to respond sensitively to situations. It also helps if the only direct engagement is appending signatures.

As the students took part in the extensive programing, Professors Castro and Dr. Akoi from Kumasi met with HFBK President Prof. Martin Köntering, Vice President Prof. Ingo Offermanns and Head of the International Office Mareike Stolley. The team discussed the possible ways forward to

[10] As of yet there have been no successful partnerships established with African institutions, the majority of connections being within Europe and the United States of America. At the centre of the program is HFBK Hamburg, with participating institutions including the College of Art and Built Environment Bard College, Division of the Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson/New York State; School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Tufts University, Boston; Univasidad del Cine, Buenos Aires; China Academy of Art, Hangzhou; Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem; Goldsmiths University of London, Department of Art, London; California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles; Purchase College, School of Art and Design, New York; Kindai University, Department of Cultural Design, Osaka; École nationale supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris; Institute of Design, China Academy of Art, Shanghai; and Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna. "Art School Alliance," HFBK Hamburg, accessed April 5th, 2020, <https://www.hfbk-hamburg.de/en/internationales/art-school-alliance/>.

start the long term exchange for their students. By the time we bid farewell to our comrades, paperwork to formalize the cooperation and incorporate KNUST as a partnering institution in the Art School Alliance (ASA) international exchange program was underway. A ten year initiative of HFBK, the ASA program's goal is to intensify the links and exchange between arts universities all over the world. It provides grants for up to twenty-two international students per semester to live and study in Hamburg with free tuition and accommodation provided, and in turn many HFBK students spend a semester at the partnering universities located in Europe, the United States of America, South America and Asia. ¹⁰

Given this expansive program and the obviously high importance HFBK places on international exchange, and what seemed to be initially productive communications between HFBK and KNUST representatives, it was a shock to us as students to later learn that the long term exchange would not be going ahead as expected.

OTHER TRIPS TO THE CONTINENT

Over the years, trips have been made by different classes of HFBK to three African countries:

Senegal, Benin and, of course, Ghana. The experiences were said by HFBK students to have been enriching as they all had one thing in common: they generated experiences that were less predictable.

In early winter of 2012, a group of students travelled to Benin through a trip instigated by Kulturforum Süd-Nord.¹¹ The primary organizers were artist Prof. Georges Adéagbo and his manager Dr. Stephan Köhler, and the program included participation in the Benin Biennale. A proposal made following this for further cooperation with Dr. Köhler and Prof. Adéagbo and regular participation of HFBK students in the Benin biennale was denied by the university. I came to understand this was due firstly to a perceived lack of artistic networking opportunities for their students, and secondly because the trip was considered too chaotic, though a public statement of this was not made by the university. Instead, HFBK later invited Prof. Georges Adéagbo to join their staff as a guest professor for the winter semester of 2017/18 - perhaps because the university saw this as a more efficient relationship, and one not supported by many participating students who had recommended more excursions to Benin. Offering a guest professorship, as opposed to entangling themselves in the extremely dense interactions implicit in the Benin trip, sounds less “chaotic”. Rebekka Seubert, a participant of the trip, shared her experience with me:

[11] kulturforum Süd - Nord Hamburg - Cotonou was founded in 2011 by Stephan Köhler, a curator and catalyst for cultural exchange. It “seeks to collaborate with other organizations that have similar goals, no matter where they are located. [The association] also help[s] organizations from outside Benin to produce their projects, for example conferences, symposiums and general research with the help of our staff and logistic facilities.” “Collaborations,” Kulturforum Süd-Nord, accessed March 21st, 2021, <http://www.kulturforumsuednord.org/collaboration.html>.

I can only say for myself: yes it was chaotic but it was among the best experiences in my life! What a privilege to travel and even do a project in Benin! It’s the country where voodoo originated, where things of global historic relevance happened in the past, where most slaves were gathered and shipped to South America, it’s a proud kingdom and was a communist country in the 60s. There was so much to discover! And to see the confrontation with our own practice when you’re in a country where contemporary art is not established through museums and art structures and therefore has an immediacy in the interaction with the public. We had a memorable discussion at the university about the question of getting an art education and becoming an artist as a way of professionalizing a practice. This was very much put into question by the art history students who had a way more collective vision of cultural production (everyone can dance, everyone can sing and everyone has an aesthetic sense) than the individuality and genius based concept of art that we have in Europe. Also interesting: Benin is a country with a high amount of illiteracy in western education which gave omnipresence to hand painted pictures as signs for shops and

also certain street signs and do's and dont's. And not to forget: the coffins we saw there! Both examples are super interesting for the omnipresence of art that is produced for a purpose and done outside of art structures.¹²

Given what I have heard from the students who took part, I doubt HFBK's concerns about the lack of artistic networking opportunities for their students' trips to Benin were valid ones. Were the same be said about the project in Ghana it would totally be unfounded. Contacts had been made with leading art practitioners, galleries, art spaces and studios in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale, and the visit to Kumasi through direct contact with a university provided access to fellow students who were critically and actively engaging in contemporary artistic practices. The trip offered various opportunities that went beyond networking as a basic reward, as well as motivating several other collaborative projects¹³ between participants and the earmarked institutions in Ghana and Germany - some of which were already underway by the time KNUST visited Hamburg.

About a year after the visit to Benin in June 2014, another group of students from the class of Prof. Dr. Michaela Ott travelled to Dakar in Senegal. The trip coincided with the Dakar biennial and was repeated in 2016, and again in 2018 when

[12] Rebekka Seubert, in conversation with the author, February 2020. Frame, Asafo Black, Anamorphic Stain, Soul 6, Red Clay, Nkrumah Volley.

[13] Examples include Exit Frame, Asafo Black, Anamorphic Stain, Soul 6, Red Clay, Nkrumah Volley.

[14] Lisa Sperling, in conversation with the author, June 2020.

I took part. In my experience, we attended international openings, performances and symposiums but actually had no meaningful interactions with local artists or spaces. Discussions were held, but only within our group. We experienced a discovery fever and the excitement of being somewhere new, hopping from one event to another as is often the way in the opening weeks of biennials. Lisa Sperling, a student who attended Dakar 2014, had this to say:

In Dakar, we witnessed some situations that left us uncomfortable and wondering, and we never ventured to speak up. To begin with, our privileged position to stay on Île de Gorée wasn't questioned. This privilege was acted out in many other situations too, for instance in the choice to use private transport in the city, in missing the chance to exchange with local artists or the rare visit to smaller local spaces not included in the larger biennale exhibition, and in the constant challenging of the so called 'professionalism' of the biennale.¹⁴

At one point, four students of the group split away from the rest of the group in search of exchange with local artist – an action they later had to defend when a meeting to reprimand them was called. The

group had managed to organize an informal meeting with students from the art school in Dakar, École National des Beaux Arts. HFBK students and professors were also invited but none other than the initial four turned up.

There was (and there always is) potential in meeting people, but these potentials need care to develop – for example, the challenge of a “lack of artistic networking opportunities” could have evolved into attempts to nurture the already existing links between HFBK and Kulturforum Süd-Nord, Cotonou university, École National des Beaux Arts and most recently College of Art and Built Environment of the Kwame Nkrumah University for Science and Technology.

BURDEN OF TRAVELING TO EUROPE

When one travels as a black person in Europe, one is tasked daily, both mentally and physically, with dealing with the hyper awareness of one’s body in white spaces. I say this because never had I ever thought of myself in terms of color; I just was Nantume. The “burden” of being racially defined as “black” did not dawn on me until I lived in Europe four years ago. Living in Europe strips you of the freedom of simply being. It becomes a privilege and

oftentimes deep relief if a conversation does not have to do with the pigment of your skin, if a professor does not always look your way when talking about “Africa” expecting you to rise to the occasion and represent the entire African continent. Being in Europe comes with the baggage of not only having to deal with micro-aggressions every other day that demand you prove your right to live there, but also with white folks who want and expect you to educate them on what racism is.

During the 1930s a period of intensified scholarly movement between continents began. Ben Enwonwu, a Nigerian painter and sculptor who studied art at Goldsmiths University of London (1944), Ruskin College, Oxford (1944-1946) and the Slade School of Fine Arts (1946-1948), wrote an article published in 1956 entitled *Problems of the African Artist Today*. The piece pointed to the predicament of being cornered by political conditions through which, whether home or abroad, an African artist was quite damned. Enwonwu posits that, wherever they are, the African artist suffers in the postcolonial conditions of independence created by the expansion of Europe’s empire.¹⁵ As such, living in postcolonial states does not offer a choice whether to deal with such issues or not; undoing colonial legacies is instead a daily task. Theories such as evolutionism, diffusionism and primitivism¹⁶ were used as tools to legitimize the colonial project and set a conceptual structure in which the anthropol-

[15] Ben Enwonwu, “Problems of the African artist today,” *Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle série no. 8/10 (1959): 174-78.

[16] For further information see: <https://library.ccis.edu/ant>.

ogist and the people he or she studies can relate. Therefore, the continued role of non-western artists is often to act within this historical precedent. Sixty years later, African artists have to deal with a European ideology that is overtly embedded in knowledge and power configurations through education, and political systems, much more so when African bodies cross into European territories.

In the following section I will describe the final events that led to the abandonment of the exchange to show how this case in Hamburg illustrates the failure of European institutions to look reflectively at the encounters with their African counterparts. The European institution acts from political predispositions, in which the African must be humble to receive the gaze, knowledge and criticism of the benevolent European.

NOVEMBER 11TH 2019

The information that the project was cancelled was just dumped on us without warning. In a meeting between Prof. Köttering, Prof. Ingo Offermanns, Mareike Stolley and the project coordinator and student representative Julia Gyemant on November 11th, the HFBK president started by stating he was taking the exchange off the table. Two emails that were exchanged between the two institutions

were given as the reason for this sudden change of heart. Prof. Köttering said that he found it impossible to accept the tone of Prof. Castro's answer to their email, that he had expected to be shown more gratitude after all the money HFBK put into the exchange, that they had only asked him a very "normal" question and that Castro had no reason to send a rude reply. If the exchange started off with such behavior, there was no point pursuing it, because it would just get worse in the future.

It began with an email to Prof. Castro, sent from the office of Mareike Stolley and dictated by Prof. Köttering. It thanked KNUST for the talk and wonderful exhibition and reminded Prof. Castro, as director for foreign exchanges for the College of Art and Built Environment, to send a draft of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) so they can go ahead with the planning of the cooperation. The email also stated how excited HFBK was to take the next steps. Then came the house cleaning: the message went on to say that when the professors' hotel bill arrived at the university it had additional charges on Prof. Castro's room for an unauthorized guest, which HFBK was going to pay although it was never agreed on.

Still, we are quite confused that our hospitality has been expanded without any further consultation. Since we have to answer

to external auditors on how we spend the public funds we work with, please explain to me who this additional guest was and why they had to stay in the hotel.

– ended the email sent to Prof. Castro.

This was Castro's response, which I think was graceful and polite (maybe diplomacy actually helps, if it were me I would shoot straight from the hip) trying to understand what could have led to a double billing, but clearly expressing his disappointment with how the email was written without first double checking the facts.

Thanks for your mail and thanks for hosting us too. We really enjoyed every aspect of the visit.

I will send you a draft of the MOU as soon as possible.

I am also quite confused about the additional charges in my room and how that came about. I must also express my concern for the tone of your mail regarding the extra charges. For you to assume a stance without hearing from me almost mars the good feeling we all had with the

trip. I was not expecting any extra charges with my room and I am responsible and capable of taking care of extra charges in my room if need be. Indeed, if after the possible reason, it still stands that the extra charges have to be paid, I will pay it myself. The school should not do this for me. The statement, "we are quite confused that our hospitality has been expanded without any further consultation" is an insult and unfortunate.

This might be the reason:

One of our former students who knew about our visit decided to visit us in Hamburg to see the exhibition. She stayed with our students for a number of days and only spent a few hours of the 24th at Wedina hotel because she was catching a train at the Central Station at 4:00 am on Thursday the 25th. Nothing more than that. We (Bernard and I) did a similar thing the night before our departure on the 27th when after spending most part of the night at the school some of the students joined us at the hotel for an hour or so just for us to get to the Central station early to catch the 4:00am train to the airport. I also recall asking for extra towels in the room one

day and not because someone was staying with me. I don't know how that was interpreted by the housekeeping staff since communication was a problem.

So, I guess now you can imagine I am also quite surprised at the additional charges, especially as it applies only to my room.

I have traveled all over to a number of institutions and schools and have been very careful as I understand the implications of situations like this. Perhaps this happened because I was traveling with students for the first time.

As I mentioned I am very disappointed with the tone of your mail and will not want the school to bear the extra charges. I can make arrangements to pay that.

So the meeting was called to announce the end of the partnership, and it was in that same encounter that the president declared he was worried about being called racist. "It can happen to anyone." He cited another incident where a professor from the university who had recently gone on a personal visit to one country in Africa had been accused of being racist.

Julia Gyemant later narrated her meeting with the administration to Sam Durant's class, explaining that she pointed to Prof. Castro's reply to only be matching the one set by HFBK's first email. This was dismissed with the excuse of "German directness" – merely a straightforward attitude that belongs to the culture. Somewhere during this conversation the president must have felt that the exchange meant something to his students, as he told her not to worry: "HFBK will find another exchange partner in Africa."

In an attempt to move past this, Julia suggested that the HFBK administration could start the process again by reformulating their initial – now infamous – email and, if possible, resolve this misunderstanding via Skype in a face to face meeting. Both requests were declined. Without glossing over how things transpired in the meeting, the outcome was relayed to Prof. Castro who agreed that reformatting of his email was also an impossible demand, however he would still be willing to engage in an open conversation if HFBK admitted to their first email being disrespectful.

NOVEMBER 14TH 2019

The second meeting between Julia and Prof. Köttering took about five minutes and was just outside the

president's office door. Julia explained Prof. Castro conditions for restarting the conversation and his willingness to find a way forward, but the president declined. It was, ironically, the same day that the symposium on decolonization took place in the main hall of HFBK.

NOVEMBER 18TH 2019

The outcomes of the meetings described above were shared with the other participants from HFBK and Prof. Sam Durant. It was agreed to call for another appointment with everyone in the presidential office so the issue might be discussed together by all concerned parties.

NOVEMBER 19TH 2019

The president did not attend as he had a full schedule, so in the fourth and last meeting the university administration was represented by Mareike Stolley and Prof. Ingo Offermans, and from the class was Prof. Sam Durant and six of the participating students.

I was told by the students that the last meeting basically consisted of the vice-president repeating

over and over again that, after this email exchange, HFBK could not regard KNUST as a trustworthy partner and if they tried to sort out this situation now the problem would only reoccur in the future. The counter-argument on the side of the class was that it was a two-way cultural misunderstanding; HFBK cannot demand their “German directness” be understood while not bothering to understand a “Ghanaian reception” of that. And so, the students contested HFBK's decision, arguing that the exchange had been fruitful and should not be compromised by a distasteful issue with a hotel and just a handful of ensuing emails – to which the vice-president repeated, this set a precedent for trust issues in the relationship. Besides that, the only thing he appeared to have paid attention to was how much money the university had already spent on the exchange. Their actions were made to sound like this was some kind of aid or altruism, whereas in reality it was becoming clear that HFBK just wanted their “token exchange” with Africa.

'...THE INFAMOUS HOTEL STORY'

In between all these meetings, Julia Gyemant resolved the question over the hotel bill but the

hotel didn't want to make an official statement to the university. From the phone calls with the relevant personnel, it was clear that the double billing was a mistake generated from the night the two professors checked in, when Julia had asked the receptionist how much it would cost if a guest hosted someone overnight in case a colleague of the professors needed somewhere to stay. With that the "eventuell eine zweite Person" (possibility of a second person) had been written against Prof. Castro's name. As a consequence, although an extra person did not spend a night at the Wedina Hotel, it was included in the bill anyway. Still, up until the last moment this communication was relayed by Julia to HFBK, they didn't entertain the possibility of it being a mistaken extra charge from the hotel. And as of yet, the university refuses to acknowledge this or apologize to Prof. Castro.

From the look of things, if the students and project coordinator had not made the concerted effort to request and mediate these meetings, no further conversation would have taken place. Having decided to hold off on signing the papers confirming the exchange, the university did not see fit to explain this to those actively participating students – without which there would have been no paperwork to formalize in the first place.

It was the students who, due to a booking error, had to redistribute their personal luggage to make space within their 23kg baggage allowance for each

and every artwork being exhibited in *Umstand der Dinge* in Hamburg. To cut costs, students borrowed a van to transport luggage from Hamburg airport and shared meals from the same plate – kenkey, shito and fried mang in HFBK's cafeteria. They built exhibition stands, unpacked and installed, repaired and painted the gallery spaces, opened their houses, laid beds between nightstands and sofas, making space for two where one is recommended, nursed one of us back to health after an asthma attack, borrowed a friend's van to pick up frames, screws and nails before rushing off to catch a flight, and hosted all participants for a three course lunch at the ASA studios. The canceled flights, the racked nerves, the tears, the worn bodies, the shared Brötchen, the night spent dancing into wee hours at Thai Oase karaoke bar on Reeperbahn, the morning trips to Berlin, the Flohmarkts and painful, late-night goodbyes.

As students are the ones who primarily and directly benefit from such exchanges, their feedback, contributions and criticism should have been received with consideration. That aside, it is this same exchange project that earned me the DAAD outstanding achievements prize for 2019,¹⁷ decided upon by the committee of professors and the student body representatives. The fact that the prize was awarded by a diverse selection team indicates recognition of the importance of the budding relationship of KNUST and HFBK, and the possibilities it held for the students in Hamburg and Kumasi.

[17] DAAD Prize for outstanding achievements of foreign students studying at German universities is a prize of €1,000 per university. Awarded by the president, it aims to "give faces to the many international students at German universities" who actively participate and enrich their homes to Germany with social and intercultural engagements. "The students who have received this prize via their respective host institutions stand for their fellow students from all around the world. They are Germany's future partners in economics, politics and science." "DAAD prize," DAAD, accessed April 4th, 2020, <https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/what-we-do/prizes-awards/daad-prize/>.

Spin-offs were generated by the Ghana project, including a performance by multi-disciplinary artist Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi hosted by hhintersection¹⁸ at Finkenau in HFBK. VaB is a director at perfo-craZe International Artist Residency [pIAR],¹⁹ a space which offered opportunities for HFBK students interested in performance, a semester before HFBK included a class unit in their timetable. Additionally, as a direct result of the Ghana Project two HFBK students received funding from the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen for a group exhibition including work from contacts made during the exchange at alpha nova and galerie futura in Berlin. If the university is too half-hearted to realize this, then it falls to the students as the first-hand beneficiaries of such experiences to stand up for them. So far, the responsibility of keeping these threads alive has rested solely on them.

EXCHANGES THAT SEEK INTERNATIONALITY

A German institution's desire to connect with places beyond Europe cannot be based on the leveraging and utilization of money as capital. The world's focus is shifting to places where money is not the sole motivator in bringing people together. With

[18] "hhintersection is an art mediation project and online platform focusing on topics of diversity and encouraging experimentation in the educational institution and beyond. The project began within HFBK Hamburg with a desire to draw the outside world into the institution and allow the work and actions within the university to make moves towards the exterior. The project focuses on promoting content representing femme and queer artists and producers aiming to make this material and information available to all." "About," hhintersection, accessed April 4th, 2020, <http://www.hhintersection.net>.

[19] Located in Kumasi, perfo-craZe International Artist Residency is "an interdisciplinary artists' program and a performance 'hatchery.'" Running each year from January to the end of August, it "serves as a laboratory and an interactive platform for artists, activists, researchers, curators and thinkers to develop and engage with one another in artistic research projects." With a focus on performativity as a way to merge contemporary art, culture and the people through collaborative practices, the studio is designed as a site and point of contact for promoting cultural exchange between international and local artists. The residency focuses on processes, collaborations and experiments rather than products. "pIAR perfo-craZe International Artist Residency," Crazinistartist, accessed April 0, 2020, <https://www.crazinistartist.com/piar-artist-in-residency/>.

[20] Koyo Kouoh, "Filling the Voids: The emergence of Independent Contemporary Art Spaces in Africa" in Condition Report: Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa, ed. Koyo Kouoh (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013), 15-18.

[21] From my personal experience, these include Nagenda International Academy of Art and Design, Uganda; Wits University, South Africa; and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

new centers being established in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, Europe badly needs to reinvent itself and look beyond its own development. The world's majorities are at the core still generative epistemologies established and sustained in collaboration with the multilingual, multi-communities and multi-cultures, and money is only involved as a factor at a later stage.

It is easy to take beautiful pictures and slap them on a website, a technique which is used by various institutions to prove they are representative of diverse racial populations and communities. This illustrates an understanding of the importance of inclusivity, without necessarily being reflective and pragmatic. It is crucial that depth is afforded by European institutions when attempting to practice integration through co-operations and exchanges, or else one risks treating such relationships as badges of honor, holding these interactions and exchanges as treasures to show off to their circles after a return from another trip! The encounter with KNUST College of Art and Built Environment was too close; it required negotiation of differing layers of value systems that are more likely than not to clash. African cultural and artistic economies are concentrated on investing in the immaterial to upset and shift the power imbalance in knowledge production.²⁰ Individuals and communities are the driving forces and creators of the content that dominate these conversations, spaces and collaborations.

A number of institutions in Africa ²¹ are occupied with the immaterial, the same immaterial which Europe claims to be interested in, while downplaying the value of these associations with so-called “developing” countries. Their engagement with cultural and artistic practices is not built on the idea of who has more material resources, but on other means of support and how this continually evolves. For if it were not for the violent and exploitative histories related to land and resource economies, the educated world knows that its motor boom, as well as the industrialization of big cities like Hamburg, would never have taken place.

Working collaboratively or in collectives relativizes every possibility of action. It introduces unplanned adaptation which threatens the meticulousness of exhaustive concrete pre-planning typical of German systems. This potential is very important in the creative world as it opens up space for the relentless, unfolding movement of ideas - the flip side then being the daunting effort of deciding which thoughts, actions and ideas are to be excluded. Given that the totality of the European world is constrained by its immobility and unawareness of that which is non-western, the thinking and reflection on a two-way intellectual exchange is still at the level of theoretical ideologies and politically correct intentions that are rarely put into practice in any real sense. The reality of Hamburg is based on modes of uncritical enthusiasm for excursions

close to myth or tragedy, always accompanied by an act of “grasping”. “Grasping” is a constriction; a motion to contain and hold, to bring back to oneself and own. This action is used for instance in HFBK’s attempt to single handedly define the conditions of this exchange.

HFBK’s desire to engage and further collaborate with African institutions is still shallow and, as proven by this incidence, often just a fever of discovery which turns to discomfort at the realization they will be forced to confront their own historical biases.

Six months was an insanely short turn-around given the lengthy processes of project funding. While I would initially have said it was commendable that HFBK recognized the importance of the project, it does seem in retrospect that they threw money at it without really considering what they were agreeing to - or the real nature of collaborations. Perhaps this rush meant the whole thing was easier to destroy? ²²

And, in the case that it was not throwing money at the project, ²³ what was it that HFBK was paying for and what did they imagine would happen after? What were the reasons for this over-enthusiasm to

[22] Emma Wilson, in conversation with the author, Dec 2020.

[23] According to the project’s financial report, it is estimated that HFBK supported the project with a total of 17,000 euros. Goethe Institute in Accra gave 3,080 Euros. An estimated total of 8,000 Euros for lodging was covered in kind by students hosting.

fund the project if it was easily dispensable?

CONCLUSION

It is far-fetched to imagine that German institutions, whose core design is to be exclusive, have even begun to reflect on themselves – to consider their function as museums of outdated approaches or to recognize the scaffolding within that supports and maintains the status-quo. Another condition of this historical predicament is the occupation of positions of power and leadership, positions which make the occupying individuals complicit if they act uncritically in such instances. These institutional structures are thereby further capacitated to perpetuate violence as they were initially designed to, in the subjugation or complete exclusion of certain bodies and races. The obliviousness to this historical legacy when actually engaging and encouraging intercultural connection makes that aim superficial and to me an orchestrated “forgetfulness”. To embody the power in institutional positions is to question, rather than to reinforce safe spaces for white institutions to “deal” with race and coloniality. White institutions see, speak to and critique, but completely block out being seen, spoken to or critiqued themselves.

These defensive attitudes do not confront the power, but rather shield these spaces from criticism

from its students and guest collaborators. Though building consciousness of such attitudes is a slow process, it cannot happen when those with the power within the relevant institutions make allegations that are indicative of or are regarded as personal attacks. This attitude is reactionary and egoistic, and contradicts productive intercultural engagements.

“To put an object on a pedestal, to light it and walk away is not helpful.” An observation made by Roy Sieber and directed towards *Africa: Art of the Continent*, an exhibition curated by Tom Phillips at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum in 1996 that presented 500 works of art from Africa minimalistically – i.e. chronologically and geographically – arranged.²⁴ In his comment, Sieber elucidates the problematic state of engagement where the African collaborator is seen as lucky to get a platform to showcase their artwork, forever indebted to their European host for creating space for their thoughts and allowing them to exist in a European environment. With such attitudes African artists and cultural producers are invited, expected to exist only in the manner anticipated by their host and to avoid playing a constructive part in the process by questioning the quality of the game. In this structure, the guest collaborator is afforded no permission for active participation unless directed by the host. These terms of engagement rob them of the opportunity to engage on equal terms. At the same time, they are required to navigate white fragility, repressing

[24] Christa Clarke and Henry Louis Gates, “African Art,” *Art Journal*, 56, no. 1 (1997): 82–87. Accessed 4th June 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/777790?seq=1>.

their criticisms lest they be immediately reduced by a racist lens that allows their host to assume the role of wounded victim. The guest collaborator brings knowledge, ideas and experience to an encounter, but the host would rather not deal with the bearers of these qualities, they would rather pretend that the bearers are not who they are. So, the host acts minimally, sweeps things under the carpet, and waits until there is another African accessory.

I consider saying that the Ghana project was treated as a dispensable ornament by HFBK, despite the reverse clearly being true according to the students' testimonies, to be putting it lightly. This low standard for collaboration is an unacceptable way of working with KNUST. Ultimately, the reasons I argue that HFBK ended the collaboration, based on a closed mindset and sense of superiority, immediately unsettle the ground on which such engagements are built and undo the very values so-called liberal European art schools profess to hold.

If placed in a cultural historical context as now, within a small radius such as that of a university to its students, the instinctive way to learn and be relevant is by opening up rather than closing down. One thing for sure is that Germany at large is in the early stages of opening up, and so are its institutions. It is clear – even the stones know of HFBK students' desire to engage – but the administration's inexperience at running and handling misunderstandings made the situation more complicated than it should

have been. This puts the institution in a disadvantaged position to build relationships and make future attempts for such cooperations. In light of this, having a student-run project like *hhinter* becomes even more problematic. It exists in a space that the university has provided to “allow” for decision-making by its students. Criticism has been compartmentalized, able to happen there while leaving out the other structures of the university – of the institution at large.

White people have the tendency to find a problem where there seems to be none. The continued conviction that Prof. Castro abused HFBK's hospitality after the hotel's admission that the extra charge was a mistake dumfounds me. The sheer absurdity of demanding the implicated person to reformat his response without HFBK taking responsibility for their own actions is hostile! Even still, these are not sound reasons to discontinue the exchange, or to end it in such a violent manner of silence. Having experienced the burden of coming into contact with difficult histories, coupled with learning to live and study in a new land, as we walk the great cathedrals of HFBK it is clear that the ways of interacting with people that look like me is not innocent – and neither is brushing their concerns under the carpet. Though HFBK's initial actions dangled carrots in front of us, in the light of an altercation they clearly illustrated that the power to bring such projects into and out of existence was wielded by one side.

In conclusion, I would like to posit that within the assumed walls of progressive institutions, it is naïve not to expect friction and constant negotiation. If not, it raises questions on; How much power do students have to actually choose and contribute to building networks beneficial for their own experience and growth? How much power lies with the few people that continue to reinforce stereotypes, which fortify and retain their power without deeper reflection for the fear that they might not be right – for fear that they might not be able to keep absolute control of programs or projects like the Ghana – Germany exchange? This was a collective project and had – or even still has – multiple stakeholders. The university does not own it. It is normal that some collaborations end up being ephemeral when intentions, goals and connections shift and move in separate directions, but this was not the case. The university, which was only to be a co-owner of a project entrusted to the students, used its transitory and temporary custodianship to suffocate a successful students' exchange program. In killing it, the university has the obligation of public accountability.

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