

# Rikki Wemega-Kwawu

## African Encounters

Contemporary modes of expression

### Artist Statement

I am, generally, a very eclectic painter, swinging easily between pictorial and abstract themes, without any qualms.

The essence of my abstractions or near-abstractions is to try to find a visual imagery to deal with mystical realities of the African spiritual world; the thoughts of my people: their philosophies, sensibilities and values, their mode of worship, that which they believe in and which guides their day to day living. This has led to bold experimentation with traditional Ghanaian geometric and color symbologies, the adaptation and transposition of ancestral mask shapes, sculptural images, Akan classical icons, ideographs, pictographs, petroglyphs and mythical creatures, the latter which are a constant feature in our proverbs, aphorisms and legends of the past. These inspirational sources form our cultural heritage and it is this heritage which influences our thoughts and spiritual existence. This spirituality, of course, is evident in many things we do.

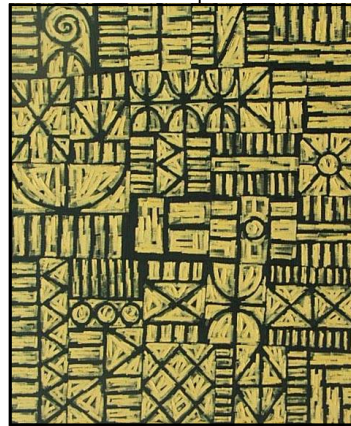
It is incumbent upon me, as a painter, to make known the thoughts of my people, to portray the lasting manifold spirit of Africa, show how it is experienced and felt in totality. My work, invariably, has something to say in search of modern visual expressions of religious meaning.

To capture the supernatural, the intangible, effectively, I work with cubistic fragmentations, multiple images, overlapping planes and transparent harmonies, thereby creating a complex ambiguous interwoven field of light and color. I sometimes glaze, but more often paint directly into the canvas, not suppressing the individual strokes, but allowing their natural texture to make a statement of their own, evoking the gauge marks, and, perhaps, the brute power and emotive rusticity of classical African scul-

ture. With richly keyed color, juxtaposed with closely related color values and luminous colorful grays, however, I am able to create an illusion of overlapping planes and transparencies, effecting a discrepancy between what actually is and what the viewer perceives. These optical mysteries cause a push - pull effect. As a result, pivotal perspective points seem to be in constant change. A dynamic, pulsating motion, co-existing with static stillness and calm. A stability in revolution.

The polyrhythm, repetition, improvisation and syncopation of African music and Dance, and African-American Jazz, with their correlation in West African hand-woven strip-cloth are all oblique influences in my work, hence the musical titles of many of my paintings.

As an African artist, I simply cannot escape my African cultural origins even if I wanted to. I, therefore, see my art as a part of my African past and a continuation of it into a contemporary universal idiom. My experimentations using tribal themes: Spiritual Abstractions,



Spatial Dialogue 46 x 38 inches

ing is hanging with its illumination and to elicit visual intimacy and emotional immediacy, thereby providing a kind of visual shamanic experience for the viewer.

My profuse usage of tribal symbols and designs deal not with just their symbolic meanings but also with relationships of shape to shape, shape to edge, figure to ground, surface to depth, and part to whole. In fact, I use them greatly also as a vehicle for the exploration of formal problems. Very often, too, the subject matter is merely a point of departure for discoveries about form, which I unite into

a rhythmic whole. I frequently make use of linear design as the underlying structure of my composition. The resulting complex network of integrated planes invariably imparts an inexplicable solidity to the picture structure, forging a sculptural unity. In all my works, however, emotional content is expressed, but always within the conventions of form. They will always challenge the viewer to extract psychological meaning from the formal and coloristic decorum.

All in all, what I am doing with my creative work, is coming up with a style of painting which maintains the particularity of the African cultural ethos, simultaneously aspiring to a universal significance; an art work which, authentically, is African in spirit for the African to easily relate to, at the same time would hold its own when displayed alongside masterpieces in Paris, New York, or elsewhere in any of the major art centers of the West. This art work, above all, should have the power to touch people on a variety of levels. Striving to reach such syncretism in my work is my humble goal as an artist.

Rikki Wemega-Kwawu

Born February 3, 1959, Sekondi, Ghana.



Liberation 54 1/4 x 75 inches

Afro-metaphysical Abstractions, or, call them whatever: afford me the opportunity to explore color performance: issues of flatness, textured surfaces, optical mysteries, transparencies, ambiguity, luminosity and dynamic forces: tensions between form and color, structure and imagery, subtle spatial and perspectival activity and implied movement. The primary role of color in my work is to suffuse the room where the paint-

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2004 - Transition – Brondsalen Gallery - FREDERIKSBERG, Denmark
- 2004 - Transition – Artists Alliance Gallery; ACCRA Ghana
- 2004 - “Kpehe” Art in Action 3 – Exhibition Hall – W.E.B. DuBois Memorial Centre – ACCRA Ghana
- 2004 - Is Justice seen to be Done? Ghana National Museum , ACCRA Ghana;
- 2002 - Ancestral Memory: Renewing Our Spiritual Connections. National Museum – ACCRA Ghana
- 2002 - The Color of Love is Blue - The Old Flora Theatre, THE HAGUE The Netherlands
- 2001 - Statue of Liberty, I'm Still Standing (Benefit Exhibition in Aid of September 11, 2001 U.S. Disaster Victims) – Art Gallery, National Theatre - ACCRA Ghana; Gallerie Marina – LOME Togo
- 2001 - Akwaaba - International Exhibition of Sacred Art – The Theological Institute, Basilica Del Santo – PADUA Italy. Travels to ASOLO (Veneto Region) and LUCCA (Tuscani Region) in 2002
- 2001 - Skowhegan Alumni Exhibition and Auction – KnoedlerGallery – NEW YORK, NY, U.S.A.
- 2001 - Frontier Art: Contemporary Art from Ghana – Galerie Xenios FRANKFURT AM MAIN Germany
- 1999 - Frontier Art: Expositie Kuana – Circle 1 Galerie - ALMERE HAVEN The Netherlands
- 1999 - Zeitgen~~Ö~~**Össische Kunst aus** Ghana – Galerie Xenios – FRANKFURT AM MAIN Germany
- 1998 - Bank Holiday – 33 Water Street (former Key Bank Building) SKOWHEGAN, ME, U.S.A.
- 1998 - Contemporary Ghanaian Painting - African Art Festival - DELFT The Netherlands
- 1998 - Contemporary Painting from Ghana – Maison Descartes – AMSTERDAM The Netherlands
- 1997 - PANAFEST '97 – Pan African Visual Arts Exhibition- Center for National Culture – CAPE COAST Ghana
- 1995 - Absolute Ghana – Accra Contemporary Art Gallery - ACCRA Ghana
- 1994 - PANAFEST '94 – International Visual Art Exhibition – International Trade Fair Center – ACCRA Ghana
- 1993 - Ghana Association of Visual Artists (GAVA) – Takoradi Chamber of Commerce - TAKORADI Ghana
- 1992 - Nestle Art Exhibition – Ghana National Museum – ACCRA Ghana
- 1990 - PAFAM '90 – The first Pan-African Fair for Arts and Music – ACCRA Ghana (Two-man exhibition: Yenok –International Trade Fair Center



Ashanti Saga 84 x 60 inches



Sunsum 38 x 61