Joan Kjaer: Hello and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. I'm Joan Kjaer and we're coming to you from Merge in Iowa City. Our topic tonight is art and the afterlife. The University of Iowa Museum of Art and our School of Art and Art History have been engaged in a rich collaboration this fall on a semester long project during which African artist Eric Adjetey Anang has been on campus, creating original sculptures that will remain in the UI collection and teaching UI sculpture students about his techniques and aesthetic philosophies.

We're happy to be joined in this segment by two members of the faculty of the School of Art and Art History, Christopher Roy and Isabel Barbuzza. Thank you for being here. Chris, I think I'll start with you. You're a professor and the Elizabeth M. Stanley faculty fellow of African art history. You have the closest longtime acquaintance with the extensive African art collection here at the University of Iowa, so obviously while we're centering our conversation on this lovely work by Eric and some other contemporary art, I'd like to take a step back and ask you to give us a little bit of understanding about the Stanley collection itself and why it's important to the University of Iowa.

Christopher Roy: Good. I came here in 1978 because Max and Betty Stanley had promised their African art collection to the university, and Sandy Boyd, the president at the time, called the chair of the department, Thomasini, and asked if that would be helpful and Thomasini said it will be totally worthless unless we hire someone to teach African art, and so I came here and have been here now for 40 years and I love it because we have the best collection of African art of any college in America, right up with UCLA and Indiana.

UCLA and Indiana have very good collections and so do we. Other colleges not so much. I'm glad you asked the question now because, of course, Dick and Mary Jo Stanley gave $10 million to go towards the construction of the new art museum which will be called the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and I'm very happy and proud of that. I'm also happy and proud that in the first 10 years of my career here, I worked hand-in-hand with the Stanleys picking out pieces that they were to buy that have come to the museum since.

All of those objects that Cory showed are objects that the Stanleys acquired in the years after 1978. We here at Iowa should be very proud of that collection. Of course the collection being here means that interest by students is enormous here. Our classes are astronomically big and that is important in a state like Iowa. When I came, Iowa was a very white state and happily it is getting much more interesting, ethnically much more diverse, so the interest is increasing as time goes by.

Joan Kjaer: The African art collection that you and the Stanleys worked to amass, it was basically 19th century pieces or early 20th century? Were you looking just for interesting pieces that would make for a great collection or were you looking to hit on certain themes, certain kinds of pieces?

Christopher Roy: Mostly it was looking for good pieces that would make a good collection. Almost everything you see anywhere in the world about Africa with very few exceptions is either 19th or 20th century. I daresay probably the majority of pieces in the art collection here are early 20th century but there are some that are late 19th. You don't get much older than that simply because of the character, the climate in Africa, and the kinds of materials that the objects are made of.

There are important exceptions though. The [inaudible 00:03:58] bronzes date back to the 13th century and there are a lot of other objects and durable materials in our collection, the Benin bronzes that date back at least to the middle of the 19th century and perhaps earlier than that. Generally speaking, African art in collections outside Africa don't have quite the age that art from other cultures does.

Joan Kjaer: This major project that Cory, you and others have been working on is called Art and the Afterlife. Of course you spent most of your life thinking about-

Christopher Roy: In the afterlife.

Joan Kjaer: … Africa and the afterlife, doing a lot of work and research in Africa. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about general conceptions of the afterlife among the societies you studied.

Christopher Roy: I'd love to. It's important for people to understand that there's a big difference between burials and funerals, funerals and memorial services, in almost all of Africa with the exception of Ghana and a couple of other countries. When a person dies, they have to be buried immediately otherwise things get extremely nasty. If you're in rural villages where I worked in Burkina Faso or countries like Mali or Northern Nigeria, the burial is almost instant, certainly before three days have passed and then they hold a funeral and that can be anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months or even sometimes, in rare cases, a couple of years after the person died, which makes it much more like a memorial service than it is like the funerals that we have in our own culture.

When the person is buried, art objects come out to assure the ancestors that the person who's passed away was a respected member of the community. But then a memorial service is held, where people drink a lot, eat a lot, have a lot of fun, dance a lot, offer prayers to the spirits of the ancestors to ask them to watch over the community and the family. Those are scheduled when people have enough food and drink to celebrate properly.

There was a huge drought in West Africa in 1971-76 and lots and lots of funerals were postponed because they didn't have the resources to celebrate properly. Nora and I were in the Peace Corps from '70 to '72 and then in '76 we returned. That was the first good crop they had so there were hundreds of funerals all over Burkina Faso that year. I think I must have gone 30 or 40 funerals in villages

within a 20 kilometer radius of the town where we lived just in that winter from '76 to '77.

Joan Kjaer: You wanted to show us a few images, I think.

Christopher Roy: Why not. I just spent 16 weeks explaining Art and the Afterlife to 250 undergraduates so I'll do it for this group in 10 minutes.

Joan Kjaer: Sounds good.

Christopher Roy: This is the kind of funeral, in fact, that is a funeral that I attended and here you can see the masks. You see there are two masks right in the middle with the baobab tree in the background. They're making a circle of the dead man's house. They go around three times because three is the sacred number for men and if it had been a woman, they'd go around four times. This is to free the spirit of the deceased person to leave the community of the living and start its long journey to the land of the ancestors.

These are mostly people in Burkina Faso and they have a very clearly defined idea or understanding of where the land of the ancestors is. It's in a cavern of a village called Pilimpikou which means butterflies which is about halfway between that village and the capital city, Ouagadougou. If you go on the market day, where the ancestor spirits are holding market day, you can listen at the entrance to the cave and hear the drums and the cavalries as the ancestors celebrate market day drinking a lot of [inaudible 00:08:07] beer.

This was a photo … The history of interest and study of art in Burkina Faso goes way back. This is a photo taken by the great German explorer, Leo Frobenius, in 1907, so you're seeing the very same kinds of masks you saw. On this slide in 1977, you see in this mask, it's actually … Yes, in 1907 and here in the same village you see two masks performing in front of the house of a dead man. One of the key moments in the funeral is when if it's a man all of his male friends break all of his weapons and bows and arrows and spears and shotguns over the threshold of his door, and destroy them all which breaks the tie between the spirit of the dead and the world of the living so he can begin his journey to the cave, to the land of ancestors.

If a woman has died, they break all of her cooking pots and cooking utensils not because they didn't like her but because that frees the spirit to begin that long journey. In Ghana, in Kumasi, [inaudible 00:09:17] make beautiful coffins like this but other people in Ghana celebrate in other ways. Pretty much everybody in the Akan world uses stools like the one you see here, men and women alike.

The stools are very personal. They belong to just one individual and that individual uses them all of his or her life. When that person dies, the stool is blackened. If that person has been successful, has achieved important things, has contributed to the life of the family and the prosperity of the family, they

blacken the stool with a black pigment mixed with palm oil and place it on a shrine where offerings and prayers can be offered through the stool, to the spirit of the dead person, to maintain the line of communication to the dead person.

This stool is in the national museum of African art in Washington, DC. This is Sir Osei Agyeman Prempeh II who was the Asantehene in Ghana when I was in graduate school. He died in 1971 and his funeral was celebrated. You see him seated on his [inaudible 00:10:24] chair, his throne wearing kente cloth. When he died, his stool was paraded through the community, still in the white condition that it had been in when he was still alive, but it was then taken to the ancestral shrine and blackened and tipped over on its side in the shrine just as you see here.

These are the stools that belong to all of the Asantehene, all of the kings of the Asante going back to at least the beginning of the 18th century probably before that. Each of those stools is a direct line to the spirit of the deceased king and each of the stools has an attendant who is responsible for its upkeep, who stands behind him-- and a bowl, jar, or a mug in front in which the Asante and other Akan people, bless their souls, like to pour out large quantities of Dutch gin or snaps called Jenever which is not only found delicious by the ancestors but delicious by the living as well, so that's poured.

However, a tradition that I find particularly fascinating and my students love and which I think we should establish or revive here in the state of Iowa is the use of figures like this by the Wende people who lived at the mount of the Congo river who make these beautiful coffins. That's a coffin right there, made of cloth. What happens when an important man dies--they gather all of his wives together and the wives are seated around the walls of a small building made of thatch and they bring the dead man's body in and put it over a low fire and they smoke it for days, and days, and days until it's very nice and dry just like really good beef jerky.

As the bodily fats drip out of it into the fire, great clouds of smoke below up and the wives pass out, they faint from lack of oxygen and the heat and the stress. People, their sons-in-law and sons and daughters drag them out of the hut and pour a bucket of cold water over their face to revive them and drag them back into the hut so that they can finish up the desiccation of the dead person's body.

Then all of the guests at the funeral come and wrap the body in yards, and yards, and yards, and yards, and miles, and miles, and miles of red cloth until the dried out beef jerky body is wrapped up in a coffin that looks just like the dead man. The head is a portrait of the dead man. An artist is commissioned to fashion the head with all of the indications of status and prestige and all of the marks including on the stomach, you see these white chalk marks which in the Caribbean world and southern of the United States are called [inaudible 00:13:16].

These are symbols in the religious beliefs of the people of the kingdom of the Congo and represent all sorts of ideas about death and the afterlife and the fact that when people die, their spirits go below the surface of the lakes and ponds and rivers which are reflective and so they are represented by mirrors. Here, you see one of these enormous coffins that weighs 4, 500 pounds. Here is a smaller one with just some long bones and a skull inside. This is my next goal, actually.

There are a lot of things the Stanleys would not purchase because I made the mistake of telling them what was inside. My goal now is to raise the money, to acquire one of these objects for our collection here at the University of Iowa. This is a large one. This one is 10 feet tall and weighs 400 pounds. Most of these are in museum collections in Sweden because, during the middle 19th to middle 20th century, all the missionaries in the area were Swedish. This is in a collection in Stockholm and here you see one of these great coffins being dragged through the street on its way to the graveyard where it will be buried just like this fish, buried standing upright with its head just below the surface of the ground. I think we should do that here at Iowa.

Joan Kjaer: I think that's a great idea.

Christopher Roy: Can you imagine the students going up to the Pentacrest to attend Professor Roy's funeral up there and there's this huge massive red clay? I mean red cloth, rather. I think that would be a stitch, or Jay Semel.

Joan Kjaer: Thank you. We're going to switch to Isabel Barbuzza who's a professor of sculpture at the University of Iowa and who has been involved in this project working with Eric and with Chris and with Cory throughout this semester. She also has a few pictures of the work that her students were doing this semester. Tell us how this all went.

Isabel Barbuzza: It was an incredible experience and a pleasure to work with Eric. I think when he was talking about how he works and all that, he said he brought the wood and hand tools. He summarizes it all. I mean I think it's interesting that we're here at Merge where technology really drives the future and the present in a way. The way we approach working with Eric, he's wonderful … through stories, he introduces us to the whole idea of death and the coffins and so forth.

Something that he said--and I mention this because it was part of one of my students' work--that for him it's as important to make the coffin and so forth but also the stories from the families and this idea of having a whole … Talking to people and talking to the family of the deceased and so forth. We were very interested in that. The assignment was basically to think about transitions, to think about death perhaps everywhere, but this idea of what is a coffin, this idea of what's a vessel, what's carried inside the coffin, because we see the fish… but the inside, Eric has sewn the inside using a beautiful fabric.

We were able to see the entire process in terms of designing what kind of fabric or what's he going to use. It was really an amazing experience. We have here the image. He basically … I think it's very, very important and what a wonderful moment for our students to see what you can accomplish with hand tools and with really thinking about … We have been talking about this alone with the three dimensional intelligence, rather than relying on an AutoCAD or file, it's like you imagine in space what a piece is going to look like.

I think Eric, it's amazing that I don't know if I have very much. That is probably … I think that was our first meeting with Eric at the museum. We went to see what he was working on and so the class is there. We were observing--that's Jennifer's piece. Jennifer is here, one of the students. Jennifer is a grad student in the painting program but taking sculpture because we offer students the opportunity to explore other areas aside from their major area.

She wanted to make a boat and before coming to the idea of making a boat, she was already making pieces made out of nylon dipped in wax and they had an incredible texture and she wanted to cover the interior of her vessel with those forms so that's why I'm mentioning the interior of the coffins because the interior is as important as the exterior.

Let's see, here, we go, and this is a perfect example of how to calculate that point. It was purely by just cutting the wood in space and putting it together using hand tools so it was an amazing … See, here we go. This is in our shop at the School of Art and Art History. We met several times with Eric and I think what we take away from that experience is not only the techniques that we learned but the conversations, his take on being an artist and what does it mean to be an artist in the world, the path you want to take in terms of art, the importance of having a global vision in art, in making.

Here we are putting the pieces together and Jennifer didn't have experience in working sculpture but she completely embraced the making of the boat. That's finished and that's the bottom of the piece and remember she wanted to make a boat and so the idea of that because it was a site specific piece, so meaning that she was responding to the site where this piece was going to be and, if you know the School of Art and Art History, we have a pond.

The idea was to have this piece float in the water. What's inside, I put a picture … What's inside … It's covered by mesh. Inside, she put the pieces that she was working previously. This [inaudible 00:20:32] texture pieces of the fabric dipped in wax, adding different shapes. Then we went to the pond and it floated. It was a beautiful afternoon for all of us because what happens is, you stop thinking about the pieces of art and it's more about the experience that we were all having during that time, the boat going and the light.

It was at 1:30 so the lighting was perfect. Anyway, that was a wonderful successful piece. It's posted on Facebook and Instagram and the School of Art and Art History. I think I just posted some images in rural canvas. Anyway, it's

not only … I mean the class was not about making a coffin, it was learning from Eric. I was learning a lot about what a coffin is, what does it mean. All the amazing work that goes into making something like that because whenever there's wood and so we were saying, "How do you get that very soft surface?" Because we saw the ribs, we saw how it was worked and then the painting, and then the inside, the interior.

I don't have the images here but I have other students who approached the work in the death of the prairie in terms of Iowa being one of … They say that it's more turnaround. Then I had a student who worked with doors, real doors that she bought and she put all the doors, freestanding, on the little amphitheater by the IMU so that's another site specific. She was thinking in terms of passage going from one side to the other. It was a very lovely piece too. Anyway, it was … I mean what we take out of our experience with Eric, it's everything but I mean this idea that you can do things with hand tools.

Joan Kjaer: That's so amazing to me. When you look at this piece we have here in the room and it's so soft and so smooth, you might imagine that it has a plaster covering or something underneath but this is all just the wood that you were working with? Yeah, incredible. Your students were happy with this experience and what-

Isabel Barbuzza: I think so.

Joan Kjaer: … came out of it.

Isabel Barbuzza: Yeah. Jen did the boat.

Joan Kjaer: Congratulations on the boat. It's beautiful.

Isabel Barbuzza: Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Wonderful. I guess I'll just thank you both for being here. This was really, really interesting and I'm so pleased you could share some of the pieces, Chris.

Christopher Roy: Thank you, Joan, and thanks to International Programs, and to Cory, and the museum, and everybody else involved for giving us this chance.

Joan Kjaer: You're welcome. I should actually mention that International Programs helped sponsor Eric's visit here with a Major Project award because it was such a persuasive application. How could we refuse? Now, to have you all here today is really great.

Christopher Roy: The Stanley family has been providing huge amounts of money every year for the last 40 years to study Africa.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Christopher Roy and Isabel Barbuzza, thank you so much. I appreciate you being here and everyone else please stay with us. In this next segment, we'll hear from Silvia Forni and once again from Eric Adjetey Anang. Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: Hello, I'm Joan Kjaer and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. This is part three of our program on Art and the Afterlife, and in this segment, we're joined by artist Eric Adjetey Anang and by the curator of African Arts and Cultures of the Royal Ontario Museum, Sylvia Forni. Thank you both for being with us.

Eric Adjetey Anang: Thank you.

Silvia Forni: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: I would like to have both of you converse a little bit about authorship and cultural authenticity.

Sylvia, as we know, Eric's fame is well-established, not just as a coffin maker but also of ... I don't mean that, not "just as", no, I mean, not-

Eric Adjetey Anang: That's fine.

Joan Kjaer: ... ONLY as a coffin maker of the first order, but also as an independent artist whose work is shown in galleries and is pursued by private collectors. Is the cultural authenticity of an object like this coffin, the one we have in our room, altered in any way when it's presented in a purely artistic context, as opposed to a funeral ceremony where mourners see the work as layered with personal meanings?

Silvia Forni: Well, that's an interesting question. I think what's interesting is why are we asking these questions. It really seems like many times, when we talk about African art, we continue to carry with us a whole load of categories that were really created by the market and by scholars in the West, that often have nothing to do with the process of making, and what African art was, and has been, for centuries. So, it is always interesting that this idea of authenticity comes across or has been a very defining element of African art.

I find that Eric's work and Eric's life somehow voids this category of its meaning and shows how fictitious sometimes it is to impose these categories on the arts of others. I actually was thinking about this when I saw a segment of a documentary that is being shot here at the University of Iowa in which Eric says, "I do not want to limit myself to only being a coffin maker or a carpenter. I'm moving the story."

So, Eric, I would like to start talking to you a little bit about, really, your practice, and how you define yourself, and what inspired you to experiment in different ways while drawing on this art form, and skill and ability that you learned growing up in your family, and how your recent practice ... Eric and I met the first time in 2009, so I've somehow been following Eric's artistic trajectory from a time in which most of your activity was in the workshop in Teshie to the time in which more and more you've become an international artist. So, what

inspired you to take on this trajectory and what were you thinking? How did this come about?

Eric Adjetey Anang: I took over this shop in 2005. I started working with my dad and, of course, before then, I don't know if any of the coffin makers had ever been out of Ghana to talk about the artwork. But what I know was, I knew my grandfather was invited, let's say, like in the '90s, and he refused the offer. He has his own reason for refusing the offer. So, what actually happens is when these coffins go abroad, there is nobody to tell the stories of the coffins. They end up in the museum with a big Ghana coffin with no proper artist name.

There was an artist by the name Nam June Paik who actually used my grandfather's piece, an airplane coffin, as part of his artwork. After the show, he named the piece, instead of giving credit to the coffin maker or the artist who made the coffin, he said "Ghana coffin" and I was actually not happy about that. So, one of my goals was to make a follow-up anywhere my coffins go, and then also to trace where my grandfather's coffins are, and bring the story to the people, and then meet the people directly. In the course of doing that, once you are here, you need to be doing something. You don't have to see and wait. And already, back home, people were commissioning coffins, bringing them here not for burials but for galleries and museums. So once I'm here, I have to find a way. Basically, I would say back home, I was already considered as an artist, but locally, people would call me a carpenter or a coffin maker.

So, once I get here, and then also, like I said, I love working with students. It is through the students, I sort of learned a lot of stories. That was how I started to put, like bring out the story of this bumblebee, the fish, and then the firefly, and the gun. So, that was how I sort of grew up, like going into all these colleges, and then meeting with the students, and then working with them, and then at the same time, also learning from them too.

Silvia Forni: What I find interesting also, the way you work. Earlier when Joan was asking about your life, you said, "I live part in the United States, part in Ghana."

Eric Adjetey Anang: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Silvia Forni: You're still very much ... Despite the fact that you're here on a residency, you just opened your first solo show in the United States. So, clearly, being projected towards a career as a contemporary African artist, as Cory was highlighting earlier, you're still very much connected to your workshop and to the activity of a coffin maker. Why is this important for you? Why keeping, if you want this two type of activities across seven hours' time zone difference, and somehow different settings, going at the same time?

Eric Adjetey Anang: These coffins are so important to my people and the Kane Kwei name is already there. So, if people actually want a coffin, they would still go to the shop and making it easy for the people in Kumasi, that was why I did move my shop. Then

also, getting to this platform, I sort of have the possibility of putting a huge respect to my profession being a coffin maker back home.

I remember, growing up, I went to an orphanage, and the reason I went there was most of the kids in the orphanage, all the time, expect to be given something like in monetary terms or in clothing or food. I went there to share with them my art. "Let us build something. Let us work with wood," but my offer was rejected because they thought, I was a coffin maker and the children are not supposed to be working around coffins or something. So, I have to come back, work on myself, build myself up. They would still call me a coffin maker back home, but at the same time, they would see the reputation I've built for myself. And that would permit me to get into the lives of these children and let them understand what they can do with their hands. So, I really have a very huge connection back home and I only don't want to limit myself to only building the coffins, but also, being in the classroom to share with the kids.

I know you've been to Ghana a number of times and you've seen how furniture has disappeared. Nobody is buying locally-made wood stuffs. Getting wood also is not easy, but I think there is something that stays, and that is building the coffins. So, we have to make it stay. If I live here full time, I know some people are doing that already, but I still have to be there to help them make it.

Silvia Forni: That's great. What changes for you in your creative practice, in the way you approach the making of a piece? When you're doing it locally, for a family, that is there to commission a coffin, or when you're doing it, let's say, in Iowa, in the wood shop of the museum?

Eric Adjetey Anang: In both ways, I try as much as possible to make the decision on what I build. If you give the family the chance, they would stick to whatever that has been made all the time. Let's say like a coco farmer passes away, and the family comes, they would still want a coco plant for the deceased person, but being an artist, I have to stand firmly and let them understand, "We could do something and not only limit ourself to building the coco." So, in this case, I could build one of the tools, which has never been done before for the coco farmer. There was this woman who travels all the way to Burkina to bring tomatoes, and she passes away. We've made like 10 or 20 tomatoes, I mean coffin shaped ... They came in and I said to them, "I want a photo of the box filled with tomatoes," and through that, I've built something through the picture they sent to me. That was unique. And now, a lot of people are doing the same thing.

When I meet people like Cory also, I still try to make the decision, but also I hear from them what they have in mind before taking decision. So, in both ways, I try to make my voice heard louder.

Silvia Forni: A flip side of this, I know, I've seen you work in Ghana, and you work in a workshop. So, the making of a piece is yes, part you're the master of the workshop, so you're definitely leading, but often time, I remember you guys gathering and trying to find a solution, like the first tomato you built.

How do you a build a coffin in the shape of a tomato is not necessarily, it's not obvious. It takes a lot of thinking, and also part of what Isabel was highlighting, thinking three-dimensionally, and doing it without sketching, or maybe sketching but without the technological tools that people would use in the west. So, there is a very collaborative aspect of the making that it's not necessarily present in your activity as a solo artist. How does the shape transform the way you go about making things? Which way is most satisfying for you and why?

Eric Adjetey Anang: Again, that's what takes much more time when I'm working here. I work alone here, so I have to do all the physical jobs, and then at the same time, I have to do the whole thinking also on how to build. Back home, if we don't understand something, at least one of the apprentices could show up and bring an idea, and we could figure out how that works. So, we could work within a week to build this all, like a couple of days to build this. But once I'm here, I work alone, so I wouldn't say a week, but I would say like three weeks or a month.

Silvia Forni: It's just the time issue.

Eric Adjetey Anang: Yes, yes. And sometimes, my dad is still around, and that's one thing that helps a lot. I speak on phone with him and kind of ask for advice and stuff.

Silvia Forni: That's good. Another question that is a bit connected also to the title of this series and to the interest of what a colleague of ours and friend of ours, Roberta Bonetti, has also been working on, in looking at your practice and your career, which is the role of social media and the internet in projecting your career on an international level. Can you talk a little bit about how and why you introduced your Facebook page, you got a Wikipedia page, and how this transformed the way your career has evolved?

Eric Adjetey Anang: The first time I was introduced to the internet was in 1998 by a friend. In the year 2000, I went to the internet café, trying to learn something. I went on Yahoo and then I typed my name, like "Eric Adjetey Anang". There was like a topic that showed up about somebody I met in the shop and I told him the story of how the coffins was started and stuff. I was so happy. I was awake and I said, "Wow. So I can go really far."

I joined the shop fully time from I would say 2002 while I was in my senior high school, working with them sort of part-time, full-time. In 2005, I took over the shop, after my senior high school. I was working with my dad and I still don't have any connection with the internet but I knew something was there. I kept on speaking with friends who showed up in the shop, and then whenever I told them story, I also tell them about the internet and stuff. Until in 2008, a friend, [Jam Sharuse 00:15:36] offered to help me build a website. He sort of interviewed all the guys in the shop, and he put everything to pen and book. Upon building the website, we realized, a friend also suggested the Wikipedia. Now, we have the Wikipedia in English, and then we have the website. Any friend who shows up in the shop after speaking with them, especially when they

are journalist, I speak with them, and they would translate my Wikipedia in various languages.

All of a sudden, everything started to grow. I got an invite for the first time in 2009. I did this commercial for Coca Cola in Spain. This was shown in 2009 on Spanish TV for a whole year. That allowed them to give me a visa to travel to Europe, to make a follow-up to my coffins. Yeah, because anytime I apply, I am qualified to escape, not go and do the writing and escape and stay there. That was the idea. Anytime I applied, they refused. But through the commercial, they gave me the three months visa. So, I went to Spain, Italy, Belgium, Holland, just making a follow-up on the coffins. I came back home.

Right after I coming back, I got another invite to a festival in Senegal. I went to Senegal also for two weeks and then back. And then I got a very strange email, and the guy said, "Hey, Eric. We want all your coffins." I'm like, "I don't have all the coffins. Tell me what you want." They said, "We want five coffins." I said, "Okay, tell me the designs and we could figure something out." He said they were from Russia. I said ... My friend helped me and we realized it's not easy to take exotic wood to Russia, so we suggested to them, "Oh maybe I could come to Russia," not thinking of you know, Russia. They said, "Hey, you can come. We want you here." Then I have to make a research, what's going on, and actually it was a crematorium so they wanted me to stay for six weeks to build coffins in a crematorium and speak with people. I was there, it was a good time. It was a cold, good time.

So, I made all these connections through this Wikipedia. That was the same way, I think Cory also found me.

Speaker 4: I found you in the Facebook page.

Eric Adjetey Anang: Yeah.

Silvia Forni: There you go. It's really interesting to see how these things really shape and transform, and really do have potential to also move beyond what you were saying earlier, the idea of a Ghana coffin or a Ga coffin, to a Kane Kwei coffin, or an Eric Adjetey Anang coffin. So, really creating this idea of authorship and ownership.

Maybe the last topic I wanna touch upon is something that, we started discussing in the gallery, when I saw the exhibition in October. I was looking at the Mami Wata "coffin" but I would also say the Mami Wata sculpture. I was thinking, as you evolve and continue to grow your practice internationally, also many of the slides that Cory was showing before, like the fish, or the bee, or increasingly your creativity and ideas are moving beyond the functionality of the coffin itself. Yet, you continue to call your work "coffin". Why is that? And why is this connection important? What is the meaning for you of continuing to call these works, these artworks "coffins"?

Eric Adjetey Anang: Most of what I still talk about is still related to death, that's what I would say. Something like the gun talks about death. Something like the fish, it's still about death, how we ... Though it's talking about waste, but it's also about death. The bumblebee and the firefly, the disappearance, so it's still related to death. I would say that's why I'm still stuck to that. But with the Mami Wata, it wasn't a piece that I actually chose myself. We actually talked about that. It was commissioned by the Education Department. We have two options: either we build a dragon or we build a Mami Wata. So, we finally arrived at building the Mami Wata, and he saw my work before making a decision on requesting for one. If I should build something without opening, it doesn't look like my work, I would say. Yeah, it's gonna be like a totally different thing to him and I don't wanna surprise him. Maybe I should have asked him in the beginning before deciding to open that or not but it wasn't-

Silvia Forni: But you could conceive a building, a sculpture without a door in certain cases, maybe?

Eric Adjetey Anang: Maybe someday.

Silvia Forni: Maybe someday, okay.

Joan Kjaer: Eric, I'd like to ask you….I read an interview that you had done at Wisconsin, at Madison. Among the topics for your work was Black Lives Matter. You said that you might like to create a piece that would refer to this movement. Tell us about your interest in that.

Eric Adjetey Anang: The piece was the one I built, the gun-

Joan Kjaer: The gun.

Eric Adjetey Anang: ... that I built. So, we had a couple of the Black Lives Matters there, and then we had a ceremony, and then we broke the gun into two. Now, we're planning on going on a parade because Tony Robinson, he's been ... They go on a parade every year for this little guy who was shot on Williamson Street. So, I'm still in touch with them and we're figuring out how we could parade on the streets with the gun.

Joan Kjaer: Do you intend to stay at Madison for some period of time? Is this going to be a second permanent home for you?

Eric Adjetey Anang: I would say it's like a second home. Maybe a first home or second home, yeah.

Joan Kjaer: You're used to the winter?

Eric Adjetey Anang: Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Sylvia, tell us a little bit about your work with the museum in Ontario.

Silvia Forni: Well, I have a similar job to Cory's, but I work in a much bigger, larger institution because it's a big encyclopedic museum. I guess, really, the reason why I met Eric in 2009, which was at the beginning of my tenure there, was to introduce in the collection, really problematize the sense of African art as a "primitive thing", or complicate the idea of African art by really showing contemporary practices that are both artistic and culturally meaningful, and that was the first.

I don't have in the collection in Toronto pieces comparable to the Mami Wata, or the bee, or works that really go more in the direction of creative sculptural work, but what I commissioned then was a fish because I asked Eric, "What is the coffin that people buy the most now?" And it was a fish, and he was making four fish at the same time. The other piece that I commissioned, by another famous workshop, the Paa Joe Workshop, was a Mercedes Benz, somehow as a reference and a quote of the Magiciens de la Terre exhibition, in which Kane Kwei had a white Mercedes Benz, and then Paa Joe who went on to exhibit also in Africa Remix, that was done the year later in New York. There was a Mercedes Benz. So, it's kind of an iconic piece in African art, contemporary African art history. I'm very interested in these intersections and complications, yeah.

Joan Kjaer: We have had a few occasions to hear the name of your grandfather. Maybe you can tell us of who Kane Kwei was.

Eric Adjetey Anang: Yeah. Kane Kwei was born in 1922, passed away in ... He became baptized in 1990 and passed away in 1992. He was succeeded by two of his children, that's Cedi, my dad, and Sowah, Benjamin Sowah, who also passed away in the year 2000. So, it was actually left with only my dad in his shop, and I sort of joined him in his shop to work.

Joan Kjaer: It means a lot to continue the tradition of your grandfather.

Eric Adjetey Anang: Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Well, it's a huge pleasure for us to have had you here tonight, you two. Sylvia Forni, Eric Adjetey Anang, thank you very, very much.

Eric Adjetey Anang: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: I thank all of you who joined us here in the audience and everyone listening.

All WorldCanvass programs are available on iTunes, the Public Radio Exchange, and the International Programs website. Our next world canvass is February 22nd, here in this room, again at 5:30. That program will be a preview of a series of events that will be happening in early March, the Provost’s Global Forum on the topic "Against Amnesia: Archives, Evidence, and Social Justice". It will be a very interesting program.

I’m Joan Kjaer. Thank you very much for being here and good night!