



Each September, as my body tries to re-adjust to being back in the States, my mind wanders back to the summer in Ghana. It's impossible to focus on just one person or program or event. In retrospect they all seem wonderful, overlapping and important to our mission of bringing people from different cultures together to interact and learn from each other. It's always reaffirming to see familiar faces like Laurel, who is in charge of our mosaic project, and Steve, who uses Aba House as a home base every August as he researches kente. (PHOTO RIGHT)

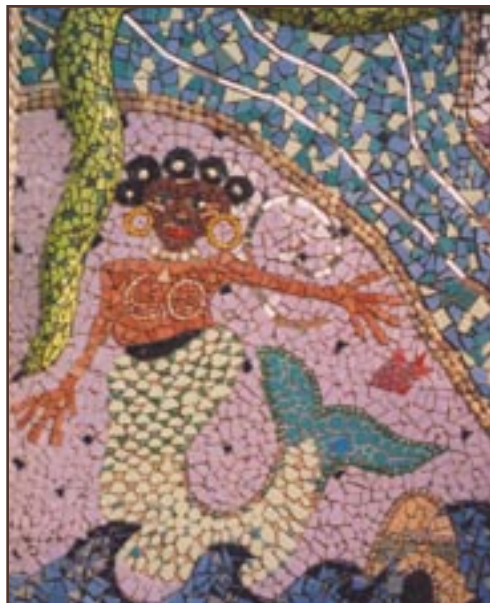
Wendy Kinal and Alli Ross of The Grace Project (Girls Raising Awareness Artistically as Community Educators) spent two glorious weeks working with Ghanaian teenage girls teaching them self esteem and empowerment through theater, dance and song. A final performance attracted a large audience with many proud parents in attendance.

Our textile workshop, two weeks of lectures, demonstrations and hands-on workshops about African textile techniques, was so successful this summer that we're going to repeat it in January and July of 2005!

Our summer participants have many reasons for coming to Ghana. There are always teachers in the group, usually working on curriculum development for their unit on Ghana. We are so happy to see more and more classes learning about Africa. One American parent said that her children learned about Ghana before they learned about the United States. Teachers visiting ABA HOUSE also have opportunities to visit classrooms, setup student exchange programs and meet with directors in the Ministry of Education.



This is Mami Wata (BELOW, A DETAIL OF THE MOSAIC AT ABA HOUSE), a water spirit and very close to us at Aba House. According to local beliefs, she appears in dreams and visions as a mermaid and her colors are red and white. Some people believe that she bestows blessings and others see her as a source of temptation and illness. It is thought that she gives wealth to her followers. Although she lives in the ocean, it is said that her daughters wander the earth as fair skinned, dark haired beautiful women.



Cross-Cultural Collaborative

Adinkra is a fascinating indigenous craft in Ghana. Much has been written about its symbolism and if you type "Adinkra" into a search engine more than 15,000 sites will be listed. As part of our textile workshop this summer, we had an Adinkra class. On the first day we learned how to carve the stamp from a piece of calabash and on the second day we stamped our cloth. David and his cousin Paul were our teachers. When it was my turn to stamp, David said, "Either you stamp or you talk." A good piece of advice as it's not so easy to avoid splotches.

Sadly, hand-stamped adinkra is going to be a lost art. Now the symbols are being silk screened using commercial dyes. The "real" dye is made from boiling the bark of the badia tree until it is tar-like. Paul is one of only four stamp carvers working today. Both he and David are dedicated to carrying on the traditional way of producing adinkra, but even they offer silk-screened pieces for sale.



Adinkra Cloth (ABOVE), hand-carved stamps (MIDDLE), and teachers David and Paul (BOTTOM)

ART GALLERY

We are always trying to promote African artists and help them sell their products, so this summer Aba donated a room at ABA HOUSE to be used as a gallery. The local artisans started an ART CLUB which is a cooperative effort by them to run the gallery and market their work. People staying at ABA HOUSE this summer did a lot of shopping at Cultural Collaborative Ghana Art Club (CCGAC) gallery (BELOW) and appreciated the hassle free, no bargaining atmosphere. Now the challenge for the artists is to reach out to a larger audience...a universal problem for artists.





FALL NEWSLETTER 2004

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Every day at Aba House (BELOW RIGHT) is an adventure. I had decided last spring that a trip to Ghana with a stay at the Cross Cultural Collaborative – familiarly known as Aba House – outside of the capital of Accra would be interesting. I was not aware, however, of the wealth of experiences I would have there. Aba House offers the opportunity to live in a local community in order to meet Ghanaians in the immediate neighborhood as well as those who are invited to make presentations and display their art work. At 3 a.m., a rooster announces the beginning of each day (I always thought roosters crowed at dawn but Ghanaian roosters seem to be on their own schedule). Breakfast comprises a welcome spread of fresh fruit (oh, that pineapple!), good bread, hardboiled eggs, Aba’s secret blend of delicious coffee (think Dunkin’ Donuts) and jars of local groundnut (aka for westerners – peanut butter).

The day’s activities vary widely and can include visits to weaving, bead or brass-making villages, museums — in Accra and elsewhere, Cape Coast and Elmina castles, Kakum National Forest with its Canopy Walk, and, of course, the enormous, dense, thriving markets in Accra and Kumasi. Back at Aba House, artistic opportunities occur frequently. Exhibitions of drumming, puppet, and fire-eating; demonstrations of batik or tie-and-dye procedures; lectures on Ghanaian textiles; storytelling activities — these are just a few of the offerings by people who are invited or who just drop by.

As darkness falls — by 6 p.m. in Ghana year ‘round — the busy days end with excellent suppers prepared by Talk True, chef par excellence. The Ghanaian “red-red” (red beans with red palm oil, rice and plantains) is absolutely addictive. Occasional trips to the Blue-Blue for bottles of Star Beer can further enliven the taste buds and the dinner table conversation. An evening might then include a walk to the nearest internet café on the main road in Nungua or dancing to music at one of the local “clubs” — open air collections of tables and dancers,

but it always ends with laughter around the big table in the main room with the beautiful — albeit cushionless (ouch!) — cane chairs. Finally, the new gallery at Aba House is always available; local artisans regularly replenish it with imaginative craft items. One needs to have a supply of cedis (the currency of Ghana) or dollars ready because the items disappear almost as quickly as they are delivered.

The summer’s adventure was incomparable. No other tour can offer the combination of camaraderie with artistic and cultural experiences provided by Aba House and Aba Tours. We all exchanged e-mail addresses, which will make staying in touch relatively easy, and we promised ourselves reunions, either in our home cities (we had a significant number this year from the Boston area) or by returning soon to Ghana.

Anne Serafin
Newtonville, Massachusetts

“THE CURE FOR BOREDOM IS CURIOSITY; THERE IS NO CURE FOR CURIOSITY.”

ORIGIN UNKNOWN



Cross-Cultural Collaborative

Fall Newsletter 2004

We're booking 2005 now! Join us for one or all workshop weeks. Our goal is to create workshops where people can share ideas and be creative. This is truly a unique opportunity to work with artists from all over the world and hone your creative skills. See the workshop page of www.CulturalCollaborative.org for more details, or call 617-277-0482.

JANUARY 10 – FEBRUARY 10

American writer and artist Ann Sayre Wiseman will conduct workshops entitled "Dreams As Metaphor" and "Illustrated Journal Keeping." Journals will be published.

JANUARY 17 – 21

British potter Jennifer Robinson teaches ceramics: "Handbuilt Pottery Incorporating Animal Symbolism."

JANUARY 24 – FEBRUARY 5

Textile Workshop: Lectures by Ghanaian professors of textile- tie and dye and batik-asafo flags; adinkra, kente.

JANUARY 28 – 30

Nigerian textile artist Gasali Adeyemo teaches adire-cassava resist designs with indigo.

SUMMER:

JULY 11 – 17

Cultural Tour of Ghana

JULY 18 – 31

Handmade papermaking from indigenous African plants. If you're a beginner, come learn! If you're a papermaker, come share your knowledge.

AUGUST 1 – 28

Product Development to produce salable items from the paper. Marta Herberston, of Australia, and Jackie Abrams of America will facilitate this important workshop.

AUGUST 8 – 22

Textile Workshop: African textile techniques. Lectures and performances.

For more workshop details, see the workshop page at www.CulturalCollaborative.org.

Newsletter information by Aba. Design by Michelle Groper, www.Emphasis-Design.com.

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