

central to Thompson's strategies in representing the workings of the Afro-Atlantic. This strategy is reflected in his early essay "An Aesthetic of the Cool," which explores the aesthetic as found in African and diaspora music that seems to move from West Africa to the barrios of Afro-Cuban New York in the space of a downbeat. "Aesthetic of the Cool II" from 1974, expands upon the previous version by applying this technique to visual art. Using transoceanic pairs such as Dahomey and Haiti, Thompson demonstrates enduring diasporic connections in a way that anticipates later, better known texts such as *Flash of the Spirit*. In describing the concept of the cool, Thompson moves smoothly from music to language to visual form, and the inclusion of an elaborate chart mapping the term "cool" in different African languages alerts readers to the central role of language in Thompson's study. His analysis seems to employ tactics of the jazz he describes: polyphonic to the core, making leaps from one register to another, relying on verbal and formal affinities where historical record is sparse. Perhaps this is the best way to analyze diaspora culture, which often resists easy assimilation or academic classification, but those with an empirical mind may be lost if they wish to look for clean narratives or a steady analysis of historical record. In *Aesthetic of the Cool*, the reader must give way to Thompson's seductive phrasing and dig the groove.

The chronological organization of *Aesthetic of the Cool* highlights another key facet of this collection: each essay is inextricably rooted in its time. As much as the book posits and supports the concept of an Afro-Atlantic as a cohesive aesthetic world, through it, one can also trace Thompson's contribution to the evolving discourse of African Diaspora art. In particular, the book situates Thompson in the global story of multiculturalism in later twentieth century art. The essays in *Aesthetic of the Cool* were part of the increasing recognition of the importance of black art and culture by a broad American (and international) viewership. In his essay "Activating Heaven," Thompson makes a prophetic claim about Jean Michel Basquiat: "With his meteoric rise ... it seems to me the vanguard of Western art and Afro-Atlantic visual happening are now becoming one. This has enormous implications" (p. 38). Originally published in 1985, this statement forecasts the profound impact of multiculturalism's rise in contemporary art canons. The text goes on to celebrate a generation of art stars including Basquiat, Hammons, Betye Saar, Renée Stout, José Bedia, and Keith Haring. In doing so, the book also underscores Thompson's importance as a cultural critic working in dialogue with the art of his time. Considering the fact that most African American artists of the 1980s and 1990s read his writings, one senses the interwoven nature

of their production and Thompson's interpretation. Whether intentional or not, the text highlights a feedback loop that collapses often implicit lines between art history and art production, between observer and participant.

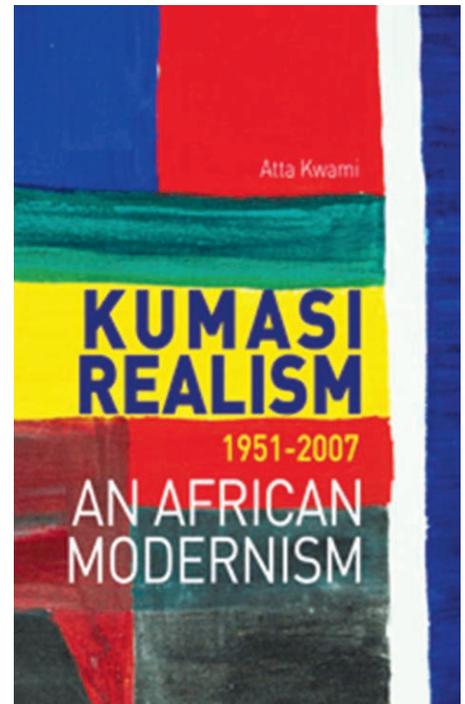
Thompson is a master of language and one can be swept away by his turn of phrase. It is no wonder that many of the included writings found their original home in popular venues such as *Rolling Stone*. Yet, some scholars may be frustrated by a lack of footnotes and other forms of exterior substantiation if they have the desire to find the roots of his arguments. Some chapters, such as "An Aesthetic of the Cool II" and "Keith Haring and Dance," are fairly well documented, but others, such as the poetically written chapter on David Hammons, have no footnotes at all.

Illustrations reflect another limitation. While the book includes hundreds of images, many clearly did not accompany the original essays. On one hand, this demonstrates the strength of Thompson's arguments by highlighting their continuing relevance—revealing the way in which other, often more recent, expressions are still illuminated by his ideas. But, on the other hand, there were moments where I wished to see the original work being referenced. For example, in "From the First to the Final Thunder: African American Quilts," Thompson gives an intriguing description of a quilt by Odessa Doby who "shades the count" in her compositions, but the account lacked the corresponding image. Since his arguments are so often based in visual analysis, one is left with a definite sense of incompleteness.

Overall, this book is a great resource for a broad audience. It is an enjoyable, image-rich volume that serves as an accessible guide to anyone interested in art of Africa's Atlantic diasporas. Further, scholars who have already read most of these texts can gain new perspective by exploring these essays together. Thompson has readily earned his status as "Master T." Through its survey of writings that reflect his unique style and perspective, *Aesthetic of the Cool* demonstrates why this is so.

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book review



Kumasi Realism 1951–2007: An African Modernism

by Atta Kwami

London: C. Hurst, 2013. 500 pp., 188 color ill., 17 b/w ill., 4 appendices, bibliography, notes, list of illustrations. £30.00, cloth

reviewed by Kristen Windmuller-Luna

Artist, curator, and art historian Atta Kwami defines "Kumasi Realism" as a kind of representational painting inspired by a plurality of sources. Distinctly local, it is drawn equally from Ghanaian and European art histories, mass-produced advertising and photography, as well as from Ghanaian history, culture, and current events. In *Kumasi Realism 1951–2007: An African Modernism*, Kwami argues that in Kumasi, Ghana, both college-educated artists and those trained in the city's hundred-plus sign shops draw from this shared visual vocabulary. Exploding the categorical divisions between academically trained and "street" painters often present in the West—launched nearly three decades ago by the exhibitions "Magiciens de la Terre" and "Africa Explores"—Kwami argues for the simultaneous contemporaneity of both groups of painters by claiming each as practitioners of Kumasi Realism.

Declaring that "in Kumasi painting is unavoidable," Kwami claims his book to be the first to systematically document the medium

of painting in a single location (p. 338). While city-based studies of painting abound for European locales like Paris and Rome (see for example, Georges Duby's 2009 *The History of Paris in Painting* or Patricia Leighton's 2013 *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*), none exist for any African city. Indeed, the closest urban art historical portraits on the continent are Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin's 2003 *Rorke's Drift: Empowering Prints* and Joanna Grabski's 2012 film *Market Imaginary*. Like *Kumasi Realism*, each examines modern art in a single locale: however, Hobbs and Rankin focus on the relationship between style, social engagement, and politics at a Lutheran-linked South African art school, while Grabski charts artists' engagement with the multiplicity of commercial and visual networks in Dakar's Colobane Market. Building upon previous unpublished studies of Kumasi's painting (Sarah Brown, SOAS, 1994; Yoshimi Kanazawa, SOAS, 2000; Margaret Hunt de Bona, School of International Training, 2005), Kwami offers new insights based on his own primary research and successfully records the symbiotic relationship between artists trained in Kumasi's two instructional modes.

Kumasi Realism opens with a history of art education in Ghana (Chapter 1), from its inception as a British colonial institution in the 1920s, to the gradual introduction of Ghanaian methods in the 1950s and 1960s, to the decolonization-inspired artistic pluralism in practice through the present day. In 1952, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST, then known as the Kumasi College of Technology) opened as one of the West African colonial colleges established in response to Britain's 1945 Elliot Commission report. Kwami cites January of that year—when the School of Arts and Crafts (art department) became KCT's first Faculty—as the moment when the parallel traditions of street art workshops and college-trained artists first intersected. With that, Kumasi Realism was born “from the fusion of photographic naturalism, and the demands of advertising, shop front decor and commercial portraiture” (p. 63). Chapter 2 continues by examining each artistic track's training methods, expansively considering the teaching methods espoused by influential instructors. He recounts the underlying push-pull between African and European teaching methods from 1900–1950, the transformation of the School of Arts and Crafts into KNUST's College of Art (COA) in 1965 as a theory-driven institution linked to Nkrumah's Sankofa movement, and the increasing experimentalism present at KNUST-COA in the following decades. In what is the book's greatest contribution, he considers the training curriculum in sign workshops from 1999–2005, as well as some

sign painters' education at the College of Art and Industry (CAI, founded 1973), breaking apart the myth of the autodidact advertising painter.

Chapters 3 through 5 present twelve case studies of “college” (KNUST-COA trained), “city” (workshop apprenticeship trained), and “hybrid” (college and workshop trained) artists. Many, such as Ato Delaquis and Alex Amofa, later became influential instructors or workshop owners, which Kwami posits as a driving force behind contemporary teaching policies that promote stylistic preferences for figurative realism. Chapter 6 functions as a reenactment of the 2002 exhibition “Kumasi Junction,” which Kwami curated. Amongst installation views and his own abstract-schematic works, Kwami emphasizes that Kumasi Realism interprets the unique context of its natal city. Given its figurative emphasis, he sees his own works as apart from those presented in his study, but also as something of a kindred spirit thanks to his leadership of KNUST-COA's painting department and his engagement with the environment of the Kumasi Realists. Sufficient to stand on their own, the introduction and case study chapters are particularly well suited for teaching.

The book concludes with a set of appendices. Appendix C, which includes syllabi and enrollment statistics for KNUST-COA, is especially notable, as this academic ephemera pinpoints curriculum content, eliminating any reliance on vague notions of “art school training.” It also includes a codification of the training stages in ten sign painting workshops, allowing for a juxtaposition of Kumasi's two dominant forms of art instruction.

Kumasi Realism is at its strongest when considering the careers of individual artists. Each case study functions as a mini-monograph, charting not only an artist's production, but also their place in the city's intricate artistic networks. By considering artists at various stages in their careers, the case studies holistically construct the genealogy of Kumasi Realism, tracking the progression from art student to instructor and influencer. As both observer of, and major player in, Kumasi's art world, Kwami's argument benefits from his access to a wide variety of primary sources, including his unpublished interviews with Kumasi artists and instructors. It also draws deeply upon art teaching materials in the Kumasi university archives, several unpublished Ghanaian manuscripts and theses, as well as government reports and papers. Though sometimes heavy-handed in translating this wealth of information into prose, the substantial material presented by Kwami will prove equally engaging to scholars of Ghanaian art history and to students of art pedagogy.

While Kwami admirably documents Kumasi's art education systems, greater examination

of the commercial and exhibition opportunities of these painters—especially those not employed by sign workshops—would have made his argument more convincing by ruling out the possible effects of non-educational influences on subject matter and style. Perhaps the most serious limitation of this study is the absence of female artists: in Kwami's telling, Kumasi Realism is an exclusively male practice. While the 2002–2003 statistics for KNUST-COA (p. 379) do indicate lower female art school enrollment, none of the case studies examine female artists; only a glimpse of female artists at work in a sign shop and a handful of names in the “List of Artists” implies their involvement in this practice. The BA dissertation of Yoshimi Kanazawa, whose work as Kwami's research assistant underlies much of Chapter 4, does discuss gender in relation to sign shop practices. Though included in full as an appendix in the dissertation, it was omitted in the book.

Regrettably, greater editorial care should have been taken when adapting Kwami's 2007 dissertation (Open University, UK) into book format. Readers are frequently directed to nonexistent or mislabeled cross-textual references and figures. As many works are being illustrated for the first time, both this inattention to the book's structure—and the poor quality of many of the images—detracts from their otherwise revelatory dissemination. The volume also lacks an index, which would have been greatly appreciated by those seeking the many carefully researched details.

By elucidating the systematic training used in the sign workshops and the shared pool of visual resources used by Kumasi's artists, Kwami deftly dispels both the autodidact myth, and the division between college-trained and sign painters seen most profoundly outside of Ghana, but also expressed within the country's art colleges. As a voice in the ongoing contemporary/traditional debate, and in the continually expanding conversation about African modernisms, *Kumasi Realism* argues for an expanded scope of modernity that spans not just geographically, but also theoretically and temporally, stretching the bounds of increasingly outmoded dualisms.

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