

H A U S D
EL ANATSUI

E

R KUNST



Triumphant Scale
08.03—28.07.19
#elanatsuiHDK

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El Anatsui working on
Second Wave (2019),
 façade work for Haus der Kunst
 Photo: Maximilian Geuter

“When I create work, it is in my view a metaphor reflecting an alternative response; to examine possibilities and extend the boundaries in art. My work can represent links in the evolving narrative of memory and identity. The link between Africa, Europe, and America is very much behind my work with bottle caps. I have experimented with quite a few materials. I also work with material that has witnessed and encountered a lot of touch and human use... and these kinds of material and work have more charge than material/work that I have done with machines.

Art grows out of each particular situation, and I believe that artists are better off working with whatever their environment throws up.”

El Anatsui, 2003

Introduction

El Anatsui (born 1944, Anyako, Ghana), is perhaps Africa’s most prominent living artist. This survey, *El Anatsui: Triumphant Scale*, the largest ever mounted on Anatsui’s work, encompasses every media in the artist’s prodigious fifty-year career. As the exhibition title suggests, it focuses on the triumphant and monumental quality of Anatsui’s sculptures, with the signature liqueur bottle cap series he developed over the last two decades at the core of the presentation. Along with these ambitious works, with their imposing physical presence and dazzling colors, the exhibition includes wood sculptures and wall reliefs spanning the mid-1970s to the late 1990s; ceramic sculptures of the late 1970s, as well as drawings, sketches and prints, and the grand work – his largest ever – on the building’s monumental façade.

Anatsui’s artistic practice exemplifies a critical search for alternative models of artmaking that in turn questions the foundation of modernist ideals of artistic autonomy and aesthetic purity. Based in Nigeria since 1975, Anatsui taught in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, until 2011. He continues to work in his studio at Nsukka.

Anatsui’s ideas were formed in the context of Nsukka’s creative environment marked by artistic experimentation and aesthetic research, informed by the belief that great art can be developed anywhere in the world, independent of the so-called art centers of the West. Anatsui and his contemporaries at Nsukka, including world-renowned artists, writers, poets, and dramaturges, were motivated by a sense of worldliness that was

more imaginative than locational, with an abiding belief that their work could contribute to enlarging the scope of artmaking in a much-expanded, global contemporary art scene. The premise of this exhibition is to explore the variegated paths of creation the artist has taken to formulate a new approach to sculpture, which in turn made him one of the most formidable sculptors of our time.

This exhibition testifies to Anatsui’s invention of a completely new and unique sculptural form and visual language with material for artmaking revealed to him by his context of production. It presents ideas that inform his practice across diverse media he has worked with, from circular and multi-panel wood reliefs to terracotta forms, and the later metal sculptures. One such idea is art’s ability to engage with complex flows of history, memory, time, and how these forces shape human society. This speaks to his enduring meditation on the impact of colonization and postcolonial global forces on African cultures, and invests his work with a profound conceptual purpose, its invocation of resilience and fragility, and its visual resplendence.

Anatsui’s employment of fragmentation as a compositional technique serves to infuse even the most abstract of his works with iconic power. For instance, the laborious manual work of flattening, cutting, twisting, and crushing bottle caps and using copper wires to suture and stitch the elements into one dazzling epic piece serves as metaphor for the constitution of human society.

It takes a visionary of incomparable imagination to create the objects in this exhibition – sculptures whose technical

sophistication, material intelligence, cascading lightness and visual splendor, reveal the powerful social critique that is unique to Anatsui’s brand of the political.

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Curated by Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu
 Assistant Curator: Damian Lentini

El Anatsui

Biography

El Anatsui is arguably one of the most critically acclaimed sculptors working in the international art scene today. Born in Anyako, Ghana, in 1944, he earned a bachelor’s degree in sculpture and a post-graduate diploma in art education from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, in 1969. He taught at the Specialist Training College (now University of Education) in Winneba, Ghana, until 1975. That same year he moved to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he taught sculpture and basic design. After his retirement in 2011, he became emeritus professor in 2014.

After studying art in a British-style art school, he was attracted to the progressive cultural politics championed by mid-twentieth-century Ghanaian and African cultural nationalists, scholars and artists of the independence era. Specifically, prevailing ideologies and concepts of Pan-Africanism and African Personality, exemplified in Ghana by *Sankofa* – an Akan term for “go back and pick” – suggested to him the importance of African artistic traditions as sources for his own artistic explorations.

Anatsui’s work in Ghana consisted of round wood reliefs inspired by trays used by Kumasi traders for displaying their wares. On these tray-like panels he carved *adinkra* motifs and other designs that convey the dynamic relationship between the rich symbolism of African proverbs and graphic power of *adinkra*. At Nsukka he expanded his field of artistic resources to other West African design and sign systems, and syllabaries, including

Igbo *Uli*, Efik *Nsibidi*, Bamun and Vai scripts. He became a leading member of the famed Nsukka School, and, in 1985, a member of the Eastern Nigeria-based Aka Circle of Exhibiting Artists.

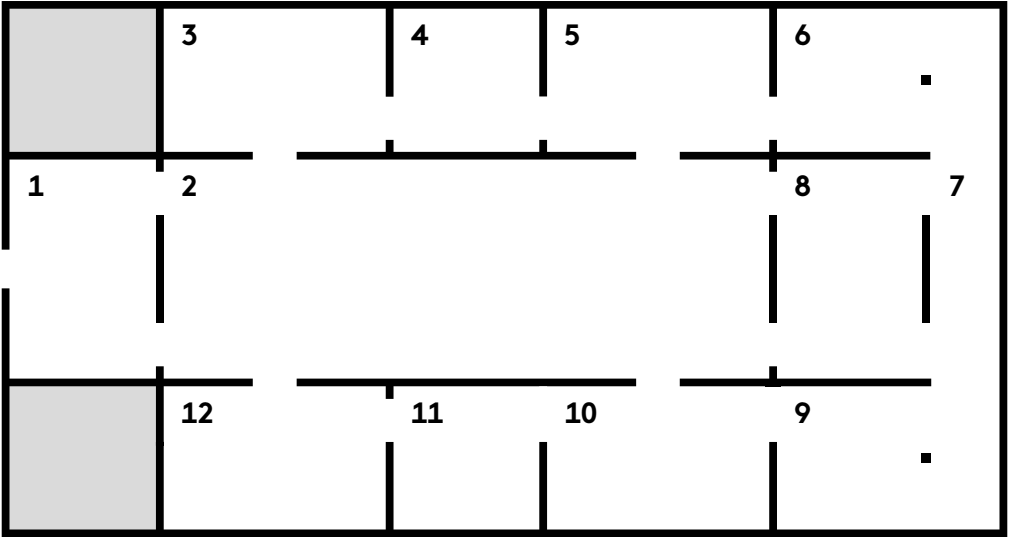
A survey of Anatsui’s oeuvre shows a systematic determination to use readily available material to develop formally sophisticated and conceptual multi-layered work. Since the early 1970s, he has consistently explored diverse materials – including clay, wood, and metal – subjecting them to vigorous experimental processes. The significance of his sculptural practice lies in his unrelenting commitment to intense formal inquiry and exploration into Africa’s rich artistic traditions, histories of slavery, migrations and colonialism, and the impact of postcoloniality, globalization and environmental change on today’s world.

Anatsui has received honorary doctorates from Harvard University (2016), the University of Cape Town (2016), and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (2017). He received Honorable Mention at the Venice Biennale (1990); Kansai Telecasting Prize, Osaka Triennial (1995); the Bronze Prize, Osaka Triennial (1998); The Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale (2015), and the Praemium Imperiale (2017). He was elected honorary member to the Royal Academy of Art (2013), the American Academy of Design (2014), and American Academy of Arts and Letters (2018). His work is in the collection of Asele Institute (Nimo, Nigeria), the British Museum (London), the Smithsonian National Museum

of African Art (Washington DC), Museum of Modern Art, New York, Centre Pompidou (Paris), Museum Kunstpalast (Dusseldorf), Setagaya Museum (Tokyo), the National Gallery of Modern Art (Lagos), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), and many other major public collections.

Anatsui lives and works in Nsukka, Nigeria.

Plan



Second Wave (2019)

Second Wave, Anatsui's largest work so far, incorporates several thousand offset printing plates that are folded, pressed, layered, bent, curved, welded and riveted to form 22 panels, each approximately 10 × 4 meters. These main components are connected by the more familiar bottle cap material and aluminum roofing sheets. Following the principle of accumulation, this creates an autonomous aesthetic form at the intersection of craft and everyday life. *Second Wave* combines a strong physicality and visual urgency with structural indeterminacy. With its metamorphic nature, the installation conjures the popular African rule of life that 'no condition is permanent.' Against the monumental, neo-classical symmetry of the architecture of Haus der Kunst, *Second Wave* stages an aesthetic of operatic syncopation, a dialectic of stasis and dynamism.

The sources of the printing plates – from a daily newspaper in Munich, and a printer of art books in Bolzano – are important to the concept and meaning of *Second Wave*. By using locally-sourced material for this work, Anatsui emphasizes the connection between its location, form, design

and subject-matter. Starting from the left and moving to the right, dominant lateral lines flow, cresting at the main entrance foyer; another wave, more energetic and colorful, gathers and peaks on the right. This second wave, which give the installation its title, is Anatsui's meditation on today's flood of information and on the history and evolution of Haus der Kunst, from the nationalistic ideas that informed its founding, to its current location – next to the famous *Eisbach* wave – as a key global center for contemporary art.



Second Wave, 2019
Installation for Haus der Kunst's façade
Photo: Jens Weber, Munich

Gallery 1

Medium and Material: Sculpture as Relief

El Anatsui's career is defined by his deep investment in the exploration of materials readily available in his immediate environment; as he says, an artist should work "with whatever his environment throws up". While he had created works with found materials previously (most notably used printing plates and cassava graters), the monumental sculptural reliefs which he created from found liquor bottle caps from 2001 onwards nevertheless marked a radical shift in both the scale of his works, as well as his approach to the relationship between medium and material. More specifically, his shift to arranging the bottle caps into sheets – which are then combined and rearranged within a composition – signifies the moment in which the boundaries between "medium" and "material" are finally dissolved within his practice; something which is dramatically conveyed by three key works in this gallery. This includes the paradigmatic *Man's Cloth* (2001), one of his very first compositions in this new medium, and an adroit demonstration of his insistence upon testing and prodding his materials to reveal their potential as artistic media. The thin and small material elements of the bottle caps – which are cut, rolled, twisted, crushed and then stitched together with copper wire – are in all of these works transformed into an effective medium to constructing large-scale reliefs.

Furthermore, the potentially limitless open-system driving the creation of each of these compositions presented the artist with the opportunity to work on a scale far greater than his previous

sculptural reliefs. To this end, they also denote a distinct transition within Anatsui's conceptual field; a moment in which his works shifted out of the domestic space, to instead occupy the field of monumental sculpture or even architecture. Despite their massive scale, however, the character and form of each individual element of the bottle caps draws the viewer into an intimate encounter with their formal quality and, as branded objects, to economic and political histories to which they bear testimony.

Dusasa II, 2007

For the 2007 Venice Biennale, Anatsui created two sculptures, *Dusasa I* and *Dusasa II* that showed the direction of his work at the time. In 2001, when he produced the first of the metal sculptures constructed from aluminum element from liquor bottle tops, he used either the strips from the side walls of bottle caps (*Man's Cloth*, 2001), or combined these with the caps' rounded tops (*Woman's Cloth*, 2001), all stitched together with copper wires. Eventually, he developed several stitch patterns, and increased the scale of his works. For *Dusasa II* which spans approximately 6 × 7 meters, he used two patterns – "Crushed" and "Singlet" – which he developed respectively in 2004 and 2006. The combination of the more solid, crushed caps, and the delicate Singlet stitches, creates an exciting interplay of texture and color at close range. But from a distance, they all merge into shimmering, swirling abstract forms. *Dusasa* in Ewe (a West African language) could mean the large-

scale fusion of two distinct things. This might refer to the combination of two stitch patterns in the work, but also the fusion of cultures, tradition and modernity, all of which are important to the experience of our world today.



Man's Cloth, 2001
Aluminum and copper wire
British Museum, London
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Dusasa II, 2007
Aluminum, copper wire and plastic disks
Collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Purchase, The Raymond and Beverly Sackler 21st Century Art Fund;
Stephen and Nan Swid and Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation
Inc. Gifts; and Arthur Lejwa Fund, in honor of Jean Arp, 2008
bpk / The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Gallery 2

Architecture and Space: Transparency and Opacity

El Anatsui first created *Gli (Wall)* in 2010 in order to directly embrace and engage with the architectural space in which the viewer encounters the work. The work derives its name from an Ewe word which can mean “wall,” “disrupt” or “story”. Walls, as idea and physical form, have informed and featured in Anatsui’s work throughout his career. His interest in walls was inspired by the 15th-century story of imprisonment of his migrant Ewe ancestors by King Agokoli in his walled city of Notsie, their cunning destruction of the city walls, and their liberation. Anatsui has since used this history and wall structures to reflect on migration and boundaries, citizenship and power, and on the power of imagination over technologies of oppression.

The present installation at Haus der Kunst is a significantly expanded and reconfigured version, using the five sheets from the earlier work as a basis for this new site-specific installation, *Logolili Logarithm* comprising sixty-six individual units. In contrast to opaque, semi-solid forms of works such as *Man’s Cloth* (2001) and *Dusasa II* (2007) in Gallery 1, the diaphanous structure of *Logolili Logarithm’s* components is achieved via the use of the “singlet” stitch pattern that Anatsui and his assistants developed with thin bottle cap seals.

Also in contrast to the previous works is *Logolili Logarithm’s* emphasis on porosity and lightness: it is a work that is suspended in the air, rather than being

firmly rooted to the earth. Deliberately shifting in transparency and opacity, the various registers of light, color and form appear to continually adapt and react to the body which maneuvers around and through its spaces. Its walls do not enclose, rather they perpetually open themselves up to continuous revelation and surprise. In this way, *Gli’s* semiporous curtains of metal loops do not define the space so much as they serve as liminal demarcations of shifting spatial possibilities. Instead of resembling walls, *Logolili Logarithm* sumptuous and alluring play of light and material recall the experience of sunlight refracting off mist or fog.



Logolili Logarithm, 2019

Aluminum and copper wire

Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria © El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Maximilian Geuter

Gallery 3 & 4

Abstraction and the Monochrome

In the late 1960s, as a student at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana, Anatsui was introduced to various formal modes of sculpture by the program's mostly European instructors, ranging from academic realism to modernist abstraction. After Kumasi, Anatsui commenced research into traditional and folk design and the arts of Ghana which helped him develop fresh approaches to sculptural form. Inspired, for instance, by the woven patterns and graphic symbols respectively of the *kente* and *adinkra* cloths, sculpting became for him not so much the manipulation of mass and volume, as a process of organizing abstract shapes, lines, textures, colors, as well as negative and positive space, no matter the medium.

The works in these two galleries exemplify Anatsui's reliance on the abstract form and image, and the monochromatic palette as devices for emphasizing the design and material properties of his wood and metal works. Recognizable or allusive motifs and symbols occasionally appear in his wood panels, yet the compositions are simultaneously non-illustrative, narrative and conceptual. The metal works, on the other hand are composed of completely abstract elements. The use of similarly colored bottle cap parts conveys the grace and power of the pure sculptural form.

Invitation to History, 1995

When Anatsui first used the chain-saw to cut wood during a residency in the United States, he realized he could turn the machine into a carving tool. Soon after, he introduced other woodworking tools, such as the rotary saw and wood router into his practice. Once he decided to use wood planks as his material, he carved their surfaces with these machine tools, then burned the entire surface with a blowtorch. The surfaces of the planks were then cleaned using a sanding machine, leaving the machine cuts as dark lines. He sometimes painted parts of the composition. In *Invitation to History*, he created to layers of compositions: over the layer with more colors on its surface, he placed another one with only the black cuts. The spaces between the planks making up the front layer allow the viewer to see parts of the colorful layer behind. This composition is a statement about Africa's rich histories that were denied or destroyed by western colonialism. Designed to lean against the wall, this piece is unique among Anatsui's wood panel sculptures.



Red Block, 2010
Found aluminum and copper wire
The Broad Art Foundation
Brooklyn Museum. Digital Collections
and Services. Gravity and Grace:
Monumental Works by El Anatsui.
[02/08/2013–08/18/2013]. Installation view



Invitation to History, 1995
Tropical hardwood, tempera
Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria
Photo: Adolphus Opara, courtesy El Anatsui Studio

Gallery 5 & 6

Fragmentation and the Unfixed Form

Arriving in Nsukka, Nigeria, in 1975, Anatsui redefined sculptural objecthood as pictorial and planar, and constituted by fragmentary and unfixed elements. Once fully developed, this aesthetic of fragmentation became an enduring characteristic of his work as a sculptor. In describing a major series of work in clay and wood respectively as “Broken Pots” (Gallery 9) and “Pieces of Wood”, he emphasized both the objective condition of his working material and sculpting as a rigorous process of collating, connecting, juxtaposing and joining distinct components of his artistic media.

Anatsui conceived his multi-panel wood sculptures such as *Harvest Moon* with the expectation that anyone can alter their original composition and design by rearranging the individual planks. This idea also underlies his works in metal. Because the bottle cap elements are stitched together to form large expanses of pliable media, his constructions are solid and organic. This technical fact, combined with the artist’s conception of his works as metaphors for the flow of time and inevitability of change, results in reliefs and floor pieces that dramatically change form with each new installation.

Take for example the works in these two galleries. One’s experience of their chromatic registers continually shifts between the flickering energy of the gold and red elements of both *Tiled Flower Garden* and *Strips Earth’s of Skin*, counterpoised by the blocks of almost solid color that seem to majestically drift across the surface of *Earth’s Skin*; which lend the latter work a distinctly cartographic sensibility. However, any attempt to ascribe a pictorial or lateral reading to any of these works is abruptly interrupted by the changes in rhythm evoked by the folds and slashes; an act which once again reinforces the works’ sculptural properties, anchoring them within the space in which they are encountered.



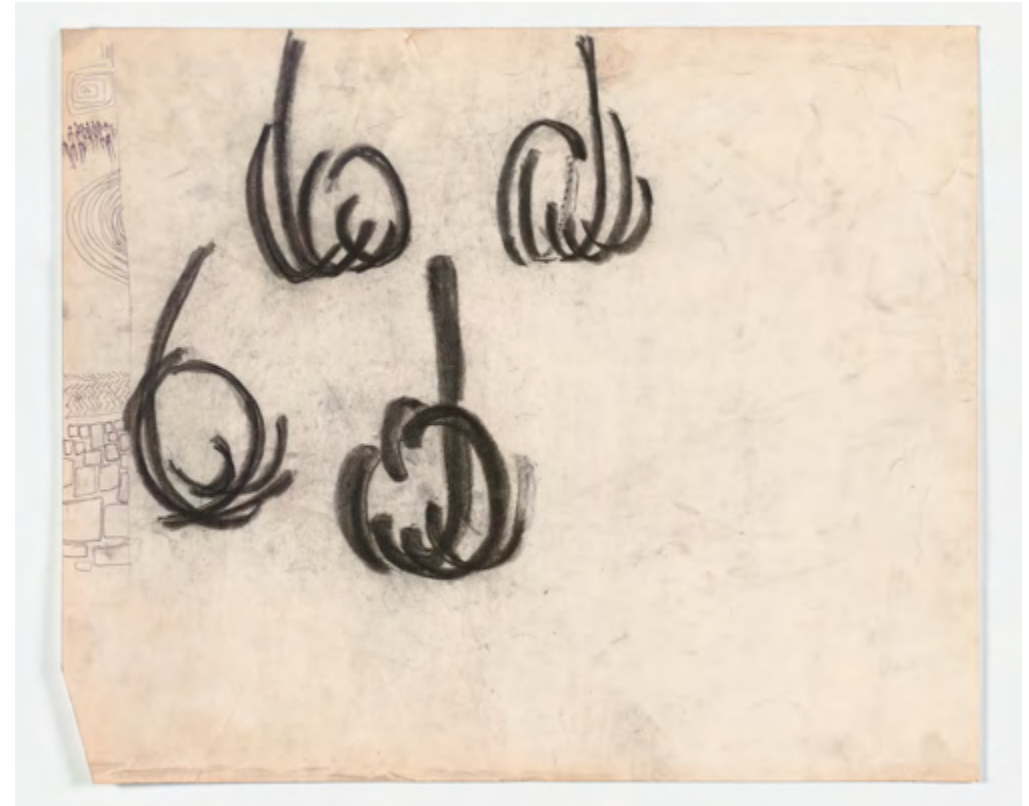
Tiled Flower Garden, 2012
Aluminum and copper wire
Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria
© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Gallery 7

Drawings and Graphic works

The works displayed in these vitrines and along the wall in this gallery are testaments to the continuity – and continual reworking – of Anatsui's conceptual systems throughout his long career. Perpetually revisiting and interrogating the theoretical limits of his abstract sculptural forms, this selection sketches, drawings and prints works aptly demonstrate the furious reworking of structural and compositional syntaxes which have informed his work across a range of media. Indeed, such is the breadth of Anatsui's ongoing enquiries into the various potentialities of the architectonic systems which underpin his works, that the artist commonly works through his ideas on whatever is at hand; hence one sees within this display scraps of paper sourced from hotels, building supplies stores and restaurants throughout the world.

Of particular interest here is the manner in which Anatsui's lifelong engagement with theories of abstraction pervades all of his works on paper; the ways in which his interest in the use of negative and positive space, or ideas pertaining to the traces or indexicality of mark-making, transcend any particular fidelity to medium – or object-specificity. This small vignette thus provides the viewer with a fascinating insight into the depth and extent of Anatsui's copious research into and probing of the possibilities of abstract syntactical schemata, and the way in which such investigations manifest themselves across all of his works.



Untitled, n. d.

Pen and charcoal on paper

Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria

© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Gallery 8

Wood Reliefs and Columns

In 1980, while on a studio residency in the US town of Cummington, Massachusetts, Anatsui had an epiphanic encounter with the chainsaw: he realized that he could use it as a wood-carving tool. In the next few years he sought to control and exploit the machine's vicious bite which, for him, was a metaphor for colonialism's destruction of indigenous African cultures.

However, instead of carving solid wood blocks (with the rare exception of the monumental *Erosion*, 1991), Anatsui developed a relief format consisting mostly of planed planks, usually of different types of tropical woods. At first, he carved only with the chainsaw, burned the entire surface with the blow-torch, and cleaned it off with a wood sander. He then introduced other wood cutting tools, such as the router, and the band and hole saws, which could cut a variety of organic and geometric marks and designs on the panels. Henceforth, wood carving for him becomes less about organizing masses and volumes; it is primarily graphic mark-making, a unique type of incised drawing and inscribing inspired by various African writing systems and syllabaries such as *Nsibidi*, *Vai* and *Bamum* scripts respectively from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Cameroon. With these Anatsui reflects on the relationship between writing and history, memory and identity in postcolonial Africa.

Whereas his wood sculpture is mostly in relief, a few – including the *Wonder Masquerade* series from the early 1990s – were produced with rounded forms. As with the reliefs in this gallery, these

columnar sculptures consist of individual pieces of wood, but are stacked and held together by a steel rod. This allows their shape and surface design to be changed at will. Inspired by the astonishing, shape-shifting “Wonder masquerade” of the Igbo people, this series speaks to the different paths Anatsui took toward the invention of manipulable, dynamic and unfixed sculptural form.

Grandma's Cloth Series VI, 1992

The *Grandma's Cloth Series* is one of the best-known and most successful works Anatsui produced during his wood panel period, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. This large piece from that series features various key elements of his wood panels corpus. It consists of several planks of different tropical woods. This accounts for its five distinct bands of ochre colors. On the left side he made deep and burnt-out cuts using a chainsaw, and in the central area he created bisected circular marks with the hole saw. On the right, he carved a section of disorganized strips in relief, followed by organic lines cut with the wood router. The whole composition of mostly shallow abstract marks, seen against the wood colors, emphasizes the work's pictorial character, as it combines drawing, surface marking and color. This quality is consistent with his other wood and metal relief sculptures.



Grandma's Cloth Series VI, 1992
Wood, tempera
Collection of Faysal El Khalil, Lagos, Nigeria
Photo: Adolphus Opara, courtesy of
the El Anatsui Studio and Faysal El Khalil



Erosion, 1992
Wood
National Museum of African Art,
Smithsonian Institution, USA
Purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian
Collections Acquisition Program, 96-17-1,
Photo: Franko Khoury

Gallery 9

Wholes and Parts

The circular wood panels presented in this gallery are the first important series of work Anatsui produced as a professional artist in the early 1970s. Inspired by the *Sankofa* (“Go Back and Pick”) cultural movement in post-independence Ghana, Anatsui began his own artistic reorientation, after his academy-type training at KNUST, by studying Ghanaian arts and crafts (see Gallery 3). By combining hand carving and fire-branding techniques of craftsmen, he created designs on round panels he commissioned from carvers of traders’ display trays. Featuring incised *adinkra* or his own idiosyncratic symbols in the center and abstract patterns around the raised rim, the panels were Anatsui’s first attempt to think of sculpting primarily as graphic mark making on flat or formed surfaces. After this series his sculpture ceased to be about structural solidity, wholeness and stability. Henceforth, he worked with his materials such that they invoked states of fragility, brokenness, fragmentation and flux.

With the “Broken Pots” series of terracotta sculptures, the first works he produced at Nsukka, Anatsui inaugurated his experimentation and exploration of the aesthetic of fragmentation and structurally dynamic, entropic forms. Working with the clay pot as a model, he constructed sculptures out of disparate parts and fragments, broke, punctured and destabilized whole forms. Rather than structures of containment, these are expressive of the dynamic tension between forces of cohesion and entropy, stability and fragility. Inspired by West African practices of using

broken pots and pottery fragments as ritual containers, and the use of “old” grog from shards to reinforce new clay, Anatsui’s created terracotta objects that serve as commentary on death and reincarnation, destruction and regeneration.

On Their Fateful Journey to Nowhere, 1974—75

Anatsui’s first act as a professional artist, after training in a British-style modern art school, was to develop a unique sculptural language by studying indigenous African arts and crafts. He began by commissioning local carvers to make objects similar to wood trays used by Ghanaian traders for displaying their wares. On the rims of trays, he combined painted lines and metal plates with abstract designs made with hot iron. In the recessed center, he carved Ghanaian *adinkra* symbols, or his own unique images that reflect the work’s theme. In this way he turned the utilitarian trays into beautiful relief sculptures through which he meditates on African histories and the human experience. In *On Their Fateful Journey to Nowhere*, the central motif is a cluster of footprints pointing in all directions, suggesting mass movement and migration without self-determined destination. After this series of work, his sculpture focused more on surface marking and design rather than manipulation of volume and mass.



On Their Fateful Journey to Nowhere, 1974–75
Wood, paint, lacquer
Collection of Dr Elizabeth and Sandor Janos Peri,
London © El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and
Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



Gbeze, 1979
Keramik, Mangan
Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria
© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Gallery 10 & 11

Monumentality and the Epic Scale

The change from wood to metal as his primary material for sculpture marked a major break in Anatsui's work. Although key elements of his wood sculpture – the fragmentary, unfixed and planar form – carried over to the bottle cap works, the change of scale is dramatic and significant. While testing different ways of turning the found material into a sculptural medium, he realized that its expressive value lay not just in stitching the small pieces of bottle cap elements with copper to form large panels, but in compounding these panels to form expansive fields of color, texture, shapes and lines. Thus, he concluded that the medium was not amenable to small gestures, or the human scale of most of his previous work. The characteristic epic scale of his bottle cap sculptures is informed not so much by a desire for the “big statement” as by the nature and logic of their material, medium and mode of facture.

Despite first appearances, the arrangement of the sheets is anything but random. Whether the emphasis is on the monochromatic or multicolor composition, we encounter works as varied as *Rising Sea*, *Gravity and Grace* and *In the World But Don't Know the World* as expansive panoramas that at once demand that we come close in order to appreciate the delicately stitched, plain or branded elements, and compel us to step back to apprehend Anatsui's magnificent visual orchestras. Indeed, in much the same manner as a musical score, the intricacy of these final compositions unfolds across both time and space; their very vastness testifies to the amount of intellectual and physical labor that

goes into their creation. And yet, despite the careful consideration which has informed the placement of each of these sheets, all of these works ultimately remain open; as evidenced by the seemingly endless number of configurations with which they can be mounted on the gallery. Each hang reveals a fascinating new arrangement of both dynamic and chromatic relationships – with some elements even occasionally spilling onto the floor in front of the viewer. The manner in which the works' pulsating chromatic fields appear to operate both independent of, and in tandem with, their placement within the space imbues each of them with a beguiling complexity that perpetually forecloses any attempt to ascribe predetermined formal or hierarchical readings onto them.

Rising Sea, 2019

Rising Sea is one of the important new works Anatsui created specifically for this exhibition, in response to the monumental scale of Haus der Kunst's East Wing galleries. Easily one of the artist's largest indoor sculptures, it occupies the entire south wall of the gallery. The work is mostly made of small, white strips of liquor bottle cap seals stitched together with copper wires. But about 6 meters up from the left edge and rising toward to right the work consists of lustrous silver-colored elements, and toward the bottom is a combination of multicolor areas and patterns. In contrast, the sharp horizon line higher up demarcates the silvery sky from the large expanse of sea which forms gentle billowing waves moving to-

wards the bottom, almost swallowing up the beautiful patterns below. *Rising Sea* is Anatsui's most recent artistic response since his monumental wood sculpture, *Erosion* (1992) – installed in Gallery 8 – to environmental threats of global warming. Its sublime presence and colossal scale speak to the magnitude and scope of this problem.



Rising Sea, 2019
Aluminum and copper wire
Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria
© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
Photo: Maximilian Geuter



Gravity and Grace, 2010
Aluminum and copper wire
Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria
© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Gallery 12

Traces and Indexical Fields

Anatsui's interest in indexical schemata is not merely confined to his large-scale sculptures, reliefs and installations, but is also ever-present in his more recent print works. Here, the residual marks and traces of his material-making process serve as the basis for a series of works which investigate the formal and compositional possibilities of the surfaces and supports used within his art-making process. However, in marked contrast to the earlier prints exhibited in Gallery 7 – which were created via traditional printmaking techniques – all of the works exhibited in this room employ newer and more experimental processes. Each of the surfaces were scanned on a high-resolution 3D printer, routed onto aluminium plates, and then printed through an etching press with more complex effects created using *chine-collé* or *takuzuri* techniques.

Take, for example, the *Untitled* series of predominately black prints, whose abstract indexical traces and registers were formed by stencils taken from the wooden benchtops upon which his studio created the bottle top sheets. After years of having these bottle top units folded, pressed and conjoined on top of them, the surfaces of these small tables had developed a rich aleatory patina from years of continuous scarring.

Also of note is the large 6 × 4 meter composite print work created out of discarded cassava graters; a device which evokes overlapping histories of exchange and trade within the region. Cassava is a woody shrub that was brought over from its native Brazil by Portuguese traders,

with the resulting pulp then used to create *Garri*, a polenta-like carbohydrate which has become a staple food within the region. Furthermore, the metal used to create these graters was commonly sourced from discarded oil drums – which themselves bear the traces of colonial trade – that are cut up and punctured with holes. Therefore, in contrast to the sculptural works created on or by these elements, these prints function more like palimpsests, whose various intaglio and surface textures bear the traces of years of continual experimentation and production.

Yam Mound, 2019

After many years of using wood as his primary medium for sculpture, Anatsui began to experiment with other materials, including different types of found metallic objects. He first used steel in the form of evaporated milk cans. In Nigeria discarded milk cans are reused by cutting out the top to form small cups used for steaming food or as measuring cups. These tops are discarded. When Anatsui found large quantities of these can tops, he collected them and later decided to stitch them together with copper wires forming small panels. In 1999, he shaped these panels into a few dozen cones. Because they resembled small mountains – and, in reference to the popular 'Peak' milk brand from Denmark – he called this work *Peak Project*. In 2010, he piled the small panels into one large heap, and called it *Yam Mound*, for it looked like the heap of earth made by farmers in West Africa for planting yams. In the present installation of the

work, because of the mound's spreadout on the floor, it is equally reminiscent of a mountain range, and thus retains the topographic element of the original *Peak Project*.



Untitled, 2016
Manioc graters imprints and collage, ink on paper mounted on aluminum sheet with copper wire links / Photo Oak Taylor-Smith. Courtesy Artist/October Gallery, London/Factum Arte, Madrid



Peak Project, 2015
Sheet metal, copper wire
Collection of the Artist, Nsukka, Nigeria
© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Lectures & Specials around the exhibition

Artist Talk

Fri, 08.03.19, 7 pm, auditorium
El Anatsui with Okwui Enwezor and
Chika Okeke-Agulu

in English
Tickets 5€ / 15€ (incl. exhibition)

Talks & Tours with Francis Kéré

Tue, 19.03.19, 6.30 pm, exhibition
Damian Lentini, curator, and Francis Kéré, architect, lead a dialogue through the exhibition and discuss individual works. The Burkina Faso-born architect Francis Kéré is one of the most important representatives of contemporary socially committed architecture. He is best known for his designs for Christoph Schlingensiefel's opera village Africa. Since October 2017 he has been Professor for "Architectural Design and Participation" at the TU Munich.

in German
Tickets 13€

Talks & Tours with Nadine Siegert

Deputy Director of Iwalewahauss,
University of Bayreuth
Tue, 07.05.19, 6.30 pm, exhibition
In dialogue with Damian Lentini, Nadine Siegert places El Anatsui's work in the context of Ghanaian and Nigerian modernism and highlights the artist's extraordinary role as a teacher at the University of Nigeria. Siegert also explores Nsukka aesthetics, which are evident in El Anatsui's early graphics to his current installations.

in German
Tickets 13€ (incl. exhibition)

Atelier night, for small and large art lovers

Sat, 18.05.19, 5–9 pm
The focus is on the current exhibitions, including El Anatsui, immersion in his labyrinth, decoding codes and a programme based on the motto "see, understand, do it yourself" until late in the evening.

Tickets 4€ / Haus der Kunst

Lecture by David Adjaye

Mon, 08.07.19, 7 pm, auditorium
David Adjaye's wide range of well-known projects makes him one of the most important contemporary architects. Awarded the title of Knight Bachelor in 2017, Adjaye has repeatedly found inspiration in the fine arts. In his lecture, Adjaye will focus on El Anatsui - the man and the artist behind the works.

in English
Tickets 5€ / 13€ (incl. exhibition)

New Elective Affinities in Old Areas

Tue, 12.03.19, 3 pm
Thur, 23.05.19, Sat 11.07.19, 6 pm
Old and new art are negotiated in a dialogue between Dr. Weniger from Bavarian National Museum [BNM] and Dr. Weniger from Haus der Kunst [HdK] – in both places, starting with Anatsui's works.

Tickets 8€ BNM, 7€ HdK / Foyer Haus der Kunst [HdK]

Inclusion Tour

A guided tour through the exhibition
El Anatsui: Triumphant Scale.
Guided tour for people with:
Dementia: Fri, 22.03.19, 2 pm
Sign language: Fri, 29.03.19, 3.30 pm
Including tactile guidance:
Fri, 17.05.19, 4.30 pm

in German
Only with registration at
fuehrungen@hausderkunst.de

Details and all tours under:
www.hausderkunst.de/programm

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Exhibitions 2019/20

Capsule 09/10

Raphaella Vogel: A Woman's Sports Car

Khvay Samnang: Popil

18.01–30.06.19

Archive Gallery 2019:

Archives in Residence –

Southeast Asia Performance Collection

28.06–29.09.19

Miriam Cahn: I as Human

12.07–27.10.19

At Night

Sammlung Goetz in Haus der Kunst

12.07.19–12.01.20

Markus Lüpertz: The Zone of Painting

13.09.19–26.01.20

DER ÖFFENTLICHKEIT –

von den Freunden Haus der Kunst

Theaster Gates: Black Image Corporation

25.10.19–03.05.20

Interiorities

Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Leonor Antunes,

Henrike Naumann, Adriana Varejão

29.11.19–29.03.20

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