

El Anatsui

Born in Anyako, Ghana in 1944, and educated at the University of Nigeria, Anatsui has worked with wood, ceramics and paint over the years. But his international renown exploded over the last decade after he hit upon his signature method of cutting, folding and bending found materials from his surroundings into swatches of color and texture, then joining them with wire to create massive hanging sculptures that often resemble shimmering mosaics, curtains or tapestries.

Because the materials often come from liquor bottles, the sculptures' seductive beauty can call to mind loaded topics like addiction, globalization and even "slavery's economics, of which liquor was a key part," as Alexi Worth wrote in a 2009 New York Times Magazine profile of Anatsui.

Now he's an art-world rock star, a sought-after participant in biennials who has exhibited around the world. Museums are on waiting lists to collect his work. A major retrospective, *When I Last Wrote to You About Africa*, will inaugurate the Museum for African Art's new building on Manhattan's Museum Mile.

He is widely considered one of the most exciting contemporary visual artists of our time. Emerging from the vibrant post-independence art movements of 1960s and '70s West Africa, he has gone on to receive widespread international acclaim for his sculptural experiments with media, form and tradition.

Throughout a distinguished forty-year career as both sculptor and teacher, El Anatsui has addressed a vast range of social, political and historical concerns, and embraced an equally diverse range of media and processes. Making use of tools as diverse as chainsaws, welding torches and power tools as well as developing a range of processes such as the intricate and meditative 'sewing' process of his later work, he has shaped found materials that range from cassava graters, railway sleepers, driftwood, iron nails and obituary printing plates, aluminum bottle-tops, etc. to create a wide variety of novel sculptural forms. His iconic "bottle-top installations" have provoked a frenzy of international attention between 2002 and the present, with institutions lining up to acquire these magnificent works. Created from many thousands of aluminum bottle-tops wired together with copper, these wall sculptures continue to excite and amaze audiences wherever they are exhibited. His sculptures have been collected by major international museums, including the British Museum, London, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the de Young Museum, San Francisco, the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, the museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, and many other prestigious institutions.

One of these shimmering bottle-top wall-hangings, *Fresh and Fading Memories (2007)*, caused a quiet sensation when, during the 2007 Venice Biennale, it transformed the historic Palazzo Fortuny when draped upon its outer facade. At the Dubai Art Fair, 2010, October Gallery presented another large-scale masterpiece - *In the World, but Don't know the World (2009)*, - to great acclaim, and the works have continued to expand in size, of late, and have been used to adorn the outside walls of various museums and galleries around the world.

In an interview with October Gallery in central London, El Anatsui noted, *“The amazing thing about working with these metallic ‘fabrics’ is that the poverty of the materials used in no way precludes the telling of rich and wonderful stories.*

El Anatsui has exhibited his work around the world, including at the Clark Art Institute (2011), Rice University Art Gallery, Houston (2010), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2008–09); National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C. (2008); Venice Biennale (2007); Hayward Gallery (2005); Liverpool Biennial (2002); the National Museum of African Art (2001); the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona(2001); the 8th Osaka Sculpture Triennale (1995); the 5th Gwangju Biennale (2004); and the Venice Biennale (1990).

A major exhibition of recent works, entitled "Gravity & Grace: Monumental Works by El Anatsui," had its New York premier at the Brooklyn Museum in February 2013. Organized by the Akron Art Museum (exhibition: 2012), the exhibition will later be on view at the Des Moines Art Center (2013–14) and the Bass Museum of Art in Miami (2014).

ABOUT THE KIA PRINT

“Benefit Print Project is pleased to announce the publication of a remarkable new project by the internationally acclaimed artist El Anatsui. The project is the first of its kind to be done by the artist and evokes the celebrated works of his that are made from liquor-bottle caps, which are currently on view in his survey at the Brooklyn Museum. Inspired by his ongoing regard for reinterpretation and the process of stenciling layers of inks on paper, Anatsui mixed different combinations of color to create eight exclusive variations in print. Similar to how his works made out of liquor-bottle caps and other materials change appearance each time they are installed, the imagery that Anatsui created in each of the variations contrast, too. The contrast is the result of him manipulating the stencils, thereby producing alternative arrangements of patterns and shapes; and the effects observed within the variations fluctuate from slight to dramatic, just like with his other works. Anatsui also made five unique works that combine printmaking and hand painting. The five unique works explore variation in another way; the artist created them with more than one orientation, which demonstrates that there is more than one way for them to hang and connects them to his sculptural practice.”

This is the only example of his work in the KIA collection, and can provide the basis for valuable conversation with, and introduction to, his more iconic installation work. His work is featured in the PBS CD art:21 season 6, available in the KIA library.

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Ann Marks