

IZIBONGO

Celebrating Art in Africa and the Diaspora

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Abdalla

Rainbow

tribute to the Sudanese Master Ceramist
Mohammed Ahmed Abdalla Abarro

Natty Mark Samuels

Editorial

When I think of great teachers and longevity of teaching in one institution, I think of Nellie Robinson in Grenada, Amy Bailey in Jamaica, Aaron Douglas in America – and the featured artist from Sudan, who taught at an arts centre in England. I sense that he brought the source of laughter to the classroom, as well as the bag of abundant skills.

When we think of Modern Sudanese artists, we think only of Ibrahim El Salahi. Why do we not know of the featured one, especially as he taught in London for thirty years. I wonder why his art isn't displayed more on the net. Is there a room named after him in Camden Art Centre? Is there a Blue Plaque in Primrose Hill? Does a lecture hall carry his name at Khartoum University? Or a road in Abu Jibayha?

From Sudan, I am happy to present to you, a great ambassador of Sudanese Culture, the master ceramist, MOHAMMED ABDALLA.

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Cover photograph from *Emerging Sudan* Abdalla Rainbow©Natty Mark Samuels, 2018.



from *Camden Arts Centre*



from *The National Museum of African Art – Smithsonian Museum*

Abdalla Rainbow

after watching *Mo Abarro* by Frederique Ifuentes Morgan

from *Sudan: Emergence of of Singularities 2017*

Abdalla Rainbow

Believe me when I tell you, that you've never seen an office as enchanting, as that of the Sudanese artist, Mohammed Abdalla Abarro.

The camera pans round from the right, where, in their paler versions, yellow, pink and green greet the eyes, alongside the less prominent colours. Bowls and dishes, items oval shaped and globular, like offerings of appreciation, to the Deity of Magical Hands. Standing prominent in the middle of this section of the white shelving against a white wall, like the sentinel at the shrine of the deity, is the largest vase, coloured bronze, standing proud in its guardian role.

We next come to a little indentation in the wall. On the shelving we are shown mushrooms, which might formerly be called *Agaricus campestris*, but have become *Agaricus ceramstris*. The two bottom shelves where the mushrooms are - of varied size and colouring, with a strong contribution from brown – remind me of illustrations in a book of folk or fairy tales.

As the camera moves, your eyes gladly follow. We see larger offerings here; once again, but in a darker version, pink predominates, sharing the clay with black. We see a bowl coloured lime and a bowl and a dish of the last of sunset orange.

Another indentation gives us the largest pieces so far. These ones carry bolder patterning, two of geometric styling. One of the latter and a bowl below it have been coloured Pan-African: red, yellow and green. At the Festival of Magical Hands, where the master ceramists gather, these must be the items where they place a shard of clay, in appreciation of their deity

On the final wall, we see, like on the previous one, larger works; with varied patterning and no outstanding colours. Instead, we get a subtle, mystical fusion of pale colours, including little contributions of blue from the sky.

Later on, the camera goes left to right. In that second panorama, with the pinks, reds, greens and browns, you get the impression of an enchanted grove of apples and pomegranates. You happily walk through it, accepting the open invitation, offered by Abdalla Rainbow.

Beautiful Rendezvous

I have seen where the lake becomes the river in Ethiopia; now, I would like to see where the Blue meets the White in Sudan.

Khartoum Graduation

I imagine you Mohammed, grinning, can't stop grinning, on that monumental day in 1958, when you got the news. You go through the white-wrapped populace, the khaki-clothed soldiers, the cars and buses, the donkey rider and the cyclist, the market and the mosque, to sit under a tree, at a quiet place by the river. Will you teach in your alma mater? Find a way to study in Europe? An ageing white-turbaned man, leading a camel by a rope, stoops by the water, looking across. Where will the water take a young Sudanese artist? A fellow student shouts congratulations and the pondering of options is over, or at least deferred. You spring up, bouncing away, to prepare for the evening celebrations.

Afi

to Afi Ekong

When you got there Mohammed,
To The Central School of Art and Design
Did you hear of Afi?
Studied there before you,
Now artist and promoter,
Founded the Bronze Gallery.

The Year Before

Like you had been,
He worked as a carpenter.
Resident in Notting Hill,
An immigrant from Antigua.

Claudia Jones counteracted,
The darkness of Oswald Moseley.

It happened the year before you got there,
The death of young Kelso.
A racist gang took his life,
With the blade of a stiletto.

Claudia Jones counteracted,
The darkness of Oswald Moseley.

Rose

to the artist Rose Glennie

Rose and Mohammed said to each other "Let there be love": and so it was. Love, seeing that she was embedded there, said "Let the love be passed on, so love can be always": and so it was; Amna, Halida and Beesher.

Ablade

Seems to me Mohammed, that when your pioneering contemporaries came to study in England, most of them went to either Goldsmiths, Central, Camberwell or the Slade.

Haile Selassie was the first African leader to send youth abroad for fine art study. Both Afewerk Tekle and Skunder Boghossian, passed through Central and Slade. The Trinidadian Carlisle Chang, with the financial support from the British Council, also went to Central. With backing from his teacher Kenneth Murray and with financial support from Shell Petroleum and like Chang, the British Council, Ben Enwonwu of Nigeria, went to both Goldsmiths and Slade – and as a wartime evacuee, to Ruskin College in Oxford. Your compatriot, Ibrahim el-Salahi also attended the Slade. Jamaicans appeared to have favoured Camberwell, as both Albert Huie and Alvin Marriot studied there: your former teacher Osman Waqialla studied there also. The first modernists of Ghana appeared not to have favoured a particular art school; Kofi Antubum chose Goldsmiths, Vincent Kofi opted for the Royal College of Art, while Oku Ampofo took night classes, at the Edinburgh School of Art.

You studied at Central when the Ghanaian Ablade Glover was there, who was specialising in textiles. Did he tell you of the Asafo companies and their flags? Of the Asante state, founded in the jungle bush? Did he speak with you of King Tarharqa? The glories of ancient Kush?

With Jollof Rice

Did you go to the WASU hostel on Warrington Street?
Talking of Osman Waqialla,
As they spoke of Uche Okeke,
And the rebels of Zaria.

Arnold and Arthur

Arthur Bennett wrote of them,
Arthur Berry painted them.
Talking of the Potteries.
After Central you went there,
Stoke-On Trent time,
Your post graduate studies.

Towns of Josiah

You went to the towns of Josiah Wedgewood,
Learning the science of clay.
And then you spread the knowledge,
All along the way

Saluting Arthur Berry

Did you speak with Arthur Berry,
Share a pint or bag of chips.
Speaking of pencil and paint,
Of the glaze and of the slip.

Icons

Donald Hinds and Claudia Jones

Did you buy the *West Indian Gazette*?
Which championed Lumumba.
And came out in defence,
Of Sisulu and Mandela.

Candles for Khartoum

Friends sit around the table on one of those nights when humanity feels good, as the patio
candles are lit and culture and laughter continue to flow, as the great river that passes
beside them.

The Abdalla Beatitudes

to the Camden Arts Centre

Blessed are the students of Abdalla,
For they shall inherit laughter.

Blessed are the lovers of clay,
For magic shall touch their fingertips.

Blessed are those who experiment,
For they shall bring inspiration.

Blessed are those who gather to learn,
For they shall be told of Meroe.

Blessed are those who believe in art,
For they will have a route to respite.

Blessed are the ignorant of history,
For they will know the Kushite Pharaohs.

Blessed are those who love culture,
For they shall be sharers of beauty.

Blessed are the ragged in spirit,
For art will provide a remedy.

Camden Blessings

Camden Art Centre never made a better decision, Mohammed, than when they invited you to teach. Seems everyone wanted to be an ingredient in the rays and beams, after basking a little in your presence. They wanted to make their contribution, to add a little colour, their individual iridescence, to the sun-emblazoned rainbow, that emanated from you.

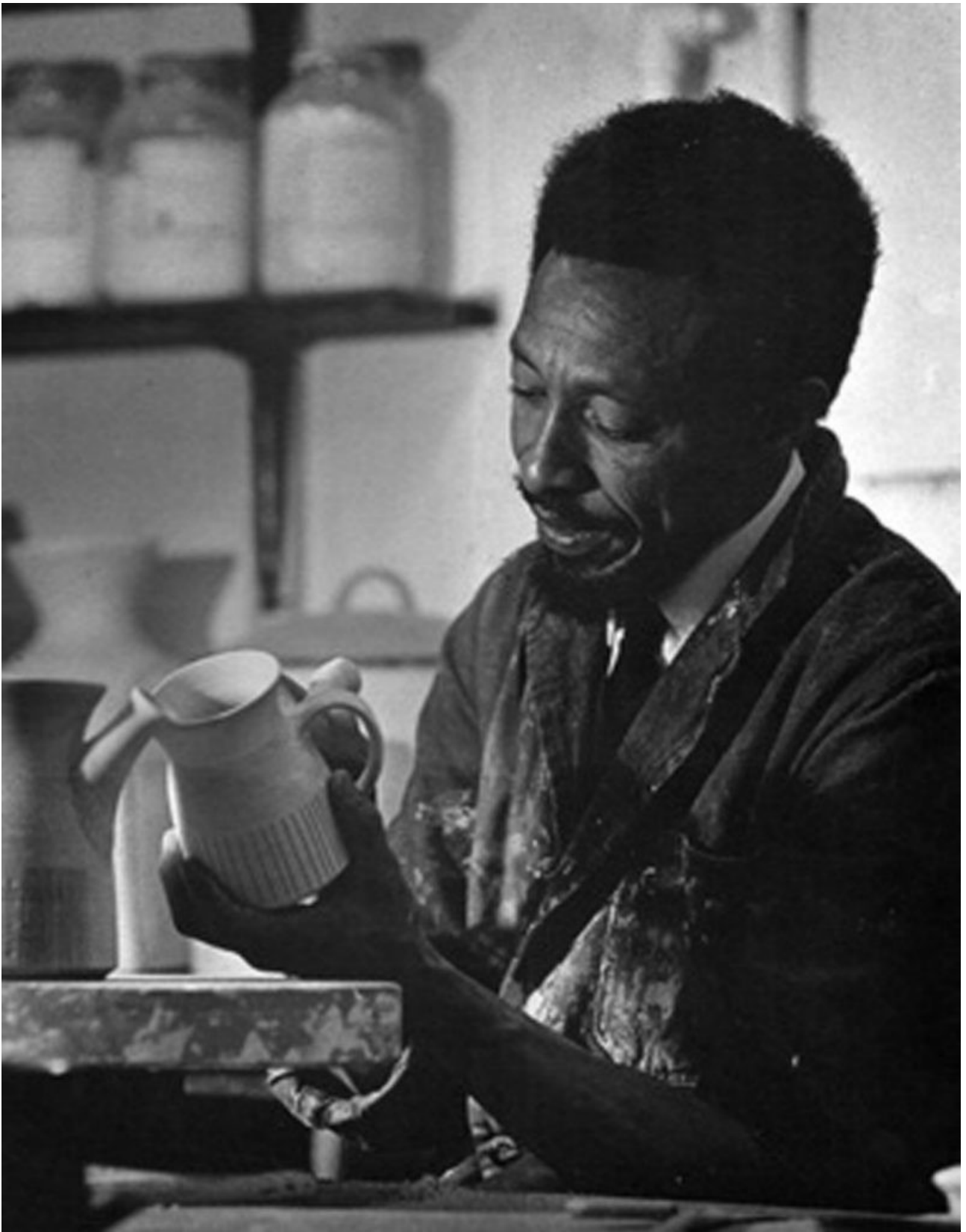
Primrose Hill

You knew that and this,
Chemical analysis.
Delighted your students in Camden,
Embellished the home on Primrose Hill.

Surface like snakeskin,
Or volcano exploding;
Delighted your students in Camden
Embellished the home on Primrose Hill.

Laughter

If one day, walking late at night or early in the morning along Arkwright Road, you hear the sound of vocal merriment, from where you do not know; do not worry, you're not experiencing temporary insanity, nor have the night's indulgences caught up on you; no, what you are hearing, oozing through the walls of the Camden Arts Centre, are echoes of the laughter of Mohammed Abdalla.



Mohammed Abdalla

1935 - 2016

from *Lutyens Trust*