Visiting Artist Coming to University of New Hampshire: September 22-26, 2014

Durham, NH -- Ghana's leading fantasy coffin artist will be an artist-in-residence at University of New Hampshire’s Department of Art and Art History, Sept. 22 -26. Eric Adjetey Anang will give a public lecture about art and offer workshop demonstrations of his processes while he sculpts a fantasy coffin unique to New Hampshire. The lecture and demonstrations are open to the public.

Photo by Jean-Michel Rousset.

Ghanaian fantasy coffins are exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the world, and Anang's creations are highly sought after by collectors of contemporary ethnic art. Fantasy coffins are a traditional folk art unique to the Ga people of southern Ghana. These coffins are functional, customized, sculpted and painted to be figures or objects that represent the deceased. For example, a fisherman might have a coffin formed like a fish, or an airplane shape might symbolize someone who always hoped to travel. Many coffin shapes also suggest local proverbs.

The Ga believe that death is the next step after life. They want to respect and honor their ancestors, believing they are more powerful than the living, so they are driven to appease them, and fantasy coffins are one way.

Anang’s presentation, "Going Out in Style: The Folk Art of Fantasy Coffins," will be at 12pm on Monday, Sept. 22, room A218 in Paul Creative Arts Center. He will describe the history of his family’s carpentry business, which began with making elaborate palanquins (conveyances carried on poles) and coffins for tribal chiefs in villages and towns in and around Accra. Anang's grandfather, Seth Kane Kwei, is credited with founding the fantasy coffin tradition in the early 1950s.

Leah Woods’ woodworking and furniture design class is hosting Anang, who will create a fantasy coffin while demonstrating his traditional woodworking processes. He will work in the woodshop in the Service Building, Monday –Friday 9-12 and 1pm-5. Anang will sculpt a coffin to look like a fish.

Woods plans to donate the coffin to the Seacoast African American Cultural Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.
A fantasy coffin in the shape of a lion.

While in the United States, Anang has done a residency at The Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia, and conducted workshops at the Oregon College of Arts and Crafts and Iowa State University.

Fantasy coffins have been featured in National Geographic, on "CBS Sunday Morning," in the book "The Fantasy Coffins of Kane Kwei," and in the documentaries "The Master of Coffins" (Brazil), "Going Out in Style" (Great Britain), and "Ghana: Customized Coffins" (France).

Anang's visit is co-sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and the Department of Art and Art History. For additional information, contact Leah Woods at leah.woods@unh.edu.