WE FACE FORWARD
ART FROM WEST AFRICA TODAY

2 June – 16 September 2012

Gallery of Costume
Manchester Art Gallery
Whitworth Art Gallery

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We Face Forward

We Face Forward is a season of contemporary art and music from West Africa, celebrated across Manchester’s galleries, museums, music venues and public spaces, as part of London 2012 Festival.

The exhibitions, concerts, events and community activities recognise both the historic and contemporary links between Manchester and the various countries that make up West Africa. They will explore three key ideas:

• Economic and cultural exchange
• Environment and sustainability
• The place of tradition in contemporary culture

This is the first major collaboration between Manchester Art Gallery, Whitworth Art Gallery and Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall. It features painting, photography, textiles, sculpture, video and sound work from a wide range of internationally acclaimed artists, including Georges Adéagbo, El Anatsui, Romuald Hazoumè and George Osodi. The exhibition will also be the first major display in the UK of work by emerging artists such as Lucy Azubuike, Emeka Ogboh, Charles Okereke, Nyani Quarmyne and Victoria Udondian. New, large-scale installations have been commissioned from Barthélémy Toguo at Manchester Art Gallery, and from Pascale Marthine Tayou at Whitworth Art Gallery.

The title for the season is taken from a speech by Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, made in 1960. Stating his resistance to Cold War super powers, Nkrumah’s full quote is “We face neither East nor West: we face forward.” The festival takes its direction from Nkrumah’s statement of independence, deriving inspiration from his sense of West African cultural dynamism.

http://www.wefaceforward.org
http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=420258
We Face *Forward* Exhibiting Artists featured in the Education Resource

### Manchester Art Gallery
- El Anatsui
- Romuald Hazoumè
- Armin Kane
- Nnenna Okore
- Pascale Marthine Tayou
- Barthélémy Toguo

### Whitworth Art Gallery
- Lucy Azubuike
- François-Xavier Gbré
- Romuald Hazoumè
- Nii Obodai
- Amadou Sanogo
- Pascale Marthine Tayou
- Barthélémy Toguo

### Gallery of Costume
- Malick Sidibé

### Across all sites
- Meschac Gaba
El Anatsui, *In the World But Don’t Know the World*, 2009
El Anatsui emerged from the vibrant post-independence art movements of 1960s and 70s West Africa. He creates large-scale works, usually wall hangings out of recycled materials such as flattened liquor bottle caps and metal scraps. He is interested in the materiality of these objects and in playing with the expectations associated with these materials - although bottle caps are made out of metal, it is not rigid but pliable and almost sensual. At first glance, his drapes are therefore more reminiscent of African textiles than harsh metallic installations. El Anatsui transforms rejected materials into something of worth. The titles for the pieces are an amalgamation of the product names for the liquor and references to events and issues that have occurred.

By a process of manipulation and transformation, El Anatsui seeks to unlock the histories that make up each object. This in turn exposes questions on contemporary notions of consumer culture, the circulation of goods and the politics of waste and recycling as well as acting as a metaphor for African traditions of oral histories.

El Anatsui lives and works in Nigeria. Since 1975, he has taught at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. As the Professor of Sculpture., he has taught some of other artists in the exhibition (Nnenna Okore and Amarachi Okafor).

Web Links
http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/microsites/anatsui/
http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/B/bigart/big4_artists1.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7UBvknG8c4

Glossary
Materiality is the state or quality of being physical or material.
Consumer culture is a way of living that sees increasing consumption of goods as economically beneficial.
Metaphor, in this context means something understood as representing another; a symbol.

Suggested Activities
Collect bottle tops, made from metal or foil, or other shiny, metallic objects. Change the objects from their original state by flattening. Bending or twisting them. Experiment with ways to join these materials to construct new forms, whether a 2D wall hanging or a sculptural form.

Venue
Manchester Art Gallery
Lucy Azubuike, *Wear & Tear series, 24*, 2011
Lucy Azubuike (b.1972 Nigeria)

Lucy Azubuike lives and works in Nigeria. This year she is studying for an MFA in the Atlanta, USA.

She works in collage and photography, which she uses as a way of re-assessing the world around her and the everyday.

“My art is mostly informed by chance simulations. ‘Wear and Tear’ series is inspired by serendipity of paper tearing; Posters pasted every nook and crannies of our road and streets often metamorphose into something else through the blend of wear and tear by human and effect of weather (rain and sunshine). The resultant effect is often a magnificent painting, caricature or abstract forms of colours and images. Above all this process is a revelation of our subconscious cultural interaction. Human’s effort to tear-off someone else’s poster in order to paste their information strikes me as one of our daily struggles to be at the forefront, to be in charge and to be heard. Thousand and one questions come to mind especially; what survives this process of wear and tear? And who is in charge after all?” Lucy Azubuike

Web Links
http://invisible-borders.com/lucy-azubuike/bio
http://www.blogger.com/profile/11848054727290930429
http://artsadminartsblog.blogspot.co.uk/2009/03/like-virgin-lucy-azubuike-zanele-muholi.html

Glossary

**Caricature** is a representation, especially pictorial or literary, in which the subject’s distinctive features or peculiarities are deliberately exaggerated to produce a comic or grotesque effect.

Suggested Activities

Stick several layers of coloured paper or images from magazines on top of one another. Use a variety of ways of reveal the layers beneath (slicing, tearing, ripping as well as leaving to weather outside, focusing on shape, colour and texture.

Venue

Whitworth Art Gallery
Meschac Gaba (b.1961 Benin)

Gaba lives and works in Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Through a broad range of artistic strategies, Gaba explores globalism, economic power, commercialism, public space and the role of the western museum. At the heart of his work is a desire to engage visitors in an exchange of ideas and so the final form of his installations are often left open to be shaped by the desires and actions of those who visit.

In his art, Meschac Gaba focuses on issues around intercultural balance and imbalance. He created a work called *The Museum of Contemporary African Art* between 1997 and 2002. Over this time he created works in international galleries and brought them all together for the first time at Documenta 11 (2002) – 12 different rooms showing his previous installations from 12 galleries, such as the Library for the Witte de With in Rotterdam and the Wedding Room for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

For *We Face Forward*, Gaba has been asked to create a flag to fly outside all the venues and it has been used as the brand identity of the show. This flag incorporates the flags of all the West African nations with the Union Jack.

Web Link
http://www.museumofcontemporaryafricanart.com/entree.html
http://artnews.org/fridericianum/?exi=15793&Kunsthalle_Fridericianum&Meschac_Gaba
http://www.iniva.org/library/archive/people/g/gaba_meshac

Glossary
*Intercultural* is relating to or involving more than one culture.

Suggested Activities
Explore ideas around national identity. What objects or symbols do you associate with a country’s identity? – flags, money, language, football teams, writers, prime ministers? Consider the use of colour to create strong identities.

Venues
*Gallery of Costume*
Manchester Art Gallery
*Whitworth Art Gallery*
François -Xavier Gbré, *Swimming Pool VII*, 2009. (From the series called *Tracks*)
François-Xavier Gbré was born in 1978 in France, with a French mother and an Ivory Coast father. He lives and works in France and Italy.

François-Xavier Gbré is a photographer whose work focuses on themes of identity and urban life. Having traveled a lot throughout his life, Gbré feels close to the realities of nomads and migrating communities, constantly living in between two worlds. This constant movement in an ever-changing and increasing global world has revealed itself through the development of what he refers to as ‘no man’s lands’ – an empty swimming pool, a deserted factory. It is these ghost towns and this sense of in-between-ness that he captures through his photography.

His series of work called Tracks 2009-2011 present buildings which seem to be suspended in time. They are incomplete structures, either through disuse or unfinished building, which hint at the human presence. The pool in Swimming Pool VII was originally built for the African Games, which was cancelled due to a coup in Mali. The pool was never used for its original purpose and was eventually closed in 2005 due to its poor state. This photograph was taken during its renovation in 2009. The pool represents political change in the country.

Web Links
http://www.fx-photo.com/
http://www.fx-photo.com/wordpress/

Glossary
Globalization is the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.

Suggested Activities
Take photographs of derelict buildings and new buildings in the same locations. Compare the atmospheres of these spaces. Think about how the use of the spaces have changed over time. Play around with the images to convey a feeling of another time or a sense of time passing.

Venue
Whitworth Art Gallery
Romuald Hazoumè, ARTicle 14, Débrouilles-toi, toi-même! 2005
Romuald Hazoumè (b. 1962 Benin)

Romuald Hazoumè is a multi-disciplinary artist working with a huge variety of media and art forms including petrol canisters, large-scale installation, video and photography. He is particularly fascinated by the anthropomorphic forms of certain objects such as plastic canisters that he transforms into masks. Underlying these works is a critique of imperialism and consumerism.

Article 14 is a cart made out of found and functioning goods that have been thrown out by the West. The title is taken from the hypothetical ‘fourteenth’ article in African constitutions, said to convey the idea that you’d better look out for yourself because no one else will. The work shows the realities of daily life in West Africa, particularly the individual life of the street trader who must continually reinvent survival strategies and negotiate ever changing urban territories.

The use of reclaimed objects relates to these resourceful strategies and also trace memory and the relationships between objects and people. Hazoumè explains: “...Materials tell us a lot about the life of people – it is a way of connecting with their lives – everything we use says something about us...It is like a kind of modern-day archaeology”. Even if the function of objects is made redundant by change, history remains embedded in them.

Web Links
http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/artists/hazoume/index.shtml
http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mediacentre/displayrelease.aspx?id=539
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L4gejIY2dk

Glossary
Anthropomorphic is the showing or treating of animals, gods and objects as if they are human in appearance, character or behaviour.

Suggested Activities
Select discarded everyday objects which look like faces or make faces from fragments of re-cycled objects. Add extras to the objects to create hair, head phones, glasses, etc.

Venue
Manchester Art Gallery (Sénégaulese and Wax Bandana)
Whitworth Art Gallery (ARTicle 14, Débrouilles-toi, toi-même! )
Abdoulaye Armin Kane, *Yaatal Kaddou or the Event*, 2007  (video still)
Armin Kane (b.1965 Senegal)

Kane lives and works in Dakar. He is a video artist and sculptor – his work is socially engaged as he aims to present current issues of social, economical, political and cultural life as well as contributing strategies to cope with them.

As part of We Face Forward, Kane’s video entitled Yaatal Kaddou or the Event will be shown. Against a backdrop of blocks of flats, we see and hear the flow of urban life quietly unravelling – including the traffic passing, people watching football, power cuts, accidents etc. The video feels like a video game and is a gentle expose of daily urban life in Senegal and how small dramas affect society.

In addition to his work as an artist, he has, since 2005, been holding visual expression workshops at a Psychiatric Centre in Dakar.

Web Links
http://www.flickr.com/photos/lettera27/2523405979/
http://translate.google.co.uk/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdoulaye_Armin_Kane&ei=QLO6T6GcAoSX1AX69OnvBw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CGIQ7gEwBg&prev=/search%3Fq=Armin+Kane%26hl=en%26client=firefox-a%26hs=FeG%26rls=or

Glossary
Animation is a specialised field of film focusing on moving pictures.

An Expose is a public report of the facts about a situation, especially one that is shocking or has been kept secret.

Suggested Activities
Make a flick book animation based on your observations of urban or rural life as you experience it.

Venue
Manchester Art Gallery
Nii Obodai, 1966, 2009
Nii Obodai (b. 1963 Ghana)

Obodai lives and works in Ghana.

Obodai’s photographs were taken during a voyage of self-discovery around Ghana, his home country. They depict urban and rural scenes and landscapes that capture the vibrant histories, traditions and spirituality inherent in the country’s physical and social make-up. Their soft focus reveals the artist’s intimate appreciation of and engagement with what it means to be Ghanaian in today’s world. Above and beyond the search for identity and self-discovery, the positive and poetic quality of these photographs clearly challenge some of the characteristics such as war, corruption and helplessness among others that we expect to find in African landscapes.

“I desire to engage the past, traveling the places that create memory and thus to see a way into the future. I explore the zones between tradition, improvisation and modernity, documenting a New Africa. In this landscape of wonder, with its unlikely adeptness, cultures merge, positive traditions remain in contemporary living, faces of the Diaspora return home and spiritual stories are told not to be forgotten.” Nii Obodai

Web Links
http://niiobodai.wordpress.com/about/
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXDMjLDDNM0

Glossary
Spirituality is the quality of involving deep, often religious, feelings and beliefs, rather than the physical parts of life.

Suggested Activities
Collect images, words and articles which you associate with the identity of your local area, Manchester, the North West, England and Great Britain. Find out more about local stories which are part of an area and it’s history. Are there identifiable traits for Mancunians or British people? If so, how would you show them through a photographic collage or single photographic image?

Venue
Whitworth Art Gallery
Nnenna Okore, *When the Heavens meet the Earth*, 2011
Nnenna Okore (b. 1975 Nigeria)

Nnenna Okore lives and works in Chicago, USA.

Okore’s work is inspired by the use of found objects, transforming discarded materials into cultural objects. She is concerned with the concept of materiality and how materials, both natural and man-made, change and are able to recycle themselves organically according to their environments. She works with biodegradable and usually discarded materials such as newspapers, ropes, thread and dye amongst others. She explores how various hand based processes such as weaving, twisting and dyeing transform these materials into new entities, new forms and new textures. Underlying her processes and works is an interest in transition through decay and composition, and life and death.

*When the Heavens Meet the Earth* is an installation made with burlap, acrylic and dye. The processes involved include tearing the material apart and re-constituting the elements together into a new shape and entity.

Web Links
http://www.nnennaokore.com/
http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/artists/okore/index.shtml

Glossary

**Biodegradable** means able to decay naturally and in a way that is not harmful.

Burlap is a type of rope made from hessian, which is a thick, rough strong cloth. It can be used as a base for weaving.

Suggested Activities

Collect biodegradable materials such as paper, cotton fabric and string to make into a pulp to create new fibres. Add colour using natural dyes such as red cabbage, roses, tamarind paste and turmeric. Press the pulp into a range of shapes, both 2D and 3D forms. Experiment with the density of the materials, leaving gaps at times and making fine tendrils at other times.

Venue
Manchester Art Gallery
Amadou Sanogo, The Last Crowd, (Les derniers bain de foule), 2011
Born in 1977 in Mali where he still lives and works.

Amadou Sanago is a painter by training. He is concerned with the place of the individual in global society. His canvases usually depict current affairs images he has seen on television as a way of exploring his individual freedom in relation to present time as a ‘maker’ or fabricator of the past and future present.

His work seeks to unravel the socio-historic and ideological strategies and traditions that imprison present human behaviour and that become rigid conceptual barriers. His general approach extends to the way he displays his canvases – they are usually frameless and hanging freely in order to expose the 3-dimensional nature of the work.

Web Links
http://www.amadousanogo.com/

Glossary
A global society is where all people of the world live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done. In other words, a global society relates to the whole world.

Suggested Activities
Watch TV news or read current issues in the newspaper and make an immediate response in paint to show your response to the news. Consider your use of colour, brush strokes, etc. to show an emotional response. Layer clippings from relevant newspaper articles below and above the paint surfaces.

Venue
Whitworth Art Gallery
Malick Sidibé (b. 1935 Mali)

Known as the Eye of Bamako, Sidibé is renowned for his black and white studies of popular culture. He opened Studio Malick in 1958 and specialised in documentary photography of local young people during the 1960s and 1970s. His subjects are caught in surprise snapshots at a variety of locations including parties, sports events and on the beach.

Sidibé’s later work was more studio-based where his subjects posed leisurely against textile backdrops. Some wore African-style clothing and others dressed in Western clothes, showing the desire to be like young whites. His photos focus solely on a newly independent generation of young Africans going through momentous social and cultural change, where they struggled to adapt to city life and faced unemployment and alcohol for the first time. Far from being voyeuristic, the photos are convivial and complicit.

Sidibé’s work will be shown alongside two other esteemed Malian photographers, Abderramane Sakaly and Soungalo Malé. All their archives are being preserved by the National Museum of Mali.

Web Links
http://www.lensculture.com/sidibe.html

Glossary

Voyeuristic, in this context meaning photographs that are taken with a sensational motif so it is almost exploiting the subjects or people in the photographs.

Documentary Photography captures observations of the world and its people. The photographer uses their knowledge, skills and trained eye to see the hidden messages in our societies and captures the moments of time for all of us to see, now and in the future.

Suggested Activities
Set up an artist’s studio to take photographs of your friends or family. Experiment with changing the backdrop to show easily identifiable spaces such as party or wedding. Consider what you are trying to show through these images.

Venue
Gallery of Costume
Pascale Marthine Tayou, *The World Falls Apart (Le Monde s’effondre)*, 2012
Pascale Marthine Tayou (b.1967 Cameroon)

Tayou lives and works in Ghent, Belgium. He is a self-taught artist, and produces extremely varied work, which consists of drawings, sculptures, videos, performance and installation. Central to his work is the theme of nomadism and by extension of cultural and national identity and global migration. Through his work, Tayou examines the permeability of boundaries: he seeks a definition of the self, investigating its character through personal history and social contacts while at the same time examining aspects of economics and migration.

Tayou’s installations are often overwhelming, sprawling assemblages of human shapes, shantytown like dwellings and an accumulation of recycled materials including colourful plastic bags. As a result they convey a sort of global jumble, highlighting issues of borders, cultural stereotypes and environmental concerns. As part of We Face Forward, Tayou’s new work The World Falls Apart, was inspired by the African novel Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achibe. His installation appears as an interior forest which spills out into the Whitworth Park. Tayou’s installation is a “cultural traffic jam, with African sculptures produced for tourists, steel diamonds hung from chains and structures stuffed with food packaging. The distinction between trade goods and sacred objects is blurred. A selection of his figures, Poupées Pascales (and Sauveteurs Gnang Gnang act as interventions in the collection galleries at Manchester Art Gallery.

Web Links
http://www.pascalemarthinetayou.com/
http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/pascale_marthine_tayou/

Glossary
A Nomad is a member of a group of people who move from one place to another rather than living in one place all of the time.

Permeability is the observation of ease of opportunity for people to pass through something, e.g. boundaries.

Suggested Activities
Create a small 3D figurative self-portrait from re-cycled materials. Consider your selection of materials – what message do they convey? Tayou sees plastic bags as similar to people in the fact that they are dangerous and can be re-cycled.

Venues
Manchester Art Gallery (Poupées Pascales 2010 )
Whitworth Art Gallery (The World Falls Apart 2012)
Barthélémy Toguo, *Redemption*, 2012
Barthélémy Toguo (b. 1967 Cameroon)

Toguo Lives and works in France. He is a very versatile artist who uses a variety of different media to produce installations, performances, photography and film, drawings and watercolours. For We Face Forward, he has been commissioned to create a new installation for Manchester Art Gallery and some watercolours for the Whitworth.

Toguo’s work is primarily concerned with boundaries and barriers, not just on a physical and territorial level but also psychological and moral. In a global world where travel and movement is made so easy, he exposes the absurdities of borders and boundaries and explores the effect travel and transition have on individuals’ sense of identity and freedom. Despite the seriousness of the themes involved, his treatment of them remains playful and at times, theatrical and fantastical.

Web Links

http://www.barthelemytoquo.com/
http://www.barthelemytoquo.com/7liens/liens.html
http://www.bienalhabana.cult.cu/

Glossary

An installation is a form of modern sculpture where the artist uses sound, movement or space as well as objects in order to make an often temporary work of art.

Psychological is used to mean relating to the human mind and feelings.

Suggested Activities

Experiment with watercolours and how you apply them to paper. Try adding very watery paint to thick paper which is very absorbent (e.g. watercolour paper) and physically move around the paper to create forms. Remove water by using tissues and sponges to create textured marks and control the shapes. Allow to dry over a day and continue to work on the image further. Use the marks expressively.

Venue

Manchester Art Gallery (Redemption 2012)
Whitworth Art Gallery (Purification 2012)
Optional Extras

We Face Forward Artists Tours:
Cost: £50 per group for a maximum of 22 students
These 45 minute tours of We Face Forward are led by artists whose practice is connected to West Africa. They introduce the exhibition to groups through personal responses and reflections inspired by the artworks on display. For more information, please visit, http://www.manchestergalleries.org/education/we-face-forward

Secondary Teacher Training: Thursday 21 June 2012 10 – 4 pm
FREE event
This training day is for teachers planning to use We Face Forward in their schemes of work. The training will start at Manchester Art Gallery where you’ll meet artists whose practice has been influenced by West Africa, explore the exhibition and receive a resource to support self-guided visits to the exhibition. In the afternoon you’ll head to the Whitworth Art Gallery for an introduction to the rest of the exhibition and a practical, creative workshop exploring some of the techniques used by the featured artists.

Summer in the City: Summer programme for 11-16 year olds
Every Tuesday 1 – 3 pm. 24 July, 31 July, 7 August, 14 August, 21 August & 28 August.
Artist-led workshops inspired by We Face Forward.

We Face Forward Bespoke Practical Workshops:
Cost: £90 half-day, £180 full day
Choose from: Using Sketchbooks, Experimental Printmaking, Pattern & Process in Textiles or Sculpture in the Environment

For all visits please book in advance with Denise Bowler via e-mail denise.bowler@manchester.ac.uk or call on 0161 275 8455 or Alex Bird 0161 235 8842 or a.bird@manchester.gov.uk