Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AKWAABA

Weaving Unity between Bonwire and Staten Island

Press Contact:
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Reception: 3:00-5:00pm,
Saturday, November 6

Dates: November 13, 2010 to
May 1, 2011

Hours: Wed-Sun, Noon to 5pm

Admission: $3 Adults,
$2 Seniors/Students,
Kids12 and under Free

**Location: Snug Harbor
Cultural Center &
Botanical Garden**
1000 Richmond Terrace
Bldg G
Staten Island, NY 10301

General Info:
(718) 448-2500

Website:
www.snug-harbor.org

The Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, The Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island and The Staten Island Immigrant Council are proud to present *AKWAABA: Weaving Unity between Bonwire and Staten Island*. An opening reception will be held on **November 6 from 3:00 to 5:00pm**. The reception will feature music by Ghanaian, DJ Dan.

AKWAABA, *welcome* in Ghanaian, is a multi-media presentation of indigenous Kente cloth and the art of weaving on a traditional loom built on Staten Island. The exhibition traces the history, origin and cultural significance of an extraordinary textile tradition that dates back to the seventeenth century. The unique story of how Bonwire weaving came to Staten Island is told through video and photographs that document a family of tradition bearers that recently immigrated to the area, which include Anthony Oti Kegya, Francis Marfo and Nana Adu-Bofour.

Bonwire, Ghana is the birthplace of the Kente cloth. Ghanaians often explain that, "Bonwire is to Kente cloth, as steel is to Pittsburgh." One of the exhibition's highlights is the loom built by Staten Island carpenter, David Riccardi, in collaboration with tradition bearers from Bonwire, Ghana.

Public Programs

Weaving Demonstration: Saturday, November 20, 2pm-4pm
Weaving Demonstration: Saturday, December 4, 2pm-4pm
Weaving Demonstration: Saturday, December 11, 2pm-4pm
Weaving Demonstration: Saturday, December 18, 2pm-4pm

Ghana Independence Day: Sunday, March 6

Organized by Samuel Owusu-Sekyere, Staten Island Immigrant Council and Christopher J. Mulé, *Folklorist*, COAHSI/Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island.

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Support for *AKWAABA* provided by a JPMorgan Chase Regrant in partnership with the COAHSI/Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island. Additional support provided by the Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation. Programming support during the exhibit is made possible by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, celebrating 50 years of building strong, creative communities in New York State's 62 counties.

DIRECTIONS Via mass transit from Manhattan, take the 1 to South Ferry, 4/5 to Bowling Green or R/W to White Hall. Exit and walk south to blue neon Staten Island terminal to take free ferry. After landing take the S40 bus at Gate D to travel along Richmond Terrace, less than a 10-minute ride. Let the bus driver know that you want to get off at Snug Harbor.

Bonwire comes to Staten Island...on wheels

Kofi Marfo (left) and Nana Adu Bofour weave kente in Staten Island like they used to do at Bonwire

Strange Disease Killing Local Industry in Ghana

by Kofi Ayim

Kente, the intricate multicolored apparel that is exclusively associated with Ghana's culture and symbolic pride of many Africans born outside Africa has now come to Staten Island, New York to stay. The interest in the first ever "live" kente weaving demonstration in a 2005 Cultural Diversity Program organized by Wagner College of Staten Island seemed to be dying out when Samuel Owusu Sekyere a Ghanaian community leader, chanced upon a family of kente weavers - Nana Adu Bofour, Oti Kegya and Kofi Marfo – from the ancestral home of indigenous kente, Bonwire, in the Ashanti Region. The board member of the Staten Island Immigrant Council and Vice president of the Ghanaian Association of Staten Island liaised on behalf of his group with Chris J. Mule a folklorist and Deputy Director of the Council of the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island (COASI), and in collaboration with the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, created the "AK WAABA –Weaving Unity between Bon wire and Staten Island" exhibition. The problem of acquiring a traditional loom was resolved when David Ricciardi an artist and carpenter with input from the three weavers redesigned and constructed a collapsible and portable loom complete with rolling wheels. Given the fact that indigenous looms are stationary, observers believe this innovation is probably the first of its kind in the world.

In an interview Chris Mule opined that it is prudent for Staten Island to celebrate cultural diversity to meet the needs and challenges of its growing mixed heritage. He pointed out that it is important for homogenous cultures to reconnect with their identity and also to teach and share the history and culture with one another, especially the younger generation.

Making kente, like unique trades requires elaborate dexterity and long hours of sitting. It takes between two to four days to weave the most basic and simple cloth. Complex ones with geometrical patterns and designs could take up to three months or more for a 10 hour a day work. The strips of woven cloths are sewn together into rectangular shapes. Authentic kente cloth is not mass manufactured. Every woven kente cloth – from strips of college graduation to ceremonial gowns of academic pomposity and flowing clerical gowns – is baptized with a name. The name, usually proverbial, reflects socio economic or religious tendencies in an environment. So the next time you see someone wearing kente, inquire of its name. The AKWAABA Weaving Unity exhibit runs from November 6 to April 3 2011 at the spacious and sprawling Snug Harbor complex, Staten Island. All events are free and open to the public Tuesday through Sunday. For more information contact Chris Mule at 718 447-3329 x 1006 or Sam Owusu Sekyere at 347 409-7618.