

NEW TALENT

Anthony Amoako-Attah

The glass artist describes how he replicates the kente fabrics of Ghana in his works to *Debika Ray*. Photography by *Owen Richards*

Anthony Amoako-Attah is rapidly making a name for himself with a series of sculptures that dazzle as well as confound – hung on the wall like tapestries or draped over surfaces, they glisten as glass but have the colours, texture and apparent movement of cloth.

Despite the artist's skill with the material, glass wasn't always his domain – he started out studying ceramics, but during his undergraduate degree at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in southern Ghana, he was seduced by the idea of working with it after it was mentioned during lessons about firing and glazing. The course didn't offer practical training in the medium, so when he graduated he decided to enrol in a master's degree somewhere in the world with the ambition to learn how to craft with it, return to Ghana and teach it himself.

And so he found himself at the University of Sunderland, in a city that's home to the renowned National Glass Centre, first doing an MA and then embarking on a PhD. He began by translating his ceramics pieces – which depicted the symbols traditionally found on Ghanaian adinkra and kente cloth, hand-woven and printed textiles associated with the Ashanti people – into the medium of glass, but now strives to replicate the fabrics themselves. The latest iterations of his *Transitions* series – a name that refers to his move across mediums and his shift across cultures from Ghana to the UK – mirror the warp and weft of woven

textiles, as well as the complex and varied patterns on their surfaces. 'I love the colours and the sparkle when light falls on glass,' he says. 'Glass is made to store and preserve the content within it: in labs, for example, chemicals are stored in glass bottles, and in museums important artefacts are preserved in glass cases. Due to how fragile it is, glass is always kept safe, and I intend to use it to preserve the value of my culture.'

Achieving the illusion of fabric involved a long period of experimentation. Having initially been attracted to glassblowing when he arrived in Sunderland, Amoako-Attah soon turned to casting, drawing on skills he'd already picked up as a ceramicist. Later, in an effort to replicate the sense of wovenness, he tried waterjet cutting, before settling on engraving and screen-printing on the surface using enamels and coloured powders, then finishing the pieces in a kiln. 'I am still exploring using the print techniques to refine the woven textures,' he says.

The artist's focus on textiles – and kente fabric in particular – was an attempt to represent his personal identity while far away from home, as well as capture wider ideas around the cultural significance of cloth in an immutable form. He recalls when his father gifted his brother the kente cloth that represented their community when he graduated from high school. 'People hand these through the generations, to their kids, and their kids' kids,' he says. 'I was thinking about these rites of passage that happen, from birth to death, and how fabric can tell the history of a particular place or people.' He sees similarities in the specificity of tartan, which he has begun to refer to in his designs as a nod to his new home in Britain.

The artist is showing some of his work at London's Collect art fair (25-27 February), with Scottish gallery North Lands Creative and US-based Bullseye Projects, which supplied him with materials after spotting his potential. 'I first saw Anthony's work online last year – the confluence of kente pattern with Scottish plaid sparked a rainbow-like joy for me,' says Lani McGregor, its director. Michael Endo, curatorial consultant at Bullseye, describes his work as 'beautifully crafted, visually stunning, personal, and conceptually complex'.

For Amoako-Attah, the *Transitions* series is a life's work, but he hasn't forgotten his original ambition – to teach others to work with glass. 'I believe in diversity and that knowledge gained is open to all, so I am ready to teach anywhere in the world,' he says.

[instagram.com/kente_glass](https://www.instagram.com/kente_glass)

Opposite: Anthony Amoako-Attah. Left: detail of *The Stole (Identity)*, 2021, glass, from his *Transitions* series

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