

Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng

“NCECA has been a **life-changing** experience in my career as an artist.

Being a presenter and having the opportunity to show my work in two separate NCECA exhibitions has been a huge recognition of my practice as an artist. This motivates me to continue working. If I can get that recognition from NCECA it motivates me to do more for myself and others to become involved.”

When ceramic artists and educators first gathered together as NCECA, their intent was to overcome a sense of isolation. Over more than 50 years, its members have supported one another in myriad ways to create a sense of community. Amidst the profound experiences of isolation these past 18-months, NCECA members like Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng have provided sources of renewal and gratitude for NCECA’s founding purpose. In the Akan language, the name Asiedu has a meaning associated with senses of responsibility and caregiving—essential themes that flow throughout conversations with Japheth who is pursuing his MFA degree at Illinois State University. Art can be a vehicle to process and express complex experiences of identity under stress. Japheth shares,



“The things I am going through are not so peculiar to me ... not that different from the experiences of others. I want my work to speak for those who are separated from family ... those who feel like strangers ... those experiencing the gaps that come with being transnational.”

His early childhood on his family’s cocoa farm in Kaase in the Western region of Ghana endowed an appreciation for the earth. Clay was the primary building material in many homes. At Presbyterian Senior High School in the town of Berekum, Asiedu-Kwarteng’s connection to his world through materiality and creative inquiry. A teacher named Mr. Asiedu Arthur transformed Japheth’s life, nurturing his curiosity through self-directed learning. Mr. Arthur guided Japheth’s applications to university, helping him gain a cherished spot in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Following graduation Japheth received a posting as a teaching assistant and was ultimately hired on as a technical staff member.

When Professor Jeannie Hulen of the University of Arkansas visited Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology on a Fulbright Fellowship, she shared her appreciation for NCECA, and the work it does to create a sense of connectedness throughout the field.

When he received an offer to enter the graduate program at Illinois State University, Japheth was thrilled for the opportunity. He also had to confront the kind of decision no parent freely envisions having to make: pursuing this opportunity would separate his family for months at a time. Already beginning to focus his work on themes of dislocation and belonging, only a few months into his graduate studies the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. With any plans for a visit with his family in Ghana indefinitely postponed, Asiedu-Kwarteng remained awake for 2:00 am video calls with his wife and sons just starting their days.

Personal sacrifice and loss have cascaded from this global crisis for so many in so many different forms. Asiedu-Kwarteng's focus has been to sustain a sense of hope for the future. Building connections to others through his work are essential to the future he envisions for his family. In this difficult time, NCECA has provided a conduit for these connections to be made.

“My family keeps me hopeful... I need to pay them back for their sacrifice.”

