

ASAFO



THIS GLORIOUS DEFIANCE AGAINST TIME.
GUS CASELY HAYFORD OBE
DIRECTOR, SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF AFRICAN ART

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THE GALLERY OF EVERYTHING

ASAFO

In the 17th century, on the coast of what is now modern-day Ghana, the Fante people developed a new tradition.

They organised themselves into military groups, the Asafo; they gave their assemblies numbers; and they used their skill as designers and image-makers to commence a visual practice today considered as one of the most vivid and celebratory of 20th century Africa.

These are Asafo flags: “asa” meaning war, “fo” meaning people. They are symbols and allegories, conjured from folk tales and proverbs. They speak of resistance, yet seem a far cry from their colonial era. Ghana claimed its independence from British rule in 1957 and these memory cloths straddle those years. They speak of a time and a place.

Colour-coded in accordance with the companies’ numeration, Asafo flags contain a jazz all their own. They invent and appropriate in equal measure. They encapsulate ancient beliefs and black consciousness. They are the identifiers both for funerals and festivities. Their ingredients include oral history, mythology, heraldry and new technology.

Each allegory aims to express its message with pride, personality and pizzazz. A draught-board becomes a landscape for battle. Fishermen harvest a catch, just as the company will scoop up its enemies. Crocodiles cooperate and share a single body to eat. In the upper corner, the Union Jack looks down: a mark of allegiance, perhaps also a premonition of change. For Asafo flags clearly do not fear the Empire’s mighty signifier.

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Asafo flags have long inspired artists, curators and designers. Notable advocates include Smithsonian director Gus Casely-Hayford and contemporary artist Kerry James Marshall. Asafo flags are included in the collections of the National Museum of African Art (Washington), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) and Quai Branly (Paris).

ASAFO at The Gallery of **Everything** features vintage flags from a number of key collections, including that of author and enthusiast Peter Adler. Dates range from the turn of the century until the 1960s.

THE GALLERY OF EVERYTHING

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www.gallevary.com

The Gallery of **Everything** is a commercial space for non-academic artists, private art-makers and other alternative creators.

An initiative of The Museum of **Everything**, the gallery engages with a wide network of institutions, artists and curators to place artists in private and public collections. The gallery's roster includes major historical masters, as well as newly discovered authors. Events include group and solo exhibitions, talks, readings and happenings.

The gallery has been exhibiting at Frieze Masters since 2012 and opened its London gallery space in 2016. Exhibitions to date include *Journeys into the Outside*, an installation of environmental art-making in collaboration with performer Jarvis Cocker, and *Le Foyer de l'Art Brut*, an in-depth study of artist Jean Dubuffet's legendary 1947 project in Paris.

Proceeds from The Gallery of **Everything** help support The Museum of **Everything**, a registered UK charity and non-profit organisation, dedicated to the advancement, integration and celebration of artists and makers beyond the cultural mainstream.

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THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

www.musevery.com

The Museum of **Everything** opened in London in 2009 and has welcomed over a million visitors to its large-scale installations in Britain, Europe, Russia, America and Australia.

As the UK's leading advocate for non-academic and private art-making, the museum functions as an international exhibitor, archive and activist, collaborating with artists, curators, writers and institutions. These include Tate Modern (UK), Hayward Gallery (UK), Pinacoteca Agnelli (Italy), Kunsthal Rotterdam (Holland) and Garage (Russia).

The Museum of **Everything** remains a major influence on the inclusion and display of non-canonical art. It was closely involved with the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, during which it was also profiled in a BBC documentary, *Turning the Art World Inside Out*. Recent activities include a 2017/18 exhibition at Mona in Australia, featuring several hundred artists in the largest installation of self-taught art ever presented in the region.

For more information, please visit www.musevery.com.