

Re/defining

Polish-Ghanaian
Textile Narratives

Curatorial concept

Redefining. Polish-Ghanaian Textile Narratives

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OmenaArt Foundation's thematic pavilion at the Malta Biennale 2026 presents monumental textile installations, the result of collaborative efforts between Polish and Ghanaian artists. This work reimagines the CUT | CLEAN | CLEAR theme by delving into the shared history between Poland and Ghana – one marked not by oppression, but by mutual aid, cultural exchange, and solidarity.

The exhibition aims to present a hopeful, constructive proposition for the future, built on the possibility of cross-cultural cooperation based on equality, respect, and shared humanity. In this spirit, the concept is deeply informed by the philosophy of Ubuntu, "I am because we are", a Southern African ethic that emphasizes human interdependence, compassion, and community. Ubuntu reinforces the exhibition's message: that identity and progress are not individual pursuits, but collective endeavors built through empathy, respect, and mutual recognition.

Importantly, a specially commissioned soundtrack by a contemporary artist will form an integral part of the exhibition, serving as an auditory thread that complements the textile works. This original sound piece will echo the themes of reconnection, solidarity, and co-creation, deepening the sensory experience of the pavilion and drawing visitors into a multidimensional narrative.

Historical context

In the 1960s, amidst the global wave of decolonization, Poland extended educational and professional support to newly independent African nations, including Ghana. This assistance was part of a broader Eastern Bloc initiative aimed at fostering ties with the Global South. Ghanaian students were invited to study in Poland, often beginning their journey with a year-long Polish language course in Łódź before pursuing degrees in various fields. At the same time, Polish specialists (artists, engineers, and architects) were dispatched to Ghana, contributing to its development efforts.

This exchange was not merely transactional but a genuine partnership rooted in shared ideals of progress and mutual respect. These transcontinental interactions remind us of the unrealized potential of internationalism, which remains deeply relevant today. The strong and unique bond between Ghana and Poland in the 1960s stands as a powerful yet underexplored chapter in the history of global solidarity. That this relationship faded without being fully realized leaves a space for artistic imagination and renewed dialogue.

This pavilion takes up that thread, reactivating a moment of historic optimism. It embraces what was left undone not as loss, but as opportunity, inviting artists and audiences alike to continue a story paused, not ended.

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As Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, declared in the early days of independence:

"We face neither East nor West; we face forward."

Spoken at a moment charged with possibility, Nkrumah's words resonate with the spirit of the exhibition, which is rooted in the past, but firmly oriented toward the future.

Łódź, a city that became a hub for African students during this period, symbolizes the intersection of these transnational connections. The city's role as a gateway for Ghanaian students underscores the significance of this collaboration. At the same time, Łódź holds a longstanding tradition as the center of textile production and art in Poland, which enriches the thematic framework of the project. Drawing from this dual legacy – both as a site of cultural exchange and textile innovation – the exhibition is developed in partnership with the Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, whose institutional context further deepens the dialogue between past and present, local and global, material and political narratives.

Vision of works presented

The works presented will be the result of a dedicated artistic residency in Malta, taking place in the months leading up to the Biennale. Three artists – one from Ghana and two from Poland – will create new textile-based installations that draw from both of their cultural traditions while engaging deeply with Malta's own artistic heritage.

Ernestina Mansa Doku is a Ghanaian artist who lives and works in Accra, Ghana. Her practice reflects her view on nature and how natural forms adapt to any given environment, squeezing through crevices, attaching themselves to surfaces, intertwining with other objects, and adapting to any given circumstance. She describes her working process as a surgical treatment, involving distortion, reorganization, reshaping, multiplication, or even division, to alter the appearance of form and create something new. Eliza Proszczuk is a Polish visual artist, PhD in Fine Arts, academic lecturer, and researcher. She works with textiles, spatial objects, and collages, treating art as a tool for social change and a space for emancipation. Her artistic practice focuses on themes of memory, inheritance, and women's herstory. She finds inspiration in the words of Pier Paolo Pasolini: "Culture as prison, art as liberation." Consistently, she creates spaces where art serves as a tool for experimentation, therapy, and social transformation. In her work, Polish painter Marta Nadolle features topics such as love, alienation, adolescence, intimacy, personal relationships, and human emotions. She processes today's cityscape as a form of contemporary veduta, weaving her immediate urban reality in with inspirations drawn from folk culture. By bringing together these seemingly disparate elements and customs, she blurs the line between what is central and what is peripheral, between the public and the private. She creates a space in which stories of the big city are blended with the authenticity and intimacy of traditional craftwork and folklore.

The artworks created by Doku, Proszczuk, and Nadolle will also actively incorporate the skills, knowledge, and participation of the local Maltese community, with a particular focus on the island's rich weaving and textile traditions. This interweaving of Ghanaian, Polish, and Maltese narratives speaks to the broader idea of transnational solidarity, cultural synthesis, and the Ubuntu principle of shared becoming.

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The artists' works will employ textiles and redefined materials to construct the monumental pieces that embody the essence of CUT | CLEAN | CLEAR:

- **CUT:** Fragment and reassemble elements to signify the dismantling of colonial narratives and the forging of new, equitable relationships.
- **CLEAN:** Utilize reclaimed and natural materials, symbolizing the purification of historical misconceptions and the embrace of authentic, shared histories.
- **CLEAR:** Present a transparent narrative that elucidates the complexities and depth of the Polish-Ghanaian partnership, free from colonial tropes.

The textile medium, with its deep cultural significance in Polish, Ghanaian, and Maltese traditions, serves as an ideal conduit for this dialogue. It allows the weaving together of stories, memories, and identities, creating a tapestry that honors the past while boldly envisioning a shared, hopeful future shaped by Ubuntu values.

Malta as a cultural conduit

Situated strategically between Africa and Europe, Malta has historically served as a crossroads of cultures and ideas. Its geographic and symbolic positioning make it an apt venue for this exhibition, which seeks to bridge continents, traditions, and histories.

The island's textile heritage and the enduring presence of artisanal weaving practices make Malta not just a location, but an active collaborator in the making of this work. The limestone quarries that define much of its landscape echo the themes of transformation and renewal at the heart of the exhibition, aligning naturally with the Biennale's aim to rethink and reframe cultural narratives.

This pavilion is a reclamation of history, a celebration of solidarity, and above all, a hopeful proposition for the future. By foregrounding the collaborative relationship between Ghana and Poland – built on respect, empathy, and shared growth – the exhibition challenges reductive historical perspectives and offers a new lens through which to view postcolonial cultural exchange.

It invites audiences to imagine what healing and cooperation can look like when rooted in dignity, mutual creativity, and Ubuntu, where humanity is seen not as a collection of individuals, but as an interconnected whole.

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