Kabas & Couture

CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN FASHION
People have been fashionable for years... in Accra especially. The fashion would come based on those who were coming off the ships, who were coming off the planes. The fashion moved here even as there was no TV and all that. So people were fashionable...

— Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, 2012, Former First Lady of Ghana

Fashion, an inherently cross-cultural and elite-oriented form of dress that embodies change through innovation, is one of the most meaningful and visually present forms of artistic expression on the African continent. The significance of African fashion is rapidly gaining recognition in academia, particularly in the field of art history (Gott and Loughran 2010, Hansen and Madison 2013, and Rovine 2015). Kabas and Couture: Contemporary Ghanaian Fashion is one of the first American exhibitions to focus on the cultural and historical significance of African fashion, centering specifically on the dynamic and enduring production of women’s fashion in Accra, Ghana from the 1950s through the 21st century. Whereas the garments on display attest to the beauty, creativity, and vibrancy of Ghana’s complex fashion culture, this publication provides a more detailed account of individual designers and the historical precedence of Accra’s co-existing spheres of designer and kaba fashions. The ultimate intent of this exploration of Ghanaian fashion is to expand our understanding of fashion beyond Western predilections by shifting focus to the African continent.

Juliana “Chez Julie” Nortey
Akwadzan
Late 1960s
Wax print
Gift of Edith Francois
As the capital of Ghana, Accra has served as a nexus for the exchange and creation of diverse and varied forms of dress, encouraging the development of a complex and vibrant fashion culture. The historical importance of fashion in Accra is evidenced by early issues of the *Sunday Mirror*, a weekly publication that consistently highlighted the cultural events and sartorial preferences of Accra’s diverse citizens. One of the earliest archived copies of the *Sunday Mirror*, dated August 16, 1953, featured photographs of two Ghanaian women on its front page in the midst of volleying a tennis ball. The photographs were accompanied by the following captions: “beach type slacks set new fashion note” and “shorts are still in favor” (“Over to You” 1953: 1). This particular feature, coupled with the repeated coverage of diverse dress styles including Indian saris, East Asian qipaos, and the latest European couture creations, illustrates that a complex and dynamic fashion culture was firmly established in Accra by the 1950s, if not earlier.

**“THE QUEEN OF FASHIONS”: THE DESIGNER FASHIONS OF JULIANA “CHEZ JULIE” NORTYEYE**

The importance of fashion to the citizens of Accra, particularly styles that were viewed as unusual and innovative, created space for the development of the country’s first formally-trained fashion designer Juliana Norteye (known by her designer label “Chez Julie”).¹ Norteye was one of twelve children, born in 1933 in the town of Nsawam, Ghana. After completing her education through standard seven, Norteye began working at the Ministry of Education, where she continued sewing “as a hobby, for people, all the time. She sewed to make ends meet” (2012: personal interview). During this time Norteye made her first appearance in a 1958 edition of the *Sunday Mirror*. A column posed the question, “What makes our girls look so lovely?” The answer: “one of Norteye’s latest fashions,” a dress she named “the Hall and Chamber frock” (“These New Fashions” 1958: n. pag.). The columnist then turned his attention to Norteye, suggesting “this charming beauty has hundreds of them [fashions] in her head. Be it warm or cold weather she has something new to wear. No wonder, for lovely Juliana Norteye is a fashionable dress-maker in Accra, who always has something smart to offer her customers” (1958: n. pag.).

¹ “Chez Julie’s” married name was Juliana Kweifio-Okai, although the majority of historical documentation refers to her as Juliana Norteye, or simply “Chez Julie.”
Despite her initial success, Norteye wanted to formally train in the art of fashion and dressmaking. In 1958, Norteye was awarded a partial scholarship from the Cocoa Marketing Board to attend France’s oldest fashion school, Ecole Guerre-Lavigne. Norteye’s scholarship was part of an initiative created by Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah’s goal in awarding overseas scholarships was to ensure that members of Ghana’s population were provided with the highest quality of education in specific fields. By fostering the development of “experts” in a variety of occupations, Nkrumah sought to establish the creation of a highly-educated group of Ghanaians who would contribute to his nation-building and disseminate their knowledge to future generations.

Norteye departed for Paris at the age of twenty-six and embarked upon a journey that taught her the intricacies of garment construction, pattern drafting, and design. Her return to Accra was celebrated in the January 14th, 1961 issue of the *Daily Graphic* with the headline “Julie —The Girl from Paris.” Several months later, Norteye had already begun to make her mark on Accra’s fashion culture, earning the appellation “Queen of Fashions” from the *Sunday Mirror*; she was further described as possessing “first-hand knowledge of everything that would enhance the beauty of Ghanaian womanhood” (“Julie” 1961: 8).

Norteye created fashion garments for the next thirty years, until her untimely death in 1993 at the age of sixty. For the majority of her career, Chez Julie was the fashion designer in Accra. She hosted annual fashion shows, regularly created garments for the promotional materials of Ghana’s first wax print manufacturing company GTP (Ghana Textiles Production), and catered to everyone from Ghana’s former first ladies to women who simply aspired to be dressed by Chez Julie. As one Ghanaian recounted, her British father insisted that all of her special occasion garments were made by Chez Julie, as she was “the best” in Accra.

Despite Norteye’s importance in establishing a distinctly Ghanaian designer fashion culture in Accra, few of her original garments remain. The Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art is fortunate to include two of Norteye’s oldest and most important garments in this exhibition: her Kente Kaba (Figure 1) and the female version of her Akwadzan (Figure 2). The kaba, which will be discussed in detail in the following section, is a historically-rooted

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2 *Akwadzan* is a Ga word that implies the dress practice of wrapping the upper torso with cloth.
women’s garment that symbolizes Ghanaian heritage and identity. What makes Norteye’s kaba significant is not the garment’s silhouette, but her chosen material: Norteye created this particular kaba from hand-woven kente cloth, a textile typically associated with Ghanaian traditional culture and Ashanti chieftaincy. As Norteye’s sister Edith Francois explained, “at one time, kente was very expensive...now we have a lot of imitation, but kente, people didn’t want to cut...kente was precious” (Francois 2012: personal interview). When Francois first wore her sister’s kente fashions, which included a range of skirts, suits, and blouses with kente collars, her mother-in-law proclaimed “oh, you’ve spoiled your kente!” (2012: personal interview) Francois disagreed, valuing the tailored kente because “you know that you will wear it, and you’ll wear it, and you’ll wear it, and it’s not spoiled” (2012: personal interview). Francois appreciated her sister’s kente fashions because they were more wearable than traditional attire; the designs reflected a unique blend of Ghanaian historical dress practices and a cosmopolitan approach to dressing that encapsulated the attitudes of Accra’s post-independence population.

Norteye’s most innovative and culturally significant garment is her Akwadzan, originally created in 1968 and officially unveiled at Ghana’s 1971 annual Trade Fair. The garment was originally conceived as a form of attire for men and women, mimicking the historical men’s dress practice of wrapping the upper torso in cloth, a form of dress that can often be difficult and cumbersome to maintain. Following its premiere, the Daily Graphic newspaper celebrated Norteye’s Akwadzan, stating “for the first time in the history of Ghanaian fashion, the men’s cloth has been converted into a manageable outfit with an opening for the head” (“Something for the Men” 1971: 7). The columnists’ claims were further supported by the recollections of Francois, who stated that Norteye created the tailored Akwadzan “to make it easy for people to put on the traditional cloth because you’ve seen the men, they’re always adjusting” (Francois 2012: personal interview).

Norteye’s female Akwadzan is included in this exhibition and is one of the most avant-garde of Norteye’s designs. The practice of wrapping the upper torso with cloth, in a “toga” style, was almost exclusively the prerogative of Ghanaian men. By transforming a style of dress viewed as a symbol of masculinity and men’s traditional...
leadership into a stylish garment for young female Ghanaians, Norteye’s Akwadzan challenged established gender norms while revolutionizing and reinvigorating established cultural and historical dress practices. The form of the garment itself, comprised of a voluminous, yet flattering silhouette, was an additional challenge to the accepted forms of women’s historical fashions, which were primarily tailored and overtly feminine.

Norteye’s fashions illuminate a period of rapid modernization and innovation in Accra that happened immediately following Ghana’s independence in 1957. By melding local materials and styles of dress with global silhouettes and techniques, Norteye transformed traditional Ghanaian garments into more wearable and stylish forms of dress. Her designs sustained the relevance of historical dress practices and materials to Accra’s cosmopolitan elite by encapsulating their global, yet decidedly local and nationalist identities.

“It’s beautiful in our eyes again”: Accra’s Contemporary Fashion Designers

Chez Julie was a pioneer of Ghanaian fashion whose exuberant creations paved the runways for future generations of designers in Accra, exemplified by those included in this exhibition: Aisha Ayensu (Christie Brown), Ajepomaa Mensah (Ajepomaa Design Gallery), Brigitte Merki (BM Designs), Sumaya Mohammad and Kabutey Dzietror (Pistis), and Aya Morrison (Aya Morrison). This new generation of designers is primarily focused on reinvigorating wax print fabric, blending the material with international styles of dress and other imported fabrics to create garments that reflect a youth-oriented, cosmopolitan and nationalist aesthetic, a reimagining of the creative intent that motivated many of Accra’s past fashion designers, including Chez Julie.

Aisha Ayensu, the designer of Christie Brown and the most successful of Accra’s young fashion designers, exemplifies this generation’s approach to revitalizing wax print. Ayensu explained the impetus for creating the Christie Brown label: “the whole idea was to find interesting ways of using African print. There is always some element of the print in my designs” (2012: personal interview). Ayensu’s continued use of wax print extends beyond her efforts to reimagine the material; she believes that the fabric serves as a symbol of her Ga heritage.3

3 The Ga are an indigenous group of people that live primarily in Southern Ghana.
Ayensu admitted that, “I know wax print didn’t come from here...but even though it’s not from here, it’s become our culture. We embraced it and it has become our thing...that’s the tradition bit” (2012: personal interview).

What separates Ayensu’s garments from the work of other emerging fashion designers is her physical manipulation of specific materials. Unlike the majority of Ghanaian designers who rely on large swaths of wax print fabric to create their garments, Ayensu blends luxurious European fabrics with wax print in subtle and often surprising ways. Her yellow satin evening gown exemplifies this approach, as the garment’s sweetheart neckline and areas of the bodice are finely edged with thin strips of wax print (Figure 3).

Ayensu’s emphasis on detailing resulted in her creation of innovative embellishments that challenged the expected forms of wax print fabric. As part of her 2010 Arise Fashion Week collection, Ayensu used wax print to create fabric covered buttons and horizontal fringe, which she used to adorn her garments. By festooning her stylistically simple and boldly colored garments with an explosion of dynamic, wax print detailing, Ayensu ensured that the garment’s embellishments served as the focal point, creating a collection in which her predominantly European silhouettes were transcended by her careful and detailed inclusion of wax print fabric. As an additional part of this collection, Ayensu created a range of necklaces featuring her fabric covered buttons and horizontal fringe, which quickly became highly sought-after accessories in Accra. Ayensu’s wax print button necklaces currently serve as unofficial symbols of the Christie Brown label and have been relentlessly copied by aspiring designers from around the world, including the United States and South Africa. These imitations encourage her to continually reimagine her bib necklaces, with her latest iteration taking the form of removable collars punctuated by metal studs, as seen at the 2014 Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa (Figure 4).

Like other Ghanaian fashion designers, Ajepomaa Mensah, creator of Ajepomaa Design Gallery, was initially inspired by her mother, who would regularly sew clothing for her children. Mensah chose to pursue a career in fashion design, graduating in 2005 from the LaSalle College of Arts in Singapore with a degree in fashion design and merchandising. Following the completion of her degree, Mensah traveled to New York City where she interned with fashion design companies Jil Stuart and Searle and worked in various fashion retail positions.

When Mensah returned to Accra in 2009, she recollected:

“I did not understand this whole phenomenon behind wax print. Growing up, my grandmother and my mom...middle-aged women...wore the African print. They wore it beautifully, but they wore it in the traditional sense of the kaba and slit. The women wore it as a form of maturity and refinement. Growing up, we were influenced by urban cultures, we wanted to look hip and cool, so we were not really drawn to the African print” (2012: personal interview).
Mensah was encouraged by a family friend and fashion designer to explore the fabric markets in Accra and, after a month of combing the stalls for materials, Mensah came to the following conclusion: “we have a market full of fabrics, why don’t we just go and try and work with it and make it ours” (2012: personal interview). Mensah’s approach to design is similar to Ayensu’s, highlighting her use of wax print by restricting the material to specific details of her garments, such as a wax print collar or edging along the neckline and armholes of a dress. Her designs are often edgy and imbued with a degree of youthfulness, exemplified by her provocative evening gown of wax print fabric, lace, and leather adorned with metal studs (Figure 6). Mensah does not limit herself to wax print and has begun to incorporate materials from other African countries, as seen in her cocktail dress of woven fabric from Burkina Faso (Figure 8).

The Pistis label was established by Kabutey Dzietror and Sumaiya Mohammed while they were enrolled in fashion courses at the Vogue Style School of Fashion and Design in Accra. After graduating in 2008 with certificates in fashion design, Dzietror and Mohammed continued to develop their skills as fashion designers and opened the Pistis boutique in 2011. Their main focus is to create affordable, expertly sewn garments from predominantly wax print fabrics. Dzietror and Mohammed’s garments often feature a blending of wax print with more luxurious fabrics, particularly lace. This is illustrated by a small collection of garments released in April 2012, which featured a range of cocktail dresses sewn from white eyelet and lace fabrics, juxtaposed with horizontal strips of patchwork wax print fabric (Figure 5). Additionally, Pistis is known for their elaborate and elegant evening gowns, exemplified by the green satin and wax print gown they created for the 2011 Vlisco fashion show (Figure 7). These two garments testify to the diversity of Dzietror and Mohammed’s designs and to the variety of wax print fashions in Accra’s contemporary fashion culture.

Unlike the other designers featured in this exhibition, neither of Brigitte Merki’s garments include wax print fabric. Her two garments feature a hybrid form of Ghanaian kente cloth and Nigerian ashoke cloth, called “kente-oke” by the cloth’s creator, Nanahemaa Asaasafio II, Queen of Akromofie. Merki designed these two garments as part of a larger collection that premiered in 2011. The intent of Merki’s collection was to depict her Ghanaian-Swiss heritage through the use of specific materials and styles of dress. This is most evident in her cocktail dress sewn from imported Swiss lace and blue and white “kente-oke” cloth, materials that serve as tangible representations of Merki’s multicultural identity (Figure 9). The silhouette of the dress, inspired by the dirndl (a traditional style of dressing for German and Swiss women), further indicates her Swiss heritage. Merki’s expertly-crafted designs exemplify the inherent originality of Accra’s contemporary fashion culture and further illustrate how other historically significant textiles, such as kente cloth, are being reimagined by Accra’s contemporary fashion designers.
Figure 6
Ajepomaa Design Gallery
Evening Gown
2011
Leather and wax print
Premiered at the Vlisco “Delicate Shades” 2011 Runway Show
On loan from a private collection
HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY KABA FASHIONS

When discussing fashion, emphasis is typically placed on designer fashions: garments associated with elite status and created by recognized individuals who champion innovation (such as the majority of garments on display in *Kabas and Couture*). Designer fashions are only part of Accra’s dynamic fashion culture. A second sphere exists, comprised primarily of a form of dress worn by a majority of Ghanaian women: the kaba, or kaba and slit. Kaba fashions are the most recognizable and visible form of women’s attire in Accra. The diversity of styles and fabrics creates a kaleidoscopic display of dress that is performed daily, transforming the streets of Accra into informal runways for showcasing sartorial experimentation and novelty. Unlike most forms of fashion, the kaba is an inherently egalitarian form of dress, worn equally by street vendors and first ladies. The inclusion of kaba fashions in this exhibition is to formally recognize the importance of this dynamic form of dress and to further illustrate the vibrancy and complexity of Accra’s fashion culture.

The kaba is a fusion of international and local dress styles that signifies a distinctly Ghanaian identity. As a Ghanaian explained to art historian Suzanne Gott, “kaba is our national custom. It’s our real Ghanaian dress” (Gott 2013: 19). The kaba is typically created from six yards of fabric, with two yards used for each of the garment’s three integral elements: a tailored blouse, a sewn or wrapped skirt, and an additional piece of fabric used primarily as a wrapper or shawl. As elucidated by Gott, Ghana’s distinctive three-piece kaba was created when a European-inspired blouse was added to the existing wrapped ensemble of Ghanaian women’s dress; the earliest illustration of this hybrid garment appeared in the 1831 account of a British woman’s travels along the coast of West Africa (2010: 13).

THE REIGN OF THE “JAGUAR”: KABA FASHIONS DURING THE 1950S

Despite the popularity of the kaba during the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century it “became a mode of dress largely associated with ‘illiterates,’ or women without formal schooling” (2010: 14). Immediately prior to and following Ghana’s independence in 1957 and encouraged by Nkrumah’s exaltation of indigenous forms of dress, the status of the kaba was restored; it quickly became a symbol of Ghana’s national heritage and a form of dress that was debated, celebrated, and routinely worn by fashion-conscious Ghanaian women.
Figure 8
Ajepomaa Design Gallery
Cocktail Dress
2014
Woven fabric from Burkina Faso and wax print
Designed for the 2014 “Ready-to-wear” Spring-Summer Collection
On loan from a private collection
The earliest and most comprehensive documentation of a specific kaba fashion focused on the rise and fall of the “jaguar.” The “jaguar” was premiered on the front page of the Sunday Mirror on December 20th, 1953. A photograph of two women wearing the “jaguar” was included, capturing an innovative interpretation of a kaba blouse that included a scalloped v-neckline, scalloped sleeves, and a flamboyant ruffle along the hem of the blouse (Figure 10). The accompanying caption explained the women’s identical attire, stating “a new style in women’s dress called ‘Jaguar’ has been introduced in Accra. Seen in the picture are two intimate friends—Miss Ivy Bamor (left) and Miss Sarah Abbey (right) introducing the new style which is likely to [start] the craze in Accra (“Jaguar” 1953: 10).” An additional photograph and accompanying caption stated that this new style of kaba “has been hailed with every manifestation of delight by women of society and fashion in Accra” (1953: 10).

By 1955, the “jaguar” fell out of favor with Ghana’s fashion conscious women. In an article from the Sunday Mirror, the fashion contributor Edith Wuver recognized that the “jaguar” originally “set the fashion tongues wagging,” but further stated that “the ‘jaguar’ however, is being superseded by the ‘Opera 4.15’” (Wuver 1955: 6). Four months later, Wuver’s account of the “jaguar” was expanded by an unidentified author, who vehemently declared distaste for the “jaguar” with the following headline: “Jaguar is not a decent fashion garment” (“Jaguar is Not Decent…” 1955: 2). The author described the “jaguar” as “an ugly and objectionably looking design. It is not designed in conformity with an acceptable theory with regard to warmth, modesty, or elegance” (“Jaguar is Not Decent…” 1955: 2). The unknown author continued their critique of the “jaguar”: “it affords very little opportunity for variety and gives a very bad impression about the women who wear it,” ultimately concluding that the “jaguar” represented “a remarkable deterioration in the dress of our women” (1955: 2).

Within a two year period, the “jaguar” went from captivating Ghana’s fashion conscious women to being rejected by Accra’s fashion contributors as an indecent and unattractive style of dress. The ascension and subsequent
dénouement of the “jaguar” is significant, as it clearly attests to the existence of a fashion culture that actively documented the rapidly changing trends of kaba fashions in Accra. It further demonstrates that the kaba was regaining its prior status as a form of fashionable women’s attire by the early 1950s.

The kaba’s post-independence revival as a form of fashion was fueled by young Ghanaians such as Letitia Obeng, Ghana’s first female scientist and a champion of dressing in local styles and materials. Obeng remarked that Ghanaians viewed the kaba as an outmoded form of dress in the early 20th century: “it was not the done thing to be a ‘cloth lady’ at formal functions and there certainly were those ladies who, at that time, wouldn’t be caught dead in ntama [wax print fabric], in public!” (Obeng :180)

In spite of the kaba’s negative associations, Obeng was described by the Sunday Mirror as possessing “the strong conviction that the traditional costume is part and parcel of the heritage of the people of Ghana and that every Ghanaian should be proud of it and wear it without any misgivings” (Kotey 1957: 1). Prior to Ghana’s official independence, Obeng organized a “Ntama Fashion Show.” The event was divided into three sections: dance costumes, traditional costumes, and funeral costumes, with an overwhelming emphasis placed on variations of the kaba.

The impetus for Obeng’s show stemmed from the growing popularity of her own wardrobe: “she had worn different adapted fashions of our women’s attire since she had returned from overseas five years ago. The effect of her experiment has been so much appreciated...that she decided to stage a public show of different modified fashions of the traditional costume” (1957: 1). Obeng’s fashion show was extensively documented by the Sunday Mirror, including several photographs and detailed descriptions of specific kaba styles. As Obeng recollected in her autobiography A Silent Heritage, “I designed the ntama styles and sewed a variety of nicely fitted kaba for many occasions: sleeveless kaba with a little collar as a secretary’s outfit, a smart one with little straps, for early evening social events, an off-the-shoulder, strapless ‘willpower’ for formal evenings, and others with overlapping peplum, short and long flared out sleeves” (Obeng :179).

Figure 10
“The Jaguar” pictured in the Sunday Mirror, Dec. 21, 1953, courtesy of The Daily Graphic Archives

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4 Ntama is a Twi word that refers to wax print fabric.
“ANYWHERE ONE GOES, THERE IS BOUND TO BE KABA”: CONTEMPORARY KABA FASHIONS

The malleability of the kaba has ensured its relevancy as a staple of Ghanaian female dress throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, often reflecting the political and cultural shifts of specific eras. Whereas immediately following independence, the kaba was transformed into a form of elite, nationalist fashion, during the regime and presidency of John Jerry Rawlings (1981 – 2001) it functioned as a populist form of nationalist attire.

During the 1990s, the kaba experienced a renaissance similar to that of the 1950s; the Sunday Mirror repeatedly featured photographs of Ghanaian women, particularly women in official government positions, wearing a diverse and elaborate array of kaba designs. The inclusion of recognized and powerful women wearing kaba likely encouraged other Ghanaian women, both elite and non-elite, to don the iconic garment for a variety of contexts. The most significant proponent for wearing kaba fashions was Former First Lady Nana Konadu Ageyman Rawlings. Rawlings made a concerted effort to wear kabas on a regular basis, a sartorial choice that lasted for the duration of her husband’s career as both head of state and the President of Ghana. As Rawlings explained,

“I decided that I would start wearing traditional clothes using the wax prints from our factories for two reasons: first of all, wax print wasn’t available and we were trying to improve the economy, so I thought it would be good if I promoted the cloth to encourage Ghanaians to wear it when the factories began producing again. I also didn’t want to be a role model for anyone while wearing Western clothes” (Rawlings 2012: personal interview).

Similar to the experiences of Obeng in the 1950s, Rawlings explained that initially elite Ghanaians reacted negatively to her adoption of the kaba and wax print fabric: “the first time, people said ‘Why is she behaving like an illiterate?’ I said to myself, ‘You don’t choose for me what I wear, if I look in the mirror and I like it, I’m wearing it.’ I wanted to make a change and I wanted to make a statement” (2012: personal interview). In spite of criticism from her peers, Rawlings continued to wear kabas sewn from wax print. As she recollected: “I just kept pushing it. Sometimes they would say ‘Oh, you’re always so local,’ and I said, ‘Yes, I like to be local’” (2012: personal interview).

Rawlings’ championing of the kaba had a noticeable effect on Ghanaian women, as exemplified by a photograph in a 1997 issue of the Daily Graphic. The image, which captured Rawlings and a group of women celebrating the anniversary of her husband’s December 31st Revolution, is awash in colorful wax print. This photograph provides additional evidence to suggest that Rawlings’ promotion of the kaba encouraged women to revitalize the wearing of this distinctly Ghanaian garment. As Rawlings recollected, “I kept wearing it [the kaba] until others wore it and eventually, people started to say ‘I want to wear it, I want to be like Mrs. Rawlings’” (2012: personal interview).
The kaba remains one of the most popular and prevalent forms of women’s attire in Ghana. Due to its predominance, seamstresses and fashion designers alike are continually inventing variations on the kaba, resulting in the creation and promotion of a dynamic and capricious system of dress. This is best illustrated by the proliferation of kaba fashion posters. These posters attest to the intense ingenuity of kaba creators, the rapid pace at which specific styles are revised, and the dazzling diversity of kaba designs.

Ghana has maintained a complex and vibrant fashion culture for decades, allowing for the creation of garments that simultaneously challenge and preserve culturally and historically significant dress practices. Juliana “Chez Julie” Norteye served as one of the catalysts for the development of Accra’s designer fashion culture, which has flourished in recent years and is fast becoming one of the most captivating fashion capitals on the African continent. The contemporary designers included in this exhibition represent only a small selection of the creativity and dynamism that is currently flourishing in Accra’s fashion scene. When the continued importance of designer fashions is interwoven with the equally significant and historically-rooted kaba fashions, a comment made by Edith Francois becomes more potent: Ghanaians have “always been fashionable.”

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