mournning period, thus helping to banish death from the community, just as analogous Senufo composite masks do (see chapter 5). Announced by bush-cow horns believed to be their voices, *bonu amwin* maskers, with costumes of bush materials, carry whips and lances to terrorize the crowds, menacing people with wild, erratic behavior. Women, who are especially threatened, retreat to their houses.

*Bonu amwin* operate—and especially did some decades ago—to protect communities against hidden or overt dangers such as witchcraft, disease, or threats of warfare or catastrophe. These masks are also purifiers, judges, and settlers of conflict. Through intimidation and threatened or actual violence, this masquerade represents the male ethos of dominance, pointing out by contrast the restraint and order preferred in village life. Significantly, the only *amwin* stronger in Baule life belongs to women, who never use masks, and this is invoked only when men's efforts to avert misfortune have failed.

The Baule have Do masks quite similar in form and function to *bonu amwin*, and indeed the Do masking cult is distributed widely among Mande and Mande-influenced peoples. For Do is a word of Mande origin, and in some places it refers to a Poror-like initiatory organization (see chapter 5). Like *bonu amwin*, many Do masks are part of a complex of horizontal masks found across much of West Africa. The Do masks illustrated here both fit this paradigm and are an exception that prove the rule, for they are from the Ghanaian Akan, the Fante, who for the most part do not engage in masking (fig. 7-36). These masks belong to a Fante military company in the town of Cape Coast. Several Do masks have been recorded too among western Akan and Lagoons peoples. While detailed data are lacking for many, at least some were used to protect against sorcery and witchcraft, a function coincident with others in the tradition of composite horizontal masks.

**AGE-GRADE ARTS OF LAGOONS PEOPLES**

Community leaders and age-grade associations are the primary users of visual arts in the Lagoons region. Age grades, an institution not found in Ghana, are formal divisions by social age of the male population. Formerly initiation prepared younger men to be warriors; their age-grade proved its courage and unity to men of the elder age-grade in dancing displays. Monumental drums were visual and
spiritual focal points in these ceremonies (fig. 7-37). In some areas each new grade commissioned its own drum; in others, the new grade had to capture the drum of the seniors they were seeking to replace. Such elongated drums, with various relief carvings, are believed to embody the spiritual power of ancestors and local nature deities. Their powerful rhythms still inspire their age-grades. Formerly they called men to war and led them to battle; today, they still summon people to age-grade members' funerals, which are also occasions for displays of personal decoration and regalia discussed earlier (see figs. 7-8, 7-9, 7-10).

ARTS OF FANTE MILITARY COMPANIES

Living along the former Gold Coast and in adjacent inland areas, the Fante share with other Akan the religious and state arts explored above, but they also have distinctive arts of their own belonging to their military companies. Asafo. While Akan kinship is matrilineal, Asafo membership is patrilineal, and the groups are essentially egalitarian even though they have leaders—commanders, captains, and other officers. Both men and women thus join their father's Asafo company. Having been in constant contact with European powers along this coast since the late fifteenth century, and having served as reluctant hosts to European-designed trading and slaving forts and the garrisons that staffed them, Fante military organizations have absorbed and adapted European ideas, motifs, objects, and technologies into their own artistic culture.

For many decades now Asafo groups have been "fighting with art," for first the British, then the Ghanaian government usurped military functions once performed by Asafo members. Otherwise they are essentially social organizations, which still serve as a democratic counterbalance to royal hierarchies, playing a role for example in selecting and enstooling a paramount chief. Each state and most larger communities have from two to a dozen Asafo companies, setting up an automatic rivalry played out in festivals and their arts. Each company owns certain exclusive colors, motifs, musical instruments, and other insignia, with any violation of such prerogatives by another company being considered an act of aggression. Art, then, may and does cause disputes, which in the old days erupted into virtual warfare.

For many Asafo companies, a concrete shrine, building, or monument serves as a rallying point. Called posuban, these structures developed during the 1880s, slowly replacing previous rallying points such as fenced shrine mounds or sacred trees. Over the course of the twentieth century they have been elaborated into fanciful, even flamboyant civic markers in an otherwise rather dull architectural landscape. Posuban are built of European-introduced concrete and related materials, drawing upon local castles and Christian churches for

In the left flag, the boy who picks a ripe pepper will learn wisdom when it gets into his eyes. Rival companies are like the inexperienced boy. In the right flag, the palm is credited as the strongest plant, the elephant, the strongest animal. "Only the elephant can uproot the palm" asserts the superiority of the elephant, the animal kingdom, and the company that owns the flag. "When no trees are left [elephant got the last one], birds will perch on a man's head," or when you see something unusual—such as a bird perching on a man's head—something caused it. This reminds the company to look for reasons behind the strange behaviour of others. The linguist with the staff, to the right, explains all this.

7-41. *Asafo company flag sewn by Mr. McCarthy in 1952. Drawing by Patrick Finnerty*

Currently in the collection of the Fowler Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles, this flag was originally made for display by Asafo No. 6 Company in Anomabu, Ghana. A rival Asafo successfully challenged its maroon background color in court, however, and the company was prohibited from using it (which is why it could be purchased by the museum). No. 6 Company eventually had a duplicate flag made on a correct bright red background which they still legally display (see fig. 7-44). The flag is almost 100 feet (30 m) in length. Its nineteen motifs do not form a continuous narrative, but they variously refer to the strength, wisdom, preparedness, and invincibility of the company and the foolishness, timidity, and weakness of competitors.

The British Union Jack occupies an upper corner of earlier flags (fig. 7-40), replaced by the Ghanaian flag after independence in 1957. Asafo flags have been made for at least three hundred years. Each new officer commissions one that later enters his or her company's collective property; many groups had several dozen until these flags became popular among European art collectors and were sold off to dealers. Such has been the fate of all too much African art. Less easily alienated are those locally invented flags, some as long as 300 feet, with thirty or more appliqué motifs, that are a playful, almost illogical, extension of the flag maker's art (fig. 7-41). Unlike *posuban*, which are of course permanently on view, flags and uniforms come into their own when animated in festivals.

Many Fante states celebrate an annual festival largely given over to Asafo displays, though their ritual base points up the traditional civic
some of their architectural elements and from native Akan impulses for their essential and sometimes whimsical visual character. A posuban houses its company’s sacred drums and symbols. Although most have little interior space, they serve as centerpiece pieces for meetings, funerals, and festivals, and as ostentatious flagships for Asafo activities—sometimes literally (fig. 7-38). This warship is one of five in Fanteland, where two other posuban take the form of airplanes.

Most posuban, however, are built as multistoried structures (fig. 7-39). Many have this example’s wedding-cake stack of progressively smaller stories, and most are ornamented with sculpture. As with other Akan arts, sculptural subjects may be emblematic, or they may be linked with proverbs. Motifs generally aggrandize the company, often while belittling rivals at the same time. A common proverb for lions, for example, is “A dead lion is greater than a living leopard,” meaning “Even at our worst we are stronger than you.” Notably, the lion became a popular Akan motif in part because of its use in British heraldry and commercial logos.

The same types of imagery, with the same origins, are seen in two dimensions in flags, an Asafo company’s most important portable symbol. Inspired by flags of European visitors, Asafo flags have been aggrandized in form, use, and meaning. Many of their appliqué motifs are linked to verbal expressions, giving them a particularly Akan inflection. As with posuban imagery, these expressions commonly vaunt the strength of the owning company, often at the expense of the diminished and weaker rival.

Generally measuring about four feet six feet, flags are sewn and applied with bright cotton cloth by male artisans.
specially trained flag bearers twirl, grow, protect, and otherwise dance their flags, which graphically broadcast their company’s military prowess (figs. 7-44, 7-45). Companies with long flags may suspend them from their posuban or carry them in serpentine processions through town streets, as if clearing away anything in their path. These spectacular banners have names such as “river” or the “runoff of rainwater,” metaphors for the company’s power to sweep obstacles away as they inundate their outclassed enemies.

Competition between companies is serious, yet playfulness also pervades Asafo imagery and martial activity. Since the Fante understand well that actual warfare is a thing of the past, they let imagination, humor, and a spirit of play enliven their “fighting with art.”

LIVES WELL LIVED: CONTEMPORARY FUNERARY ARTS

Second burials are a widespread West African custom. Colorful, joyful celebrations commemorating the lives of the prominent dead, they usually occur several months or even a few years after interment. Vast sums of money are channeled into commemorative sculpture and lavish festivities, consonant with a belief that amounts to a formula: status in the world of ancestors is directly proportionate to social position, generosity, and great expenditure in the living world. Much in keeping with the accommodations that Fante Asafo companies have made over the centuries with European ideas, materials, and images, second-burial arts too have been modernized to keep pace with the changing cultural conditions in contemporary Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.

The early decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of cement memorial sculpture, a direct legacy of the terracotta memorials discussed earlier. Stimulated in part by European mausoleums and graveyard statuary, Ivorians and Ghanaians (also many others in West Africa) began to erect monumental sculptural groups in permanent materials, often polychrome. By the 1960s and 70s, such monuments were common.

Cement memorials range from single figures to rather large sculptural groups, some in abbreviated architectural settings (see fig. 7-45). In addition to the commemorated man, and often his wife, sculpture may depict other family members, drummers, angels, police or other guards, equestrians, lions, or leopards, all more or less symmetrically and hierarchically arranged. Inscriptions on the monuments record the relevant names, community, and dates, sometimes along with biblical passages if the family is Christian. These extensions of earlier commemorative traditions accord with overall tendencies of contemporary art in Africa toward permanent materials, vibrant colors, descriptive portraiture, and artists who want to be known and appreciated for their considerable skills.

During the 1970s in Accra, the capital of Ghana, a carpenter named Kane Quaye (1924–1992) began a parallel tradition, the construction and marketing of a remarkable series of fancy coffins (fig. 7-46). His subjects—cocoa pod, Mercedes Benz,
and spiritual responsibilities of these military groups. One such is the path-clearing festival, akwambo. The paths are those to local shrines and water sources. After company members have cleared these overgrown trails, which may be a mile or more long, rituals are performed for major deities to placate and thank them for granting and preserving prosperity (fig. 7-42; see also 7-38).

The principal source for the example of akwambo described here is Legu, a coastal fishing community with two rival Asafo companies. This akwambo transforms the town with costumed marching groups, singing, skits, flag dancing, chanting, and dancing for some six hours, with each company allotted equal time. Up to eighteen subgroups of each company appear, with vibrant, distinctive uniforms in company colors: red, white, and blue for one company (see fig. 7-42), and yellow, orange, green, and purple for the other. Some subgroups dress as soldiers, boy scouts, girl guides, and police, with uniforms faithfully copying the originals (fig. 7-43). The two companies compete in outdoing one another in the brightness and numbers of uniforms, in marching, chanting, and in skits interspersed in the flow of subgroups entering and leaving the main town plaza in quick succession. Thus an officer mimics sounding the water’s depth with a line, a mock police officer directs truly heavy traffic in the plaza, soldiers speak to each other over string telephone wires stretched between their wooden handsets, and a flag dancer acts out a brief scene.

Flag maneuvers and elaborate figures strongly in Asafo display.
onion, rooster, outboard motor, and many others—catalogued both aspects of everyday life and current concerns with prestige and wealth. Coffins were painted with bright enamels and lined with sumptuous fabrics. The very piecing together of objects with shaped wood, nails, and glue is introduced technology (seen earlier in adapted European chair construction), earlier wood sculpture having been carved from single pieces of wood.

Kane Quaye died in 1992, but his son and his former apprentices carry on an expanding business in this burgeoning art form, which accords so well with long-established lavish sendoffs for the respected dead. Such expensive coffins are commissioned by middle-class or wealthy families, and their cost is only a fraction of the outlay for an entire funerary celebration. The coffin subject generally refers to the dead person’s special concerns. A farmer of onions might commission an onion coffin, for example, or a wealthy fisherman a boat or fish (fig. 7-47). A globe-trotting businessman might ask for an expensive car or an airplane to reflect his hard-earned status and wealth. Coffins stressing traditional regal motifs—leopard, eagle, elephant, stool, state sword—are popular with chiefs and other leaders. The choice of subjects is dynamic, and new images are constantly invented by the workshops.

An ongoing, quasi-traditional aspect of Akan arts is the quantity of figural images such as akua ma and figural combs that are being made expressly for an outside market. Some of these are freshly carved, canonical figures—the mother and child icon is favored—whereas others have been made with the intent to deceive (see fig. 7-29, two top right figures). Some of the latter fetch five-figure prices on the international market, only a small proportion of which the carvers themselves get. Several quite prolific workshops are found in southern Ghana. They are run by or employ master carvers capable of fine original work and several different styles. Some of the same shops also have groups of young boys busily rubbing dirt or sand on figures to give them the illusion of age so that they will fetch higher prices. Throughout Africa today the need for art by “traditional” religious practitioners and shrines is negligible, nor is there much local demand for masks. Most works being made in early or “traditional” styles are reproductions, tourist carvings, or fakes destined, perhaps ironically, for homes a long way from Africa. These sculptures, of course, need to be differentiated from expressly modern works being made by professional academic artists.

**INTERNATIONAL ART**

Both Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire have many contemporary artists whose work is more international than local and who exhibit in Europe and the United States as well as in Africa. Many are academics, and/or were trained in art schools, colleges, or universities in Africa or abroad. One artist is El Anatsui (born 1944), an Ewe sculptor born and educated in Ghana but for many years a resident of Nigeria, where he teaches. He works primarily in wood, the more “traditional” of materials, which literally assails, mostly with power tools, as if to violate deliberately conservative canons of more traditional woodcarving (fig. 7-48). “Power saw tearing rough-sawn through organic wood at devastating speed, to me constitutes a metaphor...