



## News Release

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### V&A unveils new artwork commissioned to mark relationship with the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi

The V&A today unveils a new artwork commissioned to mark the next stage in the Renewable Cultural Partnership between the V&A and the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi, the home of the Asante king. The sculpture, titled *Unity*, is a collaboration between the Asante Royal Goldsmith Nana Poku Amponsah Dwumfour and British-Ghanaian designer Emeфа Cole and is on display in the Silver Galleries at V&A South Kensington from today.

The commission is part of a significant cultural partnership, which saw Asante gold regalia from the V&A collection displayed in Ghana for the first time in 150 years, as part of a long-term renewable loan agreement.

*Unity* is a bronze tree crowned by two leaves within a gold disc, and reflects the Asante people's belief in gold as the essence of the sun and the material manifestation of life's force. It also nods to the origins of the city of Kumasi, the Asante capital in Ghana, which translates to 'under the Kum tree'. At the tree's base are small porcupines, which were established as a symbol of the nation's independence by the first Asante king in 1701 to represent the people's readiness to protect themselves. These have been cast in bronze using historic Asante metalworking techniques, except one single porcupine rendered in gold to represent the Asante king (Asantehene). The gold is Single Mine Origin, sourced exclusively from the **Endeavour Sabodala- Massawa Mine in Senegal**. As SMO gold, it is fully traceable to this single, responsibly managed mine, providing verified transparency and assurance of its provenance from extraction to the finished creation.

The sculpture was made in sections by Emeфа and Nana in London and Kumasi, before they worked on it together in the Asante royal workshop in April 2025. The commission builds on the pair's pre-existing collaboration to promote the sophisticated techniques of historic Asante goldsmithing and fuse it with contemporary making. Nana, also known as Buramuhene (King of the Furnace), descends from a long line of master goldsmiths who served previous Asante Kings and he continues to make gold regalia for ceremonial occasions. A London-based jewellery designer previously Curator of Jewellery (Diaspora) at the V&A, Emeфа is the first woman to be apprenticed to the Asante royal goldsmith.

The commission continues the V&A's Renewable Cultural Partnership with the Manhyia Palace Museum, acknowledging the history of conflict that brought both institutions

together whilst pointing to a future based on cooperation and friendship. This is reflected by Nana's choice of proverb to represent the sculpture: 'Ahata ne ahata ka ba mu a, εna εye pepe', meaning 'When two sides come together, it becomes complete'.

**Emefa Cole said:** *"This sculpture marks a momentous milestone in the ongoing collaboration between the V&A and Manhyia Palace. I am honoured to have worked alongside Nana on this project and extremely thankful to the Asantehene for his ongoing support and for granting me unprecedented access to the historic workshop and to the royal goldsmith. This is especially pivotal given that women are not traditionally allowed to work in this space. It is a wonderful privilege to have been able to coordinate this by bringing together expert craftsmen from the United Kingdom and Ghana to create this healing work of art. It teaches us that we can work together to create a better world than the one we inherited."*

**Dr Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A said:** *"We are delighted to unveil this remarkable new commission, which marks the latest phase in our Renewable Cultural Partnership with the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi. This unique collaboration between the Asante Royal Goldsmith and British-Ghanaian designer and former V&A curator, Emefa Cole has created a work rich in symbolism, which reflects on our shared history and Britain's colonial past, while also looking towards a brighter future of friendship and co-operation."*

**Ivor Agyeman-Duah, Director of the Manhyia Palace Museum said:** *"This is high art of traditional and modern creation. Nana Poku represents the best of contemporary goldsmithery though his craft is inherited from the ancient sages. The deluded universal motive of unity which this work represents, underlines the new cultural cooperations between the Manhyia Palace Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, the two institutions from which the artists referenced their creation."*

The V&A holds a small but significant collection of Asante royal regalia, acquired in 1874 from items looted by British troops who raided Kumasi during the third of the so-called Anglo-Asante Wars. For the Asante, the gold regalia contains the spirits of former kings and carries meaning deeply embedded in Asante identity.

A Renewable Cultural Partnership was established in 2023 following an official visit to London by the Asantehene (King of Asante) Otumfuo Osei Tutu II at which time he met with the leadership of the V&A and the British Museum. The following year, all 17 items of Asante golden regalia in the V&A along with 16 from the British Museum went on show in Kumasi for the first time in 150 years. The gold was greeted personally by the King who opened the exhibition, titled *Homecoming*.

The sculpture was made with support from the V&A Americas Foundation. The makers would like to thank the following people in their support of the making of the commission: Charlie Betts, Chris Nash, Clive Burr and Junko Adachi of Clive Burr Silversmiths, Harvey James-Park, Grace McNamara, Benjamin Hawkins, Amankwaa Opoku Benjamin, Akwasi, Nana Yaw, Kofi Owusu and Kofi.

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### **About V&A South Kensington**

V&A South Kensington is a world of extraordinary global creativity, with unmissable exhibitions, experiences and educational programmes for all. One of London's most iconic buildings, it is home to national collections of art, design, fashion, photography and furniture to theatre, performance, architecture, and ceramics, as well as the UK's National Art Library. It is a place where everyone can experience a story of creativity that spans 5,000 years and every creative discipline, which brings that story to life through programmes and activities for all ages and specialisms, and world-leading research and conservation.

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