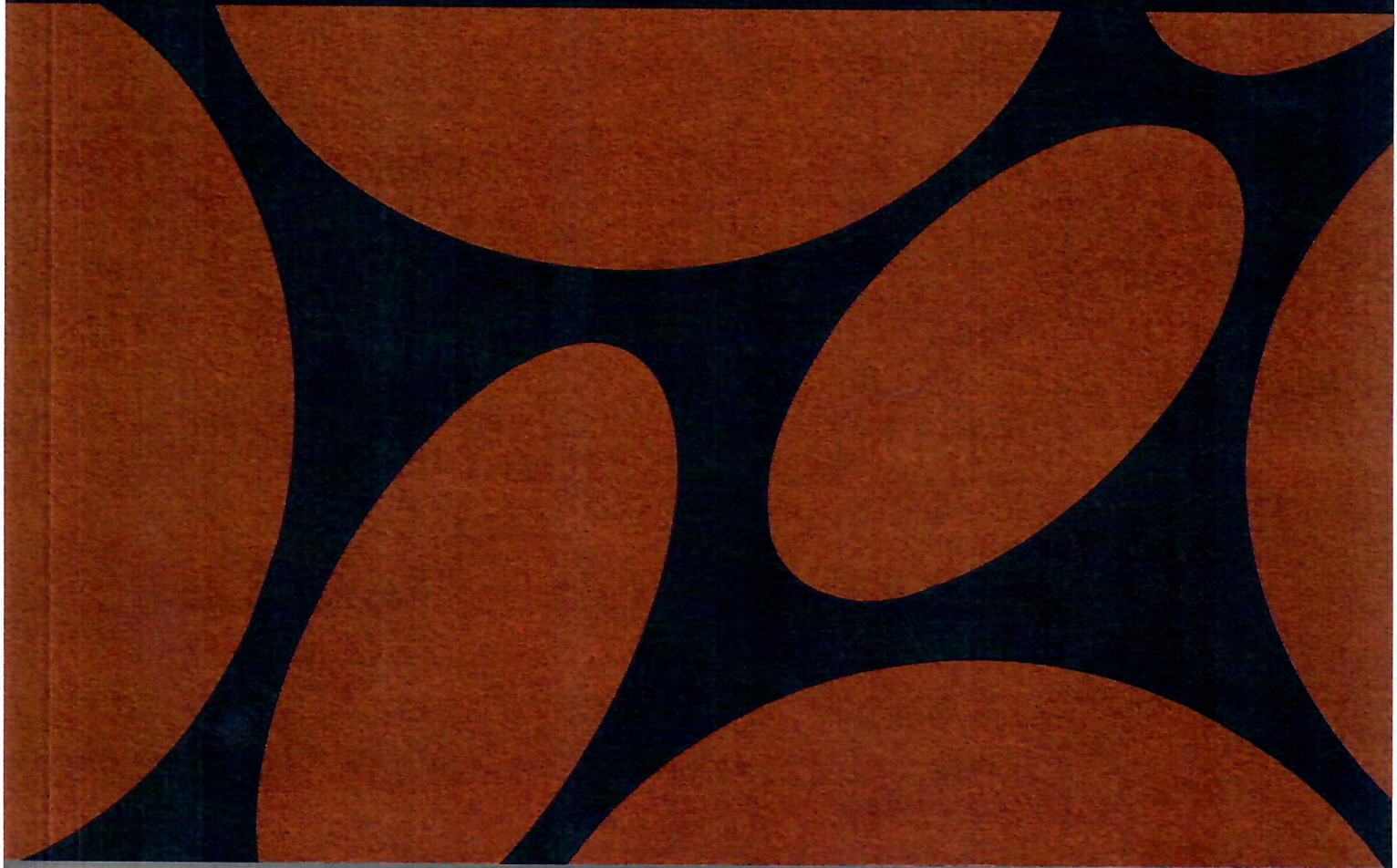


GHANA FREEDOM

La Biennale di Venezia

58. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte
Partecipazioni Nazionali

GHANA PAVILION AT THE 58TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA



ARTISTS

FELICIA ABBAN

JOHN AKOMFRAH

EL ANATSUI

IBRAHIM MAHAMA

SELASI AWUSI SOSU

LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE

ARCHITECT

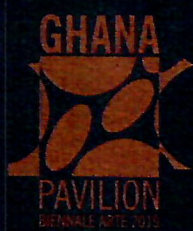
SIR DAVID ADJAYE OBE

CURATOR

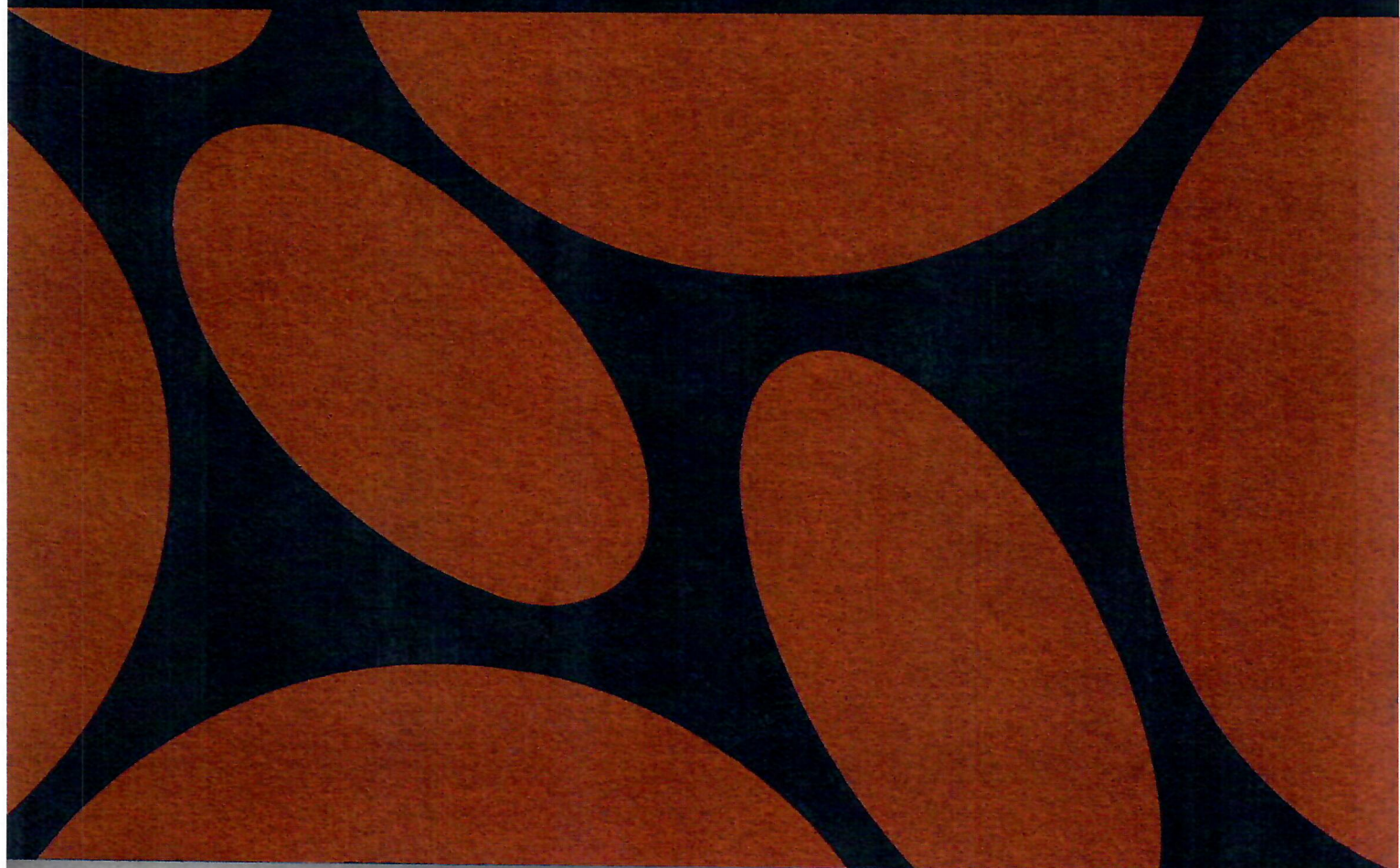
NANA OFORIATTA AYIM

COMMISSIONER

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS & CULTURE



KOENIG BOOKS



GHANA FREEDOM

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EDITED BY NANA OFORIATTA AYIM

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Ibrahim Mahama

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Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture

STRATEGIC ADVISOR

Okwui Enwezor

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo President of the Republic of Ghana | 9 |
| Introduction Barbara Oteng Gyasi Minister of Tourism, Arts & Culture Republic of Ghana | 11 |
| PHOTO ESSAY | |
| Deo Gratias Photo Studio | 12 |
| ESSAYS | |
| Ghana Freedom Nana Oforiatta Ayim | 26 |
| Becoming Ghana Kwame Anthony Appiah | 32 |
| Who's Afraid of a National Pavilion? Taiye Selasi | 38 |
| ABOUT THE ARTISTS | |
| Felicia Abban Adjoa Armah | 48 |
| John Akomfrah Hakeem Adam | 58 |
| EI Anatsui Mae-ling Lokko | 68 |

Ibrahim Mahama 78
Kuukuwa O. Manful

Selasi Awusi Sosu 90
Mavis Tetteh-Ocloo

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye 100
Larry Ossei-Mensah

CONVERSATION

Sir David Adjaye and Okwui Enwezor 114

ABOUT THE ARCHITECTURE

Adjaye Associates 126

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST 128

APPENDIXES

Selected Bibliography 129

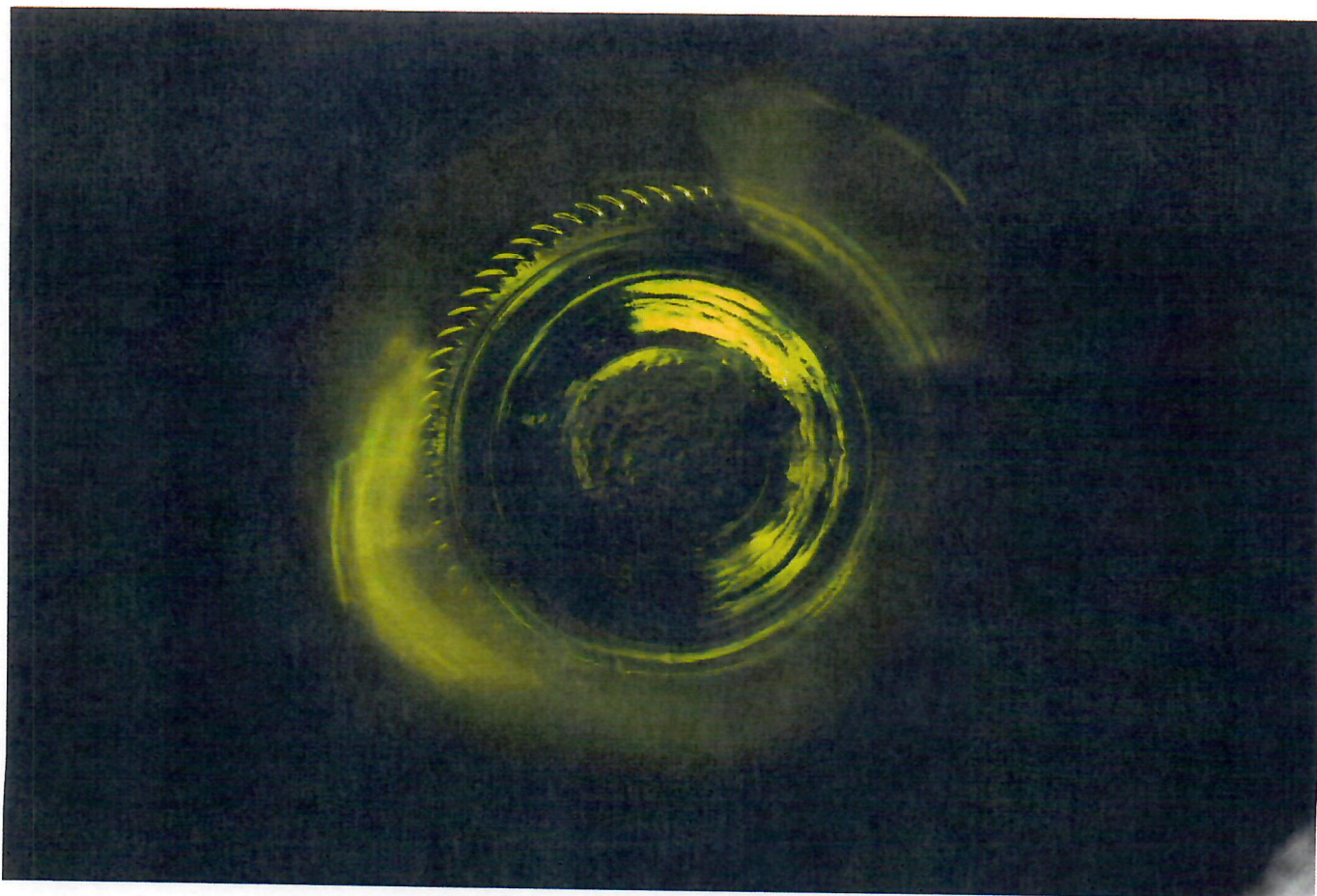
Artists' Biographies 134

About the Contributors 138

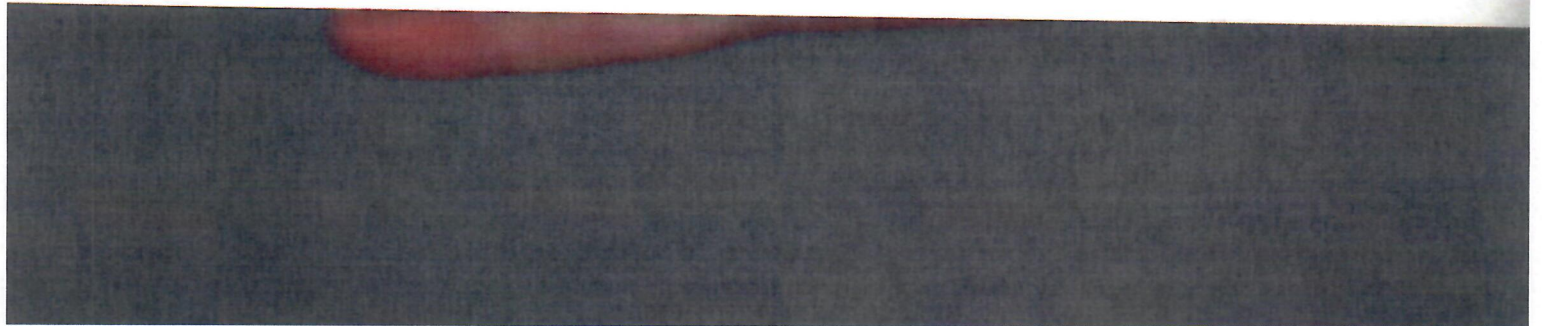
Curator's Acknowledgments 140

Image Credits 141

Colophon 142



Selasi Awusi Sosu. *Glass Factory II*. 2019. Three-channel color and black-and-white video installation with glass bottles, stereo sound, 7'08", 5'33", 10'10". Courtesy the artist.



SELASI AWUSI SOSU

Mavis Tetteh-Ocloo

In Selasi Awusi Sosu's work, glass objects find poetic and insightful expression in her photographs and videos through the endless play between the interstices of inside and outside, here and there, and all the spaces in-between. Of glass, she says, "It is a container that does not contaminate its content."¹ In projects, such as her two series "Transparencies" and "Transience" (2015),² Sosu ventured into the photography of existing glass objects. By deliberately choreographing her gaze to specific parts of these objects, she produced a whole new perspective. The work in these series reflects the ineluctable, transcendental nature of existence by capturing the many shimmering, reflective, and refractive nuances of glass. Abstracted images of glass bottles, drinking glasses, and mundane glass bowls—enlarged beyond easy recognition—evoke other-worldly sensibilities.

In this exhibition, Sosu's *Glass Factory II* (2019) is an extension of her *Glass Factory* project (2017-2018), which was inspired by a desolate and defunct state-owned industrial glass manufacturing site in Aboso, in Ghana's Western Region. The factory had been commissioned in 1966 by Ghana's first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, to produce sheet glass and hollow glassware. Remarkably, a lethal combination of operational challenges—including management, technical, political, institutional, structural, and other factors—ruined the factory's industrial capacity and overall performance. As part of privatization policies pursued by the government of Ghana in the mid-1980s—a strategy to revive distressed state-owned industries—the Aboso Glass Factory was divested to the private sector. However, even this obsessive faith in divestiture did not yield the expected outcome, and the factory now lies in a deplorable state.

In its prime, the factory at Aboso, like many post-independence industrial establishments, provided a

livelihood for thousands of Ghanaians. What Sosu has done is to visit this particular site on numerous occasions, seeking to capture transient moments, and, perhaps, hint at ghosts of a past that supposedly still linger there. Her visits to the site and her interviews with former employees of the factory reveal a nostalgic desire for the past, because many of them—seeking an alternate means of survival—have since resorted to illegal small-scale gold mining, known locally as "galamsey." But this new venture, which processes gold by using mercury, is detrimental to their health, to that of the community at large, and to the natural environment.

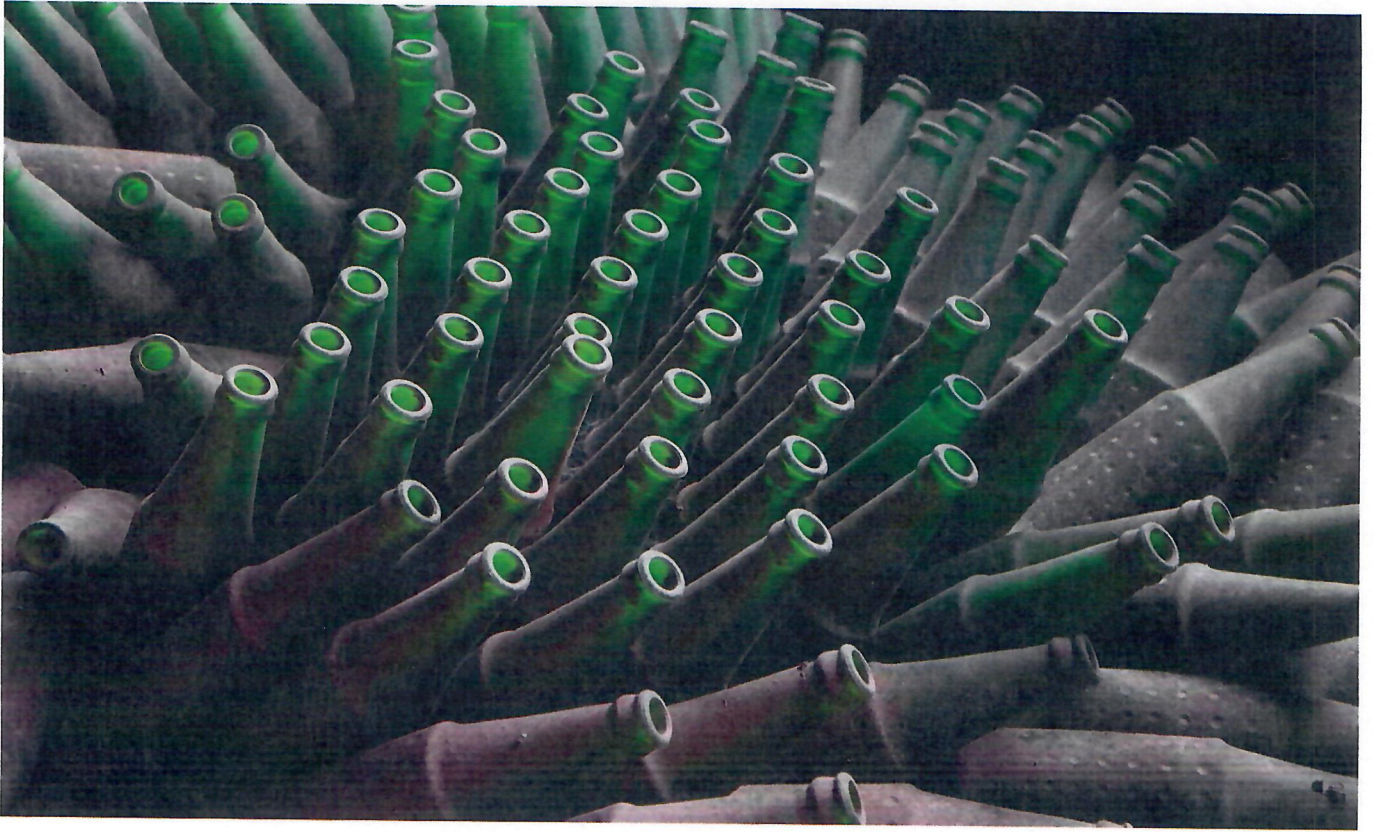
Her *Glass Factory* installation adapted the nineteenth-century optical-illusion technique known as "Pepper's ghost" to re-animate the abandoned factory.³ Sosu's process oscillates between an engagement with actual objects and their capture with image-making machines, their digital manipulation, and a display that employs the re-interpretation of obsolete techniques. As a result we encounter an artist who, through subtle acts, layers history upon history, form upon form, and image upon image. In so doing, she both mimics the very material she is initially interested in and pushes the experience into a new dimension of seemingly virtual reality. In *Glass Factory*, for instance, a holographic image is projected through a Plexiglas prism, accompanied by sounds typical of those once heard on the glass factory's assembly lines and other production units when glass was being manufactured in Aboso. Although this work exists in a flat plane, Sosu's deliberate incorporation of illusion through the "Pepper's ghost" technique evokes in viewers a sense of a third dimension.

In this exhibition, *Glass Factory II* pans out further into the busy, bustling, and chaotic features of the modern city, to present a sort of visual pun on the "One

District, One Factory” initiative of the current government. This concept was designed to boost the nation’s industrial output by installing a factory in each of Ghana’s 254 districts, based on the raw material available in a given district.

In *Glass Factory II*, Sosu weaves together images of masses of people swallowed up by anonymity and precarity; visual material and sound bites that point to the effects of capitalist exploitation and the inconsistencies of globalization; views of ambitious but failing architectural projects featuring glass, steel, and concrete—all mashed together in one maddening potpourri and creating a dire sense of confusion. Scenes from the glass factory as well as an assortment of glass bottles each tell their own story of hope, dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and wavering faith. When still images of translucent objects are gradually replaced by images of the nameless masses, city buildings, and flickering lights from traffic jams, what else do we begin to witness? Apparitions? Brittle remnants of the old Aboso factory? Or fragile ghosts of future factories, yet to be established?

1. The artist made this statement about her work during a conversation with the author on January 2, 2019, at the University of Ghana, Legon.
2. This body of work was presented in two solo shows: *Transparencies* (2015), at the University of Education in Winneba; and *Transience* (2015), at St. Teresa’s Minor Seminary Community Parish in Amisano, Cape Coast. In *Transience*, the duration of the exhibition (December 31, 2015 to January 1, 2016) was used as a metaphor for the transient nature of glass. “Transparencies” was also shown in the group exhibition *The Gown Must Go to Town* (2015), organized by blaxTARLINES KUMASI at the Museum of Science and Technology in Accra, Ghana.
3. *Glass Factory* was first exhibited at blaxTARLINES KUMASI’s *Orderly Disorderly* exhibition in 2017 and was later included in the exhibition *Tracing Obsolescence* (2018), at ApexArt, New York, curated by Evelyn Owen. See the exhibition brochure at: https://apexart.org/images/owen/owen_brochure.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2019.



Selasi Awusi Sosu. *Glass Factory II* (Film still). 2019. Three-channel color and black-and-white video installation with glass bottles, stereo sound, 7'08", 5'33", 10'10". Courtesy the artist.