

The photography, video, and performance works of Lyle Ashton Harris are situated at the intersection of autobiography and historiography. Harris's work became indispensable to the discourse of identity politics in the United States through his participation in the 1994 landmark Whitney Museum show *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art*. The exhibition catalog memorably juxtaposed two minimalist black-and-white photographs of nudes on facing pages: a graceful self-portrait of Harris's toned, bare back, and an image by Robert Mapplethorpe with a full-frontal framing of an unidentified (black) man's lower torso showing a well-endowed penis mounted on amply muscular legs. Curiously, it was the more ambivalent sexuality of Harris's images that drew the harshest critical response from conservative African-American audiences, who focused on Harris over Mapplethorpe as a scapegoat for their discomfort with emergent queer identities.

Over the past two decades, Harris's vision has been subtly honed yet increasingly layered. Often using found objects and collage, his images entail complex archaeological assemblages, and possess an almost prophetic ability to anticipate and record critical turns in the representation of masculinity. Harris's interest in historically significant social rupture is most apparent in the body of work reproduced in these pages, which he created during his tenure in Accra as a professor at New York University Global in 2005–12. It was a pivotal period of increasing visibility for gay and lesbian people in Ghana's capital city, since homosexuals were driven underground by tabloid media persecution.

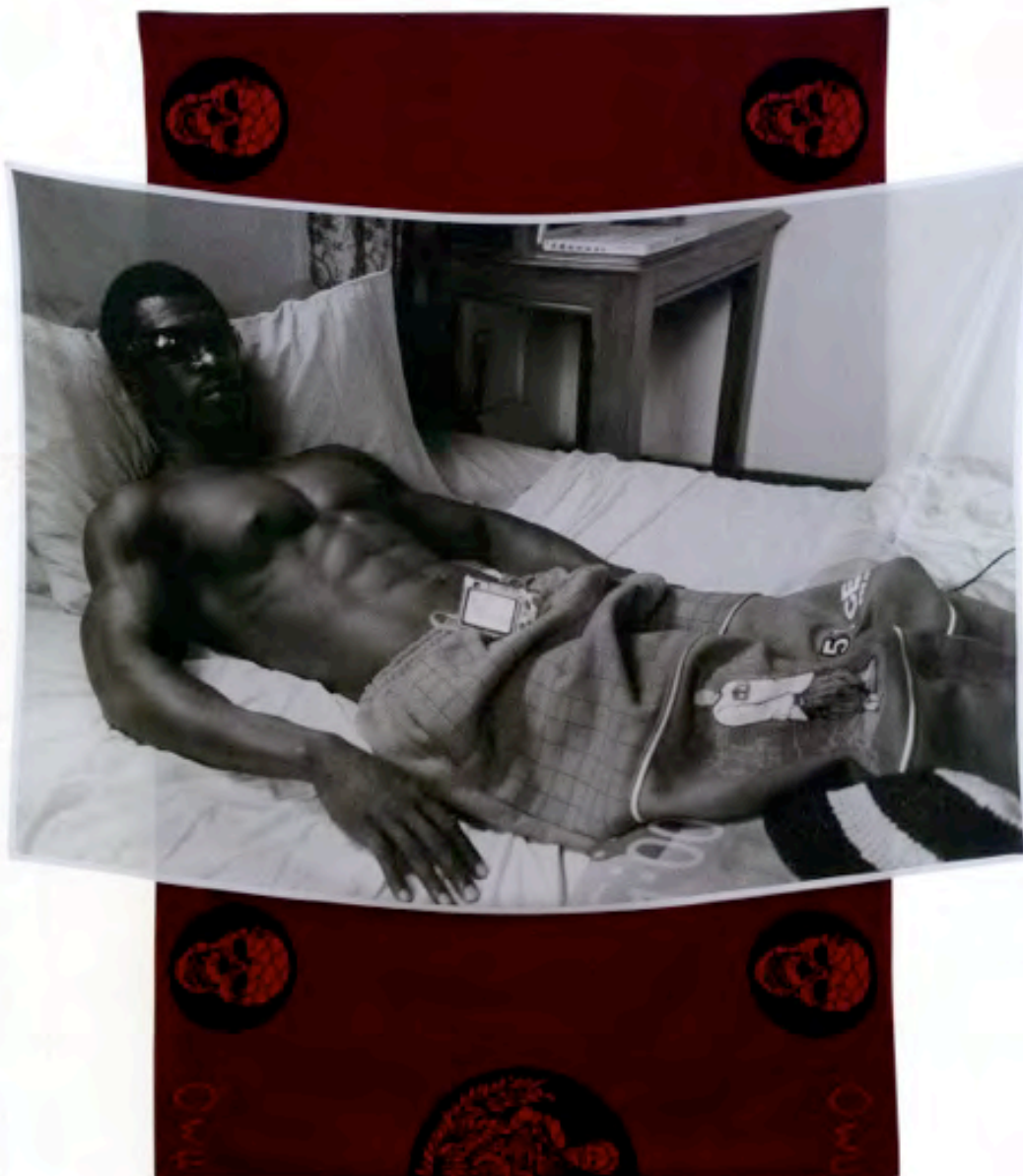
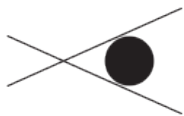
Harris's works *Deceivers and Money Boys*, 2013, and *Untitled (Colonial Law)*, 2014, are emblematic of recent draconian oppression with increased police harassment, targeted arrests, and club raids. As predicted by local LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex) activists, British Prime Minister David Cameron's declaration in 2011 that his country would no longer provide foreign aid to African countries with "anti-gay laws" provoked an eruption of violence against gay and lesbian people in Ghana, stoked by local media; people were literally attacked and driven from their homes. Surprisingly, Ghanaian culture had traditionally recognized the possibility of a discreetly tolerated "phase" for lesbianism in pubescent schoolgirls called *supi*. Reactionary critics of Cameron's statements framed homosexuality as something "unnatural" and imported from abroad, obviating the fact that Ghana's anti-gay laws were actually a constitutional carryover from colonial laws put in place under British rule. In *Untitled (Accra #10)*, 2012, Harris captures a rare celebratory event: a coming-out party thrown by his neighbor for her twenty-five-year-old son. Within the context of urban Accra, the image of two young men dancing together may be less radical than it appears, for while deeply homophobic, Ghanaian society is strikingly homosocial. Harris's photographs also document the ease of physical intimacy among men in everyday situations in which there are no social taboos against physical proximity and nonsexual touching in same-sex relations.

Reflecting Harris's uncanny knack for registering critical turning points in social history is a series of remarkable photographs, titled the *Jamestown Prison Erasure* images, taken at James Fort in Jamestown (Accra) in 2010, just days after it was decommissioned as a prison and became a tourist site. Upgraded to a fort in the seventeenth century, the original building foundation was constructed on a site that had been used by European traders to house enslaved Africans. In 2007, one of the last years of its operation, the prison repeatedly drew criticism as the public became aware that it housed approximately one thousand inmates in a space designed for fifty persons during the transatlantic slave trade. Images torn from magazines festoon rough-textured surfaces—luxury cars, pinup girls, a man resembling a Spanish football coach, the Christ figure bestowing a blessing—bear witness to the fantasies of men recently incarcerated there. Photographs such as *Untitled (Blue Cell/Blue Christ)*, 2010, and *Untitled (Blue Field)*, 2010, document a spectrum of imprisoned desires whose realization lies beyond the blue horizon of the painted prison cell walls. With other works, Harris creates an act of remembrance through erasure, as shadowy silhouettes of ripped, collaged images embody the presence of an absence, a theme carried throughout Harris's recent works that record otherwise unknown histories of civil rights, bringing both the struggles of the LGBTI community of Accra and the ongoing legacy of the transatlantic slave trade to the fore.

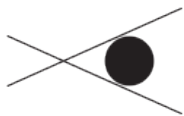
Lyle Ashton Harris

Senam Okudzeto

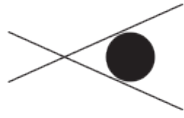
Senam Okudzeto is an artist and writer of Ghanaian and American parentage. She is the founder of Art in Social Structures, a nongovernmental organization for cultural education and preservation in Ghana.



Untitled (Prince w/ Red
Skulls), 2013 (assemblage)

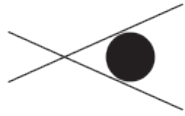


Top:
Untitled (Blue Cell/
Blue Christ), 2010
Bottom:
Untitled (Blue Field),
2010



Untitled (Accra #10),
2012





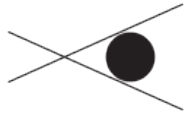
colonial law.

As homosexuality is illegal in Ghana, MSM's have no protection under the law and reporting a crime can lead to the victim being

High Price



Untitled (Colonial Law), 2014



11 April, 2009
Deceivers and Money Boys



Alphonse Ayitey Kokou

He claims to be Ghanaian but he's actually a



Francophone. He is 'waiting2see' on GayRomeo.

After sending his nude pictures, his victim rushed to meet him at Christian Village (online he often claims to be from Achimota). Alphonse and his gang slapped the guy around, insulted and robbed him.

Check him on [Ganyu](#)

Emails: alphonse_ayitey@hotmail.com bisharko@yahoo.com
Tel: +233 245 20 15 92



Posted by [James Osei](#) at 11:31 PM 0 comments

Labels: [Alphonse Kokou](#), [be mine!](#), [bisharko](#), [Idrisu Bahaman](#), [waiting2see](#)

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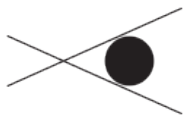
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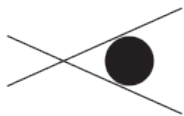
Background

In Ghana, On-line criminals are targeting men who have sex with men (MSMs). They aim to extort money through kidnapping, violence and use of Ghana's archaic colonial law.

As homosexuality is illegal in Ghana, MSM's have no protection under the law and reporting a crime can lead to the victim being



Untitled (Kokrobitey), 2009



Untitled (Miss Ghana), 2000
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Gallery, Brussels, and
David Castillo-Gallery, Miami