

A Love Letter with Teeth

“Aesthetics then is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming.”

- bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*

In Ewuresi Archer’s work, aesthetics is never only about beauty. It is a way of inhabiting place, of looking through land, and of becoming unsettled by what beauty often helps conceal. What begins as a love letter to Ghana, shaped by diasporic yearning and the pull of ancestral land, opens into a deeper confrontation with the realities that have come to feel ordinary. Archer presses on the violences, dislocations, and distortions that structure everyday life, while turning toward land, memory, and spirit as sites of return.

Drawn to Busua by the sea, the sky, and the shifting blues that move between them, Archer enters the landscape through feeling first. But in her work, beauty never remains untouched. If paradise appears here, it does not stay innocent for long. Busua emerges as a place of seduction and strain, where first impressions give way to a more layered encounter shaped by memory, contradiction, and unease. In this sense, the work carries a quiet kinship with Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place*, refusing the postcard view and staying instead with the fractures beneath paradise.

Archer’s practice moves with a restless, intuitive energy. Writing enters the work not as explanation but as drift, interruption, and inner weather. Her brushstrokes can feel feverish, but urgency is never emptiness here. It carries a dense layering of thought, emotion, and anxiety. What emerges is a language that is poetic, unruly, and sharp enough to hold sensation and critique in the same breath. These are works that seem to think while they are being made. They do not arrive tidily. They circle, scrape, insist, double back. They know coherence is sometimes overrated.

That refusal of tidiness matters because Archer is not simply painting feeling. She is painting a distorted reality that has been absorbed into the everyday and renamed normal. Her work pushes against that renaming. What it refuses, again and again, is the soft violence of normalization: the accumulation of waste, the erosion of care, the entitlements and failures that become so familiar they risk disappearing into background noise. Archer does not let them disappear. Nor does she aestheticize them into harmless texture. The work is too alert, too irritated, too full of bite for that.

Running through a number of the paintings is the recurring figure of the fly. For Archer, the fly stands in for the men who hovered around her and other women in Busua: intrusive, persistent, difficult to shake. What first appears as a small buzzing disturbance gathers force through repetition, becoming part of the exhibition’s wider language of gendered tension, discomfort, and unease.

Her surfaces are built through accumulation. Paint, chalk pastel, and yarn gather across batik fabrics that serve as her canvas, while plastic waste, bottles, and bags are folded into the work as both material and residue. Archer’s crochet-based sculptural forms extend this language of entanglement into three dimensions: crocheted from cut-up T-shirts, yarn,

tangled with found debris, and anchored by discarded fishnet. They carry the tension between improvisation and ruin. Together, these materials form a visual language in which beauty is never separate from what has been discarded, and where texture begins to speak of intimacy, excess, fragility, and survival.

Running through the work is also a sharper historical consciousness: the understanding that the present did not simply happen, and that many of the distortions Archer confronts are inseparable from the afterlives of colonization. The work does not stage this history as lesson or slogan. It registers it instead as atmosphere, pressure, residue, and psychic condition. Love for Ghana is never severed, but it is no longer naive. It has had to grow teeth. What begins as yearning becomes a harder form of devotion, one willing to look directly at what has been damaged, normalized, looted, or left to rot.

What does it mean to return to land and water as sources of memory, spirit, and ancestral connection? This question moves quietly but insistently through Archer's work. In dialogue with Ehime Ora's *Spirits Come from Water*, her practice turns toward the possibility that the natural world is not simply environment, but inheritance: a living trace of those who came before, and a site through which one might begin to find a way back to self. The sea, the sky, and the earth are not scenery here. They are living presences charged with memory, spirit, and return.

This is part of what gives Archer's work its force. It is not only angry, though anger is certainly there. It is not only mournful, though grief moves through it too. It searches for relation: to land, to ancestors, to self, and to a form of care not wholly deformed by colonial logic or by the deadening habits of contemporary life. That search does not produce purity, and thankfully so. Purity is usually a scam. What it produces instead is a more difficult honesty, one that allows beauty, disturbance, humor, disgust, tenderness, memory, and refusal to occupy the same field.

What Archer offers, then, is not resolution but a sharper way of seeing, and perhaps a different way of inhabiting what has too often been naturalized, romanticized, or ignored. Her work stays with the tension between love and disillusionment, between the pull of beauty and the realities that fracture it. In doing so, it asks what it might mean to refuse the numbness of normalization and to approach land, memory, and self through a deeper, more searching form of attention. Not the postcard. Not the performance of national romance. Something messier, more sentient, and much more true.

By

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