

Fantasy Coffins in Ghana

Located in the Accra region of Ghana, there is a three generations old workshop dedicated to the art of crafting "fantasy coffins". A unique funerary tradition specific to the Ga



people of Accra, fantasy coffins are designed to honor the person who has died in a special way. Fantasy coffins usually take the shape of something that was meaningful to the person who passed or serves as a reminder of their life. The origin of fantasy coffins dates back to the 1950's and begins with a craftsman named Seth Kane Kwei.

In Ghana, during traditional festivals and ceremonies, the chief is transported in an ornate chair called a palanquin. Kwei, who was a young carpenter at the time, crafted a palanquin in the shape of a cacao pod at the request of a chief. Before the ceremony happened, the chief died unexpectedly, and was buried inside the palanquin instead of a traditional coffin. When a short time later, Kwei's grandmother died, he was inspired to create another

non-traditional coffin. He crafted it in the shape of an airplane to represent her lifelong wishes to fly and travel. The airplane-shaped coffin drew the attention of the community, and pretty soon, the requests for one of Kwei's custom coffins began to roll in.



The business is now run by Kwei's grandson, Eric Adjetey Anang, who has continued in his grandfather's steps of crafting breathtaking fantasy coffins. The coffin designs are incredibly diverse, and include models like animals and fish, shoes, food and drinks, cars, musical instruments, vices, and electronic devices. Some designs are reserved for specific people such as lions coffins for chiefs or royal emblems for members of that family. Other requests might be tied to a person's hobbies and passions, careers, or an inside joke.

Fantasy coffins are called "abebuo", which translates to "proverbs". This implies that the coffins hold some kind of message or wisdom about the person who is buried inside them. The coffins serve as a reminder of the vividness of life and of the complexity of the individual who has died. In Ghana, funerals tend to be expensive, lively, and celebratory in nature. Rather than seeing death as an end, the Ga people see it as a transition. Fantasy coffins emulate this notion of death and are a symbol of the complexity of life - full of color, beauty, and personality. The art of fantasy coffins is a beautiful tradition that brings a sense of humor and joy to the experience of death. In this way, the people of Ghana honor their dead by celebrating their lives.

Citations

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Photo 1:

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Photo 2:

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