

the october gallery

EL ANATSUI: "THE SCULPTED HISTORY OF AFRICA:"

SCULPTURES, RELIEFS AND INSTALLATIONS

14 May - 20 June 1998

From 14 May - 20 June 1998 the October Gallery will present an exhibition of the West African sculptor El Anatsui, who is currently emerging as one of Africa's most powerful contemporary artists. Born in Ghana but living and working in Nsukka, Nigeria, El Anatsui first came to the attention of London audiences during the africa95 season with a solo show at the October Gallery and other work in the exhibition "Seven Stories" at the Whitechapel Gallery. Recently his work has toured in Japan and was juxtaposed with the work of Sol Lewitt in a highly successful exhibition in New York. His work is currently on show at the National Museum of African Art, Washington.

El Anatsui's pieces are concerned with the history of the African continent. They draw simultaneously on traditional African idioms and contemporary western art and move effortlessly between the African and western aesthetic sensibilities. El Anatsui uses the chainsaw to carve his powerful visions into wood. He sculpts, draws on, scores, slashes and burns African hardwoods of mahogany, afara and iroko. The woods he uses become a metaphor for the texture, grain, colour and pattern of Africa's history. His reliefs are composed from individual timbers, which are interchangeable. In recent works he has used driftwood, old door-posts and the battered wood of pestles, once used for extracting palm oil, but, with their bases worn by pounding, now discarded. The pestle is reconstructed but its final form remains bound by past experience, its history is made manifest, and not disguised. The central piece of the exhibition will be a major installation sculpted from driftwood, *Akua's Surviving Children*, a commentary upon the resilience of the of the African peoples in their constant battles to overcome the reversals of History. Most importantly the exhibition will coincide with the publication of the first book dedicated to this artist's work (*El Anatsui*, published by Eastern Art Publishing in collaboration with the October Gallery) with an foreword by John Picton (reader in African Art, SOAS, London) and English text by Dr Elizabeth Peri - Willis (African art historian) a French text by Simon Njami (editor, *Revue Noire*, Paris), a Japanese text by Yukiya Kawaguchi, (Chief Curator, Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo) and a German text by Elisabeth Lalouchek (Artistic Director, The October Gallery).

"Over the past two decades, the sculptor El Anatsui has firmly established himself as perhaps Africa's most significant modern sculptor, exhibiting consistently at home as well as in the most reputable international spaces including the Biennale of Venice where he won a joint honourable mention in 1990, those of Havana and Johannesburg, and in 1995, the sculpture Triennale of Osaka where he won the Kansai Telecasting Corporation Prize. In the 1980's he was a regular participant in international collaborations, especially in Germany, and in 1984 he spent an outstanding period in residence in St. Ives where he produced over 120 ceramic sculptures in eight weeks. In 1992 Anatsui collaborated in the Amazonas environmental sculpture project in Brazil together with Anthony Gormley, Marina Abramovic and Alfredo Jaar, among others. In Nigeria where he has lived and worked as a University Professor since 1974, Anatsui continues to produce new and challenging work in his converted church-hall studio, from where he exercises enormous influence on the artistic landscape of that country and across the continent."

Olu Oguibe, *Third Text*, Summer 1996

This exhibition is supported by africa95.

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OPENING HOURS: TUESDAY - SATURDAY 12.30 - 5.30

