

“What is this?” focuses on visual artists in Ghana who are part of an institutionalised framework of galleries, cultural institutions, (international) workshops and museums. Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork, the author explores the underlying ideological premises underpinning the category of Contemporary Ghanaian Art since its inception in colonial times.

Moving beyond conventional art historical approaches, this study traces the emergence of an artistic field in which ideas of Primitivism and Pan-Africanism play a central role. While these ideas still inform current artistic practices, modes of self-representation and evaluation, in the context of growing global connections, old frames became increasingly contested or mobilised in alternative manners. Examining the discourse and work of several kinds of artists – established, conceptual, wayside and indigenous- this study spotlights contestations over the definition of Contemporary Ghanaian Art. This book, furthermore, exhibits the richness, ingenuity and diversity of art practiced in Ghana.