



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Ademola Olugebefola papers (additions)**

1970s-2003

Sc MG 500

## Summary

**Creator:** Olugebefola, Ademola

**Title:** Ademola Olugebefola papers (additions)

**Date:** 1970s-2003

**Size:** 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

**Source:** Gift of Ademola Olugebefola, 1993-2006.

**Abstract:** Artist, designer, educator, and businessman, the Ademola Olugebefola papers (additions) continue to document his various careers during the 1970s-2000s

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Ademola Olugebefola papers (additions), Sc MG 500, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

### Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound (MIRS) Division: audio image materials. For more information, please contact the division at [schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org](mailto:schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org) or 212-491-2270.

### Related Materials:

Ademola Olugebefola papers, Sc Micro R-6653, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

## Creator History

Ademola Olugebefola was born Bedwick Lyola Thomas on October 2, 1941, in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, and migrated to New York City with his family at the age of four. He studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology from which he received an Associate degree in 1961;

Pomusicart Inc.; the Yoruba Academy of West African Culture; and the Weusi Academy of African Arts and Studies, all in New York City. He also studied at the Printmaking Workshop, New York, with Krishna Reddy and Robert Blackburn.

Artist, designer, educator and businessman, Ademola's career has spanned more than twenty-five years. Introduced to the arts at an early age, Ademola is one of the most respected and inventive catalysts of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Primarily a visual artist, he has worked in all areas of the arts. His involvement with music began in the 1950s during his high school years; he sang and played drums and the acoustic bass. Early in his career, he was a jazz bassist with the Jimmy Waymar Ensemble and later joined Pomusicart, a pioneering cultural workshop dedicated to the fusion of poetry, music, and art. He became the director of Pomusicart's Jazz Art Development and Research Project and under the auspices of this organization executed one of the first Jazz paintings for the *Blues for Nat Turner Jazz Suite*, combining the three media. "Tri-Art Fusion", as he termed it, opened new doors in the art of visual expression.

Ademola has created several thousand etchings, woodcuts, serigraphs, lithographs, oils, ink, and pencil and charcoal drawings as well as wall and free-standing sculptures and murals. He has exhibited in a variety of solo and group shows at the Brooklyn Museum (1969), the Studio Museum in Harlem (1970-1971), the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1972), the American Museum of Natural History (1973), the 2nd World Festival of Art and Culture, Lagos, Nigeria (1977), and The Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C. (1969), among other places. His work is in a variety of private collections as well as in the collections of the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York Health and Hospitals Corporation, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Johnson Publishing Company, Chicago, Fillmore and Fell Corporation, San Francisco, Northern Illinois University, and the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts, U.S. Virgin Islands. His mural commissions include the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the Harlem Cultural Council. Ademola was also a pioneer in the concept of wearable art - the body as moveable sculpture - and, in 1966, cofounded and directed the House of Umoja on Seventh Avenue in Harlem. His fashion and jewelry designs manifested a changed Black consciousness while combining various fabrics and multiple patterns. This body of work influenced African American fashion and jewelry designers and was a precursor of the present wave of Afrocentric clothing and accessories.

As graphic designer and illustrator, Ademola has produced cover designs and illustrations for books by several prominent African American authors, and has designed and illustrated a number of books, booklets, brochures and fliers for a variety of cultural and business organizations. Commissions include those from Anchor Press-Doubleday (1974), Harper and Row (1973), and William Morrow and Company, Inc. (1973). His illustrations have also appeared in a number of periodical publications, both national and international, such as the February 1974 issue of *Natural History* magazine published by the American Museum of Natural History. Ademola's design talents and interests extend to the performing arts where he has been a stage manager, production director, and set and costume designer for a variety of theatrical and film productions. From 1969 to 1972, he was resident designer and associate art director for the New Lafayette Theatre; a consultant to the director of the National Black Theatre; and a graphic and costume consultant to the Public Theatre. Additionally he has been a consultant for various television productions. As co-founder and director of Seven Arts, he introduced and actively promoted African American culture to the Lincoln Square area of New York City.

Ademola has been a frequent lecturer, speaker, panelist, and seminar leader in academic, community, and artistic circles. Speaking engagements have carried him from the Weusi Nyumba Ya Sanaa Gallery and Academy of African Arts and Studies in Harlem to Lincoln University (Pennsylvania), Howard University, Oberlin College, and the College of the Virgin Islands. He has conducted seminars at the New School for Social Research (1976) and the Smithsonian Institution. Topics covered have included

"The Influence of African Art on Modern Expressionism" and "Enhancing the Educational Process through Art". He has also lectured at schools and churches across the country. He has taught at Wesleyan University, and at such New York City community-based organizations as the House of Umoja Cultural Exchange, the Lincoln Square Community Center where he instructed adults, and the Mount Morris Amphitheatre, where he operated a program for adults and youth. From 1977 to 1980 under the auspices of the Cultural Council Foundation (CETA) Artists Project, he was employed as an instructor in public schools and community centers throughout the New York City area. Today Ademola still maintains an active role in education; in addition to speaking engagements, he has organized an educational summit conference at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. Now in its third year, it comprises teacher workshops which bring together individuals from the education profession in an attempt to offer solutions to such pressing issues as multicultural education. A member of Twentieth-Century Creators, one of the largest African American art groups of the 1960s, and one which called for unity and positive ethnic direction in the arts, Ademola participated in the development of the philosophy of "Black-Art for Black People." He aimed to "bring art to the people" as a means of rescuing the people; he viewed art as a weapon, a tool, "a conduit for upliftment". Through the pioneering efforts of artists James Sneed, Abdul Rahman, and others, this movement led to the establishment of the Annual Harlem Outdoor Art Festival in 1964, which brought art to the streets. This concept was also manifested by the Weusi, a group of young artists devoted to raising the cultural awareness of the African American community, of which Ademola was an original member. The Weusi ("Weusi" being a Swahili term for "Blackness"), whose members included Kay Brown, Rudy Irwin, Taiwo Shabazz, and Muhammad Mufutau, first became associated in 1965. They advocated black art, black brotherhood, and black unity and, in 1965, became organized. In 1967, five members of the the Weusi founded the Nyumba Ya Sanaa (House of Art) Gallery and in the early 1970s, the Academy of African Arts and Studies, of which Ademola was Director of the Education Department, was founded. A recipient of numerous prizes, honors and awards, Ademola was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Weusi in 1969. Another Harlem-based organization, Benin Enterprises and Gallery, organized a decade later and of which Ademola was Vice President, also utilized art as a means of education and cultural preservation through its community outreach programs.

Ademola has served as consultant to several important cultural, civic, and business organizations including the Harlem Cultural Council, Harlem Visitors and Convention Association, and the New York Urban Coalition. For six months in 1969, he was a special research consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where he gathered and analyzed data on African American artists for a potential national survey exhibition, and under another project was involved in surveying designated regions of New York City for the location of a community museum.

For over twenty-five years, Ademola has been a marketing consultant and businessman. In the early 1970s, together with his brothers Verl and Harold Thomas he formed Ori-Gem, a fashion boutique, gift shop and fine arts gallery in their native St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. The business featured men's and women's fashions, crafts made by Caribbean artists, and art exhibitions by native artists, other Caribbean artists, African American, and European artists. He was president of Caribbean Media Associates Inc., an audiovisual production firm incorporated in 1975. With his brother Verl and artist Hannibal Ahmed, Ademola established Tetrahedron, a fine arts brokerage and artistic consulting firm, in 1978. The company exhibited and sold art, dealing in paintings, sculpture, mixed media, graphics, jewelry and design services. In 1980 together with his wife, photographer Pat Davis, he formed Solar Associates, an advertising, public relations, graphics and production firm. Clients have included Audience Development Committee (Audelco), Uptown Chamber of Commerce, New York Urban Coalition, and the American Place Theatre. With Pat Davis he also formed Grinnell Studio/Galleries, an art gallery and multipurpose space which has been host to concerts, receptions, book parties, fashion shows, auctions, and a variety of fundraising events. Grinnell Galleries is located at their residence, "The Grinnell", at 800 Riverside Drive in Upper Manhattan. In 1989 Solar Associates and Grinnell

Galleries were merged to form Grinnell Galleries Collections. Ademola was a consultant to the Robert Gumbs (Colbob) publishing company and in 1988 became a partner, together with his two brothers, forming Gumbs and Thomas Publishers. The company issues books, posters, and greeting cards, among others items. Merchandise includes Kwanzaa greetings cards and a Kwanzaa activity book for young readers. In 1991 the company offered a Kwanzaa teacher's guide, endorsed by the United Federation of Teachers.

In a cooperative effort with Golden Ribbon Playthings, the producer of Huggy Bear, the first mass produced Black character doll (1985), the company has published a series of three adventure books (1991) recording Huggy Bear's travels and experiences in the African diaspora. The company also published *Harlem Today* (1985) a tourist guide to events, businesses and organizations in the Harlem community, now in its second edition.

Ademola has been an active member of the Harlem community and the national and international artistic community. He has served on the boards of various organizations including Harlem Cultural Council, New York Arts Consortium, and the National Conference of Artists (NCA), the oldest and largest national organization of Black artists in the United States. He served as Vice President of NCA from 1973-1977, presiding over its Regional Development and Public Relations departments.

Ademola is the father of seven children, five of them from previous marriages. He and his wife Pat Davis currently live in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. He continues to play an active role in the Harlem community and in the African American and larger artistic community as a whole.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Ademola Olugebefola papers (additions) continue to document his career as an artist, designer, educator, consultant, and businessman during the 1970s-2000s. The collection includes personal and professional correspondence; art loan agreements; printed matter such as invitations, programs, and clippings; exhibition material; designs; honors and awards; and material related to organizations with which he has worked or studied.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American artists  
African American educators  
Black arts movement  
Graphic design  
Illustrators

### **Names**

Olugebefola, Ademola  
Grinnell Gallery (New York, N.Y.)  
Weusi Artists Collective

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