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ART-THERAPY-INFORMED POTENTIALS OF SELECTED INDIGENOUS ASANTE VISUAL ARTWORKS

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Abstract

Through qualitative, interpretivist, art-therapy-informed ethnographic design, this study interrogates how indigenous Asante visual artworks operate as therapeutic cultural mirrors that facilitate socio-emotional expression, psychological wellbeing, and identity construction among the people of Ashanti. Using twenty purposively sampled participants consisting of traditional artists, custodians of cultural heritage, art-therapy practitioners, educators and community members, I collected data through semi-structured interviews, participatory artistic product making sessions, participant observation, and visual-symbolic analysis across key communities for artistic cultural production and or archiving namely Bonwire, Ahwiaa, Ntonso, and Manhia Palace Museum. Thematic, arts-based and symbolic interpretive analyses reveal that practices such as kente weaving, stamping technique of Adinkra printing, wood carving, and pottery function as potent non-verbal conduits for mood and affect regulation, offering rhythmic, repetitive processes that engender calm, reflection, and catharsis. Symbolic motif designs embedded in these artistic media encode complex socio-emotional, and moral narratives that enable communal healing and reinforcement of collective identity. Heritage artefacts including the Okomfo Anokye Sword, Golden axe, Unity Bowl, and coward sword, emerge as indigenous psychological unitary relics that historically mediated behaviour, sustained social cohesion, and nurtured resilience. These findings align with emerging scholarship on the therapeutic potential of African visual traditions, underscoring their relevance for culturally responsive mental-health interventions in Ghana. Asante visual artworks represent a culturally grounded therapeutic resource applicable to contemporary counseling, mental-health education, and community-based practices. They can inform counselor-training curricula, collaborative frameworks linking traditional practitioners, museums, and mental-health professionals, and the preservation of holistic wellbeing knowledge systems.

Keywords: Art therapy, indigenous, symbolic, communal healing, socio-emotional, moral narrative

1. Introduction

Art has long functioned as a tool for healing, communication, and emotional regulation in many African societies. Within the Ashanti culture of Ghana, visual arts such as kente weaving, Adinkra symbolism, carving objects, pottery, and goldweight casting are more than aesthetic expressions; they carry deep emotional, spiritual, and therapeutic significance. These artworks operate as cultural metaphors that communicate values, restore social harmony, affirm identity, and reinforce psychological resilience. Contemporary art therapy theory recognises culture-based art practices as important vehicles for emotional healing, community support, and mental well-being (Akotia & Adjei, 2024; Malchiodi, 2022; Moon, 2023). The Ashanti artistic repertoire embodies embedded therapeutic philosophies such as *sankofa* (self-reflection), *dwamena* (inner strength), and *gye nyame* (spiritual assurance), which align strongly with modern therapeutic goals.

Despite this alignment, art therapy as a clinical practice in Ghana rarely incorporates indigenous artistic traditions, and the therapeutic potential of Ashanti art remains underexplored in scholarship (Doku Asare et al., 2024). While Ashanti art forms such as kente weaving, Adinkra symbolism, carving, and pottery have long supported emotional expression, healing, and identity affirmation, their psychosocial and therapeutic potential has received little empirical attention. This gap limits culturally grounded approaches to mental health and art therapy in Ghana, particularly for youth and communities experiencing identity-based distress.

Consequently, this study systematically examines how Ashanti visual arts function as **therapeutic cultural mirrors** that promote psychological well-being, resilience, and social cohesion. Specifically, the study examines how selected Ashanti visual arts foster emotional regulation, identity formation, moral socialisation, and communal healing as indigenous psychological techniques. The questions guiding the study are 1. In what ways do Ashanti visual art practices enable emotional expression and emotional regulation at individual and communal levels? 2. How do Ashanti symbolic artifacts and visual practices function to reinforce cultural identity, guide moral-emotional behavior, and sustain communal well-being?

2. Conceptual Framework and Related Literature

This study is guided by an Integrated Afrocentric–Expressive Art Therapy framework, which conceptualises Ashanti visual arts as culturally embedded healing systems that facilitate emotional expression, psychological well-being, and identity formation. Rooted in Afrocentric Theory (Asante, 1980, 2007, 2015; Gyekye, 1996, 2023; Quayson 2007), the framework emphasises cultural centering, holism, communal healing, and symbolism as indigenous knowledge systems, recognising Ashanti art forms as inseparable from spirituality, morality, and social life. A central part of this perspective is Expressive Arts Therapy Theory which foregrounds how artistic processes function therapeutically through non-verbal emotional expression, embodied engagement, symbolic externalisation, and process-oriented creativity (Knill et al., 2005; Malchiodi, 2022; McNiff, 1981).

When integrated, the framework positions Ashanti visual arts such as kente weaving, Adinkra symbolism, carving, pottery, and regalia not merely as aesthetic artifacts but as therapeutic cultural mirrors that reflect emotional values, promote communal and individual healing, and reinforce cultural identity and continuity. This integrated theory provides both a culturally legitimate epistemological foundation and a contemporary therapeutic lens for understanding how indigenous Ashanti art practices support emotional regulation, resilience, and well-being within their sociocultural context.

Global art therapy research increasingly recognises that traditional and indigenous art practices play a significant role in promoting emotional balance, trauma recovery, and social cohesion (Malchiodi, 2022; Moon, 2023; Peile, 2024). Engagement with culturally familiar symbols, materials, and creative processes allows individuals to externalise complex emotions, regulate affect, and process experiences more effectively than purely verbal therapeutic approaches. In communal contexts, traditional arts foster shared meaning-making, collective support, and interpersonal connection, strengthening social bonds and communal resilience (Nabunya & Opoku, 2024).

Recent Ghanaian scholarship conceptualises Ashanti artistic traditions as psychosocial healing systems extending beyond aesthetic functions to support emotional well-being, social cohesion, and identity affirmation (Akotia & Adjei, 2024; Sarpong, 2023). Adinkra symbols, in particular, function as visual aphorisms that encode philosophical values and ethical principles, guiding reflective thought, resilience, and emotional balance (Rattray, 1927; Willis, 1998). Symbols such as *Sankofa* promote introspection and learning from past experiences, while *Gye Nyame* provides spiritual reassurance and existential security. Kente weaving, stools, and regalia, including the sacred *Sika Dwa Kofi* (Golden Stool), reinforce cultural continuity, ancestral connection, and communal identity (Akotia & Adjei, 2024; Rattray, 1927; Sarpong, 2023).

Symbolic reasoning is fundamental to Ashanti visual culture and functions as a powerful emotional and therapeutic language. Symbols serve as culturally intelligible signs conveying complex emotional meanings and guiding personal conduct (Boateng, 2024; Tuffour & Asare, 2024). This symbolic system enables externalisation of emotions, reflection on lived experiences, and cultivation of psychological resilience.

Contemporary social changes and urbanisation have contributed to identity-based distress, particularly among the youth (Gyekye & Owusu, 2024). Ashanti art forms, including kente weaving, Adinkra symbolism, and stool regalia, serve as culturally anchored tools for identity affirmation and emotional resilience. Engagement with these art forms reconnects individuals with ancestral knowledge, moral philosophies, and communal values, fostering continuity, belonging, and self-understanding.

Traditional Ashanti artistic practices function as embodied therapeutic processes, offering psychological, emotional, and social benefits. Repetitive weaving promotes mindfulness, focused attention, and meditative engagement (Malchiodi, 2022). Adinkra stamping externalises internal states and facilitates symbolic processing of experiences (Levine & Levine, 2024). Carving engages somatic and kinesthetic dimensions, supporting somatic release and affective regulation (Hamel, 2021; Counselling Directory, 2025). Pottery and clay molding provide tactile grounding, sensory engagement, and non-verbal emotional expression (Van Lith & Beale, 2025; Creative Arts Therapy, 2025). Collectively, these processes exemplify how Ashanti art naturally embodies therapeutic principles aligned with contemporary art therapy, trauma-informed practice, and somatic creative methods.

Despite extensive scholarship on cultural meaning, very few studies examine Ashanti art as a therapeutic system or explore its integration into modern art therapy frameworks in Ghanaian educational and clinical settings. This study addresses these gaps

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, interpretivist, and art therapy-informed ethnographic approach to explore how Ashanti visual arts function as therapeutic cultural mirrors that support emotional expression, healing, and identity formation. A qualitative interpretivist

framework was appropriate because it facilitates in-depth engagement with culturally embedded meanings, lived experiences, and symbolic processes that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Integrating art therapy perspectives allowed artistic practices to be understood not merely as creative acts but as mechanisms of emotional regulation, resilience, and psychosocial well-being, consistent with arts-based research paradigms that foreground embodied inquiry (Phoenix & Chamberlain, 2025).

An ethnographic design guided the study, offering holistic insight into Ashanti art practices within their natural cultural contexts. This design enabled interpretation of therapeutic symbols and motifs as they arise in everyday artistic practices, observation of emotional significance inherent in those processes, and direct engagement with participants through participatory practices, thereby aligning with ethnographic goals of cultural immersion and contextual understanding. Ethnography also supports the interpretivist emphasis on meaning-making within lived social worlds.

Participants were purposively selected based on their engagement with Ashanti art and cultural practice. A total of 20 participants were included: indigenous artists (weavers, carvers, potters, Adinkra makers; $n = 8$), cultural custodians such as chiefs, elders, and traditional priests ($n = 4$), art therapy practitioners and psychologists ($n = 2$), educators integrating art into counseling ($n = 2$), and youth and adults engaged in Ashanti art activities ($n = 4$). This purposive sampling ensured representation of practical, cultural, and therapeutic perspectives, supporting a comprehensive understanding of Ashanti visual art as a therapeutic practice.

Data collection was triangulated to capture the symbolic, cultural, and therapeutic dimensions of Ashanti art. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' perspectives on art's role in emotional expression, psychological healing, ritual practice, and community cohesion. These interviews elicited rich narrative data consistent with interpretivist qualitative methods. Participatory artmaking involved kente weaving, Adinkra stamping, clay work, and symbolic drawing, facilitating observation of embodied and processual aspects of therapeutic art engagement, and aligning with arts-based research techniques that emphasise creative production as analytic inquiry.

Visual and symbolic analyses of participant-generated artworks drew on established frameworks such as Panofsky's iconology for cultural symbol interpretation and semiotic cultural analysis to contextualise communicative and cultural significance. Complementing these, participant observation at Bonwire, Ntonso, Ahwiaa, and the Manhyia Palace Museum provided contextualised insight into artisanal practices, rituals, and social interactions, revealing art as a lived and socially embedded therapeutic experience.

Data analysis combined thematic, arts-based, and symbolic interpretive approaches. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns, concepts, and emergent themes across interviews and observational data, with careful attention to reflexivity and contextual depth (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Arts-based analytical techniques highlighted the therapeutic and symbolic dimensions of participant-created artworks, consistent with emerging guidelines for arts-based inquiry that treat artmaking itself as an interpretive mode of analysis. Symbolic and interpretive analysis further decoded cultural and emotional meanings embedded in visual motifs and practices, enabling a multi-layered understanding of Ashanti visual arts as culturally grounded therapeutic practices.

Ethical rigor was central to the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to engagement. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained where requested. Respect for sacred artifacts and cultural protocols was upheld, particularly at the Manhyia Palace. The

intellectual property of artisans was acknowledged and safeguarded, ensuring that artistic knowledge and creations were not misappropriated. Engagement with participants and communities adhered to culturally appropriate protocols, balancing scholarly inquiry with sensitivity to local traditions and community values.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Therapeutic Cultural Mirrors

Therapeutic Cultural Mirrors refer to culturally embedded visual and material practices that reflect, regulate, and reshape emotional experience at both individual and communal levels. In this study, a therapeutic cultural mirror is defined as a cultural form that externalises internal emotional states, provides culturally sanctioned pathways for emotional regulation and meaning-making, and reinforces identity, moral values, and social connection to support psychological well-being. Unlike symbolic mediation and ritual healing, which emphasise communication and ceremonial processes, therapeutic cultural mirrors foreground the reflective and regulatory functions of visual culture. Within this framework, art does not merely symbolise emotion or accompany healing rituals; it actively makes emotions visible, socially interpretable, and collectively manageable. The concept also extends expressive therapy by emphasising culturally shared, relational, and embodied processes rather than individual emotional expression alone. The framework integrates four core components: embodied expression, symbolic translation, relational co-regulation, and identity anchoring. Together, these components position Ashanti visual arts as indigenous psychological technologies that operate across emotional, social, and cultural domains.

4.2 Artmaking as a Medium for Emotional Expression and Regulation

Analysis of interviews, participant observation, and participatory artmaking sessions revealed that Ashanti visual arts function as powerful non-verbal channels for emotional expression and regulation. Across kente weaving, Adinkra printing, wood carving, pottery, and goldsmithing, participants described how artistic processes enabled them to communicate complex emotions such as grief, stress, pride, anger, hope, and resilience without reliance on spoken language. Artisans consistently reported entering calm, focused, and reflective states during artmaking. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of these practices was central to this experience. A kente weaver explained, “When I weave, I do not think of the day’s worries. The rhythm of the loom takes my mind away” (Field Data, 2025). Similarly, an Adinkra printer noted,

The stamping is not only decoration; it is my prayer (Field Data, 2025).

Potters emphasised the therapeutic quality of tactile engagement with clay. One participant reflected,

When the clay is in my hands, I feel my anger soften (Field Data, 2025)

suggesting that material malleability supports the externalisation and gradual release of emotional tension. Participants in contemporary artmaking sessions reported comparable outcomes, including relaxation, emotional lightness, and increased self-awareness. As one participant observed,

I came here stressed and tense, but after stamping Adinkra symbols, I felt lighter (Field Data, 2025).

These findings indicate that Ashanti artmaking operates as an indigenous emotional regulation practice. The repetitive and embodied nature of these activities parallels concepts of flow and mindfulness, which have been associated with improved emotional well-being and stress reduction (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Garland et al., 2015; Kaimal et al., 2016). Unlike clinical

settings, however, these regulatory processes are embedded in everyday cultural life, making emotional expression socially acceptable and culturally grounded. Artmaking thus functions as a form of “quiet healing,” where emotions are processed through rhythm, embodiment, and material engagement rather than verbal disclosure.

4.3 Symbolism as Emotional Language

Findings further revealed that symbols embedded within Ashanti visual art such as Adinkra symbols, kente patterns, carved motifs, and gold ornaments function as a culturally shared emotional and moral language. Participants emphasised that these symbols are intentionally selected to communicate values such as patience, humility, courage, unity, reflection, and emotional restraint. Rather than serving merely decorative purposes, symbols were described as deliberate communicative tools for expressing emotions and guiding moral reflection. An Adinkra stamp maker explained,

The symbols speak to people. If someone is angry, we use ‘Sankofa’ to remind them to return to their past and learn (Field Data, 2025).

Elders and community members similarly highlighted the use of symbolic attire and motifs during funerals, festivals, reconciliation rites, and leadership ceremonies as indirect ways of communicating grief, contemplation, and moral expectations. As one elder noted,

During funerals, people may not cry openly, but the cloth they wear tells the story of grief (Field Data, 2025).

Symbolism, therefore functions as a culturally sanctioned emotional language. These findings support research suggesting that cultural systems provide “emotion scripts” that shape how emotions are expressed and interpreted (Hinton et al., 2018). This way, Ashanti visual culture reduces the need for confrontation and supports psychological safety, consistent with evidence that nonverbal symbolic expression can reduce emotional suppression and enhance emotional processing (Tiffany et al., 2017).

4.4 Communal Art Practices and Collective Emotional Well-Being

Participants emphasised that Ashanti visual art is embedded within shared cultural practices rather than experienced as isolated individual activity. Communal engagements such as shared meals, wearing symbolically significant cloths, ritual use of carved objects, and participation in festivals were described as key spaces where emotional states are publicly expressed, observed, and addressed.

Community members reported that participation in these practices signals emotional and relational well-being, while withdrawal is widely interpreted as an indicator of distress or conflict. One participant explained,

When someone refuses to come to the festival or refuses to wear the cloth, we know something is wrong (Field Data, 2025).

Such absences often prompted concern and intervention by elders, who were seen as responsible for restoring emotional and social balance. Elders described the use of symbolic objects such as stools, cloths, and gifts as central to reconciliation processes. These objects functioned to soften emotions, signal willingness to reconcile, and re-establish unity without direct confrontation. Festivals were also described as communal emotional spaces where collective participation in dance, music, costume, and performance transformed individual sorrow into shared resilience. As one participant reflected,

During festivals, we laugh together, dance together, and our sadness becomes smaller (Field Data, 2025).

These findings demonstrate that Ashanti visual art supports psychological well-being at the communal level through shared emotional regulation. This aligns with theories of co-regulation, which emphasise that emotional balance is achieved through social interaction (Tronick, 2019), and with research on community-based healing, where collective rituals and symbolism support mental health and social repair (Kirmayer et al., 2018; Caldwell et al., 2019). Emotional well-being in this context is therefore relational and embedded in social participation

4.5 Art, Identity, and Emotional Resilience

Participants consistently linked engagement with Ashanti visual arts to identity formation and emotional resilience. Artisans described their creative practices as inseparable from their sense of self and cultural belonging. One carver stated, *I am not only carving wood; I am carving my identity*, reflecting a broader understanding of artmaking as a process through which personal and collective identity is continuously shaped. Community members reported feelings of pride, belonging, and emotional reassurance when wearing or encountering Ashanti art. A youth participant noted, *When I wear the cloth, I feel proud*, illustrating how visual symbols contribute to positive emotional states and a strengthened sense of belonging. Elders further emphasised that art serves as a reminder of ancestral lineage, clan identity, and social responsibility, particularly during periods of emotional vulnerability. As one elder explained,

Art reminds us of our ancestors. When you are weak, you remember the people who came before you.

These findings suggest that identity affirmation is a key pathway through which Ashanti art supports psychological well-being. This is consistent with research indicating that cultural identity and connectedness buffer against stress and enhance resilience (Berry et al., 2020; Phinney et al., 2019; Yehuda et al., 2019). Through cultural transmission, art also teaches patience, discipline, and moral values, supporting emotional regulation and resilience across generations (Carter et al., 2020).

4.6 Therapeutic Continuities Between Traditional and Contemporary Contexts

Participatory artmaking sessions and museum-based observations indicated strong continuity between traditional Ashanti art practices and contemporary emotional experiences. Contemporary participants reported calmness, reflection, emotional release, and personal insight, even when they lacked prior symbolic knowledge. As one participant noted,

I did not know the meaning of the symbols, but I still felt calm.

This suggests that therapeutic effects extend beyond cognitive interpretation to embodied and affective engagement. Museum curators similarly observed strong emotional responses among visitors encountering Ashanti artworks in exhibition spaces. A curator explained that visitors often pause before gold weights and respond emotionally, indicating that Ashanti visual art retains affective power even outside its original ritual contexts. These findings align with research suggesting that art can evoke emotional and reflective experiences across diverse settings (Chatterjee & Noble, 2018; Pelowski et al., 2017). However, elders and traditional authorities expressed concern that accelerated teaching methods and commercialisation risk diminishing the emotional and spiritual depth of these art forms. As one elder cautioned, “If you rush the teaching, the meaning is lost. The symbols become just decoration.” This highlights a tension between continuity of therapeutic impact and threats posed by market-driven production and cultural commodification (Smith & Akagawa, 2020).

4.7 Symbolic Artifacts as Indigenous Psychological Technologies

Findings related to key Ashanti symbolic artifacts including the Coward Sword, Golden Axe, Okomfo Anokye Sword, and Unity Bowl, demonstrate how material culture functioned as

indigenous psychological technologies for regulating emotion, shaping behavior, and sustaining communal well-being. The Coward Sword (figures 1 & 2) was described as a moral-regulatory artifact that transformed internal fear and moral failure into visible social symbols. By marking cowardice on the body, the sword externalised emotional states and enforced communal values of courage and responsibility. Although harsh by contemporary standards, elders emphasised its preventive and educational function in shaping emotional discipline and collective survival.



Figures 1 & 2: The Coward Sword as Moral Discipline and Communal Regulation
Source; field data (2025)

In contrast, the Golden Axe (figure 3) functioned as a diplomatic and therapeutic symbol. Its presence signaled restraint, suspended hostility, and invited dialogue. Participants emphasised that the Golden Axe regulated collective anger and fear, facilitating emotional containment and reconciliation. Unlike punitive artifacts, it was consistently associated with peace, patience, and restoration of balance (ahotosoo).



Figure 3: *The Golden Axe as a Diplomatic and Therapeutic Cultural Mirror*
Source: Field Data (2025)

The Okomfo Anokye Sword (figure 4) was described as a foundational symbol of unity, continuity, and spiritual grounding within the Asante Kingdom. Participants emphasised its role as a living emotional and cultural anchor, evoking calm, reverence, pride, and a sense of ancestral protection. Elders and community members identified the sword as marking the sacred moment of the Golden Stool's descent, which legitimised King Osei Tutu I and unified the Asante states into one nation. As one participant explained, *"The sword marks the place where we received our collective soul."*

The sword's continued presence in the ground was interpreted as reinforcing its meaning as a permanent anchor of Asante identity and stability. Participants described it as providing emotional security and cultural confidence, with one elder noting that it *"does not only tell history; it gives us security and pride."* Visits to the site were associated with feelings of calm, reverence, and emotional connection to ancestors, indicating its role in regulating collective emotions and reaffirming shared origins and destiny. Participants further emphasised the sword's importance in identity formation, particularly for younger generations, as it reinforces belonging, unity, and cultural pride. Framed as a living therapeutic presence rather than a static monument, the Okomfo Anokye Sword functions as a symbolic anchor that supports emotional regulation, communal reflection, and cultural healing. Alongside other Asante visual forms, it stands as a powerful therapeutic cultural mirror, illustrating how indigenous Asante visual arts sustain both individual and communal well-being through shared memory and symbolism.



Figure 4: Okomfo Anokye Sword as a Cultural and Therapeutic Landmark
Source: Field Data (2025)

The Unity Bowl (figure 5) embodies co-regulation and collective emotional care within Ashanti domestic and social life. Shared eating from a single bowl created structured opportunities for dialogue, emotional support, and conflict resolution. Absence from communal meals was widely interpreted as a sign of emotional distress or relational conflict and prompted elder mediation, demonstrating how material culture was intentionally designed to reveal emotional imbalance and restore harmony. Visually, the bowl's circular form and sculpted human figures symbolise interdependence, mutual support, and relational well-being. The Unity Bowl, originally created by Kwame Amoah and inspired by indigenous Ashanti dinner bowls, features a wide mouth, rounded belly, and two-tier structure symbolising abundance, openness, and inclusivity. Emerging from the bowl's midsection are Akuaba-inspired heads or sculpted human figures that connect to the rim. These forms function practically as handles and symbolically as representations of shared life, collective responsibility, and emotional interdependence, transforming the bowl into a visual metaphor for communal existence. According to Mr. Justice Brobbey, Director of the Manhyia Palace Museum, the Unity Bowl was historically regarded as “the family bowl.” In traditional Ashanti households, where two or three families often lived together, fufu was eaten communally from a single bowl, symbolising unity and cooperation. The sculpted figures reflect the proverb that “two or three heads are better than one,” emphasising collective wisdom and mutual dependence.

Beyond nourishment, the shared bowl served a therapeutic and social function. After meals, family members discussed personal and domestic concerns while others offered guidance, emotional support, and collective problem-solving. In this way, the Unity Bowl functioned as a silent facilitator of dialogue, empathy, and emotional healing, embedding psychosocial care within everyday cultural practice. Refusal or exclusion from the shared bowl signaled relational strain and triggered elder intervention, reinforcing the bowl's role as a mechanism for emotional monitoring and social repair. Although men, women, and children ate in separate groups, shared eating within each group fostered accountability, moral instruction, and emotional learning. These practices created psychologically safe spaces for feedback, affirmation, and social bonding. In therapeutic terms, the Unity Bowl reflects contemporary

concepts of co-regulation, where emotional balance is achieved through supportive social connection.

This philosophy resonates with broader Ashanti symbolic traditions, such as the gold weight depicting two crocodiles with separate heads but a single stomach, which teaches that conflict is inevitable within unity, yet shared survival requires continued connection. Today, when displayed in institutions such as the Manhyia Palace Museum, the Unity Bowl continues to function as a therapeutic cultural mirror. Although no longer used domestically, it invites reflection on togetherness, dialogue, and collective care, demonstrating how Ashanti visual art extends beyond aesthetics to actively support psychosocial well-being, identity formation, and social harmony.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

Figures 5, 6, and 7: Unity bowl as Therapeutic Cultural Mirrors in Ashanti Society
Source: Field Data (2025)

Collectively, these artifacts illustrate how Ashanti visual culture operate as an integrated system of indigenous psychological technologies. Through discipline, reconciliation, grounding identity, and facilitating dialogue, symbolic objects transform invisible emotional states into visible, shared processes that regulate emotion and sustain communal balance.

5. Summary

Overall, the study found that Ashanti visual arts function as therapeutic cultural mirrors that support emotional expression, regulation, identity formation, and communal healing. Rhythmic and embodied practices promote calmness, emotional release, and reflective awareness.

Symbolic systems provide culturally shared emotional languages that allow indirect expression of difficult emotions while preserving social harmony. Communal art practices facilitate co-regulation and early detection of distress, supported by elder intervention. Art also strengthens cultural identity and resilience across generations. Key symbolic artifacts operate as indigenous psychological technologies that regulate behavior, resolve conflict, ground identity, and sustain social cohesion. While contemporary participants continue to experience therapeutic benefits, elders caution that commercialisation and rushed transmission threaten the deeper emotional and spiritual meanings that sustain these practices.

6. Conclusion

The findings indicate that Ashanti visual arts are not merely aesthetic or cultural artifacts but function as indigenous psychological technologies that support emotional well-being, social cohesion, and identity formation. Through rhythmic artmaking, symbolic communication, and communal participation, Ashanti art enables individuals and communities to express, regulate, and heal emotions without relying on verbal disclosure. The study further shows that these practices operate as therapeutic cultural mirrors, reflecting shared values, ancestral memory, and collective emotional states back to the community. Traditional artifacts such as the Coward Sword, Golden Axe, Okomfo Anokye Sword, and Unity Bowl illustrate how visual culture historically governed emotion and behavior through discipline, reconciliation, grounding identity, and co-regulation. Contemporary engagement with Ashanti art through museums and participatory sessions confirms that its therapeutic power persists beyond traditional contexts. However, the sustainability of these benefits depends on preserving cultural depth and meaning, as commercialisation and rushed learning threaten the integrity of symbolic knowledge and emotional function.

7. Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by repositioning indigenous Ashanti arts as therapeutic cultural mirrors and indigenous psychological technologies rather than merely aesthetic or cultural artifacts. It advances scholarship by demonstrating how practices such as kente weaving, Adinkra stamping, pottery, carving, and symbolic artifacts facilitate emotional expression, emotional regulation, identity formation, moral socialisation, and communal healing within culturally grounded contexts. The study further contributes an integrated conceptual framework combining Afrocentric perspectives with expressive arts therapy to explain how Ashanti visual culture supports psychosocial wellbeing through embodied, symbolic, and communal processes. Methodologically, it expands qualitative and arts-based inquiry by applying an art therapy-informed ethnographic approach to indigenous African visual culture. Practically, the findings provide culturally responsive insights for counseling, psychotherapy, mental health education, museum practice, and community-based healing initiatives in Ghana. The study also contributes to the preservation and recognition of indigenous knowledge systems as valuable resources for holistic wellbeing and culturally relevant mental-health interventions.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Ashanti visual arts be integrated into mental health and counseling education by developing curricula in Ghanaian universities that incorporate art practices such as kente weaving and Adinkra stamping into counseling and psychotherapy training, thereby using art-based methods as culturally relevant therapeutic tools

in community mental health settings. To preserve symbolic meaning, community-led educational programs should be established to teach Adinkra symbols, their meanings, and emotional functions, while apprenticeships and craft training must prioritise cultural context and spiritual significance beyond technical skill. Community-based art therapy initiatives should be promoted, utilising Ashanti art forms to support emotional expression, trauma healing, and social reconciliation, and employing communal activities such as festivals, shared meals, and group weaving as therapeutic platforms for emotional regulation and social cohesion. Museums should be supported as therapeutic spaces by designing exhibits that emphasise emotional and symbolic meanings and by incorporating participatory workshops that allow visitors to experience the healing aspects of Ashanti art. To protect cultural integrity against commercialisation, policies should regulate mass production of symbolic art to prevent loss of meaning, while artisans should receive financial and social support to ensure sustainable livelihoods and preserve traditional learning processes. Traditional artifacts like the Golden Axe and Unity Bowl should be reintroduced in modern community mediation and restorative justice practices, encouraging elders and community leaders to use symbolic objects in peacebuilding and reconciliation. Finally, intergenerational transmission should be promoted through family and community practices that enable children to learn art skills alongside moral and emotional values, while oral histories and symbolic meanings are documented to ensure knowledge is preserved for future generations.

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