

A short film
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ME BRONI BA

A film by Akosua Adoma Owusu

22 minutes/ 16 mm & video / color & b & w / 4:3 / Stereo / Languages: Twi & English / 2009

Contact:

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Me Broni Ba (My White Baby)

Synopsis:

Me Broni Ba is a lyrical portrait of hair salons in Kumasi, Ghana. The tangled legacy of European colonialism in Africa is evoked through images of women practicing hair braiding on discarded white baby dolls from the West. The film unfolds through a series of vignettes, set against a child's story of migrating from Ghana to the United States. The film uncovers the meaning behind the Akan term of endearment, me bronni ba, which means "my white baby."

Credits:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Directed & Produced | Obibini Pictures, Akosua Adoma Owusu |
| Story | Adwoa Adu-Gyamfi |
| Cinematography | Akosua Adoma Owusu, Betzy Bromberg, Dustin Thompson |
| Editor | Romulo Alejandro |
| Sound Design & Mix | Nathan Ruyle |
| Sound Recorder | Caroline Key |
| Animation | Christian Robinson |
| Colorist | John Hawk |
| Music | Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings, FELA, & ROB |

Selected Screenings:

Museum of Modern Art Documentary Fortnight, New York, NY
Cannes Film Festival, Cinema des Monde, Cannes, France
NY African Film Festival, New York, NY
AFI/Discovery Channel SilverDocs Film Festival (In Competition)
San Francisco International Film Festival, San Francisco, CA (In Competition)
London Film Festival, London, UK
Visions du Réel - Nyon, International Film Festival, Nyon, Switzerland (In Competition)
International Film Festival Rotterdam, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
DOK Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany
CPH:DOX, Copenhagen, Denmark (In Competition)
Festival du Nouveau Cinema, Montreal, Canada (In Competition)
Athens International Film Festival, Athens, OH
Atlanta Film Festival, Atlanta, GA
Chicago Underground Film Festival, Chicago, IL (In Competition)
Festival des Trois Continents, Nantes, France
7th World Bangkok Film Festival, Bangkok, Thailand
Festival des Cinémas Africains, Brussels, Belgium (In Competition)

Filmmaker's Biography:

Akosua Adoma Owusu (b. 1984) is a Virginia born, Ghanaian filmmaker and artist. She received her MFA in film, media and art at CalArts and at the University of Virginia. A protégé of prolific filmmaker Kevin Everson, Owusu's films are richly informed by traditions in avant-garde filmmaking, her bi-national identity, and West African storytelling. Owusu's star has been on the rise since the debut of her award-winning short film, *ME BRONI BA (My White Baby)*. It has shown at over 50 high profile institutions worldwide including The Museum of Modern Art, Rotterdam Film Festival, London Film Festival, DOK Leipzig, and Cannes Film Festival at Cinema des Mondes. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Washington City Paper*, *SF Weekly*, and was selected one of *ArtForum's* Top 10 in 2010.

After attending the MFA program at CalArts, Owusu was introduced to the art world by LA-based curator Christine Y. Kim. She was the youngest artist featured in *30 Seconds Off an Inch*, curated by Naomi Beckwith, at the Studio Museum at Harlem, in NY. She has exhibited at art venues including solo shows in *VideoStudio: Changing Same* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY curated by Thomas Lax and *Cusp* at the Luggage Store Gallery curated by Arnold Kemp in San Francisco, CA among numerous others.

Owusu worked as a Development and Production intern at Echo Lake Productions (the Producer's of the Oscar-winning *Tsotsi*) and at HBO Films. For the latter, she provided post-production assistance on Chris Rock's *Good Hair*. She was a featured artist at the Robert Flaherty Seminar (2010), a participant of *Produire au Sud* (2010), and an alumnus of the Berlinale Talent Campus (2008). She is an adjunct faculty at Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria, Virginia.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self...He would not Africanize American, for American has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American...without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face - W. E. B. Du Bois

The African immigrant is unlike the African American who has a double consciousness. The African immigrant has a triple consciousness. The African immigrant has to assimilate in White American culture in order to succeed in American society. The African immigrant is grouped and identified with African Americans in the eyes of others because of their shared skin color. Yet the African does not always identify with African American culture and history. Along with the African immigrant's triple consciousness, he has to deal with the African world and his or her own line of descent.

My father was a great storyteller. He used to tell me stories about his life growing up in Ghana and how difficult it was for my older siblings to migrate to the United States. My father told me once my older sister would touch the hair of white children in her elementary class. The bold touch of foreign hair stuck with me. My short film, *Me Broni Ba (my white baby)* was inspired by my sister's childhood memory and my personal experiences traveling to Ghana in my adult life. Like my sister, I found it difficult to integrate successfully into both Ghanaian and American cultures. For the longest time, I struggled with my identity as an American born to Ghanaian immigrants. I wondered whether the cultural practice of braiding my hair was a manifestation of my inability to fit in either American or Ghanaian culture. I felt like this cultural interplay has become a major force in my films.

Me Broni Ba (My White Baby)

My White Baby allowed me to examine hair not as a phenomenon of fashion but a physical embodiment of identity and culture. I realized the performance of using synthetic hair to style my hair was also a way for me to conceal something deeply seeded and personal. To white people, I was making a black power statement; to my Black friends, I was an African; and to Ghanaians, the length of my natural hair made me a *broni ba*. The hairstyles I experimented with in my life - the Afro, Braids, and hair straightening - were physical manifestations of my warring triple consciousness. I used my hair to fuse my Ghanaian and American pieces. I am formed by at least two cultures: Ghana as homeland and living in the United States in an immigrant family. I think of myself as a walking contradiction and make use of my cultural hybridity in my film investigations. That being said, I do not hesitate to move readily back and forth between similar (or different) mundane activities in West Africa and North America, ever aware of my insider and outsider status.

According to Kobena Mercer, hairstyling is a cultural practice and signifier of black identity. From weaves to dreadlocks, the politics behind hairstyling comes from the roots of self-identification. *Me Broni Ba (My White Baby)* uses the specifics of hair as a metaphor for personal identity, culture, and language. I was also interested in showing the creativity of African women and how this creativity is applied to the body. However, instead of deconstructing history, my film work also finds tensions in my bi-cultural identity that refer to moments in time. By making my work personal, a broad range of viewers can relate more to the artist's experience. My goal is to somehow transcend this opposition between the self and the other. Art and films have moved on from mere ambiguity and conceptual repetition. Art has the power to change and give audiences the credibility to find their own place in an artist's story.