

Part 2

Rail: So then, let's go back to the beginning. What was your early art education like?

Anatsui: We followed a Western curriculum, which included life modelling and plaster casting. At the time, I did not find them useful. Artwork should replicate life, not life caught at a certain moment and just kept there.

Rail: No one can accuse your art of stasis! Did art pedagogy feel like it was stuck in the past?

Anatsui: I do enjoy looking at traditional forms of art, but I thought from the very beginning that art should do something else—or something more. Because life is not a static thing, it's constantly in flux. Initially, my work taught me that a situation is not fixed, and transition is inherent.

Rail: You found freedom in the form. In many ways, your work gives shape to Stuart Hall's assertion that "identity is not a set of fixed attributes, the unchanging essence of the inner self, but a constantly shifting process of positioning." Can you say more about how important it is in your work to be able to reposition things?

Anatsui: Repositioning is at the core of how I think and work. I have always felt that materials, like people, histories or ideas, carry multiple possibilities within them. When you shift their context or relationship to one another, something new emerges. So, this act of repositioning is a way of freeing both the material, and myself, from fixed meanings.

I am drawn to forms that allow for change, for movement, for reconfiguration, because they reflect the fluid nature of identity itself. Each installation becomes an opportunity to reconsider how things might relate differently, to find new resonances between parts that were once separate. In that sense, the work is never final; it remains open, available to transformation, just as our understanding of who we are continues to evolve over time.