

Part 4

Rail: So, how did this approach translate into your work with wood?

Anatsui: After working with clay, I turned back to wood again, this time using strips so that I could line up many of them into one work. The idea was that each element could retain its individuality and change, just like in life, where you find yourself close to somebody one day and at another time, closer to someone else. This idea of relation, of things that are always in a state of flux, is very important to my work.

Rail: This ethic of relation also seems to retain something fundamentally playful. I'm reminded of Ghanaian playwright and poet Efu Sutherland (1924–96), whose book *Playtime in Africa* contained evocative visualizations of sails in the wind, of kites fighting then finding the breeze to soar. I thought of these poems when observing how your recent works conjoin different properties into a new whole. In *One Teaspoon Daily* (2022), wood and metal coexist in more than fifty panels, some dangling, others overlapping. When was the turning point in your work where your two defining materials could start to intertwine?

Anatsui: After working with materials in series, I thought about marrying them, having them in the same composition, where each says, or does, what it wants to do. We call it “mixed media.” I think about mixed media as a situation whereby you bring in a medium that does what you want done better than others. When I was teaching, I would give to students the example of a building as being “mixed media” where the properties of each material endow it to perform specific functions within a greater whole. I got my students to interrogate why each material was present. A roofing sheet is light and waterproof. A window must be something that lets in light and air. They can apply the same thinking to their work as I do to mine. When I'm making my work and I need an area that is light, then I think about a material that is endowed to do that.