"Unity in Diversity" – an Interview with Ebenezer Akakpo

By Stephanie Forester

Born in Ghana, Ebenezer Akakpo grew up planning to be an architect, but later began studying jewelry design and stone setting. It was not until Ebenezer continued his education in the U.S. that he decided to refocus his career path, working towards merging technology and art, specifically focusing on "How can design be a tool to solve problems?"

During his time in Ghana, a popular form of artwork involved symbols and shapes being used without variation. Ebenezer began to challenge this use of symbols and started to add his own style to these designs. "I have many silhouette designs and express them in my own way with my own voice, but I keep the integrity of the symbol," he says.

When Ebenezer decided to support Project Citizenship, he created a design titled "Unity in Diversity" that he printed on multiple metalware products. The logo is inspired by a Ghanaian symbol called "Funtummireku Denkyemmireku" (fun-tum-me-rek-koo den-chim-me-rek-koo), which is a symbol of "the oneness of the human family despite cultural differences and diversities" (The adinkra Dictionary p. 110).

This "Unity in Diversity" symbol comes from a Ghanaian story of a mythical two-headed crocodile with two separate heads, but with only one stomach. The two heads struggle and fight over which head should have the food, not realizing that when they are eating, they both benefit from whichever head has the food. This story emphasizes the importance of working together in a community to benefit everyone, despite individual differences, Ebenezer explained.

"With the divided world we currently live in, it is important to realize that we are all members of the same community and members of the same country," he said. Ebenezer feels this symbol emphasizes the power of diversity to unify communities – very much aligned with Project Citizenship's mission. Ebenezer strongly supports Project Citizenship's work of helping immigrants and increasing our country's diversity. He hopes that his design will help his audience find their own voice within his pattern and "remind them of the need for people to come together."

As an artist, Ebenezer also emphasizes his mission of sustainability. His goal is that his art can make an emotional connection between the person and the product. If that happens, the person is more likely to keep the item for a longer time, preventing waste. Therefore, he always designs his pieces with a message in order to sustain his own mission of promoting sustainability in his art.

Ebenezer has studied jewelry-making at universities in Italy and elsewhere, and at the Maine College of Arts; he also studied computer technology and works in information technology with the Maine Turnpike Authority. He develops his art at his studio in Maine.

Thank you, Ebenezer, for your thoughtful and generous support of Project Citizenship!