


Images and Representations of Women in Ghanaian Paintings



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, this thesis is my original piece of research conducted between July 2016 and July 2018 under the supervision of Professor Daniel Avorgbedor, lecturer at the University of Ghana.

In places where references of other works have been cited or ideas adopted, full acknowledgement has been given. No part of this project has been presented either in whole or in part to any other institution for and award before.

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To Prof. Daniel Avorgbedor, whose kind words, comments and suggestions pushed this work, I say Thank you. To my parents, Victoria Asiedu and Charles Addo Asare for their financial contribution towards this work, I say *Medaase pii*. To my brother, Eric Gyamfi, who sacrificed and suffered to see me complete this work, I am extremely grateful. Also, to friends and family, Sɛdɛm Gavua, Namata Musisi, Moshood Balogun, Nana Akosua Hanson, Ras Kobby for their supportive comments and nurturing companionship that kept me going; *Adɔfonom, Nina Kupenda!*

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Abstract

This thesis is a visual analysis of the representations of women in the works of Adjo Kisser and Serge Attukwey Clottey both contemporary Ghanaian artists. Drawing primarily on Edmund Feldman's (1971) models for art criticism, the study investigates Kisser's drawings within the context of feminist humour with attention to the agency of creativity, play, and notions of artistic license. Clottey's charcoal drawings demonstrate some unique approaches to and perspectives on techniques and resources of exaggeration; they provide new insights into processes, ideologies and artistic impulses associated with the commodification of the female body. Both employ similar and sometimes dissimilar artistic tools and devices to reposition the nude female body in contemporary times. This study is an addition to the corpus of discourses that interrelate visual ethnography, art history and gender studies.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Our perceptions and modes of knowing are often influenced by visual conventions. “Nowhere are these conventions more evident than in artistic representations, which consist more or less exclusively of icons” (Gilman, 1985; 204). Artists use these icons to communicate their perspectives and these icons may be representations of the real world in the sense that they may “be rooted in some observed reality” (Gilman, 1985; 205). Thus, art presents a unique visual window through which we can look at society.

In this study, I examine the silent visual stories told by two Ghanaian contemporary artists practising in the country’s major cities, Kumasi and Accra about women in their artworks and the tools or devices employed in portraying them. As explained in the “Delimitation of the Study”, I have focused on two contemporary artists of producing works of art within the context of the *Chale Wote* Street Art festival (post-2011). Are women stereotyped in paintings? What interventions do artists employ to subvert these stereotypes? Are women’s roles as depicted on canvas multifaceted or narrowly focused? Does their presence on canvases correspond to and confirm their roles in society and how they are perceived? These are some questions I grapple with in this study. Below, I discuss the significance and contribution of this form of public engagement to the transformation of art production in Ghana.

Chale Wote

The development of contemporary African art to a degree was facilitated by the creation of galleries and museums from the 1980s and the proliferation of such spaces in the 1990s and 2000s (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). The expansion of spaces for exhibition allowed for a movement of art practise that allowed for experimentations (Fosu, 1993). However, these experimentations needing validation to be considered as art operated within the confines of

galleries and museums. Artworks that found their way to the streets were termed as Souvenir Art. That they are souvenir implies that their commercial leanings directed the output. Thus, there was the urge for the works of art to break from the limiting confines of the galleries and museums and engage with the masses of people for whom works of art were produced to speak to.

The *Chale Wote* street arts festival, started by the coming together of groups of art collectives in Accra and from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, since its inception in 2011 contributed immensely to the artists' challenge of dominant white cube spaces in Accra whose sole purpose are to give a commercial appeal to works of art. The white cube space in art connotes the idea of a closed space with white walls whose purpose is to gather a certain caste and kind of people to view works of art. The Irish art critic Brian O'Doherty reflecting on the concept paints the quintessential characteristics of the white cube as:

“constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes a source the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. The art is free, as the saying used to go “to take on its own life” (1999; 15).

The white cube thus becomes a sacred space for the elevation of the work of art. However, this mode of engagement due to its confined and highly controlled approach allows, almost naturally, a certain kind and caste of people maligning others. This leads to the idea of elitism associated with art and its engagement. This is what the *Chale Wote* street art

festival by its mode of public engagement and shift away from such modes and spaces of exhibition has sought to disturb.

The street arts festival has not been the only major force against white cube art spaces as the festival was a climax of public art engagements put up by artists in Accra. For example, since 2007 smaller modes of public engagement with works of art was facilitated by the Foundation of Contemporary Art Ghana, directed by Ato Annan and Adwoa Amoah, which served to encourage engagement and exchanges amongst artists. To buttress my point on the challenge of dominant spaces, let us consider an article written by editor and writer Billie McTernan (2018) for ARTNEWS. Writing on the rise and contributions of public art engagements, McTernan anchors her assertion in the quote of co-director of FCA, Ato Annan:

“Ten years ago, “there were very few galleries and almost all the galleries that existed were commercial,” said Ato Annan, who has codirected the FCA with Amoah since 2011, adding that this is still the case. High-end hotels like the Golden Tulip and Novotel, now the Accra City Hotel, would host monthly exhibitions in their lobbies, and the Alliance Française, the British Council, and the Goethe-Institut put on shows. But homegrown spaces dedicated to fostering creativity were few and far between” (McTernan, 2018)¹.

Some homegrown art spaces were sprinkled in the major cities of Accra and Kumasi. This included the Kumasi Cultural Centre, Accra Cultural Centre, and the Centre for National Culture inside the Arts Centre, Accra are examples of the local spaces that exhibited art works. The commercial appeal of the galleries that existed however, meant artists had to produce works for the market. This appeal did not allow for lots of experimentations as the

¹ Retrieved from <http://www.artnews.com/2018/07/11/city-canvas-ghanas-artists-building-engaging-communities/>

radical era of ‘dumping’ art works will show. In doing such, the city became a canvas through whose engagements informed how artists produced works as McTernan’s article narrates. In ‘dumping’ works of art on the streets of Jamestown and creating the spectacle of a festival, people are forced to confront works of art in ways that challenge and trouble how art is engaged with at commercial galleries and museums. The same article citing from Bernard Akoi Jackson, performance artist and art lecturer agrees with this point and illuminates the impact of making art a public spectacle:

“While other performances and art-making activities went on, Akoi-Jackson’s quiet movement forced onlookers to slow down as he had. Some even joined in and formed a train behind or walked alongside him. Akoi-Jackson rejects the idea that art should produce some kind of uninhabitable space around itself. *“The tendency of art, and performance especially,”* he said, *“is to be a spectacle and take over the space and make the place almost sacred, so that nobody can simply pass by”*” (McTernan, 2018. Emphasis mine)².

Thus, the idea of inclusion permeates in art production and its exhibition. The intellectual framework of artists of the *Chale Wote* era operates within the mindset of liberation and inclusion. People are becoming more aware of the country’s status as a neo-colonial state as the country hitherto, undergoes Structural Adjustment Policies and World bank bailouts leading to the western control of state resources. These western imposed policies with a drive to enhance the fiscal discipline of a country in turn impede on the subsidization of social benefits like health and education. These restrictions eventually impact negatively on citizens as a result of the bondage of the government to monetary organisations. Thus, visual artists

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Retrieved from <http://www.artnews.com/2018/07/11/city-canvas-ghanas-artists-building-engaging-communities/>

join contemporary Ghanaian music artists like Shatta Wale to sing “*Freedom*”. Freedom from neo-colonisation, patriarchy, racism, white cube spaces of art are some of the inspirational forces driving these artists. For example, the digital illustrator and satirist Bright Ackwerh through his cartoon caricatures visualises the oppression of Ghana by external factors such as the two mentioned above. The well-rounded artist, Serge Attukwey Clottey also uses discarded plastic gallons formerly containing oil to visually dramatize the impact of trade on the culture and environment of Ghana. Their educational backgrounds vary, ranging from self-taught artists to holders of Masters Degrees and PhDs. Some artists of this era include photographer Eric Gyamfi, site-specific installation artists Ibrahim Mahama, Kwame Akoto Bamfo; painters Sela Kojo Adjei, Isshaq Ismail, Adjo Kisser, Poetra Asantewaa, Bright Ackwerh and many more multi-disciplinary artists. It is from this lot that I will be sampling an oeuvre of paintings to analyse the (re)presentations of women.

Thus, the period 2011 to present in which *Chale Wote* and such forms of public engagement are now occurring is a vibrant period in the transformation of art practice, production and engagement in Ghana. On a large scale, the modes of production and engagement is being radicalised being pushed by forces of liberation and inclusion that are in the ‘now’ and ‘present’. *Chale Wote* offers a fresh perspective into the art scene of Ghana but this method of exhibition is not new to Africans who have always had art exhibited in such a spectacle. Daniel Avorgbedor (1994) for example writing on the *Haló* performance amongst the Anlo-Ewe’s shows how such a music form infusing proverbs engages through public *display*. Likewise, as Strother (1998) observes while researching the Pende masquerade, the performance needs a public audience to engage with. What is however fresh, to come back to my main point, is that contemporary works of art operating now in the context of *Chale Wote*, are utilizing radical forms of engagement in the now to publicly confront the people whom the works of art are supposed to be made for.

In this study, I focus on visual imaging and representations of women in the Ghanaian contemporary art scene. My focus is centred on two artists producing paintings in the context of *Chale Wote* and other modes of extensive public engagement with art. Moreover, as the call for the recognition of the roles of women become louder it is pertinent we take a look at what spaces they occupy on canvas thus I have centred my focus on women as subjects.

Statement of Problem

“Visual art demands profundity” (Kaila Philo, 2016). To say and accept this statement as true is to recognise that the visual arts are intellectually stimulated. Artists use visual symbols to communicate to an audience thus provoking some introspective thought in the viewer. The contemporary art scene in Ghana is full of such visual symbols. These symbols may be described as a form of window through which we can look to understand certain cultural traits of people here in Ghana.

Discourse on visual arts in contemporary Ghana and in Africa, in General, devote little attention to the gender factor, as discussed under the Literature Review section. This study is thus an analysis of and a critical reflection on the silent visual stories of two Ghanaian painters, Adjo Kisser and Serge Attukwey Clottey about women in two-dimensional art forms and the motivation of the artists in depicting women as they do.

Objectives of Study

The broad objective of this study is to deconstruct the representations of women in the visual art of two contemporary Ghanaian visual artists.

The specific objectives include:

- To explore the images and representations (social and political) of women encoded into works of two artists working in the context of *Chale Wote* and public art engagements.

- To explore stylistic techniques of representing women in Ghanaian contemporary paintings.
- To explore the background of these artists and articulate its influence on the representation of women
- To add to the conversation about gender representations and to challenge readers to deliberate on the silent visual images of artists.

Research Questions

As a guide in this study, I present the following research questions:

- What are the symbolisms used in the images and (re)presentations of women amongst these visual painters?
- Do women occupy multifaceted roles on canvas or are their presence on canvas restricted and confined?
- Are depictions of women on canvases a reflection of their socio-cultural and political positions in society?
- What themes do the images and (re)presentations of women address?
- Are women depicted stereotypically?
- What interventions if any are used to subvert the stereotypes?
- What are some responses to depictions of women by *Chale Wote* era artist?

Conceptual Framework

The artist, as the German Expressionist artist Paul Klee (1879-1960) reflecting *On modern art* records, is “standing at his appointed place, the trunk of the tree, he does nothing other than gather and pass on what comes to him from the depths. He neither serves or rules – he transmits” (Herbert, 2000, p. 104). The image of a tree is called to mind here. Its roots soak deep into the earth or in this case the intangible ideas of a culture. The artist stands as the

stem. She or he taps into these ideas visually manifesting ideas of a culture nested in the earth. The artist thus assumes the role of visually assembling and visually passing on ideas of a people. I find this concept similar to the idea of plants as pipes as described by Fu-Kiau (1991) discussed below.

In chapter eleven of Kimbwandènde Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau's (1991) book, *Self-healing power and therapy* – a book that explains in detail traditional concepts of healing in Africa-, Fu-Kiau describes plants as pipes through which special chemicals in the *futu* (Kikongo concept for earth) are made manifest on the surface for use by humans and animals. Fu-Kiau (1991, p. 119), notes that “all plants, including fungi are, in the eyes of African people, pipes through which hidden substances in the *futu* [earth] flow to “life” on earth. It can also be said that plants are living pumps whose function is to draw from the depth of the *futu* (“earth”) all kinds of *nkisi* (‘chemicals’ or better ‘substances’ and ‘salts’) hidden inside it.” This concept of plants is relevant to my study because like Fu-Kiau, I look at art as a plant serving as a pipe through which an artist's perception of a culture or an issue is made manifest. Art transmits, drawing from the depth of the earth or intangible ideas of a culture and makes it physically manifest.

Commenting on African art, Chukwunyere Kamalu (1990) points to the fact that for Africans, art is not just art sake as some may argue but that African art “is a medium through which ideas are communicated” (p. 49). Communicating a similar thought, Labi (2009) remarks about *Akan* traditional visual art as expressing the unseen values in the culture which can be said of African art. Labi (ibid.) points that the ‘intangible’ that is the worldview, values and proverbs of the *Akans* is reflected and complements that which is tangible. This is the formal elements of the artwork; that which the viewer perceives. This can be said of art on the continent and art in the contemporary Ghanaian scene whose aesthetic values provide a window through which we can view and interact with the thought of the culture. Culture must

be understood as a dynamic process and contemporary Ghanaian art also serves as a tool to critique, question and shape some values and worldviews in the culture and thus becomes an important medium for understanding cultural thoughts.

Thus, I approach the artworks of Kisser and Clottey as a pipe through which ideas about representations of women are made manifest. Of course, this is not the only pipe but also one of the pipes through which we can understand representations of women. This pipe is not a one-way flow but I explore ways in which visual artists shape how a woman should be looked at.

Methodology

In this study, a visual ethnographic approach to qualitative research was utilised. This method allowed for an exploration into the stories symbolised in the images of women in paintings in attempts to understand how women are represented and why. Thus, narratives gathered from interviews as well as familiarisation with artists' works were paired with images aiding in spelling out precise emotions or narratives (Riviera, 2010). This pervasive feature of the qualitative approach helps to offer an explanation which is informed.

For me to offer this informed explanation of the 'hows' and 'whys', it demanded I interacted deeply with artists selected for this study. How were the artists selected? By a process of purposive sampling. This allowed for me to use my judgement in the selection process. Through this I had the benefit of staying within the time and cost this study had to be carried out and presented. Also here in this study, meaning can be offered through an informed intuitive approach. For meaning to occur and for me to hold to the promise the title of this thesis offers, I set a criterion.

Sampling

I had a criterion for the selection of artists. First, the select artists needed to be Ghanaian and practising in Ghana. The geographical location they practised in Ghana was not of concern to me. What was of particular concern was that the artist should have emerged or have been emerging within the context of the *Chale Wote* street art festival, that is to say post-2011. As we will see, Kisser became known on the art scene post 2014 where she has partook in a number of exhibitions both solo and as a part of a group. Clottey also became widely famous in Ghana when he partook in the festival as a performance artist in 2012. He would perform each year after and submitted his charcoal paintings for exhibition at the festival in 2016. Why the *Chale Wote* street art festival as a marker, one may wonder. First, from my earlier assertions, the series of public engagements has presented a new energy in the production and display of art works. A radical approach towards art is being encouraged by the artists. Here, artists are questioning forms, as we shall see in the works of Kisser as well as content. It is pertinent that scholars give this new wave of art production some attention. The festival also allows for me to engage with the new generation of contemporaries who are currently shaping the discourse on art practice. A new field of fresh thoughts, content and form abounds to scholars who engage with this contemporary art practice.

A further criterion was that they should have a form of engagement that included two-dimensional art forms, as this study was to reflect on paintings. Ideally, I would have wanted to examine also representations in other modes of expression like performances and sculpture but constraints on time and space would not allow me to do so. Moreover, the select artists must feature women extensively on their canvases. Taking into consideration all these factors, and after discussions with some artists and curators in the practise, Adjo Kisser, one of the few Ghanaian women artist to have participated (2014) was selected.

Sources of Data

I engaged with two sources of information for this study. They were primary and secondary sources. For the primary, I engaged with the select artists using an unstructured interview format. This form of engagement guided by a few questions allowed for conversations that were fluid and allowed for me to pry further into the thoughts of the artists while notes were made in a notebook. A conscious decision was made not to record as the recorder, although allowing for the opportunity to review what was said verbatim, makes the informant so self-conscious to the extent that the natural flow of conversations is almost inhibited. However, this had its drawbacks especially as an instrument of intrusion. The notebook itself and the act of note taking are in themselves a third element; a sort of filter between the Informant and the Researcher. The pause-to-write introduces gaps that may be significant. And whereas the note taking was less intrusive, the precision of an audio recorder was dearly missed. A structured interview however, would not have allowed me to gain an in-depth information pertaining to the lives and works of the artists; it would also hinder the levels of familiarisation required to engage with the select artists on a personal level. I engaged with the two selected artists separately at places of their choice to engage with them. I required from the artists their backgrounds, experiences in the practice, inspirations and probed into their thoughts on their representations of women as well as in the general field of art. The data gathered from the conversations provided sources of information for analysing the background and motivations of the artists and how it influences their depiction of women.

For analysis, a sample of ten artworks from Adjo Kisser and Serge Attukwey Clottey were selected and Edmund Feldman's (1971) method of artistic enquiry towards critical performance was utilized.

For one to engage in the utmost critical visual exercise, the Feldman art criticism order has to be followed sequentially, proceeding from the simplest (descriptive analysis) to the most

difficult (judgment). The exercise was more of an empirical one i.e. from specific to general before drawing conclusions about the collective value of the work of art.

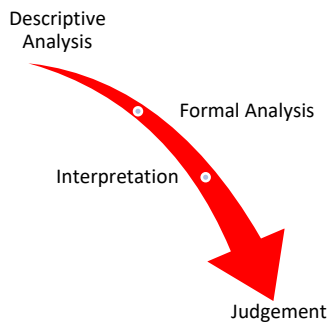


Figure 1. Edmund Feldman's (1971) Trajectory of Art Criticism

In the *descriptive analysis*, we collect an inventory of all that is available in the artworks. We name what we see in the art work helping us to gather an inventory of what is visible in the artwork. In the stage of *formal analysis*, we make a connection between the things named and their relations heightening expectations of what we expect to see for interpretation and judgement. Moving to the *Interpretation* stage the critic infers meaning from the artwork. The ideas expressed in the work are sought and related to societal

values linking it to the final stage, the *Judgmental stage* where the work is compared to its predecessors or others in its cohort. Here, its value is also pronounced.

I had the insight of being a student of African art in the graduate school for a year. My muscles in the field, I sought to flex. This was with its faults for my gaze as a man prying to explore tales on womanhood definitely stands to construct a type of view specific to my upbringing and my unlearning; which can be agreed will be impossible to do. This I do acknowledge and will point out as a reason the Feldman trajectory explained above was chosen as a tool to help in making informed explanations.

Moreover, the reason for choosing this method out of many art criticism methods is that with Feldman's technique, it allows for one's ideas and feelings about a work to be properly justified as judgements are connected to factual descriptions said of a particular painting. Moreover, it provides the space for exploration of works of art and opens the work of art up for interpretation as and when new facts are discovered. In addition to the above, Feldman's

art criticism trajectory allows for one to unravel the intrinsic ideas in the art as well as uncovering how the work of art is related to the society in which it was produced. An example of this method use has been in the *Critical Analysis of the Exploratory Art of Kunle Adeyemi* by Olayele-Otunla (2017).

Structure of Thesis

In Chapter One, I discuss the background of study as well as research questions and methodology. A conceptual framework is also presented; to enable the reader have an idea what the study will be about. This exercise is followed by a Literature review which is the burden of Chapter Two. Here, utilising a desk review, I focus on literature around contemporary art and representations of women in various forms of African art. I show that little scholarly attention has been given to the arts in Ghana and how women are depicted visually. Chapter Three discusses five visual drawings of the contemporary artist Adjo Kisser. Kisser earned a Masters in Fine Arts in 2014. Prior to that she had exhibited her drawings at the Nubuke Art Gallery, Accra as well as participated in several group exhibits and the *Chale Wote* street art festival. Kisser's drawings are well known for the extensive depictions of women in a comical manner. Here, I analyse five of her works utilising the Feldman's art criticism enquiry. Humour is a constant tool employed in the works of Adjo Kisser. I situate this tool in the context of feminist humour and show its relevance in the drawings of Kisser. In Chapter Four, I introduce Serge Attukwey Clottey and his *Sex and Politics* series, which features unclad women. Here, I similarly analyse Clottey's works utilizing Feldman's mode of art enquiry. Exaggerations tend to be an important device in the visual arts of Africa and are quite pervasive in Clottey's charcoal drawings. I discuss its effect on the feminine depictions of Clottey all in the context of the trade (or commodification as I shall argue) of sex. Chapter five concludes the study by summarising the findings as well as producing afterthoughts on the implications of the study as well as

pointing to new directions for research. Questions used for analysis in the appendix as well as references will follow this chapter.

Chapter Two

Women in Paintings: Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to extensively establish the dimensions of scholarship on representations of women in art. Literature on women's representation in Ghana has focused on their portrayals in music and proverbs (Asante-Darko, Sjaak van der, 1983; Collins, 2002; Falola & Amponsah, 2012; Jeffries, 1984; Kaplan, 1993; Wallace-Sanders, 2002). Although there is a ubiquitous recognition of women in the visual arts, their representations in the visual arts has not been elaborated on.

I have looked through articles appearing in *African Arts* and contemporary art journals. It is interesting to note that in these journals the representations of women in contemporary paintings in Ghana are not discussed. I have also combed through art history texts in the Balme library and African Studies Libraries as well as well as through online catalogues of student thesis especially in the University of Ghana where an art history program is offered in the Institute of African Studies; and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) which has an art college continuing the tradition from the Achimota School.

In the books in the libraries, I only came across a chapter devoted to studying the gendered nature of the traditional arts and crafts in Falola and Amponsah's (2012) *Women's Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The chapter in addition discusses the economic contributions of art to women's life in both traditional and contemporary art in the "sub-Saharan" region of Africa; I discuss more extensively in my literature review in subsequent pages.

In the library of KNUST, I came across a study by Asare-Baah (1989), *Woman in Ghanaian art: (A study of Ghanaian woman as a subject and practitioner of the arts)* which is useful

only to the extent that it profiles the lives of female artists who were then the writer's contemporaries. A reference to this is made in this chapter as well. Several articles have appeared in books and journals on the internet which have attempted to discuss portrayal of women not only in paintings but also in music and proverbs which I engage with but I must note again that hitherto, I have not come across an extensive work detailing the portrayal of women in Ghanaian contemporary paintings which this study explores. I follow this lengthy introduction with a discussion on the 'contemporary' in African art.

Engaging the Modern and Contemporary

The modern in African art connotes the introduction of easel paintings into the artistic and expressive scene of Africa by European colonizers from the 1900s (Makongo 2018). This introduction led to the shift from familiar aesthetic conventions as well as modes of production and dissemination. As Labi (2009) shows us the trajectory of this shift in colonial Ghana from the early 20th Century, the hub of this new medium was the newly founded Achimota Art School which was set up in 1924. This era of modernism produced a set of experimentations directed by the art school. Observing the same phenomena in Cameroon, the young curator Yves Makongo (2018) notes that works of this period were characterised by "naïve figurative record of [artists] surroundings in the form of landscape scenes" (p. 10). The works according to Makongo were as a result lacking depth in content as it was devoid of research. This may not be the case for colonial Ghana as Labi (2009) informs us that despite the naivety to the medium, the push to have students look for inspiration in their environment led to the defining characteristic of Ghanaian modernism; something unique and special; something of here but at the same time not of here. This art of using various mediums, however foreign will lead to the contemporary awakening in African art whose transformation would be fully felt from the 1970s as newly formed African nations confront nationalistic tendencies at the same time emancipating art forms from the "aesthetic canons

of Western art” (Makongo 2018: 10) and actively exploring new and different ways and methods of engagement.

Three texts in my opinion have collectively sought to discuss the contemporary art scene in Africa. These are Kojo Fosu’s (1993) *20th Century Art of Africa*, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir’s (1999) *Contemporary Art in Africa*; and Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu’s (2009) *Contemporary African Art since the 1980s*. Surveying these texts, one gets a sense of the frameworks that have transformed contemporary African arts over time; as well as the influence of external forces on the development of the arts as well as the discursive contexts the arts have engaged with. While Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu’s explicitly discuss gender and thus women in their text, the rest mentioned above do not give this area of study any attention but I engage with them to shed some light on the trends of contemporary in African art which forms the scope of my work.

Contemporary Ghanaian art has transformed with time and the Ghanaian educator Kojo Fosu’s (1993) text mentioned above is informative for showing the trajectory of changes in African art. For Kojo Fosu, the contemporary in African art began at the beginning of the twentieth century with the shift from stylized realism to European ideas of realism; a shift that was more of an exchange between Africans and Europeans as Fosu notes that “at the time that European artists were beginning to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of African traditional art, and were therefore experimenting with them in their own works, African artists were equally fascinated with European aesthetic conventions of realism and were also experimenting with them in their works and in their own expressions” (1993: 6). Thus, for Fosu, the contemporary in African art began at the time of this exchange; however, this definition of the contemporary in Fosu’s text is not clearly distinguished from the modern and causes a bit confusion as contemporary and modern Ghanaian art operated under varying intellectual frameworks.

Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, however, do not necessarily see the contemporary as a shift from tradition which they term as a process of 'deskilling' but they see the contemporary forms of art as new traditions of art making as Africa confronts its complex modern history and this confrontation for them is situated from the 1980s as exhibitions on African art proliferated leading to global recognition and respect.

If we are to accept that the modern in African art occurred at the beginning of the 20th Century and its offspring, the contemporary arose from the 1970s through the 80s then we can go on to borrow from Fosu (1993) to mark some distinct transformations occurring in modern African art characterized by the intellectual frameworks and aesthetic considerations.

The first as Fosu (1993) points out was the phase of the pioneers whose aesthetics soaked deep from European realism as paintings were mainly miniature portraits of subjects. This was at the beginning of the 20th Century with artists mostly of Nigerian descent like Aina Onabolu (d. 1963). The works were also characterized by African sensibilities as seen in J.A. Akereolu's (d. 1983) relief sculpture *Mother and child* which appearing in Kojo Fosu's book portray a mother occupying a major part of the frame with a baby strapped to her back in a fashion common in many African homes. She looks solemnly ahead as her side is turned to the viewers gaze. This theme of the African woman as a mother has featured so prominently across time one can say it is the main association of the woman on canvas. This prominence is closely associated with society as a huge emphasis is laid on the woman's ability to give birth and nurture them that it has become the defining point of a woman. To be a woman is to bear children and this is visually communicated on canvas. Thus, in discussing representations of women in paintings, the theme of motherhood cannot be overlooked. It will be interesting however to study how this theme is depicted today.

The second generation of the modernists (1950s – 1960s) as Fosu (1993) shows, were that of artists whose art was produced majorly at the crux of the new wave of independence on the continent thus inspiring a new sense of pride in the people by celebrating the unity of cultures to form a nation. In essence they were inspired by the spirit of nationalism. In fact, Ghana gained its independence in 1957 and the emotions associated with forming a new state was also captured in the works of artists of the era. The works of this era borrowed aesthetic conventions from Europeans (Fosu, 1993) but they could not be classified as European because its content echoed African traditions and the mix up of various ethnic symbols into works of art was a reflection of the times artists worked in. This fluidity between the foreign – and I use foreign here not in the rigid sense of something external but something that is taken, used and owned- and the familiar gave artists some uniqueness, one that expressed itself in works produced and I agree with Kojo Fosu (1993) that the works had in them an individual “artistic expression which can be identified as wholly African in form and in content” (1993: 12).

Some Ghanaian artists of this modern era as recorded by Kojo Fosu includes Kofi Antubam whose works centred around a cultural sense of royalty who himself from royal lineage is widely acknowledged for his symbolic contributions to the nation by means of a presidential chair and a state sword. A mural of his at the Accra community centre which is relevant to this study boldly portrays a group of men and a woman. The mural titled *There is Strength in Togetherness* according to Kojo Fosu depicts “attitudes and gestures” which echo “traditional concepts of beauty” (1993: 16). Conventional ideas of beauty are indeed clearly articulated in the mural but should one be more inquisitive and questioning, the mural also visually reveals concepts of power, ideas which are as present and valid as the latter concept as art has been a means of articulating societal conceptions (Fosu, 2009) when it is not critiquing or tearing them down.

The woman close to the right margin of the mural attests to this. Her back is turned to the viewer and her head turns to the men in the left and the centre who seem to be in a dialogue, one associated with royalty and in some sense power as symbolised by the spokespersons staff, the traditional symbol of authority. The woman in the mural whose feminine essence is captured by her elegant appearance in *kaba* and *slit* and an appeal to her nourishing abilities symbolised by the bowl gently resting on her head seems to interrupt the talks by the nation's male elders. This in a sense captures a sense of power that have been traditionally carved out for both genders:

- The power afforded to men to govern
- The power afforded to women to nourish.

One may look at this and think of complementarity but this idea will be hard to communicate as a result of the imbalanced gender representation in the mural. A question rushes to mind; how do recent paintings conceptualise beauty and power and what are the feminine attributes to power?

Amon Kotei (b.1915) is probably the most prolific artist of the modern era to represent women. His representations of women characterized by sizeable bodies referred to in Ghana as *Obolo* in contemplative moods. The sizeable women have been noted by Fosu in the catalogue of the exhibition celebrating *Pioneers of Contemporary Ghanaian Art* as a “deliberate attempt by the artist to shed light on some of the many qualities of Ghanaian women as serious, hardworking and caring thoughtful mothers” (2009: 30). This feminine spirit of strength and perseverance is also the main motivator for Ablade Glover, a celebrated Ghanaian artist who according to Kojo Fosu (2009) liberated artistic expressions from dogmatism and infused in the art international artistic trends. Glover, using the palette knife and a combination of colours presents viewers with female portraits in a composed and self-

assured manner. The self-assured manner of Glover's female subjects lays in their uprightness and heads tilted towards the sky signalling pride that is unquenching. This style of representation is subversive as the catalogue of the exhibition *Spotlighting: Artists of the Alliance* comments that the "confident and powerful women whose angled bodies challenge the spectator..." and thus revokes the viewers "right to view them in a sexual manner" (2013: 9).

Ablade Glover uses self-assured women to capture the positive aspects of Ghanaian culture, that is societies strength and resilience and one gets a sense of this when he writes:

"But let me emphasise here and now that I do not paint women. My painting practice has been, and continues to be, a long schooling on some of the things that excite my imagination, and I continue to study, canvas after canvas, *what I see as the very sustenance of the culture*: The females' spirit of perseverance, strength courage all those positive attributes of the female's cannot-be-cowed disposition. My women profiles are therefore a continuous and consistent study of those positive attributes of the culture" (Artist Alliance Gallery, 2009: 11 emphasis mine).

With respect to the above, it can be said that the woman on the canvas serves as a metaphor (Harley & Terborg-Penn, 1997) for the positive aspects of Ghanaian culture and Amon Kotei and Ablade Glover portray their female subjects as such. Glover hints that he was inspired by the works of Amon Kotei in representing women (Artist Alliance Gallery, 2009) and by this one gets a sense that he refers to the strength imbued in women on canvas than the aesthetics as Glover without unclothing his subjects still captures this essence and does this without fetishizing the female body for public consumption. Amon Kotei however is one of the few Ghanaian artists who have navigated positioning the semi-nude in a way that does not seek to fetishize but to idolize the woman's inner strength. The trend of navigating the nude without

objectifying the subject on canvas in contemporary Ghanaian art has not been duly given attention and this work in looking at images and representations of women in paintings is an attempt to engage this discussion.

The Unclothed Woman

The body of the naked woman has been duly avoided in the literature and one could hint at this being as a result of the tension that exists between the unclothed woman's body and the canvas. Lisa Gail Collins (2002) a professor in Art History, Africana Studies, and American Studies at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie in New York explores this tension that seems to exist in her essay publication *Economies of the Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art* which appeared in the book *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* edited by Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (2002), an Associate Professor of American and African American Studies in the department of African American Studies at Emory University in the USA. The book shows the relationship between art, literature, medicine to the woman's body, particularly women of African descent.

Returning to the tensions existing between the unclothed woman's body and the canvas, Collins (2002) points that this is as a result of the symbology of the female body which represents a synergy of triumph and terror. This representation of this synergy was not permitted in visual mediums in the museum and popular arts of the 19th century only to be allowed but rarely approached in the early 20th century (Wilson, 2002) for the tension surrounding the woman's body "evokes a racialized, sexualized and exploitative history" (Collins 2002: 101).

Although Collins (2002) notes that the unclothed female body has attracted aesthetic and academic contemplation, this has not been a topic of discussion for Africans on the continent. Why has the nude woman been sparsely discussed in contemporary African paintings? Readings point to the suggestions that the African woman's naked body is feared (Tamale,

2006) as traditionally it has been used to communicate political resistance (Sutton, 2013). In February 1992, Wangari Maathai – the Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Winner- together with a group of women who had their sons in jail embarked on a naked protest to combat the brutalities of the police. This forced the police to run as the sight of naked elderly women is a weapon that seems to say “this is where life comes from. I hereby revoke your life” (Turner & Brownhill, 2004: 169). One may infer then that artists are aware of this potential of the naked woman’s body through cultural learnings and may avoid portraying the powerful unclad female.

Sharing similar sentiments, Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu (2009) commenting on the iconic significance of the Aba women naked protest against tax laws in Nigeria in 1929 regard the decision to strip naked as a message of iconographical resistance. After reviewing such images as depicted in paintings such as that of Uche Okeke’s painting *Aba (Women’s) Revolt* (1965), they remark that “nakedness is not just a tactic to shame, but an act of social protest, a vehicle of gendered radicality and feminist power” (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009, p. 47). This power wielded in the naked body of the woman brings to mind the synergy of triumph and terror Collins (2002) attributes to the unclothed Black female body. One may want to find out if nakedness on the canvas wields such power.

However, carrying such political weight and commanding such tensions, it becomes understandable why the unclothed woman on canvas is duly avoided as Glover and other artist in his cohort do. One barely encounters the female nude in galleries like Artist Alliance Gallery. For Collins (2002) contemporary artists are trying to reposition the Black female body in this visual spectrum while expanding the spectrum through cultural appropriations and it is only appropriate that attempts to reposition the unclothed woman’s body are explored fully in contemporary Ghanaian paintings.

Toyin Falola, the Nigerian historian and African Studies professor and Nana Akua Amponsah (2012), a Ghanaian author provide details as to the multifaceted roles of Women in their book *Women's Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa*. In this book which challenges the dependency of women on men, Falola and Amponsah (2012) discuss the contribution of women in areas, grouped in chapters, like courtship and marriage, family, religion, work, government, education and relevant to this paper arts and literature. In the chapter on arts and literature, Falola and Amponsah (2012) acknowledge that the arts “offer avenues for understanding gender constructions in a society and the way women and men negotiate their social, economic, political, and religious roles within gendered spaces” (Falola & Amponsah, 2012: 123) and they interrogate the gender divisions in the arts of Africa situating that of women as “oriented toward the domestic, reflecting in part, the amount of time women spend within this space and their control of it” (2012: 123). This is situated in the context of the public and private, mundane and sacred, women and men’s spaces in African societies suggesting complementarity (Falola & Amponsah, 2012). Although discussing women and the arts, Falola and Amponsah (2012) mention little in relation to the depictions and representations of women in the arts. This could also be as a result of the emphasis they lay on pottery and traditional wall paintings amongst groups like the Shai women potters in Southern Ghana and the Gurense of Northern Ghana whose wall paintings are highly abstracted.

In passing, Falola and Amponsah (2012) mention briefly some representations of women in various art forms by women artists in Sub-Saharan Africa. Notable amongst them is Fatimah Tuggar of Nigeria who combines “imagery of both personal and the collective to explore the ways in which tradition and modernity could be constructed or deconstructed” (2012: 137). Tuggar’s depiction of a young African woman in a brightly coloured dress holding a cake “with an awkward image of a thatched hut and an African female form perched on top of it” (2012: 137) set against the backdrop of a “domestic Western Kitchen with tiled walls,

utensils, pots, kettle, and excessively huge oven appliances” (2012: 138) puts the woman according to the authors in a domestic setting. However, they do mention that the images are also a portrayal of the relation of African cultures and globalization (Falola & Amponsah, 2012). Moreover, they mention briefly a work, *Soul on a Peg-Leg* by a popular African female artist from Kenya Wangechi Mutu which “represents the legacy of violence piled on the black female body through rape and degradation coupled with the social negation of the black female body and the internalized self-dislike many black women experience as a result of the idealized Western notions of beauty” (Falola & Amponsah, 2012: 139). The point to be made here is that although Falola and Amponsah admit that the arts offer a lens or act as a pipe into cultural thought, they do not give critical perspectives into how representations of women in paintings or art in general could make us understand the changing roles of women. This would however be a bit too much to ask of scholars without an art historical focus. It will thus be worthy to explore how contemporary Ghanaian women artist confront violence imbued on a woman’s body and in which ways they represent this on canvas.

Art has for a long time been used to communicate and reinforce stereotypes as it is usually laden with symbols that reflect the thoughts of society. Sander Gilman (1985), an American cultural and literary historian in his work *Black Bodies, White Bodies* shows us the juxtapositions made by 19th Century artists of the Khoikhoi female and a European prostitute. The Khoikhoi female, when depicted was characterised by a strikingly pronounced buttocks which came to represent all African females and their supposed deformities. This image was also circulated throughout Europe to reinforce the notion of an overt African sexuality in contrast to the idealised covert sexuality of the Victorian model European female. The black female has been stereotypically depicted to serve the overt and covert racism of Euro-Americans. What is important to note here is the ways women artists and to some extent male artists on the continent are challenging the stereotypical views of women and it is

important for a detailed study to highlight this trend in relation to Ghanaian paintings as it is to be expected that the Ghanaian contemporary artist will only naturally portray their subjects as melanated.

Women and Art in South Africa (1996) a book by the South African art historian Marion Arnold discusses the links and issues surrounding South African women and art. She uses a revisionist methodology -which she critiques herself as having the capacity to “become morally self-righteous” (1996: xii) as the theorist can use the opportunity to reprimand artists- to write a series of essays spanning from revealing “meanings that underpin the construction and reception of images of women” (1996: xii) to reinstating the histories and arts of women artists in South Africa into the cannon as the canon has for a long time been male dominated.

On representations, Arnold (1996) notes that women in South African have been made objects or commodities in a phallogentric sphere of art. “The process of objectification” she writes “is sanctioned by the sustained looking of the gaze” (Arnold 1996: 2). Analysing form and meaning, Arnold (1996) notes that women’s artists intervention in the objectification has thus been through ways by which they become “active subjects rather than passive object” (Arnold 1996: p. 2) thus women artists whether they portray women in a negative or positive light tends to counter existing patriarchal concepts of women and art (Arnold 1996). I highlight the above because in contemplating how women are depicted in art, I will be on the lookout for how my male and female artists under study assert and intervene in portrayals of women. Will Adjo Kisser, my female artist under study prove Arnold’s point true? Or does Arnold’s point above only relate to the South African phenomena? This however is an important point of entry into the mode of depictions female artists utilize. Arnold’s (1996) book *Women and Art in South Africa* is a potent book as it gets people to contemplate “on information embedded in silent visual images”(Arnold 1996: xii).

Representations of women in art has also been studied in other parts of the continent. Makda Teklemichael (2009) published on *Contemporary Women Artists in Ethiopia* in the *African Arts journal* where she “explores the lives and work of six contemporary women artists in Ethiopia, both those who paint within the artistic traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and those who were educated in an academic fine art tradition” (2009: 38). In exploring the “historical roles of women as patrons and subjects of Ethiopian art” (2009: 38) she points that it has been a common occurrence to represent women as patrons in paintings who are depicted “prostrating at the bottom of the painting they donated (Teklemichael, 2009) usually to churches. This elevated their social statuses putting them on an equal pedestal as their masculine fellows (Teklemichael, 2009).

Linking representations to education, Teklemichael (2009) asserts that women are prominently featured in paintings of western trained artists whose focus usually centres around “the beauty of women, women’s hair and dress styles from different ethnic groups and the day to day activities of rural women” (2009: 40). It is however notable that six is too small a number to be studied to arrive at such a conclusion.

After 1974, the Ethiopian revolution which lasted for about 16years seeing to the overthrow of the imperial regime of Haile Selassie saw women in Ethiopian art depicted as heroines in paintings (Teklemichael, 2009) . Moreover, it is worth noting that a year after the revolution a UN conference was held in Mexico declaring the decade 1976-1986 as a decade for women. Combining all these factors, Teklemichael (2009) notes that young women were giving the honorary role and symbols of the motherland and revolution against Haile Selassie’s rule. She however does not demonstrate how these portrayals were reflected in the images. In the depictions of women artists however, Teklemichael (2009) notes as the favourite themes of women artists including themes which place women in the domestic, economic and food production spheres as women are depicted “carrying firewood, water, or a baby while

working, making *injera* and selling produce and material in the market” (2009: 40). The theme of domesticity crops up again even as women seek to break stereotypes. Will I observe the same phenomena in my selected artists and if yes, why do they depict women in such settings?

The Image of Woman in African Cave Art is examined by Rosalind Jeffries (1984), an art historian and curator at the African American Historical and Cultural Museum of Jersey City in the United States of America. She obtained her PhD from Yale University and her publications include essays in Benin art. In her publication listed above appears in *Black Women In Antiquity* edited by Ivan Van Sertima (1984) which is a collection of essays dedicated to assessing and reassessing the place and roles of women especially the queens of Kemet and Nubia in classical African history. The collection offers readers an insight into the multifaceted roles of women in antiquity. Van Sertima comments on the depictions of woman as “both a giver and killer of life” (1984: 9) amongst many other representations and roles and distancing narratives of African women from European women concludes after analysing the arguments in the book that “[t]he myth of female inferiority seems to have been far more developed in Europe and Asia than in Africa” (1984: 11). These differences in narratives is attached to the differences in metaphysics and social structure of Africans and Europeans, a thought in line with the empirical arguments advanced by the respected African-Centred scholar Cheikh Anta Diop (1959) in his book *Cultural Unity of Black Africa*. It thus becomes imperative to assert that cultural narratives about European females cannot be imposed on African women.

To return to Jeffries (1984), she examines “thousands of cave etchings and paintings in hundreds of sites throughout the African continent” (p. 98). She points to the observation that in cave art, men tend to dominate as subjects compared to women but women were depicted in a “startling variety of styles and actively assume very significant roles” (Jeffries 1984: 98).

These significant roles spread from portrayals as leaders which included rulers and priestesses, maternal and domestic depictions, agricultural depictions and women in various poses executing the arts such as pottery. Commenting on cave art, Jeffries (1984) reports that the aura surrounding women in paintings and etchings were ambivalent as they were depicted as both “aggressive and passive, assertive and forthright” (p. 98).

She goes on to discuss into more detail depictions of women as primal mother in cave paintings and in sculpture. In cave paintings, Jeffries observes that women were depicted in “beautiful protuberant curves” (1984: 99) which is an allegorical reference to mother nature, the giver and taker of life; a potent fertility that transcends nature to revitalise the ancestors. This symbol of fertility according to Jeffries (1984) also pervades sculpture where “fertility is personified as a woman with voluptuous curves, tremendous buttocks and thighs” (p. 101). This Jeffries (1984) terms as the *padded aesthetics of steatopygia*. It should be noted that these images soak deep from the well of African symbolisms which according to Jeffries (1984) informed later periods and locations and she argues this by comparing earlier cave paintings and sculpture to recent Akan and Fon pottery and sculpture. Jeffries’ (1984) work is informative and does more as it establishes a cultural unity of Africans through representations of women in art.

Of course, such depictions happened in a time and socio-cultural context that differs from today but it is of importance that we look into our past to understand our present and it is for this reason I include the work above.

Sculpture

In studying representations of women in arts of the African continent, portrayals that have been frequently studied by art historians is in the field of traditional art, more emphatically sculpture due to its traditional nature. African art from the traditional to the contemporary has always addressed social issues. Tagged as ‘authentic’, traditional African art “served as a

kind of cultural mirror, since it was largely produced in response to religious and social needs and consequently reflected and gave visual expression to certain fundamental aspects of life” (Mount, 1973: xv). One such traditional artwork that functioned for both religious and social needs is the Asante *Akuaba* doll. The carved figure is characterised by its flat forehead, ringed neck and protruding breasts –symbol of ideal feminine beauty- when ritually activated, aided a woman in need to bring forth a child. After it had served this religious purpose, it became a doll for children to play with also reinforcing this ideal beauty notion.

A fundamental aspect of life includes gender and it is visually depicted in various art forms. Strother (1998) examined forms in which gender and the roles they play corresponds to the physiognomy of masks which are danced by the Central Pende people. Thus, “the forehead of men is uneven [lumpy] [and shows that] men are mean; that of women is smooth and level” (p. 108) symbolising the perceived warm and soft nature of females. However, this smoothness according to Strother also symbolises peacemakers in the society of which the chief is an integral part as he is expected to exhibit less aggressive behaviour than the ordinary man thus rendering him more feminine. Also, the eyes of the carved mask visually represent masculinity and femininity. Thus, to depict the independence of the masculinized male, the eyes of the masculine masks are carved in an open manner to “show that he can take care of himself, is alert and on his toes, able to solve his own problems” (p. 111) in contrast to narrow carved eyes of the female masks which symbolises seduction (Strother, 1998). These masks reinforce gender portrayals and stereotypes and are danced in front of an enthusiastic crowd.

A work also worthy of discussion in this field is that of Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan (1993), an anthropologist, professor emerita, and former founding director (1978-99) of the Museum Studies Program, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, New York University. *Images of the Queen Mother In Benin Court* was featured in the leading journal art on *African arts*. In this

research, dwelling on the histories and events presented by Oral Tradition, ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and participant observation (worshipping with an Iyoba crowned in 1981), she gives “illuminates the symbolism in Benin art” (Kaplan 1993: 55) as depicted primarily in its court or royal visual art of the Edo in Benin located in South Eastern Nigeria, particularly sculpture, ivory and brass works; and in passing, discusses symbolisms of figurative forms and depictions on a few of the local visual art including clay pots and musical instruments which she terms as “vernacular”.

In a male dominated society, motherhood significantly elevates the status of women. However, conventional portrayals of the Iyoba (li. Mother of the Oba) whose status is higher than that of all women in the state, depict her as a senior chief with male features. She derives her position from being a widow to the late chief and mother to the present Oba “yet her sexuality is muted and rendered ambiguous in art” (Kaplan, 1993: 55). She guides and counsels the Oba. Pendants worn by the Oba, bronze works and altar tusks carved in ivory, the Iyoba is graced with a beard which is also used to represent the Oba. This is in clear contrast to ‘vernacular’ arts where no such depictions are made of non-royal women and even of the water goddess Olokun who is also the goddess of wealth.

Another stark contrast, between the royal and the ‘vernacular’ arts is in biological depictions. Depictions of women in the vernacular art are defined with explicit sexual characteristics that celebrate and idealize the height of their fertility. Thus, they are depicted as mothers either nursing or holding babies. It has been stated above that motherhood elevates the position of women in the Edo kingdom. However, depictions of the biology of the Iyoba in the royal art accentuates the bosom of the Oba to match that of the Iyoba. The result is thus a toning down of the sexuality of the Iyoba to symbolise her powerful position. The only thing that gives her away as evidenced by Kaplan (1993), is the scarification marks above her eye lids and

elongated conical coiffure evoking the image of a parrots curving beak which the first Iyoba invented.

This representation of women to denote power is not a unique occurrence to the Edo people of Benin.

Writing on the *Sande Masquerades of the Mende* of Sierra Leone, Ruth Philips (1995) shows that “the idea of power [depicted in the Sande masks] is suggested directly by the prominent display of amulets and medicine-filled horns, a carver might add a representation of a gun to strengthen and underlie the idea” (Philips, 1995: 134). Although this is additive and not a change of form, it seems in sculpture the female must acquire a masculine attribute to denote power. It will be insightful to explore this complementarity, ambiguity of sex and purposeful crossover in the realm of paintings. How are women of power depicted in Ghanaian paintings? Is their femaleness and sexuality muted?

Conclusion

Art historians and gender scholars have attempted to bridge their fields to understand how women are represented and portrayed and also to be aware of changing trends in roles of women in society. In this paper, I have looked at works surrounding women’s representation on the continent where one gets the sense that the roles of women are multifaceted spanning from active subjects as heroines and revolutionaries to limiting women to the domestic and nurturing spheres. However, in my unoriginal opinion, “a work of art only discloses what is asked of it, and so new questions stimulate new responses” (Arnold 1996: 3) and as a result there is the need for art and gender historians to question contemporary art of their representations of women but that void in Ghana is yet to be filled. This paper then is an attempt to understand the messages embedded in silent visual images and reiterate the stories contemporary paintings in Ghana tell of women. It goes without saying, once again in my unoriginal opinion, that research is not objective no matter how objective we may make it

seem; knowledge according to Arnold (1996: xii) “is acquired to be applied, and if it is to be used persuasively it must convince through passion as well as logic. Knowledge is also partisan. I am partisan; I maintain that art is gendered, [...] and I attempt to reveal meanings that underpin the construction and reception of images of women.” What follows then is an exploration of some revelations I uncover in the visual narratives of two noteworthy artists beginning first with the comical drawings of Adjo Kisser (b. 1992).

Chapter Three

Creating a Spectacle: A Visual Analysis of Adjo Kisser's Drawings

Introduction

This Chapter has two aims. First, I seek to visually analyse drawings portraying women by the contemporary Ghanaian artist, Adjo Kisser (b. 1992) by using Feldman's (1971) trajectory on art criticism. I back my analysis with conversations with the artist while adding textual and news references. Secondly, I seek to situate Kisser's drawings which utilises comical and satirical depictions in the context of Feminist Humour. "Feminist Humor", writes Sally McWilliams, "is multifaceted, resistant and piquant" (2015: 47) and in this study, I elaborate the forms of resistance Kisser's colourful images of women take and shed light on its implications.

The contemporary art space in Ghana has been dominated by men. Few women share this space with men to make their visions felt and heard. Adjo Kisser is one of such women active in the visual arts. Her exposure was felt to a large degree through her contribution to the 2014 edition of the *Chale Wote* Street Art festival which has been seeking to trouble and re-examine public engagements with the arts. She was one of the few women residents in the country to partake in having exhibited her *Untitled (Type 709)* (Fig. 4).

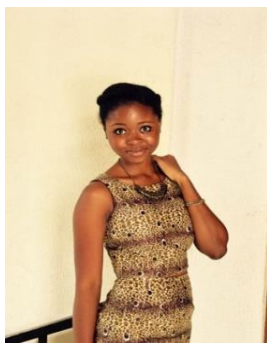


Figure 2. Adjo Kisser*

Kisser has shown interest in the visual arts since high school at the Wesley Girls Methodist Girls High School in Cape Coast. However, she would develop dexterity in drawing using primarily charcoal in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology where she

received her Bachelors and Masters in Painting while she had her intellectual thoughts challenged and structured mostly by the emancipatory teaching of an art department lecturer Kari’Kacha Seidou³.

I chose to explore the visual drawings of Adjo Kisser as first and foremost she is one of the few available women emerging within the past decade and actively painting in Ghana. While researching information on the list of artists emerging post-2011 to consider, Kisser’s name kept coming up. I had approached students of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology art department and spoke to a few practising artists in Accra. I had also seen Kisser’s works at exhibitions at Nubuke Foundation an art gallery in Accra and also exhibitions held by the contemporary art group blaxTARLINES. Her depictions of women figures in modes that were not conventional yet strikingly piqued my interest. I reached out to her and heartily she responded. We met at an open space in Accra where for about two hours we were engaged in conversations about her work. It is important to mention that Kisser’s works are not made to be collected. She informed me they deteriorate over time and she has made no move to sell any of her works⁴. The works presented here, she handed to me via a usb stick. They are the choice of the artist and reflect the nature and mode of the artist, Kisser.

I have been given permission by the artist to discuss five works produced by her, between the periods of 2014 to 2016. Works to be discussed here all portray women satirizing societal ideas and values. Utilising acrylic paints on ink-craft paper to give a glossy feel, Kisser’s depiction of women discussed here are humorous and are usually unclad. “The nude” writes a Cameroonian art curator, Ange Kayifa “is unpleasantly striking” (2018: 17). The visual

³ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

* Retrieved from

<http://www.nubukefoundation.org/artist.php?artist=WEEvaENpL3VyK3BxTER3cTFYVJqUT09>

⁴ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

pairing of such ‘unpleasant striking’ nude forms in Kissers works creates a spectacle and helps to trivialise and soften perception of the female unclad. This idea of creating a spectacle also informs her medium which are sometimes gigantic and cannot be avoided as in Fig. Four (4) and Fig. Five (5).

Contemporary artists in the *Chale Wote* era (2011-present) operate in a space where there is the call for inclusion and related to gender and feminist politics, the depoliticization of women’s bodies. The constraint and control of the bodies of women has been as a result of power exercised by patriarchal masculinity (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1994). Moreover, there has been the constant effort to include women’s narratives in the arts and this has been the space Kisser is operating in as well as in the series of experimentations by contemporary Ghanaian artist.

In style but not in form, Kisser mentions her works draws from paintings of the European Renaissance⁵ and studio photography but not in form. Reflecting on African studio photography, Gisela Feurle (2009) writes that:

“The photo studios are both a public and private space: they produce pictures that depict social norms, roles, and values and at the same time express secret personal wishes and visions, and may also break or play with norms. The studios are places of transformation...the African studio relates to particular traditions -sculpture and textile art- and its mode of expression do not aim at a realistic image: ideals and ideas, dreams and aspirations are staged” (FEURLE 2009: 89–90).

Likewise, as I would show later, Kisser’s presentation of women lies in her ability to imagine them in societal roles and values that disrupt the norm to present new ways of looking and thinking about the feminine. I will examine this against the backdrop of feminist humour.

⁵ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

Subverting the Roles



Figure 4: Adjo Kisser, UNTITLED (TYPE 709)-2014, Acrylic paint and ink on craft paper, 39.4 x 1968.5 in. (100 x 5000cm), Image Courtesy of the Artist



Figure 5: Adjo Kisser, UNTITLED (TYPE 709)-2014, Detail, Acrylic paint and ink on craft paper, 39.4 x 1968.5 in. (100 x 5000cm), Image Courtesy of the Artist

Figure Four (4) displays the forms of about fifty distorted human figures on a huge banner with three unmarked divisions. The human figures are characterised by forms of irregular and regular shapes. The heads of the figures in the work are characterised by enormous circular shapes. A semi-circle with rectangular markings form wide grins and teeth of the figures. Two symmetrical circles with three-line markings inside of it forms the bulging eyes of the figures. On the heads of the figures in the division to the left margin and the division to the right margin sits a combination of curves whose presence take the form of hats. The hats bear the insignia of a cross figure.

The bodies of the figures are characterised by soft curves in *Untitled (Type 709)*. Stretched thin vertical lines however depict the necks of some human figures whereas amongst some figures (see Figure Five (5)), these lines are sacrificed so the bulky heads rest solemnly on the bodies. The arms of the figures on the left division of the work are missing whereas those on the right side are elongated and distorted further connected to a gun shaped object at the tip of the hands of the figures featuring distorted figures.

In my conversations with Kisser, she pointed out to me that she does not set out to draw with a particular idea in mind⁶. Although the title *Untitled (Type 709)* does not help in getting an idea what the artist is speculating, interpretatively, the work presents to me ideas of female organization towards victory in a defiant mode. All the human figures in the work with the exception of the two clad in the centre appear feminine.

Colour is utilized in an odd fashion in Kisser's drawings. Odd in the sense that they are not imitative of the real world but rather used symbolically as we shall see in Kisser's other works. The human figures in Figure Four (4) as well as in subsequent plates are depicted in blue. The blue blends in perfectly with the colour of the base of the building on which it was

⁶ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

displayed. Contrasted against the all-white background, the figures appear in relief. Kisser informs me that when she began her career at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science of Technology, she painted her human figures in blue to signify the *Other*.⁷ Marimba Ani suggests that the first delineation of the 'self' and 'other' would have been 'male' and 'female' (1994: 242). The *other* in her case are visible minorities, usually women and people of colour. Taking huge prominence in her works, the *Other* in Kisser's works takes the forms and figures of the female.

Kisser employs acrylic on an ink craft paper in *Untitled (Type 709)*. This gives the work a bright and glossy feel which when displayed as it has been in Figure Four (4), is difficult to overlook. This is important for the engagement of the work by the public on the streets of James Town at the *Chale Wote* street art festival 2014 where it was originally exhibited. The expansive size of the medium also affords the viewer intimacy with the work and allows for one to pay attention to its details. This is one of the ways Kisser gains attention to her works thus creating a spectacle.

Reading the work from the left margin, the composition is orderly whereas the right side towards the margin presents a more chaotic view as some figures are cordially superimposed on each other. This composition echoing order on the left part of the drawing in contrast with the celebratory disorder on the right presents in the work a balance that can be termed as informal. The women in an orderly marching pose strikes me as an organized effort towards an agenda. Two human figures who appear masculine clad in white are positioned in the centre. With a comical gaze, the male figure at the left of the centre frame exposes a phallus shaped object giving ideas of a penis towards the marching female figures. This calls to mind the invoking of masculinity as well as the control and dominance of the masculine over the

⁷ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

feminine. Reading from the right margin to the right centre of the work, presents a more chaotic sight - chaotic in the sense that the spatial arrangement of the women figures is informally balanced – evoking a jubilant mode. Some slender arms of the women figures, as we can see in Figure Five (5) are raised to signify victory. The jubilant mode of the female figures seems to leave the masculine figure clad in white with his back turned to the viewer. Thus, his gaze is removed signifying power lost. This is what strikes me as victory of a kind of the feminine against the patriarchal control and domination of the masculine.

The Red River Series: Of Saints and ‘Prostitutes’



Figure 6: Adjo Kisser, THE RED RIVER SERIES (MITRA), 2015, Acrylic paint and ink on craft paper
63 x 39 in. (160 x 100 cm), Image courtesy of the Artist

Figure Six (6) presents a quintessential image of Kisser's *The Red River Series*. In *Mitra*, we are once again faced with human figure depicted in blue. Compositionally balanced, the figure's form is characterised by a circular bulky head forming its head. A semi-circular shape crowns the bulky head which together forms the foreground resting in a background of a circular shape filled with yellow. This evokes the halo, a religious symbolism of holiness or sainthood in the Christian religion. With squinting eyes and a wide grin, the subject returns the gaze of the viewer.

Thin vertical lines form the neck of the figure leading down to a body clad in a cloak of white with blue stripes. The upper part of the body exposes the figures' breasts marked by soft curves and small circles forming nipples. This exposure is done almost willingly by the female subject. In the left hand of the subject is a flower motif. The figure stands as a foreground to a green background. The blend of colours makes the figure stand in relief.



Figure 7: Adjo Kisser, THE RED RIVER SERIES (MIYUKI), 2015, Acrylic paint and ink on craft paper
64 x 39 in. (163.3 x 100cm), Image Courtesy of the Artist

Figure Seven (7) also features a human figure whose formal qualities are similar to those exhibited in Figure Four (4). In the work, the subject, *Miyuki* of *The Red River Series*, is fully nude. Between the figure's, *Miyuki*, shapes of breast are a red triangular object surrounded by spikes. This calls to mind a heart with an arrow through it. The figure is positioned more to the right of the frame against a dark greyish background. This colour blend also makes the figure appear to sit in relief. Here also, with squinty eyes and a knowing grin, the blue-textured figure matches the gaze of the viewer. Its head also forms the foreground resting in the background of a yellow glorified glow evoking the religious symbol of holiness and sainthood, halo.



Figure 8: Adjo Kisser, THE RED RIVER SERIES (MANNA), 2015, Acrylic paint and ink on craft paper 50 x 39 in. (127 x 100cm), Image Courtesy of the Artist



Figure 9: Adjo Kisser, THE RED RIVER SERIES, 2015, Installation view
Acrylic paint and ink on craft paper

In Figure Eight (8), a human figure clad in a black hijab is centred in the frame making its composition balanced. It also features the yellow glow evoking holiness around its head which is covered by its clothing accessory. The dark hijab exposes nothing but its eyes and breasts pointing outwards. Its squinted eyes match the gaze of the viewer. A flower motif is attached to the right breast. The dark clad figure paired against a brownish background also appears to stand in relief.

The Red River Series is an oeuvre of works submitted by Kisser in 2015 for the contemporary art exhibitionary project space, blaxTARLINES Kumasi. The exhibition title *the Gown must go to Town* featured a canon carefully selected from the works of graduates of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in the 2015 graduating year as well as prominent contemporary artists from the department of which Kisser was a part. The exhibition which was held at the Museum of

Science and Technology, Accra from June 19th 2015 to July 17th 2015 lived up to its title *the Gown must go to Town* to highlight the need for art to be in the public space.

The series presented by Adjo Kissler took inspiration from the memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) by Azar Nafisi who recounts her experience moving back to Iran and teaching there from 1971⁸. The author recounts her experiences subverting cultural norms in the predominantly Muslim country relevant to our discussion here the author's refusal to wear a veil during her period of studies at the University of Iran in 1980. The veil in the book also signifies the politics of power and control in the book and the author's loathe for controlling and dominant powers is felt when the author recalls her grandmother in a conversation with a student:

“She resented the fact that her veil, which to her was a symbol of scared relationship to god, had now become an instrument of power, turning the women who wore them into political signs and symbols.” (Nafisi 2003: 103)

The above quote is linked to Kissler's works who in a comical manner unveils the clothes of her female subjects. Nafisi's quote above does not only capture the politics of female clothing in Iran but same sentiments where covering up a woman is an instrument of power both sacred and moral in Ghana. Equating the covering up of women to symbols of their relationship with a religious power also permeates. In some streams of thought, the unveiled or uncovered woman is opined as immoral and “stupid” as a news article by Showbiz an online news portal recently reported the self-acclaimed morality inspector of women, Counselor George Cyril Lutterodt, in Ghana as saying:

“How can you dress, show your vital statistics, show your dressing like a prostitute and believe that it is confidence, that's a shame. How on earth can you wear a dress that

⁸ Interview with Adjo Kissler

shows that you are clearly a prostitute and you are believing that it is confidence?" (Kendrick, 2018)⁹.

The news item brought to bear the equation of the less covered female to the position of a sex worker. Kisser's work in *The Red River Series* can thus be seen as a comment on the politics of female clothing where she pairs the unclad female with iconic symbols of holiness and sainthood. The halo in which the heads of the female figures rest in are symbolic of the transcendence of those who in their ways resist and also proclaims the naked bodies of women beyond the confines of sexual objects and 'provocative' implements.

The Billboard Series: Of Incepting the Nude



Figure 10: Adjo Kisser, THE BILLBOARD SERIES, 2016, Installation view
Commercial acrylic paint, aluminium foil, reflectors on PVC flex banner
590 x 1990cm (232.3 x 783.5in.), Image Courtesy of the Artist

⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.showbiz.com.gh/dressing-provocatively-shows-your-stupidity-as-a-woman-lutterodt/>



Figure 11: Adjo Kisser, THE BILLBOARD SERIES, 2016, Installation view (Aerial shot)
Commercial acrylic paint, aluminium foil, reflectors on PVC flex banner
590 x 1990cm (232.3 x 783.5in.) Image Courtesy of the Artist

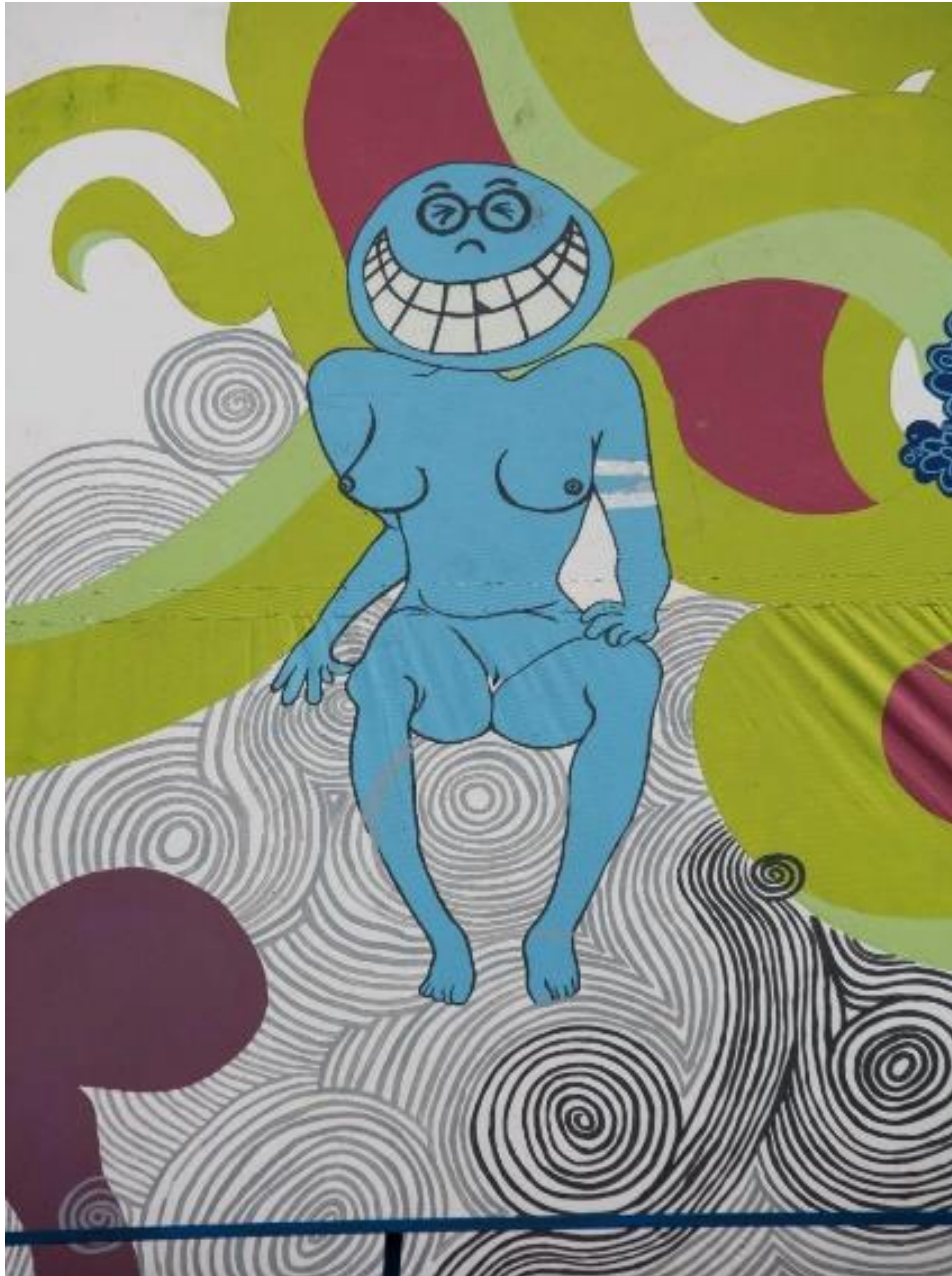


Figure 12: Adjo Kisser, THE BILLBOARD SERIES (DETAIL), 2016, Installation view
Commercial acrylic paint, aluminium foil, reflectors on PVC flex banner

Figure Ten (10) presents to the eye an amalgamation of forms and colours on a pharaonic medium. Eight distinct human figures can be identified in *The Billboard Series*. Their forms characterised by exposed breasts give them away as women. The use of bright colours and flowy lines presents the work as psychedelic. From the left margin where a larger-than-life human figure is positioned in a restful pose, a bright yellow circular object adorns her neck. Resting against a light pinkish background, a set of unusual lines flow behind her and over

her lower part covered in a checkered cloth. A set of these lines flow also from the left margin to the centre frame connecting with a laid down figure depicted in silhouette.

The second figure positioned next to the restful figure in the left margin appears smaller in composition. In an upright pose, this figure is fully nude. It is scaled in a composition that is miniature to the figure in its background. The colour green encompasses its head making its head depicted as blue look like a blossomed flower. 'V' lines merges to form her breasts and mark where a vagina should be. In a convergent fashion, thin lines denote her legs which connect to brown divergent lines forming something of a shadow.

The third figure from the left steps out to the front of the frame. Bright colours in the form of fractal shapes are superimposed over each other around its head giving the face a floral resemblance. The lower body of this figure does not sport the 'V' lines that characterise the breasts of the other figures. Without this important feature, one can say this figure is male, as thin curvy horizontal lines mark the part of its chest cavity where breasts should be.

The centre frame of the work shows a human figure clad but with chest exposed to show breasts. The figure appears to do so willingly exposing a red triangular shaped object denoting a heart with an arrow pierced through. This evokes a religious iconograph. Towards the right margin, a fully nude figure in a seated pose can be seen. Its body rests against the background of thick flowy colourful lines on the upper part and spiralling concentric lines at its feet area.

At the extreme of the right margin, two figures in life-size composition stand to the front of the frame. Semi-nude, fractal shapes appear on top of their heads. They are also positioned against a background of curvy lines. The lines in *The Billboard Series* appear to give the work some form of movement and also connects the figures, ideas and themes on this gigantic piece of work.

Subtle Provocations

The Billboard Series featured as part of a group exhibition “if you love me” which brought together artists, students from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology art department, railway workers and engineers to collaboratively bring the Kumasi Loco Shed to life with varied media art works. Situating *The Billboard Series* in the context of the exhibition, one gets an idea of the themes and functions posited in the work. In the exhibition brochure featured in the thesis of the curator, Robin Riskin (2016) the exhibition:

“...presents work born out of freedom of thought and practice, steered by attitudes of subtle resistance, activated by suggestions of renewal. The project aims to penetrate the site like a bacteriophage on a host cell, quietly attaching to the cell’s DNA and reproducing, until the space has been regenerated...Presenting work by 30 artists and numerous collaborators, if you love me... meditates not only on human love, but that of plants, winds, germs, machines; not only on romantic love, but also toxic, consuming, possibly fatal passion. The pharmakon, both poison and cure, can be the Agent Smith that replicates itself onto subsumed subjects, or the kenosis that empties out the disease. Dangerous, seductive, formless, it floats in free play, disappears into itself, and ever eludes grasp or possession” (Riskin 2016: 95).

The titular, *The Billboard Series* does not appear to give much of a hint as to what the work does. It merely speaks to the medium on which the work is carried on. Artist, Toril Johanessen (2016) reviewing the exhibition points to the creation of alternative spaces such modes of exhibition like Kisser’s *The Billboard Series* creates. A work of such magnitude which was exhibited at the busy Asafo Interchange in Kumasi is bound to gain some public attention. Kisser provokes the viewer through the recurring themes of the unclad woman. The detail as shown in Figure Twelve (12) is even more provocative. She informs me that was her intent to serve the more conservative nature of the public in Kumasi¹⁰. From the above we can deduce that the images of women in this pharaonic sized work engenders forms of subtle

¹⁰ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

resistance. The unclad woman here is presented in a public space as a huge spectacle for the public to confront. Thus, the image of nude distorted women in *The Billboard Series* adorned in floral motifs with comical grins *quietly* incept their presence onto the minds of viewers getting them as a start to question the notion and implications of the nude. This is in line with Kissers admission that “I like provocations that are subtle”¹¹.

The concept of love and our lives intertwined with that of plants, germs, wind, is communicated through the use of motifs and flowy lines. All of this at a busy intersection where the moving human eye only has a couple of seconds to look and to see is considerably impressive. The use of humour as Kisser has been fond of mitigates the seriousness of the subject. Let us turn to the implications of the use of humour.

To laugh or not to laugh: The use of humour in Kisser’s works.

When it comes to drawing women, despite the problematic forms in which women have been portrayed in (Willis 2010), Kisser navigates this space by utilizing social comedy in the form of satire. Writing on the social functions of art, Edmund Feldman discusses the use of satire:

“The social function of satire is to ridicule people and institutions *so that they will change*. Or, at least, stop what they are doing. Also, as a type of humor, satire gives us the feelings of superiority or relief we usually get from laughter. But remember; satire has an aggressive intent; it makes fun of its object—bitter, derisive fun. Although humor is involved, satire is a *serious* art form: it cuts the mighty down to size; it loves to show up hypocrisy; it dramatizes the gap between political promises and actual performance” (Feldman 1971: 58, original emphasis).

The superiority embedded in Kisser’s feminine subjects as a result of satire presents them in nude forms that do not appear to serve the voyeuristic gaze. The women in Kissers drawings are not vulnerable. The ‘aggressive intent’ in Kisser’s lies in the wilful imposition of the nude in ways that arrests the viewers’ attention not for the viewers pleasure. Consider Figure Six

¹¹ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

(6) where the subject on canvas willingly bares her breasts to be looked at. Coupled with a gaze that is unflinching, the subject is not in the passive.

Satire in Ghana is expected to caricature and portray political leaders in a certain way but Kisser's comical depiction of women in her drawings and in her own words, "stupid"¹² serves as a form of intervention in the (re)presentation and imaging of women in the visual arts. Also discussing the social essence of art objects, Amani Maihoub asserts that:

"Art can indeed become a powerful symbolic weapon in the fight for recognition of culturally distinctive claims to equality and self-determination" (2015: 2).

In this vein, Kisser's drawings call attention to how women and their bodies are culturally defined which lends its credence as a symbolic visual tool for addressing the emancipation of women. Kisser informs me she is not a feminist¹³ but in art where meanings are made (Sullivan, 2010) as the viewer imposes on the work their beliefs and values, her works in this era can be interpreted in that light.

In the figures above, we see that Kisser uses humour to effectively mitigate the seriousness of her visual statements through her visual depictions. This is characteristic in the wide grins of her subjects baring chipped frontal tooth which gives the 'stupefied' looks. The squints of her visual subjects with rounded droplets calling to mind tears also give the indication of laughter in a hysterical fashion. Moreover, the distortions of her subjects add to its comedic effect. But these forms do not make her subjects wholly innocent. The hysterical laughter coupled with the squinted eyes and droplets of tears signify to me a knowingness amongst her subjects.

Writing on feminist humour, Wendy Siuyi Wong and Lisa Cuklanz (2009) identify the "politically charged act" (2009: 71) of humour utilized by women as having four elements:

¹² Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

¹³ Interview with Adjo Kisser (15th June 2018)

- “Directly attacking or critiquing gender roles,
- Exposing the realities of gender inequality and discrimination under patriarchal ideology,
- Expressing elements of experience that are shared by women generally,
- Expressing hope toward a vision of change” (Wong & Lisa 2009: 72)

We see for instance the disruption of gender roles in Figure Four (4) when women march in a militaristic fashion and are towards the right part of the frame bearing arms. In Ghana, especially in the arts as Anyidoho and Ampofo (2017) observe, women are overrepresented in the informal sector. This is especially true of tourist art paintings found in the art markets which frequently places women in the market domain or domestic sphere. Kissler however places her subjects in Figure Four (4) in roles overly dominated by men leading to a disruption of such roles which results in their jubilant mode in the right side of frame. Still on directly attacking and critiquing gender roles, we see in *The Red River Series* the equating of nude women with sainthood a position reserved for the morally righteous which in most societies includes the covering up of women.

The African woman’s naked body is however feared (Tamale, 2006) as traditionally it has been used to communicate political resistance (Sutton, 2013). In February 1992, Wangari Maathai

– the Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Winner- together with a group of women who had their sons in jail embarked on a naked protest to combat the brutalities of the police. This forced the police to run as the sight of naked elderly women is a weapon that seems to say “this is where life comes from. I hereby revoke your life” (Turner & Brownhill 2004: 169). Moreover, my attention has been drawn to a politically charged act by women on the Fante coastline of Ghana called *mumume* where women stripped to draw weak and lazy men out to compel

them to join their male colleagues on the war front¹⁴. But Kisser's nude figures do not stand to reproach men on issues of masculinity. Her figures unearth elements of gender inequality and discrimination, experiences that are shared by women in general as the body of a sexual/ised young woman is deemed an object for repression (Sutton 2013) and subject to control which could lead to an attack on the said woman.

The humour in Kisser's work, however, goes beyond the listed. It also aids in creating a spectacle. It helps gain her an audience through which she now subtly yet provocatively disseminates her critique. In a visual exhibition at the Kemper Art Museum, Washington, U.S.A, showcasing *Humour, Irony and Satire*, the curator Bryna Campbell writes of humour in the flyer:

“Whether satirical or ironic, corporeal or conceptual ... humor serves as a vital means of critique. Comic strategies allow these artists to put form to their critiques, in the process providing what the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer has defined as “perspective through incongruity.” Because of its accessibility and directness, humor is a potent if seemingly innocuous tool” (Campbell, 2010)¹⁵

As an innocuous tool, humour permeates in the socio-cultural setup of the Ghanaian society, especially in disseminating information and critique. This is evident when from the visual arts in newspapers to galleries and also verbally when one turns on the news on radio to a local speaking station. For example the use of humour has been highlighted by Avorgbedor (1994) as mitigating tensions when the people of Anlo engage in their song plus proverbs, *haló*:

“In *haló*, we come across the interplay of humor, play, the ugly, and satire. These techniques are situationally patterned to enhance both the goals of musical superiority and the affective and incisive communication of insult. While the technique of humor and comedy is generally employed to temporarily minimize the level of tension

¹⁴ Dr. Kwame Amoah Labi drew my attention to this. I have however not come across any documents in my search to confirm this.

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/exhibitions/3481>

generated in haló performance, it is also attention-structuring. Humor and comedy are particular aesthetic devices employed to diversify and elevate the artistic experience...” (1994: 107).

The above quote buttresses the point of humour as an innocuous tool which mitigates tensions.

Kisser is not the only Ghanaian contemporary artist to extensively utilise this device. Her peer, Bright Ackwerh (b. 1989) also a satirist recently together with the Kenyan illustrator, Michael Soi (b. 1972) exhibited an oeuvre of works celebrating visual satire. Themed as *Almost True*, the exhibition’s flyer agrees with assertions above that “satire is often seen to only entertain; however, it is a route to highlight sensitive social, political, religious and economic concerns” (Soi, M., Ackwerh, B., 2018)¹⁶. Highlighting concerns, the use of humour gains attention of the audience. The information is however not lost. Thus, observing Kisser’s drawings, the implication of the imaging and (re)presentation of women in such a comic manner is the fostering of awareness and through laughter the disempowered finds ways to overcome.

Writing her curatorial thesis for an MFA in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Riskin (2016) highlights the dialectics Kisser’s works seem to play. According to her, “In Kisser’s world, sweet may be seductive, innocent profane, man indiscernible from woman: a carnivalesque event where order is suspended” (Riskin 2016: 64). Kisser’s work as a result collapses binary. The feminine is envisioned and represented through satirical means as occupying the same spaces as the masculine, which in its resilience invokes possible futures. Kisser’s humour also dramatizes contemporary attitudes and beliefs ridiculing them while calling them into question.

¹⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.gallery1957.com/exhibitions/almost-true/>

Concluding Thoughts

The gender discourse in Ghana has been led by conversations about the place and position of women. The contemporary arts in Ghana have been a part of this discourse showing their relevance as not mere stores for cultural knowledge but by putting themselves in positions to offer visual critiques that shapes discourse.

Kisser's representations of women offer a lens for the repositioning of the female unclad against the backdrop of humour. Situating the works of Kisser within the context of feminist humour, we see that humour while offering a laugh becomes an intervention used by Kisser in Figures shown above to confront the misogyny in the world and afford an opportunity for women to empathise.

Through such a visual discourse, Kisser's psychedelic works above present ideas of female organisation (Figure Four), a condensing of binaries by pairing the often problematised bodies of women with religious Christian iconographic symbols as we see in the *Red River Series* (Figures Six (6) to Nine (9)), and the subtle provocations her works incept as they are magnified and placed at busy intersections (Figures Ten (10) to Eleven (11)).

Chapter Four

Sex and Politics: An Analysis of Attukwey Clottey's Series

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the feminine representations of Adjo Kisser's drawings within the context of feminist humour. My initial observation and preliminary analysis suggest the use of humour was a form of intervention in the politicisation and control of the woman's body. This chapter has two aims. Firstly, it visually analyses the works of a male contemporary artist, Serge Attukwey Clottey (b. 1985) residing and practising in Ghana. The choice to include the works of the above-mentioned artist in my work stems from the fact that Clottey became widely known in the contemporary art scene during the *Chale Wote* era (post 2011) after having done a series of performances and exhibitions at the Street Art festival held annually at James Town, Accra. Clottey exhibited a collection of his *Sex and Politics* in 2016 at the Brazil House in James Town.

Through the analysis, I seek to explore how Clottey visually represents and imagine women within the context of magnificent exaggerations. What are the symbols of femininity in Clottey's works? Does his series have any contemporary relevance? What roles does he imagine for their female subjects and what values are embedded in his depiction of women?



Figure 13. Serge Attukwey Clottey

I will support my discussions with excerpts from an interview I had with Clottey in which I made notes. I will also contextualise the discussion using research material and news article pieces on the commodification of sex.

Clottey is a versatile artist practising for about 15yrs. He attained dexterity in the art from Ghanata Secondary School and further explored his skill while in residency in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Clottey's *Sex and Politics* series features canvases that are mainly characterised by abstract expressionism also evoking the features of sculptural idiom posited by Kobina Bucknor (1924 – 1975). By superimposing figures on top of each other, Clottey creates abstracted forms whose intertwining deepen their connections. The paintings have been exhibited in both local and international galleries including Brazil House, Ghana (2016); GYNP Gallery, Berlin (2016); Goethe Institute, Accra (2013); Gallery 1957 New York and Cape Town (2017).

It should be noted that Clottey's *Sex and Politics* series in terms of subject matter, colours and context draw political numbering and clandestinely displayed images in newspapers usually displayed at Newspaper Kiosks in the country. His composition is however Picasso inspired. Responding to why he is drawn to explore politics with charcoal paintings in a Skype interview with *studio international*, an online art website, Clottey mentions that *Sex and Politics* is a body of charcoal paintings:

“...inspired by the current political system as well as by sexual pleasures in this country... I began to explore politics further by using the idea of a performance as the drawing. So, the drawing was originally a performative idea of what is happening and how people are responding to politics, and how politics has become a major concern in our country” (McNay, 2017)¹⁷

Commenting on his sexual references in the same interview, Clottey offers that:

¹⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/serge-attukwei-clottey-interview-ghana-my-body-is-part-of-my-works-mystery>

“People are exploring sexuality a lot on social media. Ghanaians are very religious, but social media has affected their religious commitment because you see someone posting naked pictures and yet they will say they are religious. They tell you they are Christians, but their online presence is very pornographic...I comment on this because it’s affecting the country – it’s a major concern.” (McNay, 2017)¹⁸

Sex and Politics is thus a comment on issues which the artist finds dominating both online and graphic content in the country. I follow with a visual analysis discussing how Serge Attukwey Clottey represents women in this series.

¹⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/serge-attukwei-clottey-interview-ghana-my-body-is-part-of-my-works-mystery>

bent posture over the thighs of the first figure. Its gender can only be assumed. Its head is divided into three vertical colour bands.

Colour is spatially defined in the painting. Different areas of the composition divided by a thick dark line receives different shades of colours. Pitched against the black background, the figures assume low relief.

I will be crying on your shoulder interpretatively evokes a deep sense of intimacy to the viewer. An intimacy that is supportive as we see the feminine figure assume a supportive gesture in the work allowing the second (2nd) figure to lay on her alluding to the females nurturing spirit, a sense of support.



Figure 15. Serge Attukwey Clottey. FAITH RATHER THAN FEAR. 2018. Acrylics, oil pastels, charcoal on Belgium linen. 40” x 57” (Image courtesy of the Artist)

In Figure Fifteen (15) we are presented with a figure, thin in form and unclad. Its upper body sports pointy breast evoking female fertility as well as youthfulness. Above its breasts are coloured rectangular facial figures that makes one recall masks. If one is also familiar with Clottey’s art with gallons, one sees the semblance. The female figures head like we see in figure Fifteen (15) is also sacrificed.

Clottey uses dark thick lines to form the outline of the forms in the work. The middle part of the figure sees human arms which are distorted. The left arm holds a thin device which triangulates at its bottom. Two dark balls appear on its edges.

The use of colour in *Faith rather than Fear* is dark. Strokes of white paint are however irregularly painted in the background interpretatively signalling faith in the midst of the unnerving darkness. Commenting on the use of mask-like figures as faces in the series, Clottey points out that:

“The faces in my drawings were inspired by the gallon mask that I use for my performance. So that is the link. The mask will represent the mask of our time and symbolise the current state of the country” (McNay, 2017)¹⁹.

Thus, the faceless feminine figure in *Faith rather than Fear* appears to tower and triumph above the current state of the country. “The females' spirit of perseverance, strength, courage” as Ablade Glover (2009: 11) mentioned in an interview is echoed here.

¹⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/serge-attukwei-clottey-interview-ghana-my-body-is-part-of-my-works-mystery>



Figure 16. Serge Attukwey Clottey. *STILL HOPING ITS YOU AND ME IN THE END.* 2017. Pastel, charcoal on paper. 40" x 57" (Image Courtesy of the Artist)

Figure Sixteen (16) presents an emotionally charged work. I say emotionally charged as the work is characterised by deep rough lines whose heavy visual impact announces Clottey's hands. These rough lines call attention to themselves and also exhibit the controlled penmanship of the artist. The undulating lines also convey a sense of linear energy. In the

work two distorted figures joined together at their pelvic level can be made out. This conjoining gives out notions of intimacy. Space is evenly shared amongst the figures.

Clottey portrays their faces with rectangular masks. The faces are turned to look at the viewer. The figure on the left appears feminine as the viewer can make out a breast and its nipple. Its short right arm reaches to grasp the figure on the right who without visible drawn lines of a breast appears masculine. His distorted arms appear to hold onto the bar stool behind him as if in need of support.

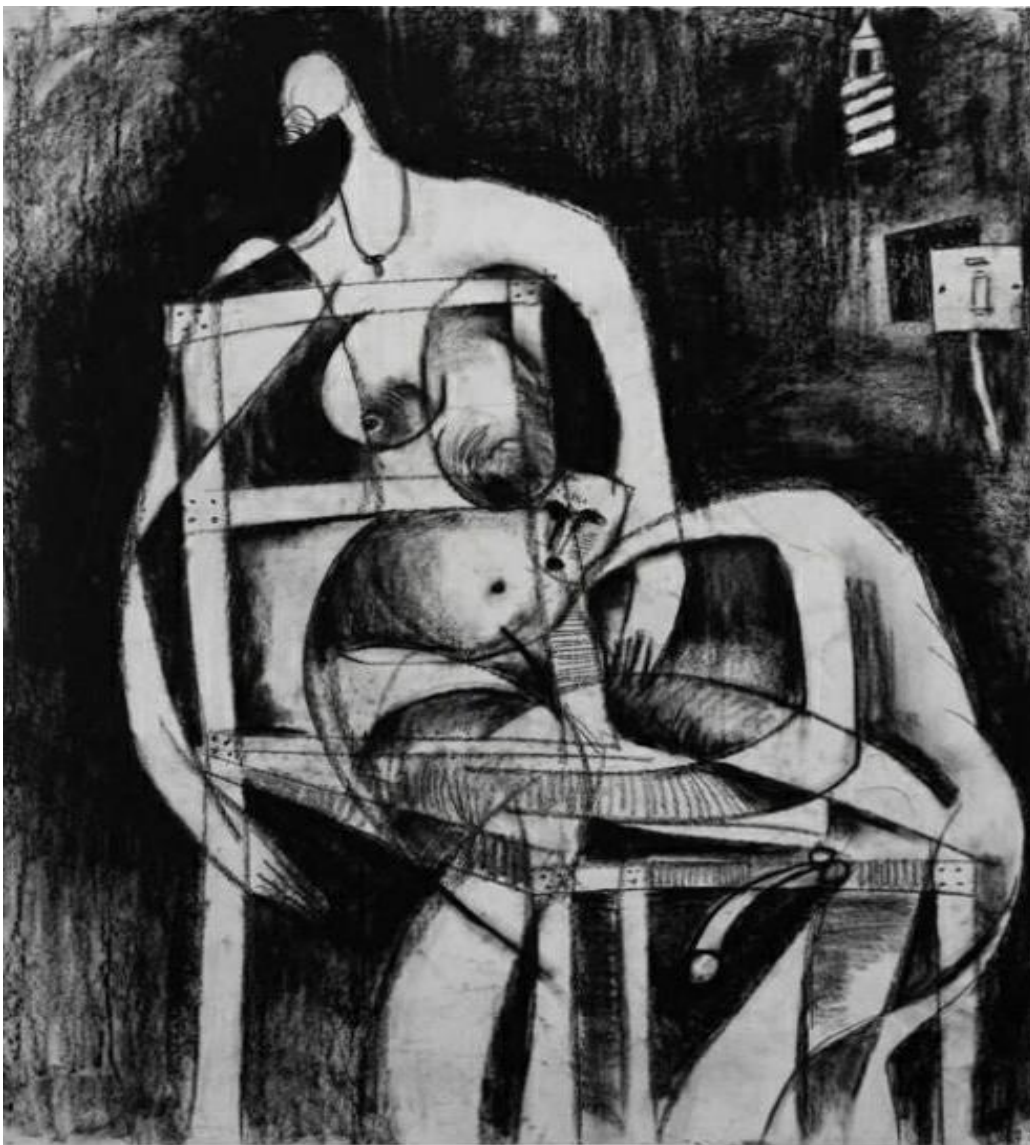


Figure 17. Serge Attukwey Clottey. ENDORSEMENT. 2017. Charcoal on Paper. 40” x 57”

(Image Courtesy of the Artist)

In Figure Seventeen (17), using abstracted shapes and patterns, Clottey superimposes two figures which feminine and masculine features. The life-size seated figure, feminine in appearance, is portrayed with huge breasts and voluptuous hips. Moving towards its head, the figure appears to lack logical representation. Its cone shaped head appears to look downward seated on an elongated neck. The second figure rests its upper part on the body of the feminine seated figure. Its head assumes the form of a mask on an elongated neck. Its upper body at its arms and hands is superimposed on that of the seated feminine figure. The second abstracted figure sports an elongated phallus giving a gender description to its form.

We hear a silence in the painting. A silence echoed by the dark black colour in the background which seems to suggest the night as well as the strong contrast in colour tones of the figures against the backdrop. Notice a spiralling light bulb in the upper right corner as well as a switch removed from its socket. This suggests the setting, a dark room breeding intimacy. *Endorsement* thus appears to present the foreplay of an intimate activity. Gaining prominence in size and positioned on top, the female seated figure assumes a position of power.



Figure 18. Serge Attukwey Clottey. FEMME VIBES. 2017. Pastel, Charcoal on paper. 40” x 57” (Image courtesy of Artist).

In Figure Eighteen (18) we see abstracted figures superimposed on each other. This connection via lines shapes and colours deepens the intimacy amongst the four abstracted figures laying down huddled together. From the left margin, a side profile of a curvaceous unclad figure bearing breasts assumes form. One can notice its knee penetrate the accentuated buttocks of the second abstracted figure from the left. This second figure whose feminine essence is heightened by her buttocks assumes a position of deep embrace with the third

figure from the left who is centred in the frame. Faceless, her sexuality is referenced as her breasts and hips are exaggerated. Her leg is conjoined with that of the fourth figure from the left who is also huddled close to the group. Thin dark lines form their outlines. The artists pencils are also felt in the rough zig-zag movements. The arrangement of lines and shapes in *Femme Vibes* evokes unity and allows for a grand reconciliation.

Interpretatively, *Femme Vibes* comments on the contentious same-sex sexuality and the fluidity of sexuality. Huddled together in naked forms, a sexual intimacy is evoked.

Magnificent Exaggerations

Interviewing Clottey, he informs me he is drawn to the soft curves of the female body²⁰. This he attributes to growing up in a Ga family where it was quite common to see a topless woman working in her house. Coupled with work, the female topless body was in a desexualised context and for him the female nude evokes ambition. Clottey also tells me, during his time at the Ghanatta College of Art and Design, Accra, their painting courses allowed for live drawings of women but they were not nude. He would encounter nude models during his art residency in Sao Paulo, Brazil which formed the basis of the *Sex and Politics* series.

Clottey's compositions however, looked at in totality give the works formal and structural excellence as the forms and figures through a careful blend of lines, colours and shapes are made to relate to each other. Walk into a room where Clottey's works are prominently exhibited. The artistic combination of line and shapes in geometric-like patterns calls the viewer to look, arresting their attention. Depicting the bodies of women in a naturalistic *cum* abstracted forms, Clottey entrenches traditional African sculptural forms onto pictorial canvases evoking the "Sculptural Idiom" coined by the Ghanaian modernist painter, Kobina Bucknor. Works which classify under the Sculptural Idiom terminology exhibit stylistic representations and exaggerated features to lay emphasis on themes and ideas (Fosu, 1993)

²⁰ Interview with Serge Attukwey Clottey (2018, June 8)

and this is also characteristic of Clotey's *Sex and Politics* series. Writing a preface to the 'magnificent exaggeration' characteristic of modernist artists like Oku Ampofo (1908-1998), Vincent Kofi (1923-1974), Paul Ahyi (1930-2010) and Agbo Folarin (1936-2010), Kojo Fosu (1993) notes that the distortions and exaggerations of this expressive style of the sculptural idiom:

“represent full individual expressions which are totally dictated by the inspirations of ideas they convey. Thus form is infused with content of the subjects to highlight the aesthetic quality of the works. For these artists, therefore, the exaggerations in their works add to the beauty and strength of the works themselves, and make them meaningful” (Fosu, 1993: 142).

From Figures Fourteen (14) through to Eighteen (18) we see the artists intent at fusing forms and ideas which is a characteristic of the magnificent exaggeration and also contributes to Clotey's originality. The ideas surrounding the feminine is of concern to this work. Notice the use of accentuated lines to imply weight is pervasive in Clotey's works. Compare his formal features with Amon Kotei's heavy magnification which evoked the feminine and radiated their strength and disposition.



Figure 19. Amon Kotei. RECLINING WOMAN. 2000. Oil on Canvas. 73 cm x 119 cm.
(Image Courtesy of www.mutualart.com)

Of Contemporary Relevance

In Figure Fourteen (14), Seventeen (17) and Eighteen (18) exaggerating the “soft curves” of his female subjects, the artist enunciates a canon of beauty associated with women (Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2013). Situated in the modern day and the fixation on popular culture, the voluptuous woman has become so much of a symbol of beauty that surgeries for such body types are reported to be on the rise in Ghana. Let us consider pieces from an online news article in Daily Graphic reporting the phenomena. Dr. Kwasi Debra, a surgeon who was interviewed for the piece linked his client’s aspiration to the proliferation of images in the virtual world:

“According to a cosmetic surgeon, Dr Kwasi Debra, who is benefiting from this boon, the desire to have such shapely bodies has been greatly influenced by the internet,

television and social media which have brought celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, Nicki Minaj and Cardi B closer to many Ghanaians.” (Zurek, 2018)²¹

Thus, according to the doctor television and social media contributes to shaping such ideals of beauty. In my conversation with Clottey, he also pointed out that his images stems from his observations of Ghanaians on social media where women with curves are served with social media affirmations, ‘Likes’.²² *Ergo*, we see a link between media and the shaping of social reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984) which affects the representations of women.

Clottey also reveals to me that his oeuvre of works in *Sex and Politics* also is an exploration and the contemplation of how the bodies of women are used as currency in our contemporary milieu²³ where consumption and unemployment have become mutual acquaintances. In the same news article, this is confirmed by the surgeon:

“Dr Debra who claims to perform an average of 10 procedures a week when he is in the country says his clients come from every walk of life and include young people in their twenties with aspirations to be models or *work in the corporate world*” (Zurek, 2018. my emphasis)²⁴.



Figure 20. Moesha Boduong

Thus, the attainment of a voluptuous body has become a tool into the corporate world but is not specific to it. This physical ‘currency’ became a popular subject of contention when Moesha Boduong, a Ghanaian actress was interviewed by CNN’s journalist Christiane Amanpour for her *Sex and Love Around the World* series. Moesha as she is popularly known as in Ghana drew attention to the exchange of women’s physical bodies for wealth when she revealed that:

²¹ Retrieved from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/lifestyle/life/cosmetic-surgeries-on-the-rise-surgeon.html>

²² Interview with Serge Attukwey Clottey (2018, June 8)

²³ Interview with Serge Attukwey Clottey (2018, June 8)

²⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/lifestyle/life/cosmetic-surgeries-on-the-rise-surgeon.html>

“In Ghana, our economy is such in a way that you just need someone to take care of you and a single person you can’t make enough money as a woman here...Because even when you want to get an apartment, in Ghana you pay two years in advance and I just started working; where will I get money to pay for an apartment for two years?” (Fresh Juice FJ, 2018)²⁵.

Responding to Christiane Amanpour’s question whether women must have sex with men to pay rent, Moesha answers in the affirmative “Because he can afford to take care of you; he takes care of me. My financial stuff, my apartment, my car, my rent, everything” (Fresh Juice FJ, 2018)²⁶.

Moesha in the above statement has linked the commodification of sex to the fiscal policies of the country. This is what Clottey drives at in his series *Sex and Politics* visually enunciated in *Endorsement*. However, such an analysis falls short of seeing the complexity of the Global Sex trade. Akosua Adomako Ampofo (2003) paints this global picture when analysing *The Sex Trade: Globalisation and Issues of Survival* she writes:

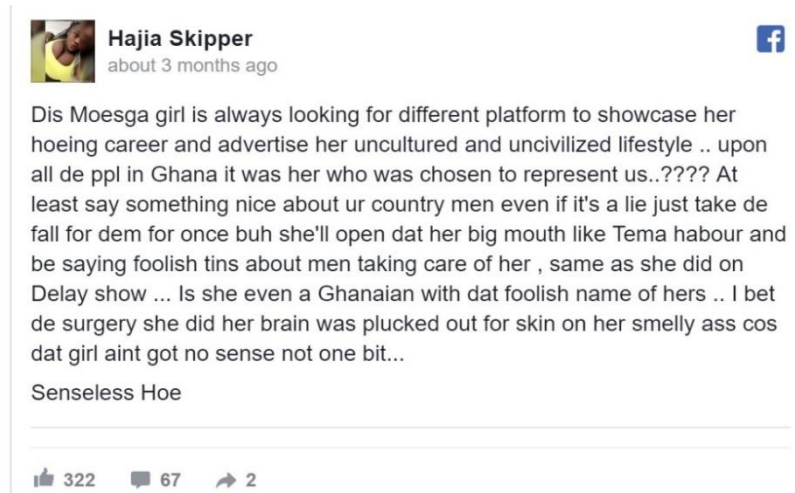
“The modern economic order of structural reform puts women at an even greater disadvantage as small-scale informal work is increasingly marginalized. Indeed many accounts agree that the Structural Adjustment Programs initiated by the World Bank over the last few decades have severely worsened the economic situation for women in Africa” (2003: 32).

The mode of Globalization has affected the survival of women and where they stand at a risk of losing their survival means, the body then becomes a tool exchanged and often ‘stolen’ for material gains.

²⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIM48MxF2oM>

²⁶ Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIM48MxF2oM>

Not seeing the simple truth in Moseha's statements, many Ghanaians denied the validity of Moesha's statements although such transactions has formed the basis of some research (Adomako & Takyiwaa, 1994; Adomako, 1991; Adomako, 1995; Adomako, 1997; Clark & Manuh, 1991; Dinan, 1983). The sentiments shared on social media expressed outright disapproval:



Hajia Skipper
about 3 months ago

Dis Moesga girl is always looking for different platform to showcase her hoeing career and advertise her uncultured and uncivilized lifestyle .. upon all de ppl in Ghana it was her who was chosen to represent us..???? At least say something nice about ur country men even if it's a lie just take de fall for dem for once buh she'll open dat her big mouth like Tema harbour and be saying foolish tins about men taking care of her , same as she did on Delay show ... Is she even a Ghanaian with dat foolish name of hers .. I bet de surgery she did her brain was plucked out for skin on her smelly ass cos dat girl aint got no sense not one bit...

Senseless Hoe

322 67 2



I-am Ofori-Atta
about 3 months ago

OMG.

Moesha Buduong, aka the self acclaimed international thot has landed Ghanaian women in fresh trouble. We all know 99% Ghanaian women are hard working. The 1% is a THOT & feeds off married men. And that's Moesha. Disgusting.

25 13 1



Naa Adjeley Shuga
about 3 months ago

"Are you basically telling me that u having sex with this guy essentially to pay your rent ? "

Moesha: because he can take care of me.

Who stole her brain pls ? I beg return it in the name of God. Herh!!!

59 20 Share

Commented on Naa Adjeley Shuga's public post



Edem d'Almeida Naa Adjeley Shuga Am not surprised she said that thou,

But why make a fool out of her self for the whole world to see. Well, We could have managed her stupidity in Ghana 😏

👍 1 · about 3 months ago

Figure 31. Facebook Comments

In fact, in commenting on the fiscal policies affecting the survival of women, Moesha had made a hasty generalisation for which she suffered the wrath of many Ghanaians but regardless, she had shed some light on the realities of some women whose bodies are exploited and/or exchanged for survival. It is for such women that Clotney entreats to have *Faith Rather than Fear*.

I am a bit wary of Clotney's nude depictions. First Clotney is a man who seeks to bring attention to the exploitation of women's bodies in the form of commodification of sex by painting them naked, unclad. However noble, Clotney's works travel into expensive art galleries and are offered for sale. There is nothing wrong with the artist trying to make a living but a paradox presents itself. Clotney can be said to be also exchanging the naked bodies of women for cash while highlighting its commodification. The nude woman on Clotney's canvas can be attributed to patriarchal ways of seeing and does not aid much in the radical questioning of the representation of the woman. It carries on the tradition however abstracted by exploiting the stereotypes, voluptuous, accentuations and buttresses essentialist notions of the beauty of women. Thus, even on canvas the nude woman's accentuated form and body assumes a currency where probably per the aesthetic pleasantness it evokes, a price is set for it. This is the paradox situated in the commercialisation of the female body.

Concluding Thoughts

Through a visual analysis of Serge Attukwey Clotney's works in his *Sex and Politics series*, we see his use of accentuated lines and nakedness to evoke the feminine, however

problematic. Clotey echoes the magnificent exaggeration feature of Bucknor's term Sculptural Idiom which sees the fusion of form and ideas. Moreover, it illustrates his artistic ability to sculpt on a pictorial form.

Sex and Politics is an exploration of the artist which is of contemporary relevance. Rooted in the exploration is the commodification of women's bodies as a result on a micro-level, the short-sighted fiscal policies of the country and on a macro level the impact of the globalizing order which Clotey visually calls attention to through his positioning of women in compromising positions on canvas.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Afterthought

Introduction

The Gentle Reader will find buried in this final and concluding chapter, my thoughts, comments and questions for the advancement of studies on the imaging and representation of women in contemporary art. In so doing, a discussion and summation of my arguments made thus far is also presented. In addition to the above, I will contemplate on the nude or unclad woman and its implications in art practice today. My current study is not without fault. I will offer the limitations of my research and offer new points of entry for art research on gender. I will proceed by first recapping what my study has undertaken thus far.

Chapter One

Chapter One presented the background to my study. I situated the context of the contemporary in the post-2011 era; the reason being the emergence of the *Chale Wote* street art festival taking place on the streets of James Town, Accra sought to disturb how the public engaged with art. We see for example in Kisser's mode of exhibition how this is being done. Art 'galleries' through public display are being extended as artists choose different modes – modes that are not confined to white walls - to publicly express themselves. Moreover, seeing the artists as stems of tree visually passing ideas of a culture, I sought in subsequent chapters to discuss some of the ideas the artists sampled for this study transmitted.

I further presented my research questions. What are the symbolisms used in the images and (re)presentations of women amongst *Chale Wote* era visual painters? We saw in the works of Kisser the pairing on the female nude with Christian religious iconography as in *The Red River Series*, thus collapsing binaries; the sacred and secular; Saints and 'prostitutes'. In Clotey's *Sex and Politics*, the unclad is heavily accentuated alluding to their sense of support

even as he explores through his work the commodification of the bodies of women. The role of women also in Kisser's work strikes one as unconventional as she tampers with their 'familiar' on canvases and depicts women in roles and in a manner which they can readily identify. The market scene as well as scenes of women in a domestic setting or carrying on their heads basins and pots tend to be the familiar setting women are depicted in. This in an Independent Study at the College of Art, Kumasi by Margaret Hunt De Bona (2005) pointed to the fact the observation of traditional events as well as their depictions are heavily reinforced by Professors in the college. Artist in the *Chale Wote* era like Kisser seek to break from these traditions. Their depictions are not stereotypical but an offering of critiques and the non-confinement of their subjects as they paint their visions of a better world. Clottey extends this conversation. His depictions of women however exaggerated take on social ideas about women while reflecting on the positionality of the body of women in today's Ghana. Both Kisser and Clottey employ tools or devices to aid their portrayals. The role of humour and abstractions are employed to mitigate their depictions of women especially nude.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two set the tone for a review of relevant literature. Here I engaged with relevant literature to show that although women occupy a ubiquitous position on canvas in Ghana, scholarly reflections of their portrayals tend to be lacking as historians may not be placing due emphasis on artists as cultural connoisseurs. Ones who are fit enough to lend their voices and visions, visually, to society. My study thus inserts itself in the critical engagement of artworks and the ideas they portray by analysing the works of two artists.

Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, I introduced the works of Adjo Kisser which I analysed using Feldman's trajectory of art criticism. Here, I have shown that through humorous satirical depictions of her naked women subjects in public, Kisser innocuously critiques how society perceives the body of women. Perception of women's ideas is however one of the many ideas Kisser

presents in her works. She also visually gives form to notions of women organisation and emancipation from patriarchal domination and control.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four invited the reader to engage with the series *Sex and Politics* painted by Serge Attukwey Clottey. Analysing the works, we see the use of exaggerations as an identification of the feminine in the works of Clottey. The use of abstraction which also features prominently in Clottey's works has also been discussed as a tool or device which is employed by the artist to give prominence to the ideas posited by the art works.

Contemplating the Nude

If we are to contemplate the nude which reoccurs in the works of Kisser and Clottey we are forced to think that there may be changing notions in the depiction of the nude in contemporary times. Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke (2009) suggest that the female nude is avoided in contemporary African art due to its radical and historical notions. Tagged as unpleasantly striking (Kayifa, 2018), Kisser and Clottey seem to reorient notions towards nude display while mitigating its effect through the use of humour as in Kisser's works and abstraction as seen in that of Clottey.

Moreover, recalling the significance of the nude as shown in Chapter Two, and after examining Kisser's works, one comes to agree with Enwezor and Okeke that "nakedness is not just a tactic to shame, but an act of social protest, a vehicle of gendered radicality and feminist power" (2009, p. 47). It's gendered radicality and feminist power lays in its quest as seen in Kisser's drawings to attack and reposition attitudes towards the female body.

Implications of Research

What then to do with this knowledge? I think first, this research implies that there is scholarly merit in the art of contemporary artists. Artworks can be utilized and used as a source in schools to provoke discussions on issues surrounding us. Knowledge of the ways of imaging

and representation of women also attests to how contemporary artists are visually shaping the discourse on how women should be looked at. This will be particularly useful in gender discussions as the scope of representations and imaging are widened. Moreover, this research reminds us that images are not innocent. They convey ideas from the depths of the mind of the artist which is the product of the society the artist is engaged in. Images are powerful shapers of discourse and critically examining will pose useful to artists as they become more aware of the power they invoke onto the canvas by assembling forms, shapes, lines, colours.

Limitations of Study

This study however is with foible. One may point to the number of artists sampled for the study. I will plead with the reader to understand that due to scope and space and for the researcher to critically engage the works of the artists in a deserving manner utilising Feldman's trajectory of art criticism which is also particularly demanding, such limiting choices had to be made.

Moreover, I recognise that my gender as male may produce in the work some biases which I may not be privy to on first thought. I do not plead sympathy here but a critical affirmation from the reader especially of opposing genders to better situate and contextualise female experiences in the depictions of the artists.

Recommendations

I seek to point out that there is a fertile ground for research in the works of contemporary artists. The sample size must be expanded to enable a much clearer picture on the images and representations of women in paintings.

However, I push for the notion that the frontiers of art historical scholarship in Ghana must be radically widened to include photography which is a powerful tool to freeze time as the camera is currently becoming a widely used artistic tool. How are women and men framed in

photographs? How is the camera used in shaping notions of the female and male? And what are some themes photographs pursue?

Adwene Asa

Images are not innocent. They evoke in the viewer sentiments allowing for the viewer to either question or affirm reality as “we consume the world through images” (Rosler, 1989, sec. 3). This study has contemplated on ten works of two Ghanaian contemporary artist, Adjo Kisser and Serge Attukwey Clottey, of the *Chale Wote* era and made manifest some ideas they posit in their imaging and representation of women. The study has seen that the artists reposition notions of the nude and question its dominance in society. The use of tools like humour and metaphor is served with such representations to mitigate its effect. We also see that there is shifting notion in the representation of women especially in the drawings of Kisser whose women take on visual roles that are subversive. In Clottey we see in women attributes of nurture and support even as their bodies are compromised. Moreover, female love, a liberal and radical notion is celebrated. This study has aimed at contemplating such visual stories in hopes to challenge viewers and scholars to contemplate them too and for artists to be aware of depictions.

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