

LOCAL MYTHOLOGY IN NARRATIVE PAINTING

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the award of the MFA degree and that, to the best of my knowledge; it contains no material previously published by another.

Person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

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ABSTRACT

This research work stands as an exploration of mythologies and narratives sourced from hitherto marginalised or ill represented cultures in the genre of academic narrative painting which was the most visible genre in major art circles in 15th to 19th century Europe and the world built on the spirit of that time. Through experimentations, exhibitions and audience interactivity I investigate notions of identity and representation in relation to ideas which attempt to explain this popular genre. It is no doubt the power stories and myth have, from a perceived abandoned leisure activity or form of entertainment to a whole field of scientific study as some have it referred to and a tool for possible addressing of pertinent critical issues facing the world we live in today. My research employs the use of exhibitions and audience interactions as my main methodology for collecting and sharing information for my analysis. My studio work which stands between the more definite fields of traditional painting and tableaux installations sets the stage for dialogue to begin or advance on issues bothering on identity and cultural capital considering how the mythological themes of my work are set. The strategies employed in the execution and exhibition of the work stand as inflections on various canons in art and knowledge production and it's far reaching associations. Perhaps this gesture however subtle has inspired new imaginaries which could go a long way to institute new configurations of how newer notions of identity and representation are formed.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. THE INTRODUCTION

“It is easy to forget how mysterious and mighty stories are. They do their work in silence, invisibly. They work with all the internal materials of the mind and self. They become part of you while changing you. Beware of the stories you read or tell: subtly, at night, beneath the waters of consciousness, they are altering your world” (Simms L, 2011). These words of Nigerian author Ben Okri strike me deeply and sum up for me, the intent of my work. Though he may have been referring to the genre of traditional storytelling, this statement goes on to display an underlining truth for a lot of other fields of endeavour which seeks to spread the idea of narratives. From prehistoric forms such as oral traditions to more contemporary forms as on screen movies these subconscious powers of stories are evident.

It is in this light that my own work which can be classified as narrative painting takes shape. Local mythology used here is a bricolage of historically unproven narratives from the romanticised past to episodes from general popular culture to include urban legends which seek to provide understanding of those characteristics about a people which is not easily explained scientifically and in my work it becomes a tool for my inquiry through my story telling. My focus here was on myths from marginalized groups: sections of the world populace that could be classified as historically ill represented others during colonisation, a space which also includes my country of origin and thus explains my use of the word local as an adjective. The use of the word also hints at a alien and exclusive system dictating the discourse for the genre I am exploring. The spirit of art and life in general post the post modern critique of the predominant worldview made interesting room for such sidelined groupings to express new found identities.

In Ghana for instance and Africa in general where the sting of colonisation has been felt, it is popularly known that the one of the positive but discarded traditions is that of the fireside story telling. Television programming in the 90s in Ghana sought to bring that culture back to the lime light with the introduction of the hit show called *By the Fireside*. This featured stories from various parts of Ghana being told and enacted to children and broadcast on state television. Some of these programs, including the more adult targeted *Thursday Theatre* and the *Showcase* series were the last time such local mythological content was to be seen on such a scale in Ghana.

The power that the directors and writers who created these films had was immense. Whereas the truths of the episodes they broadcast may be publicly known to be highly debatable their exaggerations which may come off as innocent entertainment went a long way to influence how the topics related to their themes were viewed later. The power exhibited in this instance also served as an inspiration for my research. If one could harness the subconscious powers of storytelling and the undeniable need for a taste of the nostalgic culture then such canons as identity could be easily interrogated.

Popular music, movies, advertisement and the general lifestyle could since Pop Art in 1950 America become the subject of admiration and contemplation in such formerly serious fields as the exhibition space. Not only did this influence the subject matter and themes of art but also the methods of production and strategies of display. All these were major inflections on a canon which hitherto favoured the depiction of bourgeois tastes via skilful production of ‘gifted’ hands. I had explored with other ideas and forms too which touched on various issues of representation and identity in relation to myths.

Ever since colonisation and the various fights for varied levels of independence, the question of identity has become very paramount. Across various fields of endeavour, researchers have questioned the various notions of identity in a bid to reclaim what rightly and legally constitutes their being. With the general notion that history can be twisted one can almost certainly not rely on records even from the most revered sources. This has led to the very interesting questioning of notions on identity and testing the ever ready answers with newer angles to expose their truth. I decided to fall on the idea of mythology for a reverse effect on the above stated point that also interested me.

Mythology in today's society serves as theme for cultural production most visible in the field of movie making. Movies from Hollywood featuring mythology especially from ancient Greek culture such as Louis Leterrier's 2010 *Clash of the Titans* advertised with a poster capturing a climactic scene shown in figure 1, Zack Snyder's *300* in 2006 shown in figure 2 and its sequel were box office hits. Other big movies featuring ancient mythology include Kenneth Branagh's *Thor* in 2011 shown in figure 3 and Joss Whedon's 2012 record breaking *Avengers* with its poster in figure 4.

Television series like *Merlin* seen in figure 5, which debut in 2008 and was broadcast on BBC and was subsequently spread throughout the world through DVD releases and internet airing and the record breaking and still running HBO *Game of Thrones* series in figure 6 which is one of many since 2011 feature a strong element of mythological subjects and fiction. Due to the critical and commercial success of these on screen ventures the books by George R. R. Martin's , *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996 -) which inspired the Game of Thrones venture is certainly worth a mention as one of the greatest literary works featuring mythology in our time.

God of War which is captured in figure 7 is by far one of the most popular and commercially successful video games among a host of others also developed around traditional mythology.



Figure 1. Louis Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans*



Figure 2. Poster advertisement for Zack Snyder's 300



Figure 3. Poster advertisement for *Thor*.



Figure 4. Marvel's *Avengers* poster showing mythological heroes and urban legends.



Figure 5. Poster advertisement for the BBC *Merlin* series.



Figure 6. Poster advertising the HBO series *Game of Thrones*

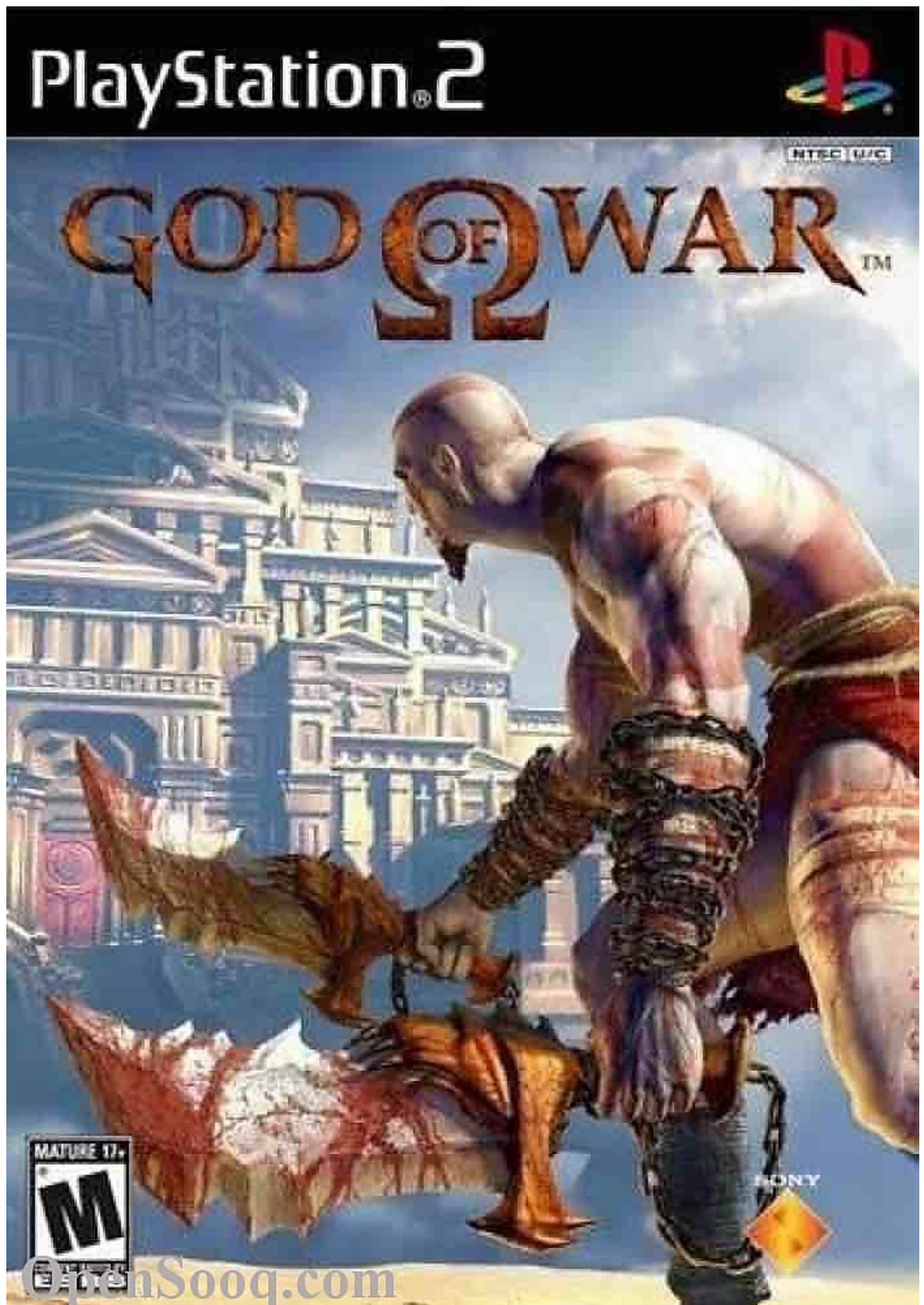


Figure 7. Poster advertisement of *God of War* video game

It is worthy of note that all these examples stated are sourced from cultures alien to some of the spaces they are consumed. Even with the birth of more modern trends of myths such narratives don't do justice to balancing out the notion of fair representation of cultures. Even in today's world where we can boast of a collective culture in the post World War II age, it is integral to understand ourselves individually and as respective collectives as happenings the world over go to refute the notion of a big global community.

The narratives referenced in my work are sourced from Ghana, Africa and the Diaspora. Such was the inspiration for the many cultural institutions Kwame Nkrumah set up (Botwe-Asamoah K, 2005) aiming to salvage what positive remnants of the local culture we could find from the rubble colonialism left. Movies and theatre produced work which featured significant references to local traditional myths and stories, however the taste for foreign culture which was instilled in the not so distant past would re-emerge in the guise of globalisation of content and render quality productions with local content largely invisible.

Paradoxically my work which although stems from this globalized sourcing seeks to refer to the discarded and sometimes imagined pasts to appropriate elements from local settings in a bid to encourage discourse on pertinent issues in the world today. My themes which featured football sought to harness the almost instant popular appeal the game had come to gain. A sought of reference to what the pop artists of 1950's America did so well. The painting and exhibition techniques themselves which were an exploration between traditional academic styles and newer innovated methods also seeking to draw interrogations into contexts and their associations with the various notions on representation they held.

In subsequent chapters a more detailed account with visual accompaniment of my studio processes and how the works cited in this script were made is given. Works of other artists which inspired my own exertions have also been included and spoken about in connection with my own work. The works of some prominent theorists in the field of mythology have also been reviewed in connection with my work.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAME

Of the many theorists that explored the idea of the myth, the work of Carl Gustav Jung most informed my ideas for this study. Jung was born to a priest whom he survived at age 21 perhaps influencing his investigation into how mythology formed and played such a crucial part of religious doctrine. Jung's work on mythology has been compared and contrasted to another prominent theorist and philosopher on psychology, Sigmund Freud.

Several of Jung's publications touched on his position on what the psychology of myth was about though no concrete volume was ever dedicated to the subject. His elaboration on what he himself referred to as the individuation process also influenced how I and in fact many other artists and philosophers whose works are based on mythological themes think through their work. Freud's work on mythology examined the origins of religions and myth however Jung, a more revered figure in the field was interested in the mythologies independent of the religious garb and constant reference to the Oedipus complex and sexual trauma Freud made (Stenudd S, 2006).

As opposed to modern science, mythology was dismissed as an obsolete mode of finding understanding of the world. Jung theorised that myths held very important albeit intangible keys to achieving self-realization. Due to the position of myths as intangibles studies about Myths work was constantly connected to the unconscious workings of the mind. In a quote Jung stated that myths are primordial languages to the psychic processes of the mind. One which no intellectual formula could come near as they were less potent than the expressiveness mythical imagery provided. (Fuller R, 1977)

His work around the understanding of the concept of the hero myth also influenced my thinking in that a common trait of many myths, an archetype, had to overcome some obstacles to reach their goal. This served as the needed inspirational element to aid in the achievement of self-realization. According to Jung, man is on a constant quest to understand himself and myths were clues to guide him on the journey, these clues were however to be deciphered on a relatively individual scale even if the myths were transmitted to whole body groups (Stenudd S, 2006). Myths which are popular among such historically marginalised groupings involve a climax of some sort where self-actualization or heroic deeds was very crucial to the success of the narrative.

In the area of counter appropriation which becomes a medium in my work, the thoughts of African postcolonial theorist, Olu Oguibe influenced me. Oguibe pushed the idea that in the space of art post colonisation, artist should not revert back to traditional modes of expression. He believed in the hegemony of the newer emergent cultures and encouraged artists to embrace, master and then contest the territories that so vehemently excluded their narratives (Oguibe O, 2004).

2.1 PRACTICE REVIEW

My own research is in no way an isolated effort in a world of art where no idea is said to be original. However personally my own work may have been conceived and executed, I must submit that I took great encouragement from a myriad of other artists and their work. My work could be described as an intersection of bits and pieces of incoherent ingredients from the work of other artists. My work however attempts to extend or divert in discourse from my inspiration where the formers' own enquiry was different from what I wanted to articulate with my work. I saw in the

work of the group of artists whose experiments inspired mine, a large percentage of who are African and have been confronted with the issue of representations of their identity while dialoguing with the same idiom I am in conversation with, the use of counter codes from the same canons which dictated elements of their hitherto dictated identities.

In the words of Hassan Musa and the members of the group of artists collectively called the Crystallist Group who worked in Khartoum in the late 1970's and early 1980's, colonialism had inevitably brought artists into the orbit of, and under the imperial view of western art tradition and its legacies, methods and formal procedures which were now some of the possible ingredients with which the contemporary artists from these subjugated cultures could practice (Enwezor O and Okeke-Agulu C, 2009).

Marvin Bartley is an emerging Jamaican artist who uses the medium of appropriation and photography to reconstruct 17th century paintings. Focusing largely on religion and violence and its respective legacies to his native Jamaica, Bartley composes his work using very modern digital photography techniques and post shoot photoshopping to recreate old masterpieces which seek to question what he calls the high eurocentrism in the work he appropriates. Most of his works switch the cast of characters to black, a deviation from the usual European ideal. He also plays with the fashion codes of the paintings he appropriates and replaces them with the bare commoditized flesh of his African models or with clothes contemporaneous to his own time (figure 8).



Figure 8. Marvin Bartley's installation at Mutual gallery.

Before my own work would grow to reflect themes on football an Algerian artist called Adel Abdessemed made a bronze statue he called *Coup de Tete* in commemoration of one popular incident involving a Zinedine Zidane head butting Marco Materazzi during the finals of the FIFA World Cup in 2002. Professional lip readers read the incident and revealed that comments of a racist nature were uttered to Zidane who replied with the infamous head butt which was broadcast on live television all over the world. The giant bronze statue which used to sit outside the Pompidou in France (figure 9) has now been acquired by the Qatar Museum Authority and installed in Qatar. This according to some pundits, though is a direct disregard of the Islamic doctrine of monotheism which governs the Islamic state and frowns on figural representation of the human form, is to boost the nations bid to host one of the world cup events in the near future. This gesture in itself hinted to

me, how the power of the popular sport could attempt a deconstruction of older religious institutions. One attribute my own work and the *Coup de Tete* share in common is the way it celebrates the negative side of the game.



Figure 9. Marco Materazzi with the work he inspired on show at the Pompidou in France.



Figure 10. *The Discobolus of Myron*

Traditional narrative art from Greco-roman historical space often celebrated the heroic aspects of human actions and the athletes and players were heralded as gods

among men as is the case with these modern day footballers. This work aside its implicit reference to football was more appealing to me in the way it subverted the canon of representation in its theme. The incident itself would become myth and be retold due to the magnitude of the personalities involved in the scandal.

Kehinde Wiley is another artist whose work inspired my own. Kehinde's signature portraiture experiments sought to investigate the historical canons of art and representation; a sort of body politicking. In 2010, he embarked on a project commissioned by the fashion brand Puma, titled *Legends of Unity: World Cup 2010* (figures 11, 12 and 13) related to the 2010 FIFA World Cup which involved using portraiture made of some prominent footballers from the African continent which hosted the event for the first time ever. The project sought to present the idea of how people from different parts of the world had finally found a grounds, football, to express equality through art making. His process much like my own which involves revisiting traditional painting styles from the nineteenth century European scene because these styles were the official state styles of the colonisers of the spaces we both hail from. An idea of citizenship of these psychological spaces is invoked here and it's so justified by experiences shared by Kehinde himself of his work always seen as the exertion of an African and then as a homosexual male, something that would have seen him considered 'unfit' to practice years ago.



Figure 11. Kehinde Wiley's *Legends of Unity*, installation view, 2010 at The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing. I



Figure 12. Kehinde Wiley's *Legends of Unity*, installation view, 2010 at The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing II



Figure 13. Kehinde Wiley's *Unity*. Oil on canvas. 2010

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 DIARY; STUDIO PROCESS AND EXPERIMENTS

The process of making such art has transformed and has been extensively developed since the conception of the rather canonical methodologies for making paintings in the traditional academic sense. Traditionally, artists had to graduate from the mastery of the use of one medium considered lower to the use of the next higher ranked medium. This and other ideals of hierarchies have been engaged by the gestures and philosophies of artist in the recent past.

As Thomas McEvilley aptly put it, figurative work today is if anything, like much of the work of others artists' of the twentieth century who returned to the use of figuration in their work, a renunciatory gesture (Enwezor O and Okeke-Agulu C, 2009). "The use of figuration was not necessarily an affirmation or visual manifestation of the western ideas of humanism". I had this quote written down on the wall of my studio space as a reminder to diligently pursue a dialect which was fast becoming vilified at its mere sight among the audiences I encountered. I needed to constantly remind myself of what I was about.

During my early experimentation with this medium I used the device of pun to make work dialoguing with some of the derivations of the traditional narrative art genre. In my estimation this wouldn't have been necessary but the medium had a profound effect on how many other cultures saw themselves represented. The professed universality of such work posed several problems which I found interesting in the way I conceived my own work. Images from traditional academic art were reproduced extensively and spread across the world via the press and print medium. Such work which often would capture religious scenes of a certain denomination had influences on how the people who were colonized by these religions formed their

identity within the predominant world view. A current icon that appeared in such painting for instance was the *putti*.



Figure 14. William Adolphe Bouguereau. *Our Lady of the Angels* (detail). Oil on canvas.

1889



Figure 15. William Adolph Bouguerau. *Birth of Venus* (detail). Oil on canvas. 1879.

These little winged children were depicted in narrative scenes and either represented the presence of the heavens or the supernatural or could also represent earthly or humane pleasure depending on the general theme for the work they were captured in. After investigating the meaning of the idiom I came to its Italian root to mean ‘little men’. These little winged men were captured in some lovable pose with their little arrows and bows flying around or causing some mischief in the scenes. I transported that representation to the way little men from Africa were sometimes portrayed in the mainstream news. After several wars over government, politics and the management of the natural mineral wealth of the continent have been fought, many of the little

men in such affected regions have taken on the identity of soldiers of fortune. My inspiration for some of these early experiments came from the representations in Hollywood movies such as Edward Zwick's 2006 thriller *Blood Diamond* advertised by the poster shown in figure 16.

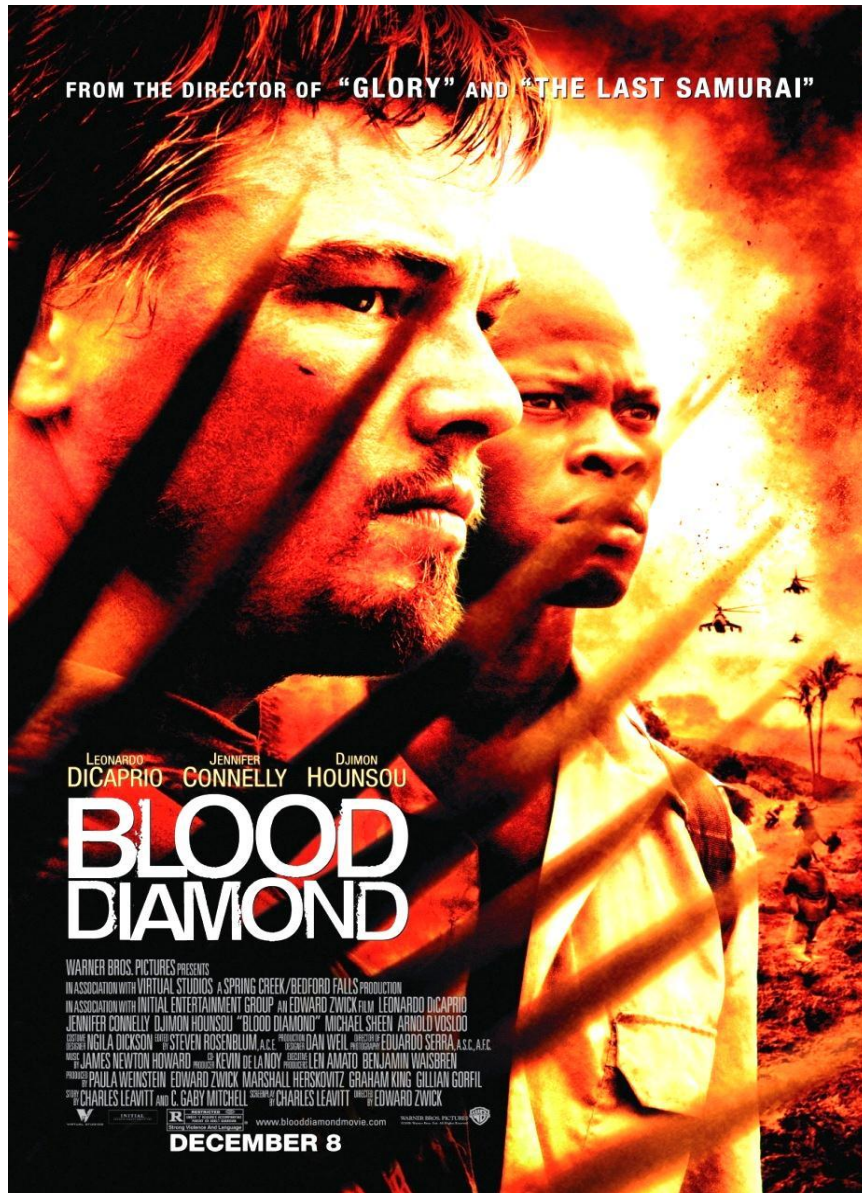


Figure 16. Advertisement poster for Edward Zwick's *Blood Diamond*.

The plot of the movie follows the story of a European mercenary who became a top smuggler in Sierra Leone's post 1990's illegal diamond mining industry. Little boys

and girls from the war zone became properties of a militant liberation army and were depicted as effective and gruesome killers as their criminal superiors. This example is only one among a larger pool of representational material like the tabloid news where Africa's 'putti' were not shown in the best light. Some of my initial sketches crossed the identities of the little men from the two cultures in the way they were represented, replacing the harmless looking bows and arrows with the automatic rifles these two different groups were depicted to wield. Some of these sketches and studies I made were to be made into small images and circulated via the internet and social media where most of the negative reportage was also spread. I supported the view that the emergence of the internet and its connections with the art establishment offered newer and different ways to consume art.



Plate 1. Appropriated 'putti' from a Bouguereau with an automatic rifle



Plate 2. Experiments with puns on names of African 'little man' (putto) and angels I



Plate 3. Experiments with puns on names of African 'little man' (putto) and angels II



Plate 4. Experiments with puns on names of African 'little man' (putto) and angels

III

I have always employed the use of acrylic paints in my practice as it lends itself well to both oil and water colour techniques. Acrylics, culturally and historically represented a shift from more traditional tastes in art making to more modernized industrial kinds. Born from the industrialization boom in America, acrylics were not formally accepted in the Art space till much of the work of American pop artists were made from it. This spirit of revolutionarized art making influenced my creative process and thus I settled for acrylics as my main choice of painting medium. Oil was traditionally the medium of choice for such paintings and required that artists use several layers of glazes of the medium when painting to ensure the durability and optimum longevity of the medium. My use of acrylics however didn't follow formalized techniques as durability and permanence was not highest on my ranked list of priorities. I was more interested in the powerful presence of my images. And I also learned to paint with speed as distortions in my forms also introduced new points of interest. Painting on canvas however did limit how my work could be experienced and taking inspiration from a cut out I encountered at a fuel filling station in Accra my attention once again shifted to looking into cut outs.



Figure 17. Cut out man as advertisement at a car mechanic shop at Osu in Accra.

Traditional systems have always been deconstructed by newer societies when they felt their ideals for life were not reflected in these systems. New ideologies could expand and build on older ones or consume them wholly if they contradicted at critical intersections as has been the story of the art movements in the past. What then started for me as miniature cut outs soon developed to life-sized and larger figures. Taking inspiration from the cut out from the filling station which also apparently was a feature in many big supermarkets as an advertisement tool, I started to make my paintings in mimicry of the commercial object. The comic book, posters and commercial displays and means of production in modern day Ghanaian life then, became the muse for some of my art production.



Figure 18. Plywood cut out dummies used as advertisement by a bank at a garden function in Accra.

My wood cut out idea was also influenced by plywood dummies which were in my mother's possession in my formative years as a child. My mother was a seamstress professionally and before the advent of the modern kind of three dimensional manikins, petty seamstresses like her displayed their wares on cut out plywood figures (figure 19).



Figure 19. My mother and her plywood cut out fashion dummies

These figures were named and were often my playthings and partners in conversation. I later encountered cut outs like these again from some books on American culture where pages had motifs to be cut out and used as dress up dolls. Other samples came from fashion magazines, some of which I collected and used as motivational material for my research.

With all these ideas and even more daring expressions of recent times in mind, exploring the cut out was relatively easier for me, I still however appropriated

traditional techniques of easel painting. My earlier paintings on canvas were either cut up and pasted to ply wood boards or my paintings were done directly on the boards' surface. I also experimented with newsprint as a potential support. I was interested in the idea of how the news helped to form peoples thinking and in one of my early works I tried to incorporate actual newspapers. The news and its mode of circulation, the way it impacted heavily on how the discourses on prevalent issues were formed and how the news material itself went on to form archives of history began to interest me. I often thought of how my work could engage the power relations involved in the shaping of peoples thought patterns much like the traditional newspaper did if I had my own brand of paper with my own version of the news. The traditional news has always come under scrutiny for allegations of being politically tainted in nature and being a propagandist tool.

In an experiment to have my own papers printed, I came by a huge quantity of plain news print sheets. These came to good use when I started pasting them to the plywood boards I worked with. This served as a substitute to the traditional priming and sizing procedures but made my work all the more delicate as outdoor exhibits meant I had to watch out for the rain lest my work be soaked and probably destroyed. My work has now had to be mended carefully in between shows.

For some of my experiments, I employed the use of live models. Traditionally these models would pose for lengthy hours and be painted in timed sessions from life or detailed studies made as notes but that technique was laborious and strongly connected to skilling in the production of art which was an issue I constantly had to deal with. It was one of the attributes of the traditional genre and its political implications meant I had to be witty in the way it could be traced to my work. I looked for a more impulsive approach to my paintings and employed the use of

photography to capture poses of my models from which I painted. In the instances where I had to appropriate elements like poses from popular work which served as inspiration to me, I posed models in the requisite way and took my photographs. I had to play the role of the model in some of my own work. This was done sometimes to enhance the content of these works or simply because live models were not easy to come by.

I often had to move my work between studios to afford me the most suitable conditions for working. My processes of sketching and cutting, wrapping up with newsprint which became my substitute for traditional priming and then drawing and painting were sometimes executed in different places.

To test display methods, I usually made sketches of proposed sites with my work set up in envisioned modes or I photoshopped images of my work into actual photographs I obtained of exhibition venues.

I however worked with a lot of improvisation as the space sometimes allotted to me and my work had to be cleverly manoeuvred around to enable suitable setting up. Initial models were drawn up to be implemented so my work could actually stand freely as individual units as was the case in many supermarkets and other venues where commercial wood and cardboard cut outs were used (figures 17, 18 and 19), however improvisation with the fishing twine was adopted as the earlier option was a strain on the budgets allocated for projects sometimes.

3.1 PHOTOGRAPHIC DIARY

The following set of images serve as a photographic diary of some of my tangibly recordable production process.



Plate 7. Studio and set up process I



Plate 8. Cutting forms out with a jig saw in the studio



Plate 9. Cutting forms out with a jig saw with the help of a volunteer.



Plate 10. A cut out form leaning against the wall



Plate 11. Wrapping the wood piece with newsprint sheets.



Plate 12. Allowing a wrapped cut out to cure.



Plate 13. Wrapping on the reverse side with glue solution.



Plate 14. Initial washes for subsequent painting.

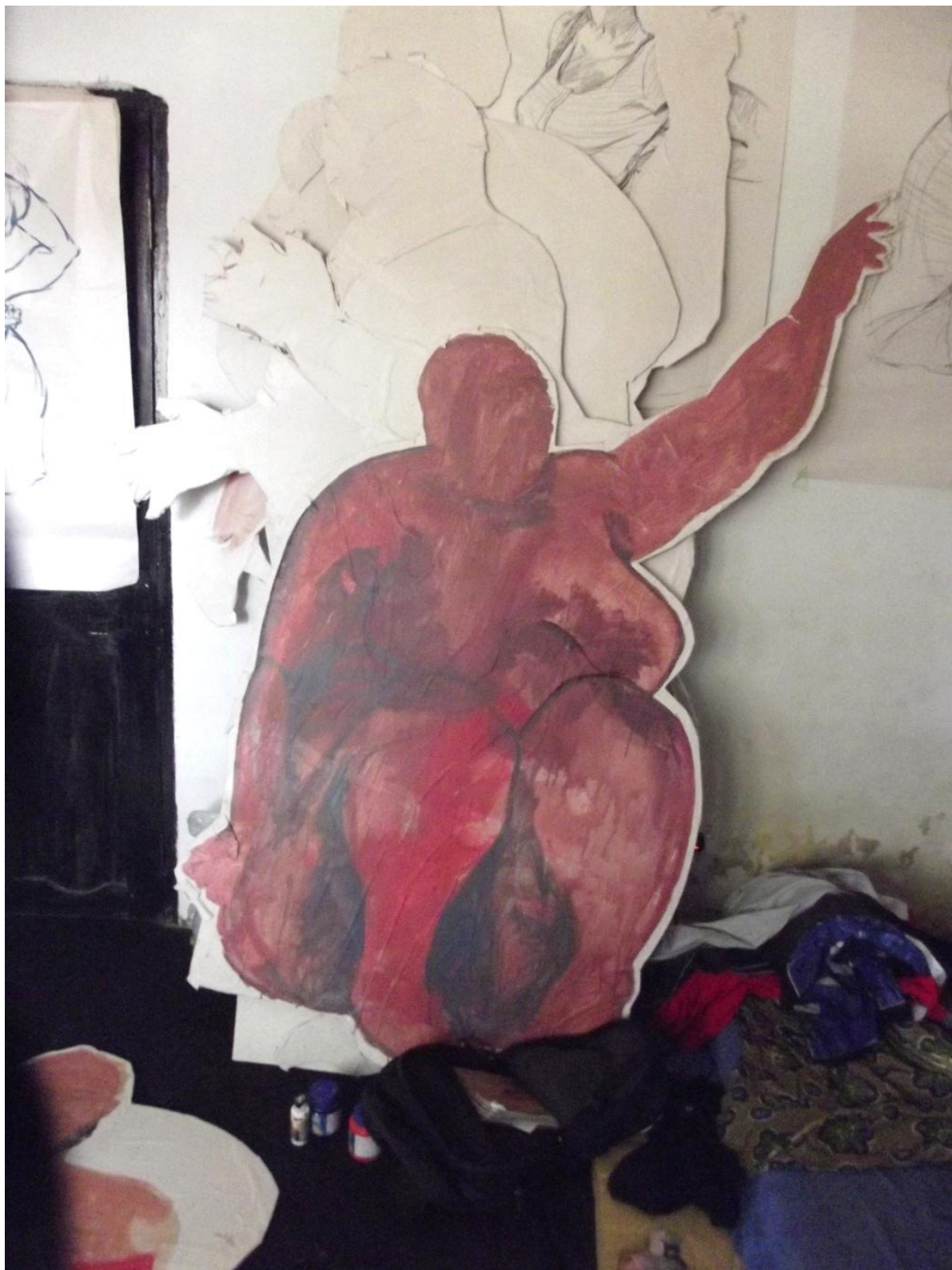


Plate 15. A figure forming during the painting process



Plate 16. Forms revealing in the painting process

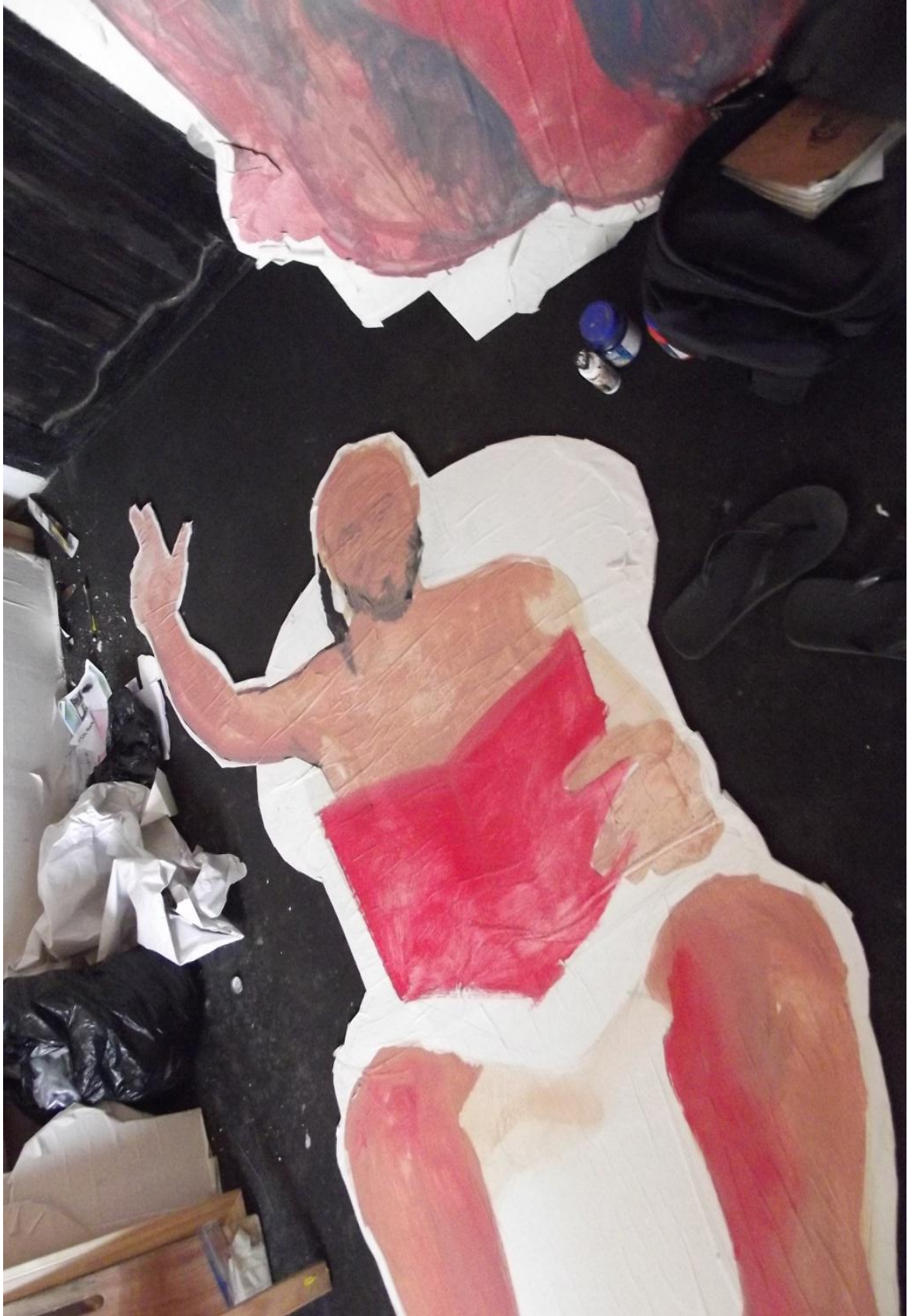


Plate 17. The size of the pieces meant I had to paint on the floor sometimes

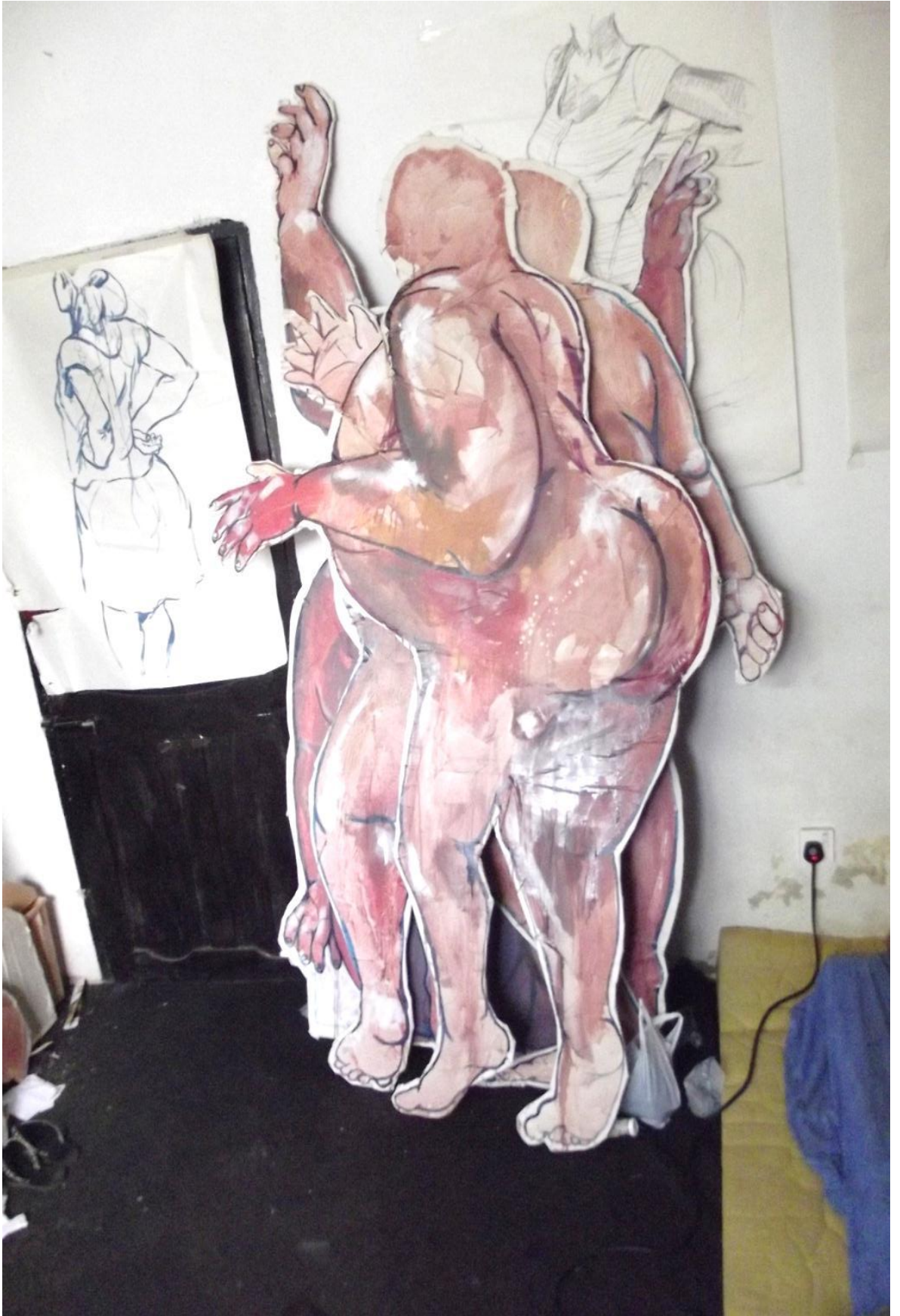


Plate 18. A shot of the alternate views of the work.



Plate 19. Moving the pieces to an exhibition site.



Plate 20. A complete set ready for hanging



Plate 21. Stringing up my pieces

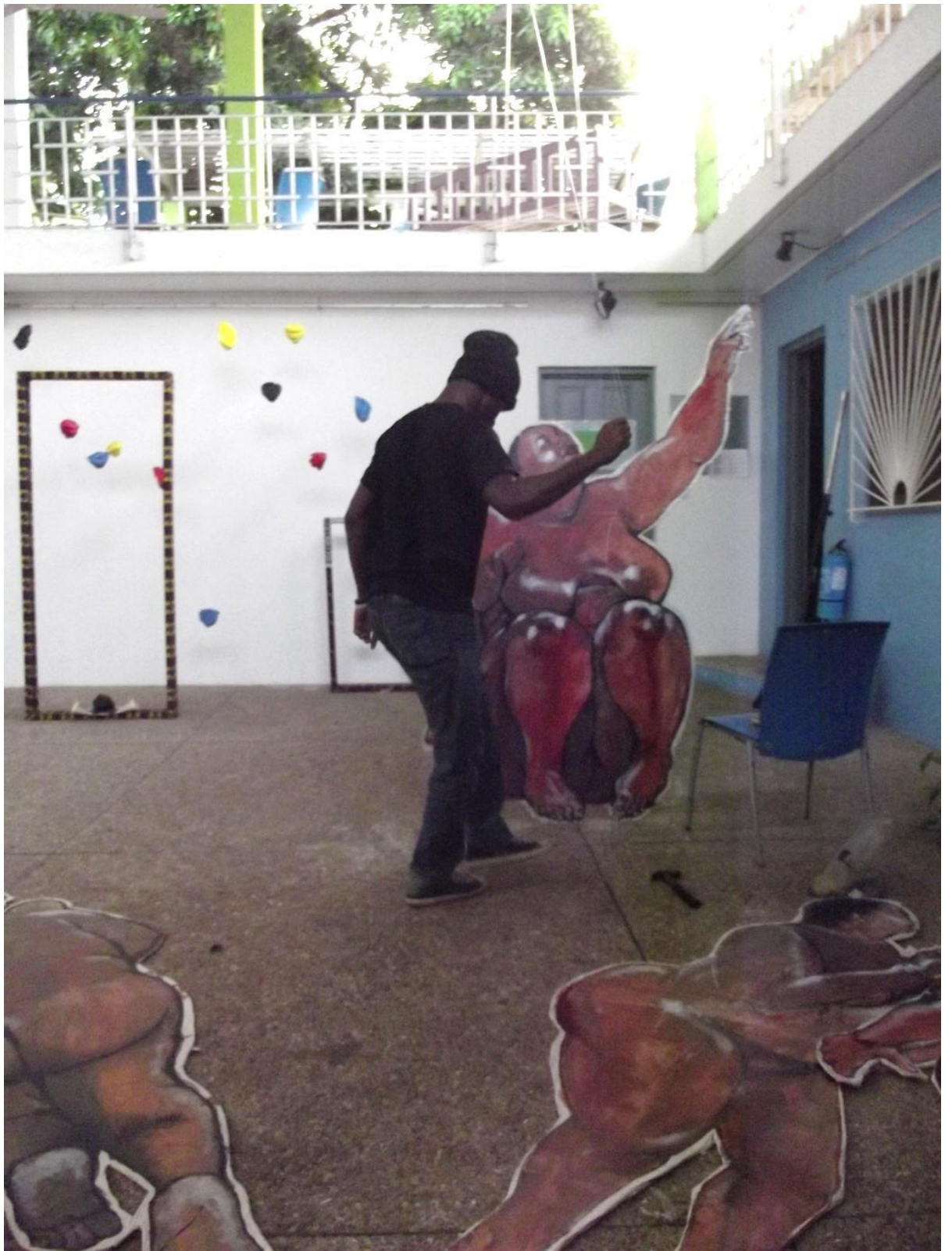


Plate 22. Adjusting a piece to find a balance



Plate 23. Experimenting with interlocking parts of the individual pieces



Plate 24. 'Les undesirables ?'

3.2 EXHIBITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

My more recent work which took the form of plywood and flat board cut outs introduced me to the experience of having to set up work which I would technically still classify as paintings, in such ways that brought means of experiencing my work in ways traditional paintings would not have afforded the audience. It opened me up to the display techniques employed in the construction of tableaux. Staged dummies and sometimes even live human beings posed on set like would be done in a theatrical presentation; lit or otherwise to introduce the effects of the actual environment and also to introduce various moods to the set up. Yinka Shonibare MBE whose typical work is displayed in figure 20 and Geoffrey Farmer in figure 21 are some artists whose use of this display method influenced my work. My work however offered more viewpoints depending on where the audience viewed from.



Figure 20. Installation view of Yinka Shonibare's *Jardin d'Amour* (2007) depicting the use of the tableau format.



Figure 21. A Geoffrey Farmer on display. *Leaves of Grass* at Documenta 13.

A show in December of 2013 afforded me the first chance to professionally exhibit my work. The response from the show would go on to further shape my enquiry. A group of nine artists including Jeremiah Quarshie, Bernard Akoi Jackson, Serge Attukwei Clottey, El Carna, Kelvin Haizel, Fatric Bewong, Constance Swaniker, Nii Odzenma and I decided to make work and show it on the theme 'Muses'. After several discussions which were held over phone conversation and meetings during studio visits I settled on the central idea of representation of women in the classical narrative art genre. A muse had been described as the source of inspiration for an artist and where as this inspiration could come from a myriad of ways the definition which elected women as subjects and men as artist was the most striking to me. The art world had been presented violently as a masculine led space. The production scene was male dictated and the subjected scene was the position of the objectified

feminine. Perhaps that was why the nude female body was one the most popular subject matters in classical painting tradition.

The kind of feminine body too which was represented in such art was of the slender, fair by large, and European model. Where a body short of these standards was depicted, it was when the subject was either slaving to the whims of a more preferred kind, or simply performing some derogatory act. Even though the whole concept of the female body being objectified in art would become the main subject of scrutiny for the Guerrilla Girls in a later period, I think there were still layers to their enquiry (Kidd D, 2010). This idea passed on to film after photography and the Eurocentric male gaze would continue to push the agenda as the onus fell on these two latter art forms as the primary pictorially dominated and mass produced genres.

The works presented in the show commented on various ideas of what the word muse meant to each artist in question and also commented inventively on each other. My work looked to pose questions like ‘why are all the desirable women portrayed in popular culture of a certain body kind?, a certain race, captured in a certain mannerism, why are the yardsticks set so high that they do not reflect our experience of the everyday world so much so that the body has to be modified or improved to fit what society prescribed or considered as fit?’

My work captured three over sized women reaching to a man who was seated on a throne draped in a cloth covering his groins and with an open red book in his hand. His right hand was raised above his head with index and middle fingers posed like a gun. This pose was appropriated from some popular depictions of great male colonizers of history, notable among them are the Christian Jesus Christ, depicted with his right hand in this pose on many calendars that populate the homes and office walls in Accra and Kumasi where I live and practice and Napoleon Bonaparte as

captured by Ingres in his famous 1806 portrait of the monarch titled Napoleon I on his Imperial Throne presumably alluding to the divine power ascribed to the subject in the first example stated above. The image or ideologies propounded by these men have served as instruments which have been used to colonize various groups of people at various points in time. The character of the male figure in my work was posed for by Ghanaian hip hop artist Wanlov the Kubolor. The inclusion of his character was ironic to the commentary the work was making as his own work as an artist stands as a critique of the political and socio-economic legacies left by the work of the men he was being posed like. The inclusion of his character also gave the work some popular appeal, either pleasant or otherwise. It gave the audience an interesting point from which to enter and initiate dialogues about the work. Many wondered why such a controversial character would be included in something so 'innocent' as a painting. But these little tensions made the project more successful in the way it generated new and unforeseen interests.

The red book incorporated in the work was borrowed from the idea of The Little Red Book of Zedong. A little popular book having the reputation of being the second most published in the world next to the Christian Bible; it was used by Mao Zedong, a powerful leader in China's history to propagate his ideas of communism. China had been a very conservative civilization and thus the effort, with the help of the red book to transform its ideological framework was very immense. I saw in my work, a book of ideals being read by the male figure and used as a new measure for progress as one also containing the ideals of certain elitist kind which these undesired women were struggling to match up to.

The individual wood cut outs were strung up to the ceiling and to other lines purposely installed to serve as hanging devices for the work. These were made from

fishing twines and without careful observation gave off the illusion of the paintings being free standing and even suspending in thin air. This kind of set up, with larger than life figures gave the audience an experience of an actual space in the painting, unlike those visually created only with classical devices as visual perspective or foreshortening. The audience could enter the work and walk through it which was one of the main ideas I wanted to experiment with when my research work began. This afforded the audience multiple points of view as the paintings showed corresponding views from either front or back of the flat wood cut outs.

The site where this work was exhibited was also ironically adding a new context by which the work could be understood. The various show spaces in the venue had been allocated to the participating artists before my work physically got to the venue. Due to the exhibition models I had presented and discussed earlier with the rest of the organizing team I was allotted an open space in the rear end of the exhibition space made available. One had to walk all the way into the show to encounter my work. The space was originally a storey floor with the a section of the first level above the ground floor removed to make the rest of the untouched floor circling the whole area act as a gallery overlooking the ground. One could climb up and see the work from above in a view different from that which was experienced by the audience below. The venue, the Goethe Institut is a German cultural centre in Accra, located in Cantonments near the National Film and Television Institute. It was for me, a little bit of Germany in Ghana. And my allotted space had a bold label which read the name and displayed the logo of the institution. We were not permitted to make any major alterations to the space as it served normal working purposes in the day and only opened up to our exhibition audience after work in the evenings. The presence of Germany in the space was reminiscent of the part Adolf Hitler's Germany played

in the dictation of the direction of painting and art in general making connections to philosophies of painting which were akin to the kind I was investigating for my research work.

My painting exhibited there at the time was not named and was labelled as *Untitled*. Another painting I showed at the venue during the event was one I called “M and J”. This was commentary on the popular classical subject of the Madonna and child theme (figure 14). This was a religious subject as it was the order of the day in the Renaissance to use narrative painting for religious indoctrination after the Reformation epoch in European history. Several different versions of this subject were made by several different artists over a vast period of time spread over a span sometimes differing each other by hundreds of years. And though more recently artists who have worked in the similar spirit to mine have revolutionarized this subject to reflect the newer opinions towards the popular theme mine also presented an angle which was innovative in its paradoxical subtle provocation and denial of what it stood for. The classical Madonna was always depicted as a lowly and humble woman, physically beautiful according to the classical canons and shown to have less presence in the space as compared to the infant she carried that was barely of speaking age. Without the depiction of any speech action the baby was clearly more eloquent and bold looking than his mother.

Perhaps these codes reflected what that society prescribed to the woman as acceptable codes of behaviour for her to express. My version which was a painted wood cut out depicted an oversized woman of African descent staring straight at the audience, a gaze the classical Madonna wouldn't depict, and bearing on her right shoulder a golden painted cut out of the small English letter ‘j’. My woman, named M because the model is actually named Mary, is nude but showing no signs of

shyness in the way she gazes at her audience and is shown in the pose of someone levitating, perhaps even ascending into the heavens. The effect there would be more explicit with the work seen in the conceived exhibition format of it being hanged in the air by the twines. Members of the audience alluded the iconography to the more traditional one borrowed from the classical Madonna and child though I would cynically deny it as a mere painting of a woman who inspired my work alas, that was my muse.



Plate 25. Posterior view of 'Les undesirables?'



Plate 26 . Under set light and reaching



Plate 27. Installation view of work at Goethe Institut (detail view), 2012



Plate 28. Discussing the work with a section of the audience I



Plate 29. We were all beneath the King and his red book.



Plate 30. Discussing the work with a section of the audience II



Plate 31. The mother by the German name



Plate 32. A full view of the tableaux set

At the 2014 edition of the Accra Dot Alt Chalewote Street Art Festival I showed another set of my paintings. The show which is at its third edition is organized by the Accra Dot Alt team and their organizing partners to commemorate the celebration of the annual Homowo festival in the Ga Mashie traditional area in Accra. It brings

together all kinds of artists, national and international to have a two day massive showcase on the John Evans Atta Mills high street in Accra. The venue for the show is close to the shores of the southern eastern coasts of Ghana where the predominant Ga speaking fisher folk live. At this edition the organizers decided to incorporate some more critical art exhibitions into the program extending the usual fun fair to have some art driven agenda set in the many cultural and historical sites that abound the venue.

Due to the nature of my work and spaces available, I was allotted an open space at the Brazil House most ideal off all the spaces available, for the display of my work. The Brazil House which was off the main high street serves as a cultural home to many Brazilians and Africans in the Diaspora. The venue which houses a photographic museum and archived documents also served as the venue for some workshops held during the event. The place is rich with Ghanaian and Brazilian history and records of how the two countries have married their cultures. All this and the just ended football World Cup in Brazil about a month to the show came together to set the mood for showing my painting I called *Race II*.



Plate 33. Portrait heads of a section of my footballers.



Plate 34. Setting up in Jamestown in Accra, 2014 I.



Plate 35. Setting up in Jamestown in Accra, 2014 II.



Plate 36. Setting up in Jamestown in Accra, 2014 III.



Plate 37. Installation view of *Race 11*. 2014 I

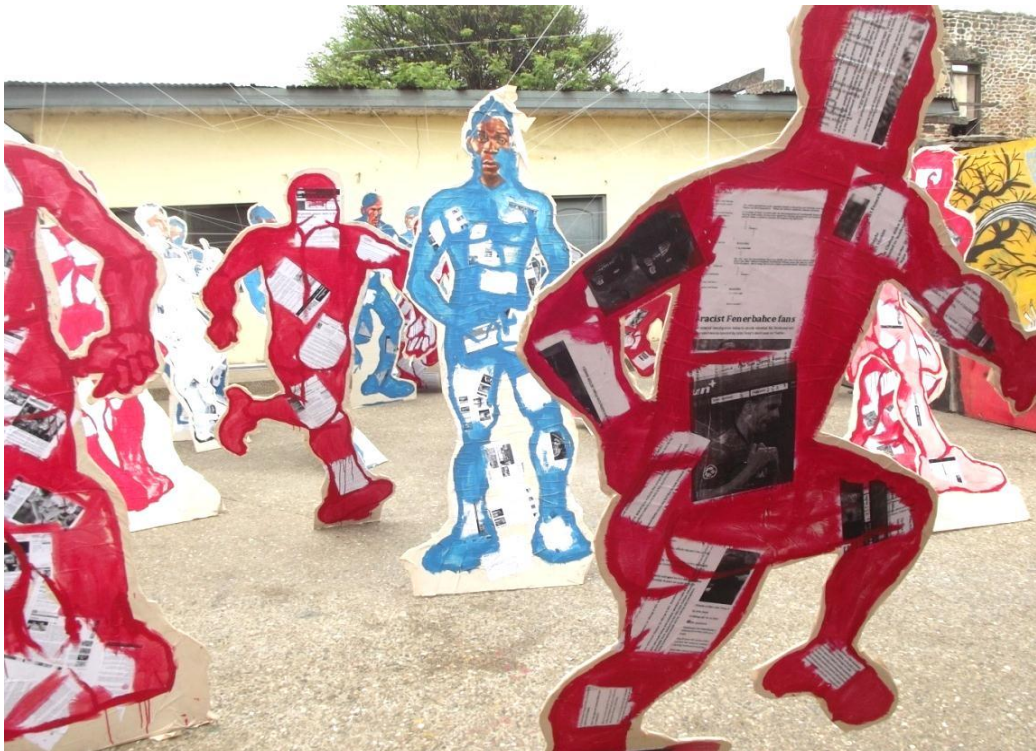


Plate 38. Installation view of *Race 11*. 2014 II

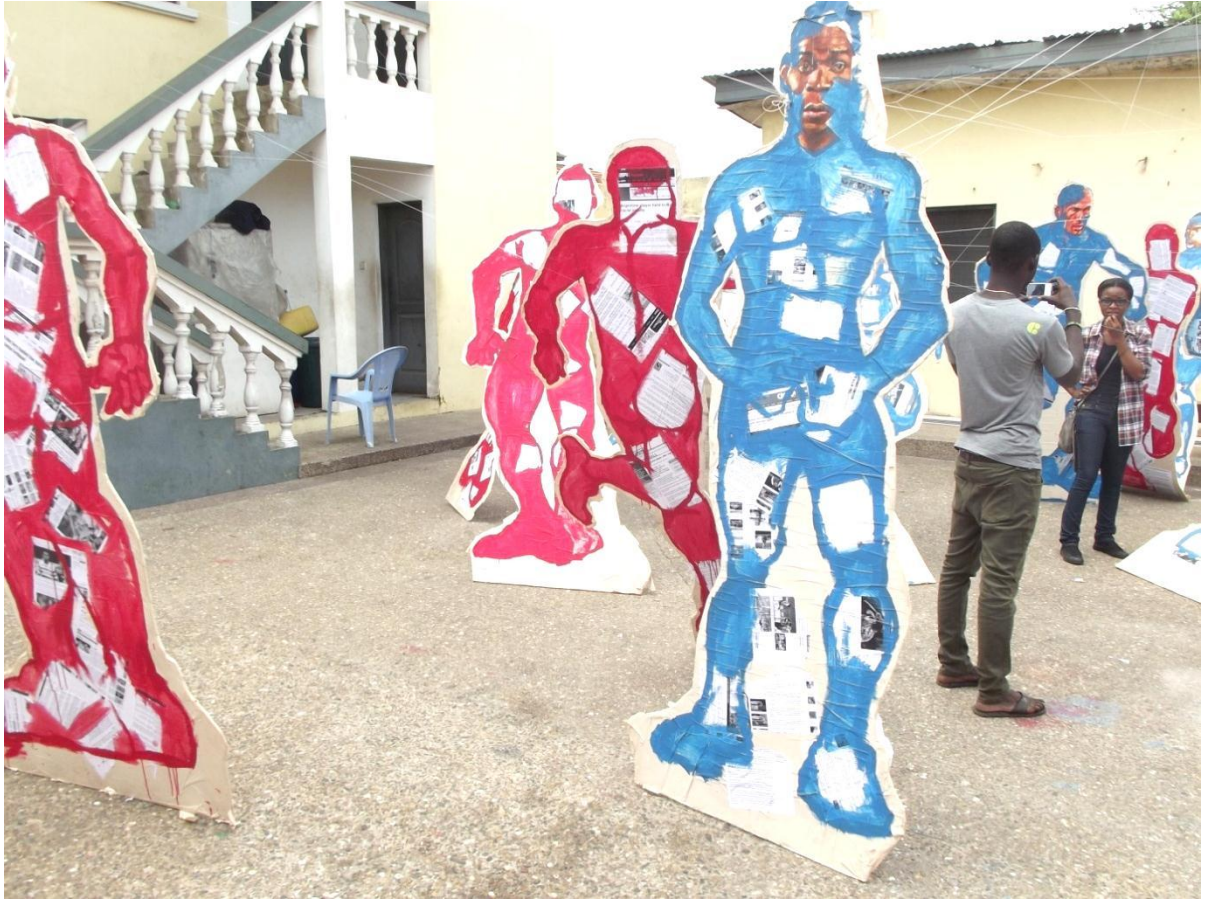


Plate 39. A section of the audience viewing the work



Plate 40 . Detail view of *Race II*, Jamestown. 2014



Plate 41. A section of the audience interacting with the work.



Plate 42. Some members of the audience reading the news clippings



Plate. 43. Engaging in some of the discussions arising



Plate 44. Answering questions from the audience



Plate 45. A panoramic view of the set up

Every year after major footballing competitions, fantasy teams are drawn up, consisting of players from different clubs or countries, depending on the nature of the competition and are put in such teams that probably never would even play together. This is done to honour the outstanding performers during the tournaments. This venerating gesture mimicked one that was made during the height of narrative art and often unlike my work, showcased the beautiful side of sports; a romantic view which did not capture the much more negative aspects of the game which make headlines every other weekend.

Football has undoubtedly grown into the biggest sport in the world. Players, administrators and other stake holders in the game rake in financial benefits periodically in the region of millions. From endorsement deals to broadcast franchises, sale of fan paraphernalia, bet placements and running of general businesses related in any way to the game all record rises in profit margins during footballing season. Football like some fans claim has become a religion and like every other human endeavour, it breeds room for negative activity which in no small way inspired my work. One of the major issues FIFA, the world game's governing body has battled with is that of discrimination on and off the field of play involving

footballers, fans, officials and all other players in the sport. Being a fan and former player of the game and also seeing how classical narrative painting reeked of discrimination in its representations I decided to marry the two fields and appropriate elements from each other to make commentary on some of the popular incidents of discrimination. In my work I drew up two fantasy teams from different eras and from different football association leagues to compete in a match. My selection process was based largely on these criteria; the player had to be one to fit or play well in the position I assigned to him as would be done by a manager in real life, he had to have been labelled a culprit or victim of discriminatory behaviour toward an opponent before or a fan or an official and this incident should have been reported by the press. I particularly focused on the press coverage because I see the press as one of the major writers and bearers of history today. Stories captured as news go to a large extent to form what becomes history especially in the way the news is circulated today. Football news concerning discrimination has made headlines in many major news papers and with the newer trend of press houses spreading their news online via the internet stories could go viral within a matter of minutes after publication.

One would ask, do you trust the news? What if reportage is twisted to suit political ambitions like it has always been? These questions fuelled my interest rather than deter them as many footballers have rather come out to openly deny some of the allegations levelled against them and the penalties therein placed on them for discriminatory conduct. The idea of the authenticity or otherwise of such reportage also interested me. I picked stories from certain big press houses covering the events where any footballer I picked would be justified his position in my teams. Some of these stories came from popular names as BBC Sports, CNN, Mirror, Mail Online,

The Guardian and The Independent to name a few. These press houses though may have their offices concentrated in a certain geographical boundary did have their eyes set on incidents in the game worldwide and moreover many other smaller news agencies made their stories in referrals to what these major houses reported.



Plate 46 . A single piece from the group painting showing the pasted news stories.

I made my painting using news clips from these press houses pasted on the bodies of the footballers. Each news clip captures the episode where a particular player might

have had involvement with these discriminatory issues. These stories which were culled off the internet and thus came as soft copy materials were printed on paper to enable the pasting to be done on the ply wood cut outs. Another idea that greatly influenced this work was a television commercial for Chelsea football clubs 2012/2013 playing kits. This commercial, shot for their kit sponsors Adidas, featured some of the key footballers of the club captured in some classical heroic poses and splashed with blue paint. The idea was reminiscent of the James Cameron movie, *Avatar*; Pandora's Box, which also had themes of discrimination and exploitation. Due to the attributes of some pop art elements I wanted my work to have, I appropriated ideas from these commercials into how I executed my work. I did not want to design jerseys which could end up implicating certain sports equipment manufacturers in my agenda so I mimicked the effect of splashing paint on my figures. The splashed paint contained collages of the news features and just a part of the players faces showed for identification.

There were two teams identifiable by the use of two distinct colours; blue for victims and red for culprits. A referee was added who was painted white. The cut outs were strung to lines made from fishing twine. The players were positioned according to the roles they played in real life matches from goal keepers to strikers. Members of the blue team included Carlos Iddriss Kameni, Ashley Cole, Patrice Evra, Emmanuel Eboue, Kevin Prince-Boateng, Zinedine Zidane, Sulley Muntari, Mario Balotelli, Didier Drogba and Opong Weah. The red team included Roman Weidenfeller, Rio Ferdinand, George Costa, John Terry, Pepe, Lex Immers, Marco Materazzi, Leandro Desabato, Luis Suarez, Emre Belozoglu and Kevin Grosskeutz. All these footballers could arguably be called the best in their positions of play and have been involved in one way or another in news scandals involving racism and other forms of

discrimination. References for this work came from photographs of the various players culled from the internet and some posed for by models which were recorded using photography and subsequently painted. The work which was conceived initially to be on a very huge canvas ended up as wood cut outs and earlier portions which had already been painted on canvas traditionally were cut up to be finished as wood cut outs.

RACE 11 rematch

A few months after the show at Chale Wote 14, I showed the piece again in Kumasi in the studios of the Painting and Sculpture department. This was mainly to have some of my work critiqued in person by my professors and supervisors. As it were most of my prior shows were held off the premises of the college and even though most of the work could be accessed via social media the physical presence of the work was not experienced by many based in the Kumasi environs.



Plate 47. A close up shot of a member of my red team



Plate 48. Frozen athletic energy



Plate 49. A portrait of Drogba, a member of my blue team.



Plate 50. A frozen charging Weah.



Plate 51. Penetrative view point



Plate 52. A panoramic view across I



Plate 53. A panoramic view across II



Plate 54. Portraits of Zinedine Zidane and Kevin Prince Boateng, ambassador for FIFA

anti discrimination programmes.



Plate 55. Roman Weidenfeller of Germany, goalie for the red team.

My work was presented as a depiction of a whole match and the selection of players and theme was not to particularly say discrimination in football was good or bad, I tried to take a neutral stand on the matter as much as I possibly. After all FIFA has sanctions they believe would eventually eradicate the incidence of racist actions. Several conferences are held to discuss the issue and new laws for punishment are discussed. Footballers are even made to read out messages condemning discrimination in the game. It would however be rather unreal to see the game played in a totally clean manner.

One could only imagine the epic magnitude such a match would have if it was ever played in real life. It could however be feasible to experience this event in one of the EA Sports simulation video game adaptations of the sport.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DISCUSSION OF OUTCOMES/ ANALYSIS

My earlier experiments were for me, take-off points to explore and make more specific strides in the choosing of my themes and of technique for making my work and exhibiting them. My work grew through time as I narrowed down my theme to reflect specifically football related issues. One thing I wanted to avoid however was fixating so much on a particular theme that I couldn't be flexible enough to explore something different when I lost interest or exhausted my ideas. I always knew I wanted to work with mythological subjects though, due to the interesting ways it served as a marker of our identity. I measured my progress mainly by the nature of the dialogue my work encouraged with the various kinds of audiences it was presented to.

Too often I had to give crash courses to the larger audience on the histories of traditional academic painting and its legacy of exclusivity before we could begin deliberating on the issues my work were trying to discuss. This was very educative for both myself and my audience as I saw that as one of the ways art exhibitions stood to produce knowledge. One wouldn't have to wait till books were published

The myths I used as themes were chosen to attempt a fostering of a stronger sense of identity among my audiences. The display modes were also intentionally employed in another attempt to subvert the classical ones associated with such narrative work and its associations and context.

Some of the more positive responses I received from sections of my audience when I showed 'race 11' were those of funny nostalgic moments on how some of the discriminatory actions exhibited by various characters in the work took place. It made a good case for a requisitioning of how race issues were handled by world

ruling bodies like FIFA. I would say it also extended the experience of the space ‘*Coup de Tete*’ for instance, created. Whereas the former was presented in more traditional sculptural forms, my work was more of an immersive one. The audience had the chance to walk through and be recorded as part of the display through photographic recording. An even more stronger case could be presented if the subject was extended into the medium of popular film on the proverbial big screen as such a medium was by far more reaching than the even supposed open space of contemporary art.

In the area of the level of skilled labour employed in the conception and exhibition of my work, it drifted with time further away from the normalised traditions than the experiments of Kehinde. Some of my influences warranted my almost total disregard for the treatment of carefully delineated human forms but that was okay for me as at some points too I was more interested in the conceptual debates emerging at having my work presented.

4.1 SUMMARY OF CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project for me is at its best a testing of interesting pointers which open up windows and doors for possible future work to be done. Traditional mythologies from a former colonial space like Ghana have become nothing more than shameful fantasy episodes which should be discarded to enable a seamless integration into modern or as I would put it foreign neo-colonial society. More work can be done to bring more traditional codes to the fore front of cultural production again.

Some mythologies can be reconfigured to reflect positive modern elements as in urban legends and used as the aids to reconfigure people’s consciousness about their identities. As far as issues on racial imbalance come into contention one needs to

look no further past occurrences in the United States in 2014 and 2015 of seemingly racially motivated and targeted police brutalities. Some of these positive myths can be adopted by the victimised groups to address issues of their identity and survival of their cultures.

Understanding the associations and meanings of various art making technologies would also help to further question and deconstruct where necessary, insensitive ideologies about mankind. The readings I made into the various techniques and strategies I employed in this research is by no means a definite or total deconstruction and so further work could be done in that light too.

All of art to me is like a game of trying to have and hold people's attention so you can share your opinions on matters with them with the help of your work. Without having to be kitschy in my choices I fell on football at times to widen my audience because of the work its managers are constantly doing to spread it out to the whole world. In future experiments I would like to employ the use of the short movie or film genre to share my ideas and solicit public interactivity due to the more recognizable nature of such media among the audience I have as my immediate target. This strategy could cut the usual long lecture I have to give on traditional academic painting to lead people into the starting points of my work.

If art as we know it today is inspired by the collective or individual action of mankind then without being laboriously moral I think art owes mankind a fair share of the knowledge it reveals and produces through its sensitive research. The way the exhibition space encourages dialogue between the audience makes room for knowledge sharing like no other and I only hope some of the ideas generated and discussed in my spaces and possibilities imagined would go a long way to have more than a temporal sensational effect on the members of the audience I had.

CHAPTER FIVE

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