

**LIFE AND WORKS OF SELECTED PRACTISING GHANAIAN FEMALE  
PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS**

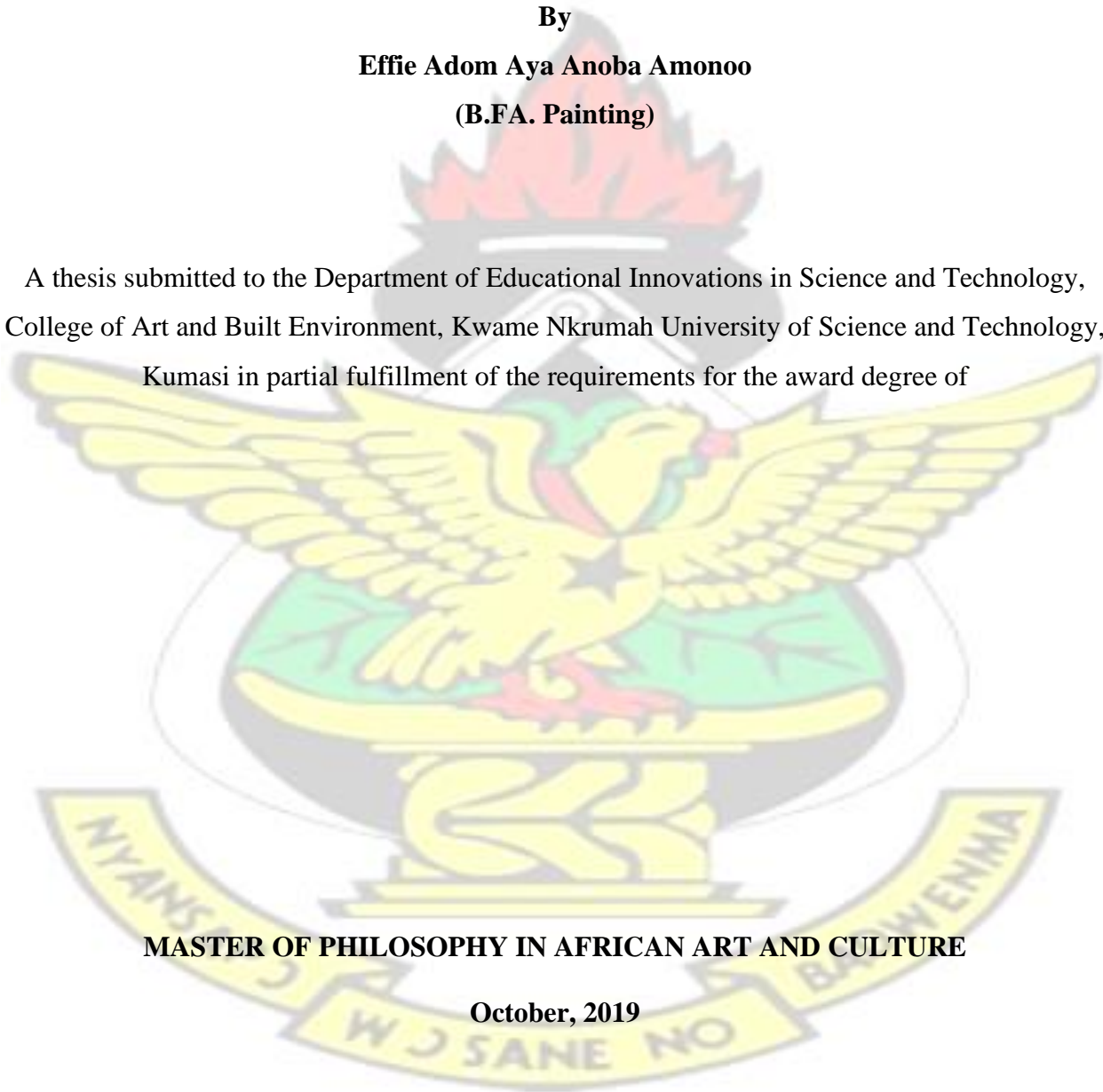
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## ABSTRACT

Women have been and continue to be integral to the institution of art, however, from time immemorial, only a small sample of women found their way into the tales of the greatest artists. Over the years, the painting and sculpture industry has seen very few practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. Also the few who practise as artists are not able to forge ahead and make waves like their male counterparts. Most literature on the painting and sculpture practise in Ghana is therefore centered on the life and works of male artists. Additionally, in respect to literature on African art specifically, most scholars who research on women artists tend to focus on the indigenous arts produced by women because those affected by colonization and globalization are not perceived as authentic African art. Hence, this research aimed at inquiring into the life and works of some practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. The target population for the study was professional Ghanaian female painters and sculptors living and working in Accra and Kumasi, precisely those that have been practising for five (5) years or more after completing school. The study employed qualitative and descriptive research to look into the life and works of four (4) Ghanaian female painters namely; Fatric Bewong, Betty Acquah, Victoria Adoe and Afia Prempeh, and three (3) sculptors; namely: Gladys Adinyira, Dorothy Amenuke and Margaret Anakwa. Interviews and observation were the main data collection instruments used. Among the information gathered from the research, the researcher found that people usually question whether female artists are the ones who created their artworks because generally females are perceived to be incapable of producing good paintings and sculptural pieces. Thus, painting and sculpture are regarded as a profession solely for men, because they are perceived as the ones who are capable of painting and sculpting. In view of this, when an author or researcher sets out to look for artists the first group of people that comes to mind are men artists, except the author or researcher consciously decides to research on women artists. As a matter of fact this misconception about female painters and sculptors is one of the reasons why throughout history the works of women artists remained unrecognized. Owing to this, the study concluded that people attribute works of art done by female artists to male artists. It was recommended that, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs together with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts should help promote works done by practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the award of Master of Philosophy in African Art and Culture and that, to the best of my knowledge it contains neither 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 acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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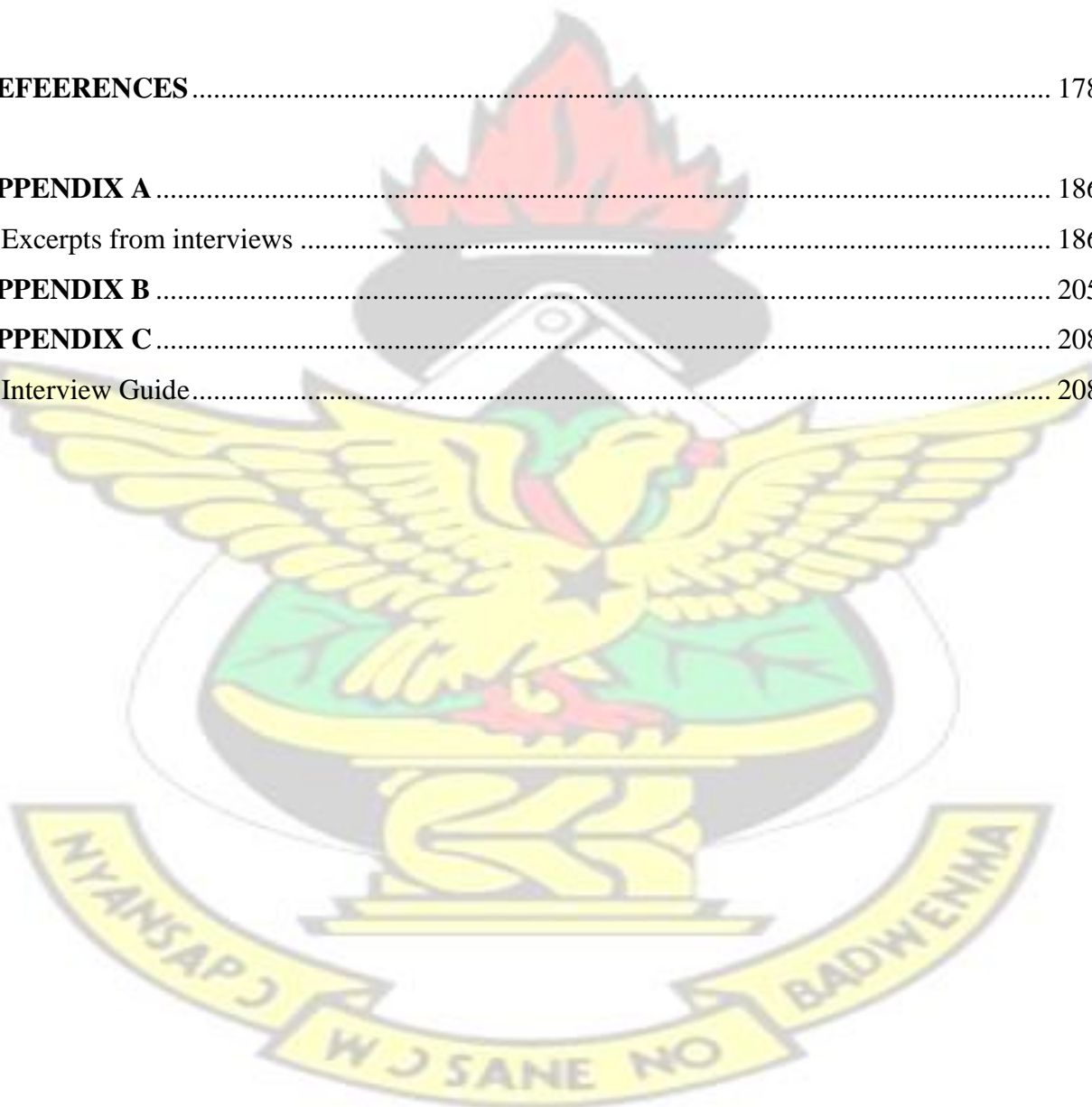
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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Overview**

The chapter provides a background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the research, research questions, delimitation, limitations, definition of terms, importance of the study and the organization of the thesis.

#### **1.2. Background to the study**

For centuries artists and their works have formed an essential part of societies all over the world. Artists tell the different narratives, culture, philosophies, and history of their society in very interesting, creative and profound ways. Works of art apart from distinguishing one particular culture from another usually bear significant information which when revealed cause people to reflect on certain issues, they have served as mediums through which knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next generation. All the same, in documenting the life and works of artists those than by women need to be accorded attention as this has not been the case for decades. In Ghana it can be said that the painting and sculpture industry is male dominated. The few women painters and sculptors who find themselves practising after school seem to lack behind; it is therefore in the interest of this research to probe into the issues they are faced with as practising female painters and sculptors, that is aside from looking into their works of art.

Gajewski (2015) wrote that women have been and continue to be integral to the institution of art, but despite being engaged with the art world in every way, many women artists have found opposition in the traditional narrative of art history. They have faced challenges due to gender biases, from finding difficulty in training to selling their work and gaining recognition. From

antiquity onwards, only a small sample of women found their way into the tales of the greatest artists. Furthermore, men who dominated the discipline both in practice and history often believed women to be inferior artists. As artist and instructor Hans Hoffmann once said in a “compliment” to the influential abstract expressionist painter Lee Krasner in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century: “This is so good you wouldn’t know it was done by a woman” (Gajewski, 2015).

With the few research studies that have been conducted on practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, there has been the condition of incomplete knowledge. Anomah (2016) for instance inquired into the significance of the works of some practising Ghanaian female sculptors namely; Dorothy Ameunke, Gladys Adinyira Wuaku and Asabea Anakwa. In her research she also explored the forms of documentation of their works. However, her study did not expound on their techniques, philosophies, and inspirations. It did not also look at their experiences and challenges as practising women artists and that is what this research probed into.

### **1.3. Statement of the problem**

Over the years, the painting and sculpture industry has seen very few practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. Also the few who practise as artists are not able to forge ahead and make waves like their male counterparts. Most literature on the painting and sculpture practice in Ghana is therefore centered on the life and works of male artists. Also, in respect to literature on African art specifically, most scholars who research on women artists tend to focus on the indigenous arts produced by women because those affected by colonization and globalization are not perceived as authentic African art. Aronson (1991) rightly notes that though there is still much work to be done concerning traditional arts done by women; we need to break from the traditional art-historical mold in order to look at gender issues in contemporary African art. Why,

for example, do far fewer African women enter the contemporary art world than men? When women do enter the male-dominated art world, what circumstances allow them to do so? These are some of the questions this research delved into aside from looking at their works as artists.

The study therefore sought to identify and document the profile, techniques, philosophies, and inspirations of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, and also investigate their experiences and challenges.

#### **1.4. Objectives of the research**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify and document the profiles of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.
2. Document the working techniques, philosophies, inspirations and materials used in producing the works of the selected female painters and sculptors.
3. Investigate the experiences and challenges of the selected female painters and sculptors.

#### **1.5. Justification of objectives**

The study can be justified on the following grounds:

1. Identifying and documenting the profiles of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors will expose some Ghanaian female artists and also add to the existing literature on African art.
2. Documenting the working techniques, philosophies, inspirations and materials used in producing the works of the selected female painters and sculptors will provide an in-depth knowledge about how they execute their works and the ideas that inform their practise.

3. Investigating the experiences and challenges of the selected female painters and sculptors; will provide a data base for further research in that direction. It will also help in finding ways of addressing their challenges.

### **1.6. Research question**

1. What are the profiles of the selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors?
2. What philosophies and inspirations guide the practise of the selected female painters and sculptors; and which techniques and materials are used in producing their works?
3. What are some the experiences and challenges of the selected female painters and sculptors?

### **1.7. Delimitation**

- Contextually, the study is limited to practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. Geographically, the study is limited to practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors in Accra and Kumasi.

### **1.8. Limitations**

Few of the interviewees were reluctant in sharing some information that would have been relevant to the study.

### **1.9. Definition of terms**

**Antiquity:** the ancient past, especially the period of classical and other human civilizations before the Middle Ages.

**Archeology:** the branch of anthropology that studies prehistoric people and their culture.

**Artist:** a person whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination.

**Artistic:** having or revealing natural creative skill.

**Bias:** a partiality that prevents objective consideration of an issue or situation.

**Craft:** the skilled practice of a practical occupation.

**Creative:** relating to or involving the use of the imagination or original ideas to create something.

**Feminist:** of or relating to or advocating equal rights for women.

**Fine art:** the products of human creativity; works of art collectively.

**Inferior:** lower in rank, status, or quality.

**Inspiration:** Someone or something that gives you ideas for doing something.

**Marginalize:** treat (a person, group, or concept) as insignificant or peripheral.

**Painter:** an artist who paints.

**Philosophy:** a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour.

**Predominance:** the state or condition of being greater in number or amount.

**Sculptor:** an artist who creates sculptures.

**Technique:** a way of carrying out a particular task, especially the execution or performance of an artistic work.

**Visibility:** quality or fact or degree of being visible.

### 1.10. The importance of the study

- The research would add to the existing knowledge of African Art.

- It will serve as a source of information for further research studies by authors, gender activists, historians, art critics, anthropologists and other academicians.
- It would be beneficial to organizations such as; Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, Centre for National Art and Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts and other art institutions abroad.
- The research would encourage more women to study and practise painting and sculpture upon reading and finding out about their fellow females that are practising.
- The recommendations when adopted and implemented will contribute to national development.

### **1.11. Organization of the thesis**

The main idea of the thesis is to provide an in depth documentation about the life and works of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. This thesis is presented in five chapters. Chapter one has to do with the introduction of the research which comprises; the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, justification of objectives, the research questions, delimitations, and limitations of the study. It also highlights the definition of terms, the importance of the study and the organization of the thesis.

Chapter two discusses the related literature reviewed as part of the research process. This is done to determine the research vacuum that needs to be filled and also guide the researcher to elicit new information that will add to the existing literature on the life and works of Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.

Chapter three gives an account of how the research was conducted based on certified research procedures which are used in collecting data for a research.

Chapter four and five focus on the presentation and discussion of the findings from the research conducted, and the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study respectively.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1. Overview

This section reviews literature that has bearing on the study. It appraises relevant literature and validates the knowledge of the research problem. The review of related literature has been done under the following sub-headings: Concept and evolution of painting, concept and evolution of sculpture, the history of painting and sculpture in Ghana, female artists in the art world, African female visual artists, Ghanaian women artists, and the artist conceptual framework.

#### 2.2. Concept and Evolution of Painting

Painting is one of the earliest known forms of artistic expressions that has been practiced by humans around the world for millennia, with confirmation in the form of used ochre found in caves in Northern Australia, Arnhem Land, dating the practice to at least 60,000 years ago (IdeelArt.com, n.d.).

According to Owen (2018) painting is an expression of ideas and emotions, with the creation of certain aesthetic qualities, in a two-dimensional visual language. The elements of this language; its shapes, lines, colours, tones, and textures are used in different ways to create sensations of volume, space, movement, and light on a flat surface. The choices of the medium, such as tempera, fresco, oil, acrylic, watercolor, ink, gouache, encaustic, or casein, and the choice of a particular form including mural, easel, panel, miniature, manuscript illumination, scroll, screen or fan and panorama as well as the artist's own technique, combine to realize a unique visual image.

However, today some contemporary painters do not express their ideas in only a two-dimensional visual language but employ other materials and artistic visual expressions that was once not considered part of the art of painting. For instance some painters express their ideas through installations, photographs and performative pieces. In buttressing this point the French painter Maurice Denis in 1890 famously said that “a painting before being a warehouse, a naked woman, or some story or other is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.” Nonetheless, in a progressively globalized art world, and one marked by boundary-breaking and interdisciplinary artistic practices, the fine line between painting and associated media is not always easy to discern. In actual fact, with so many factors to consider, from the support to the media, technique, or style used, the line between painting and other visual art forms is less clear than ever before, leaving today’s painters faced with a blank canvas, and the opportunity to reinvent an ancient medium (IdeelArt.com, n.d.).

In consonance, Owen (2018) wrote that unlike the former where cultural groups of tribes, religions, states, guilds and royal courts mostly regulated the craft, form, imagery, and themes of paintings and determined its purpose, whether ceremonial, decorative, devotional, educational, or entertaining. Today artists have now obtained the freedom to invent their own visual expression and use unconventional painting materials and techniques. For instance, some painters have employed other art, such as sculpture, with painting to produce three-dimensional abstract designs. Also some artists have attached real objects to the canvas in collage style or used electricity to operate coloured kinetic panels and boxes. Conceptual artists often express their concepts in the form of a suggestion usually in respect to an utopian project, while performance artists are an integral part of their own works. In view of this statement it is important to note that some contemporary painters also refer to themselves as conceptual artists where the ideas that

inform their works are more important than the artwork's aesthetic qualities. Owen (2018) further notes that the edgy endeavor to break boundaries in Western art produces endless global artistic reforms. The often puzzling succession of new movements in painting is further enthused by the swift interchange of ideas by means of international art journals, art centers and touring exhibitions.

Carey, et al. (2018) points out that African art, stays connected to specific histories and colonial and postcolonial circumstances. The rise of globalization and the ongoing African diaspora intensified the diversity and myriad of insinuations characteristic of contemporary African art. Artists did not only work within indigenous African and diasporic perspectives, but they also experimented with new media, including installation, motion pictures, performance, and other modes once solely Western. The Johannesburg Biennale, the Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art in Dakar, the Cairo Biennale, FESPACO (a forum for African cinema) and the Bamako Biennale all served as spaces for the presentation of new, complex, and inventive art forms and also the introduction of talented artists to an international audience.

### **2.3. The Concept and Evolution of Sculpture**

According to Rogers (2018) the utter heterogeneity of 21<sup>st</sup> century plastic art has left us with a lone defining element: three-dimensionality. Hence the current definition of sculpture is something like this: "Sculpture is the only branch of visual arts which precisely has to do with expressive three-dimensional form." Three-dimensional art commenced with prehistoric sculpture. The earliest known works of the Stone Age are the Venus of Tan-Tan and the Venus of Berekhat Ram, both primitive effigies dating to 230,000 BCE or earlier. Subsequently, sculptors have been active in all primeval civilizations, and all major art movements up to date.

Owing to the fact that it's three-dimensional in nature and can also be displayed in numerous different kinds of spaces than say painting. Unlike the earlier modernists, present day postmodernist sculptors are at liberty to employ a wide-range of materials, methods and images to exhibit. Styles tend to be more localized, as today's propensity among contemporary art movements is to doubt the grand concepts and internationalism of the modern art movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Rogers (2018) further explained that sculpture is an artistic form in which hard or plastic materials are worked into three-dimensional art objects. The designs may be exemplified in freestanding objects, in reliefs on surfaces, or in environments ranging from tableaux to contexts that envelop the viewer. A vast variety of media may be used comprising wood, clay, wax, metal, stone, fabric, glass, plaster, rubber, and arbitrary "found" objects. Materials may be modeled, molded, carved, cast, assembled, wrought, welded, sewn, or otherwise shaped and combined.

Rogers (2018) continued to say that some characteristics which in earlier centuries were deemed essential to the art of sculpture are not present in a great deal of modern sculpture and can no longer form part of its definition. One of the most important of these is representation. Prior the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sculpture was regarded a representational art, one that emulated forms in nature, most often human figure but also inert objects, such as books, game and utensils. Meanwhile in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, sculpture has come to consist of nonrepresentational forms. It has long been believed that the forms of such functional three-dimensional objects as buildings, furniture, and pots may be expressive and beautiful without being in any way representational; but it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that nonrepresentational, nonfunctional, three-dimensional works of art began to be produced. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sculpture was

considered predominantly an art of solid form, or mass. Nevertheless in a great deal of modern sculpture the focus of interest has shifted and the spatial aspects have become presiding. Today spatial sculpture is largely accepted branch of sculpture.

Sculpture may be either in the round or in relief. A sculpture in the round is a separate, detached object in its own right, leading the same kind of independent existence in space as a human body or a chair. A relief does not have this kind of independence. It projects from and is attached to or is an integral part of something else that serves either as a background against which it is set or a matrix from which it emerges. The actual three-dimensionality of sculpture in the round limits its scope in certain respects in comparison with the scope of painting. The forms of sculpture are tangible as well as visible, and they can appeal strongly and directly to both tactile and visual sensibilities (Rogers, 2018).

#### **2.4. The History of Painting and Sculpture in Ghana**

While the history of fine art in Ghana can be mapped out to the Neolithic period of the Stone Age (circa 8,000 C), most Ghanaians have not had the chance to experience some of these artworks. Citing comprehensively from academic literature Fosu (as cited in Owoo, 2015) notes that by the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD, major ethnic groups of migrating Africans who later united their positions into ethnic states, kingdoms and empires, in due course produced standard creative works of long standing historical worth.

Fosu further stated that sculpture was practiced mostly in some forest zones around the country for the understanding of reality in nature, rather than imitating the exactness of nature. Boateng (1987) explained that a lot of figurative sculptures were created to form the basis for ethnic religious practices. As the carving profession proceeded over the years in Ghana, and

predominantly among the Akans, it remained an exclusive sphere for only males. On no account were females allowed to carve. Only the males who were acclaimed to be endowed with special talents upheld the tradition. In Ghana, unlike other counterparts in Central and Eastern Africa, figurative sculptures received attention especially with the production of the male and female Akuaba dolls. Other figurative sculptures were placed at the tip of linguist staves and as finials for state umbrellas. The rest were found in shrines and oracles. Figurative sculptures in Ghana were used as fertility cult objects, to symbolize social class distinctions like symbols of authority as epitomized by linguist staves and state umbrella finials.

Boateng (1987) further notes that among the Akans, when the Akuaba doll and other figurative sculptures were being carved, pregnant women were not allowed near the carvers until the figurative sculpture has been successfully carved and polished. It was believed that if the pregnant woman sees the unfinished carving, it would affect the development of the fetus in the womb. An unfinished carving has a lot of deformities which receive attention as the carver progresses with the carving. Thus, it was a belief shared among the Akans that when the defects in the unfinished carving attract the attention of the pregnant woman, it may affect the orderly growth of the fetus in the womb. This belief and other taboos linked with the carving profession made it to be secluded from public places. It was therefore done in private and not out there in the open.

Moreover, the art of mural painting continued as wall decorations on some palaces and shrines in several areas in the country. Nevertheless, in the upper savannah (East), Mural painting was practiced by female artists to beautify homes so as to raise social standing of their spouses and also brighten palaces, communities and shrines (Fosu; as cited in Owoo, 2015).

Fosu (as cited in Owoo, 2015) also explained that Ghana has experienced several interactions with foreign exploits; slave looters, colonial exploiters and education architects; a move which has gradually developed into a diverse cross cultural contemporary art tradition. Fosu expounded on the development of an exceptional mixture of cross cultural contemporary art tradition, which he defined as being the product of a cool blend of European art conventions of academic realism, proportions, and perspectives with African ethnic art traditions of stylizations, disproportions and exaggerations. The harmonious blending of these three styles meant that the emergent new Ghanaian contemporary art of realism, regularly composed in cultural tales to glamorize and put on a pedestal Ghanaian customary practices, concurrently displayed disproportionate features.

Antwi and Adi-Dako (2014) observed that art historians normally cite the beginning of painting in Ghana at the time when colonial educational training of the arts was commenced in Achimota in the 1900s. Consequently many are led to believe that the Western style of canvas painting is all there is to painting in the Ghanaian Culture. Contrarily, several ethnicities are known to have been indigenously practicing one form of painting or another. Thus, the art of painting, paint and pigments were not embedded into Ghanaian culture from another, but have bloomed since Paleolithic times till now; just as wood sculpture has been an inherent part of Ghanaian art right from the genesis of history.

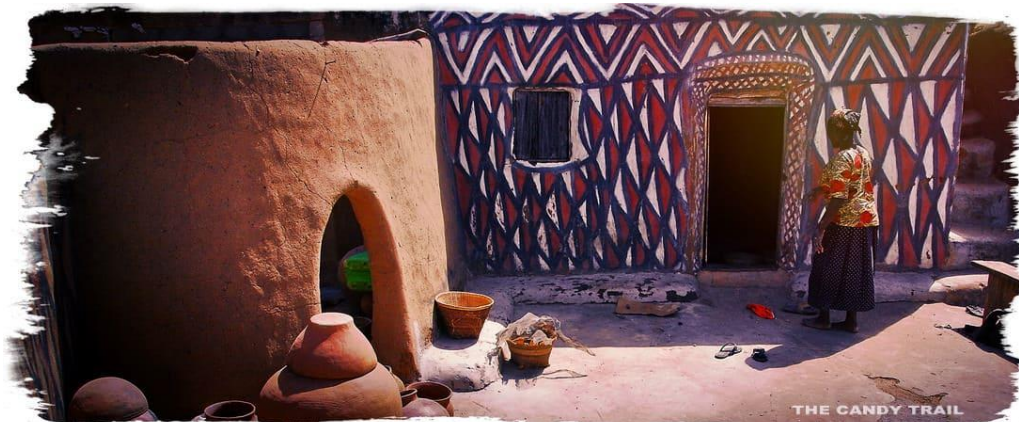
Antwi and Adi-Dako further explained that in the English West Africa, the oldest school was the art department of the University of Science and Technology in Achimota, Accra, whose establishment dates back between 1909 (Asihene, 1978) and 1936 (Mount, 1973). About twenty years later two other schools started in Nigeria; the art department of Ahmadu Bello University at Zaria, and Yaba Technical Institute in Lagos. The Oshogbo workshop school started in the 1960s.

Antwi and Adi-Dako continued to say that the head of the art department in Achimota was H. V. Meyerowitz an accomplished sculptor and designer, whose wife was also an artist. His three years art and craft course included traditional wood carving and modelling, mural painting, pottery, basketry, lettering, wood engraving, and weaving. These courses were introduced into the country without linking them to homogeneous forms already being practiced informally or formerly, towards a synthesis with what existed, as if to say Ghanaians had no art. Contrary to this view, wood carving was heavily being practiced in the southern part of Ghana, pottery and basketry was being practiced in diverse forms throughout the country at the time. Also, mural painting was copiously being practiced by several cultural groups in the then Northern regions of Ghana.

However, Labi (2013) points out that the pioneer Ghanaian art students carried out a series of experimental works with the inspiration being their traditional art forms through the new European technique of easel painting as part of their syllabus in formal western education. Traditional experts in woodcarving, and brass casting, and a celebrated potter Michael Cardew were invited to teach Achimota School students so that they may be exposed to both African and Western traditions. Crafts were part of the school's curriculum. In their assignments they were encouraged to carefully look around them and incorporate ideas from their environment and heritage. As a result the students found new possibilities in traditional art and their heritage that could be integrated into modern art which enabled them to create original works of art. The art of combining European knowledge and African values formed the basis of art instruction and had a predestined impact on students' creativity. Hence Ghanaian modern art was not completely a rebuff of old traditional art conventions as happened in European modernism but a tactical philosophy and method of carefully selecting and incorporating Ghanaian heritage and European

techniques developed through the Achimota art school which brought about Ghanaian modernism.

#### 2.4.1. Mural Paintings of Sirigu Women



**Plate 1:** Woman within her housing compound in Sirigu  
**Source:** <https://www.thecandytrail.com/sirigu-village-painted-houses-ghana/>



**Plate 2:** Sirigu wall decorations  
**Source:** [http://www.swopa.org/Pages/about\\_us.html](http://www.swopa.org/Pages/about_us.html)

Owoo (2010) asserts that mural painting (Plate 1 & 2) is a distinctive cultural expression of the people of Sirigu, a town near the border of Burkina Faso in Northern Ghana. Their mural

paintings have over the years lured historians, anthologists, sociologists and other researchers from various parts of the world, who have performed extensive research into its painting techniques and concepts.

Cowhey (1996) explains that in Sirigu the embellishment of the houses is customarily the duty of women, while the construction of the houses is the responsibility of the men. Nevertheless, the complete exterior including the decorations of a compound is a reflection of the male head of the family (Soyiri 29 Apr 96). Thus, when a woman embellishes the walls, the credit goes to her husband by a process of association. In Nankani culture, a woman is a reflection of her husband. The man gets the praise for the reason that he has a wife who can create an object of admiration. The housing adornments (Plate 1 & 2) are nonrepresentational geometric and stylized animal figures, either painted on flat surfaces or molded into relief across the walls. Colours are restricted to black, white and red, and it is worth noting that they are obtained from natural local materials like red rock, which is pounded into powder to make paint. Some of the designs made on the walls include; stylized animals: crocodile: totem sign of saving life of a clan, cattle: the symbol of wealth/prosperity, python: totem symbol of clan and protection. Additionally abstract geometrical forms; like broken calabash: the expression of ever useful and male symbols such as woven cloth strips worn by men and walking stick: symbolize masculinity. The painting of walls, particularly those close to the entrance, is a collaborative effort. The senior wife of the compound oversees the work and other co-wives participate in various ways, depending on their skill. An excellently painted wall denotes an affirmation of female unity and support for the entire family. Sirigu women use these mural paintings to communicate their social status and the status of the head of the family. Consequently, the wall painting when done well raises the status of the head of the family (The Candy Trail, 2018).

## 2.5. Female Artists in the Art World

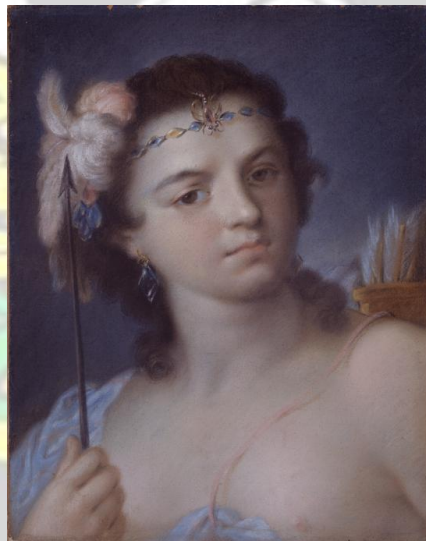
Female artists have been treated unfairly as compared to their male counterparts since the Renaissance. Famous artists of the Renaissance include Da Vinci, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Titian and Nelli. It is however rather unfortunate if Nelli (the last name mentioned) raises eyebrows. Plautilla Nelli's biblical paintings (Plate 3) as compared to those of her male colleagues were creative master pieces, yet in a tale as old as patriarchy itself, she was excluded from Renaissance history books, disregarded as just another reverend mother with a paintbrush (www.theguardian.com, 2018). The Uffizi in Florence organized its first exhibition of her works; nearly 500 years after Plautilla Nelli was born, a bid to begin to rectify the gender disparity that persists in almost all major art collections as Uffizi rightly stated. The Uffizi being one of the world's most prominent art gallery, made a remarkable, if overdue statement (www.theguardian.com, 2018).



**Plate 3:** Plautilla Nelli, Lamentation with Christ,  
Mid. 16 cent., Museum of San Marco,  
Florence, AWA Foundation

**Source:** <http://advancingwomenartists.org/artists/plautilla-nelli>

Plautilla Nelli worked in Florence in the 1500s and her large-scale devotional paintings are a precious exception in history. A Renaissance convent-painter, Nelli (1524-1588) was the first known female artist of Florence. The daughter of a merchant family, Nelli hobnobbed with prominent male painters of her day and was known for running a working studio within her convent. Nelli was one of the few female painters mentioned in by Giorgio Vasari in his 'Lives of Artists' and she was known to have inherited the drawings of Fra Bartolomeo, a prominent devotional painter who carried on the traditions of Beato Angelico. Nelli's works were also influenced by Perugino, Andrea del Sarto and Giovanni Antonio Sogliano (advancingwomenartists.org, 2019).



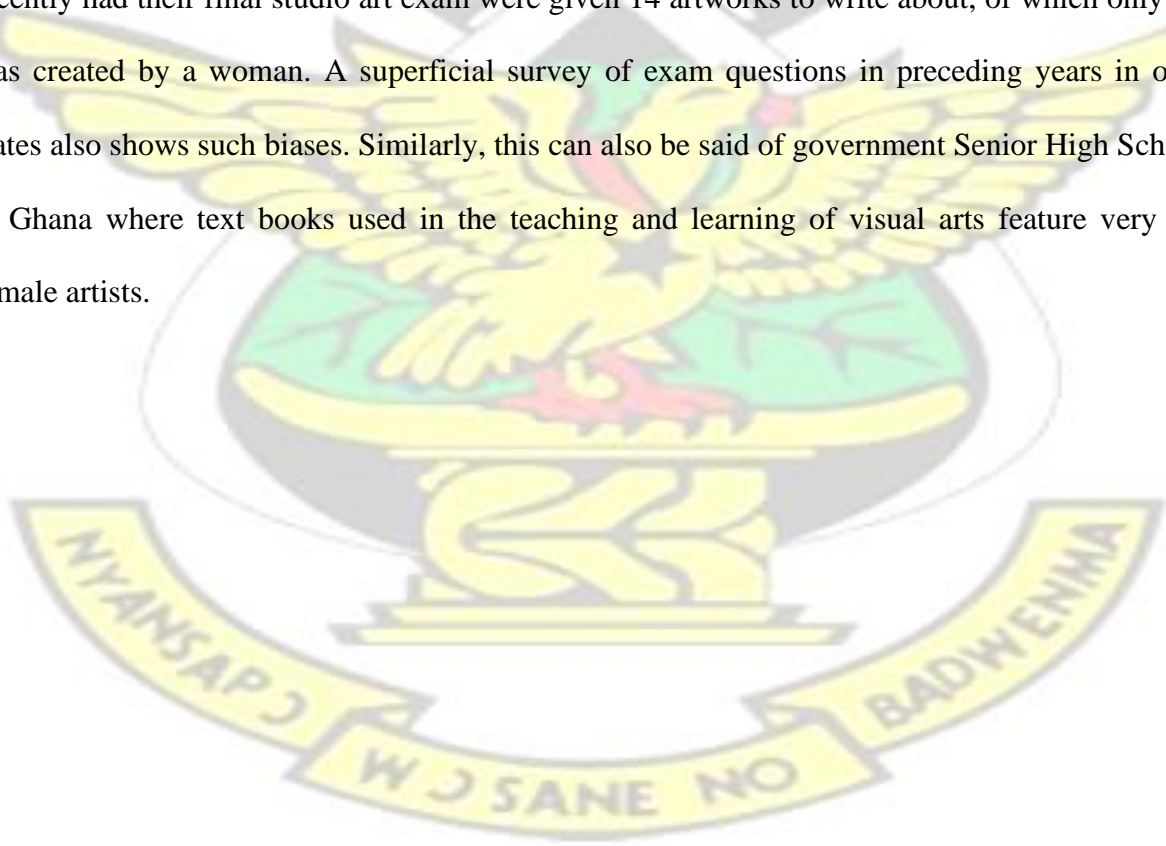
**Plate 4:** Rosalba Carriera  
America, ca. 1730

**Source:** <https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/rosalba-carriera>

Rosalba Carriera is also another woman artist whose life and works in then1980s was still not found in most art history books (www.artstory.org, 2018). Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757) was a

Venetian portrait painter and miniaturist, an originator of the Rococo style (Plate 4) in France and Italy. Rosalba spent most of her life fulfilling commissions for distinguished patrons at courts across 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. The daughter of a clerk and a lace maker, Rosalba began her career painting miniatures mostly portraits (Plate 4) and allegorical subjects. Such works quickly established her reputation within the Italian artistic establishment and gained her acceptance into Rome's Accademia di San Luca in 1704. Rosalba is best known for her innovative approach to pastels, which had previously been used for informal drawings and preparatory sketches. She is credited with popularizing their use as a medium for serious portraiture (nmwa.org, 2016).

Shiels (2014) notes that change needs to be championed at every level, particularly we must consider improving the art syllabus used in high schools. Victorian students for instance who recently had their final studio art exam were given 14 artworks to write about, of which only one was created by a woman. A superficial survey of exam questions in preceding years in other states also shows such biases. Similarly, this can also be said of government Senior High Schools in Ghana where text books used in the teaching and learning of visual arts feature very few female artists.



### 2.5.1. The Guerrilla Girls



**Plate 5:** American Photographers, Designers, Activists and Conceptual Artists  
Movements and Styles: Feminist Art,  
Contemporary Art, Started: 1984

**Source:** <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-guerrilla-girls.htm>

The Guerrilla Girls (Plate 5) is a feminist artist's protest group formed in America to fight discrimination against women artists and artists of colour in the art world. Two major events stirred the formation of the Guerrilla Girls. One was the emergence of the notable feminist essay *"Why have there been no great women artist?"* in 1971 by the art historian Linda Nochlin. Caldwell (2018) rightly wrote that Nochlin's essay set an underlying basis which provided a general knowledge of how systematic social, cultural, and political impediments forbid women from participating in the art world in countless ways. Nochlin in her essay explained that there have been no great woman artist not because there was an inventive male style or aesthetic that

was perquisite over some sort of feminine style, but because women had been kept out of the academy, and therefore away from practising as artists and the art market itself.

Secondly, the other event that influenced the formation of the Guerrilla Girls protest group was an exhibition titled: '*An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture*' in 1985 mounted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and publicized as an up-to-the-minute survey of the most noteworthy contemporary art in the world. The exhibition highlighted the works of 148 men, 13 women, and no artists of colour. The women artists were instigated to action not only by this inequity but also by a statement made by the curator of the exhibition, who said that any artist who was not in the show should rethink "his" career. When placards and chants proved futile, some of the demonstrators formed a group whose objective was to find new ways to fight discrimination in the art world. They resolved on a guerrilla-style protest, wearing gorilla masks in public and adopting pen names that honoured past female artists (The Getty Research Institute, n.d.). The Guerrilla Girls wear gorilla masks to stay anonymous so as "to keep the focus on the issues rather than their personalities." Their actual names therefore remain unknown. Each member rather took on the name of a late artist or other creative personalities including Rosalba Carriera, Frida Kahlo, Zora Neale Hurston, Lee Krasner and Gertrude Stein; women artists who in the 1980s were still not found in most art history textbooks, and whose works were even sometimes wrongly attributed to male artists (www.artstory.org, 2018).



**Plate 6:** Guerrilla Girls Poster, 1989, (The Getty Research Institute, 2008.M.14)

Courtesy guerrillagirls.com

**Source:** [http://www.getty.edu/research/special\\_collections/notable/guerrilla\\_girls.html](http://www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/notable/guerrilla_girls.html)

Of specific interest are the research files that indicate the groups' way of collecting data from arts organizations to provide proof of gender and racial discrimination. In the middle of the night the Guerrilla Girls displayed anonymous posters around SoHo, where the galleries were then, which simply pointed out these facts. The posters criticized galleries that only exhibited the works of male artists, and also condemned the museum directors and critics, deliberately putting individual institutions in the art world on the lookout that their archives were being scrutinized and that they had some explaining to do. One of their posters (Plate 6), portraying Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's eminent painting 'Grande Odalisque' with a gorilla mask, read, "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?" and also indicated that less than 5 percent of the modern artists featured there were women whereas more than 85 percent of the museum's nudes were females. These posters personified the Guerrilla Girls' method for an effective course: astonishing statistics, striking model, and conspicuous graphics. The posters shortly became collectors' items (The Getty Research Institute, n.d.).



**Figure 1:** The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist, 1988  
Guerrilla Girls

**Source:** <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-guerrilla-girls.htm>

According to The Art Story Foundation (2018), the supposed “advantages” stated on this poster (Figure 1) add up to thirteen (i.e. an unlucky number) ways in which women are consistently left out of art literature, exhibitions, and textbooks. Some of advantages as specified in the poster include; “*Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others*”, which refers to women’s artistic works that have been wrongly attributed to men. “*Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty*” denotes Lee Krasner, Louise Nevelson, Barbara Hepworth, and myriad other women artists whose involvement in the history of art were only recognized at the very end of their careers. “*Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood*” alludes to the long-standing cultural expectations of women that beset them (for men, there is no corresponding expectation). The last advantage stated on the poster is a self-referential statement: “*Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit*”. Thus, the Guerrilla Girls observed that they gained more attention because of their costume, an irony that did not escape them. As they put it:

*“We’d love to take those masks off, but would anyone listen to us without them? We discovered that the art world takes feminists more seriously when they use humor and wear a gorilla disguise. Pathetic! We think of it as our masculinity.”*

The poster (Figure 1) is a key example of the Guerrilla Girls’ first works, disseminated widely in Manhattan in 1988, which employs sarcasm and wit to lay bare prejudices in the art world.

The group reframes the question: *“Why haven’t there been more great women artists throughout Western history?”* Instead, they ask: *“Why haven’t more women been considered great artists throughout Western history?”* (www.nmwa.org, 2018)

The Guerrilla Girls persist to follow the percentages of women and artists of colour featured in exhibitions, galleries, and art journals, and draw attention to any double standards that linger (www.artstory.org, 2018).

Nonetheless, the question is: Is there a long-established prejudice against women artists and art experts, or have women not had the time and support to develop their careers in the face of societal challenges, including raising families or outright sexism? (Dennison as cited in artnet News, 2014). In view of this question, Thobejane and Khoza (2014) wrote that women’s work, in most cases, is not appreciated despite the fact that it is the engine that keeps most families going. Researchers indicate that women are wholly responsible for three quarters of all household tasks, and for women this is one of the reasons why they and their works remain unrecognized (Ramaite, 2010 as cited in Thobejane and Khoza, 2014).

## **2.6. African Female Visual Artists**

Aronson (1991) in his essay *African Women in the Visual Arts* gave a general review of the existing status of literature concerning African women’s arts that have gathered most interest until now. According to Aronson, researchers of African art have been rarely sluggish in

contemplating theoretical issues of gender. Though several have enquired about women in the arts, few scuffle with gender-related issues or try to explain the data from a feminist theoretical viewpoint.

Aronson further wrote that until the late sixties and early seventies, the only authentic African arts, from a Western viewpoint were figurative sculptures and masks which were predominantly created only by men, since women in Africa rarely if ever carve wood or work in metal. Artistic pieces including calabash decoration, basketry and ceramics which are usually produced by women were thought to be of less worth hence disregarded.

Asante (2009) affirmed this fact by writing that all through history, most civilizations have assumed women in the art sphere to be of subservient status as compared to that of men particularly in respect to the visual arts; that is women visual artists and women as themes of visual art works.

Again, Aronson (1991) explained that arts produced by women failed to be noticed because they tend to be less perceptible to foreigners than that of men's. Women restrict much of their pursuits, including their arts, to the household domain, which is mostly set apart from the public space of the community. Contrariwise, men's arts are more public and, in the case of masquerades, more dramatic in their presentation and hence more open for study than women's.

Aronson further states that the narrow purview of African art studies has also impeded discussion of feminist-related issues. Research is dedicated primarily to "traditional" arts, vaguely defined as those that are used by ethnic groups and rural communities. Arts influenced by colonialization or urbanization are perceived to be little more than contaminated versions of the authentic arts and, therefore, not worthy of significant enquiry. Correspondingly contemporary arts are disregarded because they are not considered true African art. Most researchers tend to devote

their time conserving the “traditional” by enthusiastically gathering and describing field data in order to document it on paper and in visual form before it fades entirely. Alas, theory (feminist or otherwise) has no place in this conservationist take. Notwithstanding these curbs, research on women has carved a small niche in the study of African art (Aronson, 1991).

Berns (1993) in her article titled: *‘Art, history and gender: women and clay in West Africa’*, wrote that in Africa, women are understood to have dominated the making of pottery (Bradley 1989:117; Conkey and Spector 1984:10; David and Hennig 1972:23; Drost 1968:138; Kramer 1985:83; Stossel 1984:66; Sieber 1980:246; Vansina 1984:50, among others as cited in Berns, 1993). Conversely the roles and positions of women in the network of relations regarding the production and use of ceramic objects, sculpture as well as vessels have been utterly unrecognized. This is confirmed not only of the ethnographic traditions of the past century but of a number of archaeological objects, which have come to be recognized as benchmarks of human achievement and ‘civilization’ in Africa. The generally held feminist notion that women have been awfully neglected both as subjects and as representatives has instigated re-evaluations of gender relations and of ‘gender as a structuring principle in all human societies’ (Moore 1988: vii). There is little uncertainty that sexual difference determines who makes what kinds of art in Africa. However, biased views about gender has influenced both the hierarchical exploration of the arts created by men in Africa and the ways art history itself has been and continues to be written. By means of drawing much attention to sex roles in art production and to cultural notions of gender as they are substantially and symbolically exemplified, Africanist art historians can, as feminists assert, extremely alter our understanding of past and present human societies. However, Aronson (1991) notes that despite the fact that there is still much work to be done in respect to traditional arts produced by women we need to break from the traditional art-historical

mode so as to inquire into gender issues in contemporary African art. Why, for example, do far fewer African women enter the contemporary art world than men? When women do enter the male-dominated art world, what circumstances permit them to do so? For Sokari Douglas Camp, a Kalabari Ijo woman, Nigerian by birth, it was necessary that she move far from her Kalabari environment in order to become a successful contemporary artist. Even so, her sculpture exhibition at the National Museum of African Art demonstrates the fact that African women can prevail over barriers and enter the contemporary art world. The exhibition titled *“Echoes of the Kalabari”* displayed life-sized metal sculptures, which in their dramatic staging (the sculptures moved and made sounds), vividly mimicked the denotation of Kalabari Ijo spirit masquerades as Ijo women would have perceived them. Deliberately, Sokari broke many traditional gender barriers by creating sculpture, working in metal, and organizing the replicated masquerade event. Contemporary art like the work of Sokari illustrates just one of the many rich avenues we have yet to delve into in regards to African women’s arts (Aronson, 1991). This research explores such rich avenues in regards to documenting the life and works of some Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.

## **2.7. Ghanaian Women Artists**

Anomah (2016) inquired into the significance of the works of some practising Ghanaian female sculptors namely; Dorothy Ameunke, Gladys Adinyira Wuaku and Asabea Anakwa. Anomah also explored the forms of documentation of their works. However, her study did not expound on their techniques, philosophies and inspirations; and that is what this research sought for.

Asante (2009) also researched into the traditional roles of some Ghanaian women in pottery, ceramics, mural and weaving (basketry). He examined the roles which women are playing in

these indigenous visual arts for national development; these comprised indigenous potters in Kpando, indigenous (basket) weaving – Bolga and indigenous mural painting in Sirigu. In his research there is an in depth discussion of how the process of making these art forms has evolved over the years, the meaning of the symbols they incorporate in the artworks and how they derive the materials they use in producing the artworks. He also examined and discussed the use of women as themes in the works of Ghanaian visual artists; Vesta Adu Gyamfi (a ceramic artist), B. K. Dogbe (a sculptor) and Benjamin Offei Nyarko (a painter). His research did not include contemporary Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. This study probes into the profile, techniques, philosophies and inspirations of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. It also enquires into their experiences and challenges.

Asante (2009) in his research expressed that with the many roles women assume in Africa, particularly in Ghana, as a mother, housekeeper, economic contributor, cook, water carrier, and often the breadwinner and also owing to some socio-cultural relegation of women to the background when would the women have the opportunity to make her own artistic assertion or voice her concern on this subject?

Owoo (2014) in his article titled: *'Art - Ghanaian Women Show Class'*, made mention of ten Ghanaian women artists namely,

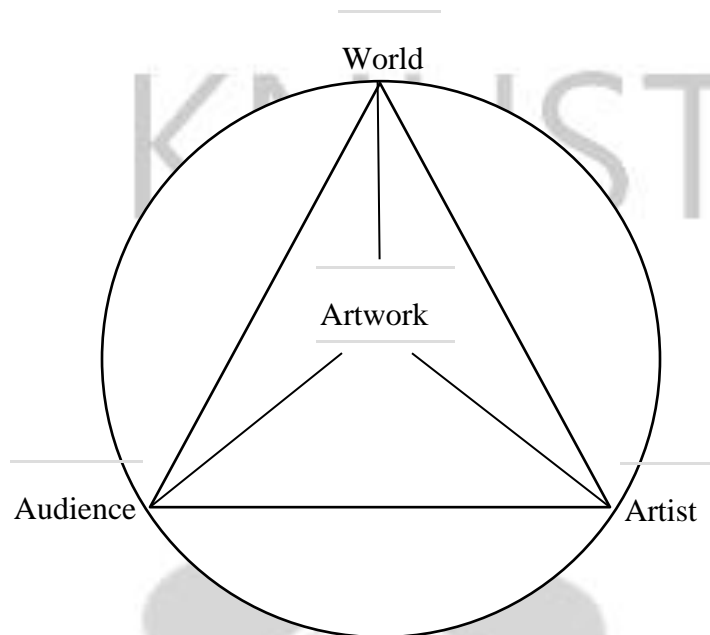
1. Theodosia Okoh – A Painter
2. Kati Torda – A Beader
3. Marigold Akufo Addo – A Painter
4. Kate Badoe – A Painter
5. Betty Acquah – A Painter
6. Constance Swaniker – A Sculptor

7. Nana Amu - A Fine Artist
8. Adwoa Amoah – A Painter
9. Fatric Bewong – A Painter
10. Araba Kromantin – A Painter

The article is about a landmark exhibition held at the Accra Loom Gallery, Ghana by Frances Ademola (the owner of the gallery) which featured works by ten Ghanaian women artists spanning three generations with ages ranging from 34 to 97. Owoo (2014) stated that the exhibition which marked the 45th anniversary of the Loom Gallery also signified the contributions of Ghanaian women to fine art since the struggles of feminist art movements in the late 1960s and 70s. In the article Owo (2014) gave brief information about their educational background and works of art.

From the related literature reviewed above it is apparent that though women have been involved in the institution of art they have faced opposition in the traditional narrative of art history. It can also be said that there is little information about Ghanaian female painters and sculptors and their practise as artists. Additionally, the few available literature on practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors does not provide an in depth information about their life and works. Hence, this thesis sought to provide an in depth knowledge about the life and works of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.

## 2.8. The Artist Conceptual Framework



**Figure 2:** Conceptual framework adopted from Usher (2014).

The artist conceptual framework was adopted for the study. It is made up of four components or agencies that help you understand the artist's art practice and also help you to critically analyse their artworks. These agencies include; the artist, the artworks, the audience and the world. These four agencies interact and relate to each other.

### 2.8.1. Artist

The artist can be simplified to who, what, how and why. Who has to do with who the artist is for example; a painter, a sculptor, a designer, an architect or a craftsman. It can also refer to a group, collaboration of artists, school or an art movement for example; surrealism. Who comprises their general biographical information which include; were they come from, where they work and who they are as a person or group. What encompasses the artist's ideas or concepts. How has to do with how the artist materializes his or her ideas into a physical or virtual object through their working

techniques and processes. Sometimes the ideas or process that they go through can be culturally determined, or different traditions that are applied during that time, taking into account what is influencing the artist. Why constitutes the artist's intentions; for what purpose, for what function, why they create artworks.

### **2.8.2. Artwork**

The artwork has to do with deconstructing the features in the artwork, identifying how they are a reflection of an idea; whether a personal response of the artist, a cultural view point or a symbolic interpretation. The artwork is the most important agency of the conceptual framework. That is where all your evidence comes from. The artwork includes the type of artwork (craft, painting, sculpture, design, performance art, etc.) and the shape or size of the artwork (3D, 2D, etc.).

### **2.8.3. Audience**

Audience is made up of everyone including art critics, art historians, students, teachers and members of the general public. Anyone who views the artwork is an audience member. However, audiences change all the time, the way the artworks are interpreted also change over time. Comparison between the way they were talked about in the past and now, and how these interpretations are changing over time.

### **2.8.4. World**

Artworks are a representation of the world in which they were created, they represent interest in the world, personal idea of the artist, class interest, society, any ideology going on at the time,

what is considered appropriate, traditional, debate of what is art, major events for example; world war. Symbolic links of whatever is happening in the world, the influence of other artists, whether the artist is commenting on the world; if they are what ae they commenting on, how their viewpoint is not evidence but represented in the artwork.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Overview**

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the methods used in collecting the necessary data in writing this thesis. The chapter addresses the research design and the data collection instruments. It also defines the population for the study and the sample that the study sought the information from. The research methodology is divided into sections as follows: research design, library research, population for the study, sampling, data collection tools, interview design and validation, interview conducted, observation, data collection procedures, data analysis plan and summary of the discussion.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

Creswell (2014) describes research design as the ideas and methods for research that span the steps from wide-ranging presumptions to thorough procedures of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The descriptive method of qualitative research was adopted for the study because it is concerned with situations or relations that exist, views that are held, practices, attitudes, current methods or trends that are developing, and outcomes that are apparent (Annum, 2013). The descriptive research method was therefore considered appropriate for the study because the study sought to identify and document the life and works of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.

Elmusharaf (2014) explained that qualitative research methods help to obtain a great deal of comprehensive and thorough information from people. Qualitative research is a form of

community-based investigation that centers on the way people construe and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. It aims at comprehending the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. It delves into the conduct, viewpoints, emotions and experience of people and what lies at the core of their lives. This thesis focuses on the profile, philosophies, techniques, inspirations, experiences, and challenges of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, the researcher therefore deems qualitative research design appropriate for conducting this study because it helps in getting insight into these areas.

### **3.3. Library research**

The researcher visited various institutional and research libraries to solicit information. These include KNUST Main Library, College of Art Library-KNUST and the Art Education Library-KNUST.

In addition to the libraries visited, various books, thesis, journals and articles found online were read with focus and keen interest on the history of African women artists, female artists in the art world, the concept of painting and sculpture, the history of painting and sculpture in Ghana, and research methodology. The bulk of the literature was found on the World Wide Web.

### **3.4. Population for the study**

In researchers' pursuit to add to scholarly debate and knowledge, they collect data or information from participants. These participants form part of the research population, which is the group of individuals having one or more essential qualities of interest (Asiamah et al., 2017). The population for the study constitutes practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors living and working in Accra and Kumasi, Ghana.

Asiamah et al. (2017) further writes that the target population is decided upon by using selection standards that disclose the most suitable prospective participants. These standards should be refined to highlight individuals who have qualities that make them the possible sources of information, keeping in view the profundity and quality of information needed to deal with the qualitative research objectives. Some of the factors that might guide the development of the right selection criteria include educational level and length of work experience.

The participants selected out of the population after its refinement is termed target population, which is defined as the group of individuals or participants with specific attribute of interest and relevance (Bartlett et al., 2001; Creswell, 2003) as cited in Asiamah et al., 2017. In view of this assertion, the target population for the study comprised professional Ghanaian female painters and sculptors in Accra and Kumasi who have been practising as artists for five (5) years or more after graduation. The researcher found that most of the female painters and sculptors worked and lived in Accra. Of all the female painters and sculptors identified in the course of the research only two (2) lived and worked in Kumasi; namely Dorothy Amenuke; a sculptor and Afia Prempeh; a painter.

For the target population the researcher identified fifteen (15) painters and five (5) sculptors. The painters identified include:

- |                    |                        |                          |
|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Afia Prempeh    | 6. Victoria Adoe       | 11. Bernice Adwoa Cooper |
| 2. Betty Aquah     | 7. Adwoa Amoah         | 12. Esther Khaki Caesar  |
| 3. Fatric Bewong   | 8. Akwele Suma-Glory   | 13. Kate Badoe           |
| 4. Cecelia Lamptey | 9. Marigold Akufo-Addo | 14. Faustima Ayambire    |
| 5. Maku            | 10. Araba Kromantin    | 15. Sarah Owusu          |

The sculptors include:

1. Dorothy Amenuke
2. Constance Swaniker
3. Gladys Adinyira
4. Margaret Anakwa
5. Charlotte Hagan

The interest of the researcher in selecting members of the target population was to reach Ghanaian female artists who have studied and majored in painting or sculpture in a tertiary institution and have been practising after school for five years or more. Most of the female painters and sculptors that were interviewed have been practising for over ten years.

According to Hubbard (2018) the accessible population is who the researcher can actually study. Resource restrictions such as budget constraints, geographical location and time contribute to the need for a limited research population. When it is not practical to recruit every human being in the target market, it is necessary to employ an accessible population as a subset of the target group.

Additionally, Asiamah et al. (2017) write that the accessible population constitutes members of the target population who are willing to take part in the research and will be available at the time of the study. In regards to this statement, the accessible population for the study comprised four (4) painters; namely: Fatric Bewong, Betty Acquah, Victoria Adoe and Afia Prempeh; and three (3) sculptors; namely: Gladys Adinyira Wuaku, Dorothy Amenuke, and Margaret Anakwa. More of the female painters and sculptors that form part of the target population could have been part of my accessible population but due to research time constraints and it being a qualitative research work which is concerned with the quality not the quantity, the researcher researched on only seven of them to represent the entire population.

### 3.5. Sampling

Mugo (2002) wrote that sampling is the technique, process, or act of selecting an appropriate sample, or an archetypal part of a population with the intention of defining the parameters or essential qualities of the entire population.

The purposive sampling technique and the snowball sampling technique were used in identifying and selecting the target and accessible population for the study. According to Etikan et al. (2015), purposive sampling technique which is also referred to as judgemental sampling is the act of consciously and intentionally selecting participants owing to their qualities. It is a non-random sampling technique that does not require fundamental theories or a fixed number of participants. The researcher based on the objectives of the study sets out to find people who can and are willing to share information by virtue of their knowledge or experience. It is particularly employed in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases so as to make very good use of accessible resources.

The researcher found that there are few practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, the snowball sampling technique was therefore necessary in identifying and selecting the target and accessible population for the study. Snowball Sampling (also referred to as chain-referral sampling) is a non-probability sampling technique employed when qualities to be possessed by samples are few and hard to find. Snowball sampling technique has to do with referrals from the first subjects who help to locate the other individuals who possess the qualities set by the researcher. Thus, when using this sampling technique members of the sample group are discovered by means of chain referral (Dudovskiy, 2018).

### **3.6. Data collection tools**

The tools used to elicit data for the study were interview (structured and unstructured interview) and observation. Annum (2013) wrote that structured interviews are formal because the same set of questions is posed to each interviewee visited and the responses are recorded on a standardized schedule. The unstructured interview is the less formal type in which although set of questions may be used, the interviewer freely modifies the sequence of questions, changes the wording, and sometimes explains them or adds to them during the interaction. In view of this explanation, the same set of questions were posed to each interviewee visited, usually adhering as much as possible to the order of questions on the interview guide. However, the researcher modified, explained and added to the questions where necessary. The interviews were conducted in an open situation and so allowed for more flexibility and freedom in the interaction which helped in obtaining vital information needed to address the research goal.

Annum (2013) also explained that the study of audio-visual materials, photographs, videotapes, tape recordings, and art objects fall under observation. Observation is a very beneficial form of data collection in qualitative research on the studio practise of a fine artist for instance where a lot of observation of artistic objects and figures take place for idea development. It enables informants to share their reality directly with researchers. It is also creative and captures attention visually.

### **3.7. Interview design and validation**

An interview guide was designed to solicit information about their life and works as Ghanaian female artists. The questions were designed taking into consideration the objectives of the study. Some of the areas the questions covered include; their background, techniques, inspirations,

philosophies, the materials used in producing their works, and their experiences and challenges. The interview guide was validated by the supervisor and an educator. The questions posed during the interview sum up to a total of thirty-seven (37). A copy of the interview guide is in Appendix C.

### **3.8. Interview conducted**

The researcher had a one-on-one interview with the female artists; this helped to ensure a high return rate and afford the chance to explain certain terms and questions to the interviewees, and also ask further questions in order to obtain an in-depth knowledge about their life and works. The interviews were conducted in the studios, work places and homes of the female artists, and questions were asked based on the interviewer's guide. In regards to this, Creswell (2007) asserts that performing a qualitative study requires that researchers endeavour to establish a good rapport with the participants being studied. In actual fact, qualitative researchers carry out their studies in the "field", where the participants live and work, as these are key contexts for understanding what the participants disclose.

The interview was scheduled to meet the interviewees' desired time. The medium of expression was mainly in English; the interviewees however, sometimes expressed some of their views and thoughts in their local dialect after which they explained. A voice recorder was used by the researcher during the interviews and afterwards transcribed. Permission from the interviewees was sought to record before doing so. Apart from recording the researcher wrote down some information where necessary.

Though the interviewees had busy schedules the researcher tried as much as possible to spend quality time with each of them. Creswell (2007) wrote that when researchers spend a lot of time

at the ‘study site’ and become well acquainted with the participants, the more they “know what they know” from the original source and personal experience.

In brief, the researcher makes an effort to curtail the “distance” or “objective separateness” between himself or herself and those being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) as cited in Creswell, 2007.

### **3.9. Observation**

In the course of the interviews, the researcher observed artworks by the female artists and asked questions about them, this was needful in obtaining vital information about their works as artists. The researcher then took the measurements and photographs of the artworks.

Also during the interviews the interviewees showed the researcher documentations (books, magazines, thesis projects, newspaper articles, brochures, flyers, invitation cards and photos) regarding their works, programs, and exhibitions they have had and participated in. The researcher took photographs of all these documentations using a digital camera. These documentations aided in writing the thesis. It also helped to ascertain the authenticity of the data gathered from the interviewees. Because of the quality time the researcher spent with each artist interviewed; she gained rapport with them.

### **3.10. Data collection procedures**

Preparatory work for the study started with the reviewing of related literature. The researcher made effective use of the World Wide Web in identifying some of the female artists. Also various art institutions were visited, these include; Berj Art Gallery, Nubuke Foundation, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Ghana (located at the Dubois Centre), and the headquarters of Ghana Association of Visual Artists (located at the Art Centre), all in Accra, Ghana. These art

institutions were visited to get the names and contacts of practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors. Some postgraduate students at the Department of Painting and Sculpture – K.N.U.S.T, and the executives of Ghana Association of Visual Artists and the Foundation for Contemporary Art, Ghana were particularly helpful with the names and contacts of the female artists. The researcher initially obtained the names and contacts of three female artists, and then upon interviewing these few some of the interviewees also helped with the names and contacts of the rest.

### **3.11. Data analysis plan**

Through descriptive and analytical methods, the data collected from the field work followed this data analysis plan:

- Documentation
- Conceptualization, Coding and Categorizing
- Examining Relationships and Displaying Data
- Authenticating Conclusions
- Reflexivity

### **3.12. Summary of discussion**

The accessible population for the study comprises four (4) painters; namely: Fatric Bewong, Betty Acquah, Victoria Adoe and Afia Prempeh. And three sculptors; namely: Gladys Adinyira, Dorothy Amenuke and Margaret Anakwa. One on one interview and observation was used to solicit information about these practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors to represent the entire population. The data collection tools used enabled the researcher to obtain an in-depth knowledge about their life and works.

The information gathered has been described and critically analyzed, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

# KNUST



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Overview

This chapter covers the analysis and discussions of the data gathered from the field. The objectives of the study were to: identify and document the profiles of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, document their working techniques, philosophies, inspirations and materials used in producing their works, and investigate their experiences and challenges. The presentation and discussion of findings in regards to each artist have the objectives stated as their sub-headings.

**Plate 7:** Elizabeth Betty Waldron Acquah  
A Painter



**Source:** Betty Acquah

## 4.2. Profile

Betty was born on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1965 in Cape Coast, in the Central Region of Ghana where she grew up and also hails from. She had her nursery education at Queen Elizabeth Day Nursery, Cape Coast and her basic education at St. Michael's Primary and Junior High School, Cape Coast. She then proceeded to Wesley Girls' High School, Cape Coast from 1979 to 1982; where she studied visual art. Moving to sixth form Wesley Girls did not offer any art course so she continued her visual art course at Holy Child Girls' High School, Cape Coast from 1982 to 1984. Betty then studied art and majored in painting at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana from 1985 to 1989 where she obtained a First Class Degree. After her first degree Betty had her National Service at the art gallery of the Centre for National Culture, Accra, after which she also worked there, from 1989 to 1993. In 1993 Betty went back to KNUST where she undertook a two years masters degree programme in Fine Art, painting. Moving on to the final year of her masters degree programme at KNUST the lecturers embarked on a demonstration which kept on retarding the school's reopening. She therefore decided to travel to Japan in 1995 where her fiancée was living there at that time. Over there she undertook a Japanese language course at OLJ Language Academy, Tokyo and then proceeded to Tokyo School of Art, where she undertook a professional art course in painting for three years. On completion Betty returned to Ghana in 2000 and then reapplied to finish her postgraduate programme at KNUST, from 2000-2001.

After Betty finished her masters she planned to practice as a full time artist. However, she did some watercolour paintings and went to Berj Art Gallery, Accra, Ghana to have them framed when she met the owner of the art gallery, Joyce Quashie who pleaded with her to take care of the gallery for her because she had to travel urgently and there was nobody. Betty had met Joyce

Quashie before at the Centre for National Culture while doing her National Service and found that a framing shop formed part of her gallery that is why she went there to have her works framed. Betty states that she took the job thinking that when she came back after three/six months; she will stop and continue to practise as a full time artist but Joyce took a long time in coming back and so she had to continue taking care of the place, and when she finally came back she asked her to continue because she had to travel again. Betty ended up working at Berj Art Gallery for three years from 2002 to 2005. Determined and wanting to practise as a full time artist, Betty resigned from Berj Art Gallery and pursued her heart desire. Betty currently lives and works in Accra as a full time artist.

Betty asserts that she has been painting professionally since 1990 that is a year after she completed her first degree. She noted that for her she does not have any other choice apart from painting; she loves painting and it is something she has been doing since childhood. Right from childhood, Betty recalled that her family members; her mum, brothers and sisters, everybody was always amazed and happy about any works of art she produced; though she does not remember what she use to draw. She expressed that she has been an artist throughout her life; right from her mother's womb. At a very young age she knew within her that, she wanted to be an artist. She made up her mind that in future whatever job she finds herself doing she will do art in addition or will specialize in art. She stated that she does not like teaching, she will not like to work in a bank; none of those things excite her, she just loves to be in her studio doing art. As to whether she was going to make enough money from it; is something she did not take into consideration; she just wanted to pursue her passion.

In 1990, after Betty completed her first degree she had a message from Ablade Glover; the owner of Artist Alliance Gallery (Omanye House) and also himself a renowned Ghanaian painter

that he was going to open an art gallery and that he had selected some artists whose works he wanted to display in the gallery. Every artist was supposed to present a number of paintings, so she sent hers and from there she has built her clientele. Betty mentioned that Berj Art Gallery has also helped her acquire a lot of customers. Berj Art Gallery sold a diptych (one of Betty's signature paintings) to African Regent Hotel and they put it in their lobby, so through that painting she has made a lot of customers. She stated that when people go there they try to find out who did the work, even though her phone number is not there; they manage to locate her somehow. Additionally, she initially did not want to join Facebook but somebody told her it's virtually like a website so she signed up and uploaded a few paintings and that has also been of a massive help. Betty asserts that at this time of her career as an artist it is okay for her.

Betty mentioned that her husband, her mum, her brothers and sisters have been very supportive. She expressed that her father died early when she was seven years old but she is sure that if he had been alive he would have been supportive.

#### **4.3. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

Betty mainly identifies with painting. In the initial stages of her career she mainly used oil paints, and when acrylics became popular in Ghana she started painting with acrylics. She noted that while on campus before canvases became popular they were using chip boards. However, most of her works now are acrylic paintings on canvas. Betty also noted that while working at the Centre for National Culture she used to do watercolour paintings; it is something she did for quite a while but because of the demand for her acrylic paintings, she has not been able to continue doing watercolour paintings. She expressed that she really enjoyed painting with watercolours, and so will one day go back to using them. She even had a major exhibition at Novotel, now

Accra City Hotel in Accra, Ghana titled; PANAFEST '94 where she displayed only her watercolour paintings. It was a group exhibition with Amarkine Amarteifio, Assou Kossie; a Togolese, and Jean and Jacky Canal; a French couple.

At first art students in KNUST were made to study all the art courses and then when moving to second year you were made to select one as your area of specialization. Betty explained that she initially wanted to become a fashion designer because she had learnt how to sewn from her aunty who was a seamstress but since KNUST did not offer fashion design but textile design, she planned to specialize in textile design. However, her lecturers upon seeing her portfolio advised her to rather opt for painting as her area of specialization and she gave heed to their advice. In the second year you are taught and made to experiment with all the media and techniques of painting and drawing; but when you get to third year, you have to specialize in a particular style of painting, that was when the works of the French impressionists caught Betty's attention. Betty expressed that she finds their works very attractive; the prints and strokes look fresh. The French impressionists greatly influenced Betty's choice of painting technique which is pointillism. However, Betty rightly notes that she did not adopt the exact technique used by the French Impressionists; she developed her own unique way of painting.

She is also inspired by the works of renowned contemporary Ghanaian painters Wiz Kudowor, Nii T. Mills, and Ablade Glover. She is inspired by the works of Nii T. Mills because of the artists he is inspired by thus basically they are inspired by the same artists. Betty mentioned that Kate Badoe a Ghanaian painter who was her senior at the university also inspired her, not in terms of her working technique but because she is a lady painter. Upon seeing her practising painting at school it encouraged her to also take up painting.

Betty explained that when she started using pointillism she was painting still life objects. After a while it occurred to her that it would be better to paint themes that involved movements because of the way in which her strokes moved, even though her still life paintings were good. She therefore decided to paint dancing figures; an idea that occurred to her also because she loves dancing. Her paintings regarding dancing figures depict Ghanaian traditional dances. Betty remarked that the dancing themes worked perfectly and so she did more of the dancing figures. Her lecturer Ato Delaquis, also a renowned Ghanaian painter guided and encouraged her. Betty shared that for her masters project at KNUST she researched on and made paintings depicting some Ghanaian traditional dances found in each of the ten (10) regions in Ghana.

Later on Betty noticed that her technique also worked well with seascapes and landscapes and so she started painting scenes of that nature. She however, shared that in school she used to do landscape paintings with watercolour but it never came out well, it looked like poster colour paintings so she lost interest in painting landscapes. Later on after completing KNUST and wanting to still paint landscapes upon seeing a photograph of a beautiful landscape scene she tried again but this time with acrylic on canvas. Though she was not confident about what she had painted, her husband and daughter loved it. She expressed that her daughter came back from school and when she saw the painting she said: *wow mummy; it's working*. Her husband too saw it and said: *wow; this is very nice*. She noted that it looked different from what she had been usually painting and so she began to also paint more landscapes.

Also after some time, every time she went to town she observed how fast the 'kayayo' girls (porters) moved through the crowd, carrying heavy loads on their heads. That moved Betty to also start painting themes regarding 'kayayo' girls. Betty's themes focus on movement and light. She shared that the first time she did a painting regarding the 'kayayo' girls in her studio at

KNUST; while painting her lecturers and most of her friends loved and expressed interest in the work. Some of her lecturers even asked her to gift it to them. She recalled that they had an exhibition later on where she exhibited that particular work and that was the only work that everyone wanted to buy. Due to the demand for the work she decided to keep that work for herself and so made a tag with the writings; *not for sale* and put it on the work. Betty noted that anytime she exhibited that work at exhibitions it gathered a lot of interest. Betty's diptych paintings which usually depict a 'kayayo' girl is her signature painting. With the kayayo themes she initially made paintings depicting one kayayo and then with time made paintings depicting more than one.

Betty usually finds ideas for her paintings from photographs in art books and magazines. She stated that she particularly likes seascapes and landscapes that feature mountains, streams, lakes, rivers, and waterfalls; whenever she sees scenes of that nature she is inspired to paint. She however, does not paint the exact scene, they just give her some ideas. She mentioned that she also likes to take a whole lot of pictures whenever she goes to the beach or a funeral outside town. She loves listening to cool music and inspirational messages while painting. She expressed that music goes with painting a lot.

Betty is of the philosophy that God has given every single person a gift and so we must identify that gift, learn about it, perfect it and then give out our best. You will by all means gain something from it; whether financial or moral satisfaction. You will be surprised that through your gift, you can help a whole lot of people and bless so many lives.

Betty finds great joy in the fact that she is able to express her God giving talent which gives her inward satisfaction and after she is done with a painting, when the work is bought she gets economic satisfaction in addition. She stated that some people do it the other way round; because

of money, they abandon their God-giving talent and go looking for jobs that will bring them a lot of money. At the end of the day they are not satisfied inwardly, their job stresses them out but they can't stop because they are getting a lot of money from it.

#### **4.3.1. Exhibitions**

While doing her national service, Betty took part in the 'Pan-African Festival of Arts and Music' in 1990 (PAFAM '90'), her first solo exhibition. The organizers of the exhibition called for people in different art related professions to come and pay for a space to exhibit their works. Luckily for her though she did not have money, her cousin who lived in Accra gave her money to pay for a space to exhibit her works. Betty mentioned that she exhibited works that she produced while in school and though she did not sell anything she had a lot of encouragement. At PAFAM '90' Betty met two ladies, namely; Ama and Ahema who owned an art gallery called Amahema Gallery at Osu, Accra. Upon seeing her works they told her they had another exhibition for her after PAFAM '90' so gave her their card. In 1991 they organized another solo exhibition for Betty in their gallery. Betty noted that the exhibition was big and powerful. They helped her a lot in the beginning of her career. Betty asserts that PAFAM '90' and the exhibition held at Amahema Gallery are the only two solo exhibitions she has had, every other exhibition has been with other artists.

She shared that Amahema Gallery was later renamed Ahema Gallery because the two ladies got separated, thus Ama left. Later on, unfortunately Ahema passed on so the gallery closed down.

Also in 1991, Betty had some of her works exhibited at an international media conference in Sheffield, England. Betty shared that a friend artist who was attending the conference came and told her that he had to attend an exhibition with artworks but he had not done any. He told her he

needed to be there so if she has done some artworks she should give it to him, so he can go and exhibit them. At that time Betty was doing watercolour paintings so she gave him some to go and display at the exhibition. Betty rightly notes that even though she sent few works, they had very good reviews. She shared that because she did not get her visa on time, by the time she got to England the exhibition was over. However, this experience changed her life in a way because that was when she had the opportunity to visit England for the very first time.

In 1992 Betty had a joint exhibition with renowned Ghanaian artists Ablade Glover, Amon Kotei, and Tafa Fiadzigbe at Novotel now Accra City Hotel in Accra, Ghana titled 'Explosion of Art'. Then In 1995, she participated in an exhibition titled 'Vital Strokes', at Golden Tulip Hotel, Accra, Ghana which featured the works of other Ghanaian female painters namely; Belinda Hodasi and Janet Nmai. Betty mentioned that the late Janet Nmai was Amon Kotei's apprentice so she could paint exactly like Amon Kotei and you will think it was Amon Kotei's work.

Furthermore, in 2014 Frances Ademola the owner of Accra Loom Gallery, Ghana organized a landmark exhibition titled 'Three generations of women in art' of which Betty was part. The exhibition held at her gallery featured ten women artists, namely; Araba Kromantim, Theodosia Okoh, Kati Torda, Marigold Akufo-Addo, Kate Badoe, Betty Aquah, Constance Swaniker, Nana Amu, Adwoa Amoah, and Fatric Bewong; their ages ranging from 97 to 34. Betty noted that Frances Ademola organized an all women exhibition to round up her gallery experience. Frances Ademola's gallery the Accra Loom, is one of the oldest galleries in Accra, established in 1969. Betty has participated in several group exhibitions.

While working at the Center for National Culture, Accra Betty was commissioned to do two mural paintings for the National Commission on Culture, Ghana. Also, Betty was part of a joint project where they sewed together paintings produced by different artists; mainly members of the

Ghana Association of Visual Artists, a very powerful work that is currently displayed at the lobby of the new Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) office in Accra, Ghana. Two of Betty's paintings form part of that work.

Some of Betty's paintings can be found at Artist Alliance Gallery, Berj Art Gallery, Tiga Art Gallery and the art gallery of the Center for National Culture, all in Accra, Ghana. Also, Kuaba Gallery in Indianapolis, USA.

#### 4.3.2. Some Works of Betty Acquah

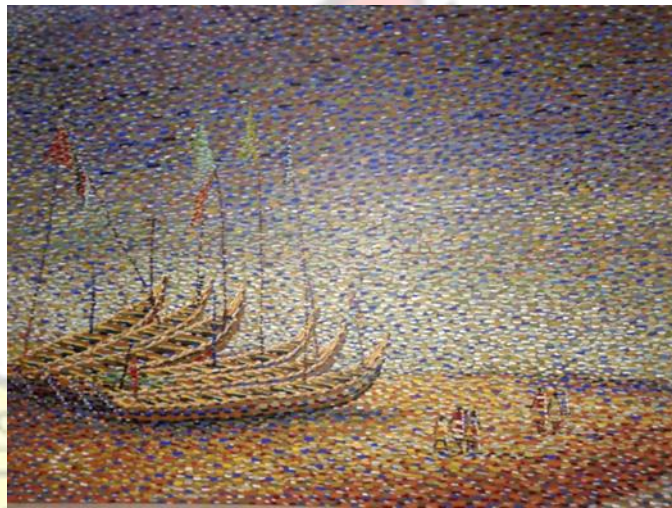


**Plate 8:** Traditional Models, 2016, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas), 60 x 20 inches each

**Source:** Betty Acquah

The diptych painting (Plate 8) is a sample of Betty's signature paintings of which she has produced a whole lot. The size of the painting also forms part of the signature, a size she adopted from the renowned Ghanaian painter Nii T. Mills who also paints in strokes. The painting makes reference to '*kayayo*' (porters) usually seen in the markets. The first painting usually depicts the

front view, and the second depicts the back view of the *kayayo*. '*Kayayo*' are typically adolescent girls and women mostly from the Northern region of Ghana who relocate to the southern part of Ghana to work in cities like Accra and Kumasi. They are known for working in the markets where they help convey often very weighty loads of shopping done by market patrons (Abdulai, 2010).



**Plate 9:** Castle Beach, 2016, (Landscape painting, Acrylic on canvas), 30 x 40 inches

**Source:** Betty Acquah

Growing up in Cape Coast; a fishing port community, Betty saw the sea every day, which has had an influence on her works as an artist. She likes painting seascapes (Plate 9). In Cape Coast Betty lived on a hill where you could view the sea. Cape Coast is the capital city of the Central Region of Ghana. The region is characterized by a lot of batholith rock and is typically rippling with steep slopes. There are valleys of several streams between the hills, with Kakum being the largest stream. The minor streams end in wetlands, the largest of which drains in the Fosu Lagoon at Bakano. In the northern part of the district, however, the landscape is suitable for the cultivations of various crops. It is one of the most historical cities in Ghana. From the 16<sup>th</sup>

century until Ghanaian independence, the city and fishing port changed hands between the British, the Portuguese, the Swedish, the Danish and the Dutch.



**Plate 10:** Damba Twirl 1 & 2, 2016, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas), 20 x 60 inches each  
**Source:** Betty Acquah

The painting (Plate 10) portrays '*damba*' dancers from the top view. Of particular interest is the twirl pattern of the *damba* smock as seen while the men do the *damba* dance. Betty uses short, thin strokes of paint to capture the essence of the object rather than the subject's details. The carefully applied layers of earthly colours and brush strokes give the painterly illusion of movement and spontaneity.

Fuzzy (2014) wrote that Damba is an extensively eminent thanksgiving festival of the Dagombas/Dagbamba of Northern Ghana, which is now celebrated by other stratified northern societies including Nanumbas, Mamprusis and Gonjas, and also the Wala in the Upper West region, which is called 'Dumba'. Damba is also the name given to a well-known traditional

dance of the Dagomba/Dagbamba monarchs. Both the festival and dance are in actual fact ritual in nature. During this festive event the men wear colourful, handwoven smocks that are specially made for dancing while women wear traditional handwoven cloth wrapped around their waists and costly jewelry. According to Acquah et al. (2017) the smock is the most distinguishing costume form in Northern Ghana. The smock by design is shaped like the ‘dondon’ drum of the Dagombas; two ends are broader with trimmer middle which when stitched together makes a lovely dress. Smock as we have it today has seen a number of developments and modifications to make it suitable for several occasions. Ever since it was introduced into Dagbon during the reign of the Ya-Naa Zangina, smock has evolved from royal wear on communal occasions to official and casual wear, today smock is worn to several occasions as desired. The smock attire has interesting colour stripes organized in a recurrent order. The beauty of smock is seen when men do the *damba* dance with the edge of the dress going round in circles as depicted in the painting.



**Plate 11:** Child at heart, 2014, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas), 30 x 40 inches

**Source:** Betty Acquah

In doing this painting (Plate 11) Betty sought to say that everybody is a child at heart. Every adult has been a child before and that child that you were is still inside you. When you were a child you did not have to deal with so many tough issues, you were always joyful, always

playing and carefree. Do not let life stress you out, remember your carefree days, take it easy and be a child at heart. Some of her other paintings depicting children have the titles ‘care free days’ and ‘pure at heart’ which also address the same concept.



**Plate 12:** Nation builders, 2013, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas), 40 x 60 inches

**Source:** Betty Acquah

‘Nation builders’ (Plate 12) portrays the industrious and hardworking nature of women. It particularly depicts market women and hawkers who in their own small way contribute to national development. The painting also sought to entreat all women to identify their gift and endeavor to make good use of it. Like the French Impressionists Betty strongly emphasizes the effect of light and the vibrancy of colours in her paintings by portraying scenes or figures at the time of the day when there are long shadows. Her paintings capture the light of the moment, not the detail. She uses layers of colours, leaving gaps in the top layers to reveal the colours underneath. The layers of colours which have been applied optically eliminate perfect coverage and smoothly-blended transitions.

#### 4.4. Experiences and Challenges

In the beginning of her career as an artist Betty stated that availability of art materials was a challenge. Sometimes you even had the money but where to go and buy; most of the time they run short of it in town and then once in a while an artist will come and inform them that he has found someone selling canvas, they all rush and go and buy and when it gets finished that's it. Now it's better but in the beginning it was not easy. Also after Betty completed KNUST she moved from Kumasi straight to Accra, she shared that getting a space to paint was very difficult because she had been based in Cape Coast throughout her life. She did not have a house in Accra; she was a student coming out of school. Betty stayed with her brother who lived in Accra for some time. She however stated that whether in the house or outside the house, anyway would have been okay but there was no place. She therefore had to move around a lot, from her brother's house she went to stay with the late Amon Kotei (a renowned Ghanaian painter), who invited her to come and stay with him. He had a studio at home so she was living there and painting in his studio. At some point she had to go and rent a place. Betty expressed that anytime she moved from one place to another place she had to organize herself and continue painting. However she has a permanent place now.

Being a female artist, Betty shared that usually when people see her work for the first time and find out a female did the work, they get surprised. Betty recalled that she was in charge and part of a group exhibition at the National Museum of Ghana and so she was around when the Director of the Museum at that time came round to look at the works on display. He moved toward her work and said; *this person, he should have done it like this, he should have put this one here*, so she walked to him and told him it was her work; he then said; *no, no, no it's not possible, no, no, no, a woman couldn't have painted this work*. Betty also recalled that two men came to interview

her to be featured in a magazine, they later brought her a copy of the magazine and when she read it they had written; *Betty Acquah thinks that it's a normal thing for a woman to paint...* That is when it dawned on her that people think women cannot paint. Betty expressed that; *what's so strange about a woman painting, it's normal for me.*

Betty stated that people have it in mind that painting is a profession for men. She however noted that she is sure is not limited to painting, there are other professions that people think women cannot do, they do not expect women to be there at all. She further noted that women are expected to be at home taking care of the family. To date she does not understand why people get surprised because she believes painting is something a woman should be able to do.

Touching on the poor visibility of female artists Betty stated that women are expected to take care of the home, so people do not expect women to aspire and take up certain professions. A man will get up in the morning, just take his bath and he's off to work but a woman will have to sweep, wash the dishes, cook, take care of the children and send them to school so by the time you go to your studio to start working time has already been far spent. Then while working, within some few hours you have to stop and go and prepare supper; these are the things. If you are a married woman you have to do these things. All those things take a lot of energy out of women, they take your time and time is money, the time that you invest in the work will cause you to move forward but here is the case where you have less time so it really brings the women back. Betty noted that it is in fact serious. Everybody has 24 hours, so if the man is spending more time on his work than the woman is, you definitely cannot compete with the person who is spending more time on his work. Because of the way the family has been put up, a lot of responsibility lies on the woman to care of the home. If you even have people helping you, you have to give instructions and monitor them and if you decide not to take of the home as a married

woman it will one day cost you a lot. Betty expressed that it's the time that really sets women back a lot because they can't spend as much time on a work as they should. Asante (2009) affirms this fact and so therefore writes that; with the huge number of roles women assume in Africa, especially in Ghana, as – housekeeper, mother, economic contributor, cook, water carrier, and often sole provider and also due to some socio-cultural relegation of women to the background when would the women have a chance to make her own artistic proclamation or voice her concern on this issue?

Betty mentioned that women artists are even more so given the same opportunities and privileges as their male counterparts because there are not many women artists. Nobody has discriminated against her because she is a woman artist, on the contrary, she has had people tell her; *you mean you are an artist, come, come, come*. People ask; *where are the women, we want them to come, where are they*.

She expressed that being a woman artist has being a blessing. She realized that everywhere she goes people are amazed seeing her works and finding out it was produced by a woman. She recalled that, she first met the late Amon Kotei (a renowned Ghanaian artist) at the Center for National Culture. He had his works on display at the art gallery of the Center for National Culture where Betty was working. He had seen her works somewhere and so through a conversation with him he found out she was Betty Acquah. He was amazed, pulled her and said; *youuuuuuu, you mean this tiny thing, you did this work*. She expressed that people just like her because of her works. They invite her and ask her to bring the other women artists. She is not able to keep up with orders because she is not able to spend enough time painting. She further stated that her working technique has also set her back a little because it takes her a lot of time to finish one painting. She recalled that it actually took her ten weeks to finish one painting for

someone, a big size painting that measured six feet by six feet. She expressed that if she was a fast painter she will be competing with the men.

Betty however admits to facing racial discrimination while working as a part time waitress at an Italian restaurant in Japan. Over there part time work is referred to as 'Arubaito'. While schooling in Japan Betty worked as a part time waitress; she was one of the waitresses who served food to customers after it has been cooked. Normally when people came the first thing you did was to fill their cups with water. A family of about six came to sit around a table in the room where she was on duty, so she went and filled their glasses with water. As soon as she finished filling their glasses, her boss called her aside and told her not to serve that table anymore, but she did not understand. She thought he said she should not serve them with water again, so when their food was ready she took it and when she was about serving the food, her boss came and shouted on her in public so she sent the food back. Betty noted that she had never faced that kind of thing in her life. She got angry but was trying to control herself. She did not get it because she was serving all the other tables in that particular room. The restaurant had several rooms so each waiter or waitress was assigned to a room. After the family finished eating and left, her boss came and asked her to go and clear the table, she then told her boss; *was he not the one who said she should not go to that table, she will not go*. Her boss then explained to her that the father of the family came to him and told him that he did not want a black person to serve them. Betty expressed that, that was the first time she faced racial discrimination, she had never faced that anywhere in her life before and it's painful. She stated that; that may be the reason why some Black-Americans, especially the guys are so violet, if you have to face that every day of your life you will try to break the law.

Betty is a member of Women Artists Institute, Ghana, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Ghana and the international treasurer of Ghana Association of Visual Artists. She noted that there have been other several groups that were formed but did not work out.

# KNUST



**Plate 13:** Victoria Sophia Adoe  
A Painter



**Source:** Victoria Adoe

#### **4.5. Profile**

Vicki was born in Accra, Ghana on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, 1970. She hails from the town Ekumfi-Otuam in the Central Region of Ghana. She had her basic education at Happy Home and Prince of Peace International School in Accra, Ghana and then had her secondary education at Mfantsiman Girls' School, Saltpond, Ghana from 1984 to 1989, she then proceeded to Apam Secondary School where she had her sixth form and completed in the year 1991. She studied visual arts in secondary school. Vicki then did her national service at the Teachers Resort Centre, Tudu, Accra. Over there they produced artworks - teaching aids for schools, this marked Vicki's first working experience. From there she entered the university. Vicki went to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), in Kumasi, Ghana where she studied arts and majored in painting for her first degree, from 1993 to 1997. After, her first degree, she had to travel to South Africa where she taught English and art in Queenstown Private High School, Queenstown, Eastern Cape. Vicki taught there for a year and returned to her homeland, Ghana.

After some years she went back to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) where she undertook a masters programme in painting from 2009 to 2011. Currently, Vicki works and lives in Accra as a full-time artist.

Vicki shared that at a very young age, as at seven years old she developed interest in drawing; she admired every artwork and so started practising. She recalled that anytime her sister came back from school she would copy what she had done in her art book. Also in primary school she always topped art; there they drew on the board for them to draw, and every time she found it easy. She mentioned that it's an inbuilt talent.

When Vicki came back from South Africa and started practising seriously as an artist she found out that her father used to paint when he was young. He criticized most of her works and sometimes he would say he did better art. That made her realize she inherited the talent from her father. It was at this point that her father began to tell her how he started painting and at some point stopped. He said he was so much into the art that he realized if he continued he would not be normal. He found himself always painting, he liked it and worked with it for some time but stopped and started pursuing a career in accounting.

#### **4.6. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

Vicki mostly paints using acrylics and oils on canvas. She sometimes works with other media including; chalk pastel and watercolour. Vicki stated that at first she mostly used oil paints but was later introduced to acrylics and so now that is what she uses in executing most of her works, also because it's faster to get a work done in acrylics and easier to come by.

She is inspired by the traditional art and culture of Ghana and Africa as a whole; some of her paintings depict women in African costumes and also incorporate traditional symbols like the

Adinkra symbols. Vicki's paintings usually make reference to the African woman; their values, their beauty and the role they play in society. Vicki rightly notes that her paintings usually depict the art and culture of Africans because that is who she is; she is a Ghanaian and an African. Vicki mentioned that most of the time when you travel abroad you will notice that every bad thing is associated with the African. The African is restricted and we are seen as poor people. However, regardless of all these mentalities and concepts about Africans; she believes that there is something good and beautiful about the African and that is what her works seek to portray. She therefore seeks to portray the beauty of the African woman and also educate people about some of the art and culture of Africans. Vicki also paints landscapes. During her masters programme she mastered in painting landscapes using subjective colours.

Vicki stated that the first time she took painting seriously was when she saw Ato Delaqui's work; a Ghanaian artist and lecturer at KNUST. At first she could not believe somebody could produce a work of art like that with his or her hand. She did not know one could develop art to such an extent. Vicki stated that she was inspired by most of the works of her lecturers and Ghanaian artists including; Richmond Ackam, Ben Offei-Nyarko, and Wiz Kudowor; upon seeing his works at an exhibition. Anytime she saw the works of her lecturers she admired them and aimed to paint like them.

Vicki is also inspired by the works of renowned artists; Michelangelo and Vincent van Gogh; whose works she studied while in school. She mentioned that she is inspired by their works because of the way in which they executed the human figure. She would ponder how they managed to get the human figure so perfectly; she was inspired to do even more. Vicki notes that all artists who are older than her inspire her.

She finds ideas for her work from nature; trees, colours of flowers etc. She stated that she sees the colours of these and admires it and is therefore certain that if she paints it on canvas; it would also be admired by somebody. She sometimes takes pictures of things she admires in nature but does not paint the exact thing. They are just to give her a clue or some guidelines concerning the idea she has in mind to paint. She is also inspired by the lyrics and video clips of some local and contemporary songs by African artistes. Vicki shared that she made paintings inspired by the songs titled; 'Stop the war' and 'African Queen' sang by Tsepo Tshola (the Village Pope); a South African artiste and 2Face Idibia; a Nigerian artiste respectively. Also some sermons, poems and books especially that of African writers like Efuia Sutherland inspire her to paint.

Vicki shared that sometimes when she is inspired or in the mood to paint, she starts the work and finishes in a sitting; in oil and watercolour painting this technique is referred to as alla prima or wet-on-wet. She realized that the works she does in a sitting sometimes come out better than a work she has spent days or weeks doing. However, she notes that there are days that she spends about a week or a month on a painting and those to come out equally nice.

Some of Vicki's finished paintings are smooth, others are rough; you can feel the brush strokes. Vicki expressed that the environment counts when she is painting. When she paints in a cool or quiet place her painting comes out smooth but where there is noise or loud music; her painting comes out rough. Vicki noted that when working on certain themes she prefers to work in a cool environment. For instance if she is executing a painting of an African women because women should have a softer touch she would need to work in a cool environment. She would also have to take her time when doing paintings relating to such themes. For Vicki the atmosphere of the environment she paints in has an effect on the outcome of her paintings.

Vicki also shared that in the beginning of her career as an artist she use to do a lot of portraits and because of that many people came to her for portraits; but nowadays it's difficult for her to produce portraits. She stated that this may be due to the fact that she does not have time and so cannot concentrate so much as she use to because now she has some other responsibilities. She has a child and a family to take care of and so does not have enough time to do portraits. She realized she moved from producing portraits to doing abstract works or works that will not take so much of her time. She however noted that as an artist she should be able to do what she has done before and so if she has time and is in the mood she can do a portrait in a sitting or within two days.

Vicki also mentioned that sometime back she went through some difficult times but was still painting. When she came out of that stage, she realized that during those difficult times she used dark colours in painting as compared to the works she produced after. She shared that during those difficult times she did not notice that what she was going through affected her choice of colours or her work as an artist. This has made her believe that whatever experience you are going through can affect the type of work you produce.

#### **4.6.1. Exhibitions**

Vicki's first major exhibition titled 'Women's Voice' was held at the Aviation Social Centre, Accra, Ghana from the 30<sup>th</sup> of July to the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2004. This exhibition featured the works of two Ghanaian female artists; that is Vicki Adoe and Betty Acquah. The works exhibited looked at some of the issues that women are going through, their daily activities and the beauty of the African woman. Some of the titles of the paintings Vicki exhibited include 'Fertility',

‘Hope’ and ‘Men do not know what women do not say’. Vicki mentioned that she has had another exhibition with Betty Acquah in somebody’s residence.

In 2012 Vicki organized an exhibition in her church; Life way Community Baptist Church, East legon, Accra titled; ‘The beauty of Eden’. She believes that Christians too should know what artists do because not all works of artists are worldly as some people think. The exhibition referenced a statement made by Paul Cougan, he said; *God took clay and we all know what he did with it, he molded a human being out of it.* Just as God is creative, Vicki notes that she too needs to be creative with her paints and brushes. Vicki expressed that her first inspiration for producing any work of art is God.

Vicki stated that most of the time she paints and exhibits her works in her house and people who come and visit see them. Vicki expressed that she likes to exhibit her works in her house because when her works are with her, she can explain them better to people who come close. She will like to have her paintings displayed in art galleries and museums but how many times can she be there to talk about her paintings to people who are interested. She stated that the works usually found in museums and art galleries are so many, it will be difficult for people who work there to give customers insight about the works of a particular artist but when they are close to you anyone who comes sees you and you are identified with your work. She however mentioned that maybe in future she will send some of her works to art galleries and museums. She also plans to have her own art gallery where she can display her works and the works of other artists.

#### 4.6.2. Some Works of Victoria Adoe



**Plate 14:** Fertility, 2003, (Figure painting, Oil on canvas), 76cm x 114cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

‘Fertility’ (Plate 14) highlights the traditional costumes worn by women in South Africa, Botswana, Nigeria and Ghana. In doing this Vicki seeks to portray the beauty in look and clothing of the African woman. Vicki’s stay and experiences in South Africa has had great influence on her works as an artist. Also while in South Africa; once in while she saw people from Botswana who came to visit. She remarked that anytime she saw them she admired their costume and this is seen in her paintings.

In African societies, social standing, gender and age play a significant role and are mirrored in the clothes an individual wears. Among the Zulu in South Africa, wedded women grow their hair and adorn themselves with circular-shaped hats called ‘*izicolo*’, an esteemed costume. These hats were locally made of cotton and grass and measured as much as a meter across to protect the wearer from the sun (Collison, 2017). Typically, the hats are entwined with white or red cotton thread and the shape and size varies from tribe to tribe. The largest are however found in the hot vales of the Tugela River (Eshowe.com, 2019). A marital woman covers her whole body to signify that she is spoken for. An unmarried lady (*intombi*) contrarily wears her hair short and a

short skirt made of beaded cotton strings or grass, she wears no clothes on top irrespective of her small or large breasts, size or weight, and then adorns herself with beadwork. In the Zulu culture, they do not colligate any sexual connotation to the bare breast, but rather the buttocks (Eshowe.com, 2019).

Zulu beaded ornaments are opulent in culture and traditional denotation. Zulu handmade beaded work is an art practiced by the women of the clan. Customarily elder siblings pass down the tradition to their younger sisters. Though Zulu men wear beaded ornaments they do not take part in its craftsmanship. More often than not Zulu beaded jewels convey messages between the sexes in respect to relationships. The design together with the colours of the beadwork conveys a message. A particular beaded necklace worn by a woman for instance may tip off men that she is single. In order to avoid inappropriate social situations such as a single man approaching a married woman, the Zulu people communicate relationship status and sexual intent using this delicate means (Interesting-Africa-Facts.com, n.d.).

Beaded jewelries made by Zulu women are typically triangular in shape. The way in which the triangle is situated within a specific beadwork denotes different meanings. When the triangle is positioned aloft it indicates a single man, and when positioned downwards it indicates a single woman. There are many variations of triangle positions and positions to other triangles each with a different connotation. The colours of the beads used also impact the meaning of the message communicated by the bead work. Contrary to the shapes used in the bead work, which have fixed and constant meanings, the colours used can have positive or negative denotations. Zulu craftswomen use seven main colours; these are blue, green, yellow, black, white, red, and pink. Each of these colours has a positive meaning; nonetheless the meaning can be changed by the context in which the beads are used within the jewelry piece (Interesting-Africa-Facts.com, n.d.).

In the lives of the Tswana people of Botswana, ornaments play a significant role. Tswanas, both males and females from the youngest to the oldest use them, and mostly in large quantities. Women wear an apron called “*khiba*”, a skirt called “*mosese*”, a “*kaross*” to cover their bosom, and then wear a lot of ornaments including bracelets, necklaces, earrings and rings. Tswana ornaments are normally made from leather, animal teeth, copper wire etc. Well along they began to trade with other ethnic groups and countries and so included seashells and glass beads (Nationalclothing.org, 2015).

Also depicted in the painting is the distinctive traditional headdress of the Igbo and Yoruba women of Nigeria. The Igbo and Yoruba women of Nigeria usually adorn themselves with several head wraps called ‘*gele*’. The wraps made from coarse fabrics are low-priced and easy; and normally used for everyday life. Contrarily, those worn during special occasions like engagements, marriage ceremonies and funerals are made from costly imported fabrics which have different patterns and designs. There are several ways of how to wrap it. The traditional costumes of Nigerians are mostly bright and colorful (Nationalclothing.org, 2015).

The painting (Plate 14) also depicts a hairstyle which is typical of the royal women folk of the Ashanti kingdom in Ghana, thus the ‘Dancing Crown’ or “*Dansikran* (in the Twi vernacular)”. Particularly on special occasions tradition insists that queen mothers of the Ashanti Kingdom must wear the ‘*dansikran*’ haircut which differentiates them from the lowly. The ‘*dansikran*’ hairstyle is characterized by a short haircut which is dyed black. Customarily the ‘*Dansikran*’ hairstyle is known as “*Kentenkye* (woven-basket-hat)”. The haircut was first worn by the late Queen Mother of Asanteman; Nana Kwaadu Yiadom II (1917 - 1945), who had it on while performing a traditional Ashanti dance called ‘Adowa’ during the reinstatement of the Ashanti Confederacy. Maxwell, the then Governor referred to her haircut as the ‘Dancing Crown’ which

subsequently became known as *'Dansikran'* (the distorted form of *'dancing crown'*) because the town folks could not pronounce it the Governor's way (Maclean, 2017).

Additionally, portrayed at the right side of the painting (Plate 14) is the *Akua'ba* doll; a sacramental fertility doll used by the Akan people of Ghana and some other African tribes. However, the *Akua'ba* doll depicted in the painting has not been used in terms of giving birth as a woman but rather seeks to entreat all women to be fertile; thus exhibit good values and make a positive impact in the lives of the younger generation and the society as a whole. The painting is also inspired by a quote by James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey, who said *'if you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation'*. If a woman is equipped or educated she will teach her children and other people's children what she has learnt.



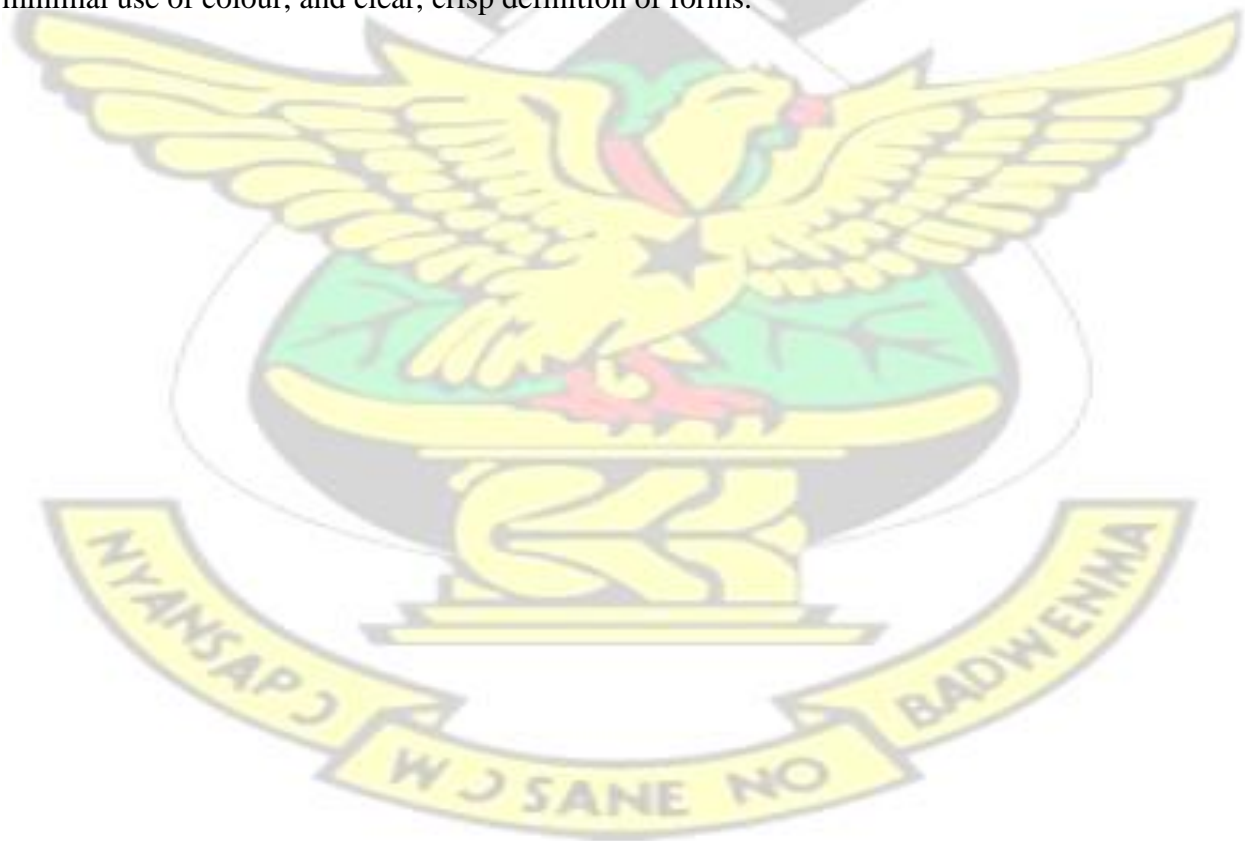
**Plate 15:** African Queen, 2004, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas), 63.4cm x 76cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

Upon hearing and watching the video clip of a song titled *'African Queen'* by 2Face Idibia; a Nigerian Artiste, Vicki was inspired to produce the painting *'African Queen'* (Plate 15). In the song the artiste addresses his beloved as his *'African Queen'* which is typical of some African men; not necessarily because the person is a queen but because they love and appreciate the

person. The painting 'African Queen' also highlights the traditional costumes worn by women in Botswana, Ghana and South Africa as discussed in the write up for Plate 14. This painting also seeks to portray the beauty of the African woman.

Vicki usually portrays the outline of the side view of African women as dark figures against light coloured background. The costumes worn by the African women are usually depicted in tinted colour shades of red, blue, violet, gold, orange and yellow. The background of her paintings usually portray figures mostly adinkra symbols which make reference to the subject matter of the painting, these figures carry significant messages about the subject matter of the painting. Vicki's figure paintings showcase an exquisite attention to detail, asymmetrical values, pastel colour palette, curved or serpentine lines, a smooth paint surface, the depiction of light, a minimal use of colour, and clear, crisp definition of forms.





**Plate 16a:** Adinkra II, 2018

Abstract painting, Acrylic on canvas  
89cm x 30.7cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher



**Plate 16b:** Adinkra II, 2018

Abstract painting, Acrylic on canvas  
89cm x 38.2cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

The paintings (Plate 16a & 16b) form part of a series of paintings titled 'Adinkra'. The paintings make reference to a traditional art known as *Adinkra* symbols. Alabi (2018) rightly notes that *Adinkra* symbols are exceptional representations of traditional sayings, values, concepts and customary myths of the Akan of Ghana and Gyaaman of Ivory Coast. The sophisticated symbols of *Adinkra* have an attractive characteristic. They epitomize objects that put in a nutshell reminiscent messages that bear traditional wisdom and spiritual aspects of life. *Adinkra* symbols and their connotations communicate subjects that chronicle the history, values, beliefs and heritage of the Ashanti people. The history dates back to the primordial time when Africans engraved on caves and walls as a means of written records.

In the Akan dialect '*Adinkra*' insinuates goodbye or farewell. For centuries, wearing of indigenous costumes adorned with *Adinkra* has been the practice of most Akans. Initially, only

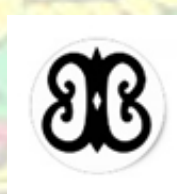
spiritual leaders and nobles were allowed to wear *Adinkra* cloths on special occasions. In modern times however, *Adinkra* has been greatly incorporated into pottery, jewelry, fashion, wood carvings, furniture, architecture and many other forms of arts. Oral history has it that the *Adinkra* is named after Nana Kofi Adinkra (the king of Gyaman). The Ashanti artists were subsequently to learn the *Adinkra* designs from King Kwodo Adingras's son; Appau after Ashanti conquered Gyamnan. It goes ahead to imply that Nana Adinkra dressed in patterned cloth, in response to his pain of being taken to the capital of Ashanti Region, Kumasi. Ashanti indigenous cloths and fabrics with impressions of *adinkra* symbols are referred to as *Adinkra*. These symbols were initially crafted by the Akan community. Among the hundreds of all *Adinkra* symbols and their connotations that have been documented and conserved, the earlier symbols express abstract proverbs, fables, folktales, phrases and songs. *Adinkra* symbols also delineate notable happenings, human, flora and fauna attitudes.

The *adinkra* symbols that have been incorporated in the paintings include; '*Ntesie*' and '*Hye wonye*'.



**Figure 3:** Ntesie

**Source:** ghanaculturepolitics.com



**Figure 3a:** Hye wonye

**Source:** ghanaculturepolitics.com

The '*Ntesie*' *adinkra* as seen in the first painting (Plate 16a); symbolizes knowledge and wisdom. It reflects the saying; I have heard and kept it, thus '*Nyansa bun mu ne mate masie*' (in the Akan language) meaning 'deep wisdom comes out of listening and keeping what is heard'. The '*Hye wonye*' *adinkra* as seen in the second painting (Plate 16b) symbolizes; imperishability, endless,

forgiveness and toughness. It reflects the saying; *'hye a wonnhye'* (in the Akan dialect) meaning 'that which cannot be burnt' (ghanaculturepolitics.com, n.d.).

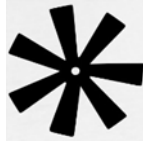


**Plate 17:** The ideal woman, 2007, (Figure painting, Oil on canvas), 30 x 50 inches

**Source:** Victoria Adoe

'The ideal woman' (Plate 17) was produced in honour of Esther Afua Ocloo during a competition held by the executives of the Women Artists Institute (WAI) on International Women's Day. The painting competition was organized for professional women painters in Accra, Ghana. Vicki Adoe who was part of the competition and having produced this painting was declared the winner. The competition was on the theme, "Engraving the Achievements of Women; 50 Years of Ghana's Development". The theme for the competition was specifically focused on the works of the late Esther Ocloo, a renowned industrialist, who contributed to the economic development of the country and also paved the way for women to engage in industrial economic ventures. The artists were required to create original works of art that gave a visual representation of Ocloo's works and contributions from the artist's own view point. Six women artists participated in the competition which was monitored by a jury of art enthusiasts (Daily Graphic, 2007).

Vicki incorporated the *adinkra* symbol; ‘*Ananse ntentan*’ as seen at the right corner of the painting (Plate 17).



**Figure 4:** Ananse ntentan  
**Source:** ghanaculturepolitics.com

‘*Ananse ntentan*’ (spider’s web), is an adinkra symbol named after a well-known character called ‘*Ananse*’ (spider) in Ghanaian folktales as possessing many different traits. It symbolizes wisdom, creativity and complexities of life. The African woman breast feeding and sitting behind a computer, and the ‘*Ananse ntentan*’ adinkra symbol as portrayed in the painting therefore makes reference to Esther Ocloo as a creative woman who played many roles at the same time; she was a wife, a mother and a career woman. Nyabor (2017) rightly notes that Esther Afua Ocloo instituted the nation’s first native food processing enterprise; Nkulenu Industries and stood up for women’s empowerment in Ghana with a doodle today. To date Nkulenu Industries produce orange marmalade and export local food items to markets overseas. Having started her business in the 1930s, Esther Ocloo rose into an international inspiration and passed on in the year 2002 at the age of 82.



**Plate 18:** Fertility II, 2004, (Figure painting, Oil on canvas), 80cm x 40cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

Fertility II (Plate 18) makes reference to the *Akua'ba* doll; a ritual fertility doll used by the Akan people of Ghana and some other African cultures. It highlights the essence of the fertility doll; that is been able to give birth as a woman and the responsibilities that come with it.

It is held that if an Ashanti woman is infertile and desires to be fertile; when she secures one of these ritual fertility dolls and cares for it as her child; it brings about pregnancy. As stated in Akan myth, in the remote past a woman called Akua could not become pregnant with a child. Akua tried to find out first the spiritual cause for her barrenness. She went to a diviner (a person with the power to use charm and manipulation of mystical beings, powerful objects, and herbal concoctions to act as mediator with the gods on behalf of the people). The diviner told her to contract a carver to make for her a wooden child and to treat the wood figurine as though it were real baby. Akua did just as she was told and after some few months, she became pregnant with a

child. The Akan peoples believe that when infertile women use one of these wooden figurines in the same way Akua did, if a diviner after sacramental divination established that it would be effective. A craftsman would then sculpt an *Akua'ba* doll for her and she would carry it on her back, present it symbolical food and drink, and venerate it on a shrine in her home until she conceived a child (ba). *The Akua'ba* doll could be gifted to another female family relative if she too sought divine help to conceive a child (Klemm, 2019).

Klemm further writes that, bygone days *Akua'ba* dolls were significant fertility aids among the Akans in Ghana. They represent an abridged female form in wood and were sculpted by male carvers. Although this figurine is called *Akua'ba* (Akua's child), it is obviously not meant to look like a child. *Akua'ba* dolls are at all times female figurines, because Akan culture is matrilineal. Though intended to portray the prime of life, the *akua'ba* is also somewhat abstract. By laying emphasis on certain features, the artist depicts the Akan epitome of feminine beauty. Her large, rounded forehead is apprehended as the abode where wisdom resides; it implies the wealth of knowledge and intellectual maturity the child should have. Her ringed neck is meant to imply rolls of fat. Extra body fat at this stage of life indicates that the young woman is matured and capable of bearing hale and hearty children. Finally, her high, stick out breasts insinuates a woman who has not yet bore and nurtured children. Hence, the *akua'ba* shows three essential qualities of womanhood (wisdom, birth, and the prime of life) which are associated with her physical and mental capabilities.

The profile of a woman with her breast showing at the background and the silhouette of a naked woman at the right side of the painting also signify fertility; as a woman there should be breasts to feed your baby after giving birth. These features of a woman are therefore part of being fertile.

Vicki asserts that no matter how your form is as a woman; the moment you birth it brings out your form.

Another prominent feature in the painting (Plate 18) is the '*kente*' cloth; the national cloth of Ghana. *Kente* is a traditional cloth, woven by hand on a horizontal treadle loom by Ashanti and Ewe weavers. *Kente* is not just a clothing piece; it is graphic portrayal of history, oral literature, philosophy, religious dogmas, political views and moral codes (kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com, 2012).

#### **4.7. Experiences and Challenges**

Vicki shared that in the early stages of her career as an artist her parents were supportive. She use to paint and do fashion design at the same time and most of the time when she organized fashion shows she would invite them. They approved of it until after she completed her tertiary education. Vicki mentioned that most Ghanaians think painting is not a major work to do, they think it should be a part time work so when you tell them you are a full-time artist they would ask you; *so do you get enough income from it?, is it the major work that you are doing?.* Some would even advise you to go and take up a banking job or something else, but Vicki noted that she sees it as a full-time work. She shared that people find it difficult to accept the fact that she is a full-time artist, sometimes she has to convince them. She however feels it should be normal for everyone to see painting as a major work.

Vicki expressed that some schools abroad give people the privilege of studying other courses in addition to art, so you would find that someone is a doctor and also an artist, but this is not so in the public schools in Ghana so if its art; it purely art, if its science; it purely science. Also artists abroad are able to solely depend on art because there is a ready market but in Africa, getting

money is not that easy, so one would think of what they would eat before thinking of getting an artwork to display in his or her house.

However, Vicki rightly observes that some of her family members appreciate her so much and usually refer to her works of art. Whenever her uncles introduce her to other people they would say; *this one can do powerful works. Just give her a portrait, and she would paint it to look just like you.* Wherever she goes, she is singled out as a special person as if there are some things that she can do that others cannot do. Sometimes she does not need to talk about herself but because of what people have seen her do they testify on her behalf. She considers it normal but to them it's extraordinary.

Being a female artist; Vicki shared that she sometimes meets people who do not believe in a woman being an artist. When you introduce yourself as an artist some people get surprised and ask; *Are you sure?, Did you do this work?.* They want to see a man or a scruffy looking person being an artist. She finds it normal because she believes what a man can produce; a woman can produce equally but in our society, she expressed that people find it difficult to accept the fact that a woman too can produce a work of art, so it's a bit of a challenge. She noted that in our society they want to see the woman in the kitchen; at home always taking care of her husband and children but in abroad a woman can decide that am going to be an artist; I will not marry and it's accepted. Vicki mentioned that we have a bigger challenge here. Though it may be also difficult abroad, they're challenges is not as much as what we have here.

Touching on the poor visibility of female artists, Vicki stated they are not so pronounced because the profession is not accepted. People expect you to go and find another job even though you are an artist. You tell them you are an artist, you paint and they tell you; you should look for a job or

won't you look for a job to do? Some family members have this mindset that it's a part-time job or this is not a serious profession but you know you have studied about working with it.

She further stated that it's a challenge she is still facing; that she should go and look for a job to do because they do not see you getting up in the morning and going to work; but she tells herself she is working. Elsewhere somebody will see you and promote you and even build a gallery for you because they understand the profession better than Ghanaians. Though it looks a bit gloomy because art is not respected, she believes that some time to come Ghanaians will admire and start looking for the works of artists to buy and by that time those who have bought them already will be rich. This concurs Kum-Essuon's view in his article titled: *'The Artists and the Philosophical Vision of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ghana'* when he writes that; the few who brave the storm to work as artists, soon come to grips with the difficulty of practicing art in Ghana: – non-affordability of materials, lack of working capital, societal disdain for made in Ghana ideas, lack of art galleries and above all, ignorance on the part of most Ghanaians about the positive effect of the arts on their lives. Moreover, these problems are all the more compounded by parental or family demands for 'better' and 'attractive' jobs depriving the artist the vent to his creative urge and within a serene mind frame. This is the socio-cultural and economic scenario in which the artist finds himself in Ghana today, and from which he has to carve out his art philosophy.

Vicki continued to say that another contributing factor of poor visibility of female artists is that they do not hold a lot of exhibitions so other women will know what they do and be inspired. You find women artists practising in their corner. Vicki stated that women artists do not put themselves out there like the way musicians come out readily to display their works. For them if it's not an exhibition you will not even find them talking about their works. She expressed that a good idea will be going out every year and exhibiting in churches and in the secondary schools

for the young ones to know what is ahead of them especially those who have the talent. She believes women artists have not done much regarding visibility. Vicki shared that dressing in a unique way will also help deal with the poor visibility of female artists. When they go out people should see and know that they are artists. Additionally media houses should endeavor to interview female painters and sculptors, and show their works on television and in the newspapers; so that children and other ladies will know that it's a profession and it's real.

Vicki also asserts that per her experiences; female artists are given the same opportunities and privileges as their male counterparts. There have been times when they have been called upon to exhibit their works together with male artists. However, she noted that the man has more time to work but for a female is different. When they were in school they learnt that there are some paints you cannot use when you are pregnant so that alone will cut you off from working when you get pregnant. Men will not even have to go for maternity leave, so they have more time to work. The responsibilities of women are so many that there are times you want to paint but you cannot paint. In buttressing Vicki's assertion, Miller (2018) wrote that there isn't a type of paint that's considered 100 percent safe for pregnant women. All paints are created equal. "In pregnancy, they usually try to advocate that if you're going to be around paint, you want to avoid paints with harsh solvents." Oil-based paint isn't a good choice when painting while pregnant, because it contains harsh solvents. This type of paint gives off vapors, called volatile organic compounds (VOCs), that can cause headaches, eye irritation, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. High levels of exposure to paints with the solvent toluene have been shown to cause growth restrictions and small head size in babies, symptoms similar to fetal alcohol syndrome. Acrylic or latex paint is water-based and considered much safer than oil-based options, but it can still contain certain solvents and pose potential risks for moms-to-be. Pregnant women should avoid

anything that contains ethylene glycol, ethers or biocides. Additionally, a lot of paints these days are marketed as zero-VOC and are generally considered the best choice for painting while pregnant. However, while some paint bases are free of VOCs, the color pigment that's added after can contain VOCs. "They're definitely a better option than the others, but...zero-VOC isn't enough to say it's safe during pregnancy". However, Miller also points out that there isn't a lot of data on this. (After all, researchers aren't going to expose pregnant women to paint fumes just to see what happens.) "Paint is a general term referring to many diverse exposures and mixtures. This makes it difficult to define any specific dangers," says Michael Cackovic, MD, a maternal-fetal medicine physician at Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. "Some studies on reproductive outcomes in men and women painters suggested an increase in miscarriage and childhood cancer; however, the studies lack consistent findings."

Vicki also shared that when she went to South Africa, where she taught art in a private school; she organized an exhibition for her students one open day because she realized the children did not have the opportunity to draw so people did not know their potential. She was teaching standard six and eleven. She made them draw a shoe and when it was exhibited she noticed that the white administrators and teachers who came for the opening of the exhibition were surprised. They did not know that children like that could draw and African students for that matter could produce good works of art like that. Vicki expressed that the works her students produced were master pieces and the exhibition gave them the opportunity to express themselves.

Vicki is a member of Women Artists Institute (WAI); a group of women artists involved in different levels of art related activities. She shared that they sometimes go for talks where professionals in other professions are invited to come and teach or talk to them about other aspects of life. Vicki recalls that they had a talk where they were taught about how to manage

their finances; so it keeps them abreast of the latest developments in some areas of life for their own well-being. The institute also organizes workshops, competitions, and exhibitions to help raise public awareness about women artists. Vicki adds that the association was founded by some group of women artists who felt the need for women artists to come together and know each other's potential because they realized that we were all apart.



**Plate 19: Nana Afia Sarpong Prempeh**  
A Painter



**Source: Afia Prempeh**

#### **4.8. Profile**

Afia Prempeh was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, 1986 in Adum, Kumasi, Ghana where she also grew up. She hails from Fawoade - Mampong, Kumasi. She had her primary education at Cambridge International, Kumasi and headed to the University of Science and Technology-Junior High School (UST-JHS), Kumasi. Afia then proceeded to Holy Child Girls' School in Cape Coast, Ghana where she opted for visual arts because she realized she loves drawing and sketching; her secondary school education spanned from 2001 to 2004. Eager to polish her painting skills Afia then studied painting as an undergraduate programme at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi from 2005 to 2009. After which she had her national service at Manhya Palace Museum, Kumasi from 2009 to 2010.

After school, once in a while some of her friends she met at the university contacted her for commissions, because they had seen her doing some paintings in school of which she was able to make a little money from. She shared that the money she made was very little. She was ignorant about the art market and so did not know what to charge or how the market was for other artists but because she loved what she was doing as an artist and also liked the fact that she was a freelance artist, she was enjoying it at that time. Also she did not have so many responsibilities; she was young and had nobody to take care of. She expressed that it was like doing a hobby and getting paid for it. She had not really taken it up as a business until she moved to Accra in 2013. However, Afia currently lives and works in Kumasi as a full-time artist.

Afia shared that she was given the opportunity to be whatever she wanted to be, her parents supported her a 100%, in secondary school her mum use to get her paints and brushes, also when practising at home during vacations her mum use to get her all the materials she needed. She noted that they just allowed her to be herself, they did not stop her, they did not decide for her; though it was difficult making money in the beginning; they believed it will get better. So far as she was passionate and happy about what she was doing; she was allowed to go along with it. Even sometimes when she was not working, they would ask her whether her materials were finished. They encouraged her to keep pushing and told her not to stop and that it was even unique for a female to paint.

#### **4.9. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

Afia mostly does landscapes and figure paintings using acrylic on canvas. She initially started with landscapes before producing figure paintings. She expressed that; she loves painting landscapes because it gives you a variety of things to look at on your canvas; there is a sky, there

are trees, there is a river, there is the land, there are birds, there are so many things to look at. Also, she initially painted only landscapes because she was not good with human figures, she was scared it will not come out well and so did not even want to try it. But then she shared that the moment you tell someone you are an artist the first question they ask is; *can you make a portrait of me?*, one very question she usually gets from people since her practise as an artist and so felt that if she is going to make some money from making peoples portraits and she did not know how to do it that meant she was going to lose a lot of money. That pushed her to start practising with the portraits. Thinking about why that question is mostly asked, she mentioned that; most people feel if you are a good artist then you should be able to make a painting of them, that's the impression they get because one of the most difficult things to tackle in painting is the human figure. Growing up when she sometimes went to town with her mother or an elderly person she observed that roadside artists who usually paint portraits of well-known people or people in high offices did not get it proportionally right or even sometimes did not really resemble the person, which also added to her fear of tackling figure paintings. She felt comfortable painting landscapes because with landscapes one will usually not detect a mistake, she mentioned that it allows you to be creative but for human figures, it's a bit tricky. With time that fear of tackling the human figure is gone because of constant practise; she finds it much easier to paint the human figure now. However, Afia noted that apart from drawing or painting portraits, there is more to painting, is the very few people who understand painting. People feel it all about the human figure but we can move from that aspect and vent into something else.

Afia's paintings highlights past heroes of her homeland, her culture, the history of Ghana and Africa as a whole, her life as an artist and her faith in God. Her paintings also excogitate the economic state of her homeland in relation to the ideas and works of past and present leaders.

She considers her paintings to be documentation, and her voice concerning the event of things as it happened, as she heard them and as she is facing it now. She noted that it is more or less like passing down information to the next generation. Afia's figure paintings mostly have backgrounds that give you more insight about the personality depicted. Her recent paintings, especially her landscapes portray some of her religious beliefs regarding her faith and personal relationship with God.

Afia rightly notes that it is not just about the beauty of the work, if it's the beauty then anybody can buy any painting at all, for her it's about the message the painting seeks to communicate. She likes it when people see her works and look at it over and over again, they stand viewing the painting for about ten minutes because they are trying to get the message.

Afia is inspired by the works of landscape artists Thomas Cole and Peter Paul Robins. She is also inspired by most of the works of the foreign masters including; Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, because of the way in which they executed their works. She recalled that while in secondary school, she use to study their paintings and observed the details especially with the landscapes; the tiny details of the trees, stones, rivers and how they painted the land. She noted that when you look at their paintings you can see the patience with which the work was executed; this taught her not to rush with her paintings and made her determined to produce detailed paintings.

She is inspired by everything she sees, everything she hears and everything she reads; she picks up information from these things and put it into her paintings. She sometimes takes photos of images including statues, trees and landscapes she will like to incorporate into a painting. She however noted that she does not paint the exact thing; they are just to serve as a guide. Most of

Afia's paintings are imaginative. She mentioned that sometimes while painting she gets new ideas.

Afia expressed that she always want to challenge herself over her old paintings so if she did this painting today the next painting she does should be better than the old one, it should be more challenging, it should be crazier. She likes to always bring something new to her paintings. She believes you always have to be better than before.

#### **4.9.1. Exhibitions**

Afia has participated in some major group exhibitions including, The gown must go to town – KNUST exhibition in 2015 which was the first exhibition Afia participated in, Cornfields in Accra – KNUST exhibition; 2016 and Orderly Disorderly – KNUST exhibition; 2017, all held at the Museum of Science and Technology in Accra, Ghana. Also, 'If you love me...'; a group show held at loco shed, Kumasi railway, Kumasi, Ghana. She mentioned that most of these exhibitions have been through the help of kari'kacha sied'ou, a lecturer at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology - KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana who she kept in touch with after school. From time to time he would ask what she was working on and she will show him pictures of some of the paintings she has produced.

In 2018 Afia was commissioned to make a painting for the first lady of the Republic of Ghana - Rebecca Akufo- Addo, she painted a section of the Golden Jubilee House also known as the Flagstaff House - the presidential palace in Accra that serves as a residence and office to the President of Ghana. The painting was made to be used for Christmas cards.

Afia has made paintings for high profile Ghanaian personalities including; Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II – traditional ruler of the kingdom of Ashanti in Ghana since 1999, John Dramani

Mahama – ex-president of Ghana and Kwaku Sintim-Misa – a Ghanaian actor, director, talk-show host and author. Some of Afia’s paintings can be found at Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana.

#### 4.9.2. Some Works of Afia Prempeh



**Plate 20:** The city on the other side, 2017, (Landscape painting, Acrylic on canvas)  
114cm x 178cm

**Source:** Photographed by Afia Prempeh

‘The city on the other side’ (Plate 20) portrays some of Afia’s beliefs in respect to her faith in God; it’s mainly inspired by some bible verses. She believes there is a better place awaiting us after our life here on earth; this she represented in the painting as an imaginary city in the sky as written in the bible verse; 2 Corinthians 5:1 - *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands (NKJV)*. Thus, nothing is permanent, everything on earth is temporary; all the material things we rely on and cherish so much is one day going to be destroyed, as seen in the bible verse; Psalm 49:12 - *But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish (NKJV)*. But there is a place prepared for those who have put their faith in God, we do not see it but after all this, is done and over with there is a better place where those who have put their trust in God will live till eternity; as written in the bible verses; 2 Corinthians 4:18 - *So we fix our eyes not on*

*what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal;* and John 14:2 – *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you (NKJV).*



**Plate 21:** ‘Before 1957’, 2016, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas), 114cm x178cm

**Source:** Photographed by Afia Prempeh

‘Before 1957’ (Plate 21), references some of the major activities that took place in Ghana before she gained independence on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1957, it however looks at Africa as a whole. The tiger hide rug symbolize the aggressive nature of the Europeans, Iweriebor (2011) wrote that between the 1870s and 1900, Africa encountered European autonomous aggression, political suppression, soldierly foray, and subsequent defeat and colonization. Concurrently, African societies formulated several forms of resistance against the plan to colonize their countries and inflict foreign sovereignty. Nonetheless, by the early twentieth century much of Africa, excluding Liberia and Ethiopia, had been colonized by European states. He continues to say that, they were strangers, domineering, bureaucratic, and wrenched African political and social establishments and subverted their moral right and political validity as governing structures.

The picture of the hands of an African in chains clipped on the shelf symbolize the period of ‘Slavery in Africa’. Afia stated that while producing this painting, at some point she became emotional because she began imagining what might have taken place during that time. Wright (2000) writes that the outlawing of slavery did not erase the pain and stigma of having been a slave. Many descendants of slaves have been affected by this stigma for generations.

Furthermore, the easel with a sketch book depicting a railway station symbolize the various structures erected by the Europeans during colonization, the books on the shelf symbolize knowledge; with their knowledge they came and erected structures. Colonization led to the acceleration of the country’s infrastructural growth. A case in point is the erection of the Takoradi Harbor, Achimota School, and the Korle-Bu Teaching hospital by Governor Guggisberg, a surveyor; marked a substantial watershed in the country’s socio-economic development (Larbi, 2013). As the tense excitement for independence increased gradually, the British resolved to establish more schools and colleges to yield the expertise needed to run the activities of an independent country (Larbi, 2013).



**Plate 22:** John Wesley and Christianity in Africa, 2016, (Landscape painting, Acrylic on canvas), 114cm x 178cm

**Source:** Photographed by Afia Prempeh

Afia indicated that she produced (Plate 22) after painting 'Before 1954'. The strong pillar erected behind the statue of John Wesley is just to say that Christianity is one of the strongest pillars that was erected in Africa and is still deep rooted in Africa today. As far back as 1771, John Wesley was keenly involved in saving slaves for God's kingdom and bringing to an end to their ill treatment as less than human beings were. He barely understood why their covetousness and monetary lure was used as a cause to indulge in slave trade under agonizing conditions. Despite the fact the eighteenth century European Christian evangelists who initially came to Africa showed misgivings and hostile attitudes toward a "primitive continent", Wesley, saw Africa as a wellspring of world evolution, a place that should be esteemed and its people given the chance to progress (Maiko, n.d.). They taught us about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the bible and the church, some came to believe and destroyed their mediums of worship. We decided to head to the church – in observing the painting you will realize that below the statue of John Wesley, people are destroying their mediums of worship and heading to the church.

The part of the painting that depicts an angel with a cross and a fountain from which people are drinking water is inspired by the bible verse; John 4:14 - *But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (NKJV).*

Nevertheless, Maiko (n.d.) writes that though these African Christians may not have been able to elucidate every facet of Christian beliefs because they did not apprehend the language and the culture of the missionaries, their songs on their cargo to the foreign world had some traditional and religious inscriptions that gave them meaning, purpose and resilience. That is to say, the fact that the slaves were not able to fully comprehend the doctrine of the faith may not automatically

mean they never envisaged the idea of a higher power. This painting can be found at the Wesley Methodist Church, James town, Accra, Ghana.



**Plate 23:** Unsung heroes, 2016, (Landscape painting, Acrylic on canvas), 183cm x135cm

**Source:** Photographed by Afia Prempeh

‘Unsung heroes’ (Plate 23) recalls three past heroes and a heroine that played significant roles in the history of Ghana, namely (from the left as depicted in the painting): Komfo Anokye, Kwame Kyiretwie, Tetteh Quarshie (he is represented in the painting by a signpost clipped to a tree with his name, date of birth and death date on it), and Yaa Asantewaa.

Okomfo Anokye (1655-1717) was a traditional spiritual leader and cofounder of the Ashanti Kingdom in Ghana. He is deemed to be the most outstanding lawmaker and wisest sage of the Ashanti people. He had a deep influence on the Ashanti Kingdom in its establishment. He is the foremost architect of Ashanti laws, customs, and beliefs about religion and supernatural powers. Okomfo Anokye is known to have performed great deeds and supernatural cures. It is

held that, among other things, he climbed palm trees with his sandals on and carved a game of Oware - a tactic game employing shallow hollows and pebbles or the like out of a stone slab with his bare fingers. The sandals and the slab of stone are on display at Awukugua, Ghana. Other supernatural acts of Anokye include the redirecting of rivers, the restructuring of Ashanti institutions, the fetching of water in a basket without spilling a drop, and the commanding of the Golden stool (the unifying symbol of the Ashantis) to land on the knees of his friend, Osei Tutu, thus making him the first king. It is also said that he lived in a house without a roof, but never got wet when the rain fell. Additionally, Okomfo Anokye is known to have buried a sword in the ground to the hilt, which up to date cannot be uprooted without bringing down the Ashanti Empire. The sword that Anokye buried remains firmly in place on the grounds outside the C ward in the Komfo Anokye Hospital, Kumasi. The Ashantis wrote songs in Anokye's name, and he was revered in praise poetry. His fame and reputation grew immensely after his death, and the people of Ashanti bear in mind his cautionary that if the Golden Stool were ever to be demolished or seized by the adversaries of the Ashanti, the Kingdom would descend into chaos (Asante, 2019).

Kwame Kyiretwie was also a brave Ashanti man. Before, the run about at Odum, Kumasi was a thick forest, there was a lion there and because of that nobody could use that route. The lion would catch and eat up traders who used that route; so the chief at that time summoned people to go and kill the lion. Kwame Kyiretwie gathered the courage and went to kill the lion. They then took it to the chief's palace and since then traders are able to ply that route. Kwame Kyiretwie literally means 'Kwame catch lion'. Afia mentioned that most people do not know this historical story because we do not talk about.

Tetteh Quarshie (1842-1892) was a pre-independence Ghanaian farmer and the person directly responsible for the introduction of cocoa crops to Ghana, which today makes up one of the chief export crops of the Ghanaian economy. In 1870, Tetteh Quarshie undertook a voyage to the Spanish colony Fernando Po (now Bioko in Equatorial Guinea). About six years later he returned to Ghana with several cocoa beans and made history. In 1879 he planted the seeds at Mampong with some success. Friends and relatives also undertook the planting of cocoa when pods were distributed to them. Soon other farmers followed suit (Nyabor, 2018).

Lastly, Yaa Asantewaa (1840-1921) remains a much-loved figure in the history of the Ashantis and the history of Ghana as a whole for her role in confronting the colonialization of the British. In 1896, Asantehene (King) Prempeh I of the Asanteman federation was captured and exiled to the Seychelles islands by the British who had come to call the area "Gold Coast." Yaa Asantewaa's brother was said to be among the men exiled with Prempeh I, deported because of his opposition to British rule in West Africa.

In 1900, British colonial governor Frederick Hodgson called a meeting in Kumasi with the local rulers. At the meeting, Hodgson stated that King Prempeh I would continue to suffer an exile in his native land and that the Ashanti people were to surrender to the British their historical, ancestral Golden Stool - a dynastic symbol of the Ashanti empire. Power was transferred to each Asantehene by a ceremonial crowning that involved the sacred golden stool. The colonial governor demanded that it be surrendered to allow Hodgson to sit on the golden stool as a symbol of British power. At this time, Yaa Asantewaa was the Gatekeeper of the Golden Stool. After the meeting, the leaders of the federation gathered to discuss the British development. Upon hearing some of the local rulers entertain surrender to the British demands, it is reported that the Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa rose and said the following:

*"Now I have seen that some of you fear to go forward to fight for our King.*

*If it were in the brave days of Osei Tutu, Okomfo Anokye, and Opoku Ware, leaders would not sit down to see their King taken away without firing a shot.*

*No white man could have dared to speak to a leader of the Ashanti in the way the Governor spoke to you this morning.*

*Is it true that the bravery of the Ashanti is no more? I cannot believe it. It cannot be!*

*I must say this, if you the men of Ashanti will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight the white men. We will fight till the last of us falls in the battlefields."*

The Ashanti-British "War of the Golden Stool" was led by Queen Mother Nana Yaa Asantewaa with an army of 5,000. Though Yaa Asantewaa was seized by the British and deported, her bravery stirred a kingdom-wide movement for the return of Prempeh I and for independence (<http://www.blackhistoryheroes.com>, n.d.).



**Plate 24:** Once upon a time in Ghana, 2015, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas)

114cm x 178cm

**Source:** Photographed by Afia Prempeh

‘Once Upon a time in Ghana’ (Plate 24) is inspired by a well-known Ashanti oral culture called *Anansesem* – “spider tales”. *Anansesem* are folktales of the Akan people of Ghana. The word

*ananse* means ‘spider’. The tales constitute an entire oral tradition that has been handed down from one generation to the other. *Ananse* stories play an essential role in the fostering of many Ghanaian children, as elders use these stories to pass on knowledge to children. *Ananse* is typically portrayed as a trickster; however, he may be represented in several other ways. The soul importance of these stories is to educate people about the complexities of life, while at the same time daring listeners to aspire to be the best they can be. In Ghana he is also known as Kwaku (kway-koo) Ananse (<http://www.anansethtrickster.com>, n.d.).

In mimicking the Ashanti oral culture (*Anansesem*) the painting depicts an old man documenting past and current national and historical events of the country; and leaving it for the future generations. He has already documented some, which have been printed into books. These books carry weighty information particularly about the life and legacy of the past presidents of Ghana. Some of the past presidents of Ghana include Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, General Joseph Ankrah, Brigadier Akwasi Afrifa, Kofi Abrefa Busia, General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, General Frederick William Kwasi Akuffo, Dr. Hilla Limann, Jerry John Rawlings, John Agyekum Kuffour and Prof. John Evans Atta Mills. Some of which have their statues depicted in the painting.

#### **4.10. Experiences and Challenges**

Afia expressed that some people find themselves in certain jobs that they are not really happy about and then when they look deep within themselves, they realize that no this is what I want to be, so sometimes they have to change and go and do what they really want to do but luckily for her she did not have to experiment with different jobs to realize what she wanted to be. Her

aunties and brothers would tell her they are trying to link her up to a bank job but deep within her; she realized she did not want to work in a bank; she wanted to practise as an artist.

She shared that in the initial stages of her career it was not that easy, especially after school because you are now starting to work as a professional artist; in the art world you are seen as a beginner and most people who patronize works of art like to patronize the works of renowned artists but as you keep working and then people get to know your works, then people start to patronize them. It was also part of the reason why she moved from Kumasi to Accra after school; she was determined to make a name out of her paintings, she felt since Accra is a big place and also the capital city of Ghana she could meet people who when she paints for could link her up to other people. In the early stages of her career; money, patronage and building a clientele was a challenge, she states that as much as her parents supported her she did not want to be a burden, she wanted to be the one buying my own materials.

Her few friends and some of her parents' friends who patronize some of her paintings upon seeing them when they come to visit helped her in the beginning. So they linked her to other people and then also with time social media; she created a face book page particularly to share her paintings, so she puts pictures of her paintings there, and then people see it and contact her. She noted that as a painter, this moment is really good for her.

Being a female artist; Afia shared that people get surprised, people do not believe you, they doubt you; sometimes they want to see you in action, they want to see you painting before they believe. She mentioned that she faced the same thing even when she was on campus. Some of her lecturers did not believe her, they felt that she paid some professional artists to do her projects, so was asked to come to class and paint before rewarding her marks; either than that somebody did the work for her. She expressed that sometimes it is not funny; you work hard,

wake up at dawn, go to bed late at night, you are up all day working, you spend days, weeks and months producing a painting and people tell you they do not believe you painted it. It's sometimes disheartening and then she feels that so if it was a male would you have believed it. She however rightly notes that these reactions motivate her to work harder.

She shared that sometimes when you are standing by your painting with a male friend or colleague and people come around, they think it's your male friend who did the work. She mentioned that sometimes you do not really hear nice things; people just do not believe you. She recalled she posted some of her paintings on Facebook and then at some point it started trending, people started sharing it and there was one particular painting that people really shared so she went to some of the pages to read peoples comments, one person wrote; *a female did this, go to Afia Prempeh's page*. There was one particular comment from a guy that caught her attention, he wrote; *how can a female do this painting and even a Ghanaian for that matter because a female can always get somebody to buy things for her, a sugar daddy to buy a car or anything that she needs, why would a Ghanaian girl waste her time to do this painting*.

Also after school, she recalled that a friend came to visit her and saw her painting, in shock he said: *nooooo a girl like you, you don't need to waste your time to do this, you should be out there having fun, you should be out there partying, I mean*. Also, one lecturer saw her works for the first time and told her point blank; *oo Afia, I underrated you oo, I thought it's a female painter so you would not be able to paint, your paintings are different, your landscapes are so unique, the details and everything; oo Afia sorry, sorry*. He even established contact with her after school and told her; he thinks they should come together and have an exhibition.

She stated that right from the onset people just belittle you, they underrate you, they think you are not capable unless you are able to prove yourself. People just look down on you, they feel

you are incapable, they feel as a female you will not have time to make a painting, they think you are all about having fun, you are all about comfort, you are all about somebody should give you money, why should you bother yourself, struggle, stay up in the night, sketch, draw, paint, mix paint. They don't even think you can be hard-working or you can be creative. People have the notion that if you are a female you will not be able to make a painting. If you are male then you will be able to. She mentioned that she has so many people telling her; *Afia, I want you to work so I can look at you.*

Afia further stated that it is not common to see females painting; it's unlikely to hear of a female painter so when people hear of one they get surprised because painting is not an easy job. Some people think it's just painting but it is not that easy, it demands a lot of hard work. She is hopeful that maybe with time there will be more female painters and it would not be news any more.

Touching on the poor visibility of female artists, Afia stated that there are some professions that people usually attribute to men, of which painting is one so when people start looking for painters; it is the male painters that come to mind because they think is something that only men can do. Asante (2009) in attesting to this fact writes that; throughout history, most societies have thought that women in the field of art are of inferior status compared to that of men especially when it comes to the visual arts; thus women as visual artists and women as themes of visual art works.

Afia further stated that when she was in secondary school she usually heard of only male artists. Also most of the males that are even into painting do not find it easy because in our part of the world people do not really appreciate the arts. Some people start and along the way they stop because you have to struggle, so for a female to be a die-hard painter is unheard of. If you are not really passionate about it you will stop and go and find some other job.

She noted that luckily for her; her parents supported her and encouraged her, if not for that she would have not been able to continue painting; even for that matter be a full-time artist because from the beginning you do not see money, even sometimes money to buy your paint, and then people will advise you to go and look for a better job, where you will get a monthly salary so because of that people divert from their path and venture into other professions. People do not even appreciate the arts, they would prefer using their money for something else, and also the economic situation in the country does not encourage the patronage of works of art.

She continued to say that women are naturally known to be home takers; men would usually not have their hands full as women would when they start raising a family. Men would usually have the time they need to pursue their dreams. She shared that its something she thinks about; how she will balance family and work when she starts raising a family because painting is something she would want to continue doing as a full-time job. She mentioned that she will have to know how to balance the two, either than that she may end up abandoning her practise and concentrate on raising her family or find another job for income.

Afia also stated that in some ways males are different from females, sometimes the risk that males will like to take, females would not want to. For instance she would not want to stand by the road side and paint but some male artists will do it. She noted that if female artists should put themselves out there and market themselves more in order to raise awareness she believes people will start recognizing them. She remarked that; honestly she hardly hears of the hype for art exhibitions compared to that of music shows. She expressed that; that is marketing, put in the work and after people leave the exhibition let them talk about you for months. You will put your name out there.

## **Plate 25: Fatric Bewong**

A Painter



**Source:** Fatric Bewong

### **4.11. Profile**

Fatric was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1981 in Tarkwa in the Western Region of Ghana where she also spent most of her childhood years because her dad worked in the mines at Tarkwa. She hails from Sakote, Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana and Wa in the Upper West Region of Ghana where her father and mother come from respectively; she believes in the two energies that came together to great her and so likes to keep balance. Fatric had her secondary education at Archbishop Porter Girls' in Takoradi, Ghana from 1996 to 1999 where she studied visual arts. She then studied painting as an undergraduate programme at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology – KNUST in Kumasi, Ghana from 2002 to 2006.

Fatric started practising as an artist right after she completed the university. After her national service at National Film and Television Institute – NAFTI in Accra, Ghana she stayed at home for three years purposely just to find her language in art. Her studio was then at the family house in Tarkwa. While practising she thought of working in the art industry for a while because she

wanted to understand the business aspect and politics of arts, and also find out what she was really interested in and will like to contribute to the art world. Fatric shared that Ablade Glover (a renowned Ghanaian painter) came for her first solo exhibition at Goethe Institute in Accra, Ghana where they had a conversation when he proposed that she should come and work for him at his art gallery. She therefore worked at Artists Alliance Gallery in Accra, Ghana from 2010 to 2012. Fatric stated that working at Artists Alliance has been the most significant of her working experiences because it influenced what she does as an artist and why she does what she does. She expressed that she did not go looking for the job, the job came looking for her and that is how it has been for most of her working experiences and so that makes her feel she needs to respond to it.

After working at Artists Alliance Gallery, Fatric worked as a part-time creative art consultant at Multi Kids Academy in East Legon, Accra, Ghana from 2012 to 2015; the only school so far in Ghana that really gives opportunity to both able and disabled children, all of them in the same space, learning the same syllables; the syllabus or teaching method is structured in such a way that the needs of each child is met. Fatric rightly expressed that; that is something she found very beautiful in an educational environment and it will be good if we incorporated that in our educational system. Currently, aside from studio work Fatric works as an art teacher at Brainy Bairn School in West Legon, Accra, Ghana where she is also helping the school to develop their art department. Fatric expressed that in wanting to see the change that we seek as a society we must find ways of instilling certain values into the younger ones and teaching is one way in which she finds it easy to do that; which is why she loves to be in the teaching field so that she can help instill good values into the children. It also helps her to learn and relearn certain things

about herself and the world at large. She is also pursuing a master of fine art degree in interdisciplinary art studies at the University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.

Fatric shared that her parents saw art in her and have always encouraged her though they did not understand what she did. She recalled that when she gained admission into secondary school she was enrolled as a science student but her parents and elder brother stepped in and said they think she should rather study visual arts because they noticed it comes to her naturally. She thought about it and fought it for a while because she expressed that most people perceive visual art students as dumb, and so she went to the school administration and told them that she wanted to do science because she was enrolled into the school as a science student. By then she had already taken part in a couple of visual art classes and Mensah; the visual art teacher then spotted a talent in her. She had already become one of his good students and he really wanted to impact more knowledge into her. Fatric shared that she attended Science classes for two weeks and that was her worse time in secondary school. She was so lost and felt she missed the visual art classes and so found her way back to study visual arts. She mentioned that throughout her life, in the process of becoming an artist she has met individuals who have encouraged her and that has helped her to stay in the path till now.

#### **4.12. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

In the initial stages of her career as an artist, Fatric usually made paintings with acrylic on canvas and wax print. Fatric regards her early and recent paintings as therapeutic exercises. Her recent works involve more of performative pieces, installations and a bit of video. She explained that the reason why she has drawn nearer to these forms of art expressions is because in her opinion it is easier to engage a lot of people and also because she wants to break away from the

conventional way of thinking about art. It gives her more room to express herself in so many ways. She continued to say that using the body as another form of communication is also one strong way of communicating because performance has always been part of our human existence and so to find a language in that makes it easier for people to connect and relate to the concept of the work. Fatric expressed that with whatever art form or expression she uses; she ends up seeing herself thinking as a painter; for instance when it comes to colour she sees the painter in her. She notes that she being a painter manifests itself in other ways aside from 2D motion.

She mentioned that she has seen herself grow into not limiting herself to only painting but also using other media to talk about the issues that she is interested in. Her early paintings were inspired by her childhood memories; precisely the environment which she grew up in and that has translated into different forms. Her works are mostly concerned with some of the environmental issues in our world today and how she envisages an utopian world that she wishes for. Fatric stated that she has always believed in the power of art to communicate and address the issues she is interested in.

Fatric remarked that there are so many artists; both young and old who are doing amazing things which inspire her works as an artist, these include; Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Kevin Hazell, Ibrahim Mahama, Seth Clottey, Marina Abramovic, Kofi Setordji, and Caroll Padberdj; her programmes director.

Her works address issues concerned with environmental pollution. Her immediate materials are textile scraps, wires and then some plastic waste which she collects from sea-coasts and rubbish dumps. She notes that she does not buy 99% of the materials she uses in producing her works.

Fatric finds ideas for her works by spending a lot of time at coastal areas that are polluted and in the forest; communicating to the trees and all the other beings that are there. She shared that

growing up she spent most of her time in the forest and that is what influenced the way she is so fascinated about the environment. They lived on a hill and there was this forest near their house at Tarkwa. Anytime she came back from school all she did was; take her cutlass and then go to the forest and hunt for whatever she finds. Patric expressed that her friends were the forest and that has been her life. As a child she naturally liked to work with her hands. She liked to mix colours for her mum who did tie and dye - batik; so whenever she went to the forest she observed colours in nature and then came to mix the colours she observed for her mum. She noted that she loves to observe colours in nature. Anytime her mum went to the market to sell her tie and dye - batiks; people usually bought the batiks with the colours she chose or mixed for her mum first. She expressed that her son also gives her a lot of inspiration, he is her new voice and part of the work she does is as a result of the things she sees him do.

Patric stated that the processes involved in producing her works are very tedious and time consuming. She collects the textile scraps she uses in producing her works from dressmakers; because what happens is that all the scraps are considered as waste and then end up in the landfills and in the sea. She has also hired some people who collect textiles scraps and some plastics from seashores and rubbish dumps for her. After collecting them, she sorts them and once she is done sorting them out she starts creating the work. She usually makes sketches of what she has in mind to create with the plastics and textile scraps before producing a work. Patric stated that the labour intensive bit is sorting the plastic materials and textile scraps out. She sometimes has to wash them and then dry them which take a lot of time. She however mentioned that the labour intensive bit of producing her works is intentional because one of the key concepts in her work is labour; so she intentionally emphasis on that through the process of producing her works. Patric explained that her works stresses on labour because the issues that

her works addresses which is environmental pollution is as a result of industrialization and globalization and all the other names that come with it. The production of goods involves labour and also the processes involved in the production of goods have great environmental side effects. She notes that environmental pollution is a very complex issue. It's not limited to one geographical area because whatever happens in one country affects another country so everybody needs to be concerned and contribute to finding ways of solving the problem. Also in finding ways of solving the problem labour comes to play.

Fatric loves to take part in artists' residences that focus on environmental issues. She also likes to work with institutions and museums that are interested in environmental issues and that would want to work with artists who are working with textiles scraps and plastic waste.

Fatric's recent works incorporate a variety of artistic techniques such as braiding and hand-stitching. The techniques she uses emphasis labour as well; thus instead of using a sewing machine where she can easily have it done within the shortest possible time she consciously uses her hand to sew to emphasis the concept of labour in her works. Fatric explained that hand stitching in her work also references healing. When you get a deep cut; for it to heal it sometimes has to be stitched. Two parts are stitched together to unite; in the process there is pain but within some time it heals. She expressed that it is time we as human beings found a way of healing the environment and to do that we must come together as a collective and find a solution.

Fatric's philosophy of life is that; the world does not belong to only human beings, it is made up of other living beings which include deer, monkeys, and trees but we are made to think that humans are the most important. We forget that there are other beings that keep this world in balance. We cut down all the trees forgetting that we are destroying a whole ecosystem that supports everything. She expressed that it is very important that we always factor in and

remember the other living beings when thinking of development, expansion, and modern ways of living or else we will get to a point when everything will be lost. That is what guides her practise and inspires her to do what she does.

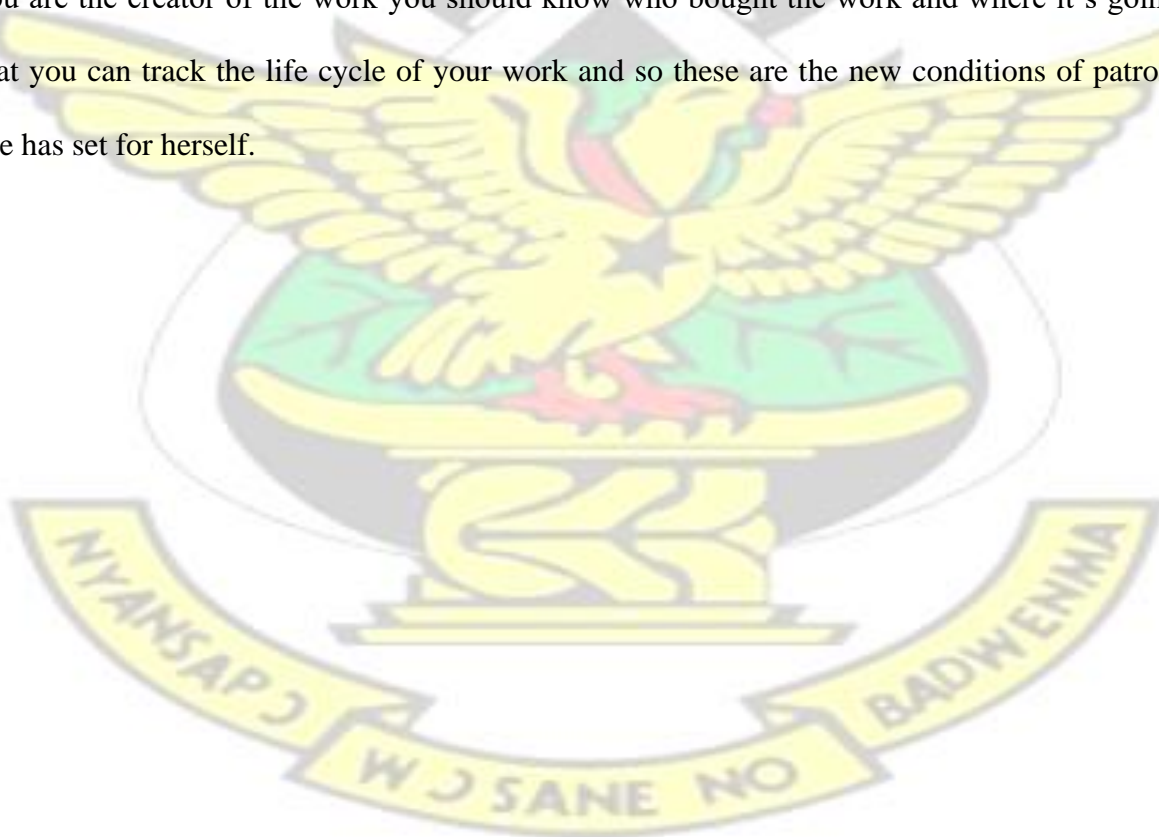
#### **4.12.1. Exhibitions**

Fatric was part of two group exhibitions at the Loom Art Gallery in Accra, Ghana titled; 'Women in art', and 'Three generations of women in art' in 2007 and 2014 respectively. She shared that she was grateful for the exhibition at the Loom Art Gallery because the first one especially was right after school and she was the youngest artist to be among them. It reinforced, confirmed and encouraged her that yes she can do it because in the beginning of her career as an artist she looked for female artists and had really wanted a mentor; somebody she could go to and ask the questions that any young professional would want to know about the profession but she just couldn't find any. It was always the men artists that she had to rely on and ask certain questions. Fatric's experience attests the research conducted by Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare (2011) in four senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana, which showed poor visibility of practising women artists within the Ghanaian community of professional artists to serve as role models to inspire young adolescent girls into the local arts industry.

Other exhibitions she has had and participated in include; a solo exhibition in 2015 titled; 'Caught in the web' at Nubuke Foundation in Accra, Ghana, a group exhibition in 2012 titled; 'Colours and Creativity' in Lagos, Nigeria, a group exhibition which featured her works and the works of other three Ghanaian female painters namely; Marigold Akufo-Addo and Adwoa Amoah in 2011 titled; 'Presence in Absence' at the Dei Centre in Accra, Ghana and 'African

Encounter' in 2007 at San Diego. Fatric has participated in several exhibitions in her home country and abroad; these are just to mention some few.

Some of Fatric's works can be found at Artists Alliance Gallery, Dei Centre and Institute of African Studies – University of Ghana, all in Accra, Ghana. Fatric noted that she has worked in a gallery before and is a bit concerned about how galleries go about representing artists and how it has become more of an extortion than what she thinks it should be. She therefore prefers to work directly with whoever wants to buy her works, so that she can fully dictate and negotiate the terms and conditions of patronage. She stated that with her previous knowledge; most galleries do not tell you who patronized your work for fear that you will go behind them and deal with a client in future and make money without them getting any percentage. She expressed that once you are the creator of the work you should know who bought the work and where it's going so that you can track the life cycle of your work and so these are the new conditions of patronage she has set for herself.



#### 4.12.2. Some Works of Fatric Bewong



**Plate 26:** Song around the globe, 2010, (Abstract painting, Acrylic on canvas), 30cm x 40cm

**Source:** [https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=257](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=257)

‘Song around the globe’ (Plate 26) was part of a series of paintings that looked at the environment; the paintings made reference to environmental sounds heard in the community where Fatric grew up. The paintings that formed part of this series were displayed at her second solo exhibition in Accra, Ghana. Fatric made a lot of recordings of environmental sounds heard in the area where she grew up and then reflected on the sounds and made paintings. Fatric explained that because things have changed in the area where she grew up, the familiar sounds that were once heard based on what existed have disappeared. There was a series of sounds that they use to hear around the mining area between two to three o’clock in the afternoon, but those sounds are no longer heard. She reflected on what has caused that and majority of what has been as a result of the mining. The mining activities have led to the destruction of the forest because the mining companies buy all the natural resources and use the lands. The natural sounds which were therefore made by the birds and animals that this forest attracted is no more. Renowned Ghanaian painter Ablade Glover bought the painting.



**Plate 27:** Good Harvest, 2014, (Landscape painting, Acrylic on wax print), 40cm x 60cm

**Source:** [https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=257](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=257)

The triptych painting titled ‘Good Harvest’ (Plate 27) recalls the time in the history of Ghana when cocoa farmers faced challenges because the cocoa plants got infected by a disease. The painting depicts burning cocoa farms which is representative of that period. Fatric gifted this painting to Seth Dei (the owner of Dei Center in Accra, Ghana); as he played a significant role in helping farmers to tackle the issue of cocoa plants that was infested.



**Plate 28:** An installation titled, ‘To life’ (I), 2018, Materials: Textiles scraps

Technique: Stitching, 120cm x 100cm

**Source:** [https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=2076](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=2076)

‘To life’ (Plate 28) makes reference to colours and what they represent in Fatric’s cultural setting. According to Breidenbach (1976) talking of the general inferences of the customary colour triad previous ethnographers (Patton 1948:7 and Antubam 1963:78) all point out that white is comprehended as the colour of the sanctified. White denotes purity, life, health and general well-being. Black or dark colour on the other hand has a major adverse connotation in traditional sense and ritual usage. It is embodied in dark or black funeral cloths and charcoal, and denotes loss, darkness, hidden, bad luck, witchcraft, death, impure things and forces. Blood is used as the primordial representation for the colour red. It generally implies struggle, loss of life and danger. The colours of textile scraps as seen in the work mainly make reference to the cycle of life.

Textile scraps which usually end up in the ocean and on coastal lands were collected from tailors and seamstresses and used in producing the work. The textile scraps used in producing the work represent all the beings that exist on this planet. Fatric notes that when she talks of all beings she refers to anything that has life, with that Fatric drew inspiration from the Dakota culture; the Dakota people regard every being as a relative and so traditionally everything is respected. With this work Fatric seeks to represent the life that exists on our land through the very things that are destroying the land. This work has grown very big and is part of her masters thesis project at Hartford University.



**Plate 29:** An installation titled HeaRing the Sea, 2017, Materials: Textiles scraps

Technique: Braiding and stitching, 180cm x 90cm

**Source:** [https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=2076](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=2076)

Concerning ‘HeaRing the Sea’ (Plate 29) Fatric asserts that interestingly, just very few people address the issue of textile consumption that affect the environment but this country is one of the countries that consume a lot of textile prints. Fatric was inspired to produce this work upon viewing an ocean documentary titled ‘Blue’. ‘Blue’ is a full-length documentary filmed on sites in the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia and Hawaii over 35 days in 2016, the movie is equally stunning and startlingly sad. The film features seven “Ocean Guardians” who are ardent and devoted to saving the world’s oceans. The film begins with a statement by Lucas Handley a marine biologist and free diver;

*“No matter where you live on our planet you are connected to the sea. Yet in my lifetime half of all marine life has disappeared,” he says.* (Cunningham, 2017) When an ocean in one country is polluted it ends up flowing into and affecting water bodies in other countries because oceans all over the world are interconnected.

Over the last century the industrial development that has taken place in the oceans reflect the actions that caused mass extinctions on land. Pollution, industrial scale fishing, species loss and

habitat destruction have placed the ocean in jeopardy. The true nature of the aquatic is being irreversibly changed. BLUE is a goading drive into the marine world, witnessing this perilous moment in time when the oceanic world is on a rock face (www.beltiblibrary.org, n.d.).

Upon viewing the documentary Fatric began reflecting on the environmental pollution in her motherland. Fatric, having visited most coastal sites across her country to study the environment attests that usually in the mornings you will find an accumulation of textile scraps at the seashores. This art piece seeks to ask these questions: Do we know what we are doing to the environment?, How much awareness do we have concerning the harmful nature of plastics and textile scraps to the ocean and the environment as a whole? and When are we going to realise the effects of polluting the ocean?

Fatric states that she sees this work growing very big and taking up a whole space. Textile scraps were collected from dressmakers and seashores across her homeland and used in producing the work. Fatric hopes to try as much as possible to collect the different types of fabrics she can find in her country and use it for this piece, so it's a work that is still in progress. She however exhibited this work at El Salvador in Central America in the year 2017 and hopes to show it in Ghana when she develops it into a large scale.



**Plate 30:** A performance titled: Walking legs – The unfinished walk, 2017  
In James Town, Accra

**Source:** [https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=616](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=616)

‘Walking legs – The unfinished walk’ (Plate 30) was a performative piece in James town fishing community in Accra, Ghana. In the performance Fatric took a walk through all the colonial sites in Accra while reflecting on what took place in her motherland during colonialization. In the performance Fatric wore ‘bakatari’ also called fugu or smock, the traditional attire of the people in her hometown Bolgatanga in the Upper East region of Ghana based on her paternal roots. Ahiabor (2013) rightly states that ‘bakatari’ is the most distinguishing costume from northern Ghana which has obtained national relevance. Bolgatanga, Tamale, Wa, Daboya, Yendi and its suburbs have a specifically sturdy tradition of intertwining fugu. The fugu normally has embroidery designs on them to add to its beauty. The material, made of cotton is processed into threads by women. The threads are then stretched, dyed in different colours, dried on a line for a period of time and woven into strips and stoles with hand looms. The strips which are four inches wide are sewn together either by hand or machine. The fugu attire typically has embroidery patterns on the neck, with V or U shapes cut above the chest. The fugu also has an exceptional historical and linguistic significance.

The smock Patric wore had mirrors on it which represent reflection, a moment to reflect on what happened in her homeland and to the people of her homeland; she among many others being witnesses and the bearers of what has been as a result of colonization is what the work was about. In the performance Patric walked barefooted from Accra High Street to James Town beach. In the performance she passed by the Ussher Fort. The Ussher Fort (Crevecoeur) in James Town and then the fishing coastlands were of major important in the performance because it served as a point of departure and a point of arrival, so that place marked what was taken out and what was brought in. Additionally, until 1993 Ussher fort functioned as a prison cell. Ghana's first head of state and a leading personality in the fight for independence Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was detained there during the colonial era. In 1868 the Dutch Fort Creve Couer was reassigned to the English. It was then somewhat renovated and named Ussher Fort, after the British official who had been influential in the Exchange of Territories between the Dutch and the English in that year (<http://www.ghanamuseums.org>, n.d.).

The green paint on her uncovered body parts; thus her face, hands and feet was to put herself into character; and also symbolizes the richness of the land before colonization, that is however not to say the land is no longer rich.

#### **4.13. Experiences and Challenges**

Patric shared that in the initial stages of her career as an artist understanding the industry and also when she moved to Accra getting herself comfortable and settling in the place was challenging because she did not grow up in Accra. She initially moved to Accra because of her national service at NAFTI and so trying to understand the space that she was in took her a while because she noticed that the people relationship was different from where she came from. For

instance, you go to the market and market women if you ask for the price of something they are selling and you don't buy; they having to insult you. It took a while to understand the people, find her way around and make up her mind as to what she stands for. She mentioned that people always saw her as a foreigner.

Being a female artist, Fatric mentioned that she knows the struggles that women are going through; the industry for her is a struggle. She has colleague at work who go like; *how do you do this*. She has to travel three times in a year, she leaves her family and goes to school abroad, she has a full time job, has studio work and other responsibilities. She expressed that to combine all that is sometimes crazy. She has one colleague who always asks her, *how do you do it; for me I can't do it oo*. Fatric states that the reason why she pushes herself to do what she does is because there are few women in the industry, and upcoming women artists need women they can easily relate to who are doing the things that they would love to do and so if she has good health and opportunity she will continue to do the things she does. Fatric shared that growing up, there was no woman artist she could look up to, there were only those who wrote literature like; Ama Ata Aidoo and then actresses like Grace Omaboe popularly known as "Maame Dokono", but when it came to the fine arts she just couldn't think of anybody. She expressed that when she looks back and now becoming a wife, a mother, and working in an educational environment she totally understands why. The environment that we are in is very challenging, we do not have institutions that will easily support art and so it takes a certain kind of personality or individual to be able to balance this and get it to work and that has been the problem. In some other countries there are a lot of support groups and institutions that support artists. Just recently there is an organization called Sustainable Art Foundation that provides financial awards to visual artists and writers with children; so if you have such an institution for instance, it's an inspiring and supportive

foundation that seeks to helping women artists fulfill their dreams. She notes that the country that we are in; has its own unique stories and challenges and that is the reason why we do not have women artists out there to encourage the young ones. In buttressing this information Kum-Essuon (2015) writes that after graduating from an art school, the few who brave the storm to work as artists, soon come to grips with the difficulty of practising art in Ghana: non-affordability of materials, lack of working capital, societal disdain for made in Ghana ideas, lack of art galleries and above all, ignorance on the part of most Ghanaians about the positive effect of the arts on their lives.

Fatric continued to say that also, we do not have documentations of all the amazing women artists. Why are women who are contributing to the visual arts not being written about, spoken about and institutions not even inviting these women to meet or engage with the young ones. These are ways that we can get the young ones inspired to pursue their dreams and that has been her goal.

Fatric shared that she always tells her students that; she teaches them art not because she won't them to become artists but because she wants them to be creative in whatever field they find themselves and she has observed that its influences the way they go about their things. She expressed that it makes her very happy because that is what we need as a nation and that is her legacy. She enjoys teaching young individuals; she stated that she desires to see certain changes in the country and wants to be known for working with the young ones because the older ones have already made up their minds and it's very difficult for them to undo what they have learnt, only few people can do that but if you can get them at the very young age to help them to begin, they see the world in a different way and begin to think of the world in a creative way which she

thinks would be better for all of us. She is therefore also interested in developing this area of her interest as well.

Fatric mentioned that none of the few female artists she knows who are amazing are practising, right from her colleagues when she was at the university; she is the only one practising art. Even the men; two or three were practising but all of them have diverted. Also those she knows who are married, are having marital challenges. She expressed that she is blessed to have a husband who supports what she does; if there is money and she has to invest some into her art, there is no fight. The reality is that in our society the basic thing is to be able to find accommodation, feed yourself, and if you have a child or children, funding them and giving them the basic things they need; so if you are an artist you cannot guarantee that you will sell or easily make money out of it. These are the realities and so if you find yourself in that situation which is common to a lot of artists. Some would just have to give up and then do something that would bring them the regular money that they need to survive. She further noted that, it however also boils down to the individual, in her case art has become part of her, when she deprives it, it feels like she is depriving part of her, so whatever sacrifice she has to make to practise, she does it and so it varies from person to person. She notes that it takes a lot of determination, time and self-discipline to practise as an artist and how many people can do that, it's also another thing. Fatric rightly notes that if you want to be present in the family, take care of your children and also practise as an artist it's really a tough situation to handle.

Fatric shared that she has met amazing professional woman artists out there, interestingly the last residence that she took part in at Minneapolis St. Paul; all the women were married with two/three children. They do other jobs apart from practising as artists and they are able to do that because there are organizations and foundations in their countries that make it easier for them; so

it is possible but very challenging. She stated that maybe we here have not really figured it out. We must come together and have a dialogue to find a way forward. She has come to realize that if we have those supportive systems it will be much easier because in other countries; what is working for women artists is that they have collectives and through that they support themselves and update themselves with what is happening currently in the art world. That is how they are able to survive and do what they do.

Fatric mentioned that she has observed that men artists are more forceful than women artists. She explained that when the guys need something, they go all out for it but she does not see that same determination with the women. The women will easily give up but the guys will go and hang out with whoever they have to hang out with and negotiate their way through to get things to happen. Asked whether she has faced discrimination of any sort; Fatric stated that growing up she felt her parents did a bit of discrimination although they educated their children to the highest that they could. Fatric recalled that; she always use to argue with her mother because she did not understand why her brothers could go out and play while she stayed in the kitchen to cook. She always argued with her and told her that when the time was right she will come to the kitchen; her mother will intend call her a tomboy in their local language. She felt that they did not allow her to play enough. Also, her dad was an engineer and he was more interested in talking to her brothers about the sciences while conversations with her were centered on cooking and taking care of the home. That made her think that doing art is a sign of weakness and that science was more for the guys. She stated that as she takes a position as a parent what she will do different is to get the children to know all, help the child find what comes to him or her easily and direct the child; not take that decision for the child and right from the word go direct the child in a certain way. So that bit did not make her happy as a child, she felt she was looked at as not the smart

person because she was not included in the subjects that as a child she thought were the smartest. However she remarked that she has never regretted becoming an artist, especially knowing what is happening now with art, she is so impressed and happy that she finds herself in art and that it happened that way.

Fatric is a member of the Foundation for Contemporary Art, Ghana.



**Plate 31: Gladys Adinyira Wuaku**  
A Sculptor



**Source:** Gladys Adinyira Wuaku

**4.14. Profile**

Gladys was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1962 in Accra, Ghana where she also grew up. She hails from Amedzofe in the Volta Region of Ghana, and Ningo-Prampram in the Greater Accra Region where her father and mother come from respectively. She had her basic education in Teshi-Nungua, Accra and her secondary education at Aburi Girls' Secondary School in the Eastern Region of Ghana from 1976 to 1980 where she studied visual art and wrote her O levels. She then took part in AFX student exchange program and so went to study in the United States for a year after which she came back to Ghana and then went to Okuapeman Secondary School also in the Eastern Region of Ghana from 1981 to 1983 where she wrote her A levels. Gladys then majored in sculpture as an undergraduate programme at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana from 1984 to 1988. She went to the university in the year 1984 instead of 1983 because the then government led by Jerry John Rawlings had closed down the universities because the students embarked on a demonstration;

so for ten months the universities were closed. Graduates usually did their national service for two year after completing the university but since the universities were not reopening anytime soon fresh students who were awaiting to enter the universities were asked to do one year of their national service while waiting and then do the second year of their national service after completing school; that was the first time sixth formers did their National Service before entering the university. Gladys was posted to teach at Nungua Secondary School where she taught English literature; a course she enjoyed teaching because she likes literature, and then after completing the university she did the second year of her national service at Abibigromma Theatre Company – School of Performing Arts - University of Ghana where she worked as a set designer, costume designer and a substantial actress.

After her national service Gladys worked as a teacher in her alma mater; Aburi Girls' Secondary School from 1991 to 1993 and then left to do her master of philosophy in educational theory at Norsk Learer Akademi, Bergen, Norway from 1994 to 1999. At Norsk students were required to first learn the Norwegian language and then do a research related to their home country; so Gladys came back to Ghana for a semester to collect data for her research and then went back to finish. After her masters she worked with Church World Service where she helped in moving refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leon to the US and also made posters to show them what to expect. She is currently having her doctorate degree in sculpture at KNUST.

Gladys lives and works in Accra as a sculptor and an art teacher. Being in the teaching field Gladys expressed that she realized that is where she wants to be, she likes it; she enjoys going to work and teaching people. She has worked as an art teacher in Roman Ridge School, Morning Star International High School, East Airport International School, Tema International School and currently works at Lincoln Community School, all in Accra, Ghana.

Gladys noted that she started practising as an artist in the year 1986, thus while studying at the university. All through school she and her mates usually got together and produced works to have them displayed at art exhibitions; she shared that the idea was making money for themselves. She recalled taking part in such art fairs like INDOTECH at the Ghana International Trade Fair Centre in Accra. Gladys stated that since she started teaching, she does not produce works to wait to be sold; she usually works on commissions, so as and when she is commissioned to do a work she finds time to do it and that is how it has been for most of her working years.

Gladys shared that growing up she never thought she will end up becoming an artist, she thought more of becoming an actress; someone who would always be on stage and throughout school she joined drama groups. She stated that everyone in her family is an artist; her father can sew anything including curtains, cushion covers, and clothes and her mother too was very artistic; she baked and did crouching. She mentioned that growing up it's always been hands-on; she saw things been done at home. Charlotte Hagan (a renowned Ghanaian sculptor) had an art gallery in her house at Teshie-Nungua Estates where Gladys grew up and had her primary education, so that also exposed her to seeing sculptures. The children in Charlotte's house were her friends and so anytime she went there she viewed the sculptures and paintings on display and also saw how they were being produced. Charlotte had several exhibitions during the Acheampong era; her gallery however did not survive after she moved to another place. Gladys stated that art has therefore always been part of her and maybe it's just natural that she flowed into it.

Gladys asserts that luckily for her she never had any pressure from her parents as to which career path she should pursue; it was up to her to decide what she was interested in and would like to

pursue. Her parents advised that whatever she decided to do she should make sure she does it and do it well and also make sure she becomes good in that field.

#### **4.15. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

Most of Gladys' works have always been about women; their contributions to society and how they go about their daily task always informs her works. She expressed that maybe because she is a woman that comes to her first, people say when you do an art work a part of you is in it so it must be natural that when she thinks of creating an artwork the theme that usually comes to mind are themes that have to do with women. Also at the early stages of her career as an artist one factor that propelled her to create works that made reference to women is that she observed; there are not many works of art that honour women. She stated that there are a lot of women for instance who helped Kwame Nkrumah achieve independence but we have no statues honouring them, their names are not even mentioned in history books. Some of the women were jailed, they used their money to sponsor campaigns, they cooked and housed these supporters and the executives when they got to certain stations but they are not mentioned. There was one lady Hannah Cudjoe, who is said to have been the only woman who was present at every executive meeting but when Nkrumah won she was not given any position so she then went to the north and started a campaign against nudity in the north. She was one of the people who was the front of the campaign voice for CPP. She is said to be one person who can rally a crowd for you within a short time and you will have a stadium full of people but she is never mentioned and even for her, the one who wrote about her got the information on her from her obituary brochure. When you talk to old members of the CPP they will tell you; yes this woman was part of the people who helped the CPP during Nkrumah's time.

Gladys is inspired by the works of renowned French sculptor Auguste Rodin; she expressed that Rodin's works are very powerful and very strong, you feel the force in his works; the detailing of the muscles and how real his works look is also one of the things that attracted her to sculpture. Once in a while Gladys produces water-colours paintings which are inspired by the works of Georgina Steytler; an award winning Australian nature photographer. She is also inspired by the works of Ghanaian artist Betty Acquah, she expressed that ever since she saw her practise at the university she has always loved her works.

Gladys gets ideas for her works from nature. She noted that she is inspired by everything around her. She usually makes sketches of things she sees in nature that catch her attention and take ideas from it to create her works. Gladys expressed that we do not stop to appreciate nature; the colours and shapes of trees, how the branches are spread out or closed, the intense colours of flowers and how they look so alive. Coming from Accra and schooling in Aburi and Kumasi; places characterized by very beautiful landscapes, she has learnt to appreciate nature more.

Gladys has worked with such media including wood, cement, clay and plaster of paris and then recently tried fiber glass which she did not like because it was too toxic, so when she had to cast the model she asked some other sculptors to do it for her, she expressed that the fumes was too much she could not even stand in the room. Gladys added that she teaches International Baccalaureate (IB) students and each student is usually made to decide which material they want to work with and so because she instructs; even though she is not the one creating the works, helping others to do theirs adds to her skill and knowledge about sculptural media. It helps her know the new trends of what is happening in the art world.

Gladys carvings usually have rough finishes, she typically likes to leave the tool marks on her carvings but then if it's a commissioned work then of course she does what the client wants.

However when working on some particular themes she smoothens the carvings. Most of her wood works are abstract. Her clay and cement works are mostly realistic with very few being semi-abstract. Her watercolour paintings are abstract and realistic. Gladys mentioned that her mood and what she wants to achieve with a particular work usually have an influence on the kind of work she produces.

Gladys has moved from creating only realistic sculptures to also producing conceptual artworks like installations, especially while pursuing her doctorate degree in sculpture which is more of studio work. She shared that for one of her project she did a research on the life of market women and the role they play in politics so she did some works in clay imitating market women, eventually in all the trials and processes she thought of using the wooden boxes used by market women to rather represent them instead of making sculptural pieces depicting market women because the objects they use speak for itself. She stated that finding those boxes suggested something to her; you can deliberately place an object in a particular location and still make the statements you want to make. One can easily relate to the boxes because they tell a story. These boxes have moved in tracks from the north to the south of the country. Markets women carry these boxes on their head; they sit on them and also usually display their foodstuffs on the boxes for sale. Duchamp; a renowned conceptual artist said that as soon as an artist uses an object in a particular way it changes from being a functional object to an artwork because now it's telling a story.

The philosophy that guides Gladys' practise as an artist is to create images that promote and celebrate women. Also she stated that; she is a Christian and so there some things she will not create, she will not carve idols and sculpt anything that is vulgar. She noted that some people think that for your works to sell they have to be vulgar but these are things she will not do.

#### 4.15.1. Exhibitions

Some of the exhibitions Gladys has participated in include; Two exhibitions at the Loom Art Gallery in Accra, all titled; ‘Women in art’ in 2004 and 2007, ‘Shapes of our spirit’ – an exhibition at Novotel Hotel, Accra in 2007, Chale Wote Street Art Festival, Accra in 2017 and a solo exhibition at the W. E. B. Du Bois Memorial Centre, Accra and the National Museum, Accra in 1989 and 1991 respectively. Gladys mentioned that most of these exhibitions looked at issues concerning women.

One of Gladys’ notable works is the ‘Monument of the May 9 Stadium Disaster’ also titled; ‘Gbomo nyemii dzi gbomo’ (I am my brother’s keeper) – a cement, heroic-size figure (8ft) on a 4ft pedestal; in memory of the 127 souls that perished during the May 9<sup>th</sup> stadium tragedy making it the worst stadium disaster to have ever taken place in Africa. The work can be found outside the Accra Sports Stadium in Accra, Ghana. Gladys explained that it was a competition organized by the Sports Council. They put up an advert in the newspaper which requested sculptors to bring their designs; so on sending her designs she was chosen to execute the project in 2003.

Some of Gladys’ works can be found at Artists Alliance Gallery and the Loom Art Gallery all in Accra, Ghana. Gladys expressed that one thing about sending your works to art galleries is that sometimes you ask yourself who bought your work because you are never told. Aside that you are expected to give a certain percentage to the gallery and most of the time these percentages are quite high; some art galleries take as much as 35%. Looking at the cost of materials and the time spent in producing a work, how much are you going to sell that work and fell gratified that you have not been cheated and your time has not been wasted; so in effect you sell your works at a high price because you want to get your money back and also make profit. She shared that at

some point she stopped creating works to have them displayed and patronized at art galleries; she prefers to rather work directly with her clients.

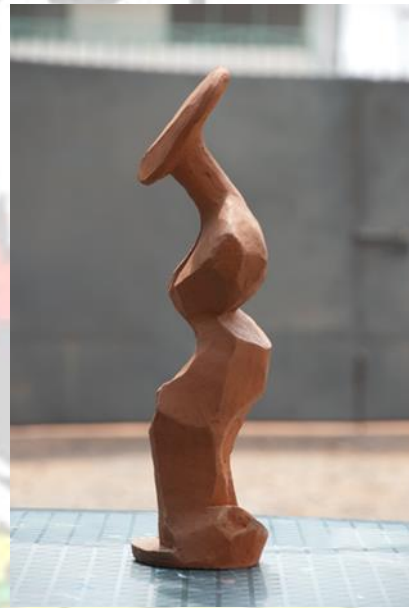
#### 4.15.2. Some Works of Gladys Adinyira Wuaku



**Plate 32a:** 'Celebrating womanhood', 1989  
(Front View)

Terra cotta – 1 ft. high

**Source:** Gladys Adinyira Wuaku



**Plate 32b:** Side View

The sculpture piece (Plate 32a & 32b) is inspired by the form of a woman with the 'Akua'ba doll' being the inspiration. 'Akuaba' doll is a ritual fertility doll used by the Akan people of Ghana and some other African cultures. It particularly portrays some features characteristic of the female *Akua'ba* doll which include; a flat discoid (or oval) head and roundly shaped buttocks and legs. Boateng (1987) wrote that the features of a female 'Akua'ba doll outline the bodily facets of Akan interpretation of a beautiful woman. *Akua'ba* dolls are used as ritual fertility figures and carried by women either to induce conception or, during pregnancy, to ensure the birth of a beautiful child.

Additionally, Klemm (2019) wrote that though intended to portray the prime of life, the *akua'ba* is also somewhat abstract. By laying emphasis on certain features, the artist depicts the Akan epitome of feminine beauty. Her large, rounded forehead is apprehended as the abode where wisdom resides; it implies the wealth of knowledge and intellectual maturity the child should have. Her ringed neck is meant to imply rolls of fat. Extra body fat at this stage of life indicates that the young woman is matured and capable of bearing hale and hearty children. Finally, her high, stick out breasts insinuates a woman who has not yet bore and nurtured children. Hence, the *akua'ba* shows three essential qualities of womanhood (wisdom, birth, and the prime of life) which are associated with her physical and mental capabilities.



**Plate 33:** Yaa Asantewaa, 1986, (Cement), Life-size

**Source:** Gladys Adinyira Wuaku

The statue (Plate 33) can be found at the sculpture garden of Ghana National Museum in Accra, Ghana. While studying sculpture at KNUST, during a vacation training organized by the then Dean of Students - KNUST; Gladys together with her mates were made to sculpt figures within a

period of six weeks in the sculpture garden of Ghana National Museum. The then executives of the Ghana National Museum were going to create a sculpture garden where people could come and sit, listen to life band music and interact with the art works. Among the sculptures that were created, Gladys and Alabi; her class mate sculpted the statue of Yaa Asantewa: a past heroine of the Ashanti Kingdom and the nation Ghana as a whole. The concept was to create artworks that talked about Ghana's cultural history and heritage. The narrative of Yaa Asantewaa has been discussed in the write up for (Plate 23).



**Plate 34:** Forms representing movement, 1991-92, (Ebony wood) 12 inches

**Source:** Gladys Adinyira Wuaku

'Forms representing movement' (Plate 34) is inspired by physical movement; movement of people and movement seen in various dance forms.

#### 4.16. Experiences and Challenges

Gladys stated that in the initial stages of her career as an artist getting commissions was a challenge but because now she teaches in addition to practising as an artist she is able to fund herself. She noted that when it becomes a matter of survival then it becomes a challenge because you are not getting income to survive, but when it's a passion you get inspired and then you are motivated to work and so it becomes more of an enjoyable thing where you can even decide to decline some commissions, it gives you that option. She shared that she has had people come and ask her to carve certain figures, and from the way they describe what they want it is obvious they are going to use it as an idol, Gladys rightly notes that she declines such commissions. She further stated that when you are free to explore you get even better outcomes rather than working under pressure because you need money.

Being a female artist Gladys shared that people usually wonder whether you are the one who actually did the work. They get surprised and ask, *you mean you did this work, wow*. They admire you and wonder because they hardly see women in that field so they see you and they are amazed. Gladys shared that while creating the May 9<sup>th</sup> stadium monument in her art gallery at Teshie-Nungua in Accra a young man came and told her he wanted to learn how to sculpt. And so she invited him to come around and learn since she was working on a commission. After the monument was erected, she received a call from her friends asking her whether she was watching television. She tuned in only to find out that the young man had taken pictures of himself standing by the work and was on a television show telling viewers; he created the work, and talking about how he went about it because he knows people will find it difficult to believe a woman created it. Gladys expressed that these are some of the challenges; people wondering whether you actually did the work because of the nature of the work and the cultural implications

of being a woman and finding yourself in some particular professions. Some people will tell you; no one even believes you did the work because they feel how can a woman do this. She shared that she has had exhibitions where some guests come and ask her whether she drew it for somebody to do it for her. Some people cannot understand that you have done that carving; they feel that you cannot do it because you are a woman but if it were to be a male artist who had his works on display, they would not ask such questions. She also mentioned that while studying sculpture at the university; she was being called names and even in an intellectual environment people told her that if she carves she will not be able to give birth to children; this mentality stems from our cultural background as stated in the literature review where it was stated that; As the carving profession progressed over the years in Ghana, and particularly among the Akans it remained an exclusive preserve for only males. No female was allowed to carve. Only the males who were acclaimed to be endowed with special talents upheld the tradition. Also, among the Akans, when the Akuaba doll and other figurative sculptures were being carved, pregnant women were not allowed near the carvers until the figurative sculpture has been successfully carved and polished. It was believed that if the pregnant woman sees the unfinished carving, it would affect the development of the fetus in the womb. Unfinished carving has a lot of deformities which receive attention as the carver progresses with the carving. So, it was a belief shared among the Akans that when the deformities in the unfinished carving attract the attention of the pregnant woman, it may affect the orderly growth of the fetus in the womb. This belief and other taboos associated with the carving profession made it to be secluded from public places. It was therefore done in a closet and not out there in the open (Boateng, 1987).

Gladys further stated that some clients do not see why they should pay so much for a work of art but in other parts of the world works of art are selling for so much. She explained that the nature

of the work is such that the first cast may not come out well and also the materials used including; P.O.P., bronze and hot molten metal among others are expensive so you must consider all that in costing but people especially in this part of our world do not understand. Gladys rightly observes that in Ghana, is just a group of expatriates who buy works of art and you meet these same group of people at every art exhibition. She noted that Ghanaians are now warming up to patronizing works of art; you hardly see works of art by Ghanaian artists in the homes of Ghanaians. She shared that she had an exhibition once when someone came and asked for the price of an art work, when she told him the price he said; *for this amount do you know how many balls of kenkey I can buy with it*, intend she said; *that's an insult, you haven't even thought about what has gone into producing the work*. She expressed that it's more of a cultural mentality because in our traditional society works of art are mostly created for a specific purpose not for its aesthetic values and so if an artwork is not functional people feel then what is the use. For most of the crafts, paintings and sculptures produced by Ghanaian artists the target groups are foreigners not Ghanaians, you just have few Ghanaians visiting art centers and galleries because they want to buy a gift for somebody. In other countries some people save money towards buying works of artists they like because they want to have their artwork. Also in our society a number of sculptural pieces are perceived as fetish and so that also affects the patronage of sculptural works, so the cultural knowledge about it makes it obscure. Gladys noted that these are the main challenges otherwise it would be something you enjoy doing.

Concerning the poor visibility of female artists, Gladys mentioned that most female artists work in their corner, they work hard to obtain their clientele and that is it, only a small group of people know them. They do not advertise, organize exhibitions and put themselves out there; by for instance going on television shows. She expressed that the platform for exposure is also

expensive because you would have to pay for the time on air and only few people can afford that, so the accessibility of a platform to be seen is a challenge. Also in our society people are discouraged from pursuing certain professions; some people will not even allow their children to study art.

Gladys asserts that female artists are given the same opportunities and privileges as their male counterparts, however, your very role especially as a married woman makes it difficult to practise more and make a significant impact in the art industry. Also if you do not have a husband who appreciates your profession and is very supportive of what you do as an artist it becomes difficult to practise. If a woman finds herself in the situation where her husband is not supportive but is determined to still practise it will be at the cost of her marriage and her relationship with her children. Gladys expressed that it is at the cost of something more so for women than men. The opportunities are there but the time to make good use of the opportunities is the problem. Women artists may probably have more time to practise when their children become adults and can fund for themselves. However, when you are young, that's when you have more energy and so can produce a lot of works but as you get older that may not be so appealing, you may want to take your time about things and work on a lighter note and so you may be practising but will not be so visible, you just get commissions here and there.

Gladys is a member of Women Artists Institute (WAI).

**Plate 35:** Margaret Astrea Asabea Anakwa  
A Painter and Sculptor



**Source:** Asabea Anakwa

#### **4.17. Profile**

Asabea was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 1968 in Accra, Ghana. She hails from and grew up in Manfe Akuapem in the Eastern Region of Ghana. For her basic education, she moved through the schools; Manfe Presby Primary, Presbyterian Training College (PTC) - Demonstration Primary and then Mampong Christian Unity Preparatory School. Asabea then proceeded to Nifa Senior High School in Adukrom, Ghana where she studied business from the year 1983 to 1988, after which she went to Mount Mary College of Education in Somanya, Ghana where she acquired a diploma in French Education, from 1989 to 1992. On completion, Asabea went to her station, Apam Catholic J.H.S. in the Central Region of Ghana where she taught French for four years. In 1996, she gained admission to University of Education, Winneba, Ghana where she first acquired a diploma in education and then after graduating, she and some of her mates were selected to do their bachelor of art degree in art education. At that time the university was changing from offering post-diploma programmes to rather offering degree programs in art education. Asabea's group was therefore the first to offer a bachelor of art degree in art

education. Asabea majored in sculpture and completed in the year 2000. In 1999 she was taken on as an art teacher in O'reilly Senior High School in Accra, Ghana where she taught for ten years, thus 1999 to 2009 after which she furthered in a master of fine art degree in painting and sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana from 2009 to 2012. Asabea expressed that by the time she completed KNUST she had become more of a conceptual artist and so you see it in some of her works. Asabea also studied French at Aillance Francais, Ghana where she completed in the year 2015 and has a master of art degree in ministries from the Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana where she completed in 2017. Asabea lives and works in Accra as an artist, a preacher of the gospel, a marriage counsellor and an art teacher. She currently teaches art in Accra College of Education, Accra, Ghana.

Asabea started practising professionally as an artist in 1996, thus while studying at University of Education, Winneba. However, before studying art at the university she was already producing works of art. She learnt how to paint and sculpt from her father; the late Emmanuel Asa Anakwa (a Ghanaian artist), and so right from childhood Asabea has always enjoyed painting and sculpting which comes to her naturally.

Asabea asserts that she was born an artist; she has the gift of using things in her immediate environment to produce works of art. As at six years old she saw herself looking on her picture and drawing her self-portrait and things she saw in her environment like people pounding fufu. Whenever she thought of a creative idea she most at times made drawings of them using pen or crayon in a sketch book. She recalled that at primary school one of the courses she studied was art and craft; and with that course every child was supposed to periodically create a work of art at home and bring it to school for marks; she usually used clay to mold figurative sculptures of

things she saw in her environment such as; a market woman, a child at the poolside or an imaginative composition. Because her father was a sculptor they usually had clay at home. Also her mother, brother and sisters are all in art related professions. Asabea shared that her father really wanted one of his children to become an artist and so he was very happy and supportive of her profession as a painter and a sculptor.

Asabea completed secondary school and training college without pursuing art, she explained that in secondary school she did not enjoy art because they followed laid down procedures of drawing the human figure and producing other works of art and so she saw it as a regulation; whereas growing up she use to create works of art freely, so when she had to choose her area of specialization she did not chose art as one of her subjects. At that time students went to secondary school for five years; from form one to form three students were made to study all the courses and then in form three you choose which area you want to specialize in.

When she decided to go to the university, one educationist on hearing that she was good at art; sat her down and advised her to rather pursue her talent and polish it; if not the gift will be a waste, so with the help of an art teacher in Apam Secondary School and a little tuition she studied art for three months, wrote nov-dec and then applied to the University of Education to pursue art. Asabea expressed that she really enjoyed her stay at the University of Education because that was the first time she offered herself to study art academically. While pursuing art at the University of Education, her lecturers, including; Opoku Mensah, Gyapong and Coufie, advised that, there are few practising female painters and sculptors and so after child birth and as women life goes on but while progressing they should not neglect their gifts, they should endeavor to continue practising after school. Asabea noted that this advice really motivated her to continue practising as an artist and it was true, they were not just saying but it's something she

noticed in her department, that there were few female students offering painting and sculpture and even there was no female lecturer in her department. Also her mother who was working at the Ghana National Museum as a technical photographer and textile conservator use to call her and tell her about art exhibitions that were going to take place in the museum and art galleries across the country; so upon going to these art exhibitions she observed that there were few practising female artists, however going for these art exhibitions and seeing the few who were practising inspired her, one being Marigold Akufo-Addo. She mentioned that there is a big space for female artists to occupy.

#### **4.18. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

Asabea's paintings focus on themes that project the nature of women. Some of her paintings also examine the roles of women in society. Her recent sculpture works make reference to important women personalities. She also uses her works to promote the gospel, inspire women and anyone who also wants to be an artist. Her paintings usually depict women whereas she is mostly commissioned to sculpt effigies of men. Asabea usually employs the impasto painting technique; she paints with palette knives using acrylics on canvas and likes to depict closer views of the figures or things she paints. She sometimes incorporate beads and miniatures of wooden 'nyame gye' symbols into her paintings. For her sculptural works she uses resin, plaster of paris, fiber glass and clay, and employs the modelling and casting sculpture technique. Her sculptural works usually have smooth finishing. Her conceptual artworks utilize conventional painting and sculpture techniques and materials, and any other available materials; mostly those used by women.

Asbea is inspired by the works of artists; Marigold Akufo-Addo, Frida Khalo, Judy Chicago, Tracey Emin, Benjamin Offei- Nyarko, Dorothy Amenuke, Georgia O’Keeffe, Caroline Sherman and Salvador Dali.

She mostly finds ideas for her works from daily activities, observing things in her environment, when reading religious and inspirational books, when listening to a sermon and when watching programs on television.

‘Occupy till I come’ is Asabea’s philosophy of life; a phrase derived from the bible verse, Luke 19:13 - *And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come (NKJV)*. Asabea believes that everybody has been given something to work with and there is a time for rendering account. The scriptural verse motivates her to use the gifts that God has given her judiciously so as to give a good account when He comes.

#### **4.18.1. Exhibitions**

Asabea had her first solo exhibition in 2008 at the Ghana National Museum, Accra, titled “Asabea in Action: Promoting African Art and Culture”. In 2009 she had a joint exhibition with one Jeremy Manteau at Novotel now Accra City Hotel in Ghana, titled “The Focal Point”. In 2010 she was part of an art exhibition in memory of one Professor Nkrumah which took place at the Dei Centre in Accra where artists were invited to come and exhibit their works. Then in 2011 she had one at the Maintenance Park – KUNST, Kumasi where she displayed her project work for her masters degree titled; “The Portrait of a Ghanaian Woman”. Additionally, in 2018 she had “Creativity in motion” at Accra College of Education in Accra, where she currently teaches. The exhibition featured artworks created by the art teachers, visual art students and textile students of the home economics department. Also, to mark her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary she organized

another exhibition in her school titled; “Asabea’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Life statement and Art Exhibition”. Asabea has had several solo and group exhibitions; the above are just a few.

Asabea has some of her works at the art gallery of the Centre for National Culture, Ghana National Museum, the office of the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, Accra City Hotel, Dei Centre, For Art’s Sake Gallery, Accra Tourist Centre and Novica Online Art Gallery; all in Accra, Ghana. She also has a terracotta work titled; ‘Mother and child’ at Margaret McCord’s private sculpture park in Yorkshire, UK. Additionally, most of Asabea’s commissioned effigies can be found at Nsamampom in Accra, Ghana specifically, where they bury the chiefs.

#### **4.18.2. Some Works of Asabea Anakwa**



**Plate 36:** The Breast that Satisfies All, 2008, (Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas),  
135cm x 82.5cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

In the painting titled; ‘The Breast that Satisfies All’ (Plate 36) Asabea depicts God as a mother with her children, the different colour of strokes behind the woman represents the entire human race. The painting makes reference to the best-known “El” compound name of God which is “El Shaddai”.

Smallwood (2013) wrote that the name “El” (God) also means “mighty”, “strong”, and “prominent”. El Shaddai means The All-Sufficient One and is usually translated in English Bibles as “God Almighty”, “the Almighty” or “Almighty God”. All of the following words have been used at various times in the development of the name: The Hebrew word “dai” (meaning “sheds forth”, “pours out”, or “to heap benefits”) suggests provision, sustenance, and blessing. Thus, God is the All-Sufficient, All-Bountiful El. (Genesis 42:24-25).

The Hebrew word “shad” or “shadayim” (meaning “breast” or “breasts”) occurs 24 times in the bible as “Shaddai” and signifies One who nourishes, supplies, and satisfies (Isaiah 60:16, 66:10-13). Combined with the word for God, “El”, it then becomes the “One who mightily nourishes, satisfies, supplies and protects His people. El Shaddai is our All-Sufficient Sustainer. It is God as ‘El’ who helps, and it is God as “Shaddai” who abundantly blesses with all manner of blessings. It is God who really nurtures.

*You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breast. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Saviour, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. (Isaiah 60:16, NKJV)*

*For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance.” (Isaiah 66:11, NKJV)*



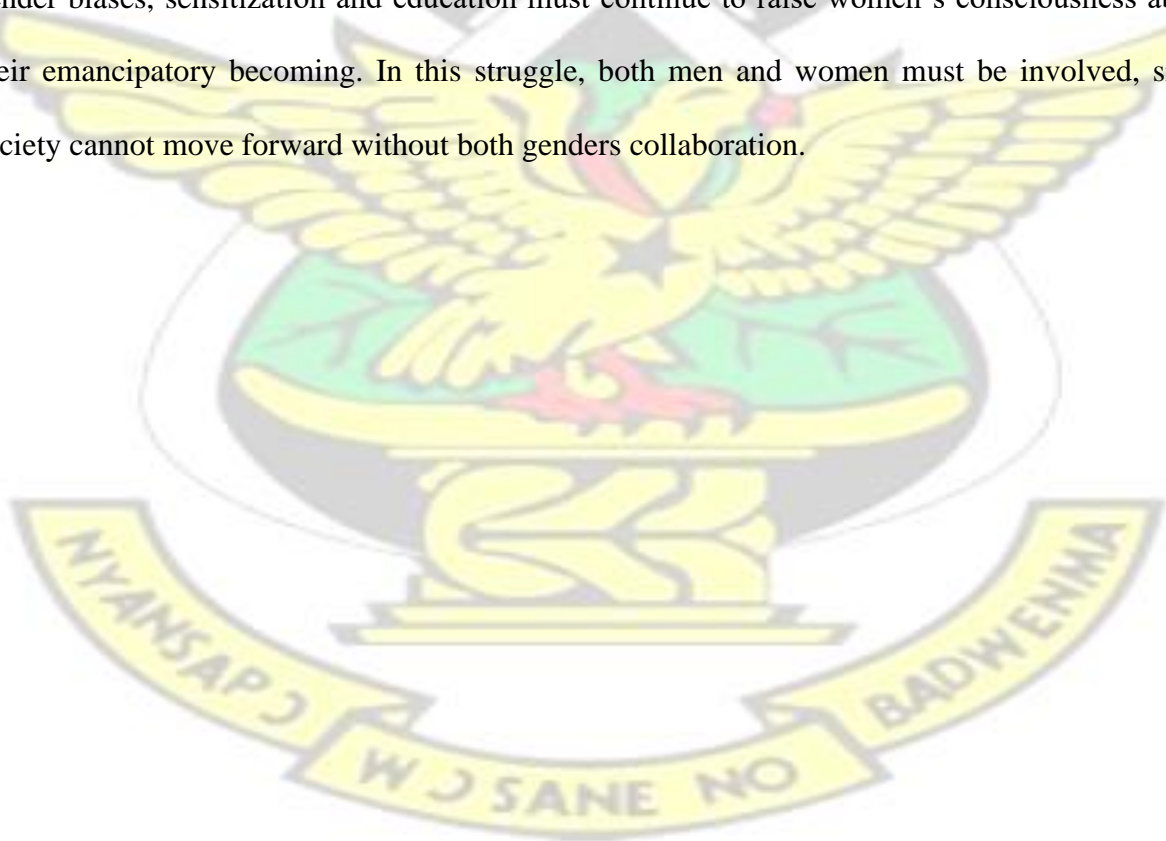
**Plate 37:** Birth, 2011, (Abstract painting, Acrylic on canvas), 122.4cm x 88.5cm

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

‘Birth’ (Plate 37) makes a call to patriarchal communities, saying that; women are not only capable of giving birth but are also very capable of conceiving significant ideas that are needed for the development of a society. Asabea rightly notes that God in his own unique way created the woman to be able to contain that which two people have decided to have for nine months, and then gives birth to it; this woman should therefore never be suppressed; if her child is accepted then she must be also allowed to express her ideas. If the ideas of a woman are not considered, in fact the society will be missing out on a whole lot of things. During the period of pregnancy the emotions, thoughts and daily intake of the woman affects the unborn child just as the way a woman is treated in the society has an untold effect on the society. Upon a critical observation of the work you will notice that a woman has giving birth to a baby that assumes a form of the word ‘ideas’.

Familusi (2012) in her article titled; ‘African Culture and the Status of Women: The Yoruba Example’ wrote that discussion on the rights of women in Africa has been a key focus of modern

scholarship in Africa. Several intellectuals of feminist studies have resolved that aspects of African culture are antagonistic to women, hence the necessity for an instant change so that the presumed hitherto restricted woman will be liberated. Familusi contends that if a man is indispensable then women should also be recognized as such, and value must be placed on the human person, not sex. It needs to be endorsed that cultural practices that are harmful to women should be abolished. If culture is a way of life and it is dynamic, one does not expect it to be detrimental. Additionally, Lare (2015) wrote that the social perceptions held about women as weak and immature beings, home oriented and in need of guidance by men are false. Women's rights to freedom of choice in marriage and their economic status should be recognized and respected by both men and women. To arrive at a tangible result in dismantling sexism and gender biases, sensitization and education must continue to raise women's consciousness about their emancipatory becoming. In this struggle, both men and women must be involved, since society cannot move forward without both genders collaboration.





**Plate 38:** A conceptual artwork titled; ‘Dispensation of time’, 2018

Materials: a dummy, wild pepper, a wooden table and stool, a traditional cooler with a calabash, a cutlass, a metallic bucket, lemons, sedimentary rocks, plate, ladle, dried palm nut husk, firewood, earthen ware bowl, kerosene lantern and a chamber pot

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

The conceptual artwork (Plate 38) makes reference to Asabea’s childhood life. Growing up life was not easy for Asabea who lived with a single parent; her father. As depicted in the work, a farmer cannot do without his or her cutlass; as at eight years old Asabea practised subsistence farming with her father and was responsible for the day to day housekeep because her older siblings went to boarding school. She was then the last born until her father married again and had another child. The empty table depicted in the work talks of how at an early stage she had to think of what food to prepare for herself, her father and any other person that came to visit.

In the work Asabea is seen picking up *nyeraa*; a wild pepper as a result of seed dispersal and so nobody could accuse you of stealing it from his or her farm. She usually gathered this pepper from a nearby bush and recalls the pain of having to pick these tiny peppers anytime it poured while cooking. The plaster on her right hand makes reference to how she used to treat her sores by applying local herbs like *onunum*. Whenever Asabea fell ill; going to the hospital was not

the core value and also due to financial constraints, they first resorted to the use of *'enema'* (a local concoction); if the application of *'enema'* proved futile then they then went to the hospital. An *enema* is of introducing liquids into the large intestines (rectum and colon) via the anus. The increasing volume of the liquid causes rapid expansion of the lower intestinal causing an uncomfortable bloating, cramping and a feeling of extreme urgency and complete evacuation of the lower intestinal tract (graphic.com.gh, 2018). *Enema* was usually applied when you had fever or stomach pains. The application of *enema* required the use of a chamber pot as depicted in the work.

Asabea and her father used kerosene lantern which was the best and highest source of light used in their village, if you had kerosene lantern you were rich because most people used *'pgatashie'* or *'bobo'*.

The conceptual work also depicts some of the things Asabea used for cooking; among them is *'mukyea'*, a traditional tripod clay stove. She usually sought for firewood from the bush and used *'mmeffe'* (chaff from pounded palm-nut) as her source of fuel. After pounding palm nut she dried the husk and used it as a source of fuel, kerosene was mainly used for the lantern; if caught using kerosene as a source of fuel for cooking you will be punished. Also depicted in the work are *'asanka'* and *'tapoli'*; a traditional earthenware bowl and grinding stone which served the purpose of blenders. Every three days Asabea washed the cooler, turned it upside down and then placed it on the tripod stove immediately after turning out the fire after cooking, this did not only kill germs but also gave the pot a very nice smell. She usually went early in the morning to fetch water from the stream in the village because at that time the dirt had settled down and also a lot of people were not there, so was sure to get clean water.

Children in the village where she grew up were taught how to keep themselves and their environment clean by utilizing the natural resources found in their environment; lemon and sedimentary rock for instance was used for cleaning metallic buckets.

Now living in a postmodern world the conceptual artwork highlights how things were for Asabea growing up in a village at Manfe Akuapem in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Asabea's father was eager to educate his children and so usually went to Accra to sell teaching aids in order to make some money. Asabea expressed that though she worked with joy she sometimes felt discouraged and cried but there was nobody at home to console and encourage her. She however appreciates her childhood experiences because she learnt a lot, she enjoyed it because there was nothing to compare with; all the people in her community lived like the way she did.

This work was displayed at Asabea's solo exhibition titled; Asabea's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Life Statement and Art Exhibition which was held at Accra College of Education, Accra in 2018. The exhibition displayed artworks that talked about Asabea's life.



**Plate 39:** A conceptual artwork titled; 'Bound unto righteousness', 2018

Materials: a dummy, chains and perforated pieces of cardboards soaked into plaster of paris

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

The conceptual artwork (Plate 39) makes reference to Asabea's life as a Christian. The dummy sitting in the chair represents Asabea who believes that she has been set free and is free indeed as written in the bible verse; John 8:36 which says; *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (NKJV)*. However, she reads another bible verse in Romans 6:18 which says; *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (NKJV)*. Her freedom therefore makes her a slave unto righteousness; she has been set free but is limited to stay unto righteousness and so cannot choose to live her life anyhow but according to the precepts of the Word of God. One bible verse that guides her daily activities; is Philippians 4:8 which reads; *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things (NKJV)*. The chain she has been bound with have cardboards with the inscription 'righteousness' which symbolize that she is bound unto righteousness and the chains on the floor have cardboards with the inscription 'sin' which symbolize that the chain of sin is broken; she has been therefore set free from sin. This work was displayed at Asabea's solo exhibition titled; Asabea's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Life Statement and Art Exhibition, which was held at Accra College of Education, Accra in 2018.



**Plate 40:** A conceptual artwork titled; ‘Occupy till I come’, 2018

Materials: a bust of the artist in plaster of paris, photographs of the late Emmanuel Asa Anakwa and Daniel Akpey and some materials used by the artist in her studio

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

The conceptual artwork (Plate 40) makes reference to Asabea’s philosophy of life; ‘Occupy till I come’, a phrase derived from the bible verse; Luke 19:13 which reads; *And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come (NKJV)*. The artwork is also inspired by the bible verse; Psalm 1:3 which reads; *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers (NKJV)*; this she has shown in the work by tying a bust of herself to a tree. With this work Asabea places herself between the dead; that is her late father; Opanin Asa Anakwa and her late twelve years old son; Daniel Akpey who she believes is now the Minister of Sports in heaven, and asks herself; *why am I still here?*. Asabea believes that everybody has been given a gift by God to work with while on earth and we must make good use of that gift because everyone will have to give an account of it. Everyday Asabea therefore does something in relation to the gifts that God has given her because time is short; this she has portrayed in the work by incorporating some of the materials she uses in her studio. This work was also displayed

at Asabea's solo exhibition titled; Asabea's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Life Statement and Art Exhibition which was held at Accra College of Education, Accra in 2018.

#### **4.19. Experiences and Challenges**

Asabea shared that some Ghanaians associate sculptural figures with idol worship because of our religious background where most sculptural figures were created and used to represent, connect to, or communicate with spiritual forces. When you go to shrines, you usually find sculptural figures and so some people fear sculptural figures. This fact is affirmed by Boateng (1987) who wrote that a lot of figurative sculptures were produced to form the basis for ethnic religious practices. Asabea is usually commissioned to sculpt effigies of past chiefs and family elders. Some people regard her as a weird person; they feel she has some supernatural powers which enable her to sculpt, especially the effigies of past chiefs because it is believed that these chiefs enter into blood covenants and indulge in idol worship, some people ask her; *don't their spirits visit you?*, some religious extremists also advise her to be very careful because if she does not take care their spirits will attack her; they warn that: *these people you sculpting are dead and gone and you are sculpting them.*

Asabea also stated that the patronage of artworks by Ghanaians is not encouraging at all because our economy is such that for most people even been able to afford the basic necessities of life is a problem and so people rarely think of patronizing works of art, some hotels across the country buy framed printed pictures instead of buying original works of art by Ghanaian artists because they are less expensive; she noted that these are some of the socio cultural challenges that can easily discourage you from practising as an artist. More art galleries have now emerged across the country but in the initial stages of her career as an artist there were not much galleries. She

mentioned that if you are not able to make a name for yourself so that foreigners gain interest in your works and patronize it, your works can be in an art gallery for years. Asabea recalled that with her first painting exhibition she spent a lot of money in producing the works she displayed and organizing the exhibition but was not able to make enough money from the exhibition to cover the expenses; in fact she expressed that there was a vast difference between the money she put into it and the money she was able to make. She stated that it is discouraging when for instance people buy six works out of the twenty works you exhibited. However, because she teaches in addition to practising as an artist she is able to make ends meet, had she been only depending on her works of art as her source of income it would have been very difficult. She noted that though she is faced with some of these challenges as an artist she finds joy in using the gift that God has given her to educate, project ideas, promote the gospel and even tell her life story, using her gift to make a positive impact in the lives of people in her community makes her happy and satisfied, now there are some of her works she chooses not to sell because of the concept behind the work and what the work means to her even though people want to patronize it.

Asabea stated that being in the teaching field she has observed that because some people perceive visual art students as less intelligent, some people have the gift of sculpting and painting but will opt for another course because of what their friends will say. Also some parents when their children are not able to meet the requirement needed to study science, general arts and business; come to the art department and say; *if my child cannot do anything as for where they draw please take her, at least she can draw something small*. She expressed that if a child should even hear things like that he or she will think is not the best area but because she does not meet the standard required to study science, business or general arts that why their parents brought

them to do visual art, so the child then looks down on the course. People generally value other courses than visual arts, they think art is a subject that should not be studied in school, some parents will not even allow or encourage their wards who naturally have the gift of painting and sculpting to opt for visual art because they want them to get white colour jobs after school and it is because of our upbringing and what the nation values; you don't see programs on television that educate people about art. She noted that we all have a role to play in promoting visual art education.

Being a female artist, Asabea shared that most people are of the misconception that sculpture is a profession for men not women; she rightly notes that a woman can sculpt as long as that is what she wants to do and is passionate about it. She mentioned that as an art teacher anytime she handles a new class; she addresses issues about such misconceptions before teaching. While studying sculpture at the university, Asabea stated that she was given names; people referred to her as '*obaa dendan*' (hard woman), Yaa Asantewaa (a past Ghanaian heroine who was a female warrior) and '*mari gyata*' (lioness). She explained that some people think if you are woman and you sculpt; you will grow muscles because you find yourself doing things like pounding clay, so they wonder whether you will be flexible and romantic sometime to come. She shared that because she was offering sculpture it turned off some men, others too admired her and believed she was doing what is on her heart. However, no matter the negative reactions she got from people it did not discourage her from pursuing a career in sculpture; she rightly notes that; her hands were most at times dirty with clay and she was proud of it. She expressed that practising sculpture has helped her to be up and doing. Also because she is very intelligent some people felt that she should rather pursue other professions like medicine, engineering or other art courses like graphic design and textiles because there is a ready market for such professions. She

mentioned that while studying sculpture at University of Education, Winneba; they were only two sculpture students, she and one male.

Furthermore, Asabea stated that people normally doubt that she is the one who created a work; especially when it's a sculptural piece depicting the exact replica of someone's self-portrait. They wonder how she is able to get it; so some will even like that they come to her studio while she is working. At some of her exhibitions where she displays sculptures of that sort; she therefore selects one person from her guests and sculpts the person's self-portrait in front of everyone. She rightly notes that being able to sculpt the exact replica of a human being is a gift from God which she has polished through constant practise. Asabea mentioned that some people doubting maybe due to technological advancements where we now have computers that can easily create sculptural figures.

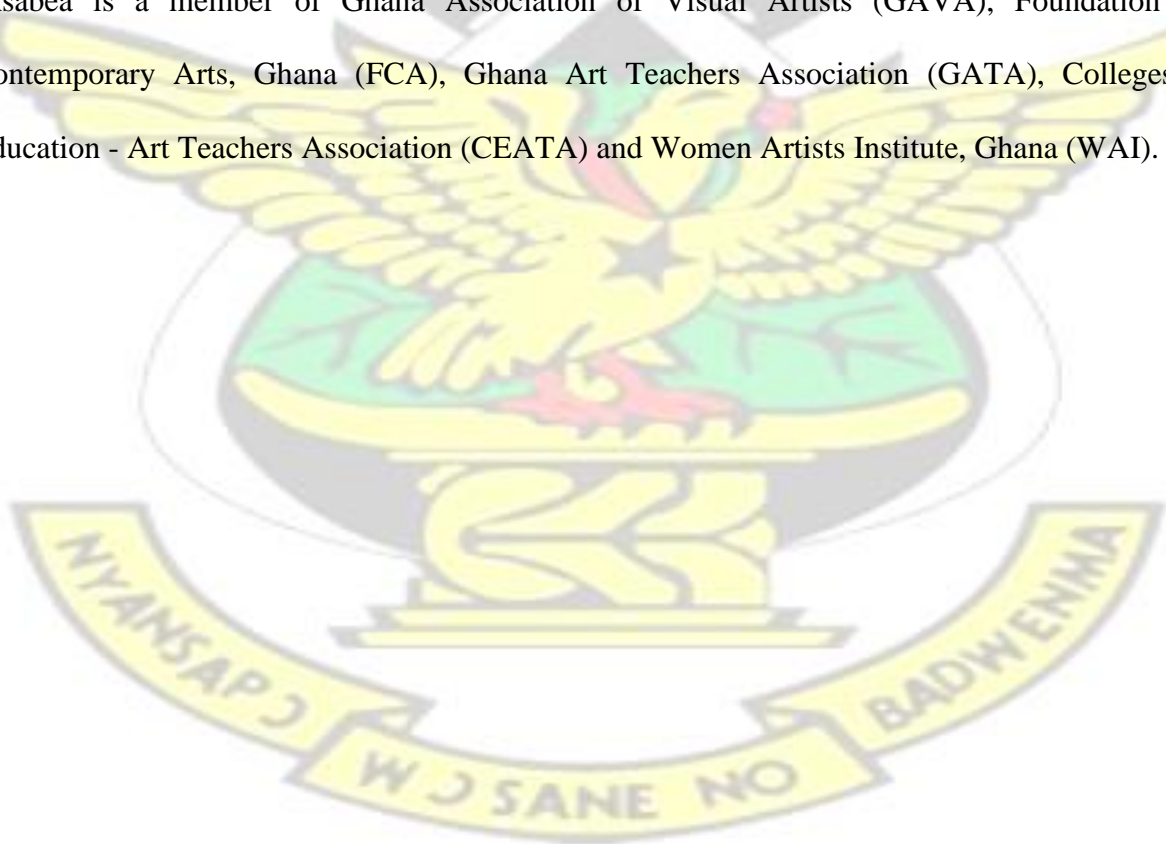
Regarding the poor visibility of female artists, Asabea stated that she has come to realize that female artists need to come together and collaborate. Apart from holding solo exhibitions, the few female artists that are practising must come together and move from one region to another region organizing quarterly exhibitions where they talk about themselves and their works. She noted that the community will dictate for them and push them aside if they themselves do not talk about what they do as artists. She further noted that there has been a lot of talks about women empowerment, now the platform is there, so it is left for us to stop competing among ourselves and come together; most at times people say we are our own enemies. She expressed that collaboration is what is lacking. If women artists, not only in Ghana but other African countries come together and collaborate it will help create more awareness about our works; than an individual artist promoting herself.

Asabea further stated that the many responsibilities of especially married women is also a contributing factor of poor visibility of female artists. Had it not been her philosophy – ‘occupy till I come’ which pushes her to always work and fight her way through, not waiting for anybody; she wouldn’t have been able to make it this far in her career as an artist. She noted that even in the bible it is written in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that; *every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head – it is just as though her head were shaved (NKJV)*; meaning every woman who does not perform her duties as a wife; dishonours her husband and must therefore keep mute. She explained that this can be traced as far back to the Jewish cultural ascendancy when the bible was written; the many cultural expectations of women have therefore been in existence from time immemorial, so in fact women artists who are married have to go an extra mile and it’s not easy because they are already tired from fulfilling their duties. And even the fact that before they completed University of Education, Winneba, some of the male lecturers in her department advised their female students to make a conscious effort to continue practising because most women artists after they marry and start giving birth stop practising as artists; makes this statement very true. She noted that it is one the causes of poor visibility of female artists that cannot be ruled out. In buttressing this fact Ramaite, 2010 as cited in Thobejane & Khoza, (2014) wrote that; researchers suggest that women are mainly or solely responsible for three quarters of all housework. For women, this is one of the many ways in which they and their contributions remain undervalued. However, Asabea encourages women artists to be determined, plan and create time besides all their duties to practise, and hold exhibitions because that is what will put their names out there.

Additionally, Asabea shared that she knows some women artists who are struggling because their family is not supportive. As an artist, a preacher, educator, and counsellor, she therefore believes

that both men and women need to be well educated about art so as to appreciate it; because if you have a husband who does not appreciate art and support you it becomes very difficult to practise as a woman artist; you need the man's support. Asabea therefore organizes exhibitions that bring both men and women together to appreciate art. She rightly notes that people must be allowed to polish their gifts and pursue what they are passionate about. Asabea also shared that some institutions like Ghana National Museum and Accra City Hotel; formerly known as Novotel in Accra, Ghana; where artists usually hold exhibitions; now give priority to women artists, because they realized that more men artists applied for exhibitions than women artists. Also in her school female visual art students are encouraged to produce works of art, after which exhibitions are held where they display their works.

Asabea is a member of Ghana Association of Visual Artists (GAVA), Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Ghana (FCA), Ghana Art Teachers Association (GATA), Colleges of Education - Art Teachers Association (CEATA) and Women Artists Institute, Ghana (WAI).



**Plate 41: Dorothy Akpene Amenuke**  
A Sculptor



**Source:** Dorothy Amenuke

**4.20. Profile**

Dorothy was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 1968 in Adzokoe-Peki in the Volta Region of Ghana where she hails from. Part of Dorothy's life growing up was both in the Eastern and Volta Region of Ghana. Her father worked at the diamond mines in Akwatia in the Eastern Region of Ghana so she had her basic education in Akwatia. She then proceeded to St. Roses Girls' Secondary School also in Akwatia where she studied science, math and arts from 1980 to 1985, and then went to Mawuli Secondary School in Ho in the Volta Region for her sixth form; over there Dorothy dropped science and studied economics, French and arts from 1985 to 1987. Dorothy studied art and majored in sculpture as an undergraduate programme at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana from 1989 to 1993, after which she undertook a postgraduate diploma and master of art degree in art education at KNUST from 1993 to 1994 and 1994 to 1996 respectively. Dorothy also has a masters degree (2004 to 2006) and a doctorate degree (2007 to 2012) in sculpture from KNUST. She worked professionally as an art teacher at the basic and secondary levels in Kumasi from 1987 to 2004.

Dorothy currently lives and works in Kumasi as an artist and a lecturer at the Department of Painting and Sculpture - KNUST. Dorothy mentioned that she is not so much into categorization and prefers to be called just an artist.

Growing up Dorothy stated that she was more interested in the sciences, but along the line she realized she had a flair for art. Students in secondary school at that time were given the opportunity to study other courses in addition to their area of interest; so though she was a science student she also studied visual art. It was during that period that Dorothy realized she was good with the arts, and so moving on with her education she pursued art courses in order to polish her skills. Dorothy noted that most of her uncles and aunties are into art related professions; she was also told that her grandfather was a carpenter. Dorothy indicated that her parents were supportive and allowed her to pursue her area of interest; she noted that it was about what you were good at and felt you were capable of doing.

#### **4.21. Techniques, Philosophies, Inspirations and Materials**

Since Dorothy started practicing as an artist in the year 2006 she has been known for producing sculptural pieces with fibers. Dorothy explained that intimacy has to do with closeness and privacy, and that is what naturally fibers do. Fibers are woven into cloths and brought together in varied ways to get different kinds of things. People hang curtains in their room so that nobody sees what is happening inside; so intimacy here does not necessarily mean cloths that are worn but how you keep your privacy.

In the initial stages of her career as an artist she employed the conventional sculpting techniques (modelling, casting, carving, assemblage) and used the conventional sculpting materials including; clay, wood and plaster of paris in producing her works because of the kind of training

she had. Along the line she began incorporating and using natural fibers such as coconut plant and jute to model and cast three-dimensional works of art. Dorothy's interest in using fibers to create sculptural pieces therefore began with hard sculptures. For most of her recent works she uses different kinds of natural fibers including straw, straw mat, hide, tree barks and synthetic fibers in producing soft sculptures. However, she mentioned that her future exhibitions may include carvings in addition to soft sculptures because she has gathered a lot of materials she plans to carve.

Dorothy took interest in the works of Claes Oldenburg and Faith Ringgold when she first began producing soft sculptures; thus mainly using fabrics in producing her works. She later started following the works of Ernesto Neto; an artist whose works involve creating spaces and moving within those spaces using different kinds of materials including fabric and foam. Ernesto Neto's works had a great influence on Dorothy's soft sculptural piece 'Habitation-Inhabitation'. Dorothy is also inspired by the works of Oliver Herring, Kiki Smith and some feminist artists; including Judy Chicago, she noted that she is inspired by their works not because she is a feminist but because she admires their courage and the kind of works they produce.

Dorothy mentioned that her colleagues; kari'kacha sied'ou and Bernard Akoi-Jackson are two people who are always interested in her works; thus what she is producing and how she goes about producing it; she usually discusses her ideas with them. They encourage her and sometimes give her ideas. Dorothy usually produces large scale works which require the assistance of others. Her family, students and friends are therefore very much involved in producing her works and helping her mount her works whenever she is going to have an exhibition, they do not necessarily inspire ideas on the works but help in executing it. Dorothy also has two studio assistants who are almost every day helping her.

Dorothy tackles different themes. She gets ideas for her works from everyday encounters; she usually thinks deeply about some of the things she encounters and then produces a work. Her works are mostly about her questioning something, which includes; an idea, philosophy or an issue. She stated that as an artist and intellectual you are always reading and thinking about things so ideas come to you. She sometimes gets ideas from intuitions, her life experiences and that of others. She likes to share her experiences with people and so does that through her art; she shared that for instance she has been working on the theme 'responsibilities' for a long time now, an idea that came to mind at a time in her life when she was a student and at the same time a mother, a wife, a lecturer and a leader; so then in situations like this she begins to ask herself a lot of questions and then she comes up with a piece of work. For one of the works she produced under the theme responsibilities; she used jute to create '*Batakari Kesse*', a traditional war armour worn by the Asantehene. The '*Batakari Kesse*' was given to the late Asantehene Osei Tutu by his friend and a fetish priest; Okomfo Anokye, as traditional armour during wars. It is believed to contain magical powers that protect the Kings and ward off all evil powers that come their way (otecfmghana.com, 2017). She then used the art piece to question the roles and expectations of not only kings but leaders in general, including; mothers, wives, teachers, class prefects, chiefs etc.. Most of Dorothy's works are not representational. She expressed that she likes for people to draw near her work, observe it and then ask questions so that there is a discussion about the work.

Apart from using fibers Dorothy sometimes utilizes other materials including; wire, iron rods, paper, wood, coloured fabrics, and pigments, and employs artistic techniques such as; hand stitching, cutting, pasting, painting, tying and scorching. Depending on the topic she wants to

address she uses materials and techniques that best communicate the idea. The processes involved in producing her works are labour intensive and time consuming.

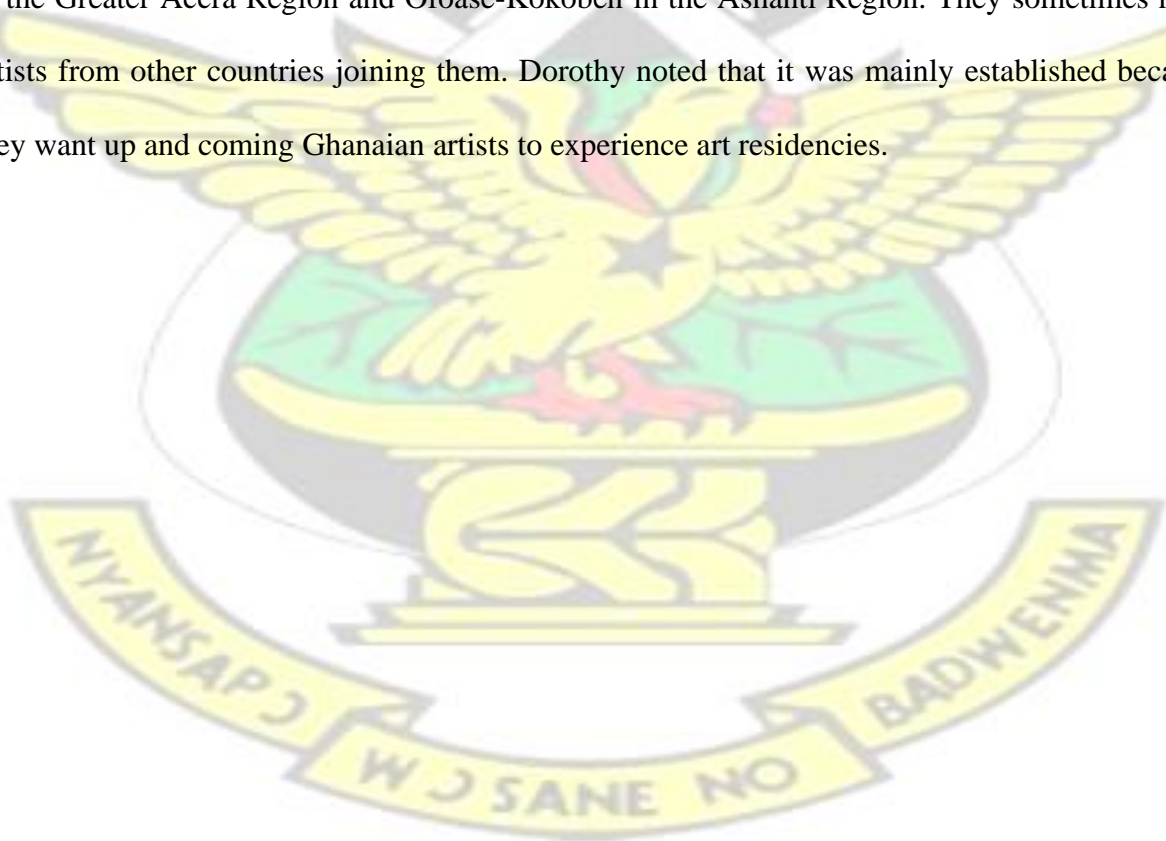
Dorothy believes that everything you put your hand to must be done well. She believes that being a woman does not mean she is vulnerable but rather very powerful; just as a man is capable; she being a woman is also very capable. She noted that she hates to be at the mercy of people, and maybe that is what pushes her to work hard. She learns from every situation and that is why her works mostly question the existence of things because she believes things are not just there.

#### **4.21.1. Exhibitions**

Dorothy has had and participated in several solo and group exhibitions in her home country and abroad. Some few include; 2006 “Tale of two cities”, organized by Foundation for Contemporary Art, Ghana, 2009 “Still 2 troubles one God”: Some Contemporary Ghanaian Artists Comment on Modernization at the University of Ghana, Legon, 2014-2015 “How far how near – The world in the Stedelijk”, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2015 “the Gown must go to Town...of art and philosophical consciencism” at the Museum of Science and Technology, Accra, Ghana, 2016 “If you love me” at the Lomotive Shed, Kumasi, Ghana and 2009 “Fluid flow through woven screens” at Alliance Française, Kumasi, Ghana. She has also participated in several International art workshops and residences. Her work, “How Far How Near”, is in the collections of Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA), Netherlands.

Dorothy together with G. Berquin and M. A. Martey sculpted the stool at the center of Kumasi City Mall in Kumasi, Ghana.

Since 2013 Dorothy has been directing “OFFKOB”, an art residency based in Ghana. Having participated in several art residencies abroad, she shared that she and a friend realized that art residencies are good because you get to meet other artists, share ideas, discuss your work and then people feed into your work. However, while some Ghanaian artists are able to afford traveling to other countries to take part in art residencies, some are not able to; that is what led Dorothy and her colleague to organize an art residency based in Ghana, so Ghanaian artists who are interested would have to pay for their food, accommodation and transportation which is less expensive compared to the cost involved in traveling abroad to take part in art residencies. The OFFKOB art residencies are organized once a year at different locations across the country; some of the places it has been held so far include Akuse and Aburi in the Eastern Region, Accra in the Greater Accra Region and Ofoase-Kokoben in the Ashanti Region. They sometimes have artists from other countries joining them. Dorothy noted that it was mainly established because they want up and coming Ghanaian artists to experience art residencies.



#### 4.21.2. Some Works of Dorothy Amenuke

The narrative of Dorothy's works is based on the works she displayed at her solo exhibition titled; 'Twists, Turns and Broken Doors' at the Nubuke Foundation in Accra, Ghana in 2017.



**Plate 42:** Scroll II, 2017

Materials: Opened jute sacks, jute cords, pandanus, reed mat, plantain barks, parchment and pieces of hand-made papers

2730cm x 91cm

**Source:** Photographed by Dorothy Amenuke

Created entirely from natural fibers, the 'Scroll II' (Plate 42) forms part of 'the scroll series' which is made up of seven different kinds of scroll work. The scroll series has to do with revelation and how different ideas are used to express the future; a revelatory idea that has to do with openings and closures, that is what is revealed and what is concealed. The work recalls the former days when there were no books; information was documented on scrolls. As a scroll is

being unfolded it reveals information, as its being folded it conceals the information; and that is how revelatory the idea of scroll is in the work. It has to do with the known and the unknown and how things are revealed to us. The scroll therefore reflects revelations, and drapes into the ground revealing and concealing its hieroglyphic-like codes.



**Plate 43a:** An installation titled; 'Habitation-Inhabitation' 2017 (Outer view)

**Plate 43b:** 'Habitation-Inhabitation', 2017 (Inner view)

Materials: Red and orange polyester cotton fabrics, kapok and jute sacks

**Source:** Photographed by Dorothy Amenuke

'Habitation-Inhabitation' (Plate 43a & 43b) is inspired by the entanglement and the way parasites work, thus the way things (plants, animals, ideas or machines) take over spaces, and how people allow things to take over spaces. Habitation-Inhabitation talks about how spaces are infiltrated, where other things that do not belong to a certain space all of a sudden grow there or happen there because we allow it to, like hard concrete and then all these things are growing inside the concrete; Dorothy reflects and questions the existence of such things, and relates it to other aspects of life.



**Plate 44:** A conceptual artwork titled; Coded, 2017

Materials: Jute sack, wool, silk screen printing on the jute sack, stitching with pieces of polyester cotton fabric.

**Source:** Photographed by Dorothy Amenuke

‘Coded’ (Plate 44) connotes geographical accentuations and psychically internal concept of boundaries and repressions which are as a result of the re-territorialized cultural constructions which may be crossed or breached from time to time. The work poses the question: What type of societal progression, retrogression or stagnation is experienced “within” and “without” the bounded space?, and What forms of intervention are used to counteract these?

Within a given space, bounds, ends and limits, associates of boundaries and borders, prevent or hinder one from what would otherwise be transgressed. In their own ways, they impose some form of restriction on freedom. This may not only be geographical boundaries but also found in other spheres of life; the divides of ethnicities, religions, sexes and cultures (Artist’s Statement – Dorothy Amenuke, 2017).

#### 4.22. Experiences and Challenges

Dorothy shared that as a female artist you have to be determined and put yourself out there; you need an extra effort as a woman artist, working in your corner will not help; you have to get out there and meet people, and hold exhibitions in order to be visible and make a name for yourself. She stated that the industry is male dominated and somehow the male artists are able to forge ahead more so than female artists. She expressed that in Ghana there are very few organizations that look out for artists; you have to fund yourself, so in that sense you find yourself alone and that has been the situation so you have to deal with it and forge on. She noted that it is recently that you can make mention of Kuenyehia Prize for Contemporary Ghanaian Art; an art organization that identifies, rewards and help develop outstanding Ghanaian artists between the ages of 25 and 40. Also, Nubuke Foundation and Goethe Institute in Accra; if you apply may give you space to exhibit your work. She expressed that if you are in a community that supports and organizes art programmes that encourage people to display their creative potentials it becomes easier. However even though these are some of the challenges, Dorothy rightly notes that it does not deter her from doing what she loves to do and would usually not complain about it, so although that is the situation she does not see it as a challenge.

Concerning people's reactions about her works Dorothy shared that most people get amazed at the scale of her works. Looking at the space it occupies and how intricate the work is; they realize that so much work has gone into it, some ask; *how long did it take you to produce this?*. Most people are fascinated about the nature of her work and some think that once you do an art work it should be such that it can be bought by an individual and displayed in a room, one person for instance told her; *these things that you are doing aren't they expensive?; no one will buy this.* Also, when some people get to know the concept behind the work; they become interested and

want to learn more, they say things like; *wow, it's interesting, you've done well; I mean you don't see artists delving into this area of art*, but some others are so indifferent. She mentioned that some even think she is a hard woman; going through all this and coming out with such a large scale work then she must be hard. She explained that she does not work towards selling but if along the line a museum expresses interest in buying her work so that they can have it as part of their collections then she may consider selling it. The few people that have expressed interest in buying her works are foreigners from countries like Israel. However, she expressed that she would like a museum to own her work rather than an individual because once a museum owns it, it will be available to a wider audience and also the price they will pay for the work may be better.

Dorothy stated that Ghanaians do not buy works of art because of our economic situation; people cannot even afford the basic necessities of life, let alone think of buying works of art. Also, people have not really respected art to that level, we do not value it, most people think art is only for decoration or something that you can buy as a gift for someone. Additionally, she stated that some people think art is for the weak minded; some people perceive visual art students as dumb so right from secondary school some courses are perceived to be better than others; we have not created that importance for art. Some parents will not even encourage their wards to study visual arts, except those who are themselves artists or know people who are artists and have being travelling abroad so appreciate art; because in some other countries art is held in esteem so when you travel to such countries you learn to appreciate art. She expressed that our understanding of the field is limited; people think being an artist is all about drawing; especially people's self-portrait, people do not think critically about art.

Dorothy mentioned that there are few practising female artists and that is why they are not visible, the painting and sculpture industry especially is male dominated and our culture is such that when males do things is more visible than females. Asante (2009) in attesting to this fact wrote that within Africa and around the world, men get almost all the attention for their creative accomplishments. Dorothy further stated that married women generally have a lot of responsibilities so if you are a female artist and married the time to practise becomes a challenge. Dorothy is a member of Ghana Art Teachers Association (GATA), International Sculpture Center and the director and organizer of OFFKOB.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. Overview

This concluding chapter reports on the summary of the findings on practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, and further looks at the conclusions drawn from the findings, and makes recommendations based of the findings.

#### 5.2. Summary of findings

##### 5.2.1. Objective 1 - Identify and document the profiles of selected practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.

- a. The researcher found that some of the artists' childhood memories and educational experiences inspire their practise as artists. For instance, this is evident in Fatric's series of paintings inspired by her childhood memories; precisely environmental sounds she heard in her locality while growing up in Tarkwa-Nsuta and most of her other works which address issues concerned with the environment. Growing up in Tarkwa-Nsuta, Fatric learnt to appreciate and love nature more because of the environment where she grew up and how she was brought up; she usually liked spending time in a forest near her house observing different kinds of living creatures, and was also assigned the task of rearing some of the animals and birds in her mother's backyard farm; all of which contributed to her developing a deep affection for all the different kinds of living beings in the world. Also Betty Acquah, growing up in Cape Coast; a place characterized by seascapes, influenced her to painting seascapes and landscapes that feature waterbodies. Additionally, Asabea Anakwa remarked that her training at K.N.U.S.T. greatly influenced her to start producing conceptual works of art. Gladys Adinyira also

mentioned that the Ghanaian female sculptor Charlotte Hagan; had an art gallery in the neighbourhood where she grew up which exposed her to seeing paintings and sculptures, and how they were produced.

**5.2.2. Objective 2 - Document their working techniques, philosophies, inspirations and materials used in producing the works of the selected female painters and sculptors.**

- a. The concepts that inform their works are mostly derived from life experiences, everyday observations, their religious beliefs, African arts and culture; and the history of Africa. Some of Afia Prempeh's paintings for instance do well in talking about the history of Africa and portraying her religious beliefs. Also, Vicki Adoe when she traveled to South Africa got inspired by the traditional attire of South African women; and that of Botswanan women whom she also saw in South Africa which greatly influenced her practise as an artist. Vicki who sometimes paints landscapes stated that she finds ideas for her landscape paintings from nature (trees, colours of flowers etc.). She remarked that she observes the colours of these and admires it and is therefore certain that if she paints it on canvas; it would also be admired by somebody. Additionally, Gladys Adinyira mentioned that at the initial stages of her career as an artist, one factor that propelled her to create works that made reference to women is that she observed; there are not many works of art that honour women.
- b. Most of the media including oil paints, linseed oil, acrylic paints, brushes and palette knives used by Ghanaian painters are imported products.

### **5.2.3. Objective 3 - Investigate the experiences and challenges of the selected female painters and sculptors.**

- a. People usually question whether female artists are the ones who created their artworks because generally females are perceived to be incapable of producing good paintings and sculptural pieces. Thus, painting and sculpture are regarded as a profession solely for men, because they are perceived as the ones who are capable of painting and sculpting. In view of this, when an author or researcher sets out to look for artists the first group of people that comes to mind are men artists, except the author or researcher consciously decides to research on women artists. As a matter of fact this misconception about females is one of the reasons why throughout history the works of women artists remained unrecognized.
- b. In a family setting a lot of responsibilities lies on the married women, so for a married woman painter or sculptor to forge ahead in the fine art industry requires a lot of hard work, passion, and the help and support of her family.
- c. People who usually patronize works of art buy the works of renowned artists, so an upcoming artist will have to work hard to make a name in the industry in order for his or her works to sell. However, in the initial stages of your career as an artist; if you do not have your family supporting you it becomes difficult to break through or forge ahead especially if you want to practise as a full-time artist, and so most professional artists are forced to abandon their gifts and venture into other professions. For those who do other jobs apart from practising as painters and sculptors; the time to practise as an artist is a

challenge even more so for married women artists. Upcoming artists need the support of their family because there are very few organizations in the country that sponsor artists. The researcher found that the female artists who have had their family supporting them since they started practising after completing a professional art school, have been able to make a name in the industry and so are even able to solely depend on their works of art because they have people patronizing their works frequently whereas those who have not had that family support are still thriving to make name in the industry.

- d. Ghanaians hardly patronize works of arts due to lack of education and appreciation for the works of artists, and also due to our economic situation; however even if one has enough money where he or she can afford to buy a work of art but does not appreciate it, they will not patronize it because they do not see the use of it at the first place. Also, because of our religious background where most sculptural pieces were created and used to represent, connect to, or communicate with spiritual forces some people fear especially figurative sculptural pieces, and so will not patronize them. The target groups for most of the works produced by Ghanaian artists are therefore expatriates and foreigners.
- e. Female painters and sculptors are not properly utilized in regards to developmental projects such as the beautification of the environment. Additionally they are not utilized in regards to building more art galleries and museums that display the works of artists in order to acquire foreign exchange which can be used for the development of the nation and at the same time enable the artists make some ends meet.

### 5.3. Conclusions

- a. The study concludes that some of their childhood and educational experiences inspire their practise as artists.
- b. Also the concepts that inform their works are mostly derived from life experiences, everyday observations, their religious beliefs, African arts and culture; and the history of Africa. Most of the media; including oil paints, linseed oil, acrylic paints, brushes and palette knives used by Ghanaian painters are imported products.
- c. Furthermore, the study concludes that people attribute works of art done by female artists to male artists because there is a general misconception that female artists are incapable of producing good works of art (paintings, sculptural pieces, ceramic and metal works etc.)
- d. Also, lack of patronage of the works of up and coming artists on the part of society, family responsibilities, lack of support from family and the society in general are the major contributing factors to the unpopularity of practising female artists.
- e. Another major factor that has contributed to the female artist being unpopular is the fact that they are not properly utilized in regards to developmental projects.

#### 5.4. Recommendations

- a. The works of female artists, like male artists are rich in skill and content; and therefore need to be given attention. Their works embody the history, philosophies, religious beliefs, and the art and culture of Ghanaians and Africans as a whole; these they portray in very profound and creative ways. Future researchers should therefore endeavor to take interest in the life and works of Ghanaian female artists as their works also tell a lot about how the painting and sculpture industry in Ghana has progressed over time. Also, Ghanaian paint manufacturers should consider producing creative art media like oil paint, linseed oil, acrylic paint, poster colours, water colours, oil pastel, chalk pastel, palette knives and brushes. This will help improve our national economy.
- b. Visual arts text books used in public secondary schools must be improved and feature an equal number of men and women painters and sculptors; this will help deal with the misconception that females are not capable of painting and sculpting. It will also encourage females who have the talent of painting and sculpting to polish their talents and pursue careers in that direction. The authors of the text books should do well to include photos of the works of the artists.
- c. To get Ghanaians to appreciate and patronise works of art we must start at the basic school levels. Professional visual art teachers should be employed to teach an intensive arts and crafts course in the basic schools so that by the time a child grows up he or she is already appreciative of artists and their works. This will also go a long way to enhance their education and total development. Additionally, there should be television programs

that talk about the life and works of not only renowned but upcoming Ghanaian female painters and sculptors, and the art world in general so as to raise awareness about how the art world works, and the importance and benefits of arts to an individual and the society.

- d. Your training as an artist makes you solution oriented; and so artists should be properly utilized in respect to developmental projects so their gifts do not go waste. The government of Ghana should for instance make a conscious effort to commission Ghanaian female painters and sculptors to create significant works of art to beautify the environment which could also serve as tourist attractions. This will help make them known in the society and also help deal with the misconception that female artists cannot produce good works of art.
- e. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs together with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts should help promote works done by practising Ghanaian female painters and sculptors.
- f. More art galleries and museums need to be built across all the ten regions of Ghana, and in the process of building these art spaces we must not only consider traditional painting and sculpture works, but also conceptual works of art which some Ghanaian contemporary artists are now embracing. This will help raise public awareness about the works of Ghanaian female artists and Ghanaian artists in general and also help in acquiring foreign exchange which can be used for the development of the nation.

g. Apart from holding solo exhibitions, female artists need to come together and organize more group exhibitions across the country where they display and talk about their works, and also invite media houses to feature them on their radio and television programs. Additionally visual art students in high schools should be invited for such exhibitions so that visual arts female students especially who have the gift of painting and sculpting will be inspired and know that painting and sculpture is a profession that females can also venture into.

#### **5.4.1. Agenda for further studies**

- a. Future research studies about the life and works of African female painters and sculptors should consider inquiring into their childhood and educational experiences because it will help in acquiring an in depth knowledge about their works of art. This will also help in acquiring knowledge about some of the experiences they had which contributed to them becoming artists; Gladys Adinyira for instance mentioned that the Ghanaian female sculptor Charlotte Hagan, had an art gallery in the neighbourhood where she grew up which exposed her to seeing paintings and sculptures, and how they were produced.

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## APPENDIX A

### Excerpts from interviews

- **Fatric Bewong**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?**

Documenting my work; documentation I will say is very important and it has really helped me. Also, being clear with the themes and concepts that I want to work with; when I narrow my ideas I go out and am clear with what am looking for so I don't have to beat around the bush. That has also been very helpful.

**Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** When I get an idea it makes me

happy, that is the most exciting part. The process of creating the work is exciting but tedious. While executing my works I reflect on the environmental issues and it's painful, I feel the pain. Creating the work and reflecting on the issues that my work addresses take a lot of energy. I do not enjoy doing that but I have to do it and then when I finally see the work in completion I get happy.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** 'Cock Fight', that is the first piece I sold. I regret selling that work because I have a picture of it and it is so beautiful. I really love it. It was one of my experimental works at K.N.U.S.T with Ato Delaqui (a lecturer and renowned Ghanaian artist), and it came out so well. I used the pouring and splashing technique and then you bring out the images with a brush. That is the technique I normally use when painting on canvas and wax print. I love that process because it is like a performance, you move around while working, lift the canvas, tilt it, pour paint and splash paint on the canvas; that kind of thing. I just love that painting technique, I like the rawness of effect that it gives. I liked that piece, the 'cock fight'.

Every artist has their own conditions of production that guides their practise. It is really difficult for me to produce the same piece of work. I tired that once and trust me it is like a punishment. I can do something similar but not the same thing. People sometimes see my work somewhere and ask me to reproduce the same thing for them and I tell them it is really difficult to do the same thing but I can do something similar. Some artists can reproduce a particular work of theirs a thousand times and not get bored, they rather enjoy doing that. Ablade Glover for example can

reproduce a copy of his paintings over and over again and that is his style of practise. He can reproduce his works a thousand times and he is fine so it depends on the individual artist. I easily get bored with doing the same thing over and over again, that is me. I don't know whether it is a weakness. That is how its always being. Even when it comes to cooking I always change the ingredients I use, I always take away something and add something. I don't know whether its a weakness or an advantage. I struggle with that.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** I recently exhibited the project that am working on right now in Minneapolis and the first expression was *'wow, to think of that and use this to reference it'*. The work made reference to how our human actions have changed the landscape that we are living in now. It was an installation that took the form of a mangrove. That response made me think of reproducing that work in larger scales and as at now that is what I am working on as part of my thesis project.

Another memorable one was at the exhibition I had at Dei Centre, Accra, Ghana, featuring my works and that of Marigold Akufo-Addo and Adwoa Amoah. I got the response from now Dei's ex-wife, she stood in front of my painting for minutes. I have never seen someone stand in front of my work for so long. It was a monochrome painting which also made reference to the environment. I used that style of painting to portray what is gradually disappearing from the environment. I played with the theme for the exhibition which was; *'Absence in presence'*. So she stood there for a while and said; *this is amazing, am still trying to figure out what the work is about*. Even though I give the direction, I always leave room for the viewer to fit in his or her own narrative or understanding. For me to have had that response meant that I achieved what I set out to achieve so that was inspiring. And that is what comes to mind. That night was exciting, I got three works sold so I was happy, at that time I was more interested in selling my works.

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** Going to the forest every afternoon after school. I really enjoyed it. There is nothing like going to the forest and just sitting there and looking at the birds, and then also picking guavas and mangoes. Where we lived was really nice, I really loved it. Its always been my dream space, if I should build a house, I will like to maintain something like that. That was in Tarkwa-Nsuta in the Western Region of Ghana. My dad was a manager at Ghana Manganese Cooperation now Ghana Manganese Company Limited in

Tarkwa-Nsuta. I always think of my childhood, the house was big and so my mum divided it so that each child was responsible for a portion of the house. My mum also had a farm, she reared goats, sheep and chicken. In those days they promoted backyard farming, grow what you eat. Each child had a number to take care of and I enjoyed doing that. It taught us to be responsible and it also gave me the opportunity to get close to nature, that kind of thing. Anytime it was time for me to take care of the animals and birds I got so happy, I do not know why I did not end up becoming a farmer. In fact I see myself retire to become an artist and a farmer. I will like to go into farming.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** When I cannot go further with it again, then I know that I am done with it. Yeah, that is how I always determine. I have a very personal relationship with my work, I do not really force myself to conclude it because I believe that the work has its own life, is not the way we think about life that when something is done, we know it is done.

**What does your art work mean to you?** My artwork is part of me; it is an expression of me. Every day I have to think about my artwork, even when am not in the studio am thinking and writing about it. It has always been part of me.

- **Betty Acquah**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?** While working at the art gallery of the Centre for National Culture, Ghana I noticed that some of the artists who had their works on display at the art gallery will come, sit there and when customers came around they will go and pull them to come and see their works. Customers have their preferences so they may not be interested in your work but because you force them to be interested in your work they may try to please you. I found that awkward. I told myself that I will never pull a customer to come and see my work, I will just allow my work to be there, while viewing the works, if the person is interested in my work and asks who did this work then I will reveal my identity and talk more about my work to the person. I always say that I want my works to sell me and I think that is better because a lot of people have come to know me through my works. My experience at the Center for National Culture, Ghana taught me that people have different preferences because some people will come there, approach a work and say; *this work*

*is wonderful, this is gorgeous, its powerful;* then when they leave another customer comes, sees the same work and says; *why have you people put this in the gallery, this work is not fit to be in the gallery,* so I realised that people have different opinions. The fact that someone does not like a work does not mean that the work is bad at all, it just means that the person does not prefer that kind of style or theme. There is no bad artwork actually, is just what somebody likes and does not like, that is how it. There are even occasions when an artist displays his best works, a customer comes and is rather interested in the ones the artist has folded and hid somewhere thinking its not his or her best. I once did a painting but did not like the outcome so I painted over it and did a new painting on the canvas. However, before I painted over it I took a photograph of the painting. Someone came to my studio wanting to buy one of my paintings. After he looked at the works I had displayed he began looking through my album and saw the work that I had painted over and that is what he was interested in, so there is no bad art. Mine thing is that do not force people to love your work. People who like your work will walk toward it.

**.Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** The most frustrating part of my work is finding an idea to paint, sometimes I come and sit in my studio for long hours just thinking of what to paint. I look through magazines, photographs of my old works, go to my house and then come back to the studio just looking for an idea, but the moment an idea comes to mind and I see the picture in my mind's eye that is where I get happy. As soon as an idea comes to mind, I often make a sketch of it in my sketch book before painting it on a canvas. Also, when am about completing a painting; that also makes me happy. I normally finish with the highlights where I use very light colour shades. When am at that stage I know am almost done. I really like that part because it is like a burden has been lifted. The battle has ended, that kind of thing.

**What has been a seminal experience?** I will say when I acquired my painting technique (pointillism). Before then I was experimenting with different techniques but when I saw the works of the French Impressionists it helped me develop my painting technique. I must have gone to the College of Art Library - KNUST and I was looking through art books when I came across the works of the French Impressionists, there was something about their works that caught my attention. I enjoy looking at pictures whether magazines or books. Anyway I see pictures I

look at them. I even went to look for and bought some French Impressionists books. I still have them with me; it was a turning point in my practise as an artist.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** Amahemaa Gallery sold quite a number of my paintings during the exhibition they organized for me so am sure the first work I sold was one of the paintings I displayed during that exhibition. What the galleries do is that they keep the artists from knowing who bought their works because they do not want the customers to buy directly from the artist so that they can also make some money from the works of artists. So some galleries do not tell you who bought your work. Ideally you should know who bought which work. Honestly, I do not know where most of my works that I have sold are.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** At my first exhibition, that is Pan-African Festival of Arts and Music – ‘PAFAM 90’, my teacher from way back Cape Coast came there and when he saw my works he said; *wow, Betty you did all these works, you will go far.* To date that statement still rings in my mind, that was in way back 1990, 29 years ago. It inspired me a lot. Also when I meet people who like my work the way they express it, sometimes I even get surprised. I ask myself what is it at all, I don’t even know. Recently, someone called and said, he has been searching for my number for a long time, they checked online and have been to all the places were my works are but they still could not get my number. The man is from Pakistan, so he was aided by a Ghanaian guy who was working for him. Eventually they got a colleague of mine. I worked with copyright issues, so that guy apparently he had put something up with my name, my name appeared on his list and he had his number there. I do not have my number online so they called him and he gave my number to them and so I went to meet them and you should have seen how the man greeted me. He took my hand, kissed it, it was like he had met some god or something, so those things make me think then maybe there is something good about what am doing. He had even done shopping for me free of charge before ordering for some of my works. These are some of the things that encourage me.

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** I remember when I was in nursery school we had an end of year exhibition. Those times we use to draw with pencil on paper, I do not remember what I drew but I remember some of my mates and teachers asked; *how did she do it,* that kind of thing. Right from there, they referred to me as the best artist. Also, in primary and

secondary school where I studied art, I was always amongst the first three in class. I even won about ten art awards and prizes in secondary school.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** When I finish a painting I sit back and observe it to see whether I need to work on certain areas, if I feel there is the need to work on certain areas a little bit more, I do it and after that I know I should not add even one stroke to it. That is when I feel the painting is complete. Otherwise, sometimes I start a painting today, somebody will come and think it is a finished work meanwhile have not even than half of the first coat. I had a painting I had not finished at all, somebody came and wanted to buy it and I told him its unfinished then he said; *what do you mean by its unfinished, to me it's finished*. He bought it like that, so a customer may decide that the work is finished depending on how they feel about it but I will know.

**What does your art work mean to you?** My artwork is part of me, it's an extension of me, so if somebody expresses interest, says *I love your work*. I become very happy that at least I have found somebody who thinks like me. Not everybody will like your work; I mean there is no way. Some people just do not like this kind of painting so when I meet somebody who likes my work; that person and I can move together, I become happy, it like I have found a long-lost brother or sister.

- **Victoria Adoe**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?** I learnt that the old masters when they set out to do something, they do it with all their heart and do it well; so I realised I have to enrich my mastery. I am still striving on, working towards a day I would be satisfied with what I have produced. Though I am happy and people are also happy with my works, I believe I have not ranged the ultimate, am still striving to produce master pieces.

**Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** Whenever I am painting and when an idea comes to mind I get happy. Also, when I produce a work and am satisfied with what I have produced.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** I sold my first artwork in the university when we were having our final year exhibition. As we displayed our works there was this man from the U.S. who wanted a particular work. Even when I told him that it for my academic file he insisted, went and came back when the exhibition and marking was over and bought the work. It was a small chalk pastel work. I quite remember I sold it for \$200, that was over 20 years ago.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** Most of the time people find it difficult to believe that it is a woman who produced them, some people see my works and they ponder. They find out it is a woman who did it and then they put you in a certain class because now they know you are able to entertain or communicate to the soul. Have had people tell me that what I have done is so beautiful. There are times that works that I considered ordinary impact people so much that when they come to visit they refer to those works, they look for that work, they want to see it for the second or the third time but I was thinking they were ordinary works. Some wish they could have it in their homes, if they had enough money.

Now I display few of my paintings in my living room. At first I used to display them all over and when people come and visit I realized they feel comfortable, they don't leave early. Unconsciously, the paintings communicate to them. Some people come and visit me angry but when they come inside the house they calm down and I am sure is the paintings. They admire the paintings so much, I observed that while talking to them they're eyes are fixed on the paintings and they ask questions about them. People come and visit me stressed but leave relaxed. Art is good, art is beautiful, art is part of you, it communicates to your soul, there is a lot in art.

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** I remember when I was very young, I used my hands to sewn a dress and wore it, nobody noticed it. As I said earlier, I was painting and also doing fashion design. I hide myself under a table, cut a material, used my hand to sewn it and wore it, I still remember. I hid myself because at that young age if your parents should see you with a scissors or a needle they will be alarmed. They will think you want to harm yourself with it because they do not expect you to do that at that age. I was afraid to tell them what I had done but in me I knew I had achieved something. I wore the dress out but they thought it was one of my dresses. I also remember when I was going to secondary school most of my uniforms, I did not take to the seamstress to sewn it for me, I sewed it myself at home.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** I have realized that most of the time if am not careful I over work and spoil the painting, so after painting I display it at a place where I will see it whenever am passing and if I realize it time for me to stop I stop. Sometimes somebody comes and sees it and the comments he or she gives also help me to know whether I should work on the painting or its okay.

**What does your art work mean to you?** I call them my babies. Most of the time I display them and I admire them and if they need correction, I do them. What I would not want to see is somebody buying my work and not treating the work well. I would rather give my painting to a poor person who cannot afford it but admires it and will take good care of it than a rich man who can afford it but would not handle the work well. Most of the times I call the people that have purchased my works and ask them where the works are. I want to know if they are in good shape, if they are not and I can help to put them in good shape I would do that. Is part of the reason why I do not send my works to museums and art galleries because I want to know who buys my works. It is interesting to know that I know where most of my works are, that is why I say I call them my babies, I treat them as my children. My works are very special to me and I would not want them to be treated anyhow.

- **Afia Prempeh**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?** I would say patience. When you see my paintings you do not see a rushed work. Right from secondary school, been inspired by the works of the old masters, you can see the energy and time they invested in their works, it made me realize that if am not patient I will not be able to paint like them.

**Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** I would say when I start painting. The outcome of the painting depends a lot on the sketch you do on the canvas before you start painting. If your sketch does not come out well you are not going to get a good painting. So I am happy when I start painting because the difficult part is done, am done with all my measurement. If I want to get it accurate I have to print it and then scale it to get it accurate. Especially with the human figure the outcome of the painting is all in the sketch. Also when an idea comes to mind,

that too makes me happy. When the ideas are not coming you keep thinking, but when you get ideas it motivates you to keep working. Even thinking is part of the process. I do not like to repeat my paintings so if a client wants a painting I have done already, he or she will not get it, I can do something similar for you but it does not have to be the same thing. As an artist I find it boring to repeat the same thing.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** That would be in 2009, after I completed the university. When I was at home and did not know I was on the journey to become a full-time artist. It was a small, A3 size landscape, acrylic on canvas. I sold it to one of my friends from school. He saw some of my works when I was on campus so called me after school and told me that he had found a new apartment and he needed a painting and so if I was still painting he needs one.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** When people come to believe that I am actually the one behind my paintings sometimes they end up encouraging me; *I mean it's not common to see a female painter so you should keep on with the good work.* After their initial shock, they commend me for my works because of the messages they derive from my paintings. Someone sent me a message on social media saying; *Afia, you are rich, not in money but in your paintings, the way you portray your religious activities and the heavenly beings in your paintings, it makes you rich in the soul,* that one really touched me. Have had people sending me messages saying that; *I encourage them, I use to be an artist and I stopped but because I saw your works, I am going back to start painting,* people say; *my parents did not want me to do art but I really love art, am doing science now, can you help me.* Those are favourable responses and it motivates me to keep working because I feel even in my small corner am motivating somebody that I don't even know. Most of them are even males. I think sometimes you should also look at the good side and not just the negative aspect where people are in doubt.

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** I remember when I was four years old, there was this story book titled Andy Pandy. I remember Andy Pandy very well, it was about a boy who had a pet; a cartoon character with his pet, I remember that was the story book I started making drawings from when I was very little.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** When I am satisfied, I should be satisfied, sometimes though am done with a painting and there are no white spaces left I still feel there is something missing, I know I have to add something more. So a work can be finished and it will still be in my working space for maybe two weeks or a month. After I have fixed the missing piece, then I know that the work is done.

**What does your art work mean to you?** It means a lot to me, I see it as my child, for me it like carrying a baby for nine months and taking care of it. Then after nine months you have to go and push the baby out, considering the pain and all that you have been through to bring forth your child, when the child comes out, for me that is the finished work. Sometimes it is even difficult to part ways with it because of the amount of time and energy you have invested in the work.

- **Gladys Adinyira**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?** I believe that when you are doing something you have to do it well, it must have meaning, it must go a long way and have an impact on others; you do it as if you are doing it unto the Lord. There are some people you meet and you will be surprised, they do not care, they do not care whether they cheated you to do it. When I was doing the stadium monument someone asked me why I was putting so much of the money given me into the work because someone else would have bought cheap materials, the cheapest of everything needed to produce the work. When working on the stadium monument I made sure to create a strong reinforcement. The reinforcement is more than 6 feet deep, there are woven metals with stones and cement inside so that monument can never sink. Someone else will do it and the depth of the foundation will not even reach 3 feet so after a while the monument will tilt because it started sinking. I tell people my cement works do not pile. The stadium monument for instance has been there for more than five years and it has not piled. You find some monument piling off because the artist was not allowed to do the right thing. One thing about producing sculptural pieces is the time. You cannot commission me to produce a work and tell me it has to be ready within two weeks. Cement works for instance need more than 21 days to cure before I can continue with the process and most of the time that is what happens, people come and put pressure on artists to produce a work within a

short time frame. Also I realized when you work with other sculptors you learn from them. You discover easy ways of doing certain things; maybe your process was longer and tedious. You learn which materials to mix in order to get certain results.

**Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** When I get an idea I really want to work on and also when am almost done creating a work because then you are seeing what you were seeing in your mind's eye come to life, that is it I guess. You have an idea and you are really eager to let it happen, so you go through the process and then when it's finally done and you are satisfied with what you have produced.

**What has been a seminal experience?** When I came back to Accra after completing KNUST, I did not have wood and clay to work. I had to find out where I could get clay to buy in Accra so I began painting using water-colours. It turns out that I do water-colour paintings when I do not feel like sculpting. Water-colour is soft and easy. Also, I guess more now because of what I am researching on its made me more deliberate in looking out for something that can be used to represent women, at first I did not think about it, I just found myself creating works that talked about women but now am deliberately looking out; what is it that they do, what one thing can be used to represent them, a landscape that will cut across all women.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** The first artwork I ever sold was during the INDOTECH exhibition at the Ghana Trade Fair Centre. It was a wood work. I do not remember how much I sold it for. The wood was in a certain shape so the carving was done into the shape of the wood. It was an abstract work which portrayed a human figure with an elongated head. That is one of the first artwork I remember selling at that fair. It was bought by a parent whose child was at KNUST, he was excited to see students from KNUST taking part in the exhibition.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** When people realize how long it took you to execute the work they appreciate it and say; *wow, its looks good, it's nice*. The appreciation of the work at least is good to hear.

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** Creating artworks, in those days we drew, painted and made clay works in primary school. Also Sunday school dramatic plays especially during Christmas.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** I decide this is the way I want it and that becomes the finished work.

**What does your art work mean to you?** It is a medium through which I send a message I wish to communicate. Art is a medium of expression.

- **Asabea Anakwa**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?** While studying at the University of Education, Winneba, during one vacation my mother sponsored me abroad where I spent three months. I went to U.K. in the year 1998 with one Margaret McCord, she was a curator and a textile conservator from the U.K. who usually had appointments with Ghana National Museum where my mother worked and other museums in Africa so she traveled a lot and happens to be my mother's friend. Margaret asked my mother what she will like as an offer from her and since my mother had being travelling abroad already she said she will rather like her daughter who is an artist to tour art galleries and museums abroad. So we went there and toured a number of art galleries and national history museums in Oxford, Briston and Sutherland, and also took part in workshops. Margaret planned and put me on a rigid educational tour. They say travel and see; I saw several works of art and in fact by the time I came back I had learnt a lot and was inspired so decided in my heart to continue practising as an artist. We visited Madame Tussauds, a wax museum in London among many others. I will recommend women artists if they have the opportunity, to travel and tour art museums abroad because it really inspired me.

**Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** I enjoy getting ideas, that alone satisfies me. Right now I have a lot of ideas but the time to paint and sculpt is a challenge. Whenever I get an idea I make a sketch of it in my sketch book and I have a number of them. Whenever I look through the sketches it sends me back to the time when the idea came to mind, maybe while I was listening to a sermon, its like am seeing a different thing all together because I am analyzing the sermon artistically and enjoying it. I usually spend time improving on the idea before making a sketch of it on my canvas to paint. For most of my paintings I first make a

sketch of what I want to paint in my sketch book before executing the actual work. I mostly get ideas when am reading and listening to sermons.

**What has been a seminal experience?** My education and my faith in God has greatly influenced my practise as an artist. At first I mainly employed the conventional way of painting and sculpting but now some of my works are conceptual which I enjoy doing because that one breaks boundaries, so it now becomes difficult to define painting and sculpture. I like to attend art exhibitions to educate myself more. Also, being a preacher of the gospel it occurred to me that there are so many sermons that can be understood better and register in the mind if I create and use works of art in preaching. It got to a time whenever I read the bible the Lord will ask me; *what of using your artworks as preaching aids?* Teachers sometimes use teaching aids to help students understand the topic being taught better, so I can also use my art to project the concept or the message I want to send across as a preacher and a counsellor, and so for some time now that is what I have been doing.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** It was an acrylic painting on canvas titled; 'Legacy', I used palette knife and employed the impasto technique in executing that work. It depicted a chief in his palanquin with his subjects, and the concept behind the work is, when a chief or an important personality is coming, you hear of them even before they arrive per their entourage, and when they have come and left people still talk about them because of the role they play in society. The painting was just to admonish people to leave a good legacy such that even when they are dead and gone they still continue to make a positive impact in the lives of people. It was one of the paintings bought by the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs at my first solo exhibition at Ghana National Museum. I sold it for GHC 600.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** *This one should not remain only in Ghana, you must come out boldly and become an international artist;* that is what someone said. Some too say; I have really made my father proud, like I said he was also an artist. He had some of his works not only in Ghana National Museum but museums in the United States. Also, when foreigners come around especially during my exhibitions, they say; *oo so you did this, you did that, you have really shown that Ghanaian female artists too are doing well.*

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** That was when I sculpted ‘the thinker’ in clay, I was around nine or ten years old. I grew up with a single parent, my mother was not around so I usually woke up early and thought of how best to manage the home. In primary school we studied art and craft and for that subject we were usually asked to make an art work at home and bring it to school for marks, so my circumstance got me to create an old man sitting by a tree truck thinking, and then on my way to school because people know that during that time students will be sending their works for marks, they met me on the way and pleaded with me that they want to have a look at my work, they would say; *oo Papa Asa Anakwa’s child will you let me look at your work;* then I will open it for them to look at it, then as I continue on my way another group will meet me and plead with me that they also want to have a look at my work. So they look at it and go and tell other people that; *eii go and look at what Papa Asa Anakwa’s child has done, she has used clay to do a sculpture work, go and see, it is exactly like a human being, when you breath into it, it will get up;* so it got to some time I had to beg them that if they do not allow me to go I will be late and my teacher will cane me. My house was near a bush so I had to walk some distance to the town where the school was.

Also, growing up I usually made a lot of paintings with crayon in my G book, some of the paintings included someone pounding fufu, a woman carrying her baby at her back while washing and many other things I saw in my community where I grew up. I usually added things in the immediate environment such as a lizard, a cat, etc. I quite remember that the first day I went to secondary school the seniors came around, took my G book and then started fighting over it, by the time I realized they had torn all the sheets from my book and it was left with only the cover. To my surprise after some time when I went to some dormitories I realized they had pasted my paintings inside their trucks, meaning they admired them and that made me happy even though I was sad from the onset. If it were to be today I would have put down the date but then I was young. Also, I had a picture of my infancy which I usually made a painting of and anytime someone comes to visit my father and sees it, they ask whether am the one who drew it and take it away. I was a very happy child and known in the community because of my gift. So when the then Director at Apam Education Office advised me to rather pursue my talent and polish it instead of pursuing other courses, I remembered some of these things that happened when I was young and then heeded to his advice. I was then teaching French and was having all the A levels that will allow me to go to sixth form but remaining economics so I wanted to move

to Accra to study economics when he sat me down and advised me, so I rather sat for nov-dec and then applied to the university to study art.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** When I finish producing a work I usually call people to come and have a look at it and then give constructive criticisms. I mostly call artists I know around, if they are not around then I call passersby or I make my husband and children come and critic the work for me, their critics sometimes give me more ideas. For my sculptural pieces especially when its an exact replica of someone the moment they see that it resembles the person it amazes them so they do not criticize it but I tell them that please I want to improve on the work so do not be fascinated about the work, study it critically and then say something about it, both positive and negative. If it a family that is coming to look at the work I tell them; I wish one of you will be a critic because I really need to know how the works look before I display it at an exhibition or send it to the person who patronised it.

**What does your art work mean to you?** It reflects myself, I see myself and my God in every work that I do because I acknowledge who gave me the talent and asked me to ‘Occupy till He comes’.

- **Dorothy Amenuke**

**What is something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?** I learnt to be myself and to be independent. I learnt not to follow the crowd but rather find my path and work along that area so I found my feet by being different. A lot of people ask me whether I am a textile artist and I tell them am an artist. I confidently do what I do because you will notice that my works are different. I also learnt that to be confident you have to be knowledgeable; you must read a lot to find out what is going on in the art world, find out which artists are working like you and how they are going about it, what they are saying about their works and how different theirs is from yours.

**Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?** Every process involved in producing my works excites me. I love and enjoy what I do. I am a practising artist and so whatever I do is serious work.

**What is the first artwork you ever sold?** Many years ago when I was a student and even after school I sold some of the works I did in school, most of which were carvings and modellings. I sold my first work in the 90s; it was a modelling of a figure-relief work. It was patronized in a gallery so I do not know who bought it but it may be in the records of the gallery.

**What memorable responses have you had about your work?** People think my work is different, people wonder how long it takes me to produce one work; because one set of work looks like a whole tedious kind of work. It sometimes takes me a whole year or more to make one work. People are usually amazed at the scale of my works and they think that is different in the sense that I don't call myself a textile artist but I work mostly with fabrics. People ask me; *so the way you work do you get other people working like you?*, if no; *how do you get people to discuss your work with?*, and I think once people begin to think about your work like that then they begin to appreciate that this is something really different.

**What is your strongest memory of your childhood?** My mother was very protective, very caring and very loving. When we were kids she had this very big cloth that when we were growing up we all slept under, and so I grew up and I still was asking about this cloth and she told me it was our great grandfather who gave that woven cloth to her. We all slept under it and it was fun, but it was not until I grew up and began to think back about this cloth and what it meant for a family that it began to make so much meaning to me on how every evening it brought the family together, I mean all three of us together with my mum slept under it. I will not say that, that is what drove me into working with fabrics but may be it did unconsciously because of the idea of cloth beyond what it was doing. At first I use to sculpt with only the conventional sculpting materials and when I decided that well why don't I try using something else, the first thing that came to mind was; what is more flexible which can be easily manipulated, and it was cloth. So I started using fibers when I was having my first degree in sculpture, nobody else at that time in my department was using fibers for sculpture. When that idea came to mind it led me to go and find out and read about artists who are using fabrics to sculpt and I found that; Claes Oldenburg and some other artists were doing that in the sixties. So having that covering over me, once it is in my subconscious mind may have influenced my decision of using fabrics to sculpt, it may have triggered my love for using fabrics to produce sculptural pieces. I see cloth beyond clothing, for me cloth is powerful, it has language and so I can do and say a lot of things with it.

**How do you know when a piece is done?** When I look at it and I think am okay, then it is done. With my works I usually cannot tell the end from the beginning. I have an idea as to how I want the work to come out but as you work a lot of things come along the way that you either add or subtract so when it is done you just know that it's done.

**What does your art work mean to you?** It means everything to me, that is why I spend money on it, and that is why I have created a studio where I stay up the whole night to work. Actually that is what I do, I teach alright but if I had the opportunity to only do my art and not teach, that would have been great. And if I will teach I want to teach for fun but not because I have to.

**What do you have to say about the text books used in public secondary schools that feature very few female artists?** In response to this question Betty Acquah explained that you will find a lot of women in art professions like fashion designing and beadwork, even in those fields there are few men but for fine arts its vice versa. She shared that had it not been for the exhibition organized by Frances Ademola at the Accra Loom which featured ten female artists she would have never heard of or known Araba Kromantin. She explained that Frances Ademola herself practised as a painter for quite a long time so is sure while she was practising she knew Araba Kromantin who is also a painter. She continued to say that marketing wise, female artists do not market themselves so as to reach that level where people will know them and feature them in important exhibitions. There are female artists but how well have they been marketed. Because they are not featured in the textbooks you will think they are not there. Women generally have that set back, taking care of the family and so time to practise becomes a problem. Betty expressed that she believes some of the female artists stopped practising along the way and ventured into other areas. She shared that she knows of one female artist whose family keeps telling her to stop painting and go and look for a job and because of that other things have taken her time. They discourage her and because she is not getting her family's support she is not able to do a lot of output; so it has been a great challenge for her. Fortunately for Betty, her family did not only support her with their mouths. To date her sisters and brothers buy art materials for her. They have supported her all round, money wise, encouragement and everything that is why she is able to continue practising throughout and is even able to solely depend on her art practice. She however noted that she believes that textbooks that are going to be written now will include female artists.

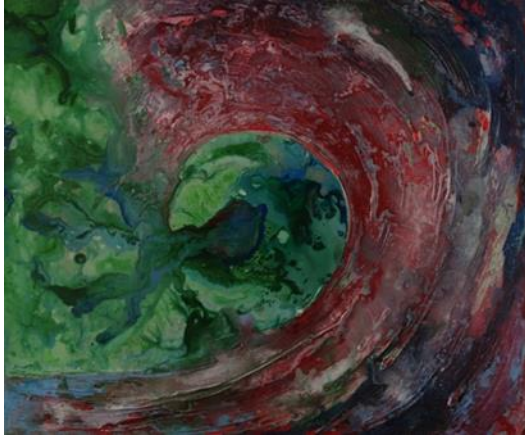
Victoria Adoe also shared that while in school she never read about any female artist, they learnt mostly about male artists. She noted that they read about female poets and writers like Efua Sutherland, a Ghanaian playwright and poet among many other things but for artists never. She did not hear of any female painter or sculptor as at that time. Vicki expressed that she is sure there were female artists but they were not pronounced maybe because they have not had the time and support to grow their careers in the face of societal challenges, including raising families. Gladys Adinyira also stated that working as a full time artist may not be the easiest way to sustain yourself and your family financially, so most artists do other things in addition to practising as artists and so if you are not able to balance the two within some time your art practise fades. As a woman as soon as you get married, some people may say it should not be an excuse but it is, it is part of it because the time that you may have used to produce works as a practising artist within some few weeks of getting married you become pregnant and after giving birth you spend that time taking care of your child. That is about two years gone and you have not had time to sit and work as an artist. Some people will put it off and say when the kids get to a certain age I will start practising again and with the art practise if you do not practise, you will go still and so in the end some of them just abandon it. That is the stuck reality women artists are facing. A male artist will have more time to practise and go out to do whatever he needs to do to promote his career knowing that his wife is at home taking care of the kids so even by the very role you play as a woman in your home limits you as a female artist. Gladys also shared that she visited Vume for instance and is only the women in the town who are allowed to make the traditional pots for keeping water and cooking, they go and dig clay themselves, carry it some distance and bring it to town to create the pots. The pots these women create is to be used in the house so they are specifically for domestic use. The men do the flower pots you usually see by the road sides. Imagine if these women want to carve, in that community they will say it is a taboo, a woman does not carve. The women will tell you that they sell some but not many, they sell it to people in the town, maybe if your pot breaks but how often will someone's pot break, so the limitation is there. What they produce is on a very small scale. In buttressing this point Aronson (1991) wrote that women's arts were also overlooked because they tend to be less visible to outsiders than that of men's. Women confine much of their activity, including their arts, to the domestic arena, which is often set apart from the public space of the compound.

Men's arts, by contrast, are more public and, in the case of masquerades, more dramatic in their presentation and thus more accessible for study than women's.

Asabea Anakwa also mentioned that if female visual art students use textbooks that feature more male artists than female artists it even adds to their misconception that males are more capable of creating certain works of art like paintings and sculptures than females. She noted that now we are preaching gender balance, at first it was women empowerment and if we empower ourselves but are not featured in textbooks it does not help



## APPENDIX B



**Plate 45:** HearRing the sea  
By Fatric Bewong  
Abstract painting, Acrylic on canvas

**Source:** [https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=257](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=257) (Plate 45)  
[https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page\\_id=2076](https://www.fatricbewong.com/?page_id=2076) (Plate 46)



**Plate 46:** Co-existing, 2018 (close up shot)  
By Fatric Bewong  
Materials: textile scraps and mirrors  
220cm x 120cm



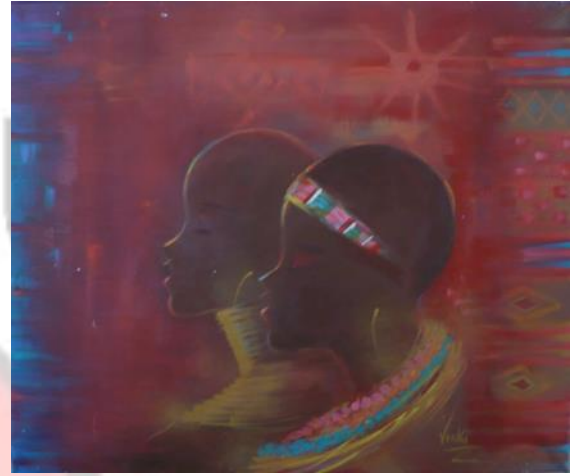
**Plate 47:** August, 2009  
By Betty Acquah  
Landscape painting, Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 40 inches  
**Source:** Betty Acquah



**Plate 48:** Galaxies, 2010  
By Betty Acquah  
Abstract painting, Acrylic on canvas  
40 x 60 inches  
**Source:** Betty Acquah



**Plate 49:** Mango ase, 2018  
By Victoria Adoe  
Landscape painting, Acrylic on canvas  
89cm x 114.3cm  
**Source:** Photographed by the researcher



**Plate 50:** Ashanti and Zulu, 2016  
By Victoria Adoe  
Figure painting, Acrylic on canvas  
63.7cm x 76.3cm  
**Source:** Photographed by the researcher



**Plate 51:** Memories from my motherland  
By Afia Prempeh, 2016  
Acrylic on canvas  
**Source:** Afia Prempeh



**Plate 52:** An installation at James Fort Prison  
(Chaley Wote Stree Art Festival – 2017)  
By Gladys Adinyira Wuaku  
**Source:** Gladys Adinyira



**Plate 53:** ‘Gbomo nyemii dzi gbomo’ (I am my brother’s keeper)  
 By Gladys Adinyira Wuaku  
 Cement sculptural piece  
 Heroic-size figure (8ft) on a 4ft pedestal  
 In memory of the 127 souls that perished in the May 9<sup>th</sup>  
 stadium tragedy  
**Source:** <https://twitter.com/Joy997FM/status/1126443732037984256>



**Plate 54a:** A conceptual artwork titled Adolescence



**Plate 54b:** (Side view)

(Asabea’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Life Statement and Art Exhibition, 2018)  
 By Asabea Anakwa

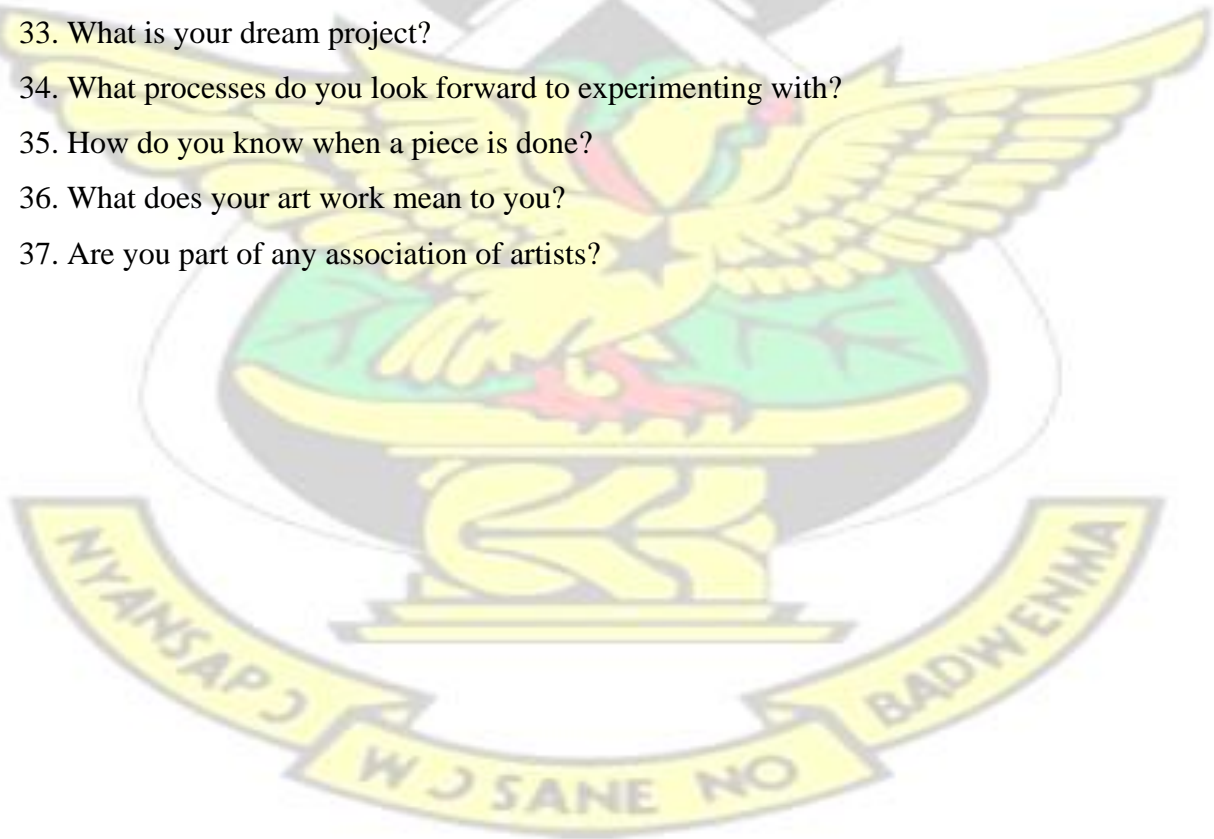
Materials: a bust in P.O.P., wooden framed mirrors, brassier, waist beads, cotton wool, powder, lime, soap (Azuma twere), sponge, towel, bobo, shea butter and comb

**Source:** Photographed by the researcher

**APPENDIX C**  
**Interview Guide**

1. When and where were you born?
2. Tell me about your educational background and working experiences?
3. How long have you been practising as an artist?
4. What art do you most identify with?
5. Why did you decide to become an artist? What are some of the factors that influenced your decision on becoming an artist?
6. Did your parents like your decision on becoming an artist? Were they supportive?
7. What are some of the challenges you faced in the early stages of your career?
8. Are you inspired by the works of any artist? Local/International Artists.
9. Where do you usually find ideas for your work?
10. What are some of the issues that your work addresses? What are some of the key concepts in your work?
11. What materials do you use in producing your artworks and why?
12. Tell me about your working techniques?
13. Which stage(s) of your creative process do you enjoy most?
14. How has your practice changed over time?
15. What has been a seminal experience?
16. Tell me about some of the major exhibitions that you've had/participated in?
17. Tell me about some of the major projects you've worked on? What project are you working on right now?
18. Which galleries/museums have your work?
19. What philosophies guide your practice as an artist?
20. What's something you learned early on in your career that made you a better artist?
21. Being a female artist; what reactions do you usually get from people?
22. What do you think is the main cause of poor visibility of female artists within the Ghanaian community of professional artists to serve as role models to inspire young adolescent girls into the visual art industry?

23. What do you have to say about the text books used in Senior High Schools that feature very few female artists?
24. Is there a longstanding bias against women artists and art professionals, or have women not had the time and support to grow their careers in the face of societal challenges, including raising families or outright sexism?
25. Have you faced discrimination of any sort?
26. Per your experiences are female artists given the same opportunities/privileges as their male counterparts?
27. What's the first artwork you ever sold?
28. How is the art practice in Ghana? What are some of your challenges?
29. What do you think can be done to better enhance the visual art industry?
30. What role does the artist play in society?
31. What memorable responses have you had about your work?
32. What's your strongest memory of your childhood?
33. What is your dream project?
34. What processes do you look forward to experimenting with?
35. How do you know when a piece is done?
36. What does your art work mean to you?
37. Are you part of any association of artists?



# KNUST

