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Visual arts and environmental conservation in Ghana: A case study of selected paintings of Ablade Glover

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Abstract

Environmental art remains one of the suitable advocacy strategies to ensure the preservation and conservation of the natural environment for human posterity due to its effective awareness creation. It is against this backdrop that the pioneering contemporary Ghanaian Visual artists and their succeeding generation of artists have produced several Visual artworks for the promotion of environmental conservation in Ghana. However, their efforts have remained largely undocumented and could be misconstrued. This qualitative case study sought to aesthetically reveal the immense contributions of selected paintings of Ablade Glover toward environmental conservation in Ghana. Five paintings of Ablade Glover namely; Accra Floods, Slumscape, Sunrise, Red Forest, and Forest were purposively sampled with data collected through semi-structured interviews and unstructured observation. The study, through visual and descriptive analyses, found that the five aestheticised paintings of Ablade Glover are environmentally related advocacy-artefacts that seek to (re)create the awareness of city dwellers, urban planning authorities, and agencies about: the deadly seasonal disasters (floods) in Ghanaian cities (Accra); the presence of slums and their associated insanitary/health issues in Ghanaian cities (Accra), and other human unfriendly acts toward the natural environment. While Glover is encouraged to produce more of such environmentally-related paintings, the study recommends further aesthetical studies to be conducted on similar environmentally-related Visual Arts

Keywords

Ablade Glover,
Accra Floods,
Environmental art,
Slumscape,
Visual arts.

produced by Ghanaian Visual artists to decode their intended advocacy meanings to city dwellers, urban planning authorities, and the entirety of the Ghanaian populace. This stands to minimise and/or avert the seasonal floods in Ghanaian cities (Accra); deal with slums and their insanitary issues in Ghanaian cities (Accra) and generally protect the natural environment for posterity.

1. Introduction

There is a near-universal agreement among the scientific community that humans' unfriendly interactions with the natural environment have over the years led to gradual but significant depletion of the ecosystem (Environmental Protection Agency, 2011; 2015; Ministry of Environment Science and Technology, 2012; Jean, 2019; Ghana Statistical Service-GSS/Environmental Protection Agency-EPA, 2020), and unfortunately in some cases, it served as a recipe for natural disasters as often witnessed in Ghana. The unprecedented June 3, 2015 flood disaster that resulted in the destruction of public and private property and the death toll of over 152 lives in Accra (Asumadu-Sarkodie et al, 2015) is a clear example of such disasters. According to GSS/EPA (2020, p.21), the state of Ghana's environment 2016 annual report reveals that "some of the major environmental issues that confront the country include climate change, waste and sanitation, air pollution, land degradation, biodiversity loss, coastal erosion, water pollution, deforestation". GSS/EPA further stressed that "these issues are cross-cutting in nature and therefore require a multi-faceted approach to effectively address them" (p. 21). Owing to this, the past and present governments of Ghana have deliberately put in place a wide range of measures such as the enactment of laws, development of policy frameworks, regulations, establishment of ministries, agencies, and departments to ensure the existence of a harmonious relationship between man and his immediate environment for safety and survival (Environmental Protection Agency Act-490, 1994; Environmental Assessment Regulations, 1999; Management of Ozone Depleting Substances and Products Regulations-L.I. 1812, 2005; Environmental Sanitation Policy, 2010; Hazardous and Electronic Waste Control and Management Act-917, 2016; Land Use and Spatial Planning Act-925, 2016). The presence of the aforementioned statutory documents in Ghana suggests that environmental issues are of serious concern to the nation as well as demonstrates the country's readiness in conserving the natural environment for posterity. The Environmental Protection Agency ACT 490 (1994) established a body known as the Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) fully clothed with the legal authority to zealously deal with environmental issues in Ghana. Functions of this body (EPA) as catalogued in the ACT amongst others, tasked EPA to “secure by itself or in collaboration with any other person or body the control and prevention of discharge of waste into the environment and the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment” (Environmental Protection Agency Act 490, 1994, p. IV-3). By this, EPA is enjoined to collaborate with all persons including Visual artists, bodies, or organizations who have a demonstrable interest in the holistic protection and improvement of the quality of the natural environment for the collective safety of Ghanaians and their rich ecoculture for the current and future generations. Therefore, the environmentally-related advocacy roles pursued by some Ghanaian artists through their artefacts (painting, assemblage, and construction as in sculpture) find expression within the aforementioned function of the Environmental Protection Agency of Ghana.

Also, the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act-925 (2016) is equally worthy of highlight considering Ghana’s average population growth rate of 2.1% recorded during the 2021 population and housing census (Ghana Statistical Service-GSS, 2021). An average population growth rate of 2.1% could be said to be rapid and does have far-reaching consequences on the physical environment. Therefore, the act is meant to:

Revise and consolidate the laws on land use and spatial planning, provide for sustainable development of land and human settlements through a decentralised planning system, ensure judicious use of land in order to improve quality of life, promote health and safety in respect of human settlements and to regulate national, regional, district and local spatial planning, and generally to provide for spatial aspects of socioeconomic development and for related matters. (Land Use and Spatial Planning Act-925, 2016, p. 9)

Despite these legal regimes espoused, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Land Use and Spatial Planning outfit are yet to fully achieve their harmonious legal mandate of protecting the environment from human abuse. Recurrent reports of waste and sanitation problems, environmental degradation generally leading to climate change as well as seasonal disasters (floods) in Ghanaian urban centres claiming lives and causing destruction to property are still issues bothering mother Ghana (Asamoah, 2010; Danquah, 2013; Monney, Odai, Buamah, Awuah, & Nyenje, 2013; Asumadu-Sarkodie, Owusu & Rufangura, 2015; Osman, 2015; Aforporpe, 2016; GSS/EPA, 2020). As the human-related

environmental abuses and their negative impacts on lives and property persist, one of the uncontested causes for all the mishaps has been attributed to the lack of sufficient enforcement and implementation of the very legal and policy regimes adopted to protect the environment from abuses (Asamoah, 2010; Attipoe, 2014; Afornorpe, 2016). This suggests that much is still needed to be done moving forward as a nation.

Although full enforcement and implementation of the legal and policy regimes regarding environmental issues remain unchallenged, environmental arts are effective communicative vehicles that have the potency to contribute significantly to environmental conservation. Researchers have reported that art remains a supportive vehicle in helping to curb the growing environmental crises across the globe (Williams, 2001; Kagan, 2014; Jean, 2019). Davidson explains that “environmental art can reinterpret natural processes, generate awareness about environmental problems, restore damaged ecosystems, and convey the power and beauty of nature and wildlife” to mankind. Bower emphasises that environmental art often takes into consideration the environmental impact of the ways an artwork was constructed and disseminated, as well as its long-term positive effects on the lives of humans, nonhumans, and systems. The contributions of Visual artists in promoting and conserving the natural environment through their artefacts remain uncontested. Visual artists have been actively working to both inspire and advocate human awareness about the growing global environmental crises while enhancing friendly ecological relationships as well as modelling desirable ecological values (Wallen, 2012; Vasko, 2015; as cited in Jean, 2019). Marks, Chandler and Baldwin (2016), as cited in Jean (2019, p. 14) concur that one of the reasons for “using this method is to foster pro-environmental behaviour and to encourage environmental awareness and stewardship”. Williams (2001) and Jean (2019) stress that artists all around the world are using their talents to affect people’s conscience and raise their awareness about the need to ensure responsible human relationships with the natural environment. In the considered view of Jokela (1995, p. 2):

Art is one means by which people rearrange the environment. It clearly reflects its maker’s, user’s and the existing society’s values and relationships to the environment. A work of art is a sort of crystallisation of values, reflecting the thinking of its community. This is why understanding art enables us to notice ... incidents and structures between people, their sphere of activity, and their environment.

As indicated, Jokela finds three categories of relationships between art and the environment. These categories are that a work of art can: dominate a place (the subjugation and conquest of the environment); be characteristic to a place (the adaptation to the environment) and be defined by a place, that is, environmental art created by the environment. Lister (2003) in concurrence, states three similar strands of environmental art, which include; art that observes and interacts with the natural environment, art that reclaims or improves physical environments in the tangible sense, and art that engages the social environment with pedagogical and/or activist intent. Simply put, environmental artworks are often created to inform the public about environmental problems and ecological dynamics, proposing new ways for sustainability and co-existence (Lambert & Kholsa, 2000; as cited in Jean, 2019) thereby promoting and conserving the natural environment for posterity.

In Ghana, it is obvious that the artistic activities of the pioneering contemporary Ghanaian Visual artists (Kofi Antubam, Ernest V. Asihene, Ablade Glover, Ato Delaquis, Wisdom Kudowor, Robert Aryeetey, Victoria Sophia Adoe, Kofi Sertodji, Grace Kwami Nee Anku, Vincent Kofi Akwete, A. M. Opoku, Lydia Nanor Dede, Amon Kotei, John Owusu-Addo, Owusu-Ankomah, Owusu Dartey, Seth Anku, A. O. Bartimeus, Fred Agyeman and others); and their succeeding generation of artists (Ibrahim Mahama, Jonathan Aggrey, Serge Attukwei Clottey, Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, Zohra Opoku, Latifa Idriss and others) reflect(ed) their views on the nature of their immediate social and natural environment in the country. Such environmental artworks produced by these two categories of contemporary Ghanaian artists as aforementioned, when appropriately interpreted and imbibed by the Ghanaian populace would contribute to solving environmental problems in the country. However, there is little or scanty aesthetic appreciation of their visual artworks in that, such works have since “remained largely undocumented while the artworks created are stigmatised and stereotyped as mere objects of decoration in public spaces and homes” (O. Q. Essel, personal communication, January 01, 2017; as cited in Asenso, Issah, & Som, 2020, p. 67). This study, therefore, sought to aesthetically examine selected environmentally-related paintings of Ablade Glover to reveal their intended social and educational purposes and/or meanings to the Ghanaian populace regarding the protection and conservation of the natural environment for posterity of Ghanaians.

2. Theoretical Framework

Deweyan Aesthetic theory of instrumentalism underpinned the study. Instrumentalism, as a theory of aesthetics, originated from Dewey's philosophical pragmatism. However, it finds exact expression in one of Dewey's (1934) series of publications titled: *Art as experience*. The aesthetic theory of instrumentalism concerned itself with the general forms of the conception of Art and the reason behind its production. According to Walsh (1992, pp.34-35), Dewey "believed in the importance of understanding the conditions under which the object [Art] was made, the controlling operations that were characteristic of the thinking represented in the object, and the object's influence upon future consequences". Also, the aesthetic theory of instrumentalism could be explained as an approach to understanding the greatness in Art to effectively advance the objectives of humanity (Walsh, 1992). In the words of Diffey (1982), aesthetic instrumentalism highlights the "value of Art in the fulfilment of a function or functions" (as cited in Axelsson, 2013). The foregoing explanations of the aesthetic theory of instrumentalism denote that artefacts, particularly those of African origin, have premeditated social functions to serve. Art is created not for Art sake but to address the needs of society. This is ostensibly concurred by Feldman (1982) that "the purpose of Art is frequently moral, ethical or commemorative" (as cited in Walsh, 1992, p.23). For the sake of emphasis, Tolstoy (1904, p. 156) from the instrumentalist's standpoint posits that "Art, like speech, is a means of communication, and therefore of progress, i.e. of the movement of humanity forward towards perfection". To put it more explicitly, Walsh (1992, p.106) posits that "the instrumentalist sees art as serving a propaganda-like purpose by communicating ideas related to moral, religious, commemorative, political or economic reason". And, "if the art object does not promote the objective of humanity, the work may be regarded as a failure in the eyes of the instrumentalist (Walsh, 1992, p. 106).

Anchored on the theoretical standpoint of the instrumentalist, the study aesthetically examined selected environmentally-related paintings of Ablade Glover to transmit their intended social and educational meanings to Ghanaians regarding the protection and conservation of the natural environment. Therefore, the intended socio-environmental purposes or functions of the paintings have been made explicit through rigorous analysis situated within the parameters of the aesthetic theory of instrumentalism.

3. Methodology

The study sought to document the contributions of Ablade Glover's paintings to environmental conservation in Ghana. Amidst several environmental arts produced by pioneering contemporary Ghanaian artists and their succeeding generation of artists, the selection of Professor Ablade Glover is premised on his long-standing unblemished painting career whose themes centre on his immediate social and natural environment. Therefore, the study was anchored on a qualitative case study design with a specific focus on five (5) purposively selected environmentally-related paintings of Ablade Glover. These paintings included; *Accra Floods*, *Slumscape*, *Sunrise*, *Red Forest*, and *Forest* which have been collected and physically unavailable at the collection of the artist. Therefore, the study relied upon the available photographs exhibited online. The data collection instruments used were semi-structured interviews and unstructured observation. A guide, inspired by the objective of the study, was designed, pretested, found to be robust, and utilised for the interview session with Ablade Glover which was conducted through zoom (video) due to COVID-19 constraints. The unstructured observation tool generated in-depth data for the study as each of the selected paintings was visually observed and analysed in detail, interpreted, and explained using descriptive means. This entailed detailed observation, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of each of the paintings using the approach of the aesthetic theory of instrumentalism (Walsh, 1992). The instrumentalism approach allowed the study to search for internal and external cues that suggested possible uses or functions of each of the selected paintings of Glover. The internal cues found in each of the paintings provided basic information about the themes of each of the paintings; the literal qualities (art elements such as line, shape, colour, texture, space, shape, and value) that characterised each of the paintings and the expressive qualities (the moods, emotions, feelings, symbols, and meanings) associated with the paintings were significantly considered. Also, the study searched for possible external cues (environmental, societal, cultural, commemorative, ethical, or moral) and made use of such cues to interpret each of the paintings. Primary interpretations (artist's statements) of the paintings by Professor Ablade Glover himself were instrumental in eliminating or minimising weird conjectures.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Brief Biography of Ablade Glover

Ablade Glover (Figure 1) was born in Labadi, a suburb of Accra-Ghana in 1934. After his basic and second cycle education, he furthered to Kumasi College of Technology, now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi in 1957. Other institutions attended by Ablade Glover included; London School of Art and Design, Newcastle University; Kent State University, and Ohio University, where he obtained a doctorate degree in 1974. After his extensive scholarly pursuit in the diaspora, Glover returned to Ghana to teach at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi where he later became the dean of the College of Art until his retirement in 1994. The Artists Alliance Gallery in Accra, which has since become one of the well-known centres for the promotion of modern Ghanaian arts, was established by Professor Ablade Glover. All this while, Glover has been passionately engrossed in the painting of multiplicities of thematic scenes (Profiles, People, Market, Social Commentary, Townscapes, Forestscapes, Beachscapes, Prayerscapes, Trotro Stations, and Carnivals) mainly using oil, palette knife and canvas as the chief media to add his discerning voice to the happenings in his immediate social and natural environments (Petersen, 2012; Acquah, 2018). There is a sense of spontaneous vibrancy and visual texture associated with Glover's paintings due to his accustomed impasto technique. In almost all paintings of Glover, primary colours are thickly applied to achieve a very bright, bold, luscious, and intense colour effect. Glover has over the years exhibited his paintings both locally and internationally (Petersen, 2012; Acquah, 2018). According to Christopher Moller Gallery (2016), paintings of Ablade Glover could be found in both public and private collections worldwide including; the Imperial Palace Collection of Japan, the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, West Africa, Europe, USA, and Japan.

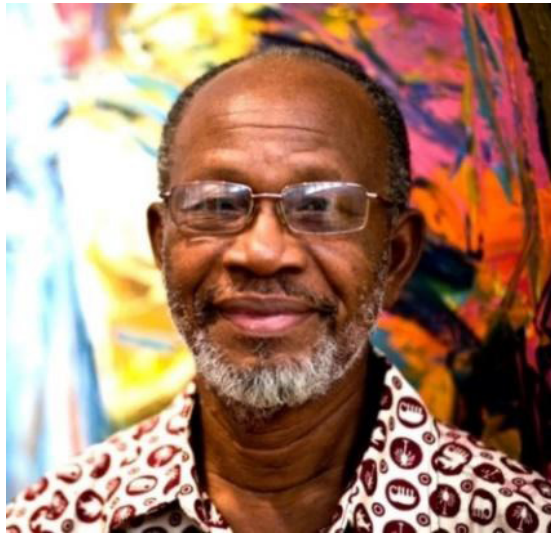


Figure 1: Photograph of Professor Ablade Glover
(Source: Artists Alliance Gallery-Accra, 2020).

4.2 Ablade Glover's Paintings and Environmental Conservation in Ghana

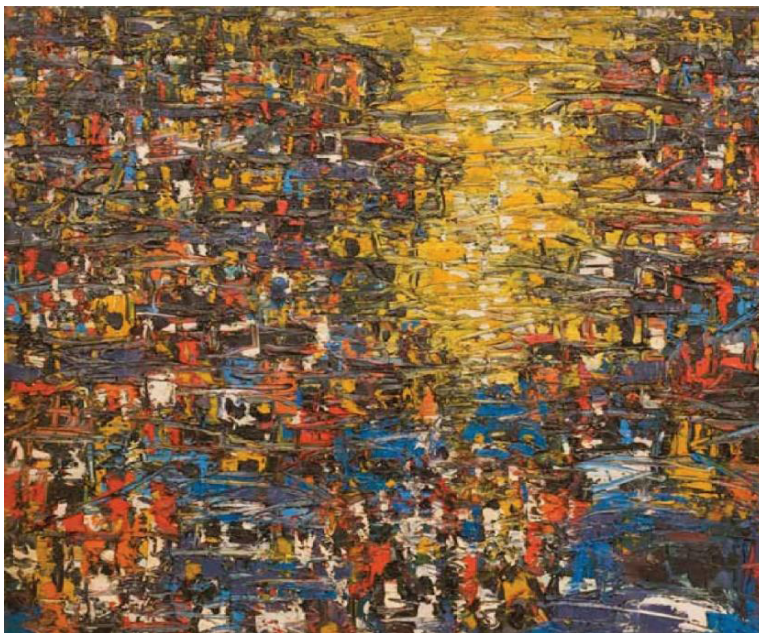


Figure 2: Glover, A. (1992). Accra Floods. [Oil on canvas, 102cm x 102cm]
(Photo Credit: October Gallery, 2020).

Figure 2 is a polychromatic oil on canvas painting of Ablade Glover worthy of documenting as far as the issue of Visual arts and environmental conservation in Ghana is concerned. The 102cm x 102cm sized painting, which is captioned *Accra Floods* made in 1992, metaphorically reveals horrific and disastrous episodes of a flood scene. With the use of a palette knife, Glover thickly registered random shapes on canvas using the primary ochres with the explosive effect of their tints and shades representing a chaotic and disastrous scene of several vehicles, people, houses, and other structures submerged in deadly flood waters. This painting (Figure 2), is a reminder of previously experienced flood situations or a warning of possible floods yet to befall the populace of Accra. In recounting the philosophy behind the *Accra Floods* theme, Glover (personal communication, August 28, 2020) points out that:

The Accra floods theme came to me when Accra was really flooded. It came as a subject of the season. The seasonal rains get Accra flooded. So, I sold the idea to all my friends. I encouraged them, we had a meeting here at the gallery [Artists Alliance Gallery, Accra] and we challenged every artist to paint his impression about the Accra floods. We invited art lovers who came that Saturday. Lots of people were here to see the artists paint the picture of the Accra floods really on the spot. It was not painted in the studio. We painted them right at the spot. Since we were in the season, it brought a lot of interest. People were excited about it. I was excited about the outcome. It was ... a seasonal subject to respond to the challenges associated with the seasonal floods in Accra. So..., the Accra floods became the subject of most of the artists in Accra who experienced the floods.

From Glover's accounts, the *Accra Floods* theme was chosen together with his peers at the time to visually avert the minds of the Accra populace to the disastrous and chaotic nature of the seasonal floods in Accra. Accra as the capital city of Ghana is congested because of misplaced structures and choked gutters with the only open spaces being the roads which are also always trafficked by a countless number of vehicles. As a result, Accra gets flooded seasonally when there are heavy downpours. Afornorpe (2016, p.112) attests that "flooding is the most predominant disaster in Accra [and, it is] most frequent and is cumulatively claiming lives and causing damage to property, companies and the public especially during rainy seasons." Afornorpe, however, attributes this unfortunate Accra flooding phenomenon to drainage problems; disposal of waste products into gutters; high rainfalls; increasing urbanisation and population growth;

poor settlement planning, and weak enforcement of regulations and other unfriendly human behaviours. In a similar vein, Asumadu-Sarkodie et al. (2015, p. 57.) report that:

Improper waste management practices in Accra and the incidence of flooding in the city are correlated. This is because the volume of solid waste in the form of silt or rubbish cannot be collected by existing systems. Some settlements in rural areas in Accra are used to dumping solid waste directly into watercourses, drains, culverts, and other drainage structures which results in reduced flow capacity and therefore overflowing to cause floods.

Asumadu-Sarkodie et al. (2015) further add that increasing urbanisation and development of residential buildings with disregard for building regulations and ignorance have led many settlements in Accra to build in the green belt zones of the city causing depletion of vegetation and making these areas more prone to erosion and flooding. Also, in a study on urbanisation and flooding in Accra, Afeku (2005), as cited in Danquah (2013) attributes the flooding in Accra to the absence of drainage and sanitation services. Therefore, the *Accra floods* painting (Figure 2) warningly communicates Glover's reservations about the seasonal flooding in Accra. If the intended meaning and purpose of the painting (Figure 2) were properly interpreted and understood, the populace of Accra and other urban centres in Ghana would have engaged themselves in practices that were friendly to the natural environment to avoid seasonal flooding at least instances of downpours. However, Glover's awareness creation or warning to the populace of Accra and other urban centres in Ghana through his painting (Figure 2) has since not yielded positive results. As a result of human continuous unfriendly activities toward the natural environment, findings of research works have revealed regular occurrences of worse flood situations in Accra and other cities in Ghana (Danquah, 2013; Asumadu-Sarkodie et al. 2015; Ayikpa, 2015; Afornorpe, 2016). The worst amongst them was the unprecedented June 3, 2015 flood cum the explosion of the Goil filling station disaster that resulted in the destruction of public and private property and a death toll of over 152 lives in Accra (Asumadu-Sarkodie et al, 2015). This means that the awareness that Glover sought to create through his painting (Figure 2) about the dire impacts of the seasonal floods in Accra is yet to achieve its intended purpose.



Figure 3: Glover, A. (2013) *Slumscape*. [Oil on Canvas, 122cm x 153cm]
(Photo Credit: October Gallery, 2020).

Another environmentally-oriented painting of Ablade Glover meant to promote environmental conservation in Ghana is *Slumscape* (Figure 3). It is an oil on canvas impasto measuring 122cm x 153cm and was produced in 2013 with the primary focus of drawing the attention of the populace to slums in Ghanaian cities (including Accra) and their looming disastrous implications. The composition (Figure 3) is characterised by a clump of thick polychromatic paints (yellow, orange, violet, green, and their tints and shades) in the form of rectangles and squares suggesting the infamous cluster of houses, kiosks, tents, and other structures typical of city slums. Glover constrained the canvas with perspectival consideration, reiterated a cluster of polychromatic shapes that enlarge near the bottom of the canvas and gradually shrink in size towards a virtual horizon beyond the canvas' top edge as perceived with the mind's eye (Petersen, 2012; Glover, 2011; as cited in Acquah, 2018). In revealing the artistic statement and the motivation behind the painting (Figure 3), Glover (personal communication, August 28, 2020) states that:

Almost everybody is in Accra. We leave the old people in the villages and come to Accra because it is the capital city of Ghana, right from the north to the south. For that matter, Accra is choked. When we were kids, we used to play in gutters. The gutters were clean and the waters were flowing nicely. Today, no gutter in Accra flows. I see the filth in slums of Accra as a threat to human lives. But, it appears it is no one's business. As an artist, I work toward waking people up to the realities of society.

The firsthand accounts of the artist (Glover) indicate that the *Slumscape* (environmental art) as observed in Figure 3 speaks a lot about slums in Accra. Therefore, the artist painstakingly used his painting prowess to mirror the poor and indecent human settlements known as slums found in Accra as a way of exposing the existence of slums in Ghanaian cities (Accra) and their threats to human survival. According to Monney et al. (2013, p. 711), “the burgeoning of slums in the developing world poses an urgent environmental threat due to insanitary conditions and rampant disposal of wastewater”. Slum as human settlement is faced with inadequate access to safe water, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding, and insecure residential status (UN-Habitat 2005; Riley et al. 2007; as cited in Aggrey-Korsah & Oppong, 2013). Since most of the slums are found on watercourses and do not equally have worked out drainage systems and sanitary facilities, inhabitants of such places usually suffer the outbreak of communicable diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, and tuberculosis (Aggrey-Korsah & Oppong, 2013). Therefore, the environmental art, *Slumscape* (Figure 3) serves as an advocacy piece to slum dwellers to be wary of the bizarre consequences of such settlements to human safety and the natural environment. However, this noble visual communiqué (Figure 3), from Glover seemed not appropriately decoded and understood as damning reports have it that 265 slums at different stages of development have been identified in Accra only (Graphic Online, 2018). It is in this disposition that the regular occurrences of floods that have often claimed hundreds of human lives and invaluable assets in Accra and other urban centres where slums are commonly found in Ghana have been attributed to poor drainage systems (Aggrey-Korsah, & Oppong, 2013; Monney et al. 2013; Danquah, 2013; Aforporpe, 2016).



Figure 4: Glover, A. (2013) *Sunrise*. [Oil on canvas, 122cm x 152.5cm]

(Photo Credit: October Gallery, 2020).

The painting titled *Sunrise* (Figure 4) is the handiwork of Ablade Glover. It is oil on canvas artwork measuring 122cm x 152.5cm. *Sunrise* (Figure 4) is similar to *Slumscape* (see Figure 3) as it displays a cluster of tightly erected structures interpreted as slum scenery illuminated by rising sunshine. The composition is characterised by congestion of rectangular and square-shaped structures harmoniously rendered in polychromatic paints such as; blue, violet and yellow in varying degrees of their tints and shades carefully constrained on the canvas, representative of the cluster of buildings and other infrastructures found in Accra and other urban centres in Ghana. The countless randomly repeated clump of shapes were expertly harmonised by the artist with respect to perspective in that, the shapes enlarge in the foreground and gradually shrink in size towards the background creating a sense of realism when the composition is viewed at a reasonable distance as similarly observed in Figure 3 (Petersen, 2012; Glover, 2011; as cited in Acquah, 2018). The clumsiness of the buildings and other structures, as registered on the canvas by Glover, is to expose the populace of

Ghana to the high level of congestion or slums in Accra city. A glimpse of the painting reveals unjust, total disregard and abuse of the natural environment by humankind. The congestion created by misplaced structures as seen in the painting (Figure 4) just as in Figure 3, poses serious environmental threats to human lives in that habitats in such areas are liable to natural disasters and communicable diseases due to poor sanitary and drainage systems. Several reports suggest that congested areas commonly found in urban centres as exhibited in the painting (Figure 4) are liable to natural disasters such as floods and communicable diseases, largely due to poor drainage and sanitation services in such places (Afeku, 2005; as cited in Danquah, 2013; Asumadu-Sarkodie et al. 2015). This ostensibly means that *Sunrise* (Figure 4) is an unambiguous visual report to the populace and for that matter the urban planning authorities of Ghana about the predicament of Ghanaian cities where there exists gross abuse of the natural environment without respect to its disastrous consequences. However, Glover explains that the theme of the painting, *Sunshine*, suggests that there is still a window of hope.

Out of slums is filth. And that, in spite of the filth, there is beauty and a ray of hope. So, if authorities clothed with legal powers to plan the development of the cities rise to the occasion by implementing the existing laws without fear or favour, such slums in Accra will be demolished to promote healthy and dignified human living. (A. Glover, personal communication, August 28, 2020)

This means that the painting (Figure 4) plays duo functions; awareness creation of the existence of congestions in Ghanaian cities (Accra) as well as giving a ray of hope that the legal regime (Land Use and Spatial Planning Act-925, 2016) of Ghana be enforced by spatial planning officers to ensure sanity in human settlements in Ghanaian cities at national, regional, district levels.



Figure 5: Glover, A. (2011) *Red Forest*. [Oil on Canvas, 40cm x 60cm]
(Photo Credit: Hourglass Gallery, 2020).

Another painting by Ablade Glover which focuses on the natural environment is the forestscape captioned *Red Forest* (Figure 5). Accustomed to his oil on canvas media, Ablade Glover combined both abstraction and realism to produce this painting (Figure 5), which serves as a visual statement precisely conveying sentiments of the artist to the Ghanaian populace in relation to the forest ecology. At a close distance, *Red Forest* (Figure 5) seemingly appears as an explosive constellation of well-thought-out contour shapes restively restrained within the canvas portraying an abstract ecstasy of a monochromatic forestscape. However, as the viewer moves back from the picture plane, at a point where the inchoate array suddenly resolves into startling focus, the abstract shapes unexpectedly transform into a realistic forestscape rendered in a burnt state (Houghton, 2009). The composition is characterised by the massive use of red in its raw state, which could be interpreted as an attempt made by Glover to avert the minds of Ghanaians to a forest begging for freshness. As observed in

Figure 5, it is revealed that Glover adopted the impasto technique where red oil paint was boldly and thickly applied with the palette knife piling up weight as they repeatedly build thick carpet-like planes of dry leaves loosely hung on top of trees with some falling to the ground. The stems and branches of the trees that make up the forest have also been variously registered in grey with dark tones in-between them serving as cast shadows. The dominant use of red in its raw state to generally represent all the leaves and the grey ochre for the stems and branches of all the trees of the forest seemingly depicts a forest that suffered death out of the burns of wild harmattan fire visited upon it by cruel human-hands. Therefore, the painting, *Red Forest* (Figure 5) could be interpreted as an effort made by Ablade Glover to draw the attention of Ghanaians and environmentalists to the consequence of the indiscriminate destruction of the natural environment through bush fires in all parts of the country mostly perpetrated by humans. In stating the artistic statement behind the choice of the *Red Forest* theme, Glover (2020) reveals that his major theme is about the vegetation around him. He added that though he has never seen a red forest anywhere, the painting was done in Kumasi to generally convey his mood about the presence of a forest around his bungalow in Kumasi and the need to conserve them for posterity. The *Red Forest* (Figure 5) is therefore a wake-up call to the populace of Ghana to desist from engaging in acts that have the tendency of destroying the natural environment. The usefulness of the forest to human existence cannot be underestimated. According to the United Nations (2014), the forest provides useful physical products such as food, wood, fibre, and fuel. It plays a role in erosion control, flood prevention, climate regulation, carbon sequestration, and water purification. Forests are sources of aesthetic and spiritual regeneration as well as provide recreation and education, which supplies services for the tourism industry. With the usefulness of forests to humanity as espoused by the United Nations (2014), the painting (Figure 5) is a passionate appeal made by Ablade Glover to the populace of Ghana for them to see the need to conserve the forest ecology as signaled by the proverbial adage that, "when the last tree dies, the last man dies" (Awuye, 2015, p. 1).



Figure 6: Glover, A. (2015). *Forest*. [Oil on Canvas, 102cm x 102cm]
(Photo Credit: LouiSimone Guirandou Gallery, 2020).

Forest, as titled in Figure 6, is another classic painting of Ablade Glover unveiled in 2015 in response to his immediate natural environment. As if captured from a bird's eye view at dusk, the monochromatic oil on canvas painting is rendered in repeated planes forming a thick carpet of glowing yellowish lights and shades of a mass pack of shapes on the canvas with dexterity. The forestscape represents the top cover of a thick staled forest. The staleness of the forest as registered on canvas (Figure 6) by Glover could either be caused by indiscriminate bush fires or unfriendly climatic conditions. Glover (2020) recounts that:

The painting, *Forest*, is my response to my immediate environment. I use the words; immediate environment with emphasis. When I was in Kumasi, I lived in the forest. My bungalow was right in the forest. It was a great thing. You get up in the morning and you hear birds singing. You saw nature around you. One day, I was suddenly inspired by the forest around me. So, I registered.

Although the painting represents the artist's response to his immediate environment, it silently draws the attention of the populace of Ghana, particularly environmentalists, to the beauty of nature and the gradual depletion of the forest ecology. Forests are important sources of timber, raw material for pulp and paper, fuel wood, energy, and other essential harvestable products like food, medicines, oil, and resins. Forests also play a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance and environmental make-up of our world (Roy, Dutti & Joshi, 2002; as cited in Addo, 2013). However, Glover's advocacy through his painting (Figure 6) for the protection and conservation of the forest ecology in Ghana against unfriendly human activities has not been strictly adhered to as the forest ecology is gradually being depleted with careless abundance. The proximate causes of the depletion of the forest cover in Ghana point directly to unfriendly human activities (Teye, 2005; Yiridoe & Nanang, 2001 as cited in Addo, 2013). Meanwhile, Ghana has robust legal and policy regimes (Environmental Protection Agency Act-490, 1994; Environmental Assessment Regulations, 1999; Management of Ozone Depleting Substances and Products Regulations-L.I. 1812, 2005; Environmental Sanitation Policy, 2010) to deal with environmental-related issues.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This aesthetical discourse sought to highlight the contribution of Visual Arts to environmental conservation in Ghana. By doing so, five selected paintings (*Accra Floods*, *Slumscape*, *Sunrise*, *Red Forest*, and *Forest*) of Ablade Glover were aestheticised to transmit their intended meanings. The study established that the five aestheticised paintings of Ablade Glover are environmentally related advocacy-artefacts that seek to (re)create the awareness of city dwellers, urban planning authorities, and agencies about the deadly seasonal floods in Ghanaian cities (Accra); the presence of slums and their associated insanitary/health issues in Ghanaian cities (Accra), and other human unfriendly acts toward the natural environment. While Glover is encouraged to produce more of such environmentally-related paintings, the study recommends further aesthetical studies to be conducted on similar environmentally-related Visual Arts produced by Ghanaian Visual artists to decode their intended advocacy meanings to city dwellers, urban planning authorities, and the entirety of the Ghanaian populace. This stands to minimise and/or avert the seasonal floods in Ghanaian cities (Accra); deal with slums and their insanitary issues in Ghanaian cities (Accra) and generally protect the natural environment for posterity.

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Nyamawero Navei is a doctoral student (Arts & Culture) of University of Education, Winneba-Ghana. His research interest rests on Ceramics, Graphic Design (Visual Arts education), and African Arts and culture. Navei's research also focuses on unveiling the multifaceted contributions of Visual Arts in contemporary Ghanaian society and one of such areas is environmental conservation. Navei believes that scholarly aestheticisation of the available environmental arts would bring clarity to their embedded loaded visual messages to the Ghanaian populace for the supreme purposes of conserving and preserving the natural environment for posterity.

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