

ABRAHAM AGBESHIE^{1*}
AGBEYEWORNU KOFI KEMEVR²
ALEX DARPOH³

abraham-agbeshie@ttu-edu-gh¹
kawavor@yahoo-com²
alexthedarpoh@yahoo-co-uk³

Department of Industrial Painting and Design^{1, 3}
Takoradi Technical University, Takoradi, Ghana

Department of Art Education²
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Vintage elements: Sourcing an aesthetic inspiration for contemporary Ghanaian painting

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Abstract

This study identified and discussed how some contemporary Ghanaian painters have so much interest in vintage elements. The descriptive research method was used as a qualitative inquiry for this study. The expert type of purposive sampling method was employed to select five contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) whose artworks focused on vintage elements in material content and subject matter. The study used direct observation and unstructured interviews to collect data. Thus, the data were analysed into an illustrative description using the visual analysis tool. The thoughts of interest of the five contemporary Ghanaian painters revealed that the incorporation of vintage subjects helped communicate their metaphysical ideas in an artistic context. The study argues that vintage elements are rife in Ghana and should not only be seen as material content but as scenic and thematic subjects for contemporary Ghanaian painting. It is, therefore, recommended that the thoughts and usage of vintage elements in the art of painting by the five contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) should be continued to inspire other contemporary Ghanaian painters including the upcoming contemporary Ghanaian artists to also adopt vintage elements in their paintings to help communicate their metaphysical ideas into artistic contexts.

Keywords

Aesthetic, contemporary Ghanaian painters, Inspiration, Material content, Vintage elements

1. Introduction

Some contemporary Ghanaian painters can be found confidently experimenting with colour and form as well as incorporating vintage elements such as Adinkra symbols, Kente cloth, Asafo flags, wood carving, old canoes, thatch houses, ancient lorries (described in Ghana as boneshakers) and other subject matters to communicate their ideas. The deployment of vintage elements in painting scenery to portray the milieu of indigenous Ghanaian setup and lifestyle was a popular practice since the 1950s (Bonsu, 2018; Fosu, 2009; Akyeampong, 2005) and remain relevant in contemporary painting due to their unique sociocultural significance (Woets, 2019; Hanks, 2007; Ratcliffe, 2016; Lane, 2014). Studies established that vintage elements have evolved to become dominant conceptual characteristics of contemporary Ghanaian paintings, (Amoako, Aidoo, & Agbeshie, 2022; Hanks, 2007; Ratcliffe, 2016; Lane, 2014).

Since post-colonialism, vintage elements have laid the foundation for a unique sense of artistic impulse for contemporary Ghanaian painters (Lane, 2014). Fosu (2003) affirms that there seems to be a vibrant trend of change in contemporary Ghanaian paintings over the past few years, and this has been greatly inspired by the prevalence of certain vintage elements and ideas characterised by stylisations, symbolisms, and extreme distortions. Studies have variously typified works of pioneering and succeeding generations of contemporary Ghanaian painters (Amon Kotei, E. V. Asihene, Kofi Atubam, A. O. Bartimeus, El Anatsui, Ablade Glover, Ato Annan, Tei Mensah Huagie, Ibrahim Mahama, and others) to have been inspired by the prevalence of vintage elements (Ankrah, Donkor & Micah, 2022; Navei, 2022; Woets, 2019; Besancon, 2018; Fosu, 2014; Labi, 2013). While some of these previous studies focused on the materiality and techniques adopted by notable contemporary Ghanaian painters, others documented the contributions of selected Ghanaian painters to environmental conservation in Ghana.

What appears unaddressed is why some contemporary Ghanaian painters develop interest in the use of vintage elements in painting? The study, therefore, seeks to diagnose and establish the parameters of vintage elements in contemporary Ghanaian painting. This includes establishing the hidden concepts and sources of inspirations behind the use of vintage elements in contemporary Ghanaian painting. By so doing, the study aestheticised two selected paintings of five contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) to decode the vintage elements embodied in them and discuss their sources of inspirations.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Concept of Vintage Elements in Aesthetic Context

The study adopted Meera Hashimoto's (2005) theory of reawakening to what pertains in the world of art and the welcoming nature of each artistic inclination and style of presentation. In other words, the theory of reawakening is a revelation of the plasticity of the span at which an artist can push his or her artistic thoughts hidden either in the material content or subject matter of the work (Hashimoto, 2005). Vintage element in a palpable response to the theory of reawakening is much about materiality or experimentation of materials but in an aesthetic context (Mills, 2009; Folarin, 2013). It could also mean a look up to and/or experimentation of subject matter in a work of art. The historical connections of these Ghanaian vintage elements, as tangible objects or subject matters, make them unique and perhaps one of a kind not only in painting but also in other creative arts disciplines (Ankrah, Donkor & Micah, 2022).

Since Hashimoto's (2005) theory of reawakening canvasses that artistic thoughts of an artist could be hidden either in the material content or subject matter of the work, it aligns with the current study in that it explored the hidden concepts and sources of inspiration behind the use of vintage elements by five contemporary Ghanaian painters.

2.2 Verge and Practices of Vintage Elements by Some Contemporary Ghanaian Painters

According to Cilliers and Hansen (2019, p.325), "Pablo Picasso, in the midst of the Spanish Civil war 1936/7 said that art is the lie that makes us realise the truth". This is because, through art, society can understand the nostalgic stories of our environment.

The expression of the vintage, according to Encarta (2009), first speaks about wine. It is a modified French word 'vendage', meaning 'the grapes picked during a season' (Encarta, 2009). Encarta further illustrates vintage as objects that may be old, voluble in expression, or of high quality or qualities associated with or belonging to a specific era. In addition, vintage elements explain any memorabilia or collectible objects that are of high value because of their oldness, uniqueness, inimitability, or the quality of being one-off and have the essential capability to inspire, motivate and trigger off ingenuity (Bastoni, n.d). According to E. Sofo (personal communication, July 9, 2015) vintage elements refer to "things from immediate and distant past". Sofo further explains that

“anything with history or something that those before the present have used”. Sofo, a Takoradi-based Ghanaian painter who uses discarded pure water sachets and pure water plastic bags as a quilting technique for his art (Black, 2013), explained the word ‘vintage’ without giving a specific time frame. This assertion affirms Lane (2014), as cited in Sahraoui (2013) that vintage elements must have at least a 20-year period to be categorised as vintage though the wellspring of the word never made mention of a time frame. Sofo believes that once somebody has acquired the said object, in his case the pure water sachet, drank it or exerted energy on it, it implies it has a history behind it and is therefore fit to be classified as vintage. Sofo’s view is that the history starts with the factory or factories that manufactured the product and then to the distributor, to the buyer, to the user, into the streets/ gutter, to the collector, and finally to the recycler. To Sofo, these are the deeper and true essence or meaning of his vintage paintings. In summary, vintage elements in Sofo’s context could be the material, process, surface or subject matter. For instance, if one considers the painting of an ancient lorry (boneshaker), then the drawing of its parts, be it the reams, tyre, fender, bonnet or the wooden body, each of these parts of the lorry could be considered vintage because each has a kind of story behind it and a certain unique interest that needs attention.

From another material point of view, Kum-Essoun (2015), a Takoradi-based contemporary Ghanaian painter who uses the dried plantain pseudostem leaf sheaths in his painting, situated the dried plantain pseudostem leaf sheaths as a vintage material. In the context of Kum-Essoun, the dried plantain pseudostem leaf sheaths have a peculiar or unique character in the form of textured patterns that run in rhythmic lines. The use of dried plantain pseudostem leaf sheaths as a material in Kum-Essoun’s paintings stands out. Again, Kum-Essoun (personal communication, May 15, 2015) stated that a vintage element is any material, natural or man-made that could give the artist the character he is looking for. This means that the material does not need to be natural or artificial to be considered vintage. Kum-Essoun’s statement on vintage elements seems to be in contrast with Dondis (1974) who thinks that all elements of art should not be construed as material or medium for vintage. Kum-Essoun (2015) cited El Anatsui’s bottle tops, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson’s flip flops (Africanah, 2018), and Ibrahim Mahama’s jute art as an archetypal paradigm. To Kum-Essoun, a material by itself may not necessarily be a vintage element until an artist uniquely uses it to produce a work of art. Kum-Essoun further explains that vintage comes with an idea that has been put into practical use and therefore it is the idea and inspiration that make an object or material a vintage. This perhaps backs Sofo’s

(2015) description that the vintage element includes all the processes that a vintage material goes through before being converted into art.

A German-Ghanaian-based contemporary painter, renowned for his 'microcron' symbols and mannish figure paintings, B. Owusu-Ankomah (personal communication, 28 May, 2015) states that his symbols are vintage and if there is a word stronger than vintage then that is what his symbols represent; for they are old, perhaps as creation. Owusu-Ankomah's explanation of the dynamism of vintage elements sounds more mythical, mystical and/or numinous. Owusu-Ankomah believes that the symbols are the unconscious manifestations of one's subconscious thoughts which have deeper meanings. In other words, the vintage elements which range from the Adinkra-like symbols to the microcron symbol in relation to the human figures, are a universal manifestation of consciousness. The symbols in Owusu-Ankomah's paintings are ancient designs and a true manifestation of life, a design in secret geometry that reflects cosmic creation (Adepoju, Houghton, Kalkmann, Okediji, Owusu-Ankomah and Wemega-Kwawu, 2014).

Owusu-Ankomah's thoughts on vintage have to do with period and since symbols do not pertain only to the planet Earth but other planets such as Uranus and astrological signs such as horoscope and zodiac signs (Goos, 2019: p. 9), his symbols could be termed vintage, or perhaps an 'overly vintage'. It is, therefore, certain in Owusu-Ankomah's paintings that symbols as vintage elements proclaim the seed of life, the flower of life, and the tree of life.

In one of Owusu-Ankomah's scholarly studies, Adepoju et al. (2014) share that symbols, in general, have originated from the 18th century and therefore are ancient (Bell, 1997). Owusu-Ankomah claimed that the years for these symbols keep growing and multiplying because symbols are linked to the beginning of civilisation, which started in Africans 8000 years ago, as argued by Adepoju et al. (2014), and Bell (1997). Owusu-Ankomah (2015) again insinuated that cavemen are remnants of civilisation that went into retrogression for their consciousness to be reawakened. Owusu-Ankomah, therefore, states that humans have existed a long time on this planet since the very first civilisation which, perhaps, Currey (1990) possibly dates it as old as 6000 years ago.

An Accra-based realist and naturalist painter, E. Adiamah adds to the limelight on the historical antecedent of vintage art that he is mostly inspired by nature and thus uses the human figure in about 90 percent of his works (personal communication, June 11, 2015). For Adiamah (2015), nature goes back to the

history of humanity and constitutes his subject matter is of vintage elements. Adiamah's reliance on nature as vintage elements for his paintings is similar to the case of Owusu-Ankomah whereas Sofo and Kum-Essoun focused on the use of objects as vintage elements in their artworks. In other words, Adiamah and Owusu-Ankomah's elements are not tangible while those of Sofo and Kum-Essoun are tangible. Adiamah is inspired by the tear and wear elements of subjects that show rural women as they go through their daily activities. This is seen in the dresses, trays, head pans, and other subject matters in his works (Figures 7 & 8). Not only is Adiamah's subject matter a focus of the vintage but the way he uses more earth-related colours and scenes that show the typical rural Ghanaian settings.

Per the discussion, this study argues that vintage elements are objects, materials, or subject matter that have a trajectory of activities that bring nostalgic memories of situations in both the past and present.

3. Methodology

The study adopted qualitative descriptive design. The descriptive research method was used to subjectively describe the concepts and sources of inspirations behind the use of vintage elements by selected some contemporary Ghanaian painters (Doyle et al., 2020). This research method was appropriate because the study required the knowledge and values of the socio-cultural basis of the core subject of vintage elements for artistic expression (Epstein & Blumenfield, 2009). The expert type of purposive sampling method was employed to select five contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun), whose individually selected paintings focused on vintage elements in material content and subject matter. These painters are experts in the use of vintage elements for artistic expressions. The study used unstructured interviews and direct observation to collect data from the five selected contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun). The data were illustratively described using the visual analysis tool. The analysis specifically focused on the prevalence of vintage elements in the paintings of the five selected contemporary Ghanaian painters to reveal their conceptual meanings and sources of inspiration.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Radiance of Vintage Elements in Some Contemporary Ghanaian Paintings

The transformation and decoding of the elements of art or the materials used by some or the five contemporary Ghanaian painters are challenging and intriguing without understanding the intrinsic beauty of these paintings. Therefore, this section of the study presents intrinsic paintings of five selected contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) with the view of identifying and discussing vintage elements that inspired these artists.

4.1.1 Brother Owusu-Ankomah

Owusu-Ankomah's paintings (Figures 1 & 2) are such remarkable demonstrations and correlations of abstract precision with abstract symbols rendered in anthropomorphic perfection. The paintings show a rhythm of circles, blooming in achromatic radiance. Both paintings (Figures 1&2) reveal sublime use of colours suffusing the negative and positive spaces with deep contemplative colours that overwhelm the cool and light array of colours. Owusu-Ankomah's paintings are cladded with Adinkra and Astrological symbols that cut across ethnic, cultural, and national borders and always with the microcron (a symbol usually made of twelve circles that transform into another circle or ring).

A critical look at each Adinkra symbol in Figure 1 (titled *Kusum No. 4*) in conformity to the sublimity of the subject matter and in relation to the background, echoes the feeling of space and the planetary bodies of the universe. The unique presentation of each Adinkra symbol in Figure 1 also captures the thoughts and stories of fusing Afrocentric and Eurocentric cultures such as Africa, Western, Asia, and America (Fosu, 2014, Adepoju et al., 2014). This creativity exhibited in the work (Figure 1) shows how dynamic the artist is, as demonstrated in the transformation of homogeneous symbols into a universal symbol. This probably shows that these Adinkra symbols do not only ejaculate the manifestation of one common language but it further demonstrates the relics of nature. Perhaps, it is for this reason that during an encounter with the artist, he postulated that his art transcends beyond aesthetics (Mills, 2009).



Figure 1: “Kusum No. 4” (Source: Amoako et al., 2022)

The august presentation of male naked figures usually covered with symbols, as observed in Figure 1, evokes the vigorous existence of humans and the material essence of life. The nude figure (Figure 1) also suggests depth and further creates a feeling of tattoos. An optical focus on the posture of the muscular figure, which often reaches out to the Microcron symbol, creates an attentive concentration and conveys a sense of movement caressing the Microcron symbol, which consists of a twelve-dotted circular shape (ten white dots, one yellow dot and one brown dot). The transition in the position of the Microcron symbol, as seen in Figure 1, shows the focus of the composition and presents the twelve-dotted circle as the culmination of all the Adinkra symbols and the painting as a whole. The postures of Owusu-Ankomah’s stout male figure can be likened to that of Egyptian paintings (Adhikari, 2021), even though the face is not exhibited in the frontal view.



Figure 2: “Movement No. 28” (Source: Amoako et al., 2022)

The painting in Figure 2 also radiates an atmosphere of energy despite the calm silhouette attributes in representing the symbols. The intersection of Adinkra symbols and human figures in the painting (Figure 2), further encapsulates the critical soul of the Adinkra symbols, such as *Funtumfunefu Denkyemfunefu*, a Ghanaian symbol of two mythical crocodiles with a common stomach connoting unity in diversity that gives a common destiny (Adinkra Symbols & Meanings, 2020). A cursory view of the patterned textural effect created by the work (Figure 2), elevate the minds of the audience into the mythical realms that the painting evokes.

These Adinkra symbols’ genuine staccato and historical aesthetics reflect the concepts of beauty, taste, and style as they have changed over time and as they have been influenced by cultural, social, and historical factors. The historical aesthetics of these Adinkra symbols in Figure 2, perhaps comprehend how some contemporary Ghanaian painters are being inspired to paint. In this regard, Owusu-Ankomah is so much inspired by symbols of old, recent, and differing sources, which he referred to as vintage elements and perhaps overly vintage. No wonder his Adinkra symbols show so much cultural diversity of the Akan people that appear as modified alternates of the Egyptian and Japanese

symbols. For example, on the fifth column and row six of Figure 2, is *Aya*, an Adinkra symbol that has been altered to capture traces of *Ankh*, an Egyptian symbol of life (Adepoju et al., 2014).

4.1.2 Patrick Tagoe-Turkson

Patrick Tagoe-Turkson is one such a great talented artist who relates or incorporates found objects from his immediate environment into his paintings by repurposing and incorporating or re-enacting the found objects back into the environment. Tagoe-Turkson's works (Figures 3 & 4) help put up a good relationship with nature. Tagoe-Turkson's paintings are intended to starve off the abysmal behaviour of dumping things around with no regard for the environment and to prop up a better human co-existence with the environment. Tagoe-Turkson (personal communication, May 22, 2014) believes in making use of the off-beam to spruce up life, in other words, his art does not only focus on the aesthetic appeal but also salvages the environment. Tagoe-Turkson's usage of found flip-flops, *chalewote*, as they are known in Ghana, as unconventional material is seen in his "Chalewote kiosk" (Figure 3) and "Water lily" (Figure 4).



Figure 3: "Chalewote kiosk" (Courtesy of the Artist, Tagoe-Turkson, 2006)

Chalewote is a cheaply affordable footwear used virtually by everyone in Ghana. The magnitude at which the *chalewote* covers the wooden structure (Kiosk) as illustrated in Figure 3 speaks volumes of the painter's mind. Furthermore, Tagoe-

Turkson (personal communication, May 22, 2014) shared that the usage of flip flops on the kiosk appears to be dependent on one's social class. It is generally used in the bathroom or as shower flip flops but for the commoners, it is the daily walk-about sandals. For the rich, a little defect sees it discarded. Conversely, for the less privileged, the defect, which is wear and tear, attracts one patch-up upon another, until when it can no more take it then it is discarded, sometimes indecorously. Tagoe-Turkson cuts the flip flops to suit the intended work as he used mostly rectangular shapes in 'Curio kiosk' (Figure 3) to match up with the rectangular coordinate of the kiosk.

Africanah (2018) affirmed that:

The "Curio Kiosk Intervention" as the theme for the 2nd Kumasi Biennial Symposium in 2011 (Ghana) and Memory Repairs in 2016 (Frappant Gallery, Hamburg) focused on Kiosk constructed from flip-flops as traumatic experiences and shelters for migrants. The Chalewote kiosk was intended to whip up the audience's curiosity towards discarded chalewote or flip-flops.



Figure 4: "Water lily" (Courtesy of the Artist, Tagoe-Turkson, 2008)

According to Tagoe-Turkson (2015), he gets his *chalewote* by searching for them at the beaches. These *chalewote* (flip flops) usually come in layers of colours at the sole, which are sometimes worn out, because of extreme usage, thereby showing the underlining colours through the overlaid colours. These interplays of colours, according to Tagoe-Turkson, are what he uses to enchant and scintillate his viewers. Tagoe-Turkson cuts and joins the flip flops to conform to the shapes like the rounded shapes of water lily. The composition of the artwork in Figure 4 appears animated, due to the interplay of the colours, materials, and background.

The key lessons in Tagoe-Turkson's art from the discarded footwear are to promote recycled material in a more ecologically friendly and also to put away individual differences, weaknesses, flaws or challenges, and come together (Africanah, 2018), just as he darns and glues the torn and thrown away *chalewote* to make such beauty in one piece (Figures 3 & 4).

On another hand, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson's grounds for his works are as common yet unusual as his pigments. He uses common things in his immediate physical environment as his support to express his emotion in amazing ways. In 'Chalewote kiosk' (Figure 3), for instance, he made use of wood chassis as an armature for the kiosk. In 'water lily' (Figure 4), Tagoe-Turkson used a flowing water body, another common feature but also very rare in its usage as support for painting. He uses a common thing in life to make a serious impression about important issues. In Figure 4, Tagoe-Turkson mimics nature using waste, discarded and unwanted flip flops (*Chalewote*), and virtually the unthinkable, water. In these vintage paintings (Figures 3 & 4), Tagoe-Turkson simply reveals that even the most 'useless' has quality if it is well tracked down and used. Thus, he puts flip flops together in a manner that tells of the hidden beauty ingrained in the environment which people usually overlook. With these artworks, as observed in Figures 3 and 4, Tagoe-Turkson revealed that the deep thoughts of the audience which when well decoded can be of great value to society. These flip flops are considered vintage elements because they are embodied with history or narratives as a result of their usage that spans from when they were produced in the factory, to the distributor, and finally to the user (Sofa, 2015). Tagoe-Turkson continued to express that the *chalewote* again is a vintage element because it is an old object embellished with unique characteristics and surface appearance that cannot be inimitable as a result of wear and tear over a long period. It is these essential capabilities that make the *chalewote* a one-off material with memories that inspire, motivate and trigger ingenuity in Tagoe-Turkson's works.

4.1.3 Elijah Sofo

Another fascinating contemporary Ghanaian painter is Elijah Sofo who sees his unconventional painting dwelling mostly on the use of vintage elements such as; re-fabricated plastic sachet wastes and other eccentric materials (discarded fabrics) as an evolving innovation, pictographic language that is inspired by African ethnic writing systems and communal artistic tradition of quilt making. These inspirations are two distinct cultural practices that have played important roles in shaping African history and culture (Folarin, 2013). Sofo's choice of vintage materials (plastic sachet and fabric wastes) is also informed by the historical and physical attributes of the materials (Sofo, 2015). From Sofo's stance, the material is a metaphor for advancing dialogues between the artists, the material itself, the artistic process, the product, and the society for which the work is made. These dialogues rely on a number of themes such as; the relationship between art and the human experience; individualism and collectivism; and human activities and environmental sustainability. The empty water sachets (wastes) that constitute the principal vintage material for Sofo's artistic expressions, as shown in Figures 5 and 6, play a duality of roles. Firstly, the physical aesthetics of the empty waste sachets, that is, their natural colorations, textures, text, as well as, their overall composition draw people's attention to the assemblage.

Secondly, the concept of Sofo's human touch and procedure of work is likened to the communal process of quilt-making in Africa (Black, 2013). The stories of quilt making are told as families gather to sew pieces of cloth, transforming the otherwise ordinary empty bags into contemporary symbols. The quilting evokes waste and this societal shift reflects Sofo's native Ghanaian and African cultures from a collective to an individualistic approach to life (Black, 2013). *Maturing bond* (Figure 5) is one of Sofo's numerous assemblages of plastic sachet wastes. The found pieces of fancifully printed fabric, raffia ropes and rattan measure 280 cm by 200 cm. Fabricated in 2013 by Elijah Sofo, the composition is characterised by a syncopated rhythm created by the movement of black zigzag lock stitches that bind each component of the composition (Figure 5) to the other.



Figure 5: "Maturing bond" (Courtesy of the Artist, Sofo, 2013)

Plastic sachets, square-shaped and predominantly covered with a variety of blue and red printed texts and motifs, arranged both horizontally and vertically in Figure 6. While the fabrics, kaleidoscopically adorned with intricate geometric patterns, are sparingly spread within a number of plastics stitched together in a square shape. The amalgamation of the stitches with the angular-shaped plastic sachets and fabric form zigzag symmetrical and geometric pattern. The stitched sachets and fabrics are stretched on two parallel vertical rattans with strings of fabrics joining the two into one component. On the cane bars are rolls of raffia that firmly hold each linking string to the rattan while patches of red, white, black, and yellow colours lie on blocks of black. While the rattan holds no symbolic significance to the artist, they serve as the frames and balancing mass that stabilise the assemblage on the display panel.



Figure 6: "Interrogation II" (Courtesy of the Artist, Sofo, 2012)

The expression of Sofo's thoughts in his works explains that the bespoke raffia ropes around the rattans as seen in Figure 6 are meant to create a feeling of man's overarching responsibility to his environment. The kaleidoscopic pattern of the colours of the patched fabrics, as observed in Figure 6, creates variety whilst the natural colorations on the plastic sachets also give texture and depth to the work. The projections at both ends of the work give it an irregular alignment, whilst the subtle undulating waves on the right of the composition coupled with the zigzag pattern of the stitches at both sides of the band of colourfully patched fabric in the middle of the composition, gives it a relaxed rhythmic feel. E. Sofo (personal communication, July 9, 2015) disclosed that the bands of patched cloths add colour to the composition and symbolise the richness of mother earth while the waste plastic sachets connote the wanton assaults and destruction of the natural environment.

Sofo continued to say that the kaleidoscope uses natural colourations from the waste plastic sachets and the patches of cloth (Figure 6) also denote the competition of space between the waste plastic sachets and nature. The loosely hanging strings of raffia ropes at the base of the composition recalls the flexibility

of nature. The dominant overlays of fabrics over the plastic bags reflect the artist's intention to focus on the aftermath of littering the environment with the waste of water sachets. The varied stitches reflect the destructive bond between Mother Nature and some elements of human inventions, thereby, affirming the title *Maturing bond*. The symbolic meanings attached to the vintage materials used in Sofó's works reflect the historical context and expressive memories of sachet rubber as a non-degradable material to nature (Donkor et al., 2021).

4.1.4 Emmanuel Adiamah

Emmanuel Adiamah is another prolific contemporary Ghanaian painter whose paintings speak of the conspicuous candour and bravery of society, especially in relation to his presentations on issues of women. Adiamah's paintings put women on the utmost pedestal of discussion as far as their daily struggles for survival are concerned. His paintings; *Go lime* in Figure 7, and *Young Hawker* in Figure 8, often show the glamour of women in spite of the grueling and operose work conditions they go through under the sweltering Ghanaian sun. "Most of my genre themes are humanistic-inspired" (E. Adiamah, personal communication, June 09, 2015). Therefore, Adiamah's paintings stream on the emotions and sufferings of women, and the local colours of the environment. He presents, in his paintings (Figures 7 & 8), the unusual calm women display despite the hustling and bustling settings at the Ghanaian markets. This, he does by presenting in his paintings of women in trendily seated postures, often in front of what they are selling.

Almost all of Adiamah's works, as relatively shown in Figures 7 and 8, indicate a feeling of the sellers' virtual bathetic massage of the wares despite the absence of customers around their wares. Thus, Adiamah captures not only the lovey-dovey between sellers (market women) and their wares but also the deep and true tenacity of Ghanaian market sellers in these paintings. The unique colour intensity, in the case of Figure 8, creates the impression that the items, thus the tomatoes have just arrived from the farm even though the paint rubber container in which the tomatoes have been arranged sings a contrary impression.



Figure 7: “Go lime” (Courtesy of the Artist, Adiamah, 2012)

Adiamah derives his inspiration from nature and in his opinion; nature goes back to the history of humanity. As a humanistic painter and a hard-edge realist, most of his paintings talk about human beings and women form over 90 percent of his subject matter (Adiamah, personal communication, July 16, 2015). Apart from the human figures, he draws the attention of viewers to the countryside or rural settings as another inspirational source. He says the countryside is gradually being abandoned yet no matter how ugly it may be, it presents a reference point that everyone looks up to (Adiamah, 2015).

Adiamah’s thoughts on vintage elements explain the fact that some contemporary Ghanaian painters have abandoned the rural setup for an urban lifestyle forgetting that there is beauty at rural settings, and that is what he portrays in his artworks. He shows these in his painting by trying to bring to the fore the beauty that seemed ignored and untainted life of the countryside, instead of the overly populated urban centres and all the ills they bring. Adiamah (2015) believes that, consciously and/or unconsciously, many city dwellers are attempting to bring a piece of the rural setup into their houses by growing plants in the premises of their houses. To the artist (Adiamah, 2015), he is rekindling or re-enacting the unique, old, historical, and one-off moments or scenes that seem to elude people’s imagination as a result of urbanisation and

industrialisation in the cities. This is what Adiamah shows in Figure 7, where a woman in a seated posture is selling lemons. The painting captures a unique, minute-by-minute moment or narrative that goes unnoticed in the environment and society as a whole. The painting, as observed in Figure 7, is again garnished with an old, unique, but historical object, such as the basket with a white sack positioned on the left side of the human figure and a plastic violet stool on which the woman sits like the *Agbogbloshie* market seller. *Agbogbloshie* relates to an attentive market sited in the heart of Accra, Ghana. The main subject in Figure 7, which is the human figure, is also modelled with fancy fabrics that are craftily and uniquely treated and painted to give the subject matter surface quality and form. These objects, which add up or double up as the subject matter, are considered vintage elements (Lane, 2014). This is because each component or element, from the basket to the plastic stool, and the treatment of the human figure, in the painting (Figure 7) is unique, old, historical, voluble in expression and a one-off painting.

In this regard, Adiamah's choice of colours are mostly earth colours; burnt umber, burnt and raw sienna, and yellow ochre among other earth-related colours are influenced by his love and affection for the natural milieu. Most of his paintings are mixed media as he uses fabric for the clothing of his figures and acrylic for the other parts, Figure 8 attests to that. Adiamah's naturalistic approach makes him share the emotions of people, especially Ghanaian women whom he believes are the softer vessels yet carry most of the burdens of humans, something they do so well, no matter their age, to the admiration of their male counterparts.



Figure 8: "Young hawker" (Courtesy of the Artist, Adiamah, 2013)

Adiamah's paintings also decode the attitudes and attributes of ordinary people who engage in day-to-day activities within the countryside; an example is in Figure 8. Adiamah's themes are humanistically inspired, and so his paintings stream on the emotions and sufferings of women, and the local colours of the environment. These emotions and sufferings of women are unique moments and subject matters that are not static but rather keep changing. The "*young hawker*"; Figure 8, renders the calm manner of the human figure seated on an old paint container, despite the warm conditions of the weather, as expressed in the strength of the shadows and the reflections on the hand reaching out to the tomatoes. The size and strength of light and dark tones in modelling of the head and limbs especially the shoulder (Figure 8) capture the aggression associated with hawkers. The melodious attention given to the various landmarks within the work establishes the critical connection between the artist and his audience. The tensed textured treatment of the background and foreground also reveals the striking affection to earth schemes such as yellow ochre and browns. The subject matters portrayed in Figures 7 and 8 are activities that keep changing as a result of urbanisation, such as shopping malls replacing some traditional markets.

4.1.5 Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun

Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun is another dynamic contemporary Ghanaian painter who makes use of dried plantain pseudostem leaf sheaths as his support after which he applies intricate transparent washes of colourations. His paintings exhibit a masterly control of various elements and principles of art. The vintage elements (textures on the plantain barks) for Kum-Essoun paintings capture dazzling glazing of colours in geometric shapes and forms. As shown in Figure 9, Kum-Essoun applies these colours in a variety of transparent strokes and drips geometrically to break the monotonous sound of textures created by the plantain bark. These transparent strokes, ranging from shaded blue, yellow, orange and red, not only break the rhythmic orchestra of textures but further allude to the impression of depth. In his painting titled; *Journey* (Figure 9), Kum-Essoun's tensed strokes of ultramarine washes are placed within two rectangular orange symbols to suggest a feeling of footsteps.

A critical gaze at the eccentric movement of the rectangular symbols from the top to the brown jute perhaps imbues the title *Journey III* (Figure 10). Whereas the monumental use of jute and series of rectangular symbols coupled with the dazzling slashes of drips create a feeling of a lorry station. This is because, to the artist, the life of a person presents a rhythmic flow of obstacles that could be associated with the varied striking use of rectangular washes in the work (Figure 10).



Figure 9: "Journey " (Courtesy of the Artist, Kum-Essoun, 2004)

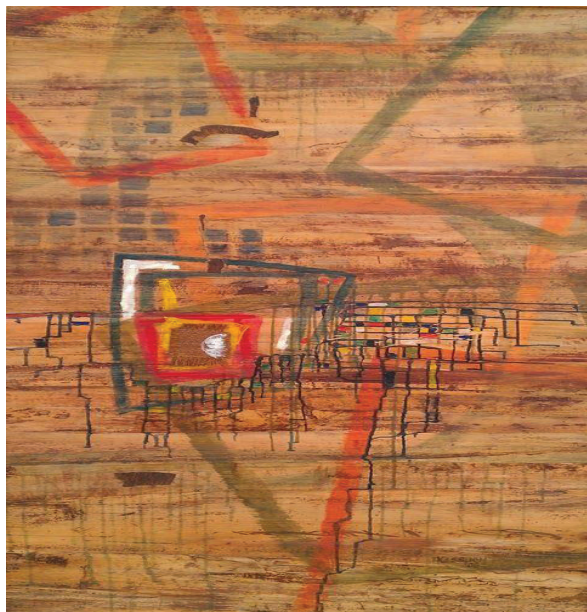


Figure 10: "Journey III" (Courtesy of the Artist, Kum-Essoun, 2006)

Journey III (Figure 10), significantly employs dried plantain pseudostem leaf sheaths as vintage elements as indicated by the artist, where his brutal and teasing use of drips and strokes is domineering in the work. A squint of one's eyes on the jute and the work as a whole in Figure 10 creates a critical feeling of an exit or perhaps a door to another dimension or spiritual world, if any. It is plausible in the artist's hypotheses that bring out the illusion of vintage as climaxed in the material content of the work. The network of drips both horizontal and vertical in connection with the patches of red, green, yellow, ultramarine blue, orange and white reveal an authentic feeling of Kente cloth. The stressed patches of colours coupled with the occasional use of drips also capture a feeling of a beach with a crowd of holidaymakers. The transparent but distinctive use of minimalist shapes creates a feeling of glass panels vertically arranged on a carpet foreground within the work. *Journey III* in (Figure 10) also reveals similar expressions in the eccentric movement of shapes. This is vehemently evident that Kum-Essoun is strongly inspired by his vintage material (plantain barks). Kum-Essoun's works as arranged in certain elements and principles of design prove that nature is the master artist as it provides individual artists with inspiration.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study sought to identify two selected artworks of five contemporary Ghanaian painters and decode the vintage elements embodied in the artworks. In the corroborative context of the contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) engaged by the study, sourcing aesthetic inspirations from vintage elements is a creative and explorative way of utilising the environment for contemporary Ghanaian painting.

It was established that vintage elements were used by these selected contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah, and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) to unveil divergent aesthetic inspirations as seen in individual artist's resilient, mastery and variant forms of paintings. These aesthetic inspirations from vintage elements motivated the uniqueness of each artist's thoughts, which appear different yet are well in line with the held-out intents and purposes. The intriguing aspect of vintage elements in each artist's paintings tickles the mind into play, thereby giving birth to thoughts.

The study also revealed that the visual aesthetics of vintage elements have a material content and subject matter serving as a metaphor for advancing dialogues between these contemporary Ghanaian painters and their societies. These painters' choice of vintage elements and their aesthetic suitability were clamoured on the symbolic meanings attached to the vintage materials. The symbolic meanings of these vintage materials were associated with their closeness to nature in historical context and expressive qualities. The activation of all human senses in the creative arts with vintage elements offers prospects to individuals to create and decode meanings in contemporary Ghanaian painting. Therefore, vintage elements are rife in Ghana and should not only be seen as material content but as scenic and thematic subjects for contemporary Ghanaian painting. It is recommended that the thoughts and usage of vintage elements in painting by the five contemporary Ghanaian painters (Brother Owusu-Ankomah, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Elijah Sofo, Emmanuel Adiamah and Papa Kofi Kum-Essoun) should be sustained to inspire other contemporary Ghanaian painters including the upcoming contemporary Ghanaian artists to also adopt vintage elements in their paintings to help communicate their metaphysical ideas into an artistic context.

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About Authors

Abraham Agbeshie is a lecturer at the Department of Industrial Painting and Design, Takoradi Technical University, Takoradi. He holds a Master of Philosophy degree in Arts and Culture acquired from the University of Education, Winneba, and is currently pursuing a PhD programme in Arts and Culture. His artworks are characterised by the historical "old boneshaker" (Bedford Lorries) which predominantly served as a mode of transport during the post-independence era in Ghana. The primary philosophy of his work is to mirror the value of blank surfaces and expressively reconcile the nostalgic past of these vintage vehicles (boneshakers) with present happenings.

Agbeyewornu Kofi Kemevor is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Graphic Design at the University of Education, Winneba. He holds a PhD in Art Education, from KNUST – Kumasi. He is a trained teacher by profession. He has taught design for several years at all levels of undergraduate and graduate education programmes and has extensive examining experience.

Alex Darpoh is a lecturer at the Department of Industrial Painting and Design, Takoradi Technical University, Takoradi. He holds a MA in Art and Culture from the University of Education, Winneba. Like Karl Marx, Darpoh believes 'art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it' and he uses his 'hammer' to rejuvenate, revitalise and give back life to things otherwise seen as waste. He uses these 'waste' as his pigment to make his art.

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