

Review of: "Unearthing the Cultural Values of Personalities in Photorealism Portraiture: The Iconography of the Works of the Ghanaian Fine Artist, Samuel Otu"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The author sets out to “examine the subject matter of five of Samuel Otu’s photorealism portraiture as part of a project he termed *The African Story Series* to see whether they are mere representations of the personalities made possible by his skill, or whether they convey certain social, political or cultural nuances of contemporary Africa”. in order to establish comparisons between the five subject matter uses a method derived from Panofsky’s three-step approach to iconographic analysis ie an attempt at a formal analysis of line, shape, colour, texture, mass and composition.

The author has a wonderful photorealist artist to work with and each piece of work is competently executed. He says at the beginning that he has made visits to the artist and has spoken to him about what each piece is intended to convey - that appears to be recorded in the body of analysis under each image which is also presented with high resolution and good reproduction values.

I think this is a good attempt to privilege the work of a Ghanaian artist. The choice of the five portraits selected is interesting, perhaps because, with the exception of the young girl, all the others are well known personalities and with many photographs of Mandela and Kofi Annan so that they stare out from the portraits as familiar images.

Since the materials used for each are similar, and more or less a frontal face, head shoulders and part torso, shown, apart from the young girl which focuses more on her face, again we are able to judge for ourselves the competency and sure line of the artist. In the field of photorealism he is on par with good artists.

There are three points i would perhaps make to the author for improvement of his analysis. First, since he spoke to the artist about the making of these images, perhaps apart from the initial quotation from the artist we could also hear more about his making of the image, any challenges with this or that subject he encountered and what were his own thoughts in selecting these five portraits.

Second, perhaps this is a problem of language, but it is politically incorrect to refer to Lowania Anku as “succulent” - i am not sure how this word succulent is read in Ghanaian languages or even how it is used to describe women or the female figure - she is clearly a lovely woman, very healthy - with an open trusting eyes and the portrait shows he readiness to embrace her new culture as well as how well the adornment suits her.

Third, the Mandela portrait allows far more depth for reading, i found that the texture and gradations used by the artist is

resonant of an animal's skin almost and wondered if the artist was not imbuing Mandela with the land itself - there was much more to read from some of these portraits from an imaginative perspective

In conclusion, this is a good attempt but I would encourage the author to read Peter Manjuel Reading Pictures, and to trust his own eyes more, to be imaginative when reading paintings, the artist renders the work but leaves it to the viewer to interpret. While Panofsky can provide a baseline for interpretation, the analyst must also enter the frame more, be more perceptive and intuitive and defy rules that confine us to read images according to predefined categories of thought.