

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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Unearthing the Cultural Values of Personalities in Photorealism Portraiture: the Iconography of the works of the Ghanaian Fine Artist, Samuel Out

Dickson Adom, Samuel Otu, Babaaradio Kombui et al.'s article 'Unearthing the Cultural Values of Personalities in Photorealism Portraiture' examines the subject matter of five of Samuel Otu's photorealism portraiture as part of a project termed 'The African Story Series' to see whether they are mere representation of the personalities made possible by his skill or whether they convey certain social, political or cultural nuances of contemporary Africa.

The scholarly work defines Portraiture as the reproduction or recording of an individual's appearance and personality in media such as photography, painting, sculpture and digital media. It traces the root of portraiture to the prehistoric era, especially the ancient civilization of Egypt. The paper asserts that photorealism emerged as a result of the revival of the 1960s and 1970s in the American art movement. Photorealism also referred to as Hyper-realism, is said to have evolved from Pop-Art and uses the camera and photograph as reference. It describes photorealism as a genre of art that involves the reproduction of image as precisely as possible from photograph which could be in printing, drawing, collage, sculpture or other mixed media, but with emphasis on the accuracy or exactness of the representation of reality.

Dickson Adom, Samuel Otu, Babaaradio Kombui et al.'s made references to some artists in Africa and other parts of the world whose related art works have used photorealism to explain how popular and relevant the genre is in contemporary time. Also, five selected portraits of a renowned Ghanaian Artist- Samuel Out were utilized as an integral part of the series of telling African story. The portraits are those of Dr. Kofi Annan- a former Secretary General Of the United Nation (figure 2); Dr. Nelson Mandela- a former President of South Africa (figure 3); Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo –Addo a former Ghanaian President (figure 4); an African girl child of about age three (figure5); and Lowania-an American citizen married to a Ghanaian .

Apart from the general artistic description of these portraitures, the paper made analytical explanations of specific messages the images portray or convey in telling African stories. On Dr. Kofi Annan , the artist noted that the gaze of the subject exhibits the role that Dr. Kofi Annan played at the UN which brought peace to the World, justice, equity, hope and relief to many who were living in poverty among others. On its artistic analysis of Nelson Mandela's portraiture, the paper posits that his demeanor depicts a complete absence of pain and bitterness thereby portraying a visual testimony of former President's statement of "forgiveness" he made after his release from the Prison.

In its analytical explanation of Nana Addo Dankwan -Akufo Addo's portraiture, the paper pointed out that the President's posture and gaze is one that reflects deeper thoughts bordering on how to surmount the teething difficulties of a developing country like Ghana, particularly in the wake of the global health crisis - the Covid 19. On the portraiture of the African girl child of about age three, the paper analyzes the artistic presentation of the image that the frown gaze portrays a feeling of a deep anger revealed through somewhat squinted eyes and enhanced by the appearance of a pair of carved-in on the forehead above the eyebrows. To buttress this, the paper quoted the remark by another artist- Wango that though photorealism can be very engaging as not every portraiture reveals the intending meaning by the artist to the viewers and as such the viewers at times will have to derive personal interpretations.

On the portrait of Lowania Anku , (a south American citizen from Guyana, dressed in a full Ghanaian traditional regalia from the Akan ethnic group), the original artist-Samuel Out, pointed out that the portrait talks about understanding and embracing cultural diversity. In analyzing the portraiture, the paper posits that her solemnity, noble and gracious gaze reflect her underlying passion to make a significant impact on African societies in the areas of domestic violence and physical abuse with special focus on vulnerable women and children. It explains further that what the artist portrayed through her gaze is the social service-hearted access of the subject.

In spite of the elucidating artistic analysis of the five portraitures, certain observations must be pointed out in respect of the issues raised about the messages the portraitures are said to convey to the viewers. First, the paper asserts that portrait in the ancient times was primarily used to exalt the nobles, the powerful and to commemorate the dead. It must be noted that the functions of this phenomenon goes beyond that, it was used in depicting all historical events taking place in the society. This is because, quite a lot of the images carved, painted drawn are being utilized as sources of reconstructing the history of the ancient periods when there was no written record. Invariably, the art of painting, carving and drawing could be regarded as a popular culture of the periods.

Also, the paper explains that the portraits were used by the artist to draw the attention of the viewers to the contemporary challenges of the African society. This cannot be justified in as much as all the portraits analyzed have nothing tangible that shows the viewers about the real challenges of African societies in the area of politics, economic instability, religious and ethnic crisis, abject poverty, environmental degradation, maladministration and lot more. It can be inferred that the artist must have expressed his subjective imagination of what the portraitures conveys.

It is essential to stress that photorealism is a media which captures the mood of a subject or a scene as at the time it is being taken. That is, it is a momentary expression of the current reality, thus, the mood of a subject or scene could be real or artificially created.

Summarily therefore, the analysis or interpretations of the portraitures by the artist could sometimes be the subjective views of the artist as it is of the five portraitures used in this paper. A person who has never known the subjects in the portraits or familiar with their antecedents would find it difficult if not impossible to juxtapose their mere facial gaze with what the writers claim they convey especially as it relates to the social, political or economic challenges confronting African countries.

