

# From Ghanaian Modernist Painting Genre to Contemporary Functionality:

*A Spotlight on Samuel Prophask Asamoah*

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## Abstract

This is a biographic study of Samuel Prophask Asamoah, one of Ghana's remarkable artists. It was aimed at showing how his philosophy and technique of painting are influenced by the early Ghanaian modernist painting genre while explaining how his themes reflected contemporary functionality in Ghana. The Feldman system of criticism guided the scholarly analysis of five selected paintings of Asamoah to unearth their contemporary significance. Personal interviews with Asamoah, as well as the intelligent comparison of his works with his contemporaries and other published scholarly literature, pivoted the intellectual discussions of his skillfully executed paintings. The discussions revealed that Asamoah's paintings present the developmental challenges in Ghana and also offer solutions to them. His style of painting demonstrates that the Ghanaian modernist painting genre still exerts a strong influence on some young artists despite the radical changes seen in the art of the contemporary over the last two decades.

**Keywords:** *Art Criticism, Modern Ghanaian Art, Contemporary Ghanaian Art, Cultural Heritage, Development, Ghana*

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## Introduction

Samuel Prophask Asamoah is an internationally acclaimed young Ghanaian artist who is, one of Ghana's living treasures. Asamoah's (Figure 1) natural talent and passion for art emerged at a tender age while drawing and coloring many of the things he observed in nature. His father who was a craftsman positively impacted his development as an artist by providing him with the materials he needed for his artistic creations. Asamoah is passionate about colors. As a result, he works with diverse media such as oil paint, acrylic paint, oil and chalk pastels, color pencils, and charcoal with a cotton canvas as his preferred working surface. Asamoah told me that he loves to paint with acrylic paint because it helps him to communicate his thoughts easily and faster on the canvas, unlike oils that take longer to dry. After completing high school where he studied Visual Arts, he went to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology to study Integrated Rural Art and Industry in 2003. An initial visit made to Asamoah's home residence in June 2010 revealed that he had a myriad of breathtaking paintings; ranging from completed to on-going projects. Besides, there were huge piles of newspapers which were confirmed to be the artist's way of constantly upgrading himself with news circulating in the country. This is the strongest force behind the developmental themes espoused in his expressive paintings as a social commentator, making him one of the indispensable contemporary painters in Ghana. These themes span many areas: from governance, transportation, through agriculture, finance, to health, business, and many others.



Figure 1. Portrait of Samuel Prophask Asamoah, December 14, 2019, Asuoyeboa, Kumasi, Ghana. Photo by the first author in the artist's home studio.

Also, the themes espoused in his paintings show Asamoah's tremendous empathy for the rich Ghanaian cultural heritage. Although, the themes espoused in his paintings also show Asamoah's tremendous empathy for the rich Ghanaian cultural heritage, the majority of these themes as evidenced in over 200 hundred paintings were dominated by feminine figures encapsulating the activities the Ghanaian woman goes through in her life. Asamoah believes in the empowerment of women in the search of for solutions to the problems of mankind and frowns

on the often popular male-dominated scenes in every facet of life. This may be traced to the veteran Ghanaian artist, Ablade Glover, who is known for his representation of females and crowds and who has impacted Asamoah's life and style greatly.

Asamoah's love for the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, Akua'ba figures, and African masks were nurtured while growing up seeing his father incorporate them into the stools he carved as a craftsman. Thus, Asamoah uses the symbols in his paintings to offer viable solutions to the problems staggering Ghana's development.

As it is exceptional of his style as a versatile painter, his paintings depicted a multiplicity of realistic, semi-realistic, and abstract styles. Asamoah has great mastery in the application of his paint in a somewhat impasto style that he refers to as a 'relief sculptural paint application', which is uncommon, if not unique. Due to the creative nature of his paintings, his works have won the hearts of both local and international art collectors and lovers with some being government leaders. Many of his works are displayed in both private and public collections. He has participated in many local and international exhibitions. Asamoah has participated in major exhibitions such as the 2015 'Art For Every Home' in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, 'Colours that speak' in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2013, 'Life' in Cotonou, Benin in 2012. He was part of the delegation of Ghanaian contemporary artists who exhibited in the 'Fidak' exhibition in Dakar, Senegal in 2011. Asamoah was not left out when Ghanaian contemporary artists were once invited to partake in two important African art exhibitions in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso with the theme 'Artisans Africa in et Circuits de Distribution' in 2008 and 2010. On the international scene, Asamoah has participated in the 'Gold Coast Artist' view from the top exhibition, 2006 in the United Kingdom. Also, his works were exhibited at the two important exhibitions in 2012 that brought Ghanaian contemporary artists together with their Asian counterparts. These were the exhibitions themed 'Ghana to Korea' and 'The Living Ocean and Coast' at the Moree Gallery in Yeosu in South Korea. In 2014, Asamoah took part in the exhibition that aimed at showcasing the historical heritage of countries themed 'Repository of History' at Muscat in Oman. In Lisbon, Portugal, Asamoah was the only African painter who took part in the Fia Lisbon International Handicraft exhibition in 2015. He exhibited a group of works titled 'Legacy' which he deliberately created to inform the world of the state and quality of contemporary painting in Ghana. Asamoah's vibrant and ever-growing painting career holds greater prospects for Ghana's development as his works offer time-tested solutions to Ghana's developmental challenges on the canvas.

This paper applies Feldman's system of criticism in analyzing five paintings of this industrious Ghanaian artist with remarkable international fame, Samuel Prophask Asamoah. This analysis is aimed at discussing the significance and impacts of Asamoah's works in solving the problems confronting Ghana. It tactfully examines his works in the light of related literature on touching on the various cankers in the Ghanaian society.

### An Overview of Ghanaian Modern and Contemporary Art

Ghanaian modern and contemporary art advocates incorporation of traditional Ghanaian values, symbols, and themes, often expressed in new and diverse media. Labi (2013) observes that from the 1970s, though Ghanaian modern and contemporary painters have tactfully employed painting techniques such as impressionism, pointillism, impasto (which Asamoah refers to as relief sculptural painting) in presenting modern and contemporary Ghanaian culture narratives which may be attributed to Western formal training in Art, efforts have often been made to maintain the traditional Ghanaian ideologies evident in the symbols and objects embedded in the creative pieces. However, there have been very radical changes in the contemporary narratives in Ghanaian art in the last two decades. These have been driven by a spirit of experimentations with new media and concepts, redefining and broadening the boundaries and borders of what was initially understood in Ghana as contemporary. The freedom to create and experiment with various media found objects, and waste, as opposed to the conventional way of engaging in artistic productions in the various fields such as painting, sculpture, metal works, pottery, and graphic design, coupled with large-scale installations and conceptual, as well as performance art, has defined what is contemporary in Ghanaian art. In his recent comprehensive work on contemporary art in Ghana, aside from the rising interest in experimentations with new media and themes, Labi (2019) attributes this new paradigm of contemporary narrative in Ghana to the new teaching methodologies and pedagogies on what constitutes contemporary, the promotion of young emerging artists on the international art space via art biennials and triennials and the interests of foundations, experimental groups such as ArtHaus, SaNsA and BlaxTARLINES as well as artist residencies in Western art institutions and the tactful use of technology in offering virtual spaces to promote artists.

The themes are not just driven by local events and socio-politico-economic landscape in the country but also global, making the art transcultural and transnational as theorized by Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009). Popular themes explored in the Ghanaian contemporary range from the creative depiction of natural phenomena and observations as well as analytical representations of events and conditions in the local and global political and economic landscape with a careful interplay of the artist's thoughts and imaginations. For instance, the high rate of corruption and crime, political tensions, issues on the poor management of waste, and environmental resources are themes exemplified in Ghanaian contemporary art in the last two decades (Labi, 2019). Generally, it can be concluded that contemporary in Ghanaian art can be seen as a period of high innovation through a high sense of freedom of expression in the selection and use of diverse materials, found or natural materials as well as exotic art materials, themes, and concepts. This is seen largely among young artists, many of whom have been influenced by the radical changes in art pedagogies, technology, the internet, and the wave of local and global socio-political and economic milieu. Due to their ease of the virtual environment, art biennials and triennials, and the efforts of foundations dedicated to the promotion of the contemporary, their innovative creations have earned international recognition.

## Methodology

This paper is a biographic analysis of Samuel Prophask Asamoah and his works. In building a better appreciation of the significance of his creatively executed paintings and how they portray the rich Ghanaian cultural and societal values, Feldman's system of criticism (Feldman, 1994) was applied. The process involves four major steps in the analysis of the works of art. These include a description of the sensory properties of the artworks, analysis of their formal qualities, discussion of their intrinsic and extrinsic interpretations, and evaluating its significance in the society (Subramaniam, Hanafi, and Putih, 2016). Scholarly discussions of the selected works of Asamoah in the socio-cultural context relevant to the Ghanaian society have been made. Comparative analysis of Asamoah's works with the philosophies or concepts, techniques, and subject matter or themes of other Ghanaian and global artists was done to show how they influenced and/or had similarities with Asamoah's paintings. Scholarly articles on the themes presented in Asamoah's marvelous paintings are discussed to highlight their applications to contemporary situations in Ghana. Personal interviews with Asamoah were carried out to unearth his philosophy, style, and interpretation of his works. The themes for the five selected works analyzed in this work are:

1. True Solution (Figure 2) - Women Empowerment
2. Better Investment (Figure 3) - Agricultural Production
3. For the Sake of Tomorrow (Figure 4) - Food Security
4. Revivalism in Music (Figure 5) - Ghanaian Traditional Music for Moral Education
5. Culture in Retrospect (Figure 6) - Preservation of Ghanaian Cultural Heritage

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The True Solution – Towards Women Empowerment

During the post-independence period in the early 1960s and 1970s, there was a growing agitation and concern for gender equality, especially for fighting against discrimination against women. Women activists, properly referred to as feminists spearheaded the formation of the feminist art movement around this time to fight for the rights of women while highlighting the political differences women experience in their lives (Feminist Art Movement, 2018). In contemporary Ghana, several feminine artists such as Kate Badoe, Adwoah Amoah, and Marigold Akufo Addo are using art to raise consciousness about the dangers women face and to revolt against some cultural values in the traditional Ghanaian culture which have restricted the roles of women to domestic chores despite their superb abilities to contribute significantly to the nation-building (Casely-Hayford, 2002; Casely-Hayford and Akabza, 2009). A very disturbing canker in the domestic situations in some regions of Ghana is domestic violence where the rights of women and children are trampled upon by some men, even assaulting women (Dery and Diedong, 2014). Despite the growing campaign through academic discourse as well as existing policies and legal instruments in contemporary Ghana rolled out against domestic violence such as the Domestic Violence Act 732, this absurd practice continues to exist. Thus, there is the need to beef up the campaign against domestic violence using artworks. Women must be dignified and given the freedom to contribute to the diverse fields of development in Ghana instead of selling them

off in early marriages (Offorma, 2009). The contemporary Ghanaian woman has stood at the frontiers of the affairs of Ghana, with some of them showing by their exemplary achievements that women's efforts in nation-building are significant (Anyidoho and Manuh, 2010). Thus, Prophask joins the campaign to end domestic violence and promote women empowerment using his sterling paintings.

In his work titled 'The True Solution' (Figure 2), Asamoah suggests proactive ways of ending domestic violence while putting women empowerment on Ghana's development priority list. He joins the few gender-based Ghanaian contemporary artists such as Priscilla Kennedy, Adwoa Amoah, and Na Chiankua Reindorf who use their works to fight against gender stereotypes in Ghana. The primary goal of the painting (Figure 2) is to empower women just as Serge Attukwei Clottey does, using his popular 'My mother's wardrobe' exhibited at Gallery 1957 (Figure 3). Yet, unlike Clottey who explores traditional gender roles such as spirituality, ancestry, and family through his works, Asamoah rather highlights the need to eradicate stereotypes that discriminate women's roles, especially in education. Through the semi-abstract depiction of women draped in the two most significant academic graduation robes for Master's and Doctoral programmes, Asamoah visually posits that women are capable of reaching the self-actualization stage in Maslow's hierarchy to earn much recognition, respect, and fame. The artist believes that domestic violence is not part of the rich cultural heritage of the Ghanaian people rather he admits that the Ghanaian cultural values advocate respect for women. In an interview, Asamoah disclosed that 'It is an illusion to accept that naturally men were created to abuse their wives and children in the African society' (Prophask, Personal Communication, 20/6/2019). However, he mentioned that traditional culture in some Ghanaian societies encouraged bad and inhumane practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriages that demeaned women and crippled their freedom and abilities to self-develop and to be more productive in the Ghanaian society. Thus, as a 'true solution' to this age-long canker, he suggests the promotion of girl-child education to the last education level so that women can team up with their male counterparts in all the facets of development in contemporary Ghana while making significant inputs in decision-making processes (Anyidoho and Manuh, 2010).

In the composition, he uses the two women in graduation robes who have been able to complete their master and doctoral programmes to debunk the recent Ghanaian societal perception that women need only the first level of education which is the pursuance of degree programmes just to support themselves and their families. This perception is wrong as it limits the abilities of women. Thus, Asamoah campaigns via the painting, the need to encourage and support women to pursue postgraduate programmes in the tertiary institutions of Ghana. This would make women earn the respect and admiration (as seen in the self-actualized woman in the composition), the true solution to domestic violence, as they can contribute significantly to the finances in the domestic home (Haj-Yahia, 2000). However, if married women can pursue higher education, his painting instructs men to help them to shoulder the domestic responsibilities, especially in taking care of the children in the house. This is depicted by the man holding



the child in the composition. In an interview with the artist, he cautions that: 'the domestic duties are not only for the wives. Husbands are to support their wives in performing the domestic duties to assist the women to have considerable time to attend to their academic obligations' (Prophask, Personal Communication, 20/6/2019).

He suggests in the painting that women's empowerment will not be complete if women's choices of academic programmes and job preferences are restricted. He illustrates in the composition, the need for giving women the freedom to choose their academic and job preferences, similar to the concept of the Spanish feminist artist, Maria Acha-Kutcher who uses her portrait series in the Pop art genre to campaign for gender parity in job and academic opportunities (Girls on a Mission, 2015). Asamoah depicts in the painting, two abstracted women playing the musical instrument of their choice, herein symbolizing the academic and job preference. He uses the painting to warn the members of the contemporary Ghanaian society to repudiate all forms of prejudice against the job and academic programme preferences made by women. Thus, women should not be coerced to narrowly pursue academic programmes in the humanities and/or vocational programmes but to be allowed to study programmes in engineering, medicine, and the sciences if that is their ambition and choice. The wrong mentality of some Ghanaians that programmes of study and pursuance of jobs in the fields of engineering, medicine, and the sciences are solely in the preserve of men must cease in the contemporary Ghanaian society.



Figure 2. True Solution by Asamoah Samuel, 35 inches × 60 inches, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 2018, Collection of the artist.



Figure 3. My Mother's Wardrobe by Serge Attukwei Clottey, 2015, Courtesy Gallery 1957.

## 2. Better Investment – Investment in Road Network, Industrial Machinery and Means of Transport to Boost Agricultural Production in Rural Communities in Ghana

Agriculture in contemporary Ghana has been the main source of employment for 70% of the rural population (World Bank, 2012). The agricultural sector is estimated to be two to four times higher in raising the economies of countries than other sectors (World Bank, 2011). The agrarian rural folks in Ghana feed the entire country with their agricultural produce. Transportation is one of the influential factors that affect rural agricultural development. It improves access to produce markets that cater for surplus farm production (Akangbe et al., 2013; Girvan, 2007). Unfortunately, the road networks in the agrarian regions in rural Ghana are in deplorable states. This results in great losses of farm produce as well as post-harvest losses (Adom, 2018). Also, the absence of mechanized simple tools for agricultural production and vehicles for transporting farm produce results in high post-harvest losses (Darfour and Rosentrater, 2016).

Asamoah uses his painting titled 'Better Investment' (Figure 4) to highlight the deplorable road networks in the agrarian regions in rural Ghana which result in great losses of farm produce as well as post-harvest losses. In the painting, Asamoah's interest in the affairs of women is seen again in his representation of the agricultural workers in femininity. Two women in the composition represent the vast smallholder farmers spread across Ghana. They are seen engaging in maize production, the largest staple crop that is grown in the forest, transition, Southern regions, Upper West, Upper East, and Northern regions of Ghana (Voto, 2015). Due to the vastness of maize production in contemporary Ghana in comparison with other crops in the field of agriculture, Asamoah deliberately uses it as the face of agricultural production in contemporary Ghana (Prophask, Personal Communication, 21/6/2019). The smallholder farmers in the rural regions in Ghana also engage in the laborious manual shelling of maize from the maize kernels using the fingers as well as minimal pounding to separate the maize from the maize kernels. These labour-intensive production methods are responsible for the severe yield losses (Amponsah, Oteng-Darko, and Kumi, 2012).

Asamoah represents this condition in the painting to register his disdain of the failure of the ministry of agriculture to provide these poor rural farmers with industrial maize shellers and small-scale hand-cracked or pedal-powered maize shellers (Darfour and Rosentrater, 2016). He advocates the embracement of agri-



cultural mechanization by the government of Ghana to improve the agricultural sector in the country. This is represented in the composition by the abstracted plowing machine at the left bottom part of the composition. Simple industrial tools could have reduced the time spent on the manual shelling of maize and eased the pain faced by the smallholder farmers. According to agricultural experts, a technology-driven agricultural production (Fenny, 2017) would also boost maize production which is currently pegged at 1000 kg/ha for Ghana and her African counterparts, far below the averages of Asia and Latin America (Tiawo and Kumi, 2015).

The realistic depiction of the big rubber car tyre in the composition illustrates the need for the government of Ghana to invest in viable means of transportation for the agricultural produce from the rural communities to the urban market centres. Sadly, many rural farmers do not have easy and good access to means of transport, exposing them to incidences of losses on-farm and through thefts, bushfires, physical damages, and animal destruction (Aikins and Akude, 2015). The introduction of motor tricycles to farmers by the District Agricultural Development Unit (DADU) of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) has enhanced the transportation of crops from the rural agrarian regions in Ghana to the market centres in urban regions. Yet, more has to be done as many rural smallholders have not been captured under this project. The exaggeration of the size of the tyre in Asamoah's painting may be his emphasis on the supply of vehicles in good condition to the farmers. In an interview, Asamoah noted that these motor tricycles and pick-ups must be given to farmers at moderate prices with flexible terms of payment. He added that vehicular maintenance should also be a priority to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA). He suggested that MoFA organize workshops to educate the smallholder farmers on simple maintenance strategies for their vehicles. Regular checkups of the vehicles used for agricultural activities by smallholder farmers would reduce the eventual high cost of overhaul repair and maintenance as a result of total breakdown (Crossley, Chamen and Kienzle, 2009).

Despite the existence of the Export Marketing and Quality Awareness Project (EMQAP) aimed at rehabilitating, surfacing, and constructing feeder roads to link major horticultural produce growing areas in the country (MoFA, 2018), the project has suffered funding challenges. As a result, many of the road network projects linking farming communities to their market centres have been stagnant. Even in rural regions where road networks are impassable, challenges such as traffic tariffs are high and the market for the produce is uncertain and thus slows the progress in rural agriculture (Tunde and Adeniyi, 2012). As Asamoah portrays in the composition with a well-constructed road network depicted in perspective, he strongly argues that the construction of the first phase of road networks, which is the filling of demarcated roads with gravels, is insufficient if the government of Ghana wants to register considerable successes in the field of agriculture. The road network must be upgraded to all-weather roads, tarred, and maintained in their good condition all the time as seen in the composition. This is identified as critical for good service quality in agricultural production (Salas, 2006; Xie and Levinson, 2008). Asamoah's painting titled, 'the better investment' is a wake-up

call to the Ghana government to invest more into agricultural mechanization and proper transportation infrastructure for smallholder farmers to boost agricultural production in contemporary Ghana.



Figure 4. Better Investment by Asamoah Samuel, 60 inches × 35 inches, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 2019, Collections of the Artist.

### 3. For the Sake Tomorrow- The Key to Food Security in Ghana

Food insecurity in Ghana has been an age-long developmental challenge. It is estimated that the commercial food imports and food aids that Ghana has used as a supplement for her food produced in the last 15 years is 4.7 percent (Ayifi, 2017). Despite the food and agriculture sector's developmental policy and the medium-term agricultural sector investment plan by the Ghana government to avert food insecurity, the blight remains. In his painting titled 'For the sake of tomorrow' (Figure 5), Asamoah asserts that the challenge of food insecurity in Ghana is due to the lack of innovative ways of preserving the food that we produce. In the painting, he represents fruits, the most perishable produce in Ghana (Yaro, 2013), using the realism technique of painting to highlight the need to find a lasting solution to the high losses in agricultural produce in Ghana. He may not be far from the truth because the food scientists in Ghana have highlighted that farmers in contemporary Ghana have 'limited knowledge in post-harvest management, especially for perishable produce, resulting in high post-harvest losses of about 20%-50% for fruits and vegetables, roots and tubers, and about 20%-30% for cereals and legumes' (Darfour and Rosentrater, 2016, p. 4). Thus, in the painting, he skillfully represents some of the pieces of equipment used for scientific experimentations. These include test tubes, conical flasks, beakers, burette, and pipette to propose a solution that the government must invest in funding for researches into technological, scientific, and innovative approaches to food preservation. These innovative strategies must be simple, cost-effective, and perpetual. These research activities, as he suggested during an interview, 'should find innovative ways of combining both traditional food preservation methods that have stood the test of time with the recent scientific food preservation methods' (Prophask, Personal Communication, 11/7/2019).

In the composition, Asamoah portrays a female scientist who is busily engaging in a scientific experiment with the quest of finding a lasting solution to arrest

the menace of food insecurity in Ghana. Here, we identify his interest in involving women in every facet of contemporary Ghana's developmental processes. He is an advocate for the education of women in the fields of engineering and the sciences to help in solving the challenges in contemporary Ghana. This is seen in the representation of abstracted and semi-realistic female heads flung at the sides and lower parts of the composition. Asamoah admitted that women generally have great tolerance and patience and as such have a high affinity and natural tendency for undertaking long-term researches that would yield positive results. Thus, his suggestion of bringing women on board in Ghana's search for innovative strategies to counter the food security challenges is not misplaced. This is because 48.7 percent of women are into food production in Ghana (MoFA, 2018) and sadly, they have been using only traditional food processing technologies that are strenuous and often result in low yields of less quality (MoFA, 2007; MoFA, 2018).

With the ever-increasing rate of population growth pegged at 2.2% annually (Roser, Ritzie and Ortiz-Ospina, 2019), Ghana must think of sustainable ways of preserving the food produced that fluctuates due to the 'altering of the spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall and the availability of water, land, capital, biodiversity and terrestrial resources caused by climate change' (Yaro, 2013, p. 3). The mantra should not only be on the shoulders of the government. Asamoah calls on the collective efforts of industries manned by private organizations to help in the country's fight against food insecurity. This, he colorfully portrays with some gear wheels and axles in the painting. Asamoah is right when he admonishes the Ghanaian society, in general, to look at sustainable ways of solving the food security challenges in Ghana not just for the present generation but more importantly, 'for the sake of tomorrow.'



Figure 5. For the Sake of Tomorrow by Asamoah Samuel, 60 inches × 45 inches, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 2014, Head Office of the Ghana Export Promotion Authority, Accra, Ghana.

#### 4. Revivalism in Music – Renaissance of Ghanaian Traditional Music in Contemporary Ghanaian Music for Moral Education

Music in Ghana has taken different dimensions during this contemporary age. There are several music genres such as jazz, pop music, Blues, Rock and Roll, Reggae, Ragga, R & B, Indian and Arabic songs that have impacted traditional Ghana-

ian music (Adom, 2014). Now, the highlife music which has a lot of traditional elements has given birth to a new genre of music called hip-life and hip-hop, which are largely influenced by Western Ragga music. The influence is also seen in the use of Western musical instruments such as guitars, pianos, saxophones, cymbals, and others. An organized synergy of both the traditional instruments and foreign musical instruments results in interesting rhythmic instrumentals which when coupled with morally charged lyrics would produce great music that morally educates and entertain listeners. However, this cannot be wholly said of the contemporary music churned out in Ghana lately. Many well-meaning Ghanaians are worried about the morally-degrading lyrics that impact negatively on the moral behaviors of Ghanaians, especially the youth. During an interview, and simultaneously observing a guitar and a flute hanged on his living room wall, Asamoah relayed how he enjoys Ghanaian traditional music and his personal view of how Ghanaian music should be used as a vehicle for educating the Ghanaian populace while he lamented on the sorry state of Ghanaian contemporary music. As such, he uses his paintings as a vehicle to morally educate the general public on the need to be circumspect of the kind of music they listen to. His paintings also caution contemporary Ghanaian musicians not to abandon the traditional Ghanaian music and its instruments but utilize them effectively with the foreign musical instruments while accompanying the instrumental with morally chaste and culturally educative lyrics. He is in league with Kofi Antubam that Africa's modernity must be rooted within its traditions (Antubam, 1963).

The traditional music serves as a vehicle for the intangible cultural heritage of a people (Mai, 2013). Thus, they must not be abolished. This is the concept behind his painting titled 'Revivalism in Music' (Figure 6). Asamoah intimated that he holds the personal belief that a synergistic combination of the traditional Ghanaian musical instruments and Western musical instruments would give an interesting musical genre. As Antubam rightly said, Ghanaian culture is not static. It must be open to new ideas to help in its development. However, as Labi cautioned, the opening up to new ideas borrowed from other cultures must not in any way 'depart its roots and context within which this development is taking place' (Labi, 2013). In principle to the Ghanaian music culture, there shouldn't be blind copying of all the facets of Western culture with a total abolishment of the roots of our contemporary Ghanaian music. Asamoah's thought; very similar to Nkrumah's ideology of pursuing the 'African personality' in all spheres of development in the post-independence era, including music is not misplaced. Granted, Western musical instruments have been a regular feature in the works of early modern Ghanaian artists like Larry Otoo and Ato Delaquis. These artists painted musicians playing saxophones, pianos, and guitars "all Western musical instruments" with all figures in the composition wearing indigenous Ghanaian clothes, dancing to Ghanaian dance styles from morally charged lyrics from traditional proverbs. Asamoah portrays a similar ideology by showing two mouths in the composition that symbolize the lyrics of songs that must be dignified and morally educative. The mouth at the top of the composition which is a mixture of red, yellow, and brown stands for the indigenous Ghanaian musical lyrics that offer moral advice on successful life especially for the youth and educates them on their culture as opposed

to the morally corrupt lyrics in some of the foreign music shown with the mouth painted in the well finished and organized yellow and red lips. The morally corrupt lyrics look organized from the outside but could damage the moral attitudes of listeners, especially the youth. Thus, he advocates the renaissance and utilization of the traditional Ghanaian lyrics that offer good moral education into contemporary Ghanaian music. This is symbolized by the Sankofa bird symbol at the base of the composition which in this context means returning to pick the good elements (Babbitt et al., 2015; Abissat and Korem, 2014) in the Ghanaian traditional songs. This appropriation of the Sankofa symbol is equally evident in Owusu Ankomah's works to establish the fact that one's cultural heritage must always be rediscovered in the development schemes of Ghanaian contemporary societies (Ringle, 2010). Using the Sankofa concept (fetching for what has been forgotten) in this painting, Asamoah campaigns for a revival of the rich traditional Ghanaian music that offers wise counsel on practices of good living that lead to development.



Figure 6. Revivalism in Music by Asamoah Samuel, 60 inches × 45 inches, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 2018, Collection of the artist.

##### 5. Culture in Retrospect- Preservation of Ghanaian Cultural Heritage

Asamoah demonstrates his great love and mesmerization for the rich Ghanaian cultural heritage in the painting titled 'Culture in retrospect' (Figure 7). The lavish



display of the popular Adinkra symbols in the work shows his intention to project the Ghanaian cultural heritage as other Ghanaian artists such as Papa Essel, Wisdom Kudowor, Owusu Ankomah, and Rekki Wemega-Kwawu (Figure 8) explicitly do in their works (Owusu-Sampah, 2014). Asamoah's deliberate selection of these three Adinkra symbols, Gye-Nyame (Except God), Nyame biribi wo Soro (God is in the Heavens) and Sepow (Executioner's Knife) symbol is to educate the global audience on the Ghanaian spirituality, belief, and value systems. As it is unique of his style, Asamoah represents the symbols in three-dimensionality to symbolically bring them to life to show the pivotal roles these symbols, though traditional, play in the contemporary Ghanaian society. The high recognition of the supreme deity in the lives of Ghanaians is shown by the Gye-Nyame (Except God) symbol and Nyame biribi wo Soro (God is in the Heavens) symbol. Granted, every individual must have to face the challenges or curves of life (Babbit, Lachney, Bulley, and Eglash, 2015; Cook, 1979). However, the Ghanaian cosmology asserts that a person can only be successful if he is blessed by the supreme deity whose powers are eternal, indicated by the Gye-Nyame (Except God) symbol. Thus, aside from hard work, a person must be morally upright and must follow the statutes of the immortal Supreme deity (symbolized by the Sepow- Executioner's Knife symbol) (Glover, 1992) to be imbued with the power to overcome the challenges in life. Ideally, a typical Ghanaian believes that a person must demonstrate faith in the powers of the Supreme deity to assist him to overcome every obstacle in life and express hope in Him, shown by the Nyame biribi wo Soro (God is in the Heavens) symbol (Abissath and Korem, 2004). It is clear that Asamoah cleverly uses the philosophies in the Adinkra symbols to symbolically express the religious belief systems of the Ghanaian, similar to Wiz Kudowor and Wemega-Kwawu. And like Essel, Asamoah succinctly blends the Adinkra symbols with their proverbial interpretation to speak volumes about the Ghanaian value system (Magee, 2010).

Also, there are several mask representations in the work, showing the influence of the father of cubism, Pablo Picasso whom Asamoah admires greatly for his love and high interest in African sculptural forms. The mask-like faces in the composition aim at showing the strong Ghanaian belief in ancestors as living shades in the Ghanaian communities, keen in the affairs of the country (Adom, 2014), especially issues about economic development, depicted in the composition by the full and crescent-moon shaped pots. The strong belief in the ancestors as spirit agents who are supervising all activities to reward and punish persons, visualized by the Sepow adinkra symbol, aims at inciting Ghanaians to stand by the virtues of justice in all transactions targeted at national development. It is in a similar ideology with Bucknor's work titled 'Libation' (Fosu, 2014) where mask-faced human figures were depicted to bring memories of communication with the ancestors in the mystic spirit world. The works of Asamoah and Bucknor reflect the African belief of always ensuring peaceful co-existence and equilibrium between members of the physical world and metaphysical world to effect sustainable development in African societies (Amponsah, 1977).

As an iconic work depicting the Ghanaian culture, Asamoah shows a representation of Akuaba dolls. The representation of the Akuaba doll in compositions in

Ghana is to portray the high currency Ghanaians place on fertility and the respect for motherhood (Sarpong, 1974). Though Asamoah places emphasis on the breasts of the doll, considered a fertility symbol just as Amon Kotei does, he loves to do it in the spirit of total abstraction in a cubist style unlike Kotei who adopts a semi- abstraction approach to represent female fertility as evident in his works ‘Good mother’, ‘Reclining Woman’, ‘Cooking’ and ‘Mother and Child’. It is noteworthy that in a typical Ghanaian cultural setting, married couples are dutifully expected to give birth to children for the sustenance of their families, clans, and the entire society (Antubam, 1963). Thus, it was labeled as a curse and a bad omen from the ancestors to live without the seed of procreation (Mosely, 2012; Danquah, 2008). This cultural value of childbearing, especially in the family environment, still exerts some considerable influence in contemporary Ghanaian society.

He visually showcases the iconic Adinkra symbols and Akua’ba dolls that have come to epitomize the Ghanaian culture in the contemporary global society. He asserts that contemporary Ghana can only progress in development if policymakers take great cognizance of the traditional Ghanaian values and ideals. He enumerates that a blind following of foreign culture while throwing aboard the rich traditional Ghanaian cultural values is the canker behind the stagnation of Ghana’s development. Thus, embracing a synergy of the good elements in both the Ghanaian culture and other foreign cultures is the sure path to Ghana’s development.



Figure 7. Culture in Retrospect by Asamoah Samuel, 60 inches × 45 inches, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 2007, Collection of the artist.



Figure 8. Blue Symphony by Rekki Wemega-Kwawu, Acrylic on Canvas, 162.6 cm 133.4 cm, 2003, Photo courtesy Wemega-Kwawu.

### Traditional Ghanaian Objects and Cultural Symbols Used in Asamoah's Paintings

Traditional objects and symbols used in carrying out everyday life activities such as religious, social, utilitarian, and others are often visually presented in Asamoah's paintings. The popular Ghanaian cultural symbols used by Asamoah are the Adinkra symbols. The term 'Adinkra' means 'farewell' or 'bidding goodbye' to a departed soul. The Adinkra symbols are cultural iconographical symbols with philosophical meanings often linked with the accepted cultural, moral, and ethical values of the Asantes (The largest and most dominant ethnic group of the Akans of Ghana). The Adinkra symbols are often stamped as designs on clothes called 'Adinkra clothes'. These clothes are funerary clothes worn for mortuary rites of a deceased person. Though these clothes are worn by the Asantes in particular, they are now accepted and worn by all the other ethnic societies in Ghana. The Adinkra symbols have come to be identified with the Ghanaian. Interestingly, the Adinkra symbols are used as designs for various crafts and artistic productions such as metal arts, graphic arts, pottery, and ceramic wares, leatherwork, basketry, jewelry, sculpture, architecture, tattooing, and many others. The table below explains the Adinkra symbols and traditional Ghanaian objects used in the paintings of Asamoah discussed in this manuscript.






Adinkra Symbol	Philosophical Meaning and Uses
 <p data-bbox="368 580 767 607">Nyame Biribi Wo Soro (God is in the heavens)</p>	<p data-bbox="842 412 1353 510">It is a traditional symbol from the Akans (A famous ethnic society in the southern region of Ghana). It gratifies the belief in the supreme deity (God) and it is a symbol of hope that God will intercede for the people in all their calamities.</p>
 <p data-bbox="453 898 683 925">Sepow (Executioner Knife)</p>	<p data-bbox="842 678 1353 896">The <i>Sepow</i> is a knife or dagger for executioners at the traditional court in Ghanaian societies. It is used for executing capital judgment on culprits who defile the moral standards established in the society that often warrants death. This verdict is decided by the ruling chief and his cabinet of elders. <i>Sepow</i> is a symbol of authority and justice. To prevent the condemned person from invoking any form of curse on the king and his elders, their mouths are torn open with the <i>Sepow</i> (dagger).</p>
 <p data-bbox="480 1205 655 1232">Nkyinkyim (Twisted)</p>	<p data-bbox="842 974 1353 1261">The <i>Nkyinkyim</i> (Twisted) Adinkra symbol offers a moral lesson about life's uncertain path. The twists in the symbol indicate the different aspects or stages in one's life journey. The path can sometimes be 'smooth' with enjoyable moments (good health, well-paid employment, the affection and support of loved ones, material and spiritual wealth, etc.). Likewise, life's journey could be 'rough' at times (death of a loved one, sickness, famine, disasters, unemployment, etc.). Thus, one must be well informed on this so that s/he can prepare himself/herself to be able to cope with the daunting moments in life which are highly expected.</p>
 <p data-bbox="376 1594 719 1621">Akoko Nan (The leg of a chicken or hen)</p>	<p data-bbox="842 1310 1353 1574">The <i>Akoko Nan</i> (The leg of a chicken or hen) Adinkra symbol portrays the Akan proverb that says 'The leg of hen steps on the chick but it does not kill it'. This implies that the mother hen can deliberately step on the chick as a sign of discipline. Yet, the discipline is done lovingly without the intention of physically assaulting the chick. It is a symbol of parenthood, nurturing, and discipline. It paints the imagery that children have to be disciplined to teach them the importance of applying sound moral values in their lives. The symbol educates the crucial role of discipline in parenting.</p>
 <p data-bbox="432 1980 647 2007">Gye Nyame (Except God)</p>	<p data-bbox="842 1671 1353 1980">The <i>Gye Nyame</i> (Except God) Adinkra symbol shows the belief Ghanaians, in general, have about omnipotence (all-powerful), omnipresence (everywhere), and omniscience (knows everything). It shows the supremacy of the power and authority of the supreme being in the affairs of man. It shows his greatness and the topmost position He is believed to occupy in the hierarchy of spirits in the cosmos. It propagates the religious value of reverence, obedience, and respect to God which is expectant of every community member in Ghana. It underscores the need to acknowledge Him in all societal gatherings or events in the Ghanaian community through prayers, songs, appellations, and sacrifices.</p>

Figure 9. Table of Ghanaian traditional symbols used in Asamoah's paintings.



Adinkra Symbol	Philosophical Meaning and Uses
 <p data-bbox="343 571 587 600"><i>Adinkra hene (Adinkra king)</i></p>	<p data-bbox="769 358 1278 504">The <i>Adinkra Hene (Adinkra king)</i> symbol is said to be the parent symbol, from which all the other Adinkra symbols were developed. Being an overload of all the other symbols, it signifies authority, leadership, greatness, and charisma. These qualities are often ascribed to a leader of a group, or the chief or king of an ethnic society.</p>
 <p data-bbox="375 1003 614 1032"><i>Sankofa (Go back and get it)</i></p>	<p data-bbox="769 649 1278 891">The <i>Sankofa (Go back and get it)</i> Adinkra symbol. This symbol symbolizes the essence of always learning from the past, especially from the wealth of indigenous knowledge of the elderly in society. This knowledge which includes the belief systems, cultural values, norms, statutes, and traditional events must not be forgotten but preserved for posterity. The material and immaterial culture of the Ghanaian people must be revisited and critically examined in the quest to chart a path for the future or formulate sustainable policies for the present and future generations.</p> <p data-bbox="769 913 1278 1052">Also, the symbol throws caution to all not to downplay correction, reproof, or ideas that were initially rejected. The symbol calls on all members of the Ghanaian society to exhibit humility in all their endeavors, accepting their wrongs and always seeking to make amends or correct a wrong path taken.</p>

Figure 9 continued. Table of Ghanaian traditional symbols used in Asamoah's paintings.



Traditional Ghanaian Object	Functions
 <p data-bbox="359 1608 689 1637">Ghanaian Pentatonic Xylophone (Gyil)</p>	<p data-bbox="826 1288 1278 1433">The xylophone is a percussion musical instrument consisting of a set of tuned flat wooden bars with different sounds, working like the keyboard of a piano. It has gourd resonators and beaters, usually made from old, discarded tyres. It is played during traditional and contemporary events in Ghana.</p>
 <p data-bbox="391 1971 657 2000">The <i>Atentenben</i> (Bamboo flute)</p>	<p data-bbox="826 1706 1278 1921">The <i>Atentenben</i> flute is a reedless, aerophone, woodwind instrument produced with bamboo that produces sound from the air blown into its circular openings at its top. It is the most popular melodic instrument in Ghana which is traditionally used to play folk songs as well as funeral songs during funeral processions, it is played together with other musical instruments for joyous events such as wedding and outdoor ceremonies, parties, etc.</p>

Figure 10. Ghanaian traditional instruments and items used in Asamoah's paintings.






Traditional Ghanaian Object	Functions
 <p data-bbox="523 831 678 857">Ghanaian Masks</p>	<p data-bbox="901 459 1361 651">Ritual and ceremonial masks are an essential feature of the traditional culture and arts of Ghana. They are usually used during social and religious events and ceremonies. The masks convey symbolic messages understood by the people. They are used during initiation rites and festivals. They are believed to be abodes for the spirits of deities and ancestors who attend those events.</p>
 <p data-bbox="539 1391 662 1417">Kuku (Pots)</p>	<p data-bbox="901 1003 1361 1196">Traditionally, pots (<i>Kuku</i>) in Ghana are produced from clay by hand through hand-building techniques (such as using clay in blocks or ropes) and used for storage purposes (storing water, pomade, riches, herbal medicine, etc.), for cooking, and as receptacles for carrying ritual objects or items. The pottery profession is largely dominated by women in Ghana.</p>
	<p data-bbox="901 1442 1361 1680">The Akua' ba doll is a sculptural piece in Ghana, with feminine features carved from a type of hardwood called Sese and blacken with soot or black pigment. Traditionally, the doll is used as a fertility charm believed to imbue fertility potent in barren women who desperately desired children. The features of the doll ideally epitomize the ideals of beauty among the Asantes of Ghana. Today, the doll is used for decorating homes, traditional courts, and other communal places in Ghanaian society.</p>

Figure 10. Ghanaian traditional instruments and items used in Asamoah's paintings.

## Conclusion

Asamoah's biographical study has revealed that his main inclination towards artistic production is to visually offer proactive solutions to Ghana's contemporary developmental challenges. His themes drive the techniques he employs, though it has been his style to show emphasis using realism and semi-realistic representations in his compositions. However, he skillfully interplays abstract and realistic forms in his paintings. The works of Asamoah speak directly to policymakers and Ghanaian citizens in Ghana on what they must do to effect developmental changes in Ghana. Interestingly, his works permeate through various fields of Ghana's development, from agriculture, roads and transportation, through medicine, environmental sanitation, to many others fields. The great impacts of his works, as well as the international recognition of his works through numerous exhibitions, as well as both private and public collections, make him one of the renowned artists in Ghana who merit a space in scholarships on Ghanaian contemporary artists. The paintings of Asamoah clearly show the great impact of the Ghanaian modernist painting genre in the development of contemporary art in Ghana.

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