Unearthing the Personal and Cultural Values

of Personalities in Photorealism Portraiture: The Iconography of the Works of the Ghanaian Fine Artist, Samuel Otu

Dickson Adom,[+] Samuel Otu,[++] Babaaradio Kombui,[3] Joe Adu-Agyem[4] & Peggy Ama Fening[5] (Ghana)

Abstract

The roots of portraiture are most likely to be traced to if not prehistoric times, at least ancient Egyptian civilization. Over time, various forms, styles and significance of this genre emerged progressively in line with the various artistic traditions in history. In these contemporary times, portraiture strives immensely on the advancement of technology thereby giving rise to photorealism not only in the West but also among African/Ghanaian fine artists. The Erwin Panofsky's three-step approach to iconographic analysis was used to examine five meticulously pencil-rendered portraits by the Ghanaian photorealist Samuel Otu in the light of contemporary portraiture. The paper utilized a series of one-on-one interviews with the artist amidst studio observation to obtain primary data alongside relevant secondary sources of data. It was revealed that beyond the subjectivity or likeness of the subjects portrayed, the artist used these masterpieces to draw the attention of the viewer to the contemporary challenges of the African society.

Keywords: *Contemporary Art, Likeness, Portraiture, Photorealism, Ghanaian Art*

Introduction

Portraiture is the reproduction or recording of an individual's appearance and personality in media such as photograph, painting, print, sculpture, and digital media. Portrait-making is an old form of art that traces its roots to if not prehistoric times, the ancient civilization of Egypt. Though portraiture serves a multiplicity of functions, it was primarily made in ancient times to exalt the noble, the powerful and to commemorate the dead (Pound, 2022). Through the ages, portraiture has been created in a variety of styles and media (Wango 2020). Freeland (2007) remarked more styles emerged as more people were portrayed, and the form changed. From ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, Byzantium through Renaissance to the modernism and post-modernism times, portraiture was executed in conformity with the prevailing styles of each artistic period. The turn of the twentieth century however, saw an expansion in the production of portraiture owing to the increasing interest in abstract and non-figurative art rendition exemplified in several avant-gardes such as fauvism, cubism expressionism, etc. with notable artists like Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Max Beckmann respectively. Whiles, there was a dip in portraiture in Europe and America by the mid-twentieth century, there came a revival by the 1960s and 1970s which culminated in the American art movement, Photorealism/Hyper-realism evolved from pop-Art (Ihringová 2022). Unlike the traditionally realistic portraiture of the modern and post-modern eras that required several sittings of the subject (sitter), photorealism uses the camera and photographs as references. It is not only a change in style and form of portraiture but also a change beyond its traditional representational purpose to include emotional, social, political and cultural elements (Lansroth 2015 as cited by Wango 2020).This latest approach to portrait making which strives on photographs and digital technology enshrined portraiture as an integral part of contemporary art practice not only in the West but also in Africa. Several young contemporary African fine artists are absorbed in photorealism sometimes referred to as hyper-realism including Ghanaian Samuel Otu. In 2014, Samuel Otu started a portrait drawing series called *The African Story* in which he identified some eminent African personalities, whose lives in his own words "have imparted their generation and the unborn generation in their countries, Africa and the world as a whole". Quoting an African proverb to support his quest Samuel says "until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter". He added that, the story of Africa has always been told by the West and it has been twisted to suit their interest but here he is to use his artworks as an African to highlight the contribution Africa has made and continues to make in making the world a better place.

Photorealism as an Art Movement

Photorealism was an art movement that came into existence around the 1960s and 1970s in America. It is a genre of art that involves the reproduction of images as precisely as possible from photographs (Lansroth, 2015). Though the reproduced image(s) could be executed in painting, drawing, collage, sculpture or other mixed media, the emphasis however is on the accuracy or exactness of the representation of 'reality' (Gustlin & Gustlin 2022). Photorealism artists relied purely on the use of cameras and photographs as a primary impulse for the subsequent reproduction of the image(s) in paint or other media (Ihringová 2022). Photorealism differs from traditional realism of the pre-modernist era in that it uses a camera to record a visual occurrence before reproducing it on a support (Bent 2013). With the camera, information is gathered and the captured moment is then transferred onto the canvas by the photorealist artist in a way that gives a photographic appearance to the fin-

ished painting. According to Liu (2020), the main feature of photorealism is to use modern photographic techniques to make objective and realistic depictions of photographic results. The primary aim of photorealism is to reproduce images from photographs so that the human eye could not distinguish between the original and the resultant drawing or painting (Bent 2013; Mouka 2017). First named in 1969 by Louis K. Meisel, a New York art dealer, the photorealism art movement emerged in the United States and declared a clear preference for realism against idealism and abstract expressionism (Gustlin & Gustlin 2022). Some of the proponents of this photo-based art movement during the period include; Chuck Close, Ralph Goings, Richard Estes, Robert Bechtle, Duane Hanson, Audrey Flack, Charles Bell and Don Eddy (Taggart, 2021). The subject matter of the works of the early photorealists centered on ordinary everyday life themes. It ranged from industrial objects such as automobiles and motorcycles, simple urban life, to the representation of human faces (Ihringová 2022). Akin to all other art movements in the world, photorealism (sometimes referred to as hyperrealism or super-realism) gained the needed recognition in the global art space particularly in the latter half of the 1960s when the use of camera and photographs had received complete acceptance in everyday life (Odom 1981). With the prowess of digital technology today, photorealism as an art genre has become an integral part of the contemporary art world.

In Africa, the use of camera and photographs as references for image representation has a long history. This art genre remains an important part of contemporary African art as several young and upcoming fine artists continue to engage camera, photograph and other digital media for creating visual reality. Some contemporary African photorealist particularly in painting and drawing (using charcoal, graphite pencil and ballpoint pen) with international reputations include but not limited to; Kelvin Okafor, a Nigeria descent based in London, Ebuka Emmanuel from Nigeria, Solomon Ikechukwu from Nigeria, Richard Amankwah from Ghana, Enam Bosokah from Ghana, Thembalami Ndlovu from Zimbabwe and Eddy Ochieng from Kenya. The subject-matter of most of these contemporary African photorealists, centres largely on portraits, figure drawing (men, women and children) and animals. Beyond the traditional representation or communication purposes, the subject-matter of the contemporary African photorealists expresses the ordinary everyday socio-cultural, emotional and political life as well as women empowerment in the contemporary African Society (Wango 2020).

Kelvin Okafor renders photorealistic images of both ordinary and world leaders as well as celebrities. Some of such portraiture include but not limited to Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, Princess Diana, Tinie Tempah and Amy Winehouse (Jones, 2013). These images of global or continental personalities draw, inspire and propel the viewer to higher accomplishments in life. Inspired by his dad's love, Ebuka Emmanuel rendered in ballpoint pen on paper, *Father's Love* (2021). In this photorealism artwork, a young contemporary African father is seen joyously holding his newly born baby. In a similar manner, Richard Amankwah rendered in charcoal and graphite on paper, *A Mother's Love* (2018). These photorealistic artworks are simply representations but an expression of the deep-seated love of parents for their children.

In advocacy for environmental protection and prevention of child labour, Richard Amankwah also uses his photorealist piece – *Galamsey Kid* (2021) to bring into remembrance the

numerous children involved in illegal mining operations (galamsey) in his country Ghana. Richard again, uses his photorealism artwork – *The Obstacles Around* (2021) to project to the world the challenges or difficulties that bedevil the success of the youth of the African continent. These challenges include political instabilities, economic hardships, corruption, weaker educational systems, and societal pressures among others. The portraits of *Mariam Ewurama Addy* who was a Ghanaian biochemist and *Rose Dieng Kuntz,* a Senegalese computer scientist executed by Enam Bosokah won him a collaboration with the Wikimedia Foundation aimed at expanding the visual representation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in Wikimedia projects and advancing knowledge equity (ArtAfrica.org November 7, 2022). With both images executed in ballpoint pen, Enam re-echoes the need for women's empowerment in a patriarchal African society.

Thembalami Ndlovu in his *Beauty In scars* (2022), executed in charcoal on paper, represented a Southern African woman in the left side view. The tribal mark on the face of this woman portrays the African pride in its culture no matter how others frown at it. Similarly, Ndlovu rendered *Traditional African* (2019), a young African woman fully adorned in African costume. Eddy Ochieng used his hyper-realistic painting titled – *Timeless* (2019) to portray how a community's culture is enduring in providing a true and authentic identity to its people culminating in a life of fulfillment. Ochieng depicted an elderly Kenyan Maasai man, well detailed with a pierced and stretched ear lobe which resonates with the culture of the people (Wango, 2020). All these are but a testimony of how expansive the role of portraiture has become. This paper sought 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. For the purposes of clarity, discussions on each portrait are preceded with a quote from the artist.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Creation of Photorealistic Images
The definition of photorealism today, is one that is contextualized. It is viewed either from the perspective of the manual reproduction of photographic images with drawing tools which is acknowledge as a genre or art movement (Hausken, 2024) or the rendition of photographic images with computer graphics (Akesson, 2024). Whatever the definition stance, the photorealist's primary aim is produce indistinguishable images as captured by a camera. The renewed interest in photorealism towards the end of the twentieth century also came with a rise in the use of digital imaging technology, computer graphics, and other digital equipment cross a variety of graphic media and forms of expression including within the field of fine arts (Hausken, 2024). Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the other hand, is the use of deep machine learning and algorithm models for mimicking or performing tasks in ways that humans do (Akesson, 2024). AI primarily relies on existing data to new content in response to users' text prompts and the output can resemble specific people or things which are named in the prompt depending on the parameters (Magnus, 2023). The application of AI to produce photorealistic images has advanced significantly in the recent years. AI algorithms are capable of developing multifaceted portraits in various styles, ranging from cubism to modern to Pop Art by simply varying parameters like stroke length to achieve a level of abstraction (DiPaola & McCaig, 2016).

With AI image generators today, the line between the work of the visual artist and AI generated art is blurred (Wong et al., 2024) and sparks debates about issues of creativity and authenticity. Despite the endless discussions surrounding this topic, it appears the advantages of AI systems and technology have made them indispensable to the process of creating art moving forward. AI technology is revolutionizing digital art by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of visual information transfer (Magnus, 2023). With AI today, photorealistic portrait works are produced and completed in a split second. It produces faster, massive and high-quality (hyper-realistic) contents than any traditional computer software or manual method. Some examples of AI technologies include but not limited to Dall-E, MidJourney, and Stable Diffusion. Artists, such as Mario Klingemann, appear to have embraced this creative opportunity and integrated AI systems into his portrait creation, blending art and technology. Scott Eaton uses AI to transform drawing and animations into figurative, digital imaging, and abstract sculptural forms (Wong et al., 2024). Other artists like Gene Kogan, Mike Tyka, Robbie Barrat, Ahmed Elgammal, and Stephanie Dinkins use AI as an artistic medium to create unique portraits and figurative artworks (Gülaçtı et al., 2021).

The use of AI across every discipline including photorealism, is however not without its own challenges and ethical concerns. Referring to the use of AI-generated pictures by the press to depict how an imminent arrest of former US President Donald Trump would look like and Amnesty International's use of AI to generate images to mark the second anniversary of police violence against protesters in Colombia are but a few examples of what Hausken describes as visual disinformation (Hausken, 2024). On the part of Chen (2024), avers that while AI technology is convenient, it also presents new challenges and challenges such as questions about the authenticity of AI-generated images, personal privacy, bias and fairness. Despite all the concerns around it, AI undeniably has a greater transformative potential to expand and enhance creative processes. Whiles the use of AI has become the turning-point in art creation and the new normal for artistic productions of many creative artist across the globe including Samuel Otu of Ghana, his current photorealist portraits been discussed were produced without generative AIs.

Methodology

The primary data for this paper was obtained from a series of one-on-one interviews with the artist amidst regular studio visits to observe his works. The interviews were voice recorded to collect the necessary data from the artist. The paper also utilized relevant secondary sources of data such as journal articles and other scholarly materials with the aim of examining the place of portraiture in contemporary African art making. Since photorealism portraiture is recognized as an art, it is appropriate to analyze it within the lexis of art. Curnow (2021) remarked that objects (artworks) anywhere in the world require a specific way of looking at and describing them through the use of a discipline-based vocabulary. Such a framework could include but not limited to a formalistic analysis, contextual analysis or Erwin Panofsky's three-step approach to iconographic analysis. The formal analysis is the result of closely looking at a work of art and its elements such as line, shape, color, texture, mass, and composition (Barnet, 2002). Contextual analysis refers to the cultural

context within which an artwork is presented (Wango 2020).Erwin Panofsky's three-step approach to the iconographic analysis of any given artwork involves the pre-iconographical description, the iconographical analysis, and the iconological interpretation of the artwork (Panofsky 1972).This need for a framework to analyze an artwork is a necessary ingredient to providing a significant interpretation of the artwork to the art history fraternity. Though there are a number of iconographic approaches, this paper discusses the selected portraits using the Erwin Panofsky's three-step approach to iconographic analysis. The main steps in Panofsky's analytical procedure include:

1. The pre-iconographical description of the works (primary or natural subject matter). In this stage, the work is thoroughly described. All the visible aspects in the composition are well described.
2. The iconographical analysis (secondary or conventional subject matter). This is the second stage where meanings are attributed to the visual elements in the composition of the work from secondary data or published articles.
3. The iconological analysis (tertiary or intrinsic subject matter). This is the third stage where deeper meanings are attributed to the work by associating the work to it's historical and cultural contexts.

Panofsky's iconographic analysis was adopted by the authors to offer a more holistic analytical framework (Asamoah et al., 2021) for presenting detailed information about the portraits.

Ethical protocols were duly followed by the authors in every facet of the research including the photographic images that have been featured in the article. Credits to the original sources or owners of the images have been given while formal permissions have been sought from the artists and original photographers concerned. The artworks, *Kofi Annan* (figure 2) and *Nelson Mandela* (figure 3) were obtained from the public domain (internet) that did not necessarily require any formal permission while artworks figured 5, 6 and 7 were original photographic images that were duly obtained with formal permission. The president's image – *Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo* (figure 5) was obtained with permission from the presidential photographer at the presidency. The *Defiance* image (figure 6) was from the personal collection of the artist. The image of *Lowania Anku* (figure 7) was taken by the photographer hired for the marriage ceremony and delivered to the Samuel Otu (artist) by the couple to be reproduced. The couple have consented to the use of the image in this article.

Results and Discussion
From the series of interviews and studio engagements with the artist, the responses were translated and presented as follows including verbatim responses.

The Artist called Samuel Otu
Samuel Otu (Figure 1) hails from Asokore, a town in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He had all his education in Kumasi the capital of the Ashanti Region. His nationality as a Ghana-

ian and for that matter African affects his work as his is drawn to depicting subjects from Ghana or of African origin. Graphite pencils and charcoal are the favorite media for him. In an interaction with the artist in his studio regarding his choice of medium, he said:

> My favorite medium is graphite pencils and charcoal. Although, I also use wet media and other forms of dry media sometimes but I enjoy using graphite pencils and charcoal. Most of my drawings are in graphite and charcoal. My love for this medium goes back to when I was a child. Growing up, I was so much enthused about art and creating. Then I fell in love with this simple tool, graphite pencil, which I found to be easy to work with and very common in my community. I remember when I was in high school, our General Knowledge in Art teacher gave us an exercise to draw and shade any natural object that we could find around. He gave us instructions that we should shade the light areas with the hard graphites (H grades) and the shadow areas with the softer graphites (B grades) and I did just that. I drew a leaf and the outcome was amazing. The next day during afternoon break my colleagues in the Picture Making class came to tell me that the leaf that I drew looks so amazing. Apparently, the teacher whiles giving that class the same exercise he gave us used my drawing as an example to teach them how to shade. I wasn't the best student in my class so I was mesmerized by the fact that my teacher found my drawing so good that he used it to teach. This is how I fell in love with this medium and from that time onwards I kept pushing harder (Artist).

Having secured the photograph to be reproduced (in a digital format,) he places the image on the desktop of his laptop and places gridlines on the image. With his support (paper) other media set, Samuel Otu manually executes the work by observing and studying the image paying keen attention to the facial expressions and proportions. He begins the work by making preliminary sketches to establish an overall layout or shape of the portrait. He establishes the basic tone and shapes with his pencil in mass-shading technique and charcoal for the very dark toned areas to depict hair, black attire and shadows. This gives the image a sense of three-dimensionality and depth. He constantly refines the details and proportions as he progresses to capture the unique features and expressions of the subject and reveal their personality. Starting from his home country Ghana, Samuel Otu dreams of reaching the global limelight in the area of photorealism and to have his name etched in annals of the genre. To do this, the artist use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and twitter to share his works to build a following. He also hopes to use online marketplaces like Etsy and Saatchi Art to sell his works, participate in local, national and international art shows and exhibitions, secure a representation in museums and galleries that specialize in contemporary art. Smauel Otu is already a recipient of numerous commissioned works including the five works been discussed in this study. Samuel draws inspiration from his love to see people's face and also by the things people do to impact their lives positively and other people's lives, to their communities and to the world at large. *It is interesting to find that a story could be told without words by the look on a person's face. The message could be loud yet without sound* (Artist).

Figure 1. Samuel Otu working in his home studio, Asokore, Ashanti Region of Ghana. Source: Photographed by the lead researcher, 2023 Courtesy, Samuel Otu.

Iconographic Analysis of Five Selected Works of Samuel Otu

The analysis of the works on the theme - *The African Story* series include; *Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Defiance* and *Lowania Anku.*

The portrait – Kofi Annan

Figure 2. *The African Story series* (Kofi Annan), Samuel Otu, 2014, 16.5" x 23" inches, Graphite Pencils on paper. Courtesy, Samuel Otu's Collection.

Dr. Kofi Annan a former UN Secretary-General who in my opinion is the greatest personality Ghana has produced after our first President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah… The role that Dr. Kofi Annan played at the United Nations brought peace to the world, justice, equality, hope and relief to many who were living in poverty amongst others (Artist).

The portrait – Kofi Annan is a depiction of the first of the series on the theme, *The African Story* started in 2014. Rendered in the three-quarter view in political attire, the politically posed Nobel Peace Prize winner is depicted with a well-detailed face through tonal gradation and textured effects that harmonize the gray hair with the neatly shaved gray beard and mustache. With a very engaging but unintimidating gaze, the eyes are the center of attraction of the portrait. The gaze of the subject suggests that of a self-composed, dignified and calm expression without any tensed emotions either on the subject or the viewer. This conservative noble demeanor of the Ghanaian diplomat portrayed is one that is in tandem with his personality and the role he played as the UN secretary-general in bringing peace, hope, and relief to many in the world as alluded to by the artist. The portrait goes beyond the representation of a subject whose life forms part of the historical narratives of nations to reflect his inner moral attitudes.
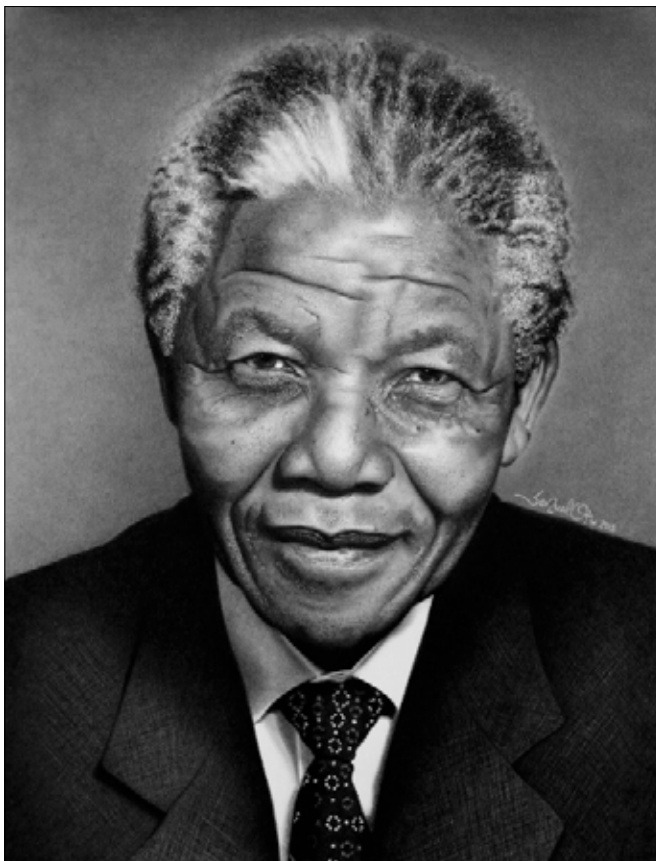
The portrait – Nelson Mandela

Figure 3. *The African Story series* (Nelson Mandela), Samuel Otu, 2015, 16.5" x 23" inches, Graphite Pencils on paper. Courtesy, Samuel Otu's Collection.

Figure 4. *Nelson Mandela* by Enam Bosokah, 2018, ball pen on paper. Source: Courtesy, Enam Bosokah's Collection.

Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa….He was released from the prison and became the President and ruled for only one term then stepped aside paving way for others to rule. One most prolific character of his that shook the world was his ability to forgive. He is an example worthy of emulation (Artist).

The Nelson Mandela portrait is a self-explanatory depiction of the former South African president in a front view with a very high degree of facial details and precision. His attire does not leave the 'viewer' with any doubt that the personality depicted belongs to the political elite society of Africa. The textured treatment of the subject's dense hair in a chiaroscuro effect is suggestive of grayness. The highly visible wrinkles on his face undeniably allude to his advancement in age. The demeanor of the subject can best be described as one of calmness with deep-seated determination and a high sense of accomplishment. This is revealed by the silent and gentle smile on the face with a focused gaze. His demeanor further depicts a complete absence of pain and bitterness thereby portraying a visual testimony of former president Mandela's statement of 'forgiveness' he made after his release from the prison; "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." The use of the portrait by the artist to epitomize the inner virtue of 'forgiveness' of the former president is in line with the later part of an assertion made by Freeland (2007), that as more people were depicted over time, more styles were developed and the form of portraiture progressed from emphasizing outward details to paying more attention to expressing the interior emotions and moral attitudes of sitters. Though Nelson Mandela was not siting directly as a model for either artist, the photographs from which the drawings were done

still captures the expressions. Enam Bosokah, a Ghanaian photorealist made a very similar rendition of the same former president of South Africa in 2018 (Figure 4) characteristically epitomizing the assertion by Freeland and reflective in Samuel's work. In Enam's portrait of the former president, the gesture of interior emotions herein been "forgiveness,' 'gratitude,' 'calmness' and 'joy' are well emphasized through the holding of the palms together coupled with a broad smile on the face.

The portrait – Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo

Figure 5. *Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo,* Samuel Otu, 2020, 22" x 30" inches, Graphite Pencils on paper. Courtesy, Samuel Otu's Collection.

I drew a portrait of the president as a gift of my appreciation to him and his government for nominating me in 2019 to represent the nation at the Ghana Heritage Week exhibition in the United Arab Emirates. The job of the president involves deep thinking and reasoning beyond the ordinary in running the affairs of the nation (Artist).

This depiction is a continuation of the theme explored by the artist. Executed in almost a complete three-quarter view and wearing a spectacle, the politically dressed seated subject rests on the arm of an office chair to the right with the right hand supporting the chin. With a very high degree of precision which is a fundamental quality of photorealism, the artist rendered the image of the current president of Ghana in graphite on paper. Using dark tones and lightening effects, the artist successfully created the feeling of hairlessness of the president and the effects of clearly opened eyes behind a transparently-glassed spectacle. As alluded to by the artist, the president's posture and gaze is one that reflects deeper

thoughts obviously bordering on how to surmount the teething difficulties of a developing country like Ghana, particularly in the wake of the global health crisis – COVID-19. Ghana upon recording her first case of COVID-19 virus on 12th March 2020, has suffered the negative impact of the corona virus pandemic on the socio-economic situation of the citizenry leading to job losses, and overwhelming healthcare systems (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey 2020). This certainly will set any president thinking deeper. Alphen (2011) asserted that the artistic portrait does a bit more than just referring to somebody and differs from the photographic portrait as the artist uses his or her artistic expressive skills to consolidate the self of the subject portrayed. Similarly, more than just a photographic portrait presented to the president as a gift, the artist used his photorealist prowess to depict the personality of the president in the circumstances, full of solution-finding thoughts that could befall any sitting president at time of a global pandemic that claimed millions of lives and imposed serious economic hardships on nations, particularly the third-world countries. The portrait presented to the president perhaps is the artist's way of reminding the president to stay focused and be tactical about the execution of plans for the country in the face of all the economic difficulties amidst the vilifications from the citizenry and political opponents.
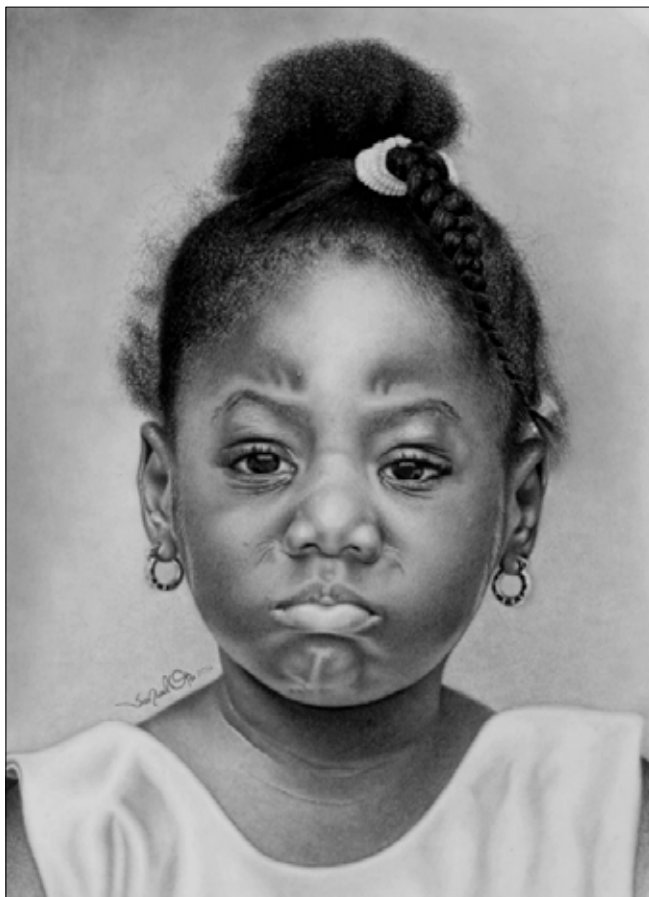
The portrait – Defiance

Figure 6. *Defiance*, Samuel Otu, 2014, 16.5" x 23" inches, Graphite Pencils on Paper. Courtesy, Samuel Otu's Collection.

The portrait is to empower the African child. It speaks about the African child especially the girl-child and the youth in general to defile all odds in rising to take their rightful place in the family, community, economy and the global stage. It takes resilience and a fighting spirit to achieve that (Samuel Otu's comment).

The portrait depicts a little girl probably of age three. Though the portrait is an unidentified sitter, it is integral part of the series of telling the African story by the artist. The graphite pencil work on paper rendered in a front view shows a black tenderly dense hair partly styled in a singular braided role held with a white ribbon and bent downwards towards the left. The subject is dressed in a sleeveless white dress, a pair of ear rings, wears a deep frowned face. The artist focused on the facial features by meticulously depicting every minute detail of the natural tender skin of the small girl through the use of tonal gradation. This meticulous facial detailing from the eyebrows, the eyes, the nose, lips to the chin resulted in the precisely depicted frowned gaze exerted on the viewer. The frowned gaze portrays a feeling of a deep anger revealed through the somewhat squinted eyes and enhanced by the appearance of a pair of caved-in on the forehead above the eyebrows, the scrambles surrounding the nose and the uneasy tightly lipped mouth. As remarked by Wango (2020), though hyperrealism and for that matter photorealism can be very engaging, not all portraitures reveal the intended meaning by the artist to the viewer; as such the viewer at times will have to derive his or her own interpretation. While the photorealist piece – *Galamsey Kid* (2021) by Richard Amankwah which clearly depicts the struggles of the African child, this well-composed and vibrant looking girl child *(Defiance)* does not necessarily suggest to the viewer the predicaments, the resilience and the fighting spirit of the African girl child as purported by the artist. The general adornment of the girl child in a full and neatly depicted dress, new pair of ear rings, a stylish hair coupled with the perceived healthy condition of the child rather alludes to the representation of a wealthier girl child contrary to the notation of resilience and the fighting spirit. However, it suffices to say that the artist chose of a child is probably to emphasize that fact that the struggle of the African begins at birth.

The portrait - Lowania Anku
The portrait of Lowania Anku (2019), talks about understanding and embracing cultural diversity. Lowania is an American citizen who is originally from Guyana. She came to Ghana to marry her Ghanaian boyfriend and on the day of their marriage she dressed in full Ghanaian traditional regalia from the Akan ethnic group (Artist).

Succulent and very actively looking in a well-composed front view, the South American citizen originally from Guyana, is fully adorned in the Akan (Ghana) traditional regalia as a bride of a traditional African customary marriage. The meticulously treated black hair of the subject is crowned with a beaded necklace and the pendant of the necklace (an *adinkra* symbol of the Akans, *Gye Nyame* meaning 'except God') lies on her forehead in between the eyebrows. A set of four other necklaces are worn around the neck, partly covered with the bride's white round-shaped feathered hand fan. The body of the figure is skillfully wrapped with *Kente* (a popular Ghanaian hand-woven cloth) in a toga-like style leaving the right shoulder and hand uncovered. The detailed execution of the subject's face through tonal effects to reveal the succulent and fleshy forms is easily noticed by the viewer. This is evident in the velvet-textured hair, eyebrows and eyelashes coupled with the dainty nose and

mouth. The rendition of the eyes in sharp contrast of light and dark tones further brightens and illuminates the face thereby casting a very gracious and noble gaze on the viewer.

Figure 7. *Lowania Anku,* Samuel Otu, 2019,12" x 16.5" inches, Graphite Pencils on Paper. Courtesy, Samuel Otu's Collection Permission.

While her Ghanaian traditionally adorned outfit attests to a bride-personality of a traditional African marriage ceremony at the same time cultural assimilation, her solemnly noble and gracious gaze reflects her undying 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. This argument of the social-service heartedness of the subject portrayed by the artist through her gaze is in tandem with the point made by Pereira (2015) who noted that 'besides the information that a portrait transmits to its viewers regarding the appearance of the subject … a portrait contains a context, identity questions, social issues.' Similar in function to that of the *Traditional African* (2019) by Thembalami Ndlovu in which a young African woman is fully adorned in African costume, this portrait *(Lowania Anku)* is used as a means to showcase significant aspects of the Ghanaian culture to the outside world and the readiness to accept people into the Ghanaian cultural space. This was emphasized through the wearing of the *Kente* cloth, the beads and the Adinkra symbol – *Gye Nyame* as posited by the artist.

Conclusion

The photorealist images of Samuel Out are very engaging as he tactfully uses the various postures and gazes of his images to reveal their true personalities as though they were seated directly before him. The gazes of the subjects encompassed underlying dimensions of emotions such as calmness, humility, nobility, determination and anger that communicate significantly to the 'viewer.' The portraits did not only typify the subjectivity or likeness of the subjects portrayed which has traditionally been a critical part of portraiture and enhances the connection between the 'viewed' and the 'viewer,' but have also been used as artistic expressions by the artist to tell the African story. The portraits of *Dr. Kofi Annan,* South African former president *Nelson Mandela* and Ghanaian president *Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo* are depictions of illustrious African leaders whose leadership styles did not only benefit and won the admiration of Africans but also the globe. The *Defiance* and *Lowania Anku* portraits comment on the cultural aspects of the African society and the struggles faced by the youth, women and children on the continent. The meticulous detailing of the faces of his subjects as referenced from photographs coupled the overreaching range of issues the artworks addressed places the portraits in the light of contemporary photorealism portraiture.

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