

THE SUN, CLAIRVOYANCE AND SHADOWS OF CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN, CONGOLESE AND UGANDAN WOMEN ARTISTS

Rhoda Quarshie*

*Department Of Painting and Sculpture (African Art And Culture), Kwame Nkrumah
University of Science and Technology Kumasi, Ghana.*

*Corresponding author: rhodaqf456@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In the pulsating tapestry of African art, African women visual artists of contemporary times have emerged as transformative figures, challenging gender barriers and illuminating the artistic landscape with their extraordinary talents and visionary viewpoints. This article unveils the background and history of African art, underlining the recent surge of talented women artists reshaping the artistic landscape and challenging conventions. Metaphorically, it captures the illuminating brilliance and intuitive foresight that these artists bring to their work. This goes beyond aesthetics to delve into societal issues, culture, and the human experience. Through the profiling of selected contemporary African women visual artists, the article compiles a monograph of their ideologies and approaches to art-making, focusing on the concept of “clairvoyance” as a metaphor for their visionary perspectives. These women take up inspiring roles in their various communities through their art. Roles that create awareness about recycling and making use of affordable resources found in their environment. These women stimulate our thoughts about what we think art should be. The research sheds light on the underrepresentation of women visual artists and the need to create awareness of their existence and praxis.

Keywords: African women, artist, clairvoyance, contemporary, exhibition.

*This article published © 2025 by the Journal of
Science and Technology is licensed under CC BY 4.0*



INTRODUCTION

The dichotomous involvement of men and women is acknowledged in artmaking throughout the history of Africa, where art serves as a vessel through which the rich tapestry of the continent's diverse cultures, struggles, and triumphs is expressed. African art history offers examples of women who were artists, art patrons and art entrepreneurs. Emphasising their contributions to African art and demonstrating that women in the past have laid the foundation for current artistic practices (Visoná, 2021). There has been a rising interest in contemporary art created by artists from the African continent or the African diaspora. This rising awareness in contemporary African art is emphasized by Dijkhuizen (2021) as resulting from the emergence of a new generation of African visual artists and the demand for their artworks by collectors around the world.

Recognition of works of women artists has accelerated as they continue to produce works that obfuscate and contest one's understanding. African women artists, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, face some challenges due to gender predispositions in the art world. They have encountered difficulties in areas such as training, travelling, selling their work, and recognition. The Feminist Art Movement (late 1960 to 1970) was one of many steps instituted to address the role of women in the art world (Fall, 2007). Women recognition expanded at the time and their art was said to have been contested by male artists. A comprehensive report was published on the demographic and employment patterns of workers who are artists as their primary occupation by the National Endowment for the Arts Research (NEAR) from 1990-2005 in the United States. This research, Reckitt (2013) iterates, gave a more detailed view of women artists, including patterns in the women composition of various artist jobs and

in the earnings, and discrepancies between men and women. Out of the almost 919,000 artists in 2005, women represented 46% of the artist labour force, comparable to their percentage of all civilian workers.

The Women's Initiative Fund launched in 2012, aimed at increasing the profile of African women in the arts according to Piechowiak (2019) by The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, was done through exhibitions, publications, acquisitions, and strategic partnerships globally. This resulted in an increase in the number of women artists from 11% to 22 % in the museum's collection. Styles ranged from paintings, sculpture, ceramics, videos, installations, textiles and fashion. Okeke-Agulu (2009) proposed that the study of contemporary art in Africa requires edging it within socio-political boundaries defined by decolonisation of the geographical space mapped by diasporic and transnational movements. Contemporary African art consequently cannot be cross-examined only as local art practice but as transnational occurrences across cultures and national frontiers. Ghana in the 1990s, for instance, was considered the golden age that enhanced the situation for contemporary artists significantly. A period succinctly put by Eytan (2018) as "all eyes on Ghana and Ghana is eyeing the world when speaking of contemporary art, at least". A standing that pressed on in the subsequent decade and has not only been categorized by a shift toward new styles and themes in Ghanaian art but also by new notions of what purpose art should serve.

On a much larger scope, the need for recognition of women's contribution globally is one of the driving forces of this article. The United Nations in 2015 set Sustainable Development Goals to achieve a balance between social, economic and environmental sustainability (Tremblay *et al.*, 2020). The 17 SDGs identify that action in one area

will affect outcomes in the other areas. The pointers for SDG 5 are broad and objective to attain gender equality and opportunity to empower all women and girls which is a human right and a prerequisite for realising all goals in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Scholarship on the contributions of these indefatigable African women artists contributes to promoting gender equality, empowering women and girls, raising awareness, challenging stereotypes, and adopting a more inclusive society.

‘The Sun, Clairvoyance and Shadows’, metaphorically encapsulates the brilliance and intuitive foresight that these contemporary African women visual artists bring to their art. Their works, journey beyond the realm of aesthetic beauty. They explore the profound depths of societal issues, personal identity, cultural heritage, and the human experience. This article highlights the practice of some contemporary Ghanaian, Ugandan and Congolese women artists living and working in Africa. These women are united by art, yet, make their work meaningful to us through different startling lenses slowly changing the perception of society and reinforcing the belief that they can rise to the occasion when given the opportunity. The visual arts space, just like any other field, is intellectually stimulated, having both men and women actively involved in the progress and evolution of the field. Asare (2018) points out the lack of extensively established dimensions of scholarship on representations of women in art. The decade of 1991 to 2001, saw a lot of written scholarship about men visual artists, while written scholarship about women artists within that same decade paled in comparison (Mensah et al, 2020).

According to Valentine (2019), the Women’s Initiative Fund exhibition, launched by the Smithsonian Museum of African Art to increase the profile of African women in the arts resulted in doubling the representation

of women artists. Nonetheless, at present, nearly 80% of the museum’s collection of more than 12,000 artworks is by men.

METHODS

Although this article is based on artistic representations of women artists, a social science approach to research and data gathering together with an art-focused approach, was adopted to obtain relevant information from and about the artists. The qualitative research approach to research was employed using case study and art-based research as the designs; particularly in conducting interviews. These designs were preferred because arriving at conclusions was made easy from the artists’ viewpoints, constructions, and perceptions. As part of this, the artists’ mediums and ideologies and how this reflected on their practices were also considered. In art-based research, from the perspectives of Cahnmann and Segesmund (2018), an investigation into the process of art-making and some aspects of the experiment from the position of the artists were conducted. This was to identify the relationship between purpose, selection of art tools and approaches to art creation which allows understanding of the work as well as its conscious and verbalised undertones.

Sampling Techniques

The artists were selected purposively; because of their position as women artists, their zone of practise as African, their diversity in exploration and use of the medium for their practice, and the obvious challenges they face due to their position, zone and diversity of the medium. Their location at the time the research was conducted made it more convenient. During the time the study was conducted, the artists were involved in in-depth interviews and dialogues that allowed insight into their lives, their artistic space, their choice of medium, their mode

of representation and their philosophies as artists, women, and Africans.

Ethical Considerations

Respecting the artist's rights and ensuring ethical research practices are paramount. Informed consent was obtained from all participating artists before conducting interviews and using images of their artworks. The research adhered to ethical guidelines and Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols.

Data collection

Five contemporary African women artists were considered for this study. These five artists hail from Ghana, Uganda and The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These artists are: Theresa Ankomah (Ghana), Esther Ofofu (Ghana), Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson (Ghana), Piyola Irene (Uganda) and Godlive Kabena Kasangati (DRC).

Based on the availability of the selected artists, they were put into 3 schedule plans. The first plan consisted of the Ugandan and Congolese women artists who were engaged in interactions during studio visits and face-to-face interviews. The interaction with these two artists, Piyola Irene (Uganda) and Godelive Kabena Kasangati (DRC) were to establish an understanding of them within their working environment, while they engaged in a conversation and their views were assessed from the perspective of five major markers; their philosophies and what they stand for as women artists, mediums, inspirations, exhibitions, and the ideologies behind their works.

The second schedule plan consisted of two Ghanaian artists; these were Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson (Ghana) and Theresa Ankomah (Ghana) who both provided clear and comprehensive information relevant to the study. Although unavailable for physical interviews and or studio visits, the

detailed interactions with them churned out adequate information regarding the five major markers that served as key points in Piyola and Kasangati's interactions. The third and final schedule plan was Esther Ofofu (Ghana). Before the interaction with Ofofu, like the other four artists, she had received adequate information about the nature and requirements of the study leading to an engaging interaction also based on the five markers mentioned, although the time spent with her was relatively shorter than with the others.

Data Analysis Plan

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were carefully reviewed and analysed for themes and patterns related to the artists' experiences, artistic visions, and challenges faced in their careers. The analysis of the artworks involved a thematic exploration of the visual narratives and symbolic representations present in the artists' creations. This has been identified and linked to the artists' narratives and clairvoyant perspectives. A comparative analysis was conducted to identify commonalities and differences among the artists' experiences and artworks. This analysis helped to uncover broader trends and themes present in the works of these women artists and other contemporary African women visual artists.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Sun and the Shadows within

Amidst the shadows of challenges, contemporary African women visual artists harness the power of their clairvoyant perspectives to rise like the sun, illuminating paths of empowerment through their art. Their creative expressions become catalysts for transformation, not only for themselves but for their communities and the broader

society. This section explores the ways in which these remarkable artists wield their creative brilliance to empower themselves and inspire positive change.

While the brilliance of contemporary African women visual artists shines brightly, they continue to face significant challenges as they navigate their artistic journeys. These challenges, akin to shadows, cast upon them by longstanding gender disparities and systemic barriers, hinder their full participation and recognition in the art world. Yet, amidst the shadows lie opportunities for transformation, empowerment, and the forging of a new path for future generations of African women artists. Challenges and opportunities that shape the experiences of these remarkable artists are what this section delves into.

Balancing Artistic Expression and Societal Expectations

African women artists often find themselves torn between their artistic pursuits and societal expectations, particularly regarding family and domestic roles. Striking a balance between personal aspirations and cultural norms can be challenging, influencing the time and energy they can devote to their art. According to Stalp (2016), women who have broken through the glass ceiling in the art world have also paid particularly dear and gendered prices throughout the life course. For example, in the documentary film, "Who Does She Think She Is?", Pamela Tanner Boll (2008) notes that successful women artists across various mediums experience difficulty as they negotiate their artistic careers with the gendered expectations of becoming coupled and having children. Historically, in the Western world, women pursuing artistic careers were often criticised as "bad women" for answering the creative call instead of devoting their full time and attention to more traditional roles of tending to family.

African women visual artists use their clairvoyant perspectives to address pressing social issues within their communities and beyond. Their art serves as a powerful medium for social commentary, shedding light on issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, human rights, and cultural preservation. Through their art, these artists create mediums for their expressions. They use creativity as a tool to process their emotions, experiences, and trauma, while also encouraging others to find solace and strength through artistic self-expression. Mentoring and empowering the next generation of African women visual artists through their knowledge and experience to inspire most especially young women, providing mentorship and support, to women artists and nurturing a thriving artistic community.

THE ARTISTS

Theresa Ankomah (Ghana)

Theresa Ankomah is a Ghanaian artist who lives and works in Accra, Ghana. She was trained as a sculptor at the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture. Her expressions are noticeable in the form of performative installations, painting, weaving, sculpture, fashion, and printmaking. Her body of work is critical to the traditional concepts of social and economic structures, and the concepts of norms, which have been given certain prestigious levels in our community to the detriment of others.

The artist combines techniques of painting, weaving and, printmaking to create bold and colourful works of art reflecting her origins and confronting gender norms. Ankomah's layered tactile works invite curiosity, matching the complex weavings that she incorporates

Quarshie

into her practice. Through a time-intensive process, she also combines painting, patterns from everyday objects, silkscreen, collaging, stitching, and weaving to create dynamic multimedia works on canvas. Ankomah won the first runner-up prize for the prestigious Kuenyehia Art Prize for Contemporary Art, in 2017. She also won the second runner-up for Gallery 1957's inaugural Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize in 2021. Works of Ankomah are held in permanent collections in Europe, Asia, and Ghana.

Medium

Ankomah began incorporating baskets into her installations after a visit to the Anloga onion market in Kumasi, where she watched baskets filled with onions being off-loaded to traders' stalls. Today she collects her onion baskets from Anloga and other major onion markets in Ghana, like the Agbogbloshie market in Accra. The onion baskets are taken to Ankomah's studio, where they are dyed, cut apart, and woven together into sculptural forms. She takes the baskets through a process of sorting them into sizes, soaking them in water and dyeing them in a *sudin* with different colours in a special vessel.

Inspirations

Ankomah's monumental artworks place a new spin on West African basket-making traditions from local craftspeople. The artist uses a variety of natural fibres such as kenaf, jute, palm leaves and rattan to create woven environments whose appearance changes as light filters through them and casts shadows within and around them. Repurposing is central to Ankomah's art making, and her work often makes use of the kenaf produce baskets, or *chalis*, that are found in marketplaces across Ghana.

Her art embodies the geopolitics of the region, where traditionally handmade items like baskets are being replaced by cheap imported goods. Woven baskets are not simply objects but also embodiments of a host of social and economic structures. In Africa, basketry is usually practised by women, this skill and technique are passed down from one generation to another providing them with a source of income. Her interest in exploring the dynamics of fibre "lies in its ability to generate a dichotomy between temporality and permanence." She employs more commentary and changing opinions across space and time by preserving these practices within her works. This she achieves by drawing from the past and magnifying it within the present.

Exhibitions

'Where I Come From' is a solo exhibition of Ankomah's works held in the United States in partnership with Urevbu Contemporary. It invited its viewers to a "visual re-discovery of colour, a reconsideration of gender norms, family, consumerism, and sustainability." She was also part of the 'Those Beings Be Not Being' Exhibition Curated by Julia Gyemant and Nantume Violet, Alpha Nova Galerie Futura in Berlin, Germany with Dorothy Akpene Amenuke (Ghana), and Sheila Nakitende (Uganda) in May 2022. Ankomah's Untitled (2017), a site-specific installation in the Anloga onion market, returned the transformed baskets to the place where she first encountered them, activating this public space in a performative way that drew new attention to it—and to the baskets.



Figure 1: Theresa Ankamah

Source/ Image credit: Artist's archive



Figure 2: The Wonderland (2016)
by Theresa Ankamah

Source/ Image credit: Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi

Esther Ofosu (Ghana)

Esther Ofosu is a Ghanaian- born practising artist currently residing and working in Accra. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Art from the University of Education Winneba and a Master of Fine Art from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi - Ghana. She has been an art teacher for over 10 years at both the Secondary and Tertiary Levels. She trains sculpture students to work with organic and inorganic materials, teaches art history and gives art talks. Ofosu also

works every year as an artist Facilitator for Creative Action Institute, an NGO based in the USA that trains the youth on how to use art to address current issues, some of which are sometimes in sync with the SDG goals. She is also the Creative Director of Xta Impressions, a firm which supplies art products.

Medium

Ofosu explores and expands the ideologies of craft labour into various dimensions, she also perceives each strand from her work as a labourer; as with every strand, an arm moves while a pocket knife moves either upwards or downwards the surface of a rattan. The rattan shavings are a medium she first caught sight of when she was roaming one day on the streets of “37” in Accra. Rattan shavings are the byproducts of laborious cane craft; thus, cane chairs, lampstands, tables and baskets, are woven and fashioned with care from the cane vine to a desired form. With her background in textiles and her interest in the cane shavings, she bleaches and dyes the shavings, transforming them into various forms. To create recognisable shapes, thousands of rattan shavings are put together by plaiting them into thick heavy strands, coiling and converting them into fluffy circular mats for works and installations.

Inspiration

Her work induces emotions drawn from matters happening in and around her environment. One of her finest works, “You Know How I Feel”, is a work that came to be as a result of the darkest time in her life when her dad passed away and her mother was in a coma on that same day. Along the line, body sculpting became a subject of interest in her explorations.

Exhibitions

Ofosu, like other artists has taken part in a number of exhibitions. She has held two solo art exhibitions titled; *Ways of the Shepherd*, Kumasi (2014) and *“Tsiher (Head Pad)”* Kumasi (2016). The titles of her exhibitions are sometimes informed by what the cane represents for instance as in control, the language, and how it is used. She has been part of an exhibition in Wa (2020), the Citi FM Exhibition in Accra (2020), *Telling the Ghanaian Story Through Art* in Accra (2020), *Chalewote Street Art Exhibition* at Ussher Forts Accra. Ofosu also took part in the African Heritage Art Festival exhibition in Osu Accra (2018) and *Cornfields In Accra* (2016) which was part of the KNUST final year Painting and Sculpture exhibition in collaboration with blaxTARLINES, KUMASI.



Figure 3: Esther Ofosu

Source/Image credit: Artist’s archive



Figure 4: “You know how I feel” by Esther Ofosu

Source/Image credit: Artist’s archive

Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson (Ghana)

Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson is a Ghanaian artist who lives and works in Accra and Kumasi, Ghana. She obtained first-class honours in a Bachelor of Fine Art, a Master of Fine Arts and a PhD in Fine Art all from the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Thompson has an independent practice within the post-production of food and non-human agencies in artistic production. She has participated in two large-scale exhibitions organized by blaxTARLINES, KUMASI in Accra, namely *Cornfields* in Accra (2016) and *Orderly Disorderly* (2017). As a Master of Fine Arts student at KNUST, she participated in the intercontinental exchange program at Städel Schule in Frankfurt, Germany, where her practice revolved around an interest in the material and industrial processes.

Inspiration

Her practice is greatly influenced by the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST and by the emancipatory teachings of artist and pedagogue karî’kächä seid’ou. “The polymath Professor karî’kächä seid’ou is her biggest influence as he encouraged art that is necessarily more challenging to deal with than being conformist.” Anicka Yi (a South Korean conceptual artist whose work lies in the intersection of fragrance, cuisines and science) and Neri Oxman (an American designer and professor known for art and architecture, biology, computing and material engineering) are her influencers in terms of her interest in Computer generated design, speculative realist and post-human ideologies. Christopher Nolan (a British – American Hollywood blockbuster with a complex storyline) and Hans Florence Zimmer (a German film and music producer) are her greatest influencers from the movie and music artistry, stimulating Thompson’s

explorations into notions of plasticity, temporality and fluxes in forming and being.

Medium

Her work encompasses foods, plastics, computer-generated design and microbes. Tracy explores the latent ability of ubiquitous materials (synthetic or natural) to transform into unrecognisable, strange, new and mimicry forms. For this purpose, she employs alchemical processes of dissolution and crystallisation of the varied morphology (form and structure) of things. Thompson's unbound and perceptive approach to making art creates a disposition that transcends given notions of art tools and questions what art could potentially be. In taking advantage of the multi-transformational ability of plastic, she also creates varied textures in her plastic works by exploring drawing and carving in an unconventional way using water (in contrast to the oil nature of molten plastic).

The same perceptive awareness pursued in the viscoelastic property also allows her to have works that imitate the frozen motion of liquids which she has explored in simulating geographical forms (water droplets, icicles, stalagmites and so on). Therefore, the alchemist process of a permeating material like Styrofoam to become unrecognisable becomes an interest for her.

Exhibitions

Thompson's work has been featured in 'Cornfields in Accra' (2016) and 'Orderly Disorderly' (2017) two large-scale exhibitions organised by blaxTARLINES, KUMASI in Accra, Ghana. She participated in the inaugural Stellenbosch Triennial (2020). She co-curated 'Akutia: Blindfolding the Sun and the Poetics of Peace (A Retrospective of Agyeman Ossei 'Dota')' in 2020-2021 at Savannah Center for Contemporary Art Tamale and Red Clay in Ghana. The exhibition 'Fizzy Waakye',

illustrated the decomposition process of hydrogen peroxide on bio-plastic substrates made from organic food; *waakye*, a popular Ghanaian local dish made with beans and rice boiled with sorghum leaves. Thompson shows the non-human relations and hidden co-presence with microorganisms through the interest she has in exploring biochemical processes and mutations with foods. By clairvoyance, she paints a picture of how bio-plastic substrates are living materials containing bacteria and microbes, and how these living materials decompose hydrogen peroxide as it reacts with catalase enzymes produced by most living cells. The feeling and notions that complicate 'still-life'; as 'death and decomposition' are rather birthed as vibrant and lively forces. With this use of antiseptics in revealing the hidden presence of microbes in the living body of foods, it projected the heightened co-presence with viruses and sanitisation processes of the COVID-19 pandemic – which is actively shaping both human and non-human spheres. In 2019-2020 Tracy exhibited her installation titled *Sobolo*; made of vegetable and edible elements like *fufu* powder, lime juice, salt, vinegar, glycerin and icing colourant. Thompson's pursuit of initiating her audience into the world of biochemical mutations and plasticity opened a door of possibilities that came with mutations and deviation from homogeneous inheritable traits. She explores those deviations and deformations in biochemical and thermal processes of generating mutant forms from already-existent materials. Through food modifications and bio-synthetic processes, she investigates non-anthropocentric notions of consumption. *Sobolo* was in the form of petals that come in varied repetitions of undulating shapes formed and deformed by the effects of fluxes of heat and temperature that intra-act with living membranes of thermoplastic starches.



Figure 5: Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson

Source/ image credit: Artist's archive

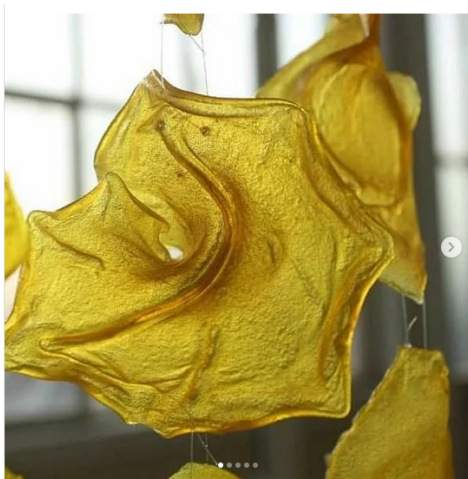


Figure 6: Plantain Fufu – Undulate Petals I, (2019) by Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson

Source/ Image credit: Artist's archive

Piloya Irene (Uganda)

Piloya Irene is a sculptor, painter, fashion designer and art teacher based in Kumasi, Ghana at the time of this study. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Fine Art and Design from Uganda Christian University

2016, Post Graduate Diploma in Art Education from Kyambogo University 2019, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi-Ghana. Piloya participated in Documenta 15 as part of the blaxTARLINES collective in collaboration with Gudskul in Kassel, Germany and was part of the Gasthoff 2022 in Frankfurt Germany. Piloya is now part of a collectively run art space in Kampala called Underground Contemporary Art that runs international arts exchange programs. In 2018, her paintings featured in the Okuki-women rising collectively through art, reflecting on gender-related struggles and successes. Piloya has also worked with Spurs, an art organization which puts emphasis on the exposure of young women visual artists.

Medium

Piloya uses sculpture, painting and film to explore personal experience of displacement and its effects, memory and history in relation to place, identity and belonging. She investigates what it means to be at home, what home looks like, the connection we have with our homes, what reminds us of home, and the consciousness of being far from home. She does this through various processes that construct and deconstruct relationships between materials. Recently in Ghana, she had an exhibition which explored memory, the storage of impressions, events, experiences, and other information by the human brain, as well as the phenomenon of recalling those things after a passage of time drawing upon techniques of creating forms that are symbolised by memories. Information transforms into memory through a process of selection based on taste, identity and values, along with the effects of various forms of interference on the materials. These interferences may be exaggerations and transformations that she instigated by introducing sodium hypochlorite onto the material. She finds intriguing parallels

between the results of these processes and the volatile and fluid nature of memory and home. From Piloya's history and practice, we deduce that trauma and happiness both generate and degenerate some brain activities that affect future decisions in a way that a traumatic situation may lead to positive decisions in future while a happy situation may not necessarily lead to positive outcomes.

Inspiration

The ability of beings to become aware of the transformations that occur within a space fascinates her and fuels her research. She focuses on notions of belonging and interconnectedness, entanglement and collaborative performances within nature; ideas of presence and, the feeling of being in a place that experiences change over time. Piloya is intrigued by the themes of rebirth, feminism and the body.

“Experimenting with the bark of the *kyenkyen* tree led me to explore more natural fibers which made me appreciate the notion of letting the material lead me in my artworks. The process of cutting and transporting the bark of the tree from the bush to the studio, fermentation, boiling, pounding, bleaching and the whole paper-making experience by hand has been interesting and I have learned to value the process of creating a work of art” (Piloya I., June 12, 2023).

Exhibitions

She has had a number of solo and collective exhibitions. Trees, like humans, also agonise from transplant shocks and violent uprooting from their homes. Piloya Irene takes inspiration from these trees in their ambivalences, their sense of shelter and their fragility to whither. For the Solo Exhibition November-December 2022: “There is hope in the tears of separation,” Zodongo,

Gulu City, Uganda; an exhibition curated by Sascia Bailer (Germany) and Nantume Violet (Uganda). As Piloya introduces acid onto the bark cloth, she makes tangible the destructive effects of war migration and exposure to extreme environments and how it has impacted mental states. With a focus on the histories of origins of both bark cloths, the artist creates works layered with intimate chronicles of recollections of home, missed heritage, refuge and a longing for the familiar. The works thus eloquently weave together personal memories and political uprisings, as Gulu city is tainted with the tumultuous 1980s era of Uganda's so-called 'Kony war' that led to the recruitment of the largest child soldiers' army by the Lord's Resistance Army; historical turmoil that forced Piloya to leave Gulu at the age of seven, in 2000. The installation 'Beyond Transparency' documents the reaction between sodium hypochlorite and bark cloth, while the viewer listens to a monologue sound piece that grapples with the state of unconsciousness, in which one's mind escapes from the body. The installation is an experiment in a transparent container consisting of sodium hypochlorite reacting on the bark cloth fabric allowing the processes to be experienced in real time and space.



Figure 7: Piloya Irene

Source/Image credit: Field research



Figure 8: Reconstruction of memory by Piloya Irene

Source/ Image credit: Artist's archive.

Godelive Kabena Kasangati (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Godelive Kabena Kasangati was born in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kasangati is currently living and working between Kinshasa and Kumasi. She graduated with Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa, where she discovered photography. She currently holds a Master of Fine Art from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. In 2017, she participated in a 2-year photography training course initiated by EUNIC-RDC, The Goethe Institute of Kinshasa and the Kinshasa Academy of Fine Arts. Kasangati's photography focuses on black-and-white self-portraiture, using masks, and isolated or familiar spaces. She uses staged/constructed photography as her preferred method of expression and has also created short films. Her work portrays a strong interest in the self and human relationships and questions of identity, memory and place. She argues and expresses her thoughts about issues through stage-constructed photography, performances, chemistry and creating archives and also short films." (Kasangati K.G., June 13th, 2023).

Inspiration

Her inspiration often includes her interest in how bodies in situations of presence and absence, all interact with the natural environment. That is to say the role of nature and our environment, in relation to our actions and inactions. She maintains an affinity to the word 'MADE', which means something being done not necessarily by the artist but by all, considering the participation of the audience, the place or entity in or within which the work is operating. Her work draws on speculative research and reflects on the engagement of different bodies—these bodies, opening up an emancipatory speculative post-humanist analysis of difference that allows for non-systematic approaches while engaging a discursive arena on negotiation and notions of equality and collaboration.

Exhibitions

As an artist who understands the requirements of building a successful career Kasangati has participated in several exhibitions. A concurrent exhibition, one as a solo exhibition organized at KNUST and the second at the Compound House Gallery –Accra which was titled "MbWa" in July 2023. 'The Impression to Look at the World from Far Away' in 2019, from the series *Etrangère*, is a photographic discourse that focuses on identity, her starting point being an exploration of her past and present as memory and as reality. "I revisit breaks and ruptures in my family structure and my feelings of fear and loneliness." She has been questioning her lack of trust, fear and the uncertainty that she feels on an everyday basis. Her work is an attempt to recreate key moments and emotions in her life while celebrating her liberation. She further took part in group exhibitions such as the 12th edition of the Bamako Encounters, and *Passing the Torch*, Institute of National Museums of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinshasa (2020).



Figure 9: Godelive Kabena Kasangati

Source/ Image credit: Field research



Figure 10: Made 7 Performance, (2023)
by Godelive Kasangati Kabena

Source/ Image credit: artist archive

CONCLUSION

This study uncovers the artists' strides in empowerment, such as Ankomah's innovative use of waste materials and Ofosu's involvement with NGOs for youth art training. Thompson challenges gender expectations and emphasises art's limitlessness. Piloya's narrative addresses challenges faced by women artists and advocates for systemic changes and Kasangati acknowledges both barriers and opportunities for African women artists, encouraging others to use challenges as springboards to success. The study highlights the contribution of these artists and profiles their works, compiling

a monograph with resource materials, including details about the artists and their creative processes and the role they and their arts are playing in empowerment and social change. To extend the impact of this research, ongoing support, promotion, and mentorship initiatives should be considered to continue empowering and recognising the valuable contributions of African women visual artists.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Dr Dawood Mohammed Abdallah, Dr Dickson Adom, Prof kaŕi'kaçhä seid'ou, Prof Steve Kquofi, and Dr Emmanuel Antwi. The artists Theresa Ankomah, Esther Ofosu, Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson, Piloya Irene and Godelive Kabena Kasangati for allowing us to 'look into their world through their eyes'.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Asare, N, M. (2018). Images and Representations of Women in Ghanaian Paintings (Masters thesis). Aronson L. (1991). African women in the visual arts: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,16 (3).
- Cahnmann-Taylor M, & Segesmund R, (2018) Arts-based research in education: Foundations For Practice. ISBN 9781138235199.
- Eytan, D. (2018).How an Accra-Based Art Gallery is Bringing Ghanaian Contemporary Art to The Global Stage. Retrived from <https://www.forbes.com/sites> 2022

Quarshie

- Dijkhuizen, H. (2021) . An exploration of discourses On contemporary art created by artists from the African continent in Dutch museum publications of the past ten years (Master's Thesis).
- Stalp, M. (2016). Still a man's art world: The gendered experiences of women artists. *Journal of Research on Women and Gender*, 6, 40-55.
- Mensah A.A, Annan J.F , & Korley S.N.K (2020). A Contemporary Perspective of The Role of Women in Popular Music in Ghana: A Case of Les Femmes All Women Band.
- N'Gone Fall (2007), Providing a space of freedom. Women artists from Africa. Retrived from // efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://blogs.fu-berlin.de/thesoapbox/files/2013/03/NGone-Fall-Providing-a-space-of-freedom.-Women-artists-from-Africa-2007.pdf>
- Okeke-Agulu, C. (2009). Venice and contemporary African art. *African Arts*.
- Piechowiak, K. E. (2019). An exhibit of women, by women, but for women?: The Limits of Interpretation at the Smithsonian. University of Maryland, Baltimore County.
- Boll, P.T.(2018),” Who does she think she is?”, Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1124217/>.
- Robinson, H. (Ed). (2015). *Feminism art theory: An anthology 1968-2014*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Tremblay, D., Fortier, F., Boucher, J.F., Riffon, O. & Villeneuve, C.(2020) Sustainable development goal interactions: An analysis based on the five pillars of the 2030 agenda. *Sustainable Development*, 28(6), 1584-1596.
- Visoná, M.B. (2021). Women and Art in Africa: A Historical View. In: Yacob-Haliso, & T.Falola (Eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of African women's studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_145
- Woets R. (2020). “Young artists can try out everything”: Redefining contemporary Ghanaian art in the 21st century, Pages 4-2. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/19301944.2020.1760054> on November 5th 2020.