

## **The Youth and Contemporary Art in Ghana**

**Samuel Nortey<sup>1\*</sup>, Edwin K. Bodjawah<sup>1</sup> and George Ampratwum<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.*

### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author SN designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and the first draft of the manuscript. Authors EKB and GA managed the analyses of the study including literature searches and youth exhibitions. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study looked at Ghanaian youth and contemporary art vis a vis perception and challenges involved in contemporary art practices in Ghana. The current practice of contemporary art by Ghanaian youth has come under scrutiny, with many questioning the place of art in their practice and exhibitions. Using a triangulation of interviews, observation and survey, the study revealed that Ghanaian youth are actively embracing contemporary art and have developed an interest in exhibitions despite challenges of accepting the expanded media, processes and forms it could take. Despite the misunderstanding of what contemporary art should be and what should not, contemporary art is gradually gaining grounds and recognition in Ghana and placing the Ghanaian art on the international art scene. Although the youth have no privileged routes and a weak infrastructure for art making, recent teachings, coupled with a passion to train independent artists, commitment and collaborative efforts by the youth have made recent exhibitions trailblazers on the continent. Through more experimental projects, critique sessions and exhibitions, the Gown would surely get to Town. The passion for more experimental approaches to art making and exhibition signal greater and emancipated future for art in Ghana.

**Keywords:** *Contemporary art; youth; Ghana; art materials; perception.*

\*Corresponding author: Email: [sammynort@gmail.com](mailto:sammynort@gmail.com);

## 1. INTRODUCTION

What were Socrates's judges reproaching him with when they accused him of corrupting the youth and condemned him to death for doing so? They reproached him putting in doubt certain aspects of tradition, of openly flaunting his impiety about the gods of the city, of turning the youth away from its familial and civic duty. Young people are wedged between, on the one hand, the mortifying possibility of a return to tradition which is always a matter of resuscitating a corpse and bringing ghosts to life and, on the other hand, the possibility of taking a place in the general competition and struggling for their own survival therein, to the sole end of not being a loser [1]

According to Seid'ou [2], Contemporary Art from Ghana is akin to the Y and Z-Generation which is unsettling, emerging tomorrow and indifferent to hopelessness. It has become a new 'Sankofa' (go back and take) vision with silently loud anagrams and an anamorphic symbol. Such ideas have shaped and continue to inform the direction of the Contemporary Art scene in Ghana, on the other hand, they serve as the creative stimulus for young Ghanaians to continue to defy the odds of what could have been the stale absence of Ghana on the global Art scene. The Phoenix Rise of Contemporary Art from Ghana on the global Art landscape is largely attributed to the Kumasi School and courage of youth willing to challenge systems which dull and alienates their voices in current global constructions of History. Smith (2011) opines that 'Younger artists certainly continue to draw on elements of the first two currents, but with less and less regard for their fading power structures and styles of struggle, and with more concern for the affective and interactive potentialities of various material media, virtual communicative networks, and open-ended modes of tangible connectivity (p. 256) [3].

Paradoxically the advances made by the Ghanaian contemporary Artists in their practices, and global fame do not commensurate in any proportion, the Art institutional establishment, needful for a thriving Art scene in a country. It is important to note however that, several young Art professionals and some established ones have over the years been working to sustain the little candle light from oblivion.

In 2017, blaxTARLINES organized the third in their trilogy of exhibitions in Accra titled "Orderly Disorderly" as a response to the hopeless dystopian conditions of contemporary Art in Ghana and global politics. In an interview with kaŋi'kaçä seid'ou (Director of the exhibition), he stated that the vision of the show was inspired by the life work of Abbas Kiarostami, who instead of escaping the hopelessness into exile after the revolution, like other critical intellectuals did, stayed on to creatively evolve film forms that became significant in the history of film making. He was noted for using star amateurs, children, avoided sophisticated gadgets, the used economy of means; in so doing he evolved films without directors when digital technologies made it possible. According to Seid'ou (2015), these resonate how blaxTARLINES has worked so far to build art infrastructure and prepare the consciousness and sensitivity of the younger generation. seid'ou again asserts that on the political front, "the world is in a state of hopelessness, refugee crises, looming ecological disasters, etc.

Art has been a good path and a good tool for empowering the creative sensibilities of the youth and preparing them for the future. The authors of this paper have gone through Ghana's educational system up to the tertiary level and have been part of the basic level education where one is required at the end of every term examination to present an artwork for assessment. The joy of producing something extraordinary than that of our peers propelled one to put in the best always. Moreover, assessment of these works was largely based on general comments from peers and teachers. The works we produced were largely single narratives such as making of vehicles from milk tins, hats from corn husks, and many others. These often-single narrative works were because of the "hand and eye" training that the colonial education prescribed (Seid'ou, 2014). It was mainly to train boys and girls for industrial work. Very renowned artists in Ghana such as Kofi Antubam, Ablade Glover, E.V Asihene, K.K Broni, Kofi Asante and so on, produced exciting works but were largely single narratives such as 'market scenes' in paintings and 'mother and child' representation in sculpture and vessels for ceramics which are generally acceptable, but art is not limited to them. In all these practices and works, the finished pieces were anticipated and left little room for diverse forms of expression and experiments.

In recent times, contemporary art which proposes a zone of freedom is patronized by artists who produce works that raise social issues and engage the mind in reflecting on relevant issues in and around their environment. Contemporary artists work in a globally influenced, culturally diverse and technologically advancing world. It connotes a cultural dialogue that concerns larger contextual frameworks such as personal and cultural identity, nationality, family and community [4] According to Stallabrass (2006, p. 16), while contemporary art allows artists to endow their works and life with their own meanings on one hand, for viewers, 'there is a corresponding freedom in appreciating the purposeless play of ideas and forms, not in slavishly attempting to divine artists' intentions, but in allowing the work to elicit thoughts and sensations that connect with their own experiences [5].

In Ghana, contemporary art has come under keen scrutiny and many, including artists, have questioned whether it should be considered as art. The issue of contemporary art has been a sensitive topic for discussion with many holding the view that it does not, and should not be art. Spivey [6] notes that, it is ironic that many people say they don't 'get' contemporary art because it speaks to the dramatic social, political and technological changes of the last 50 years, and it questions many of society's values and assumptions, a tendency of postmodernism, a concept sometimes used to describe contemporary art. What makes today's art especially challenging is that, like the world around us, it has become more diverse and cannot be easily defined through a list of visual characteristics, artistic themes or cultural concerns [7-8].

The emergence of contemporary art practice led to the birth of the Foundation for Contemporary Art Ghana. Within the last ten years, most of their projects have centered on the discourse between contemporary art and projects such as Meet the Artist series, Cities Sequels, Art in the Garden/Public Spaces, Tapped Talents, Critique Clinics and Exhibitions. The foundation continues to collaborate with numerous projects some of which have been The Archive: Static, Embodied, Practiced [Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos], the 'Chale Wote' Street Art Festival and many more.

The Faculty of Art at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, where the

authors are academic members have attracted attention from colleague artists and non-artists to the current trends in artistic practices and exhibitions by the youth. There are also many who are questioning the place of art in these emergent contemporary experimental practices by the youth. Many, including some artists, consider these activities by the youth as rubbish and certainly not art. For them, the strict form of making art is by employing media, processes, elements and principles that western education gave them. However, everyday objects, multi-media and cross genre approaches to making art which predates the introduction of western art education have always been conspicuous in the traditional arts of Ghana and other cultures. They have just been repackaged to reflect recent technologies in diverse forms for contemporary art. What appears to be dominant is the use of materials found in our immediate environment (found objects).

One of these contemporary art expositions is the 'Chale Wote Art Festival'. 'Chale Wote' literally means 'buddy, let's be on the move' in the local Ga parlance. 'Chale Wote' is a carnival of street painting, graffiti murals, photo exhibitions, interactive installations, a marketplace, live street performances, extreme sports, African film shows, street boxing, a fashion parade, a music block party, recyclable design workshops and much more, which is held annually.

Nonetheless, there has not been a thorough discussion on the youth and their contemporary art practice. Since contemporary art proposes an interaction between the work and viewers, it is imperative that we get feedback for artistic reviews. Public interactions with art works explore the meaning and therefore involve re-seeing [9]. The contemplative awareness that occurs when engaging in a work of art is facilitated by the intellectual and emotional investment in the experience, which in turn, shapes the viewers' subjectivity. According to Lahlry [10], the impression is the process by which we interpret sensory data. Halpern [11] discussed that a vast ray of knowledge influences impression in that what you see depends on where you focus on. Similarly, people form an impression according to what artists present to them. These impressions according to Severin et al. [12], are influenced by different psychological factors such as experience, cultural expectations, motivations, moods, needs and attitudes. Feldman (1999) calls it a process of sorting out, interpretation,

analysis and integration of stimuli involving our sense organs and brains [13].

Gradle [14] stated from personal experience that art speaks in its entirety and responds directly to the viewer. In this vein, we can all understand that whatever artwork is produced in any form or shade and holds within it a message or a tool which can facilitate the development of mankind. In this study, the authors discuss Ghanaian youth and contemporary art vis a vis perceptions and challenges in contemporary art practice in Ghana.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORY OF ART IN GHANA

The learning and teaching of art in Ghana have been strictly followed by the curriculum introduced in 1909 by the colonial masters until recent times when there have been reviews. According to Seid'ou (2015), material and documentary evidence of the modern history of Ghanaian art has been borne out of touristy paintings, sculptures and ceramics and the persistence epi-colonial curricula anachronistic to real time ambitions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (p.131) [2]. Archival studies point to the fact that in 1955, the colonial masters introduced the National Diploma in Design (NDD). Dominant subjects in the programme were still life, modelling, landscaping, and perspective drawing which were more of producing what you see or better put 'imitate'. This type of training tends to be restrictive leaving little room for experiments with new media technologies. It is therefore not surprising that from basic school through to the tertiary institutions, most of the training has edged on imitating exactly what is seen and accepted with prescribed instructions which limits creativity and freedom to express one's thoughts and emotions. Most of the youth in art practice have not experimented with materials in their immediate environment or deduced meanings out of what happens around them, not to talk of incorporating them in their art works. It has largely been reproducing what they see or feel, or what is generally accepted by the public or society.

In recent times in Ghana, through the emancipatory teaching of Artist Collective Youth Tutors led by kaŋi'kaçhä seid'ou, many young artists have been inspired by the spirit of communality, contemporaneity, material revision and reflective public engagement in their art practice. Various exhibitions such as *Cornfields in Accra, the Gown must go to Town, Silence between the Lines, From Earth to the Market,*

*Spectacle Speculations* and *Chale Wote Art Festival* have brought significant attention from the world over to recent developments of art in Ghana. The Faculty of Art at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana has an incubator-BlaxTarlines, a project space for contemporary art which supports and is sensitive to the nuances of art practice, market, and exhibition-making. It is therefore expedient to discuss the youth and their emerging current interests in contemporary art.

## 3. INTERACTIONS WITH THE YOUNG ARTISTS AND THE PUBLIC

Assessing the thoughts and current issues regarding the youth and contemporary art practices in Ghana obviously calls for a triangulation of survey, interviews and observations. A nine-page survey was designed to gather data from youth artists, non-artists and exhibition participants. The survey contained six sections – respondent's profile, personal views, the trends of art, the state of contemporary art, perception, and exhibition state of contemporary art. The survey was designed in such a manner that it provides the opportunity for the respondents to express their opinions. The authors were involved in the organization of some major exhibitions, art talks, and seminars in the two largest cities in Ghana; Accra and Kumasi.

In all, 321 took part in the survey, succinct interviews and group discussion. Out of the sample gathered, 134 were females and 187 were males. The respondents were both artists and non-artists' status. These include the youth and adults who have been following contemporary art for more than five years. The interviews were done during and after the exhibition periods. Observations of contemporary practice by the youth and exhibitions were done for a period of four years.

## 4. CONTEMPORARY ART IN GHANA: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Reactions and comments on Ghanaian contemporary art practice revealed three major answers; it enhances the environment; it reminds us of our preserved cultural heritage, and there is nothing much to learn from. Interestingly, though many see these contemporary art practices as non-art work, most of the respondents and exhibition participants see contemporary art from an aesthetic point as something that enhances

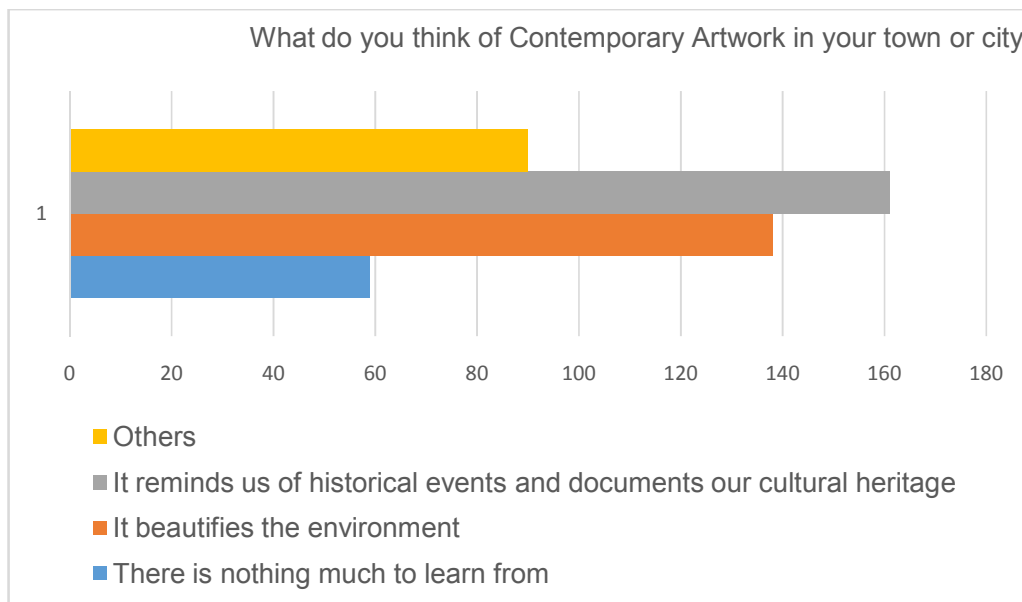
the environment. The youth are of the view that contemporary art is very vital and important to the society. Their thoughts on the importance of contemporary are presented in Fig. 1. According to the youth, contemporary art beautifies our environment and helps question societal values which hold the society responsible or raise issues in our societies. Another significant point in their thoughts on contemporary art is that it preserves their cultural heritage and helps to remind them of their historical facts. However, whilst these were the major thoughts, a significant minority were of the view that nothing much is learnt from contemporary art displays and exhibitions.

Further discussions revealed that many of the respondents were not able to connect the materials and the philosophies or concepts behind these contemporary art displays. To these respondents, it was just putting something together. Interestingly, the comments were from both artists and non-artists. The respondents see the youth involved in contemporary art as individuals who do not have the dexterity for art making and only put things together, forcing the public to accept their cooked meanings.

From such comments, it was undeniably clear that many individuals' perception of contemporary art varies and the interpretation of the message each artwork sought to convey,

differ generally to the 'outsider's perspective'. People who know very little about art just expect it to be compelling and interesting, or better still beautiful or decorative. Others basically associate it with aesthetics rather than the social, historical or political message behind its execution. Artists at this age especially in Ghana are influenced by various things to create art pieces. Usually, individuals express themselves or portray events through artworks but when the 'outsider' does not identify any such key information, to them, the artwork loses its purpose. Spivey (2015) quotes Spoons.

Are people insane? "Contemporary art" is a way for untalented con artists to get away with doing something awful and after the fact, a lot of pretentious silly people will somehow impose meaning on it and justify it as art. Modern art is disposable trash and surprisingly Andy Warhol is not the worst offender. These guys must be laughing their way to the bank. Thankfully the more untalented people 'fine art' colleges churn out the less value will be placed on sheer rubbish. I know the post-modern response would be "you just don't get it," an argument always used to defend things lacking substance. No. I do get it. But it doesn't make it any less awful. I once spilled a bucket of paint. Did I forge a Jackson Pollack? I used a shovel to dig a hole. Have I committed an unforgivable act of iconoclasm, defacing a Marcel Duchamp?



**Fig. 1. Public perception of contemporary art**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2017

A reaction to this comment...

I don't think it's rubbish. Yeah, it's easier and less time consuming to do what Andy Warhol did compare to let's say the *A Sunday Afternoon* by George Seurat, but modern art is all about getting away from tradition. It's about stretching the limits. Yes, this can seem ridiculous. When I go to art museums I joke with my friends to bring a ketchup bottle and set it on the floor and watch people admire it, but there's something to that idea that the world can be seen with wonder and awe. There's something to the ideas that just certain shapes, or contrasts in color, or random images, in general, can bring us emotion, cause inspiration and stretch our imaginations. In the end, I would not just check off all modern art as being from talentless hacks, even if it may be tempting. There are so many philosophical, political, religious, social, beautiful and ugly ideas portrayed through modern art with challenging techniques. Not all is just shock value, and I would seriously keep exploring all that this genre has to offer outside of "spilled paint" [6].

A greater number of the youth hold the view that, public artworks bring back memories of historical events and document our cultural heritage. This simply implies that most of the artworks they see around are predominantly within the context of the Ghanaian culture. Also, if these artworks remind them of past events, it means most of these artworks are created by inspiration from traditional art forms. This is because most historical artworks were created with materials that are not extensively utilized in this contemporary digital era. A substantial number of the youth were also of the view that art beautifies the environment. According to Debord [15], there is a spectacle of contemporary art that draws people or engage viewers to appreciate it. Without the spectacle, many people find art to be very exclusive and conceptual. Even though this may not be the focus or idea of many artists from the genesis of their artworks, many of them tend to follow a predetermined line of art making to fit the generic forms or fall within what the viewer is likely to appreciate.

The youth strongly agreed with the fact that contemporary art gives individuals the avenue to express themselves. For many artists, their works are a direct representation of how they feel or what motivates them. This is solely reflected in the kind of materials they put together to create their art pieces. For example, Ibrahim Mahama

also reflects on issues of labour, capitalism and politics by repurposing jute sacks and cobbler's boxes into huge forms and installations. Mahama's installation works, which employ both cocoa and coal sacks are the result of his investigations of conditions of supply and demand in African markets. Torn, patched, stamped with *the product of Ghana*, and branded by owners' names, the sacks are variously marred, marked, and transformed. These installations are displayed in Ghanaian markets as well as galleries, thus defying the artifacts' intrinsic value system. Mahama uses the coal sacks as a device to explore process, material, value, and meaning. He creates an artistic vision out of a commonplace material, repurposing them and exhibiting them in the very marketplaces from which they came [16-17]. According to the youth artists, this is the kind of freedom they need, to explore and repurpose materials within their environment and telling their stories, through these materials. This freedom makes contemporary art attractive and interesting. This owes to the fact that many contemporary artists knit together different layers of ideas, histories, materials, processes and technologies in one piece. This is evident in Fig. 3 when respondents were more of the view that contemporary art thrives outside the art institution. To them, there is the need for a push towards material revision and design concept which better outside limitations. For these youth, there is a sense of fulfilment in breaking rules.

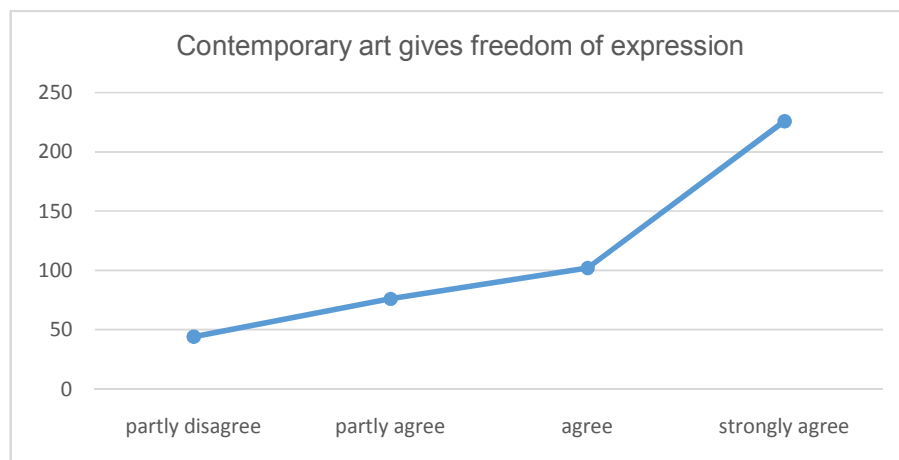
The youth's impression of contemporary art is influenced by the characteristics of the work being observed and several other variables. Bargh et al. [18] intimated that a person's impression can be a very subjective process and be based on factors such as the producer of the work, the context of the work and the viewer's own personal characteristics. This means, both the artist and non-artist strongly support the idea of being observant. It is also palpable that there is the need for keen observations by the artist. This idea of observation calls for a detailed study of every creative activity and interactive engagement in public and private spaces. Because it is through these detailed cross observations by both the artists and viewers that exciting artistic experiences were derived. An art work should not only be successful in telling us what to think but should be stunningly successful in telling us what to think about [19]. When the artist and the viewer have contributed successfully to the production of an artefact, quality is assured and this becomes a precursor to a better impression [20].

Clearly, the youth see Contemporary art as their response to a global environment that is culturally diverse, technologically advancing, and multifaceted. Their interest and choice have been on working in a wide range of media, reflecting and commenting on both past and day to day activities of the society. During exhibitions such as 'The Gown must go to Town', 'Spectacles Speculations', 'Cornfields in Accra' etc., a few participants have questioned whether a work of art is good? or aesthetically pleasing? Others too were questioned whether art is 'challenging' or 'interesting?' Contemporary artists may question traditional notions on how art is defined, what constitutes art, and how art is made while creating a dialogue with—and in some cases rejecting—the styles and movements that preceded them. According to Gillian [21] the term "contemporary art" is marked by an excessive usefulness. The contemporary has exceeded the specificity of the present to become inextricably linked to the growth of doubt consolidation. At the same time, it has absorbed a resistant group of interests, all of which have become the multiple specificities of the contemporary. The tendency is for artists to deny that they are part of a collective that is recognized and defined by others. Frustrations here are quite unique. Donald Judd did not identify himself as a minimalist. Yet 'contemporary art' activates denial in a specific new way. It does not describe a practice but a general "being in the context".

The graph shows that a diminutive segment of the youth was not in support of the notion that traditional art is diminishing. This implies that

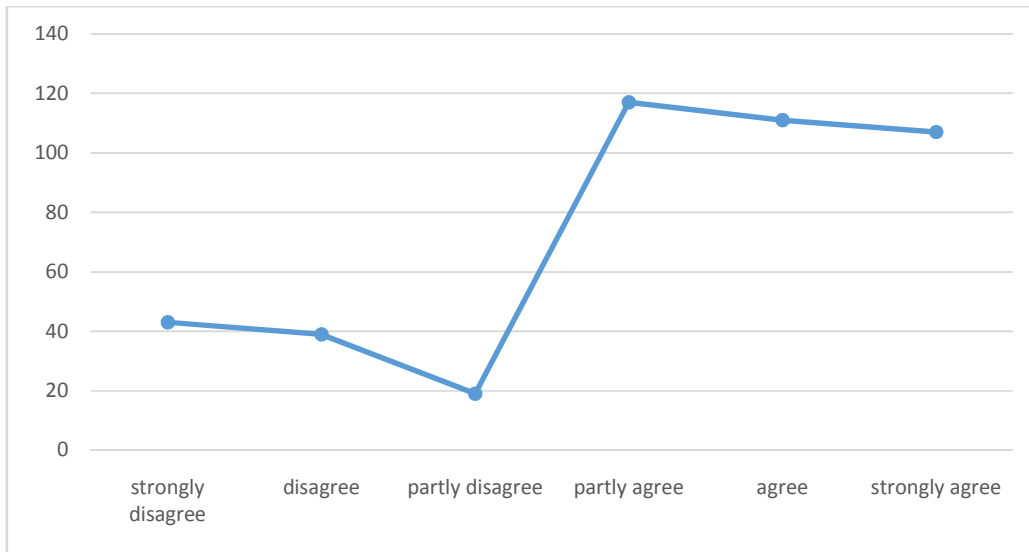
they subscribe to the fact that traditional art forms: painting, sculpting and drawing among others are still predominant in the art terrain, presently. However, a greater number of the youth tended to embrace contemporary art. Kelly [22] avows that the works of modern artists display a shift from 'Renaissance Classicism'. Essel and Acquah [23] proclaim that throughout the Renaissance era, dating from the fourteenth to the seventieth century, the core aspects of art were emulating human figures and other decorative arts. Modern art forms, on the other hand, have introduced many technological elements into its execution with the aim to revive the nature of art [24-25,23]. Notwithstanding these assertions, (Labi [26]) does not identify a divergence between traditional and contemporary art because he contends that they encompass the same elements with different approaches.

A greater number of the youth believe that contemporary art thrives outside the art institution. Many people believe that art is not limited to a specific scope and therefore can be created from a wide range of channels. A greater number of the youth are embracing contemporary art presently. Many of them do not find it boring and opposed to the traditional arts, rather they find it very insightful and intriguing because it puts together simple elements, materials and forms to create complex and layered art. Moreover, contemporary art falls within the interests of the youth as many of them easily relate with the media and processes of making.



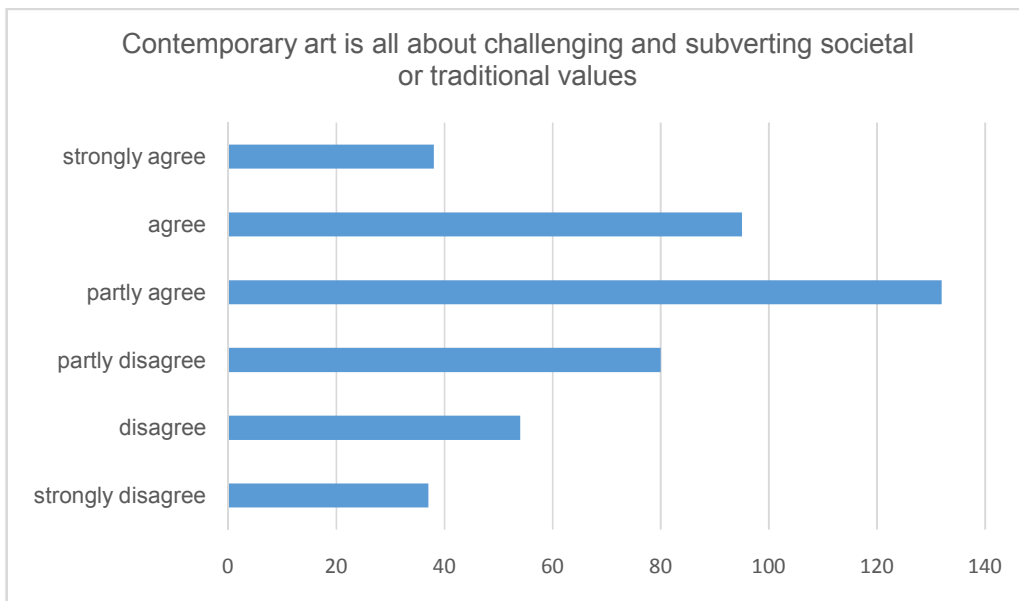
**Fig. 2. Contemporary art gives freedom of expression**

Source: Fieldwork, 2017



**Fig. 3. The place of contemporary art**

Source: Fieldwork, 2017



**Fig. 4. Contemporary Art and societal values**

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

## 5. THE YOUTH AND EXHIBITIONS IN GHANA

After these emancipatory teachings from the group of young artists at the Faculty of Art led by seid'ou, the students have been actively involved in contemporary art exhibitions. It is through such exhibitions that Ibrahim Mahama, Tracy Thompson and Bernard Akoi-Jackson are all

emerging as budding contemporary artists. These young contemporary artists in Ghana work within the confinement of postmodernism. In this regard, the practice of artistic pluralism is elevated rather than remain in the mainstream philosophies. These young contemporary artists pull from an infinite variety of materials, technologies, and forms to create art. In this regard, it is problematic to fleetingly summarize

and accurately reflect the complexity of concepts and materials used by contemporary artists. The following figures throw light on the youth and their contemporary art practice and the issues they seek to raise or explore.

In Fig. 5, the artist Edwin Bodjawah interfaces accumulative practice, collaborative production and mechanical manufacture of serial face masks which exists as both multiples and standalone objects. Bodjawah's work is guided by the axiom 'the medium is the message and the message is the medium'. His art reflects images of modern and past life on litho-printing plates and derelict roofing sheets. The serial face masks materialize African systems of cultural productions which anticipate the expanded field of contemporary art, its democratization of media and its prospects for collective production of art. In his work, the interface between repurposed material and appropriated image presents a congenial site through which the literal African experience in a capitalist, colonial systems can be resurrected, re-presented and re-engaged [27].

In Fig. 6, the shells of snails are used in a compelling art work by Livingstone Amoako. The careful arrangement of snail shells according to the young artist reminisces a time in his village Senegya when snails were abundant and could be gathered easily but in recent times, very difficult to find due to the gradual depletion of the

forests. To the artist, the snail shells resonate a global concern that goes beyond climate change. By binding these snail shells to form tower-like totem, he draws our consideration of other life forms and 'things' that are connected to our everyday survival; a consideration of an inter-specie co-evolution. Amoako's work is an artistic impression of the extent of environmental degradation, crafted using non-essential materials such as snail shells and galvanized wire. His work engages the society to appreciate and protect our natural environment.

Fig. 7 shows an image from the 'Chale Wote Street Art Festival' in Accra. The art festival is an alternative platform which brings art, music, design, dance and performance together to the streets of Accra. The community-based festival takes place in James Town - one of Accra's most historical communities and targets exchanges between Ghana-based and international artists creating and appreciating art in one space. Over the last eight years, 'Chale Wote' has transformed the city of Accra into arguably, the most active cultural hub in West Africa. The festival has inspired possibilities in public space design through community supported cultural production. The youth have been actively involved in 'Chale Wote' and their display of works of art go beyond restricted materials as there is a conglomeration of different materials in producing very intriguing works.



**Fig. 5. Edwin Bodjawah. Untitled, 2016. Mask Installation. Lithographic plates and roofing sheets. Courtesy of the artist / blaxTARLINES Kumasi**



**Fig. 6. Livingstone Amoako. Untitled 2016. Snail Shells.**  
Image courtesy of the artist// blaxTARLINES Kumasi



**Fig. 7. Performance by Bernard Akoi-Jackson. Chale Wote Art Festival, 2014**  
*Courtesy: Desire Clarke*

So, what is contemporary about contemporary art in Ghana? Ghanaian youth are embracing its practice despite challenges of space and infrastructure. Their practice and exhibitions

allow for collective or autonomous processes of making art, different forms of display, interpretation and engagement. Both artists and viewers can find a space in the gap between these two moments where they reflect temporarily on each work, considering and analyzing every new development or addition to the contemporary inventory. Yet, an inventory of art spaces alone, for example, cannot help us find a categorization of participation within the realm of the contemporary. Contemporary art is often under attack because of its inclusiveness. This very inclusiveness has helped open up deliberations on what art is and more importantly what comes next. We know what comes next as things stand—more contemporary art.

The installations and by association the exhibitions in themselves are the articulations of the contemporary. Even paintings cannot escape this “installed” quality, the considered and installation of things and images, even when approached in a haphazard or off-hand manner. We all have an idea of what contemporary art represents while only knowing the specifics of any instance. It is this knowing what it means via evoking art that pushes people towards an attempt to transcend this generality.

## **6. CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD FOR THE YOUTH IN CONTEMPORARY ART**

Challenges and possible development of contemporary art to its fullest require the concerted efforts of both artists and the public. Contemporary art is issue driven and results also point to the need for the Ghanaian community to give the youth the chance to take control of their own thinking (concepts) and learning processes of art making. According to the youth exhibitors, comments from the public and artist are somewhat discouraging. Questions such as “what is this?” “What are you turning art into” sometimes dissuade them. However, others too compliment their works, and these motivate them to work harder. Although the youth have indicated the need for freedom to take control of the learning processes to involve in making art, they obviously would need guidance. One clear challenge with contemporary art in Ghana has been largely its acceptance by the public so far. The youth in contemporary art should know that rejection has been a great stimulator for most practice.

Perhaps, there is a missing link between the message the artist wants to send across and the

understanding of the viewer. Again, it could also stem from the fact that the public has been very accustomed to the traditional forms of art making and exhibition and therefore not receptive to these new forms. Another challenge that was significant was the acceptance of material used for their contemporary art practices. It appears from interactions that some of these materials used by these young contemporary artists are frowned upon, for example, the use of sanitary pads, female panties and the likes. These according to respondents are materials for private use and society frowns upon them. There are ethical issues here which must be considered by these artists. Some of the artists also have limited knowledge of the art market. There is also a major challenge of suitable exhibition spaces. For now, the Museum of Science and Technology in Accra which seems to the most convenient arena is undergoing renovation works. Foundation for Contemporary Art, Nubuke Foundation and the blaxTARLINES spaces are a few others that promote contemporary art.

In other African countries such as Nigeria and Mali, there are challenges such as not being fully integrated into the world of contemporary art due to limited art infrastructure and the limited numbers of African led, funded and art fairs. Also, a combination of lack of state interest and limited resources are challenges in Africa and specifically Ghanaian contemporary art.

There are also challenges with limited art critics, curators and writers to cross-examine and review Ghanaian contemporary art practices and research [28]. The contemporary Art scene in Ghana is a type of ground Zero, a dystopian space with no archival memory, no public or local private funding, no major national galleries and commercial galleries, no biennales or few active collectors, poor income of Artist families, a severe ectopic Art establishment and market circuit, unable to legitimize or create symbolic value for Artists.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

For contemporary art to thrive fully in Ghana and sustain strides on a global scale, there is the need for combine efforts to place high value on the works we produce and organize exhibitions to project these works. There is nothing wrong with critiquing a work of art as it serves as positive feedback to the artist. However, critiquing should not be prescriptive or done from only one perspective of art making. In addition,

the infrastructure to project the various exhibitions to enable its viewing across the country and beyond is very vital to the development of contemporary art in Ghana. Ghanaian youth are actively embracing contemporary art and have developed interest in exhibitions despite challenges of space and full patronage of what they produce. However, it is very early to assess the extent of involvement of the youth in contemporary art practice in Ghana. What is certain is that the youth are the people now involved in contemporary art making and exhibitions in Ghana and have started making strides internationally with what they produce. These contemporary practices by the youth have come under intense scrutiny from artists and non-artists who have gone through formal education and consider certain materials processes as impure and therefore should not be used for art. That could be where the missing link is and perhaps requires more time for better appreciation. What is needed firstly, is to have sober reflections on pre-colonial artistic practices in Ghana which were cross genre in nature and connected to life in the communities and relate them to art today. These reflections could help artists and non-artists move from the state of self-denial, associated dismissive tendencies and abhorrence for contemporary art to a more receptive one. Despite the misunderstanding of what contemporary art should be and what should not, contemporary art is gradually gaining grounds among the youth in Ghana. In this new spirit of the youth, the varied visions of the exhibiting young artists might be best interpreted as "anagrams of emancipated futures" as silence between the lines envisaged. The degrees of freedom of these anagrams expand with the multiplicity of "alphabets" at the disposal of the engaged anagrammatist. Although the youth have no privileged routes and inherit a weak infrastructure for art making, recent teachings, coupled with a passion to train independent artists, commitment and collaborative efforts by the youth have made recent exhibitions pacesetters on the continent. These activities bring a lot of hope to the future of art in Ghana. Through more experimental projects, critique sessions and exhibitions, the Gown would surely get to Town.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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