

## Navigating Tradition and Innovation: Trans-Modernism among Five Contemporary Young Ghanaian Painters

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the fascinating intersection of tradition and innovation in the artistic practices of five contemporary young Ghanaian painters, encapsulated by the concept of "Trans-Modernism." As the art world grapples with the complexities of globalization and rapid cultural change, these artists navigate the complex terrain of identity, heritage, and modernity with a distinctive blend of traditional Ghanaian artistic elements and innovative approaches. Drawing upon extensive interviews, artistic analysis, and critical discourse, this study unveils the evolution of a unique trans-modernist art movement in Ghana to strengthen the egalitarian principle of the global contemporary art framework. The study highlights the power of art to bridge cultural divides, questions established norms, and inspire societal change. By navigating the intricate balance between tradition and innovation, the study showed how these five young Ghanaian painters exemplify a trans-modernist movement that not only reflects the complexities of their heritage but also paves the way for a promising future in global art discourse.

**Keywords:** Trans modernism, Modernism, Post-modernism, Post-Post modernism, Contemporary

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary art has undergone a complex evolution, navigating through post-modernism, post-post-postmodernism, and other shadow paradigms like remodernism and transmodernism. According to Mensah (2020) changes in social and political systems, as well as technological and industrial innovations, altered the world in the twentieth century. As artists explored new methods to adapt to and portray their changing environment, modernism emerged. Modernism refers to artists' purposeful rejection of the past and search for new forms of expression (Mackey & Rachel, 2009 cited in Mensah, 2020). Notably, Goldner (2009) puts forward that current African art, like twentieth-century modern art, has embraced diverse forms and followed modernism's aesthetic and contextual trends throughout its various stages.

This study delved into the dynamic world of contemporary Ghanaian art, focusing on the creative expressions of five young painters with trans-modernist philosophical inclination to advance an understanding of their ideologies and paintings through rigorous artistic analysis. As Elliot and Cavazos (2021) postulates, transmodernity was fueled by factors such as a heightened sense of ethnic pride, we explored the intersection of tradition and innovation in their artistic practices, shedding light on how they navigate the complexities of their cultural heritage while embracing modern influences.

There is no doubt that at this historical moment, contemporary African art, and art of the African diaspora, has assumed a preeminent place in Western taste (Jamal, 2022). Ghana, with

her rich history and culture, has a burgeoning art scene that reflects the country's diverse traditions and its engagement with the global art world. predicted a boost in Ghanaian visual arts whilst referring to the work of Amoako Bofo and especially the artists trained at Ghanatta College of Art and Design, and the Black figure traditions of Kerry James Marshall, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, and others. Soon after this forecast, a new generation of Ghanaian artists has emerged, reshaping the landscape of contemporary art both locally and internationally.

These artists are not confined to traditional artistic conventions; instead, they engage with a trans-modernist approach that transcends boundaries and challenges conventional categorizations (McClure, 2017). This new approach to painting draws on contemporaneity yet transcends it into a new epoch where Vitz (1998) envisioned it as exuding a spirit of hopefulness; a desire for wisdom; a concern with religious and transcendent and spiritual themes; a rediscovery of the importance of truth, beauty, goodness and harmony; a concern with simplicity and the quest for a mature and balanced understanding of experience.

This study investigates how these five young Ghanaian painters negotiate their identities as both traditional custodians and contemporary innovators. We explored the ways in which they draw inspiration from Ghana's cultural heritage, incorporating Ghanaian traditional motifs, themes, and techniques into their work. Simultaneously, we examined their openness to international art movements, technologies, and global influences, creating a unique blend of traditional and modern elements in their art. Through a comprehensive analysis of their works, artistic philosophies, and the socio-cultural context in which they operate, we sought to provide a nuanced understanding of trans-modernism in contemporary Ghanaian art. We highlighted the significance of the young artists in shaping the discourse of African art and underscored the importance of recognizing the complexity and fluidity of artistic identities in a globalized world.

By navigating the intricate interplay between tradition and innovation, the five young Ghanaian painters offered a fresh perspective on the evolving nature of art, cultural identity, and the transformative power of creativity. This paper sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of their individual journeys, artistic contributions, and the broader implications of their work within the context of contemporary art in Ghana and beyond.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the creation of artworks, transmodernism is often seen in the use of diverse materials, techniques, and styles that draw from multiple cultural and historical contexts. Artists working within the transmodernist framework combine traditional and contemporary elements, or merge different art forms and media to create new forms of expression. Transmodernist artworks also reflect a concern with social and political issues, and may challenge dominant narratives and power structures (Eliasson, 2015). According to Elliot and Cavazos (2021), the movement is often associated with concepts such as globalization, migration, and identity, and artists use their work to explore the ways in which these issues intersect and impact our lives.

Ghanaian art today extends beyond street artists in kiosks often producing repetitive copies from books, video covers, and popular portraits of politicians, musicians, or sportsmen and women (Labi, 2013). It includes works of skilled metal artists, sculptors, painters, graphic and textile designers, installation artists, and many more, demonstrating new innovative techniques and original creative works which attract collectors and galleries, and a wide range of local and international patrons. The researchers contend that there is dynamism in the techniques, styles, philosophies, and contexts of production and the place of trained artists in the history of Ghana's modernism. Undoubtedly, the dynamism in the techniques, styles, philosophies, and contexts of production in this contemporary time has attracted the pens of scholars and art educators to make scholarly documentation of various artists across the art discipline in Ghana (Sofa, 2015).

In accounting for these artists in the circus of the transmodernist paradigm, the researchers dwelled on the document phenomenology theory developed by Gorichanaz and Latham as a guide. With this approach, discussion of artworks is seen as form of documents which does not ignore the mental aspect of the document. The phenomenology theory provided a lens through which the artists of the study were understood based on their experiences and interactions with information in their daily lives from the context of culture and social norms and how it shaped their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in art creation. Here, when the narrator participates in the action, it is considered first-person narration. By employing the first-person narration of document phenomenology, the researchers participated at some point in the artists' creative process (Gorichanaz, & Latham, 2017). The researchers gained a thorough understanding of the artist's whole creative process as a result, we were in sync with the experiences of the responders.

In document phenomenology, Essel and Asare (2020) postulate that artworks in itself are a type of document, they serve as a window through which to view the personality, ideas, convictions, and feelings of the creators. This is so because artists portray themselves in their works of art. Artwork's content embodies the authors' experiences in life. According to Essel & Asare (2020), understanding the experiences and lives of the artists is made possible via the decoding of their works of art. Therefore, works of art are objects of biography. When someone creates a biography of a piece of art, they are reevaluating the key ideas of the topic and dissecting the work's underlying philosophy for intellectualization (Gorichanaz, & Latham, 2017).

Gorichanaz (2017) revealed that art documentation involves the creation and organization of documents representing and related to artworks and artists. In art documentation, as in modern society at large, Berryman (2018) asserts that a document is typically considered to be evidence in support of a fact. In art documentation, that "fact" is generally a given artwork or an aspect of an artist's life (Gorichanaz, 2017).

From the above, it could be established that art documentation embodies the inspiration, thematic concepts, technique, style, medium, and mode of expression by which an artist produces a work of art. This is what is believed to be the "fact" that represents the aspect of the artist's life. The artwork produced is seen to be the artist him/herself.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative research approach because it is designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006). The nature of the study required a deeper understanding of transmodernism as a social phenomenon and its influence on the lived experiences, perceptions, and attitude of the respondents of the study in terms of their art production.

The study was directed through the descriptive phenomenological design. The study relied on this design because of its appeal in biographical documentation, in that it is mostly explorative, and looks at how individual accounts of life experience can be understood within contemporary cultural and structural settings (Roberts, 2012). Furthermore, it enabled the researchers to understand major social shifts, and how old and new experiences from the social shifts impacted the artmaking process of the study respondents. By this approach, the study was directed through a form of systematic empirical inquiry into finding meaning to the art-making process and experiences of the selected individuals in the context of the transmodernist paradigm.

The trans-modernist paradigm being a complex and multifaceted artistic movement, goes beyond the boundaries of traditional modernism and postmodernism. It involves a variety of artistic expressions, perspectives, and influences hence the use of qualitative research approach allowed for in-depth exploration and understanding of the nuances and intricacies of this

phenomenon. Again because of the exploration of subjective experiences, this research method was particularly well-suited for exploring the subjective experiences, perceptions, and motivations of individuals, in this case, the five young Ghanaian painters. The five painters were purposively selected for their bias towards transmodernist paintings and worldview.

This methodology allowed the researchers to delve into the personal narratives, creative processes, and artistic journeys of these painters, shedding light on their unique perspectives. Qualitative research emphasizes context and cultural sensitivity so understanding transmodernism among young Ghanaian painters necessitates an examination of the sociocultural, historical, and artistic context in Ghana. The qualitative methods employed enabled the researchers to gain a deep contextual understanding by engaging with the lived experiences and cultural backgrounds of the artists. The approach also offered flexibility in data collection methods; it allowed us to use techniques such as interviews, participant observation. The qualitative comparative analysis and content analysis were the major method of data analysis. This adaptability was essential for the study, which required a diverse set of data sources and approaches to capture its essence fully.

Furthermore, qualitative research methods prioritize the voices and perspectives of the participants. By engaging young Ghanaian painters in the research process, this approach empowered them to share their insights, experiences, and artistic visions, giving them agency in shaping the narrative surrounding trans-modernism. The descriptive phenomenology is well-suited for providing a detailed account of the phenomenon under investigation. It enabled the researchers to situate trans-modernism within the specific context of contemporary art in Ghana, offering a comprehensive picture of its manifestations.

In summary, the use of qualitative methodology for this study is justified due to its ability to explore the complexity of the topic, engage with the subjective experiences of artists, provide cultural context, and offer flexibility in data collection methods, ultimately contributing to a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this artistic movement within its specific cultural and generational context.

### **PROFILE OF THE FIVE TRANSMODERN GHANAIAAN PAINTERS**

The five artists under consideration are established mid-career artists who have dedicated several years to cultivating their unique bodies of work. Their artistic endeavors have not gone unnoticed, as they have garnered both national and, to a certain extent, international acclaim through the public showcasing of their artworks. What is particularly intriguing is that these artists boast an impressive record of accomplishment of numerous solo exhibitions hosted by prestigious galleries and museums, both on a domestic and global scale.

**Kingsley Sedem Dzade**



**Figure 1. Kingsley Sedem Dzade**  
(Image courtesy: Kingsley Dzade, 2022)

Kingsley Dzade, a gifted contemporary artist from Ghana, was born on April 10, 1989, in Adidome, Volta Region. He began his education at Adidome Basic School and later pursued Visual Arts at Sogakope Senior High School. Kingsley's passion for art did not wane after high school; in 2011, he enrolled in Takoradi Polytechnic, where he completed a three-year HND program in Commercial Art (painting) with distinction, earning a first-class degree.

***Artistic Style and Technique***

Kingsley's artistic style is characterized by its versatility and skillful use of various mediums. He primarily works with acrylics on canvas but occasionally incorporates oils, watercolour, and charcoal into his creations. This willingness to experiment with different materials suggests an open-minded approach to artistry, allowing him to adapt his technique to the specific demands of each piece. One of the most prominent features of Kingsley's style is his commitment to realism. He strives for perfection in his realistic renditions, creating artworks that captivate viewers with their interplay of dark and light tones. This dedication to detail and precision in his work makes his art visually striking and emotionally engaging. By skillfully depicting male and female figures of all ages, he showcases his versatility as an artist. Additionally, Kingsley's use of glowing colours is noteworthy. As depicted in (Figures 3 and 4), he employs these vibrant hues to portray the richness of African culture and values, infusing his art with a sense of vitality and energy. This choice of colours not only add aesthetic appeal to his work but conveys a deeper message about the vibrancy and diversity of African heritage. Kingsley's art is interactive, participatory, and experiential, as he blurs the line between the art object and the viewer. This suggests an innovative approach to artmaking, where the audience become an integral part of the artistic experience. This approach aligns with his transmodern sensibilities, which reject the boundaries between art and life, emphasizing a holistic integration of art with everyday existence.



Figure 3. Dzide, “Edem’s Closet”, 2021

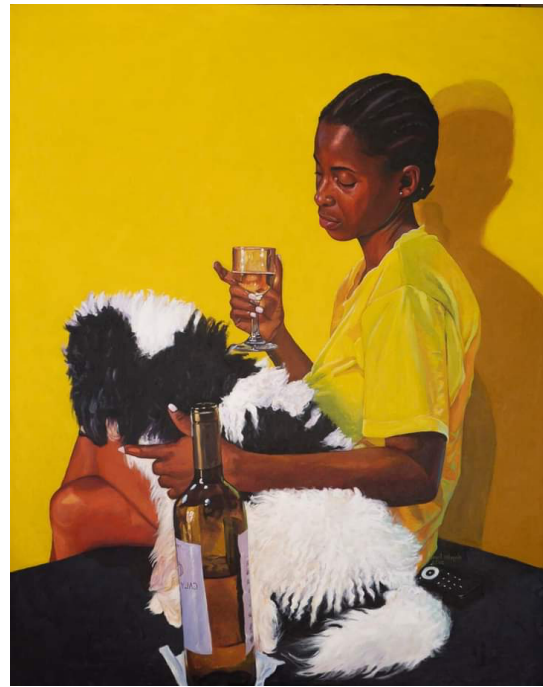


Figure 4. Dzide, “Solitude”, 2021

(Image courtesy: Kingsley Sedem Dzide, 2022)

### ***Themes and Subject Matter***

As portrayed in Figures 5 and 6, Kingsley’s art is deeply rooted in his Ghanaian identity and African heritage. His major themes and subject matter reflect his commitment to addressing societal issues and advocating for social equality. Some of the key themes in his artworks include:

*Social Equality:* Kingsley’s art serves as a platform to shed light on issues relating to social inequality. He uses his art to draw attention to the disparities and injustices in the Ghanaian society and beyond. Through his realistic portrayals of people from various walks of life, he highlights the importance of addressing these inequalities and striving for a more equitable world.

*Socio-cultural Issues:* Kingsley’s work delves into socio-cultural aspects of Ghanaian and African life. He celebrates the richness of African culture and values, showcasing them through his use of vibrant colours and depictions of everyday life. By doing so, he contributes to the preservation and promotion of African heritage.

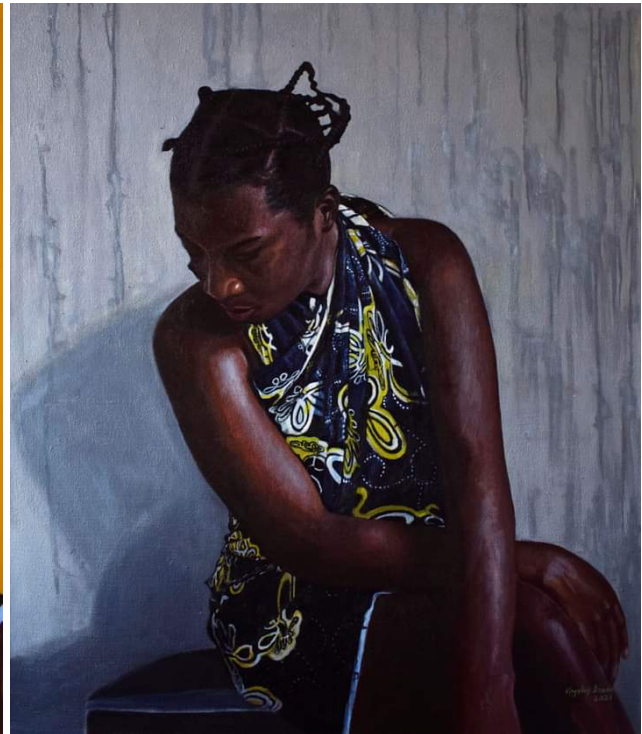
*Political Problems:* His art also tackles political issues affecting Ghana and beyond. While the specific subjects may vary, his commitment to using art as a means of advocacy is evident. Through his creations, he voices his concerns, critiques, and aspirations for positive political change.

*Afrocentric Values:* Kingsley’s art is deeply infused with Afrocentric values, emphasizing the significance of African culture, history, and identity. This cultural pride is evident not only in his subject matter but also in his choice of materials and colours, which serve as a testament to the richness and diversity of African traditions.

In summary, Kingsley’s transmodern artistic approach blends a commitment to realism with a versatile use of mediums and an emphasis on vibrant colours. His art serves as a powerful advocacy tool to address societal issues such as social equality, socio-cultural challenges, and political problems. Through his work, he celebrates African culture and values, challenging preconceived notions about the viability of art as a career path in Ghana.



**Figure 5. Dzade, “Self-Love I”, 2021**



**Figure 6. Dzade “Self-Love II”, 2021**

(Image courtesy: Kingsley Sedem Dzade, 2022)

### Stephen Abban Junior



**Figure 7. Stephen Abban Junior**

(Image courtesy: Stephen Abban Junior 2022)

Stephen Abban was born on December 15, 1992, in Saltpond, Ghana, and began his education at the Methodist kindergarten preparatory school. At the age of 12, he moved to Akim Oda to live with his father and continued his schooling at Saint Anthony Catholic School, eventually passing the Basic Education Certificate Exam in 2011. He then attended Winneba Senior High School, where he focused on visual arts and received the Best Visual Arts Student Award in 2012.

In 2016, Stephen enrolled at Takoradi Technical University to pursue a Higher National Diploma in Commercial Art, specializing in painting. He excelled academically, earning a first-class grade for the first three years of his education. He extended his studies for an additional two years, completing a Bachelor of Technology certificate in studio practice. During his first year of the top-up program, he received a scholarship from the Erasmus+ programme of the

European Commission to study visual representation at Ezsterhazy Karoly University in Hungary for eight months. He returned to finish his project and graduated with a first-class honours degree in 2021.

**Artistic Style and Technique**

Stephen Abban's artistic style and technique are central to his identity as a transmodern artist. Abban's artworks primarily utilize a mixed-media technique. He skillfully combines acrylic paint and natural earth components. This combination of materials is crucial to his artistic style, as it symbolically bridges the gap between nature and the past. The use of natural earth components grounds his work in the organic and historical paradigms, while the use of acrylic paint adds a contemporary dimension. Abban's exceptional mastery of figurative anatomy is a prominent aspect of his artistic style. His ability to render human figures with a high level of realism enables him to convey depth and emotion in his artworks. This mastery of figurative art is essential in his exploration of historical narratives through the depiction of black figures of all ages. Abban's artworks blend realism with symbolism. While his figures are rendered realistically, they serve as vessels for conveying deeper historical narratives and cultural symbolism. Through the juxtaposition of realistic human figures and symbolic elements, Abban creates artworks that are both visually captivating and emotionally resonant.

Interestingly, Abban's art is deeply influenced by diverse people, ideas, and cultures that transcend national boundaries. His incorporation of cultural references from various traditions and contexts reflects his commitment to multicultural aesthetics, a key aspect of transmodernism. This fusion of diverse influences results in a rich and layered visual language in his art (Figures 8 and 9) are classic examples.



Figure 8. Abban, “Phillis Wheatly”, 2022 Figure 9. Abban, “Amanda Gorman”, 2021 (Image courtesy: Stephen Abban Junior, 2022)

**Themes and Subject Matter**

As presented in Figures 10 and 11, Stephen Abban's transmodern artworks explore several major themes, reflecting his engagement with contemporary global culture and his desire to push artistic boundaries. His transmodern artworks delves into crucial historical narratives that were often neglected by modern history. By doing so, he called for fresh ideas, principles, and approaches that could seamlessly integrate into the global art culture. A few of his themes are;

*Representation of Black Figures:* Abban's primary focus is on the representation of black figures of all ages. This deliberate choice addresses the historical neglect of black voices and experiences in mainstream art and history. Through his figurative depictions, Abban seeks to reclaim and celebrate black identity, history, and culture.



*Historical Narratives:* Abban's artworks delve into crucial historical narratives that have often been overlooked or excluded from modern history. He uses the human body, depicted in various postures and settings, as a vehicle to explore and reinterpret these historical stories. His art becomes a means of restoring and preserving forgotten histories.

*Memory and Identity:* Abban's personal connection to art, stemming from his childhood drawings used to preserve memories, underscores the theme of memory and identity in his work. His art synchronizes age and history with episodic recollections, suggesting that as humanity progresses, it should not forget its past. His mixed-media technique, combining natural elements with acrylic, serves as a metaphor for the preservation of both nature and cultural heritage.



Figure 10. Abban, “The Golden Eggs”, 2023



Figure 11. Abban, “Old Man Plant Coconut”, 2023

### Ebenezer Edem Kwame Dedi



Figure 12. Ebenezer Edem Dedi  
(Image courtesy: Ebenezer Edem Dedi, 2022)

Ebenezer Edem Kwame Dedi is the first son and second child in his family, born on January 12, 1991, in Sogakope, Volta Region, Ghana. He began his education at Comboni R/C

complex in Sogakope and passed the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in 2005, which led him to Sogakope Senior High School (Sogasco). Despite his father's wish for him to pursue a career in business and become an accountant, Edem's passion for art prevailed, leading him to study Visual Arts in secondary school, with a focus on ceramics and painting. His journey into Visual Arts in secondary school was transformative, as he discovered a deeper understanding of himself and his artistic identity. This realization led him to embark on an artistic adventure, and in 2009, he decided to further develop his skills at Ghanatta College of Art and Design. At Ghanatta, Edem felt a profound connection to his true self, discovering his innate talents, beliefs, and inclinations through his creative work. He honed his skills in Graphic and Textile design and graduated in art and design in 2012.

Edem's pursuit of academic growth remained a driving force, and in 2016, he applied for a bachelor's degree program in art education (painting and sculpture) at the University of Education in Winneba. This decision was influenced by advice from lecturer friends he made in Winneba after relocating there in 2014. Following their guidance, he completed his bachelor's degree in art education (painting and sculpture) in 2020, further solidifying his commitment to the world of art. Throughout his journey, Edem's art has served as a vehicle for self-discovery and expression, enabling him to explore his identity and artistic potential.

#### ***Artistic Style and Technique***

Ebenezer Edem Dedi's artistic style and technique are expressed in his use of acrylics on canvas and his brushwork. He employs thick, noticeable strokes to capture the fleeting nature of light and the passage of time, a hallmark of impressionist art. Impressionists often used pure, unmixed colours and applied them in small brushstrokes to achieve the desired tones, allowing these colours to visually blend when viewed from a distance. In Edem's paintings, one can see the influence of this technique, as he uses varied colours to create a sense of light and atmosphere. Edem also draws from expressionism in his work. He describes his process as emotional and instinctive, aiming to elicit spontaneous and visceral reactions from viewers. Expressionism is characterized by a focus on emotions, often conveyed through bold and expressive brushwork. As portrayed in (figures 13 and 14) Edem's use of "blocky swaths of dark brown and vibrant, expressive, spontaneous colours" aligns with expressionist principles. His goal is not to create a precise representation of reality but to convey the essence and emotional impact of his subjects.

This unique approach involves blending these two artistic styles, creating a fusion of impressionism's sensitivity to light and expressionism's emotional intensity. The combination however allows him to project his topics in a powerful and visceral way while using the impressionist technique of subtly guiding the viewer's gaze through the painting, creating an engaging visual experience.



Figure 13. Dedi, “Ochre Flavour”, 2021



Figure 14. Edem, “The Chopper Experience”, 2022

***Major Themes and Subject Matter***

As seen in Figures 15 and 16, Edem's artwork is heavily influenced by cultural, fashion, lifestyle, and societal events. These themes play a significant role in his work and serve as a means of connecting with his audience and conveying his beliefs. Themes such as culture, fashion and lifestyle are predominant.

*Culture:* Culture is a central theme in Edem's art. He believes that culture is an essential element of civilization and serves as a foundation for a sense of identity and pride. His paintings reflect various aspects of culture, and he uses art as a tool to communicate the importance of preserving and understanding one's cultural heritage.

*Fashion and Lifestyle:* Edem also explores the themes of fashion and lifestyle as integral components of culture. He sees clothing and the way people carry themselves as expressions of their beliefs and ideologies. Through his art, he highlights how fashion and lifestyle choices can reflect an individual's identity and resonate with broader societal values.



Figure 15. Edem Dedi, “Velvet Ecstasy II” 2021



Figure 16. Dedi, “Night with Eddie I”, 2022

**Philip Komla Letsu**



**Figure 17. Philip Komla Letsu**  
(Image courtesy: Philip Komla Letsu, 2022)

Philip Komla Letsu is an expressive artist born on April 28, 1985, in Hohoe, Volta Region, Ghana. He displayed a strong passion for art from a young age. After primary education at Kabore School Complex in Ho, he pursued Visual Arts at Mawuli Secondary School in the same region. Despite facing resistance from his family for choosing art as a full-time pursuit, he remained dedicated to his artistic calling.

In 2005, after completing secondary school, Letsu enrolled at Ghanatta College of Art and Design in Accra to further develop his skills. He encountered challenges and met fellow talented artists, exploring various artistic disciplines such as printing, sculpture, designing, and painting. Over time, he gravitated towards painting and print-making, ultimately making them his primary modes of artistic expression. Despite the initial lack of support, Letsu persisted in pursuing his artistic passion, leading him to become the expressive artist he is today.

***Artistic Style and Technique***

Letsu loves a print-like finish of his works. As depicted in (figures 18 and 19), his works are seen as patterned prints effect that set out the uniqueness of his brush strokes. His artistic style is characterized by its vibrant and colourful presentation. He primarily works with acrylics and occasionally oils on canvas, which allows him to create bold and expressive compositions. The use of these mediums contributes to the lively and dynamic quality of his artworks. Letsu's style can be described as both contemporary and transmodern. Letsu's art reflects a blend of cultural elements and an exploration of shifting consumer lifestyles, fashion, and cultural trends. The artist's portrayal of human figures is a central aspect of his style. These figures, which encompass both young and older individuals of different genders, serve as the focal point of his works. Depending on the concept he aims to communicate, these figures engage in various activities that help convey his message.



Figure 18. Letsu, “Star Boy”, 2022



Figure 19. Letsu, “Khaki”, 2022

(Image courtesy: Philip Letsu, 2022)

### ***Major Themes and Subject Matter***

As portrayed in (figures 20 and 21), Philip Letsu's art revolves around several major themes which include:

*Identity and Social Constructs:* Letsu explores the characteristics that shape personal and social identities. He is interested in understanding who we are as individuals, as a society, and as a nation. He challenges stereotypes and conventions that may limit our understanding of ourselves and others.

*Cultural Fusion:* A prominent theme in Letsu's work is the idea of cultural fusion. His art serves as a bridge between different cultures, showcasing the interplay between consumer lifestyles, fashion, and culture. Through his vibrant and lively compositions, he communicates the dynamic and ever-changing nature of culture in the modern world.

*Social Commentary:* Letsu uses his art as a means to comment on various social issues. He delves into topics such as gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and heritage. By addressing these subjects in his work, he encourages viewers to question societal norms and consider the diversity of human experiences.

*Influence of Art and Social Endeavors:* Letsu believes that culture is influenced by a wide range of artistic and social endeavors, including technology, politics, style, music, performance, and the arts. He seeks to communicate these influences in his art, highlighting the interconnectedness of different aspects of contemporary culture.



Figure 20. Letsu, “Ama”, 2022



Figure 21. Letsu, “Turquoise Blue Pendant”, 2022

### David Kofi Amoateng



Figure 22. David Kofi Amoateng  
(Image courtesy: David Kofi Amoateng, 2022)

Kofi Amoateng is a talented figurative experimental artist hailing from Wadie Edwumakase in the Kwabre East District of Ghana. He was born to Mr. Akwesi Atta Oppong Adinkrah and Madam Grace Afram. His father, Mr. Adinkrah, was both a teacher and studio artist who worked as a practicing painter at a beach near Labadi Hotel. His early exposure to the arts came from his father, who produced postcards and paintings for sale to tourists. Kofi spent his formative years with his father in Accra, where he received home tuition in both the arts and academics, delaying his formal classroom education.

In the 1990s, Kofi's father relocated from Labadi beach to the Art Center, which eventually allowed Kofi to start his formal schooling. He began his primary education at High Street SDA Primary School at the age of 8, followed by a stint at Bishop Boys' Primary School from primary 4 to 6. He completed his primary education at Bishop Mixed Junior High School in 2009.

Kofi was a bright student, having performed well in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), he initially chose to pursue a business program in senior high school. However, he was assigned to study Visual Arts at Holy Trinity Cathedral Senior High School (HOTCASS). His early exposure to art through his father made this transition relatively smooth, although his dedication to art was initially challenged by his interest in football.

Kofi's passion for art was reignited by one of his art teachers named Big Sam, who recognized his potential and encouraged him to pursue his artistic talents. In 2013, Kofi gained admission to Takoradi Technical University, where he enrolled in a Commercial Art (Painting) program. Despite lacking prior experience in painting, Kofi was motivated by his classmates and a demanding art lecturer, Mr. Ako, to develop his unique style and find his artistic identity.

During his time at the university, Kofi experimented with painting, pyrography, and other artistic mediums. He became known for his expressive and spontaneous application of patches of colour, which boosted his confidence in understanding colour behavior. In 2016, he completed his Higher National Diploma in Commercial Art (Painting). Not content with stopping there, Kofi continued his academic journey by pursuing a Bachelor of Technology program at the same institution, focusing on illustration, animation, and design. He strongly believes in the importance of diversity in art and aims to be an adaptable and versatile artist.

***Artistic Style and Technique***

Kofi Amoateng's artistic style and technique are characterized by a unique blend of mixed media, particularly the use of charcoal and acrylic on canvas. This allows him to create a rich and textured visual experience. The combination of these mediums provides depth, contrast, and versatility in his works. He employs a combination of direct drawing and tracing techniques to transfer his images onto canvas. Figures 23 and 24 are notable examples.



Figure 23. Amoateng, “Grandma’s Ludu”, 2022



Figure 24. Amoateng, “Destiny”, 2022

(Image Courtesy: Kofi Amoateng, 2022)

***Themes and Subject Matter***

Amoateng's art reflects fashion and lifestyle, which could be seen in his choice of subject matter and the way he presents it. This theme likely influences his use of vibrant colours and attention to detail when depicting human figures and lifestyle scenes. It is however deeply rooted in the exploration of human experiences, perceptions, and self-identity.

*Human Experiences:* Amoateng draws inspiration from people and their experiences. His art serves as a mirror to reflect the diverse range of experiences that individuals go through,

whether positive or negative. This theme highlights his empathy and the way he seeks to capture the complexities of human life.

*Social Impact and Evolution:* Through his art, Amoateng acknowledges that the experiences of individuals can shape societies and lifestyles. He suggests that the way people navigate and respond to their experiences can influence societal change. This theme underscores his interest in social dynamics and cultural evolution.

*Self-Identity and Perception:* Amoateng delves into the concept of self-identity and how individuals define themselves. He challenges the idea that people often define themselves based on external factors such as location, language, or religion. Instead, he encourages individuals to discover their own path to self-identity, emphasizing self-assuredness and personal empowerment. His major themes and subject matter are evident in (figures 25 and 26).



Figure 25. Amoateng, “Untitled”, 2022



Figure 26. Amoateng, “A Wait”, 2022

(Image Courtesy: Kofi Amoateng, 2022)

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSMODERN INSPIRED WORKS OF THE FIVE ARTISTS

The contemporary art world is a dynamic landscape where artists continually push the boundaries of tradition, seeking new ways to express their ideas and engage with the complexities of our ever-evolving society. In this section, the researchers attempt to identify casual relations in terms of the commonalities and differences that arise from the transmodern approaches of the five artists: Kingsley Sedem, Stephen Abban, Ebenezer Edem Dedi, Philip Letsu, and David Amoateng. Each artist employs a unique blend of techniques and themes that reflect their individual perspectives on the world, yet they share an overarching commitment to trans-modernism. The selected artists’ transmodern artworks are characterized by four key elements: hybridity, dialogical approach, critical engagement with the world, and intuitive and spiritual elements. These elements are aligned with the principal ideas of trans-modernism as described by Dussel (2012).

*Hybridity:* The transmodern artworks of the artists combined elements from diverse cultural traditions, genres, and media. The artists used both modern and traditional techniques and styles to create a new form of expression that transcends the boundaries of culture.

*Dialogical Approach:* The works are also characterized by a dialogical approach, which involved a conversation between different cultural, historical, and artistic perspectives. The artists sort to engage their viewers in a dialogue that reflects on the complex relationships between art, culture, and society.



*Critical engagement with the world:* As transmodern artists, they use their work to engage with the historical, social, political, and environmental issues of their time. They sort to create art that is not only aesthetically pleasing but also socially relevant, culturally accepted and politically engaged.

*Intuitive and spiritual elements:* Their transmodern artworks incorporated elements of intuition and spirituality, drawing on the wisdom of traditional cultures and spiritual practices to create a sense of connection and meaning.

Using Feldman's method of art analysis as a framework, we compared the artworks based on their technique, style, philosophies, and content, and related them to the transmodern perspective. Feldman's approach is an inductive process that draws general conclusions from available evidence (Subramaniam, et al., 2016). Our utilization of Feldman's method was driven by its structured framework, which guides the examination of artworks through four crucial steps. These steps encompass a detailed description of the sensory characteristics of the artworks, an analysis of their formal qualities, a thorough exploration of their intrinsic and extrinsic interpretations, and an evaluation of their societal significance (Subramaniam, et al., 2016, as cited in Adom et al., 2020).

We employed a combination of visual narrative inquiry and descriptive analysis throughout the process. This dual approach proved invaluable in extracting meaningful insights from the respondents' creations. The researchers leaned on visual narrative inquiry for two primary reasons: firstly, its focus on individual cases, and secondly, its ability to help us make sense of the events and experiences shared by the respondents during interviews and observations (Webster, 2010). This however enabled in examining how they embrace transmodernism while expressing their individuality through their art.

### **Artistic Style and Technique**

As noted earlier, Kingsley demonstrates a willingness to experiment with various mediums, including acrylics, oils, watercolour, and charcoal. His dedication to realism and precision, along with his use of glowing colours, showcases a commitment to perfection while celebrating the vibrancy of African culture. What sets Kingsley apart is his interactive and participatory approach, blurring the line between the art object and the viewer. This aligns perfectly with his transmodern sensibilities, emphasizing the integration of art with everyday existence.

Stephen Abban, on the other hand, employs a mixed-media technique, combining acrylics with natural earth components. This unique blend symbolically bridges the gap between nature and the past while showcasing a deep mastery of figurative anatomy. Abban's art beautifully blends realism with symbolism, creating emotionally resonant narratives through the juxtaposition of realistic human figures and symbolic elements. His commitment to multicultural aesthetics reflects the transmodern ethos, embracing diverse influences from various traditions and contexts.

Ebenezer Edem Dedi adopts a fusion of impressionism's sensitivity to light and expressionism's emotional intensity. Using thick, noticeable strokes and varied colours, he captures the fleeting nature of light and the passage of time. His art is deeply influenced by cultural, fashion, lifestyle, and societal events. These themes serve as a means of connecting with his audience and conveying his beliefs, especially in the context of culture, fashion, and identity.

For Philip Letsu, he uses vibrant colours and bold brushwork to create a contemporary and transmodern style. His art revolves around themes of identity, cultural fusion, and social commentary. He explores personal and social identities, challenges stereotypes, and emphasizes the interconnectedness of different aspects of contemporary culture.

David Amoateng, like Letsu, employs mixed media, including charcoal and acrylic on canvas, to create a rich and textured visual experience. His art is deeply rooted in the exploration of human experiences, perceptions, and self-identity. Amoateng's themes of human experiences, social impact and evolution, and self-identity and perception reflect his empathy and his interest in societal dynamics and cultural evolution.

A striking similarity emanating from the analysis of the artistic styles and techniques of the five painters is the dexterity with which they explored different media and to challenge the status quo. This, is at the forefront of transmodernism as Hudde (2022) citing Dussel (2019) indicated that transmodernism is a worldwide ethical liberation project. Within this project, artists are liberated from Eurocentric modalities and therefore emancipate themselves into exploring and celebrating alterity and diversity. This perhaps explains why Kingsley Sedem Dzade demonstrated a willingness to experiment with various mediums, including acrylics, oils, watercolour, and charcoal. Ebenezer Edem Dedi adopted a fusion of impressionism's sensitivity to light and expressionism's emotional intensity. Similarly, the trio of Stephen Abban, Philip Letsu and David Amoateng relied on mixed media in their artistic praxis. Whilst immersing themselves in the philosophies of transmodernism, the ubiquitous artistic intention is an affirmation of their African identity and roots. Akin to what Neal (1968) proposed as black aesthetic, all five artists endeavoured to assert their persona in a blatant objection to white ideas imposed on the black African through colonialism, an Eurocentric modernism worldview. This culminated into achieving realism in terms of the correct proportions of the black African figure whilst emphasizing the black skin in rather an exaggerated manner.

### Themes and Subject Matter

While these artists employ diverse techniques, they share several common themes that align with their transmodern approaches. Social equality is a prominent theme in Kingsley's art, as he uses it to address disparities and injustices in society. Similarly, Stephen Abban delves into historical narratives and the representation of black figures to celebrate black identity and culture. Both artists use their art as a means of advocacy, voicing their concerns and aspirations for positive change.

Ebenezer Edem Dedi explores culture, fashion, and lifestyle as integral components of identity, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Philip Letsu delves into identity, social constructs, cultural fusion, and social commentary, challenging stereotypes and celebrating diversity. David Amoateng's art reflects human experiences, social impact and evolution, and self-identity and perception, capturing the complexities of human life.

In view of the above, these five transmodern artists, Kingsley, Stephen Abban, Ebenezer Edem Dedi, Philip Letsu, and David Amoateng, bring their unique styles and perspectives to the contemporary art scene. While they employ different techniques and themes, they all share a commitment to transcending traditional boundaries and embracing diverse influences. Their art denotes dynamism as they engage with societal issues, celebrate cultural heritage, challenge stereotypes, and explore the complexities of human life. This is typical of trans-modernist worldview as Elliot (2016) citing Luyckx (1999) reveals that the paradigm of trans-modernity involves an assertion of indigenous values, wisdom, and traditions while adapting to a changing world. Additionally, transmodern perspectives emphasize the retrieval and reevaluation of excluded cultures (Goizueta, 2000). In this vein, the artist in this study exemplified the transmodern spirit, whilst using art as a powerful vehicle for bridging gaps and fostering a deeper understanding of their African identity.

### Impact on Ghanaian Culture and Socio-Political Landscape

The impact of Ghanaian culture and the socio-political context on the transmodern approaches of these Ghanaian artists, Kingsley, Stephen Abban, Ebenezer Edem Dedi, Philip

Letsu, and David Amoateng, is profound and multifaceted. Their art reflects not only their individual identities but also the broader cultural and societal dynamics at play in Ghana and Africa.

First and foremost, as Ateljevic (2013) postulates, there is a broad range of cultural diversity as part of the transmodern vision, insisting that each community or region needs to be free to develop in ways that are uniquely suited to its culture, ecology, climate and other characteristics, these artists' commitment to their Ghanaian identity and African heritage is a central theme in their work. They draw inspiration from the rich tapestry of Ghanaian culture, celebrating its values, traditions, and diversity. This cultural pride is evident in their use of vibrant colour, patterns, and depictions of everyday life in Ghana. The infusion of African cultural elements into their art challenges preconceived notions and stereotypes, showcasing the vitality and depth of the Ghanaian, ecology, climate, and African heritage. This reflects a transmodern sensibility that values multicultural aesthetics and seeks to bridge traditional and contemporary elements.

Moreover, the socio-political context of Ghana plays a significant role in shaping their artistic themes and subject matter. Kingsley, for instance, uses his art as a platform to shed light on social inequalities in Ghanaian society. Through realistic portrayals of people from various backgrounds, he highlights the disparities and injustices present in his homeland. This commitment to addressing social issues aligns with the transmodern emphasis on societal engagement and activism through art. This resonates Mkhize (2017) who stated that the transmodern paradigm carries the catalytic power to influence societal behaviour.

Similarly, Stephen Abban's focus on the representation of black figures and the exploration of overlooked historical narratives reflects a response to the global discourse on race and identity. In a world grappling with the legacies of colonialism and racism, Abban's art reclaims black voices and experiences, fostering a sense of empowerment and identity. This theme resonates with transmodernism's call for inclusivity and the recognition of marginalized perspectives.

Rooted in trans-modernism's ideology of ethical, heart-centred responses to all levels of personhood and society (McClure, 2017), Ebenezer Edem Dedi bears creative fruits of diversity as he explores culture, fashion, and lifestyle in his art as influenced by the socio-cultural dynamics of Ghana. He emphasizes the importance of preserving and understanding one's cultural heritage, reflecting the broader discourse on cultural preservation and identity in the Ghanaian society.

Philip Letsu's art, which delves into identity, social constructs, and cultural fusion, captures the complexities of contemporary Ghanaian society. His exploration of gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and heritage challenges societal norms and encourages viewers to embrace diversity. This resonates with the transmodern theme of questioning established norms and celebrating the diversity of human experiences.

David Amoateng's art, rooted in human experiences, social impact, and self-identity, reflects his engagement with the psychological and emotional dimensions of Ghanaian society. His exploration of self-identity and perception encourages individuals to define themselves on their own terms, reflecting a desire for personal empowerment and autonomy in a rapidly changing world.

We concur that: "transmodernity is not the new happy Grand Narrative of a globalized world that finally achieves harmoniously unification, in opposition to the old nefarious acts of blindness, plunderings and dominations" (Magda, 2017, p23) yet, the paintings of these artist serves as a powerful medium for advocacy, cultural preservation, and the reclamation of marginalized narratives. These artists, through their transmodern sensibilities, bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary discourse, contributing to a vibrant and dynamic cultural landscape in Ghana and beyond. Typically, the impact of Ghanaian culture and the socio-

political context on these Ghanaian artists' transmodern approaches is evident in their celebration of African heritage, engagement with social issues, and exploration of identity.

### **THE INFLUENCE, CONTRIBUTION, AND LEGACY OF THE FIVE TRANSMODERN ARTISTS ON THE GHANAIAN ART SCENE AND BEYOND**

In this section, we discuss the influence of the five transmodern artists on the Ghanaian art scene and beyond. We again discuss their contributions to the evolution of transmodernism in art and reflect on the legacy of their transmodern artworks.

#### **The Influence of Transmodern Artists on the Ghanaian Art Scene and Beyond**

Kingsley's paintings serve as a powerful platform for advocacy and dialogue in the Ghanaian art scene. It rejects the boundaries between art and life. He seamlessly integrates elements from everyday life, rooted in Afrocentric values. Like other painters of the Black figure, most notably Kerry James Marshall, Barkley L Hendricks and Amoako Bofo, his portrayal of issues such as skin toning attitudes among young people in Africa resonates with viewers, sparking important conversations about societal norms and values. Kingsley's art is vibrant and evocative. He challenges conventional beauty standards and highlights the significance of embracing African heritage and black skin. This resonates with Kpade (2022) who also discusses artists like Yiadom-Boakye, who exclusively paint black figures in elevated socio-economic positions. His works are not only been visually striking but also socially impactful, shedding light on critical issues within the Ghanaian society.

Similarly, Stephen Abban's transmodern artworks plays a significant role in bringing historical narratives to the forefront of the Ghanaian art scene. By skillfully blending acrylic and natural earth components, Abban creates visually captivating pieces that bridge the gap between nature and the past. His exploration of neglected historical stories contributes to a richer understanding of Ghana's cultural heritage. Whilst discussing the opportunistic and/or pathological expressions of black life today, Jamal (2022) was interested in artists who are able to simultaneously embrace and transfigure the burden of black history. Like Ossawa Tanner and Nelson Makamo, Abban is certainly on one of such artists whose works encourages viewers to reevaluate their perspectives and engage in conversations about the interconnectedness of cultures and histories.

Ebenezer Edem Dedi's transmodern artworks are deeply influenced by culture, fashion, lifestyle, and social dynamics in Ghana. He uses his art as a means of communication, addressing issues such as the decay of traditional dressing among the Ghanaian youth. Edem's works highlights the importance of cultural preservation and the significance of culture in defining a civilization. His ability to connect with viewers on an emotional level through art has made his messages accessible and impactful.

Philip Letsu's art on the other hand serves as a bridge between cultures, emphasizing the interconnectedness of people living in different regions and locations. His works have explored the influence of society and culture on fashion and lifestyle. Letsu's art reflects the principles of multicultural aesthetics within transmodernism, fostering a deeper understanding of how culture shapes our lives. His portrayal of diverse similarities and differences has contributed to a more inclusive and equitable perspective on art.

David Kofi Amoateng's transmodern artworks embraces the ideals of universal dialogue and integration. Through his use of charcoal, oil, and acrylic, he creates multi-particular spaces within his paintings, where diverse narratives and symbols coexist. Amoateng's art invites viewers to engage in shared experiences, promoting empathy, understanding, and integration. His works challenge the status quo and push the boundaries of what art can achieve in fostering a harmonious world.

### **Contribution to the Evolution of Transmodernism in Art**

These Ghanaian transmodern artists have contributed significantly to the evolution of transmodernism in art. Their works embody the principles of transmodernism, such as cultural diversity, interconnectedness, and social inclusivity. They have expanded the boundaries of traditional art forms and challenged prevailing norms by addressing critical societal issues.

Kingsley, Abban, Edem Dedi, Letsu, and Amoateng have all demonstrated a deep appreciation for the multifaceted nature of human existence and the interconnectedness of cultures. They have rejected the idea of a single cultural or artistic authority, instead emphasizing the value of diverse perspectives and experiences. Their artworks have showcased the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of Ghanaian culture and society.

Moreover, these artists have used their works to initiate authentic inter-cultural dialogues, bridging gaps between different cultures and ideologies. They have promoted inclusivity and understanding by creating spaces for universal dialogue and integration. In doing so, they have contributed to the growth and development of transmodernism as an artistic movement that values the mosaic of human existence.

### **Reflecting on the Lasting Legacy of Transmodern Artworks**

The legacy of these transmodern artists and their artworks is one of enduring impact. Their ability to address societal issues, challenge norms, and promote cultural diversity has left a lasting mark on the Ghanaian art scene and beyond.

Kingsley's paintings continue to inspire discussions about self-identity and cultural pride. They serve as a reminder of the importance of embracing one's heritage and resisting societal pressures.

Stephen Abban's exploration of neglected historical narratives has enriched our understanding of Ghana's cultural heritage. His artworks stand as a testament to the power of art in preserving and celebrating history.

Ebenezer Edem Dedi's art remains relevant as it addresses contemporary issues such as cultural preservation and the influence of globalization on traditional practices. His works encourage viewers to reevaluate their cultural identities and values.

Philip Letsu's bridging of different cultures through his art serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of humanity. His legacy lies in promoting a more inclusive and equitable perspective on art and culture.

David Kofi Amoateng's creation of multi-particular spaces for universal dialogue and integration continues to inspire artists to challenge boundaries and foster understanding through art. His legacy lies in his vision of a harmonious world where diverse voices converge.

In conclusion, these transmodern artists have had a profound influence on the Ghanaian art scene and have contributed significantly to the evolution of transmodernism in art. Their legacy is characterized by their ability to address critical societal issues, challenge norms, and promote cultural diversity, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and interconnected world through their art.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper delved into the dynamic world of contemporary art in Ghana, exploring how a new generation of artists were navigating the intricate interplay between tradition and innovation. Through a comprehensive analysis of the works and philosophies of these young Ghanaian painters, it was evident that they are not merely inheritors of their rich artistic heritage but active participants in its transformation.

The artists demonstrated a deep respect for their cultural roots. They drew inspiration from traditional Ghanaian art, folklore, and customs, infusing their works with a sense of authenticity and continuity. At the same time, they were unafraid to experiment with new

mediums, styles, and concepts, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression. The painters explored in this paper used their art as a platform for social and political commentary. They addressed pressing issues such as identity, gender, colonialism, and globalization, reflecting the evolving concerns of their society. These artists were gaining recognition not only within Ghana but also on the international art stage. Their ability to navigate between tradition and innovation makes them important contributors to the global art conversation, offering fresh perspectives and challenging established norms. They play a crucial role in preserving Ghana's cultural heritage while simultaneously evolving it. They ensure that traditional art forms remain relevant and adaptive in a rapidly changing world.

They exemplified the notion that tradition and innovation are not opposing forces but rather complementary aspects of artistic evolution. They masterfully navigated this duality, forging a path that celebrates Ghana's artistic heritage while propelling it forward into the future. Their trans modern approach served as an inspiring example of how art can both reflect and shape a society's cultural identity. As they continued to create, these artists are not just painters; they are cultural ambassadors, storytellers, and visionaries who illuminated the way for future generations of Ghanaian artists.

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