

Two Works by Ghanaian Artists
The Harn Museum of Art
University of Florida

Susan Cooksey

As noted in Nagy and Jordan's *First Word* in this issue, Director Rebecca Nagy and Curator Susan Cooksey of The Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, have recently investigated contemporary art in Ghana both to build the contemporary art collection and in planning an exhibition focused on current Ghanaian artists' work.

After taking in the vibrant art scene in Accra and visiting the campus of KNUST in Kumasi, they purchased several works by emerging artists, including Jeremiah Quarshie, Caleb Prah, Priscilla Kennedy, and Zohra Opoku and also acquired works by established artists Kate Abena Badoe, Kwame Akoto, and George Adfezi Hughes. Kwame Akoto's untitled painting (2016), and George Adfezi Hughes's *Time Cycles* (2010), illustrated here, show us two divergent approaches of approaching personal, local, and global ideas that have informed and inspired a new generation of artists. For the Harn, both works lay the foundation for the collection of late twentieth century and twenty-first century works from Ghana and enhance and complement its collection of contemporary art.

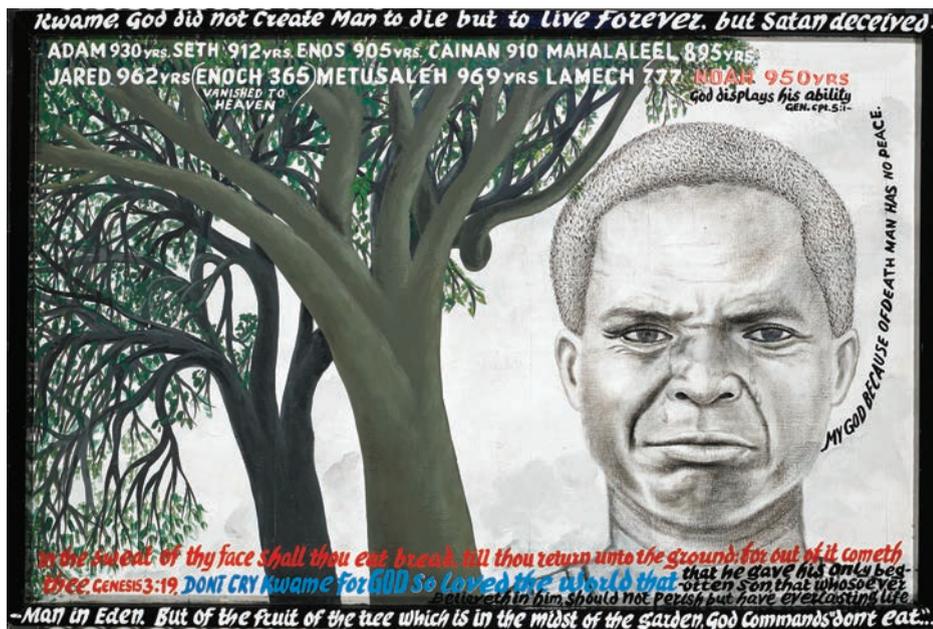


(top) George Adfezi Hughes (Ghanaian, b. 1962) *Time Cycles* (2009) Mixed media; 61 cm x 76.2 cm Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville Museum Purchase with Funds from the Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund Photo: Harn Museum of Art

George Hughes, a Ghanaian-born artist who now works in the United States, addresses the turbulence and violence of colonialism and its aftermath through imagery that references personal and historical narratives. Hughes states that his painting with collage, *Time Cycles*, is about "The natural connections within human genealogy and how it is 'trapped' in overbearing forces of technological advancement and violence." The recurrent themes in Hughes's oeuvre of death, decay, destructive technologies, and their consequent degradation and dehumanization are seen in this work in the images of a tank, a vomiting horse, and bowels over excreta filled with faces cut out from a year-book, and, his counteractive themes pointing to the travesty of postcolonial reconciliation appear in the image of an aerosol can spraying stylized flowers. Hughes work is the first that the Harn has acquired by a Ghanaian artist whose work explores themes of colonialism, conflict, and violence.

(bottom) Kwame Akoto (Ghanaian, b. 1950) *Do Not Cry, Kwame* (2016) Oil on wood panel; 91.4 cm x 122 cm Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville

Museum purchase with funds from the Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund, 2017.45.1 Photo: Harn Museum of Art



Akoto's painting is a self-portrait in his typical photo-realist style. Trained as a commercial artist specializing in sign-painting that featured realistic imagery, Akoto (also known as Almighty God, from his studio's name, Almighty God Artworks) is one of the most prominent artists in Ghana whose multifaceted status as an urban, commercial and fine artist has been well documented (see Doran Ross's article on Akoto in *African Arts* vol. 47, no.2, 2014). This work is remarkable example of Akoto's oeuvre, in his layering of text and image to engage us in an unusually reflexive and introspective inner dialogue. Inscriptions around his somber gray, tearful face—"MY GOD BECAUSE OF DEATH MAN HAS NO PEACE"—reveal his despair as he contemplates mortality, but an inscription at the top of the painting "Kwame, God did not Create Man to die but to Live Forever, but Satan deceived" and below, "Don't Cry Kwame for God so Loved the world ..." and biblical verses and statistics about man's longevity ("ADAM 930 yrs. SETH 912 yrs." ... etc.) suggest the reassuring voice of another inner self.