

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

WIDEWALLS

Gideon Appah Explores Ghanaian Cultural Memory at The Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU

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In 1957, Ghana became the first colony in sub-Saharan Africa that gained independence and became the republic led by Kwame Nkrumah. The newly formed state embraced the values of Pan-Africanism, the movement developed to abolish enslavement and colonization. Ghana started developing rapidly in all aspects of society, including culture.

During those fruitful years, cinema had an essential place in people's lives as seen as both entertaining and engaging. However, as society changed and eventually became in turmoil, cinema became less and less important.

This particular period came under the close inspection of Gideon Appah, known for highly evocative drawings and paintings. This prosperous artist explores intimacy and leisure to address specific social and political conditions. Through his works, focused on stylish figures set in intriguing cityscapes, Appah explores layers of memory drawn from both his family stories and the history of Ghana.

In his latest body of works titled *Forgotten, Nudes, Landscapes*, currently on view at The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Appah explores the Ghanaian cinema culture.

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Left: Gideon Appah - Two Men Having a Smoke, 2020- 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York. Photographer: Adam Reich / Right: Gideon Appah - Hyped Teen, 2020. Oil and acrylic on canvas. Photo: Adam Reich

A Nod To Ghana's Cinema

In recent times, Gideon Appah explored the Ghanaian cultural memory through a series of portraits expressed through paintings, drawings and media ephemera. The primary source of inspiration was the legacy of the country's film production from the 1950s to the 1980s. By employing entertainment posters, newspaper clippings, and films from the period, Appah has created a vibrant tableau that commemorates the cinema and leisure.



Gideon Appah - A Woman Drowned in Water, 2021. Oil on canvas. Photo: Adam Reich

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The Works

The central piece in the exhibition, *ROXY 2* (2021), is titled after the Roxy Cinema, which played a significant part in the cultural life of Accra, the capital of Ghana. The painting depicts a group of figures in front of the legendary venue and thus gives the nod to the places where social life thrived during the country's struggle for independence from colonialism throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Appah purposely refers to Ghanaian films such as *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952), *I Told You So* (1970) and *Kukurantumi: Road to Accra* (1983) to tackle the collective memory. Moreover, these popular films enabled him to trace the shift of cultural appetites throughout time and map the memories that define the present moment.

The artist explores scenes from both public and private life to unravel the effect popular culture had on the development of personal and collective identities, as illustrated with works such as *Hyped Teen* (2021), *Bliss* (2020-21), *A Woman Drowned in Water* (2021) and *Man in Bed* (2021).



Left: Gideon Appah - Remember Our Stars, 2020. Oil and acrylic on canvas. Photo: Adam Reich / Right: Gideon Appah - Roxy 2, 2020-21. Oil and acrylic on canvas. Photo Adam Reich

Gideon Appah at ICA

Appah's dreamy works symbolize **the sense of loss** in terms of social distortion, ranging from the death of cinema to the end of democracy. The artist critically observes portraiture and uses his depictions to address the ways memory is being formed across space and time.

The exhibition *Forgotten, Nudes, Landscapes* will be on view at [The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University \(ICA at VCU\)](#) **until June 19th, 2022.**

Featured image: Gideon Appah - The Goodbye, 2021. Oil on canvas. Photo: Adam Reich.