

Proverbial Akan Nexus of Micah's Three-Female Terracotta Sculptures

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Abstract

Proverbial Akan culture has been unavoidable in the creative life and works of Contemporary Ghanaian artist Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah. Micah has redefined his expertise in Akan (Twi) proverbs and their symbolism in his three-female terracotta sculptures that send his artistic statement across. The article sought to explore the biographical data of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah and decontextualize his three-female terracotta sculptures with the portrayal of women in some selected Akan (Twi) proverbs. The biographical research method offered the changing experiences and outlooks of Micah in his daily life as an artist and provided interpretations on his three-female terracotta sculptures with Akan proverbs. The biographical research method coupled with narrative and interpretive analysis tools established the research constructs for the study. The article revealed that Micah's three-female terracotta sculptures reflected the feminist consciousness of women by elevating their self-awareness and their importance in their daily lives as Ghanaians with Akan (Twi) proverbs through political, socio-cultural and religious contexts. The nexus of Proverbial Akan culture and Micah's terracotta sculptures served as an artistic way of elevating the female character in society. It encapsulated the rich source of philosophical expediency for preserving the tradition of Ghana and its Proverbial Akan culture.

Keywords

Akan (Twi) Proverbs, Feminist Consciousness, Three-Female Terracotta Sculptures, Proverbial Akan Culture, Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah

1. Introduction

Terracotta is a fired clay used as building materials and for sculptures. It has been used throughout the history of civilization. Terracotta can be found in

countries all over the world. Clay for making terracotta as a substance has long been valued for its strength, abundance, and low cost (Pariona, 2018). The suitability of clay for modelling sculptures is due to its adhesive quality and plasticity (Wilkerson, 2017). When a lump of clay is fired, it transforms into terracotta (baked earth as referred to by Italians). The terracotta sculpture is created from a particularly porous and easily shaped clay with a high iron content that gives the sculpture a reddish/brown colour. Lewitin (2019) is of the view that “Terracotta is fired at a relatively low temperature (600 to 1000 degrees Fahrenheit), and its surface remains quite porous unless it is glazed”. As ascribed by these authors, clay has played an important part in the life of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah, a versatile artist who had explored clay for numerous reasons. In the context of Micah’s three-female terracotta sculptures, the sculptures popularity stems largely from their attractive natural colours, which are the very epitome of earth tones (Lewitin, 2019).

Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah has been a practising sculptor for years and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Takoradi Technical University from 2018 till date. Micah was born on 9th October 1974 in Winneba, Ghana and married with three (3) children. He is also the “Okyeame of Ekumfi Akosti Anona Okusubenstir Ebusua” (Donkor et al., 2021). Micah’s terracotta sculptures bring forth by connecting his ideologies to nature. In Micah’s view, artists have no option but to stick to a few popular traditional materials. To Micah, clay as part of the few popular traditional materials for sculpture has been made to serve mainly as a modelling material for sculptors than for any other purpose. Unfortunately, in Micah’s view, this versatile material has been underutilised since much has not been explored about it (Micah, 2005).

Micah explores more into clay (a versatile medium) as a Ghanaian artist throughout history. In his view, clay as terracotta has varying colours that suit perfectly as a natural material for exterior sculpture. The nexus of Micah’s three-female terracotta sculptures is situated on the proverbial Akan culture. It is understood from a traditional point of view that Akan proverbs are wise oral sayings that have in-depth truth and hidden meaning. It can be easily understood by the wise. In a more prevailing manner, Akan proverbs are propounded by societies based on their prevailing issues. Micah seeks to immortalize and make Akan proverbs relevant in modern society by incorporating them in his triple *Ganga* (Goddess) female terracotta works. In this context, proverbial Akan culture has been unavoidable in the creative life and works of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah as a contemporary Ghanaian artist.

The importance of proverbial Akan culture is captured in his works, as exhibited to tell the significance of females in society and motivate gender equality. In this sense, Akans have rich oral cultural traditions of which proverbs are part. A proverb may be determined largely by situational context specifically in social, political, religious or aesthetic/artistic purposes. Buah (1998), as cited in Kissi and Van Eck (2017), shares that the Akan people are Asante, Fante, Adansi, Bono,

Twifo, Akuapem, Akyem, Akwamu, Kwahu, Asen, Sehwi, Awowin, Nzima and Ahanta. However, these people are known for their strong connection between visual and verbal expressions and a distinctive blending of art and philosophy (Yankah, 2012). The thoughts of proverbs always leave indelible imprints on the minds of listeners. The Akan proverbial language has beauty and content that fulfil the soul of the people in the community (Micah et al., 2021). In other words, the proverbial Akan nexus used in the works of Micah fulfil the content and beauty of Akan proverbs as expressed in the representation of all respects of Akan culture such as a metaphor, allusion, euphemism and folk tale (Adom et al., 2021). Micah's three-female terracotta sculptures have a feminist significance that acts as a catalyst of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals where it covers themes about God, ancestors, human beings, marriage, family death, values, animals and plants (Tetteh, 2006).

Considering the expression of Micah's terracotta sculptures in Akan perspective, it heightens the wise philosophical expressions which are terse and witty and yet makes the language rich and conveys a lesson or wisdom. It couches conventional wisdom in a poetic capsule, making it aesthetically pleasing and memorable (Adotey Addo, 2001; Yankah, 1999). In this regard, it is indisputable that Micah's three-female terracotta sculptures with Akan proverbs support the view that artists in general especially sculptors can play a very vital role in keeping proverbs alive (Ampem, 1998). Artists as custodians can manifest their thoughts with these proverbial expressions. Art and its connotations with Proverbial Akan culture may be associated to bring much prominence in the contemporary Ghanaian arts (Asante, 2002). However, much has not been seen with contemporary Ghanaian sculptures. A combination of contemporary Ghanaian sculptures with Akan proverbial expressions makes this a source of inspiration that broadens the scope of the creative minds of contemporary sculptors by keeping Akan proverbs alive in these artworks (Micah et al., 2021; Gyekye, 1996).

Regarding Micah's et al. (2021) and Gyekye's (1996) statements, there is the need to understand Micah's three-female terracotta sculptures with Akan proverbs that possess in-depth knowledge of values that the contemporary sculptor can tap into for his execution of works. The article, therefore, decontextualizes the three-female terracotta sculptures by Micah with the portrayal of women in some selected Akan proverbs. In an attempt, the article explores the biographical account of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah and analyses his three-female terracotta sculptures incorporated with Akan proverbs that preserve the Ghanaian cultural values with deep-rooted meanings to enhance contemporary Ghanaian sculpture.

2. Theoretical Basis

The study was theorized on Leonora Carrington's (b. 1917) feminist consciousness and her artistic life typifying the commitment to linking psychic freedom

with a specifically feminist political consciousness (Chadwick, 1986). This study adopted the theory as a workability test to “avoid the pitfalls of ‘abstractions’ of the feminine by exploring alternative ways of enabling female characters to appear more multi-dimensional or multi-faceted” (Knight, 2021: p. 5; Johnston, 1973). Consequently, the theoretical concept as a backdrop of Micah’s thoughts enunciates the subject “feminism”. The three-female terracotta sculptures create the desiring look that articulates the story of his mother in a sublime manner of aesthetic, social, cultural, political and economic envision. In this respect, Micah’s philosophical remarks on women are more impulsive and comfortable with nearness when growing around his mother. Therefore, by rearticulating the proverbial Akan culture based on feminism in his terracotta sculptures, his three terracotta sculptures are represented in a feminine subjectivity with symbolic meaning with Akan proverbs. Connelly et al. (2000: p. 51) support that “the feminist frameworks each rely on a unique assumption about the basis for women’s subordination; each raises unique questions and provides unique concepts for examining women’s inequality; and each suggests quite unique strategies for change”.

In this regard, feminist consciousness created in his three-female composition is significant as theorizing women’s subjectivity on the notion of how women, both individually and collectively are challenged and deprived of their rights, roles and status in the Akan society. Primordially, women are discriminated against and made to feel less privileged in the societal status quo. For instance, in an organisation such as marriages, workplaces and other functions, the self-awareness of women is put behind. As in an actual sense, men are classified as being strong, more intelligent, possessing leadership traits and the competence to provide security, sustenance, and livelihood in Akan traditional communities (Gyan et al., 2020; Gyan, 2018; Addei & Addei, 2010). From personal accounts, the artist puts himself and his cultural life experiences in the Akan extended family setting where the women in his family are more than the men. Therefore, enriching his understanding of the history of gender relations, identity and consciousness in his extended family, the artist portrays his self-awareness of the importance of feminism in his life and recognizes feminist consciousness in his terracotta works.

The artist’s concept on feminism, Akan proverbs and clay as a material philosophy creates a nexus that deepens a person’s way of thinking (Adakabre & Naté, 2019). Undoubtedly, it is commonsensical that the artist’s commitment to Akan proverbial culture using his tree-female terracotta sculptures brings to forth the competency and versatility of Akan language (Agyekum, 2021). The combination of these three artistic concepts by the artist is crucial as it highlights the representations of women and their feminine subordination (Mubarok, 2017) to men in Akan society. The artist, therefore, deepens the knowledge concerning the metaphor of women in the Akan society as it tends to serve the gender equalities within all aspect of lives.

3. Methods

The study was carried out using biographical research under the qualitative inquiry. Biographical research in this context sought to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah in his daily life and how to provide interpretations of the accounts on Micah, his past, present and future. Thus, the goal of biographical research is not only to understand such individual cases in the context of individual life histories but to gain an understanding of social realities or the interrelationship between society and life history (Rosenthal, 1998). Also, it includes life history writing, oral history, memoir, autobiography and life narrative (Roberts, 2002; Merrill & West, 2009; Kridel, 2022). To be able to understand and explain the statements of the biographer and about his artworks and experiences in the past, it was necessary to interpret them as part of the overall context of Micah's current life and his resulting present and future perspective (Rosenthal, 2004).

As a life story approach, the narrative and interpretive analysis tools were used for the study as a great deal of discussion in the field of qualitative research. The narrative analysis was a proximity method that gave the oral narration of history, memories of the artist from the artistic standpoint of his cultural values. In this step, the study explains the biographical significance of Micah's experiences in the past and above all, the timeline of his life history (Rosenthal, 2004; Bornat, 2008). Also, the interpretive analysis guided in discussing the three-female terracotta sculptures produced by the artist. In telling the meanings of the three-female terracotta sculptures as to whether they are decontextualized within the nexus of Akan proverbs, the interpretive analysis addressed the deep level of explanation and interpretation, which one looks for hidden and explicit meanings in the artworks (Bornat, 2008). At this point, Micah's three-female terracotta sculptures can only hint at the importance of the artistic, social, religious and political impact of women in his artworks and their influences on him as part of being an artist.

The study used face-to-face interview and direct observation for the data collection. A face-to-face interview was used to capture the verbal and nonverbal cues from the respondent that help the study to probe deeper since there was the need to have more valuable information from the respondent's expertise in the art discipline. Face-to-face interview as a data collection method took a form of unstructured interviewing that allowed the researchers to communicate directly with the respondent to acquire factual information on the study. Thus, face-to-face interview method ensured the quality of the obtained data and increased the response rate. As the most popular and oldest form of survey data collection, the data collected was then transcribed into written text with the help of a tape recorder (SmartSurvey, 2022; Schröder, 2016; Lavrakas, 2008).

Direct observation was made on the three-female terracotta sculptures. This was done to observe the physical characteristics of the works in their natural setting. The study used the overt type since a direct encounter with the artist and

his works. The artist, therefore, knows that he is being observed (CDC, 2018). On the other hand, the data collection on the artworks through direct observation was performed with video recording equipment and photographs. These recordings were adequate conclusion to the data collection by recording the artist's explicit and implicit knowledge (Ramduny-Ellis et al., 2005) on the Akan proverbs and his artworks.

In addition, ethical consideration was the key research ethics where the study sought permission from the artist to use his images for academic exercise and focused on confidentiality by protecting his rights. It was also to enhance the research validity and maintain the scientific integrity of the study (Bhandari, 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

The results and discussions in this section are based on the biographic data of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah and his three-female terracotta sculptures that relate to women from Akan proverbial context. The selected Akan (Twi) proverbs for the terracotta sculptures are attributes based on Akans' social, cultural, political and economic settings. The Akan proverbs used for these sculptures are explicitly mentioned in *Asante Twi*. The sculptures are titled in Akan (Twi) proverbs in compliance with the description, interpretation of their content and significant meanings.

4.1. Biographical Data of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah

Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah, affectionately called Papa Bondzie (see **Figure 1**), was born on the 9th of October 1974 in Winneba to Mr. Victor Bondzie Micah



Figure 1. Portrait of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah (Papa Bondzie) (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

and Madam Marian Turkson all of the blessed memory. He grew up in Victoria road, a suburb in Winneba with 11 other siblings. Growing up in his family home, everyone was each other's keeper. Roaming the street of Victoria road and selling petty things, Micah and his siblings have to provide for their parents. This situation was the order of the day. His parents operated a store to support the entire family. The parent effortlessly provided formal education for all the siblings. Through that blueprint, he exhibited his talent as a sculptor. He trained with expertise and practising sculpture in 2001. Again, Micah (see **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**) then enrolled in art school to obtain his Bachelor of Fine Art (Sculpture) in 2002 and Master of Fine Art (Sculpture) in 2005, all from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi. In 2015, he completed his PhD in (Arts and Culture) at the University of Education, Winneba. Micah has gained extensive experience in teaching. He started as an Art teacher at A.M.E. Zion Girls Secondary School, Winneba, before he became a Teaching Assistant at KNUST. He joined Takoradi Polytechnic in 2005. As an instructor in the Department of Sculpture, he rises to become a lecturer. In 2009, he was promoted to Senior Lecturer and later became an Associate Professor in July 2016. Becoming a Professor, Micah has researched and authored five books on art in the area of sculpture materials and their practices. He has attended several seminars and conferences and has published in local and international journals. Micah has made an academic visit and practical training to Sweden in 2018 (see **Figure 4**). He has also chaired parallel sessions at conferences in Ghana. He has had the privilege to write the foreword for art books and catalogues. Professor Micah has extensive professional exhibitions to his credit. Most of

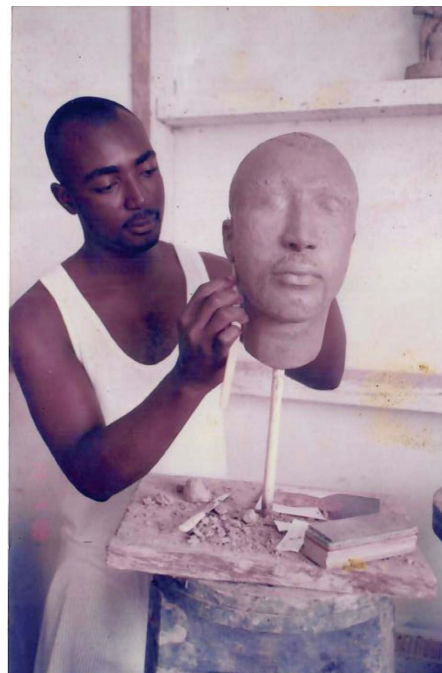


Figure 2. Self-portrait with clay, self-portrait with clay, Micah worked as a BFA candidate at KNUST, Kumasi, 2002 (Image courtesy: Victor K. B. Micah, 2022).



Figure 3. Micah worked as an MFA candidate at KNUST, Kumasi, 2005 (Image courtesy: Victor K. B. Micah, 2022).



Figure 4. An institutional visit from Stockholm to Gothenburg, Sweden in 2018 (Image courtesy: Victor K. B. Micah, 2022).

which are permanent exhibitions and memorials.

Micah combines creative abilities and managerial skills admirably; the competencies have enabled him to manage his art company—Micahes Expressions—

specializing in quality spatial art. He has been running the Company since 2001. He has successfully handled several offices during his career. He was the substantive Head of the Sculpture Department (2010-2012) and the Dean of the School of Applied Arts (2013-2015). Additionally, he has served on numerous boards and committees in and outside the Polytechnic. He was the President of the Takoradi Branch of the Polytechnic Teachers' Association of Ghana (POTAG) now Technical University Teacher's Association of Ghana (TUTAG) from 2009 to 2011 as per the Government of Ghana's conversion of Polytechnics into Technical Universities, which aims at promoting industrialization and economic development for Ghana.

In the early days at KNUST, he served as the Judicial Committee Chairman, College of Art, which officially made him an automatic member of the S.R.C. Judicial Committee in the 2000/2001 Academic Year. In November 2017, he was elected as the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Takoradi Technical University. Professor Micah has a well-balanced and pleasant personality with good interpersonal skills. His excellent communication and administrative skills helped build a formidable local POTAG in a situation where the Association was on the verge of collapsing, giving him hands-on experience in union affairs. There is a spiritual side to Professor Micah. He worships with the Price Cathedral African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church in Winneba. He was the youth president from 2005 to 2007 and currently serves as Treasurer for the Men's Fellowship. Micah has a family of three children and a wife.

4.2. Three-Female Terracotta Sculptures with Akan (Twi) Proverbs

The relevance of the proverbial Akan nexus can be observed in the three creative terracotta (clay) works of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah. The artist's efforts to create terracotta pieces that embody the Akan oral traditions of wise saying was inspired by feminist consciousness as espoused in the artistic life of Leonora Carrington's by exploring alternative ways of enabling female characters to appear more multi-dimensional or multi-faceted (Knight, 2021; Johnston, 1973). The three-female terracotta works created in 2015, have the aesthetics of prolific geometric forms and smooth polished surfaces found in studios of the artist located at Winneba and Takoradi both the Central and Western regions respectively. The works in **Figure 5** display three-female terracotta sculptures that the artist uses to elevate the proverbial Akan nexus that reflects the daily life activities of Ghanaian women in socio-cultural, religious and political contexts. The Contemporary Ghanaian artist titled his works in Akan (Twi) proverbs as a source and inspiration for making his artworks. Micah understands and identifies the background of the Akan proverbs before he uses them. Also, he blends Akan (Twi) proverbs with modern trends to promote Akan cultures by surviving the tides of modernity. The three female figures in the composition tell the Proverbial Akan nexus through how the artist has grown through the Ghanaian socio-cultural, religious and political settings with his extended family where

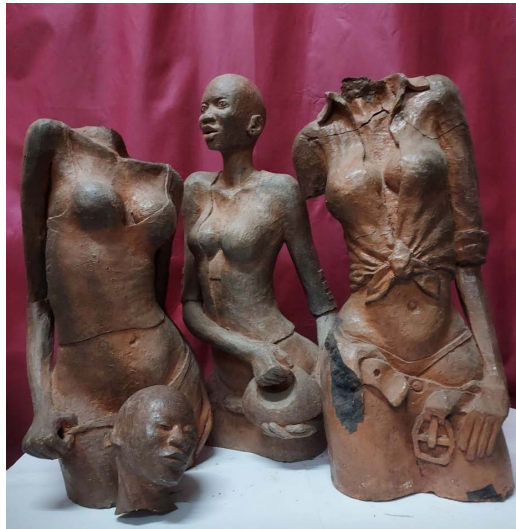


Figure 5. Three-female terracotta sculptures (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

women are dominant. The artist's intent in the creation of these works tends to elevate the pedigree of women through gender balance in the Akan tradition. The creation of the artworks enriches the cultural potencies of the Akans. The study, therefore, projects the three-female terracotta sculptures with some selected Akan proverbs in narrative and interpretive explanations from the Akan (Twi) language as indicated in **Figures 6-8** (a)-(c) respectively.

4.2.1. "Obaa warefoɔ ho ye fe a, woye ma ne kunu"—A Wife's Good Appearance Is a Credit to Her Husband

From **Figures 6(a)-(c)**, Micah creates a sexy, curvy, thin, upper and lower torso woman in a bikini. The upper torso has a broad shoulder line with a narrow waist. The lower torso has a wide hip exposing its navel. The upper limbs of the figure take a twist shape that coordinates with the body posture. The figure has a protruding abdomen with sexy lingerie as the right handhold part of the lingerie. The left-hand rests calmly on the left hip of the figure. The bust of the figure displays the pride of womanhood with two bulging breasts. The back of the figure shows contours of the upper limbs, the spinal cord and the buttocks in the lingerie. As part of his techniques, the work is made hollow and then fired at temperatures from 1000° to 2000° Fahrenheit in a kiln. The work has burnt finishes of reddish-black from the upper to the lower torsos.

In the political, socio-cultural and religious contexts, the symbolic content of the female figure reveals the character of a virtuous woman. The acrostic Akan (Twi) proverb describes a woman's appearance as a delicate issue from a man's perspective. This thought strengthens the Akan cultural and ethnic belonging where a wife's effort to be beautiful for her husband speaks of her care and respect for him. It also communicates her desire to be sexually attractive and available to him. The artist relates his work to the Akan (Twi) proverb, "Obaa warefoɔ ho ye fe a, woye ma ne kunu", meaning that a wife's good appearance is a credit to her husband. The work depicts women in the lives of men. The

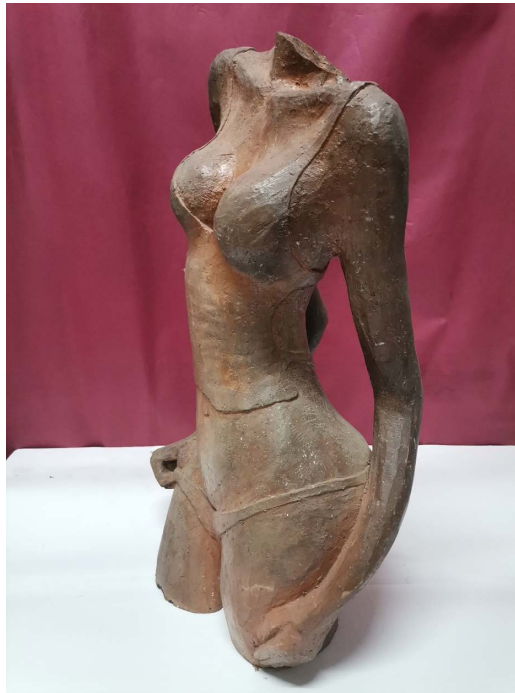
thought of this proverb goes beyond the beauty of the woman. The symbolic meaning of the terracotta sculpture is as important as the reality. The artist, making a reasonable effort to portray the beauty of womanhood and for that fact that he demonstrated women contribution in the lives of men, shows the importance



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 6. “Obaa warefo4 ho ye fe a, woye ma ne kunu”. Material: Fired clay (Terracotta) Dimensions: 43 × 25 × 18 centimetres (cm) (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

of women and their devotion to societal development.

In Micah’s view, the Akan proverb is a tenet in the visual representation of his artwork. His works communicate and transmit special messages of the Akan cultural values of the people (Adotey Addo, 2001; Kquofi et al., 2013). The Akan proverbs used in the context of Micah’s artwork show the success of women and their benefits to men in society. The figure symbolizes women as the backbone for a progressing nation, which deserves equal importance and rights in society (Prasanna, 2021). In the context of the artist, women give excellent outcomes and their capabilities must not be underestimated in society. They should be given equal opportunities to display their talents. Men need to acknowledge the status of women in society and therefore, the love, care and effort they offer in society. In this regard, the artist’s effort demonstrates a sense of women as deep-rooted spirit and power they possessed. **Figures 6(a)-(c)** illustrate the front, back and side views of the female sculpture titled “Obaa warefo4 ho ye fe a, woye ma ne kunu”.

4.2.2. “Obaa mmɔdenmɔfoɔ”—A Hardworking Woman

From **Figures 7(a)-(c)** stand a thin, young, beautiful, sexy and fashionable torso of a female figure that measures 1.5 feet high. The female figure is poised in a conceptualised form where the upper torso has only one arm; thus, holding her undergarment in a striking pose as a fashion model ready to advertise herself. The female figure has a loose blouse tied at her waist and has a folded sleeve around the elbow. The blouse showing the nipple takes a mouth-watering round

and bulging breast shape of the bust of the female figure with light drapery around the tied garment. The blouse exposes her curvy abdomen or belly with a circular navel. The female figure has a narrow waist and a wider hip. The hips of the female figure are perpendicular to the tilted shoulders. The left hip bone has thin lingerie that rests underneath the contour of the abdomen. The garment around the lower torso has a loose or open belt as its hook is closer to the left



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 7. “Obaa mmɔdenmɔfoɔ”. Material: Fired clay (Terracotta) Dimensions: 47 × 21 × 15 cm (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

hand of the female figure. The upper torso of the female figure has thin cracks at the bust while she has thick open cracks at the back of the right shoulder. Also, the female figure has a black chipped-off surface at the right hip bone down to the thigh. In the aesthetic context of Micah, he fantasises about the female figure in a pleasurable manner where the female figure seeks to catch the attention of her observers with the striking curvy bust and tilted posture. The artwork consists of half-covered women revealing some parts of the body only. The artist articulates his sculpting skills by representing the dressing of the female figure in an unpretentious and classical manner. However, the creation of this female sculpture was due to the changing social environment for women.

In the political, socio-cultural and religious contexts, the symbolic content of the female figure reveals the character of the hardworking woman (Connelly et al., 2000). Micah portrays the women’s roles, functions and responsibilities in his artwork with Akan (Twi) proverb that elevates the socio-cultural and philosophical significance of the proverbs in Akan society as well as highlighting how they are created and used in various contexts of all walks of life within the feminine point of view (Yankah, 2012). Micah’s female sculpture titled “Obaa mmɔdenmɔfoɔ” represents an ideal image of a young woman whose hard work is reflected in her physical appearance. The artist portrays the travails of a hardworking before earning ends meet. The concept of one arm, broken back with cracks suggests the pain women go through in life to survive the tides. The pose of the female figure with the garment portrays the extreme cases where unem-

ployed women are forced by hard conditions to exhibit their body to look attractive for men to make earnings meet. The nexus of the Akan (Twi) proverb and this sculpture have predefined women and their gender both in the workplace and society as hard work. Micah argues that women's presence and their accomplishments in the Akan setting are undermined in decision-making in the socio-political system of Akan culture. Again, they are unacknowledged and often ignored in everything they do. On the other hand, Micah believes women are equally positive-minded as men.

4.2.3. “Obaatan na onim nea ne mma bedi”—It Is the Mother Who Knows What Her Children Will Eat

From **Figures 8(a)-(c)**, the artwork depicts a woman who has a bowl in her hands. She gazes at her children while holding the bowl with her right hand. The bowl rests on her left thigh while beneath the bowl she clinches it with her left hand. Looking at her posture, one could tell that the female figure is in conversation with her children. Her physique shows a round-shaved head, open lips, open eyes, tender cheeks, perforated ears, stout nose, collar bone, thick breast, long arms, wide curvy hips and broad shoulders. The female figure is dressed in a garment that leaves parts of her thick breast showing as one could tell that she is a nursing mother. The garment has three buttons placed at each of the limbs around the elbow area. The artist titled this work “Obaatan na onim nea ne mba bedi” in Akan (Twi), the mother knows what her child will eat acknowledges the fact that the Akan have a matrilineal system of kinship that is based on inheritance. In addition, the mother extends the family's lineage by giving birth to children to keep it intact. The Akan word “Ena, Eno, or Maame” substantiates the unique position of a mother in the Akan matrilineal kinship system (Schwimmer, 2003).

The interpretation of a mother is believed that women are expected to be caretakers and spiritual protectors in the home. The depiction of her physical appearance within the work espouses her dressing and presentation. Among Africans, Ghanaians precisely the mother in the home is believed to be the helper as the Man is provider, hence she knows what the child or the people in the home would eat (Micah & Donkor, 2015). In the Akan society, one could notice that the society is traditionally oral in nature. Akan proverbs were not only used to communicate truth but also to reinforce valued behaviour and discourage negative behaviour known as taboos (De-Whyte, 1998). In Micah's view, he communicates the idea and behaviour of the mother who has responsibilities to perform as a woman by taking care of the family while the man provides for them.

In the political, socio-cultural and religious contexts, the symbolic significance of the female figure refers to womanhood. In the representation of the artist's thought, motherhood carries a deep, fascinating significance in the Akan society. In this context, a woman is defined as a goddess through her epitome of procreation and maternal motives such as sacrifice, endurance and submission. The

artwork represents striking beauty, kindness and fortune. Collectively, women are believed to have sympathy and also show kindness. The posture and appearance of the female figure embody beauty, grace, happiness, splendour and charm. The popularity of the mother who cares for her child has been a historical



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 8. “Obaa warefoɔ na nim ne kunu yem kom”. Material: Fired clay (Terracotta)
Dimensions: 52 × 22 × 16 cm (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

and theological theme in ancient times (Oduyoye, 2002). This theme is seen as a union of the divine and human nature with subjects like the Madonna and Child; Mary, the mother of Jesus; Venus of Willendorf and the rest (Mott, 1993).

5. Conclusion

Proverbial Akan culture has been unavoidable in the creative life and works of Contemporary Ghanaian artist Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah. Micah has redefined his expertise in the use of Akan (Twi) proverbs and their symbolism in his three-female terracotta sculptures that send his artistic statement across. This article explored the biographical data of Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah and decontextualized his three-female terracotta sculptures with the portrayal of women in some selected Akan proverbs. Micah’s craving for clay for sculpture production has been a beauty and fashionability in his majestic representation of these three-female terracotta sculptures in Akan (Twi) proverbial contexts. The argument of this article stirs from the fact that Micah’s form of art has come with a trend in designing that demonstrates Akan culture to the art world. His current trends in sculpture production move hand in hand with tradition to create an effective blend. It was evident that Micah elevates the symbolic meaning of Akan cultural values through his choice of Twi proverbs that attribute to making the three-female terracotta sculptures. He addresses the political, socio-cultural and religious statements concerning the feminine consciousness of women within the Akan society.

Victor Kweku Bondzie Micah acknowledges the importance of Akan (Twi) proverbs that allow them to be interpreted in different situations. It was observed that the artist demonstrated a womanhood theme in the various life cycle. The artworks appeared to reflect specific cultural values of the Akans. In the daily lives of the Akans, proverbs are used to pass on rich cultural traditions, transmit folklore, and communicate expected codes of behaviour. It was revealed that the proverbial Akan nexus of Micah's three-female terracotta sculptures tell the expression of the artist's feeling and concept, which captures the message he wants to send across. Subjectively, the expressions of Akan (Twi) proverbs with the artist's feeling give value to Ghanaian culture and bring out the hidden meaning of women's daily lives and activities.

The proverbial Akan nexus for enhancing the essential element of contemporary sculpture for the future generation perhaps lies on sculptors to maximise the important use of proverbs in their works to tell the story of Ghanaian culture. Contemporary sculpture and other forms of traditional arts produced by artists must not only focus on their aesthetic purposes. It must also concentrate on themes that focus on proverbs within the Akan culture. Micah's portrayal of three-female terracotta sculptures with Akan (Twi) proverbial meanings has come at an opportune time to help Ghanaian artists tell the world that Akan rich culture is not static but rather a dynamic medium that can blend effectively with the modern trends of culture. In this regard, artists can preserve the Ghanaian Identity in the field of art specifically sculpture. The article, therefore, recommends that in adapting a conceptual style, sculptors can still develop their oratory style to fit Proverbial Akan culture that will involve human forms and other imageries but still present the proverbial meaning. It also suggests that enriching contemporary sculpture with Proverbial Akan culture defines the hallmark of Ghanaian sculptors by exhibiting to the world the great importance of their rich traditional and cultural values through sculpture.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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