



## Nana Yaw Oduro's Portraiture Explores Boyhood in Suburban Ghana

*Photographer Nana Yaw Oduro shares how poetry and his childhood have shaped his autobiographical images.*

Accra-based photographer Nana Yaw Oduro – who goes by the name The Vintage Mason on Instagram – began his creative pursuit first in poetry before actualising his autobiographical written word in cleverly staged and art-directed fictional portraiture with street-casted subjects. The resulting images usually place youthful figures mid-action and seemingly adrift in Ghana's varied natural environments, which leaves the viewer to contemplate its meaning. What is clear, however, is Nana Yaw Oduro's astute sensitivity to colour and composition; add to that his quirky use of everyday objects as accessories: emerald-green Sprite glass bottles, a red plastic chair, ivory eggs, or even an armful of oranges.



**You picked up photography in 2015. Over the last seven years, how has your photographic practice evolved?**

Over the years, I have been overwhelmed with the outcome of my pursuit. To be honest, when I started, I couldn't really tell the future. All I had was an idea of where I wanted to be with my art when the future comes. Having my work exhibited in galleries and art fairs as well as being acquired by a museum at this stage of my career means so much to me and undoubtedly proves a great pace of evolution.

**You've also got an interest in poetry. Are there any similarities or differences between how you approach poetry and photography?**

Yes, poetry is very dear to my heart. It has always been my biggest inspiration. Meaningful words move me a lot. In fact, poetry led me to photography.

I have always been a writer, but photography for me, came at a later stage in life where I thought I needed to visualise my ideas rather than writing and leaving it at that. I felt like visualising my ideas would do enough justice in trying to tell my story and for people to have a vivid description of what I'm trying to communicate at all times.

Everything is perfect.  
Just that we are used to  
And used to could be quite boring!  
For the eye is a wanter  
Wanter of the unseen  
And more of the seen it misses  
So as to say;  
let's take things just the way they come.  
Not to mean never crave different things.  
But never say dear nature is boring.  
For I must tell you  
Not everything can be different

For  
-When the snail stops to crawl and starts to hasten,  
( would we not have to run around when we could have just picked them for soups)

If Dogs start to hiss and bark no more.  
(As hisses invade fear and the night thieves would have their way around)  
or  
should we rather see the moon at noon and the sun at night ,  
(I mustn't tell you about the oppressive sweltering heat at night).  
For sometime, you will enjoy, for the strangeness of the new might intrigue.

But,  
Believe me, and I must tell you  
One time,  
You ll breakdown on your knees, screaming to The skies  
Asking

God!!! why the sudden change?

-take everything as it comes!

## **Masculinity, boyhood and self-acceptance are some of the key themes of your photography. What was it like growing up in Accra in Ghana?**

I grew up with a woman, my mother, for the early years of my life, but I wasn't quick enough to learn much about 'female'. Mainly because, even though I lived with her, I didn't spend most of my time with her. I was almost always with myself or around male peers.

Spending time with myself helped me a lot. At some point, I realized I had gained enough understanding of myself and what being a boy meant for me.

Being around males peers, I picked up traits and they taught me a lot. It gave me more understanding of who I am as a man, which has really helped me navigate my reality, my strength and to accept myself right from boyhood until now.





**Was there a particular place, experience or photograph that has been the most memorable to you?**

Definitely! That is surely living with my mother at an early age in the suburb of Gbawe in Accra. I picked up a lot as a little boy living in very traditional surroundings. I think that was the birth of everything concerning me being an artist.





**Your work has been showcased in exhibitions around the world. Do you have any ambitions to publish a photo book or move into video in the future?**

Yes! It is always a great feeling to see artists get to the point of publishing books about their works. That is something I look forward to. I've actually started a poetry book that never got published. I'm still working on it.

Also, I have undoubtedly been hugely passionate about videos. In the past, I have created a few videos. There's still much to do.



**There has been an explosion of artistic talent in Accra and in Ghana in general in recent years. Why do you think that this is happening?**

When you talk of the widely growing art scene in Accra, it brings so much joy to me as an artist myself. But I will tell you this; it has always been there. There have always been great artists here. There's just more exposure now. The exposure for us hasn't always been like this. It is much more empowering than ever, seeing the youth pursuing their passion in arts being projected onto the world stages.