

## A Day in the Life of an Artist

# SAMUEL ADOQUEI

By Wende Caporale

**O**n a recent weekend, I had the pleasure of visiting the studios of Samuel Adoquei opposite Union Square in New York City. Born and raised in Ghana, West Africa, Adoquei has been working as a professional artist since he was a teenager. After completing his art education at the Ghanatta College of Fine Arts, political unrest forced the young artist to pursue his livelihood beyond the comfort and familiarity of his family. He traveled to Europe and ultimately the United States. His work no longer hangs on ephemeral billboards, but rather in universities,

museums, public and private collections. A consummate artist whose work spans the genres of portraits, figures and landscapes, he is also a best-selling author of two inspirational books.

Adoquei warmly recalls his childhood spent in Ghana. His father was a minister, while his mother was the spiritual leader of their tribe. Both parents instilled the seeds of the philosophy that the artist reveals in his writing and his painting. Adoquei recalls his early education as an inquisitive student who easily passed the exams that would advance him to higher education. One experience

remains vividly in his mind; as a teenager he was an attentive accounting school student and was traveling on public transportation to school one day. Recognizing a friend, they sat together and began to talk about their education. The friend was attending art school and showed Adoquei his portfolio. Adoquei became so intrigued that from that moment forward, he abandoned accounting and decided to become an artist.

When I arrived at his studio, Adoquei offered to show me the other two spaces within the building that encompass the various aspects of his work. The first was a working studio, the second was designed as a classroom for his students and the third was a larger, bright exhibition space for his and other artist's work.

This has been his working environment for over 20 years. We discuss the inherent risk involved in choosing the life of an artist but agree that it is a necessary ingredient to succeed. Having worked as a successful artist for decades, he has spent more time in recent years helping others to succeed through his two inspirational books: *How Successful Artists Study* and *Origin of Inspiration*.

Adoquei has taught at major academic art institutions throughout New York City. He currently works closely with six students privately two full days a week teaching and mentoring. His preference to keep his group limited is due in part to the physical limitations of space but also it enables Adoquei to provide the attention required. He maintains a waiting list of eager students who would like to be under his tutelage. From October to May, Adoquei and his students work in the studio and beginning in June, they paint on location in Central Park and Union Square Park in New York City. The exhibition space hosts two shows each year by artists affiliated with Adoquei.

Adoquei shares his early experiences as a developing artist at OIC International in Ghana, an American run organization that provided him with practical training to become an artist. After one year, he had developed enough employable skills to



*Repose*, oil on panel,  
24 x 30" (61 x 76 cm)





*Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King* (triptych),  
2001, oil on canvas, 72 x 148" (183 x 376 cm)

be attractive to the companies who were searching for talent at the school. At 15 he was employed painting billboards and was becoming further educated on the job while helping to support his family who were going through a crisis at that time. The tumultuous nature of Ghana's government drove Adoquei to move to Nigeria where the oil boom provided better wages. He spent 18 months working in advertising and graphic arts there as he continued to provide for his family. The political climate remained unsteady and wanderlust propelled Adoquei to travel to Europe. He eventually settled in Naples, Italy, where he was "adopted" by an Italian family while working on their farm. Recalling this memorable time, Adoquei painted landscapes, copied "lots of Madonnas" and Old Masters during the two years he spent there. He admits that although they lost touch for many years, he recently reconnected with the family.

In the early 1980s Adoquei moved to America and settled in New York City. He attended the Art Students League where he studied with Oldrich Tepy for many years, including seven years as his monitor.



*Death of a President*, oil on canvas, 44 x 60" (112 x 152 cm)

Among the other teachers with whom he studied was Ron Sherr, but it was Tepy whose philosophy resonated with the young artist. Adoquei recalls spending several days working at the Metropolitan Museum studying their vast collection. During this time, the artist recollects frequently walking past the Portraits, Inc. gallery on his way to

the subway until one day he finally had the nerve to go inside and introduce himself. He tells me the amusing story of how naïve he felt when his casual conversation with the director at the time, Marian MacKinney, led him to show her his work. He was mortified when she explained how she could not represent him for numerous

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reasons although he had not intended to make an official presentation. Several years later, the artist presented an outstanding, professional portfolio and was immediately asked by MacKinney to join the roster.

As I am being regaled with Adoquei's stories, I am mesmerized by his work including the beautiful landscape on the facing easel. Adoquei explains that this was done on his annual trip to Bergerac, a town in the Dordogne region in France, where he returns each summer. Adoquei primarily works from life and in plein air creating numerous oil sketches, sometimes more than 20 for reference for his large landscapes. It was 15 years ago when Adoquei visited the Dordogne region for the first time and found Bergerac. He was enthralled with the beauty and enjoyed the fact that no other painter from the past had chosen to represent this locale. It has become an annual pilgrimage, which is ironic in that it is also home to a monastery run by Thich Nhat Hanh, the global spiritual leader and peace activist



*Central Park at Noon*, oil on canvas



*Study in grays, pinks and whites*, oil on canvas, 30 x 22" (76 x 56 cm)

who is known worldwide for his best-selling writings on mindfulness and peace. Thich Nhat Hanh is a pioneer in bringing Buddhism to the West. Adoquei has become friendly with the residents and the mayor in Bergerac who is grateful to have an artist of Adoquei's stature representing the town. Several years ago in a special ceremony, the mayor presented Adoquei with the Medal of Honor and a key to the village. Both of his inspirational books were written in Bergerac during his regular six-week visits.

Several large provocative works in the studio gain my attention and I ask Adoquei about them. *The Legacy of Martin Luther King* is a large triptych and another is *Social Studies*. Adoquei was invited to exhibit both of these works in separate exhibitions at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. Adoquei has recently completed a posthumous portrait of

Justice Constance Baker Motley, a civil rights lawyer who taught at Columbia University. When the justice's son expressed concern that a posthumous portrait would not compellingly represent his mother, the artist assured him he would bring spirituality to painting. When it was unveiled, there was little doubt that the artist had accomplished his goal.

For many years, the artist spent 12-hour days in the studio, but in the last decade, he has dedicated more time to writing, teaching and mentoring while taking a temporary hiatus from painting. As he gets older, he recognizes he must "study life in order to paint and understand." He explains by mentioning how creative people become engrossed and obsessed with an idea and it is only by taking time to fully explore can a solution be discovered. Adoquei shares this curiosity and inner calling with his




*Social Studies*, oil on canvas, 44 x 60" (112 x 152 cm)

students. He encourages them to explore a subject with dedication and only then will the subject reveal itself. Using the modest park outside his window, Union Square, as an example, he occasionally takes his students there to paint because he feels that we often take the familiar for granted. He wants them to study their subject and find the hidden and initially unseen beauty that will only reveal itself over time or to find the “beauty in the ordinary,” which he feels brings out the true artist. He demonstrates his method to show how nature reveals itself to those who are devoted and the discovery unfolds through observation. This passionate quest to discover the world around them is what drives artists to see what others cannot. His teaching and mentoring coincides with Adoquei’s personal spiritual

journey, which has taken him on a mission to help others: “Everything powerful nature has made is invisible; strength and energy, leadership, even beauty.”

Adoquei’s current schedule involves several hours of writing each morning before dawn. Mondays and Wednesdays are spent teaching in the studio and at the National Academy Museum School of Fine Arts. The remaining days are spent on his own work painting from life and “exploring prudent wise elders in dusty books.” When I press him further, he is fascinated by the Greek and Roman philosophers and the Age of Enlightenment and has devoted a period of study to them. Adoquei admits to being “on a quest for solutions beyond technique” and his art is part of this “searching for answers.” Adoquei states, “If enlightened ideas bring

illumination to one’s greatness, and if what I have written about has transformed some talents to international stardom, then it is worth it to keep searching and helping others with the findings.”

To learn more about Adoquei’s art and writings, visit his website at [www.samadoquei.com](http://www.samadoquei.com). 

Wende Caporale is a highly successful artist whose portraits are always in great demand. Her biography and list of awards and accomplishments runs to many pages. As you’ll read in this ongoing series, Wende’s proactive approach to work and life make her the ideal columnist for the subject every artist has to face on a daily basis.

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