

## In Bright Paintings Full of Color, Artist Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe Depicts Black Subjects in Gray

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By Grace Ebert



"Sitter" (2019), oil on canvas, 86 x 54.75 inches. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer.  
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## ALMINE RECH

For Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe, pastel backdrops and numerous shades of orange, blue, and pink directly connect to the Black subjects depicted in his oil paintings. The artist, who was born in Ghana and now resides in Portland, uses a range of bold hues to engage with emotions. “Through time, I have formed a unique language through color, one that serves to communicate directly to my audience,” he tells Colossal.

With skin rendered in shades of gray, each subject helps to establish the contours of the textured piece. Through the style and color of their clothing, distinct poses, and facial expressions, Quaicoe reveals their personalities, of which he writes:

When I first see my subjects, whether in real life or in photos, I see in them their resilience, their power, their inner strength. These are the character traits that arrest me, that jump out at me and grab my attention... My subject’s attitude is very important to me. I try to put myself in their place. See what they see, experience what they experience, be who they are.

When painting men, Quaicoe inserts softer elements, like in his recent works “Fur in Black” and “Kwame Asare in Stripes.” “When I paint male figures, I typically incorporate floral elements into the painting as a means to subvert the overall masculine energy of the work,” he says. “These questions—what’s makes someone read as a man, or manly—and how this comes down to societal expectations is something I try to engage within my work.”

*Follow the artist’s vivid, subversive work on Instagram and see his available pieces on Artsy. (via Juxtapoz)*

# ALMINE RECH



"Fur on Black" (2020), oil on canvas, 40.25 x 30 inches. Photo by Alan Shaffer



"Kwame Asare in Stripes" (2020), oil on canvas, 84 x 52 inches. Photo by Alan Shaffer

## ALMINE RECH



"Lady on Blue Couch" (2019), oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer



"Radiant" (2019), oil on canvas, 40.75 x 30.5 inches. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer

## ALMINE RECH



"The Artist II Kwesi Botchway" (2019), oil on canvas, 85 x 55 inches. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer



"Man and his Black Cat" (2019), oil on canvas, 86 x 54.75 inches. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer

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Boafo was also in L.A. for the La Brea Studio Residency organized by The Cabin, a small alternative art space spearheaded by Danny First. He invited Quaicoe to stay and hang out in L.A. so he could meet more people in the art world. Then Boafo received an award in Vienna and had to briefly leave L.A., leaving Quaicoe to his own devices. “I was left alone, so why not buy some canvases and paint?” he reasoned.



**Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe**

*Lady in Sunglasses, 2020*

Roberts Projects



**Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe**

*Nykhor on Blue Couch, 2019*

Roberts Projects

Sold

Quaicoe quit his job in Portland and started painting in L.A. As folks dropped into the studio looking for Boafo, they found another Ghanaian artist working in his stead. This is where Quaicoe’s relationship with Roberts and the gallery started, and where he also met other gallerists such as Mariane Ibrahim. He had finally caught his big break.

“Later, Amoako came back and told me I have a show with Roberts Projects, and I said, ‘What!?’” Quaicoe recalled. He returned home and started working in the grayscale palette he uses now. “I had the motivation to work larger in scale and with this type of imagery that I have now.”

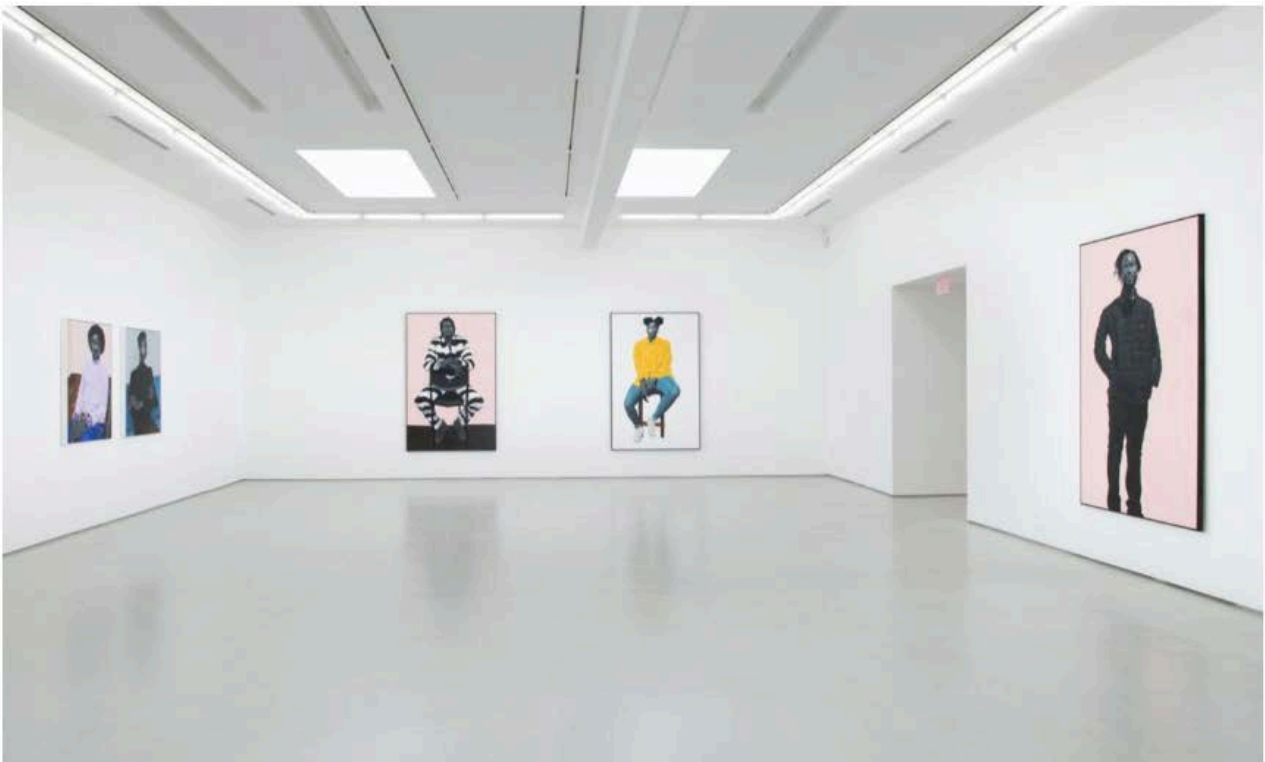
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Quaicoe's mesmerizing story is a rare feel-good story of the art world. It made me think of his nexus of support as being present in the work itself, a body of work that in some ways is a collaborative process predicated on trust and support.

"My work was really inspired by how people look at me. It's like a sense of wondering: 'Who is this person?'" Quaicoe explained. "What I realized is that people couldn't tell where I was from by the way I dress. And when they found out, they'd approach me very differently than an African American already living here."

Quaicoe started speaking to Black Americans in Portland and Los Angeles, asking them how they live, how they carry themselves, how they are perceived by others, and how they want to be seen by others in the outside world. "So it's always a combination of my African culture with Black culture living here, which all come together as a single identity," he said. "So I try to incorporate the fashion sense here and the fashion sense back home."

In effect, Quaicoe's work is a practice of collage, taking candid portraits of his subjects' faces and editorializing their outfits and environments, creating a timeless vision of the Black figure.



Installation view of "Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe: Black Like Me" at Roberts Projects, 2020. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles.