

PRESS RELEASE

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SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY ARTIST AMOAKO BOAFO

Soul of Black Folks celebrates the nuance and complexities of Black life globally in the artist's Seattle debut

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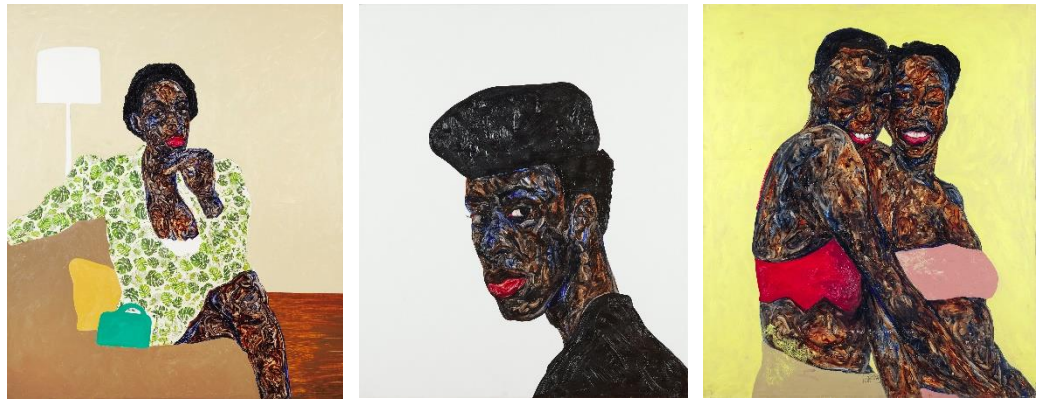
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SEATTLE – The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *Amoako Bofo: Soul of Black Folks* (July 13–September 10, 2023), the debut solo museum exhibition for Ghanaian artist Amoako Bofo. A rising star in contemporary art, Bofo is known for his vibrant portraits that celebrate Blackness, with dynamic figures rendered in his signature finger-painted textures and saturated colors. Curated by Larry Ossei-Mensah, *Soul of Black Folks* presents over 30 works created by the artist between 2016 and 2022. This marks the first time Bofo's work has been shown in Seattle.

Bofo's work centers on Black subjectivity, Black joy, and the Black gaze. Inspired in part by W.E.B. Du Bois's seminal 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, the exhibition explores the concept of "double consciousness," in which Black people must navigate their self-identity through the eyes of others. Bofo's figures—often in intimate domestic settings—appear to gaze or smile directly at the viewer, calmly asserting their presence, power, and beauty. Bofo calls his figures "characters"; they are alternately friends and acquaintances, composites, or people he admires. Many of his subjects are from his community of multihyphenate global creatives. Taken together, Bofo's portraits form a vivid assemblage of Black life around the world.

"I'm excited to be presenting my work in Seattle for the first time," says Bofo. "Even after the last stroke of pigment is dry, my work is not complete until the viewer has interacted with the piece. When people come to see this exhibition, I hope they feel like they are a part of the paintings or that they can imagine themselves as the subjects as these paintings were made. That's the mood I have when I am working in the studio, responding to the energy of the moment when I am making choices about colors and compositions."

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“We are thrilled to bring Amoako Boafo’s stunning portraits to Seattle audiences for the first time,” says Amada Cruz, Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. “These captivating portraits draw you in with their extraordinary formal qualities—exquisite patterns, bright colors, and sculptural textures—and then invite you to consider what they have to say about the history of the Black figure in art history.”

“I’m humbled to have the opportunity to exhibit Amoako Boafo’s work at the Seattle Art Museum and grateful that the Seattle community will be able to experience *Soul of Black Folks*,” says Ossei-Mensah. “This exhibition is a labor of love and a holistic snapshot of how Amoako Boafo sees the world through his artistic practice. All who visit this exhibition—which is anchored by radical care and the celebration of Black life—will be moved and hopefully, see a little bit of their humanity embedded within the paintings in this show.”

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Soul of Black Folks opens with the artist’s self-portraits, originally created as a private cathartic exercise while he was living in Vienna, Austria, experiencing racism and a lack of support for his practice. In *Reflection 1* (2018), the artist looks at himself in the mirror, head resting on hand, capturing a divided self both discovering and suffering in reflection.

From these explorations of himself as subject, Boafo began to create portraits of others: friends, family, and celebrated cultural figures. Rendered in larger-than-life scale, his subjects are set within backgrounds of bright colors and patterns that accentuate their faces and bodies sculpted in improvisational gestures of black, brown, and blue paint. In these portraits, their confident and knowing gazes are the focal point. In their titles, *Green Clutch* (2021) and *Black Hat* (2021) also reveal the significance of fashion and style, whether as a form or personal or political expression. The portraits also feature duos and groups that radiate joy and closeness, such as *Libby and D-Lee* (2019).

The inspiration from sociologist and Pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* is personal for Boafo. Du Bois is buried near Osu, a neighborhood in Accra near where Boafo grew up. Du Bois’s text offers a framework for thinking about how Boafo’s artistic practice challenges an “othered” gaze of the Black figure. The portraits in *Soul of Black Folks* focus the viewers’ gaze on the presence of his subjects—who represent all walks of Black life—articulating the connectivity and cultural overlap of existence within the Black diaspora.

Despite the physical and emotional tension of Boafo’s mark-making, his painted subjects appear steadfast. His works serve as means of self-preservation and resistance—a celebration of his identity, Black people, and Blackness. More than mere portraits, they are images constructed to assert the dignity and importance of Black people.

Soul of Black Folks also offers interpretive experiences. A tour available via visitors’ smartphones features the artist’s voice sharing his insights and perspectives on select works. And an artist-curated Spotify playlist brings listeners into the sounds of Boafo’s studio, where music is central to the artist’s process and a major inspiration for his portraits.

ABOUT AMOAKO BOAFO



Born in 1984 and raised in Osu, Accra in Ghana, Boafo studied at the Ghanatta College of Art and Design in Accra in 2007 before attending the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, Austria. Boafo was awarded the jury prize, Walter Koschatzky Art Prize in 2017 and the STRABAG Art Award International in 2019, both in Vienna, Austria. In 2019, he participated in a residency with the Rubell Museum in Miami, Florida, and in 2020 he collaborated with Dior for their Spring/Summer 2021

Men's Collection. His work is widely collected by private and public collectors and institutions, most recently by Leopold Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Rubell Museum, Marieluise Hessel Collection, the Aishti Foundation, Hessel Museum of Art, The Pizzuti Collection of Columbus Museum of Art, and the Albertina Museum in Vienna. Boafo is represented by Roberts Projects, Los Angeles and Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, Chicago and Paris. In December 2022 he established dot.ateliers, a first-of-its-kind artist residency and gallery in Accra that will nurture current and future generations of artists.

ABOUT LARRY OSSEI-MENSAH



A native of the Bronx, Ghanaian-American curator Larry Ossei-Mensah uses art as a forum to redefine how we see ourselves and the world around us. He has launched numerous exhibitions and programs featuring artists such as Firelei Baez, Steve McQueen, Catherine Opie, Nick Cave, Guadalupe Maravilla, Judy Chicago, and more. Ossei-Mensah has collaborated with renowned venues around the world, such as The Metropolitan Museum of Manila, The MCA Denver, Ben Brown Fine Arts in Hong Kong & London, the 7th Athens Biennale

(co-curated with OSMK Social Club), and MASS MoCA (co-curated with Susan Cross and Allison Janae Hamilton). He's been a partner on several Web3-related projects with creatives such as Derrick Adams x Jay-Z, Marco Brambilla, and Mikael Owunna. In YEAR, he co-founded ARTNOIR, a nonprofit whose mission is to drive racial equity in the art world by centering creatives, curators, collectors, and communities of color.

PLANNING A VISIT

Museum Hours

- Closed Monday and Tuesday
- Wednesday-Sunday 10 am-5 pm
- Holiday hours on the website

Admission Prices

- Adults: \$29.99 (advance), \$32.99 (day of)
- Seniors (65+), Military (with ID): \$24.99 (advance), \$27.99 (day of)
- Students (with ID), Teens (15-18): \$19.99 (advance), \$22.99 (day of)
- Children (14 and under): FREE
- SAM Members: FREE

Free & Discounted Options

- First Thursdays: Free to all
- First Fridays: \$5 admission for seniors (65+)
- Complete list of discounts available: [Discount Access Programs](#)

Details are subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on planning a visit, go to seattleartmuseum.org.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated 112-page catalogue published by Cameron Books will be available for purchase at SAM Shop (\$40). Also titled *Amoako Boafo: Soul of Black Folks* (ISBN: 978-1951836993), the catalogue is a comprehensive study of the artist's process and career to date. Produced by the Museum of the African Diaspora and edited by Larry Ossei-Mensah, the catalogue features original contributions by leading scholars and artists including Monetta White and Hesse McGraw, Aja Monet, Elena Gross, Moses Sumney, Sally A. Nuamah, Allison Glenn, and Eddie Chambers.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Amoako Boafo: Soul of Black Folks is presented in partnership between Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco. The exhibition is curated by Larry Ossei-Mensah.

Presenting Sponsor

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Image captions: *Green Clutch*, 2021, Amoako Boafo, paper transfer and oil on canvas, 82 5/8 x 70 7/8 in., Courtesy of Private Collection and Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, Chicago and Paris. *Black Hat*, 2021, Amoako Boafo, oil on canvas, 47 3/16 x 39 3/8 in., Courtesy of the artist. *Libby and D-Lee*, 2019, Amoako Boafo, oil on canvas, 62 1/2 x 72 1/4 in., Courtesy of Holly Jane Butler and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles. Portrait of Amoako Boafo © Amoako Boafo. Photo: Emma Chang. Courtesy Gagosian. Portrait of Larry Ossei-Mensah by Courtney Harvier.

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020, following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.