



Annan Affotey, *Addicted*, 2021.

Photo: Craig Smith

Ghanaian artist and Ghanatta College alumnus Annan Affotey brings his subjects into intense, colorful, textured, and expressive portraits. Affotey's paintings of everyday people are known for their expressive eyes, accentuated forms, and rich color palette. Although he currently lives in England, Affotey draws inspiration from people and places in Ghana that he vaguely remembers, knows personally, or discovers via photographs.

Partly autobiographical and partly allegorical, Affotey's "red eye" portraits speak to the artist's experiences of being seen as an outsider in both America and England. Outside of Ghana, the reddish color of the area around his pupils becomes a quality that marks him as "the other": a Black man, a foreigner, one who doesn't belong. Affotey incorporated this experience into his work and started portraying the eyes of his Black subjects in subtle shades of red. The color becomes an indicator of outsider status and in the art magazine *Yellowzine*, Affotey has stated that this series of portraits is about "misinterpreted identities." Through his choice of subjects and sitters however, he began to forge a collective group identity—a community that transcends time and place. These are people to whom the artist feels deeply connected, emotionally and physically, as part of the community he belongs to and lives in. As a Black man, an "other," there is a connection with his subjects and that can be perceived through his paintings.

At the same time, each person's individuality is relayed through the artist's realistic style, use of electrifying hues, and seductive ombrés. His gestural brushstrokes and bold use of color suggests that there is depth to the person in the picture. And while notions of power, privilege, and history cannot be erased from the white gaze on Black bodies, Affotey is an expert at reversing and reexamining it. His portraits are stark in composition; there is nothing to distract onlookers from the fact that the subjects gaze directly at them. They speak only of themselves and for themselves.

-Natasha Becker, Curator of African Art
de Young Museum