



Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe,
Nykhor on Blue Couch, 2019.
Photo: Craig Smith

With arms and legs crossed as she sits confidently on a sky-blue sofa, Nykhor gazes discerningly at her onlooker to her right. Captured in hues of black and white, her skin is bright, and the texture of her hair intricately detailed. Nykhor's yellow feather earrings and nails pop off the canvas in contrast to the cool tones they rest upon. Perhaps a nod to Nykhor Paul, the Sudanese model known for her stellar career and work with the International Rescue Committee, Nykhor is indeed a symbol of the pride and beauty embodied in the figures Ghanian-born artist Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe portrays in his paintings.

Using distinctive warm or cool color palettes chosen to reflect the identity of the subject, Quaicoe highlights the extraordinary grace and power of each Black individual he paints. And as he has done in *Nykhor on the Blue Couch*, Quaicoe often renders the background in a limited palette so the depth of the individual takes center stage. His portraits exude an ease, sophistication, and glamour reminiscent of the figures in the late Barkley L. Hendricks' paintings. However, the textures and patterns Quaicoe employs to capture the light in Black and brown skin tones, clothes, and objects definitely differ from his predecessors and contemporaries. His repetitive brushstrokes hypnotize the viewer, encouraging them to linger longer and meditate on the qualities that define an individual. As the artist outlined in a 2021 interview, these stylistic choices are a gesture to "appreciate the skin tone of Blackness—the beauty of Blackness—and to appreciate and accept who we are."

-Emily Wilkerson, arts writer and curator