Teacher Guide

Amoako Boafo: Soul of Black Folks

On view | May 27–October 2, 2022
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Exhibition Overview

• *Amoako Boafo: Soul of Black Folks* is a solo exhibition of Ghanaian artist Amoako Boafo and presents over 30 paintings from 2016 to 2022. The exhibition is curated by Larry Ossei-Mensah.

• Boafo exclusively paints Black people to create a focus on representation—documenting, celebrating, and finding new ways to approach Blackness. His subjects range from family members, friends, people he admires, and himself.

• Boafo paints the faces and skin of his subjects directly onto the canvas with his fingers. This finger technique creates thick, gestural strokes that emphasize the contours and luminous skin tone of the subjects in his portraits.

• Boafo uses a photo transfer technique to add textiles and patterns that have become definitions of his practice. On solid colored backgrounds, his subjects are expressive through their fashion and home decor.

• Boafo's paintings are deeply personal and intimately connected to his experience as a Ghanaian artist living and working between Vienna, Austria, and Accra, Ghana.

• His portraits declare the dignity and importance of Black people through their body language, facial expressions, and gaze.

• The exhibition takes its title from the seminal text by sociologist and Pan-Africanist W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, an ethnographic study of Black life behind the veil of race. Du Bois conducted research that resulted in the coining of the phrase double-consciousness, which evoked the sense of Black people constantly having to look at themselves through the eyes of others.

• Du Bois’ text serves as an invitation to think deeply about Boafo’s artistic practice and how it challenges an “othered” gaze concerning the Black figure.

• This exhibition includes a site-specific wall painting created by Boafo.
Key Questions

- What narrative or story is Amoako Boafo creating through his portraits?
- Who holds power in our society? How is this power demonstrated?
- What is the significance of “the gaze” in Boafo’s work?
- What are the most distinctive qualities of an Amoako Boafo painting?
- Where does Boafo get inspiration for his art?
- What makes these portraits different from other portraits you might see in an art history book or museums?

Curriculum Connections

**Language Arts** | Pick a portrait by Amoako Boafo and write a story about the person. Use the visual language Boafo provides, like fashion and home decor, to influence how you imagine the person lives. How can Boafo’s portraits inspire and teach us about Black life and humanity? How can you use the clues Boafo presents in the painting to imagine a story about the subject?

**Art History** | For years, painters have painted self-portraits. In *Reflections I* (2018), Boafo paints himself looking into a mirror. Compare and contrast this painting to one or two self-portraits by other famous painters like Frida Kahlo, Vincent van Gogh, and Albrecht Dürer. Think about techniques like brushstrokes, composition, and color palettes. What do these details tell us about each artist? Go further and create a self-portrait using inspiration from Boafo’s expressive techniques and practice.

**World Geography** | Geography is the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments. Research Amoako Boafo’s environments: Vienna, Austria and Accra, Ghana. What do you imagine the influence of each place has on his artistic choices like subjects, patterns, and techniques? How do places influence people? How do people influence places? Go further and create your own visual representation of your relationship to your environment. What techniques inspired by Boafo can you use?

**Fashion Design** | Like the art industry, the global fashion industry connects us to people and places across the planet. List adjectives to describe the fashion choices of Boafo’s subjects you admire. How do the textiles in Amoako Boafo’s artwork give us information about his subjects? Go further and create a digital collage of global fashions you admire including home goods and patterns.