

## ROBERTS PROJECTS

LA Times

"In Amoako Bofo's portraits, every brushstroke of every black face matters"

Sharon Mizota

February 20, 2019



Detail of Amoako Bofo's "Blue Pullover," 2018, part of the show at Roberts Gallery in Culver City. (Robert Wedemeyer /Amoako Bofo and Roberts Gallery)

Amoako Bofo's portrait paintings are beguiling in their simplicity. His figures, often isolated on spare or monochrome backgrounds, gaze out matter-of-factly, confidently asserting their presence. Their poses are relaxed, sometimes playful, imbuing the images with a casual intimacy. And they make the artist's first solo exhibition at Roberts Projects a quiet delight.

The subjects of Bofo's paintings are all friends and acquaintances from the black diaspora, like Bofo himself, who is from Ghana but lives in Austria.

The young man in "In Yellow With Malcolm" stands with his arms crossed, clutching the book "Malcolm X: In Our Own Image," to his chest. He's wearing a bright yellow hat and shirt that are only a few shades darker than the painting's flat yellow background. This near-matching color scheme makes his face, hands and the book pop amid the sea of yellow.



Amoako Bofo's "In Yellow With Malcolm" 2018. (Robert Wedemeyer / Amoako Bofo and Roberts Gallery)

By muting the clothing and background, Bofo draws our attention squarely to the people in his paintings. It's their presence, their gaze, their attitude that matter, not the stuff around them.

This approach takes even more extreme form in smaller works like "Krystal 1," which depicts a young woman, absent-mindedly raising her hands to her face. In this image, the body dissolves entirely into the white background; only her face and hands are discernable.



Amoako Bofo's "Krystal 1" 2018. (Robert Wedemeyer / Amoako Bofo and Roberts Gallery)



Amoako Bofo's "Blue Pullover" 2018. (Robert Wedemeyer / Amoako Bofo and Roberts Gallery)

Yet perhaps the most striking feature of Boafo's work is his treatment of black skin. In contrast to the backgrounds and clothing, the faces and hands of his figures are painted in flurries of brown, tan and blue, the oil paint thinned and luminous so that every brushstroke is visible.

In "Blue Pullover," the subject's sweater is rendered in long, confident lines, but his face is a riot of mottled strokes. This technique not only belies the literalness of the designation "black" but also makes the figures pulse with energy. Despite their static poses, they seem ever shifting and unfixed.



Amoako Boafo's "Reflection 1," 2018. (Robert Wedemeyer / Amoako Boafo and Roberts Gallery)

Nowhere is this more apparent than in "Reflection 1," in which a nude man, clutching a knee to his chest, regards himself in a mirror. The brushwork is so varied that the contours of his body nearly dissolve into abstraction. This uncertainty is further reflected in the painting's chain of gazes. We see the man looking at himself, both from our own perspective and in the mirror's reflection, which is not necessarily the same as what he sees. The work dramatizes the slipperiness of the self: always partial, never quite at rest.

*Roberts Projects, 5801 Washington Blvd., Culver City. Ends Saturday. (323) 549-0223, [www.robertsprojectsla.com](http://www.robertsprojectsla.com)*