

Identity - Toyin Ojih Odutola

Rebecca. G. Kelly

Nigerian-American contemporary visual artist Toyin Ojih Odutola is renowned for her vibrant multimedia drawings and works on paper. Her distinct aesthetic of intricate mark-making and opulent compositions challenges conventional notions of storytelling and portraiture.

She debuted her first solo exhibition in New York, "(MAPS)" at Jack Shainman Gallery in 2011, while enrolled at California College of Arts in San Francisco. A ballpoint pen was used to layer a series of distinct black figures on decontextualized white backgrounds. She was given a new voice in the visual portrayal of black skin thanks to the theories underlying this series of skin as geography.

Their detailed pictures done with a black ink pen are called "drawn stories." Black bodies are depicted by Odutola as polished bronze; each figure commands the space with strength and presence because he is interested in the topography of skin as a marker and metaphor. The National Portrait Gallery in London has never featured a woman with an afro until her latest portrait of Zadie Smith.

Toyin Ojih Odutola is a specialist at speaking gently but with great impact. Her theoretically direct images have strong political undertones, but they never ignore the foundations of form and craftsmanship. Ojih Odutola's renderings are mostly concerned with mark-making and portraiture, but what sets her apart from other artists is the ideology she bases her work on. She combines these themes of gender with those of race and history to create images that talk about blackness—African blackness, American blackness, and the blackness of the 20th century colour field. The artist talks about her new surroundings, the development of her work, and the few things that won't change after recently moving her studio.

