

## **Nicholas Tettey Wayo**

Ghana

### Biography

Nicholas Tettey Wayo, Dangme and Muslim, hails from Dodowa in the Greater Accra region. He began drawing on walls with charcoal and pencil at the age of 8 after seeing his father's art sketches as a schoolboy. In 1995, he began drawing and painting from memories of movie posters in theaters. In 1996, he completed a three-month apprenticeship with Mr. Okyere, who painted movie posters and signage for barbershops, hair salons, and other businesses, etc. From 1997 to 2001, Nicholas worked with advertising companies to gain experience in large-scale painting and murals. He met Ghanaian music legend Kojo Antwi and began painting backdrops for live performances in 1997.

He began as a "street artist" painting commercial signs, billboards, and movie posters, and then acquired a visual vocabulary that addresses many different social and political issues. Wayo's murals and graffiti work can be found throughout the capital city of Accra as well as other parts of Ghana. His vibrant art style has made a significant impact on the Ghanaian street art scene.

He is also dedicated to education and passing on knowledge to younger generations through training programs and workshops. He does this through his company NicoWayo Arts and as an active tutor at Nima Muhinmanchi Art and Alrayan International School. He is a member of several collectives and networks including Afuabe Collective, Foundation for Contemporary Art-Ghana and Painting in the Open Collective. He empowers and touches the lives of youth by sharing, inspiring, and teaching them art because he believes art has the power to change minds and transform society. Nicholas conducts art workshops with New York University students visiting Ghana for their final projects.

### Exhibitions

His artwork has been exhibited primarily in Ghana, also in Italy by Virginia Ryan, in New York by Lyle Ashton Harris, in Los Angeles by Todd Gray, and in Japan by the Japan Foundation. He is one of the main artists of the annual Chale Wote Street Art Festival. Wayo currently incorporates paint splatters and the caps of plastic bottles into his paintings.

## The artworks, aesthetic position(s).

His works explore notions of "self" and "own" in contemporary African society and are intended to open the viewer's eyes to peculiar perspectives of representation and representation that cross stereotypes of "being African."

### *Proudly African*

Mixed-Media: Acrylic, drawing pencils, plastic fasteners on canvas.

2019

Size: 102 x 127 cm

"It feels great to be an African, too many of us are not living our dreams because we are living our fears. Don't let your fears limit you."

### *Self-Love*

Mixed media: Acrylic, drawing pens, plastic fasteners on canvas.

2020

Size: 29,5 x 42 cm

"Can't love nobody without loving myself. You have to do something in your life that is honorable and not cowardly if you are to live in peace with yourself."

### *Feeling Blessed*

Mixed media: Acrylic, drawing pencils on canvas

2021

Size: 104 x 76 cm

"It is a blessing to wake up to see thy self alive and looking where we came from and where we are now."

### *Black Beauty*

Mixed media: Acrylic, drawing pens, plastic fasteners on canvas.

Size: 102 x 137 cm

2019

"Believing in thyself as a beautiful black woman."

### **The Color of My Skin: Black**

Mixed-Media: Acrylic, drawing pens, plastic fasteners on canvas.

2019

Size: 175 x 175 cm

"I believe in the color of my skin: it is black."

## Work comment by kukutana

"I believe in the color of my skin: it is black." - decisively, the artist lets the world know this. His work revolves around perspectives of an African identity: What does it mean to be African today? What does it mean to live in Ghana, as the example of an African state? As a street artist, he has an impact on society, the street is his stage. There he finds his subjects, the actors of his theatrical portraits. "Proudly African": a self-confident woman in a classic pose looks over the side backwards at the viewer. She wears glasses, bracelets, and her painted clothing is adorned with red circular plastic fasteners. She smiles cautiously slightly ironically, questioningly, critically. Is she inviting a conversation? Is she on her way to an important meeting or home? Has the viewer disturbed her and she is a little reluctant because she has to go on or is not interested? Her figure stands out against an ochre background: be exemplary, proud to be African. "Black Beauty" shows an everyday scene: a woman in a modern snack bar, a beverage cup in her hand, a plate with a dish in front of her and a pack of juice next to it. Her dress is covered with colorful plastic fasteners: green, yellow, orange, contrasting with her shimmering dark black skin. Her hair braided into pigtails, her legs crossed in a relaxed way, that's how she looks out of the picture. She seems to look questioning, reserved, not defensive, but not inviting either - is she tired, or does she want to be alone, is she waiting? In her individuality, in her self-being she is: Black Beauty. "Feeling Blessed" - a young black man sits in a modern kitchen next to the sink on the cabinet. A golden cross dangles in front of his orange T-shirt. His right hand covers his eyes. He does not reveal his mood, his condition, but he seems relaxed sitting on the sink, his head slightly tilted back. Wayo himself comments on the work, "It's a blessing to be alive, and to feel that every morning." Skin color plays a central role, a positive one: "The Color of my Skin: Black." A younger black man, his face unrecognizable, sits casually on the beach; sneakers on his feet, watch on his wrist, white shirt and white pants trimmed with plastic fasteners - palm trees and ocean in the background. His presence is a statement: I am! I am here! I exist! I am fine!

Wayo's works show everyday stories that formulate long-lasting things in snapshots: fixed moments of joie de vivre, of being in many facets. The three-dimensionality of the plastic closures lets them project into the respective reality on site.