



**“IF YOU WALKED INTO A ROOM WITH A THOUSAND PEOPLE IN IT, AND ONE OF THE PEOPLE IN HER PAINTINGS WAS THERE, THAT’S WHO YOU’D WANT TO MEET”**



## LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE

Artist and writer

Lynette, born in South London in 1977, is acclaimed for her striking paintings of fictitious people. Working from a composite of sketches, pictures and her imagination, the result is individuals who exist outside of any specific time or place. Looking at her paintings, the viewer is not met with the usual questions that one might have when looking at a portrait - Who is this? What are they feeling? Where are they from? What is their relationship to the artist? Instead, it is as though you are immediately connected to a particular aura or reflection of the human condition. Lynette communicates a sense of being in the world through individuals, often alone or sometimes together, sometimes with other living beings, but people who appear present, connected to their selves and to the space around them.

“I paint what I cannot write and write what I cannot paint”.

Lynette's painting style is at once free and also scientific. She is known for completing her paintings in one or two days. Painting with oil, she describes the experience as a physical act - she does not come up with an idea and then decide how she can transcribe this into a painting - but communicates as if through her paintbrush. She is able to do this because of her mastery of colour, form, shape and proportion. Having mastered her technique, she get to the heart of what it is to paint and communicate what cannot be said through words.

Upcoming Exhibition at the Tate Britain:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/lynette-yiadom-boakye>



## WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

"He is a black man. He is often thought of as a nothing, a cipher. But he has layers upon layers upon layers." Zadie Smith on "Under-Song for a Cipher" (left)

The titles for Lynette's paintings act, in her own words, as another mark on the page. They do not describe the painting but add them in their poetic and ambiguous phrasing. Zadie Smith, reflecting on Lynette's title "Under-song for a Cipher" relates this to the man, pictured on the left, in a similar way to the way that Lynette has spoken about blackness and the infiniteness within this.

In the same essay, Zadie is critical of reflections on Lynette's work that frame it in relation to the absence of black figures in Western Art History, and her success due to an intent to disrupt this. Lynette paints black people. As she remarks it would be odd if she only painted white people. Where she has painted white people with black people she commented that it felt tokenistic. And so she paints what she wants and what she knows and suggests others do the same. The tendency to see only this when looking at her paintings speaks to the single perspective that we are so used to seeing in Western Art History. Her paintings do say something about blackness but it is because of the unique way in which she paints people, and her artistic skill, not because of an absence that has come before.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/19/lynette-yiadom-boakyes-imaginary-portraits>