

## Artist Profile – Chris Ofili

b. 1968 Manchester, England; lives and works in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Ofili attended the Chelsea School of Art, the Royal College of Art, and the Universität der Künste Berlin. Ofili creates paintings, drawings, and sculptures that include grand ornamentation, tensile lines, and colorful pyrotechnics. Common themes in Ofili's works are art history, religion and iconography, pop-culture, internal tensions, and oppositions. Ofili is interested in studying humans, he thinks about what humans want, what we look for in ourselves, and how we understand. Common subjects in his pieces are the human form, typically nude, and flora and fauna, they are often accompanied by line work and patterns.

Ofili's paintings early on included shimmering patterns that included elephant dung as part of the medium. As time went on, Ofili began studying single figures and their energy, melding the black figure with pop-culture and art historical references. His paintings are colorful, capture movement, and focus on both how men and women are perceived. Ofili's later paintings take on a new style where he splits the piece into monochrome fragments that resemble stained glass. The colors he uses, red, green, and black, symbolize the Pan-African flag and the vision of a return to the African homeland. Still, in these works Ofili is returning to his techniques from his early work and includes Elephant dung alongside his paintings.

In addition to the stained glass paintings, Ofili started another new series later in life after his move to Trinidad. These paintings were dominated by shades of blue and black, the title of the series being Blue Rider. Ofili was transfixed by the different environment and how the city was illuminated only by the moon at night, creating mystery in the city and later in his pieces. Because Ofili uses a silver base in these paintings they are very dark yet seem to be lit from within, this causes viewers to take a large amount of time looking at the works. It was also in Trinidad that Ofili began uses multiple colors again, still creating paintings with mystery, the supernatural, and pagan and biblical references.

Ofili began creating sculptures after he had been established as a painter because of his interest in freestanding sculpture. These sculptures include many of the previously mentioned themes and subjects along with new one such as eroticism and folklore with the inclusion of feces as a subject of the sculpture instead of an addition to the side. The subject of man and woman is still his main focus in his sculptures, but now he is directly juxtaposing the idea of a majestic human with feces.

Examples of Ofili's works include *Pimpin' ain't easy (1)*; an example of his earlier works where nudity or phallic symbols were involved, along with elephant dung, and the shimmering patterns that he is known for. *Afronirvana (2)* is a "stained glass" piece, *Blue Moon (3)* is an example of his sculptural work that incorporates feces as part of the subject matter, and *Blue Riders Bass (4)* is a work from his Blue Rider series.



1



2



3

