

Bolu Ikuemonisan

Artist Bio

Bolu Ezra Ikuemonisan is a Nigerian-born interdisciplinary artist and curator based in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Trained in linguistics and pursuing an MFA in Studio Art at the University of Arkansas, he investigates identity, language, cultural memory, and the politics of visibility through drawing, photography, performance, and film. Working from photographs, Ikuemonisan renders figures with striking realism before interrupting the image through abstraction, erasure, and color. These disruptions are central to his practice. They challenge the expectation that a portrait should offer a single, fully legible self, and instead make room for interiority, ambiguity, and the experience of being seen through cultural assumptions. Drawing on his experience navigating American art spaces as a Nigerian artist, his work considers the pressures to translate oneself, the tension between visibility and misrecognition, and the ways digital culture reshapes self-image.

Charcoal is fundamental to Bolu's drawing process. Its deep blacks, soft grays, dust, and erasable surfaces allow him to use light and shadow as metaphors for knowledge and concealment, recognition and erasure. Acrylic enters as a contrasting force: vivid, immediate, and digitally charged. Together, the materials create a dialogue between tactile presence and screen-based perception.

Bolu creates images that move between hyperrealism and abstraction. Across these mediums, he approaches the face and body as sites where private feeling meets public image, history, and daily ongoing negotiation. His work invites viewers to reconsider how they look at others and how social, cultural, and technological systems shape what can be seen, withheld, distorted, or reclaimed.

Artist Statement

These drawings examine identity as something increasingly assembled through screens, images, and repeated acts of looking. Each figure confronts a phone that becomes both mirror and barrier: a device that offers self-construction while obscuring the person behind it. Fragmented faces, cropped bodies, and fields of acrylic color interrupt charcoal's careful realism, visualizing the gap between lived selfhood and the digital self-shaped for viewing, circulation, and public approval.

I use charcoal and acrylic for their complementary tensions. Charcoal carries intimacy, touch, shadow, and the labor of observation; acrylic introduces the immediacy, brightness, and artificial saturation of the online image. Together, they create portraits that move between presence and distortion, vulnerability and performance.

Women serve as muses because social-media self-imaging has disproportionately centered women's bodies and faces, particularly through the familiar gesture of the mirror selfie. Rather than treating this gesture as superficial, these works consider it as a complex negotiation with visibility: an attempt to author one's image while living under the pressures of being seen. The phone becomes a contemporary mirror—reflecting, filtering, fragmenting, and continually remaking the self.



Mirror Mirror on the Wall II, 26 x 40 inches, Charcoal, pastel and acrylic on paper, \$1,500.