

# Buffalo Arts Studio

Tri-Main Center  
2495 Main Street, Suite 500  
Buffalo, NY 14214  
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www.buffaloartsstudio.org

Gallery hours: Tuesday - Friday 11am-5pm, Saturday, 10am-2pm



George Afedzi Hughes is an Associate Professor of Painting at SUNY Buffalo. Born in Ghana, Hughes studied painting at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, College of Art, where he earned a BA in Fine Art and an MA in Art Education. After graduation he spent two years in France and England painting and the artworks created during this tour culminated in a major solo exhibition at the Artists Alliance Gallery in Accra, Ghana. Shortly after, Hughes settled in the United States where he received an MFA in Painting and Drawing from Bowling Green State University. Since then, he has exhibited internationally and has taught in universities throughout the United States. His paintings, performances, and installations have been shown in Canada, China, Denmark, Dubai, England, France, Germany, Ghana, Holland, Northern Ireland, Nigeria, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Uruguay, Wales, and the United States.

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Council on the Arts



George Afedzi Hughes, *The Politics of Identity*

January 26-March 3, 2018

Opening Reception, Friday, January 26, 2018

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## George Afedzi Hughes, *The Politics of Identity*

George Afedzi Hughes uses painting and performance art to focus on the turbulence of colonialism and to highlight parallels between that violent history and contemporary global conflicts. *The Politics of Identity* includes two separate bodies of work: *Social Predation* from the early part of the 21st century and *The Politics of Identity*, his most recent work. The older canvases emphasize the tragedy of such history, with images of animal/human body parts, scientific notations and military metaphors. In contrast, the newer paintings address ostensibly positive roles and identities derived from contact between colonial regimes and developing economies. Hughes' project interprets the spectacle of information, knowledge, and subjectivity through a systematic yet accessible iconography.

More personal and introspective than Hughes' later work, the paintings from the *Social Predation* series include photos of the artist and his family, original poetry, and imaginary objects inspired by the military barracks that served as his studio. Using aggressive brush strokes and meticulously rendered schematics, the artist maps the connections and interconnections between himself, his family, and the places he called home during that time. The expressive mark-making and powerful colors suggest a spontaneity and even an urgency in their creation. One cannot help but imagine the artist before the canvases, shifting between dynamic, gestural brush strokes and finely rendered diagrams. Compositionally, these canvases do not present a clear sense of space or depth, however the large size and dramatic verticality of the paintings recall the "truth" of Western history paintings. Surrounding the photographs of Hughes and his family are massive faces inspired by traditional African sculpture. The masks look out from the canvases and past the viewer, tying together the ancient and recent pasts and drawing further connection between himself and his ancestry. Like the complex diagrams of interconnectivity in the paintings, his stratum of symbols and surfaces requires time and attention to absorb and decipher.



*Genealogy*, 2001, acrylic, oil, enamel on canvas, 68 x 124



*Metaphysics*, 2005, acrylic, oil, enamel on canvas, 72 x 120

The newer works in the front gallery are more focused, both formally and symbolically. Hughes has deliberately limited the elements, drawing the viewer into the paintings very quickly. There is a clarity to the compositions, with many of the canvases using horizon lines and perspective to place the objects, as well as the viewer, into a clear spatial relationship. Green has replaced red as the dominant color and the smooth surfaces force the viewer to focus much more on the objects and figures themselves rather than the gestural marks used to render them. The artist's symbolic language remains intact, including animals, anatomy, soccer balls, bananas, and barcodes, but here they are both distilled and amplified. The barcodes no longer include numbers, allowing the forms to simultaneously reference an irresistible consumer culture as well as a catastrophic incarceration system. For the paintings in *The Politics of Identity*, Hughes seems to both comment and critique from a different vantage point, perhaps from a greater distance.

Cover images:

*After Party*, 2017, acrylic, oil, enamel on canvas, 44 x 68

*Skills*, 2017, acrylic, oil, enamel on canvas, 68 x 124