



Oscar Ukonu is a Nigerian hyperrealist biro artist who has made a name for himself in the world of art with his incredibly detailed pen drawings that are often mistaken for photographs. His unique style of art is a result of his passion for capturing the intricate details of the human face and form.

Oscar Ukonu, born in 1993 is a Nigerian ballpoint pen artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. He draws large-scale hyperreal style portraits using only biro pens. His style has been described as both hyperrealism and Afrorealism - he uses his drawings to convey a social message about the African descent. His portraits are strikingly realistic, capturing every nuance of his subjects' faces and expressions - a celebration of the beauty and diversity of humanity.

Ukonu discovered his passion for art at a young age and began honing his skills using whatever materials he could find. However, it wasn't until he started experimenting with ballpoint pens that he truly found his niche.

**Why do you think Ukonu only uses blue biro pens in his work? What overall atmosphere does it create?**

Ukonu works exclusively with a monochromatic colour scheme. The subjects of his portraits appear to be younger people, often staring straight ahead, with their eyes (when not covered) looking directly at the viewer.

This makes the subject's expressions difficult to interpret, as there appears to be a mix of sadness, introspection, and detachment.

Ukonu's biro pieces are rendered in shades of blue-grey. This colour scheme helps to create a sense of unity and harmony within the artworks. The subjects are placed against a stark white background, enhancing the blue tones and ensuring our attention doesn't stray from the people depicted.

**What emotions do you associate the colour blue with?**

Despite the challenges of working with such a limited medium, Ukonu has become a master of the biro pen. He spends hours painstakingly creating each piece, often working late into the night to capture the perfect image. His dedication to his craft has paid off, with his work being exhibited in galleries across Nigeria and beyond.

Look at the close up picture above - Ukonu uses his ballpoint pen with great precision. There is a careful juxtaposition of broader strokes and intricate finer lines to heighten areas of interest and create an illusion of stark reality.

Using biro to draw tones and highlights can be challenging, but biro pens can be very useful for drawing sharp edges, lines and outlines precisely.

**Do you think Ukonu's artworks are large or small? Why?**

Oscar Ukonu says:

*I describe my creative process as a practice in time and patience, working*



*approximately 200 to 400 hours on a project. I approach every project as a research work that involves processes of writing, sketching and photography before the final drawing.*

Top facts about artist Oscar Ukonu:

- Oscar Ukonu was born in 1993, he now lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria
- He started drawing, as a hobby, when he was nine
- He studied architecture at Federal Polytechnic in Nekede, Nigeria
- His portrait work is described as hyperrealism and Afrorealism
- His artwork constantly explores Black identity and pride
- An artwork can take between 200 - 400 hours, meaning he is working for up to six weeks
- One artwork can use around ten biro pens
- To create his pieces he uses three drawing techniques: hatching, cross-hatching, and scribbling
- He has created official artworks for The Oscars
- Prints of his drawings sell for over \$700

**What do you think about Oscar Ukonu's biro drawings? Which are your favourite pieces and why?**





