

Alfred Amadu Conteh, **Sauce**, 2016
Charcoal, Conte' (similar to a crayon) and Acrylic on Paper



Introduction: Alfred Amadu Conteh b 1975 Georgia & lives/works there today.

- His mother is African American and his father is from [Sierra Leone](#), West Africa.
- Classically trained artist — w/Bachelor & Master's Degree in Fine Arts. He has practiced his craft for more than 20 years
- **About his portraits, Conteh said, "I made it a point to be mindful of how people choose to pose themselves and what they're communicating with their facial expressions,"... In some of the portraits you can look into the eyes of the subject, but many of them look away, not allowing their souls to be exposed through their eyes."**
- What does his **body language** say to you? —>Crossed arms & Thumb pressing against chest — protective, tense

- Artist positioned his **Head towards the upper left corner** of the painting— **His eyes gaze off somewhere outside of the painting** — how can we interpret that? “cornered —> does he feel “cornered”, tense, unengaged, living in his own world

Paints many contemporary portraits exploring lives African diasporal societies in South.

- MAJOR THEME: **TWO FRONTS: How Black people face challenges on WITHIN THEMSELVES AND OUTSIDE OF THEMSELVES.**
- ***Fighting to survive*** social, economic, educational and psychological wars

Atlanta, GA is divided into two worlds — those with what they need and those without. Amid the 50 largest U.S. cities, Atlanta ranks number one for its **income disparity** between wealthiest/poorest, — more than **twice the national average**

- **Conteh wanted to put faces in front of the statistics.**

Let’s look at 2 more things Conteh included with this painting.

- Tattoo —**Zone 3** —> area in Southeast Atlanta, GA — Noted for a high rate of reported crimes AND black youth gangs
- **Tattoos** are chosen to show an **idea, feeling, or memory that you WANT to carry with you forever**
- **In a world where someone feels they are fighting the outside world AND world within—** imagine reasons he might choose a tattoo saying “Zone 3”

Title of the painting is **“Sauce”** —has multiple meanings... here are 2 interpretations:

- Rappers use term — “have style and confidence ...and have a certain attraction”
- **“get lost in the sauce”** — (US, slang) **Out of it, lost; bewildered, stupefied, or daydreaming, due to intoxication, distraction, aimlessness, etc.**
- **Consider how the title “Sauce” fits him... stylish, confident, attractive?**
- **Lost in the Sauce?**
- **Or ...could he be both?**

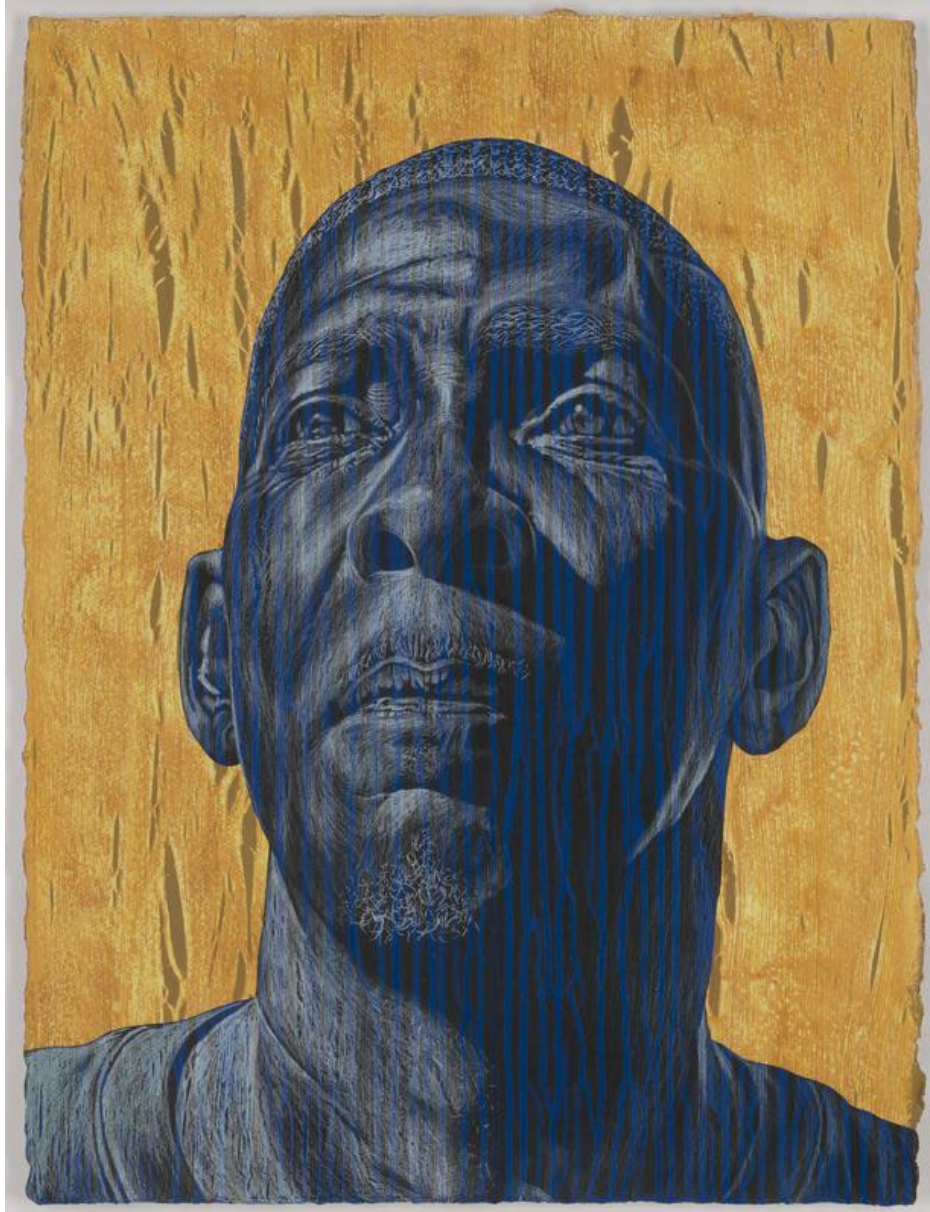
- Conteh’s many portraits try to **reveal something more** about the person in the way he creates the **backgrounds and surfaces of his paintings.**
- Here we see a background of thinned acrylic paint — much like watercolor. The background may reflect this man’s inner life and the toll of living in “Zone 3”— **formless and undefined and in the process of change .**

PATINA —We are familiar with the word “ patina” where metal surfaces are scratched with use or with oxidation —(reflect age/beauty)

Conteh uses a Variety of **PATINATION TECHNIQUES** in a different way. It is a — **very important part of each of his portraits. It shows how the outer world takes a toll on the inner world**

- For his patina technique he says. "I'm using **metal powders, chemical compounds, acrylic and dry media on paper and canvas to recreate those aging and weathering effects on the faces of people**, which are reminiscent of the erosive conditions that patina the **lives of black people every day, everywhere.**"

Next are two other images of people where he has used the patina technique to add a layer of meaning to his paintings.



This is in Mia's collection but not on view right now.

Kirby, 2017 Alfred Amadu Conteh 2019.35.3

“Kirby’s stern expression imparts dignity, grace, and an inner wisdom, qualities that recall the black pride movement of the 1960s. As such, the portrait functions as a positive expression of African American culture, while at the same time evoking the persistent inequities and challenges that remain for many people of color in the United States.

Conteh uses a variety of chemicals on the surface to physically change the faces, bodies and the background and add another layer of meaning.



Alfred Conteh: **"Mama Waiting."** Charcoal and acrylic on paper, 22 x 30 in.

This woman and her child were forced out of their home in a low income area because of floods. It is unlivable & they cannot return.
Conteh chose to show a background resembling mold.

SUMMARY OF Conteh's ideas: "Being a realistic painter means making recognizable pictures of the world. Painting reality means also making visiblethe invisible: revealing what makes us what we are, and what stops us from becoming what we long to be."

REFERENCES

<https://www.alfredconteh.com/statement>

Imaging Atlanta: Placing the People Front and Center—Feb 02, 2017

<https://www.artsatl.org/alfred-contehs-imaging-atlanta-placing-people-front-center/>

<http://galeriemyrtis.net/alfred-conteh-biography/>



<https://www.tikkun.org/alfred-conteh/>

4/23/2022 Artist Talk — click on orange arrow lower right for link to video

1 hour 18 min video — last 18 min are questions/answers. **If you have time this is a worthwhile video. Talks a lot about the different patination techniques he is experimenting with. You get a good idea of the variety of people he**

paints.

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Zone%203> -----[Zone 3](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Amadu_Conteh