

Unveiling spotlights a recently completed portrait commission or figurative work from some of the best and most active members of the Portrait Society of America. This month, Kimberly Azzarito, Assistant Director of the Portrait Society, interviewed Luis Alvarez Roure about his recently completed portrait commission of Felix Oduyemi.

Luis Alvarez Roure: Portrait of Felix Oduyemi

BY KIMBERLY AZZARITO

Puerto Rican realist painter, Luis Alvarez Roure, recently unveiled a stunning commissioned portrait of Felix Oduyemi, the executive vice president of Caleb-Inland Energy. In the painting, Roure portrays Oduyemi, who immigrated to the United States from Nigeria, sitting upright in a wooden chair and dressed in traditional Nigerian clothing. “I always begin the process of a portrait by getting information and discussing ideas about my subject and what they are envisioning,” says Roure. “Amy (my client) told me she desired to leave a legacy portrait of her long-term partner Felix Oduyemi. They told me about his background, and I asked them to pick an attire that was in connection with his roots.” Oduyemi’s tribe is Yoruba from Ijebu Kingdom. “His royal lineage is Omo Oba Imupa Asayan, Rubakoye of Ijebuland,” explains Roure. “As soon as we met in person, I started brainstorming ideas as we had a warm conversation.” Roure proceeded with an extensive photoshoot of his subject and then asked his clients to allow him to make his own artistic decisions. “They were so nice and they actually wanted me to move ahead with all artistic freedom. That is something I am always grateful for and appreciate when clients put their absolute confidence and trust in me.”

For the portrait, Roure chose an intense red background, which he likens to “one of those striking chords from composer Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.” Painting Felix’s portrait came very natural to Roure. “I see him as a leader, a man of strength, and great spirit and sensibility,” Roure says. “I looked to balance these elements within his facial expression, the corporal language between his body and hands, and the background colors and textures. One hand is soft, the other is firm, and his gaze is welcoming but alert.”

“To me, a portrait should speak



individually to each one in front of it,” Roure adds. “The story behind a portrait should not be a fixed one dictated solely by its creator. And so, there must be improvisation and freedom. History as well as the possibility to invent something new. Deliverance and the fearless attitude to say what you want to say unapologetically. French composer Claude Debussy once said, ‘Works of art make rules: rules do not make works of art.’”

Roure has previously completed portraits of the late Federal Reserve Chairman Paul

Volcker, legendary Afro-Cuban jazz pioneer Cándido Camero, actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, composer Philip Glass and violinist Joshua Bell for the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery. Most recently, he completed a portrait of retired Metropolitan Opera bass and Kennedy Center honoree Justino Díaz, which is going to be unveiled at the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico later this year. ●

1
Felix Oduyemi, 2023, oil on linen, 36 x 36”