

## GODFRIED DONKOR

Godfried Donkor is a Ghanaian artist based in London and when I last encountered his work he was drawing, painting and collaging references to a history of black boxers and market trading. Old B&W images of sportsmen were graced with gold leaf and interleaved with pages from the densely typed, peach-pink pages of the Financial Times newspaper. In those works the artist implicitly communicated the way in which blackness, having played such a terribly significant part in providing the necessary difference to fuel and instigate first world capitalism, continues, through the spectacle of sport, to operate as a continuing symbol of difference. The durable boxer, the rapid runner, the skillful footballer all excel as exceptional others, thereby extending an ignoble history into the heart of 21st century global sport as an incomparable media spectacle. Young professionals with comet-like careers are still traded as profitable workhorses that – Donkor reminds us – might be read as glamorous, hyperbolic extensions of capitalism's foundation in commodity, slave and livestock markets.

For the Camberwell Arts Festival – held during the 2014 World Cup – he has produced a series of 12 postcards showing footballers, adorned with halos, sometimes surrounded with gold



leaf. The word 'Santo' precedes their names. Hence we are blessed with the presence of a secular saint, an iconic popular hero representing not only sporting prowess but the aspirations of the global poor for whom televised football has become a kind of Soma as well as a significant solace. Despite the great social injustices and disparities that are an integral part of the great capitalist mechanism any kid from a poor family might yet be transformed, through nimble footwork and some lottery-style good fortune, into a star footballer paid unimaginable sums. Such a star's appropriately astronomical wages are of course a relatively small investment made to generate a far greater pool of profits from which various agents, managers, clubs, associations, sponsors and media companies all take their own satisfactory cut.

Today's markets, technology and political representation have changed significantly since an officially sanctioned slave trade but a global population's indigenous faiths and locally empowered political agencies are now sorely tested by new allegiances to media, brands and consumerism. Global capitalism is celebrated and illuminated by the wonders of slow-mo, HD heroes while the goal of constructing fairer and more rewarding lives and societies is hijacked and supplanted by images of success - experienced vicariously through the sparkling imagery of an untouchable pantheon. Godfried Donkor looks directly into this potentially blinding phenomenon, subtly, colourfully and engagingly teasing out underlying continuities of a sinister history, implicating and exposing a persisting scenario of global inequality unfolding beyond and behind the televised image of the ghetto-urchin-made-good – now heralded as a compensatory god.

Santo Jairzinho by Godfried Donkor  
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