

Iké Udé: Style and Sympathies

Leila Heller Gallery, New York



Iké Udé, *Sartorial Anarchy #4*, 2010. Courtesy the artist and Leila Heller Gallery

As much as identity is a cultural construct, it's also an individual creation, and few people have fashioned a self with as much flourish as Iké Udé. The Nigerian-born, New York based photographer, magazine founder, writer, best-dressed list-maker, and all-around dandy is himself a work of art.

Outrageous, playful, witty and worldly, the self-portraits from his *Sartorial Anarchy* series, from 2010 to the present, are on view at Leila Heller through November 9. Every carefully chosen accessory and item of clothing is described in detail in each lengthy caption. For *Sartorial Anarchy #4*, the caption specifies, among other things, an Afghan coat, an American Boy Scout shirt, a traditional Anglo-American cummerbund, Mastude /

Japanese designed tweed-knee breeches, Italian soccer socks, and a boater "inspired by the traditional Eton / Oxford College boat-race celebration for Queen and County, started in 1829, held annually since 1856."

Blending historical periods and ethnic origins, Udé does what adventurous fashion designers do, but his self-portraits are also a refusal to be labeled or categorized, an enthusiastic embrace of every and any piece of design or class and cultural marker that has appeal. Aristocrat, student, wrestler, cheerleader, Native American, Ugandan police officer, Ude strikes a pose and becomes his own canvas.



Iké Udé, *Sartorial Anarchy #5*, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Leila Heller Gallery

"The very notion of a nation is an ideological invention," he wrote in the 2000 catalogue for *Beyond Decorum: Iké Udé*. "Hence it becomes apparent that this African nomination being bandied about my person, or identity, is an insidiously crass issue of geographic containment employed to measure, define and dispose — I fear — in vain."

Playing with oppositional identities — white/ black, American/Nigerian, artist/fashionista — Udé throws them into constant and colorful flux. Like Cindy Sherman, or Lyle Ashton Harris, with whom he's collaborated, Udé's work is performative and tuned in to wider and deeper cultural references. Race and colonialism, certainly, but also gender and sexuality, wealth and its signifiers are all woven into the vivid and ornate fabric of his work.

— By Jean Dykstra 10/28/2013