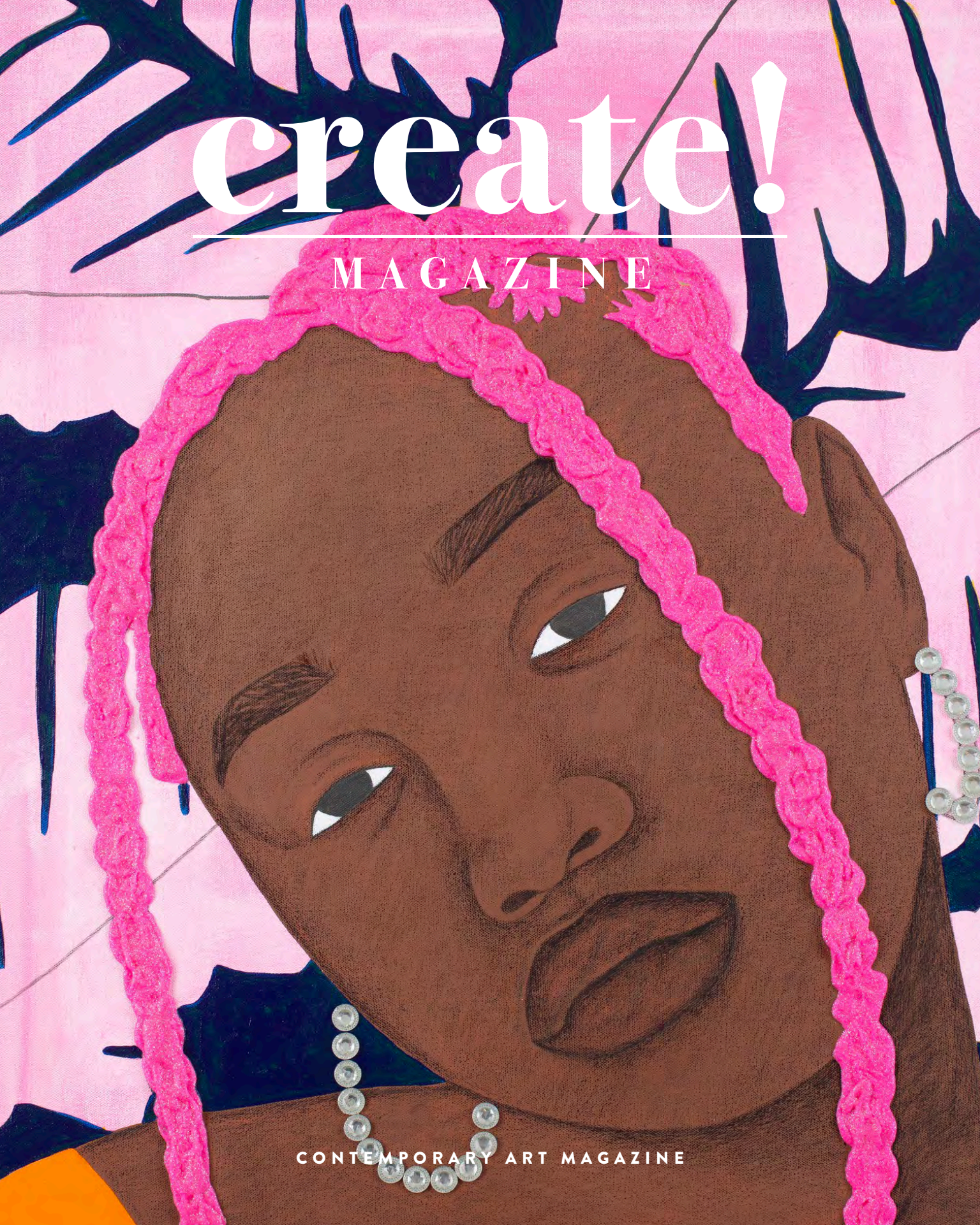


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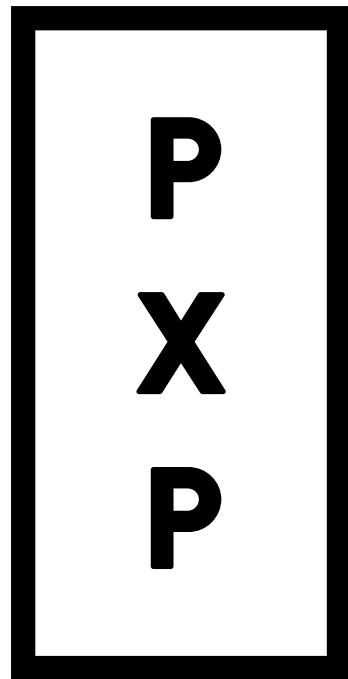
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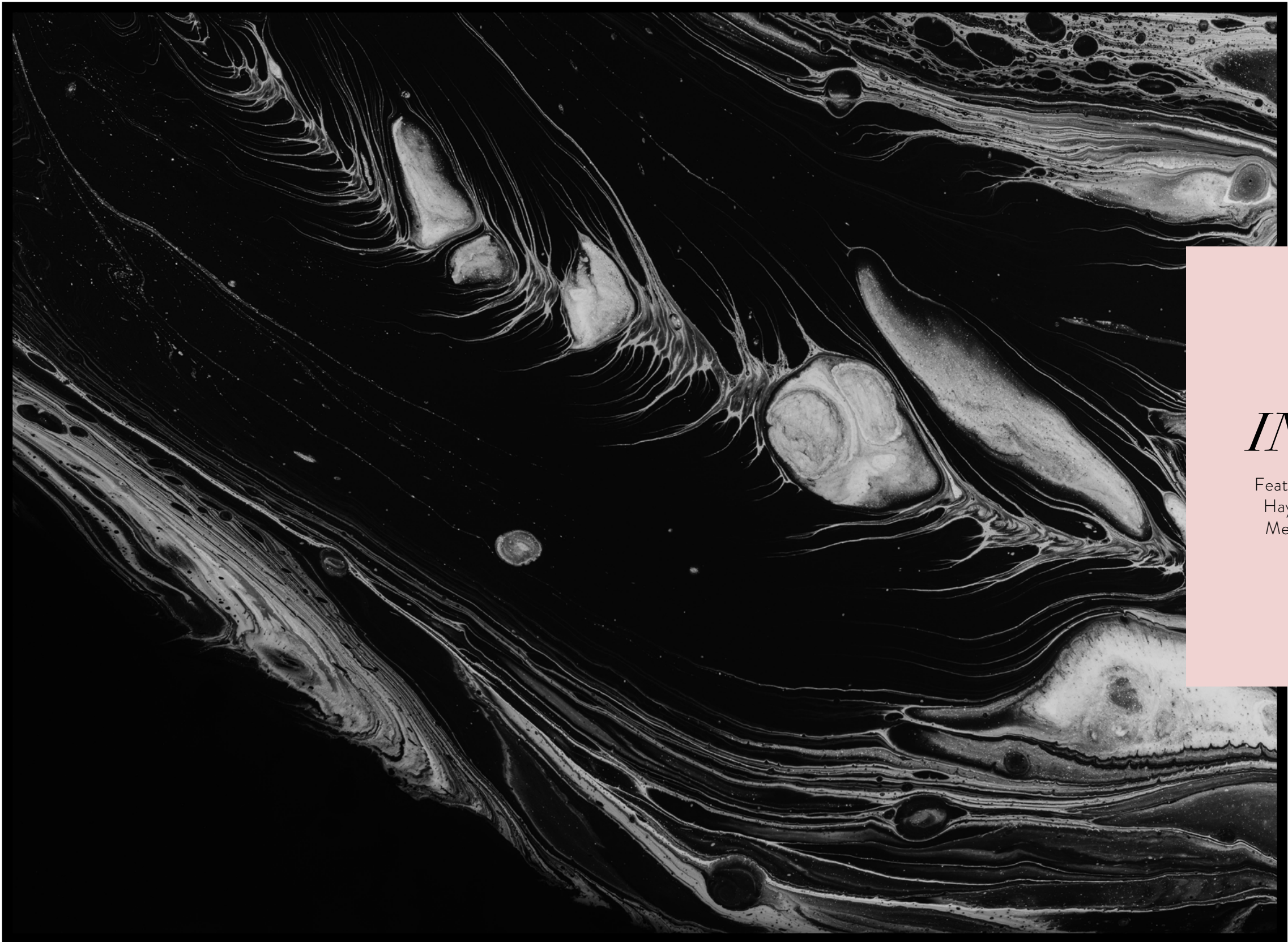
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INTERVIEWS

Featuring Tiffany Alfonseca, Grace Lynne Haynes, Clotilde Jiménez, Larry Ossei-Mensah, Danielle Krysa, and Tam Gryn



Power Portraits

Interview with Tiffany Alfonseca



By Ekaterina Popova

Tiffany Alfonseca paints colorful, thoughtful portraits of everyday moments using her unique and confident style while celebrating Black and Afro-Latinx diasporic culture. Her work has been getting a lot of attention recently, and I was thrilled that the artist agreed to chat with me about her powerful paintings.

"Alfonseca continuously taps into her Afro-Dominican roots and leverages it as a conceptual cantilever that provides a dynamic framework for her artistic practice. Moreover, her work aims to visually articulate that the Black and Afro-Latinx diaspora does not exist within a monolith, but that these communities are a cultural cornucopia that is vast, varied, and complex. Alfonseca's artwork is an intricate combination of beauty, diversity, and multilingualism that exemplifies the strength of the Black and Afro-Latinx diaspora."



Tell me about your background as a painter. When did you first start creating art, and where are you currently on your journey?

I was always an artist, from the early age of three, and just continued practicing throughout my life. It wasn't until I entered college that I really began taking art more seriously as a career path. I'm still very much an emerging artist exploring different mediums and trying new things with my art.

Who are the figures in your paintings? Where do you find the most inspiration for your work?

Most of the figures in my work are my friends or people from within my community. I come from The Bronx, NY; everyone here has a different spunk/personality to them and I make sure to always capture that in my work. My work shows a variety of what AfroLatinos/AfroDescendants look like. My inspiration stems from the people in my community and trying to capture what it is to be AfroLatino.

How has your style evolved over the years? Is your work much different than when you first started exploring figurative painting?

Stylistically my work has definitely changed throughout the years, but the message I want to emphasize has never changed. When I first started I created work more from my imagination, but now I use actual people in my work because I want the work to be more relatable. Not saying that my older work wasn't relatable, but when you look at my new work you can say "Hey, I know Mathy!" and that's an instant connection you have with someone who is a real person. For me, it's about making work so that the youth can feel happy to see someone in art depicted that looks like them.

What are you passionate about, and what changes do you hope to see in the art world in the coming years?

A passion of mine that has remained the same from a young age is art, which will never change. Art is everywhere all around us, which is so beautiful and brings me such joy. Something I'd love to see in the art world is more black/brown bodies taking up a lot of space. More opportunities, more recognition, more black narratives.

What are you currently working on?

I am working on expanding my portfolio by experimenting with new mediums and also preparing for my first show at New Image Art Gallery in LA. It will be a two person show with myself and Raelis Vasquez who is also another Dominican figurative painter.

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**“MY INSPIRATION
STEMS FROM THE
PEOPLE IN MY
COMMUNITY AND
TRYING TO CAPTURE
WHAT IT IS TO BE
AFROLATINO.”**

Name a few artists who are currently inspiring you that we should know.

Jordan Casteel was a big influence on my "In Quarantine Series" drawings and I've always admired her as an artist and her willingness to help/teach the community.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby

Kudzana Violet

Chase Hall

Lynette Yiadom Boakye

Kerry James Marshall

Toyin Ojih Odutola

Noah Davis



The Decisive Moments That Define Us: Grace Lynne Haynes on Resilience, Taking Risks, and Reframing Black Femininity

By Alicia Puig

For California-raised artist Grace Lynne Haynes, 2020 hasn't been the year she expected careerwise... it's been better. Like many of us, she had events postponed and transitioned certain aspects of her work online, but overall, the pandemic and momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement have acted as a boon for the emerging visual artist's career. Around the time that I reached out to her for this interview, Grace revealed via Instagram that *Vogue* selected her as one of seven artists tasked with painting a look from the publication's runway archive in their own style. Her reinterpretation of a Valentino gown from Fall 2019, a monochromatic figure in a patterned one-shoulder gown set against a fluorescent pink backdrop, was shared widely across social media and garnered even more attention for her work. Then she was invited to create the cover art for not one, but two editions of *The New Yorker*. When we recorded our interview, over *Zoom* of course, I caught her shortly after completing her painting for the first one, for which she only had a two day deadline! It's impressive to produce a full painting on such short notice and equally impressive that she's working on projects at this scale at this point in her career. It places her squarely in the ranks of other notable Black artists who've also been tapped for cover art, including Amy Sherald, who painted the late Breonna Taylor for *Vanity Fair* this summer, as well as Kerry James Marshall and Jordan Casteel, who were recently commissioned to create new artwork for the famed September issue of *Vogue*.

While the aforementioned artists have been major players in the art world for years, Grace has just entered her first semester in the MFA program at Rutgers this fall. "I finally decided to go to graduate school and then this happens," she says jokingly before explaining how the program will be shifting its courses and critiques online. Yet, her overall outlook remains positive. She looks forward to interacting with the other 12 artists in her cohort as well as having access to a studio space provided by the school. The artist also plans to take advantage of the extra free semester that Rutgers has offered each student after her two years in the program. Coming from a background of illustration and design, this will be her opportunity for a more hands-on experience with studying fine art.

Her artistic inclination was evident at a young age. Grace painted and drew extensively as a child, recalling memories of creating her own storyboards and dreaming of working as a cartoonist, but she ultimately heeded the advice of her conservative parents and put her passion for art aside throughout her teenage years. After graduating, she enrolled in college to become an English teacher. In short, it didn't work out. When Grace began taking art classes instead, she underwent a spiritual reawakening. Her senses came alive again and her repressed creativity resurfaced. She ultimately came to the realization that she no longer cared what others thought; she would pursue art with conviction, but cautiously. Still doubting the possibility of working full-time as a fine artist, she opted for the path of design and completed an illustration program at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. The budding designer successfully launched her career with her commercial illustration work and consistently continued painting on the side, yet still felt something was missing.

Then she applied to the Vermont Studio Center for a month-long paid residency and got accepted. To her, it was the life-changing sign that she needed to finally embrace fine art not only as her passion, but as her vocation as well. There she met accomplished furniture designer and art advisor Cheryl Riley, a woman who would shortly come to take on the role of mentor. When Grace showed Cheryl her paintings, Cheryl eagerly shared the artist's work with her network of curators and galleries, eventually helping to place Grace's work in the collections of actor Jesse Williams and art world powerhouse Nina Chanel Abney. Things took off very quickly after that.

Unlike many artists who fall victim to their inner critic and let the fear of rejection bar them from applying to opportunities that feel out of reach, Grace often spent hours poring over online call for art websites. The artist submitted her paintings far and wide in the hopes of being selected for other

residencies so she could travel and interact with other artists in a way she missed by not studying fine art as an undergraduate. She cultivated a 'what do I have to lose' type of attitude early on that has served her well and both motivates her to continue putting her work out there as well as keeps the sting of rejection letters in perspective. "You're putting the energy out there that you want something. You might get 100 rejections, but then you'll get one good one," she muses. Indeed, she was right. Her acceptance to the inaugural iteration of Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock residency in Senegal marked yet another significant milestone in her career, giving the artist further validation from the contemporary art world for her work.

In August of 2019, less than a month after hearing of the successful application, the emerging artist headed off to Senegal to begin the four week residency. Grace immersed herself in the culture and history of Dakar, the nation's capital city, eventually deciding to extend her stay for an extra month. The fact that it was her first experience on the continent made it an especially emotional and impactful one for her as both an African American and an artist.

She expanded upon her creative process during this time, further deconstructing the figure and experimenting with texture in her compositions. Additionally, Grace began incorporating collage and fabrics into her work, inspired by the Senegalese sartorial sensibility that includes a penchant for pairing multiple patterns together within the same ensemble. Now the patterns in her work have a stronger, sentimental purpose behind them. Her use of patterns acknowledges how people of the Black diaspora adorn themselves with confidence, emphasizes the contrast between their dark skin and vibrant colors, and tells narratives of their traditions and womanhood. It's her goal to buy new fabrics each time she returns to Africa as a means of reclaiming a culture that was stripped away from her as much as for creative inspiration.



When looking at the artist's work, the pattern and color draw the viewer's eyes across the canvas, yet the figures and one particularly defining aspect about them that stands out the most. They're painted pitch black. Speaking on this, she shares that "in art school we would do a lot of figure drawing, but we would never have Black models so I didn't learn how to paint Black or brown skin." Thus, at first, the choice to use black for skin was an act of rebellion against the lack of diversity in her art school experience. As she delved deeper into the contemporary art world and discovered the work of artists like Kerry James Marshall, a quote from the artist's statement about his work added another layer of meaning to her own: the darker you are, the more marginalized you are. She adds that for Black women in particular, "the darker you are, the less feminine you are perceived as and you're less worthy of protection." Her sole focus is painting the Black female figure in order to counter these notions and present Black women as dignified, elegant, and feminine.

In her paintings, she also turns the inherent tension between opposites on its head. Grace surrounds her figures with a light background that contrasts against the dark skin. She thinks about the idea that dark and light are always at odds and in the West, how dark is often perceived as evil, while light is considered positive and even heavenly. Yet, in her compositions, dark and light don't work against each other, the two entities coexist in the same image, each serving to enhance and emphasize the other.

With her art inescapably intertwined with her personal experiences and the way she interprets contemporary society, the obvious question to ask was how her practice had been affected by the global lockdown. “It’s such a strange time right now. It’s been harder to feel inspired and be creative,” the artist admits. Instead of forcing productivity, she’s allowed herself to turn inward and focus on bettering herself to better her art. She’s experimenting, learning new mediums, researching, and reading. On her list at the moment were books on Romaere Bearden’s series of Caribbean watercolor paintings, a biography about Elizabeth Catlett, and a collection of essays and poems on Magical Realism. Although 2020 may have taught us to expect the unexpected, it is clear from the direct vision she has about her work and the fervor with which she now approaches it that what we can expect from Grace Lynne Haynes is a bright future ahead.

The artist has a solo show and a solo booth at The Armory Show expected to occur in 2021 with Luce Gallery based in Turin, Italy.

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Multiple Sides of One Self:

Exploring intersectional identity in the work of Clotilde Jiménez



By Christina Nafziger

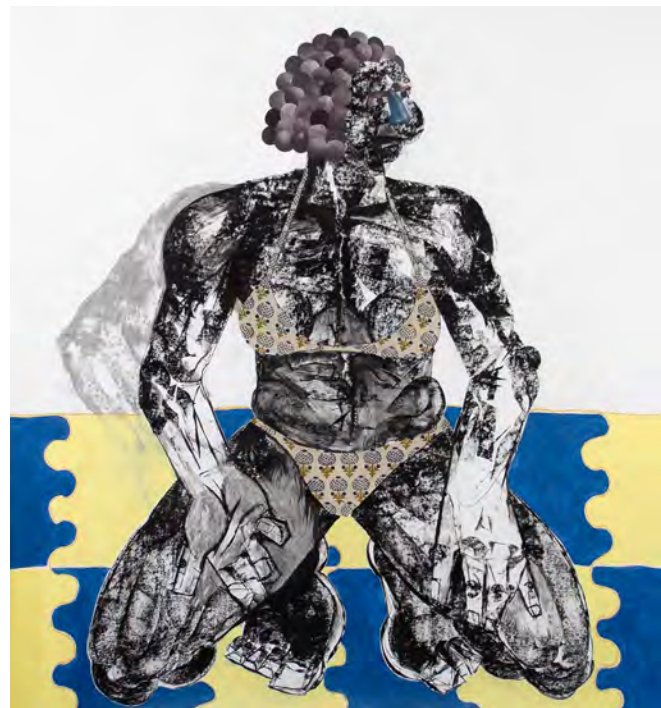
The process of collage is inherently a deconstruction. Images are cut up and pulled apart from their original context before being put back together to create something new from the fragments. Artist Clotilde Jiménez uses this notion of reconstruction to form his larger-than-life, figurative works. Using materials such as magazine clippings, wallpaper, and clothing name brands, Jiménez combines collage with charcoal to construct form and figure, body and face. In his recent solo exhibition at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery titled *The Contest*, his subjects are all athletes, bending into position with a palpable energy akin to what is felt when a runner is seconds away from the start of the race, ready to bolt. Jiménez skillfully utilizes charcoal to create a rounded texture that renders stretching muscles and limbs. Juxtaposed against the smooth fragments of collage, this texture creates a stark contrast that brings attention to the details within the imagery. Piece by piece, a face, a pectoral muscle, or a hand are constructed. These sections of bodies are parts of different people used by Jiménez to build a single person, offering multiple perspectives to each subject. An intersectionality that is both layered and whole is created through this process.



Although Jiménez primarily uses collage in his recent work, he originally studied printmaking. It was during this time that he was introduced to the professors that would heavily impact his practice and perspective, which include Rita Goodman and David Hart. Jiménez explains that Hart was “one of the only Black and gay professors to sit down with me and teach me race and social politics as it relates to contemporary art.” However, as printmaking requires a hefty amount of space and materials, like a printing press and ink, the artist found himself without access to equipment after graduating. Instead, he used what was around him: tissue paper, sandpaper, magazines, charcoal, anything he could get his hands on. The result is a body of work that is rich in texture, layers, and movement.

As Jiménez’s figures offer us multiple sides to each person through his use of collage, he is also revealing multiple sides of himself, like his connection to athletics and his identity as a Black man. Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, who represents the artist, explains that Jiménez’s work is “rooted in conceptions such as the fragmentation of queerness, and in this series, his relationship to his father and athleticism. Through these techniques, Jiménez examines the way the intersection of athleticism and queerness relate to himself as a Black male.” To draw a figure, to create a portrait, is to tell that person’s story. It is a way of claiming space for that person, demanding that others give them time and attention.

Jiménez aims to alter the art historical narrative through his work and amplify stories of those who are marginalized, saying “I want to be a storyteller for people who look like me.” Representation matters. Art, like most avenues of visual culture, has been historically dominated by white bodies. In his work, Jiménez depicts “the complexities of Black life, what it means to be queer, and how it is OK.”



Like each of us, these figures are ever-changing; they are multi-layered with different elements to a personality and various sides of one identity. For Jiménez, collage is a way to tell a more multifaceted story. It allows him to tell many stories at once, as he says, “We are not all just one monolithic thing, we are multifaceted individuals.” Like identity, athletics are performative. We get ready for the day and construct our appearance to help tell the world who we are. There is an element of showmanship or spectatorship, just like in sports. In *The Contest*, titles often include words like *Pose*. The subjects move into different athletic positions—in other words, they pose, just like we pose for a camera in order to capture a piece of who we are. By constructing images of athletes, Jiménez proposes complex questions of how we construct ourselves, posing for the world to see, digest, and decipher. How will we be interpreted? How will our story be understood?

The Contest is on view at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery in Chicago from July 11 – August 22, 2020. Images courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim Gallery and the artist.

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The Curator's Vision

Interview with Guest Curator, Larry Ossei-Mensah

By Ekaterina Popova

Larry Ossei-Mensah uses contemporary art as a vehicle to redefine how we see ourselves and the world around us. The Ghanaian-American curator and cultural critic has organized exhibitions and programs at commercial and nonprofit spaces around the globe from New York City to Rome, featuring artists such as Firelei Baez, Allison Janae Hamilton, Brendan Fernandes, Ebony G. Patterson, Glenn Kaino and Stanley Whitney to name a few. Moreover, Ossei-Mensah has actively documented cultural happenings featuring the most dynamic visual artists working today such as Derrick Adams, Mickalene Thomas, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Federico Solmi, and Kehinde Wiley.

Ossei-Mensah is also the co-founder of ARTNOIR, a global collective of culturalists who design multimodal experiences aimed to engage this generation's dynamic and diverse creative class. Ossei-Mensah is a contributor to the first ever Ghanaian Pavilion for the 2019 Venice Biennial with an essay on the work of visual artist Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Ossei-Mensah is the former Susanne Feld Hilberry Senior Curator at MOCAD in Detroit. He recently co-curated with Dexter Wimberly the critically acclaimed exhibition at MOAD in San Francisco *Coffee, Rhum, Sugar, Gold: A Postcolonial Paradox* in spring/summer 2019. Ossei-Mensah currently serves as guest curator at BAM's Rudin Family Gallery where he curated the inaugural show featuring the work of Glenn Kaino. Spring 2021, Ossei-Mensah will be co-curating with Omsk Social Club 7th Athens Biennale in Athens, Greece

Ossei-Mensah has had recent profiles in such publications like the *Create Magazine!*, *NY Times*, *Artsy*, and *Cultured Magazine*. Ossei-Mensah was named to *Artnet's 2020 Innovator's List*.

Photo Credit: Ludovic Nkoth

What is your creative and educational background?

I studied Business Management in undergrad at Clark University. I got my MBA in Marketing and Hospitality at Les Roches in Switzerland. Additionally, I'm an alumni of ICI's curatorial intensive program. Much of my creative education has been trial by error. I firmly believe that life, and hands-on experiences, is one of the greatest teachers you can have.

What inspires you when it comes to contemporary emerging talent?

When it comes to contemporary artists, I'm always looking for something unique. This uniqueness could come in the form of the conceptual framework for their practice, the artistic gesture (how the work is made) and passion for what the artist is doing.

For me it is not enough to just be artistically talented. I want to see interesting ideas that feel fresh, timely, and will cut through the clutter. As we would say in marketing, "What is your unique selling proposition?" Secondly, I'm always in search of work that will personally move me, make me think and challenge my assumptions. If I feel like I have the potential to grow from experiencing your work as an artist, I know others will too.

What do you look for when you curate?

When I curate, I'm looking for an opportunity to grow and learn personally through the exhibition experience. The exhibitions that I've had the pleasure of creating have all been opportunities to ask questions, explore ideas, and recalibrate how my audience can see the world around us. I'm a firm believer in the power of art and creative experiences to serve as a guide toward social, political, and cultural understanding.

What are you most proud of so far in your career?

I'm most proud of the fact that I've been able to create a viable and sustainable career over the past twelve years. I'm truly blessed to be doing this work. It is an honor and a privilege to have collaborated with so many artists over the years. Gratitude to all the artists, colleagues, cultural workers and my ARTNOIR family.

How do you think galleries, publications, and small creative businesses ensure more representation and support for diverse artists?

I think everyone has to be committed to doing this work as a way of life. What are your policies, staff make-up, hiring practices, etc? When you are talking about diversity, inclusion and equity, this is not something that has an on and off switch. There needs to be representation across the board. That means hiring more creatives, artists, dealers, editors, photographers of color to be intertwined into each level of the industry. Moreover, it is not enough to hire, but also needs to be a sincere, honest, and effective infrastructure of support that is well funded so folks have the resources to truly thrive and not just survive.

What approaches have you seen work well?

I can't say I have at the moment.

Name a few artists on your radar right now.

There are so many amazing artists out there doing incredible work. A couple artists that I think are doing their thing right now include Dario Calmese, February James, Layo Bright, Tariku Shiferaw, Delphine Desane, Raelis Vasquez, and Azuki Furuya.

What are your general thoughts about the selections for this issue?

First, I want to say thank you to all the artists who submitted. I'm grateful for their interest, time and dedication. For those of you who weren't selected, keep striving and pushing.

Thank you, Create! Magazine, for the opportunity.

Regarding this selection, I think it is an interesting mix of artistic approaches, tactics, and ideas. I've always enjoyed open calls because they provide space for artists who typically would not be seen to have an audience. One of my key curatorial pillars is to provide access to as many artists and patrons as possible. I love the magazine as a format for your readers to see, discover, learn, and engage with the artists selected. What a humbling experience!

Where can we find you and how can we support you?

Folks can follow me on instagram/twitter at @youngglobal. A project folks can support is "Parchment 40". It is a print project that I created in partnership with Pegasus Prints in Brooklyn. *20% of all proceeds from this project will go to Summaeverythang Community Center's free organic produce box donations for Watts and South Central Los Angeles and COFED-Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive. For folks who want to purchase here is the link: <https://www.pegasusprints.co/editions/country-feast-set-pkc7n>.

They can also follow ARTNOIR, the collective I co-founded with six other friends with a mission to celebrate and highlight the work of creatives

of color from around the world while catalyzing cultural equity across the arts and culture industries. Check us out at @artnoirco on instagram and twitter. Our website is www.artnoir.co. We have just launched the Jar of Love Fund, a microgrant initiative intended to provide relief for artists, curators, and cultural workers of color. Please check our site to get more information.

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“I THINK EVERYONE HAS TO BE COMMITTED TO DOING THIS WORK AS A WAY OF LIFE.”

How to Spot an Artist, A New Children's Book

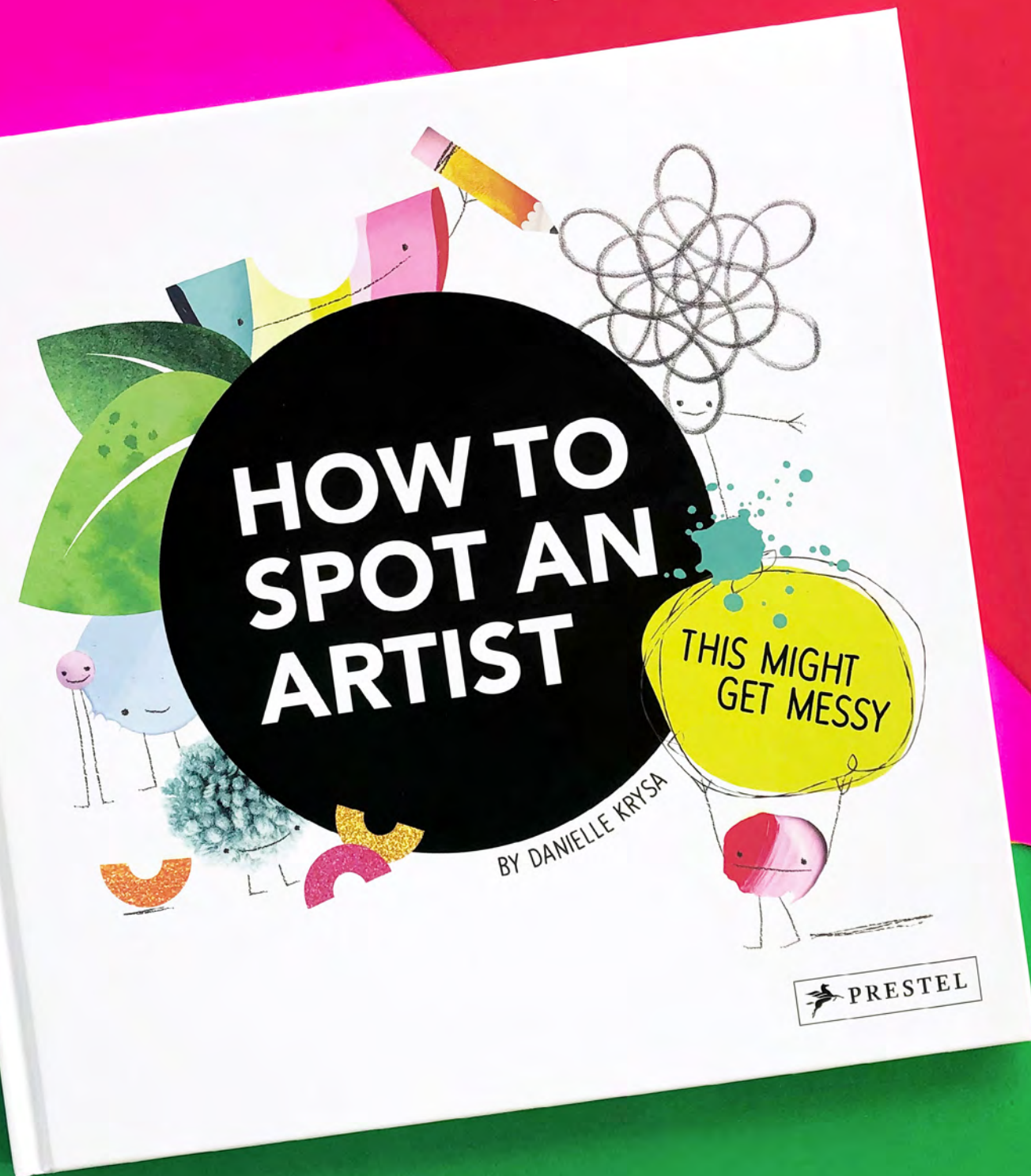
Interview with Danielle Krysa

This Might Get Messy!



By Ekaterina Popova

Once again, Danielle Krysa inspires us to silence that inner critic and go for a dream that may have been hanging out in the back burner for a few years. You may know her for her fun and sassy collages, inspiring blog, *The Jealous Curator*, and best-selling books such as *Creative Block* and *Your Inner Critic is a Big Jerk*. This time she spoke to a slightly different audience and fulfilled her longtime idea for a children's book. Kat asked Danielle to share the behind-the-scenes and inspiration behind her latest work and original illustrations, *How to Spot an Artist*.



Congratulations on writing your first children's book! Tell me, when did you first get the idea for this book?

Thank you so much! This is a dream come true. I wrote my first kids' book under a bush in my backyard when I was seven, so this has been a long time coming!

I got the idea for this story about four years ago. I've written several books for adults, all focusing on getting past creative blocks, shutting down inner critics, and jumpstarting creativity, but from the beginning, I noticed a really interesting (and sad) pattern emerging at all of my signing events. Over and over again, people were telling me the same story, and it always went a little something like this:

**“SO WHAT
IF YOU’VE
NEVER DONE
THIS BEFORE
— THERE’S A
FIRST TIME FOR
EVERYTHING!”**

“When I was [6, 7, or 8] I was told I couldn't be an artist because [I wasn't talented, art is just a hobby, you'll die a starving artist], so I haven't made art since.”

Yeah. I heard this hundreds and hundreds of times - and it lit a fire under me! I decided that instead of writing another book for grownups about jumpstarting creativity, I'd just sneak around to the front and talk to people a few decades sooner! If I can prevent one kid from giving up on their artistic dreams, well then, this book will be a huge success in my mind.

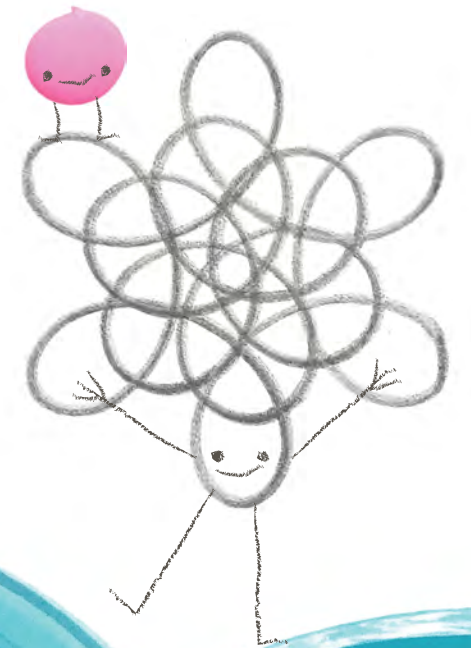
You mentioned not waiting for a book deal and pitched your idea to the publisher first. What inspired you to take action on this dream?

Well, as I said, I'd had this idea for about four years, but there were always other projects pushing it to the back-burner. Honestly, I was also a little nervous because I'm not known for writing kids' books, and I'm not a trained illustrator. Hello, Imposter Syndrome - I'm Danielle. Nice to meet you. Anyway, at the end of 2018, my Dad - who has always been my biggest cheerleader - passed away very unexpectedly. I'd told him about this book

a bunch of times, and he'd always said, “So what if you've never done this before - there's a first time for everything!” Indeed!

I decided to approach this book like any other art project. I'd never wait for a gallery or buyer to ask me to make a collage, I just make them because I can't not. So, I started writing, painting backgrounds, and photographing textures (ie., some of the city building guys

are made from photographs of the sidewalk outside my favorite coffee shop). Once the story was written and most of the illustrations were finished, my fabulous literary agent Kate Woodrow sent everything off to a bunch of publishers - and thanks to Prestel / Penguin Random-House, I can now tell my imposter syndrome to take a hike because I AM an author and illustrator of a children's book. I know my dad would be ridiculously proud.





Who do you hope this book will help? What age group and reading level is it suitable for?

The target is 5-8 years old. As I mentioned earlier, almost every "you can't be an artist" story I've ever been told usually occurs within that age range - which, by the way, I think is absolutely heartbreaking. I didn't experience this soul-crushing moment until I was 21 and about to graduate from art school. My painting professor told me, only weeks before graduating as a painting major, that I should "never paint again." I wish I'd read a book like this over and over and over again as a child because maybe I wouldn't have believed him and subsequently quit for twenty years. All of this to say, I want this story to be the whisper in every creative kid's ear (regardless of their age), reminding them that, "You are an artist no matter what anyone else says."

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Tell me about how you decided on the illustrations and the inspiration behind your art for this project.

My mom is an artist, so as a kid we always had the most beautiful books. One of my favorites was "Swimmy" by Leo Lionni. The actual story is really sweet, but I remember kinda listening to my mom read, but spending a lot more time wondering how he painted the water, and the rocks, and oh my goodness is that seaweed made from lace doilies?! So yes, I really wanted this to be painterly, while also being clean and designy (is that a word?). For a few years I couldn't solve 'the look' in my mind. I had the story down, but I couldn't see the characters. Then during a swim at my local pool (I do all of my best thinking while swimming) I had a picture of juicy paint strokes, blobs of glitter, and cut out shapes pop into my head. Aha! I was so happy about this solution because I didn't want gender, race or age to be present - because anyone can be an artist, right? Right. After that eureka moment, the illustrations just flowed out of me.

What's next for you? Will you be writing more children's literature soon?

I sure hope so - I have an idea for another one, so we'll see what happens! Right now I'm focusing on my usual daily posts at TheJealousCurator.com, and on my own personal artwork. I think if this global pandemic has taught me anything, it's to take care of your mental health and to do what makes you feel happy and safe.

Please share tips for those dreaming of writing their own kid's book.

Write it because you can't not. Illustrate it because you can't not. If it ends up finding its way to a publisher, great. If you self-publish, great. If you put it on your shelf and view it as a great work of art, also great! And, if you need a bit of dad wisdom, just remember: "So what if you've never done this before - there's a first time for everything!"



NOW GO
MAKE
STUFF!

ART'S SECRET DESIRE



Tsedaye Makonnen's "The Crowning Series:"

"Nsukka Market II" speaks on feminism, reproductive rights, birth, womxn's bodies, ritual, motherhood, Matriarchy, treating and seeing the womb as a crown.

By Tam Gryn

Tam is the current Head Curator at SHOWFIELDS where she is helping to bridge art with retail.

She is the former Head of the Curatorial Department of the Artist Pension Trust as well as Head Curator for RAW POP UP. Tam is the co-founder of Culturadora and currently sits on the Board of Directors of the Kulturspace Foundation in Berlin.

Originally from Venezuela, she studied Art History at the Sorbonne University. She then specialized in Diplomacy at the Herzeliya Interdisciplinary Institute in Israel and received her M.A. in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution from Tel Aviv University.

Tam has curated multiple art exhibitions as well as charity fundraisers. Cultural projects that Tam and her team produced hosted 300,000+ individuals, curated and 300+ site-specific art installations by global artists and reached 13B+ in online impressions.

Clients and collaborators include The Brooklyn Museum, The Whitney Museum, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Puerto Rico, Glossier, Heineken, Bombay Sapphire, The Glenlivet, Diptyque, Evian, Mastercard, SVA School of Visual Arts NYC, Neuchouse, Downtown Development Authority Miami, Miami Design District, Lincoln Rd, VICE, Paper Magazine, CNN en Español, CULTURED, Haute Living, Miami New Times, CULTURED, Art Basel, Diptyque, KIND, Espace Meyer Zafra, Brightwire, the Bakehouse Art Complex, Lifion, Arevalo Gallery, Bas Fischer Invitational, Garis & Hahn, The LA Art Show, Untitled Miami, Inga Gallery, University of Miami Frost School of Music, Brickell City Centre, Create! Magazine, All She Makes, Paradigm Gallery and many more.

Tam specializes in creating memorable immersive art installations, satisfying the audience's desire for new and genuine experiences, generating social media buzz, content creation, newfound exposure and foot traffic.

What does art want?

It is not as complicated as the art world makes it seem. Art wants the same things you want.

Tsedaye Makonnen's "The Crowning Series: Nsukka Market II" speaks on feminism, reproductive rights, birth, womxn's bodies, ritual, motherhood, Matriarchy, treating and seeing the womb as a crown.

Art wants a clean planet, an end to police brutality, and an equal opportunity environment. Art wants to stir up the status quo and turn it upside down. Art wants you to look at a tree like it is your first time ever seeing one.

Art has clear ideas on how to make hospitals and airports better transitional spaces – as it demands better aesthetics and experiences. Art wants us to reimagine and redesign our current reality. As cliché as it sounds, art wants a more emotionally connected world.

I know what you are thinking and you're right; art also wants to make the world more beautiful, but that is not art's main mission. First and foremost, it has to be radically honest, raw, and real.

"Sweet Catastrophe" by Nicolle Cure. To the naked eye, this piece looks like ordinary abstract painting. However, if you look deeper into the story of the artist you realize this is a struggle with hearing loss and disability. Sound translated into Sight, truly therapeutic.

Love versus Desire

We all love what we know, and what we know is that art is pretty. It is like Esther Perel says, "love is knowing, desire is a mystery." An example of easy-to-love artwork is an abstract painting made by a white male painter, or what I like to call "real estate art". It is colorful, it is cheerful, it is

pretty. What more can you ask for? This type of art doesn't create any sort of controversy (you know, in case the landlord is really conservative) and it has no clear goal besides decorating a space. Ergo, it sells.

Just like in a couple's relationship, what we really desire deep down is the more challenging art, the one that makes you feel ecstatic and furious and you don't even understand why, but you are here for it.

Art lets you escape your reality and forces you to connect to it at the same time.

Art Wants To Slap You In The Face

Art is the translation of the entire world's emotional pulse. Have you ever been in the presence of art and had one of the following physical reactions? Feeling your blood-pumping, a lump in your throat, crying, sweating, a stomachache, sexual desire... Bottled up emotions deep down inside of you are resurfacing, because of that art piece. Now, you have to have it (or at least a selfie in front of it, which is what you can afford).

Art is connected to our deepest, most secret desires. It causes visceral reactions in us, even if we aren't aware of what our desires are.

Artworks that are well-executed but lacking in appropriate complexity will not produce these "meta-emotions". Neither will artworks that are meaningful but missing in technical skill, according to Dr. Noy Sharav. The emotional feeling of beauty, or aesthetic experience, does not have enough valid emotional undercurrent.

Art doesn't want to appear attractive to you as a one-night-stand; it wants to blow your mind and change your emotional landscape, forever. Beyond it being aesthetic, how do you know if an art piece is IMPORTANT?



"Sweet Catastrophe," by Nicolle Cure.

To the naked eye, this piece looks like ordinary abstract painting. However, if you look deeper into the story of the artist you realize this is a struggle with hearing loss and disability. Sound translated into Sight, truly therapeutic

Context is Everything

People say art is subjective, and I disagree. Art is not subjective, beauty and aesthetics are.

Art is only good and valuable if it is in the right context. But, how do you know if it is the right context? I trust you can know when something is true to its time and important, now. The following examples of right context are directly related to what is important for us, therefore related to our emotions and desires.

- The artwork captures a moment in history – a pandemic, a social movement, a natural disaster.
- It is political – it is risky, it is ballsy, it is critical and it has opinions.
- It is taboo – it makes you uncomfortable in all the right ways.
- It is innovative – you hadn't really thought of it that way.
- It has never been done before – you've seen many paintings/sculptures/installations in your time but never really quite like this one.
- It is conceptual – straightforward and literal. It uses visual language to explain an idea which you can understand, right away.
- It is true – to its time, to its identity and to its place. This is me begging you; please do not try to imitate or glorify the past.

"As We Roost In The Safety Of Our Homes", Azikiwe Mohammed calls out who is privileged enough to be safe at home and who isn't.

Pretty art with no conceptual backup is nice to put above your sofa, but really no one is going to give it a second thought.

In conclusion, what art really wants is to be our generational legacy. Whether you are a young creative exploring your voice, an enthusiast, collector, or just someone who wants to experience art without feeling intimidated, the key is to look at art through the lens of what you care about. What are your values and ideals for the world? With this perspective, you will find the art that speaks directly to you.

"Civilizations are not remembered by their business people, their bankers or lawyers. They're remembered by the arts." – Eli Broad.

“ART IS ONLY GOOD AND VALUABLE IF IT IS IN THE RIGHT CONTEXT.”



"As We Roost In The Safety Of Our Homes," by Azikiwe Mohammed
Azikiwe Mohammed calls out who is privileged enough to be safe at home and who isn't.

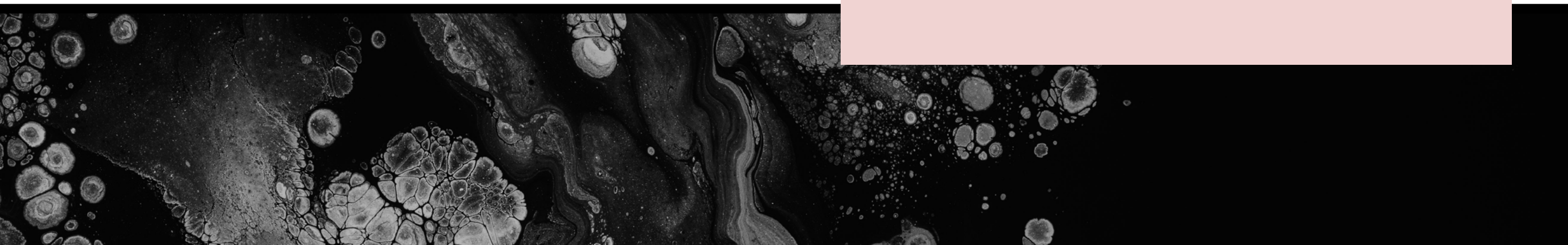
CURATED

SECTION

GUEST CURATOR: LARRY OSSEI-MENSAH

Larry Ossei-Mensah uses contemporary art as a vehicle to redefine how we see ourselves and the world around us. The Ghanaian-American curator and cultural critic has organized exhibitions and programs at commercial and nonprofit spaces around the globe from New York City to Rome, featuring artists such as Firelei Baez, Allison Janae Hamilton, Brendan Fernandes, Ebony G. Patterson, Glenn Kaino and Stanley Whitney to name a few. Moreover, Ossei-Mensah has actively documented cultural happenings featuring the most dynamic visual artists working today such as Derrick Adams, Mickalene Thomas, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Federico Solmi, and Kehinde Wiley.

Ossei-Mensah is also the co-founder of ARTNOIR, a global collective of culturalists who design multimodal experiences aimed to engage this generation's dynamic and diverse creative class. Ossei-Mensah is a contributor to the first ever Ghanaian Pavilion for the 2019 Venice Biennial with an essay on the work of visual artist Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.



Mark Fleuridor

www.markfleuridor.com

Mark Fleuridor is a Haitian American artist born and raised in Miami, Florida. He graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art with a BFA in Painting. Fleuridor recently completed the Vermont Studio Center Artist Residency (VT) and the Oxbow Artist Residency (MI) and is currently attending Oolite Artist residency (Miami, FL.) Fleuridor explores his own personal history within his Haitian background and familial religious experiences. These topics are explored through mediums such as painting, performance, quilting, and collage. Fleuridor has exhibited his work at The Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), Reginald F. Lewis Museum (Baltimore MD), Baltimore City Hall (Baltimore MD) and Locust Projects (Miami FL).



Mark Fleuridor's artwork depicts personal experiences with his family. It is a journey of self-exploration and a means to understand and depict protection and spirituality through the lens of his experiences as a Haitian American. It is important for Fleuridor to understand his family by dissecting his own memories and family narratives through the labor in his art process. Physically and digitally working with materials that preference Fleuridor's family helps him understand their past in Haiti and present lives within the Haitian community in Miami where he grew up. These topics are explored through mediums such as painting, performance, quilting and collage.

Emi Avora

www.emiavora.com



Emi Avora (1979) is a Greek born, UK trained (Oxford University and Royal Academy Schools) and Singapore based artist. She has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad. Solo projects include the National Theatre of Greece Athens, South Square Arts Centre, The Apartment Gallery, Athens, Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, New York and Gallery Truebenbach, Cologne. She has participated in a number of group shows including Studio Voltaire, London, The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, The Whitechapel Gallery, London and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki. Her work can be found in private as well as public collections in Europe and the USA, including The Wonderful Fund collection and Marsh collection. She has also been an Elizabeth Greenshields recipient and her work has been in various publications, including ArtMaze Magazine, The New York Times, Future Now, Aesthetica Magazine and Defining the Contemporary, The Whitechapel in Association with Sotheby's. Her work was recently included in Be.Long.Ing, an online exhibition, organised by ilikeyourworkpodcast.com, as well as featured in online platforms <http://yngspc.com> and [@greekfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/greekfoundation). She recently had an online exhibition at www.sidexsidecontemporary.com.



Born in Athens and currently based in Singapore, Emi Avora is drawing subject matter from her everyday; her sketches and images of public and personal spaces focus on the interior and still life. Her works are entering a dialog with painting's modernist historical canons and ponder on our ambiguous relationship to colonial narratives, exoticism, and taste. Humour, curiosity, and anxiety are elements that occupy her compositions. Sometimes dreamy, sometimes intense and with the use of light on the driving seat, her work allows space for invention, creating a gap between looking and making, between the real and the imaginary. Everyday observations become exaggerated through the use of colour and change of scale, focusing on what surprises her or grasps her attention. Stemming from reality, observed situations are weaved into fictional compositions that allow a multitude of readings. Equally, the very process of mark making opens up a platform to investigate painting's power to transcend imagery by breaking it down to the basics of colour, shape, pattern and composition.

Tony Vazquez-Figueroa

www.tvazquez.net

Caracas Venezuela. B. 1970 - Tony Vazquez-Figueroa received his BFA (Film) from Emerson College, Massachusetts in 1992.

By 1995, he had become an award-winning Advertising-Creative in Venezuela. His Client list had names such as Coca-cola, Chrysler, Jeep, Fiat, Polar, BBVA, Chivas Regal, among others.

At 27 he continued his art studies, first, at the Escuela de Arte San Alejandro in Habana, Cuba and then, earning a scholarship, at the New York Studio School. He then finished his formal training in 2002 at the Slade School of painting - UCL- under the tutelage of Jenny Saville.

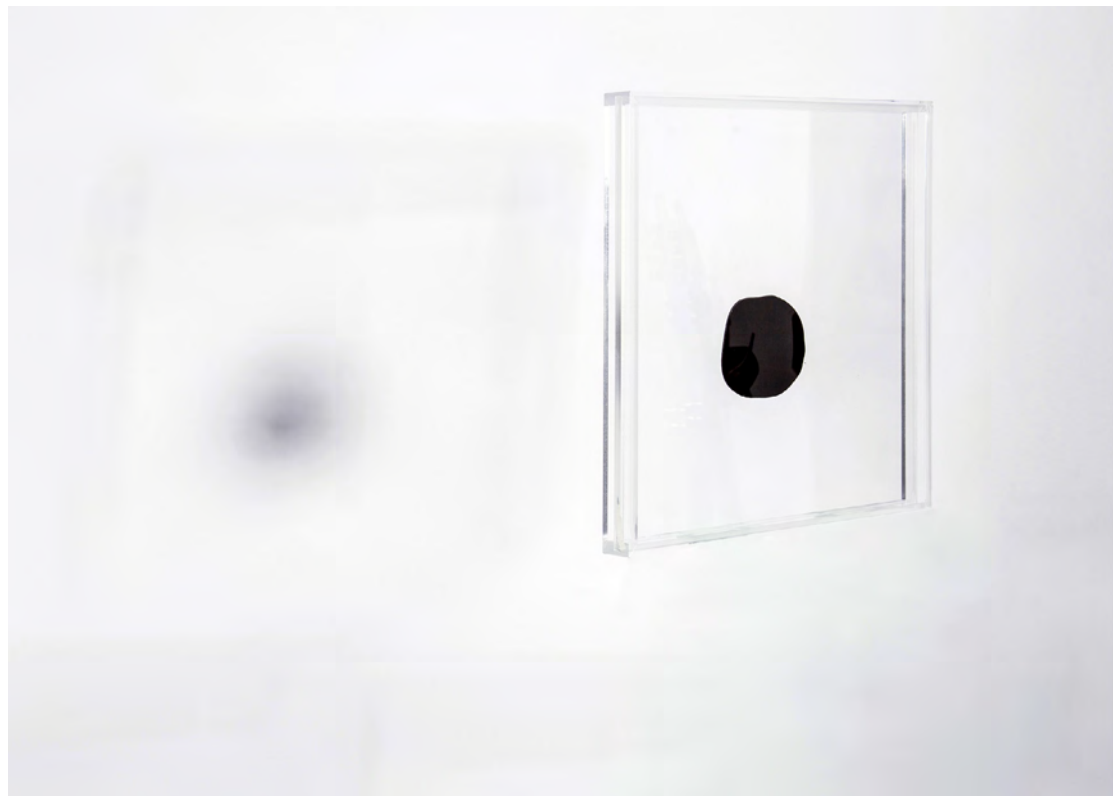
His work has been greatly shaped by his experiences in Advertising and his time in Cuba between 1997/99 and Venezuela, between 2002-2010.

He received the Honorable Mention at the Long Beach Island Foundation for the arts and Sciences, Works on Paper 2017, NJ, USA, the 2015 Rozas-Botran Foundation Latin American Award, and The First Price of The 63rd. All Florida Exhibition at the Boca Raton Museum of Art in 2014.

His work is featured in public and private collections worldwide, including The Perez Art Museum Miami, The Museum of Latin American Art California, The UNIS Museum Guatemala, Alan Kluger's Collection and the Maldonado Collection among others. He has also been showcased in numerous solo and group exhibitions and international art fairs Like Zone Maco, Pinta NYC, MIA, Scope NY-MIA, Context MIA, etc.

Vazquez-Figueroa is currently represented by LNS Gallery Miami, Galeria Beatriz Gil Caracas, and lives between Miami and Mexico.





Vazquez-Figueroa investigates social, economic, and political themes related to ideologies and cultural histories under the influence of the crude oil industry. His work activates space, using materials such as bitumen, crude oil, plastics, rubber, and resin among others. Utilizing photographic and paint mediums, he creates minimalist works of art where he un-does selective imagery through reductive techniques to blackout objects or surfaces, creating dark reflective abstracted planes that are both literal and figurative voids. Through this process, the artist emphasizes dichotomies between disappearance and emptiness; asking the viewer to question concepts related to truth and perception.

In his current body of work, Vazquez-Figueroa is focusing on how crude oil influenced and changed the social and political landscape of Venezuela: the place where he was born. Using crude oil as a key material in the creation of works that include drawings, photography, oil-ink blots, three-dimensional objects and prints made from his specially created oil ink, he has produced a personal archive of the products that form his country's and his own collective memory and patrimony... an inventory of his own contrived archive, both real and imagined, available and no longer existent, and all dependent on oil and made of oil or its products.



Jelani Ameer

www.noahbility.us



Jelani Ameer, creatively known as Noah Bility, is a New York City native photographer and videographer based in the Bronx. His career has spanned close to ten years from his start as a hobbyist to a professional in the latter half of the decade. With a focus in portraiture, he uses a lifestyle approach to display Blackness in its many facets.

It is in this fly-on-the-wall style that Jelani is able to showcase beauty undisturbed. For him, the best moments live in between the poses and outside of the subject's awareness of the camera.

His work has been featured in Google, Huffington Post, and BuzzFeed. He has also assisted and worked alongside the likes of Ed Maximus and Rog + Bee Walker of Paper Monday. Through these other great artists, with shoots ranging from Essence to Vogue Italia, Jelani has been expanding on his ever-growing list of experiences to apply to future visual projects.





I feel it is my mission as a visual artist, to help shape the narrative on what it is to be Black, indigenous, or disenfranchised. If we let the world tell it, we are nothing more than criminals, suspects, and unworthy of respect.

It is this warped view that I get the pleasure of bending back into place every time I take a portrait of us. Our beauty knows no bounds and I'm sure it pains some to admit this fact. Through all of the adversity and hardship we endure, we continue to shine. A lot of us are tired, but we do not stop because we have lives to lead, families to tend to, and dreams to fulfill.

One of my greatest joys is seeing someone's face light up when I show them just how beautiful they truly are. That moment of realization...remembering that truth. That's what I live for and am grateful to do for others for a living. This is a collective effort and one I never forget, which is why my slogan is "It's not just me. It's us."



Kwesi O Kwarteng

www.kwesiokwarteng.carbonmade.com

Kwesi O. Kwarteng is a contemporary fabric artist based in Newark, NJ. He dyes canvases using multiple dyeing techniques and combines them with textiles from different cultures to create abstract pieces. Starting off as a painter, Kwesi approaches his work like he would his paintings. He considers the fabrics as the paint he uses in making these works and the sewing (by hand and/or machine) as the brush that brings them together. By combining these assorted cultural fabrics with the dyed canvases, Kwesi attempts to represent his view of the world as an immigrant living in the United States. Over the last decade immigration has become a major part of the socio-political discourse of many developed countries. Be it the emigration of Mexicans to America, the Syrians or North Africans heading towards Europe, or the emigration from east to the west in search of high paying jobs in the tech world. There is anxiety on both sides. Anti-immigration and xenophobia is very prevalent today, he seeks to address this through his work. The goal? To champion multiculturalism.

As a Ghanaian, Kwesi appreciates what one wears. It is a very essential part of the culture. It could tell if one is mourning or if one is joyous, if one has survived a tragedy or if one is going through a trial. Fabric is an unspoken language that identifies its users. By combining them, he is bringing together what makes these different cultures who they are.

Kwesi has a BFA from the School of Visual Arts, NY; he's had two solo shows and taken part in several group exhibitions. His works are in private collections in the US, Germany, and Ghana. He is a recent recipient of the creative catalyst grant award.



Giulio Bonatti

www.giuliobonatti.com

Giulio Bonatti was born in Florence on April 30, 1985. He graduated at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze in the Adriano Bimbi school, and specialized in printmaking at Fondazione Il Bisonte per lo Studio dell'Arte Grafica as bursary. Bonatti lives and works in San Giovanni Valdarno (Arezzo).

He worked on projects in residence in Santa Fiora (Grosseto) and in the Camaldoli Monastery (Arezzo).

Bonatti is also a member of Printmakers Council and East London Printmakers and present in important collections like Victoria and Albert Museum (G.B), the Museum of Contemporary Art of Florina (Greece) and Fondazione Il Bisonte.

In 2017, Bonatti was selected as Artist of the Month (April) by GAI (association of Italian young artists). He also collaborated as teacher at the Fondazione Il Bisonte per lo studio dell'arte grafica and as director of the art department at FCAEC, Florence Culture & Arts Exchange Center in Dalian (China).

In 2019 he was invited to speak at the conference, "Art and Science: Crossing disciplinary borders," at the Art Center of University of Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing.

His work has been exhibited in group shows in Italy, Great Britain, United States, China, Japan, and Greece.



I have always been fascinated by the imprints of memory that remain on objects, landscapes, images deteriorated by time, on symbols. I started developing these suggestions in a small stone village on Mount Amiata. In some places the matter manifests itself more sincerely, more clearly, and the traces, the notes of man in the form of object, deteriorating, sounds of a deeper echo. Their voice is stronger, their calling closest, their fishline narrowest. Time, stripping it of its details, dresses the image of mystery, creating a space between us and the wall of what is understandable. Everyone fills that mystery according to his own sensitivity. Providing this space is what I try to do. I try to give this suggestion of memory through deteriorated pictures of old landscapes, portraits, and traces of daily life.

REWA

www.artbyrewa.com

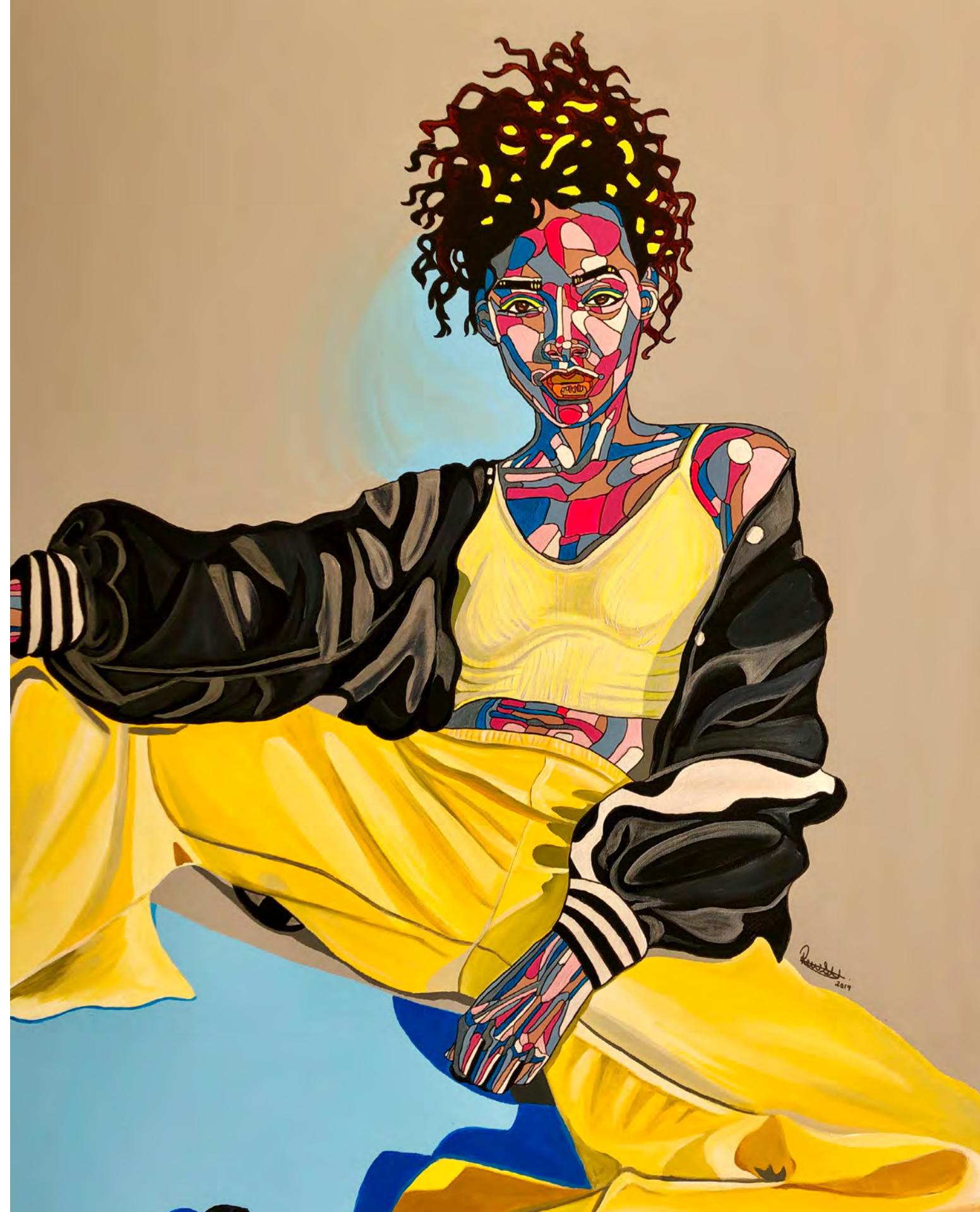
REWA was born and raised between Nigeria and England and received a BSc. in Physiology and Pharmacology from University College London (UCL). Never having received formal art training, she is self-taught and revels in the celebration of the female form using vivid colors. Her preferred medium of acrylic on canvas provides the immediacy to express her influences living between Lagos, London and Johannesburg, cities she considers home.

REWA's primary body of work, *The Pantheon*, celebrating Nigerian deities, led to her appointment as ReLe Gallery's 2017 Young Contemporary in Lagos, Nigeria. She went on to exhibit her collection, *Onicha Ado N'Idu*, which delved into the significance of naming rites and traditions within the Igbo culture in Nigeria, at the Gallery of African Art (GAFRA) in London.

REWA's work formed part of the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) annual 2017 gala in New York. In 2018, she showed her series, *INU NWUNYE: Bride Price*, as part of a group show at the Jonathan Ferrara Gallery in New Orleans, USA.

REWA's first solo show in 2019 at the Jonathan Ferrara Gallery showcased her *NWA AGBO: Entering Adolescence* series. She was part of the acclaimed exhibition, "Back to the Future: Still Here Tomorrow to High Five You Yesterday" at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Cape Town, South Africa – the largest museum of contemporary African art in the world. She also featured in the Contemporary Art Centre of New Orleans (CACNO) 2019 annual exhibition, *Identity Measures*, in New Orleans, Louisiana. In addition, REWA was one of the selected artists to participate in Nike's Women's World Cup 2019 Campaign, titled, "Don't Change Your Dream. Change The World".

REWA's work has since been shown at the National Museum of Nigeria and as part of the annual Art Dubai 2020 fair.

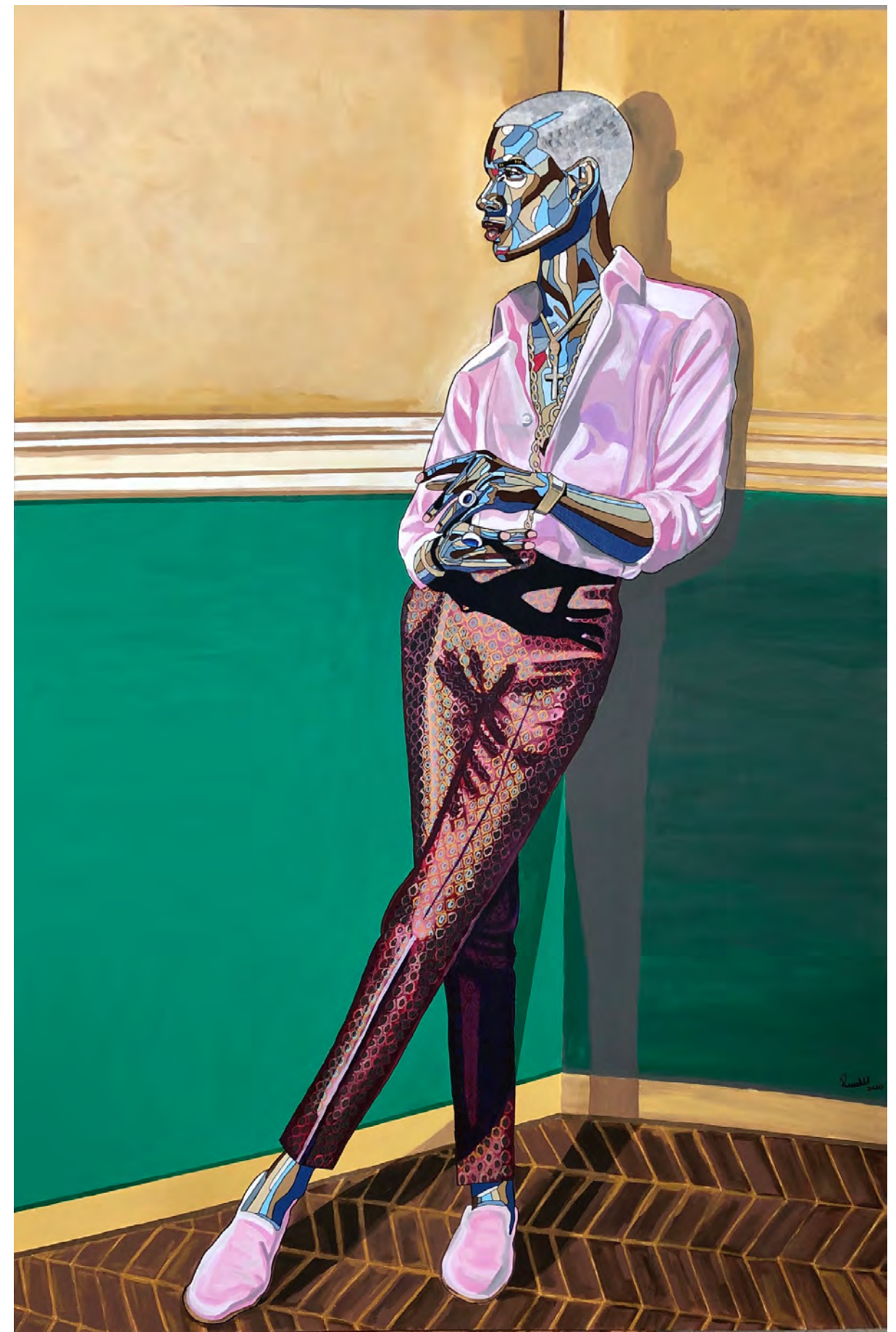


Viewers largely label me under “Contemporary African Art”. I label my work as Igbo Vernacular Art. The reason for this is that I believe that I have created a truly original body of work that exists outside formal academic or Western dialogue. My art is drawn from life itself and deeply anchored in a place and culture from which it was derived. This is the Igbo culture pertaining to the Igbos of Nigeria.

I think that this description is more accurate, as it implies a unique iteration of customs and tradition, bound to a particular location and a particular people.

Igbo Vernacular Art is not to be mistaken with Folk Art, but rather, concerns itself with an expressive aesthetic that would be more commonly associated with Contemporary Modern Art: form, composition and narrative. Vernacular dialects are anchored to a particular land, and in much the same way, my art contains a vocabulary that is built on a strong sense of place and is situated in a location and a history.

It is my hope that one day, my work will be included in art historical dialogue about Africa and specifically Nigeria, beyond the confines of the wide-reaching Contemporary African Art designation.



Dennis Schaefer

dennidschaefer.deviantart.com

I have painted off and on for 40 years, inspired by the Fauves, Expressionists and uniquely American examples such as Hopper, Sloan, Prendergast, and the Ash Can School.

My work has been exhibited in galleries, movie theater lobbies and restaurants in Ohio, Pennsylvania North and South Carolina and Maine. Juried shows include- Rosewood Gallery, Armory Gallery, WAA Spring Show, ArtFields, Art Walk, Cape Fear Artists and Art of the State. I am currently showing on-line at the Curated Art and Design Gallery in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

To me, "art" is any creative expression that communicates the essence, the quintessential quality available to all and everyone. My response is a visceral sort of recognition. Satisfying to me and hopefully to you as well.

**“TO ME, “ART”
IS ANY CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
THAT
COMMUNICATES
THE ESSENCE”**



Soimadou Ali Ibrahim

www.soimadou.com

Soimadou Ali Ibrahim (French, b. 1989) explores and re-examines family memories by representing cherished moments of life in Itsinkoudi, a remote village in Ngazidja the biggest island of the Comoros archipelago, where Ibrahim's grand mother and most of his family still live.

Growing up in Comoros until 10 years old influenced his perspective on socio-economics, the strength of community and the complexities of race, and has triggered Ibrahim to question his own Frenchness in relation to the island's colonial past.

These artworks are adapted from archival photographs, pictures taken by the artist himself, memories, and imagination. They each portray the importance of family, of life itself and hope, illustrated by straight lines, bold gestural strokes and bright colours inspired by his studies in graphic design and art. In essence, Ibrahim uses the practice of painting as a way to reconnect and engage with his roots.

Ibrahim currently resides in London but from the age of 10 and throughout his adolescent life he lived in a small town in Brittany, France. It is not only his personal experiences but also those of the African diaspora that provide him with a narrative to share and explore how it is to be black and navigate the environment you are in.





Capturing the character is everything. As a figurative painter, it is always the personality that I aim to express by exploring the individual's features and bringing it to life. That's the reason I paint. Not only to remember the traits of some family members who live in Comoros, but to feel closer to them. Painting is a form of therapy for me. I wish for people to question the paintings. To wonder, "who is this old man who sits in this chair? What life has he lived?" I want them to create their own story from the characters that I will always remember.



Seleen Saleh

www.seleensaleh.com

Street Culture is a stunning collection of photographs representing women and men of color who exhibit a unique style. Seleen Saleh's photographs reveal individuality, fearlessness, and creativity in the most vibrant beings who collectively represent street style. This style is as varied as the people; it is a personal expression that changes day to day. It is an expression of a person's culture, mood, influences, and aesthetics. Street style originated in the street where top designers look for inspiration for their next collections. The book preserves the integrity of street style and features some of the muses that have been forgotten or were never acknowledged.

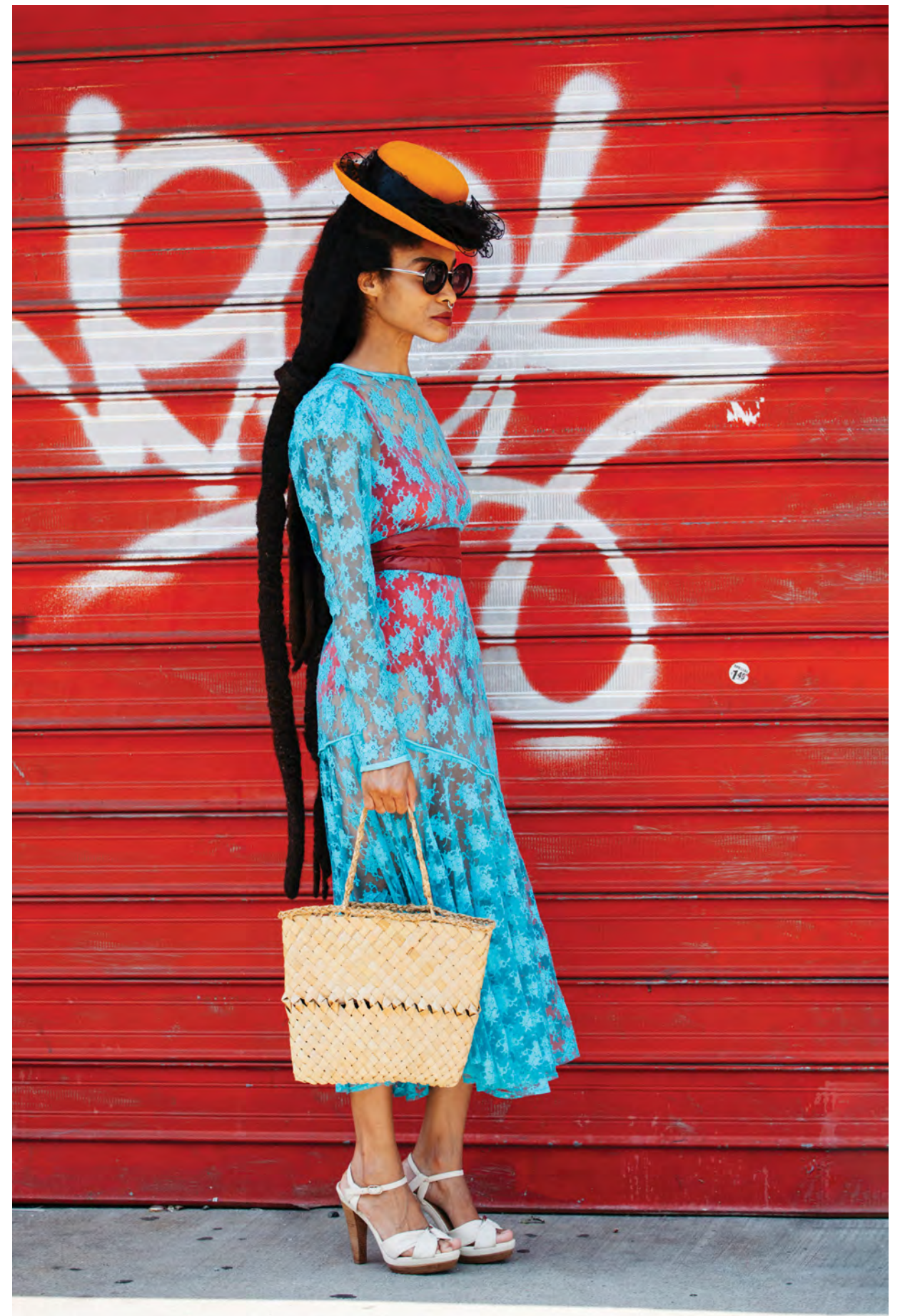
In the book Seleen combines photographs from previous projects with new images. As a lover of fashion, art, and people, Seleen brings out the authentic nature of these known and unknown muses. Each person depicted here can be considered a brilliant artist in his or her own right. These portraits were taken in New York City—the perfect global destination—diverse and open and where people are not afraid to tell you who they are. There is an underfed audience for this book; the world is waking up and wants to see more diversity and more eclectic styles.





Seleen Saleh, in her younger years, spent years painting fashion spreads and collecting inspiration from magazines and the world around her. In school at the Art Institute of Philadelphia she merged her love of fashion and photography. It was during this time that she began to develop her bold and vibrant style.

Her editorial work has been featured in magazines such as British Vogue, People, Essence, Fault, Gilt, as well as gracing the cover of Footwear News. In addition to her own projects as a fashion photographer, Seleen began working at Essence Magazine in 2009. There, she helped develop the “Street Style” section of the magazine’s website. Seleen enables her subjects to show their best selves. She takes photos of a snippet of time which immortalizes her models making them bigger than life. She enables her viewers to experience and live in and through all her subjects. She has made it a priority to create and foster relationships with all these beautiful people. She cultivates connections while generating exponential exposure for her evolving brand. Her highly praised work stands as a divine tapestry of culture and sensuality.



Papay Solomon

www.papaysolomon.com

(b. 1993, Guinea of Liberian descent; lives and works in Phoenix, AZ)

Liberian-American artist Papay Solomon lives between two worlds: his adopted home in America and that of his African heritage. His work boldly attempts to reconcile the two with an artistic vision enhanced by his formal education in the West and at the same time wildly alive with the indelible imprint of his home country.

Solomon paints hyperrealist figures, with traces of non finito and color field qualities, to amplify stories and experiences of the African diaspora. With this approach to the figurative tradition Solomon attentively renders his sitters with dignity, complexity, and beauty. Faces of African immigrants are meticulously imbued with reverence that echoes the grandeur of Renaissance and Baroque portraiture. In doing so, Solomon invigorates the structures and techniques of Western art with an African soul.

Born in Guinea in 1993, Solomon's mother fled the First Liberian Civil War while she was still pregnant with him and crossed into the neighboring country on foot. At age 5, growing political unrest in the Guinean city of Gueckedou forced Solomon and his family to again relocate hundreds of miles away to refugee camps, where he would spend much of his childhood.

At 14, Solomon resettled with his family in the United States, where he attended high school and the Herberger Institute of Design and the Arts at Arizona State University, graduating with a BFA and being awarded Outstanding Undergraduate in 2018. Solomon received the 2018 Friends of Contemporary Art Artists' Grants Award from the Phoenix Art Museum and the Erni Cabat Award from the Tucson Museum of Art.



Libby Saylor

www.libbysaylor.com

My work acts as a vehicle for transformation and transmutation of darkness into light, and aims to take any of my stuck, uncomfortable, anxious, and painful emotions, and spin them into something more beautiful, hopeful, and pure. My creative work has always been a powerful tool for personal healing.

With a formal background in photography and a passion for paint, I am inspired by the play between these two mediums. My collage work explores the relationship between both processes as I traverse the space that exists in between things, playing in the area where this crossover takes place. Through my creative process, I attempt to blur the boundaries where photography and paint collide, softening the edges between light and dark, pattern and field, magic and reality. I work intuitively and keep my focus on aesthetic balance as I allow my subconscious to express itself in whatever way is needed.

My original works on paper are small and delicate, raw in some areas and refined in others. I use my own photographic work as the basis for each assemblage and incorporate additional found images, paint, colored pencil, and graphite.

I received my BFA in Photography from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia in 2002. I live and work in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Eve Greenberg

www.oaklandoutlook.com



I lived in the depths of the redwood forests for half of my life, secluded and isolated as the only black girl in my school, to the Big island of Hawaii out in the middle of the sea to experience a similar, yet completely different world. It wasn't until I made it to Oakland, California that I was able to tap into this energy of the Divine Feminine.



**“BEING DIVINE
IS FIRST BEING
AWARE OF WHO
YOU ARE AT
YOUR CORE.”**

This feminine energy looks like righteous self love for my body, along with my soul: whether I'm doing my hair in the mirror, cooking, or engaged in erotic acts. It's taken me a long time to tend to the soil of my essence, to connect, find out what my needs are. I have asked myself what I may be lacking, what things do I need to get rid of, get more of, or tend to to grow the life-fulfilling essence of divinity. Being divine is first being aware of who you are at your core. For me, I have found myself again by dredging through the dark, mucky parts—not only to observe it, but also to clear it out by acknowledging all that has collected on my spirit through my life, expressing my suppressed sorrows and lost dreams out loud to myself or those I felt needed to hear it. To say the journey has been simple cheapens the immense pressure and pain that has been pushed out through my spirit into the power of radical honesty and acceptance. My art reflects my soul; where once I felt alone, I've found the only being I truly needed to unite with was my own self. When I met and accepted myself without all the extra weight of the world, love began to flourish at my core.

It now manifests in my art, effortlessly.



William Kwamena-Poh

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William Kwamena-Poh is an award winning self-taught artist from Ghana, West Africa. He came to the United States in the early 1980's and has resided in Alabama, Washington DC, Chicago and has called Savannah, GA home since 1995. His studio is in the heart of Savannah's City Market. William is internationally known for his series images of Women, Fisherman, Children and Market Scenes. His work is collected by private and public figures. His corporate collections include Disney Corporation, DuSable Museum, Amoco Corp., Ford Motors and Prudential Financial. In November 2019 William debuted his solo exhibit, "The Journey is Mine: Chapter One" at Savannah's Telfair Museums – The Jepson Center.

William paints with gouache, also known as opaque watercolor; the same medium used by Jacob Lawrence and also experimented with by Dali, Picasso, and Klimt. "The density and opacity of gouache allows me to capture and give the viewer a small window into my beautiful and wonder-filled homeland. The sun's strength is ever present, providing a colorful environment which is strongly reflected in Ghana culture and clothing," says William.

William's father was a notable history professor who spent most of his teaching career at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana. He came to the U.S. in the early 1980's as a Fulbright Scholar, teaching African history at Talladega College, AL. He brought young William with him, where he received his B.A. in Sociology. His father was aware of William's budding artistic gift, inherited from his father who was an art teacher. However, William's father hoped he would follow in his academic footsteps, sharing the history of his people. William has been doing just that for over 30 years, not in a classroom but with his paintbrush.



Cydne Jasmin Coleby

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Cydne Jasmin Coleby (B. 1993, Nassau, Bahamas) attended The College of The Bahamas (now University) where she received her associate degree in art in 2012. Afterwards, she went on to work as freelance graphic designer, specializing in brand design. She has worked with numerous companies including Adworks, The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas, Poinciana Paper Press, Popostudios International Center for the Visual Arts, The Island House and served as Creative Arts Design and Communications Manager for The Current: Baha Mar Gallery and Art Center.

In 2018, Coleby reintroduced her art practice at The National Art Gallery of the Bahamas as a part of their Ninth National Exhibition with a body of work entitled A God Called Self. Since then, she continues to produce digital and mixed-media collages which investigate the transformative effects of trauma through a personal lens.

Her work has exhibited in galleries within The Bahamas, France and London, and she is a part of local and international collections, including the private collection of acclaimed art advisor and curator, Maria Brito.



**“THROUGHOUT
MY CHILDHOOD
I REMEMBER
DISASSOCIATING
MYSELF FROM
MY BODY,
QUESTIONING
ASPECTS OF
MY BEING AND
HOW OTHERS
PERCEIVED
THEM.”**

Throughout my childhood I remember disassociating myself from my body, questioning aspects of my being and how others perceived them. But even with this awareness I've been unable to elude conditioning's grasp. At some point I pivoted from the position of investigating to accepting – accepting narratives I was told were mine despite never holding a writing credit. Though I found that I did this for many years, one cannot fight their nature.

Self-reflection is an intrinsic aspect to my art practice. Through my graphic collages I examine personal and collective/ancestral relationships to trauma and conditioning. It's hard to distinguish between which experiences inform rather than define our identity. My work aims to explore this gray area, while questioning our ability for healing, and to cultivate our individual and collective narratives, through these events.



Jerome Lagarrigue

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Jerome Lagarrigue was born in 1973 to a French father and an African American mother, and was raised in Paris. He moved to the United States in 1992 and graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design (class of 1996). He has since received several awards for his work, including the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award as well as the Ezra Jack Keats Award (2002). He taught a drawing and painting class at the Parsons School of Design in New York from 1997 to 2005.

A documentary, *Jerome Lagarrigue: portrait of an artist*, directed by Richard Mothes and Anne-Laurence Bizeau, was selected for the sixth International Documentary Competition at the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1998). In 2005, he was one of the recipients of the grant and residency program at Villa Medici in Rome. At the end of his stay, he held a solo exhibition in the villa's main gallery, entitled "Paesaggio delViso" (Landscapes of the Face). In 2007 he collaborated with celebrated African-American poet Maya Angelou, for the illustrations of her book *Poetry for young people*.

In 2009, Jerome Lagarrigue was commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera to paint *Tosca*. The painting was part of the opera's set design (season 2009–2010 opening, directed by Luc Bondy, set design by Richard Peduzzi). In 2010 Jerome was one of a hundred artists to have been personally selected by Georges Lucas to participate on an exclusive project commemorating the original *Star Wars* trilogy.



In 2012 Jerome Lagarrigue is featured in a full-length documentary entitled HEAVYWEIGHTPAINT about four Brooklyn-based figurative painters. In 2010 Jerome was commissioned by Georges Lucas to produce a painting commemorating the Starwars trilogy for “Starwars Vision”. He also created Round Zero, an animation project commemorating Rumble in the Jungle, the historic fight held in Kinshasa (Zaire) in 1974 between Mohammad Ali and Georges Foreman.

In 2014, Jerome Lagarrigue’s solo exhibit at Driscoll Babcock gallery in Cheslea NY entitled “Visible Man” focusing on Albino Model Shaun Ross was reviewed by The exhibit received major press attention.

In 2015, Jerome was asked to participate in the 1st edition of “No Commission” curated by Swizz Beats and Nicola Vassel, he also participated in “Manifest Justice” in Los Angeles. In 2017 his solo exhibit entitled “The Tipping Point” depicting fictional riot zones was critically acclaimed in London.

In 2017 The Rhode Island School of Design invited Jerome to display his solo exhibition entitled “Radiant Silence”. In 2019 Jerome’s work was included in “Generation War” at the Torrance Art Museum. Collectors include: Blake Byrne, Swizz Beats, Georges Lucas, Peter Berg, Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Carmelo Anthony to name a few. The artist resides and works in Brooklyn. Jerome is represented by Galerie Olivier Waltman (Paris/Miami), and Lazinc (London).

New Paintings by Jerome Lagarrigue are family portraits. More precisely, they are portraits of family members, literal, figurative, even imagined, spanning generations, cultures, races, and continents. Some are distant relatives, abstract and referenceless, constructed from memory, others have been plucked from family photographs. Staring at these grainy, monochromes from the past, Lagarrigue extracts the details that interest him the most, enlarges them, reconfigures and recontextualizes them, adds riots of wild color where there had been none. Time is immaterial, context vanishes. These are all his people, lifted out of place or time or memory, recreated on canvas. Like DNA that carries within it the clues to one’s genetic heritage, the patchwork of one’s extended family is inextricably tied to personhood. In these paintings Lagarrigue is fleshing out the characters in his life story, looking for clues to his own identity, becoming himself.



Katia Lifshin

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Katia Lifshin is a Ukraine born Israeli artist, currently living in Tel Aviv, Israel. She focuses mostly on oil painting, drawing and cyanotype prints. She relocated to the U.S in 2012, studied painting and sculpting in Pima College, Tucson, Arizona. She held her first solo exhibition in (9)Gallery, Phoenix, Arizona in 2017, and participated in group shows across the U.S and Israel. Since returning to Israel in 2018, she continues to work and live in Tel Aviv. In her current series of works, Katia uses old photographs as inspiration to her work, and paints them as colorful paintings.



In my current series of works, I use old monochromatic photographs as my guide and inspiration. Photography is one of the means to save and treasure a memory, memory on the other hand is ambiguous and deceptive, it constantly transforms and takes new shapes. Relying on photography to capture a moment creates a fragmented piece of it, open for interpretation. I use this opening to create new meaning for the old photographs, and recast them as colorful oil paintings. I collect the photos from flea markets and old family albums, usually with little or no information about the people I paint. I enjoy imagining, or reinventing who they are, and often I will modify details in the photographs to match my own narrative, intertwining the vintage scenes with my own experiences and emotions.



Nelson Makamo

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Johannesburg based artist Nelson Makamo is best known for his charcoal and oil paintings of young women, men, and children who are redressing decades of images that have perpetuated the stereotype that African people are destitute. For approximately sixteen years since he received his formal training at Artist Proof studios in Johannesburg, Makamo has been committed to distracting that demeaning image by portraying African people in a manner that reverses these stereotype.

Makamo's subject matter and artistry has steadily placed him on a global stage, making him one of Africa's young and most sought after visual artists of our times. In 2019, Makamo was commissioned for the cover of TIME magazine for the February issue, guest edited by Hollywood film director Ava DuVernay.

Makamo has exhibited in Cape Town, Johannesburg, America, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Scotland. His work is featured in prestigious public and private collections, including City of Johannesburg, Oprah Winfrey, Standard Chartered, Matasis Investment Holdings, The Dean Collection, Giorgio Armani, Hanzehof Zuphense Kunst Collection, Black Coffee and Telkom South Africa to name a few.



Amid covid-19 global outbreak, South Africa witnessed yet another wave of gender based violence and femicide cases, whilst in America, violence against black women and men sparked a global protest... #BlacklivesMatter.

Nelson Makamo's work has always depicted a sense of desire for freedom of existence, a freedom which seems to be a thing of the past when one considers both the systematic and direct violence that the world is currently facing. Home sick at home and Blue, are some of the themes that Makamo is deeply exploring in his studio at the moment, where he associates the theme "blue" with ideas of loyalty, trust, and wisdom, which we possess naturally as humans; and at the same time, explores homesickness as an underlying emotion that anticipates the human connection that seem to have been spiralling downward recently, following this violence that we have been witnessing worldwide.



Isabella Gonzalez Reyes

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Isabella González was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Central America. In 2020, she received her double B.F.A. in Painting and Fibers at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). Her art pieces involve different layers of fabric embroidered as an intention to mend herself. Isabella's work relates to the acceptance of living between two extremes, physically and emotionally. Her artistic production is deeply grounded in the hand made. Her work has been included in national exhibitions such as "Honduras Art Festival" in Gracias, Lempira, and Tegucigalpa, Honduras, with her solo exhibitions "Stitched Memories" and "Processes". She has been actively involved as a promoter of Women in the Arts (MUA). Isabella continues to explore and develop her concept and technique in her practice.

I stitch pieces of fabric together to metaphorically assemble myself back into a complete whole. I was born in Honduras, located in the middle of Central America. Honduras has a long history of corruption, poverty, and crime, which have rendered it one of the least developed and most unstable countries in the world. The struggles of daily life keep you grounded. The poverty you see reminds you to be humble, to be happy with all you have. It pushes you to do your part, no matter how small, to contribute in making a change. You develop patience; you accept the way things work and carry on with life, you pick up the pieces and mend yourself. I deconstruct portraits and reconstruct them; rip them off and start again. I use embroidery to mend and repair torn images. My emotional relationship with fabric goes back to my childhood. I remember spending days with my grandmother discovering fascinating materials with different colors and prints at the fabric stores. My love for bright colors comes from my everyday life back home. The use of bold multi-colored shades is considered one of the national characteristics of Latin America. I have lived battling bipolar disorder, by trying to keep it a secret, I haven't fully accepted it; I have decided I could make it visible through my work. Through my art making I prove that living between two extremes, physically and emotionally, can be transformed into immense creative energy.





Beverly McCutcheon

Beverly McCutcheon

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Beverly was born in and continues to reside in New Jersey. As long as she can remember, the desire to create has always been uncontrollable. She recalls as a little girl spending hours with her friend, Billy, drawing her own paper dolls and their outfits, constructing convertibles for them out of shoe boxes and, when alone in her room, copying the pictures from a gilded page book of bible stories, which today she keeps safely tucked away on her bookshelf.

Beverly's formal training began in the late 60s at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she majored in English, but found it impossible to stay out of the art department. There, under the tutelage of renowned painter David Driscoll and sculptor Martin Puryear, she learned principles of design and color theory.

After graduating from college, Beverly set about raising two great kids and working in structured jobs with absolutely no leeway for creativity. However, it was while listening to the book, *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, that Beverly was assured that one day her art, even though jumpstarted later in life, would become her number one irrepensible priority.

Beverly enjoys experimenting with and exploring different mediums, but collage and assemblage, seem to be the most self-fulfilling. She's studied collage with artists such as Jonathan Talbot and conversations with Benny Andrews were a great inspiration. Beverly has exhibited her work throughout New Jersey, New York and she recently had a most successful solo exhibit at the prestigious Stella Jones Gallery in New Orleans, LA.



**“I FIND
PURE JOY IN
THE ACT OF
CREATING.”**

I have been an artist for as long as I can remember. Certain motifs, such as the butterfly and eggs are emblematic in my work, the butterfly representing a metamorphosis and the egg symbolizing new life. Be it collage, assemblage, or fiber, I always incorporate jewel-toned colors. I especially enjoy cutting through all types of fabrics, paper, and textures, in particular, soft, buttery leather. I

treat my picture plane with great reverence, seeing three dimensions instead of two. Mixed media collage suits me. With collage, nothing is impossible. The need to experiment and explore also leads me to create assemblage pieces out of wood, another favorite material.

I've always been drawn to portraits from any era and at first glance, one would not immediately describe my “Wallflower Portrait” series as such. However, they are my interpretation of portraits with a twist and a dash of teenage recollections of trying to become invisible by pretending to blend into my surroundings – I was and at times still am the proverbial “wallflower”. When creating my Wallflowers I draw upon one of my favorite quotes.

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart.”

Helen Keller

I find pure joy in the act of creating, regardless of the outcome, and I hope that in doing so my work will invoke a meaningful, personal emotion in the viewer.

Delphine Hennelly

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Delphine Hennelly (Brooklyn, USA) received her BFA from Cooper Union in 2002 and her MFA from Mason Gross School of the Visual Arts at Rutgers University in New Jersey in 2017. A painter, drawer and occasional printmaker, Hennelly explores figuration primarily using the female form. She is a three-time recipient of The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Award. Recent exhibitions include a solo at Pt.2 Gallery (Oakland, USA) as well as a group show organized by James English Leary at Lisa Kandlhofer Gallery (Vienna, Austria) and a two-person show with Mimi Jung at Carvalho Park (New York, USA).

For a recent solo show of paintings at PT. 2 Gallery in Oakland California I revisited the theme of the traveler/wanderer, the idea of the figure in transience. The show was titled *Wandering Players*, taking its cue from the name given to actors of the Elizabethan period in England: *Strolling Players*. Slightly costumed, the figures in these paintings take on the role of actors playing archetypes in their ubiquitous banality. Meandering a stage, set in a bucolic landscape, an abstraction of the pastoral, dystopian idyllic. Anachronistic, their journeys remain random with their faithful dog following behind.



Taking as axiomatic the notion that there is no time but the present, which contains past and future, I work serially as a means to employ this concept of time in the paintings. Much of this thought stems from Gilles Deleuze's ideas on Difference and Repetition. I enjoy the idea of a liminal space where past and future can be inscribed in a present. In painting a motif or an image over and over again I see the space of a continuity in time simultaneously accepting the fact of the still image. A painting will never be a narrative in movement, such as would happen in film, but perhaps a painting can allude to the temporal or the notion of an omnipresent event. I enjoy how in every repetition there occurs something specific, and therefore new in the work. It is within this structural thought that drawing continues to be a key component of the work. Welding concept with form I lean towards bending the nature of the paint to fulfill a graphic need, mimicking ideas of reproduction, the print, paper, ink, a doodle.

For playful levity my palette tends towards the pastel. Furthermore, the gendered proclivity pastel colors perpetuate is of interest to me in my wish to subvert such tropes. More recent paintings depict a departure from the pastel in their use of blacks and browns along with deep reds, purples and blues. In the paintings for *Wandering Players*, I conceptualized colors of archetypical 'History Painting' merged with the colors of a landscape in turmoil. Flower garlands decorate but also act as a foil, to distract; stones lock a picture plane in place like possible paperweights, a pair of pastoral lovers. All these motifs, along with colors I choose, work in service to formally build a ligature from which to hang the image. Within this framework the use of repetition and decoration, either masking or unmasking, offers a multiplicity of possible interpretations. In a text by Amy Goldin published in *Artforum* in 1975, titled "Patterns, Grids, and Painting", Amy Goldin states: "Pattern is basically antithetical to the iconic image, for the nature of pattern implicitly denies the importance of singularity, purity, and absolute precision." This quote perfectly exemplifies my interest in using repetitive motifs but more pointedly explains much of the reasoning behind my choice in duplicating an image. Golden further writes, "to see the same image over and over again in a variety of situations disengages the control of context and erodes meaning." By playing with repetition, I enjoy seeing how far I can subvert the iconic image from its singular contextual meaning while retaining some residue of the power an iconic image can hold. Perhaps I am attempting to have my cake and eat it too. Nonetheless, it is the tension that lies in this dichotomy that has become fruitful in my wish to pursue figurative/pictorial inventiveness.



Gherdai Hassell

www.instagram.com/hassell_free



Gherdai Hassell graduated from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2013. Her mixed media artwork celebrates the black female figure. Exploring ideas about representation, perception, identity creation, and childhood, her vibrant collages capture and collect the gaze. The eyes of her figures are an access for viewers and also a veil or protection, a safe space for the women to exist.

Her artwork is on permanent display in the Government Administration Building, Hamilton, Bermuda. In 2019, she was showcased in Tina Lawson's Annual Wearable Art Gala, Los Angeles, CA. She has presented her work in solo and group exhibitions in Bermuda, USA and China. Gherdai is currently an MFA candidate at the China Academy of Art. She is based between the UK, Bermuda and China.



My work suggests that identity should be self-determined and understood. My work explores concepts of representation, perception, identity creation, and childhood themes. The collages are avatars, an exploration of self, as an exploration of various materials. My work is a reflection of who I show up as in the world, a black woman. The desire to story tell is at the core of my work. The black woman's story, a story of play, revelation, revolution, imagination, evolution, self reflection, passion. A human story.

Farley Aguilar

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Miami-based Aguilar (b. 1981, Nicaragua) has developed a distinct pictorial language, depicting tableaux of grotesque figures with unspooled gestures and a delirious palette. Using all manner of brushwork, oil sticks, and pencil to create these deeply unsettling compositions, Aguilar dredges the psychological depth of James Ensor and Edvard Munch, as well as German Expressionist cinema and Existentialism. Placid pools of color crash against jagged forms, figures spring from the scribbled noise of the ground. Faces are masks more expressive and shifting than flesh itself. The artist works from found photographs—portraits, crowd scenes, war reportage—thus undergirding his paintings with historical reality. By basing his compositions in fact, Aguilar wrings even more turmoil from their surfaces, accessing the waking nightmare of the twentieth century.

His works reveal a frenzied pageantry of violence: psychological storm clouds loom over Aguilar's seaside compositions, while his images of ritualized humiliation feel darkly carnivalesque. Importantly, the artist's reference to French resistance fighters shaving the heads of female collaborators is unhinged from that specific context. Aguilar shows how, throughout history, the body is scapegoated—the flashpoint and symptom of social turmoil. This could be the female body, that of the minority, or the migrant. Through the lens of his paintings, Aguilar meditates on fundamental social balances: the shift between seeing and being seen, between agency and objectification, and, perhaps most importantly, the relationship between the individual and the crowd. Whether he is portraying a lone sitter or a crowded street scene, Aguilar instills in his anonymous subjects a near-Dostoevskian existential depth. His figures stare out at the viewer, lost and adrift, like Watteau's Pierrot, and we stare back, submitting to their logic, embracing their grotesquery, feeling the growing pangs of empathy.





Farley Aguilar (b. 1980, Nicaragua) lives and works in Miami, FL. Recent exhibitions include *Fragmented Bodies*, Albertz Benda, New York, US; *Shifting Gaze: A Reconstruction of the Black & Hispanic Body in Contemporary Art*, The Mennello Museum, Orlando, US; and *We are the people. Who are you?*, Edel Assanti, London, UK. His work is in the collections of the Pérez Art Museum Miami, Brown University, and the Orlando Museum of Art. Aguilar is represented by Lyles & King.



Eilen Itzel Mena

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Eilen Itzel Mena is an Afro-Dominican multidisciplinary artist and community organizer from the South Bronx currently based in Los Angeles. She graduated from the University of Southern California in 2017, with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts. Her visual arts and writing practice synthesizes Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism and African Diasporic spiritual frameworks through painting and performance work. In her social practice, she serves as a Co-Director and creative collaborator for Honey and Smoke, a global artist community and platform focused on creating space for artists to meditate on the important themes of our time through themed seasons. It is a conceptual project that explores these themes through new media and interactive digital content.

She has shown work in New York, San Francisco, Miami and London and have been covered by various publications such as the New York Times, Cultured Magazine, Mujerista, Artnet, Hyperallergic, and It's Nice That Magazine amongst others. In 2018, she participated in the LSI Artist Residency in London, UK organized by the UCL Slade School of Fine Arts and the Camden Arts Center. She is currently an artist in residence for Zeal's Studio Incubator Program in Inglewood, CA. Zeal is a creative agency and co-op creating spaces for Black Artists across the diaspora to thrive. Through Zeal, she also curated the exhibition Who Owns Black Art? in Miami during Art Basel 2019.

I grew up in the Dominican Republic and the South Bronx, have studied abroad in Salvador, Brazil and participated in my first artist residency in London, UK. My diasporic understanding of the Black experience strongly influences my understanding of self, the world, and my creative practice. The symbolism and imagery in my work stems from the natural environment, and the spiritual, ancestral, and dream realms that make up my everyday life. In my painting and performance works, I depict moments of revelation, introspection and identity through the use of African Diaspora symbology. I exalt the natural environment by showcasing its divinity and my spirit's relationship to the complex ecosystems surrounding me.



My works are often portraits in exterior settings. These sacred natural grounds are a place where I create homes for Black bodies that are often treated as “foreign”, “alien”, or of lesser importance. I exalt the natural environment by showcasing its divinity and my spirit's relationship to the complex ecosystems surrounding me. I place different characters outdoors in order to express introspection in open space, signaling at the necessity of freedom for true growth. Imagery in my work reflects personal dreams, memories, and spiritual experiences that have acted as clues to my self-discovery. I include imagery depicting my ancestors in order to showcase the role they play in my understanding of purpose and legacy.

My color palettes come from hues found in dreams, meditations and sacred color combinations in Ifa, Santeria and Candomble connected to Orisha (deities). As such, color itself comes to life and enters conversation with other more personified elements. Different strokes of color become characters of their own having conversation with anthropomorphic figures in my work. As an Ifa practitioner, I am often inspired by the semiotic language of African traditional religions as well as Afro-Diasporic religious practices. I stray away from a technical painting approach and apply mark making techniques reminiscent of childhood brushstrokes and image making. I leave room for abstraction and fluidity of understanding different frames, shapes, and figures.

It is important for me to create imagery that grounds the viewer in visually fluid, innocent and safe spaces that allows for a deep contemplation of the complex topics expressed in my work. Simultaneously, I underscore the power and potentiality that lies within a childlike point of view. In my spiritual practice, children are more connected to the realm of

the ancestors, therefore their point of view is highly regarded. Through this technical approach I employ painterly qualities in my performance work, as well. I either paint my body to act as a fluid moveable frame, or paint the set for my performance work and interact with it. By doing so, my body enters a conversation with the static figures and imagery in the background, bridging the gap between the child self and the adult self.

My multimedia process begins with studies on my iPhone's markup feature. I stretch a canvas, photograph it and sketch the work on top of the photo using markup. Afterwards, I paint on the canvas following the digital study, switching from digital to analog and vice versa. The process of moving through the digital and analog worlds physically reflects my relationship to the spiritual, ancestral, and dream realms that make up my everyday life. This is important to me because it shows their streamlined relationship. It shows me the way information can be transferred through different spaces, while still retaining its original energy.

The spiritual environments reflected in my work are the grounds upon which I process and bring meaning to personal revelations, subconscious messages, and other spiritual information. In these energetic settings, Black spirit isn't arrested. Black imagination and aesthetic thrive, because these realms emit a frequency of freedom and healing. I aim to create works that showcase the wisdom and magic that nature and Black minds, bodies, and spirits are home to. This wisdom is a tool for self-actualization and protection. It is a tool for survival.

Jeanna Penn

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Jeanna Penn has been creating art for over twenty-five years in various forms. Including documentary film, curating art exhibitions, designing public murals, and working as an arts manager. She received her BA in African American Studies from Morgan State University and continued graduate work in African History at Howard University. She grew up in Columbia, Maryland, moved to Los Angeles in 2001 and now lives in Oakland with her husband and son.

I was trained as a historian and that practice mirrors the way I approach creating visual work. Research is foundational when exploring subject, media and process. I am most interested in material history and the idea of activating archives and collections for alternative purposes and narratives.

This piece is part of a larger body of work in progress. In 2018, I began exploring the idea of a shift in our collective experience and how Black people responded to that shift. How we reach back in history for clues and codes which aid in manifesting our survival. Youth Dem A Rise is a tribute to protest as survival and how it is sometimes necessary to turn the enemies tools against them.

I work by incorporating found imagery in the form of collage with other media. My intention is to recontextualize the subject amidst the controlled chaos of watercolor and ink on paper. Gold is significant for its warmth and luminescence, as well as a symbol of power and value against the complicated relationship with people of Africa and the diaspora.





Kyle Penner

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My name is Kyle Penner and I am a mixed media Artist born and raised in Dallas, Texas. I am now based between New York City and Dallas and am currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at Parsons School of Design in Manhattan with an emphasis on drawing and painting. I am set to graduate in spring 2023. My interests in media range from a traditional painting, drawing, and fiber art practice to a more contemporary photography and video. However, my media of choice are acrylic paint and charcoal.

Growing up in the South, there is a huge emphasis on image. When everyone knows everyone, reputation and status become sacred. However, amid the constraints of Texas suburbia, there lives a fantasy world of aliens and demons and witches and bigfoots. There is a deeply rooted superstition and hunger for conspiracy that lives in the South that was always a source of excitement for me. As I grew older and began to grapple with questions of my body, my sexuality, my identity, my shame, that local mysticism became a place of escape. In my mind, I began to equate queerness with the supernatural, and it became a major source of inspiration for my art. By combining that with my real life experiences, I'm able to elevate my work to an almost mythic level. Each painting full of narrative, each brushstroke full of energy. My style combines the dark, dramatic, and emotive quality of charcoal with the contemporary boldness of acrylic paint to create my pieces. My heavily figurative and intimate scenes portray the nuances of youth, tiptoeing the line between what's private and public.

Sigurdur Olafsson

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Sigurdur Olafsson is a visual artist living and working in Iceland.

Working within the field of contemporary abstract art he applies acrylic paint to his canvases with large custom-made squeegees, trowels, spatulas, and other unconventional tools. Through an accumulation of spontaneous, reactive gestures he composes striking, multifaceted works with intriguing color combinations and a mathematical twist that explore the boundaries between order and chaos, faith and uncertainty.

Although abstract in nature, Olafsson's work is often inspired by the colors, rhythms, and seasons of the Icelandic landscape. His passion is to use the medium of painting to explore new patterns and forms that will lead to new creative discoveries. His paintings pose a series of questions rather than provide clear statements or narratives. The works thus contain an account of his search for that elusive and ethereal something that can only be discovered through art and the meticulous application of the creative process.

Olafsson is a graduate of The Icelandic College of Art and Crafts and his work has been exhibited in various institutions in Iceland. His work is held in public and private collections in Iceland and in private collections in Europe, Canada and the USA.



In a world that abounds with technology and machine-made perfection, a painting provides a welcome alternative; a way to connect to something real and intimate. It takes us back to the roots of human creativity and our most basic form of self-expression. I love old hand made things that have a history and a soul. Abandoned farmhouses, ghost towns and other forsaken human relics fascinate me. I like the feelings they evoke and the poignant stories they tell. Weathered layers of peeling paint, rusted metal and crumbling concrete have a strange visual quality that I find interesting. With my art I try to induce similar feelings in the viewer's mind. I am exploring something that I can only describe as the boundary between order and chaos. I think in that elusive and mysterious area I will find the secrets of creativity itself, or at least continued inspiration on my artistic journey. What do I want to say with my art? Treasure your humanity and uniqueness. Meaning can have many layers and it is a worthwhile effort to uncover a few of them. Celebrate the eccentric as well as the mundane, the hidden as well as the obvious. Beauty can be found in the most unlikely of places.



Michael Booker

www.michael-booker.com

Michael Booker is a mixed media artist originally from Jackson, Mississippi that currently resides in Maryland. He received his BFA in Studio Art – Painting from Mississippi State University in 2008, and received his MFA in Studio Art from University of Maryland in 2012. He has exhibited in various galleries across Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, Maine, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington DC. His work has been acquired by the David C. Driskell Center in College Park, MD. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor of Art at Montgomery College Takoma Park/Silver Springs. He is represented by Morton Fine Art in Washington DC.

Influenced by how quilts were used during the Underground Railroad to send hidden messages to the traveling slaves, the drawings in Godspeed document a journey of escapism for travelers in search of a better life, for themselves and the generations to come. Quilts are used as sign markers, shields, portals, and gateways to help secure safe passage towards an “Afrotopia.” Hip Hop music, African wax fabrics, and the quilts of Gee’s Bend give form and guidance to the figures and patterns, encompassing African American history, culture, and mysticism.

**“QUILTS ARE USED
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SHIELDS, PORTALS,
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PASSAGE TOWARDS AN
“AFROTOPIA.””**



Taha Clayton

www.TahaClayton.com

Through portraiture, the realistic renderings of Taha Clayton transcend time, playing with fantasy and mystics of the universe to celebrate culture and legacy. His Muslim upbringing and clashing cultural heritage shapes his work in addressing mistruths of black antiquity. Clayton's technique is a mix of precise, labored, and intricate methods of realism focusing on subjects and narratives reflective of today's social climate. Taha Clayton is based in Brooklyn, NY, born in Houston, TX and raised in Toronto, ON, further exemplifying his melange of influences and experiences. He has exhibited extensively throughout the United States and Canada, including New York, Miami, Boston, and Toronto. He most recently showcased at New York's 2020 Scope Art Fair and is currently showing with 2020 Vision exhibiting into the end of the year at South Hampton Art Center, co-curated by David Kratz (NYAA president) and FLAG Art Foundation's director Stephanie Roach. Clayton's artistic journey was documented in the award winning 2016 documentary, Heavyweight Paint.



Miguel Angel Payano Jr.

www.instagram.com/miguel_angel_payano_jr

My trans-continental cultural life, the conflicts it creates and the insights it offers, is the foundation of my art. My “inner city” adolescence with Afro-Latinos immigrants in New York City, my education and training in affluent White private institutions in New England and emerging as an artist in Beijing with my Chinese colleagues are three very distinct spaces racially, culturally, economically or linguistically speaking. Further, with more than a decade of relative isolation in each of these spaces, I have nurtured a shifting social identity that thrives in a tri-cultural delta. In short, mediating constantly shifting racial, socio-economic and cultural atmospheres is my modus vivendi. This has increased my awareness of similarities and differences within a culture and between cultures. Moreover, it has heightened my sensitivity to how we are indoctrinated into our communities also known as socialization.

We are socialized in many ways, but language is the most common medium for human socialization. Language that we hear and engage with influences how we see the world. We are engulfed in and realized in language. In order to investigate this subject, I had to reduce the human figure. In so, I arrived to mouthed-peaches, which I consider to be my single-celled humans. This was my point of departure for this body of work, which traverses multiple medium and dimensions.

Generally speaking, I am interested in the figure and figural synecdoche in narratives and metaphors. Frequently recurring themes in my work are cross-cultural misinterpretations, identity formation, movement across thresholds, anthropomorphism, landscape as metaphor, the surreal, the grotesque and humor. In the studio I often use laughter as a guide—serious conversations are easier with levity.



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