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ARTISTS TO WATCH



Naudline Pierre with her works (from left) *Hold On, Hold Tight* (2019) and *Power Within* (2021), on view in her exhibition "What Could Be Has Not Yet Appeared" at the Dallas Museum of Art.

Face Forward

These four fresh talents use figuration in powerfully unique ways to address issues surrounding spirituality, gender, identity, and loss

Naudline Pierre

There is something very comforting about Naudline Pierre's epic paintings, which serve as mesmerizing portals to a fantastical alternate universe. Across vast horizonless landscapes, jewel-toned celestial beings float, fight, and embrace, all connected through a vibrant use of color, texture, and warm light. They are there to guide and serve the radiant protagonist, who can be considered an alter ego of the artist, helping her to gain strength and power. "I am constantly revisiting themes surrounding protection and affection, but at the moment, I am enjoying digging into the concept of power," says the artist, whose star has been firmly on the rise since she completed her MFA at the New York Academy of Art in 2017.

Her first solo museum exhibition, at the Dallas Museum of Art, is currently on view and will be followed by a show at James Cohan gallery in New York, opening in May. "Raw

moments of strength, passion, rage, sorrow, and joy will be woven throughout this body of work," she says.

The daughter of a Haitian pastor, Pierre grew up surrounded by religious iconography and ecclesiastical stories, elements of which inform her large figurative paintings. "The protagonist in my work lives in this other world, and we meet at the surface of the canvas," Pierre says. "We share some similarities, but she has her own will. In making these paintings, I get to communicate with her and the other inhabitants. Those precious moments of communication allow me to process my own existence."

Working intuitively, Pierre begins with a feeling, sometimes scribbled as notes, that she translates into a thumbnail sketch that later becomes the larger composition. "As I'm making the work, I spend a lot of time sitting and staring at the painting surface, trying to coax an image out of the stillness," she says. "Then there is a moment where it's like a lightbulb turns on and I've found a way out of the painting." *jamescohan.com* —LUCY REES



Clotilde Jiménez. The artist's 2021 works *Femme Chevalier* (left) and *L'Ange Enceinte* (below).

Clotilde Jiménez

Six months after his triumphant solo exhibition, “The Contest,” in the summer of 2020 at Chicago’s Mariane Ibrahim gallery, Clotilde Jiménez had an epiphany. The pandemic had given him ample time for reflection and had introduced the reality of death with the passing of family members. “I needed to start over with a new chapter—something had to shift with me and within me,” says the artist, who is based in Mexico City.

A Ghanaian Asafo flag embroidered with the message “Will you fly or will you vanish?” which he acquired from a London dealer, gave Jiménez the guidance he was searching for. “It was profound because I was suddenly faced with the question I had been asking myself.”

The artist decided to fly, constructing his latest body of work, “Un Nouveau Monde,” recently on view at Mariane



Ibrahim’s Paris outpost. The series of collages blends Jiménez’s signature materials—dense charcoal smears, magazine cutouts, and patterned fabrics—with amate, an earthy, handmade paper with pre-Columbian Aztec roots. Depictions of animals, such as fish and birds, serve as reminders of a higher power, but the show’s true heroes are the artist’s friends, family, and community members. “I prepare an exhibition the same way an author approaches a book—each work is a chapter for an overall narrative,” he explains. Veering away from the defined bodies of past series, his new figures are abstracted, allowing room for their ethereal presence to breathe. “My style is transforming as I evolve,” he adds.

Growing up in Philadelphia, Jiménez was raised Southern Baptist within a Black community of both Christians and Muslims. The ecclesiastic notes in his new collages reflect a personal search more than a religious statement. “There is a flame of spirituality within me, and experiencing personal losses in the last two years prompted a focus on what awaits us,” says Jiménez, who uses collage as a way to process internal conflicts, finding harmony in sifting through a bag of paper cutouts and piecing them together. “The technique helps me take my time and enjoy being in the present,” he says, “and when two pieces refuse to match, I work my way around them.” marianeibrahim.com
—OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN



María Fragoso's 2021 works (clockwise from left): *Augurio*, *Pareja en Jade*, and *Seeding*. BELOW: The artist.



María Fragoso

"I'm actually in a very weird moment," confesses artist María Fragoso, from her Mexico City studio. "Right now, I'm moving on to an entirely new body of work. For my second New York solo show, in early 2023, I want to include sculpture, which I've never done before." The declaration may surprise those following Fragoso's rapid rise since earning a BFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art just three years ago. In that short time, she gained critical

praise for her first solo show in New York, at 1969 Gallery last spring, and tantalized visitors with her sensuous, quick-to-sell-out presentation at the most recent Untitled Art in Miami Beach.

Surrealist vessels, saliva, pomegranates, conch shells, and snail slime comprise the world of Fragoso's paintings and drawings. "Food creates pleasure just as many activities in love or sex do," she says of the symbols in her work. To wit, bodies are often in erotically charged poses and rendered in lush crimson hues, with echoes of Mexican devotional tableaux and Renaissance nudes.

Although Fragoso is not from a religious background, Mexico's Catholic culture informs her vision as a pervasive lens through which sexuality, gender, and queerness are filtered. "In the beginning, I had the



idea that figures in the paintings were in communion," explains Fragoso, who photographs friends and makes copious preparatory sketches before each composition. "The ritual emphasizes the importance of the mouth that's visible in many of my works, as is the importance of touch through hands or gloves." *Augurio*, for example, depicts a trio of women, two of whom are spurring water. "Initially, I asked my best friend for just one photo of herself spouting water from the side," Fragoso recalls. "She sent me five different videos of her doing it over and over. Watching them, I realized there are so many more interesting poses that I could use."

With a lightning ascent like hers, another young artist might be inclined to avoid risk. "There's a big pressure to continuously create a lot, maybe even to repeat yourself because something is appreciated by many people," she acknowledges. "But I want to give myself the time to experiment and play again." *1969gallery.com* —JACOBA URIST





Anya Paintsil with her work *Your Mum Eats Like a Camel* (2020). LEFT (FROM TOP): The artist's *Should I Blink Now?* (2021) and *Adar Mair* (2022).

Anya Paintsil

African hair braiding and Welsh rag rug making may not seem to have much in common. But in the hands of Anya Paintsil, these two distinct art forms are masterfully interwoven to create striking assemblages that explore the new art star's dual identity. Growing up Ghanaian in a rural white farming community in Wales, Paintsil remembers watching her grandmother rug hooking, a simple, working-class pastime. She also vividly recalls traveling for miles to have her hair done in a Black salon, resourcefully learning to rebraid and reattach the extensions at home. "I was around 10 years old when I realized there is a lot of crossover between traditional British textile techniques and Afro hairstyling," says Paintsil, who is currently preparing for solo exhibitions with Ed Cross Fine Art in London from May 4 to June 18 and at Hannah Traore Gallery in New York in September. "It's fascinating to me that they emerged in completely different places in the world for very different reasons."

Starting with pieces of rough burlap, Paintsil punches yarn through the woven cloth to render simple, childlike figures. She then felts, hooks, twists, and plaits remnants of both her natural hair and synthetic extensions into the forms, juxtaposing the two textures. "In a way, my work is about celebrating women," she says. "In both the concept and the medium, it's about shining the light on women's creativity from both sides of my heritage."

Most recently, Paintsil made a bold impression with her first New York solo show, at Salon 94 in New York. Presented throughout the Beaux Arts building, the exhibition included new large-scale works such as *Dim Ond Ni (It's Just Us)* (2021), a topsy-turvy depiction of her and her sister. Boasting exaggerated, troubled expressions, they stare out with bright eyes and toothy grimaces. "My work is autobiographical for a reason," she explains. "I was constantly questioned about my identity when I was growing up, and there was a lot of extreme racism. My work asserts that people like us have a right to exist."

For Paintsil, the softness of textiles and overtones of domesticity allow her to convey these challenging experiences and messages. "I like the innocuousness," she says. "The connotation of domesticity draws people in and makes them feel comfortable, and then they take that security away as they realize the discomfiting story behind the work." edcrossfineart.com —L.R.