HAENA YOO

TREY ABDELLA

JESSICA MAGALLANES MARTINEZ

SAMANTHA JOY GROFF

SELMA SELMAN

TAÍNA CRUZ

ERIC OGLANDER

RACHEL JONES

SIMON BENJAMIN

TYRRELL TAPAHA

AMANDA BA

NEW TALENT

MARIE HAZARD

DAVID-JEREMIAH MANDLA

SONG LU

ALIX VERNET

STEPHANIE TEMMA HIER

PAIGE BEEBER

The editors of *Art in America* selected a global group of 20 exciting artists to watch. Read about all of them in the pages that follow.

ROKSANA PIROUZMAND

PEDRO ZYLBERSZTAJN

Portrait illustrations by Daryn Ray

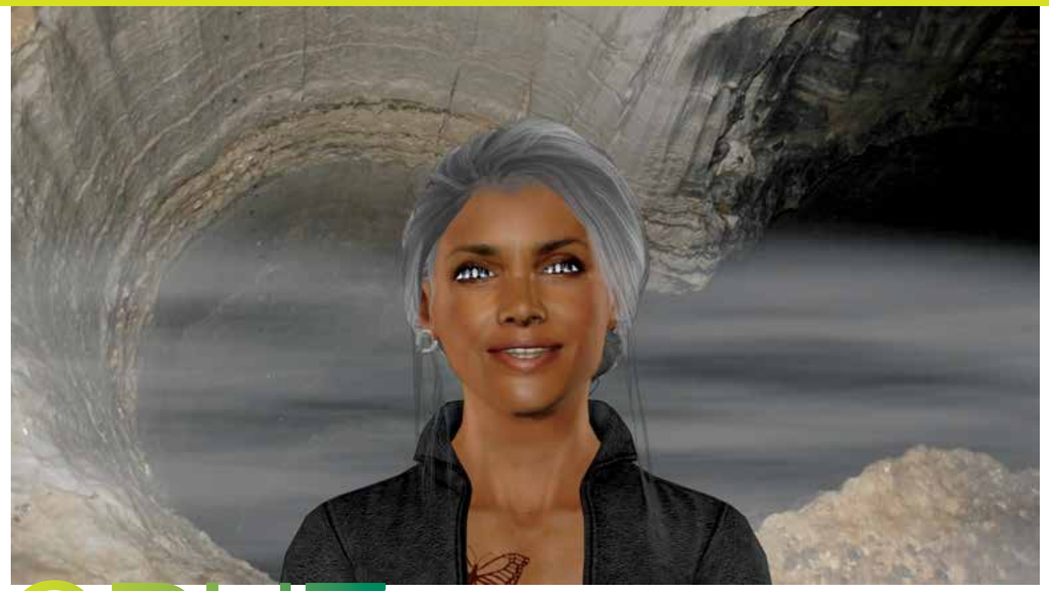
Born:
1998

Birthplace:
New York

Currently Based:
New Haven, Connecticut

TAÍNA CRUZ

Paintings of goblins and celebrities conjure a parallel realm.



Taína Cruz: *How to Breathe Ecstasy*, 2019.

Midnight Moment, 2023.

Taína Cruz's studio is cluttered with books: chunky catalogs devoted to Jacolby Satterwhite, Henry Taylor, R.B. Kitaj, Kerry James Marshall, and Emil Nolde; surveys of street art and the culture of New York's East Village; a novel by Zora Neale Hurston. There is one book that she tells me she is most excited about: *Devil Land*, a 2011 play by Desi Moreno-Penson about the kidnapping of a Nuyorican preteen able to summon Taíno Amerindian deities.

Cruz read the play as a teenager, and describes it as formative for her paintings, which often depict gender-ambiguous figures seemingly transported from other worlds to Manhattan streets. Of *Devil Land*, Cruz said, "I viscerally feel so much of a relation to it, even though nothing in it actually happened to me whatsoever." Her art is imbued with the play's sensibility: both mix gritty realism with a haunting spirituality.

Though her paintings may depict greenish figures or fingers reaching out from six feet under, Cruz refuted the idea that they are horrifying. She says instead that she represents life as she knows it, recalling a childhood memory of a zombielike old lady walking a young dog on the Upper East Side. "It could have been scary," she said, "but it wasn't."

Still, many of her works are grotesque. One 2023 painting depicts an unnaturally pale version of the model Tyra Banks, her features stretched until she appears alien. Another recent work, *Goblin Girl* (2021), shows a green-skinned creature, her face scrunched up in an indescribable expression—a silly grin, perhaps, or maybe something more menacing.

Alternate realms have fascinated Cruz for as long as she can remember. Her father, who is Puerto Rican, instilled in her a love of the Caribbean's rich tradition of magical realism; her mother, who is African American, drew her toward various rituals shared among Black communities of the American South. Her studio's overflowing shelves feature books on those subjects, from an academic survey of essays about queer Nuyoricans to a tome of Elizabeth Spires's poems about Southern sculptor William Edmondson. She refers to these while working in her space on the Yale University campus, where she is an MFA student, though already she is represented by the Berlin gallery Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler.

Cruz studied computer science as a kid, and is also fascinated by the digital world. She sometimes maps out her compositions using 3D modeling software, then translates them to canvas by hand, tweaking her scenes along the way. A few works have remained within the digital realm: her 2019 video, *How to Breathe Ecstasy*, purports to be a meditation exercise led by a CGI Halle Berry, whose computerized voice awkwardly intones instructions that barely make sense. But Cruz said she mainly considers digital technology a "second tool" for art, which largely looks unlike that video.

Though best known for her paintings, she has recently returned her focus to sculpture, the medium she studied as an undergraduate at the Maryland Institute College of Art. One recent creation took the form of a bare-bones animatronic dog that, when activated, seemed to clamber awkwardly forward. Cruz set this makeshift canine before an oversize tennis ball, as though her machine were chasing after it. When motionless, this ramshackle canine looked tame, but Cruz explained that when activated, the robot "could evoke a puppet or a spirit." She seemed to delight in the idea that it could come alive at all.

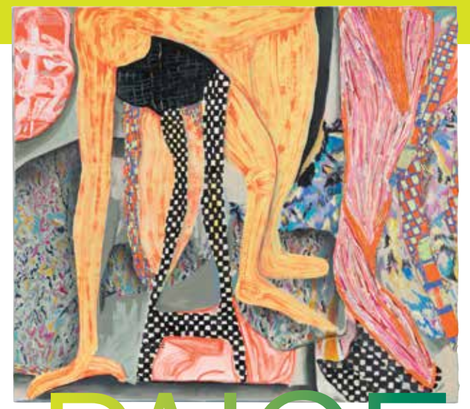
—Alex Greenberger

Courtesy Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin

Top: Photo Marjorie Brunet Piaza; Bottom right: Photo def images; Courtesy Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin (3)

Goblin Girl, 2023.

Stay a little longer, 2023.



Paige Beeber: *Mother Me, Mother Me*, 2023 (far left), and *Fast Slow Disco*, 2023 (left).

Born:
1993

Birthplace:
Syosset, New York

Currently Based:
New York

PAIGE BEEBER

A New York abstract painter works in dizzying layers.

What abstraction does best is take painting apart and then put it back together differently. Paige Beeber understands that principle better than most artists, and she puts it into practice at both material and perceptual levels, melding physicality and illusion.

My first contact with Beeber's paintings came via the computer screen. My impression then was that the paintings would be very dimensional, like montaged reliefs, so I was surprised when I finally saw the works in person—this would have been around three years ago—and realized that their layered patchwork of colors was mostly just painted rather than assembled. But let me accentuate the word *mostly*. Beeber does use collage in her painting, but it is her conceptual or perceptual cutting and pasting that predominates. The literal collaging in her work complements and sometimes contradicts her purely painterly juxtapositions. At a certain distance, or in reproduction, the effect is almost trompe l'œil, but a slightly closer or longer look is all it takes to dispel the momentary illusion: This is painting that always wants to keep the materiality of painting visible.

The work I saw in a spring visit to Beeber's studio in the Gowanus neigbhorhood of Brooklyn seemed to be germinating. It was fascinating to see bins full of scraps of painted canvases that she cuts up then saves for possible use in future paintings. My guess is that she stockpiles a lot more of these than she uses, but any of them might come in handy eventually.

Preparing to leave town for a residency at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, New Mexico, Beeber explained to me that she didn't want to finish her latest paintings—which to my eye already seemed quite developed—until her return in a few months' time. "It's better to keep things unfinished until I come back with a fresh eye," she told me.

Perhaps Beeber's abstractions evoke not only multiple spaces, but multiple temporalities. They evoke the coloristic mélange of textile designs, with sequences of more translucent marks (often spray-painted) that add sensations of variable depths, while reiterated dabs of opaque color suggest patterns of embroidery

An Awesome Wave, 2024.

atop these murky surfaces. The complexity of the interplay among these compositional layers can be dizzying. Collocations may be discordant. The eye becomes entangled. Yet the feeling that the painting's flickering hues and overlapping parts never quite mesh is what makes the works so exhilarating. Take, as a good example, a painting from Beeber's most recent solo show, "Phantom Threads" at New York's Freight+Volume last year: *Trick Mirror II*, 2022, is dominated by a jagged many-pointed starburst outlined in white and containing a throng of short vertical white marks, through which deeper layers remain obscurely visible. This crazy star seems to communicate with a smaller, five-pointed star to its upper right that is mainly light blue, though its loose weave of horizontal and vertical marks also contains other colors. The blue star, a separate bit of canvas collaged on, presents a paradox: although materially it sits atop the painting's surface, its recessive hues and especially their transparency create an opening into deeper space. Meanwhile, the middle ground is occupied by a dense congeries of concise rectilinear marks that divide the plane into rough triangular zones. Everything vibrates, clear boundaries become permeable, and it all seems caught in the process of making sense of itself in collaboration with the eye—not quite formed, but rather piecing a form together, or perhaps undoing a form so it can be formed differently later.

—Barry Schwabsky

Courtesy the artist (3)

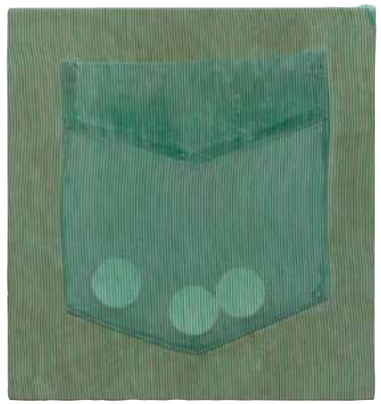
ERIC OGLANDER

In the back of an antique shop, a sculptor makes tiny curiosities.

Born:
1987

Birthplace:
Nashville, Tennessee

Currently Based:
New York



Eric Oglander: *Lunch money*, 2024.

Eric Oglander makes his sculptures—poetic and odd, searching and guided by a sense of play—in the back of an eccentric antique shop. Hidden behind a wall in Tihngs, a store he stocks with one-of-a-kind finds, and operates on Sunday afternoons in Ridgewood, Queens, is a workshop filled with scraps of wood, piles of button-down shirts, and other cast-off materials that Oglander crafts into curious contraptions, often at minuscule scale. Some are elaborate and mechanical, like the homespun catapults and trebuchets he builds and coats in white paint; others are crafted from the simplest of gestures, like tiny wooden totems bearing curves and curlicues whittled with just a knife and a thumb. All of them could blend in on shelves full of offbeat objects.

"I was always into stuff," Oglander said of his upbringing in rural Tennessee, where he obsessively collected things like arrowheads, fossils, and rocks as well as fish and other organisms. "I had 14 snakes at one point," he said, expressing a persistent interest in pythons. Both of his parents and his brother were artists—as a family, they once mounted an art show in the Nashville airport—but Oglander is mostly self-taught, having dropped out of high school when he was a junior to follow his own idiosyncratic path.

After he moved to New York at age 26, Oglander made a name for himself with "Craigslist Mirrors," searching online listings of mirrors for sale and posting pictures of their reflections on Tumblr and Instagram. In 2016 he published his collection as a photo book with TBW Books. "That was a lesson for me: that I should pay attention to compulsions I have outside of art," he said. "That's where the best art comes from—these weird little obsessions."

One of his obsessions is creatures—as seen in *Crab lamp* (2024), a sculptural lamp he made using a crustacean shell he found on a Florida beach, set on top of a blue-and-white-striped Oxford shirt stretched over a wooden frame. A button doubles as the on-off switch. "I don't often buy art supplies," he said, noting that he started using shirts—a frequent motif—after finding one in an abandoned house, then saturating it in beeswax. "I like recontextualizing everyday things—stuff that's readily available and that might be overlooked."

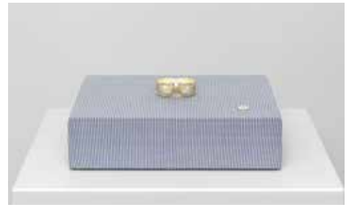
He approaches all that stuff with a careful kind of craftsmanship: *Butterfly tongue* (2024), a small slab of wood standing upright on a pedestal, features a corner slice curled over by a simple stroke of a knife.

Both those works featured in "Do Nothing Machine," a solo show this past spring at Bernheim Gallery in London. Prior to that was "World Beyond World," a group exhibition at New York's 1969 Gallery in which Oglander showed a series of glass jars filled with water, plants, and living organisms one might find in an aquarium: snails, scuds, daphnia, ostracods. In text that accompanied the exhibition, he offered instructions too: "I encourage all purchasers to engage with their jar(s), and to treat this engagement as an engagement with the self," Oglander wrote. "Welcome failure. Mimic nature. Have fun."

—Andy Battaglia

Photos Annik Wetter/Courtesy Bernheim Gallery, London (4)

Butterfly tongue, 2023.



Two views of *Crab lamp*, 2024.

STEPHANIE TEMMA HIER

Stephanie Temma Hier: *She used to want to be a paper swan*, 2024.

Born:
1992

Birthplace:
Toronto, Canada

Currently Based:
New York

Nature takes over in Surrealist-inspired sculptural still lifes.

Arguably, the anxiety of influence plagues painters more than it does other makers. Or at least they are the ones who complain about it most. This means that plenty of painters prove nerdy about art history, conversing with the dead through a hodgepodge of shared references or trying to find a clever way to break free of the baggage.

The best painters do a bit of both, as in work by next-gen star Stephanie Temma Hier. Her colorful still lifes are indebted to the Dutch, but go light on the drama. And they brim with Surrealist motifs: mollusks and crustaceans, rotary phones and Belgian endives. It often feels as if nature is taking over in her work: bringing the natural realm indoors, she gives us a kind of Art Nouveau for the Anthropocene. But this isn't decorative wallpaper, the stakes are high. Art Nouveau, after all, emerged as the nascent Industrial Revolution began to sever human connection to the environment. Hier's ceramic vegetables—vibrant but, with their glossy sheen, obviously dead—beg the question: is it too late for us to try and reconnect?

The artist likes that all these references—and existential questions—are part of the work, forming an evocative, absurdist swirl of attraction and repulsion, exuberance and ennui: "Rather than starting out with some thesis," she said, "the works reveal themselves to me over time." Hier, whose process tends toward the spontaneous, insists on ambiguity, warning that "when art has a distinct narrative, it feels like it could be propaganda." Paraphrasing some of the original Surrealists, she added: "in an absurd world, the only sane response is Surrealism," a principle as relevant now as then.

The painterly references are all there, loaded up; by fusing them with sculptural elements, Hier breaks free from their weight. To carve out her own vocabulary, she begins her paintings in a manner it is tempting to describe as backward, often starting with the frame, of all things. At first, she wanted her paintings to "jump off the wall." Soon, her frames began to dispense with the tyrannical form of the rectangle. In the rare case when you can find four flush corners at the edges of her works, they tend to come from frame-like structures comprising neatly arranged, intricately crafted replicas of natural forms: rows of strawberries, carrots, eggs, or teeth. Hier makes the familiar seem totally bizarre, in the hope that you might begin to question the ordinary things all around you—the status quo—and start to embrace, in her words, "the strangeness of life."

Hier adores her spacious studio in Bushwick, Brooklyn, where she works almost every day with a small dog named Daphne. "I'll just sit here for 10 hours and, like, sculpt snails, as if in a trance," she said. She builds almost everything by hand, with no molds. Over time, her ceramic forms have taken on more and more primacy. Last year, she bought a kiln bigger than her own body, and this has allowed nature to spill over even more emphatically into sculptural dimensions.

The work in Hier's solo show this past spring at Gallery Vacancy in Shanghai delved into the domestic realm: cheese graters, mops, and vintage TVs merged with animals and plants. In one piece, *Mornings at home with myself* (2024), rectangular paintings comprise the planes of a sculpted ceramic stove: one side depicts an eerie, pinkish snake, but the oven's vintage vibe makes it all feel nostalgic, even comforting. The oven isn't functional but, rather, fictional. As for the green ceramic fish that dispenses toilet paper in her studio bathroom? That's another story.

—*Emily Watlington*

View of the exhibition "CORRIDORS," 2024, at Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai.

Courtesy Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai (2)

Sweet songs don't last long, 2024.

Courtesy Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai (2)

Mornings at home with myself, 2024.

Born:
1979

Birthplace:
St. Andrew, Jamaica

Currently Based:
New York

SIMON BENJAMIN

The artist-surfer explores how Black people relate to the sea.

View of Simon Benjamin's exhibition "Native Diver," 2024, at Swivel Gallery, New York.

Of all the songs that played during my hours-long visit to Simon Benjamin's Brooklyn studio, "The West" by Althea and Donna echoed in my head the most – partly because it's catchy, and partly because its refrain ("the West is gonna perish") complements Benjamin's current question: "how productive is nationalism right now?"

Benjamin is a multidisciplinary artist driven by curiosity. Previously an avid surfer, he'd travel to coastal regions from Hawaii to Senegal to surf on tranquil waves. These experiences made him question why he was often the only Black person in the water. Soon, Benjamin devised a series of questions about the "complex relationship African diasporic people have with the sea." Centered around his native Jamaica, his artworks take shape in the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade and examine the brutal relationships Black people have with the ocean, global trade, and migration.

The St. Andrew–born geopolitics-minor-turned-artist has always been concerned with matters of international relations and national identity. Growing up in a family of national service sector employees – Benjamin's mother was a stewardess for Air Jamaica, and his father was in the Jamaica Defense Force – there was a "great sense of national pride" within his household, given that his parents were among the first generation to witness the island's transition from colony to independent nation. Benjamin credits family discussions around Jamaica's political history and MTV music videos as things that broadened his understanding of culture. Through his artworks spanning photography, film, installation, painting, and sculpture, Benjamin speaks to ecological devastation and political friction, honoring all that has fallen prey to the horrors of modernization. For *Barrel 1 – South Coast, Jamaica* (2024), Benjamin compiled cornmeal, sand, beach debris, and resin into a cylindrical form that considers deep time and the impact of colonialism on the landscape, as well as citizens' waning access to fresh fish and the island's coastlines.

Archival 19th-century photography is central to Benjamin's practice. Such images were tools of propaganda that romanticized the Caribbean as a utopia after decades of associating the region with savagery and malady. In his recent New York solo show, "Native Diver," at Swivel Gallery, Benjamin forgoes the sensationalism of a Caribbean fantasy by embracing neutral hues and minimal forms, eschewing lush pigments and dramatic compositions. *Native Diver* (2024), a black-and-white silkscreen painting, has a fold at the center that conceals the figure in the boat. Like *Barrel 1*, it expands the hallmarks of Caribbean aesthetics and encourages the multiplicity Édouard Glissant encourages in his 1990 book *Poetics of Relation*.

Altogether, Benjamin's artworks affirm a global interconnectedness that prevails beyond borders. In this year's Malta Biennale, he presented an interactive video installation, *Pillars* (2024), made with shipping barrels often used by immigrants to send goods back home. Bored into the barrels are apertures that act like portals: through them appear diorama-like video seascapes that migrants encounter in their journey toward safety. Like much of Benjamin's work, the piece highlights the ways our histories are bound by a single body of water. Now, all we must do is blur the lines that divide.

– Shameekia Shantel Johnson

Two views of the installation *Pillars*, 2024, at the Malta Biennale.

From top: Photo Cary Whittier/Courtesy Swivel Gallery, New York; Photos Julian Vassallo/Courtesy Malta Biennale (2)

AMANDA BA

Strong women and big dogs star in prismatic figurative paintings.

Born:
1998

Birthplace:
Columbus, Ohio

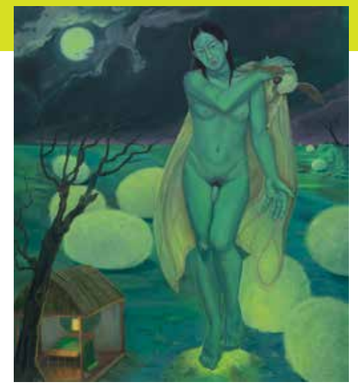
Currently Based:
New York

When I met Amanda Ba in her Bushwick studio this spring, she had just returned from a trip to China, where she spent a month filming for a 15+ minute video premiering in September at Jeffrey Deitch in New York. The film is part travelogue, part staged: her father narrates in voiceover how various scenes relate to Jean-François Lyotard's idea of a libidinal economy, describing how the concept has manifested in contemporary China.

Filmmaking is new to the artist, who turns 26 in September; so far, she has focused on painting. Strong female figures dominate her colorful canvases: they squat behind a big dog, an American Bully; or ride motorcycles and wrestle. The paintings, yes, thwart the racist stereotype that Asian women are meek and docile, but that's not a statement Ba is trying to make. "I'm not looking specifically at gender roles and racial stereotypes, but they're always present – probably because of who I am." She says she's "thinking about other things," like posthumanism, construction, or critical theory.

This past January, Ba curated a group exhibition at James Fuentes titled "Re: Representation" that featured work by Asian and queer artists from London and New York, including Dominique Fung, Sasha Gordon, and Catalina Ouyang. She wrote that the pieces "create work nearby – rather than about – the notions of Diaspora and Representation," borrowing the idea of "nearby" from filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Ba was born in Ohio, where her father emigrated from China to pursue postgraduate studies in economics. Her grandparents raised her in Hefei, China, until she was five, when she reunited with her parents in the United States. She remembers her grandpa teaching her how to draw a three-dimensional popsicle when she was three. After that, she "was pretty obsessed with wanting to master every medium. So I drew anime. I drew cartoons. I did watercolors, colored pencil, and acrylic landscape paintings like Bob Ross." Her obsession led her to Columbia University, where she double majored in visual arts and art history.



Amanda Ba: *Sericulture*, 2022.

After Covid interrupted her senior year, Ba made it a point to spend time in London, where she had studied abroad. In 2021 she got her first solo show, at the London gallery PM/AM. "Ninety-five percent of all my opportunities throughout my career have come from Instagram," Ba said, remarking that the platform makes for a dynamic portfolio that shows both your work and your personality.

An American Bully is present throughout her work, a reference to her obsession with the idea of posthumanism. She describes the spring 2024 collaboration she did with Chinese fashion label Sankuanz, which saw dogs on the runway, as the "theoretical agent." "We organize our world around us and we treat animals and other living beings with various levels of respect, depending on how sentient or how useful they are to us," she said.

Visiting her studio, I spotted a square canvas painted in red with faint outlines and asked about it. "I'm actually doing the vinyl album cover for that new Kristen Stewart lesbian movie, *Love Lies Bleeding*," she tells me. "It's going to be two women, wrestling kind of in the desert with a gun on the ground."

While Ba initially wanted her upcoming Deitch exhibition to be about eroticism, much of it deals with construction, a subject that fascinated her while visiting China, where she witnessed the cycle of demolition and rebuilding as old structures came down to make way for new ones. In one painting, a woman floats in the Huangpu River along Shanghai's skyscrapers; here, eroticism and construction meet in a surreal scenario. The giant naked woman, as big as the cityscape, lies in the body of water, displaying both her vulnerability and her power.

– Ann Binlot

American Western, 2022.

From top: Courtesy Jeffrey Deitch and Gagosian, New York; Courtesy PM/AM, New York

ROKSANA PIROUZMAND

Born:
1990

Birthplace:
Yazd, Iran

Currently Based:
Sherman Oaks, California

After a controversial performance, the Iranian artist pivoted to sculpture.

Growing up in the '90s in Yazd, Iran, Roksana Pirouzmand was surrounded by familial creativity. Her mother sewed all the family's clothes, and her grandmother, remembering songs from her youth, played them on the *daf*, a Persian drum often used in weddings. Pirouzmand adopted a similar proclivity for making things with her hands, though she entered high school intending to study science, before cajoling her parents into letting her attend art school instead.

After high school, Pirouzmand and several former classmates started an art collective; around 2008, they staged a series of public interventions scattered around the campus of the Yazd Art and Architecture University. For her piece, Pirouzmand stood in a pond, goggles covering her face, and attempted to paint a portrait underwater. It ended with the artist asking one of her teachers, who was in the audience, what he thought of this subaquatic art. He did not respond.

"After the first night, [the university] was like, 'sorry, you can't come back here,'" Pirouzmand recalls, sitting in her airy garage studio in Sherman Oaks, California, where she relocated in 2012 via a refugee program for religious minorities. She's never had another experience quite as risky and thrilling as that subaquatic public intervention. "Those performances, even though I was not sure what I was doing … that was so exciting," she says. This excitement has been a constant through line animating Pirouzmand's practice. Ranging from painted ceramics to sculpture in various metals, her works unfurl stories at once personal and intergenerational, by turns playful and sobering.

Pirouzmand, who is Zoroastrian, initially lived with her aunt in Valencia, California, after emigrating from Iran. There, she found herself drawn to the interdisciplinary ethos of nearby CalArts, and wound up pursuing her BFA there, honing her interest in performance but also exploring textiles and sculpture. In *Feel the Velvet* (2015), a work Pirouzmand made while still a student, she had participants enter a gallery space one by one, then put on an unwieldy gown encrusted with velvet stones. Every time someone wore the 50-pound dress, Pirouzmand sewed one more stone on it. "I was thinking about the labor of being an artist," she says. "By putting the weight on the audience … I was distributing this labor, in a way."

Around 2020, Pirouzmand began painting on clay slabs, because the Covid pandemic precluded having an audience. The paintings initially mapped out future performances, in physical and psychological realms. Soon, a series emerged entitled "I was praying at home while you were dying on the streets" (2022), which envisions figures lying on the ground as though meditating, their long hair being drawn toward a void. These works also nod toward civil unrest in Iran, as does her 2022 performance, *Tapping, Rocking, Remembering*, wherein Pirouzmand tugged on strands of hair that were attached – through a wall – to terra-cotta casts of her grandmother's fingers: the tugs caused the fingers to tap cacophonously.

Around that time, sculpture started to find its way into Pirouzmand's work, but the body remains decidedly present. One of her pieces in the latest edition of Made in L.A., *Until All Is Dissolved* (2023), is a ceramic cast of five headless figures stacked over one another in an attitude of submission. Water flowing down the piece drenched and deteriorated the figures throughout the show's run, their bodies cracking as their prayers seemed to give way to begging.

– Paula Mejía

View of Roksana Pirouzmand's performance *Feel the Velvet*, 2015, at D300 gallery at the California Institute of the Arts, Santa Clarita.

From top: Photo Miguel Ayala; Courtesy the artist (5)

From top: Photo Joshua White; Courtesy the artist (6)

Until All Is Dissolved, 2023, in Made in L.A.

Nine ceramic panels from the series "Things That Can Happen in a Room," 2020.

Birthplace:
Zimbabwe

Currently Based:
Manchester, England

MANDLA

The artist as self-professed liar.

We spent a day together in Manchester. The cloudy sky threatened rain as we walked throughout the postindustrial city, discussing mandla's multidisciplinary practice, the collaborative energy of the local queer arts community, the potential of museums, and the realities of citizenship … or lack thereof. Mandla was born in Zimbabwe and now lives in the UK—a seemingly unending journey across continents, histories, and legalities that have shaped the infinitely complex and visceral storyteller who walked beside me. I found myself compelled to ask, "so, Manchester is home? It's good here?" which mandla eagerly affirmed with "good for now." Over coffee, we discussed mandla's expansive practice, which includes poetry, scriptwriting, songwriting, and stage performance, all intertwined and individually profound.

Language has always been a preoccupation for the artist: mandla received a degree in English literature and creative writing from the University of Westminster, and has been writing since adolescence. She speaks multiple languages, including English and sleight of hand. Speaking English is more than simply learning grammatical rules and extensive vocabularies, it's also body language and lilt. I cannot simply say, "I'm British" in my clunky American accent and be believed. I must perform British. For those who navigate the world between countries, cultures, and genders, there is an intimate understanding that performance is a critical survival skill, and mandla has mastered it. Hence, we must make room for lapses in truth and slippages of language … we all have the potential to be liars when confronting the whole of our past.

It was at the Manchester Art Gallery that we began discussing *as british as a watermelon* (2019), mandla's breakout work of autofiction written for the stage and now translated to video. In this piece, shown in the 2023 Sharjah Biennial and at the Julia Stoschek Foundation, mandla demonstrates mastery of sleight of hand. The short film features the artist narrating their life, or perhaps the life of someone else, to an unseen audience. Mandla moves within a minimalist set designed to suggest the walls of a little house, or perhaps the holding cell of a prison. Watermelons litter the floor haphazardly, sometimes comically rolling along, or cradled in mandla's arms like a baby. Dressed in an apron covered in watermelon wedges, mandla drags a knife along healed scars and asks us to bear our own.

"My memory is a long-lost appetite that's watching, day by day, as fruit turns to mold," mandla says in the 30-minute video.

Do you know the origins of the watermelon? How the fruit came to the UK, to the wider Western world? Can we trust mandla to tell us how mandla came to the UK, or even how mandla came to mandla? The narrator expresses their control by breaking the walls of performance to reveal what they want revealed, and to hide what needs to remain hidden. *As british as a watermelon* is a guttural retelling of the personal experiences of a queer immigrant child from the perspective of an adult who is figuring out how to heal. Perhaps it is a beautifully crafted narrative about faulty memory, and the inability to hold on to a singular truth. Personally, I believe the performance is about the death of a young girl named Bridget and a being called mandla who protects Bridget's memory and plays games with her spirit.

—TK Smith

Two views of mandla's performance *as british as a watermelon*, 2022, at Bristol Old Vic Mayfest.

as british as a watermelon, 2022.

From top: Photos Paul Blakemore (2); Photo Benjamin Liddell

PEDRO ZYLBERSZTAJN

Pedro Zylbersztajn: *Three Digestions*, 2023.

Videos and performances distill the feeling of information overload.

"Language is the bottom line of all my work," Pedro Zylbersztajn told me over Zoom this spring, "and also the beginning of it." From such a linguistic genesis, critical expressions have emerged in modes as varied as drawing, video, installation, and performance, but Zylbersztajn had been grappling with language and the way it moves through the world—as knowledge, as information, as rhetoric—for years before he took up art making.

Born in São Paulo in 1993, Zylbersztajn studied graphic design and printmaking before working in art publishing, which amplified his interest in discursive networks as a locus of creative potential. In 2016 he enrolled in the MIT graduate program in Art, Culture, and Technology, which he found a paradigm-shifting experience. There, Zylbersztajn learned to consider how "the materiality and discursivity" of his practice could "feed off each other," he told me. Instead of working within circumscribed forms and familiar processes to produce objects, like publishing books or prints, he began to consider the very motions of *doing*, thinking through actions—like circulation, collection, and consumption—as well as the forms that these verbs produce.

While a student, Zylbersztajn began to experiment with performance, which, by 2019, became central to his practice. That year, he staged *Waiting Room* at Galerie Art & Essai, in France. For the installation-performance hybrid, guests were directed to the exhibition space, a waiting room replica, by ushers who never returned to collect them, producing the banal anxiety of liminal, unstructured time. Zylbersztajn became interested in the ways we are pushed to "perform everydayness"—in this case, to behave as one would while waiting. As he puts it, "everything we do is a small gesture that is confined by a certain set of protocols that order our quotidian [experiences]." By thinking through the disciplinary norms of our social and physical environments, his work asks, "how does a gestural shift in performance change absolutely everything?"

These everyday gestures are the focus of Zylbersztajn's recent three-channel video *Three Digestions* (2023), completed during his residency last year in Switzerland at Kulturhaus Villa Sträuli. A central screen plays looped footage from an endoscopy, a camera tunneling through pixelated innards. Flanking the display are two other screens, each running a video that echoes the first screen's action, but meandering through institutional collections in lieu of human viscera. One side shows the stacks of a national public library, the other, an ethnographic museum.

The impossible speed at which we are compelled to "digest" words and images is also the subject of his video *Yesterday's song for afterwards* (2022), in which lines of text and brief, flashing images simulate a kind of quotidian, metabolic unconscious. This piece feels especially perceptive at a time when the inundation of image and text defines everyday life, even as access to such mediated stimuli is regulated by profit mechanisms beyond our control. By reminding us that what we consume through perceptual encounters is shaped by—and in turn, can shape—the protocols that define language and history, Zylbersztajn's work asks us to confront the processes that determine our experience of reality.

—Phoebe Chen

Born:
1993

Birthplace:
São Paulo, Brazil

Currently Based:
São Paulo, Brazil

Courtesy the artist (3); Bottom: Photo dotgain

Waiting Room, 2019.

Birthplace:
Los Angeles

Currently Based:
Los Angeles and Syracuse, New York

JESSICA MAGALLANES MARTINEZ

A photographer captures LA's evolving cityscape.

Growing up in Los Angeles without a car, Jessica Magallanes Martinez spent a lot of time on the bus, especially on her four-hour commute from her home in South Central to Notre Dame Academy, an all-girls Catholic high school in Culver City. "That was the beginning of shaping all the observing," she said. "The bus becomes this intimate, temporary space where you see the same people over and over. You build almost parasocial relationships. It presents the world in a different way."

Another formative experience was an art history class in which she first saw photography presented as "art" in the form of images by Nan Goldin and Larry Clark. "It blew my mind," she said. "I realized that there was a word for what I had always been doing, that there was a way to physically lock in the way I was framing and noticing moments."

Pictures she took on bus travels between home and school got her into Syracuse University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in photography before moving on to an MFA at Columbia University. While photography remains the core of her practice, Magallanes Martinez has also ventured into performance, video, and, more recently, installation.

Her observational roots and the repetition of photographing familiar places continue to inform Magallanes Martinez's image-making today. "A big part of my work is time as a character," she said, noting that she prefers shooting with a medium-format camera, in harsh afternoon light. "I'm interested in the sun as a character, the way it erodes and erases layers of history. The sun is something that illuminates but is also destructive."

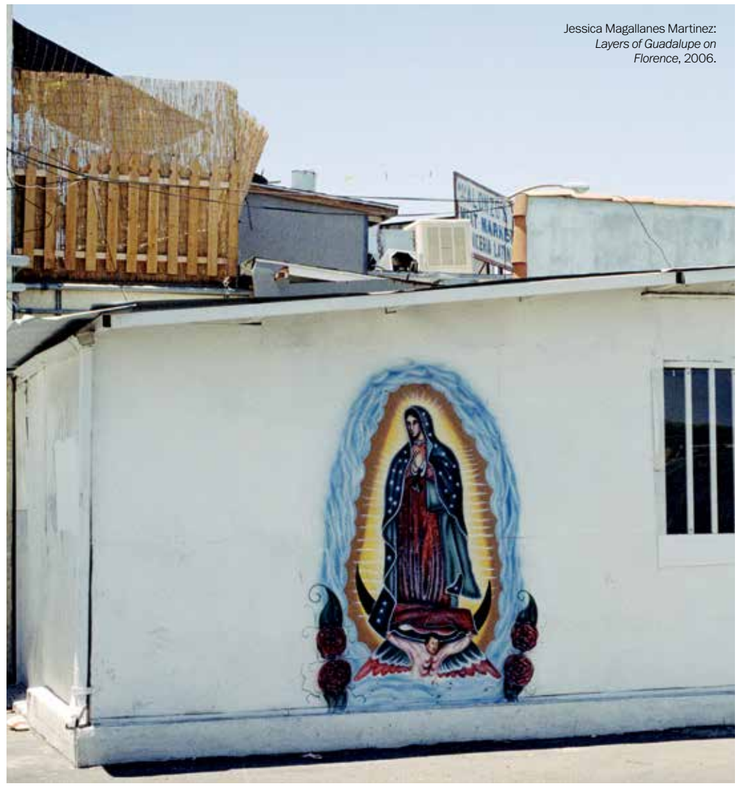
Another point of interest is the Virgen de Guadalupe, which—with its loaded histories across Catholicism, the Chicano civil rights movement, and feminist critique—has long been a subject of Magallanes Martinez's pictures. She ascribes her relationship with that imagery to a personal connection with the death of a young man who was shot in a gang initiation as he was leaving her neighbor's house next door. The bullet that hit him was only feet from Magallanes Martinez's bed.

She began photographing his death shrine with her own form of photographic religiosity, and then turned to shooting other death shrines nearby; she continues this zealous recording whenever she returns to LA. "It opened my eyes to things that I had always grown up with," she said, adding that it made her think about "what had happened to my neighborhood to create an environment like that."

Last year, Magallanes Martinez began a new series in which she and others step into the roles of the Virgen de Guadalupe and San Juan Diego, to whom the Virgen appeared. Blurring the line between representation and abstraction, the new pictures—which she produces as cyanotypes on large swaths of fabric—are what she calls "sacred honorific images of my body" that aim to show that "my body should be valued."

She added, in relationship to her teaching at her alma mater, Syracuse, "I think about what I ask my students to do: imagine the worlds that they want to exist and try rendering that. I am trying to do that myself too."

—Maximiliano Durón



Jessica Magallanes Martinez: *Layers of Guadalupe on Florence*, 2006.

Courtesy the artist

How It Hurts, 2018.

Courtesy the artist (2)

View of the installation "On Their Way," 2021, at Light Work, New York.

Rachel Jones: *SMIIIILLLLEEEE*, 2021.

RACHEL JONES

Born:
1991

Birthplace:
London

Currently Based:
London

An abstract painter embraces the unknown.

"I think we often want things to be resolved so that we can understand them," Rachel Jones told me from her studio in London. "And it's like, well, sometimes you can understand things in a *more complicated* way." Jones's work has always grappled with liminality: between painting and drawing, abstraction and figuration, the past and the present. She has been working as a painter for more than a decade now, after studying at the Glasgow School of Art and getting her master's at the Royal Academy Schools in London in 2019. As she moves into a new stage in her practice, she has become even more comfortable working in unresolved—and perhaps unresolvable—ways.

Last fall, Jones cowrote and produced *Hey, Maudie*, an opera performed at St James's Piccadilly in London that represented a completely new direction in her work. She described the process of making it as like "leaping off a cliff." When she returned to painting after, Jones found herself approaching her original medium with a new freedom, an openness to new possibilities. "I think that boldness is a direct link to the experience I had of making the opera—knowing what it is to take steps into the unknown, but having faith in the inherent desire I have to express myself in a multitude of ways," she said.

A new body of work made for "!!!!!," her first solo exhibition in the United States, at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco (through September 1), marks the first time Jones has painted on linen rather than canvas. The works still have her signature vibrant color fields made with strong, textured strokes of oil pastel, but for the first time they incorporate significant areas of bare, untouched negative space that bring the texture of the linen support into the composition. "With the linen, I felt like there was already quite a lot happening in the weave and natural dye," Jones said. That material became a sort of color field in and of itself, rather than a blank space that needed to be filled.

Jones has long been fascinated by mouths and teeth, using them as a central motif in her works from the 2010s to the present, and often referencing them in the titles of works and exhibitions (including *lick your teeth, they so clutch* and *SMIIILLLLEEEE*, both 2021, and the 2020 diptych, *A Sliced Tooth*). Her mouths do not smile: they speak instead to the long and complex history of the representation of Blackness in art and the many ways we use our mouths to convey meaning.

Language is central to the way Jones thinks and works, despite her paintings' seeming lack of narrative. She says she gets most of her inspiration from reading rather than looking at other things, and she hopes to find more outlets for her writing practice going forward. Jones's visceral articulation of purpose helps explain the palpable sense of depth in her paintings. She is fascinated by the challenge of communicating multiple truths at once, constantly navigating the duality between the real and the imagined.

—*Eliza Goodpasture*

View of the exhibition "!!!!!," 2024, at the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco.

From top: Photo Eva Herzog; Photo John Wilson White/Studio Phocassco/Courtesy Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco

Born:
1982

Birthplace:
Guizhou Province, China

Currently Based:
Hainan Province, China

SONG LU

Using photography and AI, a Chinese artist renders the everyday uncanny.

Song Lu: *Tomato*, from the series "Still Life," 2018.

Courtesy the artist (3)

A red and ripe tomato wedges tightly between the door and the doorjamb, illuminated by a light source from the right. A perfectly round onion sits atop layers of pamphlets in a vaulted safe, its skin just beginning to unravel, a spotlight shining from above. These are some of the scenes in Song Lu's 2018 photographic series, "Still Life," depicting common food items in her home studio. They are oddly satisfying, framing the mundane as an aesthetic experience. She treats each object with a delicateness and curiosity rarely granted things so ordinary and ubiquitous, suggesting they contain more drama and character than we may think. What secrets might an onion hold?

Lu describes her attentiveness by referring to the way that "minute moments imprint on my retina, evoking a peculiar chemical reaction, compelling me to pay attention to these experiences." This sensitivity is visible in her works, where viewers are invited to lean into the poetics of seemingly ordinary objects.

Indeed, Lu's superpower seems to lie in noticing the distance between the mere appearance of things and their infinite, imaginative possibilities. In her 11-minute 2021 animation, *Elephants Never Forget*, Lu widens this distance as she reflects on her relationship with New York City through the device of a memory palace. Each marked by its own color, scenes alternate between majestic views of the city's skyscrapers at sunrise and nightfall, joined by abstracted objects and signs of personal significance to the artist. We see a giant poppy seed bagel roll past a view of a partially submerged Manhattan, and Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* on display at MoMA, its wheel spinning and spinning. A silhouette shows Lady Liberty standing above a bathtub as it slowly overflows. These objects are emblematic of the city, yet in Lu's quirky and unlikely scenarios, seem to portray something else.

Lu moved to New York to complete her studies at the School of Visual Arts just before the pandemic, and spent a significant length of her time in the city in lockdown. Perhaps owing to this, Lu's New York, though glittering in the sun, exudes an intensified sense of loneliness and isolation that one so often finds in big cities. As she takes us on a walk along the memory palace she has built, she invites us to view it as she did—in a time of stillness, strangeness, and longing for more.

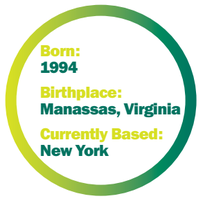
Over a series of emails, Lu shared with me that in 2022, she began experimenting with AI. At first, she wanted to visualize assumptions and imaginings that are often elusive and hard to grasp. In creating her "Snow Drawing" series, Lu found that when she prompted the AI program to generate an image of an artist, it tended to picture an older white man, revealing an inherent bias that our machines learned from us. She soon became interested in how neural network models average out large sets of data, and started incorporating this into her work, which has so often focused on her individual emotions and experiences. She continues to focus on making the abstract tangible and the distant intimate, now training her focus on the elusive beast that is artificial intelligence.

—*Clara Che Wei Peh*

Working Women 30, from the series "Working Women," 2023–.

Print insert: Song Lu enlisted AI to generate a limited-edition pull-out print, titled *Working Women 01* (2024), for this issue.

TREY ABDELLA



Born:
1994

Birthplace:
Manassas, Virginia

Currently Based:
New York

A new kind of bad-boy artist.

In Trey Abdella's gargantuan paintings, the American Dream is alive and well – or at least hooked up to some kind of terrible machine invented in a moment of desperation, keeping the blood pumping if only by a technicality. His beautiful blond figures have bright-blue eyes, but no warmth; their grayish skin looks corpse-like.

Abdella grew up in West Virginia, surrounded by poverty and people who would eventually vote to "Make America Great Again." He wound up in New York in 2013 after following a former girlfriend who had stood out in their art department at West Virginia University for her unusual ambition. In the city, Abdella transferred to the School of Visual Arts and majored in illustration; the way his pictures tell stories – often, they veer past the illustrative toward the cinematic – betrays this background.

But every point has a counterpoint in Abdella's work, a clear sign of his contrarian impulse. In every vision of blissful Americana, a dark side bubbles to the surface, so that no painting is ever just an illustration. Instead, each scene – a stressed blonde at Christmas, some men gone fishin', a jack-o'-lantern so menacing that one worries about the woman in the painting who carved it – gets either ripped open or patched over via some kind of sculptural intervention. *Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds* (2022) is an 8-foot-tall painting of cherry pie, with a glistening twinkle courtesy of a 3D hologram fan. This moment of magic is so spectacularly fake, and so uninterested in being a convincing illusion, that you'd be a fool to be seduced by the sheen.

The work can be described as so 1950s (Norman Rockwell paintings and Sears catalogs both provide source imagery); so 1980s (for its loudness and size, and a bad-boy energy that, impressively, does not reek of privilege); and so 1990s (for its indebtedness to David Lynch, as well as to Abdella's own childhood). All this speaks to the way his subject, American decline, feels both timeless and timely.

Trey Abdella: *Under the Skin*, 2023.

Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds, 2022.

For his breakout two-venue gallery show in New York this past fall – titled "Under the Skin," at David Lewis and Vito Schnabel – Abdella focused on paintings that look like advertisements, only dirty. Their surfaces are rough, not shiny. The star of the show was an enormous sculpture that visualized the exhibition's title rather literally: a 10-foot-tall depiction of skin in cross-section that resembles a slice of cake with layers of veins, hair follicles, and red blood cells. A bottom layer gives way to dirt brimming with burrowing bunnies in the form of holograms, animatronics, and a Pez dispenser. In the center of it all, a motorized train does laps on a track. The crowning touch is a giant mosquito with a lava lamp on its thorax; the whole thing is made of a bunch of dumb American junk.

Abdella's studio in the Carroll Gardens neighborhood of Brooklyn is full of such stuff, like a plastic dollhouse and a fake deer that hunters use for shooting practice ("I grew up with deer carcasses all over my house," he explained). In describing the way he begins paintings with a plan but then "falls down rabbit holes" – like the time he spent hours on YouTube and in an aquarium store to figure out how to get a painting, *Sealed with a Kiss* (2023), to pump blood – Abdella revealed himself as a true iconoclast. He seems to find catharsis in taking images of America and then fucking them up. Or, better yet, setting them straight.

– Emily Watlington

Photos Shark Senesac/Courtesy David Lewis Gallery and Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York (2)

HAENA YOO

Born:
1990

Birthplace:
Seoul, South Korea

Currently Based:
Seoul and Los Angeles

A Korean artist concocts strange new brews.

From top: Courtesy the artist; Photo Josh Schaedel/Courtesy Murmurs, Los Angeles; Photo Michael Popp/Courtesy Bibeau Krueger, New York

Haena Yoo: *The Milky Way Table*, 2021.

Haena Yoo's studio is located on the outskirts of greater Seoul, in one of the so-called Knowledge Industry Centers developed during an investment boom in the pandemic years. While there are hundreds of these high-rise office-factory complexes still under construction across South Korea, those that are already completed exist almost like ghost buildings, sparsely populated and far from the real estate havens they were conceived to be. It is there, in a limbo of liquid capital, that Haena Yoo established a transitory home for sculptures that often look like science experiments and resist efforts to contain them in fixed forms. "It's very unsettling," she said of her work, "and that's a kind of extreme emotion – discomfort – that I like."

In the studio this past spring, Yoo was amassing cartons of gelatin, a material often used as a food preservative and a base for cosmetic products. Laid out on the floor were sealed vacuum packs containing mundane objects being tested for durability in different kinds of conservation. Nearby were yoga mats with photographic images printed on them, mass-produced foam rollers that resembled slick Brancusian figures, and metal objects cast in the shape of massage and relaxation tools. There were shelves full of glass bottles filled with organic matter, including bricks of *meju* (fermented soybeans) and gold-painted ginseng laid out in a line on a cart with electric hot plates used for boiling. They were reminiscent of vessels filled with herbs for "wellness" or liquor that one might see in an Asian grandma's living room, evoking a strange mix of traditional healing methods and tools for self-care.

After splitting her time between Seoul and Los Angeles for years, Yoo settled in Korea around the beginning of the pandemic to stay with her mother, who was battling cancer, and later died. Left with an excess of medications and supplements, the artist decided to liquidate, circulate, and incorporate them into her work. "I wanted to create a cure-all for diseases amidst the pandemic," she said of creations that draw on processes like cultivation and fermentation. One such work, *Milky Way Table* (2021), lived through the run of her exhibition titled "The Oriental Sauce Factory" at Murmurs gallery in LA, with the "sauce" comprising things like soybeans fermenting in an acrylic-encased pool filled with pills and health supplements from American drugstores as well as East Asian natural products.

Recent works have taken the form of blown glass orbs, such as *I was the placebo* (2023), which contains organic materials like turkey tail mushrooms and *hwanggi* (a medicinal root) soaked in liquid, trapped again between the forces of preservation and decay. That work was featured in a show last year at New York's Bibeau Krueger gallery titled "Severance," after the hospital that Yoo's mother stayed in before her death.

"We've talked a lot about failure," Yoo said during our correspondence, after we talked about her plans to split time once again between Seoul and LA. "I want to convey systemic/socio-structural failure through my work. I want to take such failures as a given reality and reflect them." By short-circuiting systems of containment and fixed states, Yoo's work generates tension that can awaken us to get real about illusions of art's comfortable neutrality in a time of unbridled crisis.

– Jaeyong Park

Immortelle Divine, 2023.

I was the placebo, 2023.

Born:
1994
Birthplace:
Le Havre, France
Currently Based:
Paris

MARIE HAZARD

A French weaver loses herself in cross hatches and spirals.

Marie Hazard:
In the sky, the dust, Under the city, the red lake, Land of stones, in the winter light, Your face, sign of an unexpected spring, 2024.

Photo Gerardo Landa Studio/Courtesy Gallery Mascota, Mexico; Opposite: Courtesy Tristan Hoare, London

To communicate beyond the word, beyond "the disastrously explicit medium of language," per James Baldwin: This is Marie Hazard's obsession.

Hazard is a weaver, and we converse well. Yet words are hard for her. She is dyslexic. She wishes she could write. Writing, she says, is "difficult to next to impossible" for her. But recall: "text" came into French from the Medieval Latin *texere*, meaning "to weave." In earlier Latin, *textus* meant "a woven thing."

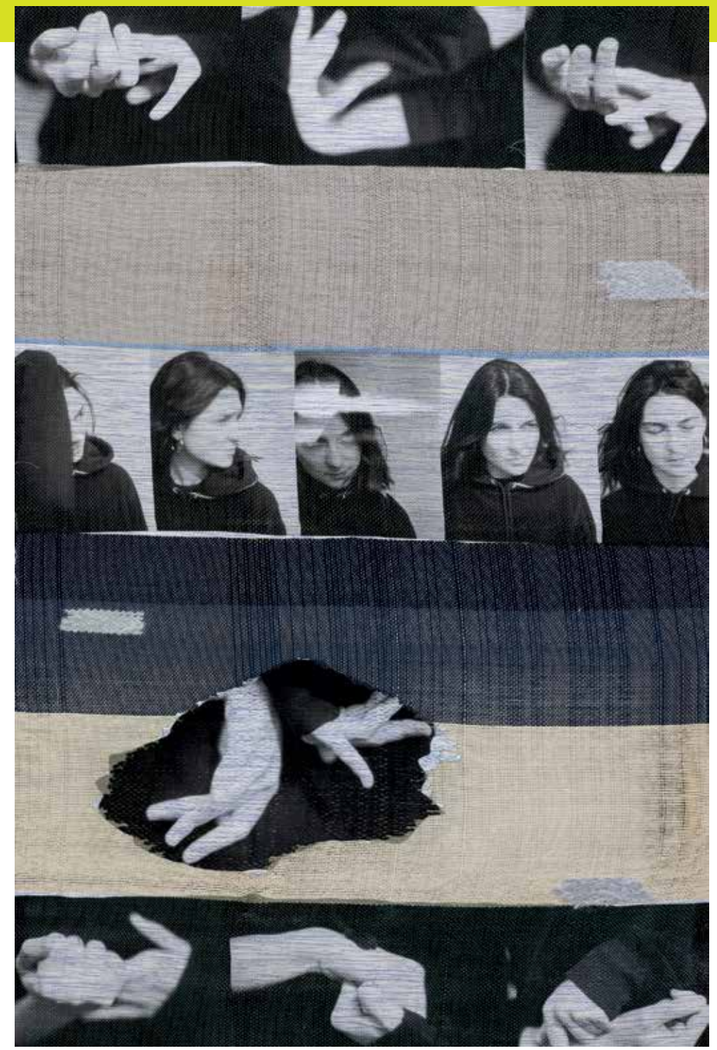
Hazard was born in Le Havre, a city for which she bears little nostalgia. "I had a complicated childhood and questioned myself a lot," she tells me in her Parisian studio. "My greatest desire was to acquire my freedom, my independence." And so, she developed her voice in a suite of elsewheres: London (where she learned to weave at Central Saint Martins), then São Paulo, New York, and Mexico City. She read a lot: "an inexhaustible source." We talk much of Marguerite Duras and of Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, which took a central role in her breakthrough exhibition, in 2021, at Galerie Mitterrand in Paris.

This is how Hazard works: first, she draws. She leans toward spirals, jagged forms, and splashes of color that are part Mark Rothko, part Jacques Demy. Then she weaves from this drawn plan. She listens to music or perhaps a podcast while working at the loom. "It's all about listening. How my body moves. I tell stories. I think weaving is my own language, an action to transcribe my thoughts, my stories, my messages." Her colors are spring-fresh, but can lean broody, play-around. Sometimes, she prints photographs—Brazilian street scenes, a Lakers jersey, selfies—upon her woven texts. Perhaps it's a way to stretch time, to delay the oblivion of forgetting.

In early cinema, the process of editing one shot next to another to create the third meaning was dubbed not *montage*, but *conversation*. And Hazard, who was touched early by weavers like Sheila Hicks but is currently more animated by books and music and movies, always uses her pieces to converse. She tells me about a special motif in her work: the spiral. Paris, which I get the sense has never quite felt like home for her, is built around the concept of the spiral. As she puts it in an interview in her debut monograph, put out by Zolo Press in 2022: "I began working with spirals because I was feeling like one. I was really asking myself: Where should I place myself? … I feel much better not being in the center. The edge gives me a certain clarity." The whole point, as I take it, is for the artist to get lost in her own work. The self gets effaced and re-created in so many cross hatches, small threads, and hypnotic patterns.

Hazard is not unaware of the sudden institutional interest in the practice of weaving, historically dismissed. The Met just staged a comprehensive exhibition putting 20th-century weavers (Anni Albers, Lenore Tawney, Olga de Amaral) together with ancient Andean artists spanning the first millennium BCE to the 16th century. Tate and MoMA PS1 have mounted retrospectives of Albers and the fourth-generation Navajo weaver Melissa Cody, respectively. As Hazard slyly notes, "weaving is taking off." It is a loud moment. Both in its creation and its reception, the craft inspires introspection, in an age where that's in short supply. There is a hushed force to her works. You don't consciously feel them working on you when you first encounter them, but afterward, on the subway or in the park, there they are, unfolding in front of you. Like a photograph you can hold.

—Carlos Valladares



Self portrait 2024, my hands, my faces, 2024.

DAVID-JEREMIAH

Born:
1985

Birthplace:
Oak Cliff, Texas

Currently Based:
Dallas, Texas

A conceptualist considers Black masculinity by way of Lamborghinis.

David Jeremiah: *I Drive Thee*, 2022 (above), and *Hamborghini Rally (white; '91 András)*, 2021 (below).

***Hood Niggas Camping*, a set of 28** paintings from 2020 inspired by Lamborghini sports cars, bears a trait characteristic of David-Jeremiah: a maximalist impulse that produces works of significant scale and densely layered content. Lamborghini references run through many of his works, and the ideal installation of *Hood Niggas Camping*, the artist said, is "in a massive circle, comprised of larger-than-life, Stonehenge-esque pedestals that act as freestanding chunks on a white cube wall."

His vision for the work is to evoke what he describes as "peak Texas hot." He continued: "Have you ever looked at a fellow camper from across a campfire? The fire tricks you into believing that the best way to see the person in front of you is from its perspective. From this vantage point, you are the flame. You're not *on* fire—you *are* fire. A fire to keep some hood niggas who decided to go camping warm."

Since his first solo exhibition in 2020, David-Jeremiah has been a persistent phenom on the Texas art scene. His urgency and methodical studio practice emerged from a period of self-evaluation after spending nearly four years in prison for aggravated robbery committed when he was a teenager. While in prison, he conceived ideas for several series of works. *Hood Niggas Camping* was one of them. Another was a collection of paintings based on Lamborghini steering wheels.

Titled *I Drive Thee* (2021–23), the series—on view at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, through January—explores how some Lamborghinis are named after bulls that end up killing matadors. One example is the Lamborghini Miura, alluding to a breed of Spanish bulls that are large, fierce, and cunning. For David-Jeremiah, this description echoes the way the Black male body is often viewed as a site of masculinity, violence, and potential.

In another group of works, the "Acronym Paintings," David-Jeremiah recognizes a duality between his pursuit of art in its purest forms and the realities of being a Black man in America. The acronyms "I.A.H.Y.F.F.A.W.D." and "N.F.D.B.J.W.B.D." represent indecipherable words of hate spoken aloud by the artist. Others represent internal dialogue imagined between a bull and a matador. "The original acronyms shrouded this sentiment from a certain type of Black person towards white people, but they're limited by the fact that it's just [a conversation between men]," he said. "I created a bull's version of the acronyms, which elevates the conversation."

David-Jeremiah has also worked in other forms. *I Heart Micah* (2019–23) is a video in which he puts bumper stickers on police cruisers that reference Micah Xavier Johnson, who killed five police officers in Dallas in 2016. The stickers are part of a fantasy narrative in which the police are grateful that their fellow officers were killed and reform their impulse to kill Black people. For *The Lookout* (2019), he staged a performance during which he lived in a cinder-block cell for three weeks.

Such works can be jarring and unsettling. There is no respite in David-Jeremiah's oeuvre, just intensity and lots of awe, humor, shock, and dread. "I like being in control of how the practice evolves in and outside of ways I haven't been able to," he said. "Everything you push from yourself is beyond you. It's righteous to leave a better version of yourself behind to keep the you you aren't anymore company—just as it's divine to send a better version of yourself forward to give hope to the you you aren't yet."

—*Christopher Blay*

From top: Courtesy the artist; Photo Thomas R. DuBrock/Courtesy Houston Museum of African American Culture

TYRELL TAPAHA

Born:
2001

Birthplace:
Goat Springs, Arizona

Currently Based:
Four Corners

Tyrell Tapaha: *Better Don't I*, 2023.

A Diné artist departs from traditional Navajo weaving.

From top: Courtesy the artist; Photo Jason Mandella

Sonny Boi Summer, 2023.

Tyrell Tapaha lives in the Four Corners region of the American Southwest, raising sheep for wool to dye, spin, and weave. But he likes to play with what is signified by notions of the typical Navajo weaver. His work stood out in "Young Elder," a group show last year at James Fuentes gallery in New York, for its woven textual provocations bearing messages like FUCK and KKKOLONIZATION. And when I spoke to the Diné artist in March, he was preparing a pointedly atypical figurative piece on a self-made floor loom in his kitchen. "[Traditional Navajo weavers] will lose it if you weave a triangle, let alone a man," he said. "My work gives me leeway to poke fun at Navajo textiles and traditional motifs."

Transgressive yet still informed by tradition and the resource-rich agrarian Southwest, Tapaha hand-dyes and hand-spins Churro sheep wool to use in his work. Contrasting the nearly cubist silhouettes of historical pictorial weaving, his renderings of *shimá sání* (grandmothers) and ovine themes are less abstract, constructed with emoji-level realism and detail. "Navajo designs were once pop," Tapaha said, alluding to the Industrial Revolution's standardizing impact on Navajo weaving styles. Demand for weavings across America in the late 1800s reduced the complex figures and symbols representing the mise-en-scène of Navajo life, going back hundreds of years, to simpler motifs produced at scale by companies like Pendleton.

On top of that, much pop Navajo weaving is kept in museum archives, uncredited and unincorporated into public perceptions of a rich tradition. Tapaha, for his part, flips the switch on dimly lit views of his textile progenitors. Proudly queer, he draws inspiration from such contemporary sources as the app Grindr: some of his pieces percussively juxtapose his heritage with exchanges of gay social dynamics, deploying pictorial figures and irreverent phraseology like *BUTT STUFF* and *ALL THAT FOR A BOY? TRUEEEEE…*

Tapaha's colorful form-bending style also echoes that of Jean-Michel Basquiat, pairing figures and sociopolitical text with vibrant tones in a way that evokes the artistic output of an imagined downtown Manahatta. His path has also led to projects working with the textile collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History, both in New York, and those led to different kinds of involvement and consultation on the 2023 exhibitions "Shaped by the Loom: Weaving Worlds in the American Southwest" at the Bard Graduate Center in Upstate New York and "Horizons: Weaving Between the Lines with Diné Textiles" at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture in Santa Fe.

"There's interest now in traditional methods, oral histories, and why we made things this way," he said, while expressing a mix of optimism and, in classic Native realist tradition, skepticism about the glare of "ethnic spotlight." With new opportunities far from home, Tapaha faces the prospect of staring down a sort of Indigenous Hydra: to stay or to leave the reservation. The former focuses on man and nature (namely Navajos and Churro sheep); the latter, an ontological turn from Diné materiality toward Western enlightenment's supercilious man-versus-nature divide. Both present a crisis of conscience.

For now, Tapaha balances demand and production based in the Four Corners with escapades in New York for shows and archival work, uplifting thousands of anonymous weavings as his muses while putting his own spin on the unadulterated origin story of his artform.

—*Petala Ironcloud*

SELMA SELMAN

Selma Selman: *Crossing the Blue Bridge*, 2024.

A Romani artist mines scrap metal from her family's body shop.

Ophelia's Awakening, 2024.

Born:
1991

Birthplace:
Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Currently Based:
Amsterdam; New York; Washington, D.C.; Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina

"When people ask what I do with my art practice—am I a painter? a performance artist?—the best explanation is that I'm a transformer," Selma Selman said when asked to describe her work. Indeed, the 33-year-old's practice spans painting, performance, installation, and film, but central to everything is the act of transformation: of materials, social constructs, cultural signifiers, and, most often, combinations thereof.

Born in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of Romani origin, Selman currently divides her time between her hometown and Amsterdam, New York, and Washington, D.C. Her biography being integral to her work, family histories feature heavily, along with the involvement of family members in her performances. Many of her works, for example, feature scrap metal: her family owns a scrapyard, and she grew up collecting and selling scrap metal with her father and brothers. Recently, she spent two years working out a nontoxic method to extract gold from motherboards; then, in a series of performances titled *Motherboards* (2023–ongoing), she invited her brothers and father to help her perform the process in front of an audience. After one such performance in Hamburg, she had enough of the precious material to make *Motherboards (A Golden Nail)*, 2023, a gold-covered nail hammered into a wall.

While her work is rooted in the personal, the strength of Selman's art owes as much to its treatment and subversion of recognizable symbols. "I wouldn't use the word 'universal,' but [the works] become planetary," she said. "They could be understood—connected—by many other people." In Selman's world, luxury cars become scrap metal. Electronic waste becomes gold. Stigmatized labor becomes prestigious.

In a solo exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt that runs through September 15, Selman is showing, among other works, her newest film, *Crossing the Blue Bridge* (2024), which frames a site-specific performance centered on her mother's memories of the Bosnian War. Works from a series of drawings titled "Superpositional Intersectionalism" (2023), meanwhile, were shown in a 2023 exhibition at Berlin's Gropius Bau and in another earlier this year at Röda Sten Konsthall in Gothenburg, Sweden. One drawing in the series, *Ophelia's awakening*, shares a title with a painting covering an entire Lotus car she completed earlier this year, with both pieces exploring a kinship with Shakespeare's classic. "I feel a connection to Ophelia being forced to marry someone," Selman said. "My father wanted me to marry someone, but I managed [to escape that]. I'm missing the point of Ophelia taking life into her own hands, so I'm trying to rewrite it—she's a great symbol that can be reused for the resistance."

Addressing intersectional oppressions faced by peoples around the world, Selman's work resonates in many different contexts, with pointed transformations at its core. Much like the precision needed to dismantle a car into valuable sections of scrap metal, Selman makes it clear that nothing in her work is incidental or accidental: "If I have something to say, I'm going to say it," she said. "If I don't, I shut the fuck up. I don't waste my words."

—*Emily McDermott*

View of the performance *Motherboards*, 2023, at Gropius Bau, Berlin.

From top: Courtesy the artist; Photo Dávid Tóth; Photo Elke Walkenhorst

ALIX VERNET

A sculptor excavates secrets from architectural facades.

Born:
1997

Birthplace:
Denver, Colorado

Currently Based:
New York

On St. Marks Place in New York's East Village, above a smattering of smoke shops and cheap pizza joints, two half-nude women in the form of decorative columns set within the facade hold up an apartment building. Most people pass by unaware. But when Alix Vernet spotted them, she was fascinated—and decided she had to cast one in latex.

The resulting sculpture, *Lady, Saint Marks, November* (2021), resembles a flayed skin with hollowed breasts and a stomach drooping loose, hanging against a backdrop of roughly cut cheesecloth. It looks like a piece of refuse, but one person's trash is another person's treasure, as the saying goes, and Vernet's sculptures tend to consider what really matters in the cluttered New York landscape.

Vernet often makes her art in public view. Working on fire escapes and other outdoor sites, she slathers exteriors of buildings with latex, then allows it to dry to form thin, saggy sheets. Those who spot Vernet creating one of her sculptures might mistake her for a conservator, which makes sense, since she has spent time shadowing city workers charged with the upkeep of public monuments.

Alix Vernet: *DPW, Church St*, 2023.

In 2020 she came upon a technician power-washing the arch in Washington Square Park. After she spent the day observing him, he invited her up in his cherry picker, and she got a close look as he cleaned off the grime that had accrued over time. Vernet brought with her a small piece of clay that she applied to the arch, taking an imprint of its 19th-century facade. Thus was born the first in a series of sculptures made by casting elements of architectural ornamentation in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

To create her work, Vernet seeks permission from superintendents, building managers, and tenants, and asks them about the structures they inhabit. None of those conversations are apparent in Vernet's sculptures, or in the photographs of her making them that she has exhibited as artworks themselves. But at least one work alludes to the many people involved: a stoneware sculpture that features the word CROWDS repeated over and over, in reference to an N.H. Pritchard poem. Each of the letters was cast from text on the Brooklyn Public Library's facade to invoke the crowds that pass through and maintain a municipal building that does not always bear traces of their presence.

An MFA student at the Yale School of Art, Vernet has recently grown interested in how institutions preserve the ages-old objects they own and ensure that the past remains visible to the future. To that end, *Time Warner Fragment, Broadway* (2023) is a ceramic cast of a New York City manhole cover that Vernet broke into fragments, causing it to look like an ancient artifact. Vernet said the work functions as a "story of the present moment," even as it appears drastically aged.

—*Alex Greenberger*

Portal, 5 pm, St. Marks Pl, 2023.

Lady, Saint Marks, November, 2021.

From left: Photos Sebastian Bach (2); Photo Dario Lasagni; Courtesy Helena Anrather, New York (3)

Born:
1993

Birthplace:
Franconia, Pennsylvania

Currently Based:
Philadelphia

SAMANTHA JOY GROFF

A "Pennsyltucky painter" refracts her Mennonite upbringing.

Samantha Groff: *Conduit*, 2023.

"I'm always interested in an antagonistic female," said Samantha Joy Groff, whose paintings are situated in and inspired by the rural southeastern Pennsylvania landscape in which she grew up. "The rural woman has been historically used as a caricature in popular culture, as hypersexualized, domineering, roaming."

Recalling her early exposure to classic American landscape painters such as Andrew Wyeth and Grant Wood, Groff always questioned the lack of leisurely women and the bleak, muted hues of the environments they rendered. For her part, Groff offers a more vibrant look at everything, including what contemporary women can be in the pastoral setting she calls home.

Placing women in the role of the hunter, Groff reimagined the classic mythology of the goddess Diana who, according to legend, turned a man into a deer for having seen her naked. Adorned in ribbons and fur, Groff's women pose together with animals in nature, often in sexually suggestive scenarios. With a playful touch and a light choke, her work turns traditional notions of hunter and prey on their head.

Groff's elaborately constructed scenes offer compelling melodrama that is perhaps best understood through her sense of staging. With a background in costume design and film, she photographs friends and family as subjects for her paintings. For her elaborate shoots, Groff makes costumes, scouts locations, and choreographs poses.

Her latest paintings follow an equally performative process in the service of exploring modern-day exorcisms. Having grown up both Pennsylvania Dutch and Mennonite, Groff depicts one of the oldest folk magic practices in America: *Braucherei*, as it is called by the Pennsylvania Dutch, is a prayer and healing ritual intended to banish demons. Paintings such as *Dark Pasture Encounter: Conduit* (2023) and *Night Prey, or (The Prey of the Terrible shall be Delivered)*, 2024, evoke the ecstatic, almost erotic experience of the divine.

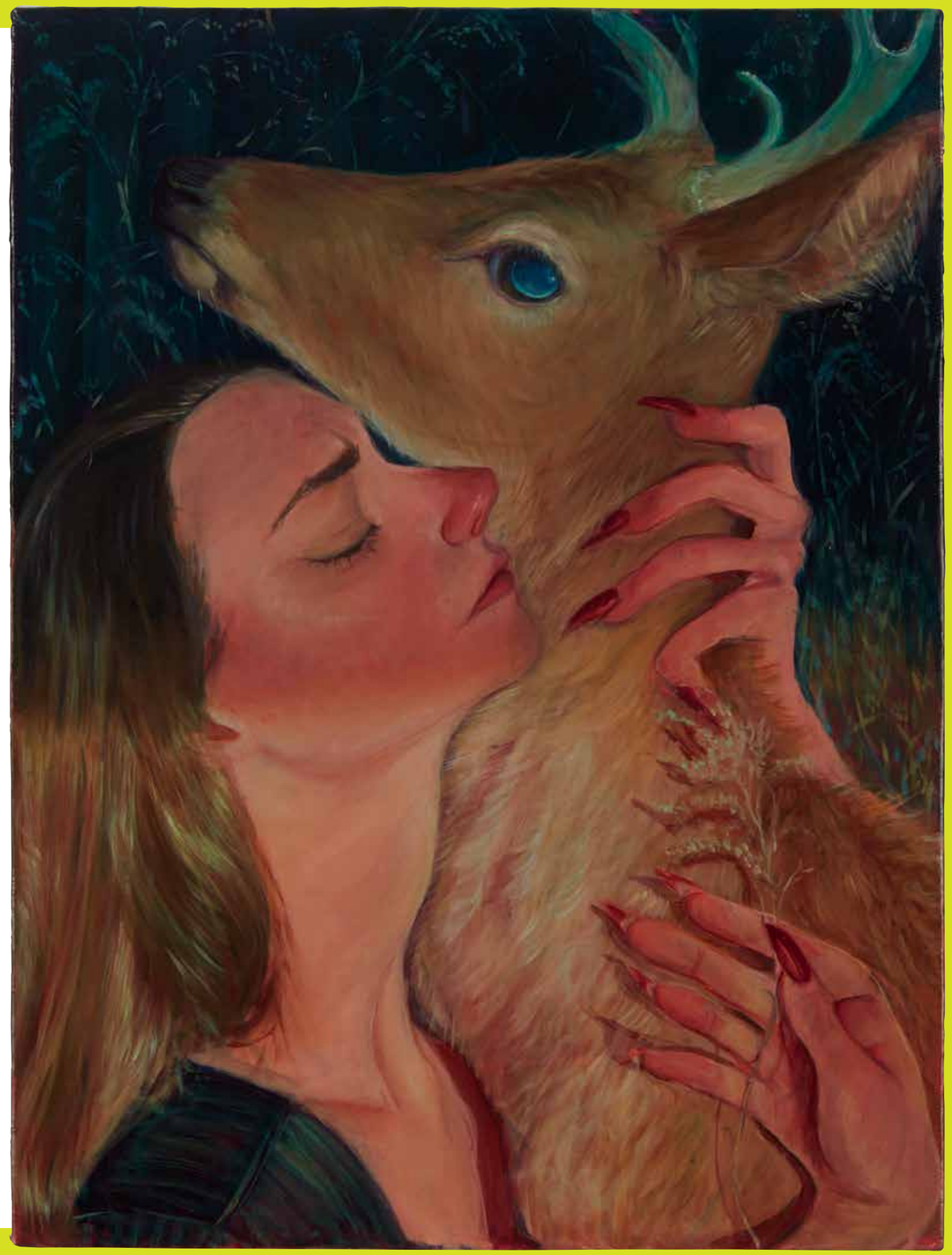
Groff said she is interested in displays of vulnerability and desire that can be found in the ritual practice of "putting hands on someone and praying," while simultaneously "trying to conjure something out of somebody." Improbable poses, struck by working behind the scenes with contortionists, only heighten the palpable tension extended through an unusual use of taxidermy and foreboding landscapes that beg for a moment of release.

Though Groff's work eschews political messaging, it captures a distinctly American ethos rooted in the present day: the struggle between the old and the new found in the freedom of the open landscape and the struggle for bodily autonomy. In her orchestrated scenes, Groff pushes the limits of physical and narrative possibility, allowing new ideas to coalesce. Whether one is a viewer or an active participant, one thing is certain: "there's a dynamic," Groff explained, to "organizing bodies in a space where no one's really neutral."

—*Francesca Aton*

Courtesy Half Gallery, New York

Intercession, 2023.



Courtesy Half Gallery, New York