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T'S 2021 ART ISSUE

Artists on Artists to Watch, and Maybe Even Collect

We asked 16 established names to suggest a fellow talent they feel should be better known.

By Noor Brara

June 14, 2021

The best direction one could give to someone interested in expanding their knowledge of contemporary art is to pay attention to what artists are paying attention to; artists always know before everyone else does. With this in mind, we asked 16 established artists from all over the world about a young or underappreciated artist whose work resonates with them. They spoke about why these talents deserve more attention than they're getting, and why readers should take time to explore their oeuvres, which inspect, among other things, issues of identity, race, material culture, social justice, climate change and how we live.

T's 2021 Art Issue

A look at the soul of the art world, and where it's headed.

- Experts weigh in on how to buy a work of art, and artists share which artists to keep an eye on.

- How TriBeCa became New York's hottest new gallery district, home to PPOW and more — and where to find notable galleries outside of New York and Los Angeles.

- The down-to-earth guy with one of the most exciting collections around ...

- ... And **the optimistic artist** who turned the Met's rooftop into a "Sesame Street" fantasy.

For her part, the renowned 96-year-old Syrian-American poet and painter Etel Adnan, whom we interviewed for this story but who wasn't able to select just one artist, chose instead to share a bit of advice for all the artists mentioned — each of whom, she says, is rising in their own way. "The thing I want them to remember," she says, "is that being an artist means you'll always be a little insecure and a little unsure because you don't know where you're going a lot of the time — every act of creation is new. You may have feedback, and there are moments when people will give you reassurance, but you won't have that always. But that's true of life in general, and people make too big a fuss over the struggles of being an artist, as though an artist's humanity is different from anyone else's, as though we are a different kind of creature. It's not. We are not. Keep going."

Young Sun Han's "Great American Spirit (Supplication)" (2017). Courtesy of the artist

Marcel Dzama: Young Sun Han, 38

Young Sun Han — a former student of Kara Walker's — uses photography and performance to explore queer identity issues, history and social movements. For the last little while, he's been documenting anti-Trump, Black Lives Matter and anti-Asian hate protests. I met him when Raymond Pettibon and I were collaborating for a show at David Zwirner and he was working in the archives. He was initially assigned to help us keep our schedules in order, but we got along as friends. He showed me his artwork, and I was really into it and bought a few of his pieces. One is a really beautiful image of him in which there's a curtain behind him and he's disguised himself as the curtain. It's really powerful. I think we should be featuring artists right now who are putting out important messages for our time, and Young Sun is one of them.

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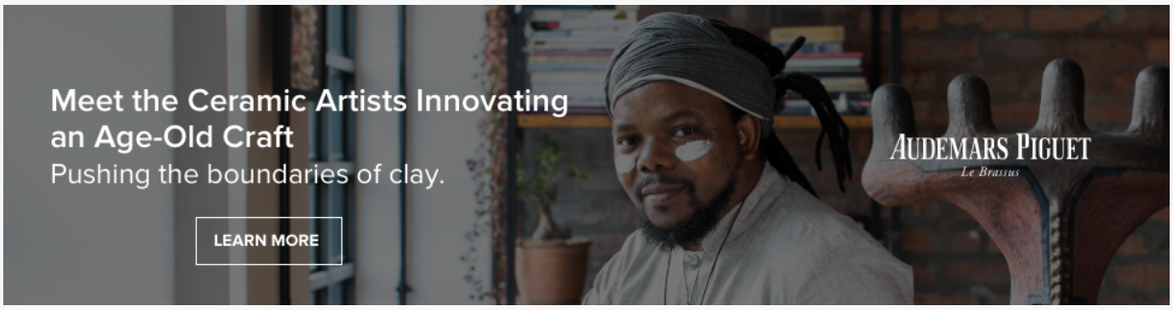

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Renée Stout's "No Lie in Her Fire (Charles Bukowski, Quoted)" (2017). Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Hemphill Artworks

Sean Scully: Renée Stout, 63

Renée is a wonderful artist and a very good friend of mine. She had a show a few years ago in my space [Sean Scully Studio]. Her work can be categorized somewhere between baroque, mystical and confessional painting. I've got one piece of hers that depicts a ball of fire in the night sky. It's very beautiful. She is influenced by the idea of Fluxus — objects that have a memory attached to them. Her work is very emotional and not particularly in tune with what's fashionable, though of course now that's changing so fast, and who even knows what it is anymore. Renée has a kind of tender stoicism. I'm very fond of her.

Sana Musasama's "Girl Soldiers Series 3" (2020). Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Dominico Lynch

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Nari Ward: Sana Musasama, 70

Sana Musasama is an amazing colleague of mine at Hunter College who has been doing great work for years. Her work is connected to social justice — it's what's driving her vision — and, for me, is really exciting. I always joke and say I'm a materialist, and people are usually confused, because that's associated with selfishness and greed, but what I mean is that I'm engaged with how material can speak and how it can have meaning specific to the experiences of individuals. So I really love her regard for clay, which she thinks about as this primal material. She said once that there are as many clay colors as there are colors of people on the earth. I found that really poetic, to link our bodies to the earth in a direct way. The body of work of hers that I thought was the most difficult to engage with was the one that dealt with sexual mutilation. I can only look at those works so much — they're very traumatic and beautiful at the same time. Sana is an African-American, Afrocentric artist, but her interest in the world is global, and I think that's very inspiring.

Editors' Picks

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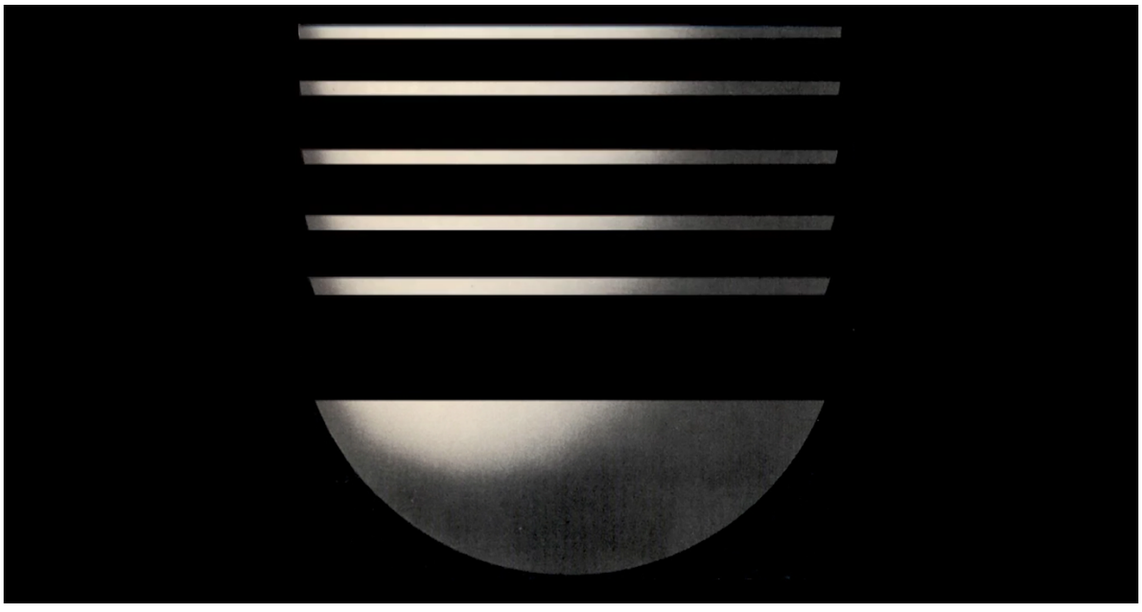
Set view of Baseera Khan's "By Faith" (2020). Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Ariana Sarwari

Amy Sillman: Baseera Khan, 41

I've known Baseera since she was an undergrad in her 20s in Texas — we attended a rodeo together. We loved each other right off the bat, and then we fell out of touch for several years. Then I ran into her when we were getting our computers fixed at the Grand Central Apple store. Recently, she asked me to participate in a film she was making called "By Faith" (2020). It's this really range-y, incredible sort of TV show about her own life. She also makes sculpture and drawings and does performances. She's a fascinating, incredible and productive person. I love this still of hers on her website where she's kneeling and adjusting her screen on the set of "By Faith." I just think she's a person of the highest level of ambition and talent, and she's coming up in the world.



Aimee Goguen's "Famous Intercourse: A Science Fiction Movie (Sample 'Cloud')" (forthcoming). Courtesy of the artist

Zackary Drucker: Aimee Goguen, 38

To me, Aimee Goguen's work unlocks a limitless and imaginative internal universe. It spans genres and is truly masterful in every form. She is an abject visionary and a prolific artist's artist in Los Angeles.

A still from Laleh Khorramian's "Odyssey," detail of "It Happened in the Future" (2020-ongoing). Courtesy of the artist, September (Hudson, N.Y.) and the Third Line (Dubai)

Shirin Neshat: Laleh Khorramian, 47

Laleh used to show at Salon 94, and they had a show of her work in their little space in Freeman Alley, which had on display, I think, one video and a couple of small paintings. I was blown away by them. I had heard about her years before, but I hadn't known anything about her work. The animation and the paintings were both about this kind of landscape that she creates out of this imaginary world that somehow is rooted in ancient mythological and theatrical spectacle. Within her abstraction, there was such amazing intensity and I thought, "Wow, I need to know more about her." This was when she was emerging, and she became a hit for a moment.

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Then she sort of disappeared. But I got to know her, and we became pretty good friends. She's an Iranian who grew up in this country, so she has very little relationship to Iran — but she's still an immigrant, still a foreigner in that way. The most fascinating part about her work is the narrative that she creates through these assemblages of colonies or cosmic voyages and ruined landscapes that belong to destroyed buildings of ancient times — yet they're totally postindustrial, and she uses a lot of digital techniques to achieve them in her paintings. I'm not a painter, and my work is about realism and photography and all of that, but there's something about her vulnerability and something deeply human in her work that has always resonated with me.

A still from Hetain Patel's "The Jump" (2015). Courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee & Lal

Anish Kapoor: Hetain Patel, 40

Hetain Patel is a visual artist and performance maker. In the persona of Spider-Man, he has created a wonderful re-examination of what it means to be an outsider in Britain today, where racist attitudes are on the rise post-Brexit. In "The Jump" (2015), his family looks on as he jumps in poignant slow motion as Spider-Man … you watch and wonder.

Olivia Bigtree's "Untitled" (2021). Courtesy of the artist

Wendy Red Star: Olivia Bigtree, 18

I first met Olivia in Syracuse, N.Y. She came with a group of high school students to see an exhibition that I had on at the photography center Light Work. She's a young Native woman from the Oneida Nation in the area. I was really impressed with her because she came right up to me and spoke about how she was very interested in going to art school. When I was in school, I was the only Native student, and I know for me it would have been so important to have another Native woman there that I could talk to and ask for advice. I had an opportunity to see the work she's making, which is primarily photo-based. It's also sophisticated, slick and has style, and she's unafraid to work collaboratively with subjects. I think she's going to be a really powerful force.

An installation view of Carolina Caycedo's "Yuma, or the Land of Friends" (2014) at the Eighth Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Museen Dahlen, Berlin. Courtesy of the artist

Calida Rawles: Carolina Caycedo, 42

Carolina's whimsical work takes me to different places. She is completely unafraid to explore and expand her artistic vocabulary. So I'm watching her — and if there's one thing that's for sure, I enjoy looking at someone's work that's different from mine. I take it in — all the expressions and feelings and thoughts that ultimately bring me out of my own box. And I like her a lot. Her work is important.

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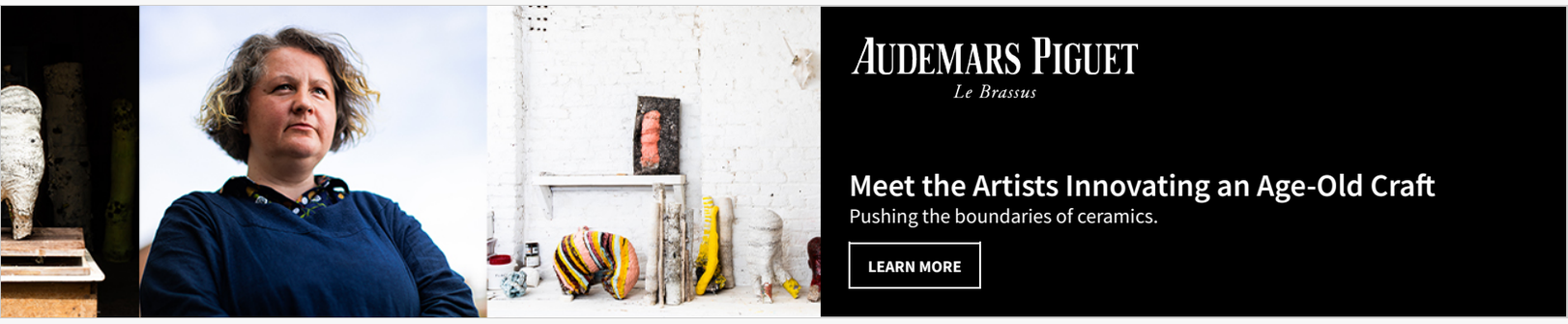

Sho Shibuya's "CALIFORNIA" (2020). Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Henry Hargreaves

Patti Smith: Sho Shibuya, 37

Sho doesn't even call himself an artist. He calls himself a worker, like I did when I was younger, because he doesn't feel he has earned that mantle yet. I found him on Instagram just by accident, and there's a certain irony to the fact that I found Sho, this person who has an old-school work ethic, there. But somebody that I follow posted a picture, and it was the cover of The New York Times with this beautifully abstracted painting, almost like a Rothko. It went from reds to black, and just said "CALIFORNIA." That was in September of 2020, when all the terrible fires were happening. I was disturbed about the fires and tried to write about them, and here was someone who, in one image, captured the horror of the whole thing through the beauty of a graphic image. I thought truthfully that it was a Times front page, and that it was so amazing for them to have printed that. I was just so taken with the immediacy of this image — the simplicity, but also the artistry. I tried to get it — I do subscribe, but of course I couldn't find it, so I went to the corner shop and discovered it didn't exist. I sent a message to Maureen Dowd and asked her about it, and she said, "Actually, it's the work of an artist."

I started following Sho and we just talked and met one on one, as two people who do work — no agents or anything. What he does is, he wakes up at dawn and takes a photo of whatever's happening — if it's cloudy, or if it's brilliant. He has such an appreciation for the first moment of the day, when the light pours through the window. But his images not only reflect nature but comment on what's happening in the world. I am often so moved by how much he says. Right before the election, he asked if I'd like to collaborate with him. He came over with a freshly painted front page when we were trying to get people to vote, and I pressed my white-painted hand on it and just wrote "Vote."

Nupur Kundu's "Painting No. 3," from the series "#QuarantineScapes" (2020). Courtesy of the artist

Anjolie Ela Menon: Nupur Kundu, 46

Nupur is an abstract painter, and she uses very thick impasto in her paintings. She's doing quite well now, but I really feel more people should know about her. Her pieces don't get the attention they deserve. There are a lot of people who are doing cutting-edge work these days but, I have to say, I don't really connect to a lot of the more didactic work some of them do. Nupur is a straightforward Abstract Expressionist, and a powerful, powerful painter.

An installation view of Giorgio Andreotta Calò's "Senza Titolo (La Fine del Mondo)" (2017) at the Italian Pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale. Courtesy of the artist and Sprovieri, London. Photo by Nuvola Ravera

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Giorgio Andreotta Calò, 41

Giorgio is from Venice, Italy — he was one of our assistants and students many years ago. Even as a student, he was talented. Now, he's brilliant. He creates situations that are very surreal — for example, you walk into a room with one of his works and you see the sun coming out of the sea. But of course you're still in the room.

He has a lot of things like this … and very interesting sculptures. He manages to create the most surreal atmospheres for you, which you don't want to leave. You want to stay there.

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Ava Hassinger's "Untitled," from "The Legacy Series" (2017). Courtesy of the artist

Maren Hassinger: Ava Hassinger, 35

When my daughter, Ava, was really young, maybe even before school, she got interested in taking pictures. So we encouraged her by buying her a snapshot camera. She continued her obsession with photographs — and, as she went through school, would always take the best photos. When it was time for her to go off to college, she majored in art and photography, and did well with all of that, and then she decided to go to graduate school. Then she was working with a guy named Terry Adkins, and his focus was sculptural, so she started expanding her practice into three-dimensional work. Yesterday, I happened to go to her studio, which I had not seen because I hadn't been to Philly in many months, and she's started doing a variety of projects with castoff materials and found objects. I had the funniest feeling that I had made some of the work. My daughter is authentically an artist, and the little bit she has helped me in working on my projects has really been successful. I know she has good taste in friends, most of whom are artists, and the things that she makes feel like they came out of my own head.

Arnold J. Kemp's "Mr. Kemp: Yellowing, Drying, Scorching" (2020). Courtesy of the artist and Martos Gallery, New York. Photo by Tom Van Eynde

Mary Weatherford: Arnold J. Kemp, 53

Arnold J. Kemp is an incredible artist whose own work has been overlooked because of his incredible career as an educator. The last mention of him in the paper of record was from 2001 by Holland Cotter … so I see this as pure evidence that what I'm saying is the case, because it's taken two decades for it to happen again. Kemp makes photography, sculpture and painting, and is also a poet and a performance artist. This particular sculpture, which is brand-new — the first thing I thought about when I saw it was [Jorge Luis] Borges, who is one of my favorite writers. Reading Borges is such a pleasure because I understand that there's fiction masquerading as truth, and truth masquerading as fiction. And this particular sculpture comes closer to the mastery of Borges than any artwork I've ever encountered because of this novel that is stuffed in the pillows, which is indeed by an author named Arnold Joseph Kemp. And Arnold has been mistaken for the author Arnold Kemp. When looking at this chair, I'm wondering, because I know it's an artwork: "Is this a real novel? Is Arnold pretending that this novel exists? *Does* this novel exist?" Arnold J. Kemp is also a creator of fictions, and his work is so meta and brilliant. There's a kind of cool delight I experience in walking around this sculpture in particular.

Adjei Tawiah's "2 Chains" (2021). Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957

Amoako Boafo: Adjei Tawiah, 34

Adjei formally trained at the Ghanatta College of Art and Design in Accra, Ghana. He is into portraiture and figurative painting, but what draws me closer to his work is his use of authentic materials and his defined style, which set him apart from many other figurative artists. He uses sponge to clothe his powerful subjects, creating colorful, delicately textured portraits across mixed media. He calls this his "sponge martial" technique. I believe attention should be paid to this work, and that people should make space for it.

A still from Enantios Dromos's "Eso Esta Sabroso" (2021). Performed by Gabriel Massan. Courtesy of the artist

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Wu Tsang: Enantios Dromos, 23

I'd like to recommend Enantios Dromos, a trans video artist from Brazil who works collaboratively through Limitrofe Television, the collective he founded. He describes his approach as "low resolution and high quality," in the sense that the richness of life saturates through any value of visibility.

Interviews have been edited and condensed.

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