

30 YOUNG ARTISTS TO

In art, like in life, there is a premium put on youth. In creating our second annual young artists list, we wanted to celebrate individuals who are charting their own course, creating work that challenges us—both inside and outside the art market. The 30 artists under 35 we include here capture just a slice of

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PORTRAITS BY JASON SCHMIDT

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a generation that feels more connected than ever with one another. Via screen, canvas or installation, these are the voices of a moment in time that has as much to mourn as to celebrate. We look to the youth to communicate our future—a glimpse of which we capture on these pages.



Janiva Ellis | @ducatimist

Janiva Ellis picked up painting as a child as an outlet for self-expression. “Being black in Hawaii is really isolating,” she says. “It was hard to be a part of a community where my identity was not reflected at all.” Ellis moved to San Francisco after graduating from high school and began studies at California College of the Arts. During this time, though, Ellis lost confidence in her vision and threw herself into technique. “I wanted to be perceived as really knowing how to handle paint,” Ellis says. “I felt the need to impress people, the need to be exceptionalized, and especially as a young black woman, who’d never been surrounded by black people, I felt the need to stand out.”

After CCA, Ellis took a hiatus from painting. She spent four years between New York and Hawaii before settling in Los Angeles in 2016. There, her spark was reignited when a serendipitous gift of stretchers landed in her lap. “I had finally got to a place where I didn’t feel any pressure” Ellis says. “I felt like I had the headspace and freedom to work.”

Months of experimentation beared out in “Lick Shot,” her debut solo show at 47 Canal this summer, where Ellis showed a suite of paintings that placed cartoonish gestural figures in dialogue. “If you want to convey a complex idea really quickly, a cartoon is a great mechanism to do so,” Ellis says. “This is something that ties into representations of blackness, there is this comedic-ness to our existence.”

When it comes to actually repurposing Sambo or other black-face clichés, Ellis treads carefully. “I often question whether re-asserting those images creates a larger critique, or just reinforced their existence,” she says. “What I want is to create new reference points for myself instead of just comparing how things are different from one another.”

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—Janiva Ellis

Borna Sammak | @bboornnaa

Borna Sammak’s restless energy flows into his work. Moving fluidly from medium to medium, the New York-based artist creates sculptures, paintings and photographs that keep the eye moving. “Pictorially I’ve been trying to make the same thing since I was a kid,” Sammak says. “When I was in high school in 2001 or 2002, I was an apprentice at fabric workshop and I made this repeating screen print all made of arrows. If you look at what my work does now, it operates the same way. It doesn’t let your eye leave the pictorial; you are in a kind of figure eight or ouroboros or something.”

Sammak draws his mesmerizing imagery from the everyday. Take for example paintings like *Hoagie Nose* (2015) and *You Could* (2017), which the artist made from layering ironing t-shirt decals on a canvas. “I try to keep what winds up in the art, whether it’s the t-shirt decals or the signage, to real life,” he says. “I never want to put something in my work that you don’t see out in the world.” Another piece, *Two Full Height Turnstiles Stuck In Each Other* (2016), shows the way the architecture and street culture of New York intervenes directly

into his formal, albeit humorous, investigations.

This spring, Sammak will stage solo exhibitions at his two main galleries, JTT and Sadie Coles. At press time, the ideas for the show were still percolating but Sammak’s

focus was on expanding his vocabulary, specifically his talents as a draftsman and a sewer.

“If I could draw, maybe I could plan for once,” he says.



Bailey Scieszka | @bailioni

Detroit-based artist Bailey Scieszka describes her relationship to Old Put, her performance persona, as Jekyll might talk about Hyde. “Old Put lives inside of me,” Scieszka says. “It’s not an alter ego. I see Old Put as this real, shape-shifting character. She is a clown, but she can also be an alien and a demon.”

One could say Old Put was born in New York but grew up in Detroit, when the artist graduated from Cooper Union and returned home to the Midwest. “When I first moved back, I would dress everyone up as Old Put and we’d have parties,” she says. “For me, it was this Jack Smith thing. I don’t care if the audience is four people I can still put on a show. I have the time and space to do that here.”

An avid fan of *Wrestlemania* and *Hobby Lobby* crafts, Old Put might be the penultimate expression and critique of unfettered Americana. “I draw inspiration from wrestling because, if you listen to what they are saying, it is all about this American, inspirational drive to be the best,” Scieszka explains. “I kind of think of Old Put as that, this dreamer who believes they are going to win this belt and be the champ. It’s really about heartbreak.”

Old Put enters the physical realm through live performances and Scieszka’s prolific work at her studio, which usually begins with drawing and often ends in elaborate craft projects, such as costume design and mask-making.

The work that Scieszka produces under the guise of Old Put mix historical and pop imagery with an emphasis on taboo—think: Confederate flags, poppers and tiki torches. “I think it’s interesting to engage symbols that make me uncomfortable,” she says. “I always think you can say the darkest things in the brightest colors.” This January, Scieszka will unveil her latest ruminations at the University of Michigan where she is hosting a solo show.