

More about the artists featured in

How to Talk About Art: A Beginner's Guide

ARTSY

Olafur Eliasson



“It is not just about decorating the world... but about taking responsibility,” Olafur Eliasson said of his practice in a 2009 TED Talk. Eliasson uses natural elements (like light, water, fog) and makeshift technical devices to transform museum galleries and public areas into immersive environments. Prompting reflection on the spaces surrounding us, for Green River (1998-2001) he poured bright green (environmentally safe) dye into rivers running through downtown L.A., Stockholm, Tokyo, and other cities to “show the turbulence in these downtown areas” and to remind passersby of the cities’ vitality. Similarly, by installing four large waterfalls in New York’s East River (2008), he intended to give the city a sense of dimension; Eliasson also famously installed a giant artificial sun inside the Tate Modern (The weather project, 2003). Known for their elegant simplicity and lack of materiality, his installations are rooted in a belief that art can create a space sensitive to both individual and collective.

More about the artist

“[Olafur Eliasson: Playing with space and light](#)” TED Talk.

“[In Wake of Paris Attacks, Olafur Eliasson’s Ice Blocks Evoke the Human Impact of Climate Change](#)” by Artsy Editorial

James Mathison



Venezuelan sculptor James Mathison renders the male figure with an anatomical precision. Using resin and bronze, he depicts standing nudes, individual portraits, and isolated fragments of the human body, such as outstretched forearms or clenched fists. Recalling the weathering of ancient Greeks and Roman sculptures, Mathison also manipulates the texture of his hyperrealistic works. He adds cracks, perforations, grid lines, and even text to the surfaces of his portraits, giving them the appearance of archaeological objects.

More about the artist

“[James Mathison](#)” by ArtNexus

“[James Mathison](#)” by Aldo Castillo Gallery

Samuel Fosso



Cameroonian artist Samuel Fosso has earned the nickname “the man of a thousand faces” for his ability to take on a variety of personae in his work. Fosso began taking photographs at age thirteen after fleeing the civil war in Nigeria. After settling in the Central African Republic, he made a living taking wedding portraits and passport pictures, and began using the leftover frames to take self-portraits, at first to send to his grandmother in Nigeria. “I wanted to show how good I look,” Fosso has noted about these early pictures, referencing his practice of dressing up in bell bottoms, disco boots, hotpants, and other costume attire for his self-portraits. More recently, in his series “African Spirits” (2008), Fosso has continued to transform his appearance by posing as fourteen iconic figures of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, casting himself as Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and Muhammad Ali, among others.

More about the artist

“The Self-Portraits of Samuel Fosso” by Guernica Magazine

“Looted, but Not Lost: An African Artist’s Life Work” by The New York Times

Amy Feldman



Deceptively simple, Amy Feldman’s large acrylic paintings feature loosely geometric motifs set against areas of bare canvas. New York Times critic Roberta Smith once noted “a kind of back-to-basics abstraction characterized by simple forms, not much color and an emphasis on process.” This process ensues from a vague vision of the finished work and entails thumbnail sketches, taping the shapes onto the canvas, and finally, painting; Feldman’s images evolve considerably along the way. In letting the paint drip where it will, Feldman seeks to retain the casualness of her preliminary sketches, often based on her surroundings, yet she also strives for poise. “I think, the unfinished (or seemingly unfinished) quality in my work feels like it is in a dialogue with the landscape...the forms are carefully articulated yet under-polished,” she explains.

More about the artist

“Amy Feldman - High Sign” in The Brooklyn Rail

“Taking Cues from Stand-Up Comedy, Amy Feldman Whips Up Dynamic Paintings” by Artsy Editorial

Faig Ahmed



Faig Ahmed's surreal sculptures incorporate ancient carpet-weaving techniques from his native country of Azerbaijan into forms that anyone would identify as hyper-contemporary. His intricately patterned weavings are mounted on architectural structures, fabricated in wood or plastic. Sometimes the stark contrast between white form and traditional tapestry is startling enough on its own; other times, Ahmed alters the patterns to suggest digital manipulation, pixelation, and distortion. He has exhibited internationally at fairs and museums, including the Venice Biennale and the National Center of Contemporary Art in Moscow.

More about the artist

["Faig Ahmed Pulls the Threads of Islamic Tradition with his Rewoven Rugs"](#) by Artsy Editorial

["A Rebellious Artist's Psychedelic Rugs"](#) in The New York Times

Cai Guo-Qiang



While living in Japan from 1986 to 1995, Cai Guo-Qiang began exploring the properties of gunpowder in his drawings. Cai's use of gunpowder has become central to his practice, leading to his experimentation with explosives and the development of his signature ignition events. Drawn to the medium for its myriad of associations, his gunpowder work, in addition to his repertoire of large-scale installations and social projects, draws upon Eastern philosophy, Maoist sentiment, and contemporary social issues. Though his fireworks are immediate signifiers of Chinese culture, Cai's aim is to transcend these boundaries, establishing dialogue between viewers and the world around them. His site-specific work often alludes to the culture or history of the city or region where his work is presented, as in his series of ignitions "The Century with Mushroom Clouds: Project for the 20th Century" (1995-96), conducted at symbolic locations in the United States to, as Cai has said, "depict the 'face' of the nuclear bomb that represents modern-day technology."

More about the artist

"Sky Ladder" by Kevin Macdonald, a Netflix Original Documentary
["Explosives Artist Cai Guo-Qiang's Story Comes to Netflix"](#) by Artsy Editorial

[Cai Guo-Qiang: Falling Back to Earth](#) at the Queensland Art Gallery

Elín Hansdóttir



Elín Hansdóttir has said that art should “cut the ground from beneath your feet and make you re-evaluate your rigid ideas.” Indeed, the Icelandic artist’s site-specific installations are designed to alter the audience’s perception of space, whether through architectural manipulations or optical illusions. Casting the viewer as the central actor in her works, Hansdóttir often combines mirrors, video, light, and sound to create her immersive environments. For example, her work *Path* (2008-2011) consists of a narrow, meandering tunnel, partially lit by horizontal and vertical slits throughout the structure. Zigzagging through the space, visitors can easily become disoriented—mistaking shadows for walls and vice versa—which focuses their attention on the often-overlooked experience of navigating a gallery space.

More about the artist

“Path by Elin Hansdottir” by Rethink09, YouTube

“Disruption – Ásmundur Sveinsson and Elín Hansdóttir” by Reykjavík Art Museum

Shahzia Sikander



With Indo-Persian miniature painting forming the basis for all of her work—including her own approach to this traditional art form, as well as animation, video, photography, murals, and installation—Shahzia Sikander explores history, politics, and current events, as well as interpersonal themes. She trained under a traditional master, and went on to pioneer alternative approaches to miniature painting. “I found it ripe with potential—to change its status and its narrative and to deconstruct its stereotypes,” she writes. “I recognized...a path to expanding the medium from within, embracing the complexities of craft and rigor in order to open up possibilities for dialogue.” Among the ways she does this is by combining different religious and cultural references in her internationally acclaimed work, which was included in the 2005 Venice Biennale and the 1997 Whitney Biennial.

More about the artist

“Shahzia Sikander: ‘The Last Post’” by ART21

“Shahzia Sikander” by Pérez Art Museum Miami

“Kinetic Drawing and Human Landscapes: Shahzia Sikander’s Animations 2001-2016” in MAXXI Monograph

Rafael Lozano- Hemmer



Electronic artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's public art installations combine technology, architecture, and performance using devices like robotics, projections, and cell phones. He constructs "temporary anti-monuments for alien agency," as in *Pulse Tank* (2008), in which heart rate sensors send ripples across the surface of water, or the Guggenheim's 2009 installation *Levels of Nothingness*, which allowed people to speak into a computer that linked voice traits to colors that were projected across the room. His *Vectorial Elevation* (1999), in which 800,000 participants created searchlight sculptures above Mexico City, may well be the world's largest interactive artwork ever.

More about the artist

["Rafael Lozano-Hemmer Playfully Addresses Privacy and Surveillance in an Age of New Technology"](#) by Artsy Editorial

EJ Hill



EJ Hill's endurance performances and installations, such as those staged during his 2015-16 residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, often have deep personal roots—"I've been storing these experiences in my body since childhood," Hill has said. In his work, Hill often pushes himself to the point of exhaustion—both emotionally and physically—in order to make visible the daily difficulties of living in a queer, Black body. Hill draws in audiences with deft displays of both vulnerability and strength; in A Monumental Offering of Potential Energy (2016), the artist reclined face-down at the base of a roller coaster sculpture until the end of each day, when he rose to go home. While his prone posture evoked all-too-familiar images of Black male victims of violence, he realized the "potential energy" to transcend victimization daily when he stood up and left unharmed.

More about the artist

["Up and Coming: EJ Hill Channels the Emotional Power of Endurance Art"](#) by Artsy Editorial

["Alive Someplace Better"](#) on Arts. Black

Julie Blackmon



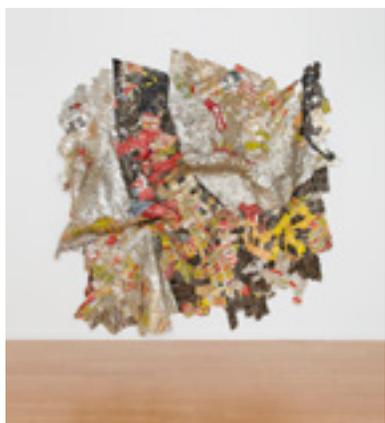
Inspired by 17th-century Dutch and Flemish paintings of domestic life, Julie Blackmon photographs carefully orchestrated tableaux that feature members of her own family and are imbued with a sense of the uncanny. Blackmon's "Domestic Vacations" series (2008), for example, shows a world saturated with color, filled with toys and candy and populated by mischievously deadpan children. As she explains, her work combines the fantasies and realities of domesticity: "These images are both fictional and autobiographical and [. . .] explore the fantastic elements of our everyday lives, both imagined and real."

More about the artist

["Julie Blackmon's Family-Filled Photographs Merge Fantasy and Autobiography"](#) by Artsy Editorial

["A Tale of Motherhood in Julie Blackmon's Playful Photographs"](#) on Hyperallergic

El Anatsui



A critically acclaimed mixed-media artist, El Anatsui gained worldwide recognition in the early 2000s for his shimmering, monumental wall hangings, visual feasts rich with associations to Africa, Europe, and America. These expansive sheets, hung in undulating swags and blocky folds, are composed of countless bits of brightly colored metal, the salvaged caps of liquor bottles, which Anatsui and his team form into shapes, then link together with copper wire. A cross between painting, tapestry, and sculpture, the hangings grew out of his earlier investigations into re-purposing scrap materials, with their attendant cultural associations. "The link between Africa, Europe, and America is very much part of what is behind my work with bottle caps," Anatsui explains, referencing the fraught connection between the sale of slaves and liquor, and the transformative power of his art to link everyone involved in its creation.

More about the artist

["El Anatsui's Bottle-Cap Tapestries Weave Their Way to London's October Gallery"](#) by Artsy Editorial

["El Anatsui"](#) on ART21

Grace Weaver



Brooklyn-based painter Grace Weaver portrays playful scenes of stimulus-saturated modern life in a graphic style. Her subjects—often depicted at leisure and in bright shades of orange, green, and purple—have included a girl checking her cellphone at the beach, another jogging in flipflops at the park, and a couple lounging in bed holding a laptop and a hand mirror. Presenting these vignettes in a distinctive aesthetic, Weaver flattens and elongates her figures, giving them an almost cartoon-like appearance. The young painter had two breakout shows in 2015 and 2016—“Teenage Dream” at Thierry Goldberg Gallery and “Skinny Latte” at Soy Capitán—which were aptly titled with references to popular culture.

More about the artist

“These 20 Female Artists are Pushing Figurative Painting Forward” by Artsy Editorial

“Artist Grace Weaver Creates a World in Which the Familiar and Psychedelic Collide” by It’s Nice That

Jenny Morgan



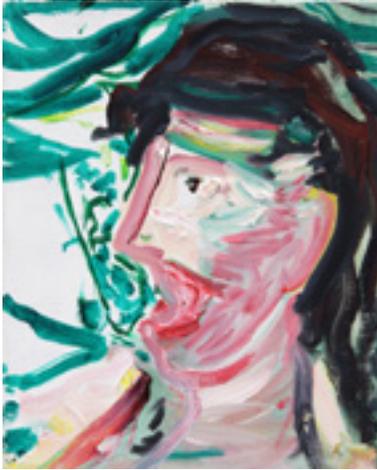
In her portraits, Jenny Morgan paints photorealistic nudes suffused with fantastical color, distorted by gestural blurs, and sometimes framed by abstracted shapes. Her subjects are most often friends or self-portraits, as having a personal connection with the subject is essential to the artist. Echoing this intimacy, her figures hold eye contact to forge a psychological connection with the viewer. Morgan’s recent portrait series “All We Have is Now” invokes themes of death and rebirth with nods to religious imagery and symbols of mortality. The heady subject matter may seem at odds with the intense color that suffuses her figures—however, it is the push and pull between darkness and light that interests Morgan, to “look at everything in the light and realize it no longer feels so dark,” as she has said.

More about the artist

“Jenny Morgan’s Search for Ghosts” in Whitewall Magazine

“Jenny Morgan: Growth and Renewal” in The Huffington Post

O Jun



Japanese figurative painter O Jun works in a wide variety of forms and techniques, from thick, gestural strokes of oil paint to flat images on glass sheets constructed with geometric iron elements. While similarly diverse, O Jun's subject matter centers on human figures seemingly suspended in their stark white or densely textured surroundings, and close-cropped flattened landscapes. Whether sumptuous or stark, his images often evoke stripped-down and abstracted moments from everyday life, like snapshot photographs. Echoes of traditional Japanese composition can be found in his paintings—for example, his abstracted landscapes are often expressed as flat and colorful brushstrokes suspended in blank space.

More about the artist

[O Jun](#) on Artsy

Deborah Kass



Walking the line between respectful homage and brazen appropriation, Deborah Kass mimics and reworks the signature styles of some of the 20th century's most iconic male artists—including Frank Stella, Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, and Ed Ruscha—in her bold, meticulous paintings. “They’re my daddies,” she has said, in witty acknowledgment of her indebtedness to her male antecedents. Kass’s alterations of their work in her own paintings are both biting funny formal interventions and keenly critical commentary on the historically dominant position of male artists. Feminism is central to her approach. As she explains: “It is about my desire to be part of what they’re a part of. [...] I think the desire was ambition and greatness. For women of my age, it was still not very cool to be overtly ambitious.”

More about the artist

[“Pop Art’s Long Tail Snakes Between Katz and Kass”](#) by Artsy

[“True to form: Deborah Kass Shakes Up the Canon”](#) in *Modern Painters*

Ben Charles Weiner



Connecting two opposing styles—abstraction and photorealism—Ben Weiner creates hyper-detailed, lush paintings and videos of extremely magnified consumer products, including hair gel, chemical food additives, and deodorant. In his work, he presents such meticulously rendered, close-up views of his subjects that they read as pure abstractions. A through-line in Weiner’s various bodies of work is contemporary culture’s obsession with bodily enhancement through chemical products—whether by using hair products or taking illegal drugs. To create his drawings, the artist soaks monochrome drawings or to-do lists on chromatographic paper in solutions of drugs, creating colorful psychedelic washes generated by chance based on the substance’s chemical composition.

More about the artist

[“Ben Charles Weiner in Dialogue with Steven Cox,”](#) Hunted Projects

[“Artist Ben Weiner, Who Makes Art with Drugs, Opens Up His New York Studio”](#) in W Magazine

Stefana McClure



“I have always been fascinated by the gray area that exists between languages and cultures, and so was naturally drawn to discrepancies in translation,” Stefana McClure has said. Both this interest and her methodology have roots in the artist’s time in Japan, where she lived for over a decade and studied traditional paper craft. McClure’s process of translation involves transforming text and printed materials into sculptural objects, often through laborious processes like knitting, cutting, wrapping, and tracing. Through the lens of language, she has addressed subject matter ranging from the treatment of U.S. military detainees to popular culture. In her ongoing “Films on Paper” series, she inscribes every subtitle in a film on the same piece of paper, a laborious process that creates two, superimposed ghostly lines on a monochrome field through wear and repetition.

More about the artist

[“Life Camera Action: Films on Paper”](#) in Paste Magazine

[“An Interview with Stefana McClure”](#) in qu.ee/r magazine