ARTISTIC PRACTICE

6 Artists Who've Made the Human Form Cool Again

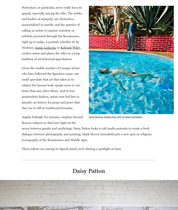
Art that clearly portrays people is ranging in popularity. Here are some of the most innovative figurative artists to watch, as well as a few who have been at it for more than half a century.

by Ana Lenski | December 21, 2020

Kerry James Marshall, Untitled (Lounge), 2015, via Sotheby's

Since the dawn of recorded history, paintings of people have persisted, but modern which trends took over the "art world" fell through the cracks. Figurative painting, from Renaissance to Abstract Expressionism, has ebb'd and flow'd — a certain kind of figurative approach had its era, across the ahead Under Thirty Positions and decline. Art critics, curators, and collectors tend to arrive at a view of what is "relevant" under internal among collectors and curators.

Here, in particular, has contributed to strong processes, attracting an admiring audience of curators and collectors with the hard-edged extreme portraits of the hip and chic beautiful and exotic amplified but refined Indonesian of Paul Kikuni. A recent exposure that wrap a lot of attention is Kerry James Marshall's Museum of Art and Lens exceptional work (published last month by Rizzoli).



Mickalene Thomas, Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, 2010, via Sotheby's

Meanwhile, the unwrap prize, Pop portraits of David Hockney, the 84-year-old British artist, who inexpectedly resorts as an Old Masters among figurative painters, continues to command attention. He really conquered 2017 Museum of the Royal Opera's general administration, the Royal Wedding, and $62.5 million in October at Christie's, and an overview of 60 of his drawings from his student days in the primary at the Hungarian Library in New York through Sep. 26, 2021.

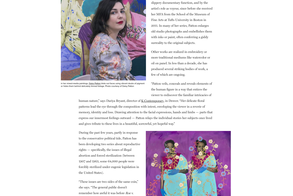
Ratiation, in particular, never sadly leave its speed, especially in the current pandemic. The soiling and fatalities of antiquity, was Alexandre Cabanel's Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners, calling an artist to capture attention or celebrity potential through the Renaissance right up to today. A portrait, whether it by Pitchers, Jenny Lefcourt, or Kehinde Wiley, is a kind of commission, and it is a long tradition of artists hired as superstars.

Given the sizable number of younger artists who had enjoyed the figurative course, one would speculate that art that takes a lo-relapse? Do human body spirits seem to wear fewer than any other clients. And in true postmodern fashion, artists now feel free to plunder art history for props and poses that they can be off-traditional branches.

Jenny Lefcourt, Gemma, 2015, via Gerald Peters Gallery

Angela Fraleigh, for instance, regularly focused on the intersection of Dutch Golden Age and sense between gender and mythology. Hans Makrta looks to old studio portraits to create hyper-topography of the Renaissance and Middle Ages.

These talents are among six figural artists we're closing a spotlight on here.



Daisy Patton, Oil on Canvas, 2020, via Gallery Wendi Norris

Daisy Patton

Daisy Patton's Sheerfield, Oil on Canvas, 2020, via Gallery Wendi Norris

Eileen Cooper

Secret Garden, 2019

British figurative art has a reputation for trending toward the dour, the dark or the tortured. Think Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Francis Bacon. But Eileen Cooper's paintings and woodcuts are dreamy and humorous, with a man giving a woman a foot rub or a woman tenderly cradling a rabbit. In her world, a couple drifts happily on a sea of love; sisters embrace; and cats, bears, and foxes show up as benign companions.

Eileen Cooper's narrative oil paintings are reminiscent of modern-day fables. Photo courtesy of Eileen Cooper/Hurley-Parlour Gallery

Cooper has said that she has a head full of stories: "Mythology, fairy tales, Bible stories, fables and early special-effects movies — they're all part of my work even if it's not obvious. I always try to look spontaneous."

Alongside her artistic practice, Cooper has maintained a teaching career at institutions including Central St. Martins, the Royal College of Art and the Royal Academy Schools.

She became an Academician and Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools in 2010 (the first woman Keeper since the RA's founding, in 1768), and in 2016, she was made an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) for her services to art and art education.

Mark Steven Greenfield

Collateral, 2020

After earning a graduate degree from Cal State in 1987, Los Angeles–based Mark Steven Greenfield launched his career on the West Coast riffing on some of the more offensive stereotypes of Black Americans in popular culture — for instance, the theatrical tradition of blackface and the ways in which "ethnic" characters were portrayed in cartoons, many of them so insulting they have since been banned.

"There's been an entire generation that didn't even now these things existed," he has said. Of the "Blackatcha" exhibition, which superimposed blurbs in the form of eye charts on photos of blackface characters, he has remarked, "If you are discomforted by what you see, I invite you to examine those feelings, for out of this examination will come enlightenment."

A different kind of discomfort prevailed in his recent series of Madonnas, exhibited at William Turner Gallery in 2019. The coal-black mother-and-child figures, borrowed from Renaissance masters yet still hinting at the blackface tradition, are positioned within tondos and surrounded by fields of burnished gold leaf. In the backgrounds are scenes of outrage — marching Nazis, a gas chamber — or little vignettes of white supremacists getting their comeuppance.

Toussaint, 2020

Greenfield can playfully subvert time-honored genres by toying with art history and tossing in modern artifacts. In one triptych, a Black Pietà, a trope borrowed from Michelangelo's famous statue of the adult Christ in his mother's arms after the Crucifixion, hovers in front of elaborate Gothic arches, while snazzy running shoes lie piled on the ground.

The works' subjects are unsettling, but Greenfield shows a huge respect for craft in their realization. These paintings are a cunning mix of postmodernist irony, pointed social commentary and pure optical delight. ■

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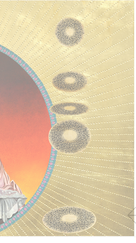

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