



X Insurance

AXA Art Prize

2020

ArtCity

The AXA Art Prize 2020 will also be part of **ArtCity** – a new online, interactive event that will run exclusively from 23-28 October. Since the major art fairs are currently on hold, the ArtCity platform has been designed to replicate as closely as possible the experience of visiting an art fair in person. AXA XL are delighted to be a part of this innovative event and to promote the AXA Art Prize finalists to an international audience.

artcity.online

AXA Art Prize

The AXA Art Prize seeks to shine a spotlight on the re-emergence of figurative art and as of yet undiscovered stars of its future.

The competition is built on the legacy of a related prize which successfully ran in the UK for a decade. Now in its third year in the United States, the AXA Art Prize has established an excellent reputation as an insightful overview of the best new talent nationwide.

The AXA Art Prize is brought to you by AXA XL, a division of AXA Group. We insure some of the world's most acclaimed galleries, art collections, and dealers. We are also an established patron of the arts and are committed to supporting initiatives designed to promote and celebrate emerging talent.

Through the AXA Art Prize, we aim to advance the age-old practice of figurative art. By giving these talented young artists a forum for their works to be shown, critiqued, and discussed, we reward their risk-taking and champion their desire to continue this tradition for the benefit of future generations.

axaartprize.com
axaartprizegallery.com
axaxl.com

Welcome from Scott Gunter

Like so much in 2020, this year's AXA Art Prize looks very different than it has in years past and very different than we had hoped. Unfortunately, the traveling exhibition of finalist artworks, which has been a highlight of previous competitions, cannot be held this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Although I regret, both for the participating artists and the viewing public, that the exhibitions in San Francisco and Chicago are not part of the 2020 program, we are delighted to launch the AXA Art Prize Gallery and make the exhibition available online. Forty figurative artworks of outstanding quality by this country's brightest emerging art world talents can now be viewed by anyone, anywhere in the world. I hope this online exhibition will contribute to the goal of the AXA Art Prize, which is to support young artists while also promoting figurative art as a vitally relevant mode of artistic expression.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on all of us and our lives. Students, and especially those who rely on physical workspaces such as studios, had their lives particularly upended when schools around the country closed campuses. Although many of the works in this exhibition were created several years prior and did not directly respond to the COVID-19 crisis, we wanted to hear from this year's finalists how their art practices have been changed – for better or worse – by COVID-19.

As Emily Potts from the University of North Texas aptly put it, “This time is unique in that it is affecting everyone; no one is immune to the consequences of this virus.” She also noted: “In a time where everything feels so uncertain, art and connecting to others through common experience seems like the best way to make sense of the world.”

In a similar vein, Adam Wever-Glen from the University of California, Davis captured the contrasting emotions I think many of us have experienced in the past few months. “During this time in quarantine, I've asked myself many times if what I'm doing is worth pursuing. Making art can feel very selfish much of the time. I'm not directly changing policy or solving injustice by making paintings. I've come to peace with these thoughts, though, and concluded that we each have our strengths and weaknesses, and we each help in what ways we can. I'm humbled and grateful to be able to continue painting and shining whatever light I can into this world.”

I am also humbled by the talent on display in this exhibition and, on behalf of AXA XL, grateful to provide these young artists an opportunity to share their figurative art and the stories they aim to tell. Seeing the positivity and resilience this year's group of finalists bring to their artistic endeavors is a reminder of both the vital necessity of art and creative expression in times of crisis as well as the ability of art to bring people together and create a sense of community.

Scott Gunter
CEO, AXA XL
Stamford, CT









A Revolution in Vision

Antwaun Sargent
Art Critic and Writer

Throughout the history of figuration, artists have mostly selected or have been commissioned to paint from inside the circles of power and privilege, creating a portraiture of possibility for some while others were met with exclusion, misrepresentation and erasure. Positioned at the center of their canvases are the noble, their children, generals, and those men of industry and great wealth who are believed to have mastered the universe. Women as muses. People of color, nearly nonexistent. The non-heterosexual body in twisted fantasies, when present at all. Figuration, whether in painting, drawing or photography, establishes frames of dominion over who deserves to be seen and have their realities, whatever they may be, named for history.

In the generations since figurative painting was considered dead, artists such as Kerry James Marshall have found reasons to contribute to its rebirth. Central to figuration's revival have been artists practicing a politics of refusal that invalidates, what Marshall has called, "a subtextual narrative of superiority." Because what is figuration if not a mapping of desire onto the body and environment, a construction of symbols that communicate who belongs in a scene of the world, dominating it with presence. The contemporary figuration, notably ushered in by Marshall and Barkley L. Hendricks, among others, has produced images that center the long-ignored subject in ways that allow for specificity over a showing of representation, that in its practice of using a single painting as a stand in for a group, can be confused for its cousin: stereotype. In the space of their paintings where color is in flux, refusing to consent to be read simply as identity, they are operating against what the feminist scholar Michele Wallace has called, "regimens of visibility" that enforce modes of discrimination. Their images, and the generations of artists who have followed, from Kehinde Wiley and Mickalene Thomas to Amy Serrano, Jordan Casteel and Jonathan Lyndon Chase, have established a contemporary figurative tradition that has produced what Wallace termed, "a revolution in vision."

Before each figurative artist comes to the canvas, they have the responsibility of identifying a subject. This is as supreme a task as any conceptual conceit, narrative, or formal consideration of rendering likeness. Subject selection is what has given figuration a renewed vitality. It reminds us that each generation has a right to their own figurations, that define who they are, politically, socially and culturally, in relation to the history of art. To view the works of the emerging artists, a part of the AXA Art Prize exhibition, is to see a new generation of maturing hands and eyes embracing that challenge. Their work has seeds of necessary interventions that emphasize a little appreciated notion: the inclusion of new narratives in figuration is nothing without advancing, through experimentation and authority, the liberation of the subject on the canvas.







Artists

Susan Alvarez

Cassidy Argo

Davis Arney

Caley Buck

Demetri Burke

Fernando Cabrera Gonzalez

Raven Tsz Lam Chau

David Cooper

Alexandria Couch

Josie Del Castillo

Manos Dimitrakis

Angel Duran

Aaron Feltman

Atisha Fordyce

Analinda González

Kirk Henriques

Loc Huynh

Young Lim Lee

Jessie Lefebvre

Krystle Lemonias

Sarah Maranze Levy

Larry Li

Oscar Lopez

Corey Lovett

Larry Madrigal

Heather V. McLeod

Erin Miller

Amuri Morris

Megan Abigail Nugroho

Visakha Jane Phillips

Emily Potts

Michon Sanders

You Jin Sim

Raven Smith

Xiangni Song

MJ Torrecampo

Natalie Wadlington

Adam Wever-Glen

Linna Yao

Cy Yoon

Look At Me

2020

acrylic, pen, graphite, and oil on Bristol board |
7 x 10 inches



Susan Alvarez

Maryland Institute College of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

My piece *Look at Me* is part of an ongoing investigation of conscious individuality and human behavior in context to its ecosystem. All this takes place in the “World of All Consuming Love,” a world I’ve been developing founded in recognizing natural occurrences through an honest lens. This piece recognizes consciousness, wanting to be seen, and the choice to see others.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I’m a mixed media-oriented artist. I would describe my current practice as documentation and visualizations of various sociopolitical ecosystems. We exist in an ecosystem, and it’s impossible to accurately understand persistent concepts or problems unless considering its place and interactivity with the surroundings. In trying to understand the current and cyclical issues humans manifest, I map out networks. These networks are a food chain, of sorts, to explore animalistic natures and subjects alongside their environments.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

My process has slowed since the beginning of quarantine, but I’ve taken the time to educate myself on occurrences in the world. Art is a crucial part of documentation, activism, and general awareness, and knowing that has pushed me to reevaluate my practice and consider what I can do for my community.

Instagram | @lil_suzi_uzi



Oranges

2018

oil on canvas | 60 x 48 inches



Cassidy Argo

Moore College of Art & Design

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

I have an interest in creating cryptic narratives through the use of the figure and space. *Oranges* is reflective of a specific time in my life where I felt very present and happy in my environment. As I painted my close friend in the hallway just outside my dorm, paying careful attention to simple things like the dirty carpet and chipped old chair was my way of writing a love letter to my surroundings.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

Belena Chapp, the director of Moore's Career Center, recommended that I submit my work. Around the time when classes were made remote, she sent me an email with a link to submit my work. She said that the AXA Art Prize reminded her of my painting that hung right outside her office and encouraged me to give it a shot!

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

Through my art, I aim to unsettle but also delight through humor, reliability, and nostalgia. A regular theme in my work is eeriness, whether it is with spooky imagery or the unnerving gaze of a figure. I like to make work that is satisfying to look at but also raises many questions, creating a juxtaposition between comfort and discomfort.

Instagram | @cassidy.argo



Wimbledon '17

2017

oil on canvas | 34 x 30 inches



Davis Arney

Boston University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This painting is part of an attempt to unpack my relationship to affluent domesticity and the physical culture of my upbringing while reflecting on notions of complicity and leisure. Perspectival oddities, disparate adjacent painting languages, and uncanniness create a cocktail of effects that approximate my ambivalence to home.

How would you describe your studio practice?

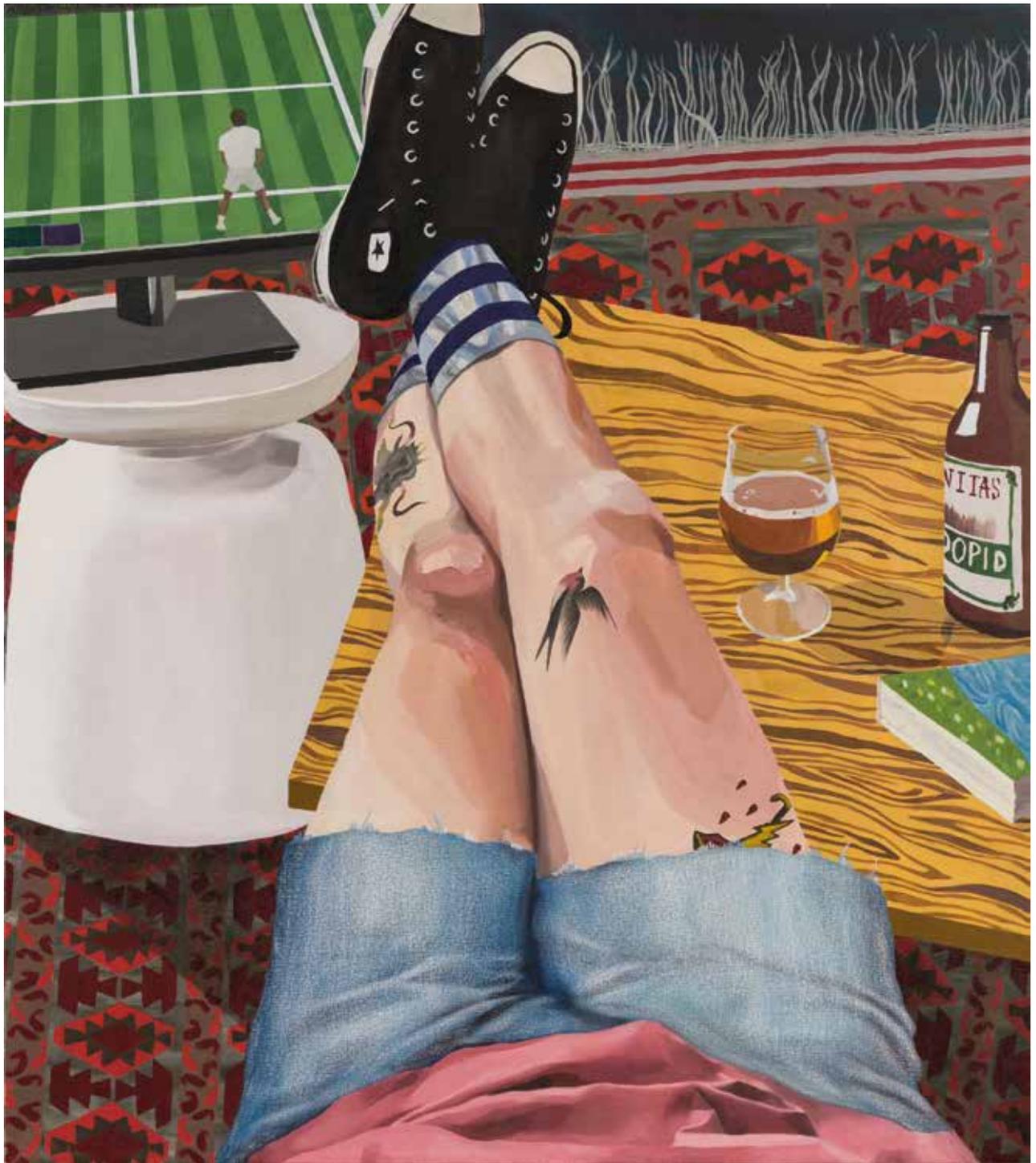
My work is primarily rooted in painting and has recently begun integrating photography and object making. Some themes that are central to my practice are presentation, taste, and class. I have recently been interested in the role that signifiers – particularly ones associated with liberalism and wellness – play in self-presentation and identity, and how these ideas can overlap with painting and illusion.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

I think that difficult and uncertain times like these create fertile ground for artists' voices to process and poeticize what is happening. The challenging part is getting in the right headspace to do that, which I have admittedly struggled with.

www.davischarlesarney.com

Instagram | [@davisarney](https://www.instagram.com/davisarney)



Several // Taxonomic Ranks

2019

oil, oil pastel, acrylic, and sequins on canvas |
48 x 48 inches



Caley Buck

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This piece is one of mine which proposes that the word “several” means precisely “seven” as opposed to the imprecise “many.” Rather than conceding to the unanimously upheld codes of language, I instead set forth to persuade the audience to my side, using recognizable imagery and definite groupings of seven to develop a learning device in the form of a digestible visual aid.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I am a largely figurative painter engaging with the retro. A kitschy Maximalist, my recent work attempts to bridge the gap between art and design, each piece being a pastiche of various appropriated elements – many taken from art history – that explore the hierarchy of composition and message as well as the [mis]understanding of language.

How has your school environment nurtured your practice?

The interdisciplinary manner of SAIC’s curriculum has allowed me to nurture my mixed media tendencies. It is within this versatile environment that my type of “fusion painting,” wherein I incorporate disparate elements such as embroidery, wood carving, or mosaic tiles, has been cultivated.

www.caleybuck.com

Instagram | [@caleybuck](https://www.instagram.com/caleybuck)



Untitled

2020

oil, ink, paper, plaster, vinyl, and preserved
flower on canvas | 48 x 30 inches



Demetri Burke

Georgia State University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Images from my past get mashed together in my thoughts: pastors howling, archways floating over me, rappers' shiny grills on tv. These topics amalgamated together question identity along with the nature of power and the means in which to get it – all cascaded on the canonical surface of the canvas.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

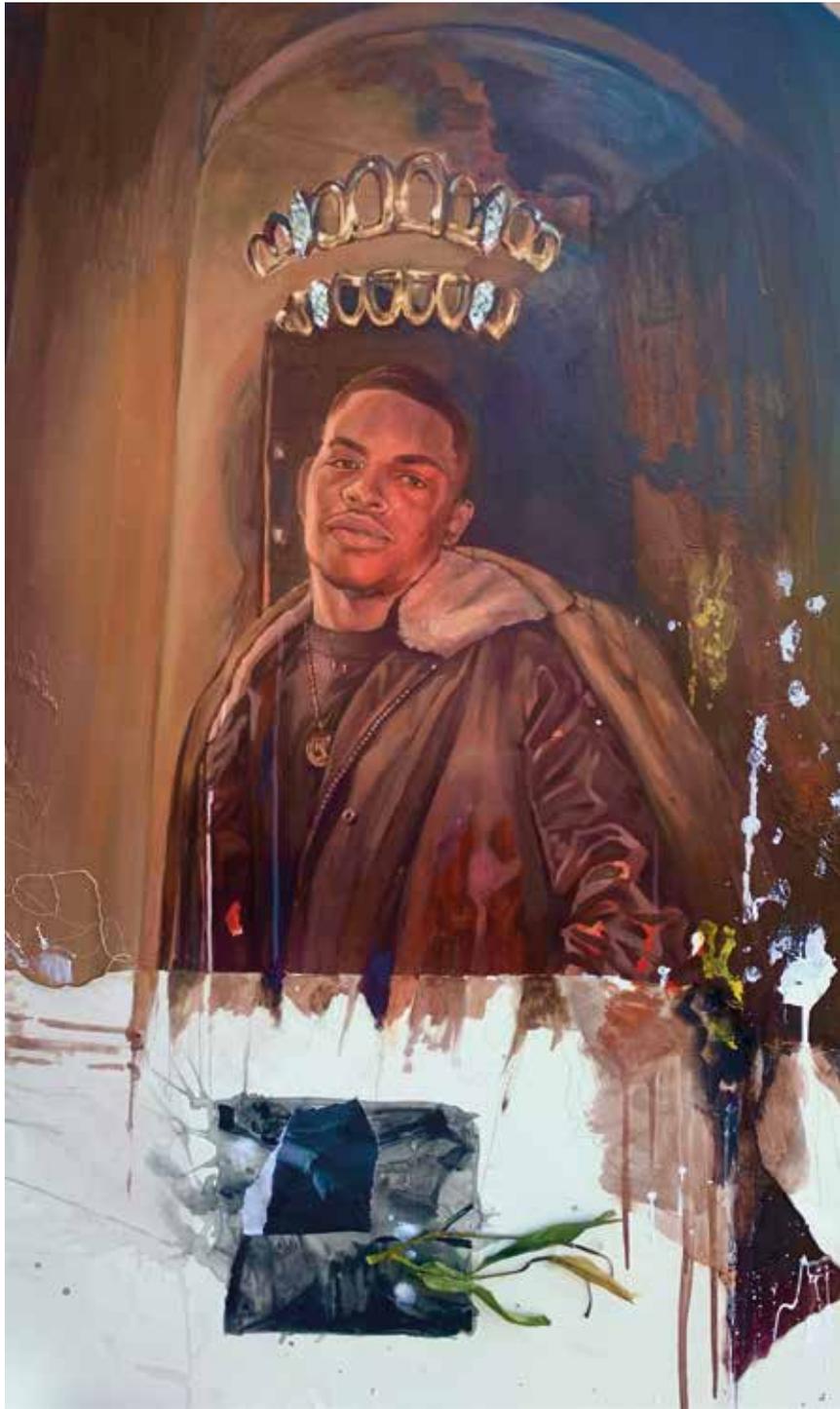
The AXA Art Prize connects artists to communities they might not have had access to before and validates their experiences as artists in the very daunting presence of the art world. To have this opportunity to showcase my work with such a diverse group and such a large audience is amazing to me.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

In times like these, I think artists get to work. The practice, if implemented actively, moves artwork from depictions or storytelling into activist and therapeutic productions. For me, it's not the best of times, but it has shown me how much art matters.

www.dmtriburke.com

Instagram | [@demetri.stefan](https://www.instagram.com/demetri.stefan)



Dale Tiempo Al Tiempo (Give Time Its Time)

2020

oil on canvas | 48 x 48 inches



Fernando Cabrera Gonzalez

Arizona State University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Nationality plays a big part in the understanding of who we are. When rejected from both cultures, we're sent into an identity limbo. Through the repetitive use of the Loteria cards, this painting conveys the overwhelming struggle in the search of cultural acceptance.

How would you describe your studio practice?

There is no better place to be than the studio. Creating paintings allow me to process and visualize recurring thoughts. It gives them their own physical space, allowing for my mind to feel at peace and opening mental space for new ideas. It's important for me to create something every day.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

The story of my migration from Mexico to the United States of America is a recurring theme in my work, as it resulted in unavoidable feelings of detachment and created a void in my identity. In my work, I attempt to explore some of these unresolved feelings and shed new light on my cultural heritage.

Instagram | @fernando.cabreragonzalez



Afternoon Light

2018

oil on canvas | 35.5 x 47.5 inches



Raven Tsz Lam Chau

Savannah College of Art and Design

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

My close friend Pam, our mentor Thomas, and I had a short hike on the hill behind Savannah College of Art and Design in Hong Kong. It was the first sunny day after a week of heavy rain, a perfect day for a photoshoot. We would be apart soon as Pam was graduating, and I was transferring to the Savannah campus in the United States. I told Pam, “We are always going to be together in the painting!”

How would you describe your studio practice?

What inspires me are my childhood drawings, diary, and poems I remember from when I was little. My recent work includes portraits and full-figure oil paintings that capture the beauty of humanity. I create works with positive energy. People grow up and go on with their lives without looking back to respect and appreciate where they came from. I respect and honor my family, friends, and my past by painting, bringing joy to my loved ones in a time of struggle.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

The AXA Art Prize is my first painting competition. I learned to paint only three years ago, and I didn't have enough courage or confidence to compete with my paintings. With this chance, I would be able to show my family that they made the right choice sending me to art school to study fine art. I hope to make them proud.

www.ravenctl.wixsite.com/fineart

Instagram | @ravennpainting



Nascence

2019

oil on canvas | 35.5 x 35.5 inches



David Cooper

University of Texas at Tyler

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Nascence is about the potential of growth, whether it be spiritual, physical, a learned skill, or maturity. Breaking out of a shell is challenging, but it provides strength to survive. A toddler entering an unfamiliar world shows that beginning one's journey is important even when started later than expected.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I have a goal of showing more work this year. When I saw that Anna Park – the winner of the 2019 AXA Art prize – posted about the AXA Art Prize, it seemed like an excellent opportunity to do so.

How do you approach your work?

I start with sketches and writing until I have an idea worthy of pursuing. When I paint many of my decisions are suggested by the piece itself as I ruminate upon it. Much like gardening, I plan an idea, but it is alive and contributes to the outcome.

www.davidcooperpainting.com

Instagram | [@davidcooperpainting](https://www.instagram.com/davidcooperpainting)



Target Practice: It Seems You Must Open Your Arms Wider 2020

acrylic, oil, colored pencil, sharpie, colored pencil,
and embroidery on canvas | 53 x 42 inches



Alexandria Couch

University of Akron

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This work is a reflection of the more subtle ways in which one can become a target of racial judgment or unwanted attention. The figure here is pictured sitting in the grass comfortably and perhaps mid-conversation or movement. As viewers, we dissect the figure and its surroundings. It is the inevitable target of our attention. The figure is used to stares of judgment and stares back, unafraid, almost daring for further interaction.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

Applying to the AXA Art Prize and attending the final exhibition last year had a tremendous impact on my work and the dialogue I am looking to facilitate with it. I gained exposure to up-and-coming artists and colleges in the art world looking to have the same conversations and impact as I am. The other artists that I met and the conversations I had, alone, made me excited to apply again.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Figurative artwork is like an internal mirror. We are constantly exploring self through our work, whether it's intended or not; it becomes a reflection of us. This reflection is not limited, though, and just by the existence and nature of figural work, we empathize, expand, break down, connect, re-create, and emerge over and over again within ourselves and the eyes of others.

Instagram | @cosmocouch



Healing, Learning, and Growing

2020

oil on panel | 48 x 40.5 inches



Josie Del Castillo

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

I find beauty in figurative painting, and by having this concept in mind, I use the love for figurative work to also find love for my body despite my flaws. I am holding myself as a form of self-love. I am emerging from an aloe vera that I have used before to represent healing. Since it is a common plant in Mexican American households, we tend to use this plant for its many healing purposes. I have gained awareness of what is important in my life. I need to learn to be nicer to myself. Because if I am nicer to myself, I will be kinder to the people around me.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My work often deals with concepts of body image, personal development, and growing up in the Rio Grande Valley. My body of work is composed of self-portraits and portraits of the people I admire the most, such as my family and friends, which can often be analyzed as reflections of myself. Through this series, I have been able to evolve into a journey of self-acceptance and have learned to represent my Mexican American culture in a positive outlook.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

Before the pandemic, I was in the studio every day and had a set routine. During the pandemic, I felt unmotivated and struggled to find the energy to be productive. The new challenge is getting back into a routine and being productive in a new setting.

www.josiedelcastillo.com

Instagram | @josieleila



Self-Portrait as Fayum Mummy Portrait

2019

encaustic on birch plywood panel | 15 x 9.5 inches



Manos Dimitrakis

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Impressed by Fayum mummy portraits and their historical content, I was motivated to use encaustic techniques to create a contemporary self-portrait that would work as a time bridge between ancient and present times under the umbrella of Hellenistic identification of a society that assimilates the diversity of cultures.

How would you describe your studio practice?

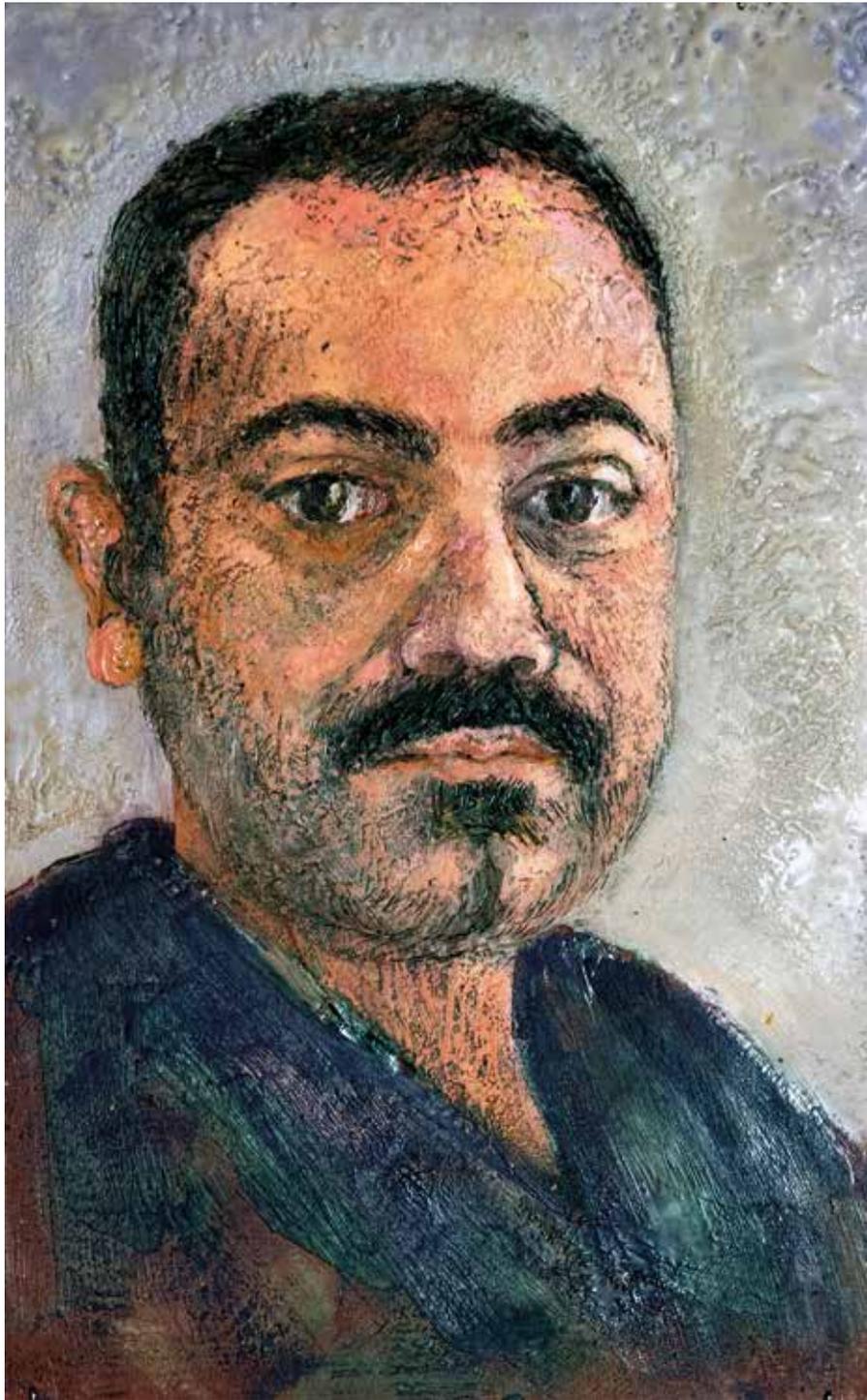
My studio practice focuses on exploration of the diversity of artistic media (from painting and printmaking to film and video) and their potential combination in order to provide aesthetic and conceptual proposals. I initiate and witness the alteration of traditional methods, offering new perspectives, and expanding ideas within the contemporary world.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I find particularly interesting the figurative artwork that explores the psychology of human nature, questioning its existence and has a poetic approach in its expression. In that context, the figure escapes the limitations of time and history, breaks the labels of origins, norms, and social restrictions by reflecting every human in every time.

www.manosart.net

Instagram | @manosdms



The Social Interactions of an Insomniac

2020

oil on canvas | 40 x 60 inches



Angel Duran

Mason Gross School of The Arts

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This piece depicts the moment Brandon, a self-professed insomniac, crosses paths with a stranger on an empty New York City street. Thematically, it poses questions about the role urbanization plays in social fragmentation and the disintegration of human interactions. It highlights how – instead of forming intra-personal relationships – metropolitan areas can help foster the feeling of isolation. My hope is that this piece helps form a communal experience built upon our shared moments of isolation.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Rather than plan out a painting ahead of time, I simply decide on the feeling I wish for it to evoke. I spend hours photographing strangers, chasing the perfect moment of emotional resonance. Oftentimes I find them; other times, I'm forced to collage multiple photos together in order to achieve my desired goal (my featured painting, for example, is made up of 17 different photographs). Since my works serve as an exploration of the relationship between painting and photography, I tend to incorporate qualities traditionally considered unique to photography – such as the bokeh effect – into my paintings, as a means of addressing how both media have historically related to each other.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

The AXA Art Prize provides the perfect opportunity to present my work to a larger audience, while also allowing me to engage in a broader dialogue about the themes of my practice and to see how deeply these themes resonate with others.

www.angelduranstudios.com

Instagram | [@artist.duran](https://www.instagram.com/artist.duran)



Sunburnt Sweater

2020

oil on linen | 60 x 48 inches



Aaron Feltman

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Sunburnt Sweater serves as a recollection of my time in the surreal space of Norfolk, Connecticut, where I attended the Yale Norfolk Residency last summer. This painting taps into larger themes of repression and shame as the sunburn across the main figure's chest is inverted, representing a psychological sunburn rather than a physical one. The searing of the skin recalls the pulsing heat one may feel when they experience a moment of shame. The painting also draws influence from Piero Della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* with its central composition, low horizon, and the contrapposto pose of the main figure with an out-turned foot.

How would you describe your studio practice?

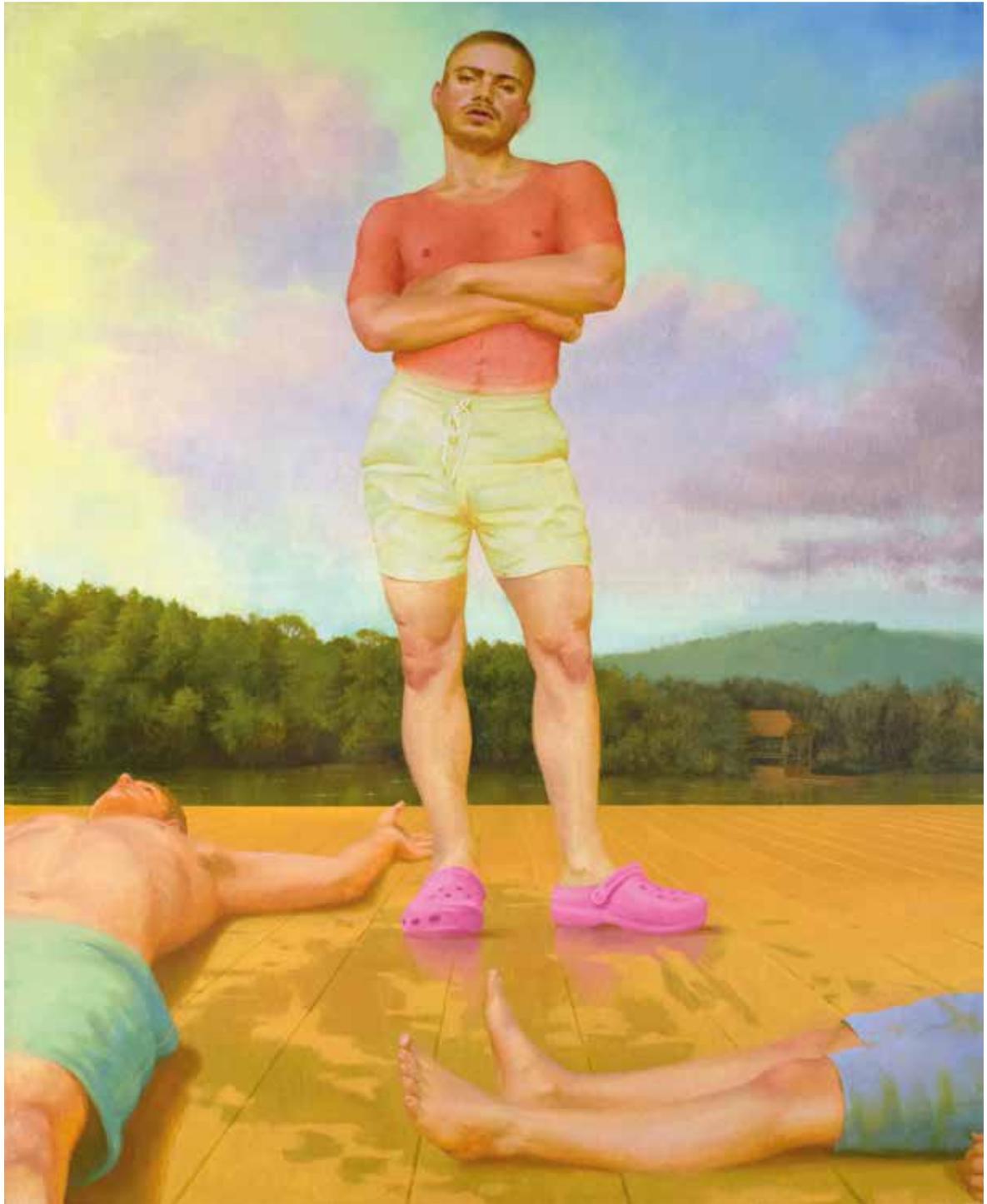
I am a painter who mainly works in oils with a primary focus on the male figure. In my work, I try to understand my relationships with those around me, as well as the internal relationship I have with myself. I also have a strong bond with art history in my work and continually look to artists of the past to understand how they were able to evoke certain qualities like lust, repression, empathy, or vulnerability. I then use these historical references as a departure point to reinvent my reality in its current moment.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

The figure interests me as it can simultaneously act as a unifying force in allowing for empathy with a subject from a sense of shared experience while also revealing the complexity of individuality and the peculiarity of personal encounters and perceptions.

www.aaronfeltman.com

Instagram | [@aaronjfeltman](https://www.instagram.com/aaronjfeltman)



Bantu

2017

acrylic, colored pencil, and ballpoint pen
on paper | 45 x 36 inches



Atisha Fordyce

Mason Gross School of The Arts

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Bantu is part of a series where I create hybrids, versions of family members, or people I am close with who inhabit the architectural spaces of my memories and dreams. The drawing depicts a moment in a space where beings float, existing between the places I've seen and my desire for belonging in them.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice is interdisciplinary, involving representations of the body and its relationship to home and the familiar. In the process of re-representing people and places, the image can get abstracted in ways that anyone can lay anything – baggage, perceptions, ideas – onto it. But what do we do without trying to hold onto false senses of representation? My practice is constantly contending with that question, among many others.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I find that figures are one of the most relatable subjects in art because they reference life and offer personage. They are relatable because we can attribute emotions and senses to them. I particularly find it interesting that I can alter the figure to create hybrids that exist in endless alternate planes; as a proposal for new ways of thinking, feeling, and being.

www.atishafordyce.com

Instagram | @thedraftswoman



Separated

2020

acrylic on canvas | 18 x 24 inches



Analinda González

New Mexico State University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

My painting expresses the pain caused by my father's deportation. It depicts an image of my father, whose stoicism belies the sadness expressed in his eyes. Understanding how controversial this topic is, I do not portray the underlying structure of our immigration system, but rather shed light on his story.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I felt very determined to apply since the exhibition is primarily concerned with figurative art, which is what I am most interested in. I strongly felt that the AXA Art Prize was a great opportunity for me to receive exposure and engage with the broader discourse of art.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I enjoy replicating the complexities of our characteristics from our bone and muscle structures to our wide range of flesh tones. The figure is a predominant subject in my work. They are personal and readily convey the challenges we face in our collective human struggle for dignity, recognition, and acceptance.

Instagram | [@analinda_rose_art](#)



Discourse

2020

oil, oil paint chips, and house paint on wood panel |
32 x 24 inches



Kirk Henriques

Cornell University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

In this painting entitled *Discourse*, the viewer experiences the composition from the outside-of-the-fence-looking-in-at-the-figures who are comfortable in their own space. It embodies conversations and the empowerment one feels to express freely within their space. The landscape is abstracted into color fields, and I fragmented the faces into planes using dried oil paint. This is an exploration into spaces and accessibility to them and how fences are a social construct.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio work is multidisciplinary. I apply different media to best fit the exploration. Currently, I paint figures that are at odds with their surroundings and simultaneously integral to them. These multi-layered depictions speak to the complexity and endless layers of a person, exploring between the visible that is obscure and the visible that is perceptible.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

As an emerging artist, I recognize the opportunity the AXA Art Prize gives as a platform to introduce my work to art enthusiasts outside the reach of my studio. I decided to apply after my classmate forwarded a link to the website.

www.kirkhenriques.com

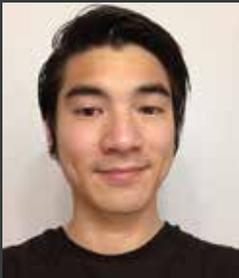
Instagram | [@kirkaworks](https://www.instagram.com/kirkaworks)



The Embrace (Electric Blue)

2019

acrylic on canvas | 48 x 48 inches



Loc Huynh

University of North Texas

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

The piece I submitted is a loose narrative about human interaction and using a pop/geometric language (which tends to be cold and impersonal) to convey a sense of vulnerability and empathy. It's partially biographical, but I leave the narrative ambiguous so that viewers can form their own conclusions.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was motivated to apply for the AXA Art Prize because it seems like a good opening given to emerging artists. I also saw it as a way to connect with like minds from around the country and enable people outside of my art school circle to view my work. Also, the financial gain of the prize would make a world of difference to a young artist like me, and I think it's a wonderful opportunity being provided.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I am drawn to the accessibility of figurative art. The figures act as a tangible entry point to view a painting, and I think that the figure, in many cases, personifies the painting. Giving it a "soul," so to speak.

www.lochuynhart.com

Instagram | @locxhuynh



Artist's Studio

2020

oil and pastel on linen | 42 x 42 inches



Young Lim Lee

New York Academy of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Artist's Studio depicts the agony, anxiety, and pressure that I and all other artists experience as an intrinsic part of our respective artistic journeys. The multiple characters in the painting represent me in my more vulnerable moments. Last year, I was going through a difficult time as a young artist, and I wanted to express what I was experiencing in the most authentic way, while presenting it in a way that was, aesthetically, whimsical and bright.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Imagination plays a crucial role in my studio work and my overall creativity. I like to let the childlike self inside me be free to play around with images and ideas drawn from my imagination. Everything starts to exude their own shades and different nuances, and inanimate objects begin to come to life. These are often depicted as metaphorical devices in my paintings.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

For me, painting is the best tool for communication and expression. The narrative, whether it is metaphorical or direct, is important in my work, and I think figurative art suits me more when creating a narrative that I want to convey. I feel that figurative work provides a broader opportunity for me to communicate with others.

Instagram | [@yl.lee_art](#)



Equality

2020

oil and linocut on linen | 16 x 21 inches



Jessie Lefebvre

Savannah College of Art and Design

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Equality is an exploration of culture. It challenges the viewer to bring up questions within, addressing the importance of freedom of speech, the power of nonviolence, and peace movements around the world.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

As an emerging artist, I saw the AXA Art Prize as an excellent opportunity for my exposure. So, I can pursue my passion, creating images that exemplify my beliefs and interests. Through this experience, I hope my work will inform viewers and bring them together.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

I use my work to try to shed light on social themes dealing with human rights, freedom, unity, oppression, culture, and societal standards. These themes are part of my belief system, and they are used to stir up questions, although I leave meaning up to the viewers' interpretation.

Instagram | @jlart_



Change Change

Change

Eeh, Hole Still!

2020

baby clothes and woodblock relief on fabric |
56 x 34 inches



Krystle Lemonias

University of South Florida

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Caribbean people's resilience to provide for their families captivates and fuels my work. Here, I critically examine the experiences of women who have immigrated from predominantly Black Caribbean nations and been employed as nannies. The work contemplates the social and economic complexities of race, gender, class, and citizenship.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

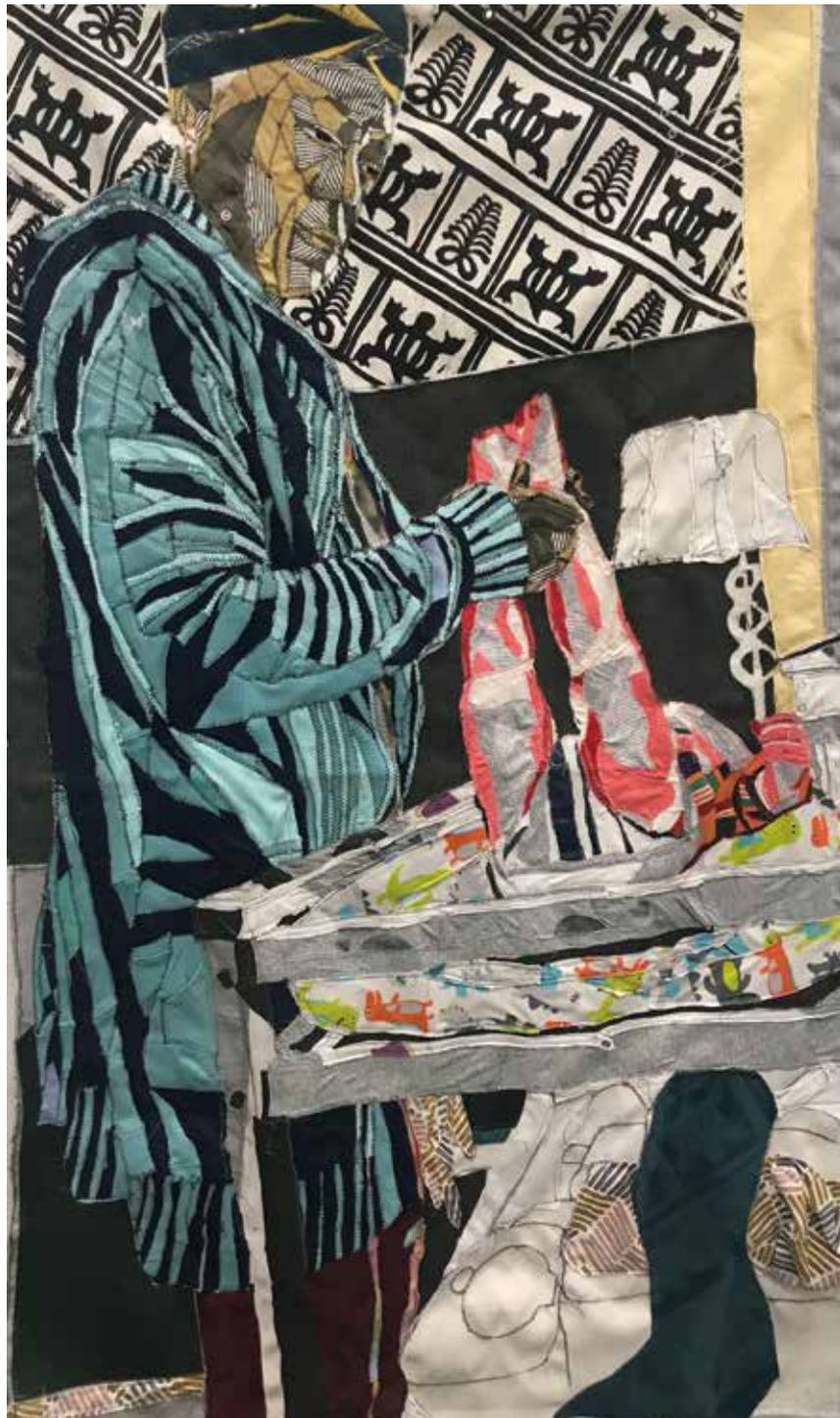
I applied because I admired what AXA Art Prize represents, its established credibility in the UK, and its mission to showcasing emerging figurative artists. Its jury process exposes my work to top curators from renowned museums. Not to mention the top prizes that would support my education and art career.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

Issues surrounding essential workers during the pandemic encouraged me to continue my visual research of Black Caribbean women who work as nannies. I realized my work's relevance as well as how it brings forward the experiences of people that aren't often appreciated but are crucial to the function of society.

www.krystlelemonias.com

Instagram | [@empress1989kl](https://www.instagram.com/empress1989kl)



Korey

2019

charcoal on paper | 41 x 36 inches



Sarah Maranze Levy

New York Academy of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This is Korey King Wise, a member of the Exonerated Five (formerly referred to as the Central Park Five). After watching Ava DuVernay's documentary *When They See Us* last year, I couldn't stop thinking about the five men and the devastating injustice they had to face. This piece was a response to thinking about Wise and his story.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I draw as a way of processing things. This process of looking intensely at a subject is a way of learning more about them, empathizing with them, and getting to spend time thinking about them and their story. In my practice, I draw laps around the subject – looking, marking, looking, and re-marking – over and over again. I look where I am compelled to, and I make marks to leave a record of where I've gone.

How do you approach your work?

I am interested in looking and responding. I look where I am compelled to look and make marks as a record of this – what I see, how I emotionally respond – and then I repeat this process until I feel satisfied, leaving the history of the drawing visible as I go. I am more concerned with conveying the feeling of a thing than the academic depiction of said thing.

www.sarahlevyart.com

Instagram | [@sarahlevyart](https://www.instagram.com/sarahlevyart)



Idols Through Time

2018

oil and collaged fliers on canvas | 36 x 48 inches



Larry Li

University of Southern California

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This piece interprets a 1976 photograph of students mourning the death of Chairman Mao, juxtaposed with fliers for the 2018 music festival, Head in the Clouds, by Asian hip-hop record label 88rising. Illustrating the differences between the Asian youth through the passage of time and war defines a generation.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My practice is rooted in the investigation of my own cultural identity as a Chinese American, and exploring the nuances included in that specific narrative. Using figure painting as the backbone to my process while experimenting with collaged objects to continually contrast and push those ideas in my work.

How do you approach your work?

I approach my work through the lens of cultural contrast, whether conceptually or materially. I believe artists are able to find connections between things in life that are often overlooked. My work combines and juxtaposes those things and relates them back to my existence as both Chinese and American.

www.larryli.myportfolio.com

Instagram | @larryli_official



Revolucion Sin Fronteras (Revolution Without Borders) 2019

oil and graphite on canvas | 60 x 40 inches



Oscar Lopez

San Francisco Art Institute

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Moving to America as a young adult continues to teach me to embrace who I am as a person and value my cultural roots. Knowing myself here, in contrast to knowing myself in my homeland/country of origin – or choose another word – really gives me the chance to re-explore the past and the present. I can see that many things have not changed, and the best thing that I can imagine to do is to start my own revolution, with paint and education. I hope this is my opportunity to communicate and be an example for those who want to see and know more from my perspective.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was able to experience the show at SFAI, and I love the diversity and honesty of the work. Seeing the quality in techniques and subject matters that the artists depicted was incredibly motivating for me. It inspired me to get better and not be afraid to show my thinking in my artwork.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

The form of the human body has its own language. The movement of the body and facial expression in complement with place and time are powerful, and also mysterious. At the same time, figurative work allows us to make our own narrative, and often the viewer doesn't know the real feelings of the model.

www.artbyoscarlopez.com

Instagram | [@oscar_lopez_art](https://www.instagram.com/oscar_lopez_art)



Near Drowning

2019

oil on wood | 48 x 36 inches



Corey Lovett

Pratt Institute

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

I created the painting which I've entitled *Near Drowning* as a way to describe the constant internal and external battles Black people endure due to racism and false ideologies in America. The painting tells a narrative of a Black male figure, who almost drowns while battling an abstract form of water. This narrative describes how overwhelming the constant battles can be that Black people have to fight.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I heard about the AXA Art Prize from one of the previous winners, Monica Ikegwu. I'm a fan of Monica, and I also follow her on social media. When I saw the amazing exposure and feedback she got from her work, I was inspired and motivated to join.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

I feel encouraged more than anything to continue making art despite these challenges. I believe that now more than ever is the time to create work that either inspires, motivates, encourages, documents, or educates Black people.

Instagram | @coreylives_



Eye Exam and Tangled Viewpoints

2019

oil on canvas | 60 x 48 inches



Larry Madrigal

Arizona State University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

When I painted *Eye Exam and Tangled Viewpoints*, I was interested in the idea of perception, fear, and vulnerability within the context of everyday life.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My paintings are expressions of how I see the world as a meaningful and precarious venture. I am interested in the daily rhythms of life and how they are entangled with dramatic themes. Ordinary routines are infused with issues of identity, worldview, and responsibility. I see the commonplace as an arena for sacred reflection on the complex nature of being, and a platform to explore painting's ability to promote empathy and wonder.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

The constant balancing of personal, social, and creative expectations has been a central theme for me. The feeling of trying to keep up with responsibilities, political issues, social media, and family is complicated. My work has been gradually surrendering to the effects that these chaotic demands have on my paint handling and image-making.

www.larrymadrigal.com

Instagram | [@larrymadrigal](https://www.instagram.com/larrymadrigal)



The Ear Project

2020

oil on panel | 34 x 60 inches



Heather V. McLeod

New York Academy of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

The Ear Project is a collection of 160 individual portraits. There are so many ways to capture a sitter's identity, and I have found that a body part, so often overlooked, can say as much if not more about a sitter than the likeness of a face.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I believe that doing what you love as an artist takes a great deal of support, and the AXA Art Prize can offer so much to an artist looking to establish themselves. It connects you with a community of like-minded people and gives you that confirmation to keep working.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

Art has always been a way for me to express myself. There will always be obstacles that make you pause and reevaluate what you're doing or why you're doing it, but I find that taking in what's going on in the world only gives me more to paint about.

www.heathervmcleod.com

Instagram | [@heathervmcleod](https://www.instagram.com/heathervmcleod)



Departure From 2019

oil on canvas | 48 x 24 inches



Erin Miller

New York Academy of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

The act of departure is a generational cycle – of pushing away from a home that is familiar toward something hopefully better, albeit unknown. In this journey, a modern-day pioneer sits in a moment of tenuous and hopeful waiting for where the journey will take her.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My practice is evolving through my current experience in graduate school, but consistent in hunting for my language in figure-based narrative painting. My work is becoming more and more invented from an original moment of a seen, real-life inspiration toward more imagined and narratively strong environments.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

The pandemic forced me to zero in on what I need to generate ideas for my work. Rather than searching out inspiration in new places with new people, I felt like an explorer in my home. I learned how to playfully manipulate and imagine in otherwise mundane spaces.

www.erinmillerartist.com

Instagram | [@erin_miller_artist](https://www.instagram.com/erin_miller_artist)



Self-Portrait as a Grandma

2019

charcoal on paper | 42 x 28 inches



Amuri Morris

Virginia Commonwealth University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

In *Self-Portrait as a Grandma*, I'm exploring the contrast between self-identity and social identity. The viewer sees this figure as a grandma and imposes their own connotations/identity with that. This identity could have sexist or ageist implications, and so on. However, this identity is a facade. Underneath this guise, my own self-identity remains intact. This piece explores the dissonance between the world that you know and what you mean as a symbol in public. This is often a lived reality for many groups such as African Americans, where, for example, people see race over the person.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was motivated to apply to the AXA Art Prize so my work can be recognized outside of the classroom. Competitions like this require initiative, dedication, and a level of professionalism that is not necessary for amateur pursuits. Therefore, it is a learning tool for immersing myself in the professional art world. Through this experience, I am hoping to successfully further promote my talents so I can become successful in my field.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

In my portraiture, I often focus on identity as a theme. This identity always forms to show the consistently powerful presence of the Black figure. I'm frequently looking at the dialectic between a history of aristocratic representation and the use of portraiture as a statement of power. In response to this, I elevate my figures to a level of high culture or power that is classically unavailable to them as Black females and males.



Ancestral Offerings

2020

woodcut and screenprint on Rives BFK paper |
30 x 44 inches | edition unique



Megan Abigail Nugroho

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Ancestral Offerings views ideas of rituals and offerings by contextualizing the culture and narratives that I grew up with. The abstraction of beauty and collections of photographs all collaged using printing techniques become central in telling the narrative. I wanted to explore ways that people memorialize and pay tribute to ancestors. Therefore, this work rethinks the role of art as an offering towards ancestors. It is the beautification of tribute, love, and culture through image-making.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I see my studio practice as constantly evolving; however, I find a lot of importance in searching for narratives. Recently, that has involved digging through family archives as source material for the narratives. I also place urgency in concepts of identity, from my identity as a Chinese Indonesian growing up until the present, to my identity as an artist and the identity of my work itself. The constant reminders and exploration around this notion of identity fuels my studio practice and results in the works I produce.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

Themes that regularly resurface reflect my studio practice which focuses on ideas about identity. That is where it always starts. Dissecting my identity propagates steps to creating my work. From there, I find myself exploring family concepts and narratives that imbue a self-reflective view of my personal identity.

www.nugrohomegan.com

Instagram | @megan_nugroho



Sang Pi

2019

oil and charcoal on canvas | 58.5 x 60 inches



Visakha Jane Phillips

Bard College

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Sang Pi is a synthesis of moments tied to the village the piece is named after. Though seemingly unrelated, each of the elements comes from my own childhood memories or my family's memories, from my parents on their wedding day, to my grandmother's chickens, to the school playground next door.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice demonstrates the convoluted nature of memory by fusing personal objects, figures, and events together in a dreamlike space. I am constantly undergoing cycles of painting and un-painting, with a visual emphasis on discoveries made in the process rather than a fixation on the final product.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was forwarded the AXA Art Prize by a professor and was compelled by the opportunity for exposure. Because the figure has always been so central to my artistic practice, I was also excited to apply for a prize that recognizes the power and weight of figurative work.

Instagram | @visakhajane



OG

2017

oil, charcoal, and wood on plywood |
47 x 19 inches



Emily Potts

University of North Texas

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This work is titled *OG*, as it was the first in a series of wooden portraits representing different personas of the human experience. These portraits each symbolized a part of the subconscious, or how an individual sees itself, that I believe in one way or another exist in everyone. The facial expressions in these figures allude to being lost in a moment of contradiction or deadlock, indicative of a personality affected and maybe even limited by its own self.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I never really go in with a specific idea. I am most interested in allowing the piece to be open to change and resolving itself. Because I am interested in psychology and particularly in subconscious/conscious deadlock, my practice is guided mostly by intuition and the conversation between myself, the piece, and a part of myself I tend to filter.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

For me, fear and anxious energy breed creative impulse. In a time where everything feels so uncertain, art and connecting to others through common experience seems like the best way to make sense of the world. This time is unique in that it is affecting everyone; no one is immune to the consequences of this virus, which allows us all an opportunity to connect and relate in a very intimate way.

www.emilypottsart.com

Instagram | @freepiral_



Repast to Follow

2019

oil on canvas | 36 x 48 inches



Michon Sanders

California College of the Arts

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Repast to Follow is a work that I believe represents a common moment for Black people, especially those from the south. This painting depicts that particular period of time between the end of a funeral and the beginning of the repast, which is the meal served after the service is completed. This moment feels familiar and comforting, and the figures portray the mix of emotions that follow such an event.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Currently, I am enjoying sorting through old family photos and picking out figures that would work in a composition. I look at things like body language, the scene or event that's happening, and I am especially interested in eye contact with the viewer. I am building a series of these paintings that I hope to present as a glimpse into Black history, specifically my own Black history. The idea of Black people simply "being" has been missing from the art historical canon for far too long, and I would like to represent that.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I believe that my work offers a unique perspective on the narrative that would be an asset to the exhibition. It is my desire to share the images of Black life, and I would like to show us just "being" with as many people as possible.

www.michonsandersart.com

Instagram | [@michonsandersart](https://www.instagram.com/michonsandersart)



Look at This! He Is Wearing Pink!

2020

watercolor and gouache on paper |
48 x 40 inches



You Jin Sim

San Francisco Art Institute

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Through my use of pink, I would like to illustrate my work in a humorous way: how perceptions change with the times, the social situation of modern capitalism and consumerism dominated by consumption, and the way Eastern ideas are destroyed by Western ideas.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My pieces are created to express and clarify myself. My paintings highlight how differently people can perceive the same thing. In the process of finding my essence, I attempt to depict the struggles that human beings all have in our lives with humor and positivity.

How do you approach your work?

I would like to portray the emotions and thoughts that I feel as I go through my life – the people who live in modern society and the state of modern society as I see them. I observe the behavior of people and social flow to express them through my work.

www.youjinsim.com

Instagram | [@jinsim1020](https://www.instagram.com/jinsim1020)



Untitled: Distraction Piece #1

2019

oil on canvas | 36 x 48 inches



Raven Smith

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Spectators observe a suspenseful trio saturated in seductive energy. Attentive demeanors contrast dancing pigments while welcoming an otherworldly escape from the mundane. It is subconsciously a way to distract emotionally while simultaneously exposing the flaws of existence. Delusional cinematic hues cause figures to lose grip of reality, allowing them to transform into personas other than themselves. Within this fantasy, we perceive what appears to be ordinary while subtly being made conscious of the obscurity of the subconscious.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My work's goal is to aid in the desegregation of "Black art" from the rest of the contemporary art world. I create oil paintings that depoliticize the Black body by allowing monochromatic moods and captivating surrealism to shift the viewer's attention away from the race of the incorporated figures. I am now an artist creating work that demands my viewers' interactive curiosity while simultaneously creating a new perspective on Black contemporary artists and their work.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was interested in the AXA Art Prize for the national exposure, networking opportunities, competition, critique, and response observation. This was also a recommendation by a respected artist that I am inspired by, and I want to add to the competition's racial diversity as a young, Black, female artist.

www.fineartbyraven.com

Instagram | [@fine_art_by_raven](https://www.instagram.com/fine_art_by_raven)



Memory

2019

oil on canvas | 30 x 24 inches



Xiangni Song

School of Visual Arts

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

The painting is oil on canvas and painted last year. This is the first painting that I have ever painted. It is my father holding our cat in the old house that we lived in for years in China. The original house was taken down by the owner in 2018. I got the inspiration from a Polaroid photo I took before I left China. There are huge changes in our life. The relationship between my father and me has been strained for a while. However, I always remember the good times that I spent with my family in that old house. Those good things which happened to me in that house will always be part of who I am.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was motivated by the encouragement of my instructors and for the chance for more people to see my work. The AXA Art Prize is the first competition in New York in which I have participated. It is a great opportunity for me to gain more experience.

How do you approach your work?

The most important thing for me is to have good references. I collect the photo reference that I need with great help from my parents, and then I draw several versions of sketches. After getting suggestions from both my instructors and my parents, I do some color studies. Some problems don't emerge until after I start the painting, and sometimes, I need to stop for a while to determine how I can finish this painting.

Instagram | @xiangnisong



Two for One Tuesdays

2019

oil on canvas | 56 x 36 inches



MJ Torrecampo

New York Academy of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Two for One Tuesdays represents a short period of living in Tupelo, Mississippi, and the act of drinking as an excuse for the gathering of an unlikely group. Arms reach for one another, a drink, or a phone in a moment that lasts as long as there's more beer.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Painting is a constant internal dialogue. I pick at my own memories and choose from interactions and relationships I previously glossed over but need to be dissected or resolved. Besides a scribbled composition, there is no roadmap to the final image.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

I'm interested in the relationship between people and the simultaneity of camaraderie and division within a group. It's an investigation of the group dynamics of my own community: a closer look at the relationships we maintain and its complications.

www.mjtorrecampo.com

Instagram | [@mjtorrecampo](https://www.instagram.com/mjtorrecampo)



Stubbs the Dog

2019

oil on canvas | 47.5 x 44 inches



Natalie Wadlington

Cranbrook Academy of Art

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

Stubbs the Dog is an oil painting on canvas depicting a nude woman watching something on her laptop with her dog. Both she and the dog are excited, but what is exciting them? Behind them hangs a painting by the 18th c. British equestrian painter, George Stubbs.

How would you describe your studio practice?

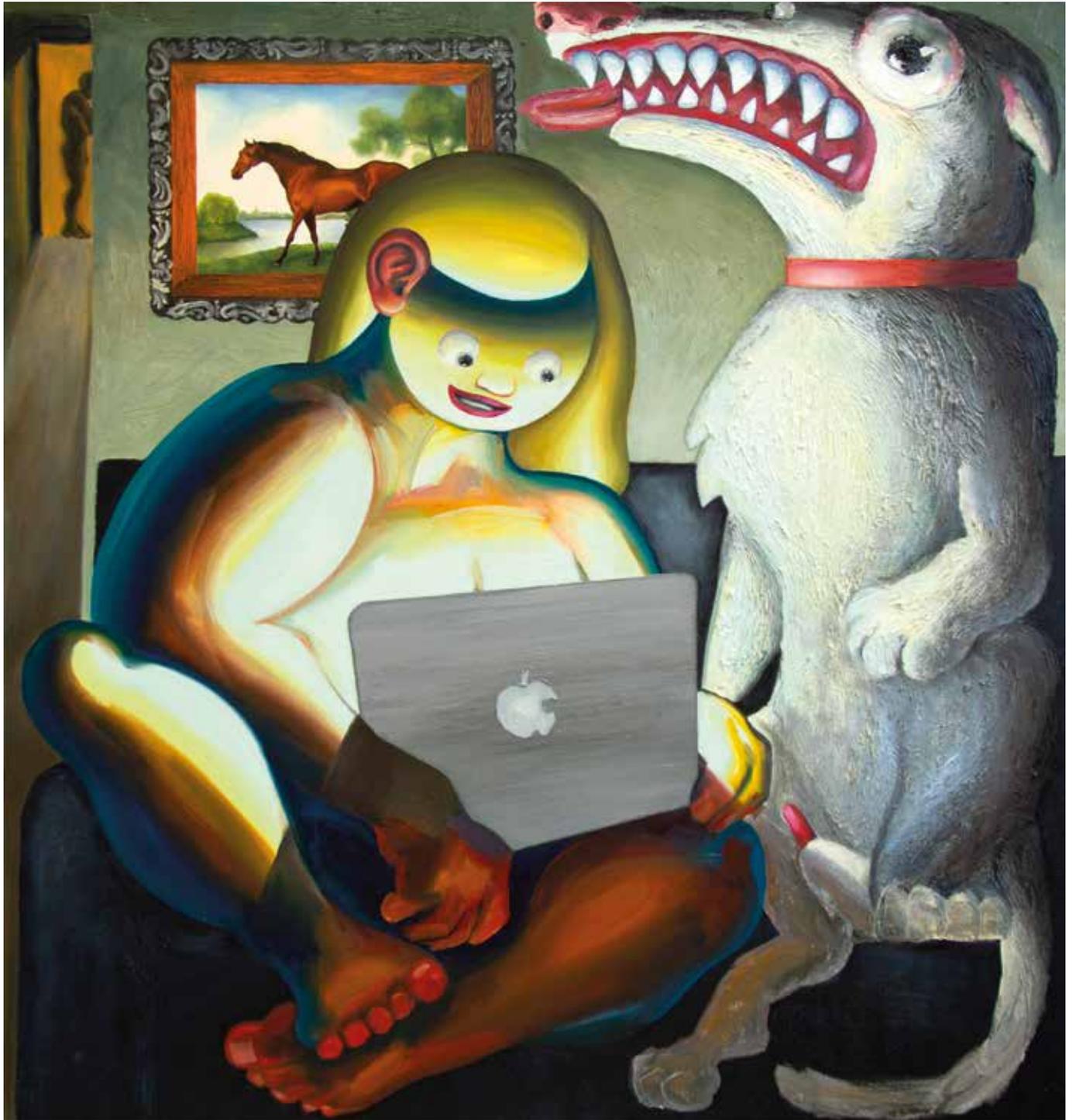
I am a painter depicting narrative, allegorical paintings that explore the fraught relationship between people and animals. I employ various painting styles and histories to expand upon the multifaceted quality of painting today.

How has your school environment nurtured your practice?

I greatly appreciate the support I got from my graduate program. Cranbrook is a unique space that encourages artists studying there to pursue their individual projects. During my time there, I refined my unique artistic voice and developed a studio practice that continues to sustain me. I will be thinking about and growing from the feedback I got from Cranbrook for years to come.

www.nataliewadlington.com

Instagram | [@natalie.wadlington](https://www.instagram.com/natalie.wadlington)



Alizarin

2020

oil on canvas | 36 x 36 inches



Adam Wever-Glen

University of California, Davis

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

There is a scene in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* where a group of murderous outlaws sits around a campfire, staring into the flames. The wood glows, forming cracks and fissures, revealing "hidden geometries." The figure, like charred tinder, is in grayscale so that its own hidden geometries may be pondered. Surrounding the figure, like fire, is a gaseous, alizarin atmosphere – womblike and stellar.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

As a figurative artist, I could not pass up the opportunity. To have a painting selected for a national exhibition, judged by a panel representing prestigious institutions, is an honor. It is also a wonderful opportunity to show my work with an amazing group of artists.

With the pandemic forcing the world to rethink how we keep moving forward, do you feel encouraged or inspired in your own studio practice to persevere despite these challenges?

The pandemic has shown how fragile our human world really is. The pandemic, as well as the BLM movement, has forced me to re-examine my life and work. During this time in quarantine, I've asked myself many times if what I'm doing is worth pursuing. Making art can feel very selfish much of the time. I'm not directly changing policy or solving injustice by making paintings. I've come to peace with these thoughts, though, and concluded that we each have our strengths and weaknesses, and we each help in what ways we can. I'm humbled and grateful to be able to continue painting and shining whatever light I can into this world.

Instagram | @adamweverglen



Prepackaged Identity

2017

oil on canvas | 48 x 36 inches



Linna Yao

Yale University

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

I am subject to society's perception of who an Asian American female adolescent should be. For too long, I have allowed these stereotypes to limit my expression. More and more, however, I am trying to challenge the preconceived notions of who I am by acting out of unencumbered sincerity.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Making art fulfills my indomitable urge to materialize an internal struggle. Most of the time, I do not understand why I have that urge or how it fits into my life at that moment. After the completion of a piece, however, I finally begin to understand why I felt that need to create, and in those times, art becomes my therapist, the unbiased voice that helps me solve my internal struggles that are deeply embedded in my subconscious. My canvases are my most private journals; they hold my deepest secrets and conflicts. By physically representing such struggles, I am able to find clarity in my knowledge of self.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

In my paintings, my interaction with my environment is always conflicting; while I try to resist the restrictions of my environment, I also sink into these environments. This conflict between fighting and surrendering to my environment to take control over me is reflective of my adolescence: I float between yearning for the autonomy of adulthood but also wanting to keep my childish ways.

www.linnayao.com/painting



Wedding in Utopia

2018

oil on canvas | 38 x 60 inches



Cy Yoon

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tell us about the work that you have submitted.

This work is in combination with a novel that I wrote about the Korean social structure that I feel is desolate for me. I think the social structure resembles a rigid plastic, where people live in the same way and lose their primitive childhood dream. To me, it feels like a factory that repeatedly makes a uniform human being. I wrote a story about a hypothetical modern man who lives in such a frustrating social structure. The character represents most of us who want to escape reality to utopia. Based on this idea, I work on extracting visual images of many utopian scenes for the hero to reach.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I have been focusing on converting social and cultural themes into public interactions. I spent most of my life in Korea, where societal structures have influenced me. While growing up, I was curious why people live in a way not related to their own dreams. They just live by their parents' opinion or typical societal framework. Before I start my works, I always take notes from my novel, and these notes will be the framework of my piece. I am trying to visualize my text in all the ways, and I don't want to create any restrictions for myself.

How do you approach your work?

My starting point before I paint is to write the text from my imagination. I strive to make more delicate connections between my writing and imagery. In my novel, the character feels disgusted by society and he continuously is trying to find his utopia. I want to find his place, but at the same time, I have no idea where it is or what it looks like, so I paint an ambiguous and strange place that feels like beautiful. This utopia series is the endeavor that we are continuously finding that place for ourselves.



Juries

Regional Jury

Jamie Adams Washington University in St. Louis
Tamie Beldue University of North Carolina Asheville
Ruth Bolduan Virginia Commonwealth University
Charles Browning University of the Arts
Robert Campbell Cornish College of the Arts
Zoë Charlton American University
Bonnie Collura Penn State University
Lisa Corinne Davis Hunter College
Maggie Denk-Leigh Cleveland Institute of Art
Peter Drake New York Academy of Art
Fritz Drury Rhode Island School of Design
Robert Dunning University of North Carolina Asheville
Christian Fagerlund University of North Texas
Joe Fig Ringling College of Art and Design
Anne Gaines Parsons School of Design
Maureen Garvin Savannah College of Art and Design
Arthur Gonzalez California College of the Arts
David Gothard Pratt Institute
Julie Heffernan Rutgers University
Robin Hill University of California, Davis
Clint Jukkala Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Arnold Kemp School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Jeremy Morgan San Francisco Art Institute
Margaret Morrison Lamar Dodd School of Art
David Pagel Claremont Graduate University
Sara Pedigo Flagler College
Shawn Powell Kent State University
Howard Quednau Minneapolis College of Art and Design
Hope Railey Laguna College of Art and Design
Joe Santore Bard College
Tylonn Sawyer College for Creative Studies
Dan Scott Boise State University
Tony Shore Maryland Institute College of Art
Leslie Smith III University of Wisconsin-Madison

Exhibition Jury

Ian Alteveer The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Lauren Haynes Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Brett Littman The Isamu Noguchi Foundation
and Garden Museum
Eugenie Tsai Brooklyn Museum

Prize Jury

Julia Chiang
Erik Parker
Jennifer Schipf
Laurie Simmons
Salman Toor

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Contributing Essayist

Antwaun Sargent

Antwaun Sargent is an art critic and a writer who has contributed to *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Vice* and more, as well as essays to multiple museum publications. His first book, *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion* (Aperture), is out now.

Prize Jurors

Julia Chiang

Julia Chiang is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Chiang has exhibited her work nationally and internationally at The Modern Institute in Glasgow, Scotland; Nanzuka in Tokyo, Japan; The Journal in New York, NY; Colette in Paris, France; Half Gallery in New York, NY; OHWOW in Miami, FL; Deitch Projects in New York, NY; as well as editions at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, NY, the online collection Exhibition A (<https://exhibitiona.com/>), and The Standard. Chiang is involved with the nonprofit RxArt and worked as an artist in resident at Mount Sinai Hospital, New York, NY. Chiang's work has been written about in publications such as *Whitewall Magazine*, *Modern Painters*, *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Paper*, *Purple*, and more. She released her first book *Coming Together, Coming Apart* with Picturebox and Nanzuka in 2013.

Erik Parker

Born in 1968 in Stuttgart, Germany, Parker was raised in San Antonio, TX. He received a BFA from the University of Texas at Austin and an MFA from SUNY Purchase. Parker has been awarded several honors throughout his career, including the Durhurst Family Scholarship (1997), Rose Scholarship (1997), and the Rema Hort-Mann Foundation Grant (1999). Parker has had solo exhibitions at galleries and museums around the world, including the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; De Appel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX. His work is in numerous international collections including The Brooklyn Museum, NY; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Montreal Museum of Fine Art, Canada; and Fauschou Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark. Parker's work combines elements of contemporary culture into a narrative flow of politics, music, internet memes, hallucinatory dreams, conspiracy theories, and the hieroglyphics of various subcultures. In his employment of overwhelming content, Parker seeks to comment on the human condition — what it means to be human specifically in this time, in this place, and with these politics.

Jennifer Schipf

Jennifer is AXA XL's Global Practice Leader for Art. She has a BA in art history and economics from Georgetown University and a BS in interior architecture from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. As AXA XL's Global Practice Leader for Art, Jennifer is responsible for setting worldwide strategy for client solutions, Underwriting guidelines and ultimate profitability. She's been dedicated to the highly specialized fine art underwriting market for nearly twenty years and recently helped establish the AXA Art Prize. She previously led the organization's North American Fine Art & Specie team while also serving as leader of Broker and Client Management for North American Specialty. Jennifer is actively engaged in various arts organizations, teaches fine art underwriting courses and regularly participates in industry educational conferences. She also pursues continuing education classes in painting at the New York Academy of Arts (NYAA) and is an active patron of the NYAA, Tandem Press and other art related organizations.







Laurie Simmons

Laurie Simmons is an American artist, photographer and filmmaker. Since the mid-1970s, Simmons has staged scenes for her camera with dolls, ventriloquist dummies, objects on legs, and people, to create photographs that reference domestic scenes. Simmons has had solo exhibitions at MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY; Artists Space, New York, NY; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; San Jose Museum of Art, CA; Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden; Neues Museum, Nuremberg, Germany; The Jewish Museum, New York, NY; and Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO. Her work has been featured at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; New Museum, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; and many others. Simmons's retrospective originated in 2018 at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX and traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL in early 2019. Her feature film, 'My Art,' premiered at the 73rd Venice International Film Festival and had a North American premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival.

Salman Toor

Salman Toor was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1983. He lives and works in New York City. Toor received his MFA in Painting at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 2009. His paintings are figurative, varying in scale and style, ranging in subject from art history, queer culture, and post-colonialism. Toor has had several solo exhibitions in the US and Pakistan and has participated in significant group shows such as the Kochi Biennale 2016. A recipient of a 2019 Joan Mitchell Foundation grant, Toor has been profiled in a number of publications, including Interview, W Magazine, ArtAsiaPacific, Foreign Policy, THEM, GAYLETTER, The Friday Times, Hyperallergic, and The New York Times. His solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY is expected to open later this year.



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