COMPLEX

Meek Mill's 'Expensive Pain' Album Art Takes Over Landmarks, Major Cities Across U.S.

BY BRENTON BLANCHET

Sep 28, 2021

Image via Publicist

You might want to keep an eye out for Meek Mill's album artwork somewhere in your city.

The Philadelphia rap giant is using cities across the country to showcase his *Expensive Pain* artwork before the album's Oct. 1 release.

Image via Publicist

Image via Publicist

The cover—painted by renowned artist Nina Chanel Abney—can now be seen via photos shared with Complex, as it sits on boats in Miami, buses in Philadelphia, murals and transportation in Los Angeles, billboards in Times Square, on top of buildings in Harlem, and on the sides of trains in Atlanta.

Meek's record will be his first full-length project since he dropped his Grammy-nominated album *Championships* in 2018, his second offering to top the Billboard 200.

Expensive Pain is set to include notable singles "Sharing Locations" with Lil Durk and Lil Baby, as well as "Blue Notes 2" with Lil Uzi Vert. Before giving the full project a stream come release day, check out pics of Meek's nationwide billboard campaign above and below—or in person in your city.

Image via Publicist

Image via Publicist

The art for Meek's fifth studio album was unveiled earlier this month, when the MC shared the cover on Instagram.

He also previously posted a clip of the artwork coming together on his feed:

GRUNGECAKE

When worlds collide: Meek Mill chooses Nina Chanel Abney original for abstract 'Expensive Pain' cover art

The artwork will certainly stand out in the marketplace.

by **RICHARDINE BARTEE** • 3 days ago

Are you ready for Meek Mill's fifth album 'Expensive Pain'?

Photo: **Pitchfork**

Ready or not, here it comes. The Philadelphia rapper's next album will go live on all streaming platforms on Friday, October 1.

It has been 2018 since the passionate artist **Meek Mill** gifted us with the 'Championships' **full-length**. Now, the rapper-activist gears to release a new album called 'Expensive Pain', which features the lead single 'Sharing Locations' with Lil Durk and Lil Baby, '**Blue Notes 2** ' with **Lil Uzi Vert**, and a bonus track titled 'Flamerz Flow'. Inspired by a **Nina Chanel Abney original**, the cover art abstractly shows dice, dollar signs, fire, life rafts, women, men, palm trees, a bike, boat, checkerboard, and a car. These things/objects on his cover art may be topics on his new album, or it is a picture he identifies with and is the best visual representation of what brings forth "expensive pain".

Art is open to interpretation, but Meek Mill delves deep and offers examples on his track with fellow Philadelphia rapper Lil Uzi Vert on 'Blue Notes 2' with phrase "trying to tell them how this rich shit really feel". Regardless, the New York City-based African-American contemporary artist and painter's piece is forever etched into the minds of mainstream modern Hip-Hop/Rap fans, and a new group of people are familiar with her style. I love when worlds collide and a hidden talent unknown to the general public gets discovered.

DAYTONCOM

Oakwood artist, 2 other women to talk about exhibits at The Contemporary

ART EDUCATION

By Meredith Moss, Staff Writer

Aug 29, 2021

Free artist talks, films are part of increased focus on art education

If you've been to a bookstore or library for an author's talk and book signing, you know just how fascinating those sessions can be. It's a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the inspiration for the book, as well as the individual who penned it.

The same is certainly true of artist's talks. The Dayton Visual Arts Center, now known as The Contemporary or The Co, has a rich history of offering free admission to the galleries, as well as hosting entertaining and informational artist's talks. The idea is to educate visitors about the artistic process and to get to know individual artists on a more personal basis. There's typically time for questions and answers at the end of the presentation and for interaction with the guest speakers.

With the expansion of gallery space at the Arcade, the focus on art education at The Contemporary is being expanded as well. You can pick up a free Gallery Guide for each of the three main exhibits. The informational sheets include a detailed description of the specific show, a biography and photo of the artist, and a two-page full-color reproduction of one of the works on display. You're welcome to take these educational pieces home with you.

The Contemporary is also producing short films that give us a behind-the-scenes peek into the studios of prominent Dayton and Ohio artists, and enable us to watch them at work and hear them chat informally about their passions. These 10- to 15-minute films will continue to be available on the gallery's website. To see an example, check out the film on artist Mychaeyn Michalec that's already online.

Small books about featured artists are also being published by The Co and will be available at the annual Holiday Gift Gallery (Nov. 19-Dec. 2) and at the CoSHOP, which opens Feb. 12.

The new retail space will sell fine crafts by Dayton and Ohio artists, including work from the Ohio Craft Museum in Columbus. Art books, prints and cards also will be available.

Free curatorial tours of the galleries are being held once a month on Saturdays.

All told, The Co is providing a wonderful opportunity to glean free art education from the experts.

Meet the artists

The current exhibits at The Contemporary focus on three female artists — Nina Chanel Abney who lives in New York; Sara Cwynar from New Jersey and Oakwood resident Mychaelyn Michalec. All of them will be participating in upcoming artist's talks; one will take place at the gallery with social distancing and masks required; two will be held online.

"We're presenting shows that have challenging themes of social justice and social unrest and we feel it's important to hear the artist's voices and allow them to give you their perspectives," explains executive director Eva Buttacavoli. "Gallery talks will be a priority in our continuing education program."

A case in point? Abney's use of spray paint in her paintings. "People like to know how she uses that spray paint, it's an incredible process that comes with years of experience," says Buttacavoli.

Nina Chanel Abney

Abney is known for large-scale figurative paintings that touch on topics ranging from race and gender to pop culture, homophobia and politics. She's produced everything from public murals and toys to interactive animation, augmented reality pieces and even a deck of UNO cards. She was named one of the top 20 Black Lives Matter artists by Vanity Fair and created the May 31 cover of the New Yorker.

Her colorful paintings are typically multi-layered and filled with an abundance of images she has labeled "information overload." In contrast, the work she's been creating during the pandemic is less hectic. "They have a lot of breathing room," she says of the work she has produced recently. "I was thinking about people leaving the city and what it would mean to own a bunch of land and kind of start your own thing."

Michael Goodson, curator and director of public programs, will moderate the artist's talks. He says Abney's three large paintings on the large gallery's east wall were all made during COVID. "They are paintings that depict Nina's reaction to the isolation and disparity of the pandemic," he explains. "Her reaction, largely, was to imagine activities by these quasi-families, these gatherings of like-minded people who are racially fluid as well as fluid in their gender, gathering together in a rural setting to do physical normal joyful things."

In his view, they also comment on the fact that we don't always think of people of color engaged in the outdoor activities depicted in Abney's paintings, like camping, fishing, picnicking. "In a way, these works try to dispel both the sadness and isolation of the pandemic and these notions that people of color do not engage in these very human activities."

Mychaelyn Michalec

Michalec's exhibit is entitled "From a Basement on A Hill," a reference to the sixth and final studio album by the American singer-songwriter Elliot Smith. In her case, it also refers to the artist's basement studio in Oakwood.

The gallery is filled with a new body of her work: large and dramatic tufted rugs that cast light on her own family's life during the pandemic. Her process begins with cell phone shots that she snaps when her spouse and kids are going about their day and mostly unaware of the camera. The images are then transformed into rug paintings. Michalec says her work is a dramatic contrast to what she frequently observes on social media where family life is idealized. Instead she seeks to show what goes on in a real family on a day-to-day basis, capturing both the connection and love we have for one another as well as the distractions caused by electronic devices and smartphones.

Michalec's creativity is also featured on an installation in the adjoining gallery wall. She's collected embroidered quips from the 1960s through the 1980s about the nature of motherhood, many of them ironic. In some instances, she's embroidered an image of herself over the original.

They were all created in the era of second-wave feminism when women were trying to "do it all" and the focus was on workplace issues, reproductive rights and legal inequities. "A lot of my work is about invisible labor," Michalec's explains, in this case referring to women's unpaid work that often goes unnoticed and unacknowledged.

"Our house has a maid, a cook, a butler, a gardener and a chauffeur: ME," reads one. Others say, "Every mother is a working mother," and "Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men. Fortunately that's not difficult."

"My mother said you could do all these things, but it is difficult to be an artist who's taken seriously and also have children and a career," she says, adding there was a disconnect between what she'd been told and what she actually experienced. "You have to make choices. I was unable to keep my job because of the cost of child care."

When artists like herself are creating work, notes Michalec, they are removed from the world. When she can engage with her audience, she adds, she can see her art the way others see it. "I get ideas when we're discussing the art," she says. I'm looking forward to my artist

talk."

Sara Cwynar

The Co's new video gallery is featuring Cwynar's work entitled "Soft Film." She has collected, arranged and archived her eBay purchases of dated objects.

You'll see her working in her studio and the film's voice-over blends her own writing with quotes from others. "At the heart of the project is a set of questions," she explains. "Why would anyone care about a discarded thing? Why should you care and why do I? And what other systems of power are all these things caught up in?"

CULTURED

DESIGN

CULTURED COLLECTIONS WITH STEELO BRIM

THE MTV HOST AND PRODUCER SHOWS CULTURED AROUND HIS ECLECTIC LOS ANGELES HOME, WHERE HIS COLLECTION INCLUDES ARTWORKS BY NINA CHANEL ABNEY, SAM GILLIAM AND MORE.

ELIZABETH FAZZARE

07.23.2021

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHEMOI GIDDEN

STEELO BRIM AT HOME WITH HEBRU BRANTLEY'S "WHO'S CAN JUDGE," 2013.

Elizabeth Fazzare: How did you begin to build your own collection?

Steelo Brim: The same way a lot of first generation collectors do, through what they see at first. In the beginning it was mostly hypebeast stuff, what was accessible, and from there, educating myself as much as I could on my own. I became my own art advisor and eye in the industry, and just worked to get my foot in the first couple of galleries and develop lasting relationships in the art world.

EF: What pieces inspired you to continue?

SB: Todd James's *Tumblr1* was the first piece I bought on my own from a gallery. It was my first taste, my first time really doing it. I thought the piece was exciting and the process was, as well. The whole thing made me eager to become more knowledgeable in the space.

ANTHONY AKINBOLA, *EGUNGUN #096*, 2021.

EF: What designers/artists are inspiring you right now?

SB: Everything is art. So when I think of an "artist" who inspires me the first people who come to mind are Amoako Boafo, Rhuigi Villaseñor, Tyler the Creator, Jammie Holmes, Dave Chappelle, Jazmine Sullivan. I know I'm missing some.

EF: Does the marketplace help your discovery process? Why or why not?

SB: I would be lying if I said I didn't. I'm always checking for what is new, not only in art but in other industries, as well—cars, houses. Anytime you're spending your money, the marketplace will always have an effect. You try not to make it your full reasoning ,but I think it will always have a say.

STEELO BRIM AT HOME WITH NINA CHANEL ABNEY'S *TWO YEARS AND COUNTING*, 2018, EDITION 28 OF 35.

EF: What is the next piece on your radar?

SB: I talk with artists I admire all the time about getting some work done. I'd like to get a primary from Jammie Holmes, Nina Chanel Abney, Joel Mesler, Amoako Boafo, but who knows? I could just be dreaming or they could be in my collection soon. An original George Condo, of course a Jean-Michel Basquiat: there's some real stuff out there that I definitely really want. But, that all just depends on how rich or broke I am in life.

EF: What is the one piece that got away?

SB: The more and more you dive into the art game the more you realize there are a lot of pieces that get away.

HYPERALLERGIC

Art

How Artists Have Paid Homage to the Bicycle

People throughout history, including artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Ebecho Muslimova, have celebrated the bike's potential for freedom.

by Valentina Di Liscia
June 30, 2021

Nina Chanel Abney, "Ridin Solo" (2020), acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 48 x 1 3/4 inches (courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

"Modernism — and modern art — would never exist without bicycles." That's the claim made by a new group exhibition at Manhattan's Susan Inglett Gallery, ***Re: Bicycling***, curated by David Platzker in collaboration with Alex Ostroy, founder of the eponymous NYC cycling label. Through more than 20 works spanning more than a century, from the Industrial Revolution to the present, the show pays homage to the wondrous two-wheeled vehicle and its awesome potential for autonomy and freedom.

Ricardo Brey, "Joy" (2018), mixed media, 14 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 31 3/8 inches (courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York. © Ricardo Brey/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

When we think of bicycles and modern art, one of the first works to come to mind is Marcel Duchamp's "Bicycle Wheel" (1913) the earliest of the conceptual artist's provocative *Readymades*.

"It's the hallmark image. When it comes to Modernism, you can't separate the fact that revolutions were on bicycles. Almost every one of the Surrealists, Dadaists, and Futurists did something with a bike," Platzker told

Hyperallergic. “They took it to heart that this was a means of self-powered locomotion.”

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen, “Bicyclette Ensevelie, Fabrication Model of Pedal and Arm” (1988), fabrication model of pedal and arm, polyurethane foam, wood, cardboard, hardware, pencil, resin, latex paint (courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

But the show expands the visual repertoire of cycling far beyond this formative reference. Contemporary works like Sarah Sze’s “Lifted” (2020), a silver plated chain and bike lock hooked to a bench at the gallery, tap into the surprising elegance of a rarely cited and perhaps less glamorous signifier of the bicycle. A similar dynamic is at play in Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen’s “Bicyclette Ensevelie, Fabrication Model of Pedal and Arm” (1988), a wooden construction that puts the humble pedal on a pedestal. And in her painting “Ridin Solo” (2020), Nina Chanel Abney extolls the joys of cruising alone, portraying a lone biker shirtless and beaming, in her distinctive graphic style.

Ebecho Muslimova, “Fatebe Dirt Unicycle” (2021), Sumi ink on paper, 9 x 12 inches (courtesy Magenta Plains and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

One particularly interesting pairing, says Platzker, is Rodney Graham’s kinetic sculpture “Mini Psycho-Opticon” (2008) and Ebecho Muslimova’s “Fatebe Dirt Unicycle” (2021), a Sumi ink on paper drawing characteristic of the artist’s refreshingly uninhibited depictions of her cartoon alter ego.

“It’s about as close to a before, during, and after trippy encapsulation of what it’s like to ride a bike on LSD on a warm early summer day,” Platzker says.

Rodney Graham, "Mini Psycho-Opticon" (2008), kinetic sculpture, 90 1/2 x 78 3/4 x 86 3/4 inches, installation view at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich (courtesy 303 Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

Every Wednesday during the run of the show, Platzker is leading group bike rides from Susan Inglett Gallery down the path of the Hudson River Waterfront Greenway, stopping at the Little Red Lighthouse at the base of the George Washington Bridge and returning to the gallery for refreshments. The rides are slow and easy, "tight fitting lycra outfits not required," Platzker promises.

The bike rides leave from Susan Inglett Gallery (522 W 24th Street, Manhattan) every Wednesday at 10:30am. Emailed RSVPS are required to info@inglettgallery.com.

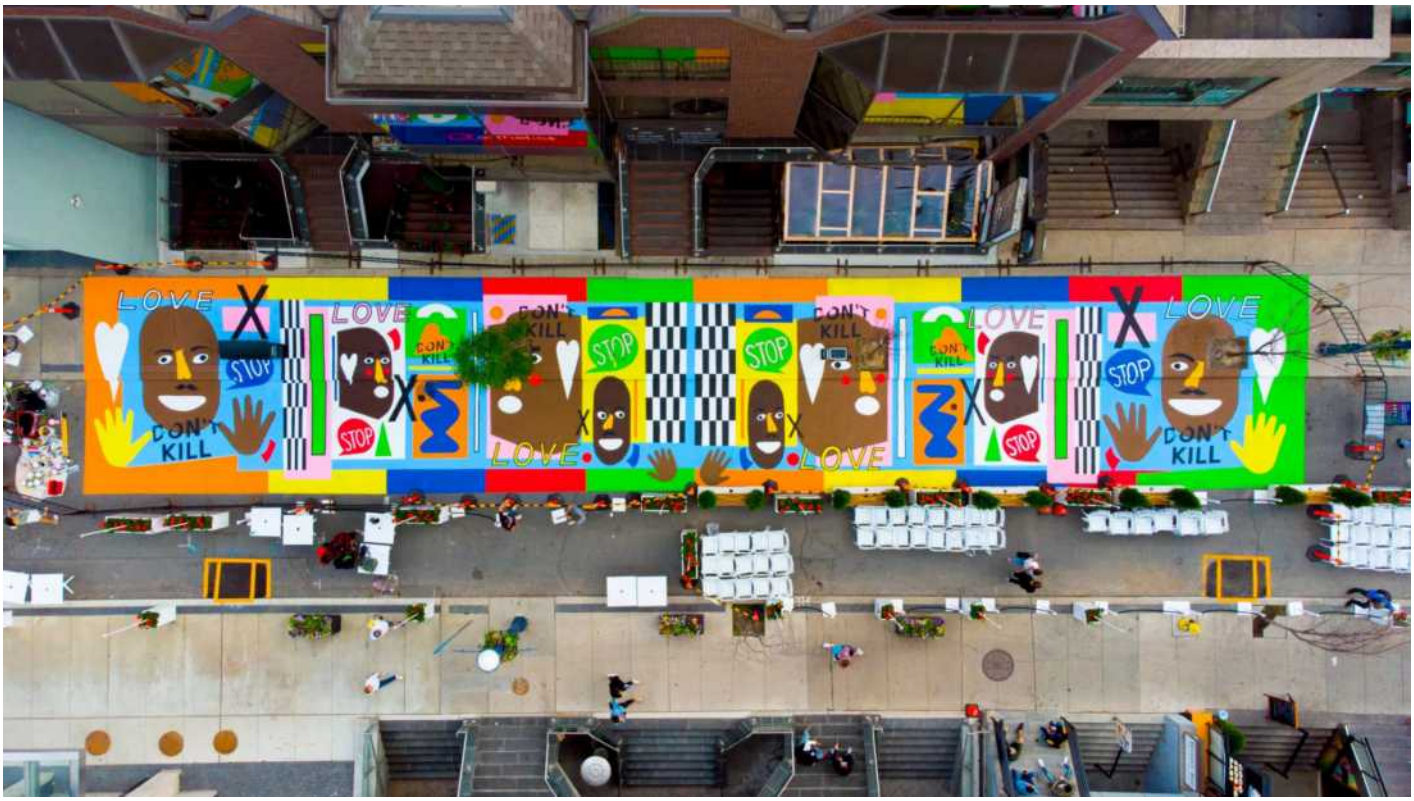
Gabriel Orozco, "Standing Bicycle" (2002), Fuji crystal chromogenic archive C print, 16×20 inches. (courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

Both the exhibition and the concurrent group rides embrace what Platzker calls "the camaraderie of motion."

"The culture of cycling has changed so much over the last few years, from being white middle-aged guys in lycra to the breadth of people in New York City. It's been amazing to watch, and you can time it exactly with the inception of city bikes and the expansion of bike lanes," he said. "It encourages people to come out in numbers."

A Call for Justice and Healing, Nina Chanel Abney's First Public Art Installation in Canada Declares 'Stop,' 'Don't Kill,' and 'Love'

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE *on* Jun 17, 2021 • 11:58 pm No Comments



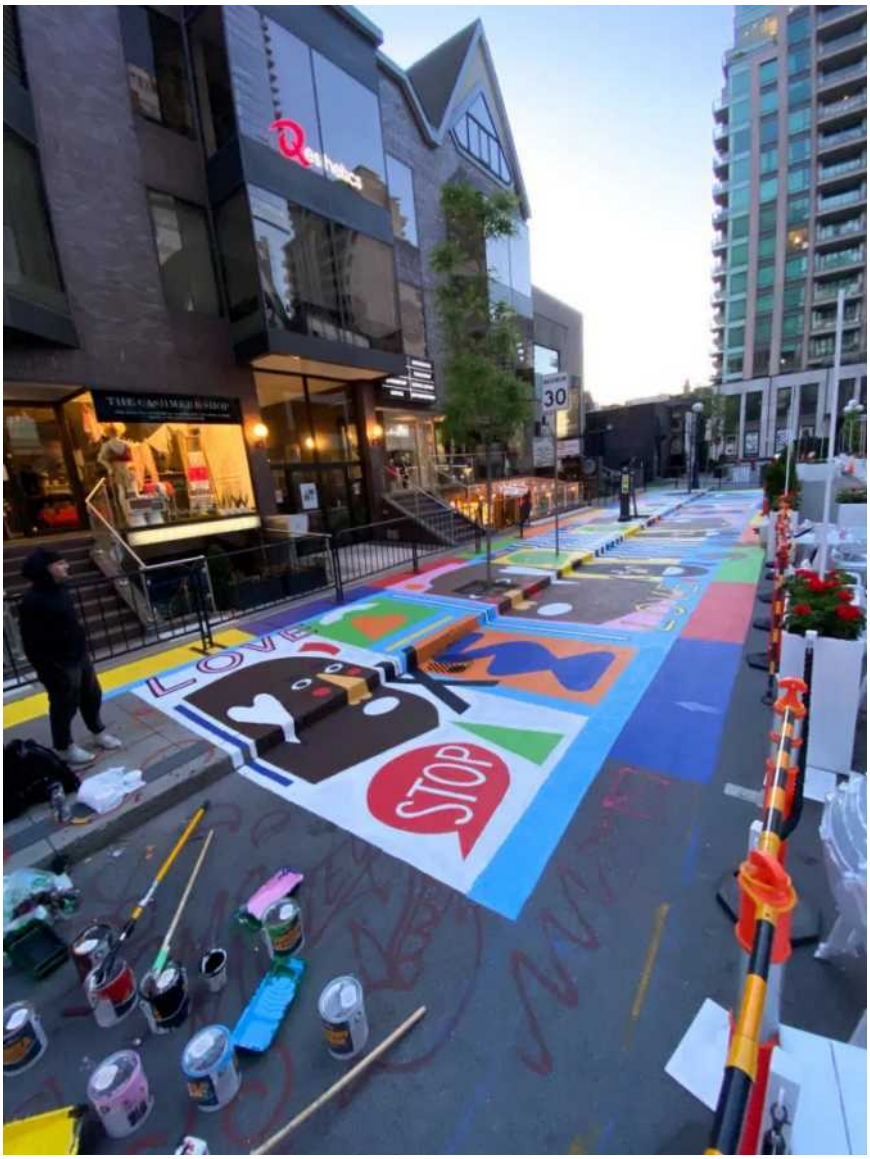
A NEW THOUGHT-PROVOKING PROJECT from Yorkville Murals implores the community to choose joy and hope over violence and despair. "Generally Speaking" by **Nina Chanel Abney** is the artist's first public art work in Canada. Installed in Toronto's Yorkville district, the 120-foot street mural (one-third the length of a football field) is replete with the graphic shapes, text, and icons that define Abney's urgent and energetic visual language.

Her poignant messages declaring "Stop," "Don't Kill," and "Love," have occurred in previous public art installations. Abney, who lives and works in New York City, has created murals in communities throughout the world, including Portland, Ore.; Detroit, Mich.; Bentonville, Ark.; Chapel Hill, N.C.; Newark, N.J.; Coney Island, N.Y.; Lyon, France; and Gwangju, South Korea.

Curated by Toronto-based Ashley McKenzie-Barnes, Abney's current mural offers a symbolic salve for the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for racial justice that have escalated over the past year. A collaboration between an artist and curator who each identify as queer women, the work also seeks to raise awareness about cultural- and gender-based hate. The mural project is part of ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art.

In a curatorial statement, McKenzie-Barnes said "Generally Speaking" is "asking pedestrians to 'stop' for a moment of consideration on how we can embark on a communal process of healing through art and intentional contemplation." **CT**

TOP IMAGE: NINA CHANEL ABNEY, Installation view of "Generally Speaking," 2021 | © Nina Chanel Abney, Courtesy the artist and Yorkville Murals


LOVE
STOP


LOVE
STOP


YORKVILLE MURALS
MURAL IN PRODUCTION
ARTIST
Nina Chanel
Nina Chanel Abney was born in Chicago and currently lives and works in New York. Her work is included in collections around the world, including The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Brooklyn Museum, The Rubell Family Collection, Bronx Museum, and the Burger Collection, Hong Kong.
CURATOR
Ashley McKenzie-Barnes
As the most recent curator of Nuit Blanche Scarborough, Ashley McKenzie-Barnes is responsible for some of Toronto's most compelling public art installations and site-specific projects and has created unique artistic experiences at venues such as 401 Richmond, the Harbourfront Centre. Ashley's knowledge of working in unique spaces, both indoors and outdoors, has allowed her to produce artistic work that engages and challenges public audiences.
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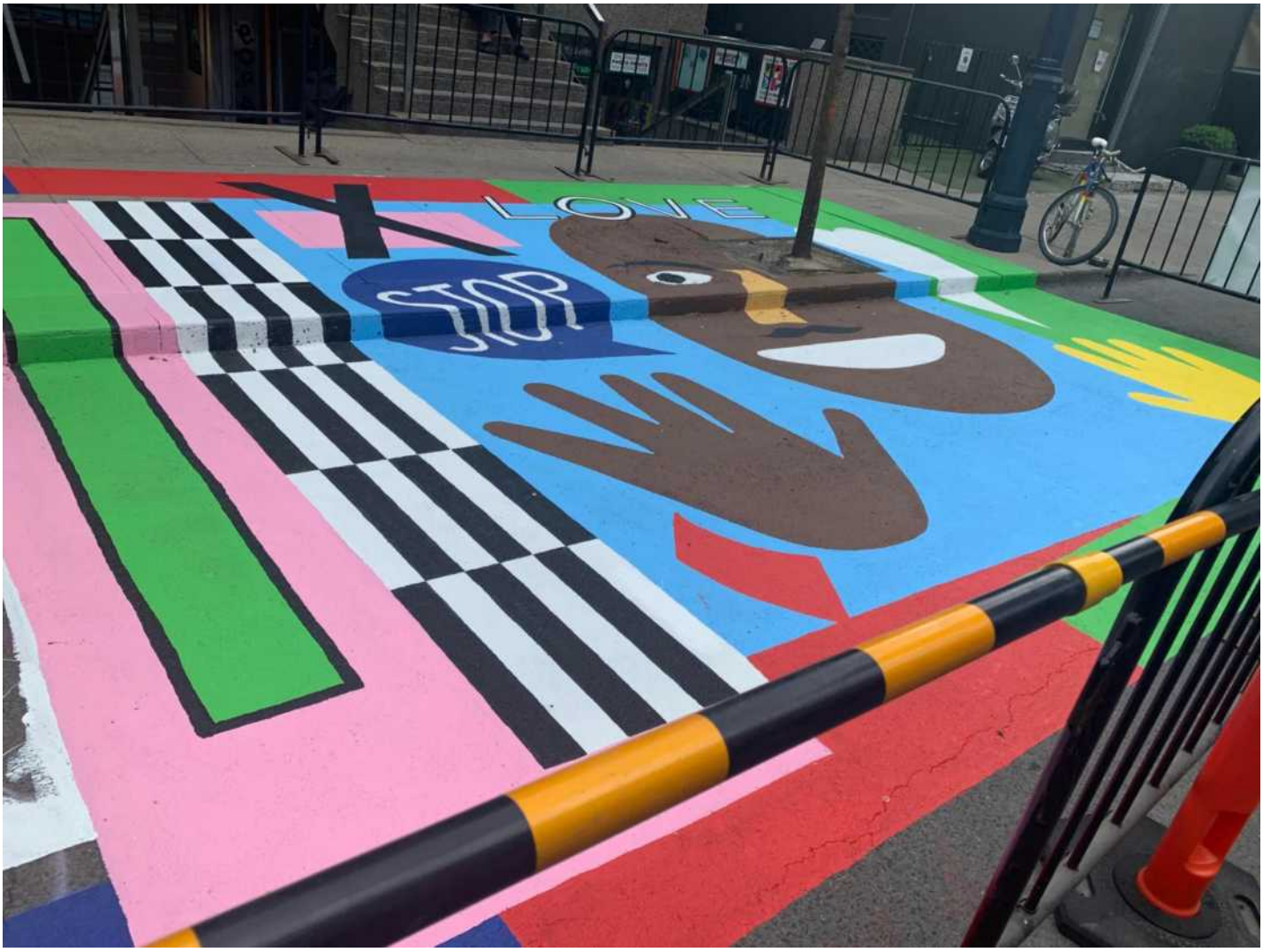

LOVE
STOP

Art in America

ALL BLACK EVERYTHING

By J. Howard Rosier

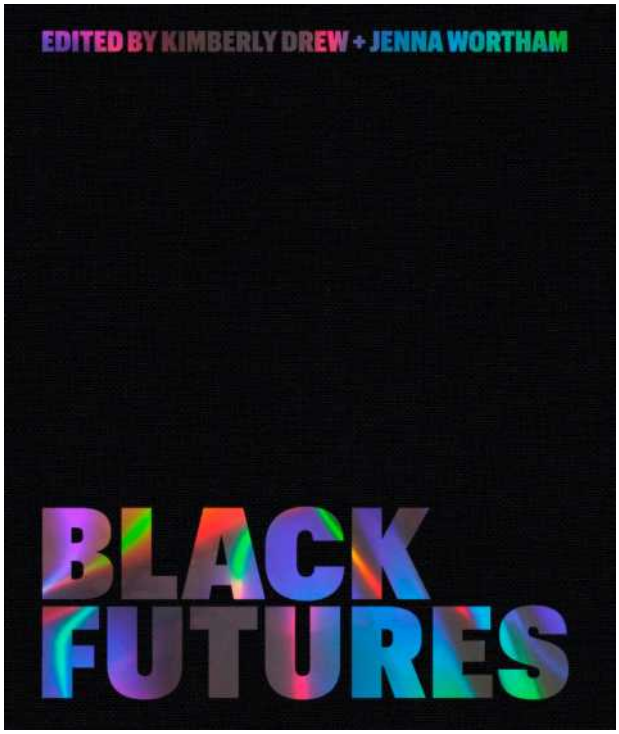
May 13, 2021 11:13am

Nina Chanel Abney, *Penny Dreadful*, 2017, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 84 by 120 inches.
COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Since the editors of the anthology ***Black Futures*** ***(https://www.artnews.com/t/black-futures/)*** aspire to nonlinearity—encouraging readers in the book's introduction to enter the text wherever they please—I will start on page 95: a conversation involving artists Rodan Tekle, Sean D. Henry-Smith (aka S*an D. Henry-Smith), and Destiny Brundidge. "Black people are so thirsty for other Black people—anything! What are you thinking? What do you like? Who do you love? Do you love me?" Brundidge says. "I think that's a slippery slope, where Blackness plays in, because we . . . get super

hyped about each other whenever someone does something cute, then we're all doing it, and that's so easy to exploit." Tekle asks the group whether the complexities of Blackness get dumbed down for the sake of popular media. Henry-Smith qualifies their response: "Sometimes, but maybe the bar is already low."

This exchange gestures toward both the opportunities and the potential pitfalls of the moment that Black America finds itself in. On the one hand, interest in the goings-on of the Black community is arguably higher than ever before. Racist institutional structures hindering upward mobility, the effects of segregation and redlining on access to fresh food, and the implicit bias affecting the quality of medical care, among other topics, have all been elevated to the level of front-page news by mainstream media, under the assumption that America writ large will care, or at least pretend to. However, this degree of attention has a consumerist dimension, which in turn induces one to conceive of Black consumers as a monolithic block. Few people would dispute the empowerment emanating from Black alternativism and Black nerdom, or deny the agency created by their rise, in counterpoint to whatever is currently being pilloried as #SoWhite. But there is something odd about these new avenues proliferating simultaneously with all the hashtagged names of the latest Black people brutalized by the police. (In this context, #BlackLivesMatter seems the perfect catchall for the myriad intersections of location, class, and interests that consider skin color a factor—you are Black anywhere; your life has value everywhere.)



Black Futures, edited by **Kimberly Drew (https://www.artnews.com/t/kimberly-drew/)** and **Jenna Wortham (https://www.artnews.com/t/jenna-wortham/)**, New York, One World, 2020; 544 pages, $40 hardcover.

Yet fixating solely on plight can lead to that other unfortunate sinkhole: Blackness as a never-ending problem to overcome. This is the myth of the Magical Negro underpinning films like *The Butler* and *The Green Book*. Elizabeth Alexander, in her *New Yorker* essay "The Trayvon Generation," gets at this in regard to works addressing Black contemporaneity, though she takes great care to value all the artists mentioned. "Why, in fact, did Earn drop out of Princeton?" she asks of Donald Glover's character in the TV series "Atlanta." "Why does Issa"—Issa Rae's lead character from the show "Insecure"—"keep blowing her life up?" For Alexander, the point was to highlight the grave risk of Black people failing to account for joy. Both shows are groundbreaking in their characterizations and their resistance to the full-blown comedy genre, but like corporate strategy or sports teams constructed to win championships, mass media operates in a perpetual state of parity. "Don't you think [both shows are] about low-grade, undiagnosed depression and not black hipster ennui?" Alexander says she asks any young person who will listen. But "black hipster ennui" is easier to reproduce. It stands to reason that, by the time the bracing sensibility of these and other works arrive down-market, they will have already become pernicious.

In other words, the only way to get it right is to get it *all*, which *Black Futures* attempts to do, despite characterizing the effort as impossible. The book's editors, Jenna Wortham, a journalist at the *New York Times Magazine*, and Kimberly Drew, a curator who formerly served as social media manager for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, initially connected via Twitter with the goal of putting out a zine—a notable detail, if only to mark their book's amalgamated visual language and playfulness. *Black Futures* draws from commissioned pieces and previously published material that ranges in length from a single spread to several pages. It's not uncommon for a poem to follow screenshots from social media, or an annotated collection of zines to lead into a gallery of nameplate jewelry. Pages are color-coded by content: green for recipes, yellow for wisdom or trend observations, black for poetry, and white for incendiary essays and artworks. The beginning of each entry has a "Related Entries" note in red nestled in the lower left corner, directing readers to other parts of the book. The only organizational detail that feels expected is ordering the material by theme: "Black Lives Matter," "Black Futures," "Power," "Joy," "Justice," "Ownership," "Memory," "Outlook," "Black Is (Still) Beautiful," and "Legacy." Wortham and Drew recommend reading *Black Futures* next to a device, and hope readers will follow ideas down their various rabbit-holes, but the book's structural quirkiness makes reflex googling unnecessary; its form renders the activity of thinking about Blackness in and of itself.

With race-centered projects such as this, it's often difficult to parse how ideas and images might affect the uninitiated, and whether their reading experience is tinged with voyeurism. But to a Black person (or at least this Black person), the feeling of being seen is all-consuming. "Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less / familiar than the rest," Walt Whitman wrote. Or, as Adrienne Maree Brown put it in her contribution, a "recipe" for how to reclaim our skin: "This is your living body; this is what aliveness feels like."

Though Drew and Wortham expressly state that *Black Futures* is not an art book, its contributors are overwhelmingly artists, novelists, and poets: Teju Cole, Kara Walker, Eve L. Ewing, Hanif Abdurraqib, Samantha Irby, Danez Smith. Doreen St. Félix of the *New Yorker* defends architect, poet, and critic June Jordan's vision of a progressive architecture in Harlem (attributed, in its 1965 publication in *Esquire*, to her collaborators R. Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao underthe profoundly racist headline "Instant Slum Clearance"). Zadie Smith extols the virtue of Deana Lawson's photography—portraits of Black people as "creative godlike beings" who do not "know how miraculous we are." LaToya Ruby Frazier, who has arguably done more than anyone else to document the gutting of the Black middle class by capitalism and a hostile government, reminds us that the water in Flint, Michigan, is still lead-tainted, while Wesley Morris, Wortham's colleague at the *Times*, describes the feeling of seeing Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald's unorthodox official portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama at the Smithsonian.
As a lifelong Chicagoan, I was pleased that the city's artists factor so heavily into the *Black Futures* vision. Amanda Williams's "Color(ed) Theory" photographs show houses slated for demolition that she covertly painted in a palette based on products commonly associated with Black people, the colors of Ultra Sheen and velvet Crown Royal bags evoking a sense of place. Photographer Dawoud Bey's 2018–19 series "The Birmingham Project" testifies to the dignity of Black personhood by documenting the community of Birmingham, Alabama, where one of the most devastating domestic terror incidents in US history took place: the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. I gasped at Nina Chanel Abney's *Penny Dreadful* (2017), a beguiling composition of a person being hugged (detained?) by a police-like figure as onlookers watch with flashlights pointed at their backs (and a cluster of hands holding smartphones documenting the scene). I smiled with recognition upon encountering my colleague at the School of the Art Institute, Shawné Michaelain Holloway, discussing her work's exploration of sexuality, technology, and power structures with Tiona Nekkia McClodden.

But, you know, #BlackAesthetics. Could the cynics among us reduce these entries to a bracing but obligatory bout of Black bohemianism? Well, sure. Yet in aggregate, they capture a rich multiplicity of worldviews that have always been present in the Black community. Seeing decades of hard-won excellence ordered and contextualized at an opportune moment in time dispels the reactionary bogeyman of "wokeness," the notion that Blacks are being brainwashed into residing on a de facto liberal "plantation." I wouldn't call Hank Willis Thomas a conservative, but his *Black Survival Guide*, with its tips on how to stay alive in the event of a police riot typed over screen-printed images of inner-city chaos, taps into the Black Conservative tradition Ta-Nehisi Coates identified in the *Atlantic* more than a decade ago, encompassing figures such as Bill Cosby, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X, who share "a skepticism of [white] government as a mediating force in the 'Negro problem,' [and] a strong belief in the singular will of black people." And you can call the Montgomery, Alabama, National Memorial for Peace and Justice "woke" if you want, but it's stupid—knee-deep in an era overtly concerned with the survival of monuments—to denigrate a new one, and one serving as a virtual mass grave for lynching victims at that. Granted, when looking for clues about how to live, it's overwhelming to engage with so much that has been thought, said, and built. But the solution, which Drew and Wortham hint at, is not necessarily to dogmatize one viewpoint

over another: it's to affirm a shared humanity by looking at viewpoints together in their totality. Black disability, Black kink, Black agrarianism, Black politics, Black arts, Black hair, Black love, Black Twitter, Black survivalism—all Black everything.

So the moments that jump out—the only constant in this wealth of pluralism—are the instances of Black camaraderie. *Black Futures* establishes this early on, with an illustration of the original DM exchange between Drew and Wortham that sparked the idea for the book, and most of its sections contain at least one conversation between two or more people. In a work spawned through outreach, it's fitting that the act of Black people sharing ideas and experiences is so thoroughly catalogued.

In other places, charmingly low-res photographs emphasize the stakes of letting Black people exist as themselves. There's Jelani Cobb tearing it up at Nikole Hannah-Jones's Black Genius Joint in one entry, while another features late-night revelers at the Promontory (Chicago again) in a 2016 photo by Vino Taylor. And in the "Legacy" section, Jeremy O. Harris's breakout *Slave Play* isn't represented by an excerpt from the script, but by a group of four photos documenting the Broadway production's Inaugural Blackout Night, in 2019, for which Harris reserved all 804 seats in the theater for Black people to watch and discuss what they saw. If the Black inclination continues trending toward autonomy, and creating a space for the community to properly frame its creations, then the future looks bright, indeed.

THE NEW YORKER

COVER STORY

NINA CHANEL ABNEY'S "HAPPY HOURS"

The artist discusses the reëmergence of a social culture in New York City and how the lockdown shaped her work.

By Françoise Mouly

May 24, 2021

With widespread vaccinations and the return of mild weather, New York City is springing back to life. Throngs of people fill outdoor bars and restaurants; parks teem with chatter. In a nod to our Jazz Age dandy, Eustace Tilley, Nina Chanel Abney's first cover raises a glass to the spirit of the moment. We recently asked Abney a few questions about her approach, her future projects, and her life in lockdown.

The bouquet of COVID-19 flowers gently captures the struggle of the past year. What do you think a renaissance in New York social culture could look like?

Now that people are enjoying the outdoors, there are more options for socializing. But, personally, I like New York and New Yorkers with as much distance as possible between me and the next person. A renaissance in hygiene is what we need; that will allow everyone to have a better time hanging out. I hope everyone keeps washing their hands and being considerate of others. We've been through a lot over the past year, and COVID-19 is still active and present.

You've shown your work on city streets, in fine-art galleries, and on a deck of Uno cards. Does your approach change depending on who the intended audience is?

My approach may be different depending on the project and what's appropriate for it. My intended audience is everyone; I hope anyone can find a way to connect to my work. That being said, I like to use art in public spaces to consider more local issues. In the gallery setting, there really aren't any restrictions on what one can do, so I typically use that venue to push my own boundaries, whether in content or visual language.

How did quarantine affect your work? Did you begin any projects that were influenced by the lockdown?

Lockdown forced me to think outside of the box, as people were no longer able to experience art in person. That led me to experiment with augmented reality: I created a piece that could be experienced nearly anywhere, at any time. And I became interested in some commercial projects, which led me to create those Uno cards with Mattel. With everyone being stuck in the house, it seemed like a good idea to create playable art.

What are your upcoming projects? And is there a venue that you haven't yet tried but are curious about?

I'm having an exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales that will open toward the end of October. I will also have public works popping up in Toronto, Chicago, and Miami this summer. And, now that we can move around again, I'm curious about outdoor sculpture parks such as the Storm King Art Center. I'm very excited about the possibility of creating large public sculptures.

See below for more covers featuring dandies:

culture type

Nina Chanel Abney Embraces the Great Outdoors in 'Idyllic Scenes of Blackness'

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE *on* Dec 23, 2020 • 11:58 pm

"Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape" at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

A CAMPFIRE, BIKES, AND FRESHLY CAUGHT FISH have replaced the tumult and complexity of contemporary urban life that have animated **Nina Chanel Abney**'s paintings in recent years. Her latest exhibition features rural scenes: farming, hunting, and kayaking. The graphic, boldly hued paintings embrace the great outdoors and celebrate communal living.

"Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape" is her second solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. Abney is showing 22 new paintings. The joys of leisure, freedom of open space, and beauty of nature are represented. Idyllic Blackness and a queer utopia are on view.

The paintings are partially inspired by Abney's recent experiences. In May, she bought a bike in response to the pandemic lockdown. Cooped up in her New Jersey studio and apartment, which are located in the same building, the artist was eager for a change of venue. She loaded the bike onto her car and headed out of the city. That trip led to others and the rural destinations stirred up ideas.

Abney wrote a brief, two-paragraph essay about the exhibition. She said in part:

Is there space for Black autonomy in a world organized by white supremacy? If it were an actual place – a space absent of race relations, antagonistic or friendly – what would it look like? This series responds to these questions by reimagining Black people's relationship to nature, property, and each other. Taking inspiration from the fugitive utopias of Black queer social life, these scenes refuse the enclosure of Blackness to topographies of the city and to ideals of heteronormativity. Instead, communal living in rural,

wooded outdoors figures as a place for the performance of a Black autonomy that evades the ballistic force of the white gaze.

Abney's images tend toward abstracted narratives, dense compositions that explore race, sex, and social justice issues and reflect a frenetic, media-driven culture. Her new paintings are more traditionally composed scenes layered with details that convey a sense of agency, belonging, and radical refuge beyond the white gaze and the increasingly divisive nature of American life.

The world Abney envisions is transporting, but it is not free of reality. "Where's the Remote" (2020) is an interior scene with the 2020 election results displayed on a television screen. Another painting, "Being Mixie with my Fixie" (2020), two bike riders on a rural road passing a "Black Lives Matter" sign. **CT**

"Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape," on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y., from Nov. 12– Dec. 23, 2020

TOP IMAGE: Installation view of "Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape," Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. (Nov. 12– Dec. 23, 2020). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Being Mixie with my Fixie," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 84 x 84 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Installation view of "Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape," Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. (Nov. 12– Dec. 23, 2020). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "HouseTop," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 84 x 84 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "If You Wanna Ride, Don't Ride the White Horse," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 96 x 96 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Installation view of "Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape," Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. (Nov. 12– Dec. 23, 2020). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Plenty of Fish," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 48 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Installation view of NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Storytime – Learn How to Read," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 96 x 96 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Finessing," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 84 x 84 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Where's the Remote," 2020 (spray paint on canvas, 48 x 72 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Off," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 48 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Helen with the Drip," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 36 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Femme Games," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas 96 x 96 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Installation view of "Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape," Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. (Nov. 12– Dec. 23, 2020). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Cocks & Balls," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 84 x 84 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Installation view of "Nina Chanel Abney: The Great Escape," Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. (Nov. 12– Dec. 23, 2020). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Buoyancé/Seas the Day," 2020 (acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 96 x 96 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

WIDEWALLS

See Nina Chanel Abney's Latest Mural for ARkanvas!

December 17, 2020

Elena Martinique

Combining representation and abstraction, the vibrant works of **Nina Chanel Abney** capture **the frenetic pace of contemporary culture**. Executed in **a distinct pop-surrealist style and bracing color**, these works explore diverse subjects such as race, celebrity, religion,

politics, sex, and art history, while echoing the perpetual stimulation of the digital age.

The artist recently brought her signature bold style to the Northwest Arkansas community with her latest site-specific mural executed alongside the Bentonville Razorback greenway trail, opposite the recently inaugurated art space The Momentary. Invited by global curator group Justkids and Bentonville art organization OZ Art, the artist created a mural titled *Mull It Over*, that reads *DON'T KILL - LOVE - BLACK*.

Left and Right: Nina Chanel Abney - Mull It Over (detail)

Mull It Over

Executed as part of the public initiative called ARkanvas, a statewide engagement curated by Justkids and commissioned by OZ Art that brings public art by world-renowned artists to Arkansas communities, the mural is executed in the artist's recognizable visual language.

With this piece, Abney sends powerful messages of love and human embrace, placing it in a historical context and a moment we live in. It references the longstanding racial crisis and the nonsensical killing of black men, women and children. The artist explained:

> *My starting point for the mural was thinking about the things that have been going on in the last year, and historically, and about how it can't be unity unless everyone is respected equally.*

Nina Chanel Abney - Mull It Over

The Practice of Nina Chanel Abney

The distinctively bold style of Nina Chanel Abney harnesses the flux and simultaneity that has come to define life in the 21st century. Featuring **cartoonish figures and playful compositions**, her works propose a new type of history painting, one rooted in autobiography, current events, and traditional storytelling and funneled through the velocity of the internet.

Creating imagery that is legible and accessible, the artist approaches loaded topics and generates discussion, allowing viewers to come to their own conclusions.

Nina Chanel Abney - Mull It Over

THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

ARTIST'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Nina Chanel Abney Imagines a Queer Black Utopia

The artist's new body of work depicts life outside of the city, in a rural idyll free of the white gaze.

By Erica Rawles

Nov. 19, 2020

By the beginning of this year, the artist Nina Chanel Abney's studio, a 1,500-square-foot space in a multiuse building in Jersey City, N.J., that she's rented since 2018, had begun to feel like a storage room. Stacks of boxes filled with books and products she'd made, as well as paintings — both her own and ones she'd purchased — lined the walls, and the countertops of the kitchenette were barely visible beneath the countless cases of spray paint piled on top of them. When the pandemic hit New Jersey in March, and the state went into lockdown, Abney — who also lives in the building, in an apartment a few flights below — became even more aware of her spatial confines. And so, in May, she bought a bike and a rack for her car and began taking road trips to rural areas outside of the city to find some relief from all the time spent indoors. Inspired in part by these excursions, Abney's new body of work conveys a sense of expansiveness — one that she also found in the form of an additional studio that she rented in the same building this fall. This larger temporary space, with a view of the Manhattan skyline, gave the artist enough room to finish the 22 paintings — ranging from 2 feet by 2 feet to 8 feet by 8 feet — that are currently on display in "The Great Escape," a solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York.

Abney, 38, is known for large-scale paintings with densely layered compositions and fragmented narratives that touch on topics including politics, race, policing, sexuality and celebrity. Graphic, angular figures that resist categorizations of race and gender appear against boldly colored backgrounds overlaid with large geometric shapes and fields of vibrant patterns, as well as symbols and numbers, creating a mesmerizing, often disorienting, array of imagery in a single canvas. But while past works have been informed by the idea of, in Abney's words, "information overload," her new paintings feel notably more serene, in terms of both their subject matter and density. "They have a lot of breathing room," she says.

Stacked buckets of acrylic paint, which Abney used to create the solid backgrounds of her new body of work, "The Great Escape." Donavon Smallwood

Traces of spray paint remain on the artist's studio walls, showing where her in-progress canvases once hung. Donavon Smallwood

To create them, Abney also took inspiration from Black queer social life, exploring the possibilities of Black autonomy and reimagining a setting in which such a world might exist — in the country, absent of both heteronormative ideals and the white gaze. "I feel like people might expect me, based on my previous work, to be going in one direction because of the election," she says. "But I'm switching it up." Rather than engaging directly with the news cycle, Abney offers a parallel story of sanctuary and community via abstracted landscapes across which Black people build and enjoy a world of their collective making — figures cycle, pick flowers, chop wood, bake a pie and feed chickens. "I was thinking about people leaving the city," says Abney, "and what it would mean to own a bunch of land and kind of start your own thing."

If the scenes in these works are more pared back than in past paintings, Abney is consistent in her instantly recognizable graphic style, which she has honed over the past eight years. The approach, she says, has its origins in “First and Last” (2012), a diptych of two collages that she made, by adhering paper and acrylic cutouts to a paper background, for an exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem honoring the groundbreaking American artist Romare Bearden. It was the first time her practice included a collage technique, breaking away from a more traditional painting process. “Collage really piqued my interest in how to layer flat shapes or flat elements in a way that could give the illusion of perspective,” she says. “I think from that point on my work visually took a major turn.” In “Femme Games” (2020), from her new series, Abney creates a woodland setting with layered brown fragments that depict tree trunks and branches, blocks of blue with wavelike strokes that evoke water, and striped rectangles that resemble picnic blankets and beach towels. On the same visual plane, a group of lively characters sit around a pregnant figure, their expressively angled limbs and hands suggesting vibrant conversation, their activity fully integrated into their environment.

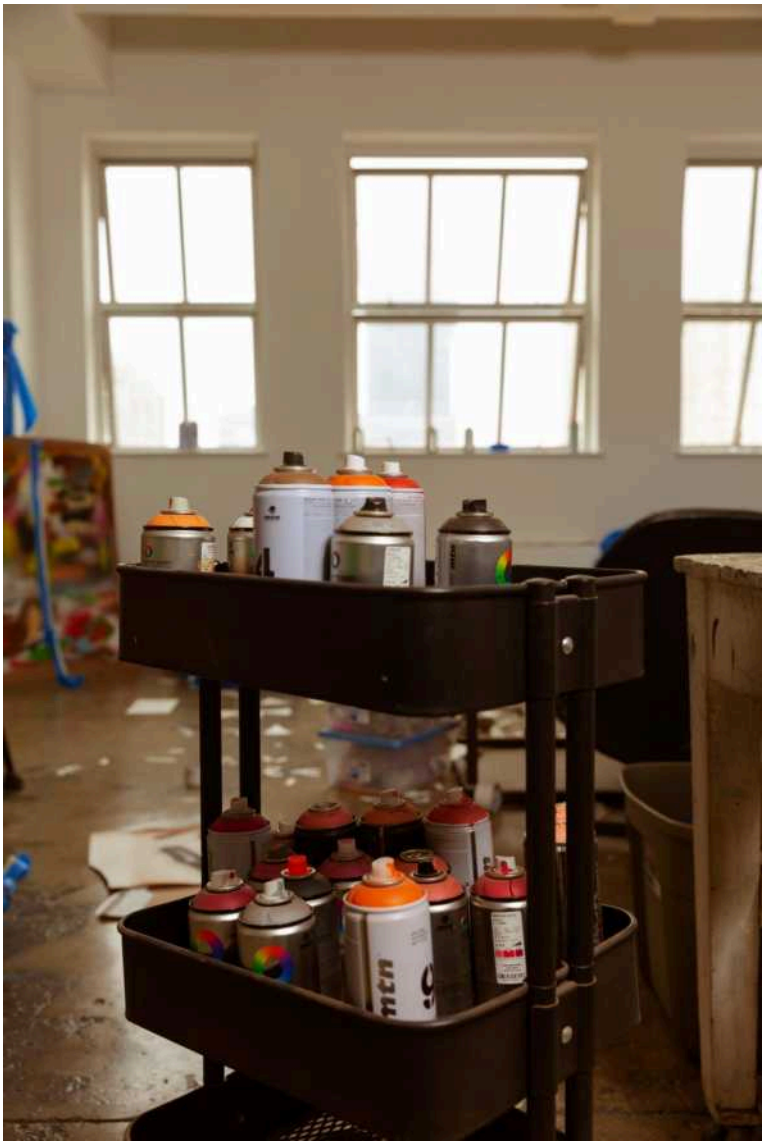
Nina Chanel Abney’s “Femme Games” (2020).

Abney’s style and interest in storytelling can also be traced back to one of her earliest fascinations: animation. Growing up in Harvey, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, she would make drawings of the cartoon characters she watched on TV, and she later chose to study studio art and computer science at Augustana College in Rock Island, with aspirations to become a graphic designer or animator. “I didn’t really realize then that you could make a career out of being a painter,” she says. After graduating, she worked on an assembly line at the Ford Motor Company in Chicago while applying to graphic design grad school programs, but after getting rejected by every school on her list, she decided to pursue a master’s in fine art instead, earning her degree from Parsons in New York. A painting from her M.F.A. thesis show, a 15-foot-wide work titled “Class of 2007” (2007) — in which Abney depicts herself as a white prison guard and her white classmates as Black inmates — caught the attention of the New York gallery Kravets Wehby, which became the first to represent her. Her debut show there sold out within a few days and, soon after, a selection of Abney’s paintings were included in “30 Americans,” a traveling exhibition that premiered at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami in 2008 and featured work by 30 prominent African-American artists, of which Abney was the youngest. In 2017, her first solo museum exhibition, a 10-year retrospective organized by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, N.C., traveled across the country, and her paintings are now included in collections around the world.

Nina Chanel Abney's "Buoyancé/Seas the Day" (2020).

Abney has also ventured beyond the canvas, most recently transforming characters from her works into 3-D figurines — such as her limited-edition collectible vinyl toy "Baby," which she released in October through her website — and interactive animations, including the augmented reality artwork "Imaginary Friend," which debuted in August on an epic scale, just above the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and remains accessible, in a smaller version, through the app Acute Art. It is perhaps unsurprising, given this spate of recent projects, that Abney describes herself as a "workaholic" who gets bored easily. Indeed, much of her practice is about trying new things and finding ways to challenge herself as an artist. While making the pieces in "The Great Escape," she especially relished the difficult task of working in spray paint while maintaining her clean-lined style. She employed a combination of hand-cut paper stencils and painter's tape to create crisp edges and rendered only the solid backgrounds in acrylic. "If I don't have a brush, then I've restricted myself in a way that makes it fun," she says.

Speaking from her home on an early October morning, Abney answered T's Artist's Questionnaire over Zoom.



"I was already working with acrylic because you get very saturated, flat color and it dries fast," says Abney. "But spray paint dries even faster and I don't have to mix colors, which would prolong the process for me." Donavon Smallwood

A stool with a tray holding spray paint and rolls of tape stands in front of two of the artist's new works. Donavon Smallwood

What is your day like? How much do you sleep, and what's your work schedule?

I wake up around 7:30 in the morning and, if I'm feeling motivated, I might work out. Then I check emails — that's probably the first thing I do. You're not supposed to but I do. Then I go up to the studio. I like to work during the day so I can get the natural light. Earlier in my career, I would work very late at night, till like 4 in the morning, but now I like to work during the day. I'm typically in the studio from 9 or 10 to around 6, but now it's longer because of my show. If I don't have a show, it's a very different schedule. I have different periods. There will be times when I'm working nonstop for a long time — for months — and times when I'm doing absolutely nothing, you know? Like a break. After I work in the studio, I come back to my place. I might watch TV. I watch a lot of "Housewives" on Bravo.

How many hours of creative work do you think you do in a day?

A lot? I've been trying to set more boundaries for myself. But between Instagram, my cellphone, email and my studio being upstairs, there's always an opportunity to do something. I don't want to admit how many hours. Let's just say 10.

What's the first piece of art you ever made?

Little drawings of Mickey and Minnie Mouse, stuff like that. My mom might still have some.

When you start a new piece, where do you begin?

I look for imagery — source imagery — on the internet. I'll say, "Oh, I think I want to do a piece of people gardening," and find a ton of pictures of people gardening, and that's how I start.

How do you know when you're done?

I can't even explain it. It's a feeling of content, almost a nervousness — like I can't add anything or else I'm going to mess it up.

One of Abney's hand-drawn stencils on the floor of her studio. "I started using stencils for numbers and letters and small shapes," she says, "But progressively, I got more interested in using them to make an arm, a hand or an entire figure." Donavon Smallwood

How many assistants do you have?

I have one studio assistant — sort of. I've always only had one and sometimes, because of how I work, it's not much help. It's all intuitive, and now I'm not even painting as much. Before, my studio assistant would paint solid background colors for me. Now, they do a lot of digital things for me: digitizing my paintings so I can then use the figures from them for cartoons, products and other things like that.

Have you assisted other artists before? If so, whom?

No, but before I got represented by a gallery, I did interview with Mickalene Thomas to be her studio assistant. During the interview she ended up giving me a list of residencies I should apply for. Things moved pretty fast and, later, we were in the 2008 "30 Americans" show together. I don't know if I would have been a good assistant for Mickalene. Now, being friends with her, I know that she's very precise, and her work is so intricate. I feel like I would've messed up and gotten fired.

Do you work that way?

Oh, yeah. I feel like I'm a fun artist to work for because it's a very laid-back environment — we're listening to music, podcasts, joking around — it's very casual. But I'm also very particular. I think my studio assistant might get annoyed with me sometimes for feeling like I'm watching over his shoulder.

What music do you play when you're making art?

Right now, I like H.E.R. and Sir — that whole vibe has taken over my Spotify. Sometimes I listen to my playlist so many times that I need to switch it up, so I listen to audiobooks, too. There's also an app, Clubhouse, that I got introduced to recently. It's like podcasts, but it's basically live conversations. You can enter into all these rooms, like chat rooms, but you can't direct message anyone. There are all these different, interesting conversations that people are having and you can join in.

When did you first feel comfortable saying you're a professional artist?

Maybe when other people said it. Or maybe I equate the word "professional" with it being, unfortunately, tied to money.

Is there a meal you eat on repeat when you're working?

I don't usually eat when I'm working.

Are you bingeing any shows right now?

I'm not bingeing it, but I'm watching "The Real Housewives of Potomac," and I'm watching "Power Book" on Starz. I was trying to get into "Lovecraft County," but I don't really like scary movies, so I didn't want to watch it by myself.

One of the reference images Abney used while painting her new works. Donavon Smallwood

A large bundle of discarded painter's tape sits against a studio wall. Donavon Smallwood

How often do you talk to other artists?

I have some close friends who are artists, so I talk to them all the time.

What do you do when you're procrastinating?

I'm on Instagram, I'm hanging out with friends, I'm on the phone. Anything. I procrastinate a lot.

What's the last thing that made you cry?

It's maybe kind of cheesy, but I wrote personal notes to my close friends when I sent them the toy that I released. I found myself a little teary-eyed finally taking time to reflect on the long journey that I've had and on my friends, who have been there for me from the beginning. Putting out a toy and manufacturing it yourself is not an easy task. I think I was more emotional out of gratitude.

What do you usually wear when you work?

I have a jumpsuit that I'll wear, or sweatpants and a T-shirt — things that I don't mind getting dirty. And I like to wear the same pair of shoes: a very dirty pair of Vans or Crocs. My floors are concrete, and if I'm standing for eight hours, I'll go with the Crocs.

What do you pay for rent?

Too much.

What do you bulk buy with most frequency?

Spray paint and a ton of tape. People always look at me like I'm crazy when I'm in Home Depot with a shopping cart full of painter's tape.

What's your worst habit?

I feel like I'm easily distracted. Maybe that's it. Or looking at my phone. My phone's probably my worst habit.

Do you exercise?

Yeah. I don't like to, but I do.

What are you reading?

I listen to audiobooks, if that counts. I'm currently listening to "The Body Is Not an Apology" (2018). I just finished 50 Cent's book "Hustle Harder, Hustle Smarter" (2020). I have a ton of audiobooks on my phone — Jerry Saltz's "How to Be an Artist" (2020), a book called "How to Break Up With Your Phone" (2018), "Boom" (2019) a book about the art world and some by bell hooks. I switch it up. I might get tired of one and then I'll rotate to the next.

What's your favorite artwork by someone else?

I have a bunch, but Henry Taylor and I did a trade when I was in L.A. for my show at the I.C.A. in 2018 and he painted me, so that's probably one of my favorite paintings right now.

Harper's BAZAAR
November 3, 2020
By Alison S. Cohn and Ariana Marsh

The Culture Lover's November Guide

Here's how you can get your streaming and socially distanced culture fix this month.

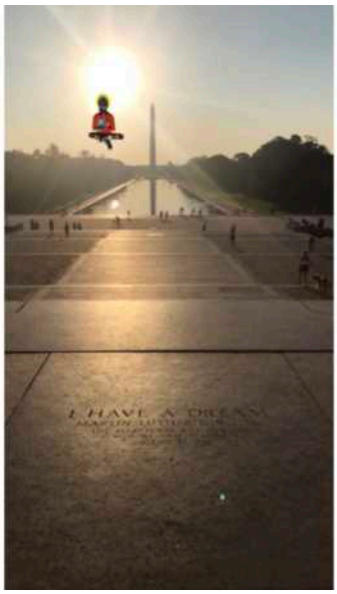
Nina Chanel Abney. Charlie Rubin.

Holiday fever has officially begun, and while this year's festivities might look much different than usual, there's still plenty to do and see this month to get into the seasonal spirit. In honor of National Native American Heritage Month, tune in to The Museum at FIT's livestream conversation between Indigenous designer Korina Emmerich and artist Jeffrey Gibson. And don't miss Bloomingdale's virtual holiday benefit featuring singer-songwriter Andra Day and dancers from the American Ballet Theatre. With star-studded Broadway livestream performances, a symphonic debut, a virtual ballet gala, and art exhibitions aplenty all additionally on the roster, there's much to be grateful for this November.

4. **NINA CHANEL ABNEY: "THE GREAT ESCAPE"**
OPENING NOVEMBER 12

Combining representation and abstraction, and addressing subjects as diverse as race, religion, politics, homophobia, and pop culture, Nina Chanel Abney's paintings capture the frenetic pace of contemporary culture. Her latest body of work, on view at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery beginning November 12, takes a different tack. Titled "The Great Escape," it's inspired by the idea of utopia as seen through the lens of an imagined Black commune, and raises potent questions about living in nature and the creation of a community, as well as the accessibility, or lack thereof, to nature and natural resources.

whitewall

Nina Chanel Abney s Imaginary Friend You Didn t Know You Needed

By Pearl Fontaine

Nina Chanel Abney has debuted her first augmented reality (AR) creation, “Imaginary Friend.” Recently launched at Washington, D.C.’s Lincoln Memorial on the anniversary of the March on Washington, 57 years after Martin Luther King made his I Have a Dream speech, the work extends a virtual hand of comfort during these unprecedented—and often unsettling—times.

Encouraged by art’s role in helping see the true possibilities of everyday life, Abney turned to the AR experience as an alternative method of art presentation in response to limited social interactions brought on by COVID-19. The work, accessible for free through the Acute Art app, presents itself as a a modern-day sage with rosy cheeks who captivates users with his soothing voice.

Made with the help of Chris Chalk, Jeanette E. Toomer (JET), and El Tsid, the “Imaginary Friend” hovers above the ground, yogi-style, while delivering an anecdote of attempting to bestow a blessing on a friend. Lacking faith that good things would come his way, the friend refuses the blessing, and viewers are left with the phrase, “Sometimes we believe nothing good can ever happen to us, so it don’t.”

“Inspired by the mythological characters and disincarnate guides whom people turn to in times of trouble, and in collaboration with artists who understand the value of humor in processing grief, trauma, and distress, I created ‘Imaginary Friend’ to offer participants an always-ready companion to mitigate the uncertainty and precarity of today,” said Abney. “This work brings to life childhood strategies of fantasy and play as a proxy for the loss of social comforts and physical contact we experience as adults.”

“Imaginary Friend” has been virtually installed at a monumental scale all over the globe, including locations in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Grand Canyon, Washington, Paris, London, Berlin, and Tokyo. Viewers can also experience a smaller version of “Imaginary Friend” through the app, which is easily accessible anywhere at anytime you might need a friendly presence or some words of wisdom.

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9th September 2020

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Acute Art at Berlin Art Week

For this year's Berlin Art Week, Acute Art are delighted to present multiple projects:

Nina Chanel Abney at Berghain

Visitors to Berghain, the notorious Berlin nightclub turned exhibition space, will discover Nina Chanel Abney's *Imaginary Friend* floating outside the entrance.

Having officially launched earlier in the summer, visitors will have the opportunity to view this monumental AR work by downloading the Acute Art app below.

Read more about ***Imaginary Friend.***

Koenig Gallerie presents *My Trip* by Bjarne Melgaard

Bjarne Melgaard's *My Trip* is now on view at Koenig Gallery's second iteration of Messe in St Agnes at their Berlin space.

Originally designed as an experiment to compensate for the cancellation of this year's ART BASEL, the first fair counted more than 400 visitors in 12 days. Tickets are available here or at the gallery.

Read more about Bjarne Melgaard's work **here.**

Nina Chanel Abney created an augmented reality work in the form of a wise companion.

Nina Chanel Abney, *Imaginary Friend*, 2020, augmented reality. Courtesy Nina Chanel Abney and Acute Art.

Nina Chanel Abney has teamed up with extended reality (XR) company Acute Art to launch a new augmented reality (AR) artwork. *Imaginary Friend* (2020), which debuted today in Washington, D.C. and is available for free on the company's app, is meant to mark the 57th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, as well as the "Get your knee off our necks" march, scheduled to take place tomorrow.

The AR sculpture tells the story of "a modern day sage" who attempts to give a blessing to a friend, despite that friend's pessimism, according to a press release. The monumental version of the virtual sculpture will be on view in Chicago, the Grand Canyon, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC in the United States; Paris, London, and Berlin in Europe; and Tokyo in Asia. There will also be a version available on the app that users can place and interact with in their own home.

Inspired by the mythological characters and disincarnate guides people turn to in times of trouble, and in collaboration with artists who understand the value of humour in processing grief, trauma, and distress, I created "Imaginary Friend" to o er participants an always-ready companion to mitigate the uncertainty and precarity of today. "Imaginary Friend" asks us to keep at the heart, the value of collective life and public interaction at a moment that threatens to push us further toward alienated being.

Imaginary Friend marks the latest far-reaching collaboration between an artist and Acute Art. In March, the company launched a global exhibition of monumental AR KAWS sculptures, along with a series of small-scale virtual sculptures that could be placed around the home. In May, the company collaborated with Olafur Eliasson to release an AR project, dubbed *Wunderkammer* (2020).

Further Reading: A Virtual KAWS Exhibition Tests the Market for Augmented Reality Art

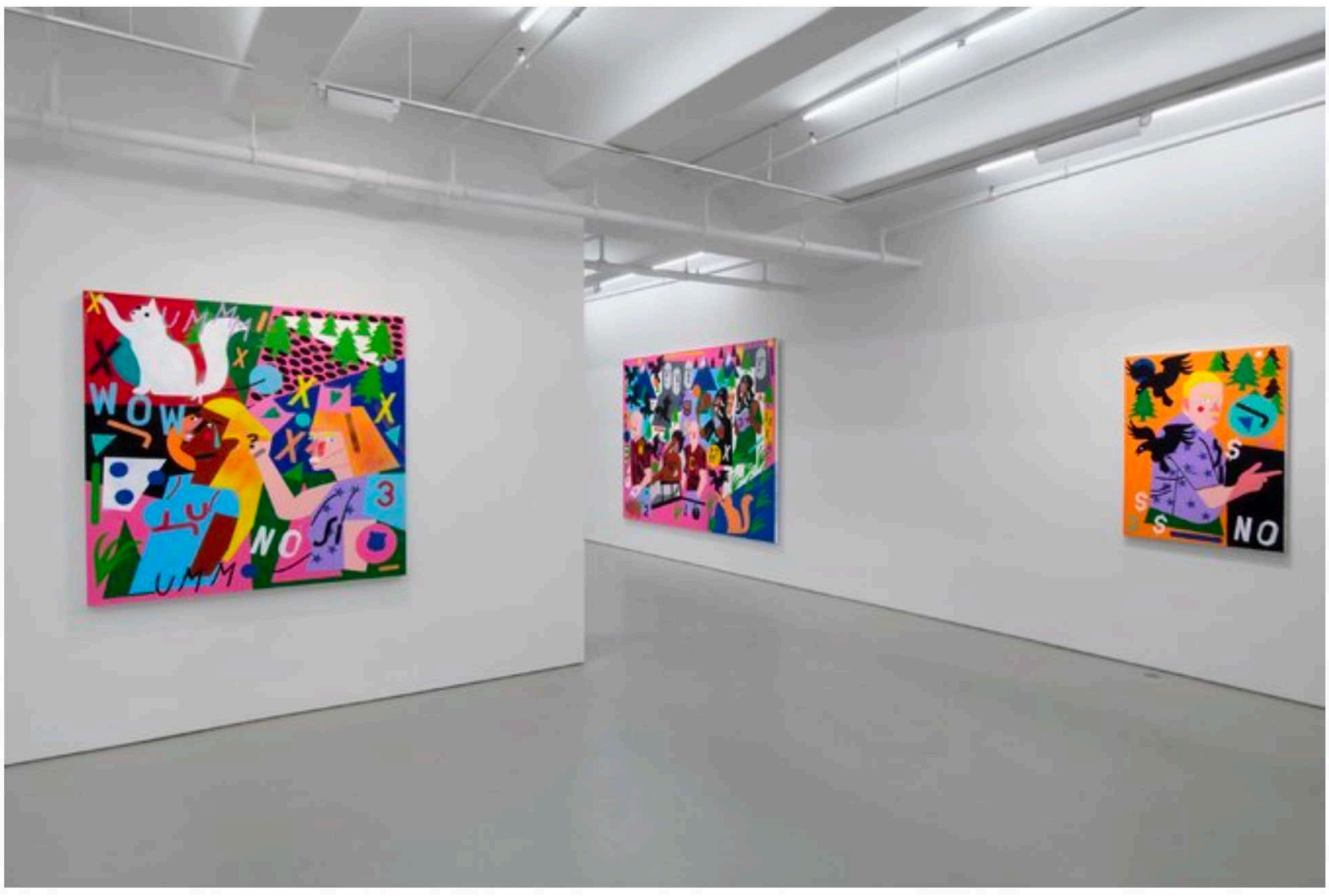
The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER and MARTHA SCHWENDENER DEC. 6, 2017

Nina Chanel Abney

Through Dec. 20 at Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, Manhattan; 212-645-1701, jackshainman.com. Through Dec. 22 at Mary Boone Gallery, 541 West 24th Street, Manhattan; 212-752-2929, maryboonegallery.com.



From left, “Whet, “Black and Blues” and “Mr. Baker,” all 2017 paintings in Nina Chanel Abney’s show “Seized the Imagination,” at Jack Shainman Gallery. Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The painter Nina Chanel Abney, now 35, has been on a tear since she first unveiled her visceral fusions of abstraction, figuration and politics at the Kravets Wehby Gallery in Chelsea in 2008.

She quickly developed a distinctive method, improvising images using scores of stenciled shapes and symbols, and graffiti-like touches of spray paint. Posters and billboards come to mind, along with Matisse cutouts. We see the entangled effects of racial prejudice, misogyny, violence and environmental depredation laid out like the scrambled pieces of a puzzle.

Ms. Abney's sources and inspirations range accordingly and include Jean-Michel Basquiat and Romare Bearden, Stuart Davis and Faith Ringgold, digital imaging and street art, Robert Colescott, Picasso, and Robert H. Johnson. In her hands, painting as both commentary and art seems full of possibility.

Two gallery shows in Chelsea offer the latest on Ms. Abney's progress. "Seized the Imagination," at the Jack Shainman Gallery, is dominated by 7-by-10-foot mash-ups of issues, figures, crayon-box colors and multipurpose symbols, especially dollar signs, X's, hearts and teardrops, but also police badges, guns and skulls. Both gender and race are often blurred. Chaos reigns. We are left to our own devices.

Ms. Abney's "Black and Blues" (2017) shows her mix of figures and multipurpose symbols.

Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Confrontations and fights — or seizures — prevail. In "Black and Blues," a drug deal may be going bad amid evergreens, Mercedes-Benzes and the frowning faces of Mount Rushmore. In "Hobson's Choice" — referring to a decision between one thing and nothing, or, essentially, the idea of take it or leave it — men with black bodies and white heads enter a fray amid numerous small fires and some prison bars. "White River Fish Kill" is dotted with images of fish, both alive and dead, but also with sunbathers, one of whom — being seized by two park rangers — may be transgender.

Ms. Abney's "White River Fish Kill" (2017), one of several paintings in which authority figures, such as police officers and park rangers, play a role. Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The show culminates in a big untitled mural full of confrontations among bare-chested white fight-club types, a black man in a hoodie and another black man who may be wearing a red "Make America Great Again" hat. Two white policemen are seen at the far right, one calm, the other apoplectic and wielding a chair.

In the somewhat smaller works of "Safe House," at the Mary Boone Gallery, Ms. Abney messes with language more, riving relatively normal images of black life. In several, she alters the wording of 1960s safety posters about hazards at home, work and play. In the two best, and most colorful, paintings — "People at Peoples Beach" and "Fruit of the Womb" — she subtracts words from disturbing captions, leaving blanks or X's. For example, beneath the beach scene: "Bob (blank) the X and (blank) them both. Mike will have to spend a month in the hospital." All these paintings point in a promising new direction: slightly calmer but still disturbing.

ROBERTA SMITH

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum
"Rodin at the Met"
A team of Met curators led by Denise Allen has installed about fifty bronzes, plasters, terracottas, and carvings by Auguste Rodin, along with works by related artists, in the grand foyer of the museum's galleries of nineteenth-century painting. (One room is filled with a chronological survey of his drawings.) The show marks the hundredth anniversary of the artist's death, but no occasion is really needed. Rodin is always with us, the greatest sculptor of the nearly four centuries since Gian Lorenzo Bernini perfected and exalted the baroque. Matter made flesh and returned to matter, with clay cast in bronze: Rodin. (There are carvings in the show, too, but made by assistants whom he directed. He couldn't feel stone.) You know he's great even when you're not in a mood for him. Are "The Thinker" and "The Kiss" kind of corny? Does the grandiosity of "Monument to Balzac" (for which there is a small study in the show) overbear? Sure. There's a stubborn tinge of vulgarity about Rodin, inseparable from his strength. But roll your eyes as you may, your gaze is going to stop, again, and widen at the sight of one or another work of his. He—or his hand, as his mind's executive—wrenched figurative sculpture from millennia of tradition and sent it tumbling into modernity. *Through Jan. 15.*

Museum of Modern Art
"Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978-1993"
This calculated clutter of ephemera, art work, and experimental films opened, appropriately, on Halloween. Inspiration for last-minute costumes could be found in such treasures as a transparent vampire cape constructed from a shower curtain, worn by the New Wave legend Klaus Nomi, and a coat made from fibreglass insulation; or, more generally, in the anything-goes, drag-punk aesthetic that suffused the East Village scene. Club 57 was located in a church basement on St. Marks Place and defined by its visionary team: the artist Keith Haring was the exhibition organizer, and the actor and cabaret cutup Ann Magnuson curated performance. The venue was a creative hub for the interdisciplinary, operating at the margins of the official art world. So it's no small feat that a major museum captured the scope and spirit of this Reagan-era subcultural landscape, down to the darkened club environment in the lower-level theatre gallery. Here, among the deluge of anonymous, Dadaesque flyers and campy silk-screen posters by the performance artist John Sex, you'll cross paths with an early Ellen Berkenblit horse painting and a ballpoint Basquiat drawing. The film programming promises surprises as well: in December, new MOMA preservations will be shown along with No Wave classics. *Through April 1.*

Nina Chanel Abney casts a sharp eye on race relations—and packs a colorful, graphical punch—in her new paintings (including "Whet," above) at the Shainman gallery, through Dec. 20.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

MOMA PS1
"Carolee Schneemann: Kinetic Painting"
In one of the New York artist's iconic performances, "Interior Scroll," from the nineteen-seventies, she unfurled a text from her vagina indicting the sexism of her experimental filmmaking milieu. Around the same time, in a mesmerizing sendup of Action painting's macho posturing, Schneemann swung nude, from a harness, marking the walls with a crayon. But the artist's career adds up to much more than an extended riposte to the insults of the male-dominated avant-garde, which this survey makes clear. Moving from her dynamic abstract paintings of the fifties to her Fluxus-inspired events and Super 8 films of the sixties and on to recent installations, schematic drawings, and multichannel videos, the show reveals Schneemann's quest for a feminist visual vocabulary to be the unifying force of these disparate endeavors. In her ongoing series of often hilarious lecture-performances, she indexes ancient symbols of female sexuality; in grids of color photographs, from the eighties, she documents her unorthodox relationship with her cat; "More Wrong Things," from 2000, is a foreboding tangle of cables and monitors displaying disaster footage and her own archival performance clips. With this decades-overdue retrospective, Schneemann is shown to be a crucial forebear to younger performance-based artists, and a groundbreaking Conceptualist attuned to the tactile properties of every medium she takes on. *Through March 11.*

Whitney Museum
"Toyin Ojih Odutola: To Wander Determined"
The young Nigerian artist, who is based in New York, uses an evocative conceit to unite her figurative works—and to heighten their intrigue. Faux letterhead announces that the large-scale works on paper, in charcoal, pastel, and graphite, merge the collections of two aristocratic Nigerian families. Her regal depictions of Africans retool traditions of European portraiture, as well as strains of contemporary photography (think: Instagram), showing the wealthy at leisure or enshrining their belongings in luminous vignettes. Ojih Odutola is known for her intense, even psychedelic, renderings of black skin, an approach echoed in her textured depiction of clothing, interiors, and landscapes. The sumptuous collision of gleaming tile, gauzy fabric, and desert scrub in "Pregnant" (2017) is especially noteworthy. Its off-kilter composition suggests an enlarged snapshot, but the pose of its subject is curiously formal. "Wall of Ambassadors," also from this year, is an unabashed moment of meta-commentary, showing a panelled wall of oval-framed portraits. Each mysterious dignitary speaks to the dizzying detail of the artist's invented history, as do the hands entering the bottom edge of the still-life, to complete it with an elegant arrangement of leaves. *Through Feb. 25.*

Morgan Library and Museum
"Drawn to Greatness: Master Drawings from the Thaw Collection"
The practice of drawing in Europe is as old as the lines on the caves at Lascaux. But there was a sea change during the Renaissance, when the earliest pieces on view here were made. Artists began to think with their hands, working through ideas on paper, rather than merely recording the world. In one sublime pen-and-ink sketch, from 1450-55, Andrea Mantegna posed the same columnar saint

CHRISTIE'S

Established names and fresh new talent to look out for

A look at nine artists whose reputations and markets are on the rise — featuring works offered in our *First Open | Online* and *Contemporary Edition* auctions in July

Nina Chanel Abney

Nina Chanel Abney (b. 1982), *Two Years and Counting*. Sheet: 65¾ x 39¼ in (1670 x 997 mm). Estimate: $20,000-30,000. Offered in Contemporary Edition, 9-16 July 2019, Online

Who? Nina Chanel Abney's (B.1982) work is engaged in

Harper's BAZAAR
November 2019

LADIES OF LIBERTY

The Statue of Liberty, or Liberty Enlightening the World, *as the iconic 152-foot-tall copper sculpture with broken shackles and chains at her feet is officially known, has guarded the entrance to New York Harbor since 1886. A gift of friendship from France to the United States, the statue has long been a universally recognized beacon of freedom and democracy. To honor Lady Liberty's enduring power,* Bazaar *asked three female artists to reinterpret this potent symbol using fashion from female designers. By reexamining and unpacking lesser-known aspects of the statue's history, each artist reconsiders what she means now. By Alison S. Cohn*

THE NEW COLOSSUS

By Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Engraved on a plaque inside the Statue of Liberty's pedestal, 1903

Nina Chanel Abney

Lady Liberty "symbolizes forgotten history," says 37-year-old African-American painter Nina Chanel Abney of the statue, which was originally intended to celebrate the shared democratic ideals of France and America, which abolished slavery in 1848 and 1865, respectively. While we now consider the Statue of Liberty a symbol of immigration, Ellis Island, the entry point through which millions of new Americans passed from 1892 to 1954, didn't open until six years after her unveiling. Abney's graphically bold canvases—like this painting of the statue clad in what the artist calls an "unapologetically audacious" Versace ensemble—challenge viewers to think critically about how meanings change over time. ■

Blazer, shirt, top, hat, and bolo tie, Versace. See Where to Buy for shopping details.

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, UNTITLED, 2019. © NINA CHANEL ABNEY. COURTESY THE ARTIST, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK, AND PACE EDITIONS, NEW YORK

Broadly.

7 Black Artists You Should Know

From working with Solange to being lauded by "Vogue," these women are lighting up the art scene.

CULTURE | By Miss Rosen | Dec 6 2018, 5:01pm

Throughout history, great works of art have been ascribed to the hand of "Anonymous," their names erased and authorship denied. Virginia Woolf famously said, "I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." Fortunately, we are now at a time to write and publish our histories, firmly inscribed. With Art Basel in Miami Beach heating up this weekend, here are seven black artists on our radar out here changing the game.

Photo by J. Caldwell

Nina Chanel Abney

Nina Chanel Abney, 36, came out blazing with *Class of 2007*, a monumental painting from her M.F.A. thesis show at Parsons, depicting her classmates as prisoners on the right, and herself as their white prison guard on the left. Abney, the only Black student in her class, told *Vanity Fair*, "It's nothing personal." It's much deeper than that. Abney understood the impact of the statement she was making and the impact it would have on her career. The work was purchased by Miami collectors Donald and Mera Rubell, and included in *30 Americans*, an exhibition of contemporary African-American artists which has been touring the U.S. since 2008. Over the past decade, its presence has become increasingly clear, as the focus on police brutality and Black Lives Matter movement reveals.

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Nina Chanel Abney's Intricately Dense and Critically Clear Painting

The Chicago-born artist's work is as entrenched in political discourse as it is in pop culture.

Rachel Heidenry 24 hours ago

Nina Chanel Abney, "Randaleeza" (2008), acrylic on canvas, 90 × 94 inches (Private collection, image courtesy the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion, © Nina Chanel Abney)

LOS ANGELES — Nina Chanel Abney is having a moment. After opening at Duke University's Nasher Museum of Art, the artist's first solo museum survey, *Royal Flush*, is now spread across two venues in Los Angeles. Jointly presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and the California African American Museum (CAAM) through January 20, 2019, *Royal Flush* offers a critical look into the past 10 years of Abney's artistic output, revealing the depth of her paintings, watercolors, and collages.

Abney's works are typically characterized as narrative figurative paintings that are graphically bold and colorfully striking. The Chicago-born artist is an adept observer of contemporary urban life ranging from sociopolitical realities and abuses of power to celebrity culture and the news media. With an aesthetic that combines influences from animated cartoons, hip-hop culture, graffiti, and even emoji, she has created a visual language that is definitively hers, painting canvases that are as entrenched in political discourse as they are in pop culture.

The date of Abney's paintings often gives a clue for understanding their contexts. In her 2008 painting "Randaleeza," she depicts then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rica in a white bikini surrounded by agitated dogs and several male onlookers — including one modeled after Abney's friend Randall (hence the title). The menacing dogs reference the news story of the summer: Michael Vick's charges for organizing

Installation view of *Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush* at the California African American Museum

competitive dogfighting. Placing political and celebrity news side by side, Abney creates a chaotic scene that challenges viewers to think critically about the relationships between gender and sexuality, public image, and race. The result invites the viewer to consider the often jumbled presentation of what constitutes the news, and the profuse and ceaseless way information is publicly shared and manipulated today.

A later series of paintings takes on gun violence and police brutality. In "Untitled (FUCK T*E *OP)" (2014), Abney paints a dense composition filled with geometric shapes and truncated text. Six black faces in profile emerge on the canvas, some with a teardrop falling from their eyes, others with a black X painted across their cheeks. The painting is arresting, absorbing you into its composition, just as one might get lost in a news cycle or Twitter feed. Conveying a mood of protest in a manner that balances accessibility and urgency, the work requires the viewer to consider the symbolism of each number, color, pattern, and shape. It is a new way of thinking about how the intersection of representation and abstraction can be translated into sociopolitical critique in the context of the digital age.

Nina Chanel Abney, "Untitled (FUCK T*E *OP)" (2014), acrylic on canvas, 72 × 108 inches (Collection of Kamaal Fareed, image courtesy the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion, © Nina Chanel Abney)

Often said to be revitalizing narrative figurative painting, Abney does so in a way that pulls from the tradition of 20th-century public art and mural painting in the Americas. Like murals, her paintings are meant to be read, requiring active engagement to be interpreted. Indeed, the most successful mural paintings narrate through symbols — the significance of an ear of corn or the color red conjure specific associations that create an iconographic vocabulary to interpret the walls. Whether consciously or not, Abney inherently does the same thing, consistently revisiting letters and signs that create a singular visual language.

Not surprisingly, the artist has produced several public works, including a mural at Coney Island and a basketball court in Memphis. Working in acrylic with occasional complements of aerosol spray, Abney's choice of materials naturally lends itself to wall painting. In her 2018 exhibition *Hot to Trot. Not.* at Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Abney created in-situ frescoes along the institution's main stairwell. One depicts the busts of three black women against a yellow background, the numbers 1, 2, 3 listed next to them as if cataloguing objects in a museum. Alongside the figures, Abney has simply painted "WHAT?" in black letters — pointedly demanding viewers to consider the composition and then think critically about its meaning. Without offering an

explanation herself, Abney reminds us that narratives can be interpreted in myriad ways and through various lenses — the didactic nature of her work becoming that much more impactful.

Installation view of *Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush* at the California African American Museum

At both ICA and CAAM, what stands out is the pointedness of Abney's hand. Her line work is as sharp as her wit, and over 10 years has only gotten more defined. Synthesizing new methods of communication with a satirical sensibility that is at once intricately dense and critically clear, her canvases present narratives that offer new ways of engaging with some of today's most critical topics.

Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush *continues at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1717 E 7th St, Los Angeles) and the California African American Museum through January 20, 2019.*

Welcome to Culture Type!
Exploring art by and about people of African descent, primarily through the lens of books, magazines and catalogs, Culture Type features original research and reporting and shares invaluable interestingness culled from the published record on black art.

Nina Chanel Abney Debuts a New Series of Monumental Works at Pace Prints

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE *on* Oct 25, 2018 • 10:58 pm

WHETHER ITS THE BREAKING NEWS or a song she recently heard, **Nina Chanel Abney** is inspired by contemporary events and meaningful moments that often find their way into her work and may spontaneously define or change its direction.

A new generation storyteller, Abney blends abstraction and figuration. Her images draw on the public discourse, music, video games, Google searches, and vintage cartoons. The seemingly random configurations reflect urban life, address provocative topics, and echo our fast-paced, media-driven culture.

Her latest body of work is a series of large-scale monoprints debuting tomorrow in a solo exhibition at Pace Prints in New York. The works explore a variety of subjects, including gentrification and housing discrimination; gender and identity issues; and America's racially charged politics of division.

“I am dealing with a lot of subjects, issues that are typically hard to talk about. My goal is to basically take these touchy topics and present them in a way that’s visually appealing that would get the viewer to interact with something that they might not normally want to,” said Abney, talking about her new prints in the video below.

When discussing her work, she prefers not to dive too deep into the issues she raises in order to give viewers the opportunity make their own interpretations.

> *“I am dealing with a lot of subjects, issues that are typically hard to talk about. My goal is to basically take these touchy topics and present them in a way that’s visually appealing…” — Nina Chanel Abney*

Nina Chanel Abney talks about the experience of making her first body of monoprints. | Video by Pace Prints

BORN IN CHICAGO, Abney lives and works in New York. “Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush,” her first solo museum exhibition is currently on view in Los Angeles, where it is being co-presented at the California African American Museum and Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles through Jan. 20, 2019. The survey of paintings and collages travels to its final destination, the Neuberger Museum of Art at Purchase College, State University of New York, in April 2019.

Over the course of her decade-long professional practice, Abney has simplified her painting style, employing a universal language of symbols, shapes, and color paired with near life-size figures. The iconographic approach naturally lends itself to printmaking.

Abney has made a few small-sized prints before, but this is the first time she has embarked on a major print project. The new series of monumental works features nine monoprints—three are single panels and the others are multi-paneled, including “Ooh la la,” a five-panel work that is nearly 17-feet long.

“Ooh la la,” which depicts a two disembodied black male heads gazing at the a pair of nude white female figures, resembles a site-specific wall painting Abney made earlier this year for “Hot to Trot. Not.,” her Palais de Tokyo exhibition in Paris, earlier this year.

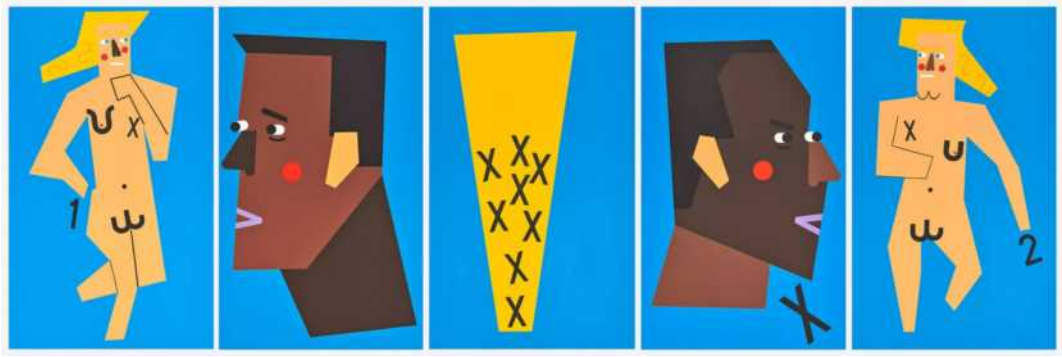
Abney's prints are among the largest Pace has created. She said the collaborative process of printmaking with the Pace team was "amazing" and she is hooked.

"It allows me to work faster and, because I can work faster, I am able to try more things that I probably wouldn't be able to try in the studio by myself. So it allows me to experiment a lot more and try a lot more new things," Abney said. "I addicted now. I think I will always have this as part of my practice." CT

TOP IMAGE: NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Let's Work, Let's Play, Let's Live Together," 2018 (diptych monoprint, Overall dimensions, 68 1/2 x 84 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney, Courtesy the artist and Pace Prints

Nina Chanel Abney's exhibition is on view at Pace Prints, New York, N.Y. from Oct. 26, 2018 – Dec, 15, 2018.

READ MORE about Nina Chanel Abney's work on her website



NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Ooh La La," 2018 (five-panel monoprint, overall dimensions, 66 1/4 x 198 5/8 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney, Courtesy the artist and Pace Prints

NINA CHANEL ABNEY, "Fast Draw," 2018 (triptych monoprint, Overall dimensions, 59 5/8 x 108 1/2 inches). | © Nina Chanel Abney, Courtesy the artist and Pace Prints

HYPEBEAST

Nina Chanel Abney to Present Large-Scale Monoprints in NYC Show

The rising artist's first body of work in the print medium.

NINA CHANEL ABNEY

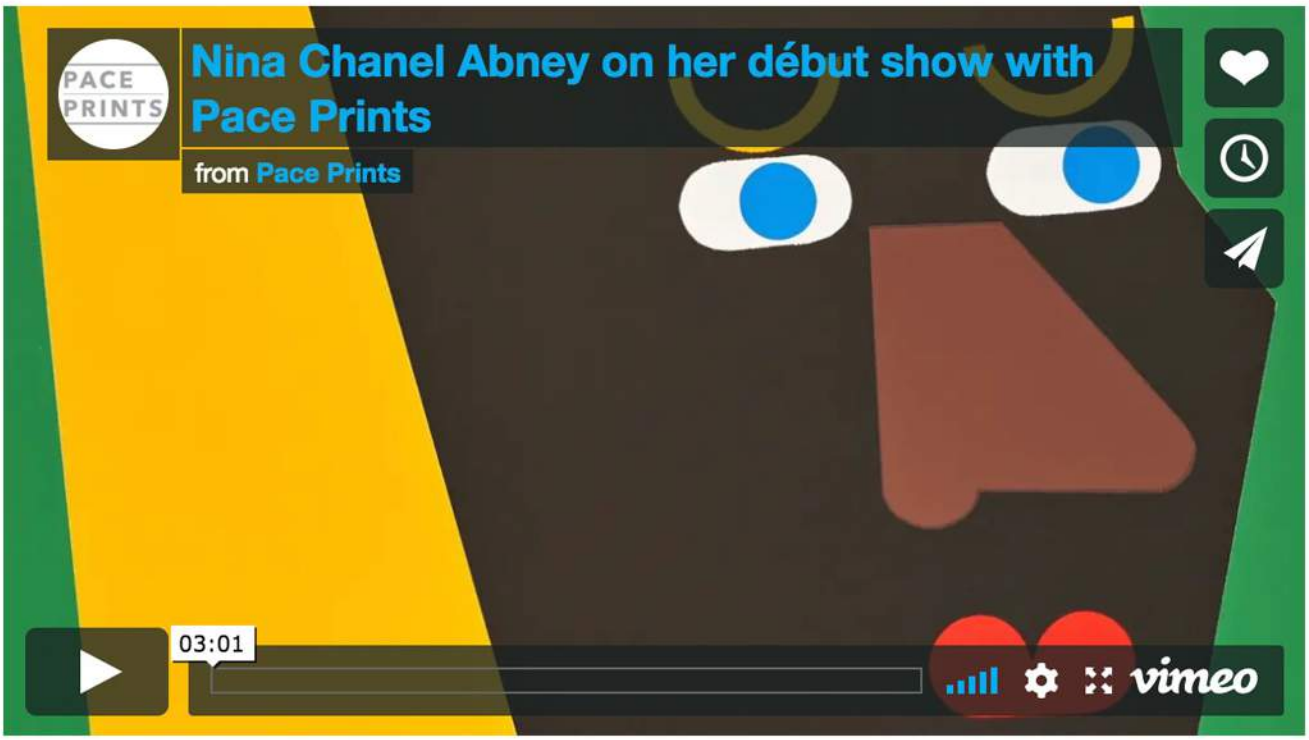
Oct 24, 2018

By **Keith Estiler**

One of the artists leading the contemporary art industry today is Chicago-born artist Nina Chanel Abney who creates vivid paintings that touch upon themes of race, gender, pop culture, and politics. Abney will soon launch a body of work in the print medium for the first time ever at New York City's Pace Prints gallery. The namesake show will encompass life-sized monoprints that feature "her signature visual language of symbols and stylized figures," said the gallery. "As I am creating a piece, everything that is happening at the moment may find its way in the work," added Abney.

The show will be open to the public from October 26 to December 15. Learn more about the works by watching the video below. In related stories, check out this week's list of best art drops.

Pace Prints
521 West 26th Street
3rd & 4th Floors
New York, NY 10001



All images by Charlie Rubin

Painting the Pain and Beauty of Black Life

Artist Nina Chanel Abney's simultaneous gallery shows were down the street from each other and a world apart.

By**Gabrielle Bruney**photos by**Charlie Rubin**
Jan 8 2018, 5:00am

Presenting one gallery show at a time is challenge enough for most artists, but this fall the painter **Nina Chanel Abney** opted for two. "It was a good opportunity to make a huge statement with all the work, so I pushed, and I got it done," she said, laughing. "But I really don't know how." The exhibits—*Seized the Imagination*, at New York's **Jack Shainman Gallery**, and *Safe House*, just a few blocks north at **Mary Boone Gallery**—were two halves of a whole. Taken together, they formed side-by-side portraits of black American life.

The works in *Seized* were just as kinetic as the show's title suggests, picking up on themes of racialized violence, **police brutality**, and information overload that

have long been present in Abney's work. The paintings depict near-constant conflict, with culled-from-the-headlines **imagery recalling brutal police interactions**. These frenzied works bombard viewers with disjointed and sometimes contradictory suggestions, creating a visual language that's as endless and overwhelming as scrolling through Twitter.

The paintings in *Safe House* at Mary Boone were the antidote. Their figures—all black, as opposed to the interracial brawlers of *Seized*—engage in leisure and domestic activities. They depict black life as it exists outside of the headlines. And as *Seized* used the visual language of the social media era, *Safe House* drew on another medium particular to its time: occupational safety posters from the 1960s. Though the specter of postwar American supremacy is most fawningly invoked by those who would make the country great again, by adapting the posters and turning them into vehicles for black joy, Abney was re-appropriating conservative nostalgia.

The author (left) and artist Nina Chanel Abney (right) at Mary Boone Gallery

Abney has never shied away from politics. Her first major work, which earned her gallery representation, was a race-swapped group portrait of her Parsons School of Design MFA graduating class, in which she was the lone black student. She painted her classmates as black prison inmates, with Abney herself as their blond, white guard. But as political tensions have heightened, impelling artists and public figures of all kinds to frequent and direct political messaging, Abney now takes a more oblique approach to social commentary, raising countless questions and answering almost none of them. It's both fascinating and infuriating. In a time that's left us begging for guidance and certainty, Abney offers only a mirror.

VICE visited *Seized the Imagination* and *Safe House* with Abney late last year to discuss race, painting politics, and creating a visual language for the emoji era.

Nina Chanel Abney, *Untitled,* 2017. From *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman

VICE: You've described your process as intuitive—is that still the case?
Abney: That's still the case—none of these [paintings] were planned out ahead of time, so it's all intuitive. I feel like I work intuitively because if I planned it out ahead of time I'd be bored. So I feel like it keeps me interested in the work as I'm making it. That's pretty much why I just go for it, so I keep myself challenged. Like I don't plan any of the paintings out, but I at least come up with a general idea of what I want to make a painting about.

Does that idea evolve while you work?
I usually stay under the general main idea, but as I'm working, anything could happen in the work, which I like because it keeps it very current. So that's how I can make a painting where something that could have happened two weeks ago is in the work.

How are the works in these two simultaneous shows related?
I found an artist who makes **fake art therapy books**. And the title of one of his pieces is *How to Feel the Way You Felt Before You Knew What You Know Now*. So [the show at Jack Shainman] is the chaos of what you know now, and the work at Mary Boone's is kind of like how you felt before.

We could leave here, one of us could get pulled over by the cops, and it could instantly be an incident. But then after that, where would you go? You might go work out the next day. [The Mary Boone paintings are] just more reflective of our day-to-day—that we have these chaotic things happening, but we have these things from our daily life that occur in between.

Nina Chanel Abney, *White River Fish Kill*, 2017. From *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman
The author (left) and artist Nina Chanel Abney (right) at Jack Shainman

It feels like sometimes there are snippets of familiar scenes in your paintings—like *White River Fish Kill* has imagery that recalls the incident when a black girl in Texas was slammed to the ground by police. She was at a pool party in her swimsuit at the time.
Out of all the paintings, this is the one where I took the actual image and then switched out the figures. I typically do that to kind of take it away from what it was initially.

The cops are black in your painting.
Yeah.

You've talked about the struggles of painting black figures, which are so often read to be inherently political in the art world. How do you deal with that?
That's why I work the way I do, where I switch out the [races]. I will mix genders, race, and figures. Just to broaden the story, so just because this person's black, you don't just assume one set story to the painting.

Nina Chanel Abney, detail of *Untitled*, 2017. From *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman
Nina Chanel Abney, *Request One Zero One*, 2017. From *Safe House* at Mary Boone Gallery

What's the relationship between your work and social media?
The way I paint now is really driven by social media and how we take in information now. I try to reflect that chaos. We take in so many different things at one time: You scroll down your timeline, someone died, and you're like, "Oh, that's sad." And then you go down, and your friend's at a party, and you've forgotten about that previous post in a second. So I wanted my paintings to kind of reflect all of that information in one spot.

Nina Chanel Abney, detail of *Untitled*, 2017. From *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman

And since you work in one of art's most revered mediums, we're forced to consider your work in a way that's almost the opposite of social media—entering a gallery space, meditating on it.
Yeah. I felt like if we had to sit down for a minute and really actually process the information, what would that be like? So if I can present it in a way that makes it feel like one narrative, it forces us to consider what all this means together.

Nina Chanel Abney, *Penny Dreadful*, 2017. From *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman

You've said that you're interested in emojis. Is that still true?
Oh yeah, for sure. All the symbols and things I use in the work. Another way of me challenging one defined answer is in creating a shape or something that could mean multiple things depending on who's looking at it.

Installation view of *Safe House* at Mary Boone Gallery
Nina Chanel Abney, *All These Flavors and you choose to be salty*, 2017. From *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman

Are you trying to create a visual language that's as universal as emojis are?
I'm just trying to create a language that's simplified, where anyone can come into the show from any background and read into the work in a way that they can relate to, just like an emoji.

Given the political climate, do you feel any responsibility to communicate anything specific to audiences?
I'm not trying to dictate any specific message to the viewer. I obviously have my opinions on the things that are happening, but I at least just want to start a conversation around it. Someone could send me negative feedback based on what the subject matter is, and that's OK. It doesn't mean I agree with it, but at least… I welcome all opinions.

Seized the Imagination *was on view at* ***Jack Shainman Gallery*** *through December 20*. Safe House *was at* **Mary Boone Gallery** *through December 22*. *Learn more about Nina Chanel Abney on her* ***website***.

Follow Gabrielle Bruney on ***Twitter***.

Los Angeles MAGAZINE

Nina Chanel Abney poses with her work, First and Last.
Image courtesy of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Photo by J Caldwell.

Nina Chanel Abney Tells the Stories of Our Brutal World in Bold Detail

The art star's first solo show in L.A. is taking over two local museums

By **LaShea Delaney** - September 27, 2018

Figurative painting is the art of representation. It's taking something that is real, tangible, and recognizable and using any number of mediums to create it again. With figurativism the artist can present exactly what exists or they can form greater contexts and appoint new meanings. Some artists choose to create narratives so we get a glimpse of how they see the world unfolding.

Nina Chanel Abney is an artist who truly tells a story. For the past ten years, she's been creating large-scale works that use a bold, graphic style to create narratives about racial politics, sexuality, gender, and violence. She uses hip-hop culture, celebrity gossip, video games, and the 24-hour news cycle to represent our reality, taking recognizable symbols and reflecting them back at us in a style that's as dizzying as modern life can seem.

The New York-based artist's first solo show in Los Angeles, Royal Flush, also happens to be her mid-career retrospective. Thirty of the artist's paintings, watercolors, and collages—made between 2009 and 2017—will be on display across two museums, the California African American Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, through January 20, 2019. Curators Naima Keith of CAAM and Jamillah James of ICA LA have both been fans of Abney's work and thought this was the perfect opportunity to collaborate on a show.

Nina Chanel Abney, Untitled (Yo 123), 2015 (on display at CAAM).
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NASHER MUSEUM OF ART AT DUKE UNIVERSITY. PHOTO BY PETER PAUL GEOFFRION. © NINA CHANEL ABNEY.

Abney began her career in 2007 when she graduated Parsons School of Design and her thesis painting, *Class of 2007*, caught the attention of the art world. In it she painted her white classmates as black prison inmates and reimagined herself as a white prison guard. Since then her work has evolved as the times have changed. "My process is intuitive and the work is really a reflection of the time in which they were created," she says. "It's fun to go back, because they are almost like time capsules." The pop-culture references change, the contexts shift, and so do the stories that need to be told.

Royal Flush traveled from North Carolina to Chicago before landing in L.A. Abney hasn't spent much time in Los Angeles, but her work is universal. In her paintings, race and gender are turned on their heads. The brutality of the state is not just projected onto black bodies, and the authority is not just given to white figures. Women are objectified in one panel of a three-paneled painting, bending over suggestively; the man doing the objectifying is played for the fool in the very next panel. The small details are packed with meaning and a keen sense of the absurd.

The last eight years have been a roller coaster and Abney's art reflects that. No matter what the viewer's experience has been, Abney will show them something they can relate to or learn from. "Everyone can take something from the work," she says.

Nina Chanel Abney, Catfish, 2017 (on display at ICA LA).
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NASHER MUSEUM OF ART AT DUKE UNIVERSITY. PHOTO BY PETER PAUL GEOFFRION. © NINA CHANEL ABNEY.

Los Angeles Times

The week ahead at SoCal museums, Sept. 16-23: 'Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush' and more

By MATT COOPER
SEP 15, 2018 | 1:00 AM

Nina Chanel Abney's "Forbidden Fruit" is among the pieces on display in a joint exhibition of the artist's works at the California African American Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles.(California African American Muse)

Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush Parallel exhibitions include paintings, watercolors and collages by the Chicago-born artist that explore urban life and our media-saturated world. California African American Museum, 600 State Drive, Exposition Park, L.A. Opens next Sun.; ends Jan. 20. Closed Mon. Free. (213) 744-7432. Also at the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1717 E. 7th St., L.A. Opens next Sun.; ends Jan. 20. Closed Mon.-Tue. Free. (213) 928-0833.

BLOUINARTINFO

VISUAL ARTS / ARTICLE

Nina Chanel Abney's "Royal Flush" at California African American Museum

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | SEPTEMBER 05, 2018

"Thieves Guild in Oblivion," 2009, Nina Chanel Abney, Acrylic on canvas, 55.5 x 67 inches (140.97 x 170.18 cm).
(Private collection. Image courtesy of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion. © Nina Chanel Abney.)

The California African American Museum (CAAM) in Los Angeles will host "Royal Flush" by artist Nina Chanel Abney. The show runs from September 23, 2018, through January 20, 2019.

The artist is at the forefront of a generation that is working towards revitalizing narrative figurative painting. Abney is a skillful storyteller and visually articulates the complex social dynamics of contemporary urban life. Her first solo museum survey — includes paintings, watercolors, and collages created during the past 10 years.

“Abney draws on mainstream news media, animated cartoons, video games, hip-hop culture, celebrity websites, and tabloid magazines to make paintings replete with symbols that appear to have landed on the canvas with the stream-of-consciousness immediacy of text messages, pop-up windows, or the scrolling headlines of an incessant 24-hour news cycle,” the museum says.

Abney’s work simultaneously contains scenes from contemporary genres and scathing commentaries on social attitudes and inequities. This she does by engaging loaded topics and controversial issues with irreverence, humor, and satire.

Nina Chanel Abney (b.1982) is an American artist. She graduated with a BFA from Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, in 2014, and an MFA from the Parsons School of Design, New York, NY. Her work have been presented in institutions such as Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France, The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, The Gateway Project, Newark, NJ, Kravets|Wehby Gallery, New York, NY, and Galeria Rabieh, Sao Paulo, Brazil, among others. Abney lives and works in New York.

The California African American Museum (CAAM) was chartered by the State of California in 1977. It began operations in 1981 and is a state-supported agency and a Smithsonian Affiliate. The museum explores the art, history, and culture of African Americans, with an emphasis on California and the West. CAAM also holds a permanent collection of more than 4,000 works of art, artifacts, and historical documents, and a publicly accessible research library.

“Royal Flush” runs from September 23, 2018, through January 20, 2019, at California African American Museum (CAAM), 600 State Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90037, USA.

artnet news

Art World

From Mark Bradford in Baltimore to Victor Hugo in LA: 33 Museum Shows Around the US Worth Traveling For

We've looked beyond the Big Apple to find the most exciting museum shows opening in September and October around the country.

Caroline Goldstein, September 5, 2018

14. "Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush at the California African American Museum

Nina Chanel Abney, *Hothouse* (2016). Courtesy of Jack Shainman.

The first museum retrospective of Abney's work covers the last 10 years, as the artist ascended to become one of the foremost African American artists working today. Her cartoon-style collages are punctuated with political and socially prescient material and make the case for narrative figure painting's resurgence in contemporary art.

September 23, 2018–January 20, 2019; CAAM, 600 State Dr, Los Angeles, California

HYPEBEAST

Nina Chanel Abney Creates Bold New Paintings for "Travelogue" NYC Exhibit

Subverting mainstream culture with piercing illustrations.

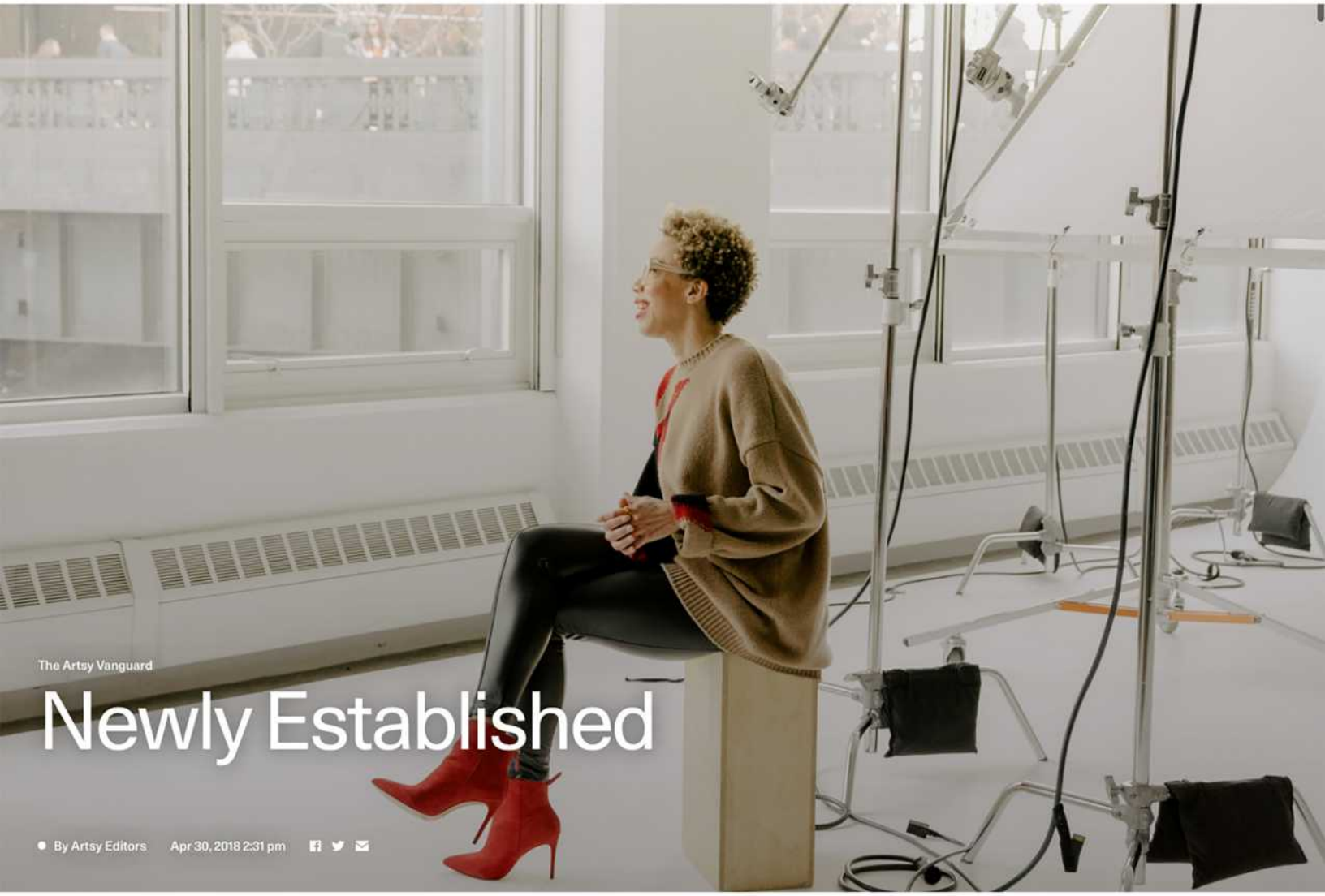
By Keith Estiler / 1 day ago / Arts

New York City-based artist Nina Chanel Abney is widely-recognized for her vibrant paintings that are filled with animated cartoons and colorful geometric shapes. Abney is currently taking part in a survey exhibition at The School in Kinderhook dubbed “Travelogue.” She has created new works for the show that portray African American subjects playing with a Wilson volleyball. This series of paintings is a part of her larger body of work that comments on social attitudes and racial inequality. Accompanying Abney are other concurrent solo show by Shimon Attie, Math Bass, Valérie Blass, Vibha Galhotra, Brad Kahlhamer, Margaret Kilgallen, Lynne Lapointe, Gordon Parks, and Leslie Wayne.

View select artworks above and head over to Jack Shainman Gallery’s official website to learn more. “Travelogue” is currently open to the public until October 6. In other art news, Kinfolk 90 will soon launch a collaborative exhibition entitled “Kinetic” featuring works by Meguru Yamaguchi and Yoon Hyup.

The School in Kinderhook
25 Broad St
Kinderhook, NY 12106

ARTSY



The Artsy Vanguard

Newly Established

By Artsy Editors Apr 30, 2018 2:31 pm

What does it take to officially break into the canon? Consult the latest accomplishments of these 10 members of The Artsy Vanguard—a new, annual list of the 50 most influential talents shaping the future of contemporary art practice. Each of these artists has recently reached a crucial tipping point in their career, whether by landing a major commission, a survey at a globally recognized museum, or a national pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Nina Chanel Abney

B. 1982, Chicago. Lives and works in New York.

Nina Chanel Abney ***Hobson's Choice*, 2017**
Jack Shainman Gallery

Nina Chanel Abney's work samples from a wide swathe of pop culture, remixing everything from cartoons to Henri Matisse. The simplicity of her compositions—which sizzle with a vibrant palette and energy that harkens back to Stuart Davis—is at odds with the complexity of her concerns, which have recently included police violence against people of color in the U.S. "Abney creates paintings with Pop colors but deep tensions," notes Hugo Vitrani, who curated the artist's current Palais de Tokyo exhibition. He paraphrases the artist herself, who often says that her paintings are "easy to swallow, but hard to digest."

Abney has been eagerly treading sensitive ground for over a decade. Her large-scale diptych *Class of 2007* (2007) reimagined her fellow MFA classmates at Parsons as dark-skinned prison inmates, and herself as a blonde, blue-eyed prison guard. Dealers and collectors took notice of the provocation, and in 2008, the piece was included in the Rubell Family Collection's "30 Americans" exhibition. The exhibition continues to travel around the U.S.—currently at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio until May 6th, it will later head to the Tucson Museum of Art and the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia—and includes work by heavy-hitters Kerry James Marshall, David Hammons, and Kara Walker, among others.

Since then, Abney has continued apace, with inclusions in landmark group shows such as "Flatlands" at the Whitney in 2016 and "No Man's Land" at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami in 2015, which was then hosted at the National Museum of Women in the Arts from 2016 to 2017. Last year found her opening a high-profile pair of solo shows in New York that were on view concurrently at Jack Shainman Gallery (where she recently joined the roster) and at Mary Boone. And despite being in her mid-thirties, the artist has already earned a retrospective, which debuted at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in February 2017. That show is now on view at the Chicago Cultural Center through May 6th, and will travel to both the California African American Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles this September.

Nina Chanel Abney ***People at Peoples Beach*, 2017**
Jack Shainman Gallery

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Good Grief, Charlie Brown! You're Graffiti

By ANDREW R. CHOW APRIL 2, 2018

From left, new works depicting Peanuts characters by Kenny Scharf, Rob Pruitt and Nina Chanel Abney, for a public art project commissioned by Peanuts Worldwide that will go up in downtown Manhattan this month. Kenny Scharf, Rob Pruitt and Nina Chanel Abney

Kenny Scharf's oozing, vividly colored cartoon figures have covered billboards in downtown Manhattan for decades. Now, his whimsical psychedelia will appear in New York in the forms of Charlie Brown, Snoopy and the rest of the Peanuts gang, as part of a new public art project bringing Charles M. Schulz's characters to cities around the world.

The project was commissioned by Peanuts Worldwide, which oversees all representations of Schulz's indelible comics. Seven artists were chosen to form the Peanuts Global Artist Collective and interpret the characters. Nina Chanel Abney, for example, has created a digitalized, geometric rendering of Snoopy and Woodstock riding skateboards. The provocateur Rob Pruitt, known for startling juxtapositions, has placed Snoopy next to a panda bear, while the graffiti artist André Saraiva has Snoopy interacting with Mr. Saraiva's signature stick-figure doodle. The other artists are Tomokazu Matsuyama, the duo FriendsWithYou (Samuel Borkson and Arturo Sandoval III) and the collective AVAF, founded by Eli Sudbrack.

"I think I taught myself how to draw by copying Peanuts characters and strips over and over, especially the details — the grass, the snow, the wobbly lines," Mr. Pruitt said in a statement.

The murals, approximately 15 feet wide by 10 feet tall, will go up on office buildings in Hudson Square on April 16. (A map of their specific locations will be put up at the Children's Museum of the Arts the day of.) They will remain up for three months, with similar projects going up in Paris; Seoul, South Korea; Berlin; San Francisco; Tokyo and Mexico City.

artnet® news

On View

Rob Pruitt and Other Artists Painted Murals of 'Peanuts' Characters All Over New York City—See Them Here

The company that owns Snoopy and friends has enlisted contemporary artists for a new public art project.

Sarah Cascone, April 19, 2018

Mr. A. Photo courtesy of the Peanuts Global Artist Collective.

Good grief! A corporate public art project has hit the streets of cities around the world, all based on Charlie Brown, Linus, Lucy, and other characters from Charles M. Schulz's beloved *Peanuts* comic strip. A clever bit of marketing for Snoopy and the gang, the murals have touched down in New York, with installations to follow in Mexico City, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, San Francisco, and Seoul.

The public art show is the work of well-known contemporary artists Kenny Scharf, Rob Pruitt, Nina Chanel Abney, AVAF (Assume Vivid Astro Focus, a collective founded by Eli Sudbrack), FriendsWithYou (Samuel Borkson and Arturo Sandoval III), Tomokazu Matsuyama, and graffiti artist André Saraiva, who goes by Mr. A. Collectively. They've been dubbed the Peanuts Global Art Collective.

FriendsWithYou. Photo courtesy of the Peanuts Global Artist Collective.

The artists were commissioned to create their own interpretations of Schulz's iconic creations by Peanuts Worldwide, which manages the rights to the use of the *Peanuts* characters. The cartoonist, who died in 2000, inspired generations of children with his work, which became the basis of the classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and other television specials and movies.

"I taught myself how to draw by copying *Peanuts* characters and strips over and over," Pruitt wrote on the project website. In his mural designs, he has paired Snoopy with a panda bear, an animal that has become Pruitt's signature.

AVAF. Photo courtesy of the Peanuts Global Artist Collective.

"As a child I would draw all of my favorite cartoons, so to be able to filter *Peanuts* through my creative lens is definitely a childhood dream come true," added Abney, who has depicted Snoopy and his friend Woodstock in her blocky, colorful style.

In New York, the murals are all on downtown office buildings, clustered on the West Side near Hudson Square. They were unveiled April 16, with a map showing their locations available at the Children's Museum of the Arts.

See more photos of the works below.

Nina Chanel Abney. Photo courtesy of the Peanuts Global Artist Collective.

whitewall

January 2018

NINA CHANEL ABNEY

BY KATY DONOGHUE

Nina Chanel Abney's "Seized the Imagination" opened at Jack Shainman on November 9 and will be on view through December 20. The artist is known for her colorful canvases, which are at times frenzied or chaotic, packed with pop culture imagery and references to current events. Looking at her work is comparable to the feeling of information overload we get when browsing the Internet or staring at our phones. Abney's new body of work recognizes our powerlessness over the manipulations of technology and media, and the feelings that arise as a result.

WHITEWALL: *Was there a starting point for your show "Seized the Imagination" at Jack Shainman?*

NINA CHANEL ABNEY: *How to feel the way you felt before you knew what you know now*, a fictional self-help book title painted by Johan Deckmann, from his "Art Therapy" series.

I had been feeling uninspired, not my usual self, and I realized that after immersing myself in the news, social media, pop culture, et cetera nonstop to produce work, it was finally taking a toll. And the very thing that drives my work was simultaneously seizing my imagination (hence the title of the show). So "Seized the Imagination" at Jack Shainman will be an exploration of the recognition of our seemingly unescapable and unrepairable circumstances, i.e., technology/media as means of manipulation and control, global warming, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, gentrification, et cetera. The show will explore the relationship between anger and fear, conventionality and acquiescence.

I am also doing a collaborative project at Mary Boone Gallery to coincide with "Seized the Imagination." In a nutshell, Jack Shainman's show will tackle "what we know now" and its effects and implications. And the work that will be in Mary Boone's show, titled "Safe house," will explore "how to feel the way you felt before you knew what you know now" and ponder the questions "How to reclaim anger? How to restore creativity? How to find joy in the mundane?"

WW: *The shows come after your first major museum show at the Nasher Museum of Art, which just closed in July. What was it like looking back at 10 years of your work?*

NCA: It was great to look back at my older work. A lot of times when I look at much older work, oddly it doesn't feel like I created it. But

it's an amazing opportunity for me to reminisce and possibly take another look at the things I was interested in 10 years ago and look at their current relevance. Also, to see if there is anything I would like to revisit in my new work and further investigate.

WW: *You've said, "I'm very intentional about creating work that gets a mixed response, and every interpretation is welcome. I want to start conversations and arguments, for viewers to participate in the work and have their own personal relationship with it." Has that always been important for you in your practice?*

NCA: Yes, what's the point of creating work if the viewer's only participation is simply just viewing it? I aim to create work that is accessible to everyone. From frequent gallery patrons to someone who has never been inside of an art museum.

WW: *What kinds of conversations are you hoping to open up in your more recent work?*

NCA: I have previously talked a lot about this idea of information overload. And if we think about that in addition to all of the things going on currently, it can be very overwhelming. And that can result in many things . . . anger, fear, sadness, intentional ignorance, people operating in autopilot. I just hope this body of work will allow people to take a moment to check in with themselves to see where they stand, and ask themselves, have they truly processed the current state of the world, and their place in it.

WW: *You've expressed interest in translating your work to other media, like sneakers or bags. Why does that interest you?*

NCA: I like to explore new things and challenge myself, and not confine my creativity to a canvas. I also am interested in translating my work to other media as a way to create more access and broaden my audience.

WW: *Where else would you like to see your work? Who else do you want to see your work?*

NCA: I am interested in more public art, possibly huge outdoor paintings or large sculpture.

REVIEWS

Nina Chanel Abney
To Be Titled
2017
Enamel on panel
90 x 294 inches
©Nina Chanel Abney
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Photo by Charlie Rubin.

C&

In Conversation with Nina Chanel Abney

January 11, 2018

Using Bright Colors to Tell Dark Realities

In her debut solo exhibition at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery last December, Nina Chanel Abney presented a handful of images inspired by memes. Also featuring in Seized the Imagination are a series of largely violent, dislocated images that seem at once both alien and familiar – where the real and the imaginary blur together, as in a dream or nightmare. Syma Mohammed talked to the Chicago native to discuss how she deals with terrible news, creating a universal language for the digital generation, and how today's ubiquitous violence affects her on a personal level.

Nina Chanel Abney, White River Fish Kill, 2017, acrylic and spray, paint on canvas, 84 3/16 x 120 1/8 x 1 , 15/16 inches, signed, dated on the back

C&: Can you talk about the title of your exhibition and what you hope viewers take away from *Seized the Imagination*? Several of your works seem grounded in the disturbing realities of modern day America and feel anything but imaginary.

Nina Chanel Abney: I came up with the title *Seized the Imagination* after realizing the very things that drive my work (social media and the news) were blocking my creativity. There was a point when I didn't want to watch the news – or consume media – hence the title. Then I came across an artist who paints fake self-help book titles, and I was specifically drawn to one that read, "How to Feel How You Felt Before you Knew What You Know Now." After thinking about *Seized the Imagination*, my ideation was organic regarding a response to "seized."

C&: Certain symbols crop up repeatedly in your work, e.g. dollar signs, eyes, Xs, and birds. Others, such as fire symbols, seem new. How do you use those?

NCA: Symbols are as ubiquitous as language, and with the advent of mobile technology and rapid-fire communication, they are shaping up to be a benchmark of communication for our time. I have been especially influenced by emojis and their layered meanings. Someone once said to me that my work is indicative of the digital era that we are embarking upon – and I'd like to think that the disassociated use of letters, numbers, and shapes is akin to a time capsule. I am interested in a universal language – a unifying code that allows for people who would not regularly patronize a gallery or museum.

C&: For some reason the symbols remind me of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Is there any truth or basis to that?

NCA: I think that I often feel that connection to Egyptian hieroglyphics in my public mural works. I am interested in the possibility of people (or whoever the human species has evolved to be) hundreds of years from now randomly coming across my work in unsuspecting locations and feeling like they have discovered something.

C&: The works *Black and Blues* and *White River Fish Kill* seem to be referring to Charlottesville and the Texas pool incident respectively. Can you elaborate on the ongoing theme of racial oppression and violence in your work?

NCA: My work is a direct reflection of the time in which the work was created. And I pull my inspiration directly from the news and current events. Unfortunately, racial oppression and violence is an ongoing theme in our world.

C&: There is a lot of violence in this exhibition whether it is practiced by the state or fellow human beings. How does this affect you on a personal level? Is the process of representing such violence (re)traumatizing? Or even cathartic?

NCA: It doesn't really affect me on a personal level. Sometimes when I am doing research for a body of work and digging up painful imagery, I can at times become sad or angry, but I wouldn't necessarily call it (re)traumatizing. I am able to turn those feelings into motivation. I become more inspired to make work that will hopefully initiate some steps towards positive change. I am also able to treat the canvas as a place to purge and process everything I take in (good or bad). The process of representing violence specifically isn't cathartic at all. What's cathartic is the process of having a place to put all of the information that I have taken in, and being able to see it all in one place to begin to process it.

C&: There is a really interesting tension between the gravity of the themes in your work and the rich, bright colors you illustrate them with – which has become part of your signature. Is that a deliberate choice or something that is more intuitive?

NCA: Using a bright color palette is a deliberate choice. Because I tend to deal with rather heavy subject matters, I wanted to find a way to draw the viewer into the work regardless. Also, I noticed that a lot of cartoons such as *Family Guy*, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* can deal with controversial

issues pretty effectively because cartoons aren't "real," so people have a much higher tolerance for them, so I have deliberately combined my love for satirical cartoons and bright colors to create work that will initially bring the viewer in simply because they may be visually enticed to do so, and once they are in front of the work they are almost forced to engage with more difficult subject matters.

Syma Mohammed *is a journalist who is passionate about chronicling the achievements of women and interested in the way art can challenge people's perspectives and can be used as a vehicle for social change.*

Nina Chanel Abney, Seized the Imagination, was on show at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, in November and December 2017.

whitewall

Nina Chanel Abney Talks Anger and Fear

By Katy Donoghue

Nina Chanel Abney's "Seized the Imagination" opens at Jack Shainmantoday (on view through December 20) along with her show "Safe House" at Mary Boone Gallery (on view through December 22). The artist is known for her colorful canvases, which are at times frenzied or chaotic, packed with pop culture imagery and references to current events. Looking at her work is comparable to the feeling of information overload we get when browsing the Internet or staring at our phones. Abney's new body of work recognizes our powerlessness over the manipulations of technology and media, and the feelings that arise as a result.

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NCA: It was great to look back at my older work. A lot of times when I look at much older work, oddly it doesn't feel like I created it. But it's an amazing opportunity for me to reminisce and possibly take another look at the things I was interested in 10 years ago and look at their

current relevance. Also, to see if there is anything I would like to revisit in my new work and further investigate.

WW: You've said, "I'm very intentional about creating work that gets a mixed response, and every interpretation is welcome. I want to start conversations and arguments, for viewers to participate in the work and have their own personal relationship with it." Has that always been important for you in your practice?

NCA: Yes, what's the point of creating work if the viewer's only participation is simply just viewing it? I aim to create work that is accessible to everyone. From frequent gallery patrons to someone who has never been inside of an art museum.

WW: What kinds of conversations are you hoping to open up in your more recent work?

NCA: I have previously talked a lot about this idea of information overload. And if we think about that in addition to all of the things going on currently, it can be very overwhelming. And that can result in many things . . . anger, fear, sadness, intentional ignorance, people operating in autopilot. I just hope this body of work will allow people to take a moment to check in with themselves to see where they stand, and ask themselves, have they truly processed the current state of the world, and their place in it.

WW: You've expressed interest in translating your work to other media, like sneakers or bags. Why does that interest you?

NCA: I like to explore new things and challenge myself, and not confine my creativity to a canvas. I also am interested in translating my work to other media as a way to create more access and broaden my audience.

WW: Where else would you like to see your work? Who else do you want to see your work?

NCA: I am interested in more public art, possibly huge outdoor paintings or large sculpture.

RESIST

How Artists Today Are Mocking Donald Trump

Donald Trump may have just been forced to abandon one of his most prominent properties in New York, but elsewhere in the city—only a bit further uptown from the soon-to-be former Trump Soho—the president has become a smashing success in real estate. (Though for the first time ever, this achievement might actually not be to his liking.) Dozens of Trumps are now starting to dominate an ever-growing radius in Chelsea, establishing their presence in galleries like Metro Pictures and Jack Shainman via Jim Shaw's not so flattering ink drawings and Nina Chanel Abney's chaotic canvases capturing today's political climate, which are of course occasionally studded with a fleshy man whose blonde hair resembles a helmet (and whose exposed lower half is thankfully obscured in one instance by a strategically placed dollar sign). Now that Peter Saul's flocks of both ducks and Trumps have vacated Mary Boone Gallery with the closing of his exhibition "Fake News," even more of Abney's political work can be glimpsed just a few blocks away, too—not too far off, in fact, from Mathieu Malouf's "Toxic Masculinity Fallout Shelter" at Greene Naftali, which is peopled with everyone from Caitlyn Jenner to Kim Jong Un to—you guessed it—the president. See those works and more, unsurprisingly all made in 2017, here.

by Stephanie Eckardt

Mary Boone Gallery and Jack Shainman

9/13 Nina Chanel Abney, *COP*, 2017.

Mary Boone Gallery and Jack Shainman

10/13 Nina Chanel Abney, *White River Fish Kill*, 2017.

Galerie

December 2017

IN FOCUS

HIP-HOP GURU AND ART LOVER **SWIZZ BEATZ** ON COLLECTING NINA CHANEL ABNEY

"The first thing that attracted me to *Untitled (NoGoX)* was the way Nina freshly uses text and color, mixing acrylic paint and spray paint. I just love the way she expresses herself in the painting, which shows a self and a political reality. The first time I saw *Untitled (NoGoX)*, I was like, Wow! Who is this person? And I found out she's from Chicago. She's young and super-talented. I love art that speaks to me with a positive energy, and all of Nina's works in my Dean Collection speak in that way. Most people want to collect on status. I collect on feelings. Like, Do you feel it? Yes or no?

"When I showed Nina's work at the Bronx edition of No Commission, the art fair I do with Bacardí, people were crowded around her piece all day. It was just amazing to see so many people relating to her work. Art is so important to the world, but it hasn't been as accessible as it should be and that is what we are trying to change with No Commission. It's free for the public. Artists get their space for free and take 100 percent of the profits from sales. It's not just an event—it's a movement that we've taken to cities around the world."

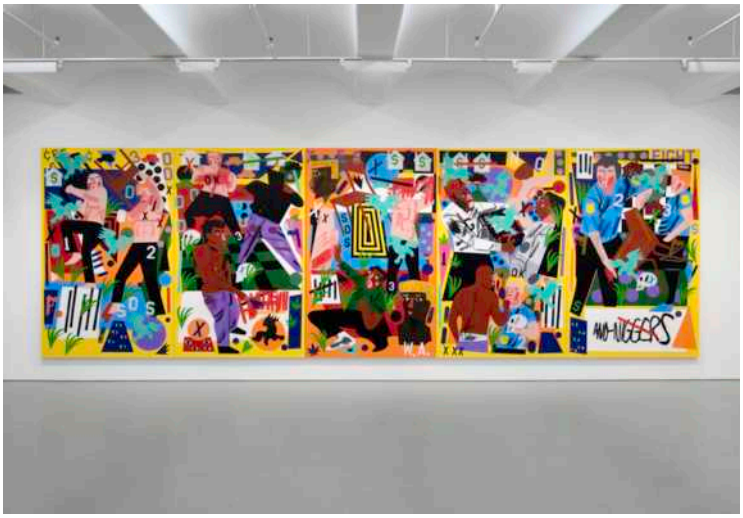
—SWIZZ BEATZ, AS TOLD TO ANTWAUN SARGENT

Above: *Untitled (NoGoX)*, a Nina Chanel Abney painting from 2016, owned by Kasseem Dean, a.k.a. Swizz Beatz.

office

Seized the Imagination

November 13, 2017



Amongst a plethora of political art, an overload of creative responses to topical controversy, Nina Chanel Abney stands out.

Her new show, *Seized the Imagination,* which opened last week at Jack Shainman, is strong, emotional, serious, and eloquent— while somehow weaving in an element of optimism.

She makes use of her medium with maturity, touching on overtly current, uncomfortable topics with artful tact, and timeless creativity.

Images and below text courtesy of Jack Shainman

Abney's distinctive, declarative color palette and pulsating forms come together in tightly compressed compositions to convey a sense of action on the brink of claustrophobia and potential collapse. The overarching mood is a "nothing matters" attitude in response to conditions that are seemingly inescapable and irreversible—global warming, xenophobia, gun violence, racism, sexism—that permeate news headlines

across the country. Rather than depicting specific conflicts, Abney highlights the violence of the takeover and the simultaneous passivity in submitting to a force greater than oneself, no matter how ominous and dispiriting the reality.

In addition to dejection, technology is an omnipresent theme in the exhibition and Abney's oeuvre more broadly. The feeling of information overload that emanates throughout is at times joyful, but also stresses media's role as a tool to manipulate and deceive. Abney's enigmatic canvases propose a new type of history painting, one grounded in the barrage of everyday events and their collision of anxieties, all funneled through the velocity of the internet.

JUXTAPOZ
ART & CULTURE MAGAZINE

PAINTING

NINA CHANEL ABNEY TO OPEN TWO SIMULTANEOUS SOLO SHOWS IN NYC @ MARY BOONE & JACK SHAINMAN

Nov 09, 2017 - Dec 22, 2017
Mary Boone Gallery, New York City

The NYC-based artist (and July 2016 cover artist), Nina Chanel Abney, is set to open two solo shows, *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shaiman and *Safe House* at Mary Boone Gallery, further solidifying the artist as one of the most sought after emerging artists working today.

Read more below

On 9 November 2017, Mary Boone Gallery will open at its Chelsea location *Safe House*, a solo show of new work by NINA CHANEL ABNEY. The exhibition is a collaboration with Jack Shainman Gallery New York (with *Seized the Imagination* opening on the same date), and is curated by Piper Marshall.

Safe House is so termed for being a place of refuge. It is also a phrase used more colloquially as a space where one escapes the dangers affiliated with the law. With these eight single-panel paintings, Abney invites us into a place of reprieve, showing us people partaking in everyday activities. Abney's scenarios offer sincere portrayals that counter how black life is represented in the mainstream media. The decision intentionally explores black joy as a means of resistance.

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce Nina Chanel Abney's first solo exhibition at the gallery. Combining representation and abstraction, her work captures the frenetic pace of contemporary culture, broaching subjects as diverse as race, celebrity, religion, politics, sex, and art history. The series of new paintings presented here explores the tumultuous relationships between exterior and interior, conventionality and acquiescence, anger and fear.

Seized the Imagination eschews linear storytelling in favor of disjointed narratives, creating an atmosphere that speaks to the helplessness many feel in the wake of today's political climate. Abney's distinctive, declarative color palette and pulsating forms come together in tightly compressed compositions to convey a sense of action on the brink of claustrophobia and potential collapse. The overarching mood is a "nothing matters" attitude in response to conditions that are seemingly inescapable and irreversible—global warming, xenophobia, gun violence, racism, sexism—that permeate news headlines across the country. Rather than depicting specific conflicts, Abney highlights the violence of the takeover and the simultaneous passivity in submitting to a force greater than oneself, no matter how ominous and dispiriting the reality.

Juxtapoz cover art by Nina Chanel Abney, July 2016

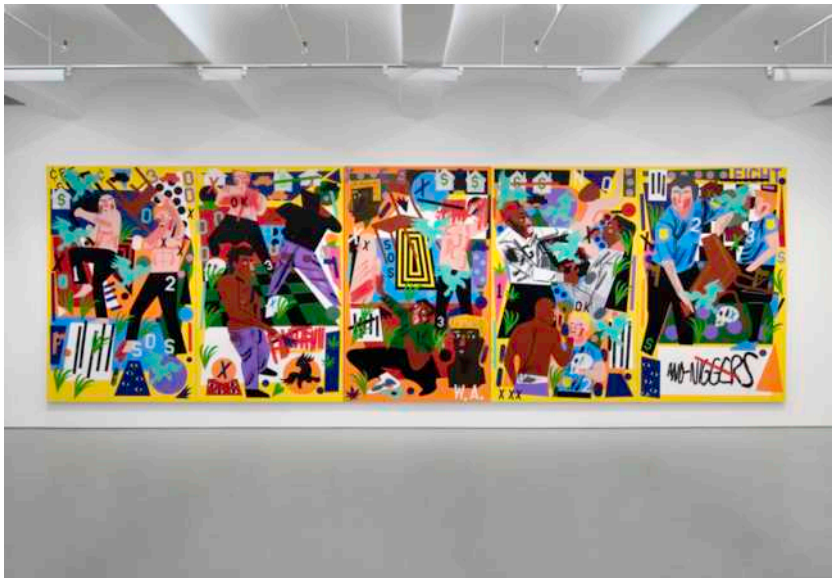
THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

NINA CHANEL ABNEY:
Safe House / Seized the Imagination

by Will Whitney

MARY BOONE GALLERY | NOVEMBER 9 – DECEMBER 22, 2017

JACK SHAINMAN | NOVEMBER 9 – DECEMBER 20, 2017



Nina Chanel Abney, *Untitled*, 2017. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 5 panels, 96 1/8 × 60 15/16 × 1 15/16 inches each. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

The title of Nina Chanel Abney's exhibition at Mary Boone, *Safe House*, caught my attention almost instantly. In such politically charged times, not making a statement is often a statement in itself. *Webster's* defines a safe house as "a place where one may engage in secret activities or take refuge." This led to my intrigue about what one might find at a show with such a title. Of course, Nina Chanel Abney is no stranger to bold statements. She burst onto the art scene a decade ago with her painting *Class of 2007* (2007), which depicted her graduating MFA class, in which she was the only black student. She flipped the script and turned herself into a white, blue-eyed, blonde prison guard, and the rest of her classmates into black inmates.
Abney's aim in this show is to combat the negative stereotypes with which the

mainstream media often portrays African Americans. The exhibitions features eight single-panel paintings, two 96-by-96 inches and six 96-by-72 inches, all depicting people engaged in everyday activities that would not be deemed newsworthy. While Abney is primarily a painter, for this exhibition she sourced graphics from old '60s comics and posters dealing with households, leisure, and safety, and then proceeded to paint over them. The works bring to mind Stuart Davis and Romare Bearden.

Nina Chanel Abney, *In the Land Without Feelings*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 86 × 72. © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery and Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

The message resonates loud and clear. Abney seeks to create a conversation with the work, using the canvas as a means of social dialogue, seemingly mocking the outdated posters with a touch of reality. *In the Land without Feelings* (2017) shows an African-American man doing yoga while colorful birds and pink hearts look down upon him. Beneath his hands are the words "Official Safety Man," while amidst the birds and hearts, poster-esque type announces, "It's great to be alive!" Such tongue-in-cheek statements fill the gallery, with other works exclaiming "Get the First Aid Right Away" and "Watch Out For the Other Guy! Uh oh Black, Oh no Blacks." While the serious message in all of these works is clear, the poster-esque depictions also lend an air of playfulness, occasionally emphasizing Abney's message of racial unity while other times undermining a topic that is undoubtedly one of the most vexing in our nation.

Ultimately, these thought-provoking works showcase Abney's ability to draw her viewers into her world. Having always been a political artist, Abney reflects this nature in her new show, but fails really to push the conversation in any particular

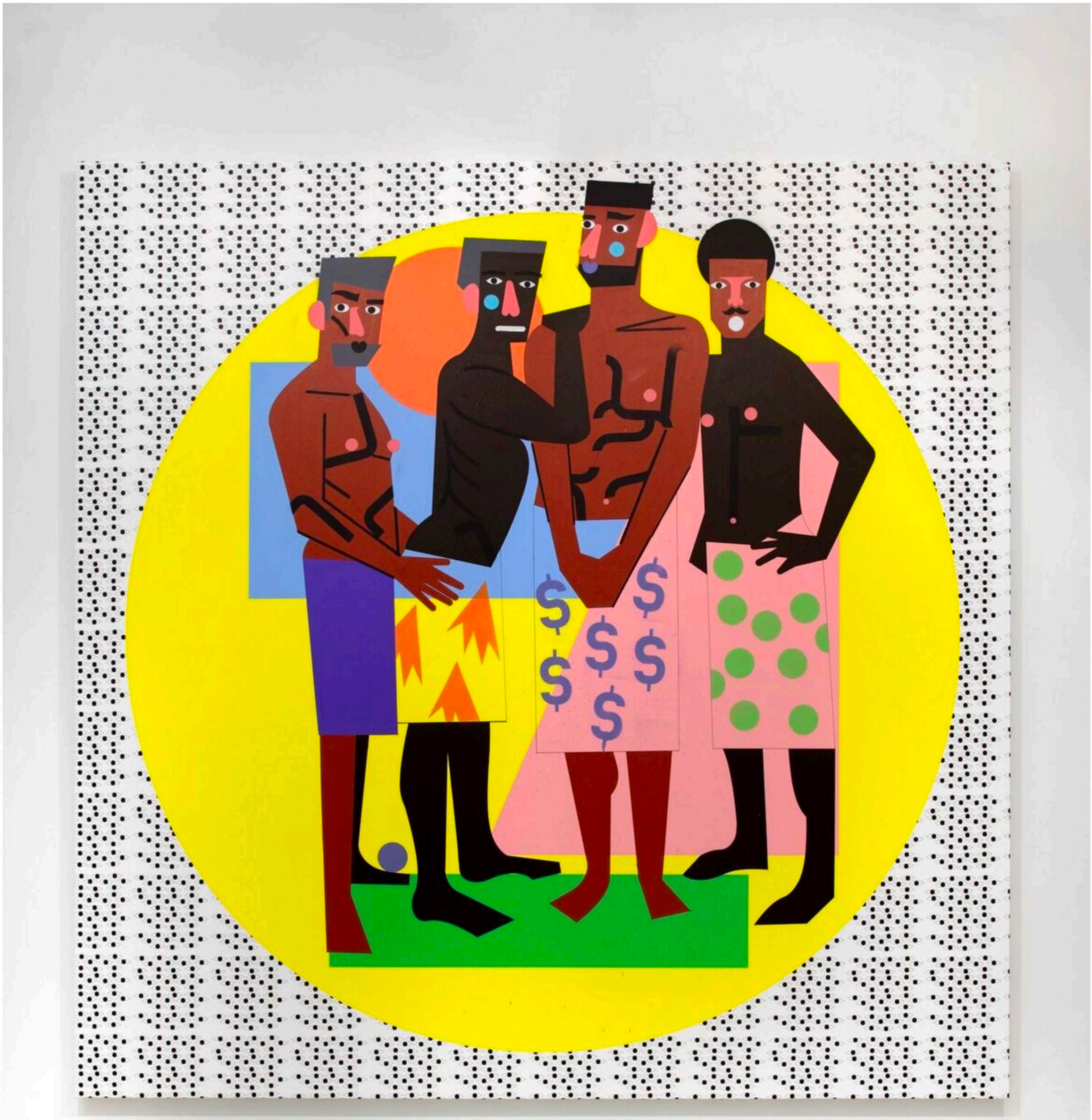
direction. Too often, Abney's works bring up an idea only to stop short of allowing her viewers to confront it, seemingly bringing it to center stage and leaving it there, disengaging with the topic. This lends to the exhibition a seemingly stream-of-conscious quality, with Abney's initial idea made clear but no further guidance should one seek to push the conversation further.

Nina Chanel Abney, *In the Land Without Feelings*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 86 × 72. © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery and Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

Abney's concurrent exhibition, *Seized the Imagination* at Jack Shainman Gallery, features similar work to *Safe House*. However, *Seized the Imagination* melds a confident ability to paint with a nod to the current technology-driven state of our society. This work appears a bit bolder, the Davis and Bearden influences on full display. While Abney seems very tongue-in-cheek in *Safe House*, at Shainman her work explodes in color. She works in a variety of sizes, ranging from 84-by-120 to 48-by-36, as well as a five-panel untitled work. The contagious pace is also noticeable in these works, as there appears to be a narrative to the works, yet no clear indicator of how that narrative is to be perceived. The lone work in the first gallery, *Penny Dreadful* (2017), an acrylic and spray on canvas, shows two police officers grabbing a man while two civilians shine flashlights, an ode to police brutality in the era of cell phones. Hands clicking cell phones are depicted in the far left corner while the right side of the painting features a car overwritten with the words "FUCK TRUMP" and "WOW." The panel painting in the main gallery, *Untitled* (2017), addresses the topic of violence, with each panel making note of how violence begets violence, ending with two white police officers—both red in the face, as if about to pounce into action—standing above a sign reading "And-Niggers." These works seem to allude to a state of helplessness in the face of turmoil, with Abney seemingly admitting that with so much going wrong it is often easy to feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Abney alludes to this feeling through out the

exhibition, matter-of-factly acknowledging that these are emotions familiar to many in 2017.

Both shows provide the viewer with a grasp of what is going on in Abney's mind and in her desire to be political. As a collaborative two-gallery exhibition, each space highlights Abney's talented palette, with *Safe House* allowing Abney the freedom to strike up a conversation with viewers, and *Seized the Imagination*operating as a reminder that nothing is ever as simple as one might wish. In 2017, being overwhelmed is an experience common to many, but Abney here—albeit with mixed results—seeks to hammer her point home and contribute to the growing political resistance against those who preach hatred and separation instead of love and unity. Undoubtedly talented, Abney further shows her potential in these two exhibitions. But they also beg the questions of whether she has pushed herself in regards to political artwork, and whether she can continue to do so in the future.



Nov 13 Nina Chanel Abney

"Seized the Imagination"

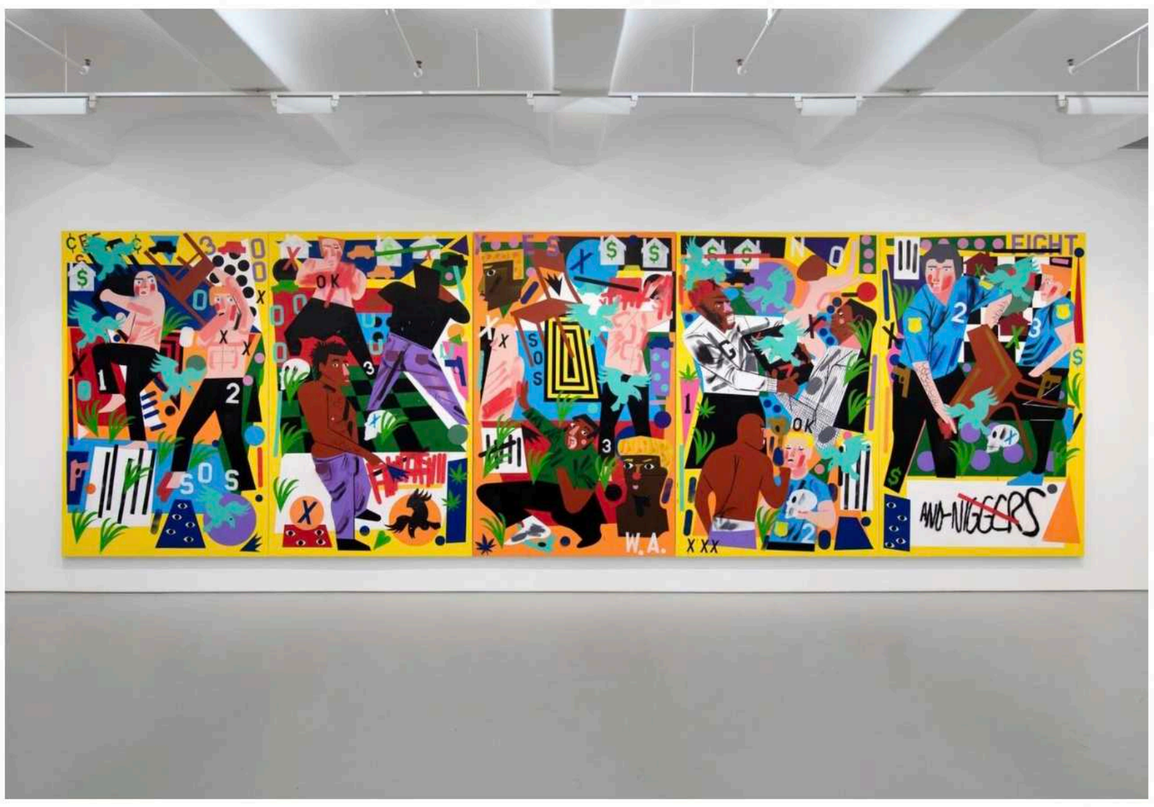
Jack Shainman Gallery

New York, 513 West 20th Street

Combining representation and abstraction, her work captures the frenetic pace of contemporary culture, broaching subjects as diverse as race, celebrity, religion, politics, sex, and art history. The series of new paintings presented here explores the tumultuous relationships between exterior and interior, conventionality and acquiescence, anger and fear.

Black and Blues, 2017 acrylic and spray paint on canvas 84 x 120 inches

Seized the Imagination eschews linear storytelling in favor of disjointed narratives, creating an atmosphere that speaks to the helplessness many feel in the wake of today's political climate. Abney's distinctive, declarative color palette and pulsating forms come together in tightly compressed compositions to convey a sense of action on the brink of claustrophobia and potential collapse. The overarching mood is a "nothing matters" attitude in response to conditions that are seemingly inescapable and irreversible—global warming, xenophobia, gun violence, racism, sexism—that permeate news headlines across the country. Rather than depicting specific conflicts, Abney highlights the violence of the takeover and the simultaneous passivity in submitting to a force greater than oneself, no matter how ominous and dispiriting the reality.



Untitled, 2017 acrylic and spray paint on canvas 5 panels, 96 1/8 x 60 15/16 x 1 15/16 inches each

In addition to dejection, technology is an omnipresent theme in the exhibition and Abney's oeuvre more broadly. The feeling of information overload that emanates throughout is at times joyful, but also stresses media's role as a tool to manipulate and deceive. Abney's enigmatic canvases propose a new type of history painting, one grounded in the barrage of everyday events and their collision of anxieties, all funneled through the velocity of the internet.

On view through December 20th, 2017

whitewaller

October 4, 2017

NINA CHANEL ABNEY AT JACK SHAINMAN

By Katy Donoghue

Nina Chanel Abney's "Seized the Imagination" opens at Jack Shainman on November 9 and will be on view through December 20. The artist is known for her colorful canvases, which are at times frenzied or chaotic, packed with pop culture imagery and references to current events. Looking at her work is comparable to the feeling of information overload we get when browsing the Internet or staring at our phones. Abney's new body of work recognizes our powerlessness over the manipulations of technology and media, and the feelings that arise as a result.

WHITEWALLER: Was there a starting point for your show "Seized the Imagination" at Jack Shainman?

TOURIA EL GLAOUI: How to feel the way you felt before you knew what you know now, a fictional self-help book title painted by Johan Deckmann, from his "Art Therapy" series.

I had been feeling uninspired, not my usual self, and I realized that after immersing myself in the news, social media, pop culture, et cetera nonstop to produce work, it was finally taking a toll. And the very thing that drives my work was simultaneously seizing my imagination (hence the title of the show). So "Seized the Imagination" at Jack Shainman will be an exploration of the recognition of our seemingly unescapable and unrepairable circumstances, i.e., technology/media as means of manipulation and control, global warming, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, gentrification, et cetera. The show will explore the relationship between anger and fear, conventionality and acquiescence.

I am also doing a collaborative project at Mary Boone Gallery to coincide with "Seized the Imagination." In a nutshell, Jack Shainman's show will tackle "what we know now" and its effects and implications. And the work that will be in Mary Boone's show, titled "Safe house," will explore "how to feel the way you felt before you knew what you know now" and ponder the questions "How to reclaim anger? How to restore creativity? How to find joy in the mundane?"

WW: The shows come after your first major museum show at the Nasher Museum of Art, which just closed in July. What was it like looking back at 10 years of your work?

NCA: It was great to look back at my older work. A lot of times when I look at much older work, oddly it doesn't feel like I created it. But it's an amazing opportunity for me to reminisce and possibly take another look at the things I was interested in 10 years ago and look at their current relevance. Also, to see if there is anything I would like to revisit in my new work and further investigate.

WW: You've said, "I'm very intentional about creating work that gets a mixed response, and every interpretation is welcome. I want to start conversations and arguments, for viewers to participate in the work and have their own personal relationship with it." Has that always been important for you in your practice?

NCA: Yes, what's the point of creating work if the viewer's only participation is simply just viewing it? I aim to create work that is accessible to everyone. From frequent gallery patrons to someone who has never been inside of an art museum.

WW: What kinds of conversations are you hoping to open up in your more recent work?

NCA: I have previously talked a lot about this idea of information overload. And if we think about that in addition to all of the things going on currently, it can be very overwhelming. And that can result in many things . . . anger, fear, sadness, intentional ignorance, people operating in autopilot. I just hope this body of work will allow people to take a moment to check in with themselves to see where they stand, and ask themselves, have they truly processed the current state of the world, and their place in it.

WW: You've expressed interest in translating your work to other media, like sneakers or bags. Why does that interest you?

Photo by J. Caldwell

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WW: Where else would you like to see your work? Who else do you want to see your work?

NCA: I am interested in more public art, possibly huge outdoor paintings or large sculpture.

BOMB

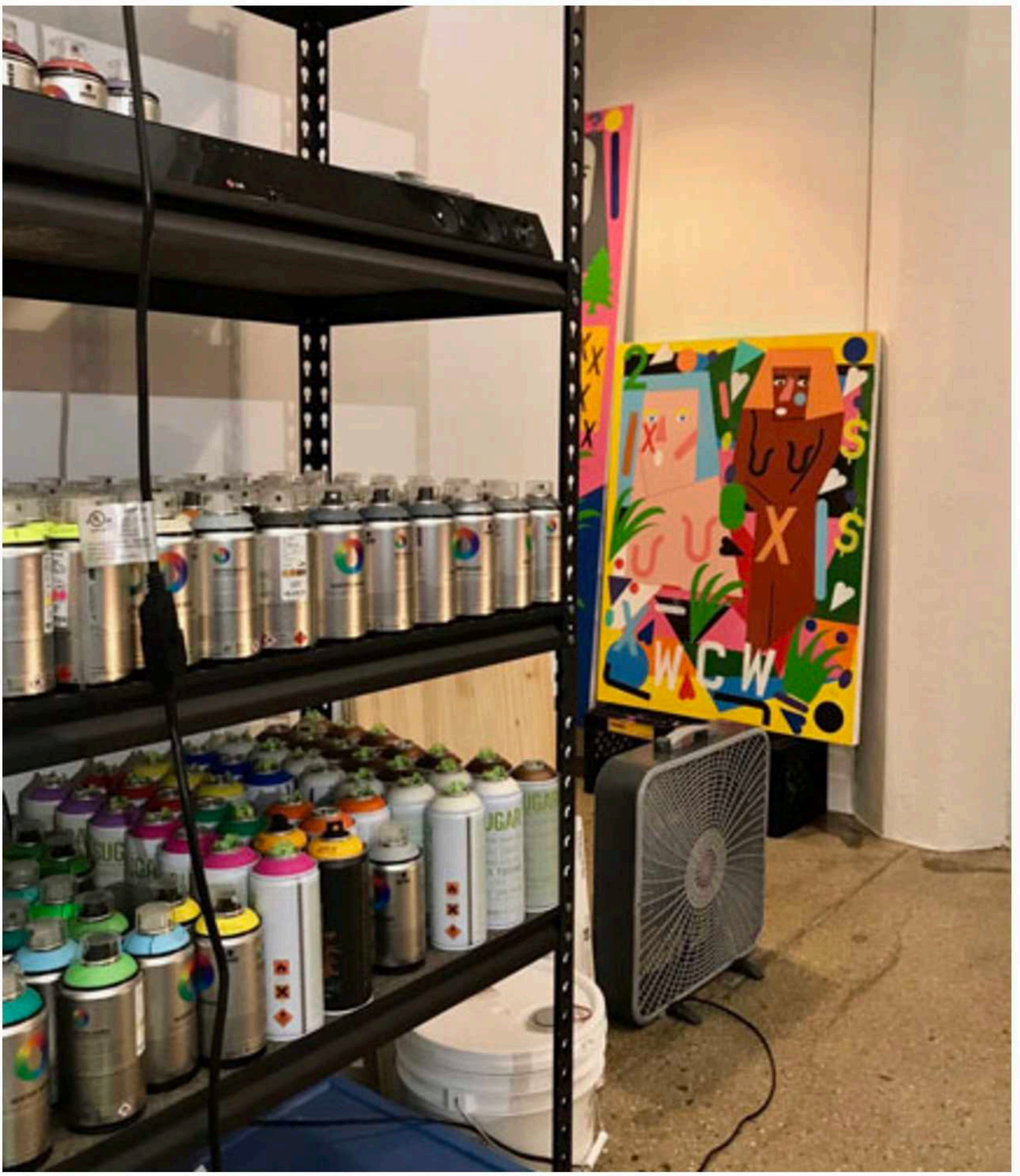
Studio Visit: Nina Chanel Abney by Osman Can Yerebakan

"Everything is equally treated."

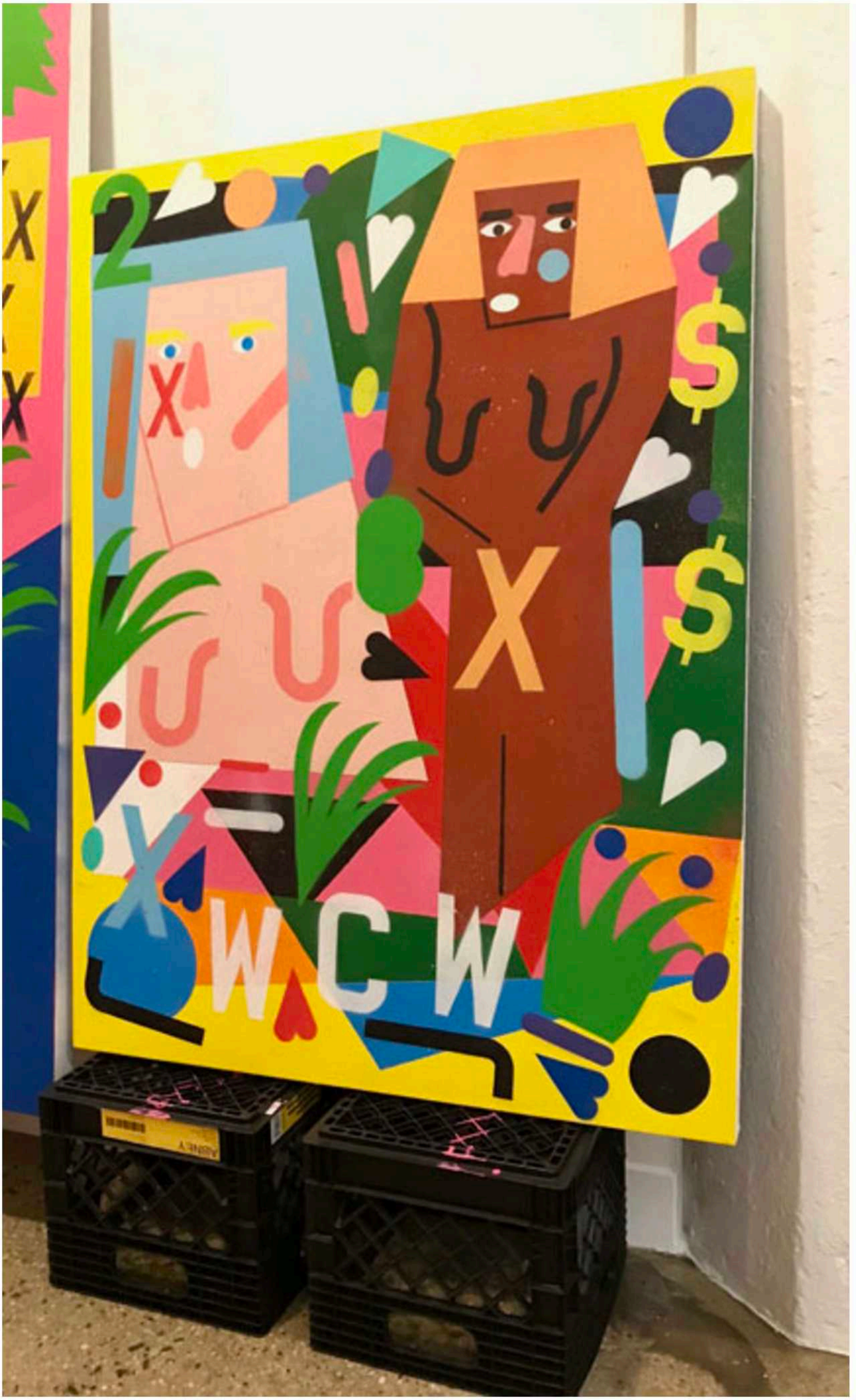
All photographs by Osman Can Yerebakan.

On my second trip to Nina Chanel Abney's studio in Jersey City, New Jersey, I found the paintings from my initial visit two weeks earlier replaced by a new series of works. Immersive orchestrations of contemporary chaos had left the stage for geometric forms and text on canvas. Preparing for her two-venue exhibition, *Safe House*, which will conjointly open at Jack Shainman Gallery and Mary Boone Gallery on November 9, Abney was on a strict creative regiment to implement final touches to her first solo presentation following *Royal Flush*, a touring mid-career survey organized by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. At Jack Shainman Gallery, the audience will find some of the most recent examples of Abney's signature visual language in which hard-edged and resolute figures from an ample source of inspirations gather on canvases within a buoyant harmony of disarray. Mary Boone Gallery, however, will introduce a new path in which text-based expressive paintings read "Watch Out For The Other Guy!" or "Defective Are Dangerous!"

From Black Hebrews preaching on 125th Street in Harlem to media images of police brutality toward people of color, emblems of collective memory and personal history coalesce in Abney's brushstrokes. Resistant to hierarchies organized by narrative and depth, the images in her work rapidly shift and fuse before viewers' eyes. "Everything is equally treated," emphasizes the painter about the various references she blends into her work. "I want the figures to feel overpowering and aggressive towards the viewer." Abney's breakthrough came with her MFA thesis painting *Class of 2007* in which she painted her classmates as black prisoners whom she guarded, depicting herself as white. Abney was the sole African American in her program at the Parsons School of Design, and the painting powerfully encapsulates class and race concerns that prevail across the United States and in the majority of her work.



Leaving the studio, I found myself on a jam-packed commuter train brimming with energy and exhaustion at the end of the workday. The panorama of faces inhabiting a train car echoed with scenarios in Abney's paintings of fury, pride, and endurance.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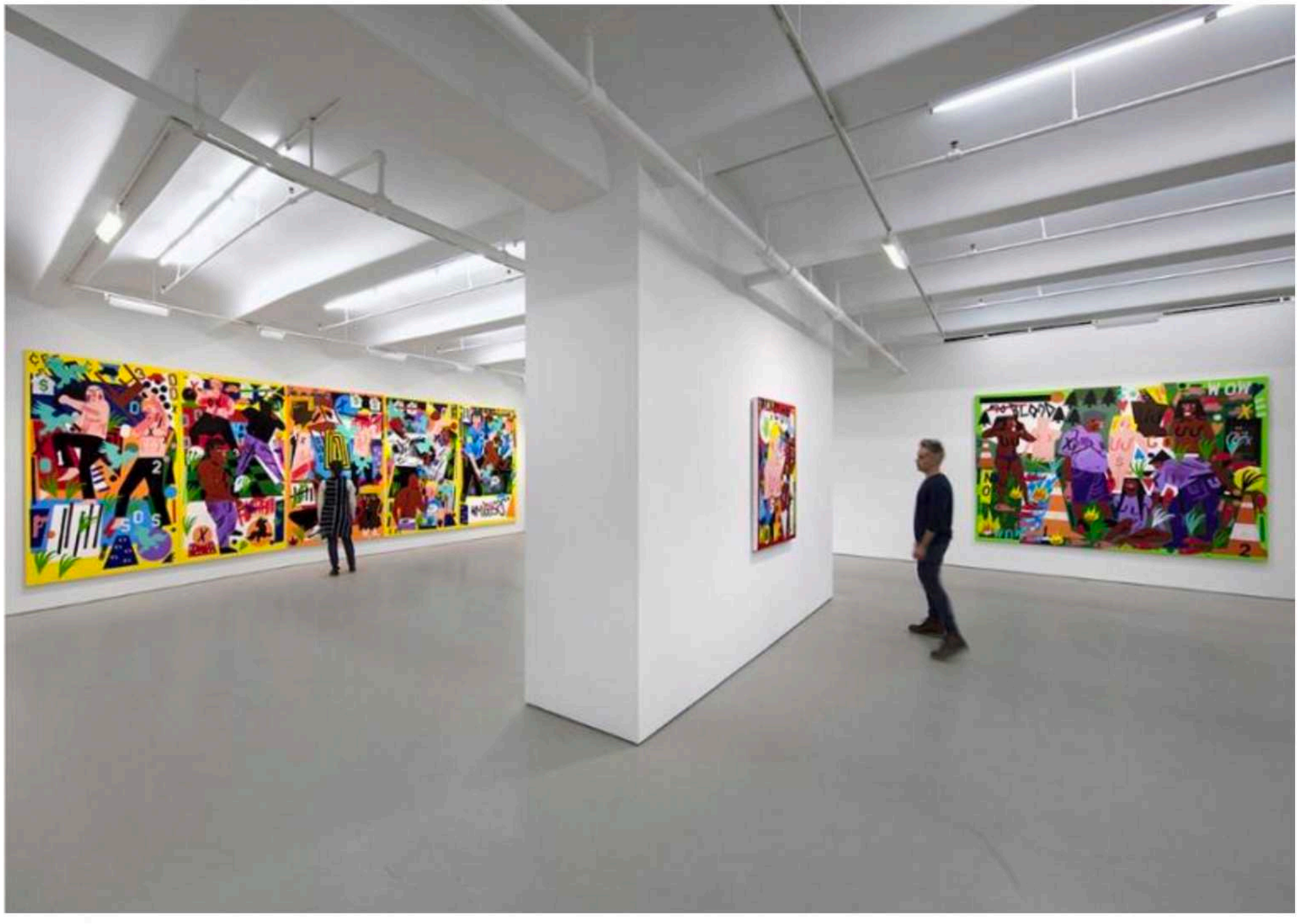
Nina Chanel Abney's two-part exhibition, Safe House at Mary Boone Gallery and Seized the Imagination at Jack Shainman Gallery, both open in New York City on November 9, 2017.

this is tomorrow
Contemporary Art Magazine

Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011

Nina Chanel Abney: Seized the Imagination



Artist : Nina Chanel Abney
Title : Nina Chanel Abney: Seized the Imagination installation view 2017
Date(s) : 9 November - 20 December 2017
Credit : Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Nina Chanel Abney: Seized the Imagination
Jack Shainman Gallery
9 November - 20 December 2017
Review by Torey Akers

At what extreme do tech and trauma intersect? The shortest answer might simply be “exhaustion”.

America was founded on the systematic and unrelenting subjugation of black people, but as the ability to digitally disseminate evidence of recent atrocities expands, the collective threshold for processing such an informational salvo seems to fray with each passing case. For marginalized folk, the burnout compounds itself; police brutality and infrastructural racism aren’t new concepts, and the burden of explanation weighs heavily on those who find their basic human rights up for debate in discussions local and legislative alike.

It's fitting, then, that Nina Chanel Abney's painterly depictions of these issues hijack the frenetic, overwhelming visual syntax employed by online news media to truly tumultuous effect. The pieces on view in her current solo show at Jack Shainman, Seized the Imagination, pulse with references ranging from Jacob Lawrence to Snapchat, inviting the viewer into the eye of a cacophonic storm where narrative breaks down into tragic, confrontational nonsense. The paintings drain as they entertain – a potentially snide nod to white cube culture and its tokenistic takes on oppression.

With the exception of one, all the works on display are assembled the same way; Abney chooses a ground color and populates its acrylic flatness with a mixture of hand and spray-painted symbols. Her optic glossary is bright, economic and purposefully reductive, for instance, she uses the same stencil for the white cat in 'Whet' (2017) and the orange cat in 'Black and Blues' (2017); same goes for the birds in 'Untitled' (2017) and 'Mr. Baker' (2017). While her meme-ified interpolations of history painting hit hard, it's the brilliant through-line she draws between graffiti and Internet commentary that helps the project transcend. Each painting boasts its own annotated feedback loop. The artists emblazons pieces like 'Penny Dreadful' (2017), a large canvas illustrating community outrage at a police shooting, with the words 'WOW" and "NO". In 'COP' (2017), a smaller portrait of a weeping, mullet-covered pink figure in frantic company with abstracted brown faces, hearts, and birds, features "COP" and "WOW" amid a sea of dollar signs and question marks. The four-paneled behemoth 'Untitled' (2017), a violent series of bloody, combative vignettes, reacts to itself with exclamations like "SOS", "W.A." and "OK". These interventions destabilize the hierarchies typically present in figurative painting by framing each artistic move as an act of vandalism. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that there's nothing to deface; instead, Abney has masterminded an experiential comment section in real-time, confronting the viewer with the impact of screen-mediated surface engagement in a truth-fluid world. Abney isn't remixing experience; she's scrambling the hell of it.

There seems to be a dichotomous relationship between specificity and standardization at play in Seized the Imagination. While occasional zeitgeist-adjacent signifiers prove easy to recognize, the activity afoot isn't immediately identifiable. Each figure operates as a cipher, sporting iconic identity markers that help the viewer establish some vague response. Abney's audience bears witness to reified over-saturation, fielding color, composition, meaning, context and claustrophobic compression at breakneck speeds. A sense of helplessness creeps throughout the gallery, masquerading initially as queasy, awkward guilt. The pieces are scaled in immersive proportions, but onlookers aren't necessarily drawn forth. Rather, we float in the shallow, synthetic dimensions that often serve as the delivery system for newsworthy upset. In abstracting ourselves, we are abstracted. Abney's paintings resonate with vibrant foreboding - an exhausted populace is an uneducated one.

Published on 24 November 2017

Holmberg, Ryan. "Exhibition Reviews: Durham, N.C. – Nina Chanel Abney, Nasher Museum of Art: on view through July 16." *Art in America.* May 2017: p. 132, illustrated.

DURHAM, N.C.

NINA CHANEL ABNEY

Nasher Museum of Art

ON VIEW THROUGH JULY 16

Nina Chanel Abney's exhibition "Royal Flush," which surveys the ten years of her career to date, begins with a bang and ends with a digital plink. Upon entering the show, the viewer is confronted with Abney's MFA thesis work, *Class of 2007* (2007), a large two-panel painting showing the artist (the only black person in her year) as a white prison guard and her classmates (all actually white) as black inmates in orange jumpsuits. It's a witty comment on racial imbalances in the art world, coupled with an invitation for audiences to reflect on the inverse imbalances that exist in America's prisons. Kitty-corner from this opening salvo—moving from a drippy Alice Neel figurative style to a punked-up '50s cartoon modernism—is my favorite work, *Close But No Cigar* (2008). This seven-by-twelve-foot canvas is based on the scene of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in Memphis. Instead of King on the ground is President Obama, with his brain popping out of his ear. Howling and gesticulating above him are not King's civil rights colleagues but rather a ragtag troupe of tramps and hipsters in corsets, bunny ears, mustaches, and clown face paint. The painting was made the year of Obama's inauguration, and is prescient considering the ensuing (and continuing) character assassination of America's first black president.

In 2009, Abney began searching for a cleaner and flatter style—with uneven results. The weakest works are smallish canvases she made in a paint-by-numbers manner, mixing figures from art history and pop culture to create mock classical portraits, religious icons, and fairy-tale scenes that comment on topical social and racial phenomena. Around 2012, geometric abstraction and a horror vacui of ornamental doodads displaced Abney's investment in figurative caricature. She began to turn toward a looser, stencil–and–spray paint "street"-graphic version of Stuart Davis's jazzy modernism, to which she added schematic African American heads crying and yelling. Her trajectory reads like a progressive attempt to reverse engineer midcentury American modernism to encompass a more socially inclusive and contemporary range of people and themes.

While the products of this revisionist project are visually punchy, Abney has struggled to marshal it toward effective commentary. Her most ostensibly political paintings are the most lightweight on this count. She has garnered accolades for her paintings on police brutality, with *Vanity Fair* (to the artist's discomfort) going so far as to describe her as a representative painter of Black Lives Matter. The two paintings from this series at the Nasher (both 2015) play on the racial role reversals she first exploited in *Class of 2007*, showing black cops barking at and arresting white men. Scattered about are words and word fragments like BLACK, KILL, and RICA (as in America presumably), in addition to numbers and numerous Xs. Paintings on other topics similarly include flat verbiage like YES, WOW, and GO. One suspects that Abney is trying to be funny in a Pop art way, but her verbo-visual arrangements ring too tinny to be witty. Many have too little force even to be accusatory.

Happily, adjacent to these paintings is *Catfish* (2017). In this eighteen-foot-long four-panel work, which refers to online identity poseurs, Abney's juxtaposition of stilted form and hot subject matter is far more effective. Eight women, their bodies 8-bit Picasso-esque abbreviations and their faces emoticon-era Mr. Potato Head assemblies, pose naked with their asses out toward the viewer. Crossing *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and booty selfie culture, *Catfish* is perhaps meant as a parody of primitivism's racial and sexual legacy. More than that, the painting succeeds in putting modernist abstraction in dialogue with digital-age sexuality, comically exaggerating the complicated human desires that can infuse virtual representations even when they are schematic or overtly put-on. Abney has a canny sense for geometric design and art history; I hope she finds a way to apply it as interestingly to political topics as she does here.

—Ryan Holmberg

Nina Chanel Abney: *Catfish*, 2017, pigment print, acrylic, and spray paint on canvas, 8½ by 18 feet; at the Nasher Museum of Art.

NEW YORK

April 5, 2017 10:56 a.m.

18 Female Artists on Their Favorite Female Artists

By **Dayna Evans**

Continuing the Cut's series celebrating women in the arts, and expanding on the National Museum of Women in the Arts' social-media campaign to get their followers to name #5WomenArtists, we asked female artists to tell us about the female artist they've been inspired by most. For more, see the first and second entries in the series — women curators and art professors — here and here.

Nina Chanel Abney

Nina Chanel Abney, *Why*. Photo: Courtesy of the artist

"It's so hard for me hard to choose one artist, so I have two that are very different in presentation, but similar in concept. The first artist that I'm currently looking at is **Nina Chanel Abney**. Her paintings are graphic, powerful, and surreal. Her current images read like short stories with symbols and colors floating through an abstract space. They interrogate many social and political themes through this lens. Her paintings pack a powerful punch and inspire me to work harder on my own paintings and collages to communicate the political unrest I feel.

My other inspiration is **Adrian Piper**. I first learned about her during a college art-history class. We watched her video piece *Cornered*. This was my first experience with video art in a class setting. This video pointedly confronts and shatters the concept of whiteness in an uncomfortable matter-of-fact way. Its as if Piper is delivering the evening news. Adrian Piper is one of my favorite artists because the line between her life and her art doesn't exist. She inspires me because her performances are protests against the expected."
–*Ashley Teamer, artist*

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen April 1st, 2017

NINA CHANEL ABNEY *Royal Flush*

by Samuel Feldblum

NASHER MUSEUM OF ART, DUKE UNIVERSITY
FEBRUARY 16 – JULY 16, 2017

From the outset of her career, painter Nina Chanel Abney draped identities over her characters as changeably as clothes. Her thesis work, *Class of 2007* (2007), depicts her school cohort in negative, with Abney—the only black student in the class—as a white prison guard, blonde-haired and blue-eyed, with assault rifle in hand. Her classmates, depicted as black prisoners, don orange jumpsuits and manacles. The conceit is simple but powerful, tying a critique of art institutions to wider social concerns, and jarring subjects and the viewer into an unsteadied sense of self.

The work is on view, alongside the ensuing ten years of Abney's oeuvre, at Duke's Nasher Museum of Art; it is Abney's first solo museum show. The works are broken up into four chronological groupings, which trace both the maturation of the artist's style and her engagement of changing features of American life from 2007 through 2017.

Nina Chanel Abney, *Mad 51st,* 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 30 inches. Collection of Jeanne Williams and Jason Greenman. © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York, New York.

Other early works of Abney's marry a similarly raw style with discomfiting subjects. In *Close but No Cigar* (2008), Abney repurposes Joseph Louw's stirring photograph of the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King on the balcony of Memphis's Lorraine Hotel, with King's companions pointing toward where the fatal shot came from. On Abney's large canvas, a stricken King-Obama composite lies on the ground swathed in an American flag, his brain plopped fully out of his head. Behind, a frothing mass points wildly, not at the fallen hero, but at a mysterious faceless figure in a yellow leotard and with a bleeding heart—perhaps the assassin, perhaps Hope herself set to wing.

By 2009, Abney's painting style had become less wet, her drips more controlled, and both figures and backgrounds flatter. A series of group-portrait style pieces demonstrate a focus on American celebrity culture and a dip into the world of fantasy. In *Make it Reign* (2009), an male-ish figure with breasts leans back, tongue-out, like a rock-star deep in guitar solo, a stripper pole instead between his/her legs. But in

place of a sexually attentive crowd, two dogs bark menacingly. The substitution of one type of attention for another highlights the fickleness of a crowd's emotion.

After 2011, Abney's style again shifted, now combining her flat color fields with muralistic elements to create vibrant canvases that often embedded social commentary. *Mad 51st* (2012) includes some elements that recur as motifs of many of her works thereafter: Xs peppered across the canvas, staccato words deployed playfully or plaintively—often both—and bright geometric shapes. The work harkens clearly to Stuart Davis's surreal, energetic landscapes-cum-dreamscapes. Hands and faces float among bright shapes, uttering "oy" and "boo." One X lies atop a kiss between what appear to be white and black male figures.

In school, Abney studied computer science as well as visual arts; her work after 2011 traces the increasingly chaotic information environment as the digital began to creep more intricately into personal lives. Her early focus on the public gaze as something monstrous presaged the rise of social media to ubiquity. She graduated the same year the iPhone debuted, before social media and attention merchants unleashed the public gaze into the most intimate reaches of private life, before the idealism of early web giants gave way to the need to turn profits through cascades of junk information and accompanying advertisements.

Abney's canvases became more chaotic and busier to reflect these emerging realities, even as they returned more explicitly to political messaging as well. *Untitled (Fuck T*e *op)* (2014) revisits, in larger format, the sensory dynamism of city life. In all the colorful excitement, it takes a moment for the six black faces (with white noses and lips) to emerge fully. This was the year that the shooting of Michael Brown sparked the founding of the Black Lives Matter movement. Some of the faces hoot out short words, some cry. The largest has one of the floating Xs slapped atop his mouth; another has an X over his ear. One woman wails in a floating blue circle, red bullet holes dripping angrily beside her. Nobody seems to hear. Noise is everywhere. "Pow" is scrawled out in one nook. "Ow" echoes back.

The newest work in the show, *Catfish* (2017), revisits Abney's focus on gender, as women white and black bend over raunchily in four panels, one man standing amid them under the word "wow." Alongside her usual graffiti motifs, stenciled dollar signs dot the canvas, and pyramids of eyes hover. There is no subtlety to the sex on display; it is gaudy and cynical, a spectacle for our viewing pleasure. And the money flows, and the women submit, and the world keeps watching, always watching.

CONTRIBUTOR

Samuel Feldblum

SAMUEL FELDBLUM is an armchair philosopher pondering getting out of his armchair.

The News&Observer

ARTS & CULTURE MARCH 1, 2017 6:15 PM

‘Black Lives Matter’ is one of many threads running through Nina Chanel Abney’s art

BY DAVID MENCONI
dmenconi@newsobserver.com

DURHAM — A decade ago, artist Nina Chanel Abney had her breakout with a striking piece of agit-art. It was an oversized painting called “Class of 2007,” a portrait of Abney’s class at New York’s Parsons School of Design.

Abney was the lone black student in the class, but she rendered herself as a white, blonde and blue-eyed prison guard – watching over her classmates, who she depicted as African-American inmates.

“I’m still in touch with a lot of these people,” Abney said recently, looking at “Class of 2007” on a gallery wall of Duke University’s Nasher Museum of Art and pointing to different figures. “Nick Van Woert, he’s an amazing sculptor. And Langdon, Dave, Jen. But it got a mixed reaction at the time.”

Abney paused to laugh a bit.

“That was welcome,” she continued. “Especially now, I want to make work that gets multiple reactions, not just one. I’m very intentional about creating work that gets a mixed response, and every interpretation is welcome. I want to start conversations and arguments, for viewers to participate in the work and have their own personal relationship with it.”

“Class of 2007” attracted widespread attention and was part of 2008’s “30 Americans” exhibit in Miami. That’s where curator Marshall N. Price saw it – which led directly to the painting’s current place in Durham as part of “Royal Flush,” a career-spanning exhibit of about 30 of Abney’s pieces.

"She really stood out, which was really saying something given that that show was just filled with luminaries," Price said. "Nina's paintings are not only provocative in terms of imagery and narrative, there's also a historical component to different levels. There's a protest spirit about it that you see in a lot of work from the '60s and '70s, and I love the notion of protest-painting."

Going political

Now 34, Abney was born in Chicago and got started the same way a lot of artists do, copying things she liked. Her efforts grew more serious in high school, finally crystallizing into the politically charged works she began producing in college – brightly colored, coursing with racially charged images both abstract and concrete.

Not long after "Class of 2007" came "Dirty Wash," inspired by a combination of celebrity gossip and political scandals. Abney painted an image of a friend of hers reacting to a bikini-clad Condoleezza Rice, who was President George W. Bush's Secretary of State at the time.

"

SHE'S A HUMANIST IN THE MOST GENEROUS SENSE OF THE WORD, CONVEYING THE HUMAN CONDITION AND THE IDEA THAT HUMANITY HOLDS ITS DESTINATION IN ITS OWN HANDS.

Nasher curator Marshall N. Price

Then there's 2008's "Close But No Cigar," based on photographer Joseph Louw's iconic picture of the immediate aftermath of civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in Memphis. Abney imagines the scene as a garish burlesque, with Barack Obama, who was still a candidate and not president when she painted it, wrapped in an American flag. The site and year of King's assassination are represented, Lorraine Motel and 1968.

"My earlier works like these were more narrative, with clues to what they're based on," Abney said. "But over time, I shifted to more abstract narratives, stripping away the backgrounds to take away specific meanings to latch onto. That really informed the collages I started to do. Then I got a studio in Times Square, and between that and the overload of information – news and Facebook and everything else – it all started to feel like chaos. There was no one story, but many stories. All of them fragments."

Becoming a brand

In recent years, protests around the "Black Lives Matter" movement have given Abney ample raw material to work with. A lot of her paintings from the past few years depict confrontations between African-Americans and white law-enforcement officers, but Abney declines to do much in the way of explaining.

"She doesn't give a lot away," Price said. "But her work is very thought-provoking. There's always something resonant to take away. We've been working on this show for several years, and it becomes more timely with every passing moment. That only underscores its urgency. I think she's a humanist in the most generous sense of the word, conveying the human condition and the idea that humanity holds its destination in its own hands."

Beyond painting, Abney has lately started working with computer printouts while pondering a move into photographs, sculpture and even branding. She's working with a brand manager now, which means her artwork might be coming soon to a product near you.

"I'm trying to see if my work can translate into other media," she said. "Creating a sneaker, partnering with some brands. Not too many artists are doing both, and there are concerns that too much commercial work dilutes your fine art. But it's a fun challenge to see if I can conquer both."

Meantime, Abney is also doing temporary murals, which are every bit as striking as her paintings. She spray-painted one on a gallery wall at the Nasher for "Royal Flush," dashing it off in a couple of days. And it's beautiful, if temporary, which doesn't concern the artist.

"Eh," she said with a shrug and a smile, "I'll just make another one somewhere."

David Menconi: 919-829-4759, @NCDavidMenconi

EXHIBIT DETAILS

What: "Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush"

When: Through July 16

Where: Nasher Art Museum, 2001 Campus Drive, Durham

Cost: $5 adults, $4 age 65 and older, $3 non-Duke students. Free for children 15 and under, Nasher members, Duke students, faculty and staff - and everyone Thursdays, 5-9 p.m.

Hours: Closed Mondays; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday

More info: 919-684-5135 or nasher.duke.edu/abney

CULTURED

February 2017

Nina Chanel Abney. Photography by Charlie Rubin.

In this complicated cultural moment the U.S. is experiencing, Nina Chanel Abney knows just how to press the hot buttons of sexuality, gender, religion and race in her paintings—committing her voice to the Black Lives Matter movement. Referring to the current political uneasiness, Abney declares, "This discomfort isn't from lack of awareness but from avoidance of critical topics." Peppered with clever doses of spontaneity and satire, Abney's large crayola-colored canvases and murals have turned the Chicago native into an art star in the making. Since 2007, she has been carving out an energetic presence, with her previous gallery Kravets Wehby, in four successive solo shows and a number of group exhibitions. *Class of 2007*, a

ery work created for her Parsons MFA thesis presentation, reverberated loudly in the art world. Abney represented her white student peers as shackled black prisoners, and herself (the sole African-American) as a stern-faced Caucasian prison guard.

The spark was lit from there. The influential collectors Don and Mera Rubell included Abney, then 6, in the ground-breaking group show of Black artists called "30 Americans." The exhibit is urrently on view in its tenth iteration at the Tacoma Art Museum.

In 2016 alone, Abney, now 34, has exhibited her work in "Flatlands" at the Whitney Museum; the international group show "Greek Gotham" (curated by Maria Brito); an artist residency, and the solo exhibtion "If You Say So…" at Gateway Project Spaces in Newark, New Jersey, among various projects. Abney capped off the year by joining the vaunted Jack Shainman Gallery, entering a family of artists rooted in social advocacy, feminism and black identity, including Kerry James Marshall and Carrie Mae Weems. Gallery Director Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels says, "Abney employs color, a frenetic mashup of representation and abstraction which engages popular culture, mass media and history painting like no other artist in our program."

In her next power move, Abney is prepping for her first major museum exhibition, "Royal Flush" opening February 16 at the Nasher Museum of Art. There, Abney will present a decade of her work including thirty paintings, watercolors and collages. "The stories Nina tells in her paintings are humorous, poignant and sometimes painful," says Marshall N. Price, Ph.D., the show's curator. "I wanted to assemble 10 years of her work as a way to reflect on some of these issues the country is grappling with, and hopefully take the visitor on journey of wonder, fright, and pleasure."

A wild ride of rage, irony, sex and violence, this show will present all of her animated and audacious characters. Following its North Carolina run, "Royal Flush," will travel to the Chicago Cultural Center, and culminate in Los Angeles, in two joint exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art and the California African American Museum.

A detail of Abney's studio wall

Of course, to view Abney's recent rise only through the gallery and museum lens is to miss perhaps the most potent component of her practice: mural-making. "I follow the ethos of the street artist, so my work is in response to the community, its inhabitants and the physical surface that I work on," she says.

Recent murals, including one in Newark near her studio, feature clean geometric shapes, bold graphic text, and genderless black figures, which collide in an urban setting. Meanwhile, in the second edition of Coney Art Walls, an outdoor summer street art museum curated by Jeffrey Deitch, sexy black mermaids interface with a psychedelic geometric composition.

Whether on gallery or city walls, Abney's work continually invokes Stuart Davis' frenzied compositions in bold primary colors, alludes to Matisse's flat and sensual figures, with some of Peter Saul's political humor thrown in too, while repackaging these references for the 2010s armed with a booming hip-hop bravado. Scrolling through her Instagram, it's evident hip-hop icons including Diddy, Kanye West, Q-Tip and Swizz Beatz, who included her in the Bronx edition of his No Commission art fair, have reciprocated respect for her work too.

Although political messages have commanded her canvases for years now, Abney admits, "in the upcoming years I would like to see my work become even more of an instigator for meaningful, inclusive and positive change," she says. "The art that I'm drawn to and find the most impactful has a certain level of ambiguity that forces me to answer many questions for myself."

The Herald·Sun

Feb 25, 2017
Blue Greenberg

At the Nasher, canvases from a new voice

Submitted/Nina Chanel Abney
Nina Chanel Abney, "Close But No Cigar," 2008, acrylic on canvas, 84-by-146 inches. Collection of Scott R. Coleman. Image courtesy of Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York, New York.

"Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush," Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, through July 16.

Nina Chanel Abney's big paintings look like highway billboards: brilliantly clear colors, flat figures and large black lettering. Billboards sell things, and while she is not promoting a product, she is telling stories that are at once humorous and provocative. They address issues of social justice, racial dynamics, politics and celebrity as they play out in today's world.

Her work shows careful study of such masters as Stuart Davis (1894-1964), Romare Bearden (1911-1988) and Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) and then becomes uniquely hers as something fresh and original. She is a product of the 21st century with TV and its running script at the bottom of the screen, text messages, social media, newspapers, music: the cacophony of today's sounds and images. It is that overload she incorporates into her canvases.

The Nasher exhibition includes 30 canvases and is Abney's first solo museum show; this is after a meteoric rise in the art world. The day after her MFA thesis exhibition at Parsons School of Design opened, she was invited to join New York's Kravets Wehby Gallery. In that show was "Class of 2007," 2007; it is her earliest painting at the Nasher. "Class" is big, 114-by-186 inches. Abney stands at the left, dressed as a white prison guard, semi-automatic at the ready. A vertical band separates her from her fellow classmates who are all white but have posed as black inmates wearing orange jumpsuits.

The message is clear: As the only student of color in her class, she decries the lack of diversity at the graduate level and also points out the overwhelming majority of African-Americans in American prisons. A year later the gallery gave her a solo show, which caught the attention of major collectors Donald and Mera Rubell. One of the paintings they bought was "Class of 2007."

By 2008 she is still painting big and her themes are about celebrity, mixing rock stars and politicians. She has said she is fascinated by the fact that celebrity is not just more interesting; it is more important than politics and merges well with race issues. For example in "Randaleeza," 2008, she depicts the former secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, wearing a white bikini. Also in the painting is a friend, Randall, being attacked by dogs, which is a reference to the football player Michael Vick, who was involved in illegal dog-fighting. The scenario is totally impossible, but it does focus on how distorted is the distinction between celebrity culture and the political realm. As I was looking at this and thinking, I had never seen Condoleezza Rice in any sort of painting, much less one that frames a berserk world on a huge signboard.

Sarah Schroth, the director of the museum, happened by and stopped to talk. Schroth said devoting one entire part of the museum to such a young artist was certainly a new thing for the

Nasher, but when she talked with some of the Duke students, they told her the work really spoke to them. She also told me that Abney's studio has a TV blasting and rock music going and all that gets turned into her paintings. Then she added when the Rubells put Abney into their collection her star rose to unbelievable heights.

Another painting about celebrity is "Close but No Cigar," 2008. She based the painting on the famous photograph by Joseph Louw, taken at the Lorraine Motel just after the shooting of Dr. Martin Luther King. She reimagines the painting with President Obama, wrapped in the American flag, as the assassinated King and adds masked figures and yellow gloves, which are part of her iconic vocabulary.

One of the galleries is devoted to a series based on the fairy tales "Beauty and the Beast" and "Forbidden Fruit," from "Alice in Wonderland." In "Beauty in the Beast," 2009, there are two white women in black face. One holds a black baby and one holds a piglet. Her take on this is the media's questioning the sincerity of Madonna and Angeline Jolie, who adopted African and African-American babies.

In 2011 Abney begins to incorporate geometric forms, letters, words and emoji-like faces into her work. She also adds collage and cut out paper as a new technique. Although the size is more modest, the surfaces are still stuffed with imagery. At this time she also expunged color from her paintings, giving herself a technical workout, much like Picasso, who returned time and again to classical painting and its discipline before moving onto new challenges. This young woman works tirelessly and the number of paintings and the quality of her work attest to her devotion to her art.

On one of the gallery walls in a general text, we are told the artist is moving away from an earlier loosely painted quality toward increasing flatness and "abstraction, harbingers of her mature style." The idea of a "mature style" for a young artist, just 10 years out of art school, set me thinking about youthful talent and how it can burn out if it is not nurtured. From her web site bio, she has been unbelievably successful with a number of solo gallery shows, some of which sold out. She is also in major museum collections like the Brooklyn Museum and Washington's Corcoran. The Rubells included her in their Miami exhibition "30 Americans" and, although she

was the youngest in the group, she had one whole room devoted to her work. That show came to the N.C. Museum of Art when it was touring the country.

Now, she has a solo museum exhibition. There is no question Abney is talented, but if I were her advisor I would encourage her to slow down, dig deeper into her soul, build on her solid base, and do not wring herself dry.

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Maria Brito, Contributor
Art Advisor, Designer, Curator, Book Author

Nina Chanel Abney and the Premonition of Social Change

02/20/2017 06:25 pm ET | **Updated** 18 hours ago

PETER KOLOFF

Nina Chanel Abney at the opening of her show "Royal Flush" at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.

True innate artists can see ahead and beyond the current moment: circumstances that are not yet fully present manifest in their works. Anticipation, thus, seems to come naturally to them. One artist who epitomizes this is Nina Chanel Abney, who was born in Chicago in 1982 and received her MFA from Parsons School of Design in 2007, and seems to be have been holding a crystal ball ever since.

PETER KOLOFF

The in-situ 30-feet mural took Abney three days to paint and it is the first and last work that the visitors to the show get to see. It represents and embodies many of the concepts and formal elements that the artist is currently exploring: gender, race, female empowerment, guns and language on a completely abstract background layered with geometric figures.

Curated by Marshall Price, *Royal Flush* is the title of Abney's first solo museum show at The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, which previewed on February 15 and opened to the public the next day. The exhibition looks back at the past 10 years of the artist's career.

PETER KOLOFF

Abney's MFA graduation thesis piece "Class of 2007", 2007.

Extremely versatile and talented both at the level of concept and execution, Abney can equally and brilliantly tackle a hand-painted mural, like the 30-foot wall that welcomes visitors to *Royal Flush*, or a large-scale digitally printed canvas using a technique whose result is called "ultrachrome pigmented". The show, which is organized chronologically, is able to convey pivotal moments in which the artist made eloquent changes to her visual vocabulary without ever losing her essence or voice.

PETER KOLOFF

The first gallery of “Royal Flush” with some of Nina Chanel Abney’s earlier paintings

When I asked Abney if this is the first time she has confronted her work in this way she laughs and answers: “Some of these pieces I saw at 30 Americans (a show organized by the Rubell family with works from their own collection showcasing important African American artists of the last three decades), but this is the first time I’m seeing many, many of these works since the time they were sold 9 or 10 years ago. There are things I see and think, ‘oh man, this looks old!’ But then I find something else I want to revisit, elements I used before and may want to explore again.”

Paintings from a phase in Abney's career where the backgrounds became more abstract

Her now notable MFA thesis piece "Class of 2007", 2007 plays a trick on the viewer who doesn't know the background: Nina has painted every one of her classmates but has changed their skin colors. Turning them dark-skinned, all of them wear an orange jumpsuit, incarceration-style. Nina has also painted herself - she's on the side, on a separate canvas, blonde and dressed as a guard with a rifle in her hands. Being the only dark student in her class, at the age of 25, Nina put an incandescent spotlight on the lack of diversity in higher education programs in the United States as well as the disproportionate number of imprisoned colored people - often for minor crimes - that populate prisons in this country. As if the topics weren't loaded enough, the diptych is about 15 feet in length by almost 10 feet in height. It is impossible to look the other way.

PETER KOLOFF

"Near and Far", 2015 is Abney's first diptych created digitally and printed with advanced technologies.

The contiguous gallery bridges the earlier, figurative works with the beginning of the abstract ones; it is a link in Abney's career that must be seen in order to understand how she transitioned from a more traditional way of painting to

finding her own style, which now consists of angles, layers, graphic and complex backgrounds that have become unique and characteristic marks of her work. Nina has always had a such strong voice, although she insists it took her some time to find and refine it. What seems to be always present however, is a sense of humor, a candid way of looking at issues that are heavy and serious which she accomplishes using words, vibrant colors and cartoonish figures that bear funny expressions. Like the meltdown of the financial markets in 2008-2009, the victory of Barack Obama as the first black president, and the strange but utterly mystifying underpinnings of celebrity culture, somehow anticipating how much they would dominate our daily lives through a bombardment of messages and images not only through traditional media but also through all platforms of social media.

PETER KOLOFF

Untitled (FUCK T*E *OP), 2014 is a densely layered acrylic on canvas piece where Abney confronts the systemic gun violence and police brutality that disproportionately affect African-Americans.

As Abney and I continue our walkthrough, we spot a group of paintings where she started to subtly abstract the background and strip away the context. While there are still figures reminiscent of her early works, we don't fully know where they are — this was another critical step toward her current direction. Layered collages allowed Abney to work with a juxtaposition of elements as well as newer ways of composition - overly saturated paintings (from the time her studio was in Times Square and she needed to deal with the information overload that had swollen her senses), more muted and smaller-scale black-and-white works. Everything is logically organized like DNA molecules, leading on to the next set of large-scale canvases where Abney began to digitally print

her work. “Near and Far” 2015 is a large diptych where Abney first employed the use of a mechanical medium. Even though it was the beginning of a new era for her, where advanced printing techniques are combined with spray paint and acrylic paint brushstrokes, nothing is separate or abruptly disconnected from the works before or the works after. There is a seemingly perfect continuation of what she does and how she does it.

PETER KOLOFF

“Pool Party at Rockingham #1”, 2016 and “Pool Party at Rockingham #2”, 2016 offer Abeney’s commentary on gender dynamics and relationships.

Identity and gender issues are also present in many of her paintings, as in the monumental “Catfish” 2017, where a four-canvas piece filled with women in suggestive poses looks at art history through the lens of Boticelli’s “La Primavera” and hip-hop album covers while dealing with gender stereotypes and sexism. Untitled (XXXXXX), 2015 shows police brutality and race conflict, except the “transgressor” is blond and the policemen are black. Multiple colored doves fly around the scene, making the narrative in the painting ironic, funny and preposterous.

PETER KOLOFF

The monumental four-canvas piece “Catfish” 2017 combines many of the techniques that Abney has been mastering for the past 10 years: a digitally-printed ultrachrome pigmented print, acrylic and spray paint.

The strength, power and urgency of this exhibition is something that should be seen by everyone. Luckily, *Royal Flush* is a traveling show that will first be at the Chicago Cultural Center in the summer of 2017, followed by Los Angeles’ Institute of Contemporary Art and the California African American Museum next year.

PETER KOLOFF

A strong ending to a very powerful and emotive show. Untitled (XXXXXX), 2015 and an earlier self-portrait of the artist.

After our walkthrough, I mentioned to Nina that historically we are living in such a complex socio-political structure that it is almost given to us to want to avoid complacency and to create, inspire, react positively, push boundaries. In that context, I wanted to know what Nina's wish is for the visitor, what would be the ideal takeaway? This is a question that she doesn't want to answer, but I press further and she says, "I'd like people to ask questions to themselves about race, gender, and identity. I hope my work provokes thoughts, raises awareness, and poses interrogations."

A Royal Flush is the best possible sequence in poker, the highest rank. Nina Chanel Abney is holding on to this hand of cards and won't let go anytime soon.

Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush

February 16 to July 16 2017

The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University

2001 Campus Drive

Durham, NC 27705

The Chronicle

Recess | Campus Arts

Nina Chanel Abney's 'Royal Flush' opening party, a celebration of black art and culture

By Nina Wilder | Wednesday, February 22

(http://www.dukechronicle.com/multimedia/28186)

The crowd at the Nasher Museum of Art last Thursday was bustling and spirited, a diverse commingling of students and residents from the farthest reaches of the Triangle area. Exhausted parents chased restless children through the lobby, snippets of conversations about art and politics floated freely above the fringe and people milled about the hallways of art, stopping frequently to snap pictures and ponder them silently. The droves of people were there to partake in the opening party for "Royal Flush," an exhibition of artist Nina Chanel Abney's work over the last ten years.

Abney, who is 34 years old and hails from Chicago, Illinois, creates art that should make you feel uncomfortable–her commentaries on race, sex, religion and sexuality eschew conventional modes of storytelling in art that we've become accustomed to. Instead, Abney opts to bombard the viewer from the outset with images, words, numbers and colors that have been collaged in a manner that's both coherent and overwhelming. Her work stems from an era wherein information is disseminated across smartphone screens and news cycles with unrelenting fervor, the incessant barrage of information a clear inspiration for both the style and content of her art. Marwa Yusuf, a Ph.D. student at UNC-Chapel Hill who was in attendance at the opening party, noted the forcefulness of Abney's style.

"What drew me to her work–I hadn't heard of her before coming [to the event]–is definitely the themes, but also the colors," she said. "There's something about the colors that's just so bold, but in a way that's not boldness for boldness's sake. There's a coherence with the theme."

While Abney's artwork may be frantic and busy, her intentions are clear–whether it's by painting a police officer with the word "OINK" adorned on his chest or depicting former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice as part of a famous celebrity couple, Abney ensures that the viewer will be forced to engage with themes ranging from police brutality, the objectification of women's bodies and the prevalence of celebrity culture. And in a millennium where unarmed black men are killed by law enforcement daily and treating women like second-class citizens doesn't bar you from the presidency, Abney's criticisms are more than significant and relevant–they are unavoidable.

"These [pieces] are all very dense, and I think that [Abney] communicated in a way that's not subtle," Yusuf said. "I think that's how it should be–at least our conversation about these topics needs to be out loud and clear."

Tackling such upsetting and moving subject matters doesn't have to be a dismal affair, though–Abney is wickedly sharp, her sense of humor woven seamlessly into the pieces and often belying the seriousness of what she's depicting. But humor is a weapon that can be wielded to make traumatic events more emotionally accessible, as noted by UNC-Chapel Hill Ph.D. student Katie Merriman, who attended the opening party with Yusuf.

"I think her use of farce is really helpful, because often times trying to overlay a sense of seriousness about an event that involves violence takes away from the ability to talk about the emotional and the psychological impact of such an event," Merriman said. "To kind of throwback at people who just want to talk about information and numbers and instead say, 'How could this happen?'"

"When we think about things that are political, this is not how we think about them," Yusuf added. "But there are desires, there is humor, there are all of these social practices that sometimes get ignored when we talk about politics. So it broadens the scope of what is political and what's not."

To categorize Abney's work as merely protest art or another form of activism for Black Lives Matter is to diminish the ambitious portfolio that she's carefully curated. Abney's art is a visceral celebration of blackness and identity that's both critical and joyous, proof of the nuanced beauty that can arise in response to systemic oppression. The bright, irreverent canvases draw you in with their chaos, humor and shocking images, but when you pull back, Abney's voice seems to say: I am black, I am proud and I am powerful.

Reflective of this recognition of blackness and black culture were the festivities that occurred during the opening party, emceed by Durham resident, NCCU and UNC-CH professor and musician Pierce Freelon. The performances included Duke student saxophonist Edgeri Hudlin, poets from Freelon's Afro-futurist makerspace for black youth called Blackspace and Duke student and spoken word artist Ashley Croker-Benn.

Any music played was made by black musicians and any poem performed dealt with black identity, all in the presence of Abney's paintings, encircled by the difficulties and victories that accompany being black in America. It was an emotional outpouring of identity and culture that complimented Abney's work well, an urgent reminder that compassion for others and a yearning for change are essential.

Nina Chanel Abney's "Royal Flush" will be on display at the Nasher Museum of Art until July 16. The exhibition is a 10-year survey of approximately 30 of the artist's paintings, watercolors and collages.

ARTNEWS
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THE TALENT

NINA CHANEL ABNEY NOW SHOWS WITH JACK SHAINMAN

BY ***Andrew Russeth***

POSTED **11/28/16 11:32 AM**

Nina Chanel Abney, *Where*, 2015.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

With the opening of Art Basel Miami Beach less than two days away, New York's Jack Shainman Gallery announced this morning that it will now show the superb young painter Nina Chanel Abney and have her work on offer at the fair, which runs Wednesday through Sunday at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

Abney, who was born in Chicago in 1982 and works in New York, has garnered attention in recent years for large-scaled, brightly colored, tightly geometricized figurative paintings whose subjects range from punchy riffs on art-historical tropes (bathers, religious iconography) to disturbing depictions of police brutality against people of color. The flat shapes of Stuart Davis and late Henri Matisse are a potent inspiration.

Previously represented by Kravets/Wehby in New York, where she had a solo show in 2015, Abney has also had recent exhibitions at Monique Melouche Gallery in Chicago and Galeria Rabieh in São Paulo, and was also featured in the Whitney Museum's "Flatlands" exhibition earlier this year. In 2017 she will have a solo show at the Nasher Museum at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Book your tickets now!

“Flatlands”

Art , Contemporary art $ $ $ $ ★★★★★ ★★★★★ **Add review**

Nina Chanel Abney, Hothouse, 2015

TIME OUT SAYS ★★★★★

During the rise of modern painting, flatness was considered a virtue, a quality denoting the pure essence of the medium. In 1890, artist Maurice Denis noted that, whatever else it was, “a picture…is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.” The mid-20th-century critic Clement Greenberg considered flatness the sine qua non of serious abstraction. However, “Flatlands,” a tight selection of millennial painters, toys with an alternate definition of flatness as an expression of 21st century anomie, conjuring “a sense of space that is dimensionless and airless.” Though the curators point to theatrical scenery as an example, they could be describing the Internet and social media.

The works here—by Nina Chanel Abney, Mathew Cerletty, Jamian Juliano-Villani, Caitlin Keogh and Orion Martin—resemble a kind of Surrealism strained through Pop Art, a mix of sharp contours and taut surfaces channeling content that’s less about a metaphysical truth rooted in the subconscious than it is about consciousness as artifice. While the work may sometimes recall Max Ernst, René Magritte and Salvador Dalí, it is the product of minds colonized by Andy Warhol and the web.

Juliano-Villani’s works are filled with whirlwinds of cartoon references, skinned with unbroken tracts of color like animation cells. Lately she’s added airbrushed layers of chiaroscuro, bringing her images more in line with custom van murals. One painting depicts a figure made of orange traffic cones, resembling an unlikely marriage of the Iron Giant and an inflatable air dancer in front of a tire store. It’s seen picking its way through a landscape of stacked rocks (ancient cairns? wind-sculpted hoodoos in the New Mexican desert?) vandalized with graffiti in a desolate setting. The scene’s meaning is impenetrable, which is probably the point.

Likewise, Cerletty’s straightforward depiction of an aquarium is opaque in both senses of the word. The fish evince no sign of life, looking like they’re suspended in Lucite instead of water. Though Cerletty plays around with a number of genres and styles, his métier is a kind of realism deliberately delivered dead on arrival. Here, his subjects are not only fixed in place, but asphyxiated as well.

Both Keogh and Martin borrow the shallow space of trompe l’oeil still life for their work. However, Keogh’s impassive synthesis of anatomical drawing and technical illustration—depicted in boldly outlined, graphic forms—recalls John Wesley, while Martin’s creepy renderings of common objects (a woman’s boot, a wooden washtub) are more in keeping with the Sadean spirit of Neue Sachlichkeit.

The most ambitious piece here is Abney’s wall-spanning canvas, which seems to meld an Edenic grove with the front parlor of a cathouse in a friezelike arrangement of female nudes, each contorted into a pornographic pose. Dotted with words like YES and NO and strategically censored in places by the letter X, the painting makes unmistakable allusions to Pablo Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon but is closer in appearance to Henri Matisse’s cutouts. Though brightly colored to the point of ebullience, the piece is tonally analogous to the thousand-yard stare of an adult-film actress who’s been in the business for too long.

Some 10 years ago, the notion gained currency that the world was becoming “flat”—that is, a global economy devoid of boundaries with a culture to match. But the work here suggests these artists take an opposite view of the zeitgeist: not as limitless landscape but as a metaphorically two-dimensional realm of stunted possibilities and deferred hopes.

BY: HOWARD HALLE

POSTED: TUESDAY JANUARY 5 2016

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

‘Flatlands,’ Where the Familiar Becomes Hypnotically Strange

By KEN JOHNSON JAN. 28, 2016

The idea of “deskilling” has incited considerable chatter in the contemporary art sphere in the past decade. In economics the term refers to the technically undemanding labor performed by most modern industrial workers. In art discourse it identifies the deliberate rejection of traditional craft in the service of conceptual provocation and expressive freedom.

While today’s art abounds in insouciant, apparently slapdash, clumsy, lazy and otherwise deskilled works, not all artists have deskilled themselves. Many are those who you might call — not pejoratively — semiskilled. Their techniques come not from the grand tradition of realistic representation extending from Velázquez and Vermeer to 19th-century academicians like William-Adolphe Bouguereau. Rather, they draw on methods associated with commercial illustration and design in order to play with public signifiers and personal poetics.

“Flatlands,” an engaging small show in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s nicely proportioned lobby-level gallery, presents a dozen works from the past three years by five young (all born since 1980) semiskilled painters. As the exhibition’s organizers, the Whitney assistant curators Laura Phipps and Elisabeth Sherman, observe in an online essay about the show, the artists in “Flatlands” “share an interest in the surface of their works, an attention to the design and finish that is reminiscent of the concerns of pattern or product design.” Fortunately, the show is more interesting, visually as well as conceptually, than this dry characterization seems to promise.

Mathew Cerletty’s highly finished paintings deal cleverly in contradictory illusions. The Magritte-like “Night Puddle” depicts a wide field of lush grass under a dark sky and a full moon. An irregular opening in the grass reads paradoxically as both a watery puddle and as an irregular window to the sky. In “Shelf Life,” Mr. Cerletty fills a 4-foot-by-5-foot canvas with the fourth wall of an aquarium populated by bright little fish, green plants and a glowing purple rock, all against a beautiful, deep-blue background. Mildly psychedelic, it smartly equates the actual painting and the illusory fish tank as hypnotic visual objects.

With a silky-smooth touch, Orion Martin creates mysterious, psychologically charged images that call to mind works by the German Pop-Surrealist Konrad Klapheck and the Chicago Imagist Art Green. “Bakers Steak” depicts a green-glass-shaded brass lamp and a centered quartet of illusory brass rings seeming to perforate the picture. White flowers on serpentine green stems emerge from the darkness within and beyond the rings as if from the painting’s own unconscious. “Triple Nickel, Tull” features a Victorian-style, high-heeled, knee-length boot against a blurry, architectural background. With all its laces and lace holes carefully described, the boot intimates a Freudian, fetishistic vibe.

Jamian Juliano-Villani paints wildly heterogeneous montages of images drawn from all kinds of sources, from scientific illustrations to comic books. “Boar’s Head, a Gateway, My Pinecone” depicts a modern apartment in which a spectral figure draped in black with an animal skull head, a much enlarged blue sea horse and a pine cone are impaled on a giant metal skewer. It’s funny and bizarre like a surrealistic scene in a David Lynch movie. “The Snitch,” in which a scary, long-legged, puppetlike figure constructed from orange-and-white traffic cones strides through an underwater rock garden, could be a child’s nightmare.

The neatly outlined compositions on two large canvases by Caitlin Keogh resemble pages from a morbid coloring book for grown-ups. “Intestine and Tassels” depicts the outline of a woman’s torso with a rendering of the human digestive tract inside and a rope with tasseled ends encircling the shoulders. “Vines,” in which colorful flowers and vines are laid on top of a book open to a picture of a rib cage, similarly meditates on life and mortality.

The show’s biggest, most visually and socially assertive painting is Nina Chanel Abney’s 18-foot-wide “Hothouse.” Made mainly of flattened, stenciled forms in high-contrast colors, it pictures what appears to be a scene in a strip club. Seven women and a man, all nude, provocatively pose amid a flurry of symbols and letters representing an environment of commercialized lust. It’s a terrifically energetic, feminist update of Picasso’s brothel painting “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon.”

It's noteworthy that all these five painters have B.F.A. or M.F.A. degrees from high-caliber studio art programs. They come from a system that encourages students to reinvent art for themselves and to figure out whatever skills they need to convey with maximal efficiency whatever they have in mind. In that sense, most M.F.A. holders are self-taught. Far from outsiders, however, the good ones are, like the artists of "Flatlands," acutely wised up semioticians, savvy players with the tropes, memes and cultural politics of the Age of the Internet.

"Flatlands" continues through April 17 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 99 Gansevoort Street, Manhattan; 212-570-3600, whitney.org.

A version of this review appears in print on January 29, 2016, on page C28 of the New York edition with the headline: Dealing in Contradictory Illusions.

VANITY FAIR

THE ART WORLD OCTOBER 15, 2015 4:13 PM

How Nina Chanel Abney is Championing the Black Lives Matter Movement with a Paintbrush

BY KURT MCVEY

It only took one painting for gallery owner **Marc Wehby** and his wife and business partner, **Susan Kravets,** to sign artist **Nina Chanel Abney** for a show at their Chelsea gallery. It was her now-famous large-scale painting from her M.F.A. thesis show at Parsons titled *Class of 2007,* which depicted her fellow classmates, who were all white, as black inmates, while Nina, the only black student in her class, painted herself as a gun-toting white prison guard with flowing blonde locks.

"I did have a couple students ask me if I was mad at them," says Abney, 33, still surprised almost a decade later. "I said, no, it's nothing personal. Just like when I put people in my paintings now—it's not you, it's just a face." Wehby sent an S.U.V. to collect the work, which was enough to impress the young artist at the time. "I feel like we can sell these," Abney remembers her now long-time gallerist saying over cookies she had baked specifically for the fateful studio visit. "I looked at the thesis show as my only chance to get the attention of a gallery," she admits. "If I didn't, I wouldn't have known what to do. How else was I going to get someone to see my work?"

Wehby was right. Within days, every piece sold. *Class of 2007* was purchased by the famed art collectors **Don and Mera Rubell** based on a photograph of the piece, an amazing feat in and of itself, especially in pre-Instagram days. That work, and several others, found its way into 2008's inaugural exhibition of "30 Americans," a group show that the Rubell's Web site claims focuses on "the most important African American artists of the last three decades." The exhibition took place in the Rubell's 45,000-square-foot gallery in Miami, formerly a D.E.A. confiscated-goods facility, a building that once contained millions of dollars' worth of an entirely different luxury commodity that caters to a similarly bourgeois clientele.

"I always said I wanted to be a famous painter. I just never knew what that really meant," she says in her studio at the Gateway Project, a relatively new gallery and studio complex in Newark, New Jersey's Gateway Center, where she is an artist in residence. Her works there will soon be transported to the Kravets Wehby Gallery in Chelsea for her fourth solo exhibition in the space, titled "Always a Winner," opening October 15. Then, on October 18, she will once more display her work alongside the likes of **Kara Walker, Nick Cave,** Robert Colescott, **Kehinde Wiley,** and Jean-Michel Basquiat—to whom the artist is frequently compared—for the traveling exhibition's ninth incarnation, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. "Art is no longer about revolution, it's about evolution," says Don Rubell on the phone from Miami. "Nina is well on her way to becoming a great artist. The level of development is astonishing. It's a prophecy that speaks for itself."

Abney was born in 1982 in Harvey, Illinois. Growing up, her biological father was not entirely in the picture. Her two aunts, her grandfather, and her mother, Karla, who was something of an artist herself, lovingly raised Nina. "One day I found her oil paints in the basement, so I started to play around with that," recalls the artist, who as a child liked to mimic Archie comics, Disney characters, and the Berenstain Bears. "I remember [my mother] telling me about this painting she did of Dr. J (**Julius Erving,** the hall-of-fame N.B.A. player), way back in the day. She was proud of that one."

Abney's mother soon married a man who had a daughter around the same age as Nina. The genial stepsisters spent much of their young lives bouncing around from one Montessori school to the next, often as the only black students in their class. On one surreal afternoon, while driving home from school just across the border in Indiana, Abney's mother was pulled over by a local police officer. As the uniformed man's face entered the frame of the driver's-side window, Nina instantly recognized it, or more accurately, recognized her own face in his. The cop was her biological father, a man she had never met until that moment. The "Lynchian" encounter was fleeting, but it had a lasting effect on the artist (she wouldn't reconnect with the man until earlier this year. Abney claims they are currently attempting to build a relationship from the ground up).

After a fire damaged her mother's home, they moved in with her aunt in Matteson, Illinois, and attended Rich South Campus High School. "We were always the only black girls, so high school was the opposite," remembers Abney. "I was excited, but also a little nervous. Though we were very much 'in-tune' we would still get teased with that whole 'talk white' thing." Nina navigated this by taking requests for portraits of famous black figures in pop culture as a sort of friendly icebreaker and also, as a means to maintain a classically trained eye. "People asked me to do portraits of, like, Tupac or something," recalls Nina with a dismissive laugh.

Though Abney had won some awards for her work in middle school, high school was where she began to take things a bit more seriously. Mr. Mayer, a teacher and lasting mentor, pushed her into A.P. art, a portfolio incubator of sorts, which led to a duel major in studio art and computer science at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Abney cites a campus-wide walkout protesting a lack of black faculty members as a turning point for her as an artist interested in tackling political themes. "Hey, what is this, the colored section?" she remembers fielding from a white professor, while sitting with her black friends in the back of class.

She decided to take a year off. After graduating, she took a job on the assembly line at Ford Motor Company, recommended by her mother who worked at an unemployment agency, and where, coincidentally, Marc Wehby's father was a project coordinator. "They give you a huge packet of things you can't do, like wear deodorant. It would make craters in the paint. One job was wiping the entire right side of the cars down with an alcohol swab. The good part was I didn't have to interact with people too much or get dressed up, but it got old fast," says Abney.

After watching a female co-worker's leg get crushed in a freak accident, she knew it was time to take a leap of faith. For a year, she painted every day after work, and was eventually accepted to both the Art Institute of Chicago and Parsons School of Design. She chose the latter. "I don't know if I would have been as motivated if I was at home and just had to commute. Also, I knew I needed a sense of independence." She moved all of her belongings into a fourth-floor walk-up in Jersey City, after what she refers to as "the U-Haul trip from hell" (aren't they all) and the rest is history.

"Always a Winner" will feature three diptychs, one triptych, and one four-panel painting, all vibrant, unique labors riddled with cryptic geometric shapes, numbers, phrases, figures, and a handful of conspicuous police officers, mostly white, in sky-blue uniforms, twisting black limbs and shouting at black faces, a playfully ferocious effort to keep the Black Lives Matter life raft afloat while bringing some much-needed excitement to Chelsea. "People who are familiar with my work know that I'm always picking hot topics," she says, adding that the work also addresses "how something could be hot and then fizzle." But don't go prodding for a backstory, she wants the work to stand alone: "I'm not going to give you one story, because I'm more than one thing," says Abney. "Whatever I feel like painting, I just paint it. For me, nothing is off-limits."

"Always a Winner"

Powerful Political Art: Nina Chanel Abney's Black History Paintings

New show is an immersive feast for the senses

By Ryan Steadman • 11/03/15 12:15pm

Why, 2015, by Nina Chanel Abney. (Photo: Courtesy of Kravets Wheby)

What we think we see in Nina Chanel Abney's current painting show at Kravets Wehby Gallery in Chelsea is police brutality against African-Americans, both extreme and casual.

But look closer at this show, up through January 3, 2016 at 521 West 21st Street, and you'll see more. Much more.

Ms. Abney impressed with her jazzy yet nuanced paintings from the moment she emerged in a 2007 group show at this same gallery, and despite some high-profile accomplishments—her work was immediately snapped up by the esteemed Rubell Collection and she's currently in the historic "30 Americans" exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.—the reserved 33-year-old has kept her head down and refined her craft with an almost fierce dedication.

The fruits of her labors are quite evident in this her fourth New York solo exhibition: an immersive series of multi-paneled works that form a tightly-knit environment of image, color and text. It's an effective recipe that blends gravitas, suggested narrative and immersive atmosphere, much like Rothko's Chapel does, despite Ms. Abney's less than Ab-Ex leanings.

A detail from *Where*, 2015, by Nina Chanel Abney. (Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman and observer.com)

Ms. Abney's large-scale works—titled *What, Why, When, Who* and *Where*—pervade the space; they give you no exit option, but they also invite you to move around them freely and connectedly.

She clearly excavates the brash and spry acrobatic style of the early American Modernist Stuart Davis (as well as the bouncy cut-outs of late Matisse) but with an urban twist that borrows "construction cone orange" and graffiti marks that echo the garish energy of the concrete jungle. Thanks to a practically unmatched work ethic, Ms. Abney's graphic execution has become flawless over the years: a synchronic surface of colors and crisp techniques.

Because of this she achieves a uniformity that is important, as it lets the viewer entertain these works as one circuitous story.

When, 2015, by Nina Chanel Abney. (Photo: Courtesy of Kravets Wheby)

It prompted one viewer to say "it's the #blacklivesmatter show," an explanation that promotes the show as a call for justice for African-American police brutality victims.

It's a tidy view that, while perhaps therapeutic, only scratches the surface of Ms. Abney's vision.

Scrutiny reveals that both white and black police officers make the rounds in Abney's work—not to mention both black and white victims. Police batons double as hard-ons while confused arrows and pointing hands pay tribute to the epic comic painter Philip Guston, as they flip between representing either the faceless powers that be or our guardian angels with helping hands. Meanwhile, animals of all sorts (birds, dogs) either scurry in fear, dive forward to attack, or simply lead the humans onward via their hidden senses.

Installation view of Nina Chanel Abney's *Always a Winner* at Kravets Wheby. (Photo: Courtesy of Kravets Wheby)

And the officers themselves are as complex as they are in real life; do they lead to safety and fight crime or use their power for nefarious purposes?

Like black history painters before her, such as Robert Colescott and Kerry James Marshall, Ms. Abney has no answers for our problems but has concocted a beautified opus inspired by what seem like insurmountable troubles.

COMMENT

FILED UNDER: #BLACKLIVESMATTER, CHELSEA, CORCORAN GALLERY, ERIC GARNER, HENRI MATISSE, KRAVETS WHEBY, MARK ROTHKO, MICHAEL BROWN, NINA CHANEL ABNEY, PHILIP GUSTON, RUBELL COLLECTION, SANDRA BLAND, STUART DAVIS

THE CONVERSATION STARTER

NINA CHANEL ABNEY

Last summer, Nina Chanel Abney created a 90-foot-long mural—100 kinetic, color-drenched figures and shapes parading down a wall in São Paulo—that she designed, somehow, in her Jersey City, New Jersey, home, a space small enough that she works in the living room on any painting too wide to make it up the winding stairs to her studio. It's not the first time Abney pulled off the implausible. She applied to the Parsons MFA program while doing a stint on a Ford Motor Company assembly line in her native Chicago, and by graduation in 2007 had gotten the attention of Chelsea gallery Kravets Wehby, which immediately sold everything in her studio to a roster of heavy-hitting tastemakers. Mera and Don Rubell, whose collection of contemporary art is widely regarded as one of the best in the world, snapped up the painting she'd made for her thesis, which depicted her grad-school classmates as black prisoners and Abney as a white prison guard holding a machine gun; Beth Rudin DeWoody, another influential collector, was so taken with a portrait that she persuaded the gallery to sell it to her even though it was on hold for someone else.

Recently, Abney has been exploring collage, layering words, arrows, and faces in a bright mix of references. "At first I felt this obligation to talk about race in my work," she says. "Now [it's] more reflective of what I actually deal with. Not that I don't deal with racism, but that's not my whole life." In the fall, as she began paintings for Untitled, an art fair this month in Miami, and a Kravets Wehby exhibition this spring, she was considering touching on the racially charged events in Ferguson, Missouri. But as with any of her influences, which range from *South Park* to hip-hop, that would only be a starting point. "I like to bring everybody's perspective in," she says. "I'd approach it from both sides of the story."

Abney in the living room of her Jersey City home, photographed with an untitled work in progress

Hair by Jason Sweeney/Future of Management+Artists for Cutler/Baden; makeup by Cyndie Sondrowski at Brydges Mackinney for Cit One; production by Heirstooth Productions; fashion assistant: Yoshuo Simmons. Double-faced canvas wall, Public Specialty, $368, wallpublicspecialty.com; felt and leather hat, Stetson, $$$. For details, see Shopping Guide

THE ART ISSUE

NINA CHANEL ABNEY

Half of Nina Chanel Abney's fourth-floor walk-up apartment in Jersey City, New Jersey, looks like it belongs to a typical 26-year-old. Comedy and Spike Lee DVDs are stacked on shelves around a TV, lucky bamboo shoots garnish a blond wood coffee table, and a jumbo-size bag of Twizzlers sits on her kitchenette table. To the left of the futon, however, an entire wall is covered with her latest 7- by 12-foot diptych: Two canvases, exploding in a riotous palette of colors, show the aftermath of a murder at a casino. Cartoonlike figures—including a mustached cocktail waitress crouched on a barstool and a bespectacled man wrapped in an American flag with his brain oozing out of his head—shrink in horror. Several characters wear elbow-length yellow rubber gloves, which, along with ambiguous depictions of race and gender, is a recurring motif in Abney's work. "Everyone in the painting is kind of a suspect," she says. "I use rubber gloves to symbolize that someone has done dirty work."

Photograph by **DANIEL TRAUB**

Nina Chanel Abney at Kravets\Wehby gallery in Manhattan, in front of *Veronica*, 2007, acrylic on canvas.

Abney, whose reserved demeanor contrasts with her art's high-octane, politically charged voice, graduated from Augustana College, a small liberal-arts school in Illinois, then spent a year working on an assembly line at Ford in her hometown of Chicago while preparing her art school applications by night. When she arrived at Parsons The New School of Design in Manhattan, she was one of the youngest students in her M.F.A. program and had never set foot inside a gallery. But she quickly grew savvy; her senior thesis was a stunning, enormous painting called *Class of 2007*. In it, she portrayed her classmates with black skin and sporting orange jumpsuits, and herself, the only African-American in the group, with white skin, wearing a prison guard uniform. The day after she unveiled the piece, Kravets\Wehby gallery invited her to join.

Last spring the gallery featured her first solo show, "Dirty Wash," in which she used wild, bright colors on extra-large canvases to depict narratives including political figures in scandalous situations—think Condoleezza Rice posing seductively in a bikini. "I'm fascinated by how celebrity news has become not more interesting, but more important than politics," she says. "I like to infuse that with race issues."

The show sold out within days, catching the eye of major collectors like Donald and Mera Rubell, who flew to New York to see it (and acquired, in addition to other work, *Class of 2007*). This December the couple will include Abney in their Miami museum's exhibition "30 Americans," which will highlight the work of African-American artists. Abney, the youngest painter in the show, will have her own room. "She fits in with the narrative thread that starts with Robert Colescott," Donald says. "She's a powerful storyteller," Mera adds. "There's a mystery in her work."

Abney agrees. "I have a definite story in my head," she says, "but I like to leave it to the viewer to figure it out." **—HAVEN THOMPSON**

W Art Flash

When she arrived at art school in Manhattan, Abney had never set foot inside a gallery.

The New York Times

Museum and Gallery Listings
Published: April 2, 2009

Last Chance

★ NINA CHANEL ABNEY: 'EMMA'S BASEMENT'; closes on Saturday. The title of Nina Chanel Abney's second New York show, "Emma's Basement," sets the scene for Flaubert's "Madame Bovary" in a perfervid underworld, where presumed absolutes like race and gender are unstable; narratives run from dreamy to nightmarish; and the moral tone is impossible to parse: good and evil switch roles; orgies could be sacred celebrations. Still in her 20s, Ms. Abney was introduced by her very smart gallery just a few years ago, arriving with a fully developed painting style and a command of scale. She sustains that mastery in this show, which has marginally less impact than her first in 2008 — two solo outings in the course of a year stretches even a strong talent thin — but confirms that she is an artist to watch. Kravets/Wehby, 521 West 21st Street, Chelsea, (212) 352-2238, kravetswehbygallery.com. (Cotter)

THE NEXT IRASCIBLES

BY CAROL LEE

The New Irascibles
1985

In 1985, the September issue of *Arts* magazine ran six group portraits by photographer Timothy Greenfield-Sanders capturing the early participants in the East Village art scene—artists, dealers and critics—whom the magazine dubbed "The New Irascibles." Included were David Wojnarowicz, Futura 2000, Mark Kostabi, Kiki Smith, Colin De Land, Pat Hearn, Robert Pincus-Witten and PAPER's own Carlo McCormick, just to name a few. The visual composition was loosely based on Nina Leen's iconic 1951 photograph of Abstract Expressionists titled "The Irascibles," which featured, among others, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and the lone woman, Hedda Sterne. Pincus-Witten, who wrote the accompanying *Arts* piece, astutely observed, "Only beginnings and ends are interesting," while lamenting the transformation of the East Village from artists' playground to gentrified bubble where, he said, "the art has improved" and "has *become art*."

Fast-forward a quarter century later, we are straddling the end and the beginning of something else. When the economy took a nosedive, anxiety spread like wildfire throughout the art world, and the future of the art market, which had been insatiable for so long, looked uncertain. The *Caligula*-style orgy of consumerism, the work that fueled it and the flippant attitude that made it all sexy seemed horribly outdated. The return of the real boomeranged back—and about time, too.

Everyone in the scene can feel the tide changing, and something new is brewing in the air. And said scene, no longer limited to downtown Manhattan, has expanded into something mercurial and sprawling. Even when the times are riddled with uncertainties, creative minds are restless and resourceful. To quote Hunter S. Thompson's famous line: "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro." So here, as an homage to "The New Irascibles," we present a band of young, brave hearts, from Jersey City to the Lower East Side to Bushwick, who have been forging ahead steadily, creating their own momentum, movement, style and even a couple of new business models. They are The Next Irascibles, as photographed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders.

The Irascibles
1951

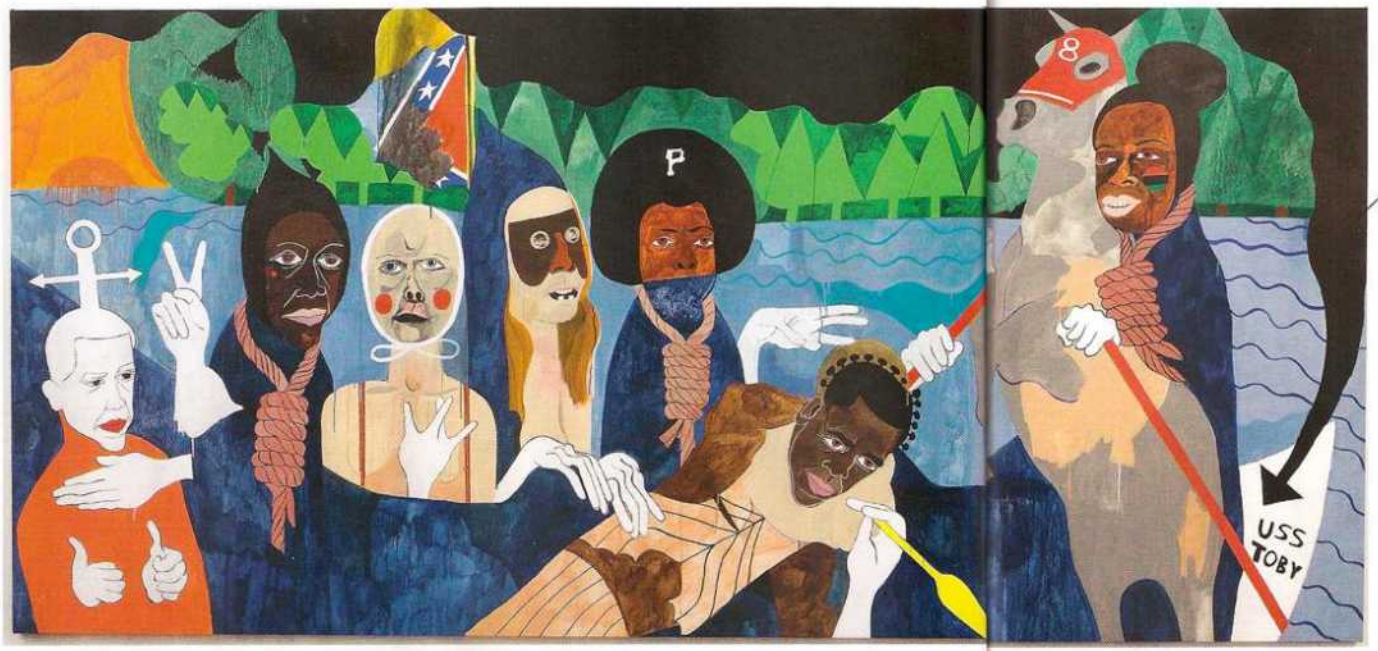
PAPER

THE ART ISSUE

OCTOBER 2009

GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PORTRAITS BY TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS

BEHIND MASKS: **BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION** **NINA CHANEL ABNEY**
JULES DE BALINCOURT **KYLE THURMAN** **MATT MORAVEC** **TIM BARBER**
PATI HERTLING **AUREL SCHMIDT** **JULIA CHIANG**



'The Takeover,' **2008**

NINA CHANEL ABNEY

The work of the 27-year-old painter Nina Chanel Abney is sheer tour-de-force. Her paintings consist of strong feminine and masculine images infused with humor, irony, perversity, satire and fantasy, marked by the bold lines of Francesco Clemente and the sensual yet disturbing colors of Francis Bacon. The style, however, is all her own. The result is that Abney's paintings seem to possess both the permanence of museum pieces and the emotional appeal of street murals. Given such talent, it's not surprising that Abney got picked up by Chelsea gallery Kravets|Wehby right out of grad school and, like a chosen few, launched into a career as an artist without skipping a beat. Everything she's painted so far has been sold, and if you're interested, there's a waiting list. The big-time art patronizing Rubell family was one of Abney's first collectors. Later, when the Rubell Family Collection organized the "30 Americans" show during Art Basel Miami 2008, they gave an entire wing to her paintings.

The Illinois native, named after her mother's favorite singer (Nina Simone) and perfume (Chanel no. 5), moved to New York to attend Parsons' MFA program four years ago. Not totally familiar with the city when she arrived, Abney arbitrarily settled on an apartment in Jersey City. "I feel a little removed from the whole Chelsea and party scenes—I find out about them eventually," says Abney, who has no plans to leave her perch across the river. "I like the distance. It's only 15 minutes away and I can come into the city whenever I want to. But then I come here and it's a little more quiet." She's about to have a piano delivered so she can practice jazz in between working on a large piece for a group show at Kravets|Wehby in October and her first solo show abroad at Fred Gallery in London next year. When you are that good and that busy, you don't need to chase the scene. It comes and finds you—even in Jersey City.

'Close But No Cigar,' **2008**

'Forbidden Fruit,' **2008**

NEUMANN FAMILY COLLECTION, COURTESY OF KRAVETS/WEHBY GALLERY, NEW YORK. MAKEUP: LEORA EDUT