



 Insurance

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of an artist's hands. The artist is using a brush with a dark wooden handle and a metal ferrule to apply yellow paint to a canvas. In the background, a colorful fish, possibly a koi, is visible, adding a sense of artistic focus and detail to the scene.

AXA Art Prize

2021

The bigger picture

At AXA, we believe in the power of art to inspire and enrich our lives.

Protecting our past

We work with the world's most acclaimed art galleries, art collectors and influential global dealers, to insure some of the world's most celebrated art. We are proud supporters of institutions like the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay and Château de Versailles. Plus, our research fund has contributed to the conservation of the world's most cherished pieces, including works by Rothko and Van Gogh. We are committed to supporting the global art community, through our sponsorship of TEFAF (The European Fine Art Fair) and Art Basel.

Enabling our future

But, it's not just our past that we're protecting. We're enabling the artists of the future, too. The AXA Art Prize shines a light on emerging artists, offering them an unrivalled opportunity to be seen by a global audience, including leading figures of the art world and helping them to transform their future.

It's all part of the bigger picture.

AXA Art Prize

Welcome to the AXA Art Prize 2021. We are delighted to showcase the 40 exceptional young artists in this year's final. Their submissions offer a bold and brilliant take on modern America. The AXA Art Prize shines a spotlight on the re-emergence of figurative art and the undiscovered stars of its future.

But it doesn't stop there.

The art world's eyes on the prize

The AXA Art Prize gives each student an unrivalled platform to have their work seen by curators from the country's most influential museums, including The Met, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the National Gallery of Art, and to be judged by some of America's greatest living figurative artists, such as Bo Bartlett, Rachel Feinstein, Elizabeth Peyton, Calida Rawles, and Peter Saul. We hope, for many, it's a bold beginning to an illustrious career.

Know You Can

As Georgia O'Keeffe says, "To create one's own world takes courage." At AXA XL, we are proud to enable the next generation of world-leading figurative artists to know that they can take risks, push boundaries and pursue their vision.

axaartprize.com | axaartprizegallery.com | axaxl.com

Welcome from Scott Gunter

It's official: figurative painting is flourishing in the United States of America – and these 40 extraordinary figurative artworks are a testament to that.

It gives me enormous pleasure to introduce you to this year's finalists, America's next generation of figurative artists, each one sharing their own journey on the canvas.

The themes that emerge from this year's competition speak to a world in flux and the importance of protecting what matters: our family, our relationships, the world we live in and perhaps most importantly, our mental wellbeing. The works also ask bold and brave questions about identity, perception, race and nationality.

What strikes me, as I view the works on display virtually, is the vital importance of a platform for artists to continue to explore, define and capture society, as well as how it views itself. As one of this year's finalists, Jordan Greenblatt, articulates, "Part of the difficulty of the artist's job is to balance being a telling mirror for our time and our people, while still hoping to maintain universality and timelessness."

Art is a reflection of the world we live in. I am humbled by the talent on display in this exhibition and, on behalf of AXA XL, I am grateful to provide these young artists with an opportunity to share their figurative art, and the stories they have the courage to tell. Of course, they are not just sharing them with the public, they are sharing them with the curators of the most influential museums in our country and with the leading practitioners of figurative art in America today. The winner of last year's prize, Michon Sanders, sums up the extraordinary exposure the AXA Art

Prize offers finalists by saying, "Knowing all those different sets of eyes were on our work was just mindblowing."

The AXA Art Prize exists to shine a spotlight on the re-emergence of figurative art and the undiscovered stars of its future. As Georgia O'Keeffe acknowledges, it takes "courage" to "create one's own world". This prize celebrates all 40 artists who are bold enough to take risks, fearless enough to imagine what hasn't yet been imagined and perceptive enough to connect powerfully through their canvases.

Taking part in the competition can be a truly transformative process. Indeed, many of our previous winners go on to seize success, on a global and national scale. The winner of the AXA Art Prize in 2019, Anna Park, was commissioned to design the iconic artwork for *Mank*, the David Fincher film, as well as hosting a successful solo exhibition in Rome. While fellow 2019 finalists, Maria Fragoso and Uzo Njoku, have lit up the New York art scene with several solo shows.

Who knows what is in store for this year's winner and many of the other highly acclaimed artists who have stepped into the spotlight?

We are excited to see where that journey on the canvas, and their creative courage, takes them next.

Scott Gunter
CEO, AXA XL,
Stamford, CT





Where personhood can flourish

Seph Rodney
Writer, Editor, and Museum Scholar

In the work of the 40 finalists for the 2021 AXA Art Prize some key themes emerge upon examination. There are a smattering of images depicting bodies under duress, bodies engaged in labor, and some in abject circumstances. However, in the majority of the work two more salient motifs appear again and again: the central figure confronting the viewer with their gaze and a spendthrift and joyous embellishment of the human form made with decorative painterly accoutrements.

In our current historical moment these themes are both punctual and imperative; they tell us something about how this generation of figurative artists experience the weight of personhood and how they imagine they will carry it to where it can flourish.

Among the finalists I count about 15 images in which a central figure confronts the viewer's gaze – almost 40%. A'Kailah Byrd-Greene's *Sour Patch* is a lovely example. Here, the painter gives us a Black woman's face with her natural hair, naked shoulders, mouth slightly parted, and gaze steadfast. The subject is aware she is being looked at, and she lets us know she knows. This painting thus recognizes the agency of the sitter. Thus, Byrd-Greene acknowledges that this person is not a specimen to be made into a saint, or martyr, or symbol. She wants to be in dialogue with the viewer, to engage in a kind of reciprocity.

In addition to creating moments of affirmation, these artists also dive into celebration, with all the effusive abandon that the celebratory feeling implies. Look at the pencil drawing of Djilas Gomez, *Kintsugi I*. There's a mosaic of stones and dying flowers swirling around the head of a figure that would otherwise just be a brooding man.

But in that gyre of swirling stones and errant swathes of gold he seems like a demi-god concocting a scheme to break an oracle's prophecy. Then, in the painting of Antoinette Legnini, *LA/1986/Pelham Parkway* the decorative impulse becomes more aligned with conveying identity. The coded tats, jewelry, and

hairstyle of the main figure all mean to convey his history and allegiances. The same is true for the painting of Julie Weaver Loffer who depicts Indigenous people at a gathering where they flaunt their costume regalia, resplendent and magnificently colorful. Crystal Miller marries the painterly impulse that I see in Gomez, to the cultural identification that I perceive in Legnini and Loffer.

Here she makes the two figures rendered in psychedelic colors representative precisely of the general category of women of color with their lips and hair composed of effulgent glitter and beadwork – all of it sensuous and extravagant and perhaps more than I expect, more even than I can easily make room for in my head and heart.

Similarly, but in a more subdued register, the painting of Mieyoshi Ragernoir uses gold accents expanded around the head a central figure to become both a sun's corona and a halo, suggesting that the Black women in this image are blessed.

Not just these figures, we too are blessed to witness this work that seeks to recognize each other's unique being and pictorially invent ways to celebrate it.



A top-down photograph of an artist's workspace. A hand is shown holding a paintbrush, dipping it into a black paint container. Surrounding the hand are several other paint containers in various colors: red, blue, brown, white, and yellow. A water bottle is visible in the bottom left corner. The background is a light-colored, textured surface. A large, semi-transparent blue diagonal overlay covers the right side of the image, containing a list of names.

Artists

Sarah Barnett

Cristina Beard

Quinn Antonio Briceño

A'Kailah Byrd-Greene

Lukas Carlson

Logan Crompton

Zeinab Diomande

Maria Elias

Santiago Galeas

Djilas Gomez

Analinda González

Jordan Greenblatt

C'naan Hamburger

Kevin Hopkins

Jazzmin Imani

Antoinette Legnini

Wendy Liang

Oscar Lopez

Assata Mason

Paulina Meyer

Crystal Miller

Hannah Murray

Caroline Myers

Mil Newton

Kirsten Perrotta

Ruth L. Poor

Jason Rafferty

Mieyoshi Ragernoir

Audrey Rodriguez

Luis Antonio Rodriguez

Abigail Rugg

Selina Andréa Scott

Jed Webster Smith

Siana Smith

Kylee Snow

Alaina Speiser

Pedro Troncoso

Derek Walker

Julie Weaver Loffer

Yuri Yuan

Protection

2020

oil on canvas | 40 x 30 inches



Sarah Barnett

Washington State University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Protection is of a figure tightly swaddled in plastic vinyl. My work often fuses sensations of comfort, familiarity and love with horror, pain and death. This painting elicits tension between suffocation and warmth, safety and violence, trauma and intimacy. It was inspired by paradoxical feelings and experiences surrounding childbirth. But, as life has been disrupted, it has acquired new meaning since the ongoing pandemic and grief felt throughout the world.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice currently revolves around my time as a graduate student and teaching assistant. It is strange pursuing an MFA during this period, but I am grateful for the privilege to still be supported and in school. My practice is comprised of my classes, painting in my "office" most days for long but rewarding hours, building lessons and enjoying the beautiful region that I am in.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Initially, I was motivated to study the human form during figure drawing courses in my undergraduate program. I am fascinated by the insides of the body. I am drawn to the strange materiality of our flesh but also to the deeper layers that exist and want to represent this in my work. Our body is our vessel, the point between inner and outer spaces and I have always been intrigued by what that could mean.

Instagram | @sarahbarnettart



Flor-Ida

2019

egg tempera and oil on canvas | 60 x 36 inches



Cristina Beard

The George Washington University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

The content of this painting is based on the history of the people of Florida, juxtaposing the social and political time and subjects in a contemporary narrative. *Flor-Ida* elevates women, particularly those who have enriched Florida's culture and are mostly overshadowed and unheard in the history of the United States. It is also a critique of the political and social disparities in society in the United States.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice starts with researching themes that relate to Caribbean and Latin American culture in the United States, including gender and social inequalities. I begin to find connections between different aspects of human experiences and relate them to my personal heritage. Finally, I gather iconographic elements from different sources, create a design, and move the elements until they organically flow into my creation.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I wanted to explore my viewers' reaction to the sarcastic narrative and the complexity of the hidden iconographic elements in my painting. *Flor-Ida* requires attention and I want to discover if my viewer could relate to the small stories in the painting and its social-political context.

Instagram | @cristinabeard



La Cortadora de Café

2021

acrylic, Made in USA stickers, lottery tickets, and found prints collaged on canvas
30 x 30 inches



Quinn Antonio Briceño

Washington University in St. Louis

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

La Cortadora de Café shows a Nicaraguan woman harvesting coffee beans. The figure is juxtaposed with collaged found materials that connect directly to my life in the United States. Latin American tile patterns, which are ubiquitous in homes throughout Latin America, surround and camouflage the woman in a new space designed specifically for her, separating her from the viewer and isolating her within the working environment of a coffee picker.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice highlights the working class. I start by manipulating photographs in Photoshop where I isolate the figure and add in warped Latin American tile patterns. From there, smaller sketches, collages and monotype prints are made to test out different media to see where they might fit in the painting. Then I paint the image and use what I have learned in the earlier process to finish the work.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I learned about the AXA Art Prize through some artists that I follow on Instagram. I was really inspired by the work I saw from previous competitions. Even before I started my MFA at Washington University, I had decided to apply to this year's competition. In addition, knowing that this year's amazing AXA Art Prize jurors would be looking at my work made it even more worthwhile to apply.

www.quinnbriceno.com

Instagram | @qbricenoart



Sour Patch

2020

oil on canvas | 60 x 48 inches



A'Kailah Byrd-Greene

Claremont Graduate University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

The essence of an emotion, feeling, or experience is something I like to capture in my work. *Sour Patch* is an encapsulation of the feelings I had amidst the pandemic. Often feeling like I was stuck in a place that had no real bright side, I decided to contrast the idea of staying optimistic during a time of uncertainty with the use of vivid candy-like colors. I hope that my work can encapsulate the expressions that we feel as a society. Black women are often misrepresented in our communities. By putting a Black woman as a central figure in my work, I hope that we can reflect on our views and ignite a change within ourselves to promote a healthier and positive outlook.

How would you describe your studio practice?

It starts with a deep reflection on how I, or the people around me, are feeling. I will often keep up with social and political movements and find expressions that help capture the emotions I am feeling or seeing. From there, I sketch and compile images of people that I feel will help promote the narrative that I am going for. Then I allow myself to feel what color schemes best represent the emotion and start painting.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Being able to relate to human experiences through the lens of other artists' work has always been interesting to me. Figurative work is the best way I know how to directly connect with another person or artist.

www.akailahbyrdgreene.com

Instagram | @artbyakailah



Sternumb

2020

pastel, charcoal, and oil on canvas

40 x 30 inches



Lukas Carlson

Minneapolis College of Art and Design

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

In *Sternumb*, I observed and illustrated the physical form through wet and dry media. I was attracted to the subtle nuances in skin and rewarded with an unanticipated subsurface illumination. This painting was guided by an effort to describe the body as a container, holding pressure and heat, and the mortality of its function.

Much of my work involves mental and psychological themes. More specifically, I am dedicated to discovering new ways of expressing the state of melancholia. I often reference myself, both physically and internally. However, the rolling model is one that welcomes all of human drama rather than any specific individual.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was initially drawn to the AXA Art Prize because I was intrigued by its multi-stage jurying process. It expressed AXA's professionalism and dedication to the artists and the exhibition to produce the best show possible. The most notable thing for me is the tremendous list of current and past jurors.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

It is the innate ability to place ourselves in another person's experience that I find unique. From my perspective, to feel what others feel and to build a shared experience is paramount to being human. With means of visual empathy, the figure is unparalleled.

www.lukascarlson.com

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



Nude for Me

2020

oil pastel, oil, and acrylic on canvas

20 x 16 inches



Logan Crompton

Kansas City Art Institute

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Nude for Me is an exploration of identity through the lens of sensuality and portraiture. The subject is in the act of undressing, assumedly for the benefit of the viewer, exposed and in a naked state. However, as the title suggests, nude is the mode and theme of this work, which has a more positive connotation within the art history canon, as it suggests the absence of the male gaze.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

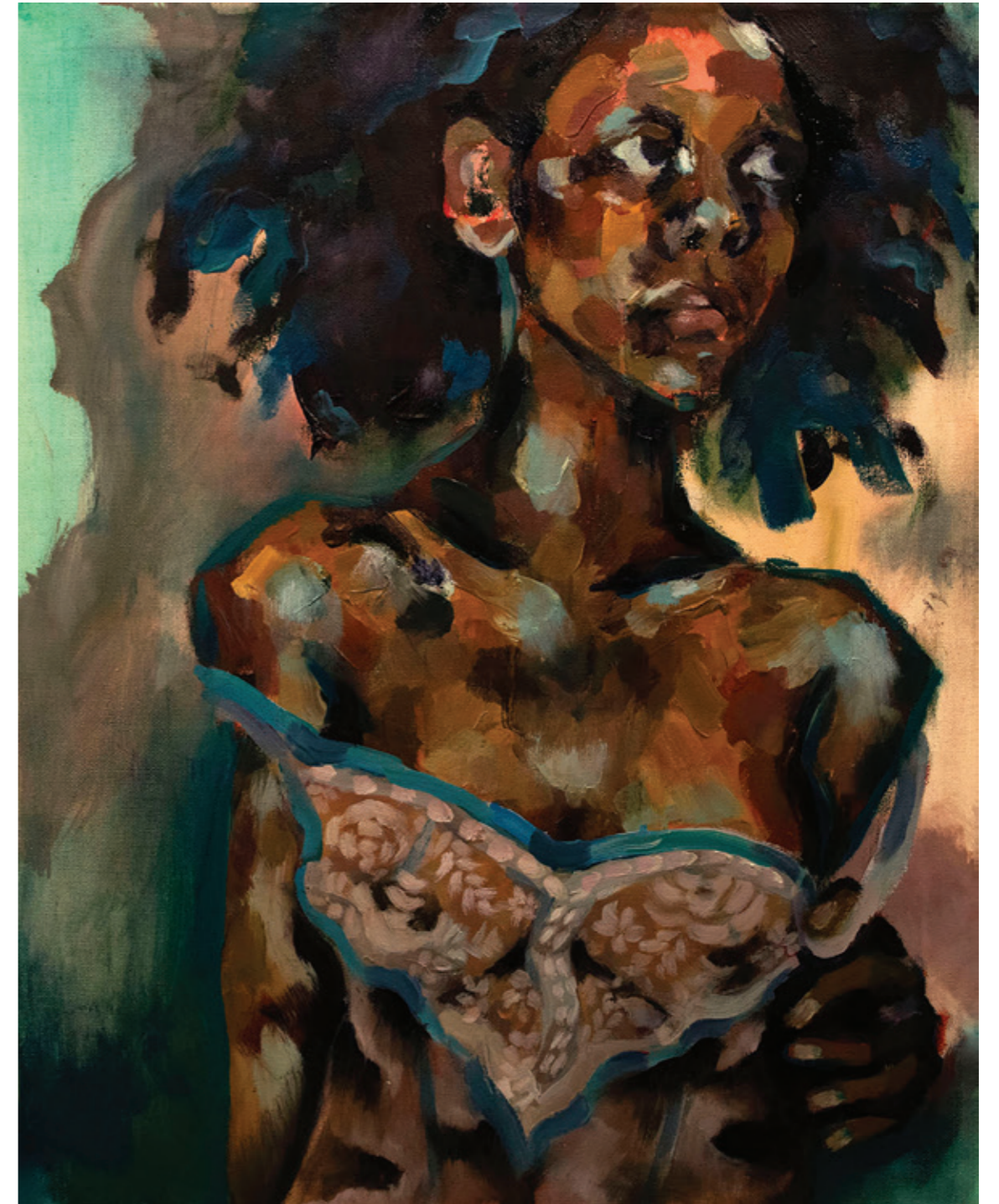
The prize provides a unique opportunity for exposure on a level that I have not been privileged to experience in my career so far. My hope is that participation will provide me with essential learning experience that will aid in my future as a working artist. I also hope to gain connections with professionals in the field as well as fellow artists, whose work I am sure to be inspired by.

How do you approach a new work?

I approach a new work without fear or a plan. I find an inspiring image, usually a photo I have taken myself or through an archive of curated images that I scan from old magazines and books and begin to piece together a narrative. Then I collage elements into a work with tape to explore possible routes of creation. Each step of a piece is documented so I am able to revisit it or use it within another piece.

www.lcrompton8.wixsite.com/logancrompton

Instagram | @logeymakesart



The Corner of the Room Was Cold and Blue

2021

collaged photographs, paper, acrylic, gouache, oil pastel,
oil, and wallpaper on toned paper | 18 x 24 inches



Zeinab Diomande

The University of The Arts

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

One of the recurring themes in my work is mental health. This piece works with the ideas of isolation and grief while also dealing with homesickness. I am an immigrant from the Ivory Coast and have not been home for two years. Working on this painting was a way for me to address how isolating it can be at times but also to figure out ways to bring home to me, whenever I cannot get to it.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was motivated to apply to the AXA Art Prize with the support and encouraging words of my faculty and peers. You never know what could happen unless you try. Whatever the outcome, it is still worth the attempt.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Portraiture, and in my case self-portraiture, raises the question: what is the extent to which one can communicate ideas through their lens. However, the real challenge is who the work is targeting. One does not speak for everyone, but one can use elements relevant to a collective experience and remodel them in a way that is relevant to their personal experience. Adapting what already exists, and reinventing it in a way that shapes a new reality, is primarily what interests me about figurative art.

www.ztherat.com
Instagram | @ztheratt



Pollo Rostizado

2021

acrylic and colored pencil on black paper
30 x 22 inches



Maria Elias

Lamar Dodd School of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

One day, my family decided to get two rotisserie chickens for dinner. My mother started to cry, because in México, her family could only afford half a chicken on a special occasion. They are not the fanciest thing to eat, but for us, it is a symbol of how far we have come. Both of my parents work in the poultry industry, surrounded by chicken corpses. But we are grateful for everything that we have even if it requires working in such a grotesque environment. This piece is an homage to my parents and all poultry workers.

How would you describe your studio practice?

As a first generation Mexican American, I have witnessed my community face racial and social injustices. My passion is to raise awareness of these disparities by creating surreal works of art that incorporate bright colors, inspired by my culture, using paint and colored pencil.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

2020 has made me very aware of the issues my community faces. I feel that, in the past year, I have grown so much as an artist and have found my purpose. Through the AXA Art Prize I want to share the ideas that I struggle with every day like greed, gratitude, suffering and hope. Receiving support from Professor Margaret Morrison at the University of Georgia also encouraged me to apply.

www.reconditeart.com

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



Ancient Arcana

2020

oil on canvas | 48 x 36 inches



Santiago Galeas

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

My work highlights a connection between the expression and diversity of gender and sexuality in my subjects and the complexities one finds already in nature. The model here is Asim, who I met in Philadelphia a decade ago. Asim identifies as non-binary and they have developed a deep love for tarot reading, crystals and spiritual nourishment. Also featured in this painting are ferns, one of the oldest plants on earth. Ferns, like tarot, have a mysterious origin and have been around for ages.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I talk to my subjects for a few hours. These conversations will reach vulnerable topics, which informs the poses we reach when I am acquiring references. Often, I will paint on top of paintings that I have already created. You can see hints of the painting that existed underneath, the most visible part being the puma eye on the lower right section of Asim's t-shirt. At one point, there were two detailed pumas that dominated the canvas.

How do you approach a new work?

Often the ideas begin to surface before I even have a subject in mind. I'll start painting something that means something to me, then speak with a new subject and start painting their portrait on top of that existing painting. In our conversations, I like to find intersections between their experiences and my own. So the painting essentially mirrors this process when I use my own images as a jumping off point for the new work.

www.santiagogaleas.com

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



Kintsugi I

2021

white pencil and gold leaf on paper
22 x 30 inches



Djilas Gomez

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Kintsugi I is an internal self-representation of a situation I rarely verbalize but must externalize: we must accept and allow ourselves to heal from the situations that scar us. The main motivation of this artwork is to show how I feel after the disappearance of my brother. I believe that the feeling of loss is something that anyone can relate to. In the Dominican Republic, broken pieces of ceramics are used to make a floor with an interesting pattern. In the same way, we must use those broken pieces of our past. They make us who we are today and prepare us for what we will be tomorrow.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

To be involved in the AXA Art Prize is not only a challenge in of itself, but an excellent opportunity for an emerging artist to gain life-changing recognition.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Contrary to other expressions of art, I can be more detailed and loyal to reality. For me, figurative art is more demanding from a technical point of view. It is a challenge that I love to accept, achieving a convincing resemblance or capturing the essence of a place or a person. I like to work with images that are recognizable, so that the viewer can connect and interpret the work in front of them easily.

www.djilasgomez.com

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



Detained

2021

chalk pastel and colored pencil on paper
17.5 x 20.25 inches



Analinda González

New Mexico State University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

My work concerns the emotional weight of my father's deportation to Mexico twenty years ago and his longing to be reunited with his family in the United States. The shallow depth of field signifies the physical distance between him and American land. I chose to shed light on my father's story as a means of placing the viewer in my family's difficult situation.

My father, who is originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, was deported when I was four years old. My work captures the emotional burden he must bear and his isolation indicates his physical separation from my family while he is still emotionally connected to us.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I am a previous finalist of the AXA Art Prize. I had a remarkable experience visiting the physical exhibition in 2020 and met many successful artists and curators. The AXA Art Prize gives me the opportunity to engage in the broader discourse of art and I am extremely grateful to have been accepted again.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

I produce paintings and drawings that depict the personal impact of socio-political issues, specifically immigration. Rather than focusing on the underlying structural issues of our immigration system, I produce work about my father's deportation to create a personal narrative between my work and audience.

Instagram | @analinda_art



Bottom of the Sea

2020

collaged canvas, acrylic, ink, sand, string, glue, spray paint, wooden blocks, and masonite on wood
36 x 48 inches



Jordan Greenblatt
The Cooper Union

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

I have been a Milton Avery fan since first seeing his work at an exhibition when I was very young. I am drawn to his sense of stillness and serenity, which largely eludes me in my own life and paintings. I tried to reimagine Avery's Red Fisherman as an exercise in trying to capture my hero's serenity myself. I gave it my best, knowing I would fail. I view it as a final acceptance of my own sensibility and temperament.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I create representational paintings/reliefs utilizing collaged elements, cut and rendered by hand, with different styles and applications. My goal is to create a form of pastiche, where the viewer is taken on a tour around the painting with the various components and historical references serving as the attractions. The works are celebratory – they are well-made, ornamental, and fun – something akin to the spirit of Las Vegas. I am especially interested in exploring this aesthetic language as a kind of Trojan horse to disguise a dialogue around unnecessarily taboo emotion.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Figurative artwork is perhaps the greatest way of understanding how we as people see ourselves and those around us. Part of the difficulty of the artist's job is to balance being a telling mirror for our time and our people, while still hoping to maintain universality and timelessness.

www.jordangreenblatt.info
Instagram | @jordygreenblatt



Otherwise Known as Zuccotti Park

2019

pen on paper | 9.5 x 31 inches



C'naan Hamburger

Hunter College

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

This drawing, based on a visit to Zuccotti Park, is an ode to a nondescript, privately owned public space. It was not designed for what made it well-known, but by radical action it has acquired new meaning as a skateboarding spot. It has been transformed through a re-visualizing and re-purposing of architecture.

Making landscapes requires one to confront the genre's troubled past, including a history of land surveying and cartography as colonial tools. I am also keenly aware of the dangers of art being used as a technology and artists being employed as tools. I hope this tension is visible in the pen strokes that depict the pink marble of Zuccotti Park – commemorating the potential vitality of all spaces.

How would you describe your studio practice?

English is not my mother tongue. I am a former professional skateboarder, winning the Women's Street World Championship at 15. I am also an outdoor educator, who taught survival skills in the American Southwest. Now, I introduce the natural world to city dwellers. These seemingly disparate experiences inform my visual language and how I navigate compositions in my current studio practice.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

Since World War II, representational art has had to tussle for legitimacy. The AXA Art Prize recognizes that figurative art has not been exhausted. The existence of this competition is a rare and integral encouragement to artists who want to expand the field of figurative art.



Pay Attention Please

2021

oil on stretched curtain | 48 x 36 inches



Kevin Hopkins

Kansas City Art Institute

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Childhood grants an emotional safety that allows one to be “aware” and blissfully ignorant. *Pay Attention Please* looks back to the early 2000s, describing my memory of one of the earliest adventures I had with my younger brother. The work is a romanticization of naivety; made in an attempt to document the past and reflect, lovingly, on familial interaction.

Pay Attention Please reflects the theme of family values by illustrating a pair of siblings avoiding eye contact while being admonished by a parental figure. The piece exposes how futile it is to lecture adventurous children. The painting also shows that the relationship between brothers may also include a pact of silence when their plans are foiled.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

Exposure and validation influenced my decision to apply to the AXA Art Prize. The idea of celebrating the Black body through humor also had some sway in my decision to enter. The most prominent reason for my participation, however, is to honor my late mother, Beverly Hopkins, by attempting to recall my earliest experiences with her through paint.

How do you approach a new work?

With each new piece, I want to challenge the fundamental preconceptions of how I work. Not just in an attempt to make something “unique” but to keep myself in a constant state of exploration – even if I am making the same type of work conceptually.

www.kevinhopkinsart.com

Instagram | @beebro_irl



Sound of Da Police

2020

oil on canvas | 48 x 38 inches



Jazzmin Imani

Brown University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Sound of Da Police visualizes the relationship between overseers from American slavery and modern-day police officers. It is inspired by a line in the song by KRS-One, of the same name. In the song, the word “overseer” is compared to the word “officer.” This piece is meant to highlight that the oppressive systems that govern society today are the same ones that existed for my ancestors. My artwork is deeply cultural, amplifying my experiences as a Black woman. Although this piece is specifically calling attention to a socio-political issue, my work also embodies how proud I am of my culture and the joy that exists within it.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I have been interested in the AXA Art Prize for years after seeing the amazing artwork that has been selected over time. I applied because I feel that my work and my message are equally worth sharing, and I hope that my inclusion in the exhibition has served as a source of inspiration for other young artists.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

My favorite part of being a figurative painter is having the opportunity to create new characters and expressions. When I paint, I am attempting to create a mirror that will allow people to see their culture in a different light. I use figure painting as a method to facilitate new relationships between people and their history.

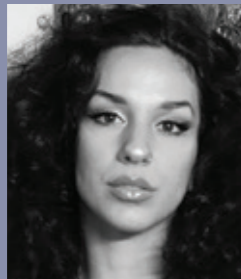
www.jazzminimani.com
Instagram | @jazzminimani



LA/1986/Pelham Parkway

2020

oil, acrylic, paper clips, ribbon, CDs, and coffee beans on gessoed Canson Mixed Media paper mounted to shaped chipboard | 18.5 x 11.5 inches



Antoinette Legnini

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

LA/1986/Pelham Parkway is a part of Bronx Faces, a collaborative community art series that pairs the stories and experiences of Bronxites with a mixed media portrait. Here is LA's Bronx Faces story: "My neighborhood is essentially the entire Bronx. I've lived in a dozen different neighborhoods throughout the Bronx, but Pelham Parkway Projects will always be home. There's so much talent in them projects. I was blessed to grow up out there. Having fun was pretty easy for me and my group of friends growing up. The Bronx is a tough love kinda place. Growing up there was definitely not easy, but I wouldn't want to grow up any other way. Having less forced me to appreciate what I have, which is a family and friendships that will last a lifetime. Now that I'm older, my favorite local spot is my mom's crib. The food is always lit and there's always fresh coffee no matter what time it is."

Bronx Faces documents a multitude of Bronx experiences through the contextual differences and intersections in time, neighborhood, race, age, and culture. The answers that the participants share are unedited, giving space to Bronxites to document their own histories through an unfiltered tongue. Bronx Faces gives space to acknowledge the interconnection and variety among Bronx experiences so we can collectively stand up and support each other.

How would you describe your studio practice?

In Bronx Faces and beyond, I collaborate with my subjects through interview questions and include them in the art making process to make their respective portraits richer and more personal. Having the collaborative process in my studio practice by building relationships, learning from one another, and connecting with people keeps my priority in focus: representing folks in ways that make them feel seen, heard, and respected.

www.legniniart.com

Instagram | [@legnini.art](https://www.instagram.com/legnini.art) [@bronxfaces](https://www.instagram.com/bronxfaces)



Afternoon

2020

watercolor on paper | 22 x 30 inches



Wendy Liang

California College of the Arts

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

My work reflects the huge cultural change caused by the pandemic. Specifically, I depict the longing we all share for simple social gatherings, which the pandemic took away from us. I wanted to remind people that the simple and fun life that we remember will soon return. The transparent and fluid qualities of watercolor gave me the freedom to create the moody, atmospheric background contrasted by the realistic figures in the foreground.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I make art to change stereotypes, increase awareness of social justice issues and reduce hatred and violence against minorities in this country. I make art to reveal the ugly and to celebrate the beautiful. Both qualities coexist and make life complex and interesting. My paintings tell stories about the myriad of human emotions: loneliness, fear, doubt, anger, nostalgia and sorrow. My work marks the experience of this critical turning point in history and depicts the ways in which people rise to these challenges.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I enjoy capturing the vivid moments of people in motion and revealing their various emotions, evident or subtle. My art conveys complex and layered meanings, dualities and opposites. The juxtaposition of Apollo, who is rational, calm, and thoughtful, and Dionysus, who is impulsive, aggressive and indulgent, features in my imagery. These dualities can exist in an infinite number of forms and variations. Figurative work is an ideal medium for depicting this.

www.wendyliang.com

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



Excavando Mi Pasado (Digging My Past)

2020

oil, graphite, and enamel paint on wood panel
12 x 9 inches



Oscar Lopez
San Jose State University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

This self-portrait reflects my struggle with assimilation and acculturation as an immigrant in the United States. Within this process, I have found that many immigrants are in danger of losing the importance of cultural heritage. While others fight to embrace, recover and honor it. This work reflects that experience. That strife is reflected in the physical use of materials and textures in this painting.

How would you describe your studio practice?

It's based on research and experimentation. Understanding the multiple sources that I am interested in is fundamental to having a clear voice and position that will help me to communicate visually. Experimenting with materials, media and techniques allows me to add visual vocabulary to communicate, similar to the feeling of when I was learning a second language. I was able to listen and answer, but the difference is that visual art can communicate with many more than a specific language can.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

The socio-political dynamics of human society are always present in my thinking process and work. I continually seek a deeper understanding of human behavior around identity, immigration and culture.

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



Rattus

2021

oil on canvas mounted to MDF board

24 x 48 inches



Assata Mason

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Rattus presents a world inhabited by rats. The figure takes a rat-like stance as they are surrounded by suggestive forms of what appear to be rats. In a world, such as the one created in *Rattus*, the viewer must scurry through the possibilities and gnaw their way through the narrative.

The narrative that is present within *Rattus* is quite flexible. Depending on the interpretation of the viewer, *Rattus* allows you to investigate the space and feel part of it. This way of inviting the audience in, psychologically transports individuals into a space that is intimidatingly unknown.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice is similar to a functioning factory with a consistent output of energy. The paintings are extremely labor intensive and precise in terms of my style of working. I am currently working on oil paintings that address my way of working and propel my way of thinking.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

There is an undeniable beauty and mystery that lies in figurative work. There is also an endless mass of narratives that are possible when it comes to making work about the forms of flesh. Personally, my figurative work consists of my own body, so there is a free range of depiction that I have control over while taking charge over my own figure.

www.assatamason.com

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



Untitled (From a Dream)

2020

oil on canvas | 36 x 48 inches



Paulina Meyer

Pratt Institute

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

In my paintings, I explore dream worlds made of strange symbols and colors that evoke a purgatorial space in which my subjects appear between life and death. Dreams, ripe with strange imagery, are often the source of my paintings. They are perhaps the truest communication of the subconscious. Inspired by a dream in which I escaped from a purple sea and found refuge in an island made of rosemary, I created *Untitled (From a Dream)*. This process developed during quarantine because I wanted to express the dream-like feeling of living in a world in which nothing felt as it should.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

My professor, Mona Brody, alerted me to the AXA Art Prize. I had just finished a series of figurative paintings unlike the rest of my non-figurative work and saw a welcoming space to share them. This past year has been a crucial time for artists, and the AXA Art Prize feels like an opportunity to progress towards a post-lockdown world.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

In my work, I explore the theme of memory. I use pattern and artifact to create illusionary spaces inspired by the fairytales I was told as a child. The way in which these fairytales intersect with the memories of growing up offer an in-between state similar to dreaming. The repetition of memory-based patterns and symbols in my paintings forms a wayfinding in these spaces built upon the unreal.

www.paulinameyer.com

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



Hair Like Me

2020

beads, glitter, gems, and acrylic on canvas
60 x 50 inches



Crystal Miller

Cleveland Institute of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

The work I submitted revolves around the ideas of empowering Black women. I use beads, glitter, acrylic and rhinestones to create posterized portraits of American women on a large scale. My main goal is to convey African-American beauty, female empowerment and grace.

Instead of using representational color, I use high contrast colors to not only represent Black skin but also celebrate Black life. From a cultural standpoint, Black women have been told that their natural hair is ugly, distracting and nappy. I completely disagree with these stereotypes, and I use these materials, such as glitter and beads to combat stereotypes and create an individualized aesthetic for Black women.

How would you describe your studio practice?

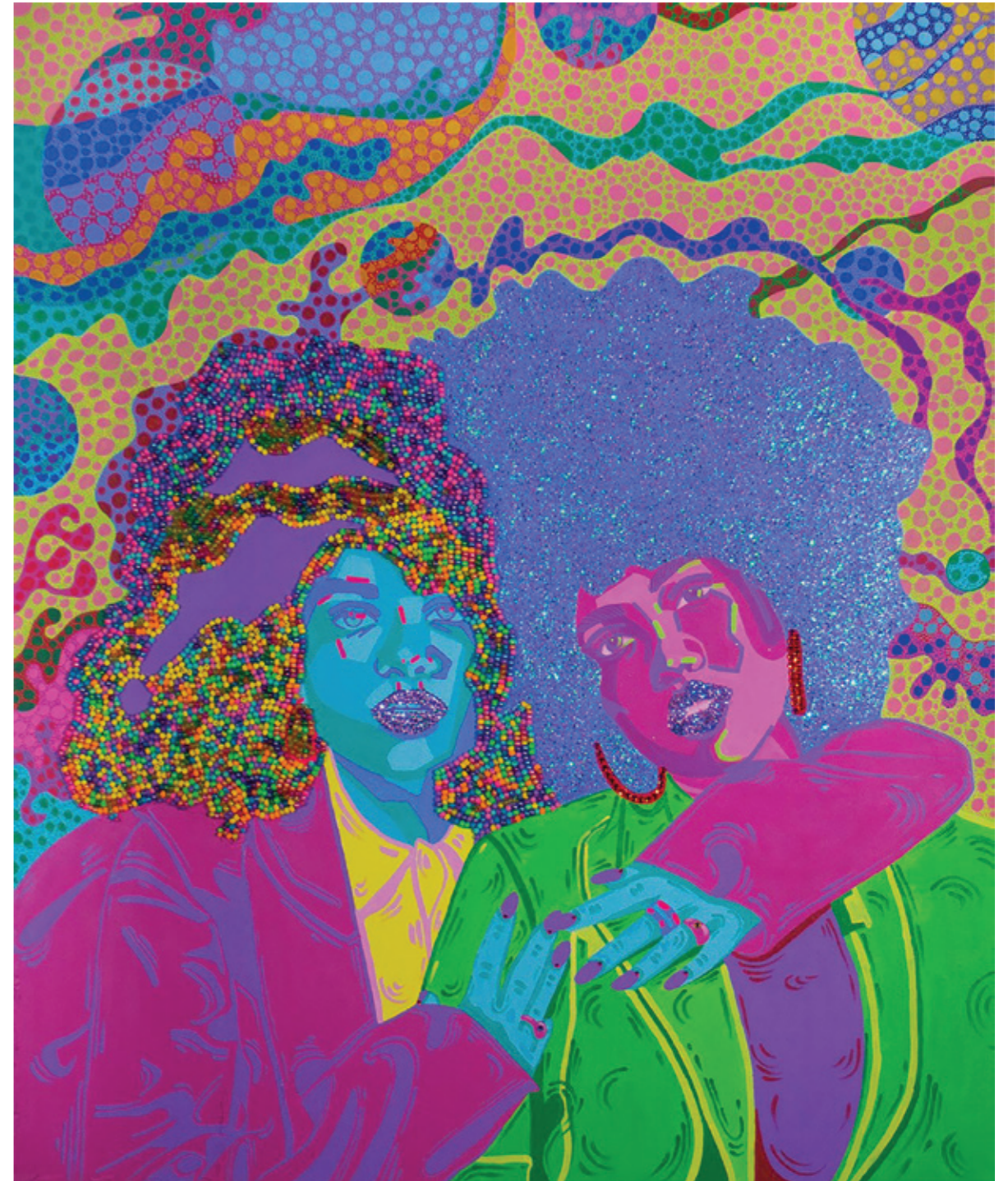
I would describe my studio practice as my sacred, happy place. The place I go to when I am overflowed with thoughts and just want to make something. Of course, that must include glitter or some type of shiny material. I make art that reflects my own experiences and my Blackness.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

Themes such as Black beauty, women empowerment, the Black experience and my own personal individualized aesthetic always come up when I create a work.

www.crymuseum.weebly.com

Instagram | @crymuseum



Rohini

2021

oil on linen | 48 x 46 inches



Hannah Murray

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

In the painting of *Rohini*, I am taking on a beautiful woman in a place of power. In the past, paintings of women were posed in rooms of castles that were owned by men. In my painting, this woman owns her own world. That is her painting on the wall, her fur, the drink she likes and has fixed for herself. She relishes her own beauty and power. The temperature in the shadows represents the heat she exudes rather than how light falls on a wall. However, I aim for the painting to unpack slowly and for the slight distortions to bely your first impressions into an uncanny feel.

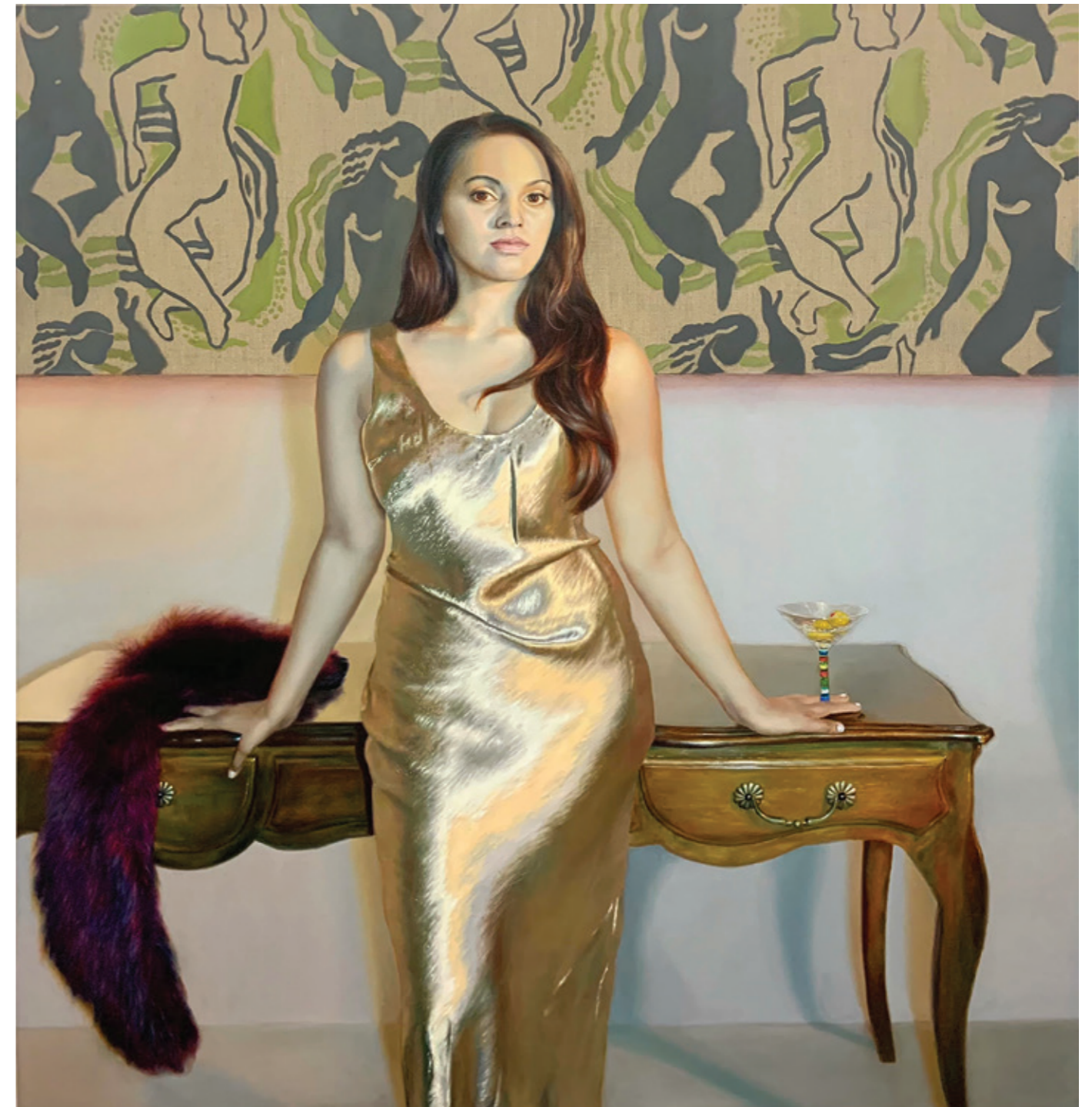
The painting speaks to ideas of wealth, seducing the viewer using exaggerated luxurious textures, yet upon closer inspection, something does not seem quite right – her drink so close to the edge, the temperature in the shadows making no sense, the flatness of the wall compared to the overly described surface of the dress, the blue in her skin. Whilst the work talks to female sexuality and power, it also acts as a vivid reminder of our bodies, the illusion of painting, and the materiality of wealth.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

Whilst at the New York Academy of Art, I was lucky enough to view the AXA Art Prize competition twice. Both times I was blown away by the variety, talent, and cultural importance the exhibition showcased. I was eager to put my work forward into an opportunity which would showcase it to a wide audience.

www.hannahmurray-art.com

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



Icon

2020

BIC ballpoint pen and gold leaf on paper
24 x 18 inches



Caroline Myers

University of Alabama at Birmingham

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

As a play on traditional icon portraiture, I created this drawing to answer the question: “Who can be represented in icon imagery and why?” Although adorned in the traditional golden halo, the Guatemalan woman represented in this work is a far cry from the subjects depicted throughout history. The medium plays into this theme as well. Instead of costly pigments, I chose to utilize a widely accessible, inexpensive tool – the ballpoint pen.

When I began studying art history, I was captivated by icon portraiture. However, the subjects of these works always represented the greatest wealth and power. I thought back to a photo my best friend took on a mission trip to Guatemala in high school. The figure, a poor woman of color, represented everything that traditional icon imagery did not. She became the perfect subject and cultural icon.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I had an instant fascination with the figure when I drew my first graphite self-portrait in ninth grade. I was thrilled to hear about the AXA Art Prize and the focus on figurative work. The idea that my art would be seen by these judges was enough for me to jump at the chance to apply.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

I have never been interested in painting a “pretty” image. My interest peaks when I see someone that is different, because that is what I find beautiful and extraordinary in this world.

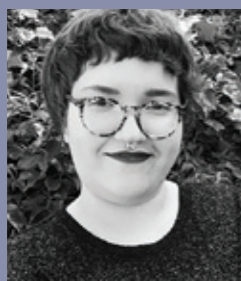
www.carolinemyers.com
Instagram | [@carolinemyersart](https://www.instagram.com/carolinemyersart)



Photo Album

2019

acrylic and paper collage on paper
12 x 12 inches



Mil Newton

University of California, Berkeley

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

I spend a lot of time looking at family photos, asking: who are these people? What are they thinking? The most startling part is when there is simply no answer – the memory is gone, the person is gone, and all that is left is the snapshot. *Photo Album* is an attempt to fill in these gaps, suturing images together to produce not only the sight, but the feeling of my family.

Photo Album is entirely about relationships. Family photos are treasures in that they are physical linkages to the past, working to temporarily break down any temporal separation between us. I want my work to live among these photos. It is my goal to add as much information as I can for those who look in the future.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was motivated to apply to the AXA Art Prize by one of my teachers at UC Berkeley. We both share a love of figurative art and all of its wonderful potential.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

It always seems like the art world is trying to turn away from figurative work, and yet it always resurfaces. There is something so fundamental and compelling about being seen or seeing others that keeps us coming back. We all relate to the figure because we exist as one.

www.milnewton.tumblr.com



Pool in Evening

2020

ballpoint pen and colored pencil on paper
14 x 11 inches



Kirsten Perrotta

Flagler College

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Pool in Evening depicts my twin sister in our family pool, looking out at our backyard as the sun sets. The person and place in the drawing has always brought me great comfort. The drawing is almost entirely drawn with colored ballpoint pens, except the parts in yellow colored pencil. It took two months to complete.

For me, art is less about conveying ideas and more about actively creating. The creation of this drawing, during which I lost myself in the serenity of sitting and moving my pens for hours, is as important as its visual, which is just as tranquil. Tranquility is ultimately what I wish to convey through *Pool in Evening*. It is what I felt while creating it, and what I believe its audience deserves to feel too.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I enjoy drawing water, outdoor scenes and important people in my life. The moments I draw from are experienced in the name of living in the moment. By drawing these moments, I immerse myself in them even further. I let go of all negativities and focus on what truly matters.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

At surface level, my drawings are connected through their depiction of my friends, outdoor landscapes or both. Many more abstract themes shine through too, such as serenity, amusement, adventure and wonder – all things I feel when I surround myself with the people and places I tend to depict on paper.

Instagram | @kirstenirel.art



Weeds (Jesus Saves)

2020

oil, ink, hand embroidery, acrylic medium transfer,
and fabric on panel | 18 x 24 inches



Ruth L. Poor

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Weeds (Jesus Saves) is part of a more extensive investigation into the complicated relationships between gender, power, belief and doubt within the context of rural America. While much of my work flirts with my youth's psychological and cultural values, I find myself concerned with the microcosm of the family and its relation to shaping regional beliefs.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My practice is often cyclical, flowing through research, material experiments, writing, making and meditating. As an artist and student, I find ways to complicate my work through layers of religious or historical references. As a structuralist, I seek opportunities to expand upon (or break apart) various social patterns noticed in rural, American landscapes.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

My work attempts to modernize biblical stories and rural cultural mythologies to highlight forms of injustice or hierarchy through collage. The subjects and media used to create my work are often symbolic and juxtaposed, in the hopes of the viewer being able to re-code and re-imagine the separate collaged parts, creating contemporary fictions. Recurring themes include religion (Christianity), gender, power (or lack-of), duty, belief, doubt and erasure.

www.ruthpoor.wix.com/portfolio

Instagram | @ruthlpoor



As Night Fell Over Us (Gemini)

2018

oil on linen mounted to birch panel

16.5 x 14.25 inches



Jason Rafferty

Lamar Dodd School of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

As Night Fell Over Us (Gemini) captures a feeling of tragic loss. Loosely based upon the tale of the Gemini, a man stumbles upon a scene of death and questions remain unanswered. The painting shows how a sense of loss can take a psychological toll. A man tears his shirt open in agony upon finding another man lying face-down in a pool of blood, apparently amidst a meal. It begs the question, how are the two related? What is their relationship? What caused this?

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

The AXA Art Prize is perhaps the most prestigious competition in the United States for students interested in figurative art and I have great respect for its curatorial process and the caliber of work that it features each year. I knew it would be an excellent opportunity to have my work be in exchange with those of other young artists who share an interest in working figuratively.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I find the versatility of figurative work interesting, the range of emotions that can be evoked as soon as two figures are set into a space to interact. Because figurative art has such a rich history, your work can also be in conversation, playful, earnest or otherwise, with that of other painters who have worked figuratively, whether decades or centuries ago.

www.jasonrafferty.com

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



Soul of Harlem

2021

oil, oil pastel, glitter, and acrylic on canvas
40 x 30 inches



Mieyoshi Ragernoir

Cranbrook Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Soul of Harlem is a visual celebration capturing the love of sisterhood and the soulful richness of “old Harlem.” Two soul sistahs, Neyssa and Daniris, are painted hugging one another in lavish furs standing near my childhood street, which is timelessly depicted to represent the street before mass gentrification. That exact street and project building is being turned into expensive luxury residences for people outside the community. Recollecting good days in Harlem, memories of Lenox Avenue, flashy clothes, and Black joy illuminating the streets after sunset, linger in my soul.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Celebratory paintings of relationships between Black people; mostly portraits that highlight the radiance of Black women, is the fuel of my studio practice. As a Harlem native, the culturally rich style, languages, and aura of the Harlem community influence every element of the paintings. Using my paintbrush as a tool of empowerment, Black and Brown femme-identifying figures are often depicted in front of vibrantly colorful symbolic backgrounds or old streets based on my childhood.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I was motivated by my duty to honor my ancestral lineage. Being a professional artist was never a thought in the minds of my parents or ancestors. The long-term effects of colonialism instilled that they could not dream outside of hard labor. Representing Black femmes of the past and present, who never thought they belonged in these predominantly white and gatekept art spaces, is small progress.

www.mieyoshiragernoir.com



Los Vendedores de Churros y Mangos de la Estación Atlantic-Barclays

2019

oil on linen | 13 x 20 inches



Audrey Rodriguez

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

This painting depicts a common scene one might find in a New York City subway station. I painted Ecuadorian vendors, Jose and Maria, while on the job. They were a fixture during my commute, and were a painting waiting to happen. Depicting street vendors is a sort of pushback to the previous United States administration's hostile rhetoric "immigrants steal jobs." My stance is immigrants do not take jobs; they make their own. This painting also highlights food, and how it brings people together. It is such a comfort to know that I can get a taste of home (South Texas) out on the streets of New York.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

The AXA Art Prize is a wonderful opportunity for emerging artists. Figurative work is such a huge part of what I do, and to apply for a prize that values figurative work is amazing. The chance for such esteemed jurors to look at my work is a huge honor; that alone is a win.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

My Mexican and Honduran heritage is a huge part of my work. I have formed a stronger bond to my heritage by the act of painting it. Food is also a recurring theme in my work. The historical and cultural significance of different types of food fascinate me. Food allows me to paint an endless number of different textures, which is enjoyable for me.

www.audpaints.com

Instagram | @audweepaints



Pozolada

2021

oil on canvas | 60 x 48 inches



Luis Antonio Rodriguez

Claremont Graduate University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Pozolada is about people enjoying food, laughter and music. Most importantly, the work reflects on how important it is to enjoy the simple things in life with those closest to you. It's about breaking bread with others, comradery and appreciating the relationships we build. The painting reflects on a past time with people enjoying a bowl of pozole and a handful of warm tortillas.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I dig into my own experiences for content and themes to paint. The memory of the moment and the experience are crucial pieces I wanted to capture in this work. Even if most people have never explicitly had a moment like this, my hope is that my experience overlaps with other people's. These are the types of connections I strive to forge in my work.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I have an uncle who spent time in a federal prison, and he would mail envelopes to my mom with small pencil drawings of people's faces on them. I thought they were the most amazing drawings ever. Since then, I have had an interest in how faces are drawn. However, it was not until later in college that I was exposed to a wide range of figurative work. Then I took painting the figure more seriously.

www.luisantoniorodriguez.com



BLUE

2021

oil on linen | 32 x 59.5 inches



Abigail Rugg

Maryland Institute College of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

In this piece titled *BLUE*, the blue and yellow color spaces, manipulated light and perspective immerses the viewer in the story of three figures in separate stages of a relationship dispute. Inspired by the blue light that fills a room at twilight, the lighting's soft, calming and melancholic nature is in sharp contrast with the artificially warm, golden light in the hallway.

BLUE utilizes the physical separation in domestic architecture like windows and doorways to highlight the emotional separation felt in American domesticity. I further manipulated the perspective and lighting of these beautifully mundane spaces to tell the ambiguous narrative of miscommunication, silent relationships, disputes and being stuck in lonely contemplation. *BLUE* pulls on the inherent humanness of these moments in the larger narrative of isolation in American relationships.

How would you describe your studio practice?

Inspired by lighting and emotions I have observed in daily life, I use loved ones as actors to create a narrative. My work illustrates the complex intimate relationships within our domestic spaces rendered as large contemporary and realistic oil paintings.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I decided to apply to the AXA Art Prize because I have always loved and admired the works that have been exhibited over the past few years. To have my work in conversation with the influential work that is shown through this exhibition is an honor in itself.

www.abigailrugg.com

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



See Through Me

2021

graphite, colored pencil, and acrylic on wood
24 x 28 inches



Selina Andréa Scott

Arizona State University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

See Through Me exists because of challenges with my mental health. I wanted this piece to carry the weight of emotions I felt that often went unnoticed to most around me. This self-portrait expresses the feeling of losing yourself and hiding in the in-between state of depression and hope. I wanted to capture the sensation of getting too close to the edge, falling in and pulling yourself out, or letting go.

Mental and psychological health is such an important issue we should be aware of and empathetic towards, especially after a year that pushed our physical and mental limits. I hope others find recognition, comfort and hope in this work and use it to inspire their own growth.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

I had a lot of apprehension making this piece because it is so personal to me. It was the encouragement of a trusted professor that helped bring this idea to life as I imagined. I feel so blessed to be a part of the 2021 exhibition finalists.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

As an Indigenous and Hispanic woman, I find inspiration in my Diné and Hispanic cultures and the connection they have built within me. Themes of resiliency, matriarchy, pride and connection to the earth are the best ways I represent and explore who I am in my work.

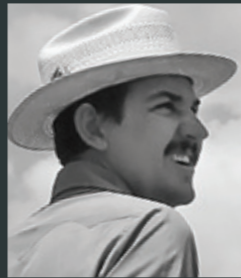
Instagram | @selinaascottart



March 7th

2021

watercolor on paper mounted to canvas
30.5 x 30 inches



Jed Webster Smith

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

March 7th considers the iconic cowboy and its relationship to individuals who have been largely written out of the Western narrative. The mesas are deliberately abstracted, and the figure's wardrobe make it difficult to determine the time and place this cowboy inhabits.

A large portion of the Southwest was formed by minority groups. They are integral in shaping the iconic narrative. However, the myth of the West only focuses on a select few. *March 7th* examines an individual from one of those lesser-known groups and celebrates their Western Spirit.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I grew up in rural South-Central Colorado. The mythology of the American West has always been present in my life and I continue to be fascinated by it. In my studio practice, I explore the distorted reality of the past and its impact on the present. I work from observation and my imagination, using watercolor as my primary form of expression.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

The AXA Art Prize is a well-respected competition that I have been following for several years. I applied because the jurors and caliber of work selected are so impressive. This opportunity supports emerging figurative artists, and I am excited to be included in the 2021 AXA Art Prize.

www.jedwsmith.com

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



Pink Backpack

2020

oil on canvas | 60 x 36 inches



Siana Smith

California College of the Arts

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Inspired by my daughter's explorations during COVID, *Pink Backpack* depicts her underground, bathed in rays of light from the storm drain above, standing upon a graffiti covered floor. The work explores the uncertainty and heaviness experienced by myself and many others in 2020.

She stands firm in that darkness of ambiguity and vulnerability with her head held high, seeking clarity and security, ready to fight for freedom from oppression and not be contained by it. The pink backpack takes on a symbolic meaning of what we have from past and present. Some things in life cannot be fixed or avoided. They can only be carried, just like the pink backpack.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

The AXA Art Prize is a big encouragement for figurative art students. I first saw the exhibition in 2019 and found the authenticity, creativity and expressiveness of the artworks extremely inspiring and motivating.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

Figurative work for me is the most expressive and direct way to convey my message to others. The facial expression, the body gesture, the gaze or lack of it, every nuance of figurative work can say so much. Every brush stroke is not only a painstaking effort to reach the resemblance as a reflection and dialogue with the subject; it is a conscientious endeavor to repair and reestablish a connection lost beyond the canvas.

www.sianasmith.com

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



Vision

2021

graphite on paper | 9 x 7 inches



Kylee Snow

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Vision is part of a larger series, which examines brief, anomalous moments that offer a glimpse of a broader event. Composed in the language of a traditional portrait, the blurred, ethereal figure is captured in the midst of an unknown narrative. It is an uncanny moment interrupted by the viewer, familiar yet unfamiliar. Enveloped in his forest surroundings, the figure in this piece occupies a private emotional space. His face is captured in movement. The ambiguity of his mental state is enhanced by the floating lights, receding into the woods behind him. The portrait is psychological in nature, offering the viewer a glimpse into another's strange, private world.

How would you describe your studio practice?

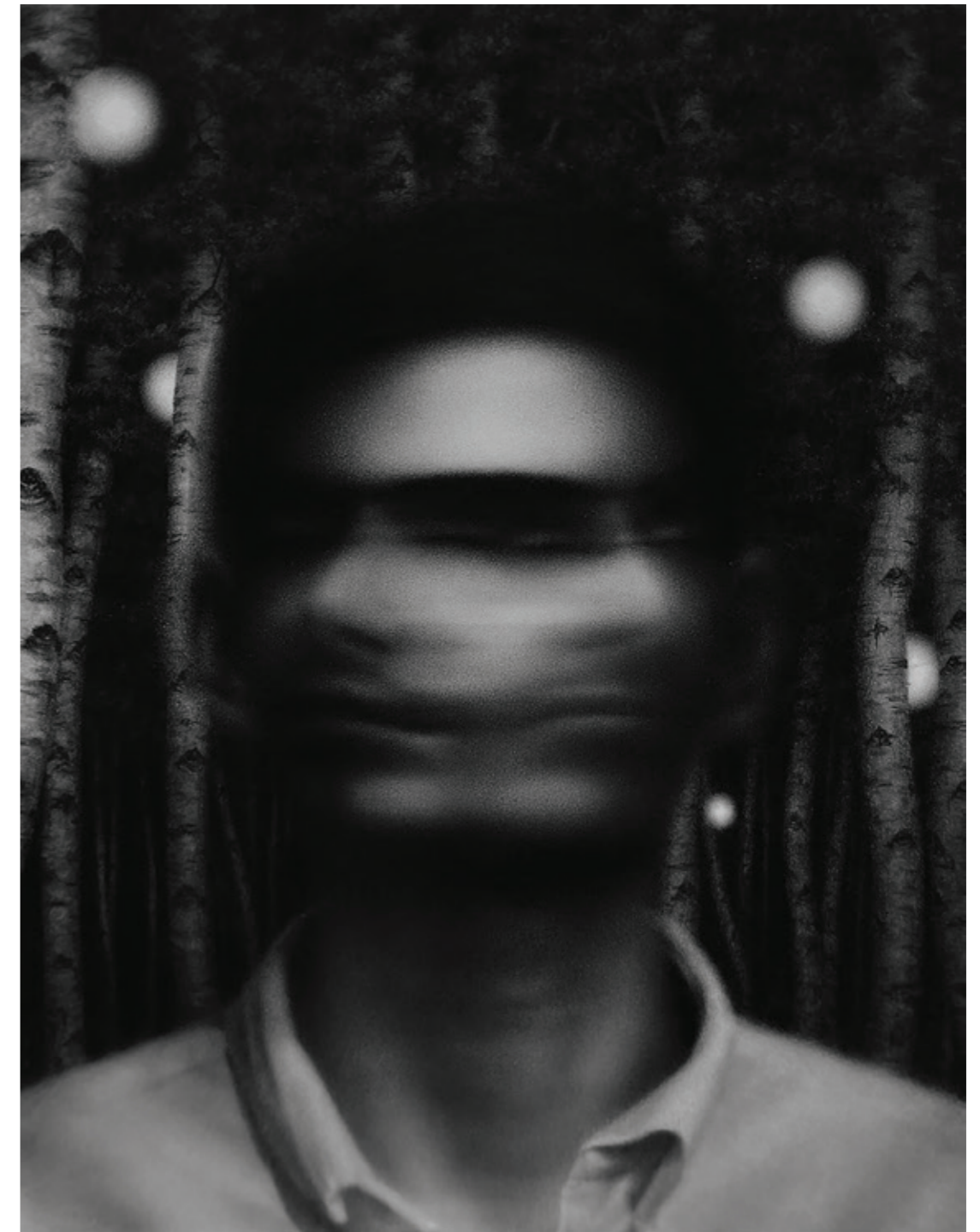
I find inspiration in the complexity of nature, deep history of place and unexplained things that shake our perceived understandings. I work primarily with graphite on paper to create moments that are narrative but ambiguous. The reflective quality of the medium weaves into each story, changing in the light, occasionally inverting to seem like a negative, and never offering the same uniform view.

How do you approach a new work?

I tend to see a specific image that is attached to a feeling or intrigues me with its emotional power. I work it out through imagination and film photography references that I create. I typically work on one piece at a time and new images come to me throughout the process.

www.kyleesnow.com

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



Green Leather

2021

oil on canvas | 60 x 48 inches



Alaina Speiser

Savannah College of Art and Design

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

Green Leather is about polite confrontation. It is about being comfortable in a room with people and knowing that you will be safe and looked after in their company. This painting is about rest and selfishly indulging in time spent with those you love, without judgement. My work explores the nature of relationships, friendships and how those relationships are often more powerful than relationships inherited through birth. Being invited to rest in someone's space, to laugh with them, to share a moment together is something to be treasured.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My studio practice revolves around ideas of anxiety and how to lessen those cicada songs within my soul. I often paint images of someone existing within a seemingly stagnant atmosphere, reminding me that we do not need to run away from, or run towards, obstacles at every moment. We can just be still.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

Comfort is an idea that comes up very often in my work. Being encompassed in a quiet joy regarding the everyday and recognizing that simple happiness is something very profound to me.

www.alainaspeiser.com

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



La Boda

2021

oil on canvas | 40 x 36 inches



Pedro Troncoso

New York Academy of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

La Boda is an allegory for the dilemma of marriage. It is my Frank-weddingstein. The bride and the groom are excited about the ring, but they are also encapsulated in the machinery of marital stereotypes. Romance, children, vulnerability, tragedy and isolation are all built in this composition inspired by my childhood toys.

The composition's playfulness contrasts the seriousness of the theme and asks us to revisit the preconceptions about the marriage symbology, which are often overlooked. In this mental dialogue, what was "supposed to be" is gone, while personal emotions and intimacy to connect the dots are welcomed.

How would you describe your studio practice?

My art is the result of my daily experiences. It perpetuates my feelings and personal thoughts often hidden in public. I contrast my memories, toys, and honesty against the irony, absurdity and contradictions of adulthood. Why keep losing our essence as we grow up, due to social expectations and responsibilities? My practice is where I keep the most powerful, genuine and inspirational childhood toy we have not lost yet: imagination.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

Beyond the support for young artists, the AXA Art Prize emphasizes that regardless of the participants' different backgrounds, art is a language on its own that deserves inclusion and exposure.

www.iwaspedro.com

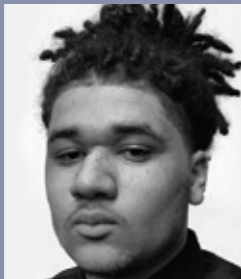
Instagram | [@iwaspedro](https://www.instagram.com/iwaspedro)



30 Wave Caps

2021

acrylic on canvas | 48 x 36 inches



Derek Walker

Cleveland Institute of Art

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

In my piece, *30 Wave Caps*, I wanted to experiment with my idea of a portrait painting. Normally, in my series of durag-themed paintings, my subjects would be seen wearing their durags. However, in this case, I chose to make them function as a background instead. This gave me room to experiment with different textures, colors and forms of headwear. The durag is a long-standing staple in the Black diaspora. Despite it being historically stigmatized, it is now being reclaimed as a symbol of divinity and identity. The durags in *30 Wave Caps*, along with the figure, are confronting the viewer. They are both letting the viewer know that the time is now for the durag to be reclaimed and revered.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I would consider my studio practice to be formulaic. I begin by sketching an idea on paper and then constructing the canvas. Once I am content with the media, I arrange a photoshoot. After hours of bouncing back and forth between my canvas and my computer, I finally end up with a digital mockup. I then use that mockup as a reference to guide my paint brush.

What motivated you to apply to the AXA Art Prize?

My motivation for applying to the AXA Art Prize came from seeing the work of previous years' finalists. This fueled my motivation to create.

www.derekwalkerart.com

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



Before We Were Distant

2020

ink and oil on canvas | 48 x 60 inches



Julie Weaver Loffer

Claremont Graduate University

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

The work I have submitted was created from a photograph I took at California San Manuel Pow Wow in 2019. The title represents the fact that this was the last gathering for Indigenous people in my area before the pandemic. It captures how we were before we were distant. The night sky, galaxies, and stars represent a spiritual realm. This idea stems from my first experience of dreamwalking with my father and my grandfather.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I describe my art practice as striving to create at my highest level, while evolving my process. As I watch what is going on in the world, I think of ways I can evolve my artwork, my spirit, and persevere when met with great challenges. I like to use Anishinaabeg culture and oral histories in my work because these have an element of truth and an element of storytelling that can teach.

What about figurative work do you find particularly interesting?

I love how figurative artwork can dance the line between reality and fiction. The day I found that dreams can be real had a profound effect on my life, and I naturally began to contemplate how we determine fiction from reality. I combine both fiction and reality for the viewer to consider.

www.my.matterport.com/show

Instagram | @ironlegs_granddaughter



A Train

2021

oil on canvas | 48 x 30 inches



Yuri Yuan

Columbia University School of the Arts

Briefly tell us about the work you have submitted.

A Train is based on my memory of taking a late-night train from Chelsea to Morningside after a gallery opening. I decided not to join my friends for a drink and went home alone. People were sitting far apart from each other due to the pandemic. I saw my reflection on the fast-moving train and felt an overwhelming sense of loneliness, despite being in a busy city like New York.

The painting investigates the psychological state of a lone commuter in New York. The gleaming surface of the seats is juxtaposed against the subtle reflection of the figure. In many ways, the train is more present and permanent than the figure. Using a limited palette, I removed details such as the advertisement on the train and the pattern on the floor to further isolate the figure.

How would you describe your studio practice?

I use the traditional medium of oil on canvas. I use colors and compositional techniques to create surreal narratives inspired by dreams and memories. Using a wet-on-wet technique and thin layers of paint, I create a sense of quiet airiness. My paintings are made in a day to preserve a sense of freshness and simplicity.

What themes regularly resurface in your work?

The themes of longing, loneliness and grief often show up in my work. I think it is due to my background of growing up in different places, constantly having to say goodbye to people I love. I feel like I do not belong anywhere. My work is a space for both myself and the audience to contemplate the distance between human relationships.

www.yuriyuan.com

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



Juries

Regional Jury

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

Exhibition Jury

Ian Alteveer, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*
Harry Cooper, *National Gallery of Art*
Rita Gonzalez, *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*
Ashley James, *The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*

Prize Jury

Bo Bartlett
Rachel Feinstein
Elizabeth Peyton
Calida Rawles
Peter Saul
Jennifer Schipf

AXA Art Prize 2021 Essayist

Seph Rodney

AXA XL would like to thank

The artists, schools, judges and in particular the New York Academy of Art for their support.





Contributing Essayist

Seph Rodney

Seph Rodney, PhD was born in Jamaica, and came of age in the Bronx, New York. He is the opinions editor for Hyperallergic and writes on visual art and related issues. He has also written for The New York Times, CNN Op-ed pages, American Craft Magazine and NBC Universal, and penned catalog essays for Crystal Bridges Museum, the Mississippi Museum of Art, Teresita Fernandez, Meleko Mokgosi, and Joyce J. Scott. He can be heard weekly on the podcast “The American Age”. His book, *The Personalization of the Museum Visit*, was published by Routledge in May of 2019. In 2020 he won the Rabkin Arts Journalism Prize.

Prize Jurors

Bo Bartlett

Bo Bartlett is an American realist with a modernist vision. His paintings are well within the tradition of American realism as defined by artists such as Thomas Eakins and Andrew Wyeth. Like these artists, Bartlett looks at America’s heart – its land and its people – and describes the beauty he finds in everyday life. His paintings celebrate the underlying epic nature of the commonplace and the personal significance of the extraordinary. Bartlett was educated at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where realist principles must be grasped before modernist ventures are encouraged.

He pushes the boundaries of the realist tradition with his multilayered imagery. Life, death, passage, memory, and confrontation coexist easily in his world. Family and friends are the cast of characters that appear in his dreamlike narrative works. Although the scenes are set around his childhood home in Georgia, his island summer home in Maine, his home in Pennsylvania or the surroundings of his studio and residence in Washington state, they represent a deeper, mythical concept of the archetypal, universal home.

Rachel Feinstein

Rachel Feinstein was born in Fort Defiance, Arizona, and raised in Miami. In richly detailed sculptures, paintings, panoramic wallpapers, and multipart installations, Rachel Feinstein investigates and challenges the concept of luxury as expressed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, in the context of contemporary parallels. By synthesizing visual and societal opposites such as romance and pornography, elegance and kitsch, and the marvelous and the banal, she explores issues of taste and desire.

Feinstein received a BA in 1992 from Columbia University, where she studied religion, philosophy, and studio art. That same year she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Madison, Maine. After being included in several group shows in New York throughout the nineties, her work was featured in the first iteration of MoMA PS1's Greater New York in 2000.

Her subsequent solo exhibitions include “Tropical Rodeo”, Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2006); “The Snow Queen”, Lever House, New York (2011); and “Folly”, a series of outdoor sculptures installed in Madison Square Park, New York, in 2014. In 2018, Gagosian Beverly Hills presented “Secrets”, an exhibition of large-scale sculptures inspired by the Victoria's Secret “Angels” and majolica pedestals modeled after Rococo commedia dell'arte figurines.

The full set of majolica sculptures – fired at the famous Nymphenburg Porcelain Manufactory in Munich – was featured in “Frieze Sculpture 2018” in London. Launching the Artist in Residence project – a collaboration between Gucci and Chatsworth House – Feinstein's work is on view at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, England, until June 2024. The included works are related to the research Feinstein conducted during her residency at the estate. In November 2019, the Jewish Museum in New York presented Feinstein's first retrospective exhibition.

Elizabeth Peyton

Elizabeth Peyton, b. 1965, lives and works in New York. Peyton's work first attracted public attention in 1993 when an exhibition of her historical portraits was shown in Room 828 at the Chelsea Hotel. Subsequently, Peyton's work was notably featured in “Projects 60: John Currin, Elizabeth Peyton, Luc Tuymans” at MoMA in 1997, and in 2004, a number of portraits were selected for the Whitney Biennial.

In 2008, A mid-career retrospective, “Live Forever,” was organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and traveled to the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Whitechapel Gallery, London; and Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht. In 2017, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art presented “Elizabeth Peyton: Still Life,” the first major survey of Peyton's art in Japan.

The same year, the Villa Medici in Rome exhibited “Elizabeth Peyton & Camille Claudel: Eternal Idol” in which works by the artists, born a century apart, are shown alongside each other, creating a dialogue between their distinct approaches to portraiture. Other solo exhibitions include: Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2013); Gallery Met, New York (2011, 2014, 2016); and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2009).

Most recently, Peyton had a major retrospective at London's National Portrait Gallery in London until January 2020. This exhibition entitled “Aire and Angels” which traveled to UCCA, Beijing, “Elizabeth Peyton: Practice” in the summer of 2020.

Calida Rawles

Calida Rawles (b. 1976, Wilmington, DE, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) received a BA from Spelman College, Atlanta, GA (1998) and an MA from New York University, New York, NY (2000). Solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at Various Small Fires, Los Angeles, CA (2020) and Standard Vision, Los Angeles, CA (2020).

Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including “Art Finds a Way”, Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL (2021); “View From Here”, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2020); “Visions in Light”, Windows on Wallis, Beverly Hills, CA (2020); “Presence”, Fullerton College Art Gallery, Fullerton, CA (2019); “With Liberty and Justice for Some”, Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2017); Sanctuary City: “With Liberty and Justice for Some”, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco, CA (2017); LACMA Inglewood + Film Lab, Inglewood, CA (2014); and “Living off Experience”, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY (2002).

Rawles recently created the cover art for Ta-Nehisi Coates's debut novel, *The Water Dancer*, and is in numerous public and private collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY.

Rawles is represented by Lehman Maupin, New York, NY / Hong Kong, CN / Seoul, KR / London, EN and by Various Small Fires, Los Angeles, CA / Seoul, KR.

Merging sharp photo-realism with poetic abstraction, Calida Rawles paints Black subjects submerged in glistening water; bodies are swarmed by a flurry of bubbles, ripples, and refracted light. For Rawles, water is a spiritually healing element for all people – yet she recognizes its historical connotations to racial exclusion and cultural fears. She uses the complicated duality of water as a platform to address identity politics while re-imagining her subjects beyond cultural tropes.

At times, her work alludes to current events, even making topographical maps of cities where acts of racially targeted violence have occurred. In other moments, her works are purely celebratory of the resilience, strength, and beauty of Black culture.



Peter Saul

Peter Saul attended the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, and the Washington University School of Fine Arts in St. Louis. In 2020, the New Museum of Contemporary Art mounted “Peter Saul: Crime and Punishment,” the first retrospective of Peter Saul’s work in New York.

His work has been the subject of numerous international solo presentations, including recent exhibitions at the Deichtorhallen Hamburg; the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; The Arnold and Marie Schwartz Gallery Met, Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center, New York. Saul’s work is frequently featured in major group exhibitions at institutions both stateside and abroad, including recent presentations at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville; The Met Breuer, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Musée d’Art Contemporain, Marseille; MoMA PS1, Long Island City.

His work is held in the permanent collections of numerous public institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Saul is currently represented by Venus Over Manhattan and Michael Werner Gallery.

Jennifer Schipf

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



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