Contemporary Artists In The Spotlight 2023 – Nico Kos-Earle

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For this rolling feature Nico Kos-Earle has chosen 15 international artists working in various mediums to look out for in 2023.

1. Gary Fabien Miller (Top Photo)

Suppose we were to picture the field of contemporary fine art photography as an actual terrain. In that case, we might see the lone figure of Garry Fabien Miller ambling purposefully along the moor, trying to capture the nuances of daylight with his "silvered mind". Since the mid-1980s, Miller has centred his practice on a cycle of daily walks on Dartmoor in Devon, followed by processing time in the dark room, experimenting with light in various forms of camera-less photography. Focused on our essential relationship with light, Fabien Miller uses it as both medium and subject, probing the edges of determinism and giving voice to his sense of the spiritual. He first came to attention in the 1970s for his serial photographs of sky, land and sea, including Sections of England: The Sea Horizon (1975-1976), shown at the Arnolfini in Bristol in 1979.

Fabian Miller will exhibit the full sequence in The Sea Horizons (*Morwellian)* at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff from 18 February – 10 September. This coincides with his major exhibition *ADORE* at the Arnolfini, Bristol, opening on the same day through 28 May 2023. Celebrating five decades of his work, *ADORE* explores how the artist developed his philosophical and spiritual beliefs through the constant observation of dawn and dusk, and a lifelong commitment to the darkroom in the inherently romantic pursuit of creating "something that wouldn't have existed before". Whilst inviting us to explore his 'camera-less' practice, the show also waves in work by other

'artists and makers, gardeners and Quakers, thinkers, and writers', highlighting a rich, dynamic and community of those who "think with their hands".

ADORE runs alongside the culmination of The Light Gatherers, a series of six lectures delivered during Fabian Miller's Honorary fellowship with Bodleian Libraries, Oxford. Exploring the history of the darkroom through the lens of his final days of solitary, cave-dwelling picture-making, Fabian Miller then looks beyond the darkroom with his new project, Three Acres of Colour, inspired by Ethel Mairet, accompanied by the publication of his memoir *Dark Room: A Memoir,* featuring an essay by Edmund de Waal, infused with the poetic voice of his long term collaborator Alice Oswald.

Book next lecture here:

https://visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/event/garry-fabian-miller-the-light-gatherers

Visit ADORE

https://arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/garryfabianmilleradore/

Visit The Sea Horizon

https://museum.wales/cardiff/whatson/11790/The-Sea-Horizon/

Hayley Barker, "Dream Front Yard with Visitor, Black Pit Bull," 2021, courtesy of Night Gallery

2. Hayley Barker

The waitlist for Hayley Barker's lush, chromatic paintings that illuminate every day is long. This February, she will present her debut solo exhibition at the Night Gallery, LA, showcasing works that linger on the threshold between the real and imagined. Like everything genuinely gorgeous, they are both arresting and intangible, rendered in soft complimentary hues like the shimmer of sunset. Bursting with unexpected grandeur, despite their quotidian nature – butterflies and potted house plants, overgrown paths – her works seem emblematic of a current sensibility that seeks beauty in the everyday. Recently, her works are set at dusk or night, liminal time zones that suggest an imaginative, nonlinear relationship with time. Indeed, the artist describes her works as spaces of passage, wherein naturalistic observations give way to ethereal ruminations on life's phases, relationships, and the self. They offer us a moment to stay with one scene, one image, and slow the fuck down.

https://www.inglebygallery.com/artists/407-hayley-barker/overview/

https://www.nightgallery.ca/news/night-gallery-to-represent-hayley-barker

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Claire Tabouret "The Dock" 2021, Kistefos Museum, Norway

3. Claire Tabouret

Her outstanding solo show 'I am spacious, singing flesh' during the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 23 April — Palazzo, was curated by Kathryn Weir with FABA (Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte) in collaboration with Almine Rech. Unsurprisingly, Italy is still in love with French-born, LA-based Claire Tabouret, who will be taking part in (https://www.ferragamo.com/museo/en/women-in-balance) In addition to Immortelle, at MO.CO. Panacée, Montpellier, a group show highlighting the best figurative painting in France today.

Flesh, in all its many tones and disguises, is a constant source of inspiration for Tabouret. Her series 'Makeup' (2015-ongoing) depicts young women and girls with clownish smears of lipstick and eyeliner and cleverly references both a child's first attempt at face painting and painting faces. Using loose, expressive brushstrokes, her broad palette encompasses natural and artificial hues, expressing the strange duality of human attraction whilst addressing the modern dilemma of augmented beauty. Staring mutely out at us from the canvas, made up or disguised, children and women are captured in frozen frames. Part fantasy, part portrait, they inhabit the carnivalesque, perfect for her recent mural at Fabrègues Castle in the south of France.

https://www.alminerech.com/artists/4769-claire-tabouret

Ciarán Murphy, shutter, stutter, 2023, courtesy of GRIMM Gallery

4. Ciaran Murphy

Ciaran Murphy's ninth solo show with GRIMM Gallery at their recently-opened space in Mayfair, 'this appears', follows his sensational touring exhibition *Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily* (Butler Gallery, Kilkenny, The Model, Sligo, and the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin). His paintings hover between the familiar and odd, desaturated in the palette or blurred in form as if captured just before they disappear. Sourced from a plethora of found images – digital and analogue – his works address our strange entanglement with technology. Splicing various source materials, Murphy waits for chance encounters and incongruity to coalesce. In painting, he notices what might otherwise be lost at the edge of perception. His compositions occupy the space between original and copy and triumphantly assert the painted medium's capacity for verisimilitude.

In an essay entitled 'Earth's Echo', published by the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, Dan Fox gives us the perfect account of this artist's recognisable but often indescribable work: "... The word 'dreamlike' would be an easy adjective to reach for. However, that would make me wonder how a physical, tangible thing in the world, such as a painting on a wall, could be compared to the intangible, gossamer blooms of the subconscious. A dream vanishes. A painting remains on the wall…" Murphy shows us the power of a painting – the hand-drawn – to more accurately capture an atmosphere or sensation through approximation rather than direct mechanical reproduction. Murphy chases "the moment of cognition, the instant that the sense of a thing emerges from a sea of marks and colours."

Ghazaleh Avarzamani Strange Temporalities, 2019, courtesy of Ab Anbar

5. Ghazaleh Avarzamani

Ghazaleh Avarzamani (born in Tehran, lives and works between London/UK and Toronto/Canada) is an artist who works primarily in sculpture and installation. Through these structures, she questions how institutional structures and educational methodologies shape psycho-social constructions of knowledge. Her large-scale works typically involve interactivity, suggesting an alternative view of dominant power structures. In 2021, at the Aga Khan Museum, she mounted 30 stained-glass mosaics overlooking 24 tons of blue rubber mulch — the same kind used in playgrounds to guard children against serious injury — piled into the reflecting pools in the Aga Khan Park. Clever and eye-catching but also potentially hazardous, the artist proposes a game. When considered or played, her work allows us to reflect on the power of physical structures and how they reinforce socio-political norms from childhood and ongoing throughout our lives. By examining the laws, rules and systems that govern human lives, she opens up the possibilities for disrupting the status quo and hegemonic power systems.

https://ab-anbar.com/artists/35-ghazaleh-avarzamani/works/

Melania-Toma-KAY-PACHA

6. Melania Toma

Shortlisted for this year's Ingram Prize by Jo Baring and shown at the artist-driven Unit 1 Gallery Workshop, Toma is currently in a duo presentation *From the Rattle* at the FOLD Gallery with fellow one-to-watch Dominique Beattie. Her shaggy textile installations are conceived as an intermediary between two worlds: urban capitalist and forest-dwelling indigenous. Series like "Daughters of Pacha" find their roots within a specific context: the new age spiritualist scenes in London, linked to rituals from an Aymara matrix. Sculpting with unorthodox materials, she creates transformative or transitional objects, which allow for "the recovery of a disintegrated and disconnected self". Large woolly pelts, not unlike Abakans, these hybrid tapestry animals emerge from a practice that is at once shamanic and inexplicably contemporary, reflecting a new spiritualism in the art world. Toma will be showing in "Soil Ethereal" from 11 February at Casa Wabi and "Cbin Utroba" (entering the Kamak Portal) at the Sarieva Gallery.

http://www.foldgallery.com/exhibition/from-the-rattle/

Aigana Gali, KOZ, 190 x 140 cm, acrylic,oil on canvas

7. Aigana Gali

Aigana Gali is a Kazakh multidisciplinary artist who works primarily on canvas and textiles. Born in Almaty to a Georgian mother and Kazakhstani father, Gali spent her formative years in the wild, open cradle of the Eurasian Steppe; its expansive geography and nomadic culture remain a constant source of her work. Gali became prominent with her solo exhibition Steppe at the Georgian National Museum, Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts. Described as 'one of the brightest young talents of Kazakh modern art", Gali moved to London in 2011. Over the past decade, she has developed a substantial body of work, delineated by series – Creation Myth, Steppe and Tengri – each representing a metaphorical chapter in her evolution as an artist and thinker and an attempt to translate her cultural milieu. Expansive and beguiling, her works explore the mysterious forces – ancient wisdom, nature's cycles and cosmic order – that shape our lives. Art critic John McEwen wrote, "Almaty is where East met West on the Great Silk Road. Gali's art is inspired by this rich history and the endless steppe of her homeland: 'I can see its nature in everything I do… it's the perfect "nothing"… you feel the true proportion of your personality against this enormous void.'"

Subtly infused with mythical and cosmological references, Gali's luminous, vibrant paintings are both familiar and otherworldly. They embody the strange duality of our modern lives: simultaneously attuned to the global but materially shaped by the local. Historically inhabited by nomads, the name "Kazakh" comes from the ancient Turkic word qaz, "to wander", and the Persian suffix -stan means "land" or "place of", so Kazakhstan can be literally translated as "land of the wanderers". Joining Kristin Hjellegjerde gallery in 2022, Gali will be showing in New York in March 2023 at the Something Machine Gallery (https://thesomethingmachine.com)

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/artists/285-aigana-gali/exhibitions/

Toyin Ojih Odutola The Firm

8. Toyin Ojih Odutola

Currently showing at SFMOMA, Toyin Ojih Odutola is a Nigerian-American artist who incorporates sprawling, alternative or forgotten narratives into multimedia works. Raised in Alabama, now based in New York, Ojih Odutola creates portraits of black life that explore hierarchies and oppression whilst also allowing the eye to linger on the sheer beauty of her chosen subjects. Often, she highlights the rich tones and lustrous quality of black skin, which "is ambiguous and ever-changing… Skin is a terrain. It's a landscape that you project meanings onto. It has its history. When I look at black skin, I think of it as a mercurial surface – a terrain, a construct, a projection, and a place where so much beauty and positivity proliferates."

https://jackshainman.com/artists/toyin_ojih_odutola

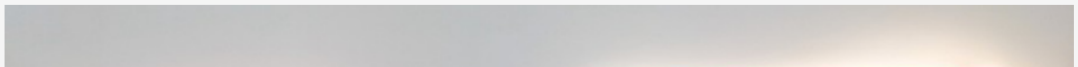
Dawn Dudek, Bere Point Forest I 2022

9. Dawn Dudek

Opening her solo show ***DISTANCE + DISPLACEMENT*** in February at the Freemantle Arts Centre in Perth, Dawn Dudek is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice is deeply entwined with the landscape that defined her journey as an artist of residence. Comprised of paintings, large-scale photographic and time-based works, this series began in the summer of 2018 in Northwestern Ontario, Canada and continued in the forests of Western Australia in 2020. The Sointula Art Shed on Malcolm Island culminates on her return to Freemantle. This slow, transcontinental project is about boundaries, about striking out of the screened environment into an unknown (yet familiar) wilderness – and staying with it. "The paintings become windows onto themes of presence and absence, matter and void," says the artist. Beginning with painting – from photographs taken in the forest – each canvas has a circular cut-out, like a viewfinder. Dudek returns to the forest and documents the paintings in their respective habitats. They raise questions about originality and ways of seeing, relevant in the age of Photoshop and digitally altered images. Viewed online, we stare into multiple windows nestled into our various screens.

This follows the success of her series *Filmscapes* and *If you love it so much…*, exploring her relationship with the moving image, the internet and memory. Many of her *Filmscapes* capture motion suspended: women running (M. escapes to dream, William in pursuit), couples falling (Fire and Ice), or poised before a kiss (Secreto, Saving Clementine). If the narrative of a film is conveyed through a sequence of moving images, these paintings focus on a single moment and how this resonates privately. *If you love it so much* might be seen as a digital self-portrait. "Through painting, I explore how we consume and take ownership of online images." Next, in London, Dawn collaborates with fine art photographer Andrea Hamilton on a series of intimate paintings based on lost weather words, questioning how we connect our internal emotions to the outside world.

https://www.dawndudek.com/distance-and-displacement/



Sahara Longe, Timothy Taylor, Frieze

10. Sahara Longe

Chosen as the hero piece for Camden's hottest club – Koko – by curator Katie Heller, I first fell in love with the work of artist Sahara Longe at the 1.54 African Art Fair, Somerset House. Now represented by Timothy Taylor Gallery, who introduced the artist at Frieze 2022 with a solo booth, Sahara Longe (b. 1994, London, UK) is a British-Sierra Leonean artist who lives and works in South London. At the Charles H. Cecil Studios in Florence, Italy, she studied technical skills forgotten by time – the use of rare pigments or Canada balsam glaze to imitate the soft-focus texture of flesh. In Longe's oil-on-jute portraits, black subjects – drawn from family and friends – are swathed in brilliant garments in canary yellow, soft madder rose, vermillion and Gauguin greens. Handling colour like an old master, Longe is unafraid to scale things up or amplify emotional depth with unctuous planes of complementary tones.

Whilst the National Gallery holds more than 2300 works, just 21 are by women; meanwhile, only 50 paintings feature a Black subject. Longe sees this as an opportunity, for the history of painting is full of borrowing in the form of homage. By engaging oil painting's weighty tradition, Longe uses its visual shorthands to usher in identities hitherto excluded by its high walls. 'You learn how they did it by doing it yourself', said Longe in an interview with Emily Watkins for Ed Cross Fine Art; 'not quite a homage, but almost.' In October 2021, Longe attended the Great Women Artists Residency at the Palazzo Monti.

https://www.timothytaylor.com/artists/sahara-longe/

Zineb Sedira Do you see the sea changing De la War Pavilion, courtesy of Goodman Gallery

11. Zineb Sedira

Stealing the show at the 59th Venice Biennale with *'Dreams Have No Titles'*,artist Zineb Sedira has just had her first institutional solo exhibition in the UK', Can't You See the Sea Changing?'.Conceived in collaboration with Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA), where the exhibition will be presented in spring 2023, this outward-looking show focuses on Sedira's ongoing investigation into the conditions of transnational trade, identity and migrant consciousness in a post-colonial context, within which the sea is a recurring motif. Beginning from the artist's fascination with the sea as an enigmatic yet geopolitically charged space, as well as the coastal contexts of the De La Warr Pavilion and DCA, the exhibition brings together photography, installation, film and archival material.

Upbeat and irrepressible, Sedira draws upon her personal history and close connection to Algeria, France and the UK to explore ideas of identity, gender, environment and collective memory. Throughout her career, she has become a leading voice in addressing what it means to live between different cultures, playfully uniting autobiographical narration, fiction and documentary genres. Whilst her work acknowledges histories of migration and exile, Sedira considers what it means to be transported through visionary acts of imagination, acts that carry us to beautiful new realms full of possibility.

https://www.dlwp.com/exhibition/zineb-sedira/

Alice Wilson Untitled

12. Alice Wilson

Alice Wilson is an artist who defies stereotypes and takes things off the scale. London-based, Wilson also teaches at the University of the Arts London, the University of East London and MASS, part of the Turps education programme. Following her 2022 residency exploring drawing in the landscape alongside Alison Wilding and LR Vandy, this January, she is exhibiting with SqW Lab at KK Chambers, Mumbai. Wilson's practice balances between the found, painted, printed and constructed; she regularly uses elements of landscape furniture and structures such as gates, benches, chairs, huts, cabins and treehouses as both subject and object. Through these, she explores ideas of identity and how this manifests or is restricted by our built environment – often pushing her creations to the limit of her physicality.

Rather than working towards a final representation, during the act of construction, she develops her understanding of the material into form. Her works privilege the element of surprise – and a devious sense of humour. None of the material Wilson uses is new; the nails, paint, hinges and splinters have lost their original function. Instead of memorialising their histories, she playfully finds new ways to combine and reframe them. "The installation appears as a primary act of construction, with wooden beams joining in moments of tension, compression and suspension."

https://www.domobaal.com/exhibitions/117-21-alice-wilson-01.html

Arthur Timothy, "Postcards from a Promised Land" Gallery 1957

13. Arthur Timothy

Walking into Arthur Timothy's solo exhibition at Gallery 1957 is like returning to a place you may never see but will forever miss. Fittingly entitled POSTCARDS FROM A PROMISED LAND, Timothy's large-scale paintings are flush with the wild beauty of indigenous flora and fauna that define Sierra Leone. Variegated leaves Ti plants, lustrous mango, coconut palms and cotton trees, Devil's backbone, Canna lily, Soursop; there are 2,000 known species of plants, with 74 species only occurring in Sierra Leone.

Into this paradise, the artist weaves figures and elements of exhausted architecture – remembered or found in photographs from his early childhood. Celebrating it as a place of outstanding natural beauty, despite struggles endured in the wake of slavery, colonialism, Ebola, and civil war, Timothy's paintings encapsulate both the dreams and failures of a "promised land". They describe a persistent but increasingly fragile aspect of his homeland: the *triumph of beauty over hardship*. Presently, Sierra Leone is plagued by illegal fishing, where foreign industrial trawlers invade the inshore waters reserved for canoes. Too often, those made destitute by illegal fishing and forced to turn to destructive mangrove logging. The primary rainforest that once covered 70% of Sierra Leone in the mid-2000s has been catastrophically reduced to around 6%. As wild, thriving ecosystems disappear globally, we urgently need to understand that they represent our greatest resource. Championed by Edward Enninful, Timothy's work *Brothers*, 2020, was showcased ICA Miami permanent collection, and his solo exhibition *Grandma's Hands* (2021) was co-curated by writer, journalist and curator Ekow Eshun (https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/art-exhibitions/black-fantastic), in Gallery 1957, Accra.

https://www.gallery1957.com/artists/57-arthur-timothy/

Rosalind Howdle, Wide Eye Ecstasy, RCA

14. Rosalind Howdle

Rosalind Howdle (b. 1997) is a British-American artist based in London. Currently showing this work at the Kristin Hjellegjerde, Howdle recently graduated from the Royal College of Art as a recipient of the Ali H. Alkazzi Scholarship, following Camberwell College of Arts, UAL (2019). Also awarded the Vanguard Prize in 2019 to Howdle "figuration is alive". Rooted in the tradition of still life, Howdle's paintings veer off into the uncanny. In her work, floral forms appear overblown and almost bacterial, rendered in nocturnal shades of deep purple and blue with touches of fluorescence. To the artist, the act of painting "seems to mimic the biological processes that underpin my subject matter: evolution, reproduction and self-repair." We recognise biomorphic, dynamic forms which have not fully coalesced – misremembered or perhaps reimagined. In skewing and skirting definition, Howdle is trying to access a kind of non-verbal intelligibility that is painting-specific. Finding answers in the act of making, this artist has developed a powerful, inimitable lexicon and will likely go on to make new worlds for us to relish.

https://2022.rca.ac.uk/students/rosalind-elizabeth-howdle

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/exhibitions/336/overview/

Freya Payne, Flicker, 2022, acrylic on shaped wood with glass, 17.2 x 26 cm (c) Freya Payne, courtesy of Flowers Gallery.jpg

15. Freya Payne

An accomplished printmaker, sculptor and painter, Freya Payne (b 1968) is an artist I first saw at Flowers Gallery with a small but perfectly formed work. Like an instrument, the piece resonated with Payne's love and attention to its unique physicality. With a practice that might be described as animistic, her output is quiet and reflective. Her pieces are intimate, often simple in form, with a pared-down beauty, but also refined, with intricate elements that belie large amounts of time invested. Frequently, she employs all three disciplines, moving between painting and printing in three dimensions. A work finds its resolution in the sum of multiple parts, like a poem, that celebrates the small shifts, tangents and doubts that mark our experience and understanding. Payne graduated from the Royal College of Art, London, in 1994 and now lives and works in Scotland. Her many awards include the Insight Investment Image of the Year Award in 2007, the Royal Academy of Arts; the Cuthbert New Young Artist Award, the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts in 2005; and the prestigious Villiers David Prize in 1999.

https://www.flowersgallery.com/artists/63-freya-payne/

Words: Nico Kos-Earle Top Photo: Garry Fabian Miller Courtesy the Artist and Ingleby Gallery. Copyright Garry Fabian Miller

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