ARTISTS

to Watch

TRACY SPENCER-STONESTREET

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Through video and photography, Endia Beal confronts the continued marginalization of black women in Corporate America. Her series Can I Touch It?, in which white women in their 40s donned typically black hairstyles for professional portraits, highlights the white normativity in expectations of workplace attire. In her new series, Fit In, Beal photographs young women in their home in front of a backdrop of a typical office space. These "transitional" images capture women in the moment between two worlds — not only home and office, but self and other, adolescent and adult. Beal studied at North Carolina State University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before getting her MFA in Photography from Yale in 2013. Her work has taken the press by storm, with features in Essence, Marie Claire, the Daily Beast, and the Huffington Post, to name a select few. Recent exhibitions include I SEE YOU: Politics of Being at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture; Great American Artists — Part III: The Seeds at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History; and Dirty Soulmates at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute in New York.
Bethany Collins
Atlanta, Georgia

Bethany Collins uses language — specifically, the language of others — to address her own racial identity. In both the White Noise and Brownian Noise series, Collins takes unnerving comments said to the artist about her work or her identity and turns them around, reflecting dissected versions of the critiques back to the viewer. Her compositional structure, set of a disintegration of the text itself, is a cloud of individual letters over color fields. The complete disassembly of the text gives these paintings an objective, inquisitive air, as if the artist wishes to find alternate meanings to the comments through their autopsy. These abstract compositions repel limitations, being both present but ephemeral, legible yet illegible. In her recent series, entitled Webster’s New World Dictionary, Collins plays more directly with language as she presents words with opposing definitions. These words become stand-ins for her own bi-racial identity, pointing again to a search for meaning or definition. Originally from Montgomery, Alabama, Collins received degrees from Georgia State University (MFA in Drawing & Painting) and the University of Alabama (BA Studio Art and Visual Journalism), and has had residencies at the Harvard Center for Creative Arts & Sciences and Wonderroot Arts Center, among others. She is a 2014 artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem.
Brandon Coley Cox
Brooklyn, New York

Brandon Coley Cox uses a variety of colorful media to create paintings that are both immediate and active. He explores culturally and historically enforced relationships of power and subjugation, with a focus on redefining conventional representations of the black body. While his work is becoming increasingly abstract, there remains a centralized theme of identity, beauty, and power. The repeated compositional construction of subjects arranged in a central circle, visible in all examples here, echo Cox’s own “circling in” on a new definition of blackness, as defined by visual imagery.

Cox received his bachelor’s degree from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and is currently working toward his MFA at Yale School of Art. He attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and participated in a Printmaking/Bookarts Residency in Fabrizio, Italy. His work has been exhibited at the Garment Room in New York; the Regina Ingham Gallery in Los Angeles; and the Baltimore Museum of Art, among others. Cox is the recipient of the Barry Cohen Award for Excellence from Yale University, the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Fellowship, and the Camille Hanks-Gosby Scholarship from Skowhegan.

of trust, we’ll meet, again, 2014
Gold-leafed black linen, velvet, pleather, handmade paper, brass, powdered inks, acrylic and other fabrics
14 x 8 x 1”

Bae, the unfamiliar, 2014
Mica flakes, brass, copper, handmade paper, glitter, blue powder, colorless, steel, salt
11.75 x 7 x 1.5”

M big got us if you really knew, 2014
Handmade paper, string, glitter, acrylic, mica flakes, brown glitter tape, mesh fabric, fabric, acrylic dispersions and powdered inks on gold-coated black linen
53 x 55”
Abigail DeVille
New York, New York

Through her large-scale assemblages and installations of discarded objects and building materials, Abigail DeVille creates complex narratives of migration, inequity, and dwelling within the context of the American city. Recycled and collected materials are minimally altered in order to preserve their identity beyond the form — those traces of the lives lived with, through, and around the materials' original use. DeVille describes her practice as "nomadic"; site-specific installations reflect the location of each exhibition, as she gleaned her materials directly from the surrounding areas. DeVille studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and Pratt Institute before receiving her Master's degree in art from Yale School of Art. Her work has been exhibited at the New Museum, El Museo del Barrio, and the Bronx River Art Center, all in New York, as well as the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. She is the recipient of grants from the Joan Mitchell Foundation and the Edward and Sally Van Leer Fund of the New York Community Trust, and has been a resident artist at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in Brooklyn and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Nikita Gale
Atlanta, Georgia

Nikita Gale Conducts a Research and Experiment-Based Practice that examines the disconnect between representation and reality, and its effect on identity construction. Influenced by her background in archaeology, anthropology, and advertising, Gale mines images and text from contemporary American pop culture. Her process of presenting information is purposefully refracted, frequently rendering the text illegible and the composition abstract. In *Acceptance* (2013), Gale layered multiple Academy Award acceptance speeches, including those by Halle Berry and Nicole Kidman. The representation of these women through their words reflects our culture’s blinding infatuation with celebrity, and again points back to Gale’s interest in the resulting gap. Gale holds a bachelor’s degree in Anthropology (Archaeological Studies) from Yale University and is currently working toward an MFA in New Genres from UCLA. Her work has been exhibited at the Bruce High Quality Foundation in New York, Reginald Ingham in Los Angeles, and the Fountain Art Fair in Miami, to name a few. She is the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Southern Constellations Fellowship, and has held residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, and the Center for Photography at Woodstock.
Deborah Grant
New York, New York

Through tightly-knit collage and near-manic drawing, Deborah Grant presents a stylized appropriation of famous male artists’ iconography. These works, part of a long-running series entitled Random Select, reflect Grant’s research into the lives and art practices of other artists, and use imagined encounters between canonical heroes like Picasso and Matisse with lesser-known artists like William H. Johnson and, in the pieces included here, folk artist Mary A. Bell. Grant uses their signature shapes and subjects as a visual language in which to express her own personal narratives of childhood, religion, and identity. Grant received her BFA from Columbia College in Chicago and her MFA in painting from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. She has held residencies at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Studio Museum in Harlem, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, and A.S.A.P. Residency in Mount Desert Island, Maine. She has exhibited at The Drawing Center, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, just to name a few. Grant is represented by Steve Turner Contemporary in Los Angeles.
Andre Leon Gray
Raleigh, North Carolina

Andre Leon Gray has a knack for selecting heavily coded materials—a school desk, cowrie shells, tar—and arranging them into complex installations that raise questions about education, tradition, and the notion of social progress. He calls this process "Eye Gumbo," an apt title for work so rich in metaphor. In his 2013 piece Hieros, two worn army boots filled with cowrie shells sit atop an upside down drawer elevated by bound paperback books. That this assemblage reflects the effort of Civil Rights activists is made clearer through the flow chart drawn between the boots, outlining a progression of potential slogans for the movement from "We Shall Succeed" to the final "We Shall Overcome." This reading is both underlined and complicated by the title of the paperback book holding it aloft: Black Power. A self-trained artist, Gray has exhibited throughout the United States, including the United Nations Headquarters in New York City; the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture at Duke University; the Human Rights Institute Gallery at Kean University in Union, New Jersey; and was featured in the Southern five-state traveling exhibition Thresholds: Expressions of Art & Spiritual Life, curated by New York art and cultural critic Eleanor Heartney. He is represented by Carol Kazer Contemporary Art in Miami, Florida.

Temporary Government Housing, 2009, tar on canvas, 61 x 93 in.

Masters of the Game, 2012, white charcoal and chalk on cardboard, acrylic on wood, reclaimed books, cardboard, gold paint on plaster, feather, teddy bear, antique kids' wicker chair, and wooden school desk, 74 ¼ x 72 x 140 in.

Masters of the Game (detail)
documenting individuals, Hamilton seeks out and celebrates the interactions between photographer and subject. In his ongoing project, 7y Portraits, Hamilton photographs prominent artists of color from around the country, such as Julie Mehretu, Hank Willis Thomas, Sonia Sanchez, and Charles Burnett. Using a wide format camera, these striking portraits capture moments of both engagement and introspection, and bear witness to a prominent segment of the art world that has been historically overlooked. This project also includes Hamilton’s journals on his travels and individual portrait sessions, a practice that emphasizes the human relationships formed along the way. For the Chicago Teen Portrait Project (2013), Hamilton teamed up with poet Avery R. Young and worked with teenagers to produce a multi-site, large-scale installation of black and white photos intermixed with three-word poems. The resulting gestalt presents a bold, self-aware, and thoughtful community of individuals. Hamilton is a self-taught photographer whose independent exploration of his medium has taken him from 35mm to digital and then most recently to wide format camera. He is the recipient of the Midwest Voices and Visions Award, the Reems Center for Contemporary Arts residency, and the 2014 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship.
Patrick Earl Hammie

Urbana-Champaign, Illinois

Through large-scale figurative painting, Patrick Earl Hammie is challenging the traditional representation of gender and race found throughout Western art. Gender roles are subtly reversed through gesture with the woman as active and dominant, man as passive and submissive; her angular, engaged movements juxtaposed against his open, vulnerable, and soft body. Hammie’s color choices add to the disquiet nature of these works: cool greys and bright yellows distance the couple from any feeling of romance, while frequent drips of paint add a sense of immediacy and movement, reminding us of the bodily aspect of physical contact. In contrast to his paintings, Hammie’s drawings, by studies, are much more choreographic, tracing the two figures through the course of multiple movements. Hammie received a bachelor’s degree from Colker College and his MFA from the University of Connecticut. His paintings have earned him the Midwestern Voices and Visions Award from the Alliance of Artists Communities with Joyce Foundation, the Tanne Foundation Award, and the Arts/Industry Residency at the John Michael Kohler Art Center. He has exhibited widely, including at the Drawing Center and THEUNFAIR in New York; Zhou B. Art Center, Chicago; and the William Benton Museum of Art in Connecticut. Hammie teaches at the University of Illinois.

Contact, 2014, oil on linen, 70 x 90”

Icarus, 2010, oil on linen, 68 x 60”

Study for Labor, 2014, charcoal on paper, 35 x 80”
**EJ Hill**

Los Angeles, California

EJ Hill is pushing the boundaries of contemporary performance through his provocative style that invades private and public spheres. From singing feminist prose as lounge music (Signaling Through the Flames, 2014) to destroying a mirror with his hands (Help is On the Way (For Mark Aguhar, Trayvon Martin, and the rest of Us), 2012), Hill has employed a variety of methods to confront the layered and complicated subject of constructed identity. But primarily what seems to be at stake here is the overlap of aggression and desire within identity. Such is the case with his recent performance O Capitor, My Capitor (2014), in which Hill and fellow artist David Bell boxed while wearing white boxer briefs and black hoods, rendering both of them blind. Their fight was precluded by a period of searching, in which the hooded men slowly drew together, led by the sounds of the other. Hill received his MFA from UCLA and his BFA from Columbia College in Chicago. His performances have taken place across the country at galleries such as Grace Exhibition Space in Brooklyn, LAXART in Los Angeles, and Yes, Out! in Boston. His photographs and videos have been included in exhibitions around the world.
Ann Johnson
Houston, Texas

Ann Johnson's small objects and installations are part of her mystical storytelling, part family album. She mines her personal history for imagery, creating ghostly portraits whose faint reproductions memorialize both a specific and universal American past. These personal photographs are coupled with carefully selected materials that sit on the overlying poetic: bird nests, dried leaves, and dinner plates point to family rituals and tale-telling.

Other work, including her series, Fly Away, present more layered versions of the American story: faint images of women and men in Native American regalia and choir robes appear on clusters of eagle feathers bound together into church fans with decorative bases. This conflation of the southern church experience and Native American iconography is wealthy in biographical content. Born in London, England, and raised in Cheyenne, WY, Johnson attended Prairie View A&M University in Texas (BS in Home Economics), the University of Houston-Clear Lake (MA in Humanities), and the Academy of Art University in San Francisco (MFA). Johnson's work was included in an exhibition and catalog for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian titled Indivisible, and earned her the Carroll Harris Simms National Black Art Competition prize in Mixed Media in 2007. Johnson is represented by Hooks Epstein Galleries in Houston, Texas.

Michele's Blinds, 2014. Intaglio on feather. 4 x 6"
David Leggett
Chicago, Illinois

David Leggett’s mixed media paintings and drawings are a tongue-in-cheek mix of cultural references and materials heavily influenced by the Chicago Imagists. Leggett blends his background in illustration and printmaking with unrestrained satirical humor to confront contemporary issues of racism, homophobia, and class conflict. His biting wit is complemented and occasionally softened by his use of color and materials, which blur the line between high and low art. Although many characters come with their own well-known symbols — take Uncle Remus, for instance, collaged atop Leggett’s cartoonish message, “Come at me, Red.” Leggett himself appears often in his work. These self-portraits usually take the guise of a soft, sweet red-cheeked Boating head, a youthful portrayal that contradicts innocence against other harsh and, at times, pornographic iconography. Much of Leggett’s work can be found on his drawing blog, entitled Coke River Fudge Street, a long running series of quickly colored pencil and pen drawings. Leggett received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and his BFA from Savannah College of Art and Design. He has held several residencies, including Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Drawing Center Viewing Program, and the Rauschenberg Residency. Leggett is represented by FoGRAND Gallery in Chicago.

Let that boy cook, 8 x 10”, collage and acrylic on panel, 2013

We Made It, 78 x 72”, mixed media on canvas, 2014

Unforgivable Blackness, 38” in diameter, acrylic on canvas, 2012
Eric Mack
Atlanta, Georgia

Eric Mack creates paintings and drawings that, above all else, reflect the complicated and rhythmic nature of contemporary life. Recognizable elements such as rulers, playing cards, and informational flyers ebb and flow through abstracted geometric forms, creating what almost reads as a still-shot of a moving matrix. His work has visible roots in the AfroCOBRA style, but also makes nods to European Constructivism and Futurism. Colorful, abstract compositions grow from the grid-like structures of mathematical charts and city maps—a product Mack describes as “visual street music.” Mack received his bachelor’s degree from the Atlanta College of Art. He is the recipient of several awards and residencies, including the Atelier Hans Studio Program in Munich, the Homestead Residency for the Arts and Sciences Summer Residency Program, and the “Artist of Distinction” Award from Martell Cognac. His work has been exhibited widely, from exhibitions at Sande Webster Gallery in Philadelphia, Reginald Ingraham Gallery in Culver City, and Welzheim Projects in Munich, to the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, just to name a few. Permanent collections include the Embassies of Sierra Leone and Madagascar. Mack is represented by whitespace Gallery in Atlanta.
Delita Martin
Little Rock, Arkansas

Using a blend of printmaking, painting, and drawing, Delita Martin creates layered portraits of women rich in color, pattern, and narrative significance. The artist’s interest in history and memory is clear through her choice of figures — women plucked from old family and vintage photographs, posed in familiar garments and gestures. While the women root the paintings within representational portraiture, the real star of this work is the background: wonderfully floral patterns of daffodils dissolve into honeysuckles, ebbing and flowing through egg-like circles and jewel-tone color washes. These symbols emphasize Martin’s interest in matriliney and connect the individual figures to a more universal story. Martin received her MFA in Studio Art from Purdue University, and her BFA in Drawing from Texas Southern University. Her work has been selected for numerous international exhibitions, including the 9th International Printmaking Biennial of Douro in Portugal, and is part of several public art collections such as the C.N. Gorman Museum; the University of Colorado-Boulder Special Collections, the Southern Graphics Council Archive; and the Mid America Print Council Archive. Martin owns Black Box Press Studio, a print shop/artist studio in Little Rock.
Stacy Lynn Waddell
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Through appropriation of images and text, Stacy Lynn Waddell creates beautiful and haunting paintings that allude to histories of power, desire, and oppression. Her installations — collections of framed work atop life-sized photographic wallpaper — present a constellation of histories both real and imagined. In her Untitled (Island) series, land and seascapes are formed from the layering of different sized letter ”B”s, literally burned into the paper. This process of branding causes beautiful gradations of brown, juxtaposed against large areas of blue watercolor washes. Waddell’s processes are almost always visible: burns, drips, and brush strokes keep the artist’s hand present, an important aspect of her practice. Waddell received an MFA in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a BFA from North Carolina State University. She is a 2014 Southern Constellations Fellow at Elsewhere Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina; a resident artist at the Project Row Houses Residency in Houston; and the recipient of the Art Matters grant and the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors grant. Her work has been exhibited at the Weatherpoon Art Museum, the ICA Boston, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, to name a few. She is represented by Koplin del Rio Gallery in Los Angeles.
Chris Watts
Charlotte, North Carolina

Chris Watts' satirical compositions of transferred images and dreamy ink washes are both familiar and alien, welcoming us in with recognizable faces and then trapping us with juxtaposing anachronisms. By pairing contemporary pop icons with historical figures, Watts raises questions about the evolving face of celebrity and blackness in America. In a recent series of works on paper, Watts questions his own role in this legacy by inserting himself across from a roster of iconic members of the black community. His doubt is made clear through titles like Getting A Lesson on How to be Black and Suspicious of my Blackness Revisited. Chris Watts has been included in the Manifest Creative Research Gallery's First International Painting Annual and is part of the Drawing Center Viewing Program in New York. He was awarded summer residencies at the McColl Center for Visual Arts in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. He extended his studies at Yale University School of Art after he completed his BFA at UNC Charlotte. He also attended the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Wrocław, Poland, where he studied printmaking.

American Art Star (Who will survive in America?), 2012, acrylic, graphite, ink, charcoal, transfer on canvas, 50 x 36"  
Pedagogue of Young Gods, 2012, acrylic, graphite, ink, charcoal, transfer on canvas, 60 x 42"  
TLC Moments, 2012, found paper, carbon, graphite, staple, and wood, 7 1/8 x 7 1/8"