



SIGN UP TO NEVER MISS A DROP



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6 DAYS AGO IN CULTURE
WORDS BY ANN BINLOT

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Artists and art movements have fused in New York for over a century. From the Abstract Expressionists and the blockbuster figures of Pop Art in the '50s and '60s, to the Pictures Generation, graffiti artists, Neo-Expressionists, and beyond, New York has more than defined itself as the art capital of the US. And although the idea of New York being an affordable option for those looking to build an art career has pretty much disappeared, the Big Apple still has the allure that creatives seek out with almost religious fervor.

Below, we spoke to five artists based in NYC about their work, fears, and dreams.



Bony Ramirez, Taking Space #1, 2022
© COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Bony Ramirez

Long before Bony Ramirez left the Dominican Republic for the United States at age 13, his mind was filled with ideas. “That’s what made me become an artist, being able to make the idea I had in my head a reality,” says Ramirez. The lush tropical landscapes, customs, rituals, and vibrant people of the Caribbean nation where Ramirez was born and raised would eventually become the backdrop for much of his work. “I was influenced by nature and everything that surrounded me,” he says. “I loved how painting and creating allowed me to twist reality and make it my own.”

Although Ramirez felt the creative bug as a child, it wasn’t until after moving to the United States that he finally had access to art classes where he learned to paint and draw. Self-taught beyond those basic technical skills, Ramirez had his first exhibition at a group show in Newark, New Jersey, that celebrated Hispanic culture, and since then the rising artist’s presence in the art world has proliferated.

New York gave Ramirez a community and an education. “New York has a very vibrant artist community that I can learn a lot from, as well as the culture and access to different art institutions that really help me study,” Ramirez explains. “As a self-taught artist, the museums in New York were the closest thing I had to an art school.”





Bony Ramirez, Conch Soup, 2022
© COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Ramirez's distinct point of view offers a whimsical portrayal of his Dominican roots. "My work is a reflection and an exploration of Caribbean life and culture, along with the colonial history of the region," he tells me. "Inspired by these notions, my figures are these anatomically distorted figures that reflect on contemporary and

Ramirez's figures have large, cartoon-like eyes and exaggerated, elongated appendages. Whimsical at first glance, some channel a darker narrative, with daggers that slice through the canvases. Ramirez's body of work also includes sculpture. He's had solo exhibitions at REGULARNORMAL and Thierry Goldberg Gallery in New York, as well as "Cayman Tears," his first solo exhibition in Los Angeles at François Ghebaly, which opened in January.

Susan Chen

Susan Chen uses her paintbrush as a tool to carve out a place in history for those who deserve it. Like the Old Masters centuries before her, she uses oil paint as her medium to depict everyday heroes — the women who work for Apex for Youth, a nonprofit aimed at empowering underserved Asian and immigrant youth in New York, or the volunteers of Chinatown Block Watch, who patrol New York's Chinatown to report and monitor anti-Asian harassment in the downtown neighborhood.



forgotten or erased,” explains Chen. “Maybe it’s an attempt to bridge two worlds, because if art is a reflection of our times, it would be good to remember more than just a very small niche of our society.”





The Hong Kong–born Chen, who moved to New York in 2015 after graduating from Brown University to find work, creates art in pursuit of the truth. “I think art-making is most interesting when you’re using it to learn something about the world, or yourself, that you are curious about, or don’t have the answers to yet,” she says. “Art-making, which is similar to the pursuit of freedom, helps you get closer to the truth, and the truth is what sets you free.”

In her search, she explores Asian American identity. “So many of us were affected by intergenerational trauma, conflicting views coming from two cultures of East and West, navigating stereotypes and microaggressions on a weekly basis,” she says. “I’ve been very inspired by this sense of pan-Asian unity, which would have been a difficult concept during our parents’ generation due to the complicated histories of wars across Asia.”

Despite the high cost of living in New York and paying rent for both a studio and a home, Chen feels the returns make it worth it. “I’ve found the New York art community to be surprisingly welcoming, where artists are often in dialogue with other artists trying to help each other get shows,” she says. “There is a really sweet camaraderie, where we all know we’re hustling together.”





Anthony Akinbola, *Lift Every Voice*, 2022
© PHOTO BY ADAM REICH, COURTESY OF SEAN KELLY

Anthony Akinbola



being brushed down, or to encourage growth. Symbolically, the durag means so much more; it's a celebration of Blackness, a fashion statement. For Anthony Akinbola, the durag is his medium of choice.

"I had always been pretty used to durags, but there was something about how the light reflected off the satin that was compelling to me, and I started to appreciate the beauty of durags as an object independent of someone wearing it," explains the artist. "I wanted to see how I could translate that beauty into something new." Akinbola sews countless durags together to create colorful, abstract compositions that are both compelling and mesmerizing.



Anthony Akinbola, Blade Trinity, 2021

© COURTESY OF SEAN KELLY



Akinbola grew up in Columbia, Missouri, surrounded by art thanks to his parents, who ran an arts nonprofit there. “On the weekends when I couldn’t stay home by myself, I would follow them there,” he recalls. “The studio was always full of art books and material for me to make use of.” It wasn’t until Akinbola was older and movements such as Fluxus and Arte Povera showed him the possibility of art that he saw it as a viable career path.

This spring, Akinbola, who is represented by Sean Kelly Gallery in New York and Night Gallery in Los Angeles, will have his second solo show at Night Gallery open from the end of March. He credits New York for kick-starting his career. “There’s just so much that goes on here, so many things happening, so many people to meet, so many places to be,” says Akinbola. “New York gives me hope, I always feel like tomorrow is another opportunity for anything to happen. The city keeps it fresh and exciting and applies pressure to you where you have to step out of your comfort zone to try and chase your dream.”



Lucia Hierro, Mandaito: Vinagre, Bustelo, 1 Mango, 1 Platano Maduro, Salami Higueral, 2021
© PHOTO BY OFSTUDIO, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY

Lucia Hierro



stocked in New York bodegas and grocery stores, elevating them into fine art in her commentary on the capitalism and consumption that defines American culture.

The Dominican-American artist — who was born and raised in Washington Heights and Inwood, the predominantly Dominican neighborhoods located at the northern tip of Manhattan — grew up between two cultures. “Where I grew up is an amalgamation of Manhattan and the Dominican Republic — the result of which feels spiritually ubiquitous,” says Hierro. “It’s hard for that to not come into the work even when the work is about all of our consumption, not just the demographics.”

Hierro came of age in New York surrounded by creativity. “My father is a musician-composer,” she explains. “I grew up watching artistic expression and how it affected people. I don’t know a life outside of the arts.” For Hierro, art is a way to escape society’s ills. “In a capitalist, racist, patriarchal world, being an artist meant freedom,” she says.



Lucia Hierro, Deli Not a Bodega, 2022

© PHOTO BY OFSTUDIO, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY

Hierro's process begins with research, notes, and photographs. She then prints the images on fabric before creating installations and individual pieces. Like the Pop artists, Hierro uses everyday objects as a way to communicate how these products define us. Rows of chips bags hang on walls. Transparent bags are filled with dish soap, Air Jordan 1s,



“The work deals with late-stage capitalism and the ways we have formed identities around products, materials, images, architecture, all of which have been designed for a myriad of purposes — some good, some not so good,” she says.

Her New York and Dominican-American identities are everywhere in her work. “You can’t walk around without awareness,” says Hierro of the city that has formed so much of her identity and practice. “Train rides reveal income disparities, trends, unexpected moments of kindness.” The next stop for the artist is a group show at BRIC in New York, which will run through April, and a solo exhibition at Charlie James Gallery in Los Angeles this June.



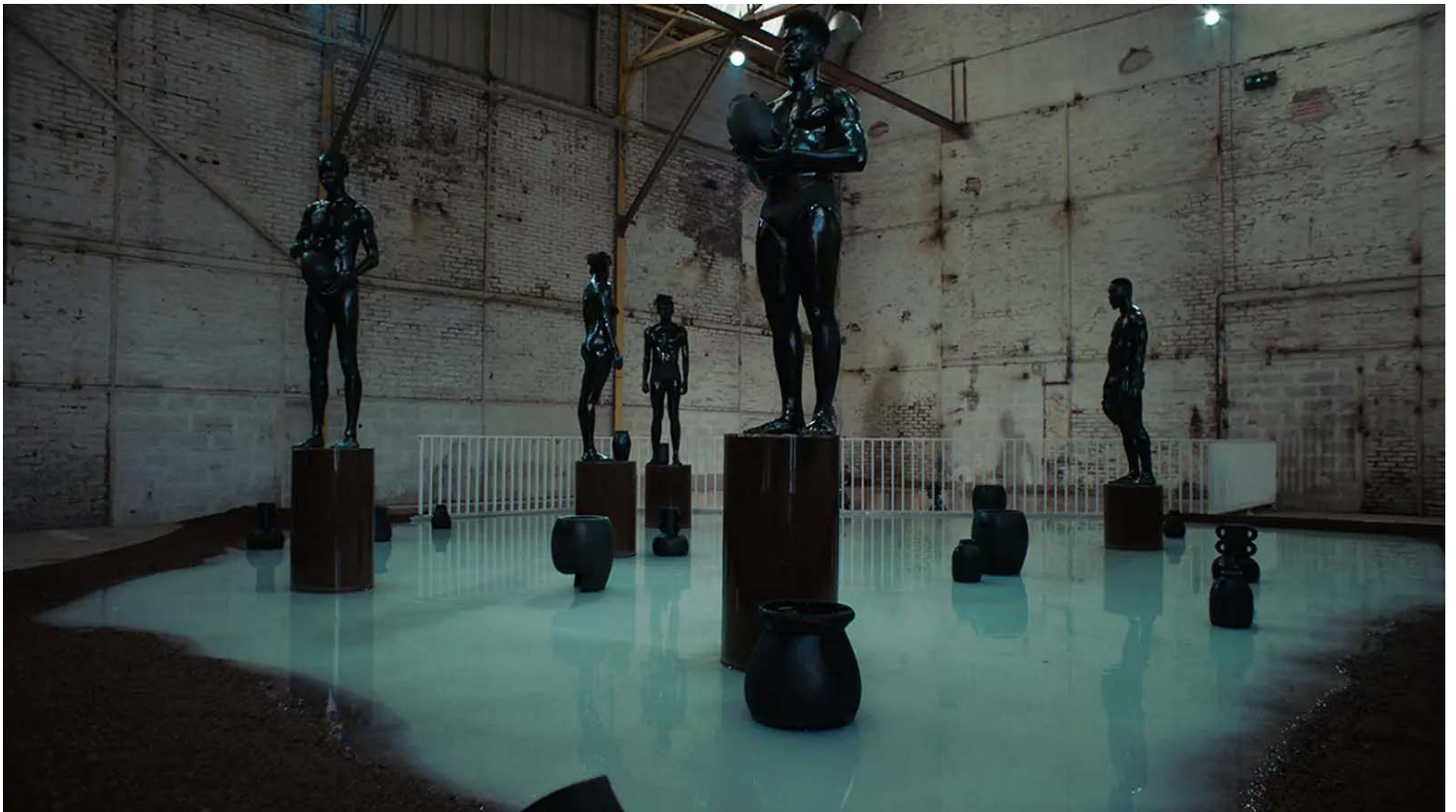
Miles Greenberg, PNEUMOTHERAPY II, 2020

© PHOTO BY MARIA BARANOVA, COURTESY OF GALERIE PERROTIN NEW YORK AND MILES GREENBERG

Miles Greenberg

Miles Greenberg knows the meaning of endurance. The Montreal-born, New York–based performance artist tests the limits of his mind and body through durational performances. He has the ability to stand on a plinth for seven hours as liquid drops from the ceiling onto his naked body, his genitals covered by an 18-karat gold jockstrap, as he did in “Pneumotherapy (II)” at Perrotin New York just before the pandemic. Standing stoically, he looked like a Greco-Roman statue atop a bed of 4,000 hyacinth, lily, and tulip stems. He emerged after the seven-hour performance in a cheerful, upbeat mood. He did the same in “Oysterknife,” another durational performance in 2020 where he walked on a treadmill for 24 hours straight.

Greenberg says he doesn't feel like becoming an artist was a choice. "It just sort of happened," he says. "My mother definitely had a hand in it."



Miles Greenberg, Late October, 2020

© COURTESY OF MILES GREENBERG



work at the same time as you are, and I find that very romantic,” says the artist, who had an exhibition at the New Museum late last year. “By the time you’re finished making the work, it’s already been seen by everyone, and you can’t go back and erase. You do it, and then it’s done. There’s enormous risk involved in making performances every single time, which I’ve grown to find extremely seductive.”

At press time, Greenberg is in Paris where he’s creating a performance film at one of art’s greatest institutions: the Louvre. But it is New York’s towering skyscrapers that serve as fuel for Greenberg’s practice. “I have a huge fetish for monumentality,” he says. “Seeing tall buildings helps me think. I also love that here, you can get anything done, any time of day, any time of year. New York is this deeply unhealthy clusterfuck of ambition, and I’m obsessed with being a part of it.”

Anthony Akinbola

Bony Ramirez

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