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CULTURE > ART, BOOKS & MUSIC

The Women Painters Redefining a Classical Art for the Digital Age

Seven artists who are expanding the possibilities of one of the most traditional forms of art-making—and reshaping the way we see it.

STORY BY SASHA BONÉT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSICA MADAVO PUBLISHED: DEC 1, 2025

A few years ago, during a moment of extraordinary political uncertainty and collective mourning, I had a conversation with an artist known largely for digital and multimedia work. They told me that they were returning to painting. When I asked why, the artist said, “I’m going home.”

For many artists, painting is a practice intimately intertwined with their earliest experiences of art—one as old as art itself. It’s a physical process, an attempt to make meaning through the hand—through labor, through matter itself—that engages the body through imagination and imagination through the body. Anyone who has ever stood before a painting and felt it rearrange something inside them can attest to this.



PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ARTWORK: © ANNA WEYANT, COURTESY GAGOSIAN

Anna Weyant in her New York workspace.



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Anna Weyant, *Girl in Window* (2024)



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Anna Weyant, *Geraldine* (2024)

For some, painting is an escape; for others, it marks a kind of return. In an age of digital tools and AI, when the making and experiencing of art can feel very virtual or ephemeral, it also represents something else; to paint is to insist on presence.

Each day, we are bombarded with images that shape our individual and collective consciousnesses. These images are not neutral; they coax us toward different perspectives and push us toward singular standards of language and thought. Our digital selves bleed into the material world. In some ways, they even form our conception of it. To paint today is not merely nostalgic; it's an embodied refusal to let art exist without the traces of being.



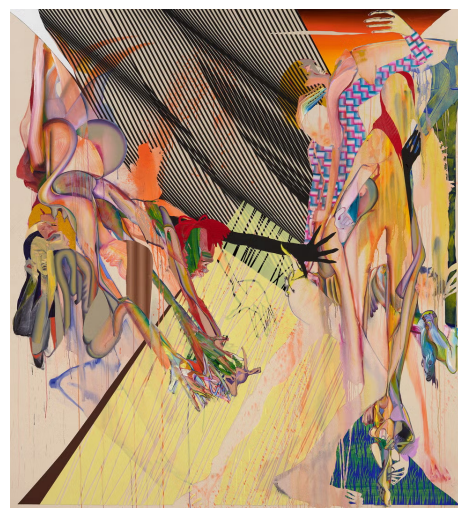
PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ARTWORK: © CHRISTINA QUARLES, COURTESY THE ARTIST, HAUSER & WIRTH, AND PILAR CORRIAS, LONDON

Christina Quarles in her Los Angeles studio with *Magic Hour* (2016/2021)



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Christina Quarles, *Y'all Always Be a Part of Me* (2025)



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Christina Quarles, *Living in the Wake* (2025)

For women painters, who have long been excluded from many of the canons and institutions of a tradition that has historically rendered them less maker than muse, this insistence on visibility is about much more than art. It's about what Simone de Beauvoir once referred to as the struggle to "become"—to define and not be defined by the identities and narratives that have been imposed on them, to create a tangible record of their presence.

I spoke with seven women artists who make vastly different work informed by vastly different projects, perspectives, experiences, and histories. But they have each used the language of painting, formally and thematically, to engage with subjects like identity, gender, and expression and explore new modes of seeing.



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Quarles working on a painting in preparation for a forthcoming show at Hauser & Wirth.

In her Brooklyn studio, Jenna Gribbon, 46, works on a large portrait of her wife, musician Mackenzie Scott, in blue hues that evoke a seductive memory. Gribbon suggests that we've forgotten how to see. Our eyes are fatigued by screens, skimming over beauty. She considers herself a documentarian. She is deeply influenced by the filmmaker Agnès Varda and interested in the reciprocal relationship between subject and observer.

Gribbon's process begins with taking iPhone photos of Scott in candid, often intimate poses. "Sometimes," Gribbon says, Scott "will see a finished painting and say, 'I've never seen anything that looked more like me.'" For others, she explains, Scott will say, "I don't know who that is. Is that you?"

Gribbon has been painting Scott for eight years and says she's nowhere near done; she wants to continue painting her as they both age. Maybe there's something about love that demands a witness. We all yearn to be seen, though we fear the cost. "When you see someone every day," Gribbon says, "you overlook things."



PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ARTWORK: © SASHA GORDON, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK

Sasha Gordon with *Whores in the Attic* (2024)



© SASHA GORDON, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK

Sasha Gordon, *It Was Still Far Away* (2024)



© SASHA GORDON, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK

Sasha Gordon, *Flame Like Blush* (2024)

Sasha Gordon's first solo show at the David Zwirner gallery in New York this fall included a room filled with a series of self-portraits depicting chaos and how it manifests in our bodies. In one work, *It Was Still Far Away* (2024), Gordon, 27, paints herself clipping her toenails with headphones on while an explosion erupts behind her—a nod to our collective obliviousness and unabashed self-indulgence. In *Whores in the Attic* (2024), she paints herself nude, with cellulite and a cigarette, wearing pointy-toed mules.

Because Gordon often presents herself in her paintings, her work is frequently labeled as being about identity or body positivity. But for her, it's more about the language of embodiment and the porous line between vulnerability and force. "This is about disassociating and going in and out of consciousness," she says. "I just want the figures to be pure and not affected by the current social norm," she says—not innocent but immune.

Born to a Jewish Polish-American father and a Korean mother, Gordon grew up in Somers, New York, and studied at the Rhode Island School of Design. Her earliest lesson in looking came from her mother. "It maybe sounds like an insult, but she told me my friends were pretty, but they're conventional," Gordon says. "She told me I had something different that was more memorable." That beautiful off-centeredness is the seam she keeps tugging at in her work: "It's important to have something uncanny."



PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ARTWORK: © JENNA GRIBBON, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

Jenna Gribbon in her Brooklyn studio with *Projecting myself onto M* (2025)



© JENNA GRIBBON, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, PHOTO BY PHOEBE D'HEURLE

Jenna Gribbon, *A Reflection Held* (2024)



© JENNA GRIBBON, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, PHOTO BY DARIO LASAGNI

Jenna Gribbon, *Popcorn painting* (2023)

You can practically hear Jadé Fadojutimi's paintings. Her large-scale abstractions are symphonies of color. The artist, 32, who lives and works in London, is speaking with me from Japan, where she visits often. She recalls spending many hours as a child watching Kyoto Animation anime, which is known for its soft, seductive use of color to communicate feeling. "When I'm in Japan, my use of color flourishes," she says. "The sky is different here; the color sensibility leans toward pastels that might seem feminine in the U.K. but here feels universal."

Fadojutimi grew up in a British-Nigerian household. Her paintings reflect states of longing and dislocation—not any fixed identity but the instability of the very concept. These themes surface through lush, volatile palettes that behave like weather systems; feeling arrives chromatically first and only afterward allows itself to be understood. She is a conductor, in the spirit of Italian maestro Riccardo Muti: one who guides rather than commands. "When you're working with color, compositions form naturally through tone, temperature, depth, perspective, and theory," she says. "I think worlds begin to shape themselves through the notion that they aren't destinations that are predecided."



PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ALL ARTWORK: © JADÉ FADOJUTIMI, COURTESY THE ARTIST

Jadé Fadojutimi in her London studio.



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Jadé Fadojutimi, *Untitled* (2025)



© JADÉ FADOJUTIMI, COURTESY THE ARTIST,
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Jadé Fadojutimi, *Untitled* (2025)

Much like the figures in her works, Anna Weyant, 30, projects a disarming innocence that belies her wisdom. She understands the power of perception. Social media has played a role in her practice, both in content and process—the former because her figures can seem posed and framed like Instagram images, the latter because she gained early attention via the platform. Her paintings sometimes feel like moments lifted from feeds, depicting young women with ambiguous expressions set against neutral backgrounds, all rendered with classical Dutch Golden Age and baroque techniques attentive to surface, texture, and studied stillness. The result is a kind of portraiture caught between eras, where intimacy is at once a performance and a spell. "My figures are posed, but I think of the images as more like film stills," Weyant says. "Something choreographed, paused."

When I visit Weyant's studio in New York, an unfinished canvas shows the lower half of a woman looking over a terrace, her exposed backside at its edge. She tells me she often imagines a man in the room with her figures, just beyond the frame. They know they are being watched. They play with the gaze, offering stonelike beauty, then undermine it with an eerie humor, challenging the concept of assumptions versus reality. "It is really a reflection of my own experience," she says. "I don't feel qualified to paint from anyone else's gaze."



PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ALL ARTWORK: © JADÉ FADOJUTIMI, COURTESY THE ARTIST

Fadojutimi's studio.

Sahara Longe, 31, tends to find inspiration everywhere: in historical Instagram accounts, while people-watching in the park, in a painting of saints she spotted at the National Museum in Oslo, Norway. Recently, she became captivated by Doris Lessing's 1962 novel, *The Golden Notebook*, in which the protagonist searches her past for meaning in her postwar English life as a woman condemned to freedom, lamenting "the thinning of language against the density of our experience." Longe paints from the spaces where language fails.

The eldest of four girls, the London-based Longe grew up on a farm in Suffolk, England; her father is British, her mother Sierra Leonean. Her semi-abstract figurative paintings are potent—emotional and intimate—but leave room for the viewer to complete them. She works with Canada balsam, thickened linseed oil, rabbit-skin glue, gesso, and turpentine, summoning the weight of history in her materials. Her paintings carry the hush of the old masters, but turned inward, the subjects claiming the frame not as ornament or offering but as ground of self—as bodies that refuse to be read except on their own terms.



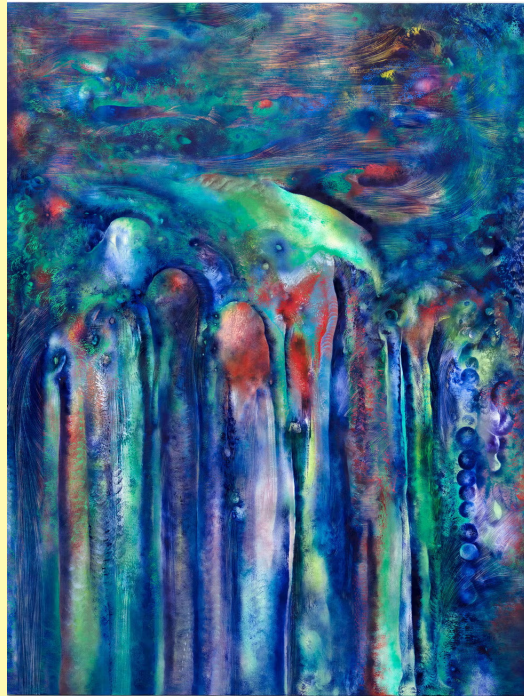
PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ARTWORK: © LUCY BULL, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

Lucy Bull in her Los Angeles-area studio.



© LUCY BULL, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER STACH

Lucy Bull, *16:55* (2025)



© LUCY BULL, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, PHOTO BY JEFF McLANE

Lucy Bull, *15:17* (2024)

Longe says her approach to painting is born in part of an ethos she picked up while studying at the Charles H. Cecil Studios in Florence. "The mantra of the school was to take something in real life and make it more beautiful on the canvas, and I always try to do that," she says. She becomes endearingly giddy when speaking about the moment she finds something that will lead to new work. "You're just emptying yourself and watching until something comes," she says. "It's a kind of evangelical feeling of 'Oh! I've discovered something.'"

Lucy Bull's L.A. studio sits discreetly in the middle of a commercial strip in San Gabriel. Her walls are lined with layered canvases in various stages of production. The artist, 35, isn't precious about where she paints—sometimes in an alley, sometimes in a backyard. She prefers to work outside in the elements.



PHOTO BY JESSICA MADAVO; ARTWORK: © LUCY BULL, COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

Paint brushes and supplies in Bull's studio.

Bull's paintings pulse with an inner rhythm that feels both alive and otherworldly. Her layered strokes carry traces of her intensive labor; each surface seems to breathe. "I'm constantly trying to use color and mark-making as visual bait, suspending the viewer's attention," she says. "I'm creating a scenario where they're pulled into the landscape of marks."

Bull grew up in New York and studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she developed an intuitive, process-driven practice rooted in repetition and endurance. Her ambition is to teach the viewer how to roam again. "I'm trying to conjure associations," she says.

Christina Quarles, her wife, producer and screenwriter Alyssa Polk, and their daughter lost everything in the Altadena fire in L.A. last January. The devastation delayed but did not derail her practice, which merges the technical with the spiritual. Quarles's paintings feature figures bent and contorted to fit into dynamic, futuristic spaces; they twist and collapse into one another, revealing fluid, layered textures that carry the weight of history and memory.



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Sahara Longe in her London studio.



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Sahara Longe, *School Girls* (2025)



© SAHARA LONGE, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND TIMOTHY TAYLOR

Sahara Longe, *Looking Back* (2025)

Like a lot of only children raised by single mothers, Quarles, 40, learned early in life how imagination can be a shelter. She also has a knowingness and instinct that come from understanding how to absorb without instruction. "I think of making art as a formal practice that you learn," she says. "You have to learn all these skills at first, and when you are learning them, they're all you can think about," she explains. "But eventually it becomes so familiar that it distracts the thinking brain and allows this sort of deeper subconscious to flow through you."

Quarles is currently completing work for a forthcoming show at Hauser & Wirth in L.A. She says she knows a painting is complete when she is no longer compelled toward action—when she becomes, like us, a viewer and finds herself observing and asking questions. "It's really this back and forth between intention and actuality and trying to honor that actuality with a new set of intentions," she says. "This is the moment of ultimate freedom."

Painting provides us with a sense of belonging; a reminder that everything that makes us feel like islands in our suffering has been felt by another. That we are in fact more alike than we are different. Perhaps, ultimately, a painter's job is to take us home.