

# ARTSY

## Conrad Egyir: "5 Artists on Our Radar This August"

By Artsy Curatorial and Artsy Editorial

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"Artists on Our Radar" is a monthly series produced collaboratively by Artsy's editorial and curatorial teams. Utilizing our editors' art expertise and our curatorial team's unique insights and access to Artsy data, each month, we highlight five artists who have our attention. To make our selections, we've determined which artists made an impact this past month through new gallery representation, exhibitions, auctions, art fairs, viewing rooms, or sale inquiries on Artsy.

### Conrad Egyir

B. 1989, Accra, Ghana. Lives and works in Detroit.



Left: Conrad Egyir, *Souls That See No Despair*, 2018 | Right: Conrad Egyir, *Uctions of the Luminaries*, 2019

Left Photo: Courtesy of Library Street Collective | Right Photo: Courtesy of Jessica Silverman Gallery

Conrad Egyir is one of several esteemed artists featured in Beyoncé's new visual album *Black Is King* (2020), though the Ghana-born, Detroit-based painter has already made a name for himself. In fact, he's sparked interest from museums for the past few years. When Egyir graduated from the Cranbrook Academy of Art's MFA program in 2018, he received the school's Museum Purchase Award with an acquisition from the Cranbrook Art Museum. In 2020, Miami's Perez Art Museum announced the acquisition of works by Egyir, while the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit opened the artist's first institutional solo show this past July. He's also due to have a solo show this year at UTA Artist Space in Los Angeles, curated by Jessica Silverman, who represents him. On Artsy, the artist's follower count has grown by 400 percent in the last 3 months.

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In his graphic figurative paintings, Egyir visualizes the multidimensionality of Black men and women. Often, he paints multiple depictions of the same character in a single canvas, varying their poses, skin tones, sizes, and clothes. “[My subjects] are heirs of a new abstract country whose vessels (my new word for ‘skin’) reflect a spectrum of blackness not bound by the ‘othering’ or dictations of any institute,” the artist has said.

Through text, fashion, and symbolic objects, he fills his canvases with iconography from contemporary American culture, biblical parables, and Ashanti storytelling from his native Ghana. His large-scale shaped canvases—which resemble postcards, stamps, and notebook paper—surround these compositions with a sense of grandeur and familiarity.

—Sarah Gottesman

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

B. 1940, St. Ignatius Indian Mission, Salish and Kootenai Nation, Montana. Lives and works in Corrales, New Mexico.



Left: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Untitled*, ca. 1985 | Right: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *I See Red: Petroglyph Park*, 1996

Left Photo: Courtesy of Pan American Art Projects | Right Photo: Courtesy of Garth Greenan Gallery

In early July, news spread that the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., had acquired Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's *I See Red: Target* (1992), making it the first painting on canvas by a Native American to enter the institution's collection. Smith, now 80, is an enrolled Salish member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation in Montana. "My painting is caught in a perfect storm: Black Lives Matter, the death of George Floyd, Covid-19, the presidential election, the Standing Rock Sioux temporarily winning a stay on the pipeline and add to that the supreme court saying the Creek Indians do exist and their treaty is valid," the artist told *TheGuardian*. "These are possible reasons that caused my painting to be purchased." Like much of her work, *I See Red: Target* conveys a sociopolitical message, contending with the oppression of Native Americans in reaction to the 500th anniversary of Columbus arriving in the Americas.

Smith began to make a name for herself as an artist in the 1970s, as she began forming her own visual language in painting and printmaking. Her work is often embedded with narratives around the United States's past and present, racism, capitalism, and the mistreatment of the environment. Stylistically, Smith incorporates elements of Abstract Expressionism and Pop art into

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her works, including deft gestural brushstrokes and appropriated imagery and text.

The National Gallery acquisition is only the most recent of her many art-world achievements. Smith's work is included in the collections of other major institutions, including the Walker Art Center, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Whitney, among others. She has also received numerous awards of distinction and lifetime achievement and exhibited widely at galleries since the late 1970s, been featured in solo shows at American museums since the '90s. Smith is now represented by Garth Greenan Gallery in New York.

—Casey Lesser

### Robert Nava

B. 1985, East Chicago, Indiana. Lives and works in Brooklyn.



Left: Robert Nava, *Angel With Head*, 2019 | Right: Robert Nava, *Blue Ghost*, 2019  
Left Photo: Courtesy of Night Gallery | Right Photo: Courtesy of Night Gallery

In early July, Robert Nava's painting *The Tunnel* (2019) sold for \$162,500 at Phillips's 20th-century and contemporary art evening sale, quadrupling its low estimate of \$40,000. *The Tunnel* is an acrylic-and-spray-paint diptych of what can only be described as an angry ghost from Super Mario Brothers. This result came off the heels of a busy year for Nava: The artist sold out two solo shows in 2019 at Night Gallery in Los Angeles and V1 in Denmark, and *Sorry We're Closed* mounted a solo booth of Nava's work at The Armory Show this past March, attracting a long waiting list of hungry collectors.

Nava's paintings of monsters and ghosts are more than meets the eye. While the childlike aesthetic and materials of his work—Nava frequently uses crayons—may appear simple, he plays with texture and color to create thrilling juxtapositions and fresh recreations of epic myths. Nava,

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who earned an MFA at the Yale School of Art in 2011, learned the rules of painting to break them: "By drawing things 'incorrectly,' I found more things to do in that realm," he told *Juxtapoz*. "So that's why I find it more interesting and why I draw and paint like this."

—Sarah Dotson

### Dario Calmese

B. 1982, St. Louis, Missouri. Lives and works in New York City.



Left: Dario Calmese, no. 90., 2012 | Right: Dario Calmese, no. 107, 2014

Left Photo: Courtesy of projects+gallery | Right Photo: Courtesy of projects+gallery

In mid-July, Dario Calmese became the first Black photographer to shoot *Vanity Fair's* cover. His stunning photograph of actress Viola Davis wearing a midnight blue dress adorns this month's issue. The picture, in fact, takes inspiration from a silver print in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection, which features an enslaved man, his back covered in scars. Calmese's contemporary interpretation powerfully reclaims the composition.

In addition to his editorial work for the *New York Times*, *The Daily Beast*, and other publications, Calmese has developed independent projects that celebrate communities or color, and has directed shows for fashion label Pyer Moss. He's shot Harlem socialite Lana Turner and captured South Africa's impoverished Alexandria Township. Since his days studying fashion photography at the School of Visual Arts, Calmese has been interested, he recently told the *Times*, in photographing "ordinary Black people who were living extraordinary lives."

—Alina Cohen

### Veronica Ryan

B. 1956, Plymouth, Montserrat. Lives and works in London and New York.

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Left: Veronica Ryan. *Liminal Spaces*, 2019 | Right: Veronica Ryan, *Coral Polyp IV*, 2018  
Left Photo: Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery | Right Photo: Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery

In the coming months, sculptor Veronica Ryan is due to open her largest and most ambitious solo exhibition to date at Spike Island in Bristol. Though she's exhibited extensively throughout the U.K. and U.S. since the 1980s, the artist is only now receiving the public recognition she deserves. Last month, it was announced that Ryan, alongside Thomas J. Price, had been commissioned by Hackney City Council to produce a series of public sculptures in celebration of the Windrush Generation. The bronze and marble sculptures, due to be unveiled in 2021, will depict Caribbean fruits and vegetables that Ryan remembers buying from London markets with her mother shortly after she moved to the U.K. from Montserrat as a child.

Throughout her career, Ryan has explored her own ancestral history and the impact of migration. She creates sculptural renderings of domestic objects and often combines them with found objects or organic materials. Ryan casts, stitches, wraps, bundles, and stacks objects to create devotional arrangements that question identity as it relates to place. At the same time, she conjures a sense of memory, loss, and longing.

Since 1990, Ryan has split her time between the U.K. and New York, where she is represented by Paula Cooper Gallery. Last year the gallery presented a solo show "The Weather Inside," which was revisited as an online exhibition on Artsy this summer.

—Gemma Rolls-Bentley

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