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Meet Eight Artists Reshaping the 59th Venice Biennale

By Christopher Bollen

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If this year's roster of artists for the 59th Venice Biennale looks a little different than previous iterations of the longest-running survey of contemporary art on the planet, that's because significantly—and finally!—the majority of the participating artists are women or gender-nonconforming. That much-needed burst of energy is thanks largely to this year's curator, Cecilia Alemani, who stacks the deck in favor of artists exploring identity, subversive states of being, technology, and an aesthetic rebuff to the tired tropes of straight white males of yore. "The artists in the show portray a world where everyone can change, be transformed, become something or someone else—a world set free," Alemani explains. "The show looks at art and artists as travel companions, who can help us imagine new modes of coexistence." To celebrate this sense of freedom, we spotlight eight artists showing their work this spring in the most beautiful city on the planet.

JADE FADOJUTIMI



Photographed by Valentin Hennequin.

Age: 28 **Medium:** Painting **Hometown:** London

Describe your studio/work practice.

Painting, and the way I compose the space around me, are the ways I have a conversation with identity and question what that means. My practice involves delving into myself and my experience in the hope of witnessing my core. For me, the core can be described as our true identity undisturbed by the noise and distraction of the world. Painting becomes a catalyst for my character to blossom, revealing itself for a brief moment in the form of environments, hoping to provide a sense of belonging.

What's the biggest risk you've taken as an artist?

I'm all about taking calculated risks with my studio and my paintings. I'm always trying to take leaps to energize myself and the work. Constantly experimenting with painting always feels like a risk, but I never want to hold back from what the work could be just because people are watching.

When was your first trip to Venice?

In 2017 to see the Biennale for the first time. I was supposed to go for only five days, but I ended up staying for ten, because the magic of the city stole my attention. I bathed in the art and history of the city, writing and drawing and going to the same bar every day, meeting new people.

Which artists influenced you the most at the start of your career?

Laura Owens, Makiko Kudo, Yoshitomo Nara, Phoebe Unwin, Helen Frankenthaler, Henri Matisse, Claude Monet, John Singer Sargent, Marc Chagall, and David Hockney among others.

What is your biggest influence outside of the art world?

Most of my influences come from my own life. It was my initial interest in Japanese animations and soundtracks that sparked my love for painting. I'd spend hours absorbing the stories of these worlds, and experiencing feelings that felt abstract. At the time that could only be translated through painting. I also take a lot from my immediate surroundings, including my studio and home space, particularly the clothes, furniture, and objects from my childhood that make up my environments.

If you could show with any artist living or dead, who would it be?

Claude Monet.