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PHILADELPHIA STYLE

State Of The Arts: 9 Visual Artists Leading The Cultural Conversation Right Now

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Now more than ever, the dialogues of the day play out through the visual arts. Here, the artists who lead the cultural conversation and ask the important questions that push us all forward.

Carl Hopgood

As a child growing up on a farm in rural Wales, Carl Hopgood's (carlhopgood.com) imagination ran wild. "Surrounded by animals and nature, I spent a lot of time daydreaming and creating imaginary worlds with baskets and fruit boxes," he says. "They were make-believe Technicolor worlds full of dried flowers and seashells, backdrops covered with collages of tabloid magazines. Here, anything was possible."

After spending a pivotal afternoon with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton—his best friend's cousin—Hopgood's future became clear. "My world was never the same after that day," he says. "I knew I wanted to be surrounded by creative people and make dynamic, exciting art that would leave a lasting legacy in the world."

Hopgood attended Goldsmiths College in London, then later, lured by Southern California's sunny, open skies and inspired by *A Bigger Splash*, a documentary about David Hockney, he moved to Los Angeles in 2015. "I had heard about the growing L.A. art scene and prominent collectors such as Chara Schreyer and Beth Rudin DeWoody. LACMA, MOCA and The Broad were beginning to attract an international audience," he shares. "It was the perfect time to go, and I was ready to work in new mediums and expand my repertoire."

Since then, Hopgood has highlighted social issues through his sculptural pieces that incorporate found objects and neon, all inspired by memories and everyday life. "Giving a voice to the underrepresented and often ignored [is very personal to me]," he shares. One piece demonstrating this is "Just Say Gay," a

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response to the Republican bills passed in Florida that heavily restrict in-school discussions about sexual orientation. Hopgood will display this piece at The Bunker Artspace during Art Basel Miami Beach this year, along with “Ban Guns Not Books,” a sculpture made from school desks, a neon gun and neon books. “The banning of books from schools and libraries is an attempt to silence the stories about both Black history and silence LGBTQ+ voices while gun laws remain and our kids leave school in body bags.”

Beyond Basel, Hopgood, who counts Morgan Freeman, Rupert Everett and many others as collectors of his work, is working on a series of empty chair paintings (“Old empty chairs are not empty in reality, memories always sit there,” he explains), and *Fragile World*, a documentary about his life that releases in 2024. “I love the way that I am able to use art as my therapy and... help others... struggling with their mental health or sexuality... raising awareness and giving back to our community,” Hopgood says. “[I love] being able to push boundaries and create art that navigates a way through the rich tapestry of life.”

Nate Young

Quiet, contemplative, introspective, meticulous—that’s the work of Chicago-based artist Nate Young, whose works hint at meaning without explicitly conveying it. It’s an approach that has won Young, who is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery, accolades in Chicago and across the art world, as the artist received The Joyce Foundation 2021 Artadia Award, and his work is featured in the permanent collections of institutions like the Walker Art Center; the Milwaukee Art Museum; Flint, Mich.’s Mott-Warsh Collection; and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Now, Young is one of the featured artists in the new exhibition at renowned art museum MASS MoCA, *Like Magic*, which examines artists that use “technologies of magic”—whether AI, divination or healing earth—to overcome obstacles presented because of race, gender, sexuality or ability. What’s next for this rising artist, who recently took up horsemanship? “I’m hoping to make the journey from South Carolina to Philadelphia on horseback sometime in the next year. Other than the actual action, I’m not quite sure what form it will take; possibly a film.

But along the way, there have been a number of experiments—look out for those.” *Like Magic* runs through Sept. 1, 2025, at MASS MoCA, North Adams, Mass.

Liam Everett

Liam Everett’s studio practice is influenced by movement: contemporary choreographers and minimalist theater. “My interests in both disciplines lie in the act and process of rehearsal as the primary subject rather than the performer or the plot,” says the Bay Area abstract artist, who works with New York’s Kasmin Gallery

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and Kamel Mennour in London and Paris. The overriding message of his work, says the artist, doesn't attempt to convey, represent or dictate content. "It's instead an ongoing engagement with the invisible and that which avoids contextualization."

Everett's recent shows include the sun is their drum at Paris' Galerie Mennour and the four corners at Brussels' Galerie Greta Meert. Next month, art patrons will see his solo exhibition of new paintings at San Francisco's Altman Siegel Gallery and a curated two-person presentation at Art Basel Hong Kong with Galerie Greta Meert in March. "I'm also co-curating a three-part exhibition featuring artists working on the West Coast of North America whose work shares a tendency to evade identification and the referential and occupies a position of physical ambiguity," he says, adding the project will debut in New York City next October and in Brussels and Los Angeles in 2025.

Yayoi Kusama

Heralded as an iconic artist who has spanned countless mediums throughout her prolific career, Yayoi Kusama presents LOVE IS CALLING, on view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) through April 7, 2024.

Born in 1929 in Matsumoto, Japan, Kusama began studying traditional Japanese Nihonga painting in her youth before relocating to the United States in 1958 during the rise of abstract expressionism. As one of the first Japanese artists to make this bold move to New York, Kusama cultivated a highly visible, avant-garde public persona in tandem with her artistic practice. She would go on to represent Japan at the 1993 Venice Biennale and be the subject of major international exhibitions organized by preeminent institutions such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art in New York, Tate Modern in London and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

PAMM has been honored to present Miami audiences with LOVE IS CALLING. Stepping inside the darkened, mirrored room, patrons discover inflatable, tentacle-like forms in kaleidoscopic colors that extend from the floor and ceiling. Kusama's own voice permeates the space, reciting a love poem in Japanese that conveys her enduring message of spreading love universally through art. As Miami's flagship modern and contemporary art museum, PAMM is the ideal home for this transcendent exhibit that facilitates human connection for the city's diverse communities.

Judy Chicago

Judy Chicago's work has always been a blend of the provocative and the poignant. From her early days in the male-dominated art scene of the '70s, she carved a niche for herself by creating pieces that were unapologetically feminist, pushing boundaries and sparking conversations. Her iconic work "The Dinner

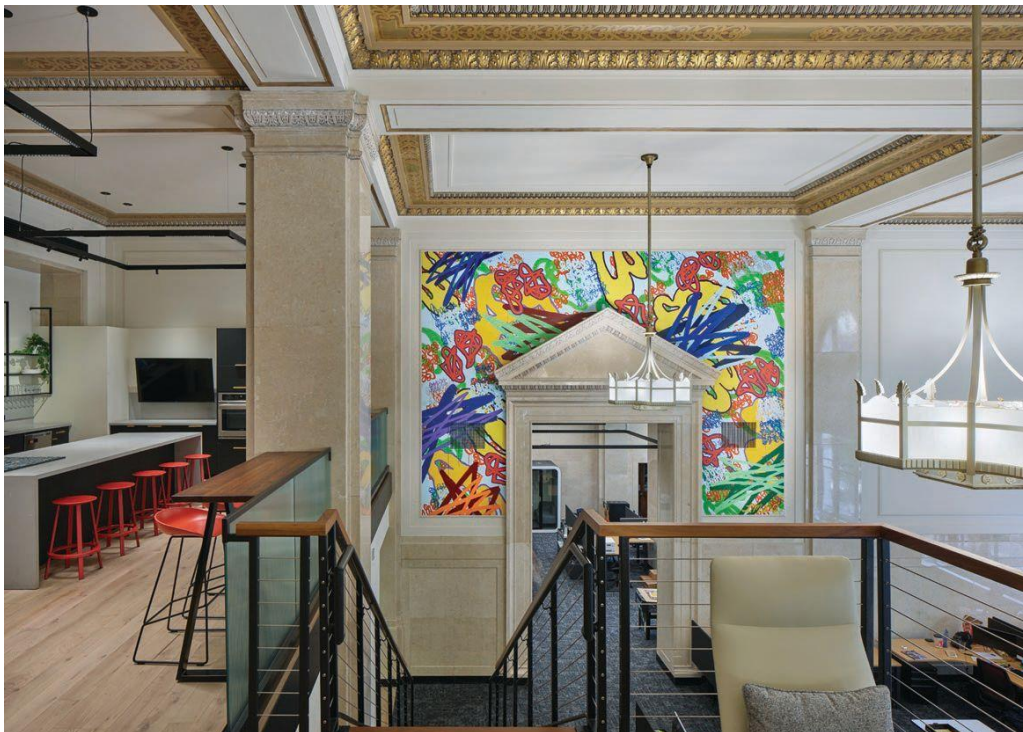
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Party” was a testament to her ability to blend artistry with activism. Now, decades later, the art world is abuzz amid her most comprehensive New York museum survey to date, spanning four floors of the New Museum, tracing the artist’s 60-year career across painting, sculpture, installation, drawing, textiles, photography, stained glass, needlework and printmaking.

The survey, *Judy Chicago: Herstory* (on view through Jan. 14, 2024), includes “The City of Ladies,” featuring work by over 80 women essential to Chicago’s practice. The compilation of artworks and archival materials from luminaries, including Hilma af Klint, Hildegard von Bingen, Claude Cahun, Elizabeth Catlett, Simone de Beauvoir, Artemisia Gentileschi, Emma Goldman, Frida Kahlo, Georgia O’Keeffe, Charlotte Salomon, Remedios Varo and Virginia Woolf, among others, spotlights Chicago’s work as a feminist activist and reclaims the narrative for women. “The exhibition brings together works from across her paradigm-shifting 60-year career, showcasing her tremendous impact on American art.

It also highlights Chicago’s critical role as a cultural historian who has helped reshape art history to include numerous women artists long excised from the canon,” says Lisa Phillips, New Museum’s Toby Devan Lewis Director. “Her creative spirit, dedication to social justice and advocacy for women continue to motivate her to make art and inspire others to this day.”

Tim McFarlane



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“When I was originally curating my roster of artists, I was looking for talented, creative artists from Philadelphia who weren’t afraid to take risks, who were going to add to the dialogue on contemporary art and who were passionately committed to their artistic practice,” says Bridgette Mayer of Bridgette Mayer Gallery. One of those artists who checked all those boxes, and more, was Tim McFarlane.”



McFarlane believes there can be a sense of time travel in many of his paintings because he often builds them up while leaving traces of the beginnings, and other layers, showing through to the top layer.

“My work is built on a base of observations from life,” says McFarlane, a Philly-based abstract painter who also dabbles in site-specific mixed-media installations, murals, photography and digital experimentation. “As nonrepresentational as my work can be, it has its roots in how I experience the world around me, witnessing and taking note of the many ways that the human experience alters the physical environment around us.”

McFarlane also thrives on the unexpected. “Some of my paintings take on the look of drawings, and some of my drawings and other works on paper resemble my paintings. I use acrylic paints and other water-based media on canvas, panels and other materials. My work is usually multilayered, with each layer contributing to the overall look and feel of the completed paintings,” he says of his work, some of which has been placed permanently at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Woodmere Art Museum and the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art, among many other institutions.

Cicely Carew

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After graduating from MassArt, Cicely Carew spent years living in New York City, Los Angeles and Mexico City working as a wellness coach and educator, creating on the side, but never fully committing to it. Until one day, the universe brought her back to Boston and back to her art.

“A lot of things pointed me back to art, to be who I was meant to be. I realized people are out there to support me and I’ve got to leap,” Carew says.

She bounded into the Boston art scene winning numerous awards and fellowships. She had solo exhibitions, group shows and paid commissions, and her work joined the collections at notable Boston institutions.

And still she pushed herself to jump higher. She created a large public art project for Northeastern University and a giant installation at the Prudential Center with the art accelerator Now and There. Her work began to cover feet and then miles, looming large in the city. Her biggest stage yet came with a single phone call.

“Her interest in materials and their transformation to create immersive experiences in the gallery was immediately clear and very interesting to me, as well as how much she works to challenge and push herself as an artist and maker,” says Anni A. Pullagura, the assistant curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. “I found the practice compelling for the Foster Prize and exhibition.”

The Foster Prize was established by the ICA in 1999 to nurture and recognize Bostonarea artists. Carew, along with this year’s winners, have been on display at the museum since August and the show runs until the end of January. There is a green grass carpet in Carew’s gallery where visitors sometimes lie down and gaze up, which fills the artist with joy.

“I want the art to be a peaceful place to land—loving, like a hug, ethereal, joyful, meditative and safe. I want to make this institution feel like home and like everyone has belonging. I think of art as a gift,” she continues. “I’m making it in the hopes that it is offering something good to the world.”

It’s a grand gesture from an artist who’s not afraid of going big.

April Bey

On display through Feb. 4, 2024, at the Nevada Museum of Art, April Bey: Atlantica, The Gilda Region immerses viewers in contemporary artist April Bey’s exploration of Afrofuturism. A movement that dates back to the 1960s, Afrofuturism navigates the relationship between Black Americans and their ties to space travel and understanding of extraterrestrial life.

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Told through a series of colorful tableaux, Bey positions herself as an alien from the fictional world of Atlantica who was sent to Earth to report back to her native planet. On Earth, she discovers racism and oppression, constructs that do not exist in Atlantica, a world where Black people prosper through beauty and love. “I’m creating a space where Black women and queer people can simply be themselves,” says Bey, who was inspired by her life growing up on the island of New Providence in the Bahamas, where her otherness manifested in bullying from her childhood peers. “In Atlantica, we can solve everything.”

The solutions Bey presents take shape as Black vampire women who solve food insecurity; the Cowgirls of Color, an all-female Black rodeo team who uphold Atlantica’s past, present and future; and trans activist Marsha P. Johnson. Glitter is the currency of Atlantica, and Black individuals are celebrated as visionaries, artists and beacons of queerness, feminism and radiant joy. Woven tapestries, mixed-media paintings, digitally woven blankets, videos and resin-encased textiles mounted on wood dance with color, life and prosperity due to Bey’s inspiring visions.

“Atlantica is a joyous Afrofuturist meme, while it is also a serious paean to women’s resilience in the face of colonialism, specifically Black women who are expected to be sovereign and robust while at the same time assumed to be inept and emotionally weak when leadership roles are sought,” says Bey, who now calls Los Angeles home. “Made in another universe that parallels, critiques, celebrates and satirizes our own, Atlantica occupies exploited space, offering up a fictitious world where labels are nonexistent and we are allowed to float within our self-defined identities.”

Atlantica, The Gilda Region was curated initially by Mar Hollingsworth at Los Angeles’ California African American Museum (CAAM). Organized by Carmen Beals, associate curator and outreach director at the Nevada Museum of Art, the exhibition is on display now in Reno, Nev.

Halim Flowers

Halim Flowers’ work is so bold and moving that there’s a name for it: optical improvisation. The D.C. artist admits he coined the terminology because no other description of his work, from abstract to pop art, sufficed. “What we physically see is only 1% with our eyes; the other 99% is from memory—images that the brain convinces the eye to see,” says Flowers. “I lean into love as a visual language to transcend the confines of what the brain and society have programmed our eyes to see.” The artist, who only began painting in earnest several years ago after a stint in prison, wants people to see his work with their hearts and souls.

This year, collectors scrambled to see his work from Los Angeles to Paris. Ted Vassilev, owner of DTR Modern Galleries, with locations in New York City, Boston, Nantucket, Palm Beach and Washington, D.C., swooped in to sign and showcase Flowers’ genius. The accomplishments for this artist over the past 12 months are staggering: a coffee-table book of his work (Love Is the Vaccine, 2023, Scala Arts Publishers), art residencies

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in Los Angeles and Barcelona, plus a solo show at Paris' ChamPop Galerie, which received media raves. Lithographs Flowers created in Barcelona will show at Art Basel 2024 in Hong Kong, Switzerland and Miami Beach, and in September 2024 at New York's Armory Show. "In prison, a mentor asked me what's the biggest room in the world. I thought about palaces like the Taj Mahal or the White House," says Flowers. "He looked at me and said, 'The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.' That stuck with me. I continue to evolve as an artist by always understanding that process is about bringing the world something new."

Full article: <https://phillystylemag.com/visual-artists-to-watch>