

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



A Partial Truth by Katherine Fraser. 26x30" oil on canvas Private Collection

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10 Philadelphia female artists you need to know

BY NATALIE MCDONALD

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[The Philadelphia Ten](#), known simply as "The Ten," was a group of female artists who exhibited together starting in 1917, largely to draw attention to their work in an art world that was dominated mostly by men at that time. These women – all painters – spent decades traveling the country and showcasing their work in what was then considered a fairly rebellious act.

Today, the trajectory of the female artist is still a complicated one. But in Philadelphia, home to the Moore College of Art & Design, the country's first and only visual arts college for women, there are many female artists making big, bold statements through a range of mediums – from painting and sculpture to photography and installation. Two of the artists on this new list, the new Philadelphia Ten, if you will, are linked to solo exhibitions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, while other locals are emerging as top talents at galleries and museums around the country. Remember their names.

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Shelley Spector



As a former gallery owner, [Shelley Spector](#) has not only been a champion of fellow Philadelphia artists, but she's been a staple in the art community for decades. Her own work – comprised of a combination of sculptures and installations – makes use of pattern and found materials to create complex worlds reflecting ideas about home. [Her solo show](#), "Keep the Home Fires Burning," is currently on exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) at the Joan Spain Gallery, on the first floor of the Perelman Building through Sept. 27.

"I use imagery such as flowers, birds, houses and people to represent concepts," the University of the Arts grad says, "ideas larger than the literal translation of what's shown."

All of the items in this latest exhibition (her first at the PMA) were handmade in her South Philly studio near Fabric Row. In fact, many of the items are woven from secondhand clothing and interesting textiles that she scouts for locally. Spector's mother, Anita, also assists in the painstaking hunting, gathering and organization process.

"The labor-intensive processes that I use, like stacking, winding, patterning and creating works from very small pieces," says Spector, "present me with time to build layers of meaning into my work. I'm interested in themes that are part of most people's everyday, like money, relationships, tools of measurement, personal history and the environment."

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Nile Livingston



Illustrations of historical figures and celebrities when they were younger. Nile Livingston.

"Everything is an investigation," says [Nile Livingston](#). "My artworks are about things I want to explore and understand more clearly."

As a painter, printmaker, sculptor and fashion designer, Livingston is a true Renaissance woman. Born in West Philly in the late 1980s, she's spent much of her career documenting her own life and interactions with people. Her portfolio reads a bit like a diary in which she shares memories and provides a narrative that addresses social change.

"I romanticize about space, loss, people, decadence and anxiety," she says. "I hope that by translating things that are mysterious and sometimes elusive into something beautiful, I will help others that are just as curious about life as I am. Art is about catharsis."

An important part of work has to do with gender.

"People believe that the female's gaze is different from the male's gaze," says Livingston, who sometimes delves into the erotic and even grotesque to challenge people's ideas about women. "It is a difficult process," she says, "to make something that not only manifests an idea but also translates our physical world."

Zoe Strauss

As a chronicler of Philly life, photographer [Zoe Strauss](#) has created a career from capturing the underbelly of the city - the people and places you'll never find in a glossy brochure or travel guide. With an eye on unexpected

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moments and unlikely characters, she's become one of the most well-known photographers in the city, and for good reason. Her solo exhibition several years ago at the Philadelphia Museum of Art showcased highlights from a decade of work, not only images taken in the city, but also from around the country. One might argue that Strauss is exposing the American Dream, warts and all.

"In terms of making a portrait, the camera is the introduction," Strauss explained in an interview with Photo Eye. "I approach someone with the intent of making a photograph and what attracts me to the person is intangible, although later on in the edits it seems as if the portraits that have the greatest importance to me, and have the greatest satisfaction, are the ones where I have had some sort of connection with the person, and that almost always involves a connection that can not be articulated – a sense of pride and joy of being in the world."

Holly Trostle Brigham



Tamara de Lempicka: On Autopilot, 2009 Watercolor on Paper. Holly Trostle Brigham.

For the better part of her career, [Holly Trostle Brigham](#), a Smith College grad, has been painting herself into portraits that tell the story of powerful women. But her newest project, also rooted in feminism, takes a very different approach. Not only is she collaborating for the first time, she's doing so with award-winning poet [Marilyn Nelson](#). The two have partnered on a series of seven paintings and poems about nuns. These representational watercolors tell the stories of lesser-known religious women from around the world, who themselves worked as artists and crafters. To paint the stories, Brigham's using influential symbols of world religions and even numerology.

"There is a lot of iconography," says Brigham, "a mixing of my subject's iconography with my own."

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By merging her own image with the guise of the nuns she's painting, she borrows heavily from her background in art history.

"When you study art history," she says, "you get the sense that there weren't enough women artists being talked about."

This year, she's participating in a show of women's art at the New Bedford Art Museum (Sept. 1-Nov. 13), as well as an exhibition at the [James A. Michener Art Museum](#) next year.

Diane Feissel

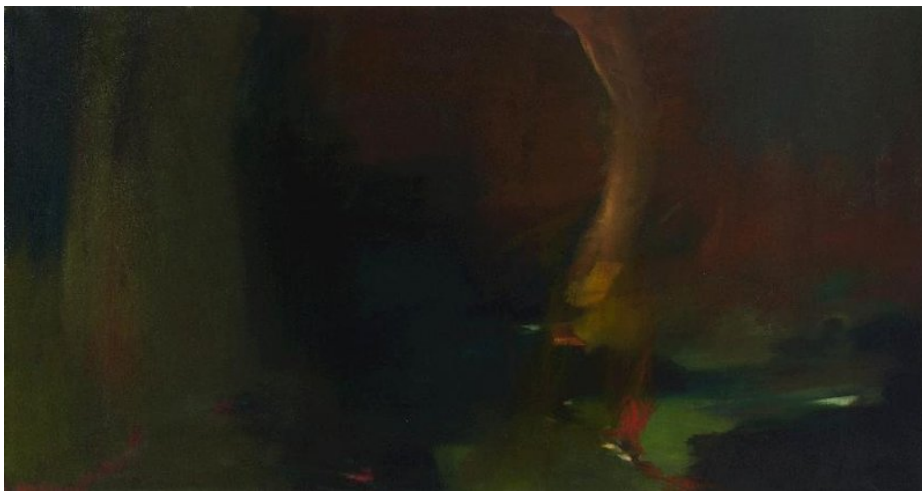
Many of her paintings are portraits, though even [Diane Feissel's](#) landscapes tend to tap into moments of deep contemplation.

"My work seems to be most inspired by my life, everyday interactions with people, random moments and sights," she says. "It is probably ironic and contradictory in some way that I tend to paint people from the outside, their face, their exterior – but probably what I am trying to convey the most is their inner self."

She has spent many years telling the story of the collective human experience, starting from her early life on Cape Cod, where she was raised, to her later studies at Bryn Mawr, Haverford College and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She also spent time in France before winning the Anna Hyatt Huntington bronze medal and co-founding the blog "[Women Painting Women.](#)"

"Professional representation in the greater art world – by galleries, institutions and sales – still seems to be dominated by male artists," says Feissel. "The best we can do is to expose the work of more female artists to the market at large and dispel notions that there is any qualitative difference in the work of female and male artists overall, and that, in fact, many female artists are offering fresh, insightful, challenging depictions of the female person and its form."

Hollis Heichemer



Long Summer Evening II, by Hollis Heichemer. Oil on canvas.

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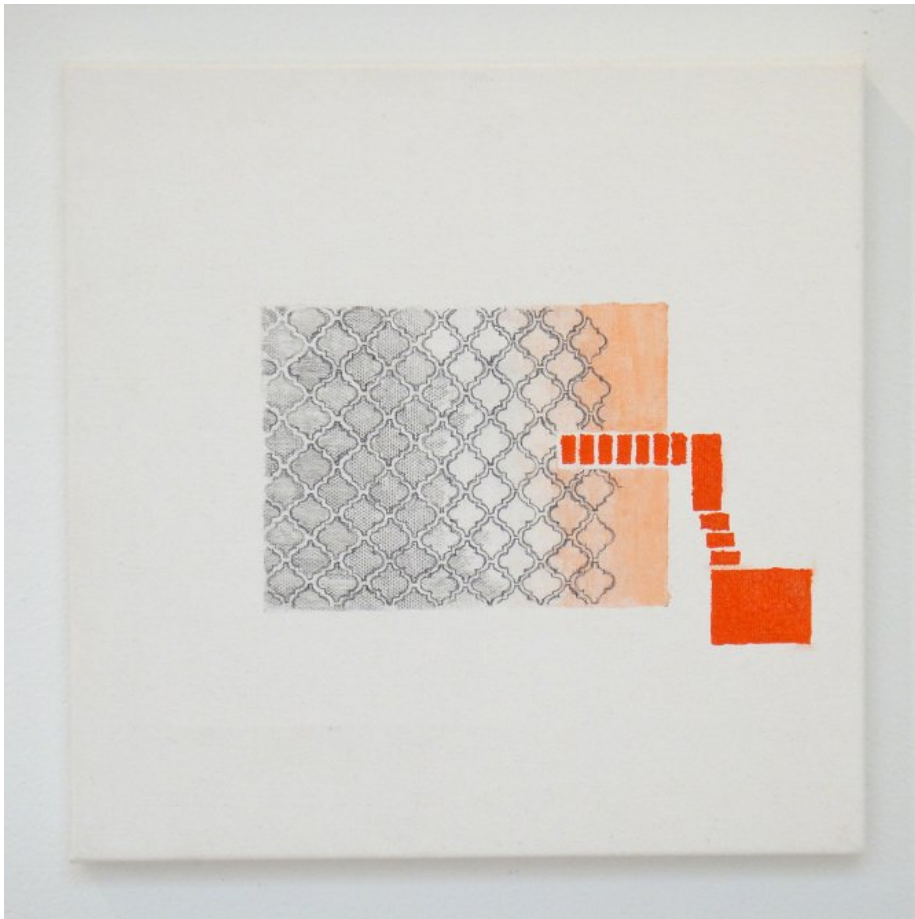
"My work explores the edge where beauty and tragedy meet," says [Hollis Heichemer](#), a painter from New York who lives and works in Philly.

She's currently working on drawing and painting concurrently, capturing immediate impressions and fleeting moments that all seem to be part of a much bigger picture, one that's not entirely figurative, but also not completely abstract either.

"The nature of our mind, imagination and the question of 'what is reality' are subjects which interest me," says Heichemer, who has traveled extensively to Ireland and Italy, as well as New England. "I'm examining this through the use of shapes, lines, color and space. I'm attracted to connecting to the experience of feeling that it looks familiar, yet not knowing what that familiar is."

The music scene, particularly the Philadelphia Orchestra, has been inspiring to the artist, who admits that theater and dance also bring a certain energy to her creative process, matching only the vitality of the city itself. Her work is currently exhibited at J. Cacciola Gallery in New York City.

Aki Torii



Map of Home (1-60). 2013. Mixed Media on Canvas. By Aki Torii.

At 19, she moved from Okazaki, Japan, to study art at Indiana University, later earning her Master of Fine Arts at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Making her home in Philly, [Aki Torii's](#) most recent work focuses on

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social behavior as seen through drawing, sculpture and installation. Torii's exhibited widely in the Northeast and has been included in shows at the Skybox Gallery and the Slought Foundation in Philadelphia.

"We all have different measuring tools (knowledge) to understand others and ourselves in society," she explains of her "Analysis Drawing," where she takes a new look at well-known fairy tales like Cinderella.

And using a dystopian novel as inspiration for her mixed media project "Perfect People," she describes it as a "make-believe reflection of our society where a human's worth is evaluated by mathematic measuring tools."

She teaches at the Delaware College of Art and Design in Wilmington, as well the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Delphi Art Club.

Eileen Neff

"Traveling into View," [Eileen Neff's](#) current exhibition at the Bridgette Mayer Gallery, is inspired by an artist residency in Costa Rica, where she spent three weeks in a tropical rainforest.

"I've always liked the idea of being somewhere else," she says, "knowing how an unfamiliar place can quicken one's sense of attention and presence, touching on values underlying my work."

The new exhibit showcases the artist's photographs and mixed media work, everything from abstract reflection to the taxonomy of tropical leaves, in keeping with her more encompassing interest in engagement and display. Over the years, Neff has received many awards, including a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, [Leeway Foundation](#) and the [Pew Fellowship in the Arts](#). The University of the Arts grad has also exhibited in New York, Dublin and at galleries throughout the U.S.

"The hope is always to retain that sense of wonder," she says, "knowing that the mystery of presence is always waiting to be recognized. This is what drives my work."

Katherine Fraser

"My memories growing up in Maine are a great source of inspiration," says [Katherine Fraser](#), a painter who honed her skills at the University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. "My paintings have the visceral quality of memories or dreams, when the image is reduced to the essential, and the mood is what draws your focus."

Fraser, whose paintings can be quite introspective, has won numerous awards and fellowships, including the Thomas Eakins Painting Prize. She recently participated in "American Wisdom," a two-person show at the James Oliver Gallery, as well as "(R)evolution: Women Painting Women" at the Principle Gallery in Alexandria, Virginia.

"Life often strikes me as a string of moments," she says. "I paint people experiencing these moments of profound self-awareness and growth."

Her work was recently showcased at Scope Art Fair in Miami Beach.

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Kiki Gaffney



Two Botanicals, by Kiki Gaffney. Acrylic and graphite on 2 wood panels. 2014

A native of Meadowbrook, Montgomery County, [Kiki Gaffney](#) is a painter who uses nature, geometry and abstractions to create patterned, heavily designed worlds.

"I am interested in the visual patterns of my surrounding," says Gaffney, a University of the Arts grad, "particularly those that follow some type of order or repetition, such as wallpaper or street grids."

Drawn to symmetry, the paintings tend to reach for a certain stability that the artist says most people are searching for in their lives.

"There is a visual organization," she says. "My work aims to highlight the beauty of configuration and decoration, to create space for contemplation."

She regularly shows at Philly's Pentimenti Gallery, as well as Susan Maacsh Fine Art in Maine and the Julie Nester Gallery in Utah.



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