

Royal College of Art Graduates: 5 Painters to Watch

By Annabel Downes | London, 7 July 2023



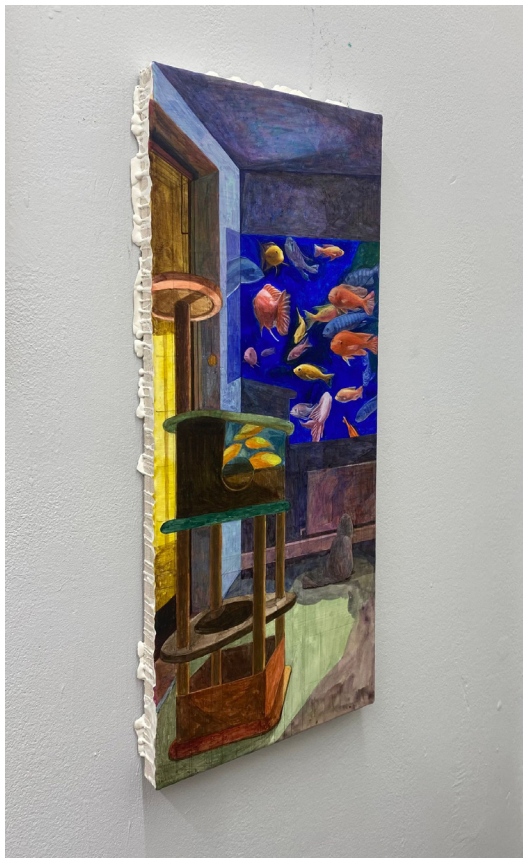
Main image: Alexis Soul-Gray, *There is no dead, there are no dead* (2023). Oil, spray paint and bleach on linen. 220 x 300 cm. Courtesy the artist.

procuring some of the capital's best young painters. You only have to look back at last year's cohort to understand how quickly these talents can be scooped up by gallerists and collectors.

Pam Evelyn is the standout from 2022. Before even graduating from the RCA, the abstract painter was the subject of a solo exhibition at Peres Projects (October 2021), Berlin, and a sell-out show at The Approach in Bethnal Green (April 2022). Now, there are murmurs of a solo show with another major London gallery later this year.

Fellow classmates Li Hei Di, Georg Wilson, and Konstantinos Argyroglou have found similar success recently with respective solo shows at LINSEED Projects, Shanghai (November 2022), Berntson Bhattacharjee, London (April 2023), and Claas Reiss in London (January 2023).

Now, as RCA's graduate shows open up across the College's Battersea and Kensington campuses (30 June–3 July 2023), the Truman Brewery in East London (13–16 July 2023) and online, Ocula Advisory takes a look at potential art stars of 2024.



Miyeon Yi, *The world I offer you* (2023). Egg tempera on wood, 60 x 25.5 x 2.5 cm. Courtesy the artist.

1. Miyeon Yi

You'd be forgiven for immediately falling in love with Miyeon Yi's paintings, which capture individuals or groups playing card games, preparing for family rituals, and simply coexisting.

Rendered in egg tempera, every brushstroke of her delicate painting process can be discerned while also enabling a rich assortment of colour to shine through as a result of its varying opacity.

The world I offer you (2023) is a prime example of this technique. While the walls behind bear the remnants of each stroke, in contrast, the fish projected upon the walls are rendered in exquisite lifelike detail.

The sides of her wooden canvases reveal gesso seeping down the edges. Applied directly with her hands, the gesso adds some sculpted tactility to their otherwise flawless finish.

Later this month, the Seoul-born artist features in Ojiri Gallery's presentation at CAN Art Fair (12–16th July 2023) in Ibiza.

2. Bárbara Alegre

Working between Barcelona and London, Bárbara Alegre was a student at Chelsea College of Art and Design before heading to the Royal College of Arts for her MFA.

Her delicate close-ups are a means of respite for the artist, who treats art as a form of shelter, a contemplative practice which one can return to and reflect on.

Bárbara's practice arises from personal experiences and universal questions. Such questions were most recently posited in her solo exhibition *Dancing in the Sky, Waiting for the Sunset* (11-22 May 2023) at IONE & MANN in London.



Bárbara Alegre, *Beacon* (2023). Oil on canvas. 80 x 80 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Following a period of loss in 2020, Bárbara worked on a series of poignant paintings which celebrated this life and the all-encompassing sense of connection between people, while also acting as a meditative process to fill the unassimilable void of her loss.



Alexis Soul-Gray, *Two children and a chained parrot* (2023). Oil on canvas. 200 x 160 cm. Courtesy the artist.

3. Alexis Soul-Gray

Alexis Soul-Gray succeeds in playing with varying degrees of abstraction and colour, yet each portrait is immediately identifiable as her own for the consistent linework and the veiled wash she employs over each expressive face.

Exploring tenderness, and how such traits manifest in both kindness and sensitivity to pain, Alexis paints her lived experiences from images sourced from Renaissance art, found photo albums, and 20th century advertisements.

Two Children and a Chained Parrot (2023) features in *Immutable Fragments* (22 July–9 September 2023), the artist's solo exhibition at Bel Amis in Los Angeles.

Taking the corruption of innocence as its starting point, the exhibition features paintings, drawings and collages of children and their families that have been delicately rendered, then rubbed out, or worked upon, suggesting the haptic burden of their bodies.

This year, Alexis has similarly found success more locally, having featured in group exhibitions at London-based Pippy Houldsworth Gallery (January 2023) and Tristan Hoare Gallery (June 2023).

4. Hettie Inniss



Hettie Inniss, *Model Car Grave Card* (2023). Oil and oil stick on canvas. 320 x 200 cm. Courtesy the artist.

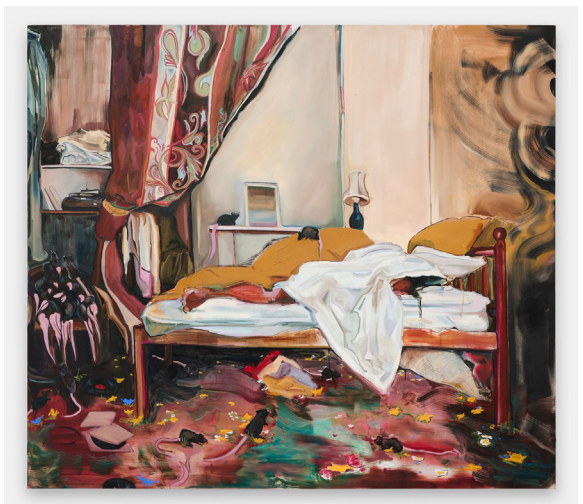
Born in 1999, the young painter completed her BA at the University of Leeds before heading down to London to complete her MA at RCA.

Gazing at her paintings you are reminded of the deliberation over detail and selective paint density employed by Jennifer Packer and Lisa Brice. Her paint slips and fades into her backgrounds, with interior and exterior environments folding into one another, yet stands confidently to form these clear, yet undefined spaces.

In doing so, Hettie questions the stability of both memory and identity, while simultaneously combatting rigid ideas of representation, specifically advocating for Black Fluidity as a more liberating way of being.

Earlier this summer, Hettie featured in the group exhibition *Somewhere in Between* (14 June–2 July 2023) at Hew Hood Gallery in London. The Islington-based gallery is a good place to start for artist introductions,

5. Shaquelle Whyte



Shaquelle Whyte, *Rat Dreamz*. Oil paint and spray paint on canvas. 200 x 220 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Shaquelle Whyte is among the youngest of this cohort. Exploring the human condition and his own lived experiences, the figurative painter has turned heads, notably that of London gallerist Pippy Houldsworth who signed the artist this year.

Prior to attending the Royal College of Art, Shaquelle completed a Fine Art degree at London's Slade School of Fine Art. While a student there in 2022, Shaquelle spoke to Ocula Advisor Rory Mitchell about the challenges faced by young painters finishing art school today, his key influences, and the new directions he wishes to take in his work.

‘What I realised in a really good tutorial with Michael Armitage was that I wasn’t painting people—I was painting myself and using the paintings as anchors to drive forward an idea. And that’s how I developed my idea of treating paintings as devices to mobilise different ideas.’

The physicality of paint is an essential part of his work, yet oil pastel can be spotted weaving throughout his portfolio as a means to bring back elements of drawing into his figurative practice.