

Art of the City: Who Are Biggest Artistic Talents in Cities Across America?

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In this unique, inaugural Art of The City section, we spotlight and celebrate the freshest, boldest artistic talent from each of the 11 cities in which we publish. From Aspen to Washington, DC; LA to NYC; and for art connoisseurs and enthusiastic voyeurs alike, we're delighted to reveal the diversity and richness of America's emerging artists with in-depth profiles and a rare glimpse into the creation of their portfolios. Be sure to pick up our magazines when you visit our cities for the complete story on each of our featured artists (and how to support them)—together, they make a compelling collection.

ASPEN - LINDA GIRVIN AUSTIN - BEILI LIU BOSTON - STARN BROTHERS
NEW YORK - FAILE WASHINGTON, DC - MAGGIE MICHAEL MIAMI - JILLIAN MAYER
PHILADELPHIA - CHARLES BURWELL HAMPTONS - MELINDA HACKETT
CHICAGO - HEBRU BRANTLEY LOS ANGELES - FALLEN FRUIT LAS VEGAS - JK RUSS

AUSTIN - BEILI LIU



The ghostly white tree hovering over Austin's downtown Lady Bird Lake appeared at once to have risen from the water and drifted down from the heavens, a haunting memorial to the 300 million trees lost to the Texas drought in 2011. "Thirst," a collaborative public art project by Women & Their Work Gallery (dreamed up and executed by visual artist Beili Liu, architects Emily Little and Norma Yancey, and landscape architect Cassie Bergstrom), was perhaps the city's finest moment demonstrating the beauty and reach of public art.

Two years later, Liu, the toast of Austin's emerging art scene and a professor at the University of Texas who has shows around the world, is readying another public art installation, this one to launch in San Francisco in August. She plans to transform a little-used pedestrian bridge (which connects Chinatown to the Chinese Culture Foundation within the Hilton Hotel) by affixing pieces of silver Mylar onto nearly 50,000 brick faces. "People will walk on it, and they'll see their reflection," she says. "So then the bridge becomes a river with this rhythmic kind of energy."

Born in a rural farming village in China, Liu works with everyday materials like thread, paper, and incense to compose installations that seem effortless and exacting, weightless and profound. She moved to Austin seven years ago, and triumphant shows soon followed. This year she continued the climate conversation she started with "Thirst" with a more hopeful solo show called "Stratus."

"I've grown so much since I've moved here," says Liu. "Imagine how wonderful it would be if our visual arts scene could catch up to our music scene?"

ASPEN - LINDA GIRVIN



For longtime Aspenite [Linda Girvin](#), art is an exercise in duality. Her latest series, "Presence with Absence," explores the boundary between life and death, realism and abstraction, movement and stillness. The striated shapes of the new works have a Richter-scale feel with Rorschach-test bursts of color. And like those tests, Girvin wants the audience to suspend rational thought and absorb the work more viscerally. But, the process is so interesting that even the most far-from-reality viewer will have a hard time resisting the urge to dig into each piece's multiple layers.

Quite simply, the series is composed of scanned images of dead birds mixed with acrylic paint and blown up to 48-by-56-inch posters. However, as an intensive artistic process they're "two-minute performances" that straddle two- and three-dimensional shapes. To produce the images, Girvin uses bird carcasses as paintbrushes. She manipulates and moves their bodies while they're being scanned to create discontinuous lines and amorphous shapes. The results are spontaneous, beautiful, and haunting. She says, "I like the beauty of birds," she says. "I like their freedom, their gestures—they have such 'ta-da' about them." Girvin is careful to point out that no birds are harmed in the creation of her work.

While transition and movement have always been prevalent themes in her work, the current series didn't come about until she and her husband started to spend more time in Mexico. "I feel closer to life and

closer to death down there,” she says. “[I feel] the immediate quality, the palpable quality, and the heart down there.” That synchronicity with the cycle of life has allowed her to peaceably work with a medium as ostensibly grotesque as bird carcasses. “I don’t think I’m talking about death; I’m talking about life. I’m trying to push the boundaries of photography.”

BOSTON - STARN BROTHERS



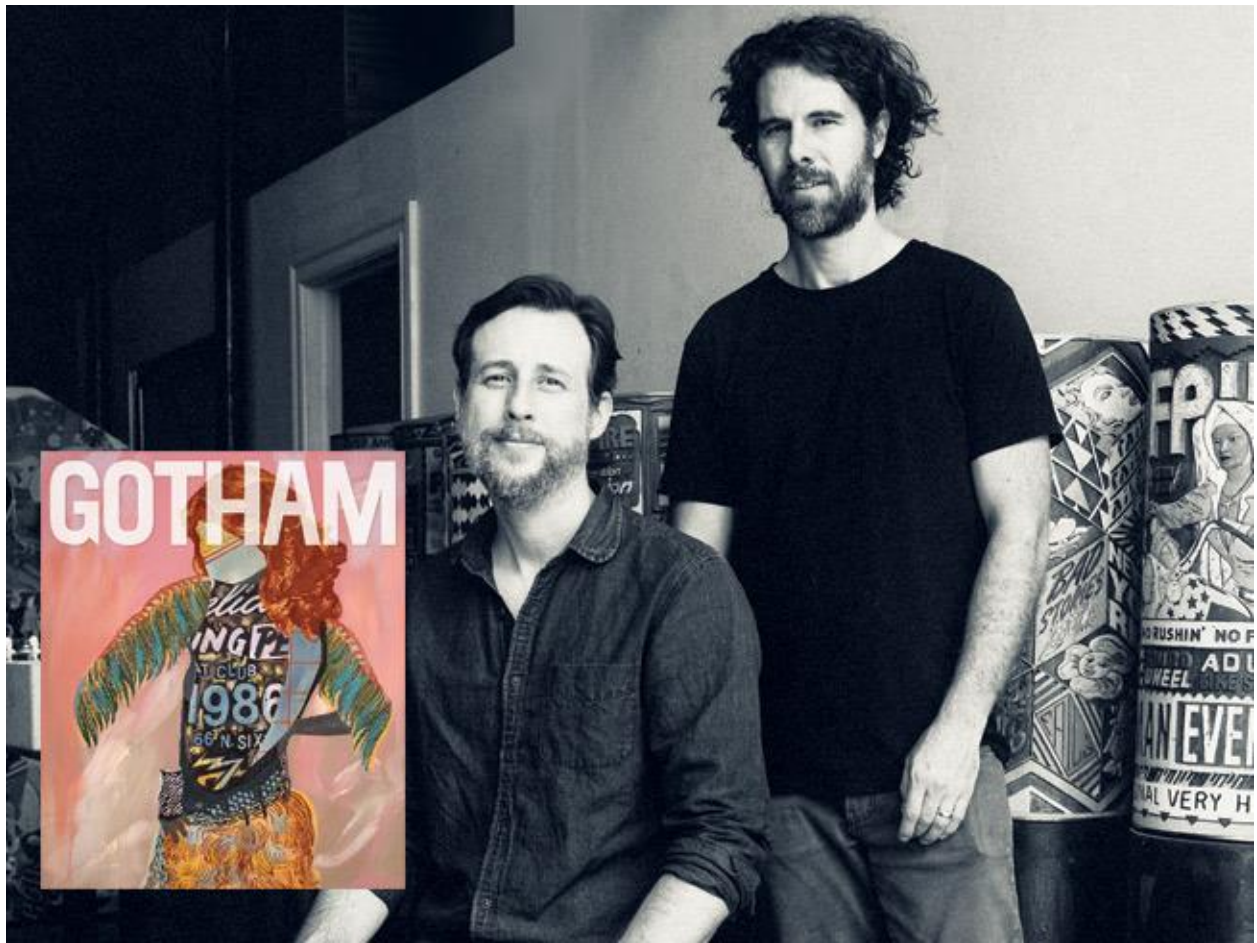
When most of their classmates were grappling with puberty, 13-year-old Doug and Mike Starn had already realized their purpose in life. They discovered art. They learned they were talented. And, they understood that they naturally enjoyed working with no one but each other.

They are identical twins, but over the past three decades, the Starns’s art has been anything but repetitive. Sculpture, video, photography, and painting are mixed and matched into pieces that resist categorization but captivate art critics and collectors alike. Just two years after graduating from Boston’s School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA), the Starns garnered international attention at the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial. Since then, they have won the SMFA Medal Award, two National Endowment for the Arts Grants, and The International Center for Photography’s Infinity Award for Fine Art Photography. Their artworks are exhibited in La Bibliothèque Nationale, MoMA, the Guggenheim Museum, the Jewish Museum, La Maison Européenne de la Photographie, LACMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, SFMOMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Yokohama Museum of Art, among others.

The Starn brothers frequently explore duality: light and dark, technology and nature, past and present. They are no strangers to the dramatic statement: “Big Bambú: You Can’t, You Don’t, and You Won’t Stop,” which they installed on the roof of Manhattan’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, was created from 6,800 bamboo poles and measured 50 feet high by 50 feet wide by 100 feet long. Visitors strolled through the sculpture, while the Starns directed a brigade of rock climbers to continuously build out the piece to echo a wave’s movement.

This summer at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, the brothers are exhibiting *Manjushri*, an intricate four-color carbon print of a bodhisattva, a Buddhist symbol of enlightenment, which, true to Starn form, expresses colliding concepts encased in artistic wonder.

NEW YORK - FAILE



Patrick McNeil and Patrick Miller—better known by their nom d’art, Faile—started creating street art in New York City in the late 1990s, using stencils, wheat-pasting, and other media to emblazon the urban landscape with their bold, graphic images. “There was something exciting about that art form,” says McNeil. “It had a life to it. One day it was there and the next it was not, and every day you walked down the street there was something different.” At the time, McNeil and Miller weren’t trying to become famous or impress people in the art world (though they eventually achieved all that and more). “It was a way to participate in something that was inspiring and cool and immediate,” says Miller.

Since then Faile has achieved major recognition (including auctions at Sotheby’s and a commission from the New York City Ballet) with vibrant, large-scale works that incorporate elements of graffiti, religious iconography, vintage cartoons, and a healthy dose of punk rock attitude. This summer the Brooklyn Museum presents “Faile: Savage/Sacred Young Minds,” the duo’s first solo museum show in New York City. Many of the artworks in the show take inspiration from the city itself—like layered paintings reminiscent of peeling subway posters, or wood-block installations that echo the streetscape’s quiltlike juxtaposition of contrasting images.

It’s an approach, says Miller, that allows them to “look at the chaos that is the city visually and say there’s something beautiful here.”



As a painter, Maggie Michael's work is always shifting. Her earliest shows in Washington, DC, featured pours of latex paint. These pools of dense, earthy colors were vivid and organic, but also viscous and methodical. It was as if she were trying to capture the body's humors—sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic—through large, biomorphic, abstract paintings.

Born in 1974, Michael began showing these paintings after she received her MFA from American University in 2002. Just a few years later, her poured paintings yielded to a different style altogether. She began using spray paints and other applications to strike the canvas in a new way. If her previous paintings were slow, these were swift. Once again, she seemed to be referencing another powerful system for organizing the world: the elements—earth, wind, air, and fire—never by name, but through the textures, colors, materials, and applications of her paintings.

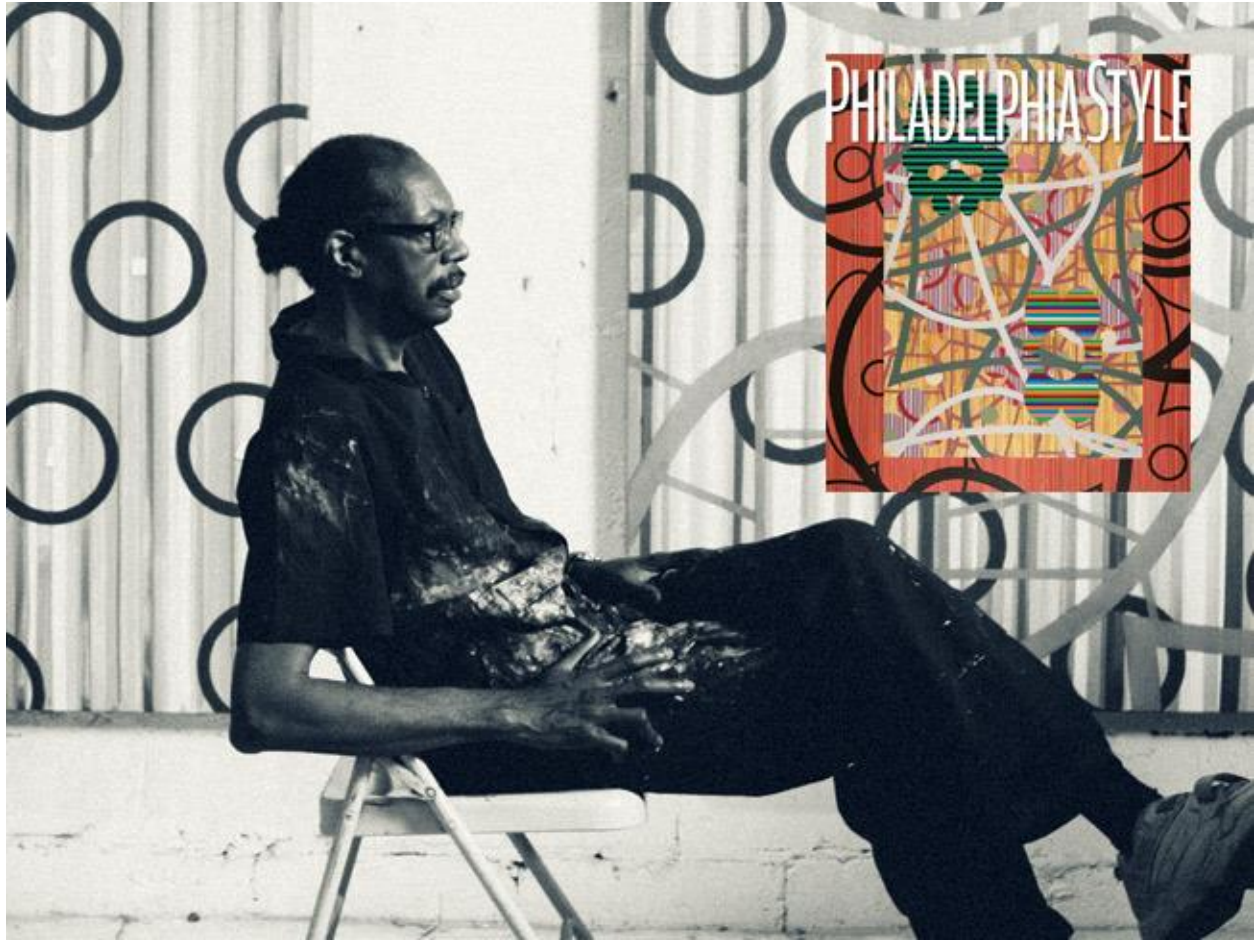
The artist's abstract paintings are totemic. She often paints in series, exploring an idea through several iterations. These series summon powerful forces to mind—the compass rose, the zodiac, and the four seasons—again, never explicitly. For example, in Michael's latest show at G Fine Art, her gallery in Washington, she showed a series of silver paintings that each repeat an "X" figure, as if they were stations of a cross of her own making.

Michael and her husband, sculptor Dan Steinhilber, are two of the District's favorite artists during a time when the local art scene is still settling into the pace of the city's incredible growth over the past decade. As she prepares for a significant survey at the American University Museum, Michael is weaving new abstract narratives. The personal mythos she explores in her painting is broad, intimate, and, like the city itself, poised to change once again.



Jillian Mayer's first computer was on the bedroom floor; she spent hours in front of it, her body folded over in some parody of prayer. "The computer is your shrine," she says. "Think of the halo, Byzantine gold leaf—it's now the glow of the screen." Mayer, who works with anything from video to photos to other peoples' pornography, has thrown our search history back in our faces, showing us who we are. And while you can find it on YouTube, her art is just as likely to be projected on the exterior of the Guggenheim, at Sundance, or on the streets of Montreal.

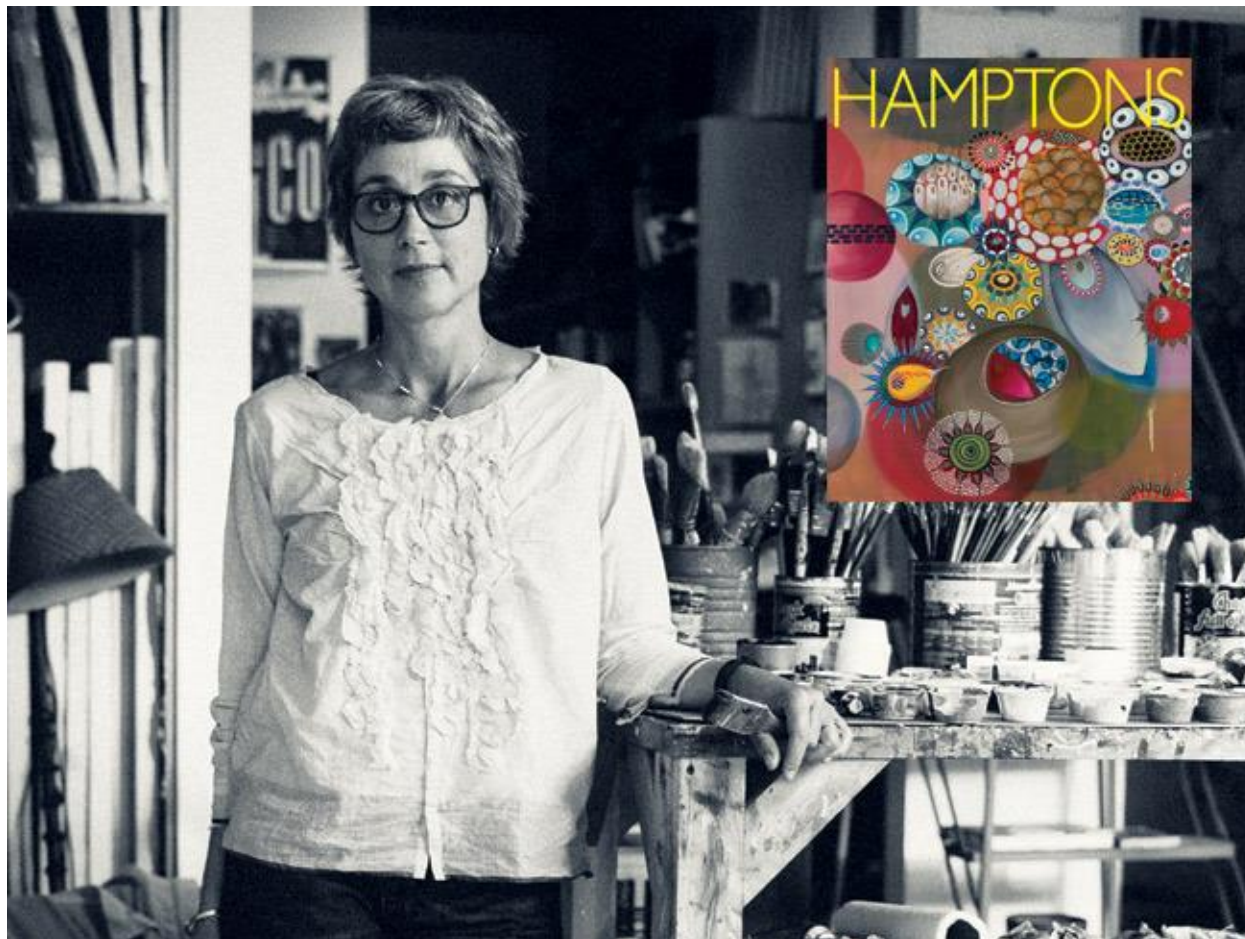
By the time she graduated from Florida International University in 2007, followed by an internship at the nonprofit Locust Projects, she'd had a full introduction to Miami's art scene and become a favorite among those "in the know." Her comic yet disturbing short film, *I Am Your Grandma*, at once a message to her unborn grandchildren and a study in meme psychology, garnered more than 3 million views on YouTube, but it was her *400 Nudes*, an art installation of both digitally and physically altered images, at the 2014 Montreal Biennial that received real notoriety. For *Nudes*, Mayer downloaded 400 nude selves from around the Internet, Photoshopped her face onto them, and recirculated the images online at 400nudes.com, a site created especially for the project (tagged with search terms such as "revenge porn") and on card stock around Montreal. The piece nimbly debates sexual politics and rights of representation and privacy as the online world proliferates. "These are the things I think about—the state of identity, the state of existence," she says.



Abstract artist Charles Burwell represents a growing number of artists who not only live and work in Philadelphia, but also draw inspiration from the city itself. “A lot of my work has something to do with not being able to push your way through,” says Burwell, who grew up in West Philadelphia and has a studio in Kensington. “There’s certainly a connection to my living and working in Philadelphia with all of its visual complexity.”

In fact, Burwell says he may not have pursued this career at all if not for the opportunities he had here growing up, like Saturday art classes during elementary school and then classes at Moore College of Art during high school. A graduate of Temple University’s Tyler School of Art with a master’s degree from Yale University School of Art, Burwell’s aesthetic is equal parts Jackson Pollock action painting and Matisse cutout, with sprinklings of color field, op art, Pop Art, and other styles.

A drip technique characterizes many of his works, but his true signature is his ongoing exploration of geometric shapes: Over the years Burwell has created hundreds of templates, first by hand and then in the last decade by computer. Once the templates have been traced onto the canvas, his fondness for stripes, dots, grids, and other shapes comes to life. Burwell’s work can be found in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the African American Museum in Philadelphia, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. This summer, one of his latest works will be installed at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts in Wilmington, where it will serve as a focal point for an exhibit called “Layering Constructs” (through September 7).



Artist Melinda Hackett creates vibrant layered paintings of biomorphic shapes inspired by a combination of the landscape and light of the East End and 1960s Finnish textiles. Her paintings fuse together the play of interior and exterior spaces in oversize format pieces and represent a state of nonlinear time. Objects move through the picture plane at various speeds and directions, some gliding slowly and others spinning as if in a blender. Forms flirt with the edges of the works, providing the sense that the activity continues outside the borders.

Born and raised on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, Hackett spent her childhood summers in Southampton on Coopers Neck Lane with her parents and grandparents, who have been residents of the area since the 1940s. All three generations of her family have been heavily involved in supporting exhibits at the Parrish Art Museum and were instrumental in the institution's move to its new Herzog & de Meuron space in Water Mill. Hackett was selected by fellow artist Gary Simmons to be a part of the museum's Artists Choose Artists program in 2011.

Before devoting herself to painting full-time, Hackett founded Realart Inc. in the East Village with literary critic Charles Finch, displaying the work of artists such as Phoebe Legere and Anthony Haden-Guest. Hackett earned her MFA from Parsons/The New School while painting and exhibiting at the Charles Cowles Gallery in Chelsea in 2009. She is currently represented by Cade Tompkins Projects in Providence, Rhode Island, and her bold, colorful oils and watercolors are often displayed by interior designers like Jamie Drake, Jeffrey Bilhuber, Todd Alexander Romano, and Ashley Whittaker. She divides her time between her studios in New York City and Southampton. Proceeds from the sale of her work will benefit the Parrish Art Museum's educational initiatives, programs, and artists-in-residence series, which support the talent of emerging artists.



Superheroes abound in the work of artist Hebru Brantley: a Batman and Robin here, a Captain America there, and—almost everywhere else—his own heroic figure, Flyboy, the begoggled child, inspired by the Tuskegee Airmen of WWII, who has become his signature character (“My Mickey Mouse,” Brantley laughs). It makes perfect sense for this native of Chicago’s South Side, whose pop culture-heavy influences range from comic books and graffiti to Basquiat and who, at a towering sixfoot- eight, jokingly calls himself a “tall black nerd.”

Nerd or not, Brantley’s star is rising incredibly fast in the art scene; celebrity fans include Jay Z and Beyoncé, Lenny Kravitz, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and *Star Wars* director George Lucas, who recently snapped up several of Brantley’s paintings. He first came to prominence in 2012, when Red Bull and Bombay Sapphire both selected Brantley’s work to be displayed at the Scope Art Show, a sister event to Art Basel Miami Beach. Since then, his pop-inspired contemporary pieces have been exhibited in LA, London, New York, and Art Basel Switzerland, and he has done work for Nike, Adidas, and Swiss watch brand Hublot.

What sets Brantley apart, in the end, are the stories his art tells: With spray paint, oil, acrylic, and watercolor, his paintings project a world of optimism, hope, and youth empowerment. For Brantley, though, the medium is just as important as the message. “Being able to express myself through different characters—some appropriations, some my own—is me being true to who I am.”



Does art grow on trees? For the emerging Los Angeles–rooted arts collaborative *Fallen Fruit*—whose “Endless Orchard” will likely ripen into the world’s largest collaborative art project this month—the answer is an emphatic, organic yes. “We use fruit as a media to change how you see the world,” says cofounder Austin Young, with friend and fellow cofounder David Burns grafting on, “and as a material by which we can reimagine the world around us.”

The collaboration first germinated in 2004, when Young, Burns, and third cofounder Matias Viegner saw a call by *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest* for proposals that addressed social or political issues positively rather than negatively. Or as Burns explains, “to show how it’s possible to be like-minded in a way that’s not a critique or in opposition to something.”

As part of the resulting project, the trio created a map of their Silverlake neighborhood in Los Angeles, one that showed the location of all fruit trees growing in or over public property such as in streets or on sidewalks. It was a *de facto* invitation for drivers to get out of their cars, to walk, to experience the city differently, and even to grab an orange, lemon, avocado, or fig. It also was an exploration of the concept of “public,” what constitutes community, and how new interactions and exchanges between citizens can be both created and encouraged, and all this in relation to... fruit. “It’s transnational, transhistorical, transcultural; it crosses all classes, all ages, and moves through all geographies,” says Burns.

Evidently. *Fallen Fruit* has since mapped fruit trees in cities nationally and internationally, and exhibited and curated wildly popular exhibitions and collaborative happenings at cultural institutions far and wide. But it’s the collaborative’s groundbreaking work in creating nontraditional forms of public art—California’s first public fruit park in 2013, and, most recently, “Endless Orchard,” a noncontiguous online map of fruit trees in public space the world over (a project partially funded by the cultural philanthropy nonprofit Creative Capital)—that will likely weather time’s seasons while benefiting the emerging publics of tomorrow.



New Zealand-born artist JK Russ is known for her collages, surreal landscapes that are imbued with a disconcerting sensuality— imagine Dalí meets Georgia O’Keeffe. Now based in Las Vegas, she has two favorite hideouts in the city, both central to her work: secondhand bookstores and burlesque shows. She hunts down underground burlesque shows, often held in neighborhood bars, as a source of inspiration. In fact, she calls them places of creative expression and female empowerment. “I love showgirls, but in burlesque you can be all sizes and shapes,” Russ explains, though she says she’s never been tempted to join a troupe herself.

As for secondhand bookstores, that’s where she trawls for the old magazines that form the raw materials for those collages. She’ll buy anything she finds visually arresting, but is especially keen on 1960s and 1970s pornography. With its color saturation and acres of fesh, it’s especially well suited to her aesthetic. And her composite worlds of fashion and the desert landscape in saturated hues evoke the overt sexuality and commerce in an otherworldly natural environment that is the reality of Las Vegas. Prepping for a piece, Russ will often rip through a pile of recent purchases, blade in hand. “I have envelopes with legs, arms, lips, and fowers,” she confesses, “Once they’re cut out, they get put in a little categorizing system.”

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