

# STUDIO VISITS NEW TALENT NEW YORK

A.i.A. visits the studios of five New York-based artists to watch.

as told to  
Emily Watlington



photography by Christopher Garcia Valle



## MADELINE PECKENPAUGH



I start by mixing a palette, and as I mix, I get an idea of what the painting will be. I'll have a general sense of the palette within a few minutes: they usually involve interactions between earth tones and bright, saturated colors. But I spend a lot of time figuring out the light and contrasts, and a palette can take a sharp turn quickly if it's just not feeling right.

Lately I've been starting with the background, then working my way to the surface of my paintings. I like making the background look like it was the last thing that happened, even though it was first. I'm often building up thick paint, then wiping it away, and the wipes leave marks. But I change the process up from painting to

painting — I always want to stay surprised and spontaneous.

I mostly draw imagery from everyday experiences: memories, places I've lived, things I see on walks. Sometimes, I'll see something I liked in one painting, and then I'll try it again in the next one.

For *Convergence* (2023), I started off building up layers of dark acrylic dye washes. But I couldn't figure out the space at all: it was too abstract and looked almost underwater. Eventually, I flipped the canvas over and started painting on the back. You see the stains from the reverse side at the top, and at the bottom, I painted over them in oil. The harsh horizon line helps both parts feel like they're in the same space,

even though, material-wise, they're very different.

I keep paint skins in my studio, made from paint I took off old paintings. I'm often holding them up to canvases to see what needs them. Sometimes I'll throw in paint from another palette. I almost want it to feel like you could just peel it off.

Usually, I'm working on four or five paintings at a time. It's helpful to bounce between works. I can finish a painting in one day, and usually I find those to be the most successful — it means I got the full idea out and I don't have to go back in and fix it, which sometimes makes me feel on the verge of "designing." For me, it's always about spontaneity. ●



# JUSTIN CHANCE



*Depression, 2022.*

thought, Maybe I could do one of those. I'm also a writer, but there's something about the authority of language that feels daunting, whereas in art there's more wiggle room.

The title of my recent show at Tara Downs gallery in New York was "Live," and I left it deliberately unclear as to whether I meant the noun or the verb. I wanted to permit the viewer/reader to take it however they want. There's something beautiful about the state of not-knowing, and I want my viewers to feel curious. I never want it to be, "I'm the artist, listen to me."

I started making my quilt works in 2013, hoping to combine my love for making with my interest in painting. I wanted to be able

to physically pick up colors and move them around. I also love learning how things work, down to the molecular level. If you're dyeing something, you have to ask, Is this a cellulose fiber or is it a protein fiber? Some pieces incorporate resist dyes using wax. Since wax is nonpolar and water is a polar molecule, the two materials don't interact.

Recently I was Duolingo-ing Norwegian, and decided to make a Norwegian-language web drama called *Svak*. I wanted to write a script in Norwegian to explore the materiality of weakness; I'm weak in that language. The project was about carving space for curiosity without utility, learning just for the sake of it. ●



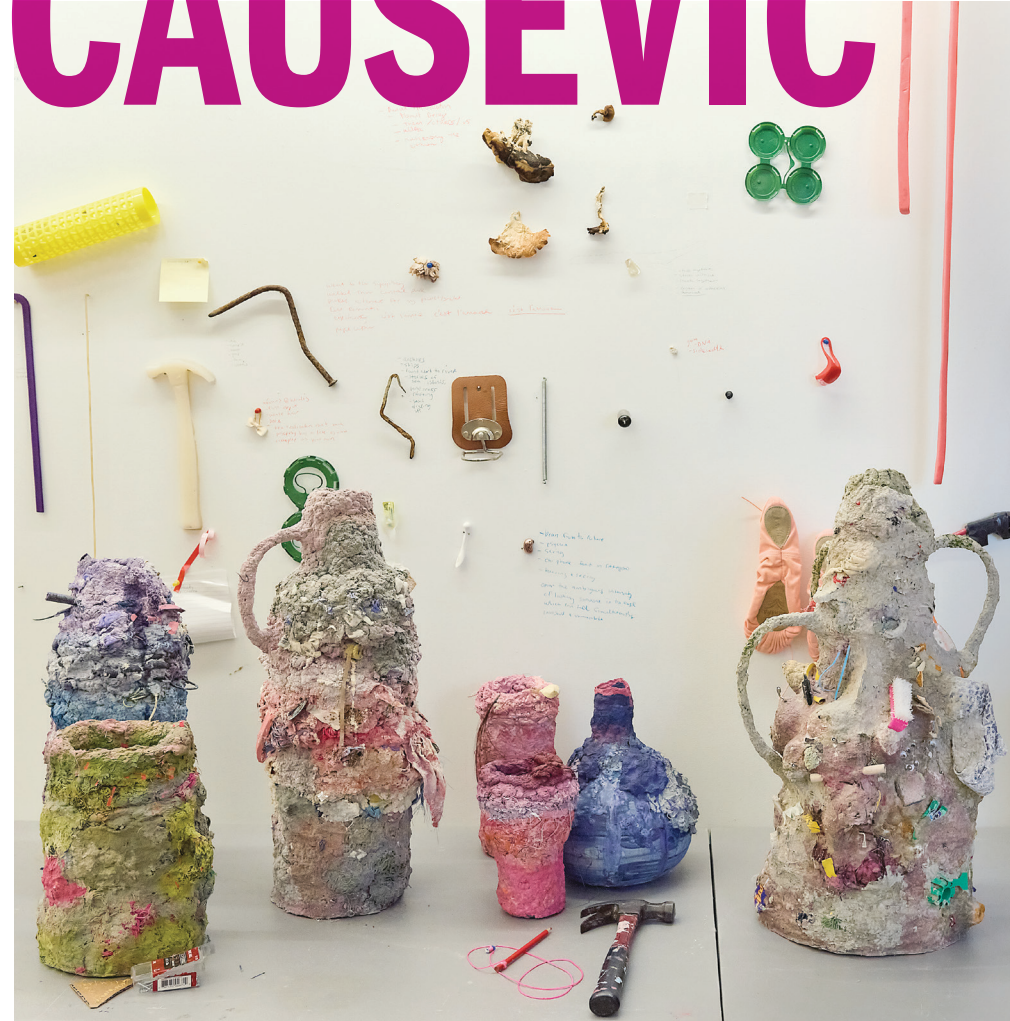
Above: Photo Phoebe d'Heurle/Courtesy Tara Downs, New York

**My pieces begin as titles. Titles come to me when I'm washing dishes, or running, or showering.** A recent example is *Aloha Sadness* (2023): I thought, That's so dumb, but also so real. Aloha means goodbye, but also hello. I asked what would *Aloha Sadness* look like? I did a little research — looked up tiki culture, watched *Lilo & Stitch*, played that song "Hawaiian Roller Coaster Ride" in the studio.

I'm driven by curiosity, and I can get interested in literally anything. I'm less interested in judging whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, than I am in asking, What is this thing? *Why* is this thing? Exhibitions are a helpful way of focusing my curiosity. I can point to one and say, "That's my oceanography era," or that's my how-TVs-work era.

For me, "artist" is kind of like a catchall term. Takashi Murakami's 2008 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum drew me to art. He was making mugs, pins, paintings ... I

# AMRA CAUSEVIC



**My current body of work deals with** involuntary migration and materiality. A lot of my work is autobiographical. I was born in Bosnia, and came to the United States as a war refugee in the '90s. The Balkan region has always been a place of war and empire changes. It's never really had a stable identity, but it still feels like home.

My dad's side of the family migrated from Turkey to Bosnia through multiple empire changes, and every time they moved from place to place, they were kicked out, usually for religious reasons. It made me think about the material baggage and the historical baggage that we carry.

I make sculptures out of objects I collect

from the streets. Hauling materials in the city has always been a challenge. How do you carry lumber on the subways? I just walk around the neighborhood and find things spontaneously: maybe stacks of egg cartons, or some little yellow plastic thing that clearly belonged to someone. I find myself wondering where these things came from, what their history is.

I definitely have a weird obsession with objects. Lately I've been embedding them in vessels: you'll see all kinds of materials, salt and pepper, glass, hair. I like to imagine people digging them up 1,000 years from now.

I've also been emulating objects of antiquity, specifically rugs and pottery. On *relic* (35.3658650, -10.1964504), 2021–22, I collaged a vinyl picture of Poseidon that I procured from the New Museum, where I work as an art handler. They were just going to throw it away, but I thought it was so beautiful!

I started making rugs after playing around with pouring paint on the ground, then peeling it off. I've used these kinds of paint skins in performances and nailed them to walls, but over time, they start to crack. So I started adding cloth to stabilize them, and they sort of turned into tapestries and rugs. Sometimes I draw inspiration from Slavic folk patterns.

When pouring paint, you don't necessarily have control. It feels sensual and cathartic. Maybe, when I peel it off, I'll decide the back should be the front. Then I'll start incorporating the fiber and embedding garbage, and eventually ask, How do I make this less chaotic? Sometimes I start with a sketch, but my process is intuitive. It's all about trial and error, and finding solutions.

The works are both heavy and humorous: I'm thinking about things like war, but also, how do I soothe myself? How do I create a future? For me, the point of making art is to fuel my endless curiosity and to get excited about the little things. ●







# DAVID L. JOHNSON



Since 2020, I've been making a series called "Loiter" that involves the ongoing removal of different forms of hostile architecture. One example is the metal spikes that get attached to benches, steps, or standpipes in order to prevent people from sitting. A standpipe is a connection outside many buildings that allows the fire department to access the water supply, but people use them as impromptu forms of public seating, especially in areas of the city where there aren't any benches.

Sometimes, property owners add devices that look like medieval contraptions to them. I exhibit these spikes as sculptures, and usually place them at roughly the same level as the standpipe they were originally installed on. Each work in the series takes a different form according to the aesthetic decisions of the developer who commissioned it or the fabricator who made it. The sculptures make the removal visible, since they're not meant to be noticed. But the work is also about the growing series of absences across the city, and the increased possibilities for loitering.

That means I make most of my works by walking around in the streets, then use

my studio as a space to store objects or try out installations. I'm invested in highlighting the ways that forces like real estate development, or the ongoing privatization of the city, continuously encroach on different aspects of daily life. I try to find moments where those forces become visible.

I'm looking for objects that are physical forms of policing. Another example is planters that are strategically placed to prevent access to areas where there might be shelter or a covering, such as under awnings. Often, they're not even filled with plants but, instead, bricks or cement, making them too heavy to move. I've been removing some of these structures and reconstituting them as actual planters, growing things inside them. For a 2022 show at Artists Space in New York called "Everything is Common," I placed three of these planters in the windowsills and grew parsnips and carrots in them. Those reference this group of 17th-century radical Christians in England known as the Diggers. The Diggers would grow edible crops on other people's property, since they believed that everything is communal under their god. ●

# CATHERINE TELFORD KEOGH



and their belongings were compacted, then covered with sand. Recently it's been eroding.

Because this was the 1950s, there's more glass than plastic. I extracted a hunk of landfill that included all these products that have been vitrified over time. It contains rubber, cement, plant matter, packaging, sand, and other miscellaneous objects. My students helped me drag this piece back, and it spawned my most recent show, "Shelf Life," at Helena Anrather Gallery in New York.

Another piece in that show, *Compost Index 3 with Volumes 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1* (2023), involves repurposed tiles I got from Marble Expo on Facebook Marketplace. The onyx tiles were originally extracted from Karachi, Pakistan, and brought to Marble Expo in the Bronx, which then sold them to corporations, a bank, and a Best Western. I purchased the leftovers. The multicolored onyx has all this depth, so you can really see the earth processes that happened over eons. I wanted to position

them [on the floor] so that they signify earth or ground, but also a countertop at the same time. I waterjet-cut different advertisements in the tiles, borrowed from things like moisturizers that promise a healthier or more efficient body. I also sandblasted images of things that I found on the ground in my neighborhood: lottery tickets, gum, cigarettes, Modelo beer cans. I photographed them, turned them into stencils, and then sandblasted them into the tiles. Sandblasting is almost like a mechanized geologic process, but it also creates this ghostly or fossilized image of the waste.

I also remade plastic vessels in glass that you can carry around – like detergent bottles, milk jugs, or motor oil containers. I work with containers a lot. I'm interested in how they promise space cordoned off from temperature, climate, and decay, but are also everywhere in landfills. Positioning vessels on the onyx tiles, I wanted to point to deep geologic processes that have happened over years and years. ●

*Hardgood & Dolly* (2023) is a piece of compressed landfill I extracted from Dead Horse Bay [between Brighton Beach and Fort Tilden in Brooklyn]. In the Industrial era, it was also home to fish oil factories, and garbage incinerators. In the 1950s, a series of highways decimated a number of low-income neighborhoods in Brooklyn, and they moved all of those folks' goods to Dead Horse Bay, then used them to extend the shoreline. The trash



Geologic Trough-Cum-Bathtub (Mint), 2022.