

Meet Six Disrupters at the New Museum's Triennial

By HILARIE M. SHEETS FEB. 2, 2018

When Gary Carrion-Murayari showed up in 2015 at Bikini Wax, a funky living-cum-exhibition space for emerging artists in Mexico City, everyone there put out the call to friends: “There’s a curator from the New Museum interested in meeting some young artists — do you want to come down?”

Over the course of the day, about 10 artists, including Manuel Solano, streamed through the gallery with portfolios and laptops to show to Mr. Carrion-Murayari, who, with Alex Gartenfeld, had just been tapped as the curators of the 2018 New Museum triennial and were beginning a worldwide hunt for the next generation of important voices. Mr. Solano, a transgender artist who was denied access to medical care in Mexico while in the early stages of H.I.V. and went blind from the infection, offered painted self-portraits — and was among the first of 26 artists or collectives from 17 countries selected for “Songs for Sabotage,” opening on Feb. 13 in New York.

When the New Museum kicked off its first triennial in 2009, titled “Younger Than Jesus,” some critics raised their eyebrows at the ageist premise. Yet the focus on international youth has come to distinguish these triennials from a slew of rival shows. And the current news cycle makes this a potentially more interesting moment to consider the new generation’s sensibility. The fourth version includes artists ages 25 to 38 whose work often pushes back against social or bureaucratic power structures and sounds the call for change.

Janiva Ellis

AGE 30
BORN Oakland, Calif.
LIVES/WORKS Los Angeles

Ms. Ellis grew up in Hawaii where she described feeling like “the onlyblack person.” Now she makes



“Doubt Guardian 2” by Janiva Ellis.

paintings that communicate the isolation and pain of the African-American female experience. Each of her three allegorical canvases in the triennial is set in a pastoral outdoor environment, to contrast with “the internal mayhem” her subjects feel, Ms. Ellis said. In “Curb-Check Regular, Black Chick” (2017), the “battlefield” is a farmers’ market. A dark-skinned woman selecting produce appears to have internal organs erupting from her chest. Three white women recede in the distance. “You’re in this pleasant situation, picking up a cabbage, but there’s still a fraught dialogue that happens, whether it be a memory or something a stranger says” that can feel psychologically eviscerating, Ms. Ellis said. The paintings are “not only an attempt to communicate to nonblack women my experience, but also to call to other black women, ‘Do you feel this, too?’”