



The 6 Rising Artists to Watch in 2019

by Diane Solway, Antwaun Sargent and Janelle Zara

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Janiva Ellis



In 2012, Janiva Ellis took a break from painting. She left the California College of the Arts and went to New York hoping to find inspiration. When it didn't come, she moved back home to Hawaii to think through her feelings of isolation, which she was convinced stemmed from having grown up in "a place where I didn't know any black person until I was 18." By 2017, the artist, who is now 31, had returned to New York, and to painting. Her solo show, at [47 Canal](#), explored doubt as a pressure cooker—"the hysterical moments when you realize your perceptions of safety are false"—through the lens of memory, race, and media that informed her childhood. Soon after, she emerged as one of the breakout stars of the 2018 New Museum Triennial, with three seemingly pastoral

scenes subverted with pure mayhem. In the cartoonish *Doubt Guardian 2*, a black woman stands in a lush, grassy field, her fist clenched in despair, as she watches what seems to be a lobotomized, sleepwalking black figure carrying a lamb around its neck. Like much of Ellis's art, the painting is a dizzying, psychologically astute mash-up of faces, masks, media, and religious references that, says Ellis, "reconcile who I am, how I feel, and how I'm perceived." —[Antwaun Sargent](#)