

15 Los Angeles Artists to Watch

BY MAXIMILIANO DURÓN AND ALEX GREENBERGER

JANUARY 9, 2019



Janiva Ellis, *Doubt Guardian 2*, 2017. JOERG LOHSE/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND 47 CANAL, NEW YORK

Janiva Ellis

Born in 1987, Oakland, California

Painter Janiva Ellis's surreal tableaux often fix on figures with tensely contorted faces that look as if they are decomposing. Their features—angry mouths, see-through noses—seem to morph before a viewer's eyes. In *Something Anxiety* (2017), ghostly visages are superimposed over a scene from *The Wiz*, with action that comes across as both kinetic and creepy. For Ellis, these works—which sometimes lift imagery from mass media, such as a picture of Daffy Duck's exploded head—are playful and eerie at once. Ellis said that such strange visions represent “the multiplicity that occurs when we juggle who we are, how we feel, and how we are perceived.” Her paintings engage “unspoken tensions” that “when not addressed, have a tendency to fester.”