




# ARTSY



## 16 Rising Artists of the Asian Diaspora in the United States

• Harley Wong May 19, 2021 8:06pm   

**E**ven as artists of color begin to gain a foothold in the upper echelons of the art world, naming widely celebrated Asian diasporic artists with cemented legacies in the art historical canon remains challenging. Oftentimes, it feels as though we’re constantly excavating long overlooked or ignored artistic practices. However, thanks to decades of activism and advocacy from BIPOC artists and art workers, greater attention is being given to contemporary artists of color during their lifetime. Here, we focus on rising artists of the Asian diaspora currently based in the United States. Many of these artists have been experiencing substantial career momentum in recent months, exhibiting in art institutions or international biennials one after the other. Some have honed their craft and bypassed educational barriers, exhibiting in solo shows at leading galleries without an MFA, and sometimes even without a BFA.

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My conversations with these artists and close readings of their works reveal an engagement with similar ideas through varied approaches and media, suggesting a collective consciousness created through shared experiences within the diaspora. Multimedia artist Catalina Ouyang and figurative painters Oscar yi Hou and Timothy Lai spoke about losing the Chinese language or never having a firm grasp of it to begin with. Informed by theorists Gilles Deleuze and Isabelle Stengers's writings on how stuttering acts like a glitch, Ouyang pushes the English language to points of deterioration. Yi Hou, on the other hand, visually obscures the English texts in his paintings and drawings, relegating them to the space of inscrutability often reserved for Chinese characters. Meanwhile, painters like Lai, Bambou Gili, Sasha Gordon, and Dominique Fung expand on the color palettes used to render Asian skin—not only with shades of yellow and brown, but also hues of red, blue, and purple.

The artists featured also pay tribute to those who came before them, acknowledging the continuum of the diasporic experience. Gili includes the late Matthew Wong's spotlighted door from *5:00 PM* (2019) in *Blue Summer (An Ode to Matthew Wong)* (2020). Ouyang's "*Lift me to the window to the picture image unleash the ropes tied to weights of stones first the ropes then its scraping on wood to break stillness as the bells fall peal follow the sound of ropes holding weight scraping on wood to break stillness bells fall a peal to sky*" (2020) borrows its title from the last line of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's 1982 publication *Dictee*, and features a portrait of the artist as the late poet. Multimedia artist Kang Seung Lee's labor-intensive reproductions of photos of painter Martin Wong and photographer Tseng Kwong Chi illustrate both the precarity of these artists's lives during the AIDS epidemic and their diminished presence in art history. While charting careers of their own, these rising artists bring their predecessors with them.





## Hangama Amiri

B. 1989, Kabul, Afghanistan. Lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut.



### Hangama Amiri

*Sahar, Nail Salon and Eyelash Extensions #3, 2020*  
T293

Contact for price



### Hangama Amiri

*Bahar, From Kabul (Rice Sack #1), 2021*  
Albertz Benda

Contact for price

Since receiving her MFA from Yale University in 2020, Hangama Amiri has already shown in three solo gallery exhibitions around the world, including at T293 Gallery in Rome, Towards in Toronto, and Albertz Benda in New York. Her fourth solo show is currently in the works, slated to open in September at Cooper Cole Gallery in Toronto.

Through immersive textile installations, Amiri expands perceptions of contemporary Afghan feminism in her own visual language. In “Bazaar, A Recollection of Home” at T293, the artist’s deft ability to construct entire worlds through a variety of textiles shined through. Wielding cotton, chiffon, silk, suede, and handmade Afghan embroidered fabrics, Amiri evoked the bustling atmosphere of Kabul bazaars in post-Taliban society and commented on the ways in which economic power at these markets shifted after the regime’s fall.



Hangama Amiri, installation view of “Bazaar, A Recollection of Home,” 2020, at T293, Rome. Photo by Roberto Apa/Courtesy of the artist and T293.



In her childhood memories of visiting bazaars, the artist recalls the prevalence of men managing businesses dedicated to providing services and products to women. In the years following the fall of the Taliban, Amiri was struck by how many of these businesses were now led and owned by women. For her T293 exhibition, Amiri culled from her memories to recreate storefronts of beauty parlors, nail salons, jewelry stores, fashion boutiques, and tailor shops—places that spoke directly to women in their advertising. Amiri’s deliberate inclusion of items banned by the Taliban, such as red lipstick in *Madam, Mariam Beauty Salon* (2020) and nail polish in *Sahar, Nail Salon and Eyelash Extensions #3* (2020), further establish the increased sense of agency Afghan women possess in expressing their femininity.

For her recent exhibition at Albertz Benda, titled “Wandering Amidst the Colors,” Amiri shifted her attention to Afghan diasporic communities in New York. Developed over the course of a year, this body of work anchors the viewer in specific locations from throughout the city: Kouchi Supermarket in Flushing, Central and South Asian restaurants in Jackson Heights, and an Afghan-owned fabric shop in Chelsea. Assembled from an array of textile materials, the works point to the hybrid-like quality of diasporic identity that’s similarly pieced together from a wide range of sources.