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# VOGUE



Photographed by Tyler Mitchell

## Jordan Casteel Is Making You Look

JULIA FELSENTAL  
February 27, 2018 8:05 AM

There's a thing that happens when you look at certain paintings by the young portrait artist Jordan Casteel. You take note of her subject, usually a black man. You look again, closer this time, and only on second glance do you recognize that his skin tone doesn't actually resemble skin at all, but is instead blue, or green, or pink, or orange, or chalky white. You may question why you didn't notice at first. You may marvel at Casteel's clever palette, her ability to rationalize figure against ground, to hide a person the color of, say, the Hulk, in plain sight. If you're thinking the way she hopes you're thinking, you may wonder why you were so quick to clock his race. Maybe you wonder what other judgments you jumped to in the process.

"Which I love!" Casteel says when I describe it as a sort of magic-eye trick. "That was very intentional." The artist, 29, is lanky and long-limbed, with a boyish haircut and the easy, funky style—'80s jeans, white Nikes, colorful socks, oversize glasses—of a very cool fifth grader. We're sitting side by side on a sofa on the lower level of the Casey Kaplan gallery, where this fall Casteel mounted a much buzzed-about exhibition of paintings, "Nights in Harlem." "I was interested in the fact that people were going, 'Oh, you're painting black men.' And then they would be like: 'Oh, actually, he's green.' I loved witnessing the externalization of that internal process."

She goes on: "I consider myself a painter in the most technical way. I spend probably the majority of my time thinking about the nuance of color and composition, and that's usually not the conversation."

Whatever conversation has been happening around Casteel's work, it's lately been building to a fever pitch. Some of the chatter concerns her biography: Casteel was born and raised in Denver and is the daughter of a social justice activist mom, herself the daughter of civil rights hero Whitney Moore Young, Jr. He passed away long before his granddaughter was born, but Casteel grew up with a keen sense of "the legacy that my bloodline held." (Appended to her email signature is a quote from her grandfather: "I am not anxious to be the loudest voice or the most popular. But I would like to think that at a crucial moment, I was an effective voice of the voiceless, an effective hope of the hopeless.")

"My mom," she continues, "has been really clear from the beginning that as powerful as that legacy is, the most important part is doing the work for oneself. There's a difference between symbols and substance." That gulf informs her paintings, too. Casteel had virtually no formal fine arts training when she applied and was accepted to Yale's MFA program. She arrived with a style all her own—a loose, exaggerated manner of rendering the human figure that she claims is the only arrow in her artistic quiver ("I don't know how to do anything else; I tried; it was a disaster")—and the unfashionable desire, in an age of conceptual art, to pursue figurative painting. "Everybody was like, 'Good luck!' " she remembers, guffawing. "When you have an art history that's so saturated with figuration, what do you have that's any different than anybody else? Great: You see somebody. We're all seeing somebody. What is it that's different that you offer?"



Jordan Casteel, *Galen 2*, 2014. Oil on canvas. Photo: Courtesy of Jordan Casteel and Casey Kaplan, New York

Except, of course, that Western art—particularly portraiture—has always privileged whiteness. Perhaps not coincidentally, as this country has reckoned in recent years with the dire need for broader representation in all facets of the culture, there's been a simultaneous renaissance in representational art. "Why is portraiture returning now?" the writer Dushko Petrovich asked recently in *T* magazine. "For one, there is an institutional urgency to speak to a more diverse audience with painting that depicts the black community, the Asian-American experience, the Latino face, to attract the various people who had been excluded from the museum by remaking the history of figurative painting, this time with color." Consider Lynette Yiadom Boakye's classical oil paintings of fictional black figures ("suggestions of people," she's called them), or Toyin Ojih Odutola's intricate, narrative drawings of an imaginary clan of West African aristocrats, unburdened by the legacy of slavery. Consider the recent fervor over Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald's just-unveiled presidential portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama—"I saw history being made," Casteel says. "Portraits suddenly became important in the context of politics"—or the popularity of Kerry James Marshall's 2016 traveling retrospective "*Mastry*," which traced his long quest to reinsert black faces into the Western art historical canon.



Jordan Casteel, *The Baayfalls*, 2017. Oil on canvas. Photo: Jason Wyche / Courtesy of Jordan Casteel and Casey Kaplan, New York

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If Marshall’s work considers the erasures of history, Casteel’s is very much set in the present tense (though her paintings are less a literal transcription of real life than they may seem: “I like to think of them as being able to wobble in and out of these flat and hyperrealistic spaces”). The artist found her focus in 2013, while on a summer landscape painting fellowship in Gloucester, Massachusetts, after news broke that a Florida jury had acquitted George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watchman who a year earlier had shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in cold blood. Casteel, who grew up with two brothers (one her twin), turned her attention to painting the black men in her life, in part as a means of showcasing individuality and three-dimensionality where the culture insisted on seeing only racist stereotypes. She centered her nascent art practice on “telling stories of people who are often unseen, making someone slow down and engage with them.” One early series—*Brothers*—focused on pairs and trios of figures in relation to one another. Another—*Visible Man*—consisted of nudes, artfully posed to hide their genitalia, stripped of any garments that might politicize their identities. Casteel’s models—their expressions coy, defiant, tender—return the viewer’s stare, complicating the artist’s deliberate inversion of the standard paradigm: male gaze, female subject. Though not literally exposed, they appear surrounded by personal ephemera (a disco ball; a forlorn stuffed elephant), revealing some incontrovertibly private side of themselves.

In 2015, Casteel moved from Ridgewood, Queens, to Harlem for a residency at the Studio Museum. The neighborhood, “the only place [in New York] I’ve ever felt at ease,” has given her a community in which to root her art. In the past few years, she’s painted men she’s met while strolling the streets, many of them local characters or street-stall vendors. She’ll introduce herself, take their photos, then work from those images in her studio to compose larger-than-life portraits set against fantastically textured streetscapes.

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Jordan Casteel, *Subway Hands*, 2017. Oil on canvas.  
Photo: Jason Wyche / Courtesy of Jordan Casteel and Casey Kaplan, New York

“To take somebody else’s image, you feel you become the holder of a piece of them,” she observes. The portraits, more than just a snapshot of a moment, enshrine what Casteel has referred to as “two-sided generosity,” the relationship that is forged in the making of the art, “something bigger than just the painting itself.” (That impulse to build community, she offers, may derive in part from her struggle with lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease that makes her, by necessity, both something of a homebody and someone who “really desires authenticity, because everything else feels so fleeting.”) In a short documentary made by Art 21 about Casteel’s work, we can see the other side of that equation. At an opening, some of her subjects confront their likeness on the gallery walls. “I feel like a superstar,” declares a man named Quentin, depicted by Casteel in a hoodie emblazoned with a picture of Biggie Smalls. “I can’t stop blushing.”

She’s gained a reputation around Harlem. “They call me ‘Painter,’ and they pass me around to one another,” she says. “There’s this sense of respect that has been built, because I’m no longer just a person who appeared one day. I’m a person who is moving through the neighborhood with a certain amount of intention and purpose.” In the film, Casteel talks to a group visiting her studio. “There have been some criticisms of, I only paint men. Every time people are like, ‘When are you going to paint women?’ I’m like, ‘I don’t know if I feel absence, because I’m very much a part of this work, and it’s translated through my experience.’ ”

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To paraphrase Oscar Wilde: Every portrait is a self-portrait. It does bear mentioning, though, that Casteel actually is now painting women. Upstairs at the gallery, in a back room, hangs a new canvas, an image of three figures, two younger men, one older woman, leaning against a kitchen counter. They are the proprietors of Benyam, an Ethiopian restaurant near the high-ceilinged upper Harlem apartment Casteel recently purchased.

“I’m in a place where the expansiveness of the work is most important to me,” she says, “thinking about its ability to evolve organically, and not be stagnant in what it has to represent.” She’s having a moment, the artist acknowledges, but what she wants is staying power, a long career that transcends any passing trend for or against portraiture. “I think the challenge for many African Americans is that there’s a pigeonholing. This is black art. This is how we understand it. This is the way we talk about it. There’s not a lot of room for nuance outside of that. I want to be part of something bigger than just a moment. It’s about breaking more intrinsic systems to make room for people to flow in after.”

Her peak, she hopes, remains far in the future. I bring up Alex Katz, a painter who bucked the postwar fashion for abstract expressionism in favor of figuration, and who at 90 is still painting, who likes to say that he’s better at it now than ever before. “Ninety!” Casteel exclaims, with another of her big laughs. “Talk to me when I’m 90. I hope I’m like, Actually, I’m the shit now! Like, Nailed it! That’s the dream. To be able to be painting at 90, and feel like, Now I have done the thing that I’ve lived my life trying to understand.”

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## ARTFORUM

### Jordan Casteel

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121 West 27th Street  
September 7–October 28

In 2015, while in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Jordan Casteel took to the streets with her camera and iPhone, photographing men she encountered at night. Adopting this process for the exhibition of paintings here, the artist presents herself as a flaneuse, capturing the vibrant life of the neighborhood without categorizing it for easy consumption. In these portraits, men appear alone or in groups of two or three, sitting in subway cars, on stoops, and standing in front of store windows. (Women are absent, save for images on a braiding salon's awning.) Nonetheless, Casteel's subjects are perfectly at home in their environments, often bathed in the fluorescence of street lamps, as in *Q* (all works 2017), where the eponymous subject gazes back, phone in hand, a Coogi-clad Biggie Smalls on his red sweatshirt.

Casteel has a knack for detail where it counts: the sharp glint of light hitting the subject's sunglasses in *Zen* or the folds of a black puffer jacket and the stripes of a Yankees hat in *Subway Hands*. In *Memorial*, a bright spray of funeral flowers on an easel sits over a street-corner trashcan—the pink bows attached to the easel's legs feel almost animated, celebratory. The artist also possesses a wry humor: The pair of bemused men in *MegasStarBrand's Louie and A-Thug* sit on folding chairs next to a sign that reads "Melanin?"

Casteel's paintings capture Harlem's denizens beautifully, a community that has long shaped black American identity despite years of white gentrification. Casteel navigates her terrain with ease, lightness, and empathy.



Jordan Casteel, *Memorial*, 2017, oil on canvas, 72 x 56".

— Tausif Noor

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## THE NEW YORKER

ART GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Jordan Casteel



In one of the most buzzed-about débuts of the fall season, Casteel shows large figurative canvases that combine the candid immediacy of the digital snapshots on which they're based with the restraint and humanity of an Alice Neel portrait. The young Colorado-born phenom worked almost entirely from pictures she took in Harlem of men, at night. Casteel's subjects, like the artist herself, are black, and her work tackles the representation of race in general, while revelling, as painters will, in the specific details. In "Q," a man sits on a stoop next to a sketched-in green railing, earnestly consulting his iPhone, and wearing a sweatshirt with an image of Biggie Smalls in wraparound shades, a gold chain, and a Coogi sweater. In "Mega-StarBrand's Louie and A-Thug," two well-turned-out young men sprawl with authority in folding chairs on the sidewalk, gazing skeptically out of frame. One wears a shirt that says "REASON," the other is in a T-shirt that reads "T.H.U.G.: THE HATE YOU GAVE US." In her exhilarating, if uneven, show, Casteel gives nothing but love.

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## Private View: Jordan Casteel, Leon Poll Smith and Jack Whitten

  
**THE ART NEWSPAPER**

Noteworthy exhibitions at commercial galleries, from emerging names to forgotten talents

SARAH P. HANSON and ANNA BRADY  
31 August 2017



Jordan Casteel  
Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York  
7 September-28 October

The 28-year-old Casteel has her debut at Kaplan following a packed dance card of group shows over the past two years, from the Studio Museum in Harlem to Mass Moca. The 2014 Yale MFA grad (raised on a diet of Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence by her grandmother, a collector) makes empathic, large-scale portraits of black men and recently began painting from portraits she takes of men she observes on the street in Harlem at night. In one, Casteel locks eyes with Harold, seated just beyond the fluoro glow of a Laundromat; in another, a man identified as Tito interrupts his own story to describe it with a gesture. Casteel allows the visual cacophony of settings to envelop but never swallow her subjects. The artist inserts herself invisibly into the frame, bearing witness through achingly specific details—a trait shared by another painter of Harlem denizens, Alice Neel.



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## Three-Sentence Reviews: Peter Saul's Fake News, Trevor Paglen's Zombie Conceptualism, and 7 More September Shows

By Jerry Saltz  
September 19, 2017

Jordan Casteel's new exhibition *Nights in Harlem* shows this very talented 28-year-old Yale graduate (and Alice Neel in embryo) picking up her painterly and visionary game to great effect in portraits of her Harlem neighbors that reveal profound empathy for the inner lives and consciousness of her subjects. As in her previous work, her main subjects are men she knows — Harold selling detergent outside a laundromat; Joe and Mozel, of Pompette Wines; Tito, who painted his father in different stages of his life on another laundromat; Louis and A-Thug, designers who sell their clothes on the street. She's also started painting women, as seen in the exceptional multi-portrait of the window of a hair salon with numerous depictions of models and styles, a painterly update on Walker Evans's great picture of a photo-studio photographer's window with hundreds of little pictures; Casteel seems prepared to take a rightful place on the front lines of contemporary painting.



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22/ART

Interview



## Jordan CASTEEL

Photography SEBASTIAN KIM  
Styling MICHELLE CAMERON

THE YOUNG NEW YORK  
ARTIST TACKLES BLACK  
MALE STEREOTYPES BY  
PAINTING PEOPLE SHE  
MEETS ON THE STREET.

Jordan Casteel applied to Yale's MFA program on a dare from her mother. "She and I were googling 'best art schools,'" says the 28-year-old Colorado native. "Yale popped up first. I applied with no expectations." The university responded favorably to the young artist's leap of faith, and three years after graduating, Casteel still considers the experience a formative one. "I was lucky enough to grow up with work by Romare Bearden, Faith Ringgold, and Jacob Lawrence," she says. "But it wasn't until I got to school that I found artists like Kerry James Marshall and Henry Taylor. They helped me formulate my own voice, my own style."

Like Marshall and Taylor, Casteel focuses on representations of the black body. Where she differs is in perspective: her canvases are informed by the female gaze, and as a result, she tends to focus on men. Pushing against the preposterous yet pervasive generaliza-

tions of black men as aggressors, the artist infuses her subjects with tender contradictions, such as *Miles and Jojo*, a 2015 painting of a father and son with a toothy, stuffed monster propped in the son's arms. The intimacy of the work can be traced to her painting process, which begins with photography. "I take hundreds of images," Casteel says. "Very rarely does a singular shot determine the whole composition." Casteel's muses have varied from actors to friends, often posed in cramped domestic interiors in various states of undress.

Recently, she's begun approaching strangers she encounters on the street during her commute from her apartment in Harlem to her studio in Brooklyn. "So often in New York we just walk by each other," Casteel says. "I wanted to find a way to engage." To her surprise, most have been open to posing for her camera. "When I ask someone if I can take their picture, I have to step outside my comfort zone," says

the self-proclaimed introvert. "I think if that discomfort went away, I would find something else to paint. For me, it's about this kind of two-sided generosity."

For her solo show at New York's Casey Kaplan gallery in September, Casteel plans to unveil a new series inspired by Harlem nights. Such scenes include a painting of a man with dreadlocks walking two small dogs down the sidewalk and an elderly man, illuminated by an open door, lounging in a plastic lawn chair. As with all her shows, Casteel will invite her subjects to the opening. "A huge part of my work comes from a desire to create a community," she says. "The paintings have the lifespan of an object, but the relationships have a history, a life, of their own." —KAT HERRIMAN

JORDAN CASTEEL IN BROOKLYN, 2017. SWEATER AND PANTS: ISABEL MARANT. GLASSES: CASTEEL'S OWN. SNEAKERS: CONVERSE. HAIR: DENNIS DEVOY USING KERASTASE FOR WHITEROOM BK/ART DEPARTMENT. MAKEUP: KRISTI MATA-MOROS FOR LA MER/FRANK REPS. FASHION DETAILS, PAGE 95.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAMES, 2015. OIL ON CANVAS; 72 × 56". COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM, NEW YORK. JARED, 2016. OIL ON CANVAS; 72 × 54". PHOTO: ADAM REICH. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM, NEW YORK. TWINS, 2017. OIL ON CANVAS; 72 × 56". PHOTO: JEAN VONG. COURTESY OF RENNIE COLLECTION, VANCOUVER. TIMOTHY, 2017. OIL ON CANVAS; 78 × 60". PHOTO: JEAN VONG. COURTESY OF PRIVATE COLLECTION.





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BY LEAH MELBY CLINTON  
MAR 13, 2017

Amongst the never-ending, century-spanning talk about what art means—the ways it can impact society; how to define it—today's political climate has us looking to gallery walls with an even sharper eye. What is the artist's role in everything that's happening out there? Recording, parsing, distracting?

"If anything, for me, it has affirmed why empathy and the sharing of stories continue to be necessary," Jordan Casteel explained. The Colorado-born artist's work has been lauded by big-time institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Times, and from our conversation, it's easy to reconcile thoughts of the little, craft-loving girl raised by a justice-chasing family with the cerebral, Yale-educated creative she is now. Here, Casteel answers our questions on building a career, weathering criticism, and more.

### **What are some of your first memories of art?**

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to the act of making. I was the child who would ask for a box of "stuff" from Michael's for Christmas. That box could include things like pom-poms, popsicle sticks, paint, construction paper, and, always, a glue gun. It would bring me hours of pleasure in exercising my imagination. I was making "art." I had a part of our family room dedicated solely to my crafts. That space was sacred. It was one place where my brothers weren't.

In general though, art was always around growing up. My grandmother, Margaret Buckner Young, was on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and moved to Denver to be near her grandchildren. Although I only ever knew her as "Grams," she had left behind a full life supporting the arts in New York City. She was collecting the works of Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Hale Woodruff, and many others before they had established names within the art canon. I was surrounded by this artwork every day, though I am not yet sure where or how I fit into that.



James, 2015; Oil on canvas

### Why was going to a women's college important to you?

If you had asked me as a junior in high school if I would ever consider going to a women's college, I would have laughed. Having grown up with two brothers and all male cousins, I felt most comfortable in my relationships with men. Grams had taught educational psychology at Spelman College and my love and respect for her was profound, so the potential of following in her footsteps was something I wanted. However, I surprisingly found my home on the campus of Agnes Scott College [in Decatur, GA]. Agnes is an institution that had not previously been on my radar, but it took my breath away. I immediately changed my application to early decision. (I have made most of my major decisions in my life by trusting my gut.) My time there was life-changing.

Before Agnes, I would have described myself as being brutally shy. There I came out of my shell and explored the power of my own voice, which I believe could have only happened in a space where I felt the confidence and encouragement of women. As a result, I cannot regret not having gone to an HBCU [historically black college or university]. I was still in Atlanta, close to Morehouse, Spelman, Clark Atlanta, and the like. I was still connecting with local HBCUs and running the Agnes Scott Black Student Union, Witkaze. The values of my grandmother continued on even if I was not in the physical location where she had once dedicated her time. I was defining my own journey.

### Your body of work and professional CV, including work with Teach for America, make it obvious social justice is important to you. Where is that rooted?

My passion for social justice runs very deep. I come from a family where having compassion for others and fighting for equity is a non-negotiable. My grandfather was born to educated parents in Kentucky—a rarity for black families. His father, my great-grandfather, was the president of the Lincoln Institute, an all-black boarding high school that had a secret curriculum where they were educating students outside of the meager societal expectations. My grandfather, Whitney Moore Young, Jr., went on to serve as director of the National Urban League from 1961 to 1971, working as one of the “Big Six” during the Civil Rights Movement. He married my grandmother, Margaret, an educator and writer who went on to serve on many boards (Lincoln Center, Metropolitan Museum, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Girl Scouts, and New York Life Insurance) and write her own children's books. My mother, Lauren Young Casteel, is the current President and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Colorado and was the first black woman to head a foundation in Colorado and the only person in Colorado to run three foundations.

All of which is to say: My legacy in education and philanthropy is undeniable. I think for much of my life, I did not know how this personal family history would fit into the life I wanted for myself. It wasn't until college that the potential of merging my interests in education, social justice, and art presented itself, but the root of those passions has always felt clear.

### Can you identify a turning point in your career?

When I was accepted into the MFA program at the Yale School of Art, I knew that the opportunity had the potential to take me from painting in my bedroom in Denver to developing a career. But my time in that program was really grueling. I did not graduate with a sense of confidence in myself or the work, however, I was affirmed that hard work could pay off. I have always been really ambitious by nature, but being an artist, I have the opportunity to put my that hard work could pay off. I have always been really



Timothy, 2017; Oil on canvas





*Twins, 2017; Oil on canvas*

ambitious by nature, but being an artist, I have the opportunity to put my skills as a learner to good use. I continue to believe strongly that nothing can happen without the work. It is because of the work that I have had the opportunities I have had. [Art] is a practice, and with practice comes growth through failures and successes. I am in this profession for the long haul. I have to exercise patience and put all of my skills to use in order to ensure a thoughtful career.

### **Have you experienced disappointments that turned out to be positive in the end?**

One of my dearest friends, artist EJ Hill, often uses roller coasters as a metaphor for life and being an artist, and I cannot think of a better example of the highs and lows that come along with this work. Being an artist is about learning to navigate the lows in order to feel the highs again. Of course there have been moments where I wasn't accepted into a residency I really wanted or had a tough studio visit. But with each "fall," I have come up a little stronger, a little more prepared for the next. Developed grit. It feels similar to the notion of mistakes. Hindsight is always 20-20.

Looking back on moments where I thought it was impossible to stand again and seeing that not only have I stood, but I have stood much taller and with more humility and patience than before. At some point, we all have to relinquish our fears to a process. A process that may just be out of my control, which is undoubtedly terrifying. Much like a roller coaster.

### **How do you think about creating work meant to be digested by both an audience and critics?**

Learning to sift through information is a skill we all can and do benefit from. I'm constantly exercising my will to determine what does or doesn't affect me and my practice. I believe there is great power in criticism and reviews, but greater power in our ability to determine its importance on a personal level. Dialogue is power. Listening is imperative. But when it is me, alone in the studio, everything else disappears. I have to listen to my hand. Noise is just noise.

Painting for me is about seeing. It's about slowing down enough to either see something you haven't seen before or see yourself authentically considered and represented. I have been lucky enough to see the moment when some of my sitters see themselves on canvas for the first time, [like] when James's (2015) wife thanked me for seeing him as she has always seen him and for sharing that. What does it mean to offer someone visibility in a world that is constantly rendering their humanity invisible? I relinquish a ton of control over how a painting is perceived once it leaves my studio, however, I can and do work really hard to make sure it is full of empathy and respect.

### **So many of your paintings are of men—did you decide to focus on males over females?**

For me, my work is about humanity. It was never an explicit thought to paint men over women. I do not think women are absent in my work. As a woman myself, I feel utterly present, every stroke has been filtered through my own personal narrative and experience. My desire to represent my community feels clear: as a sister, daughter, and friend.



*Jared, 2016; Oil on canvas*

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Harvey B. Gantt Center  
for African-American Arts + Culture



## Jordan Casteel: Harlem Notes

January 28, 2017 - July 8, 2017

Jordan Casteel: Harlem Notes is an exhibition of recent paintings by Harlem-based artist, Jordan Casteel. These detailed portraits explore intimacy and the immortalization of her subjects.

Each painting hints at a treasure trove of stories and memories shared between Casteel and her subject. Perhaps as much autobiographical as observational, Casteel's paintings are imbued with the tenderness of her gaze. Family, neighbors, patrons – all enter her studio through a photographic snapshot captured in the specificity of their space before being projected in paint onto the surface that immortalizes. Resting with grandeur on the canvas, the subjects penetrate in a scale that is just slightly larger than life.

Through color, Casteel both embraces and pushes back against signifiers of blackness, revealing a multiplicity in tone and hue that feels supernatural in its matter-of-factness. Offering a chromatic spectrum that mirrors the complexity of being and circumvents any singular reading, these works tease what is familiar while chronicling what is lived in that very moment.

Building a tapestry of structure and dimension through a weaving of loose and tightly knit brush strokes, Casteel builds upon the canvas' plain surface an orchestra of color and texture, with the application of paint not unlike the caress of a familiar hand.

*Casteel (b. 1989 in Denver, CO) received her B.A. from Agnes Scott College in Decatur, GA for Studio Art (2011) and her M.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art in New Haven, CT (2014). She has been an artist-in-residence at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY, (2015) Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Process Space, Governors Island, NY, (2015), The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2015), and is currently an awardee for The Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, DUMBO, NY (2016). Casteel is an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University-Newark. She currently lives and works in New York, NY and is represented by Casey Kaplan, NY.*



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ARTNEWS

**CASEY KAPLAN NOW REPRESENTS JORDAN CASTEEL**

BY Alex Greenberger



Jordan Casteel, Charles, 2016.

Casey Kaplan in New York will now represent Jordan Casteel, the young painter who's recently gotten attention for her portraits of men lounging in various environs. One of the the 2015–16 artists in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, she will have a solo show with Kaplan on September 7, 2017.

Casteel, who was born in 1989 in Denver and who lives and works in New York, often depicts men sitting on street corners or in living rooms. Sometimes they pose in the nude, lying on couches or mimicking Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker* on a folding chair. One of the most notable aspects of her paintings is her sitters' skin tones, which can be a shade of brown or even, if the setting seems right, lime green, or navy blue.

The gallery's announcement comes ahead of Casteel's first solo museum show, at the Harvey B. Gantt Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her work has been shown in New York at Sargent's Daughters, where she had two solo shows, James Cohan Gallery, and the Studio Museum.

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ELLE

## 15 WOMEN ARTISTS WHO ARE CHANGING THEIR WORLD—AND OURS

*Whether they make art or they buy, sell, collect, or "incubate" it, these 15 renegades share both an eye for beauty and a piercing awareness of that which is not beautiful—in ourselves, in society, even in the supposedly freewheeling sphere of art. Their mission: make sure we see it, too.*

BY MOLLY LANGMUIR AND CURATED BY CARY LEITZES NOV 15, 2016



### JORDAN CASTEEL AND THELMA GOLDEN | SPACE MAKERS

Jordan Casteel spent her yearlong residency at Harlem's Studio Museum painting tender portraits of local black men—a guy on his bike selling kites, a young hacky-sacker. It's a project she began while earning her master of fine arts degree at Yale, informed by years of watching male family members, men she knew as thoughtful and sensitive, but "in the street, I was well aware people saw them differently." And it's one perfectly suited to the museum, which was formed in 1968 with the intention of not just promoting the work of artists of African descent but also welcoming in the surrounding community.

Casteel learned she'd gotten the residency in a call from the Studio's legendary director, Thelma Golden. The artist's first words—"Are you f—ing kidding me?"—reflected not just disbelief that she'd been selected but also that she was actually speaking to Golden. "If I think about the trajectories of so many artists I admire, from Kehinde Wiley to Mickalene Thomas, a few things are consistent," Casteel says. "One is Thelma Golden."

A New York City native, Golden knew early on that she wanted to champion black artists. "If the Studio Museum hadn't existed," she says, "I would have had to create it." Hired by the Whitney Museum in 1988 as a curator, Golden became the Studio Museum's director in 2005 and has since focused on strengthening the institution's status as a cultural anchor and, recently, spearheading a \$122 million expansion by architect David Adjaye (of DC's recently opened National Museum of African American History and Culture) that will increase gallery space by almost half. For now, though, Golden's office still lies beneath the residency studios, the walls thin enough that occasionally, "I'll hear a bang and have to decide, Is that a good bang or a bad bang?" she says, laughing. "I sort of have an instinct for it."



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**STUDIO  
MUSEUM  
HARLEM**

## **Tenses Artists in Residence 2015–16**

Jul 14, 2016 - Oct 30, 2016

Tenses presents recent works by 2015–16 artists in residence: painter Jordan Casteel (b. 1989), and multimedia artists EJ Hill (b. 1985) and Jibade-Khalil Huffman (b. 1981). The exhibition's title suggests the range of shifting possibilities in the artists' practices.

The six large-scale paintings by Casteel—an extension of the investigations she has been pursuing for several years into the complexity of black male identity—use vibrant, textured colors to capture the spirit of the vendors who operate every day on the sidewalks of West 125th Street. EJ Hill's installation *A Monumental Offering of Potential Energy* uses a platform stage and a scaled-down wooden roller-coaster track as its central elements, suggesting the highs and lows of life. Hill's work will be activated by the presence of the artist's body, which is intended to rest there, inertly, as a meditation on the space of queer black bodies. Jibade-Khalil Huffman's installation will be a complex layering of photo-based inkjet prints and screenprints, video and sculpture, challenging the viewer's normal understanding of visual perception while creating strategic overlaps between the digital and the analog.

*Tenses: Artists in Residence 2015–16 is organized by Amanda Hunt, Assistant Curator.*

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# NYAQ

## Jordan Casteel In Conversation With Nicole Kaack

*For the past year, Jordan Casteel, Jibade-Khalil Huffman, and EJ Hill have occupied the studios on the third floor of the Studio Museum in Harlem, privy to the flux and flow of traffic on 125th Street and spectators of the events that rally on the plaza in front of the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building. Under the auspices of the Studio Museum's Artist in Residence program, these young artists are now part of a new community, one that has become a part of their lives and their work.*

*On the advent of the A.I.R. exhibition *Tenses*, organized by Amanda Hunt, NYAQ's Nicole Kaack discusses the installation with each of the residents. The conversation with EJ Hill will be available on NYAQ's website upon the completion of his series of gallery performances.*

*In monumentally scaled, vibrantly colored canvases, Jordan Casteel captures likenesses of the men in her life—from artist models to cousins, from brothers to friends—with an immediacy and fraternity tempered by a sense of caution. Always black, always male, and always imbued with an ineffable humanity, Casteel's paintings regard their viewers, engaging us in a way that transcends the objecthood of becoming a painting.*

**The works in *Tenses* shift your focus from the interiority of the home to the communal space of the street.**

I personally found it interesting that although the settings of the paintings moved from inside to outside—they still had the same intimate and personal depth. There is such individuality in the “things” or people someone chooses to surround themselves with for hours out of the day. I have been very intentional in my desire to preserve the relationship between viewer and sitter. It is beyond important to me that I am a black woman making these paintings of my black male counterparts. It is that connection that has and will always remain the same.

**Your deliberation with color and pattern is evident in the divisions and correspondences made in each canvas. The ties that you draw become the expression of a slower process; we can watch you noticing or deliberately making connections that are variably formal or political.**

Slowing people down is absolutely a huge priority for me and my process. I am interested in drawing people's attention to ordinary everyday moments that they might otherwise be inclined to pass by. In the painting of Stanley, I am painting him in black and white monochrome to specifically draw a relationship between him as a young man and the people represented in the “stop police terror” sign above him. The day that I photographed him,



Charles, 2016. Oil on canvas, 78 × 60 inches. Photograph by Adam Reich.



I felt overwhelmed by the casual relationship between him sitting in front of a barbershop and the signs above and beside him. I immediately found myself feeling overcome with emotion; I knew I had to paint him. I wondered if anyone else had walked by and felt similarly. Generally, in the body of work in *Tenses* there is more explicit language than in previous work. I think much of that is literally just an effect of being on the street—what is amazing is that people are always surprised that the signage represented in my paintings is just as I found it. Nothing is fabricated. I do think that people miss most of their surroundings the majority of the time. Hopefully, through this work, people are able to slow themselves down enough to see things in a way they have not seen them before.

**In almost all of your compositions that I have seen, you have painted men in seated poses. This adds something to the intimacy and latent familiarity in the work. Can you talk a little about your engagement of your subjects?**

I have found that people's willingness always surprises me. I'm not sure that if someone came up to me and was like, "Hey, my name is Jordan, I'm an artist, could I photograph you for a painting?" I would say yes. Matter of fact, I am pretty sure I would say no. Every person has given me a gift—they have trusted me enough to share themselves with me—a stranger—to become a "painting." I would say the moment many of them had the opportunity to see the paintings for the first time in person, they were shocked by its monumental quality. As James told me, he expected "a little drawing or something." What is also beautiful is that I have had the opportunity to really get to know the men of my community—Harlem—through painting. The rapport I have developed is one full of love and support.

**I am really interested in this idea that you are introducing of the twinned experience between yourself and your subjects. It's almost one of synchronous opposition—as a black woman representing black men. Your gaze is sympathetic, but can never wholly be the same, and maybe that is precisely the intimate cautiousness that we have been talking about. Gender is a clear consideration in your work.**



Stanley, 2016. Oil on canvas, 78 × 60 inches.

my emotional and physical experience with each subject—allowing them to live a life beyond what you and I can imagine. I have to trust that the paintings' integrity will allow them to hold space wherever they go and encourage conversation and thoughtfulness that might not have been there otherwise. I won't always be there to speak on the painting's behalf—its success lies in its ability to speak for itself.

I feel that I am, as a black woman, represented in this work. Perhaps it is not evident in a literal sense, but my process, my experience, my lens is ultimately what creates these images. Everything is being translated through my experience. I also think it is worth talking about gender constructions in a similar way to how we think about systematic racism. Projecting onto a body under any circumstance can be limiting—we are defining a body/person before we slow ourselves down enough to truly get to know them. There is generally much more fluidity in the way we function as human beings than we allow ourselves to explore/consider. On a more personal level, I come from a family where there is a strong masculine presence. I have two brothers, my father, only male cousins, three nephews, et cetera. I feel I am in a unique position to share my experience as a sister, friend, family member—I desire to share my vision through a lens of empathy and love.

**The power and the gift of your paintings seems to me to be the way that they almost propose an alternate way of being together in space.**

As crazy as it sounds, I feel like every time I paint, I give birth and even possibly go to church. It is a personal and spiritual process for me. It gives me life—and in turn, I produce an object that is destined to have a life of its own. I cannot control the lives of my paintings—but I can only hope to set up the best set of circumstances for them to thrive. My hope is that each painting goes into the world and touches the life of another. I hope that the paintings hold a piece of

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# HYPERALLERGIC

MUSEUMS

## Painting, Performing, and Deconstructing the Body

*Jordan Casteel, EJ Hill, and Jibade-Khalil Huffman all use their work to explore the body, whether the subject's, the artist's, or the spectator's.*

Julia Friedman | October 20, 2016

An insistent physicality courses throughout *Tenses*, the 2015–16 artists in residence exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem. The show features three artists — Jordan Casteel, EJ Hill, and Jibade-Khalil Huffman — who explore the body, whether the subject's, the artist's, or the spectator's. They work in a wide range of mediums, including painting, installation, performance, sound, and digital media, but Assistant Curator Amanda Hunt has solved the problem of cohesion by placing each artist's work in a distinct space within the gallery.



Jordan Casteel, "Kevin the Kiteman" (2016), oil on canvas, 78 x 78 in (courtesy the artist, photo by Adam Reich)

In her painted portraits of black men, Casteel uses props and place in a way that evokes pre-20th century portraiture; her subjects are not deconstructed representations, but rather surrounded by clues about their occupations, social statuses, and geographic setting. Their locale is Harlem, New York, and in this Casteel's work feels uncannily linked to the space outside of the museum. "Kevin the Kiteman" (2016) sits on a bike holding at least three colorful kites in front of the Adam Clayton Powell Jr State Office Building, which is situated directly across from the Studio Museum. In "Glass Man Michael" (2016), graffiti on a construction-site slab reads "Harlem not for sale—fight back," a reference not only to place but also to socioeconomic relation to place. The suggested proximity of Casteel's subjects to their displayed portraits evokes the old-fashioned practice of hanging paintings of living subjects in family homes. One wonders if Kevin or Michael come to the Studio Museum sometimes to look at their images, and how other visitors might respond to the rarity of seeing subject in the flesh adjacent to oil on canvas.

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## The New York Times



Jordan Casteel's paintings, from left, "Glass Man Michael," "Charles" and "Stanley," all from 2016, part of the "Tenses" exhibition by the artists in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

### What to See in New York Galleries This Week

September 15, 2016

#### **Tenses: Artists in Residence 2015-16**

Studio Museum in Harlem  
144 West 125th Street  
Through Oct. 30

Police violence has brought the image of the black body back into art with the symbolic force it had in the identity-conscious 1990s. The exhibition of work by the Studio Museum's three 2015-16 artists in residence, organized by Amanda Hunt, could be read as a set of subtle variations on that presence, moving from realism to abstraction.

Jibade-Khalil Huffman's "Call and Response," part of the "Tenses" exhibition of the Studio Museum of Harlem. Credit Courtesy of the artist; Adam Reich/Studio Museum in Harlem Jordan Casteel painted her large, vivid full-length portraits from photographs of men she regularly encountered outside her Harlem studio during the past year. They include a young skateboarder, Jared; some sidewalk merchants; and a neighborhood resident named Stanley, who sits under a poster with the words "Stop Police Terror." The likenesses are carefully detailed, but there's nothing distanced about them: In each case, the sitter looks directly at the artist. The expression on Stanley's face is grave; his skin has an ashen pallor.

EJ Hill's past work has been with durational performance, though, at first look, his main piece in the show, "A Monumental Offering of Potential Energy," suggests that he has shifted his attention to sculpture: It's a large wooden model of an amusement park roller coaster, set on a low platform. Only when you walk the length of it do you find its resolution in the form of a body — that of the artist himself — lying still on the platform, as if the roller coaster had precipitously ejected him and left him for dead.

Bodies are ghostly in a multimedia installation by Jibade-Khalil Huffman. They're seen in occasional figures flickering in a video, and implied in a sculpture made of car windows that seem to have been shattered at points of impact, and in the overlapping, self-canceling words "your neighbor" in a silk-screen painting. Where the human presence is clear and direct is in sound: a constant undercurrent of diarylike, poetrylike words. It's as if an invisible body were all voice, fragmented but steadily and pointedly articulate.

- HOLLAND COTTER

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news

## 10 Exceptional Millennial Artists to Watch in 2016

*They address the concerns of their generation in remarkable and imaginative ways.*

Rain Embuscado | September 15, 2016



Jordan Casteel, *Crockett Brothers* (2015). Courtesy of the artist.

### 5. Jordan Casteel, b. 1989

The young artist is known for depicting black male subjects at ease in domestic scenes, and her style is reminiscent of the work of Alice Neel, Martin Wong, and Nicole Eisenman. Her residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem culminated in a highly-anticipated show this summer. We can't wait to see what she does next.

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CULTURE / FEATURE

## This Artist Wants You To See The Fullness Of Black Men's Lives

*Jordan Casteel's large-scale portraits lend an intimacy and depth to a static mainstream narrative.*

By JASON PARHAM



Locals line the block, a dense stretch of 125th Street between Adam Clayton Powell and Malcolm X boulevards. Men and women chat. Elders go about hawking homemade oils and creams. Kids play under the afternoon sun, charged with excitement. Up here, every one moves with a determined energy. It's Harlem in late July. The commotion rises, bubbling into the third-floor window of Jordan Casteel's studio, bringing the white interior to life. Photographs of black men — fathers and sons and brothers and uncles — pepper the high walls, where half-finished paintings rest. Curios cover her desk like stray confetti: a small potted plant, a mug with the words "Black Lives Matter" in bold lettering, an issue of *HYCIDE* magazine, unused paint brushes, Post-it notes, and pencils. The 27-year-old artist has worked out of this space for the last nine months, after she was selected as an artist-in-residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York City's renowned hub and incubator of black art. "I feel like this wall is my document of all the people that I have painted," Casteel says, referring to the swirl of pictures that serve as the inspiration for her work. "Although the paintings move on, this is my way of holding onto a memory."



Since her time at Yale, from which she graduated in 2014 with an MFA in Fine Art, Casteel has attempted to broaden our understanding of the Black Male through a series of paintings which depict black men in various states of composure — at home, in the barbershop, on the street. The paintings are deceptively striking: each one a negotiation of power, placement, and identity. Her latest body of work — featured in the Studio Museum's "Tenses" exhibition — investigates the history of Harlem through the men who populate its streets. I ask her to tell me about these men, to tell me about their world. "I got plenty of stories about all of them," she says, looking at the wall of photos. "I don't even know where to begin."

Growing up in Colorado, were you drawn to art at a young age?

I grew up in a family that was always involved in the arts. My grandmother actually was on the board for the Dance Theatre of Harlem and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, so supporting of the arts always was around when I grew up, but it wasn't necessarily something that I foresaw or had any inclination around being a profession long-term. It wasn't until I got to grad school that I was like, 'Oh okay, this could be something that I do.'

I studied sociology and anthropology in undergrad. I went to a small women's liberal arts college in Georgia — Agnes Scott. I was interested in social justice and education, and I truly didn't see art being something I could do with my life. It wasn't until I studied abroad in Italy my during the second semester of my junior year. Italy was literally every Italian adventure I think I've ever heard of: I'm running down the mountain for cappuccinos and coming back and painting all day. That was my life, and thought I could do it forever. When I came back, I changed my major to studio art.

You mentioned wanting to previously work as an educator. Do you see your work now as a kind of education?

Absolutely.

Not just for yourself, but for others?

Part of my learning process in my first year at Yale was trying to figure out the subject matter part of it — I was painting landscapes, and I think MFA programs really kind of push you to hone in on your thinking in a lot of ways. So by the time my second year rolled around, I felt like I found the subject matter, or felt confident in my ability to tie my language and my ability to speak about work or the world into my art practice and making. It was black men and portraiture was what did that for me. And I felt like people were having generative conversations and asking questions, and a lot of what teaching and education and learning is about is being able to ask a question and learn from it, to have some kind of desire to figure something out, or maybe not get all the answers, but trying to generate some sense of change or movement.



"Charles," 2016



"Jared," 2016



So what are you trying to figure out?

I've always been an observer, I've always been the person in a room who is watching things before I decide to step into it. I'm much more of an introvert than an extrovert, which I guess a lot of artists are. But in making, I'm able to kind of resolve my interactions with people, or the things that I want to understand about humanity that I might not get otherwise, so there's an intimacy in the process of making, where it's literally just me and my thoughts and my paint and my discovery, and then I'm coming out of it with this product that gets to live a whole other life. It's really easy to rest in a conversation of "Jordan paints black men," when my interest in environment and paint and color and subject matter in relation to those things means more to me, and are things that I'm really trying to discover on a greater level.

I'm glad you brought that up. I'm really interested in two things specifically in your work: the position your subjects take — how these men confront you head-on — and the vibrant colors that you use. With regard to the gaze of the subjects, there's this duality: there's an incredible vulnerability present within the work, but also an incredible feeling of power and strength that radiates from the positioning of each subject.

I am really intentional about the gaze, maintaining that sense of power and strength. I'm often thinking about the ways that these will function outside of my studio, and how they'll live a life on their own in spaces where I can't necessarily speak for them. But that their presence is made known in some ways. I'm really flexible about the way that they hold themselves or carry themselves, I'm literally encountering people and then being like, "Hey can I take your picture?" so there's a ton of things that have to be negotiated in that time and space as I'm literally just getting to know someone. But the one thing I do ask is that they look at me. Selfishly, I think, the best way to connect with somebody is through looking them in the eye and actually acknowledging their presence. There's a sense of openness that has to happen when you look somebody in the eye, and it's a good memory place for me as I re-address that moment or that time and place and go back to this and be like "Okay, I remember what it felt



"Galen," 2014

like to look in that person's eyes, and now I'm gonna create this painting as a signal to that experience and hope that somebody else can connect to it as well."

It's been a little hard for me to be up here since everything's gone downstairs, because I felt like I built a community for myself up here. I had like a whole bunch of friends, you know? I refer to them by their first names, that's one thing all the paintings — it's like "That's Leon, that's Timothy." There's a friend of mine who came in here when the paintings were all up here, right before they went down, and she was like "Ahhh!" She was like, "It's too much in here for me today, because I feel like they're all staring at me intensely, and I'm not ready for that." Whereas I really loved that, and I felt like they were in conversation with one another, I felt they were in conversation with me, and they forced whoever's in the room with them to be in conversation with them.

And what's the thought process behind the rich palettes that you use?

I just love color. I wish I had some great philosophical answer to that, but in terms of the overall palette decisions, there are things that are intuitive. Sometimes it's more logical, like the painting that I'm working on right now is being really conscious of the David Hammons flag and the colors within it, so I built a palette with that in mind. There can be one color that feels triggering in the beginning that I build a whole palette around, but there's usually a starting place that the rest evolves out of. But I literally just love color. Since I was a kid I was always a person who wanted my room to be bright yellow and bright red and bright green and bright periwinkle. I fought over a color, like a shade of periwinkle, with my mother for a very long time, and it needed to be perfect for me. And why that is? I'm not entirely certain, besides an aesthetic that I am just drawn to.

I think the actual play on color in terms of blackness and skin tone is a whole other thing that I am intentional about. Like, he's purple, he's green. The comments about the most recent body of work have been that they feel more naturalized, in terms of skin tone, more than my previous work. Although I feel like, if you look closely, they're not, and a lot of the times I'm switching. So "Michael" downstairs, for example, has pretty white skin, like golden white skin in the painting, but he's dark skinned in real life. I made that decision because I felt that that color would a) benefit the composition overall and help him stand out within the context of the rest of the environment, but b) because I'm interested in pushing the dialogue of blackness. Within my own family, the scope of what blackness looks like is really vast. In my experience at least, most black people I've encountered would say that that's true of their families, you literally have a whole scope and range of literal color, and representing that in my paintings is important to me. I just allow myself to play, as it relates to each painting individually. Like, why green for him? Oftentimes I don't have a whole great answer for that.

I remember the first time I encountered your work a few years ago, in 2014, right before your show *Visible Men*. It was this painting of a young man sitting in a kitchen; he was green. I remember thinking: I know this person. He seemed so familiar. As black folk, this is our default: the richness and the plurality within blackness — we span all shades and colors. And it's interesting that you bring that out in different ways within your work.

Absolutely. And I love pushing the context of that, that what can feel familiar from one person can not be familiar to the next, the assumptions that we make on bodies. The first body of work that I did, those nudes in particular, I had a lot of them in my studio, and somebody had come for a studio visit and was like, "Oh you're just painting black men," and then they were standing there, sort of verbalizing their thought process, and I was like, "Oh actually, he's green and he's blue." The person kind of threw me, because I made all these assumptions that they just checked me on, and that's interesting. I was really grateful for them to verbalize that process, because that is something that I'm interested in, like what did you project onto that body before you actually took the time to see and get to know it and investigate what's important to them or what's in their environment? It's crazy to me how quickly we do that.

How has your family informed your work and the people that you depict?

They're everything, quite honestly. They're the part that I rarely talk about in context to this work, but really generate all the inspiration for me, or the intimate heart part for me. The most vulnerable, and the most sacred is my family. My understanding of them always felt different than the rest of the world's, and I felt that the time was now, the time has always been right to try to create a way to show them as I see them to the rest of the world. So as literally their sister, but as someone who knows my twin is super goofy and has a great sense of humor and a poet and have all this history and lineage with — walking down the street he doesn't necessarily encounter that same visibility. Those parts of him are invisible to a lot of people. I think it's my role in relation to them that allows me to do this work. I don't know how to verbalize it very well, because I don't talk about it much. I'm really conscious oftentimes of protecting them and their stories, because I think it's so easy for people to want to sensationalize the biography of people, as opposed to really trying to understand and see them as they are in this moment, in this time. As someone who's been writing professionally for six years, I rarely, if ever, write about my family. They're sacred and special to me. I would never impose them in my work without their permission. Even if they approved, I would still be hesitant to engage the interiority of their lives, so I definitely understand that. It's a weird balance.

It is! And the reality is that's where we come from, it's what inspires and gives us life to begin with. My journey for the first 18 years was basically at home; I was constantly around them, you know? The way that I saw the world was through their eyes, and sometimes not, maybe, but I didn't always understand. I still don't always understand. Somebody told me once that it felt like I was painting these men using them as surrogates to understand or build relationships. I think that's an interesting question. As someone who's been writing professionally for six years, I rarely, if ever, write about my family. They're sacred and special to me. I would never impose them in my work without their permission. Even if they approved, I would still be hesitant to engage the interiority of their lives, so I definitely understand that. It's a weird balance.

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What's the intent with this new body of work on display at The Studio Museum? Previously, your subjects were paired together, which invoked ideas of belonging and fellowship and brotherhood. Is there something specific you're trying to convey by giving the platform to one person as opposed to a pair or trio? Maybe I'm reading too much into it.

No, I don't think there's any such thing as reading too much into it. I think the beauty is other people can see things that sometimes I don't, and there are things that maybe I thought about, and there are things that I haven't and reveal themselves in time. The one thing I know for sure is



"Miles and Jojo," 2015

that when I first came to Harlem, the thing that attracted me most was the way that people inhabit the street as if it were their home. They literally surround themselves with goods and things that matter to them, and they camp out, in essence, for the entire day, or sometimes for life. A lot of people have been there, or set spaces that become theirs. It's interesting to me how claiming of space happens within the community of vendors, and even when people aren't selling things, they're like chilling under a tree with their friends every day. I was more interested in stepping into the street than I was being really conscious of whether they were alone or together.

What I was finding is that often, the people that I encounter in the street aren't necessarily sharing their booth with someone else. It's like, "Here's my booth or my table setup, and then there's my homeboy across the street," but they're not necessarily sitting next to each other and sharing space in that same way. So at the time that I was doing the Brothers series, it was out of a painting of my twin brother that that conversation started. I finally went to the source and asked my twin brother to sit for me, and my nephew happened to be there, his son, and I was like, 'You know what, actually let's do both of you guys? How about we just try that?' I loved the painting so much, and felt like there was something there to be explored, that I started to investigate the relationships between. So similarly, I think the most consistent thing in my practice has been that things happen more intuitively and more as a matter of happenstance than anything else. Circumstance, where I am, and who I'm encountering, and then the work kind of evolves out of it. The question has been, What's next? And I've had a really hard time answering that, because I'm not entirely sure where inspiration is gonna come next. I know that it comes to me everyday in the people that I meet, whether it becomes a whole, concise body of work or not, where people can say, "That's Jordan's Harlem Series, those are her Nudes" — I didn't intentionally have those things happen, and I definitely thought that, coming into Harlem, maybe I'd paint women for the first time, and then that didn't happen. Until things feel right, I don't know what's gonna happen.



The history of black Americans is one of displacement and migration. Our history is often one that is forced upon us, and we're often caught in the throes of that. Do you see your work as a comment on history in any way? Or as a way of archiving black history?

Yes. I feel that most explicitly in this body of work, primarily because of Harlem, in the year I've even just been here, which I am contributing in some ways to the shift that's happening. In my short time here, seeing people that I thought I saw everyday disappear, and there is a documentation that's happening literally through these paintings. And I felt that the night of the opening, a lot of the guys came to the opening and one of the paintings has this building, the museum, in the background of it, and this building is literally getting torn down in a year and will be something different. There are so many markers, there was somebody who's an architect who came to see the work, who mentioned how there were very specific references in the work for him, places that have or do or don't change in time. He's like, "I remember when Lenox Saphire in your painting was something else, and I bet you in ten years it's gonna be even something else," and I love that.

These [paintings] have been, and are, a document. I'll be curious, in terms the black domestic, when I was painting in people's homes, whether or not that will show to be a marker of time and space and blackness. Art generally proves as a document or documenting force. I can only hope that I get to contribute to that, to be enough a part of history that people can look to the work to be like, "This is a marker of this time or when this was happening in history."

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## Meet Harlem's Newest Artists-in-Residence Antwaun Sargent — Aug 6 2016

## The Creators Project



Jordan Casteel, James, 2015, Oil on canvas, 72 x 56 in. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Adam Reich

Since 1968, some of the black artists who have grown to be a few of the most consequential contemporary artists today have taken up residencies at the Studio Museum in Harlem. The painter Kerry James Marshall, who details black life on his canvases, multimedia artist Dave McKenzie, who uses performance to illuminate the black body, and Kevin Beasley, who notably makes sound sculptures from materials that signify the black experience, have all used the museum's artist studios to create early works. In the recently mounted exhibition, *Tenses*, the Studio Museum presents art made by its latest artists-in-residence, who see Marshall, McKenzie, and Beasley as influences. Works of text, painting, performance, sculpture, video, and installation, by Jordan Casteel, EJ Hill, and Jibade-Khalil Huffman, represent a multitude of concerns and details future possibilities of black contemporary art.

Casteel's paintings in the exhibition blend aspects of landscape and figurative painting to render the variously hued black men who line 125th St. during the day. This project, like 2014's *Visible Man* and last year's *Brothers*, is a series that visualizes hard realities. Surrounding most of the men on Casteel's canvases are what curator Sarah Lewis, in the exhibition essay on Casteel's art, calls, the "informal economies" that these men built as an act of survival. Glass Man Michael, for instance, sits on the street, next to glassworks he sells for a living. Glass Man Mike, as he is known in Harlem, is in front of a sign that reads in red: "HARLEM—NOT FOR—SALE FIGHT—BACK." The scene captures the enterprising spirit of the vendors who line Harlem's busiest thoroughfare.

"The most consistent thing has been the people I painted over the years, [who] have always been people in my community," explains Casteel to the Creators Project. "The first body of work were nudes of actors from the school of drama at Yale, the second body were literally my family and friends from Denver." She adds, "Getting to Harlem, I found myself really paying attention to the people I was encountering everyday on my walk from home to the museum. The way people set up environments and cohabitate on the street for such a consistent amount of time, I couldn't ignore that space."

There are sadder notes woven into the canvases as well. It seems, to paint proud contemporary black men is to paint some aspect of a tragedy. In James, an older gentleman in a maroon jacket and trousers with orange accents that matches his brimmed hat, has set up shop on a folding table selling CDs. James' highly stylized entrepreneurial hustle evokes Alton Sterling, the CD seller recently killed by an Baton Rouge police officer. Even Stanley, who bares a comfortable and calm expression, wears a hoodie while sitting on atop steps, overlooking the street, opposite an Arizona Tea ad. The composition is an augury; it proposes a dreadful future possibility because Stanley fits the description that characterized Trayvon Martin's sidewalk killing as he wore a hoodie and carried an Arizona. Stanley, Glass Man Mike, James, and many men like them are so consistently seen sitting along the street; their statures signify larger stories of Harlem and America.

...

Sargent, Antwaun, "Meet Harlem's Newest Artists-in-Residence", [The Creators Project](#) (online), August 6, 2016

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JAMES COHAN GALLERY

## Intimisms

JUNE 23 - JULY 29

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY JUNE 23, 6-8 PM

James Cohan is pleased to present *Intimisms*, a group exhibition that considers the continuing legacy of the Intimists. A group of late 19th and early 20th-century artists that included Jean-Edouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard, the Intimists created jewel-like portraits of family and friends in richly-colored interiors during moments of domestic quietude. Organized with artist Aliza Nisenbaum, the exhibition features twenty-six historic, established, and emerging artists and is on view at the gallery's Chelsea location from June 23 through July 29, 2016.

Included in the exhibition are paintings by Ellen Altfest, Joan Brown, Jordan Casteel, Susanna Coffey, Ben Degen, Louis Eisemius, Nicole Eisenman, Jane Freilicher, Lucian Freud, Hope Gangloff, Anna Glantz, Heather Guertin, Heidi Howard, Ridley Howard, Sangram Majumdar, John McAllister, Alice Neel, Aliza Nisenbaum, Jennifer Packer, Ga Hee Park, Fairfield Porter, Gior-danne Salley, Tschabalala Self, Sylvia Sleight, Alison Elizabeth Taylor, Henry Taylor, and Patricia Treib.

Following the advent of the genre by its earliest French practitioners, artists have practiced successive modes of intimacy inside rooms and behind closed doors, amongst friends and confidants, through diary entries and inner monologues, revealing confessions and secrets, all filtered through their aestheticized private view. The style privileges an artist's ineffable affinities and communion with his or her subject, rather than emphasizing direct observation and storytelling. *Intimisms* considers the artists who champion this introspection, focusing on the interior spaces of their studios, living spaces, and bedrooms, while looking to friends, family, and lovers as subjects. Contemporary painters continue to press and stretch against the subtle confines of the genre, updating this endeavor for the 21st century.

For modern audiences, the most intimate moments are often posted, liked, and hashtagged instantaneously. How then are these previously private, sometimes clandestine, moments preserved in our era? Writing about a younger generation of painters working through the legacy of the Intimists, writer and curator Chris Sharp of Lulu in Mexico City raises doubts, "about the feasibility of intimacy, perceiving it less as a fact of life than an ethical mode, won through the increasingly rare act of paying attention." For these artists, the act of painting actualizes and secures the personal intimacy they seek with their subjects.

Like Bonnard and Vuillard before them, these artists allow the physical interior to serve as a symbol for the soul and psyche, revealing that one's personal viewpoint—a subjective view of reality—holds unique and vital meaning.



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**The New York Times**

## What to See in New York Galleries This Week

July 7, 2016

### Intimisms

James Cohan Gallery  
533 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through July 29

The title of “Intimisms,” an excellent group show of figurative painting, pluralizes Intimism, the early modernist style best exemplified by the small, sometimes fraught domestic interiors of Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard. At a moment when so much art is for public consumption, the works here convey the intimacy of bodies, faces, emotions, touch and love.

Representing 26 artists from several generations, the show is organized by the gallery and the painter Aliza Nisenbaum. From the past, Jane Freilicher’s “Flowers in Armchair” (1956) and Fairfield Porter’s “The Bedroom” (1949) are exceptional. In an Alice Neel group portrait of the Fugs (1966), the band seems to be singing just for us. Henry Taylor’s forceful “Fawn Rogers” (2015) all but picks up Neel’s mantle.



Jordan Casteel's  
“Mom Hand,” a  
2014 painting at  
James Cohan

Jordan Casteel’s “Mom Hand,” a 2014 painting at James Cohan Credit Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York Like Porter, numerous younger artists take us into the bedroom, often casting us as intruders, as in Benjamin Degen’s close up of a flushed woman sleeping. In rich colors and full forms that distantly evoke Léger, GaHee Park’s “Night Talk” features mysterious meldings of bodies, rooms, old-fashioned telephones and paintings within paintings. Ridley Howard portrays tender lovemaking in settings stripped of detail. Nicole Eisenman’s 1994 “Self-Portrait With Mr. Monopoly” conjures a moment of quiet existential terror, while Joan Brown’s “Twenty to Nine” (1972) depicts a woman who may be weeping sitting at a restaurant table with wine glasses for two. We see only the hands of two people building a fire in a new work by Giordanne Salley. Jordan Casteel zeros in on a woman resting her left hand on her knees; the title, “Mom Hand,” speaks volumes.

There is much to linger over, especially Anna Glantz’s portrait of a bare-chested, vulnerable young man. Sylvia Sleigh’s 1970 portrait — the same subject in a different mood — might have been painted yesterday.

- ROBERTA SMITH

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ARTSY

## These 20 Female Artists Are Pushing Figurative Painting Forward

BY CASEY LESSER  
JUN 10TH, 2016



Jordan Casteel  
B. 1989, DENVER, COLORADO. LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Casteel, who describes herself as hyper-aware of her surroundings, creates vivid large-scale paintings that picture black males from the communities where she has lived. "I am most interested in sharing sensitive, humanistic, and honest stories of my community," she explains of this focus, which she began as an MFA candidate at Yale. Her paintings—which are now featured in a group show at HOME in Manchester, England and can be seen this summer in New York at the Studio Museum in Harlem and James Cohan Gallery—are sincere portrayals of men and boys, often in pairs or trios on living-room couches or floors, that capture family and friendship through a crisp, realist style, and vibrant colors. "Harlem and the people who occupy its streets have become the protagonist," she says of the work she is currently producing as a resident at the Studio Museum. "Having a studio situated on 125th street has allowed for me to create a bridge between the community and the museum. The street has literally entered the museum through my paintings."

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**CREATIVE  
NEW YORK**

## Jordan Casteel

by Chloe Wayne | April 12, 2016

*For our second story, we sat down with Jordan Casteel, a painter and a 2015–16 Artist in Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem, to chat about grad school, representations of black masculinity, and finding community in Harlem. This story also features a selection of black-and-white portraits of Jordan and other New York City residents by Brooklyn-based photographer King Texas.*



Where are you from?

I was born in 1989 in Denver, Colorado. Most of my family is still in Denver — my twin brother, my mother, father, and nephew are there. I also have an older brother based in Arizona with his wife and two sons.

I never realized how much I would miss it until I left. It was really special growing up in a city with such close access to nature. One of my favorite things to do was to lay on a blanket in the front yard and watch the clouds go by. I have always been a dreamer, and Denver was a city that really gave me the space and natural wonder to do that.

When were you first exposed to the arts?

Art has always been a huge part of my life. I grew up in a home that had Romare Bearden, Hale Woodruff, Faith Ringgold, Charles White, and Jacob Lawrence on the walls. My grandmother was on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Lincoln Center, and Dance Theatre of Harlem here in New York.

I also took a few classes at the local Art Students League. I was always making something and/or trying to realistically draw photos I'd find. Art was just there. It was hard for me to not notice or be inspired by the images and people that were around



me. And my parents valued the things I would create; both of them have my artwork that spans my lifetime on their walls. So is that when you decided to become an artist?

No. For a long time, I had decided that art was not going to make a living for me. That I needed something more practical. I originally wanted to go to an HBCU [historically black college or university] like Spelman, but I ended up attending Agnes Scott, a small, diverse women's liberal arts college also in Georgia.

I went abroad my junior year to Cortona, Italy, and that changed everything for me. I took my first oil painting class, and I fell in love. I literally remember thinking, "I could do this forever. This is the happiest I've ever been in my life." My senior year, I changed my major to studio art, but the school had no support system for oil painting, so I spent the year trying to teach myself how to paint in the school basement.

After I graduated, I did Teach For America in Denver. Education and social justice have always been passions of mine. Even though I knew I needed to continue painting, I wasn't able to rationalize making it a career.

So I would come home from work, write my lesson plans, and then paint, but my spirit was really unhappy. I was in a therapy session complaining, and my therapist leaned forward and said, "Jordan, you need to get out." I was crying. I felt horrible. I felt like I was abandoning my students, and I had never quit anything in my life. But I was like, "You are right. I need to get out."

I ultimately decided to apply to graduate school for painting, but again, I told myself it was so I could become a teacher. Because you still hadn't let yourself think you could be an artist?

Nope. Absolutely not.

It was all my mother. I was looking at schools, and she said, "What's the best, honey?" I didn't know at that point. I knew nothing about the art world. Nothing. We Googled "best art MFA." The three that popped up first were the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbia, and Yale. So I applied to those three, but I thought I definitely wouldn't get in. I was just a girl from Colorado with no art school training who taught special education and painted in her bedroom.

The day I was supposed to get notification from Yale, I bought myself a cupcake and carried it around all day to either cry over it or celebrate with it. By 7:00 that night I hadn't heard anything so I was like, "Fuck it," and ate the cupcake anyway.

Later that night, I finally got the e-mail. I got in. I fell to my knees screaming and crying and called my parents. I thought about Kehinde Wiley and Mickalene Thomas — two artists I admired who had gone through the same program. I think I knew this had the potential to change my life forever, that this could be my shot at becoming an artist.



Jordan Casteel. "Ashamole Brothers." 2015. Oil on canvas, 54 x 72".

What was Yale like?

The amount of learning I had to do in my first year was immense, everything from paint to mediums to stretching a canvas to art history to the language. The language — being able to relate to conversations around art — I felt completely on the outside because I just couldn't figure out how to have the conversation they were having.

At the end of my first year, I had any epiphany like, "There is a way to contribute to this conversation and use my own language that is just as meaningful." So my second year was everything because I was able to grow into that.

So what brought you to New York? What were your expectations of the city?

I was offered a solo show here after graduation in summer 2014. In my first few months, I moved into a tiny apartment with three roommates that I found on Craigslist, and I found a studio in Bushwick at 56 Bogart. I literally

did not think I was going to survive here. I felt so stuck under a cloud of the exhaustion of this city, the energy. I have lupus, and so physically I wasn't ready for the challenges of maneuvering the city.

I also felt so much fear and pressure about the show. People like my friend Awol [Erizku] were fantastic during that time with talking me through things. Then I came to Harlem when I got residency at The Studio Museum in Harlem. Being here has really changed the game for me. For the first time, it feels like the New York experience that people love.

How has your practice evolved since college?

It's always been figuration for me. It's always been people who are around me.

Frankly, during my first year at Yale, I didn't know how to paint well enough. It just wasn't working. I got a grant to go to Gloucester during the summer before my second year and was doing en plein air painting, landscapes, just going crazy. It was a great way to learn how to paint, but I wasn't happy. The social aspect that I care so much about was missing. The acquittal of George Zimmerman in the killing of Trayvon Martin happened while I was there.

That morning, I was at the local breakfast spot, and this man was like, "You must be devastated this morning." I was one of a few black people in the whole town. And I was like, "Shouldn't everybody be devastated? Why am I the only one devastated?"

I ended up not saying anything. It was one of those moments where you're confronted with somebody's ignorance, and you don't respond, but as soon as you walk away, you think of all the things you should have and would have done.

Was that a turning point for you?

I called my mother and then my twin brother, and we were really emotional. He talked about raising his son. He talked about being followed around in a store that morning. And we talked about Trayvon.

My dedication to black men in my painting started at that point. The first painting I did was of my twin's best friend, Cory, who was also my first crush. I had taken a photograph of him when I was in Denver that summer. He was wearing a "You Mad" Nike tee and a fitted Atlanta Falcons hat. I painted all of those things, but during studio visits, people were focusing too much on signifiers that they felt were explicitly black—the clothing, the Nike logo—and not on the humanity of the subject.



Jordan Casteel. "Miles and Jojo." 2015. Oil on canvas, 54 x 72".

How do I create a painting of these men who have been in my life as their truest selves? You know, as the loving, intimate, caring fathers, sons, brothers, friends, men I've dated, kissed. The ones that I've had a very real history with.

Someone suggested I remove the clothing. I immediately said no. Black men in particular are hypersexualized and villainized, and I didn't want to feed into that conversation. Eventually I decided to try it, but I went into it knowing that I didn't want to paint their genitalia. I wanted to give a respect to their body that historically has not been given. A lot of people, including faculty, were frustrated with me for that. One critic said I was castrating the figure.

Their insistence that I paint their penises made me all the more confident. I was like, "If you want to talk about castration, let's talk about the history of cas-

tration and the black body because my guess is you don't want to actually have that conversation, yet you feel comfortable enough to tell me I am responsible for doing that."

How did all of this impact your work?

It ignited an urgency on top of the urgency I already had. It was another critic, Sarah Lewis, who had a studio visit with me, and I told her about all the feedback. She said to me, "Jordan, I have so much respect for you, because you do not and will not. I urge you to continue to fight that fight."



I also got criticism for being a woman painting the male body. I was interested in the conversation about why, throughout history, men painted the female body with no hesitation, but not the other way around.

Your paintings are so personal; these men are not flat archetypes of blackness or maleness, they are individual men.

The best thing I've heard was from Greg Tate during my Brothers exhibition. He said to me, "Sister, you are the queen at capturing the souls of brothers." It was one of the best compliments I've ever received. That to me is everything. Which is probably why I paint the eyes first.

Do you feel very attached to a person once you've painted them?

I do find that I'm building a community. When I finish a show and that body of work leaves my studio, I feel like I'm starting anew, like I'm lonely or something. I love having all of my paintings in a small studio, where they are looking at each other and there is a conversation happening between them and myself.

Can you talk about the role of color in your work?

By playing with color, it's my way of addressing the question of how blackness relates to skin in my own personal life. Questioning how we identify blackness and color.

The color of the paint is abstracted; there isn't a literal correspondence between their skin color in real life and in the painting.

Right. This is why photography is an important part of my practice. I take upwards of 200 photos of my subjects in various places and postures, with their objects around. From a span of multiple photos, I begin drawing on the canvas to build the composition.

I do tend to cover the full canvas first with a color. I don't like the white very much. It stresses me out. Once I've colored it, I feel free to begin the painting. I also like the way the color can slip through sometimes where the paint doesn't meet.

Also, I'm always conscious about the amount of blue I use. I feel like I use it so often, unconsciously! What next? Do you draw?

I sketch with turpentine and paint. I do the figure first; I always start with their head and eyes. I feel that anchors the whole painting. One person recently noticed the use of lettering in a lot of my paintings, the legibility of place, such as a barber shop or a street



Jordan Casteel. "Barbershop." 2015. Oil on canvas, 72 x 54".

corner. Texture is also very important. There is a thickness or areas where things bulge out. I just love paint.

[Notices Black Male exhibition catalogue on the table] Wow, I lost my copy of Black Male. That show was huge for me. It got me through my second year at Yale and my exhibitions. It's one of those books I continue to go back to.

What was it about that show that was so special?

All of it. And that Thelma Golden, a black woman, curated it gave me the confidence to also tell my story. That I could have a voice as a woman—we who are daughters, mothers, sisters, all of those things. Thelma created a conversation we needed about contemporary art, and I had grown up admiring so many of the artists in the show. Literally, that book is my bible!

In the intro essay, Thelma talks about signposts of blackness at the time [in 1994]—such as blaxploitation films or Rodney King—and the power of imagery. What would you think about today?



Definitely the power of media imagery. I think about #BlackLivesMatter. I remember when Mike Brown had just been killed, and my mom and I were watching the news in her hotel room. For a long time, my work was dealing with issues from my own experiences, from experiences of black people. These experiences became part of a national conversation, and I've continued to think about how to contextualize humanity around blackness in my work.

Do you feel like you're part of a community now that you've been in New York for almost two years? How does The Studio Museum in Harlem fit into that?

I often find myself gazing out of the studio window in a trance of sorts. I love watching the energy of Harlem from a static position. The vibrancy of 125th Street is so beautiful and complicated. The other day I watched a man flying kites in the courtyard across the street for almost half an hour. I loved how he seemed to make time stop. He was clearly enjoying himself, completely without regard for everything else around him. Suddenly, I thought, I have to paint him, so I ran outside, introduced myself to Kevin the Kite man, and photographed him for a painting. I can't imagine that happening any place other than my studio perch on 125th Street in Harlem. You cannot ignore the street and the people here.

It's crazy. For me, the end-all, be-all was to be an Artist in Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem. The history, the energy of the Museum is truly profound. I feel really lucky to be able to experience the history of the building, all the nooks and crannies. I had a studio visit with Wardell Milan, who did the residency a few years ago, and he said, "Ah! This chair has been here forever!" Literally, how many artists have sat in that crusty orange chair that's in my studio?

Which studio are you in? The one where Eric [Mack] was?

Yes, Eric, and before that Abigail [DeVile]. Apparently Titus [Kaphar] had this one too.

Wow, there's some good juju in that one.

Yes, the history, the lineage! As soon as we picked our studios, I lay on the floor and rolled around. It still doesn't feel real. Being at The Studio Museum in Harlem feels like the first solid community I've had since being in New York. I feel welcome and supported.

Have you adjusted to the city yet?

I haven't found myself loving it yet. During my first six months, I thought I was going to die every day. [laughs] Now things are more familiar, less scary. But at the same time, my headphones have gotten bigger. For awhile I was constantly looking down—one of those survival techniques that New Yorkers pick up, where we're around so much intensity all day that the only way to be on the train is to act like you don't see anybody to get where you need to go. Now I am looking up intentionally. The current series I am working on is based on the photographs I have taken of people in Harlem.

What are some of your favorite places?

I was on the High Line the other night with a group of friends; it was just beautiful.

And I went to the Whitney recently with my dad, and he said, "Baby girl, you are here, you are doing it." Those are the most grounding moments when you're taken out of the hustle and bustle of New York, but you see New York, and you know you are here. That in and of itself is what's beautiful about the city. You learn how to survive. I'm surviving, I've become stronger, and I'm accomplishing things every day that I never felt were possible. All of a sudden they're possible in New York.

When you're not in the studio, what neighborhoods do you hang out in?

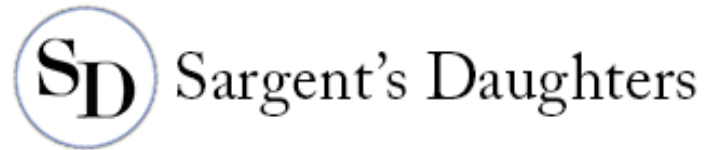
Home in Harlem. I'm a nerd! I'm not the cool artist type. I knit or bake to relax. [Editor's note: Jordan's pound cake is the best!] We think you're pretty cool.

I don't go anywhere hip, and I don't wear cool clothes like other artists. I wear clothes that are covered in paint, that I've had since high school. I really feel like an oddity. [laughs]

Final question: What is your ultimate aspiration?

Being happy and painting somewhere forever. I genuinely just want to always be making meaningful work and surviving off of it in some way or another.

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Jordan Casteel, *Brothers*  
October 16 – November 15, 2015

Sargent's Daughters is pleased to present "Brothers", the second solo exhibition of New York based artist Jordan Casteel. The exhibition will be comprised of eight new oil paintings, created while the artist was in residence at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Process Space" residency on Governor's Island. Sargent's Daughters has produced a catalogue on the occasion of the exhibition, with commentary by Jiréh Breon Holder, Didier William and Dexter Wimberly.

Casteel continues in her exploration of black men's lives and relationships, but, for the first time, turns her attention to the connection of black men to each other. In her previous body of work each figure was solitary, but here fathers, sons, brothers and children appear together, almost always at home and surrounded by familiar objects. In addition, most of the subjects are close to the artist- her own twin brother, nephew and cherished friends. This intimacy with her subjects allows for a comfortable atmosphere- the men's personalities radiate through the paintings and involve the viewers in the complexities of their connections to each other.

Casteel's handling of paint remains of primary importance to the work- each surface has a distinct imprint and weight. The settings of the paintings function as indications of larger significance: the University flags on the wall in "Marcus and Jace", the records in "Three Lions" and the glimpse of the schoolchildren portraits of "The Crockett Brothers" all point to lives beyond the borders of the canvas.

This scrutiny of the apparently mundane is central to Casteel's work. In choosing to depict black men, as they are, with weight on the prosaic as well as poetic, Casteel makes a radical choice: she depicts black men in a humanizing and sympathetic manner. As Casteel reflects: In the wake of such public continued violence against black men, it is more important than ever to contribute a vision of blackness that shows the complexities of black men instead of reducing them. These paintings address the broader scope of the human experience.

Casteel's work addresses the larger scope of the humanity of black men, who too often are portrayed in the public sphere in a deeply politicized manner, and uses the paintings as her vehicle for addressing the wider matter of what it is to be black in today's America. In her portrayals we are confronted with the humanity and individuality of these men and are brought into their worlds on their own terms.

Jordan Casteel was born in 1989 in Denver CO. She received her MFA in 2014 from Yale School of Art in New Haven, CT. In 2015 Casteel was awarded artist residences at Yaddo and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council as well as the 2015-16 Artist-In-Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem. Additionally, her work was selected for inclusion in New American Paintings Northeast Issue #116 - 2015. Casteel's work has been featured in Flash Art, Vice, Time Out New York, The New York Observer, Blouin Artinfo and Interview Magazine. This is her second solo exhibition with the gallery.

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**ARTFORUM****Jordan Casteel**  
**SARGENT'S DAUGHTERS**

179 East Broadway, Ground Floor  
October 16, 2015–November 15, 2015

Jordan Casteel's eight new oil paintings collectively titled "Brothers" are double (or triple) portraits of black men and boys—brothers, cousins, fathers and sons, including the artist's own nephews and twin. Casteel portrays them tenderly, in casual dress, sitting close together, touching. And she gives their surroundings the same attention: The canvases are windows into vibrant, detailed interiors. She achieves their diorama-like magnetism with subtle perspectival distortions and a synergy of textures. Casteel renders the tapestry prints of upholstery fluidly, and high-pile carpet with gummy little brushstrokes. Objects in the background are also represented carefully, such as the cover of the Marvin Gaye album *What's Going On* displayed in *Three Lions* (all works cited 2015), or the college pennants on a wall behind the young man streaked with Venetian-blind sunlight in *Marcus and Jace*, his arm around a sleeping toddler.



Jordan Casteel, *Three Lions*, 2015, oil on canvas, 54 x 72".

Casteel's work points to an activist's impulse to depict black men, with their particular vulnerability to state violence, intimately and individually. There's nothing ingratiating about their poses; she paints them with direct, confrontational gazes, invoking the historical provocation of Manet's 1865 *Olympia*. Casteel's solo show last year at Sargent's Daughters featured portraits of black men, too. But they were solitary, and nude, making a more explicit reference to Manet's radical depiction of prostitute Victorine Meurent. Of course, Meurent, unlike Casteel's nudes, isn't alone—she's attended by a flower-bearing black maid nearly absorbed by the studio's dark draped backdrop.

The absence of black women in Casteel's work raises another urgent representational question, one addressed less plainly in her paintings than the dehumanization of black men. You could say the "invisible" black woman of "Brothers" is actually visible—culturally—by virtue of her position outside the frame (as the artist herself). But maybe Casteel is doing something trickier than just that. Reviewing the show's images, I thought—wait— isn't that a woman, wearing Uggs and a pink beret or processing cap, a baby on her knee, in *Barbershop*?



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To Do: November 4–November 18, 2015  
Twenty-five things to see, hear, watch, and read.  
Nov 1, 2015

**Art**

20. See Jordan Casteel's 'Brothers'

*Fraternity.*

It is tremendous to see complex paintings of black men together — brothers at home, surrounded by everyday objects — as they are in Jordan Casteel's sensual, highly chromatic paintings. Her method of pictorial depiction is a wonderful woozy wobble between realism and improvisation in space that flattens, then turns photographic, then visionary. —J.S.

Sargent's Daughters, through November 15.