

STYLE

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MEET
**ART'S
LEADING
WOMEN**

MARIA BALSHAW JULIA PEYTON-JONES VICTORIA SIDDALL MAISIE COUSINS JUNO CALYPSO

THE WOMEN

OF

ART

Photographs **Sophie Green**

*Artists, curators, gallerists, dealers – the art world has always been run predominantly by men. Not any more. From the establishment to the next gen, **Louis Wise** meets the incredible women defining a new creative conversation under the female gaze*

During her 25 years at the Serpentine Galleries in London, Julia Peyton-Jones saw more than a few changes. For one thing, we Brits weren't keen on all the contemporary stuff that started pouring in during the 2000s. "In almost every show I did, I would be asked, 'Why is this important? A child of three could do this,'" she sighs. "It was almost like a mantra. And so I always patiently explained..."

Fast-forward a quarter of a century, and no one really says their three-year-old could "do this" any more. It's more likely they'll be dragging said three-year-old along to one of Britain's countless museums, galleries and spaces, desperate for them to become the next Tracey Emin. British art now is a huge, thriving, international operation, its classic pillars such as the national galleries or the Royal Academy supplemented by newcomers such as Tate Modern or the ever-glamorous, ever-growing Frieze Art Fair. It's big fun — and it's big business.

And women are central to it. Look to every level and they are slowly but surely balancing things out in a world that has traditionally been male-dominated — centuries of artists, all men, curated and directed by galleries also run by men. Some of the statistics are shocking. In 2015, according to Artfinder, only one of the 100 top lots sold at auction was by a woman; the 10 richest artists were all men.

In the public realm it's little better: female painters are outnumbered in nearly all the national collections. (No word on all the female nudes.) Much fuss was made this summer when the National Gallery bought Artemisia Gentileschi's stunning Self Portrait as St Catherine of Alexandria. There's lots that's remarkable about the painting, and indeed the painter, now considered a protofeminist in 17th-century Italy. What is most remarkable, or scary, is that in this national collection of some 2,300 pictures, it is only the 21st by a woman.

This hasn't entirely vanished today, but there's the strong feeling it won't be for ever. Much was made of Maria Balshaw being appointed head of Tate last year, and three of the four museum directors reporting to her are also women.

In addition, there's Iwona Blazwick at the Whitechapel Gallery and Yana Peel at the Serpentine (Peyton-Jones, interviewed overleaf, has since decamped to the eminent Thaddaeus Ropac). Some of the biggest dealers on the British art market are Victoria Miro and Sadie Coles. The director of Frieze, now a multinational operation with fairs in London, New York and LA, is Victoria Siddall (also interviewed in the pages that follow).

And the artists! The current holder of the Turner prize is, lest we forget, the irrepressible Lubaina Himid, a 64-year-old woman, born in Zanzibar and based in Preston. She supplements a roll call of local talent including art-world superstars such as Emin or Sarah Lucas or Rachel Whiteread, but also treasures such as Gillian Wearing, Rose Wylie, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Helen Marten and Anthea Hamilton, plus the young artists profiled in the following pages, as an introduction to the next buzzing generation.

Gender equality is still some way off, though. "The glass ceiling is cracked, not shattered," says Siddall diplomatically.

An awful lot has been written about the all-oppressive male gaze (see the White Pube overleaf — a duo of fearless young critics who have given the fusty world of art writing an almighty, emoji-laden shake). Proper diversity is required, too.

Further challenges lie ahead. What will Brexit mean for our very international art market? Can it sustain the enthusiasm it has fed on for the past two decades? In a country where the government two years ago threatened to scrap art history at A-level, how does the future look? This one feels particularly serious.

"The reality is that if there is no art education in schools, then where does the next generation of artists come from?" asks Siddall. "And the curators and gallerists as well. It's genuinely worrying. It's down to the art world to get behind that."

In short, much to celebrate, but also much reason to stay watchful — and the more women there are involved in this, the better. Then again, your three-year-old could tell you that.



THE INDUSTRY HEAVYWEIGHT
MARIA BALSHAW CBE
DIRECTOR OF TATE

■ **Everyone agreed that Maria Balshaw**, who was appointed the director of Tate last year, made an exciting successor to Sir Nicholas Serota to run the entire museum empire. She was also, they noted, a woman — the first in the role. A year into her new job, Balshaw, 48, discusses this with dry humour. "Like most women in senior roles, I've been a woman all of my life," she smiles. "It is part of who I am, and I notice still that sense of firstness and surprise. It shouldn't be like that in the future."

Balshaw originally trained as an academic, in cultural studies and visual culture. After completing the Clore Leadership Programme, she was headhunted in 2006 to run the Whitworth Art Gallery, in Manchester, where she eventually oversaw an ambitious and award-winning renovation. She also became the director of Manchester Art Gallery, the first person to hold both roles, and despite being London-based with Tate, she retains a link to the city — her husband, Nick Merriman, is director of Manchester Museum. (She also has two children from a previous marriage.)

Balshaw's big calling card is accessibility

— she is determined to keep art open to as many people as possible. "My goals go beyond years," she says. "It's about looking after a national or international collection in perpetuity for future generations."

As already mentioned, three of the Tate's four UK galleries are run by women: Frances Morris (Modern), Anne Barlow (St Ives) and Helen Legg (Liverpool). The institution has become increasingly involved in championing female artists. A huge show celebrating the work of the textile artist Anni Albers opened at Tate Modern earlier this month. "It's very dear to Frances's heart, and to mine," Balshaw says.

Albers is mostly known as the wife of Josef, one of the 20th-century greats; the bid here is to show how important her work is. "She was hugely influential in her own right, and the works are extraordinary — gloriously, materially rich," says Balshaw.

An exuberant dresser, she knows something about rich materials herself. Her wedding dress, a Vivienne Westwood design, has even featured in the Gallery of Costume in Manchester.

THE COMMUTER CURATOR LEILA HASHAM CURATOR, ART ON THE UNDERGROUND

■ **Since the start of this month**, Leila Hasham has had one of the most discreetly influential jobs in British art — curator for Art on the Underground, covering a year-long maternity leave. Millions of Londoners and tourists each day will cross her commissions, which cover everything from the cover of Transport for London's maps to murals and installations across the capital's stations. "You can't get any more public," she says.

Hasham, 38, has been pretty public already, working as curator at the Barbican for the past seven years. During that time she co-curated the month-long Station to Station extravaganza, in which musicians, choreographers and film makers were invited to fill the space. She is particularly fond of performance art, having curated the gallery's hit show by the Icelandic Ragnar Kjartansson. The nicest thing to discover, she says, is that the public are always open to new ideas. "They don't like the idea of the arts in a silo."

Next up, the Tube. "It's quite an honour and a privilege," Hasham says. "And what's good is it is really contemporary, using world-class artists — it's not trying to dumb down what public art or sculpture should be."

It's too early to say what she will be offering; as a starter for 10, though, she recommends the commissions by Jessica Vaughan, who she's covering for. These include a mural at Brixton station by the brilliant Nigerian-American artist Njideka Akunyili Crosby.





THE INTERNATIONAL EYE
AMIRA GAD CURATOR,
SERPENTINE GALLERIES

■ **Amira Gad** defines herself as a late bloomer where modern art is concerned. This is partly due to her background: born in Paris to Egyptian parents, she grew up in Saudi Arabia. "Culture wasn't lacking, but it wasn't part of my daily life or anything like that." Studies in Egypt, Holland and London eventually took her to the Serpentine, where she was responsible for filling the Hyde Park space with some of the finest contemporary art. It was Gad, for instance, who curated the hit show by the painter Lynette Yiadom-Boakye (now a good friend).

Gad is keen on improving diversity in the art world — which, she says understatedly, could do with improvement: "As an Arab and a woman, I feel it twice." However, she is reluctant to be pigeonholed. The next show she is working on is with the female German artist Hito Steyerl, who was, somewhat surprisingly, voted the most powerful figure in the art world in ArtReview's Power 100 this year. Both artist and curator are intrigued. "What is power in the art world?" Gad asks mischievously. Expect some answers at the Serpentine next spring.



THE DISRUPTOR CRITICS
ZARINA MUHAMMAD
AND **GABRIELLE DE LA PUENTE**
CO-FOUNDERS OF THE WHITE PUBE

■ **Art criticism is often** accused of being too stuffy, too freighted with jargon and too elitist. Until, that is, the White Pube: aka Zarina Muhammad and Gabrielle de la Puente, both 24 and graduates of Central Saint Martins. A sample of their reviewing style? A Twitter video review of one Tate show involved Muhammad holding a samosa and a ruler, and saying, "It was sooo shit!"

"We're gobshites," de la Puente says cheerfully of their full-on attitude to writing. "We're not," Muhammad tuts. "OK," de la Puente concedes. "We're tactical, thoughtful gobshites." They both laugh. The two have developed into a fearsome duo, publishing reviews on their website and social-media accounts. The name, in case it isn't clear, is a cheeky riff on one of London's biggest contemporary galleries, White Cube.

They hadn't planned on becoming critics, but a conventional review in a paper one day had infuriated Muhammad. "It had just listed the show and given it three stars." What did the stars mean? And why only three? The White Pube prefer emojis, and emotion full-stop. (A review of the artist of Ma Qiusha's show in Middlesbrough: a knife, a tongue, a stressy face.) "Art writing had only ever been academic or classic journalism — impenetrable," Muhammad says. "Neither of those is fun to read," says de la Puente.

They started in 2015 and were astonished at the quick response: "It was taken up by the art world instantly," says de la Puente, specifically the non-white, non-straight, non-male art world that doesn't grab attention. They're invited to give talks at universities about their so-called "embodied criticism". Yet they remain sceptical about most authorities — including themselves. "We'd never claim to be authorities," Muhammad says. "We don't want to be 'respected'. F*** that! We want people to have their own critical judgments." In other words, find your own emojis.



THE GRANDE DAME
DAME JULIA PEYTON-JONES
SENIOR GLOBAL DIRECTOR,
GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC

■ **There are all sorts of** jobs in the art world, and Julia Peyton-Jones has held a good many of them. It's hard to imagine it now, seeing the soignée 66-year-old, but once upon a time she was an artist, doing the menial jobs in galleries on the side — until she started doing less menial ones, of course, then became a curator, and eventually a director. Running the Serpentine Galleries until 2016 (she was joined by Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2006), she oversaw a remarkable flowering of contemporary art. "There was a cultural revolution in this country," she says.

There were many successes, not least the inauguration of the Serpentine Pavilion project, whereby each year an architect is invited to build a summer building in the grounds. The Pavilion and its parties are now an annual social and cultural fixture. Peyton-Jones is also very proud that, in the Serpentine Sackler, they have one of the few Zaha Hadid buildings in London.

After a quarter of a decade, though, she felt she needed a change. Thaddaeus Ropac, a prestigious commercial gallery, allows her to try out a new sector of the art world; it also allows her to return to making her own art.

Considering Peyton-Jones also became a mother only two years ago — to baby Pia — her commitment to new challenges is clearly far from over.

HAIR AND MAKE-UP FOR JULIA PEYTON-JONES AND VICTORIA SUDALL: FIONA MOORE AT TERRI MANUCCA FOR DANIEL GALVIN



THE INSTA ARTIST
MAISIE COUSINS ARTIST

■ **Twenty-six-year-old Maisie Cousins** is part of a new generation of artists who have grown up with the internet and harnessed it to their advantage. Having started out blogging as a teenager, she developed a following on Tumblr and logically moved onto Instagram, where she has more than 65k followers.

"I don't think I would be with a gallery if I didn't have Instagram," she admits. Online, her lurid, hyper-coloured work — close-ups of plants, bins, bugs, jewellery and people — can get past the art world, which for all its progress may still seem like a well-connected boys' club.

Cousins is now in high demand. At King's Cross, where we meet, we walk past a billboard using one of her images; last year she photographed a cover story featuring Björk, and she's currently featured in the TJ Boulting show *In the Company Of*. It all sounds like a nice surprise for someone who dismisses photography as "a bit blokey" and "nerdy".

Although perhaps she's about to go in a new direction. "I have a series of videos of me spanking boys' bums in slow motion," she announces happily. She shows me a "work" on her phone. "Look at the ripples! Good, isn't it?"



THE UNRULY FEMINISTS
KATY HESSEL (CENTRE) CURATOR
AND **HANNAH WATSON** (LEFT)
DIRECTOR, TJ BOULTING
JUNO CALYPSO (RIGHT) ARTIST

■ **Three years ago**, aged 21, Katy Hessel came to a few realisations. For one thing, she had been to an art fair and not seen a work by a single female artist; for another, she was a passionate fan of the American painter Alice Neel, and was bemused more people didn't know of her. And so, typical millennial, she launched an Instagram about it.

In @TheGreatWomenArtists, she resolved to celebrate the women that art history has so often forgotten. The more Hessel looked, the more she found and posted. "I've been doing it every day since," she says proudly, and the account now has more than 30k followers.

Hessel, now 24, has made the next logical move, curating an exhibition — at TJ Boulting, the independent gallery run by Hannah Watson. In the show, titled *In the Company Of* (TJ Boulting, London W1, until November 17), three historic female artists — Neel, the surrealist Lee Miller and the sculptor Barbara Hepworth — are compared and contrasted

with 12 contemporary female creatives, including Maisie Cousins (see left) and Juno Calypso. "It's very much an extension of the Instagram — it's about celebrating women artists past and present," Hessel says. "And it allows for amazing parallels."

For Watson, 38, this is a logical evolution. After more than 10 years in the art world, she has found herself working with more and more female artists. "It's just interesting work," she shrugs. "I'm not doing it because they're women, but because I'm genuinely interested in what they're doing."

An artist such as Calypso is a case in point. The 29-year-old Londoner has gained a cult following after an acclaimed show last year that saw her visit a surreal, all-pink underground bunker built in 1960s Las Vegas. A "hardcore" feminist since her teens, she has always been fascinated by what femininity constitutes — the hair, the make-up, the clothes. The show was pure Calypso. "Weird solitary pleasures are what I'm into," she says with a grin.

THE MAGPIE

LYDIA YEE CHIEF CURATOR,
WHITECHAPEL GALLERY

■ **"Interdisciplinary" might be** art-world jargon, but it's hard to find a better word for the work of Lydia Yee, who has been at the Whitechapel since 2014. Music, film, dance, performance, writing — it's all vacuumed up by the Detroit-born Yee, 50, who cites one of the favourite exhibitions she has curated as being about pioneering artists in gritty downtown New York in the 1970s — including the cult artist Laurie Anderson (aka Mrs Lou Reed), who made precisely such "interdisciplinary" work. And Yee is at it again next year, with a show at the Whitechapel asking what art can learn from architecture.

She came to the UK in 2007 to curate at the Barbican. Having observed both the British and American scenes, she notes that, with more public funding, British galleries are able to allow artists to try out more things. (Her partner is the American artist Christian Marclay, whose groundbreaking video installation *The Clock* is currently on display at Tate Modern.) But as London gets ever pricier, she worries that "artists have fewer opportunities to experiment and take risks". Yet there are positives. She is proud to work in a female-friendly environment (the Whitechapel has been run by Iwona Blazwick since 2001); her greatest achievement so far, she thinks, has been giving female artists significant solo shows or significant commissions.

"There are many women working in the art world and it is, on the whole, a good place to work. It is very collegial. Having benefited from a strong peer network of women curators, I also try to create a supportive atmosphere for colleagues to further develop their skills."



THE ART-FAIR SUPREMO VICTORIA SIDDALL DIRECTOR OF FRIEZE

■ **When Victoria Siddall** answered a job advert to work on a new art fair some 15 years ago, she could little have guessed she would end up its director. "When I graduated, I'd never even been to an art fair! I didn't know what one was." Safe to say this has been rectified, since Siddall, 40, now oversees an international brand covering not only London, but also New York and, next February, LA. The Frieze fair there will take place in some of Tinseltown's film studios — not unsuitable, considering the art world's epic ambition and scope.

It's hard to underestimate Frieze's impact on the art scene. If it is, essentially, a big showcase for sellers and collectors, it always wants to be more interesting than "just" a marketplace. At this year's edition, for instance, several talks and events sought to celebrate female artists in the centenary since (some) British women gained the vote. "People come not just to buy but also to have a great experience, to discover things," she says.

Siddall added to her permanent juggling act a few years ago when she had her first child, now two. She is aware that being a mother, when working in the art world, can be tough: the hours are often long and unsociable. "Everything happens between six and eight in the evening" — private views, drinks, international calls to America and so on — "which, if you have small children, is like the witching hour". She has established a few rules to make family life manageable — a key one is that she almost never travels at weekends. "I don't hide the fact that I have a child, because there are so many younger women working with me, it's good for them to know it's not something you have to hide. It's important to show you can still have a successful career. It's not easy necessarily," she smiles, "but it's possible."

THE VIDEO STAR

HANNAH PERRY ARTIST

■ **Right now, the genteel** halls of Somerset House are being shaken by the no-holds-barred art of Hannah Perry, 34. It feels apt that the show is called *Gush* (on until November 4). In this mixture of huge video, installation, performance and sculpture, the viewer is encouraged to think about grief, anxiety and social media. "It's turned into this monster," she laughs, but not too scary a monster, she hopes. A self-confessed "classic white working-class northern gal", Perry wants her art, a modern mix of media, to be accessible to all. "I've always tried to show a video so it's an experience," she says, "not just something isolated on a white wall."

Perry is completing a residency at Somerset House, having studied at Goldsmiths, then an MA at the Royal Academy. But this is all a far cry from her less-than-establishment beginnings. Dyslexic, she struggled until someone at college suggested she try something creative. "I was, like, what for?" She had no clue what the art world was; she'd thought she would end up a hairdresser. But she tried art anyway, "and it was the first time I did something I wasn't completely shit at. I suppose I went to my first art gallery at 18 or 19." To that end, she wants to set up a monthly discussion group for people like her in the arts. She's calling it *Classy*. ■

