



These Emerging Black Artists Are the Future of Figurative Painting

Wangari Mathenge

Following

B. 1973, Nairobi, Kenya. Lives and works in Chicago.



Portrait of Wangari Mathenge. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts Projects.



Wangari Mathenge
The Apothecaries, 2019
Roberts Projects
Sold

Wangari Mathenge's paintings often show people caught in a particular moment. Maybe they're drinking a cup of coffee, like the woman in *Coffee At Cassell's* (2019), or gazing wistfully at something beyond the frame, as in *The Cacophony of Silence* (2019). Some of her figures are based on herself or pictures of family members.

"I've heard comments about how empowering and inspiring it is for black people to see themselves reflected this way," Mathenge said. "However, for me, painting is merely an expression of myself, a form of catharsis. Currently, it takes the form of figurative painting, but if it ever morphed into abstraction, it would still feel the same to me—something of me that I offer to the world unsolicited."

Mathenge's work, which featured in a solo show at Roberts Projects in fall 2019, is instantly recognizable because of the artist's vivid color palette—which calls to mind the paintings of Alice Neel—and energetic swirls of paint. "I enjoy expressive brushwork," Mathenge said. "It's the one part of painting that is always a surprise, as it is often dictated by mood and energy."