

# WEALTH.



## FOR THE *Culture*

These Black women are making a splash in the art world—and no, they aren't artists

**BY MARQUITA K. HARRIS**

**T**hose paintings by Black artist that we see hanging in a gallery or major museum didn't get there by happenstance. When it comes to the business of art, strong representation is essential for the creatives behind the works we consume. The talents first had to be discovered by someone with a reasonable amount of power, someone who could wholly support them. From museum curators to gallery owners and directors, here are some of the women responsible for getting Black art in front of mainstream eyes. »



Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels

## JOEONNA BELLORADO-SAMUELS

DIRECTOR, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY

**What does your position entail?** As a director, I advocate for artists on our gallery roster. I have a multifaceted role that includes building and maintaining institutional and client relationships, organizing exhibitions and doing strategic planning for the growth of the artists and the gallery.

**Were you always interested in this kind of work?** Absolutely. That said, despite being surrounded by the arts in childhood, I didn't realize that a position like mine existed. If you remove the specificities within it, then you could say that it was somehow inevitable that I would meld my deepest interests. But it took time and trusting the process. I am incredibly lucky that my meandering path has brought me here.

**What advice do you have for Black women who want to work in this industry?** Build your communities, find your "friendtots" and don't let anyone make you feel that any space is not yours to inhabit. And once there, take up as much of that space as you can.

**What is your proudest career moment?** Being even a small part of helping an artist realize a vision means catching a glimpse of the future—what it could be and what it should be. There is nothing more gratifying than that.

**Who are three Black Women artists who should be on our radar?** I am beyond excited about what Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Toyin Ojih Odutola and Nina Chanel Abney will present to the world in 2020. They're major in terms of scope, fearlessness and progression.



*Helping an artist realize a vision means catching a glimpse of what the future could be."*

—JOEONNA BELLORADO-SAMUELS



## ASHLEY STEWART

DIRECTOR, GAGOSIAN GALLERY, INTERNATIONAL

**What does your position entail?** It involves managing artists and placing works in both private and public collections. I also attend a number of domestic and international art fairs the gallery participates in.

**What skills are most needed to thrive in your field?** Patience and the ability to connect with people from very different backgrounds. That includes both the artists and collectors I handle. Also, being able to prioritize and adapt in an ever-growing and fast-paced environment is key.

**What advice do you have for Black women who want to work in this industry?** Always maintain your professional and personal integrity. Have the courage to be authentic, and stay true to your own journey. You are responsible for creating your own opportunities as well as maintaining them once achieved. Connect with women in the industry who will elevate and support you in your endeavors.

**What advice do you have for people buying their first piece of art?** Most important, see as much art as you can. Go to museums, galleries, studio visits and MFA shows, and discover artists you respond to. Buy what you love from artists you believe in. I would also recommend supporting artists of your own generation.

**Name a couple of Black women artists who should be on our radar in 2020.** Jadé Fadojutimi and Ellen Gallagher.



*The biggest challenges and biggest successes are interlaced with our ability to take risks.”*

—MARIANE IBRAHIM

## MARIANE IBRAHIM

FOUNDER AND OWNER, MARIANE IBRAHIM GALLERY, CHICAGO

### **Were you always interested in this kind of work?**

I had been exposed to art as an enthusiast, but I did not plan to become the owner of a gallery. However, I have always been passionate about establishing a platform that connects people, and art is a great vehicle.

### **What advice do you have for Black women who want to work in this industry?**

Believe in your mission, stay consistent with your vision and embrace any and all challenges and changes that may arise. The biggest

challenges and biggest successes are interlaced with our ability to take risks. Every obstacle is a learning experience, and success is an opportunity to reassess.

### **What is your proudest career moment?**

It was the opening of the gallery's new space in Chicago. I love the city and know it will allow the gallery to continue to flourish on a local and international scale, supporting our eclectic selection of renowned and emerging artists in a new and transformative way.

**Who are three Black women artists who should be on our radar right now?** Lina Iris Viktor—the gallery will present our first solo show with Viktor in September 2020. Also Nkechi Ebubedike and Kenturah Davis. »



*Entre Nous is a collective of Black women who work in the art market as gallerists, dealers, advisers or auctioneers.”*

—COURTNEY WILLIS BLAIR

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## COURTNEY WILLIS BLAIR

DIRECTOR, MITCHELL-INNES & NASH GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY AND FOUNDER OF ENTRE NOUS

**What does your position entail?** I spearhead what I like to call canonical strategy at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, a contemporary art gallery in Chelsea. I execute major museum and trustee acquisitions, produce monographic and group exhibitions, facilitate special projects, edit publications and champion our artists with museums, biennials, foundations and other presenting institutions and organizations.

**What skills are most needed to thrive in your field?** The most important one is problem-solving, which requires a lot of attention to detail and the ability to really listen. I would say a combination of having

emotional intelligence, being honest and knowing how to develop strong professional relationships goes a long way.

**What is Entre Nous and where did this idea come from?** Entre Nous is a collective of Black women who work in the art market as gallerists, dealers, advisers or auctioneers. It serves as a space for us to get together and build personal and professional relationships outside of what can oftentimes be hostile spaces.

**What was the most challenging aspect of launching Entre Nous?** It wasn't challenging to launch it. You find the time and capacity to do things that are important to you. What is challenging is trying to find a time for all of us to get together amid very demanding schedules.

**Who are three Black women artists who should be on everyone's radar in 2020?** Cheyenne Julien, Jennifer Packer and Sable Elyse Smith.

THIS PAGE: DARIO CALMESE; OPPOSITE PAGE: SADIYYA AMEENA



## ERIN CHRISTOVALE

ASSOCIATE CURATOR, HAMMER MUSEUM,  
LOS ANGELES

**What does your position entail?** Endless e-mails, studio visits with artists, research and writing, travel, openings and dinners, and the occasional existential crisis.

**Were you always interested in this kind of work?** Yes and no. I actually went to film school for critical studies but realized that thinking critically about cinema could also lend itself to curating art objects.

**What advice do you have for Black women who want to work in this industry?** Even though the curatorial arena has made great strides in the past few years, when it comes to diversity and inclusion there are still many obstacles to overcome. My advice would be to take care of yourself and consult your elders, and on those days when impostor syndrome or blatant racism gets you down, remember you belong here.

**What do you enjoy most about your job? What aspect do you enjoy the least?** I love that I have had the chance to meet artists from all around the world, which has deepened my understanding of solidarity and diaspora. The hardest thing is making space for solitude and renewal. I can't be at my most optimal if my mental, emotional and physical health aren't cared for.

**Who are three Black women artists we should be aware of right now?**

Betye Saar, Lauren Halsey and Martine Syms. They are geniuses, and they're all Los Angeles-born and bred!

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Marquita K. Harris is an ESSENCE senior editor and the host of the UnBossed podcast.