

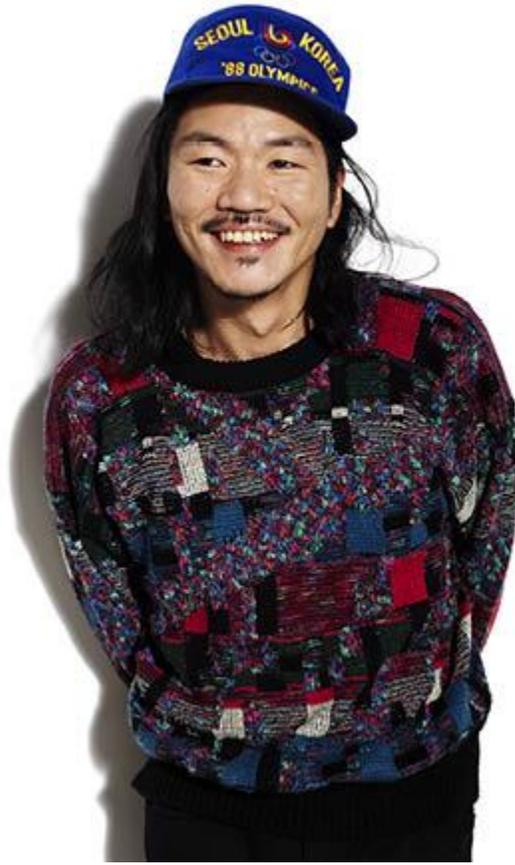
5 Brooklyn Artists You Need To Know

by [Paul D'Agostino](#)



• *Photographs by Winnie Au*

You know Brooklyn is full of art. You know it's full of artists. You know there are dozens upon dozens of more or less formal gallery spaces throughout the borough—from Bay Ridge to Red Hook, Gowanus to Bed-Stuy, Crown Heights to Williamsburg, Greenpoint to Bushwick. You also know that there are annual open studio events and other sorts of regularly scheduled art programming. However, you might not know these five outstanding artists, whose creative roots in Brooklyn run deep. Know them, indeed, you should. Our Q&As with them will certainly grant you some insight into their artistic practices—and they might also teach you a thing or two about Brooklyn.



Cheon Pyo Lee

A deft tinkerer and prolific polymath, he reactivates discarded electronics and engineers bizarre machinery out of disparate elements in ways that boggle our minds not only mechanically and visually but also conceptually, as his kinetic, sometimes interactive concoctions tend to serve the self-reflexive purpose of poking fun at the embedded impracticalities of certain mechanized processes, in particular those you might associate with the production of consumer goods. Exemplary of such interests and tendencies is his ongoing project *Bureau of Borrowed Objects*, which was recently part of Queens International at the refurbished Queens Museum. Cheon shows at Interstate Projects in East Williamsburg, and his studio, a veritable factory of hilarity and potential mayhem, is near there in the 56 Bogart building. He lives in Bushwick with his beloved plants. [Visit his website.](#)

Describe your studio practice. What gets you enthused to make work?

My studio looks like a wood shop or storage facility, and making work is almost always a cumulative process. I begin to conceptualize projects during long conversations with friends accompanied by small experiments with materials.

You've had work in exhibitions all over the city and much farther afield. Convenience aside, is there anything you particularly enjoy about showing in Brooklyn?

The benefit of showing in Brooklyn to me is the sense of camaraderie. Most venues I work with in Brooklyn are either young or not-for-profit. This means more opportunities for artists and curators who like to experiment. The conversation

is usually very intimate and direct between organizers and artists. This sense of freedom is genuine and translates into works and shows.

You've been in Brooklyn a while and witnessed a lot of change. What first brought you here? Is there anything in particular you miss, given all the transformation? Anything you particularly like about the changes?

I left and came back to New York several times. On my last arrival I got myself a studio in Bushwick. By then my friends in the Lower East Side and Williamsburg had already moved to Bushwick. So it was lower rent that brought me to Brooklyn, and the community kept me here. Now rising rent is driving my friends out of my neighborhood. It's not enjoyable, but it's interesting to witness who stays and who moves on.

Favorite Brooklyn galleries or art events? Restaurants or bars?

I enjoy most of the events in the neighborhood, but the Videorover series by NURTUREart is good, Know More Games offers interesting shows, and Interstate Projects hosts something different every time. In terms of food, the guys at Olive Valley have fed me ok food at reasonable prices.

Any forthcoming exhibitions of your work you'd like to mention? Friends' shows you're looking forward to?

This summer I have a show in Korea at the Seoul Museum of Art. It's a show about research-based art where I will be presenting a project called *Everything I Know*.



MaryKate Maher

Her sculptures are amalgams of polychemically crafted structures and repurposed post-organica that tend to read like relics of something, remnants of something, hints of something that has happened. They might even be remainders of themselves, in a way, not least due to the mixed origins of their material inputs. A recipient of numerous fellowships and residencies including Yaddo, Wassaic Project, Socrates Sculpture Park, Vermont Studio Center and a NYFA Sculpture grant, MaryKate has shown extensively in the US and several times in Germany. She lives in Williamsburg with her husband, artist Oliver Jones, and their newborn son, August, for whom they are proud to have found a Slayer onesie; he wears it with pride and budding intensity. MaryKate's studio is on Flushing Avenue in Bushwick. [Visit her website.](#)

Describe your studio practice. What gets you enthused to make work?

As a sculptor, my process usually involves making a big mess in a small space. I build mostly from hand, cast from molds, weld and collect debris, mixing it all together to create elements that make up a sculpture. Occasionally these pieces stay as a single object, but usually I group them together, reconfiguring their placement until they sit in a way that feels complete. I like to reference the organic and pair it with something sharper and crisper. Frequently the sculptures get compared to my drawings, and I think that's partially because of this process—drawing out the forms in space. I am inspired by dilapidated architectural shapes and unique landscapes. Last year I visited the Arctic Circle and found that thermally heated dirt covered in snow creates a surface texture that looks like fur. It was fantastic. Those are inspirational starting points. Sometimes it's simpler, like a poignant sentence or a great song I haven't heard in a while.

You've had work in exhibitions all over the city and much farther afield. Convenience aside, is there anything you particularly enjoy about showing in Brooklyn?

The familiarity and support of those involved. There's a genuine camaraderie where participants are friends and not just colleagues. Many of the exhibition spaces are smaller and less traditional than, say, the Chelsea gallery format. This can promote a more intimate and unexpected experience for both the work on view and the viewer.

You've been in Brooklyn a while and witnessed a lot of change. What first brought you here? Is there anything in particular you miss, given all the transformation? Anything you particularly like about the changes?

I moved to Williamsburg via Astoria via Philadelphia. Finding a rent-stabilized apartment brought me here. My first studio was in the basement of the old Dam Stuhltrager gallery on Hope and Marcy. I would usually crawl through the hatch in the sidewalk to get into the space. When it rained, there was a little river that snaked through the middle of the basement floor. It was all I could afford at the time and it was great. I miss the old brick factory buildings (speaking mostly about Williamsburg). Sometimes on Google Maps, depending on when they last updated the street view, you can see how the buildings used to look. I like the historical palimpsest that changes can bring—when the new incarnation builds off what was there and becomes something enticing and equally refreshing.

Favorite Brooklyn galleries or art events? Restaurants or bars?

Interstate Projects. They have a consistent calendar of strong exhibitions and an interesting roster of artists and curators. They also have a very nice physical gallery space. Cafe Ghia, it always hits the spot.

Any forthcoming exhibitions of your work you'd like to mention? Friends' shows you're looking forward to?

I'm looking forward to *Spitball* at Storefront Ten Eyck, *Breathless* at Rush Arts and the Whitney Biennial. I currently have some work on view at The Parlour in Bushwick, and I will have my studio open for Bushwick Open Studios this summer.



Rico Gatson

He leaves virtually no medium unexplored in works that examine, probe and survey—rather than patently or stridently critique—race relations and social inequalities. Often deploying radiant motifs and a striking palette of warm colors cooled by greens, blacks and whites, Gatson produces paintings, sculptures, photographs, videos and installations in which racial commentary is readily apparent (and perhaps occasionally blatant) while conveying notions of historical uncertainty via mixed symbols and open-ended statements. Rico is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Art in New York, and he has exhibited in dozens of solo shows and scores of group shows in the US and abroad. He has also curated a number of group exhibits, mostly in Brooklyn galleries. He teaches at NYU and Sarah Lawrence College, and he recently moved to Ridgewood with his wife and daughter. His studio is on Flushing Avenue in Bushwick. [Visit his website.](#)

Describe your studio practice. What gets you enthused to make work?

My studio practice is very much rooted in making stuff. I am inspired by so much, but I'm mostly interested in unraveling the complexity of identity and race in my work. The hand in the work is also important, albeit not the only mode of making. I believe there is a transference of the maker's energy through the hand and into the work. That's what gets me excited.

You've had work in exhibitions all over the city and much farther afield. Convenience aside, is there anything you particularly enjoy about showing in Brooklyn?

I love the sense of community among artists in Brooklyn. I moved to Williamsburg in the 1990s and then to Bushwick in the mid-2000s and experienced the same supportive communal energy in both places. This is not to suggest that there's something unique about Brooklyn in this regard, but it's the only place I've lived and worked as a mature artist.

You've been in Brooklyn a while and witnessed a lot of change. What first brought you here? Is there anything in particular you miss, given all the transformation? Anything you particularly like about the changes?

I moved to Brooklyn after graduate school at the Yale School of Art because it was cheap and space was plentiful, so the thing that I would say I miss the most is exactly that. It sounds a bit cliché, but it's much harder now for young artists than it was when I first arrived so many years ago. That stated, Brooklyn is still the most exciting place that I know of to live and work.

Favorite Brooklyn galleries or art events? Restaurants or bars?

Here's my list in no particular order: Airplane, Outlet, Regina Rex, Storefront Ten Eyck, Outpost, Momena, Studio 10, Norte Maar, Schema Projects, English Kills, Life on Mars, Beat Nite, Bushwick Open Studios, Cafe Ghia, Miles, The Johnsons and Cobra.

Any forthcoming exhibitions of your work you'd like to mention? Friends' shows you're looking forward to?

I've had a busy past few years with a solo exhibition at Exit Art in 2011 and my sixth solo exhibition at Ronald Feldman last April, *The Promise of Light*. Right now I have a few things in development but nothing too specific yet.



William Powhida

He's a creative vessel containing a deep set of artistic skills, a range of intellectual curiosities, a fair measure of intermittently humored rancor directed with interdisciplinary stretch at the art world, and at least a couple distinct personae who might regularly question one another's actions and intentions. Drawings, paintings and installations constitute the thrust of his productions, and however controversial or incendiary their content, they bear evidence aplenty of conceptual rigor and refined craftsmanship—even, for some viewers, in his series of formulaic "bad paintings" produced for a solo show in Los Angeles. These things aside, Powhida is also a devoted, hardworking art instructor who recently left teaching in public schools to take on a new role as creative advisor at the New York Studio Residency Program in DUMBO. He is represented by Postmasters Gallery in New York, Platform Gallery in Seattle and Charlie James Gallery in LA. His studio is in DUMBO, and he lives in Bushwick with his wife, artist Kristin Jensen, who might be the only person who knows which William is the real one. [Visit his website.](#)

Describe your studio practice. What gets you enthused to make work?

My studio practice is based in drawing, which I like to think of more as a thought process than a way of working. My work tends to draw out a concept, often a critique, through some formal means. Primarily, I'm known for drawings of *trompe l'oeil* lists and letters authored in the voice of "Powhida," a sensationalist, self-loathing and unreliable narrator. I also try and find different ways of drawing out ideas for exhibitions: illustrating Matt Taibbi's book *Griftopia* in 2011, having a body of stereotypical work fabricated last for Bill by Bill at Charlie James, and currently preparing a body of self-reflexive, formal paintings for a new exhibition at Postmasters. While it doesn't take much to get me drawing, following a critical

inquiry to unusual and uncomfortable ends is where the energy is, like having a long conversation about coyotes with a taxidermist.

You've had work in exhibitions all over the city and much further afield. Convenience aside, is there anything you particularly enjoy about showing in Brooklyn?

The biggest pleasure of showing work in Brooklyn is participating in my own artistic community where I live and work. I don't have as many opportunities to show in Brooklyn anymore, but I've developed enough relationships over the years that it feels good to take part in an artistic dialogue with my peers. The Williamsburg art scene had a profound impact on my development, so to participate in shows at Momenta with Guy Richards Smit or at Pierogi with Ward Shelly feels like participating in a long conversation over time.

You've been in Brooklyn a while and witnessed a lot of change. What first brought you here? Is there anything in particular you miss, given all the transformation? Anything you particularly like about the changes?

I came to New York in the late 90s and would stay with a cousin in the East Village and thought I might end up there when I arrived for grad school in 1998. I found a small place in Williamsburg and moved around the neighborhood through 2007. I witnessed a tremendous amount of change in the Williamsburg art community during that time that I have documented in different ways, and I do miss the concentration of people that made the scene so interesting, including Alun Williams, Ed Winkleman, Lisa Schroeder and Sara Jo Romero, among many others. While they're still in the art world, we were all part of a neighborhood for a while that was open and engaged in a critical conversation. There a lot of different shows that mark the energy of that neighborhood, but Parker's Box IAM5 anti-art fair in 2005 was everything that I loved about the community. Austin Thomas's Pocket Utopia project in Bushwick captured some of that energy, but I think each successive wave of artists and dealers will have to define their art community.

Favorite Brooklyn galleries or art events? Restaurants or bars?

As for the Bushwick Gallery scene, I usually find myself at Momenta, Auxiliary Projects, Interstate, Airplane and English Kills. Regina Rex, Harbor, Studio 10, Transfer and Outpost are also doing interesting shows. As for restaurants and bars, the community art hub is still the Narrows, but I frequent Cafe Ghia a lot with my wife. The co-owners, Scott and Anna, are wonderful hosts.

Any forthcoming exhibitions of your work you'd like to mention? Friends' shows you're looking forward to?

My second solo show, *Overculture*, with Postmasters Gallery opens March 15. I currently have work in *Idiom II* at Pierogi Gallery in Williamsburg and *Thank You for Writing* at 601Artspace in Chelsea. I'm looking forward to taking a trip upstate to see Letha Wilson and Jason Middlebrook's two-person show at Retrospective Gallery in Hudson. I'm also excited to work with Jade Townsend again this summer on a collaborative project in Galveston, Texas.



Tamara Gonzales

At the time of this writing it's possible to see her generally vibrantly colored abstract paintings—energetic compositions in which certain formal elements are rendered via a meticulous use of textiles as stencils through which to apply spray paints—in about half-a-dozen New York galleries, from a solo show in James Siena's Sometimes Gallery on the Lower East Side to a group show at Harbor Gallery in Ridgewood. For Gonzales, who has also curated for various spaces, exhibiting this much is not uncommon. Her enthusiasm and energy for showing and collaborating, in fact, are effulgent in a way that's reflected in her paintings. She lives in Williamsburg with her partner, fellow painter Chris Martin, and her dog, Bearpuff. Her studio is on Central Avenue in Bushwick. [Visit her website.](#)

Describe your studio practice. What gets you enthused to make work?

My work has become very seasonal. Good weather gets me excited because it means I can open the windows, hit the fans, put on a mask, and paint for long stretches. My current spray-painting process is demanding and has all these needs for controls that my previous oil and acrylic work didn't. There is a lot more planning before any spontaneity can happen. In the winter I wait until I'm really bored, then hunker down and make drawings and works on paper with brushes. Sometimes sculptures. Anyway, I kind of have an on/off switch. Once I start, it's hard to stop. Once I stop, it's hard to start.

You've had work in exhibitions all over the city and much farther afield. Convenience aside, is there anything you particularly enjoy about showing in Brooklyn?

The people.

You've been in Brooklyn a while and witnessed a lot of change. What first brought you here?

The cheap rent. I think of the years I lived on N. 9th Street. I had an apartment and a studio while working at Kelley & Ping tea bar. Pierogi Gallery had just opened down the street from me. Between there and Kasia's I met most of the artists whose work I had been admiring in SoHo. I saw their studios and learned from them.

Is there anything in particular you miss, given all the transformation?

Well, the cheap rent.

Anything you particularly like about the changes?

I love that people still come here to pursue dreams and reinvent themselves. The infusion of yoga studios, coffee shops, tattoo parlors, galleries, artisanal chocolate... The parks and pools have become revitalized. There's an art-supply store down the block. Even Ctown upped their game. I swear the L train really has improved.

Favorite Brooklyn galleries or art events? Restaurants or bars?

Galleries: Norte Maar, Storefront, English Kills, Regina Rex, Janet Kurnatowski, Pierogi, Projekt722, Microscope and Centotto. (It's not fair to leave your space out just because you're the interviewer.) I also love the spaces and spirit of Secret Project Robot, Body Actualized and Catland. Beat Nite and Bushwick Open Studios are great ways to get to know the community and see a lot of art. Restaurants: Northeast Kingdom, Tandem, Little Skips, Champs and Best Pizza. I have a love affair with sitting in the window of Tuffets—I call it the Hopper window—with a sammy and coffee watching life go by on Graham Avenue. When I want pastries, it's Fabiane's. When it's time for sfogliatelle and gelati, I head to Fortunato's.

Any forthcoming exhibitions of your work you'd like to mention? Friends' shows you're looking forward to?

As you've already noted it's been a busy start to the New Year so I'm really looking forward to heading back into the studio. Shout outs: looking forward to Jamison Brousseau at Sardine and the gang in *Spitball* at Storefront Ten Eyck. Also, Joanne Greenbaum's show at Rachel Uffner Gallery, Keltie Ferris at Chapter, and *The Last Brucennial*. I'll have a piece in that one.