

Three Young Black British Artists Boldly Reenvisioning the World around Us

[artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-three-young-black-british-artists-boldly-reenvisioning](https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-three-young-black-british-artists-boldly-reenvisioning)

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Exterior view of “Young Black British Artists from London Galleries,” a collaboration between Artsy and W1 Curates, on the facade of Flannels on Oxford Street, London, 2021. Courtesy of W1 Curates.

To be Black and to be British is so often intertwined with complicated notions or projections of wrestling with identity. It is unsurprising that the great artists of our time look inwardly to form the core ideas of their artistic practice, but we must resist the monolithic idea that Black art must represent the inner reckonings of the artist. Artists are storytellers; they draw on the rich histories of themselves, those around them, and the world and refashion them with their own subjectivity to create an endearing view on the world. The visual approaches of [Sahara Longe](#)

, [Adébayo Bolaji](#)

, and

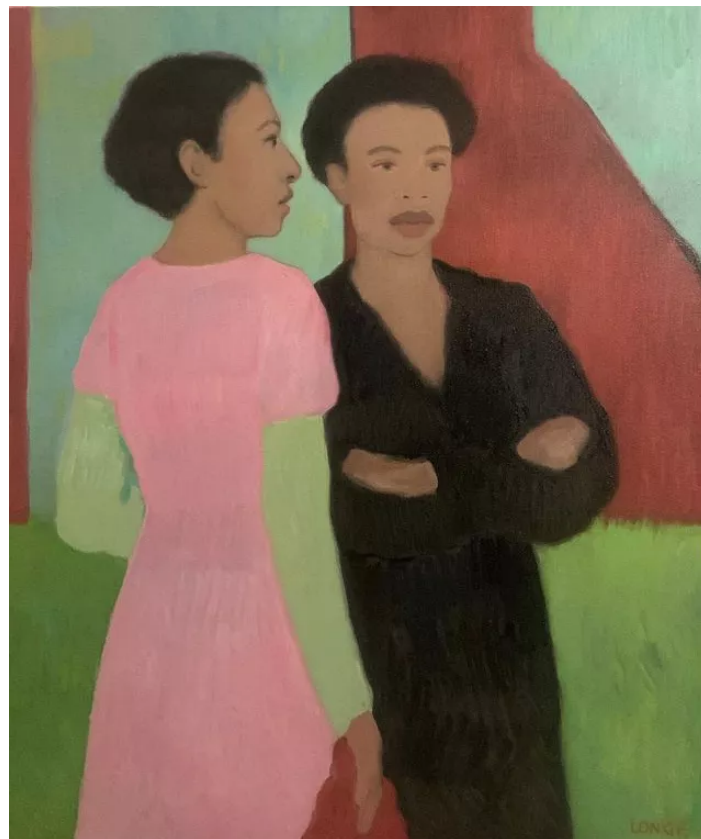
[Lee Simmonds](#)

are testament to this.

Longe, Bolaji, and Simmonds are currently featured in the public art exhibition “Young Black British Artists from London Galleries,” a collaboration between Artsy and W1 Curates that sees each artist’s works featured on the façade of luxury retailer Flannels on Oxford Street in London from October 11th through 17th.

Adébayo Bolaji’s vibrant and metaphoric artistic language centers on the dialogue of change and the focus of the self within society. His work addresses the negotiations between identity and art. “My identity is rooted in self-knowledge. Not labels or groups, but a deeper spirituality that is constantly responsive to the world around it,” Bolaji said. “The world has created identities for me....Black man, man, African, British African, artist. Labels can support the narrative, but they are not the narrative.” Indeed, we can place Bolaji’s instinctive and expressive practice within the parameters that art history has neatly provided, but that would be doing the work a disservice. We must look, and look again, then look at ourselves and then look ahead, to realize the full potential of these artists and of the genre.

Lee Simmonds seeks to “engage with ideas, and with the infinite” with his highly symbolic, tender figuration. “Creating paintings entirely from one’s imagination takes a lot of work,” he told me, “but when I really start getting into it, I’m basically playing *The Sims*. How shall I design this lamp? Do I want him to wear trousers or dungarees? Who’s invited to this party?” There is a sense of the bizarre in his magical realist suburbia. The scenes are soft and cozy, but simultaneously unsettling. Perhaps Simmonds’s work conveys a dark irony that represents the ease of complacency—and how that ease is only afforded to some and not all.





Sahara Longe's vibrant, deliberately flattened paintings also work to examine the visual hierarchies and traditions so deeply entrenched in art historical tradition. With her punchy visual aesthetic, she asks how we can look at the past in order to inform the future, and how we can reckon with history and the contemporary at once. In contrast to the oversimplified description of her work as reclaiming a history of exclusion, she seeks to shine light on the bigger picture: a wider history and a multiplicity of identities that are exciting and culturally complex. Often large in scale, these are

Old Master

paintings that are thrust, with emphasis and fervor, into the contemporary, encouraging us to look at history and art history with fresh eyes. "I love capturing snapshots of scenes and split seconds, awkward parties or social events and the strangeness of life," Longe mused. "I love the storytelling aspect of painting. My work is a playful comment on the times we live in. I aim to capture everyday life for Black and Brown people. I want to continue this dialogue and carry on this language."

These artists are boldly encouraging us to rethink what we thought to be true. To enjoy their art, we must take off the blinders that art history has encouraged and look at the world in a more expansive way. To be Black and to be British means to be boldly reasserting, reevaluating, and recreating how we move within the world. It's time to luxuriate in the interior lives of a new wave of artists; in doing so, we learn more about ourselves than we might expect.

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