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Studio Museum in Harlem Names Artists in Residence

This year's slate, which includes two performance artists and a painter, reflects the search for what's next in black art.

Elliot Reed, of Los Angeles, left, Naudline Pierre of Brooklyn and E. Jane, of Philadelphia. Credit From left, Provvidenza Catalano; Nathan Bajar; and, right, courtesy of the artist, E. Jane



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The alumni list of the Studio Museum in Harlem's artist-in-residence program reads like a who's who of the contemporary black canon, with stars like David Hammons, Kerry James Marshall, Njideka Akunyili Crosby and Simone Leigh and nearly 130 other artists who since 1969 have helped set the tone of black and diasporic art in the United States.

Typically selected in early career, in annual cohorts of three from a highly competitive field, the artists form a powerful network that bolsters the influence of the Uptown institution.

While the museum is on hiatus as it carries out the expansion, designed by David Adjaye, of its 125th Street building, the artist-in-residence program continues in the museum's temporary administrative quarters in West Harlem. And the program is breaking new ground of its own, with the announcement on Wednesday of its 2019-20 cohort, the most experimental in many years.

Two of the three artists work in performance. And one works partly in cyberspace.

That artist, E. Jane, 29, based in Philadelphia, works partly in the persona of Mhysa, a musician operating on SoundCloud and Instagram and in real life, touring the United States and Europe with a wobbly, dreamy club sound. The E. Jane persona, meanwhile, makes audiovisual and sculptural installations that explore such topics as the black diva — informed by a manifesto, “NOPE,” which rejects identity politics and any deference to the “colonial gaze.”

Elliot Reed, 27, based in Los Angeles, devises ensemble performances, sometimes casting novices, in both gallery settings and public spaces such as Union Station in Los Angeles or on the grounds of the Getty Museum. In his recent “America’s Procession” — inspired by his great-grandmother, a master church musician — he uses succinct cues and elements of chance to explore how knowledge passes on to and changes across generations.

The third artist is the painter Naudline Pierre, 30, based in Brooklyn, whose mystical style draws on medieval and Renaissance religious art, William Blake-style esoterica and Caribbean influences. The daughter of a Haitian evangelical pastor, Ms. Pierre, whose work drew attention at this year’s Armory show, represents herself in the center of her canvases, watched over or tugged between spiritual forces and mythic beings.

Legacy Russell, the Studio Museum’s associate curator of exhibitions who will work with the artists and organize a joint show for them next year, said the cohort reflects “futurity” in black art, the constant search for what’s next. “It’s about creating new definitions for what a black artist can be, and what that looks like,” she said.

The group show of the 2018-19 cohort — with paintings by Tschabalala Self, installations by Sable Elyse Smith and video and installation by Allison Janae Hamilton — is now up at MoMA PS1, which will host next year’s edition as well.

The new group’s eclecticism will pose a bracing curatorial challenge, Ms. Russell said. “It’s an opportunity to expand into new media and get a sense of how these works can live together.”