

Faye Wei Wei

Regulars / Ones To Watch 2018

Ones to Watch 2018: artist Faye Wei Wei

Words by Bryony Stone, Monday 26 February 2018

It's Nice That's Ones to Watch shines a light on 12 emerging talents who we think will conquer the creative world in 2018. From a global pool of creative talent, we have chosen our 2018 Ones To Watch for their ability to consistently produce inspiring and engaging work across a diverse range of disciplines. Each of our selections continually pushes the boundaries of what is possible with their creative output. Ones to Watch 2018 is supported by Uniqlo.

Rising rent prices are squeezing artists out of even London's most liminal spaces. Lucky then that one of the city's most visibly rising stars, artist Faye Wei Wei, turned a room in her family's home into her studio. The British Chinese artist's daydreamy paintings which spill out, motif-laden, across intimidatingly large canvases reflect her meditative, romantic demeanour. Take the routine with which she starts each day. "I wake up after a long sleep, I go down to my studio in my Chinese silk dragon trousers and corduroy apron," she begins. "I make some food, natto with rice and miso soup or rice with fish, and I will sit and just think and wonder and read for a couple of hours. Then I will begin to draw and paint with all my mind bursting with poetry and imagery, sacred love visions."

Having "always" been interested in image-making, Faye burrowed deeper into her artistic practise at the same time she was coming of age. "I really started to learn about the magic of paint when I was 16," Faye explains. "I was incredibly lucky that the art department at my school was so abundant with materials and space and time to make things." In 2016, Faye graduated from UCL's Slade School of Fine Art. "[It] taught me so much," she recalls. "I learnt how to have my own studio practice, how to be self-motivated, how to think about art, how to deal with broken hearts." In the year-and-half since, Faye has exhibited work in group shows, undertaken a residency at Hoy Hoy in Mount Tremper, New York, travelled to Japan and Seoul, had her first solo show at Cob Gallery, collaborated with fashion's fake fur pioneer Shrimps founder, Hannah Weiland on the set for her SS18 show and, earlier this month, Care, a musical at the ICA with her "talented, beautiful friend" Klein.

"I just got back from doing a show in Athens," she offers by way of a 2018 update. "I feel so inspired by the city and by my experiences there, the five-hour-long dinners, the flowers, the marble floors and church paintings. I felt so lucky to be there, I was making a film out there with a very special boy, I feel really inspired by him, seeing someone else's vision of the city and the vast beating endless poetry of the world through the lens of a camera, a really different way to looking."



Faye Wei Wei, *1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10*, 2017
 Courtesy of Cob Gallery

Counting Twombly, Picasso, Clemente, Johns, Munch, Japanese Noh Plays, Dumas, Walter de la Mare, Eliot, Hopkins, Bacon, Sappho, Plath and Emily Berry as sources of inspiration alongside “my incredibly amazing, beautiful-eyed friends George Rouy, Oli Pearce, Omari Douglin, Cheyenne Julien, Nicole Wittenberg and James English Leary,” Faye’s process is marked out by her sizeable collection of references which she keeps stowed around her studio. “I am always surrounded by a rich and vast collection of objects and words that act as triggers for drawings,” she says. “I will sometimes start with a line of poetry, or a dream, a memory, an object or another painting I have been obsessing with in my head. These past few days I keep thinking of [Dylan Thomas] lines, ‘and taken by light in her arms at long and dear last/ I may without fail suffer the first vision that set fire to the stars’. I love to walk around with these grand romantic heavy lines of poetry committed to

my memory because I think it makes all of my waking life more dreamlike. Often the image for a painting will sort of float around my mind for a while, if it’s a really particularly delicious image, I won’t need to even draw it out because it will be so strongly attached to all the tiny feelers in my brain already— when that happens the image comes out really naturally and almost easily, as if it already existed on the canvas.”

Once the idea has formed and danced around Faye’s brain, the painting itself is a relatively swift process. “Once I begin the painting”, Faye reasons, “I like to have it done in a couple of sittings so as not to disrupt the flow.” Faye’s paintings, like all great artworks, are difficult to take in without the luxury of time. It’s partly a fact of physicality: the artist’s stubborn use of vast canvases — she usually works on 72 × 54 inch canvases which require her entire body to fill and a swivelling neck from the viewer — but it’s also thanks to Faye’s fondness for symbols. Past works have been dominated by medieval, folkloric images of horses, lions, snakes, armoured knights, bows and arrows, stars, but at the moment, Faye tells us that she’s been fixating on a more natural realm, “sea urchins, the sun, the moon, butterflies, portraits of my lovers”.

Currently hidden beneath the radar on a residency somewhere in New Mexico, we can’t wait to see what Faye does next.

Illustration - Mason London