

Brooklyn-Based Painter Marcus Leslie Singleton on the Pros and Cons of Good Lighting, and Why the Best Art Works Telepathically

We caught up with the artist from his studio in Brooklyn.

[Noor Brara](#), July 19, 2021



Marcus Leslie Singleton. Photo by Yashiddai Owens.

One of the most promising young artists working today is Marcus Leslie Singleton, a Brooklyn-based painter whose work depicts the intimacy of Black communities in daily life.

His figures, often joyful and familiar with one another, lounge on living room sofas or play cards beneath the shade of a mammoth patio umbrella. They shoot hoops in a sun-filled neighborhood basketball court and chat with friends at the local deli, mulling over buying a lotto ticket. In his work, Singleton distills, down to the moment, the parallel realities of Black joy and hardship with a kind of immediacy that is at once poignant and hopeful, love-filled and close-knit.

Artnet News recently sat down with Singleton, who describes his work as an ongoing examination of “time and the Black body,” to hear about his new show at the Pit L.A., what he needs in his studio to make his work come together, and more.

What are the most indispensable items in your studio and why?

When I first started painting, my mother gifted me some oil pastels. I really didn’t know what to do with them. But a few years ago, my mother passed away, so now I keep them secured in a case.

You have a show on now at the Pit LA. What can people expect to see?

Yeah, I’m excited. It’s a group show with a strong lineup. I’ll be showing a couple paintings that I did while I was in Mexico City.

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Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Getting Ready* (2018). Courtesy of Superposition Gallery

What kind of atmosphere do you prefer when you work?

I got pretty lucky with my studio. There are pros and cons with everything. But my studio is in the cut. I barely hear any noise, the atmosphere is relaxed and focused, and I love it.

The con is that there isn't much natural light. My paintings always look different in a gallery or somewhere where there is more natural light. I'm like, "Damn these are the colors!?"



Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Guard at the Guggenheim* (2019). Photo courtesy the artist.

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Do you listen to music or podcasts, or do you prefer silence?

I usually listen to music when I work. I'm not much of a podcast person. I like listening to hip hop when I'm working, mostly. But lately I've been on a deep house wave.

What trait do you most admire in a work of art?

I like when I can tell the artist put their soul into it. Art is a spiritual thing. The fact that we can communicate something without verbiage is telepathic. So I love when an artist can achieve that through sculpture, painting, photography, etc.

What trait do you most despise?

Laziness, it's repulsive. Cowardice—stay away.

What snack food could your studio not function without?

I gotta have a bottle of wine in there, and some spicy chips.



A view into Singleton's studio. Photo courtesy the artist.

Who are your favorite artists, curators, or other thinkers to follow on social media right now?

Sam Youkilis, his video work is unique. And Mosie Romney, their paintings are always dynamic. I love the way Jason Reynolds dictates his writing. Yashiddai Owens's page is filled with creative ways to see the world. Maryah Dinane for anything delicious and healthy. I'm also drawn to the curating work of Nicola Vassell, Destinee Ross-Sutton, Mike Mosby.

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When you feel stuck in the studio, what do you do to get un-stuck?

Uh, I don't really ever feel stuck. It's more like procrastination. And when I feel that, I go for a walk and get a hot tea.

What is the last exhibition you saw (virtual or otherwise) that made an impression on you?

David Hammons went off at the Drawing Center.

If you had to put together a mood board, what would be on it right now?

Desert landscape photos, punk rock posters, family photos, 8-bit graphics, things growing out of the sidewalk, flowers, grass, and sex.