

**Forbes**

## Contemporary Artists Utilize Collage To Create Complex Social, Political, And Aesthetic Narratives In Latest Phaidon 'Vitamin C+' Tome

Natasha Gural | May 31, 2023 05:30pm EDT



Cover image of Vitamin C+ Collage in Contemporary Art Phaidon Editors May 2023 \$69.95 Hardback 304 pages 560 col. illus. 9 7/8 × 11 3/8 in.

A woman in a lace embellished dress sits to the right of a table with a checkerboard cloth, her shadow behind her, one leg behind its counterpart, the other stretched forward. Her Blackness is conveyed through grisaille skin and a brown nose.

Our gaze navigates the layers and parts that compose the figure and her environment, depicted using lace, fabric, oil, acrylic, dye, and painted canvas on canvas. [Tschabalala Self's](#) *Tabled* (2021) is among the diverse array of works created by 108 living artists from 40 countries, working with collage nominated by museum directors, curators, critics, and collectors to be featured in [Vitamin C+ Collage in Contemporary Art](#). The latest book in [Phaidon's](#) Vitamin series, launched in 2002, focuses on a current practice in a single art medium.

"I really did a deep dive into many paintings that dealt with the domestic space and thinking about the significance of that space. I also like what it means, what it symbolizes, and how it can often be a stand-in for larger concepts around interiority, like the interiority of one's own concepts around solitude," the 33-year-old Harlem, New York-born artist told me in a recent Zoom interview. "I was thinking a lot of these works show single figures in these pseudo-domestic settings, and the checkerboard or the grid that's often used to denote some kind of domestic space. Oftentimes in my paintings I use it to create a floor, but in this work, it becomes a tabletop but it also doubles as this kind of post-modernist grid because of the perspective that's given to the tabletop."

The table is intentionally titled, Self notes, adding that "it's also this idea of a conversation that's been tabled or something that's been put on pause. The idea of something that maybe was in motion, and it stopped, giving us our level

# MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

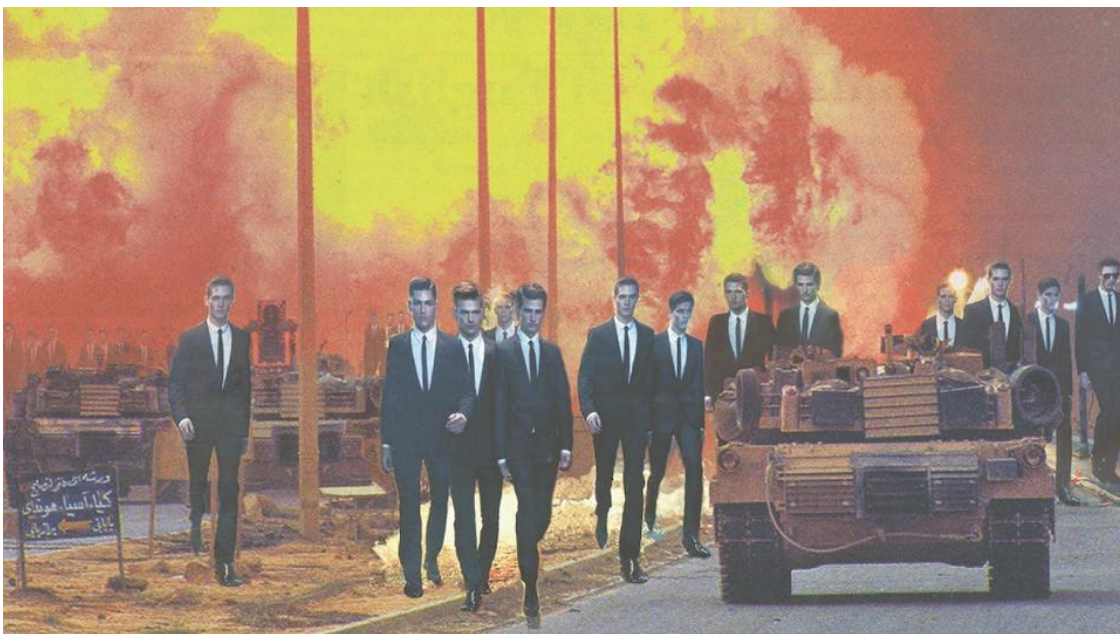
of tension to the piece. And that tension bears the position of the figure who's almost in mid-gesture or mid-movement.”

Self, who lives and works in the New York Tri-state area, works fluidly across painting and printmaking to explore concepts of the Black body. She depicts mostly women using a combination of sewn, printed, and painted materials, while borrowing from various artistic and craft traditions.

Celebrating collage as a fine art form is essential to understanding art history. While too often relegated to craft status, collage was first recognized as fine art in early twentieth century Europe when artists in Modernist movements such as Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism (including Picasso, Georges Braque, Hannah Höch, and Kurt Schwitters) elevated it by subverting traditional image-making techniques. Picasso and Braque were among the first to engage mass media in their synthetic Cubist collages, transforming real-world materials and inspiring artists such as Max Ernst and Höch to create imagery that challenges and ignites our imagination.

Many contemporary collage artists continue to create visual narratives by cutting or tearing and pasting together found, printed imagery and ephemera.

*Vitamin C+* showcases a wide range of globally-renowned artists including Linder, Christian Marclay, Wangechi Mutu, John Stezaker, Mickalene Thomas, and Kara Walker, who are regarded as trailblazers of collage. Many artists, including Peter Kennard, Justine Kurland, and Deborah Roberts harness collage to convey concerns about social issues, such as gender or racial inequalities, climate change, and war. Others, including Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Dexter Davis, and Georgie Hopton, unleash its aesthetic potential by juxtaposing materials of different textures, patterns, and depths to create abstract and tactile compositions that challenge our visual perception.



Martha Rosler. *Invasion*, 2008, from the series 'House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home, New Series', (2004–8). (page 223, bottom) Photomontage, dimensions variable. PICTURE CREDIT: © MARTHA ROSLER. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MITCHELL-INNES & NASH, NEW YORK

Martha Rosler, who has been active since the 1960s, uses collage to confront socio-political issues through energetic compositions that compel us to rethink normative narratives. Her *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home, New Series*, (2004–2008) re-examines an earlier body of work centered on war through the lens of problematic U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. She painstakingly blends immaculately cut glossy and grisly imagery to create flawless compositions that undermine the mainstream media and amplify the impact of war on all of us, even from afar.

Intrigued by lavish colors evoking a fantastical scene, we encounter an elaborate digital collage that takes on systems of power and control. Ventura Profana elegantly combats patriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism, by marrying images of the military, religious ceremonies, environmental destruction, and human-made structures. A Black trans woman and a preacher, Profana's intricate collages are prophecies of a future that overcomes white, cis-gender supremacy.