



## ART

### NINA CHANEL ABNEY'S PAINTINGS BEAR OVERLOADED VISIONS

By Diana McClure May 16, 2019

Take your rose-colored glasses, sprinkle some of Faith Ringgold's style and Black Lives Matters' societal critiques, then add the schizophrenia of 24/7 news cycles and their social media interpretations, and you might just grasp the painterly visions of artist Nina Chanel Abney.



Nina Chanel Abney poses in front of Nasher Museum mural (photo: J. Caldwell)

## RELATED: THE THERAPEUTIC GAZE OF SIMONE LEIGH'S "BRICK HOUSE"

Repeatedly quoted as saying her work is, “easy to swallow, hard to digest,” the Chicago-born, New York-based artist’s exaggerated figures, chunky blocks of color and overall interplay of forms, work together to create loud social commentary on a host of topics. From politics, race and homophobia, to celebrity, consumerism and incarceration, Abney laces her pieces with a cacophony of satire and amusement, the grotesque and the profane, with an occasional glimpse of beauty.



Nina Chanel Abney, "Untitled (Ex X)" (2012). Acrylic on canvas, 42 x 30 inches (106.68 x 76.2 cm).  
(Collection of Sara Levinson, image courtesy of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham,  
North Carolina. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion. © Nina Chanel Abney.)

## RELATED: NARI WARD'S EPHEMERA AND BLACK AMERICAN LIVES

Abney's first museum show, *Royal Flush*, opened in February 2017 at the Nasher Museum of Art in North Carolina, and has been traveling ever since. After stops in Chicago and Los Angeles, its final resting place is the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, upstate New York, where it is currently on view. The exhibition covers 10 years of Abney's work and shows a movement towards abstraction and a simplifying of her visual language. However, regardless of changes in style, her content is always inspired by current events, deftly transforming into deceptively playful atmospheres akin to fairy tales, cartoons, and more recently card games (through the symbolism found in playing card decks).





Nina Chanel Abney, "Randaleeza" (2008). Acrylic on canvas, 90 × 94 inches (228.6 × 238.76 cm). (Private collection. Image courtesy of Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York, New York. © Nina Chanel Abney.)

## RELATED: BLACK UTOPIA: THE FUNKADELIC ART OF PEDRO BELL

*Royal Flush* is in part a reference to the most valuable hand in the game of Poker, but also seems to suggest Abney's bird's eye view of the combustible existence of human life in contemporary culture. In an almost omniscient position as narrator, she wields a sheen of absurd humor amplified through her use of color, simultaneously drawing viewers in and creating a critical distance.



Nina Chanel Abney, "Thieves Guild in Oblivion" (2009). Acrylic on canvas, 55.5 x 67 inches (140.97 x 170.18 cm). (Private collection. Image courtesy of Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York, New York. © Nina Chanel Abney.)

## RELATED: THE BEAUTY OF BLACKNESS IN KWAME BRATHWAITE'S IMAGES

There's an engaging surface-level silliness alongside a provocative use of caricature and an undertone of grim pain. Abney's life experiences — a pastime of collaging comics as a child, a navigation of both predominantly white and predominantly Black spaces while growing up, a double major in computer science and art, a political awakening during college, and a stint working on a Ford Motors assembly line — presumably preclude any possibility of a one-dimensional perspective. Instead, while pleasing at first glance, her work harasses and agitates through relentless juxtaposition of emotions, symbols, colors, shapes and text. *Royal Flush* is a succinct mirror for the age of information overload, fake news and whatever may be coming next.





Nina Chanel Abney, "Mad 51st" (2012). Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 inches (101.6 x 76.2 cm). (Collection of Jeanne Williams and Jason Greenman. Image courtesy of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion. © Nina Chanel Abney.)

***Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush is on view through  
June 30, 2019 at the Neuberger Museum of Art.***