

Art21 to Share Four Stories of Artists Confronting Global Crises

Abigail DeVille opens a new film season premiering today



Clockwise from top-left: Firelei Báez, Shaun Leonardo, Michael Rakowitz, Abigail DeVille

(NEW YORK — January 27, 2021) — Art21 announced today a slate of new films comprising its first season of programming for 2021. Across **four consecutive Wednesdays beginning today**, Art21 will deliver four felicitous stories documenting artists who offer messages of hope and positivity in the face of adversity.

Four artists—**Firelei Báez, Abigail DeVille, Shaun Leonardo, and Michael Rakowitz**—confront social, political, and institutional crises impacting cultures around the world, collectively capturing a portrait of contemporary history in the making, connecting personal and global experiences that play out across generations.

Drawing from experiences dating back to their formative years, each artist speaks to life-changing events that shape their creative practices. Addressing the chronicles of **civil rights**, tales of **immigration**, and the still-

present traces of **colonialism**, the four artists in this group construct visions for paths forward.

“History demonstrates time and time again that struggle fuels innovation, and innovation feeds progress,” said **Tina Kukielski**, the Susan Sollins Executive Director and Chief Curator of Art21. “These four artists inspire change. We are fortunate to be the chroniclers of their stories, especially now when as a culture we need inspiration.”

Three artists make their Art21 debut in this group of releases: Rakowitz with a film from Art21’s longest-running digital series, *Extended Play*; Báez and Leonardo each with films from the acclaimed *New York Close Up* series. DeVille, who was previously featured in three *New York Close Up* films, joins the *Extended Play* roster through her fourth feature.

Each film will be released on **Wednesdays** at 12:00 p.m. ET on [Art21.org](https://art21.org), YouTube (youtube.com/art21org), and Vimeo (vimeo.com/art21).

Art21’s latest offerings join **over 65 hours of original video** in the Art21 library—the most comprehensive documentary film collection on today’s greatest artists.

Winter 2020 Film Guide

Screeners available by request

Abigail DeVille: “Light of Freedom”

From the *Extended Play* series; Premieres today

Filmed in late 2020, Abigail DeVille reveals the motivation behind her latest public art commission, *Light of Freedom* (2020), installed at Madison Square Park in New York City. Against a backdrop of a city and nation still reeling from the global pandemic, DeVille identifies multiple sources of inspiration for her installation, including writings by Frederick Douglas, memories of hearing Martin Luther King Jr. speeches played by her fourth grade teacher, late-19th-century images of Statue of Liberty’s torch and arm displayed publicly in the park, and, most recently, racial injustice protests throughout New York City and across the world.

Shaun Leonardo: The Freedom to Move

From the *New York Close Up* series; Premieres February 3

Marked by experiences from his upbringing in Queens, New York, and his years playing college football, Shaun Leonardo demonstrates the dynamic depth of his practice through public performances and participatory programs. Set against footage of performances at the Guggenheim Museum, the High Line, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and Recess Art—as well as rare archival film from his Bowdoin College football games—Leonardo reflects upon his personal creative mandate to distort stereotypes and create spaces for others to partake in his explorations.

Firelei Báez: An Open Horizon (or) the Stillness of a Wound

From the *New York Close Up* series; Premieres February 10

Inspired by characters from Dominican folklore and “New World”-era scientific illustrations, Firelei Báez creates paintings that shift ideas of power and perceptions around the female form. Shot primarily on film and interspersed with visual interludes of dancers, Báez is shown in constant transition—analogue to the figures in her work—traveling to locations in and around her Bronx studio, as well as to her glass mosaic commission at the 163rd Street-Amsterdam Avenue subway station in Manhattan’s Washington Heights neighborhood. This film is among the releases planned for Art21’s participation in the multi-institution Feminist Art Coalition initiative.

Michael Rakowitz: Haunting the West

From the *Extended Play* series; Premieres February 17

Inspired by his Iraqi-Jewish ancestry, Michael Rakowitz critiques ongoing systems of colonization by addressing the values placed by the West on Middle Eastern objects and people. Featuring recent work at Jane Lombard Gallery in New York City, Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College in upstate New York, and the Fourth Plinth in London’s Trafalgar Square, Rakowitz shares motivations for reviving the “ghosts” of objects that have been lost, looted, or otherwise destroyed from their original environments in Iraq. Shown maintaining a studio practice that has been largely decentralized during the pandemic—with footage of his assistants working from their homes and studios—Rakowitz describes the importance of staying connected while working apart.

Extended Play—A Pioneering Digital Series

Launched in March 2008, *Extended Play* is the first and longest-running digital film series committed to documenting the lives and works of contemporary artists. Through process-revealing footage and intimate interviews, *Extended Play* uncovers the provocative ideas and biographical anecdotes that inspire an artist's work from conceptualization, to creation, to presentation.

Initially introduced as a digital complement to the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* television series, *Extended Play*'s scope and ambitions have since expanded. In recent years, the series achieved a new milestone by chronicling artists not previously featured in other Art21 series, including **Luchita Hurtado, Jack Whitten, Marcel Dzama, and Alex Da Corte. Michael Rakowitz** achieves this recognition in 2021. **Abigail DeVille**, previously featured across three films from the *New York Close Up* series, makes her *Extended Play* debut in 2021.

The **Extended Play** series holds the distinction of being granted exclusive access to major works in progress, including **Julie Mehretu's** historic commission for the atrium of the recently-reopened San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and **Kara Walker's** monumental 2014 public project at the former site of the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, NY.

Over 100 artists have been featured in the *Extended Play* series, including **Barbara Kruger, Sarah Sze, William Kentridge, Do Ho Suh, Cindy Sherman, Nancy Spero, Gabriel Orozco, Jeff Koons, Mike Kelley, Andrea Zittel, and Carrie Mae Weems**, among others.

Extended Play is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts; and, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; the Art21 Contemporary Council; Dawn and Chris Fleischner; and by individual contributors.

New York Close Up—Celebrating Ten Years of New York Stories

Now entering its tenth year, Art21's celebrated *New York Close Up* series profiles early career artists living and working in New York City. Providing a

unique window into the next wave of art-making in the city, Art21 collaborates with artists to tell stories about their creative processes, diverse backgrounds, and daily realities.

Since its inaugural film premiere in June 2011, the series has profiled over 40 artists across nearly 100 films, including **Rashid Johnson, Diana Al-Hadid, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Jacolby Satterwhite, Jamian Juliano-Villani, Kalup Linzy, Keltie Ferris, Mika Rottenberg, Erin Shirreff, Mika Tajima,** and **Lucas Blalock**, among others.

Firelei Báez and **Shaun Leonardo** are the latest artists to have *New York Close Up* debuts in 2021.

Recent roster additions have included **Jes Fan, Maryam Hoseini, Dan Herschlein, Jordan Casteel, Meriem Bennani, Avery Singer,** and **Raúl de Nieves**.

New York Close Up is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts; and, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; Dawn and Chris Fleischner; and by individual contributors.

Always on View

The Art21 film collection features **over 65 hours** of video content, all available to view **around the clock** and **free of charge** at **Art21.org** and **Art21.live**.

In addition to full episodes from each of the **ten seasons** produced to date of the Peabody Award-winning PBS-broadcast series, *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, the Art21 film collection is rounded out by over **300 films** across two digital series, *Extended Play* and *New York Close Up*—demonstrating Art21's ongoing commitment to **digital-first video programming**, and underscoring the nonprofit organization's position as the **leading producer** of films documenting the creative processes of today's artists.

About Art21

Since 1997, Art21 has been recognized as a celebrated global leader in presenting thought-provoking and sophisticated content about contemporary art. It is the go-to place to learn firsthand about some of the most interesting working artists today—from the artists themselves—and is responsible for introducing millions of people to contemporary art and artists. Founded on the belief that artists are role models for creative and critical thinking, Art21's mission aims to inspire a more creative and tolerant world through the works and words of contemporary artists.

Art21.org provides an unparalleled year-round, always-on look at working artists, a continuous digital presence for an organization that is widely recognized for a biennial television series. The Art21 film library houses over 65 hours of original video content—over 500 videos all open and free to the public. Reaching audiences of over 5 million a month, Art21's digital initiatives continue the organization's long-standing tradition of using the power of digital media to inspire audiences worldwide by exposing them to contemporary artists.

Through its education program, Art21 engages audiences in dialogue about the contemporary art and artists featured in Art21 films. Art21's educational initiatives include the Art21 Educators learning community, Art21 Ambassadors professional development workshops, the production of interpretive resources, editorial commissions written by educators, and participatory programs and screening events.

To date, Art21's digital films have received over 100 film festival acceptances and industry honors from across the world, including two Webby Award nominations, multiple Vimeo Staff Picks, and screenings at prestigious film festivals such as BlackStar, DOC NYC, and DC Shorts.

Art21 programs are made possible through the generosity of Agnes Gund; The Anna Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation; PBS: the Lambert Foundation Fund of the Tides Foundation; Dawn and Chris Fleischner; The David S. Howe Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Brenda Potter; Jessica and Natan Bibliowicz; The New York Community Trust; The Andreas Foundation; Henri Lambert; and the B & M Wright Foundation.



For a full list of Art21 supporters, please visit Art21.org.

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