



# ART IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

**REALMS OF  
THE REAL**

SEASON 12  
EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.





Tomás Saraceno in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.

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Museo Aero Solar during *Aerocene Seoul*, 2024, Leeum Museum of Art, 2024. Image courtesy of Aerocene. Photography by Studio Tomás Saraceno.

## ABOUT ART21

Art21 is a celebrated global leader in presenting thought-provoking and sophisticated content about contemporary art—a preeminent resource for learning first-hand from the artists of our time. Art21’s mission is to educate and expand access to contemporary art through the production of documentary films, resources, and public programs.

As a nonprofit organization, Art21 provides unparalleled access to artists’ voices, using the power of digital media to introduce diverse audiences around the world to contemporary art and artists. For more than two decades, Art21 has changed the paradigm for teaching and learning about the creative process.

## ART IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The first and only series presented in partnerships with PBS to focus exclusively on contemporary visual art and artists in the United States and around the world, *Art in the Twenty-First Century* introduces audiences to a diverse group of established and emerging artists working today and to the art they are producing now.

Twelve seasons have been produced for PBS (2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2023, 2025).

Each season contains three to four one-hour programs.

Each hour features three to five artists in 12- to 18-minute segments.

To date, Art21 has featured over 300 established and emerging artists.

## THE ARTISTS

In the Art21 broadcast series, contemporary artists speak in their own words and reflect on their lives, sources of inspiration, and working processes. The featured artists include painters, sculptors, performance artists, installation artists, video artists, and new media artists.

**NOTE:** Teachers should preview all series segments before classroom or other screenings to determine whether the content is appropriate for the ages, maturity levels, and learning environments of their students. Contemporary art often explores controversial subject matter, and some of the artists featured in the Art21 series present provocative images and ideas in their work.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Educator Guides are designed as resources for planning lessons, facilitating discussions, introducing Season 12 content, and supporting further research and exploration of contemporary art, artists, and themes. Educators are encouraged to use the broadcast series, Educator Guide, and the Art21 website in tandem to integrate contemporary art into classroom and community-based learning environments.

### ARTIST PAGES

Each Artist Page contains biographical information and the following sections:

#### [ABOUT THE ARTIST]

An overview of the artist's work and working methods, including current and past projects.

#### [MEDIA & MATERIALS]

A synopsis of the artist's principal media and materials, which are documented in the artist's video segment. Featured media and materials can be cross-referenced to those used by other artists in the series.

#### [KEY WORDS & IDEAS]

Additional thematic concepts connect the artist's work and processes to those of other artists in the series. This section also highlights relevant vocabulary to support discussion and further inquiry.

#### [DISCUSS]

Suggested discussion questions explore ideas introduced in the series. **Before Viewing** questions establish key ideas in anticipation of viewing the artist segments. **While Viewing** questions support active viewing and encourage facilitators to pause and clarify or illuminate particular ideas or vocabulary. **After Viewing** questions follow up on key ideas and encourage viewers to synthesize prior knowledge and personal opinion with the narratives presented in the segment.

#### [CREATE ]

To encourage active, hands-on exploration of the ideas and materials presented in the Discuss section, these activities are open-ended interdisciplinary opportunities for individual interpretations of the creative methods and interests of the featured artists. Suggested activities can be modified for different age levels, learning styles, and media choices.

## WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART?

Art21 defines contemporary art as the work of artists who are living in the twenty-first century. Contemporary art mirrors contemporary culture and society, offering teachers, students, and general audiences a rich resource through which to consider current ideas and rethink the familiar. The work of contemporary artists is a dynamic combination of materials, methods, concepts, and subjects that challenges traditional boundaries and defies easy definition. Contemporary art is distinguished by the absence of a uniform organizing principle, ideology, or "ism." In a globally influenced, culturally diverse, and technologically advancing world, contemporary artists give voice to today's varied and changing cultural landscape of identity, values, and beliefs.

Contemporary audiences play an active role in the process of constructing meaning about works of art. Often, artists say that viewers contribute to or even complete the artwork by adding their personal reflections, experiences, opinions, and interpretations. One of the cornerstones of the Art21 philosophy is to allow artists to present their work in their own words and to encourage viewers to access their individual abilities to consider, react, and respond to visual art.

The artists featured by Art21 serve as creative role models who can inspire people of all ages to consider how ideas are developed, articulated, and realized in the contemporary world, and they offer educators opportunities to support diverse learning styles.

# REALMS OF THE REAL

The internationally acclaimed artists in “Realms of the Real” conduct extensive historical research, examine the nuances of culture and identity, and explore the boundaries of art and science to create worlds of fantasy and fiction that expand our understanding of ourselves and our world. These four artists expand on the realities of shared history and experience to create fantastical and speculative worlds, offering new possibilities for culture, identity, and the future.

**“As an adult that’s an artist, I finally get to misuse things the way I wanted to and create something of value out of that.”**

— Candice Lin



**RAGNAR  
KJARTANSSON**

**BORN** 1976; Reykjavik, Iceland

Through performance, music, video, drawing, painting, and sculpture, Kjartansson explores humanity’s fundamental concerns, from myth-making and national identity to love and beauty. Engaging with the history of music, television, and performance, the artist employs simple yet effective strategies, such as repetition and extended duration, to transform everyday experiences into profound works of art that resonate with the human condition.



**CANDICE  
LIN**

**BORN** 1979; Concord, Massachusetts

In her research-based practice, Lin works with a wide variety of materials driven by a deep interest in their histories and offers alternative understandings of society and ourselves. Equally engaging historical fact and speculation, the artist gives voice to overlooked perspectives, creating visceral and sensorial experiences through sculptures, videos, texts, paintings, and installations.



**TOMÁS  
SARACENO**

**BORN** 1973; Tucuman, Argentina

Saraceno proposes more just and eco-social ways of experiencing and inhabiting our environment through interactive artworks that bridge architecture, engineering, and sculpture. Uniquely inspired by the structures and behaviors of the “more-than-human” world, the artist often embraces a collaborative ethos working with specialists across varied fields. In particular, alongside arachnologists, Saraceno studies and replicates the behaviors of spiders to gain a deeper understanding of our collective existence and to imagine new ways of coexisting.



**NJIDEKA  
AKUNYILI CROSBY**

**BORN** 1983; Enugu, Nigeria

Akunyili Crosby uses painting, drawing, printmaking, and collage to reflect the complex construction of her own identity and those around her. Layering paintings with material from her ever-growing personal archive of Nigerian magazines, album covers, traditional Igbo patterns, and her own photographs, the artist creates a visual language that celebrates the evolving cultural, social, and individual dynamics of diaspora.



## **DISCUSS**

### [BEFORE VIEWING]

- How can artists transform materials?
- When do you feel most curious?
- What steps do you take to solve a problem?

### [AFTER VIEWING]

- What can we learn from materials?
- How can curiosity be part of an artist's process?
- How do the artists in this episode find creative solutions to complex problems?

Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.



# RAGNAR KJARTANSSON



**BORN**  
1976; Reykjavik, Iceland

**LIVES & WORKS**  
Reykjavik, Iceland

**EDUCATION**  
Iceland Academy of the Arts;  
Royal Academy, Stockholm, Sweden

**“To be an artist is to live life creating moments. Moment is so important.”**

— Ragnar Kjartansson

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Across media, Kjartansson uses repetition and duration as tools that hint at the beauty, banality, and sanctity of the human experience. Using quotidian scenes and pop cultural forms, his works are both familiar and unexpected, investigating our relationship with his subjects and the culture that produces them. The artist has developed an hour-long, nine-channel video installation featuring eight musicians, a series of works with his mother created over the course of twenty-five years, a six-month-long performance during the Venice Biennale where he painted 144 portraits of his friend wearing a Speedo, and more.

Ragnar Kjartansson and Davíð Þór Jónsson performing outside Reykjavik. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, “Realms of the Real.” © Art21, Inc. 2026.

## ✦ TEACHING CONNECTIONS

### MEDIA & MATERIALS

music, painting, performance, video

### KEY WORDS & IDEAS

|          |             |
|----------|-------------|
| dreams   | performance |
| emotions | play        |
| humanity | pretend     |
| magic    | repetition  |
| music    | time        |

### RELATED ARTISTS

John Akomfrah, Tauba Auerbach, Hadi Falapishi, Ilana Harris-Babou, Oliver Herring, Miranda July, Christian Marclay, Paul McCarthy, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Susan Philipsz

## DISCUSS

### [BEFORE VIEWING]

- When do you feel most free?
- What is the relationship between art and music?
- What does “culture” mean to you?

### [WHILE VIEWING]

- What does it mean to be an artist, according to Kjartansson?
- How does Kjartansson describe music in his work?
- Why did Kjartansson’s family move to Reykjavik?

### [AFTER VIEWING]

- Why is creative freedom important?
- How do you experience music visually? How might you experience visual art through sound?
- What does it mean to “create culture?” How is culture created where you live?

## CREATE

- Choose one of the following themes: abundance, isolation, curiosity, or conviction (or come up with your own themes). Using everyday materials to make props and your friends or family as actors, film a 2-3 minute moment centered on each one of these themes.
- How many emotions do you experience in a day? Keep a record of the emotions and feelings you have in 24 hours. Make a drawing of each emotion to better understand it. Have a partner do the same. Then swap drawings at the end of the day. How are the artworks similar or different?

Ragnar Kjartansson performing.  
Production still from the *Art in the  
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episode, “Realms of the Real.” © Art21,  
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*The End - Venezia*, 2009. © Ragnar Kjartansson; Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik. Photo: Rafael Pinho.



Ragnar Kjartansson and his mother on a poster. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.; Ragnar Kjartansson and his mother. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.; *No Tomorrow*, 2022. © Ragnar Kjartansson; Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik. Photo: Rafael Pinho.; Ragnar Kjartansson playing guitar. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.



# CANDICE LIN



## BORN

1979; Concord, Massachusetts

## LIVES & WORKS

Los Angeles, California

## EDUCATION

BA, Brown University;  
MFA, San Francisco Art Institute

**“The experience of the work is not primarily visual, you might smell it or hear it before you actually see it. It fills your body as a viewer. You almost feel like it’s this thing that’s in you. Hopefully it stays in you and haunts you a little bit.”**

— Candice Lin

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Working with materials that range from porcelain, cochineal, and indigo to urine, tobacco, and opium poppies, Lin reveals how these substances provide insight into social hierarchies, cultural values, and cycles of violence throughout history. Throughout her practice, the artist creates bodily experiences that offer something more than simple explanation. Lin creates works of art that steam and bubble, emit pungent odors, and invite touch and embodied exploration. Through multi-sensory sculptural installations, the artist crafts fantastical fictions that are grounded in rigorous research of materials involved in complex histories of trade, labor, exploitation, and desire. The artist’s investigations allow her to mine unexplored paths and create works using a range of unconventional creatures and materials.

## ✦ TEACHING CONNECTIONS

### MEDIA & MATERIALS

animation, ceramics, installation, prints, sculpture, textiles

### KEY WORDS & IDEAS

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| body    | materiality |
| decay   | memory      |
| fiction | pigment     |
| history | porcelain   |
| humor   | sensorial   |

### RELATED ARTISTS

El Anatsui, Nick Cave, Linda Goode Bryant, Nicholas Hbolo, Christine Sun Kim, Cannupa Hanksa Luger, Howardena Pindell, Michael Rakowitz, Amy Sherald, Amy Sillman, Rose B. Simpson, Stephanie Syjuco, Jack Whitten

Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, “Realms of the Real.” © Art21, Inc. 2026.

## DISCUSS

### [BEFORE VIEWING]

- Why preserve an artwork? Who typically is responsible for this work?
- What role(s) does research play for an artist?
- List the five senses. What sense do you most often experience with art? Which sense is the least often experienced?

### [WHILE VIEWING]

- What does Lin say about preserving her artwork? Is it important to her?
- Note the research topics that Lin listed in the segment. How did some topics make her feel?
- How does Lin use the five senses in her work?

### [AFTER VIEWING]

- How does Lin's approach to preserving artwork affect your understanding of the work? Does it matter that some works are discarded after the exhibition closes?
- Lin named numerous subjects that she researched, from fabric dyeing to indentured servitude in the 1800s. What steps did she take to take care of herself when a subject became too emotionally challenging?
- What emotions might you feel if you smelled or heard an artwork before seeing it? Would experiencing a sense other than sight increase your curiosity about the work?

## CREATE

- Pet animals, like Lin's cat Roger, have a long history of inspiring artists. Create a work in any medium to honor either a pet that you have now or wish to have in the future. In the final work, make sure to depict physical characteristics, mannerisms, and the personality traits that you love about this animal.
- Consider one art material that has existed for more than a century. How has that material changed over time? Which artists used it in the past? Who uses it today? Research the answers to these questions and any others that you're curious about. Write a brief summary and share it with the class, either through a presentation or performance.



Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.



Photo credit: Ian Byers-Gamber. Courtesy of the Artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, New York.



Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026; Candice Lin's studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026; Candice Lin making art with friends and students. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026; Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.



# TOMÁS SARACENO



## BORN

1973; Tucuman, Argentina

## LIVES & WORKS

Berlin, Germany

## EDUCATION

Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires;  
Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes de la  
Nación Ernesto de la Cárcova;  
Hochschule für Bildende Künste–Städelschule

**“You need to recalibrate the possibility  
to co-inhabit the world.”**

— Tomás Saraceno

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Saraceno creates interactive installations, immersive architectural interventions, and participatory community projects that research how to best steward the planet and cohabitate with all its forms of life. In his practice, the artist engages with a wide variety of disciplines and specialists, collaborating with sociologists, architects, and entomologists, but also looks beyond human knowledge to learn from and work with arachnids, honeybees, and birds. Envisioned as participatory platforms for the communities where they're sited, Saraceno's projects are driven by the pressing socioeconomic and environmental issues affecting those communities and the larger world.

## ✦ TEACHING CONNECTIONS

## MEDIA & MATERIALS

design, sculpture, architecture

## KEY WORDS & IDEAS

|              |          |
|--------------|----------|
| astrophysics | nature   |
| connection   | networks |
| empathy      | space    |
| family       | spiders  |
| futurity     | universe |
| labor        | utopia   |

## RELATED ARTISTS

Louise Bourgeois, Mark Dion, Olafur Eliasson, Cao Fei, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Xin Liu, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Mary Mattingly, Postcommodity, Lucy Raven, Pedro Reyes, Diana Thater, James Turrell

Tomás Saraceno, *In Orbit*, 2011. Installation view at K21, Düsseldorf. Courtesy the artist. Photography by Studio Tomás Saraceno.

## DISCUSS

### [BEFORE VIEWING]

- What are some of your favorite animals or insects?
- What is a utopia?
- How can artists work collaboratively?

### [WHILE VIEWING]

- Why is Saraceno interested in spiders?
- How does Saraceno consider utopias in his work?
- Make note of how Saraceno describes his studio.

### [AFTER VIEWING]

- What ways of working and living can you learn from your favorite animal or insect?
- How can design be liberating?
- Why are relationships important in artmaking?

## CREATE

- Take the perspective of your favorite animal or insect and consider the following: How does it move? What is its relationship to the environment? How does it relate to other animals or species? Make a sculpture of this creature.
- Watch the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* episode “Spirituality” featuring James Turrell. In what ways are Turrell and Saraceno inspired by built and natural environments?
- Saraceno describes the impact of lithium extraction in Argentina on Indigenous communities and of environmental racism at large. Conduct research on eco-racism in your community, city, or country. Working in a group of five, design a solution to this problem using digital art.



Tomás Saraceno and his team. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, “Realms of the Real.” © Art21, Inc. 2026.



Tomás Saraceno, *Cloud Cities Barcelona*, 2022. Installation view at The Glories Tower, Barcelona, 2022. Courtesy the artist. Photography by Studio Tomás Saraceno.



Tomás Saraceno, *Free the Air: How to hear the universe in a spider/web*, 2022. Installation view during Tomás Saraceno: Particular Matter(s), The Shed, New York, 2022. Courtesy the artist. Photography by Studio Tomás Saraceno.; Museo Aero Solar at the Sharjah Biennale, 2007. Images courtesy of Aerocene. Photography by Studio Tomás Saraceno.; Museo Aero Solar during *Aerocene Seoul*, 2024, Leeum Museum of Art, 2024. Image courtesy of Aerocene. Photography by Studio Tomás Saraceno.; Tomás Saraceno's studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026.;



# NJIDEKA AKUNYILI CROSBY



#### BORN

1983; Enugu, Nigeria

#### LIVES & WORKS

Los Angeles, California

#### EDUCATION

BA, Swarthmore College;  
MFA, Yale University

**“When you move place to place, you carry the things that matter to you.”**

— Njideka Akunyili Crosby

#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bringing together diverse cultural and geographic references, Akunyili Crosby highlights the confluence of her Nigerian and American identities, which shape her sense of self, memories, and lived experience. Using a photographic transfer process, the artist creates densely layered collages made from images of herself, family, and friends as well as textile patterns and other graphic sources that create an imaginary yet specific “third space” of time, place, and culture. Throughout her practice, Akunyili Crosby uses her signature collage style to depict the ways in which her identities collide and merge, speaking to her hybridized sense of self as an African woman in the United States, and meditating on the complexities of diaspora.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, “Realms of the Real.” © Art21, Inc. 2026.

#### ✦ TEACHING CONNECTIONS

#### MEDIA & MATERIALS

collage, painting, photography

#### KEY WORDS & IDEAS

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| childhood     | patterns    |
| education     | perspective |
| everyday      | place       |
| family        | portals     |
| new realities | textiles    |
| objects       | time        |

#### RELATED ARTISTS

Mark Bradford, Salah Elmur, Daniel Gordon, Lubaina Himid, Kerry James Marshall, Joiri Minaya, Wangechi Mutu, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Aliza Nisenbaum, Rachel Rossin, Amy Sherald, Rose B. Simpson

## DISCUSS

### [BEFORE VIEWING]

- What makes a moment special?
- What textiles are you drawn to?
- How can a place transform you?

### [WHILE VIEWING]

- What makes a moment special, according to Crosby?
- How does Crosby describe her relationship to textiles?
- What is a “third space?” How does Crosby describe “third spaces?”

### [AFTER VIEWING]

- How can art make the mundane profound?
- How can fashion be meaningful?
- How does time impact a person’s relationship to place?

## CREATE

- Spend time looking at old family photos. What aspects of the images represent time and place? Notice poses, gestures, fashions, and kinds of technology. Then create a time-capsule installation using collage and found materials.
- Crosby uses art to elevate experiences of everyday life, from lounging to going to the market. What is an everyday experience in your life? Make a painting of that moment.



Njideka Akunyili Crosby in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, “Realms of the Real.” © Art21, Inc. 2026.



Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Still You Bloom in This Land of No Gardens*, 2021 © Njideka Akunyili Crosby.  
Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner. Photo credit: Kerry McFate



Photograph of Njideka Akunyili Crosby and her husband. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026; Njideka Akunyili Crosby's work in progress. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real;" Njideka Akunyili Crosby. *Nwantinti*, 2012 © Njideka Akunyili Crosby. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner. Photo credit: Marc Bernier.

# GET INVOLVED

## SCREENINGS

### ART21 SCREENING SOCIETY

Host a free screening of one episode from the twelfth broadcast season of *Art in the Twenty-First Century*. As part of the Screening Society, Art21 offers high-definition downloads, a screening guide, an education guide, and press images and logos. Museums, schools, community-based organizations, libraries, and individuals are encouraged to host screenings that are free and open to the public, which aim to inspire new audiences with contemporary art and alert local communities about the PBS broadcast. More information at [art21.org/screening-society](http://art21.org/screening-society).

### INDEPENDENT SCREENINGS

Should you or your organization be interested in screening an episode or segment from seasons one through twelve of *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, please contact us at [art21.org/licensing](http://art21.org/licensing).

## ART21 EDUCATION

### ART21 EDUCATORS

A year-long professional development initiative designed to cultivate and support K-12 educators interested in bringing contemporary art, artists, and themes into their classrooms.

### ART21 AMBASSADORS

Art21 presents workshops for teachers in partnership with schools, school districts, and museums. Workshops introduce multimedia resources and related strategies for bringing contemporary art, artists, and themes into classroom and community learning.

### ART21 GUIDES

Both Educator Guides and Screening Guides are available online for all twelve seasons of *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, including a growing list of Educator Guides on artists featured in Art21's digital series. Find all the Art21 Guides at [art21.org/guides](http://art21.org/guides).



Candice Lin in the studio. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 12 episode, "Realms of the Real." © Art21, Inc. 2026

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ART21 VIDEO

[art21.video](http://art21.video)

[art21.org](http://art21.org)

All of Art21's films, including digital series and all seasons of *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, are available to watch for free online.

### SEASON 12 SCREENING GUIDE

[art21.org/guides](http://art21.org/guides)

The Season 12 Screening Guide contains event ideas, discussion questions, and helpful information for your free screening event.