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36 Forces Shaping the Cultural Conversation

These are the Voices of Now

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Who speaks to this moment? Whom should we be listening to, in order to better understand this time, the future, and ourselves? These are the kinds of questions we asked while compiling “The Voices of Now,” a list of 36 forces that are shaping the cultural conversation.

It’s not an easy thing to communicate your ideas so powerfully and so urgently that they rise above the noise of everyday life. But the people and groups on this list have all been able to break through—and they’ve transformed the way we think about and look at the world in the process.

They are voices of joy and inspiration, of equity and responsibility, of innovation and experience. They are voices that empower us to find and use our own.

**GRETA GERWIG / ACTOR, FILMMAKER &
SCREENWRITER**



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Gerwig's *Barbie* is at once a searing critique of gender relations and a jubilant celebration of female empowerment. It has also transformed the blockbuster landscape, becoming the highest-grossing film by a female director and establishing Gerwig as an industry power player.

HONEY DIJON / DJ & PRODUCER



JACOPO M. RAULE/GETTY IMAGES FOR CHLOÉ // GETTY IMAGES

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A legendary club DJ since the '90s, Dijon was tapped by Beyoncé to coproduce two tracks—"Alien Superstar" and "Break My Soul"—on 2022's *Renaissance*, as a celebration of house music's rich history and queer Black roots.

LILY GLADSTONE / ACTOR



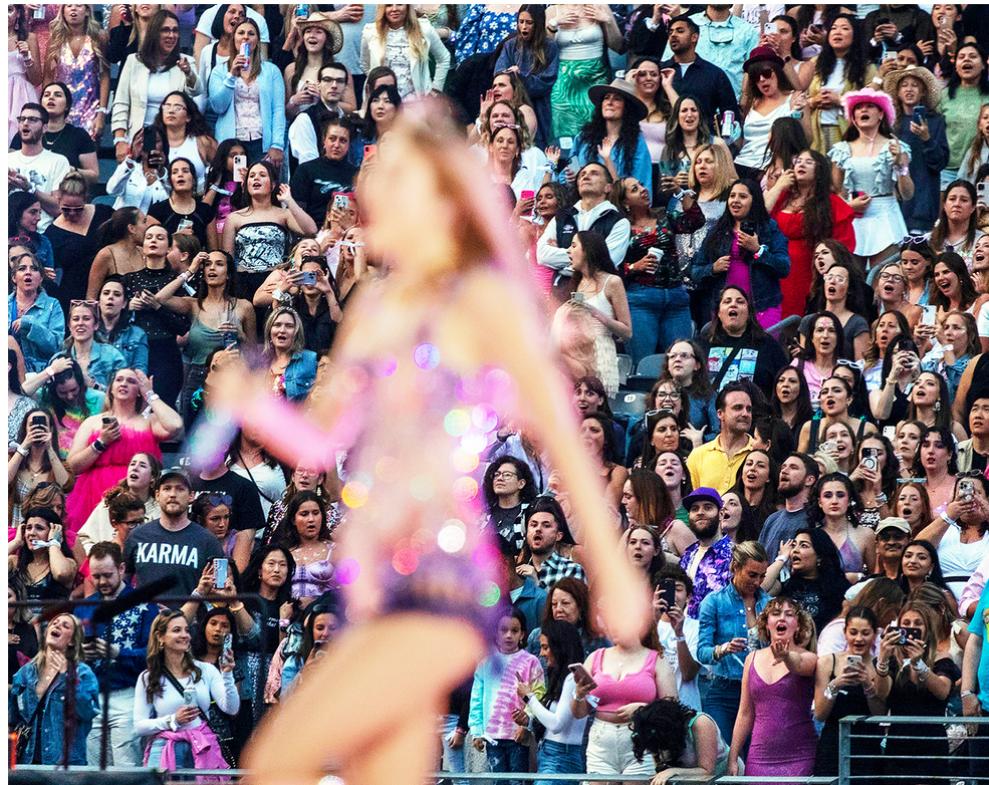
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In an important moment for Indigenous representation in film, Gladstone—of Blackfeet and Nimiipuu heritage—stars in Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon*, based on David Grann's nonfiction book about murder and injustice in an Osage community.

THE SWIFTIES



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Taylor Swift's dedicated, joy-filled followers have taken fandom to new heights, traveling across the country to catch their idol's Eras Tour performances—creating a huge economic influx within local communities in the process. It is estimated that the U.S. leg of the tour will generate \$5 billion in consumer spending. The Swifties have also curated a unique concert culture, beading friendship bracelets ahead of shows to trade with fellow fans. During Swift's performance of "Shake It Off" at a Seattle tour date, the Swifties' rapturous jubilation even caused seismic activity equivalent to a 2.3-magnitude earthquake.

AMERICAN FASHION'S NEW POWER GENERATION



Clockwise from top left: Jerry Lorenzo, Emily Adams Bode Aujla, Peter Do, Raul Lopez, and Christopher John Rogers

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America's robust new wave of star designers has positioned the fashion industry as a leader in responsibility, inclusivity, and innovation. Among them: **Jerry Lorenzo**, with the radically (and exquisitely) reinvented tailoring of his label Fear of God; **Emily Adams Bode Aujla**, who has put an emphasis on craft and material with Bode; **Raul Lopez** of Luar, a finalist for the 2023 LVMH Prize; **Peter Do**, who helms his own brand and was appointed the creative director of Helmut Lang in May; and **Christopher John Rogers**, who creates vibrant sportswear and evening looks.

SIMONE BILES / GYMNAST



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In 2021, when Simone Biles withdrew from the Summer Olympics to focus on her mental health, some speculated that her career was over. But Biles has spent the year proving them wrong. This summer, at her first competition back, she took home the all-around title, and at the Gymnastics World Championships earlier in the month, she won so many medals that she now holds the title of most-decorated gymnast of all time.

PHOEBE PHILO / DESIGNER



GIOVANNI GIANNONI/WWD/PENSKE MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES // GETTY IMAGES

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Perhaps no other person on this list has wielded more influence in recent years without saying a word. Phoebe Philo's storied decadelong tenure at Celine, which began in 2008, reinvented the way women wanted to dress. By creating sharply cut, wearable pieces that always retained echoes of her own singular style, Philo created a new blueprint for luxury that was highly personal and stood apart from the male gaze. Philo stepped away from Celine in 2018, but her work during her time there continues to fuel a cultish devotion, inspiring scores of dedicated Instagram accounts and even a crowded archive sale last fall in Paris. And while she has remained quiet in the interim, this fall is set to mark her glorious return, with the long-awaited launch of her eponymous label.

KWAME ONWUACHI / CHEF & RESTAURATEUR



LANNA APISUKH/REDUX // GETTY IMAGES

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The James Beard Award-winning Onwuachi's new Manhattan restaurant, Tatiana, spotlights the Caribbean, African, and South American flavors of his heritage. "I want to continue to give life to traditions that were passed down to me," he says.

THE BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH CAUCUS



COURTESY THE BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH CAUCUS

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The United States has the worst maternal mortality rates of any developed nation—a dire statistic that disproportionately affects Black women. In 2019, Democratic Congresswomen Alma Adams of North Carolina and Lauren Underwood of Illinois founded a group to change that. “A safe pregnancy is a fundamental right,” says caucus member Representative Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts. “We need bold, systemic solutions to confront this crisis head-on.”

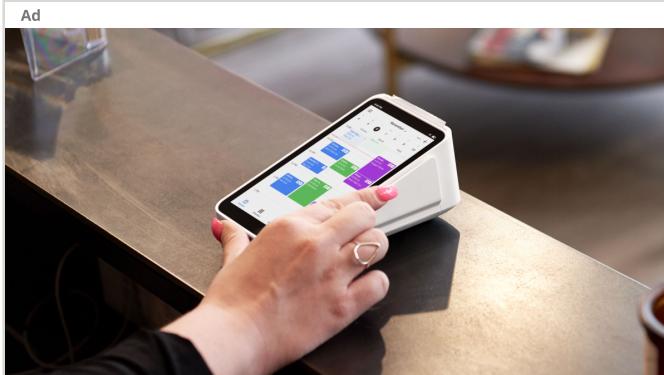
Among the group’s most significant legislative efforts are 2021’s Mommies Act, which Pressley explains “promotes community-based, holistic healthcare,” and this year’s Justice for Incarcerated Moms Act, “which supports pregnant individuals who are incarcerated.” Also introduced this year, the Momnibus Act features 13 bills that would address every leading cause of maternal mortality, morbidity, and disparities.

LOIS LOWRY / AUTHOR



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Lowry has been facing down those who would ban her seminal young-adult dystopian novel *The Giver* since it was first published 30 years ago. As Lowry explains, “The protagonist in the book, the boy named Jonas, begins to gradually perceive the hypocrisy of the people in charge. He realizes that the young people are being lied to. By their parents, their teachers, their government. That hits close to home for some people. It frightens them.” At a time when book-ban efforts are at an all-time high in America, her continued influence proves that anyone with a story to tell can never truly be silenced. “The current victims of book banning, this generation of kids, will be the next generation of voters,” says Lowry. “I have great faith in them.”

LAUREN HALSEY / ARTIST



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Halsey's sculptural artworks and site-specific projects often incorporate imagery and ideas drawn from South Central Los Angeles. During the pandemic, she established a center, Summaeverythang, to help provide food and support to members of the community. On view at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art through October 22, her installation *the eastside of south central los angeles hieroglyph prototype architecture (I)* is a love letter to her neighborhood. Designed for interaction with museum visitors, it features a 22-foot-tall cubelike structure inscribed with hieroglyphic-inspired tags and imagery representing her L.A. community, surrounded by four columns and four sphinxes.

ZOOEY ZEPHYR / MONTANA STATE REPRESENTATIVE



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In April, Zephyr—the first openly trans representative in Montana's state legislature—chided her Republican colleagues for supporting a bill banning gender-affirming care. In response, they voted to ban her from the House chamber for the rest of the 2023 session.

THE STORYTELLERS RESHAPING HOLLYWOOD



Clockwise from top left: Steven Yeun and Ali Wong, Celine Song, Will Sharpe, Adele Lim, Kelvin Yu, and Lee Sung Jin

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Stories about Asian identity have often been sidelined in Hollywood, but a cadre of writers, filmmakers, and showrunners have now thrust them to the center. There's **Celine Song**'s powerful drama *Past Lives*; **Adele Lim**'s raunchy comedy *Joy Ride* (cowritten by Cherry Chevapravatdumrong and Teresa Hsiao); **Kelvin Yu**'s fantastical Disney+ series *American Born Chinese*; and the too-real-to-handle Netflix series *Beef*, created by **Lee Sung Jin** and executive-produced by stars **Ali Wong** and **Steven Yeun**. Next, an adaptation of Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H Mart*, directed by *The White Lotus*'s **Will Sharpe**. "I'm excited that our stories are all over the damn place," says Lim.

TRACY CHAPMAN / MUSICIAN



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This July, Chapman became the first Black woman to earn a number one on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart as a solo songwriter, with Luke Combs's cover of her 1988 hit "Fast Car" illuminating her enduring influence and country music's history of excluding diverse voices.

TORY BURCH / DESIGNER & PHILANTHROPIST



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Over the past few years, Burch's designs have taken a new place in the spotlight of the fashion conversation online. But she has always been focused on empowering women—with the clothes they wear and in their lives. Outside of running her own brand, she heads up the Tory Burch Foundation, which she founded in 2009 with the goal of supporting female entrepreneurs by providing access to funding, fellowships, and financial education.

CLIMATE ACTIVISM'S NEW GUARD



Clockwise from top left: Sophia Li, Titouan Bernicot, the Climate Kids, and Daniel Pauly (left) and Rashid Sumaila (right)

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Today's most impactful environmentalists are coming at the climate crisis from all angles. Fisheries biologist **Daniel Pauly** and bio-economist **Rashid Sumaila** are the recipients of the 2023 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, for their research and reports on the dangers of overfishing. As founder of nonprofit Coral Gardeners, **Titouan Bernicot** is also working to reform ocean conservation by growing and planting resilient corals to revive reef ecosystems.

Back on land, a group of youth environmentalists called **the Climate Kids** won a landmark case in August, suing the state of Montana on the grounds that its continued investment in fossil fuels violates an article in the state constitution that guarantees its citizens the right to a "clean and healthful environment."

And as the host of Meta's *Climate Talks* podcast, journalist **Sophia Li** makes discussions surrounding climate justice, sustainability, and Web3 more accessible. "In order for people to care about the climate crisis, they must first understand it," says Li. "I believe all of our life's work is to be stewards of this shared home. We all have different roles to play in different quantities. It doesn't need to be your official full-time job, but I truly believe caring for this earth is engrained in all of us."

SZA / MUSICIAN



KYLE GUSTAFSON/ZUMA PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO // ALAMY

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Solána Imani Rowe, who performs as SZA, is an artist in control of her craft. An unparalleled vocalist, she has rejected being labeled as simply an R&B artist, citing the influence of jazz, soul, reggae, hip-hop, rock, and more on her sound. The Grammy-winning musician is beloved by fans for the emotional vulnerability and novelistic style of her lyrics. Her latest album,

2023's *SOS*, is so unflinchingly honest that you almost feel like you know her intimately—such is SZA's true magic.

KELLY SAWYER PATRICOF & NORAH WEINSTEIN / PHILANTHROPISTS



BABY2BABY

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Twelve years ago, attorney Norah Weinstein and model Kelly Sawyer Patricof teamed up to take over as co-CEOs of Baby2Baby, a national nonprofit that provides basic care products to children living in poverty. “We had surveyed other nonprofits tackling poverty and listened carefully to feedback from homeless shelters, Head Start centers, and other social service agencies across L.A. Every single one of them said they needed diapers and other basic essentials,” says Weinstein.

According to new data out this year, 47 percent, or almost half, of U.S. families can’t afford diapers. “To us, diapers represent a cycle of poverty—if parents don’t have enough diapers, they cannot drop their children at daycare to go to work or a job interview,” explains Sawyer Patricof. “When we provide families with diapers, they can put food on the table, pay rent, and hopefully get back on their feet.”

Since its launch in 2011, Baby2Baby has provided 300 million items to kids in need across America. Most recently, the group sent hundreds of thousands of diapers, wipes, formula, baby food, hygiene products, and comfort items to families affected by the devastating wildfires in Maui. “We know that recovery will take years and will continue to support families on Maui as long as they need us,” says Sawyer Patricof.

THE WNBA’S OUTSPOKEN SUPERSTARS



AP PHOTO/PHELAN M. EBENHACK

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The women of the WNBA have consistently banded together to lead displays of collective activism addressing racism, policing, gender pay equity, and LGBTQ+, voting, and reproductive rights—and fans have responded, turning out to games in record numbers. They also support one another: To protest the Russian detainment of the Phoenix Mercury's Brittney Griner in 2022, a group that included her teammates Sophie Cunningham and Brianna Turner held a rally on the team's home court.

RAMY YOUSSEF / ACTOR & SHOWRUNNER



MICHAEL KOVAC/GETTY IMAGES FOR AFI // GETTY IMAGES

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Through his semiautobiographical award-winning series *Ramy* and *Mo*, the comedy drama series he co-created with Mo Amer, Youssef has introduced nuanced, humanistic portrayals of American Muslims to mainstream television. Earlier this year, he directed an especially affecting episode of *The Bear*, and in December, he will appear in Yorgos Lantimos's highly anticipated black-comedy fantasy film *Poor Things*, alongside Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo, and Willem Dafoe.

AURORA JAMES / DESIGNER & ACTIVIST



STEFANIE KEENAN/GETTY IMAGES FOR MIU MIU

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In 2020, James, the designer and founder of fashion brand Brother Vellies, launched the Fifteen Percent Pledge, which encourages stores to pledge a portion of their purchasing power to Black-owned businesses. This year, she cofounded the Friends and Family Collective, a venture capital fund focusing on providing funding to Black founders.

DAN COLEN / ARTIST & FOOD ACTIVIST



RYAN MCGINLEY

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In 2011, celebrated New York painter and sculptor Colen established Sky High Farm, a nonprofit in upstate New York that increases access to fresh, local food. “Everyone deserves to eat nutritious food,” says Colen. Since opening, Sky High has donated more than 100,000 pounds of vegetables and 65,000 pounds of animal protein to food-access programs.

SHA'CARRI RICHARDSON / SPRINTER



CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES FOR WORLD ATHLETICS // GETTY IMAGES

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Sha'Carri Richardson's story is a lesson in resilience. In 2021, the runner qualified for the Summer Olympics, but was suspended from Team USA due to cannabis use. 2023 has proven to be her comeback year: In July, she won the 100-meter at the USA Outdoor Track & Field Championships, making her the national champion, and in August, she won gold at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest, Hungary, while also helping Team USA take home the top award for the women's 4 x 100-meter relay.

MICHAEL KORS / DESIGNER & PHILANTHROPIST



DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO // ALAMY

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Created in partnership with the United Nations' World Food Programme, Kors's global campaign against food insecurity, Watch Hunger Stop, celebrates its 10th anniversary this month. Raising money through the sale of limited-edition Michael Kors–branded capsule collections and donations, the campaign has donated more than 30 million meals to the WFP's school-meals program, providing nutritious food to children in underserved regions.

"It's a reason to celebrate and a challenge to do more," Kors says of the campaign's impact. "From social media to friends of the brand, to the real-life conversations we inspire with the special-edition product—the influence the fashion industry has on the world is something we should all put to good use."

THE VOICES OF RESPONSIBILITY IN AI

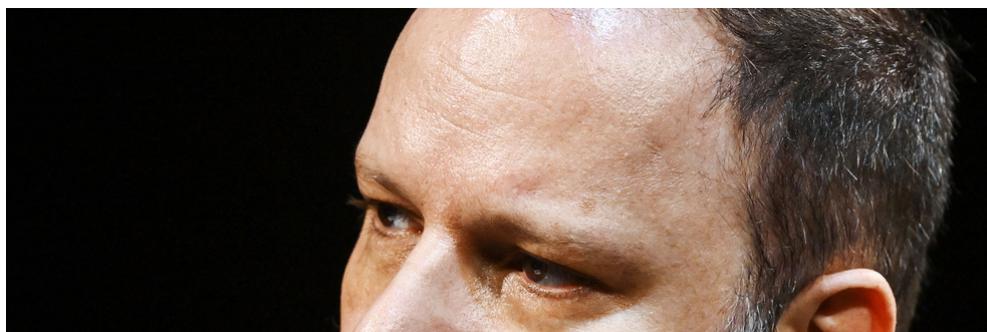


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Computer scientists **Joy Buolamwini** and **Yejin Choi** are each working to eradicate racial and gender bias within AI. Buolamwini is the founder of the Algorithmic Justice League, a nonprofit that advocates for equitable technology, while Choi has developed models that detect biases in language.

“How AI systems are used is ultimately up to the humans who wield the power to design and relay these tools,” Buolamwini says. “We must demand protection from algorithmic discrimination, and make sure the benefits of AI do not only accrue to the privileged few.” Her debut book, *Unmasking AI: My Mission to Protect What Is Human in a World of Machines*, is out this month.

YORGOS LANTHIMOS / FILMMAKER

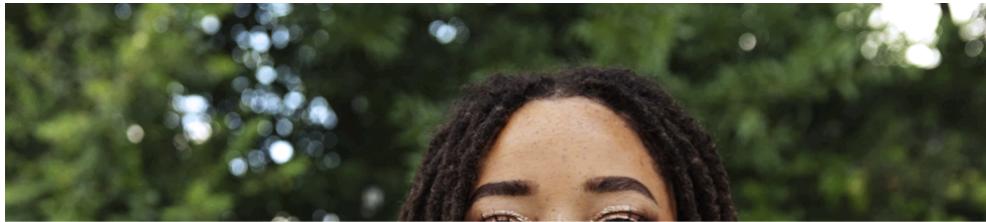


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The director of *The Favourite* and *The Lobster* has never made conventional movies, but Lanthimos's new film, *Poor Things*, might be his most surreal yet. A sort of sexed-up spin on the Frankenstein myth starring Emma Stone, the film took home the Golden Lion after its premiere at Venice, and it's a strong contender for the Academy Awards, too. Due out in December, it's sure to cement Lanthimos as one of today's most visionary auteurs.

BREA BAKER / ACTIVIST & WRITER



INARI BRIANA

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Over the past decade, Baker has contributed to dozens of electoral and advocacy campaigns, including the 2018 student walkouts against gun violence and the 2017 Women's March. Currently, she serves as chief equity officer at Inspire Justice, a social impact firm that advises creatives on how to leverage their platforms and artistry in service of social change. She is also writing *Rooted: The American Legacy of Land Theft & The Modern Movement for Black Land Ownership*, which will examine how land has been systematically stolen from Black families in the United States and makes the case for land reparations.

JACKSON HOWARD & JONATHAN ESCOFFERY / LITERARY DUO



HOWARD: JAMES EMMERMAN; ESCOFFERY: COLA CASADOS

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Farrar, Straus and Giroux editor Jackson Howard is helping to center more queer stories and voices in publishing, while Jonathan Escoffery, whom Howard has edited, is the author of the 2023 Booker Prize–long-listed story collection *If I Survive You*, which examines race and identity through the eyes of a third-culture kid.

LAUREN SANTO DOMINGO / TASTEMAKER



EDWARD BERTHELOT/GETTY IMAGES // GETTY IMAGES

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Women around the world want to dress like Santo Domingo, the unfailingly chic co-founder of fashion platform Moda Operandi. This year, she was named artistic director of Tiffany & Co.'s home collection, which means she's bringing her impeccable taste to one of the house's most renowned categories, overseeing everything from tableware and silver to crystal.

FRIDA ESCOBEDO / ARCHITECT



NIKLAS HALLE'N // GETTY IMAGES

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In 2018, Mexico City native Escobedo became the youngest-ever designer of the annual Serpentine Pavilion in London. In 2022, she was selected to reimagine the Oscar L. Tang and H.M. Agnes Hsu-Tang Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, becoming the first woman to design a wing for the institution.

MELINDA FRENCH GATES & MACKENZIE SCOTT / PHILANTHROPISTS



SCOTT: DIA DIPASUPIL/GETTY IMAGES; GATES: MUSTAFA YALCIN/ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES // GETTY IMAGES

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In the wake of their respective divorces from Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, French Gates and Scott led the charge on a radical, more humble approach to philanthropy, quietly donating billions of dollars with a conspicuous lack of fanfare to organizations focused on areas such as early-childhood education and development, as well as those dedicated to advancing gender equality in tech, education, and politics.

**DARE TURNER, MEG ONLI & ASHLEY JAMES /
CURATORS**



Clockwise from top left: Meg Onli, Dare Turner, and Ashley James

TURNER: CHRISTINA CHAHYADI; ONLI: BRYAN DERBALLA; JAMES: JOHN EDMONDS

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Museums nationwide are reevaluating the kinds of art they show and communities they serve, and that includes three of New York's preeminent institutions. This spring, Dare Turner was named the first full-time curator of Indigenous art at the Brooklyn Museum. Meg Onli has focused on elevating the voices of overlooked artists and was recently named curator-at-large at the Whitney Museum of American Art and co-curator of the 2024 Whitney Biennial; and Ashley James, of the Guggenheim, organized the museum's new show "Going Dark: The Contemporary Figure at the Edge of Visibility," which explores what it means to be seen, not seen, or erased.

DOLLY PARTON / SINGER, SONGWRITER & PHILANTHROPIST



KATHERINE BOMBOY/NBC VIA GETTY IMAGES // GETTY IMAGES

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Throughout her legendary career, Parton has donated millions of dollars to organizations addressing everything from HIV/AIDS and animal rescue to pediatric cancer and the climate crisis, along with founding her own nonprofit, the Dollywood Foundation, which is focused on increasing childhood literacy. This month, Parton is set to release *Behind the Seams: My Life in Rhinestones*, a book chronicling the evolution of her iconic style, followed by her first rock album, *Rockstar*, in November.

MAYA LIN / DESIGNER, ARTIST & ARCHITECT



MICHAEL NAGLE/REDUX

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The renowned designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., which she conceptualized as a senior at Yale University, Lin creates works that explore our relationship with the natural world; they commune with landscapes rather than dominating them.

LAILA GOHAR / ARTIST



DAVID BRANDON GEETING // GETTY IMAGES

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A sort of surrealist Martha Stewart for fashion fans, Gohar is known for the edible tablescapes she creates for museums, galleries, and parties. She describes Gohar World, her line of whimsical tableware, as “dreamy and sophisticated without taking itself too seriously”—a description that could also apply to the fantastical food-based arrangements she’s created for clients like Hermès, Prada, and Comme des Garçons.

BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS / PLAYWRIGHT



OVIDIU HRUBARU/SHUTTERSTOCK // SHUTTERSTOCK

Two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist Jacobs-Jenkins is transforming the historically white American theater landscape through plays such as *Gloria* and *Everybody*, which address topics like race, class, and identity. His 2013 drama *Appropriate*, set during an estate closing that exposes a contentious family history, is debuting on Broadway in November. “I’m drawn to stories about people actively forgetting, especially as I watch us all as a species collectively ignore this tremendously important group experience we all just moved through in the last three years,” says Jacobs-Jenkins. “I’m interested in things that are not just comedies ... in blending the light in the dark.”

A version of this story appears in the October 2023 issue of Harper's Bazaar, available on newsstands October 3. It has been revised and updated since publication.

