

ACS Studio Prize Finalist Announcement

Today the [Artists' Collecting Society](#) (ACS) announces this year's [five Studio Prize finalists](#). This year marks the [tenth edition](#) of the ACS Studio Prize. The winner will receive a £6,000 bursary to use towards the cost of an artist's studio in a UK city of their choice.

Selected by [David Dawson](#) (artist and Director of the Lucian Freud Archive), [Sir Gabriele Finaldi](#) (Director of the National Gallery), [Philip Mould OBE](#) (art dealer and historian) and [Viscountess Bridgeman CBE](#) (Chairman of ACS), this year's finalists, [Benjamin Blanc](#), [Rachel Coyne](#), [Bunny Hennessey](#), [Alexander Koch](#), and [Samah Rafiq](#) bring together an exciting selection of some of the most promising new talent emerging from the UK's contemporary art scene.

'What you are doing with the Studio Prize is nothing short of pure magic. It is transformative and so essential, and affords an emerging artist (like myself) with the courage and confidence to go out there and get 'em!'

– David Gardner, 2022 ACS Studio Prize Winner

The five finalists (biographies and images can be found on Pages 2 – 6) will take part in a group exhibition at [Gurr Johns](#), London this September with the [winner announced on 22 September](#) at the [ACS Studio Prize x Gurr Johns Exhibition Private View](#). The exhibition will take place at their St James's gallery between [22 September – 25 September 2026](#).

'The ACS Studio Prize is establishing itself as one of the most significant national awards for practising visual artists at early career stage. As an artist with a studio-based practice, I know how much difference this generous award will make to the winner, enabling them to concentrate on the critical development of their work at such an exciting and crucial stage.'

– Cathie Pilkington RA

[Note to Editors](#)

The Artists' Collecting Society (ACS) is a [not-for-profit Community Interest Company](#) dedicated to the administration of intellectual property rights such as copyright and the Artist's Resale Right on behalf of visual artists and their estates. Since 2012, ACS has [reinvested close to £250,000](#) in educational bursaries and prizes at universities and charitable institutions throughout the UK. The eponymous ACS Studio Prize is perhaps the most celebrated. You can find out more about the ACS bursaries, residencies and talks on the [ACS website](#). You can also find out more about the ACS Studio Prize past winners via its dedicated [ACS Studio Prize](#) page.

Benjamin Blanc

Blanc graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art.

For the past five years, Benjamin Blanc has been developing a figurative painting practice shaped by his experiences of living in Paris and London. Drawing from the environments, people and circumstances surrounding him, Blanc's works translate encounters into paintings informed by memory, imagination and sensation.

Ties, feathers, leopard print boots and the people that wear them come together in deconstructed form to balance frivolity with gravity of subject. The figures that feature in Blanc's work transform into props which in turn give way to matter to explore the elements that bind humanity together.

Inspired by Austrian artist Maria Lassnig's concept of 'body awareness' in the act of painting, Blanc seeks the point where grotesque becomes graceful and tender.



Rachel Coyne



Coyne graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art.

Grounded in feminist thought, Rachel Coyne's paintings examine and expose systems of power, violence and historical memory, particularly how patriarchal structures shape the representation of women. Informed by both historical and contemporary contexts, her practice explores the relationship between violence and representation, as well as the tension between beauty and brutality within traditional history painting. Coyne uses painting as an act of confrontation, interrogating the ways in which women have historically been suppressed and controlled. Through painting, she seeks to dismantle dominant narratives and create spaces where female presence and agency can be reconsidered.

Using Venetian and Indian reds, indigo and Caput Mortuum violet, Coyne consciously charges her paintings with the associations surrounding each colour. Each pigment carries its own emotional, historical and symbolic weight, further contributing to the dialogue of her work. For Coyne, painting goes beyond a means of representation, serving instead as an active and political agent.

Bunny Hennessey

Hennessey graduated with an MA in Painting from Slade School of Fine Art London.

Bunny Hennessey's work emerges from the physical and sensory conditions of painting. Instead of approaching the canvas from a singular fixed position, Hennessey responds more instinctively through bodily movement. The dialogue between the body and how it moves through and around a painting is at the centre of the artist's practice.

The artist's works exist in a continual state of flux, hovering between abstraction and somatic suggestion. For Hennessey, brushstrokes function less as representation and more as residue recorded through sequences of unconscious physical reactions.

Through Hennessey's visceral process of staining, scraping, removing and adding, a dialogue is struck between the paintings and their materials. Sensation and expression lie at the forefront of each work. Using gesture, rhythm and colour, Hennessey seeks to relocate sensations outside the body, exploring how colour can simultaneously hold time, memory and bodily sensation.



Alexander Koch



Koch graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art.

In his practice, Alexander Koch combines elements of the past and the future, in the form of memories, dreams and ideas, that he then 'activates' in the present. For Koch, the rendering of landscape in his paintings represents a form of mental space. Deeply rooted in the artist's childhood, when he spent large amounts of time outdoors, Koch's approach is intrinsically tied to his imagination - a dialogue between memory and medium.

Through the depiction of gardens, Koch explores their dichotomous character: while the garden draws us closer to nature, it also marks our separation from it. For Koch, the relationship between humans and gardens is reflective of the wider dynamic between nature and human nature. His paintings search for a personal truth and what the artist describes as a 'sensitivity of space'.

Samah Rafiq

Rafiq graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art.

Samah Rafiq's practice examines the visual language of consumer culture, drawing upon the work of Roland Barthes, Guy Debord and others. Rafiq appropriates and distorts the familiar aesthetics of advertising to pull the viewer in before unveiling a deeper, more unsettling critique of contemporary visual culture.



The dynamic between the mundane and the extraordinary is central to Rafiq's work. The artist is interested in how consumer objects can become elevated within contemporary capitalist culture and is particularly interested in the mythologies that advertising creates around mundane objects.

At a time where images have begun to replace direct experiences, Rafiq's work has increasingly begun to explore how people live within a spectacle society. Her practice looks to reveal the tension between seduction and disillusionment, belief and consumption, and deception and attraction.

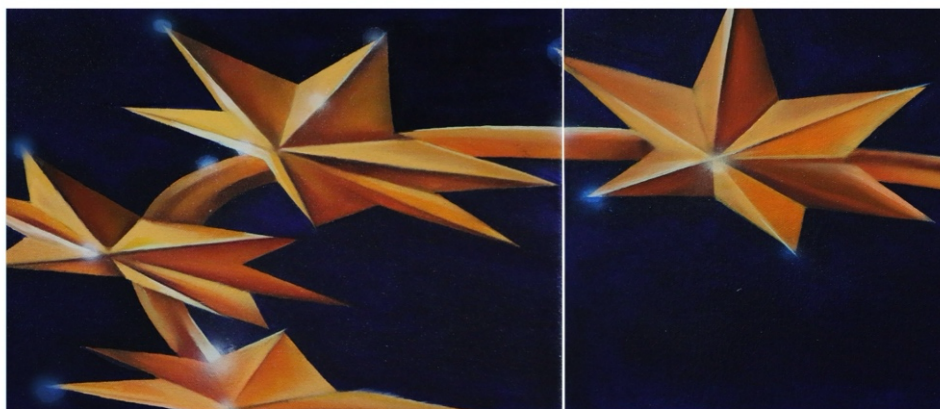
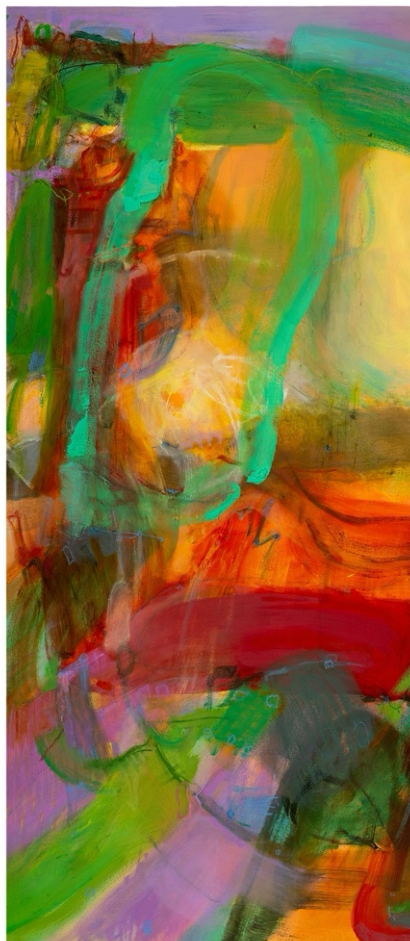
'The ACS Prize allows a recent graduate to be able to rent a studio – every young artist's dream' – Victoria Miro

Information and Images

High-resolution images of each of the finalists, along with captions for press use, are available [here](#).

Additional images and further information are available upon request at email anna@artistscollectingsociety.org.uk

'The prize offers help to artists who have just finished art school and are facing the next stage in their careers. It seems to embody the values of ACS – understated, generous and fully supportive of the people who make our creative world – artists'. – Tim Marlow



ACS Studio Prize 2026 Finalists (clockwise from top left):
Bunny Hennessey, Alexander Koch, Benjamin Blanc, Rachel Coyne and Samah Rafiq.
Images courtesy of the artists.