



Emerging Visions Educator Guide 2022 – 2023

Dominic Chambers: *What Makes the Earth Shake*

About Dominic Chambers

Dominic Chambers (b. 1993 St. Louis, MO; lives and works in New Haven, CT) creates vibrant paintings that simultaneously engage art historical models, such as color-field painting and gestural abstraction, and contemporary concerns around race, identity, and the necessity for leisure and reflection.

A writer himself, Chambers draws inspiration from literature, especially the genre of literature called Magical Realism and the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois. Many of Chambers' compositions incorporate Fabulist elements, including ghostly silhouettes meant to be stand-ins for the artist and surreal landscapes that feel both familiar yet unplaceable.

Chambers' recent bodies of work feature his friends and acquaintances engaged in acts of leisure and contemplation. In these works, Chambers addresses the historical and contemporary lack of representation of Black leisure and intellectualism. Locating his figures in shifting, monochromatic dreamscapes with their gaze fixed on points that seem beyond the realm of the picture plane, Chambers suggests the mutability of our environment, and his scenes evoke the sensation of losing oneself in a good book or moment of quiet reflection.

Chambers has developed a unique, personal language born out of comics and anime from his childhood and the power of a good book. Chambers' work grapples with the subconscious and conscious as well as speaks to the relationship between real and fictitious, imagined space.

For details on Dominic Chambers' cv, please visit the artist's [website](#).



Artist Quotes

"It's important to present Black people in states other than distress and resistance."¹

"I love James Baldwin, and in his documentary *The Price of the Ticket*. He says, 'You think your pain and your heartbreak is unprecedented in the history of the world, and then you read.' That's everything to me. Because he's right. He truly understands the lives and universal emotions people have endured. It's all recorded in books."²

"When I think about magical realism, I think about books and how they are a tool to improve or enhance your imagination... You can only create these spaces between reality and imagination if you're stimulated through an intellectual tool such as reading."³

"We don't always understand what it is that we're looking at, and our experiences may not always be as clear as we think they are."³

"I think my responsibility is to create images of my community members at rest, and as people who are capable of engaging with literary tools and escapism."³

1. Teresa Xie, "Artist Dominic Chambers Has a New Vision of Black Intellectualism: Black voices are being heard in a way that they haven't necessarily been heard before, and what I want to do with this work is have a conversation about that," *Observer*, 02/11/21, <https://observer.com/2021/02/artist-dominic-chambers-has-a-new-vision-of-black-intellectualism/>

2. Jasmine Wahi, "Painter Dominic Chambers on How Jungian Theory Shaped His Art, and the Transformational Role of Therapy in His Own Life: 'You have to go back and uncover what has happened to you,' the artist said," *Artnet*, 03/02/22, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dominic-chambers-jasmine-wahi-2080127>

3. Tessa Solomon, "Dominic Chambers, Fast-Rising Figurative Painter, Heads to Lehmann Maupin," *ARTnews*, 11/11/21, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/dominic-chambers-lehmann-maupin-gallery-representation-1234609766/>



Dominic Chambers, *Window Gaze (Ghost Hand)* (detail), 2021

About the Exhibition

Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) presents *What Makes the Earth Shake*, featuring work by the prolific figurative painter Dominic Chambers. This is the first solo exhibition of the artist's work in the Washington, DC metropolitan region.

The exhibition takes its title from James Baldwin's 1962 *Letter to My Nephew*, where Baldwin describes Black life as being a reality constructed and sustained by the white imagination. Consequently, Black people have had to traverse a haunting social and psychological landscape in the pursuit of freedom, equality, and self-actualization. The works by Dominic Chambers in *What Makes the Earth Shake* highlight the surreal conditions pervading Black life. Surrealism manifests on the periphery of a seemingly ordinary experience, where racial undertones are the shadows of conversation.

With literature being an important touchstone in his work, Chambers marries written with visual recontextualizing cultural narratives through the profound use of color, layers, and imagined space. By presenting the opportunity to witness a self-determined Black body in a moment of leisure, Chambers' work makes a profound declaration on the American consciousness and provides an important reminder – to make the earth shake.



Dominic Chambers, *Send it On (A Love Letter to Love)* (detail), 2019

Keywords & Themes

- Color field painting
- Gestural abstraction
- Race, identity, and representation
- Magical Realism
- Fabulism
- Radical Black Joy
- Rest and reprieve
- Dreamscape
- Monochromatic color schemes

See Lesson Plans for grade-specific keywords and themes.

Discussion Questions

- What can you identify in Chambers' paintings (objects, observations, etc.)? What are some things that are unrecognizable?
- Who are the people in Chambers' paintings? What do you think they are doing?
- What is Magical Realism? How do you see Magical Realist traits reflected in Chambers' artworks?
- How do the colors in Chambers' work influence your interpretation? How would the paintings come across differently if they were made in black and white?
- Can you think of an act, an object, a person, or a place that makes you feel relaxed and rested?



Other Artists to Consider and Reference

- Jennifer Packer
- Sasha Gordon
- Salman Toor
- Peter Doig
- Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

Articles and Websites

[*Artist Dominic Chambers Has a New Vision of Black Intellectualism*](#)

[*Dominic Chambers, Fast-Rising Figurative Painter, Heads to Lehmann Maupin*](#)

[*Painter Dominic Chambers opens up about his process and what he's been making in quarantine*](#)

[*Dominic Chambers with Zoë Hopkins*](#)

[*Dominic Chambers: Soft Shadows*](#)



Dominic Chambers, *Born at Night (Africanus in Black)*, 2020

Timeline

Fall 2022

In collaboration with Tephra ICA, select teachers develop grade level appropriate activities and content that connect to the Fairfax County Public School art curriculum and Standards of Learning.

Fall 2022–Spring 2023

Teachers at participating schools present the curriculum, in the classroom, and students create their artworks. Students and teachers visit Tephra ICA to view Dominic Chambers: *What Makes the Earth Shake* exhibition. Tephra ICA staff visit participating schools.

Spring 2023

Tephra ICA staff select work for Emerging Visions exhibition.

June 17 – July 15, 2023

Emerging Visions exhibition on view at Tephra ICA.

Summer 2023

Teachers offer feedback on their experience participating in the Emerging Visions Program.

To learn more, please contact Tephra ICA's Education and Public Programs Manager, Em Wang at ewang@tephraica.org.

Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art

12001 Market Street, Suite 103 | Reston, VA 20190

703.471.9242 | tephraica.org

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Dominic Chambers, *Dark Skin of a Summer Shade* (detail), 2019