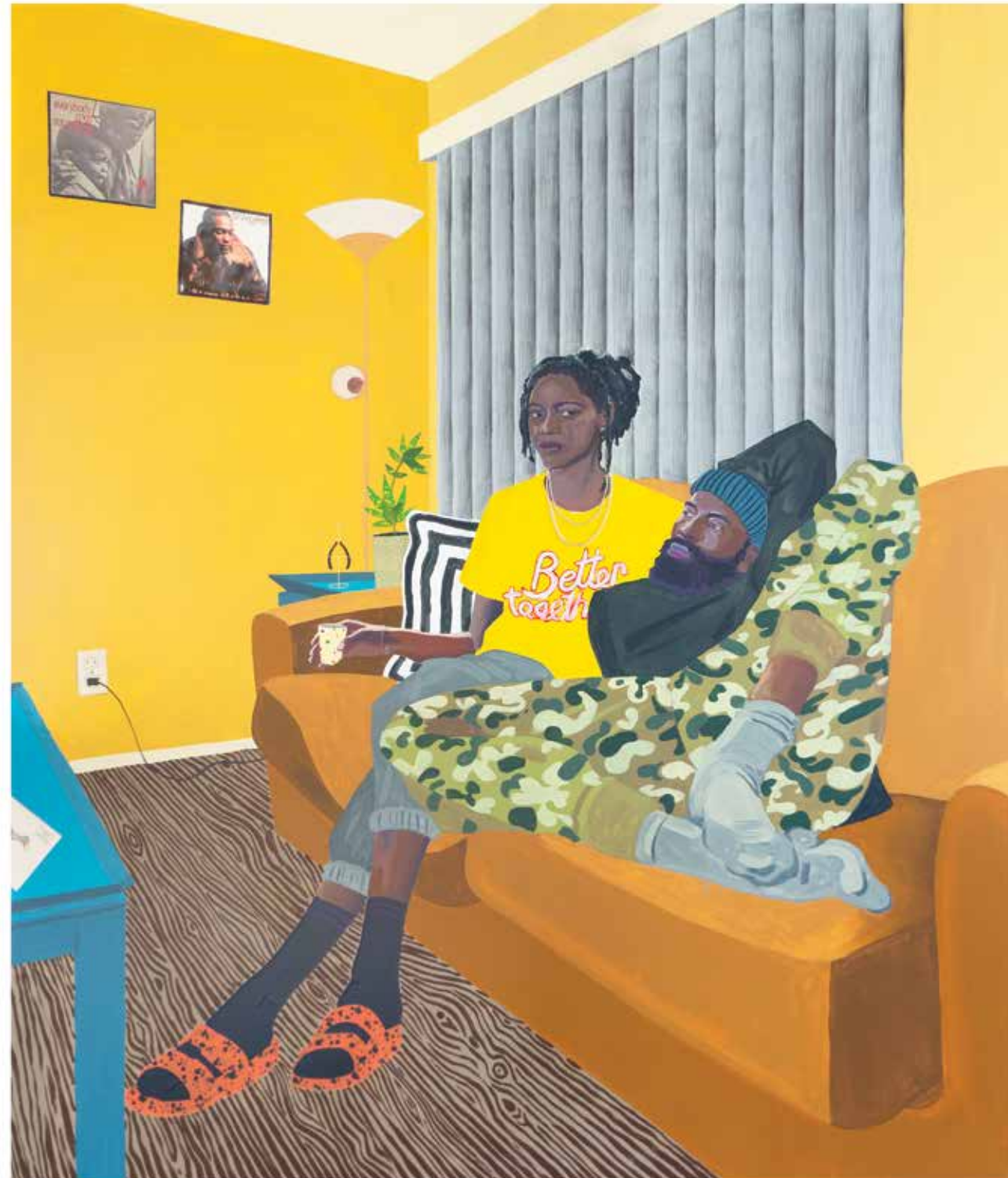


Creative Fire

Painter and glassblower Corey Pemberton nourishes his creative soul in L.A. and nurtures a new generation of diverse artisans nationwide

by JESSICA RITZ Photos courtesy of COREY PEMBERTON



Hold me down, I'll hold you up



Corey Pemberton in his L.A. studio

SINCE ARRIVING in Los Angeles in 2019, Corey Pemberton has found a robust community of like-minded creatives while staying connected to his national artist and activist network. A vignette in his downtown L.A. studio illustrates this dynamic.

Three paintings of multihyphenate force Maurice Harris, media figure and owner of Bloom & Plume floral studio and Bloom & Plume Coffee, are in progress. Harris offers an arresting stare in the pieces, set in his home, of which Pemberton compellingly captures the distinctive visual feast of pattern, texture and color. In a nude portrait, Harris sits upright on his bed and rotates to meet the viewer's gaze, subverting every Western art historical trope related to portraiture. Think Manet's *Olympia* but with multiple literal and figurative twists.

Pemberton and Harris met at Pop-Up Home vintage showroom in Hollywood, which houses UNREPD, the gallery founded by Tricia Benitez Beanum and Sarah Mantilla Griffin that represents Pemberton, along with a growing group of BIPOC, queer, female and nonbinary artists. Harris happened to be purchasing one of Pemberton's own self-portraits, and they became fast friends. In the

relatively short amount of time that Pemberton has been settling into L.A. life after initially landing a job at Joe Cariati's glassblowing workshop, he has swiftly made inroads with diverse and dynamic circles of art makers and collectors.

"I'm an artist whose practice is multifaceted," says Pemberton, a glassblower by training and trade who holds a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. Demand for the 31-year-old native Virginian's mixed-media paintings and glass creations would be enough to keep him working overtime. But Pemberton has yet another important project to nurture.

Toward the end of a six-year period living outside of Asheville, North Carolina, that he largely spent apprenticing and studying at the Penland School of Craft, he and designer Annie Evelyn launched Crafting the Future to address glaring equity gaps. The mission of CTF is to diversify the fields of art crafts and design by connecting BIPOC makers with opportunities that will help them thrive, so with a successful Kickstarter campaign, they sent two students affiliated with Young Aspirations, Young Artists in New Orleans to study at Penland in 2018. Pemberton and

Painting by Pemberton, You Know You See Us.





He was supposed to help her find her way (Mrs. Green)

Evelyn now manage Crafting the Future’s evolving scholarship fund and partnerships; so far they’ve connected five nonprofit entities based in under-resourced communities with eight schools across the country.

“We built this community of people who want to support this cause of diversifying the field of art, crafts and design,” he says. After having to adjust programming during the pandemic, he’s eager to get more kids into hands-on sessions and personally engage with the mission. Over the course of the next

year, Pemberton and fellow glass artist Cedric Mitchell have committed to teaching and mentoring stints with youth at institutions such as Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle, which was started by Seattle-based glass artist Dale Chihuly, and the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York. “These days my passion lies in the painting, and that’s how I feed my soul, but I will always love blowing glass,” Pemberton shares.

On his ever-expanding to-do list is moving this summer to a larger space in South Los

Angeles that will house his studio and serve as a headquarters for Crafting the Future as well as its inaugural artist residency. At the end of August, UNREPD will debut “Home/body,” a solo show of Pemberton’s new paintings. The theme is “loosely about Black love,” Pemberton explains. “Typically I’m working with friends and acquaintances who have been marginalized by society in some way and trying to create space for them to be relatable—but celebrated at the same time.” Much like how Pemberton’s output on all fronts is cause for hope and inspiration.