

Arcmanoro Niles

When There's Nothing I Can Do: I Go to My Heart

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New York



Arcmanoro Niles, *In Between the Glory Days and Golden Years (200 Miles from Where I've Been)*, 2025

I've realized how important it is to take time to connect with the people and things you love, especially when you feel hopeless. These connections and the memory of these moments can remind us of who we are and what's important—and can provide answers on how to move forward.

— Arcmanoro Niles

Lehmann Maupin presents *When There's Nothing I Can Do: I Go to My Heart*, an exhibition of new paintings on canvas by New York-based artist Arcmanoro Niles. Known for his colorful paintings that capture the daily, yet intimate moments of contemporary life, Niles turns to portraiture and still life painting in his latest series, exploring the poignancy and vulnerability of deep emotional connections to ordinary places, objects, and people. Across the exhibition, Niles employs his signature vibrant color palette and swaths of glitter to render tight compositions and focused, singular subject matter, delving into personal relationships and memories—or as critic Seph Rodney writes, to make “oil and acrylic paintings that do something unconventional under the cloak of conventionality.” This presentation comes on the heels of Niles’ recent inclusion in exhibitions at the Barberini Palace in Rome, the Museum Kampa in Prague, and the Parrish Museum in Water Mill, NY; the show also precedes a summer 2026 solo museum exhibition of Niles’ work at the Guild Hall in East Hampton, NY.

Niles is known for his brightly-hued paintings that expand our understanding of traditional genre painting and portraiture. His work offers a window into colloquial moments of daily life—a woman seated at a restaurant table, a child eating an apple, an elderly man playing checkers—with subjects drawn from photographs of friends and relatives and from memories of his past. In depicting not only people close to him but the places and times they inhabit, Niles creates his own record of contemporary life. The paintings, though intensely personal and autobiographical, engage in universal subjects of domestic and family life while referring to numerous art historical predecessors, including Italian and Dutch baroque, history painting, and Color Field painting. Influenced by poetry, Niles’ titles often suggest an underlying narrative behind the seemingly mundane scenes; at the same time, by pairing his own words and images, he seeks to convey a universal sense of emotional experience.

In *When There's Nothing I Can Do: I Go to My Heart*, Niles’ compositions follow the logic of linear perspective, building environments and constructing scenes that feel lived and real. In contrast to this naturalistic structure, Niles’ treatment of his medium—both in color scheme and in the visible materiality of the paint—add an otherworldly or

surreal quality to the works. Throughout his oeuvre and in this series, he makes unconventional choices when it comes to color, developing singular hues directly on the canvas by layering strokes of paint over a neon ground; his subjects’ dark skin tones are rendered with shades of blue or orange, clouds or flames are bright pink, and moments of glitter leap off the picture plane, as though hovering over its surface. The works in *When There's Nothing I Can Do: I Go to My Heart* are painted in a technicolor palette that constructs a signature kind of chiaroscuro, which serves to heighten both the drama and intimacy of his compositions.

Across the exhibition, Niles immerses himself in his intimate relationships to specific people and settings, capturing and elevating their essence through artmaking; his paintings crystallize memory, freezing moments in time. In *One Day My Bark Will Lose Its Bite (I Haven't Seen My Father in Sometime)* (2025), for example, Niles depicts an aging man seated at a table with a game of checkers laid out in front of him, his hand raised near his ear as though straining to listen to his opponent seated opposite him. The walls behind him are covered in framed images, and the entire composition is rendered in a range of blue hues, suggestive of a family home steeped in nostalgia. Niles’ composition places his viewer in the seat across from his subject, implicating them in the narrative. In this way, Niles invites viewers to commune with their own inner lives and memories through interaction with his own.

In his deeply personal *Where Do I Turn to When I Can't Take It Anymore (All the Hope I Had I Hope I Wasn't Wrong)* (2025), the lone self-portrait in the series, Niles turns fully inward. Painted in melancholic shades of teal and periwinkle, the artist depicts himself lying in bed on his side next to an open box of tissues, his eyes open and looking vaguely ahead. The composition suggests a certain sadness—Niles’ forlorn expression is one of longing, or perhaps even heartbreak, probing loneliness and solitude in the wake of loss. Here and across the exhibition, Niles finds solace in connecting with others through the universal language of art making, seeking to harness its capacity for catharsis and transformation. He finds solace in the mundane and everyday, “painting what he knows” to seek meaning and preserve memory.



Arcmanoro Niles (b. 1989, Washington, D.C.; lives and works in New York, NY) makes vivid, brightly-hued paintings that expand our understanding of traditional genre painting and portraiture. Niles offers a window into seemingly mundane moments of daily life—a child seated at the table for breakfast, a man about to get into his car, a couple in their bedroom—with subjects drawn from photographs of friends and relatives and from memories of his past. The paintings, though intensely personal and autobiographical, engage in universal subjects of domestic and family life while also making reference to numerous art historical predecessors, including Italian and Dutch baroque, history painting, Color Field painting, and ancient Egyptian sculpture. Though drawing from many styles and genres, Niles is particularly inspired by the paintings that 16th-century Italian painter Caravaggio created of daily life through representations of his family and friends. In depicting not only people close to him but the places and times they inhabit, Niles creates his own record of contemporary life.

A signature aspect of Niles' work is his use of vibrant oranges, pinks, purples, blues, and greens, which he layers, color after color, to create a saturated glow. The brown skin of each figure is rendered with a gold-like tone, their hair a glimmering halo of purple, orange, or hot pink glitter. Initially working in more traditional realist modes, in 2015 the artist began to create paintings with highly vivid color as a response to his frustration at not being able to achieve the depth of tonality he saw in the skin tones of his family and friends. Once he began to incorporate oranges and pinks into the background scene, he was able to achieve a depth and energy in his work that solidified his methods and shifted the way every painting has looked since. During this period, Niles also began to incorporate what he calls "seekers" into his work. These seekers take the form of small, gestural characters and more fleshy, gremlin-like figures that represent our most basic human impulses and desires. "Seekers," says Niles, "are more impulsive, chasing whatever they think will make them happy in that moment, with no fear of consequence, while the human subjects are more vulnerable and open with their feelings." The seekers both move the viewer formally through the painting and invite us to imagine what events might have occurred before or after the scene depicted, hinting at the inner motivation for each figure.

In addition to the seekers, Niles' titles often suggest the underlying narrative behind the seemingly mundane scenes. In *Longing for Change (I've Given Up on Being Well)*, 2019, Niles portrays himself lying face down on the carpet with a bottle of liquor on the floor next to him. In the lower left corner, two line-drawn seekers are portrayed engaged in oral sex while, off to the right, a gremlin-like seeker is cutting his leg with a knife in an act of self-harm. This self-portrait portrays the artist at a low moment in his life that the title suggests sparked the need for change. In works like *Go Home to Nothing (Hoping for More)*, 2018, Niles depicts himself in a bar surrounded by friends. The only one not engaged in conversation, the scene suggests a sense of loneliness and perhaps desire for stability with a family/partner of his own. The gremlin seeker occupies the bottom left corner of the scene with a knife pointing towards himself, while the line-drawn seekers occupy the outer edges. One female seeker has her arm draped over the artist's shoulder, suggesting his impulses and desires are the things currently keeping him company. Niles' oeuvre offers an insightful documentation of the artist's life and the passing of time. Like those of his early predecessors, each painting invites us to consider the time in which it was made, as well as our own histories. Through his use

of color, painting style, and formal composition, Niles imbues his subjects with a saintly aura, acknowledging the significance of life's mundane moments and positioning them within a larger art historical tradition.

Niles received a B.F.A. from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA in 2013 and an M.F.A. from New York Academy of Art, New York, NY in 2015. Solo exhibitions of his work have recently been organized at Lehmann Maupin, London, United Kingdom (2022); Lehmann Maupin, New York, NY (2021); UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, CA (2020); Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY (2019); Long Gallery, New York, NY (2017); and Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY (2016).

His work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including *Black Melancholia*, Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (2022); *A Place for Me: Figurative Painting Now*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2022); *Fire Figure Fantasy: Selections from ICA Miami's Collection*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; *From The Limitations Of Now*, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK (2021); *Young, Gifted and Black: The Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection of Contemporary Art*, Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NY (2020), *Gallery 400* at the University of Illinois, Chicago, IL (2021), Lehigh University Art Galleries, Bethlehem, PA (2022), and Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, Davis, CA (2022); *Afrocosmologies: American Reflections*, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT (2019); *Punch*, Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles, CA (2019); *On Refusal: Representation & Resistance in Contemporary American Art*, The MAC Belfast, Northern Ireland (2019); *Problem Solving: Highlights from the Experimental Printmaking Institute*, Mechanical Hall Gallery, University of Delaware, Newark, DE (2018); *Portraits of Who We Are*, David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD (2018); and *Mutual Interest No. 3*, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China (2014).

His work is in numerous public and private collections, including the Aishti Foundation, Jal El Dib, Lebanon; Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art, Asbury, NJ; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ; Pond Society, Shanghai, China; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China; and Zabłudowicz Collection, London, United Kingdom.

**Lehmann Maupin**

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has permanent locations in New York, Seoul, and London, as well as team members throughout Asia and Europe.

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