

CULTURED

Step Into the New Haven Studio of Taína Cruz, the Youngest Artist in the Whitney Biennial

Fresh out of graduate school, the artist is taking her hometown of New York by storm with her painted interpretations of the future.

WORDS

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Portrait of Taína Cruz by Faith Couch. All images courtesy of the artist.

You might find the work of Taína Cruz scary. She doesn't see it that way.

The native New Yorker (b. 1998) began making waves in the art world with her paintings of ghoulish, grimacing figures. She managed to secure gallery representation (with Berlin's Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler) before she even graduated from Yale's MFA program. And fresh out of graduate school, she's been selected for two of New York's most coveted exhibitions this spring: the Whitney Biennial (where she is the youngest artist in the show) and the Greater New York quinquennial at [MoMA PS1](#) (opening April 16).

In a practice that spans video, sculpture, and painting, digital-native Cruz uses 3D animation as one tool among many. At the Whitney, she's created a billboard—holding court above Gansevoort Street—of one of her haunting young girls. (Several more of her more modestly sized paintings are included inside the museum.) “I was thinking about how the future can feel both beautiful and terrifying at the same time,” Cruz says in the audioguide. “I wanted to paint a moment that feels like hope and danger mixed together, like looking at the sun even when you know it might hurt your eyes.”

Ahead of her big New York moment, Cruz let *CULTURED* take a look around her New Haven studio.



Taína H. Cruz, *I Saw the Future and It Smiled Back*, 2025. Image courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

What's the first thing you do when you enter your studio?

Take a deep breath.

What's on your studio playlist?

I prefer to work in silence, but when I need to remember a certain tone, I'll turn on Bronx drill, Nina Simone, Aventura, Michael Jackson, or Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

If you could have a studio visit with one artist, dead or alive, who would it be?

Francisco Goya.

What's the weirdest tool/instrument you can't live without?

Lanterns and my pillows that imitate a tree stump or a wooden log.

When do you do your best work?

Mornings.

Who's the first person you show something to?

My inner self, to be honest. She decides if the work is done or not.



Cruz in her studio. Photography by Faith Couch.

Do you work with any assistants or do you work alone?

My dog, Oya.

Is there a studio rule you live by?

I trust my body. When it tells me to go home, I go home.

If your studio were an animal, what would it be?

A brown bear.

What's your studio uniform?

I definitely dress seasonally. In the north, we get all four seasons, which feels special.

Tell us about the best studio visit you've ever had.

Sometimes I FaceTime my mom and show her what I've been working on. She comes up with the best interpretations, truly creative with her words, often seeing something I hadn't thought of before.

Any rituals to prepare for a studio visit?

A prayer.

What book changed the way you think about art?

Eloise by Kay Thompson.

