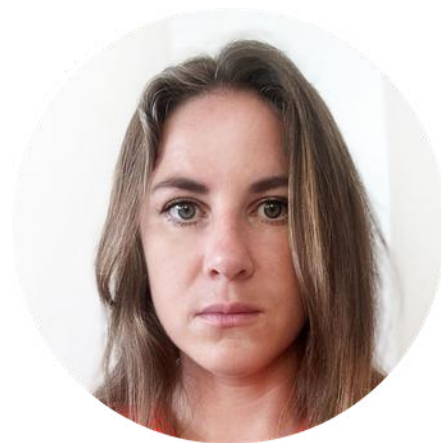


VISUAL ART JOURNAL





— Intro



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

On the Front Cover:
Jan van Luyn
Embrace
2025

On the Back Cover:
Sarah Moffett
Three Lemons
2025

Dear Reader,

You are holding the 62nd issue of our magazine.

As you turn the pages, you will probably notice that this issue features a particularly large number of abstract works. Abstraction is a form of art that gives the viewer freedom of perception and greater space for interpretation, while allowing the artist to move away from the need to represent the world realistically and instead enter a world of emotions, feelings, and free forms.

In contrast, this issue also presents photography, which, like a mirror, reflects what is there before us.

And yet, whether we look at abstract works or photographs, we often encounter the same themes, concerns, and experiences. In the end, the tools and techniques are not what matter most. What matters is what we, as viewers, feel when we look at art, and how successfully the artist has managed to realize and express their idea.

So, as always, make yourself comfortable. More than 100 pages of art await you.

Enjoy reading!



We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: <https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/>

Karli Henneman

You studied art in Paris and New York before establishing your practice in Los Angeles. How have these different cities and their visual cultures shaped your artistic language?



Karli Henneman | K.533 | 2026



Paris was the ideal place for me to begin my artistic studies. I was surrounded by renown pieces of art history every day. I would draw in my sketchbook at museums such as the Louvre and Centre Pompidou. The classical art training there helped me learn the rules in art before I could break them. New York is filled with dynamic energy and constant visual stimulation. My work there was bold, and my practice had a repetitious and obsessive quality. I was drawn to creating dense multimedia works mirroring the energy of the city that never sleeps. The most significant transformation in my work happened after moving to Los Angeles. I shifted away from dense compositions with bold colors, to a minimalist exploration of light and texture.

Your graduate studies were in Art Therapy. How has this background influenced your understanding of memory, emotion, and the creative process, and where do you distinguish artistic inquiry from therapeutic practice?

Art Therapy has been something I was unconsciously practicing before even becoming aware of it. Making art has been a constant in every chapter of my life- through the hardships and highlights. The clinical practice of art therapy helps bridge emotional and verbal expression. What can't be expressed through words can often be revealed through the process of art therapy. I am surprised how a person may claim, "they aren't good at art", and once they start creating, a new perspective and story are revealed. For me, the act of creating art is an intentional mindfulness practice. It is a way for me to process my thoughts and emotions while



discovering a deeper connection with the core of my being. While working, I am free of self judgement and intuitively problem solving through play and curiosity. If someone isn't innately confident in creating art they often need support getting started without judgement. The negative inner voice can persuade us to think "we aren't enough". The art therapist can be a supportive guide to make this process start to flow.

What prompted the creation of the Memori series, and what does the title signify for you?

I found myself ruminating on past experiences searching for some sort of closure. These thoughts were frustrating me and I was curious if I could find a way to reshape my relationship with them in my art. I found that the emotional charge of these memories began to dissipate as I worked on this series. Turning something that once felt unresolved into a work of art that could stand on its own- open to an array of interpretations. The title "MEMORI" represents an abbreviated snap shot of "what was" transforming into "what is".

When beginning a new work, how do you choose the memory or emotional experience you wish to revisit? Do certain memories return across multiple compositions?

The memories arrive organically, often songs will trigger an emotion. Music from that era of my life is often played in my studio while I work. Unresolved emotions from previous relationships, significant trips I taken, loss, love, regret, and gratitude are all emotions constantly at play.

Drawing with your non-dominant hand while looking away from the paper involves relinquishing a significant degree of control. How do intention and spontaneity

coexist within this process?

By looking away from the paper I remove the desire to control an outcome. This pulls me more into the emotion of the experience rather than trying to force a distinct representation. It taps into the state of "being" vs "doing". The art then becomes a byproduct of the exercise. This removes the desire to prove skill or technique and exist in the present moment of organic mark-making.

The submitted works range from pale, nearly monochromatic surfaces to deeper brown and green tonal fields. How do you determine the palette of each piece, and what emotional qualities do these tonal shifts carry for you?

My studio is surround by trees and nature. I see hummingbirds and butterflies dance past my windows. I see the movement of the clouds and shifting tonality of light throughout the day. The base coats of my work dry in the direct sunlight outside. I feel like I am collaborating with the weather as I work. This connection of the natural world meeting my emotional world create a union of elements. Colors then become tied to feelings.

As a co-founder of Lake Street Project and an artist whose work often enters carefully considered interiors, how has your curatorial experience shaped the way you imagine viewers encountering your work?

My hope is that my work can speak to an array of people. I don't want it to dominate a space, but instead compliment the other design elements its surrounded by. I am inspired by the interplay of art, objects, and furniture in a space. I think they all must work in harmony to offer an intentional experience and feeling.



Sarah Moffett

I am a Maltese visual artist working across photography, textiles, and mixed media. I hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Digital Arts and a Master of Arts in Film Studies from the University of Malta.

My background in photography and film informs my approach to image-making and visual storytelling. My work spans analogue photography, constructed imagery and experimental photographic processes.

Project Statement

My practice developed from a background in photography and an interest in the constructed image, materiality and visual storytelling. I explore photography as both an image-making process and a physical encounter, experimenting with staging, analogue processes, scanning, distortion and material intervention.

Increasingly, my practice considers how photographic images can move beyond representation, exploring their relationship with objects, surfaces and other material forms. Through this, I am interested in the point at which the boundaries between image and object begin to blur, and how traces, fragments and material qualities can evoke ideas of presence, absence, memory and time.





— Interview

Anna Survivor

Your professional path spans tattooing, interior and architectural design, academic drawing, and abstract painting. What led you to make painting an independent and central part of your creative practice?

Probably, above all, the fact that painting gives me a feeling of complete freedom. Here I can decide absolutely everything myself: which colour to choose, which material or tool to work with, what size the work will be, and where the process will go. I do not have to adapt to someone else's expectations or know in advance what the final result should be.

In both tattooing and interior design, I have always worked for myself, but there is inevitably a client involved. In tattooing this is especially obvious: a person comes with their own wishes, and although I always have my own professional opinion and can refuse a project if I do not want to do it, ultimately it is their body and their decision. Design works a little differently, but there are still many limitations: the client's tasks and wishes, budget, dimensions, materials, the characteristics of the space, functionality, deadlines and



schedules. I like working within these frameworks, and I genuinely love both tattooing and design. But painting gave me a completely different kind of space. There is no client, no brief, and no need to arrive at a particular result by a particular deadline. I can start a work without knowing how it will end, change direction, cover something, leave a trace, or simply stop and see where the process is going.

I think that is why painting has become such an important and personal space for me. It is an opportunity to stop controlling everything for a while and simply allow myself to act intuitively. At the same time, design remains my main professional activity and source of income, while painting exists alongside it as an independent part of my creative life — a space that belongs completely to me.

The name “Anna Survivor” suggests endurance and transformation. What does this name mean to you personally, and how does it relate to your identity as an artist?

The name Anna Survivor is very personal to me. I even have a tattoo of the word “Survivor” on my neck.

I do not take this word literally. For me, it is much deeper than simply being able to get through difficult circumstances. It has become a kind of definition of my life path.

I grew up in an orphanage and went through difficult family circumstances from childhood. After leaving the orphanage, I had to start building my life independently at a very early age: getting an education, finding work, making decisions, and



Anna Survivor | Critical State | 2026



gradually creating myself almost from nothing. Later, there were other serious challenges in my life. About eight years ago, thyroid cancer was discovered by chance. I had to undergo urgent surgery, and since then I have been taking hormone replacement therapy continuously. But I have never viewed my life simply as a series of tragedies. On the contrary, I value my experience, because it has shaped me in many ways and brought me to where I am now. For me, Survivor is not about a person who is constantly fighting or living in a state of war with the world around them. It is about the ability to go through difficult periods, remain yourself, and continue moving forward. I could have ended up in a completely different place in my life, but each time I found the strength to keep going and to decide for myself who I wanted to become. So Anna Survivor is not an attempt to present myself as special or invincible. I am not super-rich, I am not super-famous, and I do not consider myself someone who has conquered everything. For me, it is much simpler: I am a person who could have broken many times, but did not. I was able to build my life and become the person I want to be. That is why this name has become part of my artistic identity. It reminds me of my past, but at the same time it speaks about the present and about the fact that I continue moving forward.

You describe painting as a way of transferring tension, memories, and emotions onto a physical surface. Do you usually begin with a specific experience in mind, or does its meaning emerge through the act of painting?

Usually, I really do begin with a particular internal state. I am a person who thinks a lot and can constantly worry about the past, the present, or the future. Sometimes I reach a point where I simply realise that I am tired of it and need to stop thinking about it, at least for a while. That is when I go and paint. But at that moment, I do not set myself the task of transferring a specific problem or a specific experience onto the canvas. I do not think, "Now I am going to paint about what happened to me today," or "this brushstroke will mean this." Rather, I simply shift my attention to painting. And something interesting happens for me there. The state I

bring to the work gradually changes during the process. What was worrying or irritating me ten minutes earlier stops being the main thing. I become interested in what is happening with the work itself: the colour, the combination of materials, the surface, the texture, and the way the image is developing. I begin to enjoy the process, and at some point I realise that I no longer want to return to the thoughts I came in with. So I would say that my emotions and experiences really do enter the work, but not literally. I cannot say that a particular brushstroke is dedicated to a particular problem. It happens much less consciously. My state is transformed into colour, texture, layers, and the overall feeling of the work. What is especially important to me is that painting allows me to let go of that state. Sometimes it is simply anxiety or accumulated tension; sometimes it is memories, regrets, thoughts about what has already happened or what might happen in the future. Through the process of painting, I can almost leave all of this on the surface instead of continuing to hold it inside me. That is why the meaning of a work does not fully exist in advance for me. I begin with a particular internal state, but I do not know what it will become. The process gradually changes both me and the work. At some point, I simply realise that I feel good, that I enjoy what I am doing, and that whatever was troubling me before I started no longer has the same power.

Movement appears to be fundamental to your work. How do the gestures of your body, the speed of execution, and the pressure you apply shape the final composition?

Movement is indeed a very important part of the process for me. I used to dance, so a sense of the body, fluidity, and movement comes naturally to me. At the same time, movement does not necessarily have to be soft or slow — it





can be a broad movement from the shoulder, strong pressure, a sharp change of direction, or, conversely, a smoother, more extended movement.

I do not particularly like working with a conventional brush. I am much more interested in interacting with the surface through different tools: a palette knife, sponge, fabric, spatulas, abrasive materials, and other objects that allow me to rub, work into, remove, or shift the paint. I also enjoy experimenting with objects that were not originally intended for painting but can leave unusual marks or textures.

I am especially interested in the interaction between different materials. For example, I can apply a large, active area of aerosol paint and then spray water over it. The drops of water penetrate the layer of paint, make it change, and leave a very distinctive trace. It is difficult to reproduce this effect with a brush — it comes from the interaction between the materials and the precise moment at which I intervene in the process.

The position of the work itself is also important to me. I can lift and tilt the canvas, change the direction in which the water and paint move, and allow them to flow across the surface. So the composition is shaped not only by my direct movement, but also by the way the materials respond to that movement.

At the same time, I do not try to work as quickly as possible. It is more important to me to complete the process. If I start a painting, I usually find it difficult to leave it unfinished for several days — I want to go through the process to the end at the moment I have begun it. Sometimes it takes very little time, sometimes longer, but for me the feeling of completion is what matters.

Ultimately, physical movement becomes part of the image itself. The way I move, the amount of pressure I use, whether I change direction or the position of the canvas — all of this directly affects the trace that remains on the surface and

what the final image becomes.

Your process combines intention with spontaneity. Which elements do you tend to plan in advance, and at what point do you allow instinct or chance to take control?

In painting, I try not to control almost anything in advance. I have a canvas or a sheet of paper in front of me, all the materials are nearby, and I simply choose whatever I am interested in at that moment. I do not have a pre-planned sequence in which I know what the first layer will be, what the second will be, and how everything should end.

I have tried working that way, planning the sequence and the result in advance, but it does not suit me. In that case, the work starts to feel too programmed and artificial. In life, I already have enough processes that require routine, schedules, planning, and control. So in painting, I find it important to let go of that instead.

At the same time, the absence of a plan does not mean the absence of decisions. Sometimes everything starts with one very simple impulse. For example, I take a particular shade of pastel because at that moment I feel like working with that colour. Then I might choose a similar shade of paint or aerosol because it interacts well with the first colour. But the next second I might spontaneously add bright pink, lime green, or some other colour simply because I want to at that moment.

So the work develops through a constant reaction to what has already appeared on the surface. I look at the result of the previous action and decide what I want to do next.

Sometimes I can continue a logic that has emerged, and





sometimes I can completely change direction. I think that is what interests me about this combination: I do not plan the result, but I constantly make decisions during the process. I allow the work to develop intuitively and accept what appears by chance or unexpectedly, instead of trying to force it in advance to become exactly what I imagined.

You worked as a tattoo artist for more than ten years. How has the experience of making permanent marks on the human body influenced your understanding of line, gesture, pain, and personal history?

Tattooing has given me a great deal, both as an artist and as a person. Over the years, I met a huge number of people, heard their stories, learned how to interact with different personalities, and, of course, continued to develop myself. But beyond that, tattooing strongly shaped my perfectionism. When you work on human skin, precision really matters. You constantly control the line, pressure, depth, and movement of your hand. A millimetre can matter. And because the result remains on a person's body, every mistake feels very serious. Of course, I made mistakes at the beginning too, and they discipline you very strongly. You can remember one of your mistakes for many years and understand very clearly where you could have done better. For many years, I worked in different areas of tattooing — from realism and graphic work to dotwork and whip shading. I did portraits, animals, flowers, cities, and many different kinds of imagery. So I have a great deal of experience specifically with creating images on the human body. But the most interesting thing for me happened when I began studying academic drawing and painting alongside tattooing. I clearly felt how different human skin and paper or canvas are as surfaces, and how different the ways of thinking about them are. Despite all my experience in

tattooing, I consciously do not try to use it directly in my painting. I do not transfer familiar tattoo imagery or techniques into my paintings.

On the contrary, painting became an opportunity for me to do things that I cannot allow myself to do in tattooing. On canvas, I can make a mistake, cover a layer, change direction, try something new, and change the result again. No one will be hurt by it, and I do not have to remember for the rest of my life that I once did something imperfectly.

So if tattooing taught me to control every movement and strive for absolute precision, painting became an opposite experience for me — an opportunity to loosen that control. I can allow myself to make mistakes, change my mind, and not know in advance what the result will be.

I think that is the most important connection I currently see between tattooing and painting. Tattooing made me a very strong perfectionist, while painting gives me a space where I can become a little freer from that perfectionism.

You are currently living and working in Bali. Has the island's light, landscape, rhythm, or cultural environment influenced your palette and your development as an abstract painter?

I often think about this question because Bali is very easy to imagine as an obvious source of inspiration for an artist. There is a lot of colour, nature, interesting architecture, light, and a fairly developed artistic environment.

But if I am being honest, I cannot say that Bali has directly shaped my artistic language.

I have lived here for almost five years, so of course it is impossible to completely separate yourself from an environment you have been in for that long. During the first years, I was very strongly impressed by the colours, landscapes, nature, and light. Surely all of that has remained with me in some way. But I do not think about colour literally: I do not choose green because there are many plants around me, or blue because the ocean is nearby. I have always loved bright colours, regardless of where I lived.

I would say that Bali's influence on me is more indirect. This place is constantly around me, and I simply experience it as part of my life. I even have a desire now to experiment with plant imprints and certain natural forms, but this is not an attempt to make work "about Bali." I am more interested in what happens to form and material when I use something from the environment around me.

At the same time, I do not strongly connect my personal or artistic identity to a particular place. I have lived abroad for quite a long time and have become accustomed to seeing the place where I live more as the environment I happen to be in at a particular moment than as part of the definition of who I am. I can love the place where I live, be interested in its culture, and still not feel the need to express it directly in my work.

So I would say that Bali has influenced me more as a long-term experience of living in a particular environment than as a specific source of artistic inspiration. I am sure that some of what I see and feel here has already become part of the way I perceive things; I simply do not try to translate it into direct visual quotations.

And perhaps I am interested in preserving that independence. I live in Bali, but my work does not have to be about Bali. For me, what happens within the artistic process itself is more important.

— *Exhibition review*

The Names Gallery in Vienna – 12-13 September

On September 12–13, 2026, The Names Gallery presented an international group exhibition at The Last Abstraction Gallery in Vienna, bringing together artists from different countries, generations and artistic backgrounds. Curated by Anna Gvozdeva, the exhibition offered a broad panorama of contemporary artistic practices, from painting and photography to abstraction, portraiture, landscape and experimental approaches to image-making.

Rather than being built around one narrowly defined theme, the exhibition developed through contrasts. Bright, expressive paintings appeared alongside quiet monochrome photographs; figurative works were shown next to abstract compositions; urban scenes coexisted with landscapes, portraits and studies of natural forms. This variety gave the exhibition an open structure and allowed each work to retain its individuality while contributing to the overall rhythm of the display.

One of the strongest aspects of the exhibition was precisely this coexistence of different visual languages. Some artists worked with intense colour, gesture and layered surfaces, creating compositions charged with movement and emotion. Others relied on restraint, subtle tonal transitions or carefully constructed photographic observation. Together, these approaches formed a dialogue between spontaneity and control, density and emptiness, colour and monochrome.



The exhibition also revealed recurring subjects that connected otherwise very different works. Nature, memory, the human figure, architecture and the urban environment appeared repeatedly, although interpreted through highly individual perspectives. In some works, landscape functioned as a recognisable place; in others it became an atmospheric or almost abstract field. Portraiture ranged from direct representation to psychologically charged images in which the figure seemed to exist somewhere between observation and imagination.

Photography played an important role in the presentation. Black-and-white images introduced a distinct visual pause between the more saturated paintings, while photographs of people, cities, architectural details and organic forms expanded the exhibition's exploration of perception. The photographic works often focused attention on small moments or overlooked details, contrasting with the physical immediacy of painterly gesture.

The paintings, meanwhile, demonstrated a wide spectrum of approaches. Some were built around colour and energetic brushwork, while others used figurative or narrative elements. There were works with a strongly decorative or textural character as well as more restrained compositions in which atmosphere and space were central. Displayed together, they emphasised how contemporary painting continues to move freely between abstraction and representation rather than treating them as opposing categories. The installation itself contributed to this sense of dialogue. Works of different formats were arranged in compact groups across the gallery walls, creating



relationships through colour, scale and subject matter. Visitors were encouraged to move from one work to another, discovering connections that were not always immediately obvious. A vivid abstract composition could lead the eye toward a muted landscape; a photographic portrait could be encountered alongside an architectural or conceptual image. The presence of visitors also became part of the exhibition's atmosphere. People stopped to study details, photograph works and compare different pieces across the room. These moments reinforced the social character of the project. The exhibition was not simply a collection of individual works but a space of encounter — between artists, viewers and artistic practices that might not otherwise appear together. Curated by Anna Gvozdeva, the project reflected the approach of The Names Gallery to international group exhibitions: creating a platform where different artistic voices can be presented without forcing them into a single stylistic framework. The exhibition's strength came from plurality. Instead of attempting to smooth out differences, it allowed them to remain visible and productive.

This approach is particularly relevant within contemporary art, where artistic practice increasingly crosses geographical and disciplinary boundaries. The Vienna exhibition brought together artists whose works emerged from different cultural environments but shared an interest in communicating through visual form. Whether through painting, photography, abstraction or figurative imagery, each participant contributed a distinct perspective.

The resulting exhibition was therefore less about establishing one common aesthetic than about creating a temporary visual community. For two days, The Last Abstraction Gallery became a meeting point for different ways of seeing: expressive and contemplative, personal and observational, material and conceptual.

The exhibition took place on September 12–13, 2026, at The Last Abstraction Gallery, Vienna, and was organised by The Names Gallery.

The participating artists were Trupti Dave Wehner, Gina Senko, Lou Liska, Branislav Suvajdzic, Sofia Hurtado Montes, Claudio Paglia, Jeremy Bianco, Shaina Mohammed, Asma Kocjan, Svetlana Popovic – Lana S, Antonio Jose Quevedo Cabello, Pia Zabret Verbole, Lyudmila Muravyova, Anna Sergiel, Jens Christoph Gehring, Bagzhan Alikhanov, Michael Voynov, Boran Barış Balçık, Sanyart, Horacio Jose, Timeea Ionela Brandas, Mario Schuster, Balsa Gobovic, Selina Sorge, Ana-Maria Lazar, Sivan Buntova, Josef Aigner, Nela Coralic, Marina Ćosić Trbara, Dorotheos Antoniadis, Chaehyun Min, Zhanna Bieloglazova (Kravchenko), Tatjana Danilovic, Gerardo Gutiérrez Castelan, Anastasiya Ihnatovich, Kong Xin Yu, RIYA_art, Danijela Veljković, Edina Seleskovic, Marina Parés Soliva, Natalia Babych, Danielle Vibert, Eleonora Quattrini, Sofia Bellavere, Aylal Heydarova and Josué Camacho.



— Interview

Jennifer Ko

Your paintings often focus on quiet, everyday moments and familiar objects. What draws you to subjects that might otherwise be easily overlooked?

I'm interested in the things we live with so closely that we stop noticing them. An ordinary object or quiet moment can hold an entire history—who used it, who cared for us, where we came from. Painting gives me a reason to look again and give those things the attention they deserve.

Motherhood has had a profound influence on both your life and your artistic practice. How has becoming a mother changed the way you observe and interpret



ordinary moments?

Motherhood completely changed my relationship with time. When my children were babies, the days could feel incredibly long, but at the same time, everything was changing so quickly. You're exhausted and moving through all of these repetitive routines—feeding, washing bottles, cleaning, rocking a baby to sleep—and then suddenly that stage is gone.

I think becoming a mother made me much more aware of how temporary ordinary life actually is. The things that can feel mundane while you're living them often become the things you miss later. That realization changed the way I paint. I started paying attention to gestures, routines, objects and spaces that I probably wouldn't have noticed before.

You describe painting as a way to slow time and preserve fleeting experiences. Are there particular memories or moments that you feel compelled to hold onto through your work?

I'm especially drawn to memories that I know I can't return to. Some are from my own childhood and my Korean-American upbringing, while others come from watching my children grow. I think there is often a point when you realize something that once felt completely ordinary has become a memory. Those are the moments I want to hold onto.

How do you know when an ordinary scene or object has the potential to become a painting?



Jennifer Ko | Citrus and Steel Bowl | 2026



It's usually instinctive. Something will make me stop—a certain composition of light, the depth of shadows, a gesture, a familiar object, or the way a figure or object occupies a room. I'm not necessarily looking for something beautiful.

I think there has to be some kind of emotional recognition for me. The subject itself can be incredibly simple, but if it reminds me of someone, a particular time in my life, or even just a feeling I want to remember, I start imagining it as a painting.

As a Korean-American artist raised in Los Angeles, how has growing up between cultures shaped your ideas of home, belonging, and family?

Growing up between cultures made me understand home less as a single place and more as something created through people, food, language, objects, and routines. Some of my strongest memories of family are very sensory and specific—the things that were on our table, the way food was prepared, or the objects I saw every day. As I've gotten older, I've realized how much those details shaped my sense of belonging.

As I've gotten older, I've realized how much of what I remember about childhood is tied to ordinary domestic life—the foods my family cooked, the vegetables my grandmother grew, the objects that were always around the house, and the ways people cared for one another without necessarily talking about it.

I think that has shaped the way I understand belonging. There can be multiple versions of home existing at once. Now that I'm raising my own children, I find myself thinking about what gets carried forward and what changes. A lot of those questions quietly find their way

into my paintings.

Is there a particular subject you feel especially drawn to painting, and what is it about that subject that continues to inspire you?

I keep coming back to women inside the home. Lately I've been working on a series where women are seen through the windows of their homes, going about their everyday routines—working, cleaning, cooking, caring for children, or simply moving through their day. I'm interested in looking from the outside in, because there's something both intimate and distant about it. You're witnessing a very private, ordinary moment that would usually go unseen.

So much of women's lives happens this way, especially the work of caring for a home and a family. It can be repetitive and almost invisible, but there is also beauty and tenderness in it. I want to give those moments space and permanence.

What do you enjoy most about the process of working with oil paint?

I love the physicality of oil paint. There is a luminosity that is hard to describe. I can work loosely, scrape something away, soften an edge, or build up color until the painting begins to feel right. I especially love mixing color. I have a dedicated freezer that I use to store my pre mixed colors. Sometimes I'll spend a long time trying to find exactly the right cool gray, green, or warm shadow.

It's a very physical and intuitive process. There is a point when the paint stops feeling like material and suddenly becomes light, skin, fabric, or atmosphere. That transformation is probably what I enjoy most.



Soyeon Lee is an artist working across drawing, painting, and material-based practices. She received her MFA in Painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2026 and her BFA in Painting from Hongik University in Seoul in 2024.

Her practice explores perception through the physical qualities of surfaces and materials. Working with fabric, Tyvek, watercolor, graphite, oil pastel, and mixed media, Lee examines the relationship between image, sensation, and material trace. Her works often incorporate folds, stains, wrinkles, and marks, allowing the physical process of making to remain visible.

Lee's recent exhibitions include **Soft Return** at Hard Return Gallery, Chicago; **Edge-walk** at Lay Project, Seoul; **Passageway** and **Fathoms** in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan; and **Between Worlds** in Detroit. She received the Director's Award from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2026 and was a finalist in the Detroit Artists Market Annual Scholarship Awards & Exhibition.

Lee lives and works in Chicago.

Project Statement

My work begins with the surface before the image. I am interested in how perception is shaped through material, sensation, and the physical conditions of looking. I approach the surface not simply as a support for an image, but as something that can hold traces of movement, pressure, resistance, and change.

I work across drawing, painting, and material-based practices using fabric, Tyvek, watercolor, graphite, oil pastel, and mixed media. I am drawn to materials that respond physically to touch and manipulation. Fabric can stretch, fold, sag, and absorb marks, while Tyvek is lightweight and durable, smooth yet easily creased. Through folding, staining, layering, erasing, and marking, I allow the material to participate in the development of each work.

The resulting surfaces exist between image and object. Marks do not simply describe something; they record an encounter between the body, material, and the act of looking. I am interested in moments when an image becomes uncertain—when something can be sensed without being fully understood, or when a familiar surface begins to feel unfamiliar.

Having moved between Korea and the United States, I am also attentive to how physical and emotional traces accumulate through movement and transition. My works remain open to these traces, allowing material, process, and perception to shape the image rather than resolving it completely.

Soyeon Lee | Reciprocal Landscape | 2026





Soyeon Lee | Origin of the Surface | 2025



Soyeon Lee | Incorrect Spelling | 2025

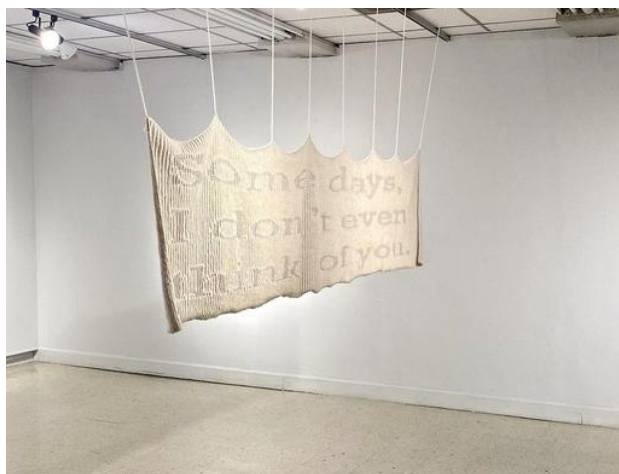
— Interview

Emma Oliver



I was first drawn to fiber as a way to create useful objects for myself and people close to me. Its history is so embedded in craft that it's hard to get into fiber in any other way. It changed and became an art medium for me at Alfred University when I took a class called How to Be Funny and created a piece representing the sitting president as a clown. The speed in which I can create in the medium has always been an asset and I am able to react faster to what's in my head than I am in ceramic or other sculptural mediums. At Illinois State, I began to try and push the boundaries of the medium and see how far I could stretch textile and the limitations of my own body. As time went on, I attempted to create larger and larger pieces and pieces where more people were reached by the medium.

What first drew you to fiber as a sculptural medium, and how did your relationship with the material develop during your studies at Alfred University and Illinois State University?



Crochet involves building a form through repeated gestures. How does the time spent making a sculpture influence your emotional relationship with it?

The time I spend making a sculpture is part of the processing of difficult emotions. I, like many artists, make because it's the way I best express how I'm feeling. I can fully process loss, grief, success, anger, and sadness through the repeated gesture of making a series of stitches. This lets me physically sit in my emotions and makes it apparent that the only way out is through. My emotional relationship with the sculpture changes over time as I work towards the finished result. Originally, my emotions can be as complicated as the work can be in the beginning, but as I get closer to the end it feels like things become clear and uncomplicated.

Sheep and rams appear throughout the installation you shared. What drew you to these animals, and what do they allow you to explore about human relationships?

Sheep and rams are frequently herd animals with herd



mentality. They flock and stick together as there is protection in numbers. In that work, I was thinking about specific types of sheep (Icelandic sheep) that don't flock and prefer to be alone or in pairs. I was thinking about how human beings often try to keep groups together that don't want to be held together any longer, well after the obvious end of a relationship or group relationship. I have definitely been someone who tries to hold onto relationships that no longer exist, and I think it's an experience that many people have.

Some of your animal sculptures appear as complete bodies, while others are separated into parts or mounted on the wall like trophies. What interests you about the relationship between wholeness and fragmentation?

The relationship between wholeness and fragmentation is always in my work if you look hard enough. I'm frequently intrigued by the cusp of a beginning or end of an event or relationship, so having a very concrete division or intersection scratches an internal itch for me. It suggests control of a reality that isn't always possible.

Your large pink elephant combines the familiarity of a soft toy with a striking physical presence. How did you arrive at its scale and color, and what kind of encounter did you want to create for the viewer?

"Pink Elephant" needed to feel both large and small simultaneously. He has to loom over the viewer while still feeling cuddly and accessible. The concept behind that work is that he is the elephant in the room, and a pink elephant (drunken hallucination) all rolled into one. It made me wonder if the anxieties many of us feel become real when we give them space to exist, and without that space would it be easier to quell those feelings?

Could you walk us through the development of one sculpture, particularly a moment when the material led you somewhere you had not originally intended?

I think the sculpture with the most interesting journey is Balloon Sweaters which can be found on my website (www.emmaoliverart.com). Balloon Sweaters are 77 crochet pieces around 77 latex balloons containing the breath of words unspoken. The balloons are protected from popping, which in this metaphor allows the words to remain unmade but does not prevent the balloons from deflating, which of

course allows the air to escape. The thinking behind the work is that you can avoid things at the start, but time always runs out and communication must happen. Is it easier to pop the balloon and get it over with? Or would you prefer the elongated process of deflation? At the start of this work, I truly had no idea why I was making this series. It took me 77 balloons to figure it out, which for me as we previously discussed is just sitting and crocheting. It's interesting how that emotional processing ultimately became directly related to the piece.

Alongside your studio practice, you teach and help students find paid creative work. How do these conversations about building a life as an artist influence your own understanding of artistic success?

I am an Assistant Professor at Montserrat College of Art on the North Shore of Massachusetts as well as the Director of Creative Employment. In my dual role I am frequently met with the Venn Diagram of my own creative practice and the creative and professional practices of students. My roles at Montserrat have broadened my perspective on what success looks like. I think many student experiences in art school give us limited ideas of success and for many it means existing in a little studio, painting the day away, selling work, and somehow affording health care and life expenses. That is just not the reality of the vast majority of creatives and it is a dated view on what being in the creative economy means. I now realize that life is interdisciplinary and realizing that variation in experience can only support your career success later. Putting ourselves into the boxes of our art college major limits us and distracts us from the goal which is usually to make meaningful, purposeful creative work.



— Interview

Ali Riley



You began learning visual art at the age of fourteen. What initially drew you to painting, and when did you realise that it would become a central part of your life?



Ali Riley | Childhood Best Friend | 2026

At first I absolutely hated painting. Before art school I've painted only once. When I had to paint because my school required it, I even considered to drop out because I got very bad grades, comparing to perfect scores for drawings. I had a very hard time learning how paint and colours work. But after a few months I started to get it and not only that, I was enjoying it. In fact even more than I ever enjoyed drawing. I had to first understand it and when I did, it was so freeing and I could get lost in mixing colours and working with brushes.

You trained in traditional painting and gilding techniques. How does this classical education influence the way you approach contemporary subjects?

In case of my own work it definitely shaped the way I see and mix colours. The way I look at my art and its value but also the way I pursue it. If we're talking about contemporary art around the world, usually I can tell what technique had been used in certain artwork. I can visualize how the artwork came into existence, what steps it took to create it and I can judge a little if it's been done according to traditional conventions.

You live and work between Poland and the United Kingdom. How has this transnational experience



shaped your artistic identity and visual language?

I definitely take a lot of inspiration from British art and culture. UK and especially London has a strong grip on my personal style. I absolutely love how expressive and bold it gets. However as a polish person I adore the spirituality of polish artists. I am deeply connected to my culture with mythology and art. In my craft I want to express and mix my polish mentality with the British boldness.

You describe your work as an attempt to reflect “tiny bits of soul”. How do you translate an emotion or an inner state into colour, light, gesture and composition?

Each colour universally symbolizes different emotion. It comes in handy but I also like to use my own associations „you look like this colour“. I use light as kind of a ethereal tool. It can make up the whole magic of the artwork. When I paint I am locked in, my hands paint but I myself am quiet inside my mind.

Several of your paintings feature elaborate white garments, lace and translucent fabrics. What attracts you to these materials, and what role do they play in expressing the personality or emotional state of your figures?

White fabric is one of my all time favorite things to paint. I like how the light shifts between the layers of fabric and creates various colours and shades. These materials allow me to express over something that is theoretically white and plain but I make it vibrant and eye catching. Also you can pick two white, lacy shirts and they're gonna be completely different and that's what I'm trying to achieve. The type of white cloth I pick for specific painting helps to set the mood and emotional weight.

Animals appear in several of your works, from swans and a dog to resting lambs. What draws you to animals as subjects, and do they function as symbols, individual characters or emotional companions?

Actually they've been portrayed by me as all of these. Depends on the artwork. I did a self portrait with my dog which was just a portrayal of our bond. The resting lambs were used as a symbol, and swans in „clearance“ are characters in „Swan lake“ which inspired the cycle they belong to. I pick animals to represent all kinds of roles and meanings simply as both an animal lover and because of their symbolic nature.

Could you describe your process of creating an oil painting, from the first idea and visual references to the final layers? How do you recognise when a work is complete?

Most of my ideas come out of the blue, when I'm resting, talking to someone, crafting something else. It's enough to spark an idea. Then with the first idea in mind I take pictures with people especially picked for certain project, and sometimes I buy or craft garments and accessories. After a photoshoot I pick the one photo that strikes the right emotions I'm going for. When it's time to paint I first start roughly and then add details. Sometimes the idea shifts during the process. A work is done simply when I look at it and feel satisfaction with the quality and feel that it's telling what it's supposed to.



JUDE SoojinJung is a South Korean visual artist working across painting, printmaking and objects. They studied Korean painting at Kyung Hee University and have held four solo exhibitions, including Lagotopia: World of Rabbits in Seoul in 2026. Their practice draws on the life they shared with their rabbit, Cream, and explores memory, care and coexistence through imagined landscapes.

Project Statement

Lagotopia is an imagined place built from real encounters, landscapes and memories. Its inhabitants share the faces of rabbits, inviting viewers to look beyond familiar categories of age, gender and identity and consider each being's life, relationships and sense of belonging. Combining the colour and layered surfaces of Korean painting with a gentle fantasy narrative, I paint journeys through forests, lotus ponds and open skies. I hope these landscapes offer viewers a space to remember the beings and places they hold dear.

JUDE SoojinJung | A Field of Green Barley Shimmering in Silver | 2025





— Interview

Gabbiano

You began creating graffiti at the age of thirteen. How has your relationship with graffiti evolved over the past twenty-six years, and which aspects of that early experience remain present in your work today?



Back then I was sketching my stuff on school books To vandalize my home city Avignon at night time. Around 20 I started to prefer taking time and advantage of daylight to use authorized walls making pieces I would really enjoy to see . Then come this time that I always relate on this say by Tracy 168 " Graffiti is for kids, but but you only get good once you're adult".

Around 25 I created my nonprofitable organization Graffiti for charity Offering free murals collectively made with the kids in schools of Marseille and then Colombo in Sri Lanka. I wanted to promote and to feel positive and integrated through Graffiti instead of marginalized.

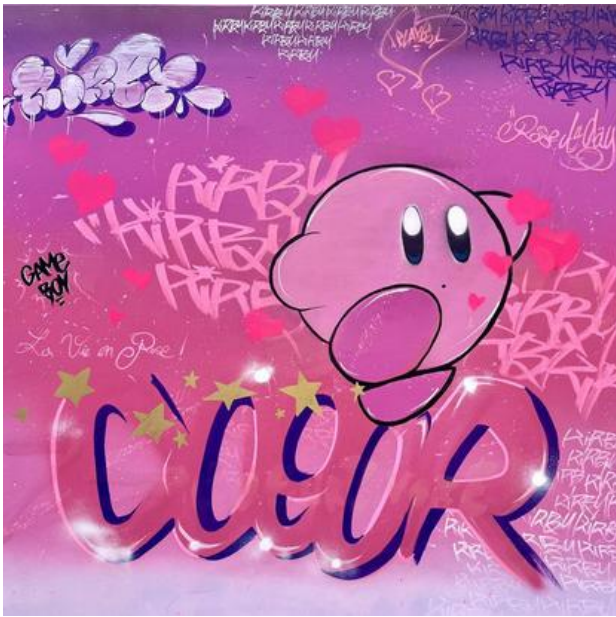
I keep doing murals, stores for friends, custom shoes, Until I got propose to offer an art exhibition. I never made canvas before But the idea of making art and using the phones to promote my organization, made absolutely sense.

What remains all the way from the beginning is the passion for letters, for smell of spray, of creativity , this wild instinct to go hard without thinking ...

I love the challenge of Condensating this wild art into a square canva.

Your artist name, Gabbiano, comes from a laugh that resembles the call of a seagull. How does this connection to Marseille reflect the personality and spirit you want your art to convey?

Marseille is a wild raw Aggressive and dirty city, but



on the other hand It's a magnificent , surprising and joyful place. So is the seagull, and so is graffiti. The city, the art and the animal offer this extreme contrast Which gives no choice to love or hate it. I identify as well as this kind of personality I can be the worst and the best of myself And I've been loved and hated, Not always by choice for sure and I always have to live with it. Naturally my art combines raw aspect from graffiti and clean and lightful aspect from the hardware topped with resin and LED light.

Your practice brings together graffiti, pop art, sculpture, and light. How did you arrive at this combination, and when did you realize that a painted surface alone was no longer enough for what you wanted to express?

Graffiti was and still is the base of the creation. I liked to add something everybody can relate to in the center, as graffiti is more a niche. The idea of having it on volume like a sculpture make this object that the LED light captivates . I found it original and playful to create art object this way.

Light is not simply an illuminating element in your work - it actively changes what the viewer sees. How do you use LEDs and phosphorescent paint to create different visual experiences in daylight and darkness?

LED and phosphorescent create a double vision on the canva. For the LED it's becoming way more brightly when light turns off and for the phosphorescent it creates

a double reading, positive on day light , and negative when light turns off.

Your works combine spray paint and acrylic with aluminium figures, resin, and integrated lighting. How do you balance spontaneity and technical precision when working with such different materials?

Spray paint is used for the background , acrylic on a more wild and spontaneous move. Aluminum figures as resin ask more patience and concentration. The more we arrive at the end of the creation the more precise I need to be.

Recognizable characters and symbols from popular culture frequently appear in your compositions. What attracts you to these images, and how do you transform them into something personal?

Those character are known , but the graffiti and messages around are transforming them into hip hop culture or personal vision I have on them.

Your visual language is vivid, joyful, and immediately accessible, yet you also describe it as symbolic. How do you create space for viewers to form their own interpretations without losing your original intention?

That's always the topic regarding creation : there's a intention to show something , its needs to be obvious enough so viewers can get the message, but if it's too much explained it looses its subtilty. In between people can make their own interpretation.



RyunJung SEO

MFA in Fine Art, Graduate School of Incheon Catholic University, Korea
BFA in Fine Art, College of Fine Arts, Incheon Catholic University, Korea

Excellence Award, Grand Art Exhibition of Korea, Korean Fine Arts Association, 2009
Award of Merit, World Peace Art Exhibition, 2009
Award of Merit, Haengju Art Exhibition, 2009
Award of Merit, Danwon Art Exhibition, 2009

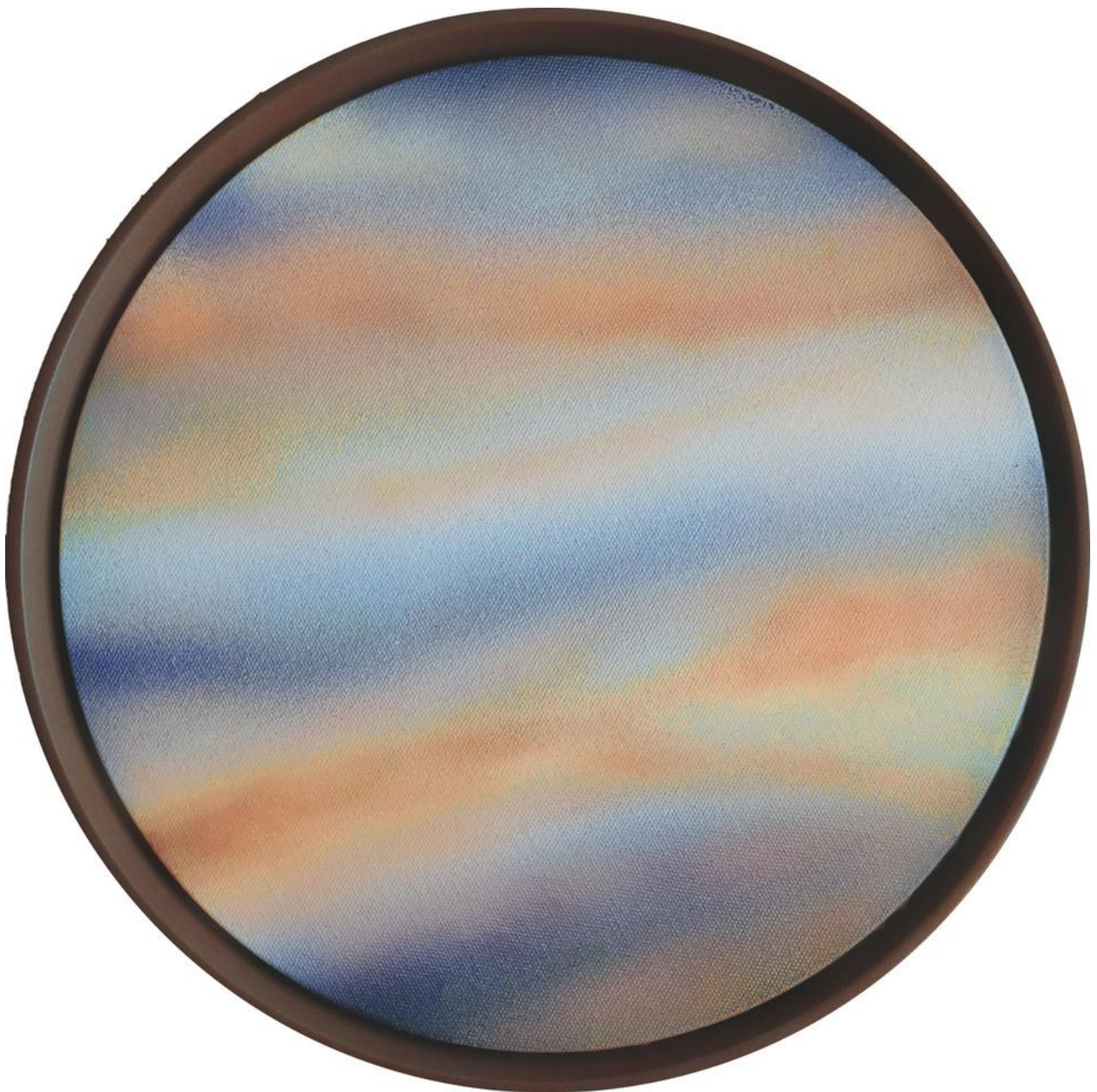
Project Statement

I consider 'color' to be the most intuitive and instinctive element through which people can connect, even within the nonverbal language of images. Through the accumulation of color, I express the 'textures' of time and contemplation.

My work draws inspiration from nature - the hues of clouds at sunset, the stratified layers revealed in geological formations and the cross-sections of rocks and gemstones, and the shimmering ripples of light dancing across water. Rather than defining fixed forms, I use an airbrush to disperse fine particles of color like mist. These delicate layers overlap, permeate one another, and gradually create a unique texture.

I see both texture and color as analogous to the structures of human emotion. Through these layered visual structures, my work invites viewers to engage in their own reflections and interpretations, allowing for an open and personal experience of contemplation.

RyunJung Seo | Sedimentation of Time | 2025





Julian Tanase



Julian Tanase | The Touch | 2025

What first drew you to film photography, and what does the analogue process allow you to express that you would find difficult to achieve digitally?

It is not a matter of choosing one as opposed to the other, based on difficulty of expression. For me, it all depends on the feeling and means of depicting what I want. I understand

You describe yourself as being on a continuous journey without yet knowing the destination. How has your way of seeing changed during this journey, and what questions are currently guiding your practice?

Indeed, my journey is yet to be concluded, it's still a road with no ending in sight. And this is all right, this is the way it should be. My way of seeing has changed, very much so: when I look at my photographs from my early days and compare them with the recent ones, almost everything has changed: composition, understanding of light, angles and way of expression. My studies with the New York Institute of Photography also had a great influence on how I understand photography. As I am more drawn to black and white photography than to color, I am seeing a scene in bw and judge its merits and opportunity even before pressing the shutter button. Questions I do ask always, when I look at a place or person: is this something that defines this moment in time? Is this a visual witness of my journey? How can I bend the light so to have this image tell a story? So, yes, I am seeing things very different from my early days, and this is still happening as we speak.



Julian Tanase | People Of Florence | 2025



Your work moves between documentary photography, photojournalism, and conceptual art. When you make an image, do you think of yourself primarily as a witness to reality or as someone transforming it through personal interpretation?

If it's not a too great contradiction in terms, both. That said, as a documentary photographer, and also as a photojournalist, my first rule is not to change anything when it comes to places, people, things or events one documents. A photograph made under this rule has, first of all, to tell the truth and let readers know what has been going on, as simple and as clear as possible. So, there is not much leeway here, as far as the interpretation is concerned. Of course, one can use his own style to shoot a documentary, but at the of the day, the rule aforementioned is mandatory. One is primarily a witness of the real happening in front of his eyes.

Available light, rough shadows, and piercing highlights are central to your visual language. What role does light play in shaping the emotional or narrative meaning of a photograph?

Light is dictating the outcome of a photograph. Light is the main and most important part of the kit with which a photographer chooses to make an image, on film or digital, no matter. Absence of it, too much of it, small or large amounts of it in a scene can be used to construct a photograph, influenced by the command of one's skills and interpretation of what one wants to express. In black and white photography, light indeed shapes and expresses the emotion and the story, by understanding how light works. Not always easily doable, and I am yet to really befriend this beautiful too at our disposal, which is the light (or its absence, as it were).

Working with film means having a limited number of exposures and being unable to review an image immediately. How does this affect your attention, timing, and relationship with the moment you are photographing?

True, because it takes between a couple of days to a week

until I see the results. Processing and scanning may take all this time, so yes, at times I am impatient. But during this time, I run scenes, numbers, situations, settings and ways of interpreting what I shot; so a good brain exercise which I do recommend. A limited number of exposures means (for me) the opportunity to think and get involved at a much deeper level in making images. One is forced to evaluate the scene and take a decision of taking the image or not, based on a lot of boxes being checked. Attention and timing are paramount, and is not easy; it takes a different type of discipline and self control not to waste the entire length of film in 5 mins.

Documentary and street photography often involve observing strangers during unguarded or intimate moments. How do you approach questions of distance, consent, and responsibility, and are there moments when you consciously decide not to take a photograph?

If we discuss photographing of people in intimate situations, places or moments, this is a no-go area. I never engage in shooting images of such, period. Unguarded, yes, this is possible; if in public spaces, this is allowed, moreso as an image of a person who is doing whatever and does not know he is being photographed, is a more interesting and powerful image than the one when he knows camera is pointed at him. There are several rules here, no matter who, where or what one photographs: if you shoot a specific individual, close to you, ask for permission. It only takes a second, and if he/she agrees, all good. If not, offer thanks and move on. A no here may well be a yes 10 metres further down the road, so do not fret if declined. If using a model, a signature and release are mandatory; this can and will provide a set of rules and measures that helps both of you. In the long run, a signature is always an easy way to get yourself out of legal troubles. I always refrain myself when it comes to shoot people if physically challenged, and / or in situations that puts them to difficult positions, real or so socially perceived. I do not shoot beggars or people that had fallen on hard times, UNLESS this is a social project for some association or a direct help to support people in their hard time in life. If I happen to be in such place, I put my camera away and have a 1 minute chat with that person; if I can, I help. I discovered long time ago that many people in distress appreciate a good word, coming from the heart, than a 5 euro bill. A good word and time to listen can go a long way.

You support other film photographers and emerging artists by sharing your knowledge and writing about analogue photography. Has putting your ideas into words changed the way you understand your own images or the way you work?

Indeed, it happens. One has to conduct one's image making in such a way that others can understand what one's doing, why, how and the desired outcome. More often than not, I find myself following my own advices, to be honest with you. Being involved in photography groups, magazines and communities out there means that I many times shape my methods, understanding of a certain situation, some particular moment in picture taking; explaining some things to others helps me remember principles and rules. So, yes, the way I work is shaped by my past and present experiences and by my strong connection with the communities I am member of.

Nini Glonti

I'm a Georgian painter and illustrator whose work explores fairy tales, symbolism, and the relationship between people and nature. My artistic practice combines painting and illustration, often drawing inspiration from the rural environment where I grew up. Through imaginative narratives and symbolic imagery, I create works that blur the boundaries between reality and the world of fairy tales.

Project Statement

This project is a series of illustrations based on my own fairy tales, which I also translate onto canvas. Through symbolic imagery, expressive characters, and imaginative landscapes, I explore the emotions, atmosphere, and narratives within these stories. By moving between illustration and painting, I reinterpret my fairy tales through a personal visual language that combines storytelling with a contemporary artistic approach.

Nini Glonti | 2026





— Interview

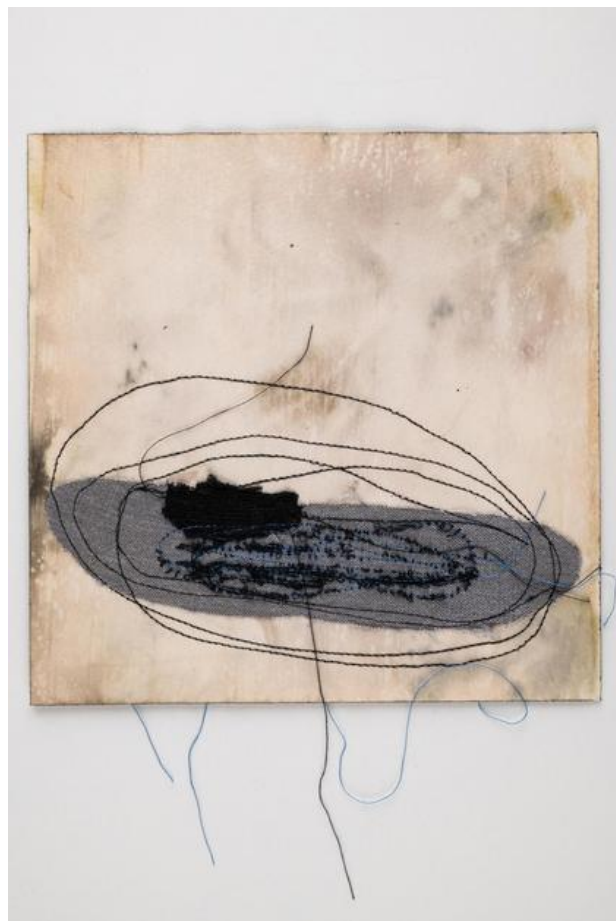
Barbara BITONDO

You grew up and lived in many different countries. How has this experience shaped your sense of home, and how does that sense emerge in your art?

Living across several continents taught me that home is less a fixed place than a collection of experiences, memories, and relationships. My work often explores this idea through layered surfaces, fragments, and materials that suggest both belonging and movement. Rather than depicting specific locations, I create spaces where memory, landscape, and emotion intersect, inviting viewers to reflect on their own sense of place.



Barbara BITONDO | Applique



Barbara BITONDO | Applique

What drew you from photography toward fiber and textiles, and what has working with these materials allowed you to explore?

Photography sharpened my attention to light, composition, and observation, but I gradually wanted a more tactile and immersive way of working. Fiber and textiles introduced physicality, texture, and construction into the creative process. They allow me to build rather than simply record, creating works that explore perception, transformation, and the passage of time.

How do you choose the paper and fabrics you work with? What role do their textures, origins, or previous uses play in the ideas behind a piece?

Materials are never neutral for me. I select papers and fabrics for their physical qualities as well as the stories they carry. The weight of handmade paper, the translucency of silk, or the history embedded in a reclaimed textile can shape the direction of a piece. Texture, fragility, resilience, and evidence of previous use all contribute to the work's emotional and conceptual depth.

You organize your work into Tableaux, Tapestries, and Texts. What distinguishes these categories,



and where do they overlap or influence one another?

These categories reflect earlier ways of thinking about and organizing my practice, though the boundaries between them have become increasingly fluid. Tableaux are image-based explorations that begin with observation and composition and often incorporate a three-dimensional element, creating a dialogue between two-dimensional and sculptural forms. Tapestries emphasize materiality, structure, and the physical presence of fiber, ranging from intimate textile constructions to large-scale installations. Recent examples include a monumental textile work exhibited in the IFC Headquarters Lobby in Washington, DC throughout much of 2026, as well as *Excavations I* and *Excavations II*, currently on view at Whittemore House in Washington, DC. Texts focus on narrative, memory, and mark-making as forms of communication, often taking the form of scrolls that unfold as visual stories, journeys, or maps. While each category has its own emphasis, all three explore transformation, connection, and discovery through shared materials and processes that continually inform one another.

Stitching seems to function as a form of drawing in your work and often threads extend beyond the surface. What expressive possibilities does working with thread offer you?

I think of stitching as drawing in space. Thread can define a line, connect disparate elements, or create movement across a surface. Unlike ink or paint, it has

both a visual and physical presence. When threads extend beyond the boundaries of a work, they suggest continuity, growth, and the idea that meaning often exists beyond what is immediately visible.

Your pieces can evoke the past, present, and future simultaneously. How do you approach this relationship between time, memory, and imagination?

In the preface to my catalogue *Horizons 2022–2026*, writer Rama George reflects on what remains with us after we leave a landscape: not its exact details, but the impressions, emotions, and fragments that linger in memory. That observation resonates deeply with my practice. I see memory as an active process rather than a fixed archive. The past is constantly reshaped through present experience, while imagination allows us to envision what might come next. By layering materials, marks, and forms, I seek to create spaces where remembrance, observation, and possibility coexist, much as a remembered landscape exists simultaneously in the past, the present moment of reflection, and the future meanings we continue to give it.

You describe making art as an inquiry and the finished work as a record of exploration. Could you share an example of a discovery during the process that changed the direction of a piece?

Many of my botanical monoprints begin with a clear intention, but unexpected discoveries often become the most important part of the work. In the *Revelations* series, I found that combining botanical monoprints with silk, glass, shells, and other natural materials created a sense of dimensionality and light that transformed the pieces from prints into sculptural forms. That discovery shifted my practice toward exploring how printmaking can extend beyond the wall, becoming sculptural, architectural, and spatial.



Naeem Eidkhani is an Iranian visual artist and photographer based in Tehran. He holds an Associate Degree in Visual Arts specifically tailored for teaching in public education and earned his B.A. in Industrial Design from the University of Art and Architecture in Mashhad in 2012. Alongside his artistic practice, he has extensive experience teaching design and calligraphy, as well as graphic design on an occasional basis.

Eidkhani's photographic practice centers on observing and capturing fleeting, candid moments in everyday life. Rather than confining himself to a rigid photographic style or genre, he is drawn to ordinary situations, human expressions, subtle gestures, animals, and natural landscapes—moments that reveal themselves unexpectedly and often go unnoticed.

He is particularly interested in photographing people and animals when they are unaware of the camera's presence, seeking quiet, authentic states between posed and unposed reality. Even within portraiture and fashion photography, he looks beyond conventional staging to capture spontaneous interactions and genuine emotion.

For Eidkhani, photography is a means of discovering small, honest fragments of life that can evoke a sense of humor, joy, or quiet reflection. He describes this experience as a brief visual shock a moment of interruption that invites viewers to pause and observe simple details that might otherwise remain unseen. His artistic approach is guided by a core philosophy: "Every moment has a story".

Project Statement

For me, photography is a way of waking up, not just recording something visible. Most people move through their days lost in habit and repetition; as if walking in a kind of sleep. Sometimes a simple event, a glance, a brief moment, breaks that sleep and returns us, if only for a few seconds, to a state of pure presence.

These are the moments I look for: a child's sudden glance toward another child, the patient hands of an old Man Shoeshine, the daily path of a shepherd with his flock, the stillness of a landscape before sunrise. None of these are extraordinary scenes, and that's exactly why they draw me in. They show that freedom and presence don't require anything dramatic to happen.

My way of seeing these moments carries a quiet sense of humor; I like to imagine what that person might have been thinking in that instant. For me, photography isn't a report of reality; it's an invitation to look again at the world we already live in... a world we usually pass by without noticing.





Priyanka Pulijal

Your practice explores speculative realities and metaphysical spaces beyond the limits of perception. What first drew you to subjects that cannot be directly seen or proven?



Priyanka Pulijal | Atala | 2020



I think I've always been interested in the idea that reality is much bigger than what we can actually perceive. We have such a limited understanding of consciousness, death, the universe, even our own minds, but we're constantly trying to build systems to explain all of it. I grew up with elaborate descriptions of other realms, gods, cycles of time, reincarnation, different forms of existence. I didn't necessarily think about them as things I had to literally believe in. I was more fascinated that humans had imagined these enormous systems for understanding things we couldn't possibly know. That uncertainty is really where the work starts for me. I like the space between belief and disbelief.

In LOKAS: Heavens, Hells, and the Realms In-Between, you reinterpret realms described in Vedic cosmology. How do you balance these traditional sources with your own imagination and contemporary perspective?

I never wanted to illustrate the lokas exactly as they've historically been described. I'm interested in the source material, but I also give myself a lot of freedom to move away from it.

I'll research a realm, read different descriptions and interpretations, and usually there's one detail or idea that sticks with me. From there it becomes much more intuitive. I start thinking about what that place might feel like rather than what it's "supposed" to look like. So the paintings end up somewhere between something ancient and something completely invented. They're influenced by the original cosmology, but also by science fiction, architecture, landscapes, cinema, things I've seen in dreams, and the visual world I'm living in now.

Do you approach the lokas as literal places, psychological states, symbolic structures, or something that moves between these



interpretations?

Definitely something that moves between all of those. Sometimes I imagine them very literally, almost like I'm designing an actual place that exists somewhere. Other times they feel much more psychological, like different states of consciousness or ways of experiencing reality. I actually prefer not knowing exactly what they are. I don't think the paintings need to prove or explain the existence of another realm. I'm more interested in asking: if it did exist, what would it feel like to encounter it?

Your works often suggest environments that feel simultaneously cosmic, organic, and architectural. How do these visual worlds begin to take shape?

Usually with fragments. I rarely sit down knowing exactly what the entire painting is going to look like. I collect references constantly—architecture, expressions, forms, astronomy, film stills, weird textures, plants. Then I start combining things that don't necessarily belong together. Eventually the world starts creating its own logic and I follow that.

How do color, scale, texture, and spatial composition help you create a sense of transcendence or passage between different states of existence?

Scale is really important because I want the viewer to feel like they could physically enter the painting rather than just look at an image of a place. Color does a lot of the emotional work. I'm not necessarily thinking, "this color represents this specific thing." It's much more instinctive. I'm thinking about temperature, atmosphere, light, depth, and whether something feels inviting or slightly unsettling. I also use a lot of layering and repetition, especially in the more detailed works. I want your eye to move through the painting and keep discovering smaller spaces inside larger ones.

Your practice draws from both metaphysical traditions and science fiction. Where do these two

modes of imagining the unknown intersect for you?

I actually think they're doing something very similar. Metaphysical traditions created incredibly complex explanations for things humans couldn't understand: where we came from, what happens after death, whether other realms exist, what consciousness is. Science fiction asks many of the same questions, just through different language and technology. One might describe another plane of existence through gods or cosmology, while the other imagines another dimension, simulation, planet, or form of consciousness. I'm interested in that overlap because both require imagination. They're different ways of looking beyond the limits of what we currently know.

When viewers encounter your work, what kind of experience do you hope they have: contemplation, disorientation, recognition, spiritual curiosity, or something else?

Probably a combination of contemplation and curiosity, with a little disorientation. I don't really want to tell someone exactly what they should believe or what they're looking at. I'd rather the painting create a moment where they're unsure. Ideally there's something beautiful or familiar enough to pull you in, but strange enough that you can't completely place it. If someone spends a little time wondering where they are, what the scale is, whether the place feels physical or imagined, or whether they'd want to enter it, then the painting is doing what I want it to do. I like leaving people with a question more than an answer.



— *Exhibition review*

The Names Gallery in Madrid – 28-29 September

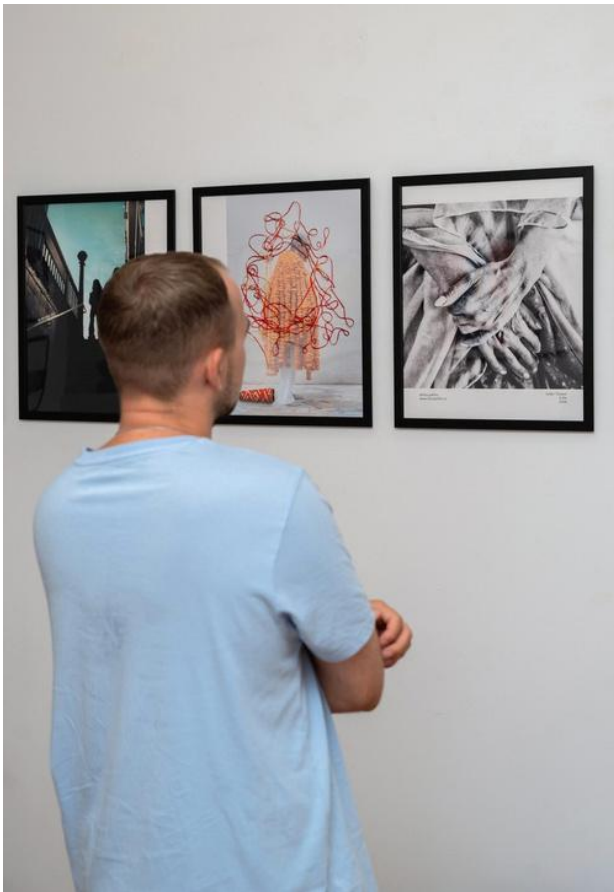
On September 28-29, Captaloon Art Gallery in Madrid hosted an international group exhibition organized by The Names Gallery and curated by Anna Gvozdeva. Bringing together artists from different countries, generations, and creative backgrounds, the exhibition became a meeting point for distinct artistic positions rather than an attempt to establish a single aesthetic direction. The project reflected the increasingly plural character of contemporary art. Painting, photography, digital practices, abstraction, and figurative approaches existed side by side, creating a space in which contrast became an essential curatorial tool. Some artists turned toward intimate experiences, memory, and questions of identity, while others explored



landscape, cultural heritage, psychological states, technology, or the formal possibilities of colour, texture, and composition.

Participating artists included Meyse Mumcuoğlu, Divya Vinod Gilatar, Andrea Pusceddu, Anna Agostini, Maro Markou, Erika Somerfeld, Brigitte B Burckhardt, Ádám Évicu, Mawadah Muhtasib, Steven Sosa, Henry Jentzsch, Irina Patasanu, Léon Émile Loizeau, Tylen Lambert, Karthik Balasubramanian, Vladimir Tomić, Zita Zádori-Gyapjas, Gracija Grošić, Cathrine Storaker, Ria Solari, Sonia Kumari Sharma, Szilvia Acs, Promila Bahri, Roland Cosmos, Olsvold, Yolanda Ramirez Goldsack, Iulian Tanase, and Ivelina Stoyanova. Rather than separating these different practices into clearly defined categories, the exhibition encouraged their visual languages to overlap. Figurative images acquired new meanings when viewed beside abstraction; quiet and contemplative works gained intensity through proximity to more expressive compositions. In this way, the exhibition was shaped not only by individual artworks but also by the relationships that emerged between them.

A particularly important aspect of the Madrid



presentation was its international character. The participants came from different cultural and geographical contexts, yet many of the concerns visible in their works crossed national boundaries. Questions of belonging, personal history, emotional experience, transformation, and the relationship between people and their surroundings appeared repeatedly, even when expressed through completely different techniques.

This diversity gave the exhibition its rhythm. There was no dominant narrative dictating how the works should be interpreted. Instead, viewers were invited to move between different

perspectives and discover their own connections. The gallery became a temporary landscape of individual voices, each retaining its independence while contributing to a broader conversation.

The exhibition at Captaloon Art Gallery demonstrated how contemporary group shows can function not simply as collections of individual works, but as spaces of exchange. Through the curatorial approach of Anna Gvozdeva and the organization of The Names Gallery, the Madrid project emphasized openness, experimentation, and coexistence between different artistic languages. Ultimately, the exhibition presented contemporary art as something fluid and continuously evolving. Its strength lay precisely in the absence of uniformity: different experiences, cultures, techniques, and visual strategies were allowed to remain distinct while sharing the same space. For two days in Madrid, these independent voices formed a temporary collective portrait of a global artistic landscape shaped by diversity, curiosity, and constant transformation.



— Interview

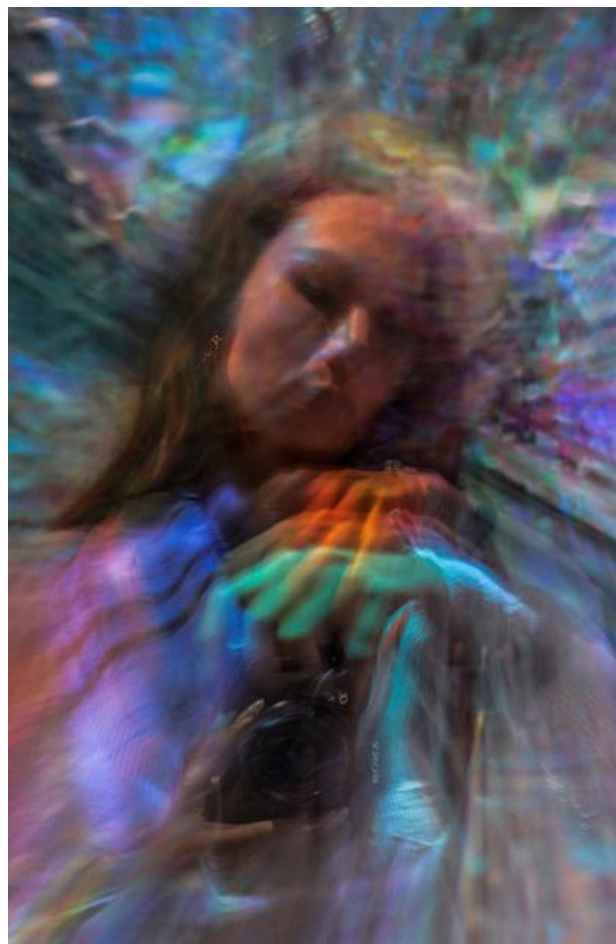
Ria Solari

Your series *Transient Landscapes, Japan Vol. I*, was created while travelling at high speed. What first made you turn your camera towards the passing view rather than the destination?

While traveling in Japan I decided to travel as much as possible by train, exploring different cities and moving around them. The “*Transient Landscapes, Japan vol. I*” series



Ria Solari | Paisajes Pasajeros Japon | 2025



is an expression of what was my day to day visual narrative. The bullet train windows transformed in to a museum in movement and my camera was the viewer of these canvases of passing landscapes.

I also have different photo series of the destinations I visited. I find particularly interesting how these transient landscapes connect one destination with another.

You describe speed as something that transforms into stillness. How did experiencing the landscape from a train change your perception of time and movement?

It has always been so intriguing for me the feeling of perceiving a photo of a particular moment when that moment is still in process of becoming something new. I love playing with the camera shutter speed and in “*Transient Landscapes, Japan vol. I*” was even more interesting since the bullet train can reach a 300 km/h speed. These photographs captured a precise moment of time impossible to replicate. Photographing those places at that time with that special weather and light seems magic.

Wabi-sabi embraces imperfection, impermanence, and incompleteness. Which of these ideas resonates most deeply with you, both artistically and personally?

I'm always struggling to approve my own artworks as a finished piece. Learning about Wabi-sabi Japanese concept helped me a lot to see my production from another perspective.

This was a huge learning both personally and artistically.



"Transient Landscapes, Japan vol. I" series is a self-expression of my personal admiration of Wabi-Sabi while honoring the passage of time. Sometimes, we can find beauty in what we usually ignore by moving too fast.

Intentional Camera Movement involves both control and unpredictability. How do you decide when an accidental or distorted image has become a successful work?

I worked in photo studios for almost 15 years focusing on product photography with a mandatory realistic art direction. The intentional camera movement is a liberation for me and my approach to photography as I can focus my artworks in an abstract direction. My photography always follows a precise direction of what I'm looking for, so nothing is unintentional.

I really like the idea, though, that some viewers might find some of my art as accidental because it gives them the opportunity to analyse what they are watching and why.

Some photographs preserve recognisable traces of houses, mountains, or infrastructure, while others move closer to pure abstraction. How important is this tension between recognition and disappearance?

I've been struggling with some personal situations during the last few years. These have affected enormously the way I perceived what used to be my reality. During this time, I've been observing how this old reality transforms into a new one. Sometimes, my capacity as a viewer has allowed me to watch how some ancient beliefs mutated into new ones, others transformed into abstract shapes while others completely disappeared.

This is how my brain has been working for the past years. Consequently, my art is just projecting what I've been feeling. Sometimes we can easily find and see what is before us, and sometimes we can merely touch the vanish of its existence.

Photography is often understood as a way of freezing a moment. In these works, however, each image seems to contain an extended passage of time. How do you think about the relationship between photography and duration?

One of the first things that captivated me about photography was understanding that it is impossible to recreate the same image again (apart from some exceptions on studio photography).

Playing with the camera shutter speed makes the photos even more unique because they capture a moment that doesn't even exist before our eyes. If we add the train speed and the intentional camera movement to this equation "Transient Landscapes, Japan vol. I" series reflects the passage of time in an intimate way that otherwise would be lost because of moving too fast.

As a multidisciplinary artist working with photography, illustration, and writing, how do these different forms influence one another? Did words or texts accompany the development of this series?

All of my projects are a result of life experiences and thoughts. They are based on social and philosophical concepts that I translate into visuals and writings. This system works as an extension of one and other always walking hand in hand.



— Interview

DADO

You describe yourself as a Croatian-Greek illustrator currently studying in the UK. How have these different cultural environments shaped your visual language and approach to storytelling?

Having been born in Switzerland, moved to multiple different countries in my life and with my family scattered across the world, my work brings a variety of different cultural perspectives, ways of life and thinking. A part of me is everywhere I have lived, and I have a great appreciation for all these different experiences. My work is greatly influenced by where I am in the moment, as each place contains different memories and emotions and the people within it. Since I am inspired to a big extent by observations from my daily life and the people around me, creating in Greece, for example, will bring out a more bright, energetic and homely feel in my work. On the other hand, when I am in the UK, I am very much more on my own, in a country which I feel to be more closed off and cold, which will slowly build up the environment which I develop in my art.

Character design is central to your practice. When creating a new character, do you begin with their appearance, personality, backstory, or the world they inhabit?

It depends. I think most of my ideas start off with a feeling or a state of mind. I very often see my life from a third perspective, in a cinematic kind of way, and from then on, I start to envision. The movement, colours and feeling of that scene, all onto paper. I have always loved designing characters with dynamic clothes and weird silhouettes, just building up on who they are with accessories and little details. That way, even if I might have a starting idea for who I want to design, there is always more depth that will come off that character once I start drawing them.

I also think a lot of my characters are an extension of myself. Art starts off as a personal process, and I put a lot of myself in (real or imaginary).

After the scenario is set in my head, I start to imagine the movement in their appearance and how their environment breathes and becomes one with them.

Lastly, another way I begin my process is just by observing



people on the street. I love seeing weird outfits, unique body types and situations that interest me, and to develop them with my imagination.

Your illustrations often feel like fragments of larger stories. How much of the narrative do you develop before you begin drawing, and how much do you intentionally leave open to the viewer's imagination?

A lot of my work is memories with an exaggerated feeling and atmosphere. I will be in my friend's speeding car with music blasting, and I already have the scenario starting to develop in my head, with bright colours and everything kind of "jumping at you".

I think we also want to relate to someone and be understood, so I like not telling the whole story, and leaving room for interpretation, because this is something I also find very appealing when looking at other people's work. Every emotion is universal, so the idea that someone can see themselves in what I draw is amazing. A lot of times my illustrations will kind of "develop themselves" in a way. Without a set goal or intention, I'll start developing an idea that speaks for itself, or conversely, leave a few holes in the story.

Often, I'll begin with a small cool detail I want to draw, like a hairstyle, or a pose, and as I start developing that personality the story builds itself, I just make room for it.

The works presented here move between very different settings - from a mysterious underwater encounter to an urban nighttime scene and a brightly coloured social moment. What draws you to such varied worlds and atmospheres?



I get inspired from so many different things every day. It could be a movie I watched, an artist, a building, or an experience, and very often I want to try new things and experiment, to see what speaks to me. Sometimes the ideas in my head stay more grounded and realistic and other times depending on my influences will need way more fantastical elements in them.

I have always loved drawing characters, and more recently with colour, because it can communicate so much and it's just beautiful to me. The underwater scene, for example, was for a university magazine with the theme "Lust" and I drew my own interpretation of it, without wanting to head to the more general idea tied with the theme which is usually sexual. The urban nighttime scene was drawn when I was living in Brixton. I used to return very late at night from work, walking fast and keeping to myself. This systematic walk is one I walked daily, in a run-down but cultured environment. I have also never played video games in my life, and recently tried *Zelda, Breath of the Wild*. The art in that is just beautiful. It's a fantasy story, with amazing environments and really cool weapons, characters and villages. This has inspired me to design more fantastical characters, not fully humans, and explore more environmental design.

Humor and unease often coexist in your imagery. How do you balance playful, exaggerated character design with darker or more ambiguous elements?

In a way, I think that this partially separates the characters mental state from its environment. In the Brixton scene, this was a daily ritual of walking home, so the character is almost unaffected by their darker seeming environment, whilst still being a part of it.

At the same time, a moment is never completely fuelled by one emotion. There are so many elements in my head that fight for hierarchy and feel like they need to be present. There are two sides to it. Firstly, coming from another country and moving to Brixton comes with adaptation mixed with a level of fear, especially as a woman. The area completely shifted at night...but then I had my music playing on my headphones and became almost detached. Playful smoke and hand drawn lines come in contrast with the environment, but it also signals the enjoyable parts of living there independently as a student.

Then again, with the underwater scene, my character is placed in dark water surrounded by piranhas. The theme given was "Lust", and the water ripples at the top are lighter

and more playful than the rest of the imagery. A situation for me is never simply black or white, there is so much in between that I feel needs to be present and spoken.

Your characters communicate strongly through posture, facial expression, clothing, and gesture. How do you use body language to suggest relationships and emotions without relying on written dialogue?

I used to draw only detailed and traditional pencil portraits that were a copy-paste from an image. I think starting within that style not only helped build a good foundation in understanding anatomy, facial expressions and lighting, but also just pushed me to pursue and find what my imagination had to say. That annoyance of not having produced anything that was really "mine", pushed me to experiment a lot with colour, break anatomical rules and see how figures coexist with each other, and just come up with my own ideas.

I also have a background in theatre and film. Years of theatre exercises and improvisation are all very much about how you communicate something, what your goals and needs are for a scene, how you present yourself, especially what happens when other characters come into play.

I think in combination with the above, this unconsciously helped me to interpret someone's emotional state and relationship to another without dialogue on paper. I love dramatizing all this too, like a huge smile or aggressive clothing, but sometimes some drawings come out more silent and subtle that express something too. Take the Brixton scene for example. It is more reserved and relaxed, so I tried to convey that atmosphere through the environment and the characters stance.

Lastly, I find self-expression through mediums such as clothing, tattoos, piercings and hairstyles a way to know a person's story. All these choices reflect who we are and what we want the world to see us as I believe. Considering all these small but important choices when building a character is a really fun process for me.

Symbols, graphic marks, and handwritten elements appear throughout your illustrations. Are these primarily decorative, or do they carry specific meanings within the worlds you create?

Even though my work lately has been mostly digital, I still find my sketchbook processes to be really important. That blend between digital and sketch is something I have always been attracted too, resembling a comic book feel. Sometimes I will use words to express what I want, but mostly it will all be found within my illustration.

Most marks like this feel "needed", that's where my hand goes, and it's completely produced by the atmosphere and vibe of what I'm creating. Often, I use them to convey a motion that is happening or has happened, like a cigarette bud falling, loud music from headphones or the motion from a stirring wheel.

On the other hand, a lot of small symbolic marks will carry a meaning. In a lot of my other illustrations, I repetitively draw some marks, like a cross for example. Because my work is vastly derived from my personal life and people I know, I have tied some marks to different people. It could be necklace they always wear, a specific gesture, which I have directly associated with that person, and serves as a sign that it is them.

Kamila Głowczewska (born 1990 in Wyrzysk). A graduate of the Kazimierz University in Bydgoszcz, Faculty of Pedagogy. Painter - self-taught.

Awards

- Honorable Mention in the "DEBIUTY II WIOSNA 2026" (Debuts II Spring 2026) Art Competition, organized by the Maya Art Gallery in Toruń
- Honorable Mention in the 47th "Golden Easel" Visual Arts Review at CKiS in Konin (Dec 4, 2025)
- 2nd Place in the 3rd Edition of the Mietek Krzak International Art Competition "Na Szczycie" (At the Summit) (Feb 20, 2026)

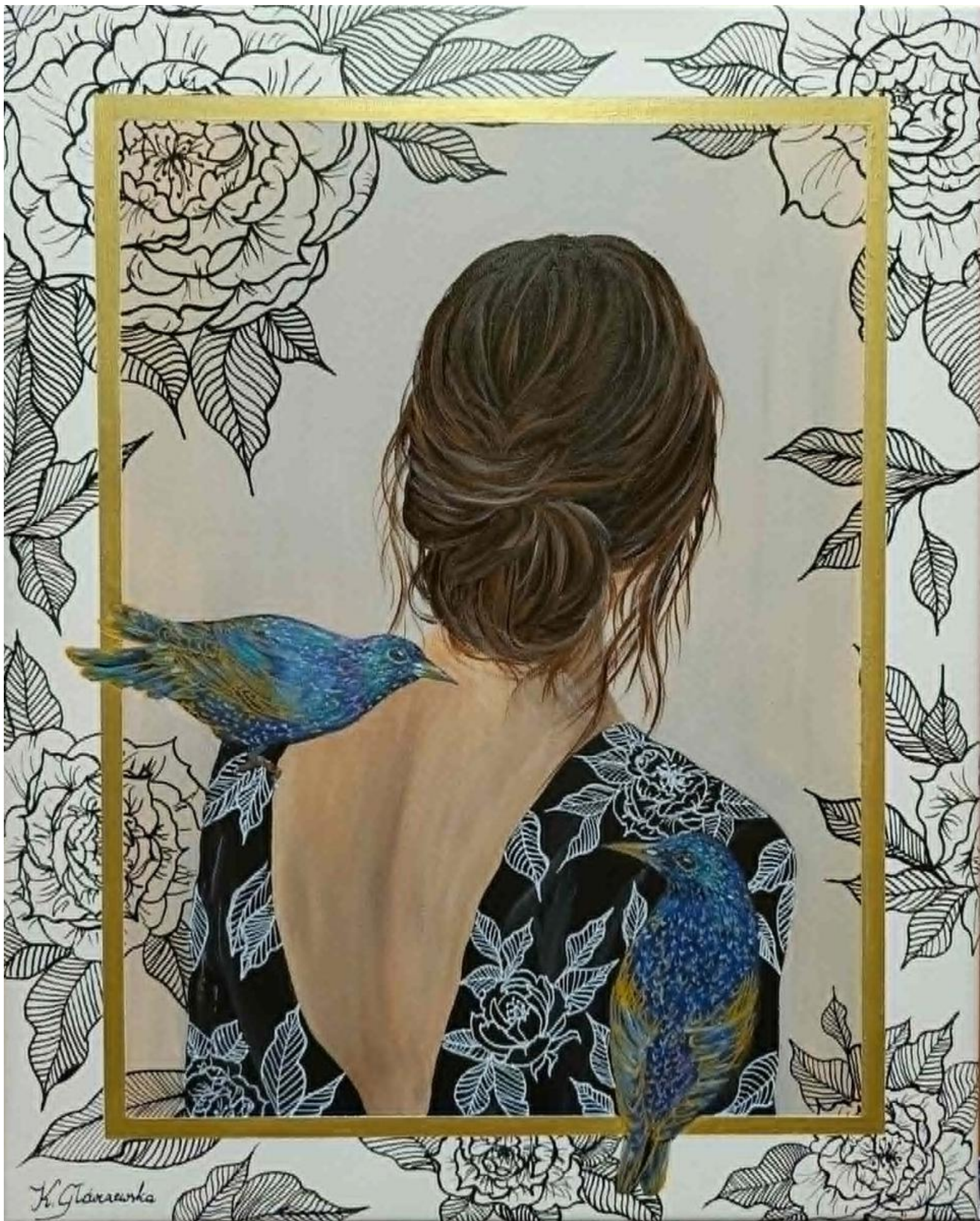
Exhibitions:

- Group exhibition "Colorful Landscapes" (Kolorowe pejzaże), Łódź 2025
- Group exhibition: 47th "Golden Easel" Visual Arts Review at CKiS, Konin 2025
- Group exhibition: 3rd Edition of the Mietek Krzak International Art Competition "Na Szczycie," Świnna 2026
- Group exhibition: "Debiuty" (Debuts) post-competition online showcase, Maya Art Gallery, Toruń 2026

Project Statement

I draw inspiration from the natural world around me, observations of people, and my own personal experiences. My work focuses primarily on acrylic painting, featuring themes of wildlife - particularly birds - and landscapes imbued with sentimental childhood memories. Bird portraits are the most recognized aspect of my body of work. In my pieces, I strive to capture the unique character of each creature, imbue the work with psychological depth, and evoke reflection in the viewer.





— Interview

Lizzy-Lace

You describe yourself as curious, stubborn and slightly rebellious. How do these qualities enter the studio and shape the decisions you make on canvas?



Lizzy-Lace | What Remains



Curiosity is probably what gets me into trouble in the first place. I always want to know, what if I do this? What if I scrape through that layer, put something where it technically shouldn't be, change the perspective, or ruin the part that was working perfectly well?

Then stubbornness takes over. If something isn't giving me the feeling I want, I struggle to leave it alone. I can work on the same area again and again, even when common sense is probably telling me to stop. And the rebellious part is simply that I don't particularly enjoy being told what a painting is supposed to be. I know there are rules in art, and I respect them, but I also think some of the most interesting things happen when you push against them. I would much rather make a decision that risks being wrong than make a safe one simply because I know it will work.

What is the story behind the name Lizzy-Lace? Does it function as an artistic persona, an extension of yourself, or something else entirely?

Lizzy actually existed long before Lizzy-Lace ever appeared on a canvas.

My friends gave the name Lizzy to my so-called "alter ego" — the version of me that comes out when I'm



having a little too much fun, taking a dare, pushing boundaries and generally behaving in a way that might make someone wonder what I've been drinking. The truth is, I don't need anything. I'm quite capable of getting high on life.

My friends would laugh and say, "Lizzy, speak to us. Is it you?"

So when Lizzy-Lace eventually became my artistic name, it felt strangely appropriate. Because that same side of me enters the studio. She is curious, impulsive and a little rebellious. She is the one willing to take the dare on canvas, push something too far, destroy the safe version and see what happens next.

I don't think Lizzy-Lace is a separate persona. She is very much me — just the part of me that is less interested in behaving herself.

And apparently, she now paints.

Your process involves changing your mind, scraping things away and painting over "perfectly good decisions". Can you recall a work that became stronger because you were willing to undo part of it?

Almost every painting I make has suffered at my hands at some point.

There have been so many moments where I've had something that looked technically good, and I knew other people would probably tell me to leave it alone, but it just didn't feel right. That is usually when I become dangerous.

I'll scrape into it, cover it, move something, change the balance or completely destroy an area I spent hours working on.

The funny thing is that the traces of those decisions often become my favourite parts. You can still see that something existed underneath. The painting has a history.

I've realised that a perfectly good decision is not necessarily the right decision. Sometimes you have to be willing to lose the good version to find the one that actually has something to say.

"Release"

Is definitely one of my extreme victims.

Since you paint instinctively, what usually provides the first impulse: a person, an image, a memory, an emotion or the material itself? At what point does a painting begin to reveal what it wants to become?

Usually an emotion comes first.

I don't necessarily see the finished painting in my head. It is more like I know how I want it to feel.

Sometimes that feeling comes from something I have experienced, sometimes from something I have read, and sometimes it is simply a thought I can't get rid of. Then I start looking for a visual way into it.

The painting normally begins revealing itself somewhere in the middle, usually after my original plan has started falling apart. That sounds terrible, but I actually think that is where the interesting part begins.

Once I stop trying to force the painting to look like the picture I had in my head, I start noticing what is actually happening on the canvas. A strange mark, an accidental texture or an area I scraped away can suddenly change the entire direction.

I think that is why I enjoy painting instinctively. I am not illustrating an answer I already know. I am trying to find it.

And sometimes I don't.

You say that perfection bores you. How do you distinguish between an imperfection that gives a work life and an area that still needs to be resolved?

I wish I had a clever formula for this, because it would save me a lot of time.

For me, an imperfection feels intentional even when it wasn't. It creates tension, makes you look again, or gives the surface some kind of history. A scrape, an awkward edge, something slightly off — those things can make a painting feel alive.

An unresolved area is different. It distracts me for the wrong reason.

I tend to walk past my paintings a lot while I'm working on them. If my eye keeps landing on the same area and something irritates me every single time, I know I'm probably not finished with it.

The danger is knowing when to stop, because I can also destroy the very thing that made it interesting by trying to fix it.
I'm still learning that difference. I suspect I always will be.

Who is the figure portrayed in "Colonel Mustard", and what made you want to paint him? What does the title reveal — or deliberately conceal — about his identity?

The figure in Colonel Mustard is my father, Dr Abraham Stephanus van der Merwe — Pa Fanus to us. I painted him for his 75th birthday, and when you have known someone your entire life, you realise that painting their face is probably the easiest part. Trying to capture all the people they have been is much harder.

My father has worn an extraordinary number of hats. He is an academic with several degrees, including a doctorate. He is a farmer, a builder, a manager, an administrator, a mentor and a problem-solver. He is the man with another project before the current one is finished, the man who keeps screws, bolts, pieces of wood and bags because you never know when you might need them. Once he gets a bee in his bonnet, good luck changing his mind.

He is also extremely curious. I could call it an enquiring mind, but that would be the polite interview answer. The family calls it nosy.

If something is happening, Pa Fanus would like to know what, why, who was involved, what time it happened and preferably what they intend doing about it. In hindsight, perhaps Colonel Mustard was inevitable.

He is also, apparently, a "serial cheese thief".

And then there is Cluedo. Whenever our family played, my father chose Colonel Mustard — but "chose" might be putting it mildly. He became Colonel Mustard.

Somewhere along the way, Colonel Mustard simply became another one of Pa Fanus's many roles.

So when I decided to paint him for his 75th birthday, Colonel Mustard felt like the only title that could possibly work.

To someone who doesn't know him, the title conceals almost everything. They see this man and perhaps start wondering: Who is he? What has he done? Is he the suspect, the detective, an innocent bystander — or is he just being nosy and trying to find out what everyone else has done?

But to those of us who know him, the title reveals quite a lot.

Academic. Farmer. Builder. Manager. Mentor. Father. Collector of potentially useful screws. Investigator of everybody else's business. Cheese thief. Colonel Mustard.

Seventy-five years. Quite a few characters.

And somehow, all the same man.

You write that "the case always remains open". What questions would you like viewers to carry with them after encountering this portrait, and do you imagine the project developing into a larger body of related works?

I would love for people to walk away still wondering who he is.

Not necessarily in the literal sense, but wondering what happened before this moment. What does he know? Why are we looking at him? Why is he looking at us? And perhaps the most important question: Do I trust him?

I like paintings that refuse to close the conversation for you. The moment I explain everything, the viewer no longer needs to participate.

"The case always remains open" is really about that.

There is no final piece of evidence hidden somewhere in the painting that will suddenly explain everything.

The viewer brings their own suspicions, experiences and imagination to it.

And yes, I can imagine Colonel Mustard becoming part of something larger. Not necessarily a literal collection of Cluedo characters, because that might become too predictable. I am much more interested in the idea of portraits as evidence — people who seem to belong to stories we have arrived in the middle of.

No beginning. No confession. No neat ending.

Just enough evidence to make you suspicious.

"What Remains" transforms an ordinary glass of water into something that feels almost like evidence of something that has already happened. Why did you choose that title, and what exactly is it that remains?

That's exactly the question—I don't want to tell you what remains.

When you first look at the painting, it's simply a glass of water. But once I call it What Remains, you start looking for what is missing. You notice the water, the small traces of color, the reflections, the shadow.

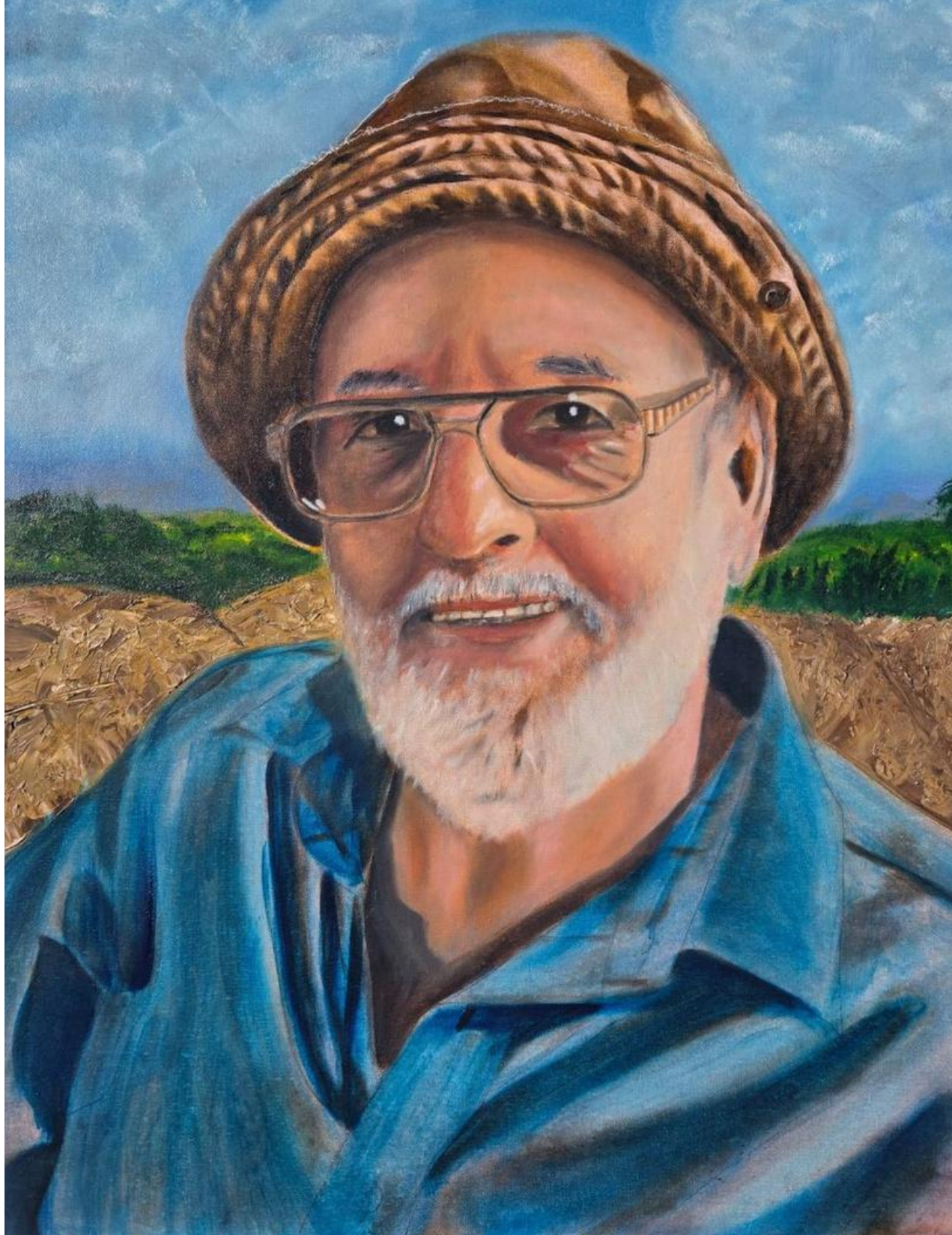
Suddenly an ordinary object feels like it has a history.

For me, what remains doesn't necessarily have to be physical. It could be a memory, a feeling, evidence of someone who was there, or simply the part of ourselves that is left after something has changed us.

I like that the glass is neither empty nor full.

Something has been taken from it, but something is still there. And I think we are often like that. We tend to concentrate on what we have lost, when sometimes the more interesting question is: what remains?

"Release" feels as though the figure is caught between holding on and finally letting go. The



Lizzy-Lace | Colonel Mustard | 2026

sweeping movement around her could be read as water, wind, thought, or emotion. What are we witnessing in this painting, and what does “release” mean to you?

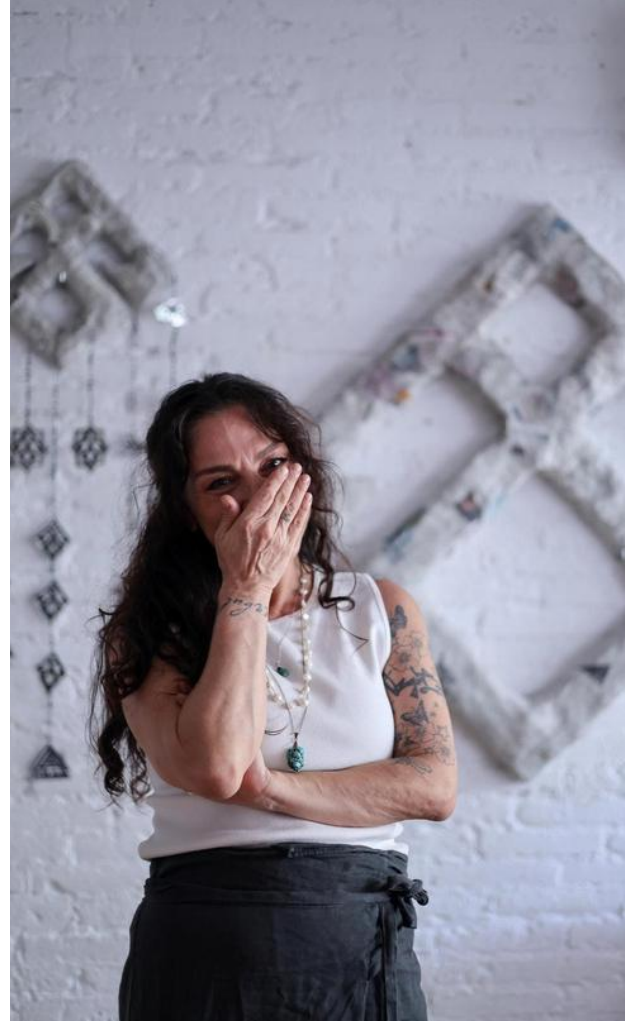
For me, Release is about that moment when you stop fighting everything you cannot control. I didn't want to define exactly what surrounds her—whether it is water, wind, chaos, or simply what is happening inside her head. That ambiguity matters to me. Her face is almost still while everything around her is moving. I think that is what release can actually feel

like. The world doesn't suddenly become calm and your problems don't disappear. Something changes inside you. You loosen your grip. The upward tilt of her face is important. I don't see her as drowning or being defeated. I see her allowing herself to be carried for a moment instead of constantly trying to swim against the current. So Release isn't really about escape. It's about surrender—but not surrender as weakness. It is the strange kind of freedom that comes when you finally realize that you don't have to control everything to survive it.

— Interview

Derya Alibaş

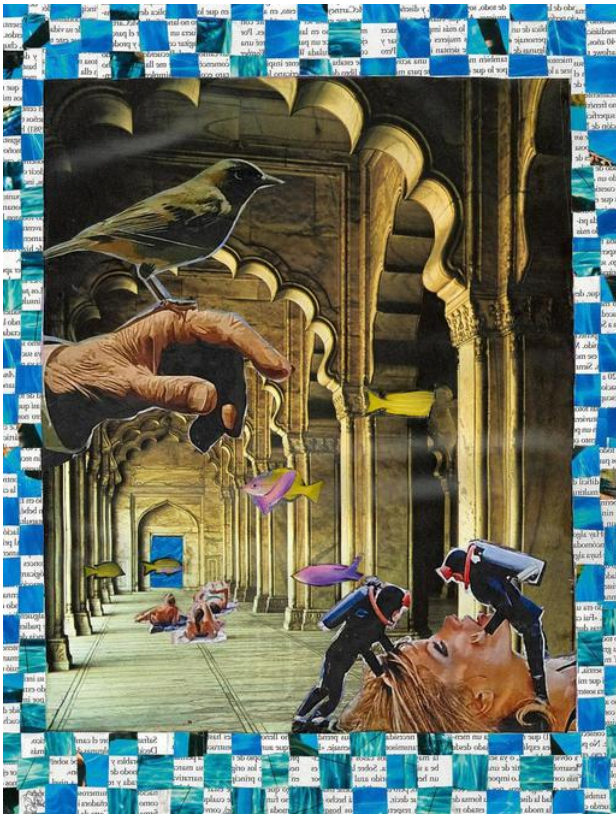
Your younger sister's gift of colors and a canvas marked the beginning of your painting journey. How has the role of art in your life changed since that first encounter?



I discovered my love for colors and textures in 2003, when my younger sister gave me an easel and oil paints as an outlet for my emotions. As a single mother, I had to be strong. This ever-growing passion led me to work as a makeup artist after I finished evening school in 2007. Later, I founded my brand, Jingle Jangle, and my mixed-media collages evolved into scarves, kaftans, and kimonos. Art had always been a part of my life, even if I didn't fully realize it at the time. The more experience I gained, the more inspired I became.

You describe your grandmother through vivid memories of henna-coloured hands, Turkish carpets, calligraphy, and mosaic lights. How do these memories find their way into your work today?

These memories are constantly unfolding for me. My grandmother is a heroine of her own life—just like my mother, and myself— and I believe all women who have hit rock bottom time and again and have risen back up despite it all, are defying everything and everyone! I recall entering a room and seeing my grandmother praying, surrounded by calligraphic prayers on the walls and carpets featuring motifs that told a different story from that of the woman who cleaned for the postal service by day and worked—among other places—at IBM in the evenings. This is the same woman who had to leave her little village behind, travel to the big city of Istanbul with her five children and



work as a cleaner in other people's houses. So my grandpa left for Germany and soon after his family followed. Her example to be creative in different ways still inspires me to this day. It's unimaginable, even thinking now, that they moved to a country without speaking the language and especially without being able to read or write. Back then, girls didn't go to school in most of the villages in Anatolia. Yet, despite such hardships and barriers, my grandmother still managed to raise her children as well as her grandchildren, helped people in need, bought herself land and apartments to save enough money, and left the heritage behind to her five children.

That is why I feel a constant, conscious and unconscious urge to revive my culture within myself. In my opinion, our history classes were not very well taught in Germany back in the 70s and 80s.

It was shameful to be türkisch (the garliceaters) back then or to have specific religious beliefs so it was sentences like 'oh you're so pretty you don't look Turkish!' that made you feel a sense of belonging. And in the teenage years you think it is better to be German. Because you're born there.

But if you're curious enough and with time and wisdom, you discover another version of history and not the one taught in European schools. My passion for history definitely led me to investigate more about my heritage and I felt deeply amazed learning about the depth, vastness and richness of Turkish history & culture.

So connecting with my grandmother before she passed away is still one of the greatest gifts I hold onto. I remember asking her about her happiest moments, her biggest regrets and her life in general and her answers unchained something in me.

You describe your mother as having a musical soul. Does music influence the rhythm, atmosphere, or composition of your art?

Yes, I'd say so. My mother was always singing and certain songs trigger an automatic explosion of ideas in me. Most of the happy memories I have of her are from the times she was happiest: singing either alone or in front of an audience. so she showed me it is never too late to fulfill dreams as she started singing with a Turkish choir in Frankfurt.

Having lived in Germany, the Caribbean, Türkiye, and Spain, how has your understanding of home evolved, and how does this appear in your visual language?

Growing up in Germany, I always knew I didn't want to live there. My first attempt at living in Istanbul didn't go so well—I was too soft for the city. My entire life changed when I had the chance to step aboard the yacht Stormvogel 1961 with my then-boyfriend (now my husband). I found my home at sea; it was on that yacht in the West Indies that I created the collages I use for fabric printing. The water is my home. My name, Derya—an Old Persian word for "sea"—is constantly reflected in my art.

The strength and unity of women are central to your practice. How do you translate the idea of women holding and supporting one another into artistic choices?

This applies more to my upcoming exhibition. Although I channel this energy through my collages and am inspired anew every day by the strong women in my life, it relates more to the female legacy art project I have been working on for about two years—and which will be the subject of my first solo exhibition at the Abyss Artspace in Valencia in February 2027.

You describe birds and hands as expressions of a divine presence. How do you approach depicting something invisible through familiar, everyday images?

I think that because I have long engaged with Turkish art, literature, and carpet motifs, it has an unconscious effect on my art—meaning I don't start by making a plan or a sketch. I work towards the piece, and it develops on its own; I let my subconscious do the work for me.

What would you like to preserve from your female ancestors, and what would you like to transform or pass on in a new form through your own work?

I want to preserve their creativity, their strength, and their connection to nature, their nurturing souls as well as the knowledge they carried in their hands and hearts. My grandmother passed on her knowledge through handwork; my mother, through her voice and her connection to music and nature. Their forms of expression differed, yet both were creative ways of connecting with life.

For me, it is not merely about preserving these things as memories; I want to transform them and pass them on in a new form. That is precisely what "The Female Legacy" is about: asking what we inherit, what we carry within us, and what we pass on to the women who come after us. I believe that something greater can shift when women begin to honor the wisdom of their mothers, grandmothers or just woman they met along their path. And when we support one another. Perhaps the world can change through this reconnection.

Tro Robinson

Sculpture, Painting, and Cut-Paper Paintings.

Project Statement

Greatly inspired by music and movement, my work is a visual feeling of the natural rhythms of the coast where land, sea, and sky meet. Creating coastal rhythms, with color and a smile.





— Interview

Tes Atelier

You came to painting after a background in engineering and more than a decade of creating hand-painted glass ornaments. What prompted you to begin working on canvas, and how did that transition change your creative practice?



My first painting on canvas actually happened about fifteen years ago, long before I ever thought of myself as an artist. It was an oil painting of a kiss between me and my boyfriend at the time, who is now my husband.

I had no idea what I was doing. I had never studied painting, and at first I was simply trying to make things look right. But somewhere in the process, something clicked. I stopped chasing realism and started thinking about how the colours worked together and, more importantly, how I wanted the painting to feel. I remember knowing then that one day I would come back to painting.

Life took me in a different direction first. I studied engineering and began working in a corporate environment. Then I became a mother, and while I was at home with my children, I found my way back to painting. When my twins were born twelve years ago, I painted my first glass Christmas ornament for them. That small, personal project eventually grew into a creative business, and for more than a decade I continued painting ornaments and creating pieces connected to other people's memories and stories.

About three years ago, I finally returned to canvas. It didn't feel like starting something completely new. It felt more like coming back to something I had left waiting for me.

Today I work with both oils and acrylics, on canvas and paper. And what fascinated me in that very first painting is still what interests me today — not reproducing exactly what I see, but finding the colours, atmosphere and details that make the work feel like my own.

Has your engineering background influenced the way you approach composition, structure, or problem-solving in your paintings?

Probably not in the most obvious way. When I paint, I don't consciously think like an engineer — in fact, painting is probably the place where I allow myself not to.

But I do think that background has influenced the way I work. I tend to observe, analyse and look for solutions when something isn't working. Painting constantly involves small problems — composition, colour, proportion, balance — and I enjoy figuring them out.

At the same time, one of the things painting is teaching me is to let go of the need for everything to be correct. I'm learning



that sometimes an imperfect line or an unexpected colour can make a painting feel more alive.

Your current body of work is titled *Dolce Far Niente*. What does this Italian philosophy mean to you personally, and how do you translate it into visual form?

Dolce far niente is often translated as “the sweetness of doing nothing,” but for me it doesn’t really mean doing nothing. It means allowing yourself to be fully present without feeling that every moment needs to be productive. The collection was inspired by a summer my family and I spent in Italy. What stayed with me wasn’t one particular place or event, but the feeling of those days — warm light, simple food, the sea, sitting somewhere without needing to rush to the next thing.

When we came home, I realised that was what I wanted to paint.

So the works in *Dolce Far Niente* are not a visual diary of that trip. They are my way of returning to it — slowing down, noticing ordinary beauty and allowing a moment to simply be enough.

Travel and the Mediterranean appear to play an important role in your work. Are your paintings based on specific places and memories, or do you combine different experiences to create an imagined atmosphere?

Travel is a big source of inspiration for me, but my paintings are not necessarily depictions of specific places I have visited. I’m much more interested in how a place makes me feel and what I remember about it afterwards. Sometimes I work from an image because it immediately brings back a feeling I recognise, even if the photograph itself is not from my own travels.

I may be drawn to the light, a gesture, a colour combination or simply the quietness of a scene. From there, the painting

becomes my interpretation of it.

So in a way, the places in my paintings exist somewhere between reality, memory and imagination.

Everyday objects — a bottle of wine, a sun hat, lemons, an open window, or a resting cat — often become the focus of your compositions. What draws you to these seemingly ordinary details?

I think the ordinary details are often what make a moment special.

We tend to remember the big events in our lives, but when I think about the moments when I have felt truly happy, they are often very simple. Being together with the people I love, sitting around a table after a long lunch, watching my children play on the beach or hearing them laugh. Sometimes there is a moment when everything seems to slow down, and you just want to be completely present in it — to experience it fully and somehow remember every little detail.

A bottle of wine, a sun hat or a few lemons may not be extraordinary by themselves. It is the life happening around them that makes them meaningful.

I think I’m drawn to that sense of calm and to the idea of finding perfect happiness in an imperfect everyday life. There is something very beautiful to me about real life not needing to be perfect for a moment to feel perfect.

When you begin a new painting, do you work from photographs, sketches, direct observation, or memory? How much does the image change during the painting process?

At the moment, I mostly work from photographs. I’m very visual, and sometimes I can look at an image and immediately know that I want to paint it.

I don’t necessarily look for a particular subject. Sometimes it is the light, the colours, the composition or simply something about the scene that makes me stop.

Once I start painting, I allow the image to change. Colours may become stronger, details disappear, and sometimes the imperfections become my favourite parts. I’m becoming less interested in reproducing exactly what I see and more interested in making the painting my own.

As my practice develops, I also want to explore working more from my own photographs, sketches and memory.

In a culture shaped by speed and constant distraction, do you see your paintings as a quiet form of resistance — a way of encouraging people to pause and pay closer attention?

I’ve never consciously thought of my paintings as resistance, but I really like that idea.

I think I started painting *Dolce Far Niente* partly because I needed that reminder myself. Life can become very focused on what comes next — what we need to finish, achieve or take care of.

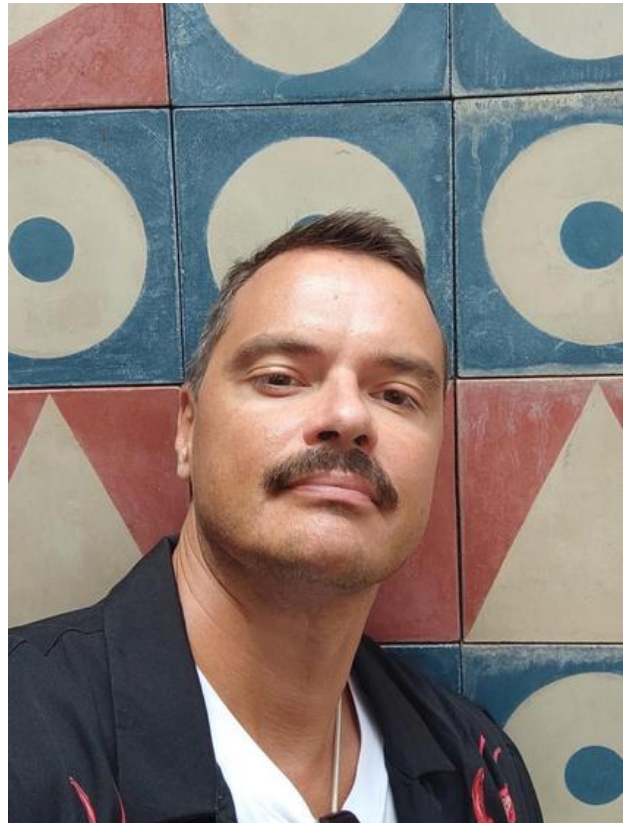
Painting makes me stop and pay attention. And if someone looking at one of my paintings feels, even for a moment, that they would like to sit there, stay a little longer, feel the sun or simply do nothing — then perhaps the painting has done what I hoped it would.

Maybe we don’t always need more. Maybe sometimes we just need to feel more.

— Interview

Vladimir Svorcan

Your education combines Visual Communications and Art Direction, while your current practice is rooted in fine art. How has this background shaped the way you construct an image, even when you begin without a predetermined composition?



I would say it has shaped my practice to the extent that an art academy can shape it, regardless of the specific field of study. My artistic practice has little to do with my applied design background, or even with my professional work. In a way, it serves as a counterpoint to it. In my art, I explore themes and approaches that are possible primarily within an artistic context, above all spontaneity and gestural expression. I don't create an image that I already have in my mind; instead, things unfold in the moment, during several-hour-long creative sessions.

You describe your works as being created in concentrated, physical sessions. What does such a session look and feel like, and how important are bodily movement, speed, and rhythm to the finished work?

The sessions last several hours. I work simultaneously on several boards with paper fixed to them. I discard some of the resulting works because they don't meet certain criteria of mine. Speed is important because the works need to retain a sense of freshness, and it is essential for me that movement remains perceptible. This is also why I work on paper: the medium itself imposes certain limitations.

At the same time, the image only makes sense if



there is a certain degree of control. Otherwise, it would be nothing more than simply pouring paint and leaving everything to chance. Rhythm is another important element. I want my paintings to have a musical atmosphere, like visual chords.

You have said that the image is “found through the act of making”. How do you recognize the moment when a work begins to reveal its direction?

This is quite a difficult question. In principle, if I haven't already torn up the paper, it means that there is some direction emerging. There is always an initial idea of what the composition should look like; everything beyond that is a combination of chance and gesture.

At what point do you know that a work is complete? Is this decision intuitive, or are there particular visual tensions or balances you look for?

A work is finished when I no longer know or feel if I can add anything to it. Sometimes I return to works I consider finished and think about whether I would do anything more. If the answer is no, then that is it.

Black dominates much of your work, yet it never appears entirely uniform: it carries layers, textures, and traces of movement. What does black represent or make possible for you as a material and visual space?

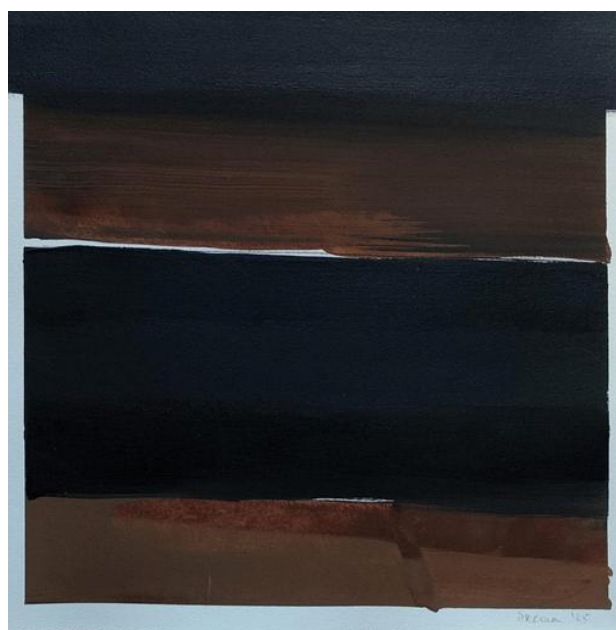
Choosing black is a way of limiting my visual means so that texture and movement can take centre stage. Through different layers, I create depth. The medium is also very important here: Chinese ink and acrylic behave differently on paper and produce different visual qualities. Abandoning colour and reducing it to accents is a kind of painterly position. Black allows me to focus on one thing: a certain artistic expression.

How does working on paper - with its absorbency, fragility, and physical limits - affect your decisions differently from working on canvas or another surface?

Paper is essential because it forces you to react quickly and rarely gives you a second chance. I have experimented with canvas, but it allows for corrections, and things can begin to feel laboured. The work loses its energy and spontaneity.

Having lived and studied in Novi Sad, Rome, and Munich, and exhibited in several European contexts, how have these different cultural and urban environments influenced the atmosphere or structure of your work?

These are simply places where I have lived or currently live. The need to create is something I carry within me, independently of where I am. Of course, all these different contexts have influenced me as a person, but certainly not my creative work. The need to create is immanent; it comes from within you. It is what you give to the world, not what the world gives to you.



— Interview

Farah Kadhimi

Your work often begins with the silhouette. How do you decide what kind of shape, proportion, or volume will best express the idea behind a new collection?

For me, silhouette is almost like the first sentence of a story. Before I think about decoration or even sometimes the exact fabrication, I think about how I want the woman to feel and what kind of presence I want the garment to create around her.

I usually begin with an emotion or an idea rather than a specific product. From there, I explore proportion — where the shoulder should sit, how closely the waist should follow the body, whether a skirt should move away from it or fall quietly against it. I am very interested in the relationship between the garment and the space around the body. There is often a process of exaggeration and reduction. I may begin with a very architectural shape and then remove elements until it feels resolved. I never want structure simply for the sake of drama. Every volume has to contribute



something to the character of the woman wearing it. Ultimately, I know the silhouette is right when it feels strong without overpowering the woman inside it.

Many of your designs combine sharply defined tailoring with softer, more fluid elements. What draws you to this contrast between strength and delicacy?

I think that contrast reflects how I understand femininity. I have never seen strength and delicacy as opposites. A woman can be incredibly strong and still possess softness, sensitivity and grace. In fact, I often think the combination is far more interesting than either quality on its own.

That is why you might see a very commanding shoulder alongside transparent silk, or a precisely constructed jacket paired with something that moves almost weightlessly around the body.

The tailoring creates presence and protection, while the softer fabrics introduce vulnerability and movement. There is a tension between the two, and that tension is very important to my work.

I am interested in clothes that allow women to feel powerful without asking them to become harder.

Movement is central to your design philosophy. How do you balance a sculptural silhouette with the need for the garment to respond naturally to the wearer's body?

A garment can look beautiful standing still, but for me that is only half of its life. Clothes are ultimately experienced through movement.

Even when I am creating something highly sculptural, I am constantly thinking about what happens when the woman walks, sits, turns or raises her arm. The construction has to support the architecture of the garment without making the body feel imprisoned by it.

Fabric choice becomes extremely important. I work extensively with silk because it can behave in very different ways — some silks can hold an architectural form while others respond immediately to the smallest movement of the body.

I like creating a dialogue between those qualities. One part of a garment may define the silhouette very precisely, while another moves freely.

The ideal result is something that has a strong identity from a distance but becomes much more alive when the woman begins to move.

Gold, black, white, and warm neutral tones create a distinctive visual language throughout your portfolio.



What emotional or symbolic meanings do these colours hold for you?

I have always been drawn to a very focused palette because it allows the construction and silhouette to speak more clearly. Black has a particular importance to me. It has authority, mystery and elegance, but it can also create an extraordinary sense of calm. I use it almost as an architectural material. White and ivory bring a completely different energy. They reveal construction in a very honest way because there is nowhere for the garment to hide. They also have a sense of purity and lightness that I find very beautiful. Gold is more emotional. There is warmth, history and a certain ceremonial quality to it. It naturally connects with some of the visual memories of my Middle Eastern background, but I like using it in a restrained, contemporary way rather than as ornament for its own sake. Together, these colours have gradually become part of FJK's visual language. They allow me to explore different expressions of strength, femininity and light without relying on constant colour change from season to season.

Your work brings together European technical training and elements of your Middle Eastern heritage. How do these different cultural perspectives influence your approach to contemporary womenswear?

They are both part of me, so the influence happens quite naturally. My education and professional development in Europe gave me a very technical relationship with clothing — an understanding of construction, proportion, tailoring and the

discipline required to resolve a garment properly.

At the same time, growing up with an Iraqi cultural background gave me another visual vocabulary. There is an appreciation of femininity, ceremony, richness, jewellery, draping and the importance of dressing with presence that has always stayed with me.

I am not particularly interested in translating heritage literally into garments. You will rarely see me take a traditional reference and reproduce it directly. What interests me much more is memory — a proportion, a sense of grandeur, the movement of fabric, the warmth of gold, or the way a woman carries herself.

London has also had an enormous influence on me because it encourages individuality and experimentation.

So FJK exists somewhere between these worlds. The clothes are contemporary, but there are layers of different cultures and experiences underneath them.

Your portfolio presents femininity as confident, powerful, and highly individual. What kind of woman do you imagine when designing for FJK by Farah Kadhimi?

I don't imagine her primarily by age, nationality or profession. I imagine her through character.

She has a very strong sense of herself. She does not need clothing to transform her into somebody else, but she understands that what she wears can communicate something about her before she even speaks.

There is confidence to her, but it is not necessarily loud. I am very interested in quiet authority — the kind of woman who enters a room and has presence without needing to demand attention.

She appreciates design, construction and materials, and she buys pieces because she has connected with them rather than because they belong to a particular trend.

Most importantly, I want her individuality to remain visible.

The clothes should frame the woman, not consume her.

That is probably the woman I am always designing around: strong, feminine, intelligent and completely herself.

You aim to create garments that remain relevant beyond a single season. How do you define timelessness, and how does sustainability inform that approach?

For me, timelessness does not mean creating something neutral or anonymous.

A garment can have a very distinctive silhouette and still remain relevant for many years. Timelessness comes from integrity — when the proportions, materials and construction feel resolved enough that the piece does not depend on a temporary trend to justify its existence. I would rather design something recognisable that a woman wants to keep than something fashionable that becomes irrelevant six months later.

That philosophy is closely connected to sustainability at FJK. We work predominantly with natural materials, particularly silk and wool, and our made-to-order approach is deliberately designed to avoid producing unnecessary inventory.

I think sustainability in luxury should begin with value: valuing materials, valuing the people who make the garment and valuing the garment enough for it to remain in someone's wardrobe. Producing less and creating pieces that deserve to be kept is fundamental to the way I want to build FJK.

Daniel Casares- Roman

You began your career as a documentary photojournalist. What first drew you to photography, and how did your early experience covering breaking news shape the way you observe people and situations today?

My first experience with photography came when I was nine years old. There was no photographic



tradition in my family beyond a small camera we used to capture holiday memories. It was one of those Kodak Instamatic cameras, with the typical parallax error: the photographs always came out slightly off-center. I asked my mother if I could have the camera and began looking at this strange object in my hands. I realized that you looked through a window, but the camera actually captured the image through a circle in the center—the lens.

“Now I understand,” I thought. I quickly realized that this was why the photographs came out misaligned. So, for the first time in my life, I brought the camera up to my eye and took my first photograph. But this time, I deliberately shifted the scene off-center, hoping and praying that the picture would still be properly framed. I handed the camera back to my mother, and that was it.

The interesting part happened during the rest of the trip. I couldn’t stop thinking about that photograph. Would everyone be in the frame? Would it be properly centered? Would I end up with nothing but sky?... What really drew me to photography was precisely that: it made me think. When we returned from the trip, we picked up the photographs from the lab, and the picture was perfect. The first perfectly centered photograph in my family’s history. (Laughs.) And that was the moment I decided what I would do for the rest of my life: I would become a photographer.

My years as a photojournalist were crucial to my development as an author. I began to discover the human being in moments of extreme sadness, but also in moments of great joy. I had the opportunity to experience situations that were completely outside my own life, approaching them with sensitivity and empathy. And running through all of this was a strong sense of responsibility, knowing that the newspaper was waiting for my photographs at the end of the day, so they could be published in the following day’s edition.



What prompted you to move away from fast-paced news photography towards the more contemplative visual language of your project *Color Humano*?

There were several reasons. For one thing, as you mentioned, that frenetic pace meant that you could never really develop or fully explore a particular subject. The newspaper had a deadline, and the photographs had to be ready. I was always left with the feeling that I hadn't gone deeply enough into the story, and I often intended to return to certain places, but the assignments waiting for me the following day always got in the way.

On the other hand, although working as a news photojournalist may seem like a dynamic job, eventually it becomes an annual routine, a kind of hamster wheel in which you have to photograph the same events year after year. And we have to remember that it was a local newspaper.

Occasionally, something would happen that broke the routine, but 90 percent of the time it was repetitive work, and from a creative standpoint, it was incredibly draining.

Around that time, the Spanish edition of *National Geographic* began to be published, and I was fascinated by the stories and photo essays they featured. I wanted to experience something like that professionally, so I decided to leave news photography behind and focus on a more thoughtful, slower-paced form of storytelling, where I could develop long-term projects. That was how *Color Humano* was born.

***Color Humano* has taken you to villages and cities in different countries. How do you choose the places and communities you photograph?**

Your interest in a particular community, or in its customs and traditions, can come from many different places. I think a photographer should be

someone active, restless, and curious—someone who likes to stay alert to what is happening in the world. Suddenly, you might be watching television, reading a book, or sitting in a movie theater, and you stumble upon a discovery, a clue, something that sets you off on a search. And in most cases, you end up discovering wonderful things about human beings. Sometimes you can't even imagine how extraordinary the window that has opened up before you might be.

Your photographs often convey a strong sense of trust and proximity between you and the people portrayed. How do you establish this connection, particularly when working in an unfamiliar community?

You need to have a great deal of patience. Every person needs their own time and space. You also have to keep in mind that you may need to return to the same place several times.

I often explain it as if I were a farmer working in photography. Many people want to harvest the fruit without having planted the seeds first, and that is simply impossible. You may not come back from your first trip with the final photographs, but you will have planted the seeds that will lead to good opportunities. Months later, you will have to return and gradually build relationships of trust with those people. Perhaps it is on the fourth trip that you finally begin to take the photographs you had wanted to make from the very beginning. I also try to learn a few words of the local language, including expressions that are particular to that region. And above all, I try to work honestly. When I first meet someone, even if I have my camera hanging around my neck, I try not to take any photographs until they have had a chance to get to know me and understand what I am trying to do.

I know that my projects are long-term projects, and that is something the people I photograph need to understand as well.



Many of the images capture gestures or situations that feel both spontaneous and carefully composed. How much of each photograph is observation, and how much is shaped through your interaction with the subject?

Nothing is staged. If it were, I would be doing advertising, lifestyle, or fashion photography. Documentary photography is rooted in absolute respect for reality.

Of course, this is where the question everyone asks me comes in: "Are your photographs candid or posed?" As if those were the only two possibilities. I always say that there is a third option that many people overlook: staying in one particular place for a long time—really, a very long time.

If I have the opportunity to live alongside a family in their home, I will usually spend several weeks with them. During the first few days, your presence is obvious and nothing feels natural. Sometimes they will do something or show you something simply so that you will press the shutter. But as the days go by, they gradually let their guard down and become accustomed to having you there. After three or four days, my camera and I have become invisible, and the scenes are completely natural. People simply go about their daily lives without noticing that you are there—or at least, not all the time.

You become invisible, and that is a wonderful thing. At that point, you are not stealing photographs, because they have given you permission to be there, but neither are the photographs posed. They are simply authentic photographs.

When you say that you want to leave a record that a particular history once existed, what determines whether a moment or a person becomes part of that record?

I always photograph from a place of admiration. It is impossible for me to become interested in



someone I do not admire. I might admire the way they live, their philosophy, their sense of humor, the way they express themselves, their kindness, and so on... but there has to be something about them that fascinates me.

For me, it is a lot like friendship. I don't think it is possible to be friends with someone you don't admire. Think about it: you don't wake up in the morning wanting to see someone who has nothing to offer you. Of course, you might have a coffee with a friend who needs to be heard and wants to tell you about their problems, but you do that occasionally, as an act of empathy. I'm talking about something else: genuinely wanting to see someone simply because you want to spend some time together. Naturally, you have to admire that person. Otherwise, it is impossible to genuinely look forward to seeing them.

Something similar happens here. Most of my photographs are not the result of a fleeting encounter. As I mentioned earlier, I usually spend a great deal of time with the person I am photographing, and inevitably, a bond develops. I'm not saying we end up becoming close friends, but almost.

Even when photography is purely aesthetic, for me, appearance is the least important thing.

After working on Color Humano across different countries and cultures, has the project changed your understanding of what people share - and of what makes each individual story unique?

Every story is unique, but there are also many things we have in common. In some ways, we are not so different from a tribe in Africa or a community in the Amazon. We are human beings, after all. And you know what? We all cry and laugh in the same way. Perhaps we do so for different reasons, because our cultural environment has a profound influence on us, but at the end of the day, we are still the same animal on this planet.



— Interview

Lilit Vahradyan

You describe your art as an "unobserved reality". What makes a reality unobserved - is it something hidden within us, something overlooked in everyday life, or a world that comes into existence only through art?

There are many things that could be considered "unobserved reality", though this seems like a new term that I have made to refer to a place within me that stays hidden, a far away location within myself that I can escape to. It is a place that doesn't necessarily fit our ordinary world, and clearly translate to something people could immediately observe,



Lilit Vahradyan | Cluster Conversations | 2025



even though I may have used real life as a reference in many instances to create the idea for my art. Much of our reality stays unexpected, no matter how much we decide to plan it. The unobserved reality is a place of choice, where once you enter, are engulfed by it entirely. This is where I enter. It is as if it is hard to explain things that I see, for what they really are. I could see for instance, an everyday object that I will entirely change and somehow incorporate, for example this could be a janitor's cart or a hair braid, and this will somehow end up in my drawing. A person's face may become combined with an animal tail. A line drawing may take on its own face with a Santa's hat. I work in the moment, and mix my imagination with something I see in real life, or use imagination entirely. Many times I make works that can change if you leave them for a while and come back to work on it again.

Your work combines spontaneous emotion with meticulous, repetitive line work. How do you decide when to surrender to impulse and when to impose order? Does your choice of material affect this balance?

My moods change frequently, and I try to capture the depth that I feel. It is hard to gather all of my racing thoughts, as they may collect gradually or sporadically. Pieces that I create with marker and pen have a certain order, whereas my works on canvas are much more free and in the moment. I experiment more on canvas, because I am more likely walking around while creating, and find it hard to sit still. I will not leave my paintings halfway and go somewhere! The piece will change. My obsessive nature plays a part as well. My drawings seem to contain more of a collection between shapes, reading a more cohesive approach. For example, with watercolor you are naturally driven to explore, unexpected in where it takes you. Many times it is hard for me to impose order and control in my own life, and I can attain this through my works. I collect feelings, and store all of my feelings in my pieces.

You have mentioned a childhood nightmare involving an endless chain of multicolored rhombuses. How has this image evolved within your visual language, and do you still recognize traces of it in your recent work?

When I was young, I remember seeing a scary dream of rhombuses hanging vertically in a straight line on a chain, continuing and growing closer. I remember the chain that was so structured and in rhythm with each other. I think the



dream was a part of my unconscious hinting at a sort of beginning and trigger to my future of art and lines. The strange part, when I grew older, in college in one of my classes, the same dream appeared in a video that one of my professor's played, and it seemed like a coincidence or a sign that seemed so shocking. Up until today, I still have very vivid dreams. They may guide me into future moments and disclose certain locations, numbers, or conversations that have yet to happen.

Faces and face-like forms recur throughout your work, sometimes appearing clearly and sometimes remaining partially hidden. Who or what do these faces represent for you?

I would say yes, faces can be seen in my art, either I outwardly make them stand out or they appear in a kind of unwritten manner. Sometimes I may unconsciously outline a face through lines without knowing. These are people that I have yet to meet, have accidentally passed by, or know in my personal life. They can be interpretations of family members, friends or different acquaintances. What is exciting to think about is who will appear next.

You cite sounds as one of your sources of inspiration. How do you translate something auditory into color, rhythm, movement, or line? Is music part of your working process?

Sounds for me are always present, as I am very sensitive to stimuli, and I am always checking for changes or frequencies in my environment. It may be a form of inspiration, though I would say I am just hyper-aware and choose to concentrate on specific minor sensitivities that others probably would dismiss in their day to day lives. At times, people's voices or conversations integrate into my linework, staying hidden taking on different paths and routes. The type of music I listen to may affect my spontaneity, pace and technique. The speed at which I form or join lines together may also then become different. I can use music to regulate my system and concentrate. In many instances, music for me is reminiscent of current or past emotions, I feel them very intensely. I trace back these memories and re-experience them again through a certain song.

Having studied at the School of Visual Arts and exhibited in both New York City and Armenia, how have these different cultural and artistic environments shaped your

visual language and your sense of identity as an Armenian-American artist?

As an Armenian, having lived most of my life in New York City, currently living in Yerevan, I find myself influenced by both cultures. In the Armenian culture, people gravitate towards vibrancy and vivid color, nature, religion and language, which marks a part of our tradition that can be found across many art forms. I recently noticed that the color and ornamental forms can sometimes be found in my pieces. In the United States, I have felt particularly influenced by a vast variety of art, architecture and diversity of people. In general, I have always liked artists who depict a sort of melancholy or realism. Studying at the School of Visual Arts, I learnt to embrace my solitude, voice and freedom as an abstractionist. During my years there, I really experimented across different categories of artmaking. I also found a great interest and gravitation towards biology research, psychology and philosophy.

Your compositions invite prolonged looking and often allow for multiple interpretations. Is there a particular meaning or emotion you hope viewers will discover, or would you prefer each person to encounter their own "unobserved reality"?

I feel as though I would encourage people to find their own "unobserved reality" while looking at my pieces. An opportunity to feel in their unique ways, to transport and reconnect with their own perceptions. The message I would to emit through my pieces would probably be for people to experience a sense of mystery and joy. Perhaps, through the playful nature of balance through colors of emotion, indecision, control and chaos.

'Hold a moment as firmly as you hold your brush. But do not hold the brush too tightly, or else you will hurt your fingers.'



— Interview

Dusan Kovacevic

Your recent works explore the human body through conditions such as calcific tendinitis, COPD, and scoliosis. What first led you to medical imagery and the body as a subject?



Dusan Kovacevic | Scoliosis | 2025



My interest in the human body did not begin with medicine, but through observing workers and their everyday lives. I am interested in the body as something that simultaneously carries personal experience, physical labour, exhaustion, and injury. When I began exploring medical imagery, especially X-rays and anatomical representations, I recognized in them the possibility of observing the body in a different way — not only as a figure, but as an internal space. Medical imagery became a kind of foundation for exploring the relationship between what is visible on the outside and what is happening inside a person.

The titles of these paintings are clinically precise, while the images themselves are expressive and emotionally charged. How do you approach the tension between medical objectivity and personal experience?

This contrast is very important to me. A clinical term represents a fact, something precise and almost cold, while the painting allows for a completely different, subjective relationship with that fact. I do not try to transfer medical information literally onto the canvas, but rather use it as a foundation on which I develop my own interpretation.

Blue dominates many of these works, but it shifts between associations with the clinical, the mechanical, and the emotional. What role



does blue play in your visual language?

For me, blue is much more than simply a colour. It can appear cold, sterile, and clinical, but at the same time it can be very emotional, deep, and vivid. Sometimes I use it precisely because I want to move the image away from the natural colour of the body and bring it into another, almost unreal space. In this way, blue becomes a kind of atmosphere through which I observe the body.

Your brushwork moves between clearly recognizable anatomy and near- abstraction. How do you decide how much of the subject should remain identifiable?

There is no predetermined boundary. It depends on the painting itself and on what I want to achieve. It is important to me that, at a certain moment, the viewer can recognize a body, a bone, a muscle, or a particular anatomical form, while at the same time feeling that this recognizability is beginning to disappear.

I am interested in the moment when the painting is no longer simply a representation of something we already know. When anatomy begins to break apart through brushwork and colour, it becomes an almost abstract structure. At that point, we are no longer looking only at the body, but also at the

surface, rhythm, material, and energy of the painting. That is why it is important to me that there is a constant tension between figuration and abstraction.

How does living and working in Banja Luka shape your choice of subjects, your understanding of the body, and your depiction of contemporary life?

Banja Luka is the city where I live and from which my experience of everyday life begins. The city may not be a major centre, but precisely because of that, I feel more connected to my immediate surroundings and to the people I encounter every day.

Having recently completed your Master's degree, which questions or themes do you now want to investigate further, and in what direction do you see your practice developing?

Completing my Master's degree is not the end of one investigation for me, but the beginning of a new period. I want to continue exploring the relationship between the human being, the body, and the space in which we live and work. I also want to continue pushing the boundaries of my artistic expression, without losing the initial human story.



Jamie Jun

MS/Pratt Institute Communication Design / Computer Graphics
in 1995

BFA/Parsons School of Design- Communication Design in 1992

- Awards: SPD/The Society of Publication Design Annual Competition, Merit
- Porcelain Artist 2015
- Teaching Art and Colleges Portfolio Consultant over 15 years
- COBY Electronics Corp. in 1995-2005
- Assistant Art Director

Project Statement

Through the ordinary dishes encountered in daily life, I decorate the shapes of each concept in a fun way with various lines expressing the feeling of the heart through a variety of colors. I found the ultimate artistic fulfillment in Porcelain Art.

Jamie Jun | Golden Leaves | 2025





Jamie Jun | Abstract Flower Jewelry Dish | 2022

— Interview

Ayla Canay

Your artistic practice brings women's unseen stories into public view. What personal or social experiences first led you to focus on women's lives, roles, and struggles?

As a woman from my region, I have often felt expected to be strong and resilient. The changing political orientations and the policies and discourses directed at women have, over time, become part of my own personal experience. I began to express the emotional and intellectual impact of these changes through the artistic language I know best. My ceramics have become a visual record of the traces this political atmosphere has left on me. Therefore, my work is not only a reflection on the social position of women, but also an exploration of how the political and social transformations of the place I live in resonate within my personal world.

In the Dependency series, the wedding ring becomes the central visual form. Why did you choose this symbol, and how does its meaning change when translated into ceramic sculpture?

The main reason I chose this symbol is because it represents the concept of commitment. Traditionally, the wedding ring is a symbol of commitment, continuity, and togetherness between



Ayla Canay | Dependency | 2026

two people. However, I question the way relationships function today, where partners can change very quickly and relationships may begin and end with equal speed. By reinterpreting the wedding ring in my work, I explore what commitment means in contemporary relationships. In my ceramic sculptures, the ring-like forms are connected, creating a larger structure. When these individual forms come together, they depend on one another and create a stronger whole. This structure makes visible the strength of connection and makes me think about how a meaningful bond is not simply about being together, but about creating a relationship in which two people can support and strengthen one another.

Some of the ring-like forms appear complete, while others are open, distorted, intertwined, or broken. What emotional states or stages of a relationship do these different forms represent?

I believe that everything in the universe is constantly changing, transforming, and remaining in motion. The same is true of relationships. I think that searching for perfection in a relationship inevitably leads to disappointment. That is why I am drawn to forms that are imperfect and constantly changing. For me, these imperfections reflect the natural process of transformation and the ever-changing nature of relationships.

The works explore the tension between forming meaningful bonds and preserving personal freedom. Do you see commitment and independence as opposing forces, or can they coexist?

I don't believe that commitment and independence are contradictory; I believe they can coexist. Of course, this depends on how we define freedom. For me, being committed to someone does not



Ayla Canay | Dependency | 2026



mean possessing or restricting them. It means witnessing the journey of someone you love, giving them the space to follow their own path freely, and being able to grow together along the way. I believe that true commitment is not about limiting one another, but about being able to walk side by side while respecting and protecting each other's freedom.

Your statement suggests that multiple partnerships and emotional impermanence may arise from an inner sense of emptiness. How do the sculptures give physical form to this emotional void?

For me, emotional emptiness is not necessarily a sense of deficiency, but rather a space that we constantly try to fill through our relationships and the connections we form with others. When we move too quickly from one relationship to another, we may sometimes be trying to escape that inner space rather than truly experiencing it. My sculptures explore the tension between our desire to connect and the feeling that something within us is still missing. The spaces within and between the forms become a physical representation of this emotional void. However, this emptiness is not entirely negative for me; it can also become a space for self-discovery and for reconnecting with oneself.

Your wider practice addresses gender, family structures, and political events. How is Dependency connected to the social expectations placed on women within marriage and contemporary relationships?

Although the roles within marriage vary from one society to another, in many cultures women are expected to establish, maintain, and hold the family and home together. In Turkey, there is a saying, "The female bird builds the nest." This expression clearly reflects how responsibilities and emotional burdens within the family are often placed on women. In my Dependency series, the shine of the gold and yellow tones I use on the wedding rings also refers to these expectations. While the wedding ring symbolizes love, commitment, and togetherness, it also makes visible the expectations placed on women to be the ideal wife, the ideal woman, and the person responsible for holding the home together.

You teach Basic Design and Drawing Techniques in the Department of Textile and Fashion Design. How has teaching influenced your own approach to materials, form, and artistic experimentation?

Working in the Department of Textile and Fashion Design has had a significant influence on my approach to materials and form. I sometimes incorporate textile materials into my ceramic and artistic practice, and one of my textile works was awarded second prize at an International Textile Biennial. This experience has allowed me to move freely between different disciplines and materials. For me, what matters most is finding the material that best serves the idea I want to express. I believe that when an artist has something they truly want to communicate, any material can become a means of giving that idea a physical form.



— Interview

Jung Eun Cho



You have been making art since high school and later studied Western painting at Sejong University. How has your approach to painting changed over the years?



After graduating from university, I worked as a designer for a Seoul company producing licensed caps for sports leagues. Some of the caps I designed were sold in the United States. I continued developing creative ideas, and after getting married, I became an active member of the Korean Fine Arts Association in the area where I live.

What experience or question led you to create BORDER LINE?

Since childhood, I have wondered how the choices I make in different circumstances might change my life. I have also wondered how the choices we make as a society shape the future.

Your statement speaks of choices between freedom and oppression, equality and inequality, happiness and unhappiness. Do you see the border as a place of separation, or as a place where opposites meet?

For me, a border includes both visible and invisible lines. It can be a place of separation or confrontation. I do not want to give it one fixed meaning. The same rock might look like a tiger from one side and a rhinoceros from the other.

A dense, textured band runs through several of your paintings. What does this recurring form mean to you, and how do you build its surface?



I create the band's texture with acrylic paint, using brushes, a palette knife, and my fingers. Within the band, different concerns and beliefs struggle and compete as a choice is being made. The band represents those boundary lines.

In one painting, two faces appear on either side of a dark vertical line. What relationship did you want to explore between them?

They could be different people who have made choices at a boundary, people on opposing sides, or different aspects of my inner self.

Are the dilemmas in BORDER LINE drawn mainly

from your own experiences, or also from what you observe in the world around you?

They come from both my personal experiences and what I see in the world around me. People are constantly wrestling with choices at these borders.

When viewers encounter these paintings, what would you like them to reflect on about the choices in their own lives?

I hope viewers will reflect carefully on the choices they have made, the choices they will have to make, and their consequences. After all, happiness and unhappiness are never far apart.

Ella Choi is a South Korean artist based in Perth, Australia. She graduated with a degree in Fine Arts in South Korea and has exhibited her work in group exhibitions and a solo exhibition. Her current practice focuses on delicate watercolour paintings that explore the warmth, beauty, and quiet wonder found in everyday life.

Project Statement

Following the birth of my child in 2022, my perspective on everyday life began to change. The world around me had not changed, but the way I looked at it had. I became more aware of the quiet beauty, gratitude, and small moments of joy within ordinary life.

This renewed way of seeing led me to notice the extraordinary beauty hidden within the ordinary. Through delicate watercolour paintings, I explore familiar objects, flowers, and quiet spaces from everyday life, often incorporating intricate floral elements into familiar forms such as doors, furniture, and personal belongings.

For me, these blooming elements are not merely decorative. They are symbolic expressions of love, warmth, and quiet resilience, suggesting that beauty and meaning can quietly flourish within the spaces we treasure and the moments we often take for granted.

My work is an expression of gratitude for ordinary life and an invitation to pause, look more closely, and discover the extraordinary within what is already around us.



Ella Choi | Blooming Coastal Window | 2022



Ella Choi | Blooming Crimson Door | 2024

3K

Lael Reiss

The title *Flowering Void* brings together ideas of growth and absence. What does it mean for emptiness to "flower", and how did this paradox become the conceptual starting point of the project?

Flowering Void started as an attempt to put words to something I felt physically in my body. During a major depressive episode, the emptiness inside my mind felt like it was growing stronger day by day. That internal process felt



Lael Reiss | Fox | 2023



like a plant germinating, emptiness taking root and developing inside the psyche.

I could only articulate this phrase after the acute phase passed, once I had enough distance to look back. Even as those internal feelings still bubbled up with a certain intensity, this idea took shape: take that feeling a step further into the visual dimension and ask myself, theoretically, of course, what would happen to my physical body if that internal emptiness kept growing infinitely.

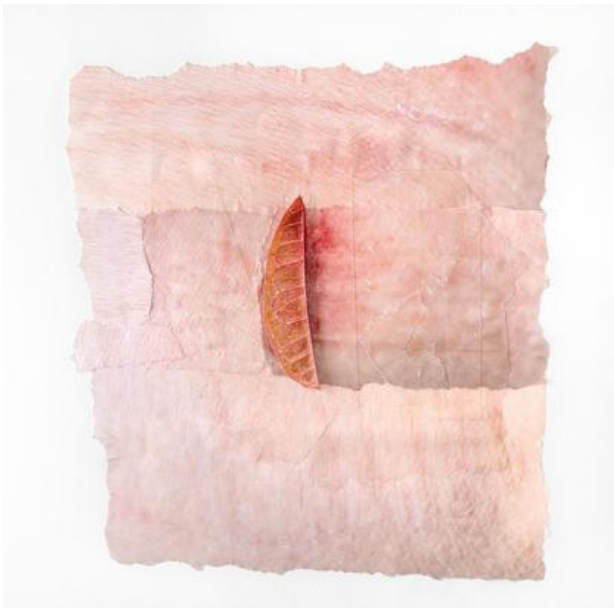
You describe the body as being filled with bags of air that burst and deepen the sense of isolation. Did this metaphor emerge from a particular physical or emotional experience, and how did you translate it into visual form?

This metaphor comes straight from intuitive writing, which is often the first step in my creative process. I write to unload what is overwhelming me in the moment, without tying it directly to an artwork. Sometimes, a specific phrase, word, or passage triggers a creative spark and makes me want to act on it.

That passage translated into visual form across several works rather than one defining piece. The core idea, that my body is filled with air bags, became the foundation for the belly, where those air pockets allowed a germination-like growth to push against the skin's surface. It also appears in pieces like an air-filled nylon bag covered in tights hanging on a tree, an earlier shoulder-pad piece, and later works, such as printing photographs of my skin onto fabric and stuffing them with air bags.

In your work, skin appears both as a protective shell and as a porous boundary. Do you see it primarily as a source of protection, vulnerability, or transformation?

I see it as several things at once. I definitely see it as a source of protection, but at times I couldn't trust it to hold up and not collapse under everything churning inside the psyche. So, I saw it as both a shield and a living partition where things from the environment soak in and push outward at the same time, both transparent and rigid. Today, I think its role is



primarily to protect and guard.

Your creative process moves between bodily sensation, sculptural construction, staged photography, and digital or material treatment. Could you describe how a work usually develops from its initial idea to the final image?

My works usually start from an intuitive, emotional place, or from a research question that interests me. Sometimes, the very first step involves reading and researching before I even step into the studio. It can also begin with a physical sensation or a material that catches my interest, which I bring to the studio to start "playing" with in front of the camera, or it can spark from a phrase, word, or note in my journal that curiosity pulls me to explore visually.

Once that happens, I gather materials that feel right or spark a desire to connect with the idea, and trial and error begins. I work in the studio with the physical materials, construct an object or take photographs, and then step back to evaluate what works and what doesn't. From there, I keep moving forward. This process can be relatively fast—just a few weeks—or it can take several months for a piece to fully realise its potential.

How do you choose the materials that imitate, extend, or replace the body? Are you guided more by their physical properties, their symbolic associations, or the way they respond to the camera?

It is a combination of all these factors. I am guided by the material's physical properties, its visual response to the camera, and its symbolic associations, though the weight of each criterion shifts depending on the specific work. Other aspects also play a big role: whether the material is organic or synthetic, and how much control I have over it. Sometimes, practical considerations dictate the choice as well—like opting for a material that is cheaper or simply easier to work with in the studio.

Your photographs can feel visually delicate and seductive while also creating discomfort or estrangement. How do you use colour, light, texture, and composition to maintain this tension?

Just as humour often helps us cope with difficult conversations in life, I believe a certain aesthetic can allow us to touch and make bleeding wounds accessible to the world. I mostly use a colour palette drawn from my own skin and body, combined with relatively soft lighting and clean, simple compositions. This approach keeps the focus on the object within the frame or space, letting it speak for itself.

How have your experiences in Israel and London, as well as your studies at the Royal College of Art, shaped the way you move between photography, sculpture, and material experimentation? Where do you see this practice developing next?

My creative process always begins with photography. Even when the final result is a sculpture, it begins as an image. This way of thinking was shaped by my studies. During my BFA in Israel, I focused heavily on classic photography during the early years, until my final project, where the medium began to evolve—moving back and forth between image and object. At the RCA, I wanted to challenge myself and take that evolution a step further into sculptural installations and expanded photography. Thanks to the university's workshops and facilities, which encouraged open exploration, I pushed that boundary and finished my degree with complex installations.

Looking ahead, I see myself continuing to explore materials and their intersection with photography. I am particularly interested in delving into BioArt—working with organic materials and connecting them back to the body and the camera.



Kyunghee Seo is a Korean visual artist whose practice spans painting and sculpture. She holds a BFA in Fine Arts from Dong-A University and an MFA in Painting from Hongik University Graduate School of Fine Arts, where she researched pictorial expression through the theory of companion species.

Her work explores the relationships between animals and people living within a shared culture. Through layered combinations of animal figures, letters, numbers, symbols, and colors, she visualizes the traces of language, information, memory, and emotion that accumulate through everyday life. Her animals are not presented as simple representations or characters, but as contemporary beings that share our spaces and shape our experiences.

Seo has presented her work at Hyundai Department Store's Gasan branch and Lotte Department Store in Busan. She has also participated in artist programs organized by the Gyeongnam Cultural Foundation and the Bucheon Cultural Foundation. Her work has been published through Art in Bank and featured by C1 News. Recently, she has expanded the animal figures from her paintings into sculptural forms, bringing them from the painted surface into physical space.

Project Statement

My practice began with observing animals living closely with people. I became interested in how they share our spaces, adapt to everyday routines, and leave lasting memories and emotions in our lives.

The animals in my paintings are not simple representations or characters. They appear as contemporary beings that experience the habits, rules, and culture of daily life in their own ways. I fill their bodies and surroundings with letters, numbers, symbols, colors, and repeated marks. These layered elements represent fragments of language, information, experience, and memory gathered over time. They also suggest how every living being carries traces of the world it inhabits.

I do not seek to humanize animals. Instead, painting them allows me to consider how our lives have been shaped through relationships with other living beings. More recently, I have expanded these figures from painting into sculpture, bringing them from the painted surface into shared physical space. Through my work, I explore coexistence and the memories formed when different lives encounter, influence, and live alongside one another.



Kyunghee Seo | The Dance of Symbols Suspended from Balloons | 2024



Kyunghee Seo | Galloping with Golden Light | 2026

— Interview

Jan van Luyn

You began making art in 2014 after a long illness. What drew you to painting at that moment, and how has its meaning in your life evolved?



Jan van Luyn | Salon De The | 2021



Actually, I was already writing poetry. And classical music became a big part of my life. But art in the form of painting came as a surprise. I had never thought about it, but one day I saw a piece of paper, a pencil and a marker and felt the urge to draw. I am very intuitive, so I just followed this need and started to draw. No masterpieces, haha, just some sketches; it was not even close to great art. But I enjoyed it so much that I started to draw every day. Painting was not possible, as my health needed to improve more before I could leave my bed. I was in a wheelchair for 14 years and ill for 17 years, from top to toe.

My art developed as my health did. Not hand in hand, but it seemed that my new health searched for an alternative way of life. As if the winter of my life had ended and spring had created new life inside of me. The urge to express myself was really strong. Almost like a basic need in life. For the first 5–6 years of my creative life, I was not able to draw or paint for more than 45 minutes to an hour on a daily basis. From 2020 to 2022, my health improved a lot due to therapy, and also, I had time on my hands. Around 2019, I started using colour (paint); before that, I did everything in black and white. It was almost unbelievable, as I started to realize that using colour was so logical and as if I had always known how to use it. (One of my first paintings was "Woman with Pipe", 140 cm by 200 cm.)

Now I can paint for several hours on a daily basis. Art has become an inner need, and creating art feels like a big gift from life to me.



Since 2022, you have been able to create art every day. How has this continuity changed your confidence, your experimentation, and your relationship with the creative process?

My confidence has not changed a lot. I have never experienced fear when I started to create. I follow my instinct. Like any other artist, I walk the road of doubt, searching and questioning my art and myself. I see those things as a need. One needs those elements to create art. It is a voyage of discovery. And this voyage has developed a stronger confidence, for sure. I believe that one is learning from each painting and drawing. I find my own ways of using techniques, structures and textures. And every painting that I have finished is another step on the mountain that I am climbing as an artist. Creativity has become a way of life. Like one needs to breathe, I need to create.

You call your new artistic language “Resonism”. How did this idea emerge, and what do you hope will resonate between a painting and its viewer?

I think Resonism is, in fact, what I tried to achieve from the beginning. It just did not have a “name”. Resonism is, for me, the constant dialogue I have with the canvas. In this dialogue, ideas come to me: how to move on, what textures and structures to use, colours,

details, balances (!). Yes, all in life, as in art, is about balances, and I try to make my paintings alive and moving. They balance the life in the paint, as I express myself completely in the image that is created. So, this “tension”, this “liveness”, is not an ending; no, it is a journey, creating, as I hope, an atmosphere that will last. It is also my hope that the viewer experiences this atmosphere and has emotions that keep on going, resonating in the energy called life.

You describe your practice as an exploration of your inner life. How does an emotion or a memory begin to take shape on the canvas?

I am not an artist who needs or wants to express direct emotions (or memories) in my paintings. I have become the person that I am today through the history of my past, my present and the future. I believe that every brushstroke has my energy. So, my inner life does not have to be expressed through a direct confrontation with emotions. I am not like this, as we humans are a complex combination of many things; emotions and memories are just a part of this energy. Every painting needs a new beginning, new energy, and I use my instinct/intuition to guide me towards a new creation. I put all of my life into the energy that is required, and every artwork demands a part of my inner life. So, it is not something we can see, hear or understand. At least, I cannot understand it. It is just there; I can feel it and use it without asking myself which elements of my life are being used, as creative



energy is, as I see it, a mysterious and complex use of the energy one is made of.

Your compositions often transform figures and their surroundings into angular planes. What attracts you to this structure, and how have you developed it into your own visual language?

Haha. Honestly? I don't know. But I will try to answer your question anyhow. The way I come to my compositions is almost as elusive as it is real. It is not a process of many hours of thinking or sketching. The ideas and compositions, as well as the way I use structures, textures, etc., come to me while I am creating a piece. Walking in nature is a perfect way for me to bring creativity to life, solve the "puzzles" and find answers as well. For I believe that making art is a way of finding answers to the questions we are asking ourselves, and nature is a helpful source and accompanist in this process. I start with an idea, but this is just the beginning. Many times, the process of creating leads me towards new compositions. Yes, I can say for sure that I love geometry. I don't know why. It is just there. It comes naturally. I feel close to the kind of structures and textures I use and the ways that I feel are helping to make the painting alive, in tension, balancing. I know this kind of "thinking" came to me with the first sketches that I made 12–13 years ago. And this beautiful, elusive way of creating is, as I believe, our inner strength and need to express ourselves. We try, sometimes too much, in my opinion, to understand everything. And yet, the greatest things in life are a mystery. I like it when we are able to leave some things in life unspoken, unexplained. For life is bigger than us. Art is a wonder of this life. We are, we may be, a part of this wonder, and I am grateful for that.

Your work has been exhibited in several countries. Has an encounter with a viewer from a different cultural background changed your understanding of one of your own works?

This answer can be short. No, it hasn't. You describe art as "the voice of beauty and hope".

How do you give hope a visual form while leaving room for the more difficult aspects of human experience?

Hope is not directly transferred into a visual form. For me, that sounds as if one can look at my paintings and see clear parts that express hope. No, for me, it is different. It feels a bit like I have to express myself in a different language to make clear what I mean by that. Hope lies in the fact that, for me, art is a visual form in general. As humans, we all have different DNA,



Jan van Luyn | After Bath | 2025

characters and backgrounds. In art, we are able to express this unique voice in a way that allows us to reach out and see, hear and feel the energy of the composer. THAT is hope, that is beauty! So, it is not a concrete form, but an energetic way of showing ourselves in art and in life. It is communicating with everyone.

My dad always taught me that we, as human beings, cannot live on the nastiness and misery that life presents us with. We can try to take off the sharp edges, but we cannot remove them from our lives. We have to accept that life has a downside. So, what can we do? To hope? To live? We can—we must—focus on the beauty and good things in life. We must not only seek them but also create them! For in this energy, hope lies within us. It is an active way of creating perspective in our lives. We can only truly live when we have this beauty and hope—as guidance, but also as a horizon.

I would like to give an example from my own life that meant a lot to me. It concerns the art of music. Classical music. When I was ill, terribly ill, the lonely mornings, afternoons, evenings and nights did not feel like a killing field, as I had my music! No matter how bad I felt physically, no matter how bad I looked, how tired I was or how the pain tried to cut me off from all of life, the music was there. My radio "sang" this music for me just as beautifully and wonderfully as it did for everyone else. It made no distinction between me and healthy people. Music is a form that is bigger than our DNA, characters and backgrounds. Art, in general, is



able to speak to us when words are not enough; it does not need a translator, for art is a common language. In this lies the voice of beauty and hope for me.

This is symbolic of my life and my relationship with art. When everything seemed lost and I was living in Dante's Inferno, I still looked for, found and spread beauty. Every day, I hoped for some relief from the pain and for some good things: hearing music, seeing the beauty of nature, enjoying the company of a friend and feeling close to my deep longing for life. Finding art. Or, better said, art found me. And I

embraced this gift.

But art does not exist without our effort, search, struggle and, yes, hope. We start with nothing—just a white canvas staring at us. We can easily walk away from it. I find it challenging and somehow reassuring to begin this journey of creating art. This path is the path of hope, and I try to create beauty. For myself, for the world, for life. It feels like a responsibility towards life because life has given me a second chance. So, together with art, I try to live up to the words my dad taught me and honour his memory.

Lane Sanjeet

With a background in architecture, Lane Sanjeet has always had a passion for art, with painting and sketching being a cherished part of her life since childhood.

After years devoted to her career and family, she is now embracing a new chapter as a full-time mother and homemaker. As her child prepares to begin university, she finds herself returning to the artistic passion she had set aside amidst life's many responsibilities.

Today, she is rediscovering the joy of creating, expressing, and exploring through art, believing that it is never too late to reconnect with a passion and give yourself the freedom to create.

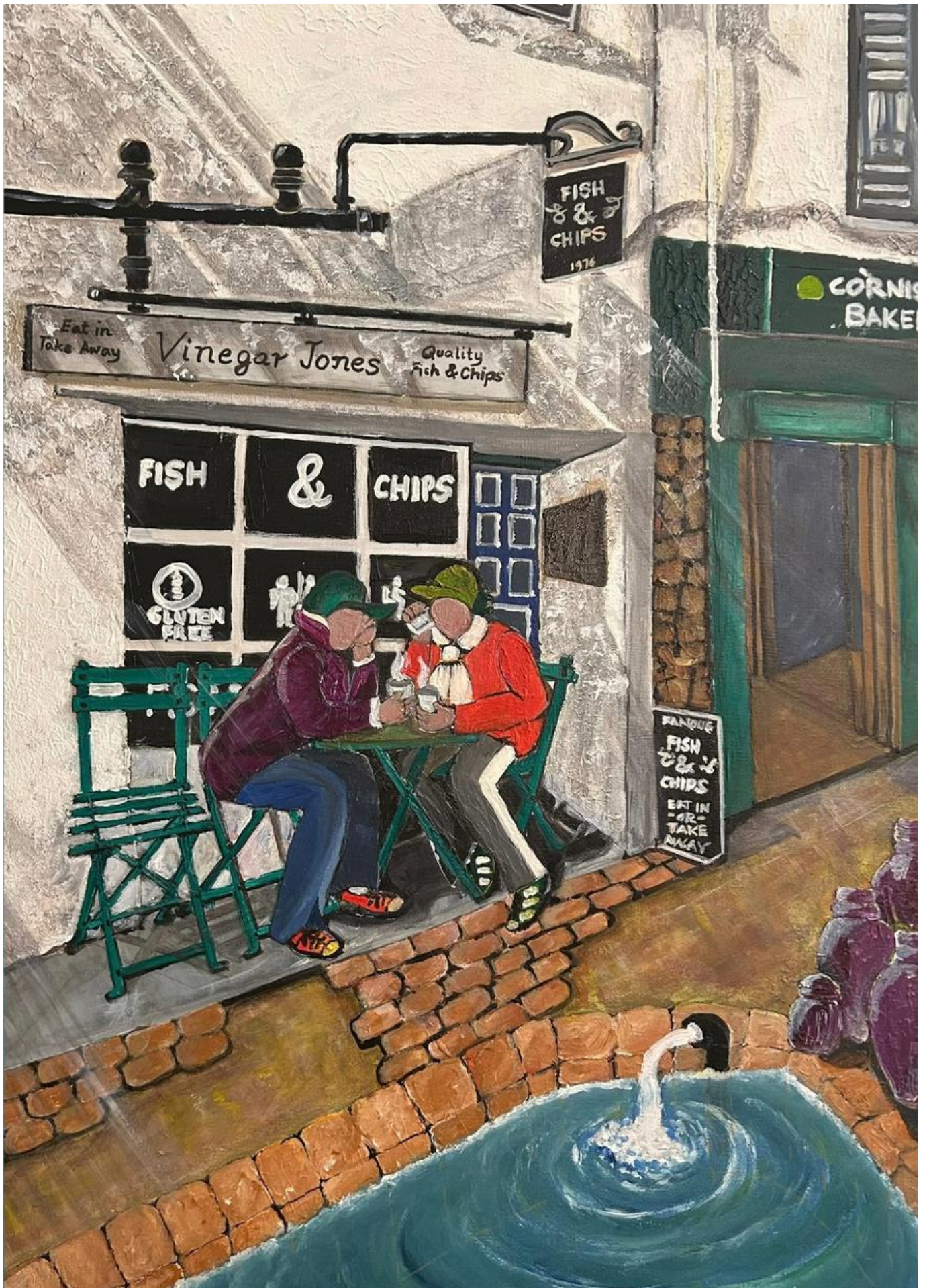
Project Statement

Serenity explores the quiet connection between the human spirit and the natural world. The Buddha is placed in the center surrounded by water, lush plants, and fish, creating a peaceful environment where nature and stillness exist in harmony.

Through soft forms, organic elements, and the gentle movement of water, the work reflects a sense of calm, balance, and inner peace. The surrounding nature represents the continuous flow of life, while the Buddha embodies stillness and mindfulness within it.

My intention is to create a visual space where the viewer can pause, breathe, and experience a moment of tranquility, a reminder that serenity can be found not only in our surroundings, but also within ourselves.





Tanisha Jha

You studied History and Politics before working in IT consulting. What prompted you to leave that career in 2026 and commit yourself fully to art?

I didn't know it growing up, but I've always been what people now call a multi-hyphenate, caught between competing interests. During school, I struggled to pick a coherent set of GCSEs and A-levels and further struggled to pick one degree that really felt like "me". After graduating, I joined consulting because another part of me really enjoys organisation, planning, engaging with clients, and making things work better. Despite leaving art as an educational part of my life, a constant in my life has been loving creativity. Throughout university and working, I still carved out small moments of creating by designing material for events at my college, doing a design internship, and painting during the pandemic.

The shift came in the winter of 2025, when I started a daily art



habit after almost a decade and, for the first time, recognised that this was where I found a flow state I'd been missing in my career. Like a lot of people in their mid-twenties, I hit a bit of an existential crisis wondering whether the thing I was doing was actually what I wanted to do for a long-term career. I realised I'd been climbing the wrong ladder, so I decided to take the leap now and see where this one goes. I had this nagging sense that I'd abandoned the artist in me after school, so going for it properly felt instinctively right. Parts of it have been scary and unstable, but I've never felt this kind of excitement about the ambiguity, or about how much I might learn in the process, even if I do return to a full-time role after this sabbatical experiment.

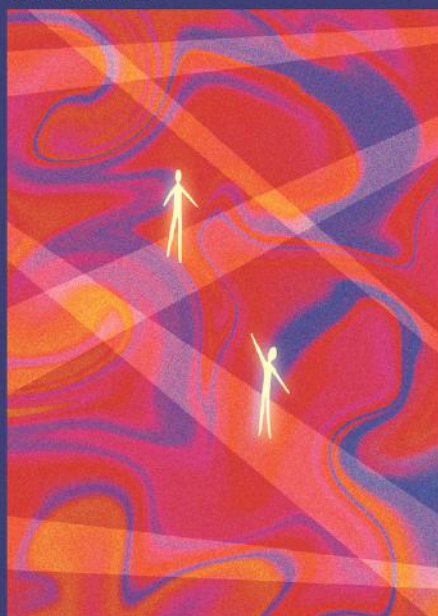
Having lived in Switzerland, Madrid, Surrey, and London, while also maintaining a connection to your Indian heritage, how has this experience of belonging to multiple places shaped your visual language?

A few things, I think. Living across Europe and spending time in India gave me an eye for architecture and environment. Madrid, London, and India are all intensely creative places, visually and culturally, and moving between them made me nostalgic for the different eras of my life and who I was in each place. Travel is deeply important to me and my family, and I've found it unlocks a huge amount of inspiration, either on the go or once I'm back and have had time to reflect. I'm actually writing these answers on the way to India, and what I'm most excited about is knowing I'm about to collect so many new visual and personal experiences that will feed the next round of pieces. India especially brings up nostalgia and childhood memories of visiting family, and that's exactly what I love putting into my work. The hazy, colourful, grainy, luminous quality of my art is really my way of documenting what nostalgia feels like.

Repetition is central to your practice. What draws you back to the same forms and symbols, and what do you discover by revisiting them in different colours and contexts?

It actually started out of fear. I was nervous getting back into art and had low confidence in my ability to execute the ideas in my head, so I kept returning to the same patterns and symbols as a comfort zone. Restricting myself to a single star, or a grid, forced me to play with the emotional weight of colour, and to notice how changing one or two elements can shift an entire piece. My confidence grew as the restriction stopped feeling like a limit on my ability to create anything, and started feeling like an experiment. That's where the series came from: changing colours,

SEE YOU



LATER

adding organic shapes, bringing in photographic elements. I know I've pushed a symbol or format as far as it can go when I feel excited to try a new composition, and that excitement is how I keep breaking out of my comfort zone. Now I restrict and repeat out of experimentation rather than fear. It was a useful lesson for me not to let the gap between my taste and my current skill overwhelm me. I start simple, pick one idea, and push it until I'm thoroughly bored of it.

Geometry provides structure in your work, while colour carries emotion. How do you balance these two elements when developing a composition?

Inspiration usually comes from all sorts of different places, but I'm mostly inspired by seeing different colour palettes together and noticing what I feel when I look at them. Geometry is an ongoing experiment, and so I always have a few up my sleeve to choose from or experiment with, and this sets up the rules for how I use and place colour. For example, in a standard square grid, I have just two colours, or two gradients, and that's the extent of it. Then the emotion comes from how much movement and texture I add, or how saturated the colours are, and if they're complementary or if they're just different tones. Once I'm happy with the grid and colour in harmony, I can bring out further interesting elements to add to the composition.

Your images often appear ordered and carefully constructed, yet you describe something restless beneath their surfaces. How do you create this tension between control and unease?

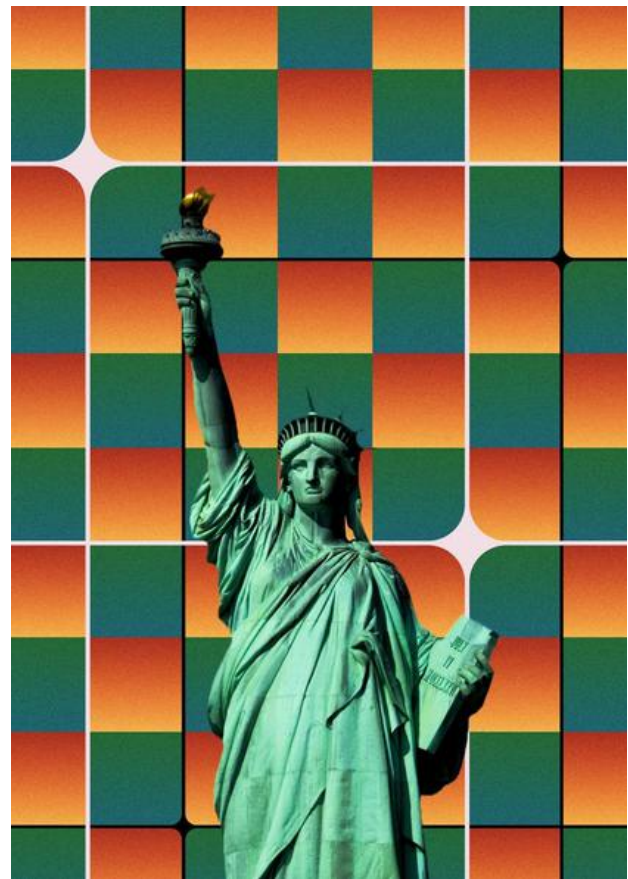
The restlessness comes from everything that sits beyond the geometry and colour, and is the next step in my creative process. It's usually what feels "missing" once I've built a neat, ordered grid. Marbled texture, circular patterns, heavy grain, and contrasting elements are what bring movement into a piece that a clean grid can lack. The organic layer, plus a bit of luminosity, is what builds the nostalgic, surreal, almost out-of-body feeling I'm after. It's also where I spend the most time, because the amount of movement and swirl is what decides how slow and hazy a piece is, versus chaotic and loud.

Cultural, spiritual and architectural icons recur throughout your practice. How do you choose the symbols you work with, and how does their meaning change when you reconstruct them through colour and pattern?

The starting point is almost always a colour or an emotion rather than the symbol itself, so I don't decide what a piece means before I make it. I follow the colour, and the distinct icons fit in as I develop the composition. That order matters to me, because if I started from the symbol I think I'd end up illustrating something I've seen a thousand times before or making a postcard, and I'd rather discover the idea in the making, pushing it beyond something predictable.

"Liberty, Gridded" is a good example of how that plays out. I noticed, after building the background, that the rusty orange and bright green I'd been pulled to were the colours of the Statue of Liberty as she oxidised. I hadn't set out to make a New York piece, I'd just been chasing a palette stuck in my head and only once it was down did I recognise what it was pointing at. Once I saw it, leaning in made sense, so I started experimenting with photographic elements and that bold, American imagery until the icon felt natural rather than imposed. What's left is closer to the nostalgia of actually travelling to a place, whether that's New York in "Liberty, Gridded" or Marrakech in "Solar Quarter". It stops being a cliché and becomes the feeling and memory of a place, or a time, or who I was when I was there.

The eyes, or nazar, work the same way but come from



Tanisha Jha | Liberty

somewhere far more personal than a country or a landmark. They're tied to flicking through my brother's collection of art books as a child, specifically the collections of M.C. Escher and Alex Grey. That's deeply ingrained in me. It's where my sense of engaging with geometric art, bright colours, and weird composition began. So when I use the eye now, it comes with that childhood reminiscence instead, sitting with something odd and cool and trying to understand it. In my palette, the eye becomes a much more vivid portrayal of what remembering my childhood actually feels like, rather than a literal recreation of the protective charm it starts out as.

Alongside your artistic practice, you are developing a Notion consulting studio and writing about building a portfolio career. How do these different activities influence one another, and what does a sustainable creative life mean to you?

When I left my corporate job, I knew I wanted to test a completely different way of working, built around the things that played to my strengths. I wanted to connect my organisational and project management skills with my creative side, rather than keep them in separate boxes. A portfolio career lets me do that.

The activities feed each other more than I expected, mostly in a practical way. The organised, ops side of me clears the space for the art. When my admin, projects, outreach, and ideas are tracked somewhere I trust, my head is quiet enough to actually make things. To me, a sustainable creative life means having enough structure to keep showing up for the art, and enough freedom to let it change. It also means not letting the admin become the thing I avoid until it's scary.

I'm currently building a "Notion for Artists" package for people who hate the admin side, aren't that confident with Notion, or get overwhelmed when they have to set up a workspace. I find Notion creative in its own right, too. I enjoy finding clever ways to bend the tool to my purpose and I think it's as useful for a solo artist as it is for a business.

— Interview

Cesar Vianna

The works submitted for this interview were all created in 2026. Do they represent a new stage in your practice, and what has changed in the way you approach the human figure?

Yes, I see these works as a new stage, although they are also the continuation of a research process that I have been developing for several years. The human figure has been central to my work since around 2018, but my approach has gradually shifted from trying to represent the body in its entirety towards asking how little I actually need to show for a body to remain present.

I have always been interested in classical ideas of proportion and anatomical balance. I look at the body almost architecturally: the relationship between the head, torso and



limbs, the distribution of weight, and the way a pose occupies space. My background in design and architecture certainly contributes to this need for structure and precision. At the same time, I am interested in the idealised male figure and in the confidence with which artists such as Tom of Finland represented it. His work has been an important reference for me, particularly in the attention he gives to the male body and in the certainty of his lines.

What has changed most in these 2026 works is that I am increasingly removing rather than adding information. I work primarily with shadows and body hair, the hair, beard, eyebrows, chest hair, and allow large areas of the body to disappear into the background. There is often no conventional outline defining the figure. The viewer understands the anatomy through fragments: a shadow beneath a muscle, the direction of cross-hatching, the shape of the hair, or simply the empty space between two marks. This minimalist approach has become fundamental to the way I represent the body.

For me, this creates an interesting contradiction. I remain very concerned with correct form and proportion, almost in a classical sense, but I no longer feel that I need to describe everything. The anatomy must be convincing underneath the drawing, even when most of that anatomy is invisible. In that sense, the blank paper or the watercolor background has become as important as the lines themselves. The viewer's eye completes what I deliberately leave unfinished. So I would describe this new stage as a search for precision through reduction. Earlier, I was interested in demonstrating what I could represent; now I am increasingly interested in discovering what I can remove without losing the body, its sensuality, its movement, or its presence.

You describe the body as both form and presence. At what point does the observation of a physical body give



Cesar Vianna | The Thinker | 2026

way to psychological or symbolic interpretation?

For me, it happens quite naturally during the process of drawing. I usually begin with observation: proportions, anatomy, posture, the direction of the light, the distribution of shadows. At that stage, the body is primarily form. My background in design has made me very attentive to structure, and I still want the anatomy to be convincing even when I eventually remove much of the visual information. But a body is never only anatomy. A slight inclination of the head, the position of the hands, the tension of an arm or the direction of the gaze can completely change how we perceive a figure. I have always been interested in these small gestures because body language can communicate emotions that are immediately recognisable, regardless of the cultural background of the person represented.

This becomes particularly important in my current work because I deliberately provide less information. By representing primarily shadows, hair and selected details, I leave much of the figure physically absent. The empty areas are not simply unfinished spaces; they allow the viewer to reconstruct the body mentally and, at the same time, to project something of themselves onto it. The transition from physical observation to psychological interpretation therefore occurs partly in my drawing and partly in the viewer's imagination.

The symbolic dimension can also emerge from the pose itself. Saint Sebastian is an obvious example. A contemporary male body can immediately enter into dialogue with centuries of representations of martyrdom, beauty, suffering, sensuality and desire simply through a particular posture or gesture. I have explored Saint Sebastian before precisely because this figure can exist simultaneously as a religious image, a wounded body and an important reference within homoerotic visual culture.

I am interested in that ambiguity. I do not want to dictate exactly what the figure is feeling or what the viewer should understand. In fact, I prefer not to explain an artwork too completely, because interpretation is part of the experience I want to preserve. The physical body gives me the structure, but presence begins when that structure suggests something beyond what is actually drawn.

You place contemporary bodies in dialogue with visual traditions once associated with saints, heroes, and idealised figures. Which aspects of those traditions do you find valuable, and which do you feel compelled to challenge?

What I value most in those traditions is their understanding of the human body as something capable of carrying meaning. In classical and Renaissance art, the figure was rarely just a body. Proportion, posture, gesture and light could transform it into a saint, a hero, a martyr or an ideal of beauty. I am very attracted to that attention to anatomy and proportion, and to the idea that the body itself can become a visual language. My interest in artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Renoir comes partly from this search for subtlety and precision in the representation of the human form. At the same time, I do not want to reproduce the classical ideal. The bodies in my work belong to the present. Many are inspired by real people I have encountered through life-drawing sessions or through personal exchanges, with different ethnicities, ages, proportions and physical

characteristics. That diversity has become an important part of the way I understand the human figure. I want to borrow the visual authority traditionally given to saints and heroes and offer some of that same dignity to contemporary, ordinary bodies.

Saint Sebastian is particularly important to me in this context. Historically, his image brings together beauty, physical suffering, vulnerability and the idealised male body, but it has also acquired a strong homoerotic resonance. I have explored that ambiguity in my work before, including through a Saint Sebastian inspired by a real model whose personal experience gave the image an entirely different emotional dimension. In the 2026 works, I return to that visual tradition without trying to recreate a historical painting. The arrows or the raised arms may immediately evoke the iconography, but the man remains contemporary.

This is perhaps where I feel most compelled to challenge tradition. Historically, idealisation often established quite narrow definitions of which bodies deserved to represent beauty, heroism or even transcendence. I am interested in separating those qualities from a single physical ideal. Tom of Finland is an interesting reference for me here because, although his bodies are also highly idealised, he placed the male body, masculinity and homoerotic desire at the centre of the image with extraordinary confidence. His representation of the male figure has influenced the way I think about both detail and presence.

So I am not rejecting the classical tradition; I am appropriating its visual vocabulary and changing who is allowed to inhabit it. I want the proportion, dignity and monumentality of the classical figure, but I want them to belong to bodies that exist now.

The male figure occupies a prominent place in your recent work. What ideas about masculinity become possible when strength, vulnerability, sensuality, and uncertainty are allowed to coexist?

I think masculinity becomes much more interesting when we stop treating these qualities as opposites. Strength does not exclude vulnerability, sensuality does not diminish dignity, and uncertainty does not make a man less masculine. For me, the male body becomes more human when all these possibilities are allowed to exist simultaneously.

The history of art offers many examples of this complexity. Michelangelo gave the male body extraordinary physical power, but his figures are not simply demonstrations of strength; there is often tension, introspection and psychological weight within that monumentality. Caravaggio introduced something different: his bodies can be beautiful, sensual, wounded and dramatically human at the same time. Saint Sebastian is perhaps one of the clearest examples of this ambiguity in Western art. He can embody physical beauty, endurance, suffering, surrender and sensuality within a single image. This combination has fascinated me for a long time and is one reason I continue returning to his iconography. In an earlier work, I connected Saint Sebastian with the experience of a real model facing cancer, which made the traditional image of the wounded body become something very personal and contemporary.

Tom of Finland is another important reference, but from a very different perspective. I have always admired the confidence with which he placed the male body at the centre of the image. His men occupy space unapologetically;

masculinity and desire are not hidden. His detailed treatment of the male figure has been an important influence on my own work. However, I am interested in taking that confidence into a more ambiguous emotional territory. My figures may have strong bodies, but they may also turn away, close their eyes, raise their arms, expose themselves, appear contemplative or seem momentarily uncertain. There is also something important to me about the gaze. Traditionally, the female body has occupied a much larger space as an object of beauty and desire in Western art. I am interested in giving the male body permission to occupy that position as well: to be looked at, admired, desired and contemplated without needing to justify its presence through action or heroism. A man does not always need to be doing something heroic. Sometimes his presence is enough. This is particularly relevant to my minimalist approach. Because I often construct the figure almost entirely through shadows and hair, much of the physical body disappears. Paradoxically, this can make the body feel more exposed. There is less information, but more space for the viewer to perceive gesture, sensuality and emotion. The empty areas become part of that vulnerability. Ultimately, I am interested in masculinity as something plural rather than fixed. A man can be powerful and fragile, confident and uncertain, masculine and sensual, heroic and ordinary, all within the same body. For me, allowing these apparent contradictions to coexist does not weaken the representation of masculinity; it expands it.

Your figures often appear emotionally exposed yet retain a strong sense of dignity and self-possession. How do you portray vulnerability without reducing it to weakness?

I do not see vulnerability and strength as opposites. In fact, I think there is a particular kind of strength in allowing oneself to be seen without constantly performing power. This is something I increasingly look for in the male figure: a body

that can be exposed, contemplative, sensual or emotionally uncertain and still retain its dignity.

Gesture is fundamental to this. A lowered gaze, closed eyes, a turned head or raised arms can suggest introspection, surrender or vulnerability without making the figure passive or powerless. I have always been interested in these small movements because body language can communicate emotions with very little information. I think this is also connected to my interest in animation: the Disney animators I admire taught me to look not only at a pose, but at the movement and emotion that lead to that pose.

There are important precedents for this in art history.

Michelangelo could give a figure enormous physical strength while simultaneously suggesting psychological tension. Caravaggio allowed beauty, sensuality, fear, pain and mortality to inhabit the same body. Egon Schiele went even further in exposing psychological unease through the body. And, once again, Saint Sebastian interests me because his iconography contains an extraordinary contradiction: he is wounded and physically exposed, yet he rarely appears defeated. His vulnerability becomes part of his endurance. In my own work, I try to achieve something similar without relying on dramatic facial expression. My minimalist technique is particularly useful here. By constructing the figure primarily through shadows, cross-hatching and body hair, while allowing large portions of the anatomy to disappear, I remove some of the visual armour surrounding the subject. The figure becomes exposed through absence. Yet because I remain attentive to proportion, posture and the structure of the body, that absence does not make him fragile in the sense of being powerless.

I also think dignity comes from the way I look at the person I am drawing. I am not interested in using vulnerability as spectacle. Many of my figures originate in encounters with real people, and those exchanges have taught me that portraiture can reveal something a person may not immediately recognise in themselves. One of the reactions that has affected me most is when a model looks at my work and says, "You made me look beautiful." That tells me that the drawing has preserved something essential about the person rather than simply exposing them. Perhaps that is the distinction I try to maintain: vulnerability in my work is not the loss of power; it is the absence of armour. The figure may reveal something intimate, uncertain or fragile, but he remains in possession of himself.

When an artwork develops from an encounter with a real person, what responsibilities do you feel towards that individual? How do trust, consent, and personal boundaries enter your creative process?

When I work from a real person, I am very conscious that I am not simply borrowing a body or a face. There is an individual behind the image, with a history, a personality and boundaries that must be respected. This became increasingly important in my practice when I began participating in online life-drawing sessions and meeting models from different countries. In commissioned portraits, this relationship can become even more personal because conversation often becomes part of the process, and what I learn about the individual can subtly influence the final work.

Trust is therefore fundamental. There is already a degree of vulnerability involved in allowing another person to observe your body closely enough to draw it, particularly when the





work involves nudity or sensuality. I never interpret that openness as unlimited permission. Consent to pose is not automatically consent to every possible transformation, context or use of that person's image. I think an artist has a responsibility to understand that distinction and to respect the boundaries established by the model.

At the same time, I am not trying to make a photographic reproduction of the person. There is always a transformation between the model and the artwork. I observe anatomy, gesture, light and individual characteristics, but these elements pass through my own visual language. Sometimes the resulting figure becomes symbolic or enters into dialogue with another image or tradition. My experience with Saint Sebastian is a good example: a real model and his experience with cancer became connected to the symbolism of Sebastian as a wounded figure associated with survival and homoerotic imagery. Because I knew something of his personal story, the work acquired an emotional significance that went far beyond simply representing his body.

This also makes me conscious of the difference between revealing someone and exploiting their vulnerability. I may emphasize sensuality, physical beauty or emotional exposure, but I never want the person to lose their dignity in the process. I think this connects to something models have occasionally told me after seeing my work: "You made me look beautiful." That reaction is particularly meaningful because it suggests that they still recognize themselves, but perhaps through a perspective they had not previously considered.

There is also an interesting paradox in my current minimalist work. I observe the model very carefully, but then I deliberately remove information. Shadows, hair and selected details remain while much of the body disappears into the paper. In a way, that process creates another boundary: I can suggest intimacy without necessarily revealing everything. Ultimately, I see the relationship between artist and model as a collaboration, even when the model never physically touches the artwork. They give me access to their presence;

what I owe them in return is respect. Artistic freedom is essential to me, but it does not eliminate responsibility. For me, trust and consent do not restrict the creative process—they create the conditions in which something more honest can emerge.

Having taught drawing and art history for many years, how has teaching influenced your own way of looking? Has explaining artistic principles to others made you more inclined to follow them or to break them?

Teaching drawing and art history for many years profoundly changed the way I look at art. When you teach drawing, you cannot simply say that something "looks right." You have to understand why it works: proportion, perspective, anatomy, composition, light, shadow, movement. You have to break the image down into principles that can be understood and then reconstructed by someone else. Teaching made me much more conscious of decisions that, as an artist, I might otherwise have made instinctively. My background in design and architecture had already given me a strong sense of structure and precision, but teaching reinforced that analytical way of seeing.

Art history had a different influence. Teaching it meant constantly revisiting how artists responded to the conventions of their own periods. What interests me is that many artists we now consider masters did not simply follow rules—they understood them extraordinarily well and then found ways to transform them. Michelangelo needed an exceptional understanding of anatomy before he could exaggerate it. Picasso knew academic drawing before dismantling representation. Matisse understood colour before liberating it from naturalism. Looking at art history in this way taught me that experimentation is much more interesting when you understand what you are challenging. I think this describes my own relationship with the human figure quite well. I remain very attached to what I would call a classical understanding of form and proportion. I want the anatomy underneath the image to work. I want the distribution of weight to be credible and the gesture to make sense. My earlier interviews already describe this desire to master a classical approach to the figure while bringing contemporary elements into it.

But once that structure is established, I feel increasingly free to break the rules of representation. In my current work, for example, I may spend considerable time studying the anatomy of a figure and then deliberately refuse to draw most of it. I eliminate the outline, remove areas of the body and retain primarily shadows, hair and a few essential marks. The paradox is that I need to understand the complete body in order to know exactly what I can remove.

This is probably the most important lesson teaching gave me: rules are tools, not obligations. I do not believe an artist needs to choose between academic knowledge and freedom. For me, one makes the other possible. The more I understand proportion, anatomy, composition and art history, the more confident I feel in deciding when those principles are necessary, and when I can abandon them. So teaching ultimately made me both more disciplined and more willing to experiment. I learned to respect the foundations without becoming imprisoned by them. Perhaps that is also why my work today can pursue something close to classical proportion while representing a body with almost nothing at all.

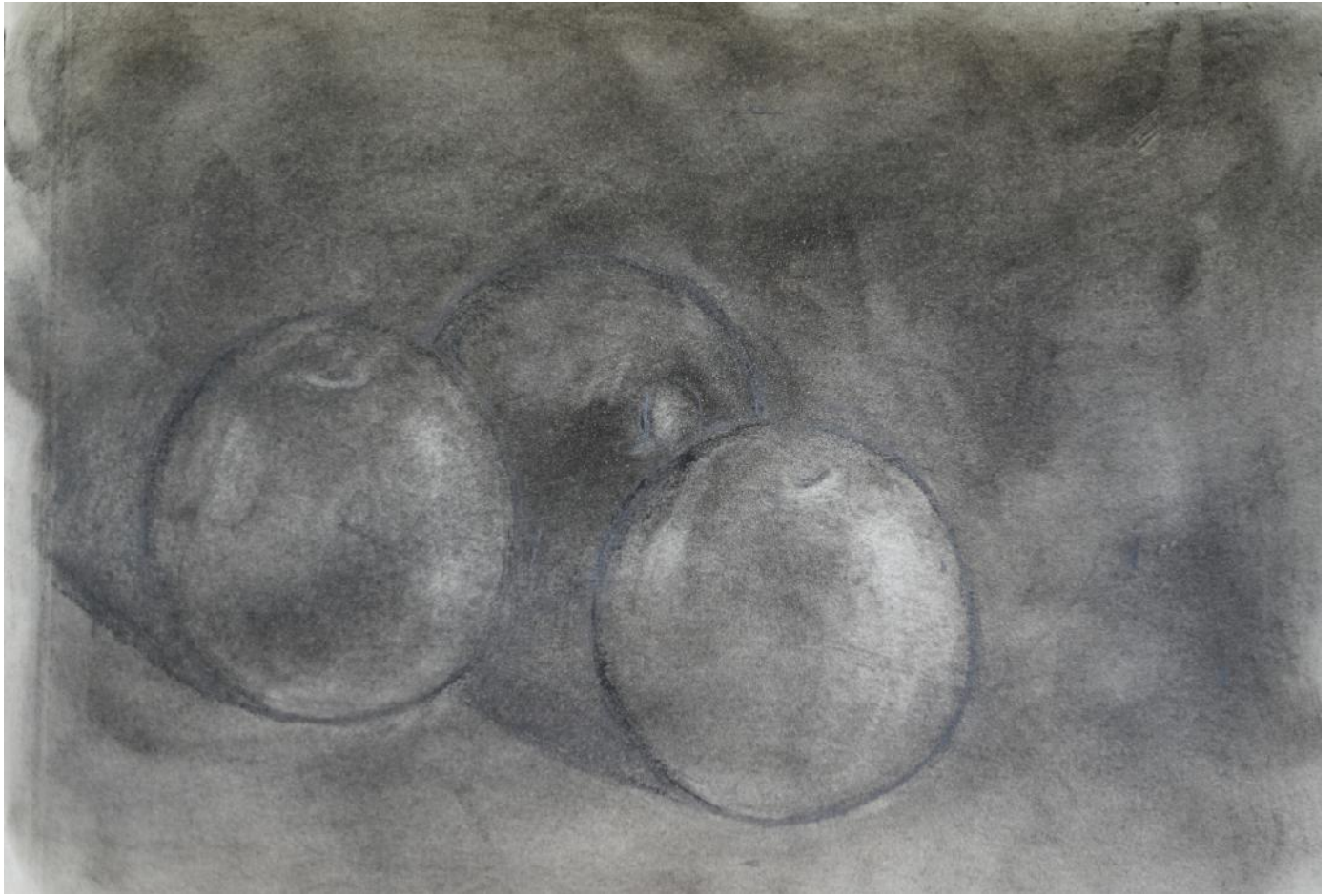
Fabio Filippi lives in Rimini. He holds a degree in Astronomy and Physics and has taught mathematics and physics at the high school level. Alongside his scientific work, he pursues interests in music, painting, photography, and writing. He is the author of historical novels and coming-of-age stories. **Il segreto di Mary Shelley** received an honorable mention at the Lord Byron – Golfo dei Poeti Literary Prize.

Project Statement

I declare that the submitted works are the result of my own personal work.



Fabio Filippi | Stork



Fabio Filippi | Apples



Fabio Filippi | Cartoon Club

— Interview

Helena Milos

Your artistic motto is, “Colours speak where words fail.” Which emotions or experiences most often lead you to paint, and how do you know when a work has expressed what words could not?



Helena Milos | On The Shoulder | 2026



I am mainly inspired by longing, joy, melancholy and hope. Painting allows me to express feelings that I sometimes cannot put into words.

You grew up and studied in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Austria. How have these different cultural environments shaped your artistic identity and visual language?

All three cultures have shaped me in different ways. Bosnia gave me a strong emotional connection, Croatia the light and Mediterranean atmosphere, and Austria shaped my artistic education.

You studied media, journalism, and Slavic studies before working as a journalist and photographer. How do observation and storytelling influence your paintings?

Observation is the foundation of my work. Through journalism and photography, I learned to look closely and tell stories through images. These experiences also influence my painting.

Photography and painting are both central to your practice. What can painting communicate that photography cannot—and vice versa?

Photography captures a moment. Painting gives me the freedom to transform that moment and bring in my own feelings, memories and thoughts.

You describe your creative process as intuitive and emotional. Does a painting usually begin with a particular image, memory, feeling, or colour?



Helena Milos | Oskar | 2024

A painting usually begins with a feeling or a mood. Sometimes it is simply an emotion that grows within me, and then the painting develops intuitively.

You work primarily with oil and acrylic on canvas. How do you choose between these materials, and what importance do layering, brushwork, and texture have in your process?

I choose the medium intuitively. Acrylic allows me to work quickly and spontaneously, while oil gives

me more depth and softer transitions. Layers and texture give the painting its sense of life.

You find inspiration in everyday life and in what often remains unnoticed. What details, emotions, or subjects are attracting your attention at this stage of your artistic journey?

I am particularly interested in the inner turmoil of people – what happens deep within the human soul and often remains invisible from the outside. This is what I try to make visible through my art.

JeeYoung Lee is a Seoul-based artist working primarily with staged photography and installation. She received her BFA in Visual Communication Design from Hongik University and her MFA in Photography from the Graduate School of Hongik University in Seoul, Korea.

Lee constructs immersive, meticulously crafted environments within her studio, often over periods lasting months. Drawing from memory, emotion, and imagination, she physically builds these fictional spaces rather than relying on digital manipulation. The artist frequently appears within her installations, not as a conventional self-portrait subject, but as a presence reflecting inner states and psychological landscapes.

Lee has held solo exhibitions internationally, including at NOW Gallery (UK), Farol Santander (Brazil), and K11 Art Space (Hong Kong). Her work has also been presented in numerous group exhibitions, including at the Singapore Art Museum and Buk-Seoul Museum of Art.

Her work has been featured in international media including BBC Culture, CNN International, The New York Times, and The Huffington Post. She was named among the Top 30 Finalists for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2012, Hong Kong) and received the OCI Young Creatives award (2013, South Korea). Her photographs are held in public and private collections worldwide.

Project Statement

I have been working on the series *Stage of Mind* since late 2007. It began with self-reflection and a recurring question: "Where am I in my mind?" Through this ongoing work, I continue to focus on life—my primary interest—and the experiences that shape who I am.

I constantly question my identity and contemplate my existence. This lies at the core of my photographs. I search for what I need to do, what I desire, what I value, and what I am capable of, and the work becomes a record of the answers I discover along the way. Each image is a "psychological landscape": a manifestation of my inner state in close relation to my circumstances at the time. I use symbolic objects to construct a scene—a metaphorical reconstruction of my perception of reality and my relationship to it.

I handcraft every element of the set to materialize an emotional experience and give physical form to my inner world. At the center, I place a figure that embodies me—usually myself, occasionally a model—completing the psychological landscape. The resulting photograph becomes a theatrical representation of my lived experience. Once the image is captured, the entire set is demolished and my studio becomes empty again. Destroying what I have created allows me to release and move beyond the emotions tied to that scene. From creation to destruction, the entire process becomes a way of analyzing and observing myself.

As an artist, I continue to challenge myself to grow and change. As my life evolves, so do the stages I create. For this reason, the possibilities of *Stage of Mind* remain open and continually evolving.



JeeYoung Lee | Black Birds | 2009



JeeYoung Lee | Mom | 2025



JeeYoung Lee | Neverending Race | 2008

— Interview

iponmwosa Joseph Okundaye

What first led you to use photography - and portraiture in particular - as a way of exploring cultural identity and ancestral memory?

My relationship with photography began with a vision shaped by my earliest experiences of the world around me. Long before I understood photography as an artistic practice, I was absorbing the visual language of my environment—the colours, patterns, architecture, rituals, landscapes, and people that surrounded me. These became a kind of internal archive of memory, fragments that stayed with me and continued to shape how I see.

Growing up in Lagos, I was particularly influenced by cultural and spiritual traditions such as the Eyo Festival and masquerade festivals. Experiencing these rituals as a child, I was struck by their visual intensity, but also by the sense of



history and continuity they embodied. I was witnessing traditions that existed beyond the individual, carrying stories, beliefs, and ancestral knowledge from one generation to another.

As I began to develop my photographic practice, I found myself returning to these early impressions. Photography offered me a way to revisit those memories and question how culture is remembered, inherited, and transformed. Portraiture became especially important because the human figure provides a space where the personal and the collective can meet. The face and body can become repositories of memory—holding traces of ancestry, place, history, and identity.

My work therefore emerged from a desire not simply to represent my culture, but to investigate my relationship to it. I am interested in what we inherit consciously and unconsciously, and how ancestral memory continues to exist within us, even as our environments and identities evolve.

You describe Westernization as something that can gradually wear away African identity. Which specific changes in contemporary Nigerian life have had the strongest influence on your work?

The changes that have influenced my work most are the gradual shift away from traditional dress, language, rituals, and communal practices, particularly among younger generations. In contemporary African life, Western fashion, popular culture, social media, and global ideas of beauty and success have increasingly shaped how people see themselves and present their identities.

What interests me is not simply the disappearance of tradition, but the tension between what is inherited and what is being adopted. I see this in the way traditional symbols, clothing, and cultural practices are sometimes replaced, adapted, or reinterpreted. My work comes from that space of transition questioning what happens to ancestral identity when a culture is constantly negotiating with a rapidly changing world.





Africa encompasses an enormous diversity of cultures and experiences. How do you balance the broader idea of African identity with the cultural specificity of your own Nigerian background?

I approach African identity through the specificity of my own Nigerian experience. Africa is incredibly diverse, so I do not see my work as attempting to represent the continent as a whole. Instead, I focus on the histories, traditions, visual language, and memories that have shaped me growing up in Nigeria.

At the same time, I believe that the personal can speak to something broader. Through Nigerian culture, I explore themes of ancestry, identity, migration, memory, and cultural change that can resonate across different African experiences. My Nigerian background is therefore the foundation of the work, while the broader idea of African identity emerges through the universal questions I am exploring.

Your portraits are carefully constructed rather than purely documentary. How does an image begin for you - with a personal memory, a cultural reference, a symbol, or a visual idea?

An image often begins with a feeling or a memory sometimes a cultural reference, a colour, a pattern, or a particular visual that has stayed with me. I rarely begin with a fully formed image. Instead, an idea develops through research, memory, and intuition.

From there, I consider the symbolism, setting, styling, gesture, and relationship between the subject and the environment. I construct the portrait deliberately, allowing

these elements to communicate something beyond the person being photographed.

For me, the process is about translating memory and cultural references into a contemporary visual language. The final image is therefore not purely documentary; it is a constructed space where personal memory, symbolism, and cultural identity can coexist.

In the works presented here, the flowing lavender-blue garment and the subject's gestures create a strong sense of movement. What role do color, fabric, and bodily expression play in the narrative of this series?

For me, colour, fabric, and bodily expression are central to communicating a sense of African femininity, strength, and grace. The series came from my admiration for the quiet strength and beauty of women their ability to embody power without always needing to express it through force.

At a time when migration and displacement have become prominent themes in contemporary African photography, I wanted to explore a different dimension of African identity: femininity, presence, and inner strength. The flowing lavender-blue garment became an important visual element, symbolising calmness, softness, and movement, while the subject's gestures reinforce a sense of confidence and composure.

Her hair is also intentional, referencing ideas of royalty and cultural pride. Together, the styling, colour, movement, and mood create a portrait of femininity that is both gentle and powerful. I wanted the image to embody a kind of quiet strength one that feels distinctly African while remaining contemporary and open to interpretation.

The soft light, textured background, and visible grain give these photographs an almost painterly, timeless quality. How do your technical decisions contribute to the emotional and cultural meaning of the work?

The technical choices are intentional in creating a sense of memory, intimacy, and timelessness. I use soft light to create a quiet, almost contemplative atmosphere, allowing the subject's presence and emotion to remain central.

The textured background and visible grain add a tactile, painterly quality that moves the image away from the feeling of a contemporary photograph and towards something that feels remembered or inherited. There is a sense of history in that imperfection, which connects to my interest in African identity, ancestry, and cultural memory.

Ultimately, I want the technical process to support the emotional language of the work. The softness, grain, and muted atmosphere allow the images to feel both contemporary and timeless as though they exist somewhere between a remembered past and the present.

How do you preserve cultural memory without presenting tradition as something fixed or untouched, especially when culture is constantly evolving?

I preserve cultural memory by treating tradition as something living rather than fixed. My work draws from inherited symbols, rituals, and aesthetics, but reinterprets them through a contemporary lens. For me, preserving culture means allowing it to evolve while keeping its memory and meaning alive.

Gwen Olsen

My love for miniatures started at a young age. I began making miniature scenes in bird nest baskets in the 70's. I enjoyed being spontaneous, combining natural materials with my love of birds and miniatures.

Today I have a lot of fun creating scenes with materials I have on hand using a variety of containers to share what feels right to me. Hoping that my artwork can influence others in a positive way.

Project Statement

My goal for this year is to create a work of art that only consists of a feeling. Obviously, there are many feelings, but the one I like to create is the feeling of community.





Russel Lavis

You work across sculpture and design and have explored a wide range of crafts and mentorships. Which experiences have been most influential in shaping your artistic language?

When I was in twelve grade I met my mentor, Mira Wilks. She introduced me to sculpture and taught me how to think and conceptualize. She had already mentored many well-known South African artists such as Allan Alborough. She also organized my first competition where I won 1st place called WAM wax art awards.

What was the starting point for this work, and what does “a world in between” mean to you in relation to it?

I heard about this sculptor called Damien Hirst and his Shark



Tank sculpture. He inspired me to make my own tank with sharks and a human element. The ‘world in between’ represents the ideal relationship between humans and sharks. You have the larger ominous monster emerging from the depths threatening the ideal relationship. Popular media has distorted people’s perception of these animals and conservationists are fighting to correct that and should be supported. Even Hirsts work relied on perception to convey a sense of awe and dread fuelling the reaction from the audience whose space (gallery floor) is being invaded by this sea creature.

The composition presents an upside-down human figure holding a shark, while another shark emerges from the water below. What relationship or narrative connects these three elements?

The composition is a play on Hirsts Shark but executed horizontally with traditional media such as bronze, steel and resin. A suspended bronze figure that hugs such a fierce creature is absurd and is reminiscent of shark films I have watched such as Deep Blue Sea. I reacted to Damien Hirst whilst retaining his technical influence similar to Andy Warhol insisting on having “dripping and drizzling” present in his early works due to the influence of Jackson Pollock.

Sharks are often portrayed as ferocious predators, despite their vital role in marine ecosystems. How does this work challenge that familiar image?

The subject matter cause discomfort amongst supporters of the ferocity only acceptance of the shark. We must rather embrace the notion of balance. Hype is useful when attempting to argue against an established narrative. Animals have too long been symbols of conquest and cruelty, such as



being painted on weapons of war. I believe we should reflect on our role as caretakers rather than apex predators.

You are preparing a proposal to Tate Modern based on this piece. What kind of dialogue would you like the work to open in that context?

Damien Hirst was present at The Tate Modern and I wish to be too. I would like to create dialogue between the artistic community, the entertainment industry as well as influential figures in society and the youth. I require a platform to introduce more support of conservation ideals to the world. I

would also like to work with other artists of similar vision.

You hope to explore the film industry. Could the tension between stillness, movement, danger, and intimacy in this sculpture be translated into a cinematic scene or narrative?

Yes, film is a very effective vehicle to accompany this sculpture. You gave me ideas now that I wish to explore, perhaps an animation in charcoal. This is one of the reasons I believe a joint exhibition would be more beneficial as artists can facilitate more meaning by helping each other.

Laura Bishop

I am a mixed media artist with a background in printed textile design. I graduated from Middlesex university in 2009 and have been creating artwork for as long as I can remember . My passion for my practice has been ever-growing and evolving through all of life's stages. More recently, moving towards the centre of my life whilst I endeavour to make the leap from a hobby artist to a professional one. It is a joy to finally feel my determination and practice coming together in harmony now more than ever before, as I juggle life with two young children and take on the mission to represent artist-mothers in the UK through the production of thought-provoking and eye-catching signs.

Project Statement

My work incorporates upcycled materials and decorated papers that are carefully curated as a patchwork , to present the viewer with a powerful and nostalgic style. I use this a platform to convey important or positive, (and sometimes abstract) messages that I believe should be given a voice in the modern world. I strive to see the potential in found and collected objects, which often serve as a vehicle for representing the many layers and complexity of our society today.





Artem Klunyy

You studied both mining engineering and economics. How have these fields shaped your artistic thinking and approach to abstraction?

Mining taught me one simple thing: the most interesting things are always beneath the surface, and to get to them, you have to break something apart. Geology also trains you to think in sections and layers. Later, when I saw the way Rozanova laid down color in bands, I caught myself thinking that I was looking at a stratigraphic column. Economics added something else: it teaches you to use abstraction as a practical tool. An investment model does not depict a mineral deposit either; it describes it through relationships between quantities. No one expects a cash-



flow chart to bear a portrait-like resemblance to oil. So, in essence, I have been doing the same thing all my life. It was only in 2015 that I stopped pretending it was reporting.

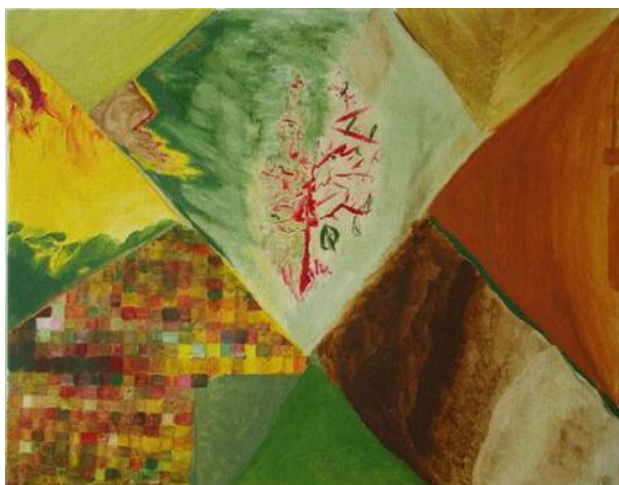
You describe abstraction as a philosophy. What does this mean for you personally?

It means that I'm not very good at answering the question, "So what exactly is depicted here?" Seriously, though, figurative painting gives you an answer. Abstraction gives you a question, and that is where its honesty lies.

I grew up in the North, in Yamal, where the horizon stretches empty for three hundred kilometres. You learn fairly early there that the world does not have to resemble anything recognizable. It simply exists — vast and indifferent — and all a person can do within it is place signs.

For me, a painting is one such sign. I do not describe reality; I argue with it. Sometimes I lose.

How do geometry, color, and texture help you express emotions and philosophical reflections?



They each have their own role. Geometry is responsible for what a person thinks, color for what they actually feel, and texture reveals whether they are lying or not. A straight line always represents a decision, will, intention. A blot or patch of color is a state of being — something that simply happens to you. When I place a hard contour next to a blurred mass, I am essentially depicting an ordinary Tuesday at work: the plan on paper and what actually happened in reality. And texture is the most incorruptible of all. You can construct a flawless composition, but if the brushstroke is weak or lifeless, the viewer will sense it, even without understanding exactly why.

Do you see your paintings as a universal language, and if so, what message do you hope to convey to viewers?

Universal — yes, but in the way music is universal, not in the way a road sign is universal. It can be understood by everyone, yet mean something different to each person. My message is quite modest: look longer. We live in a culture where an image is consumed in a second and a half, and in that sense abstraction is a healthy form of resistance. It gives nothing away immediately. If you have stood in front of a canvas for three minutes and felt something, then the work has succeeded—and it does not matter to me at all whether what you felt was the same as what I felt.

Everyone should see something of their own in it: a philosopher may find a harmony of ideas and concepts; a writer, a story and its characters; an architect, a structure, a sense of harmony. The worst thing is when a viewer simply nods and moves on.

Your works show both geometric precision and expressive freedom. How do you balance structure and spontaneity in your practice?

Honestly? I don't find it at all. I watch for it. I usually start with structure. I have an engineering background, so I feel more comfortable when there is a framework in place. And then, at some point, the hand

slips out of control — and that is the one part of the painting that makes the whole process worthwhile. Structure is what I know how to do. Freedom is something I can only allow to happen.

In the end, experience has really come down to one skill: knowing when to stop. Otherwise, you carefully correct everything, and what you end up with is a diagram. I'm already quite good at making those at work.

How do you see your artistic journey evolving since you first picked up the brush in 2015?

For the first three years or so, I openly imitated — everyone and everything I knew, and that is perfectly normal. Then it started to feel uncomfortable, and that was when the most useful stage began: I started ruining my own good compositions.

Now I am less interested in getting things right and more interested in tone. My earlier works were louder and more self-assured. The ones I make now are quieter, but they seem closer to what I actually wanted to say. I have become more willing to leave things unfinished. And the biggest change is this: I used to paint for myself, to work something out within myself. Now I want people to see it. And that has turned out to be much more frightening.

In your opinion, what role does abstract art play in today's society?

The role of an image that cannot be quickly put to use. Today, everything around us seems to want something from us, even demand something of us: to sell, persuade, engage, or hold our attention for another eight seconds. An abstract painting wants nothing. It does not deliver news, illustrate a position, or lend itself easily to being reposted with a caption. And precisely because of this, it gives the viewer something rare: a pause in which they are left alone with themselves, rather than with someone else's agenda.

A hundred years ago, the avant-garde was about the future and revolution. Today, in my view, abstraction is more about resisting the noise, about creating a pause. Its function has changed, but the need for it remains.



Patricia De Jesus

My practice explores the relationship between nature, emotion, and personal perception. Through painting, I create imagined landscapes from memory and daily observations, using vivid colour, texture, and dynamic brushstrokes to evoke a sense of atmosphere rather than depict a specific location.

Project Statement

Based in Vancouver, Canada, Patricia creates scenes drawn from her memories of growing up in the Philippines and her current home in Canada. After completing her studies in Art History at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, she began her artistic journey by volunteering in various galleries and developing her practice through plein air painting with artist collectives. Her work moves away from realism, instead rendering landscapes from memory to explore the interplay between perception and imagination.

By reconstructing landscapes through memory rather than direct observation, Patricia creates dreamlike environments that are both familiar and imagined—where nature becomes less a representation of a place and more an expression of how it is remembered and felt.

Patricia De Jesus | Won | 2025





Patricia De Jesus | Sunset in BC | 2025

— Interview

Oreofe Oguntola

Your practice spans writing, research, performance, film, visual art and cultural programming. What unites these different forms of expression, and how do you decide which medium best serves a particular idea?

I do not regard my practice as a collection of separate disciplines; I understand it as one intellectual and artistic inquiry expressed through different forms. Writing, research, performance, photography, film, visual art and cultural programming are all extensions of my engagement with memory, identity, spirituality, culture, human existence and the transmission of knowledge. I am particularly interested in what happens when knowledge preserved within a community, family, ritual, oral tradition or cultural practice is translated into a contemporary artistic language. The idea always precedes the medium, and the medium is determined by what the idea requires.

Sometimes an idea demands language because writing allows me to interrogate thought and enter the psychological interior of an audience. At other times, it requires the body because embodiment communicates dimensions of experience that language cannot adequately contain. Photography allows me to preserve a moment and construct visual memory, while film gives me the capacity to develop narrative, movement and atmosphere. Cultural programming allows the work to move beyond the individual artist and become participatory, communal and educational. My background in English Literature and my experience in research have given me a strong foundation in language, critical inquiry and narrative construction, while my work in festivals and cultural programming has taught me that culture is not an abstract concept confined to museums or academic institutions. It exists in people, ceremonies, clothing, music, food, language, spirituality, communities and collective memory. Across all my disciplines, I am concerned



with the movement of knowledge from one generation to another. I therefore do not ask myself whether I am being a writer, filmmaker, performance artist or cultural programmer; I ask what the work needs to become in order to communicate its meaning most powerfully.

You are widely known as the “Cowry God”. How did cowries become central to your artistic identity, and what cultural and personal meanings do they hold for you?

The cowry became central to my practice because I recognised that it was never merely a shell or decorative object. Across African societies, cowries have functioned as currency, ornament, spiritual material, adornment and markers of wealth and exchange. Within Yoruba cultural imagination, they also carry symbolic and spiritual associations that extend far beyond their physical form. I became fascinated by what these small objects had witnessed: transactions, ceremonies, bodies, generations, migrations and changing systems of value. My practice therefore approaches the cowry as both material and archive.

The name “Cowry God” emerged from this sustained engagement. I was not simply decorating objects with cowries; I was reconstructing them, researching their histories and using them to initiate contemporary conversations about identity, spirituality, gender, religion, beauty, power and African history. My work *Religious Tolerance*, for example, brings together symbols associated with Christianity, Islam and indigenous African spirituality to examine coexistence, faith and religious violence. The work was prompted by the killing of Deborah Samuel in Nigeria 2022, over an accusation of blasphemy. Her death among

many others who had died because of religion in my community raised my concern about the extent to which religious difference can be weaponised against human life. There is also an important personal dimension to my relationship with the cowry. I have always been drawn to materials that people underestimate. A single cowry may appear insignificant, but thousands of them can become architecture, sculpture, costume, image and language. That transformation mirrors my understanding of African cultural heritage: what appears small or ordinary can contain enormous historical and intellectual significance. I therefore use cowries not merely to produce beautiful objects, but to provoke questions about what they remember, who used them, what they represented and what they can mean in the present.

In Arùgbà Olókun, a young girl carries an offering to Olókun and represents purity within Yoruba ritual imagination. What inspired you to revisit this figure through contemporary photography and performance?

Before anything else, I must introduce the young girl in the image, Michelle Masha, a ten year old Nigerian-based model and one of the young virgin maidens chosen to serve as the Arùgbà of Olókun. The Arùgbà occupies a significant ceremonial position, representing purity, devotion and the ritual presence of Olókun during the festival. My engagement with this figure comes directly from my work as the festival coordinator of the Olokun Festival, where I am deeply involved in the cultural presentation, visual direction and ceremonial processes surrounding the celebration. Arùgbà Olókun emerged from my desire to translate a living cultural practice into contemporary visual language without stripping it of its meaning. The Arùgbà is not simply a young girl dressed beautifully and carrying an offering; within the ritual imagination, she becomes a symbolic vessel through which ideas of devotion, purity, responsibility and cultural continuity are expressed. I also dress and adorn the Maidens of Olókun, and that aspect of my practice has taught me to understand costume and adornment as forms of cultural language. Every material, colour, arrangement and object placed upon the body contributes to the meaning of the image.

Olókun, associated with the depths of the ocean, wealth and abundance, provides an important conceptual framework for the work, particularly through the symbolism of water as a site of mystery, continuity, transformation and life. The cowries become almost a second skin, extending the body and connecting the individual to a larger cultural vocabulary. The resulting image is therefore not an attempt to reproduce a nostalgic idea of “traditional Africa”; it is a contemporary intervention into a living tradition. The work demonstrates that indigenous knowledge can remain culturally rooted while participating fully in contemporary photography and performance.

How do you approach ideas of purity, femininity and cultural responsibility in Arùgbà Olókun without allowing the subject to become fixed within traditional expectations?

I approach these concepts critically because culture should not become a cage. The idea of a young unmarried woman representing purity can easily be reduced to questions of

sexuality, virginity and obedience, but my understanding of purity is considerably broader. It encompasses intention, responsibility, clarity, devotion and the preservation of something considered culturally significant. The Arùgbà is therefore not presented as an object without agency; she occupies a role whose meaning extends beyond the individual.

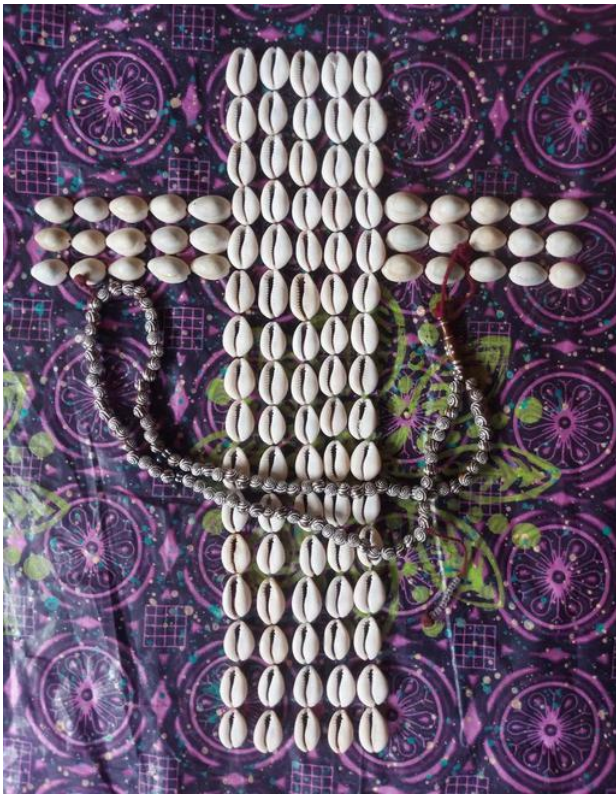
My understanding of femininity is similarly rooted in agency rather than submission. Yoruba cultural history contains powerful female figures who have served as custodians, priestesses, leaders, healers, artists, mothers and carriers of knowledge. When I work with the female body, I am interested not simply in its aesthetic qualities but in what it remembers, represents and communicates. The body becomes an archive and an instrument through which cultural knowledge can be examined.

My responsibility as an artist is to engage tradition with both reverence and intellectual courage. I preserve what deserves preservation, but I also interrogate inherited meanings where necessary. Preservation without critical engagement can become stagnation, while questioning without cultural understanding can become erasure. My practice operates between those positions, and my stand remains that culture must evolve; there is no beauty in a stagnant tradition, neither is their space for growth and prosperity in a community that doesn't tap into new things when it should. Through photography, performance, costume, cowry art and Adire, I place traditional knowledge within contemporary visual language while retaining its cultural integrity.

You describe Osun as a “living artwork”. What does this term mean within your practice, and how does embodiment transform the work beyond photographic representation?

When I describe Osun as a living artwork, I am asserting that





the photograph is only one manifestation of the work; the deeper artwork exists through embodiment, movement, environment and performance. Inspired by Osun, the Yoruba Òrìṣà associated with rivers, femininity, fertility, beauty and healing, the work examines the relationship between the human body, divinity, nature and Yoruba spiritual knowledge. I do not claim to literally become the Òrìṣà; rather, I use my body as a site through which ideas associated with Osun can be contemplated and experienced.

Water, trees, cowry costume, gesture and movement are therefore not background elements. They constitute the vocabulary of the work. The body becomes an instrument, the environment becomes a collaborator and the performance becomes an encounter between human presence and natural space. This is what distinguishes embodiment from photographic representation. A photograph preserves one moment, but performance unfolds through time; the performer breathes, moves and responds to the environment, while the audience brings its own interpretation to the encounter.

This understanding also reflects how I approach culture itself. Culture is not an artefact frozen in the past; it survives because people continue to embody, reinterpret and transmit it. Osun consequently positions Yoruba spirituality within contemporary artistic discourse and creates space for conversations about femininity, healing, beauty, nature and humanity's relationship with the natural world. The photograph records the moment, but the body carries the memory.

Your memoir *After You Left* explores bereavement, death and compassionate end-of-life care. In what ways do your experiences of grief and memory also enter your visual and performance-based practice?

Grief is one of the deepest intellectual and emotional territories from which my practice emerges. Losing both of

my parents fundamentally altered my understanding of time, memory, love, the body and human existence. The death of my mother also reopened the experience of losing my father many years earlier, making me confront the peculiar reality of bereavement: you do not simply lose a person; you lose a version of yourself that existed in relation to that person. *After You Left* emerged from this experience, but it is not simply a memoir about my parents. It examines what happens to the living after death and how people continue carrying relationships with those who are no longer physically present.

The writing led me into extensive engagement with thanatology, bereavement, palliative care, hospice care and the psychological, cultural and spiritual dimensions of dying. My research examines how different societies understand death, mourning, remembrance and continuity, particularly through my own engagement with Nigerian and Yoruba ideas of ancestry and ritual. Research is therefore not separate from my artistic practice; it is one of the principal ways through which I investigate humanity.

These concerns have profoundly shaped my visual and performance work. Grief has taught me that absence can have a physical presence: someone can be absent from a room and still occupy the entire space. I explore that tension through the body, water, objects, photography and performance. Cowries are particularly significant because they can outlive the people who touched, owned or wore them, becoming material witnesses to lives that have disappeared. I also engage directly with grieving communities through grief-focused events and conversations, creating spaces where loss can be acknowledged rather than concealed.

After You Left consequently extends beyond personal testimony into a broader conversation about compassionate end-of-life care and the human experience of loss. I approach death not only as a medical event but as a psychological, cultural and social experience that requires dignity, tenderness and care. The book brings these questions into conversation with literature, psychology, medicine, cultural anthropology and human behaviour, creating a body of work that connects personal memory with wider questions about what survives us, who remembers us and how the living continue after loss.

Through your Cowry Art training programmes, you share indigenous knowledge with schools and communities.

What do you hope participants learn beyond the practical craft, and how would you like this educational dimension of your practice to develop?

My Cowry Art training programmes are fundamentally about empowerment. I do not teach people merely how to attach cowries to an object; I teach them how to recognise cultural material as a source of knowledge, creativity and economic value. Through my training initiatives, I have worked with and trained more than 100 participants, particularly young people, introducing them not only to the practical techniques of cowry art but also to the entrepreneurial possibilities within creative practice.

The entrepreneurial component is essential to my teaching. Participants learn how to transform an indigenous material into a viable creative product, develop products, understand value, package their work, present it professionally and recognise the commercial opportunities available within the



creative economy. This allows cultural education to become economic empowerment. A participant should leave the training understanding that heritage is not only something to preserve; it can also become a source of livelihood, innovation and enterprise.

I also challenge the false distinction between African culture and contemporary innovation. A cowry can become sculpture, fashion, installation or commercial design; an oral tradition can become film; a festival can become an archive; a ritual costume can become contemporary photography; and an indigenous technique can become an entrepreneurial skill. My educational practice therefore connects cultural history,

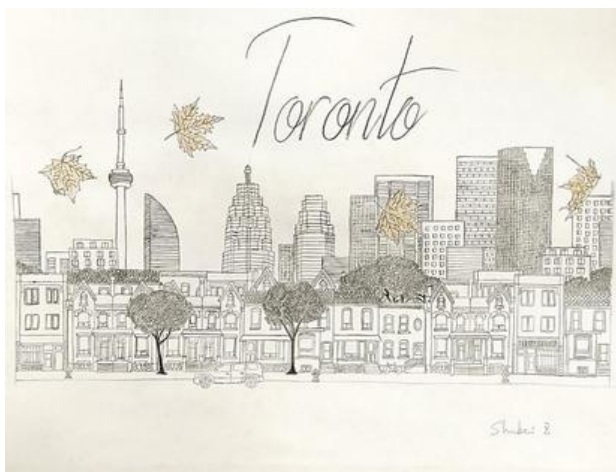
indigenous creativity, storytelling, contemporary art and enterprise.

The most important outcome is cultural confidence. Participants leave with the understanding that modernity does not require cultural amnesia. They can engage the contemporary world without abandoning where they come from. My work therefore moves beyond preservation towards transmission and empowerment: knowledge moves from one generation to another, while the people receiving that knowledge acquire the confidence and practical skills to create with it, build from it and generate economic value from it.

— Interview

Shubei Zheng

You describe your artistic practice as growing from music, storytelling, and emotional expression. How have these different creative languages shaped the way you think visually?



Shubei Zheng | Toronto Cityline With Coffee Colored Maple Leaves | 2025



I believe every visual image carries a story or sentiment, and every image has its own tone. When I look at a piece of art, I can almost imagine a particular piece of music, a beat, or a melody that belongs to it. The relationship also works in reverse. When I have a theme or subject in mind that I want to create, there is often already a corresponding tone, melody, or shade in my mind. That feeling eventually finds its way into the drawing through my lines, strokes, techniques, shading, and composition. In that sense, I don't just think about how a drawing should look. I think about how it should sound and how viewers would feel looking at it. Storytelling has taught me to think about visual art as a form of communication. A compelling story needs focus, meaningful details, a sense of narrative, and compassion for the people who are receiving it. I think visual storytelling requires the same sensitivity. Every element in a drawing needs to have a reason for being there, while the smaller details can give viewers something to discover and connect with emotionally. I want my work to communicate something without explaining everything. Of course, different people can have different interpretations based on their own life experience and mental status.

Emotional expression has perhaps shaped me most deeply. I often begin with a feeling rather than a purely visual idea. I think about what an emotion might look like if it could exist as a space, a line, a shadow, or an object. Sometimes something as simple as distance, emptiness, fragmentation, or a familiar object can carry a great deal of emotional weight. I am especially drawn to the emotions that are difficult to put into words: nostalgia, longing, tenderness, loss, and the feeling of remembering something that no longer exists in quite the same way. This is also why I am drawn to black and white. Without colour telling the viewer how to feel, there is more room for personal interpretation.

As a primarily self-taught artist, how has learning outside a formal art-school environment influenced your technique, intuition, and sense of artistic freedom?

To be honest, I don't have a professional way of measuring my own technique because I don't come from a conventional art education background. I took some drawing lessons when I was a child, and I have had some exposure to art through my education, but most of what I do today has developed through observation, experimentation, and simply drawing. That may be one of the biggest disadvantages of being a self-taught artist in the professional art world. I don't always know the formal terminology for what I am doing, or whether my approach would fit within a particular established technique. But at the same time, I think it has given me an unmatched kind of freedom.

I never learned to think that there is only one correct way to make a drawing. I don't have a set of rules in my head telling me that a particular technique is necessary before I am allowed to express an idea. If I want a line to be delicate, fragmented, rough, repetitive, or almost imperfect because that is what feels right for the subject, I allow myself to follow that instinct. The technique serves the emotion, rather than the emotion having to fit within the technique. I am less concerned with whether something is academically "correct" and more concerned with whether it feels truthful to what I am trying to express. I have learned not to let the possibility

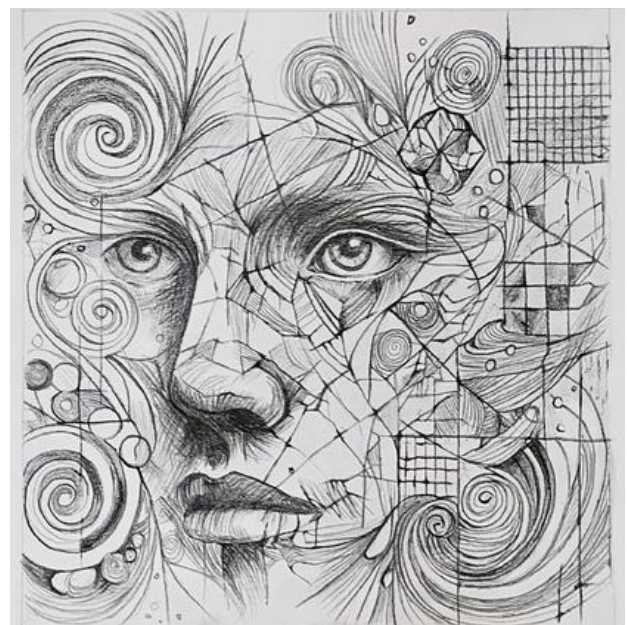
of criticism dictate what I create.

For me, drawing is deeply personal and almost spiritual. I often think of my artwork as a way of documenting my thoughts, memories, observations, and emotions. Most of the time, I am not consciously trying to create something for an audience. I am simply trying to give a visual form to something that exists inside me. I don't think creativity has rigid rules. Of course, there is always more to learn, and I value learning. But being self-taught has allowed me to discover my own visual language along the way. That sense of freedom, intuition, and personal connection is something I would never want to lose.

You often work in black and white because it allows viewers to bring their own emotional "colour" to an image. In Toronto Cityline with Coffee Colored Maple Leaves, however, you introduce subtle touches of colour. What led you to this decision, and how does colour change the emotional atmosphere of the work?

As I mentioned earlier, my drawing process is largely intuitive and improvisational. I don't always begin with a fixed plan for how a piece should look.

With Toronto Cityline with Coffee Colored Maple Leaves, the subtle touch of colour felt natural because of the subject. I'm from Toronto, the golden maple leaves immediately evoke Canadian autumn for me. I wanted to capture



Shubei Zheng | Splintered Identity | 2025



that familiar Toronto fall atmosphere, but I didn't want the colour to overpower the drawing. A small amount of warm, coffee-toned colour was enough to give the piece a richer and more tactile feeling of autumn while allowing the black and white elements to remain the foundation. The colour also has a personal meaning. The coffee I used was actually from a local coffee roaster that I visit regularly. So although the coffee creates a visual effect in the drawing, it also connects the work to a real place and part of my everyday life. I like that the material itself carries a small piece of the experience I was trying to capture.

In that Toronto cityscape, historic residential buildings are placed against a modern skyline, while maple leaves drift across the composition. Is the work primarily a portrait of the city, a personal memory, or a reflection on belonging and change?

I would say the work is more a reflection on belonging and change. I came to Canada only 14 years ago, so I consider myself a relatively late immigrant. Unlike people who have grown up in Toronto, or families who have lived here for generations, I didn't personally witness many of the stages of the city's history. There is a certain part of Toronto's past that I can only know through what's been preserved. Fortunately, Toronto has done a remarkable job of preserving many of its historic buildings and neighbourhoods. When I walk through these areas, I feel that I can somehow encounter traces of an earlier Toronto. At the same time, the modern skyline reminds me that the city is constantly transforming.

That contrast exists in the same city, but they represent different moments in time. The maple leaves moving through the composition add another layer of transition. They are beautiful and familiar, but they are also temporary. They appear, change colour, and eventually fall. In that sense, the drawing is also connected to my own experience as an immigrant. I arrived in Toronto and gradually built a life here, while the city itself continued to change around me. I may not share the same history as someone whose family has been here for generations, but over time, I have developed my own memories and emotional connection to this place.

Your works move between carefully observed architecture and more unstable, psychologically charged spaces. How do you negotiate the tension between control and chaos when constructing a composition?

I think the most important aspect of a work is the message or emotion I want it to convey. That comes before questions of technique or composition. Once I understand what I want the viewer to feel, many of the visual decisions begin to follow naturally: how controlled the composition should be, where the tension or chaos should appear, which elements belong in the image, and where I want the details to shine. When I am drawing architecture, for example, I may be very controlled with perspective, structure, proportion, and details because that precision allows the character of the building to emerge. But when I am trying to express something more psychologically unstable, I may deliberately allow the composition to become fragmented, crowded, distorted, or less predictable. In those moments, the disruption itself becomes part of the message. So my process is less about imposing a predetermined composition and more about listening to what the work needs. The emotion tells me where control should exist and where it needs to break down. In that sense, composition becomes another form of storytelling: every line, empty space, detail, and disruption has the potential to contribute to the emotional narrative.

What qualities of graphite and ink - pressure,



repetition, erasure, texture, or physical resistance - are especially important to the emotional meaning of your drawings?

What I see in graphite and ink is its unique hint of modesty and subtlety. They don't demand attention through colour or spectacle. They allow me to build an image through small details, delicate lines, texture, repetition, and changes in pressure, while still leaving a great deal of space for the viewer to enter the work themselves. I think that restraint is important to the emotional meaning of my drawings. I don't always want an emotion to be presented very directly. Sometimes I would rather allow the viewer to discover it gradually. A softer line, a denser area of texture, or an empty space can say something without explaining exactly what it means.

There is also something inherently nostalgic to me about working in black and white. It reminds me of an old photograph, a black and white memory, or an old movie. There is a quietness to it that I find emotionally powerful.

Perhaps most importantly, graphite and ink leave room for interpretation. Because there is less visual information telling the viewer exactly what to feel, they can bring their own memories and emotions into the work. I like that my drawing can remain relatively low-key while still holding

something intricate underneath the surface. In that sense, the physical qualities of graphite and ink are not just technical tools for me. Their restraint, subtlety, and ability to capture both detail and silence are part of the emotional language of my work.

You also work as an actor in theatre, film, and commercial projects. How has performing influenced the way you create characters, frame scenes, and suggest narratives within a single still image?

Performing art has probably influenced my visual storytelling in a very simple way: think of every drawing as a scene.

When creating an image, think of it were a live scene in a film or on a stage, what would it look like? What happened just before this moment? What is happening now? And what might happen immediately after? Even though a drawing captures only one still moment, I want there to be a sense that something exists beyond the frame.

Acting has also made me more attentive to small details. On stage or on camera, a gesture, a look, a pause, or the way a person occupies a space can communicate something without words. I think about visual art in a similar way, except for one being still and one being in motion.

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