

VISUAL ART JOURNAL



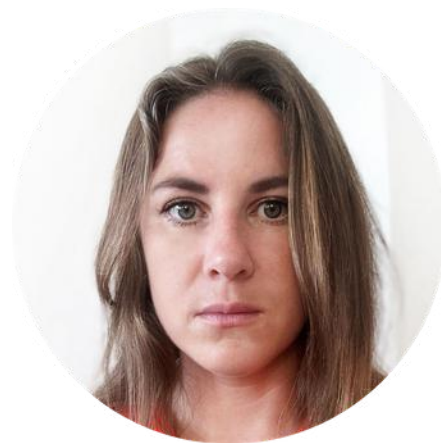
NO. 60

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Shipilova



— Intro



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Dear Reader,

You are holding the 60th issue of Visual Art Journal.

As always, our team has worked with great care to bring together compelling artworks, remarkable personalities, and fresh creative voices - introducing you to new names and new perspectives in contemporary art.

Painting, sculpture, performance, and, more recently, fashion all come together within these pages, reflecting the extraordinary diversity of visual art today. Artists from around the world find a place in this journal to share their work, thoughts, and ideas with readers across countries, cultures, and continents.

We continue to grow and develop our projects beyond the pages of the magazine. This month alone, we have presented exhibitions in Vienna, Paris, and Madrid, creating new opportunities for artists to meet audiences in different parts of Europe. You can follow our social media channels for upcoming exhibitions, open calls, and new announcements.

Thank you for staying with us, for growing with us, and for continuing to discover and be inspired by art alongside us.

Enjoy the issue - more than 100 pages of creativity, beauty, and artistic voices await you!

On the Front Cover:
Olga Shipilova

On the Back Cover:
Amber Ceffalio
Red Riding Hood



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

— Interview

Mario Schuster

Your artistic path has always existed alongside your work in veterinary medicine. At what point did you realize that these two fields were not separate, but were actually shaping the same way of seeing the world?

For many years, drawing and painting walked hand in hand with my veterinary practice—serving as a source of pleasure that eased the stress of daily life. However, I knew how difficult it was to make a living through art while raising young children in a small town in the interior of Brazil, so my dreams were put on hold. Occasionally, I would take part in a collective exhibition. During that period, my work consisted almost entirely of landscapes and watercolor birds. Although people praised my work and I was aware that I possessed technical drawing skills, I felt a deep



Mario Schuster | Rubbish



need for something more, even if I couldn't quite define what it was.

Once my children grew older, I decided to pursue a degree in Fine Arts. Many people questioned why I would go back to study if I already knew how to draw. But art school taught me how to think about art, and my work began to take a completely different direction. This search led me to see art through a new lens: it ceased to be something merely informal, just meant to hang on a wall, and transformed into a form of resistance against the contradictions of the contemporary world, the daily stress, the violence, and everything that moves me as a human being and as an artist.

Drawing sharpened my sense of observation, which helped me immensely in veterinary medicine—since animals cannot speak, but constantly show what they are feeling. Today, I also realize that veterinary medicine helped me understand art, as a set of symptoms (clinical signs) leads to a diagnosis or conclusion. From conceptual art, I learned to think first and execute later.

You have said that working with animals sharpened your powers of observation because they communicate without words. How has this experience influenced the way you approach a subject before you begin to paint or draw it?

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In the second stage of my process, I think about how and through which medium I will translate these ideas and feelings into something concrete. Then, I consider how to present the final piece, because, for me, an



artwork is only complete once it is seen.

Drawing originally became a way for you to study anatomy and understand the body. Has that scientific discipline remained present in your artistic process today, even when you are depicting very different subjects?

I thing was born drawing and for me, it was always come naturally. I still have sketchbooks from when I was 5 years old, filled with drawings of animals and people. Even back then, I unconsciously drew or painted with watercolors whenever something moved or touched me. At the age of 12, I began taking lessons with an Uruguayan artist, a professor at the Pelotas School of Fine Arts. I graduated in Veterinary Medicine at 23, and I used to study animal anatomy through my own drawings, copied from the books I checked out at the university library.

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My line is organic, fine, and delicate; I was born with it, like a birthmark. Over time, I have learned to use it in the best possible way, even if not always consciously.

In Fine Line, delicate butterflies appear among a dense network of thorn-like or barbed forms. What does this contrast between fragility and danger represent for you?

When I draw butterflies trapped in a tangle of barbed

wire, I am questioning humanity's relationship with nature, the unstable balance between fragility and violence.

Several of your works transform ordinary or overlooked objects into the central subject of a painting. What attracts you to things that might otherwise be ignored, discarded, or considered insignificant?

I am drawn to gazes, repressed emotions, ordinary people, and everyday objects that seemingly hold no significance, function, or utility. I am drawn to everything that departs from common sense, conventional beauty, and standard expectations. I do not seek to debate art and its mediums—as I feel that has already been done exhaustively—but rather to use art to question feelings, concepts, and human situations.

When I paint simple, everyday objects that seemingly have no purpose left, I am asking: “What is the true function of things and people? How are we valued?”

Your work combines close observation with a certain poetic or symbolic ambiguity. How do you balance accuracy with the freedom to transform what you see?

My line is organic, fine, and delicate; I was born with it, like a birthmark. Over time, I have learned to use it in the best possible way, even if not always consciously. Just as an artist's imagination is fundamental to creation, my work evolved from landscapes to themes drawn from events and stories I have read, seen, or felt—things that awakened an urge and a necessity to create.

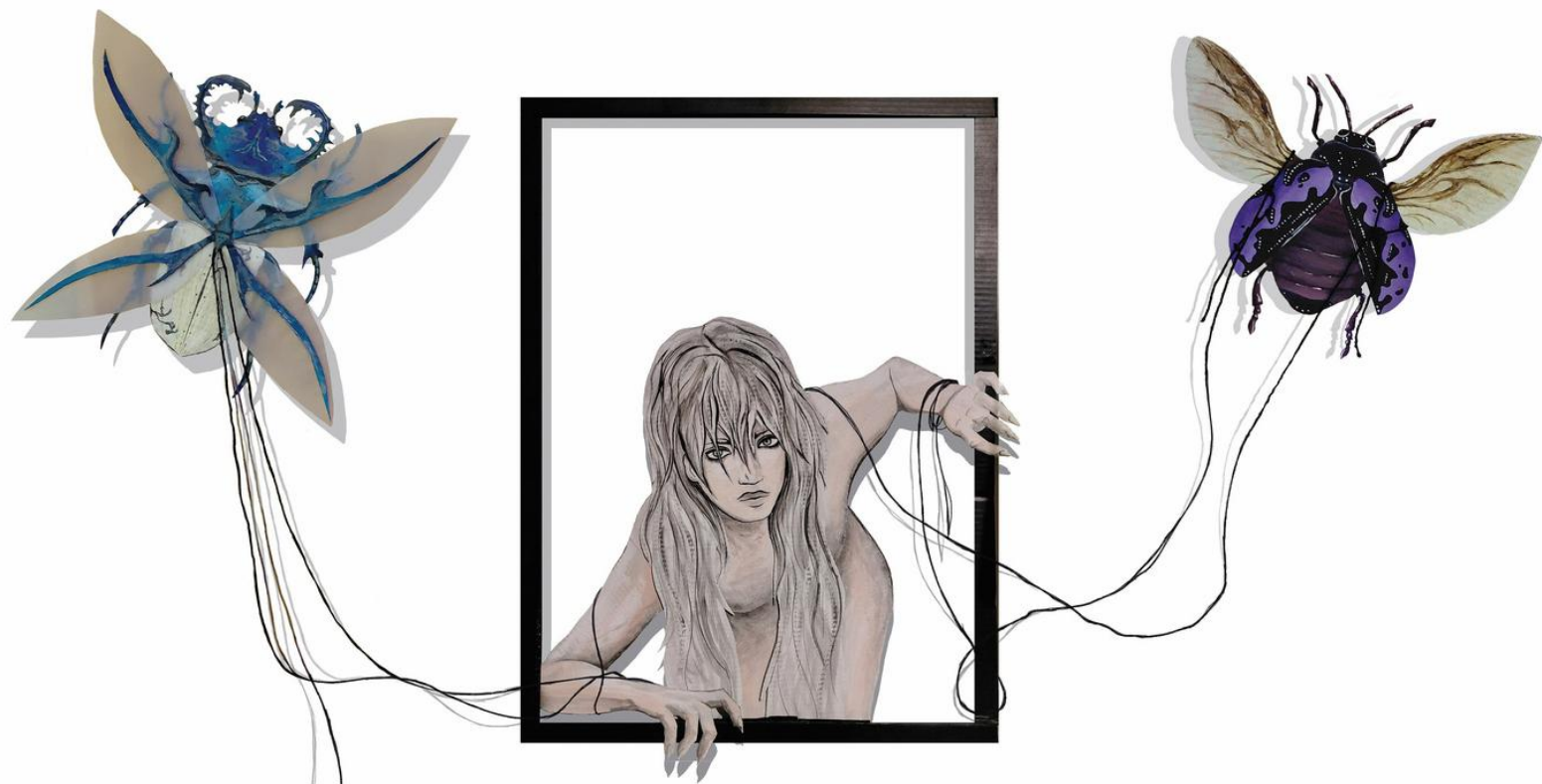
In the second stage of my process, I think about how and through which medium I will translate these ideas and feelings into something concrete. Then, I consider how to present the final piece, because, for me, an artwork is only complete once it is seen. To me, an image is an enigma that can hide something beneath the surface, and I draw reference for my work from photos I take with my phone, as well as from magazines, cinema, music videos, and art history.



Petra Faragó

I'm a graphic designer and visual artist based in the Netherlands. Originally from Hungary, I'm currently studying Built Environment at Breda University of Applied Sciences while pursuing my career in art and design. I enjoy working across different mediums and techniques, from graphic design and illustration to painting and hands-on experimentation.

Petra Farago | Between Threads | 2026





— Interview

Zoe Baer

Charcoal is central to your practice. What qualities of this medium allow you to express memory, vulnerability, and emotional intensity more effectively than colour might?

I originally worked much more with colour, so my attachment to charcoal came later. What I love about it is the contrast, but also the imperfection of the material itself. Charcoal is powder. It is never completely smooth, flat or controlled, and those tiny irregularities create texture in skin, hair and fabric that can make a drawing feel very human.

That imperfection is important to me because so much of my work is about vulnerability and authenticity. I am interested in what happens when we stop trying to appear perfectly composed and allow ourselves simply to be human. Black and white also strips away some of the distraction of colour. It gives me a very direct relationship with light, darkness and contrast, which can create an emotional intensity that I sometimes find harder to reach in colour.

Your drawings demonstrate extraordinary attention to texture — from skin, hair, and fabric to feathers and



Zoe Baer | King's Gaze | 2024



Zoe Baer | Glimmers Of Christmas Joy

animal fur. How do you build this level of detail while preserving a sense of spontaneity and life?

I try not to think of detail as an end in itself. I am not interested in reproducing every hair or every pore simply because it is there. The detail has to serve the presence of the subject.

A lot of it comes from observing light rather than objects. Instead of thinking, "this is hair" or "this is skin", I look at changes in value, texture, softness and contrast. Charcoal also helps because I can move between extremely precise marks and areas that are rubbed, erased, blurred or left unfinished.

I think life often comes from resisting the temptation to control everything. If every centimetre is equally perfect, the drawing can become strangely lifeless. I like allowing some areas to disappear, remain rough or carry traces of the process.

The gaze plays a powerful role in your portraits. What interests you about the emotional connection created through the eyes of your subjects?

The gaze is probably one of the most important elements in my work because it is where an image can suddenly stop being only an image.

I am very interested in the difference between looking and actually seeing. We spend so much of our lives looking outward — at other people, at appearances, at what we think we should be — while avoiding what is happening internally. In some drawings the subject looks directly at us, while in others the gaze turns inward. Both can create a kind of confrontation.

Psychologically, I am interested in what exists underneath the



persona we present to the world. A face may appear beautiful, confident or completely composed while the eyes reveal vulnerability, uncertainty, strength, sadness or thought. That tension between the outer image and the inner person is something I return to constantly.

How do you choose the people and animals you portray? Are you primarily drawn to their appearance, their character, or the story you imagine behind them?

Character, definitely, although sometimes I recognise it through appearance first. I look for something in a face or a posture that suggests an inner life. A large part of my work is about accepting the whole self. We all have parts of ourselves that are uncomfortable, frightened, selfish, angry or imperfect, and we often try not to look at them. But ignoring them does not make them disappear. In a Jungian sense, what we refuse to acknowledge can become more powerful. Looking at those parts allows us to understand them and, eventually, to live with them rather than being controlled by them. But the opposite is also true. People are often extraordinarily reluctant to recognise what is beautiful in themselves. We criticise ourselves constantly and rarely stop to acknowledge our tenderness, courage or vulnerability. Even sadness can be something profoundly human rather than something we immediately need to judge or correct. So when I choose a subject, I am usually responding to some suggestion of that complexity rather than conventional beauty alone.

Your work moves between intimate human portraits and depictions of animals, particularly owls and other

creatures associated with strength or wisdom. What relationship do you see between these two sides of your practice?

To be honest, I don't consciously choose animals because of their symbolism. I simply love animals, and particularly owls. There is something extraordinary in their faces and in the intensity of their gaze.

The fact that the owl has historically been associated with wisdom is interesting, and perhaps there is an unconscious attraction there, because wisdom and self-knowledge are important themes in my work. But I would not want to pretend that every animal is chosen according to a symbolic system.

What connects the animals and the human portraits for me is presence. I am looking for the same thing in both: a moment where the subject seems completely there. Animals can sometimes embody that even more naturally than people do. They are not performing an identity for us. They simply exist. That quality of presence and stillness is something I find deeply compelling.

What did presenting your first solo exhibition in the United States reveal to you about your own work? Did the audience's response change the way you understood any of the drawings?

The exhibition made me realise more clearly that the individual drawings communicate differently when they are seen together. What had begun as separate portraits and studies became much more obviously one conversation about stillness, identity, vulnerability and presence. What interested me most was seeing that people responded emotionally to the work before necessarily knowing the ideas behind it. That matters to me because I never want the philosophy to be required in order to experience the drawing. The concept should deepen the work, not explain it into existence.

I don't think the audience changed what the drawings meant to me, but seeing people connect with them confirmed that the very quiet moments I am interested in can communicate without needing spectacle. That was important for me.

As you continue exploring identity and emotional presence through charcoal, what new subjects, formats, or conceptual directions would you like to investigate next?

I want to allow more imperfection into the work. There is a slight contradiction in what I currently do: I speak a great deal about authenticity, vulnerability and accepting imperfection, yet technically I often create people who appear almost perfectly rendered. I find that contradiction increasingly interesting, but I also want to challenge it. I would like some future drawings to become looser and more visibly human: rougher skin, exaggerated textures, erased areas, traces of charcoal, unfinished passages or marks that I deliberately choose not to correct. For me, authenticity and imperfection are inseparable. We cannot really encounter ourselves while constantly editing ourselves into something more acceptable. Philosophically and psychologically, that is the direction I want the work to move towards: less perfection as an image, and more truth as a presence.

Tadeo Andrada (Buenos Aires, 1998) is an Argentine artist and psychologist. He began studying piano at the age of seven and continued his musical training throughout his life, studying with various private teachers and completing three years of a degree in Musical Composition at the Catholic University of Argentina (UCA). After changing his academic path, he earned a degree in Psychology (UBA), a profession he currently practices alongside his artistic work. He began painting more recently and has been studying with Emilio Fatuzzo since 2025. His artistic practice is deeply influenced by his extensive relationship with music and his background in psychology, exploring painting as a space for intuition, perception, and experimentation.

Project Statement

My practice focuses on painting and the possibilities of working with simple forms, color, and surface. I generally begin each painting with a single-color background that covers the entire canvas, regardless of its shape or proportions. From this starting point, I gradually incorporate other shapes, colors, and layers, allowing the painting to develop through a combination of intention and intuition. Rather than starting with a specific theme or image, I work with color, proportion, and repetition. The process remains open. I often make decisions as I paint, responding to what is already present on the canvas rather than following a predetermined plan. This allows the paintings to maintain a certain simplicity while also containing a degree of tension and ambiguity. For me, it's not about communicating a specific idea or telling a story. I'm interested in creating images that can be experienced directly, before being explained or interpreted.



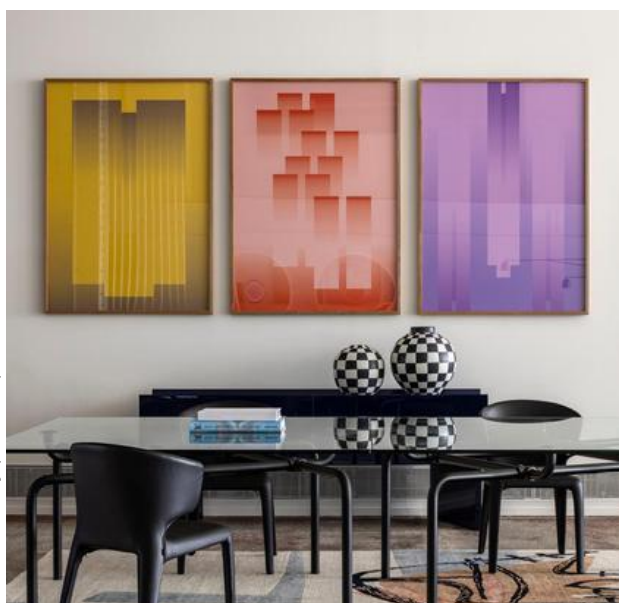


— Interview

Gil Zablodovsky

You describe your artistic practice as an ongoing laboratory dedicated to the visualization of sound. How did this investigation begin, and what first made you interested in translating something auditory into visual form?

My investigation began with a fascination for the invisible forces that shape our sensory experience. Sound is inherently physical—it travels through space as vibrations and frequency, affecting us long before we rationalize it. I became captivated by the idea of making these intangible acoustic phenomena visible. The transition from pure visual communication to an artistic inquiry into sound allowed me to explore how cadence, rhythm, and acoustic tension can be captured within a static, spatial medium.



Gil Zablodovsky | Arcadia | 2024



When you begin a new work, what usually comes first: a sound, a rhythm, a geometric structure, or a more intuitive emotional impulse?

It almost always begins with a rhythmic or emotional frequency rather than a concrete image. I listen for a specific resonance or cadence—a sense of vibration—which then demands a geometric counterpart. The geometric structure acts as the visual architecture designed to contain and express that initial impulse, giving form to what was previously only felt or heard.

The circle and the matrix occupy an important place in your visual language. What do these forms allow you to express that other geometries cannot?

The circle is a fundamental symbol of resonance, cycle, and infinite expansion; it naturally mirrors sound waves propagating outward from a source. The matrix, on the other hand, provides structure, order, and grid-based discipline. Together, they create a dialogue between infinite flow and structural boundaries. This combination allows me to represent both the precision of sound waves and the expansive, emotional nature of listening.

Your work often combines strict geometric



precision with gradients, transparency, repetition, and a sense of movement. How do you balance control and intuition during the creative process?

I approach my work like a visual laboratory. Control lies in the rigorous geometric composition, vector precision, and structural rules I set for a piece. Intuition comes forward through color gradients, transparency layerings, and subtle shifts in movement. The geometry forms the system, but the intuitive layering gives it breath and vitality. I know a work is finished when the strict control gives way to a fluid visual sensation.

You speak about sound not simply as inspiration, but as something that can be translated into visual and material structures. Is there a particular system or methodology behind this translation, or does each work develop according to its own internal logic?

It is a synthesis of both. While I operate within a consistent system—utilizing vector-based compositions, digital fine art techniques, and specific geometric relationships—each piece or series develops its own internal frequency. I don't use a literal one-to-one translation algorithm; instead, I construct visual systems that function as analogies for acoustic behavior, letting each work dictate its own harmony and scale.

Scale seems particularly important in your practice, with some works taking on an almost architectural presence. How does the physical scale of a work influence the way you want the viewer to experience it?

Scale transforms a viewer from a passive observer into an active participant. When a work scales up to an architectural presence, it commands physical space in a way that mimics low-frequency sound—it surrounds you. Large-scale compositions allow the viewer to step into the visual rhythm, experiencing the artwork not just with their eyes, but spatially and bodily.

Your background includes visual communication, integrated design, teaching, and collaborative artistic practice. How have these different disciplines shaped your approach to contemporary art, and where do you draw the boundary between design and art - if you draw one at all?

My background in visual communication and design provides me with a deep structural literacy—an understanding of hierarchy, grid systems, and medium precision. Teaching continuously sharpens my ability to articulate abstract ideas. For me, design is about solving a problem within given constraints, whereas art is about asking questions and opening space for resonance. I don't see a rigid boundary between them; rather, I use design methodologies as tools to build contemporary artistic experiences.



Natasha Svirikhina

Natalia, you became interested in drawing as a child and attended art school. How has your relationship with art evolved over time, and when did you decide to pursue a career as an independent artist?

Although I had been drawing since childhood, I consider the turning point to be when I was sixteen. During one of my classes at school, while absentmindedly sketching, a classmate unexpectedly asked me to draw her portrait.



Natasha Svirikhina | Shadows | 2026



Natasha Svirikhina | Shadows | 2026

Her enthusiastic reaction to the finished drawing was the first moment I realized that drawing was more than just a hobby. It was a strength of mine that could genuinely resonate with other people.

After graduating from school, I decided to dedicate my life to creativity and enrolled in an interior design program. However, my studies pushed my personal desire to draw into the background for several years. Academic drawing and university projects almost completely replaced my independent artistic practice.

A few years after graduation, while working as an interior designer, I realized that I still wanted to grow as an independent artist. I began sharing my work on social media, where originality and the search for a personal visual language are truly valued.

You studied environmental design and continue to work as an interior designer. How does your experience in designing spaces influence the composition, rhythm, and structure of your artworks?

Design taught me how to build a strong visual structure, and it helps me think in terms of form. At the same time, in my artistic practice I often feel the need to step away from a strict, analytical approach and keep only the essential principles of composition. In design, every decision has to be logically justified. In drawing, I find freedom from those rigid boundaries. While working, I try to let go of control and not allow professional habits to limit the creative process.

Your artistic practice is primarily focused on portraits that combine realistic and abstract techniques. How did you develop this visual language, and what does this combination allow you to express?



From my very first works, I was drawn to realism. I loved the process itself and the careful attention to every detail. A defining moment came when I entered university and showed my photo-based drawings to one of my professors. He acknowledged my technical skills but pointed out that the works offered nothing new. They were simply reproductions of existing images. I remember how painful it was to hear those words, but he was right.

I decided to move away from detailed realism, and for some time my work shifted toward abstraction. Then one day, while working on one of those abstract portraits, I realized that I was missing the emotional depth that broad expressive brushstrokes could not convey. That was when a small fragment of a realistic, sorrowful face appeared within the portrait.

This visual solution felt new to me. It brought together the two artistic approaches I loved and allowed me to express exactly what I wanted to say. That is how the idea of combining two contrasting techniques was born.

In the Shadows series, the human face appears to be divided into several states and images. What does this fragmentation represent for you: inner conflict, hidden identities, the passage of time, or something else?

In Shadows, the fragmented image represents the hidden past that exists in constant contrast with the way a person is seen by others. The detailed part of each portrait is the face presented to the world, the image of someone who has lived a life. Each portrait is like a reflection in a mirror. Yet the reflection does not reveal a complete outward appearance. Instead, it shows blurred

traces of pain, fear, and loss. A person can no longer see themselves without these experiences. These invisible inner shadows become their true reflection, even though they remain unseen by everyone else. With this series, I wanted every viewer to notice not only the face itself but also what lies behind it.

You write that a person can see themselves "down to the bone", confronting their own fears, bitterness, and anger. To what extent was the creation of this series connected to your own personal self-exploration?

Once I came across the idea that sadness contains more truth than happiness. That thought stayed with me, and I wanted to express it through my portraits. Rather than simply conveying a mood, I hoped to encourage viewers to pause, look deeper within themselves, and perhaps accept the parts they usually keep hidden. To begin an honest inner dialogue. I believe that every new work in this series gave me a few more answers while also leading me to new questions.

You have a twin sister who has built her career in architecture. Did growing up alongside someone who looks like you influence your perception of identity, reflection, and duality?

I think that when you grow up alongside someone who has been with you for as long as you can remember and who looks almost exactly like you, you come to understand better than anyone that identity is not defined by appearance. Despite our physical resemblance, each of us has always remained our own person, with our own character, perspectives, and way of thinking. Perhaps that is why, in my work, I am less interested in depicting a person's outward appearance than in revealing what makes them unique—the qualities that lie beneath the surface and cannot be seen at first glance.

Today, you present your work to an English-speaking audience on social media. How does the international response to your art affect you, and in what direction would you like to develop your practice in the future?

It is incredibly rewarding to see that my work resonates with people in the international creative community. It feels as though artists speak a universal language that goes beyond words. I often notice similar interpretations from artists who explore themes close to my own. It reminds me of a line of dominoes, where each artwork inspires the next. One idea can spark an entire chain of new creative responses, with every artist reinterpreting it in their own unique way.

At the moment, I am actively building my portfolio with the goal of exhibiting my work in galleries in the future. Social media remains an important part of my artistic journey, but I feel that the time has come to bring my work into physical exhibition spaces as well.

Modesta Gorol

Your works often feel like complete imaginary worlds with their own landscapes, creatures, and hidden narratives. How do these worlds usually begin in your mind?



Modesta Gorol | Dresden Botanical Garden



I love the beginnings. Finding the idea is probably the most important moment in the process, as it sparks the enthusiasm and desire to bring the work to life. There is no single approach.

All my works belong to an artistic cycle called Delta World, which I am constantly expanding. It is a multiverse of connected worlds, where one can travel between them through tiny, often hidden doors within each composition. Its many branches and sub-cycles emerge in different ways.

Sometimes an idea begins with research. The Gardens prints are inspired by real places and the stories shared with me by gardeners. Conversations, scents, and memories fill my mind and become a starting point. When I collaborate with musicians, my art becomes part of their visual identity and appears on posters and covers. My artistic freedom is guided by the essence of each piece. Musicians often share their feelings, impressions, and verbal descriptions of particular sounds, which I use to imagine and create a dedicated world.

Other works are deeply personal and independent of external stimuli, at least consciously. Their landscapes and creatures become a manifestation of artistic freedom and an ongoing discovery of what my mind is capable of.



In these cases, the process is very intuitive, rooted in emotions.

What all my works have in common is the large number of sketches I make while searching for the right way to express an idea. I pin them to the walls of my studio and live with them, looking at them from a distance until one catches my attention and I feel the urge to develop it further.

Sometimes an idea simply appears at random moments—in an elevator, on a tram, or even during conversations. Someone's seemingly random words can trigger images that develop into wider concepts. This happened with my oil painting *To the East* (2024): while listening to friends talk about Japan, a cat in a tree, and the passing of time, this cacophony of images and thoughts unexpectedly formed the idea in my mind.

Nature is central to your practice, but you rarely represent it literally. How do you decide which elements to keep recognizable and which to transform through imagination?

When I create works about gardens, certain elements require a degree of literalness. Showing a specific plant species that is particularly important, the distinctive architecture of a greenhouse, or the garden's map woven into the visual composition needs to remain recognizable. These selected parts of the image are recognizable because I want to clearly convey the qualities of the garden and the stories the gardeners have shared with me. After all, the narrations depicted in these prints are true!

There are also areas where I can allow myself greater freedom and metaphor. The fact that a garden is proud of their remarkable collection of carnivorous plants, for example, can be expressed by enclosing the entire composition in a cage (Savage Garden of Lausanne, 2025). In another work, palm roots transform fantastically into pathways along which tiny gardeners both walk and sail in boats. This suggests the interweaving of flora and fauna, and the multidimensional coexistence of people and plants within the garden (Geneva Garden, 2026). So, when I create, I let reality and imagination permeate one another.

Your compositions are filled with animals, birds, plants, and unusual interactions between them. What role do these creatures play in the stories you create?

These characters are my imaginary friends ;) They play leading roles, sometimes supporting ones, but they are always part of the story. Moreover, they all travel between the Delta Worlds and meet in different scenarios, creating meaningful scenes.

For example, in the *To the East* painting, a young fawn lies alone peacefully on a yellow geometric form, gazing at a blue sun on the horizon. We later discover that this sun travels along a horizontal axis, circling the world where night never falls. The fawn is still very young, with only a small set of antlers. But the shadow cast by the sun reveals a slightly different reality: it is a shadow from the





future, showing the same animal fully grown, with enormous, majestic antlers. The cats that have grown from a trees also seem to live according to their own whimsical logic. Sometimes they manage to escape their shadows and, as cats tend to do, they are not particularly willing to submit to the demands of reality. Could the fact that the shadow is late be a quiet painterly sigh, a desire to slow down the passage of time? I leave that subjective decision to the viewer.

You describe hidden doors as a way of connecting different works and allowing viewers to move between imaginary worlds. How did this idea develop, and what do these passages represent for you?

My doors' conception symbolizes constant change. This is where the name Delta World comes from. The word "delta" has many meanings: in physics and mathematics, it represents change or difference; it is also a letter of the Greek alphabet and the branching point of a river. All of these meanings are reflected in my imagined world. The idea of the doors also comes from a desire not to close the composition—to leave a way out, to keep the story from ending, and to escape into another space whenever I feel like it. Sometimes, even to escape from myself. The doors allow me to build a graphic narrative with its own chapters and storylines. They make it possible to surf through time, visiting events from the past as well as the future.

I still have drawings I made as a child, many of them contained doors. Back then, it seemed completely obvious to me, in that very childlike way, that every drawing had a continuation that simply could not be drawn because I had run out of paper space. So I drew doors instead—so that anyone who wanted to could simply walk through and keep going.

Your Gardens series begins with visits to botanical gardens and conversations with gardeners and curators. What kinds of stories or details from these encounters tend to stay with you and eventually enter the artwork?

There are so many stories that I always have to make a selection. After the research my head is overflowing with information and my notebook is packed with sketches. I always try to present each garden from its most interesting side. I choose the stories that make each garden unique. They are not always just facts about rare plants or impressive collections. Sometimes what makes a garden unique is a skeleton accidentally discovered during the renovation of a greenhouse. Sometimes the fact that visitors once found... a crocodile in the bushes, apparently left there by someone. One garden has a remarkable library, another exceptionally rich, multi-level herbarium. In the Geneva garden, you can find flowerpots with doors—which naturally made me very happy ;) —and





one of the ponds is visited every morning by a wild heron that comes to find a fish and greet the gardeners as they begin their work.

When selecting stories, I am aware that there are already countless botanical publications and natural history books that document gardens and plants, providing excellent information about collections, species, numbers, and achievements. My aim, therefore, is not to document or educate, those functions are already very well served. Art, and the ability of artistic interpretation, allow me to show the garden from a different perspective—one that is more creative, social, and cultural. I can bring attention to events that would never appear in a newspaper or scientific publication because they seem too trivial. But they beautifully reveal the character and everyday life of a garden. That is what interests me the most.

When creating a work inspired by a real botanical garden, how much of the actual place remains in the final image, and how much becomes an entirely new landscape?

The proportions vary from one artwork to another. Sometimes a garden is evoked through small details set within an entirely imagined landscape; at other times, the whole composition is based on the actual map of the garden and closely reflects its real layout. There are also occasions when a garden shares its plans and dreams for future development with me. In those

cases, I allow myself to predict the future and place a dream greenhouse—one that does not yet exist—into the print. I am always curious to see whether it will actually be built a few years from now!

Your compositions often contain many small details that viewers may discover only after spending time with the work. How important is this sense of discovery to the way you want your art to be experienced?

The discovery is crucial. Each work tells its own story, and I like to compare it to music: to fall in love with a song, you have to give it time and attention. You have to listen from beginning to end, catch the details, understand the words, feel when the song reaches its climax and when it begins to settle. You listen for the nuances and colours of the sounds, feel the rhythm, and notice the structure—the verses, the chorus, and the ending. Finally, the meaning of a song can change when you learn more about the artist's life or the context in which it was written.

I think my art works in much the same way. The viewer needs to spend some time with it to get a full experience. The idea is that, when viewing a piece from a distance, the viewer is intrigued by the overall composition. As they move closer, they begin to discover secondary stories and hidden narratives, and can read and interpret the work in their own personal way. And when they look at the artwork again, they notice something new each time. I find that very rewarding.



— Interview

Amber Ceffalio

You spent more than fifteen years working as an American Sign Language interpreter before focusing more deeply on photography. How has thinking through gesture, expression, and visual communication shaped the way you construct an image?



Amber Ceffalio | Mountain Lording Over The Lake



It's interesting to trace how ASL, a visual language, shaped my photography. ASL has a grammatical feature called a classifier: a handshape that stands in for an object like a cup, a chair, a person, or an airplane and moves through space to carry the story forward. As my photography has moved toward the abstract, I've found myself doing something similar. Objects become representative rather than literal. In my Red Riding Hood image, one of the source photographs is a straightforward shot of my granddaughter and her aunt lying together on a tree branch. I wanted them to become anonymous, to stand in for the many Red Riding Hoods who take refuge in the woods. Their red form is, in a way, a classifier, a shape that carries the story of who they really are.

You describe interpreting as carrying meaning from one form into another without losing its truth. When you work with multiple exposures, how do you decide which elements can be layered together while still preserving the emotional truth of each photograph?

For me, emotional truth is bound up with the feeling I'm trying to evoke and with whoever the photograph is really about. One of my first multiple exposure images layered Lake Michigan and the Ferris wheel at Navy Pier under a peaceful pink sunrise. I wanted the layered elements to carry that same calm, to conjure mornings spent combing for beach glass. Chicago's shoreline doesn't have beach glass, so layering an actual photograph of it felt false. But layering paint chips that evoke the color and texture of beach glass supported the feeling honestly, while also giving a nod to the city itself. Look closely and you can still read the paint color



names in the image. It's one of my favorite small secrets.

Your images often contain a remarkable density of information, with several places, textures, figures, and moments existing simultaneously. What tells you that an image has reached the right balance between complexity and clarity?

I still struggle with that balance, honestly, and I think about it often. My Art of Composition teacher at Chicago Photo Classes, Jeff Silva, introduced me to dynamic symmetry as a guide for laying out an image. I typically start by placing my subject on a grid, then build outward with supporting elements and detail. He also gave me a phrase that's stuck with me: a strong image is a puzzle you have to solve. Anyone can take a picture of the Chicago skyline. A photographer creates an image. That distinction is still a work in progress for me, and honestly, some images I'm still puzzling over.

In Mountain Lording Over the Lake, you bring together Alaska and Chicago - two places that represent very different periods of your life. What happens emotionally for you when two geographically distant places are allowed to occupy the same photographic space?

People love to ask me to choose: Alaska or Chicago? Alaska or New York? New York or Chicago? Everyone has an opinion and all opinions are correct. I'm a product of an Alaskan homestead, and I will always consider myself wealthy for having indoor plumbing and electricity. New York taught me the world is both small and so enormous. New York is where I started truly capturing images because everything was delightful and I wanted to pinch myself to be sure it was happening to me! Chicago sits in the balance between those two extremes, and it's given me room to explore photography in ways neither Alaska nor New York could. This

image is my way of saying I value every home I've had, and if I could hold them all at once, I would. Maybe it's time for a mash-up that folds in Brooklyn, as well.

Your Red Riding Hood project reconsiders a familiar fairy tale through ideas of female strength, growth, and independence. What first made you recognize Red Riding Hood as a figure through whom you could explore contemporary experiences of women and girls?

I'm drawn to fairy tales because the protagonist is often female, but even as a child, I felt they never captured the full complexity of girlhood or womanhood. I was taking a Conceptual Portrait class with Erica Ruyle and knew I wanted to build something around fairy tales, but not princesses. Red Riding Hood was the natural answer. As I explored what she meant to me, I realized every Alaskan woman I know is a Red Riding Hood making her own way into the woods, and every New York woman I know is striding into an urban jungle staking her claim. I'm only at the beginning of this project. Over the next few years, I intend to photograph women as the Red Riding Hood they see themselves as. What is their strength? What is yours? We are strong.

You grew up surrounded by both monumental Alaskan landscapes and small, fragile details in nature. Do you still consciously move between the "majestic" and the "minuscule" when you photograph or build a multiple-exposure composition?

I have a piece called Joyous Unity. The first thing you see is the nighttime Chicago skyline with cherry blossoms in the foreground, something undeniably majestic. But look more closely and you'll find children holding hands, dancing through the photograph. People are often taken with the majesty. Don't overlook the minuscule. That's where the joy is hiding.

You recently began collaborating with multi-media artist and fellow ASL interpreter Amy Rubinger. What have you discovered through the exchange between photography and collage, and has this collaboration changed the way you think about layering?

I loved working with Amy as a team interpreter. She was supportive and collaborative—the best kind of team interpreter one could have. When I left New York, I bought two of her original pieces to commemorate my time there, and they meant even more because they were made by someone close to me. I never imagined we'd end up collaborating on art. But as my photography shifted from documentary and street work toward the abstract, people who knew us both started noticing the similarities, and pointing them out to us before we'd fully noticed them ourselves. Amy started creating collages inspired by my photographs and incorporating elements of my photographs into her art. Then I tried to create photographs based on some of her work. Red Riding Hood uses texture from one of Amy's collages—an idea she gave to me. The trust we built working together as interpreters has transferred to a great collaboration in the artistic realm. I'm not sure I could do this with anyone, but I trust Amy because we've worked together in vulnerable interpreting situations. We can collaborate as artists.

Peishen Liang is a London-based photographer and lens-based artist working across documentary, portraiture and quiet observational image-making. His work is drawn to thresholds — the spaces between departure and arrival, stillness and motion, the sacred and the everyday — and to the small, often overlooked gestures through which people carry the weight of distance and belonging. Working across colour and black and white, his projects develop slowly, often over several years, favouring sustained attention over quick resolution.

Project Statement

Threshold examines the emotional and spatial borders that shape migration, distance and belonging. Made in London transport hubs in 2026, the black-and-white series observes brief gestures of waiting, departure and intimacy within spaces designed for movement.

Peishen Liang | Sixty Seconds | 2026





Peishen Liang | Suspended Time | 2026



Peishen Liang | The Farewell | 2026

— Interview

Natali Timakova

You describe your artistic language as ethno-folk symbolism. How did you arrive at this definition, and which cultural or visual traditions have had the strongest influence on its development?

This definition did not emerge immediately. Over time, I simply realized that it was the most accurate way to describe what I do.

I was born and raised in the Soviet Union. I still remember a large encyclopedia with an illustration showing representatives of all the peoples of the Soviet Union dressed in their traditional national costumes. As a child, I could spend a long time looking at that image. I was fascinated by how differently people expressed themselves and their sense of beauty through color, ornament, jewellery, and the forms of their clothing.

Perhaps that was when my love for traditional costumes and decorative details first began. One of my favorite activities was inventing and drawing clothes. Later, this passion even led me into fashion design and to Central Saint Martins in London.

Today, I am still inspired by traditional ornaments, mythology, symbols, and the distinctive character of different cultures. But I am not interested in simply copying them. I want to preserve this cultural code while reinterpreting it through contemporary art.

For this reason, the ethnic motifs in my work are not a reconstruction of the past, but rather an environment in



Natali Timakova | Queen Of The Sea | 2025

which my heroines exist. Through this context, I tell stories about contemporary people, their emotions, and their search for themselves.

Your first professional background is in analytics, corporate governance, finance, and marketing. How does this experience shape the way you structure a composition, develop a concept, or approach the creative process?

Many people are surprised by this combination, but I have never separated analytical thinking from artistic intuition. They have always coexisted peacefully and complemented one another.

Most of my paintings begin with an idea — a specific thought or feeling that I want to explore with the viewer. After that comes what is probably the most analytical part of the process: I search for symbols, develop the composition, and consider which image can communicate the idea most precisely. Some of my paintings are very carefully constructed; they function almost like complex systems of interconnected elements. Rational thinking helps me build the structure of the work.

But sometimes the process is completely different.

Occasionally, an image arrives unexpectedly. I can wake up in the morning and already see the future painting clearly and in its entirety. Then all that remains is to transfer it onto the canvas before the vision disappears.

Perhaps this is why my creative process always exists somewhere between logic and intuition. First, I think like an analyst, and then I try to trust the artist within me.

You often use the female figure not as a portrait of a specific person, but as a symbolic embodiment of emotions, archetypes, and natural forces. What does this



Natali Timakova | A Moonlit Night's Dream | 2025



recurring image allow you to express?

I am interested not in a particular woman, but in her inner state.

Through the female figure, I explore strength and vulnerability, fear and freedom, love, memory, growing up, and self-acceptance. I feel that the female form allows me to speak very delicately about experiences that are difficult to express in words.

At the moment, I am working on a series devoted to a woman's journey toward her authentic nature. For me, it is a story about how a person gradually returns to their true self, passes through different stages of life, accepts both their strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately finds inner wholeness.

This is why my heroines are not different women. Rather, they are different states of the same soul. Each figure becomes a channel for a particular energy. Sometimes it is water, sometimes fire, sometimes ancestral memory, sometimes inner balance, or the strength that emerges after overcoming hardship.

Perhaps this is why many viewers tell me that they recognize themselves in my heroines, even though none of them represents a specific person.

Many of the women in your paintings appear as queens, princesses, priestesses, or mythical guardians. Who are these figures for you, and do they belong to a single visual mythology?

Yes, I feel that they all belong to the same world.

I never deliberately created rules for this world. But with every new painting, I increasingly understand that all of my heroines seem to exist within the same universe.

A queen, a priestess, a guardian, a woman connected to one of the elements — these are not separate characters. They are different archetypes and different stages of an inner journey toward one's authentic nature.

Perhaps this is why my paintings can be perceived both individually and as chapters in one larger story.

Your experience in fashion, graphic, and jewellery design is clearly reflected in your attention to texture,

decoration, and materiality. How has your transition from design to painting changed your understanding of form and beauty?

Design taught me discipline in relation to form. When working with graphics, clothing, and jewellery, it is impossible to treat details superficially. Every millimeter affects how the whole is perceived.

Painting, however, gave me true freedom. In design, there is almost always a specific task, function, and set of limitations. In art, you can allow yourself to search not for the perfect form, but for an honest emotional experience.

Beauty is no longer a goal for me. It has become a way of holding the viewer's attention long enough for a dialogue to emerge between them and the work. This is why decorative elements never exist in my paintings for their own sake. Ornaments, gold, textures, relief — none of these are simply embellishments; they are all part of the narrative. Beauty becomes the entrance into the work. The meaning lies deeper.

Your works move between dream and reality, while combining figurative imagery with decorative and symbolic elements. How do you maintain a balance between a readable narrative and a sense of mystery?

I like it when a painting does not provide ready-made answers.

I think contemporary people are very rarely allowed not to understand everything immediately. We have become accustomed to receiving instant explanations. Art can afford the luxury of silence.

This is why my paintings always contain a recognizable story — a human figure, elements of nature, an emotional atmosphere. This becomes the point of entry.

Beyond that lies a space of symbols, where each viewer becomes a co-author of the work. I like the idea of someone returning to the same painting years later and discovering a new meaning within it.

I think the same is true of the process of getting to know ourselves. We do not discover our inner nature all at once either.

Gold, precious stones, intricate patterns, and layered surfaces give your paintings an almost sculptural presence. What role do materials and tactile effects play in communicating the emotional meaning of a work?

For me, material is as much an artistic language as color or composition.

Gold can speak about a person's inner light; volume can convey the depth of an emotional experience; layers can suggest that behind every state of being lies an entire story.

I like it when a painting invites you not simply to look at it, but to explore it — to come closer, notice new details, and discover new meanings. I want the work to be experienced not only through the eyes. I want it to evoke an almost physical desire to touch the surface and feel its rhythm. We live in a world of digital images, where everything becomes flat. Painting restores the experience of genuine presence to the viewer. The surface of a painting preserves the memory of every movement of the artist's hand. It is this materiality that makes a work truly alive. In every painting, I always leave a small piece of my heart.

Benoît Flamérion

You describe your approach as “stylized realism”. How did this visual language develop, and at what point did you realize that the balance between realistic observation and cartoon exaggeration had become central to your practice?

Drawing has always been part of my life as I've been holding pencils for as far back as I can remember. Very early on, I started copying comics and cartoons like Asterix or the Looney Tunes. That energetic, silly, expressive style was my first visual language.



Benoît Flamérion | My Polish Dream | 2025



The more academic side came later. After moving to Poland, I started taking art classes based on still-life observation and copying old masters. That developed my understanding of perspective, volume and light. At that point, I was obsessed with accuracy : getting the proportions right, capturing likeness, making everything “correct”. It really built my discipline.

Once I felt technically confident, something still felt missing. The portraits were accurate, but missing “soul”. They didn’t really feel like me. So I started to play by exaggerating eyes, simplifying lines, pushing certain features, and adding graphic textures. Because the structure was solid, I could afford to have fun with it.

I didn’t plan this mix of realism and cartoon. It just happened. At some point I realized I wasn’t choosing between the two anymore : I was using both, and it felt more honest than sticking to just one. That’s when I started calling it “stylized realism.”

Your work often begins with recognizable forms but quickly moves into something more imaginative and theatrical. How do you decide which elements of reality to preserve and which ones to distort, exaggerate, or reinvent?

My process is quite simple. It starts with an idea, an inspiration, a story that begins to form in my head. Then I browse references : photos from my phone, images from the internet, other artists’ work. I sort out which characteristics will be useful for the way I want to tell the story.

I start with the foundation, making sure it’s solid. Once that’s in place, I start playing : adding details, exaggerating proportions, pushing certain elements. I really let the creative flow come in and I let it go. At this point, I don’t follow any rigid process, it just happens like this.

It’s effortless, because I know I have the academic skills to feel comfortable. That foundation is what allows me to have fun.

Humor is very present in your work, but it often exists alongside nostalgia, cultural memory, or careful observation. What role does humor play for you as a way of looking at people and the world around you?

Sarcasm is kind of my language, so humor naturally finds its way into my work. But it’s never just humor for the sake of it. It’s layered with everything I am : my past experiences, my background, my interactions with people, what I read, what I



see. I have an almost inexhaustible source of inspiration. I often start with a serious topic, like nostalgia or culture, and then turn it into a moment or a cliché with a humorous twist. There's no deep meaning or gravity in my art. Even if I take art very seriously, I always want to integrate some silliness or fun. It's a form of warmth that makes the work feel real, human, and sensitive.

You mention the influence of Franco-Belgian comics as well as classical painting. These traditions seem very different in their visual language. How do they meet within your work?

On the surface, they do seem very different. Comics are direct, graphic, often humorous, while classical painting is more about light, volume, and a certain gravity. But for me, they share a common concern : how to tell a story through an image.

From comics, I took the clarity of line, the expressiveness of faces and movement. From classical painting, I learned to observe more carefully and to think about light as a way of modeling form and composition.

In my work, these two influences meet in the way I construct a scene. I might use the graphic clarity and exaggerated expressions of comics, but I'll build the shapes in an academic and realistic way. The result is that you can grasp the scene quickly, but there's also room to look more closely and discover subtleties.

Living in Kraków as a French artist appears to have introduced Polish culture and everyday life into your imagery. How has living in Poland changed the subjects, characters, or visual references that appear in your work?

Moving to Kraków was a turning point, both in my life and in my work. At first, everything felt new and slightly foreign, and that sensation of being an outsider made me observe more intensely.

Over time, Poland became my everyday reality and naturally found its way into my drawings. Traditions, art, history, legends, patterns, language, the way people live and interact... everything started to filter through.

Living here also shifted the emotional tone of my work.

There's a warmth and a certain melancholy in Polish everyday life that resonates with me.

At the same time, I grew up in France and I'm completely French, steeped in French culture, with my own references, my family, my friends. That part of me never disappears. Being between two cultures gives me a kind of double perspective, allowing me to see both the similarities and the differences. That tension is very fertile for storytelling.

Watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil each offer very different qualities of transparency, opacity, and precision. How do you use these materials together, and how much does the choice of medium influence the atmosphere of a work?

Even if my creative flow is somewhat chaotic, with many ideas popping into my head at once, I am very deliberate when it comes to the medium I use. Each material helps me craft a specific effect, and I care about controlling each step. I almost never do preliminary research or separate sketches. I draw directly on the canvas to keep a certain spontaneity. Once the drawing is done and detailed, I start layering watercolor. I build between five and ten light layers, letting the transparency of the medium create depth gradually. Between layers, I sometimes use oil-based colored pencils to refine and clean the lines, making sure I don't lose the initial drawing. As a final touch, I like to use the opacity of acrylics or gouache to add more details, and I return to colored pencils for fine-tuning until I reach a result that satisfies me. In the end, I have a very clear and detailed work that captures the mood I wanted to express.

Your crowded compositions invite the viewer to keep discovering small details, expressions, and references. Do you deliberately design your images to be read slowly, almost like visual stories, rather than understood at a single glance?

Yes, that's very intentional. I like the idea that an image can be experienced over time, like a short story or a scene from a film. When I compose a drawing, I think in terms of layers: there's the main action, readable at first glance, and then secondary actions, small gestures, background details that only appear when you look more closely.

I want the viewer to feel invited to explore the image, to move their eyes around and discover new things each time. These elements create connections and add meaning. They turn the image into a kind of visual narrative where you can keep finding new entries.

This also reflects how I see everyday life: as something dense, slightly chaotic, but full of little stories happening at the same time. A crowded composition is a way to capture that richness and complexity, and to encourage a slower, more attentive way of looking.

The Distance of Recognition

by Anna Gvozdeva

In Nazanin Ghahramani's *Looking in the Mirror / Self-Portraits*, self-portraiture appears not as a sequence of stable likenesses but as an inquiry into how the self comes into view under different conditions of seeing. The five selected works span the period from 2015 to 2026, moving from the isolated face to the figure within the studio and finally to a collective scene. This chronology does not offer a conventional narrative of maturation or a fully integrated identity. Instead, each medium redefines the relationship among face, surface, and viewer. Recurring features, round glasses, and a direct gaze establish recognition without proving continuity. The project's central tension lies between the ability to identify a person and the impossibility of knowing her completely.



In *Self-portrait, Pen & Ink on Paper* (2015), the face is constructed from a restless web of intersecting marks. Density gathers around the eyes, cheekbones, and neck, while the outer boundaries of the head remain open and partially dissolve into the blank sheet. Each line adds information, yet the accumulation of lines also obstructs clarity. The white paper functions not as a neutral background but as the possibility of erasure. This is one of the selection's most persuasive works because its technique enacts the contradiction of self-scrutiny: sustained looking does not secure identity but makes what is seen increasingly unstable.



Self-portrait, Pen & Ink on Paper, 2015



Self-portrait, Pencil on Paper, 2021



Blue Self-portrait, Oil on Canvas, 2019

Self-portrait, Pencil on Paper (2021) changes the tempo. Frontal symmetry and a continuous graphite veil produce a sense of closure and almost archival stillness. The face no longer fragments as it does in the pen-and-ink drawing, yet it gradually merges with the evenly worked background. The lenses remain transparent, but the gaze behind them is distant; descriptive precision does not provide greater psychological access. *Blue Self-portrait, Oil on Canvas* (2019), reverses this restraint through tight cropping, visible brushwork, and a cold range of blue, gray, and black. The circular lenses create an additional frame within the painting, acting as both a means of vision and a barrier. Color does more than suggest melancholy; it estranges the flesh and turns the face into an optical event. At the same time, the blue register risks determining the emotional reading too quickly; the work gains complexity when placed beside the quieter graphite portrait.

Green Self-portrait, Oil on Paperboard (2022) introduces the most decisive compositional shift. The face no longer fills the image. The artist sits behind a dark rectangular plane that conceals part of her body, surrounded by shelves, small pictures, containers, and studio objects. Repeated rectangles create frames within the frame, making the face only one element within a broader visual inventory. Muted greens and browns transform the studio into a space of inward concentration. Unlike the proximity of *Blue Self-portrait*, this work keeps the viewer at a distance across the table and incorporates the circumstances of its own making. The subdued spatial hierarchy makes some objects difficult to identify, yet this compression supports the underlying idea: identity is formed through surroundings, routines, and artistic labor rather than in isolation.

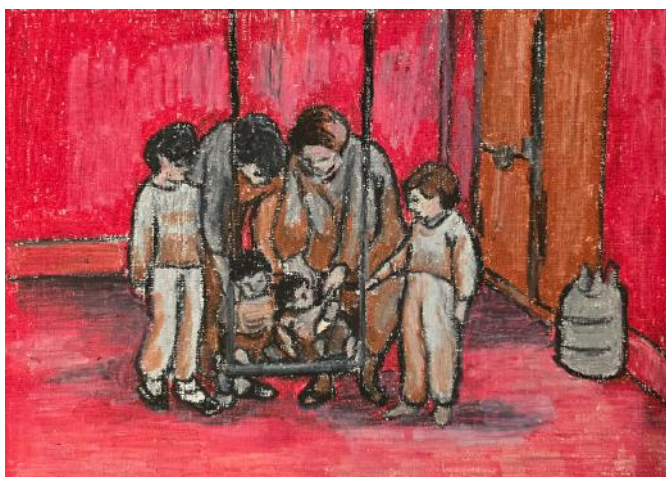
In *Un/Known Faces No.2, Oil Pastel on Paperboard* (2026), the singular self gives way to the group. Several figures bend toward a shared center while a child stands slightly apart. Black vertical lines divide the saturated red



Green Self-portrait, Oil on Paperboard, 2022

interior, while rough oil pastel and the abraded surface deprive the faces of individual specificity. Identity is now defined less by likeness than by one's position within collective memory. The red carries a risk of turning recollection too readily into danger or emotional intensity, but the resistance of the material prevents such a simple reading. The figures appear to have been physically retrieved from an incomplete memory rather than faithfully copied. The work extends self-portraiture beyond visible presence: the artist may no longer be individually identifiable, yet the self persists through its relationship with others.

Across these five works, Ghahramani's achievement lies less in producing a definitive image of herself than in exploiting the differences among drawing, painting, and pastel. The project is most convincing when the material complicates recognition rather than simply illustrating an assigned mood. The movement from agitated line to graphite stillness, chromatic estrangement, the layered space of the studio, and collective memory makes self-portraiture a practice of continual revision. For Ghahramani, recognizing oneself is not the same as possessing oneself; identity remains a shifting encounter among vision, memory, material, and the presence of others.



Un/Known Faces No.2, 2026

Antonia Halter

You are a self-taught artist and have been interested in art from a very young age. How has your artistic practice developed over the years?

I was always the artsy kid in my class, doodling on worksheets, in between math equations and all over my notebooks. My sisters used to push my abilities when I



Antonia Halter | Selfportrait | 2026

was little. They were themselves very creative, and they taught me to sketch simple faces and characters. So, from early on I loved to draw faces and portraits, sketching the people from magazine covers and tv. I never stopped drawing, even when I was busy with my education, or when people told me there isn't a future in art and I should just give up. I kept going anyways, maybe that means I'm just stubborn, maybe that means I need the creative outlet. Either way, I love to keep developing and learning every day.

Your background is in landscape architecture. How has this education influenced the way you think about composition, nature, color, or space in your paintings?

I pull my inspiration from my surroundings. In my education to be a landscape architect I was taught to look, to see, to analyze the complex landscapes around me. Every landscape has its composition, its meaning, its atmosphere and its unique colors and textures. Every person sees their surroundings differently, sees the world differently and has different beliefs and views. So, in those ways, landscapes are a lot like people. Everyone is unique, has many facets, and is seen or experienced differently through different eyes. I would love people to have a glimpse into my way of seeing the world.

Portraiture and plants both play an important role in your work. What draws you to these two subjects, and how do they connect with one another?

Portraits reflect the world. They don't just show you a person, they show the world reflected on their face. I love to see the beauty of the world reflected in every facet of



Antonia Halter | Joy | 2025



the portrait, and to me the most beautiful part of the world is nature.

Many of your paintings explore ideas of strength, confidence, resilience, and personal freedom. Why are these themes important to you?

Expressing one's own strength is hard, expressing other people's strength you admire – might be even harder. I appreciate the strength and resilience that many people have. I love to show their power and confidence in my art, as creating these works builds and strengthens my own as well.

You have also created self-portraits. Does painting yourself feel different from painting other figures, and what do you discover through that process?

When I was a kid I loved doing self- portraits, but mostly because I didn't have much access to other references, outside of some magazines or tv. But I could just never get it right, it was always off. Either it was unsymmetrical, or it didn't look like me. I was frustrated for quite a while, thinking I'm just bad at it. So, for years I then only drew off of references I found anywhere else, trying to learn about portraiture. It was only a few years ago that I realized that my face just isn't symmetrical! That was quite the revelation, as it just made perfect sense. That's why I could just never get it right before. In the meantime, I have grown up, and as it happens to most people, I had developed a bit of a self-image problem. I didn't love my own face at all. That's why I kept only doing portraits off other references. I realized only last year that I must do something about it. So, I started to challenge myself, doing one self portrait per week for the full year 2026,

trying out techniques and mixing it up. It might sound cheesy but with each piece, I am learning to love my own face again. I am discovering new techniques, new art mediums, new perspectives and some self-love. I absolutely love this ongoing process, and I might have to keep going after this year. Creating self- portraits is healthy for me, and I would definitely recommend it to anyone.

You describe painting as a way to express things that can sometimes be difficult to put into words. Are there emotions or experiences that you find easier to communicate visually?

There's a lot of emotions I prefer to communicate visually instead of ever saying it out loud. I grew up in the rural parts of central Switzerland, where people talk about the weather and nothing more. The past years I've learned to be a lot more open and blunter, when it comes to expressing my own experiences and feelings. But it still often feels wrong or difficult to really use only words to describe what's going on on the inside. I think art can say things much clearer and louder than any words ever could.

You often work with one or two layers of oil paint. What do you enjoy about this approach, and how does it affect the character of your paintings?

I enjoy that I can freely and loosely paint, without thinking a lot about layering paint, or painting softly. I used to do a lot of illustrative portraiture using fineliners on paper. I guess through painting in one or two layers, my work regains a certain illustrative character, reminiscent of those illustrations. It feels right to me, even if it isn't the classical or "correct" way of paint with oils. I do think the classical way of painting in many soft layers, using mediums and working on a painting for months is fascinating and gorgeous, but I don't see myself doing it that way anytime soon.



Elena Kuzenko is a dedicated contemporary fine art painter based in Odessa, Ukraine, specializing in classical oil painting on linen canvas. Working primarily within the traditions of academic realism, her artistic practice spans expressive seascapes, luminous landscapes, delicate floral still lifes, and emotionally resonant figurative works. Her creative path is deeply rooted in classical training, encompassing dedicated studies in portraiture, human anatomy, and precise color composition. Drawing inspiration from the techniques of historical and contemporary masters, Elena focuses intensely on capturing the subtle nuances of atmospheric light, shadow, and deep emotional narratives.

Elena's works have achieved significant international recognition across multiple continents. Her art has been featured in international print and digital media, including Arty Rat Magazine and The Big Book of Painters by the Arts To Hearts Project, accompanied by official certificates of recognition. Her paintings have been selected for multiple prestigious international exhibitions and festivals, including curated group exhibitions at Clover Gallery, repeated wins and displays at the International Art Festivals MALUY.UA and RISUY.UA — with her works featured in the major open-air exhibition in Khreshchaty Park in central Kyiv, as well as the American digital showcase ArtSeen: West Coast Screen Series, juried online platforms like the CEV Art Gallery's Chromatic exhibition, and international gallery presentations in Barcelona.

Through her art, Elena strives to preserve a soulful, technically rigorous approach that connects classical heritage with profound personal expression. Every single canvas is approached with deep dedication, transforming quiet moments of observation into timeless visual stories that resonate with viewers across borders and touch the human heart deeply. Her ongoing journey in art is a continuous exploration of beauty, capturing the eternal grace of nature and human emotion.

Project Statement

My artistic practice is rooted in the timeless principles of classical oil painting and academic realism. Through my works—ranging from expressive seascapes and luminous landscapes to delicate floral still lifes and emotive figurative compositions—I strive to capture the subtle interplay of atmospheric light, shadow, and deep emotional resonance.

Painting with oil on linen canvas is my medium for exploring the quiet, profound moments of existence. I believe that true art should bridge classical heritage with genuine personal feeling, transforming everyday observations into lasting visual stories. Every canvas is an invitation to pause, feel, and connect with the eternal grace of nature and the human heart.

Elena Kuzenko | Cocoon of Safety | 2026





— Interview

Won Ji Lim



Your practice centers on hypervigilance as a bodily condition shaped by anticipation, anxiety, and the desire for control. When did you first realize that these personal patterns could become the foundation of your artistic language?



Won Ji Lim | Held At The Edge | 2026

When I moved to the United States for graduate school, my anxiety and desire for control became much more intense. Leaving behind a familiar language and environment and entering a new institutional and social context seemed to heighten my need to keep everything organized, predictable, and under control.

Whenever professors or fellow students visited my studio, they would often comment on the walls covered with meticulously aligned notes and the materials carefully arranged along the lines of the floor. These behaviors had always felt completely normal to me, but seeing them through other people's eyes gave me the opportunity to reconsider them. I began to understand that they were not simply working habits, but physical manifestations of anxiety. From that point on, I stopped viewing these behaviors as something I needed to hide or correct. Instead, I began to see them as a language that could be observed and explored. The acts of aligning, repeating, securing, and preparing for every possible outcome became the starting point for examining how anxiety and hypervigilance are expressed through the body.

You describe actions such as aligning, securing, knotting, and repeating as temporary attempts to contain uncertainty. How does repetition function for you during the making process: as a source of reassurance, tension, exhaustion, or something else?

Repetition gives me a temporary sense of stability. Repeating the same action over and over can become almost ritualistic, creating the feeling that I am briefly containing uncertainty through physical labor. As long as my hands continue moving and the pattern remains consistent, I feel as though things are being brought into order.

At the same time, repetition produces another form of



anxiety. The desire to prevent even the smallest deviation or mistake gradually becomes stronger, and when an error occurs, I feel compelled to begin the process again. An action that starts as a way of creating reassurance can therefore generate further tension and compulsion. For me, repetition is never simply comforting. It exists in a constant state of movement between reassurance and tension, control and failure, concentration and exhaustion. That contradiction has become one of the central structures of both my making process and the work itself.

Many of your installations begin with structures that appear rational and controlled, yet gradually reveal instability. What interests you about creating systems that seem ordered but are never entirely secure?

The first thing I encountered that appeared ordered but was never truly stable was myself. For a long time, I was more accustomed to avoiding or concealing my anxiety than confronting it directly. I worked hard to appear calm, organized, and in control, while beneath that surface there was a constant fear that everything might collapse. When I finally began to look directly at that contradiction, I became interested in how the effort to appear stable could actually contain an even greater accumulation of anxiety. I also realized that this was not an experience unique to me. Many people create routines, rules, and systems in order to endure uncertainty in their everyday lives. The structures in my installations reflect this condition. They may initially appear solid and rational, but their stability depends on knots, tension, gravity, repeated adjustment, and continual maintenance. I do not think of order as a completed or permanent state. Instead, I understand it as something provisional that must be constantly managed in order not to collapse.

Materials in your work are allowed to stretch, sag, contract, decay, loosen, and transform. How much control do you retain over these changes, and at what point do you consciously allow the material to take over?

My primary material is hog casing, an animal intestine that

becomes a soft and translucent membrane when soaked in water. While it is pliable, I fill it with air, soil, liquid, fruit, or other organic matter, seal it, place it within carefully constructed systems, or repeatedly bind and knot it. My control largely ends at that point. I establish the conditions and structures within which the material can change, but I do not fully determine the form that will emerge afterward. Once the installation is complete, the membrane stretches, contracts, sags, changes color, decays, or deforms in response to gravity, humidity, temperature, time, and the condition of the matter contained inside it. I do not regard these transformations as damage or failure. Instead, I see them as moments when the material moves beyond my control and begins to produce its own form. My role is not to define a final appearance, but to create the conditions in which the material can continue to act and transform after I have finished working with it.

Your background is in ceramics and glass, while your current practice incorporates rope, wood, organic matter, membranes, metal, and other materials. How has your training in ceramics and glass influenced the way you understand material behavior today?

Looking back, I think I was already more interested in transformation and collapse than in fixed or completed forms during my undergraduate studies. Ceramics and glass are often associated with hardness, durability, and permanence, but I was especially drawn to the moments when materials deformed, collapsed, or reached an unexpected state inside the kiln.

I experimented by dipping found objects in clay slip and firing them directly, or by coating metal objects with thick layers of slip and glaze before placing them in the kiln. Some materials burned away completely, while others collapsed, twisted, or produced unpredictable surfaces and structures through their reactions with heat.

These experiments taught me to understand materials not simply as passive tools for realizing my intentions, but as active agents that respond to heat, time, and environmental conditions. At the same time, I began to feel limited by the fact that firing ultimately fixes a changing material into a single state. The kiln allows transformation to occur, but it also brings that transformation to an end.

This realization led me toward organic and biological materials that could continue changing even after the work was installed. The careful observation of material behavior, the acceptance of failure, and the willingness to work with uncertainty that I developed through ceramics and glass still remain fundamental to my practice today.

Although your work originates partly from personal experiences of anxiety, you also connect hypervigilance to surveillance, productivity, uncertainty, and social expectations. How do you move from an intimate psychological experience toward these wider social conditions without making the work overly illustrative?

My work began with an examination of my own anxiety, but over time I realized that anxiety is not simply a private or individual experience. Many people living in contemporary society carry different forms of anxiety shaped by the sense of being watched, the pressure to remain productive, the fear of falling behind, and the uncertainty of the future. These



conditions continuously affect both our daily behavior and our bodily awareness.

Although these anxieties arise from different circumstances, I believe there are similarities in how we respond to them. We organize ourselves, create schedules and rules, and push ourselves into stable frameworks in order to function as if we were coherent and controlled systems. Yet that stability is not naturally given. It is maintained through repeated self-management, surveillance, tension, and adjustment. Rather than representing these social conditions through direct symbols or recognizable narratives, I try to embed them in the structure and behavior of the materials. Structures held together by tension, knots that could loosen, membranes that continually deform, and materials repeatedly aligned or secured all indirectly express these conditions.

It is important to me that the work remains open enough for viewers to connect it to their own experiences. I do not want the installation to deliver a single explanation. Instead, I want it to create a situation in which the sensations of anxiety and control can be recognized physically and interpreted through the viewer's own perspective.

Your installations often place viewers in situations where

stability feels provisional rather than guaranteed. What kind of physical or emotional awareness do you hope emerges when someone spends time with your work?

I want viewers to experience the tension and instability of the work through their bodies rather than only observing it visually. In some installations, viewers are invited to touch the materials or stand beneath the work according to the spatial arrangement I have created. At that moment, they are no longer simply observers maintaining a safe distance. Their bodies become part of the system of weight, tension, gravity, and potential transformation.

The work is not actually dangerous, but standing beneath something suspended or tightly held in place can naturally make the body tense and become more aware of its surroundings. I am interested in this subtle physical response. The mind may understand that the situation is safe, while the body begins to anticipate other possibilities. Through this experience, I hope viewers can briefly confront forms of anxiety that they may normally suppress or overlook. I also hope they can begin to see anxiety not only as a negative emotion that must be eliminated, but as a bodily condition through which we continually sense our environment, other people, and the uncertainty of the future.



Olga Shipilova

You grew up surrounded by art, with your father as your first teacher. What are your earliest memories of painting, and how do you think those childhood experiences continue to influence your work today?

One of my most vivid childhood memories is connected with painting. There was a picture by my father hanging on the wall of my room—a rural landscape with little hens in it. From a distance, I could clearly see the hens, but the moment I came closer, they disappeared, and in their place there were only a few textured brushstrokes. It felt like magic. I repeated this little experiment again and again, trying to catch the exact moment when those textured spots of paint suddenly turned into hens. To me, it truly was a kind of magic. That childhood impression was so powerful that even now I still think of painting in much the same way—as something magical. And I try to make sure that this sense of magic is present in every work I create.

At one point, you had to choose between art and medicine and ultimately pursued a medical career. Looking back, how did that decision shape you both as a person and as an artist?



Both have become essential and complete parts of my life. Medicine cannot simply be crossed out of it: my medical knowledge and skills continue to help me, and they are still needed. At the same time, I cannot imagine myself now without painting.

Did medicine influence my art? Absolutely. Medicine taught me to think carefully before I act. And medicine and painting have one important thing in common: in both, mistakes are costly.

There is a Russian proverb: “Measure seven times, cut once.” It applies equally well to medicine and to painting.

Do you feel that your background in medicine has influenced the way you observe the world - perhaps your attention to detail, structure, light, or the physical qualities of your subjects?

Yes, exactly. Attention. Medicine taught me to pay close attention to detail. It gave me an understanding that there is no such thing as something “unimportant.” Everything matters. The smallest, seemingly insignificant detail may turn out to be decisive.

That attentiveness—to objects, to nuances, to the little things—is extremely important for an artist.

You returned to painting many years later while living in Cyprus. What was it about that period of your life that encouraged you to pick up the brush again?

The beauty around me. Everyday beauty—the kind that somehow never becomes ordinary.

I live in an extraordinarily beautiful place, almost a paradise.



Everything here is beautiful: the sea, the forests, the rocks, the people. And there is also the spirit of ancient Greek and Roman culture, which seems to permeate everything around you. How could one possibly live here and not paint? And I am certainly not the only person who has fallen under the spell of this beauty. In fact, it is almost a mass phenomenon here. Many people are seized by a kind of creative ecstasy.

I was fortunate, though. I already had the background that allowed me to channel that creative energy in the right direction and eventually achieve success with it.

You have described your artistic education as “medieval”, referring to learning from many different masters. How did you manage to absorb such varied approaches while gradually developing a visual language of your own?

Well, how else could it be?

If you study under only one master, sooner or later you will end up imitating that person in one way or another—their technique, their methods, their way of thinking. And this is always visible from the outside. No matter how accomplished you become, there will still be something derivative about your work.

But when you have many excellent teachers, you can take from each of them what interests you, what you need, what fills the gaps in your own abilities. You learn from each master something different.

And since I was fortunate enough to study with some of the very best, every one of them had something valuable to teach me.

Watercolor has changed considerably since your childhood, both technically and materially. Which discoveries in contemporary watercolor have had the greatest impact on your own practice?

When I was a child, I had a book that was almost a bible for me. It was called *The Technique of Watercolour Painting*. Everything was in there. It described essentially the same techniques that are used today—and, of course, many of those techniques had already existed for a very long time. But that book was talking about a very different kind of watercolour.

At the time, watercolour was considered a branch of graphic art, and that was largely the role it played: a secondary, supporting medium. Even today, many encyclopedias still describe watercolour, out of habit, as a form of graphic art. Today, however, that is simply no longer true.

Watercolour has become an independent, fully developed and major art form—a distinct form of painting in its own right. It is far more dynamic now. It has strength and presence.

It is no longer merely a subdivision of graphic art. It has become an extraordinary medium that combines delicacy with boldness, colour with fluidity, spontaneity with unpredictability.

And much of this transformation has been made possible by new materials that simply did not exist before.

When I was a child, nobody had even heard of special cotton watercolour paper. Of course, there was “watercolour paper,” but it was a completely different material. I am not even sure what it was made from—probably something close to what we would now call cellulose paper. And the technique had to be entirely different, because artists could only do what that paper allowed them to do.

And the brushes! In my childhood, there were essentially only two choices: squirrel or kolinsky sable.

Every artist dreamed of owning a good set of kolinsky brushes. That was it. There was nothing else.

Synthetic brushes simply did not exist for watercolour, at least not in any serious sense. Today I do not own a single kolinsky brush. Modern high-quality synthetic brushes have taken over that role beautifully, and they allow us to do things that would once have been almost unimaginable.

And then there are the paints. We do not even have to look very far back. In just the last ten years, the range of watercolour paints available has expanded enormously. Even a decade ago, many of the paints we have today simply did not exist.

Yes, the pigments themselves may be the same, but the whole concept of watercolour paint has changed.

When I was a teenager, manufacturers did everything they could to eliminate granulation. Granulation was regarded as a defect. Today, manufacturers are almost competing to see whose paints granulate most beautifully.

What used to be considered a flaw has become a striking artistic effect.

Watercolor often involves a balance between control and unpredictability. How important are accidents, spontaneous washes, and unexpected effects in your creative process?

Well, what can I say? They happen. And what can you do about it?

This is watercolour. It flows unpredictably. The paper absorbs it unpredictably. You plan one thing, and suddenly the paint produces a run or a bloom in a place where you never intended one to appear.

The real question is how you respond to it.

Do you see it as an annoying accident that has ruined the painting? Or do you see it as an opportunity that watercolour has offered you—something you can use?

We sometimes call such things “a gift from watercolour.”

But seriously, moments like these are precisely where professionalism reveals itself. When something unexpected happens, you can become frustrated and throw the painting away. Or you can find a way to use what has happened—to integrate it into the work, absorb it into the composition, and transform it from a flaw into a genuine strength.

That is what gives watercolour its unique unpredictability—something that cannot truly be manufactured or imitated.

— Interview

Pia Zabret Verbole

You studied at the Secondary School for Design and Photography in Ljubljana and later continued your education in industrial design at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design. How has this background influenced the way you approach drawing and illustration?

Throughout my education, I have explored and experimented with various techniques, gradually developing my own creative approach and discovering the ones that suit me best. My knowledge of graphic design allows me to create engaging compositions, find balance, and thoughtfully develop a visual concept. At school, we focused extensively



on solving different problems and responding to given situations, which has influenced the way I approach comics and illustration. I treat each project as the creation of a new design, starting with research, exploring and developing different ideas, and ultimately selecting the strongest solution.

I think that combination of design thinking and experimentation has made my approach to illustration much more curious and open-ended. I am always looking for a solution that is not only visually interesting but also communicates something and invites the viewer to discover their own story within it.

You have already illustrated several books. How does working on a book illustration differ from creating an independent drawing or comic for yourself?

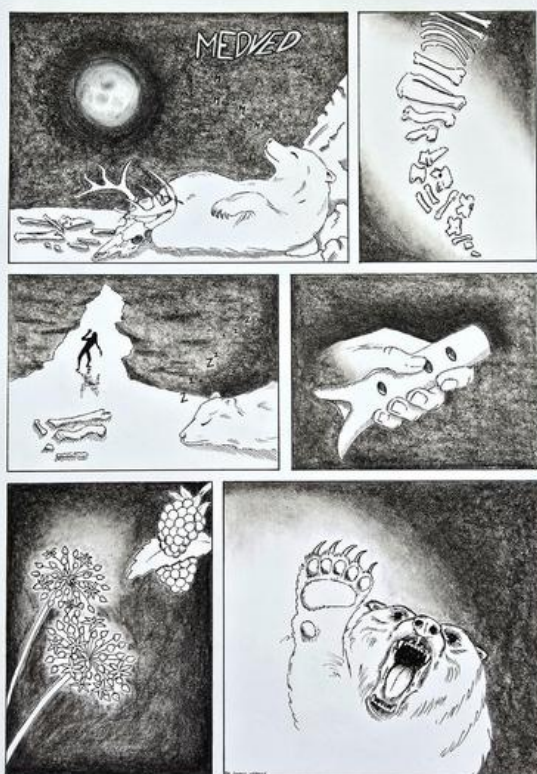
It should definitely connect to the story, while also presenting as much of the narrative as possible or highlighting a particular detail. Unlike a comic, an illustration does not tell its own story on its own, but rather complements and enhances the written text.

In my own work, I tend to work more intuitively and less systematically than I do when illustrating books, because in that case I have to immerse myself in an existing story and capture its most important element in a single image.

Storytelling seems to play an important role in your work. When you begin a new image, do you usually imagine a complete story behind it, or does the narrative develop while you are drawing?



Pia Zabret Verbole | Day Dreaming | 2025



It depends on the project. Often, I have a rough idea of the story in mind, which I then develop further as the work begins to take shape and move in a certain direction. Other projects start with just a few quick strokes, from which I gradually discover an image and a story that I then develop further. Of course, every story that already exists needs its own visual interpretation.

Your works often feature animals, imaginary beings, and unusual characters. What attracts you to creating characters that exist somewhere between the familiar and the fantastical?

I believe that if we have the ability to imagine anything we want, we should make the most of it and use our imagination to create new works that bring a little more magic into our lives.

I have always been fascinated by nature and the mysteries it holds, many of which remain hidden from us. In my everyday life, I often find myself imagining new magical creatures. I can also see a particular scene or different creatures in almost every song that finds its way onto my playlist. Sometimes, I simply draw something I have dreamed about.

In works such as *Bear*, you use sequential imagery that strongly resembles the language of comics. What interests you most about comics as a form of visual storytelling?

What I find most interesting about comics is the way a story can unfold through simple images. A sequence of images can communicate a lot on its own, while still leaving space for the viewer to connect the images and discover the story for themselves. I like that not everything has to be shown or explained—the gaps between the images can become part of the storytelling. I think comics are an interesting form of

storytelling because they exist somewhere between books and films. I am especially drawn to creating a mysterious and magical atmosphere, where not everything has to be explained.

Bear, for example, was inspired by a piece of music by a Slovenian composer. Each part of the comic reflects a different element of the music, allowing the story to unfold visually alongside the composition.

Many of your images are dominated by black, white, and subtle tonal variations. What attracts you to working with such a restricted palette, and how does it affect the mood of your drawings?

I simply love working with chalk and charcoal, especially the contrasts they create and the way sharp and soft edges can exist side by side. Although I am fascinated by colour, I feel more relaxed and happy when working in black and white. I think these tones make my work more mysterious. I do not see them as sad or filled with negative emotions, but rather as a kind of magic captured in time.

You are studying industrial design while also developing a practice in illustration and comics. Do you see these fields as separate, or do design thinking and artistic storytelling influence each other in your work?

I think they are two very different fields, but they complement each other very well. The process of creating a product is quite similar to the process of developing an illustration or comic. In both, the story and the idea behind the work are very important, as they give the final piece meaning and direction. I start with an idea or a problem, explore different possibilities, experiment with solutions, and gradually develop the strongest direction.



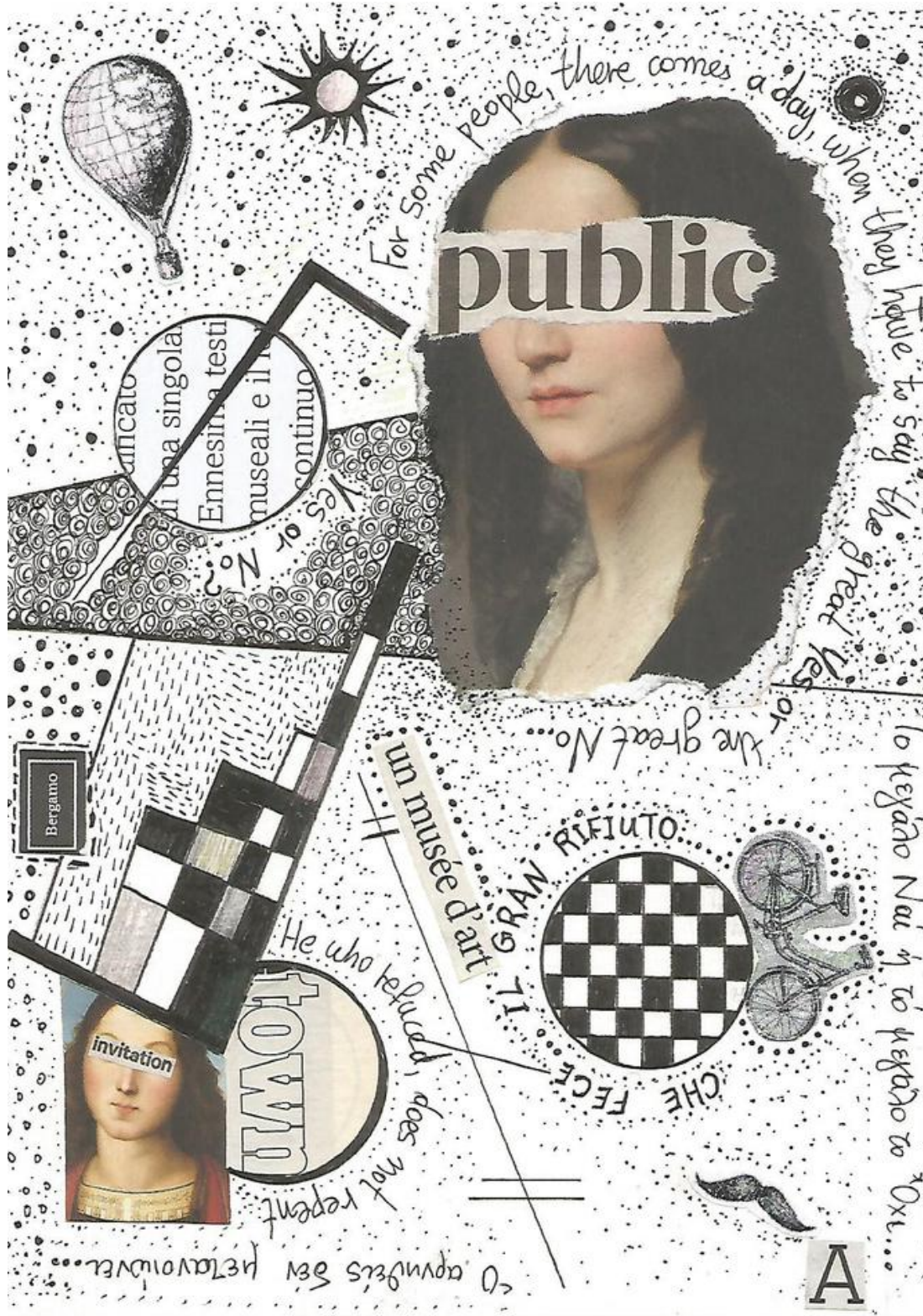
Anna Manga

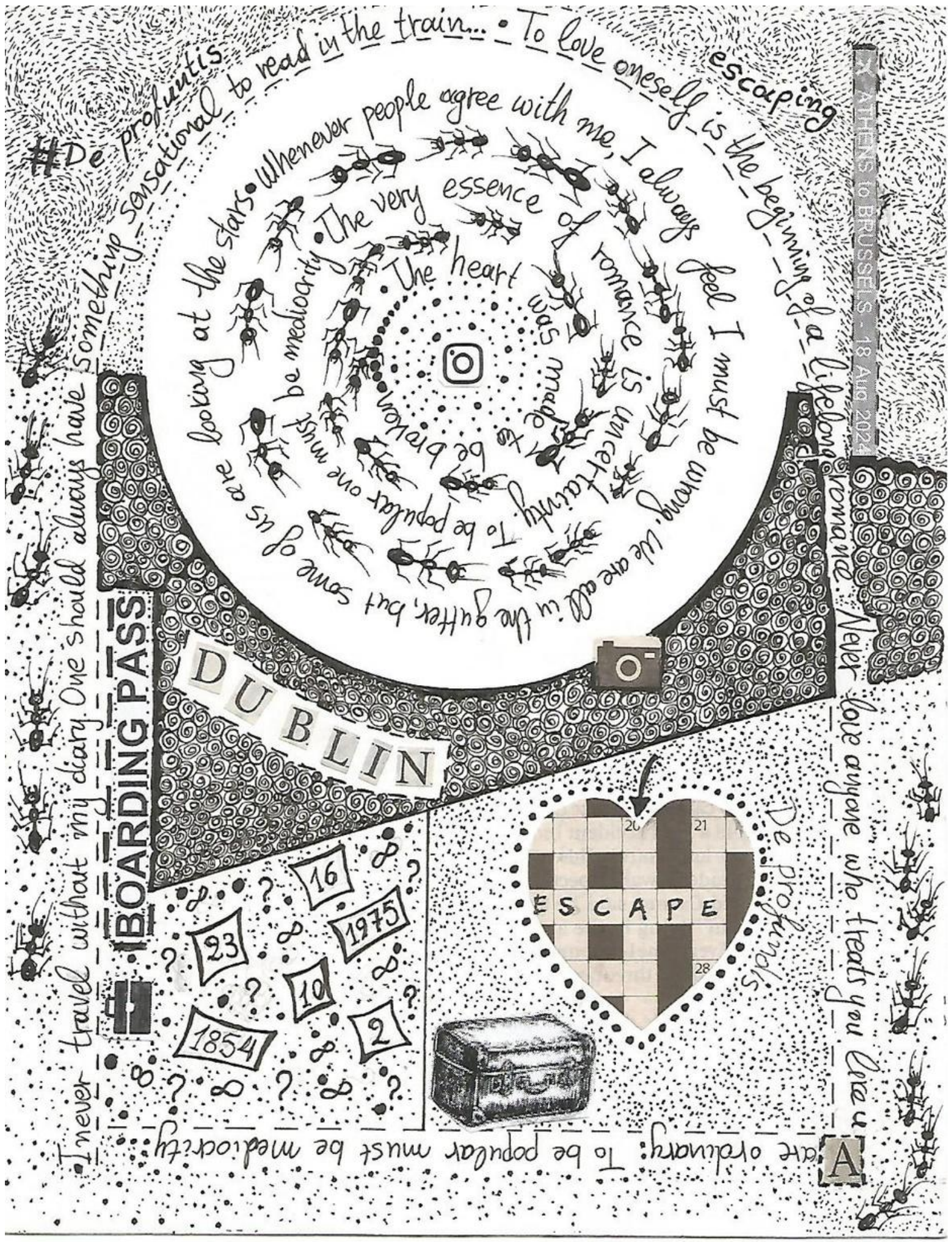
I am a visual artist with an academic background in Art Conservation, Art History and Public History (MSc) and I live in Athens, Greece. I create mixed media works on 220gm paper, combining archival ink finepen with collage elements from museum ephemera and newspapers.

My work involves a technique I call "Spiral tsiki" (an homage to Alexis Akritchakis), combining archival ink finepens, newspaper clippings and museum brochures on heavy weight paper 220 gr (dimensions: 15x19 cm).

Project Statement

Each work functions as a daily diary entry-"mood of the day"-captured through the rhythmic, repetitive motion of finepen on paper. I create a dialogue between the ephemeral nature of daily experience and the structure materiality of an archive. It is a personal record, a deliberate artistic intervention, an internal monologue.





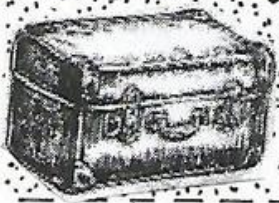
ATHENS to BRUSSELS - 18 Aug 2024

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— Interview

Svetlana Popovic – Lana S



not only as an image, but as a language shaped by psychology, history, and cultural context. Later, at the Indonesian Art Institute (ISI) Denpasar in Bali, I developed a practical foundation in painting, fine art, and batik. Together, these perspectives shaped a practice that moves between conceptual inquiry and an intuitive, material-led process.

How did your journey in visual art begin, and at what point did art become the central focus of your professional life?

Visual art has been part of my life since childhood, even while I explored other forms of expression, including performance. The turning point came during my seven years in Bali, where I lived and worked among international artists in a culture where art is woven into daily life. Painting gradually moved from the background to the centre and became my professional practice.

You have an academic background in culture and media. How has this experience influenced your understanding of art and the development of your own artistic language?

My background in Culture and Media taught me to see art



Svetlana Popovic - Lana S | Subsurface

Your work explores memory, transformation, and the hidden layers of reality. How do these themes emerge during the creation of a particular painting?

When I work, I enter a state in which conscious thought recedes. Memory and transformation are not subjects I illustrate, but traces that surface through colour, gesture, and material. I am most interested in the threshold between the rational and the irrational—where something deeply personal can also resonate with the viewer's own inner transformation.

Your abstract compositions evoke underwater environments, organic forms, and unfamiliar natural structures. How important are water and nature as sources of visual imagery in your work?

Water appears less as a subject than as a symbol of the subconscious, memory, and change. The broader theme of my work is Passages—the invisible transitions between inner



states and forms of being. Nature informs this through its rhythms and constant transformation. I leave the imagery open so that the viewer's first association may reveal something about their own inner world.

Do you usually begin a work with a specific idea, or do you allow the composition to emerge gradually through the interaction of paint, texture, and gesture?

I begin with a clear idea, but I do not treat it as fixed. As the layers accumulate, the painting develops its own logic through colour, texture, resistance, and chance. At that point, I follow the work rather than impose an outcome; the final composition emerges through this dialogue.

The presented works are characterised by richly textured surfaces and multiple layers. What techniques and materials help you create a sense of depth and movement?

I build my surfaces through successive layers, primarily using hot natural beeswax and texture paste. Yet the method matters more than the materials themselves: I treat matter as the skin and bones of the painting, rather than as decoration. Its density, transparency, and resistance create depth and movement, while other materials enter only when the work calls for them.

How does working on canvas differ from painting on silk for you? Does your way of thinking change depending on the surface and the intended purpose of the work?

Canvas and silk require different kinds of attention, although the ideas come from the same source. Silk is fluid, delicate, and allows little hesitation, so I work quickly and intuitively, following its movement. Canvas offers resistance and time: I can revise, build layers, and shape the surface gradually. The tempo changes, but the visual language and emotional source remain the same.

Mariia Shapoval is a Ukrainian symbolist artist whose work explores themes of existential transformation, inner resilience, isolation, and the search for meaning through symbolic visual language. Working primarily with acrylic and watercolor, she creates emotionally charged compositions that investigate the psychological and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

Mariia began painting seriously at the age of fifteen following a life-altering car accident, an event that profoundly shaped her artistic perception and philosophical approach to art. Her practice developed outside traditional academic art institutions, allowing her to cultivate an independent visual language rooted in introspection and symbolic interpretation rather than formal conventions.

Alongside her artistic practice, Mariia works as a foreign language teacher and a tutor. In 2025, she also received a diploma in Project Management from a university in Łódź, Poland. Her multidisciplinary background influences the conceptual structure of her work, where emotional intensity intersects with analytical reflection.

Through her art, Mariia Shapoval seeks to create images that transcend direct narration and engage the viewer on a deeply subconscious and emotional level.

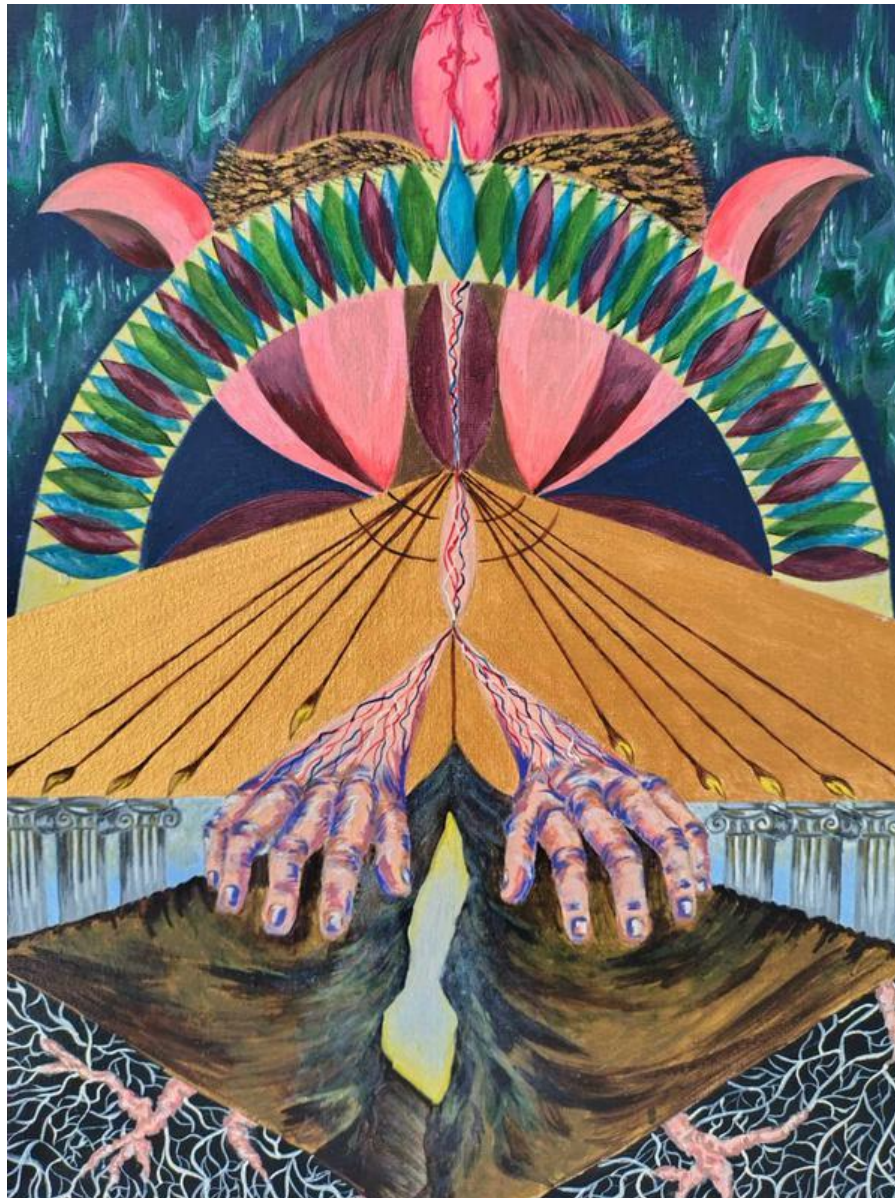
Project Statement

I call my art "religion of transformation". Through symbolic imagery, I explore existential themes such as the search for meaning, personal values, inner resilience, and the painful process of self-discovery. My work reflects the uncompromising truth of human existence: despite all connections and experiences, every individual ultimately faces life alone and must learn to defend their inner worth and identity.

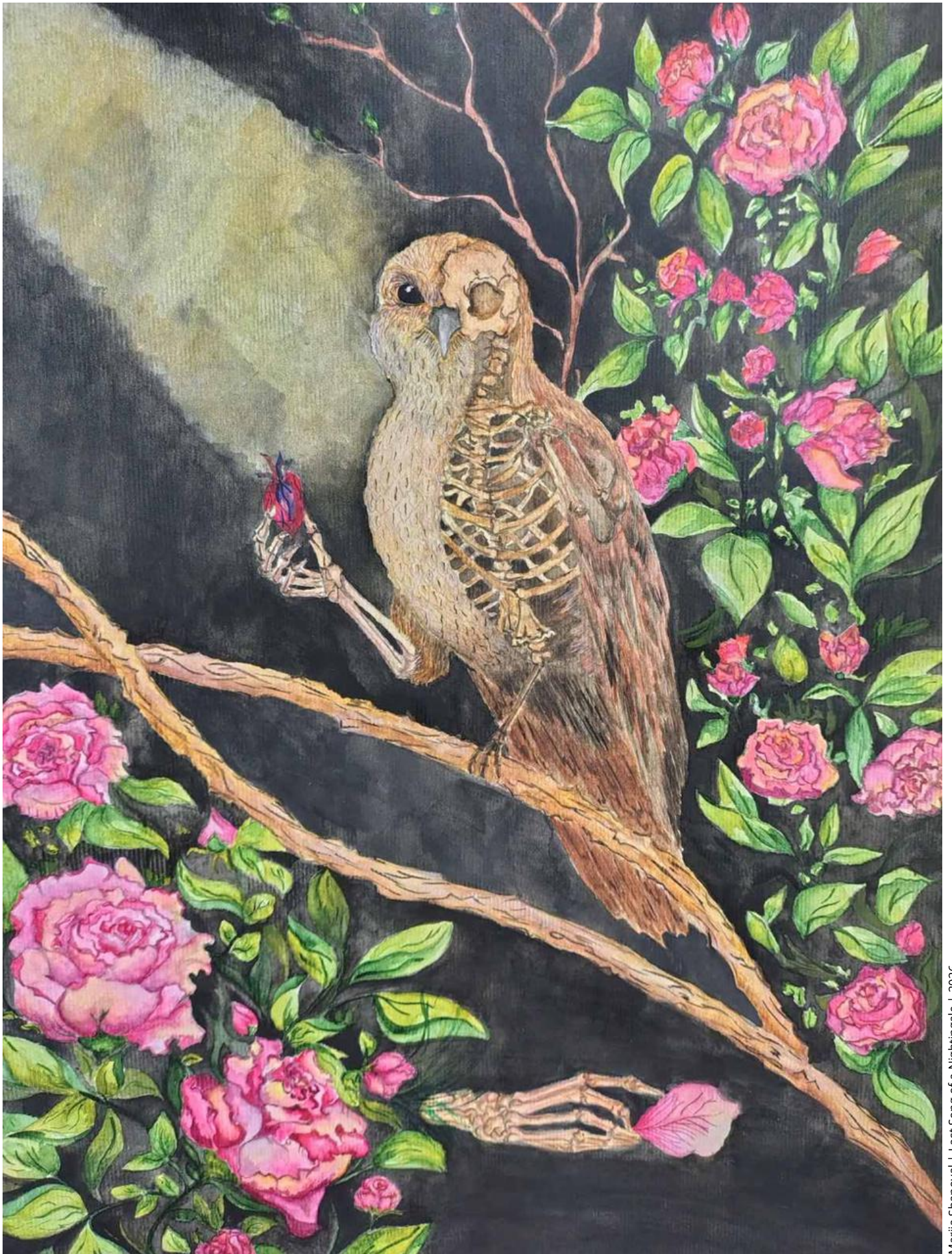
As a symbolist, I am interested in creating images that transcend literal interpretation and speak directly to the subconscious. Rather than imposing a specific emotional response, I strive to awaken an inner dialogue within the viewer and allow the image to resonate on a deeply personal level.

Pain, isolation, endurance, and spiritual awakening are recurring motifs in my work. I see art not merely as visual expression, but as a form of confrontation with the self — a space where vulnerability and strength coexist.

I primarily work with acrylic and watercolor, using layered textures and symbolic forms to create emotionally charged visual narratives.



Mariia Shapoval | Hyperborea of Transformation | 2026



Mariia Shapoval | Last Song of a Nightingale | 2026

Adam Haris bin Othman

You studied law and began pursuing art seriously only in late 2024. What gave you the confidence to move from a legal career toward a more creative path?



Adam Haris bin Othman | Kingfisher | 2026



Throughout my college years, I was primarily a digital artist and would normally design presentation slides, posters and the like for group assignments. It was important for me to clearly convey certain information in a way that would get the lecturer's attention. Even after I graduated, my old college friend who was working at a legal firm had contacted me to design a few slides for a presentation to be shown to shareholders.

As for what gave me that confidence to pursue art in a more serious manner, I was doing my chambering at a legal firm in Kuala Lumpur (one of the big cities in Malaysia) and I could only bear it for about a month due to the hectic nature of the legal field. But every day, I would pass by a number of paintings on my way to my desk. I began to take notice of their composition and the colors and eventually I just went "Yeah, I can do that". That gave me the confidence I needed to take my art seriously.

Fortunately, my friends gave me some well-needed encouragement. It was difficult at first; trying to get used to the feel of acrylics, having to manage your brushstrokes and the feeling of actually painting on a canvas as compared to a regular tablet, but my friends supported me along the way and even provide me with brushes



and paints till this day. Even my college peers were supportive; respecting my decision to pursue art instead of law because they know that law is not for everyone. You can be good at it, but it's not necessarily something you want to do for what could be the rest of your life.

As a self-taught artist, how do you approach learning and improving your technique without formal art education?

I did start with digital drawing during my teen years, so I wasn't completely clueless. I had some level of skill built up mainly in regards to colors, form, and anatomy. But one thing that rarely gets talked about is the transition from digital to traditional and vice versa. I know what I wanted to paint and how I would do it digitally, but having to move your entire arm for certain brushstrokes and color mixing/matching was something very unfamiliar. This led to my first initial painting to be quite terrible. Despite that, my friends urged me on and said that it was quite good for a first attempt. I ended up giving it away to a friend during his birthday which he ended up keeping in his room. It wasn't until I painted a penguin and a heron where I finally gained my bearings. What I wish to convey is that although your first attempts may be downright disastrous, taking up a new artform is a matter of

perseverance; You know what you must do, simply allow your body to catch up with the technical knowledge that you have.

Nowadays, my learning method is primarily from watching full recordings of people painting on Youtube; to learn what colors they use, where they use it, in what brush stroke and with what brush were pivotal for me to become a better artist. It made me understand that we were less painting the exact details and more of the "effect" that these details would give. No sane artist would draw each individual blade of grass; they would use certain brush strokes to give the "effect" of the grass.

It also helps to have a few artist friends to have a back and forth discussion as to what could be improved and what they like about your work. If I am working on an important project, I would always consult my artist friends to see what I can do differently or better. Sometimes it is a matter of subjectivity, but there are a few fundamental areas where all artists can agree on.

Most important of all, give your eyes a break; artists tend to get tunnel vision when they focus on an area for so long that they forget the entire painting as a whole. You can spend the next 2 or 3 hours painting but the subject you painted doesn't fit the composition you had in mind. So always know when to take a step back and observe the entirety of the painting.

Wildlife has become an important subject in your work. What draws you specifically to animals found in Malaysia?

My father used to work as part of an NGO and I was exposed to a lot of conservation efforts from a young age. So when I was looking for inspiration for my next painting, my first instinct was to paint a tiger. Not long after that, I began looking up more and more local wildlife and developed an interest in birds. So now whenever I wish to exhibit a painting, I would end up looking up vibrant birds that are local to Southeast Asia. There's something that brings me joy whenever I put down layers of fur or feathers one after another. At the same time, a lot of the animals (and birds in particular) are not familiar or even known by the public. If I went up to a random passerby and asked them if they knew what a "Ruby-Cheeked Sunbird" is, they

would probably say no. So in a way, I want to showcase that there are these vibrant and beautiful animals simply waiting somewhere in the country; you just need to look hard enough.

How important is your Malaysian background to your artistic identity and to the subjects you choose to paint?

Many of the animals that I choose to paint are closer to Southeast Asian or ASEAN animals rather than uniquely Malaysian animals. For example, I've painted a Hornbill before which is synonymous with East Malaysia (Sabah & Sarawak). But they are also found in other Borneo and Southeast Asian countries. I would say that it's less of my Malaysian background that's important and more the fact that I am from Southeast Asia, where a large number of the animals are comfortable in any country so long as they have the right habitat. It just so happens that Malaysia shares the same animals as their neighbors.

Your paintings often focus closely on distinctive features of animals, such as the eye, feathers, scales, or patterns. What interests you about working with these details?

I feel that the general public tends to ignore certain details of animals, whether it be due to safety, fear, or a lack of an opportunity to get up close. I wish to convey the beauty that we wouldn't normally see; the gem-like eye of a tiger, the gradients on a bird's feathers, and so on. I wanted to draw the viewer's attention to these specific parts that they either miss or don't have the opportunity to simply fully soak it in. With these sorts of focal points in mind, it becomes easy to build the painting towards that focal point; everything else can be decent or good, but as long as that focal point is perfect, the entirety of the painting becomes perfect.

Do you see your wildlife paintings primarily as portraits of individual animals, celebrations of Malaysian nature, or as works carrying a wider message about our relationship with the natural world?



Adam Harris bin Othman | Ruby Cheeked Sunbird | 2026

In a way, they are an acknowledgement and celebration of Malaysia's diverse fauna. I wish to spread the word that there are these vibrant animals simply hiding in nature or even in plain sight. There are so many publications and marketing towards our tigers, tapirs and hornbill birds, but it resulted in so many wonderful animals being pushed to the sideline. A good portion of these animals aren't even exotic, they are simply living and existing out there in their own ecosystem. Yet there aren't enough people that acknowledge their existence other than "some bird" or "some fish". So I want my paintings to be a sort of gateway for the public to know that these beautiful animals are out there; you need only give yourself the chance to find them.

Since you are still relatively early in your artistic career, how has your style or technical approach changed from your first exhibitions in 2025 to the works you are creating now?

I would say my style evolved quite a bit throughout this almost 2 years of painting. Early on, I wanted to emulate the "old masters" style of painting (the ones you'd probably think of hanging at an old Victorian house). But this resulted in me painting with dull colors; there was no vibrancy in them. I got feedback from the



exhibitions to focus more on vibrant colors and I began tapping into the sort of colors and artistic mindset you have when doing digital art. Over time, my paintings become more and more saturated and vibrant. My latest painting that I finished had a starry sky with gradients going from green, blue, purple and violet. My technical approach had quite the interesting turn of events; the two bird paintings were painted in relatively the same timeframe but had different approaches. If you would allow me to be technical, The Ruby Cheeked Sunbird started as a sketch, later painted as an imprimatura (using only brownish/earthy tones), which was then painted over as a griselle (monochrome

colors), and lastly glazed over with translucent paint. The end result was safe and effective but I ended up losing some of the brightness that I had from the previous step. On the other hand, The Kingfisher started as a sketch, painted as an imprimatura, and I painted over it as I would normally. It took more time, but the colors were exactly how I wanted it to be with deep cyans and warm browns. I took away from this learning experience understanding that the imprimatura does show up underneath the painting and give it a nice, warm undertone to it. But if I wanted to do griselle and glaze over it, I would have to do extreme contrasts in light and dark values so that the end result doesn't get dulled out by the glaze.

Anita Kamburova is a Bulgarian multidisciplinary artist whose practice is rooted in introspection and an ongoing exploration of her personal and emotional cosmos. Working primarily with painting and mixed media, she treats the canvas not as a fixed boundary, but as a starting point from which images, materials and ideas can expand, intersect and transform one another.

Her work is concerned with perception—how meaning is constructed through looking, how easily perception can be manipulated, and what happens when something familiar is made uncertain. She is drawn to the space between revealing and concealing, using fragments, distortions, interruptions and layers to obscure as much as they disclose. Recognisable imagery often becomes a point of entry, only to be disrupted and recontextualised, challenging the viewer's initial reading of the work.

Her process is intuitive and exploratory, combining painting with physical and digital techniques and allowing contrasting textures, forms and visual languages to coexist. She is particularly interested in the tensions between control and spontaneity, beauty and unease, clarity and ambiguity. Through these tensions, her work becomes an investigation not only of the image itself, but of the act of looking and the psychological associations it can trigger. Her background in English Philology and graphic design informs her approach to image-making and visual communication. This interdisciplinary foundation allows her to move fluidly between mediums and to consider the image as something that can be constructed, fragmented, layered and reinterpreted. Rather than prescribing a singular narrative, she leaves space for the viewer to participate in the creation of meaning.

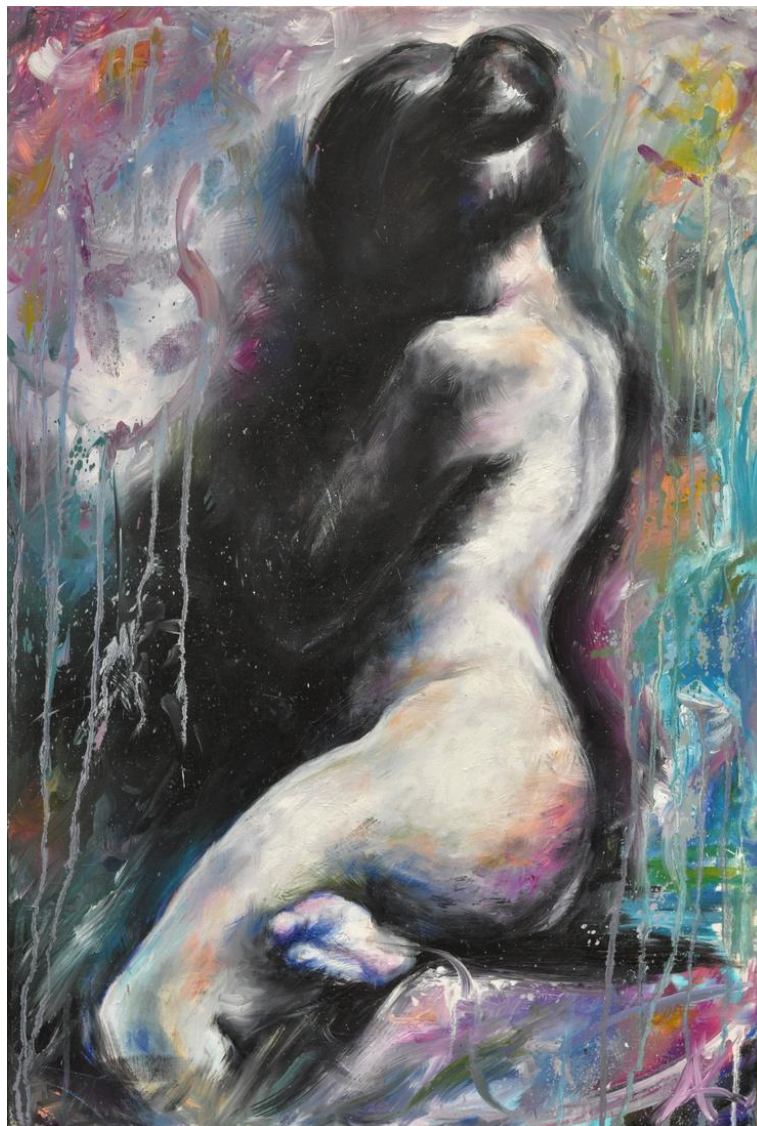
At the core of her practice is an attempt to make the internal visible without fully explaining it. Her work seeks to reveal while retaining mystery—to invite recognition, then disrupt it, creating an open space in which the viewer's own associations, emotions and experiences become part of the encounter.

Project Statement

My style — an introspective self-analysis of my personal, emotional cosmos. I enjoy using and combining different media, with the canvas as my foundation, but I do not confine myself to its borders.

I like to play tricks with the viewer's perception — to obscure, reveal, distort and challenge what they think they are seeing.

I don't believe art has to have one literal meaning. I believe interpretation belongs to the person experiencing the art, which is why I made the decision not to name my paintings. I leave the space open for my viewer — to find their own meaning, their own story, and perhaps something of themselves in it.



Kamburova Anita | 2017



— Interview

Francesca Patera - Chi?

You returned to painting in 2025 after a long break. What brought you back to art at that particular moment, and how did your relationship with creativity change during the years away?

My return to painting in 2025 was not a planned decision, but a necessity. For many years, art had taken a back seat, but the need to express what I was experiencing inwardly grew ever stronger, until a return to drawing and painting became inevitable. During those years away from art, however, my relationship with creativity never truly broke off. It changed. It continued to develop through life experiences, reflections, and observations of others and of myself. When I started painting again, I was no longer simply trying to create images, but to construct a language capable of conveying what often remains invisible: inner transformations, fragilities and the complexity of identity. Today, I experience painting as a space for ongoing exploration. Each work represents a question rather than an answer, an



opportunity to understand a little more about myself and, perhaps, also about those who view it.

You work under the artistic name “Chi?”, meaning “Who?”. How did you arrive at this name, and how does the question of identity shape the way you approach each new work?

The name ‘Chi?’ arose from a very simple yet fundamental observation: I believe that no one can define themselves once and for all. Identity is not something definitive, but a process in constant flux. That question mark is essential, because it represents doubt, curiosity and a willingness to continually question oneself. Every work stems from this question. Each work represents an inner state with which anyone can identify. The faces become symbols of the human being, shaped by experiences, fears, memories and changes. For me, art is not about providing definitions, but about opening up possibilities for reflection. “Chi?” is not just my artist’s name: it is a question I ask first and foremost of myself and which, through the painting, also reaches the viewer.

Your figures often appear partially hidden by foliage, shadows, or abstract forms. What does the act of concealing part of the face allow you to express that a fully visible portrait might not?

Hiding part of the face means revealing what is not normally seen. I am interested in depicting inner life rather than outward appearance, and the partially concealed face becomes a symbol of everything that each person holds within themselves.

The foliage, in particular, does not serve a decorative purpose. It is a living presence that represents thoughts,





emotions, memories and transformations. It can offer protection, but it can also limit one's ability to see oneself. I am fascinated by this ambivalence. If the face were fully visible, the narrative would risk being confined to individual identity. Instead, by leaving part of it hidden, I create an open space where the viewer can complete the image with their own experience. It is precisely this sense of incompleteness that makes the dialogue more universal.

Red, deep green, black, and white appear repeatedly throughout your works. How consciously do you use color to communicate particular emotions or psychological states?

Colour is a fundamental component of my artistic language, and every choice stems from a specific emotional intention, although I always leave room for intuition during the creative process.

Black represents depth, mystery and everything we do not yet know about ourselves. White, on the other hand, introduces a space of suspension, silence and possibility. Green evokes nature, but above all inner growth and continuous transformation. Red is probably the most intense colour in my palette: it represents vital energy, emotional tension, vulnerability and strength, all of which can coexist within the same experience.

I do not use these colours in a symbolic or rigid way. I prefer to regard them as tools capable of creating a psychological atmosphere, guiding the viewer into a particular emotional state rather than telling them a specific story.

Your paintings explore vulnerability, inner conflict, transformation, and self-awareness without directly illustrating pain. How do you find the balance between revealing something emotionally personal and leaving space for the viewer's own interpretation?

I try to draw on authentic experiences and emotions, without, however, recounting my personal story directly. What interests me is not autobiography, but rather exploring inner states that are universal to us all: doubt, fragility, change, the search for one's true self.

That is why, in my works, I avoid describing these aspects explicitly. I prefer to suggest them through symbols, atmospheres and details that leave room for the imagination. I believe that a work truly comes to life when the viewer is able to recognise something of themselves in it, without feeling guided towards a single interpretation.

My aim is not to explain an emotion, but to create a space for reflection into which each person can step with their own life experience. It is in that encounter between my own exploration and the viewer's experience that the painting finds its most authentic meaning.

Works such as *Conscious Surface* and *Hidden Presence* deal with fractures, shadows, and aspects of ourselves that we may prefer not to confront. What inspired these works, and what does the idea of "accepting the shadow" mean to you personally and artistically?

Conscious Surface and *Hidden Presence* stem from a reflection on the fact that we often tend to show only those parts of ourselves that we consider most acceptable, leaving in the shadows everything that makes us vulnerable or that we struggle to understand. I was interested in depicting precisely that hidden space, because I believe that is where the most profound transformations take place.

The cracks, shadows and elements that partially cover the face are not symbols of something to be eliminated, but essential parts of one's identity. They tell the story of a process of growth that also involves accepting our contradictions.

For me, 'accepting the shadow' does not mean surrendering to pain or suffering, but having the courage to acknowledge what we normally tend to avoid. It is an act of awareness. My art aims to create a quiet, almost suspended space in which the viewer can recognise themselves without feeling judged. I do not seek to provide definitive answers, but rather to open up a space for reflection. I believe that knowing oneself requires courage, because it means facing one's own shadows without looking away. But I also believe that it is precisely there, in the parts we try to hide, that a more authentic form of light can emerge.

Your practice is still evolving and you describe yourself as constantly searching for new artistic challenges. What directions, materials, themes, or projects would you most like to explore next?

I still consider myself to be at the beginning of my journey, and this excites me. I want to continue to explore the artistic language I am developing, without rushing to arrive at a definitive formula. From a research perspective, I wish to further develop the relationship between the human figure and nature, exploring new levels of material layering and new expressive possibilities. I am also interested in creating larger-scale works that engage more fully with the space and the viewer's experience.

At the same time, I would like to engage with increasingly international exhibition contexts and collaborate with organisations that share a vision of art as a tool for reflection and dialogue. My aim is not to pursue an unchanging style, but to keep asking myself questions. I believe that artistic exploration, like identity, is a constantly evolving process. As long as I continue to question myself, I will feel that I am on the right path.

I'm **Sarah Rosado**, a self-taught food artist based in New York. I turn simple, everyday ingredients into playful portraits, fashion, and style designs.

Project Statement

I'm Sarah Rosado, a self-taught artist living in New York. While I started out with traditional pencil drawings and digital art, I found my true passion in an unexpected place: the kitchen. Today, I use everyday foods—like cereal, ketchup, and fresh produce—to build playful portraits, outfit designs, and pop-culture art. My goal is simple: to make everyday items feel magical and put an instant smile on your face. You might have seen my celebrity cornflake portraits featured on The Today Show, MTV, or The Guardian. I hope my work brings a little spark of joy and wonder into your day!

Sarah Rosado | Butterfly





Bagzhan Alikhanov

Your paintings often bring together history, mythology, personal experience, and contemporary life. How do you decide which ideas or themes are strong enough to become the starting point for a new series?



Bagzhan Alikhanov | Cult Of The Screen | 2025



I don't always begin a painting with the intention of creating a series. Sometimes a single painting comes first, and only later do I realize that the idea has more possibilities and that I want to continue exploring it. At that point, it can develop into a series.

For me, a series is not something I create simply for the sake of having a series. It develops when a particular theme continues to interest me and I feel that one painting is not enough to explore it fully. Each new work can reveal another aspect of the original idea and sometimes even lead me in an unexpected direction.

You describe painting as a space for interpretation rather than a way of illustrating fixed narratives. How important is ambiguity to you, and how much freedom do you want to leave to the viewer?

Ambiguity is present in my work, but I do not deliberately make every painting ambiguous. Some works have a more direct meaning, while others leave much more space for interpretation. Sometimes this is intentional, and sometimes it happens naturally during the process of painting.

For example, some works from my Kipchak series are relatively clear in their subject. You can see a blacksmith forging a mask, for example. But other works contain many different symbols and possible meanings. In «Mother», I bring together elements that represent different periods of time — traditional yurts and a woman



in a traditional headdress alongside monuments and statues that can be associated with the future. Other works, such as «Waiting» and «Dialogue of the Ages», are much more ambiguous and even absurd. I don't necessarily want the viewer to find one correct explanation for them.

I also don't think of my paintings as stories that need to be read like literature. As one of my professors once told me, "We are not writers." I think this is important. A painting can suggest a situation, a feeling, or a question without explaining everything that is happening. So I try to leave enough space for the viewer to think and make their own connection with the work. Sometimes they may understand something I intended, sometimes they may find a completely different meaning, and sometimes they may simply experience the image without trying to explain it. All of these reactions are valid to me.

Kazakh cultural heritage and the visual language of the steppe appear throughout your practice. How do you approach these references without turning them into simple historical reconstruction or nostalgia?

I don't always use Kazakh cultural references in my work, but I also don't think I can completely separate myself from them. They are part of where I come from and, naturally, they influence the way I see the world. At the moment, I am interested in finding a balance between my cultural heritage and contemporary visual language. I want to combine Kazakh symbols, images, and cultural references with ideas and visual approaches that belong to the present.

For me, this is not about reconstructing the past exactly as it was. I want to take elements from my cultural heritage and use them to create something new.

In that sense, I am more interested in imagining a possible future with Kazakh symbolism and cultural language than simply reproducing the past. Nostalgia can certainly be present in some of my works, especially when I deal with subjects connected to my own heritage, but I don't want nostalgia to be the only meaning. I want these references to remain alive and capable of changing as I continue to develop them. I also want these symbols and metaphors to remain meaningful and memorable over time. I would like them to continue to resonate with people not only a year or two after they are created, but perhaps twenty or even seventy years later. I know that it is impossible to know whether a work will achieve that kind of longevity, and perhaps it is still too early to say, but this is something I aspire to through my painting.

Many of your compositions seem to place different periods of time within the same visual space. What interests you about creating a dialogue between the past, the present, and imagined futures?

I think the uncertainty of the future is one of the things that interests me. I often wonder what my own future will look like — who I will become, what I will achieve, and how I will get there. Sometimes these questions make me think about how much of our future is shaped by what we have already done in the past.

But I don't always consciously begin a painting with the idea of bringing different periods of time together. Sometimes an image or a composition comes to me very suddenly, almost like an impulse, and only later do I understand that the idea of time has become an important part of the work. Sometimes the composition simply feels as though nothing other than different periods of time could exist within it.



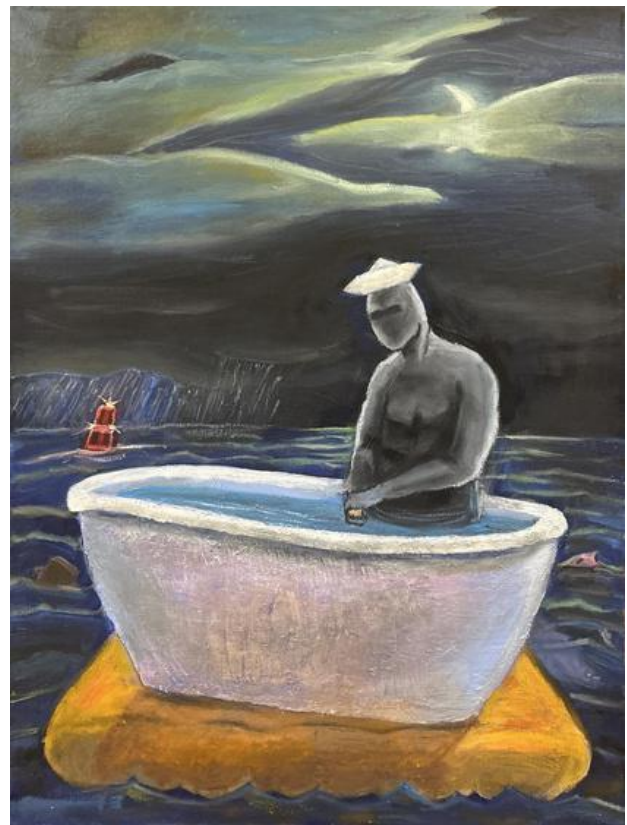
So the relationship between the past, present, and future is not always something I plan beforehand. Sometimes it is a question I discover only after the painting has begun to take shape. I think uncertainty itself can be productive in this way.

Symbolic objects, animals, tools, costumes, and architectural forms frequently appear in your paintings. How do you develop this symbolic vocabulary, and do certain symbols return across different series?

Some symbols may reappear in my work, but I don't want them to have exactly the same meaning every time. Each painting has its own meaning, and the symbols within it work together specifically for that particular painting. I also try not to repeat the visual language of one painting too closely in another. Even if I use something as ordinary as a tree, a bicycle, or a certain type of weather again, I try to make it look and function differently. I don't want the viewer to feel that they are simply looking at the same painting in a different form.

For me, the meaning of the painting itself is more important than the symbolism of individual objects. Symbols can guide the viewer toward an idea, but they do not necessarily explain the entire work.

Some symbols, however, have a more specific cultural or historical meaning. For example, the mask that appears in some of my Kipchak works refers specifically to the Kipchak people, based on a historical form associated with them. Other objects can refer to archaeological discoveries, burial sites, rock art, or other elements of real history. At the same time, some symbols are created specifically for the subject of a particular painting. So I think my symbolic vocabulary is still developing.



Bagzhan Alikhanov | Waiting | 2026

Some elements may return in the future, but I want each new work to have its own visual language and its own meaning.

You work primarily with oil, but the surfaces of your paintings can feel very different from one work to another. What interests you most about the physical process of painting and the possibilities of the medium itself?

What interests me most is the way oil allows me to work with colour, texture, and layers. I especially like contrasting and vivid colours while keeping them close to reality, as well as working with broad brushstrokes and visible texture.

My technical approach has changed over time. I used to work much more impasto, while my paintings have become less heavily textured. I still value texture, but I try to make it serve the painting rather than become its main focus.

I usually work in layers, and the way the paint changes as it dries can influence what I do next. I also enjoy details, but I don't think everything needs to be equally detailed. Sometimes a broad brushstroke can say more than a carefully finished detail.

Your work often deals with collective history and cultural memory, yet many scenes also feel intimate and personal. How do your own experiences enter paintings that address broader historical or social questions?

I think personal experience enters most of my paintings, although not always directly. Sometimes it comes from



Bagzhan Alikhanov | Mother | 2025



something I see in everyday life, sometimes from a personal feeling, and sometimes from an image or idea that appears unexpectedly and stays with me. Painting is also one of the ways I slow down and step away from the world around me. I simply enjoy painting itself, and sometimes that feeling is enough to make me start a work.

For example, «Cult of the Screen» began with a simple observation on a bus. Almost everyone around me was looking at their phones, and for some reason this image stayed in my mind. Later, it developed into a painting about our relationship with screens and the world around us.

My Kipchak works are connected to me in a different way. The idea for the mask appeared very spontaneously. I first created an oval shape while looking at the sun, and only later recognized something familiar in it — a form that reminded me of a Kipchak mask. Because I am of Kipchak heritage, this unexpected connection led me further into the subject.

I think this is how many of my paintings begin. Something catches my attention, but I don't always immediately know why. Sometimes I understand the connection only while working on the painting, or even after it is finished. Perhaps that uncertainty is part of what makes the process interesting for me.

— Interview

Tatjana Danilovic

You have spent thirty years working in architecture, a field defined by structure, measurement, and precision. When did you first feel the need to create art outside those professional boundaries, and what did painting give you that architecture could not?

Actually, drawing came first. Back in elementary school, I used to fill the pages of my notebooks by writing lessons starting from the very first page, and drawing from the last page moving toward the front. When the lessons and the drawings met in the middle, I began to seriously think about what would be better for making a living. I decided to become an architectural engineer, which created a huge distance between me and painting or drawing. It was only 12 years ago that I decided to look for that childhood spark again, because I felt I needed it once more. During Covid, while working from home, I decided to seize the moment and dedicate myself to painting continuously. It was a freedom



Tatjana Danilovic | Sunset | 2026



that allowed me to make mistakes; I worked for my own soul, giving myself permission to paint whatever I wanted, even if it turned out unappealing, flawed, or ugly, knowing the public never had to see it. In architectural design, mistakes are not welcome, and the building you design is immediately exposed to criticism for as long as the building stands. Rules are imposed, and that is just how it has to be.

You describe your artistic practice as a conscious departure from straight lines, geometry, and technical perfection. Do you feel that your architectural training still enters your artworks unconsciously through composition, balance, or the way you organize space?

Absolutely, and that can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. Architecture taught me balance, a sense of space, simplicity, and practicality. There, just like in painting, an author faces the fear of the blank page, but in architecture, the imposed constraints actually serve as a starting point for the designer, and that is where the advantage lies: regulatory lines, plot size, orientation, investor demands, the type of building, and so on. Breaking free from these constraints is the real challenge, because in painting you have a blank paper or canvas and its edges... everything else is a matter of free will, and that is where the question arises... What now?

Your practice moves between printmaking, mixed media, collage, and acrylic painting. How do you decide which technique or combination of materials is most appropriate for a particular idea?

Good question. Even I sometimes wonder what I would prefer, and most often, it is a combination. I always think of printmaking and the black line first, perhaps because drawing is my first love, and probably also because of my profession. What I love most about printmaking is the element of surprise, but also carving lines, the impression of different



materials when doing collagraphy, and spreading paint with a roller and other tools in monotype. But there comes a moment when I long for vivid, thick colors. However, due to a lack of adequate studio space, I often have to opt for techniques that make less of a mess, so I reach for collage or watercolor instead. That is also one of the reasons why the formats of my works are small.

Texture and layering play a significant role in works such as Sunrise and Sunset. What interests you about building an image through traces, overlapping surfaces, and partially obscured forms rather than through a clearly defined representation?

I have never liked explicit expression because it lacks poetry and mysticism. An exact replica of nature or a human face is a matter of good technique, but if the inner experience of both the artist and the viewer is missing, then art itself is missing. In my view, it is the hint, the sense of anticipation in art that intrigues and sparks your imagination. Something must be left to the viewer as well, giving them the opportunity to experience and 'complete' the artist's work within their own mind and soul. Overlapping layers always give depth to a painting, and somewhere out there, in that depth, there is always something for the viewer, whatever they wish to find. Personally, I love it when some light breaks through all of that.

You have said that your process is guided more by discovery than by a predetermined outcome. Can you describe how one of your works typically develops? At what point do you know that an unexpected accident or imperfection should remain in the finished piece?

For instance, I feel a desire to paint a piece using golden-yellow and dark navy-blue colors, still not knowing what I want to paint, but I take the oil paints and a roller and apply the first layers of those two complementary colors just to quench that initial thirst. Next come the lines and fast strokes that bring in dynamism. At this stage, you can catch a glimpse of the direction I might head in. Once I have enough elements, I start to notice what is lacking and what is excessive, and after letting the piece rest in a drawer for a while, I decide to be brave: I cut the painting in half, place the bottom section on top, and flip it. I rejoin those two pieces into a collage and get a landscape. Later, I will add some details with chalk or pastel as a finishing touch. That moment of recognition, realizing you have captured exactly what

pleases both your eye and your soul, is priceless. An unexpected accident is often a happy accident, as it serves as a turning point in many of my works, leading me in a completely new direction.

Architecture often begins with a plan, while your visual art embraces unpredictability. Has working as an artist changed the way you think about architecture - or, conversely, has architecture shaped your understanding of artistic freedom?

Art has allowed me to embrace my own inherent aesthetic and to realize that the principle of contrast in color and materials is a universal thing. It has taught me that not everyone has to like what I do and that I have the right to authenticity. In practice, architecture and working with materials have taught me how substances behave and helped me understand their limitations. Achieving freedom requires a vast amount of learning and knowledge, and that is a lifelong process.

As your painting practice becomes increasingly visible through exhibitions, how would you like it to develop from here? Are there particular materials, scales, themes, or forms of experimentation that you would like to explore next?

First of all, I would like to have more time and space to dedicate myself to art as much as I want. There is one area I have been thinking about for some time now, and that is sculpture. I am certain that I will try it, even if I have to work with toothpicks and modeling clay...



— Interview

Elmira Zueva

You describe your artistic practice as a personal diary of thoughts, poetry, and lived experience. How do you decide which moments or emotions should remain private and which ones you are ready to transform into an artwork?

When I was studying at university, my teacher always used to say that a revelation should happen on stage. Since I began working in visual art, I try to create by that same principle, so that sincerity is



born — or rather, so that it becomes visible and others can feel it.

I try to bring my own sensory, lived experience to the viewer — that's very important to me. Sometimes there's something I'm not yet ready to share, but that's temporary. It means I haven't yet allowed myself to live through it, to feel it fully, and so I can't yet bring it into my art.

Nature appears in your work not simply as a subject, but as a space of restoration and connection. What happens internally when you enter a landscape with the intention of photographing or observing it?

I feel a oneness with nature, a great energy and a flutter in my soul, when I stop being just an observer and become part of the story itself. I catch a sense of being outside of time, as if time starts moving differently.

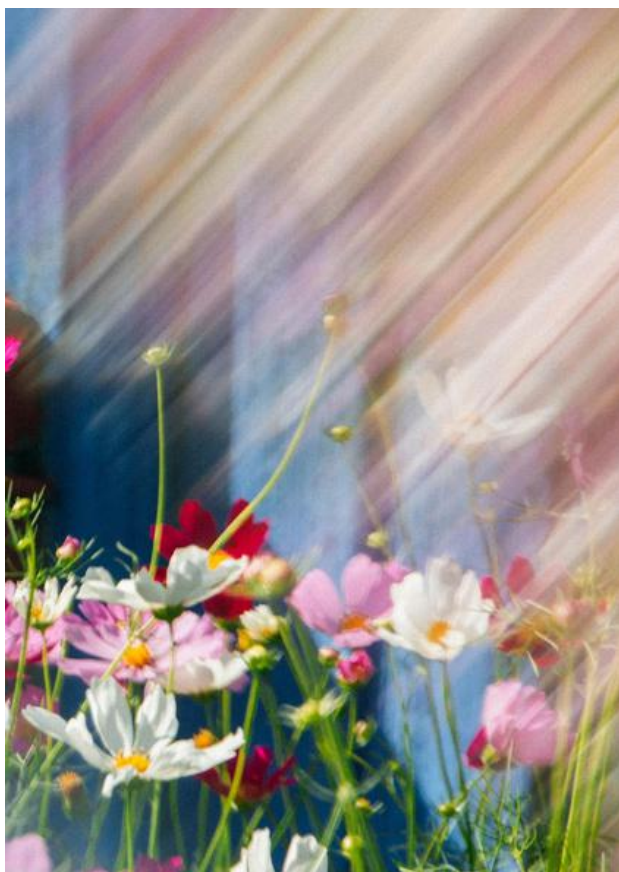
Your images often seem to preserve quiet, seemingly ordinary moments. What makes an everyday scene significant enough for you to photograph it?

I draw from a feeling of nostalgia, from sensations in the moment — as though an image awakens certain memories in me, feelings I've lived through, or sensations that give me goosebumps. I want my photographs to speak, and I do everything I can toward that: I try to let what I notice pass through me.

Nostalgia is an important element of your practice, but you describe it as a "warm light" rather than a longing for the past. How do you distinguish between remembering the past and idealizing it?

Nostalgia.

There was a time I was afraid to attach this word to



my work. It seemed to me that it pulled me back toward the past, while I wanted to be in the present, to contemplate and photograph what I feel now.

But then the word became a warm kind of energy for me and truly began to resonate with what I create.

Because here, in the present, I catch the sincere, warm sensations of my childhood — these sensations return to me through the contemplation of the present.

But I think the key word of my work is contemplation.

Rural landscapes, old houses, gardens, flowers, and domestic details can carry a strong sense of memory in your photographs. Are these places connected to your own biography, or do you approach them more as universal symbols of memory and belonging?

I'm convinced that an artist's style comes from childhood. And all the bright, warm colors in my images come from there.

I spent every summer at my grandmother's — outdoors, in the garden. Building forts, climbing trees, watching the blue sky, gathering flowers. That's where my love of light, bright colors was born.

My grandmother's love for me is reflected in my love for nature and for that place. My small hometown is the sacred place of my strength.

Vulnerability is something you describe as one of your most meaningful materials. What does vulnerability allow you to express that a more detached or controlled artistic position could not?

I see vulnerability as openness — the same openness I used to be afraid of, but in which I now feel a particular strength.

Great strength lies in my heightened sensitivity to this world, and in the sincerity of the present moment.

Your work often feels concerned with preserving something fragile - a light, a memory, a feeling, a moment of connection. What do you ultimately hope will remain with the viewer after the image itself is no longer in front of them?

I want to leave the viewer with a feeling of warmth, of light in the soul — so that the energy coming from my work wraps around them.

My main task is to make the viewer feel, to make them sense something.

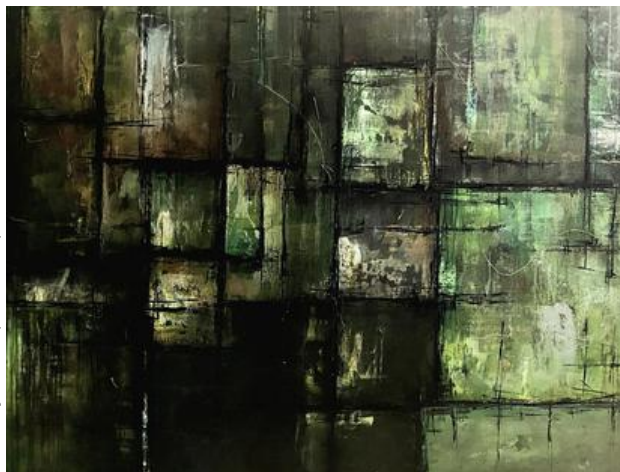


— Interview

Mark Sajatovich

Your work brings together abstract expressionism, art brut, geometric abstraction, and gothic-inspired elements. How did these different visual languages gradually come together into the style you work with today?

At first, abstract expressionism was the principal component. The discovery that layers and surfaces can serve as the foundation for delivering energy and emotion helped shape my belief that a painting could be interpreted more as a living experience, with memories and a sense of history- not a photograph or a diagram. Geometric abstraction gave it a frame. Instead of letting raw actions spread everywhere, I started organizing content and thinking of composition in terms of hard edges, blocks and spatial decisions. In paintings like "Square 1," I think it's apparent how the geometry helps frame an emotional structure which then helps the theme develop while staying coherent.



Mark Sajatovich | Descent | 2026



The incorporation of art brut influences is my attempt to keep the work from becoming too precise or too cold because paintings with a more "lived in" look and feel can more easily come to life for a viewer. I find these very effective methods of sharing thoughts or experiences. Their roughness and directness make a painting feel human rather than overly designed. I think the use of gothic elements, particularly the use of shadows, is a valuable tool to help heighten the sense of authenticity and can deepen the emotional connection to the piece, hopefully resulting in a haunting inner life to the work. If I do have a visual style, I suppose it became more recognizable when I stopped treating all these elements as separate languages and started bringing them together to try to interpret a post-covid reality with authenticity and energy. Pieces like "Sanctuary of One" and "Ghost in our Machine," are good illustrations of the challenge of building complex layers of raw surfaces and an unfinished gothic atmosphere on top of more familiar geometric structures.

You mention Kandinsky, Albers, Dubuffet, and Kline as important influences. What did you take from these artists, and at what point did you feel the need to move beyond their influence to establish your own visual language?

I think these four artists have influenced my process of blending geometric forms with layers of weathered surfaces to provide context for abstract images. I was attracted to Kandinsky's use of form and color as a way to introduce emotion to a piece without the specific depiction of a detailed, literal world. That was an important starting point when it came to exploring ways to decide on any emotional structure for a painting. Chagall said, "color is everything," and Albers was important because his "Homage to the Square" paintings introduced me to

how the placement and transitions of color helped determined how artists might bring paintings to life through their color palette. From Dubuffet, you learn honesty, grit and the value of raw surfaces that resist prettiness. I see an integrity and confidence in the imperfect and Art Brut is like permission to keep the painting human and authentic. Kline's black brushstrokes are evidence that a single structural gesture can anchor the whole composition through the great tension between light and dark. At some point, I think our influences help us move beyond seeing how to paint and reshape how we think. Personally, I think when I finished "Towards the Sun." I was aware that I was moving toward something that I could begin to identify as a distinct style. Sometime later, a reviewer of "Lost Soul" said the term "Abstract Brut" might be the best definition for my work. He may have been right.

Many of your recent works emerged in the post-Covid period. How did that experience change the subjects, atmosphere, or emotional intensity of your paintings?

Overall, the paintings have become more introspective and the atmosphere has gotten heavier and more contemplative. The themes of uncertainty, isolation, and the fragility have become more common. Before Covid, my direction may have been more about formal approaches to traditional themes. Post-Covid, the subject matter concentrates more on isolation, aftermath of loss and the psychological impact that goes along with it. It's clear in pieces like "Turn," where the figure isn't a character, he's more like an isolated witness. A lot of my post-Covid paintings carry a sense of memory, or mythic elements combined with distressed textures. They can feel thick and I believe that's why my recent geometric works don't feel as clean or formal. It's been commented my recent paintings have a haunting characteristic or perhaps feel like they're already lived in. Not outwardly dramatic but there's a tension under the surface that carries an emotional pressure inside the structure, a sense that something has already happened, or might still be happening. This is the atmosphere that's resulted after Covid, where the painting has become a reflection of where the unease has settled. I think of "Sanctuary of One" and "Ghost in Our Machine," they're both processing conditions rather than just presenting physical images. The paintings didn't just become moodier, they're more rooted in contemplation and

tension.

Your paintings often contain a tension between structured geometric forms and much more spontaneous, distressed surfaces. What interests you about bringing order and instability together within the same composition?

I think it's less about bringing order and instability together and more about producing a work that feels more alive than it is resolved. I've become more comfortable incorporating hard edged, geometric forms with distressed and textured components that can echo how we experience life. That's an artistic choice I think is important because it suggests that in our current social and political environment, order is never complete and instability is never just chaos. Tension generally occurs when our lives are interrupted. Visually, a painting which incorporates calm and distressed components together gives a work the friction it needs to be relevant and hopefully, thought-provoking. I'm drawn to art that reflects historical instability and how these pieces serve as valuable reference points. More now than ever, there's a real value to paintings that convey a sense of awareness, critical thinking and survival. In my case, I think it's appropriate to convey this through weathered or scarred components that interpret



Mark Sajatovich | The Sanctuary Of One | 2026

how the painting is balancing the former stability and control of traditional institutions against the threat of their failure or collapse. This approach is interesting because as an artist, it's in this tension where we can often find meaning.

Texture, scratches, drips, and partially concealed layers play an important role in your paintings. How do you decide when to preserve these traces of the process rather than refine or cover them?

It matters to me that the works are based on a sense of history that informs their theme. I think it's important to recognize that all these techniques aren't mistakes to be corrected because they reinforce the atmosphere of the piece as well as the same visual language we've previously discussed. While it can be a challenge to make a clear distinction between "process" marks that still carry an energy and less impactful marks that no longer need to stay visible, in a sense I'm editing the energy of the painting. That's why some marks remain exposed while others get covered or softened. The goal is not to preserve everything but to establish a piece that breathes and feels alive. For example, in "Turn," the blurred edges, residue, and concealed layers help the figure feel unstable and human. If I was to overwork that piece, you'd lose some of its haunted quality. The point is that the imperfect elements are doing expressive work. In both "Cemetery Sunshine" and "Square 1," the geometry could become too clean if every edge were perfected. The scratches, drips, and interruptions keep the forms from becoming sterile. In most instances, I'll leave marks that serve as evidence of tension, time, or contribute to the overall theme of the work. I usually try to cover components that feel accidental or that they only serve to be decorative. My preference is not to be repetitive with any technique that comes close to becoming visual clutter, unless it contributes to the balance and the composition of the piece.

Your work reflects contemporary social and environmental concerns without illustrating them literally. How do you translate observations about society into abstract visual forms without making the meaning too explicit?

I think art still functions as a mirror on society and everyone has their own personal reaction to societal change and the resulting challenges. It's not new for artists to explore their interpretations and

opinions of possible solutions. Art is a doorway for anyone to present perspectives in original ways that might serve as catalysts for increasing awareness around these issues. Ultimately, I believe the decision of how an artist chooses to interpret their opinions is a personal choice, but the goal is still the same - increase greater personal consideration of the issues and expand respectful public discourse around society's critical challenges. I enjoy using abstract expressionism as a vehicle for reflecting issues because it's a form that lends itself to critical thinking and debate without being didactic. For example, the interpretation of broken geometric forms, distressed layers and scratched surfaces can depict what feels like a world that has been scarred by crises like Covid and climate change or threatened by war without becoming too literal. There is a restraint that invites reflection and consideration and welcomes new perspectives and interpretations from all viewers on what the work implies. In that way, I think the piece becomes more of a catalyst for universal contemplation than a political statement.

You invite viewers to approach your paintings as sites of exploration where meanings can continue to change. What kind of response or questioning would you most like your work to provoke in an audience?

In a way, it's similar to Jackson Pollock's belief that there is an active energy between the artist and their paintings. I think that a similar energy exists between a painting and the viewer. That relationship, and the energy of the piece, shifts over time and can be re-interpreted. From this perspective, it's interesting to think that the viewer isn't searching for a specific, literal meaning or the definitive answer that a painting holds but instead, the piece is a constant reminder and a pathway to re-examine our perspectives and evaluate our current priorities through our art. When I return to my pieces like "Lost Soul," or "Descent," I see that the image on the canvas presents the viewer with enough information to anchor their attention in the present but not enough to limit their interpretation in the future. My personal interpretation of both these pieces is very different now than it was when I first considered them complete. It's a type of active looking that takes a viewer beyond a simple "beautiful" or "bold" description of a painting to an understanding that the meaning of the piece might just keep shifting the longer we look.



— Interview

Nela Coralic

You are a self-taught artist and have been painting for more than 15 years. How has your artistic language changed over that time, and what have you learned through developing your practice independently?



Nela Coralic | Vibrant Bloom | 2026



So much has changed since I first picked up a brush and a canvas more than 15 years ago. Throughout my journey, I have explored different styles, techniques, and artistic directions, allowing my work to constantly evolve. Yet, one thing has remained a constant: flowers. Being a self-taught artist has also taught me a great deal about myself. I have learned to trust my intuition, to experiment freely, and to allow my art to develop naturally rather than trying to fit into a particular definition or style. Most importantly, I have discovered that painting is a form of meditation for me. With every brushstroke, I feel myself leaving the outside world behind and entering different worlds of emotions, thoughts, and imagination. For me, painting is not only about creating an image — it is a way of connecting with myself and expressing something that words sometimes cannot.

Flowers appear repeatedly in your work. What continues to draw you back to botanical subjects, and what can flowers express for you that other subjects cannot?



Flowers have always been a constant presence in my work because I feel that they carry a unique emotional language.

They can be delicate and powerful, fragile and resilient at the same time. I am drawn to that contrast and to the endless variety of shapes, colours, and forms they offer.

For me, flowers are much more than botanical subjects. They can express emotions, memories, beauty, growth, vulnerability, and even the passage of time. I also love that the same flower can evoke something completely different in each person.

Perhaps that is why I always return to flowers. No matter how much my style changes, they continue to give me new ways to explore both the world around me and the worlds within me.

In works such as *Vibrant Bloom*, a recognizable flower is surrounded by a highly expressive, almost abstract field of color and texture. How do you balance figurative elements with abstraction in your compositions?

For me, the balance between figurative and abstract elements comes naturally. I like to keep the flower recognizable, giving the viewer something familiar to connect with, while using expressive colours, textures, and brushstrokes to create an emotional atmosphere around it. I don't want the background to simply support the flower — I want it to have its own energy and meaning. The flower offers a point of connection, while the abstract elements leave space for the viewer's own emotions and interpretation.

Your paintings often use intense contrasts - bright pinks, turquoise, orange, deep greens and darker tones. How intuitive is your use of color, and do particular colors

carry specific associations or emotions for you?

My use of colour is mostly intuitive. I rarely begin a painting with a strict colour plan; instead, I let the colours develop naturally as the painting evolves. I am drawn to strong contrasts because they create energy, depth, and emotion. Certain colours do carry personal associations for me, but I don't want to give them a fixed meaning. I prefer to leave that open, allowing each viewer to experience the colours in their own way and connect them with their own emotions.

Desert Symphony introduces cacti rather than more delicate flowers, yet the plants are still shown in bloom. What interested you in the contrast between the resilience of the cactus and the fragility of its flowers?

What captivated me about the cactus was its quiet strength. It can endure the harshest conditions, yet it produces something so delicate and beautiful. I see a certain poetry in that contrast — a reminder that beauty can exist even in difficult circumstances.

With *Desert Symphony*, I wanted to capture that sense of inner strength and vulnerability, and the idea that even when life is challenging, there is always a possibility to grow, transform, and bloom.

You prefer not to impose a fixed emotional meaning on the viewer. How do you create a painting that carries your own feelings while still leaving enough openness for someone else to form a completely different interpretation?

I think every painting begins with something personal — a feeling, a thought, or a moment that I want to translate onto the canvas. But once the painting is finished, I believe it belongs to the viewer as well.

I try to express my emotions through colour, movement, texture, and atmosphere rather than giving the work a specific story or meaning. This allows each person to bring their own memories, emotions, and experiences into it. For me, the most beautiful part is when someone feels something completely different from what I felt while creating it. That freedom of interpretation is what makes the connection between the artwork and the viewer so special.

Having been born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and now living in Vienna, have different places, landscapes or cultural environments influenced the way you see color, nature or beauty?

Growing up in Bosnia and Herzegovina and later living in Vienna has given me the opportunity to experience two very different environments, and I believe both have quietly shaped the way I see beauty and nature.

Bosnia has a strong connection to nature, with its rich landscapes, changing seasons, and vivid colours. Vienna, on the other hand, has influenced me through its architecture, culture, and more urban atmosphere. I think these experiences have broadened my visual language and made me more attentive to the beauty in both natural and everyday surroundings.

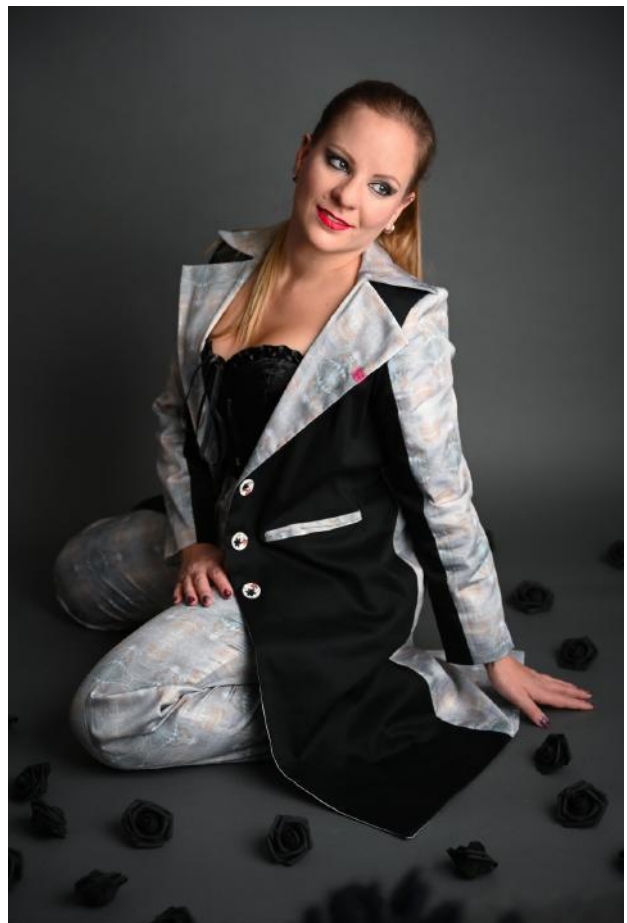
Rather than consciously choosing one influence over the other, I feel that both places have become part of the way I see and create.

— Interview

Beatrixz Hegyi- Tarsoly

You grew up in Budapest during a period of major political and cultural transformation. How did the atmosphere of your childhood influence your understanding of individuality, beauty, and personal style?

It was very different from the previous eras before in the eastern Europe life. All of a sudden all “west” stuffs - clothing, movies, glossies - everything was available. The 90's pop culture came in, still, the people were very poor and despite availability, most couldn't afford to shop the latest and greatest. I remember we started to pick our looks from the magazines at school and tried to replicate them with self-made stuff. I was very daring and usually mixed the “no-go”s on purpose together.



You began sewing alongside your mother at a very young age. What do you remember most about those early experiences, and how do they continue to influence the way you design today?

She used to be very sophisticated and feminine and sewn for herself retro dresses with long, swirling skirt part, and very toned in the upper body. I found it too girly. I felt myself stronger and I was doing a lot of sports, so my understanding of feminine was different then hers. This still influences me today, I translate classic, soft silhouettes into more urban, more modern, strong-female looks.

You describe your personal style as having gone through several phases before becoming increasingly eccentric. How would you define your current design language?

My current designs are combining extravagant, punk elements with vintage and retro styles. I love to mix the unthinkable, always something very old and very new together. I think this is the essence of my philosophy. My motto: Trends are temporary, but style is timeless.

Before establishing your own label, you built a career with prestige and luxury brands including Clinique, Shiseido, and Tom Ford. What did



working within the luxury industry teach you about creating and positioning your own fashion brand?

I've learned a lot during my career and I'm thankful for all the experiences and different sights of each brand core. My lesson here was, that I wanted to position my brand an affordable, yet healthy choice in everyday clothing. Clothes are must for every day, we can't avoid dressing up and fast fashion with their cheap quality and plastic-based fabrics are killing the planet. In my view everyone should wear comfortable, breathable pieces, that are good for the skin, good for the environment. To this core, I'm adding my spice and allow my customers to show-off their personalities, through my special designs.

You spent five years with Tom Ford and eventually managed twelve Northern European markets. Was there anything from that experience that particularly changed the way you think about luxury, customers, or brand identity?

Belonging to Tom Ford was like belonging to the royal family. It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I've learned a lot, how he translates his own experiences into products and how to connect them with the customers own's stories. Luxury is not just a high price-tag, it's a lifestyle, it's story-telling, it's heritage and also personal touch and personalized details for each customer. This deep caring for each customer I brought to my own brand and my customers know, from where I source my fabrics, where they are done

(if not by myself) and they can wear them proudly, knowing it will last way longer than fast fashion, it can be altered if needed or passed down for someone else. For me transparency is the key.

Your runway looks combine strong silhouettes, vivid colors, prints, tailoring, and highly feminine details such as ruffles and volume. How do you balance these different elements when developing a collection?

I guess it's an inner compass, how I balance the proportions of each garment. I have a vision in my head, how I want a garment to look like, I imagine the story behind, what this design tells, what is persona and the rest is coming from 'itself'. However I'm very obsessed with nature, especially flowers and probably I'm picking that ratio too.

How does seeing your designs on models during a runway show differ from working with them in the studio? Does the presentation ever change the way you understand your own collection?

Yes, I have changed some collections, but already in the studio, before it went to the runway. When I see the ready pieces, I look at them individually and in the collection as whole and if something feels off, I remove them. That simple. Of course it causes extra work and for instance before the Fashion Week Nürnberg 2026 it caused some extra weeks relentless work day and night to replace the pulled out pieces, but it worth the work, definitely. Once a collection is truly ready as per my vision, then it goes to the shows.



Zsuzsanna Ursprung

Your works seem to balance cosmic scale with very intimate, tactile details. How do you usually begin a painting—with a visual idea, a material experiment, or an emotional impulse?



Zsuzsanna Ursprung | Supernova



Every painting begins with an emotional impulse rather than a visual idea. Sometimes it is a feeling, a memory or a quality of light that refuses to disappear. Texture, wax, marble powder and genuine gold leaf help translate emotion into something tangible. I rarely know exactly where a painting will end when I begin; like life itself, it evolves through layers, discoveries and unexpected moments.

You work with layered textures, crackled surfaces, acrylic, oil, and wax. What role does physical texture play in your artistic language?

Texture is much more than a visual effect; it carries meaning. Cracks speak about vulnerability, wax preserves memory and genuine gold leaf represents hope, resilience and transformation. I want viewers not only to see my paintings but almost to feel them.

Your professional background in radiology involves reading internal structures through CT and MRI images. How has this experience influenced the way you perceive depth, light, and hidden forms in painting?

For more than three decades I have looked beneath the visible surface through CT and MRI. Radiology has taught me that reality always contains another layer waiting to be discovered. Painting allows me to explore that invisible world—not through diagnosis, but through colour, texture, intuition and emotion.

The titles of your selected works - Interstellar, Supernova, and Cosmic Flow - suggest movement,



energy, and vast space. What attracts you to cosmic imagery and metaphors?

Whether I look at a single cell or the vastness of the universe, I recognise similar rhythms and hidden structures. The microscopic and the infinite are reflections of the same underlying harmony.

Your paintings often shift between movement and stillness. Is this contrast something you consciously seek, or does it emerge naturally through the process?

Life constantly moves between intensity and silence. My paintings follow the same rhythm, balancing dynamic textures with calm spaces that invite contemplation.

Norwegian nature is mentioned as an important

source of inspiration for you. Which aspects of the Norwegian landscape or atmosphere resonate most deeply with your work?

Norwegian light, changing seasons, forests and coastline have deeply influenced my work. Rather than painting landscapes directly, I seek to express the emotional experience of nature.

Having exhibited internationally in cities such as Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Oslo, New York, Hong Kong, and Las Vegas, how has showing your work in different cultural contexts shaped your understanding of your own practice?

Exhibiting internationally has shown me that emotions are universal. People interpret my paintings differently, yet each brings their own story. That diversity of perception is essential to my work.

Nafiseh Hashempour is an Iranian contemporary visual artist working across digital and physical media, with a primary focus on mixed media on canvas and digital art. Her practice explores the human experience through the interconnected relationships between culture, nature, tradition, civilization, and society, creating visual narratives that invite dialogue and reflection.

Alongside her artistic career, Nafiseh holds a Ph.D. in Crop Physiology and is the author of five internationally published books, translator of three books into Persian, and author of numerous scientific publications. Her interdisciplinary background contributes to a thoughtful and research-informed creative practice while remaining distinct from the conceptual foundations of her artwork.

Her works have been exhibited internationally in art fairs, galleries, museums, and cultural events in several countries, including Japan, South Korea, Armenia, Italy, Norway, Indonesia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye, the United States, and Iran. In 2024, her artwork *Iran Bano* was donated to the Georgia History Museum, becoming part of its permanent cultural collection.

Through her evolving artistic practice, Nafiseh seeks to create meaningful visual experiences that encourage cultural dialogue, human connection, and new perspectives on the relationship between people and the world they inhabit.

Project Statement

My artistic practice is centered on the human experience and the relationships that shape it. Through contemporary visual language, I explore the connections between people and the cultural, natural, and social environments that influence their lives. My work reflects an ongoing curiosity about how identity, emotion, tradition, and civilization interact, evolve, and find new meaning within an ever-changing world.

Working across digital art and mixed media on canvas, I approach each artwork as an open space for dialogue rather than a statement with a single conclusion. I am interested in creating visual experiences that encourage contemplation and invite viewers to discover their own emotional and intellectual connections with each piece.

I believe that art has the ability to transcend language and geography, creating meaningful conversations through shared human experiences. Whether inspired by nature, cultural traditions, social relationships, or the resilience of the human spirit, my work seeks to illuminate the values that connect us while respecting the diversity of our individual perspectives.

Rather than separating tradition from contemporary expression, I see them as parts of an ongoing dialogue. Through both physical and digital media, I continue to explore how visual art can foster understanding, empathy, and cross-cultural connection while celebrating the richness and complexity of human existence.





— Interview

Courtlyn Sholten

Several of your recent paintings feel almost like frozen moments from a film, with a strong sense of atmosphere and psychological tension. What attracts you to translating cinematic imagery into painting?

I love film, specifically horror films. They feel so nostalgic. I try to capture that nostalgic, scared feeling in my pieces when you look at them. I want my pieces to give off the uneasiness feeling you get watching a suspenseful scene in a movie. You want to look away but you're captured in the moment.

When you work with an already recognizable figure or visual reference, how do you transform it so that the finished painting carries your own artistic voice rather than simply reproducing the source?

I work off of reference photos, but my goal isn't to make a photorealistic copy on a canvas. I want my pieces to look like paintings rather than photos. My Pennywise piece specifically, I did not want a detailed background, I wanted the only focus to go to Pennywise himself. My artistic voice is portrayed in my brush strokes and more stylized composition rather than photorealism.

Your portraits often seem to exist somewhere between realism and something more unsettling or surreal. How important is that sense of ambiguity to you?

That sense of ambiguity is my focus when working on these type of portraits. The main feeling I want to portray is uneasiness in these pieces. I want them to give off the same feeling you get watching a good, scary movie but from a 2D, still frame. Landing stylistically somewhere between photorealism and surrealism helps give off that liminal space feeling that enhances an unsettled feeling when looking at my pieces.

Blue appears very prominently in these works, especially in the skin tones, while deep reds and dark



backgrounds create a strong contrast. What role does color play in establishing the emotional atmosphere of your paintings?

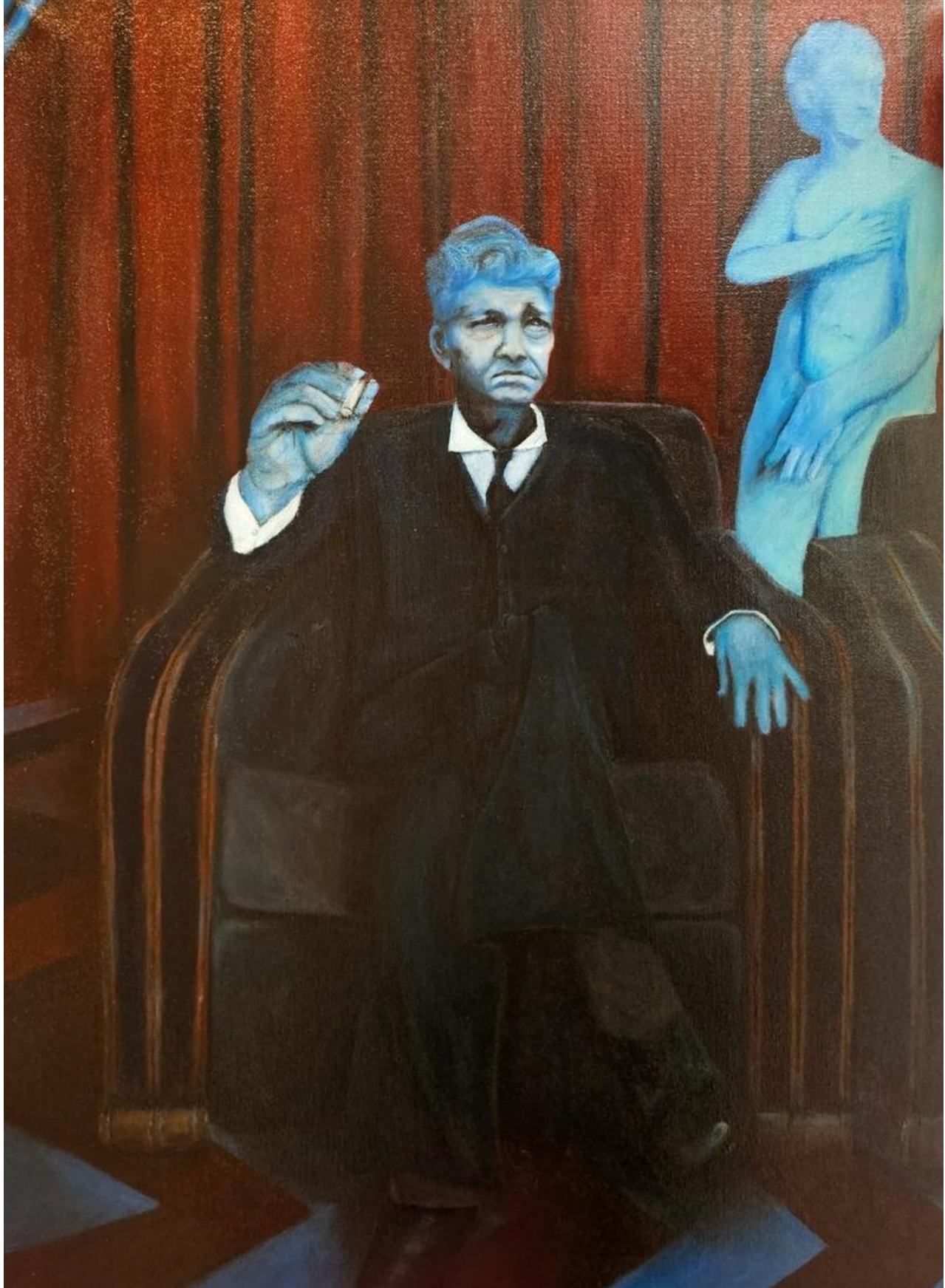
There is a huge correspondence between color and psychology. The hues of blue I used in these pieces can invoke feelings of sterileness, unapproachableness, and create a feeling of unease / harshness. Paired with the feelings that the red hues portray; stress, raised heart rate, and can create a sense of urgency. Looking at these intense colors side by side can affect people physically and mentally, which helps create that liminal, uneasy atmosphere that I hope to portray with these pieces.

There is a theatrical quality to these compositions - the curtains, dramatic lighting, costumes, poses, and carefully controlled backgrounds. Are you consciously thinking about staging when you build a painting?

Typically, prior to starting a piece I will make a mockup of how I want things staged in my paintings. Occasionally I'll see a reference I want to use and think the background looks right in reference / mockup but once the subject matter is on a canvas it looks out of place, so I'll improvise to make the main subject matter pop.

You have experience both creating personal studio work and painting murals for public spaces. Does working at a large architectural scale change the way you think about composition when you return to canvas?

Murals are still new to my resume; I have at this time



done 3 murals and am currently working on my 4th. Doing murals has made a difference in the way I measure proportions whether that's on a wall or canvas. Making proportions on such a large scale is a difficult task, but the more I do murals, the more my proportions on any piece are more accurate.

You describe becoming completely absorbed once an idea takes hold. What usually tells you that an idea is strong enough to become a painting rather than

simply remaining an interesting image or thought?

If I can't stop thinking about the way a painting would look like on a wall, I know that my idea needs to be on canvas. Sometimes I'll have an idea that I think would make a good painting so I'll draw it up on a canvas but looking at it, the idea may not translate well on a large scale or may not be translated well in acrylics. If that happens, I'll make that idea into a sketchbook drawing and move onto my next idea.

Critical Review: The Weight of Arrival

by Anna Gvozdeva

Star (Najmeh) Khani's *The Weight of Arrival* is a mixed-media photography project in which Brighton's historic buildings become sites of encounter rather than neutral records. Developed during Fabrica's Making Space residency in July 2026, the work begins with black-and-white architectural photographs, removes selected details to create blank apertures, and then fills or frames these absences with hand-drawn imagery. The sequence is clear - observation, erasure, reimagining - but its effectiveness lies less in the stated theme of migration than in the visual tension Khani creates between the monumental and the fragile.



The strongest image centres on St Bartholomew's Church. Khani photographs the facade from a low viewpoint, allowing the dark brick mass to press upward and beyond the frame. Within its great circular opening she places an intricate imagined landscape of rooftops, figures, plants, clouds and a bird, while the artist's hand remains visible at the edge, pen touching the image. This decision is particularly successful. The hand prevents the drawing from appearing as a seamless fantasy and makes authorship, labour and revision part of the subject. The church is not merely illustrated; it is actively renegotiated by someone learning how to inhabit a new city.



Formally, the work is accomplished. The monochrome palette binds photograph and drawing while retaining a productive difference between them: dense tonal blacks give the architecture physical and historical weight, whereas the fine linework feels provisional, mobile and vulnerable. The circular window operates convincingly as both architectural feature and psychological portal. Khani also uses scale well. The hand is intimate and immediate, the building almost overwhelming, and the small drawn inhabitants occupy an intermediate world of memory and projection. These relationships give the project emotional clarity without requiring explanatory text.

Nevertheless, the work is most persuasive when it resists its own symbolism. Clouds, birds, plants, miniature houses and solitary figures are accessible motifs, but they can also slip towards a familiar visual language of nostalgia and displacement. In places, the immaculate white voids created by erasure risk reading as graphic placeholders rather than absences with real emotional force. As the series develops, Khani could strengthen it by allowing the material and architectural character of each site to determine a more distinct intervention. If every building follows the same progression from photograph to void to illustrative dreamscape, the method may become formulaic. Greater friction - through incomplete erasures, differences in scale, traces of the original structure, or drawings that refuse narrative resolution - would complicate the work and deepen its critical edge.



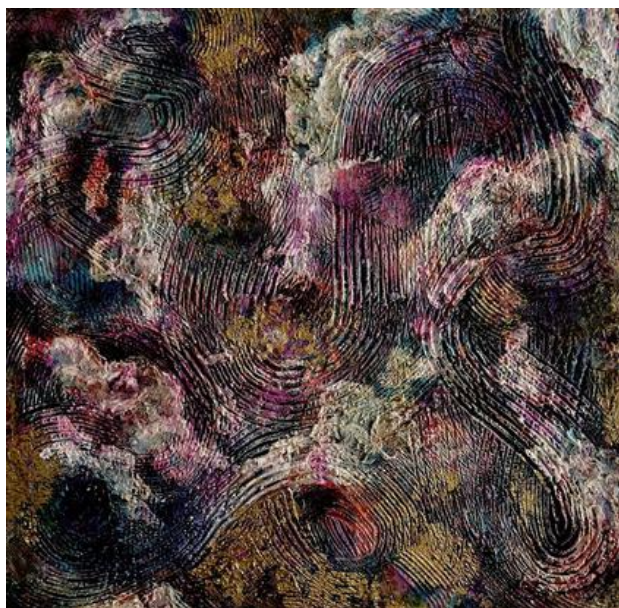
The Fabbrica residency context is well suited to a project about arrival because it foregrounds process, encounter and the provisional status of the installation. Yet the project's long-term quality will depend on whether it can move beyond the autobiographical premise and make viewers feel that architecture is also shaped by collective histories, exclusions and uneven access to belonging. Khani has already established a coherent and visually distinctive foundation. The Weight of Arrival is a thoughtful, technically controlled and emotionally resonant body of work whose best images transform documentary architecture into a contested space between permanence and reinvention. Its current directness is a strength; introducing more ambiguity and site-specific resistance would make it an even more substantial artistic achievement.

— Interview

Timeea lonela Brandas

Your practice moves between painting, textile art, mixed media, and spatial installation. How does your background in textile design influence the way you think about surface, rhythm, and material in your fine art practice?

My background in textile design has strongly influenced the way I approach my art. Working with textiles taught me to pay close attention to materials, surfaces, textures, and the way different materials interact with each other. It also helped me develop a strong sense of composition and colour — how colours work together, how textures can transform a surface, and how



Timeea lonela Brandas | Afterstorm



different materials can create particular visual and tactile effects. I think this sensitivity to material has naturally carried over into my fine art practice.

You often describe the body as an “archive of memory”. What does this idea mean to you, and how do you translate something as intangible as memory into physical material and texture?

For me, the body carries traces of everything we experience. I’m fascinated by how the textures of the body can also be found in nature, creating a connection between something intimate and something universal.

That is why texture is so important in my work. It allows me to translate something intangible, such as memory, emotion, or a feeling, into something physical and almost palpable. I want the viewer not only to see the work, but to feel something through its surfaces and textures.

In works such as Afterstorm, repeated curved and concentric marks create a sense of movement, erosion, or traces left behind. How did this visual language develop, and what role does repetition play in your process?

Afterstorm developed through a continuous process that lasted around a year. During that time, the work went through several different stages, reflecting different stages in my personal, emotional, and professional life.

There was a constant back-and-forth, almost like waves or vibrations. I went through low moments, then rose again, then went down again, until I eventually reached a point where I decided that it was time to move further and leave certain things behind.



The repetition in my work is not based on a strict pattern. I don't usually work within a predetermined system. Instead, I let my hand move freely and allow the process to flow, influenced by whatever state or energy I am experiencing at that particular moment. Looking at *Afterstorm* as a whole, I see it almost as "the sun after the storm." You can see the clouds and the colder tones representing the storm, while the warmer colours and the gold suggest the sunlight breaking through afterwards. The painting went through many stages, and all of them became part of its final form.

Magnetic Fields presents intertwined bodies in an intimate, almost inseparable composition. What interested you in exploring physical closeness, attraction, or the boundaries between two bodies in this work?

Magnetic Fields began from a more sexual state and energy. At one point, while having a conversation with my cousin about art and emotions, she suggested that I should start bringing this side of sexuality into my artwork as well.

However, I didn't want it to become something explicit or pornographic. I wanted to explore it through art as a union between two souls or spirits — through intimacy, connection, and closeness.

I chose to make the two figures slightly different in colour and character because, although we are all different, I believe that when we connect, something new and unified can be created.

Interestingly, I later realised that when the two bodies are viewed from another perspective, their forms create the shape of a heart. For me, this became a beautiful connection between sexuality, emotion, belonging, and intimacy — two different bodies becoming one through connection.

Your work frequently exists between abstraction and recognizable bodily forms. How do you decide how much of the human figure should remain visible and how much should dissolve into texture or gesture?

I don't have a fixed rule for this. I let the work guide me during the process. Sometimes the figure needs to remain recognisable, while at other times I feel that allowing it to dissolve into texture, colour, or gesture communicates the feeling more honestly.

For me, it is an intuitive balance. I'm interested in that space in between, where the body is still present but begins to become something more abstract — almost a trace, a memory, or an energy rather than simply a physical form.

How has living and working in Vienna, after studying and exhibiting in Romania, affected your artistic perspective or your relationship to ideas of belonging, identity, and place?

The first years in Vienna were challenging. When I moved here, I left behind a community of artists, friends, and colleagues in Romania, and I had to start again from zero — creating new connections and finding my place within a new artistic environment. I also had fears and doubts about whether my work would be enough for the Vienna art community, or whether people working within and around the art world here would connect with what I create.

Over time, as I moved beyond some of those fears and worries, I came to realise that I am an artist, that I create work that I genuinely believe is interesting and impactful, and that I have a very valuable opportunity to develop my practice in Vienna.

Vienna is a city that appreciates art and actively looks for and creates space for it. Living here has helped me become more confident in my own voice and in the value of what I create.

Your work crosses the boundaries between fine art, textile design, craft, and spatial experience. Do you see these categories as useful distinctions, or are you consciously trying to dissolve them?

For me personally, there are no strict boundaries between these categories. I don't see textile art, fine art, installation, painting, or design as completely separate worlds.

I like to believe that I can create whatever I imagine in my mind without being limited by a particular category or medium. If combining textiles, painting, mixed media, or spatial elements is the right way to express an idea, then that is what I want to do.

For me, the concept and the feeling come first, and the medium follows.

— Interview

Equilateral Trinity Evelyn

You began developing your creative practice and your freelance business at a remarkably young age. How has starting so early influenced the way you approach photography, collaboration, and your place within the creative community?



Starting off younger than my peers was difficult at first. Being underage meant I lost a lot of opportunities in the gig scenes. However, building by brand around fantastic, inspiring Ōtautahi creatives, I was quickly welcome into the creative circles of my city. My age still comes up occasionally and it can be hard to earn respect from our elder peers, but having an excellent creative support network around me has meant I can learn, teach and evolve with the right people.

You describe your work as confident, bold, intersectional, and unapologetic. What does each of these qualities mean to you visually, and how do you translate them into a photograph?

Who I choose to collaborate with is as big a part of my work to me as the final product is. Curating my portfolio to include models that are inherently confident and unapologetic in their lifestyles and the way they portray themselves is a huge part of my motivation for the final visual outcome. My angles, locations and collaborators are intentional and focused around these themes.

Editorial fashion photography is an important influence on your practice. What attracts you most to the relationship between fashion, the



body, posing, and visual storytelling?

Fashion is a familiar part of everyday life. The way we stand at crossings, hold ourselves in interviews etc. is relatable and full of expectations. Merging this with posing and storytelling, editorial fashion photography plays with our expectations, using different themes intertwined with its elements to create a story. For example, styling an individual in a boho outfit, with natural feminine posing and located in a forest tells a story of grace, elegance and presence. However, the same styling located in an office space with a high contrast edit style shows an interesting juxtaposition of attire and modern day commercialisation. I am deeply fascinated by this creative process and ability to warp feelings of expectations.

Your photographs often make strong use of perspective, gesture, and unconventional body positions. How do you direct your models, and how much of the final pose comes from planning versus spontaneous experimentation during a shoot?

Most of my shoots start with inspiration pictures for the posing, discussed in a preshoot meeting.

However, on the day, we love to get creative and play around with however we're feeling including any adjustments for the location such as props and modelling around the objects in the space. Often I end up picking images that were not planned poses, because what comes naturally speaks louder in the visual.

You are interested in familiarity, culture, stereotypes, and social expectations. How do you use photography to question ideas that viewers may initially take for granted?

As previously mentioned with the expectations included in editorial fashion photography, an individuals' perspective plays a massive role in the story told. Blending different styles together creates a visual dissonance that appears striking, provoking the viewer to look deeper into these explorations of culture and stereotypes.

How has living and working in Ōtautahi, Aotearoa shaped your photographic perspective? Do the local creative community, culture, and environment influence the subjects or values you bring into your work?

Absolutely my environment and circles have, and continue to, influence my work. It can be difficult to be creative in such a small, relatively rural city. The south island of Aotearoa has only 1.2 million people on it, making creative connections that much more valuable. Although a small city, Ōtautahi has a large population of emerging artists. After the 2011 earthquakes, communities had to come together to rebuild our city. Since then, I pay close attention to our culture and intentional creative spaces. This city and its architecture is full of life and continues to grow with its people.

Alongside photography, you study law and run Equilateral as a creative business. Do these different areas of your life influence one another, particularly in the way you think about representation, advocacy, responsibility, or community?

My purpose in law and passion in photography stems from the same root. I care deeply about helping and advocating for others, and I believe all areas of my life should positively influence my community. I consciously find ways of including broad communities in my careers and actively seek to encourage their comfortability.

Toktam Foroudi

I am a hyperrealist artist specializing in watercolor and other fine art mediums. Inspired by the beauty of real-life subjects, I create detailed artworks that explore light, texture, and emotions. My artistic practice includes watercolor, colored pencil, charcoal, and pastel, with a focus on realistic and highly detailed representations. Through my artworks, I aim to capture the essence and hidden beauty within everyday and natural subjects.



Project Statement

My artistic journey is driven by my passion for realistic and hyperrealistic subjects. I am fascinated by the details, textures, and emotions found in real-life elements, and I strive to recreate their beauty through my artworks. Using watercolor and other mediums, I explore the relationship between light, detail, and visual storytelling. Each artwork is an attempt to transform ordinary subjects into meaningful and captivating visual experiences.



— Interview

Jibril Ben Jamaa

You grew up in Japan with Filipino and Tunisian roots and later lived in the UAE and the UK. How has this multicultural experience influenced the way you see people and approach portraiture?

It's simply being exposed to these diverse backgrounds. Not everyone looks like me, and not everyone looks like each other. Isn't that amazing in itself? Also, it's the fact that someone who looks like me is "Japanese". Made me wonder what other faces exist that are from a nation or culture that you didn't expect would house such face. At that moment, I wanted to know more about the faces of the one nation. In my example of living in Japan, there are faces like mine (mixed heritage Zainichi), Korean Zainichi ("Zainichi" is the term for foreign-born in Japan, but particularly for the Koreans brought in during annexation), the indigenous Ainu of Hokkaido and their iconic mouth tattoos, the indigenous of



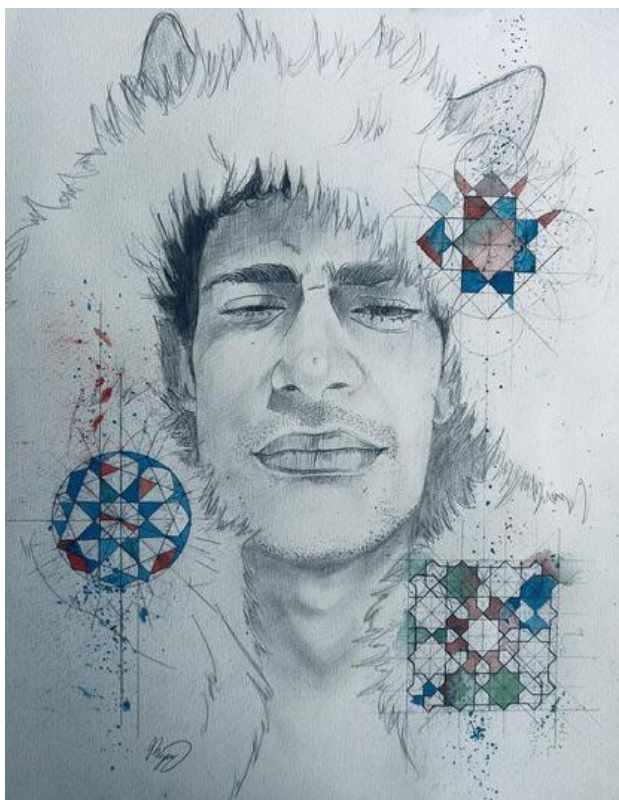
Okinawa, the "stereotypical" face of the Wa Japanese, the face of Japanese artist in full makeup, the attire of a Japanese bride — all these faces are "Japanese". All of them make up the beauty of Japan. They make people go "What? These people exist there?" And I want to see more in different locations.

You mention that you only draw faces you feel a particular connection to. What usually creates that connection, and how do you know that a face has become a subject you want to draw?

I could say many things to give a logical, tangible reason. Perhaps it's when it's a face in context I've never seen before. Perhaps it's when the face gives a striking look into whatever they are looking at. Perhaps I have a supernatural ability to see the thoughts and read the stories the face has to tell. But I always refer to a quote from MIYAZAKI Hayao's film Kiki's Delivery Service: "Today when I saw you, I thought: 'I wanna paint!'" That pretty much sums up my connection — they make me want to draw.

Faces are clearly at the center of your artistic practice. What do you think a face can communicate that words sometimes cannot?

It's more about how the face makes me feel. My latest portrait is that of a classical Indian dancer. In a way, I felt the passion and the love for the art style that dancer allows his face to express. Anyone can say they love to dance. But with my latest subject, I can believe it when I saw his face. As the poet Brian Jones puts it in his poem About Friends, the less words are expressed, the more authenticity there is. It's that moment when someone smiles without knowing by they are smiling; it's that moment someone's pupils widen unknowingly; it's the moment someone blushes without



verbal triggers. It's the passion that is allowed to shine unknowingly in a moment of being true to oneself that we see in faces that words fail to translate.

You have a strong passion for languages and are currently learning your seventh language. Do you see any connection between learning languages and learning to "read" or portray a human face?

In a way, I do. Cultures and their languages have a perspective in situations and contexts, and have a word specific to that one instance, existing only in that language and its people. People generally tend to steer clear from what they can't understand. However, because I have the fortune of having an access to a library of unique vocabulary from different languages, I know what word is best to associate with what I see in these faces.

Many of your portraits combine realistic pencil drawing with precise geometric patterns. What do these geometric forms represent for you, and how did they become part of your visual language?

When I draw these faces, I noticed that the end product is kind of lonely. They need a company, a compliment. I used to draw flowers, but I thought it too generic and unoriginal, overly-used. I was thinking to myself: "What motifs can I use to accompany this portrait?" My search led me to a (re)discovery of geometric patterns, particularly Arabo-Islamic patterns. I tried them on, and to my amazement, it fit perfectly. A mathematical, universal motif. I didn't quite bother asking myself why it worked. I just knew it did. I'll let the audience figure that out for themselves.

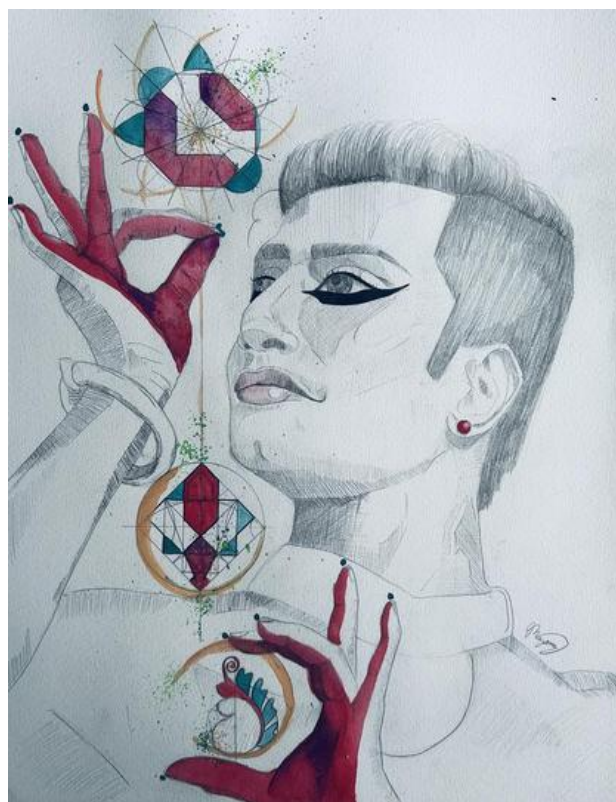
When creating a portrait, are you primarily interested in achieving physical resemblance, or are you trying to capture something less visible about the person?

I do try to make the portrait as accurate as the original subject. And that includes the inspiration that pushed me to draw them. When I look back at the portrait, I want to be able to say to myself I see in that drawing what I saw in that person.

Your own life has involved movement between countries and cultures, and you are preparing for another chapter in Malaysia. Do ideas of belonging, cultural identity, or being between different worlds enter your work consciously?

Never. I know where I belong. I know what I am. And I am not "one thing"; I am "many things". I'm not just "Japanese" or "Filipino-Tunisian"; I am "Filipino-Tunisian, born and raised in Japan, with a French education". And as I've done my tertiary education in the Emirates and in the United Kingdom, we can add that to the list. People grow, people move out, people learn. If after ten years you're still the same person, then that's unfortunate. I don't consider myself to be "between" worlds. It sounds like I am "stuck". But I'm not stuck. I am fluid. Who says I can't be this and that at the same time? Because it's true. That's how I am able to explore different views and appreciate different cultures. I have the ability to dip my toes in all the words. Many bi-racials or Third Culture Kids feel a pressure to choose one place of belonging, to identify and relate to one field. That's such a limiting mindset. Just imagine how colorful the horizons would be if we let go of the search of needing to be in one place. Imagine what abilities you can unleash once you realize you don't have to "search" for anything, and just be.

No, ideas of belonging, cultural identity, or being between worlds do not cross my mind. I do what I do best. I draw faces I love, I decorate them with geometric patterns, I take photos of scenes I feel with, and I am always proud of the work I produce.



My name is **Alexandra Levashova**. I was born in 1985 in Dmitrov, in the Moscow Region, where my artistic journey began. I acquired my first professional skills at the Dmitrov Children's Art School, which gave me a strong technical foundation and fostered my love of painting.

I later earned a degree in Interior Design. Studying design gave me an understanding of space, composition, and colour, but painting has always remained my greatest passion. I continued to paint both during and after my studies, constantly refining my technique.

Today, I work across several artistic disciplines. My primary practice is easel painting in oils and acrylics. I create works on canvas, experimenting with colour, texture, and subject matter. My paintings include animal subjects - especially bears - as well as landscapes, abstract compositions, and interior scenes.

However, my creative practice is not limited to canvas. I have always been interested in how art can exist in different forms and objects. I therefore paint on clothing, create art objects from epoxy resin, sculpt with polymer clay, paint decorative spheres, and decorate a variety of surfaces. Each new material gives me an opportunity to discover an unexpected means of expression and expand the boundaries of my art.

I love to experiment. I believe creativity is an endless exploration in which there are no right or wrong paths. This is why my work brings together a variety of techniques, styles, and materials.

I currently live and work in Dmitrov and Moscow. My paintings are held in private collections. I also accept commissions for original works, lead art workshops, and participate in charitable projects.

My art is a way of speaking to the world without words. I believe that beauty can be found everywhere: on a wall, in clothing, and in the small details that make life warmer and brighter.

Alexandra Levashova | Totem of Power





— Interview

Tabby Sophia Tanith Welch

You work across photography and mixed media. What first drew you to these mediums, and how has your artistic practice developed since you began?



I have been painting for as long as I can remember, and I never considered pursuing any other medium until I participated in a photography unit for university, and really enjoyed it, so I have been continuing with both since then.

Your work is strongly influenced by film, fashion, popular culture, and personal experience. How do these different sources come together when you begin developing a new project?

I usually envision the end result of my artwork before fully developing it, so sometimes I identify where I drew inspiration from for the project, halfway through. I consume an excess of media, like most in my generation, and I feel that my love of film and fashion inspires aspects such as lighting, colours and choices behind location and costume.

This series explores the relationship between wealth and corruption. What inspired you to investigate this subject, and what does “corruption” mean within the context of these images?

I felt inspired to explore the concept of corruption, and its relationship to wealth, as I wanted to explore how abuse of power is often concealed by a “mask” of



social status and money. In these photos, corruption exists as a by-product of how power can influence morality.

The golden masks are a central visual element in the photographs. Why did you choose the mask as a symbol, and what does its gold surface add to the meaning of the work?

Masks have been an ongoing subject matter in my practice, but for this particular project, I was initially inspired by Ancient Egyptian death masks and rituals for the afterlife. The use of golden, painted masks for the burial of the wealthy, and their preservation in the afterlife, was incredibly interesting to me. The use of masks in Stanley Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut" has also had a huge influence on my work. Furthermore, Alexander McQueen's "Dante" and his use of masks and headdresses, also inspired this project.

There is a striking contrast between glamour and unease in these images. How important was it for you to make the photographs visually seductive while addressing darker themes beneath the surface?

Within my fine art background, I have always been drawn to chiaroscuro in paintings like "The Supper at Emmaus" by Caravaggio. I wanted to draw the viewer

in, using a strong contrast with the lighting. I felt that the use of shadows and masks, would create an eerie effect, whilst red lipstick and jewellery would create a glamorous appeal to viewers.

Several images depict two figures whose relationship feels both intimate and mysterious. What role do relationships between your subjects play in the storytelling of the series?

I wanted to keep the relationship between the subjects uncertain for viewers, and imply at a shared trust, however the masks suggest a more intimate, strange bond that is up for interpretation by the viewer.

When working with friends or models, how much of the final image is carefully directed, and how much comes from improvisation and the personality of the person in front of the camera?

In terms of the concept, the photoshoot was carefully planned and explained to the models, however I always leave room for improvisation and appreciate the interpretation of the concept, and ideas from different models. Many of my models are creative students themselves, who study subjects such as acting, or photography, and understand my creative process.



Anusri Sabariperumal

You describe yourself primarily as a cinematographer. What first drew you to cinematography, and when did you begin to see it as a form of personal artistic expression rather than only a technical profession?

I didn't start off as a cinematographer, but rather as a writer. One lighting class changed my direction. I learned the art of lighting a scene just like one would



use colors on a canvas. I was also able to practice operating and pulling focus in this class, which introduced me to being a cinematographer. I still remember when my professor complimented my focus pulling skills when I wasn't even aware what that meant. Getting into camera classes wasn't easy, and the technical aspects were a hard switch from my usual creative approach. I realized how having technical knowledge is mutually beneficial to the creative looks I wanted to achieve. As much as I loved writing, telling stories visually warmed a part of my heart I didn't know existed. Sharing my mood purely through visuals was exhilarating.

Music videos and dance films are important sources of inspiration for you. How do rhythm, movement, and music influence the way you compose a shot or structure a visual sequence?

I'm inspired by how movement, lighting, and composition can tell a story without relying on dialogue. These influences have taught me to create visuals that feel expressive, emotional, and engaging. Music is a key part of my creative process. I often build playlists before filming because the rhythm helps me visualize camera movement, shot pacing, and the emotional flow of a scene. This allows me to create films that feel natural and immersive. Dance films rely on how the dancers move to tell a story. I love how each individual can come up with their own interpretation of the story being told. I tend to focus on how the shots are designed to capture the moves to evoke emotion in the audience and try to emulate that in what I want to convey.

In Alankaram, the act of getting dressed becomes a way of questioning identity, memory, and tradition. What personal experiences led you to explore these themes through this work?

I was never confident about wearing South Indian wear, and I think a lot of that came from me not having a personal connection to it apart from my mother forcing me to wear it for festivals and weddings. I did not understand its significance; I didn't





realize what my ancestors had to go through for me to still be able to wear and enjoy ethnic wear. I became more curious as I grew older and was ready to face the weight of what it meant to wear “traditional” clothes. Through this, I started questioning what “tradition” really meant. The sari has gone through many phases of evolution. It is an unstitched cloth that could be worn in many different ways, and it has a casteist background; the Colonial British exacerbated that system. Eventually, the blouse was introduced to morally police women, but today ethnic wear in India faces ageism. In the past, youth wanted to get with the times and conform to Western standards, but I saw a rise of women who were embracing ethnic wear as well. In *Alankaram*, I strip my clothes off of what society thinks and dress myself up how I want to while still keeping an aspect of the past intact.

You look directly into the camera as though it were a mirror. What does this relationship between the camera, the mirror, and the viewer represent for you?

The relationship between the camera and me is a personal one. I am capturing my innermost thoughts. Not many people get to look at you when you get ready. You have all the freedom in the world to inspect and probe yourself. An onlooker may not fully decipher what you’re thinking, but my drawings help the viewers understand my emotions. The purpose of making *Alankaram* was to inspire young women like myself to create their own relationship with traditional clothing, outside of what society expects of you. It was also to educate those who may not be familiar with South Asian culture.

The work combines black-and-white imagery with expressive layers of red, yellow, purple, and blue. How did you develop this visual language, and what role does color play in expressing thoughts or emotions that cannot be seen in the original footage?

While editing the video (before I took the stills), I decided to experiment with a black-and-white image. It stood out more to me as it reminded me of the old

photos of my great-grandmothers who wore sarees without a blouse. To me, it also represented that I was looking back at the past while mending my relationship with ethnic wear. I used the colors red and yellow because they demand your emotions; thus, I added them to images that represented anger and confusion. Purple and blue are easy on the eyes and sort of harmonious, which represented when I felt calmer and ready to embrace my look.

There seems to be both affection and tension in the way you approach ethnic dress - a sense of nostalgia alongside questioning and resistance. How important is this contradiction to the emotional core of the project?

The contradiction represents the honesty I hold myself accountable to. Instead of pretending that I embrace the dress, I stay honest about my uncertainty and the confidence I am yet to have dressing myself strongly, out of respect for my culture. Through this piece, I stay truthful to the amount of reflection I need to do while also acknowledging how far I have come. Dressing myself in cultural wear also feels nostalgic as it reminds me of a time when my mother used to dress me and I didn’t have a care in the world about what others thought of me.

As both the person in front of the camera and the artist constructing the image, how did performing in your own work change the creative process? Did it make the project feel more vulnerable or intimate?

Alankaram is a deeply personal project. It felt as if I was exposing myself and showing my innermost thoughts. At times it even felt embarrassing to admit that I did feel the way I did, when in contrast I should confidently embrace my culture. The creative process, while a little challenging, was really fun. I only faced difficulties while lighting the scene for myself. As an artist, I believe it’s essential to reveal parts of ourselves to create the most authentic work. I am still exploring my relationship with clothes and hope to create more projects reflecting my thoughts while also educating myself and others!

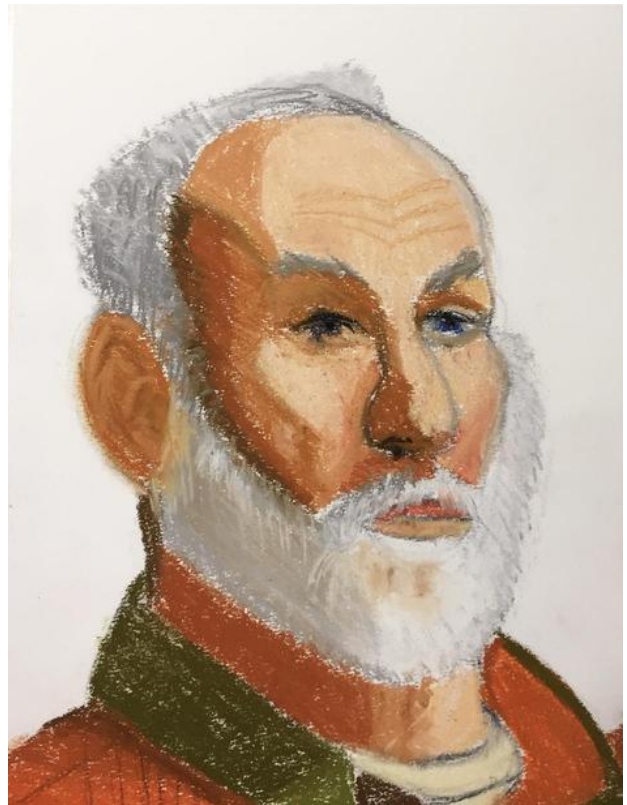


520 (Anthony Martini)

You describe drawing as something that began in childhood and eventually became your calling. At what point did you realize that art was no longer simply a creative outlet, but something you wanted to dedicate your life to?



520 (Anthony Martini) | Welcome Aboard | 2025



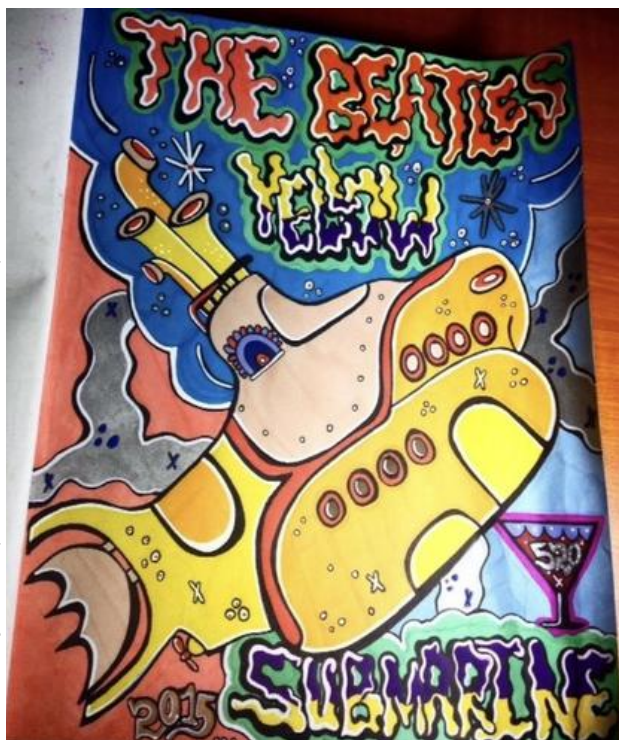
Art has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. It was always a passion, but it took years for me to realize that I wanted to dedicate my life to it. That realization developed through time spent creating, learning beyond the classroom, and experimenting with different mediums until I found what truly fit my artistic style. It was a gradual process of discovery rather than one defining moment.

Throughout my childhood, teachers, fellow students, friends, and family encouraged me to continue with something they saw in my work. At the time, I didn't necessarily view it the same way—it was simply part of my life. Later in my childhood, one teacher told me that she couldn't wait to watch the cartoon show she believed I would one day create. Encouragement like that stayed with me and motivated me to keep creating while I continued discovering.

I went on to study art for three years in college, and during that time it often seemed more obvious to my professors and classmates than it did to me that art was becoming my life's direction. Their confidence reinforced what I was gradually beginning to recognize for myself, but I still felt there was much more to learn through experience and experimentation.

The journey was not without obstacles. Looking back, every stage of my life has added, and continues to add, another brick to the foundation of where I may be meant to go. Around 2020, the pieces began to come together, and I developed a clearer understanding of what I wanted. One of my former managers once told me that there are points in life when a light switch just turns on out of nowhere. He was right. By 2025 and into 2026, that dedication had begun to transform into deeper professional opportunities, reinforcing that the path I had spent so much time building—and continue to build—was finally taking shape.

That progression changed the way I viewed art. It was no longer only a creative outlet—it had become a lifelong commitment to learning, evolving, and creating work which continues to challenge me both artistically and personally.



Your artistic development has been shaped by several very different mentors, from graffiti pioneer VICTOR-161 to realism painter Randi Eisman and animation artist Al Nickerson. What did each of these influences contribute to the visual language you use today?

In 2013, VICTOR-161, also known as VIC 161, was a New York graffiti artist who began introducing me to the general discipline and foundations of art while I was still in high school. At that age, I didn't fully understand everything he was sharing with me. It was more about establishing a baseline that I could continue to build upon. He taught me through the areas he knew best, focusing on what he felt was necessary for my development and drawing from his own experience with his preferred mediums of spray paint, markers, and graphite. Through that process, he taught me principles including composition, balance, movement, and letter structure. Above all, he emphasized the importance of developing a unique personal style and encouraged me to think independently as an artist.

As time went on, I gained a greater understanding of what he had initially introduced me to. He continued sharing his knowledge and experience, guiding, critiquing, and encouraging my development whenever he could. His influence gave me a creative foundation that I came to understand more deeply with time and that continues to shape the way I approach composition, lettering, and artistic problem-solving today.

In 2017, I began studying with Randi Eisman, a realism artist whose work and career had taken her around the world. She expanded the way I observed the world around me. When I first met her, I wasn't a realism artist, and she knew that. Rather than trying to change who I was, she devoted a great deal of attention to strengthening the areas she believed would benefit me most. She structured my classes around principles from Betty Edwards' *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, training me to observe carefully rather than assume and to better understand form, light, depth, and

proportion.

Near the end of my studies with her, Randi explained why she had approached my training that way. She wanted to give me the strongest opportunity she could with what she saw in me. That conversation became one of the greatest gifts she gave me because it allowed me to understand what she had been trying to develop throughout our time together. More than teaching me realism, she taught me what I needed to see as an artist.

In 2017, I also began working with Al Nickerson, an animator and comic book writer who brought another perspective to my artistic development through comic illustration and animation. Before I even enrolled in his class, professors had introduced us and shared examples of work I had created during the previous semester in addition to outside of my studies. He knew I had a genuine interest in animation. Due to his professional background, he understood the areas I wanted to explore more deeply.

Even before I entered his classroom, he encouraged me to begin studying Richard Williams and the principles of animation, so I could put the first brick into place there. He recognized that storytelling, character creation, and visual communication were already important parts of my work, but he challenged me to refine them through more advanced illustration. His guidance broadened not only my technical abilities, but also my understanding of narrative, movement, expression, and visual storytelling.

Looking back, each mentor contributed something very different to my artistic development. They gave me knowledge, discipline, and perspective that I was able to carry forward while continuing to discover my own visual language. Their lessons remain present in the way I create today, but over time those different influences have become integrated into a style that is uniquely my own and continues to evolve.

You create all of your work through a left-handed drawing practice and place great importance on the physical act of making marks by hand. How does the movement of your hand influence the rhythm, character, or spontaneity of an image?

Being left-handed influenced the physical way I created from the beginning. I was naturally left-handed; it was simply part of my biological anatomy. When I was young, some of my teachers tried to encourage me to use my right hand instead, but I resisted because my left was instinctively how I worked. At that age, I wasn't thinking about what that could eventually mean in the future. Looking back, however, something so fundamental to the way I physically interacted with the world became important to how my practice evolved.

Around 2015, when I began diving deeper into my work and taking it more seriously, I started to recognize how my left hand was shaping my lettering, line work, and a more consistent approach to color. I was working at an inclined drafting table or on relatively flat surfaces, generally using a hooked-wrist or southpaw posture. At that point, I wasn't yet rotating my black books to accommodate different strokes and angles, so much of my approach was built around the position and mechanics of my hand.

Around 2017–2018, I began rotating the black book as I worked. That allowed me to adapt the surface to my left hand rather than forcing my hand into a particular position. Certain mediums also give you a relatively short window to make or manipulate a mark the way you want, so repositioning the

book and reaching an area from the right angle became increasingly important. What began as an adaptation grew more fluid with time, and by 2025–2026 it became an instinctive part of the way I create.

The motion of my hand isn't separate from the image—it influences how the image takes shape. The direction, pressure, and angle of one mark can affect what follows. Much of the rhythm comes from those changing angles, which is why the black book can be continuously rotating or sometimes resting on one edge as I move it into position for the next stroke. My hand, the orientation of the book, and the medium I'm using can all affect the length, curvature, and momentum of a line.

If I weren't a left-handed artist creating this particular type of work within the physical structure of a black book, it's entirely possible that I never would have arrived at this approach. It grew from adapting the surface to the mechanics of my hand, and eventually that adaptation became part of the rhythm itself.

As that relationship has become more instinctive, it has also become increasingly refined. I can see the progression from one piece to the next. Actions that once required conscious thought now happen more fluidly. The book turns, my hand adjusts, and I respond to the material accompanied by what I'm seeing without having to consciously separate every decision.

That refinement also contributes to what many describe as a flow state. There are periods when the interaction between my hand, the medium, and the page feels continuous. I'm still making decisions, but the physical mechanics no longer interrupt the creative thought behind them. For me, that is where much of the spontaneity comes from.

Every hand-drawn mark is also a record of a decision made in a particular moment. The finished piece carries evidence of how it was created—the shifts in direction, pressure, angle, and approach along the way. In that sense, the motion of my

hand doesn't just produce the image; it becomes another layer of what the finished work communicates in addition to the image itself.

Graffiti, typography, illustration, realism, and character design all appear within your practice. How do you bring these different visual languages together without allowing one of them to dominate the others?

I don't believe every element should compete for attention. What I'm trying to express determines which visual language takes the lead, while the others support and strengthen the composition. Balance, to me, doesn't necessarily mean giving each discipline equal presence. It means understanding what role each one needs to play within a particular piece so the result feels unified rather than like a collection of separate styles.

The medium often determines the initial direction of a composition, but as the work develops, the piece itself begins to influence those decisions. Each discipline contributes something different, but their functions frequently overlap. Depth, movement, structure, observation, personality, and expression aren't restricted to any one of them. Graffiti, lettering, illustration, realism, and character design can each contribute those qualities in different ways depending on what the composition requires. Over time, the boundaries between those influences have become less important to me than understanding how they can work together.

The challenge isn't simply bringing these different disciplines together—it's recognizing when each should step forward and when it should step back. As a piece develops, I continually evaluate whether an addition strengthens the artwork or simply competes for attention. Sometimes the strongest artistic decision is knowing when not to add another line, color, or detail. Restraint is just as important to me as experimentation.

Ultimately, I want the viewer to experience the artwork as a unified whole rather than immediately noticing where one discipline ends and another begins. When those influences are working together successfully, they become part of the same expression rather than separate categories within the piece.

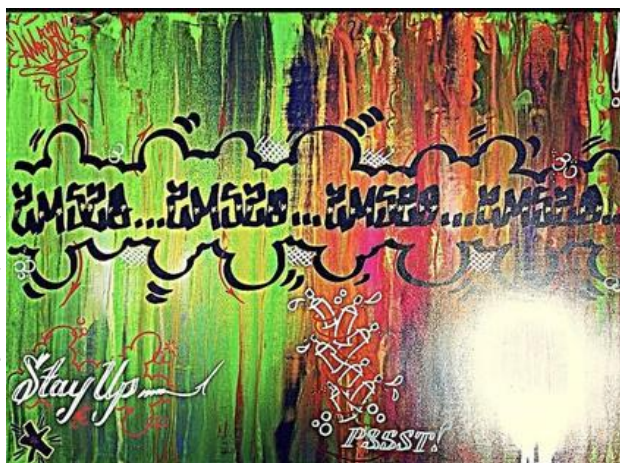
You compare your creative process to a game of chess, where each decision builds upon the previous one. How much of a composition is planned before you begin, and how much emerges through instinct while you are working?

There isn't an exact percentage that applies universally to my work. The balance between planning and instinct depends heavily on what I'm trying to express and the direction of the individual piece. Sometimes I can envision a significant portion of the composition before I begin, while other pieces leave much more room for discovery. I usually have a basis for what I want to create and an overall direction in mind, but I don't consider the idea itself the beginning of the physical creative process. From there, I move to what I call my test page—the opposite page beside the developing work in my black book. It functions as a visual planning space, and that's where I consider the work to truly begin.

The test page contributes heavily to everything that follows. It's where I explore colors, mediums, techniques, forms, and possible relationships between elements before committing



520 (Anthony Martini) | Headshot



certain decisions to the piece. Because it remains alongside the work throughout its creation, it also becomes a visual record of how the composition took shape. Some decisions happen quickly, while others can take hours to resolve. That's where the comparison to chess begins: the original vision establishes the board, but once I start exploring the possibilities, the pieces begin to move. Beneath the Sand, a piece I'm currently working on, is a good example. The main composition is on the left page of the black book, while as a left-handed artist I generally prefer having my primary working surface positioned to my right. There are instances when I will sit and study the piece for an extended period, sometimes with a timer running, because I'm mentally connecting the entire layout rather than looking at one area in isolation. Each new mark or addition can change that layout to some degree, so I evaluate what it has done to my position before deciding what comes next. Sometimes a decision creates an unexpected advantage; other times it puts the original plan at a disadvantage and requires me to reconsider the next move. What isn't established through planning emerges through instinct, observation, experience, and adaptation. As I work, new relationships appear between colors, lines, forms, and materials, and recognizing those relationships can influence where I go next. Something I hadn't envisioned beforehand can become an important part of the finished piece. I don't want the original plan to become a limitation. I want enough structure to understand the direction I'm taking while remaining open to what I discover along the way. That's where the chess comparison becomes very literal for me. I'm continually reading the position. Something that appeared to be the right move earlier may change once another element is introduced. There is also an opponent within that analogy—in a sense, both the artwork and the artist. The human element means that an unintended mark or unexpected result can immediately alter the circumstances I'm working from. At the same time, the surface and mediums respond to what I do. Materials absorb and layer differently, colors shift in relation to what surrounds them, and even a successful addition can change what becomes possible next. I have to study the new position, connect it back to my position within the overall piece, and determine the next move from there. For me, planning and instinct aren't separate stages; they're continuously interacting with observation and experience. The original vision establishes the board, the test page allows me to explore potential moves, and experience helps me respond to what emerges. Like chess, I can try to think

several moves ahead, but every move changes what becomes possible next. The finished piece ultimately becomes a record of that exchange between the original vision, the physical materials, observation, instinct, and the decisions made along the way.

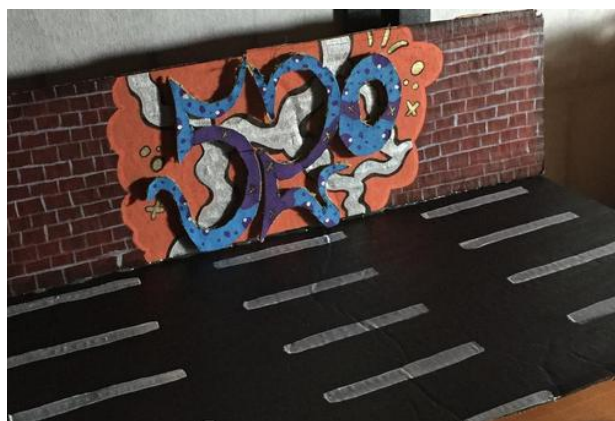
Your work is deeply connected to the history and lineage of New York graffiti, yet you are also determined to develop an individual visual language. How do you balance respect for that tradition with the need to move beyond it?

For me, part of respecting that tradition begins with being clear about how I identify myself. I don't directly identify as a graffiti artist or writer. I was taught by a traditional New York graffiti writer, and through that experience I was introduced to portions of the culture, history, and artistic foundations surrounding the traditional era. I've practiced elements of the art form as well, but I have a great deal of respect for what those titles represent and for the experiences behind them. My interest primarily lies within the traditional era because that's how I was introduced to the art form. Most of the knowledge I have under my belt comes from what I was personally taught, stories and perspectives shared with me by a few artists, and some of my own research. New York graffiti has an extensive history with a great deal to learn, and it isn't my specialty, so I wouldn't present myself as being near well versed in it. I'm comfortable with what I've learned and am always happy to learn more.

The art itself has always been what interested me most. The creativity, ingenuity, individuality, lettering, structure, and stories surrounding the work caught my attention more than the politics or other aspects of the culture. I respect artists and their individual contributions, but I stay out of the politics. My focus has remained on the artwork, what I can learn from it, and how those lessons can contribute to my own development.

I was fortunate to begin learning about the art and portions of its history when I was 17. Around that time, I was asked to choose an artist tag. I initially used AM-520, which eventually became simply 520, originating from my registered motocross number at the time. The artwork is incredible to me, but so are the stories behind it and what people from an earlier generation went through to create their work in addition to establish individual identities. Fifty years ago, it was a very different world.

VICTOR-161 tried to share as much knowledge with me as he could during that period of my life. He incorporated portions of what he knew into the way he taught me the fundamentals



520 (Anthony Martini) | Beyond The Brick Wall | 2017

of the art. It was a healthy learning environment because he knew I was genuinely interested, and this was something that had been a significant part of his own life. He shared what he felt could benefit me while allowing me to absorb it in my own way. I was learning about composition, movement, lettering, balance, personal style, the stories pieces could tell, and the thought behind creating them. My initial training began with sketching in the black book while watching him create, and from there I moved into working with spray paint on traditional stretched canvas. That allowed me to experience one of the primary mediums associated with the art form while developing in an environment that made sense for me. I still genuinely enjoy working with spray paint when I have the opportunity.

The art form, from learning to work with spray paint on stretched canvas to developing ideas in a black book, opened a creative path for me like no other. It introduced me to ways of thinking about lettering, structure, movement, mediums, and personal style that I continued to expand upon as my own practice developed.

The black book became an especially important connection between what I was taught and the direction my own work eventually took. Black books have long had a place within graffiti culture as spaces for ideas, lettering, sketches, and designs. For me, however, the book gradually became more than a planning space—it became the primary home for my finished work. I carried one throughout the end of high school and continued that habit afterward, even bringing smaller books with me to work. Of the different ways I was originally taught, the black book became the portion that stayed most closely connected to my daily practice. That's also why I'm careful about the distinction between influence and identity. I genuinely love the traditional era of New York graffiti. Elements of what I was taught remain an important part of who I am, but I don't directly claim that discipline as my own. Many of the artists associated with that tradition have dedicated a large portion of their lives to it. That's their road and I respect them, but it isn't mine. I was taught through stretched canvas and the black book. My own practice continued developing primarily within the black book. Acknowledging that distinction is part of general respect for the tradition and the people who lived it. As I continued developing, I began submitting work in college and to state-level competitions. Whenever I had the opportunity to work within my natural style, a portion of those traditional elements often found their way into the work. I never encountered the idea from professors or judges that those influences needed to be separated from everything else I was doing. Instead, they existed alongside the other disciplines I was studying and gradually became integrated into the visual language I was developing. The black book gave me a place where everything I was learning could interact. Graffiti-influenced lettering and structure crossed into typography, while illustration, realism, character work, and experimentation developed alongside them. Rather than consciously trying to combine those disciplines, I allowed them to influence one another as the work evolved.

Ultimately, that's where I find the balance. How I was taught and influenced is simply part of who I am as an artist. I don't approach a composition thinking that a certain amount needs to represent tradition and another amount needs to move beyond it. Those aspects are already part of the way I create, and they continue to evolve through experience,

instinct, observation, and experimentation.

Sometimes I'll do something, even on a test page, that I never would have expected beforehand. A line, form, technique, or relationship can appear naturally and open another direction for the work. That's part of what keeps the process exciting for me. I can recognize where certain foundations came from while also seeing how they've changed through my own practice.

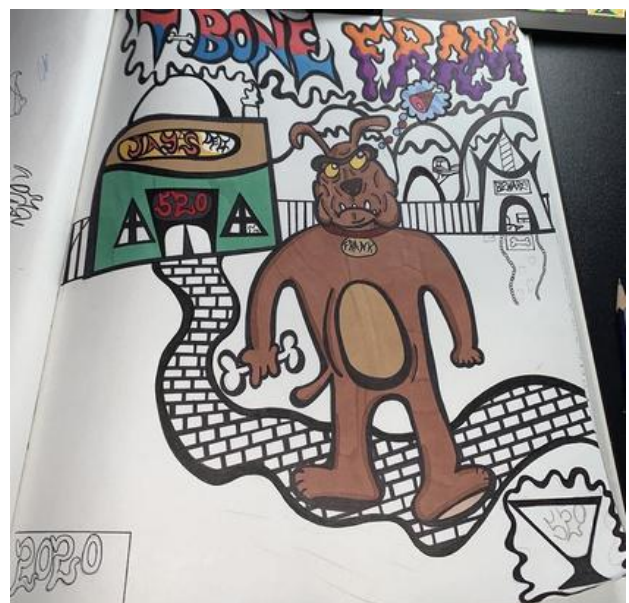
Elements associated with the art remain visible in my work because they're part of how I was taught, and due to that, I genuinely enjoy working with the mediums and continuing to expand upon what I've learned. I don't feel a need to move away from those elements simply to establish individuality. One of the most important lessons VICTOR-161 emphasized was developing a unique personal style, and continuing to evolve is part of that lesson for me.

I don't want to recreate another generation's work, nor do I want to use its history simply as an aesthetic. How I was taught and influenced is part of who I am, but it doesn't define the limits of where my work can go.

At a time when digital tools and AI-generated imagery are becoming increasingly common, what does the commitment to entirely hand-drawn work mean to you, and what do you believe the physical trace of the artist's hand can communicate that technology cannot?

For me, working entirely by hand is less about rejecting technology and more about preserving the connection I have with the act of creating. Digital tools and AI-generated imagery have their own applications, but they don't change what I value about sitting in front of a surface and building an image through my own movements and decisions. It isn't part of my artistic practice, and I don't see that changing. For artists who find fulfillment through those tools, I don't discourage it; it's simply a different realm of creation from the one I've chosen to dedicate myself to.

Respectfully, I also don't approach the subject through the political lens surrounding technology and AI in art. Those conversations exist, but my perspective is rooted in my own practice and what creating by hand means to me. Over the past 13 years, my practice has developed through tools and mediums that I was progressively taught to use from one



520 (Anthony Martini) | Tbone | 2026



mentor to the next, with each stage adding something to what came before. Continuing to work with those materials allows me to tell my story through a direct connection between mind, hand, and material that has evolved alongside me as an artist.

When I draw, that connection is always present. Pressure changes. Lines aren't always perfect. A marker can react differently depending on the surface I'm working on, how much ink remains, the temperature, and countless other variables. My hand approaches an angle differently depending on where I am on the page. Something unexpected can happen, and I have to respond to it rather than simply remove it. Those decisions accumulate until they become part of the physical history of the piece.

There is also a mental connection to working this way. When I'm creating by hand, with music playing and distractions removed, I can become completely absorbed in the work and enter what many describe as a flow state. At that point, the interaction between thought and movement becomes almost continuous. That experience is an important part of why I've remained committed to working this way. The act of creating means as much to me as the finished image.

That's one of the things I believe the artist's hand can communicate: physical presence. When you look closely at work created by hand, you can find evidence of the person who made it—the pressure of a stroke, a correction, overlapping materials, subtle variations, and even imperfections. To me, those aren't simply marks on a surface; they're evidence of the human process behind the work. They allow the finished piece to carry physical traces of the person who created it and of the decisions made throughout its

development.

There is also time embedded in those marks. A piece can represent hours, days, months, or even years of accumulated work and experience. The finished image isn't only the idea I started with; it contains the decisions required to get there, along with the countless hours of practice that shaped my ability to make those decisions in the first place. What someone sees in a single mark can be the result of years spent learning how to make it.

That physical history is important to me because it can't be separated from the experience of creating the piece. The surface records what happened. A line may reveal the angle of my hand, a layer of material may show where I changed direction, and an imperfection may remain because adapting to it became part of the composition. Those traces aren't something I view as flaws that need to be eliminated. They're evidence of the physical act of creating the work.

This is the way I began my journey as an artist, and it's something I intend to carry with me throughout it. I want someone looking at one of my originals to know that what they're seeing passed directly through my mind and hand into the materials in front of me. The variations, adaptations, imperfections, accumulated work, and experience aren't things I want removed from that story; they're part of what makes it human.

As technology continues to evolve, I hope creating by hand continues alongside it. I don't believe one requires the disappearance of the other. For me, there is something meaningful about leaving behind a tangible record of what I imagined, the decisions I made while creating it, and the fact that my own hand was physically there to make it.

— Interview

REALMS - Tsolady M'BOKOLO and Fitia JOLY RAZAFINDRAMNAVA



Your personal journey has taken you between France and Congo. How have these different cultural environments shaped your understanding of identity and your approach to fashion?

Tsolady M'BOKOLO: I was born in France in 2001, but from the summer of 2008 until the summer of 2016, I lived in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Those years shaped me in ways I don't think I fully understood until much later. When I returned to France, I realised I wasn't simply Congolese or French—I had become both, and neither, all at once. That experience taught me that identity isn't something fixed. It's something we carry, negotiate, lose, rediscover and continuously reshape.

As a child, I was already dreaming about creating clothes. Fashion fascinated me because it seemed capable of expressing things words couldn't. But over time, I realised what truly interested me wasn't clothing itself—it was what clothing could carry. Memory. Pride. Belonging. History.

REALMS grew out of that realization. I don't design garments simply because I think they're beautiful. I design because I want people—especially those whose cultures have often been simplified, misunderstood or erased—to see themselves reflected with dignity, complexity and elegance.

Living between two worlds didn't leave me feeling divided. It taught me that we are all made of multiple worlds, and that has become the



foundation of everything I create. For a long time, African cultures have often been interpreted through someone else's gaze. With REALMS, I hope to contribute, however modestly, to telling our stories from within—not as nostalgia, not as folklore, but as living cultures that continue to evolve, inspire, and shape the future. Fashion is simply the language I chose to do that

Fitia JOLY RAZAFINDRAMNAVA: Identity is something we owe it to ourselves to assert, out of respect for ourselves and others. The identity each person carries is a multitude of facets and mindsets, forged through the different experiences and challenges each of us faces. My journey has therefore inevitably influenced my identity. Clothing itself has always been a messenger, a social marker, and has been for hundreds of years. It allows one to express a

rank, a situation, a social status, and so on. Today, this approach can be elevated to a more personal dimension, one whose purpose is no longer to convey who we are in relation to society, but who we are within ourselves. And it is this vision that we must dare to assert, in order to present ourselves to the world in the most authentic way possible.

For both co-founders: How did your individual backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives come together in the creation of REALMS?

When we look back, we realise that our lives before REALMS already had many points of connection. We both grew up with a strong sense of cultural blending, carrying multiple influences that shaped the way we see ourselves and the world.

I was born in Normandy, France then lives in The Democratic Republic of Congo for eight years before coming back. Fitia grew up in Madagascar with a Malagasy mother and a French father. Our different backgrounds, our relationships with our heritage, and our experiences of navigating between cultures have always been a fundamental part of who we are.

When we first met in 2023, that was actually one of the first things we spoke about. Beyond fashion, we immediately connected through shared questions and convictions: How do we create something that goes beyond trends? How do we honour where we come from without being trapped by nostalgia? How do we speak about Africa with nuance, complexity, and respect rather than reducing it to a single visual language?

REALMS became our shared answer. Our conversations rarely begin with clothes. They begin with history, anthropology, philosophy, architecture, literature, music, and the stories carried by people and places. Fashion becomes the medium through which these reflections take shape.

What makes our collaboration meaningful is that we challenge each other, bring different perspectives, and question our own ideas constantly. But we always share the same goal: creating something more honest, more thoughtful, and more complete than what either of us could have created alone.

How do you divide the creative, strategic, and entrepreneurial responsibilities within REALMS? Are there moments when your different perspectives challenge one another and lead to unexpected creative decisions?

Tsolady M'BOKOLO: People often imagine that one person designs while the other manages the business. In reality, our work is much more intertwined.

I naturally spend more time shaping the long-term vision of REALMS—its identity, creative direction, partnerships and strategic development—but every important decision is discussed together.

The best ideas often emerge from disagreement. One of us might become emotionally attached to a concept while the other questions whether it truly serves the story we're trying to tell. Sometimes we spend hours discussing a silhouette, a textile or even the meaning of a single detail.



Those conversations can be demanding, but they're also incredibly valuable. They remind us that our responsibility isn't simply to create beautiful garments; it's to create garments that deserve to exist.

The name REALMS refers to the many worlds we carry within us—our histories, memories, cultures, and aspirations. How does this concept guide the development of a new collection from its earliest stages?

Tsolady M'BOKOLO: REALMS speaks about the invisible worlds each of us carries—our memories, our cultures, our dreams, our contradictions—but it is also a tribute to the countless kingdoms and realms that flourished across the African continent long before colonisation reshaped its borders and rewrote much of its history.

That double meaning is incredibly important to me.

Every collection begins with research rather than sketches. We immerse ourselves in history, anthropology, oral traditions, architecture, craftsmanship and symbolism. We ask ourselves not only what happened, but why it matters today.

Only after that process do garments begin to emerge.

Fashion has an extraordinary ability to preserve memory, but it also has the power to oversimplify cultures. We want to avoid that. Every collection is an invitation to discover a story—not a costume inspired by one.

Your inaugural collection includes sculptural tailoring, flowing silhouettes, draped forms, and vivid textile patterns. How did you develop a coherent visual language while allowing each garment to tell its own story?

Fitia JOLY RAZAFINDRAMNAVA: I'd say, rather, that every garment REALMS creates is part of a whole. Each piece tells the same story in different forms and with different details. And it is this story that forms the common foundation of every piece. What makes it unique is the person who wears it. It is they who add their own energy to it, finally making the garment complete.

Sustainability is expressed through reclaimed silk, recycled wool, organic linen, responsible materials, and a commitment to avoiding overproduction. What are the greatest challenges of maintaining these principles while building a growing fashion brand?

Fitia JOLY RAZAFINDRAMNAVA: Cost management, of course. Noble materials require more care and are therefore inevitably more expensive than cheap materials. This requires making choices in a way that upholds our principles without putting the brand at risk. But for REALMS, this isn't really a challenge, as environmentally and health-harmful alternatives aren't even an option we'd consider. Beyond materials, though, REALMS aims to work closely with artisans — and finding those artisans is a challenge in itself. What's more, since each collection is built around a specific guiding thread and theme, the raw materials and craftsmanship required are also specific, which can make sourcing genuinely challenging.

For both co-founders: As REALMS grows, how do you hope to explore the diversity of African cultures while preserving the specificity and integrity of each history, community, and craft tradition you reference?

This question is probably one of the most important to us because it touches the responsibility we carry as designers. REALMS' ambition is to become a living museum that people can wear. Not a museum frozen in time, but one that allows stories, crafts, histories, and cultures to continue moving, evolving, and being rediscovered.

Africa is not a single culture, a single aesthetic, or a single history. It is a continent of extraordinary diversity, and we never want our work to flatten that richness. Each collection will be guided by a specific theme, period, culture, or story, with the intention of creating a bridge between the past and the present.

Whenever we explore a culture that is not our own, we know that inspiration alone is not enough. We take the time to research, question, learn, and understand the people and histories behind the elements we reference. We

constantly challenge ourselves because we never want to appropriate something we do not fully understand or represent.

Our goal is not to simply borrow beautiful motifs or visual elements. It is to understand the meaning behind them, the communities that created them, and the stories they carry.

In the future, we hope to collaborate directly with historians, anthropologists, artisans, researchers, and local communities. We believe the most meaningful fashion does not extract from cultures—it creates conversations with them. Ultimately, every REALMS collection is a work of memory. If someone discovers a people, a kingdom, a craft tradition, or a history they had never encountered before because of one of our creations, then we have achieved something far more meaningful than simply making beautiful clothes: we have contributed, even modestly, to the transmission of stories that deserve to continue living.



Daniel Ramalan - Flameousart

Your artistic practice is built around fire, wood, and portraiture. How did you first discover that these three elements could become your own visual language?

I think these three elements found me rather than the other way around.

I have been drawing for as long as I can remember. As a child, I was always creating something, drawing, experimenting with different materials, and especially trying to capture people and faces. Realistic drawing and portraiture always felt very natural to me.



Daniel Ramalan - Flameousart | Soul Of Africa | 2017

My connection with wood also began at a very young age. We had a woodworking workshop at home, so I grew up surrounded by wood. I still remember the smell of wood and smoke from those days. Later, when I discovered pyrography, something immediately clicked. It brought together two elements that already felt very close to me — wood and fire — with something that had always been a part of me: drawing.

I initially started with traditional pyrography, using a heated wire. But I soon became curious about what I could achieve with an open flame. I began experimenting with different burners, temperatures, distances and movements. Through years of practice, mistakes and experimentation, I gradually developed my own technique and way of working.

So I never consciously decided that these three elements would become my artistic language. It happened naturally. They are connected to my childhood, my experiences, my creativity and my personal story.

Today, fire is my brush, wood is my canvas and portraiture is the way I tell stories through them.

You describe fire as your brush and wood as your canvas. What can fire express for you that you feel would be impossible to achieve with pencil, paint, or other traditional media?

Fire has something that no other medium can truly replace. It is alive, unpredictable and permanent. When I work with a pencil or paint, I can always erase, repaint or make changes. With fire, every movement matters. Once the flame touches the wood, the mark is there to stay. That gives the creative process a completely different intensity. I have to be fully present and completely focused. There is no real room for hesitation, and a single mistake can change an entire portrait. In a way, the fire forces me to trust my instincts and commit to every line.

But for me, fire is much more than a technical tool. It carries a very personal meaning. As a child, I experienced a house fire that took away our home and many of our belongings. For many years, fire was something I associated with fear and loss. Today, I use that same element to create something beautiful. That transformation is at the heart of my art. Fire once took something from me; today, it gives me a way to create, express myself and connect with other people. So when I say that fire is my brush, I really mean it. It gives my work not only a unique visual character, but also emotion, unpredictability, warmth and a sense of transformation that I could never achieve in quite the same way with a traditional medium.

Fire is naturally unpredictable, while your portraits require extraordinary precision. How do you balance control and unpredictability during the creation of a work?

That balance is probably one of the most challenging and fascinating parts of working with fire. I can control many things; the temperature, the distance of the flame from the wood, the speed of my movement and the pressure I use, but I can never control the fire completely. And I think that is exactly what makes the process so special.

It took me many years of practice to understand how the flame behaves and how different types of wood react to heat. I learned to read the fire almost instinctively. I know when to bring the flame closer, when to pull it away, when to move quickly and when to slow down.

At the same time, I have learned not to fight the unpredictability. I leave a little space for the fire to do what it naturally does. Sometimes it creates a line, texture or shadow that I could never have planned myself, and those unexpected details can become an important part of the final piece.

So I would say I don't try to completely control the fire. I guide it, but I also listen to it. The precision comes from my experience and concentration, while the unpredictability comes from the fire itself. The final artwork is created somewhere between the two.

The natural grain, knots, and imperfections of

wood remain visible in many of your portraits. How much does the character of each wooden surface influence the final image?

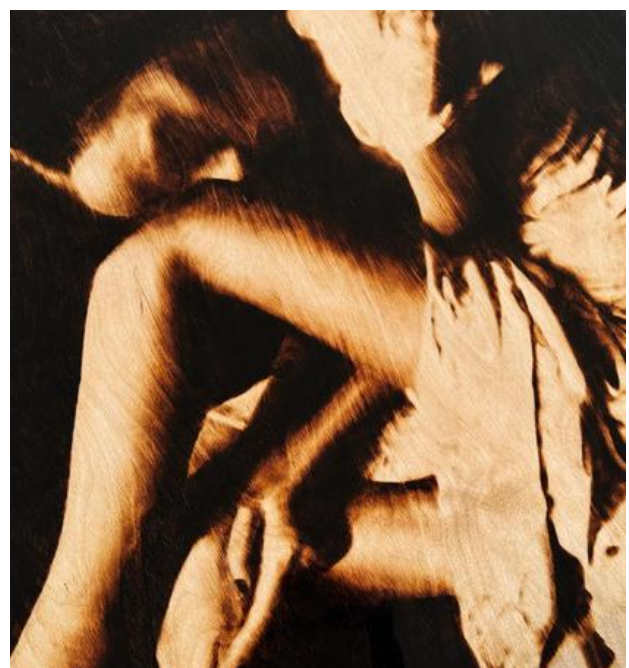
The character of the wood has a very important influence on the final image. For me, wood is never just a blank surface or a simple canvas. Every piece has its own grain, texture, knots, colour and imperfections, and I try to work with those natural characteristics rather than hide them. Sometimes the grain almost becomes part of the portrait. It can add movement, depth or texture, and occasionally it creates an effect that I could never have planned myself. Other times, I have to adapt my technique because every piece of wood reacts differently to the heat of the flame.

That is also one of the reasons why no two of my portraits can ever be exactly the same. Even if I used the same reference photograph and followed the same process, the result would still be different because the wood itself is different.

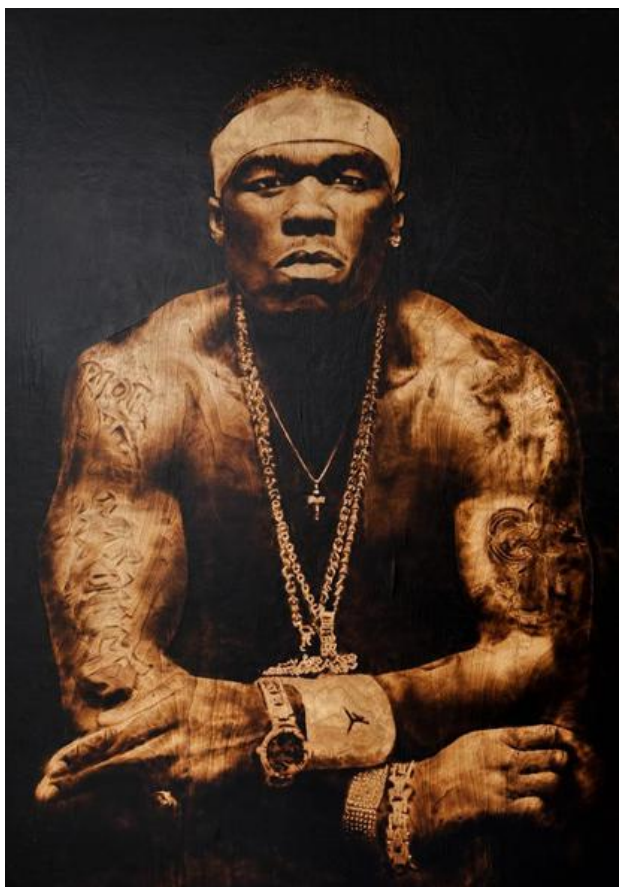
I actually see those imperfections as part of the beauty. They remind us that the material is natural and alive. I don't want to completely erase the character of the wood. I want the portrait and the wood to become one piece, so that the natural story of the material remains visible within the image.

Portraiture is central to your practice, and you frequently depict musicians, athletes, actors, and other cultural figures. What qualities make you decide that a particular person should become the subject of one of your fire portraits?

For me, it is rarely just about how famous someone is. I choose people who have inspired me in some way or



Daniel Ramalan - Flameousart | White Agony | 2024



whose story, character, talent or journey means something to me.

Many of the people I portray are musicians, athletes, actors or other cultural figures who have been part of my life for years. Some inspired me when I was growing up, while others continue to inspire me today. As a former basketball player and a lifelong lover of music, I naturally feel a strong connection to artists and athletes who have dedicated their lives to what they love.

When I look at a face, I am not only interested in the physical features. I look for character and emotion, something behind the eyes, a certain energy or presence that tells a story. A portrait becomes much more meaningful to me when I feel that there is a story behind the person.

Creating a portrait is also my way of showing respect. I am trying to capture not only what someone looks like, but what they represent to me; their strength, passion, resilience, creativity or influence.

And of course, there is something incredibly special when the person who inspired the portrait eventually sees it. When someone like Sean Paul, the members of Black Eyed Peas, or other people I admire connects with a piece I created, it feels like a very personal exchange between the artist and the person who inspired the work.

The making-of videos on your social media have become an important part of your practice and

have reached millions of viewers. Do you consider these videos simply documentation, or have they become a separate extension of the artwork itself?

At the beginning, I saw the videos mainly as a way of documenting my work. I wanted people to see what actually happens behind the finished portrait, how many hours go into it, how carefully every movement has to be made, and how the image slowly emerges from a blank piece of wood through fire. But over time, the videos have become much more than documentation. In a way, they have become an extension of the artwork itself. The finished portrait shows the result, while the video tells the story of how that result came to life.

There is something very powerful about watching a face gradually appear through fire. You can see the transformation taking place in real time, and I think that creates a completely different emotional connection with the artwork. People can also understand that this is genuinely handmade and that every line has been created by me, rather than simply seeing a finished image on a piece of wood.

The response has been incredible. One of my YouTube videos featuring legendary American rappers has reached more than 15 million views, while my Cypress Hill portrait video has passed 2.6 million views. A video of my Michael Jackson portrait on my Flameousart Facebook page has also reached 7.9 million views. The work has also been noticed and shared by people and organisations connected to the artists I portray. The members of Black Eyed Peas shared my videos on their social media, the official Dutty Rock Productions account connected to Sean Paul shared videos of his portrait, and the Dallas Mavericks have also shared some of my work, including the process of creating a portrait of Luka Dončić.

So today, I see the videos as a second layer of my art. The physical portrait is the final object, but the video captures the movement, the fire, the time, the tension and the transformation behind it. In that sense, the process itself has become part of the artwork and sometimes the video reaches millions of people who may never have had the chance to see the physical piece in person.

You have had the opportunity to present works directly to some of the cultural figures you portray. How does meeting the subject of a portrait change your perception of the artwork after it has been completed?

Meeting the person I have portrayed can be an incredibly powerful and emotional experience. When I create a portrait, I spend many hours looking at that person's face, studying every detail and thinking about their story and what they represent to me. In a way, I



get to know the person through the process of creating the portrait, even though we have never met. Then suddenly, you are standing in front of the real person, holding something you created with your own hands specifically for them. That changes the meaning of the artwork completely.

I experienced this when I had the opportunity to personally give my portraits to Sean Paul and the members of Black Eyed Peas. Seeing their genuine reactions was something I will never forget. With the Black Eyed Peas, for example, they had already seen the videos online, so when we met backstage in Zagreb, they immediately recognised me and the artwork. Will.i.am even said, "I saw that video... Man, that was you?" Moments like that are incredibly special.

What makes these encounters meaningful to me is not simply meeting famous people. It is seeing that something I created has genuinely touched the person who inspired it. When they look at the portrait and recognise the time, emotion and passion behind it, the artwork suddenly becomes more than an image on wood.

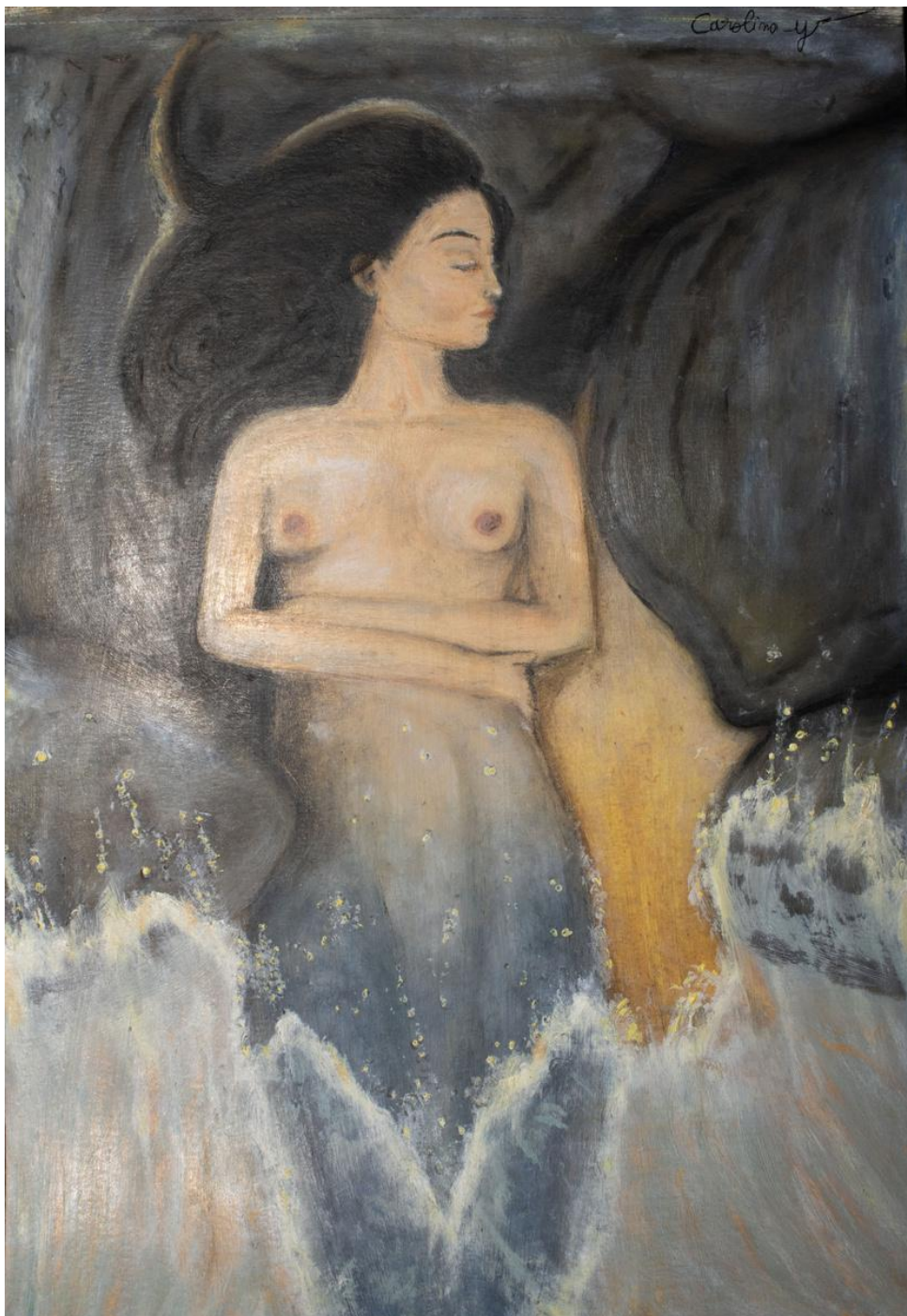
It also reminds me why I create in the first place. Behind every famous face is a real person with their own story, struggles and emotions. Meeting them brings that human connection into the artwork, and sometimes that is the most valuable part of the entire journey.

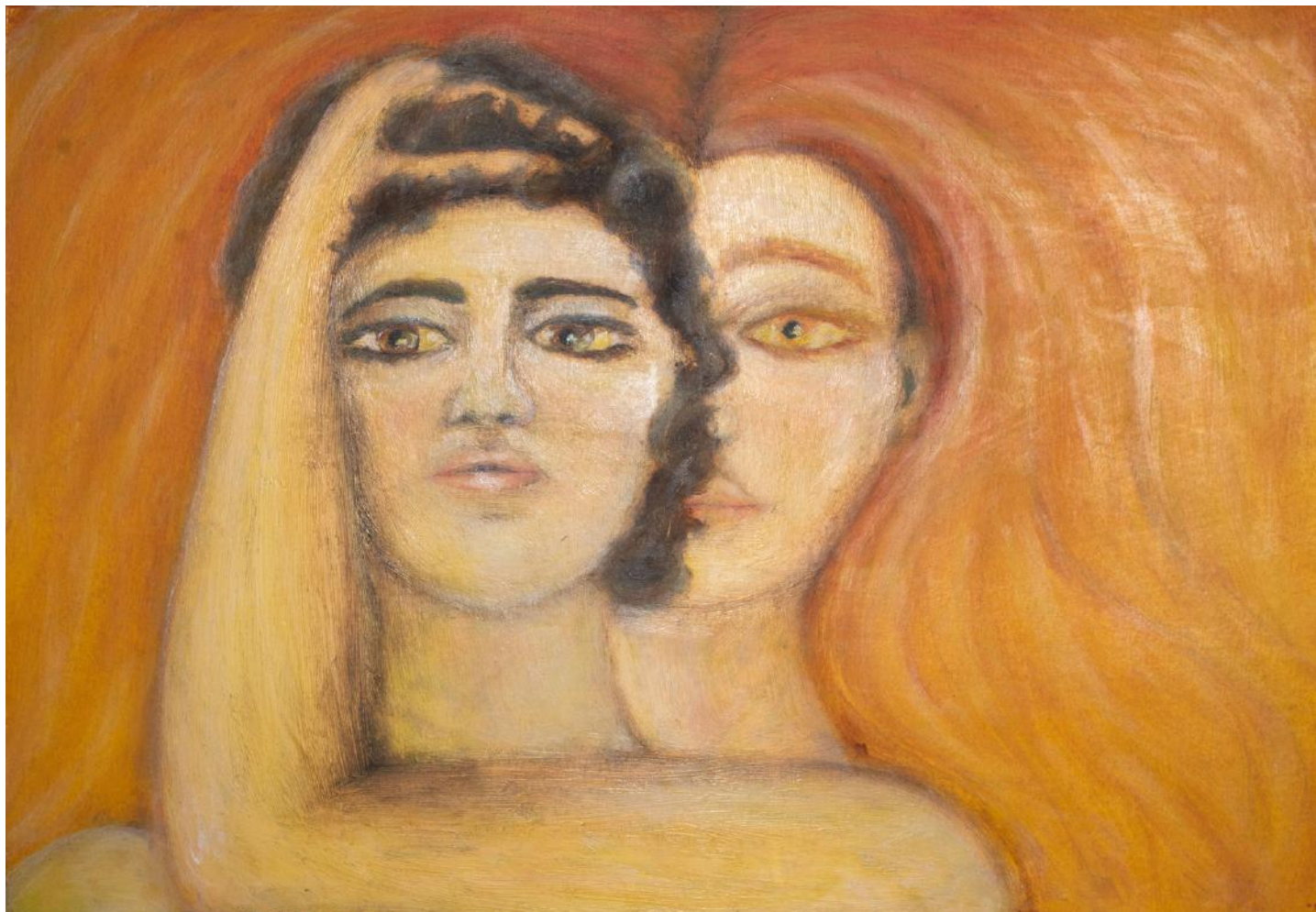
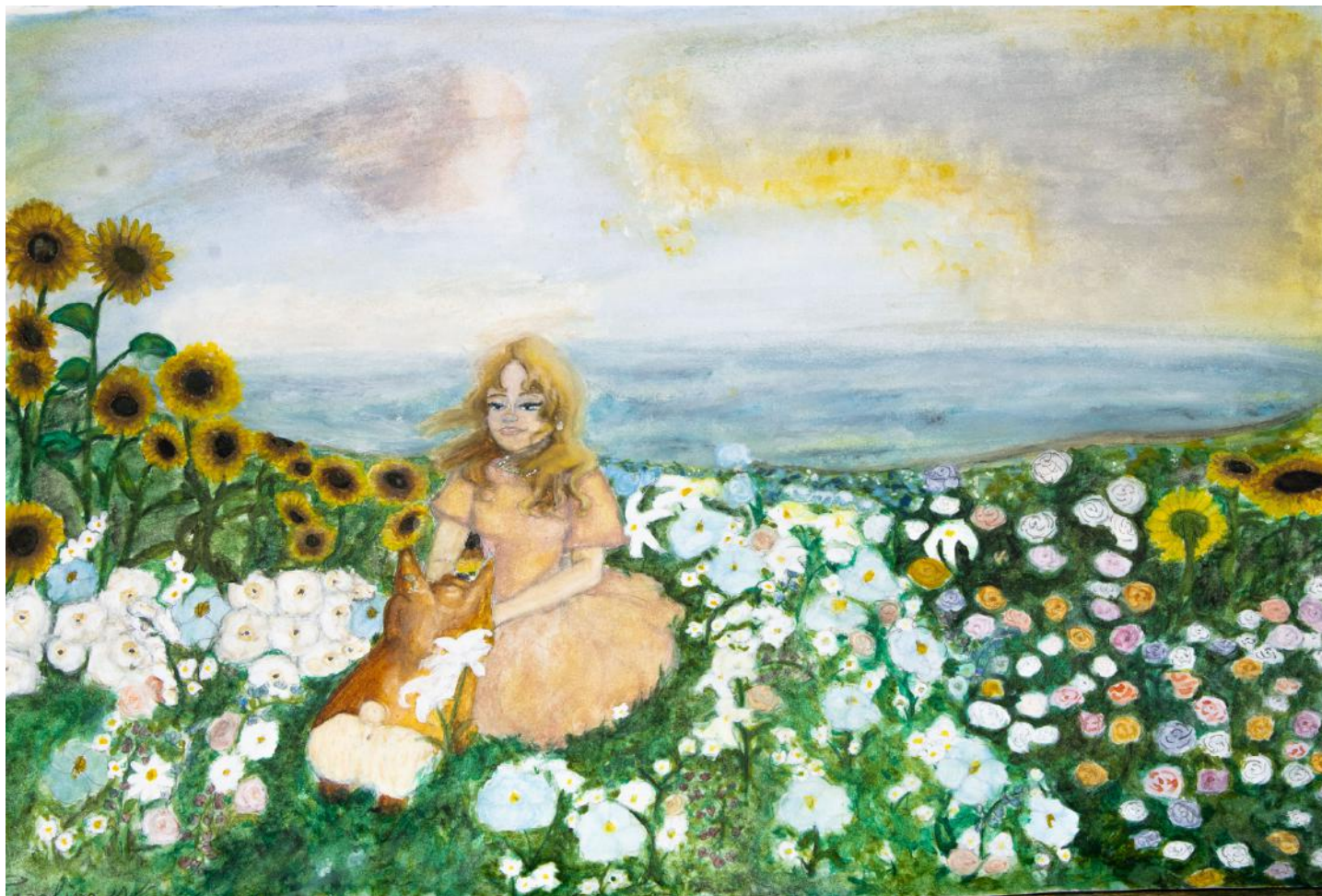
For me, the portrait starts as my interpretation of someone, but once I place it in their hands, it becomes part of their story too. And that is a beautiful feeling.

Carolina Guerreiro was born on the first of May in 2003, in Portugal. She developed in the early ages the mind and skills in Painting, and learned on the bases on memory, observacion and passion. With the time passed by, she enter in Hight School , did a course of Visual Arts. And later had a bachelor degree in Photography on Polytecnic University in Tomar.

Project Statement

My Project statement is that I call his theme an Alegoria (Allegory) for they are diferent paitings, diferent feeling and reflexions that I had in past years, a symbolic self portrait as a mermaid, the title "Sleeping in th Rocks", a human representacion of a childhood and its beauty, "Catalina", a Orpheus in his end, and man with a haunting, burning woman behide him.





— Interview

Sofia-Karla Axelsson

Your work moves between photography, music, dance, and visual storytelling. How did these different creative disciplines become connected in your artistic practice?

From childhood, creativity was always very present in my life. My father photographed with an analogue camera, which eventually became the first camera I used myself. I started taking photographs of my sisters, styling them and creating little scenes around them. He also filmed us with a VHS camera, so images, movement and storytelling were part of my everyday life from an early age.

I also had the opportunity to assist photographer Håkan Olsen on one photoshoot and took part in his photography courses at Photo International in the north of Sweden. Being able to learn through both practical experience and his courses gave me an important foundation in photography. Storytelling was another natural part of my childhood. I was always making up stories, and later I took literature courses and drama classes. When it came time to choose my education, I remember feeling very divided between media and dance and theatre. I didn't really want to choose just one subject.

Music was equally important. I played the violin because of my father's musical background, and although I learned the instrument traditionally, I often found myself wanting to improvise rather than simply play exactly as the teacher instructed. I also took piano and singing lessons. My musical influences came from both of my parents in different ways. Through my father I discovered classical music and artists such as Itzhak Perlman, while my mother introduced me to The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and other music that became part of my creative world.

Looking back, I think that instinct to move between different



forms of expression has remained at the centre of my artistic practice. Photography, music, movement and storytelling have become different ways for me to explore the same things: emotion, atmosphere, identity and the stories we carry within us.

Nature plays a strong role in your images, often appearing almost like a character rather than simply a setting. What draws you to forests, fields, and other natural environments?

I grew up in the north, surrounded by greenery and nature, so being close to the natural world has always felt very familiar to me. Even after moving into more urban environments, I have often found myself wanting to return to that feeling of complete stillness.

There is something about being in a forest where you can feel completely anonymous. You can have your own space, your integrity and your peace, away from the noise and expectations of everyday life. I think that feeling has stayed with me and naturally found its way into my photography. At the same time, I have realised that you can carry that feeling of stillness within you, even when you are living in a big city. The environment may be completely different, but there can still be an inner sense of solitude, freedom and peace. I think that contrast interests me—the relationship between the outside world and the inner landscape we carry with us.

For me, nature therefore becomes more than a setting. It represents a state of mind, a place of freedom and introspection, and sometimes a way of returning to something very essential within myself.

Many of your photographs have a dreamlike, cinematic atmosphere and seem to suggest a story beyond the frame. How do you develop the narratives behind your images?

I think I have a very visuospatial way of thinking. I often see things as images, compositions, movements and atmospheres before I have put them into words. An image



can appear in my mind almost like a scene from a film, and from there a narrative begins to develop.

I also really enjoy the way dreams communicate through metaphors. Dreams don't always explain themselves literally; they use images, symbols, emotions and unexpected connections. I think that has influenced the way I approach photography. I am interested in creating images that suggest something rather than explain everything.

Often there is a story behind an image, but I don't necessarily want to give the viewer the entire story. I prefer to leave something open, so that the photograph can become a fragment of a larger narrative and the viewer can bring their own memories, feelings and imagination into it.

For me, the dreamlike quality comes from that space between what is real and what is imagined. I want the images to feel as though they could be a memory, a dream, or a moment from a story that continues beyond the frame.

In several of your photographs, people are partially hidden, cropped, or obscured from view. What interests you about showing the human figure in this way?

A human being is complex, and so is a human story. I think there is something beautiful about not revealing everything. When the face is hidden, cropped, or obscured, the image becomes less about a specific identity and more about the feeling, the gesture, or the story that might be taking place. One of the mysterious qualities of a photograph is that it can leave you guessing. I don't always want to tell the viewer exactly who someone is or what has happened. I would rather leave small clues and allow them to wonder, imagine and create their own interpretation.

For me, what is left unseen can sometimes be just as important as what is visible. It creates a sense that there is a larger story beyond the frame, and I like giving the viewer that space to enter the image with their own imagination.

You have lived in Stockholm, London, and Spain. Have these different places and cultural environments influenced your visual language or artistic identity?

I think each place has influenced me in a different way, not only visually but also in how I understand people, culture and creative expression.

I studied both in Stockholm and London, but my time in London opened up something very strongly in me. The contemporary dance scene, the galleries and exhibitions, and the opportunity to meet different artists, choreographers and teachers exposed me to many different ways of thinking and creating. I found a sense of openness and experimentation in

the way people approached art and the world around them, and that was deeply inspiring to me. It expanded my own way of seeing and made me more curious about what is possible when different disciplines and perspectives meet.

In Spain, I found inspiration through a local choreographer whose dance classes I attended, and I also made an effort to learn and practise the language. I wanted to connect more deeply with the people who actually lived there, rather than remaining on the outside as a visitor or experiencing only the commercial and tourist-oriented side of the country.

I think I have always liked entering a new environment and adapting to it while still bringing my own story with me. For me, it is not about leaving one identity behind and taking on another, but about allowing yourself to flow with a new place and letting it become part of you.

At the same time, Stockholm and the northern environment where I grew up are deeply connected to my visual language. There is a relationship to nature, stillness and space that I carry with me wherever I go.

I don't think these places have given me separate identities. Rather, they have become different layers of my visual language and the way I experience and interpret the world.

When creating a new project, what usually comes first for you: an image, an emotion, a piece of music, a personal experience, or something else?

Often, it begins with a feeling. That feeling might create a visual image in my mind, or sometimes it becomes a movement in my body. I can feel when it is something I want to work further on, and then I develop the idea from that very seed.

I might start drawing what I see on paper, making a rough sketch, or writing down words and fragments of ideas. Sometimes it becomes almost like creating a scenography—I begin to imagine the space, the movement, the atmosphere, the people and the story within it.

From there, the different disciplines can naturally come together. A visual idea might lead to photography, movement might become music, or words might develop into a larger visual world. For me, the creative process is intuitive, but also very deliberate in the way I nurture that first idea and allow it to grow.

Across your work, you often invite the viewer into moments of introspection and emotional ambiguity. What do you hope people experience or discover when spending time with your art?

I hope people can experience the many feelings that the journey of life takes us through. The deep, raw emotions—the joy as well as the sadness—are all part of being human. I don't think we can separate one from the other, because it is often through experiencing the full range of emotions that we grow and understand ourselves more deeply.

I would like my work to create a space where people can pause and perhaps recognise something of themselves. Maybe an emotion, a memory, a longing, or a moment they have experienced in their own life.

For me, we are all human travellers. We move through different landscapes, both externally and within ourselves. I think art can accompany us on that journey—not necessarily by giving us answers, but by allowing us to feel, reflect and perhaps see something from a different perspective.

Mark Fine Art is an international visual artist known for a distinctive approach to contemporary narrative painting.

The artist's career is marked by a rigorous exhibition history across major European and global art hubs.

In 2024, artist held a successful solo exhibition in Hampshire, UK.

The artist's work has been widely exhibited in Zurich, London, Amsterdam, and Prague, and featured in prominent UK and international contemporary art publications.

EXHIBITIONS

2021 – “3 rd Open” Art Show International Gallery -US

2021- Blue Blood Gallery -Czech Republic

2021- Colors of Humanity Art Gallery - USA

2022 –SwissArtEXPO- Zurich Switzerland

2022- Thomson Gallery -Zug Switzerland

2022- Lelie Galerij- Amsterdam, Netherlands

2022 - Light Space & Time Online Art Gallery- New Mexico

2022- “ 7th International Art of Alanya Exhibition”- Turkey

2023- “Spectrum” - The Holy Art Gallery UK London

2025- Bobcat Gallery UK London

ART FAIRS

2026 – Bath Art Fair UK

2026 – Sussex Art Fair UK

2026 – Surrey Art Fair UK

PUBLICATIONS

2022- LitFM Russi

2022 - Art&Culture UK

2022 – Publication in the magazine “Art agent” Russia.

2022 – Publication in the magazine “Boomer Art for real” UK

Project Statement

My artistic practice is an exploration of the physical presence of light and energy through the medium of oil painting.

Working in a bespoke technique of Sculptural Pointillism, I move away from the traditional horizontal brushstroke to create a three-dimensional, rhythmic surface.

The foundation of my method lies in a meticulous, meditative process. I construct each image through thousands of individual, volumetric dots, applying thick oil paint with a vertical ‘stabbing’ motion of the brush. This approach transforms paint from a mere pigment into a sculptural material, turning the canvas into a tactile relief that inhabits the viewer's space.

Core Principles of My Work:

Tactile Impressionism:

Each dot on the canvas is a micro-object with its own physical volume. This makes the artwork come alive; it shifts and evolves depending on the gallery lighting, casting micro-shadows that create an effect of real movement in water or the shimmering of the air.

Optical Vibration:

By placing pure, unmixed colours side-by-side, I create a pulsating field of light. The viewer's eye blends these sculpted dots into a singular image only at a distance, achieving an internal luminosity that classical techniques cannot replicate.

Elemental Energy:

My technique allows me to manifest the raw power of a moment—whether it is the dynamic tension of wildlife or the majesty of a seascape at sunset. I do not merely record an image; I materialise the very energy of the experience.

For me, every painting is a physical embodiment of time and labour, where each dot serves as a vital link in a complex architecture of light.



Mark Fine Art | Nocturnal Energy | 2026

Jens Christoph Gehring

You began with analogue photography and learned to develop your own films and prints in the darkroom. How has that early hands-on experience shaped the way you approach photography today?

The era of analog photography has shaped me in various ways. On the one hand, it taught me technical skills—what happens in the photographic process, such as the exposure itself or the development—without relying blindly on predetermined procedures. With this knowledge as a foundation, I can focus more intently on the actual photographic and creative aspects. On the other hand, it has helped me develop my own perspective on my photographs. I'm more selective, often even before I press the shutter button. It's almost as if I see a contact sheet in my mind's eye, which allows me to assess more quickly which of



Jens Christoph Gehring | Watt | 2021

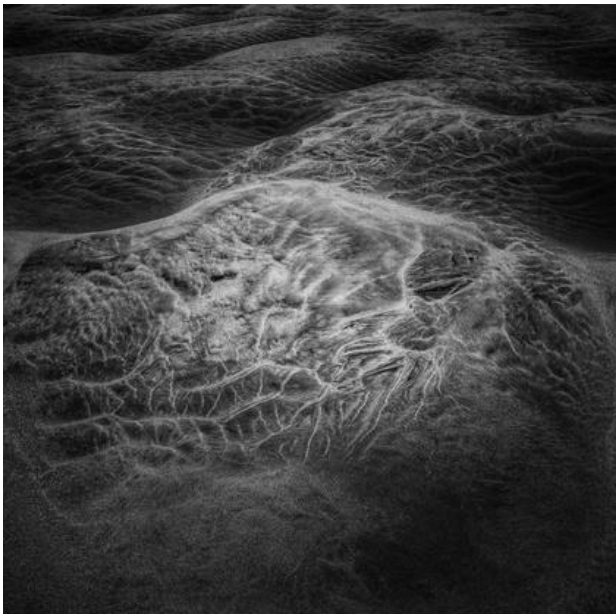
my photographs will have which effect. Even though my workflow is now digital, I still make time to experiment with analog techniques.

Photography became your life's work after a personal change in 2012. How did that transition affect the subjects you chose to photograph and the way you understood your own artistic practice?

This personal transformation has led me to view things more critically and to try to convey that in my photographs. I no longer take anything for granted; instead, I see everything as special and a gift. I take more time when developing concepts and try to examine them from different perspectives. As a result, they evolve over time and take shape. In 2012, I revisited a theme I had originally begun in the mid-1980s and adapted it to the social changes of the present day. But change itself as a theme also fascinates me and has been a recurring motif in my work ever since. In our thinking, change is often viewed negatively. For me, it is a transformation that can also unleash energy and, with it, creativity. It opens up new perspectives for our consciousness and encourages us to cross boundaries.

In your Watt photographs, the landscape appears almost abstract, with the surface shaped by lines, ridges, shadows, and traces. What initially attracted you to this particular environment?

My WATT series came about without any prior



planning. When I saw the scene before me, I was overwhelmed by what I saw and had to capture it. So it just happened to me. I was drawn to the shapes created by nature, which is constantly reinventing itself. After every tide change, new patterns emerge. Especially at the sea, we experience this process of change several times a day. For me, this process is a metaphor for the call to constantly work on myself and to embrace change—whether in the photographic process, in my personal behavior, or in my outlooks and perspectives.

Your images seem to exist somewhere between landscape photography and abstraction. How important is it to you that the viewer recognizes the actual place being photographed?

It is not important to me that viewers recognize the locations in my photographs. They are interchangeable. What matters to me is that the viewer's identification with what is shown is based not on the setting but on the subject matter, and that it evokes a response in the viewer. What is shown can then, regardless of its actual location, merge with the viewer's memories or newly formed mental images.

The black-and-white treatment gives these landscapes a strong sense of texture and structure. What does monochrome allow you to express that color might not?

Years ago, I asked myself why black-and-white photography appeals to me. In a conversation with a well-known photographer, I received an

explanation that resonated with me. He said, "Color is life; black-and-white is reality." And that's exactly how I feel. It gets right to the point, takes the viewer by the hand, and leads them more quickly and directly to the image's message. The viewer's gaze and perception of what is shown are not distracted or influenced by color. So, using monochrome, I can create a message that would lose its impact if rendered in color.

In recent years, your work has increasingly been shown internationally, including exhibitions connected with the Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles. Has encountering your photographs in different cultural and exhibition contexts changed the way you see your own work?

I wouldn't call it a new perspective on my work. It has always been—and remains—important to me to stay true to myself. However, participating in international exhibitions and the Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles has shown me that I need to engage in a critical examination of my own work. Even though I've done this in the past, the level of depth required was a new experience for me. It was also interesting for me to observe that while the recognition for my exhibited works remained consistent, the evaluation—or rather, the perspective—from the outside varied depending on the cultural context. This helped me establish a framework for my critical assessment.

When viewers stand in front of your photographs, what kind of experience would you like them to have: recognition of a landscape, contemplation of natural processes, or something more personal and subjective?

For me, recognizability is secondary. I'm not interested in picture-postcard idylls, but in the details—those little things that only reveal themselves upon closer inspection. Regardless of genre, these can be details that affect us in our urban environment, such as walls, benches, or chairs, water, or clouds. In our fast-paced and consumer-oriented society, where everything revolves around the big picture and where the focus is increasingly on "I" rather than "WE," it's important to me to use my photographs of these small things to create a counterbalance—to give the viewer the opportunity to pause and find peace, and, in the best-case scenario, to inspire a process of change within them.

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An abstract painting featuring a central figure draped in a vibrant red cloth, set against a background of dense, textured foliage in autumnal hues of orange, yellow, and green. The style is expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, layered composition. The red cloth has a subtle pattern and a small, light-colored circular detail near the top. The foliage is rendered with a mix of warm and cool tones, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is one of a dreamlike, natural scene.

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