VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

VISUAL ART JOURNAL



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Intro



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Dear reader,

You are holding the 65th issue of our magazine, woven from diverse forms of art like a beautiful tapestry. Within these pages, you will discover painters, photographers, sculptors, and many other creative voices that make the world of visual art so rich and vibrant.

Recently, we have also begun featuring exhibition reviews in our issues. I would like to emphasize just how important these events are, not only for visitors but also for the artists themselves. Being seen, connecting with fellow creatives, and sharing experiences are all essential parts of a meaningful exchange of energy, emotions, and ideas.

For us, as exhibition organizers, it is especially rewarding to see how warmly these events are received by the public. We continue to develop this direction, and in the future, we look forward to expanding the geographical reach of our exhibitions and exploring new spaces around the world.

Returning to the magazine, as always, more than 100 pages of beauty, thought-provoking ideas, and inspiration await you.

Enjoy the read!

On the Front Cover:
Daria Diterikhs
Regent Street London
2025

On the Back Cover:
Ana de Salazar
On the Other Side of
San Francisco
2026

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

Interview



Tsvetelina Tsonova

How did your journey as a self-taught artist begin, and what made watercolor the medium you wanted to explore?

My journey as an artist began with curiosity and a desire to create something with my own hands. I chose watercolor as my preferred medium because of its transparency and expressiveness. It gives me a kind of freedom that I haven't found in other mediums. At the same time, it is very challenging, and I guess I love being challenged.
I love the way water and pigment interact, how colors blend, and how a painting can develop in unexpected ways. There is always something new to discover, and I think that is one of the reasons I keep coming back to it.



Tsvetelina Tsonova | The Hour Between Arrivals

When you travel, what makes a particular scene feel like the beginning of a painting? Could you share an example from one of the works presented here?

I take a lot of photographs during my trips. Honestly, at that moment, I don't always know whether they will become paintings. I just want to capture every place that makes me feel something, and then use watercolor to capture that feeling so I can share it with others.
When I return home, I go through my photographs and choose the ones I would like to paint. I often make a quick sketch on the same day, and if I like it, I develop it into a finished painting in my home studio later on.
For example, in my painting "Andalisia", I was drawn to the contrast between all the greenery and the earthy, reddish colors of the brick buildings.

How do you develop a painting after visiting a place? What roles do photographs, sketches, and your memories play in the process?

My paintings often begin during a trip, with photographs and sometimes quick sketches or notes. I like to collect visual impressions while I am there, even if I do not yet know which ones will eventually become paintings.
Back home, I look through my photographs and try to identify the scenes that still hold my attention. I consider the composition, the main shapes, and the relationship between light and shadow. Sometimes I make a small sketch or experiment with colors before beginning the final painting.
Photographs are an important reference, particularly when I need to understand architectural details or the structure of a scene. However, I do not feel obliged to reproduce everything exactly as it appears in the



Tsvetelina Tsonova | Where The Day Slows Down

photograph. I may simplify a building, change a color, leave out distracting details, or emphasize an element that feels important to me.
My memories help me decide what to preserve and what to change. Ultimately, I want the painting to reflect my experience of the place, rather than simply reproduce an image of it.

You describe travel as leaving behind colors, light, and emotions. How does the time between a journey and a painting affect what you choose to preserve or change?

I think time can be an important part of the creative process. When I first visit a place, I am surrounded by details and impressions. Later, when I return to the photographs and sketches, I can begin to distinguish what really stayed with me from what was simply part of the moment.
Sometimes I remember a particular color or the quality of the light more strongly than the actual details of a building. Other times, it is the atmosphere of a street or the feeling of being somewhere unfamiliar that remains.
This distance gives me more freedom to interpret what I saw. I can simplify the scene, adjust the colors, or focus on the elements that best communicate the feeling I want to preserve. I do not necessarily want to recreate the place exactly as it was. I want to paint what remains with me after I have left.

Your paintings bring together warm rooftops, cool shadows, and softly lit skies. How do you use color relationships to recreate the atmosphere you remember?

The five paintings I shared are from my Watercolor Escapes collection. My idea was to paint the beautiful places I discovered during my travels on sunny days, so the colors are more vibrant rather than muted.
I play with light and shadow, warm and cool colors, and in certain places, I intentionally make the contrasts stronger to draw the viewer's eye to what I want to emphasize in the painting.

Architecture requires careful observation, while watercolor can behave unpredictably. How do you balance the structure of a building with the freedom of the medium?

This is definitely a challenge, but as I mentioned, I love challenges. Maybe that is why I am drawn to cityscapes rather than landscapes, for example.
Over time, I have learned that sometimes it is best to let the watercolor do its thing and let go of the instinct to control everything. I don't mind if a color goes beyond the lines. I actually like it when it does! I enjoy painting wet-on-wet, allowing the colors to blend and embracing the unexpected results.
I don't want my paintings to feel too rigid or overly controlled. Sometimes a few well-placed lines and carefully chosen shadows are enough to suggest the character of a building. For me, the balance lies in understanding the structure well enough to know where I can loosen up and let the medium take over.

Has painting the places you visit changed the way you look at Sofia? What do you notice in your everyday surroundings now that you might once have overlooked?

Yes, I think painting has made me more attentive to my surroundings, and that includes Sofia.
For a long time, I was particularly drawn to places I discovered while traveling. Visiting new cities and exploring their architecture gave me an endless source of inspiration. But recently, I have started looking more closely at the places around me and discovering that the familiar can be just as interesting as somewhere new. Like for example the painting "The Hour Between Arrivals". The reference is from my home town - Vratsa.
It is also a reminder that inspiration does not necessarily depend on going somewhere new. Sometimes, it comes from learning to see a familiar place differently.



Tsvetelina Tsonova | Whispers Of The Old Fortress

Daria Diterikhs is a professional painter. She holds a formal academic education in fine arts and specializes in large-scale portraiture using oil and acrylic. Daria's artistic journey is deeply influenced by street photography, particularly the urban rhythm of London. Her recent project, “London Faces I Never Met”, explores the psychological depth and quiet presence of strangers we pass by. By combining classical academic techniques with the modern energy of the street, she creates bold artworks that command attention and serve as ideal focal points for contemporary interiors.

Project Statement
My current project, “London Faces I Never Met”, is a series of paintings based on candid street photographs taken in London. The series reimagines the quiet presence of elderly gentlemen and ladies we pass by. Through brushstrokes that blend memory and invention, the works pay tribute to fleeting moments of anonymous intimacy - faces seen but never known. In this practice, the city becomes a shared canvas where photography captures a moment in time, and painting rewrites it into a lasting narrative.



Daria Diterikhs | Regent Street London | 2025



Daria Diterikhs | Duke Street London | 2025

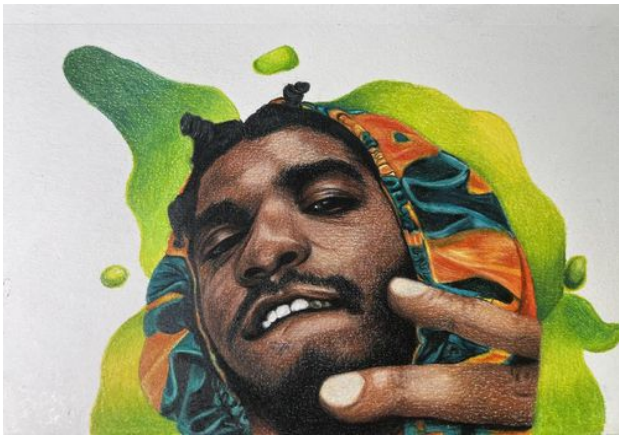
Interview

Hannah Bokanoski



As a self-taught artist, what discoveries helped you develop your approach to drawing, and what drew you specifically to oil-based colored pencils?

As a self taught artist my approach to drawing took shape when I was practicing line work through still life. While I enjoyed learning about the object or person, I became more interested in what the object/ person was doing rather than how it exactly existed. This discovery during my early drawing years quickly



turned into an obsession with expression. I realized I was finding profound beauty in drama and intensity which catapulted my work to focus on emphasizing the real, the raw, and the gritty. For a long time, I thought the ultimate goal of drawing was to try to make my pieces look as real as possible. My approach changed when I discovered expressionism and found that exaggeration and style can convey emotion far better than copying reality. Now, my approach is focused on using realism as an anchor to hold space while adding creative touches to take my drawings in more directions and provoke more thought than I felt perfectionism could. A major turning point in the quality of my work was discovering the capacity of premium oil-based colored pencils for heavy, deliberate layering. When I first became interested in color pencil I treated them like standard drawing tools, but I saw that by controlling the pressure and building layers, I could achieve lifelike depth. Discovering how to blend oil pigments allowed me to move away from grainy textures and achieve a high refinement that rivals various oil based mediums.

What makes a particular face, gesture, or everyday moment compelling enough for you to turn it into a drawing?

I try to create pieces that capture moments life is being expressed candidly because that feels the most true and real. I find myself interested in the unscripted

human experience and natural movement so when finding who or what to draw I try to find obscure images to play with and pull Inspiration from. A face, gesture, and every day moments sparks a drawing for me when it tells an honest story. I live by own motto "the more drama the more inspiration". My love for fashion contributed to the evolution of my drawing style as I started to include elements of texture and styling. I started watching various fashion weeks and letting the designs speak to me. Drapery and veils often have fold that create these pockets of light and pushes the image across a space in ways that seem alive and when I can find something like that in the wild it almost a necessity to try to re create in a drawing in my own style.

Your technique involves meticulous layering and blending. How much of a drawing is planned beforehand, and what remains open to discovery as you work?

Almost every drawing I've ever started was planned in some way. Now did it always go the way I planned? Nope. Usually when planning a drawing I will have specific parts fully conceptualized and then there are parts that I allow my imagination to cover for me as I go. As someone who draws with meticulous layering and detail planning and mapping has always helped me create better quality work and stay on task. With that said I am always open minded to the changes that may be inevitable or necessary. While I am coming up with an idea for a piece often times I will have write down various notes and ideas to keep a good grasp on the direction I'm going before a drawing is started. Once I have a good concept down I work on what I want my outline to look like and start mapping out how I want the image to look on paper. That's when the layering begins, and where things can go in a different direction than you imagined. Oil based color pencil is truly a "trust the process" medium that takes a few passes to get to a point where you start seeing the picture come to life, and in that sometimes parts you wanted one way start to take form and you think of something even better. So while planning is very important to my process, keeping an open mind has allowed me to come up with some of my best pieces.

Skin, leather, and patterned fabric each have a distinct tactile presence in your work. How do these textures contribute to the emotional story of a piece?

Material and the way they lay tells a story just as much as a face making an expression. Each have the ability to tell you how the moment feels. Long drapes can feel dramatic and classy, whereas veiled pieces that look structured have a mysterious element that can feel



stoic or somber. While I want my pieces to look like you can touch them and they would feel like the material or substance I attempt to emulate I also want there to be stories captured in the way you see material styled and persons posed. Most of the fabric you see in my work is directly inspired by moments where we are physically present but internally absent and the human experience we all share in how that affects us. Skin, however, is the ultimate canvas and is where the raw emotion lives. It can be soft, fragile, exposed, covered, tough, and anything in between. The intertwining of skin texture, expression, and fabrics creates moments of movement that can almost mirror a subjects internal psychological state.

Some of your drawings feature vivid blues, greens, and oranges, while others use a restrained, nearly monochromatic palette. How do you decide which approach a subject needs?

The subject matter of a piece is typically what decides the approach of the color palette. Certain subjects can be anything from one of my favorite musicians that have specific style and attitude to an inspiration design from a fashion week that's sophisticated and serious. I let a lot of the color selection do the talking when it comes to the way I want my piece perceived. If a drawing is supposed to catch your attention in a way that makes us feel entertained I tend to use an array of rich vibrant colors to let your imagination wander and see what pops. My more edgy pieces will likely lean towards a more monochromatic pallet when the work needs to feel more serious, subjective, and thought provoking. The decision to create a vibrant



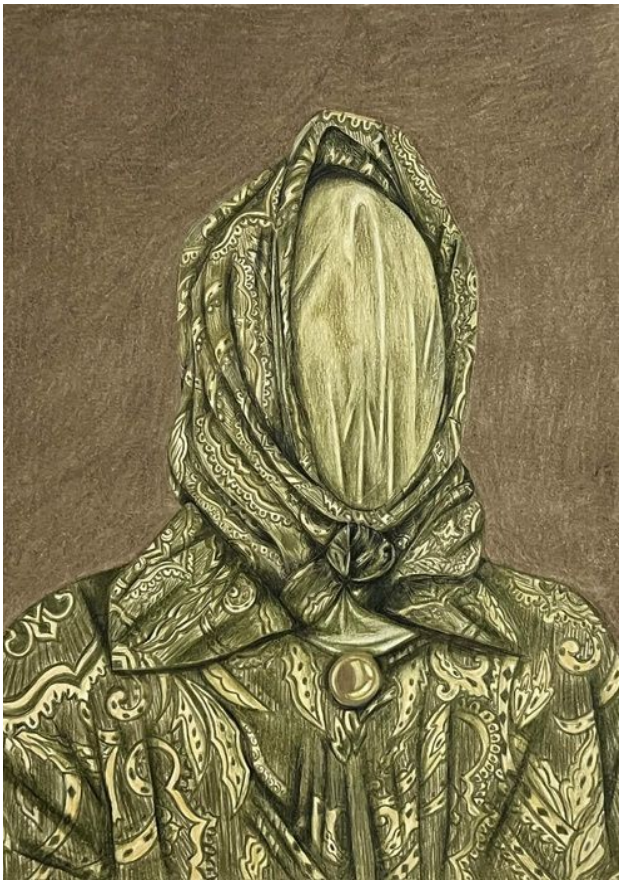
piece vs more muted monochromatic is one based on the narrative of my artwork. Rich colors evoke a specific mood or energy, whereas monochrome strips away distraction to focus on form and texture.

In your statement, you connect your work to life's ebbs and flows. Can you describe a drawing whose meaning changed for you because of what you were experiencing while making it?

The piece that shifted for me during its creation is the monochromatic drawing of the figure whose face is entirely hidden by draped, patterned fabric. When I began, my vision was largely technical and conceptual. I wanted to explore identity through anonymity and challenge myself with the complex geometry of folds and hand drawn patterns. However, midway through the drawing, I went through a period of intense overwhelm and emotional exhaustion. As I sat with the piece for hours, meticulously rendering the way the fabric tightly pulls over the face, the meaning completely changed. It stopped being a study of an anonymous other and became a deeply personal reflection of my own state of mind. The veil was no longer a lack of identity but a protective boundary. It reflected my own need to retreat, process my emotions privately, and find solace under the noise of outside life. The tension and structure of the cloth became a representation of the physical weight I was carrying, turning a technical exercise into a view into my own self preservation.

What traces of your San Diego upbringing, if any, do you recognize in your choice of subjects, clothing, patterns, or colors?

Every part of me is inspired by my upbringing in my hometown San Diego. I started drawing with my siblings at a very young age and even then pulled from my surrounding to figure out what was fun or cool to me. Fast forward I improved my technique for years by drawing objects I would see or thought was interesting around me while figuring out what was authentic and worth focusing on. I would sit in my apartment in Barrio Logan drawing on a tiny counter top for whatever local art show I could possibly enter in. This is where I felt most inspired and most free to create because I was in one of the most vibrant art communities where the members were always outside creating in some way. Panels set up so the local spray painters could paint all day for shows they were setting up, Djs on the block every weekend, and friends dropping clothing lines that started in the street and would end up in major shows. All of these intricate moving parts is what drove me to create the pieces that you see today. Some of my work is not only inspired by my hometown but directly from the people I know that I wanted to honor for inspiring me with their own style or medium. I am a true believer that art creates art and drawing from my surrounding helped me achieve higher levels of creation and style that feels extremely personal.





I am **Mina Maleki**, born in 1984 in Iran. I have been very interested in painting since I was a child and it has been and remains one of my inner talents. Since 2004, I started taking art classes at the University of Face Drawing (Black Pen), and since then I have been self-taught in the field of painting with the chalk pastel technique. Since 2022, I have participated in domestic and foreign exhibitions and received certificates. In these exhibitions, one of my works was among the most visited works. Another of my works was selected for printing the exhibition poster and was published. And two of my other works were among the selected works of one of the exhibitions and international competitions, for which I received a golden certificate. I won third place in one of the painting festivals and I have been accepted and participated in one of the international art courses. Over the years, I have gained this experience: if you hear a voice telling you that you cannot paint, paint your painting anyway, and then that voice will be.

Project Statement
Every artist immerses their brush in their soul and depicts their inner nature in the paintings they paint. I combine the soft movement of my hands with expressive colors and establish a sincere connection that stems from peace with the nature inside and outside of myself.
By combining colors, images are created that play the music of life and a dance appears in the mind, soul, and body.
Hoping for the day when all beings achieve liberation and inner peace.





Interview

Ana de Salazar



How did your journey into photography begin, and what inspired you to create the Dear Soul project?

My relationship with photography began long before I imagined it would become such an important part of my life. Ever since I was a child, I have felt a strong connection to art. Drawing, exploring colours and discovering the work of other artists were ways for me to express myself and find inspiration. Later, I studied fashion design and interior design, disciplines that broadened my sensitivity to aesthetics, shapes and spaces.
It was during my teenage years that I discovered photography, although at the time I still saw it as a hobby. As the years went by, travelling deepened that connection. I particularly remember a trip to California, just before beginning my audiovisual studies, which marked a turning point in my life. It was there that I realised photography was not simply about capturing a place, but also about preserving the way that place made me feel.
Initially, I wanted to pursue travel and advertising photography, exploring the world while creating images for tourist destinations, hotels and other clients.
However, due to personal and health-related circumstances, my path had to take a different direction. During that process, I realised I didn´t want to give up photography, but rather find a different way to experience it and share it with others.
That´s how Dear Soul was born: as a way to continue exploring my passion for photography, but also to share something that has always been important to me — the ability of beauty to make us feel good. Sometimes, pausing to appreciate a landscape, a particular light or an image can offer us a moment of stillness and help us reconnect with ourselves.
That is exactly what I want Dear Soul to be: a space where photography goes beyond the memory of a trip and becomes an emotional experience, something that inspires us and that we can bring into our everyday lives.

The name Dear Soul feels intimate and personal. What does it mean to you, and how does it reflect the philosophy behind your work?

For me, Dear Soul is an invitation to connect with what an image can awaken within us. The name reflects an idea that is central to the way I understand photography: travelling allows us to discover the

world, but it can also bring us closer to ourselves. Sometimes, all it takes is an image to awaken a memory, an emotion or a desire to experience something we haven´t yet discovered.
The inspiration for the name and logo comes from old-fashioned postcards. I´ve always loved that way of communicating: someone would travel to a special place, choose a photograph that captured it and write a few words on the back to share their experience with someone they cared about. Many began with a simple "Dear...". There was something deeply personal about that gesture, about turning an image into a message.
I wanted to bring back that feeling, while translating it into a more intimate relationship with photography. I like to imagine that every Dear Soul image is a little letter that reaches someone at just the right moment, awakens something within them or accompanies them in a way they may never have expected.
That´s why my intention is not simply to create photographs that look beautiful in a space, but images that have something to say without the need for words. Images that transport us somewhere else, inspire us, bring a sense of serenity or simply make us feel good.
Ultimately, the meaning of a photograph depends not only on where it was taken, but also on what each person discovers in it. That personal connection, which is different for everyone, is what I would like to define Dear Soul: each image becoming, in its own way, a little letter to the soul.

Travel plays an important role in your practice. How do you move beyond documenting a destination and create an emotional portrait of a place?

When I travel, I am just as interested in the place itself as I am in the atmosphere surrounding it. The same landscape can convey completely different feelings depending on the light, the weather, the time of day or the way we choose to look at it.
That´s why I try to move beyond the elements that immediately identify a destination. I´m drawn to quieter moments, unexpected details and situations in which the surroundings take on a special quality. Fog partially concealing a structure, a line guiding the eye or an empty space can convey so much without needing to reveal everything.
For me, photographing a place also means interpreting how it makes me feel. The image remains connected to reality, while offering a personal perspective on it.
I would like someone who has never visited a destination to be able to connect with a photograph without needing to recognise where it was taken. I want the image to speak for itself, through its atmosphere and the emotions it might evoke.

What usually attracts your attention first when you arrive somewhere new: light, colour, architecture, atmosphere or an unexpected detail?

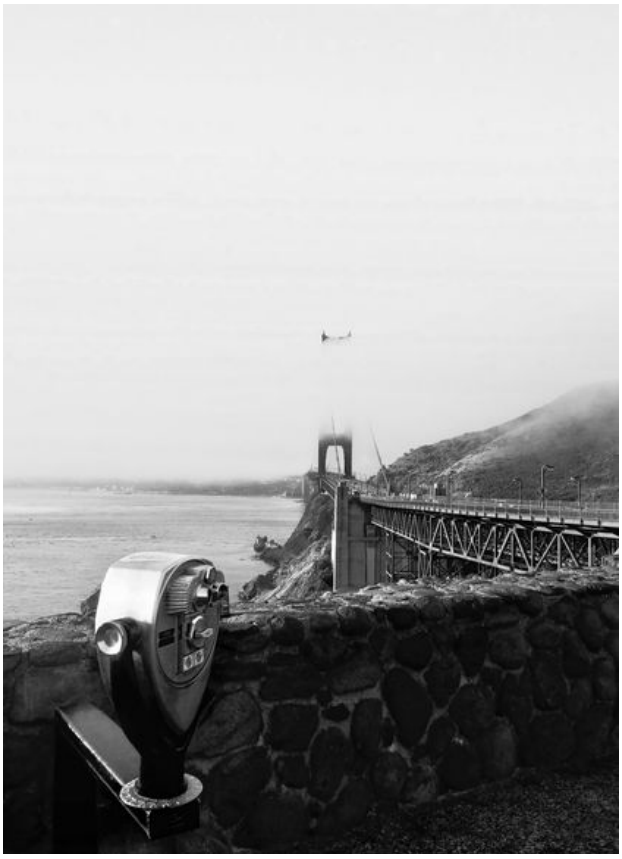
I would say that, above all, I´m drawn to atmosphere, although it usually emerges from a combination of different elements. Light can completely transform a space, while the weather can change the way we perceive a landscape or a piece of architecture that might look entirely different under other conditions.
I´m particularly interested in those moments when something changes the way we usually see a scene. Fog concealing part of a building, a structure becoming almost a silhouette, or a composition that conveys a sense of balance and stillness.
I don't always arrive somewhere with a specific image in mind. I prefer to observe, allow myself to be surprised by the conditions and remain open to whatever might emerge. Sometimes, when you stop looking for an obvious photograph, you begin to discover far more interesting images.

Your photographs of the Golden Gate Bridge present an iconic landmark through fog, unusual viewpoints and quiet moments. What drew you to this particular interpretation of San Francisco?

The Golden Gate Bridge is such a recognisable structure that it is difficult to approach it without



Ana de Salazar | Niebla Sobre El Acero | 2026



Ana de Salazar | Golden Gate View | 2026

having all the familiar images of it in mind. Precisely for that reason, I wanted to explore a different perspective, moving away from its most conventional representation to focus on its form, scale and surrounding atmosphere.
Fog plays a fundamental role in this series. It conceals parts of the bridge while revealing others, creating a sense of mystery and uncertainty. Rather than showing the entire structure, it allows the bridge to emerge in fragments, almost as if it were suspended between the landscape and the sky.
I was also drawn to the contrast between the monumentality of the bridge and the stillness of its surroundings. It is an imposing feat of engineering and a symbol of San Francisco, yet beneath the fog it takes on a much quieter, almost fragile presence.
Through these photographs, I wanted to explore precisely that duality: the strength of a human-made structure set against the vastness of the landscape, and nature's ability to transform our perception of something so familiar.

When photographing a well-known landmark, how do you avoid familiar postcard imagery and discover a perspective that feels personally meaningful?

I believe the first step is to change the way you look. Rather than asking myself how to photograph a place so that it is immediately recognisable, I try to discover what interests me about it and what I can express through my own perspective.
In the case of the Golden Gate Bridge, that meant paying attention not only to the bridge itself, but also to everything happening around it. The fog, the empty spaces, the lines of the cables, the relationship between architecture and landscape, and even everyday elements, such as the coin-operated viewing telescope that appears in one of the photographs, all help create a more personal interpretation of the place.
Black and white also contributes to this process. By removing colour, the focus shifts towards shapes, textures, light and shadow. The bridge becomes more than a tourist icon, taking on a more graphic and timeless quality.
I don't believe you need to photograph something no one has ever seen before. What matters to me is finding a perspective that reflects your own sensibility. A place can be familiar to millions of people and still offer new possibilities when you allow yourself to observe it without preconceived ideas.

What emotions or questions would you like viewers to carry with them after encountering your photographs?

I would like each person to discover something of their own in my photographs, something they identify with and that connects with their way of feeling or understanding the world. I believe the images that truly resonate with us are not necessarily those depicting extraordinary places, but those that awaken something within us.
With the Golden Gate series, I am interested in the possibility of looking at such a familiar place from a different perspective and discovering something unexpected in it. The fog, the architecture and the way the bridge appears and disappears into the landscape can evoke different feelings in each person. For some, it might be an invitation to travel; for others, a sense of freedom or adventure, or a memory of something they have experienced.
Ultimately, I would like my photographs to go beyond representing a destination, allowing each person to find something they identify with — something that reflects their personality, their memories or even a way of life they aspire to.
I would also like these to be images people enjoy living with, photographs that bring character to a space and continue to spark interest and emotion over time. Images that become more than representations of a place and turn into something personal, woven into the story of the person who chooses them.
Perhaps the question I would like to leave open is this: what is it that truly draws us to an image? The place it represents, or what it makes us feel, remember or imagine?



Masha Shvedova is a professional artist with ten years of academic training and over twenty years of experience working exclusively in oil. For her, art is a way of life, absolute freedom, and a sincere connection with the world.
Finding her endless source of strength and inspiration in nature, she explores natural phenomena and the human-environment relationship, aiming to make the world a better place by helping others notice everyday beauty. Born in Russia, Masha has spent more than four years deeply rooted in Georgia—a country that captivated her when she first visited over a decade ago. She travels extensively with her paints and canvases, capturing Georgia's majestic landscapes and people.
Her original works are held in private collections across Georgia, Russia, Spain, the Netherlands, and Canada, highlighted by a personal solo exhibition in the winter of 2026 dedicated entirely to the nature and people of Georgia.

Project Statement
Through these works, I want to express my deepest admiration for the nature of Georgia—a country whose beauty remains unmatched for me anywhere else in the world. Nearly all the paintings featured here were created on location during plein-air trips across various regions: from the majestic mountains of Svaneti and the striking canyons of Imereti to the unique architectural charm of Tbilisi.

Masha Shvedova | Mountains of Svanety | 2026





Masha Shvedova | Tbilisi in Spring | 2026

Interview

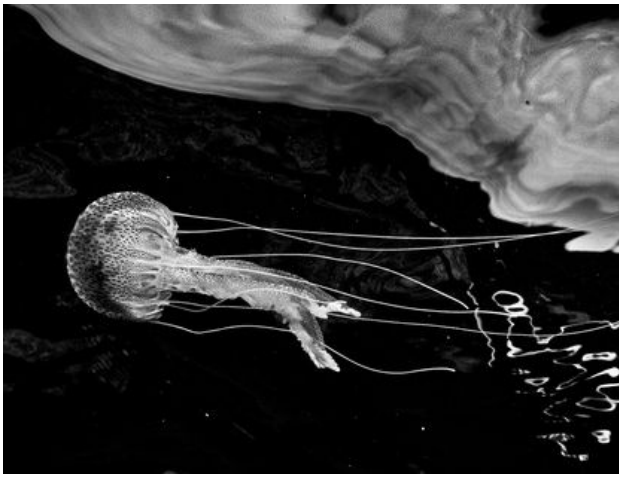
Alexandru Valentin Duta



How did diving become a means of artistic expression for you, and what led you to develop the underwater chapter of SOLACE?

My relationship with the sea started long before I became a diver. As a child, I spent most of my time swimming, holding my breath and exploring, always looking for strange marine life to observe in quiet places.
I will always remember my first night dive. The feeling of floating in the darkness, surrounded by the open sea, was unlike anything I had experienced before. There was a particular tranquillity to it, completely different from anything above the surface.
Years later, night diving brought back that same childhood feeling, but on another level. Being alone in the dark ocean feels like entering another world, where time stops and it's just me, the sea and the excitement of encountering something unexpected.
I think this feeling is at the heart of the underwater chapter of SOLACE. We all have places where we find tranquillity, places we escape to when everyday life becomes too noisy. Through my photography, I want to share that place with others, perhaps inspiring them to experience night diving themselves and discover what it can offer them.

Your background in cinema influences your photographic approach. What do you borrow from filmmaking to suggest a story within a single underwater frame?



Alexandru Valentin Duta | Ancient Dancer II - Cadence

One of the most important influences from cinema is the ability to convey emotion rather than simply show something beautiful. In filmmaking, we often talk about the "money shot", that one defining shot that captures everything. I approach photography in a similar way because I only have one frame to tell my story.
I want my photographs to make viewers stop and look beyond what is in front of them, allowing their imagination to wander into unknown places. My jellyfish photographs, for example, often take on a cosmic, almost otherworldly appearance. I enjoy creating art that evokes mystery, leaving space for each viewer to find their own story.

How has working in black and white changed what you notice underwater, even before you raise the camera?

After spending so much time underwater, especially at night, you start seeing things differently. Colours fade into darkness, and you become more aware of shapes, textures and subtle contrasts.
Sometimes, when I'm observing marine life, I turn off my torch and let my eyes adjust. There is never complete darkness, there is always a little ambient light. It's similar to waking up in a dark bedroom as a child. At first, you can barely see anything, but after a few minutes, shapes slowly begin to appear. I think most of us remember that feeling.
The octopus photograph is a recreation of this experience. Look close at the octopus and the sandy seabed around it. The silvery tones and low contrast give an idea of how I see the underwater world under moonlight.
Of course, I cannot capture that exact moment directly. When I photograph a subject, I introduce artificial light to recreate what I experienced in the darkness.
I pay attention to form, texture, contrast and composition. I ask myself whether the subject creates curiosity or mystery. There is so much detail hidden in what might initially look like

Alexandru Valentin Duta | Ancient Dancer II - Cadence



a simple black and white photograph.

What does the title Ancient Dancer reveal about the way you experience time while watching a jellyfish move?

Jellyfish have always fascinated me. They are among the oldest creatures on Earth, having survived for over 500 million years. There is something incredible about that. They simply drift through the water, almost as if they have no concern for time.
During night dives, surrounded by darkness, watching them move can feel almost like being in space. Of course, I've never been to space, but we've all seen those cinematic images of astronauts floating in zero gravity. Underwater, we experience something similar. On land, gravity keeps our feet on the ground and limits how we move. Underwater, we become almost weightless, able to float freely in every direction. There is no floor beneath us to follow. We can simply drift through the water.
Combined with the darkness and the slow, graceful movement of a jellyfish, it creates an almost surreal feeling. All these things together make me lose my sense of time. I can spend 70 minutes underwater and come back feeling as though only 20 minutes have passed. For me, Ancient Dancer captures that feeling of timelessness.

You describe night diving as both a source of tranquillity and an encounter with the unknown. Can you share a moment when those feelings came together and shaped a photograph?

One of my strangest encounters was with a flying gurnard during a night dive. We all have a general idea of what a jellyfish looks like underwater, but seeing a fish spread its wing -like fins and glide through the darkness is something quite extraordinary.
I started gliding alongside it. Sometimes I followed it, while other times it circled around me, almost as if it was curious about my presence. It didn't seem frightened at all.
I ended up spending the entire dive with it, completely forgetting to look for any other marine life. I was so absorbed in that encounter that nothing else mattered. There was a strange tranquillity in simply following each other's movements, while discovering something so unexpected. I think that's where tranquillity and the unknown meet.

Your photographs can make familiar marine creatures appear almost extraterrestrial. What do you hope this sense of unfamiliarity opens up in the viewer's relationship with ocean life?

We all know how beautiful the ocean can be with its vibrant colours and beautiful light, and I completely agree. But there is another side to it that I want to invite people to explore.
I want viewers to look differently, to question, wonder and become curious. By taking away colour, familiar marine creatures can take on an almost ethereal, extraterrestrial appearance.
I particularly like how, against a dark background, suspended particles in the water become visible, almost like stars surrounding a creature floating in space. I deliberately leave them in my photographs because I enjoy giving viewers the freedom to interpret what they see. Some of my friends have told me that certain jellyfish look as if they are floating between stars in space. That's exactly what I love. allowing people to discover their own worlds within my photographs.
I hope this encourages people to look at familiar marine creatures differently and discover a little more mystery and fascination in the underwater world.

As you continue the underwater chapter of SOLACE, what would you like to explore that these photographs have not yet allowed you to express?

One of the experiences I'd most like to share through SOLACE is what it feels like to glide through the ocean in darkness, with my torch switched off and tiny particles of plankton floating all around me. Sometimes it feels as though I'm drifting through space, surrounded by stars.
Photograph 4 is an attempt to recreate that feeling. I used suspended sand particles and artificial light to represent the plankton floating around me. The difficulty is that the plankton is only visible in complete darkness. The moment I introduce artificial light to photograph it, I change the very conditions that make the experience possible. A camera cannot capture that exact feeling.
I'd love to find a way to communicate that experience more faithfully through photography. I
sometimes think that to truly understand what I mean, someone needs to experience a night dive themselves, switch off their torch, and simply float for a while. Then they might understand exactly what I'm trying to describe.
Perhaps in the distant future, camera technology will allow us to capture these moments more naturally, in almost complete darkness, with nothing but moonlight. That's something I'd love to explore further with SOLACE.



Alexandru Valentin Duta | Ancient Dancer I Void

Exhibition review

The Names Gallery in Paris – 31 October – 1 November



Contemporary art rarely speaks with a single voice. Its strength lies in the coexistence of different perspectives, materials, cultural experiences, and artistic approaches. Fragments of the Contemporary #2, held on October 31 and November 1, 2026, at Galerie M in Paris, embraced this diversity, bringing together 46 artists whose works offered distinct interpretations of the world around us. Curated by Anna Gvozdeva, the exhibition explored the many directions of contemporary artistic expression, from photography and figurative imagery to abstraction, experimentation, and visual storytelling.

The exhibition's title suggested an approach to understanding contemporary art not as a unified movement, but as a collection of individual fragments. Each artwork represented a particular way of observing, questioning, or transforming reality. Together, these fragments formed a broader visual conversation in which personal experiences and aesthetic choices intersected without losing their individuality.

Walking through the gallery, visitors encountered a dynamic interplay of colours, compositions, and subjects. Vivid abstract works appeared alongside atmospheric photographs, architectural studies, expressive portraits, and imaginative figurative compositions. Some pieces drew attention through saturated colours and intricate patterns, while others relied on restrained palettes, subtle contrasts, and carefully constructed spaces. This alternation between visual intensity and quiet observation created a rhythm that encouraged viewers to move between different artistic languages.

Photography occupied an important place in the exhibition. Images of architectural structures, landscapes, urban environments, and human figures demonstrated how the camera can transform familiar subjects into unexpected visual experiences. Geometric lines, reflections, natural light, and carefully selected perspectives revealed the expressive possibilities of everyday surroundings. In several photographs, the absence of human figures became as meaningful as their presence, suggesting narratives that extended beyond the visible frame.

Painting and other image-making approaches

introduced a different energy. Expressive colour relationships, symbolic details, unusual characters, and layered compositions opened spaces for imagination and interpretation. The contrast between representational and abstract imagery raised questions about how artists communicate emotions and ideas, whether through recognisable subjects or through forms that resist direct explanation.

An important dimension of Fragments of the Contemporary #2 was its international character. The participating artists brought together a wide range of individual practices and visual perspectives. Rather than organising these differences around a narrowly defined aesthetic programme, the exhibition allowed them to remain visible, highlighting the plurality that characterises contemporary artistic production. The exhibition featured works by Chrisallo Borg, Benoît Flamérion, Blackwblonde, Adriana Acree, Katica Savnik, Didem Yüksekdağ, Barbara Bitondo, Elena Lipartiia, Katarina Bradovkova, Eva Dolničar, Neda Šormaz, Alisa Kishchenko, DADO, Ján Hlpka, Chan Suk On, Nadezhda Dozmorova, Roger Ajjour, Ana de Salazar, Loredana Di Cianni, Alexandra Uryasova, Ján Špireng, TAK Erzinger, Dr Anna Kadzik-Bartoszewska, Rage Kamiyama, Pablo Gabriel Ribeiro Danielli, Pavlos Stefopoulos, Sophie Bernard, Maria Ivanova, Ivelina Stoyanova, Anita, Darious Shan, Shugandhi Chowdhury Shraboni, Arthur Vons, Bada Dzurjanik, Noel Garcia, Dr Neha Sharma, ringo, Nahide Önür, Andrija Ratkovic, Mae Dag, Jan van Luyn, Leticia Varela, Jerson Ramos, Brandie Jollimore, Tom Haynes, and Katarina Stiller.

The breadth of this selection was one of the exhibition's defining qualities. Rather than placing emphasis on a single technique, subject, or artistic tradition, the curatorial approach created opportunities for contrasting visual languages to interact. A photograph could be read alongside a painting, a highly detailed composition alongside a minimalist image, or an intimate personal expression alongside a more conceptual investigation.

There was also an interesting tension between the individuality of the works and the collective structure of the exhibition. Each artist approached their subject independently, yet the shared format and close arrangement established relationships across different practices. This tension reflected a wider condition of contemporary art, in which artistic identities develop through both personal exploration and engagement with an increasingly interconnected visual culture.

Ultimately, Fragments of the Contemporary #2 offered a perspective on contemporary art as an evolving field of possibilities rather than a fixed set of definitions. Its significance lay not in presenting a single conclusion, but in making room for different interpretations, visual experiences, and artistic intentions.

By bringing these 46 artistic voices together at Galerie M, Anna Gvozdeva created an exhibition in which diversity itself became the central curatorial principle. Each work retained its own identity while contributing to a larger composition of contemporary perspectives. The result was a multifaceted portrait of artistic expression, reminding viewers that the contemporary is not one image, one style, or one narrative, but an ongoing dialogue between many ways of seeing and understanding the world.





— *Interview*

Xavier Yarto



What led you from painting to sculptural portraiture, and what has working in three dimensions revealed about your concept of Pop Modern Expressionism?



I don't see sculpture as a departure from painting, but as a continuation of it. After years of exploring faces, color, texture, and gesture on a flat surface, I wanted to give those elements a physical presence. Sculpture lets people encounter a figure from different angles and feel its presence in a shared space.
Working in three dimensions has expanded my idea of Pop Modern Expressionism. It allows me to push color, proportion, and surface further, while bringing recognizable figures into a more direct, physical relationship with the viewer. For me, the goal is not simply to reproduce someone, but to reinvent the image and express a feeling, a memory, or a particular energy.

Your subjects include Frida Kahlo, Michael Jackson, and Tlaloc. What makes a figure compelling for you to reinterpret through your own visual language?

I'm drawn to figures who carry a strong presence beyond their image—people or symbols that have become part of our shared cultural memory. They may come from art, music, history, or ancient traditions, but what interests me is the emotion and energy they hold.
Recognition is the starting point, not the destination. I reinterpret each subject through my own visual language, using color, texture, exaggeration, and gesture to bring out something personal and contemporary.

Your portraits feature elongated necks, enlarged eyes, and asymmetrical faces. How do you decide which proportions to transform while keeping each subject recognizable?



I look for the features that carry the personality of the subject, then decide which ones can be transformed to communicate more strongly. The eyes, the shape of the face, a hairstyle, or a distinctive gesture may be enough to keep someone recognizable.
I'm not aiming for academic accuracy or photographic likeness. I simplify and exaggerate until the figure feels emotionally true to me. The proportions are part of the language: they help me move away from simply representing reality and toward reinventing it.

The eyes seem particularly expressive in these sculptures, sometimes suggesting surprise, vulnerability, or unease. How do you develop a figure's gaze, and what do you want it to communicate?

I develop the gaze through the eyes' size, direction, and relationship to the rest of the face. Small changes can shift the whole expression. I often let the eyes hold a tension between emotions—surprise and vulnerability, for example—because people are rarely defined by just one feeling.
I want the gaze to meet the viewer and create a moment of connection, curiosity, or even uncertainty. It should make the figure feel present, rather than simply observed.

There is a playful quality to these figures alongside their intense expressions. What role does humor play in your approach to portraiture?

Humor gives the work freedom. It lets me approach familiar figures without treating them as untouchable, while still engaging with them seriously. I enjoy that contrast: a playful color or an unexpected proportion can sit alongside an intense expression.
The humor is part of my way of opening a door for the viewer. It can invite a smile first, then leave room for a more complicated reaction.

How did you approach reinterpreting Tlaloc, and what did you want this ancient deity to communicate to a contemporary viewer?

I approached Tlaloc as a living cultural presence, rather than as a subject for archaeological reconstruction. I wanted to respond to the power and symbolism associated with this ancient deity while making the image feel immediate to a contemporary viewer.
Color, texture, and gesture let me bring the figure into the present. My intention is to create a new interpretation that respects its cultural resonance while allowing viewers to encounter it through a different visual language.

Some works stand on substantial geometric plinths, while others have names painted directly onto their bases. How do the base and the written name contribute to the way a portrait is perceived?

I think of the base as part of the portrait's presentation and meaning. A geometric plinth can give the figure a sense of monumentality and make the viewer more aware of its presence in space. A name written directly on the base can feel more immediate and personal, as if the identity of the figure belongs to the object itself.
The name also guides the encounter: it tells us who we are looking at, while the sculpture invites us to see that figure in a new way. Together, the figure, the base, and the name shape how the work meets the viewer.



Antonia Halter

Antonia is an artist who has been developing and learning about her passion for art for most of her life. She has spent years creating her own style, techniques and motives. She loves diversifying the way she learns about art, by occasionally using different materials and motives, learning new approaches or studying different styles. Only in the summer of 2026 did she decide to start trying to get her art published outside of social media. Since then, her art has been seen by countless eyes, printed in magazines or collages, on screens in exhibitions or on billboards around the world.

Project Statement
Antonia is a Swiss artist, specialized in painting portraiture, as well as botanicals. She has spent years creating her own style and techniques, which allow her to create unique pieces using only very few layers of oil paints. She keeps developing her skills every day, trying to learn about herself through her craft, while letting her art be a mirror to her and the world around her. Her art expresses among other things, her connection to the natural world, as she feels deeply rooted in and connected to it.

Antonia Halter | Confidence | 2026





Antonia Halter | Acceptance | 2024

Jessica-Lynn Veley



What first drew you to textile work, and how did your interest in making garments develop into JLV The Label?



I started crocheting as a child, so working with textiles has been part of my life for quite some time. Over the years, that interest expanded into garment making and experimenting with different techniques and materials.
JLV The Label originally started as a lingerie brand, primarily focusing on more traditional lingerie pieces. As I continued designing, I began incorporating crochet into my work and exploring how it could be used beyond its more conventional applications. The brand has gradually expanded into more experimental designs, but lingerie and corsetry remain an important part of its foundation.

In the photographed pieces, the skirt's framework becomes a visible part of the design. What interested you in exposing a structure that would traditionally be hidden beneath fabric?

I've always been interested in taking elements from historical fashion and finding ways to incorporate them into more modern designs. The cage skirt is traditionally something that would be concealed beneath layers of fabric, but I liked the idea of leaving it exposed and making it part of the garment itself. It's a way of using a more traditional silhouette while giving it a completely different look and purpose.

Your designs combine structured corsetry with handcrafted crochet. What does bringing these different techniques together allow you to express?

I like the contrast between the two techniques. Corsetry is very structured and precise, while crochet allows for more



flexibility in terms of texture, shape, and detail. Combining them gives me the freedom to experiment with different silhouettes while still maintaining the construction and fit that originally drew me to lingerie design. I also like the idea of taking something like crochet, which is often associated with a more traditional or even kitschy hobby, and reworking it into something more avant-garde and fashion-forward. It's interesting to challenge those associations and show how a technique that's been around for generations can have a place in more contemporary, unconventional fashion.

The crocheted flowers appear across the open framework of the skirts. How did you develop their placement, scale, and relationship to the overall silhouette?

The placement was largely a process of experimenting with what worked visually against the structure of the skirt. I wanted the flowers to be substantial enough to stand out individually without overwhelming the overall silhouette. The open framework also allowed me to work with larger, heavier crocheted appliqués that wouldn't necessarily be practical on a traditional fabric skirt due to their weight. Having that structural support gave me more freedom to experiment with the scale and placement of the flowers while maintaining the overall shape of the garment. I also liked the contrast between the rigid, geometric structure of the cage and the softer, organic shapes of the crochet.

The garments combine transparency with sections of dense textile detail. How do you decide what to reveal, what to cover, and where to direct the viewer's attention?

A lot of it comes down to balance and how the different elements work together. Corsets and cage crinolines have historically been worn together, so the combination itself isn't necessarily new. I've just taken a more revealing, lingerie-inspired approach to how they're presented. With my background in lingerie design, transparency is something I've always worked with, so I don't necessarily approach it as a matter of what needs to be covered or revealed. I'm more interested in how the placement of different materials affects the overall look. With these pieces, I wanted the crochet to stand out without taking away from the exposed structure of the garments. The contrast between the heavier floral details and the openness of the cage allows both elements to be appreciated individually while still working together as a complete design.

These photographs bring your garments into a setting of carved stone and greenery. How do location and photography contribute to the way you want the work to be experienced?

I think location and photography play a big role in how a garment is perceived, especially with more unconventional designs. I liked the contrast between the architecture, natural surroundings, and the garments themselves. The combination of the corsetry, cage skirts, and carved stone gives the photographs an almost regal quality, which I think complements the overall silhouettes. I wanted the images to have that sense of grandeur without feeling overly theatrical or like a period piece. The setting adds to the visual impact of the garments while still allowing the designs themselves to remain the focus.

Through JLV The Label, what would you like to explore next that your current techniques or materials have not yet allowed you to achieve?

I'd really like to continue pushing myself creatively and experimenting with materials and techniques I haven't worked with before. A lot of what I make comes from having an idea and figuring out how to actually bring it to life, which often involves quite a bit of trial and error. Sometimes the materials don't behave the way I initially envisioned, but that process usually leads me to approach things differently or discover something I wouldn't have considered otherwise.
I'm particularly interested in continuing to explore crochet on a larger, more sculptural scale and seeing how far I can take it beyond what people typically associate with the technique. I'd also love to experiment further with unconventional silhouettes, different forms of garment construction, and the relationship between fashion and wearable art.
I think one of the things I enjoy most about having JLV The Label is that I'm not restricted to designing within one particular category. Although the brand began with lingerie, it's gradually become an outlet for a much wider range of ideas, and I want to continue allowing that to happen naturally. I don't necessarily know what every future collection or project will look like, and I actually prefer it that way. My interests are constantly evolving, and I'd rather continue challenging myself and trying things I haven't done before than feel obligated to stick to one particular style. Ultimately, I want to keep creating pieces that interest me, even if figuring out how to make them is half the challenge.

Exhibition review

The Names Gallery in Vienna – 14-15 November

On 14-15 November 2026, The Last Abstraction Gallery in Vienna hosted a two-day international group exhibition organised by The Names Gallery and curated by Anna Gvozdeva. Over one weekend, the gallery's white walls brought





together forty artists of many nationalities and backgrounds, turning a compact space into a meeting point for different visual languages.
The curatorial approach was deliberately open. Rather than imposing a single theme or medium, Anna Gvozdeva built the show around dialogue: painting beside photography, collage beside digital work, quiet monochrome pieces beside dense, colour-saturated compositions. A unified presentation, with black frames and generous white margins, gave the exhibition a calm rhythm and let each work hold its own while still speaking to its neighbours.
Visitors moved between intimate figurative works and bold abstraction, between photographs in which light dissolves into movement and paintings that draw on memory, heritage and handcraft. Recurring motifs emerged naturally: the human face, fragmented and reassembled; the gaze that looks back at the viewer; the tension between control and freedom; traces of tradition carried into a contemporary context. Gold leaf, layered paper, textured surfaces and luminous colour gave the hang a strong tactile presence.
The exhibition featured works by Marien Espinosa Garay, Shugandhi Chowdhury Shraboni,



Yanitska Lidia, Henry Jentzsch, Darious Shan, Antonio Iovine, Esraa Khattab, Dr Sanjana Mahanta, Ihart, Irene Freri, Jorge Humberto Tapia Perez, Şeymanur Akgül, Lenka Thomkova, Nathan Murphy, Stefan Pesic, Anastasiya Maria Savran, Danko Gospic, Adriana Galetska, Tomas Ittu, Ján Špireng, Tobiloba Majekodunmi, Taofeek Salaudeen, Agbolade Kelvin Agbenla, Verica Čupić, Kiran Sran, Kateryna Vistyzenko (NeoRina), Nadia Bazaziants, David ErMe, Masha Shvedova, Olga Gafita, RAMI, Zhenya Yudakov, Claudia Habringer, Brigitte Polt, Katarzyna Kmak, Adriana Navas, Irina Berlizova, Jiu Baek, Patricia Hernandez and Jose Evangelista.
The opening drew a lively crowd of artists, guests and art lovers. Conversations started in front of individual works and carried across the room; visitors photographed their favourite pieces and lingered long after the first walk-through. That atmosphere of open exchange, between artists and audience as well as among the artists themselves, was perhaps the exhibition's greatest achievement.
For The Names Gallery, the Vienna show continued its mission of giving international artists a professional platform and a real audience in one of Europe's great art capitals. For the participants, it offered something just as valuable: the chance to see their work in conversation with dozens of other voices and to become part of a shared story, if only for two days.

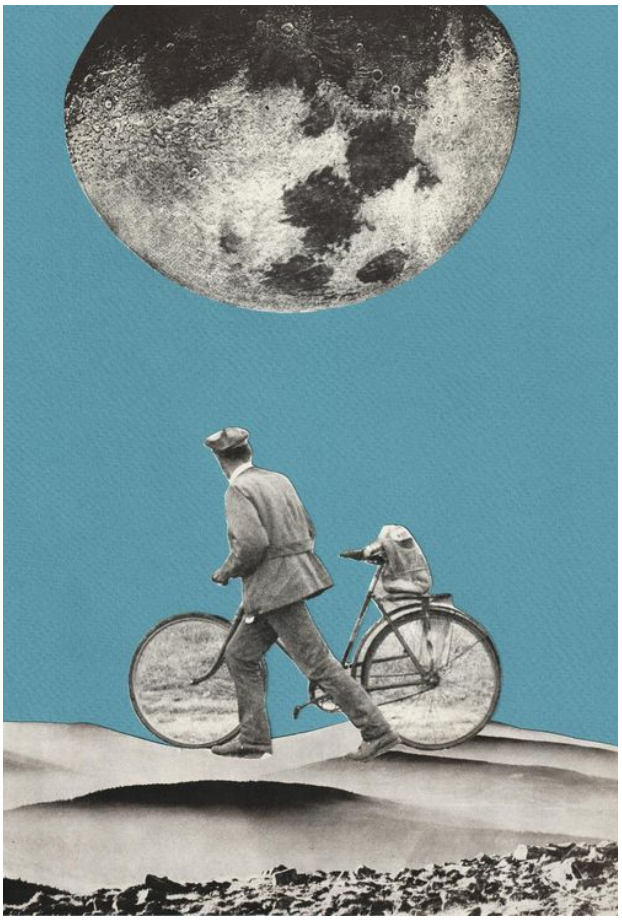






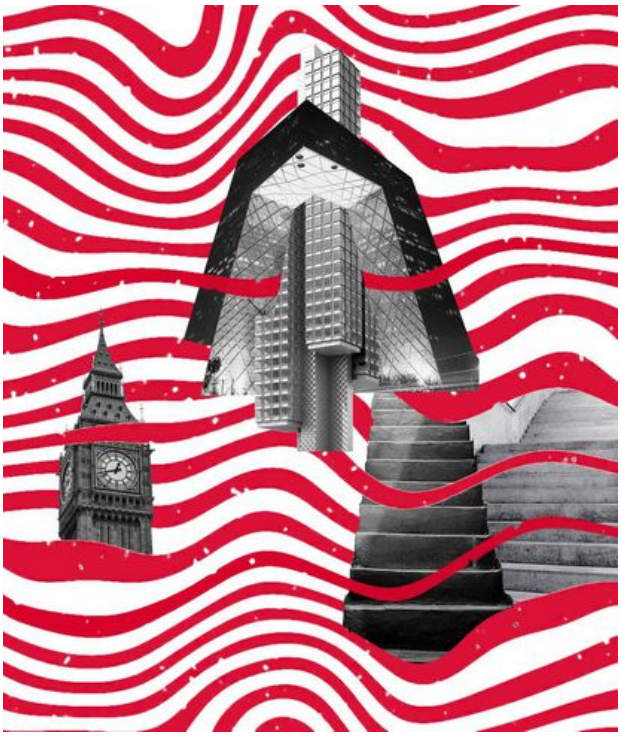


Elena Maslova



Elena Maslova | Last Man On Earth | 2025

You studied art history before beginning your own collage practice. How has that training shaped your approach to collage?



Elena Maslova | Cityscape | 2024

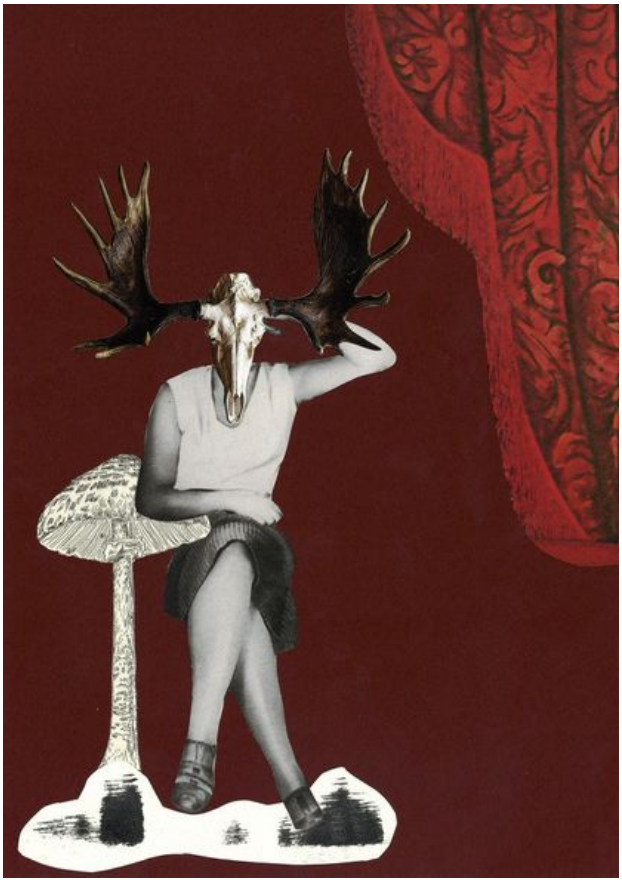
My understanding of composition and the eye I developed from looking at art during my studies both help me. My favourite artists are a source of inspiration, of course.

You began working with collage in 2023. What first drew you to the medium, and what do you still enjoy about it?

I was drawn to the sense of play and childlike curiosity in the process, and I still am. You can build an image as if you were using a construction kit, following a design of your own. Compared with many other media, collage is incredibly accessible. You can get started without formal training. There are no strict rules, and your imagination is your main tool.

Where do you usually find the photographs, illustrations, and printed materials used in your collages? What makes a particular image stand out to you?

Literally everywhere. Glossy magazines, newspapers, posters, brochures, labels. I



Elena Maslova | In Theatre | 2025

especially love working with vintage magazines. Sometimes a striking image just catches my eye. Other times, the idea for a collage starts to take shape in my mind around a single element.

Many of your works combine archival black-and-white imagery with bold areas of blue or red. How does a limited palette shape what the viewer notices?

A limited palette and a pared-back composition help me create a simple but memorable image. I think this lets the viewer focus on form and texture.

Your collages often bring together human figures, animals, landscapes, and objects that would not normally coexist. How do you decide when an unexpected combination feels complete and meaningful rather than simply surreal?

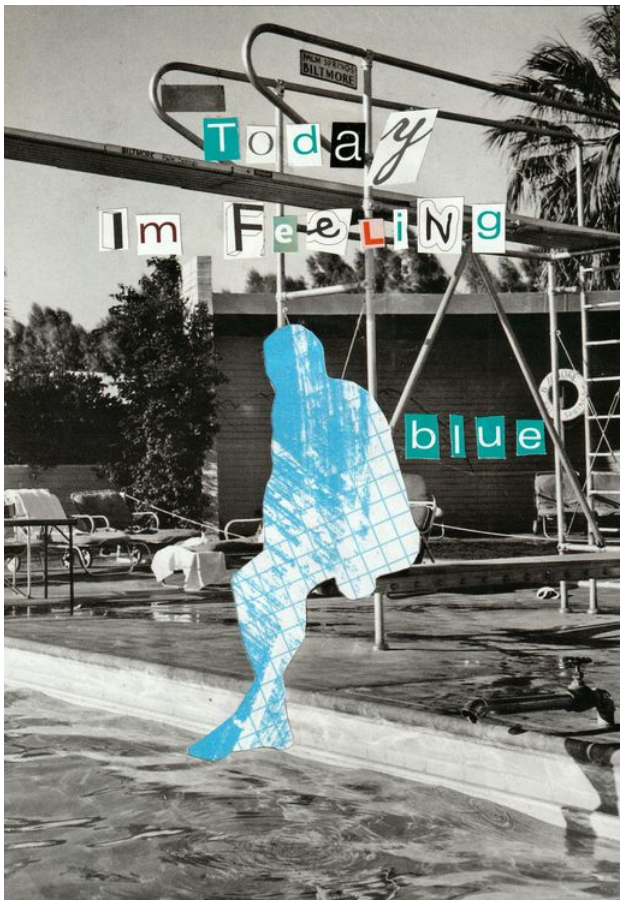
Collage is a play of contrasts, a way of making different contexts collide. I enjoy bringing together things that seem incompatible, but absurdity for its own sake doesn't interest me. A piece feels finished when the separate elements come together as a coherent statement and the result leaves room for interpretation.

Humour and absurdity coexist with melancholy and nostalgia throughout your work. Is this contrast something you intentionally seek, or does it emerge naturally during the creative process?

It tends to emerge as I work. I've always been drawn to music, films, and books that bring out complicated, mixed feelings, where you feel sad and find something funny at the same time. Maybe I'm trying to convey those same feelings in my work without realising it.

Since beginning your collage practice, how has your visual language evolved, and what themes or techniques would you like to explore next?

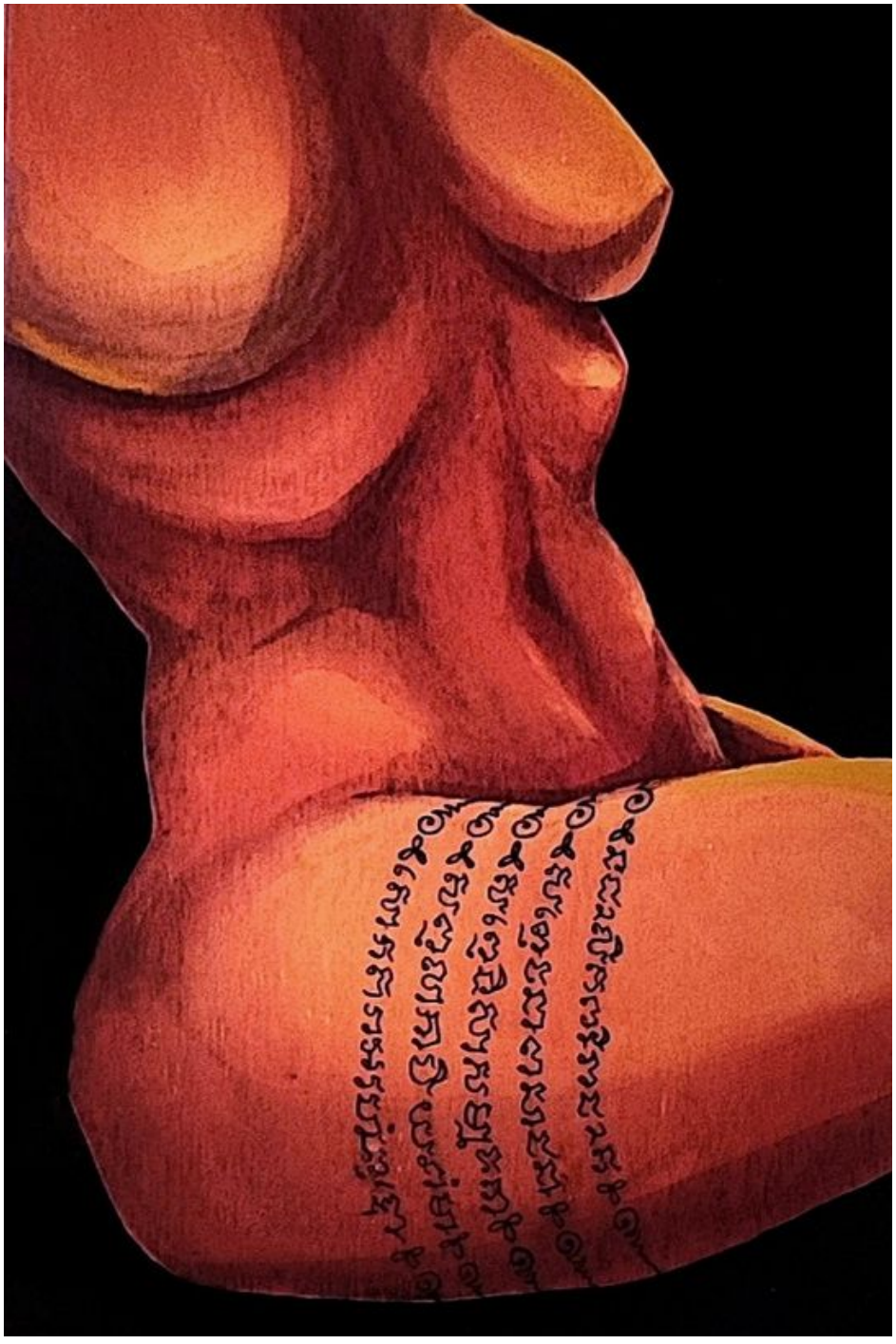
My first collages had a lot of elements and looked more like mood boards or vision boards. Over time, I gravitated towards minimalism. In the future, I'd like to try assemblage and make more digital collages.



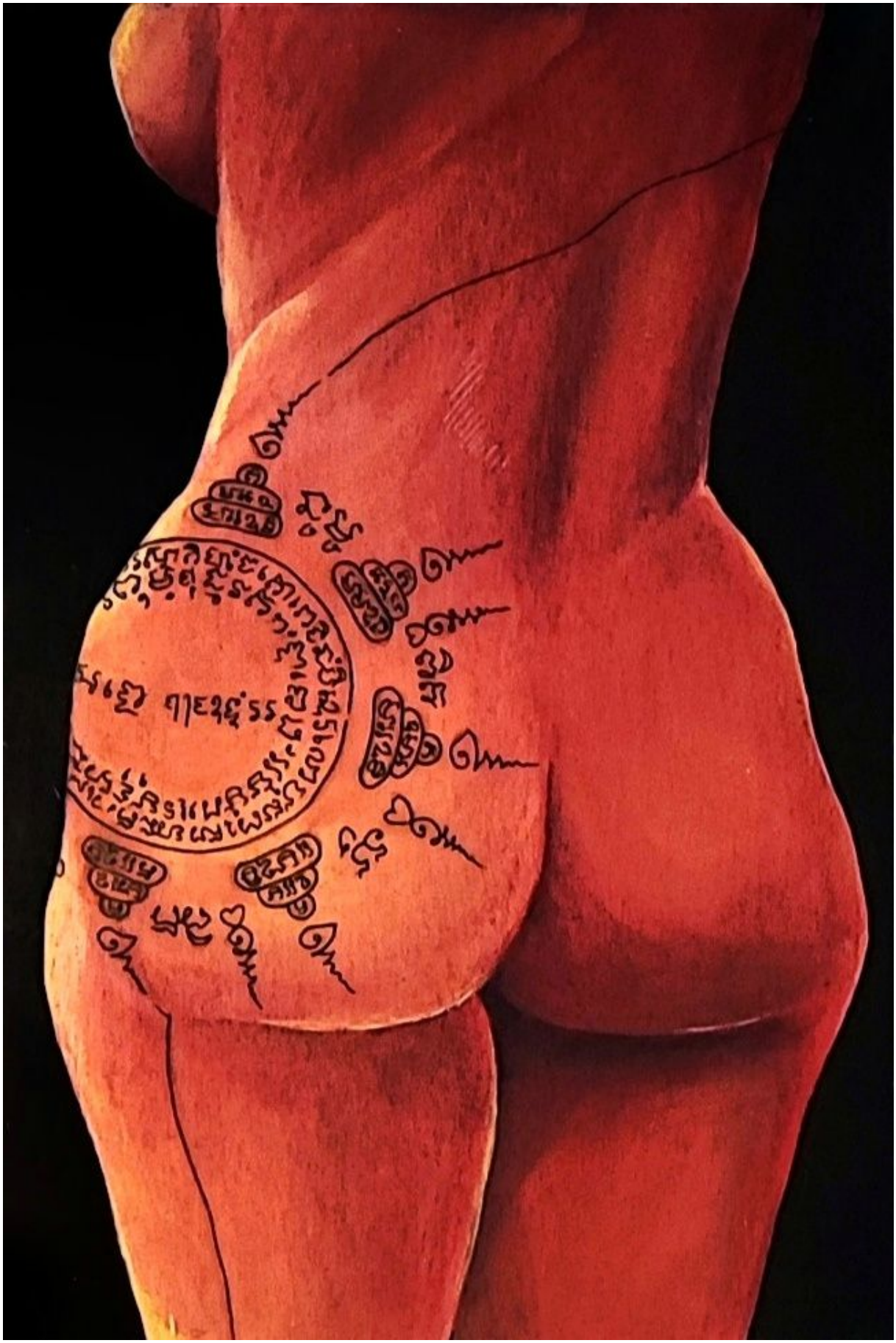
Elena Maslova | Feeling Blue | 2026

Frenco-Khmer visual artist **Zephyr Ouch** delves into themes of identity, culture, and belonging. With a background in graphic design in Cambodia and a Masters degree in Contemporary Arts from Paris, she passionately uses painting and illustration to reclaim cultural narratives and amplify marginalized voices. Central to her artistic pursuit is the exploration of the complex emotions tied to cultural heritage. Drawing and painting from her experiences as part of the Khmer diaspora in France, Zephyr's art serves as a catalyst for introspection, cultural empowerment, and challenging norms while advocating for diasporic communities in the West.

Project Statement
My work is about identity, culture, and belonging.
Through painting and illustration, I bring marginalized bodies to the forefront, exploring how Khmer heritage and decolonial aesthetics function as spaces of resistance and reclamation within a diasporic context.
Rooted in my lived experience as part of the Khmer diaspora in France, my work acts as an anchor for self-exploration, cultural reappropriation, and reclaiming my south-east asian heritage.
My work challenges the colonial narrative, aiming to dismantle stereotypes that have historically marginalized colonized communities, particularly women. By reclaiming control over how these bodies are represented, I seek to restore their complexity and agency.
Ultimately, my practice is a balancing act : how to reclaim cultural narratives and empower marginalized figures without reproducing the objectification and dominant narratives I aim to dismantle, and how to portray the bittersweet nostalgia I feel for my own culture.



Zephyr Ouch | Colonial Gaze Front | 2026



Zephyr Ouch | Colonial Gaze Front | 2026

Interview

Erick Suescún Contreras (Etheremick)

You spent more than twenty years working in audiovisual production and teaching. How has that experience shaped the way you construct and transform images in your current artistic practice?

My work in audiovisual production and teaching developed simultaneously, alongside my interest in photographic and video experimentation. I experienced the transition from analog to digital firsthand, both on location and in the classroom, where I kept pace with the evolution of cameras, lighting equipment, screens, and editing software.
As a filmmaker, I have written, directed, and edited my own short films and music videos, while also working as a cinematographer, art director, and special effects artist in independent film and television. These experiences taught me to use audiovisual tools in ways that serve my creative intentions.
For over twenty years, I also taught in programs in film and television, journalism, advertising, and design, focusing on technical skills, storytelling, and the creation of clear, accessible messages. These practices often rely on linear narratives and established systems of signs. However, these kinds of messages and structures often conflict with my deeper artistic interests.
I am particularly interested in questioning how digital culture has accelerated the pace of perception, privileged virtual experience over physical reality, and encouraged increasingly fast-paced, repetitive content. I also examine the rise of amateur aesthetics and self-display practices on social media, both enabled by the democratization of digital media.



Erick Suescún Contreras (Etheremick) | PIELES ES-IMP2 | 2026

What drew you to skin as the starting point for Pieles, and how did Ashley Montagu's book Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin influence your approach?

I came across Ashley Montagu's book while developing my first creative research proposal for my Master's degree in Arts. The project explored the ethics of face-to-face communication through the erotic body. It was a complex subject that I eventually set aside as an academic project, but it left me with many questions about how meaning is constructed through our relationships with the body—questions I continue to explore independently through my artistic practice.
These questions concern power and gender relations, social conventions and practices surrounding love and courtship, intimacy and privacy, the psychological and imaginative processes involved in virtual experiences, and the role of media in shaping ideas and behavior.
With Pieles, I began to explore the digital presence and physical absence of the body, as well as the mental processes that digital image manipulation can stimulate.
Montagu's ideas about the skin as both a protective organ and a means of communication, and about the importance of touch and caressing in the quality of human relationships, led me to use photographic images of human skin as visual stimuli, detached from any recognizable bodily context or reference to time and place.
Using close-up shots, I focus on the texture and color of the skin, manipulating them through digital painting to evoke visual and tactile sensations. I consider Pieles my most honest artistic series to date because it brings together conceptual interests and techniques I have explored and developed across previous projects.



Erick Suescún Contreras (Etheremick) | PIELES E2-RMB | 2026



Erick Suescún Contreras (Etheremick) | PIELES IN-SPL1 | 2026

Could you guide us through the creation of PIELES E2-RMB, explaining how the original photographic fragments developed into its folded, sculptural form?

I begin by arranging the photographic fragments in layers, using a collage-like approach in image-editing software. I distort the shapes and adjust the colors and exposure to create visual harmony. I then transfer the files to video and visual effects software, where I extract photographic sections according to their tonal and color values, preserving the texture of the skin.
I arrange these elements as planes at different depths in virtual space, using lighter areas in the foreground and darker ones in the background to create a sense of volume. I then return to the image editor and begin digital painting with a graphics tablet. Rather than using a conventional color palette, I treat the photographic fragments themselves as paint. I apply organic, pointed brushstrokes, reshape the forms, soften the transitions between layers, and prepare the final files for printing.

These images can suggest petals, feathers, or unfamiliar organisms, even though their source is human skin. What interests you about the moment when the body begins to resemble something else?

When I began Pieles, my initial goal was abstraction. I shared some early images of skin landscapes and unrecognizable forms with people close to me. They were drawn to finding familiar shapes within them, and some showed a remarkable tendency toward pareidolia.
A few months earlier, I had been working on Hybrida, a series of surrealist drawings and glass engravings depicting hybrid beings combining animal, plant, and human forms. I became interested in these first viewers' interpretations and began exploring how hybridity could emerge through the textures of skin and the suggestion of human volume.
When a recognizable figure begins to emerge, however, I avoid fixing it within a single interpretation. I want viewers to feel free to imagine rather than focus on the meaning intended by the artist, even when the image offers an initial visual clue. To explore further possibilities, I rotate the image in different directions, step closer to and farther away from the screen, and develop additional associations through digital drawing with a graphics tablet.
For me, an ideal Pieles artwork would be one whose different sides lead viewers to construct different meanings. This openness to ambiguity is essential to the way I approach the images.

In all three works, pale pink and peach forms appear against a deep black background. What role does this surrounding darkness play in how you want the forms to be perceived?

The black background represents my idea of emptiness. It further removes the forms from any specific context while acting as a visual stimulus that invites viewers to imagine the environment or atmosphere surrounding them. Some have imagined these forms flying, others floating, swimming, or crawling. This is an interesting example of how absence can give rise to imagination.

What changes when these digitally constructed forms are printed directly onto MDF and become physical objects that viewers encounter with their own bodies?

By transferring the image from one medium to another, it loses its virtual nature and no longer requires a screen or device to be viewed. It acquires a new physical presence, becoming a two-dimensional object in its own right. Although there are differences in color and luminance between the digital and printed images, I have managed to preserve much of the photograph's realistic qualities.
In this way, the image occupies a new space, and the changing light falling on its surface introduces a temporal dimension. The physical object is also made available for viewers to turn, interact with for as long as they wish, and take the surrounding environment into account as they interpret it.

Your practice aims to destabilize perception. Has a viewer's response to Pieles ever challenged your own understanding of a work or opened a direction you had not anticipated?

I believe it is essential to establish a shared responsibility between artist and viewer. The artist is responsible for creating an aesthetic object guided by their own convictions, while viewers take responsibility for engaging with it through their senses and interpreting the stimuli it presents.
With Pieles, I seek to stimulate the tension between what viewers intuitively perceive and the associations these colors, shapes, visual textures, and tonal gradations may trigger in their memories. The work invites polysemy and multiple interpretations, without there being a single correct answer to the question, "What did the artist intend to represent?"
Each viewer's memory, background, and personal experience shape the meanings they construct. In my experience, female viewers tend to associate them with other forms of life, while male viewers tend to interpret the images in more erotic terms. Some associations have been tender, while others have been unsettling. As an artist, I must remain open to these possibilities when I present human skin as a sensory stimulus.

Svetlana Lekanova

I am in my first year at art school. With a university degree and a background in science, I now want to immerse myself in the world of art - a long-held dream.
I wish peace and beauty for everyone!



Svetlana Lekanova | Paths and Roads | 2026



Svetlana Lekanova | Late Evening | 2026

Eleonora Molfino



You describe your figurative and abstract work as two modes in which "the hand is the same". What connects them beyond your use of colour and materials?

The same question drives both. Whether there is a figure or not, I am painting how a woman is looked at, remembered, or expected to be. The hand is the same because the decision is the same: what stays on the surface, and what gets covered, until the painting can stand on its own.



Eleonora Molfino | Not Always In My Skin | 2023

When you begin a painting, what leads you towards a recognizable figure, and what leads you towards abstraction?

A figure comes when the story needs a body to carry it, a face, a posture, a recognizable pressure. Abstraction comes when the feeling does not have a face yet, or when a face would narrow it too much. I do not choose the mode first; I notice which one the painting is asking for.

What draws you to a particular woman, cartoon character, or face from an old painting, and when does that borrowed image begin to feel like your own?

They already carry an expectation: beauty, innocence, devotion, perfection. That expectation is useful, because I can bend it. The image becomes mine when I change its scale, its color, or its company, until the original reference stops giving orders and starts taking part in my composition.

You embed feminist messages within your compositions. How do you decide how much to reveal and how much to leave for the viewer to uncover?



Eleonora Molfino | Idealized Motherhood | 2026

I test it by looking without words. If the message is still there when I stop explaining it to myself, I leave it. If it only works as a sentence, I take it out or push it further into the image. The viewer should feel something is at stake before they can name it.

Familiar characters bring their own stories and cultural associations. How do you work with those associations when they conflict with the message you want to convey?

I do not erase the association; I use the friction. A doll in an adult situation, a sacred face beside a plastic toy, a smiling woman surrounded by products: the conflict is the material. The painting does not resolve it, it holds both sides in the same frame.

You want your paintings to have a physical presence. How does working on a large scale affect both your bodily involvement in painting and the viewer's encounter with the finished work?

Painting large moves my whole body, not just my wrist. I step back, I walk around it, I paint standing up, and the surface answers at that size. For the viewer it works the same way in reverse: the painting cannot be taken in at a glance, so the body has to stay in front of it for a while.

With a process built around repeated changes, how do you recognize the moment when a painting is finished?

When the next change would be habit instead of a decision. I leave the studio, I come back the next day, and if the painting does not call me back to fix something, it is done. If it still asks for attention, it is not finished yet, even if it looks complete.

Olga Onopko (b. 1974) is a painter and educator based in Hurghada, Egypt. She graduated with honors from the Voronezh Art College (1989–1994) and the Voronezh State Pedagogical University (1994–1999). In 1994, she developed «Otlipaint,» her signature painting technique. Onopko has held over 20 solo exhibitions in Russia and participated in numerous international exhibitions and symposiums, including events at the Mahmoud Khalil Museum and Mansura University in Egypt. Her works are available for sale on the online gallery Artfinder (London) and are held in private collections across the USA, Japan, Europe, Russia, and Egypt. Her practice spans vibrant urban landscapes and textured abstract compositions, reflecting her academic background and her deep connection to the light and color of her current home.

Project Statement
My practice is rooted in «Otlipaint,» an original technique I developed based on transferring paint from cardboard to canvas without using a brush. I balance between intention and chance: I choose the colors, but I let the paint meet the surface and release control. This process creates unique, unrepeatable textures and gradients, capturing a moment in time like a fingerprint. Living in Egypt, I am endlessly inspired by the bright sun and the turquoise of the Red Sea. My work—whether in urban landscapes or abstract series like «Feelings»—is filled with rich, multi-layered colors, luminous textures, and positive energy. I strive to share the joy of spontaneous creation, inviting the viewer into a dialogue with the material itself.

Olga Onopko | Early Morning in Ras El-Barr | 2026





Olga Onopko | Metamorphosis | 2026

Constanza Eugenia



Constanza Eugenia | Deep Sea | 2026

You left Venezuela at seventeen and spent a formative period studying languages abroad. How did that experience shape the way you observe people, places, and the connections between them?

It completely changed my life. My first roommate ever was from Sweden, and she was an atheist. The first thing I said when she told me was, "Is that allowed?" My world became so much bigger after that, and my art, in turn, so much richer. I found like-minded people in corners of the world I had only heard stories about. Through those experiences, I learned how, despite our differences, we are all the same in essence and connected through it all. Language itself is also fascinating to me because the way we express something can carry different meanings depending on the language. For example, in Spanish, we have two ways of saying "I love you": te quiero and te amo. In Portuguese, obrigado (thank you) carries the idea of being indebted or obliged to someone, while in Italian, grazie, and French, merci, the expressions have roots in gratitude, grace, and favor. I find it beautiful how something as simple as expressing love or gratitude can reveal different ways of understanding the world.



Constanza Eugenia | Mountan Waves – Early Evening

What does belonging mean to you today, and has making art changed your relationship with Venezuela and your life in Brooklyn?

Belonging is more of a feeling to me now. I belong in New York because my nervous system feels calm here. I feel a sense of belonging when I'm walking around my neighborhood and my neighbors stop to say hi, or when I wave to the delivery guy in the distance. I belong when I'm having dinner at a friend's house and our dogs start running around the kitchen. Making art has changed my relationship with myself. It helps me cope with the constant changes and stress that come with Venezuela and being Venezuelan. It has certainly made my life in Brooklyn better, more peaceful, and more intentional. I like bringing little pieces and reminders of my childhood home to Brooklyn, whether it's a hammock in my living room or merengue playing in the morning. Through my paintings, I also bring the warmth of the Caribbean into my home in Brooklyn.
There is a duality in belonging to two places that are so different, yet both feel like home. For me, it's all about



Constanza Eugenia | Mountain Waves | 2026

balance, finding commonality and a sense of union between the two through art. Living in New York, I find myself painting the nature and warmth of the Caribbean. Who knows, perhaps if I were living in Caracas, I would be painting buildings instead. I think there's something beautiful about that, how we carry pieces of one home into another, and how art allows both to exist together.

Your paintings move between impressionism and abstraction. How do you decide how much of a place or subject should remain recognizable?

It depends on what I'm painting. If I'm exploring light, a memory, or a feeling, my work tends to lean more toward abstraction. If I'm capturing a particular moment, as in my In the Garden or Landscape series, it leans more toward impressionism, with pointillism as the technique that brings the image together.

Pointillism allows individual marks to become part of a larger image. What interests you about the difference between encountering your paintings up close and seeing them from a distance?

The change in perspective. I have believed since I was a kid that life is a matter of perspective. You experience life through the way you choose to see it. Despite your circumstances, you still get to choose how to experience and live it. A painting created through pointillism offers different perspectives of the same whole. The further away you stand, the more unified the image appears, but as you move closer, you begin to see and appreciate all the little marks that come together to create that whole.

How do you translate your memories of the Caribbean into color? Are there colors whose meaning has changed for you since moving to New York?

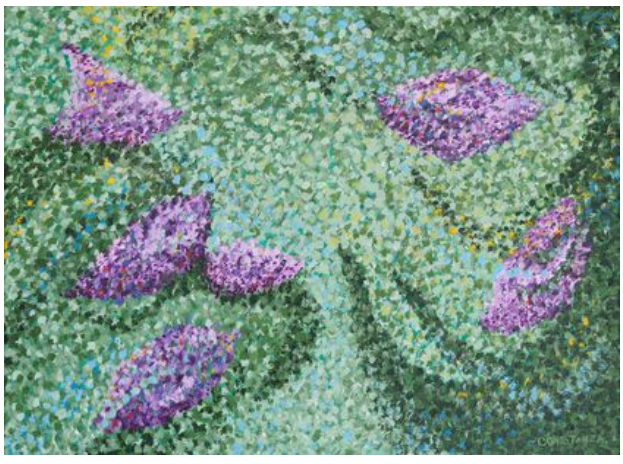
The base of all my paintings begins with a warm tone, bringing the warmth of the Caribbean into each piece, followed by the movement and vibrancy of the culture itself reflecting on the texture and saturation of the colors. The meaning of these colors hasn't changed since moving to New York. I visit Puerto Rico often to recharge and reconnect with the Caribbean. Although I didn't move to New York until I was 17, I had been visiting the city my entire life. New York is as much home to me as Venezuela once was.

How does your experience as an art director and visual designer enter your fine art practice? Are there professional habits you find useful and others you consciously set aside?

Having a professional background in design and art direction has been incredibly helpful, as it has allowed me to observe and experience art and culture from a different perspective. My experience in branding has been particularly valuable in building my own identity as an artist, from creating my website and stationery to finding ways to present my work clearly and thoughtfully. Communication design has become the foundation for how I present and share my artwork, and it has also influenced my creative practice, particularly through the incorporation of writing and typography into the borders of some of my paintings.
However, while design has taught me to be intentional and thoughtful about how I communicate, painting allows me to step away from the structure and expectations of commercial work. In my fine art practice, I give myself the freedom to explore without a brief, a deadline, or a specific outcome in mind. I think that's where the two disciplines complement each other: design has taught me how to communicate my work, while painting has given me the freedom to simply create.

You hope your work encourages people to slow down and find their own connection within it. Has a viewer's response ever revealed something in a work that you had not recognized yourself?

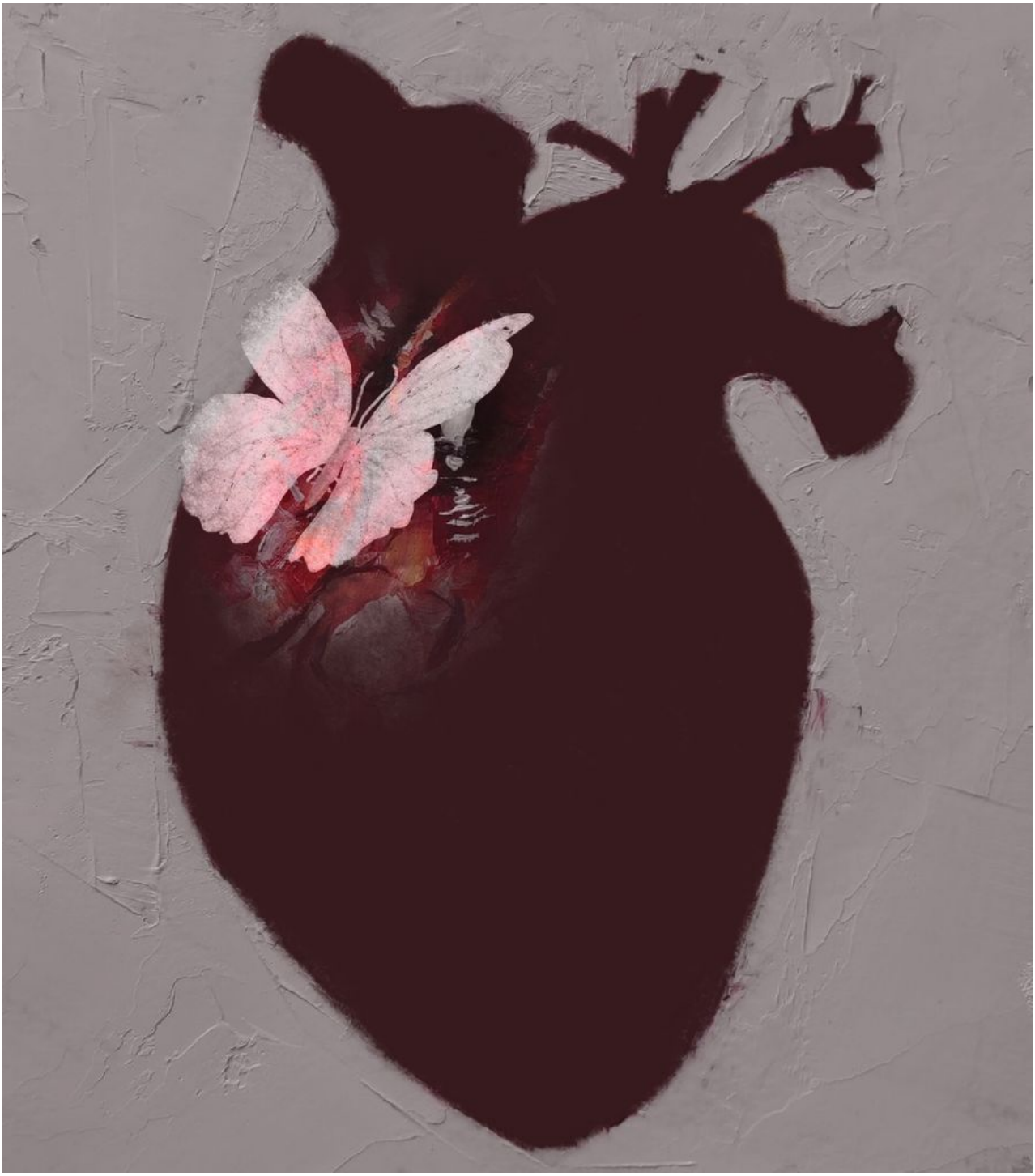
Yes, and it's always a pleasant surprise, as it offers a new perspective on something I created. I like to show my paintings without any explanation at first, allowing the viewer to form their own interpretation without being influenced by my intentions behind the work. The more their responses differ from my original intention, the richer the piece becomes. To me, that's the moment when ownership shifts, and the artwork becomes part of the greater whole it represents.



Constanza Eugenia | Within The Garden | 2026

Timi Kolozsi
I'm a 26-year-old self-taught artist from Hungary. Through my art, I strive to capture the essence of our deepest and most complex emotions, exploring themes of love, sadness, vulnerability, longing, and uncertainty through my own unique visual language and symbolism.
I'm drawn to the contrast between fragility and strength, often combining delicate, ephemeral elements such as flowers and butterflies with something as powerful and resilient as the human heart — one of the strongest muscles in our body, yet also a universal symbol of love, pain, and vulnerability.
My work is deeply personal, shaped by my own experiences, thoughts, and emotions. I use symbolism to express feelings that are sometimes difficult to put into words, transforming inner struggles and intimate moments into visual stories. I like to think of my art as a personal diary — a collection of emotions, memories, and fragments of myself, captured and preserved through imagery.
Ultimately, I hope my work can resonate with others, allowing them to find pieces of their own stories and emotions within it.

Timi Kolozsi | Anatomy of a Feeling | 2026





Timi Kolozsi | Beautiful Flaws | 2020

Natalia Polushina (Natasha Pola)



How has your background in biological research shaped the way you observe everyday objects? What changes when you approach them as an artist rather than a scientist?

For me, it's like a good habit: looking for connections and trying to understand their nature. I've always been curious why some people are more passionate about their hobbies rather than their jobs and what the real motive is in both cases. As for the difference in approach, as an artist I follow my feelings, intuition, and sudden impulses more than logic and analysis. In a nutshell, I aim to make my artwork not just understandable but fresh and evocative too.



Natalia Polushina (Natasha Pola) | Drinks | 2026
photo: Alexandr Bezuglykh

How did "A Hundred Hands" begin, and how does the "Scent" series fit into this broader exploration of craftsmanship and human creativity?

My project "A Hundred Hands" began as a fascination with every kind of craftsmanship, trying to understand how craftspeople gain and pass knowledge these days and what could change in the future. The "Scent" series is the first in the series of artworks that show how the human hands affect materials. Here, the hands are a symbol of scent: it's as if they are floating above everything. Perhaps, it's not so obvious but we often rely on our sense of smell and I also wanted to start with something simple and familiar, like our everyday life. That's why I choose baking, cooking and making drinks.

In these works, we look down onto tables filled with ingredients, utensils and dishes. What drew you to this viewpoint, and how do you decide where each element belongs?

I guess this viewpoint is familiar to every chef,

Natalia Polushina (Natasha Pola) | Baking | 2026 | photo: Alexandr Bezuglykh



pastry chef or anyone who cooks at home – the artwork is meant for them. On my posters, I placed each element according to its shape and colour.

In "Cuisine", hands working with dough bring the act of making directly into the image. What can a particular gesture reveal about a person's experience and knowledge?

In this series hands symbolize the scent itself as well as the transformation from raw material to finished product. I believe that each craftsperson has a unique set of gestures and movements which is the result of many years' experience. That is exactly what we mean by 'embodied knowledge', which is so difficult to put into words. And I imagine that an experienced craftsperson's hands move with confidence and quite briskly.

Cinnamon, citrus, berries and herbs carry strong sensory associations. How do you translate their smells, tastes and textures into a visual experience?

It's no secret that when people see a picture of a juicy piece of fruit they recall its smell, taste and texture. So, I did my best to make the viewer's mouth water using bright colours, glints of light on the surface of fruit and berries, and different shades to convey the uneven texture of the citrus's peel.

Your project explores craftsmanship through activities that include cooking and baking. What forms of creativity or expertise do you find in domestic work that people tend to overlook?

I know from experience in my family that domestic work tends to be overlooked by everyone – except the person who did it. Meanwhile, most of us believe that their grandmother cooks like a chef from a Michelin-starred restaurant! There's no doubt that experience plays a major role, while creativity brings a fresh touch every time. It seems to me that the secret lies in how we view our daily routine – is it a chore we've come to hate, or something done with love?

What would you like viewers to notice differently about their own everyday routines after spending time with these works?

From love to hate is only a step, especially when it comes to routine. But I notice that when we are trying to see beauty – not just in the result, but in the process itself – life takes on a whole new colour.

Interview

Natalia Pek



What first drew you to photography, and how did silence and stillness become central to your visual language?



Natalia Pek | Cadenza | 2024

My initial entry into photography happened during high school fine art class. While my classmates were eager to paint or illustrate, I found myself struggling with drawing. Instead, I found myself captivated by how a heavy camera's small viewing square and a compact cylinder of blank film could magically generate images. I initially believed photography was solely meant for documenting reality and preserving memories. As I spent more time photographing, I realized that photography became a medium where I can express complex personal thoughts and experiences that were hard to convey through words alone, much like painters using a canvas. My art teacher also introduced me to the work of Zhang Jingna. Back then, she had not yet become the widely recognized fashion photographer she is today. I was particularly drawn to the way she created portraits that seemed almost like paintings, with a distinct sense of atmosphere and visual storytelling. Her work left a lasting impression on me and became one of the early inspirations that encouraged me to pursue both fine art and fashion photography.

My appreciation for stillness and silence began to take shape while I was developing my visual language in South Korea, where I found myself increasingly drawn to the contemplative aspects of Asian philosophy. I have never thought of silence as something empty or passive. Rather, I see it as a space in which we can become more attentive to ourselves and to the things around us. When the noise of everyday life subsides, our senses seem to become more heightened, allowing us to observe, reflect, and perhaps understand ourselves a little more deeply. I suppose that is also the kind of experience I hope to offer through my photographs: a moment of pause that invites people to look a little longer, become more present, and perhaps allow their heartbeat to slow down, even if only for a moment.



Natalia Pek | All We Need Is Hope | 2026

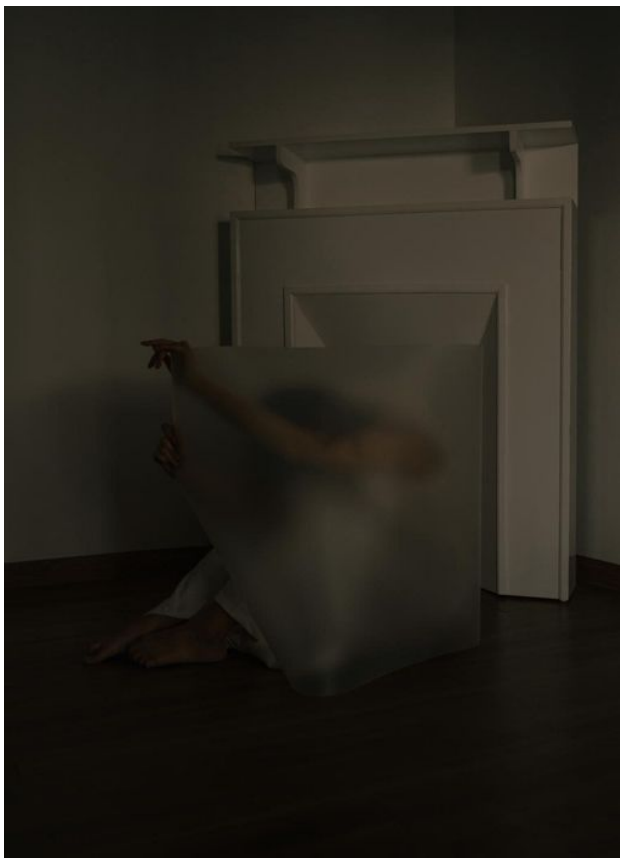
You grew up in Surabaya and describe an affinity with Northern and Scandinavian artistic sensibilities. Which specific influences shaped this connection, and how does your Indonesian background enter that dialogue?

Indonesia is a place of contrasts: intense tropical light, vibrant colours, bustling surroundings, and an expressive everyday culture. Growing up in Surabaya as a Chinese-descendant, particularly because it's in Java island, gave me distinct values and philosophical foundation. Javanese have their own remarks on how we should act, how we speak, even what kind of Batik pattern symbolizes certain emotions. As someone who tends to search for meaning in almost everything, I have always been drawn to the symbolism and visual language embedded in Javanese culture. Their exclusive cultural elements have subtly shaped the way I observe, interpret, and make sense of the world around me. On the other hand, I find a particular restraint yet freeing in Northern European art deeply appealing. Its treatment of light, composition, and atmosphere offers a striking contrast to the visual environment I grew up with. There is a particular serenity to it, yet I also feel a quiet sense of surrender in the Scandinavian approach to life, something I find quite liberating. This feels distinct from the more mysterious, almost eerie sensibility I associate with Javanese culture. Vilhelm Hammershøi is one artist whose work I particularly admire. His paintings of interiors and solitary figures possess a quality I find difficult to put into words.

Both cultures, in their own ways, encourage me to look inward and develop a deeper understanding of myself. I find myself moving between these two worlds, not necessarily trying to reconcile them, but allowing them to coexist. In many ways, this dialogue between contrasting influences has become part of how I see, feel, and ultimately express myself through photography.

What happens between your first idea for a photograph and the moment you press the shutter? How much is planned, and what do you leave open to chance?

An idea usually begins with something quite small. It could be a thought, a feeling, an overheard conversation, or even an ordinary observation that stays in my mind longer than expected. Some of my past works have been inspired by music, particularly songs or classical compositions, while others have grown out of a concept or an idea I happened to encounter in a book or somewhere on the internet. Sometimes, I have a fairly clear image in mind from the beginning. More often, however, I start with a question and gradually explore it through research, reading, and reflection. I also tend to give myself time to consider whether an idea genuinely resonates with me and whether it is something I want to express through my work. If it doesn't feel quite right, I simply keep it in what I like to call my idea bank, where it can remain until the right time, or perhaps never be revisited at all.
Thinking about how to translate an idea visually usually takes me less time than finding the right model and location for a shoot. Both need to align closely with the images I have in mind, although I have also learned that, from time to time, I need to adjust my idealistic expectations to accommodate reality. I tend to plan everything down to the smallest detail.



Natalia Pek | Consolation | 2025

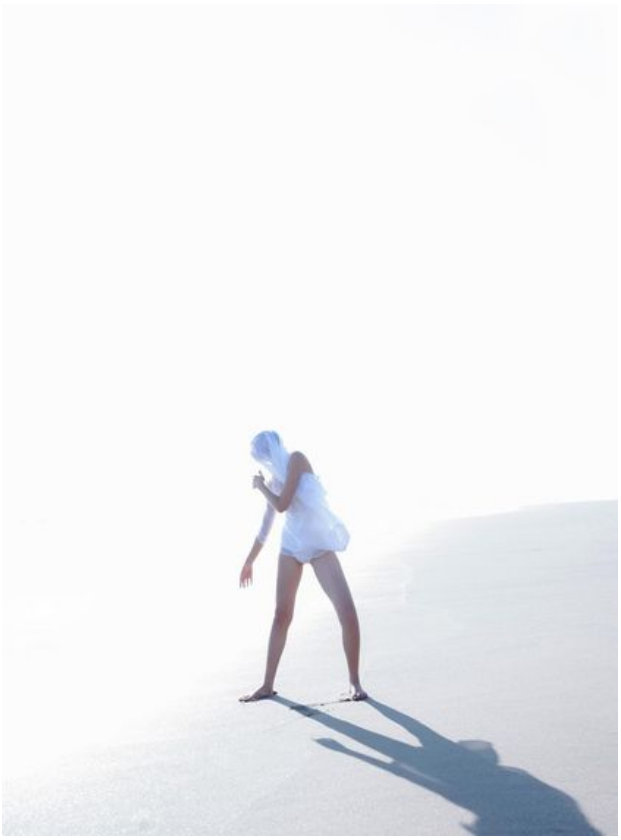
Some might think that such a meticulous approach takes away the excitement of photography, but for me, it is almost an obsession with precision and with being specific about what I want to communicate. I enjoy knowing exactly what I want an image to convey, from its atmosphere to the smallest visual elements.
That said, I don't feel the need to control everything. Unexpected things happen during a shoot, and I am quite comfortable improvising when necessary. Over time, I have learned to appreciate that uncertainty, too. You can prepare extensively for an image, but you can never entirely predict what will unfold in front of the camera. Sometimes, those unplanned moments bring something to the photograph that I could not have imagined or deliberately created.

Some of your photographs are filled with intense brightness, while others use subdued light and deep shadows. What guides your choice of light and palette for a particular image?

As I mentioned earlier when describing my creative process, I often have a certain image in mind of how I want a photograph to look and feel. However, I don't follow one particular formula, as I believe every subject and idea calls for its own approach and treatment. My natural inclination is towards muted colours, softer transitions, and relatively restrained compositions. Therefore I don't necessarily associate bright images with happier thoughts, or subdued light and deeper shadows with darker emotions. For me, these visual choices are less about following a particular emotional code and more about finding the most



Natalia Pek | Cukup | 2026



Natalia Pek | Echo | 2024

appropriate way to convey what I want to express in each work. I also don't want my photographs to become recognizable simply because they share the same colour palette or lighting style. I would rather let each idea determine its own visual language, even if that means moving beyond the aesthetic I naturally gravitate towards.

Your subjects often turn away from the camera or remain partly concealed. How do you work with them to find gestures that feel emotionally truthful without relying on facial expressions?

Having spent years practising ballet, I have developed a particular sensitivity to gestures and body language. I tend to pay close attention to even the smallest physical details, often giving specific directions on the placement of a hand, the tilt of a head, or the degree to which a model should bend their back. These gestures may seem subtle or even insignificant to some, but I believe they carry their own language. Through them, I try to translate movement and physical expression into visual storytelling, allowing a static medium like photography to communicate a sense of movement, emotion, and presence.
I've always found the human body quite expressive, even without showing someone's face. There is something quietly compelling about leaving part of someone's face unseen. It shifts the way we encounter the subject. Instead of being guided by facial features or expressions, our attention begins to wander towards their gestures, posture, and the space they inhabit. In a way, I want the figures in my photographs to exist beyond the boundaries of a particular identity, to become someone any of us might recognise a little of ourselves in. It is not so much about concealing the subject or stripping away their individuality, but about preserving something intimate, something that does not need to be



Natalia Pek | Sleeping At Last | 2016

offered to the viewer.

Your practice includes fashion, celebrity portraiture, and commercial commissions. How do you negotiate the expectations of these projects while preserving your contemplative approach, and what have they taught you about your personal work?

Working across fashion, celebrity portraiture, and commercial photography has given me the opportunity to approach image-making from different perspectives. Each project comes with its own objectives, and I believe understanding those expectations is an important part of being a professional photographer. With commissioned work, there is naturally a balance between my own visual preferences and what the client wants to communicate. I try to approach that balance as an opportunity rather than a limitation. Even when working within a very specific brief, there are still creative decisions I can make, whether in the lighting, composition, or the way I interact with and direct the subject. Every person has a different relationship with the camera, and learning how to respond to those differences is something I continue to develop through experience. I think these encounters have also helped me understand my own personal work better. Commercial photography often requires discipline, efficiency, and collaboration, whereas my personal projects allow me more time and freedom to explore an idea without necessarily knowing where it might lead. I also value the opportunity to collaborate with other creatives, particularly those whose approaches and visual languages differ from mine. Being exposed to different ways of thinking often challenges me to reconsider my own perspectives and discover new possibilities. Ultimately, I don't see commercial and personal photography as opposing practices. They serve different purposes, but each can inform and enrich the other.

You want your photographs to remain open to the viewer. Has anyone interpreted a work in a way that surprised you, and did their response change how you understood the image?

I think it is always interesting to hear what people see in my photographs, especially when their interpretations are quite different from what I had in mind when making them. Although there are some people who can’t really grasp what I want to communicate unless I explain it to them. I realize not everyone has the knowledge of visual languages, symbolism, or even a certain idea because mostly it was drawn from my personal knowledge. However, I find that quite beautiful because it reminds me that an image doesn't have to carry only one meaning. We all look at things through our own experiences, and I think those differences are what make the encounter between an artwork and its viewer interesting.
I sometimes find myself caught between wanting to explain the meaning behind a photograph and allowing it to speak for itself. Of course, every image begins with my own intentions and reasons for making it, but I also believe that viewers should be free to bring their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences into the process of interpreting it. Their interpretations don't necessarily have to align with mine, and I think there is something meaningful in allowing that space to exist. It's something I wouldn't want to take away by explaining too much.

Nomar Mi



What draws you to spontaneous, everyday moments, and what makes an ordinary scene worth photographing?

What attracts me the most about spontaneous moments is how fast you have to respond: you compose in seconds and, many times, you have to anticipate what is about to happen. That adrenaline is deeply thrilling. Your gaze, your mind, and your finger on the shutter must synchronize in a fraction of a second. There is no room for doubt. You have to read the scene on the fly, anticipating the light or the interaction of elements before it all unfolds. This constant quest to immortalize the fleeting instant keeps you in a state of absolute, exhilarating alertness, knowing that whatever you do not photograph in that precise blink of an eye will never happen again.
To me, common scenes do not exist—only special moments waiting to be discovered. A great photograph can be hiding in any corner; it is simply a matter of knowing how to observe and truly connect with your surroundings, giving value to those everyday details that so often go unnoticed by the rest of the world.



Nomar Mi | Inmaculada

How did your studies at the Centro de la Imagen in Barcelona shape your photographic language? Which lessons have stayed with you, and which have you questioned?

When I arrived in Barcelona, I already had a solid photographic foundation thanks to my training with Guillermo Ferrer, an international reporter and contributor to the prestigious Gamma agency in Paris. My goal in the city was to complete my learning and training as a photographer, and at the Centre de la Imatge I perfected my technique and delved deeply into studio photography, focusing on mastering the secrets of indoor studio lighting through constant practice and photographic work with different models.
I believe that, when starting out, every teaching is a valid pillar, but to evolve means to question. Over time, you learn to filter knowledge, deciding what to keep and what to discard in order to set your own course. In my case, this stage brought great added value to my training, allowing me to expand a photographic language of my own that responded to my true interests and to the way I felt about photography at that time.

How does living in Ibiza influence your work? What aspects of the island continue to surprise you beyond its familiar imagery?

The light of Ibiza is unique; it is what continues to surprise me the most. Its clarity and crispness completely transform the perception of colors, volumes, and spaces, becoming an invisible yet fundamental working tool that redefines creativity on a daily basis.
What still astounds me the most, far from the tourist postcard and the summer bustle, is the reverse side of the island. I am fascinated by the radical transformation it undergoes in winter: the blue hour of the cold months has a mystical and clean atmosphere that does not exist in high season. It is in those moments, when the island recovers its natural pulse and shows its true essence, that you realize its genuine magnetism has a strength that does not fade with the passage of time. I continue to find endless inspiration in hidden details, such as the texture of salt residue cracking



Nomar Mi | She loves you

the wood on traditional piers, the pure white of lime on the native architecture, the deep green of the pine trees, the earth tones of its fields, the blossoming almond trees, and the infinite shades of blue of the sea.

You describe your approach as highly intuitive. What usually prompts you to press the shutter before you can explain why a scene interests you?

On the street, most of the time it is pure intuition. There is an invisible connection of observation between the photographer and reality, a perception of the immediacy of the scene where decision-making and composition happen instantaneously. Everything happens very fast; whatever you do not photograph in that precise millisecond, you can consider lost forever.
In landscape photography, the process is different. There is more time for composition, to play with the evolution of colors, to experiment, and to glimpse different photographic options. The scenes unfold before you at a different pace, and you are the one who decides what to do with them, what to discard, and in what way they will reach the viewer.
In both worlds, my ultimate impulse is the same: I try to extract from the image that which often goes unnoticed at first glance. I seek to capture the pure essence of that moment, valuing its idiosyncrasy and transforming the everyday into something extraordinary that invites people to stop and truly look.

Can you describe a photograph in which breaking a compositional rule became essential to the image? What made that decision work?

In the beginning, you must be open to teaching and learning; later on, it is up to you to value what is truly important to you from everything you have learned, and that is exactly where you begin to shape your personality as a photographer. The definitive step is to break away from everything established and create your own rules. In my case, I break the rules whenever the occasion allows; I am driven by a constant need to experiment and take risks in every single shot.

You want viewers to feel an unconscious interest and begin deciphering the work. How much do you choose to reveal through titles or context, and what do you prefer to leave open?

The first thing I try to do is to make the viewer stop in front of the work. Through my images, I seek to directly challenge the person looking; my goal is to awaken an unconscious interest that invites them to decipher the photograph and to connect intimately with the captured instant, transforming the essence of the moment into a shared experience.
That is why, when it comes to titling or contextualizing, I prefer to be highly suggestive and barely descriptive. I understand titles not as an explanation of the image, but as an open door or a thread to pull. Revealing too much, giving an exact location, or explaining in detail what was happening in that split second destroys the magic of discovery and limits the public's imagination.
I prefer to leave the meaning open to interpretation. I am fascinated by the idea of each person completing the photograph with their own life experiences, memories, or current emotions. In the end, what I look for is not for the viewer to see exactly the same thing I saw when shooting, but to find their own truth within the shot. The work is truly completed the moment someone projects themselves into it and finds a mystery they wish to solve.

What are you currently trying to discover through photography that your existing methods have not yet allowed you to express?

Wow, I still have so much to learn! That is precisely what makes this profession so incredibly interesting: the fact that you discover new things every single day. Currently, I am expanding my boundaries and working fully within the realm of Fine Art and conceptual art through my photography.
For me, the process has shifted. Now it is no longer just about capturing the image at the moment of the shutter release; I now participate in a much more active and profound way during editing. Photography thus becomes a complete visual narrative, a canvas where I contemplate and utilize every technological and expressive tool at my disposal to tell a story with its own unique identity.
With this conceptual approach, I look to go beyond the mere recording of reality. I am trying to discover how to transform my own concerns, emotions, and abstract ideas into visual metaphors. It is a fascinating journey because I am no longer seeking to show what the world is, but rather how I feel it and how I choose to construct it through the image.



Nomar Mi | Anatomy of detachment

Vanja Valencak, the founder of Cut Out.
I was born and raised in Serbia, where I earned my first MA degree in Design from the University of Belgrade. Some years later, I moved to Helsinki, a city I quickly fell in love with and that eventually became my home. It was here that I continued my design journey, earning a second MA degree from Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture.
Over the years, I have built my career as a visual designer and Senior UI/UX designer. While I love the creative possibilities of digital design, the rapid emergence of AI and its growing presence in our everyday lives made me realise how much I missed creating something with my hands. I found myself longing for a slower, more personal kind of creativity – something tangible that people could hold, give and keep.
That feeling inspired me to bring an old passion to life and establish my own little company, creating handmade greeting cards and thoughtfully designed paper products. For me, it's a way to reconnect with the joy of making, experiment with colours and shapes, and bring a little more creativity and warmth into people's everyday moments.

Project Statement
My creative journey began with industrial design, where I developed a lasting fascination with form, shape and the relationship between objects and space. Although my work has since evolved into visual and digital design, my love for creating three-dimensional forms has never left me.
Through Cut Out, I explore how something as simple and familiar as paper can become more expressive. I enjoy experimenting with shapes, layers, cuts and painted details, finding ways to bring a sense of depth and dimension to an otherwise two-dimensional surface.
My aesthetic is rooted in simplicity and elegance, with a particular love for bold floral forms and thoughtful colour combinations. I believe that beauty doesn't need to be complicated and that carefully considered shapes and colours can bring joy in the simplest ways.
Working with paper allows me to slow down, experiment and reconnect with the pleasure of making things by hand. Through my work, I hope to create small, unexpected moments of joy – objects that are not only beautiful to look at but also lovely to hold, give and keep.



Vanja Valencak | Three Wishes: Blue



Vanja Valencak | Winter Wishes – Green

Interview



JINLEE PARK

What first drew you to traditional Korean painting, and which aspects of its philosophy remain essential to your work today?

Traditional Korean painting is the artistic foundation of my practice.
Through studying Korean painting, I became interested in the Eastern perspective on nature and the depth and subtlety of ink.
In traditional Korean painting, empty space is not simply an absence; it is a space filled with the possibility of new life.
The gradations of ink and the flow of lines express not only the forms of nature but also the energy within them.
Building on this tradition, I seek to move beyond simply reproducing nature as it appears.
By observing trees, leaves, and seeds, I discover traces of life and the passage of time.
Nature in my work is both the external world and a mirror reflecting the human inner world.
I believe that humans and nature are not separate but continually influence one another.
This understanding of interconnectedness is central to my artistic exploration.
My goal is to reinterpret the spirit of traditional Korean painting through a contemporary visual language.



JINLEE PARK | Breath–Fluttering Wings | 2024

Your The Wind Blows paintings from 2018-2019 feature varied blues, greens, and warm tones, while your recent works are largely monochromatic. What prompted this shift, and how has it changed the way you express nature's vitality?

The series The Wind Blows emerged from a period in which I was searching for hope and the possibility of recovery during difficult times.
At that time, I used blues, greens, and warm colors to express the vitality of nature and the movement of emotions.
Although the wind itself is invisible, its presence becomes apparent through the movement of leaves and flowers.
I wanted to capture this invisible force in my paintings.
In my recent work, I have restrained color and focused on the depth of monochrome and the texture of stone powder.
Emotions once conveyed through color are now expressed through the gradations of ink and the physical qualities of the surface.
In particular, repeated dots gradually form the shapes of trees, revealing the accumulation of time.
Each dot records the time I spend observing nature and the rhythm of my own breathing.



JINLEE PARK | Breath–Fluttering Wings | 2025

This shift reflects a movement away from the outward appearance of nature toward its inner essence.
Through restrained compositions, I seek to convey an even deeper and quieter life force.

In Breath-Fluttering Wings, you connect the inward movement of breathing with the outward movement of taking flight. How did this relationship become the starting point for the series?

Breath-Wings Flapping began with my observation of the golden rain tree.
In its leaves, fruits, and seeds, I discovered distinctive expressions of life in motion.
I was particularly struck by the way its seeds can travel with water currents and reach new places.
Within each small seed lies the possibility of movement, renewal, and taking root somewhere new.
This led me to reflect on the human experience of life and change.
Breathing is an inward movement through which we return to ourselves, while taking flight represents the will to move toward the world.
Although these movements seem to point in different directions, both are essential to the continuation of life.
The leaves in my paintings symbolize small voyages toward hope.
Through subtle movements in nature, I seek to express the strength of life as it rises again after hardship.
Ultimately, Breath-Wings Flapping is a reflection on vulnerability, resilience, and the possibility of new beginnings.

Your project explores three tree species, each with its own characteristics and symbolism. Could you share a personal encounter or observation that helped you understand what distinguishes each tree?

I see trees not merely as subjects in a landscape, but as living beings with their own qualities and symbolic meanings.
The golden rain tree led me to contemplate seeds that travel with water currents and eventually settle in new places.
This movement evokes departure, settlement, and encounters with unfamiliar worlds.
The Chinese parasol tree makes me think of integrity, dignity, and the importance of living according to one's principles.
Through this tree, I reflect on honesty and the need to maintain an inner sense of direction in contemporary life.
In Abeliophyllum, I explore the subtle relationship between what is visible and what remains unseen.
I believe that the full meaning of existence cannot be explained by outward appearances alone.
Although these three trees differ in form and character, they share the fundamental condition of being alive.
Through observing them, I explore the diversity of nature and the individuality of each living being.
Together, these trees embody my questions about life, ethics, and how different beings can coexist.



JINLEE PARK | Black Breath | 2025

You connect seeds travelling along water with human experiences of departure, encounter, and belonging. Has a particular experience in your own life shaped your understanding of these journeys?

The seeds of the golden rain tree travel with water currents, carrying the possibility of taking root in unfamiliar places.
In their journey, I see a reflection of human migration and the search for belonging.
Leaving one's homeland means moving away from familiar surroundings, relationships, and memories.
At the same time, it can open the possibility of building new relationships and creating a home elsewhere.
My reflections have also led me to consider the history of Korean immigration to Hawaii and the broader experience of diaspora.
Just as seeds take root in new environments, people continue their lives within different cultural landscapes.
These journeys may involve uncertainty and hardship, but they also hold the possibility of encounter and hope.
The blue tones in my work evoke movement, acceptance, understanding, and harmony.
I believe it is more important to understand and accept differences than to exclude others because they are different from us.
Through the journey of a seed, I hope to express the possibility of a world in which diverse people and cultures live together.

Healing has appeared repeatedly in your exhibition titles. Has your understanding of healing through art changed over the years, and what kind of experience do you hope your paintings offer viewers?



JINLEE PARK | Breath–Fluttering Wings | 2025

For me, healing does not mean erasing a wound or completely forgetting the past.
It means acknowledging the wound and discovering the strength to continue living with it.
When I created The Wind Blows, I was seeking hope and the strength to begin again through my connection with nature.
Over time, observing nature has taught me that healing often begins in small, quiet moments rather than through extraordinary events.
A leaf moving in the wind or the stillness of a tree can encourage us to look at life more slowly.
I express these sensations through the textures of stone powder, the gradations of ink, and the traces of repeated dots.
The act of painting itself has become a way for me to reflect inwardly and organize my emotions.
I hope viewers will pause in front of my work and take a moment to look within themselves.
I would be glad if my paintings awakened personal memories and emotions or offered a quiet sense of comfort.
Ultimately, I believe healing begins when we learn to see ourselves, others, and the world in a new way.

Alongside your studio practice, you have remained active in art education and community cultural life. What have these exchanges taught you that you might not have discovered through painting alone?

Art education and community activities have shown me that art can connect people beyond individual expression.
The people I meet through teaching bring different experiences, emotions, and ways of seeing the world.
Even when looking at the same subject, each person discovers something different.
I have come to see these differences not as shortcomings but as expressions of each individual's unique perspective.
Teaching has taught me that art is not about finding a single correct answer; it is about helping people discover their own ways of seeing.
Creating art together also opens opportunities for dialogue among people of different generations and backgrounds.
Community activities have shown me how art can bring comfort and renewed energy into everyday life.
These experiences have deepened my respect for the lives and perspectives of others.
They are closely connected to my artistic exploration of the diversity of life and the importance of coexistence.
I hope to continue using art to support both individual growth and a stronger sense of community.



Lee Seori is an AI visual artist based in Korea, working under the name Seori Studio. Her ongoing project, Confetti Life, reimagines ordinary scenes through pointillist texture, glittering surfaces, and warm color. Rather than building fantasy worlds far from reality, she begins with familiar things: a city corner, a piece of fruit, a cafe table, or a quiet walk. Through her visual language, these everyday moments slip slightly out of the real, creating a world that feels both familiar and dreamlike.

Project Statement
Confetti Life is a visual world built from ordinary scenes, vivid color, and a quiet unreality. Rather than building fantasy worlds far from reality, I begin with familiar things — a city corner, a piece of fruit, a cafe table, or a quiet walk — and let them slip just slightly out of the real.
Through AI-assisted image-making, pointillist texture, glittering surfaces, and warm color, I reimagine moments from everyday life. These five images bring together city scenes and familiar objects through that shared visual language.



Seori Lee | Fortune Parlour | 2026



Seori Lee | Val d'Orcia: Where the Sunflowers Turn | 2026

Claudia Habringer



What drew you back to visual art, and how did your earlier experiences shape the work you began making?

There is nothing worse than stopping. A constant movement in creation keeps me alive. I follow impulses. An idea pops up and I follow its lead. Creativity needs to be in a flow. There to say I can't really put my finger on it.
One day I was working with an Imago chart, thanks to Uwe Albrecht and Innerwise, which triggered the idea to resonate with different kinds of fields and to make visible what wanted to show up. As you can see its not what I want to present it is what wants to come through me. I started out with Mozart on a 60cm times 300cm fabric. Well, I found my self in a very playful mood during the process of making. This was the moment I experienced that there is more than just drawing and reproducing something. The energy field I was connected to had its own life and character. Oft course I was doubting the idea many times, but the process itself was worth it. A total contradiction to me at least was drawing number 2 Jimi Hendrix. It felt different and turned out different. The moment I realized that I continued with classical composers, painters, actresses, singers, musicians, plants and planets. I created for me a world of endless possibilities. My dancing and acting education probably are giving the works its drive and colors because the energy is running through me and my character which was formed by my musical drama education of course. All in all there is so much more to explore. Curiosity is my motor.



Claudia Habringer | In Resonance With Marilyn Monroe | 2018

Your experience in musical theatre revealed a gap between polished appearances and backstage realities. How does this awareness of what remains hidden influence your art?

Now after quite a long time and experiences in different working fields I can tell that the „polished experience" is there everywhere just follow the money and you will find it. Taking the mind off the creation process as well as possible I don't make things nice intentionally I let it appear. Dark and ugly fields are there as well which leads to the fact that no artwork was ever overpainted. It is what it is and of course it is my truth and it runs through my filters but unintentional.
Visual art makes me find out about my self every single



Claudia Habringer | In Resonance With Scotland | 2024

process I am in and it keeps me wanting more.

As an outdoor trainer, you helped people navigate fear through trust. What does trusting yourself mean when you begin an artwork without knowing where it will lead?

This reminds me to the moments whenever I stood at the edge of a cliff looking down knowing I have to abseil showing confidence. Oh my God! I learnt confidence and trust in one selfis learnable and buildable. Doubt is always a big obstacle but human and I advice to go through it. Hanging on a cliff is more threatening that diving into a new artwork without sketching. I do it because I am curious fully confident that it will be good. It is actually all about confidence. Plus, I can't fail anyway there is no visual or picture of the outcome at the beginning. It is all senses.

How did more than fourteen years of teaching German to refugees change your understanding of identity, belonging, and the limits of language?

I was told German is a difficult language. My answer was „no, not for me!" Of course I was joking. And that is my access to any kind of learning and teaching. Humor. It lifts situations up and makes them easier. It connects people cause of laughter and fun even in stressful and difficult situations. It opens doors to peoples tragedies without making them worse. And tragedies I heard a lot. My theatre education was very useful at these times. Also were my poppy drawings on the whiteboard cause pictures do stay in mind as words need a longer time.
I think that language molds people. May be this is the reason I flee the German language and prefer the English. This is actually a good question I need to dive deeper into.
My understanding of identity and belonging was quite settled before. And I believe that I belong to the world. I am an Austrian citizen but what makes an Austrian an Austrian? It is not Mozart or the Sound of Music, nor is it the Apres ski parties or all there shiny sights. May be it is time to start an artwork called „in resonance with the Austrian Soul". Fortunately I am born here and I am grateful for that.

How do movement and dance influence the rhythm and gestures of your drawings?

Movement is important to me as it definitely shows on my paintings. As a child I did a lot of sports. Living in the Alps of course skiing and ice skating was a major thing. Also the dancing shaped my character which again runs into my artworks.

In an intuitive process without fixed rules, how do you recognize that an artwork is complete?

I don´t. As mysterious as it might sound I ask the artwork and through it the original energy field. „Is there anything else to show?" If „Yes" I continue if „No" it is finished.

What does the idea of healing through art mean to you, and how does it shape the encounter you hope viewers will have with your work?

Whenever you draw or paint something with a certain intention you inform the material you are working on. The intention does not even have to correlate with the shown work. Let's say you are in a bad mood and work on an abstract pice and through your paint on a canvas.
If you really connect with the artwork you might feel the intention on a deeper layer.
Once in an artfair, I was training to connect with energy fields for a therapy purpose, I resonated with the exhibited paintings. The conclusion at this artfair was art must hurt.
It nurtured the idea though that healing could also occur through an underlying healing energy gifted to us by nature.
It lead to resonance works showing trees and other healing plants.



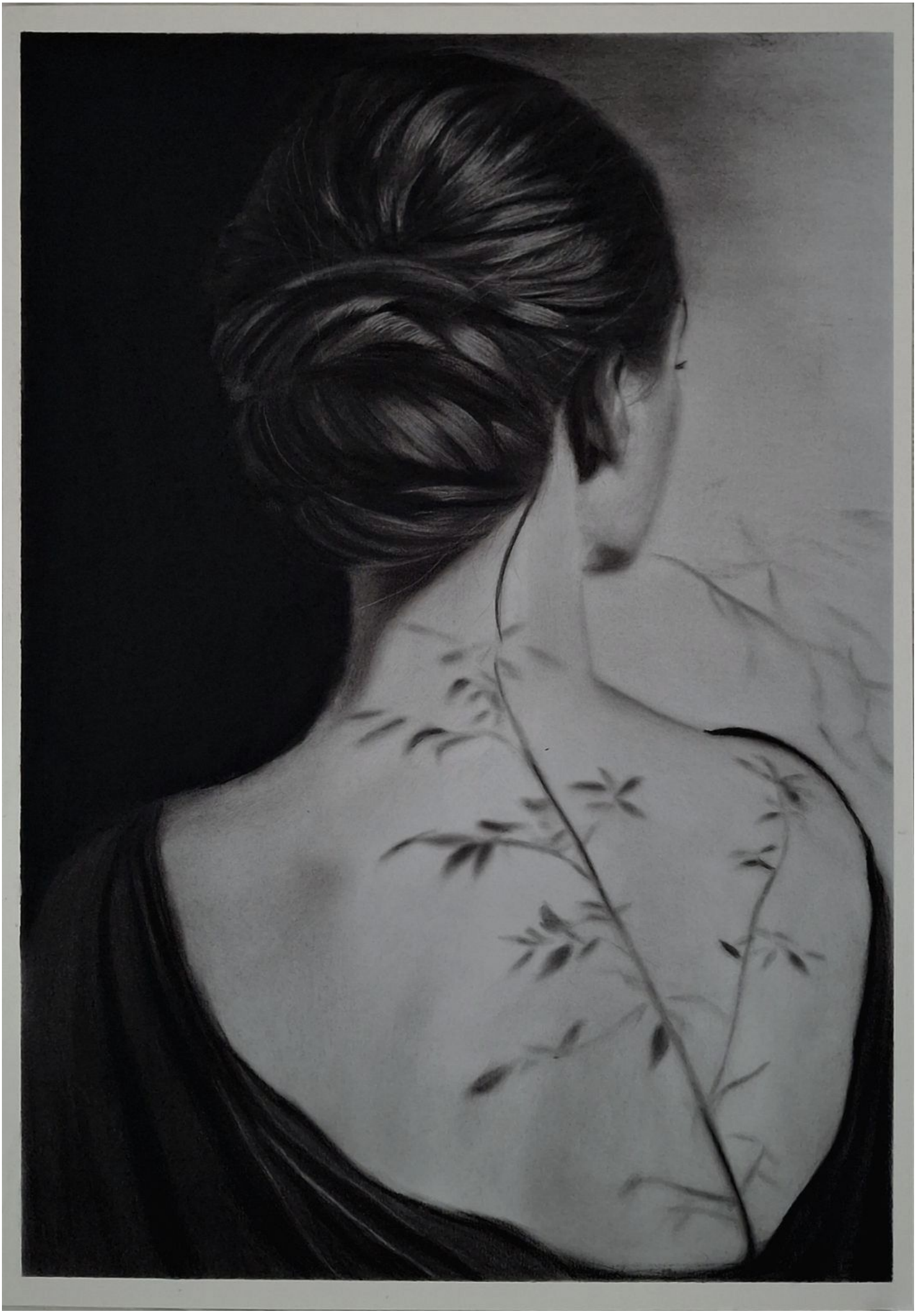
Claudia Habringer | In Resonance With Ludovico Einaudi And His Music | 2021

Ece Önür is a 26-year-old self-taught artist based in Istanbul, Türkiye, whose work focuses primarily on realistic portrait and figurative drawing. Working predominantly with graphite and charcoal, she explores the subtleties of human expression and forms.
Having developed her artistic practice independently, Önür continues to refine her approach to realism, with particular attention to tonal transitions, textures, and the delicate interplay between light and shadow. Her work reflects a personal dedication to observation, technical precision, and the expressive possibilities of drawing.

Project Statement
"Reflection" explores the delicate relationship between the human figure, light, and nature through realistic charcoal and graphite techniques. The composition brings together the softness of the female form, the intricate textures of her hair, and the subtle shadows of botanical elements falling across her back.
The contrast between the dark background and the illuminated figure creates a sense of depth and stillness, while the organic shadows introduce a quiet connection between the human body and its surroundings.
Through careful attention to tonal transitions, textures, and fine details, I aim to capture a balance between realism and visual simplicity, allowing light and shadow to become essential elements of the composition.



Ece Önür | Reflection | 2026



Ece Önür | Reflection | 2026

Ján Špireng



In CHOICE II, what interests you about the gap between making a decision and understanding its consequences?



Ján Špireng | Escape | 2026

I see decisions in two different ways. Sometimes, making a decision means stepping outside our comfort zone, without knowing what consequences may follow. Other times, a decision means leaving something from our past behind and choosing to move forward. In CHOICE II, the figure is leaving the light — something familiar, something they have known — and stepping into the darkness. For me, darkness represents the unknown. The figure does not know what lies ahead or what consequences this decision may bring. That uncertainty is exactly what interests me about decisions. We often have to take the next step before we can understand where it will lead us.

Motion blur appears in all three photographs. How do you use it to convey the experience of time within a still image?

Motion blur, created through a longer exposure and movement, expresses transience and the passage of time itself. It can also suggest the direction in which the figures are moving.

The two figures in Pain II seem to occupy different emotional states. How do you approach the unequal ways people can experience the same relationship?

In PAIN II, I wanted to express two different ways of experiencing pain. One figure walks away from disappointment and pain, while the other stays, remaining with their feelings and suffering. Both figures experience the same pain, but each has chosen a different way of coping with it.

In Pain II, the figures' clothing creates a strong visual contrast. What role do clothing choices play in developing your characters?



Ján Špireng | Pain II | 2026

In PAIN II, the choice of clothing was deliberate. The figure dressed in black represents the person who caused the pain, while the figure in white represents the one who suffered it. In this photograph, white symbolizes purity and innocence, while black represents the opposite. Sometimes in life, one person causes pain and another bears it, but in the end, that pain reaches them both.

When working with other people on emotionally difficult scenes, how do you establish trust and respect their personal boundaries?

In most of my images, I appear in the scene myself. Before shooting, I have a clear idea of the emotion or experience I want to capture. Being in the image makes it easier for me to express what I want to say, because I do not have to explain to a model what expression to adopt or what feeling I am trying to convey.
When two of us appear in a scene, the series captures emotions we share. We do not really have to act, because what we express is what we genuinely feel.

Can you describe a moment when something unplanned during a shoot changed your original idea for a photograph?

My creative process begins with the emotions, experiences, and life situations I want to express through images. I then visualize what the finished series will look like. Because I work this way, I have not yet encountered an unexpected situation during a shoot that has changed my original vision for the final series.

Pain, departure, and difficult choices have many familiar visual associations. How do you challenge yourself to move beyond those familiar images?

My way of expressing these themes comes from personal experience. I believe everyone has experienced pain, departure, or difficult decisions at least once in their life. Each of us might respond to these situations differently, but the underlying experience remains the same.

Has creating PROJECT LIFE changed the way you respond to other people's emotions in everyday life?

I would not say that PROJECT LIFE has changed the way I see other people's emotions. Rather, I try to observe how people respond to certain life situations and draw inspiration from those observations for future series within PROJECT LIFE.



Ján Špireng | Choice II | 2026

Anastasia Shabalina

My name is Anastasia, and I am a graphic artist working primarily with ink and markers, while also exploring painting. My work draws on the mythology of ancient Rus', myths from different cultures, and the theme of the afterlife.
I hold a degree in Decorative and Applied Arts and Traditional Crafts. I teach in the art department of a children's school of arts. Working with students remains an important part of my professional life and a source of inspiration. I regularly participate in exhibitions, both individually and alongside my students. I am currently developing new paintings and have also taken an interest in painting figurines. My artistic exploration lies at the intersection of graphic art, tradition, and mythological imagination.

Anastasia Shabalina | Yaginya Vievna in the Backwaters | 2024





Anastasia Shabalina | Female Musicians | 2026

Sevtap Yılmaz



My artistic journey, which began during my childhood in a workshop for gifted children at Mimar Sinan University and was later grounded in an academic foundation through fine arts education at Trakya University, directly shaped my formal discipline. Furthermore, my hands-on studio experiences facilitated the transformation of theoretical knowledge into practical application, ultimately maturing the technical framework of my photorealistic approach.

You describe painting as a way to slow down in a world driven by speed and consumption. How does the process of working in photorealism help you create this sense of attention?

Photorealism demands a high level of focus and meticulous, time-intensive craftsmanship. For me, this rigorous production process creates a space for deliberate slowing down, suspension, and profound observation, a contrast to the shallowness imposed by the contemporary culture of speed and consumption.

Your Portraits series begins with the question, "What is a "reasonable" woman?" What first prompted this question, and whose expectations are you challenging?

How did your fine art education and your early experience working in other artists' studios shape the painter you are today?



Sevtap Yılmaz | Portrait 3 | 2024



Sevtap Yilmaz | Portrait 4 | 2024

This problematic arises from the pressure exerted by the impositions and stereotypical expectations that social roles place upon female identity. My work adopts a critical stance toward the definitions of what is considered "reasonable" definitions constructed by a masculine perspective and patriarchal norms.

How do you develop the identities of the women in Portraits, and how much of your own experience enters these figures?

Rather than serving as individual portraits, these figures function as layered representations of female identity within the collective memory. My subjective experiences are not translated onto the canvas as a direct autobiography; instead, they are channeled through the aesthetic expression of the collective subconscious.

How do you use facial expression and gaze to suggest a woman's inner life while leaving room for viewers to form their own interpretations?

The inner world is encoded not through direct narrative, but via controlled expression and steady gazes. By leaving meaning fluid and multi-layered rather than fixed, my work creates a deliberate space of ambiguity that allows the viewer to engage with it through their minds' filter.

How do you choose the flowers, birds, and other natural elements that accompany your figures? Do their meanings change depending on the woman you are portraying?

When selecting the natural elements and living creatures to include in a portrait, I focus entirely on the subject's posture, the depth of her expression, and the emotional layer I wish to capture on the canvas at that moment. These choices vary depending on the woman I am portraying, as every face carries its own unique story and energy. Sometimes, I incorporate a bird that complements the strength and vibrancy in her gaze; at other times, I include a delicate flower that reveals the quiet grace and vulnerability within her.

Have conversations with viewers ever revealed a meaning in one of your paintings that you had not consciously intended? Could you share an example?

I don't have any specific memory that stands out, but from the moment an artwork is completed, it becomes an independent object; consequently, the viewer's perception can sometimes imbue the work with sociological readings or layers that I had not anticipated.



Sevtap Yilmaz | Portrait 5 | 2024

ZhiYing Jin (Su Li) is a color-glaze ceramic artist based in Jingdezhen.
Her artistic practice weaves visual creation with therapeutic reflection, exploring how art holds fragile personal memory.
The Pumpkin Series originates from her childhood: pumpkins filled every corner of her old family home, sent by her grandmother.
The house has since been demolished, and her grandmother is no longer present.
She embraces the randomness of kiln transformation as a metaphor for impermanent, unrecoverable moments.

Project Statement
The Pumpkin Series is a therapeutic visual archive of my vanished childhood home.
Pumpkins were quiet, recurring gifts from my grandmother, scattered across every corner of our old house.
Now the building is gone, and she has passed away; those warm scenes can no longer be revisited.
Working with high-temperature color glaze, I yield control to the fire.
The unpredictable flow of glaze mirrors the nature of memory: imperfect, shifting, and impossible to reconstruct exactly as it was.
This body of work is not merely a depiction of pumpkins.
It is a gentle practice of grief and healing, inviting viewers to confront their own tender, lost memories.







António Cabral
I was born in 1950 in the city of Guarda, Portugal. I lived a childhood in an environment surrounded by canvases, paints and brushes, through the activity of my mother, an artist. I came to discover the pleasure of painting, however, in adulthood, due to the influence of my wife, who encourages me. The taste for photography (old hobby) gave rise to a sensitivity to recreate paintings and faces and landscapes, retained in films and memory.

Project Statement
I participated in a collective visual arts exhibition held as part of the 7th Public Prosecution Service Congress in Alvor – Portimão, Portugal (February 2007). I also took part in the exhibition "Fragmentos"—a joint show featuring two painters—in Sesimbra, Portugal, in 2007. I participated in collective exhibitions at the Sociedade Incrível Almadense in Almada, Portugal, and at the Teatro Mirita Casimiro in Cascais, Portugal. I exchanged experiences with other painters through Fine Arts Portugal. Some of my works are held in private collections in Brazil and Portugal.



António Cabral | Musician



António Cabral | Waterfall



Susan Fleming

After many years of teaching art, what has surprised you most about focusing entirely on your own creative practice?



Susan Fleming | Grafted On The Branch | 2025

I truly loved teaching art for 36 years, but what has surprised me most is how rewarding it is to finally have the time and freedom to focus entirely on my own creative practice. This new chapter has allowed me to explore, experiment, and follow my own artistic instincts in ways that I hadn't previously had the opportunity to do.

How does your knowledge of design and art history shape the decisions you make within an intuitive, unplanned process?

After years of teaching lessons involving historical artists, various media, design, composition, and color theory, these principles have become deeply ingrained in the way I see and understand art. I find that this knowledge often emerges unconsciously as I work through my expressive and intuitive methods. Although my process is not predetermined, the foundation of my education and teaching experience continues to influence the artistic decisions that develop along the way.

Since moving from Arizona to the Carolinas, what changes have you noticed in your response to landscape, light, and color?

I have noticed that images in my work that might suggest landscapes seem to be evolving and coming together in new ways. Rather than simply responding to the physical landscape around me, these images appear to blend and collaborate with one another, drawing from both my imagination and subconscious. It has become an internal exploration in which memories, visual impressions, and new surroundings seem to merge in unexpected ways.

When you begin a new piece without a



Susan Fleming | Providential Forces | 2026

predetermined outcome, what usually gives you a starting point?

Starting with nothing is incredibly freeing and exciting. I often begin by taking a piece of charcoal, closing my eyes, and simply making marks on the surface without thinking about the outcome. This was also one of my favorite lessons to teach because it encouraged students to let go of expectations and embrace free expression. Once those first marks are made, the artwork begins to grow and evolve naturally from there.

You work with materials that behave very differently. How do their physical qualities influence what you choose to add, conceal, or leave visible?

Learning to really see every mark, texture, color variation, and overlapping layer is where some of the most wonderful discoveries happen. I believe you have to develop an eye for recognizing these possibilities through exploration. Sometimes I discover something unique that I want to develop further; other times, I simply leave it as it is.
I try to approach the process without judgment or criticism. Each medium has its own personality and way of reacting. When different materials are combined, they can interact in unexpected ways, often taking the artwork in entirely new directions. These discoveries and possibilities are a constant source of inspiration for me.

You describe creation as a path toward healing. What does that healing involve for you within the creative process?

Some of my favorite university courses were in Art Therapy Practices. As a student, I had the opportunity to personally participate in the exercises and explore the techniques behind this approach. I found it incredibly insightful to discover how deeply people can store and hold onto memories and experiences.
By focusing on different topics and allowing creative expression to unfold, I was surprised by the discoveries that emerged both during and after the process. These experiences awakened something in my own creativity and helped me move beyond certain personal life challenges. For me, this was a genuine experience of healing and an important part of my artistic journey.

You hope your work will help viewers connect with their own inner lives. What role does ambiguity play in making room for their experiences?

We are all at different places in our lives, shaped by countless experiences and personal circumstances. Because of this, I believe each viewer will interpret my artwork differently, drawing upon their own past experiences, present circumstances, and hopes for the future.
I am a true believer that we are spiritual beings temporarily living in human bodies. I believe art has the ability to connect with our souls and speak to each of us in unique ways. The ambiguity in my work allows viewers the freedom to discover their own meanings and make personal connections. These connections may come through visual memories, emotions, or even subconscious feelings that remain with them long after experiencing the artwork.

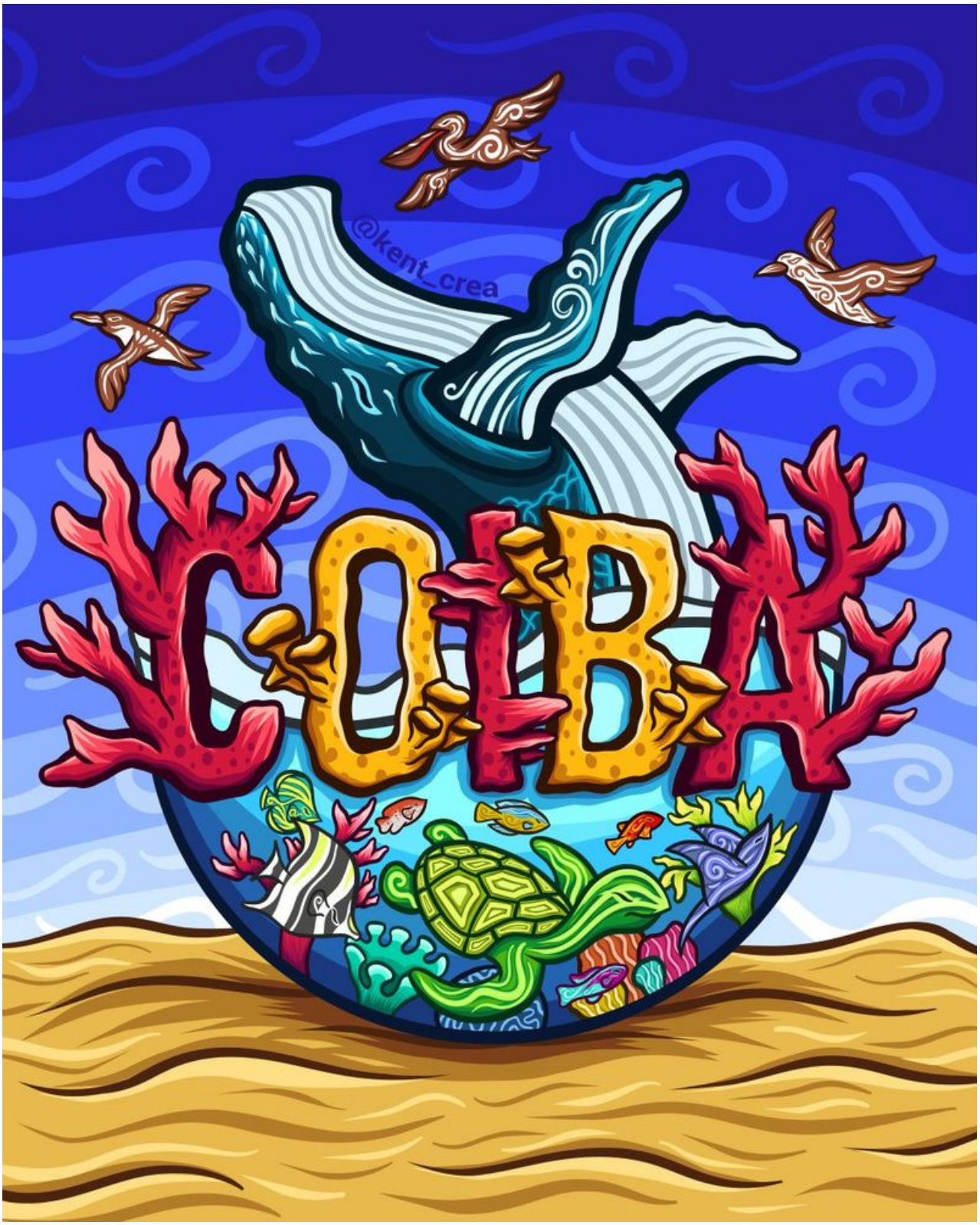


Susan Fleming | Look Within | 2025

Kent Miller
Born and raised in Panama, I am a graphic designer who loves illustration and all forms of art. I create custom pieces inspirated in nature and the culture of my country.

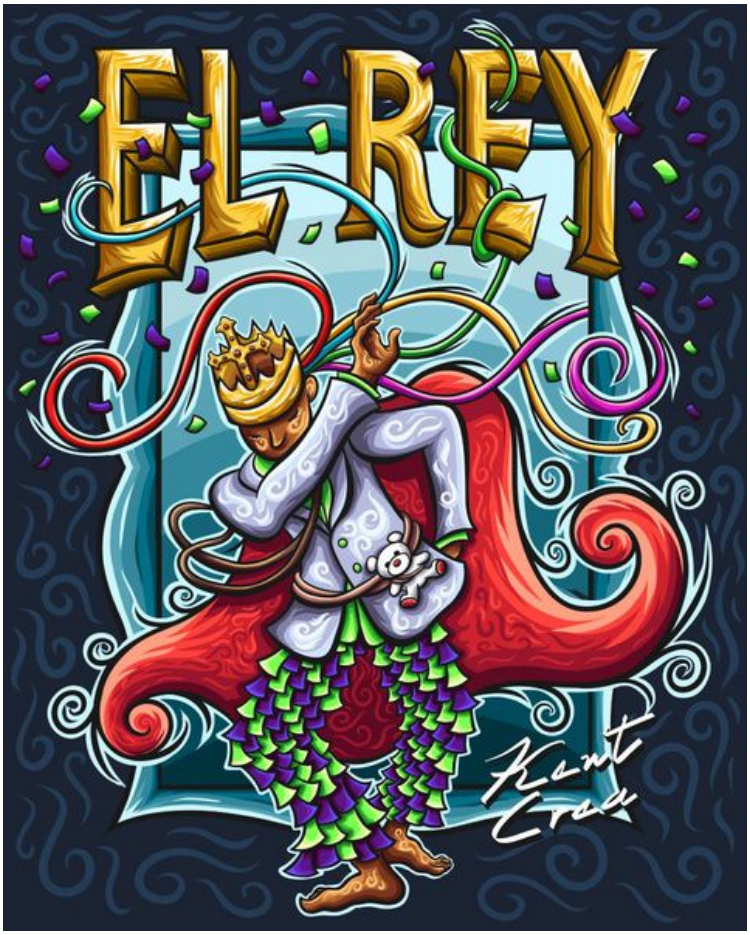
Project Statement
In these particular pieces that I am showcasing I included several of the most recognizable elements of Panama. These artworks are a reflection of our identity as a nation and what makes us proud. These elements include: the famous Panama Canal, the Coiba Island and its tropical features, the Congo King and Queen from the Colón province, and many more.

Kent Miller | Coiba | 2025





Kent Miller | The Panama Canal | 2025



Kent Miller | The King | 2026



Kent Miller | The Queen | 2026

Agbolade Kelvin Agbenla



How did you come to photography, and what led you to makemovement, resilience and progress central themes in your work?



My first steps as an artist were in drawing and painting, but photography is where I found my voice. The moment I picked up a camera, I realised it could hold something real: a breath, a strain in a muscle, a moment that existed for a fraction of a second and would never happen in exactly the same way again. I fell in love with that immediately, and I have been a photographer ever since.

The themes were not something I chose from a list. They were what I kept noticing. Birmingham is a city built on work, and I have always been surrounded by people who keep going, often quietly and without any recognition. I wanted to honour that. For me, progress is not a finish line. It is one step, then another, and another. Movement is the way I try to show that inside a still image.

You describe the human body as a language of its own. Whichgestures or postures draw your attention, and what do they allow you to communicate?

The body tells the truth before words do. I am drawn to a lifted chin, a back holding tension, feet planted firmly on the ground, an arm reaching towards something beyond the frame. Hands especially: a clenched fist says one thing, an open palm says something completely different.

I am also drawn to postures that are bent but not broken. A figure leaning forward into resistance, or caught in the moment just before a leap. These gestures let me talk about effort, determination and hope without having to explain them. People recognise them instantly because they have felt them in their own bodies.

When I look through the viewfinder, I am searching for the

one line that carries the energy of the whole figure: from the planted foot through the spine to the reaching hand. When that line is clear, the photograph speaks without needing any explanation.

How do you work with your subjects to develop movement and poses? How much is planned, and how much emerges spontaneously during a shoot?

I usually arrive with a starting point: a shape in my head, a direction for the light, a feeling I want the images to carry. But I rarely ask people to hold a fixed pose. I ask them to move: walk, push, stretch, fall forward and catch themselves, repeat a movement until it becomes natural.
I often describe a feeling rather than a position. Instead of saying "raise your arm", I might say "push as if you are moving a wall" or "reach for something you have been waiting a long time for". The body responds more honestly to that.
I would say maybe a third is planned and the rest emerges. Some of my strongest images happened between instructions: someone shaking out their arms, catching their breath after a jump, laughing because a movement went wrong. My job is to recognise those moments when they come and be ready for them.

Being photographed can involve both confidence and vulnerability. How do you build trust and give your subjects space to shape how they are seen?

I always start with a conversation before the camera comes out. I ask people what strength looks like in their own body, and what endurance means in their own life. Those answers often become the starting point for the shoot.
Photographing someone in a moment of strain can feel very exposing, so I make sure they know they can stop, say no, or change direction at any time. I show them images on the camera as we go, so they are part of the process rather than just being looked at. If something does not feel like them, we change it.
I also invite them to bring their own movements. A dancer, an athlete or someone who has simply carried a lot in life will move in ways I could never direct. When they bring that, the photograph becomes something we make together, and that is when it feels honest.

What draws you to monochrome, and how does it influence theemotional atmosphere of your photographs?

Monochrome lets me photograph what matters most to me: light, shape and feeling. When I look at a scene, I am already reading it in tones, in where the light falls and where the shadow gathers.
Removing colour removes distraction. Clothing, trends and backgrounds fall away, and what remains is form, muscle, light, shadow and texture: the shine of sweat, the tension in a forearm. It slows the viewer down and makes them look at the body and the gesture rather than the surface.
Emotionally, monochrome feels more serious and more timeless to me. The contrast between light and shadow also reflects what my work is about. Struggle and strength live together in the same body, just as light and shadow live together in the same frame.



When reviewing your photographs, what makes you choose aparticular frame as the one that best expresses a sense of an ongoing journey?

I look for the in-between frame. Not the peak of the jump or the moment of landing, but the moment when the movement is still happening: the body leaning into the next step, the weight not yet settled. If the frame feels finished, it usually does not make the cut.
I ask myself whether the photograph has a before and an after. Can you feel where the person has come from and where they are going? Often there is a direction in the body that leads the eye out of the frame, and the viewer completes the journey in their imagination.
Sometimes I look at the images small, as thumbnails, before looking at them closely. If the shape of the body alone carries energy and direction at that size, I know the photograph will hold.

Your work celebrates endurance. How do you make room for exhaustion, uncertainty or fragility within that celebration?

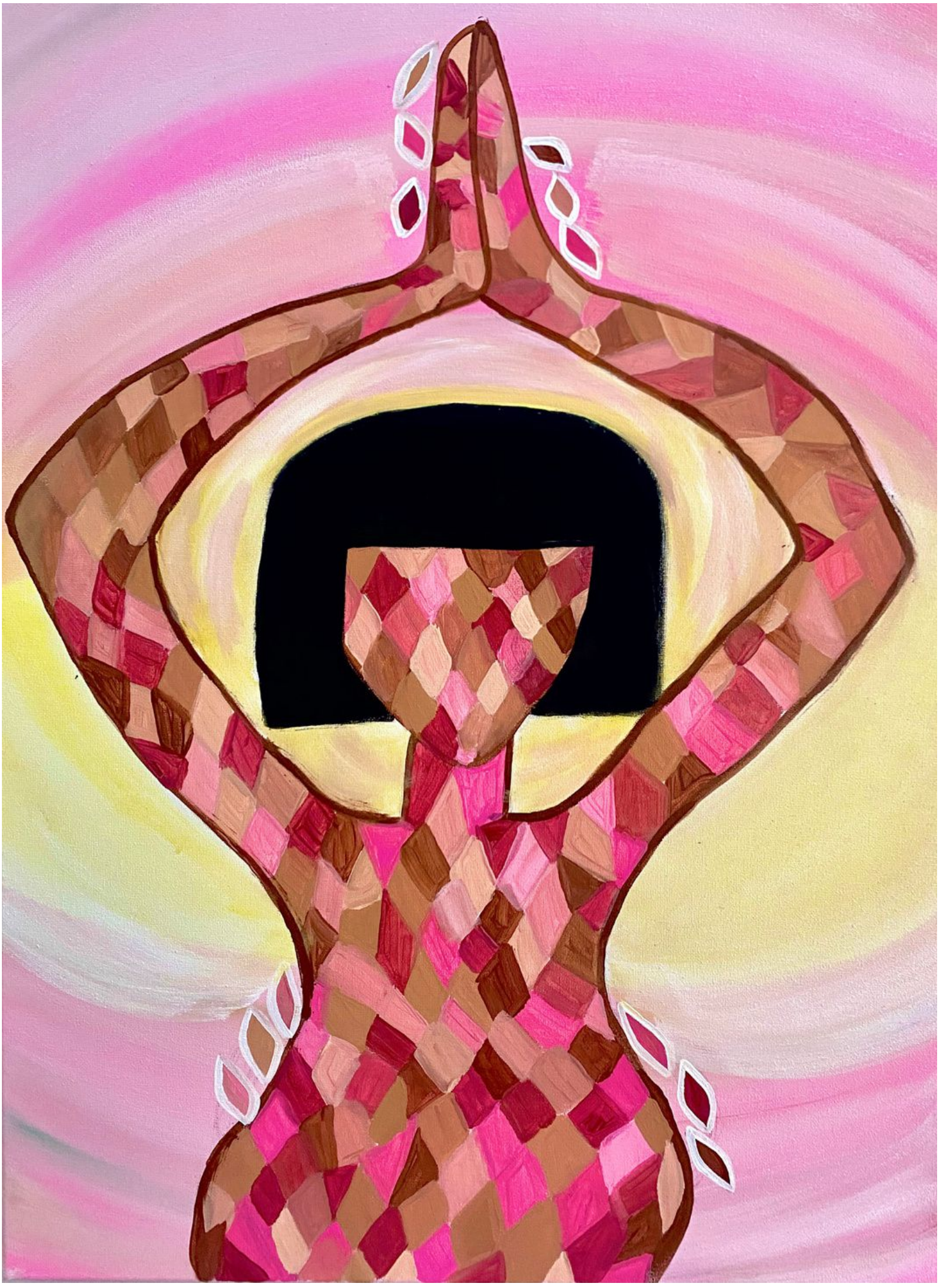
For me, they are part of endurance, not the opposite of it. You cannot endure something that does not cost you anything. So I do not only keep the triumphant frames. I keep the bowed head, the hands on the knees, the deep breath before trying again.
Rest is part of the journey. Uncertainty is part of the journey. Some of the images I care about most show a person who looks tired, unsure or close to giving up, but who is still there. That, to me, is resilience in its most honest form.
A celebration that hides the exhaustion becomes a poster rather than the truth. Showing fragility makes the strength believable. When people see a moment of weakness alongside a moment of power, they recognise themselves, and that is when the work really connects.

LadyCA is a self-taught multidisciplinary visual artist and the founder of Diamond Body Global, an evolving creative philosophy and artistic practice exploring restoration, femininity, grace, power, and inner connection.
Working primarily in acrylic on large-scale canvas, her work brings together vibrant color, symbolic imagery, and meditative forms to create visual expressions of wellness, movement, and the divine feminine. Through painting, drawing, and emerging digital explorations, she investigates the relationship between the body, stillness, and creative energy.
Her signature Diamond Body practice has developed into an ongoing body of work, expanding across meditation, yoga, embodiment, and spiritual expression. What began as a personal exploration has grown into an international artistic practice, with exhibitions in New York, the United Kingdom, and the Philippines, alongside retail partnerships and independent creative ventures.

Project Statement
My artistic practice, Diamond Body, explores the relationship between restoration, femininity, grace, power, and inner connection. At the heart of my philosophy is the idea that the human body is a living gem, much like a diamond, capable of reflecting beauty, strength, and light through intentional movement, prayer, and stillness.
Through vibrant color, symbolic imagery, and meditative forms, I create visual environments that invite viewers to experience wellness, spiritual connection, and creative energy.
Working primarily with acrylic on large-scale canvas, I use the human body as a visual language to explore movement, embodiment, and the relationship between physical presence and inner harmony. My work draws inspiration from meditation, yoga, prayer, and the transformative nature of color.



LadyCA | Diamond Body Wings | 2026



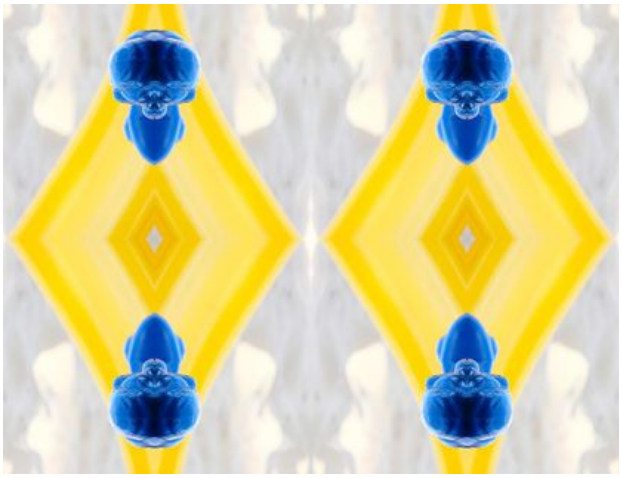
LadyCA | Diamond Body Receiving Light | 2026

illi Jung Piccato



After more than a decade in visual merchandising for luxury fashion houses, how has your understanding of what makes an image compelling changed through your artistic practice?

In luxury visual merchandising, an image is compelling because it is thoughtfully crafted to capture attention, communicate a brand's identity, and serve a clear commercial purpose.
Transitioning into fine art shifted my definition of what makes an image meaningful. Today, an image is compelling not because it is commercially curated, but because it embraces fragility, spontaneity, and raw emotion. I shifted my focus to listening closely to nature, humanity, and the fragile harmony between them. Across photography, digital collage, sculpture and installation, I reconstruct these observations into a new visual dialogue.
If I previously worked in a high-paced commercial environment, today I see myself as a farmer—working in tandem with rain, sunlight, soil, seeds, and human care to cultivate an image that is organic, living, and enduring.



illi Jung Piccato | Joy | 2025

You describe an "ethic of care" as central to your work. How does this idea influence what you photograph and how you transform those images?

I believe humanity cannot exist without nature, and we carry a fundamental responsibility to protect this vital resource for future generations. This belief forms the heart of my "ethic of care"—a commitment to giving deep attention to essential aspects of life easily overlooked in a fast-moving society.
This philosophy shapes what I photograph. For seven years across Europe, South Korea, and Brazil, I documented the sky awaiting rain and observed subtle transformations in Echoes of Rain, Echoes of Snow Dance, and Echoes of the Choir. In JOY, this care expands toward safeguarding the laughter of childhood.
In terms of how I transform those images, an "ethic of care" serves as my compass. Rather than manipulating a frame to control the subject, I embrace spontaneity. After capturing raw moments, I reconstruct select photographs through mirroring—much like a symmetrical butterfly painting—to uncover the subtle visual story suspended between human presence and the natural world.

What first drew you to the makeshift beachside playgrounds of Brazil, and when did your observations begin to take shape as the JOY series?

When I moved to Rio de Janeiro with my family, watching my children play on the beach shifted my lens from the vast sky down to the sand, the sea, and the children themselves. I noticed how beautifully their laughter blended with the sound of the crashing waves.



illi Jung Piccato | Encore Une Fois, S'Il Te Plaît | 2025

Following the sound of their play one afternoon, I came across a temporary playground set up along the shoreline at Leme Beach. In that space, I discovered a profound convergence: the sunlight, the vivid colours of the play structures, the shadows, the footprints left in the sand, the blue sky, and the ocean seemed to be sharing in the laughter together. JOY crystallized in that moment.

In your statement, you describe children returning to a slide "once, twice, and a thousand times." How do you translate the rhythm of repeated play into a visual language?

Children play dynamically and rhythmically, yet each repetition builds a private, imaginative universe. To one child, the playground is an escape from a shark; to another, a royal castle or a hero's battleground.
To translate this tireless, repetitive rhythm into a tangible visual language, I approach my photographs through a temporal lens. By cutting, duplicating, and reassembling images of these playground structures—mirroring the repetitive nature of children's play—I map the hidden architecture of their play. The collage process reconstructs the temporal flow of movement, capturing how a colourful playground structure transforms into a site of infinite wonder through a child's imagination.

The playground structures and the footprints in the sand hold distinct traces of play. What do these marks reveal to you about the relationship between the playground and the children who inhabit it?

Playgrounds exist for play, yet the difference between adults and children is revealed in these spaces. Children run directly toward play; adults instinctively search for shade and a place to sit. But as you observe longer, a shift happens—parents begin running and playing alongside their children, reawakened by the raw vitality of their laughter.
The physical traces left in the sand prove that this joyful world—where play exists regardless of age or social status—is not merely an abstract idea, but a real, tangible presence. Footprints of various sizes become physical evidence of a fleeting territory where imagination temporarily reshapes physical reality.

Having lived across several countries, what has Rio de Janeiro brought to your practice that you had not encountered elsewhere?

Having lived in New York, Seoul, Canada, Italy, and France, I was accustomed to distinct boundaries between urban infrastructure and nature, or between private emotion and public life. Rio de Janeiro gently dissolved those boundaries for me.
Rio de Janeiro offers an intense, unfiltered vitality where rainforests, mountains, and the ocean meet directly with urban space. The city taught me to embrace fluidity, warmth, and the beauty of temporary shelters—from beach umbrellas to seaside playgrounds. It brought a warm, organic, colourful lightness and a spatial openness that has profoundly transformed my visual language.

You describe JOY as a reminder of the laughter we are tasked to protect. What would you like viewers to carry from these images into their everyday lives?

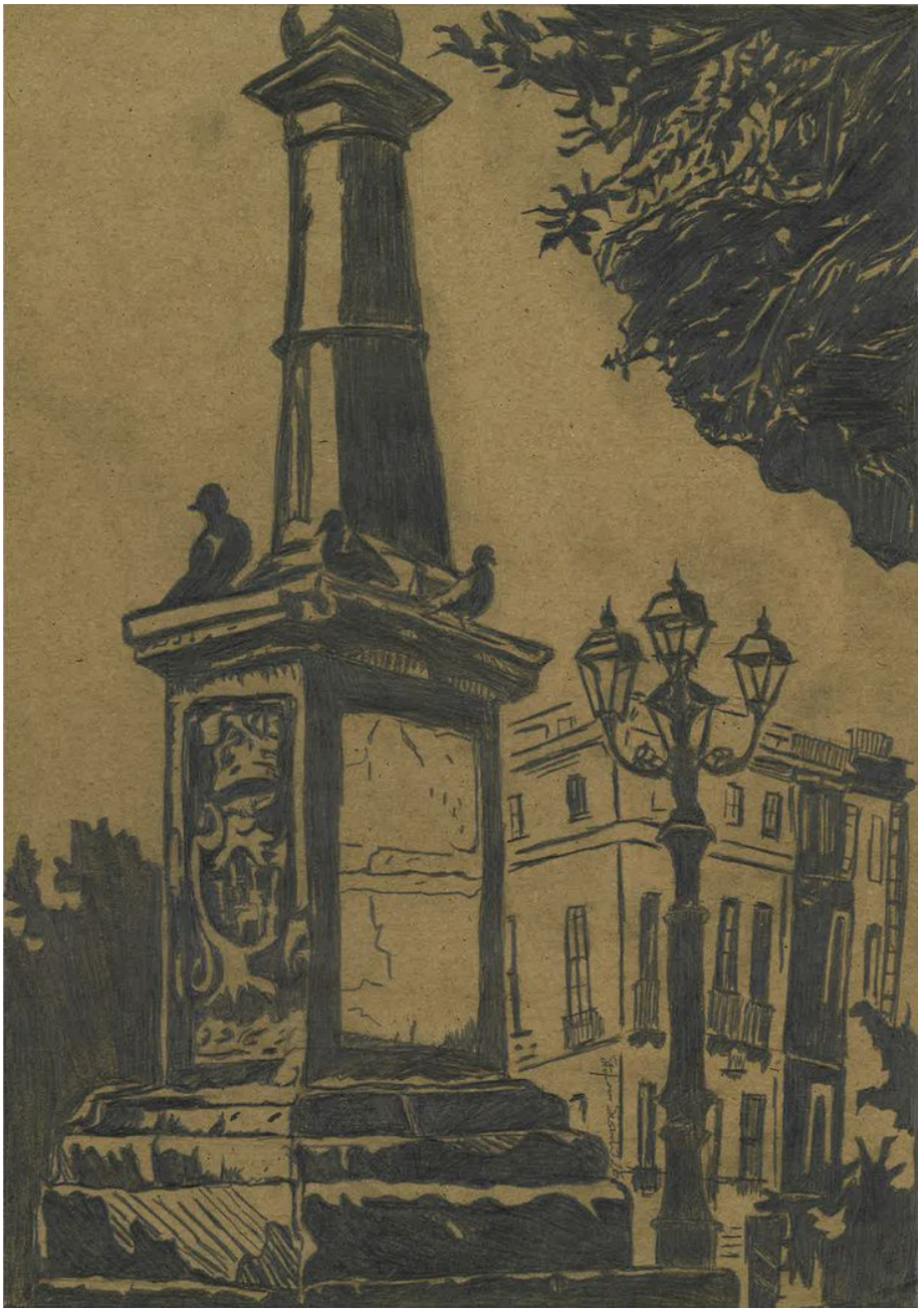
I hope viewers reconnect with their own innate sense of wonder and lightness. Through these images, I want them to recall what it felt like to build imaginary worlds in a playground, entirely lost in play until sunset.
In a world increasingly shaped by environmental anxiety and social stress, joy is often dismissed as something trivial. I view joy as a resilient, life-giving resource that we must consciously protect. I hope viewers carry away joyful memories from their youth — a quiet reminder of the abundance that exists when we safeguard childlike wonder.



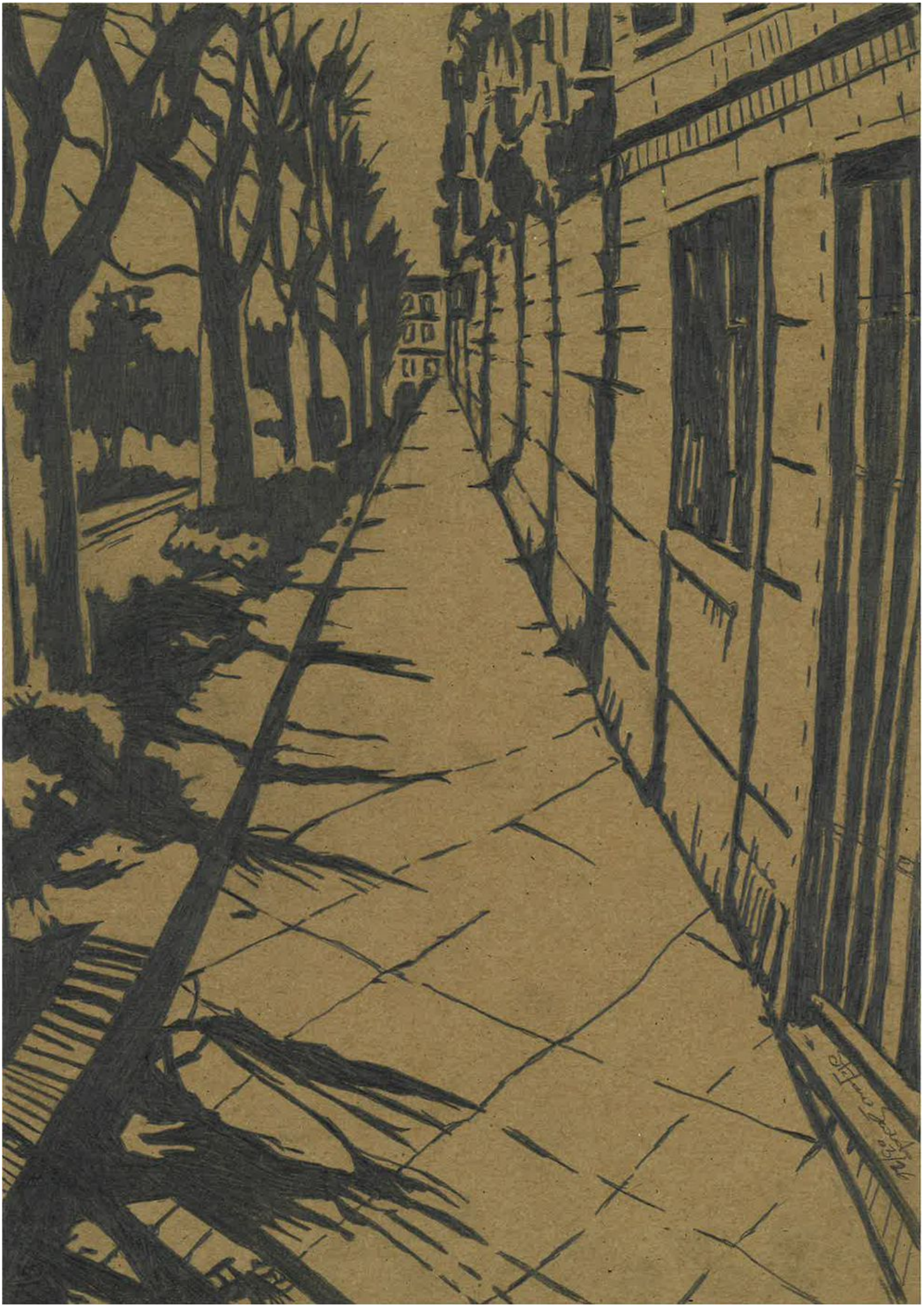
illi Jung Piccato | Wow | 2025

Stefano Scordo is an Italian artist and engineer based in Cagliari, Sardinia. His artistic research explores the relationship between urban spaces, memory, and the passage of time.
Through Caralis Noir, a series of graphite drawings on recycled paper, he explores the lesser-known faces of Cagliari, moving beyond its familiar Mediterranean imagery to reveal a quieter, more intimate city.
His work combines architectural precision with a noir atmosphere, transforming ordinary urban fragments into reflections on absence, identity, and time.
In 2026, his work CN06 received the Emerging Virtuoso recognition in the Street Stories competition organized by Lumen Art Gallery. His work CN05 was also selected for Abitare il provvisorio, an exhibition organized by ISOLART in Florence, Italy.

Project Statement
Caralis Noir is an artistic project born from the observation of Cagliari as a city to be experienced rather than simply admired.
Far from postcard views and familiar tourist imagery, the project explores urban fragments that seem to preserve traces of human presence, memory, and passing time.
Through graphite drawings on recycled paper, buildings, streets, squares, and forgotten corners become silent protagonists. Each work begins with a real place, transforming it into an intimate reflection on the relationship between the city and those who inhabit it.
Cagliari emerges as a city of contrasts: Mediterranean light and deep shadows, beauty and decay, permanence and change.
Caralis Noir seeks to reveal the poetry hidden in ordinary places, inviting the viewer to look beyond what is immediately visible and discover the quiet stories that cities carry within them.



Stefano Scordo | Obelisk of Kilometer Zero



Stefano Scordo | Regina Margherita Avenue | 2026

Jose Evangelista



You were born in the Dominican Republic and now live in Portugal. How has living across different cultures shaped your understanding of belonging and its expression in your art?

Since I was a child, I have been used to changing places. Before Portugal, I was living in Germany, but getting used to another country takes time while your mind remains dual. Now, my country is where my feet are, and my heart is in my chest. I want my art to be as universal as humans are, not limited to a location; people everywhere feel the same. Also, I love changes because I have found new tools to work with for my "Trash-transform" project in Portugal.



Jose Evangelista | ROD | 2026

Your background includes architecture and production design. How does this experience influence the way you construct space, depth, and movement within an image?

Maybe because architects see life in three dimensions, I adopted a point of view from a French friend who writes about my videos. He said that my artwork is a space you pass through, and once you do, your mind is never the same again.

Many of your projects begin with real people whose lives receive little public attention. How do you translate their personalities and experiences into abstract forms while preserving something essential about them?



Jose Evangelista | Altamira

My work is, in some way, figurative but abstract: a collage and synthesis of techniques, objects, words, and stories. The way I translate these elements into real people (anonymous characters) is through color, shape, movement, sound, and light. Video is a perfect medium for this and can be experienced in so many different ways and on so many platforms these days.

In the description of ROD, Rodrigo lives in a perfect bubble but still needs to dig to survive. What does this bubble represent, and how did you translate that idea into the work's visual elements?

In ROD's case, he wants a perfect, ideal life, which is wrong because it is not reality. As I showed in the video Prison "C", he digs while life passes by.
In other works, I use the bubble not as an isolation tool, but more as a medium for the introspection process, far from life's noise and words.

Some of your images reveal intricate detail, while others use soft focus and blurred spaces. How do you use light, focus, and viewpoint to guide the viewer's exploration of a work?

Normally, it is a journey (Periplus) of my character named TOK_KYO, who represents the best of what a human can be and guides us to a place (nowhere). Sometimes in focus, sometimes out of focus, it may let the viewer see what they want to see.

You describe making people happy as an important purpose of art. What kind of happiness do you hope to offer through works that also explore vulnerability, isolation, and personal limitations?

My work is never about isolation, nor does it explore vulnerability. It is more about encouraging people. Sometimes it is very colorful, explosive, and immersive, reminding people that the general pessimism of these days will pass and new challenges will come.
My idea of art is to create peaceful moments where two people can talk and share in front of a piece, or where children can play, explore, and touch...

You have written that art does not need to be eternal and that the experience of the present moment matters. What would you like viewers to carry in their memory after encountering your work?

Life continuously changes. As we see today, there is another way to see art. Maybe someday there will be more than the Mona Lisa, a Picasso, etc.
I do not have many expectations. Maybe people will have an interior and immaterial experience; maybe it will touch them deeply, or they will simply feel the joy of life. I like what I do. It makes me happy.



Azin Aminoleslami
With a lifelong passion for art, literature, and creative expression, Azin Amin began her artistic journey through architecture.
She earned her Bachelor's degree in Architecture in Iran and later completed her Master's degree in Urban Regeneration in the United Kingdom.
After several years of professional experience in architecture, she continued exploring her creativity through painting.
Over the past three years, she has devoted herself to sculpture, primarily working with clay.
Inspired by nature, Persian poetry, human emotions, and the inner world, her sculptures explore themes of identity, transformation, spirituality, and human connection.
Her architectural background influences her approach to form, space, and structure, while her artistic practice seeks to give shape to emotions and experiences beyond the visible world.

Project Statement
Art is a journey inward, a search for meaning beyond the visible world.
Rooted in poetry, literature, and nature, my artistic journey has found its expression through sculpture.
Each work begins with an emotion, a question, or a moment of reflection.
Forms emerge intuitively, through a dialogue between material, imagination, and feeling.
My sculptures explore the complexities of human existence — love and suffering, silence and expression, separation and connection.
Inspired by Persian poetry and spiritual philosophy, they reflect the relationship between the physical world and the inner self.
Through simplicity of form, I seek to give shape to what is often invisible or unspoken.
Each sculpture becomes an invitation to pause, reflect, and discover a deeper connection with ourselves and the world around us.



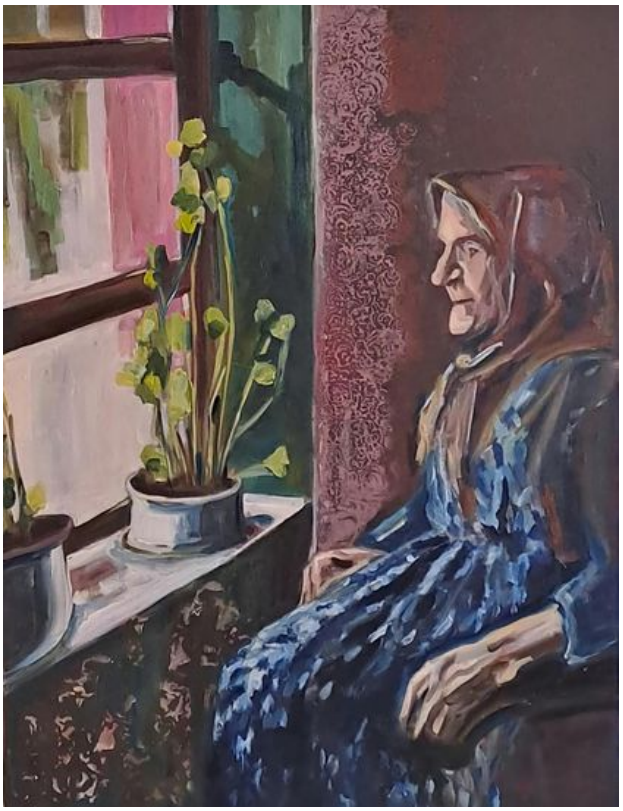


Verica Čupić



What early memories or experiences first connected painting with your interest in cultural heritage?

From early childhood, I felt a strong need to express myself through lines, shapes, and colors—to observe and record everything around me that left a mark, whether on paper or on everyday objects. I was fortunate enough to grow up surrounded by my two grandmothers and a great-grandmother, all of whom practiced traditional craftsmanship such as crocheting, knitting, and embroidery. As a result, I learned these skills at a very young age. Growing up in Vojvodina, surrounded by its vast plains, left a profound mark on my artistic sensibility—the landscapes, antique ornaments, textiles, traditional costumes, rustic courtyards, and stories that have been passed down through generations. Through exploration and practice, I came to realize that painting is not only about creating a picture – it is a way to preserve a world that is gradually disappearing. Representations of childhood and history in my work are not mere nostalgic memories, but values that should live on and which I strive to bring into the present.



In what ways do the landscapes and daily life of Vojvodina shape your artistic expression?

Vojvodina is one of my primary sources of inspiration. Its expansive horizons, plains, morning mist, waters, natural scenery, ancient roads, and traditional houses possess a unique charm that I attempt to capture on canvas. Vojvodina has also preserved its rich multicultural nature, surrounding me with diverse customs and traditional values. Consequently, I am inspired not only by the physical landscape, but by the people, the women, daily life – elements that may appear ordinary or insignificant, but only initially. It is precisely in these subtle details that I discover traces of history and belonging. In this sense, my painting represents a continuous dialogue between my immediate surroundings, the environment that shapes me, and my personal memories.

When incorporating traditional motifs into your artwork, how do you decide what to preserve and what to



Verica Čupić | Tragovi Nasleđa | 2024

reinterpret?

When integrating a traditional motif into a painting, my primary goal is to preserve its intrinsic emotion and meaning. I do not wish to translate it literally onto the canvas; rather, I aim to experience it through the emotion and the time required for its original creation. In my work, I leave certain elements recognizable while transforming others through color, texture, composition, brushwork, and the combination of diverse materials. Tradition, ornamentation, and the motifs through which communities historically expressed their identity represent artistic heritage that must remain dynamic. It should evolve and find its place in the contemporary world through visual art.

How do you approach the relationship between personal memory and collective history in your work?

I frequently begin my process with a personal memory, yet I never approach it as something that is isolated. It is deeply interwoven with the memories of past generations and the heritage passed down to us. My objective is not to simply preserve a personal memory, but to use it as a gateway to collective memory. An object or experience that once belonged to a single woman, family or era can, through art, become part of a broader narrative concerning our shared identity and heritage. In specific works, heritage is represented through the symbolic motifs of hands, thread, and handmade lace. The hands symbolize the individual human experience, while the lace and thread carry the lineage of tradition, creative labor, and female heritage passed down through generations. The thread extending across the canvas serves as a metaphor for time, connecting the past with the present. Through my paintings, I strive to revitalize this heritage—not as a passive keepsake, but as a living expression of identity and time.

Women are a central source of your inspiration. Which aspects of their lives and experiences do you most wish to highlight and make visible?

Women are a fundamental source of inspiration for me because in their lives I recognize a profound blend of strength, tenderness, perseverance, and often unacknowledged labor. I am particularly drawn to their daily narratives and the works created by their hands—creations that were carefully preserved and transmitted across generations, yet frequently remained outside the scope of grand historical narratives. I focus my attention on women's traditional handcrafts and on the hands that create, safeguard, and pass down knowledge. To me, lace is not merely a decorative element; it is a tangible trace of life and heritage. Through my art, I aim to bring visibility to what has often been overlooked: dedication, care, resilience, emotional strength, and female creativity. My works are not solely portraits of women, but reflections of the creative process within their lives, aiming to give them their rightful place in collective memory.

What does oil painting allow you to express that would be difficult to achieve with other artistic mediums?

Oil painting enables me to express depth, luminosity, layering, and atmosphere in ways that are difficult to achieve with other mediums. I am drawn to its deliberate, contemplative process—the ability to build layers over time, revisit the canvas, adjust color tones, and allow traces of previous layers to subtly remain, thereby enriching the artwork's narrative. Texture is particularly important to me. I prefer visible brushstrokes and palette knife marks that give the surface a tactile quality. This approach allows me to emphasize both emotional depth and the tangible materiality of the form. For me, oil painting is not only a technique, but a fundamental way of conceptualizing a painting.

Through your projects supporting women in rural communities, what have you learned about the role art can play in their lives?

Working with women in rural areas has taught me that art serves a far broader purpose than the creation of an aesthetic object. It creates a space for gathering, connection, mutual exchange, and the realization of personal potential. Art provides women with an opportunity to step away from daily routines, express their creativity and emotions, and recognize their intrinsic worth. I place great value on how these collaborative activities enhance women's visibility, foster empowerment, and offer a platform to share their knowledge and stories. I firmly believe that every woman carries an untold story, a unique talent, or a cherished memory. Art helps ensure these stories do not remain hidden, but instead become part of our collective cultural heritage. I have learned that art does not always need to yield a formal masterpiece; often, its greatest triumph is a smile, a new friendship, renewed self-confidence, or a sense of belonging to a community where one's voice matters. Art leaves a lasting imprint not only on canvas, but within people's lives.

I am **Jo Vance**, a self-taught digital artist based in Singapore. I spent over twenty years as a graphic designer before turning to painting in semi-retirement. Inspired by the golden age of American illustration of the 1950s and 1960s, I paint humorous, warm, narrative scenes of everyday life in a 1950s–60s American retro style. My work has been selected for publication and exhibition by ARTO 2026, the Visual Art Group Paris group exhibition, The Alchemical Art Magazine Issue 05 "Spellbound", Arty Rat Magazine Issue #6, Clover Gallery's "BRIGHT CHRISTMAS" online exhibition, the DiversaMente Art Prize Autumn Edition 2026, Naples, and Awita New York Studio's "SMALL WORKS, BIG STORIES" exhibition, Brooklyn. I paint by hand in Art Studio Pro or Procreate on iPad. Website: jovance.art

Project Statement

I am Jo Vance, a self-taught digital artist based in Singapore. My series, Vintage Everyday Theatre, is painted in the golden age 1950s–60s illustration style: single frozen moments from ordinary life, told with humour and a little exaggeration in expression and gesture. Each painting catches the second before something happens. In 'His wife found the magazine', a frozen moment full of suspense about what happens next. In 'A Sticky Situation', a dropped ice cream — very direct, but layered, like one image saying a lot. In 'Last Day Sale? Still a No from Me', it is the Final Sale, but Dad's resolve is final too. In 'Two Wheels, Two Worlds', each envies something in the other's life; neither life is better, simply different. In 'How Civil Are You', being civilized is about giving folks a little space, and not claiming their newspaper like it is yours. In 'A Boy, a Trumpet, and a Cobblestone Symphony', a boy with a trumpet — poor in pocket, not in heart. I paint these scenes by hand on iPad, inventing each story myself, because the funniest moments in life are the ordinary ones.



Jo Vance | His Wife Found the Magazine | 2026



Jo Vance | A Sticky Situation | 2026

Jo Vance | How Civil Are You | 2025



Jo Vance | Last Day Sale Still a No from Me| 2025





Jo Vance | A Boy, a Trumpet, and a Cobblestone Symphony | 2025



Jo Vance | Two Wheels Two Worlds| 2026

Sarah Elyse Granetz



Sarah Elyse Granetz | Red Hot

Your practice began with a university self-portrait assignment. What did that first body impression reveal to you that made you want to continue exploring this method?

Because I have not been trained in drawing, and previously identified as a photographer, the impression was a way for me to feel like a painter. But in that classroom, my method also stood out amongst others; it made me feel empowered and unique, an outlier, in a good way. I realized I might be onto something without needing to conform to how others "painted"; it allowed me to view my lack of experience as a positive.

In My Body Is Not For Sale, you explore the female body's capacity to act and create. How does this idea influence the decisions you make while working on a painting?



Sarah Elyse Granetz | Compass

With each canvas, I explore how best to place my body to convey the emotion or mood I am trying to express. Sometimes that means acting frantically, without much preparation, to create something new and different; other times it means making impression after impression until I start to be inspired by the image. There are also times where I try to re-create past works, as I took almost a decade off from painting. Having returned to it now, I discover new ways to apply and experiment with the paint in these processes. It's a bit of a coming undone, since the more I try to control the outcome, the less it tends to work out in the way that I imagined. Luckily, often, it's even better.

Could you walk us through the creation of one painting, from preparing the surface and applying paint to your body to deciding that the work is complete?

For some works, I want to keep the canvas clean, white and bare. I want to be able to layer various colors or textures with a more serene feel. For others, I select a background color that then brings much more emotion and gravity to the piece; I tend to prefer primary colors, and red and blue are extremely evocative. Layered with black or white, they feel energetic and bold. Typically, I need to paint outside so the paint can dry quickly (or I will use a hairdryer if I am indoors) - allowing the colors to run



Sarah Elyse Granetz | Twins

together can lead to browns and greens that do not suit my preferences. The layers must be clean, distinct and obvious. When I create the reversed impressions, having added extra water and paint to the canvas to then remove it with my skin, I use a hairdryer to manipulate how the work dries. Both processes therefore do rely on time, heat and patience. I don't always know if the work is complete until I've left it alone for a few hours or a few days. There is always the risk of "messing it up" with another layer; sometimes that is not a risk I want to take.

You describe both meditative sessions and moments of urgency. Can you share an example of how your emotional state changed the way a particular painting developed?

Sometimes the urgency is literally due to drying paint; if I am outside in the sunshine, in the summer heat, there is only so much time between washing off the paint from my skin, adding more and then creating another print. This past summer, I ran around my family's private garden nude in hopes of not missing the window of opportunity to pull more paint up from the canvas as it dried. It's quite the sight (I imagine)...

You have worked on this series for more than a decade. How has your relationship with your own body changed during that time, and how have those changes appeared in your paintings?

After receiving professional treatment for an eating disorder, I started submitting my work to galleries before being awarded a residency at the School of Visual Arts in New York. These paintings were a way to make peace with my body after years of internal strife, but they also served as a way to take back control of the narrative and empower myself through my physical self. Now, my works are often reminiscent of that time period, for even though I am no longer sick, we all experience health issues as we age. I have also built a business around my health and fitness, which creates a unique perspective on what it means to be "Strong By Sarah", the handle behind my large social media following and coaching business.

What conversations arise when you exhibit or sell paintings from a series titled My Body Is Not For Sale? Have any viewers' responses challenged or expanded your understanding of the work?

My most popular paintings feature two figures, typically referred to as "Twins" in my work; I am a twin, and there seems to be a childhood nostalgia around two figures side by side. I have had some pieces added to nurseries, others in more formal living areas. They typically have calmer impressions and feel more playful and vulnerable versus aggressive or poignant.

Your time in France included studying cooking, language, and art. Have any experiences from that period influenced the way you approach materials, touch or the physical act of painting?

While in France, I photographed practically everything, and I spent many afternoons in museums, cemeteries and other public spaces. I want my art to evoke the same emotion and significance I felt in those incredibly historic places. I remember walking around Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's graves, feeling overwhelmed with a few tears, having read their books and connected so deeply with their words. While these experiences did not change what I painted, they did help give me new ideas for how I applied the paint, after being introduced to the work of Jackson Pollack and Yves Klein and his infamous body painting parties. They both directly influenced why I started painting this way!



Sarah Elyse Granetz | Progression

Nahide Önür



Although I began pursuing art more actively in 2016, creativity had always lived within me, waiting for the right moment to emerge. With a background in economics, I spent years in professional life before leaving my banking career in 2003 to raise my children. As life evolved, I discovered painting as a new language through which I could express my emotions, explore my inner world, and rediscover myself. Art did not feel like the beginning of something entirely new, but rather the awakening of a part of me that had always been there.

You were born in Adana. How have the landscapes, culture, and memories of your hometown shaped your visual language?

Adana, with its radiant sunlight, rich colours, fertile landscapes, and vibrant cultural heritage, has left a lasting impression on my artistic vision. I feel that the warmth and energy of my hometown are reflected in my use of colour and my connection to organic forms. Nature is not merely something I observe; it is something I feel and carry within me. Even when my works move beyond recognizable landscapes, the light, vitality, and emotional richness of my roots continue to find their way into my art.

Your practice spans photography, ceramics, filigree, painting, and Kufic art. When an idea emerges, how do you decide which medium will best express it?

For me, every idea carries its own language, and each artistic medium offers a different way of revealing it. Painting allows me to express emotion through colour and movement, while ceramics and filigree bring a sense of material presence and intricate detail. Photography

You began actively pursuing your artistic practice in 2016. What prompted that decision, and what place did creativity have in your life before then?



Nahide Önür | Kirmizi Eser



Nahide Önür | Hayat Agaci

captures fleeting moments, and Kufic art introduces a profound dialogue between geometry, spirituality, and form. I do not see these disciplines as separate worlds, but as different pathways leading to the same creative vision. I choose the medium that allows the idea to speak with the greatest honesty and intensity.

The Tree of Life is central to your work and gave your solo exhibition its title. What does this ancient symbol mean to you personally, and how has your understanding of it evolved?

The Tree of Life is the spiritual and emotional heart of my artistic world. Its roots represent our origins and the memories that shape us; its trunk symbolizes resilience, while its branches reach toward new possibilities and the light of the future. I am deeply drawn to the idea that we can remain connected to our roots while continuing to grow and transform. Over time, the tree has become more than a natural form in my work: it has become a personal expression of existence, renewal, and the enduring connection between humanity and the universe. Through it, I celebrate life's ability to begin again.

In your circular work featuring a golden tree, the branches and trunk appear almost sculptural. How did you develop this surface, and what role does the circular format play in the composition?

I wanted the tree to transcend a two-dimensional image and possess an almost sculptural presence. By exploring texture, layering, and dimension, I sought to give the trunk and branches a sense of movement and physical depth. The golden surface brings luminosity and a sense of timelessness to the composition. The circle is equally meaningful: without a beginning or an end, it represents wholeness, eternity, and the continuous cycles of life. Together, the golden tree and the circular form express a harmony between earth and sky, rootedness and freedom, and the visible and the spiritual.

When depicting nature, how do you move between direct observation, memory, and imagination? Could you describe how one of the works shown here developed?

Nature is my source of inspiration, but emotion is what transforms it into art. I observe its forms and colours, draw upon personal memories, and allow my imagination to take me beyond what is immediately visible. In my Tree of Life paintings, a branch, a root, or a burst of colour can become a symbol of strength, hope, or rebirth. I often begin with the structure of the tree and let the colours, textures, and forms evolve intuitively. The final work becomes not simply a depiction of nature, but a reflection of my inner world and the universal emotions that connect us all.

Transformation is one of your recurring themes. How is your artistic practice changing now, and which ideas or materials would you like to explore next?

Transformation is both a central theme in my art and a reflection of my own life journey. Discovering my artistic voice later in life has taught me that creativity has no age or fixed timeline. Today, I am interested in exploring richer textures, more dimensional forms, and deeper connections between colour, material, and symbolism. I would also like to develop the dialogue between the Tree of Life and the spiritual geometry of Kufic art. Above all, I want my work to inspire a sense of renewal and remind people that it is always possible to rediscover oneself and begin again.



Nahide Önür | Mavi Eser

Mary Amanda Brown is a Texas-based contemporary abstract artist whose work explores the complexities of human emotion, memory, and personal experience. Working primarily with acrylics and mixed media, she creates layered compositions that balance movement, texture, and color, allowing intuition to guide her creative process.
Her work often reflects the tension between chaos and stillness, exploring the emotions and experiences that shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Rather than presenting a fixed narrative, Brown creates space for individual interpretation and personal connection.
Her artwork has been featured in Arts to Hearts Magazine and exhibited in galleries throughout North Texas. Through her evolving practice, she continues to explore the relationship between emotional expression, abstraction, and the human experience.

Project Statement
My work begins with emotion rather than a predetermined image. Through abstract painting, I explore the complexities of human experience, the things we carry, the moments that shape us, and the emotions that often exist beyond words.
Working primarily with acrylics and mixed media, I allow color, movement, and texture to develop intuitively. Each layer becomes part of an ongoing conversation between intention and uncertainty. Some compositions emerge through deliberate choices, while others evolve through experimentation and the willingness to let go of control.
I am drawn to the contrast between chaos and stillness, vulnerability and strength, and the visible and unseen aspects of ourselves. My paintings do not seek to provide definitive answers or tell a singular story. Instead, they invite viewers to bring their own experiences and interpretations into the work.
For me, art is both an exploration and a connection. It is a way of giving form to what cannot always be explained, while recognizing that our individual experiences often share something deeply human.



Mary Amanda Brown | Below the Surface | 2024



Mary Amanda Brown | Blooming Quietly | 2026

Interview

S. Sanchez



Could you tell us about your background and the experiences that first led you toward metalsmithing and visual art?

While growing up in Houston, I would visit the Museum of Natural Science and the Museum of Fine Arts annually. I would find myself in front of the same symbols of power confined behind smudged vitrines. I would study these remnants of ancient metalsmithing, glittering stones, and personal ornaments and think,"I want to touch it; I want to know how it is used." That glass denied me access to touch and examination but opened an avenue of self-reflection.



S. Sanchez | €Aguar And Jade | 2025

The actual reflection of myself appeared on the glass barriers. I would perfectly align myself with the objects trapped in time. Looking through the reflection, I would adorn myself, visualizing how those objects would function in tandem with my body. Those moments of reflected adornment led me to ask new questions that continue to fuel my practice today. How can I make my own symbols of power that may last centuries buried in the earth, observing the wisdom and the mud and the worms?

When did you begin working with jewelry and sculptural objects, and what attracted you to metal as your primary material?

I began working with metal as my primary media in 2019. I was attracted to jewelry and sculptures' ability to withstand time. The longevity of metals like copper, bronze, and silver allocates my work a longer life. Each of these materials will change and transform over time. Given the proper circumstances, they will survive and long outlast me. The natural aging and patination of a piece can inform pieces as much as the hands that made it.
Manipulating metals requires complete involvement in technique. In jewelry, there is a devotion to intricate step-by-step processes. You need flames, hammers, and the will to move materials that have the tendency to fight back. The physical exchange between body and metals brings me closer to my materials, and forces me to think critically about every aspect of creation. Small and meticulous junctions of detail build up a piece. Often these intimate aspects of my work are only able to be seen in close examination of the object. The aspect of handling and discovery in the metalsmithing process keeps me completely invested.



S. Sanchez | €Aguar Mask | 2026

Your work frequently incorporates the jaguar as a central figure. What does this animal represent to you personally and culturally?

I grew up with many sculptures of carved jaguar heads adorning the house. The jaguar represented strength, ferocity, and danger. As a kid, I would stare at the pulled back growling face of these sculptures and try to capture their ferocity for myself. The way I see the jaguar in my own work is a creature of strength and power.
I am reinterpreting the story and significance of the jaguar. This symbol has reflected power, strength, and danger across countless cultures and millennia. In my practice, €aguar's name and face have been Queered through suggestive title censorship and an adorned septum.€aguar extends the jaguar's historical contexts and assigns these honorifics to a marginalized community. While I wanted to use the symbol of the jaguar to represent Queerness as undeniable strength, I wanted to subvert the 'danger' that some assign to Queer people. The lack of aggression in €aguar facial expression counters the villainous and aggressively negative stigmas surrounding Queer existence and confrontation.
I am still aiming to capture the ferocity and strength of the jaguar I've known my whole life, just as I did as a child making faces at sculptures on a mantel.

How do you approach the relationship between traditional cultural symbols and contemporary artistic interpretation in your practice?

When starting this body of work, my inspiration stemmed from Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican visual language. In many of the pre-Hispanic cultures of MesoAmerica and South America, jewelry and body ornaments were used to assign divine power to people of high rank and nobility. Nose ornaments, narigueras, were used to attain and assign magical power and divine status to the wearer. Icons of power, like the jaguar, were also intertwined within the visual language of my own Tejano household. While I am inspired by tradition, I also understand that traditions continue to grow with the people and the culture. Tradition meets contemporary inspiration with the Queer cultures of body modification and "flagging" through adornment. Another significant influence is the Punk countercultural use of body modifications as radical resistance. I did not invent nor am I the only person to continue these practices. My inspirations have led me to this path, and they inform my artistic practice. Ultimately, my works are visual interpretations of my own lived experiences of being a Queer Chicano in the here and now.

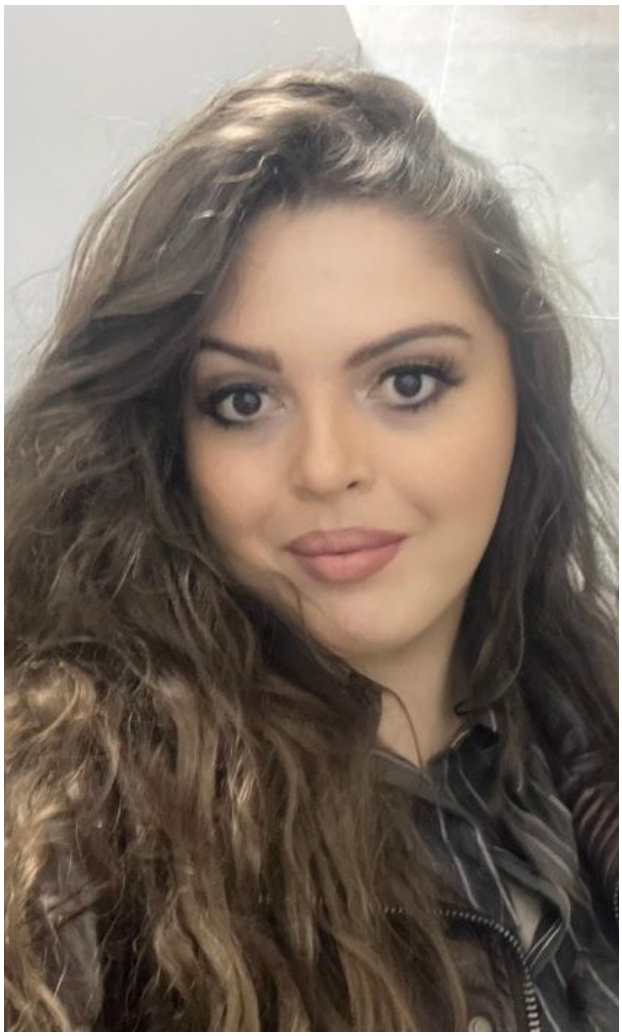
Adornment plays an important role in your work. What interests you about jewelry as a form of communication beyond its decorative function?

The practice of body modification for Queer ritual self adornment fascinates me. Many types of piercings, tattoos, and fashion function as self affirmations, flagging, and empowerment of Queer identifiers. Jewelry and adornment offers information about the wearer without speaking a word. Adornment acts as an undeniable declaration of self. The material, size, and placement of jewelry can communicate different statuses and ways of being in the world. Personal adornment has the capacity to empower and articulate our identifiers; this practice has existed for millennia and will always continue to flux and evolve. I am simply lucky enough to participate in this practice of adornment.
As I am making, I ask myself how I can create the work that I am already envisioning as artifacts of our time. When I create, I situate myself within a long line of makers. I call upon traditions of those who came before me, and see myself being quickly buried and indoctrinated into an archaeological temporality.



S. Sanchez | Double €Aguar Rattle | 2025

Blinerë Shaqiri



Which buildings, places, or craft traditions you encountered growing up in Kosovo first shaped your understanding of Albanian architecture and art?



For me, the understanding of architecture begins with my family's roots, where education, cultural identity and the built environment have long been interconnected. One of my earliest architectural references is the house built by my great-grandfather in Kosovo in 1901. Reflecting his remarkable intellectual awareness and education, the house featured an unusually advanced and carefully organised technical system, with each room having its own indoor bathroom — an exceptional level of domestic planning for the Balkans of that period. Although his professional field was different, his understanding of spatial organisation was evident through the architecture of his home. Similarly, my grandfather, despite pursuing a different profession, had a strong natural inclination towards design and the creative fields, a sensibility I recognise as part of my own creative inheritance. These family influences became even more tangible when I reconstructed my grandfather's house, a project published on Archello and identified by its editorial team as a strong candidate for the Archello Awards 2026. For me, architecture is therefore more than a profession; it is a way of preserving family memory, continuing an intellectual and creative legacy, and giving inherited spaces a future.

Beyond my family's architectural heritage, Kosovo's built environment has profoundly shaped my



understanding of the relationship between identity, culture and architecture. Influential are the traditional Albanian stone towers of Junik and Dukagjin, whose structural logic, spatial organisation and defensive character reflect centuries of cultural and architectural knowledge, as well as the historic urban fabric of Prizren, with its craftsmanship, materiality and relationship between buildings and public space. I also find architectural inspiration in traditional Albanian art, particularly the xhubleta, embroidery, weaving and woodworking, where composition, geometry and structure transcend the boundaries between art and architecture. Looking back, I realise that my architectural education began long before university, through my family's legacy and the cultural landscape of Kosovo. My ambition is not simply to preserve this heritage, but to reinterpret its deeper principles and translate them into a contemporary language that can speak to future generations.

What qualities of traditional Albanian architecture do you find most relevant to contemporary design, and how do you bring them into your own practice?

I find the greatest value of traditional Albanian architecture in its structural intelligence, contextual sensitivity and relationship between geometry and material. Its response to topography, climate, local materials and human scale offers lessons that remain highly relevant to contemporary architecture. In my practice, I am interested not in reproducing traditional forms or applying historical motifs as decoration, but in understanding their underlying principles and translating them into contemporary architectural and graphic languages. Through this approach, including projects published internationally on Archello, I seek to explore the dialogue between cultural identity and experimentation. I believe contemporary Albanian design should not be recognised by how closely it resembles the past, but by how intelligently it transforms its heritage into something new.

What drew you to the xhubleta as the starting point for this artwork? What connections do you see between a garment that surrounds the body and architecture that shelters it?

I perceive the xhubleta as an architectural artefact rather than merely a traditional garment. Its distinctive bell-shaped geometry, layered construction and spatial relationship with the human body reveal principles of enclosure, structural organisation, volume and identity that closely parallel architectural thinking. My intention was therefore not to reproduce its traditional appearance, but to deconstruct its formal and structural logic and reinterpret it through a contemporary visual language. In the artwork, its characteristic volume is translated into a geometric framework defined by a rigid red-and-black triangular matrix, contrasting with the organic expression of the upper section. The floral crown, inspired by the Sharr Mountain saffron, establishes a dialogue between cultural and ecological heritage. Ultimately, the composition explores the intersection of three interconnected dimensions of Albanian identity: the woman as cultural bearer, the mountain as a natural reference and architecture as an expression of collective memory.

You connect the triangular pattern in "Albanian Xhubleta" to timber structures and steep rooflines in the Sharr Mountains. Could you describe a particular building or architectural detail that helped shape this interpretation?

The primary architectural reference derives from traditional houses in the Sharr Mountain region, particularly their timber roof structures, exposed construction elements and steep geometric profiles. The structural logic and triangular configurations of these



vernacular buildings informed the composition of the xhubleta's skirt, establishing a conceptual relationship between architectural form and textile expression. Rather than reproducing a specific building, I intended to extract the underlying principles of structural order, material intelligence and tectonic composition and reinterpret them through a contemporary visual language. The triangle thus becomes the central compositional element, symbolising stability, structural coherence and the integration of individual components into a unified system. Ultimately, the work translates the architectural knowledge embedded in the vernacular landscape into an abstract artistic expression, connecting regional building traditions with Albanian textile heritage.

How did you translate the weight, volume, and flowing folds of the traditional xhubleta into a flat geometric composition? What guided your decisions about what to retain and what to transform?

The main challenge was translating the xhubleta from a three-dimensional cultural object into a two-dimensional composition while preserving its distinctive identity and architectural character. Through abstraction and structural reinterpretation, I retained its recognisable silhouette, expanding lower volume and contrast between light and dark surfaces, while reorganising its internal structure through interconnected triangles. The red and black surfaces evoke Albanian national colours, while fine golden outlines emphasise structural divisions and create a sense of depth and tectonic order. The contrast between the organic upper section and the geometric skirt, complemented by the sculptural floral element, establishes a dialogue between nature, architecture and textile heritage. The intention was not to reproduce the garment literally, but to preserve its essential cultural identity while translating its formal language into a contemporary visual expression.

What conversations would you like to see between contemporary Albanian artists, architects, and traditional craftspeople, and what could they create together?



I believe the future of contemporary Albanian design lies in a stronger interdisciplinary dialogue between architects, artists, designers, researchers and traditional craftspeople. Our cultural heritage, from weaving, embroidery and woodworking to stone construction and vernacular architecture, represents a complex body of knowledge whose structural, material and aesthetic principles deserve further exploration within contemporary creative disciplines. Through collaborative research, experimental workshops, exhibitions and the integration of traditional techniques with digital technologies, this knowledge can be transformed into new architectural and artistic expressions rather than reduced to the reproduction of historical motifs. Equally important is recognising traditional craftspeople as custodians of expertise and active contributors to this process. I believe that we, the younger generation, have both the academic and technological resources to establish this dialogue, allowing Albanians to develop a distinctive contemporary design language rooted in ancestral knowledge yet defined by innovation and experimentation. Our heritage should not remain confined to preservation; it should become an active force in shaping the cultural and creative expressions of the future.

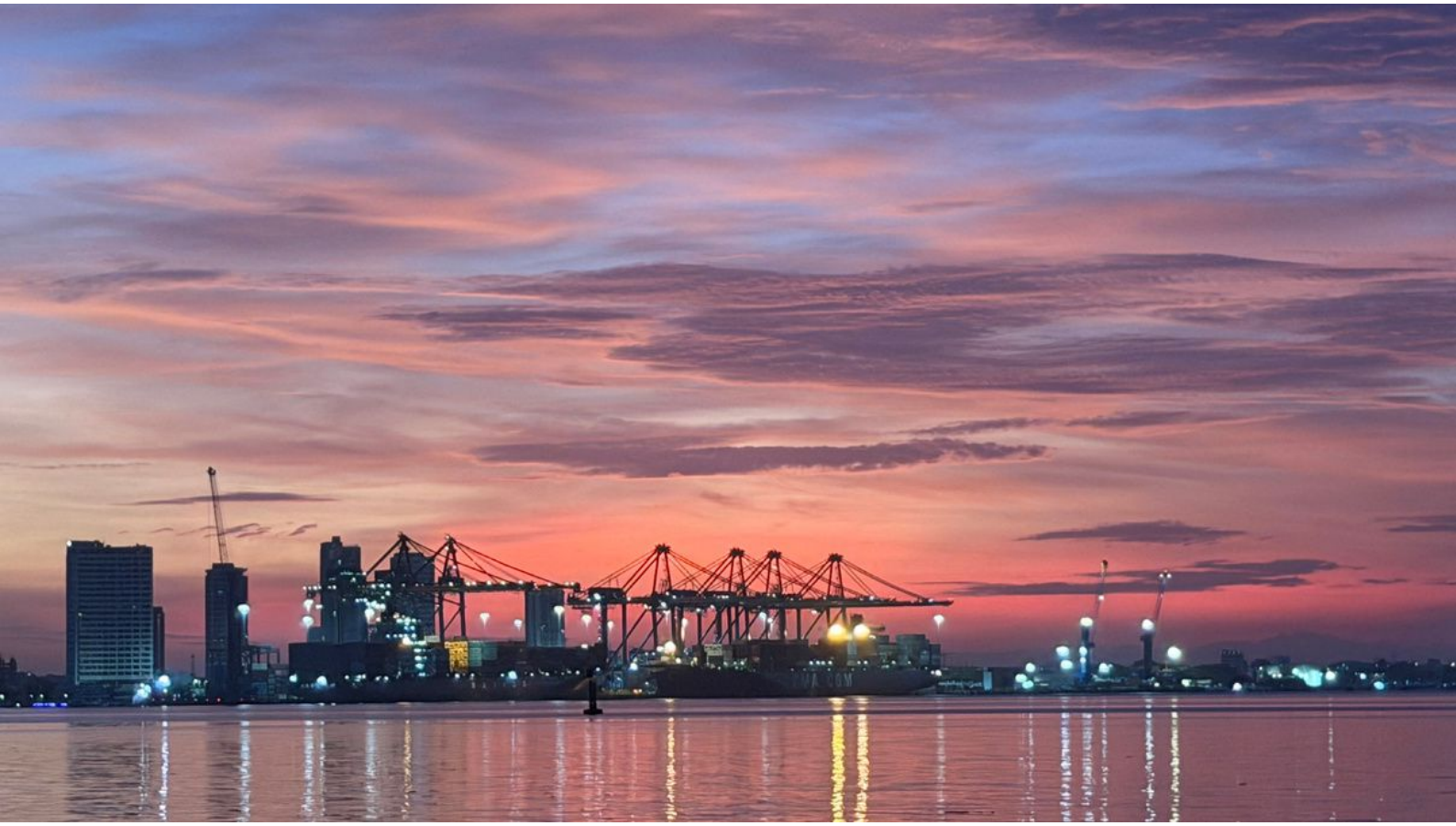
How have your experiences studying abroad changed the way you look at the architecture and visual traditions of Kosovo?

My academic experiences beyond Kosovo have fundamentally reshaped my understanding of cultural identity and architectural heritage, allowing me to reconsider my own cultural environment through a broader international and intellectual perspective. Encountering different architectural traditions and design philosophies has made me increasingly aware that understanding one's origins often requires viewing them from a distance. This has strengthened my interest in Albanian vernacular architecture, traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage as sophisticated systems of knowledge with contemporary relevance to architecture, sustainability, materiality and design. It has also expanded my understanding of the relationship between architecture, graphic design and visual art as interconnected disciplines, particularly evident in my reinterpretation of the Albanian xhubleta. Above all, these experiences have reinforced my conviction that international relevance does not require detachment from one's cultural identity; rather, a profound understanding of one's origins can become the foundation for meaningful contemporary and international creative contributions. My ambition is therefore to develop a contemporary design language that engages with international discourse while remaining intellectually and culturally rooted in the Albanian landscape.



Erik Siefken

Industrial Engineer with art and photography experimental concepts.





Erik Siefken | Egret on the Rocks

Veronika Mlinar



When you rediscovered the poems you had written between 1995 and 2000, what surprised you most about the person and creative voice you encountered in those pages?

I rediscovered approximately 150 poems that I had written between 1995 and 2000, when I was between 12 and 17 years old. It was a very special experience because I was suddenly reconnecting with a part of myself that had been quiet for almost 26 years.



Veronika Mlinar | Orange Green

My first poem, titled Love, was written when I was just 12. In the beginning, most of my poems were about love. As I grew older, especially after the age of 15, my writing began to explore much broader themes: life, the world, human existence and God.
What surprised me most was how deeply I had already been thinking and feeling at such a young age. When I read those poems today, it feels almost as if I am observing a young girl growing up, discovering the world and searching for answers to questions that are still meaningful to me.
I have worked in healthcare since I was 15 years old. In recent years, I have been working as an occupational therapist. Through my work, I have met many different people and encountered many different life stories. I have witnessed great joy, progress and small victories, but also suffering, loss and difficult life experiences.
Working with people has taught me how precious life is and how important it is to see every person as a whole. Perhaps this is also why my creative work places so much emphasis on women, their emotions, strength, dreams and individuality.
Rediscovering my poems reminded me that creativity had always been part of who I was. It was not something new that appeared in my life; it was something I had carried within me all along.
My creative journey has also recently received a special recognition. I was selected to be featured in the art book 100 European Women in Art 2027, where I will represent Slovenia. This recognition means a great deal to me because it came during a period in which I rediscovered my creativity and began developing NikiArtStories. It is an important encouragement to continue my artistic journey.

Can you take us through the journey of one poem or drawing becoming a fashion concept? What changes as it moves from the page into something wearable?

My creative process can begin in two different ways. One example is the collection The Girl in Bloom. It began with an original drawing. I developed the artwork, transferred its motif onto a handbag, and the handbag then became the inspiration for an entire fashion



Veronika Mlinar | The Last Kiss; A Dream Within

collection. The original illustration was the starting point, but the collection allowed the idea to grow into a much larger visual story.
Another path begins with a handbag. I create my own graphic artwork using Canva and develop it into a real handbag product through Contrado. The colours, motifs and overall character of the handbag then inspire me to imagine a complete fashion collection.
When I develop a collection, I usually see the entire image in my mind: the garments, silhouettes, accessories, colour harmony, surroundings and atmosphere. I can almost feel the atmosphere of the scene.
I use AI-assisted visualisation to explore individual garments and bring these ideas into a visual form. However, the original concepts, artistic direction, motifs, colours and creative decisions come from me. I give very precise instructions and often refine the visualisations several times until they reflect what I have imagined. Sometimes a single design takes six attempts.
In August, I developed approximately twelve fashion collections because so many ideas were coming to me that I could not draw all of them by hand at that time. The Last Kiss is another example. It was inspired by a poem connected to a handbag motif. From that connection, I developed an entire fashion collection, which then inspired me to create new hand-drawn illustrations using coloured pencils.
For me, this process is a continuous exchange between poetry, artwork, handbags and fashion.
One idea often gives birth to another.

What can you express through poetry that you cannot express visually, and where do images take over from words?

Through poetry, I was able to express my deepest emotions and thoughts about the world, myself, life and God. Words allowed me to explore feelings and questions that were sometimes difficult to communicate in any other way.
Drawing gives me a different kind of freedom. Through colours, shapes and images, I can express emotions such as love, passion, longing and dreams. Strong colours are particularly important in my work because they allow me to communicate feelings visually, without needing words.
As a child, I often wondered which form of creativity suited me best. Was I better at writing poetry, creating stories or drawing? Sometimes I wished I could be truly excellent at just one of these things rather than having my creativity spread across several different forms.
Through NikiArtStories, I finally found a way to bring them all together. Poetry, drawing, graphic design and fashion are no longer separate parts of my creativity. They have become one whole, allowing me to express everything I carry within me. I am a positive person with a great deal of love, and I want that energy to be reflected in my work.
Fashion gives me another space in which to express myself freely.
I do not create drawings only to transfer them onto clothing or handbags. I draw because the creative process itself brings me genuine joy and fulfilment.
After approximately 26 years, I have rediscovered a sense of freedom through drawing that I once knew. Today, I find myself looking forward to the weekend simply because I know I will have time to pick up my coloured pencils and draw.
For me, creating is something deeply personal. It gives me the freedom to express my emotions, imagination and ideas. It is not only about the finished product, but also about the joy of the creative process itself.
All of this inspired me even further, and by September I had already started creating my fashion collections by hand again. I now also develop collections through traditional drawing and painting, which I keep in my portfolio folder. In this way, digital creativity has led me back to traditional artistic expression.
Today, my creativity finds expression through different mediums, but its essence remains the same: the freedom to create and the joy of making art.

Why did you choose handbags as a medium for your



Veronika Mlinar | Gold Mint

artwork? What kind of relationship do you think people develop with objects they carry every day?

I wanted to find a way to bring my artwork beyond the traditional boundaries of a drawing or painting and into everyday life.
Handbags became a natural choice because they are objects that women carry with them every day. They are practical, but they are also personal. A handbag can reflect someone's personality, taste, memories and individuality.
Through platforms such as Contrado, I discovered that I could transfer my original artwork and graphic motifs onto real products. This opened up a new way of presenting art.
I like to think of my handbags as small, travelling galleries. Art does not always have to hang on a wall. It can accompany someone through everyday life, become part of their personal style and express something about who they are.
For me, a handbag is more than an accessory. It is a meeting point between art, design and personal expression.

In your imaginative dress concepts, how do you think about the relationship between the garment, the body and movement?

For me, all elements of a design must work together: the garment, the female body, the silhouette, colours, lines, accessories and movement.
I am particularly drawn to feminine and timeless silhouettes. I often imagine A-line skirts, defined waists and shapes that gently emphasise the hips. I want garments to celebrate the female figure rather than restrict it.
I do not want to follow every fashion trend because



Veronika Mlinar | Blue Rose

trends are temporary, while timeless fashion can remain beautiful for many years. I am interested in designs that retain their character and emotional value beyond a particular season.
Movement is also important. A garment should not only look beautiful in a photograph; it should come alive when a woman walks, moves or dances. The relationship between the fabric, silhouette and body should feel natural and harmonious.
At present, many of my fashion collections exist as creative concepts and visualisations. My hope is that one day they will also be physically realised in collaboration with professional designers and makers.

Your work speaks to women across generations. How do you approach femininity across different ages, experiences and personalities?

I believe that a woman is beautiful at every stage of her life. Beauty is not defined by age, race, skin colour or body shape.
I want my work to speak to women of different generations and backgrounds. Fashion should not be reserved only for young or very slim women. Every woman deserves to feel beautiful, confident and special, regardless of her age or body size.
This is why I also want to show different and realistic female body types in my fashion visualisations. I believe that women should be able to recognise themselves in fashion, rather than feeling that they must fit into one narrow ideal.
I also think about mothers. While caring for their children and families, women sometimes lose sight of themselves and their own femininity. But motherhood is only one part of a woman's identity. She is still a woman with dreams, desires, talents, individuality and a need to feel beautiful.
I want my designs to remind women that they deserve



Veronika Mlinar | Purple Dress



Veronika Mlinar | Teal Castle

attention too. They should not forget themselves or give up on their dreams.
My message is that fashion should celebrate what makes every woman special. I want to encourage women to express themselves, embrace their individuality and have the courage to follow their passions.
My motto is “Life is for the brave.” For me, it is not simply a beautiful phrase accompanying my brand. It has a very personal meaning.
Through my work in healthcare, I have also learned how unpredictable life can be. This year, the loss of my brother affected me particularly deeply. An experience like this makes you even more aware of how short and fragile life is.
That is why I do not want to wait for a perfect moment, for some distant day when all the conditions are finally right to pursue my dreams. I do not want to keep postponing life.
This motto reminds me that I must live now. Fully, and in the present. I must allow myself to dream, to hope and to love. I must have the courage to try, create, explore and follow what I feel inside.
I believe it is never too late to begin again or to allow ourselves to become who we truly are. Life is too precious to spend waiting for the perfect moment.

How do you balance the artistic story behind a design with practical considerations such as comfort, function and construction?

I believe that beautiful fashion should also be practical, comfortable and functional. A design should not exist only to look impressive in a photograph. It should also make sense in real life.
I pay attention to materials, quality and craftsmanship. I know how much care goes into washing, hanging, ironing and folding clothes, and I understand the importance of choosing materials that are comfortable and easy to care for.

For me, a beautiful evening dress should not only look elegant. A woman should also be able to wear it for six hours, move comfortably and enjoy an evening or dance without feeling restricted.
There is nothing worse than wearing something beautiful that makes you uncomfortable.
I also believe that quality garments should last. Well-made clothing can retain its beauty and value for much longer than something designed only for a short-lived trend.
My work is not only about creating motifs for handbags or clothing. Drawing itself has become an important part of my life again. After approximately 26 years, I have rediscovered the joy and freedom of creating by hand. The process is just as meaningful to me as the finished artwork.
At the same time, I hope that my fashion concepts will one day move beyond the computer screen. I would love to collaborate with professional designers, fashion houses and skilled makers, and to see these collections physically realised and perhaps presented on a runway.
For me, NikiArtStories is an ongoing creative journey. It brings together my poetry, artwork, graphic design and fashion, with the hope of creating something meaningful that women can connect with.

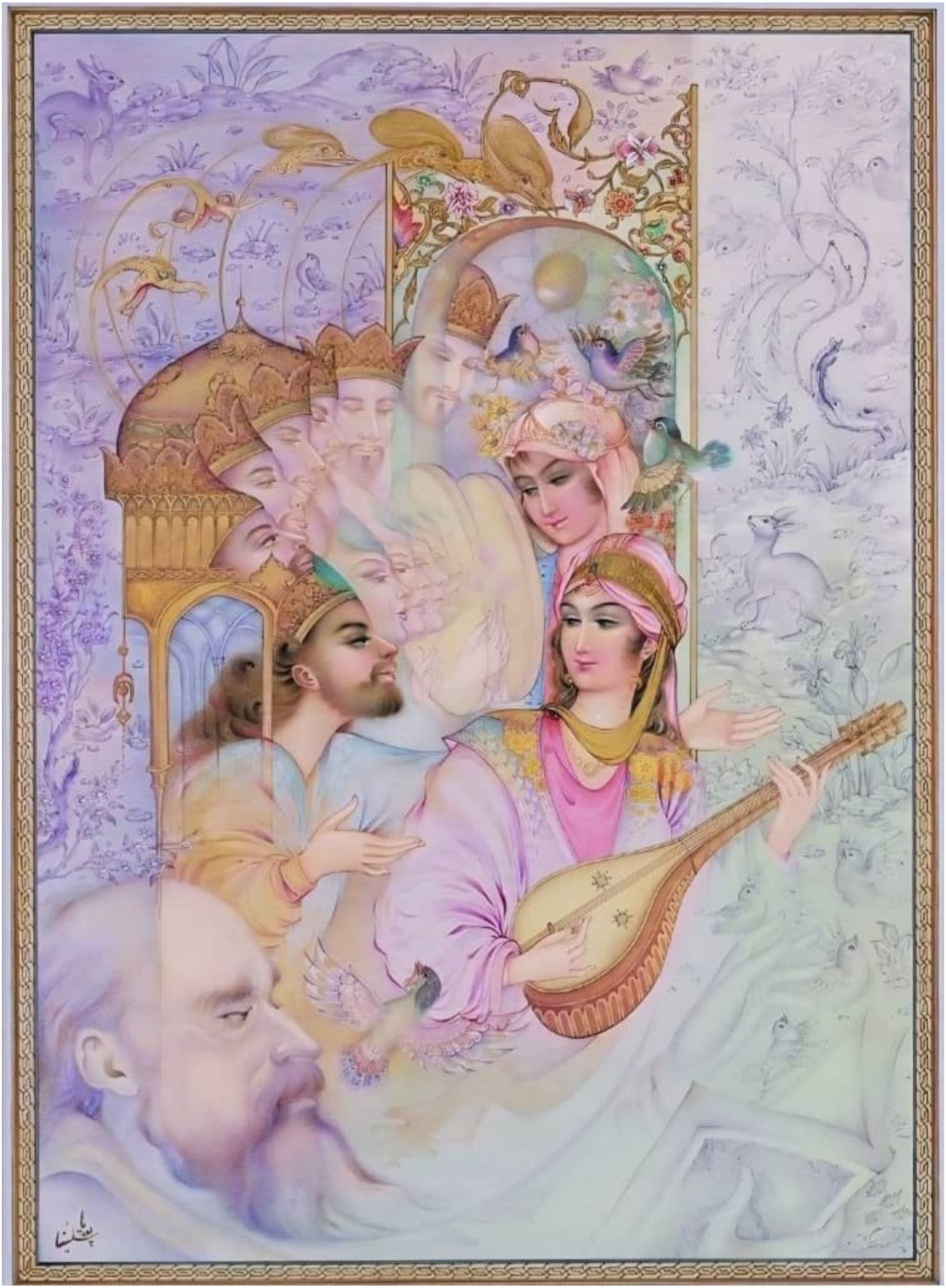


Veronika Mlinar | Yellow Dress

Selina Pouria, born on 12/6/1957, has a PhD in miniature and a BA in English. Received 76 certificates of appreciation and 30 years of teaching. Author of three miniature books, illumination design and motif geometry. Exhibitions abroad: Russia (Moscow), Iran and Turkey exhibition in Istanbul, solo exhibition in Belarus and the Indonesian festival, and received five certificates from its universities

Project Statement
Inspired by the rich tradition of Persian miniature painting, I create works that celebrate the harmony of nature, poetry, and cultural memory. Through delicate compositions, symbolic imagery, and vibrant colors, I reinterpret timeless Persian stories and aesthetics with a contemporary artistic perspective. My paintings invite viewers into a poetic world where beauty, imagination, and heritage come together, encouraging reflection on the enduring spirit of Persian art and its universal language.
draw inspiration from the literary works, cultural history, philosophy, wisdom, and customs and traditions of my homeland.





Contents

Exhibition Review

The Names Gallery in Paris – 31 October-1 November 22
The Names Gallery in Vienna – 14-15 November 30

Interviews

Tsvetelina Tsonova 4
Hannah Bokanoski 8
Ana de Salazar 14
Alexandru Valentin Duta 20
Xavier Yarto 24
Jessica-Lynn Veley 28
Elena Maslova 32
Erick Suescún Contreras (Etheremick) 36
Eleonora Molfino 40
Constanza Eugenia 44
Natalia Polushina (Natasha Pola) 48
Natalia Pek 50
Nomar Mi 54
JINLEE PARK 58
Claudia Habringer 64
Ján Špireng 68
Sevtap Yılmaz 72
Susan Fleming 78
Agbolade Kelvin Agbenla 82
illi Jung Piccato 86
Jose Evangelista 90
Verica Čupić 94
Sarah Elyse Granetz 98
Nahide Önür 100
S. Sanchez 104
Blinerë Shaqiri 106
Veronika Mlinar 112

Featured artists

Daria Diterikhs 6
Mina Maleki 12
Masha Shvedova 18
Antonia Halter 26
Zephyr Ouch 34
Svetlana Lekanova 38
Olga Onopko 42
Timi Kolozsi 46
Vanja Valencak 56
Seori Lee 62
Ece Önür 66
Anastasia Shabalina 70
ZhiYing Jin (Su Li) 74
António Cabral 76
Kent Miller 80
LadyCA 84
Stefano Scordo 88
Azin Aminoleslami 92
Jo Vance 96
Mary Amanda Brown 102
Erik Siefken 110
Selina Pouria 116



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