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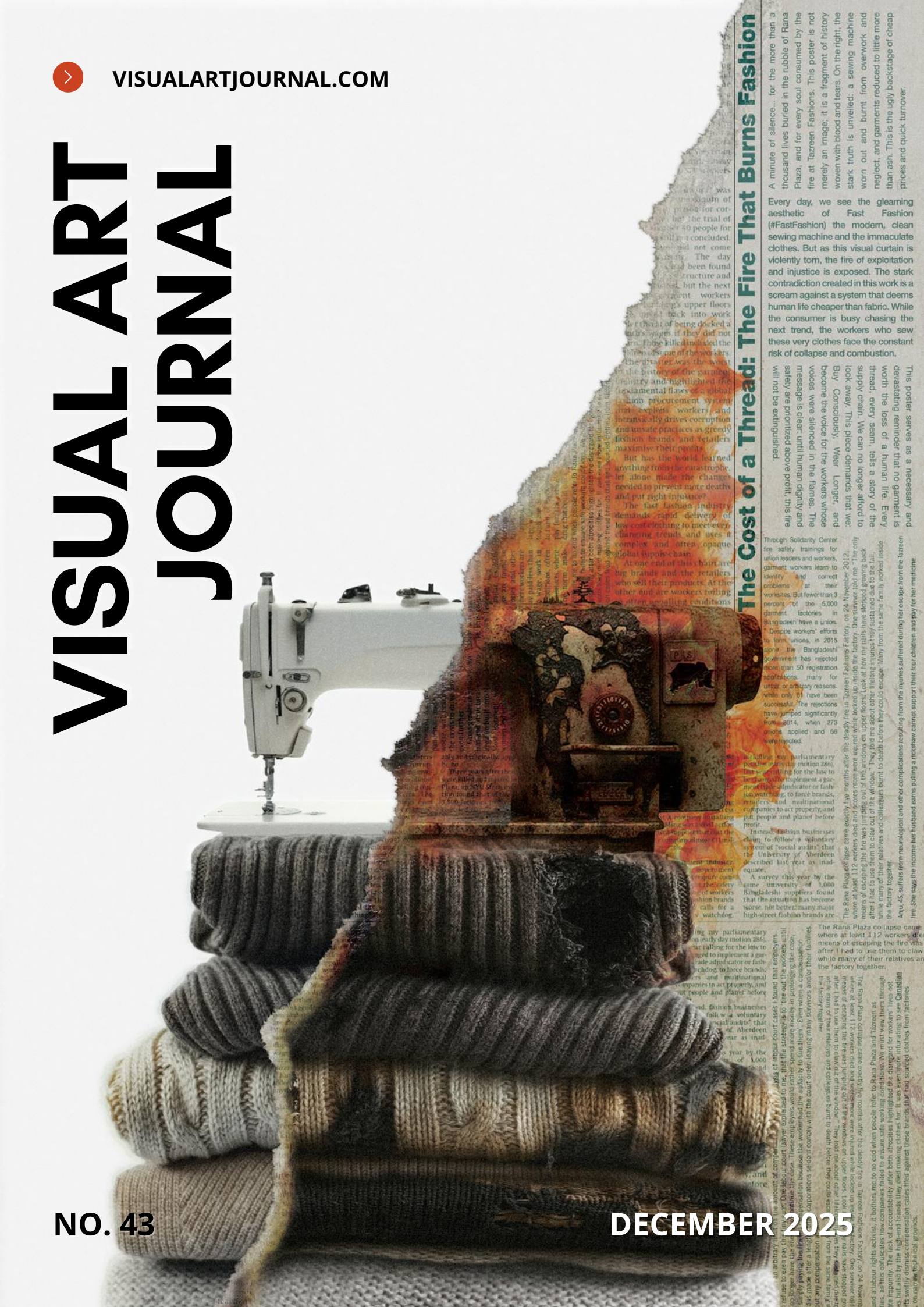

NO. 43

DECEMBER 2025

— *Intro*

Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello, dear reader,

You are holding Issue 43 of our magazine, released at the heart of this magical season - a time when we make wishes, reflect on the year behind us, and treasure the moments that inspired us.

In this edition, we bring together artists from diverse disciplines: drawing, painting, sculpture, and performance. Despite working with different mediums, they all strive for the same universal goal - to tell their story, to share their thoughts, their truth, or even their pain with the world.

As the year draws to a close, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who supports us: to our readers, and to the artists who trust us to present their creative vision. It may sound simple, but it is true - without your engagement, this project would not continue to grow.

As always, ahead of you lie more than 100 pages filled with art and conversations about art.

Enjoy your reading!

On the Front Cover:
Shadi Alibolandi
Fast Fashion
2025

On the Back Cover:
Mylene Costa
Incepta

ISSN 3051-2352
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We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: **https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/**

Kevin Perrault

The first time I really felt pulled back to the art world was when I joined my wife, Anjale @anjalepaints, at Miami Art Week last year. I was so inspired by all the artists working tirelessly to make a living through their creativity that I knew I wanted to try something of my own. When I came up with the concept for the Gentle Giants, I couldn't sleep! I just wanted to rush home and start. I had no idea it would take me three months to iron out the technical details and processes, but from that first moment, I was completely hooked.

Copper and stone are materials with such different qualities - one malleable, one ancient and enduring. What inspired you to bring these two materials together?

Honestly, it's just what I envisioned from the start. The very first mental image I had of what the work could be is almost exactly how they're created now. It's rare when a vision stays so clear through trial and error, but somehow, this one did and people have really connected with it.

Your series is titled The Gentle Giants. Who are these "giants" to you - and what makes them gentle?

Your journey to sculpture wasn't linear — from studying design at UCLA to working in a family business. When did you first feel drawn back to the art world, and what did that moment mean to you?

Kevin Perrault | Mother

Kevin Perrault | Family

This might surprise people, but I see us, the viewers as the Gentle Giants, not the figures themselves. The sculptures alter your perspective so much when you see them that it feels almost otherworldly, like an out-of-body experience. The moments I represent are often so familiar that they start to feel like your own memories or emotions reflected back at you.

There is a strong sense of community, connection, and togetherness in your pieces. What emotions or reflections do you hope viewers take away when they encounter these small figures in such monumental landscapes?

I hope people feel a universal sense of familiarity and connection. Each sculpture touches something shared through memory, nostalgia, or simply the experience of being human. I want them to remind people of moments they've lived, or ones they still hope to.

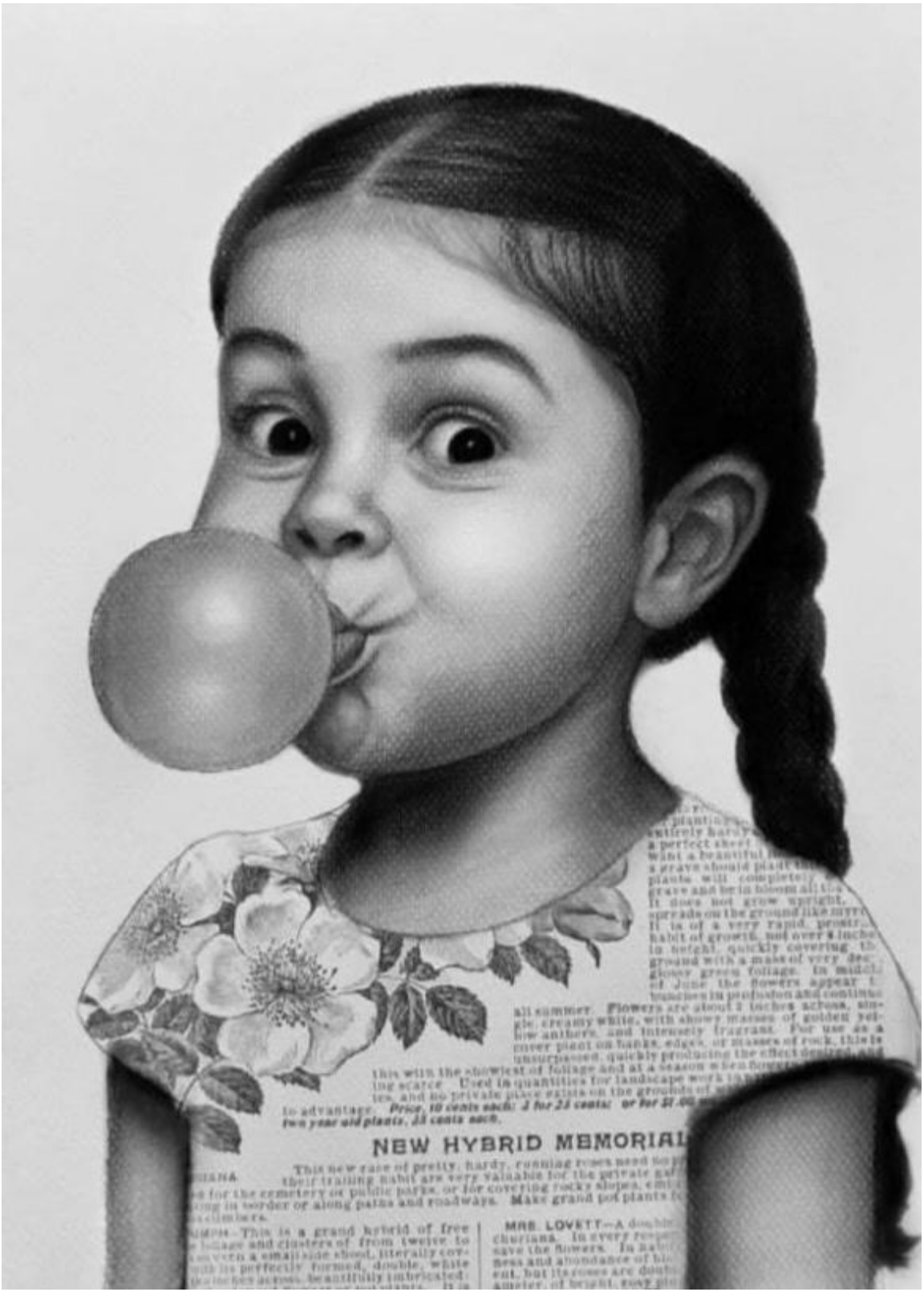
Scale plays a key role in your sculptures - tiny figures on massive stones. Why is exploring perspective and proportion important in your storytelling?

The first piece I made came from wanting to capture that feeling of camping when a group of people sit quietly around a fire for hours, just staring into it without needing to speak. I thought if I could bottle that feeling in a sculpture, I might be onto something. Playing with scale and perspective was the only way I could approach that sense of connection and emotion at once.

Looking ahead, are there new narratives or materials you want to explore in future pieces within - or beyond - the world of the Gentle Giants?

The narratives are endless. There's no limit to the emotions or experiences that deserve to be represented, and I feel like I'm just scratching the surface. One of the most unexpected and rewarding parts of this project has been hearing from people about what they'd like to see represented next.

Dilara Dolmacı
Born in Turkey, Dilara completed her university education in Business Administration; later, she discovered her passion for painting and received training in portrait techniques, gradually developing her own distinctive style. She is an artist who loves to explore human emotions and expressions through her portraits, where every face tells a unique story. At the heart of her art is noticing the subtle meanings hidden in small emotional details and bringing them to life through lines. Typically working with charcoal pencil, she creates a simple yet striking language of expression. In her work, traditional portraiture takes on a new dimension as she blends her drawings with newspaper paper, using collage techniques to craft the clothing. This approach reflects traces of everyday life while giving each portrait its own distinctive character.



THE INDEPENDENT
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THE INDEPENDENT
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Sofía Ibargüengoitia

Your latest project "Don't follow me, I'm also lost" merges theater and painting into a single narrative experience. How did the idea of blending these two worlds first appear to you?

The idea came up from identifying in my own practice the need for a change of paradigm in the way I conceive painting, to experiment with interdiscipline as a way to observe the blind spots that exist in traditional painting and transform artistic practice into a more expansive experience, not only for the artist but also for the audience.
Throughout my career I have trained in theater, music, architecture and painting; so the fusion between these disciplines seemed like a natural process to me. Theater as a language through dialogues, situations and characters creates a fictional world where everything is possible, therefore, it opens the door to the exploration of the different levels of human experience: physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional, symbolic, narrative, imaginative and spiritual.
Through theatrical language I wanted to create a fictional space that would serve as a container to expand the creative process of painting that would allow me to explore deeper layers of my own work.

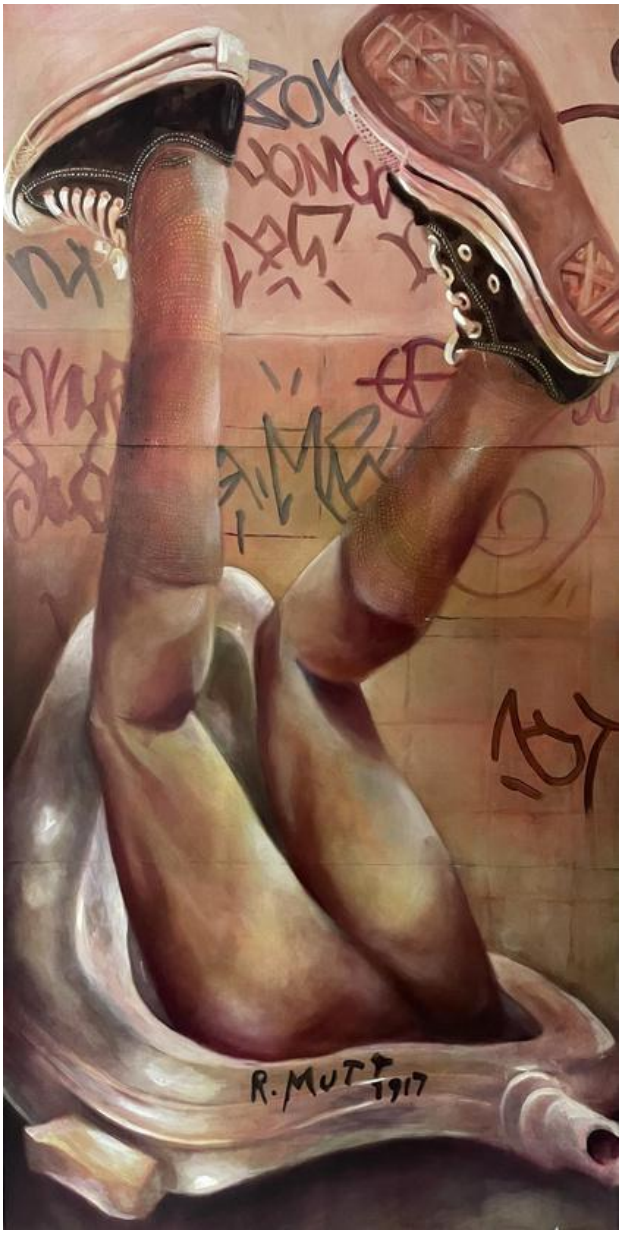
Sofía Ibargüengoitia | A Dintinguised Gentleman | 2025

When developing the play and the paintings simultaneously, how did one influence the other? Did certain scenes emerge from specific visual ideas or vice versa?

By developing both things simultaneously I would consider them as a single work; it was a process of four years where sometimes a shape or a color triggered a dialogue or a character, and sometimes a scene made me understand what was happening in the painting. At other times, paintings emerged from a lived experience translated into theater or transformed those that were already there.
It also happened making a painting or writting a dialogue intuitively where it seemed that it did not make sense with the rest of the works and a year later the relationship between them was revealed, as if the information had been there to be discovered later.
You don't need the play to understand the paintings nor the paintings to perform the play, yet together they take on multidimensional meanings.

Many of your paintings explore the human body in raw, almost uncomfortable intimacy. What draws you to this physical and emotional exposure?

The history of the nude in art, especially the female nude, has had a perspective of the body as an object of desire of the observer; traditional beauty values have dictated the way the body is represented in painting. However, I find more interesting the



Sofía Ibargüengoitia | Down The Rabbit Hole | 2025

perspective of the body as the materialization of the human experience in all its complexity.
Influenced by the work of Jenny Saville and Lucien Freud, I seek to explore the aesthetics of the body that emerges from pain, the grotesque, sadness, bonds, illness and mystery where, through the distortion of perspective or the use of "tragic" color palettes, it becomes possible to delve into the contradiction of human nature expressed in the body.

Humor and absurdity seem to coexist with existential tension in your works — for instance, the cat with human teeth or figures emerging from surreal contexts. How do you balance irony and seriousness?

I think there is nothing more serious than humor. By combining elements that apparently cannot coexist, it disconcerts the observer and confusion always forces us to ask questions. Humor, by proposing another order of things, questions them.

The theatrical aspect of your exhibition involves sound, light, and movement. How does this multisensory approach change the audience's perception compared to traditional painting exhibitions?

One of the main interests in changing a traditional painting exhibition for a theatrical performance, was precisely to be able to share with the public not only the final result of a pictorial work, but to invite them into the creative universe that surrounded it.
When I finished writing the play and the paintings, a period of collaborative work arose with the stage director, the producer, the costume designer, the actors and all the people involved in a theatrical production to bring to life another phase of the project, where the visions of all those involved enriched the artistic experience.
The result of this proposal made the public emotionally involved with the works and for the time of the theatrical performance the attention was completely on the artistic experience, unlike traditional exhibitions where the public is generally distracted and the curatorship does not necessarily get the viewer involved with the works.

In several works, you seem to reinterpret cultural or art-historical icons — such as the inscription "R. Mutt 1917" referencing Duchamp. What role does art history play in your creative dialogue?

I am particularly interested in the elements that throughout the history of painting, sculpture, cinema, music, architecture and literature have become cultural references. It strikes me how something can acquire a common meaning for an entire community and become a symbol.
The cultural references that have meant something to me throughout my work, whether because they attract me or because I question them, I reinterpret them as a way of connecting with the rest of the people and playing with the meanings of the symbols. For example, some characters in the play were taken directly from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland with completely different personalities than those that appear in the book.

Could you tell us more about the title "Don't follow me, I'm also lost" — what kind of emotional or philosophical statement does it represent for you?

The title is an analogy of the creative process; an unknown territory in which, if you decide to walk through, you have to do it without a map. Because getting lost is the only way to actually find yourself.

Tatyana Chernova is a self-taught artist based in Moscow. My dialogue with art began ten years ago with a sudden and irresistible desire to draw. I am self-taught, and from the very beginning, the pencil became my main tool. I am drawn to the magic of black-and-white and colored pencils, which can create deep, detail-rich portraits. Each work is a story told through facial features and carefully rendered elements.
Five years of creative pause did not break this connection - they only deepened it, allowing me to return to the canvas (or paper) with a more mature outlook. This artistic renewal led to international recognition: a silver medal at the Art Excellence Awards for my piece "Lamb".
I believe that art is a bridge between souls. When creating portraits, I hope that someone looking at them will recognize their own emotions, find resonance, and feel a connection. My greatest dream is to have a solo exhibition where my works can speak to the viewer in full voice.

Tatyana Chernova | Sight | 2024

Tatyana Chernova | Lamb | 2025

Anna van den Hoevel

Your paintings often draw from bird's-eye views of landscapes. What first inspired you to explore this unique perspective?

Anna van den Hoevel | Los Angeles II USA | 2025

The bird's-eye view has fascinated me for a long time because it diminishes the importance of the motif and reveals a larger whole. From above, buildings, objects and landscapes lose their dominance and become part of a broader structure. This distance allows me to highlight what truly matters: patterns, connections, fragments of memory. As someone who constantly documents her surroundings, I often feel like a tourist in my own life. The aerial perspective naturally reflects this way of seeing.

You combine traditional materials like acrylic with unconventional ones such as earth, mortar, and reused varnish. What role does material experimentation play in your creative process?

Material is not simply a tool for me, it is a partner. I enter into a dialogue with it, a back-and-forth that is expressive and emotional. Through layering, reacting and reworking, I create collages of pigment and matter that hold memories, emotions and traces of time. Natural materials like earth or mortar offer a depth and tactility that a purely visual image could never convey. I work with my hands and feet, so my physical presence and energy become part of the painting itself.

Having lived between Munich, the Austrian Alps, and Menorca — how have these contrasting environments shaped your sense of color, texture, and light?

Anna van den Hoevel | Vulcano Vesuvio Napoli, Italy | 2025

Growing up between mountain regions, urban environments and island life has shaped my visual language profoundly. This diversity sparked my fascination with both nature and the urban world. The places I've lived in or traveled through leave impressions that I photograph and later translate into painting. Mountains introduced me to earthy textures, cities to structure and density, and islands to a vibrant, breathing light. All of these influences merge into a process-driven palette where color and texture evolve naturally.

Many of your works seem to hover between abstraction and topography. How do you balance emotional expression with geographical reference?

My work never begins from emptiness. Even on a white canvas, the first layer of soil or mortar already carries history, memory, energy. I work without a predetermined plan, allowing the painting to remain open and alive. Abstraction is not really my goal.It emerges from a process that shifts constantly between remembering, feeling and observing. Topographical elements enter through my habit of collecting photographic impressions, but during the painting process they dissolve and transform into emotional landscapes where inner and outer worlds coexist.

Travel appears central to your practice. Can you share a place that profoundly influenced your recent series?

Mexico has had an important influence on my most recent series. I lived there earlier in my life and recently returned. Encountering a place that once felt familiar and now feels completely new has deeply moved me. The cultural richness of Mexico inspires me just as strongly as its landscapes. Its rituals, colors, symbols, stories, craftsmanship, and the layering of history and contemporary life—everything carries intensity and meaning.
Many of the impressions I've gathered there—visual, tactile, and atmospheric—now flow into my paintings as fragments of memory and material impulses.

The concept of the "sublime" is often associated with awe and transcendence. How do you interpret this idea through your own work?

For me, the sublime lies in the depth of perception. It emerges when I move beneath the visible surface to the point where emotions, memories, and tactile impressions merge. During the creative process, certain aspects reveal themselves unexpectedly, often carrying a dimension greater than the individual moment or place. The sublime arises from instinct, spontaneity and emotional intensity.

Could you walk us through your typical creative process — from collecting visual references to completing a painting?

My process is intuitive and process-oriented. I collect photographs, impressions, soil, colors, and memories. The blank canvas is never an empty beginning. The first material layer already holds life. Through repeated layering, adding, destroying, and reworking, textures and color fields form naturally. In the later stages, I emphasize or disrupt areas to make emotional impulses more visible.
A painting is finished when it begins to speak with its own voice, when it no longer simply carries memory but becomes a memory in itself.

Anna van den Hoevel | World Strips XI | 2025

— *Interview*

Saraya Bauer

You mentioned that you've been drawing since childhood. Can you tell us about one of your earliest memories connected with art?

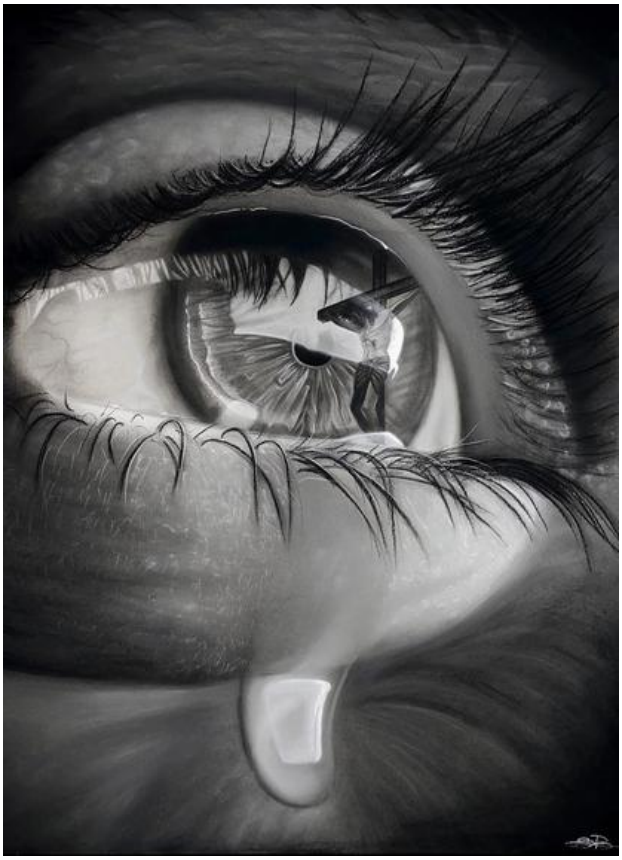
One of my earliest memories is sitting in my elementary school classroom and having teachers pause just to compliment my drawings. Their encouragement lit something inside me—it made me want to keep growing and see how far this gift could go. By middle school, I started drawing portraits, and my art teachers continued to speak life into my talent. Looking back now, I truly believe God placed this gift in me from the very beginning. All of that early encouragement helped me recognize it as something more than a childhood hobby. Today, my heart is to use the talent He gave me to glorify Him and to create art that points people back to His love.

What led you to focus specifically on realism, and what does "realism" mean to you personally?

I've always been drawn to the tiny details most people pass by—the soft shifts in light, the subtle shadows, the little textures that make something feel alive. Realism felt like a natural fit for me because it lets me honor those details and challenge myself to make a drawing look as true-to-life as possible. Over time, realism has become even more personal. It's not just about accuracy—it's about connection. My heart now is to bring moments and stories from the Bible to life on paper. I want people to look at my work and not just see it, but feel it... to connect with Scripture in a deeper, more intimate way. If my drawings can help someone experience God's love or see a familiar story with fresh eyes, then I'm doing exactly what I feel called to do.

Charcoal is a demanding medium — what draws you to it, and how do you handle its challenges?

What draws me to charcoal is the incredible depth and emotion it allows. The moment I first experimented with it, I knew it was something I wanted to master. There's something powerful about how charcoal can move from the softest, most delicate tones to deep, dramatic shadows—it lets me create a kind of intensity that really resonates with the stories I'm trying to tell. Charcoal definitely has its challenges, but I've learned to love them. It forces you to be patient and intentional. I'm always experimenting with new ways to shade, blend, and build texture. For me, those challenges aren't frustrating—they're the part that keeps me growing, pushing, and discovering more of



what this medium can do.

Your works carry deep emotional and spiritual resonance. How does your faith influence your creative process?

My faith naturally shapes the way I create. Before I start a piece, I usually take a moment to pray and ask God to guide me, especially when I'm working on something inspired by Scripture. I believe He's the one who gave me this talent, so I want my work to reflect Him in an honest, heartfelt way. When I draw biblical scenes, I spend time thinking about the emotion behind them and what the moment might have actually felt like. That helps me bring the story to life on paper. My hope is that people can look at my work and feel something meaningful - whether it reminds them of God's love, encourages them, or simply makes them pause and reflect.

There's a recurring motif of the eye and reflection in your pieces. What does this symbolize for you?

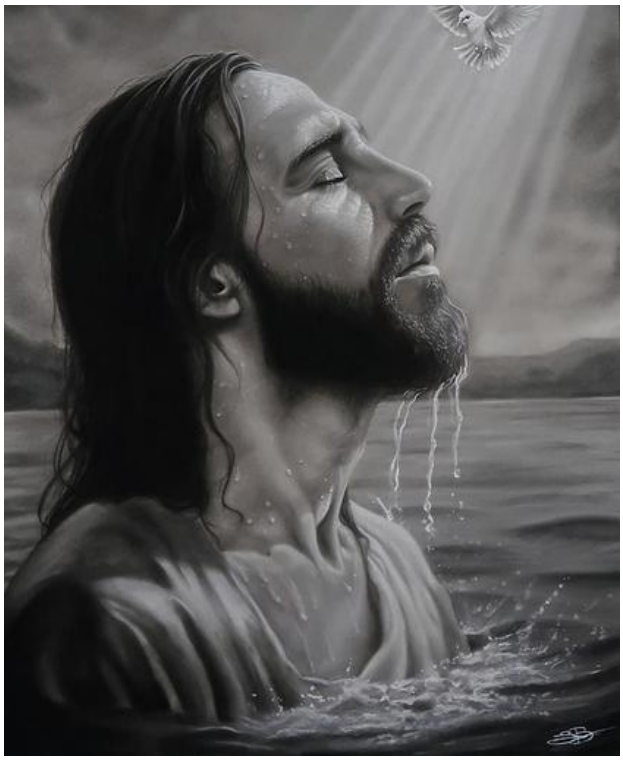
I've always been drawn to eyes—ever since I first started sketching. There's just something powerful about them. People say the eyes are the gateway to the soul, and for me, they're always the first thing I notice about someone in real life and in art. The reflections I add inside the eyes actually started as a personal challenge, just to see how far I could push myself with detail. But over time, it's become a meaningful way for me to tell a story within the story. Especially in my faith-based pieces, those reflections are another chance to point back to Jesus, add symbolism, or capture a deeper emotion. It's a small detail, but it's where so much of the connection happens.

How has motherhood transformed your way of seeing and depicting the world?

Motherhood has changed the way I see absolutely everything. It's transformed me in every way—my heart, my priorities, even the way I look at the world around me.
Children are such a blessing from God, and becoming a mom showed me a kind of love I didn't even know existed. In my art, I find myself paying more attention to tenderness, emotion, and those little moments that feel sacred. Motherhood has softened me, strengthened me, and given me a deeper understanding of the kind of love I want to capture on paper.

What message or feeling do you hope viewers take away from your works?

My biggest hope is that people feel something the moment they see my work—a real, meaningful rush of emotion. I want my drawings to help viewers connect with God in a personal way, whether that's through feeling His love, His closeness, or the weight of His sacrifice. If someone can look at one of my pieces and walk away moved, comforted, or reminded of who He is, then I feel like I've done what I'm meant to do.



Darya Vershinina

When did you first realize that art is something you want to pursue seriously?

I believe it all started back in 2017, a year after I graduated. At the time, I was primarily drawing portraits with colored pencils. I occasionally come across them now, and to be honest, I find it mesmerizing how determined I was back then. You can see the careful color selection and the many layers, making it clear that each piece required immense time and perseverance.
In a way, these old portraits serve as a motivation, urging me not to let my past self down. I have come to believe that if I was capable of that level of dedication then, I undoubtedly have the power within me to achieve even more now, and at any point in the future.

Darya Vershinina | Wish I Was Her | 2025

You studied finance and work in a bank — how do you balance such a practical profession with your creative ambitions?

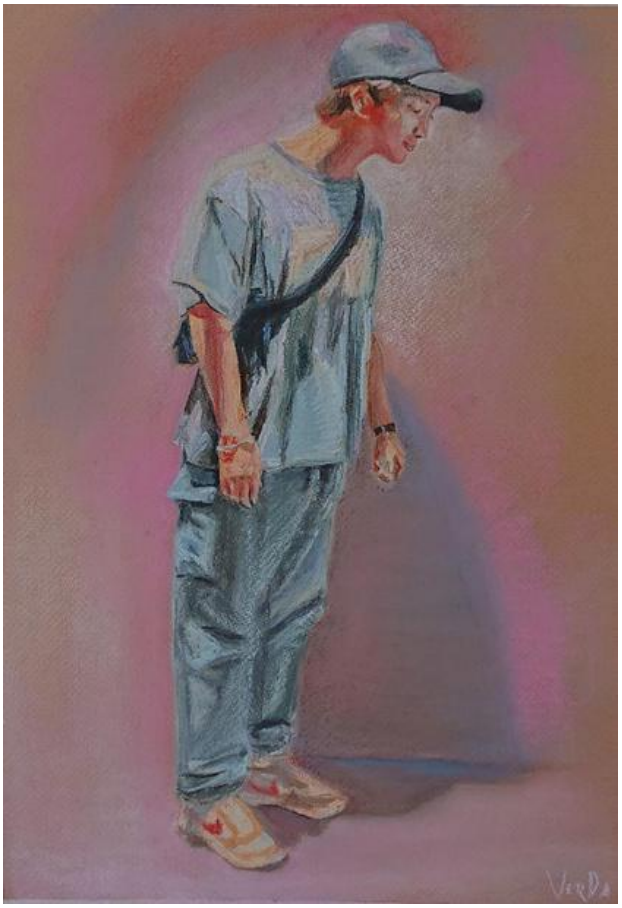
To be honest, I am still searching for that perfect balance, though I am not sure it is even attainable. During the week, my drawing time is limited to lunch breaks or evenings, and since I have the usual daily tasks to complete, I often settle for a quick sketch unless there is an exhibition deadline.
On weekends, I fully immerse myself in art, spending four hours a day or more at a local workshop. While this is productive, the sad part is that it leaves me with barely any time to rest.

What inspired you to start learning Korean and dream of building an artistic career in Korea?

It all began in 2017 (quite a busy year haha), sparked by a Korean mobile game. I was completely captivated by one of the characters and felt a strong desire to draw him. To do this accurately, I started browsing through photos of Korean people online for reference, and that is when I first came across pictures of BTS members. A friend then properly introduced me to their music, recommending her favorite songs.
My fascination grew so deep that I soon started learning Korean, initially just to understand their lyrics better and to sing along. At some point, this passion even led me to consider applying to the very company that had created the mobile game, which started it all.

You often portray people in emotional and intimate moments. What draws you to these particular stories?

I am drawn to these intimate, emotional moments precisely because of my own intense emotional nature. I see that same volcanic energy in the quietest human experiences, and I feel a deep need to give it a voice. For me, depicting a character's emotion to the fullest is how I give their inner world the weight and visibility it deserves.



Darya Vershinina | You | 2022

How do you choose the characters in your paintings — are they people you know, fictional figures, or inspired by cinema and music?

My characters come from all of these sources. I have drawn portraits of Joaquin Phoenix as Emperor Commodus from "Gladiator," RM from BTS, and a queen inspired by a Korean Empress and a local theater actress, alongside more personal subjects like my grandmother and friends, or random people I discover online.
My approach then varies. If I know the subject or the scene, my focus shifts to uncovering the story behind that specific moment. In other cases, the choice is purely intuitive; I am guided by an immediate emotional response to the image. The decision is often quick: do I like the potential narrative that pops inside my head? Do I feel connected to the character and the color palette? If so, I save it as a reference for a future piece.

Oil pastels and acrylic paint can be quite different in technique. What do you love most about each medium?

I will start with the practical aspects and then move to the more poetic ones. What I truly appreciate about oil pastels is the immediacy—how quickly I can set up my workspace and clean up afterwards. Acrylics require more preparation, though they are still far more manageable than traditional oils.
On a more personal note, I find a certain joy in the physical connection with these mediums. I love seeing the pastel dust on my hands, and with acrylics, I often test the color on my skin rather than the palette.
Artistically, one of my favorite techniques is glazing, which, despite being a classic oil painting method, I feel very confident in using with oil pastels and acrylics. I love it for two reasons. First, it allows me to build complex, layered colors that I find much more captivating. A petal is not just white; it is a fusion of five different hues. For me, these subtle layers are like a hidden testament to the love and care invested in every part of the canvas. Second, glazing lets me fine-tune the tones, creating an effect that is both realistic and softened by a dreamlike filter.
In the end, what I value most is how both mediums empower me to create something truly picturesque with a sense of depth and emotion.

Do you hope viewers interpret the story behind each character, or is it important to leave room for personal imagination?

I do not think the stories behind my paintings are always easy to interpret exactly as I intended. Therefore, people are free to imagine the narrative as they wish. For instance, at my last exhibition in Seoul, I had many conversations with guests, and their unexpected assumptions about the paintings' meanings were a genuine delight.
You see, artists are true magicians: we take a blank piece of paper, a canvas, a piece of cardboard, and we give it a face. The part of this magic though is granting the audience the freedom to imagine what the eyes on that face are looking at.

Darya Vershinina | Pierrot | 2025

Kelly Waggoner

Your artistic journey began very young. What do you think kept that spark alive from childhood into your professional life?

From a very young age, creativity just felt like part of my DNA and was supported by my parents. Throughout high school, I knew I wanted to own and run an advertising agency. That ambition led me to the University of Nebraska at Kearney, which had one of the Midwest's top graphic design programs. It was a competitive environment, but I thrived there, soaking up everything I could, especially when it came to typography,

which quickly became a passion.
This was the early 1990s, right as computers were starting to transform graphic design. I taught myself QuarkXPress and Photoshop, knowing those skills would be essential in the real world. That sense of learning and adapting kept things exciting and pushed me forward.
Whenever I felt creatively unfulfilled, I'd find other outlets, like building things around the house, my fireplace surround or the desk I still use. For me, keeping the spark alive was never a conscious effort. Creativity is just who I am. No matter what form it takes, I'll always find a way to express it.

You mentioned a powerful moment when your first oil painting sold while still unfinished. How did that experience shape your confidence and relationship with art?

That moment was both an honor and a turning point for me. Up until then, most of my encouragement came from family. But having someone outside my circle see value in my work, especially when it wasn't even finished, was a whole new kind of validation. I thinkevery artist, at some point, craves that external recognition.
That early sale opened my eyes to the idea that art could be more than just a personal passion—it could connect with others and even become a business. It motivated me to keep pushing myself, to improve my creative skills, and to take my art more seriously.

You built a successful career in advertising. How has your background in branding and communication influenced the visual language in your paintings?

My background in advertising and branding is woven into every aspect of my mixed media work. Years spent crafting

visual messages for clients taught me the power of storytelling through imagery, and that instinct naturally carries over into my paintings. I'm always searching for a sense of balance and harmony, skills honed from years of designing layouts and building brand identities.
You can see my graphic design tendencies in the way I compose each piece: the use of bold shapes, thoughtful typography, and layered elements all serve a purpose, guiding the viewer's eye and reinforcing the narrative. Even when I'm working abstractly, I'm conscious of how every element communicates, whether it's through color, texture, or composition. Ultimately, my goal is to create work that not only captures attention but also invites deeper engagement, just as effective branding does.

What inspired your transition from realistic wildlife art into bold abstraction and mixed media?

For as long as I can remember, I've been drawn to abstract art, but for much of my early life, I found myself too bound by structure to truly embrace it. My background in graphic design made me comfortable with grids, order, and precise composition, the idea of letting go and painting abstractly felt almost impossible. I simply couldn't break free from those self-imposed constraints.
After college, I stepped away from painting for almost 30 years. Then, during the COVID lockdowns, a time when I was facing significant emotional challenges, an abstract artist friend encouraged me to pick up the brush again. At first, it was purely therapeutic: I started by moving paint around the canvas with no agenda, no concern for composition, and no pressure to create something recognizable. It was about relearning techniques and, more importantly, giving myself permission to let go.
In that process, I realized I wasn't interested in returning to wildlife or landscape painting. I no longer wanted to paint what others wanted me to paint. What I needed was the freedom to explore, to express emotion without boundaries, and to use art as a form of release. That's what led me to bold abstraction and mixed media, where I could finally break away from the rigid structure and allow intuition and feeling to guide my work.

You explore social themes — such as immigration or cultural identity — in some of your work. What role do you believe art plays in today's conversations about society?

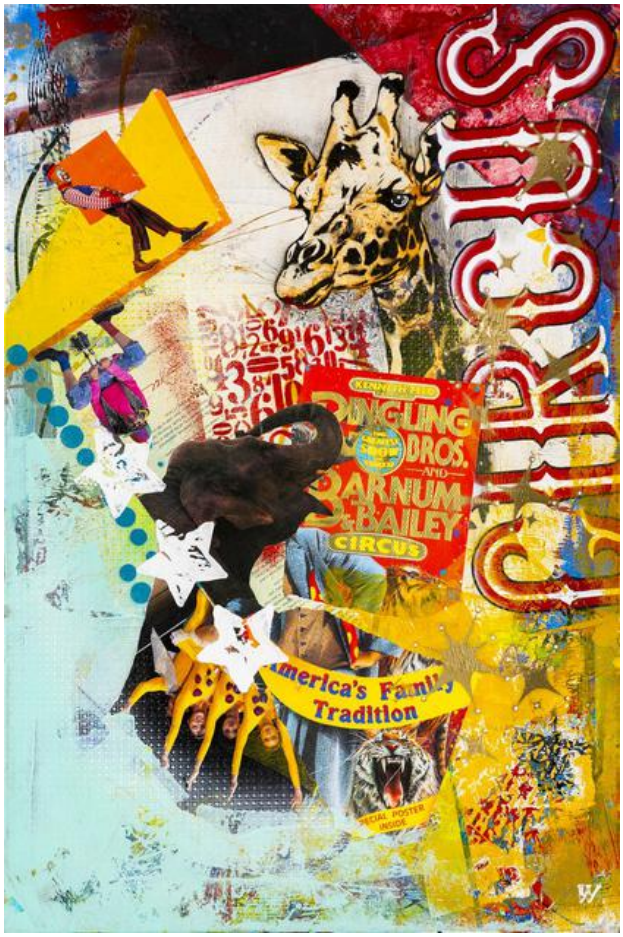
Art has a way of reaching people emotionally and visually that words alone often can't. It can challenge assumptions, and invite viewers to see issues from a new perspective.
In today's world, where so much communication is fast and surface-level, I think art's ability to slow us down and invite deeper discussion is more important than ever.

When working with collage elements and found media, do you start with a clear message — or does meaning emerge later through experimentation?

Sometimes I begin with a clear concept or message in mind, but more often than not, the process itself takes over. The materials, textures, and unexpected combinations start to suggest new directions, and the piece develops its own voice and story as I go.
I've learned to trust that sense of discovery. Even when I set out with a plan, I try to stay open to what emerges through experimentation. Often, the most authentic meaning comes from allowing the work to evolve organically, responding to what's happening on the canvas rather than forcing it to fit a predetermined idea.

What emotions or ideas do you hope viewers experience when standing in front of your work?

Honestly, my paintings are my voice, my way of processing and expressing what I'm feeling or experiencing. Each piece is a window into my story, my emotions, my opinions and my struggles. When someone stands in front of my work, I hope they sense that vulnerability and honesty. I also hope it sparks something in others, maybe a memory, an emotion, or a question about their own experiences or beliefs.



Diana Chechushkova

Diana Chechushkova | Diptych "Turn Around" | 2025

Could you describe how your background in icon painting has influenced the way you approach portraiture today?

My icon painting experience has certainly influenced my approach to portraiture today. Mastering multi-layered painting techniques has proven particularly valuable. It allows me to create threedimensional and expressive images and conveying the character and emotions of my subjects on a deeper level. Icon painting also utilizes a muted color palette, which is reflected in my works. These techniques help me mix traditional craftsmanship with contemporary approaches in painting.

Diana Chechushkova | Dreaming Awake | 2023

What inspired you to shift from iconography to impressionistic portraits?

For me the transition from iconography to impressionism was a natural step. Icon painting leaves a deep impression, but the process of creating it is very strict (subjected to clear rules) and slow. In impressionism, I found freedom of expression and the opportunity to convey emotion and light more directly. This allowed me to combine the depth and feeling I absorbed from iconography with the dynamism and color of painting.
Working with iconography, I realized that I wanted to paint living, real people. Just like all of us: imperfect, doubting, searching, dreaming, rebellious, desperate and hopeful. I want my portraits to reflect God's highest creation — humans, the beauty of their faces and the mystery of their souls.

How do you select the models or faces for your paintings?

Initially, when I started the "Immersed" series, I painted composite images of fictional characters. The images came from my head, the emotions were drawn intuitively, from the subconscious. These images

Diana Chechushkova | I See | 2023

contain my stories and emotions, essentially my self-portraits, because every artist brings a piece of him- or herself, a piece of soul, and his or her worldview to the painting.
Today, my models are real people, and I work with their emotions. Choosing models, I have several important aspects: appearance, from which the idea is born and a suitable image.
Internal compatibility with me is important too. When we are on the same wavelength, when we share similar vibrations. And the last one is model's ability to work with the body and express emotions.

The series Immersed explores deep inner feelings and solitude. How do you personally connect to this theme?

The heroes of the "Immersed" series are united by something with which a person is born into this world, goes through life, and dies — loneliness. It's natural for a mature soul, and terrifying for an immature one. Even surrounded by loved ones, we remain lonely inside, trapped by inhibitions and doubts, tormented by guilt and unable to come to terms with ourselves, keeping secrets we do not trust anyone. This state is inherent to all people on the earth, and it certainly applies to me.

Your textures and color layers create a dreamlike atmosphere. Which materials and techniques help you achieve this effect?

I use oil paints as the main material for creating a dreamlike atmosphere. I often mix paints directly on the canvas, achieving the desired color rendition and effects. That is how my technique, which I call "sculptural surgery of painting," was born. Using the blade of a stationery knife, I apply brushstrokes to the canvas, making them thick and heavy or light and thin, softening or intensifying transitions. Using this technique, I paint the hair of my characters, their clothing, and the overall background of the painting. Using the technique of scumble, which involves applying transparent layers of colored glazes, I achieve a deep and multifaceted color palette, creating the illusion of volume and light. Each layer adds a new nuance that interacts with the previous ones, which allows to convey an atmosphere of mystery and dreaminess. I use a wide range of colors, which helps to achieve more complex and deeper mixes.
Another important technique is sfumato, which permits me to soften the contours and delicately transition from one color to another. I suppose that the dreamy effect in my works is achieved by the fact that even when I work with large formats, I use thin artistic brushes.

How do you decide when a portrait is finished, given that emotions can feel endless?

There is a subconscious limiter in me. I will work on the painting until the "stop" comes. I do not go back to work after that. Looking at the early works, I like to observe my own growth, the discovery of new approaches.
If we talk about emotions, as soon as an emotion appears in the portrait, it becomes clear. I fix it, focus on it and make sure that it does not change. In work sometimes my mood changes and the emotion of the character. It is not always good. This can lead to a change in the whole idea.

What message would you like viewers to take away after seeing your series Immersed?

I want the viewer to immerse in himself. With the interacting with my paintings, he finds his response in his heart, sees his own, reflects on what he does not dare to admit to himself. I want the viewer to be as honest with himself as I trust him, exposing his soul in my works. I want to have a dialogue with the viewer, because what distinguishes me from him is that we are on different sides of the portraits: I create them, and he looks, but otherwise I am the same person, with the same feelings, doubts, joys, fears and excitement.

Iryna Dumina
I was born in Crimea.
Currently, I live in Kherson.
I love drawing, listening to music, travelling.
I am into peacebuilding. I believe in the power of dialogue and peaceful coexistence of people.

Project Statement
These artworks are dedicated to the topic of Peace which is so desired and long-awaited by many.

Iryna Dumina | Olives | 2025

Iryna Dumina | Heiwa-san | 2025

Mylene Costa

Mylene Costa | Incepta

Your works often explore the dialogue between form and emptiness. How do you approach this balance in yourcreative process?

For me, emptiness is never absence — it is presence at rest. In my sculptures, form emerges from space just as space emerges from form. I seek the point where matter becomes space, where fullness and hollowness complete one another. Working with this balance is an act of listening — allowing the material to reveal what it must become and what it must let go of. Emptiness is what allows form to hold a soul.

The concept of transformation appears central in your sculptures. How do you translate this invisible processinto material form?

Mylene Costa | Fenda Do Tempo Compact

Transformation is the language of time inscribed in matter. I do not perceive it as rupture, but as continuity — a silent cycle in which everything moves, even in stillness. In sculpture, I try to reveal this state of transition: the moment in which being renews itself without ceasing to be. Gesture, heat, weight, and resistance become traces of this dialogue between the transient and the permanent. To sculpt, for me, is to accompany the breath of time until it becomes form.

You mention “the invisible pulse that connects matter and consciousness.” Could you share how this ideamanifests during the act of sculpting?

Sculpting is an encounter between matter, consciousness, and spirit. There is a moment when the gesture transcends the physical act and becomes a state of presence — as if the material itself awakened to its own vibration. This invisible pulse is the subtle current that flows through everything — the bridge between what is tangible and what breathes in silence. When I am before the work, I do not try to impose a form, but to listen, allowing it to reveal its inner essence, as if guided by something beyond the visible. Each sculpture is born from that silent dialogue, where spirit recognizes itself in matter, and consciousness expands through form.

Your work reflects a strong sense of feminine vitality. How does the feminine principle influence yourunderstanding of time and transformation?

For me, the feminine principle is not an identity but a law that inhabits everything that exists. In the universe, nothing stands alone — every form is born from the meeting of opposites, from what contains and what expands, from the visible and the invisible. This balance is the foundation of creation: the endless movement between matter and energy, stillness and impulse, silence and sound. In sculpture, I seek this convergence — the moment when polarities recognize each other and become one presence. Time, in this sense, is not a line or a cycle, but a breath: it contracts and expands, dissolves and renews, like everything that pulses. What we call the feminine is, for me, the force that receives, sustains, and gives form to this flow — the space where existence finds

meaning through transformation.

The reflective and polished surfaces of your sculptures interact deeply with light and space. Do you considerlight an active participant in your compositions?

I do not see darkness as something that exists — only the absence of light. And in this sense, light does not come solely from the work itself, but from the viewer who approaches it. The polished surfaces of my sculptures act as a field of encounter: they return the light they receive, transforming the gaze into visible matter. The work does not impose brightness — it welcomes it. It is the spectator who activates the luminous space.
Light becomes a shared current — not something I control, but something that appears through the relationship between body, presence, and perception. The sculpture responds to what stands before it: it absorbs, reflects, expands.
For me, light is a principle of revelation; and the sculpture, a place where that revelation occurs. Light is active, yes — but active because the other exists. The work lights up only when someone crosses it.

What role does intuition play in your creative process — especially when working with materials like bronze,resin, or marble?

For me, intuition is not a sudden thought — it is a form of consciousness that precedes form. It emerges as an energetic field seeking space to exist, almost like a movement that comes before the gesture. In the sculpting process, I see myself as a mediator between this invisible force and the material world. Intuition arrives as a subtle breath pointing toward a direction in time, and the material — bronze, resin, or marble — offers the body through which that breath can become presence.
Each material holds its own temporality: bronze carries memory, marble holds silence, resin welcomes transformation. Intuition recognizes these natures before I can name them. My role is to adapt, translate, and allow what wants to be born to find the precise place where matter and spirit coincide.
To sculpt is not to impose form — it is to accompany a revelation. The work emerges when intuition finds a body capable of sustaining its truth. I simply adjust the path so that this passage unfolds with clarity, respect, and depth. It is a silent agreement between the visible and the invisible, between what arrives and what allows itself to become.

Looking ahead, are there new materials or conceptual directions you wish to explore?

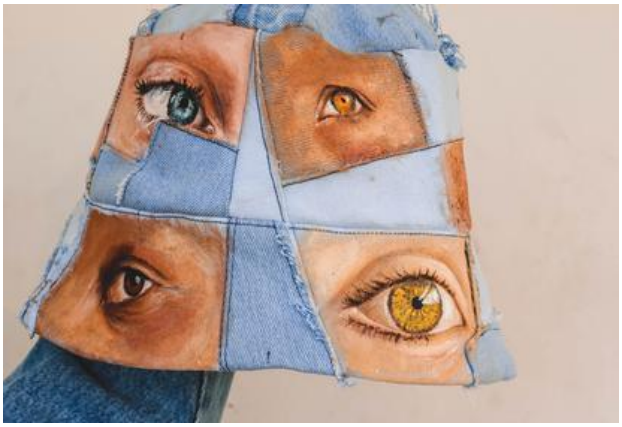
For me, the future is not a destination — it is a field of possibilities already vibrating in the present. The directions I wish to explore arise from that movement: from what has no form yet, but already has intention.
Rather than seeking new materials, I feel I am deepening my relationship with the spirit of matter itself. What draws me is not novelty, but expansion: understanding how each material dialogues with time, light, and consciousness, and how it can reveal other layers of what already exists in silence.
I am interested in scales and surfaces that broaden the sensory experience — works capable of creating portals between inner and outer space, between the intimate and the cosmic. I do not see this as change, but as the natural continuation of my path: taking sculpture toward a territory where presence, perception, and spirituality intersect even more intensely.
The new directions I seek are not only technical — they are ontological. I want to deepen the research into what gives rise to form, into what asks to be revealed, and into how the artwork can become a passage between worlds.
The future of my sculpture lies in this dialogue: between what pulses in matter and what vibrates in the invisible, waiting to emerge.

Beatriz Araza

How did your background in fashion design influence the way you approach composition, texture, and color in your paintings?

My background in Fashion Design has shaped the way I see the world visually. I focused heavily on womenswear design, and that experience trained my eye to pay attention to texture, form, and subtle details. In fashion, there is a constant awareness of how fabrics move, how colors interact, and how shapes create emotion. I carry that same sensitivity into my paintings.
I've always been fascinated by art and texture, and I often incorporate hand-rendered elements into my designs. Today, that translates into how I layer paint, choose color palettes, and build compositions that feel tactile and intentional. Fashion taught me to approach every piece with purpose, from the placement of every line to the emotion I want the viewer to feel.

Your work often captures moments of calm and comfort — what draws you to these everyday scenes?



Beatriz Araza | Bucket Hat

I'm naturally drawn to quiet moments and intimate details, especially those found in portraits and calm scenes. I want my art to evoke emotion, warmth, and a sense of comfort, almost like a visual exhale.
There's something special about capturing facial features or simple everyday moments that feel gentle and grounding. I paint what I wish to feel more of in my own life: softness, peace, and a sense of being held.

In Savor, the play of light and reflection feels intentional. Can you describe your process of studying and capturing light?

Natural light is one of my biggest inspirations, something I learned to observe deeply during art school. I take a lot of reference photos, focusing on subtle shifts in warmth, reflection, and shadow.
I'm especially drawn to soft light and warm tones because they bring a nostalgic, dreamy quality to the subject. When I paint, I study how light touches skin, objects, or spaces, and I try to recreate that quiet glow that feels both intimate and serene.

Do you see a connection between painting and mindfulness in your creative process?

Absolutely. Painting is my way of unwinding. It's where I feel most calm and present. It has always been therapeutic for me. I paint slowly and intentionally,

Beatriz Araza | Savor | 2024

taking time to focus on details and immerse myself fully in the moment.
It's the one space where I don't feel rushed or overwhelmed. Painting allows me to breathe, to reflect, and to reconnect with myself.

How do travel and cultural experiences shape your visual storytelling?

Every place I visit influences me in a different way. Whenever I travel, I make it a point to visit museums, explore neighborhoods, sit in cafés, observe people, and appreciate architecture, interiors, art pieces, furniture, and even food. I genuinely enjoy immersing myself in the culture, I'm naturally a very curious person.
Anything that catches my eye becomes inspiration: a warm color palette from a sunset, a face in a crowd, a beautifully designed space, or even a fleeting moment I notice while wandering. These small observations naturally find their way into my visual storytelling.

How do you choose the subjects for your still-life paintings — are they spontaneous or carefully planned?

Both, but I tend to lean toward careful planning. I usually gather photos I've taken and compose them into a collage to create the mood and structure I want.But inspiration can also strike unexpectedly. Some ideas come from spontaneous observations, and sometimes even from dreams. I like giving myself room to explore while still guiding the composition with intention.

How has your transition from fashion to painting changed your creative identity?

I've loved art for as long as I can remember. Before pursuing fashion, my main mediums were ink, charcoal, pencil, and oil pastel, and I joined art contests in my school growing up. I never saw painting as my strength, I had attempted it before but eventually gave up.
Everything changed when I went to university. During our design foundation classes, we had a painting course, and my professor saw potential in me. He mentored me closely and even encouraged me to join a national competition. That experience sparked my love for painting.
But after finishing my thesis and eventually graduating, I had to focus on my career in fashion, and painting took a backseat. It wasn't until recently, when I got sick from stress and had to slow down, that I finally had the space to reflect. That pause gave me clarity. I realized how much joy painting brings me, how it never stresses me out, how it feels like home. Returning to painting reconnected me with a part of myself I had almost forgotten. It reminded me that art is my true passion, something I want to pursue for the rest of my life. I want to travel, create, and eventually move abroad to continue growing as an artist and as a creative. This transition didn't just change my creative identity, it brought me back to it.

Olga Puzikova (Bobyleva)

You mentioned that your artistic style evolves along with your life. What recent changes in your environment or experiences have had the strongest impact on your work?

The global events of recent years have inevitably influenced my inner state and the way I experience the world. Along with that, personal changes such as becoming a mother and moving abroad with a small child have deeply affected me. It was during the period of gradual stabilization that I realized my paintings had transformed dramatically. My artistic language changed together with me, reflecting this new stage of life and perception.

Olga Puzikova (Bobyleva) | Once At The Museum | 2025

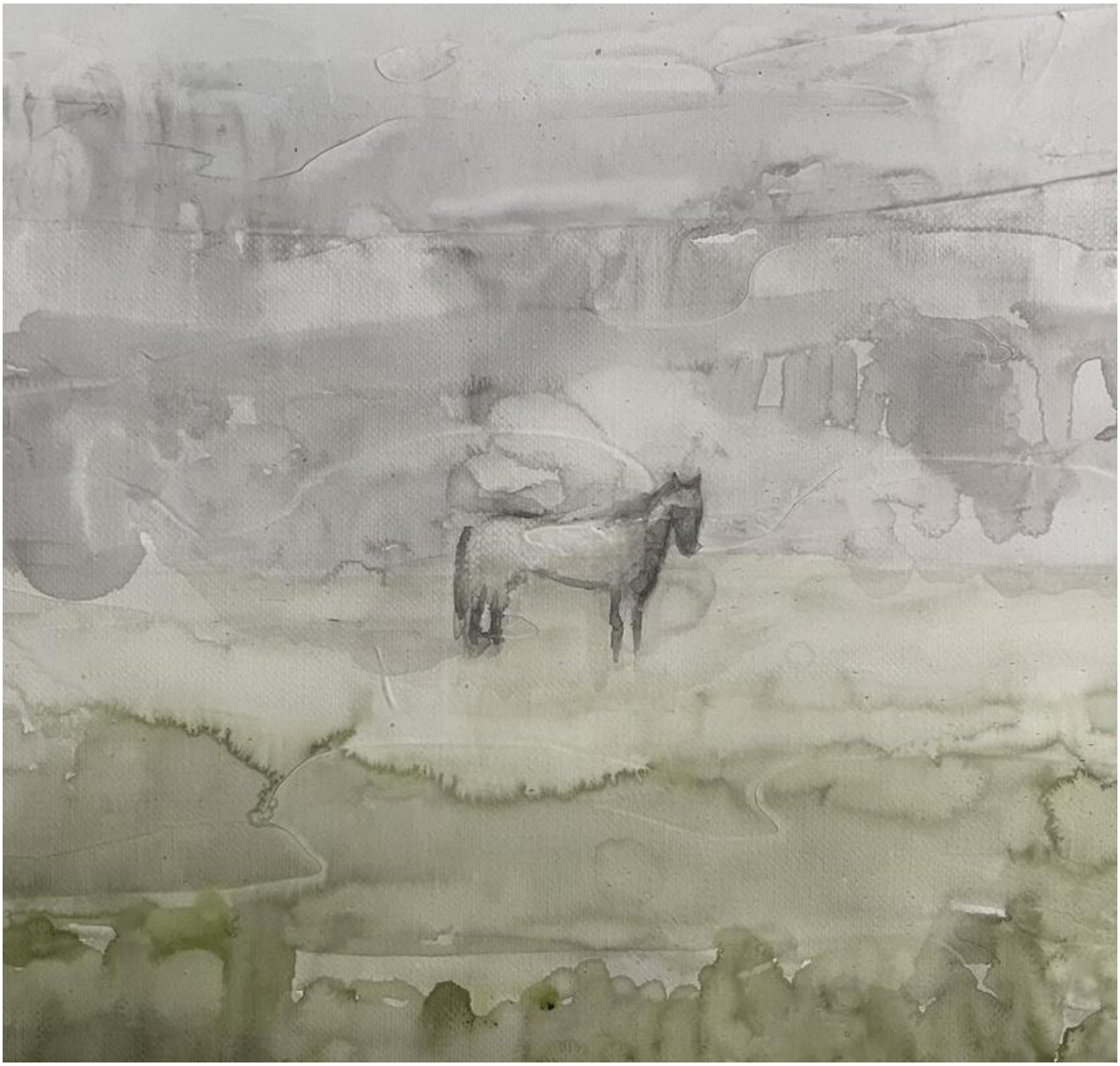
Many of your paintings feel symbolic and narrative-driven. What themes or messages do you explore most frequently in your art?

In my work, I try to understand how a person finds their path and stays true to themselves. The search itself is what matters, not the destination. I believe there is always a way out, even from the most difficult situations, and that when we follow the right direction with honesty, something greater often helps us move forward.

Your works often feature characters placed in surreal or philosophical settings. Who are these figures — are they self-portraits, invented personalities, or universal symbols?

There are a few recognizable figures in my works. For example, one of my paintings features the image of Gerasim of Jordan, but the characters I portray are often inspired by the faces of strangers. Most of them are collective or symbolic figures that exist somewhere between reality and imagination.

How do classical techniques you learned in childhood influence your current contemporary



Olga Puzikova (Bobyleva) | Fog | 2025

and expressive style?

This question made me reflect, and it brought me to quite an amusing realization. My background in classical painting gave me a strong technical foundation, and now I can deliberately break those rules to achieve greater expressiveness or other artistic goals. That training also allows me to work freely with color and paint from memory, as I learned to truly observe and understand the form, structure, and tone of what I see.

The text integrated into several works adds deep meaning. What role does language play in your artistic storytelling?

Just as in film or literature, where a director or writer lets us hear the inner voice of a character, I use text to offer a subtle hint about the message behind the work. My paintings often turn out to be metaphorical images, and each viewer sees something different in them. But for those curious about what the artist wanted to say, the words become a small key that allows them to read my thoughts, almost like a brief act of telepathy.

You have painted commissioned portraits in the past. How did creating personal art differ from creating commissioned pieces with specific expectations?

Because of my analytical and emotionally receptive nature, creating commissioned portraits was always a challenge for me. I often felt that my creative energy was directed in ways that didn't feel natural, and it required more effort to maintain authenticity. Personal work, on the other hand, allows my ideas to flow freely and my artistic voice to emerge more genuinely.

Your palette often feels soft and nostalgic, yet your compositions are full of inner tension. How do you balance these contrasting emotions on canvas?

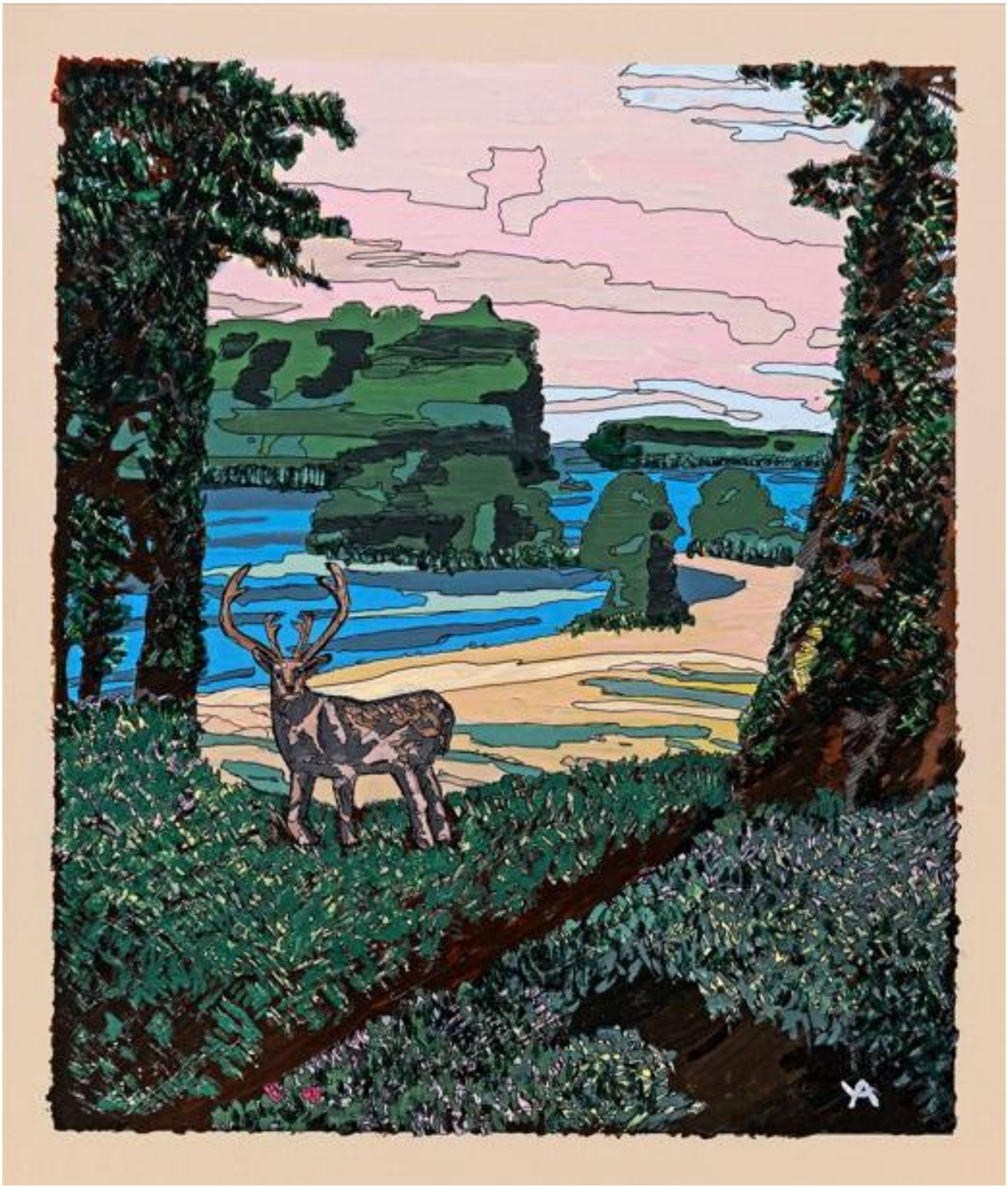
I let the composition and subject guide me rather than trying to force a balance. My goal is never to impose an idea on the viewer, but to invite them into a space of calm reflection guided by the colors. I often choose colors and arrange the composition intuitively, in accordance with the meanings the work carries.

Yotvat Rieder Aviram

My cross-cultural and migration experiences in Copenhagen, Seattle, New York, Tel Aviv, and Haifa - as well as my background in the corporate world, leading global communities, has been a catalyst to my approach on art as a space for shared resilience at the crossroads of sustainability, identity, and migration.
In 2020, I created ReLiving—an artistic and ecological project, which I since then publicly launched in 2024, with the birth of my son as a single mother. With ReLiving I breathe new life into abandoned artworks, transforming them into layered visual narratives. I explore the emotional fabric of my vulnerability and belonging, using acrylic and ink on recycled canvas and paper. I rework old pieces, granting them renewed life—a process of healing and reconstruction, like a migrant reshaping identity.
I am a member of The Hug international artist community, and my works are held in private collections in the U.S., Denmark, Spain and Israel. I previously held a solo exhibition in the history Studentergaarden community (Copenhagen) and in 2025 my works were exhibited in the group exhibitions "Root 2 Fruit" in Philadelphia (Sept.), as well as in “Invisible” in the Haifa District (Nov.) and “Healing Souls” in Tel Aviv (Jan. '26). My work was also featured in the Oct. issue of Odyssey art magazine on Healing.
My paintings reflect the interconnectedness of fragments of personal and collective identity, emphasizing that fragility can be a source of strength—and that there is much beauty in imperfection.

Project Statement
My artistic practice sits at the crossroads of visual art, sustainability, identity, and migration. Through ReLiving—an artistic and ecological project I’ve led since 2020 and launched publicly in 2024 with the birth of my son as a single mother—I breathe new life into abandoned artworks, transforming them into layered visual narratives. I explore the emotional fabric of vulnerability and belonging, using acrylic and ink on recycled canvas and paper. I rework old pieces, granting them renewed life—a process of healing and reconstruction, like a migrant reshaping identity.
Characterized by black contours, layered color, and mosaic-like textures, my works echo fragmented memory, bridging personal memory with collective culture and finding renewal through fracture.
My cross-cultural experiences in Copenhagen, Seattle, New York, Tel Aviv, and Haifa shape these emotional landscapes, while my background in leading global communities informs my approach to art as a space for shared resilience.
My paintings reflect the interconnectedness of fragments of personal and collective identity, emphasizing that fragility can be a source of strength—and that there is much beauty in imperfection.

Yotvat Rieder Aviram | Vulnerability | 2025



Yotvat Rieder Aviram | A Walk in the Forest | 2021

Sharon Nugent

Sharon Nugent | Waiting For Night To Fall | 2024

Your work is driven by automatism. How do you shift into that intuitive state before beginning a new piece?

Before beginning any piece, I need to be relaxed enough to let my hand flow freely, even if what I want to depict is slightly chaotic or based on a difficult emotion - relaxation must precede. For that, I always play some music, get something to sip on and simply begin. All in all, not thinking too much and just getting to it is what I've found time and again to be key to be able to not only shift but stay in an intuitive state.

Sharon Nugent | It'S All Fun And Games Until... | 2024

Watercolor and ink can be both fluid and unpredictable. What draws you to these mediums specifically for expressing emotion?

Well, the type of ink I use is quite easy to control, but it is impossible to correct, which adds to the pure automatic nature of my work - there are no corrections involved, and no premeditation. That is the way emotions occur: they're immediate. Regarding watercolors, I'm precisely drawn to them because of their fluidity and unpredictability, which is ideal to capture the nuances of emotions.

Many viewers mention finding characters and narratives hidden in your abstractions. Do you personally see figures forming during the creative process?

The truth is that I don't always do, or when I do, it doesn't always match what other people see, because in most cases, no shape I create is meant to be a specific depiction or anything representational. For that reason, it's always interesting to hear the input of other people. In fact, this may be one of the things I love most about

Sharon Nugent | Infinite Turquoise | 2024

my work - the dialogue enabled by it, and how the original creation expands as it is seen through other peoples' lenses.

How does your Jewish-Colombian heritage shape your artistic identity and visual language?

I was born in Bogotá and raised in Barranquilla, an immigrant city on the Colombian coast that celebrates warmth, rhythm, and color, especially through the Carnival, but in everyday life too, really. Growing up there shaped how I approach art with emotion, and a sense of freedom and ease. My Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish heritage adds reflection, grounding that sense of freedom in history, memory, tradition, identity and resilience. The rich cultural environment I grew up in, together with my heritage, helped me find balance in my artistic expression, to make it my own.

You speak about balancing the weight and the lightness of life — how does color help you navigate that balance?

The multiple values of color, technically speaking, are the perfect depiction of balance. Personally, the act of creating itself is what allows me to find that balance, but only because of the almost magical, infinite possibilities of balance that color brings.

Your compositions have a sense of motion, almost like musical notation. Do sound, rhythm, or writing influence your art?

Absolutely! Music definitely influences my compositions, but not through synesthesia - I wish I was gifted like that! It probably has to do more with technical musical training growing up and a general understanding of rhythm, and the influence of the music I play when I work. Nevertheless, I think that the rhythm in my work is derived mostly through the dynamism I see in emotions and life, maybe because not even when calm have I ever personally experienced full stillness.

Are there specific emotional responses you hope viewers experience when encountering your work?

I always hope for my viewers to experience some emotion when encountering my work, and I firmly believe color can achieve that no matter what. I find that nostalgia is the one emotion that is never missing from my work thus far, but I don't necessarily hope for the viewer to experience that. Simply put, my work cannot exist without the dialogue with the viewer and their unique lived experience.

Sharon Nugent | And They Were Free | 2024

Elizabeth Sher

You began your career working with fine art printmaking and oil painting before moving into mixed media and digital work. What motivated that evolution in your artistic practice?

Elizabeth Sher | Rebound

I've always loved experimenting with new "toys" for artists. When technology first entered the art world, especially in still images, it was a hard sell. Some people were appalled - just as many are now with the emergence of AI in art. I haven't ventured into that realm myself, though I know artists doing fascinating work with it.

It helps to remember that when photography was new, the major artists of the time all "played" with it. They didn't all become photographers, but they were intrigued by what it could do and how it might influence their art. Degas' cropped horse paintings, for example, could not have happened without the camera. And yet it took more than a century for photography to be accepted as a true fine art medium. People resist change; there were even arguments about whether acrylics were legitimate compared to oil paint. Digital tools opened new creative possibilities for me, allowing me to do things that would have been impossible otherwise. Still, I always begin with an analog image, whether a photograph, drawing, or painting, and then manipulate it digitally to arrive at the final work. I also continue to make images entirely without technology. My foundation is in painting, drawing, and printmaking, and I still love the tactile experience of mark-making and materials.

Nature and technology seem to coexist and compete in your work. How do you approach balancing these two forces?

I have a small cottage on the Russian River in Sonoma County, six miles from the Pacific Ocean. Being surrounded by trees and water provides a perfect counterpoint to my industrial neighborhood in Oakland. That duality, nature versus technology, is a conversation that runs through my work.

Elizabeth Sher | Self Portrait Still A Sucker

To explore it, I created a series called Crossing the Digital Divide. At the beach, I photographed large rocks where I perceived images of heads and animals. In the studio, I combined those photos with paint, emphasizing their anthropomorphic qualities and incorporating enlarged pixels into the compositions. The tension between the organic and the digital became a metaphor for coexistence and competition between nature and technology.

Humor and feminist consciousness are central elements of your art. How do these themes emerge during your creative process?

When I first learned about feminism, I thought, "Ah! So that's what the problem has been - sexism!" It was a revelation, and it shaped both my art and my teaching. During my long tenure at CCA, I tried to be a mentor and role model for all my students, but especially for the women.
Although I'm a serious person, I've always had the curse (or the blessing) of being easily amused. I see humor (or dark humor) in most things and believe that laughter is the best medicine. Humor can open doors that blunt force can't. Back when I was in school, we were told, "Art isn't funny." My education was rich in color, composition, and line quality, but firmly rooted in the white, male, Eurocentric canon.
Later, I met several brilliant women narrative painters whose work was both hilarious and beautifully constructed. Still, painting humor didn't quite work for me. Then I made my first film, The Training, a short mock "how-to" on toilet training your child. When audiences laughed exactly where I wanted them to, I realized I had found my medium for humor. While there is sometimes wit and playfulness in my two-dimensional work and artist books, humor truly comes alive for me in moving images.

You have an impressive history as both an artist and educator. How has teaching at CCA shaped your artistic vision?

I think I've learned as much from my students as they've learned from me. Their energy, curiosity, and willingness to experiment have inspired me continuously. Teaching also deepened my technical knowledge, especially in areas like perspective, which I had to learn in order to teach it. Collaborating with colleagues on reviews and committees further expanded my understanding of art from multiple angles.
I never sought a leadership role at CCA because my art practice always came first. Balancing teaching, family, and studio time wasn't always easy. Sometimes it meant skipping family outings, openings, or lectures, but making time for my own creative work was essential. The studio has always been my true center.

As both a filmmaker and visual artist, what do moving images allow you to express that still imagery does not—and vice versa?

Time and timing are what distinguish moving images from still ones. Juxtaposed scenes create their own rhythm and narrative. Humor also comes across more naturally in film, and I love that audiences laugh exactly where I hope they will.
When I began making films (long before the internet, TikTok, or Instagram) many people found "art" intimidating. But everyone was comfortable with movies and TV. That broader, more democratic audience appealed to me.
The gallery world, then and now, can be hierarchical, subjective, and often sexist. Having a show in a bar or café was considered beneath a museum exhibition. But I could screen a film anywhere: in a bar, at a college, or in a space I rented myself. I could promote it, reach hundreds of viewers, and even get it shown on television. That kind of freedom was thrilling.
Still, I remain deeply tied to visual art. I love looking at it, and I'm always amazed when an image I make, entirely from my own impulse, resonates with someone else. Art's ability to connect across time and culture is endlessly powerful.

Your works are included in major public collections and have been shown internationally. How do different audiences respond to your blend of technology and personal narrative?

When I first began integrating technology into my still and moving images, it was met with skepticism, much like the current debate around AI. Digital tools have since opened extraordinary possibilities, but for me, they're always in service of the image. I still begin with an analog source – a photo, drawing, or painting - and build from there. I also continue to make work entirely by hand.
With film, technology has made editing and special effects far easier, but the foundation must always be a strong narrative and well-shot footage. As the saying goes, "garbage in, garbage out." Fortunately, audiences tend to respond to the work itself rather than the tools behind it, which is exactly what I hope for.
Making films helped me find my voice. I didn't know the rules when I started, so I was free to ignore them. That experience liberated me from the constraints of the Western canon, so rooted in Eurocentrism and sexism, and allowed me.

Olia Sondge

Your works blend impressionism with expressionism. How do you find balance between capturing reality and conveying emotion?

I think it's through sincerity and trust in myself. For a long time, I tried to depict things "correctly"; it was important to me to "please," but that approach didn't work — it felt artificial. The breakthrough came when I allowed myself to stop copying nature and found the courage to respond to it instead: to paint not only what I see, but how I see it.
Today, when I work, I try not to think, "is there enough realism here?" or "am I exaggerating too much?" I just try to be as honest as possible — both toward nature and toward my own feeling. I perceive reality as a conduit for emotion, not its constraint.
Impressionism gives me a language of light and air — a way to capture the fleeting, to convey how everything trembles and changes. And Expressionism allows me not to hide what I feel when I look at it. For me, a painting is not a copy of the world, but a meeting between the artist and the world — even though it's not always an easy one.

Olia Sondge | Hopes and Promises | 2023

What draws you to still life compositions, and how do you choose the objects that appear in your paintings?

I did not immediately discover the charm of still life. For a long time, it seemed to me a secondary genre — lacking the drama of portraiture or the expansiveness of landscape. But then came the realization: still life is a very relevant form of art. In today's fast-paced world, everything moves so quickly that there is often no chance to pause, simply look, and truly see or feel something. Yet still life demands exactly that — to slow down, to observe, to find beauty in the ordinary, life in the motionless.
That is why the subjects of my still lifes are often simple, almost humble objects with their own stories: old books, worn-out coffee pots, seasonal flowers brought from the park. I can spend weeks working on a single arrangement, watching how the light changes, seeking the right relationships again and again. It is the luxury of slow observation — something you don't get outdoors. Still life is

Olia Sondge | Hortensias | 2025

always about time — about the fact that everything is transient. Fruits ripen and decay, flowers wilt, light shifts. You are captivated by nature, warmed by its glow, and you try to stop that fleeting moment, knowing it's impossible. There is something deeply human and touching in that.

You mention rejecting precise realism—what does "truth" in art mean to you?

Precise realism is an illusion of objectivity. A camera captures reality more accurately than any artist ever could — but is a photograph always truthful? It shows what the world looks like, but not how it feels, nor what it means.
For me, truth in art lies not in the accuracy of depiction, but in the accuracy of experience. Art begins where copying ends. Van Gogh painted the starry sky in a way no one had ever seen it, yet his Starry Night is absolute truth about how a human being experiences the cosmos, infinity, and solitude. It's magical when a viewer looks at a painting and recognizes something essential — not about the subject, but about themselves, about life, about the world. When a painting doesn't just show, but reveals.

Texture plays a powerful role in your work. Can you describe your process of building such rich, tactile surfaces?

Texture, for me, is a way to make painting tangible — not only visually, but almost physically. I want the viewer not just to see the surface, but to feel it, to want to touch it. I want the painting to exist not only as an image, but as a material object with its own corporeality.
Each painting is created in stages, and the process itself can be described as metaphysical. I paint without a thinner, so the dense paint lies on the canvas in a thick, textured layer. A key element is layering. Sometimes I paint on a wet surface, sometimes on a dry one — each gives a different effect. On wet paint, the colors mix directly on the canvas, creating unpredictable tonal nuances. On dry paint, the stroke remains distinct and relief-like. Sometimes it only partially covers the layer beneath, creating a vibration of color, an inner glow.
Variation of technique is also important — the thickness of the paint, the direction of the brushstroke, brushes of different stiffness. Sometimes I paint with my fingers, shortening the distance between sensation and the canvas. All of this in combination creates a rich, saturated surface.
Working in multilayered impasto technique is not easy — it requires patience. It can take months to complete a single painting, and full drying may take up to several years. During this time, the canvases, in a way, continue to paint themselves.

How do you decide on a color palette for a new piece? Is it based on the subject or your internal state at that moment?

I always start from nature, but I don't aim to copy its local colors. Nature sets the theme — the lighting, the time of day, the mood of the moment. From there, I observe the changing light and atmosphere. Like the early Impressionists, I work with pure, saturated colors and their contrasts. I place shades side by side — they interact, creating shimmering transitions and vibrations. I strive for an effect of flickering and inner glow.
Sometimes I want to add more energy — then I introduce accents: for example, flashes of cadmium red or orange. They enhance the overall resonance, filling the painting with a sense of living tension.

You describe your paintings as existing beyond specific time and space. What atmosphere or reality do you aim to create for the viewer?

When I speak of timelessness, I do not mean detachment from reality, but rather reaching its deeper layer — the one that does not change, that always exists. We live in a world overflowing with information, speed, and specificity. Everything has an address, a date, a time. Everything is tied to the moment. And there is something suffocating about it — we are constantly trapped in the "here and now."
The silvery, shimmering tones dissolve materiality, making the world weightless and transparent. When you look at the painting, it's unclear whether it depicts a real place or a dream, a memory or a vision. This fluidity and elusiveness create an atmosphere "beyond time" — a space for contemplation, where the painting is not an image of a place, but the place itself — an island of calm in a restless world.

Viewers often see different things depending on their personal perception. Do you prefer to guide interpretation or leave it fully open?

I leave the interpretation completely open. The very nature of my painting — shimmering, built on color transitions and sometimes blurred forms — invites such free perception. And I like that. It's one of the most fascinating aspects of the work. When someone sees in my painting something I didn't intentionally create, it's not a misperception — it's a dialogue. It means the painting is alive: it breathes and continues to unfold with every new gaze. By the way, viewers often notice birds in my paintings. That probably means something. In any case, it's certainly interesting!

Caleb Mashele is a self-taught artist from Johannesburg, South Africa, who specializes in creating photo-like drawings. He combines his artistic skills with cars to create drawing peices that appeal to petrolheads and finatics.

Project Statement
His goal is to vanquish the niche and overlooked nature associated with car art and make it universally cool.

Caleb Mashele | Renault Captur | 2024

Caleb Mashele | Hellcat in the Sunset | 2025

Caleb Mashele | Chevrolet Corvette C8 Stingray | 2025

Sweet Star

Your project "The Truth Untold" carries such a gentle yet powerful message. What inspired you to explore themes of honesty, emotion, and healing through your art?

The Truth Untold is something I learned, not only from myself, but from people around me. We all carry something we cannot speak — something inside us that stays silent because the world is not always gentle enough to listen.
There are times when we want to scream, to cry louder, to punch the air, to explain everything we feel — but we can't.
So the truth sinks deeper and deeper. It becomes heavy. And sometimes, it turns into darkness.
So I create. I paint. I build.
For the voices inside us that don't know how to speak.
For the stories that stay in the chest.
For the souls who carry heaviness quietly.
This project is my way of holding those souls gently.

Many of your works are connected to tarot symbolism. How did tarot influence your creative process and the stories you wanted to tell?

Sweet Star | Hope is a sunflower

Oh yes — tarot.
I don't use tarot to read fate. I use it to talk.
I don't speak much with people, so tarot became a way for me to express energy, emotion, confusion, and hope.
Before creating this series, I pulled four cards: The Fool, Strength, Wheel of Fortune, and The High Priestess.When I saw them together, something happened.
My head and my heart whispered:
"Start now. This is The Truth Untold."
Those cards didn't tell me my future.
They opened my heart.

Light and shadow often coexist in your imagery and tone. What do these contrasts mean to you personally?

Light and shadow coexist in my work because that is how I understand life.
No human is pure joy. No human is pure sadness.
We carry both.
The light is the version of myself I am learning to become.
The shadow is the version I had to survive.
Where they meet — that is honesty.
I don't create for applause.
I create for the souls who are reaching, searching, and trying to understand themselves.
Even if only one person sees the hope inside my art — it is worth it.

You often describe your works as journeys. How has creating "The Truth Untold" changed or healed you personally?

Every artwork is a journey.
Before this, I never really believed in myself — I always waited for someone to tell me what I should do, or which direction to take. I was afraid to choose. Afraid to be wrong. Afraid to be seen.
But while creating The Truth Untold, I learned to trust myself. To decide with my own heart. It taught me that healing isn't always loud — sometimes it's slow, gentle, and hidden inside the work you make every day.
This project is not only mine — it is also connected to my son, my little sunflower. He is the reason I keep going. I want him to grow seeing that I tried, that I believed. And because of that, the art healed me. It changed how I stand in this world.

Sweet Star | Bird

I'm not afraid to choose anymore.

The recurring image of birds and the moon suggests transformation and intuition. What inner truths or emotions do these symbols carry for you?

I always believe birds and the moon are the most gentle souls in this world.
Birds carry truth and freedom — they move with softness, yet they survive storms.
The moon is far, quiet, and steady. It watches everything, but never speaks to hurt.
Since I was young, I would talk to them.
Maybe it sounds strange to some, but to me, they were the only ones who understood without asking for explanation.
I would say: "Hello, are you there? I am trying." or
"I made it today. Are you proud of me?"
Birds do not laugh.
The moon does not judge.
They simply receive. I believe birds fly high enough to touch the moon.
Maybe they carry the prayers we whisper in silence. Maybe the moon returns them as light on our hardest nights.For me, birds and the moon are reminders: Even in quiet, we are not alone.

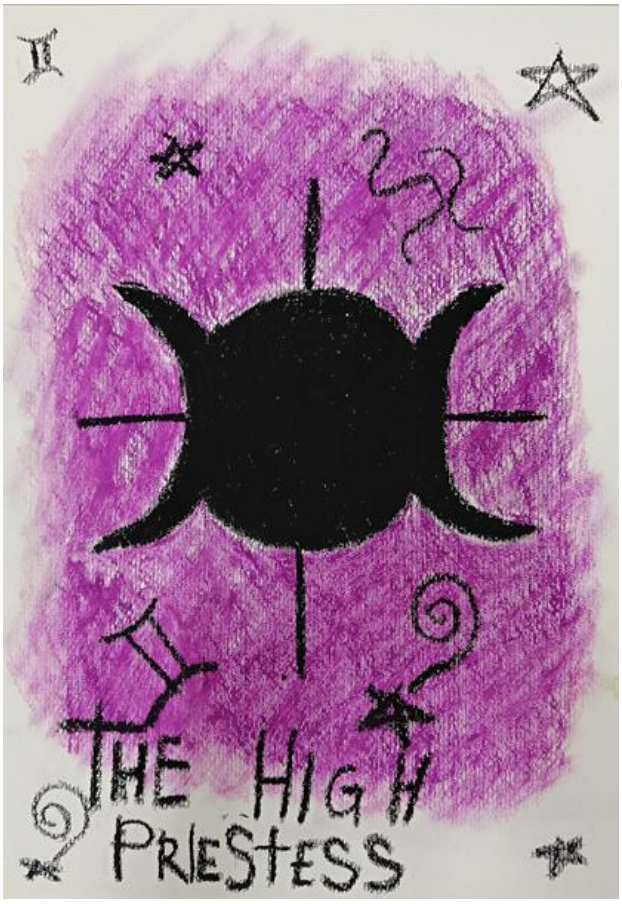
You write that "the untold becomes visible." Do you see art as a form of confession, or more as a dialogue with the soul?

Yes,deeply yes. For me, art is where I speak when I can't speak.
It is not just a confession — though yes, sometimes it is like opening the chest and letting something fall out. But it is also a conversation with my soul.

When I draw, the world around me fades.
Time slows.
The mind stops arguing.
It becomes just me... and whatever is trying to be born on the paper.
You know that feeling when music makes everything go quiet?
Or when a book holds you like it knows you?
Art does that for me.
It holds me when I don't know how to hold myself. So yes — my art is a place where I confess gently, but also where I listen to the part of me that I usually silence.
Art is where I come home.

When people encounter your work, what kind of emotional or spiritual experience do you hope they take with them?

More than anything, I hope my work reminds people to take care of themselves.
To be gentle with their heart.
To believe in their worth — even on days when everything feels heavy. If someone sees my work and feels understood — even for one second — that is enough.
If someone feels less alone because of my colors, my lines, my quiet stories — that is enough. I hope they know that they do not need to be loud to exist.
They do not need to be perfect to deserve love.
Healing is slow. Trust is slow. Growth is slow.
If my art can be a small light for someone who is trying, who is surviving, who is still here — then I am grateful.
Because if we don't hold our own heart, who will?



Sweet Star | High Priestess

Shadi Alibolandi is a freelance graphic designer who specializes in conceptual poster design. She began her career in computer software, where she honed rigorous technical skills and meticulous attention to detail. Her deep love for visual creativity led her to transition into Digital Graphic Design, pursuing a more fulfilling path in the arts.
Born in Iran, she continued her artistic and professional journey by moving to Istanbul in 2019, before immigrating to Vancouver, Canada, in 2023. Over the past few years, her poster designs have been selected and exhibited in various international exhibitions and competitions. In Vancouver, she has focused particularly on refining her conceptual approach.
Her passion for cultural and social issues drives her to create conceptual posters that dynamically transform ideas, photographs, and text into compelling visual compositions. Her work aims to stimulate reflection and dialogue rather than providing direct explanations.

Project Statement
This body of work focuses on the intersection of cultural and social issues with visual design. By employing conceptual poster techniques, the aim is to transform complex ideas and narratives into visual compositions that primarily invite reflection and dialogue, rather than offering direct, explicit explanations.

Shadi Alibolandi | Fast Fashion | 2025

NOWHERE TO BELONG

The child, with a false confidence granted by innocence, sits upon their throne, unaware that "home" has become a fragile boat drifting toward an uncertain future. They think they are just playing, while we know each drop of water holds unwritten insecurity and a future that may never reach the shore. Their play shields them from the silent fears of the adults who set this journey in motion.

Shadi Alibolandi | Child & Immigration | 2025

Nicole Louviers

Could you tell us about your artistic journey — how did Quilling become your primary medium and what inspired you to explore it further?

From a very young age I have always been attracted to drawing, painting at school I had the best grades in visual art. Over the years I have continued to create paintings for my pleasure, to offer to relatives and family. I loved cutting paper, decorating the tree with my garlands and paper stars. I also practiced embroidery. I create by instinct, by desire. I have never studied art.
And it was in 2012 at the age of 41 that I discovered Quilling in the most unexpected way. By wrapping a simple strip of paper around my finger, the idea came to me that it would be possible to create objects from this technique. By doing online research, I learned that the origin of Quilling dates back to the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, where this method was initially used by nuns to adorn sacred objects.
I started my first achievements with scraps of wallpaper and strips cut with a cutter. Since then, I have continued to explore this technique, finding my own style and developing a real passion for Quilling art.

Your work beautifully merges Quilling with acrylic painting. What led you to combine these two techniques, and what does each medium bring to your creative expression?

In Creole, “Lyannaj” is a keyword that evokes link, union and connection. Combining quilling and painting is getting out of my creative comfort zone. It is an exploration of the unknown, a quest for novelty that pushes me to think and create differently. My creative process is unique. I start by making the work in acrylic paint, without any thought for quilling at this stage. Once the paint is dry and placed on the easel, my mind turns to the quilling. With strips of paper, glue and scissors, the art of quilling takes shape on the canvas, until the completion of the work. This is how the “LYANNAJ” paintings were born. The fusion of these two mediums is incredibly satisfying for me.

Many of your pieces convey a strong sense of joy, movement, and healing energy. How does your work as an art therapist influence your artistic practice?

Art occupies an unconditional place in my life, and art therapy is a precious balance that allows me to combine my creative passion with helping and supporting others.
I need colors, movement, softness, but also rigor and precision, with a strong dose of patience. The quilling technique offers all this, and I feel immense happiness to create, happiness that I share with the participants during my sessions, workshops or creative brunches. These are unique moments, in complete immersion with my creators, where time stops to deliver wonderful and sometimes surprising productions, to my greatest happiness and especially theirs. Creating in art therapy is having the opportunity to surrender silently, it is revealing one's deep self and having fun above all. These are my precepts.

Nature appears frequently in your compositions — flowers, the sea, birds. What role does nature play in your creative universe?

I live in Guadeloupe, a Caribbean island where water is omnipresent and lush nature. In Deshaies, my city of residence, I am surrounded by mountains. My garden is a true haven of peace, rich in a wide variety of plant and floral species. Birds, especially hummingbirds, find refuge in converted shelters and forage the many flowers. This enchanting environment allows me to recharge my batteries and live in a fairytale bubble.
I want to create sweet and poetic works that reflect this inspiration.

Your color palettes are vibrant and expressive. How do you choose colors for each piece, and what emotions do you hope to evoke?

In general, I have an overall idea of my final achievement, but I often let myself be guided by instinct. I like colors and I try to combine them harmoniously. For me, it is essential to feel a sense of well-being, fullness and love for my work, an emotion that I aspire to transmit to the public.
When a visitor confides in me that he felt a real emotional discharge while contemplating my work, I am deeply touched and incredibly happy, because it means that I have achieved my goal: "let your emotions speak".

Some of your works depict symbolic forms like hearts and feminine figures. What themes or personal stories do you explore through these motifs?

Frida Khalo is an artist whom I deeply admire. Her self-portraits, the audacity of her colors and the depth of the subjects she addressed in her paintings resonate particularly with me.
My project is to capture the essence of the Woman - with a large "F" because in French woman is written « FEMME » like Frida - describing the Woman (Femme) as fantastic, fierce, fabulous, crazy (Folle) , furious, feline, fascinating, proud (Fière), faithful, fiery and fierce.
In my works, the heart symbolizes not only moral qualities, emotions, passions, will, courage, thought, intelligence, memory, love and faith, but also the physical image of the two hemispheres of the human heart. This brings us back to the reality of us on earth.

You have exhibited your works in Guadeloupe, France, and Switzerland. How does the audience's cultural background influence their interpretation of your art?

It is recent because it is since 2024 that I have fully realized my identity as an artist. Exhibiting my works is essential and paramount for me, because I do not create these paintings only for my personal pleasure. I have a deep need to share my passion and perceive the emotions, whatever they are, that my work arouses in the public.
My practice is quite unique, because I associate two mediums in an unusual way. The initial reactions of the public are often questioning and surprise, before the depth and stupor revealed in the face of the technicality used, especially for quilling. Patience remains, of course, the key word of my process.
I work according to my inspirations, and each series represents a key moment in my life where I engage in an intense creative process. Once a series is completed, a new inspiration will take over, and so on.

From her daughter, Maéva «Words do not have enough density to express the power of the relationship I have with my mother.
What constitutes me in my purest essence is probably similar to it.
I admire her even more every day because I know her history so well, our history... She inspires me, by her determination to be the best version of herself with rigor and flexibility.
His art is a quest, it allows him to accomplish his purpose.
She expresses through her works a message of life, hope, joy, resilience, healing, unconditional and universal love.
Nicky, my mother, is a philosophical artist.
His art is spiritual, it is a daily state of mind, it is his breath of life..."

Anastasia Maksimova

A graduate of the Ilya Repin St. Petersburg Academy of Arts (studio of A.K. Bystrov).

The painting “The Silver Age”, consisting of three parts, reflects the complex spiritual and cultural atmosphere of the era - a time of searching for innovative ideas, revolutionary change, and intellectual exploration from many different angles. The main goal of the work is to convey, through a multitude of symbols and images, both the chaos and the spiritual awakening characteristic of this period. It highlights the richness of the inner world, the diversity of art, and the search for meaning during an age of transformation.

At the center of each section stands an ancient tree which, despite the years and hardships, will inevitably bloom with the flowers of culture - symbols of rebirth and hope. The work expresses the idea of the eternal power of culture and the belief in the future.

Annette Seedorf

Annette Seedorf | Blue Zebra

You often describe your art as a way to "illuminate people's lives." How do you understand light, both personally and artistically?

Light is my quiet guiding star, dwelling within my paintings. It flows through clear, pure colors, its intent mirrored in deliberate reflections that shimmer like mirages, fleeting illusions that lend grace and glow to fairytale realms. Compositional openness arises from the courage to leave white space untouched, allowing the gaze to rest, to breathe, to enter. The unpainted becomes a threshold, a silent room in which the viewer may linger. Psychologically, light becomes the feeling that stirs when one truly looks, the inner spark of perception, the soul's own breath, the luminous pulse of meaning.

Your brushwork feels both spontaneous and rhythmic — almost like a dance. How does this sense of movement emerge in your creative process?

Annette Seedorf | Agulhas

Movement begins with an inner impulse, a quiet rhythm rising from within. I immerse myself in the moment that seeks expression, finding a dynamic balance between tension and serenity until the brush begins to move of its own accord. My strokes are at once spontaneous and rhythmic, a dialogue between intuition and form. Holding the brush like a crayon allows me to draw as I paint. Since childhood, I have cultivated this language of movement, a choreography of color and line that speaks of vitality and joy.

Color seems to play a central and emotional role in your paintings. How do you approach the choice of palette for each work?

Every artist carries within them a personal spectrum, a repertoire of hues gathered through years of experience. From this inner palette, I select those tones that best convey the essence of the motif or the emotion of a moment. Some colors seem destined to illuminate life; they form the foundation of my compositions. Around them, I weave other shades like spices in a delicate recipe, enhancing flavor, depth and harmony. Thus, each painting develops its own timbre, its singular atmosphere of light and mood.

Annette Seedorf | Impression Of Carousel Horse

You studied in France and were inspired by the Impressionists. What influence do they still have on your artistic language today?

Impressionism and Pointillism remain essential to my artistic voice, both as a vocabulary of light and as an attitude of seeing. Though my paintings are created in the studio, they still carry that luminous weightlessness born of direct observation. Reality is always my starting point, yet it intertwines with imagination and reverie. Magical moments, as in E. T. A. Hoffmann's literary fairy tale The Golden Pot, are also hidden in some paintings and delight the discerning viewer.

Your family's artistic heritage reaches back several generations. How does this lineage shape your own creative identity?

It is fascinating to observe the resonances across generations: the still lifes, the landscapes, the devotion to nature. Yet each artist perceives through a different lens; each hand tells its own story. Where my forebears sought precision and faithful depiction, I blend these inherited themes with imagination and fantasy, aiming to evoke delight that uplifting sensation, as though one were sitting beneath a circus tent or riding a carousel. My motivation is to offer moments of joy to the world. This is ambitious, as it is easier to spark joy than to move someone to tears. Therefore, my paintings celebrate the quiet splendor of everyday life, a flower stall, a handmade treasure, the simple beauty that surrounds us and deserves to be seen.

Many of your recent works were created in bright, sunlit places around the world. How does travel influence your artistic expression?

My journeys weave themselves into my work like colored threads in a tapestry. Alongside imagined landscapes that lead the viewer into realms of reverie, Africa holds a special resonance for me: a vital rhythm at the heart of my art. From the golden tones of the Maghreb to the vivid radiance of South Africa, the continent's play of light continues to inspire me. A living symphony that echoes through my canvases, mingling with memory and imagination to create something timeless.

If you could summarize your artistic philosophy in one sentence, what would it be?

My art seeks to bestow moments of lightness and happiness upon the world.

Annette Seedorf | Little Elephant Nala Wonderland

Nataliia Burmaka graduated from the National Studio of Fine Arts of Boris Danchenko (Sumy, Ukraine) in 1999 and worked as a designer from 1999 to 2005. Later, she earned a master's degree in philology and had a postgraduate course in accounting. Although she worked as an accountant, she didn't stop drawing and painting. Together with her husband she makes illustrations for books and murals (private commissions). In 2022, she moved to Finland to escape the war in Ukraine. Her works were shown in exhibitions in Finland and were featured in American magazines such as Welter, Phoebe, Quibble.lit, Rednoisecollective, Flare, Oakland Review, etc.
Besides being a painter, Nataliia is also a writer and co-organizer of the Ukrainian short story contest "Open World".
She compares creating visual art to writing a poem, except that she uses images instead of words. Her favorite art mediums are coffee and acrylic.

Project Statement
In Future in the Past series I explore alternative histories and possible climate changes. Water becomes the central "surface," a space where unexpected scenarios take shape: what if life had evolved under the sea? These works invite the viewer to consider the transformations that rising ocean levels may bring.

Nataliia Burmaka | Future in the Past

Sharon Seidl

Your career includes over 30 years in creative direction and design. How has this professional background shaped your artistic voice and approach to illustration?

I've been incredibly fortunate to have the career I've had. The wide variety of projects I've worked on has kept my imagination constantly active. I've always had a vivid imagination, but my work required me to sharpen it—often coming up with concepts on the spot, in a room full of people. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of times I would sit and sketch ideas to help visualize concepts. Those moments were some of the most fun, surrounded by brilliant, creative minds from both the editorial and music worlds.
My career began in music publishing, where at one moment I might be designing for the band Slayer, and the next, working on a project with "Weird Al" Yankovic, Julie Andrews, John Denver, or Metallica. I also designed for Guitar for the Practicing Musician, which was a blast because our target audience was a 14-year-old—mostly boys—and that energy was contagious. I still relate to designing for that age group; maybe because, in some ways, I've never stopped being one. Working in such a fast-paced, conceptual environment was great training. It taught me to never run dry creatively. I have more ideas than I could ever possibly execute—it would take two lifetimes to bring them all to life.

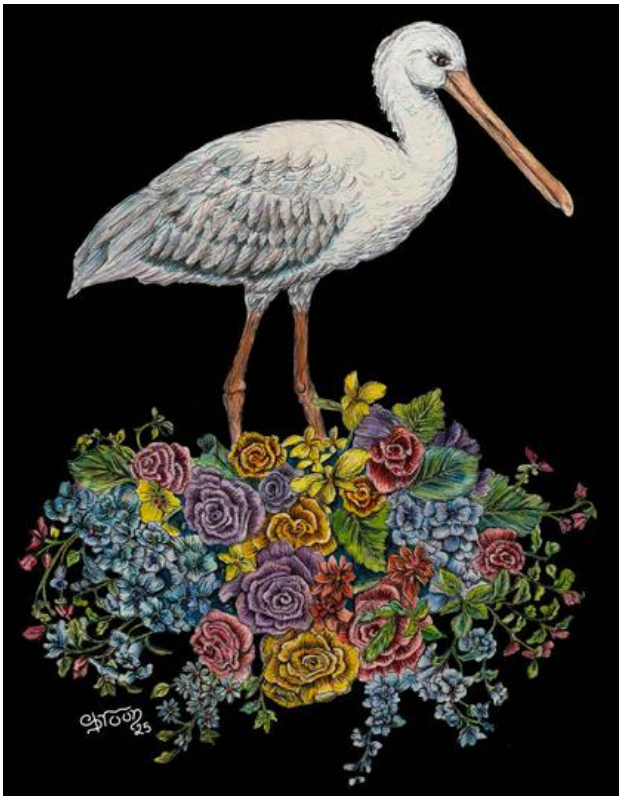
Sharon Seidl | Headless

Your pen-and-ink works feel deeply nostalgic and whimsical, with fantasy elements like moons, witches, and mythical animals. What inspires these narrative worlds?

I love this question(due to my mother unique and neiche hobby which was). My mother was an antique doll dealer, so antiques filled our home. As a kid, I was both fascinated and spooked by them. The dolls sat on a shelf at the bottom of the stairs, and I'd run up as fast as I could to escape their stare. My mom was quite the character, but through her, I developed a love for antique cards, books, and letters from the 1920s to 1950s.
I've built a wonderful collection of cards from that era, and they've heavily influenced my pen-and-ink work. I'm inspired by the detail and craftsmanship of early German cardmakers —especially the layered, pop-up, and movable designs of Raphael Tuck & Sons, Ltd. and Chloe Preston. I strive for my illustrations to carry that same personality and dreamlike quality—something nostalgic, slightly odd, and full of wonder.

Many of your artworks blend nature and imagination—poppies growing through pumpkins, birds perched on florals, seahorses wrapped in blossoms. What role does nature play in your storytelling?

Gardens have always felt like a peaceful refuge to me. I didn't have the most peaceful childhood, but I was lucky to live in a nice neighborhood with my best friend, Lawrence. We spent nearly every minute outside, inventing games and hiding in the bushes. My happiest memories are lying in the garden, surrounded by flowers that seemed to absorb my sadness



Sharon Seidl | Busy Crane

and replace it with beauty.
Flowers still hold that magic for me. Whether my subjects are an octopus, mermaid, bird, or even the Headless Horseman, I surround them with florals so that my illustrations carry the same sense of comfort and wonder that the garden once gave me.

You often focus on highly detailed, vintage-style line work. What draws you to this level of intricacy and patience in your process?

I get completely lost in the details when I draw. Time disappears. I can't hear anything—I'm at total peace. The pen is a magical tool for me. Working in pen forces you to build each piece strategically: tiny marks layered over tiny marks, gradually creating depth and contrast.
I often revisit an area 10 or 15 times, layering colors from Bic pens, gel pens, colored Pilots, or alcohol inks. The process is meditative—the sound of the pen scratching across paper, watching the image slowly come to life—it's like being in a dream state.
The vintage look comes naturally from this methodical process. Pen and ink have been used for centuries, and their natural irregularities give my work a handcrafted, nostalgic feel. In a world saturated with digital and AI-generated imagery, I love that pen and ink bring back a sense of authenticity and timelessness.

In your past design work, you created logos and visual identities for major corporations and cultural icons. How does creating personal art differ emotionally from commercial design?

There's a huge sense of freedom in not having to worry about anyone else's expectations. After decades of designing for others, it's incredibly liberating to finally create for myself. I've had so many ideas stored up for years—it feels like they're all pouring out at once now.
It took me some time to give myself permission to fully follow my own creative instincts. But now, I feel confident in my artistic voice and direction. That realization has been deeply fulfilling. At a recent art show, I loved watching people linger in front of my pieces, each finding something personal in them. The variety of people who connect with my work makes me proud—it seems to resonate across personalities, which I truly cherish.

Your illustrations feel both playful and slightly haunting—especially pieces involving Halloween themes. What emotions or reactions do you strive to evoke in the viewer?

I adore illustrated children's books, and I think each of my works tells a small story of its own. Even a bird in a nest of flowers has a story in its eyes. My slightly spooky, surreal characters often carry emotion beneath their expressions. I don't want viewers to just see a direct meaning—I want them to feel it. The joy is in the mystery. For example, in my piece Born 13, a girl is stuck inside a pumpkin and frowning. When people ask why, I always ask them what they think. I want to spark that curiosity and introspection. I hope viewers lose themselves in the details the way I do—because there really is magic in every line.

If you could collaborate with any museum, show, or creative partner for a future project, what would be your dream artistic collaboration?

I'm a huge fan of street art, and one of my favorite artists is Swoon. Her large-scale installations blend illustration and architecture in such an inspiring way. I've always dreamed of creating an immersive space—an entire room illustrated with my pen-and-ink florals and characters. Collaborating with Swoon on something like that would be an absolute dream. Our styles could blend beautifully.

Sharon Seidl | Born

Natalia Mustaeva

You have a professional background in ceramics and design. How do these disciplines influence your painting practice now?

Yes, I have professional experience in ceramics—specifically the Gzhel folk craft—as well as in design. It's difficult to pinpoint a direct influence of this background on my painting, but it has undoubtedly been invaluable. In ceramics I followed tradition; in design I considered styles and trends. Now, in painting, I follow my own recognizable personal style, as any artist does. There may not be a direct influence, but the experience and knowledge are significant.

Natalia Mustaeva | At The Plein Air | 2025

Could you describe your creative process — from the first impulse to the finished piece?

An impulse can arise from the most unexpected sources: the curve of a body, the tilt of a head, a color, or a viewpoint. It's hard to predict. When it comes to serious works—like a portrait—I usually already have a sense of which colors I'll use, what I want to express, and what state I aim to convey: sadness or melancholy. Sometimes that state can change during the process, but overall the composition is already clear. A mood—or empathy for a particular person—can also become the impulse.
Lately, I prefer working in smaller formats, creating graphic compositions. On a small sheet of paper, it's much harder to convey the full depth of emotion and energy. I usually work on heavy watercolor paper and work quickly, trying to immediately translate my vision and emotions onto the page. My palette includes black gouache, a fineliner, and watercolor. The impulse for a piece can come from anything: even a crow seen on a walk or a horse painted en plein air can become the basis for finished graphic scenes.

Natalia Mustaeva | Bravo | 2025

You often work with acrylics and mixed media. What attracts you to these materials?

Given my temperament and emotional state, acrylic is exactly what suits me. When I'm at the easel, I can repeatedly layer the paint to achieve the precise shade I want. Acrylic has incredible coverage, which really helps my process. In my graphic pieces and sketches, I always use mixed media. This allows for interesting results: I start with a blot—say, black gouache—and add elements with watercolor to create color accents. This approach strongly defines my style, and my work is instantly recognizable. It's my unique artistic signature.

Do you prefer to plan a composition in advance or to let intuition lead the process?

Usually, I begin without a preplanned composition. Some pieces call for meticulous detailing. I perceive graphic subjects, let them pass through me, and then carry them onto paper. It won't be an exact reproduction of nature or an object—it will always be a portrait or a scene as seen by my eyes and heart. It's my emotion. I believe this is the value of my sketches and graphic pieces: their ephemerality, the life that will never repeat. Everything happens in the moment.

Many of your works seem to capture fleeting emotional states. What inspires these moments?

Yes, that's a very accurate description of my work—the desire to capture a fleeting state. It feels much like autumn. Autumn is my favorite season: not just a time of year, but a state of mind. It carries a faint, bittersweet scent of withering—not frightening, but mesmerizing—reminding us of life's eternal cycle. In that tender note of farewell lies the deep philosophy of autumn. It doesn't invite sadness; it teaches us to cherish impermanence.

Do you view your art as a form of personal reflection or as communication with the viewer?

My art is, above all, a personal monologue and an interaction with the viewer. Each of my works—whether a graphic narrative or a sketch—carries a piece of my soul, my emotions, and my inspiration, expressed through color, form, and meaning. I engage in a wordless dialogue with the viewer—sincerely and candidly.

You once said that art is a way to understand the world. Has your perception of the world changed through painting?

Art is a unique way of perceiving reality through masterpieces that already exist. This is its deepest essence. To pursue it, one can turn to various sources: visit museums around the world, when possible, and study books and encyclopedias. I use these resources daily, which allows me to transform from within while preserving my individuality and signature style.

Natalia Mustaeva | Detached | 2022

Interview

Zhong Sun

How has living between Shanghai and London influenced your visual language and the way you perceive your surroundings?

As an artist that practices autoethnographic techniques, I draw some influence from the discipline of anthropology. It is often said that the principal aim of anthropology, and it's cornerstone methodology, is to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar - and this is speaks precisely to my experience of living between London and Shanghai. In Shanghai, where I have spent most of my life, my work revolved around the uncanny - of finding the strange in the otherwise familiar. Conversely, in London I found myself and my work oriented towards the inverse - finding the safety amongst the strange.

Zhong Sun | Dreams | 2025

Why did you choose soft pastels and colored pencils as your primary mediums? What possibilities do they give you that other materials do not?

In fact, my creative media are very diverse. Sometimes I make large-scale drawings using pastel and coloured pencils, and at other times I create very delicate small copperplate prints and other printed works. I think what distinguishes drawing with pastel and coloured pencils from other media is that I don't need to predetermine the final outcome of the work in advance. I can adjust it at any moment, quickly and intuitively, and the overall result tends to appear much more flexibility.

Your works feel spontaneous yet layered. How much of your process is intuitive, and how much is pre-planned?

In working on this series, only the overall direction is pre-planned, while the process of drawing itself follows intuition entirely.

What initially inspired the creation of this three-part series "Trees, birds, dreams"?

It was inspired by my observations of the shadows of trees, birds, and the surrounding landscape while

Zhong Sun | Birds | 2025

living in a historic building in the Hengfu District. The first work, trees, depicts the swaying tree shadows outside my window, shifting in the wind and in the mottled sunlight. The old, scratch-covered glass made the shadows appear like birds in motion. The second work, birds, develops from the first: in a dream, as I was speaking with a friend, I found the words I uttered turning into birds and drifting out of my mouth along with tree shadows. The third work, dreams, captures the end of that dream, when I felt myself merging with the tree shadows and becoming part of the entire garden.

Within the series, each piece moves further from observation toward the subconscious. How do you navigate this shifting balance between external reality and inner worlds?

I believe that the shift from observation to the subconscious is not an abrupt leap, but rather a gradually unfolding process. I stay connected to the external world through observation at first, but as the work progresses, these external images naturally begin to carry traces of emotion and the residues of the body. The visible world provides an entry point, while the subconscious reveals itself through the surface of the drawing.

Your work often blurs the distinction between interior and exterior realities. Do you see this as a reflection of contemporary urban life, or as something more universal?

I have always been interested in the concept of the surreal, as well as the idea of sym-poiesis between humans and nonhumans. I believe that the s exterior realities has long been permeating our perception, just as our emotions and thoughts are continuously projected onto the surrounding environment. This blurring is a reflection of contemporary urban life indeed, but I also see it as a universal condition. We live in a world where humans, nonhumans, technology, and nature coexist - air, light, architecture, and plants all reshape our psychological structures. I wouldn't consider dreams, language, or nature as separate domains; they intersect within the same field of perception.

Many viewers describe your drawings as synesthetic. Do you personally experience perception in a cross-sensory way, or is synesthesia more of a conceptual tool for you?

In this series, the way language dissipates from the mouth/body, and the way each thought takes on a specific visual form, are experiences I encounter frequently. But beyond that, I feel that what I am drawing on is not synaesthesia in the strict sense, but rather a kind of synaesthetic association.

Zhong Sun | Trees | 2025

Delia Cristina Diaz

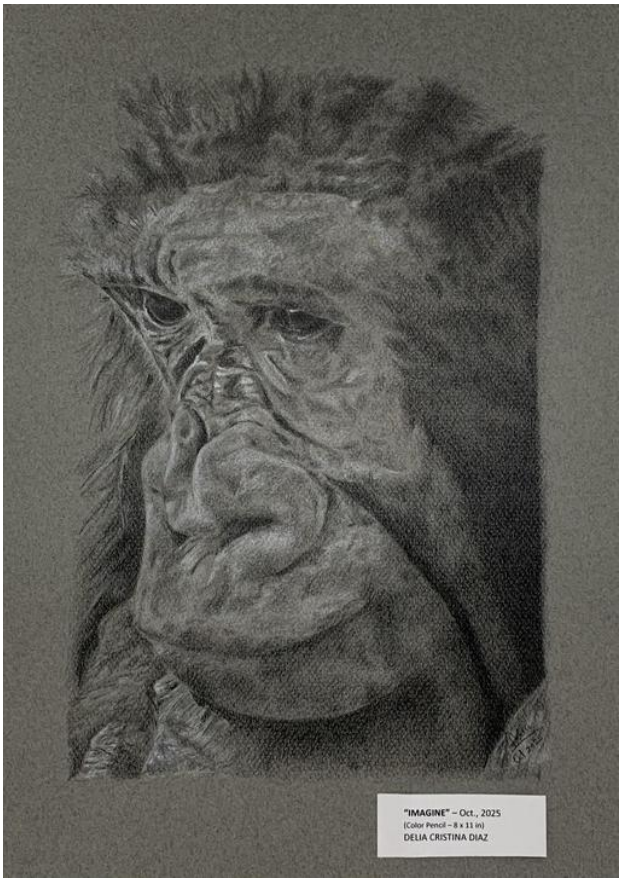
You began drawing at a very young age. What is your earliest memory of creating art?

My earliest memories of creating art were filled with joy and wonder. I remember being around 5 years old, crafting beside my mom, Maria Amelia. We made all sorts of ornaments for our Christmas Tree, like a star covered with glitter that my mom proudly placed onto the tree. Another time, we created paper silhouettes of children holding hands, and I was amazed at how it turned into such a fun piece just from paper. These were the moments that sparked my love for art, and they remain some of my fondest memories.

How did your childhood lessons in drawing influence your artistic focus today?

Very much so, the drawing classes I took as a child contribute directly to my present work. My teacher at the time would set up a model scene with white objects (bottles painted white of different shapes) on a table covered with a white cloth, then direct a lamp onto them. Her teaching helped me develop the ability to detect how light plays across the curves and angles of objects, to appreciate volume, and to build the patience needed to capture the nuances when drawing to recreate the scene.

You studied many different disciplines in the Visual Arts Institute — sculpture, ceramics, and graphic design. How have these fields shaped your artistic vision?



My education at the Visual Arts Institute was rich and diverse. Studying disciplines such as sculpture, ceramics, and graphic design has greatly influenced my artistic vision. It has helped me develop a more balanced and comprehensive approach to my work, whether in drawing, mixed media, or oil. I always keep in mind the various elements "orientation, dimension, perspective, color, and contrast" that I learned from these disciplines.

Your drawings show incredible attention to detail. What attracts you to realistic representation?

I like to transmit, through my work with pencils, the details that make the beauty of what I see, and I want to share it with my audience.
Also, I like the way it looks like a picture, but it really isn't.

Many of your works feature animals with strong emotional expressions. What draws you to wildlife themes?

As I draw, specifically wildlife, I try to capture and convey not just the beauty of the animal but, most importantly, the feeling transmitted at that particular moment.

Your art is already present in New York, Los Angeles, and Argentina — how do different audiences react to your work?

I have been fortunate to share my art with a diverse audience. Whether in New York, Los Angeles, or Argentina, I have found that when I present my work, people from all walks of life are uplifted and joyful. This universal reaction to my art is incredibly gratifying and reinforces my belief in art's power to connect and uplift people.

You mentioned the desire for your art to transmit pleasant emotions. What message do you hope viewers take away?

As I always say, my goal is to make my art pleasing to the eye. I aspire for the viewer to experience pleasant sensations, so that they can recognize my art as beautiful and take them to a place of peace and relaxation.

— *Interview*

Yana Raynus

I've always been fascinated by that fragile moment when childhood begins to dissolve into self-awareness, when wonder and melancholy coexist. Painting felt like the only language that could hold both purity and complexity without having to explain either.

The girls in red dresses feel both present and distant, almost suspended in time. What does the color red symbolize for you in this context?

For me, red isn't about passion but remembrance. It's the color of a heartbeat, an echo something that once lived and still vibrates in memory. It connects the figures to emotion, but also to time itself.

Carnival elements—carousels, banners, cotton candy—are traditionally joyful, yet in your work they appear dreamlike and introspective. How did you develop this contrast between festivity and quiet reflection?

I see the carnival as a metaphor for life's brief brightness: the noise, the beauty, the repetition. When I slow it down on canvas, it becomes

Your series "The Carnival of Memory" captures a delicate balance between innocence and awareness. What first inspired you to explore this emotional threshold through figurative painting?

something else a still kind of joy touched with nostalgia, the quiet after the music fades.

Your background in fashion illustration and ballet is beautifully reflected in the graceful poses and elongated forms. How do these disciplines continue to influence your artistic decisions?

Ballet taught me rhythm and structure. Fashion illustration gave me elegance and line. Both trained my eye to seek balance between discipline and softness, form and emotion. They're still present in every movement I paint.

Memory seems to play a central role in this series. Do these paintings originate from personal memories, imagined moments, or a blend of both?

Both. Personal memories create the emotional skeleton, and imagination dresses them. I don't try to recreate the past, I paint how it felt to live inside it.

You have worked with pastel, acrylic, and oil. Why did oil painting feel like the right medium for this particular series?

Oil gives me time. It dries slowly, like memory itself, and lets me rethink every layer and tone. Its depth of color and softness of blending perfectly matched the atmosphere I wanted - suspended, luminous, almost breathing.

Your work has already entered private collections worldwide. How does audience interpretation influence your future creative direction—do you consider it, or do you prefer to follow your own inner narrative?

I'm always curious how people read my work, but I don't follow it. Painting is a conversation between my inner world and the canvas. The viewer joins later and that little distance, that mystery, is what keeps the work alive.

Madison Rocap

Madison Rocap | A To Be | 2025

For me, the act of making and, honestly, just existing is the "grey area." It is comprised of intuition, intention, and accident. The variation of experience, whether that be in the artistic process or the ups-and-downs of life, results in an everchanging and evolving ontological state that we cannot define in clear ways. The beauty in the enigmatic, intangible, and unpredictable is the primary inspiration that I work from.

You often use mixed media on fabric. What draws you to these specific materials and surfaces?

My process tends to be highly tactile, so the feeling of these materials against my hands is actually a fairly big factor in selecting them. Stains are a fascinating part of my practice and unprimed fabric — whether that be canvas or muslin — allows for some unique interactions with wet and water-soluble media. Charcoal is probably the most prominent material I use for somewhat the same reason: the residual stain it leaves on my person while I work. When I make something, I imbed a piece of myself within the work, and I feel that the materials reciprocate that sentiment. Additionally, there end up being so many interesting interactions between the materials themselves that I cannot account for beforehand; it often feels as though I am conducting miniature experiments every time I work, even if I had used the same technique in my work previously.

How do accidents, fluidity, and material autonomy influence the direction of a piece?

My drawings are shaped around the mindset that the materials have their own independent wills and agency; rather than me just utilizing them, I work with them in a

You describe your work as existing in the space between order and chaos. How do you personally define that "grey area" in your life and art?

Madison Rocap | Amidst | 2025

Madison Rocap | And Then I Blinked | 2025

collaborative relationship. I sometimes refer to the materials as "mediators": an autonomous, conscious role that facilitates communication between myself and the surface. I have found that if I have complete control over everything during the process, perfectionism rears its ugly head, and I remain perpetually unsatisfied chasing the unattainable image in my head. By allowing that space for accidents and material autonomy — handing over control to the process — I can have a visual conversation with the materials instead.

Are there specific memories or personal stories embedded in your mark-making, or do you aim to create more universal emotional reflections?

I find that mark-making is the most honest form of expression, so I am sure that thoughts, emotions, and memories subconsciously arise from the compositions; however, I would say that they can be viewed more so as the obscure context rather than the actual subject of the work. My work forms artificial, ephemeral, intangible spaces to grant viewers the opportunity to feel their own emotions and memories be mirrored in the nonrepresentational marks. There are no preexisting expectations about how people should experience or interpret the work other than being honest with themselves, as I have done in the process of making the art.

How does your current MFA experience shape or challenge the development of your visual language?

Being in a graduate program has been an amazing privilege, but there is definitely pressure that comes with it. During my first two semesters, the visual language I used developed into something quite different from what I left my BFA program with, but it was only after much contemplation that I realized I absolutely hated what I was making. My work had adapted to become something more along the lines of what I felt people expected of me at that time, rather than something that incited my passion for my specific artistic process. While I look back and would have loved to have made work that aligns with the visual language I employ now, I fully understand that that was a necessary experience for my growth as an artist. Knowing how I actually wanted to move forward, I was able to reignite the fire that pulled me to making work in a specific way in the first place and expand it into something even more complex.

Although you are young, your work already explores themes of vulnerability and mortality. What drives those reflections?

Even from a young(er) age, I have always found myself taking time to contemplate existence and the dichotomy of who I am as a person. I am an amalgamation of experiences that constantly fluctuate on the spectrum of "beautiful" and "ugly," and we as humans are highly complex beings. There were some difficult experiences that I went through growing up that expanded my awareness of the realities of life, while at the same time, I was lucky to have once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that showed how wonderful that life could be, too. I am highly introverted, so in addition to the range of my own experiences, I constantly observe the world around me to deepen my understanding of my own existence. Silence and spending time alone may scare some people, but these are experiences that allow for introspection and acknowledgement of the self. Overall, questioning my place in the world keeps me grounded and honest, resulting in the way my visual language looks today.

Is there a message you hope viewers carry with them after experiencing your work — or is interpretation entirely open?

I do not consciously represent specific experiences or emotions as I work, so I love hearing what viewers are responding to, their interpretations, and what they are taking away from the experience. My drawings are process-based explorations of optical effects, space, and movement without any assigned meaning. Through much trial and error, I have accepted that trying to impose any particular representation or significance will be perceived by the viewer as untrue, thus creating a disconnect between them and myself. I have chosen to focus on making illusionary explorations of space and beauty that may spark associations or meaning in the viewer, but only because it comes from within the viewer themselves instead of me.

Madison Rocap | An Inkling | 2025

Margo Astahova

Your artistic journey beautifully combines design education and fine art. How did your background in industrial design influence your approach to painting?

My experience in industrial design has trained me to think structurally. In design, every element must have not only aesthetic but also functional value — it must work in harmony with the whole. In painting, this has transformed into a special focus on composition and rhythm. I construct a painting like a precise mechanism, where the balance of shapes, lines, and color accents is essential. Yet, unlike design, where the main goal is problem-solving, in painting I allow this "mechanism" to operate for emotion rather than functionality. It's a liberating paradox: I use the discipline of the mind to grant full freedom to feeling — a feeling that emerges from the chaos of scattered brushstrokes into harmony, into the rhythm of the entire canvas.

Margo Astahova | Siren | 2025

You often describe your work as a "dialogue of two souls" — impressionist and expressionist. How do these two inner voices coexist when you create?

This is the most intriguing part of my creative process. The Impressionist "soul" is responsible for the first impression — for the play of light and color. It captures a fleeting moment, a mood, an atmosphere — everything we perceive through our eyes. At this stage, light, airy brushstrokes and complex shades may emerge on the canvas.
Then the Expressionist "soul" takes over. Its goal is not to show, but to live through the experience. It amplifies contrasts, distorts form for greater expressiveness, and makes color more subjective and powerful. It asks: "What do I feel right now? Anger? Delight? Longing?" — and this answer pours onto the canvas in thick paint, sharp lines, and bold gestures.
Their dialogue is a constant balance between harmony and drama, between the fleeting and the eternal. Both styles are very close to me. By zodiac element, I belong to water — and, depending on the circumstances, water reveals itself differently. If it's a river beside an endless green meadow, it is calm and quiet. But when obstacles appear along its path, as in the mountains, the river gains character and momentum, interacting with the surrounding space in a completely new way.
All the emotions I express in my paintings come from personal experience and from my interaction with the world around me.

In your portraits, especially in "Siren", you explore the depth of feminine energy and emotional freedom. What inspired this focus on women's inner worlds?

"Siren" and other portraits are born from observing contemporary women. I'm inspired not by the mythological image of a siren luring sailors, but by her modern interpretation — a woman who is strong through her inner energy and authenticity. She is not an object of the gaze, but a subject radiating her own power. I explore the state in which a woman isn't playing roles imposed by society but exists in a moment of complete emotional freedom — whether it is vulnerability, strength, melancholy, or passion. I'm interested in capturing this pure, unrestrained flow of life.

Can you tell us more about your creative process — from the first emotion or vision to the final brushstroke?

Genesis. Everything begins not with a visual image, but with a sensation. It might be a fragment of music, the emotion from a conversation, or a feeling born from the weather. I catch this "something" and try to define its color and texture.
Sketch and composition. This is where design thinking comes in. I make quick, schematic sketches to find the dynamic, rhythm, and placement of main forms. I build the framework of the future emotion.
Color explosion. I apply the main color spots to the canvas, often skipping the drawing stage. This is the most intuitive phase. I work with paint in large masses, setting the emotional tone for the entire work.
Dialogue and discovery. Then begins that very "dialogue of souls." I step back to see the whole, then come close, entering into physical contact with the canvas. I apply layers, scrape them off, scratch lines. The painting begins to live its own life, and my task is not to silence it, but to help it reveal itself.
Final chord. The last strokes are always a decision. When the painting is already "95% complete," the most important moment comes — to understand what will become that final accent that brings everything together. It may be a single bright dot, a gleam, a sharp line. After that, any further movement would be superfluous.

You use both brushes and unconventional tools like palette knives, fingers, and sponges. How does this tactile connection affect your emotional expression?

Margo Astahova | Silent Captivity | 2025

Margo Astahova | Life Is Good | 2025

A brush is a mediator. But a palette knife, fingers, or a sponge — these are direct extensions of the hand, and therefore of the nervous system. Gesture, its speed and pressure, become an instant embodiment of feeling. The rough, uneven trace of a palette knife can convey anxiety or protest. A gentle movement of the finger smudging paint — vulnerability and impermanence. A sponge creates complex, breathing textures, resembling hints or memories. This physical engagement allows one to bypass rational control and transfer the very energy of motion onto the canvas, making emotion tangible.

You once said: "I paint not what I see, but what I feel." What feelings guided you while creating your recent works?

In my recent works, there is a prevailing sense of complex yet luminous melancholy. It's a feeling born at the intersection of the awareness of time's transience and gratitude for every passing moment. It's not sadness, but rather an intense experience of life—one that holds both gentle longing and quiet joy. I try to capture this fragile balance—the sensation of a powerful inner current breaking through an outward stillness.

What do you hope viewers take away emotionally or spiritually from your paintings?

I don't aim to convey a specific story or emotion to the viewer. What I want is to create a space for dialogue — between the viewer and their own inner self. Ideally, when someone looks at my work, they pause for a moment, forget the external noise, and listen to their own feelings. If the painting evokes a response — a memory, an emotion, a question — then it has fulfilled its purpose. I want my art to be not just an object on the wall, but a catalyst for inner experience.
We live in a wild current of constant motion, with no time to stop, catch our breath, put our thoughts in order, or be alone with ourselves to ask: "Who am I, and why am I here?" My paintings are a personal meditation in the moment — through the depiction of simple forms, I invite the viewer: Stop. Look. Feel this moment.

Kashish Bhandari

Your work beautifully merges cinematic realism with emotional storytelling. How do you begin developing a scene — from concept to final render?

Every scene for me begins as a feeling before it becomes an actual image. I often sit with the emotion first, sometimes it's hope, sometimes solitude, and I let that guide everything that follows. I write down words, collect references, sketch fragments until I start to see the mood take shape. The emotional tone always comes first; everything else grows from it. I still remember sketching the first concept for Visualizing Hope late one night after a long week of self-doubt. That small beam of light in a dark cave became the heartbeat of the entire project.

From there, I gather references and begin shaping the world in Houdini, designing how water moves, how the dust particles rise up, and how light cuts through the atmosphere. Then I move into Unreal Engine, where I experiment with light, color, and movement in real-time until the emotion feels honest. My process is a constant dialogue between structure and intuition; Houdini gives me precision, and Unreal gives me freedom.
Whether its Visualizing Hope or Between Shadows, the goal is the same: to translate feeling into form, to turn something invisible like hope or transition into an experience the viewer can step in and feel for themselves.

What role does lighting play in shaping the emotional tone of your environments?

Lighting is the soul of my work, it's how I translate emotion into something the audience can feel. In visualizing hope, it was a metaphor for transformation, light symbolized growth and guidance from the cave's faint glimmer to the lighthouse's sweeping beam cutting through a storm. Every shift in illumination mirrored the emotional movement from uncertainty toward renewal.
Whereas in Between Shadows, light became something softer and more introspective. The bridge literally sits between shadowed forest and sunlit water, so I used light to capture that fragile balance — a golden glow filtering through trees, hinting at possibility. It wasn't about revealing everything but about suggesting that clarity exists even when it's partially hidden. For me, lighting isn't decoration; its empathy made visible.

You often work at the intersection of realism and imagination. How do you decide where to draw the line between the two?

I think realism makes a scene believable, but imagination makes it feel alive. I always try to ground my work in reality like the physics of water, fog and light , but I bend those truths when emotion requires it.

Kashish Bhandari | New Level Sequence

That decision usually comes from instinct. I ask myself what the viewer should feel, not just what they should see. If the emotion feels muted, I'll heighten color, movement, or light until it captures that inner rhythm. In Visualizing Hope, I kept the environments realistic, but amplified color and contrast to express resilience in that moment where light breaks through darkness. In Between Shadows, I exaggerated how light diffused through mist to create a dreamlike stillness, reflecting the feeling of being between clarity and uncertainty.
So the line is less about accuracy and more about emotional truth. I stop when the world feels familiar enough to trust, but just heightened enough to remember like a memory that blurs at the edges but stays vivid in feeling.

Houdini and Unreal Engine are both powerful tools. How do you balance technical precision with artistic intuition when using them?

For me, balancing the two comes down to knowing when to lead with logic and when to follow instinct. Houdini is where I build precision, it's technical, procedural, and exact. I use it to control the behavior of elements like water, fog, and debris so the world feels physically grounded.
Once that foundation is set, I move into Unreal Engine, where I shift from calculation to intuition. Unreal lets me experiment in real time, moving a light, changing a hue, or adjusting the atmosphere until the scene feels emotionally true.
In Visualizing Hope, I relied on Houdini's structure for the realism of the environment but trusted my intuition in Unreal to find the perfect rhythm for the lighthouse beam. In Between Shadows, I did the same with sunlight and movement, shaping the tension between light and shadow until it carried the right emotional weight.
So, the balance isn't about choosing one over the other, it's about letting precision support emotion. Houdini gives me control; Unreal helps me let go. Together, they create harmony between technique and feeling.

How does real-time rendering in Unreal Engine influence the way you compose and experiment with light?

Real-time rendering completely changed the way I approach lighting; it made it more intuitive, almost like a live dialogue between the world and me. Instead of waiting hours to see how a light interacts with a surface, I can shift its position, change the time of day, or adjust its intensity, and feel, at once, how the emotion of the scene changes. It's like painting with light in motion.
In Visualizing Hope, real-time feedback helped me fine-tune the emotional pacing. The cave, for example, wasn't lit all at once. I discovered that the light needed to grow slowly, almost like breathing, to mirror the feeling of hope reemerging after darkness. That kind of subtle timing came from seeing it unfold in real time.
For Between Shadows, it allowed me to experiment more spontaneously. I could watch sunlight cut through mist and shift direction until it felt just right, that quiet moment when the bridge sat between warmth and shadow. Those discoveries often happen accidentally, and that's what I love about Unreal: it keeps the process alive. Real-time rendering turns lighting from something purely technical into something deeply human. It lets emotion guide composition.

In your thesis, Visualizing Hope, you used symbolic environments like a cave, a lighthouse, and a desert. What guided your choice of these spaces?

The choice of these environments came from thinking about how hope takes different shapes depending on where we are emotionally. I wanted each space in Visualizing Hope to represent a distinct phase of that transformation from confinement to guidance to renewal.
The cave came first because it felt like the most honest starting point. It stands for those moments when everything feels uncertain, when light is scarce, but you still move toward it. The lighthouse came next as a symbol of guidance and resilience, a constant reminder that direction exists even in chaos. And the desert was chosen for its quietness; it embodies renewal, how life finds a way even in stillness and scarcity.
What truly guided these choices was their emotional geometry. Each space naturally carries a certain rhythm, color, and light behavior that mirrors human feeling. The cave's darkness and narrowness heighten tension, the lighthouse's openness conveys movement and release, and the desert's vastness offers calm and reflection. Together, they form a visual arc of hope without ever using words, told purely through atmosphere, color, and light.

What message or feeling do you hope viewers take away from your work?

I hope my work reminds people that it's okay to exist in moments of uncertainty, that not every story needs a perfect resolution. I'm drawn to those in-between spaces where things are still shifting, where light and shadow coexist. That's often where we find the most honesty.
Whether it's through the quiet persistence of Visualizing Hope or the introspection in Between Shadows, my goal is to create worlds that feel emotionally real, places where stillness holds meaning. If someone can look at my work and feel a little more grounded, a little more at peace with where they are, then I've done what I hoped to do.

Kashish Bhandari | Exterior Light Sequence

Nikola Gocic (born in Nis, 1980) is an architect by formal education, film reviewer and festival curator by passion, and collage artist by obsession. He has frequently and successfully collaborated on film-related articles with filmmaker Rouzbeh Rashidi – the founder of Experimental Film Society, with six of his essays published in the book 'Luminous Void: Twenty Years of Experimental Film Society' (Dublin, 2020).
As a collage artist, he has created a plethora of promotional images for NYC-based underground artist Martin Del Carpio. For Hungarian avant-garde filmmaker Péter Lichter he designed the poster for his found-footage feature 'Empty Horses' which was shown at the 2020 edition of International Film Festival Rotterdam. He has also worked alongside German composer and film director Martin Gerigk on his animated shorts 'Otonashi' (2021), 'Once I Passed' (2022) 'Demi-Gods' (2022), 'Demi-Goddesses' (2023) and 'Demi-Demons' (2024) which have been screened on more than 500 festivals around the globe, and received recognition.

Project Statement
The Loneliest of Gods
Glistening in all the colors of acidic emanations, they woke up at the dawn of the Über-End. Initially, their skin resembled that of humans, but as soon as you touched them, it would turn ashen… or was it violet? They only had the power of transmutation or so we thought in our ignorance, and Silence was their modus operandi. Pre-existing in the past, and expecting no future, they could not age at all – no term for 'death' ever appeared in the symbols they drew in thin air. And one day, when we least expected, they just fell asleep again, the triangle of oblivion and the circle of eternity floating on a cloud above their Dream.

Nikola Gocic | The Seventh Sky of Phoenix

Nikola Gocic | Mythical Identity

Nikola Gocic | Colder Than Contempt

Jaclyn Burke

You describe your art as a bridge between cultural identity, mental health, politics, and human experience. What early memories or moments first pushed you toward exploring these themes?

From a young age, I was always aware of the spaces between things — between cultures, between emotions, between people, between belonging and not belonging. I grew up surrounded by two distinct sets of traditions: the warmth and spirituality of my Mexican and Indigenous roots, and the discipline and values of my Italian-American upbringing. That tension and harmony fascinated me.

Art became my way to process those contrasts — to find beauty in what felt fragmented. Art was a way for me to express how I felt fragmented, unsure of who I was or who I would become. Later, as I learned more about mental health, the history of art and the importance of reclaiming one's narrative, my work naturally began to reflect more of my personal healing. Each piece is a conversation between identity and emotion, history and present moment — a visual language that helped me make sense of both myself and the world around me.

Growing up between Mexican/Indigenous and Italian-American traditions, when did you first feel the need to reconcile these different cultural influences in your art?

It really began when I started studying art history at The Fashion Institute of Technology. I realized that much of what I had been taught celebrated European art, so I ventured off and took a speciality class that focused on Mexico and Meso-American Art History. While in that class I learned about iconography, traditions, and stories focused on the history of Mexico. I felt like the gap that had once existed in my identity was finally bridged.
The art of Meso-American, Mexican, Indigenous — are often marginalized or presented as "folk" rather than "fine art". That realization lit a fire in me. I began to see my own dual heritage not as a conflict, but as a conversation between worlds. My art became the space where those traditions could coexist and inform one another. Where I could honor my ancestors and the family who raised me, while also embracing the creative curiosity that comes from living in between.

Your Nana seems to have played an important role in shaping your cultural awareness. Could you share a specific lesson or story from her that still influences your work today?

My Nana taught me the value of care, both in art and in life. She taught me when you make something, whether it's a family recipe of the most delicious homemade sauce, Italian almond cookies, how your going to lay out your garden or creating a piece of art you put your soul into it, a piece of your heart. That idea of creating with intention and love continues to guide me everyday whether I'm creating art or just going about my daily life.

Both my grandparents, my Nana and my late Grandfather Jack bothtaught me how to carry this incredible respect for beauty in the everyday — a tablecloth, ash-tray,old match books or just random trinkets. Spending summers with them while growing up taught me so much. I learned that art isn't separate from daily life; it is daily life. That's something I carry into my practice today — the belief that the sacred exists in the ordinary.

Your paintings combine vibrant color palettes with iconographic and spiritual motifs. How do you choose the symbols and colors for each piece?

I'm drawn to color as emotion — each hue carries memory, energy, and meaning. Reds often represent vitality,love and ancestry for me; turquoise and gold feel sacred and protective. I actually spoke about how much I believe colors influence one's emotions on a podcast called Journeys in Focus.
The symbols I use come from deep research and intuition: Meso-American deities, textile patterns, ancient glyphs, and sometimes dreams or visions I had or ones that come to me while creating. Every symbol I use is intentional — it's like assembling a personal mythology, one that connects my lineage to contemporary narratives. I want each work to feel like a living altar — vibrant, reflective, and full of spirit.

Many of your works are multi-media. How do you decide which medium (painting, drawing, sculpture) best expresses a particular concept?

The concept usually tells me which form it wants to take. Some ideas demand the immediacy of paint, the gesture of layering of emotions . Others feel more tactile, needing to be built, held, or sculpted.I often begin with drawing because it's meditative — a way to connect with the essence of my idea. From there, I follow what feels intuitive. Using multiple mediums allows me to give each story the right vessel. Sometimes delicate, sometimes monumental, but always rooted in the message I intend for it to carry.

As a curator, you highlight underrepresented voices. How does curating exhibitions influence or differ from creating your own artworks?

Curating, for me, is an act of service. It's about creating spaces for others to be seen and celebrated. When I curate, I'm thinking collectively about dialogue, representation, and balance. When I make my own art, it's deeply personal; it's a piece of me turned outward for others to view.
But the two practices inform each other. Curating teaches me empathy and awareness. It reminds me that my story is part of a larger ecosystem of voices. Both creating and curating are about connection, storytelling, and visibility just from different vantage points.

What advice would you give young artists from marginalized backgrounds who are looking to tell their own stories?

Your story is your power. Don't wait for validation or opportunities. Define your worth through the truth of your experience and if there aren't opportunities or spaces for you create them! It's really easy to feel like your perspective doesn't fit within traditional art spaces, but that difference is what makes your work vital.
Lean into your heritage, your emotions, your contradictions. Research your roots, honor your family, and let your art be a love letter to where you come from. And most importantly, build community because our collective voices have the power to shift the world and create new communities and new cultures.

Noctilucent: On Fissures, Echoes and Imperfect Subjectivity

Noctilucent unfolds within the faint glow of London's Espacio Gallery from 30th October to 4th November 2025, drawing viewers into the boundary layer between consciousness and dreams with a light that is both near-constant and fleeting. The works are not arranged around a singular theme but gather silently in the darkness like noctilucent clouds, constructing a shared perceptual language through fragments, mist, echoes, and soft textures. Upon entering the exhibition space, it ceases to be a mere display and instead unfolds as a slowly revealing spiritual landscape: time dilutes, bodies fold, memories begin to shift, and identities re-examine themselves within the fissures of light and shadow.

The Installation view of "Noctilucent" at the Espacio Gallery, London.

Whispers of Time, 2024, Zhengwei Fan. The Installation view of "Noctilucent" at the Espacio Gallery, London.

Xiao Ge's Echo Bridge utterly liberates time and space from mutual dependence. Within the digital imagery, the bridge ceases to be a physical structure and instead becomes a psychological threshold: a path endlessly repeated and rewritten, yet perpetually unreachable. The fog, sound waves, and suspended bridge fragments create a drifting spiritual atmosphere throughout the exhibition. Meanwhile, Zhengwei Fan's drawing Whispers of Time treats time as if lightly smudged by fingers, with figures and landscapes slowly settling into the depths of memory. Xiao Ge's digital fractures and Zhengwei Fan's painterly softening create a remarkable intertextuality within the exhibition, one delays time, the other dilutes it, yet both explore how we are shaped by time and how we rediscover ourselves within its fissures.

Meanwhile, Ke Qin's Swaying Within, rooted in psychological rhythm, translates swaying, restlessness, silence, and glare into visual language, abstracting the experience of spiritual dissonance into tremors at the level of imagery. This internal oscillation, coupled with the external flickering of light, enables viewers to not merely “see” but “feel” an internal collapse and reorganisation unfolding within the exhibition. At the exhibition's opposite end, M L Zero's Tiles As Flowing Memories Shore extends the discourse on time and identity through the ‘materialisation of memory.’ She visually resists linear temporality, rendering memory as a tidal ebb and flow—this formal fluidity, alongside Echo Bridge's reverberant drift and Whispers of Time's silent duration, collectively forms the exhibition's temporal foundation.

The Installation view of "Noctilucent" at the Espacio Gallery, London.

Chillin in the bathtub, 2025, Cathalina Navarro Lagos. The Installation view of "Noctilucent" at the Espacio Gallery, London.

Honey Baker's works Between Petals and Thorns, Mary Jane, and Camomile imbue emotion with a soft yet unsettling tactility. This nuanced sensibility, alongside Cathalina Navarro Lagos's collaged oil paintings, M L Zero's memory fragments, and Zhengwei Fan's temporal haze, collectively form the exhibition's multi-layered exploration of the ‘inner world’.

As a whole, Noctilucent presents a ‘landscape of proximity’ in both form and concept, where all works illuminate one another within a noctilucent glow. The contributions from Cathalina Navarro Lagos, Xiao Ge, Ke Qin, M L Zero, Honey Baker, Zhengwei Fan, and K M Bosy collectively form not a narrative universe, but a ‘ field of consciousness in the making ’. Here, the subject is no longer required to be complete, memory no longer demanded to be clear, identity no longer expected to be stable. True light is never bright; it flickers just as it is about to vanish. And we, too, often encounter that unfinished self anew within such faint glow.

The Installation view of "Noctilucent" at the Espacio Gallery, London.

Sherry Karver

Photo by Chris Hardy

My hybrid technique of blending different materials together actually began with an earlier series “Identity and Perception” where I combined my photo images with oil paint, narrative text, and resin surface on wood panels. This series evolved into the “Missing Pieces of the Puzzle” series during Covid 19 when my husband Jerry and I started doing lots of commercial jigsaw puzzles since we weren’t going out much.
One day when he was about half finished putting a puzzle together I thought it looked more interesting and had greater meaning with pieces missing. This gave me the idea to have my own photographs made into jigsaw puzzles so that I could ‘deconstruct’ them myself.
I believe in pushing the boundaries of the materials I work with and expanding their conventional meaning. I am giving fresh new significance to jigsaw puzzles we are familiar with from childhood by putting them within a fine art context. This helps us contemplate what we are missing in our own lives or in the world today.

Your work merges photography, painting, and physical jigsaw puzzles. How did this hybrid technique evolve over time, and what continues to inspire you to push material boundaries?

Sherry Karver | Carousel Of Life | 2025

You mentioned that the idea for this series emerged during Covid. How has that period shaped your perception of connection, distance, and “missing pieces” in human relationships?

During Covid19 I became acutely aware of the distances between people, and how we were missing seeing family, friends, traveling, going to restaurants, etc. However, I soon realized that this wasn’t just a concept during Covid. Many people were already missing things in their ordinary lives, whether it was parts of their own histories, or connections to others, or missed connections. I realized this is a much greater theme that people are experiencing in today’s fast-paced culture, where human relationships are disintegrating and being tested daily.

Sherry Karver | Convergence Of Earth And Sky | 2024

The missing puzzle pieces in your works suggest absence, memory, and life's unanswered questions. What do you hope viewers discover in those empty spaces?

I hope the viewers can think about their own lives and see that not everything can always be found and replaced. We need to find the acceptance and serenity in what is missing, and the hopefulness that the missing parts could be open spaces for something new to enter the picture, or our lives.

What drew you specifically to crowd scenes and public spaces like train stations and city streets as your primary subject matter?

I was born and raised in Chicago and have lived in a number of large cities such as New Orleans, San Diego, New York, and now Oakland, CA so I am a 'big city girl'. I think this instinctively draws my interest to large public spaces in metropolitan areas. There is an energy that happens in crowd scenes and on busy city streets that I find exciting.
Train stations in particular have large numbers of people moving back and forth yet never quite connecting like ships passing in the night. People are always rushing to catch a train or to get home after leaving the train.
Even if we are by ourselves, we are still part of the crowd, which I call being "collectively alone".

Your education began in sociology and ceramics before moving into photography and mixed media. How does your background influence the way you portray people?

I think my undergraduate degree in sociology played arole in my interest about people and how we are individuals that navigate within a bigger context. My M.F.A in ceramics gave me the love of experimenting with different materials that still influences me today, and has given me the confidence to push the parameters of what I am working on.

When creating these works, how do you decide which pieces to remove and what areas of the image should remain intact?

It's always a difficult process to decide what pieces of the puzzle to remove and what to leave in. Sometimes I remove way too many and have to put them back in. Other times I'm much too cautious, so it's a delicate balance. I leave enough pieces in to keep the basic composition intact, but remove enough to open space for the viewer to explore. It's really just an intuitive approach.
After I remove the pieces I adhere the puzzle to a wood panel and paint the negative spaces with oil. The final surface is resin coated, which blends the pieces and the background together so the puzzle can never be fully completed. The British writer Henry Green said, "the more you leave out, the more you highlight what you leave in".

Travel seems essential to your practice. How does being in different cities influence the themes and atmosphere of each piece?

Traveling to different cities does inspire my work and opens me up to seeing things that I might take for granted in my hometown. I like the architecture in other places, and often the quality and the angles of light are different, so it gives me more possibilities for photography. Everything seems more exciting when I'm somewhere else!

Sherry Karver | Constructing Our Own Realities | 2025

Trevor Mezak

When I first started painting, I was always drawn to texture. I discovered the palette knife early on—it just felt right in my hand—it gave me a sense of control and freedom at the same time—but something was still missing. The textures didn't feel raw enough, too refined, too predictable. The real shift happened when I decided to paint something just for myself. I discarded most of my conventional art supplies and started using materials that made sense to me. I wanted something honest and gritty, so I started pouring concrete, adding metal, rusty bolts, and tar. It wasn't until later that I realized why those elements felt so natural to me—they were part of my childhood. I'd spent years working with my dad, surrounded by those same materials. In a way, I'd come full circle—bringing pieces of my past into my art without even realizing it.

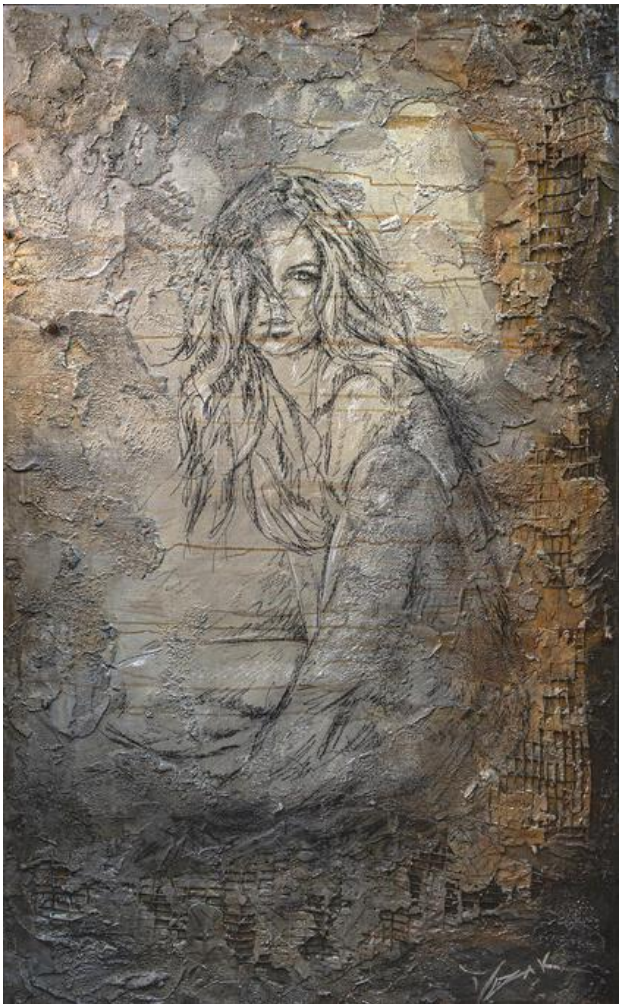
Your journey with art began with learning manual labor and tools from your father. In what ways do those early memories still shape your creative decisions today?

Trevor Mezak | Sand Spit | 2023

Surfing clearly plays a huge role in your life. How do you translate the physical rush and unpredictability of the ocean into texture on your works?

Surfing drew me in because the ocean is never the same twice. Every wave, every day is different—and I think that sense of unpredictability shows up in my art. I'm always experimenting, trying new materials, and seeing what happens. I want that same energy and movement to come through in my paintings.

Your materials — metal, concrete, reclaimed wood, gunpowder — are usually associated with construction, not fine art. What draws you to these raw elements?



Trevor Mezak | Then I Met You | 2023

I'm drawn to real, organic materials—things that have lived a life. I'm not interested in anything too manufactured. In my drawings, I like using raw charcoal; there's a beauty in its simplicity and imperfection. A lot of my inspiration comes from rusted metal and weathered concrete walls—surfaces that show time and wear. There's something compelling about blending those raw, broken-down elements with the refined beauty of a charcoal drawing. I love the challenge of creating something beautiful out of what's been discarded.

Many of your artworks juxtapose the industrial and the human figure. What does that relationship symbolize for you?

To me, adding the human form to industrial materials is like merging strength and vulnerability. Taking something cold and industrial and adding warmth and humanity creates a dynamic balance.

Can you describe a moment in the studio when the material resisted or surprised you — and how you responded creatively?

I remember the first time I used gunpowder on a painting—I was a little worried, thinking it might explode or leave a big flash burn. Instead, it burned much slower than I expected. Rather than turning black, it left a beautiful gold-colored trail. Discovering that different types of gunpowder each have their own unique color and burn pattern, I began using it to create shadows, texture, and highlight effects.

Viewers often try to "touch" your work because of the texture. How important is physical tactility as part of the viewer experience?

I think it's one of the most distinctive and recognizable aspects of my work. It's something that photos can never fully capture. However, in person, it invites people to slow down and really look closely. I love seeing viewers' reactions at shows—there's something special about that first moment when they realize how much material and depth is built into each piece.

The ocean appears as both subject and energy in your practice. What have the waves taught you about patience, surrender, or perseverance?

The ocean is an incredible teacher. I'm not a naturally patient person, but it's taught me that if you push too hard or try to force things, it usually isn't meant to be. There's such a fine balance—both in art and in surfing—between technique and flow. You're always learning, always adapting. Both require total dedication, and I've shaped my life around them. Success doesn't come easily, but that's what keeps me striving to improve, to learn more, and to keep pushing boundaries.

Trevor Mezak | Sweet Little Angel | 2024

Natalia Rozhkova

I explore the Harmony of this World through the Unity of phenomena, characters, and qualities that are completely different in their nature. In my work, I express the aspiration for interaction and union between the spiritual and the material, the classical and the contemporary, strengths and weaknesses, inner and outer beauty, the masculine and the feminine — all in pursuit of Harmony.
I help people find a path toward harmonious growth, to learn to see the beautiful and the extraordinary in simple things that we often overlook, to notice the Harmony present in the world around us, and to strive to attain this state through unity.
The desire to move toward others, the ability to make goodness and positivity the focus of life, to study this World and its laws — this is the main direction of my art, the style of my life, and the reflection of my inner world.
HARMONY IN UNITY...

Natalia Rozhkova | Let Your Life Just Be

Momo Mengyi Li

Your work explores identity, love, death, and posthumanism. What first led you toward these profound philosophical themes?

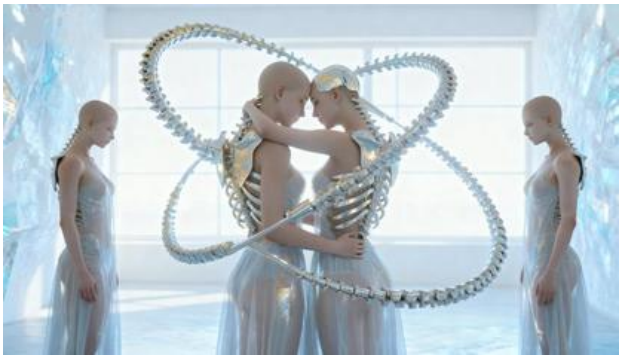
Growing up moving frequently between countries, I learned to adapt to new environments from a young age. This nomadic upbringing fostered a sense of solitude and detachment from any single community, while also fueling my curiosity and observational skills. Painting became my closest companion. I received formal training in both Chinese and Western painting, and later studied philosophy, history, and psychology. These disciplines helped me explore my own loneliness and eventually recognize it as a universal human experience. I came to see love as humanity's most precious treasure. These realizations drove me to continually use art to understand the world, define my own existence, and convey artistic prophecy.

How do you personally define "posthuman emotions"? Can machines ever truly feel?

I believe "post-human emotion" is essentially a spiritual substitute born from human greed and desire. Robots do not have genuine feelings—they only execute tasks and achieve objectives. What's unsettling is that their algorithms can precisely cater to human emotional needs, creating an illusion of care that may feel more "perfect" than human interaction.

In your latest narrative, humans pursue the "perfect relationship" through companion robots. What inspired this critique of emotional perfection?

In psychology, there's the idea that our idealized romantic partners often reflect an image of our



parents—perfected and internalized from childhood. Since most people grow up in imperfect families, they subconsciously long for someone who will love them unconditionally. In adulthood, many end up unconsciously seeking a "parent-figure" in love, only to face repeated disappointment. Modern life is fast-paced and demanding; people have little energy left to consistently care for others. Across religions, humans are depicted as perpetually unsatisfied —driven by greed and delusion. This makes genuine love and happiness rare. Yet the innate human desire for love remains. This contradiction—between greed, emotional numbness, and the longing for connection—is profoundly tragic.

You frequently work across digital art, AI, and fashion-oriented visual expression. How does fashion influence your artistic storytelling?

My father was in the textile trade when I was a kid, so I always had an abundance of beautiful dresses. That planted the seed of my love for fashion. By 19, I had developed a strong interest not only in fashion, but also in cultural history, philosophy, and religion. Inspired by the ancient Chinese classic Shan Hai Jing, I created wearable art installations. These pieces were exhibited in galleries, sold internationally, and gained appreciation from European audiences. During this period, I learned to balance art, fashion, commerce, and culture—eventually launching my first clothing brand and securing my first investment. The whole process was deeply fulfilling. But after turning 25, this approach no longer satisfied my inner desire for deeper exploration and growth, prompting me to pursue more profound artistic inquiries.

What challenges and creative possibilities do you experience when integrating AI into your artistic process?

The biggest challenge is developing a unique artistic voice amid the convenience of new technology. I conducted numerous experiments and realized that following my intuition—translating inner thoughts into tangible work—is what truly matters. AI is a powerful tool, but the key lies in aligning action with thought, and clearly expressing one's ideas and artistic language.

You have collaborated with both academic and commercial worlds—from Cambridge research to film and celebrity projects. How does each environment shape your vision?

I love experiencing and exploring different roles. While working on the Cambridge project, I immersed myself fully as a researcher, delving into history and art history alongside professors. The university's historic architecture made it feel like traveling through time, emotionally connecting with lives of the past. In film and celebrity IP projects, the perspective shifts: I think from the director's angle or comprehensively grasp what the public figure wants to express. In each case, I use my artistic creativity to enhance their narrative or brand value.

In your view, what is the greatest danger of technological alienation in real life today?

I see it less as a crisis and more as a transformation. In art, the widespread use of AI has disrupted many traditional academic disciplines, but it has also raised the demand for creativity, imagination, and conceptual expression. True innovation in thought and vision is now more essential than ever.

Berthin Cangé

drawing for as long as I can remember — it started with ninjas, Looney Tunes characters, and Ninja Turtles. Over time, that childhood passion grew into something deeper.
By the time I reached my teenage years and high school, my skills had developed through constant practice and an eye for visual detail. When I realized no one tought me how to draw is when I began to enterstand this wasn't just a learned ability — it was a GOD-given gift. Art became more than just something I did; it became part of my purpose.

Many people call you the 'Haitian Picasso.' How do you feel about that title, and how does your Haitian heritageinspire your work?

I'm truly honored by that title, and I understand what people mean by it. My perspective as an artist is unique — I see the world differently just like Picasso did. Living in Haiti for a period of my life allowed me to experience the beauty of simplicity, a life without technology or modern conveniences. It taught me creativity through resourcefulness and opened my imagination on how to use the talent that YAH has given me. Never stay in the box, no matter the environment. GOD has given us dominion in our assignment on this earth.

Faith and spirituality are clearly very strong themes in your pieces. What role does God play in your creativeprocess?

Could you tell us a little about your early journey in art? How did it all begin for you?

I was born in Brooklyn and spent my early years bouncing between Miami and New York, though most of my youth was in Miami. I've been

Berthin Cangé | The Sight Of Nature | 2023

Berthin Cangé | Gold Bee Queen | 2022

YAH is the foundation of everything I do. The gift was given, and the assignment was received. Before I create anything, I seek His direction — and it reveals itself in many ways. Sometimes it comes through a vision or a dream; other times, it's through the movement of the brush as I paint. I'm led by the Holy Spirit, and often it's not until I finish that I fully understand the meaning of the piece myself.

Your artworks combine bright colors, symbolism, and even written words. How do you decide which messages toinclude in your visuals?

I'm guided by the Holy Spirit, and often what's happening in the world at the time influences the symbols and colors I choose. Each element carries purpose — the words I include are directly connected to the message within the artwork. They serve as a reminder that GOD's words never die; he is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

In works like the one with the boombox and the city lights, music seems very present. How does your backgroundin music connect with your visual art?

Music is another gift that GOD has given me. I've come to understand that music carries frequency — and so does art. There's a visual frequency within art that many people don't recognize. In my mission to spread the message of YAH, I'm called to merge both sound and sight so that together they create a clearer understanding of how divine rhythm moves through our world and the spirit.

You describe your pieces as 'spiritual artifacts.' What do you hope people feel or discover when they look at yourart?

My hope is that people see YAH— His love, His grace, and His presence over our lives. I want them to feel a sense of renewal, as if being reborn in the presence of Yahshua's Spirit. Through each piece, I pray their eyes are opened to truth and to the prophetic message that He has for all mankind.

Looking into the future, what is the next vision or message you want to bring to the world through your art?

The message I'm carrying forward is a warning and a call to awareness. Artificial intelligence and the rise of advanced technology reflect the return of the Nephilim spirit — a deception that's shaping the world toward the mark of the beast. Through my art, I want people to wake up spiritually, to see beyond the surface. GOD is coming, and it's time to turn away from false gods and dark influences, and to receive Yahshua the Messiah as our personal Savior. We are living in the end times, and our eyes must be fixed on YAHWEH.

Berthin Cangé | Lypsa Truth The Beginning | 2024

Critical Review — Dmitriy Grechko

by Anna Gvozdeva

Dmitry Grechko's artistic journey is one defined by rebirth, intuition, and a profound sense of emotional urgency. Born in the Ukrainian SSR in 1985 to a family rooted in engineering and medicine, Dmitry grew up surrounded by structure, discipline, and the quiet expectation of a conventional career. Yet from early childhood he gravitated toward drawing as his natural language, using line and form to articulate feelings that words could not fully contain. This early impulse, though powerful, was set aside as he chose to pursue economics and later built a life within the corporate world. What makes his artistic awakening truly striking is not simply the late return to creativity, but the way in which it erupted—fully formed, courageous, and deeply connected to his lived experience.

After relocating to Israel at the age of 34, Dmitry encountered an environment that awakened latent artistic instincts. The vivid contrasts of Israeli landscapes, the coexistence of ancient and modern cultures, and the intense emotional atmosphere of daily life formed the catalyst for his transformation. It was in this new setting that Dmitry realized art was not a hobby to revisit, but the most authentic extension of his identity. His decision to abandon a stable career in favor of an uncertain artistic path becomes one of the defining themes of his work—an embodiment of risk, honesty, and resilience.

After relocating to Israel at the age of 34, Dmitry encountered an environment that awakened latent artistic instincts. The vivid contrasts of Israeli landscapes, the coexistence of ancient and modern cultures, and the intense emotional atmosphere of daily life formed the catalyst for his transformation. It was in this new setting that Dmitry realized art was not a hobby to revisit, but the most authentic extension of his identity. His decision to abandon a stable career in favor of an uncertain artistic path becomes one of the defining themes of his work—an embodiment of risk, honesty, and resilience.

Dmitry's paintings immediately reveal an artist who approaches the canvas with physicality and freedom. His portraits are particularly compelling: expressive, fragmented faces rendered with bold palette-knife strokes, layered textures, and a luminous interplay of cool blues, warm ochres, and stark whites. These works do not seek to replicate the human face; instead, they deconstruct and reassemble it, exposing psychological tension beneath the surface. The eyes in these portraits—wide, alert, reflective—anchor the composition and act as emotional gateways. They carry a sense of vulnerability, while the surrounding abstract forms suggest turbulence, memory, and internal landscapes in constant motion.

In contrast, Dmitry's landscapes and figurative scenes, such as the beach vistas and the contemplative horse compositions, offer a different sensibility. Here, the palette knife becomes a tool of atmosphere rather than intensity. Broad, sweeping strokes capture the movement of water, the shimmer of sunlight, and the open, meditative stillness of nature. These works demonstrate his ability to shift between emotional registers: from the psychological density of his portraiture to expansive scenes that feel almost cinematic in their sense of space. The result is a body of work that feels both diverse and coherent, unified by a tactile, energetic approach to paint.

What ultimately distinguishes Dmitry's art is its sincerity. There is no attempt to conform to stylistic trends or intellectual posturing; instead, each canvas is an exploration of feeling. His works carry the rawness of someone who rediscovered art not through academic discipline but through necessity—an instinctive drive to express, to understand, and to reclaim a part of himself that had been dormant. This authenticity resonates strongly, giving his paintings an emotional accessibility that draws the viewer in, inviting both contemplation and connection.

Dmitry Grechko stands as an example of the transformative force of creativity. His artistic career, born out of courage and personal reinvention, continues to evolve with striking intensity. As his visual language expands—balancing abstraction, figuration, and expressive texture—his work positions him as a compelling contemporary voice whose art is not only seen, but deeply felt.

— *Interview*

Molly Rapp

Molly Rapp | Dedicating Myself Before God

Your work delves deeply into how systems of power shape personal and collective identities. What first drew you to this theme, and how has your perspective evolved over time?

It began with reflecting on how the environments we grow up in, like our families, neighborhoods, and institutions, shape our worldview and belief systems. My earlier work was very personal, almost autobiographical, charged with solipsistic sadness. Over time, it became formulaic, and I felt like a caricature of myself. I realized I had become what I felt had been projected onto me. This realization led me to explore how inherited structures shape our sense of self.

I examine how external forces operate collectively. I explore how policies, policing, religion, and social hierarchies shape identity and behavior at a larger scale. Consequently, my artwork transitioned from merely observing these systems to questioning how art can confront or reframe them.

Molly Rapp | Cilice

Many of your pieces engage viewers directly in social and political reflection. How do you approach balancing aesthetic experience with activism?

This work is one phase of a larger social practice trajectory. This phase is research, testing forms of engagement that will eventually move into more community-based or collaborative contexts. I am observing how certain ideas are received within the gallery. The pieces are participatory; viewers can choose to engage or not, but the work still demands a lot from them in terms of reflection and presence. I see aesthetics as a strategy for engagement, it's what attracts people and facilitates complex conversations. Activism is not a solitary act, it is relational and occurs within a community. I'm interested in finding the right collaborators and contexts where the work can extend beyond the gallery and into the lived spaces of exchange.

You've spoken about using "resonant materials" in your practice. Could you share how you choose

Molly Rapp | Intermediate Weapon

materials, and what role they play in conveying your message?

Materials are intentional, they carry histories, associations, and emotional weight. In Dedicating Myself Before God to My Chosen Profession...Law Enforcement (2024), I worked with audio from Baltimore police body cams, transmitted through walkie-talkies placed on a church kneeler. The confessional screen was hand-stamped with sheriff's badges and made of copper, a material literally in our blood and tied to my family's history in law enforcement.
In Cilice (2024), I scaled up the spiked penance chain used in Catholic rituals. By enlarging it and mechanizing its movement with a linear actuator, I wanted to shift it from an object of private suffering to a public instrument of reckoning. These material choices carry the emotional and symbolic resonance the work needs, they become part of the storytelling.

Some of your works reference generational trauma and systemic abuse. How do you navigate such charged subjects emotionally and creatively?

Research is one way I create distance. I'm very conscious of the responsibility that comes with engaging these subjects, especially when they belong to communities larger than myself. My aim isn't to represent or speak for anyone's trauma, but to examine the systems that create and perpetuate harm.
In the studio, I focus on translation rather than reenactment, turning systems, structures, and histories into material or sonic forms. But I don't imagine that the healing happens in my studio or through my authorship alone. Healing and understanding happen in conversation, in collaboration, and in the spaces where people bring their own experiences into dialogue with the work. I try to create work that opens a door rather than claims a narrative, something that invites reflection without imposing a single story or exploiting anyone's pain.

As both an artist and an educator, how does teaching influence your studio practice—and vice versa?

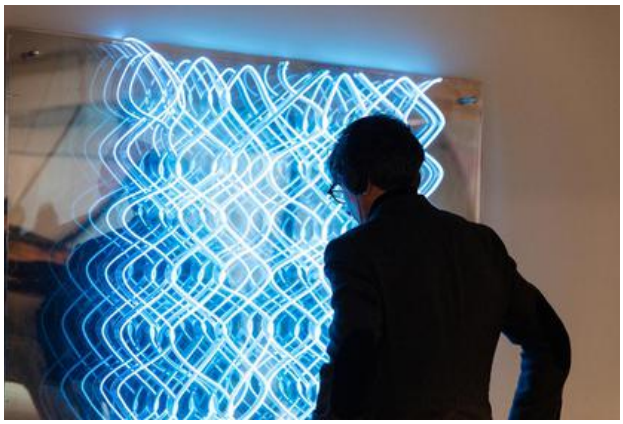
Teaching keeps me inspired. It also holds me accountable and reminds me that ideas have to be communicated, not just felt. In the classroom, I'm constantly thinking about accessibility and how to create conditions that allow students to take risks. That's very similar to what I want in my studio practice: to make space for discomfort, curiosity, and transformation. My students often bring perspectives that shift my own, so there's a real feedback loop between teaching and making.

How do you define success in art that aims to challenge perceptions and provoke dialogue?

For me, success isn't about resolution—it's about friction. If a work creates space for dialogue, if it lingers in someone's mind, or if it complicates their assumptions, that feels like success. I don't know if art can change systems on its own, but it can change how we see them, and that shift in perception is a powerful start.

If a viewer leaves your exhibition feeling uncomfortable or transformed, what do you hope they carry with them afterward?

Discomfort can be productive when it leads to reflection or empathy. I want viewers to recognize that power isn't abstract, it's personal, embodied, and continuous. If the work stays with them long enough to spark a conversation or a question later, then it's done its job.



Molly Rapp | Intermediate Weapon

Olga Laskavaya

Project Statement
Evening Duet
A slightly weary clown sits in a deep armchair by the window of a dimly lit apartment. His stage costume, with soft frills, is slightly rumpled. He gazes toward a dachshund standing before him on its hind legs, balancing a small red ball on its nose.
Outside the window, the night city stretches out — the silhouettes of skyscrapers, the glow of street lamps, and the gentle light of a full moon filling the room and turning it into a stage.
The clown's face carries fatigue, a touch of sadness, and a quiet tenderness for his loyal companion — the little dog ready to share his most difficult moments. And this is the greatest happiness: to have a living soul by your side.
A mask in the clown's hands suggests that behind his painted smile lies a real person, with his own worries and struggles hidden from the public. A round clock on the wall echoes the full moon outside, hinting at the endless cycle of life. Morning will come, the clown will put on the smiling mask again, and everything will repeat.
Although the painting evokes a gentle sadness, the presence of the dog adds hope — a reminder that a true friend nearby always brings comfort and support.

Olga Laskavaya | Evening Duet

Bahar Talebi Najafabadi

Bahar Talebi Najafabadi | Halo Ascent

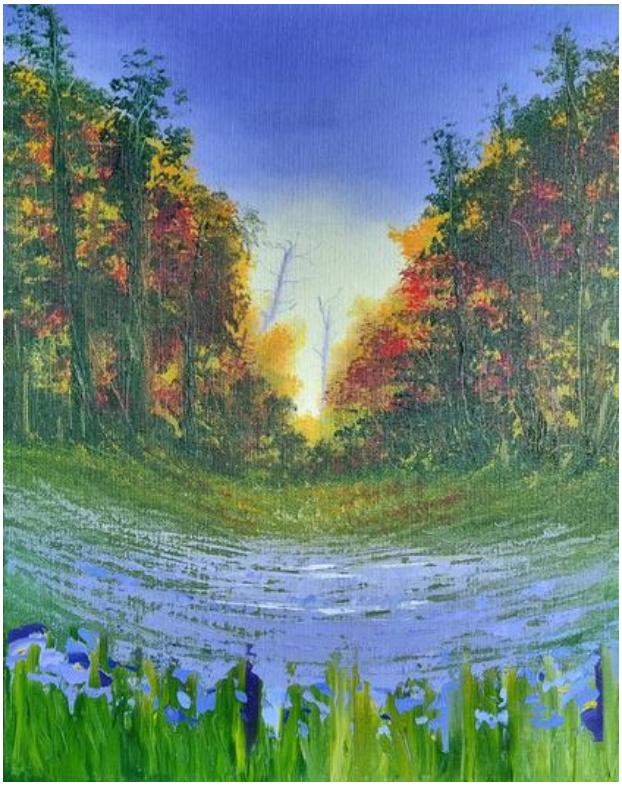
You describe painting as a sensory dialogue. Can you walk us through what that dialogue feels like at the moment of creation?

Bahar Talebi Najafabadi | Carpet Of Poppies

It is an intensely emotional experience centred on bringing my deeply personal inner world onto the canvas. At the moment of creation, the act feels like an intricate process of matching colors and themes that I myself find beautiful. This dialogue is initiated by an inspiration – a distinct memory or a unique feeling- which I seek to translate visually. My hands purposefully use the paint to express the emotions onto the surface. The entire conversation is a vivid, continuous loop where the emotional impulse drives the color choice, and the resulting visual application affirms or adjusts the expression, creating a finished piece that is a beautiful, tangible record of my subjective feeling.

Colour plays a powerful role in your work. How do you approach colour selection when your goal is to transmit a specific emotional state?

Colour plays a powerful role in my work, but my approach to it is quite instinctive and personal. I selfishly choose what I like, even when the combinations might seem unusual or unexpected. I'm particularly drawn to the tension between pale blues and red, and I love how dark shades of green interact with various pinks and purples. While I do intend for my colour choices to evoke certain emotions in my audience, I recognize that this is only partly within my



Bahar Talebi Najafabadi | Autumn'S Archway

control. What I can control is my own emotional response—so I search within myself for the colours that spark a specific feeling in my heart, and that becomes my starting point.

Many of your recent works focus on the suffering and resilience of women in Iran and the Middle East. How do personal experience and cultural memory shape the way you portray these themes?

I resonate deeply with the pain of others, and witnessing what has been happening recently in the Middle East is a constant source of pain for me as a woman from the region. The realities we face there—whether in daily life or through the news—are far removed from the experiences or perceptions of many in Western societies. What happens can be horrendous, yet it becomes an inseparable part of everyday existence. At this point, I don't feel the need to show or broadcast what is happening to others—social media already exposes everything in real time. Instead, what I can and want to do is to channel my emotions, to embody that pain and resilience through my art.

The concept of "interpretation" seems central to your practice. What was the most surprising or meaningful interpretation you have ever received from a viewer?

My viewers often have very different interpretations of my work, which I find fascinating. Recently, someone looked at my painting Paradise Rising and told me they saw birds in the sky. That response really struck me because, although the piece is actually based on the bird of paradise flower, the image of birds was my initial inspiration and emotional background for the work. It was amazing to see how another person could intuitively connect with that underlying idea and resonate with it in their own way.

How has relocating to London in 2023 influenced your artistic voice, themes, or techniques?

Relocating to London in 2023 has definitely broadened my perspective. Even just visiting different galleries and seeing the variety of artworks has been incredibly inspiring. London is such a vibrant, metropolitan city—filled with energy, diversity, and culture that seem to embrace you the moment you arrive. That atmosphere has encouraged me to explore new ideas, experiment more freely, and let my artistic voice evolve in unexpected ways.

Your mother and your aunt's Persian rug designs are key inspirations. In what ways do you feel their artistic legacy appears in your current work?

I have always been blown away by these women's creativity. I'm confident that any talent or passion I have for art is inherited from them. I feel a deep desire to succeed as an artist, especially because they never had the opportunity to fully present their own work. My mother, a medical doctor, always struggled to find the time to pursue her artistic side. My aunt actually studied art at university, but she was constantly discouraged—by both family and society—who tried to convince her to choose something more "useful" or economically beneficial. I carry both of them within me, and their stories fuel my determination to succeed as a female artist from the Middle East, despite all the shortcomings and pressures that come with that identity.

What do you hope viewers feel first when they encounter your paintings — and what do you hope stays with them after they walk away?

When viewers first encounter my paintings, I want something to immediately catch their eye—a moment of visual intrigue that draws them in. I hope that initial attraction makes them want to look closer, to follow the brushstrokes and textures, to spend time with the work. As they do, I want them to connect with something personal—a feeling, a memory, or a fragment of emotion that resonates with their own experience. My hope is that this emotional echo stays with them long after they've walked away, and they could say that they liked looking at the painting, even if they cannot specify the reason.

Teodora Kokoruš was born on April 22, 2002, in Belgrade. She graduated from the School of Design in Belgrade in 2021, majoring in Fine Arts Technician. In the same year, she enrolled at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Department of Painting. She completed her undergraduate studies in the class of Professor Zoran Dimovski.

Project Statement
This body of work represents a small life — the experience of an average person in an underdeveloped country. While my earlier works focused solely on introspection, the evolution of my practice leads me deeper into examining the politics and social structures of the community in which I am growing up.

Teodora Kokoruš | Knight of Swords | 2025 | Photo by Mare Rooze Bradić

Teodora Kokoruš | Holy Saturday | 2024

Megan Virona

Megan Virona | Bali Rice Field | 2022

Your works often feel like emotional landscapes — full of color, motion, and energy. How do you translate a feeling or memory into abstract form?

Most of the time, I'm not thinking while I work. I'm kind of in a dream like state. When I'm painting, I swatch colors that "feel right" in the moment. After a session — could be days, weeks, or even months I will then realize the similarities between my feelings, memories, and painting. I'll stop and think "wow, there's a lot of red and black in there" or "that looks pretty dark, what was I going through during that time?" And it will all tie together.
I let my hands and heart conjure up whatever they can in that trance and connect the dots later.
The first step for me is blind execution.

Megan Virona | Un | 2020

Many of your paintings evoke elements of nature — water, forests, light. What role does nature play in your creative process?

Most definitely! I have a deep passion for nature and it unintentionally comes out in my work.
Nature is a beautiful and vicious cycle. It's full of creation, destruction, and rebirth. My work mirrors its rhythm. My color choices are heavily inspired by nature. I use a lot of brown, green, and blue. I add touches of yellow, oranges, and reds finding myself thinking of the jungle or wildlife. Elements like water and earth really dominate my creations.
I love soil, rain, waterfalls, the ocean, and tropical plants. All living things are sacred to me. I find a lot of snake like patterns in my creations. Others have told me that they see a lot of birds and fish in my work.

You mentioned exploring emotions like love, passion, anger, and melancholy. Is there one emotion that dominates your artistic language?

I am such a passionate person. I express and consume love intensely. That comes at a price. I experience intense

Megan Virona | Singapore At Night | 2022

pain. It makes me feel hatred and anger. All of these feelings are portrayed in my work.
I'd like to give full credit to love. I think that love is the fuel for every other emotion.

How do travel and new environments influence your choice of color and composition?

I learned that purple is a very special color in Indonesia after I visited and experienced the culture. From that, I found a new appreciation for it. It started showing up more in my work. When I was living abroad in Bali, I saw the neighbor painting every morning. His art was beautiful. From that, I've noticed in Balinese art there are many, many small tiny little details. I went to a museum of art and saw the same thing. Tiny little details. My work started incorporating a lot of tiny little details. I met a man who told me that Indonesian women are so tough - they endure so much pain and they remain strong. I met an elder woman who gave me a flower, and held my hands for a few seconds just staring into my eyes with a humble smile. That interaction showed up in my work. Sometimes I would be painting and realize I don't have all the equipment needed so I would need to improvise. I'd use rocks as a palette, squish up certain leaves to get colors I needed, etc. it made a difference in my pieces. These are a few events that have inspired my art styles, techniques, colors, and patterns. I take these interactions to heart as they have allowed me to expand my options and mind. Being in a box kills your creativity. The way to be your most creative is to get uncomfortable and travel has allowed that to happen with every experience.

What inspires the contrast between the vibrant and darker tones in your works?

My emotions. I emphasize intensity deeply in everything I do. I don't think my emotions would be captured accurately if there was any kind of buildup within the coloring. I don't remember the last state of calm for me. I love to use my canvas as a therapy session.
I actually voiced this in another interview - as of right now, you won't find much pink, gray, pastel colors in my work. I like to get straight to the point. I use a lot of primary colors and dark shades. My emotions are always one specific thing at a time- never mixed. That will be mirrored in my work.

Abstract art often invites very personal interpretation. What kind of emotional response do you hope to evoke in viewers?

I want viewers to feel a sort of hunger, striving for something more. I'd love for them to see their ultimate passion and feel eager to reach it. I want people to indulge in their great desires. I know that message may be hard to read from a glance of my work. Id love to be a small gateway to opening that mindset.

What does your creative process look like — from the first impulse to the final brushstroke?

I start with my canvas and a bunch of paper spread out on the floor. I transfer the paint directly to random papers and the canvas. I rarely use a palette or brushes. I'm mostly finger-painting. It feels very raw and I have an easier time transferring my emotions directly without a "bridge" of a brush.
I'm pretty impatient, so I usually finish my pieces in one whole session which could be one to three hours. I'll use one or two more sessions to add details if I'm unsatisfied. I don't like to mix my emotions up onto one piece. This is why I usually only have one session per piece. I could be in turmoil one day and capture it all. That's beautiful to me. It could be one of the happiest days of my life captured onto a painting. That's beautiful. I could be incredibly burnt out. I'll capture it. That's beautiful. I don't like to blend things. After my session, I'll let my canvas - and paper pieces sit and dry. The floor will be entirely covered! My little paper pieces are kind of like "souvenirs" of a session. Sometimes I like how they came out more than the actual canvas piece.

Megan Virona | Eden On Fire | 2023

“Synthetic Souls” by Daria Atamanovskaya

Critical Review by Anna Gvozdeva

Daria Atamanovskaya’s Synthetic Souls unfolds as a quietly devastating reflection on the emotional and existential aftermath of technological progress. Rather than imagining a triumphant future in which humans and machines coexist, the project inverts familiar science-fiction narratives: here, artificial beings have already failed. Their promise of seamless integration has collapsed, leaving behind discarded bodies—mannequin surrogates for machines who never found a place in the world built for them. What emerges is a poetic study of abandonment, alienation, and the violence of societal indifference.

The photographs are staged in neglected urban spaces—an empty, cracked swimming pool, rusted metal, crumbling concrete, scattered debris. This setting is not incidental; it reads as a metaphor for a future that has aged prematurely, a world that has already given up on its own inventions. The peeling surfaces, muted earth tones, and industrial textures create a visual language of decay. Against this backdrop, the glossy artificial bodies appear unsettlingly pristine, suspended between seduction and grotesque unease. Their immaculate makeup and fashionable clothing, styled by Lisa Niroba, emphasize the tragic irony of their existence: these figures were built to be seen, admired, displayed—yet no one is looking.

Atamanovskaya’s use of mannequins is conceptually precise. They embody the uncanny valley without the need for digital manipulation—they imitate humanity but lack agency, interiority, or voice. Limbs are detached, torsos separated, faces frozen in expressions of joy or indifference that no longer correspond to any lived experience. This fragmentation suggests both literal and psychological dismemberment: the dream of synthetic consciousness has not only failed technologically but also metaphysically. The “souls” promised by futurist narratives remain unrealized.

The project's most striking tension lies in its oscillation between humor and tragedy. A mannequin leg still confidently wearing a high heel, or a torso clutching a handbag, borders on absurdity. Yet the absurdity wounds rather than entertains. These gestures evoke attempts at belonging—fashion, posture, beauty rituals—performed without understanding or reward. Clothing, as the artist notes, historically functions as a tool of identity construction, signaling community, aspiration, and selfhood. Here, fashion becomes a symbol of yearning, a costume for a role machines were never permitted to play.

The collaboration with 3D artist ashoka3dd extends the project beyond static documentation into speculative world-building. The inclusion of a hovering digital drone—playful, almost naïve in form—reinforces the disconnect between technological optimism and lived reality. It observes but does not intervene, functioning like a witness or archivist of failure. Its pastel palette contrasts sharply with the desaturated environment, highlighting the broken promise of a bright, frictionless future.

Formally, Atamanovskaya demonstrates a deliberate restraint. The compositions are uncluttered, allowing the viewer to linger on physical details: chipped paint on mannequin skin, twisted metal, shadows that mimic human silhouettes. The photographs are contemplative rather than sensational, refusing narrative closure. No human presence appears, yet humanity haunts every frame—through architecture, consumer objects, and the aspirational aesthetics of the discarded bodies. The absence becomes accusatory: Who created these beings? Who abandoned them?

Synthetic Souls ultimately operates as a critique not of technology itself, but of the social structures that produce and discard both machines and people. In its feminist and queer undertones, the work questions who is granted belonging, who is labeled "other," and who remains perpetually outside the frame of community. The project suggests that exclusion—whether directed at artificial intelligence, migrants, marginalized identities, or even the human body—is not a glitch, but a systemic inevitability of contemporary culture.

Atamanovskaya's images refuse spectacle. Instead, they offer quiet mourning, ethical provocation, and a renewed sense of responsibility. Synthetic Souls does not ask whether machines can become human, but whether humanity can recognize the consequences of its own desires. In that shift, the work gains its profound emotional and philosophical force.

Interview

Rui Wang

Your project "Not Everything Was Seen" explores absence as presence. Can you tell us more about how this concept emerged and why it feels important to you?

I didn't come to "absence as presence" through theory. It surfaced while I was between places, walking with a film camera at quiet hours and noticing what remains after a moment passes: the way dusk sits on a window, a curtain settling after someone leaves, the tide smoothing over footprints. Those traces felt charged but not declarative, more like echoes that keep speaking after the scene is over. The title, Not Everything Was Seen, acknowledges that feeling and accepts incompleteness as part of how we truly remember.

The idea matters to me in two ways. Emotionally, it's honest: memory is partial, and the gaps carry their own weight. Ethically, suggestion feels more respectful than exposure; it lets me acknowledge a scene without claiming it and invites viewers to co-author the reading. My background in Chinese art shaped this approach: liubai, or deliberate blankness, became active negative space, and restraint became a way to let images breathe.

I work on analog film with available light and a limited palette, slowing down to listen for timing rather than chase events. The series moves through scenes where presence is felt more than shown: the shadow of someone alone at dusk, the instant a flock of birds passes overhead, a person pausing to watch the sunset at twilight, a shoreline breathing at blue hour. Sequenced like a quiet conversation, the photographs don't explain a story so much as hold one, letting tenderness appear in what almost, but not entirely, comes into view.

Rui Wang | Not Everything Was Seen

Many of your works deal with traces, fragments, and what is left unseen. How do you translate these abstract ideas into visual form?

I translate traces and the unseen by working toward decisive moments. I begin by naming the feeling I want the image to hold, then set constraints that make that feeling visible: a limited palette, available light, and a point of view that withholds as much as it reveals. In the field I pre-visualize the frame and wait for the alignment of light, gesture, and distance. When that instant arrives, the fragment becomes legible without being overexplained.

Analog film slows me down, so timing and patience do the real composing. In editing, I make small work prints, live with them on the wall, and sequence in passes: first for instinct, then for structure, then for nuance. Negative space stays active, recurring motifs act as quiet anchors, and scale shifts help create a measured cadence.

This carries into my design practice as well. Design and photography are two languages for the same narrative impulse. In design I translate the feeling into system rules: a restrained palette tied to meaning, typography that sets cadence, grids that define pacing, motion that breathes, and image direction that leaves room for interpretation. Photography gives me mood, timing, and sensitivity, design returns structure, clarity, and coherence. Together they keep the story intact while allowing the viewer to enter and complete it with their own memory.

What role does photography play in your practice compared to your design work? Do you see them as separate fields or as one continuous language?

Rui Wang | Soundscapes Archive

I see photography and design as one continuous language spoken in two voices. Both begin with feeling. Photography is how I listen and discover; design is how I shape and communicate. The previous question touched on decisive moments and omission. Those same ideas connect the two: I look for what is sensed rather than shown, then give it a form the audience can read.
Photography trains attention and restraint. Working on film slows me down, sharpens timing, and refines my sense of light, palette, and atmosphere; sequencing teaches editorial flow, where a pause belongs, and how two images speak without captions. Design returns structure and clarity to those intuitions. I think in grids, scale, rhythm, and tone so a series holds together, and in brand work this becomes a system that protects voice across channels. Ethically, both practices leave room for the viewer: photography notices without claiming, design clarifies without closing. Put simply, photography helps me find the story, and design builds the vessel that carries it.

You have worked with major global brands like Disney and Nike. How does your personal artistic practice differ from your commercial design projects?

My personal practice is slow, observational, and led by mood, while commercial work is brief-driven, strategic, and built to scale. With film I accept ambiguity and edit in sequences until the feeling is right; with brands I translate insight into systems like type hierarchy, color logic, grids, motion, and image direction. Even so, the backbone is the same: storytelling. Whether I am designing or photographing, I start with the emotion I want the viewer to carry and then build the form that can hold it.

In your creative philosophy, you describe every visual as a vessel for storytelling. Could you share a moment when this idea became especially clear in your work?

To make this idea tangible, I will share two examples: one photograph from my series Not Everything Was Seen and one design project.
Photography (image 1, Not Everything Was Seen): This picture was made at the beach near dusk. Two people sit facing the water, almost absorbed by the horizon. Nothing overt happens, yet distance, posture, and the soft spread of light carry the feeling. I framed wide, kept the horizon low, and left generous negative space so companionship, time, and a trace of longing could surface without explanation. This is the core of the series: absence feels present, ordinary scenes hold tenderness, and viewers complete the story with their own memories.
Design (image 2, The Soundscapes Archive): The brief was to translate elements of the environment into a record identity. I used translucent layers, restrained type, and a modular grid so “aqua, light, cloud, wind” could be read and felt. As light passes through the package, shadows and textures shift, and the system begins to behave like the music. Typography sets cadence, materials hold atmosphere, and the object becomes a vessel for listening.

In “Not Everything Was Seen”, love appears as something fleeting, sometimes hidden. Do you think art can capture emotions that resist visibility?

Yes, but not by pinning emotion down. Art cannot show love directly; it can create the conditions in which love is felt. In Not Everything Was Seen I work with timing, distance, and omission: a pause between two frames, a figure turned away, dusk light held on water. Sequencing becomes the grammar, negative space the tone, and small recurring motifs act as echoes. Viewers recognize the trace and supply the feeling.
I approach design the same way. You cannot show empathy or tenderness in a logo, but you can let type cadence, spacing, materials, and image direction carry them. In both practices, suggestion is more faithful than explanation. We may not see love itself, yet we can sense it in what remains after the moment passes.

Your work has been recognized by institutions such as Red Dot, IPA, and MUSE Awards. How do these acknowledgments influence your creative journey?

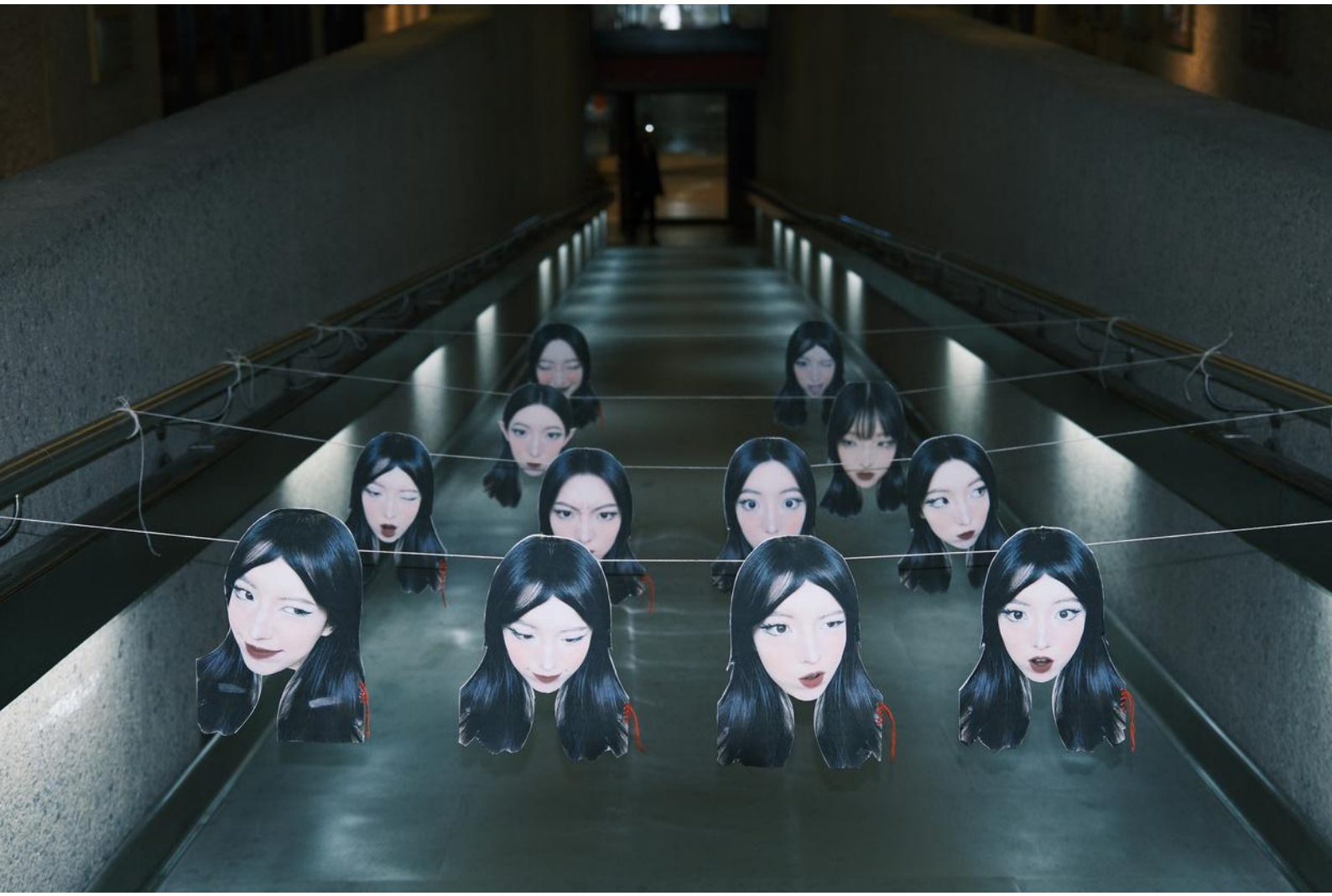
I am grateful for those recognitions because they validate a cross-disciplinary path and give partners confidence in a narrative-driven approach. They open doors to larger briefs, deeper collaborations, and practical benefits like visibility, publishing, and exhibition opportunities. Just as importantly, they strengthen my confidence in the artistic road I have chosen, encouraging me to create more, take smarter risks, and keep refining the work with patience and care.
I still treat awards as checkpoints, not destinations. They raise the bar and remind me to keep the craft honest, support younger creatives, and measure success by what matters most: whether the work carries feeling, reads clearly, and stays with the audience after the moment has passed.

Rui Wang | What Hides In Light | 2025

Guo Cheng is a London-based interdisciplinary visual artist whose practice spans architectural illustration, post-photographic media, wearable installation, and spatial storytelling. Her work examines how identity, cultural cognition, and embodied perception are shaped through images, architectures, and cross-cultural encounters.
Cheng's research-driven practice reinterprets Chinese spatial philosophy—such as sequential movement, heterotopic layering, and ritualised viewpoints—into speculative architectural illustrations and digital cityscapes. These works construct "algorithmic gardens" and future urban environments that merge cultural memory with contemporary image ecologies.
Guo continues to develop large-scale installations, speculative environments, and interdisciplinary visual works that strengthen the dialogue between visual culture, spatial theory, and cross-cultural understanding within the UK's expanding contemporary art context.

Project Statement
My practice explores how identities, bodies, and cultural meanings are constructed, disrupted, and reconfigured through images, architectures, and cross-cultural encounters. Working across architectural illustration, post-photographic media, wearable installations, and spatial storytelling, I investigate the moments when perception becomes unstable—when what we see no longer aligns with what we know, and when empathy becomes uncertain or incomplete.
Growing up within Chinese spatial culture and later working in London's artistic and architectural contexts, I became increasingly aware of the systems that shape how people appear to one another. Traditional Chinese spatial philosophy, especially its principles of sequential movement, layered thresholds, and heterotopic construction, has deeply influenced my understanding of how meaning emerges within space. In my architectural narrative illustrations, I do not recreate historical gardens; instead, I translate their logic into speculative environments—algorithmic gardens, future Jiangnan architectures, and digitally mediated cities that hold both memory and anticipation. These spaces form a vocabulary through which I explore how cultural knowledge is preserved, transformed, or destabilised in contemporary visual life.

Guo Cheng | Face Index 12 Units



Guo Cheng | In Someone Else's Shoes

Ori Aviram

Your artistic journey began after a career in television and advertising. What triggered the moment when you decided to fully dedicate yourself to painting?

There was no specific moment when I decided to dedicate myself to art. It was a long process that began in the army, where I started sculpting, continued with film studies and work in the field. All these years there was a constant flirtation with the thought of being an artist and a practice of sculpture. Because I loved Jean Dubuffet, I decided that I would leave everything and become an artist at the age of 43, just like he did. Luckily, at the age of 34, with my divorce, I decided to have my first exhibition.

Ori Aviram | Leviathan | 2002

You often describe color as something that can be "sculpted, shaped, engraved, and shoveled." Could you tell us more about how you physically interact with paint during your process?

I treat paint like a plastic material, like clay. Of course, I also work with it like you would work with oil paint, but I have no problem handling it with tools other than a brush and putty knife. For example, I can use it as glue and stick papers together with it. Probably because I started as a sculptor, I have no problem putting the entire contents of the tube on the canvas and then cutting, crushing, and scratching it.

Many of your works are painted on unconventional surfaces—old books, bibles, or monetary notes. What attracts you to these materials, and how does their history influence the final artwork?

As a child and teenager, I was a devout bookworm. I may derive a certain pleasure from defacing books and drawing on them. The relationship between painting and text fascinates me. When drawing on pages of the New Testament from 1704, the entire drawing takes on additional meanings and layers beyond its pictorial value.

Ori Aviram | Heaven | 2002

Biblical stories and mythology appear as recurring references in your earlier figurative works. How do these narratives still resonate within your abstract compositions today?

The preoccupation with the Bible and mythology was a continuation of the tradition of Western painting, relying on ancient texts and actually illustrating them. Abstract painting, which broke out after the birth of photography which made the role of describing reality redundant. That role had been one of the functions of painting for years. Now liberated, painting is free to engage with the elements of painting, line, color, and composition, and the interplay between them. Such freedom was created in me as well, and in fact the Bible and mythology play no role in my abstract paintings.

You mention the "gap between intention and outcome" as a key element in your creative process. Can you describe a moment when this tension led to an unexpected artistic discovery?

Every work actually contains an unexpected discovery/achievement/result at the end. The initial intention encounters the limitations of the material, its will in fact, and the material injects itself into the intention, and this combination always contains novelty and surprise. For example, in an abstract painting that I am working on, I painted a lot of white dots but they did not blend in and did not match the other colors. I waited for them to dry and painted them in cobalt purple.
The result stunned me with its beauty. It was a complete surprise.

Your color palette is bold and expressive, ranging from deep reds and purples to bright greens and yellows. How do you select your colors, and what emotions or ideas guide your choices?

Very easy question. My choice of colors is very spontaneous and immediate. I look at the tubes and just choose what comes to mind first. Ideas or emotions are hardly involved. But, intuition is defined as a rapid and unconscious process of knowing, and I tend to agree with that. So ideas, concepts and emotions are involved in the process, but they do not cross the threshold of consciousness.

How do you see the relationship between chaos and order in your paintings?

You can see in every painting an attempt to create order within chaos. Perhaps even all of life is such a process. And although the second law of thermodynamics ultimately decrees chaos for us, in the meantime, as long as we are here, we will make order. In my paintings, I try to create a balance between order and chaos. Too much order is rigidity, inflexibility, and lifelessness. Too much chaos creates clutter, meaninglessness, and beautylessness.

Ori Aviram | Collapse of consciousness | 2016

Carla Van der Goot
I'm Carla, an autistic, LGBTQ+ 23 year old artist who is passionate about pop culture and cosplaying. I mostly enjoy recreating iconic childhood characters and exploring whimsical and dark atmospheres through painting and linocuting.

Project Statement
My work tries to capture the authenticity of mental health struggles through the recreation of specific movie scenes or pictures from cosplay photoshoots.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Alisia Akbar Noorali

Growing up in Dar es Salaam, which memories or cultural elements most strongly shaped your early artistic vision?

Dar es Salaam shaped me long before I ever picked up a brush. I grew up in a world of colorful khangas drying in the sun, markets overflowing with patterns, and the Indian Ocean catching light in a way no paint can fully capture. Those colors became my first language.

The city itself was a constant influence: the carved wooden doors of Zanzibar-style architecture, the chaos and rhythm of Kariakoo markets, and the conversations spilling out of homes and street corners. I remember watching Makonde sculptors carve entire stories from a single piece of wood. From them, I learned that materials have memory, and that art can hold both history and imagination at the same time.

My early artistic vision grew from these small, ordinary moments: my mother's khanga tied around her waist, the quiet strength with which women carried themselves, and the way stories and proverbs lived in fabric, objects, and gestures. Growing up in Tanzania taught me that art comes from life, from memory, and from the desire to hold onto what might otherwise disappear.

Alisia Akbar Noorali | Umoja | 2023

Ultimately, I attribute my entire artistic vision to my parents. They were the first people who treated my curiosity as something worth protecting. They let me experiment—messy watercolors on the balcony, charcoal smudges on my fingers, scraps of fabric taped together in ways that made sense only to me. They never told me to stop or keep things neat; instead, they gave me the freedom to explore, to ruin paper, to take risks, to fail beautifully and try again. They created a home where imagination wasn't a distraction from real life but a part of it. My mother saved even my crooked early drawings as if they were masterpieces, and my father always made room for another question, another idea, another attempt. Their faith in me was spacious, generous, and constant. Everything I create now—every color I choose, every story I try to tell—comes from that freedom they gave me, the permission to see the world differently, and the belief that whatever I made mattered. Without them, none of this would exist.

When starting a new piece, what usually comes first for you — a specific memory, an emotion, or a visual concept?

For me, it almost always starts with an emotion or a feeling I can't quite let go of, something like curiosity, loss, hope, or even frustration. That initial spark usually comes from a personal experience or a memory that's stuck in my mind. Once I have that emotional core, I start thinking about how to give it

Alisia Akbar Noorali | Upendo | 2024

form visually: the colors, textures, and materials that could best express it.
For example, in Uhuru, I knew I wanted to convey freedom and empowerment, something deeply personal about being a girl navigating social expectations. From that feeling, the visual idea of the khanga and the overflowing colors emerged naturally. Similarly, in The Void Within, the feeling of absence and loss came first, and it guided how I broke apart the table and let the shards and voids shape the piece. So really, it's a back-and-forth: the feeling comes first, then I let it inform the visual concept, and often the materials themselves inspire new directions. It's less about planning every detail and more about letting the emotion lead the way.

Could you describe the materials and techniques you find most essential in transforming personal experiences into visual forms?

The materials I choose are often deeply connected to the story or emotion I want to explore. For me, the texture, weight, and history of an object or medium can add layers of meaning to a piece. In painting, acrylics allow me to play with bold colors and layering, which is perfect for expressing emotions that feel vibrant and alive, like in Uhuru or Upendo. In sculpture, working with found objects or wood lets me engage physically with form, breaking and reshaping materials in ways that mirror the emotional process behind the work, as in The Void Within.
I am drawn to techniques that allow experimentation and transformation. Whether it's layering paint, carving into wood, or scratching into a surface, I like methods that let me explore both control and unpredictability. For example, in A New and Old Fusion, using scratchboard and a knife allowed me to capture intricate architectural details while also embracing the raw, tactile quality of the material. That tension between precision and spontaneity mirrors the balance I aim for in my artistic expression, between emotion and form, memory and imagination.
I also find inspiration in the traditions of Tanzanian art. Observing Makonde sculptures, Zanzibar carvings, and Tinga Tinga paintings taught me how materials themselves can tell stories, from the grain of wood to the vibrancy of color. Even small elements, like the patterns in a khanga, can carry symbolism and cultural weight. Incorporating these ideas into my own work helps me connect personal experiences to a broader cultural context.
Another important aspect is letting the materials guide the work. Often, as I manipulate paint, wood, or other media, unexpected textures or forms emerge that change the direction of the piece. I embrace these moments as part of the creative conversation, allowing the medium to contribute its own voice to the final work.
Ultimately, the materials and techniques I choose are inseparable from the emotional and conceptual core of my work. They allow me to transform feelings, memories, and cultural influences into visual forms that carry depth, texture, and resonance for both me and the audience.

Your statement speaks of contrasts such as strength and tenderness, tradition and change. How do these opposites appear in your recent works?

I'm really drawn to contrasts because they feel like life itself, complicated, messy, full of tension. In my work, strength and tenderness often appear together, like in Upendo, where the lions are both powerful and protective but also gentle. That balance between the two is something I try to capture a lot, because I think it reflects real human experience.
Tradition and change show up a lot too. In A New and Old Fusion, for example, I combined Zanzibar's carved historical windows with modern buildings from Dar es Salaam. The juxtaposition reflects how I move between worlds, holding onto my roots while navigating new ideas and spaces. Even in pieces like Uhuru or The Void Within, there's this tension between structure and freedom, control and chaos, which

comes from exploring how personal and cultural expectations shape us, and how breaking or bending them can lead to growth.
I like leaving these contrasts visible in the work because they invite the viewer to sit with them, to see how different forces coexist, and maybe reflect on the tensions in their own lives.

How has studying in California and exhibiting across Europe and North America broadened or challenged your understanding of your own culture?

Studying in California and exhibiting internationally has given me a new perspective on my own culture. Being immersed in different environments, surrounded by artists from diverse backgrounds, has made me reflect more consciously on what it means to be Tanzanian and how my upbringing shapes my work. It made me realize that the cultural symbols and traditions I grew up with, khangas, carvings, and local storytelling, carry meanings that are both personal and universal.
Exhibiting across Europe and North America has also shown me how audiences interpret these symbols in ways I might not have expected. People respond to the colors, patterns, and narratives differently depending on their own cultural context, which has challenged me to think about how to communicate the essence of my experiences while respecting the viewer's perspective. At the same time, it has reinforced how powerful these cultural markers are in telling a story, because they resonate even across great distances.
Being away from home has also expanded my artistic vocabulary. Learning new techniques, experimenting with different materials, and seeing approaches to composition and narrative that I hadn't encountered in Tanzania has encouraged me to push my own practice further. I've been able to combine these new skills with the traditions I grew up with, creating work that reflects both my roots and the broader world I now navigate.
Ultimately, these experiences have broadened my understanding of cultural identity as something dynamic rather than fixed. My work becomes a dialogue between my roots and the new contexts I encounter, allowing me to explore my heritage while experimenting with form, medium, and narrative. Exhibiting internationally has shown me that culture is both deeply personal and universally communicative, and that balance continues to shape how I approach each piece.

Are there particular conversations with audiences abroad that have surprised or inspired you?

One of the most inspiring aspects of exhibiting internationally has been the conversations I've had with women and young people about identity, culture, and equality. People often approach my work and share their own experiences, the challenges they face, the expectations placed on them, or the ways they've had to navigate societal norms. Those conversations have been powerful reminders of why I create the work I do.
I've been struck by how universal some of these experiences are. Even in contexts very different from my own, women have shared stories about feeling limited by expectations, underrepresented in opportunities, or overlooked in spaces like research, leadership, or creative fields. Seeing how my work can spark dialogue around these issues, and make people reflect on their own experiences, has been both humbling and motivating.
What inspires me most in these interactions is the courage, resilience, and creativity people bring to their own lives. Hearing women and young people talk about how they challenge societal norms, pursue their passions, or reclaim their voice reminds me why art can be such a powerful tool for expression and empowerment. These stories fuel my own practice, pushing me to create work that not only reflects my experiences but also encourages others to embrace theirs.
Some of the most meaningful moments have been when young people connect with my art on a personal level. They talk about feeling seen or encouraged to embrace their own voice and ideas. Hearing them express how my work resonates with their own journey is incredibly inspiring, and it reinforces my belief that art can be a tool for empowerment and reflection.
These interactions have also shaped the way I think about my work. They remind me that art isn't just about aesthetics. It isabout opening space for dialogue, empathy, and understanding. Meeting people from different cultures and hearing their perspectives has strengthened my commitment to creating pieces that are deeply personal but also resonate on a broader, human level.

What impact or dialogue do you hope your art will spark in the coming years?

I hope my art sparks conversations about freedom, identity, and resilience. A lot of my work begins with my own experiences, but I want it to open up space for viewers to bring in their own stories too. When someone connects with a piece not just because of what I put into it, but because it reflects something in their own life, that's when the dialogue really begins.
For me, it's especially important that women and young people feel seen in my work. It's striking to me that, even in our time, something as basic as gender

Alisia Akbar Noorali | Tides Of Resolve | 2023

equality is still not a reality. We've made progress in many ways, but equality remains unfinished work, unevenly lived across different parts of the world. From unequal pay to restrictive societal expectations, and even the lack of representation in fields like research, women continue to face disadvantages that cut across different areas of life, and that reality shapes the way I think about my art. I don't want to just reflect those imbalances, but I want to create work that challenges them, that shows femininity and identity as sources of strength rather than limits.

I also want my work to speak to young people, because I believe we are the future. The voices of our generation are powerful, and the stories we carry deserve space. If my work can remind someone, whether it's a young person finding their place in the world, or a woman navigating expectations, that their voice matters and their experiences carry value, then I feel like it's doing what it's meant to do.

At the same time, I want my art to bridge cultures. Symbols like khangas or the carvings found in Zanzibar are deeply Tanzanian, but I've learned that they can also resonate universally, sparking recognition in someone who has never set foot in East Africa. Those unexpected connections remind me that while art is rooted in place, its emotions can cross borders.

In the years ahead, my hope is to keep creating work that is both personal and collective, art that doesn't just tell my story, but also becomes a way for others to see themselves, to feel, and to reflect on the worlds they come from.

My name is **Małgorzata Foltyn-Bajgot** and I live in Kraków, Poland.
I am a graduate of the Cracow School of Art and Fashion Design, where in 2020 I completed a program in Artistic Fashion Design. An annex to my diploma project was painting, and in particular collage, which opened the path for my further artistic development.

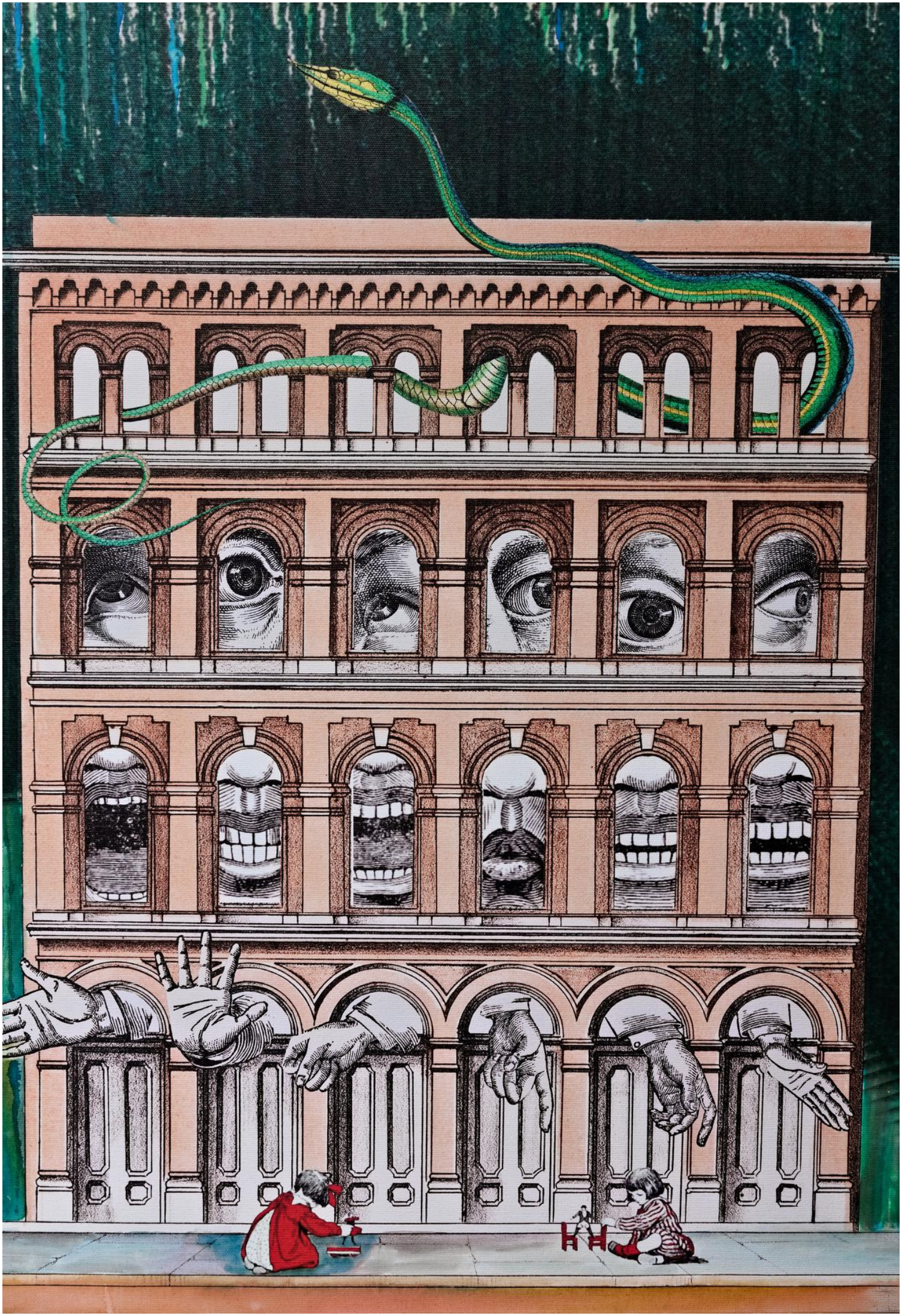
I have taken part in group exhibitions:
21/05/2021–25/06/2021 – international group exhibition “Arrhythmia of Rhythm” at the Outsider Art Gallery
10/06/2022–10/07/2022 – international group exhibition “Passion for Life” at the Outsider Art Gallery

I also held a solo exhibition:
26/08/2022–24/09/2022 – solo exhibition REM Phase at the Outsider Art Gallery

I participated in the 11th National Competition for an Illustration to a Song Text by Jeremii Przybora, where I received 3rd place.

Additionally, my collage was published in Słowniczek Feminiatywy w Akademii, issued by Dom Utopii – International Center of Empathy / Łaźnia Nowa Theatre in cooperation with the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

Małgorzata Foltyn-Bajgot | Mushrooms | 2022



Małgorzata Foltyn-Bajgot | Home | 2022

Anna Skripova

Your works on silk seem to carry light within them — almost like illuminated memories. How did you first discover batik as a medium, and what keeps you fascinated by it?

My introduction to batik began many years ago. It was not simply an encounter with a new technique, but rather the fulfillment of a long-held dream. I had always been drawn to silk—its transparency, gentle glow, and the way it seems to hold light within the fabric. I often imagined how paint spreads across its surface, creating living lines and unpredictable color transitions. These thoughts led me, as if by a delicate thread, to a phrase that once became symbolic for me: "Today you are where your thoughts have brought you."
That is how I met my Teacher, who became a true guide into the world of batik. He revealed to me the secrets of this art form. Since then, I feel as if I have entered another dimension —a space where light and color intertwine with the movement of the soul.
What inspires me in batik to this day is its vitality, its unpredictability, its ability to respond to the slightest emotion. Paint on silk behaves like living water—it spreads, merges, resists—and within this dialogue, truth is born.
Each piece is an attempt to capture a fleeting moment, to hold the light that lives within. Perhaps that is why my paintings resemble luminous memories—they preserve the echo of what has been felt and invite the viewer to touch this quiet miracle.

Anna Skripova | My Pink Locks | 2021

You mentioned that you transitioned from photorealism to abstraction. What prompted this shift, and how did it change your relationship with painting?

My transition from photorealism to abstraction became a step toward freedom.
I was once fascinated by precision—the ability to capture the tiniest details, the play of light, the breath of nature.
But over time, I began to feel that behind this outer truth, the inner resonance was getting lost.
The painting ceased to be a living experience, and that's when I allowed myself to move beyond the boundaries of form.
Abstraction opened up a new space of feeling and light for me. The paint began to flow freely, color started to sound like emotion, and the process turned into a dialogue with the material.
Now, painting for me is not a copy of reality, but a way to listen to myself and let the viewer sense that inner light that exists beyond the visible.

Many of your artworks evoke both serenity and mystery — as if they exist between dream and reality. How do you balance emotion and structure in your compositions?

For me, the balance between emotion and structure is like a morning in the fog — when the first rays of sunlight have not yet dispersed the transparent haze, but already begin to reveal the contours of the world.
Emotion is the breath of the painting, its inner vibration. I search for it in fleeting sensations — in the rustle of wind, the

Anna Skripova | Fog | 2023

glimmer of water, a brief moment that cannot be repeated. But if one follows only feeling, everything dissolves into chaos. That's when structure comes to the rescue — the invisible rhythm that holds the composition in balance.
I love when these two forces meet. When a line suddenly yields to a patch of color, and form gives way to movement. It is precisely in this transition — on the edge between control and freedom — that the living breath of the painting is born. It creates that sense of calm and mystery that lingers with the viewer like the trace of a dream not yet fully faded at dawn.

The "luminous" layering technique you use gives your pieces a stained-glass quality. Could you share more about your process and how you achieve this effect?

The "glowing" layer effect for me is not just a technical device but a way to convey the breath of light — its movement through fabric and paint. The work begins with the most transparent tones, as if born from morning air where forms are not yet visible. Each subsequent layer adds depth, but rather than covering the previous one, it interacts with it — like an echo of light within space.
I build light not from above, but from within the painting itself. It is born between the layers, where paint and silk become a single living organism. The key is not to make it heavy, not to "seal" this breath — but to leave space where light can pass freely through the material.
Contrasts here act as a pulse. Warm and cool shades, dense and translucent areas create an inner shimmer — that same sensation of stained glass, when it seems the surface glows from within.
In this technique, much depends on intuition. I move from light to shadow until the balance appears — the moment when the work seems to come alive on its own, like a window through which one can see not only color, but the silence of light itself.

Nature — mist, water, and light — appears to play a strong role in your art. What inspires your palette and atmosphere when you begin a new work?

Nature for me is not a backdrop but a living presence — a companion with whom I carry on an endless dialogue. Mist, water, and light are not merely elements of a landscape; they are states of the soul. They reveal to me the mood, the breath of the future work, its rhythm, and its palette.
I don't seek to reproduce what I see literally. What matters to me is to capture the inner tone — that barely perceptible line between stillness and motion, clarity and haze. The palette is born from feeling, not from intention: soft gray-blue hues like the breath of a cold morning, muted golden tones like the memory of sunlight frozen in water.
Mist attracts me with its ability to conceal and reveal at once. It creates space for imagination — as if leaving the viewer room to complete their own world. Water is a mirror where reality meets reflection, and light is like an invisible thread binding everything together.
When I begin a new work, I don't choose the colors — they come on their own, like memories. Perhaps from childhood, from the smell of rain, from a moment when the sun touches the surface of a lake. And in that moment, nature ceases to be an object and becomes a co-author — together with me, it paints a picture where every shade holds the breath of the living world.

Do you see your silk paintings and oil works as separate worlds, or do they communicate with one another?

My works on silk and on canvas are not separate worlds, but two breaths of the same process. They are like day and dusk: different in light, yet belonging to the same element.
Silk is fluid, elusive. It breathes, reflects light, lives by its own laws. On it, the paint seems to choose its own path, and I merely accompany it, trying to capture the moment before it dissolves. Here arise fragility, transparency, the feeling of a dream one does not wish to wake from.
Canvas is the opposite of silk, yet also its continuation. It provides stability, demands focus and clarity. Here I can build form, find rhythm, give thought a body. It is a space for reflection, where feelings take on structure.
Between these two materials there is a constant exchange. After working on silk, I bring more light and air into the canvas; after the canvas, more inner balance and precision. It is like breathing—inhalation and exhalation, movement back and forth.
In the end, both silk and canvas are simply different ways for me to speak about what cannot be said in words. Each has its own timbre, yet the voice is one.

When viewers encounter your work, what would you like them to feel or remember?

I want a person, when looking at my paintings, to pause for a moment and look inward. In the soft hues of mist, in the reflection of water, or in the diffused light, I hope they recognize their own feelings — quiet joy, nostalgia, the warmth of childhood memories.
It is important to me that the viewer doesn't just look, but listens inwardly. My works do not demand explanation; they simply create a space where one can remember what was forgotten, feel what was lost, and find peace.
If after encountering a painting there remains a sense of light — even a barely perceptible one — it means the dialogue has taken place.
For me, painting is a way to remind: the beauty of the world lives within us; we only need to let it be heard.

Marina Agafonova

At this stage of her artistic journey, the artist is creating a series of paintings that incorporate elements of traditional Russian northern folk painting. Her inspiration comes from the nature of the Russian North, while the motifs are stylized and reinterpreted within her original compositions. She is drawn to the symbolism found in these folk patterns - rich in meaning and offering compelling themes for artistic exploration, such as love, luck, and well-being.

In her work, she strives to highlight the connection with contemporary artistic trends, which is reflected in printed products, interior design items, clothing, tableware, and graphic design. The historically established technique of northern painting is primarily graphic, and when combined with texture, it gives ancient motifs a more modern and accessible feel.

Her unique contribution to contemporary art lies in creating a new interpretation of these traditional patterns, popularizing them, and developing new storylines and new techniques for their execution.

Julia Rabius

Julia Rabius | The Food | 2025

I was drawn to the combination of cloth and concrete because of their opposite nature. One soft and temporary, the other rigid and lasting. When I began casting using cloth and concrete, I realized the process preserved small gestures and folds in a fascinating way. The pairing became a way to capture something fleeting before it disappears, to solidify what's usually lost.

What initially drew you to working with materials like cloth and concrete, and how did this combination become central to your sculptural language?

Julia Rabius | Twin Pieces | 2025

Rabbits appear as recurring figures in your work. What personal or symbolic meanings do they hold for you?

Rabbits started not long ago as a representation of my own self and body. They feel domestic, yet there's always an undertone of survival. I was given the title of a "rabbit" by someone influential in my life experience and my sculptural work tries to study that title, and disagree with it.

In "The Food" and "Lure," the process of molding and removing fabric becomes part of the narrative. How do you think about the boundary between creation and destruction in your practice?

That boundary is where most of the meaning happens for me. There is an inevitable loss with each piece, but I do not think they are perfectly whole within the mold either, so peeling away the texture is less a destruction as it is a reveal.

Your sculptures capture soft, fleeting textures in a very permanent material. How do fragility and permanence interact as emotional elements in your work?

I think of them less as opposites and more as companions. Concrete isn't permanent in a romantic sense, it can crack, erode, crumble. When it holds the imprint of something delicate, it becomes a kind of fragile permanence. I like to think about it like a fossil, fragile, but permanent.

Can you talk about the tension between innocence and vulnerability in your pieces? How do these themes connect to personal history or lived experience?

I have missed many milestones in my life and it has resulted in me feeling semi stunted. While growing professionally and developing my conceptual thinking, somehow the rest of me has been left behind in those leaps.

The artwork "Ravenous" began as a gift but changed meaning during the process. How often do your works shift emotionally as you create them?

Almost with every piece. At different stages in my art I always hesitate, wanting to stop and hold onto the current feeling but I often have to force

Julia Rabius | Ravenous | 2025

Julia Rabius | Lure | 2025

myself forward to completion. Ravenous reminded me that intention isn't fixed; whether cognitively or not while painting I was symbolizing my relationship with the raven, at the time I thought I was being thoughtful and honest, now even I can see the hints I left for myself in the piece.

Teaching young students involves nurturing curiosity and experimentation. How does your role as an educator influence your studio practice — and vice versa?

It has a huge influence, partially because the experiences and emotions I carry home from teaching end up in my art. My artwork has personal stories and narratives in each, and there's no place on earth where you hear as many stories as an elementary school. In a way it also forces me to create even if uninspired or exhausted. For my students I have to develop myself, so I cannot stop being an artist to just be a teacher.

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NO. 43

DECEMBER 2025