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— *Intro*

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Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello dear reader,

In your hands lies Issue 42 of our journal - alive with color, dreams, and even the hush of sleep. As we assembled this edition, we felt like witnesses to another's dream: at times incandescent, at times softly fading at the edges, yet always mysterious and hypnotic.
Is there room for the mystical in art? Common sense may insist there isn't - perhaps not anywhere in life. And yet, who among us has never felt something singular, inexplicable, almost guided? As if place, time, and people sometimes align in a way no neat logic can fully contain.
I hope that as you turn these pages, you, too, enter a world of making and meaning - just as we did. Perhaps it's no accident you've encountered these works now; perhaps there is something here you were meant to find.

Enjoy the journey - more than a hundred pages of the unknown await.

On the Front Cover:
Alexandra Hrehová
All we have is now
2024

On the Back Cover:
Ezra Lau
Decoy Koi
2025

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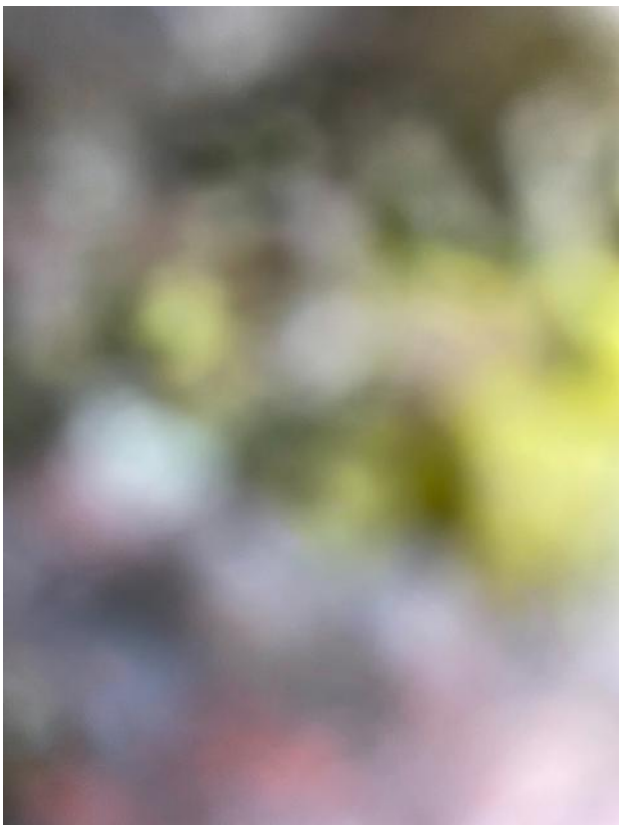
We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: **https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/**

Thomas Rosen (rsn)

Your work explores how perceptions can be altered. Could you describe a moment when you yourself felt your own perception shift while creating a piece?

This happens quite regularly — both in photography and in music. I find my motifs in everyday life, while I'm out and about. Details, structures, and colors catch my eye, and I mentally detach them from their surroundings to see whether they hold something I want to capture. At that moment, my perception shifts — through detachment, focusing, zooming in. With music, it happens in the flow, while writing or performing. It feels like a blurring and dissolving, as if things slip away and reform into something new.



Thomas Rosen (rsn) | Flowing & Absorbing Cutouts | 2024

Many of your photographs emphasize shapes and colors without referencing external objects. How do you decide when an image is "complete" if there is no subject to guide you?

That's a very good question, and one I can't fully explain rationally. It's an intuitive decision that comes to me when I select the final section of an image. Since my works are not digitally edited, I already know which areas of the original photograph will be cropped out. But the exact frame — what will eventually be printed and exhibited — is decided spontaneously and entirely by feeling.

The series flowing & absorbing cutouts blurs color structures and contours. What sparked this idea of blurring as both an aesthetic and philosophical gesture?

My artistic roots lie in music — a broad field where I've explored many genres. Since turning toward drone, ambient, and noise, detail has become central to my practice. In both music and visual art, the detail contains the whole, yet also stands independently and reveals a new world. I'm drawn to subtle structures that only reveal themselves through close or repeated

attention. Their blending and disappearance create tension and artistic depth. Like in the series mentioned, overlaps and shifting nuances — visible or purely imagined — are also crucial in my music.

Sound is central to rsn. How does working with immersive soundscapes influence your visual compositions — and vice versa?

Even though most works stand on their own, they are closely connected. Both are rooted in immersion. While music and photography are usually created separately, there are moments when the two reference or complement one another — sometimes even intentionally brought into harmony. flowing & absorbing cutouts is a good example of that.

You have experience with collaborative music projects like [B O L T]. What freedoms or challenges do you find in creating solo work under rsn compared to band projects?

I've spent most of my artistic life working in collectives. I value the exchange and the anticipation of what a group effort will become. Collaboration carries a strong emotional resonance for me. At the same time, some ideas demand to surface as solo work. The challenge is that on stage you have no backup — you're fully responsible and can't allow yourself to step back. But that vulnerability also opens possibilities, pushing you to stay present in the moment. I don't enjoy being the center of attention — that's an advantage of group projects. But when a solo work or exhibition is necessary, I have no choice but to take that position. What concerns me is when the focus shifts from the work to the artist as a persona. My art should speak independently — the ego gets in the way of immersion.

Your process seems to invite accidents and chance. Could you share a moment when an unexpected technical "mistake" led to a breakthrough?

This happens all the time in music, because I use a variety of effects whose interactions can't be fully predicted or controlled. Coincidence is part of the process — the challenge lies in shaping a complete work that incorporates everything: the mistakes, the environment, and (especially live) the audience's response. In photography, accidents are more visually striking. For instance, the triptych confused & blurred details #2.1 is the only one of my works whose colors differ from the original. The altered tones came from a misadjusted printer. Yet the result was so expressive that I chose the "mistake" as the final piece.

Your exhibitions range from galleries to music venues. How do you adapt installations or presentations for these different contexts?

It's a small challenge each time — and one I enjoy. I want to create immersive experiences, so I consider how people move through and use a space. Sometimes I activate the entire room; other times I build intimate areas that invite viewers to pause. This applies to both music and photography, since my concerts often take place outside classical music venues. It's a great artistic challenge — and a privilege — to show my work in unconventional spaces. I hope there is even more potential to explore.

Thomas Rosen (rsn)
Flowing & Absorbing Cutouts
2024

Sabina Thompson

Born 1.6.1973 in Austria, Salzburg.
Painting since 3 years in different styles, mainly mixed techniques.
Comissioned Work for Bookprints and Artlovers.

Artist Statement
I play with the idea of divine femininity in the earthly realm as a creative expression of strength, presence, self-expression, and acceptance in all aspects of individuality and origin.

Sabina Thompson | Desert Sand | 2024

Sabina Thompson | Yakuza | 2025

Eva Bodo

What initially drew you toward exploring abandoned or overlooked urban spaces in your work?

Honestly, it started with a photography course I added to my university schedule just to earn the necessary credits. We had to pick 1 of the given themes, and "abandoned spaces" immediately grabbed my attention. The deeper I went, the more I was drawn in by the abandonment and the quiet, untold narratives those spots held—the ethical necessity of human presence, that lingers even after the function was discontinued. I was struck by the indifference of people passing by the sites without even noticing them or paying attention to them. Wanting them to stop, pause, and eventually ask questions was utopia. I felt the urge to bring change to either this behavior or to the space itself, ideally both. It was not a search for best shot of ruins or dirt in the city, but a response to the radical disconnect between official urban narratives and the lived, material reality of the city. Gradually, I understood that these places embody both memory and transformation; they are witnesses to stagnation and renewal. Fascinated by how emptiness can speak, how neglect can reveal new aesthetic and emotional dimensions, I learned to look differently. For me, these spaces are not just remnants of the past but living maps of human experience. By engaging with them through spatial reinterpretation, I seek to restore a sense of connection—to give forgotten environments a renewed voice and presence within the contemporary urban rhythm.

Eva Bodo | Garage | 2022

When you encounter a "neglected site," what signals to you that it holds artistic potential?

When I engage with a neglected site, the first thing that catches my eye is usually the tension between presence and absence. I like small ambient cues, like a patch of color on a faded wall, the rhythm of cracks, or the silence that holds traces of human activity. These details make it seem that the space still "remembers" something, even if it can't be seen anymore. The artistic potential shows itself in that subtle balance between decay and persistence, when the space starts to speak beyond its function and asks me to see it in a new way. With a lot of time and repeated returns to the same spot, you get rewarded by the urge not to bring back what "was," but to show what still "is," which is often there in front of you.

How do you choose which elements of reality to transform into abstraction within your paintings?

I don't choose elements of reality in a literal way; instead, I respond to how space, memory, and atmosphere imprint themselves on perception. My process begins with photography — always in black and white — to eliminate the distraction of color noise and focus purely on structure, contrast, and spatial rhythm. Through the lens, I learn to see anew, discovering the essence of a place detached from its visual excess. Continuing with sketches on paper, using acrylic markers, ink, or pencil, I capture only the essential points — the minimal gestures that define presence and absence within the space. Both mediums allow me not to escape reality but to deepen it — to reveal its quiet structures

Eva Bodo | Flow | 2024

and unseen energies, translating what is overlooked into something perceptible, distilled, and alive.

Your paintings feature bold geometries and strong color structures. How do these visual decisions relate to the environment you document?

My use of bold geometries and strong colors is a necessary visual intervention and my way to provide order and clarity to the messy character of the void and objects that have been left behind. This formal discipline visually reclaims the space defined by abandonment. The bright color is a bold call to action. It violently breaks the optical invisibility of these gray, ignored places. The color makes the unseen material come to life, immediately recontextualizing the object. This intervention transforms the neglected space into a point of interest, yet the vibrant color scheme remains an utopian reflection—a visually intensified ideal—of the environment.

What role does color play in translating urban "vacuums" into a heightened visual language?

The idea behind the vivid, unusual color charts I use is the relationships between art and reality and how intricate and diverse or, on the contrary, simple and uniform they are. Rather than describing reality, I use color to translate the atmosphere, tension, or memory embedded in the absence of architecture. Having studied and constantly practiced color relations, contrasts, and transitions, my color choices recover these forgotten spaces and give them new visual and symbolic identity. The painting then turns emptiness into presence, silence into dialogue, and the unseen into the visible.

How do you hope viewers emotionally respond to these reimagined, often forgotten places?

The most intense feelings and experiences happen when you face the real thing. They may be very different for each person who sees them, which is a nice thing to start with. People who saw my prior exhibitions told me that they were drawn in by the paintings' size, color relations, and the way the shapes were simple and clear. The paintings captivated them, causing them to focus on each artwork and lose track of time and their surroundings; afterwards, they asked where the location was so they could visit the actual site. Some took pictures so that they can "compare" the painting with reality. Professionally, I believe any medium or action is a means of revealing hidden messages and connections embedded within a specific site—elements that exist yet often go unnoticed. Both artistic form and activity share the same intention: to initiate transformation within space, to raise questions, to open dialogue, and to deepen awareness of urban voids. Through this process, I aim to evoke an impression of participation—inviting viewers to sense their own involvement and to recognize these vacuums within their everyday surroundings.

You have exhibited internationally, including as a finalist at the YICCA Art Prize. How does visibility outside your own city influence the direction of your work?

I observed here two additional values in this context:
1. Acquiring additional knowledge and skills to guarantee that deadlines are met, professional material is submitted, and work is completed. Your artistic practice is characterized by a continuous cycle of communication and administration. Artists are no longer the sole category of artists. It is necessary for them to fulfill the duty of an artist by serving as an assistant, journalist, manager, or video creator to get things done.
2. Participating in or attending international events undoubtedly provides opportunities for valuable collaborations, connections with diverse cultures, and even the exploration of sites in various cities, including those abroad.

Eva Bodo | Cube | 2024

Zahira Barneto (b. Madrid, Spain) is a Spanish-American visual artist whose work explores spirituality, consciousness, and the unseen dimensions of existence. She studied Fine Arts at Universidad Complutense de Madrid and later expanded her practice while working as a successful production designer in film, both in Madrid and New York City.

After years immersed in visual storytelling, Zahira's creative path took a transformative turn through her study and practice of ceremonial and shamanic traditions across the Americas. Deeply influenced by her experiences with master plant medicine and ritual work, she began to receive powerful visions—images, frequencies, and forms that revealed a new way of painting. What followed was not a return to art, but a rebirth of purpose.

Her ongoing body of work, Frequencies, is a series of paintings that translate these energetic transmissions into matter—portals that hold the vibration of memory, spirit, and transformation. Each piece emerges through a slow, intuitive process using oil on canvas and watercolor sketches, bridging ancient techniques with visionary depth. Now based in Madrid, Zahira is developing new works, preparing for exhibitions, and accepting commissions. Through her art, she invites viewers to experience painting as medicine—a sacred encounter between the visible and invisible. Her work is held in private collections in Spain and the United States.

Project Statement

My paintings are offerings — transmissions received through ceremony and dialogue with the unseen. Rooted in the wisdom of master plants and guided by shamanic practice, my creative process is one of listening. Each work begins in ritual silence, where I open to frequencies that move through me — visions, colors, forms — and translate them onto canvas. I do not paint what I imagine; I paint what arrives.

Through this practice, I've come to understand art as an act of service — a bridge between spirit and matter. The Frequencies series emerged from this relationship with Great Spirit, as I began to perceive each image as a vibration: a pulse of energy seeking to take form. The paintings reveal themselves slowly, in layers, each brushstroke a conversation with what is unseen but deeply felt.

The result is not representation, but resonance — portals that hold the memory of what was received. I work primarily with oil and ancient tempera techniques, grounding the mystical in the material, allowing the sacred to meet the sensory.

These works are not mine to own; I am their messenger. Through them, I aim to share the quiet language of the invisible — to invite others into the space where energy becomes form, where silence hums with life, and where art remembers its original purpose: to connect us with Spirit.

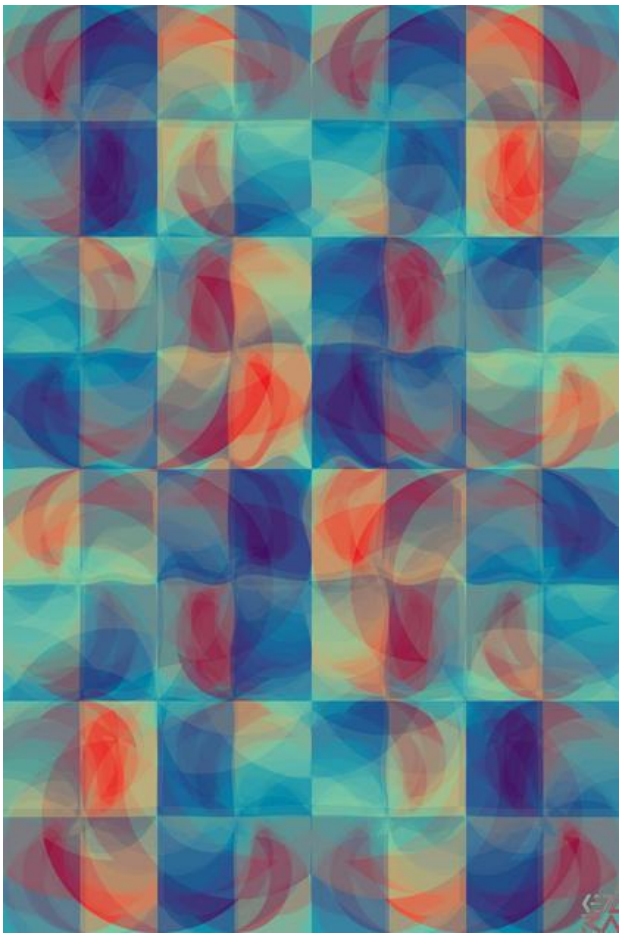
Zahira Barneto | The Game of Life | 2025

Zahira Barneto | The Womb | 2025

Interview

Ezra Lau

Your work merges digital precision with instinctive expression. How do you balance technical control with spontaneity in your creative process?



Ezra Lau | Decoy Koi | 2025

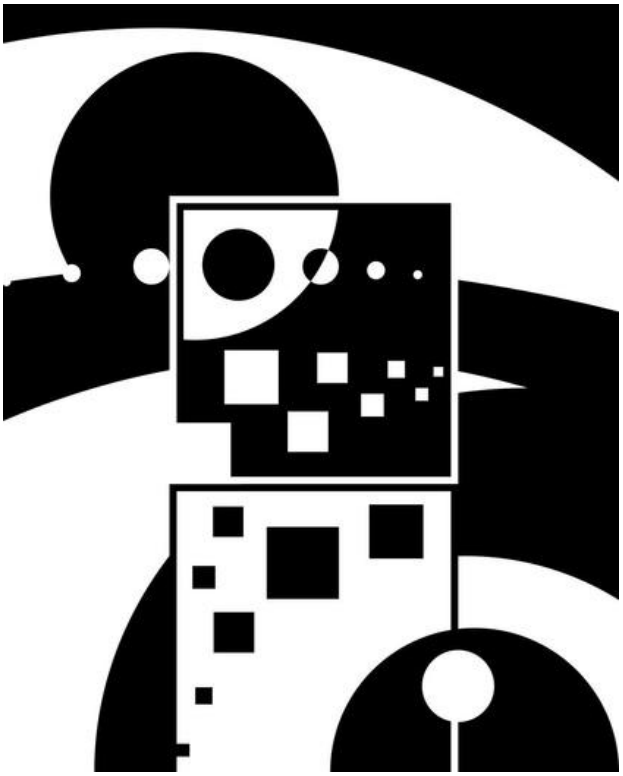
I find that the math and the ratios provide a nice framework to organize the infinite possibilities that the blank canvas represents. Once I've established a grid or some sort of structure, I like playing in the space that exists between the expected and the unanticipated. That playfulness is crucial as I iterate and experiment throughout the creative process.

The optical illusions in your pieces challenge our perception of depth and space. What draws you to explore this tension between perception and reality?

There is significant overlap of illusions with cognitive biases and the plethora of ways that our brains will lie to us, and I feel that the exploration of that concept in my art helps me maintain a healthy amount of skepticism in my personal life.

Coming from a background in video game development, how has that experience influenced your artistic language and approach to composition?

Video games are built with lines of code and geometry; individually simple elements, but when combined can provide the user a rich and



Ezra Lau | Eyes up | 2021

immersive alternate reality to dive into. I'm essentially doing the same thing when I'm creating my 2D compositions, applying design fundamentals to basic shapes to give the viewer an opportunity to stop and maybe discover a new way of looking at the world.

Many of your black-and-white works evoke a sense of rhythm and vibration, almost musical. Do you see any connection between your art and sound or movement?

This question tickles a bit of ironic humor for me, because I really didn't like being forced to practice the piano as a kid. That being said, I do think that that experience and exposure to music theory from a young age helped me develop an intuitive sense of balance and harmony that definitely influences my work.

In your artist statement, you mention philosophy and self-discovery. Could you share how these ideas manifest in your visual work?

Art is all about communication, and many of my pieces are a visual manifestation of conversations between my conscious and my subconscious. I'll be ruminating on some idea or situation that is too big or complex, so I'll break it down into basic shapes to represent my attempts at understanding.

Your pieces invite viewers to "question what lies beneath everyday illusions." What's one illusion about modern life that you personally find most interesting to deconstruct?

Capitalism, or rather "capitalist realism" would be the short answer, but in general questioning historical precedent is a recurring theme for me. I think that it's important to be committed to the search of truth, especially if it challenges existing biases.

How do you see the role of digital art evolving in the broader context of contemporary abstract art?

I would love to see more digital art installations and collaborations, particularly in the realm of motion graphics or projection mapping and especially on a monumental scale, like the Las Vegas Sphere. Immersive experiences in VR or other forms of interactive exhibits is something I think about, too.

Ezra Lau | How to slice sunlight | 2024

Oluwatobi Ogundunsin

Bloom of Consciousness beautifully explores emotional and psychological awakening. What inspired you to create this series?

I wanted to picture the quiet instant when an inner feeling becomes visible. The series grew from directing light and stillness so a small highlight could hold a large emotion. It is about presence, the moment awareness steadies itself.

How did you approach the idea of "consciousness" visually — what guided your choice of light, texture, and composition?

Oluwatobi Ogundunsin | Bloom of Consciousness

Light is selective and structural. I keep backgrounds deep and let a controlled highlight guide the eye. Texture stays tangible, including skin and fabric, while compositions are simple and deliberate, like a held pause.

The use of flowers and organic elements seems symbolic — what do they represent within the context of awakening and self-realisation?

They act as inner weather, tenderness, resilience, and memory. Placed close to the body, they make interior states tactile without fixing a single meaning.

You've mentioned Gordon Parks as an influence. What aspects of his storytelling resonate most with your own vision?

His balance of dignity and narrative clarity. The way he uses light to honour a subject while revealing context has shaped how I stage, conceal, and reveal.

As both photographer and founder of Bigrexvisuals, how do you navigate the line between art and visual communication?

I treat them as one practice with different tempos. Studio work evolves slowly to refine language, while client and editorial pieces communicate more directly. The constant is honest images that endure beyond the scroll.

Oluwatobi Ogundunsin | The Gele'S Grace

How has your cultural background shaped the way you see and represent identity in your work?

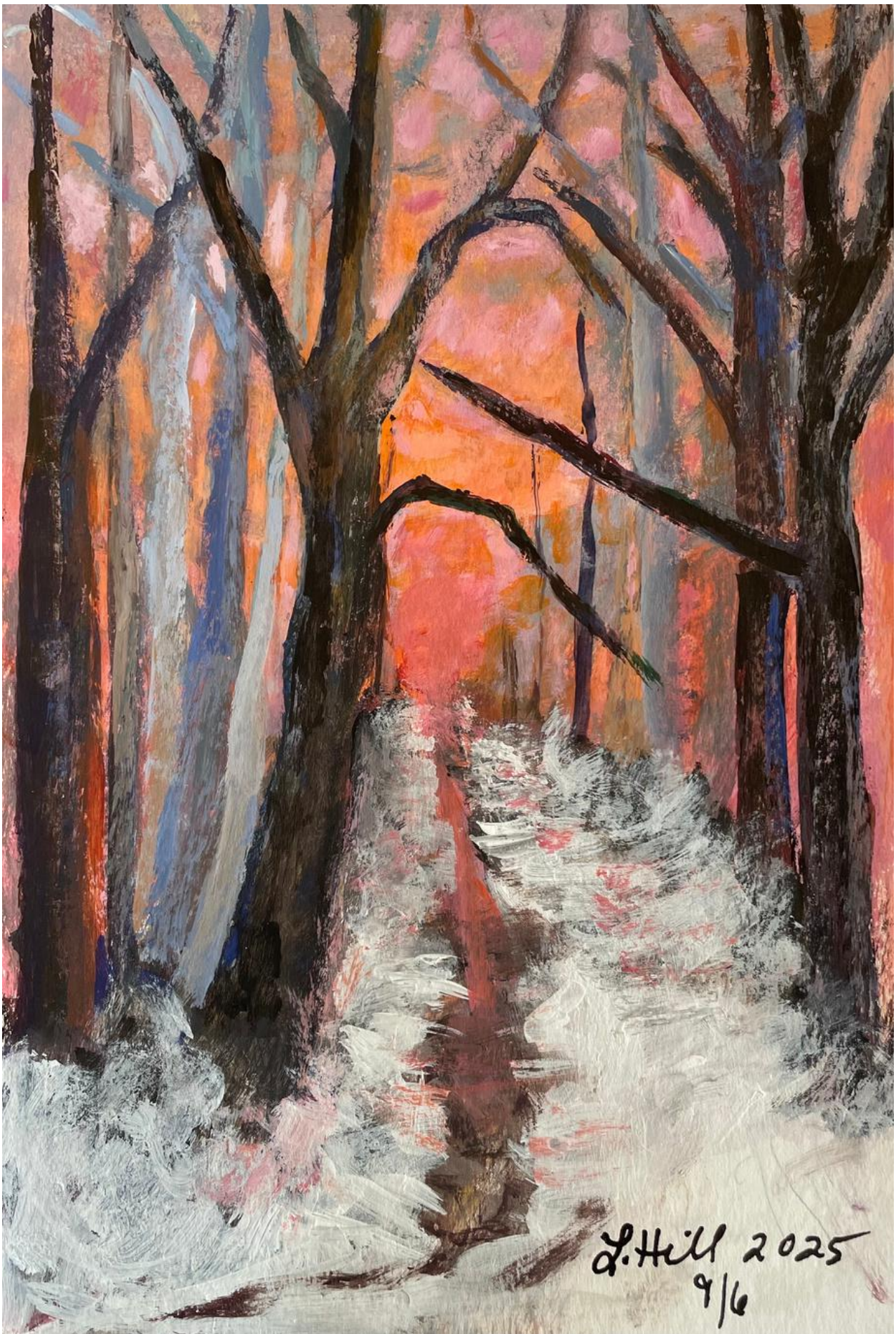
It gives me material and responsibility. I am careful with symbols, choosing precision over cliche, so identity reads as a present tense encounter and not an illustration of an idea.

What advice would you give to emerging photographers seeking to find their own visual voice?

Protect your point of view. Edit more than you shoot, light with intention, print your work, and make pictures only you could have made. Consistency is a craft choice, not a trend.

Laurel Hill
New artist, started with watercolor in 2023, and am now into acrylic. I am self taught.

Project Statement
To continue exploring art media.



Laurel Hill | Tranquility | 2025

Laurel Hill | Winter Warmth | 2025

Dmitriy Grechko

Moving to Israel was a major turning point for me. It was a challenging time — a new country, culture, language, closing my business in Ukraine, and trying to find myself again. It felt like a form of downshifting, a return to what truly matters. Each painting became a gaze from within, an attempt to understand who I am and express it through color and texture.

How did your background in economics and business influence your approach to being a professional artist today?

My background in economics and business serves me well as an artist because I already understand discipline, planning, and working with an audience. But I learned that art isn't about market and numbers - it's about moments of truth and freedom. Now I apply business-skills to support the process and logistics, while keeping the creative act open, honest and without limits.

What emotions did you experience when you first picked up the brush again after such a long break?

You mentioned that you rediscovered painting at the age of 34. Can you describe the turning point that made you return to art after so many years?

Dmitriy Grechko | Sea Of Umbrellas | 2023

Dmitriy Grechko | Spirit Of The Plains | 2023

It wasn't really "again" - it was the first time in a new way. I had been drawing since early childhood — with markers and pencils, even creating my own comics - but I picked up paints and a palette knife for the first time as an adult, after moving to Israel. A friend invited me to her art studio, and after that first class, I went straight to the store, bought all the materials, and began to experiment. It was a moment of deep inspiration and recognition - as if I had finally found my true language.

Living in Israel seems to have had a strong impact on your art. What aspects of this new environment inspired you the most?

Israel has had a huge influence on me. The light here is unique — it feels like it goes through you, making everything brighter and more honest. The contrast between sea and desert, noise and silence, old and new - it inspires me every day. But most of all, it's the people: open, emotional, and real. All of that has become part of my palette and my inner rhythm.

Your paintings often feature expressive faces and dynamic brushwork. What draws you to portraiture as your main subject?

I'm always drawn to the human face - it holds a whole universe of emotions, stories, and the silence between them. I'm not interested in perfect likeness; I care about capturing the inner impulse, the person.

Your style combines abstraction with realism. How did you develop this unique visual language?

This language developed naturally - as a reflection of how I perceive the world. Reality for me is always tied to emotion, and emotion is rarely clear or complete. Abstraction lets me express energy and movement, while realism gives it form and grounding. Together, they create that honest middle ground between what is seen and what is felt.

What does color mean to you? The blue and turquoise tones appear often in your works — do they carry a specific symbolism?

Color for me is not just a visual tool - it's a language of emotion. The blue and turquoise tones came naturally; in them, I feel depth, air, and space to breathe. These colors hold both calmness and movement, reflection and search.

Cristina Jantic is a writer, visual artist, and women's advocate whose work explores the quiet intersections between emotion, identity, and transformation. Moving fluidly between photography, digital art, and poetry, she creates visual narratives that give voice to the unseen and the unspoken.
Her art is known for its timeless quality, often captured in black-and-white or sepia tones that feel suspended between dream and memory. Through these still moments, she reveals stories of feminine strength, solitude, and rebirth. Each work reflects an inner dialogue between silence and expression, between the softness of vulnerability and the resilience of truth.
As a women's advocate, Cristina seeks to empower others to reconnect with their authenticity, creativity, and intuition. She uses art as a bridge, a way to transform emotion into awareness, and awareness into freedom. Through her projects, she invites women to slow down, listen inwardly, and rediscover the quiet power that lives within their own stories.

Project Statement
The "Unseen Flight" is a visual story about the woman who forgot herself.
Through generations, she was told who she should be, what she should feel, and how she should exist. Her voice was softened, her instincts muted. The strong ones, the intuitive ones, were called witches, burned for seeing beyond what was allowed. Yet even now, we still burn women silently, with judgment, stereotypes, and shame.
This project blends smoke and flight, symbols of dissolution and rebirth. The smoke carries the weight of everything repressed: emotion, desire, truth. The birds embody her release, the soul escaping confinement, remembering its wings.
Each image captures that invisible transformation, the reclaiming of space, body, and spirit.
Unseen Flight is about returning to oneself, to the primal truth that a woman was never meant to fit in a mold, but to create one of her own.

Cristina Jantic | The Fragile Flight

Cristina Jantic | The Smoke We Inherit

Michaela Chittenden

Michaela Chittenden | Bring Him Home | 2025

Your work revisits pivotal moments in American history. How do you choose which historical events to portray, and what draws you to them emotionally?

I've been known to be imaginative and constantly daydreaming, even in class. Many of my ideas came from the seat of my history classes. Learning history through dates and events was never enough for me, I always wanted to understand it through the eyes of the people who lived it. I wasn't interested in memorizing when a battle took place, I wanted to know how an old farmer felt before charging into the field or how a mother reacted when her son joined the rebel side. I'm drawn to eras where we're taught more about the politics and economics than the human cost. Creating these pieces helped me see history as more than a list of events, as lives and emotions.

Michaela Chittenden | Where Our Soul Was Born | 2025

You mention that your art explores how America remembers itself. What, in your view, is the biggest difference between memory and history?

Like any country, America understands its history through art. Music, literature, visual art, and now film and television shape how we remember our past, for better or worse. These creative reinterpretations are powerful because they reveal how we view ourselves and our ideals. Of course they often differ from reality and can even be harmful if we forget that difference. History is a record of facts, actions and reactions, but memory is where our humanity lies. What we choose to remember and what we choose to forget says as much about us as history itself.

Charcoal plays a central role in your practice. What do you find most powerful about working in this medium, especially when dealing with themes like war, tragedy, and hope?

Charcoal carries expressive weight with its dramatic contrasts and raw emotion. It's one of the oldest art materials, which gives it a timeless and almost ancestral quality. I love its versatility and the way its meaning changes depending on the technique. A pressed vine stick feels harsh and stubborn, while a softly blended surface conveys tenderness and reflection. That flexibility made it the perfect medium for my themes. In the Western piece, rough smudges create a rugged tone, in Lusitania, tight

Michaela Chittenden | When The West Was Wild | 2025

lines evoke dread, in the WWII drawing, soft blending suggests hope and resilience. It amazes me that one material, with different techniques, can express all kinds of human emotions.

Several of your drawings reimagine wartime imagery and propaganda. What inspired you to reinterpret these familiar symbols in a more intimate, human way?

When we learn about wars in school, they're often taught in a distant and impersonal manner. Numbers replace people, "400,000 dead" is told as a statistic instead of a tragedy. We forget the individual stories like the mothers who lost their boys, the wives who lost their loves and the children who grew up without fathers. Instead, we hear about economic recovery or military strategy. My goal was to rehumanize these histories and to turn familiar symbols and propaganda into something intimate and emotional. I wanted to tell the story not through generals or politicians, through the ordinary people who lived, suffered and endured. With this, I aimed to communicate the difference between national image and personal experience.

Your statement mentions the idea of "connection — between eras, people, and memory." Can you describe a moment in your work when this connection felt especially vivid or personal?

The moment that connection felt the most vivid was when I noticed a common thread of romanticization running through several pieces. The Wild West, the Roaring Twenties, the "noble" Fifties, all of these eras are remembered with longing, even by those who never lived them. They've been aestheticized time and time again in the media, and their hardships were overlooked by nostalgia. I wanted to confront that tension between beauty and truth, between the stories we tell about the past and the realities we overlook, poverty, lawlessness, racism and sexism. That realization made the work feel alive to me, because it showed how memory itself can distort history.

How do you approach research for each piece? Do you start with historical documents, photographs, or emotional intuition?

My research process changes with each idea. I start with an event I already know, then look beyond the textbook version. I read first-hand accounts like letters, diaries and personal belongings because I don't just want to know what happened, I want to know why it mattered. What were the social pressures, the fears and the hopes? Understanding those emotional and cultural contexts helps me translate history into something human and relatable.

As a student artist, how do you see your artistic voice evolving in the future? Are there other periods or cultural themes you hope to explore next?

Over the past few years, I've grown a lot as an artist from relying on references and creating simple portraits to creating full compositions without that dependence. I'm proud of that progress, but I still have so much to learn. Right now, I'm focusing on improving gesture and expression, since my figures can sometimes feel a bit stiff. I plan to continue exploring historical narrative drawing but expand beyond American themes. I plan to study East Asian, Medieval European and Middle Eastern art to understand how different cultures use art to tell their stories. Stepping outside my comfort zone is essential, growth only happens when we're willing to be uncomfortable.

Michaela Chittenden | The American Dream | 2024

Ma Yuelei

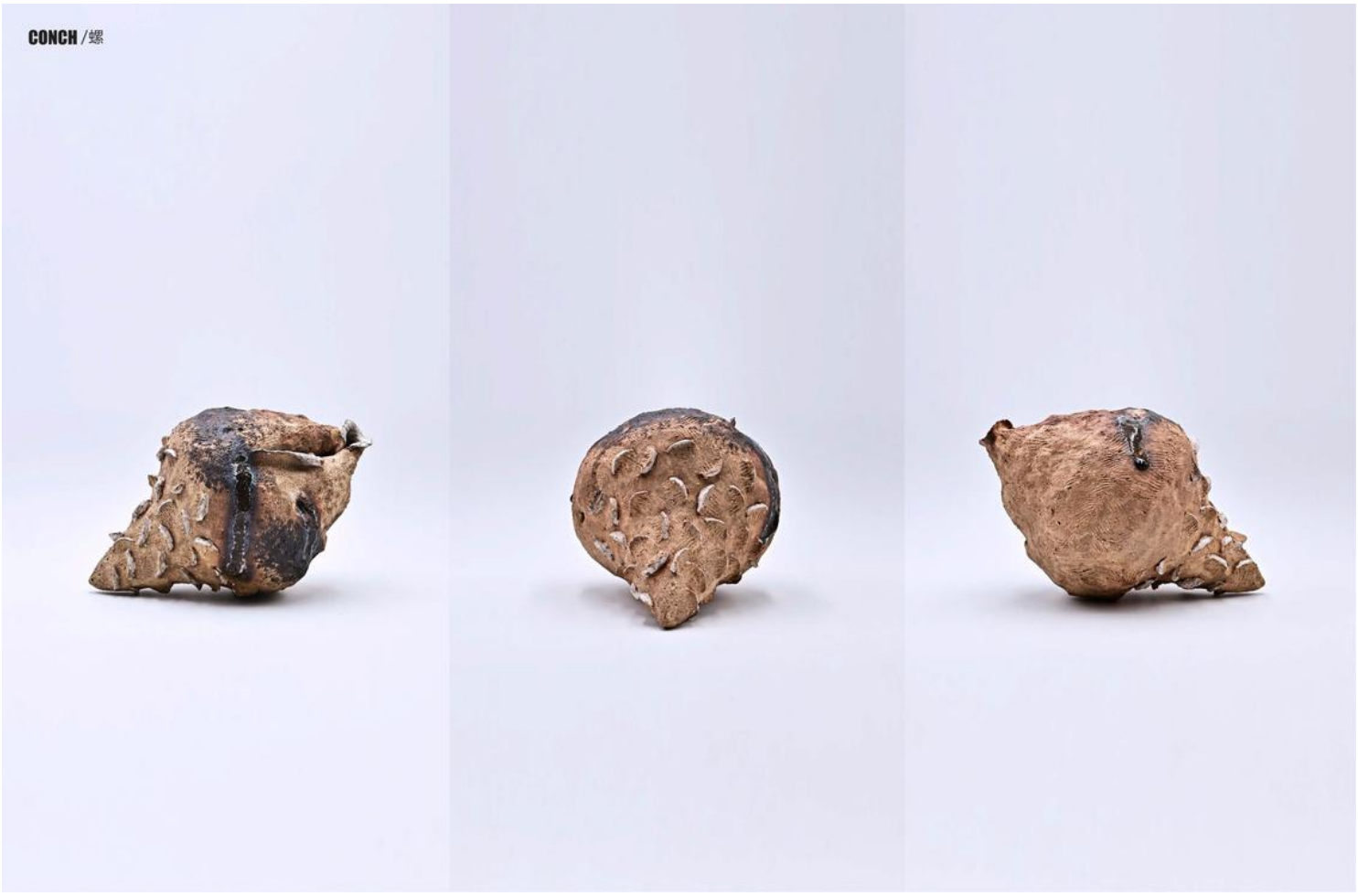
Wild Pottery and Sculpture Artist, **Ma Yuelei**, was born in 1978. As an artist without an art academy education or the guidance of professional teachers, entirely relied on own perception of life and the real world，and transitioned from worker to designer, to boss, and finally to artist. What behind each role change is means immense passion and extraordinary self-studying and creativity.

After more than 20 years of professional experience in interior design and project management, in 2021, began self-trained and learned handmade skills and knowledge of pottery, later traveled to Jingdezhen, China, Kyoto, Japan, and Seattle, USA, to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of pottery. After that, established a handmade pottery sculpture studio, STUDIO MOUNTAIN SEEKING in Shanghai, China. In 2024, moved to Zhuantang, Hangzhou, China, where the surrounding mountains are undulating, the natural ecology is lush, and the artistic atmosphere is strong.

Adhering to the creative philosophy of "Prostrating oneself on the earth, Coexisting with nature," the studio learns from mountains, rivers, and the wild ecosystem. Through continuous understanding of soil, texture, shaping, and inner vitality, it explores the interdependent and mutually influential relationships between humanity and the natural environment, living space, and the details of time of integration, contradiction, alienation, and care. The studio continuously explores ceramic art concepts and is committed to the creation and research of lifestyle aesthetics and contemporary art.

Ma Yuelei | Boat of Mountain Walking | 2025

CONCH /螺



Ma Yuelei | Conch | 2025

Ma Yuelei | Blooming | 2025

Interview

Chen Yuhao

Could you introduce yourself and share how you first became interested in photography?

I am a high school student living in Shenzhen, China, currently studying an A-level photography course and will be travelling to the UK in the future to further my undergraduate studies in photography. The story of my photography began when I was in primary school travelling with my family to Dali, Yunnan Province. My father stood on a rock and took a photo of a natural landscape, then made the image colourful by simply mixing the colours, which captivated me. I followed my father's example and took a photo from the same angle. After posting it on social media, my friends and classmates complimented me on it, and I developed the habit of taking photos as I went along. As I continued to grow, I began to focus on composition. In the last year of junior high school, I got my first DSLR camera, and since then I have more professional equipment, and gradually began to create more professional works. During this period I also shot a lot of humanities and urban themes. In the process, I also changed psychologically also from my initial interest to the major I chose for my final undergraduate degree. In my opinion, it is very enjoyable to be able to make what I love into a major or even a job in the future.

What is it like growing up in Shenzhen, a city that is changing so quickly?

Over the past forty years, Shenzhen has transformed from a small fishing village into a modern international city. Recently, Shenzhen also announced that it will host the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit in 2026. As someone who has grown up here, I feel both proud and excited about this. There is a well-known saying in Shenzhen:
“Time is money, and efficiency is life.”
The community where I live was one of the first areas to be developed in the city. I have personally witnessed the transformation of the nearby urban village—from demolition and redevelopment to the construction of new schools and commercial centers. This experience has shown me just how quickly the city changes.
In a city developing at such a fast pace, you can always see advanced technology, such as drone light shows featuring over 12000 drones, as well as many creative and trendy design elements throughout the city. Living in Shenzhen, you might find that the today’s street outside your home looks completely different from tomorrow. That is why this city can always capture the contrast between the old and the new.

How did your surroundings influence your decision to document urban life?

In my daily life, I have observed the contradictions of Shenzhen, the city where I live. These include the contrast between fast and slow, new and old, and the bustling CBD alongside the vibrant life of urban villages and old residential areas. All of this has given me the immediate impression that a city, in its process of change, is not only a carrier of memories but also a vessel for the emotional warmth of cultural transformation within collective memory. Photography, including my projects, serves as a bridge connecting these two aspects.

Your project explores urban villages and old residential areas. Why are these places important to you personally?

This is closely related to the environment in which I grew up. When I was a child, there was an urban village and a

shopping mall next to my house, and it can be said that these two places carried the memories of my childhood. At that time, I often went to the urban village with my small friends to play and eat. The neighbourhood of an urban village has a sense of kinship that cannot be expressed in words. Many shopkeepers have watched me grow up since I was a child, and until today when I go to their newly relocated shops, they can still recognise me and exchange pleasantries with me, and every time I do so, the images of the past are still fresh in my mind. At the same time, Shenzhen's urban villages are also home to many migrants who come to work and live in Shenzhen, and urban villages are like harbours for them. I think urban villages are like a microcosm of Shenzhen, although the buildings are very close together, they are also a reflection of countless people.
The inspiration for the old neighbourhood came from a chance walk through the city, when I walked in I found that it was like being isolated from the rest of the world, where I couldn't feel the fast pace of the past, and everything seemed to be on a slow speed. I saw the residents' clothes and quilts drying in the open air, and the air was full of the smell of sunshine, which was different from my usual home. I could see the old people gathering together to play chess and chatting, everything was very leisurely, which gave me a great feeling. With the passage of time, the city's development needs will certainly be the old things slowly demolished, so as to usher in new things, in the future someday these old neighbourhoods may also be demolished, but this for many people is also their memory carrier.

Can you tell us more about the idea behind using double exposure in this series? What do the layers represent?

The superposition of double exposures actually represents the spatial and temporal section of the city, and as the 'unfinished characteristics' of photography are constantly superimposed like memories, each layer corresponds to a specific spatial and temporal dimension, and the superposition symbolises that 'change is not a replacement, but a continuation'. The layering of double exposures in this process reflects the dual attributes of space and humanity in the city, one layer is the physical space, while the other layer is the traces of human beings, which also expresses the core concept of my project: the city has a temperature because of its memories.

How do you see the connection between personal memories and the transformation of the city?

For my opinion, personal memories are peripatetic and this includes many fragmented moments. On the other hand the history of city change is grand. The connection between the two is that personal memory and urban change shape and influence each other, with city change providing the impetus and context for memory, and personal memory injecting emotion and warmth into cold urban change.

Are there any photographers, films, or visual styles that inspire your work?

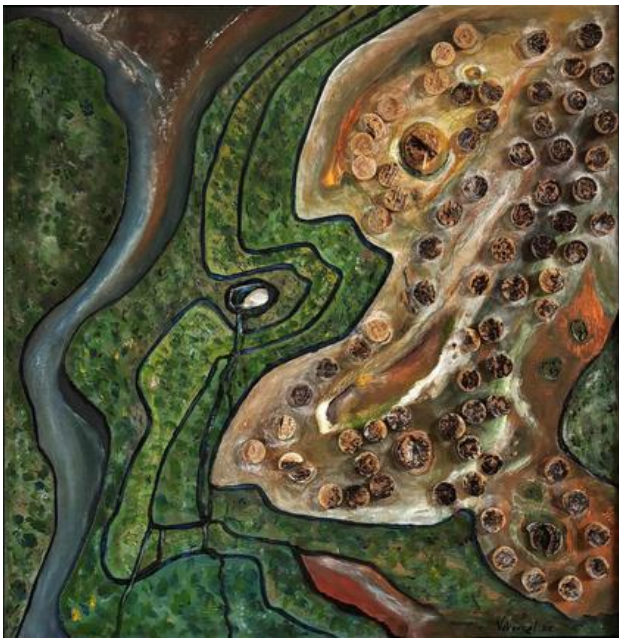
The artist I chose to research for my A- Level studies was Fan Ho, a famous Hong Kong photographer, whose photographs document Hong Kong's street life and city light, which was a very important learning experience for me in observing the things around me and the themes.

— *Interview*

Martín Valcárcel Ruíz

You are both an architect and a self-taught painter. How did these two creative paths begin to intersect in your life?

Although both disciplines are creative, painting appeals to me because it allows me to find absolute freedom, a connection with a metaphysical plane, an independence free from the parameters, calculations, and variables that are necessary in architecture;



therefore, painting allows me to find a creative process without restrictions.

Architecture requires precision, while painting often allows more emotional freedom. How do you balance these two approaches in your work?

Both disciplines share a common thread in their compositional spirit: the pursuit of creating something new makes their paths closely intertwined. My academic background provides me with the vision and the perfect tools to find harmony with painting, a practice that is deeply intimate and personal.

Sustainability plays an important role in your practice. How did you first decide to work with reused cardboard and layered textures?

Yes, sustainability and environmental protection should concern everyone—from governments to individuals. It can start with something as simple as recycling, which I learned about during my master's degree in environmental management. A few years ago, I noticed my students finishing their university term and throwing their models into the trash. I realized that this material, which essentially comes from trees, was being wasted. Repurposing it seemed like an interesting challenge—to see what new things could be created from it.

When you create a piece, do you start with a clear visual idea, or does the painting evolve more intuitively during the process?

It is an intuitive process, just a general idea from which everything flows. The forms may be organic, evoking the call of nature, or of a more artificial kind.

Some of your paintings seem to “come alive” - full of movement and mysterious figures. Do you see stories or characters emerging while you paint?

Yes, absolutely, the stories and protagonists are important and necessary in a work; it’s about finding the door that brings them to life and defines them. The story can sometimes be imperceptible to the eyes, but it’s there if you choose to look at what is hidden.

You mentioned that nature “guides you” in your creative process. Can you describe a moment when this connection felt especially strong?

When i work with layered textures, their undulating and ascending forms allow me to find that connection with nature by visualizing landscapes imbued with their own numen. There, the clues begin to appear, opening the door to the creative stage.

Looking ahead, how do you see your artistic journey evolving? Are there new concepts or materials you would like to explore?

I will definitely continue with cardboard works, but I also have another style that is more architectural; I like exploring geometric abstraction. There I use mixed techniques, I do the volumetric drawing, paint it, and then apply photographic filters to achieve a more science fiction-like atmosphere.

My name is **Kristina Tim**, I am 33 years old. I come from the southernmost and most charming city in Russia — Sochi. I moved here from the hot and harsh Siberia, which inspired me to start creating art. I began painting in 2025. Previously, I worked as a flight attendant and conquered the skies, but now I am fully immersed in creating paintings.

Artist Statement

Through my works, I strive to convey a feminine projection of the world — the emotion and perception that exist within every woman.

Kristina Tim | In the Rays of Spotlights | 2025

Kristina Tim | She is a Mystery | 2025

Brenna Tomas

Your artistic and academic background spans art, education, and community work. How do these different fields inform your creative practice today?

I could be described as non-traditional, eccentric, or unconventional, traits that stem from a kind of rebellion against my upbringing in a small town and within a nuclear family structure. Because I understand both ends of that spectrum, my practice is simultaneously chaotic and meticulous. I am constantly interpreting the world against an idealized version of "normal", a concept that has come to feel synonymous with comfort, perfection, and balance. I critique this ideal through my process and thematic focus in my large-scale pieces.
I explore themes rooted in art history, education, and community by interrogating what we've come to accept as conventional. This includes questioning traditional imagery from the canon, examining ethical and philosophical norms, critiquing research methods in educational systems, and exploring the psychological dimensions of human experience. I work primarily with acrylic washes, intentionally leaving visible brushstrokes as a way to emphasize human presence and embrace imperfection. I incorporate found imagery and textures from photography to create tension between the old and the new, drawing attention to the interplay between authenticity and modernity. My studio practice is a way of exploring the authority of the "objective few" versus the lived experience of the collective. "Normal," it seems, is a concept many strive toward, yet one that is persistently out of reach. My work is a space to find comfort in the unusual and challenge the notion of what is now considered the "new normal."

Brenna Tomas | Modern School Of Thought

The exhibition to (re)cognize explores how history and media shape our perceptions of identity and power. What inspired you to begin this particular investigation?

This investigation began during a period when I was personally struggling to adapt to a new version of "normal", throughout and after the pandemic. It felt as though we had all been asked to give up a part of ourselves, and in doing so, many of us were pushed far beyond any sense of comfort or familiarity. During that time, I began to question the foundations of my identity and to examine who, or what, held power over it.
That questioning led to a deeper engagement with perception and cognition. I began to re-examine the systems and stories around me, shifting my artistic focus from purely aesthetic concerns to prioritizing personal meaning and communication. It was a time of loss and redefinition, and the only way forward was to rebuild understanding from the inside out.

Many of your works reimagine classical imagery through a contemporary feminist lens. How do you approach this dialogue between tradition and critique?

I approach this dialogue by using my background in art history and critical theory to reinterpret classical imagery through the lens of my own lived experience, one that is undeniably modern and feminist. This lens isn't something I

Brenna Tomas | Paradise Reconsidered

apply externally; it's intrinsic to how I see the world. My work questions the visual and cultural conventions we often take for granted—particularly those that have historically excluded or misrepresented marginalized identities.
I challenge traditional narratives by layering contemporary imagery over familiar historical compositions, inserting alternative perspectives and voices. I've studied how individuals internalize collective narratives and how systems shape those perceptions. My work uses these investigations to both critique and expand the visual languages we've inherited.

You describe art as a "means of inquiry." Could you elaborate on how the process of creating helps you understand human experience?

Absolutely. I believe art is a way of asking questions that don't have clear answers. Throughout my life, moments of insight, however small, have triggered meaningful change. My practice helps me understand not only my own human experience but also how I fit into the broader fabric of collective life.
I often begin with found imagery, photographs, magazines, printed materials, and build visual correlations between them as I work. This method allows me to move intuitively, uncovering patterns, themes, and contradictions. These discoveries teach me about myself, but also about how we, as a society, interact with ideas. By engaging with shared symbols and narratives, my work creates space to meditate on collective memory, group behavior, and modern frameworks for thinking and learning.

How has your experience as a mother influenced your understanding of resilience and identity in your art?

Motherhood has taught me to embrace the mess; mistakes, marks, imperfections, as essential parts of both art and life. My practice reflects that ethos. I've learned to find beauty in what's incomplete or chaotic, because it's often those elements that make something feel real and whole.
Motherhood demands constant adaptation. It's filled with uncertainty, emotion, and transformation. In raising children, I've had to learn how to stay grounded amidst flux—and how to see each moment, even the difficult ones, as contributing to something larger and more meaningful. It's shown me how identity is shaped not just by what we choose, but also by how we respond to change. That sense of resilience, of building something meaningful out of disarray, infuses my work.

Your practice blends written and visual languages. What role does writing play in your creative process?

Writing is essential to how I process meaning. My visual work can often be ambiguous, open to a range of interpretations based on the viewer's perspective. Writing helps me articulate the personal reasoning behind certain choices, but I also use it as a way to expand and complicate meaning, not limit it.
I'm interested in the moment where visual language disrupts what has been expected or written. Sometimes, a small shift in perception can trigger an entirely new way of seeing. My writing is a way to navigate those shifts, to explore how our understanding is shaped by language, and how easily it can be reoriented. I accept that miscommunication is part of being human, and I see both visual and written language as opportunities to engage with that tension.

What artistic or literary influences have shaped your current practice?

My work is grounded in classical art history, but I use found imagery to recontextualize it, layering older visual traditions with modern perspectives to create new semiotic readings. I'm particularly influenced by artists like Penny Slinger, whose embodied collage work helped me understand how to use the female experience as both subject and lens.
Theoretically, Walter Benjamin's The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction shapes my thinking around authenticity, reproduction, and cultural value. Roland Barthes' On Interpretation and Jean Baudrillard's theories also inform how I engage with meaning, representation, and simulation in my compositions.
On a more contemporary note, the work of Chuck Klosterman reminds me that humour, irony, and pop culture can be powerful tools for understanding human behaviour. His writing helps me think critically, but accessibly, about how people engage with big ideas in everyday life.

Brenna Tomas | Off With His Head

Natalia Lukomskaya

Natalia Lukomskaya | The River of Life

How did your path in art begin, and what inspired you to create the project "About the Girl"?

My journey as an artist began with deep inner work. I was searching for a way to truly hear myself, to understand who I am and what genuinely resonates within me. Painting became a space where I could speak honestly—without filters or masks—and express myself exactly as I wished.

Natalia Lukomskaya | The Breath of Autumn

My artistic direction is what I call the “Art of Open Heart” — a philosophy and art movement that helps people look within themselves through images, paintings, and meanings. It’s about finding answers inside. That’s what makes my work unique. I don’t just aim to evoke an emotional response from viewers—when they come, say “Wow!” or “That’s beautiful,” feel touched or even cry. What matters to me is when they go beyond that, when they live through the experience and then move to the next stage—reflecting on why they felt what they did and discovering something meaningful within themselves.

The “About the Girl” series, of course, isn’t literally about a girl—it’s about me. Initially, it wasn’t a project meant for exhibition; I painted it for and about myself.

At that time, I was deeply immersed in studying Eric Berne’s Transactional Analysis—Parent, Adult, and Child. I realized that my inner child was suffering, and for me, the “About the Girl” series became a way to reach out and listen to him. The child state within us is responsible for joy, creativity, dreams—for a vivid perception of life, for feeling and savoring it. And it’s scientifically proven that in 96% of adults, the balance of these states is disrupted—they tend to underestimate the importance of their inner child.

This was my path toward transformation and acceptance of my inner child. But it turned out

that these paintings resonated with other people too: through them, they reconnect with their own inner child and go through their own transformations.
The path to oneself is a deeply individual journey, so the series intentionally has no rigid structure. Only two works have a clearly defined place. The first one, “Self-Worth,” marks the beginning—the foundation, the crucial realization that I exist in this world, I am alive, and simply by living, I already have value. From that understanding, everything else begins. The last painting, “Transition” concludes the exhibition. It’s not an ending or a point—it’s a transition, the place where we move to the next level, and everything begins anew.

You mention that art, psychology, and philosophy are interconnected in your work. How do these fields come together in your creative process?

My creation is an intertwining of philosophy and Art. Psychology stands close to philosophy — they’re so connected that people sometimes confuse the two. For me, these concepts are inseparable. Art is my language, and philosophy is the depth through which I understand inner processes.
Psychology examines these processes in detail, while philosophy is a reflection on the meaning of life.
When I create, I don’t just paint an “image.” I explore a state of being and ask myself: What do I feel? Why do I need this? What is it connected to?
In this way, each image becomes not merely visual but symbolic and multilayered.
It is precisely philosophy that helps me look inward and make sense of things — to seek answers for myself.
From this connection was born the direction I call “The Art of the Open Heart” — a space for an honest conversation with oneself through creativity.
My paintings, projects, and workshops are not about technique; they are about allowing a person to come into contact with their true self.
And everyone who engages with this art perceives something of their own in it — because deep meanings are always universal.

The series contains 52 works. Why 52? Does this number have a special significance?

Yes, of course — for me, it’s not a random number. When I decided that I would create a series, it was important to me that it had a sense of a cycle. The entire series is about awareness and meaning. At that point, I already had 28 paintings, and I started thinking about what else could represent a complete cycle. And of course, for every person living on this planet, a year is a cycle. A year is that period during which everything happens — we live through it, and then the next turn begins. There are 52 weeks in a year.
In the series “About the Girl”, there are 52 works: our world develops cyclically, and in 52 weeks the Earth travels around the Sun — each time we face new challenges and experiences at a different level.
I created the “About the Girl” series, first and foremost, for myself. The focus was on my inner world and on me — and that’s why it resonated with others. There was an interesting moment when I had painted around 42 works and felt that I had run out of ideas, that I couldn’t come up with anything new. But then, quite miraculously, new paintings were born — ones that became some of the key pieces of the project: “Parents,” “Intuition and Choice,” and “My Home” appeared when I thought the series was already finished. After completing the series, I believe that an artist should not stop their creative flow — if images of the girl keep coming,

Natalia Lukomskaya | The Bird of Life

I paint them. And if they stop, then I will stop. I don't have a strict understanding that the series is finished and that I will no longer work in this direction. If new images come, there will be new paintings.
The "About the Girl" series is a choice of a conscious path — a journey of self-discovery and reconnection with one's inner child. There's a metaphor that an artist is a vessel: by working through personal and collective experiences, they transpose them onto the canvas, offering others the opportunity to see things from a new perspective.

Could you describe how you choose the themes for each painting?

Yes, that's the most common question people ask: How do your images come to life? But the answer is rather vague, because some images appear in the very process of painting. Some paintings seem to create themselves. Or, for example, a certain phrase or image touches something inside me, and I live with it for a month or two — and only then does a painting emerge. So, there's no clear answer to how it happens.
But if you think about it, first and foremost, it's always a creative flow. Sometimes the paints dictate, sometimes the canvas, sometimes the image itself. Sometimes it's a phrase that catches me, and a painting is born right there. The first thing is always the impulse.
In the "About the Girl" series, each story is not only about me but also about that part within everyone who searches, feels, and learns to be themselves.
I am part of this world. I'm not that unique or special. That's why my thoughts, ideas, and emotions often resonate with others — because, in truth, we're moved by many of the same things, and we reflect on similar feelings.
If a theme resonates deeply with me, it will most likely resonate with others too. It's important for me to remain honest and sensitive — first of all, with myself.

Natalia Lukomskaya | The Light of the Ancestry

Many of your works seem to lead viewers toward self-discovery and inner harmony. What role does self-knowledge play in your art?

Self-knowledge plays a primary role not only in my art, but in my life as a whole.
For me, the human journey is a constant search for meaning, awareness, and understanding. Why does this happen? Why do I act this way? Why is the world the way it is and not otherwise? Why do I find myself in certain situations? What are these situations meant to teach me? I always ask myself these questions.
I believe that art must be thoughtful. It should make a person not only say, "Ah, how beautiful!" or feel emotions, but also reach deep inner realizations. Perhaps this is the true responsibility of every artist — to consider what the viewer will take with them after encountering their art.

In just five years, you reached an international level and became a member of the Japan Illustrators Association. What steps were most important on this journey?

Yes, at the moment my path in art has already been going on for seven years.
The main turning point was the realization that an artist cannot exist only for himself — an artist always creates for the viewer, and a viewer is essential.
If the world created an artist to create, it did not do so for them to hide what has been given to them.
And in fact, this is not only about artists — it applies to every person.

Natalia Lukomskaya | The Dance of Peace

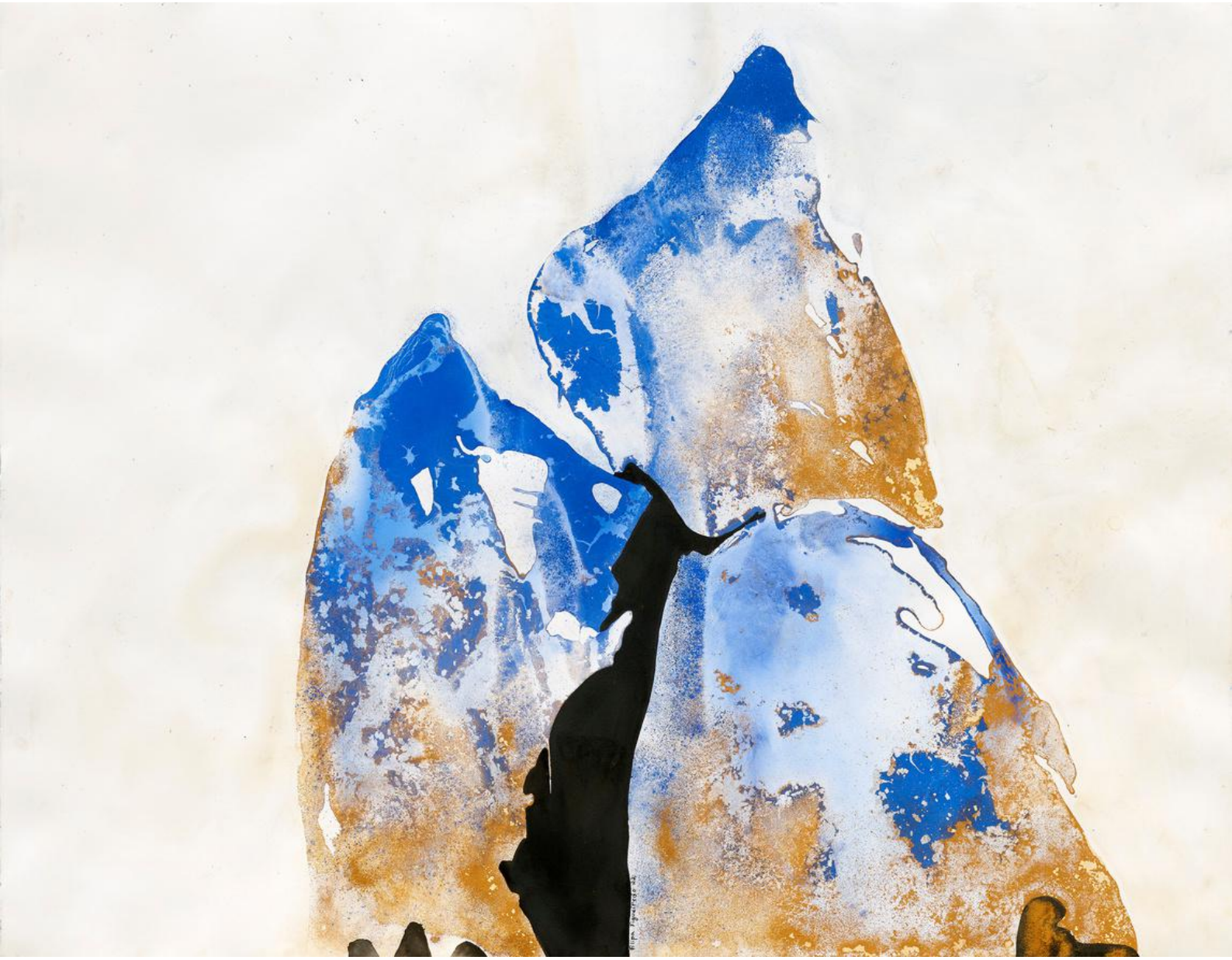
The most important step was, first of all, choosing myself — allowing myself to create in a way that is not accepted or expected within the traditional art community.
At that time, I faced a lot of negative feedback from art critics and gallerists who said that what I was creating was not art.
Then came participation in competitions, including international ones.
In 2020–2021, I took part in an international competition organized by the Japan Illustrators' Association and won third place, which led to my acceptance into the Association.

What advice would you give to emerging artists seeking to connect their inner world with their creative work?

The advice I would give, in general, to all artists is to try not to compare themselves to others, but to look for answers within themselves. What am I? What is truly mine? What resonates with me? When an artist deeply lives through what they create, the viewer feels it — and it never goes unnoticed.
Many contemporary artists and gallerists say that one must search for a new style, invent something original, stir emotions. But if an artist doesn't aim to provoke emotions or chase a new style, and simply allows themselves to be... then, most likely, that's exactly when they will create their own unique style — one unlike any other.
And later, the right audience will come — those who will genuinely connect and empathize with what the artist creates.

Filipa Figueiredo is a portuguese artist, from Porto. All her series of paintings have been developed using natural pigments made by her and brought from the most diverse places in the world. All series of paintings are large. These paintings allude to atmospheres and impressions of places, trying to capture and refer to silence and all its connotations and associated sensations. In recent years she has had several solo exhibitions in various locations of the world like South Korea, Peru, Brazil and now she is participating in the Intercontinental Bienale (Argentina, Brazil, Panama and Puerto Rico). Recently, she is presenting a solo exhibition in a gallery in Sweden and in a Museum, in Coimbra, Portugal.

Artist Statement
Her work is characterized by the use of natural pigments. She learned how to make natural pigments in 2009 when she went to India to learn and develop the technique of ancient paintings "Pata-Chitras", through the Jagannath Vedic Reserch Center in Puri. Here she sharpens his interest in natural pigments and learns from her master/teacher to develop them step by step. Enthusiastic about the context, she starts a research work on these paintings that extends to the cities of Bhubaneswar and Kolkata. She would only start using natural pigments in her works in 2019, 10 years after learning how to make them.
In recent years, all her series of paintings have been developed using natural pigments made by her and brought from the most diverse places in the world. Japanese ink is another material that is often present in his graphic compositions. The support of the paintings is usually engraving paper in large formats. The series of paintings are allusive to atmospheres and impressions of places, trying to capture and refer to silence and all its associated connotations and sensations. All of them include concepts such as amplitude, observation and repetition of the pause.




Filipa Figueiredo 25

— *Interview*

Olga Berezhnova

You mentioned that working in a theatre workshop influenced your approach to form and theatricality. Could you share how this experience continues to manifest in your paintings?

It influenced me greatly! This experience had a very significant impact on my artistic language. I often use decorative elements, fabrics, and lace in my paintings. Through fabrics, I aim to convey volume and intricate, complex patterns. The outfits of my characters sometimes seem to come from a "grotesque fairy tale" or a theatrical performance; they are often both distinctly "Russian" and highly stylish — as if taken from a magazine cover.

Your works are rich in symbolism — apples, hens, and red tones appear repeatedly. How did these motifs first emerge, and what do they mean to you personally?

To convey the true meaning and psychological intent, I often use these symbols. They were born from my childhood, from life in the village, where I spent a lot of time observing nature. Each painting carries its own mood, and through my symbols I metaphorically express the essence of the idea — sometimes it is something bright and kind, but sometimes it reveals the opposite, the shadow side. I show irony and many of the unpleasant traits that exist in human nature. Apples become a symbol of resilience and the ability to endure under any circumstances. Hens and roosters serve as metaphors for independence, attentiveness, leadership, and inner strength.

The female figure is central to your compositions. How do you see the relationship between women, strength, and vulnerability in your art?

I have an enormous life experience, and everything I have achieved, I've achieved on my own. I also know

many women and girls who demonstrate their strength — not only physical but also inner strength — while still remaining feminine and taking care of themselves, which is truly inspiring. The connection lies exactly in that: the ability to combine everything within oneself.
There are women who raise children on their own and still remain gentle and graceful on the outside, yet possess immense strength inside. How can one not be proud of that and not be inspired by it? I am inspired by women — they are multifaceted, they can do anything!

You often combine humor and kindness with introspection. How do you achieve this emotional balance in your visual storytelling?

I have excellent intuition — I can feel what's right and know how to do it without overdoing it. There are also psychological techniques that help maintain this balance. It all comes with experience.

The tactile and playful use of materials, like mirrors or relief elements, adds dimension to your work. How do you decide which materials to include?

Something draws and fascinates me, while other things don't. I like working with complex materials, but I don't like to overcomplicate things — I often think about how to simplify the technique and achieve an effortless execution that still looks intricate. I also want my paintings to feel alive through their volume, so that people not only look at them but also want to touch them.
With the mirrors, it's more about creating an interactive object that engages directly with the viewer.

In today's world, where art is often digital and fast, your work feels deeply handmade and personal. How important is this human touch for you?

Very important! The main thing is the energy present in each of my paintings — and mine is truly powerful! I'm a very emotional and lively person, and people often tell me they feel an incredible burst of energy from my works. I really do pour myself into each piece — that's how much I love what I do and how deeply I immerse myself every time.

You've created over 350 works in recent years — an impressive number. How do you sustain creative energy and inspiration?

I'm 37 now, and I spent a long time searching for my calling — but I always found myself coming back to drawing. Then I realized: this is it, my dream work. Now I feel like I'm starving for it — I grab every opportunity, take on everything, and work a lot as if I'm making up for lost time. That's what my body and mind are asking for, and I simply listen. When it's time to slow down, I'll know. But for now — full speed ahead!

Lucretia Torva

I am so grateful to have grown up in Europe. My mother made sure we traveled extensively, and we visited some of the greatest museums and architecture in Western art. Experiencing art in person is the only way to grasp the vision and value of the work. Especially in France, people respect culture and history. It is common for people to have knowledge of all the arts. This fact definitely set the stage for my love of art and it's history.
Arizona offers an interesting contrast. Everything is much newer and the desert is sparse and unforgiving, yet beautiful. For me, contrast is poignant and it reveals truths that are not noticed without the clash of ideas and places.

You've lived in Phoenix for over 25 years but grew up in Scotland and France — how have these different environments shaped your artistic perspective?

Lucretia Torva | Lining Up Nicely | 2018

What first drew you to painting as your main form of creative expression?

Drawing certainly came first. I had to learn to draw before painting. I feel my interest in painting came from seeing so many great paintings at an early age. I was around seven years old when we visited the Louvre Museum. I stood transfixed in front of "The Raft of the Medusa" by Théodore Géricault; the physical and emotional depth, the incredibly skilled painting technique, the storytelling and gigantice size. I felt I wanted to do something like it someday. It was very powerful. I was also drawn to the idea that from a distance, a painting could look like a scene or a real object, yet, up close, the brush marks were visible and it became nothing but lines, shapes and colors. It is magic.

Your works often feature stunning reflective surfaces. What sparked your fascination with reflections and

Lucretia Torva | Deep Light | 2025

refractions?

I have always been captivated by artists' renditions of our "reality". Renee Magritte's famous "The Treachery of Images" (the pipe with a statement that this is not a pipe) is brilliant and made me laugh when I first saw it. Our reality is based on consensus. Why shouldn't we play with it and question it? I love the bending of patterns in folded fabric and it was natural for me to gravitate to reflections. A reflection is a distorted view of "reality", which is open to interpretation anyway.

You work on both murals and traditional canvases — how does scale influence your process and what you want the viewer to feel?

I have been painting large paintings for a long time, well before painting murals regularly. Large paintings command and activate a space. They are difficult to ignore. I think the intrusive nature of a large painting is a good thing. Most people need a boost to get out of their every day routine. It was an obvious choice for me to be a mural painter. The activation of a large space and therefore a community is satisfying. To have hundreds of people get a glimpse of a colorful image in their everyday life makes me feel successful, makes me feel as if I make a difference in the world. Showing art in a gallery is great. Showing art on a street is a different version of great.

The highly polished surfaces in your paintings reveal hidden details and even self-portraits. What role does the presence of the artist — literally reflected — play in your work?

It is important for me to create art that keeps on giving, that cannot be seen all at once. Lots of us are naturally attracted to "shiny things" and I wonder why that is? Some viewers try to decipher the reflections, as if they are a puzzle. Some just marvel at the shiny look. My reflection is usually well hidden simply because of the distortion, yet, it's possible to figure it out. The amusing aspect of my reflection is that it can be very skewed. It seems to be a source of contemplation as well as entertainment for some viewers to investigate the reflections. The rumor is that all art is autobiographical, therefore it is fitting if I literally appear somewhere in my art.

You've mentioned wanting viewers to feel both grounded and slightly unmoored. What emotions or thoughts do you hope they carry away after experiencing your paintings?

I find that many people are attracted to realistic painting. It substantiates their view of the world. Viewers often have one of two reactions to my work that excite me. Some people can't believe it's a painting. I receive questions about how I do it. Do I use chrome paint? Is it hard? How long does it take? The other reaction is how, from a distance, it looks like a photograph, yet up close, the brush marks are visible and it becomes a painting. Both of these reactions are questions about reality and the nature of art itself. I always want people to be entertained and even uplifted when they enjoy my work. When they walk away with some uncertainty about reality or what is possible, that's a bonus!

If you could paint a reflection anywhere in the world — any landscape, any city — what place would you choose next, and why?

The answer has to be Paris. I spent a semester abroad there and Paris symbolizes the epitome of artistic creation and exhibition. From my early encounter at the Louvre to Manet as a bridge between then and now and then the concept of a Salon des Refusés. It would be the honor of a lifetime to paint a mural of a reflective subject on a very public Parisian wall!

Lucretia Torva | Bunny Distortions | 2017

Inessa Garder

Inessa Garder | Self-portrait Painting Nohkalikai | 2021

What first drew you to Meghalaya and inspired you to begin this project?

In 2021, I travelled to the North-East of India — to Meghalaya, the "Abode of Clouds." The journey began through serendipity, as they usually do in India. A fellow traveller I met in Rishikesh noticed that I often painted water and suggested I visit Meghalaya. When I looked up images of the place — mountains touching clouds, turquoise rivers running through deep valleys

Inessa Garder | Nongsawlia | 2021

— the decision was instant. I knew I had to go. In Meghalaya I stayed with a Khasi family in a 150-year-old house built by Welsh missionaries. I simply knocked on the most beautiful house on the hill, showed them my sketchbook, and said I wished to paint the beauty of their land. They welcomed me to their house, and I stayed for almost a month. Almost every day I tied a folder of paper to my backpack, rode my motorbike through winding roads, and painted from life — the slopes, waterfalls, and valleys where India meets Bangladesh.

How did your architectural background influence the way you perceived and depicted these landscapes?

Architecture taught me to approach painting as a project — to organize my work, think in series, and build a coherent visual language and statement. In architecture, I often worked on large international projects involving up to two hundred people, so I learned how to communicate across cultures and make things happen from the ground up. That experience gave me the confidence to simply knock on a door in a remote Khasi village, speak to the family, and create an artist residency for myself there. There are no art residencies in Meghalaya, and yet I had one - because I'm an architect, I guess.

You mentioned living with a Khasi family — how did that experience shape your understanding of the land and its people?

Inessa Garder | Nohkalikai | 2021

The Khasi people are among the kindest and most open-hearted I've ever met. Their connection to the land is deep and spiritual. Sometimes they guided me to hidden waterfalls — we would descend thousands of steps together, and they would wait patiently while I painted. They showed me the living root bridges — the miracle of Meghalaya, unique to this land. One of my works, Nongsawlia Village, became a gift to the head of the family — a 90-year-old grandmother named Ivory (in Khasi culture, society is matrilineal, and women are traditionally the heads of households). She was a deeply spiritual woman of Presbyterian faith, who prayed often and radiated quiet strength. When I presented her with the painting, she blessed me and my art. They hung the piece in their living room that same day, during a large family celebration — more than a hundred people gathered to honour her. Everyone treated her with immense reverence. The following year, I learned that she had passed away.

The interplay of water and earth seems central to this series. What does water represent to you as an artist?

My work always begins with water — not simply as a subject, but as a state of being. For me, water is the origin and dissolution of all forms, a living symbol of transformation and return to essence. Through painting, I enter its movement — the place where shapes appear and dissolve, where everything is in flow. In Meghalaya, water was everywhere: cascading from cliffs, running through limestone valleys, merging with clouds. Painting it felt like becoming part of that current, where even stone reveals its liquid/impermanent nature.

Many of your works feel as if the landscape itself is breathing. How do you achieve that through color and form?

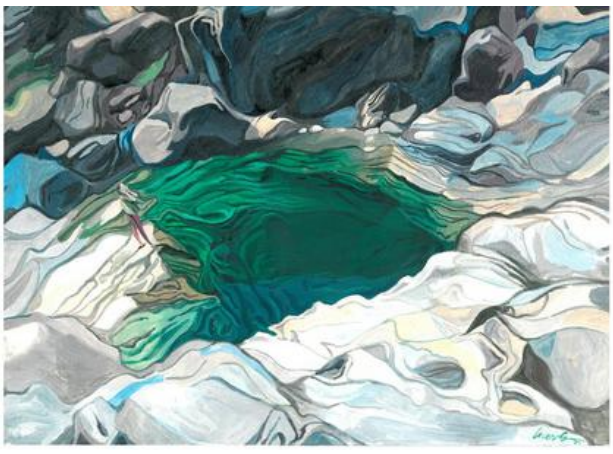
I paint outdoors, often using quick expressive mediums like acrylics, ink, and oil pastels. The humidity, wind, and light all interfere with the process — they become my collaborators. I let gravity and accidents play their part. That's how movement enters the painting naturally, as if the landscape continues to breathe on paper.

You often paint on paper in large formats outdoors. What are the challenges and freedoms of working that way?

Painting alone in nature — face to face with a waterfall like Nohkalikai, the highest plunge waterfall in India — is an incredibly powerful, transformative experience. It is also scary in some irrational unexplainable way: you just feel the imbalance of power between you and such a giant. It feels less like work and more like a daring ritual, a vow to one's own soul. Each session becomes a kind of dialogue with the elements, where you make inner promises or discover truths that later unfold in life, sometimes years afterward. These are places of power, and to paint within them is to plant a seed of revolution - daring, dangerous, life-changing.

What do you hope viewers feel when they encounter these works?

I hope they feel a sense of connection — to the landscape, to others, to their own soul. Meghalaya taught me to listen to the land as to a living organism and to channel nature's immense energy into the work of my soul. Through these paintings, I wish to share that transformative quality — to invite others into a space where the soul can merge with nature and, through that union, become something greater.



Inessa Garder | Akhia | 2021

Xolelwa Malinga (b. 2001) is a multidisciplinary artist from the Kingdom of Eswatini. Once she attained her degree in Visual Arts and Communication Design, she went on to pursue Fine Arts, developing a practice centered on the Black female form as a vessel of emotional and cultural storytelling. Through digital and mixed media, she explores how posture, gesture, and presence can communicate complex inner states — transforming the body into both subject and language.

Malinga's work examines notions of beauty, freedom, and self-acceptance within the context of African womanhood, challenging inherited perceptions shaped by colonialism and contemporary media. Each piece becomes a meditation on reclamation — redefining how African women see themselves and are seen by the world.

In 2024, Malinga was awarded the Art Connects Women Award, representing Eswatini on the global stage. That same year, she held her first solo exhibition at Alliance Française in her home country. Her work has been shown internationally, including at Miami Art Week and the RMB Latitudes Art Fair.

Beyond her studio practice, Malinga is the founder of The Phumula Project, an initiative that uses art as a tool for therapy, collective healing, and cultural dialogue. Her ongoing exploration sits at the intersection of emotion, form, and liberation — an ever-evolving study of what it means to return to oneself.

Project Statement

In my work, sensuality is not a scandal — it is a natural and intrinsic part of being. I approach it as an act of self-love, confidence, and autonomy, seeking to reclaim it from the shame and suppression that often surround it. Growing up in a matriarchal household in Eswatini shaped my earliest understanding of strength, intimacy, and care. The women who raised me embodied a quiet power that continues to inform my practice. My paintings often become repositories of memory — personal, cultural, and ancestral — allowing me to preserve fragments of women's lives, attire, and traditions across time and space. I am deeply invested in exploring African womanhood both within Eswatini and across the African diaspora. Research and storytelling are central to my process, guiding me as I weave together color, fabric, and form to honor the complexity of these identities. My work becomes a space where memory and imagination meet — a way of tracing where we have come from while envisioning where we might go. I use the figurative African body as a vessel for these ideas, drawn to the way even the subtlest posture can carry immense power and speak volumes without words.

Xolelwa Malinga | Sebe's Triumph | 2023

Xolelwa Malinga | Khumbuzile | 2023

Ekaterina Efimova

You mention being inspired by miniature illustrations and childhood fairy-tale books. Could you share how these memories continue to influence your work today?

I still feel the direct influence of fairy tales on my work. In my paintings, I depict familiar scenes in fairytale colors. Fictional characters, even if they appear as subjects in the paintings, could easily be encountered in real life. The fairytale atmosphere is achieved primarily through shades and color combinations, and the rendering of light and shadow, which in reality are often more scanty and primitive. My paintings – are fantasy interpretations of reality without overtly fairytale elements.

Ekaterina Efimova | Fog | 2025

What draws you to oil and tempera as your primary mediums, and how do they help convey a sense of magic and nostalgia?

I've always preferred oil, but I don't think the oil paint itself is what helps convey a particular atmosphere. Rather, it's the technique used to work with it.

Many of your paintings capture quiet, poetic moments in nature and everyday life. What stories or emotions do you hope viewers will discover in these details?

Ekaterina Efimova | Red Panama | 2025

As I mentioned earlier, I classify my paintings as "fantasy interpretations of reality without overtly fairytale elements". Such subjects, I believe, evoke feelings of both lightness and mystery, evoke memories of childhood, when the world was unknown, surprising, and full of discovery for everyone.

The idea of "seeing the world through the eyes of an inner child" is central to your statement. How do you nurture that childlike perspective while creating art?

I never paint when I'm in a bad mood. I believe the artist transfers their energy into the painting. Because of this, a work can sometimes be untouched for a month or two because the mood isn't right, the inspiration isn't there, and I don't feel the inner lightness and peace. For me, creativity — is much more than just a regular work.

Your works often carry a fantasy-like atmosphere. Is this more about personal memories, imagined worlds, or both?

I think it's related to my feelings about the place or the subject of the painting. Close examination of an object allows one to see beyond the obvious. This applies to color, detail, and the meaning itself. Therefore, I would say that if the painting is a reference to the past, then the fairy-tale atmosphere in it is definitely connected with personal memories, distorted, in a good sense, by imagination, which is reinforced by impressions.

Do you usually paint from life, photographs, or imagination? How does each approach influence the final result?

It's often a mix. The sketch is usually from life, the details are partly from my own photos, and partly they are a figment of my imagination.

Which part of creating a painting excites you the most: sketching, layering colors, or adding the final small details?

Detailing is definitely my favorite part of work. For me, it's like meditation I completely immerse myself in the process and can spend hours with a brush in my hand.

Ekaterina Efimova | From the City to Zarechye | 2024

Oona Aiken

You were born in London and now study in Montreal — how have these places influenced you as an artist?

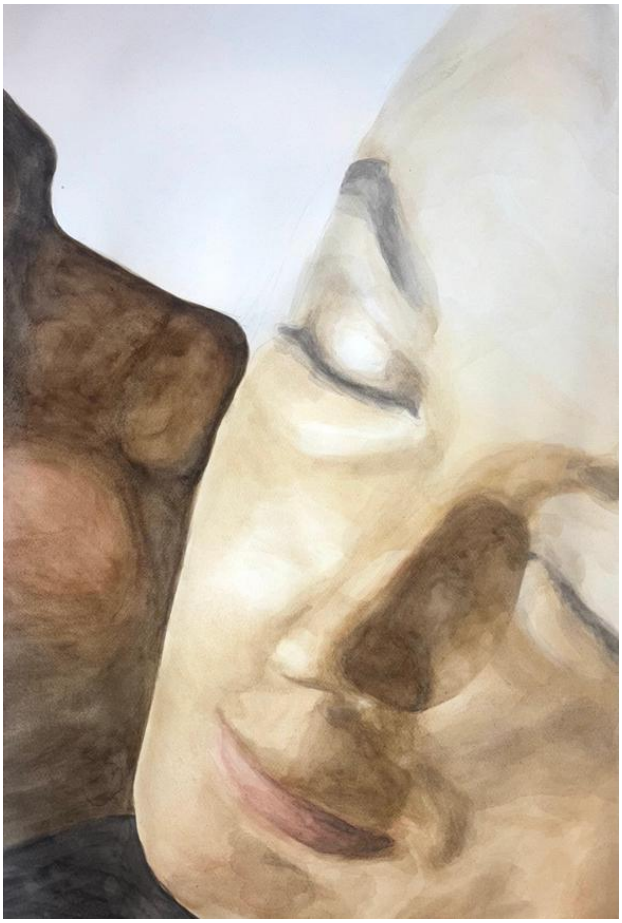
I'm very lucky to have grown up in London with artistic, culture-loving parents who often took me to galleries, exhibitions, and museums. Those early experiences sparked my fascination with visual culture and beauty. I remember being very young, visiting the National History Museum, and feeling mesmerized by all the strange and wonderful animals on display. As an artist, I try and capture that same sense of wonder - the strangeness and beauty of nature. Growing up surrounded by art in London, helped me build an understanding of what art can be: how art has no boundaries, and how one can have a personal connection with art.

Now, living and studying in Montreal, I find inspiration in a different kind of artistic environment. The city is bursting with vibrant street art and murals – which are insanely detailed and unique, they add so much colour to the city. These murals brighten my day, and they remind me of how art can make a positive impact in everyday life - how it can make everyday life more colourful and interesting. The street art in Montreal inspires me to create work that can have that same kind of impact - making the everyday, mundane aspects of everyday life a little more interesting and colourful.

Oona Aiken | Flourish

When did you first discover your passion for painting and visual art?

I've been making art for as long as I can remember, but I really discovered my passion for visual art during secondary school. At the time, I was struggling with questions about my identity and where I fit in socially. Art at this time became a way for me to articulate my thoughts and emotions I couldn't always put into words. Art became a kind of therapy that helped me understand myself better. Through Creating art, I could focus on something that distracted me from



Oona Aiken | Kiss

other worries. I was also lucky to be sourrounded by kids who were equally passionate about art as I was, and their passion drove my passion.

You are a self-taught artist — what has that journey been like for you?

Being a self-taught artist has been a journey of experimentation. Teaching yourself means always making and trying new things - different mediums, tools, different colours, and brushes. This experimentation allows me to see what works and what doesn't work. I'm glad to be self taught because it's allowed my style to develop uniquely: No one told me how to create, so what I'm making is coming from my own curiosity and intuition. I also learn by observing other artists. Seeing how others use materials and approach their subjects often inspires me and pushes my work in new directions. Recently, I've been inspired by contemporary artists like Anna Vereshchaka and Kim McCarthy.

Your portraits show a lot of emotion and character. What draws you to painting people?

Thank you! I am drawn to painting people because, to me, people are the most interesting things in life. We are social beings. Our connection with people is what gives life it's meaning. Connections to people enables love, and what is life without love? People leave lasting impressions on us. I'm drawn to painting people for these reasons. Visually, I find the eyes to be the most impressionistic feature about people, and I love painting eyes. If I'm painting a person and I've painted the eyes, its like magic, the painting comes to life, like I've created a soul, that's how powerful the eyes are. Eyes are another reason I'm drawn to painting people.

You also experiment with photography — how does photography connect with your painting practice?

I often use my own photographs as the starting point for my paintings. I like to photograph my friends and family, asking them to pose in ways that capture a certain emotion or atmosphere. These images then become references for my paintings. Experimenting with photography has also deepened my understanding of light and it's importance, which has enriched the way I handle light and shadow in my paintings.

Fashion, film, and literature are important inspirations for you. Can you share an example of how one of these influenced a specific artwork?

Yes! One of my most recent paintings, Kiss, was inspired by a film still from the 1960's French film Plein Soleil, which is an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel The Talented Mr. Ripley. I wanted to capture the sense of problematic love – something beautiful yet tinged with danger, a romance that exists on the edge of tragedy. That duality is what i love about the film: it's so romantic and visually stunning, yet simultaneously underneath it all lies murder, deception and danger.

Another painting, Flourish, was inspired by a look from Alexander McQueen's Spring/ Summer 2011 collection, titled Ensemble. I was interested in the butterflies of that design – how they can simultaneously symbolize the sense of butterflies in your stomach or in your throat when you're emotional or excited. In Flourish, I wanted to explore that symbolism.

When viewers look at your work, what feelings or thoughts do you hope they experience?

I hope they find beauty in my work. I create art because I want to bring something beautiful into the world. I believe that beauty is the most valuable thing in life. I live for beauty. Beauty is my obsession and my greatest comfort. So, if my art can allow someone else to experience beauty, and if my art lets someone else feel the comfort that beauty allows me to feel then that, to me, is a success.

Alexandra Hrehová

Project Statement

Look at Me marks a new beginning in my painting career. Until now, my works have been thematically and visually connected in series, often featuring masks, artifacts typical of the Slovak countryside, and recurring female–male symbols. However, this painting represents a shift in thinking — a personal unmasking from the world around me.

The piece serves as a hidden self-portrait. The sparks in the woman's eyes and the light she holds close to her chest symbolize the opening of new paths. The woman is depicted in traditional Slovak folk dress. While I have usually worked in a gray color palette, my paintings are now becoming increasingly vibrant. The focus is no longer solely on critiquing gender stereotypes, exploring feminism, or raising awareness of generational trauma, but also on expressing a deeply personal story and private mythology.

This work stands as a milestone — a sign of personal healing and growth, both in life and in art. To be an artist is to be an alchemist. With this painting, I remain within the visual world of Slovak folklore and rural life, as these themes are an inseparable part of me and my roots.

Look at Me is an acrylic painting on canvas, measuring 120 × 150 cm.

Alexandra Hrehová | Look at Me | 2025

Clémence BROLL

Your artistic practice connects movement, gesture, and visual expression. How does your background in performance and dance influence your way of painting?

Painting, for me, is also a physical experience of the world. In both painting and dance, it's about bringing a story to life, shaping a distinctive gaze in relation to others, and taking the viewer on a journey where the path matters as much as the destination.
I've learned to think of the work from both inside and outside — within the interweaving of lived experience, sensitivity, and visibility — to seek certain perspectives, a particular way of capturing movement and vitality. However, I'm not sure what influences my composition most; the different practices respond to, contaminate, and generate one another. The subjects I explore resonate with each other, carrying shared constants. None of these mediums are sealed off. They function together, as a system — each one informing the other, each bearing the memory and discoveries of the others.

Clémence BROLL | Psyché | 2021

You describe your process as an "intuitive and embodied exploration." Could you tell us about the moment when intuition takes over — how do you recognize it?

It's both a terrifying and exhilarating moment; it arises when my consciousness steps back, and my hand seems to move ahead of my thoughts, in a suspension of control that I do not try to regain, trusting the somatic intelligence built from experiences, readings, and gestures repeated and accumulated to the point of automatism. I listen to what is seeking to be born. Sometimes, I mix pigments at night like a sleepwalker, not knowing how daylight will reveal them; and from the unpredictable, something surprising and unexpected often emerges.
Thus, I never manage to follow a sketch in the strict sense. An initial idea is born, accompanied by a constellation of autonomous elements and a perception of what might come; but it is only through painting that all the pieces of the puzzle begin to converse, to organize, to find their own coherence. The work assembles itself, guided by an internal logic that sometimes escapes me.
I accept getting lost, again and again, with a strange faith that the path will reveal itself by walking.

Clémence BROLL | Et...Elle Se Changeait En Papillon | 2025

Many of your works seem to capture transformation — movement becoming form, gesture becoming image. What role does metamorphosis play in your art?

It's something that already happens to me in the process itself. For instance, I begin to paint in a state of vital urgency, as an act of survival — a way to contain and/or transform what would otherwise overwhelm me, to magnify it until it produces an outcome. I am often surprised by what emerges; art cannot remain silent, and the work sometimes acts as a mirror that does not reflect the image I believe I'm projecting, but the one I unconsciously carry. Words come only afterward, awkwardly, in an attempt to grasp what has taken place.
So painting means crossing through — moving from one state to another, from one form to another, from one consciousness to another. This dynamic animates my work. I would like to experiment with special-effect inks that change depending on light, humidity, temperature, or even time itself. I like the idea — and accept it — that the artwork has its own life, that it continues to evolve beyond my presence, recognizing impermanence as a fundamental condition of reality.

The textures and colors in your paintings evoke a strong emotional resonance. Do you begin with a specific emotion, or do the feelings emerge as you create?

Neither one nor the other — or rather, both at once. There is always an emotional atmosphere, an affective tone that passes through me as I enter the act of creation, and it probably imbues the final work. But my emotions transform as I lose myself in the process. The act of creating alters them, deepens them, and fortunately overturns them completely. So it is neither an absolute starting point nor a pure end result.

You mention working outside academic frameworks — how has this freedom shaped your personal techniques and aesthetic identity?

This choice to evolve outside academic structures has never meant ignoring the rules. Above all, it was a necessity — a way to experiment with my own methods, to move forward through trial and intuition, to learn by unlearning. Working this way has its limits as much as its virtues, but discovering "by chance" opens me to a vital sense of wonder that keeps my curiosity, my rigor, and my constant desire to surpass myself alive.
This freedom has also allowed me to naturally blend disciplines, to permit myself every kind of experiment and detour, and to develop an aesthetic identity that academicism might have smoothed out. Perhaps this hybridity — inherited from my upbringing and background — is precisely what I've been most criticized for, resulting in a graphic language that is varied, unfixed, and regularly renewed, driven by recurring obsessions.
My work may seem raw at first, because it emerges from a direct dialogue between my obsessions and the material itself (for example, I often paint with

Clémence BROLL | Respire | 2025

my fingers); but also because it embraces the presence of the accident, of the deliberately slipped "error," and of the shift — with the intent to unsettle the gaze by subtly displacing what, within the established order, seems out of place. Beneath its apparent simplicity and its "Unicorns," my compositions rest on precise, schematic internal logics within a network of interrelations.
I am aware of the political reading that underlies any artwork — including and especially my own — but I refuse to turn it into a marketing product, even though working outside institutions means consciously or not rejecting a certain system of validation and legitimization in art. It is to affirm that one can be an artist without having been knighted by artistic institutions — whether academic or recodified by conventional contemporary spaces.
The history of art has always been built through movements, each with the charm of telling the world — sometimes in opposition to its era, sometimes in harmony with its technical and intellectual advances. Today, contemporary art seems to have become an acquired stance, sometimes flirting dangerously with new forms of obligation, often ethnocentric.
Beyond how the art world is administered, I now move along a dual path: seeking spaces for dialogue and encounter while asserting my own approach with its demands — an approach that, in turn, must provoke the same desire for exchange and dialogue. No artist can build themselves outside the world, nor outside their own history. It is essential to remain in constant dialogue with other practices, other approaches, other spaces and temporalities, so as never to freeze one's thought. For instance, among my upcoming projects is a mural that converses with the work of Rivera, as well as a series of paintings inspired by artists such as Degas, who explored the concept of movement.

Clémence BROLL | Galaxy | 2024

Your images often seem both cosmic and deeply human — do you perceive a connection between the inner world and the outer world in your practice?

Everything that happens in the great universe resonates in my small universe, and vice versa. Behind this seemingly vast universe lies the reality and complexity of the world — its violence as much as its brilliance; and I build filters that make it bearable to look at, that allow one to endure the unbearable, to transform chaos into a form that can be contemplated, to transmute the overflow of both internal and external reality into something livable.
At the other pole, my small universe is itself infinite —made up of traces, fragments, encounters, and experiences that accumulate and sometimes require, in the very moment, to be translated, expressed, given the possibility to appear to the world, to give form to this inner richness that would otherwise remain unarticulated and unspeakable.
One can recognize a dreamlike and metaphorical aspect in my paintings and drawings, since they often arise from a meditative state or a dream (a process of meditative and Jungian-style analytical work), but also from internal representations. They

also draw on myths, tales, ancient knowledge, and ancestral oral traditions — which themselves are ways of bearing witness to the world.
They are nourished by a cultural heritage of elsewhere — by other ways of inhabiting the world, by travel and encounters with others in a "differing" and deferential dialogue. These multiple influences create hybridizations, interweavings of forms and symbols that speak of a multimodal belonging to the world.
These paintings are the fruit of an act — both ritual and social, sensitive and spiritual, poetic and psychic — that is shared. They create a space where all these dimensions can coexist and respond to one another.

Many of your paintings seem to celebrate feminine energy and vitality. How do you approach the representation of the body and movement?

The feminine is not a subject I intentionally seek to address. I am aware of the historical issues, the power dynamics that shape our society, and how women are affected by them—as well as the current upheavals in art history that are being reexamined through these struggles.
By the very nature of my being in the world, I cannot escape being a woman. From this I derive a kind of fighting capital, a management of possibilities and limitations, and a sense of solidarity—beyond my own circumstances—with all those who find themselves in situations of domination.
The feminine presence in my work draws from the flow of "mythological" influences inherited from the cultures I have encountered (Latin America, Eastern Europe, Indigenous, Asian, and Oriental traditions). These figures are plural, irreducible to the sacrificial or guilty posture that monotheistic religions can convey under the guise of beauty. In certain animist cultures, for example, naming a forest creature does not even imply a gender assignment.
The body is, objectively, the expression of power relations. It is a site where polarities coexist—tenderness and strength, gentleness and authority, grace and power, determination and courage, etc. —without the need to assign these qualities to one gender or another.
This ambivalence is present both in the mythical figures of the sacred feminine and in the women of my lineage, who carry within them this nobility—a heritage that perhaps influences my gaze in representation. Yet these same traits can also be found in the figures one might describe as "masculine" in my work—though you might read them as androgynous, beyond binary assignments, touching upon a kind of universality of the body-as-power.
In my work, movement is not perceived in an abstract way but functions like an oral signal. It is less about freezing its form than about preserving the trace of a living, experienced, sensitive body—a body that leaves its remnants in space, its echoes, its afterimages. A body that is still here but already elsewhere, inscribed in continuity.

Clémence BROLL | Renaissance | 2025

Anna's daymares

Your motto, “Because I couldn’t change the world, I started to create my own,” beautifully captures both defiance and hope. How did this idea first take shape for you, and what personal experiences led you to express it through art?

Very good question. I think, art can be so much but especially a form of escape from reality. We all are powerless over what happens in the world at lange and behind the scenes, but we always have the choice and to shape our own. If someone started with themselves instead of sowing hatred, war, fear or negativity, a lot would already be achieved for humanity. It’s a lot about introspection and focusing on the things we can control and perhaps change them for the better, simply through our vibes and actions. I am simply trying to do my part to provide a little more soul food and color for a sometimes dreary and dull world that had been forced to be numb and feel less. The Corona period was a start for me to do just that. I changed almost everything. The people who surrounded me, my habits, my job, my mindset, even my previously held worldview. To this day, I don’t watch TV anymore.
And so it just happened that I began to paint for my inside freedom and more happiness, as if it were meant to be that way. I had to follow that impulse . Perhaps because, without all the outside noise, I could suddenly hear my own whispering voice again.

Anna's daymares | The Neverending Story | 2025

Your works feel like visual diaries - full of dreamlike narratives and spiritual symbols. How do your dreams and visions translate into the storytelling structure we see in your paintings?

Through neutrality, through “nothingness”, through absolute dedication to the process. I feel more like a kind of medium through which the painting is carried. I only offer my hands and body. The less I think, the more emerges and happens in the painting. Perhaps I transfer these subconscious thoughts and voices onto a surface. While I am working on a piece, my mind completely calm and everything feels relaxed and somehow it really often happens, that I lose the sense for time and space.

Each of your “daymares” seems to blend divine light and human fragility. Do you see your art as a dialogue between faith and the subconscious?

You’ve phrased that brilliantly. Yes. It’s a dialogue between the other world (call it the divine), the people who are meant to see it, and myself. I’m convinced that these works are

Anna's daymares | Peace | 2025

perceived by precisely those to whom they are meant to give a hint, a message or a sign. So, those whose gaze lingers on one of my paintings for a longer time are invited to take a closer look for their own interest and growth. There could be a personal treasure hidden for them.

The intricate detail and density of your compositions invite viewers to "get lost" inside them. What do you hope people discover when they spend time exploring the hidden layers of your works?

I hope that they will rediscover themselves in them, that they will discover lost parts of themselves, that they will courageously reflect themselves in these pieces and thus regain access to their hearts and emotions. I also wish, that they will give themselves permission to dream, to make space for hidden wounds and thus stimulate a valuable healing process.
One could say that my art has the capacity to open the door to the human soul/psyche. The viewer simply has to allow himself to walk through it.

Your use of color and symbolism - from butterflies and flowers to surreal faces and mythic creatures - feels almost musical. How do you decide on your color harmonies and the recurring motifs that connect your paintings?

What an intriguing question. Hmm, I think everything I depict is guided intuitively. The images always emerge from a central point, and around this, everything "blooms and grows" on its own. There's no pre-conceived vision in my head. I simply let it flow and only understand the message of the image in retrospect. It's always very exciting for me to interpret what it was trying to say.

Your journey from sharing art on Instagram to exhibiting in castles and galleries across Europe is inspiring. How has this evolution shaped your confidence and relationship with your audience?

I am so freaking grateful for all the colorful and rich experiences I have encountered on my creative path so far. Looking back, I can only marvel at this appreciative, deep response. It seems as if I have been able to touch a nerve in many people or quench a thirst for more feeling. More truth, more color and depth. Often the path reveals itself beneath the feet of the walker. In my life so far, I have particularly experienced that exactly the doors that are needed in each stage of life open up. Doors that have to be opened with force or pressure are only draining or ultimately unfulfilling and not productive. I have spent far too long in rooms behind doors that were not intended for me. But these doors have also made a valuable contribution, because I have been able to learn and grow from them. What I mean by this is that we are always in exactly the right place at the right time to gain experiences, whether good or bad. I truly feel a deep appreciation and love for my customers, supporters, and followers. Through art, I've had the opportunity to meet many interesting, wonderful, and profound people. Learning to protect my personal boundaries is also part of that. My confidence is stronger than before because it is an invigorating and intense feeling to see that I can give people something profound through my energy and vibes of art.

You describe your paintings as "projection surfaces for self-discovery." What have you discovered about yourself through creating these vivid worlds of imagination and emotion?

I discovered that an entire cosmos seems to live within me. A parallel world that had existed for so long but hadn't been able to find a suitable outlet, and so had often found its way into destructive behaviors. This included eating disorders, depression, excessive dreaming, sleep disorders, and even vague anxieties. I simply had too much inside me, and what was once a knocking sound somehow developed over time into an unmistakable kicking, a pain, an emptiness, and an unquenchable longing, until I embraced the right outlet for this diversity: the creation of art. I was also able to experience —which, incidentally, is the most valuable experience for me —that God almighty is within us (Jesus = Je su(i)s/I am) and acts through us the moment we are ready to let go and follow our own intuition out of unconditional love.

Anna's daymares | All Brave Hearts | 2024

I'm **ThreeT** (each part of my full name starts with the letter T), also known as Tai Tan Thai. I'm a self-taught artist creating 2D/3D Art & Animation. With a little craziness, curiosity, and a head full of daydreams, I've been scribbling since I was just a little brat.
I love playing games, watching movies, and diving into stories. Whether it's novels, manga, or books that catch my eye with their titles or covers (yeah, I know we shouldn't judge a book by its cover... but hey, that's an artist thing right? hehe).
The number "3" has always been my magic number, it tangles into everything I do. I also really love CORGIS ^3^!
My artworks mostly focus on portraits, landscapes, and conceptual pieces inspired by ideas and definitions of knowledge I've come across in books.

Artist Statement
My work explores the space between imagination and reality, where childhood memories, dreams, and emotions blur into surreal, colorful narratives. I'm fascinated by how visual storytelling can express the unseen parts of the human psyche: nostalgia, wonder, and fear. Through dynamic composition, cinematic lighting, and conceptual symbolism, I aim to capture the essence of the "inner child". The essence that's curious, playful, and a little haunted to reconnect both myself and the viewer with that lost sense of discovery.

ThreeT | The Caged Bird

Inna Cheskidova

Your work bridges art, science, and emotion. How did your background in materials science shape the way you approach jewelry design?

I have always wanted to create not just fashionable jewelry, but true works of art that engage multiple senses. My scientific research in the field of porous ceramics as an aroma carrier became the key to this vision. The material I developed allowed me to combine elegance of form with functionality: the ceramic aroma diffuser retains a premium appearance while remaining lightweight and durable.
Thanks to this, I was able to create a clean, minimalist design that is especially suitable for earrings, where lightness is essential. Unlike pomanders that require a metal frame, my pieces are solid, purely ceramic, and come to life through the material itself. This material has greatly shaped my design language.

Inna Cheskidova | Ring Yellowgold | 2025

The Carpe Diem collection revolves around scent and memory. What was the first fragrance or moment that inspired this idea?

The idea of psychological anchoring through scent didn't appear right away. I often say: "I created these pieces, and at some point they began to create me." When the first piece was finished, I wore it everywhere. I chose orange essential oil as the fragrance. It doesn't reveal itself constantly — its presence depends on temperature, wind, movement. One evening in Marmaris, standing beneath a pomegranate tree illuminated by the dim light of a street lamp, I suddenly felt a fresh citrus aroma enveloping me. It brought back a sense of comfort and a gentle nostalgia. That's when I realized: the scent reminded me of the value of the moment precisely because you can't catch it all the time.
The idea of Carpe Diem — "seize the moment" — came to me earlier, but it was in that moment that the concept of aromatic anchoring was born: to become aware of a moment through a scent that appears unexpectedly and fades. The aroma reminded me that the value of a moment lies in its fleeting nature.

The symbolism of the drop and the Fibonacci spiral is deeply poetic. How did you arrive at these particular forms to represent time and eternity?

As a child, I always wanted to slow down time — to make a happy moment last longer, yet it would inevitably slip away like a falling drop of water that I could rarely catch.

Inna Cheskidova | Necklace Yellowgold | 2025

This metaphor became the foundation of Carpe Diem: the moment when a droplet has just separated from the surface. But unlike a real one, it will never fall — it is forever "caught" in the piece of jewelry, just like a vivid memory preserved in our minds.
The second form is the Fibonacci spiral. It is a universal code of nature, shaping the way leaves grow, how shells and galaxies form, and even our DNA. For me, it symbolizes eternity and the harmony present in all living things.

Could you tell us more about the process of developing your unique porous ceramic material? How long did it take, and what were the main challenges?

I spent four years researching ways to improve the porosity of ceramic materials. The result was a formula that became the foundation of the Carpe Diem collection.
The main challenge was to find the right balance between porosity and strength while preserving plasticity, cosmetic safety, and aesthetics. It was essential that the piece looked like a piece of jewelry rather than a laboratory sample.
After achieving the optimal composition, I spent several more years refining the production technology to reach the exact shape and lightness I envisioned.

In your pieces, jewelry becomes an emotional archive. How do you see the relationship between the wearer and the object evolving over time?

I wanted to create jewelry you'd always want to wear - something that doesn't depend on your mood, outfit, or fragrance. That's why I designed a modular system where a single stud base can be paired with short earrings, long ones, or an ear cuff — easily changing interchangeable scent-diffusing elements in different colors.
This versatility and freedom of choice make the jewelry feel alive — it adapts to the woman, becomes part of her daily ritual, and whispers: "enjoy the moment."

The collection allows transformation and interchangeability between elements. How important is adaptability and personalization in your concept of jewelry?

Modern life demands functionality and comfort from the things we wear. For me, it's important that jewelry helps rather than hinders. I even custom-make ear cuffs to perfectly fit the wearer's ear, so they sit just right and feel light and natural. Personalization and adaptability, to me, are expressions of care and respect.

You combine laboratory research with craftsmanship. How do you balance scientific precision and artistic intuition in your daily practice?

For me, intuition is a driving force — the motivation that helps me continue the meticulous work. But where beauty is born, there is no room for randomness: everything is calculated with mathematical precision — both scientifically and aesthetically. Only precision creates true harmony. And inspiration comes later — in the soul, in movement, during sports. I simply love what I do, and that's why ideas find me on their own.

Inna Cheskidova | Ring Whitegold | 2025

Kenji Kiyama was born in Japan in 1973. He discovered art at an international school in Singapore and studied at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. After working as an in-house designer for a record company, he spent 20 years working as an art director, designer, and photographer for CD covers. Since 2020, he has been creating paintings and sculptural objects. His sculptures, which combine junk parts and everyday objects, embody both a playful pop sensibility and a message about contemporary society. He also creates a wide range of works, including painting series featuring comic-style eyes and lighting art using acrylic tubes.

Kenji Kiyama | Computer Machine | 2025

Kenji Kiyama | Love is Calling | 2023

Xinchen Li | Shackle | 2020

Xinchen Li

Your sculptures often depict familiar domestic objects such as a sewing machine, a clock, or a bed. What draws you to these everyday forms?

Xinchen Li | The Mattress | 2025

I am deeply drawn to these objects because they hold emotional weight and connect me to the intimate world of my childhood. They come from my grandparents' home in China, where I spent much of my early life surrounded by handmade things filled with care and memory. Over time, as I moved across countries and left homes behind, these objects became fragments that lived only in recollection. By recreating them, I am not only rebuilding a space of belonging but also revisiting a past that is both personal and collective. These domestic forms carry stories of labor, tradition, and family, and through reimagining them, I explore how ordinary materials can preserve traces of love and loss. For me, the act of reconstructing these familiar things is an emotional negotiation with time and distance.

How did your transition from jewelry design to large scale installations influence your artistic language?

My training in jewelry taught me to appreciate the crafts and the sensitivity of materials. Working on a small scale requires patience, precision, and intimacy with the object, as jewelry is something that rests close to the body. When I began expanding my work into installation, I wanted to bring that same feeling of closeness into a shared physical environment. The transition allowed me to translate the intimacy of adornment into an immersive experience where viewers can step into the space of memory rather than simply wear it. The process of scaling up also changed my understanding of storytelling. Instead of creating pieces for individual connection, I began creating environments that speak to collective experiences of home, displacement, and nostalgia. It became a way for me to expand personal memory into a space of empathy and dialogue.

Xinchen Li | The Screen | 2025

Memory and nostalgia seem central to your work. Do you see your sculptures as a way of preserving fleeting moments?

Yes, I do. My sculptures are acts of remembrance, but they are not attempts to freeze time or preserve things exactly as they were. I see them as reconstructions that acknowledge the fragility of memory and its constant transformation. Every time I recreate an object, I realize it cannot be identical to the original; it is a new interpretation built from emotion and imagination. That sense of imperfection is important because it mirrors how we remember. By using delicate materials, I let light and air pass through the structures, as if memory itself is breathing. In this way, my sculptures become spaces where the past and present coexist.

Why did you choose wire as your primary medium, and how does it relate to your background in jewelry and metalsmithing?

Wire is a material that bridges my past in jewelry and my current practice in sculpture. It allows me to draw in space, turning linear gestures into form. But the most common materials I use right now is PLA filament, a plastic thread that mimics the delicacy of metal yet remains light and flexible. This choice reflects the way memory works—fragile but persistent. The medium itself becomes a metaphor for reconstruction, allowing me to build forms that appear strong yet remain transparent, like traces of time suspended in air.

Your works often play with light and shadow, where the shadows almost become extensions of the sculpture. How intentional is this aspect in your process?

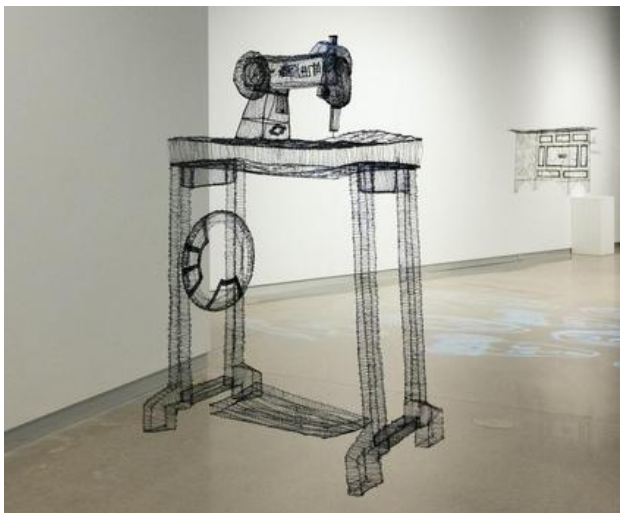
The relationship between light and shadow is very intentional in my process. I think of the shadow as a second layer of the sculpture, an invisible presence that reveals itself only when light touches the work. It feels like another kind of memory, something that cannot be held but still exists alongside the physical form. When I plan a piece, I consider not only the structure but also how it will interact with light in the space around it. The interplay of line and shadow allows me to explore how absence can carry as much meaning as presence, and how something intangible can still hold emotional weight.

The precision of your line work resembles drawing in three dimensions. Do you consider these sculptures as spatial drawings?

I would say yes, I do see them as spatial drawings. The process of working with a 3D pen feels very similar to drawing, except it happens in space. I usually start by sketching flat pieces and then assemble them into a larger structure. When I work with life-size furniture, the process becomes more physical and repetitive. I keep drawing in the air to add details, and each line records movement and time. The result feels like a drawing that has expanded into three dimensions.

Growing up in China and now working in the United States, how do these two cultural contexts shape your artistic identity?

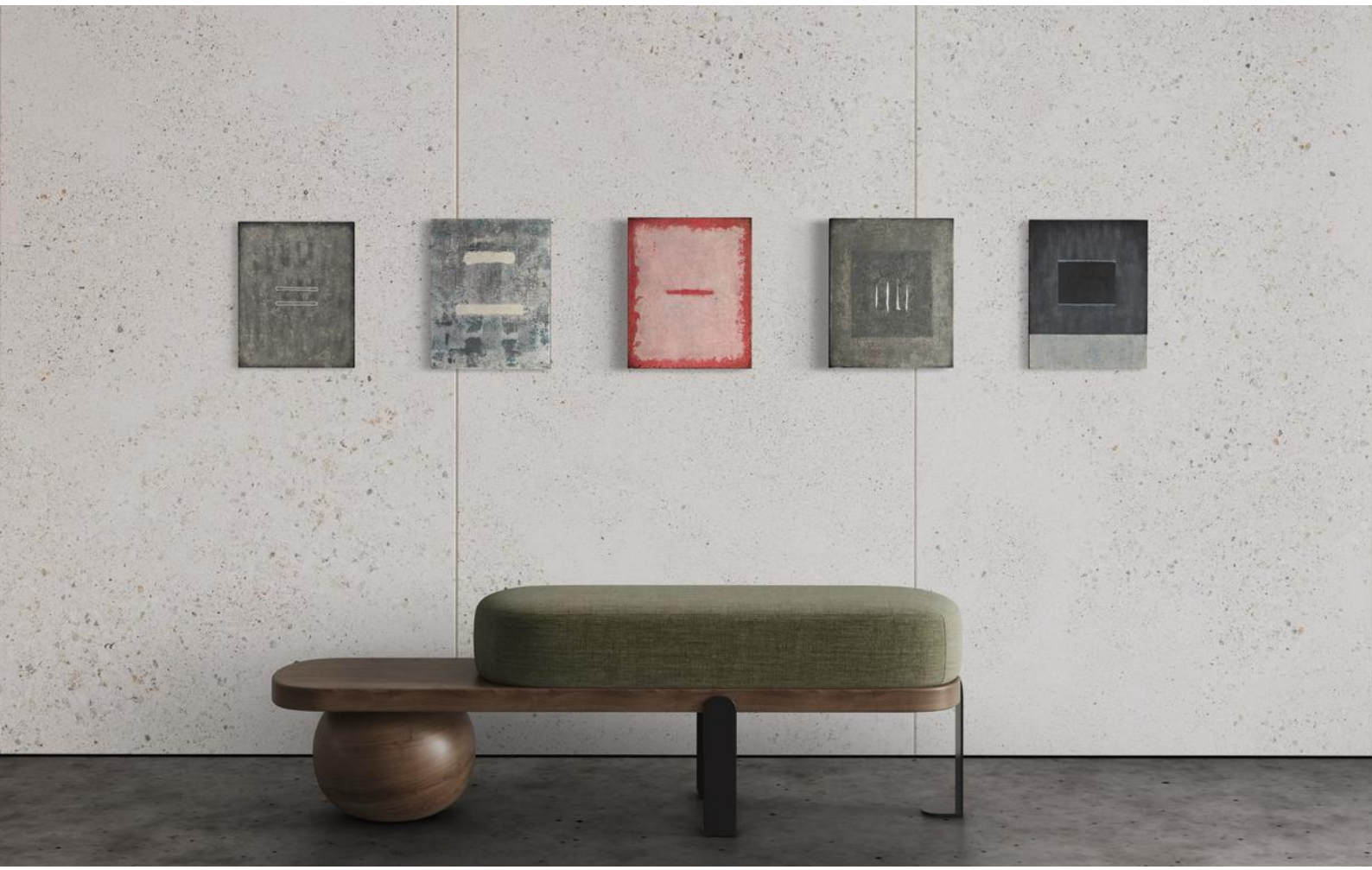
Both cultural contexts have shaped my identity in profound ways. Growing up in China gave me a strong sense of cultural identity and an appreciation for tradition. Moving to the United States expanded my understanding of artistic expression and allowed me to question, reinterpret, and rebuild my relationship with my tradition. It gave me space to explore ideas of migration, belonging, and the reconstruction of home through my practice. My work has become a bridge between these experiences, carrying traces of both cultural languages while speaking to universal feelings of distance and return.

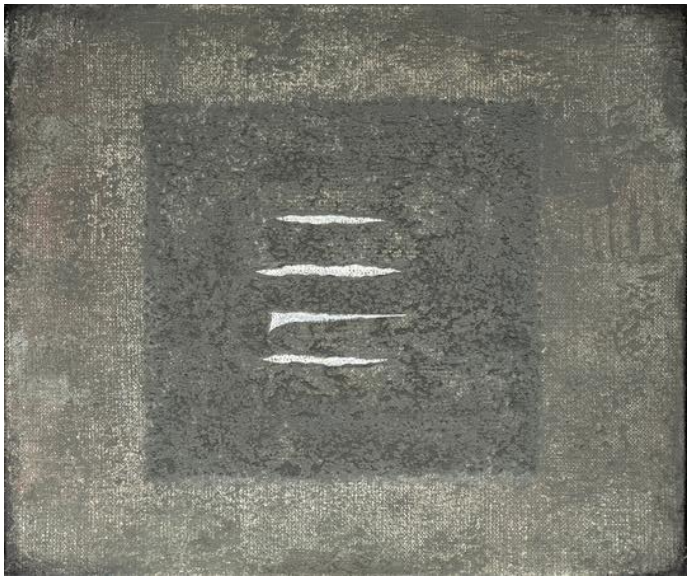


Xinchen Li | Sewing Machine | 2023

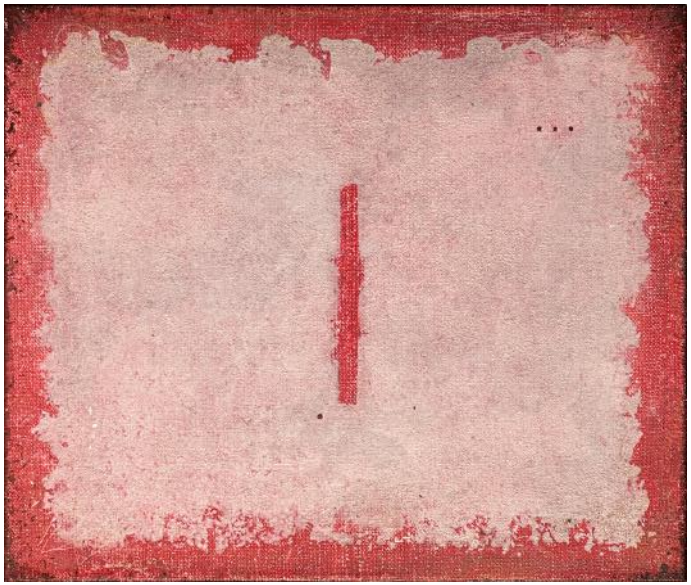
Alina Kulikovskaya-Romanovich is a Belarusian artist representing the new generation of the Kulikovsky-Romanovich dynasty, where art has been an integral part of the family tradition for generations.
My father taught me to see beauty from early childhood. Watching him transform clay into art, I felt something awaken within me — something people call inspiration. Yet back then, I could not imagine that it would one day lead me to call myself an artist.
The culmination of my becoming was my love — my husband, who instilled in me the faith and strength to be myself here and now.
My paintings are windows into my perception of human life. Touching the unknown, searching for that one perfect form I can ultimately call a painting, I seek a harmony that cannot be understood — only seen.

Project Statement
The series “Independent Quantity” is built around the idea of autonomy — each painting exists as a separate being, yet resonates with others as part of a quiet system.
Through minimal gestures and limited palettes, I explore inner movement, memory, and the boundaries of perception. My goal is to create a space for contemplation where form becomes secondary to the feeling that remains.



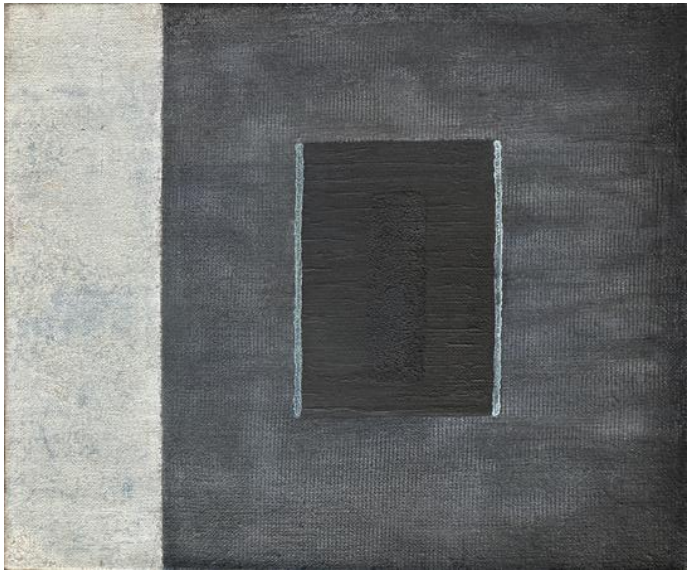


Alina Kulikouskaya | Nostalgia

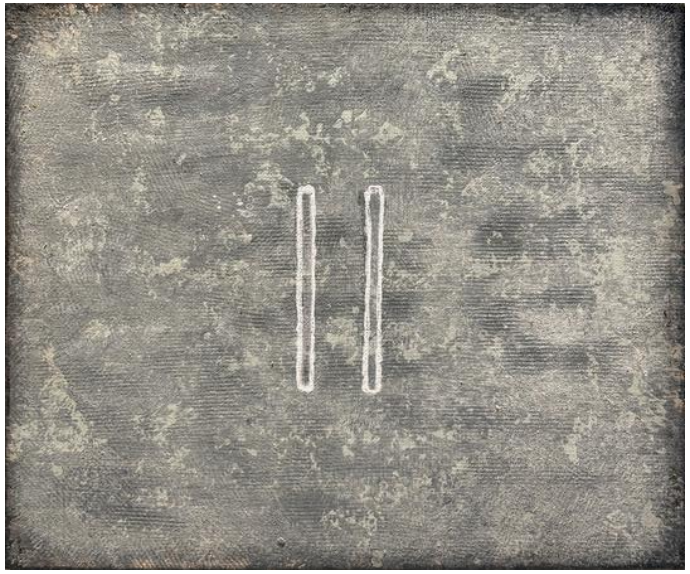


Alina Kulikouskaya | What Is Unseen but Defines Everything

Alina Kulikouskaya | The Difference Between



Alina Kulikouskaya | What Has Not Happened



Alina Kulikouskaya | The Space Between

Candise Pong Wa Wai

You have a background in data analytics and an international career outside the art world. How has this analytical experience influenced the way you approach abstraction and emotion in your paintings?

I have an extensive global career in market research and data analytics, helping businesses translate vast amounts of data into meaningful insights and strategic actions. In many ways, this work is an art form in itself requiring curiosity, creativity, and the ability to uncover patterns, consumer behaviour and emotions hidden beneath numbers.
While analytics and art may seem worlds apart, both rely on observation, intuition, and the courage to find meaning in complexity. My analytical career trained me to look beneath the surface: to identify connections and narratives that are not immediately visible. Collaborating with diverse colleagues and clients in international companies has fostered an open-mindedness that deepens my identity and my abstract work's emotional resonance, inspiring vibrant colours that reflect shared human connections.
My early self-taught exploration of multidisciplinary art forms across various media built a strong technical foundation. These skills, paired with my analytical ability to distil patterns, empower my abstract work. I transform intricate emotions through fluid forms and colours, creating a universal emotional landscape that transcends language, culture, and time.

Candise Pong Wa Wai | The Blooming Heart Of Light

Colour seems to be at the core of your artistic language. How do you decide which colours to combine, and what emotions do they carry for you personally?

When I begin a piece, it usually starts with an emotional or spiritual state of mind. Certain colour themes emerge instinctively into my mind, each signalling the feeling I want to express. I've experienced moments of light and darkness, calm and tension, and these experiences naturally guide my palette – vibrant yellows for joy, deep blues for introspection, and a mixture of colours for the interaction of my colour choices.
As I paint, the process becomes intuitive, almost as if an inner force takes over. I become deeply absorbed in that emotion; it's a meditative experience. I respond to how the colours interact on the canvas, adjusting and layering until a sense of balance emerges. At that moment, I've captured my intended expression.

Candise Pong Wa Wai | Where Fire Finds Peace

For me, colour is both language and emotion. It speaks what words cannot and conveys the invisible states of mind that shape our human experience.

Many of your works balance intense energy and calmness at once. How do you find this harmony in your creative process?

My mind naturally holds both intense energy and calmness. At times, one prevails over the other. In every stage of life, we encounter challenges, self-doubt, uncertainty, and stress, but also moments of joy, clarity, and peace.
Perhaps because of my personality, I tend to seek and find balance between these contrasts. Often, I only recognise that harmony after the painting is complete, when I look at it as a viewer rather than a creator. It's in that moment that I understand myself a little better.
This natural inclination to find equilibrium helps me navigate life's ups and downs. I hope that through my work, viewers can also sense a quiet strength, a reminder that calmness and intensity can coexist, and that beauty often lies in their balance.

Growing up in Hong Kong and now living in Oxfordshire, how have these very different environments shaped your sense of visual rhythm and composition?

Growing up in Hong Kong, a vibrant fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, shaped my openness to diverse artistic influences. Working in international research there, I was immersed in a dynamic, fast-paced city that taught me to see beauty and depth in both Chinese and Western art, informing my sense of visual rhythm and composition. Since moving to Oxfordshire, I've embraced a slower, more reflective lifestyle in a historic, culturally rich town. Surrounded by a blend of ancient and modern art, as well as the serene countryside, I've found new inspiration. These contrasting environments, Hong Kong's energy and Oxford's tranquillity, act as vital ingredients, continually evolving my artistic style and enriching my canvas with layered perspectives.

You describe creating art as a process of releasing the inner self. Could you share what this moment of release feels like for you?

I often get an urge to paint whenever I'm feeling something, joy, boredom, sadness, stress, peace, and more, driven by personal experience and the world around me. Life's demands can steal my time, but when I finally get to my canvas, it's like therapy. Finishing a piece, I'm amazed at what the colours, patterns, and mood reveal about me. It's like uncovering hidden parts of myself, and that brings such deep satisfaction and joy. Painting lets me pour out my inner world, and I hope it invites others to connect with their own emotions in a personal way.

Abstract expressionism allows vast freedom of interpretation. How do you feel when viewers perceive meanings that differ from your original intent?

I always begin a piece from a personal state of mind, but I have no expectation that a viewer will feel exactly what I felt. In fact, my own journey with art has shown me that resonance is deeply personal and changes over time. When I was much younger, I didn't connect with darker, more subtle emotions, but as my life experience accumulates, my relationship with those works has transformed. I even see my own past work in a new light.
So, I am more than thrilled when viewers find meanings beyond my original intent. If my work can act as a catalyst for someone else's interpretation and imagination, then it has fulfilled its purpose. That generative dialogue is the true beauty of the abstract form. Therefore, when a viewer perceives a meaning that differs from my original intent, I see it as a testament to the painting's depth. It confirms that the work has become a mirror for the viewer's own experiences, which is a far more powerful outcome than simply transmitting my own. That endless potential for reinterpretation is the beautiful, open-ended nature of abstraction.

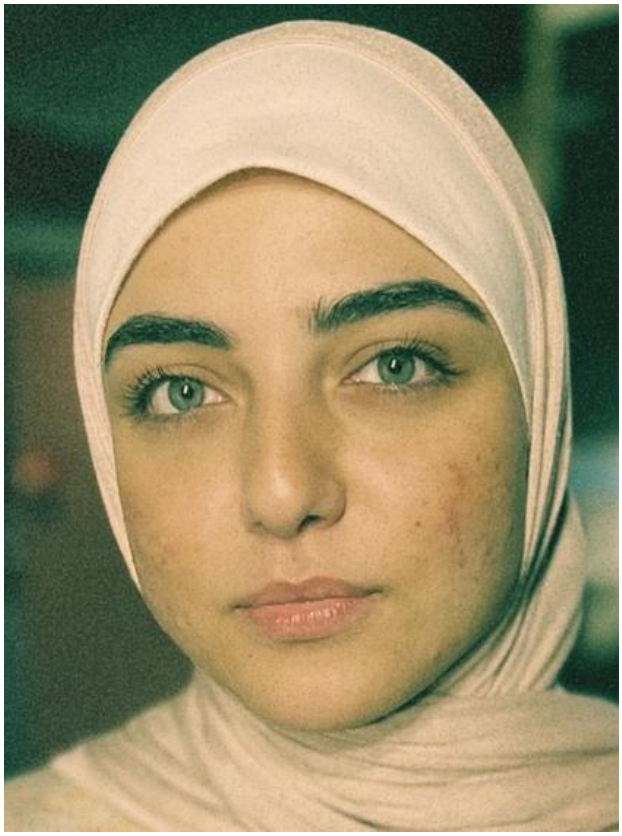
What does balance mean to you today — between art, work, and inner peace?

Balance, to me, is the dynamic connection between art, work, and inner peace.
Art gives me the strength to be truly myself. It is a genuine self-expression that heals me and can move others.
Work is what I do to make a living. I must love it to succeed, but its challenges and struggles are natural training to become more resilient.
Inner peace is the ultimate power that allows me to navigate life's ups and downs with confidence. For me, this peace grows from the wisdom I gain through both my art and my work.
So, my sense of balance comes from their connection: Art provides the channel to heal, work trains my resilience, and together, they generate the inner peace that allows me to face whatever comes next.

Enas Sistani is a street and conceptual photographer from Bahrain whose work explores cultural and social narratives through visual storytelling. Her photography often reflects everyday moments and human connections, aiming to inspire thoughtful dialogue and positive change. Enas's work has been exhibited and featured both locally and internationally, including by platforms such as MoMA, National Geographic, BBC Arabia, and VICE Arabia. She has received several recognitions for her work, including an Honorable Mention from the International Photography Awards in 2022.

Project Statement
This series is a visual reflection rooted in a research study I conducted on gender norms in the Arab region. Through anonymous surveys, I sought to understand the collective consciousness around gender expectations, the invisible rules shaping how masculinity and femininity are expressed, controlled, and judged. These photographs were born from that data, not as accusations, but as artistic meditations on long-held beliefs that are beginning to shift.
What emerged from the study was a recurrent theme: the home as both a sanctuary and a constraint. Many respondents associated womanhood with domesticity, purity, modesty, and at times, with silence. Being outside the home was interpreted as transgressive for women, while men were permitted public space, power, and freedom of movement. Emotional repression, particularly among men, was seen not as a flaw, but as an expectation, masculinity being tightly bound to stoicism and dominance. These generational patterns, however, are beginning to shift as regional conversations around gender equity, women's empowerment, and emotional well-being evolve.
In the photographs, I use visual metaphor to translate these complex narratives. The window motif appears as a silent witness, representing both longing and observation, and echoing the feeling of being inside, looking out. The white fabric becomes a recurring symbol of purity, clean, feminine, but also fragile and easily marked. A speck of blood disrupts its perfection: a symbol of violence, pain, reproductive injustice, or even sacrifice.
Broken clocks appear in another composition, representing how women are often governed by invisible timelines: expectations around marriage, motherhood, age, and behavior. Their time is not always their own. The man in the war helmet embodies repressed vulnerability, the inner conflict between tenderness and the performative masculinity required by societal norms. His pink attire is deliberate, softness, emotion, color, and care are not exclusively feminine, yet have been denied to him in the name of strength.
Rather than framing these ideologies as flaws of a particular region or culture, this work aims to highlight the universality of imposed roles, and the beauty in beginning to question them. The region, like many parts of the world, is undergoing a gender awakening. Women are reclaiming space. Men are slowly being given room to feel. And yet, the past still echoes in the expectations held today.

Nina Testaverde



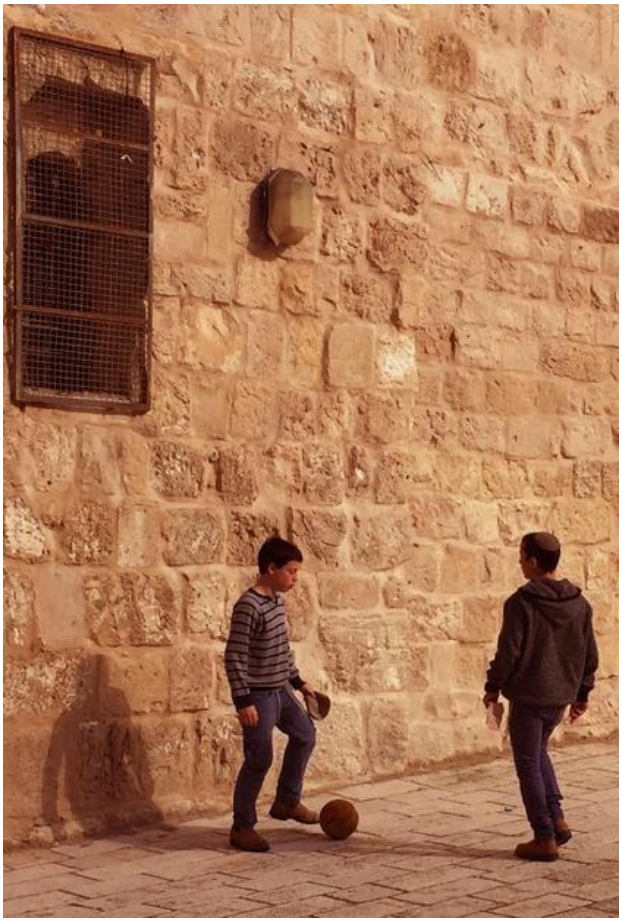
Nina Testaverde | Portrait Of Palestine

Your previous practice has focused on material culture and the language of craft. What inspired you to move toward photography for this new project?

I have been photographically documenting for some time, though I do not seek out, necessarily, to impose a story.
This project came to me, by instance in Athens, after having spent time connecting, and forming a friendship with a women named, Asma. The intention was not to create an exhibition or a project, rather, after listening to her speak about her life and experience, I felt that that I had wanted to capture the moment and share it with her.
The images are speaking a language—they carry inside of these moments, a dialogue both as separate images, and in conversation with one another. In this way, I see photography as a branch of visual culture, through the capture of fleeting moments in time, space, and context.

Can you tell us more about your encounter with Asma and how this meeting shaped the narrative of your "Portrait of Palestine"?

If there were ever a time to listen and learn from the experiences of other human beings without the barrier of social media and external social conceptions, now would be the time to begin (or to continue). Asma shared with me her story, not only as a Palestinian woman who has been displaced by war, but as a friend. She shared her experience leaving the culture and country which she loves; her people, family members, friends—many of whom, may not have had the chance to survive the horrific tragedies which continue to occur, today, in Palestine. She spoke of the land, the olive trees, and her beloved streets of Gaza, which remain forever changed.
It did not feel like a choice, but a necessity, that I should share the image of the portrait (with permission)— one image of very many Palestinian and Israeli people who have been impacted by the tragedies which continue to occur.



Nina Testaverde | Portrait Of Israel

Both photographs seem to be in silent dialogue — what emotional or symbolic balance did you wish to express between "Portrait of Palestine" and "Portrait of Israel"?

The image of two children at al-Madina al-Qadima, Jerusalem, is entitled Portrait of Israel. Innocent boys, at play, unaware of what awaits themselves and their families as this war develops— taking lives and creating tensions which rob them of certainty for a peaceful tomorrow. A casualty of war: the innocence of children.
The image was taken in 2018, prior to the height of this conflict. I met a man who had his hearing taken after a bomb had detonated on a public bus. Even during this perceived time of peace there was tension; a wall, separation, vigilance. I realized, in these quiet moments, as children play, that freedom was not inherent. Two boys play, despite political tensions— outside of the noise of a conflict which they did not choose. In both instances; the children in Jerusalem, and, Asma having fled from her homeland— there was not a choice. One image speaks to the other, in innocence. Both sides are impacted and both sides have experienced immense loss.
The images are titled, simply, Portraits. Together their dialogue speaks to both sides of this devastating, ongoing conflict.

Do you consider these works part of a larger ongoing project about transnational dialogue, or do they stand independently as a statement on conflict and humanity?

The work is a continuation of a dialogue which tends to be bound together by human relationships and the complexity of global cultures.

What kind of emotional reaction or reflection do you hope the viewer experiences when seeing these portraits side by side?

A reflection on the passage of time between these two images, and the events which have transpired in the space inbetween. Remembrance— an understanding of a situation which is very real. Those who are directly impacted by this conflict come from vastly different political views, yet we are as humanity, not as sides of a faceted political and ideological conflict.

Looking forward, do you plan to continue exploring photographic storytelling in your future practice, or return to ceramics and mixed media?

Spero! My creative work is a holistic part of my experience, as such, I will continue to create in whichever medium allows me dialogue.

Madalyn Dodson was originally from Shenyang, China. Madalyn moved to Berea, Kentucky, in 2011 and later to Richmond in 2023. Relocating to a new country provided the opportunity to learn English alongside her native language, Mandarin. Madalyn is currently attending Eastern Kentucky University, where she is majoring in Art/Design Studio and minoring in Asian Studies. She decided to pursue art in college because of the enjoyment of creating art, like drawing and origami, in middle school. Her favorite art style is 2D cartoons. She draws inspiration from cartoon artists like Walt Disney. Madalyn wants to be a professional cartoonist. Madalyn's practice includes the usage of graphite, colored pencil, marker, and Sharpie.

Artist Statement
Growing up, I loved watching cartoon shows, like Big-Ear Tutu, which continues to inspire the artwork I create today. As a child, I didn't consider creating art until an art class in middle school. That experience introduced me to the basics of art, and the assignments revealed a love for creating cartoon-style pieces. In college, I took a studio drawing class that taught more in-depth about drawing techniques and art that I needed to know. That class inspired me to pursue art more and consider a career in art.
I take inspiration from traditional cartoonists' art styles, such as Tony Bancroft, who animated Mulan. As well as Gustaf Tenggren, who is also a Disney animator who has done Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. This is why I use pencils, colored pencils, Sharpies, and markers in my art. I take inspiration from online images that I want to recreate, such as cartoon characters. I want my art to reach as many people as possible. My goal is for people to look at my art and be happy. I hope the cartoons that I draw catch the attention of other studios and future artists.

Dodson Madalyn | Winnie The Pooh

Dodson Madalyn | Monkey King

Katerina Milashechkina

Could you tell us about your first memories of drawing? What inspired you as a child?

Since early childhood, I've loved to draw. I started with coloring books and felt-tip pens, later trying to create my own superhero characters or entire comics. Years go by, interests change, but ideas never run out — they only add up to my creative "treasure chest."
As a child, I was inspired by the act of drawing itself — the joy of creating something beautiful, which immediately filled me with pride and admiration for what I had made. That same inspiration has grown stronger over the years and still gives me strength in stressful moments.
I truly love art. I've also written poetry — some of my poems were even presented in a library event, where I received a "Lyric of the Year" award. I've started writing a book, still in progress, constantly expanding with new drafts and ideas. I want to create something unique — a book unlike any other — and later illustrate it myself with accompanying paintings and drawings.

Katerina Milashechkina | At Depth | 2025

How have the art courses you're attending influenced your creative style and vision?

I attend art courses, and I don't regret continuing to develop as an artist. Thanks to these classes, I've found new meanings and opportunities to "paint my life with new colors."
Just as I dreamed in childhood, I now participate in exhibitions — experiences that strengthen my belief in myself and my abilities. These moments make me realize that I can achieve more — that I can.
They also inspired me to not just dream of recognition, but to leave something truly meaningful and beautiful behind.

What emotions or stories do you aim to express through your paintings?

My portfolio as an artist is not yet complete, but I'm actively working on new paintings. I always try to infuse each work with meaning, mood, and a piece of myself.
Painting is one of the best ways for me to escape daily routine and overcome difficult periods in life. Since I work in logistics while also studying finance, it's often hard to relax — and art feels like a breath of fresh air.

The two paintings you shared are very different in mood and theme. Do you usually explore such diverse styles?

Yes, I like to experiment and express myself across different genres, using various methods to convey my inner stories. I'm working on this direction and believe that one day I'll be able to present all my completed works at my own solo exhibition.
The two paintings you mentioned reflect very different moods:
"At Depth" represents overcoming fear and finding strength

Katerina Milashechkina | For Luck | 2025

in difficult situations, while “For Luck” doesn’t carry a deep message — it was created simply to celebrate the beauty of nature. This piece actually found a potential buyer even before I finished it, but I decided not to sell it yet. My current goal is to build a strong exhibition portfolio first.

Do you have a favorite medium or technique you prefer working with?

Right now, I’m in search of my artistic identity — something that will set me apart from others. However, acrylic paint has already taken a special place in my heart.

Can you share more about your idea for a future exhibition? What themes do you want to explore?

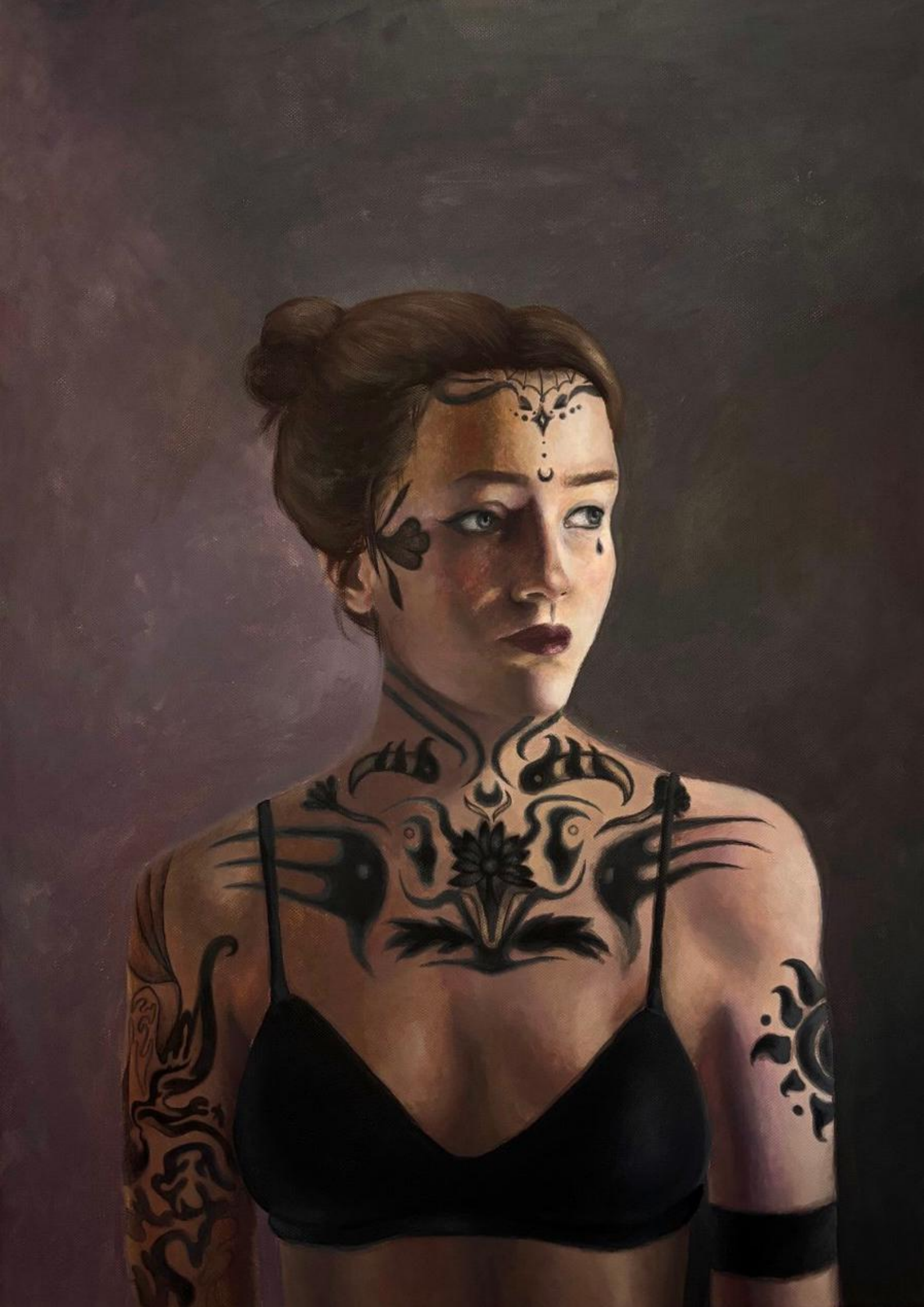
There isn’t a concrete concept yet — it’s still in development. But I know for sure that I want my paintings to carry deep meaning while remaining simple, concise, and realistic.

What challenges have you faced in your journey as a developing artist?

My biggest challenge has always been self-criticism. On one hand, it helps me notice imperfections and improve my work without outside help. But on the other hand, it hides a demanding perfectionist — someone who always strives to make everything absolutely perfect.

Ekaterina Bimaeva

Project Statement
My work is a portrait of a young woman gazing melancholically to the side. She averts her eyes from the viewer, and only part of her body and face is illuminated. Her entire body—even her face - is covered in tattoos, symbolic markers of the 21st century. In this piece, I wanted to reflect on how the real world and the present time influence a person and the human soul. Do we "turn ourselves inside out" in search of approval, trying to reveal our true selves through the prism of tattoos? Or are we hiding behind dark and curious patterns so that no one can see what lies within?



Negin Kianpour

Your works merge painting with reflection, turning the mirror into a living surface. How did this idea first come to you, and what does the mirror represent for you personally?

Since childhood, painting has been an inseparable part of who I am — not just a practice, but a reflection of my character. Yet I was always searching for the true meaning of art. Like many artists, I explored different materials and techniques, but traditional forms never gave me that raw feeling of creation.

Negin Kianpour | Unbroken Reach

The idea of painting on mirrors grew stronger when I realised I no longer wanted to present art through conventional methods. Art, for me, has always belonged to the viewer — like a theatre stage that remains incomplete without its audience. But in most traditional settings, the viewer is only invited to look, not to experience or to see themselves within the work.
To me, the mirror is not a silent or passive surface. It is a living, secretkeeping medium that reveals inner emotion. By merging painting with reflection, I dissolve the boundary between the artwork and the audience, creating a shared space where both become part of the same story.

In On the Edge of Hope, fractured faces and red slashes create a sense of tension between destruction and resilience. What emotions or experiences inspired this work?

The idea for On the Edge of Hope emerged from observing the collective emotions of modern society — a society constantly oscillating between fear, anger, exhaustion, and hope. I have always been drawn to how people react emotionally to social pressure and uncertainty. For me, these moments reflect a kind of collective psyche, where the inner and outer worlds of human beings collide.
The fractured faces and red lines in this work represent this tension — cracks between destruction and endurance. None of the faces are whole; each embodies a fragment of contemporary humanity: fear, isolation, resilience, and hope. Ultimately, this work is not just about suffering, but about the dialogue between individual emotion and shared experience — a reminder that even within silence and fracture, the quiet pulse of hope still persists.

Negin Kianpour | On The Edge Of Hope

Unbroken Reach: The Hands That Remember carries a feeling of longing and human connection. How did you develop the visual language of reaching hands and golden threads?

Unbroken Reach: The Hands That Remember was born from both personal and collective experiences of separation — the distance between people, memories, and the places we once belonged to.
The reaching hands represent bonds that have been torn apart by time yet still long for connection. Their movements through shadow and light express the quiet human effort to rediscover meaning and belonging.
The golden thread that runs between them symbolizes memory and love — an invisible link that continues to bind us together despite distance. To me, this work is about hope within separation, and the belief that perhaps it is in the very act of reaching that we remain alive.

Both works deal with the ideas of memory and touch — but also distance. Do you see them as two sides of the same story?

For me, these two works represent different chapters of a larger story — a story of humanity navigating pressure, distance, and the search for meaning.
In On the Edge of Hope, I explored the collective emotions of a society suspended between fear, anxiety, and resilience. In contrast, The Hands That Remember begins from a personal feeling of separation that gradually unfolds into a universal search for connection, memory, and wisdom. Ultimately, They stand as two sides of one journey — one expresses the wound, the other, endurance and quiet hope.

You invite viewers to see themselves within your art — literally and metaphorically. How do you think this active participation changes their relationship with the work?

In my work, the viewer is not a passive observer but becomes part of the piece itself. Unlike traditional art, where the audience stands outside the work, the mirror invites them inside — transforming them from spectators into participants.
When someone sees their own reflection within the artwork, a dual experience emerges: they confront both the emotions of the piece and their own inner world. Each person's encounter becomes unique — not only visual, but deeply emotional and introspective.
I remember on the day of photography for The Hands That Remember in a public space; people would stop, gaze, and even touch the mirror's surface. Some seemed lost in thought, others reached out as if to connect. In that moment, I realised the artwork no longer belonged solely to me — it had become a living dialogue between art and humanity, where the boundaries between creator, work, and viewer dissolve.

Your background in architecture is evident in the way you construct space and layers. How does architectural thinking influence your visual compositions?

Before entering the world of architecture, painting was my first language. Even as a child, I had an instinctive sense of space and structure, expressed through colour and line. Architecture later gave me a framework to reshape those same emotions through form, rhythm, and balance. During my Master's studies in London, this perspective expanded through sociology — I began to understand space not as a physical shell, but as an emotional and social reflection of human life.
In my works, art, architecture, and sociology converge. I construct space like a mental map; the mirror is not just a surface but an environment where the viewer moves, much like a floor plan that becomes meaningful through human presence.
Architectural thinking has made my compositions inherently layered — physically through mirror, paint, and texture, and conceptually through emotion, memory, and reflection. For me, architecture is not merely the creation of space, but the design of lived experience — and painting is the same: an act of constructing emotional space where the viewer can dwell.

Reflection can be both intimate and uncomfortable. How do audiences usually respond when they suddenly see their own image inside the artwork?

Reflection in my work creates a dual experience — it can be intimate and unsettling at the same time. The moment a viewer sees their own image within the piece, they are confronted with their inner self. It is both beautiful and uneasy, because in that instant, both vulnerability and truth are revealed.
People's reactions are deeply personal. Some smile softly, some fall silent, others reach out and touch the surface as if to connect. They are searching for something beyond the image — perhaps a forgotten part of themselves.
For me, that encounter between the viewer and their reflection is the peak of the artwork. The mirror is not simply a tool for seeing; it is an instrument of introspection. My aim is for the audience not only to view the work but to experience themselves within it — even if that experience feels quietly uncomfortable.

Masha Levchenko | 716450 | 2025

Masha Levchenko

Your statement revolves around the question "Who am I?". How does photography help you explore this question?

Among the multitude of alternatives, it's hard to understand — what is truly me? Am I what society has instilled in me, or do I resist the influence and directions of other people's minds? It's not just photography, but a creative process that helps me enter the inner realm. It's like keeping an emotional diary — you begin to hear and understand yourself, but through images.

Masha Levchenko | 835429 | 2024

Do you believe that through self-discovery one can also lose a part of themselves, as you suggest in your text?

Yes, it's inevitable — not the loss of your true self, but rather of your current one. As we discover and embrace the new, we displace the old. When faced with the question, am I this body or am I consciousness? — can one ever fully go back to focusing only on the material after that?

Many of your images seem to reflect solitude and reflection. Are they autobiographical, or do they speak more universally?

I hope it's not part of a trend. I think everything is about autobiography — any creative expression.

What role does the environment play in your work — especially the contrast between natural and urban spaces?

Sometimes it plays a very big role.
It may happen that the artist is not me, but rather the space I am in at the moment of

Masha Levchenko | 543665 | 2025

shooting.
“I am an instrument in your hands.”
And there are several approaches to this.
In the first one, you deliberately choose the environment — an abandoned house, a meat market, a psychiatric hospital, etc. — and you don’t have to invent anything, because the space itself is already assembled, the scenery already set.
In the second, more interesting approach, you simply go into an unfamiliar environment, arrive at the location, and the space begins to change before your eyes — like in our works 876499 and 835429, when there was a storm at the time of shooting, one we never ordered.
But in both the second and the first case, something unexpected can happen. For example, during the shoot, the psychiatric hospital might start to be demolished, a herd of sheep could run through the meat market, or a UFO could crash into the old house.

Your works often evoke a sense of mystery and silence. How important is ambiguity in your creative process?

“The reader is a co-author.” That’s the approach I follow. Ambiguity is a space for reflection. And I don’t mean an endless search for hidden meaning — if I can’t find a clear structure, perhaps it isn’t meant to be there at all.

How do you choose between color and black-and-white when expressing emotion or mood in your images?

Always depending on my mood. Sometimes I can spend several weeks thinking about whether to keep the photo in color or turn it into black and white.

What inspires your visual aesthetics — literature, cinema, or personal memories?

Literature, cinema, and personal memory.
And also music.
And the whole world — down to the bricks of a ruined building.

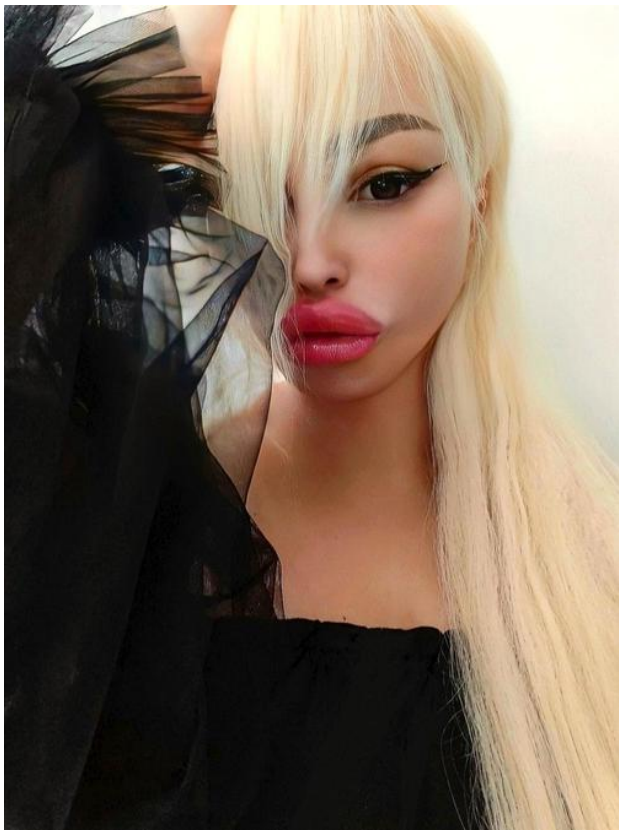
Cecile Lacombe
"What is our relationship to others?" asks Cécile Lacombe.
Her work explores the invisible threads that connect us, where each encounter becomes a space of transformation.
Through experimental compositions, still or moving, she creates dialogues images and mediums, free from boundaries of culture, gender, or value.
Independent and unconventional, she approaches digital imagery as both a graphic and pictorial language.
Her instinctive process reflects a world in constant motion, where every gesture is a form of connection, and where emotion, shadow, and light coexist.

Project Statement
INVA-ZION series
The invasion of one country by another is a ancient phenomenon that continues to influence international relations. He can manifest in various forms, ranging from military occupation to economic exploitation, and even cultural imperialism.
The invasion raises essential ethical and strategic questions. She highlights the inequalities between nations ans sparks debates on sovereignty, international responsibility, and human rights.

Cecile Lacombe | Tank | 2022

Cecile Lacombe | Camp | 2022

Lea Laboy



How did your transition from academic oil painting to conceptual and psychogeographic art occur?

Conceptual art is like a shadow that accompanies my oil painting. One feeds the other and forms an integral whole. However, I've noticed that when my faith in humanity wanes, I return to conceptual work. The only change is that previously, during such periods, I created Performance that assumed viewer interactions, whereas now I enter a space that influences me, presenting the finished product to viewers—an object. This is a completely different creative process than performance, though close to painting if we accept the psychographic assumption that the city is a constantly changing "landscape of dreams".

Lea Laboy | Psychogeograhy

Your recent work explores the intersection between psychogeography and oriental architecture. How do these two seemingly distant worlds connect in your artistic vision?

Psychogeography, generally speaking, is a science that examines how the urban environment—its architecture, layout, and atmosphere itself—influences the emotions of individuals. Therefore, every location is a potential site for fieldwork.

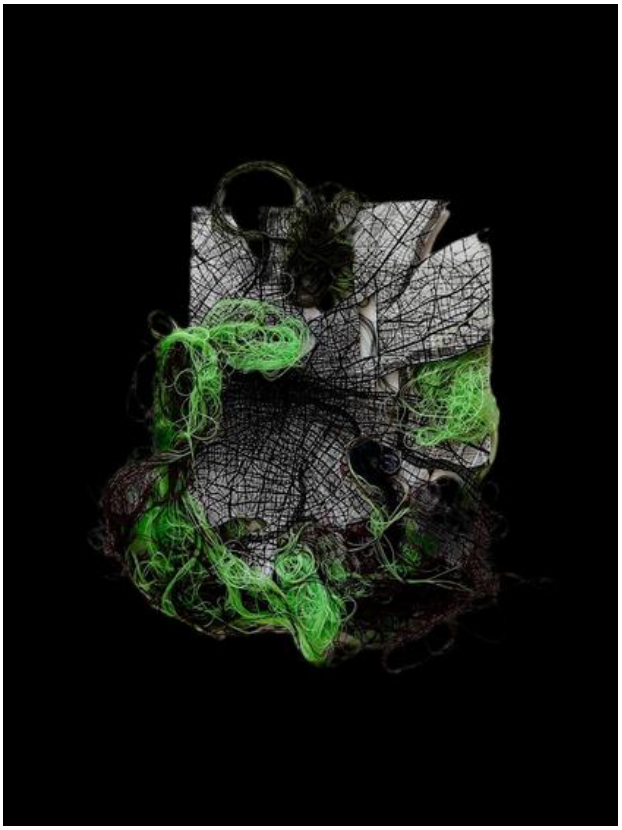
Could you elaborate on the influence of 1950s psychogeographic practices — particularly those inspired by Guy Debord — on your recent projects?

Drifting is certainly the key practice I'm referring to, which in itself is the essence of psychogeography. Let's also remember that psychogeography is a field that draws from surrealism, utilizing its techniques, and therefore focuses very strongly on the sphere of emotions, which I have also adopted. I certainly utilize objective chance, relying on coincidences.

What role does photography play in your artistic method — is it documentation, or an autonomous form of expression?

Photography in my work serves only as a form of documentation. Sometimes a moment is not enough to capture with a brush, but enough to make a single click with a camera.

Many of your works deal with architecture and sacred spaces. What draws you to these environments, and how do you capture their emotional resonance?



Lea Laboy | Psychogeograhy

This is an obvious topic for me because I'm a believer. I've encountered many different religious "environments," as you call them, and I've always wondered what makes this special atmosphere that makes you automatically enter a space dedicated to God and lose yourself in time, while others make you want to leave immediately. When I was studying Art History, professors often attributed this to the idea of telluric lines, giving Chartres Cathedral as an example. However, this theory is unsubstantiated by both historians and archaeologists. Another point of contention was the fact that temples were usually built on the sites of former temples. A good example is the Cathedral of Notre Dame, which was built on the site of the Cathedral of Saint-Etienne, built around the 5th century. The same is true for the mosques on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which I documented in my book. Summarizing, everything science says is probably important, but from my perspective as someone who visited temple after temple every day, keeping records, the most important element is faith, which finds its outlet in prayer. I remember how, after three days on the road, in filth, with no access to drinking water, with temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), and with a "minor plane crash," I finally found myself in a clean room. The only thing I did was get ready and go to the nearest temple. When I arrived, I was truly weak and looked like this. The older men, the temple caretakers, asked me if something had happened or if I needed anything. I told them about my journey. I asked if I could just pray. They nodded, and one of them addressed me with the words: Go and breath the prayer of the ages, it will give you strength. He spoke the truth. When I entered, I was enveloped in an unprecedented peace. This place emanated all the prayers offered here over the centuries. This is the key to my question, because although science studies and documents, without faith it is impossible to properly understand the essence of sacred places.

How do you perceive the act of walking — a key concept in psychogeography — as part of your artistic process?

I see the act of entering psychogeography as a key technique for studying the environment. If we examine this process, we will notice that it has profound meaning because it allows the researcher to establish a personal connection with the surroundings. After all, we live in a world dominated by technology, where personal choices matter less and less. When traveling by public transport, we cannot simply get off at any time and change the route. When we travel on foot, we decide on every element of our journey. We often discover things that are overlooked because they are not on the designated public route, such as secret paths or ruins hidden in groves, and all of this, after all, contributes to the history of a place. When we travel on foot, we also have the opportunity to meet people connected to a given place, which is also an important element in building our image of it.

When working with maps and spatial forms, do you aim to represent a real topography, or an emotional and mental landscape?

When I began my adventure with psychogeography, I focused mainly on actual topography, but over time my thinking began to evolve. I realized that there weren't really any rules here that I couldn't adapt or create for my own research needs. In my opinion, psychogeography still remains a very open field, difficult to definitively pigeonhole. Although it was officially named and defined in 1955 by Guy Debord and associated with the activities of the Situationist International, it actually originated much earlier and was widely used by authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, who is considered one of its precursors. Drawing on the work of Edgar Allan Poe, I turned my attention to the mental landscape. One such work is "Erasing History," which, although it refers to an existing place, overlaps three layers of time. The first refers to the 17th century, the second to the period of World War II, and the third is the year 2024, when I enter the space of this place. This place has evolved throughout its history. First, there was a monastery here, then the harshest prison where the Germans executed innocent people. It was here that a young girl from my family was held captive by German torturers who caught her in a roundup. From this prison, where political prisoners were mainly held, there were only two options: concentration camp or death. The child's mother undertook a dramatic battle against time, risking her own life. You know, few women would dare to speak out against the German degenerates, knowing their methods, yet she proudly went with her head held high to collect her child, bidding farewell to her family as if she would never return. Today, this place where people were tortured and executed is home to a cultural institution. In the summer, you can hear the laughter of children and the chatter of seniors who enjoy themselves at events here. This work explores the history of the place, focusing on the emotions associated with it today after its deliberate transformation into an entertainment facility, but above all, it questions the humanity of those who made this change and those who would come there to have fun. You can kill a person, distort history, or erase it, but you cannot take away the nature of a place because the stones scream.

Lyudmila Charskaya

Your academic training spans classical art education and contemporary practice. How do these different experiences shape the way you approach painting today?

I have an infinite love for visual art in all its forms, from ancient rock paintings and sculptures to contemporary objects. Studying art history, I always found something new in it, and my creative thinking intuitively began to relate to these periods. I think I felt how primitive artists once thought, and then my perception developed, inspiring me to create.
This naturally led me to a classical education. I absorbed its fundamentals: perspective, anatomy, colour theory, working with values, all the subtleties of composition. But I didn't want to stop there. I feel that one cannot limit oneself to a framework; one must move forward.
At the same time, I do not reject media that have been proven over centuries. I am very fond of canvas and paint applied with a brush. I develop my art with the help of these "ancient" tools. Academic knowledge — composition, proportions, colour — has become a reliable foundation and material for experimentation. It gives me the confidence to create something new.
A striking example is the painting "Astra Galaxy." Its compositional centre intuitively turned out to be in the golden ratio. This was particularly valuable to me: my action was based on feeling, but at the same time did not contradict the laws of nature studied by the Pythagoreans and Leonardo da Vinci. This knowledge has become part of my nature.
So, to conclude, having gone through classical training, I feel that I have the right to engage in abstraction while remaining in harmony with the laws of the universe.

What artistic or philosophical influences—beyond Nietzsche—have guided your journey toward "alchemical transformation" in art?

Apart from Nietzsche, Gnosticism has had a great influence on me — above all as a striving for true, secret knowledge. For me, gnosis is not just information, but a deep understanding of the essence of things, an inner experience of revelation. It is this idea of moving towards knowledge, towards the mystery of the world order, that inspires me and guides my creativity.
The interpretations of myths in Gnostic texts have always seemed incredibly poetic and vivid to me — they fill symbols with inner meaning. Through them, I came to realise that painting itself is alchemical in nature: in the process of transforming pigments, canvas, binders and the artist's gesture, a new matter, a different dimension, is born. This is the act of alchemical transformation — when the physical becomes spiritual and the visible becomes revelation.

Could you describe your process of turning pigment into "poetry"? How do you balance careful technique with intuitive, spontaneous gesture?

In my artistic practice, a lot of attention was initially paid to a thorough study of reality — perspective, light and air, proportions, tonal relationships. It is a school of observation and precision, brought to a state of almost photorealistic perception of the world. Thanks to this classical foundation, I feel that I can allow myself to seek not just form, but the inner poetry of the image.
For me, technique is not a shackle, but a support. It allows me to combine tension and release, discipline and impulse.

When academic techniques are perfected to the point of automatism, the brush begins to move not from calculation, but from feeling. At that moment, a miracle is born — the transformation of pigment into poetry.
I often feel that the paint itself guides me, that the movement of my hand becomes an extension of my inner impulse. Something akin to alchemy takes place: an inanimate substance, pigment, suddenly begins to breathe, transforming into an image, energy, meaning. And this transformation is possible precisely because it is backed by knowledge accumulated through experience and practice, but enlivened by intuition and freedom.

What role do materials—especially oil paint and gold leaf —play in expressing the metaphysical themes in your work?

The choice of materials and the process of creating my works are undoubtedly influenced by my conscious attitude towards matter — towards the very nature of paints. For me, paint is not just a means of representation, but a special substance with the potential to reflect everything: from the visible to the invisible, from form to the movement of the soul. It is as if it already contains all the diversity of the world, and when it is in my hands, the feeling is almost mesmerising.
Oil paint is attractive for its fluidity, plasticity, and ability to change. It seems to me that you can "mould" your own universe out of it. It is malleable, like wax in the hands of a creator — from it a new world is born, new matter, the breath of form.
Gold occupies a special place. Its symbolism has its roots in the Byzantine tradition and Russian iconography, where a gold background always signified not just wealth, but the presence of unearthly light — infinite radiance, a space outside of time. For me, gold is a conduit between the earthly and the metaphysical. That is why I use it very carefully, almost reverently. It gives the work a special mystery, sublimity and, I would say, an inner light that emanates from the world of ideas itself.

How do you decide on the palette and composition for each painting?

When approaching my alchemical painting, I try to look a little ahead — to see the canvas as already finished, as if it exists somewhere in the future and I just have to bring it to life. That's why, even before I start, I can roughly sense its colour, its breath, the range in which it will resonate. But at the same time, I always open up all the paints I have — as if giving them the opportunity to choose themselves for the work. The beginning is always spontaneous: I can start with any part of the canvas, gradually moving across its entire surface. At some point, the colours begin to 'bloom', to interact, and I feel that they are living their own lives. Then I become more of a conduit — tuned to a certain wavelength, where not only my consciousness is at work, but also my accumulated experience, knowledge and intuition.
When the work is finished, I look at it from the outside and realise that the compositional issues have somehow been miraculously resolved. Sometimes a pentagram appears in the structure, sometimes a tree of life diagram or the golden ratio, from which the entire composition grows. All this comes together naturally, as if following a predetermined route — as if the painting knew its path even before I touched it.

In your statement you write that the canvas becomes a "threshold where the ephemeral and eternal collide." Could you expand on this idea?

Of course. When I say that the ephemeral and the eternal collide on the canvas, I mean the moment when a fleeting sensation, an emotional impulse or an inner image takes shape and becomes something permanent — visual evidence of what has been experienced. Visual art has a unique ability to speak directly to the human soul, awakening its innermost thoughts and feelings. Through images, artists can guide viewers, gently leading them to reflect on the sublime, on harmony, on the movement of the elements and the energy that fills nature and ourselves. I believe that harmony has its own energy — alive, fluid, constantly in motion. It is this movement that I try to capture in my compositions and colour combinations.
For me, canvas is a kind of threshold between worlds. And the frame, if there is one, becomes a border, a portal through which the viewer can glimpse another space — a world that the artist opens up, but which the viewer completes with their own perception.

Many of your works depict flowers. What draws you to floral imagery as a vehicle for philosophical and spiritual ideas?

Here I would like to quote John of Kronstadt, whose words coincide in an amazing way with my inner feeling: "Flowers are fragments of paradise on earth." This idea is very close to my heart. For me, flowers are a reminder of primeval beauty, of the ideal that was once given to humanity and that still finds its way into our world through living matter. In every flower there is a breath of grace, a glimmer of lost perfection. However, I do not depict flowers in a botanical or naturalistic sense. It is important for me not so much to convey the form as to express the idea of the flower — its concept, its inner impulse. Sometimes it is not yet a flower, but it is no longer just an abstraction — something on the border between image and thought.
The flowers in my works are, rather, energetic entities, states of being. A space filled with possibilities, variations, the movement of light and spirit. Through them, I try to show not the object itself, but the vibration of life, that subtle level where matter touches the spiritual.

Meagan Killian is a Texas based new and emerging artist who grew up with two art-teacher parents who cultivated her love and appreciation for art from an early age. She earned her MFA from the University at Buffalo, where she deepened her exploration of the intersection between anatomy and architecture.
Her work investigates the balance and entanglement of symmetry and asymmetry found in the skeleton, organ systems, and the arrangement of muscles and tissues in the body. By fragmenting sections of architecture, she creates a dialogue between the structural systems of the body and the built environment.
Working in a variety of media—including acrylic, watercolor, paper cutouts, and wood structures—Killian draws viewers into architectural spaces that blur the line between the anatomical and the constructed. Through layered transparencies of anatomical structures, architectural elements, and shifting perspectives, she reveals moments where the body and architecture exist in a symbiotic relationship. She invites viewers to consider how these systems adapt, deteriorate, and endure over time, and what is required to preserve them.

Project Statement
My work explores the intersections of the human body and cathedral architecture, examining how structural systems—iron, stone, glass, timber, bones, cartilage, tendons, and ligaments—provide stability and respond to external forces and internal stressors. By approaching the body as a cathedral, where skin becomes surface and openings mark the confluence of inside and outside, I invite viewers to enter the body beyond its physical limits. Architectural lineage and familial inheritance connect the influence of genetics to one's perception and understanding of their own body.
Through acrylic painting and layered wood cutouts, I manipulate perception and spatial orientation, creating moments where the conscious and subconscious merge. Anatomical motifs intertwine with architectural fragments—from Romanesque solidity to Gothic verticality and Renaissance precision—tracing the evolution of structural thought alongside human physiology.
Drawing inspiration from Surrealism and artists such as Wim Delvoye, I subvert the perceived rigidity of cathedral forms, revealing fragility within strength. The 2019 Notre-Dame fire serves as both a symbolic and theoretical touchstone, underscoring the vulnerability of enduring structures and prompting reflection on preservation, loss, and cultural memory.
Architectural elements operate metaphorically, mapping onto psychological frameworks: rigid forms evoke the conscious mind, stained glass motifs hold narrative fragments, and dissolving lines suggest the subconscious. Beneath these layers lies the unconscious—formless, generative, and intertwined with bodily rhythms and inherited cultural legacies.
Through this interweaving of anatomical, architectural, historical, and psychological systems, my practice becomes a meditation on resilience, fragility, and inheritance. It considers how bodies and structures—corporeal and cultural—are sustained, disrupted, and reconstituted over time, contributing to an ongoing dialogue on materiality, memory, and the body as both subject and archive.

Meagan Killian | Anatomy of Design | 2024

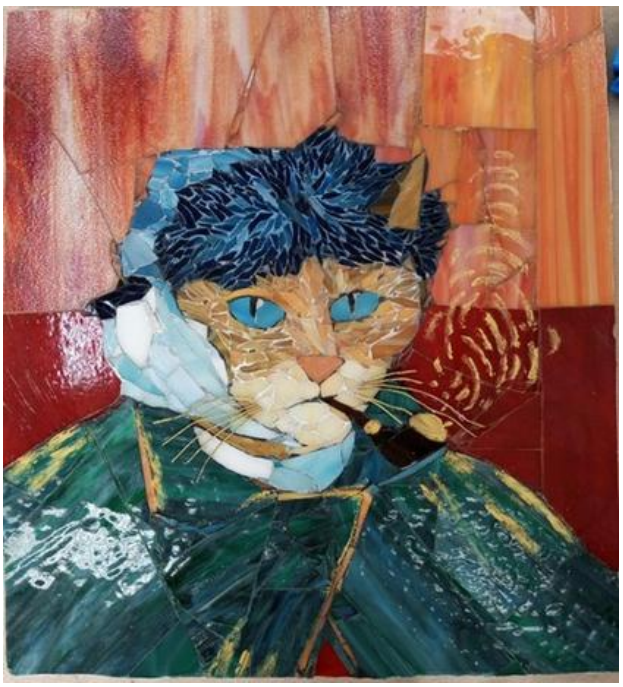
Meagan Killian | Echos in Sacred Spaces | 2025

Meagan Killian | Vestige Ossarium | 2025

Maria Egorova

You describe yourself as an organizer of art projects, a mosaicist, a contemporary artist, and a musician-how do these roles feed each other in your practice?

Yes, indeed, I define myself through many roles. They all emerged organically and helped me at some stage of my life journey; without each of them, I wouldn't be who I am today. But there is one key connecting link between all these roles - Creativity.
Initially, I was connected with music for most of my life - I started learning to play the piano at the age of five, then the guitar (I could even play the Moonlight Sonata). I also did some drawing. Then there was playing in several bands, first on the guitar, then on the drums - rehearsals, the drive of concerts, a lot of warm memories and emotions.

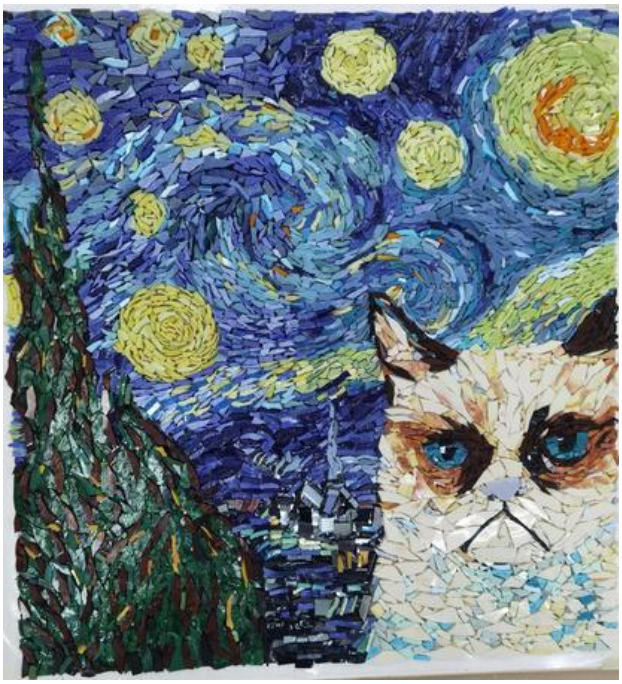


Maria Egorova | Portrait

At some point, the need for artistic self-expression drew my attention to ceramics - I was fascinated by the shapes, the moment when a piece of clay turns into a physical object, and its further refinement to the intended idea with the help of firings and paints. And then, on my way to ceramics, I accidentally turned to mosaics... and stayed there for a long time.
For me, it first became an original way to capture my emotions and ideas, then an attempt to engage in dialogue with the audience within exhibitions, which smoothly evolved into organizing art events. At the same time, I am interested in multidisciplinary events that include not only art exhibitions but also, for example, musical and poetry programs, as well as creative workshops and practices - that's how all my competencies found organic application, which I am very happy about!

When did mosaic move from "a technique" to your primary language of thinking and meaning-making?

I observed mosaic art for a long time - it's a very interesting technique, but not as simple as it might seem. It combines both the craft aspect (the method of cutting material, laying it out, and mounting) and the artistic aspect - working with color, texture, combining volumes, etc. At the same time, this is a very, very painstaking occupation - one large work can take about 100 hours of pure time! And it can weigh 15 kilograms or even more!
At first, I just wanted to «give it a try» - there was interest and curiosity. But pretty soon I could no longer see myself in other forms of creativity. If you fall in love with this technique, you can't stop (every mosaic artist will confirm this).
Every time you start a new work, it seems that you won't finish it before retirement - but gradually the work progresses, and soon the last tessera is being laid, while a dozen new ideas are already forming in your head!
For me, there is a special magic in mosaic - it's hard to describe in words. Starting from the fact that the painting begins to live its own life during the creation process and dictates its own conditions (this is how the original concept may change, or certain details may appear or disappear), and ending with the feelings you experience when the work is completed (it's hard to call it just satisfaction or joy - probably, you put so much energy into the painting that it inevitably acquires a special meaning!)
Interestingly, a certain occupational deformation of consciousness appears - you notice mosaic everywhere or



Maria Egorova | Van Cat

try to imagine how this or that object could be realized in this technique.

What did your earliest mosaics look like, and what's changed most since then?

In my early mosaics, the main task for me was to try and perfect working with various techniques and materials. Of course, the choice of subjects was also important and turned out to be quite symbolic - my first pieces laid the foundation for several series of works and influenced their further style and themes.
Now my works are primarily an invitation to dialogue and reflection. The main focus is on the message and idea, while the artistic design helps to support the concept, to make it interesting for the viewer, and to visualize symbols and narratives. However, I believe that my key works are still ahead! There are many ideas, but since mosaic art is not a quick process, their realization takes time.

How do you balance precision and accident-do you allow chance to shape the composition?

Absolutely! Mosaic art is a rather free and intuitive technique for me - there's always room for unexpected solutions that emerge during the process. At the same time, you never know how the material will break, but miraculously, each piece finds its rightful place (sometimes the place you've designated doesn't suit it - then it stubbornly jumps out of position)!
Essentially, you have a certain image of the work in your mind, but how it will manifest in practice is always a surprise, even for the artist!

You investigate the border between reality and the subconscious. How do you translate intangible states-dreams, liminality, transformation-into concrete mosaic structure?

Although mosaic is quite a monumental and «rigid» technique, where the artist is bound to the material and its specific characteristics, it nevertheless provides a rather wide scope for artistic expression. This is achieved through 3D effects, the combination of materials, and the use of tesserae in various shapes. All these elements allow emphasizing different aspects of the concept and creating amazing images where even subtle matters find their expression.

How do internet symbols and the cultural code of the 21st century enter your visual vocabulary without becoming mere "references"?

That's a very interesting question. Let me start with a little story - my first mosaic master class took place in the cozy Favoka studio, where many beautiful works by students were hanging on the walls. However, what surprised me the most was a piece depicting... french fries from McDonald's in the Roman mosaic technique (one of the oldest techniques). I found it very unusual and amusing.
Later, the teacher gave us a brief overview of the history of mosaic and expressed the idea that nowadays many people try to replicate ancient themes, while in ancient times people used to depict their own lives in mosaics - what they saw, ordinary objects, situations, etc.
In my works, I also want to show modern life. Since people spend a lot of time online, and various memes, emojis, and other digital elements have become part of our cultural code and a special way of connecting people, they occupy a certain part of my creativity. However, I try to weave this symbolism into narratives of the past (for example, you can notice my love for Van Gogh) and, in any case, use them as some kind of reference, trigger, or reason for rethinking and dialogue, rather than just a quote.

What kinds of audience reactions at exhibitions have most surprised or informed you?

It's fascinating to observe people at exhibitions and their emotions when they interact with art objects. I like that my works evoke various emotions - from surprise at how they were made to smiles and deep contemplation.
As an artist, it's very valuable for me when a work elicits a response in principle, making the viewer stop and take a closer look. When this happens, it unequivocally means that the artwork has succeeded.

Could you tell us a little about your projects and future plans?

As a mosaic artist and project organizer, my primary focus is on developing themes related to current psychological issues. I am particularly interested in topics such as childhood trauma, depression, stress, anxiety, self-esteem, self-love, and many others.
Together with my colleagues, including psychiatrist Telipov I.N., we are creating projects at the intersection of psychology and art. These projects offer visitors not only the opportunity to engage in dialogue with contemporary art but also to participate in various practices, acquire practical self-help tools, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others.
I believe this work is extremely important - it feels like a kind of social mission. In the future, with the support of international colleagues, I hope our projects will expand to the global level.

Sara Balak

Sara Balak is a visual artist based in Iran, working primarily with oil on canvas and deeply engaged with the psychological layers of inner experience. Her practice revolves around slow observation, symbolic structures, and the subtle transition between clarity and fragmentation. Over the past several years, she has participated in more than twenty group exhibitions both locally and internationally.

A significant part of Sara's artistic development took shape under the mentorship of Master Kamaleddin Rafiei at Parhoon Art Academy—an intensive, academically structured studio recognized for its rigorous approach to visual arts. At Parhoon, she trained in both classical and contemporary methods, learning drawing foundations, color theory, composition, oil techniques, and the discipline of building a painting through thoughtful layers. The academy's structured environment, which resembles a small-scale fine arts university, played a central role in shaping her visual language and technical precision.

Today, Sara's work reflects a synthesis of disciplined training and a personal search for inner stillness. Her paintings explore the quiet but complex territories of perception—where memory, awareness, and emotional shifts reconfigure themselves into layered visual forms. The influence of her academic training is present not only in her technical approach but also in the calm, deliberate sensibility that guides her artistic process.

Artist Statement

'The Architect of Silence' reflects my ongoing interest in the inner architecture of thought—how attention shifts, how memory takes shape, and how our internal experiences weave themselves into visual form. Painted in oil on canvas and built from mosaic-inspired structures, each element functions like a small fragment of consciousness, contributing to a larger psychological landscape.

The divided face symbolizes the dual forces within the mind: clarity and uncertainty, presence and drift, order and fracture. Cool tones on one side contrast with warmer, organic rhythms on the other, mirroring the balance between analytical thinking and intuitive insight. Spirals, pathways, and layered textures reflect the movement of thought—branching, merging, and settling into quiet.

This piece was created under the supervision of Master Kamaleddin Rafiei at Parhoon Art Academy, where I refined my approach to form, color, and conceptual structure. Through this work, I hope to offer a quiet pause—an invitation to notice the spaces where awareness rises slowly and silently.

Sara Balak | The Architect of Silence

— *Interview*

Nadezhda Zheltkova

Your paintings combine texture, symbolism, and natural forms. How did you first come to explore textured painting as your main medium?

Once I tried textured painting, I was captivated forever. Working with a palette knife—shaping and building texture from pastes—is a meditative process that draws you in and becomes just as important as the final result. Emotions are released onto the canvas and freeze into thin, calm lines or thick, dynamic strokes. The movement of the hand with the palette knife is so uniquely personal that its texture cannot be replicated! This deeply inspired me.
While depicting nature, I felt a desire to bring back the tactile sensation of natural materials and move away from the modern glossy plastic aesthetic. I began to experiment—adding sand, stones, bark, and fabric to my pastes. The painting becomes not just an image of nature, but something more. You want to reach out and touch it, remembering the roughness of stones, the ruggedness of bark, the delicacy of petals, the silky feel of a mane.

Nadezhda Zheltkova | Even Harsh Mountains Can Be Gentle | 2025

Horses appear frequently in your work — sometimes powerful, sometimes ethereal. What do they represent to you personally and artistically?

The history of humanity over many thousands of years is the history of domesticating and working with horses. This bond is imprinted in our subconscious. As a child, I often heard my grandmother's stories about the temperament, beauty, intelligence, and sensitivity of the horses that lived in their family. My love for horses is a connection to my ancestors, to the history of our lineage.
To me, the horse is a symbol of voluntary service to humans, of nobility, and of freedom of spirit. From a psychological perspective, perhaps it represents the part of my personality that does not submit to logic, but lives by intuition and follows emotion. It is my inner voice and spirit.
In an artistic sense, the horse symbolizes antiquity, memory, primordial nature, a guardian, a guide between worlds. In my work, I depict horses in a stylized manner, striving to move away from outer beauty toward their inner essence — to convey their energy, inner world, feelings, and emotions.

You mentioned your deep connection with horses and your studies in free hippovention. How has this experience influenced your creative vision?

When I got my own horse, I immediately realized that horseback riding is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the relationship with a horse. Being close to this animal, I felt its enormous emotional and spiritual potential. Horses are sometimes called “land dolphins” because of their highly developed emotional intelligence and complex social behavior.

Nadezhda Zheltkova | Freedom To The Free | 2023

As I began to explore different approaches to human–horse interaction, I discovered the field of free equine-assisted practices — supportive experiences that take place within a herd of freely living horses. This approach became the missing piece of the puzzle in my perception and understanding of horses. The stories that unfold within the herd during these sessions, the horses' voluntary engagement in the therapeutic process — it is truly astonishing!
When I portray a horse, I strive to convey my experience — the understanding of equine psychology, their emotions and feelings, their true freedom and strength of spirit that I have come to discover. I want to depict not what a horse looks like, but what a horse feels like.

Many of your works seem to merge earthly and spiritual elements. Do you see your art as a dialogue between nature and the inner world?

We are part of nature, and our deepest emotions follow the same laws as the natural elements. By observing nature, we discover ourselves. Sometimes it is a dialogue between nature and the inner world of a human being; sometimes they are born simultaneously from the same source, and then no boundary exists between them.

The color palette in your paintings — muted greys, golds, and earthy tones — evokes both serenity and mystery. How do you choose your colors?

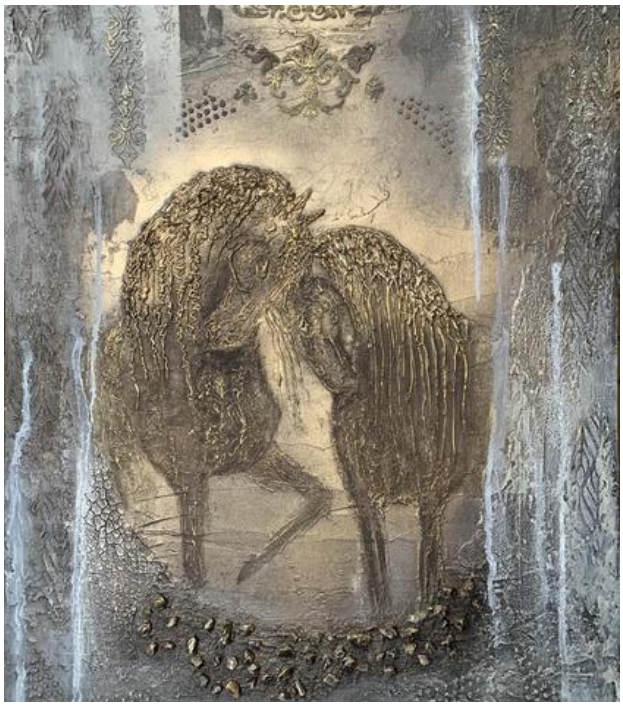
For me, the primary source of inspiration is nature. I can spend hours walking with my dog in the forest in any weather, taking countless photos of stones, tree bark, aged surfaces, and the sky before rain — images that I later incorporate into my work. I love the palette of early spring and late autumn — nothing bright, just muted tones of brown, gray, and mossy green. During this time of year, all the decorative excess fades away, leaving only the essence. It puts me in a philosophical state of mind. In my work, I prefer a calm, subdued color palette so that nothing distracts from the meanings I embed in my art.

You have an engineering and psychology background. How do these disciplines influence the way you approach composition and texture in your works?

My engineering background allows me to deeply understand the process of creating texture, always maintain structural balance in composition, and take bold creative risks while keeping in mind the specific properties of different materials —making the final result both intentional and predictable. As a psychologist, I look at a painting not merely as a beautiful image, but as a message where the viewer's emotional response matters most. By using various compositional tools, it becomes possible to evoke a wide range of emotions in the audience.

In your opinion, what role does art play today in helping people reconnect with nature and empathy toward animals?

Human beings tend to view the world through an anthropocentric lens — the belief that humanity is the center of the universe and that the value of everything in nature is determined by its usefulness to people. Unfortunately, we have grown increasingly distant from nature and often treat animals as mere resources. Until recently, we knew very little about the emotional lives of animals. Many great artists, striving for dramatic imagery, portrayed animals with expressions of intense pain and fear. Think, for example, of Bryullov's The Rider or photographs of "hot" racehorses, exhausted after the track. Suffering, as a mode of existence, has become ingrained in our psyche on a subconscious level. Art that represents not just an "animal" but an individual being with a unique inner world — an archetype of freedom and strength — can foster human empathy and, more importantly, inspire the desire to preserve the world that humans and animals share. Paintings depicting nature through a calm, muted palette and complex textures allow us to feel nature as if by touch, to recall our subconscious tactile experiences with natural surfaces. This deepens and personalizes the viewer's emotional response, helping to restore our connection with the natural world.



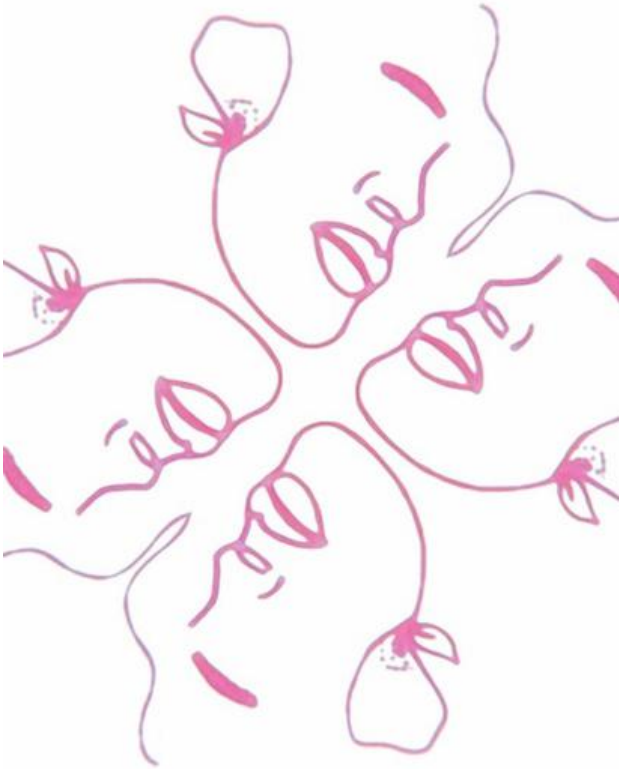
Nadezhda Zheltkova | Ode To Love | 2023

Anne-Sophie MESLEM

Could you tell us about the moment you realized art would become your primary form of expression?

I am, above all, self-taught. Drawing has been part of my life since childhood — it was my first language, my refuge. From childhood until I was 15, I dreamed of becoming a fashion designer. In pre-adolescence, I took sewing classes in a small workshop in a nearby town where I grew up in the Yvelines, nurturing my love for creating and shaping forms.

At 16, I even opened a Myspace page dedicated to graphic design, but I didn't feel confident enough in my work to pursue it, even though it was exciting and fun. I've always found something deeply therapeutic in art. As a teenager, I experienced school bullying — probably because I didn't quite fit the mold — and creating became a way to stay connected to myself, to process and to heal. It shaped me profoundly. Even today, I need moments of solitude to create, to think, to recharge, even though I'm naturally drawn to others.



For me, art always begins and ends with the human being. It reveals what we sometimes hide or disguise to conform — until the flower finally blooms. Trauma and rebirth are very present in my work; they resonate deeply with my own journey.

Painting, however, is something I'm truly discovering today, even if it has always fascinated me. When I was little, the concierge in my parents' building — a kind, grandmotherly woman — had an apartment filled with paintings. I remember praying to be invited in after daycare; it felt like entering another world. Being surrounded by those large canvases brought me an incredible sense of peace and wonder.

In the middle of my adult life, at the very beginning of my twenties, I spent a summer in California visiting my older sister, where I had the opportunity to work as a production assistant on set. I was deeply marked by the cultures, colors, scents, and the majestic palm trees.

A few years later, I studied photography at CE3P, a short but very intense and enriching training, which gave me the opportunity to explore my first professional steps as a visual storyteller. Around the same time, out of curiosity, I enrolled in Persian classes at INALCO in Paris. I also joined the school's photography club, where I began my first visual investigation on a persecuted community, particularly in Iran. My goal was to promote equality, education, and dialogue between cultures. That experience profoundly shaped my way of looking at people — with empathy, nuance, and depth.

I later worked as a photojournalist, exploring themes such as identity, resilience, and the poetry of everyday life — subjects that still nourish my artistic vision today. This also allowed me to create portraits of athletes, among other projects.

Over time, I've realized that I don't need to choose one medium. Exploring different territories feels natural to me. My first camera, a Canon I received in the autumn of 2005, opened another dimension. I loved the idea of mixing investigation and aesthetics, probably influenced by Veronica Mars, which I was obsessed with at the time. Before that, I was already the queen of disposable Kodaks at family gatherings and vacations.

Today, painting and drawing deeply complement each other, but I remain endlessly curious. This year, I've explored pottery and theatre, and I've returned to singing, which I loved as a child. I think creation is a way of staying alive — always full of ideas and impulses. Now I'm learning to give them structure while keeping spontaneity.

Your work explores femininity, intimacy, and emotions. What draws you to these themes?

What draws me to these themes is the power of the body. I don't exclude the possibility of depicting men in my work one day, but the female body fascinates me: its strength, its resilience, and its capacity to be reborn after suffering. For centuries, this body has intrigued and disturbed, across many civilizations.

I also love the idea of portraying different silhouettes, as the great Niki de Saint Phalle did. Women are multiple, and what truly interests me is paying homage to their authenticity. We live in a time where conformity is increasing, and I want to encourage women to be proud of who they are — their bodies, their hair, their noses. We have the power to endure pain, and thus the power to move mountains by asserting ourselves and being visible, without losing sensitivity.

How do drawing, painting, and photography complement each other in your creative process?

Drawing has always been my most instinctive way of expressing myself — the place where everything begins. Painting, which I'm now exploring more deeply, allows me to slow down, embrace texture, and work with emotion in a more physical way. Photography brought another dimension: a sense of narrative, composition, and attention to what exists both inside and outside the frame.

My photographic background sharpened my eye, while drawing and painting keep me connected to gesture, intuition, and imperfection. Today, I let these practices feed one another rather than choosing between them. I'm also exploring pottery, theatre, and singing — different ways of staying curious and alive — and I'm learning to structure this creative flow without losing spontaneity.

Many of your artworks feature mirrored or repeated body elements. What meaning do you seein symmetry and reflection?

I am fascinated by symmetry because it reflects how we perceive ourselves and how we reconstruct our identity. Mirrored or repeated forms speak to healing — showing how fragmentation and wholeness coexist. They reveal vulnerability alongside strength and let the viewer witness transformation and rebirth.

Is there a particular emotion or personal story that often becomes the starting point for yourimages?

My images often begin with deeply personal emotions or memories — moments of tenderness, nostalgia, or pivotal life experiences. I try to capture these traces and translate them visually, almost like an archaeology of feeling, where each gesture or silhouette becomes a language of its own.

How do you approach the balance between vulnerability and empowerment in your portrayalof the female body?

I aim to show that vulnerability and strength can coexist. Fragility is not weakness; it is part of power. Exposing emotion, gesture, or body in its truth is both courageous and beautiful. Each image pays homage to this duality and to the inner resilience of women.

How do you hope viewers feel when encountering your art?

I hope viewers feel seen and recognized. My art is meant to awaken what may have been forgotten or hidden, to be a mirror and a safe space where emotions and sensitivity can connect, and where personal strength is remembered.

Eve Jones

She currently lives in Massachusetts with a Bachelors degree in Printmaking from Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She is a printmaker, painter and photographer.

Grigorii Kniagnitskii

Grigorii Kniagnitskii is an accomplished motion designer, illustrator, and visual artist with over a decade of experience shaping the language of contemporary motion graphics. His work bridges technology and emotion, transforming movement into storytelling and design into art.

A recognized figure in the international creative community, Grigorii became an Elite Author on the renowned platform Videohive and earned the title of two-time champion of the international motion design competition AEBattle, juried by leading motion design specialists from around the world (2012, 2013).

In 2025, his artistic career expanded beyond motion design when his first digital painting was exhibited across Virginia, New York, and Georgia. That same year, he earned third place in a national design competition for the pizza brand OTTO, and his beer label design was selected as a finalist among 200 international entries, later showcased in New York. His T-shirt design for the Heart&Art competition— organized by CM Cubed Art and Hello Art World in Los Angeles—secured a Top 15 placement and received a Certificate of Excellence, underscoring his versatility across artistic disciplines.

Throughout his career, Grigorii has created content for global brands such as Samsung, Reno, Nestlé, and Lysol, crafting motion design pieces that blend technical sophistication with emotional resonance. His commercial for Lysol illuminated the streets of Moscow on public screens, captivating audiences in one of the world's busiest cities. The project Kick-off 2015, in which Grigorii served as one of the leading specialists for the IT giant Kaspersky, won the prestigious Event of the Year award in 2016.

Grigorii Kniagnitskii | Smile Through The Chaos | 2025

"Smile Through The Chaos" presents a striking critique of media saturation. What specific aspects of modern news culture influenced this piece?

The piece was inspired by the relentless stream of overwhelmingly negative information we face on a daily basis — from traditional TV news to social media, YouTube, and messaging platforms like Telegram. No matter where you turn, there's a sense of emotional overload. I wanted to visually capture that psychological fatigue, especially the emotional toll of being bombarded by crisis after crisis.

The smile in your artwork feels both forced and haunting. Can you speak about the role of facial expression in your visual storytelling?

The facial expression of the main character represents the way we all live right now — forcing ourselves to smile just to hold things together. That tension results in an unnatural, almost creepy smile. It's a mask we wear to

survive emotionally.

How do you balance dark humor and serious psychological themes in your work?

I try not to let the heaviness of the subject dominate the piece. Instead, I use dark humor to create distance — not to minimize the pain, but to make the message more digestible. Humor gives people a reason to engage rather than turn away. It's especially important now, when many people feel overwhelmed or disconnected. I want to make them pause, feel something, and maybe even reflect.

What role does animation play in your personal process of reflection and healing?

Animation has always been my dream, and becoming a motion designer was my path to realizing it. I've created content for major brands like Reno, Nescafé, Samsung, AstraZeneca, Sanofi, Lysol, and many others — crafting visuals that communicate clearly and resonate emotionally.
To deepen my skills, I taught myself illustration and painting, which opened new doors. One of my recent animated comic episodes explores similar themes to Smile Through the Chaos — how people turn to alcohol to escape overwhelming reality. Creating that piece helped me process some of my own experiences.

Do you view your art as a form of activism, especially in the context of mental health awareness?

That wasn't my original goal — I started creating art to process personal emotions. But over time, I saw that what I was expressing resonated with others who were dealing with the same emotional pressure. That realization turned the work into something more outward-looking.
For example, my painting Smile Through the Chaos was exhibited in Virginia as part of Mindscapes: Exploring the Art of Mental Health, and it will also be featured in the upcoming Art Groove exhibition in New York City. The piece is about what happens when we're forced to perform emotional stability under constant psychological strain.
In addition, combining classical frame by frame animation and my motion-design skills, I'm developing a short animation about depression, based on my own experience, using the language of motion design to connect with people who might be struggling and need to feel understood.

How has your experience as a motion designer shaped your approach to static illustration like this one?

Motion design trained me to think in rhythm, emotion, and sequence — even when I'm creating a single frame. I pay attention to how visual elements guide the eye and evoke feeling. Whether it's for a corporate campaign or a psychological narrative, the storytelling principles are the same.
I've also created educational graphics for school textbooks and was invited to produce a professional training series for Skillbox, one of the biggest online schools in Russia. That background gives me both a technical and emotional foundation in my illustrations.

Nika Lynas (Veronika Pankova) is a digital artist and author from Russia whose visual narratives intertwine introspection and dark fantasy. In her work, she explores the inner states of the human psyche — psychological trauma and disorders, vulnerability, and isolation — through imagery that merges meta-symbolism, psychological realism, and digital distortion. Her practice includes digital painting, photo, and video performance.
In 2024, she created the project The Face of Introspection — a series of confessional works and performances addressing female subjectivity, emotional abuse, and healing.
Beyond visual art, she is the author of CRYolite, a book that combines autobiography, psychological thriller, and literary fiction. It examines self-isolation as a form of creative freedom and portrays the creative journey and the harsh, often solitary reality of artists who struggle for years to find their place in the industry.
Her works have been exhibited in Mumbai, New York, Montreal, Cyprus, and Moscow, and featured in a Romanian anthology of contemporary digital art. She lives and works between inner space and digital worlds.

Artist Statement
I present a selection of works from the large-scale series The Face of Introspection. It is a reconstruction of memory and an exploration of psychological trauma that does not fade with time. Instead of direct storytelling, I give unspoken emotions — fear, anger, passion — an ephemeral and enigmatic form, preventing the viewer from drawing quick conclusions. My goal is not only to depict pain but to make it tangible, revealing its fragile beauty.
It is an act of humanizing inner chaos: transforming personal vulnerability into myth, and darkness into structure. Each work becomes an observation of how a vague feeling crystallizes into an image. To achieve this, I use digital distortions, cold light, and textural detail to emphasize the distance between genuine experience and its visual manifestation.
My practice is about creating evidence of human fragility — exploring the boundary between pain and beauty, and reminding us of the necessity to look into the darkness in order to see the light.

Nika Lynas | Satura | 2025

Nika Lynas | At in Arcadia ego | 2025

Yolanda Ramirez Goldsack

Over the past 30 years, my artistic style has evolved through exploration, experimentation, and a deepening understanding of each medium I work with — graphite, watercolor, pastels, and acrylics. Early in my journey, I focused on realism and technical precision, using graphite to develop strong drawing fundamentals and attention to detail. As my confidence grew, I began to embrace watercolor and pastels, which encouraged me to loosen up and explore light, movement, and emotion in a more expressive way. Acrylics then allowed me to expand into bolder compositions, layering, and mixed techniques — bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary styles.
Today, my work reflects a balance between control and spontaneity. I combine techniques from all these mediums to create depth, atmosphere, and feeling. My style has become more personal — less about perfect representation and more about conveying the mood and story behind each piece.

You previously worked as a hairdresser for 22 years. How has that profession influenced your attention to detail and artistic expression?

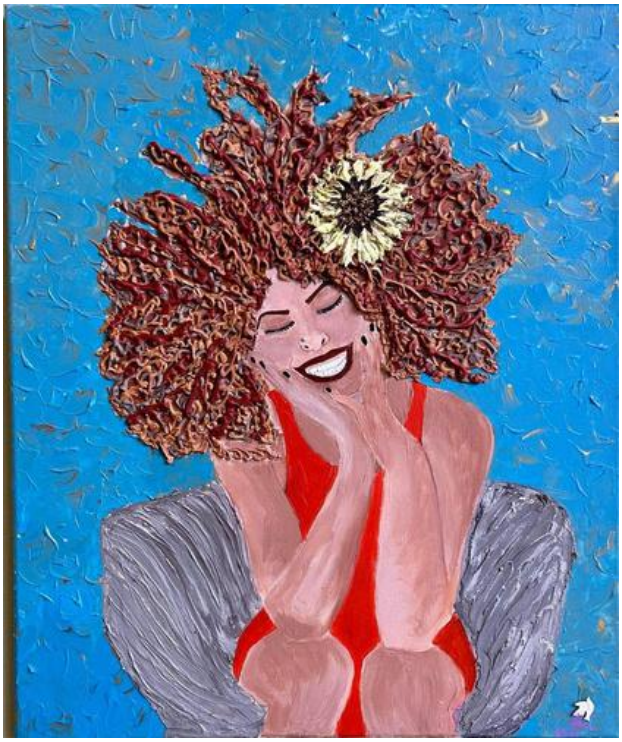
Working as a hairdresser for 22 years taught me a great deal about precision, creativity, and the importance of visual harmony — skills that have directly influenced my art. In hairstyling, you learn to see subtle variations in color, texture, and shape, and to understand how small details can completely change the overall balance of a design. That same level of observation now guides my approach to drawing and painting.
Hairstyling also trained me to think three-dimensionally — to visualize how form, light, and movement interact. This perspective helps me bring a sense of depth and realism into my artwork, whether I'm working with graphite, watercolor, pastels, or acrylics.
Beyond technique, working closely with clients helped me connect emotionally through creativity. That human connection — understanding how art or beauty can make someone feel — continues to inspire the expressive side of my artistic work today.

You now also run a bakery. In what ways do pastry decorating techniques inspire or connect with your visual art practice?

Running a bakery has given me a fresh creative outlet that surprisingly complements my visual art practice. Pastry

You have over 30 years of artistic experience. How has your style evolved throughout your creative journey?

Yolanda Ramirez Goldsack | Jerusalem Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining



Yolanda Ramirez Goldsack | The Joy Of Being

decorating involves many of the same artistic principles — composition, color harmony, texture, and balance. When I'm designing cakes or pastries, I'm essentially working on an edible canvas, using similar instincts for form and detail that I use in painting and drawing.
Working with icing, glazes, and decorative elements has also deepened my appreciation for precision and patience. The fluidity of frosting, much like watercolor or acrylic, requires control while still allowing for spontaneity — a quality I've carried back into my studio work.
There's also something deeply satisfying about transforming everyday materials — whether it's pigment or pastry — into something visually beautiful that evokes joy. Both art and baking allow me to create experiences that engage the senses and connect with people in a meaningful way.

Your works feature vibrant colors and joyful emotions. What inspires the mood and energy behind your paintings?

The vibrant colors and joyful emotions in my work are inspired by the beauty I find in everyday life — light, nature, people, and simple moments that spark a feeling of gratitude or wonder. I've always been drawn to color as a language of emotion; it allows me to express energy, warmth, and positivity in a way words often can't.
My years as a hairdresser and now as a baker have also influenced this outlook — both professions are about bringing happiness to others through creativity. That sense of joy and human connection naturally finds its way into my paintings.
Ultimately, my goal is to create art that uplifts. I want viewers to feel a spark of joy or calm when they see my work — to experience a moment of lightness and beauty that reflects the energy I pour into each piece.
Knowing that my gift comes from God is at the heart of everything I create. It gives my work purpose and fills it with gratitude and joy. When I paint, I feel that I'm not just expressing myself, but sharing a piece of the light and love that God has placed within me. That awareness brings peace and positive energy to my creative process — it reminds me that my art is meant to uplift and inspire others.
The vibrant colors and joyful moods in my paintings are a reflection of that spiritual connection. They're expressions of faith, hope, and appreciation for the beauty God has created all around us. Every brushstroke feels like a prayer of thanks, and that gratitude naturally shines through in the mood and energy of my work.

The figures in your paintings seem full of life, movement, and happiness. What message do you wish to convey about aging and joy?

Through my paintings, I want to celebrate the beauty, strength, and spirit that continue to grow with age. The figures in my work are full of life and movement because I believe joy doesn't fade as we get older — it simply changes shape. With age comes wisdom, confidence, and a deeper appreciation for life's simple pleasures, and that's what I try to capture on the canvas.
I want my art to remind people that joy is timeless. It's not limited by age; it comes from the heart, from connection, and from living fully in each moment. The bright colors and expressive gestures in my paintings reflect that inner vitality — a reminder that the light within us can stay vibrant no matter how many years we've lived.

Where do you find the most inspiration in your daily life —people, nature, personal memories?

I find inspiration in all three — people, nature, and personal memories — because each plays a special role in my creative process. People inspire me through their stories, expressions, and emotions; I love capturing the spirit and joy that shine through human connection. Nature inspires me with its colors, rhythms, and endless beauty — the way light moves through a leaf or the changing colors of the sky often spark new ideas for my palette.
Personal memories also play a big part. They carry the emotions and experiences that shape who I am as an artist. Whether it's a moment of laughter, a quiet reflection, or a cherished time with loved ones, those memories bring warmth and authenticity to my work.
In the end, it's really the combination of all these things — the beauty of the world around me and the gratitude I feel each day — that fills my art with life and energy.

What is the most meaningful reaction an audience member has ever shared about your art?

Yes, that reaction was incredibly meaningful to me. When the audience member said, "I think I am going to cry," it really struck me because it showed that my intention behind the dove — as a symbol of gratitude to God for the gift of my creativity — had touched someone deeply. It was a reminder that art can communicate emotions and faith in a way that words alone sometimes cannot.
Moments like that are what make creating so fulfilling. Knowing that a simple symbol in my work can evoke such a powerful emotional response reinforces the connection between my art, my faith, and the people who experience it. It reminds me that sharing my gift is not just about creating beauty, but about touching hearts and inspiring reflection.

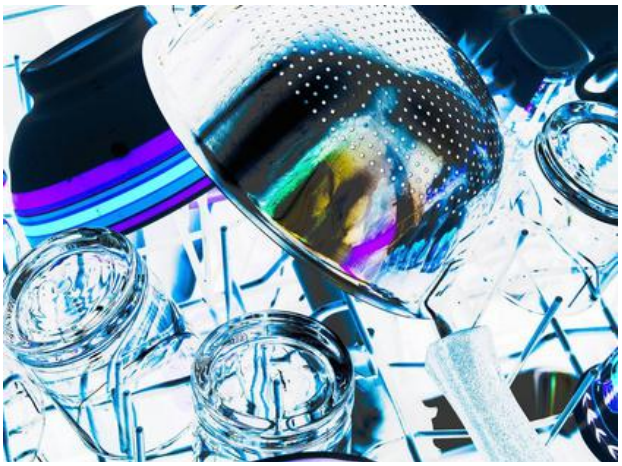
Stephany Lorena Alvarez

Stephany Alvarez, Freelance Artist for over 10 years. She is a Mexican American who's lived her whole life in the USA. Multi-Medium artist, although her main medium is Acrylic. While making art, she explores topics that are uncommon or that many people may find uncomfortable to talk about, using dramatic lighting, bright colors or drastic morphing to express herself through her pieces.
Achievements: Texas Art Education Association: Visual Art Scholastic Event. Receiving high scores up to perfect scores during the art competitions. Years 2023 & 2024, Congressional Art Competition Award, hosted by Congressman Pat Fallon. Recognition Award Certificate May 2023 & May 2024.

Project Statement
Finding your Passion, I've been contemplating on making this piece, although I remembered it's not often someone finds someone else's passion beautiful. It's often brushed off as a "Good for them." But taking a closer look, you can see fire sparking in their eyes with excitement. Whether it's for a new hobby, discovering something new, etc. Shows how life, over the simplest things, can be beautiful if you just.. look closer.


Stephany
Alvarez

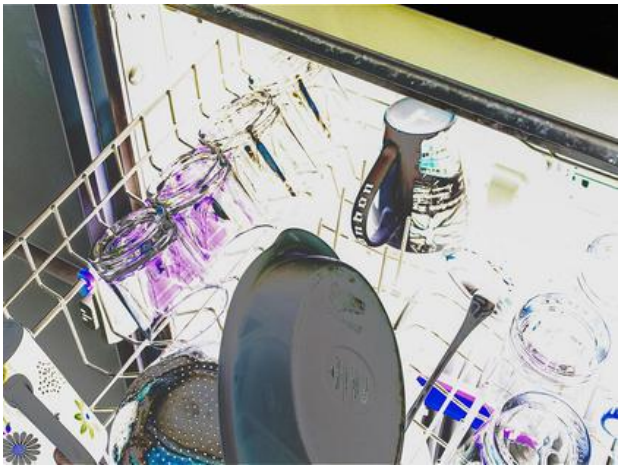
Giorgio Gerardi



Giorgio Gerardi | Dishwasher | 2025

The avant-garde movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a radical turning point, abandoning the representation of reality to pursue two fundamental directions. On one hand, they turned inward, exploring dreams, emotions, symbols, and subjective visions in an effort to transcend the limits of objective perception and give form to the invisible. On the other hand, they initiated a profound analysis of the medium and of the very language through which the image is produced.
Rather than merely depicting the world, art began to question its own codes and expressive tools. This marked a decisive break from the illusionistic tradition that had developed from the Renaissance through the 19th century—a shift accelerated by the invention of photography, which gradually assumed the narrative space once occupied by painting.
From the very beginning of my photographic practice, I have felt the need to go beyond the mere representation of reality. Instead, I have sought to use the camera as a tool for experimental exploration, drawing inspiration from artists such as Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, and Ugo Mulas.

How did your interest in the avant-garde art movements of the 19th and 20th centuries shape your approach to photography and art?



Giorgio Gerardi | Dishwasher | 2025

Could you elaborate on your process of transforming everyday objects into aesthetic symbols? How do you select which objects to focus on?

In 1913, Duchamp took a bicycle wheel and mounted it on a stool, transforming an everyday object into a work of art and thereby introducing the concept of the readymade—a gesture that challenged aesthetic conventions and questioned the role of the artist as a traditional creator.
Conceptual art inherits and expands upon Duchamp's legacy, shifting the focus from the object itself to the idea behind it: what matters is no longer formal beauty or the artist's craftsmanship, but the concept the work conveys. Just as Duchamp, through his readymades, defied the traditional art system, conceptual artists question the work's authenticity,

Giorgio Gerardi | Kitchen Sink | 2025

value, and even the necessity of the art object itself.
At the same time, transforming everyday objects into aesthetic symbols means re-evaluating and reconsidering items to which we usually assign little or no value.
In both cases, art ceases to be primarily visual and becomes instead a space for critical reflection.

Your 'Daily' project emphasizes the mundane. How do you find beauty or significance in objects that are usually overlooked in our daily lives?

In my project "Daily," I bring everyday objects to the forefront. There is no specific methodology in choosing the subjects, other than that they belong to the fabric of our daily lives—a sink, a dishwasher, an unmade bed, objects on a bathroom counter, an open refrigerator.
Our lives unfold within the everyday; we perform the same actions day after day, surrounded by the same objects, endlessly repeating gestures and routines. Precisely because these actions are repetitive (and not exceptional), we tend not to assign them value—we often don't even notice their presence; we simply overlook them.
In my work, I focus on these objects to restore their visibility, to cast them in a new light, and to allow them to emerge from the ordinary.

In your works, we see a form of estrangement from the original context of objects. What do you hope to achieve with this transformation?

I hope that those who encounter my images can pause for a moment and see what is represented with new eyes. I'm interested in provoking a perceptual shift, even a subtle one—so that an object, a situation, or a fragment of reality may acquire a different weight, a new depth. I would like the viewer not merely to recognize what they see, but to question why that thing is there, how it is shown, and what value it might take on in another context or under a different light. I wish the images to act as small fractures in the surface of the everyday, capable of revealing something that often goes unnoticed—allowing each person, even for just a moment, to reclaim the hidden wonder within the ordinary.

How do you see the relationship between functionality and aesthetics in your art? Can something functional be purely artistic in your opinion?

Art is found in everyday things. More than speaking of "art," I prefer to speak of "something made with art." In the world of images, this could be a film, an advertisement, a piece of reportage, a shop sign, a brand logo, or simply an object we use every day.

The use of AI in your recent works is intriguing. How do you incorporate AI into your creative process, and how does it affect the final outcome of your pieces?

I've used Artificial Intelligence for several image and video series, and I have to say I really enjoyed it. I was surprised by the software's ability to interpret commands and produce finished works.
It's impossible to fully control AI—there's always an element of randomness, and that's exactly what I like about it, because it continually manages to surprise me.

How do you feel your work fits into the broader conversation about the representation of everyday life in art?

I don't know; I honestly have no idea. My goal is for those who look at my images to be somehow surprised by what they see, prompting them to question what the original subject might be. I'm interested in rescuing ordinary things from their "invisibility." I'm not interested in documenting reality in the traditional sense, but rather in highlighting those details that often escape our attention.

Giorgio Gerardi | Rubbish Bin | 2025

Olesja Burghof
I live in Germany. I am currently completing my training at an art school and training as a painter in various directions, e.g. Zen as the art of medicine. My paintings have a nature-related character: I like using healing stones, medicinal herbs, natural organic teas and incense sticks (e.g. Palo Santo). I use also the epoxy resin and merge all of these in a sort of collage art style that contains a special healing energy.

Olesja Burghof | Sight

Olesja Burghof | Curer

Sunjoo Heo

Could you tell us a bit about your artistic journey — how did growing up in South Korea and living in Australia shape your creative vision?

Since I left South Korea and moved to Australia at the age of 18, my life has been totally shifted in a good way. Growing up in a very strict family, my art journey was never my career option at all. Many years of confusion and frustration about my career and future, I have finally decided to pursue my real passion for art since last September.

Sunjoo Heo | A Child Of Cosmos | 2025

I think growing up being unheard and unseen as a kid has really affected me to think of the importance of self-belief and empowerment. Living as a South Korean immigrant in Australia has definitely strengthened my journey to embrace my roots, culture and identity.

How do cultural identity and migration influence the themes and emotions in your work?

Migration to Australia has broadened my mind and view to accept myself as who I truly am. Accepting and appreciating my cultural identity as South Korean has taken for a while because I did not grow up appreciating my heritage and culture by my parents with colonised minds. By decolonising the way I see the world, people and myself, I have started painting my journey on my work. It has healed me enormously because my lost and broken inner child has been finally taken care for, and I could love my true self and get my humanity back to love others. Therefore, my core themes and emotions in my present and future work are very clear that I hope to deliver decolonisation first to strengthen the culture and identity and interconnect with others.

Your piece "We are all from Women" reinterprets the traditional Christian iconography of the Madonna and Child. What inspired you to confront this theme?

Sunjoo Heo | We Are All From Women | 2024

I am an ex-Roman Catholic, and I used to question the Bible teachings. Up until these days, Christianity has been weaponizing indigenous people and marginalised people (i.e., women). Despite the fact that a core teaching of Christianity is love, it has been against women for a long time, and still is. Therefore, I wanted to confront the irony and inconsistency about its teaching to give followers a chance to think about this matter.
Using the medieval art of 'Christ's Side Wound' as a reference, I wanted to highlight that all creatures, including Jesus, are from Women, naturally and literally. To emphasise the importance of woman as a creature who have a portal for creatures to come to this world and challenge patriarchal belief.

How do you think religious symbolism can be reimagined to promote ideas of empowerment and gender equality?

Religions have shaped people's minds and lives for a very long time. The reason why I use religious symbolism for my work is to give religious followers a space to think about something different from what they believe under their understanding of religion. For example, I have come to realise that my artworks emphasising women's power can be quite controversial as most religions worship male figure Gods. However, it is also very interesting to see the response from the people who get triggered by my painting, thus it really shows how religions have erased feminism and women's power for a very long time.

In "A Child of Cosmos," the child holding the moon above the Earth seems both small and cosmic at once. What message do you hope to convey through this image?

I have depicted my younger self there because I wanted to tell her "You are a Child of Cosmos. You do not need to fear anything." While I was growing up, I felt like I was reluctant to do anything I wanted because of my surroundings saying "no" to me all the time. I used to speak out loud about my desire and future, but later I became very internalised about the idea that I cannot make anything happen on my own. Without self-belief, I became nothing to me and to the world. Therefore, I depicted myself as a mini version of the Universe (our body structurally and conceptually resembles the Universe) to show our unlimited capability.

What materials or techniques do you prefer when translating such profound ideas into visual form?

I do not have particular techniques I prefer to another when painting at the moment. As a self-taught artist, I learn every day by watching other artists' works on social media. I used acrylic paint first to see how it went, and then I changed my medium to oil paint because I always admired oil paint's rich colours and textures on canvas. Now, I am interested in trying egg tempera as my next medium to see how it goes as I have been fascinated by iconography with it.

Many of your works seem to blend softness and strength — how do you balance vulnerability and empowerment in your art?

I think showing my vulnerability in my work is very important for me to stay authentic. It does take a courage to acknowledge my vulnerable part and embrace it as part of me. Once I become true to myself, I can start believing in myself that can lead to empowerment. By showing my healing journey in my work, people can resonate with their own journey and feel not alone along their way.

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