

VISUAL ART JOURNAL



Becca O.



— Intro

Hello, dear reader!

I am delighted to welcome you to the spring edition of our magazine.

It may seem like just a change in weather, but with it comes joy and hope. Along with nature, something within us awakens and blooms, filling us with energy and dreams.

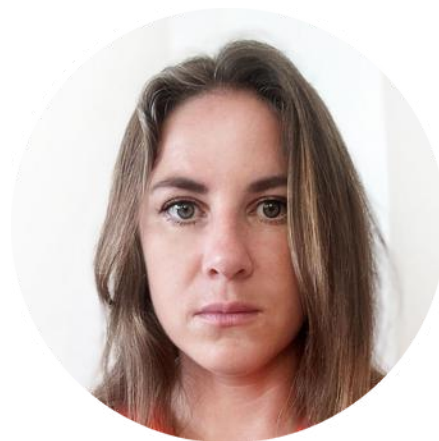
What do we dream of? Perhaps of summer and the miracle that is about to unfold. Of the tenderness that lingers in the air, carried by the songs of birds returning from their winter migration.

Our magazine is read all over the world, even in places where the seasons do not change. But I am certain that spring is always a time for renewal, awakening, and love.

Can love be captured on canvas? It would seem that everyone has their own understanding of what it means to be loved and how to love. Yet, when we look at a portrait of lovers, we instantly understand. And suddenly, there are no borders, no definitions, no rules.

Ahead, you will find works by incredibly talented artists, answers to profound questions, and an abundance of love.

Enjoy your reading!



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

On the Front Cover:
Rebecca Ogun
Guiding Light
2024

On the Back Cover:
Zach Hayward
Flesh
2021

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

— Interview

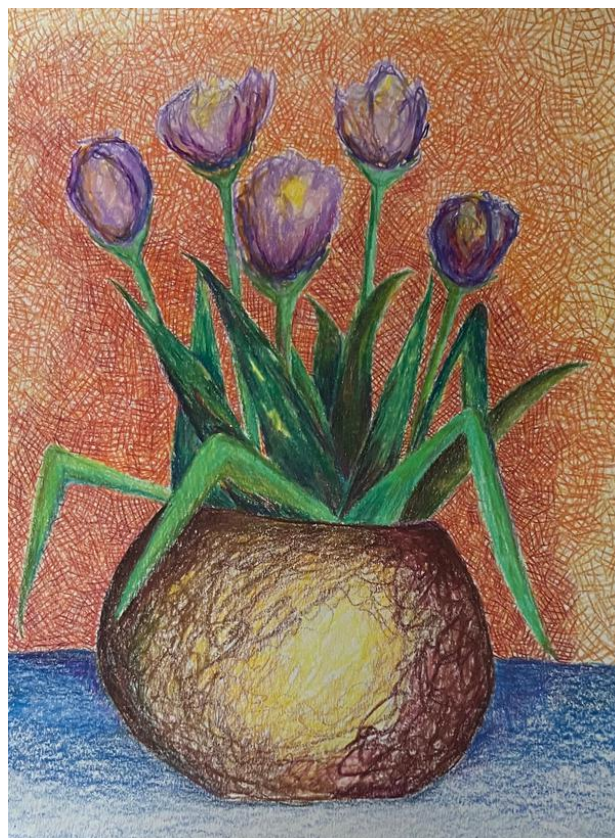
Rebecca Ogun

Your artistic journey began at a young age. How have your early influences, particularly from your family, shaped your current practice?

My influences began as a child growing up around my aunts, grandmother, and mom creatively doing fiber arts such as knitting, crocheting, needlepoint work, and quiltmaking. However, my grandmother was the biggest influencer as I was intrigued by the different oil paintings that were done by her and hung up in her house. I remember this one particular painting she did of a still life with lilies and it had a mint green background. It was the most beautiful painting in the house because of the colors used and that mint green background. I used to stand right up front at her paintings around the house and just stare and be mesmerized by the textures and colors that were used. I would also sneak into her closet and look at her art tools, paints and brushes. It was like a treasure hunt for me. She also took me with her to her art club meetings and I remember watching her and others create some ceramic pieces and paintings.

In your project statement, you mention the interplay between nature and human craftsmanship. How do you find this balance in your work, especially when using different media like watercolor, oil, and colored pencils?

Looking at my artworks, I want to show the naturalistic beauty of the flowers by showing the unique qualities of different mediums. For example, colored pencils allow me to layer and blend colors to get a nice texturized look and feel to my artwork. However,



Rebecca Ogun | Purple Tulips | 2025

layering with watercolors and oils creates a soft fluidity quality that can be seen in my artworks. When I decide and select a different medium for works in a series, I want to compliment each medium with the others which will enhance them as a whole.

You explore themes such as family, women, and daily life. How do you approach portraying these themes through your art, and what message are you hoping to convey?

Some artworks show a memory of my childhood whether it was the vase, the flowers or even the colors that I remember from my grandmother's paintings. Looking at these as well as themes of family, women and daily life, they all combine together to show the strength, challenges, and moments of connections that have impacted my life. I want to capture the personal aspects of these experiences that involve visual elements to evoke emotions and thoughts and connect with others on a personal level to spark conversations about their own lives and memories.

Could you tell us more about your series on flowers? What do they symbolize for you, and how do you translate that symbolism into your artwork?

Well, I have always loved how flowers can brighten a space up and because of this my husband and myself would buy flowers for our kitchen. But it is also sad to see how flowers wilt and die away. So one day,

I decided that I would take pictures of the flowers that we would buy, use them as a reference, and create a series of still lifes with flowers. Flowers in my artwork can be seen as a memory that I once had and convey a mood depending on the type of flower; as each one has its own personality.

Your recent works seem to involve a blend of vibrant colors. How do you decide on your color palette, and what does color represent in your pieces?

You know, that is one thing that I love in my artworks is the use of color. The way I use color can vary; it can rely on emotions or using color theory concepts. Sometimes I will start an artwork with flowers and go from there processing the color aspects of it or I will decide on a background color that I have not done and then add the flowers to it. One thing that I do keep in mind (and teach as well) is that layering colors enhances your artwork by showing the richness of colors together.

As a high school art teacher, how do you balance your professional art career with your role as an educator? Do your students' perspectives ever inspire your work?

Over the years I have learned to balance my professional and family time outside the classroom because most of the day goes to teaching students. I am a pretty organized person, so I have learned to create a routine at work to get work related things done there and not bring them home. When school finishes, my time is dedicated towards my family and myself including my professional art endeavors, which I have also learned to balance this out as well. Sometimes I may have an urge to create art late at



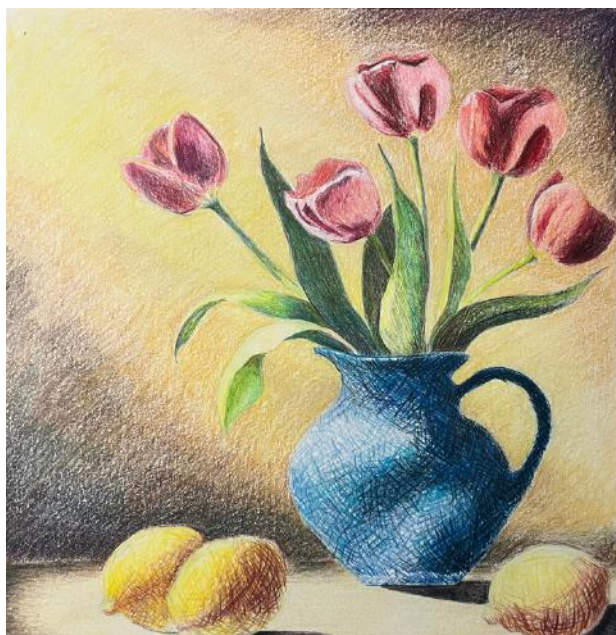
Rebecca Ogun | Guiding Light | 2024

night and just submerge myself into it. I don't like to ignore my family time either, so I try to take small projects and work on them while being with the family. Other times, I may work on something for a little while just to put my foot into what my creative thoughts are about, so that I can be in my creative space, physically and mentally.

I think I am lucky to be able to teach what I love and see how students are going through this creative process and having conversations about art in a formal setting. I do get inspired by other students whether it is their skills or creative process because they are also artists in my classroom and some have great ideas. Sometimes when I teach a certain medium, it gives me that motivation to go home and try it with my own artwork and ideas.

How do you see the role of art in raising awareness about societal issues, and do you consciously include these elements in your artwork?

Art definitely is an important aspect of getting your voice heard in society that can create a connection and inspire change by raising awareness and creating empathy. Almost everywhere you turn there is some sort of awareness going on whether it is on clothing, personal statement style, social media with tons of it, and just observing people. Visual storytelling also allows barriers to be broken down and seen through different perspectives. In my previous works, I have included these elements which have stirred up emotions and conversations and wanted to get my point across. I wouldn't say all my artworks are like that, but when I feel the need to express and share a statement visually, I just do it.



Rebecca Ogun | Lemons and Tulips | 2025

Lesha Shaw is an American artist known for her vibrant use of color in both figurative and semi-abstract works that celebrate beauty, adaptability, grace and independence. A self-taught artist, she began exploring art as child's play at a young age, developing a love for making paper doll figures that sparked her creative journey. She later earned a Bachelor of Science degree in interdisciplinary studies from the University of North Texas. As a high school art teacher, Lesa inspires young artists while also finding joy in her own work. Recently, she has found ways to make more time for producing new works and has been spending more time in her studio. The recognition her work has received in solo shows, group exhibitions, and themed displays across the U.S. and internationally has affirmed her abilities and deepened her commitment to her craft. Lesa's unique perspective informs her art, allowing her to explore a range of themes while reflecting the beauty and complexity of the human experience.

Artist Statement

"For every brush stroke, a new discovery emerges. Start with a shape, add some color then try blending with other colors and see how the greens and pinks merge so beautifully. That's the way it began and its language is ongoing. I approach my art as a form of experimentation and exploration, akin to a scientific study. I'm intrigued by the psychological aspects of color, so I choose colors that give a certain level of tranquility. Within this process, I explore themes that matter to me. I invite viewers to engage with my art, interpret it in their own way, and find reflections of their own experiences within it."



Lesha Shaw | Guitar Solo | 2025



— Interview

VICTO

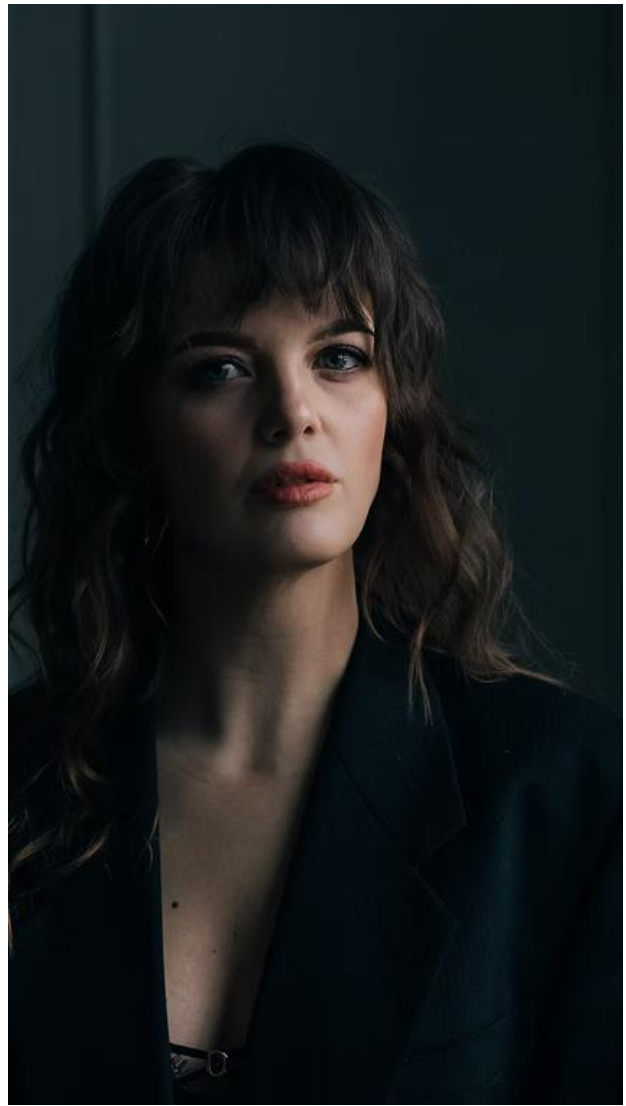
Your works focus on revealing the beauty in the ordinary. How do you decide which moments or objects deserve to be immortalized in your art?

I don't think of objects or moments as "deserving" to be immortalized—I believe beauty exists everywhere, and it's a matter of learning to see it. For me, it's about paying attention to overlooked details: the way light falls on a mundane object, the texture of a tree root, or the rhythm in something seemingly static. These moments speak to me, and I feel compelled to translate their essence into my art.

In your work, the connection between perception and beauty is central. How do you hope your audience will engage with the act of perception when viewing your pieces?



VICTO | Fluffy Comfort in Soft Light | 2024



I hope my audience slows down. We're often rushing through life, missing the nuances around us. My art is an invitation to pause and really see—to question what they perceive and reflect on their own way of experiencing the world. If they notice something they never would have otherwise, I've succeeded.

Could you elaborate on how David Hume's philosophy on beauty shapes your creative process? How do you incorporate his ideas into your artistic practice?

David Hume's idea that beauty is a product of human consciousness resonates deeply with me. It reminds me that beauty isn't an inherent property of an object; it's in the way we perceive and experience it. In my practice, I focus on creating works that challenge the viewer to reframe their understanding of beauty—whether

it's through a minimalist composition or the subtle complexity of textures. It's a way of encouraging mindfulness and a deeper connection to their own perception.

Minimalism plays a significant role in your art. How do you approach the challenge of conveying complex ideas through such a pared-down aesthetic?

Minimalism allows me to strip away distractions and get to the core of an idea or emotion. The challenge is in ensuring that the simplicity doesn't feel empty but instead resonates with depth. I achieve this by focusing on the tactile and sensory qualities of my materials, letting the smallest details carry meaning. It's a dialogue between what's visible and what's felt.

Your travel experiences seem to deeply influence your work. How has living in different places, especially London and New York, shaped your artistic perspective?

Traveling has taught me to see the world through multiple lenses. London gave me an appreciation for the coexistence of history and modernity, while New York amplified my understanding of energy and resilience. Each place leaves an imprint—not just on my art but on how I approach life. These shifts in perspective have made my work more dynamic and layered, reflecting a broader understanding of the human experience.

The simplicity of your works might seem straightforward at first glance, but they hold profound depth. How do you ensure that the viewer experiences this complexity?

It's all in the layers—both physical and conceptual. While the compositions may seem simple, I embed textures, colors, and forms that invite closer inspection. I think of my art as a conversation: at first glance, it may seem quiet, but as you spend time with it, you start to hear its whispers. This depth often comes from my own process of emotional and philosophical exploration while creating.



VICTO | Dynamic Cat Artwork | 2024

Your recent involvement in Miami Art Week and the Woman; Balancing Our World project at the MoRA Museum indicates a growing recognition of your work. How do you see your role within the art world evolving in the coming years?

These opportunities have been incredible milestones, but they've also reaffirmed my commitment to using art as a medium for connection and dialogue. In the coming years, I hope to continue pushing boundaries—experimenting with new techniques and ideas—while also fostering a sense of community through my gallery. I want to be both an artist and a facilitator, helping others find their voice and audience.

With the opening of your own art gallery, what do you hope to offer the art community and viewers who visit your space?

My gallery, Artseeker, is a space for discovery and connection. I want it to be a home for underrepresented voices, especially women artists, and a platform for fresh perspectives. Beyond exhibitions, I hope it becomes a hub for dialogue—through workshops, collaborations, and events—where artists and viewers alike feel inspired to engage with art in transformative ways.

Michał Oraszek – painter, graphic artist, and illustrator. He works in Warsaw, Poland. A graduate of the Władysław Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, where he earned his degree with distinction in 1998. He has held solo exhibitions in Poland and Luxembourg, and his works are part of private collections both in Poland and abroad. Oraszek draws his inspiration from the human being itself—its gaze, gestures, and fleeting emotions—elements that define the essence of his artistic narrative.

Michał Oraszek | Council | 2025





— Interview

Cristiana Giacchetti

What was it about your family's artistic legacy that inspired you to pursue a career in art?

What pushed me into the "arms" of art is the spirit of the artist that lives in me and that for many years, before I began my artistic career, was reflected in the images of my family heritage. On one hand, my great-grandfather Aristodemo Giacchetti, a fresco artist from central Italy. A creatively very "cumbersome" figure. Even though I never met him directly, suggestive stories about him live in me. My great-grandfather is a precious gem in the genetics of my Soul, as he profoundly influences my way of being an artist more than the technique. Equally important is my father-in-law, Gualtiero Mocenni, an Istrian painter and sculptor, who recently turned 90, celebrating with a retrospective of his 70-year career. Even though he never trained me, in over twenty years, he was a model who traced my path, as from him I learned the courage to experiment and to offer myself to art. So I can say that I did not receive an artistic education but I had a strong inspiration to art. In fact, both these figures have awakened in me the spirit of the artist who for many years has been champing at the bit to exist and then found its form in reality.

You mention a personal evolution in your work—how would you describe this journey, and how has it influenced your current artistic practice?



Cristiana Giacchetti | Caos armonico | 2024



My path has been an alchemical journey, as I slowly revealed to myself, and then to the world, my artistic nature that was obscure even to me. Before then I worked for a long time in corporate communication as a consultant. But I felt that something was wrong, there was a lot of frustration and dissatisfaction inside me. So I started studying coaching and counseling to delve deeper into personal dynamics and then I moved on to shamanism. Following these studies I started helping people in their personal evolution. In the meantime I continued to learn, studying Jung's shadow and alchemy. In this way I understood that what I was missing was inside me, not in the world out there. During the pandemic I started painting to discover myself. The pandemic is over but the love for art remained because it is the way through which I discover the images of my Soul.

Can you explain how your focus on the "Soul" and "Psyche" manifests in your artworks? Do you have a specific process for exploring these themes visually?

The core of my art is my inner world, what the ancients called Soul and depth psychology calls Psyche. It is the essence of every individual, darkness but also light and beauty. My goal is to investigate its language which is made of images. My creative process is an act of surrender, as I begin by emptying my mind to ensure that my will and reason do not interfere. My gesture must surrender to the beauty of the Soul that wants to manifest itself through the work. Consequently, I do not decide the form first, I simply follow the flow of ecstasy with the utmost trust that the form will advance.

The idea of pareidolicity, or seeing shapes in the abstract, plays a key role in your art. Could you tell us more about how this concept informs your creations and how viewers might engage with it?

The theme of pareidolicity is a key element of my art and translates into that phenomenon of the subconscious

according to which the mind tends to recreate a form through optical illusions. I did not decide this intentionally, but at a certain point, while creating my works, I realized that the viewer saw in them always different forms, not necessarily the same ones in the same work. This depends on the person. Some images are romantic, others are brutal, others are scary. Forms that arouse emotions and lead the viewer to discover parts of themselves. Therefore, since art is made of images, what I paint manifests a form of my Soul, a state of mind precisely, but on the other hand that work also becomes a photograph of the inner world of the person observing it, who sees himself through me and therefore the work. In some way, therefore, the paintings I create are messages from the Soul of those who contemplate them.

How does the medium you choose—especially your use of thick paint applications—contribute to the emotional depth and intensity of your works?

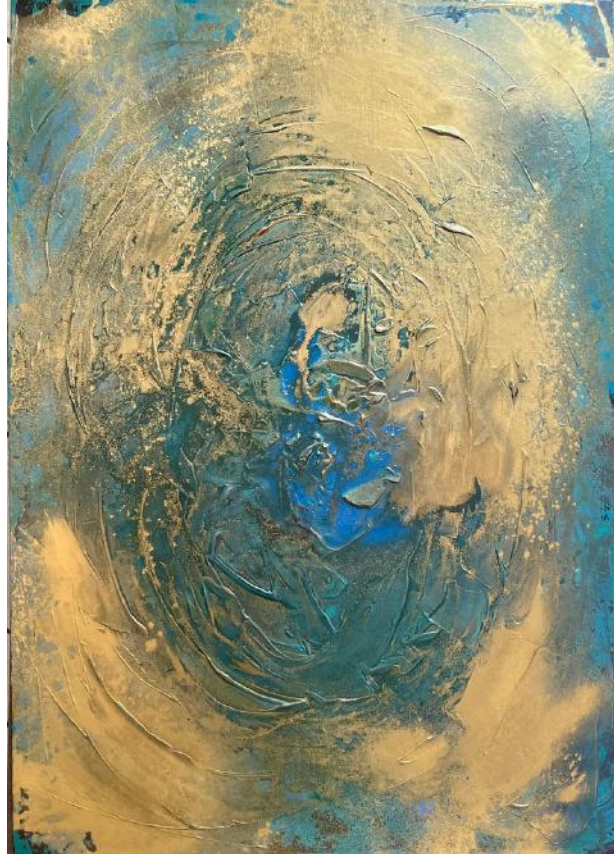
More than the medium, I am interested in the dimension of the struggle. The work manifests my internal struggle, between who I am and who I think I am. For this reason, it is crucial to empty my mind and let the Soul, the unfiltered me, guide me. In each of my paintings, this tension manifests itself in the materiality of the work, which is realized in almost sculptural forms, as if the image, which is being composed, wanted to emerge from the canvas. The final result is visually engaging. The work seems to solicit a visual dialogue with the viewer, almost “sucking” him inside to lead him on an emotionally intense journey. It doesn’t matter whether the reaction is good or bad, what interests me is the dimension of the intensity and emotional intimacy of the observer.

Your work is described as a dialogue with your unconscious. How do you feel this dialogue takes shape during your creative process? Does it evolve as you work on the painting?

Art for me has always been a dialogue with my dark side, a giving shape to what I mistakenly defined as “discomfort”,



Cristiana Giacchetti | Nutrice | 2024



Cristiana Giacchetti
Trascendenza
2024

consequently the more I painted the more that apparent “ugliness” became “beauty” in the form of a work. So art is actually a therapy of form. It was liberating and helped me understand how much beauty there actually is in what we judge as discomfort. An emotional state that for the artist is a source of inspiration, that leads you to descend into your inner caves to ascend with a work of art. In this sense, every work of art is ultimately nothing more than a sublimation of an artistic pathology, just as the pearl is the disease of the shell. And since I follow the ancestral nature of the gesture, I never know what I will paint first, the form for me is pure discovery that deforms and then recompacts into something new that I discover only at the end. In that moment I see a snapshot of my dream journey. So for me the work is the result of an act of faith in the image that is realized, in the gift that will surface from the ocean waters of the Soul.

How does the concept of “spiritual gaze” influence your approach to painting? Do you believe this concept also applies to the viewer’s experience with your art?

As I was saying about pareidolity, the observer recreates, through an optical illusion, an image revealed by what the philosopher Plotinus called “spiritual sensorium”, the eye that goes beyond the appearances of form and captures the image that the Soul reflects in the painting. In that moment you discover a piece of yourself. This eye does not judge but only sees beauty, in the form of amazement and wonder, without moral judgments, because the Soul in its poetic movements cannot be judged, since, as the ancients teach, it is the divine part that resides in every human being. Therefore my works are mirrors in which I see myself and the observer reflects his own inner world. In terms of my artistic mission, this “relationship” is essential, as my works become a bridge to connect to the psyche of every human being and at the same time a nourishment for the Soul of the individual, which wants to manifest itself through the painting.

— Interview

Chris Arnold

Your work often incorporates vibrant depictions of nature. What inspires you to explore environmental themes in your art, and how do you approach translating those themes onto canvas?

I love so many things this world has to offer, and the process of exploring environmental themes in my art feels limitless. I think this is why I choose to paint what I do today. My goal in bringing vibrant depictions of nature to the canvas is to connect the colors of paint to the colors of life. The job of the painter is to visually translate, and for me, that means telling the stories of our natural world in ways that allow others to experience and connect with it. Through expressive compositions, I not only aim to capture the beauty of nature but also its energy, fragility, and resilience. By blending structured planning with improvisation, I allow the environment itself to shape my artwork, ensuring that each piece carries an authentic reflection of the world I love to explore.

Can you tell us about a project that had a particularly significant impact on your artistic



Chris Arnold | Wild flowers | 2023



journey? How did your experience with the Ron Finley Project or the US National Park Service influence your perspective on conservation through art?

When it comes to the project that has had the most significant impact on my artistic journey, I would say it is always "the next one." I have been fortunate to collaborate with incredible people, including Ron Finley, Scientists, Philanthropists and the National Park Service. These experiences have deepened my understanding of conservation and the role art can play in inspiring action.

Working with the Ron Finley Project reinforced my belief that art can be a tool for change, using vibrant imagery to highlight the intersection of nature, food, and community. Similarly, my collaborations with the National Park Service have strengthened my connection to the landscapes that inspire my work, reminding me that conservation is both a personal and collective effort. However, it is the people and places I have yet to encounter that keep me moving forward. The drive to explore, translate

my experiences visually, and support natural causes through my craft fuels my creative practice. Each new project is an opportunity to learn, engage, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue between art and the environment.

Your style blends bold, expressive forms with intricate natural elements. How do you balance the playfulness of your compositions with the deep environmental messages you aim to convey?

I balance playfulness and environmental messaging by blending spontaneity with intention. Bold colors and dynamic shapes invite viewers in, while deeper themes such as ecosystem fragility, botanical beauty, and the resilience of nature create space for reflection. My work is a conversation between the visual and the conceptual, where engaging compositions spark curiosity and encourage a personal connection to nature. I also hide Easter Eggs throughout my pieces, subtle details that add layers of meaning, from natural symbols to environmental references. By weaving these elements together, I create work that is both inviting and thought provoking, making complex themes feel accessible and deeply resonant.

You've mentioned that cartoonists, Impressionists, and Art Nouveau artists have influenced your work. How do you blend



Chris Arnold | Genesis Garden | 2025

these distinct artistic movements with your focus on nature?

Each of these artistic movements, including cartooning, Impressionism, and Art Nouveau, serves as an essential ingredient in my creative process, much like elements in a recipe. The balance of these influences shifts from piece to piece, depending on the visual outcome I am searching for. Impressionism and Art Nouveau have a strong connection to nature, particularly in their use of botanical forms, which aligns perfectly with my own focus on the natural world. Impressionist techniques influence the way I capture light, atmosphere, and movement, while the organic and flowing lines of Art Nouveau resonate with my approach to composition. Both movements allow me to explore nature in a way that feels immersive and expressive rather than strictly representational. The influence of cartooning is most evident in my linework and the underlying narrative structure. Even in my more abstract or expressive pieces, there is often a thread of storytelling and a visual rhythm that guides the viewer through the composition. The clarity of line, inspired by cartooning, helps define forms and create contrast within the more fluid and painterly elements influenced by Impressionism and Art Nouveau. Blending these styles allows me to create a unique visual language where nature is not just a subject but an active and dynamic presence shaped by the interplay of color, line, and storytelling.

As an educator in the field of illustration, how do you encourage your students to incorporate environmental consciousness into their creative practices?

As a Professor of Illustration, I encourage my students to integrate environmental consciousness into their creative practices by emphasizing the power of visual storytelling. I challenge them to think critically about their materials, the messages they convey, and the broader impact their work can have. Through research-based projects, including a collaboration with the Creative Action Network, students explore environmental themes that resonate with them. Whether it's conservation,

climate change, or sustainable design, my objective is to help them see illustration as a tool for advocacy.

What role do you believe art can play in fostering a deeper connection between people and the natural world?

Art serves as a powerful bridge between people and the natural world, fostering a deeper connection through emotion, storytelling, and immersive visual experiences. Unlike scientific data or written advocacy, art communicates in a way that is immediate and visceral, allowing viewers to feel rather than just understand the importance of nature. Whether through the delicate balance of color and form in a botanical composition, the expressive movement of a landscape, or a narrative-driven piece that explores environmental themes, art translates complex ecological ideas into something personal and accessible. By capturing the beauty, complexity, and fragility of nature, art can inspire appreciation, curiosity, and a sense of responsibility toward the environment. When viewers see a richly textured painting of an ancient forest, an illustration depicting the interconnectedness of ecosystems, or even a surreal composition that imagines nature's resilience in the face of climate change, they are invited into a dialogue that transcends words and statistics.



Chris Arnold | Paradis | 2024



Chris Arnold | Midnight in the Moonlight Garden | 2023

Nature seems to play a central role in your art. How do you personally connect with nature, and how does that connection influence your creative process?

My connection with nature is both personal and essential to my creative process. Whether hiking through the backcountry of a national park, running at the dog park with my Vizsla, Scarlet, or painting in the solitude of my own garden, I find inspiration by immersing myself in natural settings. These experiences allow me to engage directly with the colors, textures, and rhythms of the natural world. Instead of simply depicting nature, I strive to capture the experience of being within it. My compositions reflect both its beauty and unpredictability, creating a sense of immersion that invites deeper engagement. This connection to nature shapes my creative process by balancing structured planning with improvisation. While I often map out my work as an illustrator and designer, my studio paintings evolve in a more organic way, influenced by the spontaneity of my environment. Elements like shifting weather, changing temperatures, or even a bug landing in the paint become part of the final piece, reinforcing the idea that nature is not just a subject but an active force within my art. By embracing this interaction between control and chance, I create work that is both deeply personal and universally resonant, encouraging viewers to connect with nature as something to experience rather than just observe.



Chris Arnold | Peaceful Garden | 2023

Adam Wiebe is a Brock University Fine Arts Student and emerging artist in the Niagara region. Being born in St.Catharines (2004) has meant his exposure to the artistic world has largely been in a local context: mostly being exposed to the broader art world through school and the internet. While still in the infancy of his career, Adam has already begun to participate in the artistic community of St.Catharines, with artworks up at locations including Brock University and in the Phases art show run by the city of St.Catharines.

Artist Statement

Humour and playfulness are important parts of my work, as they reflect my tendency to not take myself too seriously, which means fusing my(occasionally) serious thoughts with child-like imagery. I believe that an important part of being a human is how you deal with difficulties both in and outside of your control. More specifically I like to use objects from my childhood alongside sock puppets as references for the imagery in my artwork. The personal connection I feel with the objects allows me to personally invest myself in the work which allows me to feel more comfortable expressing my feelings: something I find quite difficult. As a result, I generally confront topics that deal with loss, melancholy and nostalgia.



— Interview

Mole^3

How did you first become interested in combining traditional woodblock printmaking with digital and generative art?

After studying oil painting and woodblock printing at university, I started working in design while continuing to make prints. During that time, I began using digital tools such as Illustrator, and gradually began creating digital sketches for my prints. Since I prefer indirect expression over direct expression, I naturally became interested in using digital technology. Later, when I was stuck in my printmaking, a colleague at work introduced me to "generative art." I thought that if I learned this, I might be able to create new ways of expressing myself in printmaking, so I started studying coding.

Your work involves a combination of open data, images, sound, and generative art. How do you see these elements coming together to tell a story or convey an emotion?

Although the work I presented this time does not include elements such as open data, images, or sound, I would like to talk about the work I do using these elements. For me, data is "material for painting." Even in data that at first glance appears inorganic and objective, there are waves and fluctuations, which can be replaced with organic images such as clouds in a landscape painting, distant mountains, and sunlight filtering through the trees. I value finding beauty and interest in the continuity, singularity, and regularity of things, and visualizing them.



In addition, the animation that decomposes and reconstructs images contains the message that "people can change infinitely." In my sound works, I try to give emotional fluctuations and depth to the sound through interaction with vision, as well as to express a sense of connection between people. In the process of generative art, I explore the balance between harmony and disharmony while looking at the unpredictable changes created by randomness and algorithms, and reinterpret the world from a new perspective.

By combining these elements, I hope to present a new perspective to the viewer at the intersection of data and emotion, or printmaking (traditional hand-made work).

What role does woodblock printing play in your process? Could you describe how it integrates with your digital work to create a more expanded form of printmaking?

My career as an artist began with woodblock prints. Woodblock prints are not just a technique, but also a way for me to understand the world. Through the process of carving and printing by hand, I have been able to converse with people from the past, deepening my understanding of materials and structures, and broadening my interpretation of the world I live in. For example, I have felt that one aspect of the world is the way that multiple things are born from one thing, or the way that opposing things are born from a

certain source, and sometimes exhibited this coexistence as a pair of print and block. Eventually I began exhibiting the "block" itself as a work of art, but I always print the print. After that, I started working on video production using coding. Here, I am attempting to abstract the production processes of woodblock prints, such as "separating blocks," "overlapping colors," and "rolling paper," and to "make prints three-dimensional" in digital space. I am also challenging myself to express generative art generated by algorithms as sculpture. Through the production using algorithms, the question of "What is it that people find beautiful?" was born. We unconsciously judge beauty based on human senses and values, but is this really something universal? By using the program, I was able to distance myself from the deliberate pursuit of beauty and wanted to find "unknown beauty" that is not bound by conventional values. A slight difference in numerical values can create order or cause chaos, and in the process, beauty that we have overlooked may be hidden. However, a work is not completed by calculation alone. Ultimately, through my hands, experience and physicality overlap, and "something" that goes beyond mere order or chance is born. In this way, the intersection of machine and human, calculation and intuition, objective and subjective gives birth to new expressions, which I believe are also an expanded form of printmaking. In the course of this exploration, I came to the idea that both humans and the world are part of a kind of algorithm. Having this perspective may have allowed me to see various things from a bird's-eye view.



Mole/3 | Fragments



Mole/3 | Coincidence or Destiny

What is your vision for the future of printmaking in the digital age? How do you think technology is influencing traditional forms of artistic expression?

I don't have a clear vision for the future of printmaking in the digital age, but in my work, I would like to explore the relationship between coding and printmaking, not just go beyond technique, but broaden my perspective on the world and connect with a world with different communities and values.

Technology complements traditional techniques and media, expanding the possibilities of art by reinterpreting them in new ways. For artists, technology offers infinite means of expression, and I intend to actively use it, except for the parts that I am particular about. However, I believe it is important that technology does not destroy traditional artistic expression, but rather respects it and uses it as a tool to add new perspectives.

Could you talk a little about the influence of Japanese culture on your work, particularly in terms of its impact on your choice of materials and technique?

I first encountered woodblock prints when I was

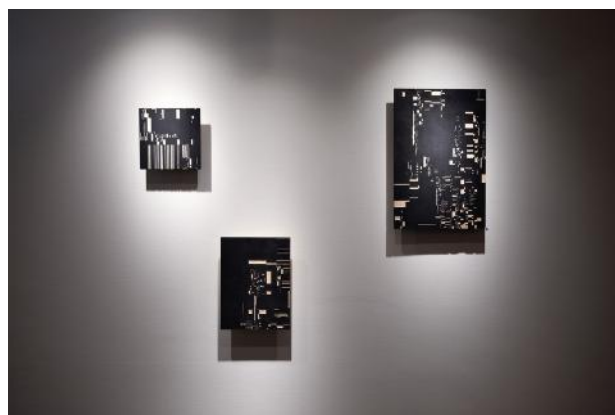
in the second year of junior high school and found a book on ukiyo-e in the school library. Since then, I have been strongly attracted to woodblock prints, and I am particularly fascinated by the traditional multi-color woodblock print technique.

While I am always exploring new possibilities for woodblock prints, I also value traditional materials. I use plywood, carving knives, water-based pigments, baren, and washi paper, and try to make the most of the texture and characteristics of each. In particular, the act of "carving" has a sense of carving time and feelings, and I feel it is an act of inheriting and connecting culture.

I also feel that my choice of materials and techniques is influenced by the environment in which I was born and raised. I was born in Kochi Prefecture, Japan, and grew up in an environment surrounded by mountains and the sea. During my childhood, there was a sawmill in front of our house, and I grew up surrounded by the smell of wood. I think watching my father fillet fish and sharpen knives with a whetstone also had an influence. In addition, the neighboring town is a famous producer of washi paper, and it was always close to me. As an aside, I studied washi paper for my graduation thesis and even had the experience of making paper myself. This background naturally formed the basis for me to incorporate Japanese materials and techniques into my work.

How do you see the role of generative art in contemporary visual culture, and what do you hope to achieve with your approach?

Generative art brings new perspectives to contemporary visual culture while simultaneously raising questions about the process of artistic creation itself. Works generated by algorithms and technology can create new visual value when artists add to them. However, debates have also arisen about the extent to which technology should influence art, and whether the main creative actors are humans or machines. In this way, I believe that generative art is an important element that broadens the framework of contemporary art at the intersection of technology and human creativity.



Mole^3 | Rhythm

Generative art is sometimes created with the sharing of algorithms and source code, and has developed under common frameworks. This characteristic makes it easier for many artists to utilize the technology, but it also leads to the possibility of artworks having similar styles, or the expression being limited by output environments like monitors. Furthermore, with the acceleration of production speed due to technological advancements, there may be a challenge where artworks are rapidly consumed and tend to have a short lifespan.

In my own approach, I do not use technology simply as a tool, but rather I want to create unique works by actively incorporating randomness and unpredictability that cannot be controlled by human hands, while also reflecting my own experiences and thoughts. Within the framework of generative art, my aim is to maximize the possibilities for personal expression and find the balance between technology and human creativity.

What advice would you give to artists who are interested in exploring the intersection of traditional and digital art forms?

Learning digital technology was a very time-consuming and persevering process for me, so I don't necessarily recommend it. However, I think it's very meaningful to collaborate with artists who have different techniques. Doing so can broaden your perspective and give you new discoveries and creative stimulation.

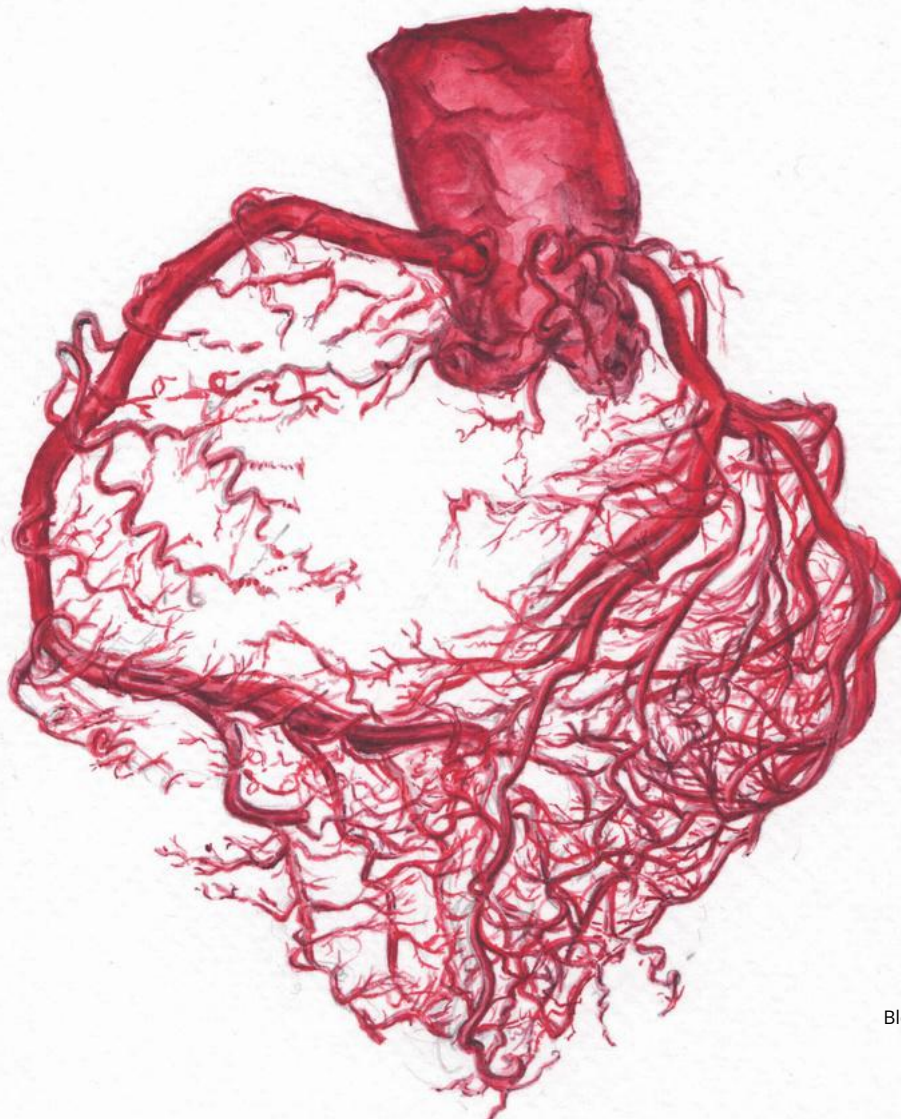
I also think it's most important to approach both traditional and digital art with respect and sincerity. I think that by deeply understanding and respecting the techniques, history, and background of each, new expressions will be born that go beyond mere fusion.



Sarah Loecker is a fine arts artist based in Graz, Austria. Raised in Niagara Falls, New York in the US she is was confronted by the juxtaposition between urban environments and the wild beauty of the natural world. Dreaming of becoming a doctor, she was just finishing her bachelor's degree in pre-medicine in the northwest when she met her Austrian husband. After a short stint of laboratory work Sarah and her husband moved permanently to Austria. Coming from an artistic family Sarah decided to try her hand at painting shortly after the birth of her son and has never looked back. Her love of the wildness of nature and background in biology directly influence her choice of subject matter. Not having studied art at university, she has participated in numerous botanical illustration seminars as well as taking online natural history illustration courses. Having exhibited in a variety of different medium in her one-and-a-half-decade long hometown of Graz as well as completing illustration projects appearing in national parks, Sarah has begun offering workshops and short seminars. Botanical illustration has proved to be her most popular course. She is also a cofounder of Urban sketchers Graz a local chapter of urban sketchers, and the Anatomical Illustrator at the Anatomy department of the University of Graz Medical School.

Artist Statement

Sarah Loecker uses a variety of medium to express her passion for the often-surprising beauty found in both nature and everyday objects. Her style tends toward realism and is often the result of careful observation of detail. She is fascinated by the spectrum of colour found in what appears to be monochromatic objects. From detailed Botanical work done in watercolour, natural history illustration in graphite, to her bolder acrylic landscapes, her desire is to seduce her viewers into discovering the unanticipated beauty of the ordinary, and to show them that through observation even the plainest, simplest things can be wonderfully complex.



Sarah Loecker
Blood vessels of the heart
2024



Sarah Loecker
Maple leaf
2024

— Interview

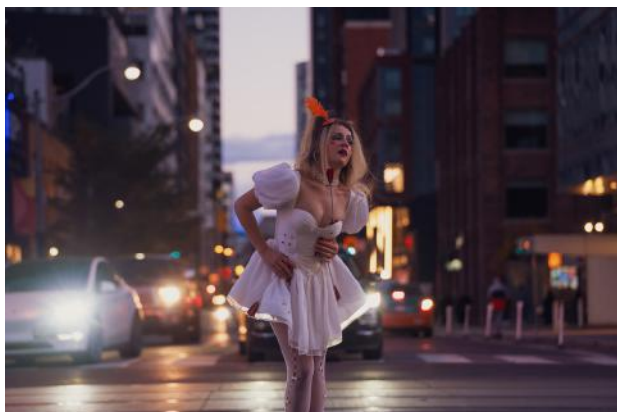
Ola Mularczyk

What inspired you to explore the theme of heartbreak and healing through surrealism?

After experiencing my fair share of heartbreak in my early 20s, I needed a creative outlet. I pulled from very real experiences from the last few years like getting cheated on, getting ghosted, long distance, breakdowns in communication, and struggling with my own insecurities. I've always felt very drawn to surrealism as it acts as a window to the subconscious. All the characters are reflections of me and I created these worlds as a place for my emotions to unapologetically take up space. I've always been someone who feels things very strongly and I'm also one to love without thinking twice. Which has been a bit of a chaotic combination but I wouldn't trade it for anything. The message that I hope people take away from this series is that healing can be messy and unsettling and painful, but it's human. Allowing yourself to acknowledge and feel the full extent of your feelings will always be worth it in the end.

How do you feel the intersection of your background in performing arts has influenced your approach to visual art?

I treat each step of the creative process as if it's a piece of performance art. Everything from creating the props to doing my hair and makeup was done with intention and mindfulness. I feel like my early exposure to performing arts makes me much more comfortable creating art in public places without worrying about how I'm perceived.



Ola Mularczyk | Marked



My theatre experience helped me do thorough character work to create complex characters with strong backstories. Even though the audience might not ever see it, I, as the performer, can use it to truly connect with the scene. I also surround myself with tokens of my past experiences to jog my memory and really sink deep into the character. These tokens, in forms such as toys, ticket stubs, and jewelry, can be found in many of the scenes.

Can you describe the creative process behind creating these surrealist photographs? How much of it is personal experience versus conceptual?

Each scene is a conceptual representation of the feelings during the healing journey. Throughout history, especially in western works, women's thoughts and emotions have been portrayed as mysterious, irrational, and unpredictable. I decided to comically lean into this idea by using these supernatural entities as vessels for my emotions. The scenarios are inspired by myths and legends from all over the world that I thought resembled my motivations in those moments. None of the scenes that I created are reflections of reality- the most human things about it are the emotions they evoke.

What do the different phases of the grieving and healing process represent in your series?

I believe that heartbreak is an example of disenfranchised grief. In many of these cases, whether it's the loss of a job, a relationship, a living situation, or an opportunity, we can still very much experience grief. But because these events are fairly common in life, the loss can be seen as "less significant" by those around us. This often puts us in this strange place because we feel like we should move on quickly and just get over it, but the pain lingers and it's

often not dealt with properly.

The scenes showcase the stages of grief including denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. This healing process isn't linear or clear cut therefore neither are the photos. Healing is also deeply unsettling. You have to face deep fears and insecurities to get to the root of the pain and take steps towards getting better. Understanding my work is a similar process. You have to sit with the discomfort and the unsettling scenes, notice the details, and reflect inwards to truly feel the full impact.

The concept of vulnerability and kindness after betrayal is powerful. How do you think this resonates with viewers who may not have experienced heartbreak?

I believe we have all experienced heartbreak in some way or another. Not exclusively in a romantic sense, but it could be disappointment, rejection, or loss in any aspect of life. These moments eat away at us, bit by bit. It's incredibly difficult not to put walls up and refuse to try again. After heartbreak, it's natural to not want to get hurt again. But this also robs you of the opportunity to experience joy or love in your life.

For those in particular who haven't experienced romantic heartbreak, I hope this series can offer them hope. The first few romantic heartbreaks truly feel like the world is ending, just like it feels for these characters. But in this cycle, we see the light at the end of the tunnel and the opportunity to begin again.



Ola Mularczyk
Crash landing



Ola Mularczyk
Spinning

What role does collaboration with Fiona Vandermyden play in the visual storytelling of this series?

Fiona Vandermyden is my best friend and the photographer that I collaborated with on this project. Where I created the scenes, she helped me capture them to be able to share them with the world. She's the only person in the world that I trust with my creation because I know she will handle it with care.

How do you approach the blending of personal emotions with abstract, surreal concepts in your work?

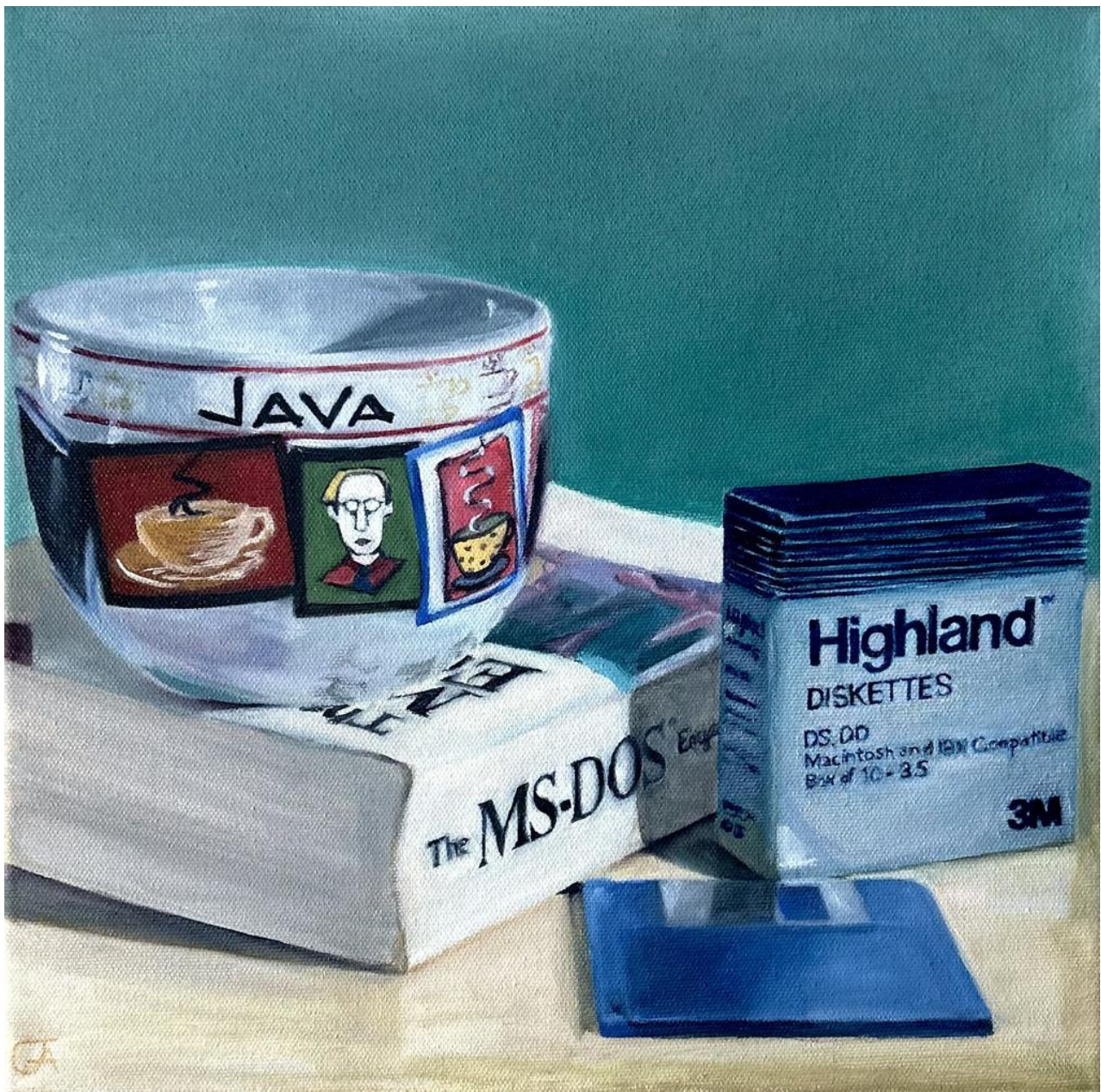
I believe that heartbreak is part of what makes us human. These tales of love and loss have been told across various cultures for thousands of years. Researching these myths and diving into classic literature was strangely comforting. It brought me an eerie sense of validation seeing all the artists that came before me who felt the exact same thing. I pay attention to all aspects, both visible and invisible. Details as seemingly insignificant as choosing which perfume the characters would wear or what they would eat. Then in preparation, I would go ahead and do what my characters would do.

As is traditional with surrealism, a lot of the meaning rests in the featured symbolism. In addition to the symbolism, I trust that the scenes I create can convey my emotions to the audience. Through my work, I aim to create more than a well composed image, I aim to share moments that are frozen in time.

Isabella Arp is a self-taught multi-discipline artist currently based in southern Indiana. Influenced by her vocation in information technology, her work often incorporates visuals inspired by early computing and elements of postmodernism. She is an enthusiast of all things vintage, often utilizing unconventional materials and techniques, such as a typewriter and floppy diskettes. In 2022, she founded 24Hr Coffee Fine Art, a studio that regularly completes commissions and sells original work internationally.

Artist Statement

I would describe my body of work in one word- anemoia. I paint contemporary subject matter through the lens of vintage media and liminality to satisfy my longing for a time/place I've only experienced through my art.





— Interview

Jeremy Bianco

How did your transition from 3D animation and design to fine art painting impact your creative process and style?

As a 3D animator, my favorite part of the process was modeling, sculpting forms from a blank mesh of vertices and polygons. In hindsight, that may explain why I naturally gravitated toward a monochromatic palette in my paintings. It wasn't a deliberate choice, but I see the connection now. The technical nature of modeling and rendering required an obsessive attention to detail, which naturally carried over into my painting. I approach my work with the same focus on precision, carefully refining edges, light, and texture to create depth and realism.

As for portraiture, I've never questioned or hesitated about it, it's always been my focus. I think that stems from an appreciation for traditional sculpture, which is largely figurative. Portraits and figures have always fascinated and inspired me, whether in sculpture or painting. Even before I studied multimedia design, I spent countless hours teaching myself Adobe Photoshop by creating my own movie and TV show posters for fun. That love for cinematic imagery and composition is something I carried into painting as well.

You've drawn inspiration from mid-20th-century advertising and cinema, particularly from the Mad Men era. How do you think those influences manifest in your current work, especially in your portrayal of beauty and glamour?

There was a lighthearted joy and optimism in the advertising of that era, everything was upbeat, charming, and had a sense of innocence. That's a



key part of what fascinates me about it. The way beauty and glamour were presented felt effortless, yet highly stylized.

In my work, I try to channel that same essence. There's a deliberate elegance, a refined aesthetic that is still inviting and warm. I'm not just recreating the visuals of that time but tapping into the emotion and cultural mood that made it so compelling.

"Bubble Bath Girls" is a reimagining of a 1950 Life Magazine cover. What drew you to that specific image, and how does it reflect your exploration of femininity and cultural ideals?

That Life Magazine cover captured a kind of beauty and femininity that feels increasingly rare today. graceful, understated, yet undeniably glamorous. It represents a time when beauty standards, while idealized, were rooted in mystique and refinement rather than overt display.

By reinterpreting the image as a painting. I wanted to engage with that contrast, the way cultural ideals evolve over time, particularly in how beauty is presented and perceived.

You use a monochromatic palette in "Bubble Bath Girls." What role does color play in your work, and why did you choose this specific approach for this piece?

Black and white naturally strips everything down to form, contrast, and composition. There's something timeless about it, it feels immediate yet nostalgic. For Bubble Bath Girls, I wanted to maintain that

sense of vintage elegance while also giving it a contemporary edge. The lack of color allows the focus to remain on the expressions, the softness of the lighting, and the overall mood. It also makes the image feel like a memory, a moment suspended in time.

In your recent work, you've focused on the intersection of vintage aesthetics and contemporary interpretations. How do you navigate the balance between preserving the nostalgia of the past and infusing modern perspectives into your art?

For me, it's about honoring the past without being confined by it. I don't want my work to feel like pure nostalgia or imitation. I want it to feel alive, relevant, and personal.

The key is in the reinterpretation. I take inspiration from classic imagery, but I bring my own perspective to it. Sometimes that means reimagining an old composition with a new subject, other times it's about distilling the essence of a time period and translating it into something fresh. Ultimately, I think that balance comes naturally. My influences are deeply rooted in mid-century aesthetics, but my perspective and style is contemporary.

Your work often captures the timeless beauty of iconic figures. How do you approach portraying



Jeremy Bianco | Bubble Bath Girls | 2025

figures like Audrey Hepburn or contemporary subjects in a way that honors their elegance while adding your unique artistic interpretation?

In the early stages of my painting journey, I developed my skills and refined my style by directly copying portraits of Audrey Hepburn and other starlets from that era. It was my way of honoring them, paying tribute to their beauty and presence while also potentially shining a light on some of the lesser-remembered actresses of the time. That process helped me find my artistic voice.

Now, my focus has shifted to creating original work, but I'm still deeply inspired by the imagery and material that shaped me. Just as some artists reimagine master paintings, I reimagine the visual culture that resonates with me. I did this with *The Birth of Venus*, reinterpreting Botticelli's masterpiece through a contemporary lens, and I continue to do it with my work inspired by mid-century cinema and advertising.

For example, I'm currently working on a piece inspired by *Funny Face* (1957), starring Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire. But rather than painting Audrey herself, I've created an imagined model as a homage to both the film and her iconic presence. There are subtle references woven into the piece that those familiar with the film will recognize, while for others, it might simply be an invitation to appreciate the aesthetics and mood I'm trying to capture.

Ultimately, my goal isn't just to revisit the past but to recontextualize it bringing forward what still feels relevant, elegant, and evocative in a way that speaks to today's audience.

What do you hope viewers take away from "Bubble Bath Girls"? Is there a specific message or feeling you want to evoke through this piece?

I mostly just want people to smile and relax when they look at it. There's a softness, a warmth, and a beauty in it that feels effortless and inviting. At the same time, I think it offers a contrast to today's beauty and advertising standards. The women in *Bubble Bath Girls* are elegant and alluring, yet the image is completely modest and innocent. It's a reminder that beauty doesn't have to be overt or revealing to be captivating. But beyond any message, it's about the feeling. If someone sees it and simply appreciates the femininity, the grace, and the lightness of it all, then I think the painting has done its job.

M.B. Dallochio

Your work draws on the themes of trauma, the Military-Industrial Complex, and intersectionality. Can you tell us how your personal experiences as a soldier have influenced your art?

My time as a soldier shaped not only the way I see the world but also how I experience it. The things I witnessed, both inspiring and tragic, deepened my awareness of the fragility and resilience of humanity. Military life exposed me to the machinery of power—the Military-Industrial Complex—and the Kafkaesque human toll it takes in perpetuating cycles of war and exploitation on behalf of wealthy individuals, Defense contractors, and the politicians being paid for by both. My experiences pulled back the veil on systems that often treat people as expendable, and this dissonance between the human and the systemic profoundly impacts my art.

Through my work, I process the trauma of childhood through military service—both seen and unseen. I explore the emotional terrain that marks a person forever, whether it's moral injury, survivor's guilt, or the struggle to find yourself again in a community that cannot fathom the realities of war. Art becomes a language for me to translate these experiences, a way to articulate the unspeakable and invite others to confront the shadowed corners of their own worlds.

How do you approach the concept of life as performance in your art? What role does transformation play in the way you explore human experiences?

Life is, in many ways, an ongoing performance. Each of us moves between our roles—the soldier, the healer, the artist, the parent—all while balancing the self within the constraints of societal expectations. My art plays in that liminal space, where the mask we wear blurs into the truth underneath. Performance in my work isn't about deception but adaptation. Humans are constantly improvising to survive, and within that improvisation, there's the metamorphosis. Transformation is central to my practice because it reflects the human condition. Our experiences can break us, but they can also remold us into something stronger, wiser, or gentler. This dynamic is evident in my work as I overlay various textures with high contrasting colors, reflecting how fragility persists despite systemic hardness. I invite viewers to explore their own layers of identity, to grapple with the ways they've adapted, and to consider what moments in life have reshaped them—for better or worse.



M.B. Dallochio | Letters to Milena

Your statement mentions using artistic alchemy to transmute tragedy into inspiration. Could you elaborate on the process you go through to achieve this transformation in your work?

Artistic alchemy, to me, is about taking life's darkest experiences and distilling them into something meaningful, if not beautiful. It's less about erasing pain and more about giving it a purpose. My process begins with honesty—I allow myself to confront those moments of deep anguish or frustration, whether it's tied to trauma, loss, or the chaos of the world. From there, I extract elements of those emotions and reimagine them in a form that others can engage with. For example, I might use objects associated with violence or obstruction but present them in a way that speaks to resilience or rebirth. This transformation isn't a linear process. It's often messy and requires revisiting painful memories, reshaping them until they feel less like weights and more like lessons. The goal is to create work that acknowledges sorrow but doesn't resign to it, offering instead a sense of shared humanity and healing.

Franz Kafka and Frida Kahlo have been major influences on your art. How do their works resonate with you and find expression in your creations?

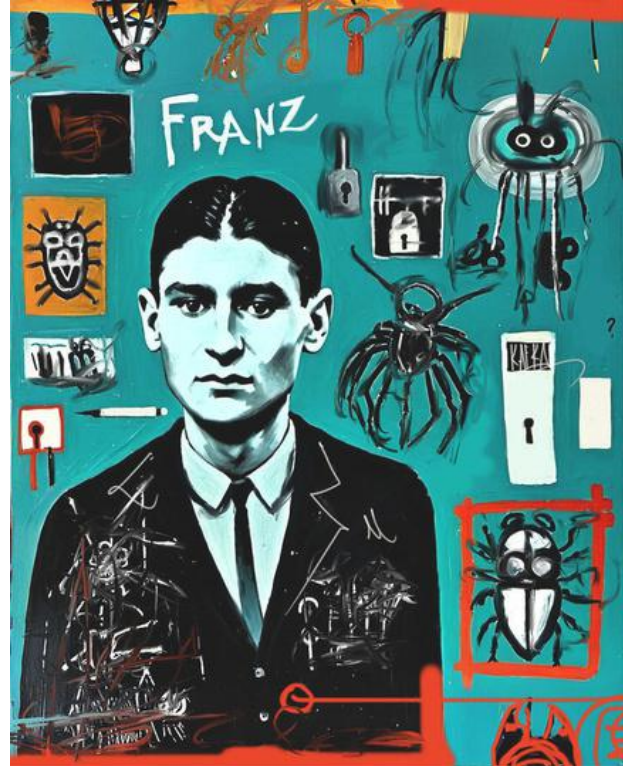
Kafka and Kahlo both reveal truths about existence that resonate deeply with me. Franz Kafka's exploration of alienation, bureaucracy, and the grotesque mirrors some of my own experiences within institutions like the military. His

sense of the surreal and absurd creeping into everyday life parallels my own fixation with the "unreality of the human condition." I often use distorted or fragmented imagery in my art to reflect how our inner worlds clash with external systems.

Frida Kahlo, on the other hand, lays bare the personal. Her work is unapologetically vulnerable, turning pain into an intimate, visceral experience. I draw strength from her ability to visualize suffering as both deeply personal and inherently universal. She inspires me to weave my own bodily and emotional experiences with larger sociopolitical themes, creating art that speaks to both the individual and the collective.

In your work, you also blend your experience as a social worker with your artistic practice. How do you balance these two aspects, and how do they inform each other?

Being a social worker taught me to hold space for others' suffering while recognizing the systemic forces at play in their lives. This practice of empathy and analysis carries into my art. Social work involves listening deeply and seeing people not as isolated beings but as interconnected with their environment, history, and identity. Similarly, my art speaks to intersectionality and positionality—where personal stories meet societal issues like trauma, war, or inequality. Balancing both roles is not without its challenges, as both demand emotional energy. However, they feed into one another in meaningful ways. Social work keeps me grounded in real human experiences, while art offers a more abstract, reflective space to explore and process those realities. At their core, both practices share the same purpose—healing and finding meaning in one's own journey.



M.B. Dalloccchio | Franz

You mention your fascination with the "unreality of the human condition." How does this notion manifest in the textures and themes of your artwork?

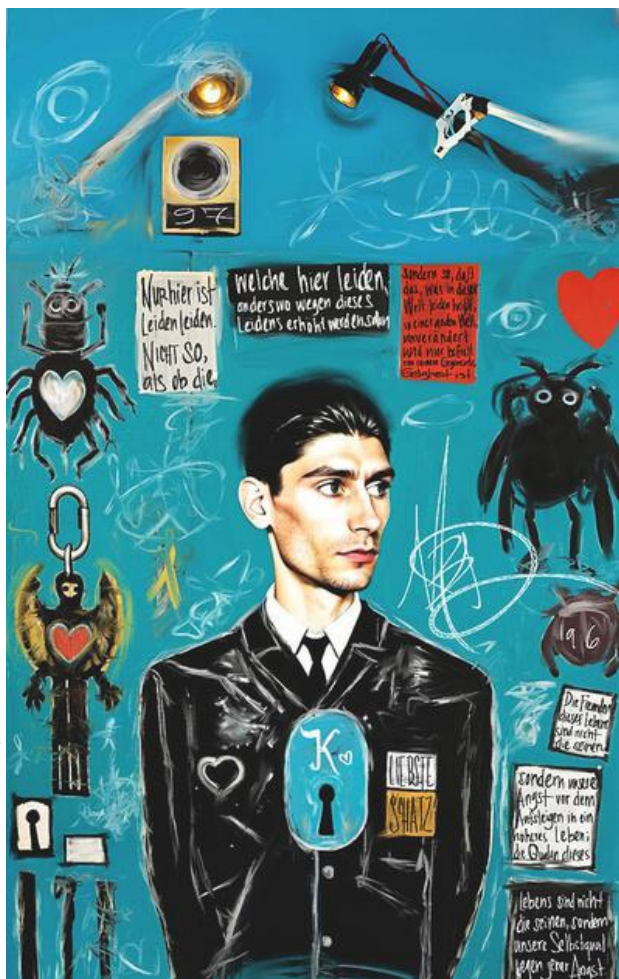
The unreality of the human condition, for me, is about the dissonance between what we perceive as real and the deeper, often hidden truths of our existence. Life is fleeting and unpredictable, yet we cling to illusions of permanence and control. This tension finds its way into the textures of my art—juxtapositions between hard-edged industrial elements and more ephemeral, organic forms represent the push-pull between clarity and chaos.

Thematically, I explore the layers of human experience that feel real yet surreal—our emotions, memories, and the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of them. This shows up in imagery that's fractured or slightly warped, reflecting how our perceptions rarely align perfectly with reality. My work ultimately invites viewers to question what is "real" within their experiences and encourages them to sit with the discomfort of not finding a single, easy answer.

Your projects explore the pathways to healing from complex trauma. Could you share how your artwork acts as a tool for healing both for you and for your audience?

Creating art is a deeply cathartic process for me. It allows me to channel emotions that might otherwise feel overwhelming into something tangible—something I can examine, manipulate, and eventually transform. This act of creation is inherently healing because it reminds me that pain is not static. My work demonstrates that trauma can evolve into a narrative—not one that defines you, but one that helps you transcend.

For my audience, I hope my artwork serves as a mirror. By being vulnerable in what I create, I want to offer others permission to confront their own pain and histories. Many viewers have shared how my work helped them process their emotions or simply feel less alone. The universality of symbol and texture in my art intends to create a shared space where healing becomes a collective, rather than isolating, experience. Healing, after all, is not a destination—it's an ongoing process, and my art offers a hand to those walking that path.



M.B. Dalloccchio | The Paradox of Pain



Haeil Kwon

Born in Daegu in 1977, he lives in Busan while going to university. He started photography through the university's black-and-white photography club in 1995, and earned master's and doctoral degrees under the theme of photography education. Starting with his first solo exhibition in 2017, he participated in several individual exhibitions and a number of group exhibitions other than the Jeonju International Photography Festival. The artist sympathizes with Guy Debord's view of "non-place non-place" places and spaces, which are characterized by modern society's capital and image, and Marc Auge. He works on photography on residential culture and environment, as well as the connection between cities and people, urban environments, and individual lives.

Haeil Kwon | Space After Spectacle | 2024

Project Statement

Space After Spectacle

Once the shantytown on the hills was bulldozed, an apartment complex with a rich town's name took the place. Out of the fear of losing a competition and despite the price premium for being close to a flashy neighborhood across the river, I ended up buying a unit. While this numbered rectangular space built on the air is legally mine, I am anxious. The concern of selling this property already gives me a headache, although I just bought it. About five decades ago, Guy Debord has warned the world that it would be full of people just like me. He named the particular loss of inherent worth and the form of worshipping commodities as "spectacle." Spectacles have degraded us into spectators no longer capable of reasons and emotions. While we are surrounded by us on all directions, we ostracize ourselves. Meanwhile, apartments have become the very symbol of spectacles. Construction site floors are flooded with cryptic numbers, signs and codes. The fence screen that encircles the entire outer wall must be trying to hide what happens on the inside. Wires are so tangled that nobody could possibly guess where they are connected to; thin steel frames are connected by some means, and then get covered with thick cement. Yesterday's floor becomes today's ceiling, and bumps develop from smooth surfaces in a day. How does the world disturb us? The very process of spectacles are as much as spectacle as the outcomes themselves. I feel anxious and nauseated. For I do not possess the level of intellect to give a logical account of my social standpoint, I wish to speak through photographs. Spectacles are not mere sets of images; rather, they are the social relationships among the people mediated by these images! Since our modern history was not built upon our willful choices, we have become secularized. For that, I give my best to be more meticulous.



— Interview

Jaymax

Can you tell us about your artistic journey and how you became interested in airbrush art?

My artistic journey has been a blend of curiosity, passion, and experimentation. I've always been drawn to art in various forms since I was a kid. I started with traditional mediums like pencil and paint, but I was constantly looking for new ways to express myself and create more dynamic, vibrant works.

My interest in airbrush art began when I visited an artist's studio in my neighbourhood at the time and I saw the stunning detail and smoothness that he could achieve with an airbrush, from there I knew I had to learn that. I was fascinated by how this tool allowed artists to blend colors and create incredibly intricate details that weren't possible with regular brushes. It was a game-changer for me, and I decided to dive in and learn everything I could about it. I carried out research on where I could purchase one for myself and spent time studying different techniques, practicing on various surfaces, and experimenting with different styles. The precision and versatility of airbrush art captivated me, and I quickly found it was a medium that aligned with my vision and artistic goals. As I continued to develop my skills, I discovered the endless possibilities that airbrush offers, from portraiture to abstract works, to designs that seem to come to life with dimensional effects. It's been a rewarding journey of constant learning and pushing my boundaries as an artist. What I love most about airbrush art is its ability to evoke such realism while allowing me to explore creativity in new, unexpected ways.

Your work blends hyper-realism with surreal elements. How do you decide on the balance between these two styles in your pieces?

Finding the balance between hyper-realism and surrealism is something that comes naturally to me,



but it's also a deliberate process. I love the challenge of combining the two styles because it allows me to push the boundaries of what's possible while keeping a strong sense of realism.

When I approach a piece, I start with the hyper-realistic elements because I enjoy capturing the fine details and textures that make the subject feel tangible. This helps anchor the viewer in reality, making the surreal elements feel even more impactful when they appear. I think of the surreal elements as a way to heighten or transform the reality I've already established. They might come from a concept or an emotion I want to express, and I think about how to introduce them in a way that feels organic rather than forced.

The key is to maintain a sense of harmony. I ask myself how the surreal elements can coexist with the realistic ones to enhance the narrative or evoke a certain feeling. Sometimes, I'll use contrasting colors or exaggerated proportions to draw attention to the surreal aspects, while still keeping them grounded by the realistic details. The goal is to create an immersive experience where the viewer can feel like they're stepping into a world that's both familiar and dreamlike at the same time.

Ultimately, it's about trusting my instincts and allowing the piece to evolve, sometimes in unexpected directions, while always keeping that balance between the real and the imagined.

What challenges do you face when working with airbrush, and how do you overcome them?

Working with airbrush definitely comes with its challenges, but I enjoy the problem-solving aspect of it. One of the biggest challenges I face is achieving the level of precision I want, especially with intricate details. Airbrush is an incredibly versatile tool, but it can sometimes be difficult to control, especially when it comes to fine lines or blending multiple layers smoothly. To overcome this, I spend a lot of time practicing control and working with different air pressure settings to ensure I can achieve the right effect. It also takes a lot of patience—sometimes I'll layer colors slowly and carefully, allowing each layer to dry before moving on to the next, to ensure the smooth transitions and crisp details I'm after. Another challenge is dealing with inconsistencies in the paint or nozzle clogging, especially when I'm using multiple colors or switching between fine and broad spray. I've learned that regular maintenance of my airbrush tools is essential. Cleaning them thoroughly after each session prevents clogs and ensures the airbrush performs at its best. It's a bit tedious, but it's a necessary step to avoid any interruptions during the creative process.

Sometimes, I also encounter challenges when it comes to working with different surfaces. Each material can behave differently, and not every surface responds to the airbrush in the same way. Whether I'm working on canvas, metal, wood or fabric, I have to adjust my technique and the type of paint I use accordingly. I've learned through trial and error what works best on different surfaces, and over time, it's become easier to anticipate these challenges.



Ultimately, it's about being patient, practicing consistently, and finding solutions that work for each unique project. Every challenge I face with airbrush art is an opportunity to learn and refine my skills further.

You experiment with textures and surfaces in your art. Could you share a memorable experiment or breakthrough moment in your process?

Absolutely! One of the most memorable breakthroughs in my process came when I decided to experiment with non-traditional surfaces for airbrush art. Up until that point, I'd mostly worked on canvas and smooth panels, but I wanted to push my boundaries and see how the medium would interact with other materials. So, I tried working on cotton and polyester clothes and even leather. The breakthrough moment came when I worked on a piece for an exhibition where I used a t-shirt as the base. I was attempting to create a hyper-realistic piece, but the texture of the t-shirt gave the arts an almost organic feel that I hadn't anticipated. The way the paint absorbed and reacted to the surface created unexpected depth, and it gave the piece a life-like quality that I hadn't experienced before. The texture of the t-shirts and all other fabrics, combined with the airbrush's fine detail, creates a beautiful contrast between realism and the surface's natural grain. That moment really opened my eyes to the possibility of how texture can play a crucial role in the narrative and emotion of a piece. It taught me that the surface

can be as much a part of the art as the imagery itself, and now, I love experimenting with different textures to see how they influence the final result. It's given my work a whole new dimension and has become a central part of my artistic process moving forward.

How do you approach conceptualizing an artwork? Do you start with an idea, or does the process evolve as you work?

I'd say it's a combination of both. Sometimes I start with a very clear idea or concept in mind, often inspired by a specific theme, emotion, or even an experience I want to explore. In those cases, I'll plan out the composition, color palette, and certain details before even picking up the airbrush. I enjoy the structure of having a roadmap for the piece, as it helps guide my decisions along the way.

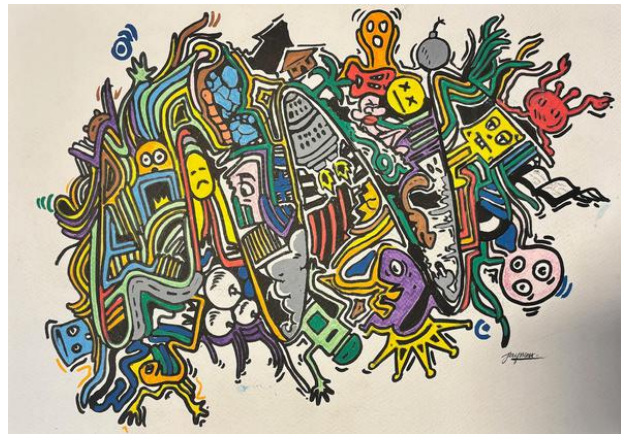
However, other times, the process evolves more organically as I work. I might start with a loose idea or an abstract feeling and let the piece unfold as I go. I find that as I begin layering and experimenting with the airbrush, new elements emerge that I hadn't anticipated. It's in these moments that the art takes on a life of its own, and the process becomes more intuitive. Sometimes a small detail will spark a new direction, and I'll follow that thread, letting the piece guide me rather than sticking strictly to a preconceived plan.

Ultimately, I think both approaches complement each other. Having a clear starting point can provide direction, but being open to unexpected changes allows the artwork to evolve into something even more dynamic. I love the flexibility of the creative process and the freedom it gives me to explore and innovate.

Airbrush art is known for its fluidity and precision. How do you maintain such fine control while still allowing for creative freedom?

Maintaining fine control while still allowing for creative freedom with airbrush art is all about balance and practice. I focus a lot on mastering the technical aspects of the tool, like adjusting air pressure and controlling the flow of paint, so that I have the precision I need for detailed work. That control gives me the foundation to create hyper-realistic textures, sharp lines, or fine gradients. But while precision is important, I also give myself space to explore and experiment.

For me, part of the beauty of airbrush is that it allows for such fluidity in blending colors, creating smooth transitions, and even improvising with different effects. I think the key is to strike a balance between planning out specific elements and embracing the moments when the paint does its own thing—whether



it's a soft mist, a spray pattern, or a surprising drip. I try to stay open to those spontaneous moments, as they can often add depth or an unexpected twist to the artwork.

Ultimately, it's about mastering the tool to the point where it feels like an extension of myself, so that I can let my creativity flow without being restricted by technique. As I build more control and confidence, I can allow myself to experiment, knowing I can always adjust the outcome if needed. The fluidity of the airbrush invites those moments of creative freedom, and it's a constant dance between precision and letting go.

What do you hope viewers take away from your art? Are there particular emotions or thoughts you aim to evoke?

What I hope viewers take away from my art is a sense of connection, whether it's to the subject matter, the emotion behind the piece, or even to the feeling of wonder that comes from experiencing something surreal. I want my work to spark a conversation in the viewer's mind, to invite them to look deeper and see beyond the surface.

Emotionally, I aim to evoke a sense of awe, curiosity, and reflection. Through the blend of hyper-realism and surrealism, I want people to feel like they're stepping into a world that's both familiar and strange, a place where the boundaries of reality can be stretched. Whether it's the delicate details that draw them in or the unexpected elements that challenge their perception, I want viewers to feel like they're engaging with something that resonates on a deeper, perhaps subconscious level.

I also hope my art encourages viewers to embrace the unknown and to find beauty in the unexpected. Art, for me, is a way to communicate the complexity of human experience, so I want people to reflect on their own emotions and accept them, dreams, and even their fears. It's about creating a space where people can pause and experience something thought-provoking, with room for their own interpretations and personal connections to the work.



Ann Stefani was born in the UK and graduated in Food Science. In 2003 she moved to Piemonte (Italy) with her husband. During the restructuring of their abandoned ruin she discovered a new aspect of her personality, an artistic, creative side which she did not know she had. She has exhibited in various local personal and group exhibitions including Turin and Alba and has created a museum in her local town dedicated to her work.

Artist Statement

Seeing undiscovered beauty in the old abandoned houses of Piemonte (Italy) and their decaying contents, I create simple but sensitive sculptures-often in complete balance. I make minimal, respectful changes to the original objects to convey their pure beauty and not remove the soul of the handmade objects, allowing them to be appreciated once more. My wall sculptures use naturally coloured woods faded by time. I create with passion conveying various emotions often in response to topical issues. I am anti-commercialisation. So I use limited bought materials.

Ann Stefani | Battery egg | 2023





— Interview

Derek Jackson

How did your background as a self-taught artist influence your approach to Pop Art?

My background as a self-taught artist has greatly influenced my approach to Pop Art by giving me the freedom to experiment without the boundaries of traditional rules or techniques. Without formal instruction, I've always approached art with curiosity, letting intuition guide me.

Pop Art speaks to me because of its focus on everyday life and popular culture—it feels accessible, much like my own artistic journey. Being self-taught has pushed me to look at the world around me for inspiration, which is exactly what Pop Art celebrates. It's about finding beauty in the mundane and reinterpreting the familiar in bold, unexpected ways.

This freedom also gives me the confidence to merge styles or break conventions, creating work that is uniquely mine. Instead of relying on

Must see T.V.!



This show is rotten!



established norms, I rely on my personal story, the places I've lived or visited, and my own emotional lens—infusing my Pop Art with a layer of authenticity that is deeply personal.

Can you tell us more about how your personal experiences with social media have shaped your work?

Social media is at the very heart of my work—it's both my inspiration and the subject I critique. The idea for my paintings was born during one of those endless scrolling sessions, where I noticed how everyone on social media seems to have a personal brand. It felt like an online marketplace, with people constantly trying to secure sponsorships, sell products, or promote themselves.

What stood out most to me was watching makeup influencers. Despite selling different products, they all used a similar language to market their items. Their opinions held power—they were shaping the buying decisions of millions of people with just a few words. That realization sparked something in me: the power of opinions, particularly in the digital age, and how they influence not just commerce but also creativity.

I started thinking about how the internet has judged and even marginalized art. The internet is essentially a void—a space where we all want to have a voice. In this void, art gets judged, whether it's a masterpiece or a humble creation. Often, it's not about the art itself but about how

it can be monetized, praised, or criticized. And tearing something down online is incredibly easy; it takes seconds to dismiss or ridicule something that may have taken years to create. That's where the concept of the "talk bubble" came from. I realized that these endless online opinions often "cover up" the art itself. They obscure its meaning, its intent, and its essence with layers of noise and judgment. The talk bubble became a way to visually represent that idea—the way opinions can both shape and overshadow art.

After a year of working with talk bubbles, I decided to infuse them with humor. I started incorporating funny reviews, and it felt like my work became even more personal. Humor is a big part of who I am, and by using lighthearted, often ridiculous online commentary, I could reflect the chaotic, endless stream of opinions we're all exposed to. It also gave my art a sense of playfulness while still making a statement about the digital age.

In many ways, this approach feels limitless. As long as the internet is filled with opinions—and it always will be—I'll have an endless source of inspiration.

What does "Can I Say Something?" mean to you on a personal level, and how does it reflect your feelings about art in today's digital age?

"Can I Say Something?" holds profound personal significance for me, as it represents my first



collection of art—a milestone in my creative journey. The title itself is a question that reflects my vulnerability as I step into the art world. It's an invitation to express myself, to share my perspective, and to explore how my voice fits into this vast and ever-evolving space. This collection is more than just a series of works; it's a means of navigating not only the field of art but also my identity as an artist. Through it, I'm learning how to articulate emotions, ideas, and narratives in a way that resonates with others, which can feel intimidating in today's digital age. The digital era has made art more accessible than ever, but it has also created an overwhelming flood of content, where voices can get lost. For me, "Can I Say Something?" embodies the courage it takes to stand out, to ask for space in a world that often feels oversaturated, and to challenge myself to communicate authentically amidst the noise. It's a statement about the value of individuality and connection—two things I believe art should always strive for, no matter the medium or platform. This collection allows me to say something in my own way and on my own terms, and I hope it inspires others to feel they can do the same.

How do you see the concept of "instant reactions" and "online opinions" affecting the viewer's connection to art?

I've explored this idea deeply in my artist statement for "Can I Say Something?" but here's a summarized perspective. Instant reactions and

online opinions can fundamentally reshape how we connect with art. In today's digital world, we often rely on "trusted sources," whether that's a critic, an influencer, or a social media algorithm, to tell us if a piece of art is worth our attention. This reliance can strip away the personal journey of discovering art on our own terms. The truth is, no one sees the world exactly as I do—or as you do. Art is deeply personal, and no one can fully predict how a piece will resonate with someone else. When we let others' opinions dictate our feelings about art, we risk losing the chance to engage with it authentically, to decide for ourselves whether or not it speaks to us. That's why I believe it's essential to step away from the noise, go out, and explore art independently. Experience it without the lens of "politics" or preconceived judgments. Find what moves you, what challenges you, and what sparks your curiosity. But here's the flip side: when we engage with art on our own terms, we also have a responsibility to go deeper. Without relying on the interpretations of others, we must ask ourselves, "What is the artist trying to say? What story, emotion, or truth are they sharing?" In many ways, the opposite of instant reactions is compassion and understanding. It's about taking the time to look beyond the surface, to connect with art and the artist behind it on a human level. And isn't that what the world needs more of? In a culture dominated by speed and snap judgments, art offers us an opportunity to pause, reflect, and empathize—and that's a connection worth nurturing.



In your opinion, what is the balance between creating art for self-expression and creating art for an audience's critique?

In my view, the balance between self-expression and creating for an audience lies in understanding the purpose behind each piece of art. For me, art begins as an act of self-expression — it's about capturing my emotions, thoughts, and experiences without worrying about how it will be received. That raw authenticity is what makes the work meaningful to me.

However, I also recognize that art lives in the space between the artist and the audience. Once a piece is shared, it becomes a dialogue. I've come to value how others interpret my work, even if their perspectives differ from my own. Their reactions, critiques, and connections often add new dimensions to the work that I hadn't considered.

So, I try to stay true to my voice while being open to the audience's input. It's not about compromising my vision but about finding a harmony where self-expression and connection can coexist. After all, art is both personal and universal—it's a reflection of me, but it's also a gift to the world.

Your work blends Pop Art with themes of loneliness, nostalgia, and longing. Could you elaborate on how you explore these themes visually?

While the themes of loneliness, nostalgia, and longing are not as overtly explored in "Can I Say Something?", they're integral to other pieces in my body of work. For me, painting is often about capturing the things I want, miss, or that hold a deep personal meaning. These themes are intertwined with my creative process, and Pop Art becomes a way to mask those emotions behind a vibrant, cheerful facade.

Pop Art's bright colors and bold imagery give the impression of joy and liveliness, but for me, it's a tool to explore contrasts. Beneath the surface, these works carry a weight of personal history and emotion. The juxtaposition creates a tension that mirrors the way we often hide our vulnerabilities behind smiles or aesthetics in real life.

For instance, I have a painting of a pair of sunglasses—a very personal piece. The sunglasses belonged to a dear friend who once left them at my house. They were an expensive, designer pair, and one day, I stumbled upon them while tidying up. Seeing them brought an unexpected wave of sadness. They were a physical reminder of his presence, yet his absence made them feel like a hollow token of a deeper connection.

To express that feeling, I painted the sunglasses in bright, playful colors, almost as if they were part of a cheerful advertisement. But I paired them with a talk bubble that says, “We found them!” It’s a humorous, lighthearted phrase that contrasts with the underlying sadness of the piece. That juxtaposition captures the push and pull of longing and memory—how objects can be comforting yet painful reminders of what we’ve lost or yearn for.

This balance of Pop Art’s cheerful aesthetic with these deeper, more personal themes allows me to explore complex emotions in a way that feels true to me. It’s not just about the surface; it’s about inviting the viewer to look closer and find the story hidden behind the bright colors and bold imagery.

How does your work challenge the traditional boundaries of how art is perceived and consumed in a hyper-connected world?

My work challenges traditional expectations of what a painting “should” be. Many people envision paintings as flat, square, easily frameable pieces that can be hung neatly on a wall—simple and conventional. But from the moment I started painting, I knew I wanted my art to go beyond that. I wanted to create pieces that are more impressive in person than in a photograph, works that engage the viewer in a tactile, almost physical way.

To achieve this, I began incorporating three-dimensional elements into my paintings. These elements don’t transform the work into full sculptures, but they disrupt the flatness and challenge the status quo. They invite viewers to step closer, to experience the artwork in a way

that can’t be fully captured in a digital image or a flat representation.

This approach directly addresses the hyper-connected world we live in, where art is often reduced to a flat image, ready to be scrolled past, shared, or mass-produced. My work resists that. By introducing textures, depth, and elements that can’t be easily replicated, I’m creating art that demands to be experienced in person. It’s not designed for mass production or quick consumption—it’s meant to slow people down and make them engage.

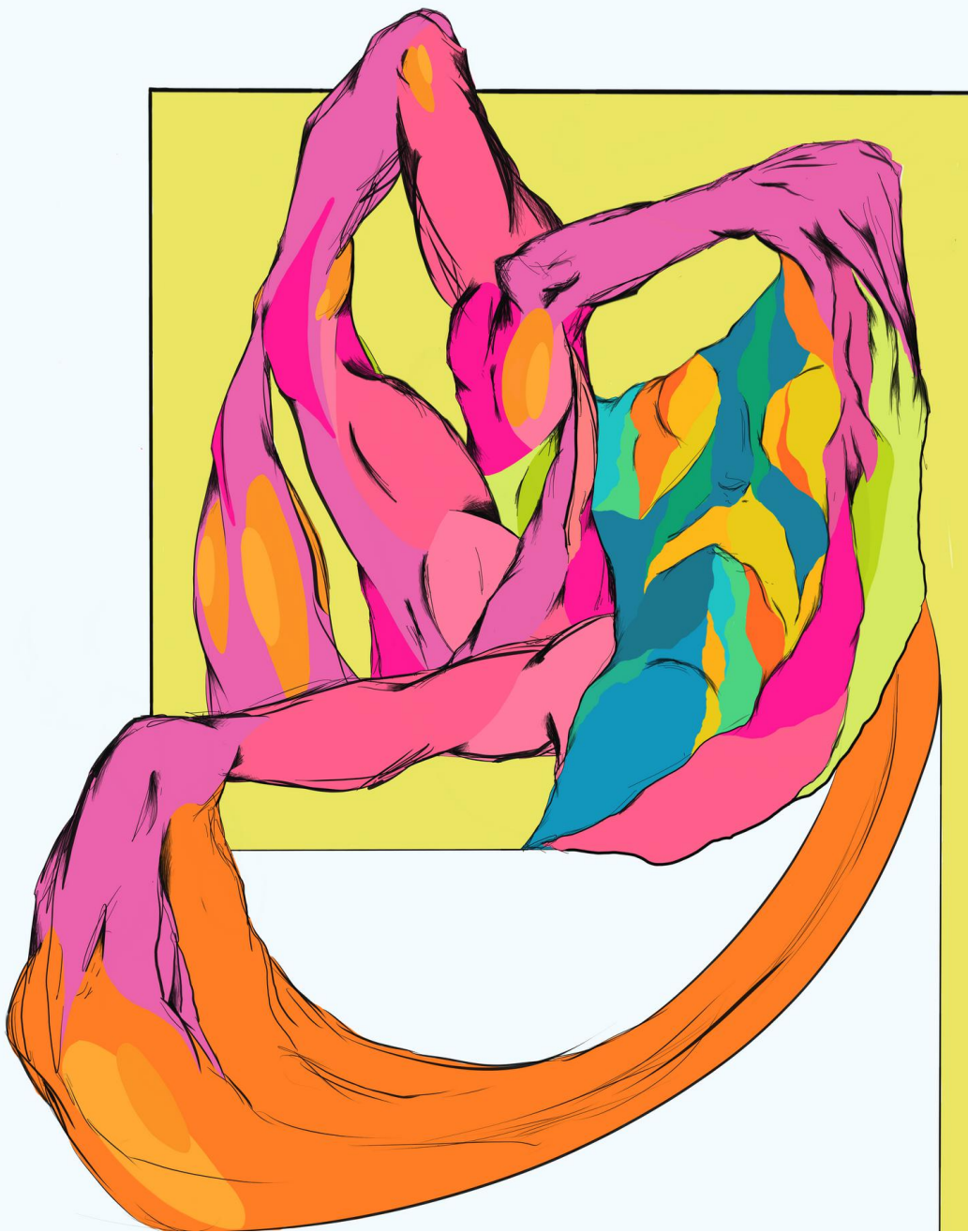
What’s fascinating is how people react to my work, especially in this digital-first era. Many viewers initially assume the talk bubbles in my paintings are digitally photoshopped into the image. They’ve been so conditioned to view art through the lens of screens that they struggle to think outside that framework. But the talk bubbles are real, physical elements incorporated into the pieces themselves. That misunderstanding reflects how much the hyper-connected world has shifted our perception of art—we’re so used to digital manipulation that we sometimes fail to see what’s right in front of us.

Through my art, I hope to break these habits and encourage people to reconsider how they perceive and consume art. I want my work to push viewers to think beyond the flatness of a screen and to engage with art in a more physical, immediate, and personal way.



Zach Hayward

I have no prior awards or showings. Unless you count being shown at my local gallery in Maryborough at the end of VCE Studio Arts. I was born in Kansas City and kidnapped by an alcoholic father in the midst of the 2008 recession. I grew up in western Victoria surrounded by the victims of neoliberalism; the poor, religious and mentally ill. My body of work is influenced severely by several styles of art; interwar styles such as cubism, modernism and surrealism; capturing things unliterally. It is thus quite figurative - the subjects are typically bodies or persons; they are all caught in pained states of sloughing or contorting. In this I try to capture metaphors for identity, the self and labelling by others. Working with acrylic paint and gel medium, using palette knives and brushes, I capture visceral feelings of motion, violence and confusion in a painterly style.





— Interview

Reanna Emanouel

Your art deeply reflects themes of trauma, healing, and vulnerability. Could you share how your personal experiences have shaped your creative process?

My art is deeply intertwined with my personal experiences, particularly themes of trauma, healing, and vulnerability. I see painting as a way to process emotions that can't always be put into words—a space where I can explore the complexities of identity, self-perception, and transformation.

Much of my work reflects the tension between struggle and renewal. There's a recurring exploration of figures caught in moments of change, whether it's a human form dissolving into its surroundings or a landscape that carries the weight of history and memory. This comes from my own journey—facing challenges, learning to let go, and redefining my sense of self.

Vulnerability plays a huge role in my creative process. I often approach a painting with an initial vision, but as I work, the piece reveals layers of emotion I didn't anticipate. It becomes a dialogue between what I consciously intend and what my subconscious brings forward. In a way, my art mirrors the process of healing itself—messy, uncertain, but ultimately transformative.

In 'Echoes of Bruny,' you explore the fragility of both human existence and the environment. How



do you think art can communicate these delicate connections between humanity and nature?

In *Echoes of Bruny*, I wanted to capture the quiet yet profound connection between humanity and nature—how we are both shaped by the landscapes around us and, in turn, leave our own imprints on them. Art has a unique way of communicating these delicate relationships because it allows for both emotional and intellectual engagement.

Unlike facts or statistics, which can feel distant, a painting can evoke a visceral response, drawing viewers into a world where they feel the fragility of existence rather than just recognize it intellectually. The way I depict landscapes—soft edges, shifting forms, and atmospheric depth—mirrors the way memories and emotions intertwine with place. This reflects the impermanence of both the natural world and human life, urging us to appreciate and protect what is fleeting.

Art also creates space for reflection. A painting like *Echoes of Bruny* doesn't dictate meaning but invites interpretation, encouraging viewers to consider their own relationship with nature. Through this, I hope my work fosters a deeper awareness of our role in preserving these fragile connections.

The glowing figures in 'Echoes of Bruny' seem to represent the transient nature of life. How do you approach the concept of impermanence in your artwork, and what do you hope viewers take away from it?

Impermanence is a theme that runs through much of my work, and in *Echoes of Bruny*, the glowing figures embody the fleeting nature of life—both human existence and the landscapes we inhabit. I approach this concept by blurring the boundaries between form and space, allowing figures to dissolve into their surroundings, almost as if they are echoes of something once present but now fading. This reflects how memories, histories, and even identities are shaped by time, constantly shifting and evolving. I'm drawn to the idea that nothing is truly static. The landscape of Bruny Island itself has witnessed countless transformations, shaped by natural forces and human presence, just as we are shaped by our environments. By portraying figures that seem ethereal or momentary, I want to evoke a sense of both presence and absence—reminding viewers that while we leave traces behind, nothing lasts forever. What I hope people take away from this is a sense of appreciation for the present moment. Impermanence can feel unsettling, but it's also what makes life beautiful. By recognizing that everything is in flux, we



Reanna Emanouel | Victory in Bloom

can learn to embrace change, let go of what no longer serves us, and find meaning in the ephemeral nature of our own experiences.

Your journey of healing and rebuilding your life is inspiring. How does your work reflect the evolution of your emotional state over time?

My art is a direct reflection of my personal journey—every brushstroke carries a piece of my emotional state at that moment in time. In the past, my work often leaned into themes of struggle and fragmentation, reflecting a sense of being lost or overwhelmed. But as I've moved through healing and self-discovery, my paintings have evolved as well. There's still a deep exploration of vulnerability, but now, I find myself drawn to themes of transformation, resilience, and renewal.

This shift is most visible in how I use light, texture, and movement. Earlier works might have had heavier, more defined boundaries, while recent pieces embrace fluidity, as if the figures and landscapes are in a state of becoming rather than being confined. The glowing figures in *Echoes of Bruny*, for example, are not just fading but also emerging, symbolizing the way healing is not about erasing the past but integrating it into a new form of existence.

Ultimately, my work is a record of growth. Each painting marks a step in my emotional evolution, and I hope that by sharing these moments, viewers can find pieces of their own stories reflected in them. Healing is never linear, and through my art, I want to capture both the struggles and the quiet victories that come with it.

How has your use of vivid colors and textures evolved over the years to communicate emotion and resilience in your art?

My use of color and texture has evolved alongside my own emotional journey. In the past, I often worked with more muted tones and restrained textures, reflecting feelings of introspection, uncertainty, or even emotional weight. Over time, as I've embraced healing and resilience, my palette has expanded, becoming more vivid and expressive, allowing emotion to take center stage in a more dynamic way. Color, for me, is deeply tied to emotion. Rich, glowing hues often represent moments of transformation—whether it's the golden warmth of hope, deep blues of introspection, or fiery reds of intensity and struggle. The contrast between these colors creates a sense of tension and movement, mirroring the push and pull of emotional growth. In *Echoes of Bruny*, for example, the glowing figures stand out against the landscape, symbolizing both impermanence and presence, fragility and strength.

Texture plays a similar role in my work. I've moved towards layering and depth, using expressive brushwork to create surfaces that feel alive—sometimes smooth and ethereal, other times raw and weathered. This allows the artwork to hold both softness and resilience, much like the process of healing itself. By integrating these elements, I hope to create pieces that not only tell a story but also evoke a visceral response, drawing the viewer into the emotional landscape of each painting.

Can you tell us about the symbolism behind the faint remnants of history, such as the outlines of early settlement boats and industrial structures, in 'Echoes of Bruny'?

In *Echoes of Bruny*, the faint outlines of early settlement boats and industrial structures serve as subtle reminders of the layered history embedded within the landscape. These ghostly remnants symbolize the passage of time, the impact of human presence, and the way history lingers, even when it's no longer visible on the surface.

Bruny Island has a complex past—one shaped by both its natural beauty and the mark of colonization, industry, and shifting communities. By including these faded elements, I wanted to explore how landscapes hold memory, much like how people carry the imprints of their experiences. The boats represent movement, migration, and the transient nature of human existence, while the industrial structures hint at the intersection of progress and decay. These elements appear almost as echoes, reinforcing the theme of impermanence that runs through the painting.

Rather than depicting these historical traces in sharp detail, I chose to let them dissolve into the background, much like memories that fade over time but never fully disappear. This creates a dialogue

between the past and present, inviting viewers to consider what is left behind and how history continues to shape the spaces we inhabit.

Through this symbolism, I hope to encourage reflection on the delicate balance between human presence and nature, and how the stories of a place—whether visible or hidden—continue to shape its identity.

What role does solitude play in your art-making process? Do you find that being in isolation has allowed you to create more authentically or with deeper introspection?

Solitude is essential to my art-making process. It allows me to fully immerse myself in the emotions and ideas I'm exploring, without external noise or distraction. When I'm alone with a canvas, there's a kind of unfiltered honesty that emerges—it becomes a space where I can confront my thoughts, process my experiences, and translate them into something tangible.

I find that isolation deepens my introspection. Without the influence of outside voices, I'm able to tap into the rawest parts of my creativity, letting emotions surface in a way that feels authentic. This solitude isn't necessarily about loneliness; rather, it's a state of quiet connection—both with myself and with the work as it unfolds. It's in these moments that I can push past surface-level ideas and reach something more profound, whether it's the fragility of existence, the passage of time, or the resilience of the human spirit. At the same time, solitude allows me to engage more deeply with the environments that inspire me. Being alone in nature, for example, makes me more aware of subtle shifts in light, movement, and atmosphere, all of which find their way into my work. The reflective space that solitude provides ultimately makes my art more personal, intuitive, and emotionally resonant.

Reanna Emanouel | Echoes of Bruny



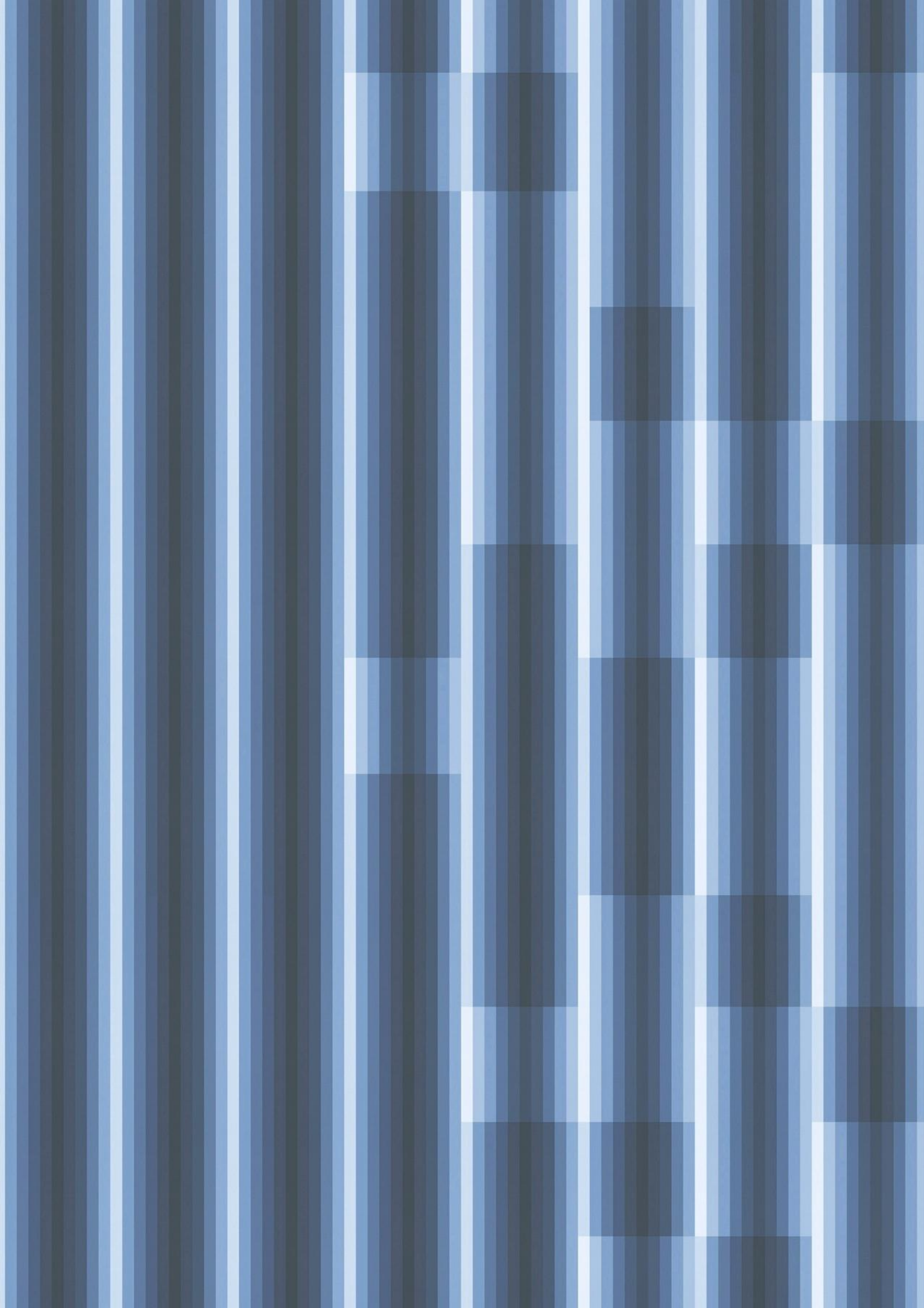


Reanna Emanouel | Unbroken

Kris Kim is a cross-disciplinary artist, working on themes that illustrate the inter-genre connections between languages, mathematics, multisensory installations, and visual culture.

Project Statement

The painting consists of flat tessellated planes that create depth and chiaroscuro in the viewers' eyes, producing an illusionistic sense of space and reflection. A word denoting the title of the work is juxtaposed within the painting, transforming alphabetical texts into numeric values, which are then transposed into colors, substituting the semiotic parameters. It explores the liminal dimensions of the multi-layered nature and the possibilities of crisscrossing verbal and non-linguistic information, documentary materials and paintings, morphological and abstract images, and the exposé and concealed, or reality and simulacra.



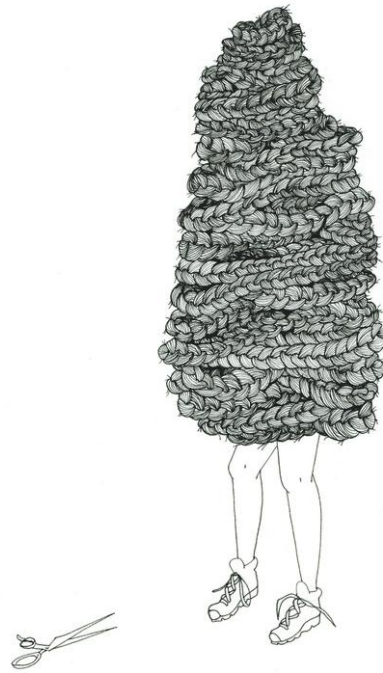
Caitlin Peck

Your artwork often explores metamorphosis and transformation. What inspired you to focus on these themes in your art?

Changing the heads and the faces of these figures started as a means to literally illustrate a "headspace" - to bring the internal to the external. We all have these things inside of us - emotions, anxiety, memories - and they determine how we relate to the world around us, people around us, and ourselves. I find that by removing the faces, more viewers relate and insert themselves in some narrative within my work and develop that on their own.



Caitlin Peck | Could it have been all my fault | 2020



Caitlin Peck | Dammit | 2020

The cocoons in your work represent both protection and change. How do you balance these contrasting elements visually?

I wanted to show these ideas together by densely focusing the detail to one or two central areas. Anything could be happening outside of these lines, but it's not shown because it's not where the action is. It is all behind those braids and we, as viewers, are not privy to it. It is a private change that took work and effort to keep secret.

How do you approach the use of delicate lines and negative space to evoke such strong emotional responses in your viewers?

There is a term I heard many years ago that resonated so much with me: "horror vacui". This is Latin for "fear of emptiness" or "horror of the void". In periods of art history, this was expressed by filling every square inch of detail. I took a different spin because life is full of moments of emptiness or unknowns. I want to balance these concentrated pockets of details with the negative space around it - like a spotlight on a moment, a memory, a feeling.

In your artist statement, you mention "warm, soft intimacy" and feelings of "entrapment and suffocation." How do you navigate portraying such contrasting emotions in a single piece of art?

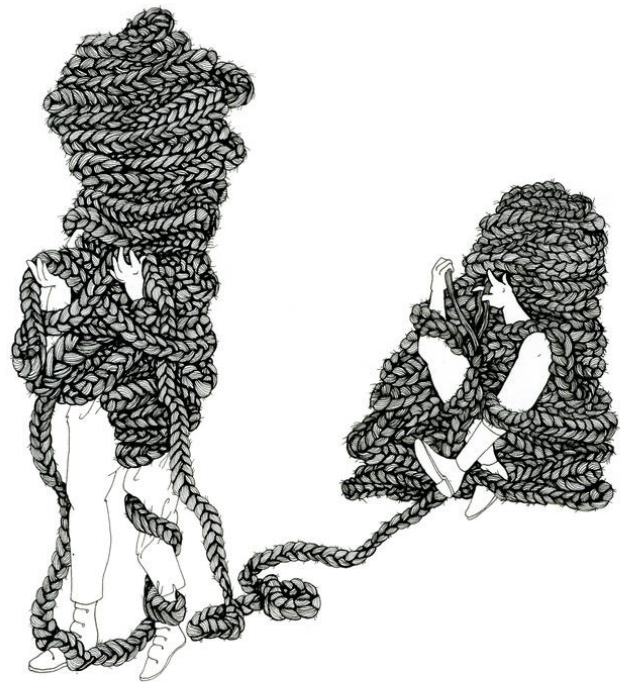
It's almost like a Monkey's Paw or be-careful-what-you-wish-for kind of fable. The seclusion and closeness can be comforting. By choosing to use braided hair, supposedly from the figures' heads, gives even more intimacy to the narrative. But that also comes at the cost of isolation or feeling there's no way out.

Could you tell us more about your creative process? Do you begin with a specific idea in mind or let the work evolve organically?

A little bit of both. I wouldn't say every piece is 100% clear as it comes to mind. I make lots of drafts of a piece - from sketch, to scale, rearranging parts by hand, drafting and redrafting until everything is exactly where I want it before transferring it all to final paper. So many redos leaves lots of space for mulling and letting the work tell me what it wants.

How do you think the process of self-reflection and human connection plays into the metamorphosis you explore in your artwork?

I believe a lot of us are the same on the inside. We have insecurities, worries, relationships, and memories. I like leaving an open-endedness so that viewers can make their own connections and stories with the art. These figures in perhaps mid-metamorphosis or hybrid leave the most space for that. I'm inspired by the elements of the human experience that make us the most

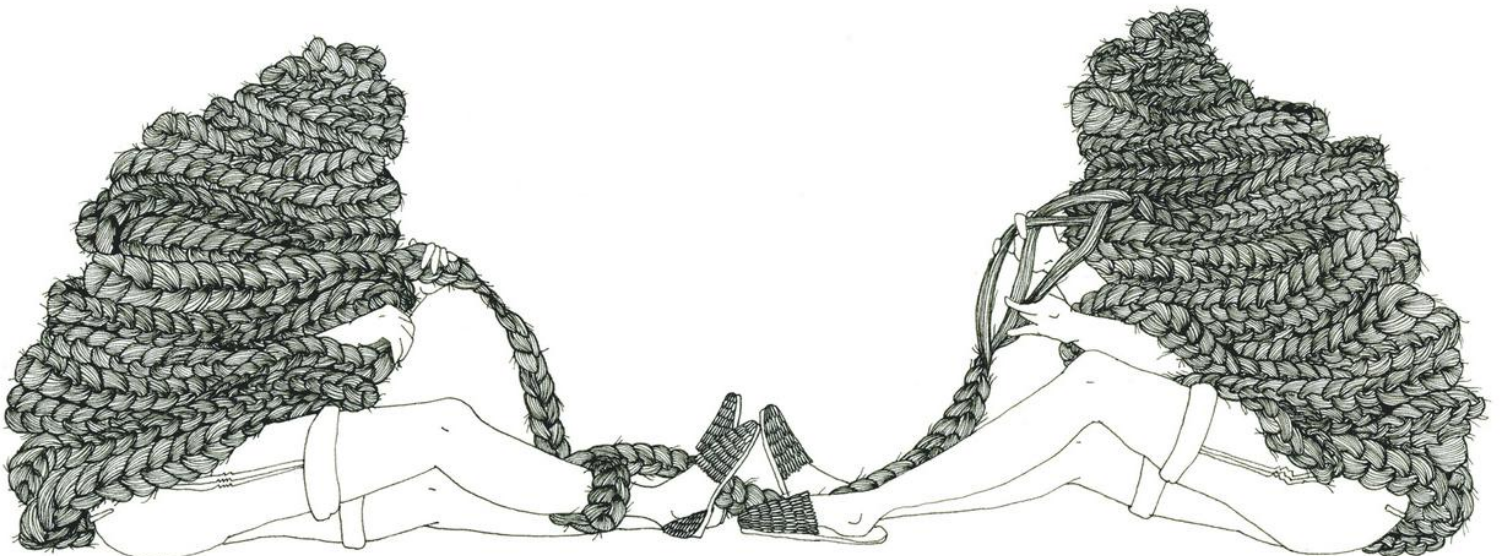


Caitlin Peck | The goal was never you become me | 2021

human: our innermost thoughts, our failing memories, our dependence, our isolation.

Your works seem to teeter on the edge of humor and sensitivity. How do you incorporate humor into such serious and intimate subject matter?

Speaking of the human experience - life is humor! And it's messy and it's sweet and it's sad and it's simple and complicated. That is the goal, to make work with just enough push of a narrative. And sometimes, that means getting a little cheeky.



Caitlin Peck | Conversations with you | 2020

Patrycja Czajkowska

I am studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, Poland. I'm mainly interested in painting but I also enjoy digital mediums.





— Interview

Claudi Piripippi

Can you tell us more about how your multicultural upbringing in Germany and Italy has influenced your artistic vision?

Born in Germany, I was raised by a single mother in Italy. I was 3 years old when we moved to Piedmont. My father is from the Italian Alps region. He met my mother in the heydays of the 60s at a popular seaside tourist resort on the Ligurian Riviera, the same village we relocated to with my stepfather Rinaldo just before I left home in 1988. Ironically, also where I am currently living after coming back in 2019.

Escaping traumas for warmth, sun, and beauty, my mother (and I) roamed nations, regions, towns, villages, and people's homes before settling. In 70s small-town Italy, my mother was an exotic catch: a beautiful Nordic woman with an indelible accent — and, with a Prussian upbringing: that — she passed onto me. Newly divorced (in Italy, divorce was legalized in 1974), she was an outcast struggling for survival in a family-oriented patriarchal tradition, and I was her cute blonde daughter — or sister — as they would compliment her, or me, or us, I don't really know.

With a single parent who spoke broken Italian, initially more of a local dialect, I grew up bilingual in a German household set in an Italian cultural context. Imagine a *ricoperto*: a thin chocolate crust on the outside with vanilla ice cream on the inside. Or better, imagine an *affogato al caffè*: German on the inside, Italian on the outside, or is it the other way around? Never mind, a



Claudi Piripippi | I am not in your stream

frozen meltdown. My mother's priority was to keep the surface uncracked, all energy invested in the function of appearing cool, the mess inside all nicely covered up by a plastic exterior.

An exodus from the artificial, a female searching for her natural, authentic truth, I have been running away from Italy's most used adjective — *bella* — and from the mentality of seduction. Nonetheless, the aesthetics of provincial conventions, of a one-sided, uniform concept of beauty, had already been embedded: both Lutheran and Catholic aesthetic values seeking to complement each other's opposites inside of me.

But the binaries do not end here. A FIAT assembly line working-class heritage, *operai* from my father's side, and a military middle class from my mother's—these other two cultural extremes met in my parents' conservative ideology—the righteous one that believes in economics over education, economics *über alles*—and, of course, in the historic alliance of slippery World War II fronts. Attraction and repulsion, hate and love carrying the ugly burden of the past. *The forgotten generation*, as Sabine Bode defined the children of that war, their duty was to brush all violence under the carpet, to suck it up in the name of prosperity.

So I fled—subconsciously, I fled in my dream, not even knowing I had one. I fled to the land of art, my work a game of contradictions where I play with the tensions that inhabit my world. With one root in the German city and the other in the Italian rural, I'm a nomadic local foreigner. Culturally never truly belonging anywhere yet perfectly fitting in the ephemeral, natural realm of human impermanence, where we all stem out of as cities creating villagers.

Making art in the flow of resisting while hoping to resolve the opposites, either by creating contrast or harmony, I am a dysfunctional human being trying to perfect my world. Barely coping with diversity—oops, diversities—secretly desiring control, the control I was taught is the

Claudi Piripippi | Blow me away if you can!



magic solution for achieving happiness, I explore the facade of illusionary harmony. Not detailed, overall general rather than analytical, my outlook is a site-specific landscape picture pixelated with Italian dramatic playfulness and German environmental existentialism.

How did your academic experiences in Genoa, London, and Los Angeles shape your approach to art?

A BA in foreign literature at Genoa University teased out a desire to actively create rather than be a passive receiver of art. I wanted to experience the making of something myself, or even dare to represent myself! I wanted a taste of empowerment, emancipation, and ownership through the responsibility of freedom. Plus, my thesis on racial issues with American history professor Valeria Gennaro Lerda had set me on the path of social engagement and prepared me for US geo-socio-politics. The need to break away from the patriarchal provincial indoctrination of my imagination is a feeling I could only word after my MFA in Los Angeles. While Genoa educated me in formal patriarchal academia, London opened me up to the magic grounds of experimenting with freedom, calibrating ideas with materials, concepts with responsibility. Los Angeles, instead, was all about politics, feminism, social engagement, and glitching my edges—finding my own fluidity and my spirituality.

Your work with recycled plastic bags is fascinating. What inspired you to use this unconventional material, and how does it connect to your environmental concerns?

First of all, I am the daughter of a pathological hoarder, a serial accumulator who collects stuff to fill the void of unhealed trauma. Then, the nothing-can-be-wasted domestic economy mentality, passed on to me not just by my mother but also by my Italian grandmother, is deeply seated in me and mingles with a German romantic environmental sensibility. A DNA that was triggered by living a wasteful lifestyle in 90s London. At that time, traveling the world—especially the Middle East, where a Western consumerist lifestyle (but not the infrastructure to process the excess of capitalism) had been imported—prompted me to look into the debris that has been colonizing our natural

Claudi Piripipi | Pescheterian Blues



Claudi Piripipi | Oggi mi sposo

landscapes. I played with all sorts of rubbish and discarded materials before landing on recycled plastic bags. Ubiquitously flimsy, ephemerally eternal, I saw in plastic bags the symbol of my contradictory and hypocritically sublime Western lifestyle.

How has your itinerant lifestyle and exposure to diverse landscapes influenced the themes and aesthetics of your art?

Walking the line of imagination, between realities and potentials, has crafted a hypersensitivity to space and place, to the relationship between object and subject, life and matter, form and content: to the relationship of self and nature and of selves and environment — in the end, the true themes behind the scenes being connection and love. All my works are inspired by nature, without which nothing would exist, not even the tensions caused by capitalist culture. As for aesthetics, I mess around with the concepts of monoculture beauty, testing my boundaries of understanding and accepting diversity while discovering that whatever I would come up with already exists in nature. Mostly, it's an exercise of decluttering, of trying to simplify to find balance between the opposites. In other words, it is an aesthetic of instability or, better, of false stability, because equilibrium is a precarious condition to achieve and maintain.

Can you share the most meaningful experience from one of your A.I.R. programs, and how it contributed to your artistic journey?

Most of them brought me closer to nature. Discovering the great North American landscapes and other amazing

places has inspired and challenged my work to become more “ambitious,” if not just in scale. I also met amazing people with whom I collaborated or became lifelong friends, such as choreographer Nina Haft, artists Laura Scandrett and Kathy Marsh. At Vermont Studios, I met poet Verónica Reyes, a crush that led to a marriage and a green card and introduced me to my fluidity, to feminism, to contemporary poetry, to Chicana lesbian literature, to Los Angeles, to Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde, and much more. Thanks to Verónica, I was able to truly grasp and get a visceral understanding of race, class, gender, and sex struggles and how these intersect with social and environmental justice.

The end of our relationship opened me up to a new body of work. The interactive poems are definitely inspired by Verónica's *Panocha Power!* Subliminally incubating, our exchange mingling all along with my literature, sculptural, and social engagement studies, these various influences matured in what seems obvious only now. Multi-genres, a hybrid of creative writing, relational aesthetics, social engagement, poetry slam, performance art, spoken word, concrete poetry, visual typography, digital collage—the interactive poems are a sort of mixed media interdisciplinary experimental art seeking the meeting point between the sacred and the conceptual, the personal and the political. They are a liminal visual narrative that soulfully attempts to capture the essence of

self while navigating the boundaries of well-being between natural and ideal, between intimacy and communality.

Receiving prestigious awards like the Joan Mitchell Grant and the Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner Grant is a significant achievement. How have these recognitions impacted your career?

Mostly, they have impacted me economically, giving me the possibility to focus on my art practice and develop my artistic research. A financial relief from worrying about making ends meet, combined with a formal official acknowledgment, is an incredible boost that encouraged me to keep going, to hang in there through the difficulties of being an artist that works outside the mainstream circuits of the gallery system. In my lowest moments, I look back at these awards for courage, for strength, for perseverance, for confidence, for validation, for trust in my abilities and artistic expression.

Your work often integrates radical feminist themes and eco-glitch femininity. Can you elaborate on these concepts and how they manifest in your art?

Initially introduced to me by Verónica Reyes and then developed thanks to professors Suzanne Lacy, Andrea

Claudi Piripippi | Plastic scream



Bowers, Annetta Kapon, Kathrine Burmeister, Renée Petropoulos, Dana Duff, Patrisse Cullors, Janaya Khan, and many others, I furthered my Public Practice MFA research all the way to eco-feminism, also thanks to curator Jennifer Heath. I see feminism in quantum and sacred terms as the great goddess holding the yin and yang, the feminine and masculine energies in balance within. The glitch part is inspired by Legacy Russell and refers not only to my glitchy DIY approach to digital technology but also to my imperfections as a human being—a feminist, a lover, an environmentalist, a daughter, an artist, a queer.

For Legacy Russell, glitch is a cyberspace for growth, a liminal ground of freedom and therefore potential. For me, the glitch is also the crack between nature and technology, the glitch is the overlooked, the cracks in between time, the glitch is where our subconscious resides, where our souls thrive. Overall, feminism is a mindset, a lens through which I filter the world entering me. Encompassing life and art, public and private, it's a holistic viewpoint that recognizes the intersectionality of our interconnectedness.

During my MFA in Los Angeles, my art practice shifted from installation to performance and video art. It was a natural intuitive transition, also encouraged by my feminist professors who had either planted the seed or saw the potential in my seed. Whichever way, it was an exciting realm to explore and experiment in—a kinder ground, free from patriarchal rules, from patriarchal virtuosity, impossible to judge and compare because it is slippery, not an object to hold on to, but life passing through.

Then, as I mentioned before, a series of coincidences, or synchronicities—the divorce, COVID, moving back to Italy, the death of my beloved stepfather—led to a new beginning, to a new body of work: the interactive poems.

While I thank you for your questions, for your attention, and for the opportunity to share my practice, I like to end this interview with a statement that summarizes the interactive poems, and also with a wish: may these paragraphs trigger the radical eco-glitch-feminist in you! By unraveling the layers of multiple identities—the archetypal, biological, political, geo-socio-cultural—the interactive poems are an excavation of the natural and artificial formations of my being to get to the inner soul that connects me to you through words that, traveling in and out of the selves, like the wind, carry and carve meaning, forming our imaginal.

Intersecting time, language, and image to multiple layers of consciousness and therefore of "I's," I invite the participant to an exploratory journey to unfold (discover and contest) the power dynamics that mold us. In my case, the socio-cultural conditioning enforced on me by my mother—another victim of the perverted, pervasive, perpetuated patriarchal system—silently and invisibly clashes with my authentic and unique potential. Her controlling rules and regulations challenge my being to this day. My role as a child, daughter, female, queer,

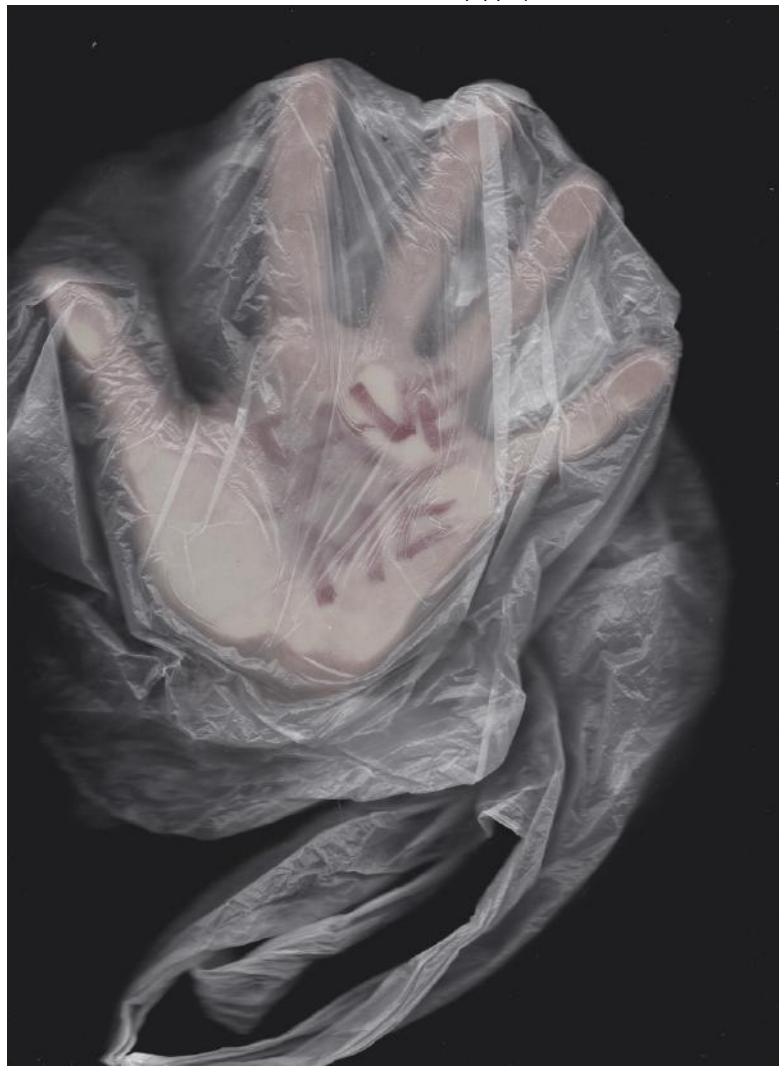


Claudi Piripippi | Oasis

artist, successful failure, white European, aging woman—who still has to resolve their relationship to their roots, their ancestry, and above all, to their mother: the biological, the metaphorical, and the spiritual one—roots back into patriarchal mythology.

Non-trusting of men, my unresolved feminine still fights to come to terms with the values of Western capitalist society that are so deeply embedded inside me. Words as images, images as emotions—how does my water run through you? How do we choose our signs? How does my experience interact with yours and with that of the Earth? A sort of words' ceremonial—praying for the word to signify the truth—past and present come together through the collective performative action of the interactive poems, hoping to reconnect emotions to the earth of our bodies.

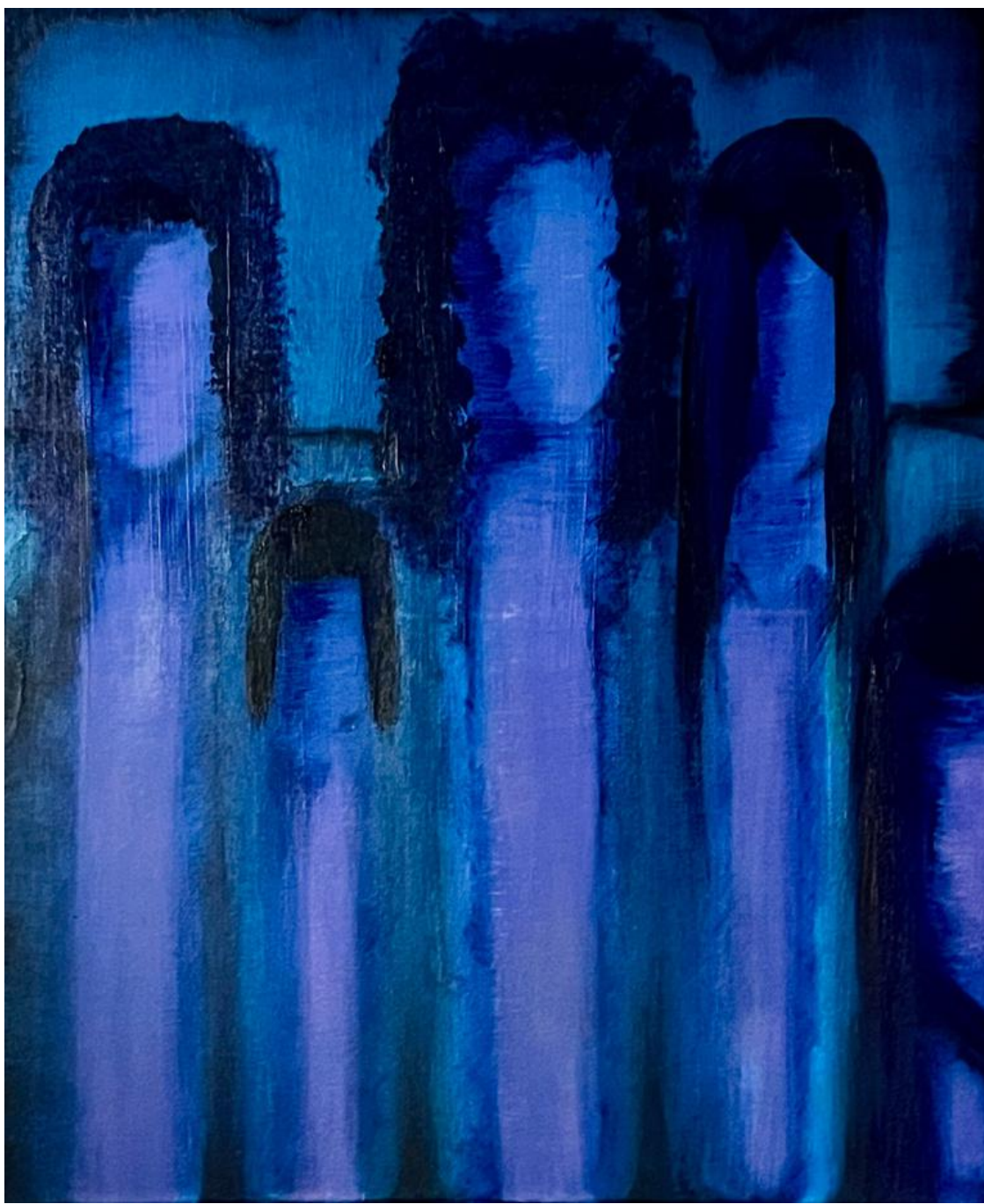
Claudi Piripippi | Save me



A first-generation, Latinx writer and painter, **Ernest Langston** holds a BA in English from San Jose State University and an MFA in from Goddard College.

Artist Statement

My work comes from how I perceive the world around me. I create from a point of empathy, free from judgement, to greater understand my finite existence and help others navigate through theirs. My artwork is a testimonial to my emotional experiences and discoveries intertwined with ever-present mysteries.



Ernest Langston | Familiar Strangers | 2025



— Interview

Bethany Altschwager

How did your background in art therapy influence your artistic practice, particularly the "Street Layers" series?

I found my way into the field of art therapy in large part because art, and particularly photography, was life saving for me. I struggled a lot with depression in my adolescence and early twenties. In my senior year of highschool I spent almost every day in the darkroom. It was my safe space away from the nonsense going on in my head. In college, I was drawn to both art and psychology. As I learned more about the intersections between these, I became interested in the works of surrealists, particularly Man Ray. I started incorporating techniques like solarization, double exposure, and photograms into my work. I also explored collage and digital imaging. Beyond the techniques, I was fascinated with the dreamlike images and what emerges from the unconscious. After college, I was able to continue my darkroom work by teaching art at a boarding school and working as a darkroom technician at a local community college. I was able to work both in the darkroom and digitally, sometimes even combining the two by creating digital negatives to print on acetate. Over time, a lot of places, including the boarding school, shuttered their darkrooms. This, combined with changes in the administration of the school provoked by the economic downturn of the late noughts, left me searching for a new direction for my career. I applied for graduate school in art therapy and started studying at the School of Visual Arts. Among the requirements to complete the degree was completion of internship hours to gain practical, supervised experience. In one of my internships I started using digital tools to make with children in an afterschool program. This turned into my master's thesis work and a catalyst for finding ways to create a digital analog to the darkroom processes that I was missing. The way that I assemble layers of photographs into Photoshop now, is about as close as I regularly get to some of my early darkroom experiences.



Bethany Altschwager | 181st and East 97th | 2025

What drew you to street textures and graffiti as the central focus of your work?

My introduction to photography was in my hometown of Collinsville, a small suburban town in the Farmington Valley of Connecticut. I drew a lot of inspiration from modernist photographers, Edward Weston in particular. I admired how Weston framed his compositions of humble objects like cabbage leaves and mushrooms in ways that mimicked majestic subjects like sand dunes and the Grand Canyon. After seeing these images I developed an appreciation for the textures of everyday things. When I moved to New York to finish graduate school, the textures around me changed from the bark, stones, and moss of my hometown to the concrete, spray paint, and rust of the city. As I started looking more carefully, the tags I would see reminded me of the brushstrokes in expressionist paintings. Over time, I lived and worked in different neighborhoods around the city and each place had a different variety of graffiti. For example, the Lower East side tends to have more colorful pieces and they're allowed to stay up for much longer. In areas like the West Village you're more likely to see posters that have been pasted up and torn down, leaving fragments of color and layers of peeled paper. What you see has also changed quite a bit over the past decade. Many of the advertisements in the subway have been replaced with video screens, so I photograph those too which generates glitch effects and moire patterns. Graffiti is also a way that people assert their presence,

a way of saying "I was here." When I first started the series, that was an important element as well. I was fresh out of graduate school, freshly divorced, and trying to establish myself in a new city. It was hard to feel grounded and present. It was hard to feel like I was putting my stamp on anything or making progress. As I've gotten more established in my profession, and I'm able to make my mark through conducting therapy, teaching, and making my artwork, I think I better appreciate the very basic human drive to create, so I'm still drawn to this part of my environment.

Could you walk us through your creative process when creating one of your "Street Layers" collages?

My process starts with taking a walk. As I travel to my destination I keep an eye out for bright colors, peeling paste ups, tags with painterly line quality, and anything else that catches my eye. I take close up photographs of what I find on these outings. These images form the palette I pull from when assembling my collages. When I get back to my computer, I import the images into separate layers in Photoshop and experiment with the blend modes and opacity- how the layers sit on top of each other. I'm intentional about choosing combinations of images from different neighborhoods or streets that don't intersect. Since I have been working in this way for so many years, many of the newer pieces include layers from not only different neighborhoods but different years in time.



Bethany Altschwager | East 8th and Irving | 2024



Bethany Altschwager | West 27th and East 9th | 2025

What does the concept of "renewal and decay" mean to you, and how do you express it visually?

The only thing that is constant in life is that it changes. Nothing lasts forever. In my life there have been periods of rapid growth, building relationships, advancing in my career, and focusing on my art. There have also been periods marked by loss and burnout. People die, relationships end, and programs close, leaving a void. Like fields laying fallow in the winter, I would pull back and build up my emotional reserves again. In the empty spaces was room for new growth. I express renewal and decay through both the subject matter and the forms in my art. The surfaces I photograph, by their nature, will not last forever. Graffiti fades, gets washed away or painted over. It lasts until something new takes its place. Similarly, the paste ups get weathered by the elements or torn down until something new goes up in their place. Formally, the fragmentation in my images demonstrates this process of a subject falling apart so a new subject can come together.

How do you think the ephemeral nature of the street art you photograph aligns with the themes of identity and transformation in your work?

The ephemeral nature of street art aligns with the themes of identity and transformation because it is an outward manifestation of the zeitgeist. The posters represent the concerts, products, and political campaigns of this moment in time. The tags are an assertion of presence in the here and now. Murals are

the monuments to communities that we value today. While the exact configurations may change, the visual language graffiti has similar handwriting. Art, in any form, is influenced by both the past and the present moment.

Our identities shift and change throughout our lives in a similar way, building upon past experiences and making a more cohesive whole from disparate parts. Our bodies are the container for our experiences and these are also always changing on the microscopic and macroscopic levels. In short, who we are and what we are is always changing, but there are echoes from the past that find new forms in the present.

The time that I carve out time for making art and the role of artist in my identity has shifted and changed over the years. I wear a lot of hats as an art therapist, an educator, a leader, a friend, a wife, and an artist. There are times when these other roles come more to the forefront and, if I'm not careful, crowd out the artist identity. During COVID, I was working on my doctorate and still physically going to work every day but much of my photography work came to a halt. I would work all day, come home to my studies, knit or run, and go to bed. As I gained momentum in my career by teaching, supervising, and volunteering, there was less and less involvement in any type of art. I found myself getting stretched thin caring for other people and not really nourishing myself.

This past year I joined a group of other art therapists in organizing a juried art show as part of a fund-raising effort to benefit the LCAT Advocacy Coalition- a group

lobbying to get licensed creative arts therapists (LCATs) parity with other mental health practitioners in New York State. I picked up my Street Layers series where I left off and submitted my work. We had over 100 LCATs submit their work and 42 of them displayed in the show in Chelsea. On opening and closing nights we packed the gallery full! The energy and enthusiasm of the event has galvanized the artist part of my identity which feels firmly in the foreground.

Can you talk more about the role of time and space in your collages?

My collages composite photographs taken during different times (either in the same day, week, month, year, or lifetime) and in different physical locations into single images. This reflects my experiences of moving through places like New York City and the experiences I have along the way. I think of my work as liminal spaces; transitionals areas between two places or states. Coming and going. Leaving and arriving. Being versus becoming. As the series has progressed, the variable of time has expanded. I incorporate current photographs as well as pictures taken over the span of the past ten years.

In your practice, how do you balance the tension between holding on and letting go, both in your art and personal life?

Finding a balance between holding on and letting go is an ongoing process for me. I was raised with a strong sense of loyalty and as a creative person I see the potential of how things can be. That makes it challenging to know when to stick things out and when to move on. The transition from darkroom photography to digital, shifting from art education to art therapy, ending my first marriage, and changing jobs are all examples of this dynamic of holding on and letting go. Within my art, this tension is expressed visually in the fragmentation of the images. I play with the layers to see how far I can push the images so that some parts of them are still recognizable. How far before they completely fall apart?



Bethany Altschwager
East 10th and 4th
2024



Igal Stulbach

I'm a visual artist making photography, documentary films and video art. I'm exploring the borders between those fields. My way is constant search and experimentation. I am a flaneur. Born in Krakow Poland in the year 1949 to Holocaust survivors , since 1959 living in Bat Yam, Israel. I started my artistic activity at a relatively late age. In the year 2015 I made a documentary film named "Group portrait" (Short monologues by second-generation Holocaust survivors) which was broadcast on Israeli national TV -channel 10 and screened in several cinematheques. My video art and photography works have been shown in exhibitions in Israel and abroad. I received awards for my artworks in several photography and film contests and festivals. My photographs have been published in print and online magazines.

Project Statement

Diptychs created from photographs I took while scrolling the streets at late night hours and looking at shop windows - mannequins nightlife.





— Interview

Julia Ulrich

Your work often blends raw emotion and sensuality with poetic undertones. How do you go about balancing these elements in your paintings?

I find the contrast between raw emotion and sensuality particularly fascinating because life itself consists of opposites. Balance only emerges when we accept that every aspect has its counterpart, and instead of rejecting it, we integrate it into our lives. In my paintings, I explore this tension—between strength and fragility, dominance and vulnerability—because I believe that true beauty lies in the coexistence of these forces.

As a woman, I don't feel the need to be only soft and delicate; strength is just as legitimate and can exist alongside femininity. This duality is what gives depth to my work. I let my brushstrokes reflect this dynamic, allowing raw textures and expressive gestures to merge with a certain poetic sensitivity. It is in this interplay that my paintings find their balance, just as we must find it within ourselves.

The themes of strength and fragility, masculinity and femininity, and dominance and submission are central to your "Of Lace and Leather" series. How do you approach these contrasts in the context of your personal experiences and your environment?

For many years, I struggled with not feeling "feminine enough." As a woman who naturally



builds muscle easily and enjoys weightlifting, I often felt out of place in the traditional perception of femininity. Additionally, I experienced challenges in a past relationship where my partner had difficulties accepting that I earned more money than he did in my main profession. He struggled with his self-imposed idea of masculinity and the expectations that came with it.

These experiences deeply influenced my work. *Of Lace and Leather* is about embracing the contrasts within ourselves—strength and fragility, masculinity and femininity, dominance and submission—without seeing them as contradictions. Today, I am in a truly equal and balanced relationship, where both partners are free to embrace their strengths without the fear of not fitting into a predefined role. I believe this balance is what makes us whole, and that's what I seek to explore in my paintings.

How has your lifestyle in the wooden house surrounded by nature influenced your artistic process and the themes you explore in your work?

A few years ago, my partner and I consciously chose this place to escape, at least to some degree, from the expectations and pace of society. The idea of living self-sufficiently and in deep connection with nature has always been a dream of mine, and now it has become reality. Together, we grow our own vegetables and care

for our sheep and chickens, which help us maintain our small homestead. What I love most is the light of the forest. The dramatic contrasts on a sunny day, when the sun breaks through the leaves, create a dance of light and shadow—pure poetry to me. I can hardly imagine being happy anywhere else. The forest fuels my passion for fairy tales and storytelling, and our regular evenings by the fire in our garden further satisfy my longing for simplicity. This environment deeply influences my work, not only in the way I perceive light but also in the themes I explore. Fire and extreme lighting often find their way into my paintings, reflecting both the warmth and intensity that I experience in nature. Over time, I have also discovered wood as my preferred painting surface—it is the material I feel most connected to. Painting on wood allows me to merge my artistic expression with the raw, organic texture of the material, reinforcing the bond between my work and my surroundings.

There is something profoundly human about the balance between solitude and connection, independence and belonging—just like the balance I seek to capture in my paintings.

Your use of vibrant, warm tones creates a strong emotional pull in your work. Can you share more about your color choices and how they contribute to the narrative in your pieces?

I deliberately use earthy, warm, and natural tones because they reflect my reality. These colors are deeply rooted in my surroundings—the warmth of wood, the glow of fire, and the shifting light in the forest. Even during my photoshoots, I carefully consider contrast—not only in color but also in the materials of the models' clothing. The interplay of soft fabrics and structured textures creates a visual tension that mirrors the themes I explore in my work. By emphasizing these contrasts, I want to draw attention to the opposing forces in our lives—the moments of conflict and harmony, of strength and vulnerability. Rather than choosing uniform color palettes, I believe that stark contrasts create a more compelling sense of balance, just as life's contradictions make it richer and more meaningful.



Julia Ulrich | Almost Forgotten

Each of your pieces feels like an intimate narrative. How do you decide on the story you want to tell with each figure you paint?

I find inspiration in many different things. Sometimes, it's a single object—like an old weapon I discover at a flea market. I start building a story around that item because I love objects with history. I can never pass by a flea market without searching for something that sparks my imagination. Other times, my inspiration comes from existing stories, like the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm or even video games. I become fascinated by a character whose motives aren't immediately clear to me, and I begin to explore their past and inner conflicts.

Once I have a concept, I look for the right model among my friends, carefully select clothing and props, and create a set that fits the story I want to tell. Before the photoshoot, I share the background narrative with my models, and most of the time, this short briefing—combined with mutual trust—is enough to capture exactly the emotion I need.

However, some of the most exciting moments happen when the energy in the room shifts unexpectedly. Sometimes, new characters and ideas emerge as if by magic during the shoot—things I hadn't even considered before. Over time, I've learned that the best approach in these moments is to let go of my initial plan and follow the creative flow. Without a story in my mind, none of my paintings would exist.

How do you see your art challenging societal norms, and what kind of reactions do you hope to provoke in viewers?

It is important to me to question the socially ingrained patterns of masculinity and femininity while at the same time making a clear statement about both. I find it problematic to rigidly separate gender roles or to strive for a complete fusion of them. In my ideal vision, women should be able to embrace extreme femininity—flowing dresses, skirts, long hair—while still being strong and taking initiative. Likewise, men should be able to embody classic masculinity—whiskey in hand, strong physiques—while also allowing themselves moments of vulnerability and softness.

I want people to reflect on whether they spend too much time worrying about societal expectations when, deep inside, they already know who they are. My work is not about dictating what masculinity or femininity should look like, but rather about encouraging people to embrace all facets of themselves. It is time to love and express who we are—without fear, without restriction.

Can you tell us more about the journey that led you from your Fine Art degree to working with such renowned artists and exhibiting internationally?

I always wanted to be an artist. Even as a child, it was my dream. But, understandably, that's not always the career path parents envision for their children. So, I chose the responsible route and studied to become a teacher—with art as my main subject. However, I quickly realized that this path, while fulfilling in many ways, left me artistically unsatisfied.

I knew I had to take direct action. I started reaching out to artists like Ryan Shultz (Chicago), Chris Guest (London), and Henry Lamy (Lyon), asking them for private lessons. With every bit of money I had, I traveled to these incredible painters, learning as much as I possibly could. I was like a sponge, absorbing every bit of knowledge they were willing to share.



Julia Ulrich | Bored princess

I will never forget one of my birthdays, which I spent entirely with Adebajji Alade (London). From morning until night, we sat in the London Underground, sketching passengers until my hands could barely hold the pencil anymore. It was an unforgettable day—one that shaped my journey as an artist. Today, some of these artists, like Elly Smallwood (Canada), have become dear friends.

Then, one Sunday morning, years later, my son asked me: "Mom, if you had a million dollars, what would you do?" Without hesitation, I said: "I would study Fine Arts." He paused, thought for a moment, and then asked: "So... why don't you just do it?"

I started crying. The next day, I enrolled in the Fine Arts program at Falmouth University through their online program. Sometimes, it takes the simple wisdom of a child to make us see the world as it truly is.

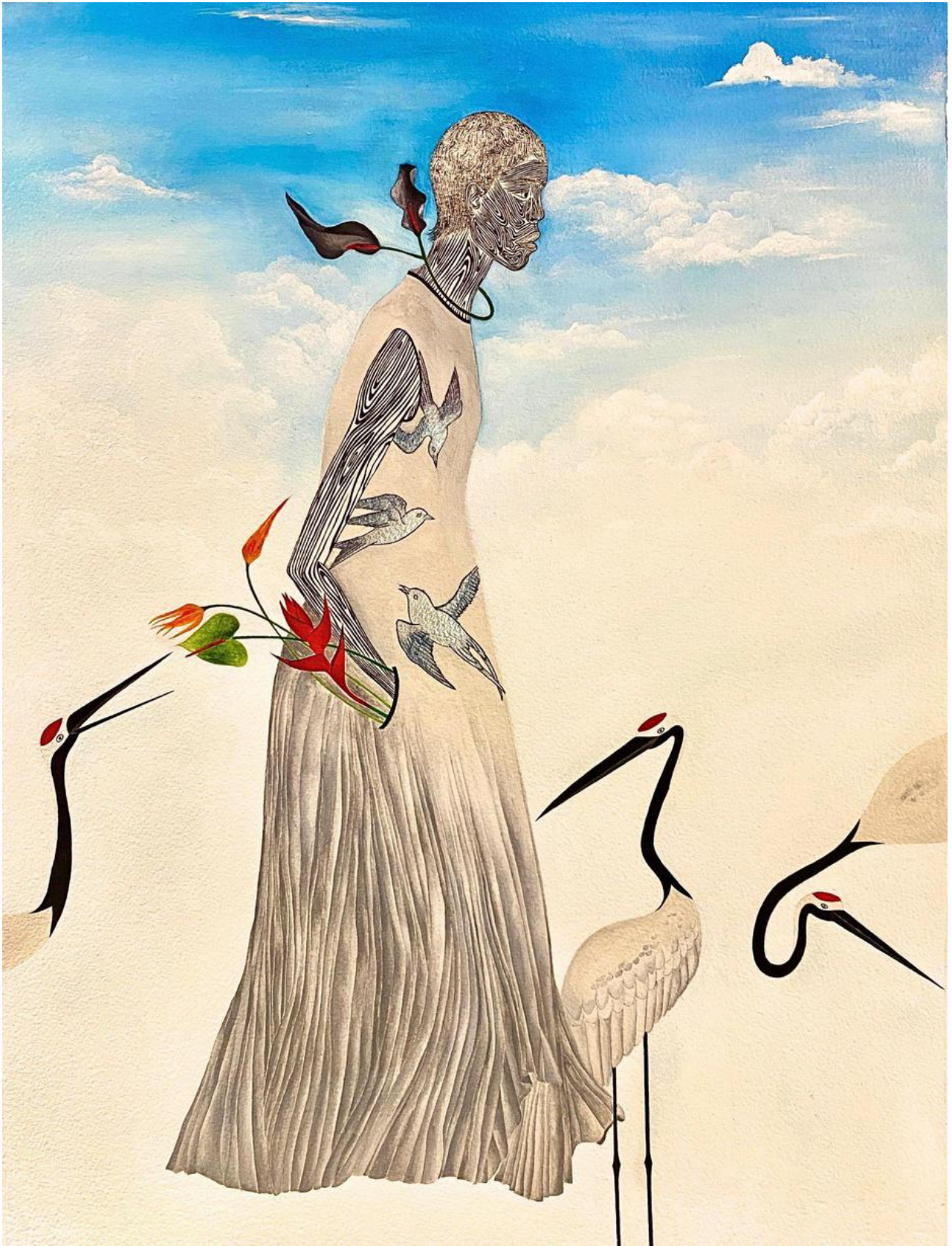
And today? Today, I exhibit my paintings at art fairs and galleries, I sell my work regularly, and I am completely at peace with every life decision I have made.



Love Aritus

Love's artistic practice delves into the profound connection between the human body and the natural world, with a particular emphasis on the female form. She draws inspiration from topographical maps, aiming to accentuate the curves, imperfections, and intricacies that make each body unique and beautiful. Through this exploration, Love celebrates the organic complexity of the human form while intertwining it with the landscapes and elements that shape our world. She merges elements from both the physical landscape and the inner world of her subjects, weaving them together to create pieces that celebrate individuality and the natural beauty of imperfection. Her process combines traditional techniques with digital experimentation, allowing her to map out the human form in ways that echo topographical maps of the earth, blurring the lines between the body and the environment.





Love Aritus | Serene Walk | 2025

— Interview

Geo Sipp

How did your experiences working with top international advertising agencies influence your artistic journey?

Time management, attention to detail, and discipline, to name a few. And solving the problems necessary to serve the client. I thrived on the energy of building and creating collaboratively, of bringing people together to share ideas that, when ultimately implemented, result in a positive experience for all involved. That can happen in an ad agency bullpen or in a studio. And in the classroom. And at the core of it all is how one works with others. Listening and treating people with dignity, respect, and empathy are critical to effectively applying my work.

Can you share more about the themes you explore in your graphic novel, 'Wolves in the City,' and what inspired you to choose the French-Algerian War as its subject?

I want to create a graphic narrative that's relevant to the depth and complexity of the human condition, particularly when we are in conflict. I also want to create a humanist fable. I



Geo Sipp | Bay of Algiers

had seen the sweeping epic *Lawrence of Arabia* and the film *The Battle of Algiers*, which I thought was magnificent, and it inspired me to read Henri Alleg's *The Question*, which documented his imprisonment in Algeria and the torture he endured at the hands of the French paratroopers. It speaks to the moral and political effects of torture on both the victim and the perpetrator. The paratroopers were a unit of the French Foreign Legion. In developing *Wolves in the City*, I aimed to weave a war story that still resonates with the fantasy of American popular mythology and evokes the romance of older adventure comic strips. I discovered this in the dark, romantic myth of the French Foreign Legion. Haunted men from everywhere, fighting anywhere, for causes not their own. There was a time in America when one could join the Legion to escape a troubled past and start a new life or aspire to a greater sense of adventure. This notion was popularized in films such as *Beau Geste*, *March or Die*, and even in comedies starring Laurel and Hardy and Abbott and Costello. Indeed, upon joining the French Foreign Legion, one took on a new identity. What person in America hasn't considered getting in the car and simply driving south? It's the same shared cultural myth of being a cowboy, riding into a new town, and stepping into a saloon filled with



Geo Sipp | Wolfman

various characters, all fraught with the risks of danger.

Your work has been displayed internationally, from New York to Algeria. What impact has traveling and exhibiting globally had on your artistic perspective?

As a storyteller, I empathize with other countries' cultural perspectives and differing aesthetics.

As a director of the School of Art and Design, how do you balance your administrative responsibilities with your personal artistic practice?

My priority is our students and the effective management of the School and the Zuckerman Museum of Art, which takes up most of my time. However, it's important for me to spend some time every day at the drawing table. I try to work at least an hour every day in my studio, usually between 5:30 and 7:00 a.m., and I dedicate Friday afternoons to making work.

Can you describe your creative process? How do you approach each new project, from initial concept to finished piece?

My working process is quite methodical. I love the research and problem-solving that comes with my projects. I read a lot; I want to be well-informed and make visual connections and associations with words. I write notes and make many rough thumbnail sketches to determine compositions. I refine the sketches to ascertain what will work most effectively. Then, I proceed with the piece. I don't trace, preferring to draw



Geo Sipp | Harbor of Algiers

freehand and allow for the work to evolve. I use a technique that requires me to respond to each step with a decision for direction, allowing for chance.

You have worked with many high-profile clients like Coca-Cola and ABC Television. How do you maintain artistic integrity when working with commercial projects?

The process for creating my commercial work is the same as it is for my personal projects, although the audience differs. In commercial work, the goal is to persuade, sell, and generate interest from the target market. The visual language in image-making follows the same grammar. The key difference is that the client, rather than I, determines the visual problem to solve. I enjoy the challenges of the research process.

What do you find most rewarding about being involved in both teaching and creating art?

I worked in the private sector before entering higher education. It is gratifying to share my experience, and I tell students that adapting and remaining flexible is essential in a creative career. This career involves creative problem-solving and design thinking. Being intellectually curious, reading books and newspapers, and drawing every day are crucial, especially for someone pursuing a career in art. Sharing ideas and generating buy-in are integral to the creative process. Helping students develop their artistic voices is very affirming, and good students challenge me to do better work.

Geo Sipp | Dracula revised 6 CQ



— Interview

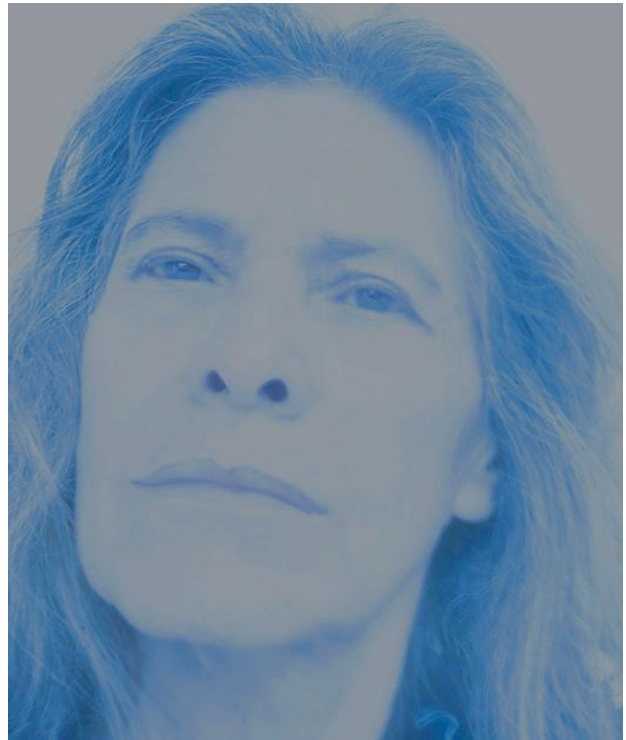
Monika Ruiz-B

Your artistic practice seems to be centered on questioning dogma. Can you tell us about an experience or artwork where you felt you truly broke free from established conventions?

In both my artistic work and my daily life, I have always been interested in exploring ways in which things could be seen or approached differently. These concerns have led me on an artistic quest to break away from the established in order to offer a new perspective on a chosen theme.

Aqua Bon is an artistic approach that involves immersing photographs in glass containers filled with water. This creates a dual effect, attempting to preserve memories while simultaneously exposing the characters through the play of reflections and transparencies. It is a fusion of photography, installation, and symbolism. Water, with its movement and transparency, becomes a medium that alters and transforms the image, just as time does with memories.

The choice of glass containers adds another dimension: they protect and expose at the same time, creating a tension between conservation and distortion. This evokes memory itself, which seeks to freeze the past but remains malleable, influenced by perception and emotion. This project challenges the idea of a fixed, immutable memory—often perceived as absolute—by demonstrating that it is, in fact, fluid, alterable, and subject to the interplay of reflections and



transparencies. This raises the question of whether a memory can truly be preserved intact or whether every act of preservation is, in itself, a transformation.

Another example of this approach is *Cornered Illusions*, a work that explores the concept of landscape, a term with a broad semantic range that is difficult to define with precision. While some aspects of its meaning are commonly understood, this is often due more to intuition than to any systematic definition, with one of its fundamental qualities lying in its inherent link to aesthetic appreciation. In *Cornered Illusions*, the landscape is constructed through successive transformations, both photographic and material, altering perception in the process. Rather than presenting landscapes as passive subjects, they encourage viewers to engage with them more deeply. By evoking varied responses, the works aim to unsettle and challenge the viewer.

How do you approach the balance between challenging norms and creating work that is still accessible and engaging to your audience?

It's an intriguing question. The truth is that striking a balance between creating art that is both accessible and physically appealing while

also prompting reflection on established norms is a significant task. In my work, I attempt to allow for numerous interpretations while avoiding preconceived notions. My goal is for the audience to examine commonly accepted conventions on their own.

Providing context through titles, explanations, and work growth are critical components in enhancing the viewer's understanding.

Your use of photography as a medium is a key part of your work. How do you feel photography allows you to challenge the boundaries of art in a way that other media might not?

Photography has always been a part of my life, allowing me to document experiences and the passage of time while also serving as a platform for creative expression. Although I work in various media, photography provides a unique flexibility that is essential to my artistic practice. One of the key reasons for my deep engagement with this medium is its complex relationship with "reality." Do photographs truly capture an objective truth, or are they merely



interpretations of reality? This question drives my exploration of photography's potential. By introducing textures, distortions, or other alterations, I challenge the boundary between the real and the fabricated, reshaping our understanding of memory, time, and history. Beyond being a creative tool, photography also serves as a space for inquiry. It invites experimentation that questions perception and challenges conventional ways of seeing and interpreting images. Ultimately, photography functions both as a record of time and place and as a dynamic, adaptable medium for artistic exploration and critical reflection.

In your statement, you mention the act of 'transgressing principles.' Can you share more about a specific project where you explored this idea of transgression and what the reaction was from the audience?

This exploration is evident in many of my works, including *Borders without Limits*. The title itself invites intrigue-not as a contradiction, but as a juxtaposition of concepts that seem opposed yet interconnected, their relationship defined by a mere preposition.

Borders without Limits is a photographic series that examines the concept of "border." What does a border signify? How is it defined, used, and perceived across different societies, geographic contexts, and disciplines? Do borders truly have limits? If so, what purpose do these limits serve, and why do they exist? This project merges photography and plastic arts, allowing it to evolve over time.

This fluidity grants artistic representation a boundless and ever-expanding dimension, embracing diverse interpretations and endless possibilities. The work has been exhibited in various venues, including galleries, museums, and photography festivals. Fortunately, *Borders without Limits* has consistently received positive reactions, with many viewers remarking on how the photographs challenge the ambiguity of established dogmas.

However, on occasion, the work has been marked or torn down when displayed at festivals. I am unsure whether this stems from a lack of understanding, a lack of sympathy, or outright disagreement.

How does your multicultural background influence your art and approach to breaking conventions, especially having lived in Colombia, the US, and France?

My multicultural background has deeply shaped my artistic approach and my way of challenging conventions. Living in Colombia, the United States, and France has given me firsthand insight into how the same individual can be perceived very differently depending on cultural context. This experience has broadened my perspective, fostering a continuous reflection on both the contrasts and commonalities between cultures, as well as a deep respect for diversity. During my studies in Boston and Aix-en-Provence, I became increasingly aware of how Art History is still predominantly taught from a Western-centric perspective. While Europe's influence on movements like the Renaissance or Modernism is undeniable, art has always been a global phenomenon-one that predates and extends far beyond this framework.

Unfortunately, many artistic traditions remain underrepresented in traditional education. This lack of recognition has been a driving force in my work, inspiring me to explore and elevate artistic expressions that have been historically marginalized. It has also pushed me to rethink artistic and conceptual frameworks, analyzing and approaching them from alternative perspectives.

Your work has been displayed in prestigious festivals and galleries. How does being part of such global exhibitions shape your creative process or the messages you want to convey in your work?

Participating in prestigious festivals and galleries has profoundly influenced my creative process and the messages I seek to convey through my art. These international exhibitions provide me with the opportunity to engage with diverse audiences and contribute new perspectives that challenge and enrich my work. The exposure to different artistic expressions and the critiques I receive foster continuous development, pushing me to explore new themes and techniques. Furthermore, the recognition and validation in such esteemed spaces inspire my commitment



Monika Ruiz-B | Borders without limits

to exploring universal concepts such as borders, perception, time, memory, and difference, turning my art into a channel for intercultural dialogue and reflection.

Can you describe how you engage with the viewer through your art? What kind of response do you hope to provoke from them?

My main goal is to establish an authentic connection with the viewer, engaging them both intellectually and emotionally. I strive to encourage reflection, questioning, and introspection while transforming perspectives and perceptions. Additionally, I seek to create new connections with what is observed or evoke experiences that resonate with the viewer's own journey.

To achieve this, I incorporate visual storytelling, symbolism, and a range of expressive techniques such as superimpositions, strong contrasts, and deformations using mirrors and reflections. These elements amplify the visual and conceptual impact of my work, adding multiple layers of meaning and inviting diverse interpretations.

Ultimately, I aim for art to become a space for personal interpretation and emotional dialogue with each viewer.



— Interview

Victoria Ellison

What inspired you to focus on capturing high-fashion/editorial looks with second-hand clothing?

My friend Cathryn approached me with the idea to shoot at a local secondhand store called Nifty, utilizing clothing pieces from there to style and create looks that have a sense of individuality and purpose through re-purposing pre-loved pieces. Cathryn also at the time owned her own thrifting business called Wasted Threads and was crucial to styling and then modeling the pieces we chose to showcase.

Can you walk us through your creative process when you're styling and photographing a thrifted piece?

The creative process was a collaborative one with Cathryn and I both roaming the thrift store to find pieces we were both drawn to and could see fitting the brief of pre-loved but make it high-end fashion. We would then come



together with the pieces and try to locate accessories that would amplify the look further. When I'm photographing clothing pieces, I'm looking for points of interest—textures, fabrics, prints—anything that can be interesting or can create an interesting look or convey a feeling or vibe when looking at the final image.

How does the environment of a thrift store influence the way you approach a shoot?

When it comes to set spaces where you can't move too many things around, I try to look for the interesting parts of the space, things that can add to or enhance the scene or help to carve out the narrative of the story we are telling. Because we were in a thrift store and the idea was to showcase thrifted pieces with varying textures, patterns, designs and make them look high-end, we were able to utilize the racks, changing rooms, and objects within the space to use as our mini sets. Nifty has also done a great job of tailoring the space from the paint, art, decor, etc., to the furniture and placement of racks—the charm of these elements helped carry through the chic/high-end aesthetic. Shooting in an environment you can't change but has so many elements to pull from leans into the art of randomness and creates adaptability and innovation by challenging the viewer to think outside the box and work over and above the limitations, whether they be space, lighting, or otherwise.

What challenges do you face when combining the aesthetic of high-fashion with second-hand items?

It can be time-consuming locating pieces that fit the high-fashion standard—they could be damaged/poor condition, you might not find the pieces you are looking for, or it could even take a few goes at layering pieces you have found together to get the look desired. I was very lucky to work with Cathryn as she was not only the model and co-collaborator, but she also has a keen eye for what



Victoria Ellison | Nifty | 2023

works and what looks good together. We were able to bounce ideas off one another as well and decided to just have fun with it, pick out things that caught our eye, and play around. We wanted to show that secondhand fashion can look luxury, bold, fun, elevated, and even like it could hit the runway at any time—the fashion industry is ever-changing, and you don't have to follow trends to the letter. Further to this, sustainability is becoming more and more important to people, and the stigma around secondhand clothing is slowly waning—there are some people who still view secondhand clothing as less desirable or valuable, but within the thrift store walls, there are clothing pieces of varying sizes, cuts, styles, designs, and materials.

Is there a specific message or theme you aim to convey through your work with thrifted fashion?

When working with thrifted fashion, the message or theme often revolves around sustainability, individuality, and the beauty of secondhand style. By choosing thrifted items, the focus shifts to reducing waste, reusing resources, and minimizing the environmental impact of the fashion industry. Thrifted fashion challenges the concept of fast fashion, promoting the idea that style doesn't have to come at the expense of the planet. It's also possible to make conscious choices without sacrificing personal style. Thrifted fashion also has a history to it, often rooted in styles of previous decades—good fashion doesn't have to have an expiry date, and older pieces are valuable not just for their sustainability but for their historical and aesthetic worth. The personalization of thrifted pieces also helps individuals create their own unique style to cultivate a look that's truly their own, which is often harder to achieve with mass-produced pieces and mainstream trends.



Victoria Ellison | Nifty | 2023



Victoria Ellison | Nifty | 2023

How do you choose the models for your photoshoots, and what role do they play in bringing your vision to life?

I don't really have a process when it comes to working with people—I tend to gravitate towards like-minded creatives who have a similar vibe to myself, people who like to have fun, and people you can get lost in the creative process with, amassing ideas upon ideas and then playing with those ideas, fleshing them out but also understanding you can't control the whole thing and allowing ideas to grow past the brief. It's important to me that projects such as this one are of a collaborative nature—no specific person is in charge, but both parties contribute to making the vision come to life.

What role do you think fashion and sustainability play in the art of photography today?

Fashion photography has always been a form of artistic expression, often following the changes to fashion over the decades, documenting and noting down changes such as length to silhouette, grandeur to rebellion, and now fast fashion vs. sustainable. Fashion is becoming more than just trends—it reflects social movements, identity, and individuality, and with rising environmental concerns, it's also becoming about sustainable fashion. People want to know where their clothing is coming from, that it's going to last, that it's ethical, and that people are being paid a fair wage. Photographers have the opportunity to document these changes and tell the stories that need to be told, bringing attention to environmental issues, conservation, the impact of consumerism, and highlighting the importance of sustainability through impactful visuals. In today's world, a photograph can quickly go viral, making it a powerful tool for influencing public perception—photographers who focus on sustainability can help shift the narrative around consumer behavior and advocate for social change.

— Interview

Fiona Yeh

What inspired you to use the lion as a central symbol in your artwork?

That is the story of The Wizard of Oz. The character Lion named himself as The Cowardly Lion, thinking that he was lacking in courage. Eventually, after drinking the non-magical solution, he thought he was the King of the Beasts. In our life, we must have something brilliant in our mind; we mustn't keep underestimating ourselves. What we actually lack is never intelligence, but courage.

You mention that courage is born from acknowledging and facing fear. How does this concept influence the creative process behind your art?

We all are not perfect as we fall down sometimes, fail often, and get out of control.



These experiences are where I meet my most authentic self. Emotions can be governed by my mental attitude and then become the creation of my artworks.

How do the emotions of fear and courage shape the way you depict lions in your work?

As you look deeply at my artworks, you are able to feel them being in existence. Imagination is the way to open your eyes and search for the feeling where you don't expect it.

Your works show a variety of styles and techniques. How do you decide which medium or approach to use for each piece?

I like to be a little playful and mischievous, so I use oil paints, oil crayons, and markers on watercolor paper, canvas, or other materials to create my pieces.

Could you share a moment in your life when you had to face fear, and how it influenced your art?

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, our lives were greatly affected, and the virus spread rapidly. At the same time, I was diagnosed with chest tumors in my breast. My

doctor suggested that the best option was to remove the tumors through surgery. This would help determine whether I needed chemotherapy in case it was breast cancer. I suffered from anxiety, depression, and social disorder. That was the moment I had to face fear and weakness.

From these experiences, my way of thinking and creating was influenced. Since we are traveling on this planet, we must live in the present and love ourselves as a lifelong romance.

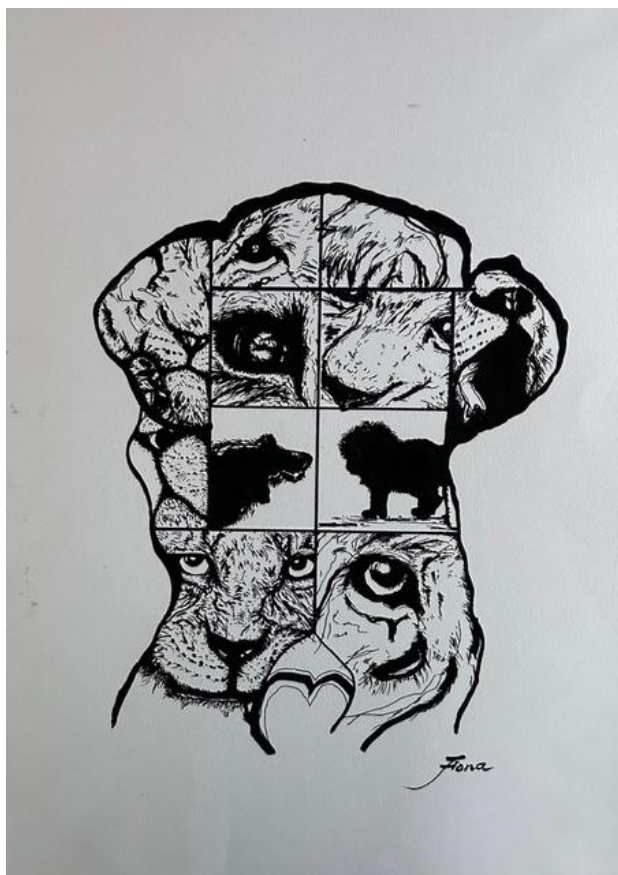
How do cultural influences from Taiwan shape your understanding and representation of courage and fear?

Taiwan's geographical location, situated in the West Pacific and neighboring Southeast Asian nations, reflects ethnic and cultural diversity. Being born and raised here, I have been able to think outside the box and create imaginatively. It gives me a sense of security and strengthens my value in being myself.

Do you feel that creating these lion-themed works has helped you process or understand your own fears?



Definitely. When I focus on painting, I find it easy to reach a state of flow whenever I meet and face challenges.



My name is **Rowan Gayle** and I am a young traditional artist. I paint with acrylics, so writes using pencil and oil pastels. I strive to create art with abstract concepts and messages in traditional form. I mainly paint portraits as the human face and its complexities intrigue me. The message in my art is always in the eyes. No matter how cluttered or plain an art piece may be, the story will always be in the eyes.





— Interview

Njeri Gitau

You mentioned that your art is deeply inspired by your home country, Kenya. Can you tell us more about how your Kenyan roots influence your artistic expression?

I grew up in Kenya and recently moved to Canada to pursue further education. Everything I learned artistically, I learned back home in Kenya. There, I would observe artists creating colorful pieces of cloth with small decorative animations (commonly known as Kitenge in Kenya) or using fabric as their canvas to depict canyons, wildlife, and tourism.

I also grew up in a very colorful, lively country where people wore their brightest clothes daily, painted their homes in vibrant yellows and oranges instead of the usual white, and where markets overflowed with colorful fruits and vegetables, filling the streets with vibrancy. The Maasai people, with their rich cultural aesthetics, became central to Kenya's identity. Visitors would recognize Kenya through the culture the Maasai represented—brightly colored clothing, intricately beaded jewelry, and handcrafted sandals.

That is precisely what I want to showcase to the world—art full of color, full of life, and deeply rooted in my Kenyan culture.

Your painting "Africans in The Diaspora" has become a sought-after piece. What was the inspiration behind this painting, and how do you feel about its significance in your journey as an artist?

"Africans in the Diaspora" originally started as a beautiful accident. I was trying out a new technique I had seen on Instagram—placing



blobs of paint onto a canvas and then using a squeegee to create an abstract piece. Being the person I am, I assumed it would turn out beautifully on my first try—but that was definitely not the case.

As an emerging artist, I didn't realize that when colors blend, they often turn into a single brown mass. However, I encouraged myself to let that first layer dry and tackle this abstract expression once again. This time, I placed individual colors around the canvas and let them dry. Once they formed shapes, I envisioned what the piece could become. That's when I pulled out my acrylic markers and decided to draw the rest of the creation as I saw it in my mind—and that's how Africans in the Diaspora was born!

The figures in the painting depict the Maasai people, who are traditionally nomadic, constantly wandering in search of a new home and adapting to their environment. I was inspired to portray this because, like them, I left my home a few years ago and had to adapt to the idea of creating a new home in Canada. Essentially, I created this piece to express how I, along with other international Africans, have felt upon arriving in a new country—doing our best to make it a place we love.

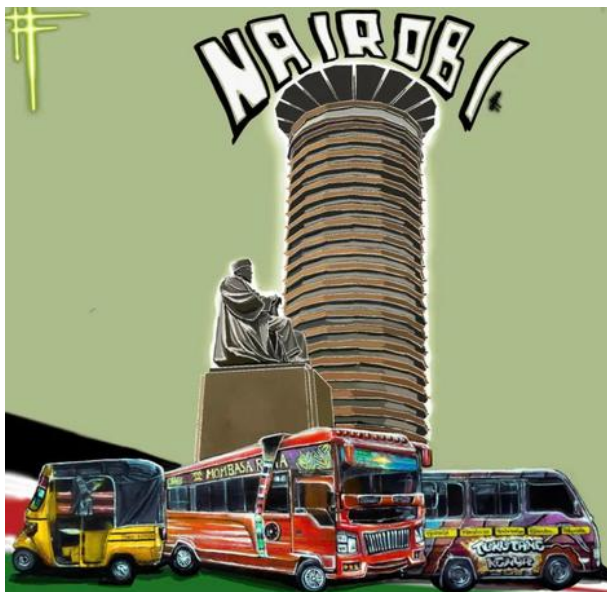
You talk about adding "a lot of color" to your work. What role does color play in your art, and how does it contribute to the message you want to communicate?

Colour is honestly everything to me in art! I always thought I needed to become more of a minimalist in life. I tried picking out outfits with the least amount of colour or designing my living space with just one colour pattern so it wouldn't look too colourful. But the more I tried to change, the more things stayed the same—I learned that colour is my way of showing the world: Hey, this is Njeri Gitau, and she loves colour!

And colour is my expression. I love the way you can use lighter, brighter colours to create depth, or how darker colours can be used to depict shadows and a three-dimensional essence. I love adding colour to mundane objects just to breathe life into them, and experimenting with different combinations to see what works and what doesn't. For me, it's the equivalent of taking a child to a candy store!

How does living in Canada impact your art, especially in terms of cultural identity and your connection to your homeland?

I think living in Canada has really helped my art grow and taken it to the next level. In Kenya, I was taught art in a very technical setting in school. My art teacher, God bless her heart, taught me everything she knew and passed down her intricacies to her students in the best way she could.



But in Canada, I learned to fully express each and every one of my ideas and see them through—no matter if they were great ideas or just ones I needed to explore and move on from. I got to experiment with different media, such as felt paper, wool, and resin pouring, which I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to explore back in Kenya.

Another interesting thing about living in Canada is that it has actually deepened my connection to my roots in Kenya. Lately, everything I create is tied to what I see back home—whether it's the hustle culture, a scene I witnessed while visiting, or simply a desire to bring a piece of Kenya to Canada.

I feel like living in Canada has propelled my art forward while also allowing me to stay true to my Kenyan roots!

Can you share more about your creative process? How do you approach a new piece of art, and what steps do you take to bring your ideas to life?

I honestly feel like my creative process changes each and every time, but the general gist is that I start by looking up references or finding a frame of reference for what I truly want to paint and create. This could be a photo I've taken—one

where I loved the vibrancy—or something I've seen while moving around the city that I want to capture in a painting. I then determine where exactly I want to create this, whether on canvas, wooden boards, or digitally.

Once I've figured out the medium, I gather my materials and get to work. The great thing about my process is that I create as I go. I don't have a fixed expectation of when a piece will be finished or what it will look like in the end—I adapt to mistakes and changes in the work as it evolves. This flexibility was a challenge for me back in Kenya, but I've given myself the space to explore it more freely here in Canada.

How do you balance your artistic practice with daily life, and what motivates you to keep creating?

Currently, I work as a part-time administrative assistant, and I also run my own art business on Etsy and Instagram. I started my Etsy page, Mikono Moyo, this January—it was something I had been very excited to do for months but hadn't yet found the courage to start. Additionally, I am a part-time student currently pursuing my master's in psychology online, so I'd say there are a lot of different elements of my life running concurrently! Naturally, I would love to give it all up and pursue art full-time because that is where my true passion lies. However, I truly appreciate the fact that I have different aspects of life that don't revolve around art. I enjoy working and studying in a field that isn't directly related to art but can still be applied to it. I usually prioritize my art time after work on most days. At the moment, I find it easier to focus on digital work rather than physically painting, as it allows me to dedicate the time and attention I'd like. For physical paintings, I set aside weekends when I have longer, uninterrupted hours to layer paint, make

corrections, and continue creating.

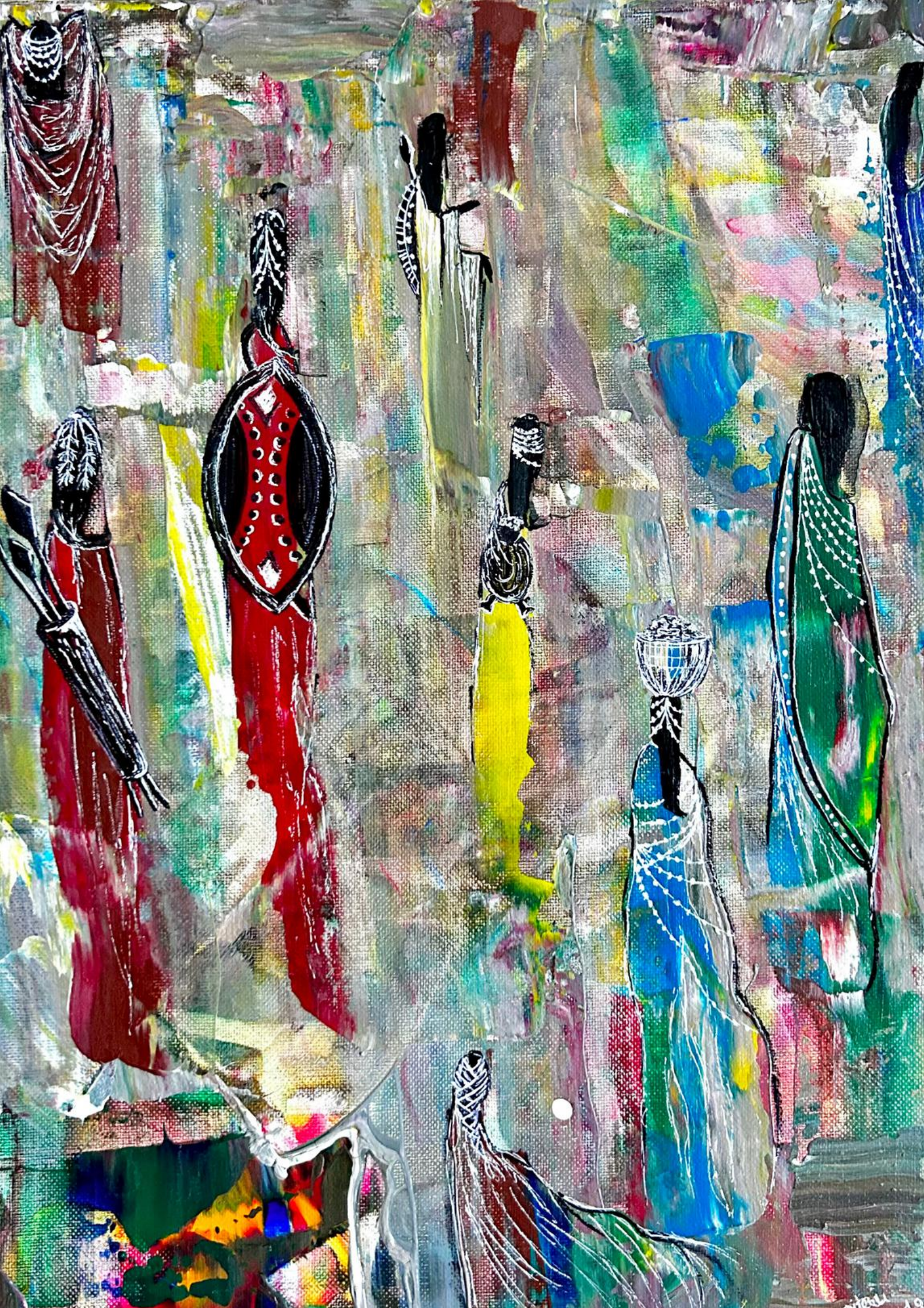
What truly motivates me is knowing what the finished result could be and the excitement of seeing it all come together! I am both my biggest critic and my biggest fan—which, I think, is the curse of being an artist altogether!

You've said that art is a reflection of your identity. What do you hope people take away when they experience your art, especially in terms of the cultural stories you tell through your work?

I do understand that while I would absolutely love to capture everyone's culture in my pieces, I am just one person who can only capture what is essential to me. That is what I hope people take away when they see my art. I hope they realize that Kenya—and, in a broader sense, Africa—is so much more than what is often portrayed in Western media. It is not just poverty-stricken, war-torn, or in constant need. Rather, it is a beautifully rich, diverse, colorful, and vibrant continent that everyone should experience at least once in their lifetime. For me, Kenya especially embodies this cultural richness. I hope people see the effort and time I put into my work, with each detail created intentionally. I am someone who loves Christ, and one of the gifts Christ offers us as His people is the gift of warmth and love. I want people to feel that warmth and love when they look at my paintings—to know they were created from a place of love and purpose.

But above all, the most important message I want people to take away from my work is the need to pursue life in the direction of their passion. You need to start living with purpose because you were created with purpose. Chase after your passion, embrace your gifts, and run toward the life you were meant to live! I promise—you won't regret that decision!





Nafia Syeed is an interdisciplinary artist residing in Northern Virginia, originally from Bangladesh, and a proud mother of two beautiful children and two cute cats. Her artistic journey is a vibrant tapestry that weaves together her roles as a painter, photographer, jewelry designer, and crafter. Nature's rhythm, colors, and boundless energy are at the heart of her creative inspiration. Her work spans diverse mediums, as she enjoys exploring and experimenting with various tools and techniques, always driven by a spirit of curiosity and discovery. Her ability to merge traditional and historical techniques with contemporary themes results in work that feels both timeless and relevant. Through her work, Nafia aims to evoke empathy, promote sustainability, and equity. She believes art holds the power to stir emotions, spark meaningful conversations, and inspire collective action. Every creation is a heartfelt expression, a contribution toward building a more compassionate and sustainable world for present and future generations.

Project Statement

For Palisades Ablaze, I combined mosaic and encaustic techniques to capture the raw intensity of the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires. The piece begins with a textured mosaic base, crafted from shards of tile and grout, symbolizing the fractured, charred remnants of the landscape. Each tile was carefully placed to evoke the chaos and devastation left in the wake of the fire, creating a fragmented scene that mirrors the overwhelming destruction of nature. Once the mosaic was complete, I turned to encaustic painting to bring out the deep, scorched earth tones that represent the scorched ground, as well as the remnants of life clinging to existence amidst the destruction. The encaustic wax, applied in layers, allowed me to convey the fiery sky. I manipulated the molten wax with heat to create dynamic swirls and gradients, reflecting the unpredictable and fierce nature of the flames. This multi step process allowed me to capture both the destruction and the haunting beauty that wildfires bring, conveying the violent clash between life and disaster. Palisades Ablaze invites viewers to reflect on the urgency of human care to protect the Earth, highlighting the delicate balance between nature's power and our responsibility to safeguard it.



— Interview

Rainy Tang

Your illustrations often blend beauty and horror in a poetic way. How do you balance these seemingly opposing elements in your work?

I think to blend beauty and horror in a poetic way is my aesthetic taste. I'm very much attracted to beautiful paintings, but at the same time beauty on its own seems empty, horror can add some spice to the planeness.

Take 'Letter from an Unknown Woman' as an example, the story itself is beautiful, yet the core of the story is tragic and sorrow which make the book so impressive. I would love to illustrate the beauty of the book yet the extreme love of the woman and the sacrifice she made to herself also seems horrific in a level of degree. I think everything can be presented in a beautiful way, and also beauty is within many things. I don't feel like I'm balancing the two elements but rather like discovering both ones within the other and it's interesting because it provides another fresh interpretation of expressing beauty.

What drew you to adapt Stefan Zweig's "Letter from an Unknown Woman"? How did you approach translating its themes visually?

'Letter from an Unknown Woman' is an interesting novel to read, as it provides a



Rainy Tang | First Glance | 2024

monologue entirely from the perspective of a passionate, obsessive woman. I love how it forgoes a complex plot and instead unfolds as a quiet confession of desperate, sorrowful love. The male protagonist is almost symbolic, existing only to highlight the intensity of the woman's love, as if he barely exists otherwise. Zweig's language is beautiful, though some criticize the novel for portraying the protagonist as a love-obsessed fool. While I don't deny this interpretation, I believe the novel's strength lies in its extreme portrayal of devotion-what happens when love is pushed to its absolute limit? Since the story has provided me with such an interesting reading experience, I wanted to see how it would look in a visual form.

Your style is heavily influenced by Persian miniatures, early Renaissance frescoes, and bio-arts. How do these inspirations shape your artistic voice?

Imagery wise, my art is influenced by these styles primarily in terms of form, color, and composition-for example, the intricate details and vibrant hues of Persian miniatures, the theatrical special arrangements of early

Renaissance frescoes, and the organic, scientific aesthetics of bio-art.

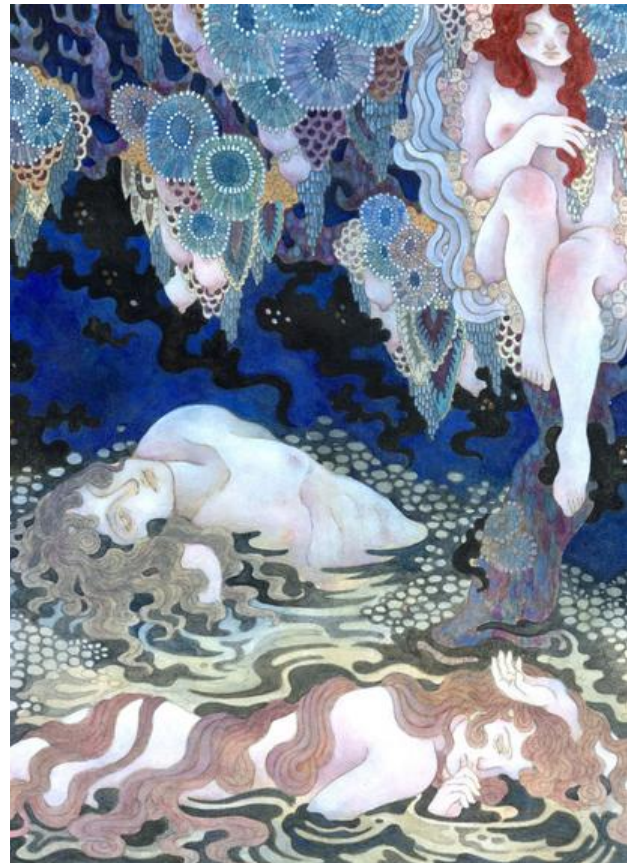
However, beneath these visual influences, I'm very drawn to the innocence and honesty of early Renaissance frescoes. They are not technically perfect and mature as in the flowering era of Renaissance, but there is a beauty of its rawness and honesty. There are no great grand compositions and showing-off with skills yet I find them more impressive. For my 'Letter from an Unknown Woman' project I went very fancy with visual presentation, but emotionally I also wanted to achieve the same honesty in presenting the woman's love and sorrow.

As for bio-art, I find them such a miracle to look at as the creation of nature and mother earth. I can sense love, horror, beauty and tendency within the mysterious nature. It has always been a great inspiration for me from a spiritual aspect. My artistic perspective also remains deeply shaped by my roots, an Eastern sense of subtlety and restraint. I believe while external aesthetics can shift across styles, an artist's cultural and emotional core fundamentally shapes how a theme is perceived and expressed. This inner perspective dictates narrative tone, artistic choices, and the emotions conveyed to the audience. Such as during my process of visualisation, I have to answer questions to myself like: Do I sympathize with this woman or critique her? Do I depict her story as passionate or restrained, realistic or fantastical? My answers to these questions are very much based on my roots and personality, which I believe are key elements that shape my artistic voice.

Themes of feminism and nature play a key role in your art. How do you use metaphors to explore these subjects?

As a female artist, I feel a sense of female solidarity with the unknown woman, which makes me worry for her, empathize with her, and understand her longing.

As for nature, I have always had this feeling of intimate connection with nature, and I love using elements from nature in my images. I believe nature contains a great power, and people as creatures living within nature are all universally connected to it in an interesting way. Nature is



Rainy Tang | The night of desire | 2024

beautiful, mysterious, and fearful sometimes too. My love of nature expanded to the unknown woman within the book, and this love added on to my sympathetic feel toward her.

When exploring the subject, my eastern restrained roots approach translates her love into a more metaphors way (which I think many western artists have a more straight-forward voice when illustrating love). For example, in the first image of the serie, When the girl silently watches the man from behind a curtain, the flowers blooming toward him above her head unfold her emotions they gaze at him with yearning eyes, reaching and kissing him in her place.

Many of your works juxtapose themes like fertility and motherhood with darker elements like death and deformity. What message do you hope viewers take away from this duality?

This is simply my personal mode of expression- conveying hope within darkness while planting unease within beauty. I don't deliberately design my compositions to communicate a precise message to the audience. Instead, my works reflect internal projections of many childhood

experiences within me, as I'm very good at remembering fearful emotions as a kid and their final form emerges organically.

I think nature also plays a role here as the opposing elements I have in my work (fertility, motherhood, love, death, deformity) are all a stage of natural circles, and for achieving unity and harmony you need to have all elements included. Elements from only one side will lose the idea of balance and fail to achieve this complement. When you talk about the beauty of love you can't avoid talking about the sadness and death since it's all part of it.

What challenges do you face when depicting tragedies in a "soft, poetic manner"?

The visualization process was challenging since the book is deeply focused on the woman's psychological state, and a direct, literal adaptation felt dull to me. I wanted my illustrations to express her joy, longing, pain, and struggle. The novel's emotional depth is so intricate, and I hoped to capture this ebb and flow rather than simply illustrating plot points. To achieve this, I spent significant time refining my approach, discarding many drafts that felt

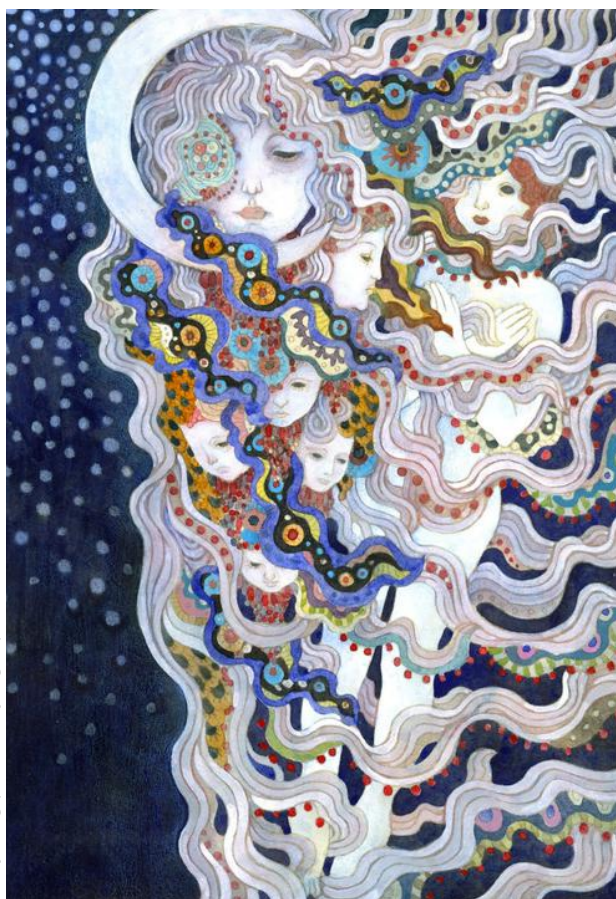


Rainy Tang | The birth | 2024

too narrative-driven and failed to convey the novel's richness in emotions. I believe, Art, as a different medium from writing, should have its own unique expression rather than just replicating the text. The final work emerged from this realization-I adopted a highly decorative, fantasy-inspired style filled with symbols and metaphors to convey the protagonist's emotions mixed with my understandings to her choice. I wish all the visual symbolic associations on the imagery made it poetic and my sympathetic attitude towards the woman create a sense of softness in my work.

Your works carry an intricate level of detail. What techniques do you use to achieve this delicacy in watercolor and colored pencil?

I think delicacy is a term I wanted to achieve for this project in order to visualize the beauty and sadness. Watercolor and pencil for me is a perfect medium to capture that kind of sense, as oil will be too heavy for the story to hold. Watercolor as a medium itself has this delicacy within it, and also I'm painting in small scale with all of these details so people will have to look at them closely, which can add another level of intimacy toward it.



Rainy Tang | The windy night | 2024



Nika Sedighi

I am currently a graphic design student and an aspiring multimedia artist. My practice revolves around digital art, illustration, and design. I take an experimental approach, trying to create something new everytime. Through my work, I try to blend traditional and contemporary elements to create thought-provoking pieces.

Artist Statement

The girl illustration, draws from the story of Melmedas, a character from Iranian beliefs. Melmedas is portrayed as a beautiful woman who adorns herself with precious gems. She appears to the youth and seduces them. Whenever a young man is deceived by Melmedas, she cuts the lustful young man with her sickle-shaped legs. This piece reflects the mysterious and powerful nature of the character, blending traditional mythological elements with my own artistic interpretation.



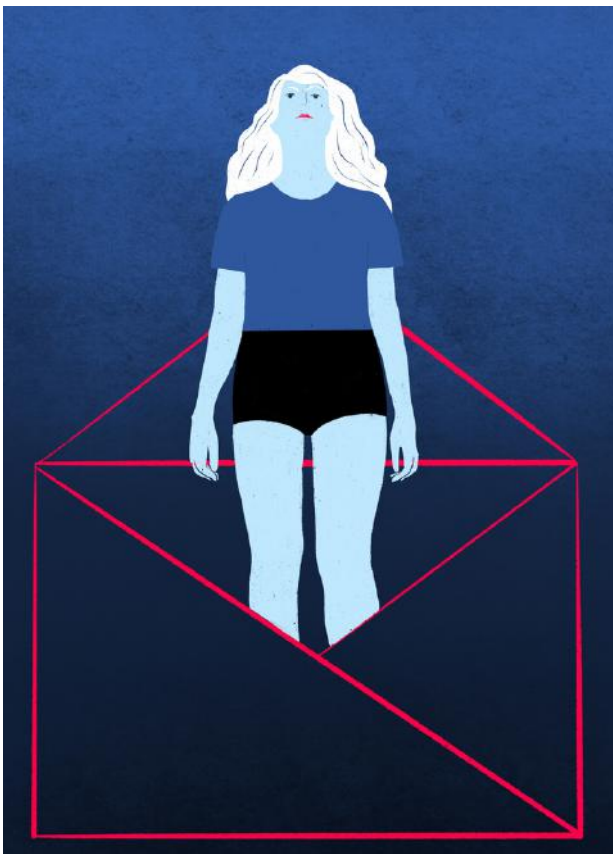


— Interview

Michela Nanut

Your background in Philosophy of Science seems quite unique for an illustrator. How does your academic training influence your work as an artist?

Philosophy was my first and greatest love, and studying it has given me a valuable tool to approach illustration in an active way. I'm not so much interested in providing answers as am in asking questions, inviting the viewer to reflect. It helps me question our beliefs and the symbolic system that accompanies them on a cultural level, allowing me to play with meanings, deconstruct them, and recombine them. In this sense, every image becomes an open dialogue rather than a definitive statement.



Michela Nanut | Il passeggero



Your project "Illustrated Stories of Minor Migrants" addresses important social issues. What drove you to work on this project, and what message did you hope to convey through the illustrations?

I was involved in this project by journalist Claudia Bellante and photographer Mirko Cecchi from Raccontami.org. Together, we wanted to tell the stories of the young people portrayed, showing the viewer that they are full of extraordinary and harmonious dreams, not driven by terrible criminal intentions.

People who cross continents do so because of objectively devastating causes-war, famine, ethnic persecution-but the wind that carries them is the same that guided Ulysses in his wondrous journey across the Mediterranean. Ulysses himself, in *The Divine Comedy*, reminds his companions that they were created to follow virtue and knowledge.' The virtuous desire for discovery accompanies every journey, including migration.

Can you tell us about your creative process? How do you approach a new project, from concept to final artwork?

I usually draw inspiration from a line of poetry, a phrase I overhear somewhere, or a scene from a film. It's as if I have a vision of an image, and from there, I start by sketching on paper. Other times, I'm asked to illustrate a specific concept; in that case, I first create a mind map, write down a brainstorming session until the right idea comes to me.

Once I have my pencil sketches, I set up photo sessions to stage what I want to draw,

photographing myself or other people. From the photograph, I trace some parts on my iPad, while others I redraw freely. This is how I create the digital sketch.

At this stage, I choose the colors and begin the final artwork. The first version doesn't always work—often, I have second thoughts, and an image can take weeks or even months to reach its final form.

You've worked with notable organizations like Terres des Hommes and MUSE. What role do you believe art plays in social causes and education?

Art plays a fundamental role in both education and social causes because it has an extraordinary power: it is not merely descriptive, nor does it provide a pre-narrated version of facts, but rather it opens the viewer's eyes and mind. It has the ability to activate the observer, to make them see things from a new perspective one that is not predetermined but entirely personal.

Anyone looking at an image is inevitably compelled to interpret it, to bring something of their own to it, and in doing so, a cognitive process is set in motion that allows them to reconstruct the narrative of the circumstances they are living in. In this sense, art does not offer ready-made answers but instead creates space for reflection and awareness.

What has been the most rewarding part of combining your work as a teacher and an illustrator?

Being an illustrator and being a teacher are very similar and complementary jobs. They have a lot in common, and often the skills required are essentially the same. In both cases, building relationships with others, the desire to communicate abstract concepts, and problem-solving are fundamental. Helping someone understand something and illustrating a concept are, in the end, two exercises in problem-solving. Both are professions with a strong social vocation, as they require putting oneself out there in front of others and finding a balance between our own intentions, our identity, and the relationship with those who are watching or listening. Whether in illustration or teaching, you never work in a vacuum—it's always a dialogue with the world.

Inclusion and social integration are central themes in your work. How do you think art can influence these issues on a larger scale?



Michela Nanut | Radici

Art has the power to give visibility to topics that have long been overshadowed by social stigma and prejudice. Through various forms of expression, it can offer new perspectives on inclusion issues, showcasing often marginalized realities in unexpected and innovative ways. This allows for the creation of new narratives that bring the world of disability and marginalization closer to something perceptibly beautiful, transforming the way these realities are perceived and experienced in society.

Looking back at your career, which project or piece of work are you most proud of, and why?

I am very proud to have participated in the migrant minors project, an initiative that gained great visibility, was highly appreciated, and still feels fresh and relevant even after years. In general, I am always very satisfied when I get to illustrate while collaborating with other professionals, sharing a common project, and bringing together different ideas and perspectives.

Working alone on my drawings is not for me. Of course, sometimes it's relaxing, but the real challenge that excites me is engaging with others and sharing ideas. I like having a dialogue, discussing with people who help me see where I'm going wrong and guide me in the right direction.

— Interview

Harshita Ezil

What inspired you to start working with mixed media, and how do you decide which mediums to use for each piece?

Back in 2019, when I was living in my hometown (Bangalore, India). I used to watch art tutorials on a platform called Skillshare, where there were plenty of videos on how to use mixed media. Deciding which medium to use is very easy, depending on the piece. For example, if I decided to paint a star map, I would use a watercolour medium to paint the background with the shades of the dark sky. The common shades that I would use are Lamp Black, Dioxazine Purple and Ultramarine Blue. And to paint the constellation lines I would use either Gold Ink or Aluminium Silver Ink. For the stars, I would use metallic watercolour paints.

Another example is, if I decided to make a detailed ink drawing of a floral bouquet, I would draw the bouquet with fine liner pens first and then, I would proceed to include highlights by adding dots on the stamen and precision lines on the flower petals using metallic watercolour paints. To be more specific, if I were to get the precision lines and dots on each petal and stamen, I would use a dip pen, a thin liner brush or a fine detail brush between the size range of .005 to 3.

Can you talk about your process when creating constellations and botanicals in your work? Do you approach each piece differently?

Yes, I approach each piece differently, especially if they are detailed. The most common mediums that I use for constellations are Winsor & Newton



artist-grade watercolour paints, Winsor & Newton Metallic Inks, Winsor & Newton Indian Ink, Royal & Langnickel Pearlescent Paints and Gansai Tambi Metallic Watercolour Paints. The process of creating constellations falls in two categories. i.e. - i) Creating a individual constellation piece. ii) Creating numerous constellations within a star map.

If I were to begin creating an individual constellation piece, for example, the constellation Orion. I would choose a Khadi watercolor paper weighing between 210 to 640 GSM. I would tape the paper on the sides in order to create a border around the paper and then wet the paper all over with a light wash of plain water. And then I would include shades of Lamp Black, Ultramarine Blue and Dioxazine Purple on my paint palette, dilute them a bit with water and then I gently spread these shades of paint across the light wash, in order to create different shades of the dark sky. I let the background dry naturally and once it's 80 to 90 percent dry, I blowdry on top of the painting using a hairdryer, so that the paper stays flat and does not bend. Once it is dry, then I proceed by drawing the Orion constellation using an Aluminium Silver Ink by Winsor & Newton. I draw the constellation using a fine detail brush ranging from .005 to 3.

After drawing the constellation, I paint stars on each point of the constellation with a thin fine detail brush in order to maintain precision. I usually use Champagne Gold watercolour paint to paint the stars. I then proceed to add dots to the middle of each star using a darker shade such as Yellow Gold to make the constellation pop. For the final detail, I sprinkle two shades of gold i.e. - Red Gold and Light Gold, in order to define little stars on the background night sky. The painting is allowed to dry naturally. Once the piece is finished, I put them on sale on my online Etsy shop. Some of the constellation pieces, they either remain in my sketchbook or in a plastic folder.

Speaking of star maps, the process is the same as above, just that the differences involve the following - i) I start by generating a specific star map region on a website called AstroDienst, by providing a location. AstroDienst then generates the starmap and I then choose the size of paper and materials to be used, respectively. ii) I, then, choose a larger size watercolor paper by Fabriano, cut it into a size of, say, 30 x 30 cm and tape the corners onto a surface. iii) After painting the sky, I sprinkle different shades of gold with a wet finer liner brush to represent tiny stars on the night sky. If necessary, I include co-ordinates and dotted lines on the map as well, using metallic ink. iv) I proceed further by drawing multiple constellations each, across the already painted night sky and make sure that the constellations are drawn such that their size fits on the paper. The points of each constellation are covered by dots using different colours of pearlescent paints by Royal & Langnickel. v) The finished piece is then framed and sent to the person who made the order.

The first time I ever made a star map, was for my best friend, Madhan. I made one for his 27th birthday last year. Making one for him inspired me to create customized star maps for people, based on their location and where they were born.

Speaking of the creativity of botanicals, I look up reference photos on Pinterest to collect ideas on how to execute my next piece.

For example, if I were to choose to paint a floral archway (wedding version), I look at 5-6 photos of them on Pinterest and observe the differences color schemes and symmetry.



I then, draw the rough sketch of the floral arch from my imagination and pick the colour palette to my liking. I take a solid 30-40 minutes to draw the floral arch with a HB pencil. Then, I paint the background, the floral details from dark to light step-by-step, till I finally finish the piece. I take 3-5 hours to finish a floral archway piece. I usually use Gouache paints to paint botanicals on paper. If it was a dense surface, say a stretched canvas, I use artist-grade acrylic paints from Winsor & Newton and Pebeo Studio Acrylics. For hologram effects to be added on the floral archway, I use Rico Art Metallic Paints (Acrylics).

Another example is, if I were to paint a bouquet using charcoal. I specifically use willow charcoal by Cretacolor. After I finish executing the piece, I spray the finished piece with a fixative spray and add couple of drops of pearlescent watercolor paint to give the bouquet a finishing touch. My preferred art supply brands are Winsor & Newton Artist-Grade Paints (Acrylic & Watercolour), Winsor & Newton Metallic Inks, Pebeo Studio Acrylics, Liquitex Basics Acrylic, Cretacolor Black Box Charcoal Drawing Set and Royal & Langnickel Pearlescent Watercolour Paints. I always purchase good quality art supplies and ensure to use them long-term.

How does living in Sheffield, United Kingdom, influence your art? Are there any specific local elements that inspire your work?

Sheffield is personally home to numerous artists. It does have many art museums especially Graves Gallery and Millennium Gallery. It also encourages local artists to partake in art

exhibitions hosted seasonally across the city. Artists within Sheffield build communities and encourage each other to create. There is one particular local place that inspires my work. The Millennium Gallery has a separate museum specifically for John Ruskin, an English polymath, who did indeed paint botanicals as a specimen. He painted them specifically using watercolors and used a liner brush to paint them with a unique, yet fine precision. His botanical works in watercolor is what inspired me to create botanical art pieces in the first place. Another local element that inspires me to paint botanicals is the Sheffield Botanical Gardens. Sheffield, being the greenest city in Europe is well known for its greenery, colourful gardens and floristry. Sheffield Botanical Gardens inspires me to paint floral archways, floral dresses on a mannequin and floral bouquets with detail. Some botanical pieces of mine with the finest detail take between 5 days to 2 weeks to finish creating. Such is the dedication to my work.

Your Etsy shop features a variety of your artworks. How do you select which pieces to sell, and what role does your shop play in your artistic journey?

Yes, I do sell a variety of artworks and place them in separate categories on my Etsy shop. For example, if I plan to sell paintings called "Constellation Series", I first make sure to finish painting 20 individual pieces of each



constellation and keep them ready. Out of the 20 pieces, I choose to sell 15 pieces by making a listing for each of the 15 pieces. After the listings are published, I create a separate category on my Etsy shop called "Constellation Series" and drop the 15 listings into that category respectively. This helps new visitors and buyers navigate my Etsy shop with ease.

The role that my shop plays in my artistic journey is that, it has helped me become a self-made entrepreneur. Running my Etsy shop has taught me that I do not have to be perfect to create and sell art. The times where I felt extreme discouragement, I would use that discouragement as motivation to look up other artists on Etsy and explore the products that they placed on sale. I would then record my observations on my notepad and experiment accordingly, especially with pricing, marketing and presentation. During the experimentation process, I learnt all the things that I was doing right and all the things that I was doing wrong. It does greatly help in the growth process of running my Etsy shop, since it has invited several opportunities for artistic expansion. Additionally, making art pieces to put up for sale on my Etsy shop, has motivated me to partake in art exhibitions within and outside Britain, respectively. I just got selected to exhibit my artworks in France and I am quite grateful for the opportunity. It will be my first exhibition abroad and I am quite excited about it!

You incorporate botanical themes in many of your works. How do you see the connection between nature and art in your practice?

Taking a walk around nature gives me peace. My favourite park in Sheffield is none other than Weston Park. I love the greenery, the trees and the peace that it exudes. On the other hand, viewing artwork that involves nature and landscapes gives me so much peace. It inspires me to experiment with colour theory. So that the botanical art pieces I create appear vibrant and colourful. The connection with nature and art in my practice involves visualization and observation of symmetry. Attributes such as direction of light source, size of the object, attention to detail are considered. For example, if I were to paint from a

reference picture of my cousin's treehouse located in Lemwerder, Germany. I would consider the direction of the light source and create a separate customized colour palette based on the colours present on the reference picture. I would start by painting the background as the first layer, the darker base as the second layer and the finer details as the third layer. Finishing the art piece provides me with the feeling of being rewarded, post the completion of my art piece.

On the other hand, painting elements from nature helps lower my anxiety and stress levels. Incorporating nature into my art, sets me into a state of serenity.

Can you describe how you use different painting mediums like acrylics, inks, and gouache to bring your pieces to life?

As a mixed media artist, I see creating art as, simply having fun. Having fun while executing the creative process. Similar to how a little kid loves playing video games on a computer. When it comes to acrylics, I begin by painting an art piece with regular acrylic paints. After the painting is finished, I use metallic acrylic paints to add highlights and finishing touches to the painting. One fine example is, I once made a painting called 'Rose in Symmetry' back in February 2024. It was a mixed media painting where it had a rose painted in acrylics in the centre and the background around the rose had geometric figures such as squares, triangles and rectangles, painted with gold ink. I remember placing it for sale for £25 and it was purchased within a week by a customer in Yorkshire. It felt special to know that I could add value to my buyers through the creation of mixed media art pieces.

Another example is, when I draw and paint a fruit, say blueberries, I first draw them lightly on



paper using a mechanical pencil and then paint it realistically using gouache. For the finishing touch, I use pearlescent watercolor paint that matches the colour of the blueberries and I proceed to add the colour as highlights. The highlights provide a hologram effect.

Besides adding finishing touches to the paint, regardless of the medium, trusting the process is what matters the most when it comes to bringing my paintings to life. It is the main element that influences viewers of my art pieces to invoke appeal and admiration towards my artworks, respectively.

How do you balance your creative practice with the business side of things, such as managing your Etsy shop and promoting your art?

I actually execute both actions simultaneously. This can be demonstrated with two instances. For instance, after I complete the publication of a single listing, I copy that listing link and picture, send it to my Instagram story and post. Instagram has a feature called 'Crossposting', which automatically sets up my stories and posts to Facebook, without my having to manually go on Facebook and post the same things again, which saves me a lot of time. Alternatively, all my Etsy listings have SEO titles on them, with the original title and detailed description listed in the 'Description' section of the listing. This allows for expansion and distribution of the visibility of each listing not only within Etsy, but outside Etsy as well. Etsy does permit the generation of Direct Traffic via SEOs into their website. Which guides the visitors and buyers to the sellers on Etsy. In this way, there is no need for me to pay for Etsy ads, or even Facebook ads.

When it comes to promoting my art, I ensure to do it both online and offline. When I promote my art online, I make to post my artwork as often as possible in order to keep my audience engaged and my social media active, simultaneously. While promoting my art offline, I really put myself out there by taking part in art exhibitions. I get to meet new artists in these art exhibitions and get the chance to know more about their works. I also had attempted to ask shops to put up my art pieces on display. It has been quite the journey as an artist indeed.

Susan L. Pollet is a visual artist whose works have appeared in multiple art shows and literary publications. She studied at the New York Art Students League, has been a member since 2018, and resides in NYC. She is also a published author in multiple genres, including three children's books, which she both wrote and illustrated.

Artist Statement

Drawing inspiration from a combination of her interest in color, composition, dreams, and personal emotions, Susan Pollet's work is a reflection of her search for beauty and meaning. Through the use of pastels, ink, collage or acrylics, she strives to communicate with viewers in a positive and optimistic way. Susan is a New York City-based artist whose eclectic style arises out of a desire to explore a diversity of vehicles. Drawn to haunting landscapes, warm interiors, and dream-like human forms, her works include both impressionistic and abstract themes. She has been a member of the Arts Students League of New York since 2018, and her work has appeared in many group shows and publications.

Susan L. Pollet | Sitting With It





S. Pollet

— Interview

Anastasia Braithwaite

Your work is heavily inspired by vanitas still-life paintings. What drew you to this art form, and how do you adapt its themes to resonate with a modern audience?

I was drawn into vanitas still-life paintings in my third year of university. I had always appreciated colourful displays of fruit and flowers but while studying photography, I began to research more into the history of still-life and fell in love with Vanitas. The somber messages- how each posed scene was rich with symbolism which had previously gone over my head.

To resonate with the modern audience, I present vanitas themes through abstract, playful shapes and vivid colours rather than the accurate realism of the traditional vanitas paintings. To feel modern and contemporary, I guess. I adapted these same symbols and themes into an almost childlike way where the reminder of death doesn't seem as serious. I want these bright features to fight each other for the viewers eyes, to mimic shop displays, advertisements and products that we see all throughout the day as consumers.

In what ways does the use of recycled and found images contribute to your artistic message on consumerism and sustainability?



Anastasia Braithwaite | Nothing lasts | 2024



Anastasia Braithwaite | Passing Through | 2024

Using recycled and found images is essential to my understanding of what vanitas represents. Remember life is fleeting, remember you will die, and when you do what will you be known for, remember it's what you do behind the scenes with your morals. I see it as if what you are choosing to do in your life is just for appearances, will you be happy with yourself in the end? I believe it's up to everyone to do their part in being sustainable, when no one's watching you.

How do you balance the bright, playful colors and compositions in your work with the serious themes of mortality and consumerism?

I'm not sure i consciously think of how to balance the two, I try to make them go hand in hand. I think about what specific theme/message I might want to present and then channel my signature style of bright and 'fun' through that.

Could you elaborate on how you interpret "Memento Mori" in your work? Do you aim for viewers to feel its presence subtly or more directly?

I want the presence of memento mori to be subtle in my work, to require the viewer to look past the aesthetic and deconstruct what all these symbols together may mean, like in 'Persuits and practices' specifically. I feel like in vanitas paintings the message is subtle but it's the repeated and gathered symbols all together that make it direct.

Memento mori exists in my work through symbolism of current affairs that make me think of ethics and the need to critically look at ourselves. Natural resources that we hoard in the west, war, recycling, capitalism, everything that i think is a disease to the Earth. Things that have a suffering beyond ourselves, things that should make us remember life is short, we will die and that's the only thing that is certain. Selfish consuming by individuals, businesses, governments, countries are all detrimental to life and future of the planet.

Mirre Roding

I'm a 21 year old graphic design student from the Netherlands. I love to connect with people through different perspectives of art and making. Sharing thoughts and experiences helps me further in my growth of becoming a graphic designer. Having fun is key!!!

Artist Statement

Personal projects for me are the best way to escape and feel completely free to do what I want. Zero rules and many surprises coming my way during the process. Anything is possible. I find the coincidences in my work is the most fun part. It's okay if people don't understand my work. You don't have to. I'm trying not to make sense. I'm trying to express myself, even if it's only me who sees the vision.

Mirre Roding | Floating Again | 2024





— Interview

Salma Elabdouni

Your series, "Agony in the Garden," draws inspiration from the biblical story of Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane. How did you approach translating this profound spiritual experience into visual art?

I approached translating Jesus' profound spiritual experience in the Garden of Gethsemane into visual art by using photography as a means of capturing real emotions, thoughts, characters, and stories revealed through nature and color.

In a space of solitude and silence, biblical themes and a reality of war permeated the atmosphere. Regarding my personal and spiritual life, I established connections, conjunctions, and parallels with the dichotomies of life. Colors or moods conveyed in a natural habitat include relationships with enemies and friends, confusion and clarity, chaos and peace, fear and love, insecurity and faith, betrayal and trust, and drought and abundance. Through deep contemplation, images in art connect human experiences to the spiritual world, the visible to the invisible, and the natural world to the supernatural. The images acknowledge their interdependence and expose the danger of their separation, which could imply a lack of meaning in life.

Patently enduring many troubles and considering it a joy to face trials of all kinds in the garden located in my hometown, this series should be interpreted as a transplantation of God's purpose and good plans through suffering on Earth.

The colors you use in your work, such as pink, seem to carry deep meaning in your series.



Could you elaborate on the symbolism behind the colors in your photographs?

Colors remind us of the beauty of life and the value of the creative process in the artistic fields of photography, painting, music, and books. In a society that often represses feelings, colors are a unique way to express my true personality, emotions, and state of mind.

I believe that colors also glorify God's creation and the gift of life, by highlighting the distinctive features of human nature. In my eyes, colors also bring life out of dead situations, as nature demonstrates through flowers that bloom after a dark and snowy winter.

In my series, the five colors I chose for my photographs have deep meaning. First, I associate the color orange with the power of authenticity. Orange is a fruit of exceptional quality in Morocco and reveals my true roots. It also characterizes the fruit of the Spirit, signifying love, joy, peace, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Purple represents spirituality or higher spiritual growth. This color illustrates the importance of understanding the deep things of God. Green was chosen to emphasize Psalm 23 or God's promises of peace, providence, security, and spiritual refreshment by lying down in pastures and basking in nature by calm waters. White represents purity, a new heart, and the washing away of sins. Finally, pink honors femininity and love. Although the seasons change, God's love for human beings

remains the same. This truth is reflected in the choice to include this color in each image. Soft pink is also found in peonies, which are my favorite flowers, and alludes to my heart's desires. Having the ability to transcend time and space, colors serve to honor people and places of the past. In this series, the four colors mentioned in each title reminded me of Claude Monet's garden in France and inspired me to reproduce the substance of this French garden in Canada by bringing it back to life through an artistic work and my photographic memory.

How do you find a balance between capturing the natural world and evoking spiritual or metaphysical themes in your photography?

By prioritizing the Lord in my life, I always find a balance between capturing the natural world and evoking spiritual or metaphysical themes in photography.

Paying attention to dreams, night terrors, and visions opens my mind to the best choice of a focal point that revolves around a delusional fantasy, a



Salma Elabdouni | Green | 2023

true story, or a futuristic vision based on my faith and heart's desires to reach heaven. Spending time nourishing myself with every word that comes from the mouth of God through diligent study of the Holy Scriptures also fuels exceptional creative ideas. In my humble opinion, eating and sleeping are essential habits that give me an edge over others in the artistic field.

In my creative process, I also like to take photographs without thinking too much about their meaning in the present moment. Through a lens of light, my eyes see and capture the beauty of life. Then, in solitude and communion with God, I reflect on my thoughts, emotions, and intentions regarding actions taken and filter them through a biblical lens. Emotions are not always right and I always make sure I can discern the truth from the lies. Spending time in nature allows me to make deeper spiritual connections with this world. Just as God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, I value my time to relax. Most good works directed by God were not created overnight. Patience is necessary to produce good fruit. Rest is just as important as intellectual work to be productive, to spark creativity, and to accurately evoke the natural and metaphysical worlds.

In your artist statement, you mention the idea of a "gentle spirit" and the fear of the Lord in the context of Proverbs 31:29-31. How does this verse influence the way you approach your art and your life?

Society often confuses gentleness with wanting to please others, but this idea is not biblical. Indeed, gentleness involves speaking the truth in love, as well as having boundaries, standards, morals, and values.

In life, this verse influences my behavior towards others and towards myself. It teaches me about the importance of learning to watch my tongue and control my emotional reactions by capturing my thoughts and making them obedient to Christ. Attitude is also important in art, because words, colors, and images have creative power that can be used for good or evil. Some artists (or "some") spread hate instead of love. Artwork affects people's thoughts and emotions. In these areas, my goal is to influence, change, and correct an individual for the betterment of humanity and society as a whole.

In the context of Proverbs 31:29-31, the fear of the Lord illuminates the importance of understanding that words can have a negative impact on human

beings and remain as a curse forever engraved in the mind of God. By recognizing this painful truth, works should not only have a temporal impact in this world, but an eternal impact that will be rewarded in heaven.

This series delves into the deeper meaning of a gentle spirit and strips away cultural factors that may influence how these terms are perceived or defined by others, in order to focus on the natural and spiritual aspects of life.

You often emphasize the need for solitude and deep connection with God in your work. Do you find that this solitude in nature is essential for your creative process?

Solitude in nature is absolutely essential for my soul to reflect on my individual role as a vessel of the Lord in this world and to say yes to the Spirit of God, as Marcus Rogers expresses in one of his songs featuring Noah Surratt. Away from the distractions of culture and society, meditating on the Bible in a garden can be seen as a form of worship to a God with a jealous nature who deserves my time, energy, and attention.

Nature is an ideal environment to praise God and wait for Him in silence. By listening to the voice of the Lord and eliminating the wicked voices of other spirits in this world, the garden photographed in my hometown transports human beings back to the beginning. Through my eyes, this garden also offers a glimpse of the paradise of the Garden of Eden and a moment to reflect on sin and its consequences.

For these reasons, this particular context allows me to grow spiritually, to get closer to God, to develop independence, to gain clarity of thought, and to establish a deeper connection between my experiences and biblical concepts. The changes of colors and seasons also reveal key aspects related to human and spiritual life.

While solitude is important, relationships with others are also valuable. In fact, the Bible mentions that it is not good for a man to be alone. Inspired by people from different cultures, I learn a lot about the meaning and perceptions of life through traveling, exploring parks, and helping communities thrive.

What role does prayer play in your art-making, and how do you see it influencing the final outcome of your works?

Prayer plays a crucial role in my art creation. By



Salma Elabbouni | Orange | 2023

honoring God above my own selfish desires and allowing Him to increase in power and become greater as I diminish and become less, prayer allows me to crucify my flesh and surrender my opinions to Him.

Through prayer, I become God's work and allow the divine hand to take control of the creation of the good works that He has already prepared for me in advance. In art, I do not rely on my own understanding. Putting my own thoughts aside frees my soul and gives space for love to be at the center of creation. I also do not rely on my own strength or power, but on His Spirit, to guide and direct me in the pursuit of my artistic goals. Prayer is a blessing to see life from a spiritual perspective and adjust the type of lens I use in photography. I see it influence the final outcome of my works in a way that leads to the creation of works of excellence for the glory of God and offers results as close to perfection as possible. With the right intentions in the heart to bring peace and healing to this world, the prayer of a righteous person is effective and powerful because God hears

and acts, as mentioned in James 5:13-18. In my artistic endeavors, even if my pictures are not always appreciated or recognized in the upper echelons of society, prayer leads to success in the eyes of God. In my projects, especially in photography, prayer encourages me to see failure, criticism, and rejection as opportunities for learning and spiritual growth.

What message do you hope viewers take away from your work, particularly when they engage with the visual metaphors of nature and spirituality?

By looking at my work, I hope viewers can take away a message of beauty in imperfection, embracing mistakes, enjoying a colorful journey of natural and spiritual growth, and learning to follow the right path in life.

Through visual metaphors of nature and spirituality in this context, my images and texts explain the meaning of suffering as a human being in relation to a perfect, sinless, and unblemished Savior. My works show that they are not separate, but rather interconnected. The images of trees and flowers also reveal an abundant message, both complex and simple to grasp, demonstrating the need to delve deeper into life and to be patient.



Salma Elabdouni | White | 2023



Salma Elabdouni | Purple | 2023

Ultimately, by viewing my photographic works through the prism of light, my luminous images of flowers in a garden aim to lead people to an understanding of a religious belief or a change in mindset or perspective when faced with the trials and tribulations.

The moral of my story is that we all sin and we all face difficulties in life. No one is above God except me. That is proof of my fallen human nature and it elevates the call to the royal priesthood through the divine power of the light of the world.

Anastasia Dorofeeva

My personal story up until the age of 18 is closely tied to the Ural region: I was born in the city of Osa in the Perm Krai, and from a young age, I was drawn to various forms of art – I practiced ballet and attended art school for several years. Later, I studied design and pattern making in the Ural region. Now, I live and create in St. Petersburg.

The desire to express emotions and feelings led me to independently explore various artistic techniques and forms of expression. It was only relatively recently that I turned to canvas and acrylics.

For me, paintings are an opportunity to dive into my own subconscious, to decode meanings and emotions. Through creativity, I get to know myself, and I offer viewers space for personal interpretations.

My paintings resonate differently with people, and for me, the important thing is the very fact of an emotional response, whatever it may be.





Anastasia Dorofeeva | Harmony | 2024

Contents

Interviews

Rebecca Ogun	4	Bethany Altschwager	64
VICTO	8	Julia Ulrich	70
Cristiana Giacchetti	12	Geo Sipp	76
Chris Arnold	14	Monika Ruiz-B	78
Mole^3	20	Victoria Ellison	82
Ola Mularczyk	26	Fiona Yeh	84
Jeremy Bianco	30	Njeri Gitau	88
M.B. Dalocchio	32	Rainy Tang	94
Jaymax	36	Michela Nanut	100
Derek Jackson	42	Harshita Ezil	102
Reanna Emanouel	48	Anastasia Braithwaite	108
Caitlin Peck	54	Salma Elabdouni	112
Claudi Piripippi	58		

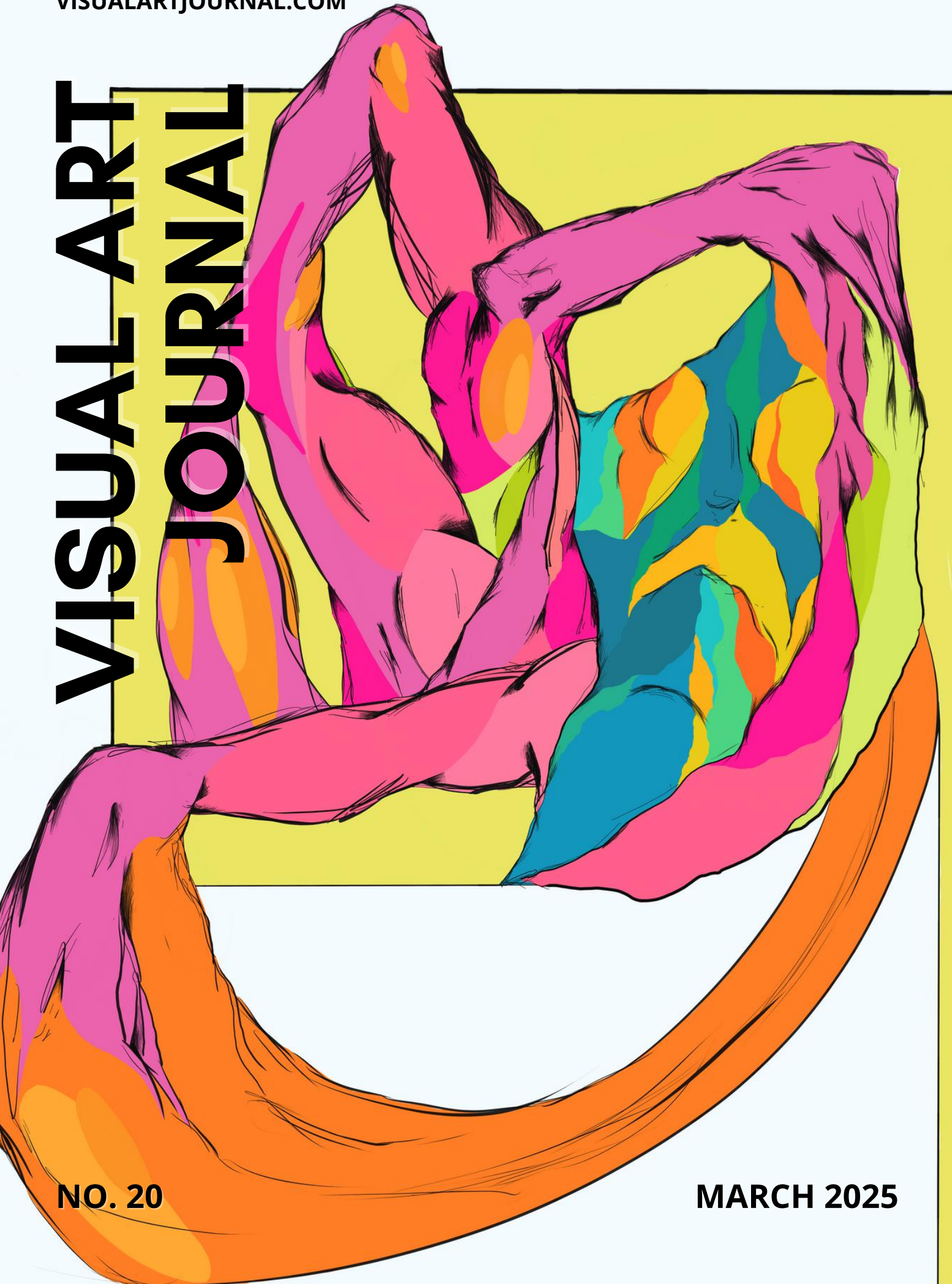
Featured artists

Lesia Shaw	6	Ernest Langston	62
Michał Oraszek	10	Igal Stulbach	68
Adam Wiebe	18	Love Aritus	74
Sarah Loecker	24	Rowan Gayle	86
Isabella Arp	28	Nafia Syeed	92
Haeil Kwon	34	Nika Sedighi	98
Ann Stefani	40	Susan L. Pollet	106
Zach Hayward	46	Mirre Roding	110
Kris Kim	52	Anastasia Dorofeeva	116
Patrycja Czajkowska	56		



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