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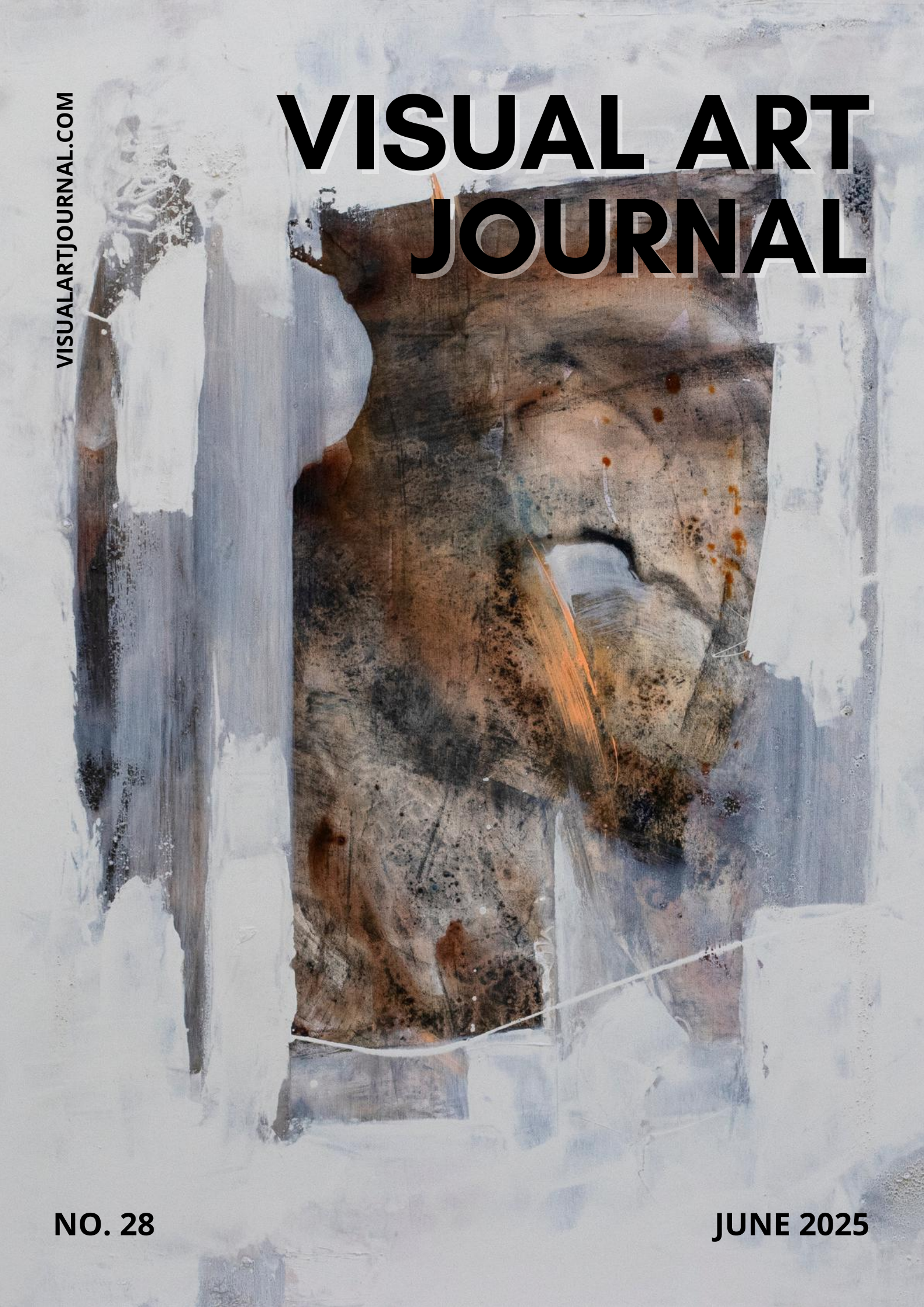
VISUAL ART JOURNAL



NO. 28

JUNE 2025

— *Intro*

Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello, dear reader,

You're holding the 28th issue of our magazine, released at the beginning of summer. In this edition, we've tried to select works filled with form, color, experimentation, and life.

As you begin to read or simply flip through the pages, try to notice which artworks make you pause. For each person, it will be a different page. It's interesting to think about why these particular works catch your attention. What is that key to our perception — and can it even be found?

Most likely, it can't. And that's the beauty of art: there are no universal answers, no well-trodden paths. To fame, money, recognition — perhaps. But not to the true love of the viewer.

Looking back at the lives of famous artists, you want to say to each of them: "Don't worry. You will be loved and recognized — just later. So don't look back. Keep creating."
Who knows — maybe someone living today is still waiting to be understood and appreciated.

Let's support those who are creating now. Those who shape and share their view of the world.

Ahead — as always — are over 100 pages filled with art and stories.
Enjoy the read!

On the Front Cover:
Rossen Donchev
Structure IV
2025

On the Back Cover:
Enzo Lauria
Self-portrait with glasses
2023

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

Enzo Lauria

You describe your works as "theoretical objects" that reflect on the image itself. Could you elaborate on how this concept manifests in your painting process?

When I talk about "theoretical objects" and "metapainting", I am referring to Victor Stoichita's concept of "self-aware images"—paintings that playfully reveal their own fictiveness. Painting thus becomes a field of visual experimentation in which art reflects on itself, its potential, its limits, its truth, and its nothingness.
According to the famous metaphor used by Leon Battista Alberti in De pictura (1435), for a long time painters have conceived painting as an "open window" through which a viewer perceives the world. Yet at times—whether intentionally or not—artists have revealed the fictiveness of this belief. Take, for example, Guido Reni's Landscape with Country Dance (1605), in which he painted two flies resting on the surface of the painting, almost as if he wished to tempt the viewer to chase them away with their hand. In this way, the true subject of the painting is not the landscape itself, but rather the painting as a flat surface on which two flies rest. In some of my works, the "Albertian window" is closed, revealing a pane of glass that is fogged up or crossed by drops of water. Thus, the true subject of these paintings is not the blurred forms depicted beyond the glass, but the painting itself as a flat, glass-like surface. These are examples of "theoretical objects" that reflect on painting's inherent flatness. Furthermore, my paintings often stage the making of the painting itself, thereby constituting themselves as "theoretical objects" that reflect on the illusory nature of representation.

Enzo Lauria | Self-portrait with glasses | 2023

How has your academic background in the History of Art and Gestalt Psychology influenced your artistic vision and the way you structure your compositions?

Gestalt Psychology is founded on the observation that we do not comprehend our world as an assemblage of disparate elements, but as a pattern of meaningful forms. In this way, Lacanian theory incorporates elements of Gestalt Psychology, particularly in the "ah-ha experience" that characterizes the mirror stage, where the infant grasps the connection between the image and its own existence. Following Lacan's research on vision, the viewer—when looking at paintings or images—may sometimes experience the uncanny feeling of being gazed at by the objects of their own gaze. This moment represents an unexpected disruption of the viewer's everyday perceptual experience and evokes a strong emotional response.
There are many accounts of this phenomenon. Jacques Lacan, for example, felt watched by the anamorphic skull depicted in Hans Holbein's The Ambassadors. Bergotte—

a fictional character in Marcel Proust's In Search of Lost Time, maybe his alter ego—was fatally obsessed with a little patch of yellow wall he noticed in Jan Vermeer's View of Delft. Georges Didi-Huberman was deeply captivated by the formless traces of colour he observed in Jan Vermeer's The Lacemaker and in Beato Angelico's frescoes at the San Marco Monastery in Florence. And the list goes on.
Like Lacan, Proust, Didi-Huberman, and many others, when I look at paintings, I love to analyze details that deeply capture my attention, even the most unlikely ones, such as cuts, erasures, craquelé, patinas, and other unpredictable elements that may affect the surface of artworks. Sometimes, I replicate them in my paintings. In this way, the vast catalogue of images offered by the History of Art has been an endless source of inspiration for my work. When I was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Urbino, my attention was captured by the powerful backgrounds in some of Goya's paintings, especially the one in The Family of the Infante Don Luis. It was a stunning example of layered painting, where layers of green over red achieved a perfect chromatic balance. I have reproduced it countless times.

In several of your paintings, we see fingers "touching" or interacting with virtual interfaces. What does this gesture represent in the context of metapainting?

According to Victor Stoichita, the pictorial devices through which artists introduce their authorial self into the image and stage the making of the image itself form the foundation of a new poetics: the poetics of metapainting. In my paintings, deictic gestures introduce my authorial self into the image—indicating points of interest or performing meaningful actions—while the drawing hands stage the making of the image itself.

The blurring, condensation, or distortion of space in your paintings creates a feeling of ambiguity. What role does this visual flattening play in your concept of perception?

The feeling of ambiguity arises from painting's enduring oscillation between flatness and depth, as seen in my painting The Image and Its Double, the Referent, which presents a real three-dimensional brushstroke alongside its representation through the chiaroscuro technique. At first glance, the viewer notices no difference between the two brushstrokes; both appear three-dimensional. However, when viewed from an oblique angle, the illusory nature of chiaroscuro becomes evident—its flatness is revealed.
The idea of art as an imitation of visual reality has dominated art history for centuries, and painters, working on flat surfaces, have devised various techniques to suggest depth: chiaroscuro, perspective, and more. However, when the surface of the painting is damaged—by cuts, erasures, craquelé, burns—or looks covered with dust, drops, condensation, etc., flatness may return stronger than before.
Flatness is always around the corner.

Do you consider your paintings to function as analog metaphors for digital experiences?

It's something I have never thought about deeply enough. Anyway, in the digital age, interaction with images is no longer a prerogative of the eye; it also engages other senses, the touch above all. In this context, the cuts, burns and erasures that I sometimes introduce in my works may suggest a form of haptic interaction with the image.

How do you decide on the symbolic or compositional role of the hand in your paintings? Is it a surrogate for the viewer or a self-reflexive element?

It is my "Deus ex machina", a device I use to resolve the plot of the painting; it tells the story.
By the way, I love the surreal images displayed in 16th and 17th century emblem books. They often depict giant disembodied hands engaged in an action to illustrate a "motto". Sometimes they serve as a source of inspiration for my work.

Can you share more about the technical process behind creating the illusion of fogged glass or screen surfaces in your paintings?

The fogged glass depicted in my paintings is created using a thin, semi-transparent layer of grey oil paint.
Glazing is a technique that consists of applying a transparent layer of paint over another thoroughly dried layer. The upper and lower layers of paint mix optically, rather than physically, creating a unique stained-glass effect that cannot be achieved through direct mixing of paint.

Mo Cheng (b. 2001) is a multimedia artist and videographer based in London. Originally from Hubei, China, she earned her MA in Interaction Design from University of the Arts London (UAL), following a BA in Digital Media Art and Technology. Her practice spans video, installation, and performance, blending experimental visuals with spatial and sound design. Her works have been exhibited at venues including the London Science Gallery, Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, BBA Gallery in Berlin, and 16art8 Gallery in Düsseldorf.

Strings is an interactive installation that transforms a piano into a metaphorical landscape of emotional tension. Within its familiar frame, the instrument becomes a living body, both fragile and responsive, reflecting the subtle dynamics of intimacy. As participants press the keys, they activate a mechanism where pressure does not simply produce sound, but alters the state of the strings. Too much force tightens them to the point of rupture, while too little lets them fall slack and silent.
This delicate tension speaks to the nature of human relationships, where both overexertion and neglect can unravel connection. By embedding risk into the act of creation, Strings invites audiences to consider how their emotional input, whether overwhelming or withdrawn, shapes the fragile balance between self and other.

Babel Experiment explores whether humans can possess the unknown through an experimental video installation and interactive experience. Inspired by the biblical Tower of Babel, where language becomes a tool for controlling the unknown, the project examines how humans attempt to possess knowledge in a possessive culture. At its core is a "Touch and Feel Box" that invites participants to project their "situated knowledge" while confronting their cognitive limitations. Drawing from Foucault's knowledge-power relations theory, the work uses experimental video and sound to reveal how information uncertainty creates tension between control and powerlessness, ultimately questioning the nature of possession itself: when we claim to possess something, the implied permanence in the subject-object relationship may be merely illusory.

Mo Cheng | Strings

Mo Cheng | Babel Experiment

Rich Heselton

What first drew you to abstract art, and how did your artistic journey begin?

My journey into abstract art began during the COVID pandemic. I started painting with my children to help ease their anxiety. In the process, I discovered a deep connection with colour and movement. Abstract art gave me the freedom to express emotions and ideas that words could not capture.
That freedom, the movement, the unpredictability, the emotion, and the reflective process drew me in and continues to inspire me today.

How has living in Tokyo influenced your artistic expression and creative process?

Tokyo constantly feeds my curiosity and creativity. It is a city of contrasts; quiet shrines tucked beneath towering neon, the pulse of tradition alongside modern motion. Living here means being surrounded by rhythm and energy, and all of it finds its way into my work. Every walk, every season, every corner of the city adds something to my process, shaping the way I see and create.
Having spent over thirty years in Japan, much of it dedicated to practising martial arts, I've developed a strong sensitivity to movement, rhythm, and stillness. That embodied awareness naturally carries into my painting. Each brushstroke becomes a physical gesture, guided by breath, focus, and flow.

Rich Heselton | Euphoria

Your work emphasises colour, movement, and emotion. Can you describe how you approach translating emotions into abstract forms?

My process follows a rhythm of discover, reflect, and rise. Each painting begins with a moment of discovery, a feeling, memory, or sensation that sparks the need to create. I reflect through colour and movement, letting the canvas become a space where emotion flows freely. There is often chaos at first, but within that disorder, I search for balance and clarity. As the layers build, the painting begins to rise, revealing something deeper — a transformation not just on the canvas but within myself. It is a journey from instinct to insight, stillness to motion, shadow to light.

Can you walk us through the creation of one of your favourite recent works?

One of my personal favourites so far is Chaotic Progress. It was created at a time when I was navigating inner uncertainty while also sensing a pull toward growth.

Rich Heselton | Glimmers of Hope

I approached the canvas without a fixed plan, only a desire to capture the raw, unfiltered momentum of change.
The colours in this piece speak for themselves. Bold reds and oranges represent intensity, passion, and determination. Deep blues and purples cut across them, suggesting moments of doubt, fear, or reflection. Gold is layered in spontaneous strokes to symbolise the hope and the power of self-belief that surfaces from uncertainty and chaos.
The strokes are energetic and unpredictable. Broad, sweeping gestures clash with jagged, erratic lines. At first glance, it may feel chaotic, but within that turbulence is a rhythm. A push and pull.
This balance of spontaneity and instinct reflects how I experience progress in life: it's rarely neat, never linear, but always moving.
Here's the short poem I wrote to accompany it:
Chaotic Progress
A chaos of brushstrokes, a frenzy of colour and shape
A journey towards the unknown, a leap of faith
A blur of motion, a reflection of time
A sense of progress, that is ours to define.
This piece reminds me that the path forward doesn't have to be perfect to be meaningful.
It's in the layers, the chaos, the risk of uncertainty and losing control where true transformation begins.

Do you see your art as a reflection of your environment or more as an internal expression?

My paintings come from a place of reflection and introspection. Every sound, shadow, and sunrise around me shapes what I paint. But what appears on the canvas isn't just what I see, it's how I feel it. My environment flows through me and emerges transformed. What begins as an external stimulus often becomes an inner response, which eventually finds its way back out onto the canvas.

How do you choose your colour palette, and what role does intuition play in your process?

My colour palette is often inspired by something I've seen, heard, or felt, or by the elements: wind, fire, water. Blues and purples reflect my childhood by the sea, evoking calm and constant movement and change. Oranges, reds, and yellows convey energy and passion, while gold and silver symbolise hope and inner strength. Intuition guides everything. I rarely plan. I follow instinct and emotion, letting colours interact spontaneously and trusting the painting to lead the way.

What do you hope viewers feel or experience when looking at your work?

I hope they feel a connection, whether it is to a memory, a feeling, or a part of themselves that is hard to name. My work is about creating a space where emotion moves freely.
If someone pauses in front of a piece and feels seen, or finds their own story in the layers, that is the real reward.
I want the viewer to feel invited to discover something within themselves, to reflect on it, and to rise from that reflection with a renewed sense of emotion, imagination, or understanding.

Rich Heselton | Chaotic Progress

Devon Hopkins

My name is Devon, and I am an 18 year-old student studying at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. I have a huge passion for art, whether that be painting, drawing, sketching or digital, and hope to one day get a job in a very creative field.

Project Statement
Some of these works are simply coloured pencil drawings of characters from my favourite shows/ games that can take weeks to finish, and some of them are paintings that portray really heavy emotions that I've struggled with.

Devon Hopkins | Max Pencil Drawing

Devon Hopkins | Ekko Pencil Drawing

Devon Hopkins | Claustrophic Painting

Interview

Tatiana Vashchishina

What brought you into the world of tattoo artistry in 2014? Was it a conscious decision or a spontaneous step?

Tattoos have always fascinated me, and I seriously started thinking about them while studying in my second year at university, back in 2006. However, I had no understanding of where or how to begin. In 2014, I finally decided to visit a tattoo studio in Kaliningrad with my portfolio of airbrush artwork. By that time, I had already built a solid foundation of knowledge, which allowed me to secure a job right away.

How has your experience with airbrushing, painting walls, cars, and motorcycles influenced your tattooing style?

During my training, I experimented with different styles, but I was always most drawn to realism—working with textures, volume, and atmosphere. Airbrushing played a significant role in shaping my approach because, just like tattooing, it requires transferring a sketch onto a car, motorcycle, or interior wall with maximum precision so that it looks like a photograph. I love working with details.

What was the first tattoo you did for a client? What emotions did you feel?

My first tattoo was an image from Pinterest in the trash-polka style—a black-and-white cat in a helmet with red accents, which the client requested. At that time, everyone used Pinterest as a source of inspiration and references for sketches. Fortunately, technology has since advanced, and artists now have many tools to create unique designs, making tattoos truly one-of-a-kind.
The experience of my first tattoo was unforgettable. The stress and level of responsibility were enormous. My adrenaline was through the roof. But in tattooing, it is crucial to be in control of your emotions.

What is the most important aspect of communicating with a client before starting a tattoo?

The most important part of working with a client is the initial consultation—it determines everything. During the consultation, you can see how much your vision of the tattoo aligns with the client's, how open they are to your suggestions, and how much they trust your professionalism.
Sometimes, within the first minute of conversation, you already understand what the client wants and how to bring their idea to life. This is the key to success and a comfortable working process moving forward.

Which of your projects has been the most challenging or memorable?

One of my most memorable projects took place this autumn at a tattoo convention in Warsaw. Normally, I participate in categories featuring black-and-gray tattoos, but this time, I decided to challenge myself and do something I had never done before—a two-day color tattoo session.
The project was a sphynx cat with a parrot. My model's complete trust and endurance allowed us to work for nearly eighteen hours over two days. We made it into the top six best works, which is an excellent result for my first time competing in this category.

What are the main differences between working in a tattoo studio and working solo?

For three years, I had my own tattoo studio in Kaliningrad, where I was not only a tattoo artist but also a manager, photographer, and more—I handled everything on my own. I know from personal experience how much work it takes to run a studio, even with a minimal staff.
When you work for a studio as an employee, you are freed from responsibilities like advertising, ordering supplies, cleaning, initial client communication, scheduling, and so on. This frees up a lot of time that can be spent on professional development or enjoying time with family.
Working in a team also fosters growth. You share knowledge and techniques with colleagues, and they share their discoveries with you. Even if you work in different styles, there is always something new to learn and incorporate into your own work. Tattooing is a constant process of development and experimentation—whether it's improving color saturation or optimizing healing techniques.

Do you have a dream or a goal you are striving for in your tattoo career?

My biggest dream is to achieve a high technical level in my work and develop my own distinctive style in realism so that people from all over the world come to me specifically for animal tattoos. That would be the greatest reward.

Anna Archinger (b. 1994, Neuburg an der Donau) is a self-taught German artist based in Dronningmølle, Denmark. Anna has worked as a professional photographer since 2022. Her art practice focuses on horse photography as her fascination with horses goes beyond a mere passion. She lives at the farm Enggaarden, an education center specialized in teaching the “Academic Art of Riding,” where her connection to horses recalls seminal artists’ fascination with horse study. Within the last three years, Anna has been elaborating a stunning body of equine artwork, some of which was distinguished with the Honorable Mention in the Professional category by International Photo Awards USA (2023) and was shortlisted in a private competition run by the Motif Collective Photography Gallery (2023). Anna’s work was presented in art venues such as The Glasgow Gallery of Photography (Glasgow, United Kingdom), the Black and White Photography Festival (Athens), and the Chateau Gallery (Louisville).

Project Statement
As an equine photographer, I am deeply committed to exploring the profound connection between humans and horses—a bond that has been immortalized in art and literature for centuries. Horses are not merely subjects in my photography; they are powerful beings with whom I share a deep, mutual connection. This relationship is rooted in respect, trust, and the understanding that a horse’s consent and cooperation are essential. This dynamic, in turn, informs every image I create, capturing the authentic essence of these majestic animals. My artistic practice is greatly influenced by the "academic art of riding," an equestrian tradition emphasizing communication and harmony between horse and rider. This tradition, which dates back to the Renaissance, has inspired my approach to photography, where I strive to portray horses in a way that reflects their innate beauty, grace, and individuality. Whether photographing a horse in motion or at rest, I aim to highlight their character and their unique bond with their human companions. Historically, horses have fascinated artists, often depicting them as symbols of power, freedom, and nobility. My work is a contemporary continuation of this tradition, drawing inspiration from the objective studies of early photographers like Eadweard Muybridge and the more expressive, painterly techniques of the Pictorialist movement. I enjoy experimenting with various photographic techniques, such as long-exposure photography, to convey the fluidity and dynamism of horses in motion, creating images that evoke a sense of timelessness and transcendence. Living at Enggaarden, an equine education center in Denmark, I am fortunate to be surrounded by these incredible creatures daily. This environment allows me to immerse myself in the study and practice of equine photography, continually refining my craft and deepening my understanding of the horse-human relationship. My work celebrates this bond—an exploration of the light and joy that horses bring into our lives and a testament to their enduring presence in our shared history and culture. Ultimately, my photographic work invites others to experience the timeless beauty of horses and the profound connection we share with them. Through my lens, I aim to capture and communicate the essence of this relationship, offering viewers a glimpse into the world of equine art that is both visually stunning and emotionally resonant.

Anna Archinger | Framed Archinger

Maria Rosa Mystica

Your work blends graphic design with deep emotional and spiritual themes. How did this intersection of art and introspection begin for you?

My creative process began with the simple act of writing down the inner unrest I was feeling — the unresolved questions and emotional tensions that surfaced in quiet moments. Through reflection, I came to see that these thoughts were often rooted in deeper questions about who I am and where my soul belongs in the larger scheme of the universe. What began as personal introspection gradually transformed into the core narrative that shapes my artistic work today.

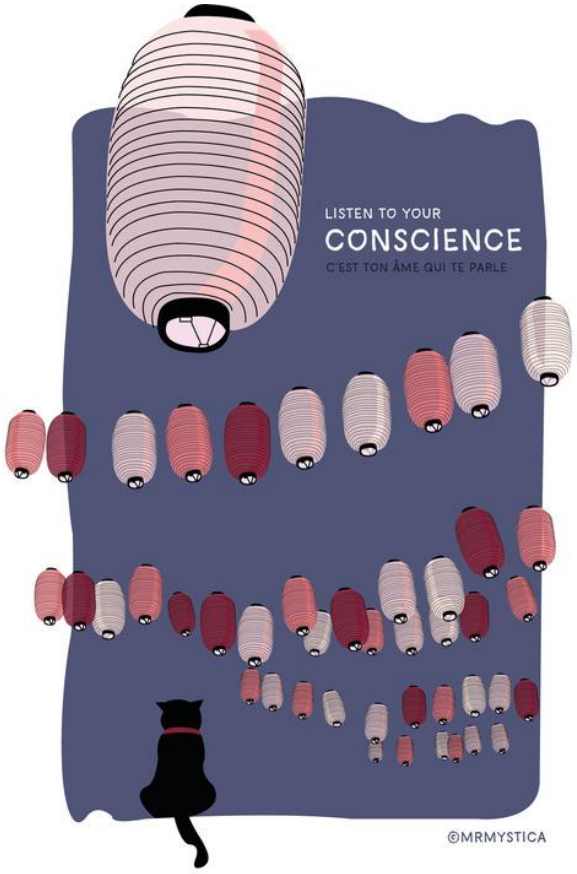
Maria Mystica | Keep Going | 2025

"The Art of Slowing Down" is both a visual and philosophical project. What inspired you to explore the contrast between speed and stillness?

Through illustration, I explore moments when the soul speaks, particularly in a series titled The Art of Slowing Down, which reflects on slowness as a quiet form of resistance and self-awareness. Inspired by early career observations and later influenced by texts like Paul Lafargue's The Right to Be Lazy, this body of work has evolved over more than a decade. It invites reflection on how we can reconnect with our instincts and deeper purpose while navigating a fast-paced world—not by rejecting urgency, but by learning to balance movement with stillness.

Many of your illustrations contain subtle humor and warmth—how important is playfulness in your creative process?

My artistic practice is rooted in emotional honesty, drawing deep inspiration from the world of stand-up comedy—where vulnerability is transformed into shared laughter and truth is delivered with warmth and wit. I aim to bring that same unfiltered expression into my illustrations, creating work that feels sincere, instinctive, and alive. Humor and subtlety are not simply aesthetic choices for me; they are essential tools for connection, reflection, and authenticity. They allow me to explore complex emotions in a gentle, human way.
This approach took shape through my exploration of comedic writing, influenced by The New Comedy Bible by Judy Carter and a stand-up workshop at the École du One Man Show in Paris. These experiences taught me how humor can disarm, reveal, and resonate—lessons I carry into every piece I create. My visual language is a blend of playfulness and emotional depth, always seeking to communicate with soul.



Maria Mystica | Listen to Your Conscience | 2025

Can you share a personal moment of "slowing down" that influenced a particular illustration in this series?

My work begins in stillness. I explore the moments when intuition surfaces—when we pause long enough to hear the softer, often overlooked voices within: playfulness, memory, uncertainty, emotion.
This sensitivity to pace is not just about how I create, but why. Influenced by personal experience, philosophical texts, and critical questions about modern systems, my work seeks to reconnect with instinct and question the structures that separate us from meaning. Much like the figure of Sisyphus in Camus' philosophy, I find value in the act of making itself—an ongoing, conscious return to presence, without the need for justification or grand narrative.
Ultimately, I aim for my illustrations to feel alive—not just visually, but emotionally. They are invitations to pause, reflect, and remember that our inner voice still speaks, even amidst the noise.

Your color palettes are very distinctive. How do you choose them, especially for emotionally driven themes?

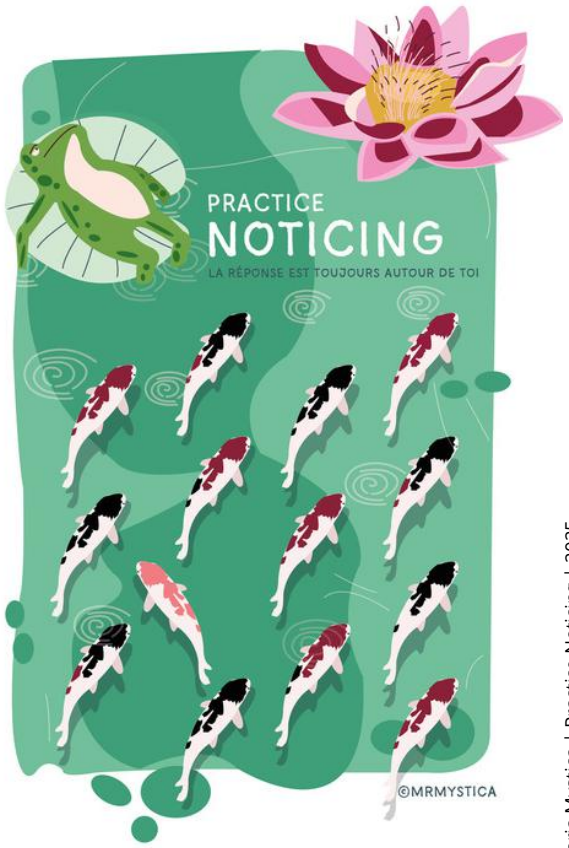
This project began just as spring approached. In Paris, spring often evokes the tradition of hanami—the Japanese custom of appreciating cherry blossoms—which finds its parallel here when Parisians gather to admire the blooming sakura in Parc de Sceaux.
The symbolism of spring as a time of renewal and new beginnings became the guiding inspiration for both the theme and the color palette. The soft pink of the sakura flower served as the starting point, with additional hues thoughtfully selected to support and deepen the emotional tone. By limiting the palette to 3–5 colors, the work achieves a sense of clarity, balance, and visual harmony.

As someone who has lived in both Indonesia and France, how do these cultures influence your artistic vision?

Having lived between Indonesia and France, my artistic vision is shaped by both cultures: Indonesia instills in me a deep spirituality, humility, and appreciation for stillness and intuition, while France fosters critical thinking, individuality, and refined visual language. A key influence bridging these worlds is Tan Malaka's Madilog, which advocates blending materialism, dialectics, and logic to challenge inherited beliefs—a philosophy that mirrors my own creative balance between emotional depth and structured reasoning. This fusion of intuition and critical analysis informs how I tell visual stories, use color, and explore the intersection of personal and collective experience in my work.

What role does intuition play in your design process?

Intuition is at the heart of my design process, guiding me beyond logic into a more emotional, instinctive space where authentic ideas emerge. As if reminded of Rick Rubin's The Creative Act: A Way of Being, I view creativity as a state of openness and presence. By allowing space to pause, reflect, and trust my initial sparks, I create work that is not only visually refined but also emotionally alive and deeply honest. Opening possibilities for a new way of being.

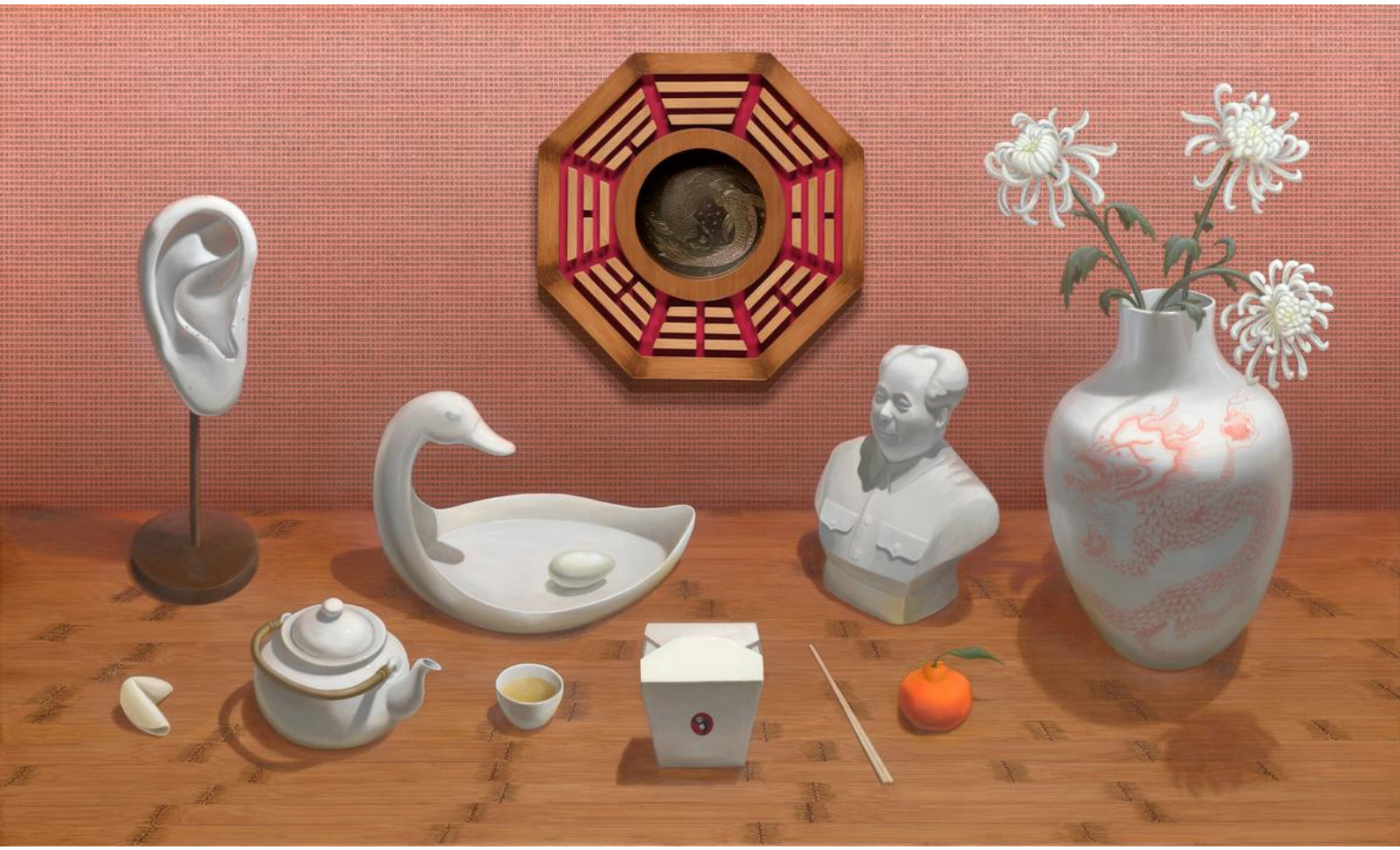


Maria Mystica | Practice Noticing | 2025

Bari Luis

Born in Armenia, current studio is in Los Angeles. Studied art in Sant Petersburg, Russia and Los Angeles.

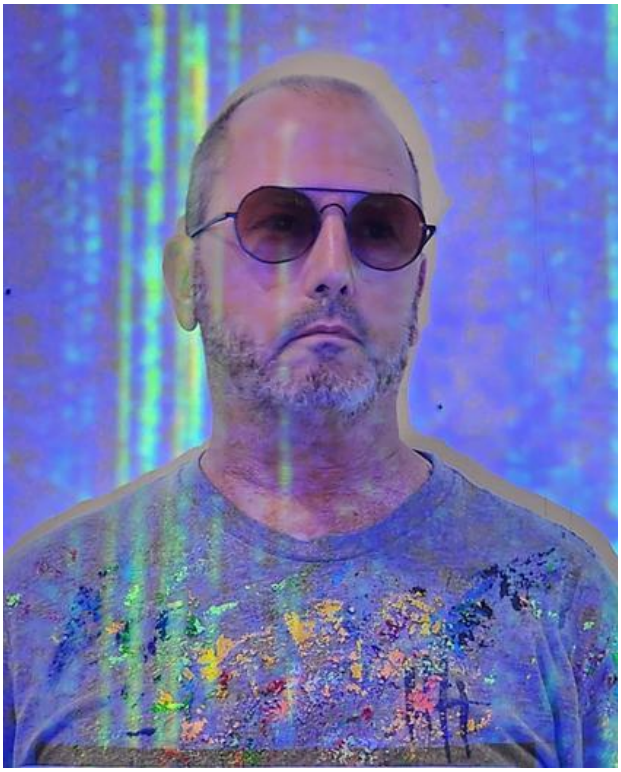
Bari Luis | Tao of Chinese Wall



Bari Luis | Belgian Magic

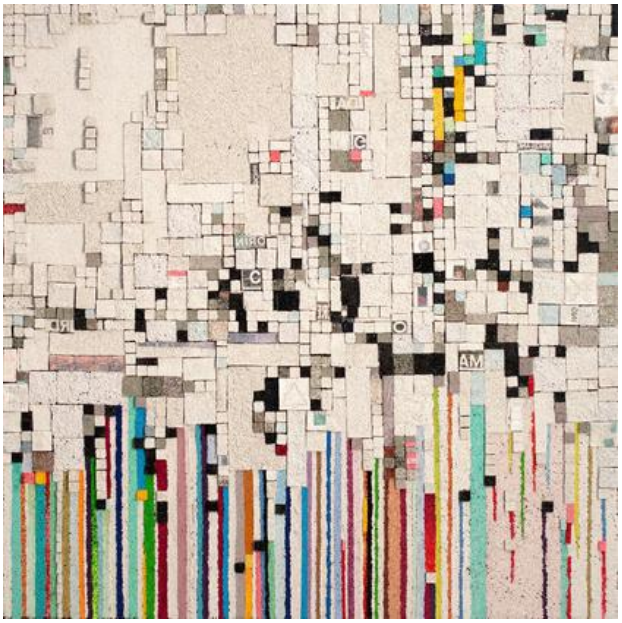
Bari Luis | Italian Romance

Bob Landström



Your works use crushed, pigmented volcanic rock—a very unconventional medium. What first drew you to this material, and how did you develop your technique?

Years ago, I realized that using materials closely tied to my subject could make my work more meaningful. Since then, the choice of material has been essential to me, with Earth being especially important. I feel a deep connection to it. In places where the Earth's presence is striking, I feel this connection even more.
Take the American Southwest, for example. The deserts and canyons there radiate the Earth's power. The vastness and sense of time in those landscapes are awe-inspiring. This connection to the Earth led me to volcanic rock. It's a material that fascinates me with its transformation from liquid to solid, shaped by fire and air. There's something extraordinary about it.



Bob Landström | Rayleigh Incident | 2024

I started experimenting with volcanic rock as an art material decades ago. Over time, I've developed new ways to use it. My techniques keep evolving, and, by now, volcanic rock feels like an old friend.

Many of your themes explore scientific and metaphysical concepts. How do you balance intuitive artistic expression with scientific research?

I think art and science have a lot in common: they're both about curiosity and exploring the unknown. A scientist might ask, "What if we try this?" or "Why does this happen?"—the same kinds of questions I ask when I create art. That process of questioning and experimenting is what connects the two.
For me, it's not about separating intuition and research, but letting them work together. The spark of an idea can come from either direction. They feed into each other, making the process richer and deeper. It's really about blending the two rather than keeping them apart.

Can you tell us more about your process of capturing electromagnetic static and incorporating it into your visual or audio work?

Static is everywhere, it's just a matter of how you bring it into focus. Radio is one of my main tools for capturing static. I explore the spectrum—shortwave, AM, FM—spending hours listening to and observing what happens between the

Bob Landström | Mercury, Installation View

channels. Some of the receivers and transmitters I use are ones I've built myself. Not because they're better, but because the devices themselves are part of the artwork.
Once I've gathered recordings during these explorations, I take them into the studio. There, I use software like Adobe tools, Ableton Live, and occasionally custom programs in MAX/MSP to shape the raw material. The process feels like a dialogue—I'm discovering patterns, introducing structure or taking it away, and allowing unexpected moments to guide me. The surprises that emerge make this especially fun. It's a balance of experimentation and intentionality, transforming static into something that resonates emotionally and conceptually.

What role does sound play in your visual art practice, especially in your kinetic pieces?

Sound happens naturally when materials move together or come apart. I don't think of my kinetic work as sound sculpture—it's not about creating sound for its own sake. Instead, the sound's frequency becomes significant because it relates to the materials or the choreography of the motion. The sound is experiential, rather than about being an instrument. It's an extension of the movement and energy of the piece, something you feel as much as you hear. It adds another layer to the work, without being the primary focus.

Do you consider your work to be more about the physical material or the conceptual message behind it—or is it a synthesis of both?

It's absolutely a synthesis of both. In every piece, one informs the other. Even in my more minimal works, the inherent beauty of the material often conveys the "what" or "why" of the piece. The material and concept are intertwined, each enriching the other.

How has your background in electrical engineering influenced your creative approach and experimentation in art?

It influences my work in ways that might not be immediately obvious. Because my practice often bridges art and science, my technical background affords me a deeper understanding of the concepts I explore. When I was younger, I blamed the time in engineering classes as a distraction. Now, I see it was a complement to my studio practice all along. My engineering education also introduced me to the beauty of mathematics. It's abstractly and conceptually elegant. I find its visual representations captivating—even sensuous in a way.

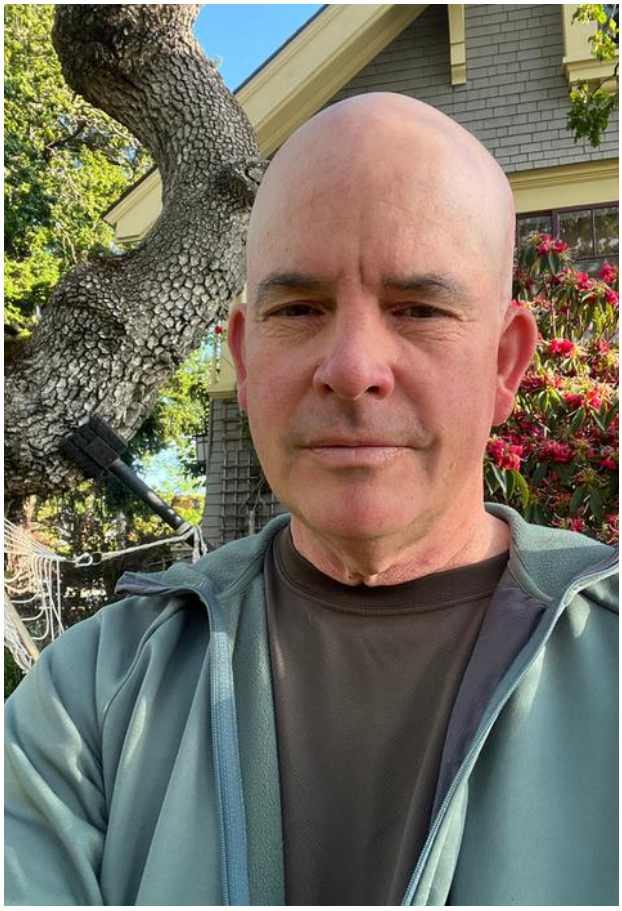
Your paintings often evoke a sense of energy and vibration. How do you think viewers physically or emotionally respond to your textured surfaces?

Viewers definitely react to the material of the paintings. The texture can be a hook, and when they learn what the material actually is, they become loaded with reaction. It's a unique painting medium and it seems to resonate with viewers. Not everyone gets the connection between the material and the act of art making, but many do.

Bob Landström | Faraday Incident | 2025

Interview

Gordon Doucette



You mention replacing your mason's hammer with an artist's pencil. Can you tell us more about this transition from manual labor to artistic expression?

I think in each case I was making art or being led by that sensibility. In the trade work I started to feel this loss at the end of each project that my message was not getting across, so it was a shifting of the arena or client to better convey my message. I also think it was this dragon I had to slay. This notion of denial I carried around of wanting to make art or to be an artist. The other facet I thought about was my daughter who is a painter and aspiring artist. I knew words were difficult between us and I wanted to encourage and inspire her. The best way I thought was to do it myself lead by example in a way.

Your process begins with a "deliberately accidental" line. How do you define that balance between chance and intention in your work?

I think it begins with speed, at a certain velocity a side of my thinking gives up, maybe the controlling side or the side that wants safety. There is then an altering of my thinking. At some moments it's like sticking my finger in a socket not in a painful way but this excited elation, particularly in 'Redeemer'. Then there's a reality check a need to connect. I use light and dark shading to create depth that the eye is comfortable with. That's the certainty. At a point it's like a pane of glass shattering, I think about trees pushing through the layer from earth to sky, life in a nut shell. There's a sense of infinity too around the image in the whiteness of the paper I like.

What draws you to the theme of the "origins of creativity"?

I think was it just a continuation of work I was doing in University. I was interested in these cave paintings at Lascaux and Altamira, one in particular where the image follows the shape of the rock face. This seems to me a point in time when the author of this had the image in their minds eye that it formed in the individual's consciousness and then proceeded to enhance and form the image. The beginnings of art possibly.

How does your background as a mason influence your artistic vision and materials today?

Work I was doing at University was quite feeble and much of it just fell apart, so the masonry I think was an evolutionary fixing of that problem. Further to your question though I saw a connection with a certain artists paintings and the stonework in the

sense there was no focal point, the work in it's entirety was the focal point. So, the drawings are a continuation of strictly object only no background. I'm making a series of sculptures rockets and bombs built with rocks and mortar ala trade work style titled "Secrets of the Universe" so that's a direct influence.

Do you see your work as a continuation of ancient creative impulses?

Yes, absolutely. Stone masonry is such an ancient way of building. The physical practice seems to open a dialogue where with these very old structures you begin to see how they were thinking and the solutions of how to build were similar.

What role does physical effort or discipline play in your current practice, compared to your previous profession?

It's definitely easier on my back. I always seem to push too hard with the pencil and I've snapped off alot of lead nibs. So, I'm always trying to be gentler and take a softer approach.

What message or feeling do you hope the viewer takes away from your compositions?

I hope the viewer gets engaged. That the image can hold their attention for more than the need to scroll to the next one. That I've conveyed something interesting to look at.

Rossen Donchev is well known in the Bulgarian art world as a fine art painter and poet. He worked for over 20 years as master icon painter in the famous Ethnographic Open Air Museum “Etara” near the city of Gabrovo. His team of the icon-painting studio searches for, discovers and popularises rare motifs from the Bulgarian Christian tradition and become a trademark of quality and professionalism. Rosen is recognized as a master icon painter by the Bulgarian Chamber of Crafts and the Association of Masters of Folk Art. During all this time, he has been working also in the field of contemporary painting, combining oil technique with egg tempera substrates, natural pigments or old wood and incorporating deep Christian symbolism and metaphors in his works. Rossen has more than 20 Solo Exhibitions and has participated in over 30 group forums in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, Greece, Turkey. His awards and nominations includes VI Balkan Quadrennial of Painting "Myths and Legends of My People" - Stara Zagora (2024), World Biennale of Contemporary Art in Florence, Italy (2017), National Triennial "Bridges", Gabrovo (2017), Hristo Tsokev Award of the Municipality of Gabrovo for artistic achievements (2014), Award at the Autumn Salon of Arts in Kazanlak (2011). He curated several projects in the field of contemporary art together with local galleries and he participated in various plein airs and international forums. He also released some author projects in the field of literature and theater. He is author of poetic, essayistic and critical texts. His most significant projects are: PRE-COLUMBUS WORLD, PORTRAIT OF A VILLAGE, ULTRAMARINE INTERVENTION, ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SOUL. In the last few years, Rossen has been working on his newest project "Warm Gray...", which raises questions about minimalism and aesthetics in the field of contemporary painting. In 2010 he created, together with his wife, a gallery for contemporary Bulgarian art called ATELIETO. Part of the work of the ATELIETO is dedicated to developing the talent of gifted children and youth. Donchev has a master's degree in plastic and fine arts from the University of Shumen and Master of Slavic Philology from Sofia University. Member of the Union of Bulgarian Artists.

Project Statement
Many of my works contain images, parables and allegories from Christian painting, used as metaphors and symbols with a contemporary meaning. From angels, goddesses and infants to fairies and dragons flying next to saints, all naturally blend together with his abstract worlds where the concrete is absent. It's all a game of colour, material and imagination. These figures act as icons and symbols - hosts for more sensual themes of magic, harmony, kindness and love. In all my work over the years I have explored the path from drawing to the abstract. From concrete images to the creation of signs. The transformation of the complex multi-layered philosophy of human knowledge into a sign with ritual meaning, as in cave paintings of our ancient ancestors. The search for these signs, the use of texts, the work with natural materials and natural pigments, the collage and often the assemblage in my conceptual projects are actually what sets me apart as an artist.

Rossen Donchev | The Virgin Mary with Angels | 2023

Rossen Donchev | Structure IV | 2025

Bianka Veselovská

You are a self-taught artist. How has this shaped your creative journey and artistic identity?

I've always believed that passion for art is enough to find one's place in the art world and that belief has been my inner motivation to pursue art.
Although I studied Italian language and literature at university, I never lost my passion and continuously worked on my artistic development in my spare time.
In the past, I thought that not studying art formally would put me at a disadvantage – either because I wouldn't have enough time to dedicate to art or because I lacked an art diploma. But instead, I discovered just how deep my love for art really is, because even during the busiest periods in my life, I found time to paint.
Now, I actually think that I gained an advantage by not studying art professionally – even though I'm quite a perfectionist, I feel free from all the "rules" that professional artists are expected to follow.

Bianka Veselovska | The Art of not giving a F-ck | 2023

Your work often centers on female figures and sisterhood. How did this focus evolve over time?

Yes, my greatest inspiration are women, who are the central figures in my paintings and illustrations.
I've always been surrounded by very strong and determined women who shaped my foundation as a girl. However, from a young age, I noticed that these incredible women were raised to see one another as competitors rather than pillars of support. In fact, even today, due to social superstructures, women are led to compete against each other (and against men) - a concept I find unappealing.
As I mentioned earlier, I studied Italian literature and some of the literary themes I focused on included liberation from the gender roles in patriarchal society, women's identity and female body in literature. Researching these topics deeply inspired me and pushed me to explore my own relationship with other women, with my body and with my identity.
After much reflection on women's roles in society, I naturally began to intertwine these themes with my art. I've created a safe space in my paintings for women's identity– free from socially constructed roles – with the goal of empowering them. I depict true friendship, liberation and an innate connection between all women. This is how my art became a celebration of sisterhood.

What role does nudity play in your art, especially in terms of representing identity and liberation?

I choose to portray a predominantly nude female bodies as a representation of true female identity that is not veiled by any gender-based role.
In my paintings, the naked body symbolizes being your true self. It represents the most liberated form of identity one can achieve. It's even more powerful to be naked in the presence of friendship, because it means being true not only to yourself, but also to others.
There is nothing left to hide under the weight of clothes that often aren't even our own. The roles we play in society – whether as women or as men – are often written by someone else. In my artworks, we are liberated, both internally and externally.

How do you choose the color palette for your works? Is it intuitive, symbolic, or both?

Actually, it's both. I have my favorite color palettes and pink plays a major role in them. I chose this color because it symbolizes love and affection, and evokes positive feelings in me. The rest of the palette for each artwork is mainly intuitive. For me, the only rule when it comes to selecting colors is to keep things colorful, positive and joyful.

Your compositions feel both intimate and empowering. What emotions do you hope viewers experience when seeing your work?

I really hope that the first emotion is love.
The faces and bodies in my artworks are representations of a positive wave of energy, friendship and freedom. With all my heart, I wish that everyone who sees my work has someone in their life who embodies these emotions – and that they can connect this feeling with my art. If that's not the case for someone right now, I hope they can imagine a future "pilar", they can lean on in difficult times.
My art speaks especially to women, as I offer a feminine point of view. It's for those who may be afraid to show their liberated selves to the world, fearing judgment even from other women. Through my work, I want to empower them and remind them that there's no shame in being your true self.
Creating this kind of loving and supporting space for women is something I feel is missing today and with my art I would like to help fill that gap, little by little.

How has your move from Slovakia to Italy influenced your perspective or artistic expression?

Back in Slovakia and in Czech Republic, where I lived for several years, I used art as a way to cope and release suppressed emotions. It became my personal form of therapy, like a session with a friend I could turn to whenever I was overwhelmed or needed to clear my thoughts. The art I created during that period carries both a positive and negative "charge", as it mostly mirrored my actual experiences and emotional state.
When I moved to Naples it marked a major turning point for me. I immediately felt more empowered and free – both as artist and as person. In general, the environment has a huge impact on my creative process and in Naples I've found a really energetic, anarchic and inspiring one. At first, I struggled with building friendships and opening up, but I began to imagine the kind of community I wanted, worked toward it and eventually discovered a beautiful art community and met amazing people.
That's how my perspective shifted – especially in seeing "problems" from the positive perspective. By "problems" I mean lack of true friendships, mutual support between women, positivity and love.
Instead of just pointing out what was missing, I tried to take action by imagining the world I wanted to live in. I still apply this mindset today. By visualizing and depicting loving, supporting and empowering female relationships in my artwork, I focus my energy on building better connections – with myself and others.

Could you describe your process when starting a new piece—from concept to completion?

The concept always begins with an emotion I want to translate into a painting or illustration. Sometimes the process – from having an idea to the final piece – takes just one day. Other times, it can take days, months or even years. I often need the artwork to sit and mature in my mind or in my sketchbook for a while, to build that emotional connection between the piece and myself, and process everything I want to express through it.
Physically, most of the times, I start with a neon pink acrylic underpainting. It instantly kicks the energy of the piece and helps me overcome the intimidation of a blank white surface. I also love when the underpainting peek through in the finished work. From there, I move on to the sketch and the first layers of acrylics. Once I'm satisfied with all the acrylic layers, I add details using colored pencils and wax pastels.

Bianka Veselovska | Sisterhood | 2024

Tina Urbajs (b. 2000) is a Slovenian artist and photographer. Her artistic practice is based on exploring different art mediums, from painting, print making, ceramic, analogue photography and experimenting in the darkroom. She mostly enjoys abstract forms of expression as it allows each viewer to see and feel something else, rather than producing realistic images.

Project Statement
In her recent works she has focused on the relationship between colours and forms of overlap and concealment to create dreamy images, that in correlation with title evoke moments that were already experienced, but differ from each individual.

Tina Urbajs | Fresh Rotten Fruit | 2025

Tina Urbajs | Palimpsest | 2025

Carolyn O'Neill

Your work is deeply influenced by early abstract expressionists. What drew you to the movement initially?

Whilst studying visual art at Tafe (Technical and Further Education) in Western Australia we were encouraged to keep a visual art journal. As I began to search for inspiration, the notion of a painting not having to be representational had a profound effect on me. In these genres of works the emotional application of paint and mixed media becomes essential to the composition. The rawness and sense of freedom in not being constrained by representation, but rather a visual dialogue is what first drew me to abstract expressionism.
This became a catalyst and directed me to explore the works and impact of the early abstract expressionists from the New York art school. Thus began the search of imagery of works by Willem De Kooning, Helen Frankenthaller and Jackson Pollock, to name a few. It was their exceptional use of bold colour, composition and expressiveness that I yearned to capture in my work.

Carolyn O'Neill | Pink lakes | 2024

Can you describe how the landscapes of the Flinders Ranges are currently influencing your palette and composition?

Since moving to this region in South Australia in recent years the Flinders Ranges have become my muse. This unique arid landscape is ever changing in hue and form. The ranges dominate the skyline amidst a sea of cascading salt bushes. However, it is not the literal landscape that I seek to replicate, but to distil the very essence. The palette is muted and earthy. It is rich with subtle tones of violet and hues of reddish-brown ochre. The compositions vaguely resemble landscapes however I feel that it is more about the mark making that truly brings these works to life. Scratching, scraping and drips of paint mixed with medium evoke the rich tapestry of this vast and dense terrain.

What role does intuition play in your painting process?

Intuition is my guide. I first realised this when I struggled to draw anything in great detail, so I just decided to improvise. One of my Tafe lecturers told me that I relied 'on a wing and a prayer.'
This became my strength and she just let me do my thing and encouraged me to pursue abstract expressionism. Each mark informs the next, it is an unplanned response. I navigate without a map and value the process over the end product.

You describe your process as involving both

Carolyn O'Neill | Tubular bells | 2024

construction and deconstruction. Can you expand on how this editing shapes your final pieces?

The beginning stages of constructing a painting involves an initial stream of consciousness mark making such as gestural brush strokes gradually building up into layers. At this stage I am just laying down paint and not yet considering the overall composition. This is quite liberating where I seek to trust myself to let go without restraint or expectation.
In order for clarity of composition to be achieved the painting needs to be tethered or deconstructed. Some marks will be retained and some will be veiled with diluted paint so that the visual history is still evident. Other areas might be strategically covered; it is back and forth process of flux. It is vital that I don't become too attached or 'precious' about these marks as this process can be quite brutal. If I can improve the overall work by being ruthless then it is worth the sacrifice.
An open balanced composition that gives room for the eyes to wander and find a place to rest is generally my goal.

How do you approach the balance between control and spontaneity in your work?

Spontaneity is my starting point, a warm up to get my creative energy flowing. It allows me the freedom to make a mess without editing, without restraint. For instance, 'what if I use a different colour? Or splash some paint over this area?' So, I just go ahead and do what comes to mind. Then I allow the work rest sometimes flat or vertical. When I revisit the piece, I look at what areas are working and what are not.
This is when the overall composition is considered and there is a need to control the process. It is time intensive and involves many decisions in an effort to unify the work. Every mark becomes intentional; it must somehow connect or weave a thread through the work in some way. Contrast is also an important consideration which gives the work visual weight and balance.

What emotions or ideas are you exploring in your current work?

My current work seeks to subconsciously evoke a sense of peace and rest. I channel these emotions instinctively through the way I apply paint and use materials. From bold to gestural strokes contrasted with areas of negative space.
The general idea that I am currently exploring is the orientation of my pieces from landscape to portrait format. I do find the composition more challenging since the territory is more linear and the length of marks tend to differ greatly. Tools for mark making are in constant demand, discovering unique marks that add more depth to the work.

How does living in Port Pirie affect your artistic rhythm and focus?

Port Pirie is a unique mining town blessed with the back drop of the Flinders Ranges. The local lead smelter is anchored by towering industrial structures that extend along a small port inlet. The quiet relaxed pace of a rural town suits and grounds me. I feel quite focused in my home studio which looks out to my bustling garden filled with an array of cacti and fruit trees. Port Pirie has a regional art gallery which I have exhibited at on several occasions.

Carolyn O'Neill | Golden glow | 2024

Viktoriia Malaniuk

In 2000, I graduated from the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture (Kyiv, Ukraine) with a degree in architect-artist. His artistic interests include traditional hand-drawn graphics in various techniques. I am particularly attracted and inspired by the ballpoint pen technique, black and white ink on colored paper. I create drawings in the genres of "Celebrity Portrait" and "Architectural Landscape".

Viktoriia Malaniuk | Historical architecture of Kyiv | 2024

Viktoriia Malaniuk | Portrait of David Lynch | 2021

— *Interview*

Claudia Missailidis

Your work often revolves around intimacy, silence, and desire. How do you translate these abstract emotions into visual form?

Intimacy manifests itself for me in the restrained gestures, in the light that slowly moves across the skin, in the space between the bodies that almost touch. Silence is not absence, but substance, it resides in the voids, in the pauses, in the shadows. Desire, on the other hand, appears as a subtle presence, almost a restlessness that lingers around the image without ever fully revealing itself. My process begins with listening, but not to sound. I listen to the environment, to the memory, to what has not yet been said. I try to let the image emerge from this initial silence, as if it were itself asking to come into being, to exist. In this approach, the body becomes a symbolic territory: not an object, but a place of passage, of memory, of invention.

You describe photography as a rupture and re-signification. Can you elaborate on how this concept manifests in your creative process?

Photography is a cut in time, a rupture that interrupts the flow of perception. It is there, in that interval, that the image can open itself to new interpretations. I like to work with the fragmentation of the body, with reflections and distortions that unsettle and destabilise the immediate reading. These visual resources are not aesthetic effects, they are ways of questioning what is expected to be seen, of reconfiguring what is understood as body, presence, beauty. This re-signification transforms photography from document into visual poetry: something that does not illustrate, but provokes. It is within this space that my work is anchored, where the visible becomes permeable to the symbolic.

There is a strong poetic and dreamlike quality in your imagery. What influences your visual language—literature, cinema, personal memory?

My language is born in the friction between memory and image. Literature and cinema are strong presences, of course, but it is the affective experience that guides the gaze. Writers like Pablo Neruda and Zygmunt Bauman help me think of the body as a place of desire and absence, while artists such as Francesca Woodman, Sally Mann, and Jan Saudek influence me by the way they treat the body with symbolic intensity. But my work is born, above all, from the skin and the memory. Many of the bodies I photograph belong to people close to me, in spaces that carry shared stories. These are places where something has already happened: friendship, love, loss, waiting. Photography, for me, is a way of stitching all of that together, what was, what remains, and what still pulses.

Many of your photos explore themes of the body, vulnerability, and eroticism. How do you navigate the

boundary between exposure and protection in your work?

This is a fundamental tension in my work. The body that appears in my images is not there to be consumed, but to be listened to. I work with a nudity that is, above all, emotional, an assumed fragility, a presence that does not perform. There is always a pact of trust. I often photograph people who are intimate to me, in shared environments, and this requires a constant ethical listening. I do not photograph to expose the other, but to welcome what they have to offer me. Eroticism, in this sense, is not separate from care, it is precisely its closeness to vulnerability that interests me. Photography, for me, is a place of negotiation between what is revealed and what is protected. And to protect, sometimes, is also a way of loving what one photographs.

Can you talk about the symbolism in your use of water and reflection in your photography?

Water is a metaphor for fluidity of desire, of identity, of perception. It reflects, but it also distorts. It reveals, but never in a literal form. I like to work with water as this unstable element that resists and prevents certainties and invites multiple interpretations. There exists something ancestral and mysterious about water it is said to have memory, to carry traces of what it has touched. This idea interests me because it brings water closer to memory and affection, as if it were a sensitive archive of experience. Beyond that, water also carries within itself the transformation: it changes states, escapes fixed forms, adapts, evaporates, freezes, overflows. This quality of constant transition, of being between one state and another dialogues and resonates directly with the themes I explore: the instability of identity, the multiplicity of perception, the body in transit. The reflection, in turn, is like a second skin an image that returns altered, that opens fissures in reality. These elements help me construct visual and symbolic layers that disorganise the perception and suggest sensory pathways. More than representing something, they invite a crossing through the image like a dive into instability, memory, and transformation.

How do your studies in biology and physics inform or intersect with your visual art practice?

Very much so. Physics taught me to listen to light, not just as a technique, but as living matter, capable of constructing atmospheres and affections. Biology brought me closer to the body as an organism, fragile and mutable, with its cycles, its limits, its pulse. This background gives me tools to observe with both precision and sensitivity. I try to reconcile the rigor of science with the openness of art what can be measured and what escapes. Photography, at this point, becomes a hybrid field: between the concrete and the symbolic, between what is visible and what can only be sensed.

What role does gender and sensuality play in your exploration of the human condition?

Gender, for me, is flow, not a fixed structure. I work with bodies that move, that don't fit into rigid categories. This fluidity is essential to thinking of the body as a space for multiple narratives. Sensuality in my work is neither fetish nor seduction: it is language. A way of touching the other through the gaze, through presence, through silence. The image becomes a place where bodies recognize one another without the need to perform. In this way, gender and sensuality are tools for accessing the complexity of the human experience, for revealing what is often made invisible or pushed to the margins. The body, in this context, is a space for listening, for confrontation, for reinvention.

Interview

Steven Sickles

Your work resists recognizable imagery and embraces spontaneity. What draws you to abstraction as your primary form of expression?

I find abstraction a more difficult way of working and I enjoy the challenge. Of course, there are many ways of rendering a still life or a portrait but with abstraction the composition, shapes, colors, and way of applying paint are limitless. The only way to consider an abstract painting a success is how long it holds the viewers' attention.

In your painting 'Eroica', vibrant colors and dynamic textures dominate the canvas. What emotions or ideas were you exploring while creating the piece?

A characteristic within the body of my work is my passion for drama. At the time of this painting's execution, I happened to be listening to Beethoven's third symphony commonly called 'Eroica' (translated: 'Heroic' symphony). As such, it's easy to see the red as blood and the circulating geometric shapes as scrapnel. I try to avoid suggesting what my paintings are about by naming them after whatever music I happen to be listening to, in this case the choice may be considered unfortunate. Really, I was simply trying to create a vortex around the white circular form. But despite my intentions I believe I was subconsciously more directly influenced by the music than I realized.

You've lived across diverse places-from California to New Jersey, San Francisco to Indianapolis. How have these different environments influenced your artistic voice?

Steven Sickles | Eroica

In New Jersey before I attended college, I worked in the style of my favorite masters borrowing heavily from Rembrandt, Degas, Michealangelo and Disney. I worked primarily in oils at the time. When I moved to San Francisco, I attended a weekly nude sketch drawing group where my medium of choice became India ink.
At other times, I amused myself painting flowers and dog protraits primarily in watercolors. After meeting my husband, he suggested I begin creating abstract work using acrylic paint. After that there was no turning back.

You describe your process as intuitive and evolving. Can you walk us through a typical painting session? What usually sparks the first move on a blank canvas?

The first move on a blank canvas usually starts with an idea that occurred to me while taking a walk or just before falling asleep. I'm often inspired by nature. Asian characters are a constant inspiration. The way a shadow of a tree falls across a rock or currently how rain soaked tree limbs take on a surrealist Franz Kline look can suggest an interesting painting. But very rarely does my original notion bear any resemblance to the finished work. My plan can change when something I original thought would be intriguing turns out to be disconnected to the rest of the painting or simply seems juvenile or ill-conceived.
Then you have three choices: A.) remove the culprit, B.) keep it and try to return harmony to the painting or C.) start over completely. Usually before the latter is a period

Steven Sickles | Incidents and Accidents

of complete experimentation. It can work out well offering a new direction or I might just create an enormous mess. At this point you have to decide which accidents to keep and which have to go.

You mentioned using everything from brushes and spatulas to your hands. How important is physicality and tactile experience in your creative process?

Many of my paintings have a smeared effect usually achieved by allowing the paint I've applied to dry for a while. Once the paint's in this state I might use the heal of my hand to get an atmospheric effect by dragging the paint across the canvas surface. I wouldn't say I use this technique often. I use it only when it occurs to me to be necessary or when the same effect cannot be achieved with a brush or anything else I might find in my studio. I don't think of it being more important than any other method only sometimes more effective.

Your collaboration with jazz saxophonist Sophie Faught is fascinating. How did this project come about, and what did it reveal to you about the relationship between sound and image?

Sophie was working in a bookstore which helped adults who could not read. I had a small show there. She phoned me one day to see if we could meet. She had a project in mind. I thought that maybe she wanted me to design a CD cover. But, instead, she wanted to go forward with the plan to create an LP with compositions inspired by my paintings. Would it be OK with me? Would anyone on earth ever say 'No!'? So she and her band members looked at a lot of paintings and chose which ones they wanted to use as inspiration.
There has always been a link betwen music and the visual arts. So many artists from Vermeer to Corravagio to Basquiat have been inspired by music. The most famous example is the link between Matisse's and his Jazz series of cut-outs.
This project was the most rewarding of any I've been a part of as an artist.

Many abstract artists struggle with the moment of completion. How do you know when a painting is finished?

Man! Have you hit on a persistent problem. It's very important while you're working to take repeated steps back to better analyze what you're doing.
Too often artists plow ahead with their original plan only to find what they've done is over worked. The easy answer to this question is to stop when you can't think of anything further to do to make your work better. But that's easier said than done. My strategy is to banish my paintings to the basement when I think it needs work. This gives me time to consider how to fix it. More often than not after a few months I say to myself, "What did I think was wrong with this?"

Steven Sickles | Black Hole Sun

Olga Sova creates art that blends reality with the surreal, telling engaging stories. Born in northern Russia and raised in a creative family, she developed an interest in art early on. She received formal training at the School of Arts, studying painting, drawing, sculpture, art history, and composition. After moving to Dubai and participating in numerous master classes, she found her style and began to create her own unique collections using mixed media, watercolor, and pencil. Her work is influenced by the connection between nature and human emotions, drawing inspiration from artists like Salvador Dalí. Olga's surreal illustrations mix the fantastical with the familiar, inviting deep reflection. She is currently developing a new mixed media collection focused on nature and its elements, pushing her artistic boundaries. Olga has exhibited her art at major events, including the Dubai Show Jumping Championship and World Art Dubai. Her ability to merge reality with imagination in contemporary surrealist art. Through her pieces, she aims to inspire wonder, provoke thought, and celebrate the connection between life and art.

Project Statement
Surreal Illusionism is an ongoing series where I explore the intersection of surrealism and human consciousness through watercolor, pencil, and mixed media. In this body of work, I reimagine familiar scenes—such as quiet interiors, seaside moments, or vintage objects—infused with unexpected, dreamlike elements. Each illustration transforms a recognizable subject into a layered narrative rich with symbolism, emotion, and introspection. Works like After Party and Gatsby Vibe evoke nostalgia and elegance with expressive brushwork and blurred identities, while seascapes like La Mer Beach, Lighthouse, and Mermaid. Sound of the Sea explore themes of solitude, reflection, and resilience. Retro Automobile adds a touch of playful realism, drawing from the charm of vintage design. Together, these pieces invite viewers to step beyond the ordinary and discover deeper meaning within the illusion of everyday life.

Olga Sova | Gatsby Vibe | 2024

Olga Sova | Lighthouse | 2021

Olga Sova | Retro Automobile | 2021

— *Interview*

Abdessamad Hassimi

Your background combines both art and science. How do these two worlds influence each other in your creative process?

To me, art and science are not separate realms, but rather mirrors of each other. Science seeks truth through logic, observation, and structure. Art, on the other hand, reaches for truth through intuition, emotion, and symbolic language. My creative process exists somewhere in between. Science grounds me by giving me tools to understand systems and patterns, while art is born from the emptiness—the pause before thought—that allows something unexpected to surface.

Abdessamad Hassimi | A girl | 2025

I believe that the most profound creative act begins with an empty mind. In that silence, something extraordinary can happen: an idea emerges, not from reference or repetition, but from the raw, unshaped infinite. That moment is, in my view, a real form of magic—not ritualistic or mystical in the traditional sense, but the mental magic of pure creation. It is the mind's ability to pull something entirely new out of nothing, and to make it visible, shareable, and alive. That is a form of transformation as real as any chemical reaction.
Art, especially painting, remains one of the last places where true freedom exists. There are no algorithms or rules—only choices made in the moment, guided by instinct, feeling, or nothing at all. In that way, painting becomes like pulling a rabbit from an empty hat: improbable, pure, and absolutely real. Art and science both participate in this act of transformation, though they speak different dialects of the same universal mystery.

What inspired the Giants of the Cosmos series, and how did the idea first come to you?

The idea came quietly, from a place I now protect carefully—mental silence. I don't begin with a story or a sketch. Instead, I start by emptying the mind, and from that stillness, something begins to rise. One day, the question appeared: What if emotions had mass? What if belief could take form, like a planet or a force of nature? That moment became the seed of Giants of the Cosmos.
This series gives form to what we usually consider intangible—power, hesitation, longing,

Abdessamad Hassimi | Smoke and silence | 2024

and destruction. These works are not illustrations of events. They are physical embodiments of psychological and emotional tension. As artists, we are not simply makers. We are translators of the unseen.

In the space of painting, there are no scripts, no expectations, only the act of turning a shapeless sensation into something others can perceive.

In the space of painting, there are no scripts, no expectations, only the act of turning a shapeless sensation into something others can perceive.

That process—pulling something out of the void and giving it presence—is the very definition of creative magic. Giants of the Cosmos is not a fixed message. It is a living and evolving question.

Many of your works depict faceless figures and surreal environments. What do these elements represent for you?

Faces offer answers too quickly. They suggest identity, emotion, and narrative. By removing them, I remove assumptions. My figures are not specific individuals but rather states of being—transient, universal, and evolving. Leaving them faceless allows the viewer to project themselves into the work or experience the image without immediate labels.

The surreal environments they inhabit reflect our interior worlds, those vast psychological terrains we traverse daily but rarely name. These spaces are shaped by memory, instinct, trauma, and longing. They are not fantasy to me. Instead, they are hyper-real and emotionally true—geographies that can only be mapped through abstraction.

Both the figures and the spaces emerge from the same source: the quiet, generative space of the empty mind, where forms remain fluid and meaning is still taking shape. That is where I paint from. That is where the raw material lives.

You mention the tension between progress and wisdom. Do you see art as a way to bridge that gap?

Yes, I do. I believe art is one of the few remaining spaces where we are allowed to slow down and engage with questions without rushing to resolve them. Progress tends to favor speed, templates, and repetition. Wisdom, by contrast, requires stillness, ambiguity, and reflection.

When art is created from silence rather than trend, it becomes a bridge between the two. It doesn't offer clear answers, but it gives form to uncertainty. It reminds us that not everything has to be efficient or immediately legible. Each brushstroke, each pause, and each unconventional decision resists the pressure to conform.

In this way, the creative act becomes an antidote to acceleration. It allows us to return to something fundamental in ourselves—the capacity to create freely, with full presence. That, to me, is the essence of wisdom.

As someone who works professionally with AI, how do you see the role of artificial intelligence in the future of art?

AI is a powerful tool, and I use it regularly in my work. It can analyze, generate, and support in

Abdessamad Hassimi | At school | 2025

impressive ways. However, AI is fundamentally an accelerator. It processes information through speed, pattern recognition, and prediction. It does not enter silence. It does not hesitate before an idea. It does not long for anything unknown.

The human mind, in contrast, is a decelerator of data. The universe, from the smallest particle to the largest star, moves at incredible speed. Yet the mind slows this flow just enough for us to observe, to feel, and to reshape it into meaning. This is the power of consciousness—it turns motion into stillness, and time into experience.

I am not afraid of AI replacing artists. What I do fear is that we may forget how to be artists ourselves. The more we rely on pre-trained outputs and ready-made solutions, the more we risk losing our ability to create from nothing. That is the real danger—not replacement, but forgetting the magic of origin. Art is not about polish or efficiency. It is a sacred act of pulling from the void and making it real. Only the human mind can do that.

Giants of the Cosmos explores themes of control, faith, and emotional inertia. Are there any personal experiences that shaped these themes for you?

Absolutely. These themes come directly from personal experience—from navigating cultural differences, shifting belief systems, and confronting identity in unfamiliar places. I have found myself in moments of uncertainty where I didn't know whether to trust, resist, surrender, or speak up. These internal struggles left deep impressions.

Over time, I began returning to silence. Not as a retreat, but as a practice of awareness. In that space, the ideas and forms started to emerge. The figures I paint often carry postures of tension, collapse, or confrontation. They are physical manifestations of emotional dilemmas. I never plan these narratives, but my body remembers, and the memory finds its way into the work.

Each piece is a response rather than a statement. Through gesture, posture, and presence, I try to give shape to the unseen forces that govern the inner life. These paintings become a way of turning the invisible into something shared.

How has your move from Fes to Helsinki influenced your artistic vision?

The move from Fes to Helsinki was not a straight path, but a journey through many countries, languages, and cultural systems. Each place transformed me in different ways. I had to unlearn and relearn how to see. My temperament, aesthetic values, and worldview were continuously broken down and reshaped. I became a composite of everywhere I've lived.

Fes gave me saturation—an intensity of color, history, emotion, and structure. I was fortunate to grow up in a school program that offered formal artistic training from a young age through high school. There, I learned how to draw, paint, mix colors, and study the foundations of art history. That early education gave me not only technical skills but also discipline and visual sensitivity.

One of my earliest artistic passions was caricature, which fascinated me with its ability to reveal deep truths through distortion. It taught me how to exaggerate essence rather than chase surface-level realism. That influence still runs

Abdessamad Hassimi | Helsinki summer | 2025

Abdessamad Hassimi | Back to the studio | 2024

through my work today, where figures are symbolic, expressive, and often carry emotional weight rather than literal detail.

As I moved through different countries, I gained perspective and sensitivity to cultural nuance. Helsinki gave me space. Not only physical stillness, but mental clarity. It allowed all the intensity I had absorbed to settle into a new form. It became a place where I could synthesize the chaotic and the calm.

My work today is not abstract in the traditional sense. It is symbolic, often surreal, and increasingly metaphysical. The figures and environments I paint may appear recognizable, but they do not represent reality—they reflect inner landscapes, emotional weight, and philosophical tension. I am drawn to scenes and objects that feel theatrical or staged, but where each element carries deeper meaning. They are like still frames from a dream, where logic is bent, and everything becomes metaphor.

What emerged from this evolution is a deep trust in the empty mind. I now see that space as infinite and essential. As artists, we are not filling that space—we are retrieving from it. We bring back what has no form yet and shape it into something that can be seen, touched, or felt. Whether the result is a painting, a sculpture, a sound, or writing, it is a true act of creation. It is not metaphor. It is not illusion. It is like pulling a rabbit from an empty hat—unlikely, but completely real. That, to me, is the essence of artistic freedom. It is a beautiful responsibility to make something from nothing.

And alongside that responsibility, there's also joy. I genuinely enjoy the act of painting. When I finish a piece and look back at it, I want to feel that I had fun creating it—that I let myself play, explore, and enjoy the moment of making something that didn't exist before. That feeling is just as important to me as any deeper concept behind the work.

Xin Lian is a Chinese-born artist who binds the multiplicity of time through imprinting and embedding. To imprint and to embed is to leave behind traces of activities and presences that once lived. By capturing past energy through drawing, the residue of the past resides in the image of the "current". Through the conversation of the past and the present, she attempts to reconstruct our current relationship with trauma, loss, and grief in the transient landscape of time. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology. Her works have exhibited at CICA Museum in Gimpo, Museum of FIT in New York, M. David & Co. Gallery in Brooklyn, and Amos Eno Gallery in Brooklyn. She will be completing her residency at Arts Letters & Numbers in June 2025.

Project Statement
I engage with art-making through the process of imprinting and embedding. The act of imprinting and embedding leaves behind traces of activities and presences that once lived. By capturing past energy through drawing, the residue of the past resides in the image of the "current", forming a time-lapsing image where the unattainable past gets re-lived through the act of seeing. In the conversation between the past and the present, I attempt to reconstruct our current relationship with trauma, loss, and grief—the universal experience that we encounter as living beings despite racial and cultural differences. From Skin to Skin is a series of attempts to repair and mend skin damaged from past traumas. The paradox within the act of repair is that the skin can never be restored as if it has never been wounded before. Within the process of mending, embedding, and sewing on the skin, lives the investigation of how we touch and are touched by the past that lingers in the ephemeral structure of intimacy.

Xin Lian | From Skin to Skin | 2025

Xin Lian | From Skin to Skin | 2025

Interview

Alisa Vos

Your background is rooted in theater through your family. How has this influenced your visual art practice?

From an early age I was surrounded with this magical world of behind the scenes of a puppet theater. My father was making dolls for many plays and I saw them being created at home and coming to life on stage. Most definitely it automatically pulled me deeply into this world and made me realize - I also want to create. Which I do every single day.

You describe yourself as a multimedia artist. What medium currently feels most essential to you, and why?

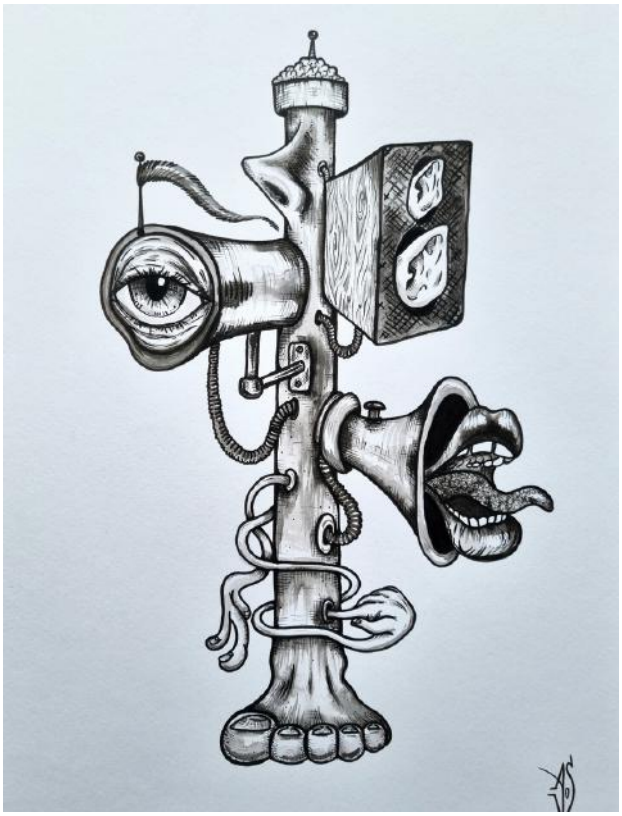
Alisa Vos | Wake up | 2025

That is so. I repurpose clothes, shoes, bags, make dolls, do photography, digital illustrations, paint with acrylic and make dolls from fabric or polymer clay. That is why it is so difficult for me to describe shortly what I can do. (What can I not? :) But I can most certainly tell that a special place in my heart belongs to two things: dollmaking and graphical art. If I really have to choose one - it will be ink drawings. Right now it helps me fully express everything that is on my mind, heart and Soul.

Many of your works feel surreal and symbolic. How do dreams, myths, or folklore influence your creative process?

True. I practically live in two worlds. Connecting to the other dimension is crucial because I receive information from the other realm. Pretty often I pay a high price for it in the shape of insomnia. Some ideas come to me in dreams or observations. Also meditations are helping me to ground and catch the most interesting thoughts and future ideas for works. As well as lucid dreams. I love to read folklore stories. Not only from my birth country, Ukraine, but I am also fascinated by international knowledge and legends.

You mentioned using rainwater and even your own blood in your graphic work. What drives you to incorporate such personal and elemental materials?



Alisa Vos | Technicasso | 2025

It might sound crazy, in some way it is, but using rain water helps me to connect with nature on some higher level. This way I feel the most tapped in and every single work gaining those special value. Also it sparks discussions and interest among people. I've got this one viral video on TikTok, where I show the process of creation one of my graphics, using a drop of my blood. I haven't expected so much interaction from people world wide. Many don't believe that I used it, some even getting terrified. Although it is not my intention in any way to scare or push away anyone, but that fact that my art brings so many people to discussion is a priceless gift! Art needs to bring emotions. And in that art, you can definitely say, I've added a part of me.

Nature and the mystical are key inspirations for you. Are there particular places or experiences in nature that have deeply impacted your work?

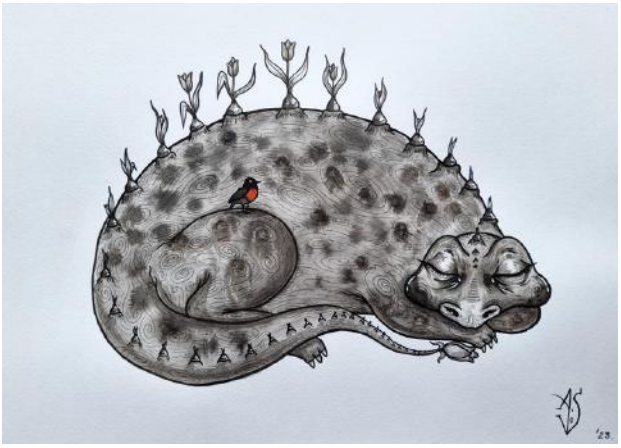
I feel deeply driven by cycles of nature. It is my ally, my helper and inspiration. I can often be found in forest paths, hugging trees, feeding birds and connecting to mother Earth. If you feel sad or frustrated - go to nature, she holds the answers in wind, in water, in gentle whispers of grass. I love to stare at the Moon or watch majestic sunsets. It helps me process any difficulties or even overcome artistic blocks. Although I cannot tell that I have some specific spot to go, I can definitely say that it is my temple and recharging point.

Living in the Netherlands now, how has the cultural or visual environment there shaped your recent art?

Oh, it is a beautiful country with so many rainy days so I will never be without water for my art.
When you visit the Netherlands you mostly see it from touristic perspective: windmills, endless fields of tulips, cheese, super friendly people and a great amount of museums to see. When you start living here it opens up a little differently. More deep, more layers, more complex structure of life. It has a slightly different culture and for me was the most difficult part to start all over. It is scary but super motivating. After all, how can you not love this nature and architecture, preserved with so much care for many centuries? Not for nothing so many artists lived and created here. Dutch people value their rich history and someday they will tell legends about one crazy artist, who painted her dreams with ink and rain.
I think I definitely grew in my art since I moved here 11 years ago and I will keep continuing to develop my skills even more.

Do you view your creations as telling a continuous story or are they more like fragments of different emotional worlds?

Ah, that is a good one! Let me think... I guess I can tell that it is One World of mine with many different stories in it. And I am proud to be able to share it with people. Because we are here for a very short spark of time and I would like to leave my mark here and continue living in my artworks.
And if in another life I could choose to play any other role... I would choose to be an artist over and over again to welcome others to my special world of magic.



Alisa Vos | Tuliposaurus | 2025

Ksenia Razzhivina
My artistic thinking was shaped at the intersection of science, design, and visual art.
I received my education at Saint Petersburg State University, where I conducted scientific research in the field of visual perception and artificial intelligence in collaboration with physiologists. This experience instilled in me a deep attention to how humans see, interpret, and emotionally process images.
Later, I studied at the International School of Design (IDS), where I focused on drawing and interior design.
My path in art evolved through numerous work and study-related travels — each new experience expanded the boundaries of my perception and shaped my understanding of art.
Today, I live and work in Saint Petersburg as an artist and designer, exploring the nature of digital imagery and experimenting with new tools. In my practice, I strive for conceptual precision, creating visual spaces where technology becomes a medium for deep emotional expression.
Instagram: @ksushaaaa.0310

Artist Statement
At the center of my artistic process is the idea, and everything I create is driven by the desire to convey it as precisely and profoundly as possible.
For me, the digital environment is not just a tool — it is a space of freedom, where perception, structure, and time can be worked with on new levels. It allows for fine-tuning of visual language, experimentation with forms, breaking familiar boundaries, and assembling something new and cohesive from fragments.
I approach the process as a form of research: each image is a journey where experience, intuition, and technology intersect.
What matters most to me is that the result is not just a visually refined image but a living artistic experience — something that stays with the viewer, evokes a response, resonance, or question.
My art aims to be precise and sincere. I seek forms capable of expressing inner states, ideas, and emotions — not through direct analogies, but through a recognizable emotional tone.

Ksenia Razzhivina | Planet

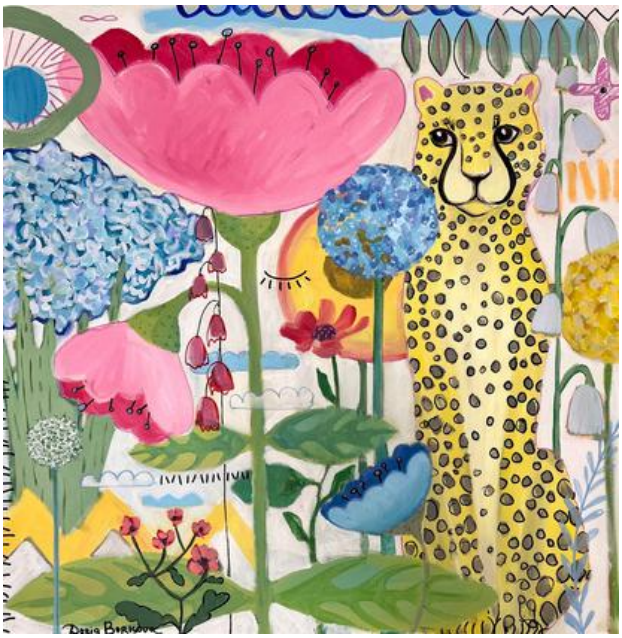
Ksenia Razzhivina | In the City

Ksenia Razzhivina | Through Time

Daria Borisova

Can you tell us about your journey as an artist? How did it begin?

For as long as I can remember, I've always loved to draw. When I was four years old, my parents took me to art classes. Later, I graduated from an art school and then earned a degree in art and design. This background gave me strong foundational skills that I use every day.



Daria Borisova | In The Garden

What role does the natural world play in your creative process?

The natural world is a major source of inspiration in my creative process. I love observing different patterns, textures, and forms found in nature and incorporating them into my work.

Your use of color is striking. How do you choose your palettes?

I see color as one of the most powerful tools in visual art. It sets the overall impression, mood, and feeling of the painting. I often work with a limited palette. I like when the colors enhance each other and highlight the theme and concept of the piece.

Many of your animals have human-like expressions or emotions. Is this intentional?

Yes, through animal imagery, I explore themes that are more about human experiences — growth, relationships, friendship, family, etc. I try to embed values that are meaningful to me and might resonate with others as well.

What emotions or thoughts do you hope to evoke in viewers through your work?

Daria Borisova
Looking Within

I aim to share a certain state of being through my artworks — whether it's peace, inspiration, joy, or balance. I hope the viewer feels a connection and perhaps finds something personally meaningful, something that allows them to pause and reconnect with themselves.

How do your surroundings in New York City influence your artwork, if at all?

New York is a vibrant, fast-paced city. Some of my paintings are created as a contrast to that to bring a sense of calm, balance, and quiet. Others are filled with energy and joy. I believe balance is essential, especially in today's fast-moving world. I want my paintings to create a space where people can recharge.

What artists or movements have influenced your style the most?

My work is a mix of styles from surrealism to expressionism. While studying, I was deeply inspired by impressionists like Monet, Degas, and Van Gogh. Their way of conveying mood and emotion through color really resonated with me, and that's something I've brought into my own art.

Dwight Benignus is a portrait artist based in Austin, Texas, working in a realist tradition shaped by classical training. He studied at Atelier Dojo and completed workshops with instructors from the Florence Academy of Art, grounding his practice in academic drawing and painting techniques. Influenced by painters like Bouguereau, Sargent, Waterhouse, and Sorolla, his work emphasizes light, atmosphere, and the emotional presence of the human figure. Born in Houston to a Chinese immigrant mother and a German American autistic father, Dwight moved in adolescence to the Rio Grande Valley, where he absorbed the layered culture of Texas border towns. He later lived in Portland, Oregon, and eventually settled in Austin, immersing himself in the art and music scenes of both cities. His current project is a portrait series highlighting musicians in Austin's folk and indie scene, blending observational realism with cultural intimacy and a deep respect for his subjects.

Project Statement
I paint portraits because I find a deep sense of connection in faces — in their ability to hold expression, emotion, and a story without words. Portraiture, to me, is an act of close attention. It's about honoring the subject's presence while exploring form, light, and atmosphere through a realist lens. My training at Atelier Dojo and workshops with instructors from the Florence Academy of Art have shaped my approach, grounding it in classical technique and observational discipline. At the same time, I'm interested in more than just technical accuracy — I want my portraits to feel lived-in, to carry a sense of intimacy and interior life. In recent work, I've focused on musicians from Austin's folk and indie scene, aiming to reflect the creative energy of the city and the quiet individuality of its artists.

Alex Eskandarkhah

Alex Eskandarkhah | Cycles

How did your Afro-Iranian heritage and upbringing in Toronto influence the visual and emotional tone of "Cycles"?

My intersection informs all my work, along with many other intersections. Art and commerce, hyper visibility and erasure. Spending time in many unique circumstances gives me a rich palette of my own lived experiences to pull from. This story was set in a Toronto suburb, and I think we were really able to use the underbelly of the region as an isolating backdrop.

The laundromat setting is a powerful metaphor for purification and repetition. How did you arrive at this concept and location?

Andre really wanted to have the adage of "airing out your dirty laundry" to have a sort of omnipresence in the theme. It's not uncommon for two strangers in a metropolitan to connect over a conversation like this. That lifeline is in the mundanity yet symbolic choice of the laundromat.

What was the most challenging scene to direct, both technically and emotionally, and why?

All shoot days in the film are overnight, so that was definitely a challenge. The human body isn't meant to be up late around the clock, so I know that was tough on the crew as well as the actors. Jerome's monologue that we used was a pick up scene, as the emotional exhaustion this script carries was palpable on our team. Oners are always tough to pull off. But we got a away with one.

How did your years of collaboration with Andre Kelly on The Gifted Gab shape your dynamic on set for this film?

There was a strong sense of comfort in the agency I

"Cycles" is described as a meditation on grief, lust and habits. What inspired you to explore such emotionally and socially complex themes in one narrative?

The script, written by Andre Kelly had this specificity that was humanizing in such a mundane setting. I saw an everyday slice of life story that had room for so much texture.

Alex Eskandarkhah | Cycles

Alex Eskandarkhah | Cycles

was able to give him from a directing standpoint. Our collaborative nature involves many discussions before going to camera and our rapport allowed us to really align on the vision of what we were trying to accomplish.

How do you balance being a storyteller and a business owner? Do these roles ever influence each other creatively?

My life has been just an extension of organic pursuits that align with who I am. That kind of alignment has afforded me the flexibility to pursue filmmaking intentionally. I have a strong support system and I'm continuously encouraged by the people around me to continue to take creative risks that stretch my capabilities and contribute to growth.

What lessons or emotional truths do you hope audiences will take away from "Cycles"?

Everyone carries something you know nothing about. Sometimes a listening ear can be a lifeline for another person. Be kind.

Matt Gold is based in Pittsburgh, PA, where he divides his time with work across various mediums, including photography, digital art and music. His first image, a picture of his cat on a Sony Ericsson Z310A flip phone, was taken in 2008, and he has continued to explore the aesthetic possibilities of mobile photography and beyond. Gold's work has been featured in numerous publications and journals. Most recently, he collaborated with Jones Soda, for their PRIDE 2023 campaign and was part of Beeple's Election Night Exhibition.

Project Statement
DIGITAL DYSTOPIA This collection centers around my perception of an alternate universe, where the strange is considered normalcy and the alien becomes commonplace. With most of the images doubled or repeated in some context, I am presenting the viewer with perhaps the "darker" roots of the character, while integrating my love for pixelated, digital art, into the final product.

Matt Gold | 2024

Trisha Kim

Your artistic process begins with automatic drawing. Can you describe what this phase feels like mentally or emotionally?

It's a small protest against the fear of blank canvas. Carefully drawn one line evolves to having rough, confident gestures as a mixture of emotions - confident, frustrated, confused, fun and eventually it mixes with different drawings. I often use an oil stick for oil paintings, but for Night Figures, it was a different experiment of setting limits by using a pen, where I can't go back and diluted, it's embracing mistakes and each moment. This disabled 'undo' makes me focus more on each second, feeling the tip of the pen.

Trisha Kim | Church underneath the willow tree | 2025

What draws you to explore relationships between humans and "other intellectual beings" in your art?

Other intellectual beings are an existence that I'd like to introduce in my art because it puts ourselves (human beings) outside of their human-centric view. It doesn't have to go back to ancient times to find one where a lot of cultures believed their own intellectual beings such as spirits, God, fairy, souls and so on, because now we have this AI that we communicate with everyday as a service assistant or advisor. I observed a wide range of manners, from extremely rude to kind while interacting with AI. This direct and common interaction of the public - beyond abstract and selective communication within rituals or lack of proof of having an intellectual interaction in ancient times - evokes interesting questions to ponder 'how would humans see themselves when we realise we are not only beings to be 'intelligent' and 'communicable'? Would we try to keep our powerful and dominant place within the society system or would there be a possibility to acknowledge its power and share the place? It's more about curiosity to observe ourselves more.

Trisha Kim | Resistance and Acceptance | 2025

How do you balance chance and intention when developing your compositions?

It's definitely a chance to discover a character. I play with negative space to find hidden figures when I 'discover' them. After that, by looking closely at each character, by observing textures and pressures of lines, these traces of emotions help to build stories as compositions. Then it can also be changed by pairing different characters.

Many of your works seem to blur the boundary between the absurd and the profound. What role does humor or surrealism play in your storytelling?

I like to keep a balance between serious and humorous. If it's too serious then it's hard to grab attention but if it's too funny then it becomes less important. Surrealism opens the gate for the ground to play between the two, where I can be free to bring anything up on the surface and weave it together for a narrative from personal and society issues. Might be easier to think of Easter eggs in a movie or computer game where it can enhance its structure and reasoning.

Do you see your characters as symbolic representations or as fully formed entities with their own presence?

It's just a character and it should be my cognitive process based on my experiences labelling them as a symbolic representation, but before all that, I want to believe they (lines and characters) are traces of fully formed entities that I'm trying to find.

In what ways do your pieces respond to or critique current societal values?

As it's coming from unexpected without any planned lines, it's against the designed and ready-to-made products with carefully selected commercial strategy (or under algorithm), as well as not being able to 'feed' to AI to generate similar outcomes. This unplanned, improvisational, arbitrary is against the current society as a frustration of repression and a protest of truly being oneself without comparing with others by breaking pushed expectations by others perspective. Each drawing can be rotated, repeated, scaled differently to weave different stories of current issues to open a new conversation in gender, violence, community etc. These evolving accidental encounters ask a question to oneself, as well as to the society.

Your use of black and white creates strong contrasts. Is this choice purely aesthetic, or does it carry conceptual weight?

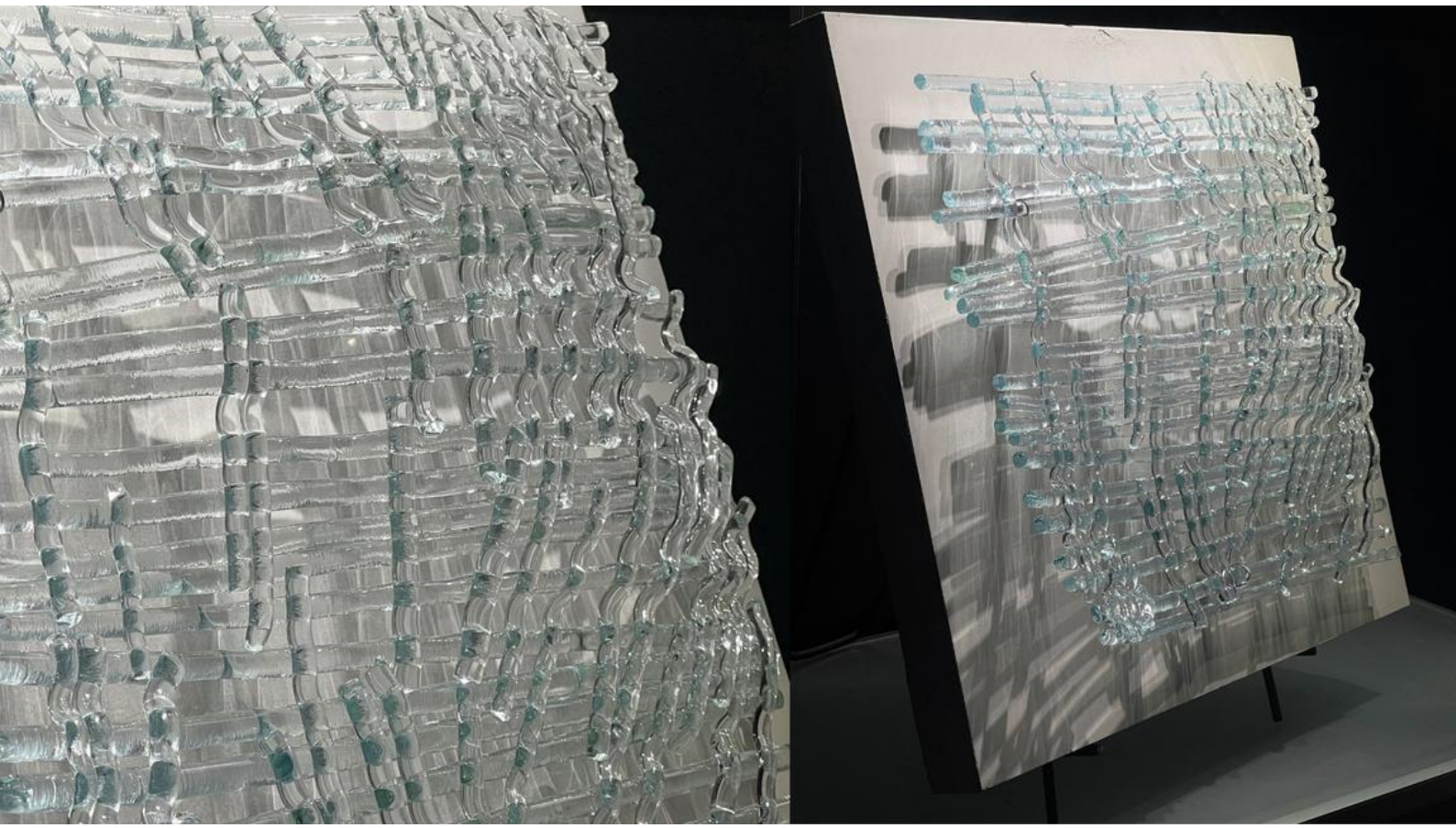
Colour itself can add emotion. And I wanted this project to purely focus on its shape and evoke new emotions by looking at it by disguising in black and white. Also wanted to put more weight on its movement, texture of each line. Black and white are all mixtures of colours/lights anyway, so it's the viewer's choice to look at differently and pick a colour what it could have been like!

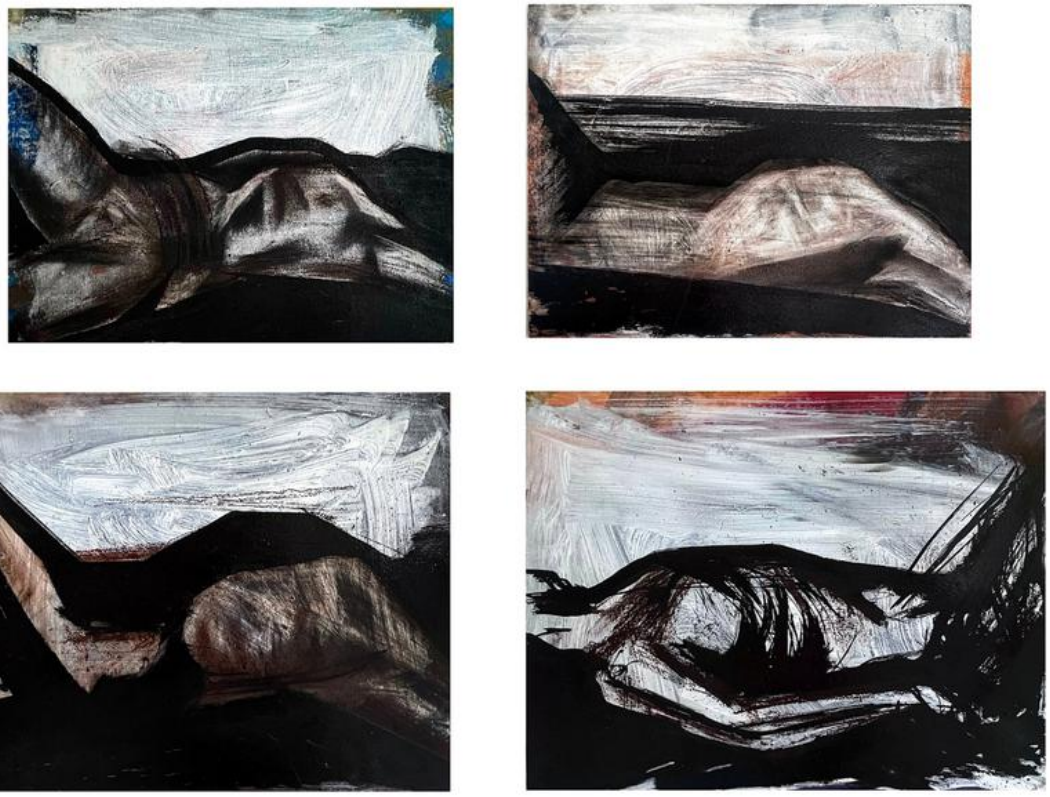
Trisha Kim | Cover Your Mouth | 2025

Julia Hadupyak is a contemporary Ukrainian artist based in Lviv, Ukraine. Since 2021, she has been studying at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, where she earned her Bachelor's degree and is currently pursuing a Master's degree (2024–2026). Her artistic practice spans painting, sculpture, and the creation of art objects, particularly within the framework of the glass studio movement. Julia specializes in an original painting technique through which she explores patterns of human behavior, cognitive dissonance, and the relationship between the inner world of the individual and external reality. The artist's works are a visual manifestation of personal emotions, observations, and research into both individual and collective psychological processes. In her sculptural practice, she often juxtaposes the fragility of glass with the rawness of concrete, stone, and metal, creating tension and contrasts between materials. Julia’s approach is rooted in continuous experimentation with form, texture, and technique, allowing her to discover new means of self-expression. The artist's works have already been exhibited in several exhibitions and are held in private collections.

Project Statement
MOTIVATION AND PHILOSOPHY My artistic research is grounded in the exploration of psychological aspects and the physical state of a person. I aim to uncover the complex interaction between the inner world and the external reality of the individual. Observing the dissonance between personal beliefs and the outside world, as well as studying the behavioral patterns that emerge from this tension, is the foundation of my artistic inquiry. My goal is to create works that not only reveal inner processes but also invite reflection and awareness of this intricate connection.

Julia Hadupyak | Fragile Resilience | 2023





Julia Hadupyak | Untitled | 2024

Julia Hadupyak | Echo of Memory | 2024

Vladimir Punin

Vladimir Punin | Fading Surge of Expectation | 2023

Your artwork often features intricate lines and abstract forms. Can you share the process behind creating these complex compositions? How do you decide on the placement of each element?

First, a certain image appears — it becomes the guiding star of the work. It is not a static picture, but a kind of action: a small visual fragment is born, with a beginning, climax, and resolution. Initially maturing only in thoughts and emotions, but becoming tangible and weighty, it begins to ask to be put on paper — and when the pressure becomes unbearable, I start the physical process. In other words, the piece is already complete before its actual execution.
Of course, my works are drawing and graphics, where the main elements are placed in their positions first, and then the composition is filled in across the primary fields. The seeming complexity arises from the peculiar merging of several images into one, where the linear sequence breaks in the most unexpected places, crumples, and fuses into a single, simultaneous representation. It's like a series of photographs united by one idea for sequential viewing — but then passed through a shredder and laid out as a single image. This creates visual chaos.
However, it's difficult to call my works chaotic, since all these lines and abstract forms appear not randomly, but through deep emotional, intuitive, and intellectual reflection. Yes, I do not strive for clear boundaries or an easily readable visual component — the viewer will independently perceive everything they need to. It's a fundamental property of our brain to assign familiar and understandable images to everything it sees. The answer is often within ourselves.

The theme of death and the fleeting nature of life is quite prominent in your work. How does this concept influence your creative process, and what do you hope to convey to the viewer through these ideas?

They say that just before death, a person sees their whole life flash before their eyes. I remembered this phrase as a way to illustrate an idea — not to question the factual truth of it, but to express a concept. That is, an entire life, many years, rush by in a compressed, instantaneous moment.
If you abstract yourself and try to look at everything — literally everything in the world — all at once, you realize how immense the number of events happening right now truly is. So many, that if you try to think about them all at once, right here and now, you understand just how fleeting a human being is. It's impossible to grasp the multitude of occurrences. And within each of us, there's a vast world that exists only here and now.
For me, the topic of death, quite literally, is about life in the present moment. When the past no longer exists and the future has not yet arrived. One could say that in time, everything is dead — except for the present moment. There's a kind of sorrow and an incomprehensible desire to preserve or hold onto so much within the fleeting instant of the now. In everyday life, we don't often encounter this feeling. And when we do, we usually brush it aside quickly, continuing to live by inertia, preoccupied with our affairs. But in extreme situations — and they are often connected with death: war, disasters, terminal illness — we are face to face with the fragile, easily torn, and swiftly ending reality of the world.

You mentioned that your background is not in art, yet your work is deeply artistic. How did your non-artistic education shape your approach to art?

Yes, my education is connected with people with disabilities. A person tries to rationalize life — to explain situations, seek causes, observe consequences — but more often, they are

Vladimir Punin | The Reaper | 2023

faced with confusing and random coincidences. People sometimes find themselves in circumstances where they can no longer live the way they used to. This happens when illness strikes, when someone is caught in war, is born with a disability, or ends up in an accident.
For example, you're walking down the sidewalk, and suddenly a car crashes into you. You're left injured, with a broken spine, learning to live again and trying to understand — why you? This happens often. Some parents spend their whole lives wondering why their family was the one to have a child with special needs. People who return from war often can't make sense of why they survived — why they came back wounded, or why they came back without a scratch while their comrades are dead, or left without limbs, with shattered minds.
Life is a mix of patterns and a vast number of accidents, mysteries, and confusion. I think this is clearly reflected in my work.

In your piece "Fading Surge of Expectation" there is a sense of stillness despite the intensity of the work. How do you balance emotion and calmness within your art?

The act of creation is a deeply personal, almost intimate process, unrelated to the outside world. It's like diving into a bottomless pool — or rather, into a solitary body of water covered in silt and algae. Down there, in the dark, without light or air, you freeze — alone with your feelings, emotions, and experiences. The only light is the light of your mind, and the only air is what remains inside you.
And when the sensation arises that you cannot go any deeper, you force yourself to return to the world — a world filled with color, light, people, emotions, and everyday hustle. I think this very moment — as you mentioned — is where the balance can be felt. If you go too far, you risk irreversible tragedy. But if you get scared and come back too quickly, the act of creation won't happen at all.

Your art often features dark, intense contrasts. What role do light and dark play in your work, both literally and symbolically?

I've always been drawn to artists' drafts — the reference point from which the artist begins, the sketches made with simple pencil or charcoal, when the future artwork is only just beginning to take shape and no clear artistic solution has yet been found. When the artist is still at a crossroads, contemplating the further development of the piece — that ambiguity is mesmerizing. It's a kind of bifurcation point of fate, because at that moment the artist could abandon the sanguine, tear up the sketch, and destroy the future work altogether. How many such conceived but unresolved creations do we know of?
Sometimes, it's in these moments that life itself is decided. I would say these drafts are independent works in their own right — both from an artistic point of view and in terms of worldview and philosophy. Light and shadow capture these states very precisely — black and white — while all other colors can be added by the power of one's imagination.

How do you decide when a piece is finished? Is there a moment when you know it's complete, or is it an ongoing process?

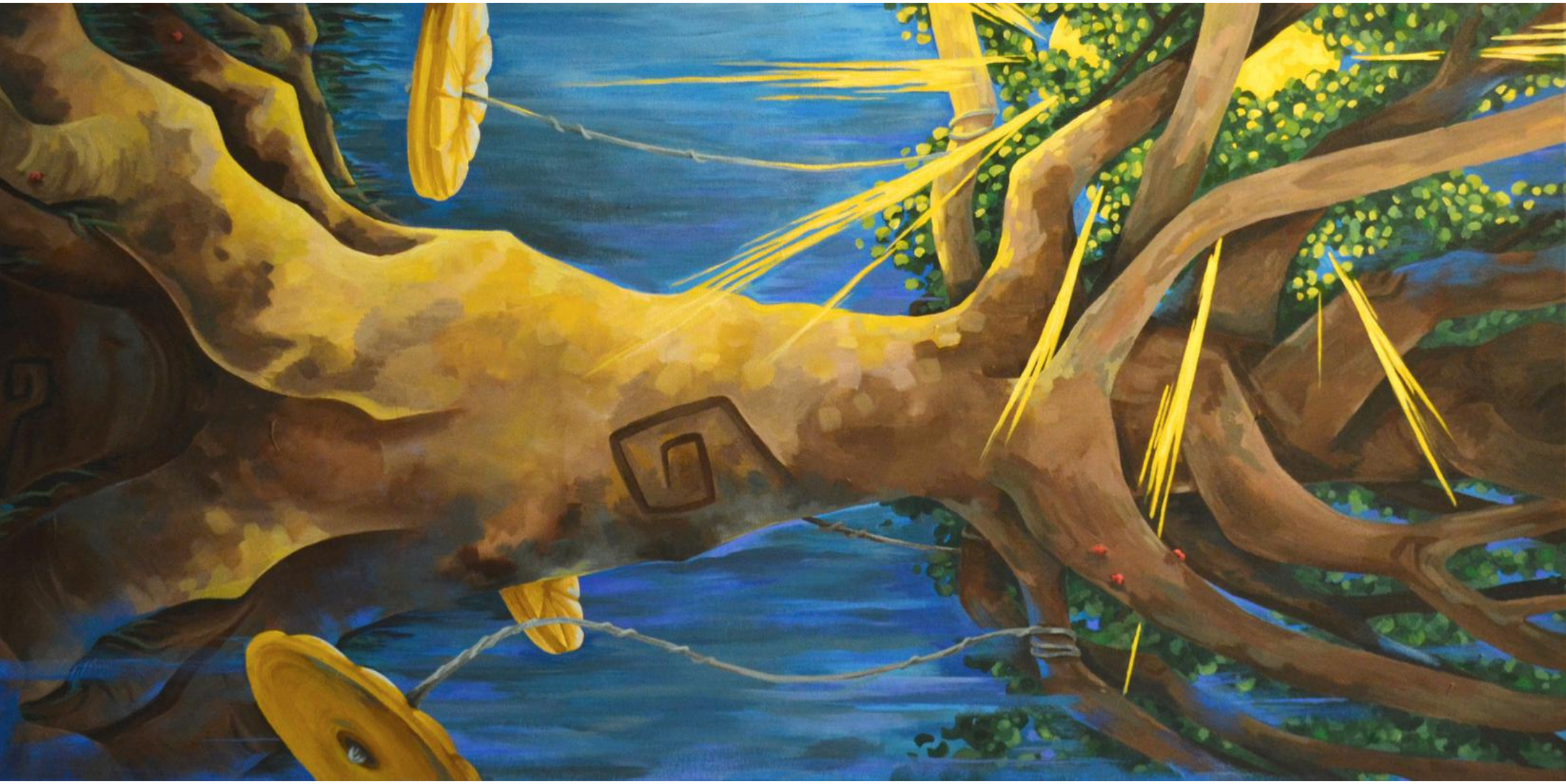
This is a completely intuitive part of the creative process — more precisely, its completion. If all the emotions and all the images that have been haunting me are poured onto the paper, and the work no longer evokes a creative response, then I consider it finished. Quite literally, my hand no longer reaches for the tools, the paper, or the easel.
Since my works generally lack a clearly defined central element — unlike, for example, portraits, where the background does not play a decisive role and the artist's focus is on depicting the person — they may give the impression of being unfinished. And I'm sure that when looking at them, it's easy to think that the painting was either abandoned or still in progress. But that's not the case. These impressions are also part of the work itself.

Many of your works feature a strong connection to mortality. What drives your exploration of death in your art, and how does it relate to the human condition?

Death equalizes everyone — sooner or later, it touches us all. Of course, this is a very old, well-known, and overused truth. And through understanding it, we realize that we have still not managed to cope with or overcome the awareness of death. We often prefer to fantasize, speculate, try to predict — but despite all our efforts, we haven't come any closer to the horizon of knowledge.
Death, in one way or another, always remains a mystery — and mysteries are always alluring. It is like a code waiting for its decipherers. I would add that, aside from being a deeply tragic subject, death is also a very calm, quiet one — requiring solitude, seclusion, and focus. And, surprisingly, through the exploration and study of death, the full richness of life is revealed.

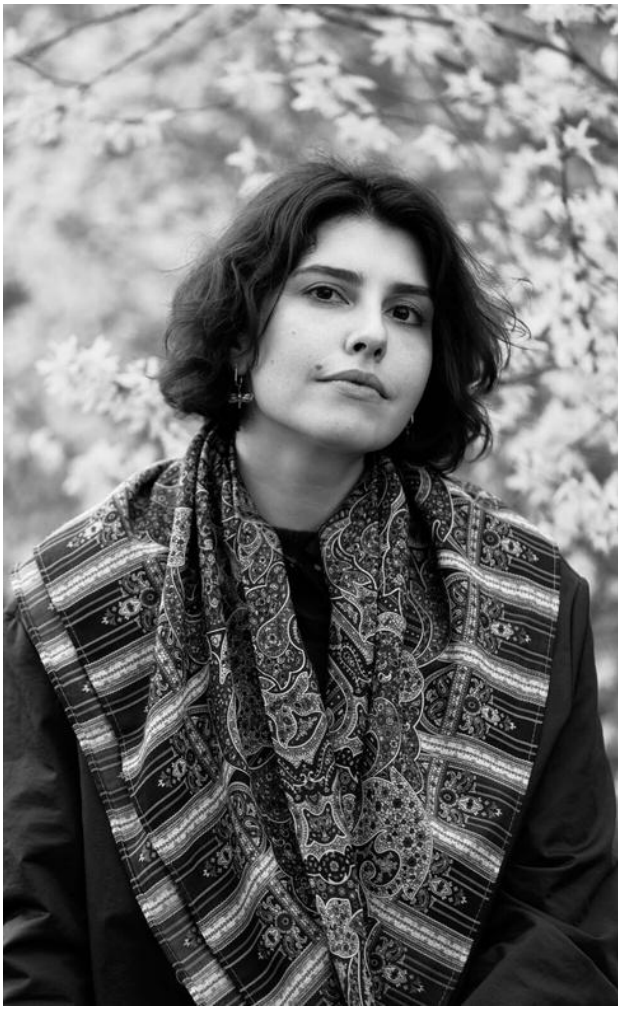
Madelyn Pieratt is a visual artist based in Buffalo, New York, originally from Dallas, Texas. She recently earned her BFA in Painting and continues to develop a practice rooted in experimentation. Pieratt primarily works with acrylic paint, drawn to its layering capabilities and saturation, but has recently begun exploring oil paint to push the boundaries of her technique. Her work shifts in subject matter from project to project, yet common threads run through it all: a desire to evoke nostalgia as well as relate to current pop culture. Using saturated color palettes and a pop art sensibility, Pieratt creates images that feel both familiar and emotionally resonant, inviting viewers into a space between memory, imagination, and relatability.

Madelyn Pieratt | Working Hands | 2025



Madelyn Pieratt | Giving Tree | 2025

Alena Trubitsina



Your work spans visual art, writing, music, and embodiment. How do you decide which medium to use when expressing a particular idea or feeling?

It often comes down to intuition—what feels right in the moment. But each medium, of course, has its own language and purpose. Visual art is best for clear, even obvious symbolism. Writing helps when something is more poetic or layered, too complex for a single image. And when something is raw, visceral, or beyond words, that's when sound and movement come in.

As both an artist and an art psychotherapist, how do your therapeutic insights influence your creative process?

I can't talk about this endlessly, but the main thing is probably about enlarging your inner container. At its core, artistic work is often seen as an act of expression, and therapy-awareness helps to recognise what exactly it is that we are expressing, to connect to it on a deeper level. It's like a power to freeze time—and then to observe it, to hold it, to play with it, to explore it, to just be with it. Go deeper, find nuance, and notice details that would otherwise remain hidden.

Alena Trubitsina | The victory of the spirit over the flesh | 2022

Many of your works seem to engage with the collective unconscious. Can you share how dreams or archetypes appear in your art?

A lot of the surreal imagery in my work comes directly from my dreams and spiritual exploration. I love the feeling of turning something completely unreal into something physical. There's something deeply satisfying—almost magical—about giving form to what once lived only in the inner world. I'm a strong believer in the equal importance of inner and outer reality, and this kind of expression feels like a way of honouring that balance—giving the inner world the same weight and presence as the outer one.

What role does the body play in your visual storytelling?

Alena Trubitsina | And what is your sin | 2024

As much as I value inner reality, we are physical beings — the body is both a powerful instrument and, at times, a kind of cage. It's an enormous gift: it allows us to feel, to express, to be. All the pleasure, all the sensory richness. In many ways, having a body defines being alive. But it also carries many limitations and challenging layers of personal, cultural, and symbolic meaning attached to every part.
I'm drawn to that tension—the balance between seeking spiritual freedom while staying grounded and present in physical form.

Your use of metaphor and symbolism is very striking—how do these emerge for you during the creative process?

To be honest, they just come to me—and they're quite hard to shake off until I make them physical. They appear in my head and follow me around until I express them in some shape or form. It's less about intentional creation and more about listening, and then letting them out.

The emotional tone of your work often feels raw and intimate. How do you balance vulnerability and control when creating?

I try to stay as open and honest as I can. But sometimes I create something that scares me—because it feels like it might reveal too much. I wonder if people will see something I'm not ready for them to know. That's when the need for control comes in, but most of the time I can keep it at bay. Therapy showed me that rejection isn't as dangerous as it feels, and that if I stay true to myself, I can handle being seen.

Has living between cultures (Russia and the UK) influenced the themes you explore?

Absolutely. The experience of immigration has been a powerful source of inspiration and personal growth. Just as therapy helps expand your inner container, living between cultures—especially in a city as diverse as London—broadens your perspective. You begin to see the world not only through the lens of your upbringing or native culture, but in its full complexity, diversity, contradiction and uncertainty, pain and beauty.
This constant exposure to different ways of being has deeply enriched how I understand human experience. It's given me more layers to explore, both personally and creatively.

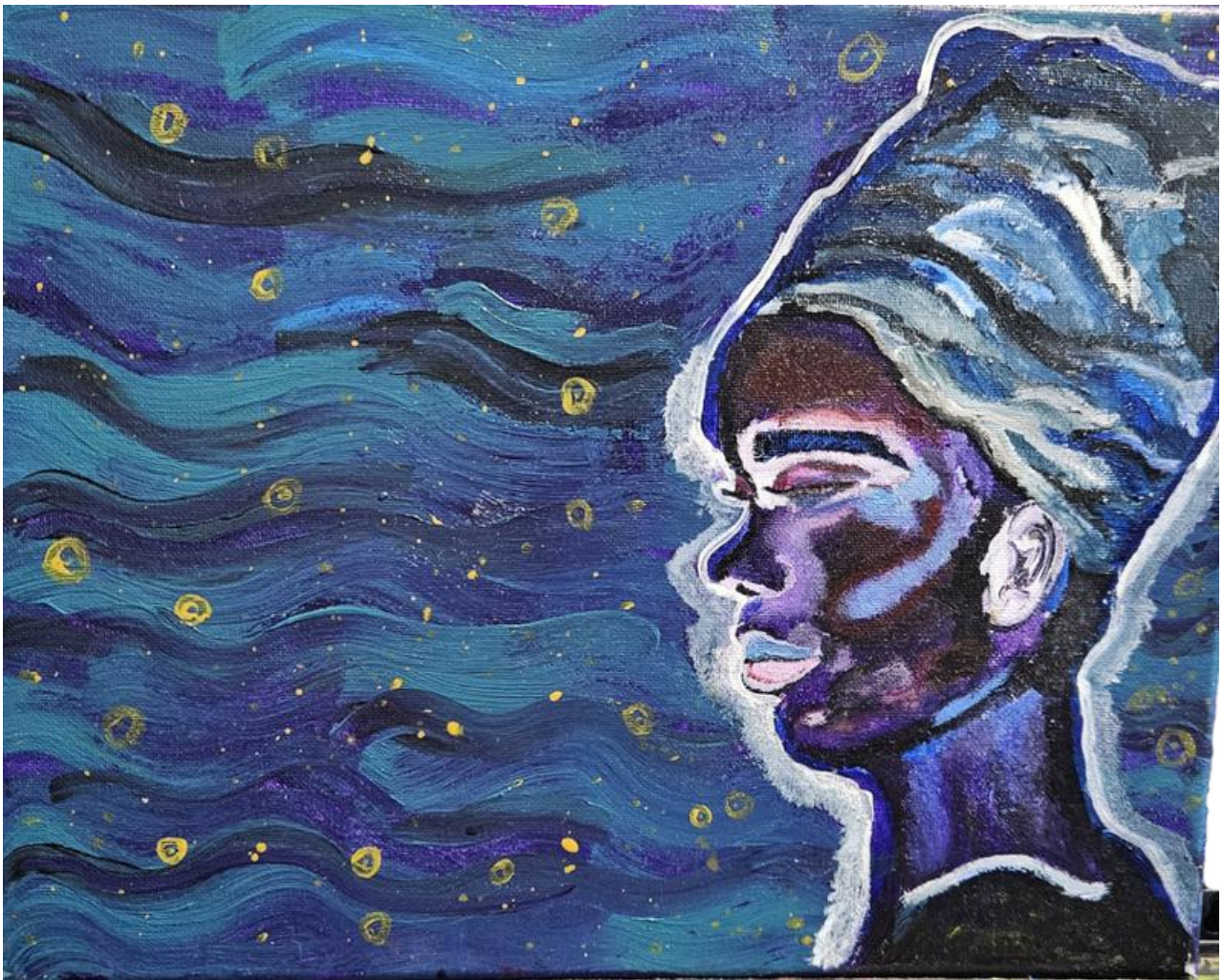
Alena Trubitsina | Last minute of a dream | 2023

Essence Mona

Essence is a contemporary painter based outside of Saint Louis, M, known for her distinctive style that blends abstract and impressionism with emotional depth. Inspired by imagination and everyday lively hood. Essence Mona' has exhibited in St. Louis and continues to push creative boundaries through her art.

Project Statement

Essence Mona' is a contemporary artist whose work explores the intersection of identity, emotion, and the invisible struggles of living with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND). Diagnosed with FND, a condition that affects the nervous system and how the brain sends and receives signals, she transforms personal challenges into powerful visual narratives. Through painting. She uses creativity as both a coping mechanism and a platform to raise awareness about neurological disorders often misunderstood or overlooked.

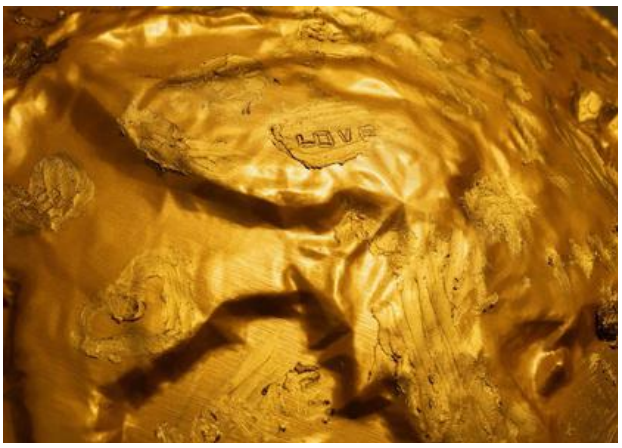


Essence Mona' | Ms. Universe

Essence Mona' | Sunlit Matricarch

— *Interview*

Marigpa



Marigpa | Heal the World | 2025

Your works radiate with metallic hues like gold and copper. What draws you to these materials and tones?

I'm truly fascinated by metallic colours – gold, silver, and copper. They are a hallmark of my work. Historically, they've always been linked with opulence and wealth, but for me, they deeply resonate with feelings of luxury, warmth, and hope.There's a sense of life in them; they shimmer and shift with the light, almost as if they respond to me as I paint. These pigments also offer a tangible connection to the earth itself. As they come from its mineral resources, they carry such a rich history and reflect our long-standing relationship with these precious materials. It's powerful to think how these elements, born from the earth, then seem to capture the light and energy of the cosmos, beautifully highlighting the interconnectedness of everything.

Marigpa | Compassion | 2024

Can you share a specific travel experience that profoundly influenced one of your artworks?

My extensive travels profoundly shape my artistic language. Connecting with people from different cultures, learning their traditions, and hearing their stories is incredibly important to me – it all becomes a part of who I am. While I can't single out just one place as a favourite, a solo journey I took to Bhutan years ago was a truly awakening experience. The sheer beauty and purity there were breathtaking. The requirement for a driver and guide actually led to unexpected, meaningful conversations. I was deeply inspired by the contentment, strong faith, and the profound love and respect the Bhutanese people have for their country and monarchy. These experiences, though sometimes hard to pinpoint individually, are woven into the fabric of my work.

What role does spirituality play in your creative process?

Spirituality isn't something separate or untouchable in my art; it's fundamental because I believe we are all spiritual beings here to experience. We are, inherently, enlightened beings, but perhaps we've forgotten this truth through the 'matrix games' of life. The metallic hues I use aren't just for visual effect; they

symbolise spiritual enlightenment for me. I find deep inspiration for my spiritual and symbolic language in expressions of faith across various cultures – Mayan Totems, Byzantine icon painting, Thangkha paintings, and Native American Totems all resonate strongly with me because they convey such a powerful connection to the divine and the natural world. I believe spiritual enlightenment is about expanding our consciousness and understanding. For me, art serves as a powerful pathway for self-discovery and spiritual growth, offering a space for introspection. My work is an exploration of my own inner world, and I hope it encourages viewers to connect with their own spirituality and a sense of something larger than themselves. My connection with The Oneness Gallery also speaks to this feeling that, fundamentally, we are all one.

Your pieces seem to balance opulence and tranquility. How do you approach that contrast in your art?

For me, opulence and tranquility aren't really a contrast. I truly believe that tranquility isopulence – it is the ultimate luxury. Real opulence comes from experiencing inner peace. Without that sense of calm within, even great wealth doesn't feel truly opulent. Tranquility gives you a feeling of having more than enough, allowing you to fully appreciate and embrace what you have. This is the sense of opulence I aim to capture in my work, where the richness of the metallic tones coexists with an aura of peace.

Do you follow a particular routine or ritual when starting a new painting?

My creative process isn't driven by a strict routine or ritual. It's much more intuitive. It begins with a profound feeling, an emotion, or a connection to a specific moment or experience. My art comes directly from my heart and feelings. I find that not being tied to a pre-set theme or a rigid structure allows me the freedom to create in a way that feels authentic and limitless.

How does light influence your choice of colors and composition?

Light is incredibly dynamic in my work, especially because I use metallic colours. They are so reactive to light; they shimmer and shift, which really brings the painting to life and changes how it looks depending on how the light hits it. I've even had moments where I needed to wear sunglasses while painting in natural light because of how intensely the metallics reflect! The way light interacts with the pigments is a key part of creating the atmosphere I want – one that encourages contemplation and reflection.

Are there specific cultures or places that inspire your visual language most strongly?

My visual language is certainly shaped by my experiences of different cultures and places around the world. I deeply value the opportunity to connect with people, learn their traditions, and hear their stories – it all feeds my work. While many places inspire me, Bhutan was particularly significant for its beauty and the spirit of its people. I also find London, where I live, to be incredibly inspiring because of its vibrancy and the amazing mix of cultures you encounter every day. Beyond specific locations, my works are deeply inspired by historical art forms that have a strong spiritual or symbolic language, like ancient Egyptian art, Persian miniatures, Byzantine icons, and various forms of indigenous art. I see us all as global citizens, and travel simply opens my eyes to different artistic traditions and ways of seeing the world.

Marigpa | Sakura / Cherry Blossoms | 2024

Rajpreet Kalsi is a fine artist based in Redditch but, she is currently studying her fine art degree at De Montford University, Leicester. She specialises in painting to explore the theme of her British-Asian identity through her stylistic portrait paintings of her family. Kalsi is an artist that always wants to learn and explore new skills, she recently began learning oil painting alongside portraiture, but also strengthened her skills in Lino printing. Three of her phulkari Lino prints of are now in the De Montford University's private collection.

Project Statement

"Let Me Take a Photo of You" is a mixed media piece using materials like Lino printing and oil painting on MDF board. The background of the painting is a Lino print of a phulakri pattern (traditional Punjabi textile) on gesso primed MDF board; the printed board has oil painted figures, which looks like they are taking a photo of the viewer. This painting explore the difference in generational immigrant in contemporary Britain and the tradition vs modern. I made my Babaji (granddad) more transparent to symbolise the closer connection he has to Punjabi culture. My Babaji was born and raised in Punjab India, then he moved to Kenya to work and get married. He had my dad there and they migrated to the UK in the late 60's. He is still in touch with his Punjabi culture whist maintain the western style in Britain. He also resembles traditional through the use of his phone and the composition. On the other hand, my sister, Rosie, reflects the second-generation immigrant. The pattern is less transparent which reflects the disconnection to the culture, due to growing up in Britain. Before joining British schools she use to speak fluent Punjabi, but after joining school she slowly forgot the language resulting in a disconnection but also a disconnection to British culture due to the hybridity. However, despite forgetting the language she still connected through music and understanding Punjabi. Furthermore, she resembles modern, by the clothes she wears and the way she is holding her phone, compared to Babaji.

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun

What initially drew you to the multiple exposure technique in film photography?

To be honest, I'm not entirely sure. The first time it happened was actually by accident—when I got my scans back from one of my early rolls, I noticed that a photo of my friend had been layered with another image. At first, I thought my camera was faulty, but everything else looked fine. Then I remembered that my Canon SLR EF-1 (from 1973) has a button that allows for multiple exposures.
I had also seen works in digital art and photography where layering techniques are used —whether through scans, prints, paintings,or other analogue processes. That inspired me to try my own experiment: photographing streets and people, layering it all together. The idea was to create something unified from the different elements of street photography. I wanted to show that even if things look very different on their own, together they can still create something beautiful. I guess it's that idea of opposites attracting. It became a kind of visual puzzle—trying to fit unrelated parts into a new whole, where contrast becomes harmony rather than conflict.
One photo that stands out is a layered shot where a brutalist concrete building cuts through the frame, intersected by the delicate curve of a Victorian terrace—totally different energies, but they created this unexpected balance. That's when I realized how powerful those accidents could be.

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers

How do you choose the locations or moments you want to overlay—do you plan them or is it an intuitive process?

Honestly, it's mostly intuitive—sometimes thought-out, and sometimes just pure accident. In one photo, I tried to frame a street scene on one side and then maybe overlay it with a person in the middle. Some of it worked, and some unexpected elements got into the mix.
I also had the idea of combining the old and new —like the classic Victorian buildings of London with modern towers, or urban scenes with more rural ones. So while a lot of it was

based on instinct—thinking "this might look good with that"—there was also technical planning involved. I had to adjust the ASA (film sensitivity) to control which parts of the image would be more or less defined. There were plenty of moments where it didn't work and I had to cut some images out. It was definitely a lot of trial and error. Sometimes the "mistakes" were more interesting than the planned results, and I started leaning into that unpredictability. It made the process feel alive.

Street Layers blurs the line between abstraction and documentary—do you see your work more as emotional interpretation or urban record?

If I really had to choose, I'd say it's a bit of both. When I try to capture something, it usually starts with an emotional motive. Maybe a street or an object gives me a certain feeling, or I see beauty in something others might overlook. It could be something simple, messy, or even kind of trashy or frayed. A lot of the time, my visuals—whether photography or video—are affected by how I'm feeling on that particular day. That emotional lens shapes how I see the world. But at the same time, certain elements always stay constant in how I approach it. It's not about documenting a place exactly as it is—it's about how it feels to exist in that place, in that moment.
So in that way, it becomes emotional storytelling through the language of the street. Even if people don't know the specific locations, they can relate to the mood or the rhythm of the composition.
Sometimes I'm walking around London and I get this strange realization—something I think anyone who's lived in one place for a while might relate to. You start to forget to appreciate where

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers

you are and how vibrant it really is. You get used to it, or you're so caught up in work and everyday life that you stop noticing your surroundings. I've lived in London for almost five years now, and every so often, I'll be walking somewhere and suddenly think—wow, I'm actually living here. In this city where so many things have happened, full of history, full of people with their own lives and places to be. Sometimes I get this weird wave of nostalgia—not just for the city, but for how it felt when I first arrived. Everything was new. It felt unreal. I guess I was documenting a kind of sentimentality as well.
Some of the photos are even quite touristy—like one I took of a phone booth—but that's honestly how I saw the UK at first, coming from Russia. That classic red phone box was a symbol of this place to me. Coming to a big city felt monumental. I grew up in Moscow, which is also a huge metropolis—bigger than London in size, full of people—but maybe because I was always there, I took the amazement for granted.

What role does imperfection play in your visual storytelling?

I think it's a big one. I've often been called a chaotic person, and while that's not entirely

wrong, I can also be quite controlling in my process. A lot of my life exists in this space of organized chaos. I like a messy vibe, I guess. I find something exciting and honest in imperfection—something that feels complete on its own terms. It's unique, and it can tell you a lot about a person or a place.

What also helps with the balance between perfection and imperfection is the patience required to do analogue photography or a project like this. Even though my thought process can be chaotic, I still like to feel in control of what I'm doing. But with film, you don't actually know how the image will come out until the roll is developed and scanned. That waiting process has become a kind of therapy for me. It teaches me patience, and it forces me to give up control —at least for a while. I think that's where imperfection becomes meaningful. Because no matter how much I plan, I can't control every detail of how the image will turn out.

In a way, working with multiple exposures on film exaggerates that lack of control even more. You can't fully predict how two frames will overlap— how the contrast will land, where the details will blur or sharpen. But that's part of the beauty of it. It's unpredictable, and it feels alive.

Sometimes I only understand what I've captured after the scan, and that gap between intention and outcome has taught me a lot.

Also, I think imperfection helps me stay

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers

connected to the honesty of the process. It keeps things grounded. When everything is overly polished, it can lose its humanity. Imperfect photos—ones with grain, blur, double exposure mistakes—remind me even if it didn't go the way I planned, it still says something true.

In Street Layers, architecture is a recurring motif. What does the built environment represent to you?

I'm not entirely sure, but architecture definitely attracts me. I think the urban environment lets me romanticize my life in a very generic way — me living in a big city. It gives a kind of cinematic feeling, where I can step outside and feel like I'm part of something larger, even if I'm just walking to the shop.

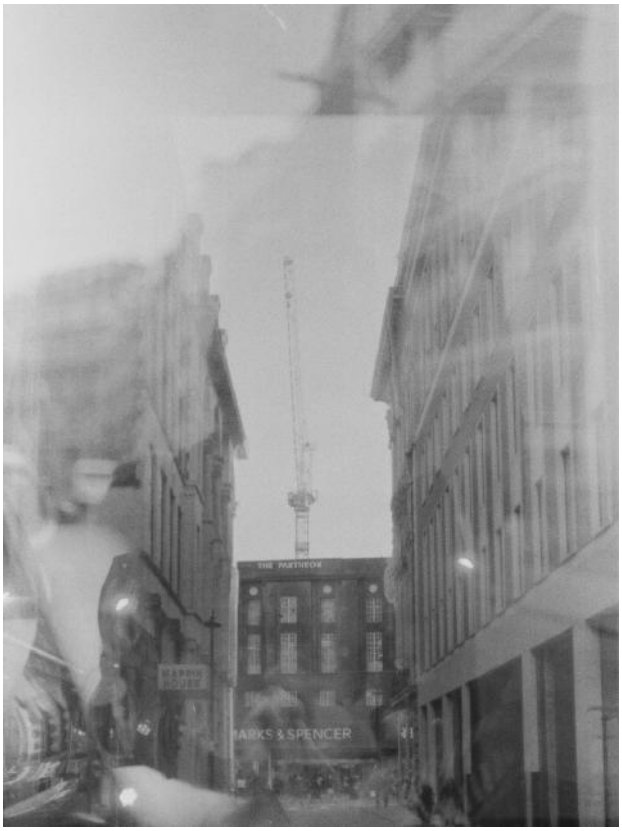
Part of it is the history and the thought process behind how buildings are designed and positioned within their surroundings. From what I understand about architecture, a lot of consideration goes into how a building will suit the already existing environment and how everything will look together. Even if the styles are different, they somehow come together —

much like the idea behind my project.
As well as that ,In some ways, it can make me feel very small, like I could get lost in it.
Architecture to me feels like a silent storyteller — a physical record of time and culture. Each building, whether old or new, says something about the moment it was made.

How do you balance spontaneity and composition when working with analog film?

I don't think there is a clear balance. While I do try to compose the image and there's usually a core idea behind the layers, I don't see the original frame when I'm shooting the next one. I have to rely on memory and the feeling I had while taking the first shot.
So for me, spontaneity isn't something that stands in opposition to composition — it's actually a big part of how the composition forms. I hope that makes sense. It kind of ties back to the question about imperfection and control. In an ideal world, some of the images might have turned out more polished or precise, but because I can't fully control the outcome, they often end up more chaotic — and somehow still work together in a natural way.
Imperfection becomes part of the process, not something to avoid, but something that adds to the story.

Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers



Omar Danial Biuiiuktosun | Street Layers

Has your background in filmmaking influenced the way you structure photographic narratives?

Yes, definitely. Mise-en-scène is a big part of how I compose photographs. I've learned a lot about visual storytelling through filmmaking, especially in cinematography — though I wouldn't say I'm some high-end professional. Most of what I know comes from personal projects, experiments, and a mix of formal training and self-teaching.
Light is a huge part of that. I'm always thinking about how light frames a subject or gives structure to an image — not just in architectural shots, but across everything I shoot. It's one of the first things I notice when composing a frame, because light can change the entire feeling of a shot. It creates mood, atmosphere, even a sense of time. In this project, the light isn't always clean or controlled — because of the layering — but it still does something important. It highlights some parts, drowns out others, and that unpredictability adds to the whole idea of peaceful chaos. I know that sounds a bit dramatic, but it really is the best way to describe it.

Axelle Emden is a French artist based in Paris with a primary focus on photography and mixed media. Her interest in photojournalism began in her early twenties when she worked as a journalist and discovered the work of Stanley Greene, Steve McCurry, Elliott Erwitt, and Martin Parr. Like many photographers, she started with street photography while travelling in China, Egypt, and across Europe. She naturally transitioned from words to images, realising that photography was another way to tell stories. Her greatest passion is portraiture, particularly photographing musicians, for whom she sometimes acts as a creative director. Axelle has a background in philosophy and political science (EHESS, Sciences Po Paris), which perhaps explains her love of playing with words in her personal projects. Difficult to categorise, her work includes several series on the body, documentary photography, and a collection of daily travel books. She also has a strong interest in women's issues, LGBT rights, and the impact of globalisation on the world. Her work has been exhibited in Paris, Barcelona, Miami and London.

Project Statement
« Play » is one of my first personal series. I wanted to celebrate creation through a classical theme of photography : water. I guess all photographers are attracted by water as it can turn any image into something else. The idea was simple : put models under a shower or in a bathtub with clothes. In English, a play is a show and just like in French, actors play just as children do. Just like the impulse to play, water is fluid and elusive. It always has inspired artists, poets and writers because it symbolizes the paradox of human condition and invites to contemplation. Water can be fountain, source, river, rain, torrent or sea. It's also what humans are : we're essentially made of water. We were all born in water, yet water can engulf us. It can evoke death as life, and that's why the series is made of joyful shots on one hand and of melancholic ones on the other. Moreover, this series is probably a note for myself : don't forget to play because that's perhaps the very reason why you chose to make art ! It's also something I want to remind humans : just play, let go your creativity and something is gonna come out of it.

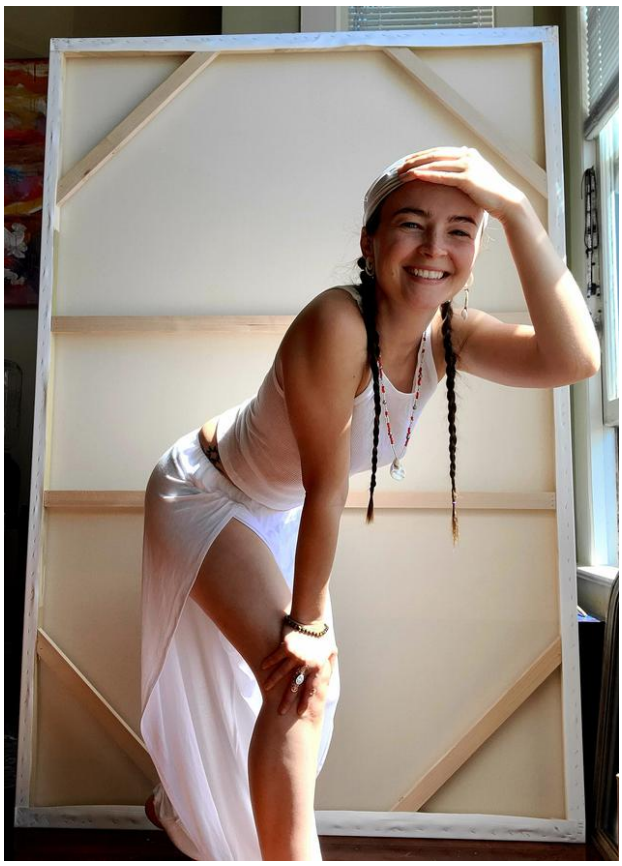
Axelle Emden | Unseen | 2013

Alexandra Baker

You began painting in 2018. What inspired you to start creating art at that moment in your life?

I was living in San Diego, California in 2018 and I began to feel this Divine Pressure to paint. Although I'd never been a painter or taken a painting class since childhood, I felt an unrelenting pressure to paint that I couldn't explain. One day I saw a sale at a local art store and bought a bunch of canvas and paints. My first painting was variations of white and yellow on a 48 x 48 inch canvas and I was so proud.

Alexandra Baker | Ancestors' Song | 2025



When I began painting it felt like I was breathing fully for the first time.

You describe painting as a form of healing. Can you share a specific moment when painting helped you process or overcome something?

Painting helps me cope with life on a daily basis. Many of my early paintings were a way of storytelling about past traumas. Things I had never dared speak about, but painting about them felt safe. I could tell the story of what happened through textures and colors and it was my own little language. In doing this I let those tales live outside my body – much like the catharsis people find by writing in a journal. Painting continues to heal me, the process is so soothing!

How do color and texture play a role in your process of healing—both for yourself and your viewers?

I find that certain pairings of colors together evoke specific emotional responses. Putting white s with certain pinks can certainly soothe my anxiety as I'm painting. People often tell me that

they feel soothed in certain ways that align with what I was feeling when I created the piece. Texture can also really jump out from the canvas and grab hold of your emotions!

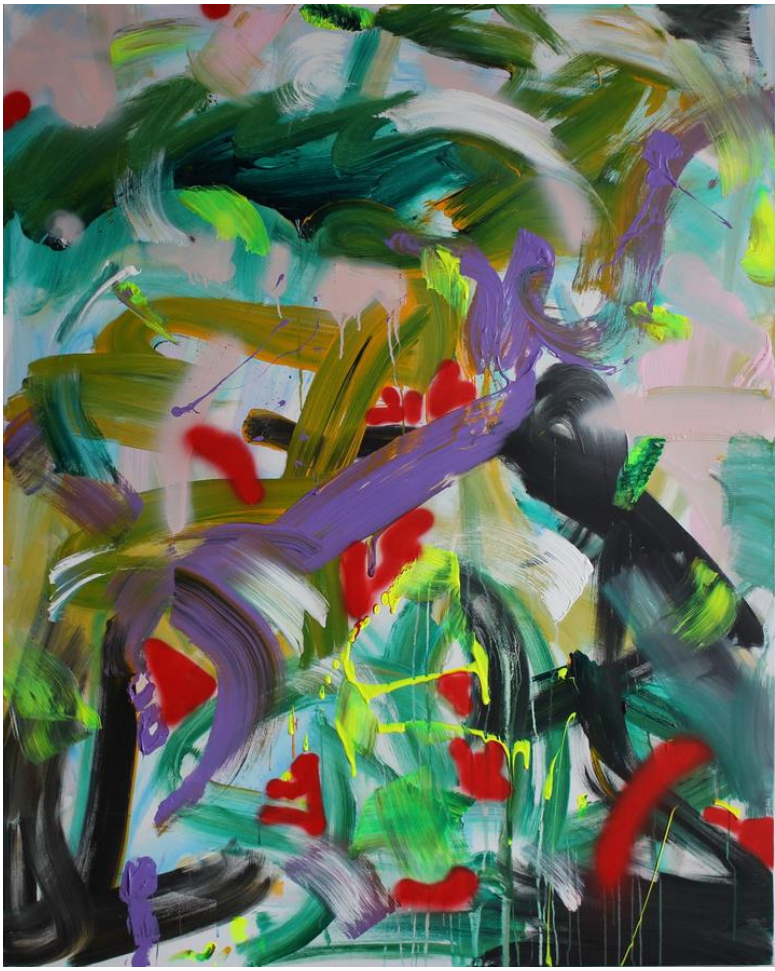
Your work has been featured in British Vogue and Vanity Fair London. How did those opportunities come about, and how did they influence your artistic journey?

One day I received an email from a curator at British Vogue asking if I would be interested in showing my work in their magazine. I agreed to a meeting and the rest is history! I don't believe publications influence my painting practice at all but they certainly have helped with painting sales to Collectors who respect these publications.

What does a typical day in your Memphis studio look like?

A typical day in the studio has natural light pouring in from the windows, some incense, a bit of music, and my cat Sheba. Sheba is of course the home studio manager and mostly in charge of everything important. My paints are strewn all over the floor and I like to open a window to let Spirit in.

Alexandra Baker
Mermaid Soup
2024



Alexandra Baker
Angel Wings
2024

Do the cities you've lived in—Boston, Memphis, San Diego, and your time in Italy—appear in your artwork in some way?

I believe every life experience I've ever had informs my work, including the cities I've lived in. The small town I lived in in Italy was not a place where I could be openly gay and much of my work celebrates the freedoms I feel to be out and proud that I find at home in Memphis, Tennessee.

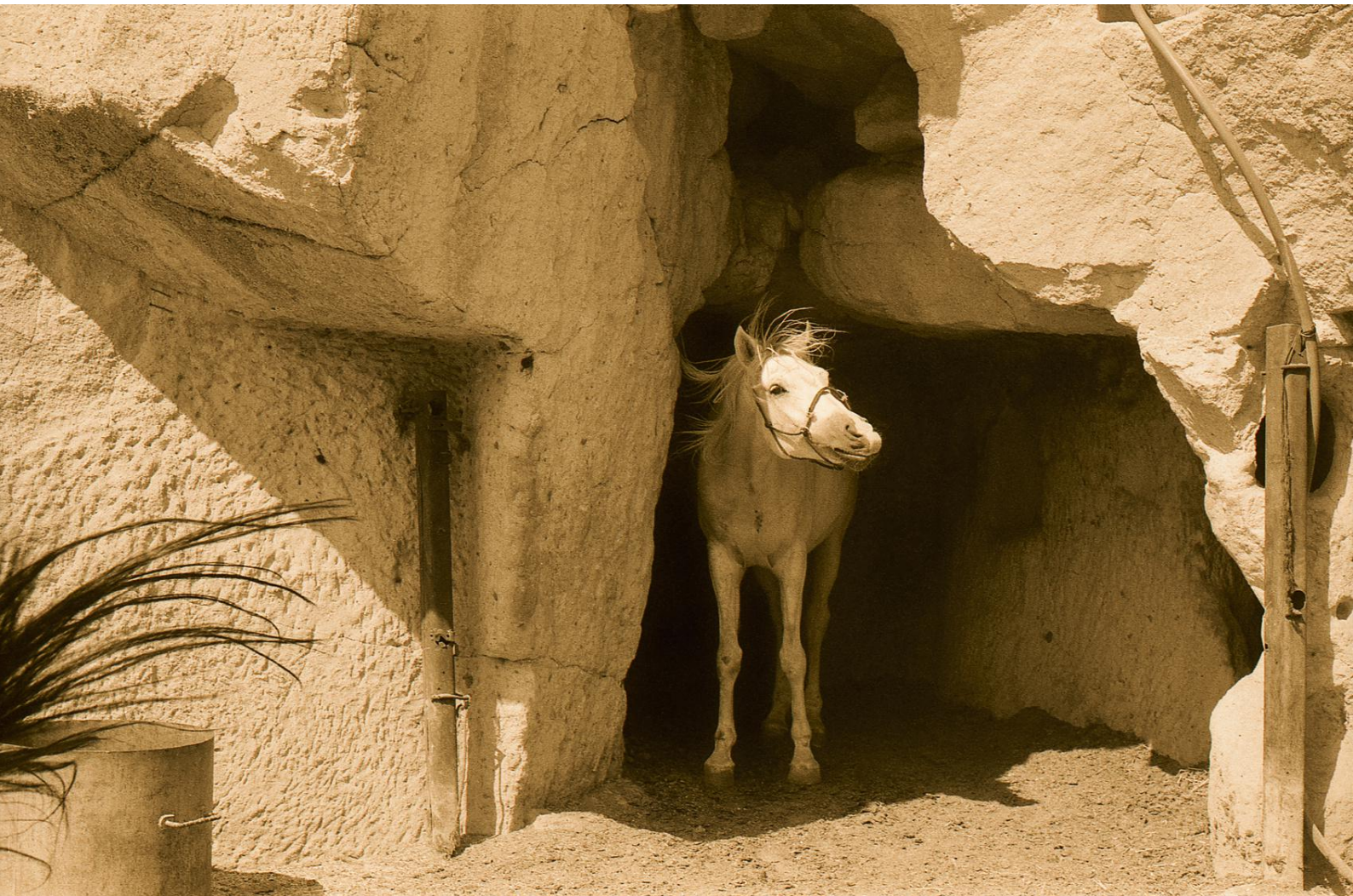
Is there a particular painting that holds the most emotional significance for you? Why?

I have a self-portrait that hangs in my bedroom that I will never sell. The painting captures my Spirit in a painting and I hold it near and dear to my heart.

Peter McCain is the studio manager and producer at 320Systems studio in Brooklyn, New York, which specializes in portraiture and fashion photography. Formerly, he was the publisher, designer, and editor of BATSHIT TIMES Magazine, a print publication that explored societal collapse through experimental art and photography. His travel and fine art photography has appeared in publications like Office, Nostalgic Futures, and Post Modern Sleaze, as well as gallery shows curated by Marcelo Pena Costa, Slow Burn, Static Arts Collective, and The Office New York.

Project Statement
Peter McCain is a filmmaker and travel photographer based in Brooklyn, New York. He fell in love with analog film, media theory, and photography while studying at the University of Texas at Austin, and now he takes month-long photography excursions across the globe. Inspired by his mother's upbringing in a religious cult and his father's hobby of restoring 19th century haunted farmhouses and cemeteries, Peter captures landscapes and ruins where subjects haunt the frame. His work explores the nostalgia, precarity, and myth-making of analog film and is influenced by pictorialist and post-war imagery.

Peter McCain | CaveHorse | 2024



Interview

René Jean Smaal

You returned to black and white photography in 2018 after many years of color and documentary work. What led to that shift?

My development as a photographer and filmmaker really goes hand in hand. I often find myself switching back and forth between the two, depending on how much time I can dedicate to each and the priorities I set for myself. What's interesting is that they inspire each other; the skills I develop in one area often enhance my work in the other. It is a dynamic process that keeps my creativity flowing. The shift I made in 2018 in my photography to working mostly in black-and-white started when I made the abstract-minimalist-surreal black-and-white short film Re/cycle. This project renewed my love and fascination for the visual style of filmmakers like Teinosuke Kinugasa (Kurutta ippêji, 1926), Maya Deren (all her work from the early to mid 1940s), David Lynch (Eraserhead, 1977), Jim Jarmusch (his early work from the 1980s), Darren Aronofsky (Pi, 1998), and Peter Tscherkassky (Outer Space, 1999). You could say 2018 was the year everything suddenly 'clicked into place.' It felt as though I had discovered my artistic voice, which I then began to apply not only to my filmmaking but also to my photography.

Rene Jean Smaal | Rijsbergen Asparagus Field | 2018

Rene Jean Smaal | Bosschenhoofd Drinking Glass on Wooden Table | 2018

Many of your recent works seem to obscure the subject to the point of abstraction. What role does ambiguity play in your artistic intent?

The so-called reality that we all are a part of, and which we usually experience as straightforward, is actually filled with ambiguity. I remember a statement from a theoretical physicist—though I can't recall exactly who it was—who said something along the lines of: "Every question we manage to answer leads to multiple new questions. The more we know, the more we realize how little we actually know." It reminds me of children who have just learned to talk, responding to every answer they receive from their parents with a simple 'Why?' It's an endless loop with no way out. This leads me to think that questions are way more interesting than answers. So in both my filmmaking and photography, I go for wonder and imagination, and even confusion at times. I prefer to raise questions rather than provide definitive answers.

How does your early experience with box cameras in the 1970s influence your work today?

I vividly remember the awe and excitement I felt as a child, barely ten years of age, capturing my first images while wandering the empty streets of my home town, using this antique magic black box camera. With only twelve images on one roll of film, and just one roll each month to spend, I had to make sure not to waste a single shot. To this day, I have held onto that sense of wonder and excitement, and I still do not press the shutter lightheartedly.

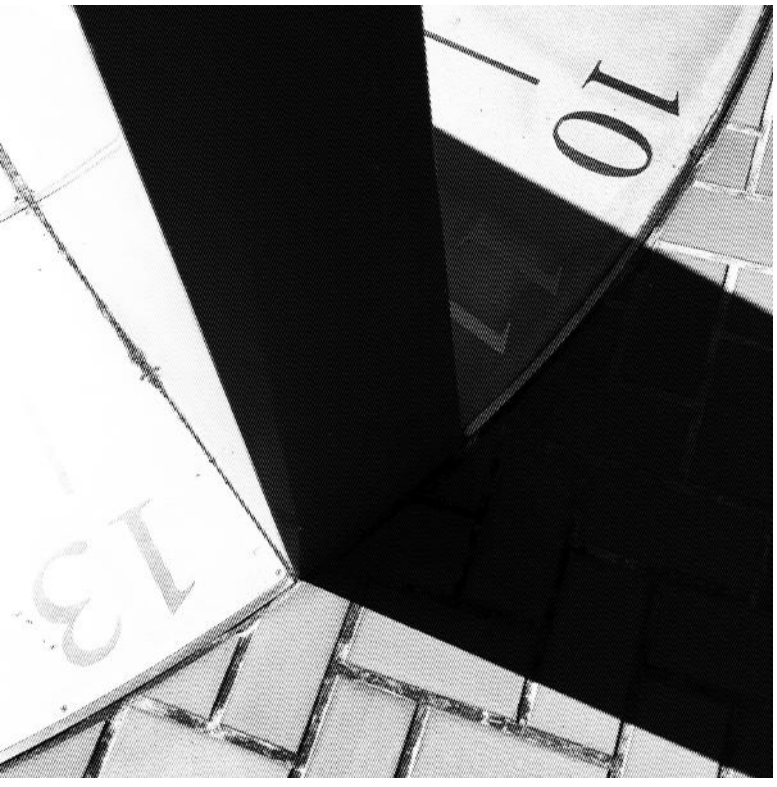
The square format is a defining characteristic of

your photography. What does this format allow you to express that others do not?

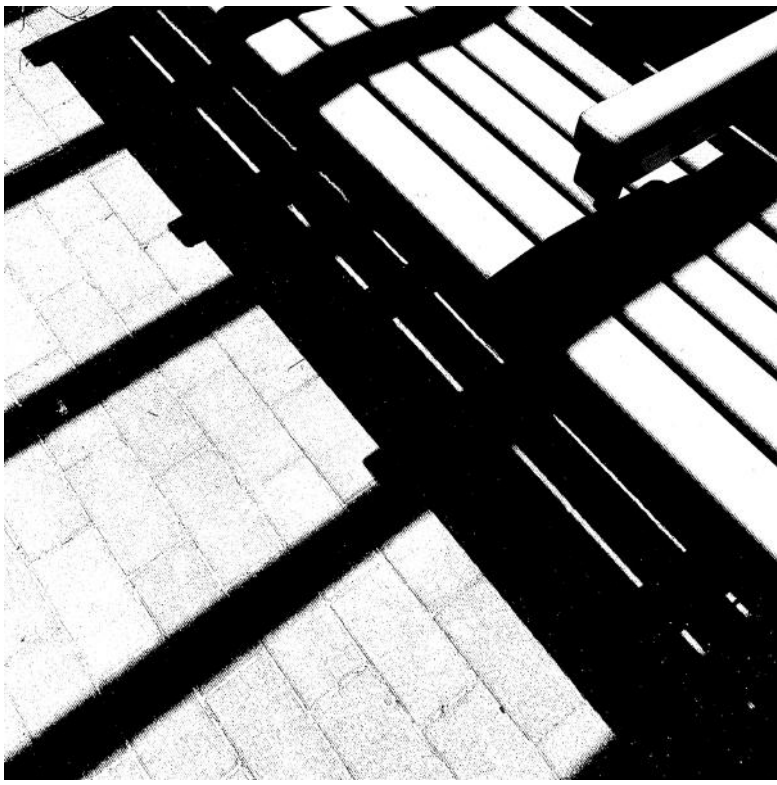
It all comes down to the liberating effect of working within limitations. Since digital photography became a thing, we've got used to the 3:4 and 9:16 aspect ratios, which differ from the traditional 2:3 format of 35mm photography or the 1:1 aspect ratio of medium format film. A tight frame such as the square format forces me to think more critically about what to include in my image, and what to leave out. Counter intuitive as it may sound, embracing such limitations sharpens my focus and helps me clarify my concepts, resulting in more cohesive and impactful images.

Your work often explores alienation and distance. Do you see the camera as a tool for connecting with the world or for maintaining that distance?

Definitely the latter. Some capture a beautiful tree, while others depict entire forests. I am interested in a single leaf, or even just a hint of one. It makes you wonder if what you're looking at is truly a leaf or something else entirely. Connecting with the world—like photographing a tree, a forest, or a landscape—feels like giving answers, while distancing yourself from it, as in depicting (a hint of) a leaf, is more like asking questions. I use a minimalist approach in my photography and filmmaking, stripping away everything that is not absolutely necessary and pushing this concept to the limits. I find that at some point, this abstraction leads to alienation. That's where it becomes truly interesting for me.



Rene Jean Smaal | Osaka Sundial | 2018



Rene Jean Smaal | Hiroshima Funairiminami Bench at Tenma River | 2025

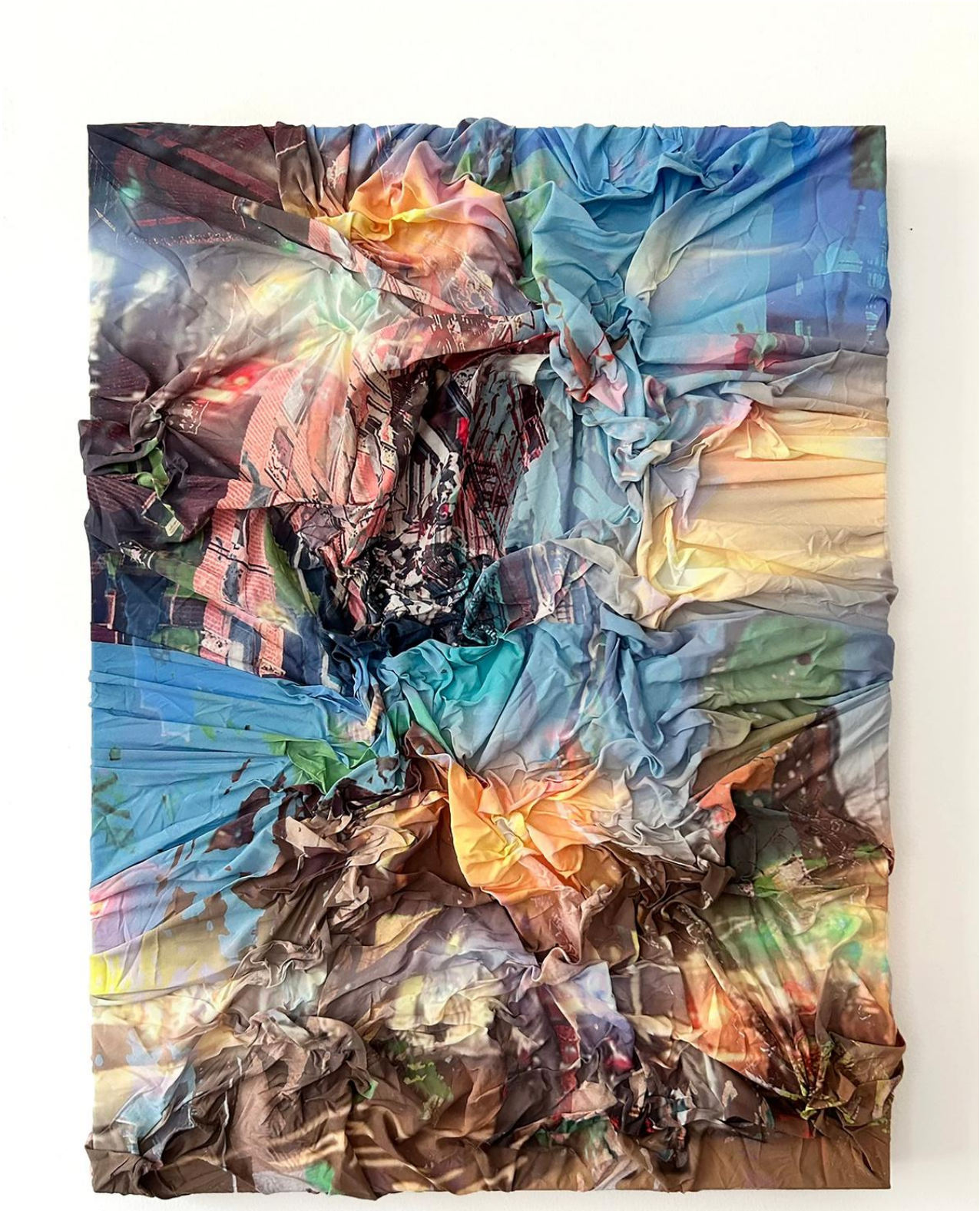
What role does memory play in your photography—especially as someone who has documented urban change over decades?

Documentary-style photography (and filmmaking, for that matter) is indeed linked to (collective) memory. However, in my current black and white portfolio, I feel that memory doesn't play a significant role; instead, it's more about free association.

The title Axioms suggests fundamental truths. What kinds of truths are you exploring in this series?

Something happens when you zoom in on a subject, strip it of its context, and look at it from unusual angles. By losing your grip on the object itself, you start to see patterns and shapes. Some (most?) of these patterns and shapes are just fabrications of the mind. This phenomenon is known as 'pareidolia,' a type of cognitive bias where our brains tend to look for (and find) familiar shapes and patterns in totally ambiguous or random visual information—think of the faces we see in clouds. The series aims to create new visual 'axioms' or truths through abstract forms. Viewers are challenged to find meaning or patterns in what might initially appear as chaos or randomness. This ties back to the idea of free association, encouraging viewers to interpret the work based on their own experiences and biases.

Michaela Shuster is a textile artist and sustainable fashion designer based in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in Textiles in 2023.



Michaela Shuster | VACUUM SEALED | 2025

Michaela Shuster | MERRY GO ROUND | 2025

Sara Montuori

Sara Montuori | Longing for love | 2022

How did your artistic journey begin, and what first drew you to collage as your primary medium?

My passion for images, photography, and color began very early, when I was a child. I've always had a spontaneous attraction to anything visual. My artistic journey started by naturally following this inclination in everyday life. Without a formal academic background in art, I developed my style through daily practice—experimenting, making mistakes, and trying again. Collage became a personal language for me: a way to build meaning, tell stories, and give shape to emotions and lived experiences. What fascinates me most is the possibility of composing and recomposing, as if each fragment finds its place to tell something larger.

Sara Montuori | Back to single life | 2022

Your works blend traditional and digital elements. How do you decide when to incorporate digital tools into your collages?

The choice between traditional and digital tools depends greatly on the nature of the project. I prefer working with paper and physical materials — I love the direct connection with the medium, the manual gesture, the attention to detail, and even the imperfection of a hand - cut edge. However, when I'm working on a commission or a project that requires more direct and contemporary communication, I integrate digital elements. In these cases, digital tools become a way to make the work more accessible and engaging for the audience, without losing the handmade essence of collage.

Many of your pieces feel emotionally charged. Do you begin with a specific emotion or experience in mind, or does it emerge during the creative process?

Many of my collages are born from real emotions or experiences that I'm going through at the very moment I create. It's a way to capture what I'm feeling

in time - as if I could transform a personal experience into image, paper, and words. I like to think of collage as a symbolic reconstruction of what I've lived, taking shape on the blank space of the page.Other times, it's the process itself that guides me: I let myself be inspired by images and texts found in magazines, newspapers, or other sources, including online. It's almost as if they suggest an emotion to explore or a story to tell.

What role do books and reading play in shaping your visual language?

Books have always been part of my world—not only as sources of inspiration, but as visual objects.I'm often struck by an image evoked by a phrase, and the words I read can directly influence what I imagine. Reading is a form of visual and mental nourishment for me: it stimulates the imagination and often sparks visual ideas. Collage becomes a way to visually express what I've absorbed through reading.

One of your works was used as a poster for a theatre show. How do collaborations influence your creative process?

Collaborations are precious opportunities for openness and listening. When I work with others, the process is enriched with new perspectives, new languages, new energy. It pushes me out of my usual

Sara Montuori | Dreams of black | 2022

Sara Montuori | Look at you | 2023

patterns and allows me to create works that are the result of dialogue—not only with myself, but especially with those who entrust me with a project. It's a stimulating challenge that often opens new paths in my personal research as well.

What inspires the textual elements in your collages? Are they sourced from literature, media, or are they your own creations?

The textual elements in my collages always stem from an expressive need tied to the emotion or experience I'm trying to represent. I often search for words or phrases that resonate with that particular feeling, and that might also touch those who view the work—perhaps helping them see themselves reflected in it. Sometimes I find these words in books, podcasts, or in meaningful conversations. Other times, they're phrases I write myself, that come to me almost spontaneously as I work. For me, text is a meeting point between my inner world and the viewer's.

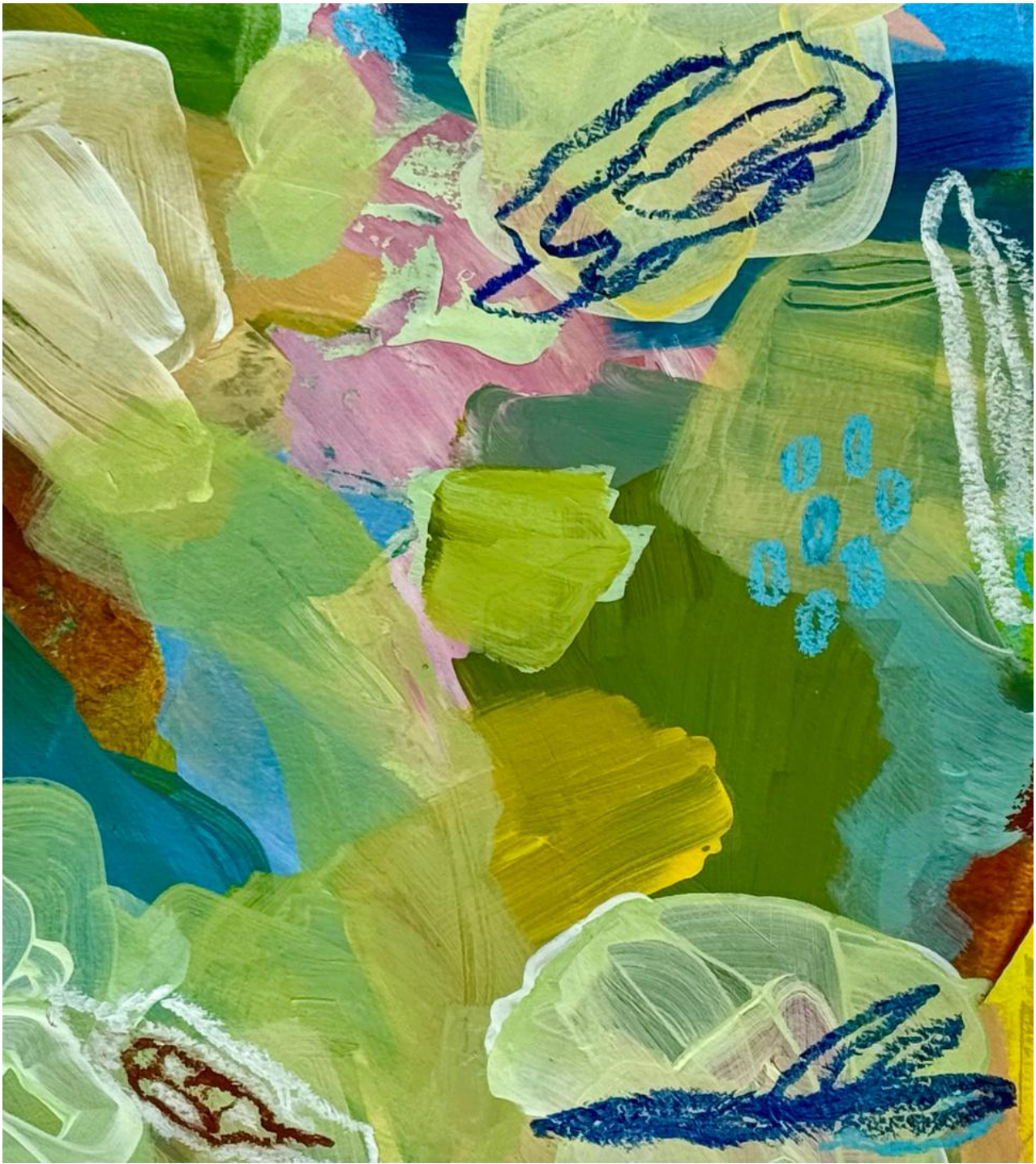
How do you approach the balance between personal storytelling and leaving space for viewers'own interpretations?

I always try to start from something authentic and personal, but I never want to fully define the meaning of my work. I believe art is more powerful when it doesn't explain everything. I intentionally leave open spaces—ambiguities—so that viewers can find their own meaning, see themselves in the work, or discover a new perspective on a familiar emotion. That's why I don't see my collages as fixed or singular. I like to think of them as pieces the viewer can walk through with their own story, building a personal interpretation.

Sarb Glaze is a female South Asian self-taught abstract expressionist artist and photographer based in Vancouver, B.C. She was born and raised in East Vancouver, a dynamic, multicultural neighbourhood that continues to influence her creative lens. A mother of two, Sarb balances family life with a commitment to her artistic practice, which she began exploring more fully in 2020 as a form of healing and personal expression. Sarb primarily creates small works on paper, but also has pieces on canvas. Her work, known for its emotive gestural strokes and vibrant yet soothing palettes, is inspired by nature, childhood, and the pursuit of authenticity. Sarb shares her creative journey and evolving body of work on Instagram at @artbysarbglaze, where she connects with a growing community of fellow artists and supporters.

Project Statement
Sarb Glaze is a self taught abstract expressionist artist whose creative process is rooted in emotional intuition and sensory memory. Her paintings explore the intersection between movement and stillness, chaos and calm. Her work is inspired by the energy of young children and the quiet rhythms and tactile qualities of nature—two sources of spontaneity and presence that ground her work. These aspects guide the way she approaches both colour and form. Her work is known for its emotive gestural strokes and layered palettes, using both vibrant and muted tones to evoke emotional depth and memories of childhood.

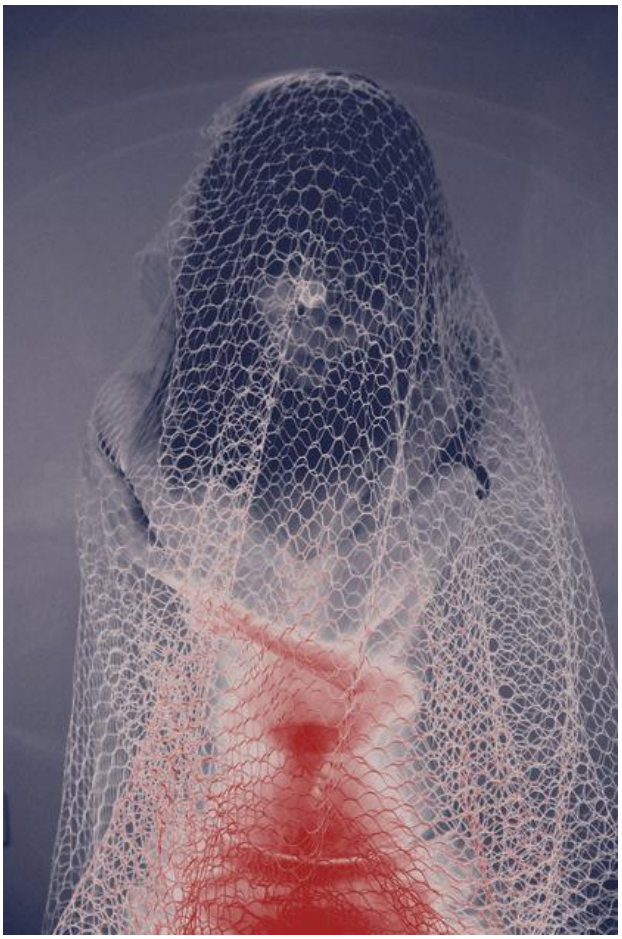
Sarb Glaze | Whimsy | 2025



Audrey Ni Ruorong

Your work intertwines folklore, surrealism, and horror. What first drew you to these themes, and how do you see them resonating in contemporary visual culture?

My work has always been closely connected to my personal experiences. From a young age, I was fascinated by urban legends and horror stories, and later, a personal paranormal encounter became the catalyst for formally integrating horror or weirdness into my artistic practice.



Audrey Ni Ruorong | The Final Straw | 2021

As for folklore, it is simply a category for me, not as mysterious or niche as it might sound. Every culture has its own regional and historical characteristics. Anything circulating within a particular group or area can be called folklore, and its boundaries are inherently blurry. Categorizing things as folklore is not particularly meaningful to me. It's more of an external labeling system.

Surrealism and postmodernism are closely tied to my current research. I'm developing my own Weird Methodology, and surrealism is a significant inspiration and practical tool in this process. Both visually and conceptually, surrealist techniques help me articulate many experiences that would otherwise remain ineffable. Postmodernism emphasizes both the ways in which language constructs reality and its incredulity toward metanarratives. Surrealism embodies these ideas perfectly, enabling me to explore the boundaries of reality through fragmentation and the questioning of perceived truths.

The reason these themes resonate in contemporary visual culture is straightforward for me: our curiosity about the unknown and the uncanny is rooted in human nature. For instance, everyone might have so-called "serious" books or encyclopedias at home, but when we're kids, what we really love to read is pulp fiction. Today, how we receive information has changed significantly—urban legends have shifted from oral tradition to internet-generated content. Yet, the desire to explore the unknown remains the same; it's just expressed differently through new media.

Audrey Ni Ruorong | Meng Po | 2022

Your work is deeply influenced by "Weird Fiction," particularly the New Weird movement. How do you translate the atmosphere of literary weirdness into visual media? And how does your understanding of New Weird—especially in contrast to traditional horror or fantasy—shape your artistic choices?

In my current practice, New Weird occupies a central place, though my formal focus on this direction began only in 2023. Strictly speaking, among the works I'm sharing here, very few explicitly deal with New Weird. Only one collage titled "Is It" touches upon this theme, and even that is just a fragment of an ongoing project. However, since New Weird is at the heart of my current research and creative practice, I'm glad to have the opportunity to discuss it.

New Weird is a contemporary evolution of Weird Fiction, which itself is a hybrid literary genre blending elements of horror, science fiction, and fantasy. The essence of this genre isn't traditional fear but rather the creation of the incomprehensible. Weird Fiction, represented by authors like H.P. Lovecraft (representing Old Weird) and China Miéville (representing New Weird), features monsters and phenomena beyond human comprehension, entirely different from clearly defined figures such as werewolves or vampires in gothic or traditional horror stories. The creatures and events depicted in Weird Fiction surpass human experience, defying classification and human-centric understanding. An anti-anthropocentric perspective permeates the entire genre. Lovecraft's protagonists often state their inability to describe or comprehend their experiences, resorting to chaotic, contradictory, and fragmented language. Readers experience the weirdness through the collapse of language and cognition itself.

The most significant difference between Old Weird and New Weird lies in characters' attitudes toward the incomprehensible. Protagonists in Old Weird are typically nihilistic, prone to despair or retreat when faced with the inexplicable. In contrast, characters in New Weird proactively engage with the unknown, attempting to analyze and solve mysteries through various methods, whether scientific or occult like tarot reading. Seemingly contradictory systems coexist within the New Weird worldview. Rather than avoiding or despairing, these characters actively participate, seeking to understand and engage with incomprehensible phenomena on their own terms. This exploratory process is what draws me to New Weird. Moreover, while monsters in Old Weird draw on imagery from Western mythology, each New Weird author builds their own unique monsters and worldviews.

So, it's clear that the main challenge of visualizing the Weird is that it is essentially "unvisualizable." Literature

Audrey Ni Ruorong | Is It | 2024

can evoke incomprehensibility effectively through textual ambiguity and confusion, but visual representation risks unintentionally providing explanations, thus losing the intangible power of the unknown. Therefore, my approach is not about visually reconstructing specific monsters or scenes but rather dissecting and visualizing the structural process through which Weird fiction generates its unsettling atmosphere. What I visualize is not a single image but the process itself: my own confusion, attempts, and struggles as I confront the incomprehensible. Through this, I've gradually developed my own Weird Methodology, and related works are still in progress; stay tuned.

How does your background in comparative literature shape your visual storytelling?

It's difficult to say that I have a background in comparative literature. My undergraduate studies were in computer science, so I never underwent formal comparative literature training. However, while researching New Weird fiction and writing literature reviews, I have drawn upon comparative literature methods.
So, comparative literature doesn't directly shape my visual language. If there is an influence, it's that my current practice approach feels like archaeological excavation, searching for connections and gaps among various narrative fragments and systems. Comparative literature helps me recognize hidden relationships among these fragments and makes it easier for me to capture cross-disciplinary and cross-media details in my visual expressions.

Can you walk us through your process of integrating digital collage, AI, and field-based narratives into a coherent visual piece?

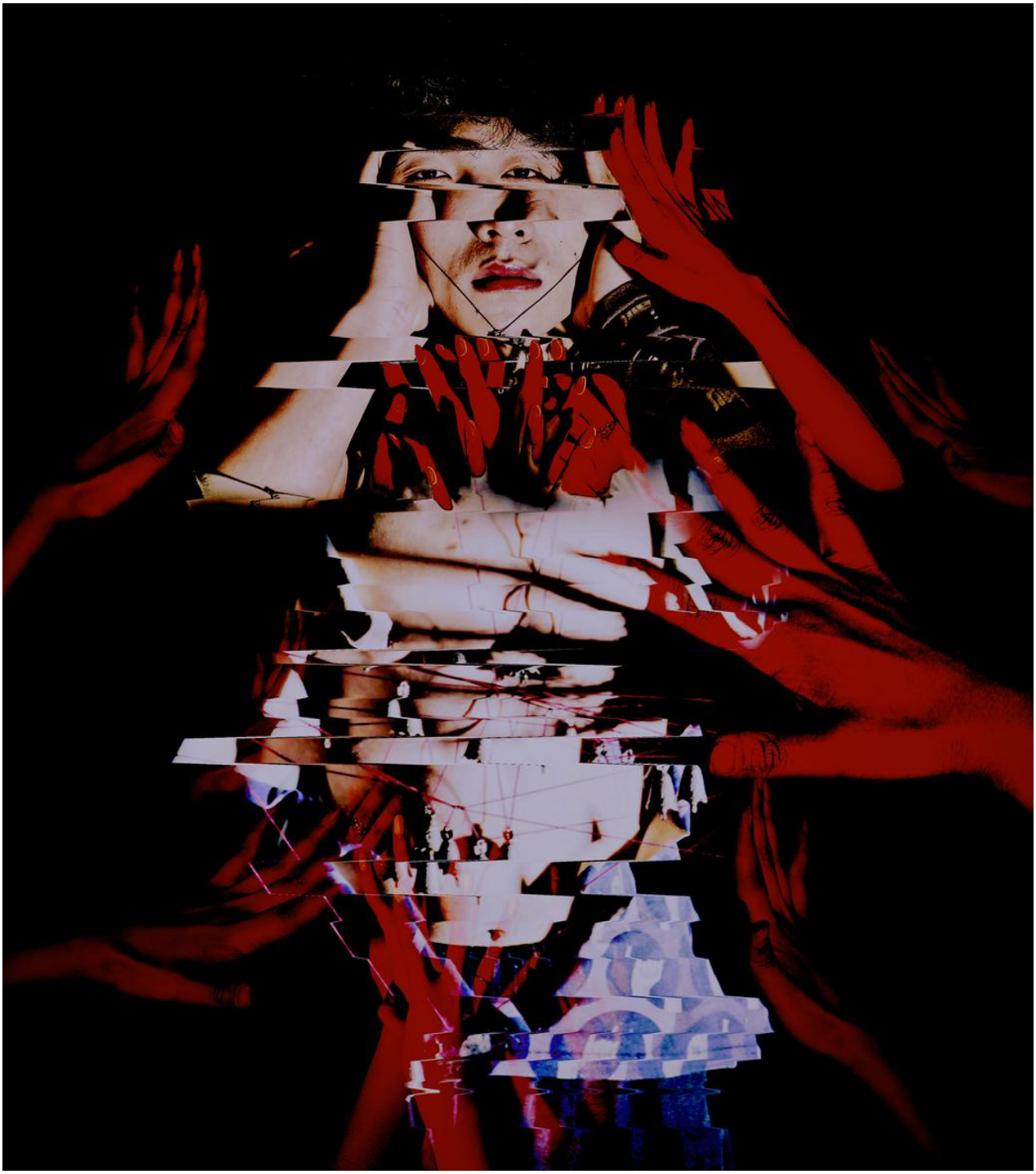
The works I'm currently showing haven't yet incorporated AI; AI is being used in a newer project still under development. Regarding integrating digital collage, AI, and field narratives into a coherent visual work, there's an underlying question worth addressing: why emphasize coherence?
Our perception of the world isn't inherently continuous—we constantly blink, creating fragmented perceptions. It's our brains that stitch these fragments into a seemingly coherent whole. In my current practice, I'm more interested in what happens when I present a narrative that appears structured but is fundamentally fragmented. How would AI interpret these discontinuities? And how would the audience interpret them? That's what intrigues me.
I never pursue absolute coherence, that's not my goal. For instance, a jump scare works precisely because it's abrupt, not coherent. For me, incoherence isn't a problem; given that my current focus, New Weird, inherently involves incomprehensibility, something completely understandable and cohesive wouldn't align with my objectives. Instead, I'm exploring how fragmentation, confusion, and discontinuity can generate novel viewing and interpretive experiences.

Much of your work explores ambiguity and temporal distortion. What does time mean to you in the context of storytelling?

Intellectually, I understand that time is an illusion. However, emotionally, I haven't fully accepted this reality. Creating my work is, in a way, repeatedly confirming and attempting to convince myself to accept this fact.
Within storytelling, time serves as a technique or structural tool. Subjective linear time allows narrative manipulations such as flashbacks, flash-forwards, or temporal disruptions. These methods are more than mere narrative tricks—they effectively engage the audience's perception. Time itself becomes material through which I deconstruct and reconstruct narratives, each exploration rearranging the logic of the world.

Your images often feel like fragmented memories or dreams. Do you deliberately work with

Audrey Ni Ruorong | Primordial | 2018



Audrey Ni Ruorong | Break in | 2019

subconscious or intuitive elements during creation?

Currently, I'm developing my Weird Methodology, with surrealist techniques playing a critical role. But even before explicitly structuring this methodology (prior to 2024), my works already demonstrated automatic or subconscious methods.
Looking back, my use of these techniques was conscious but driven by intuitive interest rather than systematic theoretical foundations. After 2024, when I began systematically reviewing my creative path, I realized I could formalize these intuitive methods into a coherent methodology. So, rather than starting to use subconscious and random elements suddenly, I've always employed them, initially because "it felt right," and later because "I understand why I'm doing it."
I've always been drawn to possibilities and enjoyed the unpredictability brought by randomness. Previously, I felt like someone drawn toward a fascinating constellation from afar. Now, having integrated these experiences into my methodology and worldview, I recognize that I'm not searching externally; instead, I've always existed within a system inherently filled with randomness and possibilities.

Felicia Boyd is a photographer dedicated to her craft, and she takes every opportunity to photograph her favorite subjects, such as architecture and nature. She is open-minded to every changing subject matter and looks for unique angles to capture it. Felicia believes that the hunger she has for knowledge in the industry will ultimately open new doors for opportunities. Her dream is to open someday a gallery where she can showcase how she sees the world through the lens.

Project Statement
For this series, I wanted to capture the tranquility of still images of someone being in these spaces. So, I will be giving you this dreamy memory. I am using the Vaseline effect to capture this by using digital photography. I strive to express my inner creativity by having this dreamy imagination of people being there. I want the viewers to feel like they are at peace with this series, and that they are on this journey of imagination that you are dreamy. Each piece is going to show you a different place and time that you are dreaming about and don't want to wake up from that place. I believe my series will draw your attention to the fact that you are happy. So, I hope this series takes you on this journey of imagination of a surreal fantasy world.

Felicia Boyd | Tranquility | 2024

Felicia Boyd | Tranquility | 2024

Felicia Boyd | Tranquility | 2024

Interview

Ana Hazelny

Could you tell us about the inner vision that inspired The Golden Hug?

In The Golden Hug, I captured a personal spiritual experience—a moment of being filled with the presence of God, when the soul resonates with the pure joy of existence. If I were to put it into words, it would be like standing in sunlight and getting a hug from it: a warmth that surrounds you inside and out, filling your heart with hope and love for all that is.

How does spirituality influence your creative process?

Growing up as the daughter of a psychologist gave me an early awareness that there is more to life than just the physical world. For as long as I can remember, I've been drawn to spirituality, different religions, and philosophy—anything that seeks to answer the deeper questions about the meaning of life. I read and learn extensively about these topics, which is a great source of inspiration for my art. Certain thoughts or ideas leave a strong impression on me—they may later transform into inner images or pop up in my works in some form. In many ways, my art reflects what my mind is currently processing on my spiritual journey.

What role do dreams play in your artistic expression?

Dreams play a central role in my artistic expression, as many of my works depict scenes I've seen in dreams. They are a core part of my creative process. I've had a vivid dream life since childhood, and from an early age, I've kept journals and reflected on them—gradually developing a strong symbolic language that also shaped my art. For me, the dream state feels almost as real as waking life: a unique state of mind where the soul can play freely and channel messages the conscious mind might not otherwise hear. I see dreams as a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal growth—if we are willing to listen and understand them.

You combine aquarelle and acrylics with fine line work—what draws you to this combination?

I enjoy experimenting with different techniques, as each evokes something unique in me. Acrylics feel like a heavier, more grounded material to work with, while watercolor has an ethereal, fluid quality. Both are challenging to control and often require broader, more expressive movements. On the other hand, fine lines allow me to add precise finishing touches when I feel a piece needs more detail. They help create a balance between boldness and softness, the infinite and the structured.

How has your background in complex art therapy influenced your artwork?

Art therapy has helped me to let go of my inner critic. In this space, creating isn't about the final product—it's about the process. There is no right or wrong way to do it; the point is to allow the soul to express itself freely. Every movement, color, and form carry its own meaning, offering a reflection of one's current inner world. This is also how I approach my own creative process. I let the picture unfold naturally, allowing my emotions to flow without restriction. Art therapy has deepened my understanding of art as a tool for healing and transformation. Through participating in and leading numerous art therapy workshops, I've been able to uncover my authentic artistic voice and connect with my unique soul-language. It's guided me toward the importance of authenticity rather than aesthetics.

Do you see your art as a form of healing or transformation—for yourself or for the viewer?

Absolutely—creating is a deeply healing process for me. When I transform inner images, emotions, and dreams into art, it becomes a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal growth. Art allows what lies in the unconscious to be brought into the light of conscious awareness, where it can be seen, processed, and released. I always create in a flow state, fully immersed in the here and now. This presence is profoundly healing—especially in a world where our minds are constantly scattered and distracted.

That's why it can also be meaningful for the viewer—to be momentarily taken out of the rush of daily life, allowing the mind to wander and awakening something universal within, even if only for a few seconds. Over the years, I've received feedback from people who were unexpectedly moved by my work—sometimes even to the point of tears.

How do your Hungarian roots and current life in the Netherlands influence your visual language?

Living in a different culture allows me to better understand my own roots by highlighting how my approach to life differs. At the same time, it enriches both my perspective and visual language. Through the lens of Dutch culture, I've become more aware of the uniqueness of my Eastern European identity and what it means to me. I find great inspiration in the hidden gems of Dutch architecture—like the stained-glass windows in churches and the small gevelbeelden (religious statues or images built into street-facing walls).

Ana Hazelny | The golden hug | 2025

Don Barnes

Concrete Noir is where shadow meets spray can — a raw digital art vision shaped by alleys, bricks, and silence. Blending stark black and white with sudden bursts of neon, each piece pulses with contrast: emotion versus decay, beauty versus grit. Concrete Noir tells stories of women, ghosts, and forgotten voices, painted across imagined urban walls where memory cracks and color bleeds through. Specializing in street-inspired digital portraits, the work drips with texture — grayscale faces melting into brick, sorrow splashed in electric pinks, blues, and reds. It's part rebellion, part confession, all crafted in pixels and grit. For those who feel too much and say too little, Concrete Noir makes the silence scream — in monochrome, in color, in every layer of digital spray.

Don Barnes | Melting lips

Don Barnes | Street bandit

Interview

Anechka Paredes Saniel

Anechka Paredes Saniel | Astraloria Gallery Photo | 2024

Can you tell us more about the world of Astraloria? How did the concept first come to you?

The world of Astraloria is full of wonder, magic and ties between the love of the light and the dark. From another viewpoint, however, it is also the relationship of chaos, where many religions believe that the world came from nothing and chaos. It brings about the harmony of two sides that intertwine beautifully because of a genuine bond between the two entities. The concept first came to me from a story someone who used to be in my life wrote for me to fall asleep to. Due to unfortunate reasons, I had to leave them to be myself again. It was a project I began before I left, but I decided to turn it into something of my own and of my imagination. By recreating the project in a new light, I decided to take the idea of two souls whose stories overlap because of love, something I have dreamed of my entire life. Astraloria became romantic and majestic instead of its original form of just a princess and a knight. Although I kept the title to keep this longing feeling of shooting stars and wishes that dazzle the dress part, which is open to interpretation. It's important to keep many of the original aspects and tie in with the new to form a much larger image of darkness and healing.

Your statement touches on the "romanticization of darkness and its contrasting light." How do you visually represent this duality in your work?

Astraloria is a series of 3 parts, so I will explain each of them: the dress represents how the light and the dark, very much like the Yin and Yang, are entangled with each other, creating a sight that no one expects out of chaos. With its form, it adds the character of balance in the world; the light cannot survive with a bit of darkness.
The video is the literal spoken story of Astraloria, which is a poetic form of the world of Astraloria. The voice of the poem speaks volumes of romance, almost enchanting the viewer to be pulled into the words.
The final part, being the piano compositions, is set up of a variation of songs composed for Astraloria. Whether it is connected to the story or not, it opens a portal to the real world with Astraloria that is full of fantasy, pure evil and love. It is like simple concepts turned into an emotional attraction. It is beauty, grace and destruction.
Visually, altogether, the duality between all three parts portrays not being able to have one or the other; thriving on the brink of chaos is the only way to survive, resulting in a euphoric peace.

What emotions or thoughts do you hope to evoke in your audience when they view this installation?

Confusion, entranced, anger, infatuation, sadness, everything. To also empathize with, to comprehend the storyline, the music and the vision. A world of your own and yet, of another and more. I want the audience to relate Astraloria to themselves mentally and emotionally. Astraloria may be of my wishes and desires, but it was also displayed to be for the people and made by the people, to compare and contrast with the real world. It is important to stay in touch with your sentimental values and how they'll guide you on life's journey.

The garment includes a mixture of textures and

Anechka Paredes Saniel | Astraloria Fashion Design | 2024

colors—how do you choose your materials, and do they carry symbolic meaning?

When it comes to choosing my garments, I make sure that every aspect of the threads and the fabric can visually represent what it is supposed to. For example, like how snakeskin-pattern fabric can symbolize a cunning manner or an actual snake. With the dress I created, I found gorgeous fabric a while ago that was supposed to be used for another gown I created, and luckily, I had leftovers! Not only was I able to reuse wonderful fabric, but it was also able to symbolize itself in another concept I wanted to display. The red being the darkness, the white being a hero of light, while the black was tied in the dress altogether. Overall, the gown, with the fabric braids and the fabrics sewn together, is visually able to create this chaotic form that contradicts itself because it does not appear chaotic; it constructs a collective of the concept. The small pearl flower clips were a last-minute idea to add the starry effect for "the light at the end of the dark path" symbolization.

Fashion, music, and visual arts all play a role in your creative process. How do you integrate these elements into a cohesive artistic language?

As an artistic fashion designer, I aim to combine all of my talents because each of them has a sole connection to me as a person, and my identity is in chaos, and I thrive in it. I am able to take pieces of my love for art and polish a presentable art idea that is abstract and magical. Magic is my goal in art, also pulling in my lasting imagination with the reality of the world, which I view as dull sometimes.

In what ways do your cultural background or personal experiences influence the themes of longing, emotion, and time in Astraloria?

I come from a Filipino-Canadian background, and I did not grow up in the Philippines. However, much of the cultural identity and standards of Asia affect my culture heavily. This means that I grew up with both of my parents, being a nurse and an engineer themselves, to be part of the health field, law or engineering field. Due to these standards and so much more, I fought within a strict environment of not being able to see the world through my own eyes as I grew up with the dreams and goals of my parents. As the environment was extremely toxic, I believe the longing in Astraloria relates to me so much as I always felt like Rapunzel stuck in her tower, waiting for her rescue. Then, emotion, being so young, emotional, angry and confused at the world, as I always wondered why I could not have the life that other children had; I longed for freedom. Finally, time in Astraloria feels so large in its way, like there is so much more to explore, yet it takes all the time in the world to discover every inch of the world. I feel like time is an eternity, and it absolutely was not my best friend for the longest time. Now, as an adult, I have become so in touch with the Astraloria world that I realize it is because of freedom and change.

Was there a specific story or narrative you envisioned while creating the costume?

I envisioned myself in the costume. As selfish as it may sound, I do this with many of my garments, picking out short stories for each as they all symbolize themes and ideas from the life I grew up in and where I am now. At first, it was a trap, something that I could not break out of, as if there were chains in my mind that I could not unlock. Then, it was destructive, as I felt like the dress was now what I wanted, so I began to sew on more and more until there was the disorder I craved in my creations. I wanted the disarray in every part of Astraloria because, without it, what is Astraloria? So, the central narrative is the uproar of dreams and nightmares. What is real? What is fake? Where does this path lead to? Who am I? Who are you? What is life now, as my ties have been severed and thrown into the world? And the questions go on and on. Astraloria is a masterpiece of alluring radiance of so many emotions in one installation.

Ambre Iperti Vukmirovic

Your work spans across several mediums—painting, sculpture, installation, and video. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular idea or emotion?

The medium usually reveals itself through the emotional texture of the idea. I'll paint if a dream seems fragile, like a vanishing memory. It turns into an installation or sculpture if it has an intense or immersive quality. I select items that reflect the feeling I wish to express or keep.

Ambre Iperti Vukmirovic | The unseeen feast

Dreams and the subconscious seem central to your practice. Can you share how you translate these intangible states into physical form?

I work instinctively. I start with fragments, images, sensations, sometimes sentences from dreams and follow them until they form a shape. The goal is never realism, but emotional truth. I use symbols like oversized flowers or mythical figures to embody feelings too large or strange to explain directly.

The alter ego "Bobby" appears in your work. Who is Bobby, and what role does this persona play in your artistic storytelling?

Bobby is both a guardian and a witness. They're an alter ego who exists between worlds observing ours while belonging to a dream-realm of their own. Bobby is non-gendered, emotionally fluid, and free from the binaries of,

Ambre Iperti Vukmirovic | The souvereign of flesh

our world. They allow me to explore vulnerability care, and escapism from a place of tenderness and otherness.

You draw from fairy tales, retro aesthetics, and kitsch culture. How do these influences help you explore themes of femininity and identity?

I use these aesthetics to reclaim softness and sentimentality. Fairy tales and retro visuals often carry coded messages about gender roles. I like to twist or subvert them, layering sweetness with discomfort, joy with eeriness. It lets me question how identity is constructed through fantasy, and how we might rewrite it.

How do personal memory and cultural nostalgia shape the emotional landscapes you create?

My work is fueled by a longing for places that never quite existed a hybrid of childhood memory and collective nostalgia. I build environments that echo blanket forts, sleepovers, or old cartoons, but with something a little unsettling underneath. It's about the fragility of comfort, and how memory always comes with distortion.

In your installations, you often use tactile materials like papier-mâché and soft sculpture. What draws you to these hand-made elements?

They feel alive. Imperfection, visible seams, and softness make the work more human. These materials speak to care and time. They remind me of play, of childhood craft projects. I like that tension between innocence and grotesque, between something lovingly made and emotionally raw.

Your environments invite viewers into introspection and emotional release. What do you hope audiences feel or take away from your work?

I hope they feel held like they've entered a space where they can safely unravel a little. If someone leaves feeling nostalgic, or quietly seen, or even just more in touch with their own interior world, then the work has done its job.

Ambre Iperti Vukmirovic | The pain

Critical Review: The Dual Dialogues of Identity in Mengzhu Li’s Visual Practice

by Anna Gvozdeva

In the work of Mengzhu Li (Helen), tension and tenderness interlace to form a compelling narrative of East Asian womanhood, one that resonates far beyond personal memory into collective cultural consciousness. A photographer and visual artist working between China and the UK, Li uses her dual identity as a lens—both literal and metaphorical—through which she investigates the psychological landscapes of intergenerational relationships, gender roles, and emotional legacies.

Graduating with a Master's degree in Contemporary Photography and Philosophy from Central Saint Martins, and previously trained in Beijing, Li embodies a critical hybridity that informs her practice. Her series of photographs—poignant, performative, and often unsettling—operate at the intersection of personal vulnerability and socio-political commentary. They do not merely depict subjects; they stage encounters—between mother and daughter, tradition and modernity, intimacy and autonomy.

Mengzhu Li | Two in One

In "Two in One," two women—presumably mother and daughter—stand topless, facing a backlit window, their postures both casual and defiant. The mirrored gestures speak to inherited identities and the physical and emotional imprint of familial proximity. It’s a quiet yet radical intimacy, one that refuses eroticization in favor of raw realism.

Mengzhu Li | Mutual Discontent

Mengzhu Li | Making

Similarly, "Mutual Discontent" presents a haunting visual of the mother's mouth crossed out with tape as the daughter gazes at her in profile. The image feels like a silent argument—love bound by repression, a generational gap voiced through forced silence. This motif of communicative breakdown reappears across Li's body of work as both a metaphor and a method: her visual narratives often speak most loudly when words are absent.

In "Making," red yarn is tightly knit around the daughter's face, concealing her entirely, while the mother stands above her, knitting. The suffocating closeness implies nurture turned into entrapment—a visual allegory of love that binds too tightly. The use of yarn, a traditionally "feminine" material, makes a critical statement about the domestic labor and emotional weaving often expected of women, particularly in conservative Asian households.

Even humor is not exempt from critique. In "Break," both women sit in an everyday bathroom, but the daughter appears only on a laptop screen resting on the mother's lap. It's an absurd, semi-surreal confrontation with digital fragmentation of relationships—an ironic take on physical presence and emotional distance in the digital age.

Mengzhu Li
Break

What elevates Mengzhu Li's work is its seamless blend of conceptual depth and visceral emotion. Her photographs become poetic texts, where each visual component—gesture, gaze, fabric, or setting—functions as syntax in a language of memory and critique. Through constructed tableaus and symbolic action, she captures the paradoxes of female identity shaped by both care and control.

In today's global art scene, where multiculturalism and identity politics are often surface-level themes, Li's work stands out for its emotional precision and philosophical grounding. Her visual essays are neither didactic nor ornamental—they are lived experiences transfigured into art. By focusing on the nuanced tensions within the mother-daughter bond in only-child families, particularly in East Asia, she opens a broader dialogue about how we inherit, resist, and reimagine our roles within culture and kinship.

Mengzhu Li's art is a call to witness: not only to observe the lives of women in transition, but to feel with them—the weight, the warmth, and the wordless spaces in between.

Interview

Paige Young

What inspired you to begin working with old family photographs for this series?

When my grandfather started to decline, they began to really clean out their house in preparation of needing to move. I've always been fascinated with old imagery, both as a human and as an academic, so I really wanted to be the one to obtain, store and preserve these images. While I was looking through them on my own, I realized I had no idea who these people were. It was incredible to me that my family was so poor through the 1800-1900s, yet someone had access to film and camera materials. Through the late 1800s, photographic darkroom paper nor film wasn't yet invented, meaning most of these had to be on glass plates or other mediums. In the 30's my great grandpa Jake was also a photographer, and again, he didn't have any more but must have had access to turn these plate images into actual photographs. However, I didn't know most of the 'who's who' while looking at these, so after my grandpa passed, but while my grandma is still alive, I took down 3 big binders of these old images and asked the stories behind them. It was then I realized that without these questions, or without any type of REAL experiences with objects handed down to us, these things passed down would just be tossed away and forgotten or put in a box somewhere and stored 'just because.'

How did your grandfather's passing influence the emotional tone of this project?

My grandfather means everything to me and his history was something he began to speak of the older he got. He was one of eleven kids- grew up very poor, worked on the farm before and after school and would walk 6-7 miles home after football practice. He was in charge of naming his brothers and sisters when his mother was pregnant, and when he dad got severely injured in an accident and couldn't move, my grandfather was the one who had to step up, as a teenage, to make sure the family was provided

for. He ended up also taking a liking and interest to photography, and ended up giving me my first Angus camera from the 1940s, in which he used during the Second World War. My grandfather really valued memories and photographs more than gifts and things. One Christmas in 2019 I built my own handcrafted frame and gifted him what would be our last family photograph that included my cousin, who would pass the following year of brain cancer. All unforeseen at that time, but even without that knowledge, he began to cry and told me that 'this was everything.' I didn't know my ancestors or my family beyond him - but I did know him and I feel his heart has always been a soft and kind one.

In "These Died With You," how do you decide which images to include, especially when the people in them are strangers to you?

There were many factors in this. First, I had to take into account which would even transfer onto photographic paper. Some of these images are on very thick paper, others are on postcard paper, and the majority of them are on older thin darkroom paper that has to be handled with such care. I have over 300 images from 1850-1960 that interested me, but some are over exposed or under exposed. So most importantly the first way I have to choose, is the technical aspect of the photograph. Will it be a successful transfer onto photographic paper and can I make duplicates from it?
Second, character. My grandmother dove quite deeply into my great [5x] grandma and grandpa Catherine and Adam, as they were really they main characters of the story in these images. I heard a lot about them, but again I don't know them. Their names were on a lot of things around their house too, that clearly my grandfather cherished. So I felt like I kind of knew them. The other people within the frames, their brothers and sisters, their sons and daughters, are all people I didn't hear too much about, but the images were sometimes comical to look at [images of them getting attacked by bees, playing with water around an outhouse, and just funny images you wouldn't think people would photograph back then, showing us we've always only been human]. The more these people were unfamiliar with my, you'll see the more blurry or unable the viewer is able to identify with them. This includes leaving them as photo negatives, since our human mind would have to flip the image to make it more familiar. The images that are a bit more clearer are going to be more so the stories I've heard more of, or of my grandfather directly.

Can you describe your process of transferring negatives and positives in the darkroom?

To preserve the original images, I have to make copies of everything in the darkroom so I can tamper with them how I want on a larger sheet of paper. The worst part of this is being size limited and needing to cut parts of the original document off to make room for other images. I feel like everything is important, so it's so challenging to cut out parts to tell a bigger story. First I take the original image and expose it directly onto another sheet of unexposed darkroom paper in the darkroom. This means facing the original image down onto an unexposed paper faced up [kind of like a sandwich]. My darkroom enlarger has to be on a 2.8 wide open aperture and most of the exposures range from 50 seconds to 90 seconds depending on the original paper source. After that exposure has gone through the developing

chemicals, it will be a photo negative. So the next time that image is placed onto a sheet it will produce a photo positive. If I want that image to be a photo negative onto my larger sheet of 16x20 final paper, I will have to take my photo negative paper and make a positive in the same way I created the original so that way when I place it onto my finalized copy, It will produce the negative. So some of these images I have negative and positives for, so that way I can decide if I need them to be a bit more unrecognizable in my final viewing of the images.

What role does grief play in your artistic practice more broadly?

I've been working with the concept of grief since 2019 specifically. I started when my really good friend suffered a loss of an infant of 6 months, and we decided to discuss it in visual images. After that my cousin who was more like my brother, was sent to hospice after a brain surgery went awry. I photographed what we thought were going to be his last moments in hospice with my film camera, and photographed the last togetherness between our family and him. I was inspired to create a body of work that opened this discussion of grief in which our society really stays away from, that we could all benefit from. COVID definitely amplified this project - as I ended up photographing 50 + strangers who lost loved ones unexpectedly and wanted to tell their story. This only perfected my craft and prepared me for what was to come in my life. Because of those lines of work, my series “Memories I’ll remember, Moments You’ll Forget,” and this body of work, I have learned to face grief head on, and be unafraid to play with some ideas that I would have been a bit more timid to in the past. This also comes with the topic of making work that you are a bit unaware of how your family will respond to. During my grandfathers funeral, I decided to bring my film camera and document the wake and the funeral. I wanted to photograph not just the sad moments, but the happy moments of togetherness that funerals bring us, too. I was blown away by the amount of gratitude people around me shared with me that I was documenting these moments, as I expected the complete opposite. So in a way, learning to embrace grief has made me a stronger and more

brave artist. Not being scared to make work the work feels like it needs to be made.

You mentioned your grandmother told you some of the stories—how did these conversations shape the final work?

These conversations are the foundation of the work. Ironically when I graduated from my undergrad in 2013, I was already thinking about The things we leave behind. Apparently I have had a fascination with the legacies we leave behind to others for a long time. As I age I begin to think about all of the collections I have [Vinyl, 500+ Taylor Swift Enamel Pins, Photographic Cameras], and who these things will go to — if anyone? When I inherited some of my grandmother and grandfathers things and images, I began to realize I didn’t know any of the stories behind them. I could just throw them away or put them in a bin in my attic and be completely unbothered because they have no personal meaning to me since I am unaware of their value - emotionally or physically. When I took the images down to her, she told me so many incredible stories about my family, my grandfather, hardship, and other aspects of even their land that they owned that changed over the years. Without these stories, I wouldn’t have made this body of work, but also, I wouldn’t know these characters that have shaped my grandfather’s life so deeply.

Do you see this series as an act of preservation, mourning, or both?

I see this work as a bit of preservation, a bit of discussion of the humanistic quality of understanding, and mourning of specifically time passing. I love the idea of preserving these

images all in one frame. They don't have to be looked at one by one - and although you cannot see each one clearly, you almost don't need to. You get the idea that these images are in the past, contained, and the memory of these people are fading away - just as those who are preserving them in their full memory have faded away. In discussing the humanistic quality of understanding (this one will get a bit deep), we don't know who our family lineage really is, meaning, I hope these were good people, but the truth is in the late 1800s and early 1900s it was hard to find truly good, unproblematic, equal rights and non-racist people. So surely my great [5x] grandfather Adam fought for the north for Civil Rights, but I am unaware if he was an actual good person. So I cannot connect to him fully - because I don't want to glorify someone I don't know personally. But what I do know, is there is an image where I have left remotely clear in the center of one of the compositions, that he has a north uniform on, in which he took a self portrait of himself, with 3 cats on his lap, and that my friends, is something I identify with [hahaha].

Lastly, mourning time passing. As I get older, I understand I cannot stop time. I understand those around me will pass. Every year on my birthday I cry, but not because I am getting older, more so because those around me are getting older. My grandmother is not doing well, my other grandmother survived CANCER but is ever aging, my mother has auto-immune diseases that I worry about frequently, my father is doing so well but is my everything and I just cannot even handle the fact of him leaving me behind. As I get older, my job even confirms how important documentation and photography is. These beautiful, encapsulated time in a bottle moments forever cherished. These images I have created mean something to me because they preserve my grandfathers' life in totality. From images of when he was younger with his dog Duke [he would never stop talking about Duke when he was diagnosed with Dementia], to when he finally got married to my grandmother - these little snippets that I wasn't there for, but through his decline I felt like I got to experience from his stories.

Interview

Stella Conrad

What initially drew you to film photography, and how does it differ emotionally for you compared to digital?

The analog process initially drew me to film. I've always loved the look. But to me, film translates more through feeling. The raw qualities of capturing emotion shine through the grain and color the film provides. The idea of being able to hand process film and have full creative control when producing an image excites me. Patience is also a quality I value within my work. Not having the instant satisfaction of viewing through the digital lens helped me enjoy the process of waiting. It provides an aspect of the unknown, which comes with excitement.

How did your mindfulness and meditation practices influence the creation of "3 Days in New York"?

My mindfulness practice helps me carry presence into my everyday life and action. My meditation practice I do is simply for joy and for others. This translates through my street photography lens of being a 'flaneur' and taking my sweet time when walking through the streets of cities; especially in a fast paced environment. New York specifically has demonstrations of shared energy all around. Therefore, I wouldn't want to miss any. Especially the small moments. The moments I was able to explore within this collection, helped me see the inner selves of all and how it proves our oneness and connection. Mindfulness practice also deals with letting go of things like judgment and attachment. When training the mind to be present, the analogy is that the mind is like a puppy. One wouldn't be intentionally mean when training a puppy therefore the practice is that we aren't intentionally mean to the mind either. This translates through the act of letting opportunities come and go, some we may photograph some we may not. In this way, when approaching 3 Days in New York, I was able to feel fully present, aware and loving.

Why did you choose black-and-white film for this project? What does the absence of color allow you to express?

Stella Conrad | B/W LA

Stella Conrad | Greetings

Black and white has always been a special interest of mine. This goes back to older film, jazz photography and experimental filmmaking. I believe it captures an array of emotion and content that shines through the absence of color. I love color, it lives all around me and I have the privilege of experiencing it all. I believe there are some fragments in time that call for black and white and some that call for a full spectrum of color. I believe this collection and photo book called for black and white as a cohesive collection of memory. It also displays the idea of the historical importance of New York's culture and life. Without the color of the city, we may find highlights such as facial expression, location, texture and detail.

Can you walk us through a specific moment or scene from the series that holds special meaning for you?

Being with my dad was the sentimental and driving aspect of the work. This connected me directly from my relationship with my dad, and his relationship to the city. This feeling directly drew me into the loving significance of the city. Coming from Chicago, It was a beautiful experience connecting with a city from the very beginning of a journey and being able to leave all the room for discovery. As a lover of music, art and connection, I felt extreme pulls of energy and was able to unearth the chaos into a sea of open awareness.

What themes of "human raw emotion" did you aim to capture during your time in New York?

I aimed to capture structure and how humans function within. By exploring places like, Tompkins Square Park, McSorely's Old Ale House, MoMA and other Manhattan and Brooklyn neighborhoods of New York, I was able to freshly discover places as I swam through. I was able to with this innocence therefore was able to connect with the innocent mind of those around me. Through meditation practice there is the notion of seeing the younger self in all, confirming our oneness. This helps the navigation of scene photography and demonstration of human life.

How do you balance spontaneity and composition when photographing candid urban scenes?

When approaching street photography, I believe preparation and freedom create balance. By wearing my camera as an extension of the self, I am able to know when it is appropriate to capture a fragment. I enjoy structuring a scene through spontaneity and intuition. This way, I allow for my open heart to reach out and connect with others. Within a urban landscape, whether it is a new place or well-known surroundings, by immersing myself in the ever-changing energy and grounding myself in the only constant of the natural world, I feel there is a compromise. With the notion of letting go in mind, I feel a strong call to a capture a certain scene or moment rather than desire. There are always sets of rules and structure through the lens of photography, but Intuition and lack of control is what allows me to approach a situation that may or may not end up on a film roll.

In what ways do you see the city of New York as a reflection of collective or individual consciousness?

New York feels alive. It's a place I had the pleasure of exploring and finding peace within the chaotic nature and movement of the city. I was able to find community through art structures and collectives, music venues and a meditation center. This helped me establish my individuality and connect with the larger whole. I am very grateful to come from a nurturing and very loved place like Chicago and explore a new area with eyes of awe. K8, a light artist and good friend of mine moved to New York a few years ago. As someone who lives their life with open arms, eyes and ears, they're able to draw in the energy of others and connect fluidly. Seeing how they function within a city of constant changing and shifting, they are able to completely immerse themselves within the act of creation. To me, New York provides opportunity through change and passion. In this way, it feels explosive and destined for creativity.

Mahibrata Das

Originally from India and currently based in Paris. I have completed my bachelor's in Media Science and currently perusing a master degree in Photography and Image-Making. In my work I record the world in a documentary way, trying to capture the emotions a landscape holds rather than capturing the landscape itself – in black and white or in colour. On the commercial side, I find myself in the genre of photojournalism and street, when not only I prefer to go inclusive with the landscape and the people living in it, but also you will find images outside of series, speaking about very specific emotions. On the more personal side, my interests revolve around the complex relationship between distance, loneliness and memory and mainly situated under the night sky. From the time when I was a child, photography and writing became my escape. Even today, the poetries often find themselves in the projects that I am working on. I am always interested in capturing moments that relate to passing of time and the emotions of everyday life.

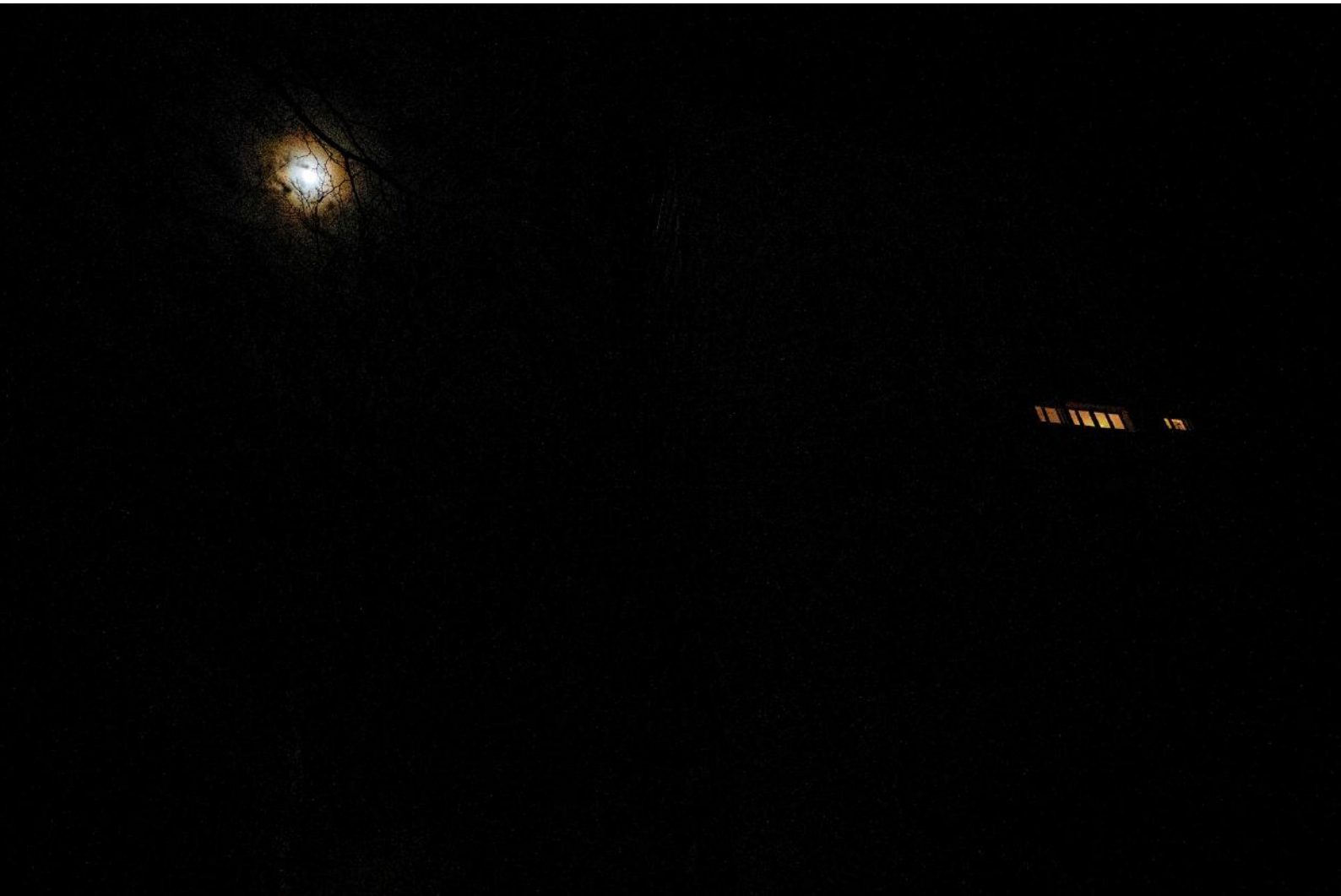
Project Statement

This series titled The Rest is Darkness, explores the notion of self-imposed solitude. As life is too noisy, I like the feeling of being unseen. It gives me a sense of comfort. At night, I exist as a shadow – observing and rarely being observed – I find it to be a safe space for me to inhabit. It is a self-imposed detachment that alters the experience of time and self. I roam the streets looking for a place to rest, a safe space where the outside eye is not allowed.

Mahibrata Das | Untitled | 2024

Mahibrata Das | Untitled | 2024

Mahibrata Das | Untitled | 2025



Chiho Handa

How has your background in educational psychology influenced your approach to creating children's books and illustrations?

My journey as a painter is like seeing the world through a child's eyes. I observe children through the lens of developmental psychology and notice every corner of their world is made up of small elements. For example, when my son was 18 months old, he adored water. He played with water in various ways—pouring it into a cup, drinking it, tapping the surface strongly or softly, gazing at dripping water. He discovered different textures, sounds, and shapes of water and found them super exciting! For many adults, water is just water, but little ones see a lot of small elements in it. As a psychologist, my art begins with capturing a child's sense of wonder.

Can you tell us about your transition from working as an educational book editor to becoming a freelance illustrator and picture book creator?

I used to work at a publisher as an editor in Tokyo, but one day, my husband was transferred to Amsterdam, so I decided to move with him. It wasn't a 100% positive decision, but now I know life is full of unexpected turns that open new doors. When I worked as an educational book editor, I planned new books, presented them in internal meetings, and lfound external designers, writers, and illustrators to collaborate with. I worked like a producer and director. However, when I moved to Amsterdam, I decided to eave that job and start my career as a freelancer. I realized I was more suited to focusing on "creating," so I began working as an illustrator. I worked very hard in Tokyo, so when I started freelancing, I felt lonely and anxious. It took a lot of patience to get positive responses as a freelance illustrator. Honestly, I still feel lonely and anxious at times. But at the same time, I have gained the freedom to express myself.

Chiho Handa | Carry Me On The Way Home | 2025

How did your move from Tokyo to Amsterdam affect your creative process, particularly in the way you depict nature and animals in your works?

Leaving my corporate job gave me a lot of time, which made me feel lonely and introspective. I lost confidence in myself and felt so down that I just read books constantly. When my output wasn't going well, I decided to do a lot of input. This helped me naturally adopt a mindful way of living. It reminded me of my childhood self. From a young age, I had a special affection for animals and plants. Running around in the greenery and conversing with the small creatures of the forest was my daily routine. When I moved to Amsterdam, I remembered my childhood passion for nature. The lush environment of Amsterdam brought me back to my primitive self. Walks in the forest, seeing squirrels running, and spending time with birds chirping became my daily routine again. My creative passion was stirred, and I couldn't help but create picture books.

Your picture books seem to have a deeply emotional connection, such as in the work about your beloved dog's passing. How do you approach difficult emotions in your art, and what do you hope childrenwill take away from your work?

When I create a picture book, I start by writing, especially for books like "Spring Comes Without You," which is about my beloved dog's passing. I write down my strong emotions in a notebook, like a poem, even crying a lot if I am very sad. This process calms me and helps me notice deep feelings inside myself. I hope children learn to recognize their own emotions, beyond just "happy" and "sad." I want them to experience these emotions so they can sympathize with others.

Could you tell us about your first solo exhibition "I Can't Help Dancing" and how it felt to showcase your self-produced picture books and original paintings?

I couldn't imagine holding my solo exhibition until I actually did it. I am so grateful to everyone who gave me the opportunity. I organized my exhibition as a picture book original illustration exhibition. I let visitors freely read my picture books, hung all pages as prints, and framed original illustrations. Not only adults but also many children came to my exhibition, which was exactly what I wanted. I felt so glad to have lots of little readers who encouraged me to create more works. Even people who live far away complimented my works on Instagram and some wanted me to hold another exhibition where they live. All of these experiences cheered me up and motivated me to keep creating my own art.

Your work often captures simple moments in nature. What draws you to these moments, and how do you think they resonate with children and adults alike?

I am usually mindful, and it's not on purpose—I do this

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naturally. After moving to Amsterdam, I had a lot of time to become introspective. I spent lots of time thinking and adoring small things. This comes from my academic background in developmental psychology, where I tend to see things in small elements. There is one more reason: I recognize plants, animals, and small creatures as my friends. That's why I want to know their features, names of species, and notice small differences. Simple moments in nature are so universal that everyone understands them unconsciously. My picture books are now seven, and some people like the book about a sour lemon, while others prefer the book about water. The joys and worries they face at that moment resonate with one of my picture books.

How does your experience as a mother influence the stories and messages in the picture books you create for your son and other children?

Becoming a mother has allowed me to write stories because I have a concrete reader—my son—right in front of me. Before that, I tried to write stories but never managed to finish them well. There were so many messages I wanted to convey that they ended up being preachy and complicated. But after giving birth to my son, I tried writing stories as if I was talking to him, and they came together easily. My habit of seeing things in small elements has become even more refined since my baby was born.

I don't want children to avoid negative emotions or events, and I know they can't avoid them. Someday, they will face deep hurt. I want to instill the strength to rise up when that time comes. That's why I create stories with deep messages that they might notice as adults. I hope they read my books again when they grow up. For example, when they become troubled teenagers, they might receive the message. I hope that happens.

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