VISUAL ART JOURNAL

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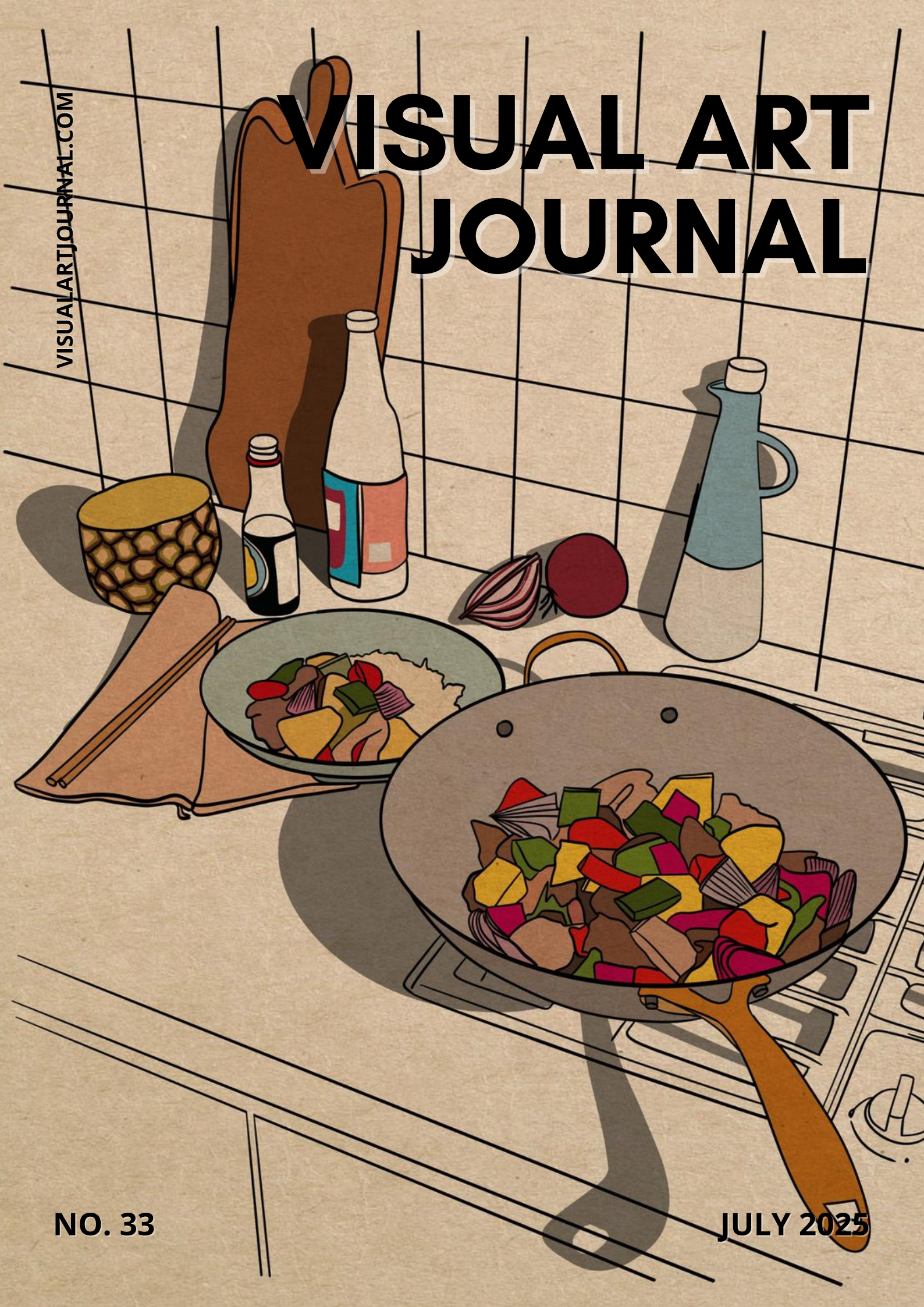

NO. 33

JULY 2025

— *Intro*

Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello, dear reader!

You are holding the 33rd issue of our magazine. It's the height of summer (or the middle of winter if you're in the southern hemisphere), and, as always, we've prepared a selection of breathtaking creativity just for you.

Every time we work on a new issue, I'm struck by how varied and multifaceted visual art can be. Humans have the ability to create beauty from any material — to shape something two-dimensional, three-dimensional, or to fill a space with sound and meaning so rich, it almost feels tangible.

The creative impulse can be so powerful that an artist doesn't create because they can, but because they simply cannot not create. As you read story after story, you begin to realize how unique each person's path is, how unpredictable each life can be. You start to see that nothing happens by chance — every event has meaning and may reveal itself when you least expect it. That's why, whatever happens, it's worth embracing it with awareness and trust in its importance.

So get comfortable — over 100 pages of beauty and inspiration await you!

On the Front Cover:
Lina Foret
Foodie

On the Back Cover:
Raz Forh
Mob

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

Interview

Weixi Kuang and Junpeng Liang

Your work spans biodesign, algorithmic aesthetics, and critical design. How did your collaborative practice begin, and how do you approach interdisciplinary creation together?

Our collaborative practice began with a shared curiosity about how emerging technologies—especially in biology and computation—reshape the way we define life, identity, and nature. We met while studying in an environment that encouraged crossing disciplinary boundaries, and quickly discovered overlapping concerns in biodesign, algorithmic logic, and speculative thinking.

Rather than dividing labor by skill, we approach creation as a continuous dialogue. Each project begins with a research-driven question—something that sits between science and society, between what is known and what is imagined. From there, we explore across scales and systems: from cellular processes to social rituals, from biological data to visual simulations.

Our work often unfolds in iterative loops between disciplines: one of us might experiment with form or code, while the other translates lab insights into tangible narratives. We are not aiming to "solve" problems, but to make hidden tensions

Weixi Kuang and Junpeng Liang | 展览图

visible—to design spaces where uncertainty, doubt, and possibility can coexist. It's this back-and-forth between critique and creation that defines how we work together.

What role does ecological ethics play in shaping your conceptual and material choices?

Ecological ethics is something that quietly but persistently shapes the way we think and create. It's not just about choosing the "right" material or reducing impact—it's more about asking the uncomfortable questions. What systems are we part of? What assumptions are we reproducing without realizing it?

When we start a project, we often look at how biological, technological, and cultural systems intersect. That naturally brings up questions about responsibility—especially when working with living or synthetic materials. We try to stay aware of how even small choices—visual language, framing, fabrication—can carry ethical weight.

Instead of aiming to be "sustainable" in the conventional sense, we're more interested in exploring the messy spaces where ecology, innovation, and uncertainty meet. Sometimes that means exposing contradictions or showing things that feel a bit unsettling. For us, ecological ethics isn't a checklist—it's a way of staying awake while navigating complexity.

In your view, how can art reshape human–nonhuman relationships in the age of the Anthropocene?

We think art has a unique way of making abstract relationships feel immediate and emotional—especially when it comes to how humans relate to the nonhuman world. In the age of the Anthropocene, where our actions reshape ecosystems on a planetary scale, it's easy to either feel overwhelmed or detached. Art can interrupt that distance. Through speculative design, sensory experience, and narrative, art can help us imagine what it means to live with rather than above other species and systems. It can create space for empathy with things we don't usually consider—like bacteria, soil, synthetic organisms, or even future ecosystems.

We're especially interested in using art to slow things down: to build moments of attention, discomfort, or curiosity that shift how we perceive the more-than-human world. Not to romanticize nature, but to recognize how entangled we already are—and maybe become a little more responsible because of it.

Can you walk us through the process of creating works from human microbial communities? What were some unexpected discoveries?

Weixi Kuang and Junpeng Liang | 作品拍摄图

Our work with human microbial communities started with a question that's both scientific and existential: If our bodies are constantly shaped by microbial exchanges, then where does the "self" actually begin and end?
In our early research, we were fascinated by how the human microbiome isn't fixed—it's something we inherit, but also something we acquire, shape, and share throughout life. Microbiologists describe two major sources of microbial inheritance: one from the mother—through birth, skin, gut, and womb—and one from the social and environmental world we grow up in. Some researchers even refer to this maternal microbial transfer as a "second genetic system." That was a striking idea for us. It suggested that who we are biologically is not just encoded in our DNA, but also carried through invisible layers of shared life—bacteria, fungi, microbes that travel between us constantly. We're not as separate as we think. Eating together, touching, talking—these are all acts of microbial exchange. Our bodies are porous. Our boundaries are blurred.
This inspired us to think of the microbiome almost as a medium: invisible, dynamic, intimate. We began working with microbial data, swabs, and simulations—thinking not only about how these organisms live in us, but how they write us. The challenge was to translate that into something people could feel or confront physically.

How do you see the ethical implications of giving inorganic matter "life" through microbial design?

We see microbial design not as a way of "giving" life to inorganic matter, but as a way of questioning what life even means—and who gets to define it.
When microbes animate a surface, change its color, digest or react to the environment, it blurs the boundary between what we typically call "alive" and "non-living." That threshold —between inert material and biological activity—is not just scientific; it's deeply philosophical and ethical.
There's something quietly powerful about watching something seemingly lifeless begin to respond. It invites reflection on control, authorship, and responsibility. Are we creating new forms of life, or are we just rearranging existing ones? If something grows, evolves, or even decays—does that make it "alive"? And what happens when we design for that ambiguity?

The Enso Series speculates about non-existent bacterial worlds. What drew you to work with lignin and white rot fungi?

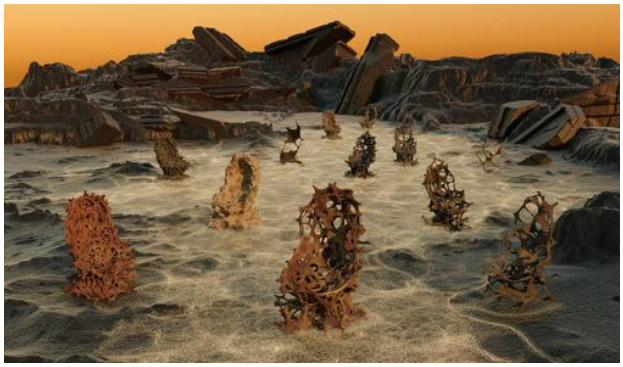
We were drawn to lignin and white rot fungi because they sit at a strange intersection—between decay and regeneration, biology and technology, past and future. Lignin is one of the most abundant organic polymers on Earth, yet it's largely seen as waste in industrial processes. White rot fungi are among the few organisms capable of breaking it down, and in doing so, they quietly shape the chemical history of forests. From a speculative design perspective, we saw white rot not just as a decomposer, but as a creative agent— something that reorganizes matter and redefines boundaries between lifeforms. We were especially interested in how its tubular hyphae structure mirrors algorithmic logic: it branches, loops, redirects, and adapts. That formal and functional elegance made it the perfect collaborator in imagining a postanthropocentric material future.

Can you elaborate on how the multiverse theory informed the aesthetics and concept of this series?

The multiverse theory gave us a language to think beyond a single dominant narrative of reality. If every lifeform operates within its own version of the world—its own perception, logic, time—then reality is already plural. This idea resonated deeply with fungal consciousness: fungi don't experience time or communication the way humans do, yet they play foundational roles in the ecosystems we rely on.
In Enso, we used the circle not just as a visual motif, but as a symbol of cyclic, non-human time—fungal time. We imagined each chair in the series as a kind of "world"—a fragment of an alternate timeline where microbial processes are primary, not peripheral. The forms evolved algorithmically, drawing from the radial and cross-sectional structures of decaying wood, generating speculative architectures for a future that centers fungal intelligence.

How do you balance scientific rigor with speculative storytelling in such works?

For us, science and speculation don't compete—they feed each other. We begin with research: biological papers, microscopy, lab experiments, field studies. But we don't stop at explanation. Instead, we ask what that data feels like, or what kind of narrative world it might open up.
We're careful not to use scientific concepts purely as metaphors. We treat the biology seriously—white rot's enzymatic logic, lignin's material properties—but we stretch its implications. We see storytelling as a way to explore ethical, ecological, and ontological questions that science alone might not ask. In that sense, speculation is not a departure from rigor—it's an extension of it, into the poetic and the possible.



Weixi Kuang and Junpeng Liang | 圆相椅子墓园

My name is **Vittoria Lonetti**, and I am an artist and illustrator.
After studying Fashion Design at the Academy of Fashion and Costume in Rome, I began developing a personal style that blends art and fashion. In my work, I use oil and acrylic on canvas to express emotions and identity. Over time, I have taken part in several group exhibitions and editorial projects related to contemporary art. I will also be featured in the upcoming edition of the Atlas of Contemporary Art, which will be presented at the MoMA in New York.

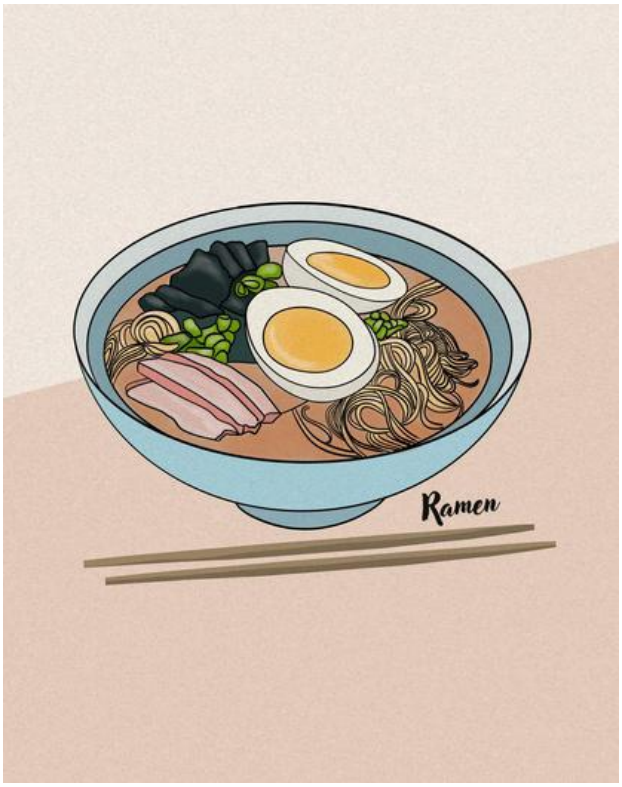

Vittoria Lonetti
V LONETTI 24

Lina Foret

Lina Foret | Vintage Food

I have always seen cooking as a form of expression, not just a profession. My training as a professional chef gave me a practical foundation and a deep respect for ingredients and technique. Illustrating food is a natural extension of that work: it allows me to observe and represent ingredients, seasons, and traditions from a different, more visual and conceptual perspective. By combining my culinary experience with art and design, I can show food not only as something to consume, but as part of a story and an identity. For me, it is a direct way to unite my two worlds and share a simpler, more honest vision of cooking.

Your illustrations perfectly combine food, identity, and seasonal rhythms. What inspired you to explore culinary culture through art?



Lina Foret | Ramen

How does your Chilean background influence your visual narrative?

My Chilean background mainly influences my work through memory and nostalgia. Many of the dishes and scenes I illustrate are connected to traditional foods that marked my childhood and life in Chile. I am interested in capturing those simple moments, a typical dish, a local ingredient, and transforming them into images that connect with memory and identity.

You have studied graphic design and visual arts in two countries. How do these disciplines intersect in your practice?

I studied graphic design in Chile and, years later, graphic arts in Canada. Graphic design gave me the foundation to communicate clearly, work with structure, and always think about the function of each image. I learned to organize ideas and build a visual

Lina Foret | La Once

message that is direct and coherent. When I studied graphic arts in Canada, I was able to update that knowledge and, at the same time, explore a more personal and experimental approach, with fewer rules. This combination between the technical and the intuitive defines how I work today. It allows me to create simple and clean illustrations that not only look good but also convey a story or a feeling. For me, it is important that each image balances design order with artistic freedom and that it feels approachable and easy to understand for the viewer.

What role does seasonality play in selecting the ingredients or scenes you illustrate?

Seasonality gives me a clear guide for how to work throughout the year and helps me stay organized, providing structure to my creative process. Knowing which products and scenes belong to each time of year allows me to plan ahead and maintain a consistent rhythm. Illustrating what is in season speaks not only about nature but also about customs, habits, and ways of living that change throughout the year. For me, it is a way to connect with the environment and the present, making the most of what we have here and now. I'm interested in showing this real and practical relationship with food and daily life, without forcing concepts or seeking perfection, but instead focusing on what is genuinely experienced in each season.

Can you tell us more about your creative process: how does a new illustration begin and evolve?

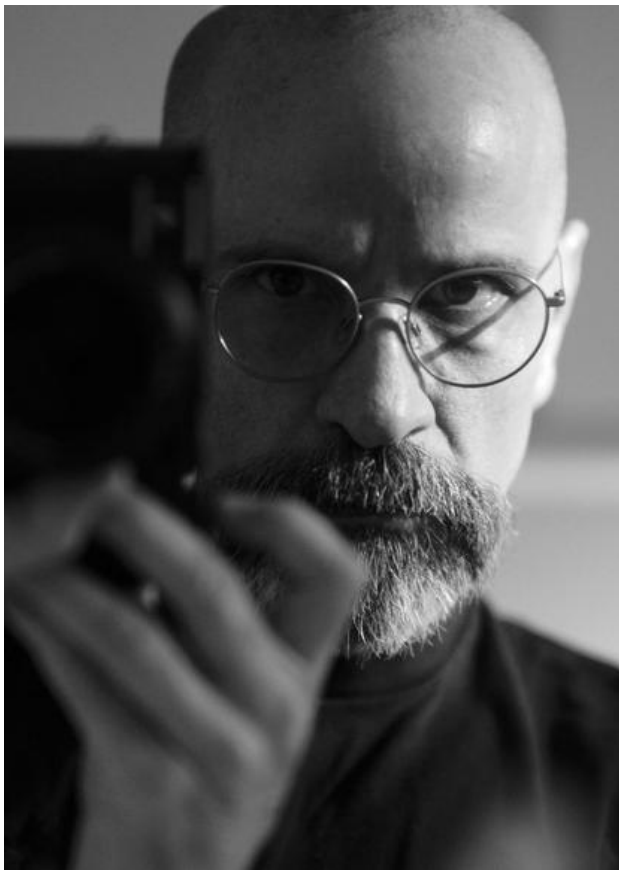
My creative process can start from a recipe, a special date, a memory, or even a new restaurant I've visited. From there, I make quick sketches to define the composition and overall idea, and I often look for references in my own photos to have a real and personal starting point. Then I move on to digital work, where I mainly use vectors because they allow me to work with clean lines and define each element clearly. I like the final image to be clear, simple, and easy to read. When I want to add more warmth or depth, I include subtle textures or details. For me, the process is not linear: I adjust, experiment, and refine until the illustration conveys what I want to express. I aim for the final result to be simple yet full of character, inviting the viewer to pause and explore the details without feeling overwhelmed.

Your style is clean and minimalistic, yet expressive. How did you develop this aesthetic?

My style developed over time, combining my love for minimal aesthetics, flat colors, and inspiration from movements like Bauhaus and mid-century design. Moving to digital work and using the iPad had a big influence on this process. I enjoy working with clean and smooth lines, something vector work allows me to achieve precisely. I prefer using a few elements, but making sure each one has intention and adds to the message. For me, less does not mean empty; it means creating space for the viewer to complete the story in their own way. I aim for the final result to be clear and organized, but at the same time full of character, reflecting my way of seeing food and daily life with a retro and timeless touch.

Lina Foret | Foodie

Eduardo Chacon



You describe your practice as "seeking beauty in the interstices of the human condition." Can you elaborate on what this means to you in a photographic context?

Our modern lives have become hectic to such an extent that we have forgotten to truly appreciate the small quotidian moments that allow us to savor them. Those bits of time are the ones I try to capture in my photographs, in order to depict the humanity in every one of us.

Eduardo Chacon | Corpus Gelati | 2023

After a successful career in commercial photography, what prompted your return to documentary and Humanist Photography?

I ran my commercial photography studio for about 34 years, and had already been retired for over 10, but once a photographer, always a photographer...
The urge to go back to wander the world with my camera was always there.

Your images are captured entirely in-camera with manual focus and settings. Why is this approach important to you in today's digital world?

I try to create my photographs in-camera in order to honor the moments that I see when I capture them.
It is a slower process, but it allows me to take the time to see the story, compose it, and then shoot it.
Besides B&W conversion and basic levels adjustments, I rarely do anything else to my images.

Eduardo Chacon | Hangover Bros | 2023

Only when I envision a scene in a square format, or when there is something truly visually offensive in it, I proceed to crop it or retouch out the offending element of the image.

How do you approach your subjects when capturing candid moments? Do you ever engage with them, or prefer to remain unnoticed?

I roam around looking for spontaneous visual situations, trying to read stories in the subject's faces and their body expressions.
Since spontaneity and truthfulness to the moment are essential to my storytelling, previous to the capture, I never engage with anyone or anything I shoot.

What role does black-and-white play in your visual storytelling?

I envision my stories in shades of grey only.
In my opinion, black and white has a unique quality that helps the story transcend the image.

How do your travels—both local and abroad—influence your vision and photographic narrative?

Traveling definitely helps broadening one's views on different cultures but, the more I travel, the more I realize that, for as different as all world cultures may seem, fundamentally as individuals, we are all equal.

What do you hope viewers take away from your photographs?

Hopefully, my images will help the viewers realize that their most important connection is not their Internet connection, but instead, their human connection.

Could you tell us about your upcoming exhibition at the Boca Museum and what visitors can expect from it?

The name of the exhibition is "Postcards From Nowhere". It will open on November 19, 2025 until March 8, 2026 at the Boca Raton Museum Of Art.
It is a collection of intimate images taken in various locations around the world.
We are expecting visitors of all ages, hoping that the older attendants can reminisce and get reacquainted with Humanist Photography, and the younger ones get introduced to the style.

Byc.foto

Byc.foto | Welcome | 2025

Everything around us are objects that have a use or utility on their own, but when two seemingly disparate objects are brought together and "something new" is created, my gaze is awakened and, beyond the use for which they were separately conceived, the objects offer infinite possibilities: I would say that they are excellent actors who can play masterful roles, and the same object—because of its shape—can be a Christmas tree one moment and a candle waiting to be lit the next.

Can you tell us about the moment when you realized that everyday objects could become your artistic language?

Photography is an art form that has always caught my attention. I am very observant and like to notice the details of everything I see: the stroke of a brush, a mark on a piece of pottery, a stone that looks sculpted because it is so worn...

Byc.foto | Renewable Energy | 2025

How did the pandemic influence your transformation into "Byc.foto"?

When the pandemic was declared, I was taking a photography course and had work projects to do; I went from studio portraits and still lifes to working at home with what I had; I joined one of the many photography groups that were created on Instagram with daily challenges such as "curtains" and "chocolate," and little by little, Byc.foto began to contribute a new way of looking at and seeing what already existed beyond the obviousness of curtains or a bar of chocolate.

Your images often use metaphors. Do you begin with a concept in mind, or does it emerge while creating?

The metaphors in my photographs sometimes arise from a previous concept and sometimes

Byc.foto | Winning Hand | 2020

come to me while I am working on a photograph, usually because the association of objects catches my attention with something I have seen and that has somehow remained in my mind.

What role does humor or irony play in your work, if any?

I would say that my photographs contain more irony than humor, and some of them have a very strong social undertone, a kind of "protest" against what surrounds us and that, morally, from my photographic style, I need to make visible.

How do you choose the objects you work with? Do they carry personal meaning?

I choose objects based on the concept I want to create—I look for them at flea markets, traditional shops, online…in the garden—although there are times when the objects choose me and inspire the concept on which to develop my work. an example of the latter is a cage that caught my eye on a shelf when I was browsing the store with some chess pieces in my hand, and I immediately saw the chess queen outside that cage, and the title could only be "016."

You use no editing. How challenging is it to rely only on natural light and analog setups?

I don't use editing in my photographs because, for me, natural light is more interesting and presents a challenge that I must face and try to overcome with diffusers and light reflectors. Sometimes I need soft light and there is bright sunshine, and vice versa, which means that a photograph can take several days to execute, depending on the image I have already created in my mind.

Is there a photograph in your portfolio that was particularly difficult or meaningful to create? Why?

Photographs in which I work with glass are always a challenge for me because of the light it absorbs and everything it reflects, but trial and error is a great teacher and I am always learning. this same learning process leads me to be cautious when addressing social issues that I want to emphasize and that can be universally understood: I put a butterfly on the heel of a woman's shoe as an allegory to show the need to fly away from a place where one is not cared for, or I put a zipper on a microphone to ironically comment on the lack of freedom.

Carmen Samoila is a multidisciplinary artist whose work spans painting, sculpture, and photographic processes. Over the past three decades, her practice has evolved through phases of deep introspection, emergence, and material experimentation—yet sustains a subtle fidelity to inner truth and the mystery of perception. Based in Western Canada, Samoila creates in close relationship with land, solitude, and subtle transformation. Her atmospheric oil landscapes—presented in the Echoe series—reflect the transient beauty of dusk, oncoming weather, and the emotional terrain of place. Her early sculptural works explore themes of metamorphosis, maternal embodiment, and the unseen forces that shape our becoming. In photography and mixed media, her process remains elemental and responsive—led by attunement to material, environment, and the energy of what stirs beneath the surface. Across mediums, she works with what is gathered: light, pigment, botanical matter, memory, and trace. Each piece arises through a rhythm both contemplative and sudden—still and charged. Samoila's work invites reflection and holds space—for memory, for stillness, for the viewer's own encounter. Across all mediums, her practice is an offering: toward light from shadow, toward feeling from form, toward presence from absence.

Project Statement
I follow light to where form dissolves—across land, memory, and thresholds unseen. My work explores the quiet intervals where perception wavers: dusk, silence, the intangible. Through oil painting, mixed media, sculpture, and analog photographic processes, I respond to what stirs beneath the surface—what cannot be named but can be felt. The work is created in collaboration with nature, the internal world, and place. My practice is guided by intuition. It begins in observation, in the body, and in the vibration of something subtle calling to be seen. The process invites a quiet unfolding: materials are gathered, compositions emerge, and form arises through dialogue between self and source. The resulting works embody feeling, transformation, and the presence of something just beyond words. I listen, I gather. The final hush of light, luminous shadows, the stillness before a storm, and the charged moments when weather breaks—these are metaphors for the internal landscape. The Blueborne series, composed outdoors using hand-coated emulsions and wild botanicals, reflects this sensitivity. Dried in prairie heat, exposed under the Kootenay sun, and toned with coffee and pigment, each piece is imbued with presence, gesture, and atmosphere. I intend to evoke—to create a threshold where the viewer might meet something of their own. A place of convergence between what is seen and what is sensed, between outer landscape and inner knowing.

Carmen Samoila | Blueborne Penumbra | 2025

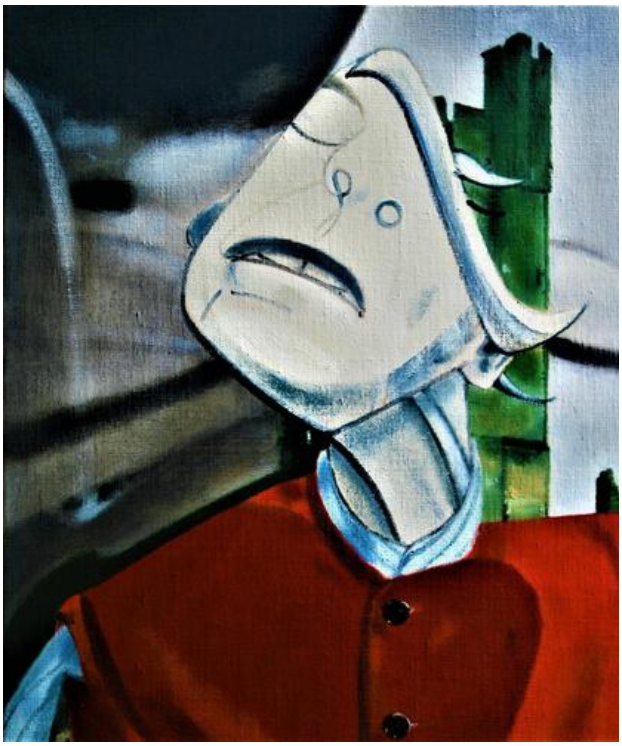
Carmen Samoila | Blueborne Matrice | 2025

Interview

Tim Clarke

In what ways has Leonardo's legacy influenced your artistic journey?

Before seeing the book on Leonardo when aged 14, I had very little interest or awareness of art. Reading that book and seeing reproductions of his work for the first time changed my life completely. I was enthralled by his astounding drawing ability, the range of his drawings and captivated by his paintings. Seeing The Virgin of the Rocks and The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist in the National Gallery, London as a teenager count as the most sacred kisses of my life. I wondered if I too could create a sense of awe in art. I set about answering that question which has occupied me now for over 50 years.
My painting process follows Leonardo's where I conceive my ideas in drawing books, develop them and make all necessary studies before starting to paint in oil. I love the complexity of his paintings, his backgrounds, enigmatic smiles and pointing fingers, symbolism and numinous nature making ordinary



Tim Clarke | Glenda Jackson As King Lear

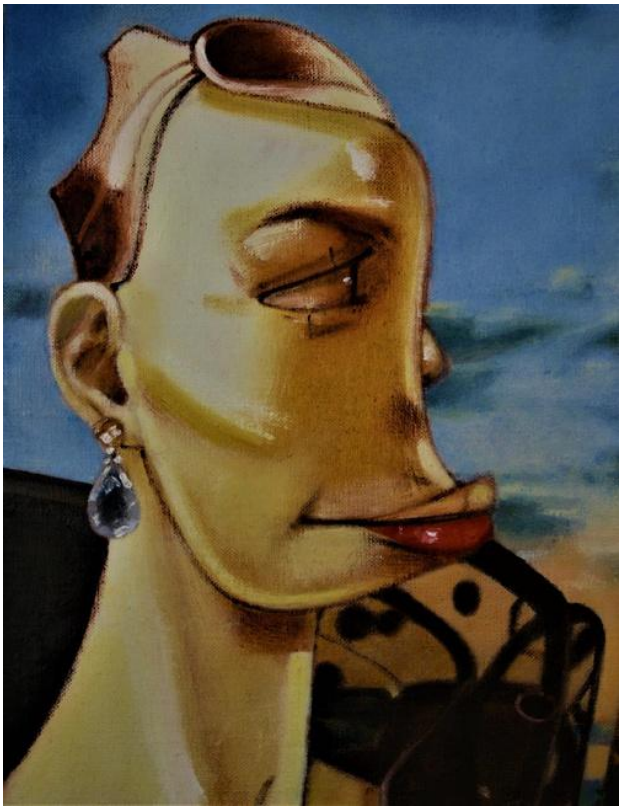
extraordinary. My fifty years of painting have been the richest, deepest and most difficult parts of my life. I am eternally grateful to Leonardo da Vinci for giving me so much.

How did your experience of drawing dancers with learning difficulties shape your approach to movement and form?

With no models I painted figures from photographs which increasingly became unsatisfying. I felt my figures were stilted and not revealing the energy, vitality and enigma of being human. Having found photographs of dancers I looked for more and came upon a brochure for Derby Dance Centre which significantly included a photograph of two dancers with special needs. This photograph deeply moved me. Having contacted their choreographer, she invited me to a performance of this group named Indigo. She then allowed me to draw them in class. This experience was pivotal to my maturity as an artist. They were superb, friendly, kind and most importantly oozed expressive movement in ingenious ways. Straight away I was able to capture their brilliance with rapid drawings which because of their speed brought constant surprises in form. I was working too fast to think and was allowing my hand to spontaneously dance with the dancers. These drawings gave me the deep sense of boundless human nature that I had been lacking, providing a sense of movement in dynamic, exaggerated, distorted, surprising forms that were unique and profound. I am very grateful to the Indigo dancers. Other dancers without special needs were unable to inspire me. I felt they were no way near as imaginative and accomplished as Indigo.

What inspires your recurring focus on women in your paintings?

'Sexuality and spirituality are pairs of opposites which need each other.' Carl Jung
When I was a boy, say 8 years old, a British singer named Kathy Kirby regularly appeared on television. I was in awe realising what a wonderful thing a woman is. Whilst she was clearly very attractive physically it was the power of her voice and presentation which moved me. Painting her is my present project.
I find females much more interesting than males. The kindness and gentleness which I have received from women has deeply impressed me. I find communication with women natural and uplifting, whereas I associate violence,



Tim Clarke | Mrs Sheldon With Diamond Earing

disappointment and emotional coldness with men. I need to make clear not all men are bad, and not all women are good. Also, I feel sexual magnetism with some women. That bewildering energy which causes so much strife has made me celebrate in paint some women nude. To balance the view that I am objectifying women sexually I began a series of small oil portraits of actresses that I drew at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. All of them are dressed. This series is exclusively female. I feel by this I am making a statement against sexism and revealing my respect and admiration for women. I accept misogyny has blighted womenkind for millennium. It is wrong. Perhaps beneath misogyny is unrealised fear of women and equally unrealised is love of women. So, I paint them repeatedly with my love and fear, realised and unrealised. I love celebrating female achievement and especially love painting Dakini, the most powerful female form I am aware of. Dakini means 'sky walker', they are so integrated that normal things like gravity do not concern them. They are enlightened Buddhas, full of wisdom and compassion.

Nature appears often in your work – birds, tigers, butterflies. What emotional or symbolic significance do these elements hold for you?

I am amazed and enthralled by other species and feel a huge urge to respect them by including them in my work. Whilst I know there is a great deal of folklore connected to the natural world; I am not always aware of it. Their wonderful differing forms and individual beauty are enough for me. Creativity in the natural world is staggering. To me a butterfly wing is like a stained-glass cathedral window.
Recently I leant Carl Jung wrote that the anima can be represented symbolically by a tiger, a sake or bird. I had included all these in my paintings, unconscious of Jung's symbolism. I have been conscious of the great power of the unconscious since my twenties and accept things will be happening in my work that I am not aware of.
I revere all species and feel privileged to be alive with so many wonderful forms of life. I feel bound to include some of them in my work, knowing we are profoundly interconnected. We are different forms of one soul. My prime aim is to paint this soul in an ongoing series of oil paintings.

Your pieces often combine realistic textures with surreal, distorted forms. What draws you to this visual language?

Drawing dancers in movement resulted in distorted forms. This begged the question should I made the whole painting consistent with distortion? Should I distort my backgrounds and other parts of my painting, or would I accept different styles in the same painting? I answer this question in different ways. Sometimes I make distorting changes to my backgrounds and sometimes I make very little changes and am content to be photographic. I came to accept that differing styles in the same paintings was a distinct advantage. Variation is a very important consideration in my work.
When asleep my dreams are always realistic or photographic. There is never anything shown in an impressionistic way. Everything is exact. They often include bizarre, illogical and challenging elements. I like my paintings to have this dreamlike exactness together with challenging connections. A feature of my work is connection. I marvel at how nature connects the most disparate of forms with staggering brilliance.

What has oil on canvas allowed you to express that acrylic on paper could not?

For me my decades of painting on paper first in gouache then acrylic was a period of learning. Gradually my painting became more and more accomplished. My dancer works on paper were decisive in making me believe my ability had matured. I was confident that I had developed a coherent language and felt I wanted that language to be expressed in the classic medium of oil and canvas. As well as changing paint I scaled up at the same time by increasing my paper size 4-fold to establish my new large canvas size. Also respecting tradition, I began making my own oil ground. It was not changes in materials that altered my expression but accumulation of years of practice. I understood I had become a potent force and wanted a medium to match.

There's a strong theatrical and narrative presence in some of your paintings. Do you consider storytelling a part of your work?

Once I have an idea, I want to present it as powerfully as possible, as dramatically as possible, as captivating as possible. To achieve these ends composition is vital. I seek to join my figures and animals with their backgrounds, interior or landscape where the whole composition supports, extends and increases the value of each contributing component; every part being vital to each other in painting as in life, making every painting greater than the sum of its parts.
Story telling is part of my practise of painting. All my works are stimulated by heartfelt personal experience. Each have stories associated with them. I see my whole body of work as a narrative. It is like a book except each page of a thousand words is a painting or drawing.

Kate Snow is a multi-award winning and internationally published photographer. She has over ten years experience behind the lens and her work has been displayed in multiple international exhibitions. Her photos capture the beauty of nature taken across her travels to the remote corners of the globe, from the massive sand dunes of Namibia to the glacial ice of the Arctic. Known for her ability to tell a story through images, Kate seeks to inspire conservation and a deeper appreciation for biodiversity through her art.

Project Statement
"Mountains of Ice" is a monochrome photographic series that explores the beauty of the world's frozen mountainscapes. Through black and white imagery, the absence of color is intentional: highlighting the form, contrast, and texture of ice and snow, and inviting viewers to contemplate not only the aesthetics of these remote landscapes but their vulnerability. Shot in extreme environments, the series emphasizes the majesty of places at the edges of the planet and that have been shaped over millennia. While beautiful to behold, the images also reflect the stark reality of our changing climate. By stripping away color, the work underscores both the endurance and fragility of these landscapes, providing a quiet call for viewers to attain a renewed appreciation and desire to preserve these frozen landscapes.

Kate Snow | Icebound Mountain

Kate Snow | Mountain Peaks

Kate Snow | Wind Over the Himalayas

Yiyang Chen

Yiyang Chen | Myths Of Disavowal | 2024

Your practice spans painting, video, ceramics, performance, and writing. How do you decide which medium to use for a specific idea?

Thank you for the question. This has actually been asked a lot! In most cases, I do not see the medium in the first place. However, I tackle the materials with care, serving the exploration of my hand-touch sensibility. I let my hands take the lead to encounter and record the sensations my body and I feel about the materials—whether clay, canvas, or just sheets of paper. I investigate making and writing as creative approaches, as bodily engagements, and as self-reflexive configurations.

Much of your work explores themes like the monstrous, touch, and the gaze. What drew you to these particular concepts?

Yiyang Chen | Psychic Home | 2025

My research started with a focus on body politics entrenched in both the East and the West—from mythology to Laura Mulvey's gaze theory and representations, to demonised female figures in artefacts, and the concept of abjection articulated by Julia Kristeva. The most striking and empowering reading I encountered, which led me to delve into the cultural definitions of monsters in societies, was trans scholar Paul B. Preciado's brilliant speech/book Can the Monster Speak? (2019), and his definition of "monsters" as entities whose faces, bodies, and behaviours cannot yet be considered true within a predetermined regime of knowledge and power. I am thinking of metaphors for a speaking body or a censored body. This is rooted in my embodied "reading" experience, whether it involves texts or images. My practice delves into a monstrous manifestation in which the "body" gives material form to an idea that has no form—an assemblage that is abstract.

What role does research play in your creative process? Could you share how a recent work emerged from your research?

As an artist and PhD researcher, I draw a clear line between research and visualisation, as I carefully resist the idea that academic writing describes/speaks for what I have done in my hands-on, studio-based practice. Or put another way, I refuse to ruin the fun by framing things to serve specific terms. I did a funded performance project this year in Vienna, which was also a week-long archival research project where I examined the Viennese museum and library collections as sources, surfaces, and post-colonial sites. Through bodily engagement and acts of making and writing, my gestures—captured by the camera in this performance—challenge the institutional roles in preservation, interpretation, gatekeeping, hierarchy, and racism.

Yiyang Chen | Myths Of Disavowal | 2024

Your exhibition Someday Somehow challenged digital representations of East Asian women. How did audiences respond to that work?

Someday Somehow (2022) was my first-ever solo exhibition, in which I intended to claim the gallery space with my video installations as a form of resistance against the representation of East Asian women's body image as highly commercialised and an integral part of the capitalist mode of gaze entertainment—considering the reward systems, comments and gifts that can be directly transformed into benefits and income. I basically just hate how it works. It inevitably reinforces the distorted East Asian beauty standards shaped by impressions of pale skin, slim figures, etc. I invited people who visited and entered the space to rethink their position in viewing/consuming these subjects, formed by this "symbolic order," shaped by a different cultural and political context. I'm still very grateful for all the stories and opinions they shared with me—such as how they found this East Asian perspective resonated with them, but with a sense of "unfamiliarity." All very interesting and thought-provoking for me, which pushed my practice further.

How does working between Glasgow and your Chinese background influence your artistic identity?

Such a great question! I think about this a lot. My hometown, Shenyang—a major city in the northeast of China—shares similarities with Glasgow in terms of the last century's industrial history, unavoidable urban decay, warm people, cold winters, and salty food. I like the novel Shuggie Bain (2020) by Douglas Stuart, which illustrates a vivid picture of a Glaswegian working-class family and the broader industrial backdrop of the 1980s. I've heard quite a few similar stories from members of my family from the previous generation. My artistic practice is highly driven by embodied experience that spans both where I come from and where I currently live. This is the way I devote my genuine emotions and feelings to my work, so that every piece of memory and transgenerational story is valid in this self-analytical approach to fine art practice.

There's a strong physicality in your work—especially around gesture and touch. How important is the body in your art?

I answered a similar question from the audience in the Q&A section of a conference at the University of Edinburgh this month. I perceive the body as a carrier or container for my feelings and sensations, as described by Ursula K. Le Guin. Embodied practice is part of the legacy left to us by 1970s feminism—a sustainable way of living. Even if you can't afford a studio, you can still carry on, finding your voice and speaking for yourself through the body. The powerful performance artists Carolee Schneemann, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and filmmaker Chantal Akerman were so important—and still are.

Are there particular artists, writers, or theorists who have significantly shaped your thinking?

Absolutely—apart from all those I mentioned above, I would also like to highlight Audre Lorde. Her essay Uses of the Erotic(1978) discusses the cost of detaching the erotic as a source of power, and how the erotic itself holds the potential to create change. She writes, "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change." Also, Bell Hooks and Black feminist art practices, trans studies by Susan Stryker, Chinese queer studies by Hongwei Bao, queer of colour theorist José Esteban Muñoz, as well as The Argonauts (2015) by Maggie Nelson—which I've been reading recently—have given me deep insights into finding my voice and stance on agency.

Kajal Zaveri

Your art blends abstraction and realism beautifully. How do you decide how much of each to include in a painting?

Nature's wisdom with its quiet cycles of growth, renewal, and stillness inspires much of my work. I often begin with something rooted in the natural world, the soft curve of a tree line, the vastness of sky, or the rhythm of moving water. But rather than depicting it literally, I allow the painting to evolve through intuition and emotion. What begins as a recognizable form soon transforms into something more open, more mysterious. I intentionally blur the details to create space for the viewer's imagination and emotion to enter.

In my practice of Abstract Realism, I'm drawn to the space between clarity and ambiguity. It's not about rendering a perfect landscape but it's about translating emotion, and not just imagery. The familiar elements serve as gentle entry points and beyond that I don't want to define the entire journey. I want to create a sense of spaciousness and openness, where memory, emotion, and reflection can unfold naturally. Abstraction gives me that freedom. It invites the viewer to feel rather than analyze. Realism provides the anchor, the suggestion of place or mood. By navigating this fine line between the real and the abstract, I aim to create not just a scene but an experience—something that encourages presence, evokes emotion, and allows for a deeply personal connection. Ultimately, it's not about what's seen on the canvas, but what's felt beyond it.

Kajal Zaveri | Walk With Me | 2024

Nature plays a central role in your work. Do you paint from specific places or from memory and feeling?

Nature is always the starting point of my art and my main muse, but I don't aim for literal representation. I paint from memory, from feeling, and from emotional impressions of the natural world. I absorb landscapes and internalize the misty coastlines, the open skies, rolling hills, wildflowers, urban parks, and many such similar encounters and then reinterpret them and share them through an internal lens. These elements stay with me and reappear in my paintings, layered with emotion. My nature-inspired works are rooted in feeling rather than form. Through layers of color, shifting forms, and intuitive brushwork, I don't try to capture a landscape exactly but rather the way it feels to stand in it. A breeze through trees. The hush of dawn. The weightlessness of sky. The expanse of the ocean. Even when my brush references a place, it's filtered through memory and instinct. I invite viewers to engage with the work on an emotional level, finding their own connections and interpretations within the interplay of color, form, and movement and offer them a sense of connection, and the quiet joy of being present, a place where they can pause, feel, and reconnect with the rhythm of something greater.

You describe your works as "soulscapes." Can you elaborate on what that term means to you artistically and emotionally?

I use the word soulscapes to describe a lot of my nature inspired landscapes. For me this signifies a visual expression of what lies beneath the surface: memory, stillness, longing, strength. The term came to me because I was looking for a way to describe work that felt deeply personal, yet didn't

Kajal Zaveri | Expansive Views | 2023

belong to any specific place. These aren't literal scenes but they're emotional environments. My soulscapes are built in layers, with movement, color, and texture guiding the way. They reflect not just what I've seen, but what I've felt. Sometimes peaceful, sometimes raw, but always honest. I want my paintings to meet viewers in their own inner spaces; to evoke rather than explain. If they feel something they can't quite name, I've done my job.

How did your artistic journey begin, especially as a primarily self-taught artist?

My journey into art wasn't a straight path but unfolded gradually and unexpectedly. I grew up in India, surrounded by color, rhythm, and celebration. The vibrancy of everyday life; rangoli patterns at doorsteps, marigolds for festivals, the saturated hues of saris and spices, was an early, intuitive education in visual storytelling. Though I never attended formal art school, a childhood hobby class sparked a quiet but enduring connection to painting.
Art remained in the background as I pursued a more traditional academic and corporate path in California. But the region's beauty and bounty, its sweeping coastlines, open skies and golden light stirred something powerful in me, and I began painting more regularly, as a form of emotional translation. Eventually, that pull became impossible to ignore, and I left the corporate world to embrace art full-time. It was a leap into the unknown, but one rooted in deep purpose.
As a self-taught artist, I've built my practice through instinct and experimentation. Without the structure of formal training, I found the freedom to paint what felt emotionally true. Over time, what began as a private process has grown into a professional journey, with work that now resonates with collectors, galleries, and publications.

You've lived and created in both San Francisco and New York. How have these environments influenced your artistic voice?

San Francisco and New York have both shaped my voice in very different but meaningful ways. San Francisco introduced me to nature's gentler side—the fog, the stillness, the expansive coastlines. California was where I truly began to listen-to the sea, to the silence of trees, to myself. Its landscapes taught me about spaciousness and surrender, and my art responded with gentler hues and open compositions. My earlier work from that period reflects that energy: soft, layered, contemplative, often inspired by misty skies and quiet light. New York, on the other hand, brought structure, energy, and resilience. There's a boldness here and a kind of urgency that challenged me to create with sharper contrasts and stronger lines. My recent NYC-inspired works, explore strength and modernity through a minimalist lens. Both the cities have left an imprint. I often say that San Francisco taught me to listen quietly; New York taught me to speak boldly. I carry both voices with me when I paint.

Color is clearly a powerful language in your work. How do you approach your palette when starting a new piece?

Color has always been central to my life and to my art; it's both my visual language and emotional compass. Growing up in India, I was surrounded by vibrant traditions, folk art, and festivals like Holi, where color was celebrated joyfully and playfully. That early immersion deeply shaped how I see the world and continues to inform my palette today.
Though I now live and work in New York, I still carry those bright, joyful influences with me. I'm naturally drawn to uplifting hues and colors that reflect energy, optimism, and beauty. Whether I'm painting a sunlit horizon or a dreamlike landscape, I want the viewer to feel something expansive and hopeful. At the same time, many of my pieces, especially my water series or abstract landscapes, explore calm and stillness through soft blues, whites, and greens. These palettes reflect the meditative peace I find in nature and in the act of painting itself. I approach each piece intuitively, letting the work evolve in layers. My hope is that these colors spark personal memories in the viewer, evoking nostalgia, serenity, and a sense of shared human experience.

What role does emotion play in your creative process?

Emotion is at the core of everything I create. It's why I paint, how I paint, and what guides each piece from start to finish. Whether it's gratitude, joy, grief, awe, or quiet reflection, I allow that feeling to move through me and into my work. I don't paint what I see as much as what I feel. Some works are light and expansive, born from peace or gratitude. Others come from deeper, more complex emotions like longing, belonging. But no matter the mood, I always aim to stay honest. That honesty is what allows others to connect with the work in their own way. For me, art is emotional storytelling; one that doesn't need words. My hope is that when someone stands in front of my painting, they don't just see it but they feel something, maybe even something they didn't expect.

Kajal Zaveri | Somewhere Feeling Fresh | 2025

— *Interview*

Majid Pazhuhi

Your background in architecture clearly informs your artistic work. How does your training as an architect influence your approach to watercolor?

My background in architecture has shaped the way I see balance, proportion, and rhythm—but when I paint in watercolor, I let go of structure in the traditional sense. Watercolor invites surrender. It reveals how to trust movement, chance, and the natural flow of the medium itself. Unlike architecture, where precision is essential, painting allows for uncertainty and imperfection. I still carry with me an instinct for composition, but I let intuition lead. I respond to the way water pools, how pigment settles, how light filters through each layer. Watercolor allows me to work with light and atmosphere in a way that echoes architectural form—only here, the materials are translucency, gravity, and time.

You work across a wide range of media—from watercolor and acrylic to sculpture. How do you choose which medium to use for a particular idea or project?

The idea chooses the medium. Some concepts ask for the immediacy and vulnerability of watercolor; others need the physical presence of sculpture or the layering of acrylic. I think of each medium as a different language—what I want to express determines the dialect. Watercolor speaks in breath and silence; sculpture in weight

and void. Each medium gives shape to a different kind of energy.

You mention poetry and the human experience as inspirations. Are there specific poets, verses, or experiences that directly influence your visual work?

Yes—poetry is a quiet force in my practice.The words of Iranian poets such as Rumi, Hafez, Sohrab Sepehri, and Sayeh continue to echo through my creative process, not as direct references, but as quiet undercurrents of feeling, rhythm, and metaphor Their imagery—often grounded in nature and the ineffable—resonates with how I experience the world. I'm also inspired by moments that defy linear narrative: the curve of a gesture, the hush before a storm, the ache of memory. These lived fragments find their way into the work not as literal illustrations, but as emotional textures.

How do you balance the precision required in architecture with the spontaneity of watercolor painting?

That tension is exactly where I like to be. In architecture, every line must serve a purpose; in watercolor, I allow space for the unexpected. But the balance comes from the way I let both disciplines inform each other. Watercolor teaches me to embrace unpredictability—something architecture often resists. Meanwhile, architecture grounds my painting practice, giving it a sense of rhythm and containment. I see it not as contradiction, but as dialogue.

What role does memory play in your creative process?

Memory is central to my work. It's not about specific recollections, but more the emotional residue they leave behind. I'm interested in how memory distorts, dissolves, or sharpens over time. In my watercolors, this manifests as blurred edges, soft gradients, or layered opacity. It's a way of visualizing what's half-remembered—more felt than seen. Each piece becomes a vessel for something unspoken, yet deeply familiar.

As someone living between cultures, does your Iranian-Canadian identity shape the themes or imagery in your work?

I often find myself drawing from the richness of Iranian culture—its intricate architecture, the deep emotional resonance of our poetry, and the layered beauty of artistry. I'm deeply inspired by the use of color, texture, and symbolism that defines so much of Persian visual tradition. At the same time, living in a multicultural country has widened my lens. The experience of moving between languages, aesthetics, and ways of being has shaped how I see and what I notice. It's not about blending cultures, but about a kind of fluid borrowing—an openness to influence that arises from being immersed in many worlds at once. That space between belonging and becoming is often where the work begins.

Can you tell us more about the relationship between form and emotion in your art?

Form is the architecture of emotion. In my work, form doesn't represent—it evokes. I'm less interested in depicting reality than in creating spaces for feeling. Every gesture, stain, or texture carries emotional weight. The viewer might not know what they're looking at, but they'll feel something—uncertainty, stillness, tension, release. That's where the work lives: in that emotional recognition, beyond language.

Hyunju An, a pastry chef and a chocolatier, based in Melbourne, Australia. After completing Bachelors in Arts of Psychology in Busan National University, South Korea, moved to Melbourne to continue with the true passion, chocolate and patisserie. Chocolate and art have been the biggest self-actualisation medium and enthusiasm. While working as a pastry chef, spending after hours to create chocolate work is to express creativity and self-awareness expression using favourite medium, chocolate.

Project Statement
Project Categorised in self-awareness, co-existence and positive attitude. Medium: Chocolate (Milk and white chocolate couvertures, cacao butter, food colouring); The whole sculpture is made with 100% cacao butter premium chocolate couverture. Edible, but not recommended. Tool: A tourne knife, chocolate scrapper, chocolate air spray gun.

Hyunju An | Thanatos | 2025

Hyunju An | The crack | 2025

Yezi Lou

Your paintings often depict mass-produced objects and toys—what draws you to these motifs?

My obsession with objects, particularly consumer goods, is rooted in both cultural context and personal introspection. Wenzhou, my hometown, known for its entrepreneurial culture, was at the heart of a manufacturing boom at the time I was growing up. Many of these products were destined for export, reinforcing the region's position in global trade. Against this backdrop, my relationship with consumer goods was not only shaped by their material presence but also by the larger forces of commerce, industry, and globalization.

Yezi Lou | Sisyphus

In your work, nostalgia is portrayed not as sentimental, but as political and historical. Can you expand on that idea?

For me, nostalgia isn't about longing for an idealized past—it's a form of critical memory. I see it as a political emotion that mediates the tension between collective experience and personal loss. My work doesn't offer closure; it dwells in the ambiguity of unfulfilled possibilities. The objects I paint often represent moments suspended in time—echoes of futures that never came to be. This layered approach invites the viewer to consider memory as fragmented, unstable, and shaped by broader social transformations.

How has your upbringing in Wenzhou influenced the visual language and themes in your paintings?

Wenzhou was a site of explosive entrepreneurial energy—its streets were filled with cheaply produced goods destined for global export. As a

Yezi Lou | One Day In A Zoo

child, I was surrounded by these objects, which were both materially insignificant and symbolically loaded. They were tools of social navigation—defining class, relationships, and aspirations. Today, I see domestic space not as a refuge, but as a stage where the pressures of tradition and modernity collide. These contradictions continue to fuel my exploration of alienation, status, and belonging.

Many of your compositions include broken, discarded, or seemingly cheap objects. What do these symbols mean to you?

I choose objects that were once part of intimate, domestic settings but have since lost their economic value—items often found in secondhand markets or simply discarded. These objects carry a dual weight for me: they are tied to my personal memories growing up in Wenzhou during China's industrial transformation, and they serve as cultural artifacts of a society reshaped by rapid consumerism. They reflect both the intimacy of lived experience and the impersonality of global commerce, becoming vessels for exploring shifting identities and human connection.

Your portraits often blur or distort identities. What does this ambiguity aim to express?

Blurring faces is a way to protect intimacy while also challenging the viewer's expectations. It reflects my own discomfort with visibility—particularly as someone negotiating cultural identity and inherited obligations. These distortions create a space where the subject becomes a proxy for emotional states rather than a fixed persona. It opens up a psychological terrain where familiarity is complicated by estrangement, and recognition is deferred or denied.

What role does emotional restraint play in your use of a muted, greyish palette?

Gray is an emotional buffer—it allows me to express vulnerability without direct exposure. It embodies ambiguity, detachment, and introspection. While brighter colors might assert or define, gray suspends meaning. It holds emotional weight while remaining elusive. My use of gray also reflects a desire to delay immediate emotional response and encourage a longer, quieter contemplation.

Are there particular memories or stories from your childhood that regularly resurface in your creative process?

Yes—one that continues to appear on my work is the brief time we had a Dalmatian when I was very young. We didn't keep her for long, but her presence has lingered with me. The image of the Dalmatian recurs subtly in my paintings, not just as a visual motif but as an emotional undercurrent. It's a melancholic and layered memory—tied to questions of family, folklore, gender roles, and social class. Over time, that early memory has evolved into a symbol of both confinement and the new understanding for freedom.

Jean-Pierre Charbonnel

Initially, I was a musician, a classical guitarist. Due to an inability to practice my instrument because of an issue with my right hand, I turned to photography.
I have held several exhibitions: in Tulle, Limoges, Brive, Abbeville, and Saint-Robert, and have won a few competitions (Bruxelles Art Vue, Viewbug) and been published in several photography books.
Recently, after a contest, one of my photos was exhibited at Casa Abitata (Florence, Italy). T
Three of my photos are selected and sold on the prestigious site Your Daily Photograph.
I have two new exhibitions in the works.

Jean-Pierre Charbonnel | Crocus and Bokeh

Jean-Pierre Charbonnel | Graphism in the Desert

Jean-Pierre Charbonnel | Windows with a Tree

Raz Forh

You mentioned that you started painting accidentally just 10 months ago. Can you tell us more about that moment — what led you to pick up a brush for the first time?

I first picked up a brush because I wanted to paint the cover for an album I was working on. The end result was amateur, but still had a glimpse of potential so I kept at it almost to a point of obession because I wanted to unlock what I was envisioning internally, but I could only achieve it through a rigorous practice.

Raz Forh | Mob

How has your background in underground hip hop and music production influenced your painting?

I have a small fanbase for my music that Ive managed to cultivate through years of releasing records and they appreciate my view of the world in general one might say, and I think it sort of gives me the confidence to express my vision through a paintbrush a little more fluidly than the typical beginner would, if that makes sense.

Your works feature a strong emotional charge and raw energy — how would you describe your artistic style?

I would describe my style as kind of like the “iron fist in a velvet glove” aesthetic. I may paint something harsh beautifully or something beautiful harshly. Sometimes its all of the above but I think it depends on how patient I can be. Patience is the x factor. The more I can lock in and not rush the process the better the brushwork may be but it doesnt always mean its the best painting, so I just let my artistic self bleed through.

Do you have any artistic influences, whether visual or musical, that shaped your creative vision?

Growing up as a part of the hip hop community Im pretty much influenced by all the classic gritty films and albums that have come out over the decades. Being a producer keeps me listening to music from all over the world due to sample searching. I might be listening to Wu Tang one minute and a Soviet jazz band the next. I also love black and white films, I’m somewhat a film buff. Ive studied many good and bad films and have directed videos myself so my eye is a trained to recognize magic if its there I might say.
My thing is to paint freely yet show great technique. Im inspired by painterly styles like Sargent and such but using acrylic doesnt allow me the range that oil does yet Im trying to get the same effect, but when its all said and done I’d like to awe the world the same as the likes of my favorites like Molino, Caravaggio etc. I enjoy a lot of

different artists.

What emotions or messages do you hope viewers feel or receive when they look at your paintings?

I want people to feel fear from a safe place. I want them to remember when the odds were stacked against them but they won anyway. I want them to feel the revenge they deserve and be inspired to go out in the world and be themselves no matter how much they feel supressed. To me this is art. Getting comfortable with the uncomfortabilities of life and finding our true strength.

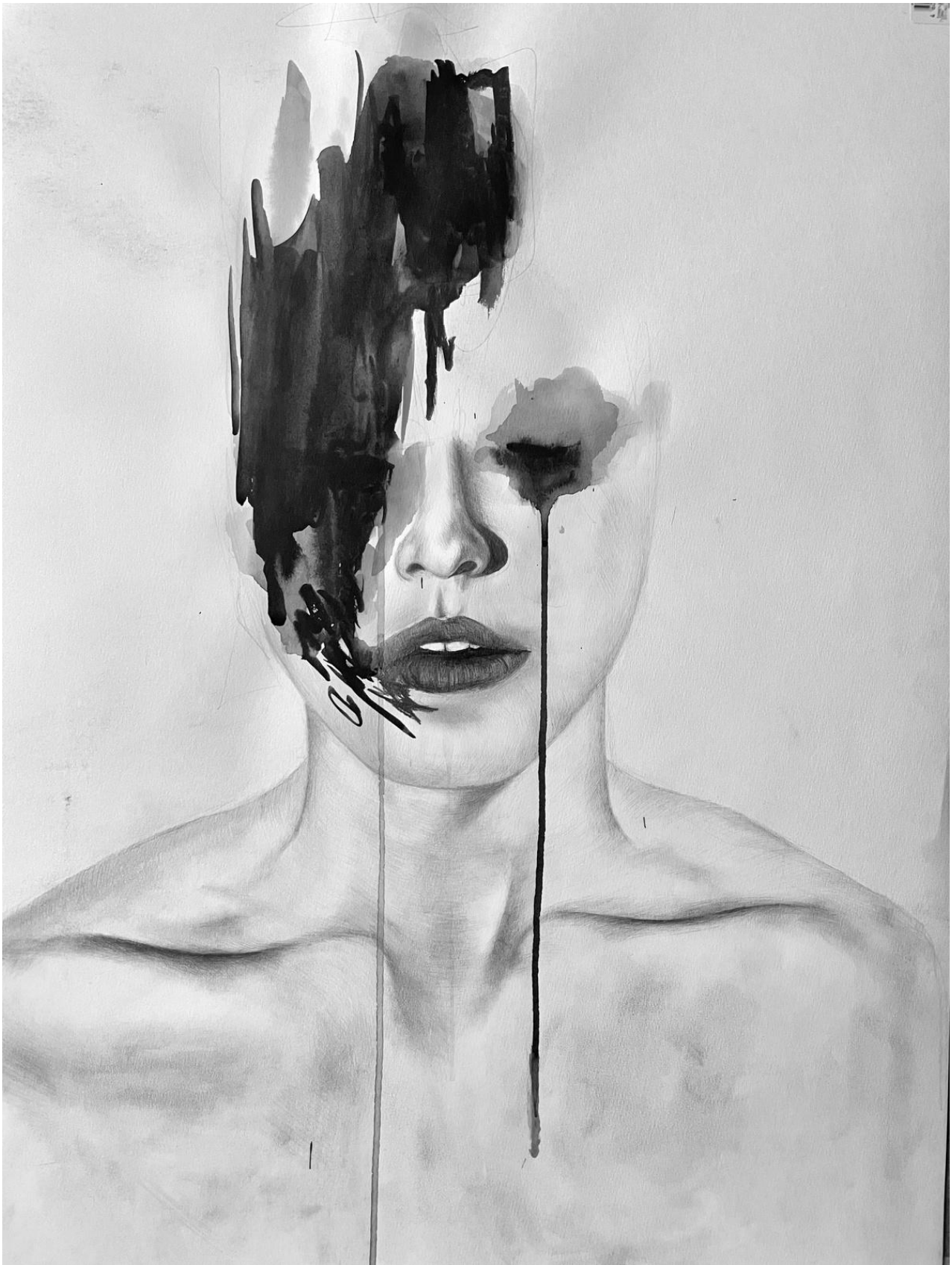
How does your creative process usually begin? Do you sketch ideas first, or do you approach the canvas spontaneously?

I stare at the blank canvas like a crazy person for 5+ minutes, grab a pencil and eraser and make a few scratchy marks so I know my proportions for the composition and then I get to building. Its a very peaceful process although so much is going on in my head at the time.

Since your art career started so recently, what has surprised you the most about this journey so far?

The most surprising thing is being good enough to even be recognized in anyway. Painting was literally an accident in my life like an illegitimate child or something. I never thought I would paint anything, let alone get my name or work published anywhere. I was just homeless a few years ago too living in a tent so all of this is very surreal to me. Almost like one of lifes cruel jokes in a way. This journey is proving to me that you can never give up because you really dont know what tomorrow holds for you. Life is very mysterious sometimes, I had no idea I could paint this way and it just revealed itself to me on a fluke. Don't let your bad luck make you forget good luck still exists. Whats for us no one can take.

My name is **Leo**. All my life, I've had a passion for art, and it's not just a way for me to express myself; it's a way of life. My artwork ranges from deep emotions to the challenges we face in the world. My desire is to grow and showcase my work around the globe. I work with various materials, including pencils and paints.



Leo | Emotion

Iñaki Oñate

Your series is titled "The Size of Hope." What does "hope" mean to you in the context of your work?

The title of my series was inspired by another title. A book of essays by Jorge Luis Borges called "El tamaño de mi esperanza" (The size of my hope). He wrote it in his youth and I was in my twenties when I started working on this series of artworks. There was something vibrant and youthful in those essays by Borges that for some reason inspired me, but it was the title of his book in particular that captured my attention on a subconscious level. In my case I decided to refer to the concept of hope not in a personal way (my hope) but in a more universal or general way (of hope). The Size Of Hope is a never ending series of drawings. Like I mentioned, I started this series years ago and it is an open series. Constantly being updated by new drawings and paintings. In the context of this series, hope is a concept that encompasses all the aspects that define humanity (beauty, horror, tenderness, cruelty, faith, uncertainty, brevity and eternity). Hope is such a vast and complex concept that suits the idea of a never ending series of drawings.

Iñaki Oñate | The Angel Of History | 2024

How do you approach the connection between the mind and the hand when creating?

In my case the connection between the hand and creating is simultaneous. Sometimes the hand comes up with an idea before the mind and other times the other way around. I believe in the idea of a "thinking hand".

Many of your pieces mix abstract elements with symbolic figures. What role do symbols play in your visual language?

Iñaki Oñate | The Life Of The Artist | 2024

I believe that the symbolic dimension of reality is far more influential in our everyday life than we actually think. We are made of symbols and metaphors. We are symbolic animals.

You work across multiple disciplines—film, music, drawing. How do these practices influence one another in your creative process?

These disciplines converge. Each one is a subsidiary language of a main and fundamental one that we could call the artistic language. The artistic language, the artistic expression, could be defined as a way to interpret, represent and intervene reality in a poetic fashion.

Several of your works evoke themes of violence, death, and isolation. Are these personal reflections, social commentaries, or both?

The idea of hope,the idea of a better world can only be conceived if we contrast that optimism with the darkest aspects of human nature. Therefore, it is inevitable to address and reflect upon the horrific side of the human soul.

What's the role of spontaneity or improvisation in your drawings?

Sometimes drawings are born out of spontaneity. A line drawn in the paper or a stain of ink might evoke something in my mind and I can develop a whole illustration out of that. On other occasions I do think and have a previous conceptualization for a certain idea that I want to address through a graphic artwork.

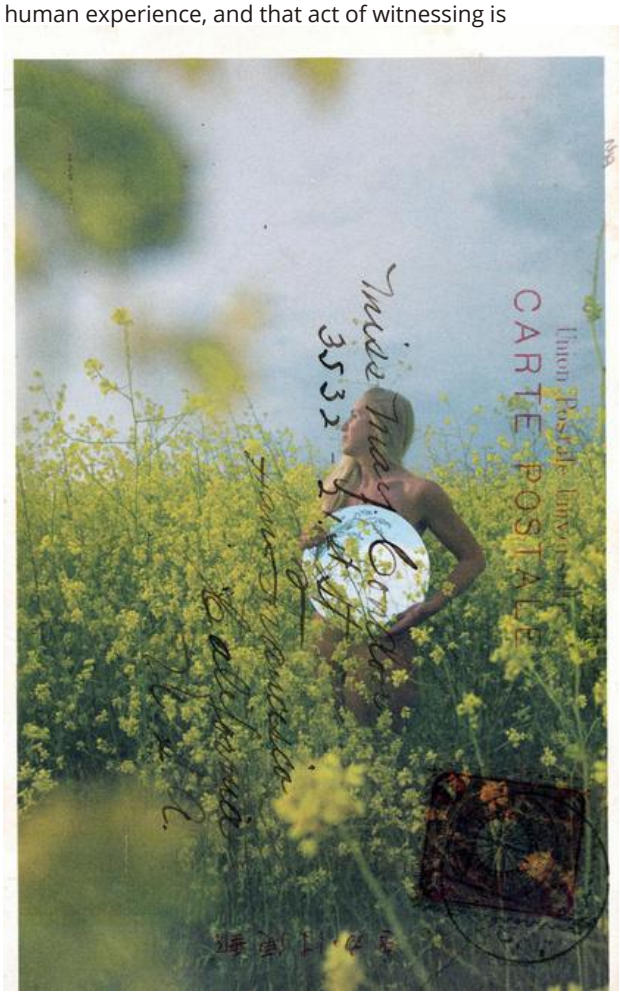
Your characters seem to exist in states of anguish or transformation. Do they represent parts of yourself or collective human experiences?

My characters do reflect my inner states of anguish and transformation. They represent parts of my mind and my heart but It is fair to say that I belong to a human collective and I assume that the other people of that collective called the human race are also in similar states of anguish and transformation. We all share this nightmare and dream called life. We also share dark days and bright days. We all hope for something good despite the darkness of the world and the weather report.

Jill Sutherland

Your work blends personal narrative with universal emotion. How do you approach vulnerability in your portraits?

Portraits embody strength through vulnerability. There's courage in being willing to be seen, whether that's seeing ourselves clearly or witnessing others in their truth, even when filtered through fantasy or illusion. Photography allows us to explore the many masks and forms of the human experience, and that act of witnessing is inherently vulnerable. In my own work, I often use personal narratives to tap into that space. The more personal the work, the more universal the meaning.



Jill Sutherland | Self Portrait

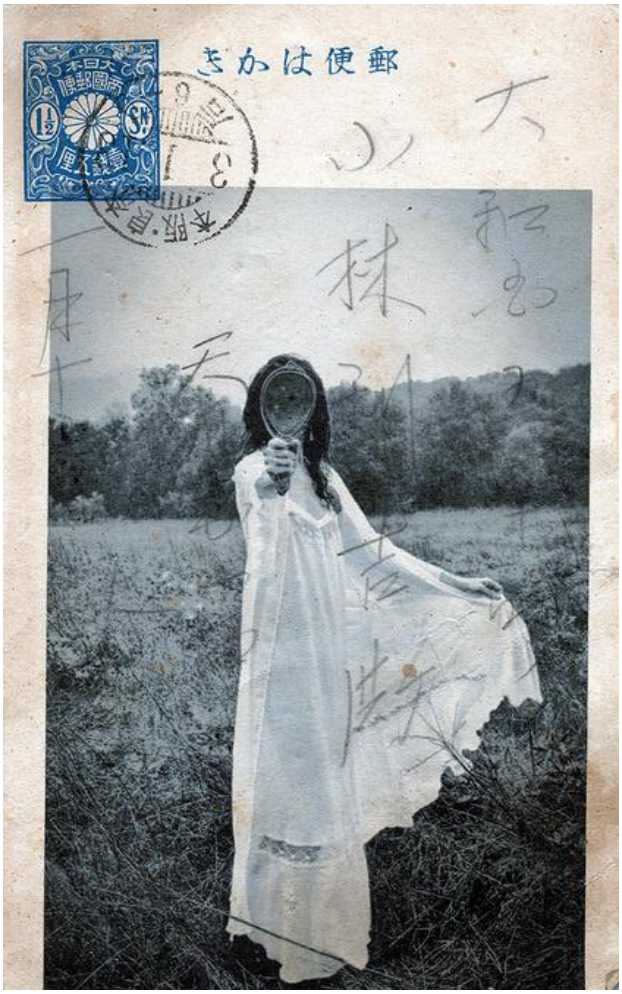
Jill Sutherland | Theatre District

How did your background in industrial metalworking influence your visual language and approach to artmaking?

My background in industrial metalworking has deeply shaped my visual language by pushing me to explore the feminine as a powerful, central voice. Working in what was often a male-dominated 'boys club' created a personal need to reclaim the feminine through archetypes like the muse, the goddess, the witch. I began the Circle of Doors Tarot project while still immersed in that industrial world, driven by a desire to understand and honor the shifting seasons of a woman's life. That exploration of self-discovery continues to echo throughout my work, because often, that which is seeking, is the thing.

In what ways has the loss of your mother shaped your artistic journey and themes of feminine energy in your work?

Losing my mother profoundly shifted the way I approach both life and art, instilling a sense of urgency, and a need to live and create with intention, depth, and emotional



Jill Sutherland | Return To Sender

honesty. I feel a quiet pressure to make something meaningful, honoring the fleeting nature of time through work that holds weight. Her absence deepened my interest in spiritual narratives and the unseen — legacy, memory, connection. It's also led me to explore feminine energy in all its complex aspects ranging from strength to softness, presence to absence. I'm drawn to photographing others in a way that feels timeless, almost like offering a small piece of permanence in a world that's constantly slipping away. There's a romantic, even mournful quality to photography that I find comforting: the idea that a single image can hold someone's essence long after they're gone. This is the kind of beauty I seek to create.

The "Correspondence Series" features layered portraits with vintage postcards. What inspired this project and what do postcards symbolize for you?

I've always been drawn to old, forgotten things — objects that carry the energy of another time. Postcards, in particular, feel like tiny relics of human connection. Whether the message is deeply personal or seemingly mundane, there's something profound in the act of sending a few handwritten words across space and time. This series grew out of my fascination with the idea of correspondence — the way we reach for each other, attempt to connect, and leave behind traces of that exchange. I love the rawness of handwriting from different eras and languages, and how those fragments now live again when layered with portraiture and communicate across generations as a bridge between the past and the present.

How do you select the found postcards and integrate them into your compositions? Do you seek specific messages or aesthetics?

I've become fascinated with postcards and letters from the early 1900s — especially Japanese postcards, which feature beautifully expressive calligraphy I can't fully decipher. That mystery adds to their allure; they feel like visual poetry rather than direct communication. I'm drawn to both the aesthetic and tactile qualities — old penmanship, stamps, paper textures, and the fading marks of time. American letters from the same era also captivate me, particularly for their elegant handwriting, which feels like a lost art form. I don't seek specific messages as much as I seek a feeling — a sense of place, a trace of someone's voice from the past. Integrating these postcards into my work is a way of reanimating them — giving new life to personal artifacts and transforming them into portals that connect memory, distance, and time.

There's a strong interplay between presence and absence in your images. What role does memory play in your practice?

Memory is central to my work, not as documentation but as atmosphere. I'm drawn to the feeling of being transported by blending timelines, history, and nostalgia into the present to create a kind of visual time machine. I use shadow, anonymity, and silhouette to evoke mystery and emotional depth. Absence becomes as meaningful as presence, inviting the viewer to bring their own memories and interpretations. My images often feel like fragments of a world just out of reach which is personal yet anonymous, both familiar and dreamlike, providing a tension between what's seen and what's suggested.

Much of your art explores dualities—light and shadow, masculine and feminine. How do you balance these opposing forces visually?

Dualities reflect the complexity of being human. Light and shadow, masculine and feminine — they're not just opposites, but interconnected forces that shape how we perceive and feel. Visually, I play with contrast — using shadow to conceal, light to reveal, and allowing both to exist in tension. I often let silhouettes, textures, and ambiguous forms blur the line between strength and softness, presence and mystery. Rather than trying to resolve these opposites, I hold space for both, letting the image feel like it's suspended between worlds. That's where the emotion comes in. Balance doesn't mean symmetry; it means allowing contradiction to live within the frame.

Clara Wodny is a ceramacist, printmaker, and writer based in the Midwest. In her work, she is drawn towards creating images that are immediately pleasing to the eye and recognizable as something, but which then become more layered and subversive the more time you look at them.

Project Statement
The Miss Piggy X Chappell Roan series plays off the social media trend of comparing Chappell Roan's performance outfits to iconic Miss Piggy looks by taking Chappell's version of the outfits and placing them on portraits of Miss Piggy. "Good Luck, Miss Piggy!" is an homage to the cover of Chappell's hit single, "Good Luck, Babe!"; "Miss Piggy of Liberty" nods towards Chappell's 2024 Gov Ball performance where she emerged from a giant apple dressed as the Statue of Liberty; and "The Rise and Fall of Miss Piggy" is based of the cover of her debut album, "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess". In doing so, this series begins to explore the ways that artists draw from each other and synthesise bits and pieces of the art that interests and inspires them into new, unique work, proving the pursuit of art is not a solitary pursuit but one which only exists within a larger context of community and creation. All images are linocut relief carvings, printed on 14x18" sheets of Kitakata paper.

Clara Wodny | Good Luck, Miss Piggy!


MISS PIGG

Krystyna Vinogorodska

Your work explores the space "before form arises." How does this idea influence your painting process?

This idea shapes the way I approach painting. I don't start with an image — I start with a state of mind, like a musician tuning their instrument before playing. I enter a space of observation — of myself, of the atmosphere within, of something barely perceptible, like a faint outline on the surface of water.

Krystyna Vinogorodska | The Right To Dream

I've always been fascinated by that moment — like the one in Dante's forest — when you no longer know where the path will lead, but it's already clear that turning back isn't an option. It's a transitional space — somewhere between sleep and awakening, between shadow and line. I'm not trying to "fill" the canvas — I'm in conversation with it. I listen to the silence, the kind from which the first movements begin to emerge.

Sometimes I just touch the surface without painting. Like Paulo Coelho writes about signs — I wait for the first "yes" to appear, even if it's just a shade, a gesture, a rhythm. In these moments, the form isn't planned — it unfolds gradually, from within, like Cézanne's slow approach to his subject, his feeling, his tone.

That's why for me, painting isn't about reproduction — it's about exploration. I can begin with one impulse and end somewhere completely different. Like with Bach or Dalí — there's order inside the chaos, and chaos inside the structure.As Richard Bach once said, "We draw not to explain the world, but to keep being amazed by it." I don't try to provide answers — I

Krystyna Vinogorodska | Abandoned Unicorns

offer a direction for feeling, so the viewer can hear what's happening between the forms.

You often use the metaphor of "the neck of the hourglass." What does that symbol mean to you personally?

For me, the neck of the hourglass isn't really about time in the usual sense. It's that exact moment when potential begins to take shape. Everything narrows — gestures, decisions, lines. But paradoxically, it's in that narrowing that the inner space feels widest. That idea has always fascinated me — the narrower the passage, the deeper the breath.
That moment feels incredibly focused — like finding the right note, the right word, the right stroke. Everything comes into a point, like a lens — but that lens opens up something much bigger. It's like looking into depth through a narrow opening. There's no chaos — only pure potential, waiting to become visible.
It's a very subtle space — being "in between." Not forcing form, but allowing it to be born when it's truly ready. I try not to rush it. It almost feels like it breathes on its own. And often, that's when something appears that I never could have planned — only discovered.

What kinds of emotions or inner states do you try to capture — before they take on recognizable form?

I'm drawn to the moment when someone is on the verge of making a choice — not where they used to be, but not yet knowing where to go next. It's a delicate moment, filled with movement, doubt, anticipation. The space of possibility expands — and that can feel less like freedom and more like confusion.
I often see it in people physically — a pause, tension in the body, a gaze searching the air.
In my work, I try not to capture a decision already made, but to create space for what's still forming. These states haven't become clear images or actions yet — but they're alive inside us. Jung might call them "the shadow"; for me, they're simply parts of us that haven't yet said, "this is who I am."
Sometimes I feel like my paintings just give someone a chance to hear themselves — without pressure, without needing to get it right. It's more like a warm, quiet "you can," even if you haven't figured out who you are just yet.
When someone says they've found something of their own in one of my works — that's when I know the piece is doing what it needs to do.

Your art has won awards and been exhibited internationally. How has that kind of recognition affected your creative journey?

I enjoy entering competitions — and yes, winning matters to me. There's ambition in that, a bit of vanity too, and a genuine desire to be seen. I don't hide it — in a healthy form, it gives me a huge amount of inner energy. Recognition, for me, isn't just validation — it's fuel. It pushes me to keep growing, to try more, to go deeper and

Krystyna Vinogorodska | Inner Crystal

reach higher.
Every exhibition, every award feels like a crossroads — a chance to pause, reflect, and then step into a new direction. I don't want to repeat what already worked — I want to raise the bar, even surprise myself. In that sense, competitions give me structure and momentum. They're part of the process — helping me stay in rhythm, keep moving, stay in the game.
What I love most is that recognition sparks new conversations. But at the heart of it, it's always a conversation with myself: Who am I now? And who could I become next?

Your use of symbols feels both playful and profound. Do you begin a piece with specific symbols in mind, or do they appear intuitively?

Usually, symbols appear during the process — not from thought, but from experience. I don't sit down thinking, "Today I'll paint inner transformation using a circle and a ladder." It's more a feeling that arises in motion. Sometimes I don't even realize I've used a symbol — it just felt right physically.
I don't treat symbols as fixed or static. They're alive. A circle might mean wholeness one day, and enclosure the next. A symbol breathes with context. I like playing with that — blending archetypes with personal stories, or with a bit of irony and subtle shifts in meaning. Sometimes I place a symbol and only later understand why it belongs.

Krystyna Vinogorodska | Just Don'T Stop

Krystyna Vinogorodska | Observer

I read a lot, and images from literature, music, and philosophy pass through me like filters. But the final decision is always intuitive. If a symbol finds its place — it sings. If it doesn't, it fades. It's like music — you can know all the notes, but what matters most is hearing the right one.

Some of your recurring motifs include the chessboard, the unicorn, and the sphere. What do these mean to you?

They're like landmarks I return to again and again — ways of looking at how people move through life, how they choose, how they orient themselves internally.
The chessboard is about the game — life as a game, and the importance of staying in it. Not burning out, not opting out, but staying engaged, curious, present. Yes, there are rules — like in any system — but within them, there's always freedom of movement. And in that infinite variety of possible moves, creativity is born. I really connect with that philosophy: not fighting the rules, but working within them to find something surprising and alive.
The unicorn is about a person's uniqueness — and the courage to live it. It represents that authentic potential that lives in each of us. Sometimes it's fragile or hidden, buried deep. But when someone finds themselves — in their work, in love, in any choice — it's always a meeting with that inner unicorn.
I hope my paintings give people space to experience that moment.

Krystyna Vinogorodska | Pearl Seclusion

The sphere is about inner balance. No edges, no start or finish. It's a kind of calm — not passive, but fully present. Sometimes it appears on the canvas as a kind of necessity — a pause between movements.
These motifs don't come from a system — they come from sensation. And each time they appear, they mean something slightly different. Because I'm always changing too.

You describe your art not as image, but as "the breath in between." What do you hope people feel or discover when they look at your work?

I want people to pause. To really look. Because when they do, something begins to shift.
My paintings aren't meant to just decorate a space — they're meant to tune it. Whether it's a home, an office, or a gallery, I want the work to interact with the environment and the person inside it.
I hope that when someone looks at a painting, they feel: "I'm in the game." The game of life — with its rhythm, its challenges, its questions. My paintings don't soothe — they activate. It's like an invitation: Look — you're already here, already part of this, already choosing. And you can go even further. Feel more. See more clearly. Hear more deeply.
Sometimes the images seem to extend beyond the canvas — they begin to shape the space around them. They open up more air, more movement, more freedom to be yourself.
And if someone finds their place in that space — then the game goes on.

Marita Tairova
I'm a creative technologist and AI artist based in Germany. My practice explores the use of generative models and machine learning as artistic collaborators. I'm interested in how technology can expand visual storytelling and reshape the creative process.

Project Statement
I love creating surreal, dreamlike visuals. Images that feel like something you might have seen once, maybe in a dream you forgot but never fully lost. Images that remind you of being a child, when everything felt possible and the world was still full of mystery. I want to believe that magic exists, and I want others to believe it too.

Marita Tairova | Cloud | 2025

Marita Tairova | Nymph | 2025

Josephine Florens

You originally studied law. What inspired you to make the leap into the world of painting?

Art has been with me since childhood — I constantly drew, attended art groups, and imagined magical worlds. But for many years, painting remained just a part of my inner life. I chose law under my parents' guidance — they wanted stability and a secure future for me. My creative side continued to live in silence until a turning point came: the loss of my mother. It was an enormous personal tragedy. In the depth of grief, I instinctively turned to painting as a way to express pain, love, and memory. That was the moment when art became not just a comfort, but a true path. It offered me a language beyond words. Since then, painting has been my refuge, my purpose, and my response to life itself. It wasn't a leap — it was a return to who I've always been.

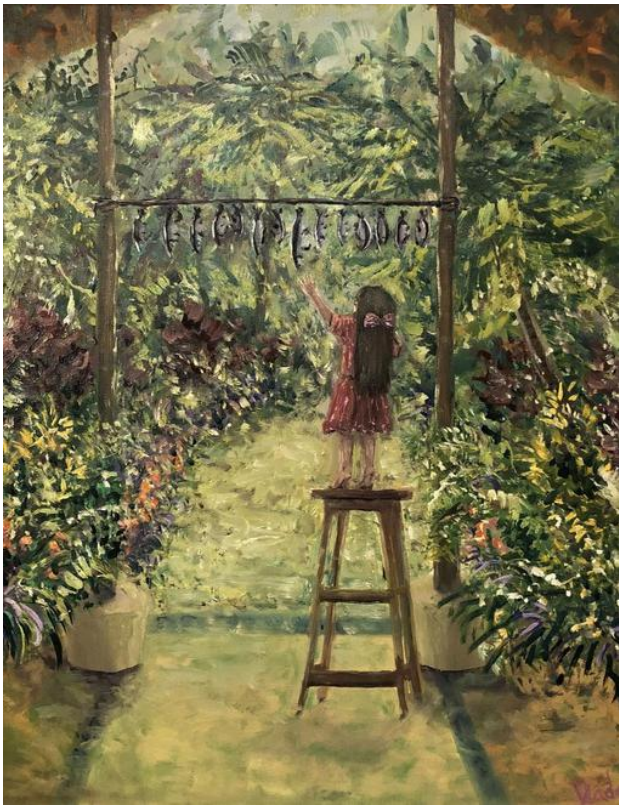
How did your background in law influence your artistic perspective or discipline?

Legal education taught me discipline, structure, and the ability to analyze complex human stories — all of which deeply influence my art. In law, you learn to look beneath the surface, to see contradictions, motives, and hidden dynamics. That same mindset allows me to build psychological layers in my paintings. I'm especially drawn to unspoken emotions and internal states — and law gave me the tools to recognize and translate them into visual language. I was fascinated by forensic science, especially under Professor Iskenderov, whose real-life cases taught me to observe closely and think deeply. That habit of attentiveness transferred to the canvas. Also, legal writing helped me structure my ideas, which now helps me construct visual compositions with clear yet subtle meaning. In both professions, the goal is empathy: to understand the human condition in all its complexity.

Josephine Florens | A Man And A Dog

You describe your style as "modern vintage." Could you elaborate on what that means to you?

"Modern vintage" for me is not just an aesthetic — it's a worldview. I seek to combine classical compositional balance, muted palettes, and a sense of timelessness with a contemporary emotional depth. I'm inspired by the warmth and quietness of mid-century interiors, old fabrics, faded photographs — but I reframe them through my personal experiences and emotional landscape. My paintings often reflect stillness, memory, and fragility — but not nostalgia. I'm not trying to recreate the past. Rather, I use its textures and forms to say something about the present: about resilience, tenderness, and survival. "Modern vintage" allows me to build emotional bridges between then and now. It is a way to speak softly but deeply — to invite the viewer into a moment that feels familiar, yet resonates anew.



Josephine Florens | As Long As No One Sees

What role does symbolism play in your paintings?

Symbolism is essential in my work. I rarely depict anything literally. Instead, I use objects, gestures, and light to create emotional and psychological subtext. A tilted chair, a shadow across a face, a window left slightly open — these become symbols of absence, longing, or silent strength. This approach reflects how I experience life: full of layered meanings and quiet signs. Painting allows me to say what can't be said directly — especially as someone who has lived through grief, displacement, and war. I want my viewers to feel something before they "understand" it. My symbolism is intuitive rather than intellectual — it comes from personal emotion. For me, a painting is successful if it lingers inside someone like a memory, not like a message.

Your works often reflect quiet, poetic moments. How do you choose the stories or feelings you want to depict?

I don't plan themes in advance — they emerge organically. Often, it begins with a small sensation: the curve of a child's hand, a quiet beam of light, a half-forgotten dream. I carry these moments with me until they ask to be painted. I'm drawn to emotions that are subtle but strong — quiet grief, inner strength, tenderness, waiting. Much of this comes from personal experience: my childhood in Odesa, the death of my mother, becoming a mother myself, the experience of war and emigration. These layers of life shape what I depict. I want my paintings to offer space — space for silence, for breathing, for emotional recognition. The stories I paint are not linear — they are emotional atmospheres. I let each image grow like a living thought, slow and sincere.

What draws you to oil paints as your exclusive medium?

Oil painting feels like a living material. It allows slowness, thoughtfulness, and subtle layering. I can return to a canvas days later and continue the dialogue with it — no rush, no pressure. It holds memory in every layer. Oil also lets me create depth, softness, and light in ways no other medium can. It's tactile, sensual, and emotional. I often say it breathes with me. There's also something timeless about oil — it connects me to a lineage of artists across centuries. I don't try to imitate the old masters, but I feel I'm in quiet conversation with them. Oil paint offers not just beauty, but dignity — and that's what I try to express through it.

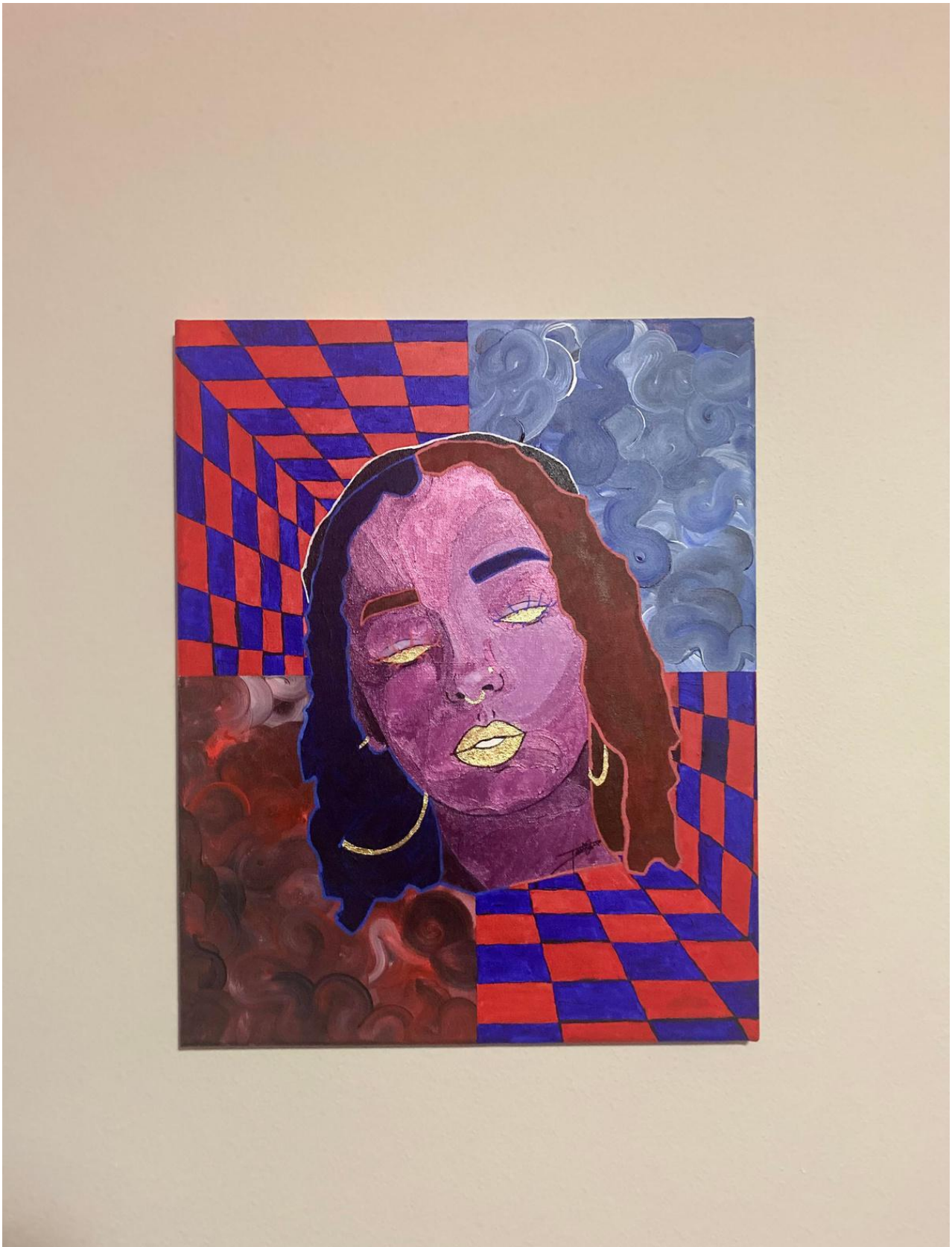
Which artists (past or present) have most influenced your work?

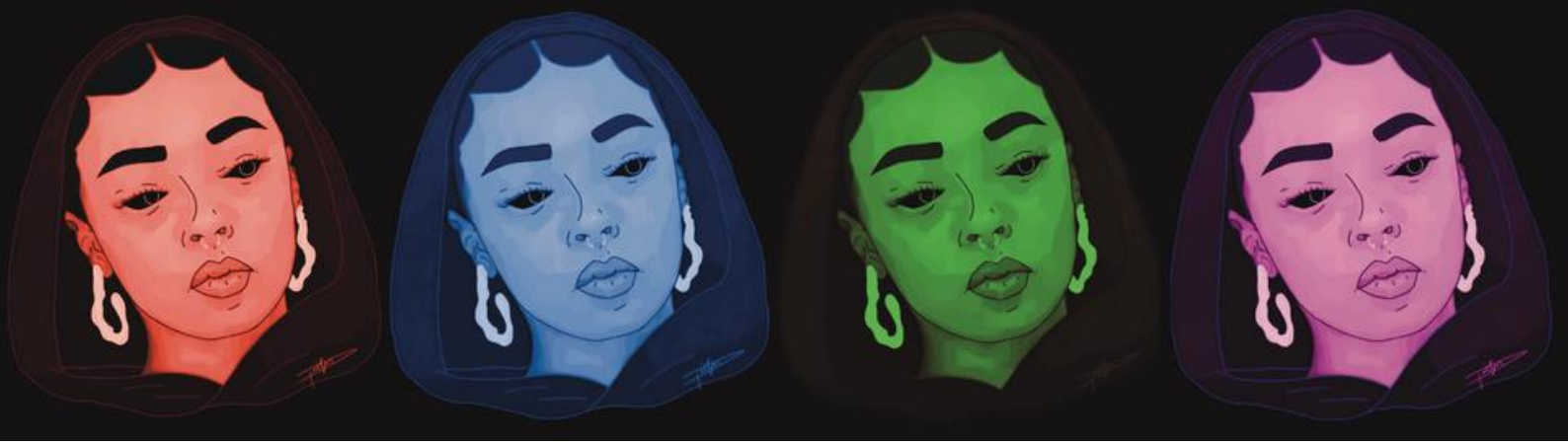
I'm inspired by artists whose work radiates warmth, softness, and a sense of quiet wonder. Carl Larsson's harmonious interiors and depictions of family life shaped my sensitivity to beauty in the everyday. Beatrix Potter and Jenny Nyström taught me how gentleness, imagination, and storytelling can come together with sincerity and heart. I'm also drawn to the magical realism of Friedrich Hechelmann and Jean-Baptiste Monge — their fairy-tale atmospheres echo the quiet mysticism I often aim to express. Petrus van Schendel's glowing candlelit scenes, Emile Munier's tender portraits of children and animals, and Albert Anker's peaceful domestic moments all showed me that realism can be infused with emotion, light, and soul. These artists remind me that painting is not only about technique or style — it is about generosity, about preserving light, memory, and a sense of goodness. That is what I try to carry into my own work.

Josephine Florens | Art Lemon

Pay
Blue for somber, red for fierce, the main colors presented in my work showcasing how I visualize my surroundings . I struggled to fill the void and find my sense of reality. I aspire to be the best I can be. I am a 21 year old retail manager with a passion for creativity.

Project Statement
You don’t need to be a painter to be an artist, you just have open up to the bigger picture that exists around you.





Pay | Hidden acceptance

Pay | Untitled-Void

Sandra Strømme

Sandra Strømme | Self Portrait | 2022

You describe your practice as "Neo-Nordic Surrealism." Could you tell us more about what this means to you, and how you came to define this term?

My main practice is painting, often combined with carved wooden frames. From the start, surrealism simply emerged as my way of expressing myself artistically, and has become a sort of native language. I use it to explore ideas and feelings beyond words, filling my work with symbols. Because surrealism did not leave as strong a mark on Scandinavia during its peak as it did elsewhere, it felt instinctive to merge these impulses with Nordic elements.
Although my work draws on Nordic motifs and methods : knotwork, mythological themes, and inspiration from Viking woodcarving, it is not Nordic in a purely traditional sense. My art reflects the contemporary world, shaped by diverse cultural influences and modern concerns. At the same time, I look to renew these ancient techniques by using 3D modelling and CNC carving alongside hand tools, blending past and present approaches. That is why I call it Neo-Nordic: "neo" both in its themes and in how it is made.

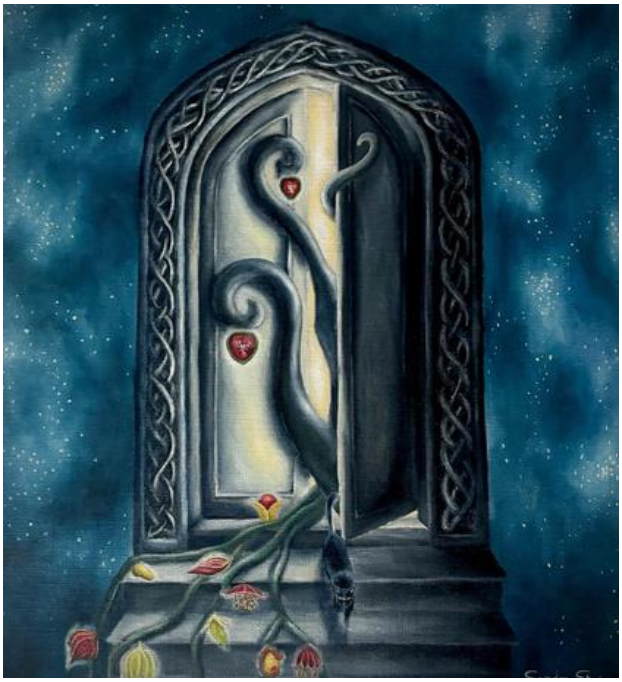
Sandra Strømme | Embrace The Chaos | 2021

Many of your works incorporate carved wooden frames with Nordic motifs. How do these sculptural elements interact with the painted image?

The interlaced motifs carved into the wooden frames are a visual metaphor for how past, present and future intertwine. By framing my paintings in these knot-like carvings, I want to suggest that art is timeless and universal. Despite differences that separate us from people of other time periods, the essential concerns of love, life and death remain constant. These sculptural frames highlight that these themes belong to a shared human story across time.

How has your background in medieval history and journalism influenced your artistic storytelling?

My studies in medieval history have made me fascinated by how people once understood the world. They have also shown me that at our core, humans today are not so different from those who lived centuries ago. The so-called "Dark Ages" are often mischaracterised in my view. There was immense artistic and spiritual richness, and the medieval mind was often more open to a magical, symbolic world where mystery was embraced.
Journalism taught me how to shape a story. My paintings are very narrative, sometimes almost like small theatre scenes. Each one tells a story, inviting the viewer to decode it. Some are built on precise ideas, others more dreamlike or mysterious. In the end, I want viewers to step into the story



Sandra Strømme | The Cat Knows The Way | 2025

themselves, finding meanings that resonate with their own subconscious. I believe in Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, that what someone else sees in my work can be just as true as what I saw when I created it.

Some of your paintings, like The Dark Place or The Dinner Party, evoke a sense of psychological or emotional narrative. Are they based on personal experiences, dreams, or imagined stories?

All of the above. I draw inspiration from what I feel, think, dream, from stories I hear, books, films and fleeting impressions. Mostly, I paint the world as I live and see it. My art is a symbolic and imaginal reflection of that world.
The Dark Place and The Dinner Party both arose during difficult periods in my life, so they carry something personal, though they are also shaped by invention. There is ambiguity in both the works and I seek to pull the viewer into them: through a hand or through the faceless figures observing the viewer. By looking, you become part of it, an invisible guest at these gatherings.

There is a recurring theme of doors, thresholds and inner spaces in your paintings. What do these symbolize in your work?

My work often features architectural elements like doors, rooms, and houses as symbolic thresholds into the subconscious. A door might suggest the passage between the conscious and the hidden, or between past and present, while an inner space can evoke a mental state. These settings mirror inner landscapes and invite viewers to wander through the architecture of the psyche. Interiors are not just physical structures but psychological gateways, urging us to explore memory and emotion and to confront parts of ourselves we might otherwise keep concealed.

How do Norse mythology and Carl Jung's psychology intertwine in your creative process?

In Norse mythology, the gods Odin, Vili and Ve found two tree trunks on the shore and shaped them into the first humans, Ask and Embla. This story has always felt powerful and poetic to me, tying directly to my use of wood, which fascinates me not just as a material but almost as a living archive. Each growth ring marks a year, a cycle, a memory of weather and time, so when I carve wood, I am aware I am working with something that physically contains different periods layered within it.
Jung's ideas about the collective unconscious, archetypes, and dream analysis give me a psychoanalytical framework for these stories and symbols. He saw dreams as messages from the deeper layers of the psyche, rich with universal imagery. When I combine carved wood with painting, it feels like bringing together material time, literally inscribed in the wood's rings, with the timeless inner worlds of myth and the subconscious. It becomes a dialogue between physical traces of history and the deeper, shared symbols that live within us all.

You have lived in countries as diverse as Myanmar, Italy and Singapore. Has your time abroad shaped your approach to Nordic identity or symbolism?

Very much so. I am Norwegian, but I have spent most of my life abroad. I love returning to Norway, but I do not see myself living there permanently. Being a foreigner feels natural to me; it keeps me questioning things and seeing them from different angles. Living in places so distant from Scandinavia has broadened my sense of identity, but it has also made me dig more deeply into my Nordic roots artistically. It is a way to stay connected, even when far away. My Nordic references are less about nationalism and more about tapping into a mythic, poetic language that anyone might relate to. In that sense, I hope that my work can become a meeting point for different worlds.

Sandra Strømme | Aevum Absurdum | 2022

Sonya Fichte
2025 Since 2019, Sonya Fichte has been weaving dreamlike narratives through the lens of her camera, crafting a photographic language that transcends time and movement. Specializing in black-and-white surrealism, her work embraces the elegance of shifting motion—ghostly figures\objects suspended in stillness yet infused with life. Through the technique of double exposure, she reshapes reality, layering moments to create images that feel like whispered fragments of untold stories. Sonya's commitment to pure photography—eschewing digital manipulation—reflects her belief in the raw talent of the human eye over artificial perfection. In an era of hyper-editing, she revives classic artistry, capturing the soul of her generation with compositions that honor tradition while pushing creative boundaries. Her photographs exist as silent films within a single frame, inviting viewers to step into an unfolding story, suspended between past and present, where the mundane meets the sublime and darkness gives way to light. In recent years, the symbolic language of color has drawn her into painting, where emotional tone and texture expand the expressive range of her visual work.

Project Statement
I build images the way one remembers a dream: slowly, in fragments, with details that slip and shift. Through black-and-white photography, I search for moments where stillness carries movement, and where motion settles into silence. Mostly, I work with double exposures and in-camera technique, not to perfect reality, but to layer it with memory and mystery. I reject digital manipulation not as rebellion, but as intimacy — a way to trust the frame. Light, for me, is both a tool and a threshold: it defines what is seen and obscures what asks to remain hidden. Recently, I've begun painting as a way to listen to color emotionally — not academically. What enters through monochrome leaves through saturation, and this cross-sensory dialogue is teaching me how to move between mediums like I move between internal states. My images do not claim just a meaning — they offer atmosphere as well. They ask viewers to notice what happens in the pause, in the blur, in the places where form begins to forget itself.

Sonya Fichte | Wash Troubles Away

Sonya Fichte | Day and Night

SoyShem

Your work beautifully merges African traditions with contemporary themes. How do you decide which elements of tradition to incorporate into a piece?

The main element I incorporate is physical representation. This could either be in the environment I choose to place the person/ people to set the scene e.g. a man playing drums in front of the houses of parliament in Central London, or the contemporary style of attire with an African twist e.g. a Kente print tracksuit, trainers, traditional masks and hairstyles, westernised or African-inspired jewellery etc.

Many of your portraits seem to tell deeply personal stories. Are your characters based on real people, or are they symbolic representations?

They're a mix of both. Some are inspired by real individuals whose stories move me; others are symbolic expressions drawn from imagination. Take the painting Tunde, for example, it depicts a real Nigerian chess grandmaster who teaches children in rural villages and travels the world to compete. His discipline, determination, and desire to share his gift inspired me to tell his story visually.

You use both acrylic and African print fabric as your canvas. What inspired you to work on printed textiles?

I love patterns, bright and bold colours in general so after visiting various markets and events in different African countries and the wide array of materials they had to represent their cultural traditions, it was a light bulb moment for me to incorporate the fabrics into my artwork to strengthen and reinforce the cultural ties, stories being told and imagery.

Your background is in Interior Architecture. How does that training influence your approach to painting?

Although I chose a different path in life from architecture into visual arts, I am still able to intertwine my training from my degree by using symmetry, geometry, composition, perspectives, scale, and accuracy in detail. I marry the two together by always making the viewer aware of the connection between a

person/people and the space they are in.

Themes of heritage and diaspora are central to your work. How do your Nigerian and Barbadian roots shape your artistic voice?

My identity is shaped by both Nigerian and Barbadian heritage, as well as by growing up in the UK. Rather than choosing one over the other, I embrace all parts of my background. This intersectionality fuels my curiosity about how people preserve culture, adapt to new environments, and define belonging.

The question "What is home?" appears in your artist statement. What does "home" mean to you today?

Coming from a multi-cultural background, I have never really felt that 'home' is just a place of region or country, but it can be a person, an object, a favourite food, or even a feeling. I feel at 'home' when I am doing what makes me feel the happiest, which is when I am painting.

How do your global travels and experiences influence your storytelling?

Having the opportunity to visit over 20 countries across five continents has fuelled my curiosity and thirst for learning about different cultures, ways of living, and historical events, influencing and informing my approach to what and how I paint. This has evolved my work by allowing me to accumulate a wealth of knowledge and insight, by experiencing the world through everyday people globally. By documenting and journaling these experiences through my work, this has enabled my stories to connect with audiences worldwide.

Anne-Julie Hynes is a multidisciplinary artist based in Montreal, Canada. Her work navigates between photography, collage, sculpture and painting, exploring the intersections between matter, image and space. Her artistic approach is rooted in a reflection on memory, identity, transformation and impermanence. Since obtaining her BFA from Concordia University (Canada), she has developed a practice that is both grounded and mobile. Her creative curiosity and openness to the world have led her to participate in numerous international research and creation residencies, notably in Europe, Oceania and North America. This path has enabled her to cultivate a nomadic approach, attentive to the cultural contexts and territories she crosses. Anne-Julie Hynes' work has been exhibited in several countries, including Canada, China, Poland, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Tahiti and England. Her work has attracted the attention of specialist media and won her several awards. She is represented in public and private collections, including Tahiti La Ora Beach Resort (Tahiti), Énergir (Canada) and the Ville de Sainte-Thérèse (Canada). Always on the move, her art unfolds in a dialogue between intuitive gesture, critical thought and the aesthetics of the unexpected.

Project Statement
The works presented are made of digital collage and collage of backlit images. Collage is a world composed solely of intersections, of images that are not supposed to be together, of convergence, of meeting, of intersecting, which is what makes a work of art strange and unsettling. Its very essence is that of junction. By juxtaposing photographs, we reinterpret rhythms, currents and negative spaces, through the disorder of color and black and white, by changing the lighting on the known. We can bring to light phenomena whose origins lie far beyond or below our senses, our imagination, and ultimately our intellection itself. The role of art is to stretch human perceptual limits, and that's what I'm trying to do.

Anne-Julie Hynes | Spinning the Wheel | 2022

Anne-Julie Hynes | Bather | 2022

Interview

Margarida Paiva

What inspired the concept behind Weaving Spells?

It was a long process to arrive at this project, which was developed with ideas rooted in earlier works. In 2019, I began working with photography inspired by nature and animism. I was eagerly reading about animism, old beliefs, and traditions that see nature as alive and interconnected. Around the same time, I happened to meet a group of women who gathered and performed rituals in the forest. Their practices deeply inspired my work.
Before I started the project Weaving Spells, I had already completed two photography series related to these themes: I Am The Forest (2021) and Eight Dark Dreams of Green Leaves (2023).

How did your collaboration with Anaïs Lalange come about?

It happened by chance that we had a mutual friend who lives in Oslo, where I also live. Anaïs is based in London, and in 2023 she visited Oslo for an exhibition with our mutual friend, Hello The Mushroom. In this exhibition, Anaïs showcased many of her masks, something she has been working on for years, drawing inspiration from her long experience as a performer and professional wrestler.
I loved her work, and I loved her as a person. She was open, creative, and full of energy. I started following her on Instagram and began closely observing her work. A few months later, I asked if she'd be interested in creating a witch mask, since witchcraft and the traditional image of the witch in the woods have long inspired my own practice.
At first, the witch mask was meant to be a one-time project. But after I received the mask and did a photo shoot with a friend wearing it in the forest, I felt truly inspired and proposed that we continue our collaboration.
I love working with Anaïs because of her wild creativity. She has complete freedom in designing and crafting the masks. I simply propose a character, and she takes it from there, sketching, experimenting, and finding the right materials for each unique piece.

Why did you choose masks as a central element in this project?

After beginning my collaboration with Anaïs, I started researching the use of masks in pagan rituals and folklore, which has influenced the project in many ways. A mask can conceal, but it also reveals. When someone wears a mask, they step into another identity or character. In this project, the masks bring specific archetypes to life, and they're designed to be worn by anyone, allowing different people to embody these figures and their connection to the natural world.

In what ways does Weaving Spells engage with folklore and mythology?

I've lived in Norway for many years, and Nordic folklore has been a source of inspiration. In pagan rituals, masks often played a symbolic role. For example, during pagan celebrations, disguises and masks were commonly used as people dressed up as spirits, animals, or mythical beings. Similar pagan traditions exist in many cultures around the world. Although these traditions are not direct references to the project, they have been an influence in terms of symbolism and the way the natural world is seen as animated and spiritually charged.
Also I've been researching ecofeminist movements, especially spiritual ecofeminism as an earth-based philosophy. When the project began with the witch mask, I saw the witch as an archetype of a forest guardian. From there, the idea for other archetypes emerged: the maiden, who cares for nature; the mother, with wide arms, who nurtures the sea; and the crone, the old wise woman.
It's important to note that the project also engages with storytelling. When I photograph these characters wearing the masks, it's not about documenting the masks themselves, but about building a narrative around the characters and their relationship with the landscape in which they are photographed.
Therefore also the title of the project Weaving Spells: Weaving suggests a deliberate, creative act, one that brings together different threads: folklore, ecofeminism, and animism. It also evokes a traditionally feminine, earth-bound practice, like spinning, crafting, or ritual work, rooted in care and connection. Spells points to the magical, symbolic, and spiritual dimension of the project. It connects to the idea of animistic beliefs in a living, spiritually charged natural world, and to the transformative power of rituals and masks. It's not about casting spells in a literal sense, but about evoking a sense of wonder, intention, and connection, almost like inviting the viewer into a shared ritual.

How has your Portuguese heritage influenced this project?

I grew up in a rural area until I was 13, when my parents moved to the city. My grandparents on both sides owned farms and lived off the land their entire lives, so nature was a constant presence throughout my childhood.
At the same time, although Portugal is a Catholic country, it is rich in pagan traditions, and Christianity and paganism often coexist. One of my childhood memories is of a neighbour whom people called a witch. She was a healer, what in Portuguese we call curandeira, someone people in rural areas turned to for help, but if something went wrong, she was often the one they blamed.
When I think about masks and pagan rituals, one tradition that stands out clearly from my memory is the Careto. This ritual, still alive today in northern Portugal, has deep roots that trace back to possibly Celtic customs. The Caretos are figures who wear masks and colourful costumes made of fringed fabric and rattling accessories that make sound as they move. They appear during Entrudo, a celebration that marks the transition from winter to spring. The Careto tradition is considered one of the most ancient folk practices still carried on in Portugal.

You describe the mask as an activist statement — can you elaborate on this idea?

It's interesting because when I first saw the masks made by Anaïs, with their balaclava design, I was immediately reminded of activist groups wearing similar masks in protest movements. In that context, the primary function of the balaclava is to conceal identity; it protects activists from being identified by authorities. But beyond that, the balaclava has evolved into a powerful visual symbol of rebellion and resistance.
In this sense, I see the archetypes, the fictional characters in my photographs, as making an activist statement for nature. This connects back to what I mentioned earlier about spiritual ecofeminist movements: an earth-based philosophy rooted in care, resistance, and reconnection with the natural world.

What messages do you hope the audience takes away from Weaving Spells?

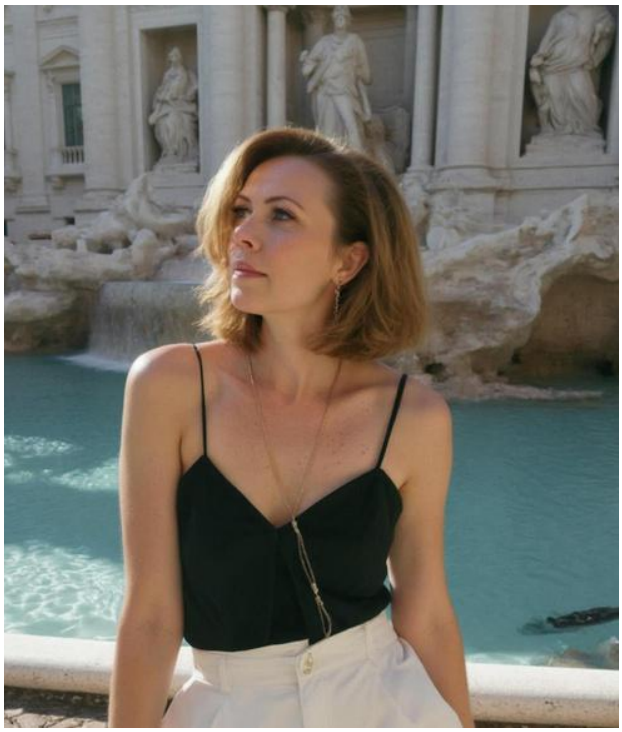
I hope people feel inspired and understand that protecting the Earth is both a spiritual and political act.

Andre Garden is a photographer and multimedia creative based out of Tucson, Arizona.

Project Statement
These pictures are a collection of who Andre Garden is, blending raw emotion and creativity.


PINK
RT CROSSING
Watch For
Vehicles
DON'T START
inish Crossing
If Started
DON'T CROSS

Elena Popova



I almost always paint with music on. I need it to begin. But even when it plays, something inside me goes quiet. Thoughts drift away, and only the feeling remains. I dissolve into the painting. I stop being a person and become whatever I'm painting. It's not about relaxing — it's about giving everything. Each work takes something from me: anxiety, tenderness, exhaustion, warmth. Afterwards, I often feel empty. But in a good way. Everything I had in me — it's now on the canvas.

Your work often explores light, rhythm, and silence. What role does silence play in your creative process?

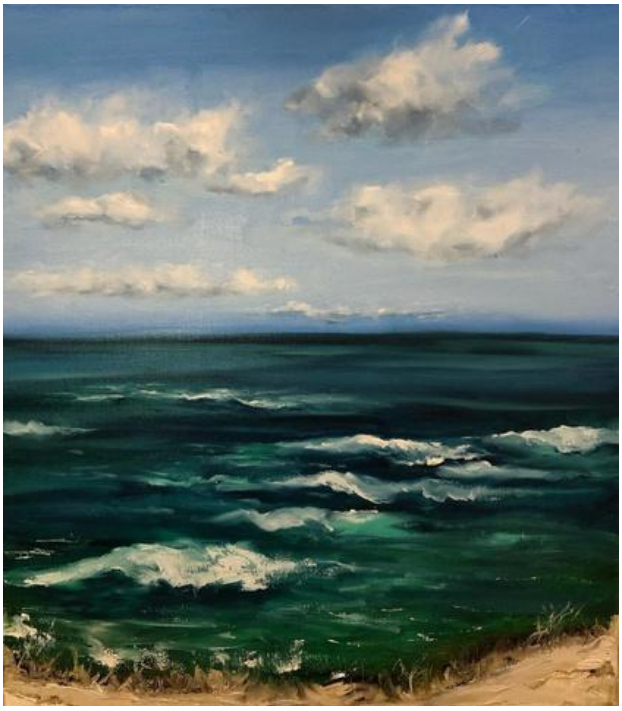
Elena Popova | Where The Ocean Breathes | 2025

How do you choose the specific landscapes or seascapes you depict? Are they based on real places or inner visions?

Sometimes it's a real place I've seen — the sea, a tree, a stretch of coast. But even then, I never copy. I always paint what it felt like. For example, "Summer Air" came from one hot, still day where even the wind seemed to pause. I didn't think about the composition — I just remembered what it felt like to stand there and just exist. Sometimes I don't even know what a painting will be about until I start. And then suddenly, a long-buried feeling shows up. And that's the real subject.

Many of your paintings seem to breathe — there's a palpable stillness and depth in them. How do you achieve that sensation on canvas?

I don't really plan it. I just don't like when a painting feels crowded. It needs space — air. Somewhere



Elena Popova | Where The Sky Meets The Deep | 2025

the eye can rest. Somewhere the light can pass through. I always leave part of the work open — not empty, just quiet. In "Where the Ocean Breathes" I kept softening the layers, pulling back, adjusting the light. Sometimes I look at a spot and realize — this needs nothing more. And strangely, that "nothing" is what makes the painting feel alive.

You mentioned painting is your way of listening to the world. Can you share a moment when painting helped you understand something wordless?

Yes. I was painting "The Sea Remembers" — with no concept in mind, just a pull toward water. Waves, some reflection — simple elements. But while working, I suddenly felt this deep sense of missing something. Not a person. Just a quiet state I had once felt and lost. I could never have said it out loud. But when the painting was done, I felt lighter. As if the canvas helped me feel it all the way through — and let it go.

What inspires your use of color, especially in depicting water and sky?

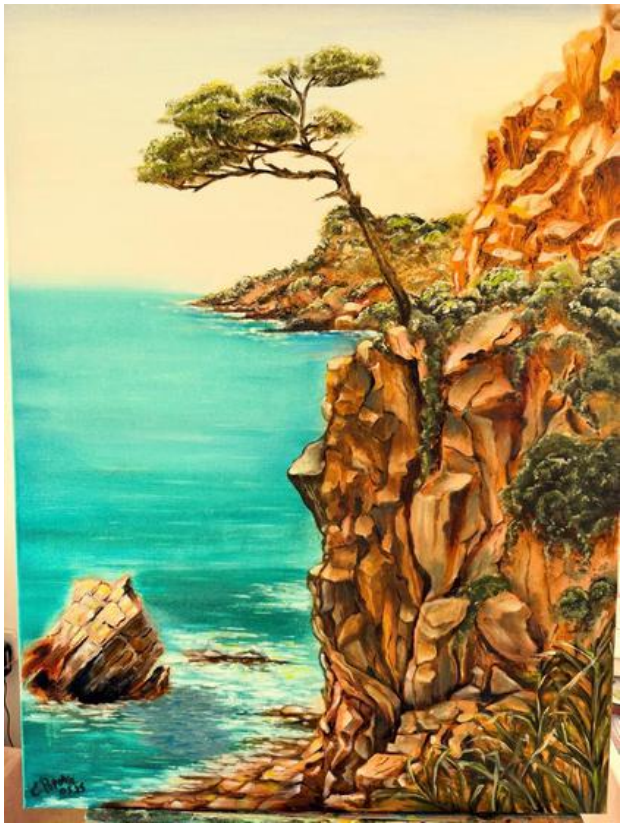
I don't plan my palette. Color comes when the feeling becomes clear. If there's tension — the color turns heavier. If it's calm — it becomes lighter, almost transparent. In "Island Breathing" I was painting ease — and the color turned airy, almost green, like water's shadow. But in "The Sea Remembers" the tones feel deep and weighted. Like holding your breath. I don't think about theory when I paint. I think about how the sea breathes.

You work with both oil and watercolor. How do you decide which medium best suits a particular idea or emotion?

If I feel quiet or light inside — I reach for watercolor. You can't control it much. One stroke — and it's done. Oil is different. It lets you come back, change things, think slower. With "The Sea Remembers", I kept stepping away. Came back days later, softened the tones, shifted the light. But "Island Breathing" came out in one go. I just knew what I wanted to say — and didn't want to overwork it. Sometimes the blank canvas tells me what it needs. I just have to listen.

How do you define the difference between what is "seen" and what is "felt" in art?

What we see — that's form. But what we feel — that's in the pauses between forms. The silence between brushstrokes. You can look at a boat and think: "Yes, that's a boat." But sometimes, you feel something else in it — loneliness, stillness, your own memory. I don't paint to show. I paint to transmit. If someone looks at a painting and stops for a moment — something touched them. What exactly? I don't know. And I don't need to. Let it be theirs.



Elena Popova | Summer Air | 2025

Gilles Grimon

Gilles Grimon | Dryada | 2024

You mentioned that your work focuses on light and color. Can you describe how you develop this sense of "vibration" in your portraits?

I paint the same portrait three or four times. With each layer of color, I change the graphic pattern and the color itself, using complementary colors (such as purple and green) with the same luminous intensity. The contrast between these colors and graphic elements creates an optical vibration that brings the painting to life.

Your portraits combine realism with abstract graphic patterns. What is the relationship between these two elements in your work?

As with the colors, the contrast between the realism of the portrait and the graphic abstraction of the patterns doesn't overwhelm the image — on the contrary, it adds volume. I would say: a third dimension.

Do you see your art as emotional, intellectual, or sensory in nature — or a blend of all three?

A bit of all three, I guess!

How important is the viewer's movement or angle in experiencing the full effect of your paintings?

From a distance, the image appears coherent — you see a portrait. The closer you get to the canvas, the more you discover the complexity of the patterns and colors.

What role does digital technique or design play in the creation of your pieces, if any?

I don't use digital techniques. I draw with charcoal and paint in oil. Very old school, I know!

Is there a recurring theme or mood that you aim to convey across your portrait series?

Looking at my work is a sensory, optical experience. I hope it's also a playful one. People often tell me they discover new things, new details, each time they look at my paintings.

How do your travels and time living in cities like Paris, London, and Milan influence your artistic vision?

For an artist, it's always exciting to engage with contemporary art being created all over the world. In this regard, London was an amazing experience. Today, I live in Provence, where artists of all nationalities are everywhere — and the light is truly incomparable.

Alauda Georges | No more silence | 2025

Ester Voropaeva

In your artist statement, you speak about the problem of labeling people. Have you personally experienced being misunderstood or misjudged?

Labeling happens to many people, and I am no exception. For me, it concerns my background from all sides. When my parents were choosing my name, it was important that the name sounded harmonious both in my father's language (Russian) and in my mother's language (Chinese). It is known that some words and names from one language can sound not just unpleasant in another language, but even like the dirtiest curse. One day, when my mother was cooking in the kitchen while she was pregnant with me, she was listening to an American radio play, and the name Esther was repeated frequently. In Chinese, this name sounds perfect. She suggested this name to my father, and he supported her, because he didn't want me to have the most typical Russian name, because his life experience showed that unusual names attract people and are better remembered.
My parents were not so deeply immersed in world and, especially, Jewish ancient culture and history, and didn't even imagine that they gave their daughter the name of one of the most important women in Jewish history, Queen Esther. Thus, from childhood, automatically, without having any Jewish blood, I already acquired the label of Jewish nationality.
At the age of eleven, I liked the comedies with Adam Sandler and I began to realize that my name was unusual and related to Jewish culture (although some traditional Russian names also come from Jewish culture, but they have become so common that they have lost their unusualness). My name is not so widespread in Russia yet, and, of course, attracts attention. And my unusual name led me to be interested in Jewish culture and the history of the Jewish people in my teens, and recently I even took a now fashionable DNA test, which showed that nine percent of the blood of Bukharan Jews flows in me.
My mixed background and unusual name lead to misperceptions from other people sometimes. There are many people with mixed background in the modern world,

Your series "Goats of Ester Voropaeva" has a strong symbolic and emotional charge. How did the idea for this series originate?

There's an old lullaby in Yiddish called "Raisins and almonds", where a white goat returns from market and gives the sweets to the child. So, in Jewish culture, a goat doesn't represent something bad, and the goat was especially important in rural Jewish areas in Eastern Europe called "shtetles" as the source of food (the famous twentieth-century Russian-Jewish artist Marc Chagall often depicted shtetl life and various domestic animals, including goats).
In European culture, the goat has become one of the symbols of infernality, impurity and sin, and in the nineteenth century it was reinforced by the artist Éliphas Lévi, who depicted Satan as a goat. And it turns out that in one culture the goat is important and good, but in another it represents something else. So here it is, the quiet, two-sided semiotics of the goat.

Ester Voropaeva | Mosaic Goat | 2025

and I hope that my works will help them cope with the ambiguous attitude towards them.
Therefore, my goats, my goat zoo, as I jokingly call my series of works, are a silent protest and even a provocation. They say with their whole appearance: think what you want about me, be afraid of me if you want, I am not going to change anything in myself, I am what I am.

Your works blend bright colors with unsettling expressions. How do you balance beauty and discomfort in your compositions?

You have to be a perfectionist in the percentage of beautiful and terrifying, otherwise you risk losing the viewer's attention to your art. You can see that the most mystical part of the goat is its eye, which is not depicted realistically, but in my own style. It is mainly located closer to the center of the composition. Usually, people look first at the center of the work, and then around the center. The goat's eye looks scary and catchy, but further on the picture is more pleasing to the eye in terms of color and composition.

You work in multiple media, from pastels to watercolors to acrylic. How do you choose the technique for a particular piece?

Usually, I first imagine the plot of the work, make drafts with the composition, imagine how the work will look as a result on different canvas formats. And then the understanding of what technique I will use to create the work comes by itself.

What influence has your Russian-Chinese background had on your artistic approach and themes?

My Russian-Chinese cultural background gives me many ideas on how to combine elements of these two cultures on canvas. Here I would like to point out that this background influences any creative beginning in me in general. In addition to visual artistic creativity, I am interested in musical creativity. Chinese songs and lullabies that my mother sang to me as a child led me to a TV Chinese song contest called Cultures of China Water Cube Cup Chinese Songs Contest. I participated in it for three years in a row and eventually won the bronze award in the final of the contest in 2022. Also, the books I have illustrated are all related to the study of the Chinese language and culture. And, having become a member of the Russian-Chinese Association of Calligraphers and Artists this winter, I have rethought my approach to my work and am also creating experimental works in a style

Ester Voropaeva | Goat And Flowers

Ester Voropaeva | Flickering Goat Acryl | 2025

close to Chinese folk and create many works on the theme of mixed Russian-Chinese origin.

You already illustrated five books by the age of 20. How different is your process when working on book illustrations versus independent artworks?

The process of creating works under a contract with a publishing house differs significantly from the process of what I call free art. In the work of an illustrator, firstly, there is a certain plot of the book that must be adhered to. Secondly, the color combination, technique (all my illustrations are black and white, in graphics) and the format. And most importantly, there is a time frame, you must manage to make the number of works specified by the publishing house (one of the books contains exactly one hundred of my illustrations) before the deadline. You can see my works and listen to Chinese songs performed by me with a guitar on my personal website youhua.ru.

How does your education in China at Huaqiao University influence your current work?

I spent most of my life in Russia, and I didn't visit China very often or for long. When I found myself in China for a longer period of time, I discovered this country in a new way. Just being in this new environment stimulates me to new ideas in my work. Everything is different here: the climate, the food, the mentality. I really like it here. Education at the Institute of Fine Arts of Huaqiao University has improved my skills and techniques and gave me some new art ideas, and I'll definitely bring them to life in the future.

Interview

Sitian Zeng

Your work navigates between painting, digital media, and philosophical inquiry. How did the concept of the "rhizome" become central to your artistic process?

Sitian Zeng | Detail 1

As an artist and practice-led researcher, I develop a method of rhizomatic painting to enable a flexible and open-ended painting practice. A rhizome is a plant structure that grows horizontally and spreads out without a central root. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduced the rhizome as a metaphorical and philosophical concept in 1980, proposing a non-hierarchical way of thinking that challenges the binary logic represented by the tree structure. The rhizome, as its image implies, forms a network in which all elements are constantly connected and interwoven, without a singular beginning or end.

This concept aligns with my understanding of painting and the theme of my practice, subjectivity in the post-digital condition. We are living in an age where digital screens are ubiquitous, blurring the boundaries between the virtual and physical. When we sit in front of different devices, our attention readily slides into a virtual world. Thus, I consider my canvas a metaphorical screen and my painting practice an intuitive mapping process, just like how a digital screen invites users to enter a virtual realm that connects numerous spaces, information and the invisible code. My painting expands like a rhizome horizontally. In the painting Entanglement, multiple canvases are considered as one painting. It weaves together various digital visual elements such as 3D-modelled figures and digital code, layering digital and virtual realms with physical paintings. In this case, the rhizomatic thinking emphasises connection and heterogeneity, enabling my engagement with many layers of my practice: painting's materiality, subjectivity and our embodied digital experiences.

Sitian Zeng | Entanglement

In the Entanglement series, you translate 3D-modelled figures into paintings. How does this transformation reflect your views on identity in the post-digital age?

I am especially interested in how subjectivity and identity are shaped by the overwhelming digital information and images in the post-digital age, and I explore this topic in my painting. My initial reason for depicting the 3D-modelled figures was an attempt to imagine and project my subjectivity into different figures. Sometimes it is a human figure, sometimes it is a bird—both serving as metaphors for digital characters. Much like in video games, where we begin by selecting a basic avatar, our subjectivity is carried by that character and gradually grows through interactions with various virtual challenges.
In my painting Entanglement, I began with the figure shown in Detail 1. I then imagined how, within this metaphorical screen, my subjectivity is entangled in the digital surroundings and the overwhelming and blurring screenshots, and I gradually expanded my painting. This process enables me to reflect upon my digital experiences and my identity. Another example is in Detail 2, where the bird seems to be attempting to fly out of the canvas, and the canvas represents the screen. However, if you look closer, you may notice that the depicted grid lines, which are often shown in the 3D software interface, are still attached to this bird. It is flying, yet can never escape, because it is born into this digital realm. This detail resonates with how I feel my subjectivity is permeated by the digital world.

The repetition of the outstretched arm is striking. Can you elaborate on its symbolism in your visual language?

Sitian Zeng | Detail 2

Sitian Zeng | Detail 4

The gestures of figures always play an important role in my paintings, and I always realise their meanings after choosing them intuitively. After I finished the painting Entanglement, I noticed I repeatedly depicted figures with outstretched arms, which can be seen in the images of Detail 3 and Detail 4. Reflecting on my digital experience, I see that the gesture embodies my attempts to reach something ungraspable in a fleeting image culture. Since I often project my subjectivity into the different characters in my paintings, I choose to depict the gestures of figures based on how I imagine my body might move in a digital and virtual space. Am I contemplating? Or am I interacting with something intangible? All the outstretched arms may imply a sense that we are always searching for something in a digital network.

Your canvases often resemble glitchy or fragmented interfaces. What role does digital error or distortion play in your critique of media saturation?

The appearance of digital glitches and distortion serves many purposes in my painting, including reflecting on media saturation. I understand the digital world as a composition of multiple fragmented interfaces with the invisible code and algorithms running beneath. Thus, in

Sitian Zeng | Detail 3

Entanglement, I use the visual effects like glitches and marks resembling digital brushes to create a metaphorical interface, inviting viewers to a digital realm.

Glitch is not only repetitive patterns representing digital errors, but also brings philosophical enquiries. As discussed in the book Glitch Art in Theory and Practice by Michael Betancourt, glitch can act as an 'inflexion point', which can be considered as a minor technical bug in digital operations or trigger our deeper critical reflection on the stability of the system. For me, as an artist, this rupture and the depicted digital noise are my ways of resisting the illusion of a smooth digital interface and the constant flow of information, which we often ignore when we are bombarded by the overwhelming digital content.

You describe the canvas as a metaphorical screen. How do you differentiate between representing versus embodying the digital within painting?

This question really points to one of the important aspects of my painting and research. Since I started my practice based on the theme of subjectivity in the post-digital age two years ago, I have always been thinking about the concept of 'beyond representation'. As a figurative painter, I am fascinated by the beauty and meaning that figures can carry and imply. At the same time, I recognise that there is something beyond semiotics and something deeper than graphics and images. Especially, painting is a composition of not only the result of lines, colours, and figures, but also the artist's body movement and feelings. It makes the depicted figures not only refer to their meaning framed by the culture and knowledge but also be the incarnation of the artist's intuition and sensation.

I emphasise these layers of intuition and sensation in my painting practice, which points to the dimension of individual embodiment. I always believe there is something that is inherent in our body but has not yet entered the realm of linguistics. Just like when we were babies, we cried or grasped the air to express our need. When we grow, even though we get to know how to convey our needs through language, there are still something carried by our body that are difficult to express. In the post-digital condition, our body keeps absorbing the impact of all virtual information and high technologies. It may be difficult for us to fully articulate our feelings in language. I attempt to use painting as a sensual meditation to reflect on them. In my painting, especially in Detail 4, the distorted figures and the twisted interface visualise my sense of falling in a digital world overwhelmed by algorithms. Pointillism is the resistance of the digital mechanism, which builds a contemplative space for me. I allow the representation and the embodied expression, pulling my practice into different directions and possibilities. The figurative images trigger my sensation and then, in return, allow me to add new juxtapositions in the rest of the painting; this process kept happening.

Back to the question, I won't say that I differentiate the representation and embodiment, it is a process I see my embodied experience through representational images or vice versa. But I am still in the process of exploring these two aspects, and I try to explore deeper.

How do Foucault's ideas about power structures inform your understanding of digital subjectivity?

I am always fascinated by the dynamic power structure in different systems and try to raise certain questions or reflect on them through my painting practice. Michel Foucault's concept of power was an initial influence on my practice. He proposes that power is productive instead of repressive, and it shapes how we understand and form ourselves. This triggered me to reflect on how algorithmic systems and the surrounding

screens regulate our behaviour and perception. It raises my interest in an individual's position in the digital network, as we keep shifting between the controller and the one being controlled.
I later turned my focus to a more post-structuralist view of power, and I mainly read the book by Deleuze and Guattari, who think power is always flux and in a state of constant becoming. The shift of identity still deeply influences my painting practice and exploration of subjectivity. For example, as I project myself into the depicted figures, I am that figure, but I am also its creator. I imagine I am trapped and exist in such a metaphorical screen, but I am also outside of this screen. This reflection on the tension of being subject, observer and creator points to how subjectivity is constantly shaped within a fluid and dynamic power structure in the post-digital age.

What does spontaneity look like in your rhizomatic approach to painting—especially in relation to coding, systems, and control?

A rhizomatic approach emphasises how different elements connect spontaneously and create unexpected impacts on viewers. In my painting practice, I don't have any predetermined sketches for colours or composition. Instead, I start with a figure or an abstract mark that triggers me most at that moment. I paint intuitively, allowing the act of depiction and the emerging image to evoke my sensations or thoughts, which then give me new ideas to expand my paintings.
I have an original 'database' of various elements related to the digital, such as coding patterns, 3-D modelled figures, or screenshots. I may start with my database. However, when I have an idea to expand my painting, I respond to this idea immediately and form a spontaneous juxtaposition.

Review of Sitian Zeng's Work
by Anna Gvozdeva

Sitian Zeng's painting orchestrates a constellation of glitches, gestures, and fragments that resist linearity and invite the viewer into a space where painting behaves like a screen, as both surface and portal. Zeng's rhizomatic painting approach is not merely a reference to the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, but rather brings it to life in the painting: Multiple canvases in the work Entanglement expand horizontally, drifting across the wall like overlapping windows on a computer screen and forming fragmented interfaces with no clear beginning or end.

Zeng's paintings are not content with the 'representation' at the semiotic level, but rather treat painting as an embodied practice. This becomes particularly touching in the repeatedly depicted 'outstretched arms' and 'distorted digital characters'. Within collapsing digital interfaces, figures stretch, twist, and hover, caught mid-movement. The dotted colours and repetitive brushstrokes echo digital pixels and slow down the viewer's gaze, drawing them into a meditative space. The twisted figures that appear in the work are not for the purpose of 'completing a painting', but rather seem like the painting itself is struggling and seeking a way out. Even if these marks deliberately simulate digital textures, it is actually a resistance to the smooth surface of the digital world. Painting is a way to regain control of perception and reflect on everyday rhythms in the post-digital age.

What moves the viewers most in Zeng's work is not only the techniques applied, but rather a constant question: 'Who am I in the post-digital age?' Zeng is not painting to criticise technology, but to immerse oneself in that fragmented interface, in the interaction with the digital code which we normally do not see, inviting us to project our imagination into the figures. Through all the detailed marks, painting becomes less a mirror of the digital world and more a tactile negotiation with it—anembodied form of meditation through which one reflects on the relationship between 'me and the world'.

Interview

Mitchell Fawcett

What initially drew you to working with light as a primary medium in your installations?

For me, it always comes back to the fact that light is life — everything comes from light. It's the core of how we experience the world, and it has a direct connection to how we feel, moment by moment. When I started working with light, I realised it wasn't just about visual impact — it was about energy, mood, and emotion. I'm really interested in how light can create spaces where people can slow down, feel calmer, and experience a sense of peace. A big part of my work is about exploring how we can use light as a tool to support wellbeing, to help ease anxiety, and to offer people more positive, restorative experiences in public spaces. Light is such a powerful communicator, and I want my installations to be more than just visual — I want them to help people feel better, even if it's just for a moment

How did your interest in phenomenology and sacred geometry begin, and how do they influence your creative process?

My interest in phenomenology started when I became more aware of how spaces make me feel — how environments shape not just thoughts, but mood, energy, and presence. I was fascinated by how certain spaces, or even small sensory details, could completely alter someone's internal experience. That led me to explore phenomenology as a way of thinking about art: not just what something looks like, but how it's felt, how it lives in the body, and how people move through it. Sacred geometry came naturally alongside this, because it connects us to natural patterns, symmetry, and flow. I'm drawn to the way these shapes carry a kind of universal language — whether people understand the mathematics or not, they feel the harmony. In my creative process, I use sacred geometry as a foundation for form, and phenomenology as a guide for experience. Together, they help me create work that's more than just visual — it's something people physically and emotionally engage with.

Can you describe the conceptual development behind The Journey of Light? How did the idea evolve?

The Journey of Light began as a personal reflection on how light affects us — not just in a physical sense, but emotionally and spiritually. I was thinking about how light guides people, how it can calm or energise us, and how it's something we all instinctively respond to. The initial concept started with

simple light interactions, but as I developed it, I wanted to go deeper — to create something that felt like a journey, something people could step into and experience as a kind of personal ritual or pause.
The evolution came through experimenting with movement and pacing — how the light could shift slowly, how it could mirror breath patterns or respond to presence. I also layered in ideas from sacred geometry and natural forms, so the structure itself would feel harmonious and grounding. The final piece became not just a visual installation but a sensory environment — a journey where people could reset, slow down, and experience a moment of calm within their day.

Your installations create deeply immersive experiences. How do you approach designing an environment that evokes emotion and contemplation?

When I design an installation, I'm thinking about how to create a space that feels alive — a space where people can slow down, feel more connected to themselves, and experience something beyond the everyday. A big part of that comes from working with light, but also with mirrored structures and reflections. I'm really drawn to how mirrored forms can manipulate gravity, perception, and orientation — how the alignment of shapes and reflective surfaces can reveal moments of light that aren't always predictable.
In Journey of Light, for example, the experience shifts depending on where you stand. The forms only appear when the mirrors, angles, and light are perfectly aligned, and that creates a sense of discovery and wonder. There's something mystical about it — about giving up control of what people will experience. I don't want to tell people what to feel; I want the environment to guide them, to reflect back something unique to their presence and perspective. For me, it's about designing spaces where people can experience calm, contemplation, or curiosity in a way that feels personal and instinctive.

You've mentioned integrating AI and biometric sensing into your work. What possibilities do you see in merging technology with art for emotional or healing impact?

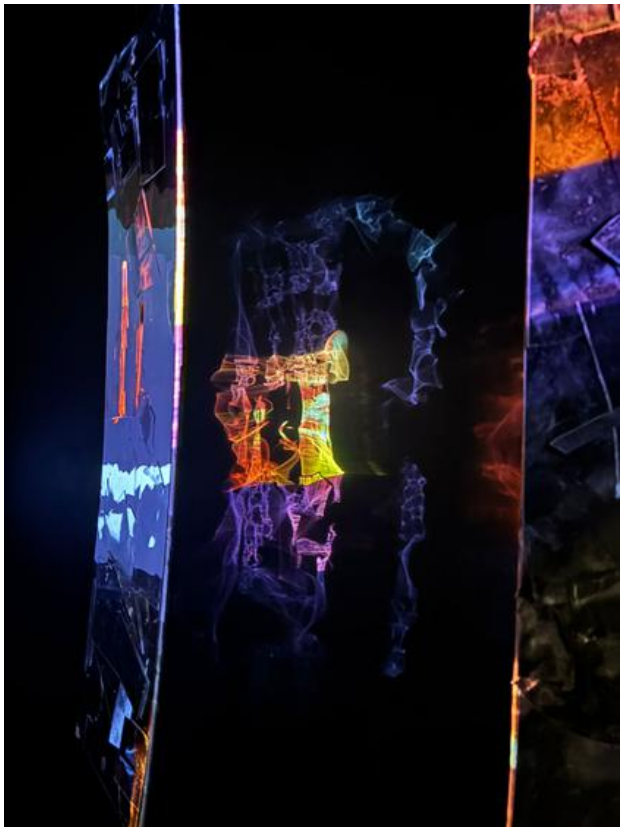
I'm really interested in how technology can help make art more personal and restorative. My vision with AI and biometric sensing isn't about adding complexity, but about creating environments that actively respond to the individual. By integrating sensors — like heart rate monitors or simple biometric scans — the installation can pick up on someone's emotional or physical state in that moment. The light and sound they experience would shift depending on their own body's signals, offering exactly the type of environment they might need to feel calmer or more balanced.
I love the idea that the installation becomes a kind of intuitive space — almost like a mirror that senses you and gives back something nurturing. With AI, there's also the possibility to evolve those responses over time, so it's not a fixed loop but a living, adaptive environment. For me, this is where technology in art becomes really meaningful — it's about creating spaces that help people reconnect with themselves, feel soothed, and leave with a little less anxiety than when they arrived.

How do sound and meditative frequencies play a role in shaping the viewer's experience?

Sound is just as important to me as light when it comes to shaping an atmosphere. Certain frequencies have a direct effect on our nervous system — slowing heart rate, reducing anxiety, and creating a sense of calm or groundedness. I'm particularly interested in using meditative frequencies, like 432 Hz or 528 Hz, because they seem to have this ability to bring people into a more relaxed, introspective state without them even realising it.
In my installations, sound works as an invisible layer that guides the pace of the experience. It creates rhythm, breathes life into the space, and helps people drop into a quieter mindset. Combined with gentle light shifts and organic forms, these frequencies can help people feel safe enough to let go, reflect, and have a more restorative experience. Ultimately, I want my installations to be places where both the visual and the soundscape work together to offer calm, clarity, or even subtle healing.

Are there particular moments or reactions from viewers that have stayed with you?

Definitely — I think the moments that stay with me most are when people tell me they feel calmer or more present after being in the installation. There's been times where people have stood in front of the work much longer than I expected, just slowing down, watching the light, taking it in. Some people have said it felt like the first time they'd properly paused all day.
One moment that really stuck with me was during Journey of Light, when someone said it felt like the installation was breathing with them — that it gave them a sense of calm they hadn't realised they needed. It reminded me why I do this, why these sensory environments matter. For me, it's those quiet moments of connection where people experience something restorative or unexpected that feel the most meaningful.



Linda Lasson

Can you tell us about your artistic journey? How did you start working with embroidery?

Years ago I worked with textile print, but I thought I didnt envolved so I started to experiment by embroidering on some of them. 2011 I had my first exhibition with handembroidery at Härnösand Arthal and that is

all I have been working with since then.

What drew you to use materials like tarp and lining paper in your textile work?

My early work was on fabric but using that you have to use a embroidery hoop. Using that makes your stiches limited, I think, beacause I want to make as large stiches as I like, so I started to look for other materals. First I started with geotextile and then by chanse I found lining paper. I like to go to hardware shops and see what you can use. Some years ago I saw that a Swedish company had started to sell white tarp and I emediatly bought several of them in different sizes. I always wanted to try tarp but they were often dark green and not so tight woven. There was no difficulties handembroidery on tarp and its always great making large artworks!

How does living in the north of Sweden influence your themes and imagery?

Since I like walking in nature with my dogs thats where I get my largest inspiration from. So almost everyone of my artworks usually depict a tree.

Many of your pieces depict reindeer, people, and forests. What stories or messages do you aim to convey through these subjects?

My embroideries have always been political wether it been about how we treat our nature or how we treat indigenous people. I want to show that embroideries can be political.

Your work blends traditional embroidery with contemporary visual storytelling. How do you see your practice fitting into today's art scene?

In Sweden embroidery have been conservative, there has been a no no for trying new materials. They should be neat, cute and small. I want with my artworks to break that notion.

How do you plan and develop a new piece? Do you sketch or improvise directly on the fabric?

I like to think how I will start a new embroidery, the coloring and shapes. If its a larger embroidery for example on tarp then I usually make a schetch, but otherwise I paint them up in my head as I proceed making them. Sometimes making altercations while I work.

Are there specific artists or traditions that inspire you?

At the moment I find my inspiration from two Swedish artists Karin mamma Andersson och Andreas Eriksson.

Miranda Moll

You have a background in biological sciences and geoscience. How do these fields influence your artistic process and themes?

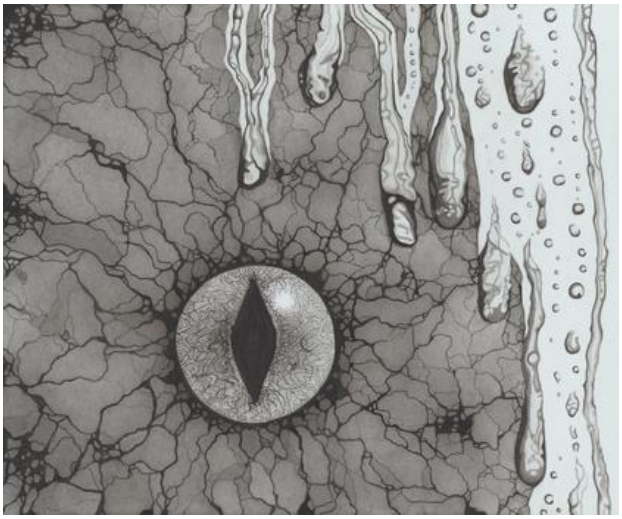
I have had a deep interest in animals and the biological world for much of my life, long before my entry into a post-secondary classroom. My childhood memories are filled with days exploring the outdoors, hunting for "creepy crawlies," and desiring to be immersed in the wild. I always felt this strong connection to the natural world and a desire to understand how life functions at its foundational levels.

Miranda Moll | Transient | 2025

After entering the post-secondary science world, I had this profound realization of how interconnected everything is. The notion of myself as separate from my surroundings feels incorrect to me at this point in my life. To many, I am viewed as a human, a separate entity from the environment. From some perspectives, this is correct. For example, my consciousness and awareness are centred in my being. I cannot know directly what those around me are experiencing or feeling; I cannot experience or feel as they.

Yet, from my perspective, I am intimately connected to and interwoven with everything around me. My body is supported by trillions and trillions of microorganisms—if they are necessary for my survival, how separate are we? The elements that make up my being are in perpetual flux with the environment, incorporating into my body transiently before passing on to another form. To me, the boundaries between "self" and "environment" or "other" dissolve; it seems an illusion. This deep sense of connection that I have felt for much of my life is validated through science, in my eyes.

During my schooling, I also reflect on how we, as humans, categorize and describe the natural world. Our biological definitions and constructs—abiotic and biotic, kingdoms and species, and the hierarchies amongst the natural world—are unavoidably shaped by our perspective and what we can understand at any point in time. These categories and definitions are dynamic, shifting with each scientific advancement and what can be directly measured or observed. It makes me acutely aware that there is a whole world



Miranda Moll | The Cleansing | 2024

we do not understand, because we cannot see and measure it presently.

We once viewed humans as the epitome of life on our planet, and as animals being significantly less intelligent and conscious as compared to ourselves. Forget about other lifeforms like plants, fungi, or bacteria. Yet year after year, we have breakthrough discoveries showcasing the intelligence and amazing capabilities of our fellow species, some of which are far superior to our own. These discoveries are not limited to the animal world; plants and fungi, too, have revealed astonishing capabilities that shake the foundations of the scientific world we built. Our understanding at present shows that at the cellular level, the same processes and principles are present in virtually all life we can observe. Small differences occur and lead eventually to evolutionary changes and speciation, but we are all governed by the same forces.

When I am exploring nature and am deeply present in the moment—a phenomenon that does not always happen in the chaos of everyday life—I can be struck by a thought. Seeing a tree or an insect, and truly seeing this other lifeform, I think how interesting it is that we are two beings experiencing the same moment in time from different perspectives. That we have evolved separately, but in tandem, for millions or possibly billions of years, diverging from our most recent common ancestor from so long ago, and now we have this moment where we experience each other's presence. It seems magical. I wonder what their experience has been. These thoughts extend beyond the biotic world, and I wonder, what has our planet's experience been? What does experience look like out amongst the cosmoses?

These thoughts further urge me to question where we draw the line between the conscious and unconscious. And do such divisions even exist?

This awe and curiosity about life drives much of my artistic practice. A significant portion of my art is centred around life and creation, exploring the experience of other life forms, and questioning the boundaries of life and consciousness.

Many of your works blend emotion with scientific motifs. What inspires this intersection between science and feeling?

I am a deeply emotional person; this is something I have known about myself for most of my life. Everything I do in life is motivated by my emotional compass. My emotion comes through in my art, in my scientific endeavours, and in every aspect of my life. For me, the connection between science and feeling is not something I can turn off. The blending of emotion and scientific motifs happens organically and deeply. I am also profoundly driven by my curiosity, both in my artistic and scientific worlds. I have this deep sense of wonder about the nature of existence, the origin of life, the experiences of other beings, and the collective human experience. In both fields, science and art, I am motivated by similar curiosities and questions. Science allows for the exploration of these questions in measurable, tangible ways, whereas art allows for the exploration of these questions in theoretical and unbound ways. When I paint or draw, I allow myself to explore that inner world of curiosity and awe, freely and intuitively.

There's a strong presence of eyes and vision in your work. What does the motif of the eye represent for you?

To me, eyes represent seeing and being seen. Perhaps

Miranda Moll | Melancholy | 2024

even a sense of understanding or of being understood. They have a very fluid meaning, however, that can change depending on the context of the painting.
Because eyes can capture vivid emotional expression, I find them to be a powerful way to articulate concepts and feelings. Eyes are a huge part of facial expression, and we likely have genetic predispositions, influenced by social conditioning and development, that guide our understanding of emotional expression. As a social species, that skill is a necessary component of survival in a group environment. Over time, we have also developed cultural and religious symbols about eyes.
These preconceptions, coupled with the subconscious understanding of eyes and emotions, lead to a motif that can create a diversity of messages. It is a motif that is exciting to play with and explore.

How do your concerns about climate change and plastic pollution manifest in your art?

I am certainly someone who deals with climate anxiety. There is a lot of fear and sadness that manifests in my life, surrounding the state of our planet and the fate of our fellow species. I have been fortunate to see a lot of beautiful places and creatures on our planet, both within and outside of my home country. Watching that beauty and magnificence slip away, by our own doing, is hard to come to terms with. Observing nature in its raw form or seeing a wild animal in its natural environment is pure magic. As a child, the wild places I experienced seemed untouched. And I grew up with this understanding that you enter nature with respect and you leave it in a state near to how you found it. Now, when I go out in ecosystems, I am bombarded by people's carelessness. It seems like destruction is the norm. The unfortunate reality is that humans have disturbed the natural world, our world, irreparably.
Realistically, we are also contributing to our demise. It is something people do not often think about, but at the end of the day, the planet will re-equilibrate after this anthropogenic mass extinction. The question is, what species will still be here? And will humans be amongst those that make it?
All this manifests in my art in different ways. In some paintings, it is about capturing the beauty and wonders of the natural world. I want to showcase an entity, a species, a scene, through a perspective of wonder and admiration. When I am creating these paintings, I feel very free and awe-inspired. In other paintings, it is about recognizing the fragility and finiteness of life and existence, which tends to carry a sense of heaviness. Either perspective can shine through, depending on the piece I am creating and how I feel during the creation process.

What is your creative process like? Do you start with a scientific idea, an emotion, or an image?

It changes quite a bit from painting to painting. Sometimes I start with a colour or pattern, and work to build my art piece on top of that feeling that has been created. Other times, I start with my subject, and I work to craft a narrative around that subject. And in other cases, I will start with a title and craft my painting around telling a story from that title. I do not have a set method; it changes quite a bit from painting to painting.
One thing that I am very deliberate about is never throwing a painting away. There are many times I start something and dislike it, for various reasons. When that happens, I put the painting to the side and wait until I feel ready or inspired to continue. I had an art teacher in high school who encouraged us to work this way, and I now feel it to be a foundational philosophy in my life.

Miranda Moll | Spark Of Life | 2024

Miranda Moll | World Walker | 2025

Because of that mental and temporal separation from the onset of a piece to its completion, there is a lot of thought and emotion that goes into creating it. I often work on my paintings for months, sometimes over a year. I think it gives me time to build my piece and to tell a story.

Your color palette is striking—ranging from deep aquatic blues to vibrant cosmic tones. How do you choose your colors?

I love colour. There is so much vibrancy and life in our world; I enjoy capturing that essence in my paintings. To create that, I like to work with a limited palette of transparent colours. I will work with two sets of each of the three primary colours, magenta/red, cyan/blue, and yellow, with those six colours, each tinted towards its neighbour on the colour wheel. With cyan/blue, for example, I work mostly with phthalo blue and ultramarine blue; phthalo blue is used alongside yellows, and ultramarine blue is used alongside magentas/reds. I try to reduce the mixing of all three primary colours as much as possible, which ultimately makes brown, to keep my paintings as vibrant as possible. I am also quite careful with white. I add it very deliberately to my transparent colours, because I have observed it changes the texture and depth quite dramatically. I will also mix my colour palette with each new painting. It keeps things interesting; there is always a new colour variation to explore and play with. I have only been oil painting seriously since 2024, however, so I still have a lot to learn and explore.

Do you see your art as a form of activism or scientific communication?

I have done a lot of work and volunteering in the science communication and environmental activism field. The biggest challenge I have found is that it is very hard to overcome people's internal biases and narratives. Reciting facts to people has proven in my eyes to be an ineffective strategy in making societal change. There is quite a bit of psychology and social science that backs this up as well. People are more likely to become entrenched in their views when you tell them they are wrong or challenge their beliefs because it becomes a point of pride and self-protection.

I think the beauty of visual art is that it is silent. The observation and contemplation happen quietly, internally. There is something powerful in that. When you produce a visual art piece, you are not lecturing someone about a topic; you are providing an invitation to explore a concept from a different perspective. To that extent, I do consider my art to be a form of activism or scientific communication.

My name is **Milica Čobanov**, a visual artist based in Belgrade. I graduated from the Faculty of Applied Arts, Department of Textile, where I am currently pursuing my master's studies. My work focuses on conceptual textiles, installations, and natural materials, exploring themes of the body, silence, connection, and invisible systems. I enjoy experimenting with art and materials, and I see art as a space for care, spirituality, and resistance.

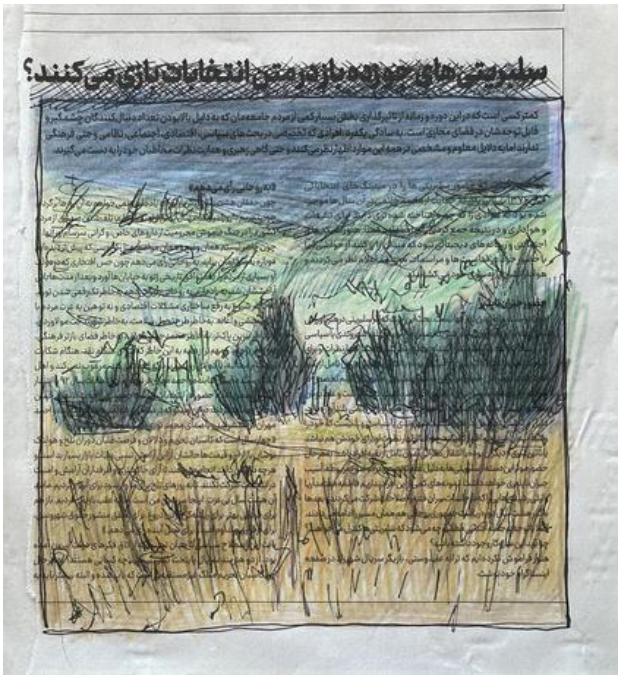
Project Statement
Mycelium is a quiet network of resistance and connection – something that grows beneath the surface, in soil filled with memory, injustice, and tenderness. In the context of Serbia, it symbolizes invisible systems of care and survival that defy official narratives. This work was created as a diploma project at the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade, under the mentorship of Professor Leonora Vekić. The materials I used are felted wool, threads, food coloring, mushrooms, and clay.

Milica Čobanov | Mycelium | 2024

Milica Čobanov | Mycelium | 2024

Milica Čobanov | Mycelium | 2024

Ghazal Ghasempour



Could you tell us more about your move from Iran to San Diego? How has this transition influenced your artistic vision?

I moved to San Diego with my family about two years ago, after years of going back and forth between Iran and the U.S. Even though I've traveled back to Iran a few times, San Diego is now where I live and work.
The calm atmosphere here really helped me focus more on my art. In Tehran, the constant traffic and noise made it hard to slow down or think clearly. Also, being surrounded by nature in San Diego changed how I see things. In Tehran, there weren't many natural views, but here I often see mountains, trees, and even the ocean—sometimes just while driving. Those drives, especially the long quiet ones to work, gave me time to observe the landscape in a slow, thoughtful way. That experience shaped my latest series, Daily Drive Diary, which is based on the views I saw on those everyday routes.

What drew you to the idea of turning everyday views—like highways and cityscapes—into a visual diary?

The idea came from my daily drives after moving to San Diego. I was often on the same routes and the repetition gave me space to notice small shifts in light, color, and atmosphere. These everyday views started to feel personal, like chapters in a story.
It also became a way to record memories. Seeing the same landscape every day gave me a sense of familiarity that was comforting, especially during the early days after migration. Turning those views into a visual diary helped me connect with my new surroundings and find beauty in the routine.

How do you choose which scenes or moments to capture in your work?

I take a lot of photos of these scenes, and when it comes time to paint, I look through them and choose the one that feels best to me in that moment. Sometimes it's about the composition or

colors; other times, it's the memory or feeling behind the image that makes it the right choice.
I don't paint exactly what I see in the photos, they serve more as reminders and inspiration. I often change and reinterpret the scenes to fit the mood and emotion I want to express.
For me, painting isn't just about the place itself but about capturing the mood and emotional connection I have with that moment in time.

You mention the impact of news and media on our focus—how do you represent that in your pieces?

In my other collection (News and Views) , I use Persian and English newspapers as canvases to explore how constant media presence affects our daily lives. The newspaper backgrounds symbolize the flood of information we face every day, often without even noticing.
I layer colors over the news text to show how difficult it is to focus on one thing when so much competes for our attention. This layering reflects the challenge of maintaining concentration amid distractions.
Like my Daily Drive Diary series, this work transforms everyday materials into art, inviting viewers to reflect on how we consume information and find meaning in it.

How does your Iranian cultural identity inform your current projects?

My Iranian background is an important part of my perspective and creative process. Even though I live in San Diego now, my experiences growing up in Iran continue to influence how I see the world and what I choose to express in my work.
The landscapes that catch my attention and inspire me might feel ordinary or unnoticed to someone who grew up here. For me, coming from Iran, these views stand out and become meaningful subjects. For example, in my "News and Views" series, using Persian-language newspapers connects directly to my roots and personal history. The influence of news on the lives of Iranians is very strong, and as an Iranian, there is a constant pressure to stay informed. This awareness and responsibility have also shaped my work. It reflects the blend of cultures I live between, showing how information and identity cross borders.
Overall, my cultural identity helps me explore themes of memory, place, and belonging, whether through landscapes I paint or materials I use. It adds depth and complexity to how I approach both the content and the meaning behind my art.

What role does nostalgia play in your creative process?

Nostalgia has influenced my interest in repetitive landscapes, the familiar views I see every day. These repeated scenes carry memories and emotions that make them feel special and meaningful to me.
Moving between Iran and the U.S. has made me aware of how memories shape my experience of place. My work reflects this connection, using nostalgia not as longing but as a way to deepen my understanding of the present moment.

Your works have a quiet, reflective quality—how do you achieve that in terms of composition and color?

I like to keep my work simple and avoid unnecessary details. When I spend too much time on a piece, I get caught up in technical things and lose the feeling I want to express.
I look at many artists who can communicate strong meaning through simplicity, that is what inspires me. My goal is to create a quiet, reflective mood by focusing on essential shapes and colors that carry emotion without distraction.

My name is **Anna Helena Strawa** a 22-year-old fashion design student from Poland, currently studying in Rome. Since I was a child, I've been performing in theatre, and that's where my love for costumes began. Over time, I realized I wanted to create them not just wear them. Now, my passion is designing costumes that tell stories, just like the ones I used to act in. My dream is to become a costume designer and bring characters to life through clothing.

Project Statement
UNFILTERED THREAD
In a world dominated by social media, where popularity often overshadows authenticity, individuality has become a struggle and identity has become a performance.The new generation faces the constant pressure of curated perfection, the fear of judgment, and the paradox of wanting to stand out while still fitting in. Every post is curated, every moment filtered, and every interaction measured in likes and shares. We live in a world where standing out is a goal, but true individuality feels like a risk. The fear of judgment keeps us within invisible boundaries, while the pressure to be seen forces us into trends that aren't our own. The idea for the design was born from this paradox. It challenges the cycle of validation and dares to redefine what it means to be seen. The design embrace imperfection, raw emotion, and the beauty of authenticity because real connection isn't built on aesthetics alone. The piece is crafted to break barriers, encouraging real connections beyond screens and societal expectations tells a story of rebellion against the digital mask, inspiring confidence in the unfiltered self.

Anna Helena Strawa | Unfiltered Thread | 2025

Magnolia Wood

Your artistic journey includes ballet, fashion, and theatre. How do these disciplines influence your painting practice today?

Magnolia Wood | The Sound Of Cries | 2025

All these disciplines have in common that they form an expression of the self, although some in more direct form and some more indirect via a medium or predefined form. My painting practice is largely a form of self- expression too. Further, a few of my works have direct reference to some of these disciplines as well.
The first example of direct reference to the theatre discipline is a painting called: 'Godot never came', which depicts a teary-eyed woman dressed like Marylin Monroe, taking off her makeup after a theatre performance is
over, with a background reference to a common 'Waiting for Godot' theatre play stage scenery. Here I used the references of this theatre play and a woman taking off her makeup mask of a Hollywood icon as a visual reference to depict a feeling of lost hope. A breaking down of a promise, or a wished-for expectation which was never fulfilled. This is in fact also the theme of the theatre play, which has two men waiting for a third man called Godot. It never becomes clear if this 3rd person is a real person or a symbolical part of themselves, a hope, or a dream. The 3rd man never shows up. This is one of the examples from my work to say that I sometimes use references from these art disciplines also directly to add depth to the images I create. If the viewer has some knowledge on these artistic disciplines they may be able to grasp some of the references, although I hope that the general feeling of disappointment and a break-down of glamour or keeping up appearances is also recognizable without understanding the theatrical references.
A second example of direct reference to the fashion discipline is the painting: 'At the catwalk', in which I created a somewhat surreal scene of a fashion catwalk with its models on show, its viewers and reporters, obsessively looking through- and

Magnolia Wood | The World Can Be A Wasted Place | 2025

using their phones and cameras to capture images of the event, all in a light pinkish/lilac environment which creates a dreamy, alienated and artificial atmosphere, which can be the case at times with fashion shows in a world of make believe and where to see and be seen is of major importance.

You mention starting with reference images but not aiming for direct likeness. Can you describe your process of translating an image into something more emotionally ambiguous?

Yes, in many cases I indeed do not aim for direct likeness as my art generally is less about a certain person but is more about human experience in general.
Sometimes a human figure is part of a landscape or scene and sometimes it can be the main topic of a painting, but it could be an imaginary person. An example of the latter is the painting: 'Lizzie's laugh', 1 of 6 of my 'Happy series'. Here I looked for images of people that express a form of happiness, as a study of what happiness looks like, reflected in bold uplifting and neon colour paintings with a clear black lining. Quite a direct expression of the emotion of joy and happiness. The paintings are not a direct likeness to the images I found, (the facial shapes are i.e. a bit different then the original photo) and even the names in the series, like 'Lizzie', are made up. I gave some of these imaginary characters names to make it a more personal experience looking at it. However, this laughing girl child could for example be anyone's' niece, (grand)daughter, sister etc. The goal was to create a relatable series of portraits of people expressing happiness, which could have been anyone in our direct environments.
In some cases, I do use direct likeness, if I think it is important for what I want to say with a work, such as a reasonable direct likeness to Audrey Hepburn and Uma Thurman in the paintings: 'Audrey in pain', or 'Kill em, Uma'. In these cases, the resemblance to these iconic figures is relevant (at least enough to tap into shared visual memory). They convey a message and connect with our universal public memory of these Hollywood stars and what they stood/stand for (kindness, grace, beauty, vulnerability and strength) and in the case of the Uma painting there is also reference to a particular movie scene of 'Kill Bill' which is relevant for the works' messaging. Some of the other paintings in the series also relate to other shared visual memories, artists and artistic scenes, such as relations to Julie Andrews in the Sound of Music, Pipilotti Rist, Banksy, and the 2025 winning song of the Eurovision song festival by the Austrian singer JJ. They altogether symbolize different elements of (struggles) with kindness and love where kindness is not returned, or trust is broken.
So, in summary, where I do create direct likeness, it is mostly to tap into shared memory (but the faces may be somewhat altered, yet enough for recognition). But most often I use reference images with a human figure on it, without creating direct likeness to that specific human figure in the painting. The figure is then painted as part of the message/experience I want to convey, which could relate to you, me, or anyone. That is why it is not important which human figure it is in the painting.

The figures in your paintings are expressive, often with dramatic gestures or gazes. What role does the human figure play in your storytelling?

Although I also create landscapes, scenes and still life paintings without any people in them, very often one or multiple human figures do appear in my paintings. I would say that roughly all my paintings are related to human emotion, human condition, states of being, or things, places, animals, shared (pop)culture or visual memories that stand in relation to us human beings.
When I do display human figures in my paintings, this often comes from a wish to strengthen the sensation of the relation of the human figure to its surroundings. For example, in a series of 3 paintings: 'Coming out of the woods' with each a human figure (non-recognizable) depicted in three wood scenes, referencing a transcendental journey through the woods. You could see the painted landscape and the figures in it, their placement in the composition, and colour palettes used all as a representation of an inner journey, which could relate to any of us.
In another recognizable human figure example and their function in the storytelling, we can talk about the painting: 'The sound of cries', (4/5) in the series: 'Kindness has (no) limits'. Here you see a Julie Andrews'-like type of figure in an iconic scene from the movie the 'Sound of Music'. In the film she sings beautifully up in the mountains, which is a rather freeing scene. In this painting, I found the reference to her and this iconic movie scene image relevant to present it in recognizable manner with a twist. With her as an iconic statute of elegance, charm and kindness, however now 'freeing' herself with sounds of cries, out into the abyss of the open fields and mountains. This is something maybe rather

Magnolia Wood | Audrey In Pain | 2025

unexpected in relation to how we remember her character, as her face in my painting somehow misses her charming upbeat sparkle but instead shows signs of torment or inner struggle. Her open arms and wide-open mouth now suggest an emotional sound release which lacks the charm of the beautiful songs she sang in the movies and would present a less polished cry out. It is mixing something familiar with something less familiar to bring the viewer in. The initial recognition and variation to it may create a more human all-rounded picture of a picture-perfect character.
Even some of my paintings with no human figures in them, have reference to a human figure who was, will be or might have been there. In for example my Japan series, there is a painting: 'An ode to geishas entertaining behind closed doors', 5/5. In this painting you see a scene of a carefully made table with Japanese dishes, sake bottle, plates, bowls, eating sticks etc. It has no human figure depicted in it. It adds to the storytelling, as geishas often are not visible to everyone when they prepare and serve the meals, and conduct their performances in its traditional form in old Japanese teahouses etc. Therefore, there is also no geisha depicted in the scene, but you can get a sense of her presence.
When human figures are displayed without any or very little resemblance to any recognizable figure, it is mostly to say: 'this could be you, this could be me, this could be someone you know'. And even when I do reference recognizable human figures, I often look for a new way to look at them and 'make them more human' as icons at times provide a limited dimension view to their personality.

Colour plays a powerful role in your paintings—how do you choose your palette? Is it intuitive or symbolic?

Yes, colour is indeed very important in my paintings. I would say it is more intuitive how I choose my palette, but it ends up strengthening some symbolic values in the works moreover. As my paintings mostly reflect states of being, emotions, memories and atmospheres, I believe colour plays an important role in that, as colours are known to evoke emotions and can strengthen or underpin emotional state representations or create associations. However, at times, it can also be fun to play with that and go more counter the obviously fitting colours. Sometimes I also experiment using a limited colour palette just to challenge myself and give a new dimension to my work. As such the painting: 'On the rocks' is made with the limited colour palette of blue, white and black, and 'Marylin with a bike' is made with only white and black. I would say that I always choose the colour palette to fit the atmosphere or visual storytelling I want to create.

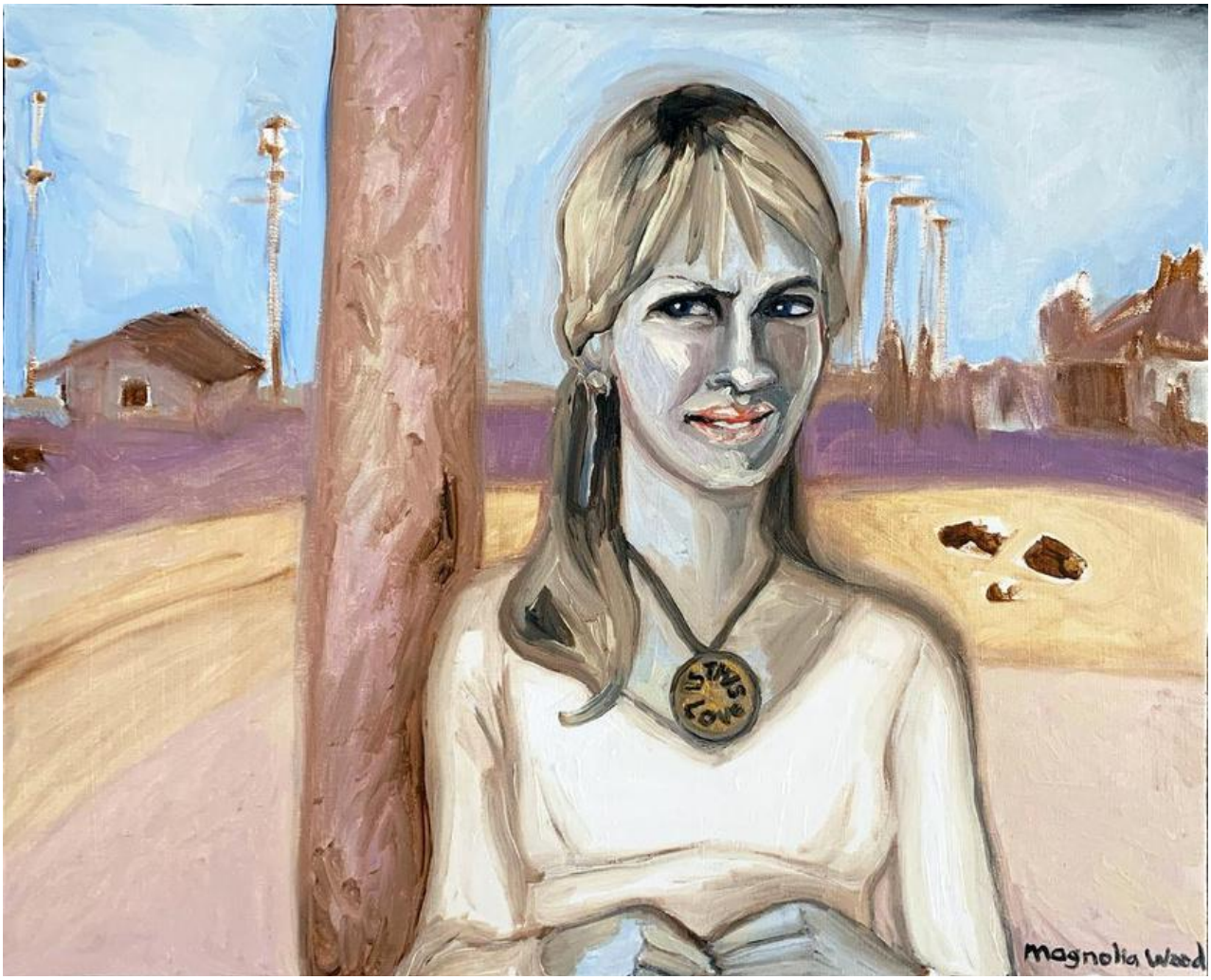
How do you balance clarity and vagueness in your compositions to evoke introspection without giving too much away?

In general, I find that more vagueness evokes more of a feeling of a memory (as also memories fade or get blurred from memory) stimulating a reflective state and clarity creates a more direct experience. I play quite a bit with these elements and at times create entire series with a lot of vagueness as well as series which lean towards much clarity, or a mix of the two outer ends combined in one painting or painting series.
Mostly I decide the level of clarity and vagueness during the creation process, as I try to determine which in that spectrum will have the best effect on the atmosphere and visual storytelling I want to achieve with the painting. Sometimes a rougher and more wiped out, 'dirty' or dreamy look (as you can see for example in my 'Bob Dylan and me' and 'Let's have fun' series) can better fit with the theme and gut feel I would like to achieve. Whereas other times, clarity is important for reference to specific iconic elements, or to promote a more direct or confrontational experience. Some of my paintings are direct and clear in style and gestures but find more nuanced meaning in sub-messages though depicted element and titles. Lastly, I play with combinations where I decide to leave parts of a painting vaguer or fill them in with abstracted gestures, whereas the rest of the painting has more clarity in style. This is to leave some parts for guessing adding to the mystery of the painting, or I use clarity versus vagueness to direct the focus of the viewer and create purposeful contrast. An example of the latter is: 'The world can be a wasted place' 5/5 painting from the 'Kindness has no limits' series. Here, the key human figure in the middle and the sails of his fort both trying to fight the storms, are painted with clarity. An additional focus is brought onto the human figure through a pink line surrounding his profile, whereas the stormy surroundings are painted with more vagueness, roughness, textured brushstrokes and scribblings onto the canvas to show the contrast of the central human figure with its distorted and chaotic environment.

Some of your works seem to reference iconic images or characters. What is your approach to using visual memory and cultural references in your work?

Indeed, in some series I do use iconic images or characters. I already talked a bit about the use of some of those in the series of 'Kindness has (no) limits' where I used them as ambassadors of visual shared memory of Hollywood stars or artists who can be associated with characteristics like charm, grace, kindness and a certain vulnerability. To then use these iconic elements as a starting point for relatability whilst at the same time referencing to struggles with these traits of kindness they are so well known for and providing hints for unseen or 'under the surface' struggles or emotions. The key point of struggle is about when one is always trying to be kind to others, and what happens when such kindness is not met back with kindness, and boundaries are violated. Can, and should one remain kind? What about the needs to be seen, heard, felt, understood? Can we all see through the

Magnolia Wood | Pipilotti Flower Thrower | 2025



Magnolia Wood | Kill'Em Uma | 2025

brave fight of a kind fighter and make room for 'unkind' feelings to bubble up? May sadness, anger, frustration be experienced, also by heroes in our public domain that stand for other values?
Besides the before mentioned series, I also created a series of works with direct reference to iconic female characters from history till now which are all inspired by remarkable women. Here I was looking for women role models, or the ones (role model or not) who have left an imprint throughout modern- and past times, to honour them. This served both as a reminder and inspiration to me and to others that any of us can create our own legacy to be remembered.
Further, I have also used iconic females depicted in historic paintings as a starting point for new contemporary work, such as the painting: 'Modern Madonna', inspired by the 'Madonna' painting by Edward Munch. In my version of the painting, I focus on her face instead of her full nakedness, creating an ambiguous modern Madonna whose expression is rather complex to read and leaves room for guessing.
Here, I used this reference for a modern version of Edward Munch's soul paintings, which one could see as a comment to the soul and state of a modern woman.

What do you hope a viewer feels or reflects on when encountering your paintings?

I am hoping for a shared experience. In that, some of the feelings, atmospheres or messages which were part of my personal process when painting them, would seep through to the viewer. At the same time, I hope that my paintings provide an open-ended story to which the viewer can feel invited to supplement their own feelings, reflections, memories and stories to emerge to the surface. They are free to complete and finish the elements of a story that my painting would provide them with their own thoughts and experiences. They are invited to experience their reflections in that moment without judgement. Their experience could also (in part) be different from the intention I made the paintings with, as I do not want to dictate the experience. My paintings provide a mixed pallet of emotions, stories and messages/themes to experience, such as: fear, loneliness, companionship, joy, anger, rage, tension, sadness, mourning, acceptance, serenity, tranquillity, peace, excitement, social community, instability, seeking, finding, disappearing, vulnerability, recovery, surprise, uncomfortability, wonder, curiosity, wit, exploration, charm, admiration, luxury, hiding, climbing, overcoming, daily rituals, subliminal messages or symbolism, encounters, relationships, art for art, self-discovery, shared events and places, hope, faith, freedom, liberation, time passing, disappointment, sensory experiences, sensuality, love, romance, love for life, death, memory, shadow work, multidimensionality, conflict, forgiveness, repressed and released emotion, dreamscapes etc.
Most of all, I would hope a viewer can be inspired and comforted when encountering my paintings by giving them a space for reflection and a moment to themselves, allowing them to have bubble up what is relevant in the moment.

Suwen Wang

What inspired you to create "Echoes of the Displaced"? Was there a specific moment or artifact that initiated the project?

I was born and raised in an ancient Chinese town that has existed for more than two thousand years. It is a place where history breathes through the soil, tombs, relics, and weathered remnants of past dynasties surround the everyday lives of its residents. From a very young age, I found myself drawn to museums, archaeological sites, and the silent allure of ancient objects. However, I also grew increasingly aware of the dark undercurrent of looting and cultural destruction that has ravaged many of these sacred places. Tombs were violently opened, entire mountains were hollowed out for treasure, and cultural relics were smuggled and sold to the highest bidder. As I walked through museums filled with dazzling artifacts, I often found myself wondering whether these objects, these fragments of civilizations, missed their original landscapes. Did they feel dislocated, uprooted, forgotten? That lingering sense of loss, of cultural estrangement, planted a seed in my mind. I began to imagine cultural artifacts not as passive exhibits but as displaced beings, each with their own emotional trajectory and voice waiting to be heard. This emotional disconnection between the artifact and its homeland, and between the past and our present, inspired me to explore new ways of reconnecting them. That's why I turned to digital storytelling, a medium

Suwen Wang | Echoes Of The Displaced Experimental Filming | 2025

where image, sound, and narrative can merge to form immersive experiences. Through this practice, I aim to foster cultural empathy and emotional reconnection, not only with the artifacts themselves but also with the broader histories and communities they represent.

Your work gives voice to silent cultural artifacts. How do you choose which objects to "animate" and tell stories through?

The selection process is deeply intuitive, guided by the emotional weight an artifact seems to carry. I don't necessarily prioritize objects based on aesthetic appeal or historical fame. Instead, I look for subtle signs of lived experience, damage, displacement, restoration, or even absence. Some artifacts, such as decorative scrolls or abstract patterns, might not lend themselves easily to emotional storytelling due to their minimal figuration or lack of context. But others, especially those that feature human figures, faces, or scenes, often feel more like frozen moments with narrative potential. I am particularly drawn to pieces that have undergone some kind of transition: they may have been unearthed after centuries of burial, stolen and recovered, broken and carefully pieced back together. These life-like trajectories form a kind of biography, a record of survival and silence. They evoke a powerful emotional resonance, which makes them ideal vessels for storytelling. I imagine them not just as objects, but as witnesses of time.

What role does AI play in shaping the emotional tone and voice of your digital storytellers?

Artificial Intelligence plays a central and multi-faceted role in my storytelling practice. One of the most critical aspects is voice design. I use advanced voice synthesis tools such as Resemble AI to craft highly customized narrations. These tools allow me to control the voice's tone, rhythm, pitch, and emotional texture, which helps create a persona that matches the artifact's history and imagined emotional world. For example, a fragmented sculpture might have a voice that sounds broken, fragile, or breathless, while a bronze bell used in ceremonies might carry a deeper, more resonant tone. AI enables this nuanced control. Technically, I also incorporate other AI-driven tools such as image and video generation, 3D modeling, real-time scanning, and ambient sound synthesis. The storytelling process starts with writing scripts based on historical data, who made the object, when

Suwen Wang | Echoes Of The Displaced Experimental Filming | 2025

and where, how it was used, how it was displaced or damaged, and where it resides now. Then I reinterpret those facts through the lens of emotional imagination, asking: if this artifact could speak, what would it say? What would it remember, fear, or yearn for? AI gives form to those questions in a way that is both poetic and technologically expressive. My goal is to bridge historical fact with speculative empathy, allowing technology to act as both interpreter and amplifier of emotion.

You mention a poetic relationship between AI and heritage artifacts. Can you elaborate on how you view that parallel?

At first glance, heritage artifacts and artificial intelligence seem to exist at opposite ends of the spectrum. One is ancient, often fragile and silent. The other is contemporary, data-driven, and synthetic. Yet, when I work with both, I begin to notice surprising similarities. Both are often viewed as non-living, lacking their own agency. Artifacts are frequently regarded as static museum pieces, while AI is treated as a machine, a tool with no intrinsic emotion. However, in my work, both become vessels for voice and meaning. When given a narrative structure and emotional context, AI-generated voices can express profoundly human experiences. Similarly, when an artifact is given voice, it becomes more than an object, it becomes a storyteller. The poetic relationship lies in this unexpected capacity for expression. Both AI and artifacts inhabit a space of silence, and both require human interpretation to come alive. My project tries to merge them in a way that creates emotional resonance, bridging the artificial with the historical, and the digital with the cultural. It is this fusion of time, materiality, and voice that I find both meaningful and poetic.

In your opinion, how can digital storytelling help shift public perception about looted or displaced cultural objects?

Digital storytelling has the power to humanize what is often perceived as distant or inert. By weaving sound, visuals, and narrative into a cohesive emotional experience, we can shift the way people engage with cultural objects. Rather than viewing an artifact as a static exhibit behind glass, storytelling invites the audience to enter its world, to hear its memories, its losses, and its fragmented identity. This fosters empathy, especially when people realize that the damage done to these objects mirrors the damage done to cultures and communities. When an artifact tells its story, it becomes harder to ignore the violence of its displacement or the colonial histories that shaped its journey. This emotional engagement can inspire more nuanced conversations around cultural restitution, heritage preservation, and the ethics of display. Audiences begin to ask harder questions, Why is this object here? Who does it belong to? What history is missing? I want digital storytelling to serve as a bridge between academic discourse and public understanding, bringing urgency and sensitivity to the issue of looted heritage.

How do you balance artistic expression with historical accuracy, especially when interpreting the 'inner lives' of artifacts?

Balancing emotional speculation with factual grounding is a constant negotiation in my creative process. I start by conducting detailed research on each artifact, its historical context, geographical origin, materials used, and the circumstances of its current location. From there, I construct an interpretive framework that considers its journey across time. If an object was buried for centuries and then excavated, I might imagine it as feeling forgotten or reborn. If it was stolen or sold, perhaps it harbors a sense of loss or betrayal. These imagined emotional narratives are grounded in the object's known experiences, not detached fantasy. Artistic liberties are taken, but always with care and responsibility. I also consult with historians, archaeologists, and curators when possible to ensure that the core facts remain accurate. The goal is not to fictionalize history, but to make its silence emotionally legible. It's about interpreting the invisible with integrity, using artistic tools to create empathy without distorting truth.

How do audiences typically respond to the "voice" of an object? Have any reactions surprised you?

Audience reactions have often been more emotional than I expected. Many people are visibly moved when they hear an artifact speak for the first time, especially when the voice is imbued with sadness, longing, or nostalgia. One common reaction is disbelief that the voice is AI-generated. People assume it's a human actor and are surprised to learn otherwise. That moment of realization where the artificial is indistinguishable from the real, opens up a space for reflection. It mirrors the broader question my work poses: what do we consider to be alive? What do we consider worthy of empathy? The blurred line between authenticity and simulation creates a powerful emotional tension. In a few instances, visitors have said they felt as if the object was addressing them personally, almost like a confession or a letter from the past. These reactions affirm the potential of digital storytelling not only as an educational tool but also as a deeply human experience.

Suwen Wang | Echoes Of The Displaced Experimental Filming | 2025

Adarsha Ajay

Your work deeply explores themes of womanhood, trauma, and healing. How do you approach translating such personal and often painful experiences into visual art?

For me, art begins where language ends. I approach these themes by allowing myself to be fully vulnerable in the creative process. I don't try to mask the pain, I sit with it, honor it, and let it guide me. My work is not about illustrating trauma but transforming it. I use symbolism, sacred patterns, and textures that hold emotional weight. Each painting is both a wound and a prayer, a way to reclaim the narrative and turn suffering into strength. Through this process, I create not only for myself but for others who need to feel seen and understood.

Adarsha Ajay | Desire & Divinity

Adarsha Ajay | She

Many of your paintings blend sacred Indian iconography with elements from Christian spirituality. How do these dual influences shape your artistic vision?

These dual spiritual influences are a reflection of my lived experience. I was raised around Hindu rituals, yet deeply drawn to the compassion and silence of Christian imagery. Rather than choosing one over the other, I let both coexist in my work, not in a religious sense, but in a spiritual and symbolic one. They allow me to explore themes of faith, surrender, rebirth, and the feminine divine from multiple cultural lenses. This blending of iconographies mirrors my identity: layered, complex, and continuously evolving.

You often use female figures as central symbols in your work. How do you see the role of the 'feminine divine' in your artistic narrative?

The feminine divine is the soul of my work. I see her not just as a symbol, but as a presence, a force that carries both pain and power. The women I paint are not passive figures; they are warriors, mothers, survivors, and healers. They rise from silence, embody resilience, and carry sacred wisdom. The feminine divine is how I channel my own journey of endurance and transformation. Through these figures, I honor women who have been broken and rebuilt themselves, including myself.

Adarsha Ajay | Censored

What role does ritual or spirituality play in your creative process? Do you follow any specific practices while creating your pieces?

During the darkest chapters of my life, it was prayer and meditation that held me when nothing else could. That quiet surrender became my survival, and now, it is the soul of my practice.
Before I begin painting, I create a quiet, intentional space, sometimes I light incense, sometimes I sit in silence, meditate or listen to calm music. My room becomes a sanctuary, not bound by any one religion, but filled with presence and purpose. I approach the canvas as if I'm stepping into a sacred space, where I can speak honestly without fear, without shame.
The act of painting itself becomes a ritual. It's a form of meditation where I lose and find myself at once. Through this process, I connect with something beyond the material, a divine source of strength that allows me to transform pain into beauty, and silence into voice.

Your use of mixed media and symbolism is striking. Can you talk about your choice of materials and how texture contributes to your storytelling?

My materials often choose me before I choose them. I'm drawn to what carries memory, what has lived a life of its own. Texture, for me, is not just a surface detail; it is an emotional language. I want my paintings to be felt as much as seen.
During my course, I remember using a beach mat as my canvas, something humble, overlooked, and deeply textured. That choice surprised many, but for me, it made perfect sense. The mat held the imprint of footsteps, of sun and sand of ordinary life, worn and resilient. That's what I look for in materials: history, fragility, strength.
I work intuitively with gold leaf, logs, fabric, thread, earth-toned pigments, each chosen for the story it helps tell. I layer, stitch, crack, and scrape to echo emotional complexity. The surfaces I create often resemble skin: marked, layered, vulnerable. These tactile elements speak to what lies beneath grief, memory, resilience.
Every material I use is part of the narrative. Nothing is ornamental. Everything is intentional. It's through these textures that my work becomes not just a visual experience, but a visceral one inviting the viewer to lean in, to feel, to remember.

How did relocating from India to the UK influence your work and your freedom of expression as an artist?

Relocating to the UK has been a wonderful and inspiring chapter in my life. It has given me the freedom and space to explore my artistic voice more openly and deeply than ever before. Here, I've found a supportive environment that encourages experimentation and boldness, allowing me to express themes that were once difficult to share. After coming to the UK, I realized my true talent and have been gaining the confidence and strength to fully commit to this field. Being here has also helped me embrace and celebrate my cultural roots in new ways, enriching my work with a beautiful fusion of East and West. This experience has strengthened my commitment to creating art that bridges cultures, fosters understanding, and sparks healing. I am excited to continue growing as an artist here and to contribute meaningfully to this society by sharing stories of resilience, transformation, and hope through my work. I hold a strong hope that through my art, I will be able to make a positive impact on the world, especially for women, by giving voice to their stories and empowering them through visual expression.

There's a visceral honesty in your paintings. Do you see your work as a form of therapy or resistance—or perhaps both?

For me, it's absolutely both. Art is my therapy, it's how I survived. But it's also my form of resistance , against silence, against shame, against the erasure of women's voices. When I paint, I'm healing myself, but I'm also challenging the narratives that kept me small for so long. Every brushstroke is a declaration: I exist, I remember, and I transform. Through art, I reclaim my story and create space for others to do the same.

Interview

Nour Elkady

One of my projects during my university years was about relationships. I started to delve into the idea of relationships which brought me to memory and intimacy. I later realized that these themes organically found their way into most of my work, because I think that memory and intimacy are interconnected with so many other universal themes.

What draws you to collage as a medium? How does the process of cutting and assembling fragments help you express complex emotions?

I think Collage or the process of cutting and assembling fragments makes me feel more present and part of the process. I feel like having everything physical and tangible in front of me somehow nourishes my creativity and it makes me think more clearly.

The textures and layering in your work create a tactile, almost archival feeling. How important is physicality and touch in your creative process?

I call myself a traditional artist because I rarely work digitally. Physical touch is very important to me when it comes to my work. I love being able to feel the materials I'm working with. One of the reasons why I don't work digitally is that I feel disconnected to what I'm doing most of the time. As I said before the sense of touch feeds my creativity. Also, nearly all of my

Your work often explores memory and intimacy. Can you share a specific memory or moment that sparked this ongoing theme in your art?

favorite work that I've created so far are made with tactile materials. I feel like I work better that way.

"Fragments of Intimacy" is a deeply emotional series. How do you decide which found images to use, and do you search for them with specific emotions in mind?

"Fragments of Intimacy" was a project I really enjoyed working on. I generally had a clear idea about what I wanted to create. While searching for images, I was looking for something that is relatable and normal, nothing lavish. For example, I wanted an everyday normal looking sofa, not too big not too small in size. I wanted the collage to feel like it could be your living room or it may look like your friend's apartment. Another thing I kept in mind was the colors, it can't be too bright. Every detail about the collage had to feel normal and believable.

There's a strong narrative quality in your collages, though it's subtle and open-ended. Do you approach each piece like a story?

"Fragments of Intimacy" was interesting because in my head I imagined I was making a card game for emotions. Obviously, each collage is a different card and you can put the cards in the order that you see fit. I created my own storyline to match each collage, each piece is a different story with different moods and emotions. I wanted each piece of collage to be separate from the others yet similar. This is one of the reasons why I enjoyed this project because you can interpret it however you like.

How do domestic spaces or everyday objects become carriers of memory in your work?

I truly feel like sometimes the less the better. I think that objects in general are underrated in art. As artists, I feel like when it comes to the human psyche we are always looking to show or interpret the unseen. Whereas, sometimes what's in front of us can portray more than we think. Everyday objects are witnesses to all our emotions. There is also a big link between objects and our memory and feelings. That is why I decided to use them as metaphors for our inner experiences.

Do you see your work as a form of visual diary? How do personal and universal themes intersect in your collages?

Yes, I feel like my art is a form of visual diary but I think that applies to all artists whether your aware of that or not. Everything you create will always have some trace of you in it. My personal experiences always intersect in my work. Sometimes I begin with a personal experience and other times they may come to me mid process. For example, the collage with the bed and a pair of eyes, that collage began with a personal experience.

Nic Cruz

Your works are rich in narrative and symbolism. Can you walk us through the story or meaning behind one of your recent pieces?

"Summer's Sour Spell" (2024) is a painting that transforms my grandparents' pool and backyard into a surreal landscape, teeming with plants, insects, fruits, and undulating water. While the imagery may appear disparate at first glance, each element is intricately tied to specific memories of the backyard and reflects my evolving perception as I transitioned into adulthood. The artwork explores themes of maintenance, the preservation of beauty, and the inevitable march of decay. In my childhood, the backyard was a vibrant oasis, boasting towering philodendrons, exotic birds of paradise, and citrus trees laden with lemons and oranges, all centered around a sparkling blue pool. This Eden-like setting demanded constant care to maintain its pristine appearance. My grandfather, the primary caretaker, allowed me to assist him in this labor of love—testing the pool's pH, skimming debris, and harvesting fallen fruit. Interwoven with these memories is a whimsical anecdote shared by my mother and grandmother. The painting features a hand wielding scissors, poised to cut a lock of hair—a nod to an incident where my grandmother chased my mother around the pool, determined to finish a haircut. This image serves a dual purpose, mirroring the pruning and maintenance required to keep the yard in its prime. Another vignette shows my mother sunbathing poolside, a testament to her desire to maintain her tan while my grandfather and I swam. As my grandfather's health declined in his final years, succumbing to the ravages of dementia, the backyard began to mirror his deterioration. The once-lush grass withered and

Nic Cruz | Interior Of Corazon | 2023

Nic Cruz | Phantom Limbs | 2024

was replaced by rocks. The pool, no longer pristine, became a repository for insects and debris. This decay is symbolized in the painting by seemingly perfect citrus fruits that, when turned over, reveal hidden mold—a metaphor I've explored in my poetry as well. "Summer's Sour Spell" is an homage to the idealized version of the backyard that exists now only in memory. It stands as a testament to the relentless effort required to maintain such beauty and serves as a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of perfection. Through this work, I've immortalized not just a place, but the love and labor that went into its creation and upkeep.

How does your background in performance and sound production influence your visual art practice?

During my undergraduate studies at UC Irvine, I deliberately stepped out of my comfort zone by enrolling in a performance art class, despite my primary focus on drawing and painting. This decision was driven by a desire to expand my artistic horizons and gain a deeper understanding of performance as a medium. The unique circumstances of the pandemic necessitated a shift to pre-recorded performances, which unexpectedly opened up a new realm of creative possibilities. This transition to digital presentation introduced me to video editing, where I discovered techniques such as superimposing footage to create ethereal, dreamlike imagery and manipulating color saturation to its fullest potential. Moreover, my background in music naturally led me to explore the auditory aspects of performance. I began experimenting with sound composition, often repurposing and looping snippets from original audio tracks to create unique soundscapes. These performance classes bolstered my confidence as a performer and helped fortify my aesthetic inclinations. I gravitate towards bold colors, surreal imagery, and visual collage to construct meaning. This newfound understanding of my artistic voice has become integral to my creative toolkit. As I progress to my master's degree, I continue to delve into the intricate relationships between performance, sound, and visual art. My recent exhibition, "4," exemplifies this interdisciplinary approach. The show combined a series of paintings with narrative poetry, providing a rich backstory to the visual elements. In homage to my late grandfather, a puppeteer, I incorporated a puppet performance, adding another layer to the visual narrative of the exhibition. This experience has reinforced my commitment to exploring the intersection of various artistic media. I am particularly intrigued by how different forms of expression can interact and harmonize on a sensory level. I aim for future projects to create immersive experiences that engage multiple senses and challenge traditional artistic categorizations.

Nature, Romantic literature, and the unconscious mind are central to your work. How do you weave these inspirations together in a single piece?

My creative process is deeply rooted in direct engagement with nature. I find solace and inspiration in forest hikes and park walks, where I immerse myself in my surroundings. These visual encounters serve multiple purposes: they may become backdrops for future artworks, subjects for plein air studies, or simply moments of pure appreciation. The organic structures and natural pathways I observe in these environments profoundly influence the composition of my pieces. I approach my work with a sensibility akin to Romantic literature, romanticizing both nature and everyday moments to infuse my art with depth and richness. By employing vibrant colors and

Nic Cruz | Sunlight Farms | 2023

exaggerated depth, I invite viewers to delve deeper into each painting, encouraging a close examination of the intricate details. This results in an unhurried, contemplative viewing experience, allowing for moments of reflection and a natural rhythm of exploration. The realm of the unconscious, particularly dreams, often serves as a wellspring of inspiration for my scenarios. For instance, my apocalyptic piece "Figure 5" (2022) emerged from a vivid dream of a world-ending event—I found myself the last person on a burning planet, witnessing mass exodus via rocket ships and the solar system's demise to a black hole. While extreme, this dreamscape provided the perfect backdrop to explore themes of apocalypse and isolation. These three elements—nature, Romantic sensibilities, and the unconscious mind—are vehicles for my creative process. They guide me in conceptualizing new pieces, and their combination opens up exciting possibilities for the evolution of my work. By interweaving these influences, I strive to create art that is not only visually captivating but also emotionally resonant and intellectually stimulating, inviting viewers into a world where reality, imagination, and the subconscious converge.

Do you approach your installations and paintings differently in terms of process or intention?

While my installations and painting series share many commonalities in their creative processes, their intended outcomes and viewer experiences diverge significantly. For my painting series, I envision a collection of thematically interconnected images that coexist within a unified visual language. This cohesion is achieved through consistent use of media across the paintings, deliberate repetition of symbolic elements, and recurring stylistic motifs. Each painting within the series is crafted to stand as an independent, aesthetically complete work, engaging viewers even when standalone. In these two-dimensional pieces, my focus is primarily on

Nic Cruz | Wooden Clacks And Glassy Clicks | 2024

Nic Cruz | Figure | 2022

overall composition and design, creating a harmonious balance that captivates the eye and invites contemplation. In contrast, my installations represent an expansion into three-dimensional space, challenging me to consider how audiences might physically navigate and interact with the work. These immersive environments demand a greater emphasis on rhythm and multisensory engagement. Unlike the contained nature of individual paintings, installations offer a more fluid, experiential encounter with art. They invite viewers to become active participants, their movements and choices becoming integral to the piece itself. In essence, my paintings create windows into carefully composed visual worlds, while my installations construct entire environments that envelop and engage the viewer on multiple sensory levels. Both approaches, though distinct, stem from my overarching artistic vision to extend audience experience past the norm and highlight the surreal.

You're currently pursuing an MFA at CalArts. How has graduate school shaped or challenged your artistic voice?

My experience in graduate school at CalArts has been transformative, exposing me to a vibrant tapestry of contemporary artists. Engaging with peers, faculty, and visiting guest artists has been a wellspring of inspiration. Each individual brings a unique perspective to their practice, creating a rich, diverse artistic ecosystem within the school. At CalArts, excellence is not just encouraged; it's expected. The institution challenges us to constantly push boundaries, experiment, and venture beyond our comfort zones. A hallmark of the CalArts experience is its emphasis on interdisciplinary arts, where traditional boundaries between practices are intentionally blurred. This approach is exemplified in the composition of our classes, where students from various majors—art, photography, dance, acting, critical studies, and more—come together, fostering a melting pot of

Nic Cruz | Summer S Sour Spell | 2024

ideas and perspectives. The critiques at CalArts are particularly valuable. The diversity of interpretations I receive for my work provides profound insights into my own artistic practice, pushing me to see my creations through multiple lenses. One of the most significant personal revelations I've had is recognizing my ambitious nature when it comes to project vision. I've learned the value of focusing my energy on fewer elements, rather than spreading myself too thin. This approach often yields more impactful and refined results. The CalArts experience is more than just an education; it's an immersion into a dynamic, ever-evolving artistic community. This environment not only nurtures individual growth but also fosters a spirit of innovation that prepares us to make meaningful contributions to the contemporary art world.

As a young artist working across so many disciplines, how do you choose which medium best fits each idea?

Like my grandfather, I find myself drawn to the role of a Renaissance artist, embracing the versatility of a jack-of-all-trades. The diverse artistic mediums I employ are akin to different tongues, each with its unique ability to express ideas. Just as certain concepts are more eloquently conveyed in specific spoken languages, some artistic visions translate more effectively through particular media. My choice of medium is often guided by what ignites my passion in the moment. Currently, I'm building a visual catalogue of plein air landscapes in sketchbook form. This project not only satisfies my current artistic inclination but also serves as a stepping stone toward my aspiration of publishing children's books, allowing me to explore and master the book format. The inherent "spirit" of each medium plays a crucial role in my creative process, harmonizing with the themes and emotions I aim to convey. When I seek to capture the ethereal quality of a dreamy landscape, I turn to oils, leveraging their natural propensity for blending and softening borders. For pieces that demand movement and dynamism, transcending static display, I harness the kinetic energy of video and animation. My artistic journey is one of continuous exploration and learning. I constantly seek to expand my repertoire of art-making techniques and media, viewing each new skill as an addition to my artistic vocabulary. This perpetual growth enriches my creative expression, allowing me to select the most appropriate "language" for each artistic statement I wish to make.

What does "belonging" mean to you in today's turbulent world, and how do you hope your work creates space for that?

To me, the essence of belonging is the profound sense of security one feels within a given space. I firmly believe that authenticity—simply being oneself—should be the only prerequisite for acceptance and inclusion. Through my art, I aspire to create a welcoming atmosphere that resonates with my audience, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. In a world often overshadowed by discord and pain, I see my artistic practice as a beacon of support and solace. My work aims to counterbalance the overwhelming negativity by cultivating an environment of empathy and understanding. I strive to create pieces that speak to the human experience, offering comfort to those in need. My goal is to create a space where people from diverse backgrounds can find common ground, sparking meaningful dialogues and forging lasting bonds. I envision my art as a catalyst for building inclusive communities—spaces where individuals feel valued, heard, and understood. Through carefully crafted visual narratives and immersive experiences, I aim to encourage viewers to explore their identities, share their stories, and connect with others on a deeper level. My artistic mission is to contribute to a more compassionate and interconnected world.

Susanne Layla Petersen is an interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Her works include video, digital art, collaborative installations, NFTs, web projects, photography, texts and sound. Petersen's works have been screened and exhibited at VASTLAB Experimental (US), FilmArte Festival (DE), CICA Museum (KR), Simultan Festival (RO), XOR Space, Kunstrum Fyn (DK), LA Art Show (US), ICME AIART Gallery (FR), Venice Open Art (IT), Intervals Festival (RU), The Wrong Biennale, ArtX Gallery (US), London's Crypt Gallery St Pancras (UK) and elsewhere.

Project Statement
My approach to art is centered around the idea that the work itself is the primary medium of communication, I believe that art should provoke reflection and interpretation directly through the experience of the work. My descriptions are kept to a minimum to keep the work open and free. I abstain from interviews, talks, Q&A to avoid distracting the viewer from the work.

Susanne Layla Petersen | Chaos | 2024

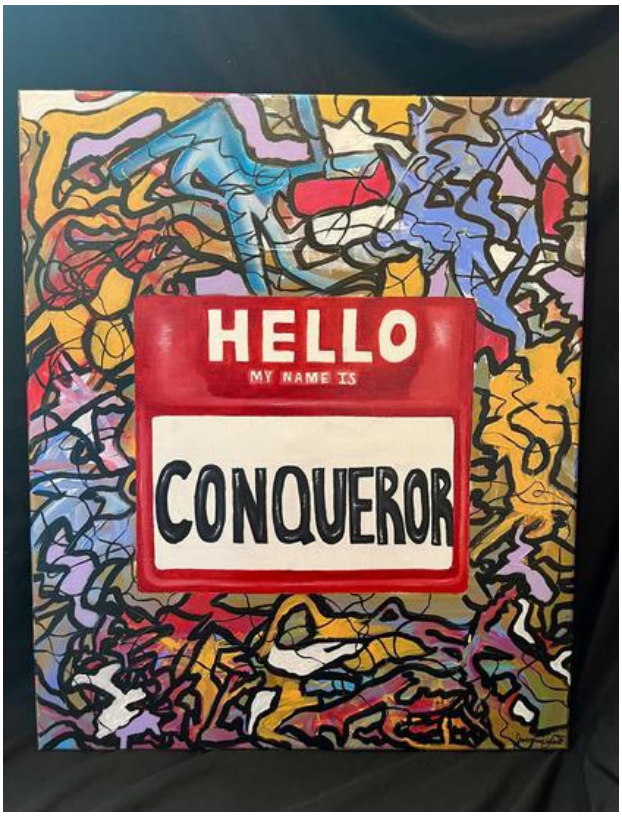
Susanne Layla Petersen | Vision | 2025

Susanne Layla Petersen | Zone | 2024

Jasmine Lewis

Can you tell us more about your journey as a visual/mixed media artist from Baltimore? How did it all begin?

My journey as a visual/mixed media artist from Baltimore has been a big learning process. Also a rewarding journey. It began mostly through my high school years.



What inspired you to start creating art as a teenager?

My inspiration stemmed from me discovering that I had a talent that i truly enjoyed. It felt amazing to discover the gift that God has given me. Also my art teacher that I had 10-12 grade really gave us students hope and motivation on taking our art really far.

How would you describe your artistic style in a few words?

I would describe it as something that consistently evolves. Metaphorically, uplifting, fun, and expressive.

Many of your works seem to include strong cultural references and messages. What themes are most important to you?

I would say self love. A lot of my pieces are messages to uplift people of all races, especially black women. To

help them love and appreciate the skin they are in.

Your artwork combines humor, pop culture, and realism—how do you choose your subjects?

I choose mainly by the imagery i have in my head. Which stems from topics, music, emotions, memories or places that impact me in the moment while brainstorming for sketches.

What emotions or messages do you hope your audience feels when they see your work?

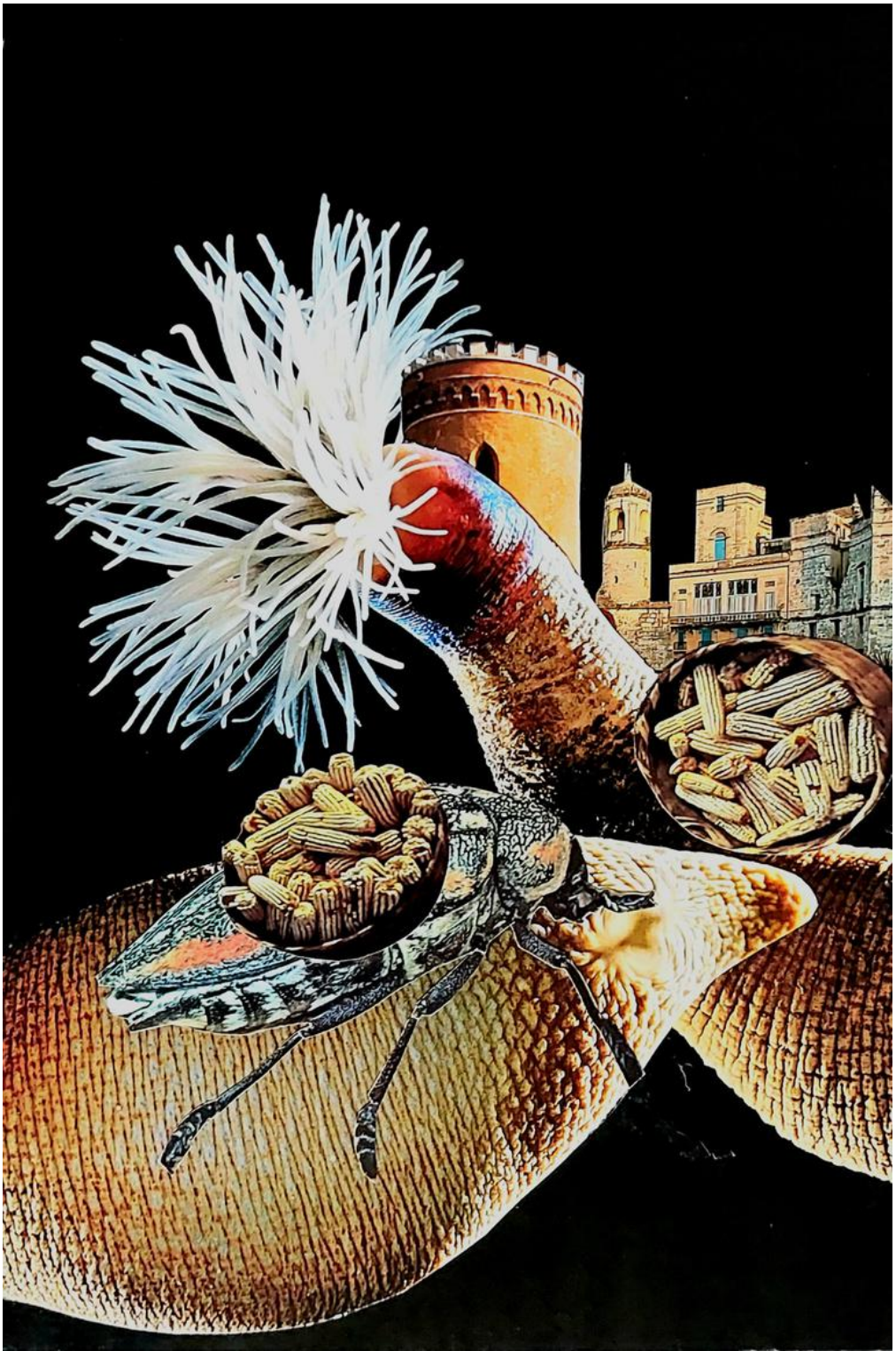
I want people to feel understood, heard, excited and inspired by my work.

How does your environment—Baltimore and your community—influence your creativity?

The environment and community in Baltimore influences my creativity by dedicating spaces for artist to come together to network and discover art in different lights. Makes me feel seen and heard.

Jane Bøgelund Pedersen
My name is Jane, and I am based in the north of Denmark.
My work is analog in nature, and I prefer to work in silence—exploring new, limitless, and unexpected scenarios, most often with nature as the central focus. I am fascinated by nature and the many forms of life on Earth. It amazes me. I use tools, clippings, and stacks of books and magazines in my creative process.
I am inspired by Sir David Attenborough—his lifelong dedication as a biologist and his environmental advocacy have deeply influenced me. I also find inspiration in early surrealists like Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí, and René Magritte, who experimented with collage as a means to access the unconscious and create unexpected combinations of images. They used collage to discover new ways of expressing emotions and thoughts, believing that surrealism could connect people with "the unconscious."

Artist Statement
Jane Bøgelund is a collage artist whose practice is grounded in analog techniques and shaped by a deep reverence for nature. She constructs her pieces using physical materials—tools, paper clippings, and curated collections of books and magazines. Her work often unfolds in dreamlike, unpredictable ways, reflecting the complexity and beauty of life on Earth.
At the heart of Bøgelund's work is a fascination with nature and the many forms of life it sustains. She explores both the visible and invisible forces that shape our environment, with particular sensitivity to species loss and the human impact on ecological systems. Her contribution centers on this duality—on the beauty of biodiversity and the consequences of its disappearance. Bøgelund draws inspiration from both scientific and artistic sources.



Ningrui Liu

Your work spans many disciplines—film, music, performance, spoken word. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular project?

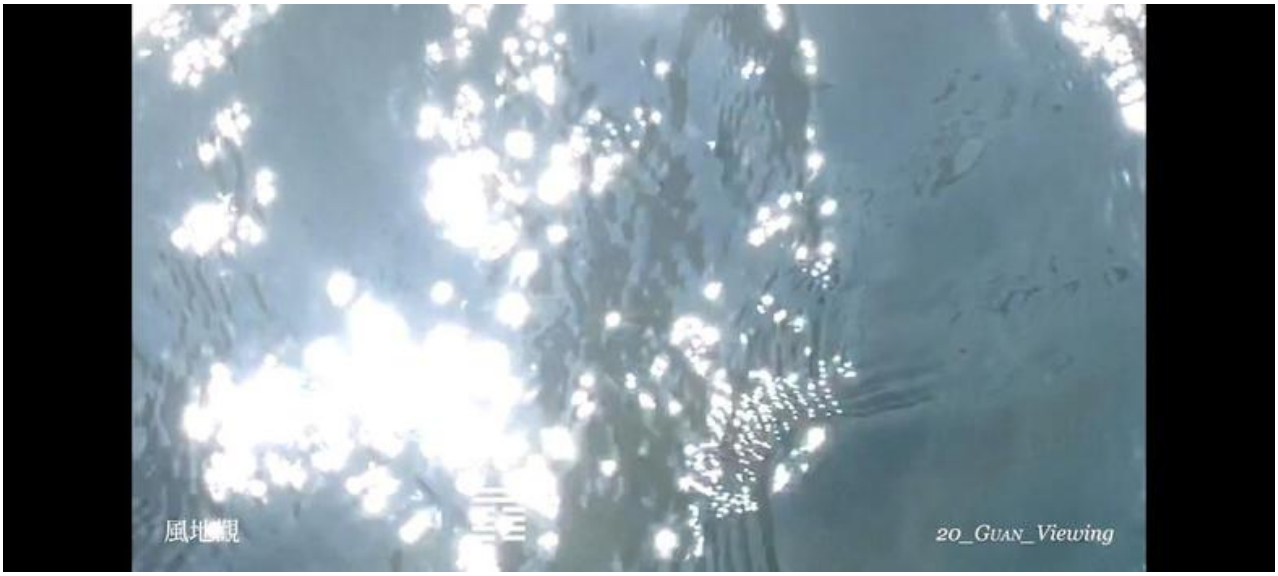
I've always loved film, so it's often my first consideration when starting a new project. But I also understand its limitations. Film is bound to the screen; it creates a certain distance between the work and the viewer. When I feel that a screen can't fully carry what I want to express, I turn to other formats like performance, sound, or installation—forms that can reach beyond what film allows.
In this sense, I'm increasingly drawn to live performance. I want to embrace the presence of real people in real time. There's something intimate and unpredictable about sharing space with an audience that film can't replicate. It's a way to break the frame and let the work breathe in the moment.

The I Ching plays a central role in your project "Film of Changes." How did your relationship with this ancient text begin?

As a Chinese person, I've always been curious about the I Ching—like many who feel a connection to their cultural roots. But it wasn't until I was working as a film editor that I truly engaged with it.
I read a book about Walter Murch in conversation with Michael Ondaatje, where Murch spoke about using the I Ching as a divination tool to help him make editing decisions. I was struck by the fact that an American film editor was not only interested in the I Ching, but actually used it in such a creative, intuitive way.
What truly excited me was his idea of developing a new cinematic language based on the hexagram system, which is similar to how music notation works. A visual grammar that anyone could learn and use. That vision of fusing ancient structure with contemporary storytelling really inspired me, and it's what led me to explore the I Ching as a core part of Film of Changes.

What are some creative challenges you've faced in merging ancient systems like the I Ching with contemporary media?

One of the biggest challenges was that I didn't understand the I Ching well when I started, I felt completely lost. All I had was Walter Murch's hypothetical ideas and an indescribable curiosity in my heart. When I opened the I Ching, I could barely grasp what it was saying. The language felt so obscure, hard to translate even into modern Chinese, let alone into film, images, or performance. I even learnt how to do the divination using the system on YouTube.
Over time, I began to see that confusion as part of the process. I stopped trying to "master" the I Ching and instead



started having a conversation with it. That shift—from seeking control to practicing listening—changed everything.

You speak about introducing "uncertainty and disruption" into your practice. What draws you to these themes?

I'm drawn to uncertainty and disruption because they make space for something real to happen. In life, we're often taught to seek clarity, control, and resolution—but in art, I find that the most powerful moments come from not knowing. Disruption interrupts our habits and expectations. It forces me to pay attention, to respond rather than impose. Uncertainty, for me, isn't about chaos—it's about potential. It's a condition for emergence.
In performance, this might mean embracing improvisation or leaving space for accidents. In film, it could mean following a structure I don't fully understand, like the I Ching. These approaches keep me honest. They allow the work to become something beyond my own plan.

How do you see the role of the occult or the mystical in contemporary storytelling?

I see the occult and the mystical not as superstition, but as alternative systems of knowledge—ways of sensing the world that don't rely on logic or language. In contemporary storytelling, they offer a way to reconnect with intuition, ritual, and uncertainty.
We live in a time where information is everywhere—mapped, tracked, and analysed. But I think there's a growing hunger for something beyond that. The mystical invites us to sit with uncertainty, to make meaning through symbols, dreams, and ritual. It reminds us that not everything can or should be explained. That some stories are meant to be felt, sensed, or intuited rather than solved.
For me, working with mystical systems like the I Ching isn't about recreating ancient practices as they were—it's about asking how these ways of thinking can inform the present. What happens when you structure a film not around a plot you want to set, but give your agency to a divination tool? That question excites me. It means letting go of authorship in the traditional sense. It invites chance, surprise, and a different kind of authorship—one that is shared with a system, a symbol, or a field of meaning larger than yourself. In my work, the occult is not a theme but a methodology. It's a way of paying attention—of listening to something beyond myself. And in a culture that often demands clarity, control, and resolution, I think mystery itself becomes a kind of resistance. It makes room for doubt, for magic, and for new kinds of connection.

Your visuals often feature symbols, natural elements, and fragmented perspectives. How do you select your visual language?

My visual language emerges through intuition rather than planning. I collect fragments—images, textures, symbols—from everyday encounters. I rarely know what they mean at first. I'm more interested in how they resonate together than in creating a clear narrative.
I'm also drawn to fragmentation. It reflects how I experience the world—especially as someone moving between languages and cultural references. A fragmented perspective doesn't mean disconnection; it means multiplicity.
I see my role as composing a space where these fragments can exist together, even if they don't fully resolve.

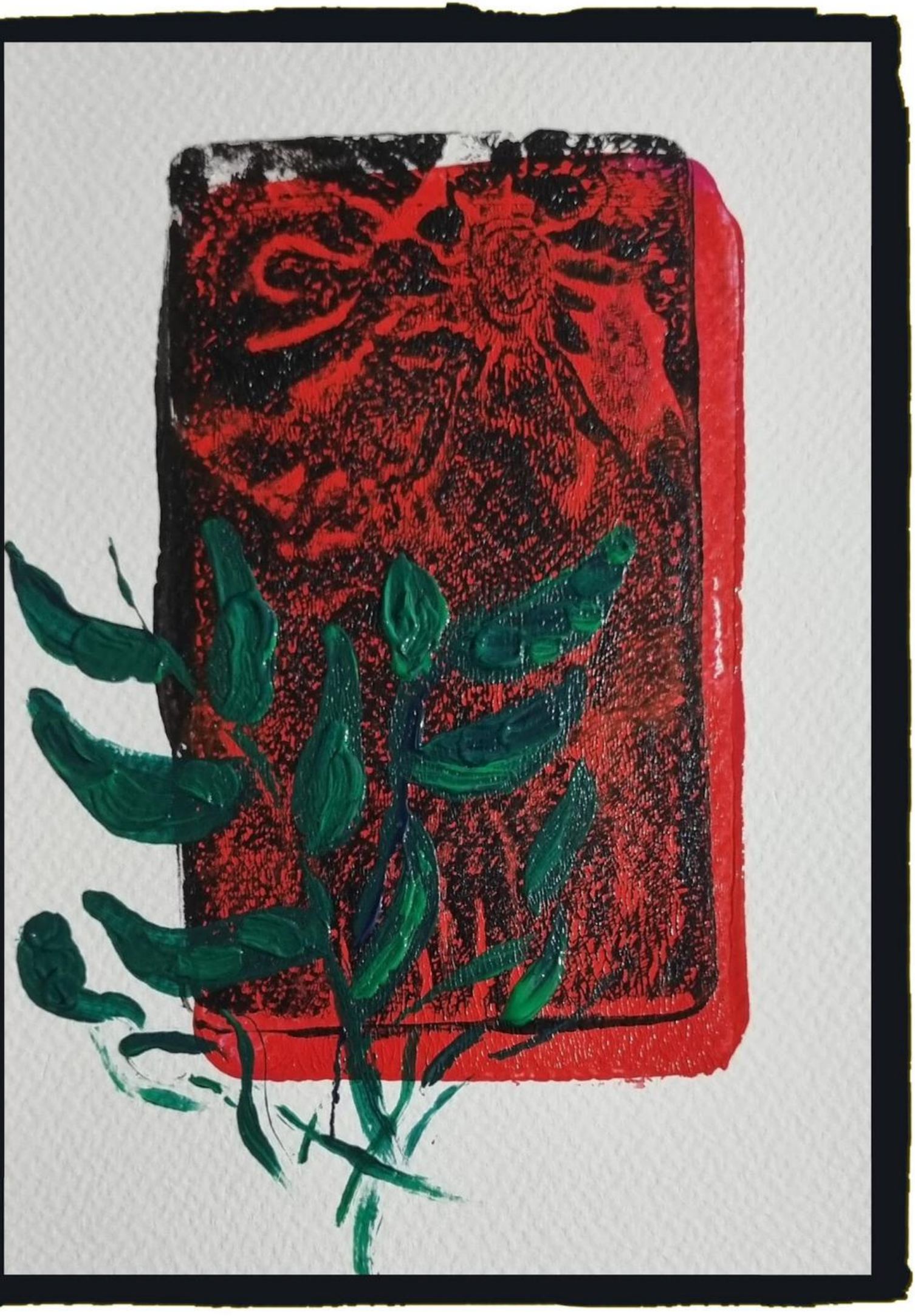
How has your background—growing up in Shanghai and studying in London—shaped your artistic voice?

Cities are noisy. Both Shanghai and London are loud in their own ways—full of motion, density, contradiction. I'm not planning to live in the countryside, so I've had to learn how to live peacefully within the noise. That practice—of finding stillness in chaos—has shaped both my life and my work.
Living in both cities gave me a sense of layered histories, overlapping rhythms, and cultural dissonance. It taught me how to listen to complexity, how to navigate contradiction without needing to resolve it.
Studying in London allowed me to slow down and begin questioning the frameworks I had inherited. It gave me permission to experiment—to work across disciplines, across languages, and between traditions.
I think my artistic voice is shaped by this in-betweenness. I often feel like I'm translating something—across cultures, across time, across sensory forms. That experience of shifting between contexts is where a lot of my work begins.

Em.Y

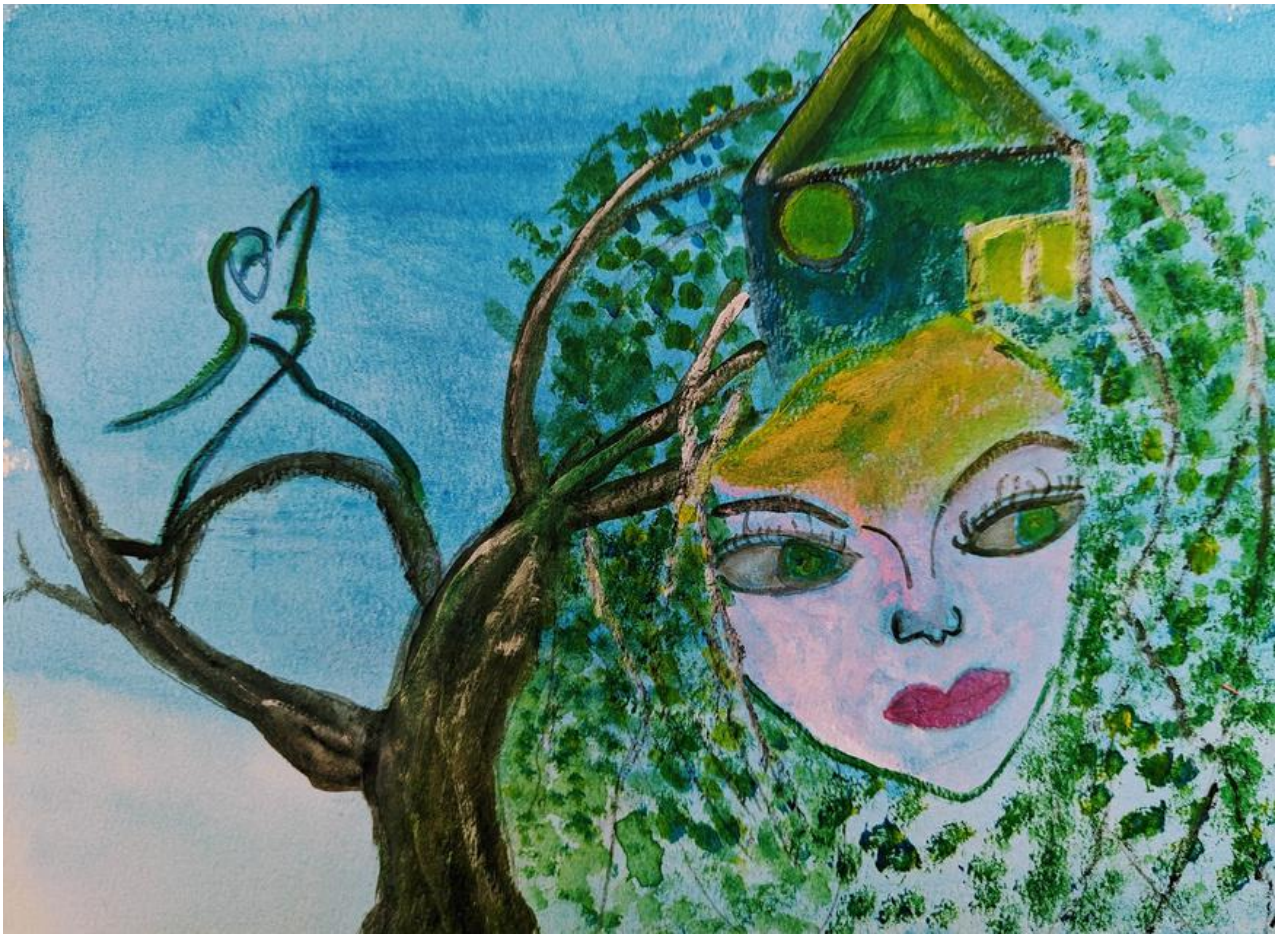
I am a self-taught artist and photographer with nearly a decade of experience in black-and-white photography. Throughout the years, I have explored painting and digital art, reigniting my passion for the visual arts. This journey culminated in the establishment of my art studio, which aims to connect art communities and offer affordable workshops to the public. My artistic practice centers on the interplay between nature and emotion, striving to capture the beauty of the natural world and its resonance with our inner experiences. I frequently utilize black-and-white photographs as references for my paintings, merging traditional techniques with contemporary insights. Committed to lifelong learning, I have embraced digital illustration, particularly focusing on anime art in my spare time to refine my skills and explore new creative possibilities.

Project Statement
Papillon Artelier is proud to present the work of Em.Y, a street photographer and a multidisciplinary artist whose textured acrylic and mixed media paintings explore the intricate relationships between nature, form, and material. Drawing from botanical motifs and environmental rhythms, Em.Y's practice invites viewers into a layered sensory world where the organic and abstract coexist in quiet harmony. Em.Y builds her compositions through an intuitive process of layering, embedding, and sculpting paint and mixed materials—mimicking the natural cycles of growth, erosion, and renewal. Her surfaces pulse with texture and nuance, echoing the complexity of ecosystems while inviting moments of reflection and stillness. Rooted in a deep reverence for the natural world, Em.Y's work responds to both its fragility and resilience. Through her unique visual language, she offers a contemplative space in which viewers are encouraged to reconnect with the environment—not as observers, but as participants in its evolving narrative.



The Woman in the Tree
by **Moona Wu**

Since 2020, South Carolina's housing market had exploded. Prices soared. Yet people kept arriving—from California, from the Northeast—turning it into one of the top ten relocation destinations in the U.S.
My artist friends and I talked about it constantly on Facebook. Some dreamed of selling their homes for big profits. But someone always asked the obvious: If you only have one house, where do you live after selling it? In a tree?
Strangely enough, that turned out not to be such a hypothetical.
Luna and I were part of the same online artist group. She had long dark hair, pale skin, and blue-green eyes. An incredible painter, she worked full-time as an insurance clerk. I met her in person at the 2019 Spring Art Festival, where she sold oil paintings and ceramics under the shade of an oak tree. I bought one of her paintings—a whimsical treehouse—and we exchanged Facebook info, staying in touch ever since.
In early 2021, Luna was stunned when her modest home of ten quiet years suddenly shot up in value by over $100,000. A couple from New Jersey offered cash. She accepted, paid off her debts, and booked a long-dreamed-of art trip to France—from Paris to Provence.
She had always imagined herself painting lavender fields in the open air. Now, she could.
France was everything. She wandered markets, tasted fresh cheeses and wine, and let her inbox collect dust. Then she met a man. He said he was a diplomat. Poetic. Polished. They had long dinners and talked of art, love, and politics. It felt cinematic.
Until the day she passed a small grocery store and saw him inside, wearing a name tag, shelving boxes of pasta.
He turned. Smiled awkwardly.
There was no explanation. None needed.
That night, she painted her betrayal into a piece she titled "Lavender Scam."
Three months later, she returned home to find things worse than she'd left them: her job was gone, and she had nowhere to live.
Her friend Jenny took her in temporarily—she had looked after Luna's cat while she was in France—but Luna didn't want to overstay. She thought she'd buy again once the market cooled. It didn't. Prices continued to rise, and renters had no leverage. She ended up moving into a storage garage she used at the flea market, where she once sold her art.
There was no air conditioning. She had to shower at the gym. The cat seemed better adjusted than she was.
She thought of returning to her father's house. But while she was in France, her parents had quietly come undone.
They'd been high school sweethearts. They had Luna at eighteen. But during the long COVID lockdown, tensions frayed. Her mother moved out, fleeing to her own mother's place in Florida.
Six months later, her father met Mimi. Then Mimi moved in, along with her son and two golden retrievers.
Luna, still in Provence at the time, hadn't known. When she asked if she could stay, her father hesitated. Mimi was allergic to cats.
"Luna," he said gently, "you're thirty-five. I helped with your first house. You chose to sell it. You've got to figure this out."
She had nowhere to go. Her eyes turned to the backyard, to the oak tree where her grandfather had once built her a treehouse for her twelfth birthday.
"I'm not going into your house," she told her father. "I'll live in my treehouse. Grandpa gave it to me."
And she did.
She moved in with her cat and a suitcase. The treehouse was about a hundred square feet—just a bed, a table, a closet. No bathroom. She showered at her father's house, quietly and quickly. Her cat loved it—leaping across branches, tail twitching in the breeze.
From her window, she could see everything.
At night, she saw glimpses of the life she no longer had: Mimi storming into the living room, slamming doors, dogs barking wildly. Luna's old bedroom, once pink and filled with books, was now a child's room. Her pink bed was gone. The image of her mother reading to her beneath that comforter returned, uninvited. Her throat tightened.
In the distance, a forest had vanished—bulldozers replacing creeks, cranes overtaking fox trails. The woods where her family once camped under stars, picking wild muscadine grapes the size of plums, were gone. What had happened to the deer, the turtles, the swans? She had no idea. A community was going up in their place. She didn't know when she'd find her own place on the ground again.
Then came the snow.
It was early 2022, and a rare storm blanketed South Carolina in white. Facebook lit up with snow photos. Friends messaged her: How's the treehouse?
She replied: Using a fireproof heater.
She posted two photos. The treehouse looked like a fairy tale. People called it magical. Luna said only, I hope spring comes soon.
The message was clear. It was beautiful—but it wasn't home.
She sold paintings online—mostly of treehouses now. Childhood memories and daily struggles painted in oil and shadow. Her Etsy listings had titles like "Mortgage Battles from the Canopy," "Life Among the Leaves," and "Perspectives from the Perch." They sold out quickly. One after another.
Then came an email from a gallery in Asheville:
"Are you really living in a tree? Want to exhibit your work?"
She looked at her cat. He blinked at her slowly, smug and satisfied.
That night, from her treehouse window, Luna saw Mimi storm out of the main house again—wine bottle in one hand, leash in the other.
Luna raised her chipped mug.
"To terrible decisions," she whispered, "and excellent views."
She began to pack.
The tree had served its purpose.
Her next stop: a small cottage—with plumbing, laundry, a bathroom, and far fewer squirrels.
Her final Facebook post from the tree read:
"Some people climb the property ladder. I climbed a tree.
Same struggle. Better view."



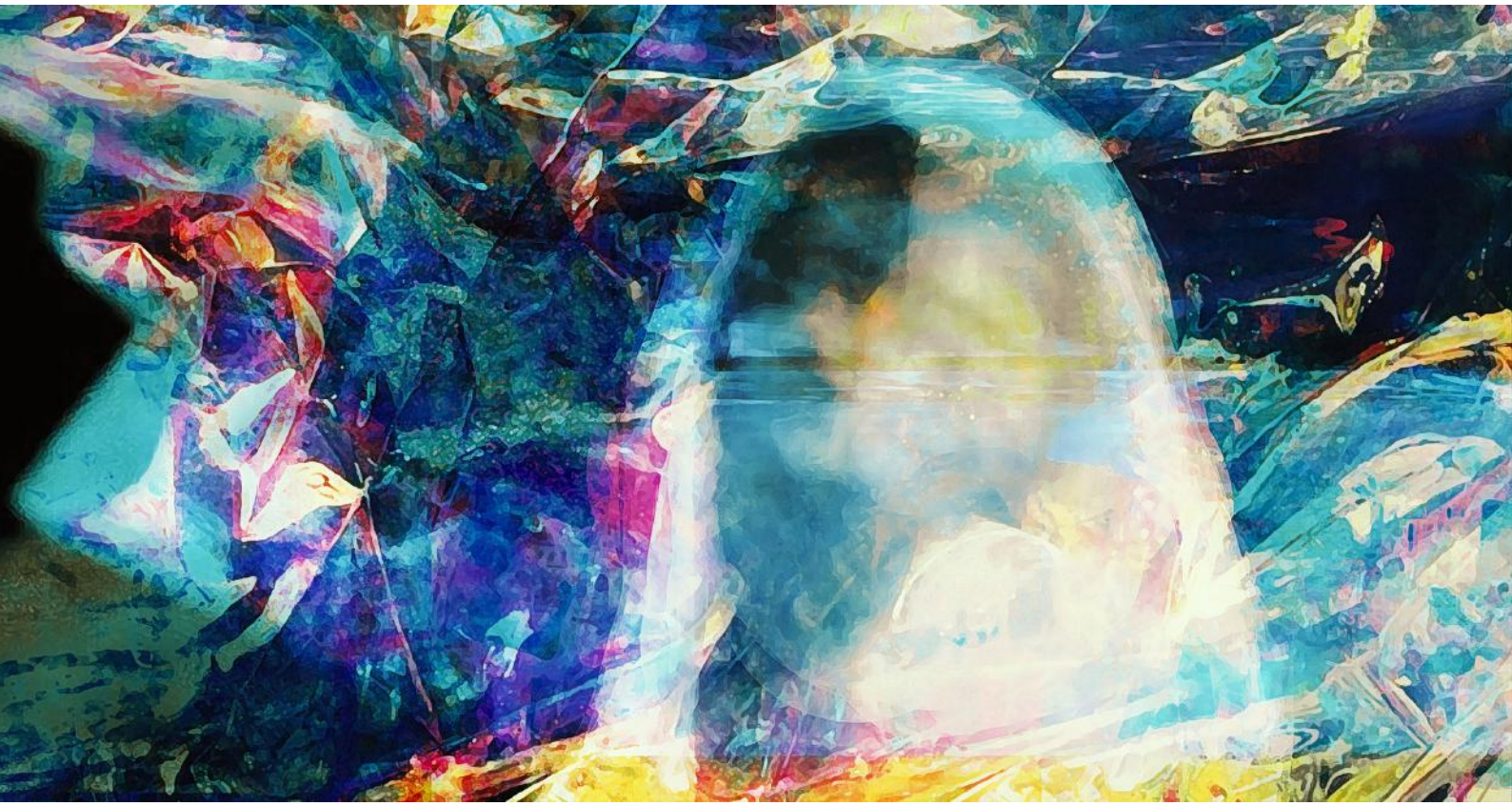
Sapphire Zhang

Sapphire is a London-based artist and researcher focusing on collage and abstract painting as forms of personal and collective healing. Through layering fragmented memories, body images, and emotional landscapes, her work explores self-awareness and resistance to social norms. Her practice combines visual art with therapeutic intention, aiming to create spaces for emotional release and reflection.

Project Statement

My work explores self-image, memory, and emotional healing through abstract painting and collage. By layering fragmented forms and blurred figures, I reflect on personal rituals of self-acceptance and challenge social norms around beauty and the female body.

Sapphire Zhang | Mirror Without Permission



Sapphire Zhang | Sapphire in White

Inaya Zaheer

I was born on November 22, 1998 in Washington DC. My father is from India and my mother is originally from Bangladesh but was born in Providence Rhode Island and grew up in Connecticut. I have a sister who is 2 years younger. My family and I moved to New Delhi, India when I was 2 and a half years old and we lived there for 6 years. We moved back to Washington DC when I was 8 years old and stayed there for 3 years before moving back to India for 1 year. After that we moved to Bangkok, Thailand for 2 years, then Vancouver, Canada for 7 years, and now I've been living in New York City for 3 years. I spent less than 1 year studying fine art at Langara College in Vancouver, deciding to stop when COVID pandemic started. In addition to a visual artist, I am studying North Indian classical dance called Kathak as well as North Indian classical and Bengali vocal music. I have loved art for as long as I can remember. I've always enjoyed drawing and painting ever since I was a child. It's always been something that I find very grounding and representative of the artist as a person. Everything that I do comes from the heart and not the head.

Project Statement

I'll let the drawings speak for themselves.

Inaya Zaheer | Aquamarine | 2025

Inaya Zaheer | Womanhood | 2025

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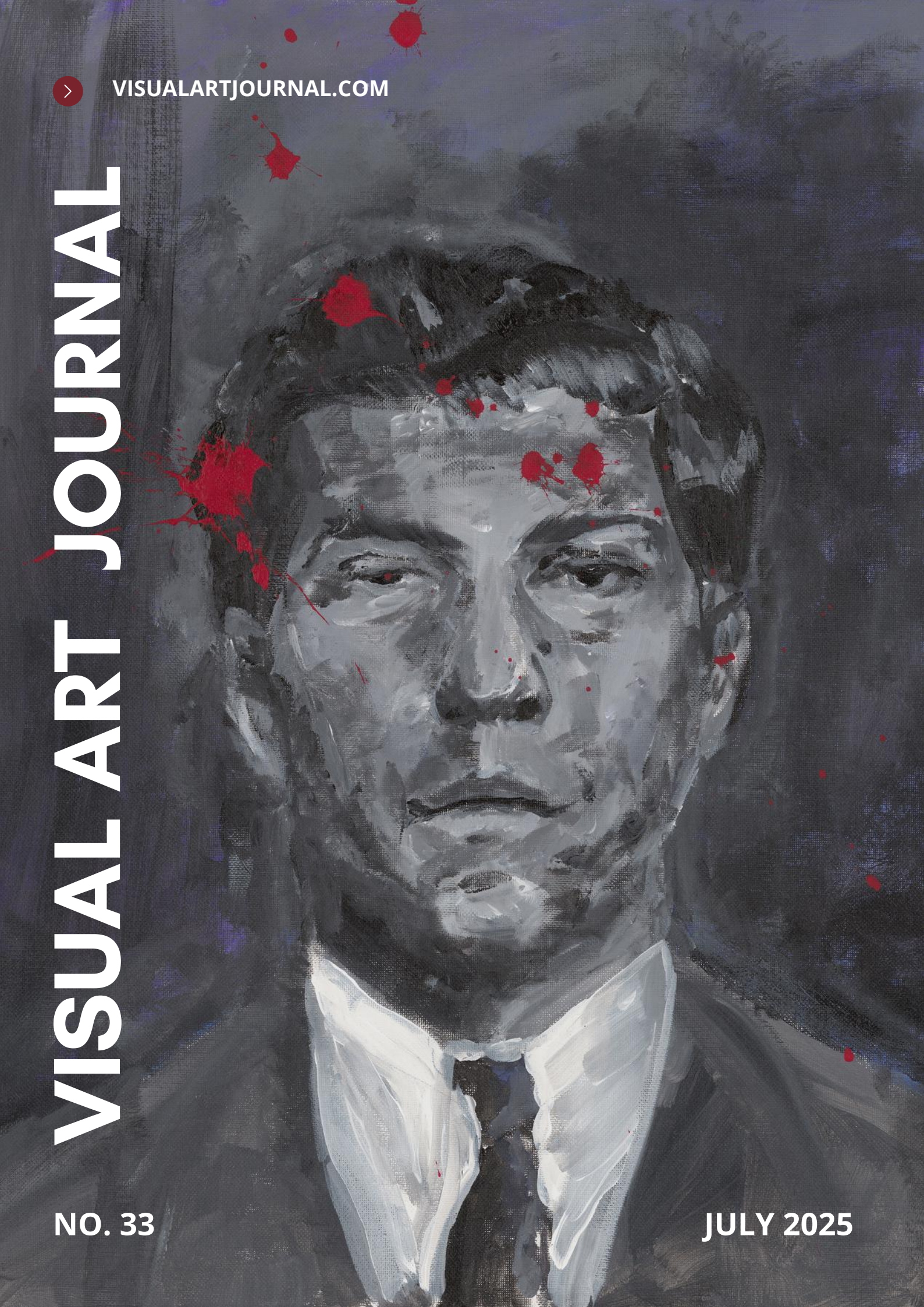

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