

# VISUAL ART JOURNAL







# — Intro

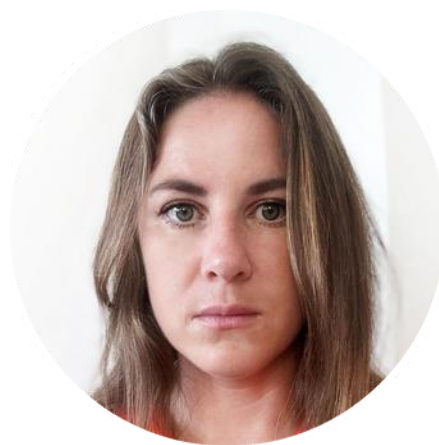
Hello, dear reader!

In your hands is the 25th issue of our magazine — and with it, an endless ocean of human creativity. Here you'll find works from a wide array of authors: some strikingly original, others inspired by existing ideas — yet all of them are heartfelt messages, reflections of their creators' inner worlds.

Thought, imagination, inspiration — they're all shaped through dialogue with the world around us. We inevitably absorb the influence of others, but does that make our creations any less our own? I believe that anything which did not exist before and was brought to life by the author's hand is already unique. For in every creation, there is a fragment of the author's soul — unless, of course, we are speaking of a mere commercial copy.

As you turn the pages of this issue, you'll encounter familiar echoes, recognizable references, and perhaps even things you never imagined could be brought to life.

I, in turn, wish you a pleasant reading experience. Thank you for being with us!



**Anna Gvozdeva**

Curator of  
Visual Art Journal

*On the Front Cover:*

**Jenny Wang**

Childhood Vacation  
2012

*On the Back Cover:*

**Alina Herzau**

Doppel  
2025

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

**Ayodeji Kingsley** is a Nigerian-born artist based in the Derby, United Kingdom who predominantly works with metal in his sculptures. Ayodeji has a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and a master's in environmental control and assessment from the University of Derby in the United Kingdom. Ayodeji's artistic side was awakened at a young age, and he excelled in fine and creative art throughout his basic and secondary education. Over the years, he has developed his own imaginative and conceptual mind through drawing, paranomasia, making graphic illustrations and, most recently, sculpting. Initially, to supplement his income during university, his digital art practice began as a creative outlet and source of extra cash. However, the act of creation was far more than a mere means to an end. After completing his first degree, he consciously transitioned from a part-time pursuit to a dedicated artistic career by taking tutelage from artists in the country, self-development, and attending exhibitions. As a passionate environmentalist/artist motivated by a deep fascination with salvaged metals' raw power and inherent beauty, Ayodeji has worked on a pre-existing art concept but a different expression lens. He has thought through and taught the magnificent use of what others see as waste, bringing them together in the praxis of pleasing aesthetics to express familiar ideas and entities such as animals, tools, items and lots more. He transforms discarded machinery, tools, and industrial detritus into evocative sculptures that explore themes of decay, rebirth, and the cyclical nature of existence. Ayodeji Kingsley infuses mediums to facilitate an interface between the subject and the viewer. Ayodeji draws inspiration from various sources, including everyday situations, nature, personal beliefs, and communication with other artists. The principal themes in his works are surrealism, paranomasia and deeply entrenched African Proverbs. He strives to express these elements in his psychological approach to his artistic expression—a perfect reflection of the evolving and kaleidoscopic world around us. Throughout his career, Ayodeji has created a remarkable body of work that has received widespread recognition. His works have been shown in a variety of shows and galleries, both online and in person, across the globe. He has completed several commissioned works, including public sculptures in his home country, Nigeria. His work has captivated audiences across multiple platforms.







*Ayodeji Kingsley*



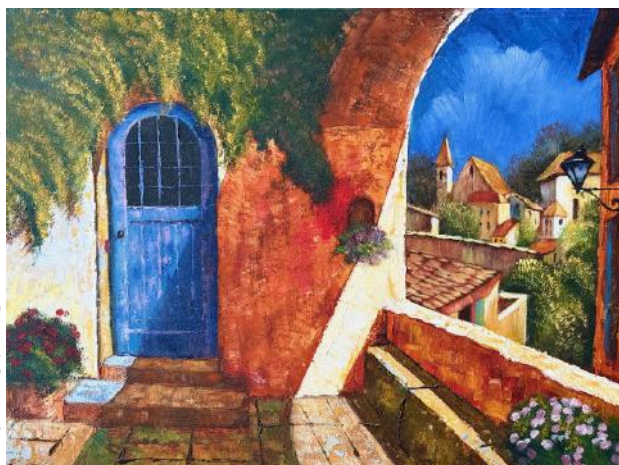
## — Interview

# Jenny Wang

**You started your artistic journey at a very young age. Can you tell us more about how your early experiences shaped your current art practice?**

Art has been my closest companion since childhood. In the early years, my focus was on exploring different techniques and understanding the basics. As I've grown, sketching, painting, and photography have become powerful tools for expressing my emotions and inner world.

I'm grateful for the strong foundation built during those early lessons, which shaped my approach to both painting and photography. Experimenting with sketching and mixed media at a young age taught me to see art as a conversation between imagination and material. Those formative experiences sparked a deep curiosity for visual storytelling—something that continues to drive my multidisciplinary practice today.



Jenny Wang | Imagine A Better World | 2014



I cherish the freedom I had as a 4-year-old, creating without rules or expectations. Looking back, I realize that this unfiltered, instinctive creativity is one of the most beautiful and precious aspects of making art.

**Your project statement emphasizes art's potential to bring people together and spark meaningful change. Can you share how you incorporate these ideals into your artwork?**

My goal is to integrate community voices directly into my work. I believe that art can be a powerful tool for addressing social issues, raising awareness, sparking conversations, and inspiring action by challenging societal norms and giving voice to marginalized groups.



**Could you walk us through your creative process? How do you approach a new piece, whether it's a painting, a photograph, or a model shoot?**

Inspiration often comes to me unexpectedly. I've learned to quickly capture these moments of insight and jotting them down on paper or in my sketchbook before they slip away. From there, I begin to draw out my thoughts and inspirations.

**With a background in Business and HCI, how do you think these fields influence your artistic vision, especially in terms of communication and interaction?**

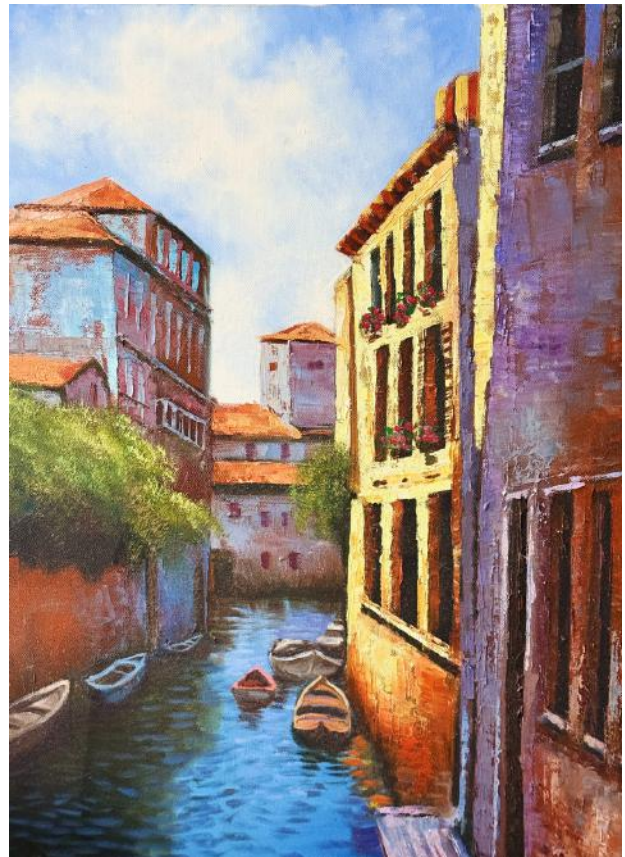
As learning and understanding more about HCI, it has opened my eyes to the interactive possibilities of art. It has taught me to think about the viewer not as a passive observer, but as an active participant or even co-creators of artwork.

Through this perspective, art becomes a dialogue rather than a monologue.

My background in Business and HCI has deeply enriched my artistic vision by encouraging me to think critically about how people engage with visuals, narratives, and experiences.



Jenny Wang | Blooming Dream | 2021



Jenny Wang | Childhood Vacation | 2012

**Photography seems to play an important role in your practice. How do you see photography complementing or enhancing your other art forms, like painting or modeling?**

Photography plays a vital role in my creative process—it serves as a bridge between the fleeting and the timeless. Before discovering photography, I was deeply rooted in sketching and painting. This fine art background gave me a strong foundation, allowing me to approach photography with a trained eye and an intuitive sense of composition.

I've found that skills in photography and modeling often enhance or complete one another. Experienced photographers tend to understand form and gesture, just as skilled models are attuned to visual storytelling and framing.

When I'm painting or working with modeling materials, I often draw inspiration from the textures, lighting, and compositions I observe through the camera lens.

With my own eyes, I find quiet moments of beauty in the mundane. Through photography, I preserve these fragments and invite others to feel how I observe the world — to connect with the emotion embedded in the ordinary.



## Emily Ricciardiello

I am a multidisciplinary artist born and based in London. My work centres around aspects of the human form, looking at bodily autonomy, transformation of self, and the relationship between the physical body and the psyche. I have been influenced by visceral, body-horror aesthetics and inspired by films from the Cronenbergian canon. Working primarily with clay, I use its malleable properties to mirror the raw essence of human flesh. Through sculptural forms that evoke grotesque metamorphosis—amalgamations of shedding, distortion, and decay—I aim to confront the viewer with bodies in distress: too altered to return to their original state.

### *Project Statement*

Untitled

10x10cm

Clay and plaster

This piece displays a grotesque metamorphosis— an amalgamation of shedding, distortion, and decay—I aim to confront the viewer with bodies in distress: too altered to return to their original state. If the self is changed beyond recognition, does it survive, or is something entirely new born in its place?









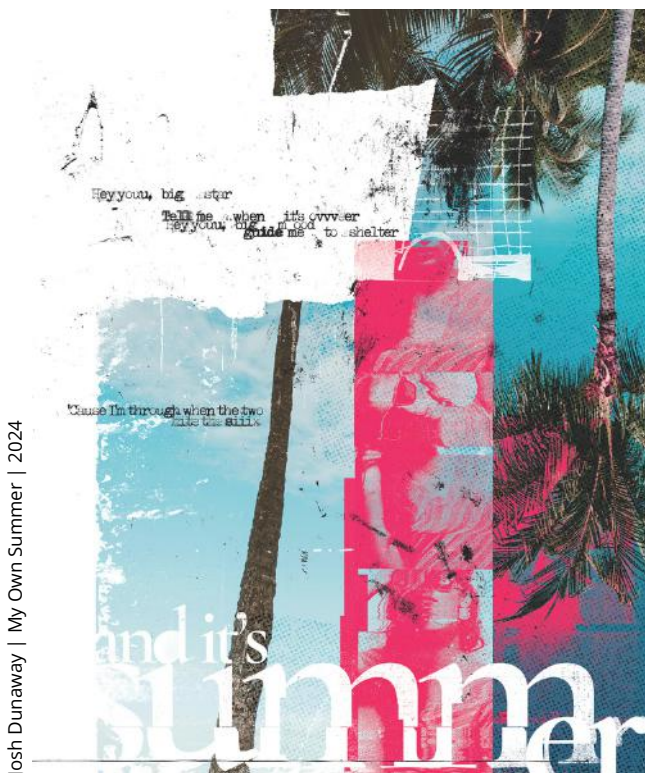
## — Interview

# Josh Dunaway

**Your work is a blend of analog textures and digital precision. Can you tell us more about how you balance these two mediums in your creative process?**

The balance comes from seeing both mediums as tools that work together rather than as opposing forces. Analog textures — whether it's paint splatters, concrete textures, or something more chaotic like distorted scans — all bring this unpredictability and rawness that I love. The digital side allows me to shape and manipulate those textures, and use them to destroy or “rough up” the pristine-pixels of digital photos and vector typography.

**How has your background in graphic design, branding, and web development influenced your artistic practice and the way you approach art?**



Josh Dunaway | My Own Summer | 2024



Design over the years has taught me how to be intentional with every element on a page. Branding has encouraged me to think about voice and identity, while web development has given me an appreciation for structure and interactivity. I feel like all of that shows up in my art, even when I'm working in a more expressive or abstract/grunge style. There's always a layer of strategy underneath the surface guiding the “chaos” in my work.

**You embrace imperfection and individuality in your work. How do these values manifest in your designs and artworks?**

Honestly, one of the main reasons I love grunge is because of the imperfections. All of us are flawed people, but we try to mask it and “put on our best face” for the world each new day. That's exhausting. My artwork lets me break free from all of those constraints and, in a way, lets me lay bare my own imperfections for all to see. I also think there's something beautiful about the marks and elements that can't be replicated, like scratches, dripping paint, torn edges, distorted scans. I want my artwork to feel like it came from a real place, like it has fingerprints or a soul — not just “nice and neat” or striving for perfection. And whether I'm building a brand for a client or creating a collage, I always try my best to let some of that rawness come through however I can.

**Your portfolio features grunge-inspired visuals and handmade typefaces. What draws you to**



**these specific styles, and how do they reflect your personal artistic vision?**

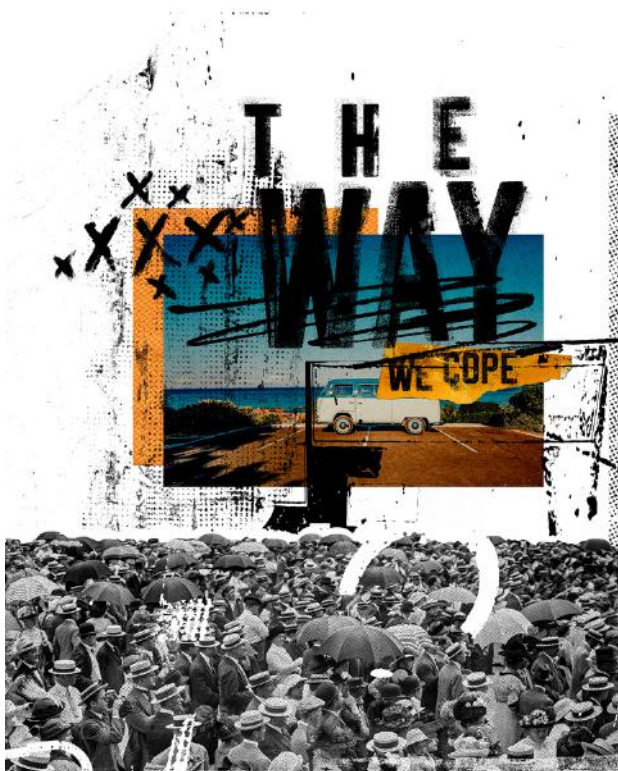
Grunge, to me, is the visual language of resistance. It pushes back against polish and conformity, and against what we're supposed to be molded into to "fit in" with society. I've always been drawn to things that feel a little broken, a little loud, and a little "rough around the edges." I just really enjoy creating things that feel like they've lived too, like they have their own history and a story to tell just from how they look.

**As someone with a long history in the creative industry, how have your influences and creative techniques evolved over the years?**

Early on, I was obsessed with clean grids and minimalism because that's what I thought "good design" had to be. Don't get me wrong, there's absolutely nothing wrong with that and I still love and admire minimalism. But as I matured in my work, I started gravitating toward the things that felt more visceral. I started experimenting with collage, hand-drawn type, and more experimental layouts. I still respect structure, but now I use it as a starting point — not a boundary. Over the years I've just learned to trust my instincts more and embrace the imperfections.

**How do you approach storytelling in your visual work? Can you share a specific example where**

Josh Dunaway | The Way We Cope | 2024



Josh Dunaway | Time Is A Thief | 2024

**your art conveyed a powerful narrative?**

For me, storytelling isn't always linear. It's about creating a feeling, a memory, or even sometimes a sense of unease.

One piece that stands out was part of a collage series I did last year. The whole series dealt with the passing of time. For this particular piece, I used layers of handwritten text, torn typography, and some vivid photography to remind people that time slips through our fingers even as life races towards the future — so try to always be present in the moment as much as you can. People connected to it in different ways, and I love when a piece gives just enough room for someone to find their own meaning inside it.

**Your work spans both print and digital mediums. Do you have a preference for one over the other, or do you find that both offer unique opportunities for expression?**

Well, they each bring something different to the table. Print has this permanence to it. It's tangible, textural, and has weight. On the other hand, digital lets me create a bit faster and explore some techniques I might not be able to accomplish off of the computer. I honestly don't think I could ever pick one over the other, so I'll likely always try to bridge the gap between them with the things I create.



## TEZMA

I'm based in London. I'm self taught, and I have been painting for as long as I can remember. Generally, my influences tend to seep in subconsciously. I like the juxtaposition of bright colours and usually dark imagery and the slightly absurd. I currently seem to have a fascination with esoteric imagery, 1950s Sci/fi, classic pop and Asian culture. My work tends to have a darker subtext and pieces tend to be based around my personal life experiences and are metaphorical. I think there's definitely a sort of catharsis taking place when I paint. After I finish a piece I tend to feel a little lost until I start the next. I work using acrylic or oil and I never use digital media. I want to continue to push myself technically to achieve more complex and interesting paintings.









## — Interview

# Vasil Akulov

**Can you tell us more about the inspiration behind your "Red Book. Animals" project and how you selected the animals to feature?**

This project is my personal response to the sixth mass extinction currently unfolding due to human activity. I approached the Red Book as a cold, documentary record of our blindness—devoid of emotion or pain, just lists of disappearing creatures.

I chose animals that have become symbols of the ecological crisis: the blue whale (a giant we've still managed to push to the brink), the polar bear (a living barometer of climate collapse), Grevy's zebra (whose habitat we've turned into grazing land). But what matters most is what I cut out—the absence of their



Vasil Akulov | Golden Eagle | 2024



offspring. This isn't just empty space; it's a question: Whose silhouettes will vanish next?

**Your work frequently explores the relationship between humans and nature. How do you see your art as a reflection of humanity's role in ecological responsibility?**

I don't believe in art as a sermon. My works aren't accusations—they're mirrors. When a viewer sees a canvas with the silhouette of a bear cub cut out, they instinctively try to "complete" the image—only to confront impossibility. That's the moment when extinction statistics become personal. In Red Book, I deliberately avoid bloody scenes or shocking imagery. Emptiness is more powerful—it forces people to realize what we've already lost without noticing.

**The technique of cutting out silhouettes of animals is a powerful metaphor. What significance does this method hold for you, and how do you believe it impacts the viewer's understanding of extinction?**

Cutting is a physical act of destruction, one I perform as an artist. The knife becomes a metaphor for human



intervention—we are literally carving species out of ecosystems.

But what remains—the hole in the canvas—is what truly matters. It:

- Changes under different lighting (like our fading memory of lost species)
- Lets you see through the work (as if peering into an empty future)
- Makes the viewer complicit—they involuntarily try to "fill" the void with their gaze

This isn't a metaphor for disappearance—it's a direct demonstration of it.

**Your work has a monochromatic palette, which is quite different from the psychedelic colors used by Andy Warhol in his endangered species series. Why did you choose this more somber color scheme, and what effect do you hope it has on the viewer?**

Warhol turned endangered animals into pop icons. I see them as ghosts.

Black and white:

- References scientific illustrations (as if these works were archival records)
- Creates emotional distance—we're used to seeing nature in color; its absence unsettles
- Focuses attention on form and emptiness, not decoration

Color would be a lie here. These works should feel like obituaries.

**In your statement, you mentioned that "the killing of animals becomes equivalent to a collective suicide of humanity." Could you elaborate on what you mean by this, and how it relates to your personal worldview?**

This isn't hyperbole—it's biological reality. By:



Vasil Akulov | Caucasian Tortoise | 2024



Vasil Akulov | Snowy Owl | 2024

- Destroying pollinators, we lose a third of our food supply
- Hunting predators to extinction, we trigger disease outbreaks
- Polluting oceans, we poison our own food chain

My project Reflection (with oil spills) shows this literally: by poisoning water, we end up drinking it.

**How do you think art can contribute to environmental change, particularly in terms of raising awareness about issues like deforestation, climate change, and the extinction of species?**

Art can't replace laws or technology, but it can:

- Personalize statistics (one missing silhouette is more memorable than numbers)
- Create emotional anchors (like Banksy's imagery does for social issues)
- Make connections visible (e.g., my porcelain sculptures, reassembled from shards—a metaphor for fragile recovery)

The goal isn't to shock—it's to make people feel the loss.

**What role does design play in your artistic practice, and how do you balance your background in industrial and architectural design with your more conceptual artistic works?**

Design taught me:

- To work with emptiness (the spacing between animals in Red Book is calculated like a memorial)
- The ergonomics of perception (viewers "read" a piece in seconds—every element must function)

But I break these rules: cracks in ceramics, torn edges—reminders that nature doesn't obey our grids.



**Alanna Grayce Campbell** is a lifelong artist, with a love for creativity in every form. She is passionate about the use of color, story-telling, and aesthetics. Largely self-taught, a natural eye for composition and keen sense of movement can often be found in her work. More than anything, Alanna loves to create something beautiful. Alanna, her partner, and their dog, Wynn, live on Florida's East Coast, where she is constantly inspired by the beauty of nature.

### *Project Statement*

"She Was Just A Girl" is a representation of the legendary Medusa, before she became a monster to be feared and hunted by men. She is shown here as a young woman, much as she would have been when she was assaulted by Poseidon on the steps of Athena's temple. She wears a dress accurate to the early Greek world; after her myth rose in popularity, this specific style of dress would often be pinned together with buttons bearing Medusa's likeness. The snakes that replaced her beautiful hair are vipers; after Medusa was slain by Perseus, he flew her severed head over the Sahara Desert. Legend says that vipers were born from the blood drops that fell. Finally, hellebores rain down behind her; a bloom, native to the Mediterranean, which was used by the ancient Greeks both in medicine and in poison. A flower of duality, much like Medusa's myth itself. Was she turned into a monster, out of jealousy and spite? Was she turned into a weapon, to defend herself and represent safety? Athena's reasoning may be unclear today, but what we do know is this- before she was any of those things, she was just a girl.





Alanna Grayce Campbell | She Was Just A Girl



My name is **Olesea Albu**. I graduated with honors from the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts (AMTAP) in Chişinău, earning a Master's degree in Scenography and Costume Design for Theatre and Film. My journey in art began at the age of 13 with painting and drawing, later continuing at an art college where I specialized in the restoration of easel and oil paintings. Over time, my practice evolved into scenography, where painterly forms transformed into spatial compositions for the stage. In my work, I explore the plasticity of the human body and its interaction with space: figures dissolve into emptiness or crystallize in sharp linear contrasts, creating a tension between stillness and movement. I am the recipient of the Artist of the Year 2025 award (Florence, Italy), the author of two solo exhibitions, and a participant in over 20 international group projects. Working as a scenographer and costume designer in theatrical productions in Moldova, I translated painterly techniques into stage design. Additionally, I am an intern at the Union of Romanian Artists, and my work has been featured in various newspapers and press outlets. Today, I merge traditional techniques with digital technologies, experimenting with materials and forms. In my studio, oil brushes coexist with AR installations, as art becomes a search for a new dialogue between the inner and the outer. "To me, art is the moment when reality cracks open, revealing another dimension. It is not a rebellion against tradition, but its reinterpretation through the lens of today."

#### *Artist Statement*

Every time I touch the palette, I return to myself — to the one who might have vanished had I not once opened my heart to art. My work is a journey of falls, ascents, and healing, where paint becomes alchemy, transforming personal experience into universal emotion. My name is Olesea. I am an artist from Moldova, working at the intersection of figurative painting and abstraction. The landscapes of the southeast, where I grew up, are not my subject but an impulse: their contrasts of light, textures, and sharp lines form the foundation of my visual language, bridging the rigor of academic tradition with rebellion against literalism. After graduating in scenography from the Academy of Music, Theatre, and Fine Arts (Chisinau), I learned to craft narratives — now they live in my paintings, turning canvases into spaces for dialogue between the viewer and the idea. My shift from realism to abstraction was not a break but a liberation. By dismantling form, I sought to express what lies beyond the visible: the tension between human fragility and resilience, inner conflicts, and strength. Thick impasto techniques, glazes, bold palette knife strokes, and delicate brushwork — these layers capture life's contradictions. Blurred backgrounds dissolve to illuminate what matters: the interplay of light and shadow, the gesture of an archetypal figure, the choreography of symbols in an ephemeral void. By stripping away the superfluous, I leave room for the viewer's question: what remains when form disappears? Each of my works is a stage where texture becomes metaphor. Inspired by the harmony of antiquity, Warhol's pop art, Marina Abramović raw vulnerability, and the quiet dramaturgy of theatrical space, I hybridize symbols to provoke a confrontation with the self. My works are held in private collections across Europe, the UK, and the US, and have been exhibited in galleries that value the dialogue between tradition and avant-garde. But what matters most to me is to create a space where the viewer, like my past self, permits oscillation — between heart and mind, control and surrender, the earthly and the boundless.



Olesea Albu | The game of buffoons | 2023





Olesia Albu | The woman and the bull | 2023

## — Interview

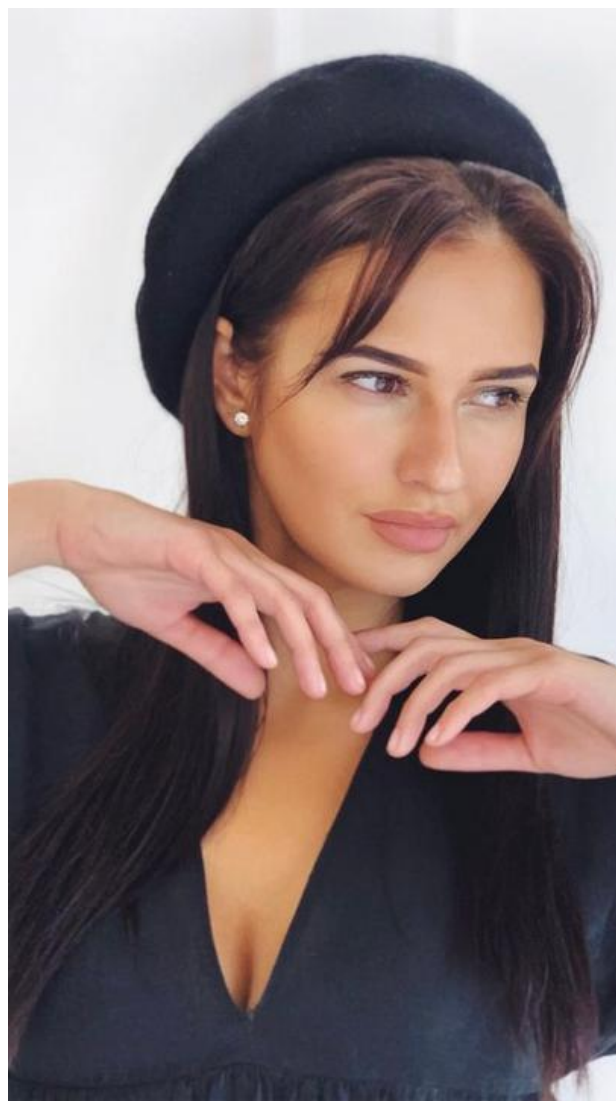
# Margarita Timofeeva

**Your early involvement in various creative activities, from knitting to drawing and clay modeling, shows your broad artistic interests. How did these early experiences shape your current art practice?**

I am sure that every single activity contributed to my creative practice in its own way. I attended all possible extra-curricular classes, every day after school and even on weekends. This gave me the opportunity to try and compare different art forms from an early age and find the one that suited me the best. To this day, I remember each of my teachers with warmth and gratitude. Thanks to this experience, I confidently take on new ideas.

**You've mentioned that you used to have difficulty keeping up with school due to your many extracurricular activities. Do you think that same energy is now channeled into your artistic projects?**

For my parents, grades at school were not the top priority. This is what helped me develop a



desire to do what I love and gave me a certain sense of freedom. Some subjects were difficult for me, but the creative ones came easily. So, there was still a balance.

**Your education in fashion design seems to have influenced your creative journey. How do you incorporate the knowledge of design into your current works, especially in your abstract pieces?**

Of course, education provides its benefits and experience. However, often in colleges and universities, we are taught according to certain templates and programs. I believe that design doesn't fit into templates but should go beyond them. That is why I did not continue this direction after my studies. Perhaps, in the future, I will try my hand at design again.

**What drives you to explore different mediums such as photography, clay sculpting,**



**and painting? Do you feel that each medium allows you to express something different about yourself or the world around you?**

I'm interested in trying something new. Perhaps this variety gives me energy. Even the most beloved activity can sometimes become boring. So, each new hobby keeps the old ones fresh. They complement each other. By changing activities, my outlook expands, more thoughts come, more ideas, and consequently, more motivation. As for comparing all these activities, I would say that I wouldn't be able to express all my thoughts and views of the world in just painting. Often, interesting shots come from unexpected places. Recently, I started writing a book. I realized that even the activities mentioned above may not always express something important or explain an idea in such depth...

**Could you tell us more about the competition photography you are involved in? How does it differ from your personal painting work, and what do you aim to communicate through your photographs?**

My paintings are abstract. I don't go on plein airs or make nature sketches. So, my alternative is the camera. I shoot on my phone, camera, and film. It's important for me to see the beauty in the world, in the moment. I love travel photography and want to share it. That's why I try not to miss various competitions and exhibitions.



Margarita Timofeeva | My Inner Child | 2024



Margarita Timofeeva | Expression | 2024

**You've shared that you dream of holding a personal exhibition at a well-known gallery. What do you hope to convey through your exhibition and how would you like your audience to feel?**

Yes, I am actively working towards this goal. I hope that one day this will happen not only in painting but also in photography. I would like people to see a completely different approach to the works. They might see paintings that are unlike anything they've seen before. Works that might provoke new thoughts and ideas in them.

**Your abstract works seem to evoke a lot of emotion. Can you walk us through your creative process when starting a new painting? How do you decide on the colors and the abstract forms?**

I love experimenting, using bright colors and confident strokes. Perhaps this is something that is sometimes lacking in everyday life, so I bring it into my work. First, I decide on the size, using canvases from 80 cm. I choose the color palette, additional materials, and begin to create. I usually prepare ideas in advance, but sometimes they come during the process.



**Michelle Sanz** (b. 1996, Chiapas, Mexico) is a visual artist with a degree from the National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving "La Esmeralda" in Mexico City. Specializing in painting, her work explores the intricate relationship between humanity and nature, envisioning a fictional world where these elements intertwine. She focuses on anthropomorphism and the mimicry of nature through disguises, examining how humans attribute their traits to other living beings and vice versa. Michelle was nominated for the Social Art Award (2021) by The Institute for Art and Innovation in Berlin and has received grants like "El Arte Ayuda" (2020) and the Legacy Santander Scholarship (2019). Her work has been exhibited in group shows, including "Autorretrato" at Fotogenia Film Festival (2023) and "5 Generations in Longer Captivity" at UNAM Cultural Center (2022). She is currently studying Media Design in Germany as part of an Ausbildung program.

#### *Artist Statement*

Michelle Sanz's artistic work explores the various aspects of the relationship between humans and nature. She visualizes this relationship in both the present and future to examine the spaces where it unfolds, creating a window into a fictional world where both elements are intertwined. In her personal cosmogony, she aims to showcase the synergistic effects of these elements, as well as the possibilities of form, color, and texture in the objects and concepts that mediate this relationship. Her current work (2022-present) focuses on anthropomorphism and mimicking nature through artifices, specifically disguise. She is interested in exploring human attempts to project their characteristics onto other living beings, for instance, in literary representations with their own visual imagery, like fables, and the opposite effect when humans attribute properties from other natural species to themselves. She uses disguise as a starting point because it embodies different motivations and rituals through which identities have been culturally constructed, making it an intriguing subject to examine in the context of this relationship. Her goal is to digest these observable phenomena and provide them with a reflective space in her painting practice, highlighting acts that we have normalized but that strongly speak to the current state of this important human/nature relationship. Paradoxically, she also intends to emphasize that humans do not suffer from otherness; rather, they are themselves natural phenomena like any other. Thus, the separation between artifice and naturalness is illusory and perhaps an outdated concept.







Michelle Sanz | Carry me with you | 2023



## — Interview

# Nicky Hiscox

**Can you elaborate on the concept of Captcha and its relationship to the human/non-human distinction in your work?**

Captcha stands for “Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart”. The technology is often overlooked by humans who are typically successful in completing the task presented to them by the computer. It's not uncommon for people to be annoyed by the task because they have no doubt that they are human, and the irony of proving themselves to a computer is not lost on them. As technology evolves, the same computers that ask us to prove our humanness to them are getting better at appearing human themselves. With this project, I wanted to pull from the non-human elements of cybersecurity to contrast and emphasize the human feelings and experiences that are explored in the etchings.

**What inspired you to use mirrors as the surface for your project, and how does this element tie into your exploration of identity?**



Nicky Hiscox | I am not a robot | 2025



People are naturally drawn to their reflections for practical or psychological reasons. I chose to use mirrors as the surface for my project because I wanted viewers to be captivated and drawn closer, either by their own reflection or simply by the way the space shifts in the mirror. I also haven't made much text-based art before this, so I was unsure of my ability to capture the viewer's attention with text alone. I'm not an expert on the science behind it, but mirrors have connections to psychological and emotional development. I wanted to intervene on these aspects of identity by putting phrases on the mirrors that pull from similar connections.

**In your statement, you mentioned themes of existentialism and identity. How do you feel these philosophical ideas manifest in your etchings?**

The etchings act as a barrier between yourself and your reflection in the mirror. To focus on yourself in the reflection means first adjusting to the etching that stands in the way. I find that the eye either tries to separate the reflection from the etchings, or combine them into a single image. It feels like a kind of internalizing process; by facing the phrase, you can connect with it and give it meaning. Whether this is a comfortable or uncomfortable process is personal to the viewer, and speaks to their individual experience.

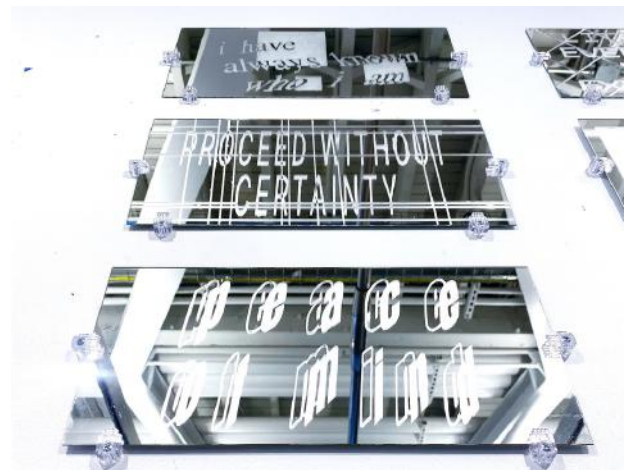
**Your work seems to draw from both the digital and the physical realms. How do you balance these two different worlds in your creative process?**



My process almost always begins in a digital landscape, using 3D modelling or image-editing software to “sketch” my ideas before bringing them into the physical world. I find it easier to plan my ideas in this way because there are very few limitations in a digital space, and I am still able to consider practical elements such as scale and material. If I can test my technological skills in the digital and then try to translate those skills into the physical realm, it becomes a really intriguing process for me. For this project, I created stencils of my phrases and distorted them in Photoshop to give them each a unique look based on various text-based Captcha techniques. I printed the stencil onto sticker paper, pasted it onto the mirror, and cut away the pieces I wanted etched in the final piece. The etching gel sometimes came off patchy, which wasn’t intentional, but letting the materials do what they want is a part of working with physical or traditional techniques. It’s quite a contrast to the “perfection” that comes with working digitally, and humbling for a perfectionist like me.

**The distorted phrases in your work evoke a sense of security and identity. Can you explain how the specific words or phrases you choose impact the viewer's perception?**

The etched phrases speak to a range of feelings or experiences. This was important to me because I wasn’t sure which phrases viewers would connect with the most. I wanted to give the viewer many opportunities to find a connection between themselves and the work. In some cases, the connections might be uncomfortable. Some of the phrases are more personal to me, so I find the connections to be nostalgic or comforting. I wanted a variety so that the piece could offer a bit of “tough love” that you might only get from someone you trust. My drawing instructor pointed me to Jenny Holzer’s Truisms (1978–87), insightful and thought-provoking one-liners that served as inspiration for my project.



Nicky Hiscox | I am not a robot | 2025

**Given the rise of AI and its ability to mimic human characteristics, do you think Captcha technology will evolve further, and how might that influence your future work?**

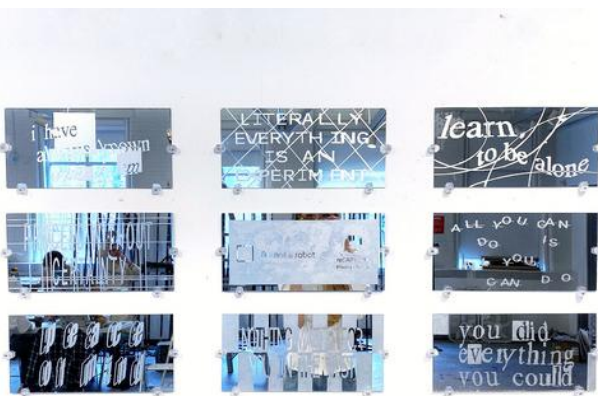
There is no doubt that Captcha technology will require improvements to keep up with the capabilities of AI. I think it will be interesting to see how Captcha moves from visual identifications (such as text- or image-based) to more cognitive and behavioural tests. It all feels increasingly ironic, and I think my future work will take this perspective as well. As much as I love technology, it can be hard to watch it become so connected to the human experience, particularly in the case of AI.

**Mirrors traditionally symbolize self-reflection. How do you feel your work challenges or reinforces this symbolism through the distorted Captcha text?**

The text itself is entirely inspired by self-reflection. Distorting the text could speak to the challenge of understanding the significance of a feeling or experience. It also gives the viewer the challenge of deciphering the Captcha, as if doing so grants them access to greater understanding or the ability to consider how a feeling or experience has impacted them. Of course, this process is not explicitly taking place, but the mirror as a symbol of self-reflection helps to ground the varied meanings of the distorted text.

Ultimately, the project is a little self-indulgent as each phrase speaks to me in different ways. “All you can do is all you can do” is what my mother tells me in moments of overwhelm. “Learn to be alone” is a lesson I was faced with after moving away from my hometown during a pandemic. “Literally everything is an experiment” is just something to tell myself when I’m trying something new. Looking through these phrases to see myself in the mirror is a reminder that “I have always known who I am.”

Nicky Hiscox | I am not a robot | 2025





## Rim Slaoui

I am a multidisciplinary artist who loves experimenting with different techniques to illustrate "basic human emotions". As I explore different approaches to mixed media art, I'm not afraid to let my creative process show through in the final product. Similarly to my paintings, my photography practice seeks to abstract reality and reduce captured moments to a liminal space for the psyche: the colourful, abstracted close-ups of urban elements are an ode to the solitary mind's obsessive internal monologues, at once quiet and dynamic. I obtained a B.F.A. at the University of Ottawa (Canada), where I specialized in Painting / Drawing. I currently reside in Toronto, Canada.







Rim Slaoui | Through | 2018



# — Interview

## Kono Mae

**You grew up in an international environment, but later sought to reconnect with your Japanese heritage. How did this journey influence your artistic style and creative expression?**

Although I was raised in an international environment, I began seeking reconnection with my Japanese roots out of a growing sense of discomfort and inner conflict about not truly knowing my own country. From a young age, I attended international schools and spent my days learning alongside friends from diverse backgrounds. Naturally, I was seen as “Japanese,” but when asked about Japanese history or culture, I often found myself unable to respond. These moments made me painfully aware of my own ignorance.

At one point, someone asked me, “How can you love another country if you don’t love your own?” I was even called a “fake Japanese.” Those words deeply hurt me and pushed me to reflect on my identity. This became the turning point that sparked a strong desire to learn about Japan more seriously and reconnect with my cultural roots.

This journey has had a profound impact on my artistic expression. My works aim to convey the beauty and spirit of Japanese culture—not by simply replicating tradition, but by reinterpreting it through a global lens and connecting it to universal, contemporary themes. For example, I created an installation using origami cranes made of traditional washi paper, arranged in space to represent diversity and a collective prayer for peace.

Growing up in an international environment has given me the ability to view Japanese culture with



perspective and to understand Japan’s position in the world. I believe that the intersection of these two viewpoints—the insider and the outsider—is where the unique potential of my creative work lies. Moving forward, I hope to continue fusing traditional Japanese culture with modern values and share it with a global audience.

**In your final project for Visual Arts at the international school, you explored Japan’s culture. What elements of Japanese tradition or symbolism do you often incorporate into your artwork?**

For my final project in Visual Arts at my international school, I created a work based on the concept of *In Praise of Shadows*, which symbolizes the aesthetic values of Japanese culture. *In Praise of Shadows* is an essay on Japanese aesthetics written by Junichiro Tanizaki in 1933. It compares the perception of “shadows” in Western and Japanese cultures. Tanizaki argues that while Western culture seeks to eliminate shadows by illuminating every corner of a space, Japanese culture accepts and even reveres shadows as an essential aspect of beauty. I deeply resonated with this notion, particularly the idea that beauty resides in the dim light of traditional Japanese architecture and lifestyle, and incorporated this philosophy into my artwork.

One of the most prominent Japanese elements in my work is the simplicity and refined sense of beauty rooted in traditional Japanese aesthetics. Rather than



using vivid colors or pop styles, I consciously choose muted tones, soft hues, and earth colors to convey a sense of tranquility and depth, visually expressing the quiet elegance unique to Japan.

Additionally, Japanese culture has long valued harmony with nature. Following this principle, I actively incorporate natural materials such as wood, bamboo, and washi paper into my work. These materials not only add organic warmth but also serve as a way to honor and celebrate Japan's cultural heritage.

**The use of origami and paper in your pieces seems to be a central theme. What is it about these materials that resonates with you, and how do you feel they enhance your exploration of Japanese culture?**

Actually, origami cranes and washi paper are not always the central focus of my work. I have explored a wide range of themes and genres throughout my artistic journey. However, my current project centers around the theme of "peace," and I am creating an installation that uses origami cranes as its symbolic motif.

The reason I feel so strongly connected to this theme is because I deeply care about global conflicts and the state of the world. Growing up in an international environment, I was naturally surrounded by friends from diverse nationalities. Through the conflicts and social issues occurring in their home countries, I developed the ability to see global events not as someone else's problems, but as my own. In addition to my perspective as a Japanese individual, my exposure to diverse worldviews has profoundly shaped the themes I explore in my art.

The origami crane is widely known as a symbol of peace through the story of Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who was exposed to radiation in Hiroshima. Sadako folded a thousand cranes while praying for recovery and world peace. Her story transcended time and borders, making the crane a global symbol of hope, prayer, and peace.

With its roots in Japan and its universal message, the origami crane is a powerful tool for expressing global issues through a Japanese cultural lens. Likewise, washi—a traditional Japanese handmade paper—adds warmth and spirituality to my work through its unique texture and tactile quality.

By using the crane as a motif, I continue to explore the essence and spirit of Japanese culture while confronting the issues that modern society faces today.

**The works you've created, such as "Blossom of Peace" and "Flourishing Cranes," seem to embody peace and growth. How do these themes manifest**



Kono Mae | Flourishing Cranes | 2024

**in your creative process, and what do they mean to you personally?**

In my works Blossom of Peace and Flourishing Cranes, the themes of "peace" and "growth" are deeply embedded—not as abstract concepts, but as values that naturally emerged from my personal experiences and creative foundation.

Growing up in an international environment, I was constantly surrounded by people of different values, backgrounds, nationalities, cultures, and religions. One of the most important lessons I learned was that what is considered "normal" or "common sense" varies greatly from person to person. Understanding one another requires time, effort, and at times, leads to misunderstandings or conflict. However, through dialogue, the willingness to build relationships, and mutual openness, I realized that people can indeed connect, empathize, and grow together.

From these experiences, I came to firmly believe that the effort to understand others is the key to uniting the world and achieving true peace. I also experienced many challenges while engaging with people from diverse backgrounds, but overcoming them allowed both myself and others to grow in meaningful ways. This is why I see a profound connection between peace and growth.

In my artistic process, I strive to express the beauty of harmony among differences and the growth that comes from overcoming obstacles together. For example, in my installations, I carefully layer origami cranes in a way that they support one another to form a unified space—visually conveying messages of solidarity and coexistence.

To me, peace is "a relationship built through dialogue and empathy," and growth is "the internal transformation born from that process." These two values lie at the heart of my artistic expression and are ones I will continue to cherish moving forward.



**Your work appears to combine delicate, intricate designs with deep symbolism. How do you approach the balance between aesthetic beauty and the powerful messages embedded in your pieces?**

For me, both aesthetic beauty and the message embedded in a work are essential, inseparable elements. Visual beauty serves as the initial gateway—it is what first captures the viewer's attention and gently guides them toward the deeper message within. In creating my work, I am mindful not to convey the message in a one-sided way, but rather to leave space for the viewer to reflect, feel, and interpret on their own terms.

I aim to infuse quiet strength into my expressions—art that speaks softly, yet powerfully, to the heart. I see art as a starting point for dialogue, a place where emotions and values can intersect between the viewer and myself. That's why I carefully maintain a balance between aesthetic elegance and symbolic meaning, always striving to create works that raise profound questions and invite introspection.

**How has studying at an international school shaped your views on art, culture, and identity, and how do these influences show up in your art today?**

My education at an international school deeply shaped my artistic vision, cultural awareness, and personal identity. Engaging daily with people from diverse cultural and value backgrounds often challenged my own assumptions, and gradually led me to confront the question: "Who am I?" A turning point came when I was seen as "Japanese" by others but couldn't answer questions about Japan. That experience was both frustrating and eye-opening—it became the catalyst for me to reconnect with my roots. I began to study Japanese culture more deeply, and this journey now informs my creative work. My art reflects not only

traditional Japanese aesthetics, but also a dual perspective—Japan as seen from within, and Japan as observed from the outside. Having grown up surrounded by different cultures, I've developed a unique sensitivity that allows me to explore themes like identity, culture, peace, and coexistence from multiple angles. In this sense, my art is not merely a representation of culture; it is a reflection of my ongoing process of questioning and seeking. It is born from a space between cultures, and it continues to evolve as I grow, think, and connect.

**What role does nature play in your work, especially considering the Japanese cultural connection to nature and its cycles of life?**

Nature plays a vital role in my work. In Japanese culture, harmony with nature and the cyclical rhythm of life have been deeply cherished throughout history. The changing of the seasons and the blooming of flowers are natural phenomena that continue to inspire my art. Especially today, as environmental issues become increasingly urgent, expressing our connection to nature carries even greater significance. I believe that portraying not only the beauty and strength of nature, but also its fragility, transience, and constant transformation, is essential for conveying a powerful message to those living in the present. The global environmental crisis has brought a new dimension to my work, prompting me to re-examine the relationship between humans and the natural world.

The natural materials I use—such as bamboo, wood, and washi paper—carry with them a sense of vitality and energy inherited from the earth. These materials, rooted in tradition and shaped by nature, serve as a gentle yet powerful reminder of the need to restore harmony with our environment. I believe that in today's world, art has the power to reconnect us with the natural world and inspire action through reflection.



Margarita Timofeeva | Threads of Prayer | 2025

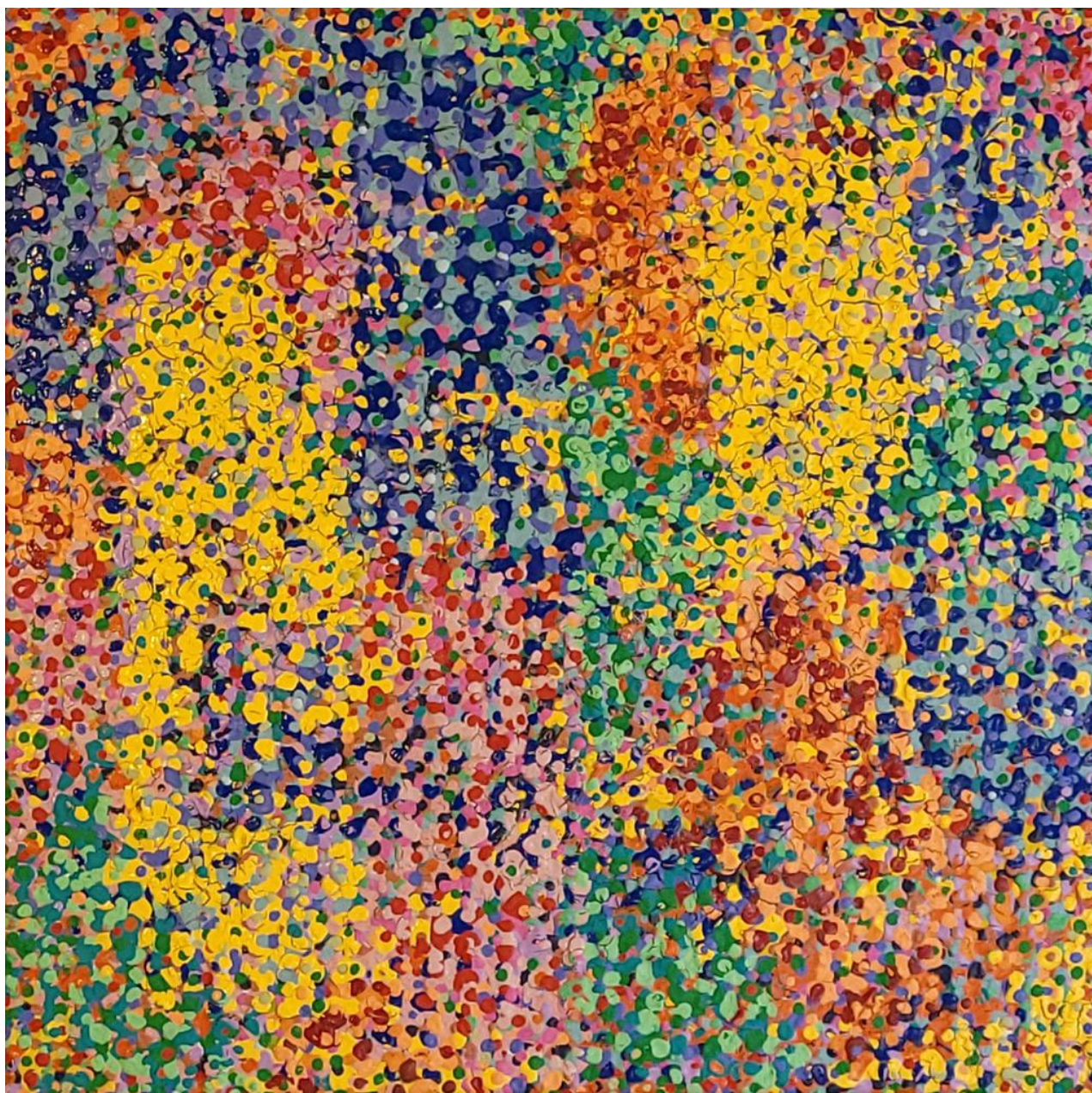




**Lars Westby** was born in Bellefonte, PA. He received a BA in Art History and a BFA in Art from Penn State University. He received a MFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and has won numerous awards and honors. He currently teaches and works as a studio artist in the Annapolis, MD area.

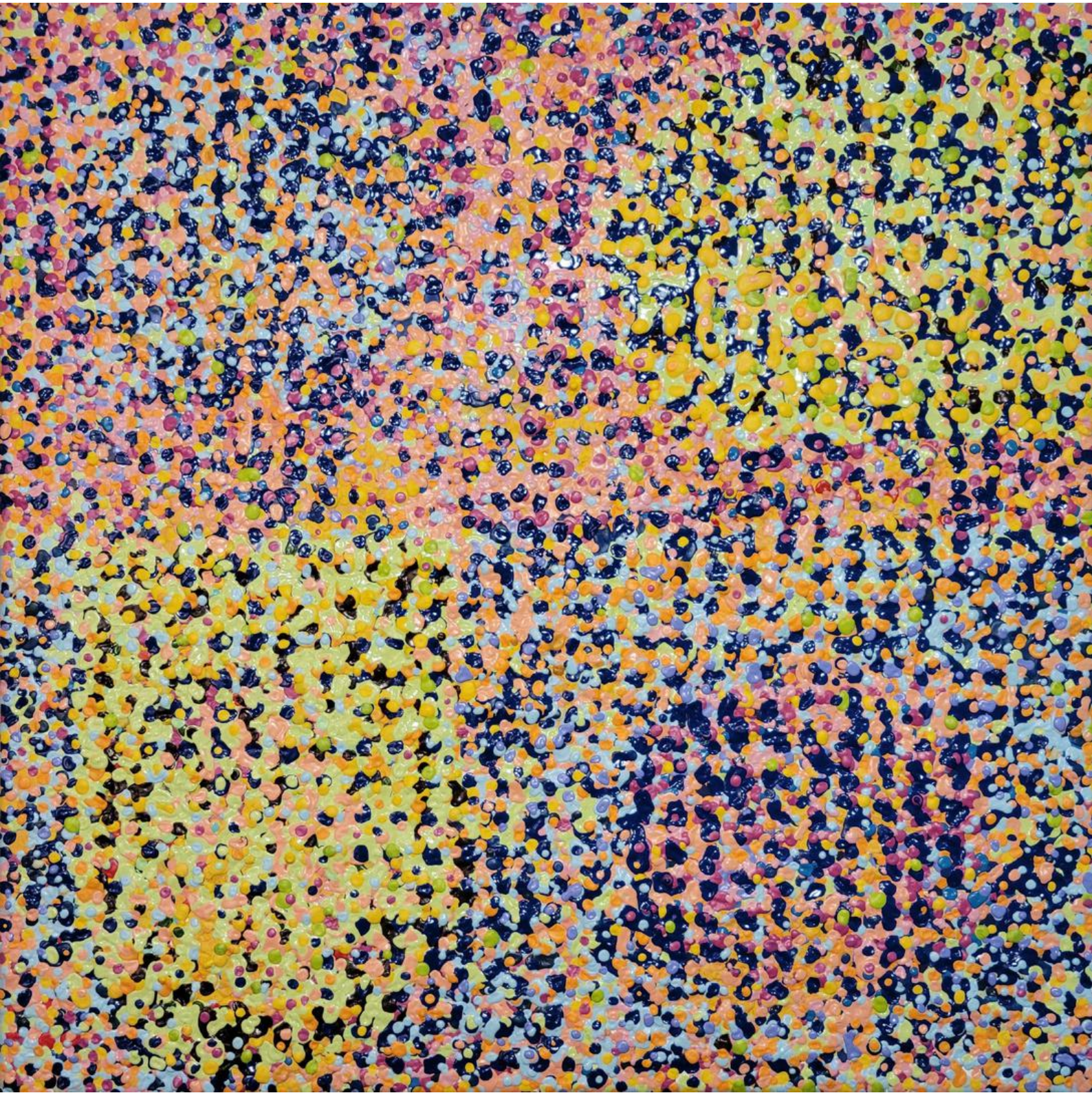
### *Project Statement*

These are a recent series of paintings I have been working on that involve dripping thousands of droplets of paint on to a canvas. this is done many times with different patterns and colored paint until I achieve the finished piece. The result is an abstract painting with many layers of paint that eludes to a likeness within its layers.



Lars Westby | Droplet Painting #18 | 2025





Lars Westby | Droplet Painting #10 | 2024



## — Interview

# Nadezda Sharapova

**Can you tell us about how your experiences living across different countries have influenced your art?**

Living in Russia, China, Turkey, Kenya, and now the United States has fundamentally shaped the way I see the world—and thus, the way I create. I worked, spoke the languages, and studied cultures and philosophies in depth. These experiences broke down the idea of an ultimate truth or a beauty standard. What is normal in one culture may be considered taboo in another, yet both are valid.

Over time, I stopped feeling like I belonged to only one place. I became a blend, a visual and emotional symbiosis of all the cultures I had lived in. I've lived both in slums and among diplomats, and experienced extremes of poverty and privilege. These contrasts taught me to notice the silent tensions in people and spaces, and my art became a way to hold these



contradictions in one frame. A way of exploring them rather than resolving them. That erased the clarity of identity and replaced it with the need to search. A search I express through my work as no spoken language can hold it.

Though my technique is rooted in Russian academic training, I rarely borrow visual styles from other cultures. Instead, I incorporate folklore and mythology—symbols from Turkish, Greek, Chinese, and other traditions. I often use symbols that carry opposite meanings across cultures, inviting the viewer to interpret them through one's own lens.

**You mention that your work explores "the unspoken" — how do you navigate translating such internal states into visual art?**

I paint universal emotions—nostalgia, despair, love, grief, and uncertainty. Even when depicting people or places, the focus is always on the emotion, rather than the narrative. These feelings need no translation—they're shared across the world. The unspoken often exists in micro-emotions: tension in a hand, an avoided gaze, color theory, and its language. I use



Nadezda Sharapova | Fallen | 2022



composition and open symbols so viewers can find their reflection in them.

**Your compositions blend Slavic, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern influences. How do these cultures come together in your creative process?**

My technique is more European, but the soul of my work comes from elsewhere. I borrow symbols, literature, and sometimes even materials from cultures that I've lived in. I often find similar symbols that might have the same, but sometimes radically different meanings—this internal contradiction becomes the conflict in my paintings, representing identity conflict, which is familiar to most immigrants. I don't try to fuse cultures, instead I let their differences coexist, echoing my own layered identity.

What role does mythology play in your work, and how do you incorporate it into your pieces?

Mythology lets us speak emotional truths through metaphor. I use symbols from Greek, Chinese, and Turkish myths—not as stories but as psychological tools. Christian iconography, Islamic mysticism, Chinese and Tengri ancestor worship, and Taoist philosophy all find their way into my work. These traditions shape the unseen worlds I try to paint—the spiritual layers beneath the surface.

**Your works often involve contrast between softness and violence, or ancient and modern. Can you discuss how you use this tension in your art to convey deeper meanings?**

Life itself exists in a contradiction. I'm interested in showing strength in fragility, and brutality in beauty. A flower can be suffocating. A scar can be graceful. By putting these elements together, I hope to show how complex and layered the human experience is—never entirely one thing or another. The ideal Renaissance

Venus is beautiful—but so is a tired, dusty miner leaving the shaft to pay for his son's education. Crumbling ruins of lost empires hold as much grace as modern construction sites building new hopes. A golden imperial carriage and a recycling cart both carry human stories. I don't believe in ugliness—I believe in the common world beauty of struggle, history, nostalgia, and hope.

**Could you elaborate on how you explore themes like grief, identity, and resilience through your use of color and form?**

Grief isn't black and white—it flashes. Identity isn't solid—it shifts. I work with sudden contrasts, broken shapes, bold lines layered with delicate strokes. I start with the canvas itself. I don't choose a canvas for a composition—I see the canvas and feel what story fits inside it.

Materials matter. Oil is soft and timeless—it speaks to memory and depth. Acrylic is sharp and dry—it captures fast emotion and brutality. Watercolor is fragile and fleeting—a moment that won't return. Ink carries ancestral weight—it's transcendental, like wisdom whispered through generations.

**Your paintings invite reflection rather than providing clear answers. What do you hope viewers take away from your work?**

My work is born from my experiences, but once it leaves me, it belongs to the viewer. They bring their own stories and see it through their own emotions and memories. That's the beauty of any art—it doesn't end with the author, it continues living in someone else's perception. I want to create space for that kind of dialogue. Not to explain, but to evoke. If someone pauses, feels uncertain, or sees something they can't quite explain—that's success to me.

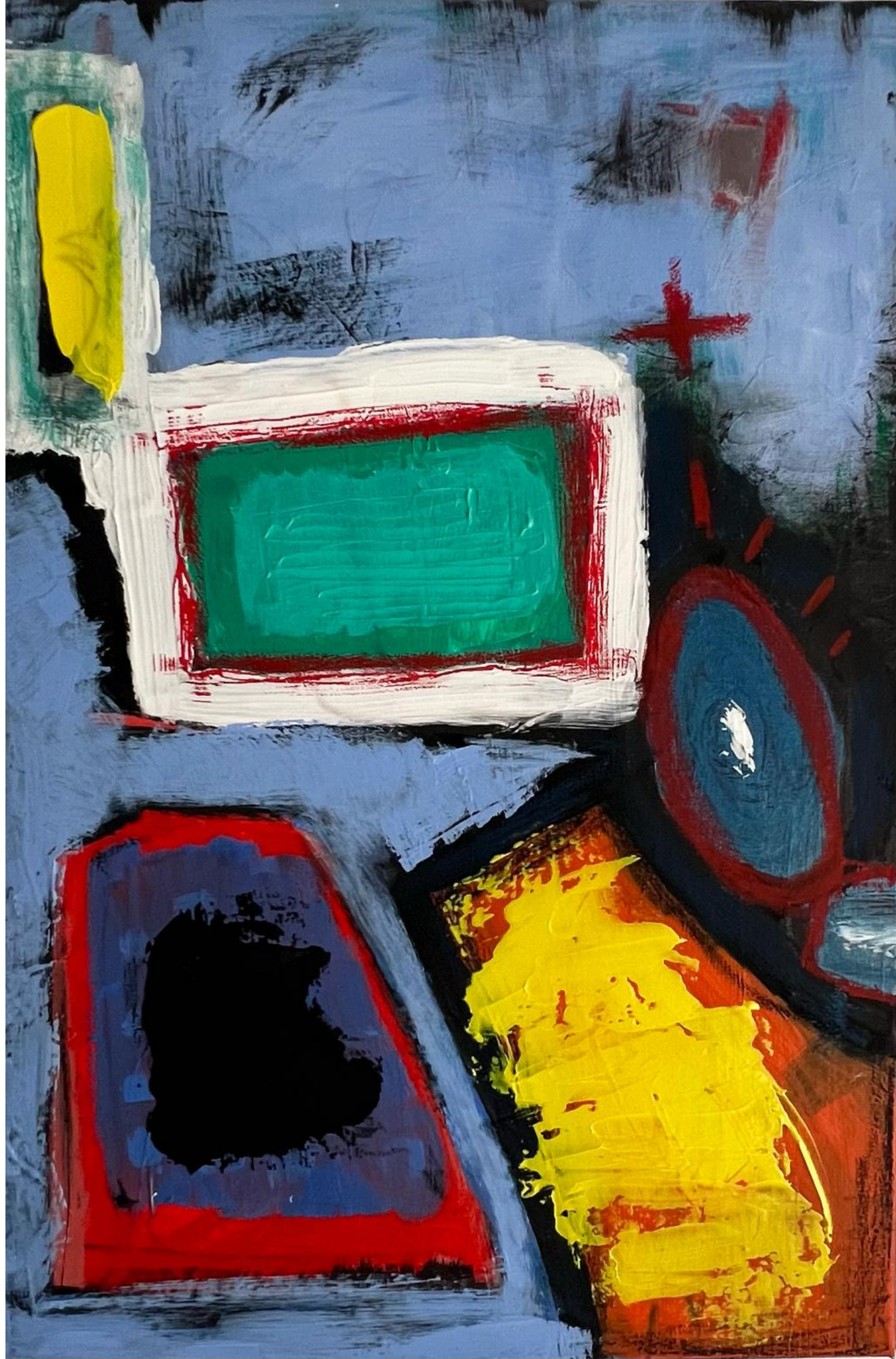




**Mark Abel**, a Ukraine-born, Portugal-based artist, paints using spontaneous acrylics and mixed media. He allows layers to build naturally, with gestural strokes and textures creating depth and movement, embracing imperfection and organic evolution. Each piece encapsulates the dialog between chaos and harmony, revealing unspoken narratives of resilience and transformation that resonate personally with viewers.









## — Interview

# Darya Permyakova

**Your path to becoming an artist has been quite unique, starting with a background in economics. How did you reconnect with painting after a break?**

I came into contact with painting quite early. At the age of 9 I went to art school, as I loved to draw from my very infancy. I got a diploma from the pre-professional general education program in the field of fine arts "Painting" at the age of 15. At that time, I was already faced with the question of my future career. I needed to plan my admission to a university. In my dreams I wanted to master the creative profession of a designer. Nevertheless, a pragmatic approach prevailed and I entered the University of Economics, where there was no time left for art.

In 2022 I returned to my passion. I came to the space for independent artists "Masterskaya", where the hobby grew into a serious interest and became part of my biography. The return happened thanks to my (then future) husband. He is also fond of painting. Till this days I like to spend time together with canvases and paints.

In the "Masterskaya" I found not only all the materials for creativity and advice from a professional mentor, but also a cool community of like-minded people. Together we discuss ideas for new paintings, study the history of art, get acquainted with the canvas of contemporary artists, visit exhibitions and art mediations. Such an environment maximally contributes to the development of creative abilities and motivates to create new works.

**You mentioned a deep love for portraiture. What is it about capturing a person's face that speaks to you most in your artistic practice?**

My special love in painting is portrait. Portraits are not just a picture of a person, but a whole story that the viewer can read in the eyes, facial expressions and every wrinkle. I am always amazed at how easy it is to recreate an image with photographic accuracy and emotional depth on canvas using just a few artistic techniques.



Darya Permyakova | Alice Through the Looking-Glass | 2024

**Your work often portrays subjects that stray from conventional notions of beauty. What draws you to these non-standard representations?**

In a process of creating portraits I am interested in characters that are far from the standard idea of beauty, because they can tell much more. They are the same as everyone else, but different. In my canvas I encourage viewers to be a little more attentive and notice details. Even in an image that is ugly at the first glance, you can find something amazing. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

**How do you approach the process of painting a portrait? Is there a particular emotional or psychological depth you aim to convey through your subjects' expressions?**

The process of my canvas creating begins with searching for references. I can be inspired by the works of photographers, literary or cinematic images. As a rule, all the characters that I draw have a special story under their belts that I strive to convey. I manage to achieve this effect, when the portrait "speaks" to the viewer through emotions. Every wrinkle can convey the feeling that will subsequently resonate with the viewer. Everyone will see their own depth there.



**You've mentioned seeing beauty in places where others might not look. Can you share an example where you discovered beauty in something unexpected?**

At the intersection of the beauty and the horror something very interesting is born. That's why I look for beauty in unexpected places and convey a view of things from the other side, sometimes even from the inside. For example, my work "Once Upon a Full Moon". Since ancient times people have sought to live in harmony with the cycles of nature, communicated with the patrons of the elements through various rituals. The full moon has long been considered a powerful energy day in many cultures. Most magical rituals and spells had to be carried out on the full moon, since on this night the moon gives the sorcerer special powers. The painting depicts a rather frightening ritual. A witch works with fire and, judging by the general atmosphere, is plotting something evil. The whole action takes place on the river bank against the backdrop of a beautiful landscape. This creates a balance: the beauty of natural phenomena and the fear of evil witchcraft.

**Your works seem to have a personal story behind each subject. How do you decide what narrative or emotion to explore with each piece?**

I don't decide what theme or emotion to explore because my characters decide it for me :) I am fascinated by every image that I embodied in my works. For example, the canvas "Hypertension" (inspired by the characters Floki and Ragnar from the TV series "Vikings"). Initially, I was simply "hooked" by the image of stern Scandinavian men. During the process I delved into their history, sea voyages and conquests, their deep spiritual connection with nature and sacred rituals. In the process of writing the tattoo on Floki's head, I even studied ancient runes :) I transferred all this experience of wise conquerors to canvas and reflected on their faces.



Darya Permyakova | Hypertensives | 2023



Darya Permyakova | Coat check attendant | 2023

The painting "Hypertension" exists with augmented reality. I have created the fragrance "Norwegian Fjords" based on the idea of the portrait. In this case, I added an olfactory component to the visual component. This scent combines all the characteristic features of the northern majestic nature. I attached a description of the scent separately.

By the way, about the history of the strange name of painting. In the process of writing the canvas, I could not accurately convey the tone of the stern, weather-beaten Scandinavian faces for a long time. Therefore, a joke was born that these guys have fluctuating blood pressure :)

**Do you see your work as a reflection of your personal experiences, or do you prefer to leave interpretation open to the viewer?**

Of course, each canvas is a reflection of my own experience. However, this does not prevent the viewer from interpreting it through their own experiences. For example, the canvas "Wardrobe Mistress". Firstly, where does this name come from? This vivid character is a flashback from my school life. Every morning in the cloakroom my classmates and I greeted Aunt Zina, who hung up clothes. She looked more or less like the character at the painting: hair styled in curlers, blue eyeshadow, flashy manicure, a "cheerful" blouse and a dull look. For me this is a reflection on the topic of self-realization. Who was this woman in her youth? What did she dream about? Who did she want to be when she "grew up"? And who did she become? Did her expectations about herself come true? Could things have turned out differently? Is this really her place in life? Even if the viewer did not have such an eccentric familiar person, everyone will be able to see in her a reflection of their thoughts and feelings.



**Emily Heinecke** is an emerging Canadian artist. Shaped by a childhood spent between country and city living, her work evolves from the juxtaposition of romanticized freedom and societal constraints. Influenced by her experiences with borderline personality disorder, Emily's pieces present like journal entries—capturing unpolished, fragmented thoughts. Her subjects embody a quiet tension, that often feels both threatening yet delicate. For Emily, art serves as both escapism and a means of transformation. She holds a BA in Fine Arts from OCAD University and lives and works in Toronto, Canada.









# — Interview

## Phyu Win

**Your work explores complex emotions like grief, love, and peace. Can you walk us through your creative process when translating these feelings into minimalist art?**

My creative process begins with stillness, both internal and external. I spend time reflecting deeply on the emotion I want to express, and let them sit with me. I don't rush to paint them. I even write or meditate before I even approach the canvas.

From there, I reduce the emotions to its purest form. Minimalist art for me, is honoring the space between things. Human emotions are already very complex. This simplicity creates space for the viewer to breathe and to reflect. I want my work to carry a quiet presence, like a gentle pause in a noisy world.



Phyu Win | Heaven's Little Guardians | 2023



**How does your background in interior design influence your artistic practice, particularly in terms of space and balance within your paintings?**

In design, every element has its own purpose. Every line, color, object and placement affects the functionality of a space and how it feels. When I paint, I think carefully about how each element sits on the canvas. Every line, every empty space on the canvas is placed with care. I think of it like arranging a quiet room to refuge in. Design has also taught me that sometimes less can often say more, what's left unsaid can be just as powerful as what's shown.

**In your artist statement, you mention that your works offer solace to those experiencing dark moments in their lives. Do you have a specific audience in mind when creating your pieces?**

I create for the ones with silent grief, who smile through heartbreak, who wake up each day carrying something invisible but heavy. I think of people who are searching for a small amount of peace, a breath, a pause, a feeling that someone else understands. My paintings are my way of sitting beside them, without needing to say a word, just offering quiet solace and presence.



**Can you tell us more about the use of symbolism in your paintings? How do you choose specific elements to represent emotions such as grief or love?**

In my paintings, symbolism often emerges through the use of space and nature. Sometimes love is in the light and endurance in the lone mountain peak. A vast green field or a clear blue sky calls for hope and resilience.

There isn't a direct symbol like this means love or that means grief. Instead, my work speaks more in metaphors, where the overall scene carries the emotion.

**The theme of impermanence is central to your work. How does this philosophy manifest in your art, and how do you hope viewers will engage with this concept?**

For me, the idea of impermanence is a reminder that life is short, and everything we love is constantly changing.

I hope when people look at my work, they feel encouraged to slow down and really cherish the people and moments that matter to them. A gentle reminder to hold things close while they're here, and to let go with grace when it's time.

**Many of your pieces convey a sense of calm and serenity. How do you balance the exploration of intense emotions with the need for tranquility in your work?**

I think intense emotions don't always need to be loud. For me, calmness isn't the absence of emotion, it's a way of holding it.

Instead of dramatizing them, I hold space for them without judgement. For me calmness is not the opposite of intensity. Calmness is a way to carry it with care.

**How do you approach the idea of healing through art? Do you see your work as a personal form of therapy, or is it more about connecting with others who are going through similar experiences?**

For me, painting is both a personal form of healing and a quiet way of reaching out to others. Everyone experiences and expresses their feelings differently, but I hope my work feels like an open hand.

Something that says, 'You're not alone in this.'

I think there's something universal in those emotions. We all experience loss, longing, hope. If someone sees one of my pieces and feels even a small sense of recognition or peace, then the work has done something meaningful.



Phyu Win | Still Getting You Flowers | 2024



## Francesca Dei

My journey is marked by a continuous process of growth and discovery, shaped by a variety of artistic and cultural experiences. Curiosity and desire for knowledge has always driven me to seek new challenges and explore different realities. Currently, I'm pursuing a Master's degree in Film Studies at the University of Turin, where I'm deepening my artistic education. From 2017 to 2021, I worked as a photomodel across Europe, an experience that allowed me to explore new environments and develop a unique sensitivity to aesthetics and beauty in all its forms. At the same time, I began to explore the other side of the camera and dedicated myself more consistently to drawing, painting and videoart.



Francesca Dei | Mediterranean Glimpse





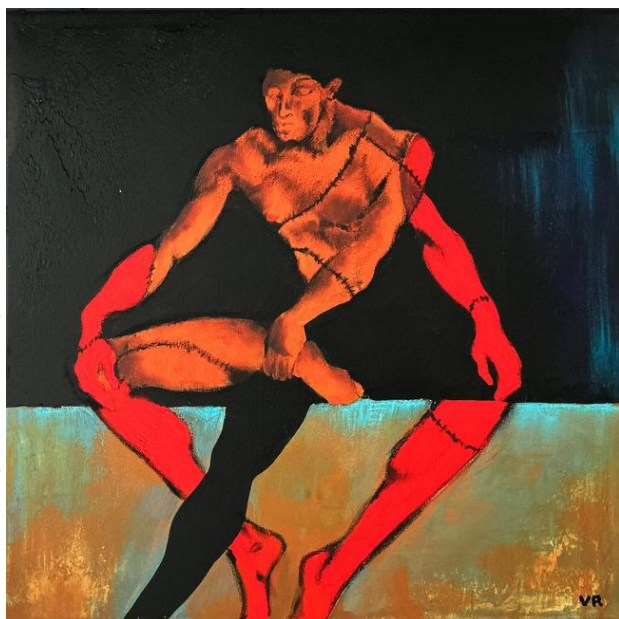


## — Interview

# Veera Romanoff

**Your works are known for their bold use of color and emotional depth. How does color function as a language in your work, and how do you decide on the color palette for each piece?**

Color in my work is neither illustrative nor expressive in the traditional sense. I treat it as an autonomous layer of meaning—a density that structures perception. Color does not accompany form—it intervenes, disrupts, redefines. The choice of palette does not follow a narrative logic; it emerges from internal tension, from the rupture between body and space. At times, color functions like a symptom; at others, like a glitch in the system of perception.



Veera Romanoff | Transformation | 2024



**In your artist statement, you mention the influence of Matisse's Fauvism. Can you elaborate on how Fauvism has shaped your artistic approach, and how you blend it with your own interpretation of modernism?**

I am less interested in Fauvism as a style than in its historical gesture—the radical liberation of color from submission to reality. What I borrowed from Matisse is not his palette, but his freedom. My own approach, however, gravitates toward a different paradigm—architectural modernism, where structure, order, and gravity are essential. I work at the intersection of these vectors: expressive surface and rational construction; sensual form and abstract framework. It's not a synthesis, but a polarity in which I seek tension.

**Your background as both an architect and an artist is fascinating. How does your architectural experience inform your artistic practice, and do you find that the two disciplines influence each other?**

Architecture gave me a language in which emptiness is as meaningful as mass. I carry this language into painting, but translate it into the corporeal. My compositions follow the same principles as spatial



design: gravity, rhythm, counterbalance, rupture. The figure in my work is not a body, but a carrier of tension between the internal and the external. Painting allows me to treat space as a field of perception—where layering, displacement, and the loss of stable coordinates become possible.

**Time plays a significant role in your work, both as a subject and as an underlying force. How do you capture the flow of time in a visual medium like painting?**

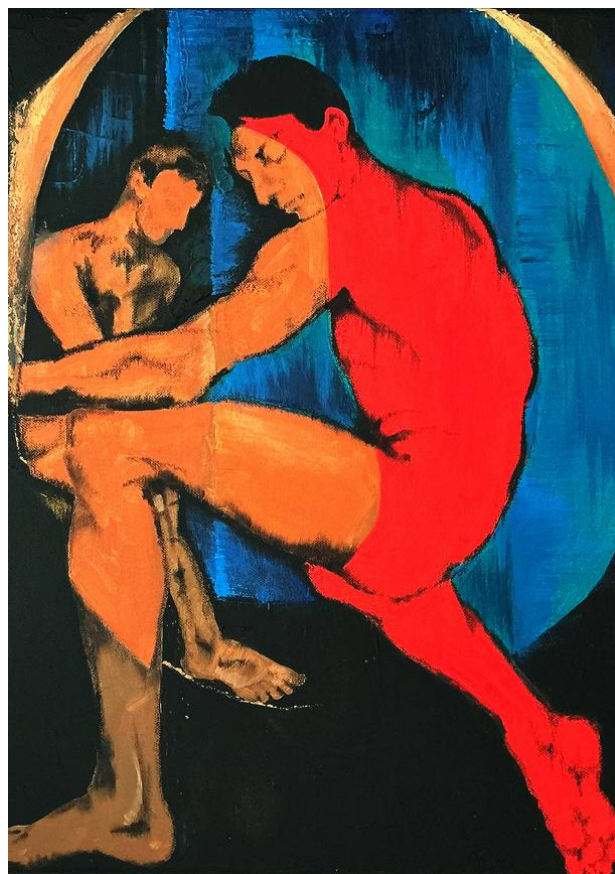
I'm not interested in linear time—with its narratives, reference points, and familiar logic. In my work, time functions as a field of tension where past and future collapse into the moment of form dissolution. I explore transitional states: bodies suspended in motion, gestures charged more with ambiguity than with action. Time appears not as a storyline but as pause, glitch, lingering resonance. It is more a gravitational field than a chronicle.

**You speak about the crumbling of old orders and the creation of new ones in the modern world. Can you explain how this idea informs your artwork, and what message you hope to convey about the evolution of society and art?**

For me, contemporaneity is neither progress nor regression, but a state that follows collapse. The legacy of the 20th century is not only modernism but also its impossibility. I offer no utopias, no appeals to nostalgia. My works are born on the ruins of cultural constructs—in a space where symbols have been devalued, and the body remains the last source of authenticity. It's an attempt to speak from where language no longer holds. In this context, art is not a message but a field of rupture, silence, and rewriting.



Veera Romanoff | Transition | 2024



Veera Romanoff | Reflection | 2024

**Your work bridges the gap between abstraction and modern technology. How do you balance traditional artistic values with the advances in technology, and what role do you see for technology in the future of visual art?**

I'm not interested in superficial integration of technology. I don't digitize painting or mimic digital aesthetics. But I closely observe how technologies alter our perception. The body in my work often behaves like an interface—fragmented, deformed, stripped of continuity. This is more of a response to the digital environment than its representation. Technology, for me, is not a tool but a new mode of subjectivity—one I engage with through traditional media.

**You've participated in exhibitions in places like LA Art Show and Art Fair Miami. How have these international platforms shaped your career and influenced your artistic vision?**

Working with international art fairs and exhibitions is less about exposure than about testing the universality of visual language. The context shifts radically, but figure, form, gesture—remain. It brings me back to fundamental questions: What keeps an image in the field of attention? How does it function outside its cultural frame? These experiences have helped me make my practice more precise, more focused, and at the same time—more autonomous.



## Summer Dawes

I am a 24 year old emerging artist from the coastal town of Cleethorpes, who has shown passion for art since I could pick up a pencil. I took a break from art to try pursuing a science based career, however due to personal circumstances this did not work out and I rediscovered my love for art. Since 2020 lockdown I have been developing my skills. I primarily create art pieces with animals as the main subject(s), which I began by creating commissioned pieces of peoples pets via my Etsy shop.

### *Artist Statement*

Art has always been something in the eye of the beholder, which is why I believe it is important to stretch the boundaries of traditional art. I vary my artwork as I like the quirky style of abstract but also the uncanny resemblance of realism. I am still on a journey to discover my style as an artist. As I progress I make pieces I love and pieces I hate, but I have accepted that in order to make good art you have to make bad art and that progression is not a linear scale. I strive to create art for others to enjoy and as long as that is achieved I am satisfied.

Summer Dawes | Look into my eyes | 2024







Summer Dawes | In the shadows | 2024

Summer Dawes | Flamingo | 2024



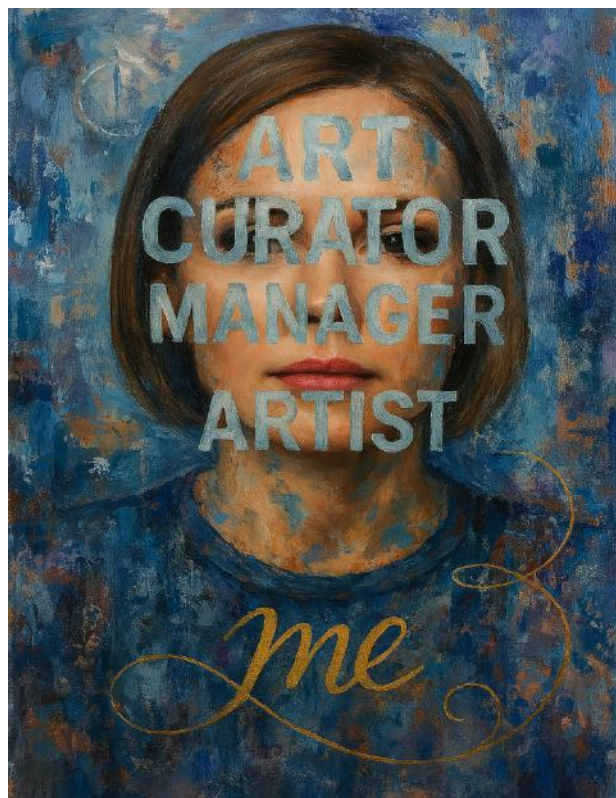


## — Interview

# Patrycja Joanna Sikorska

**Your project “Me, Myself, and I” explores complex aspects of identity. What inspired you to combine traditional painting with AI in this intimate self-exploration?**

This project emerged at the intersection of introspection and innovation. The triptych was created in collaboration with AI—as a form of dialogue between technology and intuition. I stood before myself with the question: Who am I—beneath the layers of professional or social roles, beneath the memories and dreams I carry within, in the silence of being without action? How to define these layers? And then I felt that it's Me, Myself, and I; each layer is a different element of life, yet all are me. Painting is one of my soul's languages, but this time I felt the need to extend it and invite another, digital "consciousness" into the conversation to become my "companion." It wasn't a process of writing a technical prompt but a long 'conversation' that organically formed a prompt serving as the basis for creating each image. There were many proposed images for each of these three areas. When the result didn't feel satisfactory, I added new translational layers to our conversation, and we made adjustments until the essence of the message and form felt achieved. It was a dance between logic and intuition, where the virtual brush followed the heartbeat and intuition of the soul. I continue to explore this collaboration in my next artistic project. It brings me joy that these digital images are the result of a specific conversation; looking at them, I see the entire internal process leading to this outcome. By combining tradition with technology, I ultimately presented different roles of a single identity, embodying their fragmentation, fluidity, and simultaneity. I wanted to invite viewers to ask themselves the same multilayered question: Who am I now? And find their own answer. Everyone can create their own image in this way and name their layers, just as I did.



Patrycja Joanna Sikorska | ME | 2025

I feel that answering this question is immensely important in today's world. It's essentially a question of whether I am in a given role because I choose to be. If so, am I satisfied with who I am in this area of my life? Or do I want to change something in my way of being or expression? Am I in a given role by chance? And if by chance, do I feel good about it, or do I still want to be in it? It's essentially a question of how I shape myself and my daily reality. Do I maintain balance in it? Am I courageous? Do I truly express myself? Am I fulfilled? Do I feel that I am following my individual path? What do I give, what do I receive, what do I create, and what will I leave behind?

**In your work, you use raw, organic materials—clay, charcoal, powdered crystals. How do they influence the emotional reception of your pieces?**

Each material carries a story older than myself. Clay remembers touch. Charcoal holds the spirit of fire. Crystals pulse with silent frequencies—invisible but perceptible. These aren't just materials—they are witnesses to processes occurring beneath the surface. When I mix them with paint, I invite the Earth itself to co-create the image. This imparts a certain sanctity to the work. It slows me down. It reminds me that creation isn't sterile or smooth—it's tactile, unpredictable, intimate. Viewers may not always notice the clay, but they'll feel its weight. Charcoal doesn't shout but leaves a whisper. Crystals aren't large, yet their presence is unmistakable because they subtly shimmer. On an energetic level, such a painting has entirely different vibrations. Through structure and substance, the painting begins to breathe—not only through what it depicts but through how it feels to be—touched, cracked, reassembled, connected, coexisting, blended.



**You describe your art as a spiritual act. How does the creative process become a spiritual practice for you, and what role does intuition play in it?**

When I paint, my goal isn't to decorate. My aim is to be within myself, here and now, and express what I carry in my space. What I carry depends on my choices regarding whom and what I interact with and what that evokes in me. The act itself is a meditation, almost a ritual. A return to silence, to the Source, to a language before words. In this space, my hands know what the mind has forgotten. Intuition is my compass. It doesn't scream—it suggests, hums, knows when to pause. Sometimes it tells me to paint over a face I just finished. Sometimes it suggests gold amidst gray. I follow myself. In this process, there's a force that seems beyond me, yet it's within me. I don't always understand what I'm creating until it's finished. And even then, the painting continues to reveal itself, to each viewer in their own way. It's the viewer who decides what they see, and that's a characteristic feature of my painting—it converses with everyone in their own language. It's like an externalized self, a spiritual layer dressed in matter to enter into a specific interaction with others. All my paintings have found new owners; unfortunately, I didn't have the habit of photographing them, except for one painting presented here, which has long filled the office space of a Warsaw company.

**Themes of roles and masks are central in your project. How do you visually represent these psychological layers through composition, symbolism, and the use of words?**

Roles are costumes we wear so long that we forget we're playing them. In this forgetfulness, or rather automatism, lies a certain danger—we stop reflecting, developing, and even cease to be creators of ourselves and our lives, becoming mere performers. In "Me, Myself, and I", I wanted to showcase them. I used words directly on the face because these roles also reflect how others see us. I presented them boldly, almost confrontationally, e.g., Artist. Curator. Manager. In this image, they don't whisper—they define, on one hand opening me up, on the other limiting me, because that's how roles operate.

Each face in the triptych represents a different truth. Each layer – a different relationship with the self and the world.

#### **ME – Social image**

Role. Construction. Artificial calm.

A face hidden behind the words: art curator, manager, artist.

Visible, yet trapped in labels.

A symbol of what I represent – not necessarily who I am inside.

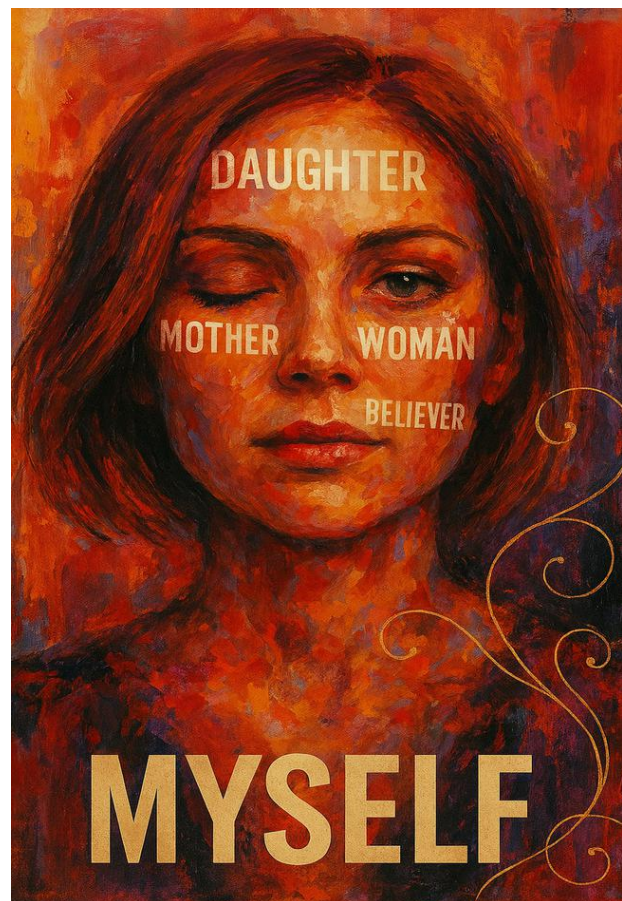
#### **MYSELF – Personal roles and relationships**

Closeness. Tenderness. Emotional identity.

A partially revealed face, surrounded by the words: daughter, mother, woman, believer, friend.

Unclear, dynamic, full of tangled emotional bonds.

#### **I – The pure soul**



Patrycja Joanna Sikorska | MYSELF | 2025

Source. Awareness. Presence.

A full face, radiating with light.

No words. No symbols.

Just one expression: I AM.

Nothing more is needed.

"I" completely abandons the need for a mask. It radiates.

No words on the skin—only affirmation above it: I AM.

In terms of composition, the faces shift in tone and presence—first the social image, then emotional identity, and finally pure existence. The golden line that connects all three layers represents the continuum of the soul—unchanging despite the transformations of the persona.

**Each painting in the triptych reflects a different aspect of the self: external image, emotional identity, and the pure soul. How do you distinguish these layers in terms of visual language and materials used?**

"Me" is structured. Clean. The face is fully visible—representative, professional, composed. The words on the skin (artist, curator, manager) are like tags. I used strong contrasts and defined lines—roles as boundaries. There's tension here. A kind of elegance born from effort.

"Myself" is softer, more tender. The face recedes, partially hidden—as if protecting something too delicate to show to everyone. Words like daughter, friend, believer float around the figure, not etched into it but orbiting—relational, fluid. The textures are layered—cracked earth, threads of charcoal—like sediment of memory, of ties that shape us, yet do not fully define us.

"I" is radiant. The face is whole, yet free. No roles, no relationships—only presence. The gold shines brightest



here. The phrase I AM hovers above the head like a halo of awareness. The materials are minimal but intentional. I allow the image to breathe. It is the silence after the storm. The clarity that comes with letting go.

Together, they form a story about the human soul wrapped in a body—its performance, its longing, its essence.

"Me, Myself, and I" are three paintings, three perspectives, three levels of being.

A visual journey through who I am—who I appear to be in the eyes of others, who I become when I look inward, and who I simply am when everything else fades.

The triptych "Me, Myself, and I" is a reflection on layers. Because each of our identities is exactly that—a layer.

We are multilayered.

We wear masks and labels.

We build relationships and belief systems.

But underneath it all—we are simply ourselves. Quiet.

True.

The ME layer is the outermost—furthest from the Source.

The social identity, built from expectations, roles, and titles.

The MYSELF layer—more intimate, emotional.

Personal identity: relationships, roles, beliefs. That which brings us closer, but also conditions us.

And I?

That is no longer a layer.

It is the core.

Presence without masks.

Existence without adjectives.

Just I am—pure and whole.

This triptych invites reflection.



Patrycja Joanna Sikorska | Cosmic phenomenon

Which of your layers is speaking the loudest today?

And which one whispers to remind you who you truly are?

It's not about judging the layers.

Each of them has meaning. Each protects something, communicates something, serves something.

They are our ways of being—in social, professional, personal, and spiritual spaces.

What we are as "ME", "MYSELF", and "I" does not exclude itself.

But to honor these layers—we must first see them.

Understand how they work. What they guard. Why they emerged.

What they mean. What they aim toward.

Only then can we consciously move between them and be fully ourselves—because Me, Myself & I are all parts of the same living fabric.

**You often speak of texture as a vessel for memory and energy. How do you infuse your paintings with these intangible qualities — and how do you hope they will be perceived by the viewer?**

Texture is my archive. The raised surface, a coarse line, an uncovered patch of canvas — they carry emotion like scars or wrinkles on the skin. I don't smooth things out. I let the surface remember. When a crystal blends into paint, when clay cracks or absorbs — it captures something fleeting. Something real. It reminds me of parts of my own experience, different layers of myself. There is energy in repetition — brushstrokes like breaths, the rhythm of applying and concealing. These gestures accumulate. They may not always be visible, but they are present. And I trust the viewer can feel them. Maybe not intellectually, but inwardly. Like déjà vu. Like entering a room filled with emotion and experience, where particles shimmer like dust in the light — constantly in motion, constantly alive.

I don't ask that the painting be understood. I ask that it be encountered. With one's own memory, one's own story, one's own self. That it be felt — not just seen.

**Working with AI marked a change in your creative process. How did it influence your approach, and what did it reveal about authorship, intuition, or control in art?**

At first, I hesitated. AI felt like a foreign language — precise, pattern-based, cold. But when I let go of control, something surprising happened: it became a digital companion. It asked questions. It developed main and side threads.

The authorship is mine. I invited a new "voice" into the collaboration — one that doesn't breathe, but listens and engages in dialogue. My intuition wasn't replaced — it was sharpened. I became more attentive. More curious. The dialogue between me and AI bears fruit in many ways. From that conversation, new intuitions arise, internal revelations, ideas.

There were tensions, of course. Moments when its suggestions clashed with my instincts. But that tension was fertile. It showed me that creation is not about control — it's about relationship. And in that, even AI has something deeply valuable to offer.



I AM



I



## Alisa Shchurova

My works explore themes of inherited value and the relationship between reality and fantasy. We are more than we imagine. Using visual references to the historical and familiar, I reinterpret the aesthetics of classical art and establish connections between the narratives of the past and present, infusing them with my own sensations and reflections. In this way, I experience the past—both mine and others'—attempting to tame the chaos of memories. In my projects, I actively use photography and digital processing, creating my own visual language. This allows me to convey my inner state more precisely.









## — Interview

# Anna Kirsanova

**What inspired you to explore traditional Chinese painting techniques in your work, and how did your trip to China influence your artistic practice?**

During our trip through China, I saw a picture in an old traditional Chinese hotel. At first glance, it seemed careless and almost shapeless. It wasn't beautiful, and I wondered why it was displayed there. But later, I noticed the energy in this piece. It made me focus on it attentively. The expressive strokes breathed life into the artwork. I was shocked. To this day, I still see this artwork when I close my eyes. It was a revelation for me because my education had been grounded in classical European culture, and I didn't expect someone to be so honest and brave to depict imperfection in such a lively way. I started looking into Chinese art. Though I had never been particularly fond of China, I began to admire the harmony in their culture—fine art, music, and calligraphy are organically interconnected. The strokes reflect the flowing character of their music. This music continues to play a vital role in my practice. I always listen to Chinese folk music while painting, as its slow yet sudden transitions mirror the rhythmic flow of ink. The interplay of movement and stillness in the music enhances my ability to capture the energy of my subjects, making sound an essential element of my creative process. While deeply influenced by Chinese painting, I do not aim to replicate it.



Instead, I embrace its bold spirit—its sense of fearless exploration and willingness to accept imperfection. In my work, I strive to celebrate the idea that beauty lies in flaws and that true artistic freedom comes from focusing on essence rather than strict representation. I have cultivated a style that prioritizes expressive lines and the essence of the subject.

**Your art emphasizes subtle movements and fluidity in nature. How do you decide when a plant or natural element is ready to be depicted in your work?**

I usually take photos while walking in nature; it's my favorite way to relax. I try to find interesting scenes, but it often requires some luck. More often, I capture characteristic views of plants and then create the composition myself. I need the photos to see the anatomy of the plant as my aim is to be precise. I want the viewer to recognize the species of the plant in my artwork. Of course, there's strong simplification, but the most characteristic parts are still present. The biggest and most interesting part



of my efforts is figuring out how to depict a particular plant. It's always a challenge. I have to invent a technique if I want to depict a plant I've never drawn before. Different forms can't be embodied using the same graphics. Just as the thorn and the burdock are different, so is the approach to their representation. That's how calm and meditative graphics can still be interesting and lively. At first, I was surprised by how nature isn't afraid to have long, straight lines, "boring" empty stems, or broken leaves. It doesn't need excessive drama to be attractive. Neither do I.

**Your work focuses on the simplicity of nature. Can you share more about how you balance simplicity with complexity in your compositions?**

This is the most important and most difficult part of my work. It's a miracle to me when I achieve it. Drawing with ink is a very quick process. Usually, it takes only a few minutes to create a whole picture. But there's no room for error. There's a lot of preparation before I even pick up the brush. I find a piece of a plant that inspires me, and I try to imagine how I want to draw it. I love the challenge, and sometimes it takes weeks. I try to extract the most specific features and movements of the plant. What's it like? What makes this stem so coarse or, on the other hand, so tender? What is its expression? Finally, I start painting. My first attempts are usually very messy, with an excess of unnecessary details. I make a lot of attempts to find the right balance between composition and simplicity. A big part of my focus is on the white space of the paper. It's a powerful tool that plays a huge role in balancing simplicity with composition. It strengthens contrast and allows the lines to resonate fully.

It's curious, but pure simplicity is the most difficult thing for me.

**You use transparent tones and a black-and-white palette in your art. What role do you think color plays in your creative process, and why do you choose to work with monochrome?**

This is an interesting question. As an architect, I love colors themselves. I can recognize a lot of tones, and I always get excited when I see them. But this skill sometimes works against me. When I tried drawing with color, I was always confused—so many colors! I lost the essence of my subject. Monochrome helps me focus on composition and



Anna Kirsanova | Continuousness | 2023

gives me an extra challenge. A lot of things can be expressed with just black and white. This palette can strengthen effects like lightness, tenderness, or rigidity by itself. You can never achieve this with color. And of course, as an architect, I can't ignore context. A monochrome picture always looks good in any interior—it's timeless.

**In your project, you highlight the deformations of plants under external pressures. Could you talk more about how this concept relates to your own artistic journey or personal experiences?**

The true treasure of Chinese art for me is its focus on nature rather than the human personality. I think Western culture is too centered on the individual. It worked well during the Renaissance, but now, we're too immersed in social networks. We pay too much attention to ourselves and forget to contemplate. We connect every object to human existence. I can understand this; our existence is the most important thing for us. But this lifestyle accelerates our lives. We want to stop, relax, and just breathe out, but nothing helps us do that. Every day, we live hundreds of lives through books, films, articles, and news. But what if we forget to live our own life? Self-immersion requires a lot of effort, and I know this from personal experience. That's



why I want to show the pleasure of contemplation—just plants without any deeper meaning. I want the viewer to enjoy the play of lines and shapes and forget about symbols, messages, or manifestos. Forget about this race called Life. Because plants are usually the same in their cycles. They are out of time. Here, we can touch eternity. I know the titles of my pieces are inspired by human feelings, but they're just for recognition. Without them, there would be thousands of "Shadows of Winter."

**Your process involves intricate technical steps like stretching, gluing, and sealing the paper. Could you walk us through one of your works' creation from start to finish?**

The technique itself is breathtaking. It's more complicated than just drawing on paper. First, I want to mention why I chose these materials. The cooperation between rice paper, ink, and the calligraphic brush is essential. They truly work together. Different types of paper allow for different techniques. For example, the sei technique requires raw paper, which is very absorbent. It helps create soft spots and transitions. Ripe paper, on the other hand, is used for calligraphy, which requires sharp lines. But all rice paper is very thin. After ink is applied, the paper waves, and you must stretch it. I use an original technique of gluing the picture. In short, the



Anna Kirsanova | Hummock | 2024

picture is glued onto another layer of rice paper, usually a ripe one. After gluing, the picture is stretched on a solid base, like a door or table. This process isn't difficult, but it requires experience; otherwise, you risk ruining the picture. Naturally, because of this process, I use special ink that becomes water-resistant after drying. What excites me most is the collaboration between the artist and the brush. The brush isn't just a tool—it's a personality. Chance plays a significant role, manifesting through the brush. The more skilled you are, the fewer unexpected results occur. But this space is fertile for creativity.

**Although your work is deeply influenced by Chinese painting, you mention that you don't aim to replicate it. What do you mean by embracing its 'bold spirit,' and how does that manifest in your pieces?**

Yes, I want the viewer to see my own style and message in my artwork, not just another Chinese painting. I was simply inspired by the spirit of this art. The most exciting aspect of Chinese art is the bold vision of the Chinese masters. It embodies an unrelenting sense of exploration, a willingness to embrace the unknown, and a refusal to succumb to the fear of imperfection. This approach celebrates imperfections in nature, highlighting the idea that perfection can be found in imperfection. For me, as an artist, this means true freedom in painting. In practice, it's a meditative state. At that point, nothing is important; you just enjoy moving the brush across the paper. You may have an idea in your mind, but even that isn't mandatory. Your mind and hand know what to do, and you just trust them, as well as the brush. Honestly, such a state is rare and valuable to me. I have to prepare for a long time to feel it. But when I do, I create some of my best work. In that moment, you can look at your piece and discover details you didn't expect. I love those conditions, but they require hard work.



Anna Kirsanova | Trace of autumn | 2023





**Rachel Berkowitz** (b. 1993) has developed her artistic practice since relocating from London to Los Angeles for her BA in Fine Art at UCLA (grad. 2016). Her work, specializing in painting, drawing and photography, delves into themes of nature, magic, fate and the human experience. Presently, she emphasizes the connection between humans and nature through biophilic structures that prioritize conservation, positive thinking and mental awareness. Berkowitz has exhibited in many solo and group art shows and fairs, and her artwork has gained international recognition, winning several fine art competitions. Her pieces have been featured on Netflix's "Selling Sunset," as well as in "Bill Nye The Science Guy," and have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, alongside displays in hotels such as The Mondrian, The Edition and The Pendry. Berkowitz's practice has been further enriched by international artist residencies such as the La Napoule Artist Foundation in France and the Slade School of Art in London. Passionate about community engagement, she teaches art to underprivileged youth in Los Angeles and participates in public art initiatives, such as creating murals that incorporate natural forms. Rachel hosts art workshops and free art events at her studio *æsthetique studio* in DTLA fostering creativity and connection within her community.

#### *Artist Statement*

Gallery 612 Presents "Exposing Pasithea" ~ A solo painting showcase by artist Rachel Berkowitz. Gallery 612, Santa Monica, CA is proud to announce the upcoming solo exhibition by Rachel Berkowitz, *Exposing Pasithea*, on view from May 9th to May 31st. The opening reception will take place on May 17th from 5 PM to 8 PM at 612 Santa Monica Blvd, Santa Monica, CA 90401. *Exposing Pasithea*: This series of oil paintings captures the goddess Pasithea's essence of tranquility, blending soft Romanticism with the fast-paced energy of modern life to highlight the importance of self-care and reflection. Set within intimate, nature-infused spaces, each piece portrays a figure of divine femininity surrounded by contemporary symbols of nurturing. The work evokes a mystical yet playful invitation to pause and embrace rest, offering a visual sanctuary amid life's chaos. The artist integrates observational studies of objects from their studio, *æsthetique studio*, weaving in references to biophilia and eternal bouquets from their previous works. By incorporating elements of their own paintings into the interior spaces, the artist creates a layered dialogue between past and present, reality and dream, ultimately inviting the viewer into a deeply personal yet universally resonant meditation on identity and transformation. Each *Pasithea* is both grounded in the mundane and elevated by the surreal, capturing the delicate balance between self-care and introspection. The goddess acts as a bridge between reality and dreams, encouraging viewers to embrace stillness in a world that rarely slows down. Join us for the opening reception on May 17th from 5 PM – 8 PM at Gallery 612 for an evening of art, conversation and reflection.



Rachel Berkowitz | *Reclining Solitaire* | 2025





Rachel B



# — Interview

## Eva Damstra

**Your work revolves around themes of intimacy, self-exploration, and the changes that come with growing up. How would you describe the evolution of your self-portraits throughout your journey from the ages of 20 to 25?**

That's a great question, in my photography I try to work as intuitively as possible. That means that the portraits that I take are in a way representative of my being during that time. Take "self portrait on the bed" for example. It was a rough time for me and he was my rock and supported me greatly. I took a self portrait with him in which I wanted to make the love and warmth come across, the end result is a somber and conflicted photo. This is of course how I was feeling during that period. This example, circumstances changing the photograph, happens in all the phases that life brings. I try to minimise the staging in my photography. Of course my style in photography changes and evolves, but the real journey is in the way that I'm feeling- that comes across in my self portraiture.

**You mention the influence of societal events such as the housing crisis and the pandemic in your work. How have these events impacted the way you view your personal experiences and those of your generation?**

It's a strange fight with privilege. Yes I have fallen victim to a failed loaning system, to the upcoming housing crisis and (like all of us) the pandemic. But I'm also very privileged in the way I have been brought up, the possibility of education, etc.

I think this is how a lot of my generation feels. It's a conflicted feeling.



**The transition from adolescence to adulthood can be an intense period of growth. Can you share how your perspective on love and lust evolved over the past few years, and how that influenced your artistic practice?**

This area of growing up is maybe the most noticeable, in my early 20's I was in a relationship with someone I knew since I was 16 years old, we were together for almost three years and we did grow a lot together. Although we grew, it was at a different pace. After a while I needed much more stability and communication. When we broke up, I was searching but mostly healing. In the relationship I wanted love and understanding but when we broke up I really rebelled to that idea. I had many one night stands, I think also trying to get validation that I'm still desired. After this wild phase I was trying to figure out what I really wanted. My standards became really high, I was really looking for a life partner and not just another fling. I was also fine on my own, and didn't need anyone anymore. Had my friends and it was alright. Then, when I least expected it. My new partner came into my life.

This whole journey is of course noticeable in my photography. In the phases of being with my former partner my self portraits are searching for something, this was also the phase where I practised automutilation, later I realised that this was because I was very insecure in my needs.

Later, in the phase of searching for desire, I almost objectified my body. In my latest photography it leans more towards security and love.



**Your project focuses on the universal insecurities that come with the age of 20 to 25. How do you think these insecurities manifest in your work, and what do you hope the viewer takes away from them?**

When I start to form a project and a theme, I always notice that universal feelings are a difficult way to approach a bigger audience. It brings along almost a resistance. I try to approach it in a really personal way. 'This is how it feels/felt for me.' This results in a more open interpretation and more people will find a connection to my work. The insecurities that I felt during this period in my life are to be summarised into one bigger insecurity, wanting to feel like I belong. This transcends into all aspects in life, and thus my photography. I hope my viewer takes away that this will come. I did find peace in who I am, and I'm really happy that I documented the search because it taught me so much.

**In your series, you blend analogue photography and digital. Can you tell us more about why you choose these mediums together, and how they complement the themes you're exploring?**

The choice to blend these two mediums together was mostly considering the cost. I love the feel, look and way of working analogue photography brings. But rolls of film have been becoming increasingly expensive. As an artist I had to find a way to still capture everything that was worth capturing so I decided to blend these two. In the series there are even some photos I took on my phone. For me the moment is more important than the medium on which I shoot.



**Can you explain the process behind creating a self-portrait? Do you plan each image in advance, or do you let the process evolve organically?**

Sometimes an image pops in my head, or there is a feeling that I want to visualise. In that case it's a planned self portrait. Most of the time it's spontaneous, I see myself in a mirror in a different light and start taking photos. I change poses and clothes and a few weeks later I review the images and pick one. So it's a mix of both methods.

**Your work often alternates between images and diary-like texts. How do these two elements—visual and written—work together to tell your story? What does each medium add to the other?**

I've always been drawn to the art of writing, but I'm a horrible writer myself. Especially since English is my second language and I think my mother tongue (Dutch) lacks a sense of poetry.

The way that text and photography work together for me are in a more personal style, like the diary-like text I used for this last series.

In my original plan I started writing these small drafts, so they could form a larger text to open the series. Together with my designer we later decided that the small texts throughout the book would be better and give more structure in the bigger picture. The text adds a layer of context to the photo's. This also happens when I title my works. It gives context in which the picture is shot.



**Alina Herzau** lives and works as an interdisciplinary designer and mixed-media artist in Leipzig, Germany. Her degree in fashion design influences her artistic practice, which is characterized by the combination of analogue and digital elements. By combining pixels, paper and textiles, she explores the interaction between surface, body and space. Alina Herzau's works deal with relationships - between people, objects, situations and the awareness of oneself and others. She focuses on the dynamics of interaction, the way we communicate and the processes that shape identities. How we affect each other, how relationships develop and change and how these experiences influence our perception. Identity is not a static construct, but a constantly changing matrix of memories, experiences and dreams – never final, always in motion. Personal stories blend with cultural influences, inner images with external projections. Identity does not appear here as a clearly defined form, but as a fluid structure of layers, breaks and transitions. The works explores this state of in-between - between self and others, memory and oblivion, reality and dream.



Alina Herzau | Untitled | 2025





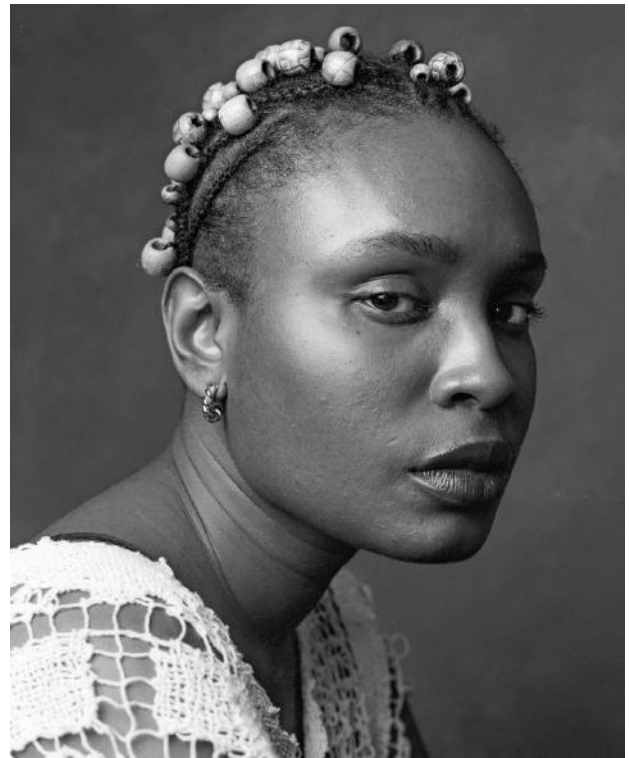


## — Interview

# Caroline Lacoma

**Your work explores transformation and self-reclamation. Can you talk about how your self-portraiture practice helps you document this process of personal evolution?**

My self-portraiture practice allows me not only to document my growth but to also to bear witness to it. Over the years, self-portraiture has become a ritualistic act of journaling how I feel, where I am emotionally, spiritually, psychically and even politically. Each image is a thread of a larger “becoming” story. It illustrates and expresses the shifting landscapes within me. I started photographic self-portraiture at a time when I needed to see Black women represented in a way that spoke to my soul. It really started with needing to document an eternal shift within me which then grew into an act of reclaiming my own gaze and narrative. I chose to see myself, I learnt to be comfortable with the discomfort of facing my own light and my deepest shadows. So, the camera became a sort of pen which helps me re-author my story.



**The themes of healing and introspection are central to your work. How do you balance vulnerability and strength in your images?**

I don't consciously try to balance them, I don't think of strength and vulnerability as elements that require balance, if anything they co-exist in this beautiful, complex tapestry that is the Self. So, my work is not a performance of either, instead I am interested in the truth that lies behind both my strength and my vulnerability. Instead of trying to balance either, I try to dissect them in each image. For instance, in one of my pieces titled “The Weight of It All” I suggest that my relationship to strength has been inherited and felt, at times, like a burden to carry. So, there is both vulnerability and strength in confronting this painful truth. Thus, my photography captures this cracked, tender in-between where grief, pain, joy, softness, strength and vulnerability cooccur.

**Your art seems to blur the lines between reality and the subconscious. How do you navigate these spaces in your creative process?**

Much of my creative process is intuitive. Often, I don't know what I am making until after I have made it, there are times when I don't even know why I have made a specific piece until weeks, months or even years later. Over the years, I have learnt to be comfortable with not always having the words to describe or explain my pieces. My work is the physical documentation of my subconscious before it makes sense in the physical world. My subconscious is always speaking to me through dreams, through observing the world around me, through art, through people. So, my creative process requires me to listen to this inner yet sharp voice. In my portraits,

Caroline Lacoma | What didn't you try to bury me but you forgot that I was a seed | 2025





I build atmospheres which exist in this liminal space between familiarity and surrealism, the known and the unknown. Our inner worlds are symbolic, layered, mysterious yet familiar. Therefore, my creative process is about capturing not just what lies beneath the surface but serves also as a framework to understand the Self.

**In your series, you highlight the fluidity of personal identity. How has your own identity evolved through the creation of these works?**

Creating these works has held a mirror to my face and revealed to me how complex identity is. Identity isn't static nor easily defined, especially as a Black woman in diaspora navigating societal projections, inherited worldviews and internal reclamations. Through my self-portraiture, I see myself as multiple, I hold different roles in both my creative and my healing process. Indeed, I am the one who creates, but I am also the subject of my creations, I am the one who watches and the one who is being watched. Similarly, I am the one who grieves and the one who is being mourned, the one who heals and the healer. Each work is a negotiation of who I am, and who I am becoming whilst being a graveyard for who I once was. It has been a journey of letting go of fixed definitions and rigid ideas about who I am and should be. Much like art, identity is ever-shifting, ever-unfolding and fluid.

**What role does color play in your photographs? Is it a symbolic tool, or does it emerge naturally through your process?**

It is a blend of both. There are some self-portraits where I am very intentional with the colours and hues. For example, in "The Sun At Midnight" the colour blue has the core function of evoking the ocean and representing nostalgia and longing. In some of my other pieces, colour arrives spontaneously and organically. I also like to subtly engage with the four elements in my work (fire, earth, water and air) so I use colour to symbolise and represent the element that is present in a particular piece. Regardless of how it emerges in my self-portraits, colour is always very symbolic and so is the lack thereof. Sometimes, I would plan for a portrait to be in colour only to realise that it is stronger in black and white. Therefore, I would say that colour serves the wider emotional ecosystem of each portrait.

**Your debut solo exhibition is titled "The (Un)Making of a Woman." What can visitors expect from this journey, and what kind of emotional terrain will they navigate?**

That is a beautiful question. The (Un)Making of a Woman is a personal and spiritual reckoning, a visual "dance" unravelling, exposing and deconstructing inherited scripts around womanhood, Blackness, beauty and strength. The exhibition invites viewers into moments of grief, memory, ritual, sacred rage and most importantly rebirth.



Caroline Lacoma | La Samaritaine | 2020

It is not a linear path, but a constellation of moments which when weaved together form a complex yet rich personal story of becoming. Visitors can expect to move through self-portraiture, collage and poetry. Each piece marks a different stage of becoming. It is an offering, an invocation and a mirror which I hope can breed collective healing.

**How do you approach the idea of rupture and reconciliation in your work? Can you share an example of how this has manifested in a particular piece?**

"Rupture and reconciliation" — there is so much poetry in these two words when put together. Rupture and reconciliation co-exist in my work, for me they come as a pair, not separately. Sometimes, when reconciliation isn't possible or enough, then I explore the idea of integration. How do I integrate what has been ruptured in my creative work? In "What Didn't You Do To Try To Bury Me But You Forgot That I Was A Seed.", I confront my history with sexual abuse. However, the piece does not dwell on what has been violated and broken, it honours the body as a site of survival, as a source of life and praises its commitment to transformation without trying to minimise the trauma experienced. Thus, the piece becomes a space of reflection, not fear nor anger. That's what reconciliation looks like in my work. It starts from within. It does not erase, it integrates.



## Helga Nagy

I've arrived from Budapest, Hungary and currently I'm living in Cracow, Poland. I have 2 main areas of my interest: history and art history. Every era in history as well as different cultures give a strong impact on my work. I have a lots of favorite masters that inspired me over the years. Namely: Flemish masters of the 15th- and 16th-century, the 14th and 15th century Italian renaissance paintings and sculptures and the turn of the 19th-20th century's style trends. I can highlight here the Parisian artist group, Toulouse-Lautrec, Modigliani, Van Gogh, the symbolic poetry, and the art nuovo; art of Klimt, Mucha and Gustav Moreau. Rococo women are a recurring image in my work. I also get many inspiration from the rococo style trend, as well as the old Byzantine's culture, and the ancient Middle East civilizations cultural and artistic creations. In addition I have always tried to apply to use my own style and expression, and develop myself constantly. It is important for me to avoid "mainstream" art, to create for the market, to meet customer needs. I had a lots of exhibitions in Budapest (Hungary) and Cracow (Poland) in galleries, ruin pubs, collective exhibition in Caste Buda, organised by the Ferdinand Gallery, collective exhibition organised by Salom Gallery in Cracow and my works are also found in private collections in Hungary, Poland and USA. In 2009, I have participated in a collective exhibition together with other Hungarian artist in Tokyo, organised by Opera Gallery, where we could present our works for the Japanese audience. The exhibition was hosted by J-Trip Art Gallery.



Helga Nagy | Goddesses Rome | 2023





NHega  
2024. 04.



Mostafa Seyyedebrahimi's art lives in the tension between the hand-made and the digitally born, fusing traditional craft with virtual worlds in ways that feel both exploratory and meticulously planned. He dives headfirst into weighty subject matter—death, ecological collapse, sexuality, religious orthodoxy—yet never resorts to didacticism or emotional distance. Instead, he peppers these heavy topics with surprising flashes of genuine touch, quiet reflection, and sly humor that give viewers room to breathe.

His XR installations carry a rare intensity: they brim with concept and purpose to the point where you sense him reaching for depth in every corner. That ambition can be almost dizzying, but it's also what makes the work so unforgettable. A gentle flood of sensory detail becomes part of the narrative itself, and by the time you lift your headset, you're not just thinking—you're feeling differently. What sticks isn't just the ideas, but the visceral memory of having inhabited them.

***Anna Gvozdeva*** (curator)





## — Interview

# Mostafa Seyyed Ebrahimi

**Your artistic journey began with an upbringing in a deeply restrictive religious environment. How do you feel this background has shaped the themes and methods you explore in your art today?**

I grew up in a home where every book, every conversation, and every question felt subject to unseen boundaries. When voices are kept low, you get very good at hearing whispers in the silence. Those early rules made me sensitive to anything unsaid or edited out, and that's exactly where my work lives now. I chase the stories left in the margins: desires called "sinful," emotions that were never given air. I'm not interested in shock for shock's sake; I'm interested in truth that's been stuffed into cupboards. Making art became a way to pull it back into daylight—for myself and for anyone else whose story got folded away under "proper" and "appropriate."

**"Ooh, La La!" challenges societal norms surrounding sexuality by exploring the concept of a "sextoys" through humor and symbolism. Can you talk about how humor plays a role in your work and why you chose to combine it with such a charged subject matter?**

Humor is my favorite crowbar. The minute you laugh, your guard drops a few inches and suddenly the subject—sex toys, in this case—isn't frightening; it's playful, even musical. In *Ooh, La La!* the toys double as instruments in a Mixed-Reality orchestra. You're busy banging out a beat, then halfway through you realise you're also dismantling a lifetime of taboo. The joke isn't there to cheapen the topic; it's there to soften the walls so we can talk about intimacy without the usual blush or shame. I lean on the same logic Mark Twain



celebrated: "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." Once people drop their weapons, real conversation can start.

**You mention creating art that invites people to question their assumptions. How do you balance provoking thought with ensuring that the audience can engage with the work without feeling alienated?**

Every artwork I create has layers: an open window for casual curiosity, a secret corridor for the daring, and a full-immersion gateway for those prepared to surrender to what I have created. In *Ooh, La La*, one can appreciate the surface with a quick laugh and a pleasant beat; nonetheless, the mixed-reality orchestra pushes everyone ready towards a fun re-evaluation of intimacy. The illustrated book in *Etidorhpa* seems familiar, yet eye-tracking VR gently transports viewers to worlds they have never ventured into. While keeping the story thread obvious, I can broaden the audience's perspective without breaking the link that would inspire them to stay by letting them gently deep to go.

**How do you approach blending traditional techniques with contemporary technology in your work? Can you share an example?**

I learned art with a pencil in my hand and oil paint under my fingernails, yet loving and doing it. Later, curiosity dragged me into 3D animation and immersive art, and that opened the tech door wide. Indeed, I just added more toys to my toolbox. What excites me about new-media art is the way it stretches a viewer's attention span. A framed painting



might earn ten seconds before someone drifts on, but step into a headset and you're suddenly breathing the artwork and living inside it. Interactive media gives me levers that traditional surfaces can't. I can hide a charcoal drawing inside a digital corridor, let a soundtrack respond to your footsteps, or make the light change when you tilt your head. Those small interactions stack up and keep people exploring far longer than they'd usually stand in front of a canvas. Take *The Other Side of Death*. I scanned my pen-and-charcoal drawings and textures so the grit and smear survive in VR; nothing feels computer-slick. In one scene I borrowed Escher's *House of Stairs* lithograph—essentially a 360-degree illustration before 360 even existed. I wrapped that drawing into a spherical environment, so you can immerse yourself in his paradox instead of just staring at it. Escher did the mind-bending math on paper; VR finally lets us walk inside it. That's the sweet spot for me: honoring the hand-made while using technology to turn a quick glance into a full-body conversation.

**Your work spans different mediums and technologies, from pencil sketches to virtual reality. How do you choose which medium best suits each project?**

I don't start by picking a tool; I start by exploring the idea. As I sketch, I ask whether the piece needs stillness or movement—observation or immersion. If it wants an intimate, frozen moment, I lean into traditional printmaking or drawing. *Stolen Life*, for instance, became a calcography print because the story needed the hush of a still-life: viewers pause, study the etched lines, and sit with the quiet tension. If the concept keeps nudging me toward immersion and interaction—sound that reacts, space that unfolds—then I push it into VR or mixed reality. So the medium isn't a preset choice; it's a discovery that happens mid-exploration, guided by whatever form best amplifies the work's heartbeat.

**"Ooh, La La!" transforms the term "sex toy" into something playful and familiar. Is there a fine line between subverting taboo topics and potentially reinforcing them?**

Absolutely—and I feel that knife-edge every time I install the piece. Subversion can tip into mockery or even reinforce the old stigma if the framing is off. So I start with two checkpoints: intent and context. Intent: Am I lifting shame off the object or just re-packaging it? Every element—from the candy-coloured palette to the musical "instruments"—is designed to signal play rather than embarrassment. Context: The laughter isn't aimed at the participants—it's shared with them, and the joke is really on the cultural baggage we all

carry.

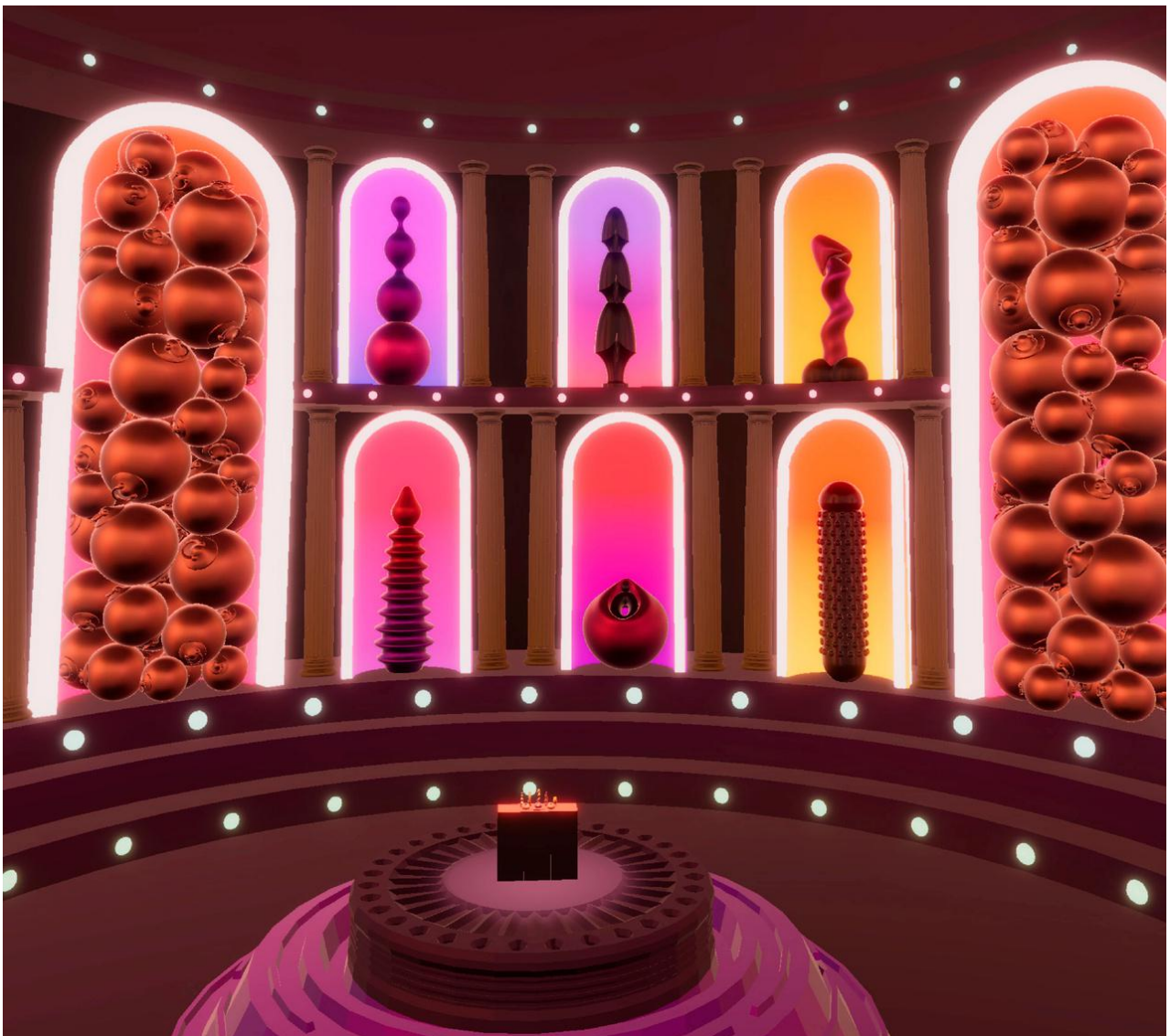
The audience response tells me if I've stayed on the right side of that line. At all of my showcases several visitors admitted they'd hovered at the doorway, cheeks warming, because "sex toy" set off every alarm. Five minutes later they were drumming on the virtual toys, giggling, and waving friends or partners over: "Come on, it's not what you think—get in here!". Those reactions—initial blush turning into open invitation—are the metric I watch. If people leave feeling lighter and curious rather than judged or objectified, the subversion has done its job without sliding into the very shame it tries to dismantle

**Can you share a moment when you realised immersive art—like VR—could amplify your ideas and deepen audience connection?**

There have been a couple "this is it" moments, but *Etidorhpa* sealed the deal. The work puts you in a hallway surrounded by stacked, mouthless heads. One time I watched a visitor bite her lip and hunch her shoulders, sliding sideways so the heads wouldn't brush her. When she finally pulled off the headset she said, "I was inside your head for all the time." That told me VR had reached her nervous system before her intellect could catch up.

Also, I noticed others reaching instinctively for the glowing particles in the last scene—hands outstretched like children trying to catch fireflies—then keeping them there because the particles react. Fear, wonder, play: all firing at once. Those reactions made it clear that immersive art can slip past the usual mental filters and go straight to heartbeat and breath. Once you connect with an audience at that level, there's no going back to flat surfaces alone.







## Mani Mehrzad

I was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1981. After graduating from high school, I moved to Kerman, where I lived for four years to study the restoration of historical structures. The city's magnificent architecture and the breathtaking nature surrounding it left a lasting impression on me. Traveling between Kerman and Tehran exposed me to a unique contrast between tradition and modernity, which became a profound source of inspiration for my first series of paintings.

In 2004, I returned to Tehran to pursue a degree in Visual Communication at Tarbiat Modares University. For my thesis, I focused on illustrating heroic stories for children's books. My deep interest in merging traditional Iranian miniature painting with contemporary art led me to study the artistic schools of Herat, Tabriz, and Shiraz, as well as 19th-century lithography. These explorations shaped a new series of paintings, blending historical influences with modern expression.

Painting is now the core of my artistic practice. Over the years, I have developed a distinctive visual language that merges elements of Persian miniature painting with modern aesthetics and bold compositions. My technique balances intricate details with expressive brushstrokes, allowing me to create a dynamic dialogue between precision and spontaneity. While my earlier works were highly detailed and meticulously crafted, I am currently exploring a freer, more intuitive approach, incorporating larger shapes, bolder colors, and a more gestural painting style.

### Exhibitions & Achievements

My work has been exhibited internationally, including at:

Magic of Persia Nowruz Auction (2015, Dubai) – Two paintings from my Lost Riders series were successfully sold.

Art Revolution Taipei (2021, Taiwan) – I was honored with the President's Award, and multiple paintings were sold.

Tehran Auction (2025, Iran) – My painting Shadow Dancers was successfully auctioned. The previous year, my work Forbidden Land was selected but later removed due to political reasons.

These experiences have reinforced my belief in the global appeal of my work and my mission to position myself as a leading contemporary artist on the international stage.

### Artistic Vision & Future Aspirations

Through my practice, I seek to bridge the past and present, tradition and innovation, creating a visual language that resonates with contemporary audiences while remaining deeply rooted in Iranian artistic heritage. My goal is not only to establish my presence in major international galleries and auctions but also to challenge conventional narratives in Persian art, redefining its place in the global contemporary scene.

In the coming years, I plan to expand my international reach, collaborate with leading galleries and curators, and create a new body of work that pushes the boundaries of my artistic exploration. My ultimate vision is to leave a lasting impact on the art world, not just as a painter, but as a phenomenon in contemporary art.



Mani Mehrzad | The Bridge | 2022





Mani Mehrzad | Shadow Dancers | 2022



## — Interview

# Andrey Savrov

**Your work reflects a deep connection to natural materials like bronze, stone, and wood. How do these materials influence your artistic process and your emotional connection to each piece?**

Any material has its own energetic potential, and if one can connect this energy with their thoughts and images, the person who views the piece will experience the corresponding emotions.

**The combination of absurd and surreal images seems to challenge traditional perceptions. How do you decide which themes to explore through these surreal forms, and what messages do you hope to convey?**

Themes can be completely different. The main thing is to express one's attitude toward events and be heard. Surrealism allows for interaction with the subconscious and visualizing what is difficult to express with words. I often choose images that may seem absurd because they help challenge established logical interpretations. Ultimately, I hope to push the viewer toward rethinking familiar concepts of the world and oneself.

Andrey Savrov | Leopard | 2018



**You mention the influence of philosophers and psychologists such as Freud and Nietzsche in your work. Can you explain how these ideas manifest in your sculptures and paintings?**

They can give a kind of push to create associative images. Associative thinking, along with images free from social dogmas, forms the main driving force behind both my paintings and sculptures. It doesn't matter how the created work is understood; as a rule, the understanding comes much later. I agree more with the ancient Greeks, for whom attraction was the main motive, and the object that was ennobled by this attraction was of secondary importance. In my works, I try to visualize inner conflicts and dualities, creating forms and compositions that may evoke unexpected emotions and reflections in the viewer. I try to reflect the inner struggle in the dynamics of forms and textures. Philosophical and psychological concepts act as a catalyst that helps me understand and explore the human experience more deeply.

**Your art appears to invite viewers to reflect on their own perceptions and fears. How do you want your audience to feel when engaging with your work?**

With interest, and that is the most important for me. I believe that if a person stops to look at the work and examines it for a long time, that is already a sign that the work has succeeded.

**How does your background in jewelry design shape the way you approach sculpting and working with other mediums like stone and wood?**

For me, these things are inseparable. Working with jewelry, I learned to appreciate the small elements that can have a significant impact on the overall perception of the artwork.

**Your works seem to be a celebration of life in all its forms, even if they explore tragic or uncomfortable themes. How do you maintain this balance of light and darkness in your art?**

This balance cannot be broken – it is around us and inside us, and that is wonderful! Because it is precisely this that makes art multilayered and alive. In every tragedy, one can find a spark of life, and even in the brightest situation, shadows can hide. This dynamic allows for a deeper understanding of existence.

**In your statement, you mentioned that art is not just a process, but a path of understanding oneself. How has your artistic journey helped you discover new aspects of your own identity?**

Art is a living flow, and my happiness is to feel myself in it. It is an eternal movement and growth, even when it seems that it is not. Of course, the creative impulse

is directly linked to the subconscious desire to materialize one's fantasies. In the end, the effort put into an art object helps not to go crazy during the process of creation. Accepting the world as it is, in my opinion, is the most valuable therapeutic effect of creativity. The state of creative excitement is similar to sexual excitement – it either exists or it doesn't.



Andrey Savrov | Tiago | 2023



Andrey Savrov | Fantasy | 2022



## **Gaudi .C (Belgium)**

*Artist (Digital Arts, Photography) • Born in 1975 • Life reflects art and art reflects life*

Gaudi .C is a contemporary fine art photographer. Passionate about visual arts, he has always felt a deep connection to painting as well. He has a strong love for colors, which he sees as a source of positive energy in life. His main sources of inspiration include contemporary Latin American culture, contemporary architecture, as well as the aesthetics of the 1960s and 1970s.

Gaudi .C was born in Brussels, Belgium. He studied photography and later attended the Academy of Fine Arts. His work is part of many private collections.

### *Artist Statement*

I am a photographic artist and I also create a lot of graphic compositions. I was born in Brussels in the 1970s. My artistic universe is built around everything that has influenced me throughout my life. I am passionate about architecture, Op Art, and space-age design. I love colors — for me, they are an essential source of positive energy in life. I'm also deeply passionate about painting and abstract art, and I adore the dynamic energy of Pop Art. All of these elements have inspired my creative path and artistic vision.

My greatest inspiration has been the universe of Gaudí, the great Catalan architect. My goal is to transmit positive energy through my artworks — energy that can bring a sense of vitality and positivity into every home.

Gaudi .C | Monte-Carlo Casino Place | 2024









# Maria Belen del Pino

**Can you tell us more about how your spiritual and healing journey led you to painting? How did this process influence your creative approach?**

When I began my healing journey, I remember sitting with my therapist, feeling completely disconnected from myself. She asked me a question that stayed with me: Who are you? What do you enjoy doing? And I didn't have an answer. I had lost touch with what brought me joy, what made me. That moment became a quiet but powerful turning point—it opened a door into a much deeper journey of remembering and reconnection.

As part of this search, I began exploring different creative outlets. One of the first things I tried was making collages, and I found that process surprisingly healing. There was something grounding about sitting with a blank page and letting myself create without judgment or pressure. Later, I began painting with watercolors and acrylics, and this became a profound way of giving form to what I felt inside—emotions, ideas, longings that had no words yet. Painting helped me express what was unspoken, to transform the intangible into something real and alive.

But alongside the creative work, I also began to turn inward. I started meditating, slowly and gently at first, always trying to go a little deeper. Through meditation, I began cultivating a stillness that helped me access parts of myself I had long forgotten. It was in that quiet space that I began to feel accompanied—held, even—by a loving presence I couldn't quite explain. Over time, I built a strong, sacred bond with beings



that guide me. These guides, whether you call them spirit, ancestors, or higher self, became part of my healing and creative journey. Their presence offered a sense of support, clarity, and deep remembrance. I no longer felt alone in the process.

Their guidance doesn't always come in words—it comes in sensations, in symbols, in sudden insights. Sometimes it feels like the canvas is a portal, a way to channel what wants to be seen, felt, or understood—not just for me, but for others too.

This journey has transformed how I approach creativity. I no longer paint to create something “beautiful” or “perfect.” I paint to listen, to remember, and to trust. I've learned to let the heart lead the way, to welcome whatever wants to come through with openness and honesty. Sometimes what appears is chaotic, sometimes it's serene—but it's always real. So painting didn't just accompany my healing—it became woven into it. Together with meditation and the loving presence of my guides, it became a path back to myself. A space where I can meet my truth, over and over again. And through that truth, invite others into their own healing too.

**How do you connect with your artwork as a channel for divine messages of love, compassion, and healing? Is there a specific moment or experience that solidified this connection?**

For me, creating art has always felt like entering a sacred space—a place where the veils thin and

something greater flows through. Over time, I realized that painting wasn't just about self-expression—it was about becoming a vessel. A channel. And what flows through that channel, when I truly surrender, is love, compassion, and healing.

This connection became even deeper as I committed more fully to my spiritual path. Through that inner stillness and presence, I started to feel accompanied by loving, guiding beings—energies that offered me support, clarity, and wisdom. Sometimes it's a soft whisper, other times I feel them gently placing colors. But always, it's about allowing something greater to move through me.

Through this process of healing—and of being truly committed to myself—I started to trust. I let go of expectations, I let go of who I thought I was and allowed myself to be guided. That's how I opened the channel. That's how I allowed the messages to flow through me.

Each painting carries a divine message—a lesson, a mirror, a gentle reminder to live in alignment with our truth. My role is simply to stay open, soft, and willing to listen. To be present enough for those messages to come through in the way they're meant to. In the end, painting has become my way of communing with love itself.

**Your work is described as free, unpredictable, and vibrant. How do you allow spontaneity to guide your creative process?**

For me, painting is about being present and allowing whatever wants to come through to take form. I never plan what I'm going to do—I just show up, open, and

let my intuition guide me. I've learned to trust what I feel in the moment, to let go of control and just flow with it.

There's something so alive in not knowing what's going to appear. I begin with a sensation, a color, a movement—and from there, everything unfolds. Sometimes I'll start painting with my hands just to feel more connected to the piece, to allow that raw, unfiltered energy to flow through. Other times, it's a brushstroke that surprises me and leads me somewhere completely unexpected.

I believe that creativity lives in that space of the unknown—in surrender. When I let go of the need to control the outcome, the most honest and vibrant expressions emerge. That's where the magic is. That's where I meet my truth.

And I think that freedom and unpredictability also reflect the inner world—our emotions, our spiritual experiences, our healing journeys—they're not linear or neat. They're layered, wild, and beautiful. So, I allow my art to mirror that. To feel alive, spontaneous, and deeply connected to the moment.

**In your art, you explore both abstract and literal elements. Can you elaborate on how you balance these contrasting approaches within a single piece?**

I don't really plan it—both the abstract and the literal just show up naturally when I paint. The abstract is how I express energy and emotion. It's very free and intuitive. I let the colors, shapes, and movements come through without thinking too much. It's more about feeling than understanding.

Then sometimes, symbols or clearer images start to appear. They come in when something wants to be seen more clearly—like a message or a reminder. I just follow that. I don't force it.

For me, both are important. The abstract holds the emotion and the depth, and the literal gives it form or meaning. They balance each other without me trying to make it happen. It's more like I'm just listening and letting the painting tell me what it needs.

It's a flow between what I feel and what wants to be shown.

**What role does color play in your work, and how do you choose which colors to use for each message or emotion you wish to convey?**

Color plays a very important role in my work—it's like its own language. Each color carries an energy, a feeling, a vibration. When I paint, I don't usually choose colors with my mind—I let them come to me. I connect with what I'm feeling in the moment, or with the energy that wants to be expressed, and the colors start to flow naturally.



Maria Belen del Pino | Back home



Most of the time, it's my guides who show me which colors to use. Sometimes it's a soft inner nudge, a knowing, or a clear feeling toward a certain shade. They guide me gently, helping me translate the emotion or the message that wants to come through. I've learned to trust that process. Some days I'm drawn to soft, calming tones when something tender is moving inside me. Other times, bold or deep colors come through when there's strong energy or transformation happening. Every color holds meaning—it speaks without words.

So really, I don't choose the colors—they choose me, through the guidance I receive. In that way, color becomes a tool for healing, for connection, and for expressing what can't always be said with language.

**How do you think your background as an Argentine artist living in Dublin influences your work and the messages you convey through it?**

Being from Argentina and now living in Dublin has deeply influenced both the way I create and how I experience life. Growing up in a busy, bustling city with fast-paced energy shaped my early years, while living in Ireland has introduced me to a more peaceful, almost mystical rhythm. The land here feels both strong and soothing, and it's allowed me to slow down and reconnect with myself on a deeper level. The contrast between the two places has taught me so much. Living far from home has opened up space for reflection and solitude, allowing me to discover a deeper sense of inner peace and connection that I hadn't experienced before.



Maria Belen del Pino | Change perspective



Maria Belen del Pino | Even this is Love

This mix of cultures and energies definitely shows up in my work. I feel like my art carries the soul of both places. There's a part of me that is always searching for home—not just a physical place, but that feeling of being fully present and connected. That's what I try to share through my paintings: that no matter where we are, we can always come home to ourselves.

**Many of your pieces invite others to resonate with the beauty of life. What do you hope viewers take away from your artwork?**

Through my artwork, I hope to offer a glimpse of the divine beauty that's present in every moment of life. My intention is for my pieces to serve as a reminder that, even beneath the noise of everyday life, there is a quiet beauty waiting to be discovered—both within us and in the world around us.

What I truly wish for is that viewers feel a connection to something greater than themselves when they look at my paintings. I want them to experience a moment where their hearts open and they resonate with the energy flowing through the art. It's not just about what they see, but how it makes them feel—a soft, gentle whisper from the universe that invites them to reconnect with their true essence.

Ultimately, my hope is that my work helps others remember that they are part of something much bigger, that they are loved and supported by the divine. If it brings them even a small moment of peace or awakening, then I feel the message has been received.







## **Ivana Enny**

Her artistic training primarily comes from self-taught studies, complemented by online courses and in-person drawing lessons. The sources of inspiration for her art are mainly social and environmental themes that, touching the artist's sensitivity, are expressed through figurative realism and the philosophical perspective of surrealism. She favors the use of oil paints for their fluidity and versatility of pigments, which also allows for the application of multiple painting styles, shading, and glazing that add depth and expressiveness to subjects and environments, while utilizing versatile techniques in different contexts. What characterizes her paintings are the figurative components, where the subjects and the emotions they evoke are the key elements of her artistic narrative. The vibrant colors, details, and well-defined figures allow the viewer an immediate understanding of the message and feelings the artist wants to convey, highlighting, in perspective, a vision that brings out contrasts and similarities of the same reality.





Ivana Enny | The wind of change | 2023



## — Interview

# Olesya Eder

### **What inspired you to focus your artistic work on the ballet "Jean d'Arc"?**

My daughter Ilina Eder (10.02.2004), a young choreographer, a ballet dancer and creator of her first neo-classical ballet masterpiece, dedicated to the historical figure Jeanne d'Arc, inspired me to paint several acrylic pictures especially for this ballet fragments.

Once, in July 2022 Ilina and me traveled to Paris, where we visited the Louvre Museum, where we both were very impressed by the painting „Joan of Arc at the coronation of King Charles VII“ by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres (1854). We were also admired from the golden statue of Joan of Arc by E. Fremiet, which was located on the Place des Pyramides. From that time on Ilina had the idea that I draw my own pictures dedicated to the ballet „Jean d'Arc“ choreographed by Ilina Eder.

I am inspired mother who was impressed from this idea and since that I decided to realise this visual project „Jeanne d'Arc“ for my daughter Ilina Eder. The Ballet „Jeanne d'Arc“ choreographed by Ilina Eder will be performed on the 09th of August 2025 in the Burg Perchtoldsdorf in Austria. There I will make a Vernissage of my pictures dedicated to this Ballet „Jean d'Arc“.

### **How does being a mother influence your creative process, particularly with your daughter Ilina Eder's choreography?**

Well, the motherhood plays a huge role in developing yourself as a person. It helped me become even more creative.



In the process of the choreographing a ballet piece, my daughter Ilina expresses emotions, feelings, emphasized the character of the heroes on stage. And during the drawing process, I seem to be on the same wavelength with my daughter, immersing myself in the process of creation, where new art ideas unexpectedly arise, thanks to inspiration.

Ilina plays the main role of Jeanne herself in her ballet. There is one ballet pose in the Jean's role, which impressed me very much, so that I wanted to paint exactly this pose, where she is dancing in pointe shoes and playing the role of Jeanne as deep-thinking, struggling, worrying, lyrical, inspired by faith and dramatic. That's how I painted the image of Jeanne, taking Ilina's stage pose and gave the title of my acrylic picture „Jeanne's Deepness of Thoughts“.

### **In your series dedicated to "Jeanne d'Arc," how do you interpret the themes of courage and heroism through visual art?**

I painted my acrylic picture „The Hero Maiden Joan of Arc of Orleans“ imagining Jean d'Arc riding a horse, dressed in men's armor and holding a flag in her hand, because the key moment of her feat was the siege of Orleans and her insistence on the coronation of Charles VII of France during the Hundred Years' War.



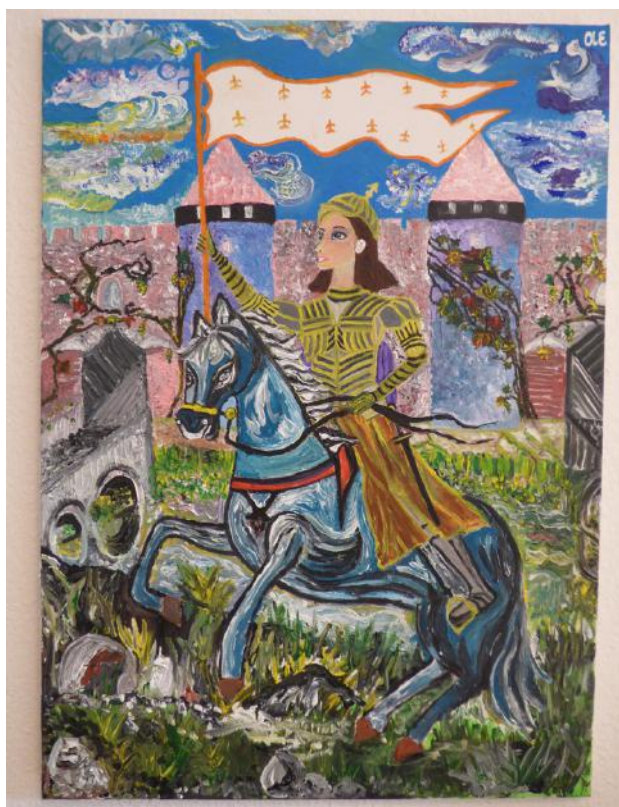
**Could you describe the emotional connection you feel when painting scenes inspired by Ilina's ballet?**

The emotional connection between ballet and drawing is very close and interacts. For example, I was inspired by Ilina's ballet scene where she choreographed a role for the young little girl-child, who will play and dance as Jeanne. I painted a picture „Jeanne d'Arc as a Child in Domremy-the Place of Birth“. I Imagined and painted how a young pisant little girl Jeanne was looking from the window, watching the lavender bloom, hearing the birds singing and trusting that she was guided by visions. Helm on the roof of her house is a symbol that she will have to become a hero of her time.

**Your artwork blends themes of classical ballet with powerful historical figures. How do you bridge the gap between these two elements?**

I bridged the gap to focus on a story, imagination and inspiration to show connection with scenes of my daughter's ballet choreography.

For example, Ilina choreographed the ballet scene where the personality of Jeanne was struggling between angel and devil, between light and dark sides when Jeanne having been captured by the English, where Jeanne had strange visions and in the ballet she danced between light and dark sides to chose the light one. I had an idea to depict this scene on canvas to create the picture with two birds from white and black feathers and between them there is a line made from a tree branch.



Olesya Eder | The Hero Maiden Joan of Arc of Orleans | 2024



Olesya Eder | Jeanne's Deepness of Thoughts | 2025

**In your opinion, what is the significance of painting Jeanne d'Arc, a figure so deeply ingrained in history, through a personal and artistic lens?**

I was impressed to paint and to connect the pictures with the ballet choreography scenes. In the modern world we could only imagine how Jeanne d'Arc was, how many trials did this young girl have to go through, who became from the simple village - girl a legendary leader, who was guided by her visions, led the french army to the victory, but later was captured, accused in witchcraft and the crime of dressing the man's clothes and she was burned at the stake. Centures later, Jeanne d'Arc became a symbol of courage und bravery.

I painted a picture where there is a young girl climbed out the clock face and got stuck there. I gave the title of this picture „Zeitgeist“ with the meaning that Jeanne d'Arc became the Hero of her Time, her Epoch.

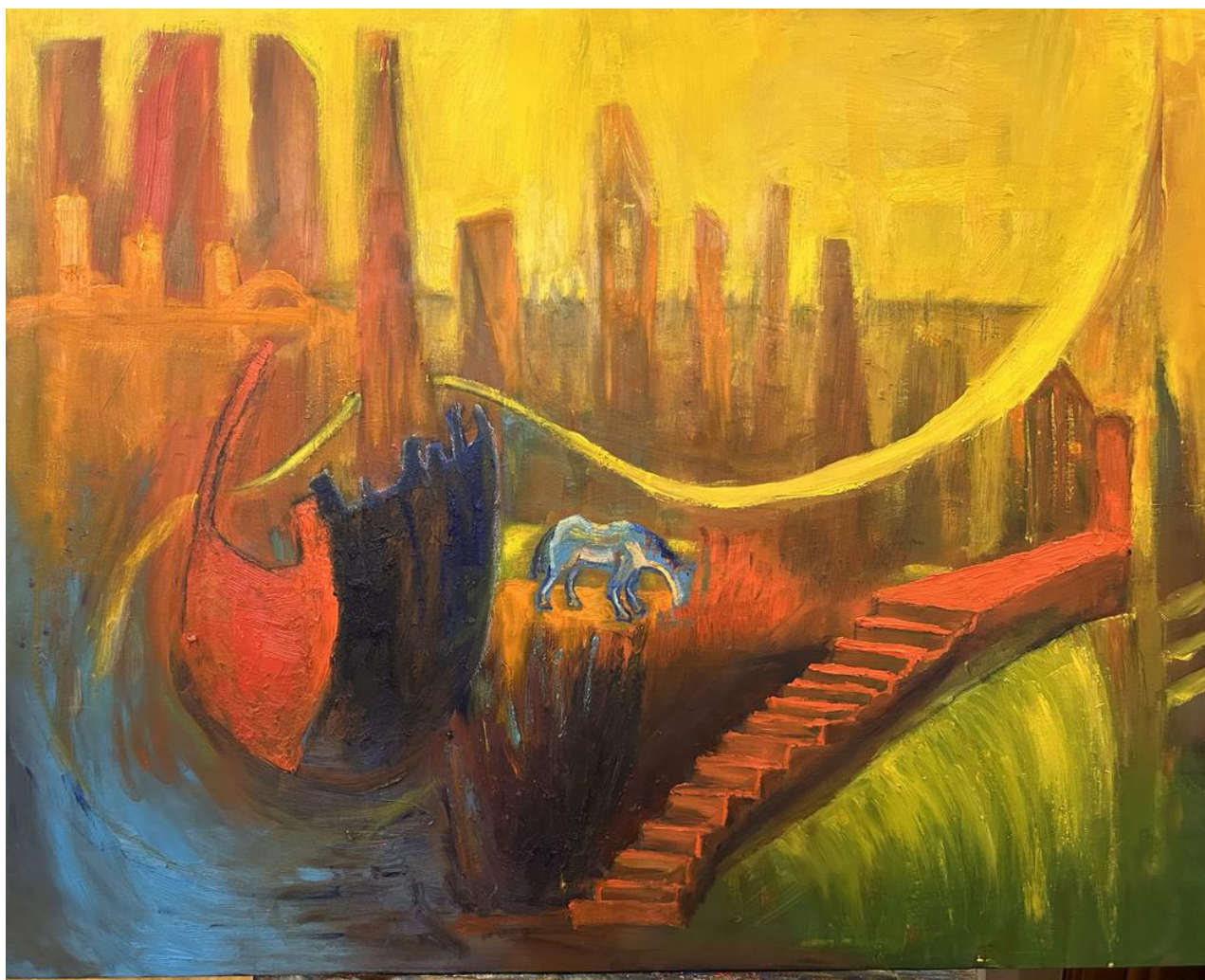
**What role do color and texture play in conveying the emotions you intend to express in your paintings?**

I draw using acrylic paints, with pleasure, enthusiasm, happiness and joy because acrylic colors are vibrant. I can express ideas in colors and at the end to have an interesting result that I didn't even expect.

To the ballet „Jeann d'Arc“ I painted acrylic picture on Canva „Theater Masks“, which conveying different kind of emotions at the same time when you want to interpret this picture. The masks symbolize laughing and crying, tragedy and comedy, theater, transformation, identity, spirits and characters.



**Bagzhan Alikhanov Tokhtarkhanuly** is a young artist from Kazakhstan, working in the fields of realism and contemporary art. His artistic practice includes portraits, still lifes, and landscapes, all executed with special attention to detail and expressiveness. Through his works, he strives to convey the mood, character, and essence of everyday life. Bagzhan began his education at an art school and college at the Kazakh National University of Arts (KazNUA), where he laid the foundation for his academic skill. He is currently continuing his studies at the Kazakh National University of Arts "Shabyt," actively exploring new artistic approaches and expanding the horizons of his creativity. Recently, Bagzhan began working in a contemporary style, searching for his own unique visual language. He is inspired by images of urban environments, people, their emotions and stories, as well as events happening in society. This allows him to create works filled with personal content and relevance. The artist actively participates in exhibitions and competitions, where his works have already gained recognition. In the future, Bagzhan aims to establish himself in the professional art scene, continuing to develop his art and share his views and feelings with the world through painting.









# Tait Ryssdal

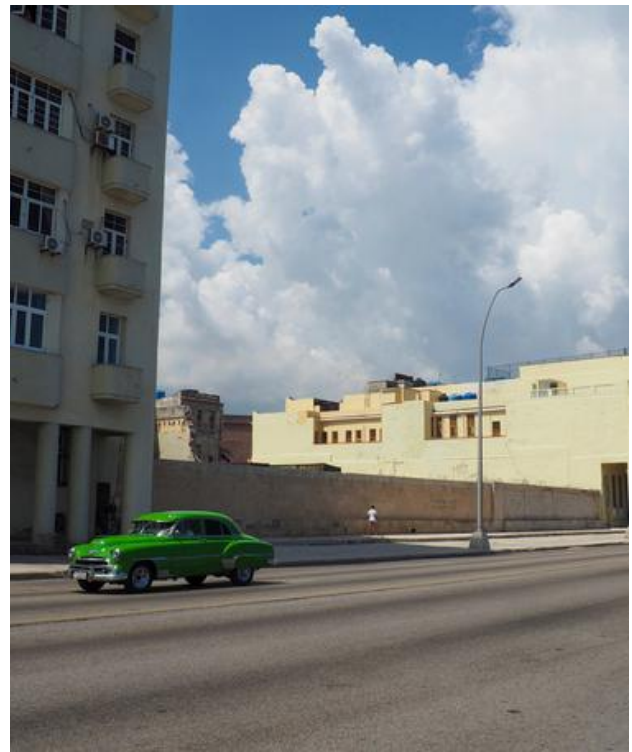
**Your photography often captures quiet yet dramatic moments of street life. What draws you to these moments?**

I try to pull out the gestures and expressions of people that are too quick or too subtle in real-time to appreciate but that, when frozen, are stripped down to something intense and meaningful. That's the driving force as I meander around looking for people to photograph.

**How do you decide what to photograph? Is it**



Tait Ryssdal | Baby in Window | 2024



Tait Ryssdal | Green Car on the Malecon, Havana | 2024

**an instinctive process or something more intentional?**

It's much more of an art than a science. In practice, the force that pulls me from one subject to the next is a set of triggers - people gesturing, yelling, laughing, smoking, praying, driving, arguing, looking serious, or funny, or peaceful, or angry. The goal is always to find interesting people doing interesting things.

**You primarily work in black and white. How does this choice influence the mood and perception of your images?**

I decided to take photography more seriously when I started shooting mostly in black and white. Black and white strips away distractions - a brightly colored bag or sign or clothes, for instance - to force me to focus on the essence of a scene. Rather than looking for color and light, I can focus just on the light. And I think that decision is what gives a lot of my photos a feeling of quietness or contemplation.

**Can you talk about the role of street life in your work? How do you see it evolving in your photographs?**

I feel like I am most in tune with a city when I'm taking photos of the people there and



photography gives me a sharper sense for how every location has a unique feel. It helps me to sense how different places are and how much they are the same. I do try to take photos that are timeless, if there even is such a thing. Generally, that means trying to catch people when they're not hunched over on their phones or getting out of a new car. I want to pull the subject out of those situations so the viewer can focus more clearly on the emotion or feeling.

**How does your background in visual art, particularly in painting and charcoal, influence your photography?**

I started making art more seriously in high school and everything that I do now in photography is grounded in those fundamentals. Basic composition techniques, light, form all take practice to see and that practice started when I was painting and drawing in high school.

**Do you feel that capturing street life in its raw, unfiltered form serves as a commentary**

**on society? If so, what message do you aim to convey?**

It's impossible not to sound cliché here, but if there is a message, it comes to me while I shoot. I certainly don't go out with a narrative in mind that I'm trying to pull out. The message determines itself for me and that's the most exciting part of photography on the street, I never know what I'll get.

**In your photographs, there's often a sense of isolation or quiet contemplation. How do you achieve that feeling visually?**

I've just started to realize that relatively few of my photos convey a sense of joy or happiness – they're mostly serious or stern or contemplative. Generally, I take what the situation gives me, but maybe that's something I will have to focus on! The quietness is partly what I seek out and partly thanks to the black and white. What I love about shooting black and white is that it allows you to drink in these moments with real clarity.



Tait Ryssdal | Car Pulling Away, Havana | 2024



## Zara Xena

Born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), USSR, in 1987, Zara Xena Malikova is of Russian and Avar (Dagestani) descent. A self-taught artist, she has been painting for over two decades. After living in Moscow, she relocated to New York City in 2015, where she worked as an antiques restorer for four years, refining her attention to detail and technique. In 2024, she joined the Art Students League, further developing her practice. Working primarily in the Impressionist style, her paintings explore themes of identity, existence, and the nuances of perception.

### *Artist Statement*

The Artist's work reflects an exploration of human presence, identity, and perception. She aims to distill the essence of being, focusing on the subtleties of form, color, and expression. In works such as "Hello Again" and the in-progress "A Woman, Being," the artist creates spaces where simplicity and complexity coexist, inviting the viewer to bring their own narratives and biases into dialogue with the artwork. In "A Woman, Being," the subject exists without explicit context—simply present. Yet, the act of observation transforms her existence into something layered with meaning, whether personal, political, or emotional. This interplay between what is seen and what is projected lies at the heart of her practice.









## — Interview

# Skylar Rains

**Your work blends light, airy themes with darker, more complex emotions. How do you balance these contrasting elements in your creative process?**

I've realized these elements don't feel so opposing when I step back and look at the bigger picture of how I process emotions. My mind doesn't do black and white anymore. I spent a lot of time trying to categorize, trying to make decisions that felt final — like I needed to define what something was or wasn't, and that would be the end of it.

But I don't approach things that way now. At this point in my life, I try to take an honest look at all the emotions I carry. I let myself feel them fully, even when they're contradictory. I've found that both can be true — light and dark, hope and heaviness — existing at the same time, layered over each other.

It's that overlap that stands out to me. That space where things blur instead of separate. That's where I've found a kind of balance, especially in my art. It's why I'm drawn to using bright colors paired with darker imagery. It reflects how I hold things internally — not as opposites fighting for space, but as parts of a whole that inform each other.

**You've had a strong connection to New Orleans and its culture. How has your**



**background shaped your work, especially considering the impact of Hurricane Katrina on your life?**

Being from New Orleans — going through what I went through, and pushing myself into a new life — has tied me to the very place that hurt me most. My old life there held both trauma and triumph. The Big Easy is rich in culture, so unique and diverse, but there's also a profound darkness that runs through it.

I grew up surrounded by art, music, and food. Cajun and Creole culture shaped me as an artist. Swamp paintings, jazz in the streets, crawfish boils — those are the things that make me feel most like myself.

Middle school is when I started to bloom creatively. I painted to ease my mind, bounced from clarinet to guitar to bass, and found joy in experimenting in the kitchen. That's when I became Skylar Rains, the artist.

But there's another side to New Orleans — alcoholism, illness, mental health struggles, addiction. If it's not us, it's someone we love. For





me, it was my father, my mother, my brother... and the list goes on. The culture celebrates life, but it also enables these vicious cycles. When Hurricane Katrina hit, I was six. Our home flooded with seven feet of water. I lost everything and my six-year-old brain couldn't grasp why we weren't going home. But there was no home left. Losing our safety changed everything. And when your whole city is gone, there's no words for that. All of this — what I've seen, what I've survived — shapes the balance I carry into my work. I come from one of the most vibrant places on earth, but its shadow follows close behind.

**As a 3D designer and fabricator, how does your technical expertise influence your artistic practice? Do you see these two aspects of your work as interconnected or separate?**

I have no choice but to let my technical side connect with my artistic side — they've become inseparable. Since attending New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, and later when I took the leap and moved to Atlanta to attend Savannah College of Art and Design, I've been grounded in traditional training. But things really started to shift when I started working as a laser cutting tech at SCAD. That's when my creative process and technical knowledge started to merge, and new possibilities opened up.

I understood early on that the workforce values artists who know how to work with technology. That awareness helped shape my path, and it's what allowed me to succeed in my career at Arc Design and Fabrication. As a fabricator, I've been trusted to operate CNC routers, plasma CNC machines, and 3D printers — tools that completely changed the way I see and approach my own work. In addition to fabrication, I also engineer the shop and production drawings for Arc, which has given me a deep understanding of how things are built and how to communicate that process clearly through 2D visuals. I've developed a broad skill set — building furniture, working on brick-and-mortar spaces, and creating custom art pieces. These parts of my job demand precision, math, and intention. That mindset has carried over into my personal work, pushing me to level up both conceptually and in craftsmanship. I carry these skills with me, no matter what medium I'm working in. But my practice isn't always so technical. I still return to painting, collaging, and sculpting without digital tools — just hands, materials, and feeling. That space is just as important to me. Once again, it's the balance between structure and spontaneity, between analog and digital, that defines who I am as an artist. It's in that intersection that I've found my voice.





**Your work often explores symbolism and color to express emotions. Can you share a piece that best represents this approach and the feelings behind it?**

“Spiking My Heart” is a strong example of how I use color and symbolism in my work. The ombré of pink, purple, and yellow feels like a sunset on the horizon — like a setting of emotion or circumstance. But the heart at the center is surrounded by spikes. That’s where the tension lives.

Emotions set. They pass through us, just like a sun going down. But the pain points — those stay. Even when I let go of a person or situation, the impact lingers. It leaves something behind that permanently changes the shape of my heart. The title is in the present tense for a reason. “Spiking” isn’t something that happened and ended — it’s something I carry forward. My heart is still whole, always will be, no matter who comes or goes, no matter what hurts me. The spikes don’t shatter me — they reshape me. They teach me how to adapt to the new pain point and grow around it. There’s something bittersweet but beautiful about that.

Nothing and no one will hurt me the way I’ve been hurt before. I’ve already survived the worst of it. So when a new spike appears, I wear it like a badge of honor. It means I allowed myself to feel. To love. To break open and keep going. I don’t let pain define me — I let it spike me. And in that spiking, I evolve.

**How do you decide which medium to work with for a particular project? Do you feel certain themes or concepts are better suited to specific materials or techniques?**

I tend to get into “kicks” with whatever medium’s calling to me at the time. Sometimes it’s clay, sometimes I stumble across a stack of old magazines and cut them to shreds. I might want to get messy with paint, or lean into something more technical just to see where it takes me. It really depends on where I’m at mentally and emotionally — it’s all pretty instinctual. I don’t usually start with a clear concept. I let the materials guide me. When I try to force a plan or overthink it, I get stuck. The piece doesn’t get finished. It starts to feel like work — like pressure



Skylar Rains | Grinding Til the Blood Puddles | 2025

— which I already deal with enough in my day job. In my personal work, I need freedom to just respond in the moment.

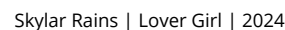
That’s where balance shows up for me. I’m not letting the material talk for me, and I’m not talking at it either. It’s more of a conversation — something I’m feeling out in real time. There’s this push and pull, a kind of rhythm that lets me stay connected to the process. That balance between control and flow, structure and spontaneity, is where the work feels most like me.

**Your portfolio includes everything from painting to sculpture and mixed media. What’s the most challenging medium for you to work with, and why?**

Sculpture has always been the most challenging and the most rewarding. Taking a concept and giving it physical life, shaping it into something real in the 3D, is never simple. But that’s what makes it so meaningful.

One of my earliest sculpture teachers told my class, “If you’re not here to fail, you’re not in the right place.” That stuck with me. It’s something I’ve carried into every part of my life. It was also the moment I truly fell in love with sculpture —





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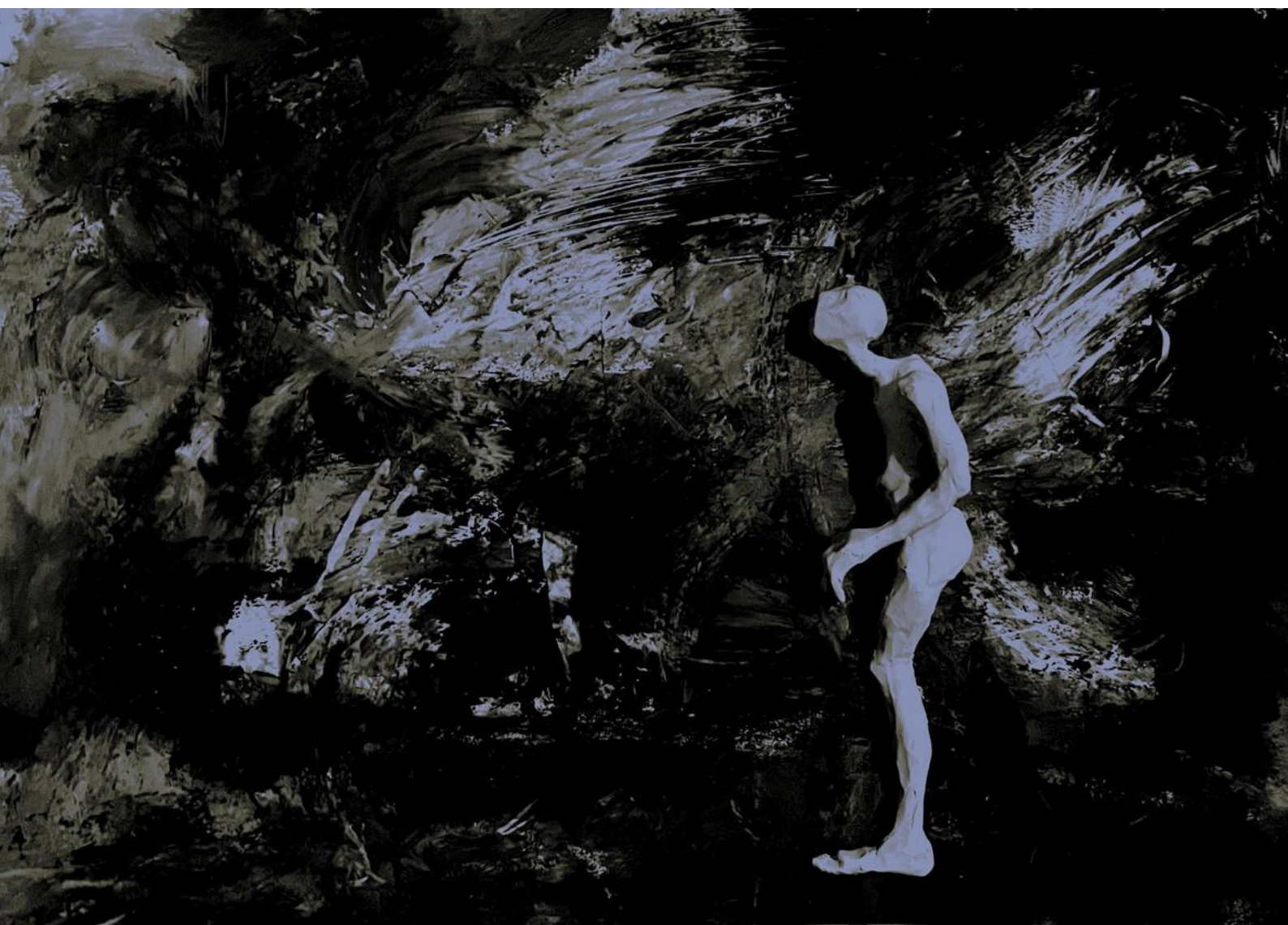
## **Anna Kapranchuk**

An illustrator with a genuine interest in the real and the transcendent, I explore themes that deeply resonate with me through my work. I prefer working with my hands and have a deep appreciation for the materials I work with. I have a particular fascination with the themes of dreams, nostalgia, the surrealism of the everyday, and the unconscious.

### *Project Statement*

“Onward, to the Sun”, plasticine series. The illustration is inspired by the myth of Icarus, where the aspiration for greatness and light clashes with the realities of a world that is imperfect and cold-blooded. In this reinterpreted version, the hero, born in an era of anxiety, expresses doubts about their original idea before even taking flight. The dream remains just as desirable and unattainable, and the noise and grime of urban reality only widen the gap.





Anna Kapranchuk | Onward, to the Sun



# Marie Leroy

**Your series "Arbonirisme" blends the beauty of trees with the concept of dreams. How did you come up with the idea for this project?**

During the pandemic, like everybody else, I couldn't practice street or concert photography, but I could go for walks in nature. I observed the trees a lot and started to read more about them, about how a forest lives. Then, I decided to literally change my point of view about trees and show this new perspective in my work.

**Can you tell us more about the neologism "Arbonirisme"? What does it mean to you personally, and how does it influence your approach to photography?**

In French, tree is "arbre", and I wanted to link the trees with the world of dreams, with "onirism".



Marie Leroy | No Title | 2021



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Plus, I like to invent new words for those times when we don't really have the right word to express what we feel or what we experience. "Arbonirisme" is the action of dreaming under the trees, to look up, to be optimistic, to take the time for ourselves. This new perspective has influenced my photographic work a lot, it shows me a path towards abstraction – yes, photography can be abstract...

**In your statement, you mention that trees are the "most generous living beings on Earth." How do you think trees symbolize emotional healing and personal growth?**

Trees can heal in various ways. They healed me when I started to shoot them for this series. Arbonirisme can be a kind of therapy for me, and maybe for other people. I think developing our imagination under the trees is a kind of cognitive exercise that helps us stop ruminating on negative thoughts. Plus, the trees show me that time moves forward and always does its work: It heals wounds, whatever they may be. Trees are such resilient beings. They're inspiring.



**Your photography often uses low-angle shots and intense colors. How do you decide on the visual elements of each piece, and what do they represent to you?**

When I'm on a walk in nature with my camera, sometimes a tree kind of "calls" me, I notice its shape, its colors, its size, the beautiful harmony of its branches. So I look at the tree from bottom to top, in a complete low angle shot, as if I were lying down, and I look for a composition of the branches and leaves, which shows me something. Sometimes it's figurative shapes, like the way children see animals or faces in the clouds – this capacity is called pareidolia. Sometimes it's an echo of an artwork or an artist I like.

**You've said that viewers may see different things in the trees, similar to a Rorschach test. What are some of the most interesting interpretations you've encountered?**

One time, children came to my exhibition with their teacher. They were 6 or 7 years old and learning to read. They recognized the plane tree, the kind of trees we often have in French schools and which are cut in square shape – they've seen letters in the tree. It says a lot about us at a certain time of our life. Maybe these same kids, if they were to see the photo years later, they'd have a vision of something else. For this same photo, adults have seen insects or Asian signs or a weird man. Of course, I see lots of things in my photos too. But I don't say what, not at first. I let the public share what they have in mind and try not to influence their vision.



Marie Leroy | No Title | 2021



Marie Leroy | No Title | 2021

**How did your artistic residency in Martinique influence the direction of your work, especially in terms of the trees on the island?**

My approach to this series was different. In Martinique, trees tell a lot about the island's history. First, many of them provide fruits and therefore have an impact on the culinary culture. Others provide rubber or wood. One in particular is used to create yoles, a typical Caribbean boat hollowed out of a single piece from the tree trunk. The Bakoua's leaves are used to make the local hat of the same name. The traveler's tree has a very particular shape that allows it to store rainwater: Its name is linked to its usefulness in providing water to lost and thirsty travelers. Finally, some trees had branches very parallel to the ground, which were unfortunately useful for hanging slaves at the whim of the colonists.

**Can you talk about the process of capturing the essence of a tree in your work? What is it about trees that fascinates you?**

Trees fascinate me because they seem so calm and still that we can forget they're alive – sometimes we simply decide to uproot them because they bother us. We forget that they're unique beings, that they have power, a life force, that they can live much longer than we do, and even regenerate sometimes. Some of them have been on Earth for decades, centuries, even millennia. Imagine what they've witnessed! So when I choose a tree and take a photo, I try to see it as an individual with something to tell.

**StreyKatt aka Bobby Collins**, is an artist, born in New York, USA, and is based in Berlin, Germany. Using analogue photography, as his main medium, since 2007, along with video, and prosaic writing, his self-taught education in and experience with the medium, stems from having worked alongside high-end fashion, entertainment and advertising photographers, during the 1990's onwards.



Bobby Collins | Veronika | 2015





Bobby Collins | Veronika | 2015

### *Project Statement*

'VERONIKA' was dually inspired by the Hyères 2016 Competition/Opening Ceremony prize winning Kiev-based label, Yulia Yefimtchuk+, whose political undertones in the work were re-interpreted in these images, with not only the bold orange and black & white Soviet-style pieces from the collection, along with the incorporation of aspects of Le Corbusier's Brutalistic 'Unité d'Habitation' in Berlin and other props, as well as by, everyday people.. all of the 'VERONIKAS'. The second part of this dual inspiration for 'VERONIKA' was unfortunately due to the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. VERONIKA initiated as a 'warning' and a kind of protest, through the lens of art. Currently, in the world's politically charged atmosphere, evident in today's global society, we are suggested to take more control over our lives as governments incessantly try to strip away our freedoms. We're finding ourselves as a collective conscience, in need of more creative expression and freedom of movement, based on this seemingly impending oppression that 'VERONIKA' shows could soon (and conceivably) become commonplace.

**Irene Fiestas**, born in Madrid, is a visual artist whose creative journey weaves together painting, photography, memory, and poetic metaphor. She graduated in Painting from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna in 2013 and has since explored the art world through residencies and experiences in Spain, Bologna, and Berlin. In 2017, she chose to settle more permanently in Bologna, where she deepened her artistic research, focusing on the cyanotype process. Her cyanotypes have become central to her practice—an alchemical language through which she investigates the inner world, nature, time, and memory. Irene does not approach photography as a tool for documentation, but rather as a vehicle to construct metaphors, evoke a sense of belonging, and narrate intimate, dreamlike stories anchored in recollection. Her most recent project, *Il Palazzo della Memoria*, exhibited in Bologna in autumn 2021 and later at Villa Salina in Castel Maggiore in summer 2023, is a powerful example of this visual storytelling. Irene's work has been featured in both solo and group exhibitions across Madrid, Bologna, Amsterdam, and Berlin. She has collaborated with international artist collectives such as Macédoine (Bologna) and WW48 (Berlin), and her work has been published in *Eye Photo Magazine* (2016, 2022) and *Biophilia Natural Trend* (2022). Irene continues to develop a visual language that merges the painterly with the photographic, crafting cyanotypes that invite viewers into poetic reflections on presence, transformation, and memory.





# — Interview

## Ian Ball

**Your project seems to explore the complexity of identity through seemingly unrelated images. Can you explain how you chose these particular moments to capture, and what they represent for you?**

The most challenging part of this project was deliberately choosing images between which I could find no obvious connection. I'd photograph anything that caught my attention, no matter how trivial, and then try to select three that felt entirely detached from one another—metaphorically disconnected from my lens. To me, they reflect the viewer's power to construct meaning where none was intentionally placed.

It's a bit of a cliché, but we really are all Frankenstein's monsters—stitched together from moments, people, places, and fragments of influence. Those patchwork parts don't just make us who we are; they dictate how we interpret the world. I can only ever see through the eyes of my own monster, which is why I find it so compelling to witness how others assemble meaning from the same pieces.

**The images you have presented blend nature and industry. What are you hoping to convey by juxtaposing these elements?**



While the environmental message is hard to miss, I'd like to think there's also room to contemplate the strange aesthetics at play—to see both the beauty and the quiet horror in what we've built. Nature's elegance speaks for itself; it doesn't need my endorsement. But I've caught myself staring at a crumbling factory wall with the same kind of awe—marveling at the ambition it took to create it, and, oddly, comforted by the evidence of its decay. There's something poetic in that impermanence. Our ingenuity may be vast, but so is our fragility. The damage we've done won't outlast us forever—and maybe, in a bittersweet way, that's part of the hope.

**How do you approach the concept of solitude versus community in your work? Are these themes personal, or do they reflect broader societal trends?**

Without a doubt, it's personal. Solitude feels less like a choice and more like a default setting—woven into the fabric of how I think and create. Collaboration has its place, and I value community deeply, but when it comes to generating ideas, I find that quiet isolation acts as a kind of intellectual catalyst.

It's not that my work is explicitly about solitude, but it rarely exists without it. The silence isn't just background noise—it's part of the process. So even



when the subject matter doesn't shout "aloneness," it still echoes with the conditions under which it was born.

**Your work invites the viewer to make their own connections between the images. What do you hope people will take away from the contrasts you've explored?**

If there's one thing I'd hope someone takes away, it's permission—the permission to engage with an image on their own terms. We've gotten used to letting images pass over us like weather: noticed, but not questioned. Or worse, we second-guess our reactions, assuming there's a "right" way to see, tucked somewhere in a textbook or gallery guide. Yes, a formal education can give us the tools for a more nuanced take—but intuition isn't a lesser form of understanding. Sometimes an image resonates not because it checks historical or theoretical boxes, but because it hums at the same frequency as something inside us. That doesn't make it less valid. If anything, it makes it more alive.

**You mention that your work reflects a vast and multicultural world. How do you think your local environment in Niagara influences your artistic practice?**

I spent years working in Niagara Falls, where tourism isn't just an industry—it's part of the landscape. In a place like that, you get this fascinating convergence: people from every imaginable background, all gathered to witness the same phenomenon. It always reminded me of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*—different eyes on the same cascade, each bringing their own story to it. At its core, it's just water tumbling off a cliff. And yet, for one person, it might be a spiritual epiphany; for another, just a photo op. The sublime and the underwhelming coexisting in the roar of the same



waterfall.

**What role do performance pieces play in your practice, and how do they complement or contrast with your photographic work?**

There are a lot of performance artists that I find endlessly inspiring, and I think I get a lot more energy from that creative sphere than most. For instance, there is something amazing about Bruce Dunlap shooting Chris Burden with a .22 for a performance piece. While my photographic work has very little in common with the likes of Burden, I feel a weird kinship with the audacity of the whole endeavour.

**Is there a specific philosophy or belief that guides your creative process, or do you approach each project with a different mindset?**

I try to approach everything differently, but if I narrowed it down to a singular philosophy, I'd look to David Lynch, who said, "I don't know why people expect art to make sense. They accept the fact that life doesn't make sense." I love this quote, and I love having my understanding of a thing I made, and seeing people come to their separate understanding and knowing that we are all hitting the mark, just from different angles.



**Olga Sorokina** is an artist and Jungian analyst. She lives and works in London. Olga studied at the Contemporary Art School TZVETNIC (Moscow 2023–2024), participated in the contemporary art course with Arseniy Zhilyaev (Venice, online, 2023–2024), and took the Painting course at the "Conception" Contemporary Art School with Mika Plutitskaya (online, 2021–2022). She has participated in group exhibitions in London (Indra gallery), Moscow (A-s-t-r-a, Zverev Center, Damirova Gallery, Arbuzz Gallery, Space 37), St. Petersburg (Kunsthalle № 7 Gallery), as well as online exhibitions in Russia and London (Artservatory, RuptureXIBIT, PL Photography Studio). In her practice, she explores themes of the relationship between individuals and collective forces, identity, and new rituality. Another key theme is corporeality—how cultural context shapes the experience of the body.

### *Artist Statement*

Recognition and reproduction of the body's experience is a key aspect of my artistic practice. The body fascinates me as a "shared space," both completely personal and simultaneously influenced by the views of others and society as a whole, with its approvals and prohibitions. In my works, there is often an obsessive repetition of images. The duality of repetition (on one hand, marking anxiety, and on the other, reproducing pleasure) reflects what psychoanalysts would call "the ambivalence of the object," which combines the potentials of sexuality and destructiveness. My main mediums are painting and graphic art. Using a wide range of materials (oil, acrylic, pastel, markers, or ink), I work on paper as a highly sensitive and ephemeral medium that allows me to deeply feel the fragility and temporality inherent to the human body and psyche.



Olga Sorokina | SPROUTS | 2024

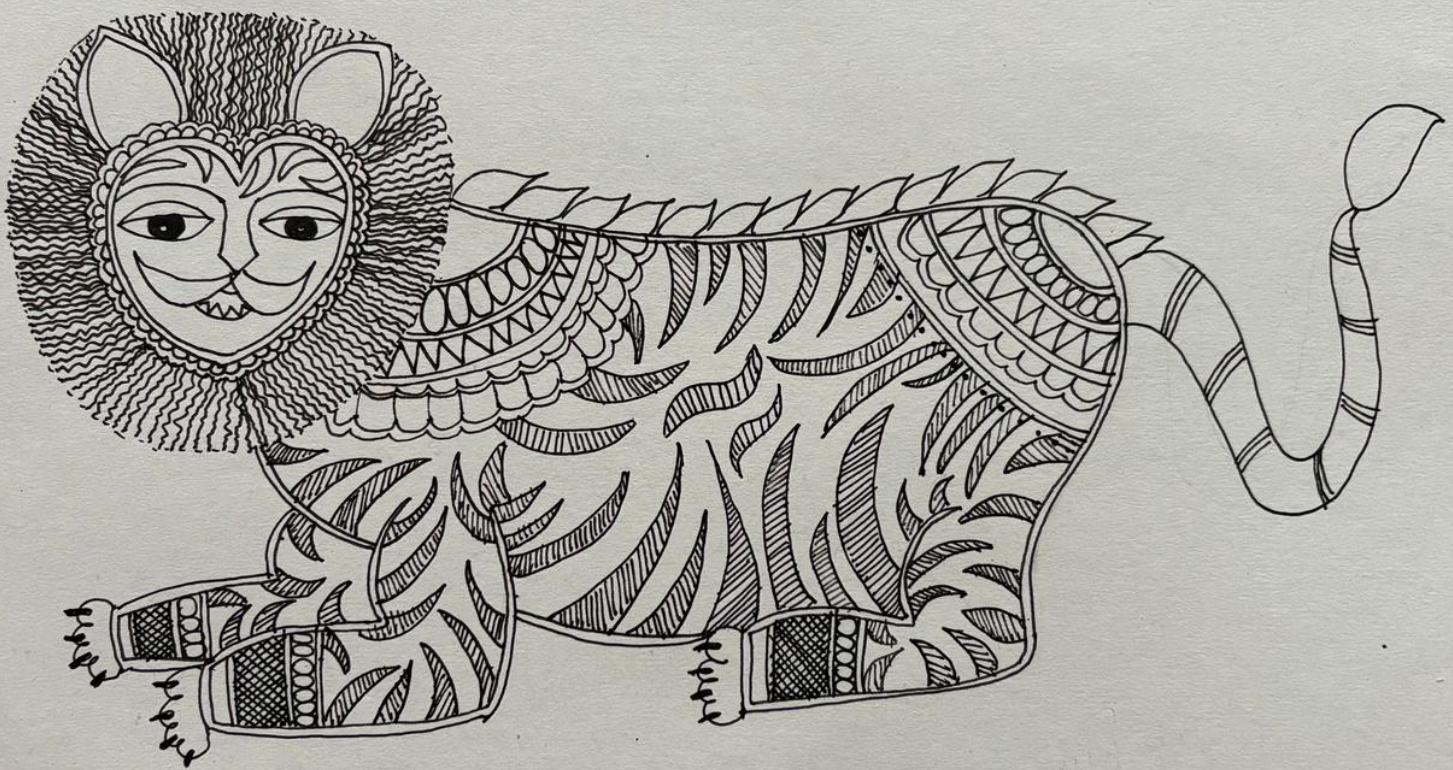






## Swati Bhargava

I am a PhD researcher and an eternally curious social scientist, passionately exploring the intersections of entrepreneurship education, design science research, and innovative teaching methodologies. My academic journey is driven by a commitment to discovering new ways to engage and educate through creative and thoughtful approaches. Beyond academia, I am an avid art enthusiast with a deep appreciation for cultural expressions. My artistic inclinations are enriched by my love for North Indian classical music, my dedication to learning Kathak, and my spirited energy as a Bhangra dancer. I believe that art and movement are profound forms of storytelling, offering new perspectives on human experience. As a traveler and nature lover, I find inspiration in diverse landscapes and cultures, often weaving these experiences into my academic and creative work. Additionally, I am a workout enthusiast, constantly challenging myself to maintain both physical and intellectual vigor. I am driven by a philosophy of lifelong learning and a desire to blend tradition with innovation, whether in research, art, or personal pursuits.









**Martha Borges** is a Brazilian visual artist based in São Paulo, with a background in architecture and a practice focused on painting, collage, and textile work. Her artistic research explores the intersections between cultural memory, ornamental traditions, and the human figure, often drawing on elements of interior spaces, botanical symbolism, and domestic rituals. Through large-format acrylic paintings and visual compositions rich in color and form, Borges creates works that reflect layered narratives—merging personal memory with references to decorative arts and collective heritage. Her work balances clarity and emotion, structure and poetic intuition. She has participated in group exhibitions in São Paulo and continues to develop her practice through material exploration and conceptual refinement, seeking international platforms to expand dialogue and visibility in the contemporary art field.

### *Artist Statement*

My work investigates the intersection between cultural memory, ornamental language, and the human figure. Through acrylic painting, collage, and textile compositions, I explore visual narratives that emerge from domestic scenes, botanical symbols, and intimate rituals. The recurring presence of vases, plants, fabrics, and architectural details speaks to a universe where memory and materiality overlap—where beauty is not an adornment, but a structure of emotional and symbolic depth. In each piece, I seek to create a space of reflection—inviting the viewer into silent moments of gathering, fragmentation, and resonance.



Martha Borges | Fragments of a Journey | 2021





Martha Borges | Quiet Gathering | 2018

# — Interview

## Hooria Sanei

**Your work explores the connection between memory, identity, and personal experience. How do you approach translating these abstract concepts into visual form through photography?**

Memory and identity are abstract and often hard to define. For me, photography is a way to bring these unseen things to life. I use objects, textures, and symbols that carry personal meaning, like a childhood doll, a lock of hair, or the empty outlines of family members. These items become emotional stand-ins, creating a visual language for what memory feels like: broken, fragile, and constantly changing.

But I don't always think of my work as "translating" concepts into visuals. That word implies a kind of direct conversion from thought to image, but my process is more intuitive, more sensory. I've always found verbal expression challenging at times. There are moments when words fall short, when language feels too linear to hold what I'm trying to say. In those moments, art becomes my voice. I'm not just illustrating an idea; I'm searching for a visual language that can speak where words cannot. A language that's felt more than read. One that reaches beyond culture, beyond explanation, toward something more universal.

**The idea of a "menu of memories" is an intriguing concept. How do you decide which moments or memories to capture in this visual "menu"?**

The concept of a tasting menu has always intrigued me. I've often thought about how, in a restaurant, the chef chooses exactly what to serve. You don't pick each dish yourself; instead, the experience is curated, with each course designed to complement the next. That idea inspired the structure of this series. I envisioned myself as both the chef and the dish, deciding which memories to serve and how they would come together as a cohesive experience.

I created nine distinct "dishes," each drawn from a core memory. The selection was based on the moments that felt most central to my identity and which could sit together in a meaningful, emotional sequence. Just like in a tasting menu, each course stands on its own, but there's intention behind how they interact. Some memories are



Hooria Sanei | A Menu of Memories

tender, others painful, but all are essential to telling a fuller story of who I am.

**Your work involves a multi-sensory approach, with elements of both photography and technology. How does the integration of technology shape the way you capture moments and emotions?**

My work in photography is deeply rooted in a multi-sensory approach, where technology becomes an extension of how I see and feel the world. While the camera captures the initial moment, it's through digital tools, whether it's editing, layering, or interactive display, that I'm able to shape the emotional resonance of an image. Technology allows me to blur the lines between the seen and the felt, between memory and presence. It gives me the freedom to push beyond the literal, to evoke atmosphere, mood, and a kind of emotional texture that invites viewers to not just look at the image, but to experience it.

**You mention a transformation of raw ingredients into a dish as a metaphor for how we shape our identities over time. Can you elaborate on how this metaphor manifests in the visual structure of your work?**

I see identity as something cooked over time. Raw ingredients, like memories, emotions, and inherited traits, are not enough on their own. They need to interact, to be transformed through experience, pressure, and time. In my visuals, I tried to mirror that by creating images that feel composed but imperfect, curated but emotionally raw. Some photos are literal, like placing a painting on a plate, while others are more abstract, like using absence as a visual element. Just as a dish reveals more than its recipe, I hope these images hint at the deeper emotional processes behind the final form.

**The concept of identity as a collage of memories is central to your series. How do you balance the individual elements of your memories, and how do they come together to form a cohesive image?**

Informed by the philosophical ideas of thinkers like



Martin Heidegger, I view identity as something not fixed but always unfolding. Heidegger described "Being" as a constant state of becoming, where we are shaped by our past while always open to the future. My memories are not merely past moments; they are fragments of an ongoing existence, each one shaping who I am but never fully defining me.

These memories are not isolated; they interact, overlap, and transform over time. There is no need for them to fit together perfectly, because the essence of identity is in the tension between them. We are defined not by a single moment but by the way those moments exist in relation to one another. Some memories are sharp and clear, while others fade into abstraction. Together, however, they form a more authentic, complex representation of self, a "becoming" that is ever-changing.

What interests me in this process is that even though each memory may seem disjointed, they collectively contribute to a larger story. It's not about creating a perfectly linear narrative, but about how these fragments, when seen as part of an ongoing journey, reveal a deeper unity. Identity is not about aligning experiences neatly, but about how they come together—how they coexist and shape who we are over time.

In this sense, the images I create are not about capturing a fixed identity, but about reflecting a fluid, evolving process. The collage of memories becomes a visual metaphor for "becoming," showing how identity is shaped by time, experience, and transformation. It is not a thing to be found but a continuous way of being, always changing, always evolving.

**The images in this series are deeply personal. How do you approach sharing these intimate aspects of yourself through your work, and how do you hope viewers will relate to it?**

Sharing these intimate aspects of myself through my work feels both like vulnerability and release. However, this isn't just about exposing my own experiences; it's about opening a space for connection. By sharing these fragments of my life, I hope to offer viewers the



Hooria Sanei | Tasting a Feeling

opportunity to find pieces of their own stories within them. While the specifics of my experiences are uniquely mine, the themes of memory, identity, and transformation are universal. We are all shaped by time, by the moments that define us, and by the silences in between. Although these images are deeply personal, they serve as an invitation to reflect on the shared human experience.

I want my work to extend beyond the personal and touch something collective. I want viewers to pause and consider how their own identities have evolved, how their memories and experiences have shaped them. For me, art is a space where the personal becomes universal, where my story transforms into a mirror for others. In this shared space, the boundaries of self begin to dissolve, and we are all connected through the emotions and experiences that shape us.

**In your creative process, how do you handle moments of uncertainty or emotional vulnerability when creating art based on such personal experiences?**

As human beings, we all go through moments of uncertainty, whether it's in conceptualizing an idea or in the midst of creating something. For me, the key to navigating those moments is embracing the process of making itself. Even when I'm unsure or feeling vulnerable, I return to the act of creation. It's in those moments that I feel most present and free.

I've learned that it's not always about having a clear vision or a defined path. Sometimes the process is messy, sometimes it's raw and emotional, and I allow that to be part of the journey. The joy of creating is that it gives me the freedom to explore, to not have all the answers, and to let the work evolve as it unfolds. It's when I let go of the need for control and embrace the uncertainty that the work feels most honest.

By focusing on the act of creation itself, I move through those uncertain moments with more ease. It's through this trust in the process that the work becomes a truer reflection of who I am, and often, it's in the mess and the vulnerability that the most powerful moments emerge.



Hooria Sanei | Tasting Time

## **Fabienne Duveau**

Totally self-taught, I have been creating relief compositions for 25 years. I live near Lyon, and I am 55 years old.









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# VISUAL ART JOURNAL

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black dress, is shown from the chest up. She is looking over her right shoulder towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting with warm tones. The image is used as a background for the journal cover.

[VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM](http://VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM)

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