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— *Intro*

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Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello dear reader,

In your hands is Issue 45 of our journal - and our first issue of the new year.

While we were preparing this edition, the world outside felt like a celebration: bright, soft, and a little magical. We wanted to bring that feeling into these pages.

Fairy tales come in many forms: kind and enchanting, frightening and instructive. Across cultures, the realm of magic is imagined in very different ways. Sometimes it is a place where wishes come true; other times it is a space for transformation and renewal.

The same is true of visual art. For some, it is a world where anything is possible and the only limit is imagination itself. For others, every image is a mirror of the inner self - a way of revealing, translating, and making sense of what lives within.

We're confident this new issue will speak to both kinds of readers. Enjoy your reading, and thank you for being with us as we step into this new year together.

On the Front Cover:
Ivana Babic
Baba Jaga House
2025

On the Back Cover:
Brian Goldfarb
Light Seeker
2023

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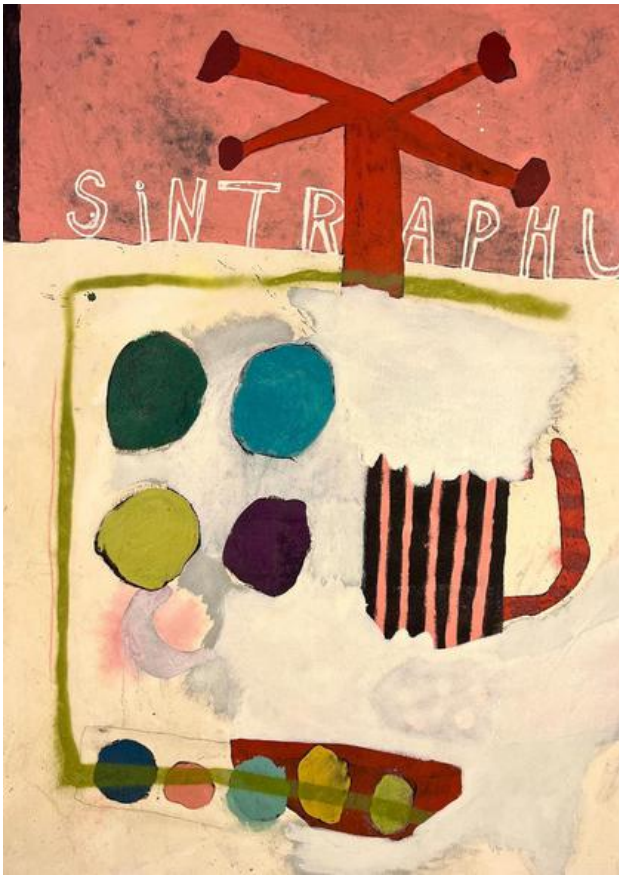
We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: **https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/**

Interview

S.W. Dinge

Your works balance simplicity with high energy. When you begin a new piece, what usually comes first for you - color, line, or composition?

I'm not one of those painters who fills a room with large blank canvases, and then paints in a fury for a few days, little by little on 10 or 12 paintings at once. Broadly speaking, I deal with each new canvas one at a time until it's found some type of resolution, then I move on to the next one. Each one is a conversation, I suppose. And as with conversations, it works better when not everyone in the room is talking at the same time.



S.W. Dinge | The Sin Trap Hustle | 2023

Each painting starts by creating 'a problem' visually. Then the next task is to fix the problem. This process of chasing the problem around the canvas happens as many times as it needs to until a sort of visual harmony is reached. I see my work similar, structurally, to how music comes together. A song is created by multiple instruments /sounds coming together in a unique way. Each player has to pull their own weight so the final result can be fully realized. I interpret each color, line, brushstroke, and shape to be a different instrument, each playing its own part, creating a visual 'song'.

You often mention "impulsive lines" and "spills of color". How do you cultivate spontaneity while still maintaining a strong sense of structure?

I hope to never see a familiar mark or shape that is so obviously 'me' when I'm painting. That's almost impossible to achieve because everyone has their way of doing things that can't be undone. I guess I'm aiming for a controlled spontaneity. Using something like a paintbrush extender, so I'm 3 or 4 feet from the canvas, can help to make it seem like someone else is doing the painting, I like that. Most often though, I paint with my non-dominant hand. Although I am getting better at that over the years so that might soon stop working the way that I need it to.

Negative space plays a crucial role in your paintings. What does "quiet stillness" mean to you within such vibrant compositions?

I guess you could boil it down to saying that 'there isn't much going on in this part of the painting.' Call it negative space, call it the gap between actions or call it simply unpainted, whatever you choose. These areas are just as important as the colors and the lines and the juxtapositions between them. They are room to breathe, room to reflect. Think about if someone is yelling or talking at you like mad without stopping. Soon you just stop listening. But if they take breaks

S.W. Dinge | Echo | 2023

to breathe and pause, you may be more apt to try and connect with what they're saying.
I'm not particularly drawn to paintings that are super busy with layers upon layers upon layers of paint all over the canvas. I like trying to use the quiet and loud parts in concert with each other to find a balance that works. I'm not trying to coat a canvas in a blanket of paint, I'm trying to thread a needle.

Many viewers see hints of familiar objects in your shapes without them ever becoming literal. How intentional is this sense of near-recognition?

Yes, intentional for sure. I want these paintings to resonate with the viewer by tugging on their subconscious memory banks. Not every viewer is going to connect with every painting, but that's OK. I often think of them as aesthetically pleasing Rorschach tests. There's a possibility of seeing something in there but you can't quite put your finger on it. The comment I enjoy the most about my work is when someone says 'I love this painting. I don't know why I do, but I do.' When I hear that, I think 'I got 'em', you know? I tapped into something.

Your work often feels simultaneously playful and confrontational. Do you aim for emotional ambiguity, or does it emerge naturally during the process?

Ambiguity, whether emotional or otherwise, is the whole game, in my mind. I want to dance around the obvious, not spoon feed it to the viewer. I'm not going to say that it's a landscape or it's a portrait or it's a vase, because each painting possesses the potential to be all of those things. I try to keep things simple and vague enough so each painting is assessable on multiple levels at one time. I like the possibility that the viewer is experiencing something familiar to them, like when you bump into someone and you feel like you already know them, but you just can't remember from where.

How did growing up in New York State's Adirondack region shape your sense of visual language or artistic sensibility?

I love upstate New York, don't get me wrong, but all I'll say is that there was a quote that always resonated with me. I believe it was movie critic, Roger Ebert, who said it but I could be wrong on that. It was 'The only good thing about growing up in a small town, is that you know you want to get out.'

How do you know when a painting - especially one built on spontaneity - is truly finished?

Well, that's the $1 million question, isn't it? I know many painters will say that a painting is never finished and I suppose technically, I'd have to agree with them since I have gone back in to add to paintings a decade or more later. That doesn't happen very often, though. I'm very cautious not to overwork a painting. Restraint is critical. Sometimes I push it too far and it loses something. It's not as impactful for some reason and then I get into correction mode, trying to recapture what it once had. Kind of like when you're driving on the highway and you miss your exit. Everything you do from that point on is just trying to get back to where you were before.
It's difficult to articulate really because I don't fully understand it myself. At some point during the process, something signals to me that there is nothing more I can do to increase the impact this painting can have. I don't question it, I don't force things upon it, I just except it and move on.

S.W. Dinge | Bazooka | 2023

Brian Goldfarb is a professional photographer living in Brooklyn. His work has been featured on laughingsquid.com, untappedcities.com, in The Governors Island Art Fair, in the "We're Still Here..." portraiture exhibition, and in The Other Art Fair. Brian's work has earned a number of nominations and awards, including being a semi-finalist in "The Travel Photographer of the Year" competition, receiving an honorable mention in the "ND Awards" photo competition and winning a bronze award in the "One Eyeland" photo competition. In addition to shooting surrealist art photos of the world upside down, Brian also specializes in portrait and headshot photography. He is known for his humorous and laid-back attitude on set, and prides himself on capturing portraits for his clients that are both engaging and authentic.

Artist Statement
I am a photographer who makes slightly surreal artwork. I want people to see my artwork and wonder if it's real or not. The best compliment to my work is when someone walks by one of my photos, stops, turns around, walks back and then looks closely at the image. I love knowing that something I came up with in my mind and then created with my camera and computer (but not with AI) is making people stop and think.

Brian Goldfarb | The Fishbowl | 2020

Brian Goldfarb | Pandemic Party | 2020

Brian Goldfarb | Insomniac | 2022

Ivana Babic

Your works seem to emerge from a space between myth and memory. How do you navigate that boundary when beginning a new illustration?

The boundary between myth and memory functions almost like a resonance field. Ancient images surface together with intimate sensations, merging into a single visual layer. The drawing grows where the two overlap: myth offers the clarity of archetype, memory brings its emotional pulse.
That tension creates a space where something both familiar and unknown can appear — a space where the old stories become contemporary again, shedding their historical weight and becoming part of a living inner landscape. In that threshold, myth is not treated as heritage but as a material that can still transform, just as memory does.

Ivana Babic | Danube | 2025

Slavic folklore is central to your imagery. Are there specific stories or archetypes that have shaped you most deeply, either artistically or personally?

Slavic mythology carries a living presence in Serbia, where I come from — it echoes in songs, folktales, seasonal rituals, and even in the way people relate to nature. It is not distant or museum-like; it breathes through culture itself.
Certain archetypes have become especially formative:
Veles as the spirit of transformation and the underworld;
Perun as a force of creative tension;
and the wandering house, inspired by Baba Yaga's hut with bird legs.
This house, constantly shifting through the forest, becomes a metaphor for impermanence — for the soul's movement through the physical world, never entirely rooted, always in transition.
Another strong influence comes from the feminine spirits of Slavic lore —"Vila", the forest maiden, the water nymph.
These beings embody nature not as scenery but as a living, conscious presence. They carry both gentleness and wild unpredictability, reminding us that nature in Slavic imagination is not passive but deeply animate, protective and threatening, nurturing and untamed at once. Their duality adds an emotional and symbolic complexity that resonates strongly in my work.
What resonates most is the cosmology behind these stories: the sacredness of nature, the belief that rivers, trees, winds, and animals are inhabited by spirits, and the deep dualism between sky and earth, order and chaos. These themes carry an ancient depth, yet they speak directly to contemporary questions about belonging, instability, and our relationship with the natural world.

Ivana Babic | Baba Jaga House | 2025

Many of your characters — like Veles, Perun, or the wandering houses — appear both symbolic and emotional. How do you balance folklore accuracy with your own contemporary interpretations?

Folklore accuracy serves as a root rather than a restriction. The essential roles and energies of each figure are honored, but their visual language evolves into something more introspective and contemporary. Myth provides the bone structure; the emotional present shapes the flesh.
This approach mirrors how myths themselves have traveled through time — constantly retold, reinterpreted, and kept alive. Bringing them into the present means allowing their symbolic core to meet contemporary sensibilities: questions of identity, movement, instability, and inner dualities.
The aim is not to reproduce Slavic mythology, but to reactivate it — to let its archetypes speak anew within a modern psychological and cultural context.

Your drawings are rich in texture and detail, yet they feel quiet and spacious. How do you approach composition to achieve this sense of calm intensity?

Calmness emerges through the relationship between density and emptiness. Detailed textures gather around symbolic cores, while surrounding space remains open — not empty, but charged with stillness. This balance creates a slow, deliberate rhythm: intensity concentrated where the image breathes, and silence holding everything together.
This spaciousness is also a way of giving the mythological elements room to exist without overwhelming the viewer. It allows the eye to rest and wander, making the image feel both intricate and meditative, anchored yet weightless.

Your illustrations often depict beings that are not meant to be read literally. How do you choose which inner states or emotional archetypes to translate into visual form?

Certain inner states already carry a symbolic weight, appearing more as shapes than as emotions. When a feeling suggests the presence of a creature, a threshold, or a shifting form, it naturally becomes visual. These beings are emotional archetypes — metaphors of fragmentation, resilience, longing, or transformation.
They emerge when an inner condition becomes so precise that it almost demands a form of its own. Rather than illustrating an emotion, the drawing reveals the creature that emotion would become if it could inhabit a body, allowing psychological experience to expand into the realm of myth.

Black ink is your primary medium here. What draws you to this material, and how does it shape the atmosphere of your mythological world?

Black ink creates an atmosphere of clarity and mystery at the same time. Its monochrome language removes distractions and brings the focus to gesture, rhythm, and breath. Dense blacks feel ancient, like carved marks; lighter strokes evoke impermanence.
This starkness suits mythological themes, allowing the beings and symbols to appear as if they were emerging from a timeless realm — part memory, part incantation. Ink's simplicity also supports a contemporary reading: stripped of color, the mythology becomes more universal, reduced to essence rather than ornament.

Do you see these mythological beings as guardians, mirrors, or guides for the viewer — or perhaps something else entirely?

They function as shifting presences. At times they feel like guardians; at others, mirrors or silent companions. Rather than delivering answers, they open a passage — a place where the viewer may encounter something already known but not yet named.
They are less characters than thresholds, holding space for a dialogue between myth, personal memory, and the viewer's own inner landscape. In that sense, they act not as authorities but as invitations — guides only in the way that a doorway guides one into another room.

Ivana Babic | Dialogue | 2025

— *Interview*

Walther Adriaensen

Your artistic journey began with early studies in drawing and later evolved toward a constructivist and abstract approach. What motivated your departure from figurative art?

I left the figurative for the abstract, drawn by a new sense of freedom in which the gesture becomes the true driving force of the work.

You spent many years researching line, movement, and form. How did this long exploration shape the way you work today?

These years have taught me that movement is the key — at least for me, it is the key to expression. Without gesture, there is no movement; without movement, no clouds, no transparency, no chiaroscuro.

For the past two years you have focused on clouds as a central theme. What drew you to this subject, and what do clouds allow you to express that previous themes did not?

The clouds became my playground, a place where movement breathes, evolves, and dissolves without end. No world is more mercurial, more alive with change, than the sky.

Clouds in your work appear both abstract and tangible. How do you navigate the balance between representation and abstraction?

In my cloud paintings, I aim less to depict than to suggest. The cloud becomes a pretext — an anchoring point that allows me to stay connected to the real while moving beyond it. I navigate the

balance between representation and abstraction through gesture: it determines how readable, dense, or dissolved the image becomes. A cloud is both form and movement, matter and disappearance — an ideal subject for exploring that shifting territory where the image remains recognizable yet already drifts into something else.

Your choice to eliminate the horizon and use vertical formats breaks traditional landscape conventions. What effect do you hope this creates for the viewer?

By removing the horizon and working in vertical formats, I invite the viewer to step out of the traditional landscape and into a more immersive, less anchored experience. Without a fixed horizon line, there is no 'up' or 'down,' no stable viewpoint — only the movement of the clouds and the gesture that carries them. This shift creates a sense of suspension, as if the viewer were inside the atmosphere itself rather than observing it from a distance. The vertical format amplifies this feeling, stretching the space and allowing the eye to travel through layers of movement, opacity, and transparency. My aim is for the viewer to feel enveloped, drawn into a space that is both vast and intimate, familiar and ungraspable.

Wooden panels are essential to your technique. What does this material offer that canvas does not?

I work on wood because it responds better to my gesture: its surface offers the right resistance and responsiveness to translate the movement of my hand. Additionally, since I aim to capture movement as it occurs in nature, wooden panels are more practical than canvas, allowing me to work quickly and spontaneously, almost as if I were painting the air and light in motion.

How do you approach capturing movement in a subject as ephemeral as clouds? Is the process more intuitive, technical, or both?

Capturing the movement of clouds is, above all, a matter of presence and attention. My approach is both intuitive and technical: spontaneous gesture allows me to convey the fleeting, fluid, and ever-changing nature of the atmosphere, while experience and mastery of the medium on wood provide the tools to ensure that this gesture retains its clarity and strength. Each cloud then becomes a pretext to explore movement itself—its speed, density, and transformation—rather than attempting to reproduce an exact form.

Tatsiana Kalcheva is an artist, born and educated in Europe, now living and working in Chicago, Illinois, USA. Her works emerge from images and states that settle in the subconscious and linger longer than words. She conveys moments that people feel deeply but cannot always express. Her paintings create a calm space where viewers can encounter their own sensations and internal responses.
As an interior designer, Tatsiana shapes specific emotional states through the impact of color palettes and carefully selected shades. Her ability to build conceptual design solutions allows her to create artworks in which color, light, and form are united by a single idea and resonate as a cohesive emotional composition.
Tatsiana works with watercolor, acrylic, oil, and sculptural painting. Her visual language is grounded in emotional clarity — in the quiet precision that allows an image to speak gently yet distinctly.
One direction in her practice is a vivid minimalist series that symbolizes a fresh perspective, renewal, and the inner strength each person returns to at different moments in life. Here, color is not decoration but energy — an accent that generates movement toward light, warmth, and calm.
In her works, Tatsiana explores the delicate boundary between perception and awareness — that moment when an emotion has not yet become a word but has already become an image. She works with light, space, and mood, creating visual stories that invite the viewer into a quiet personal dialogue.
Her message is simple: let each person find in these works a part of their own inner world.

Artist Statement
The series “Breathe” is an exploration of silence, air, and inner space. In these works, the forms seem to float in suspension, offering the viewer a moment to pause, look inward, and feel the present. In a world that constantly accelerates, my watercolors serve as a reminder of the power of stillness — a state that doesn’t require escaping reality, only allowing ourselves to observe.
Monochrome blue tones, soft transparency, and subtle transitions create an atmosphere of lightness and an almost breath-like quality. I aim to capture the temperature of the air, the state between movement and calm, where space becomes meditative and nearly soundless.
This series is an invitation to inner balance — a place where lightness meets groundedness.
“Veiled Wisdom” invites the viewer into a moment when nature still holds the breath of the night, and the morning mist lays a delicate veil over the landscape, hinting at something unseen. An owl emerges through this soft, airy curtain as a guardian of silence and ancient knowledge.
“Floating Gazebo” captures a moment when the garden structure seems to float in the air, like our thoughts during moments of relaxation and inner calm. The painting invites the viewer to pause, feel the lightness and airiness of the space, while remaining grounded and fully present.
This artworks is created in Winsor & Newton watercolor on Arches 300 gsm cold-press paper (cold press), as a unique, one-of-a-kind original

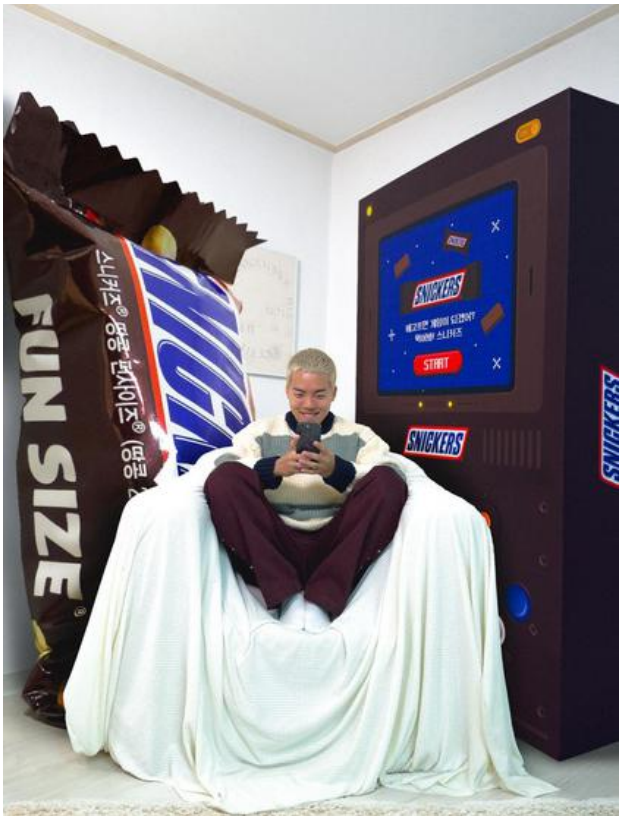
Tatsiana Kalcheva | Floating Gazebo | 2025

Tatsiana Kalcheva | “Veiled Wisdom” #1, “Breathe” Series | 2025

Hun Lee

Your creative journey began with stop motion videos in childhood. What stayed with you from those early experiments?

From those early stop motion experiments, the biggest thing that stayed with me is the sense of craftsmanship. Stop motion forces you to build a world frame by frame with patience and intention. Even today I approach filmmaking the same way. I treat every frame like a brushstroke in a painting or a piece of sculpture. That mindset shaped my habit of checking, polishing and designing every moment with care. It taught me that a powerful film is not created all at once but built through countless small decisions.

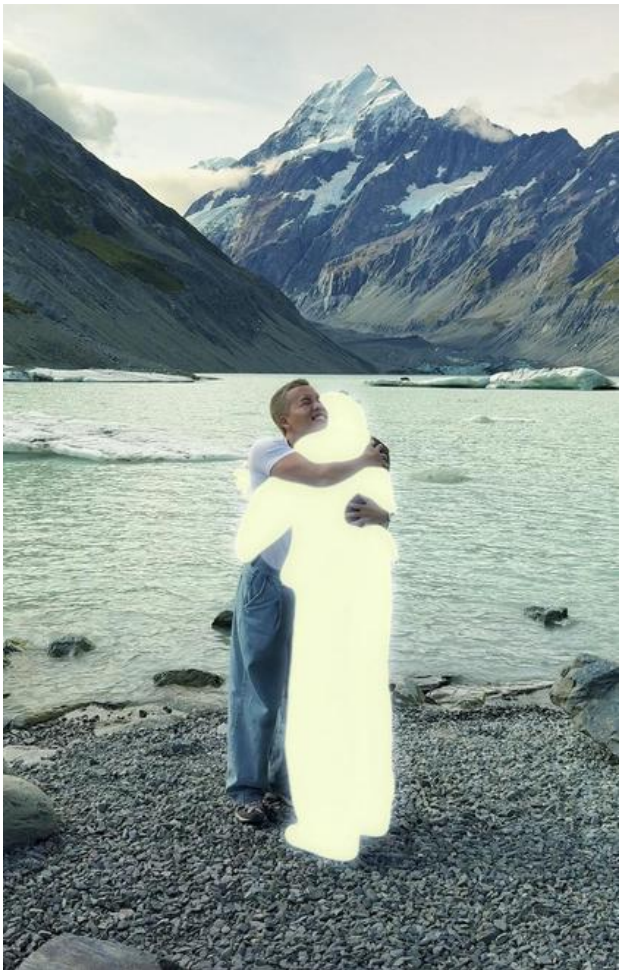


Growing up in a culture that valued conformity, what role did filmmaking play in helping you define your identity?

Growing up in a culture that valued conformity, filmmaking became a small escape that allowed me to breathe. It gave me permission to be different. Even if I danced in public or acted in a strange way, I could always say “I am filming” and suddenly the rules shifted. The camera opened a wider spectrum of freedom for me. Through filmmaking I learned that expression does not need approval. It simply needs a space to exist.

During military service you created a prize winning human rights video. What did that experience teach you about storytelling’s social power?

During military service I realized something important. Even in the most closed or rigid communities, individuals are still human first and members of a system second. If a story can reach even one person on a personal level, it has the power to slowly shift the mindset of a larger group. That experience taught me that storytelling is not only entertainment. It is a quiet force that can open minds, create empathy and inspire change.



Hun Lee | Glow Friend Effect

Hoon2Trip has become a recognizable visual identity. How would you personally describe the Hoon2Trip style?

The Hoon2Trip style is trend driven yet unpredictable. I follow what feels modern and cinematic, but I like to twist it once more and break the pattern so the viewer feels a shift. My style blends travel, storytelling, digital aesthetics and rhythm, but always with an element of surprise. It is familiar at first sight but different when you look closer.

Your dream is to direct K pop music videos that blend choreography, story and technology. What is the future of performance in your imagination?

I think the future of performance will be shaped by real time interaction between the audience, the performer and advanced technology. With rapidly evolving AI tools, generative systems and massive data centers powering real time rendering, performance will no longer be something created once by a director and presented as a finished product.
Viewers will become part of the creative process. The performance will respond, shift and transform based on the audience's movement, emotion or participation.
We will experience choreography and visual effects generated live rather than pre rendered, creating performances that constantly evolve and never repeat. To me this is where dance and technology will truly merge into a new form of art.

You often collaborate with brands and tourism boards. What do you look for in a collaboration to ensure it aligns with your artistic vision?

The most important thing for me in a collaboration is creative freedom. Many partners have detailed guidelines, but my work relies on unexpected formats and unconventional editing. Sometimes I have to break the rules entirely to create something original. The results often perform extremely well. When a collaborator trusts my vision and gives me space to experiment, that is when I create my best work.

Your work often plays with scale, perspective and illusion. What attracts you to this kind of visual experimentation?

Just like how I started with stop motion, I am drawn to visuals that bend perception. Illusion based imagery sparks new imagination and breaks the viewer's assumptions. It reminds me that film is not only about showing reality but also about transforming it. This experimentation allows me to think beyond how things look and focus instead on how things feel.

Hun Lee | Self Representation Art

Kathleen Ma is an American-born Chinese illustrator based in Beijing, graduated from SVA MFA Illustration 2024. She is attracted to vibrant colors and contrasting elements. Her work explores the combination of cuteness and strangeness, often featuring small characters such as children, animals, and dreamlike figures. These characters express deep and complex emotions.

Artist Statement
My work explores the fragile borderland between innocence and strangeness. I create small characters—children, animals, and dreamlike creatures—who inhabit psychological spaces rather than literal worlds. They embody emotions that are difficult to speak about: longing, vulnerability, quiet resistance. I am interested in making work that explores how imagination becomes a survival mechanism and in materializing the logic of dreams. Many of my figures look cute at first glance, but their gestures and surroundings reveal a deeper tension. This contrast between softness and unease is central to my visual language. Each creature, each scene, functions like a personal myth—an emotional companion or symbolic fragment from the inner world. I aim to create characters with memory; at the same time, their identity feels undefined and is easily connected with the audience.

Kathleen Ma | The Golden Whisper | 2025

Kathleen Ma | The Gold Fish

Phillip Staffa

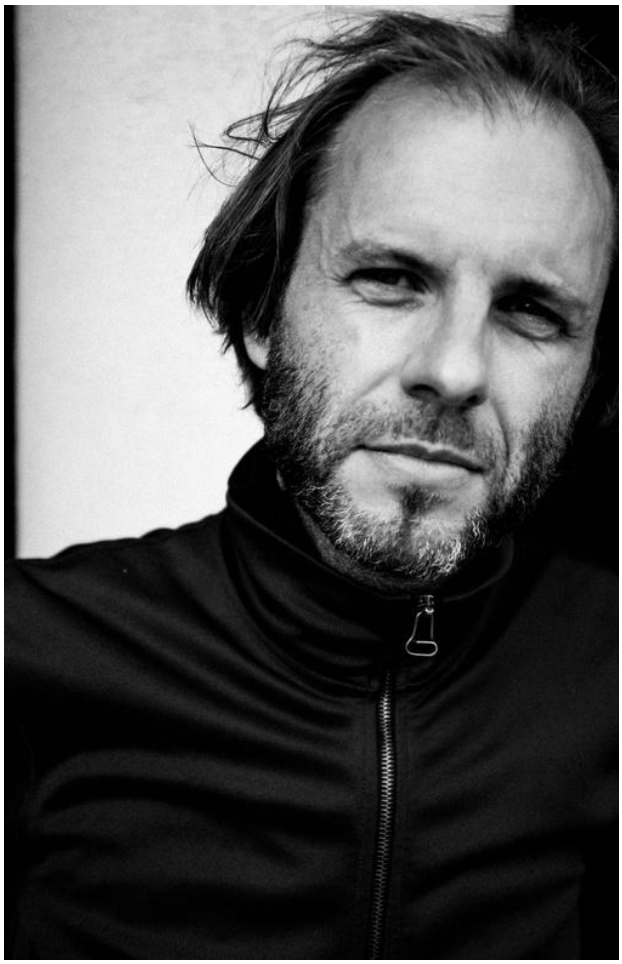


Photo By Karsten Boysen

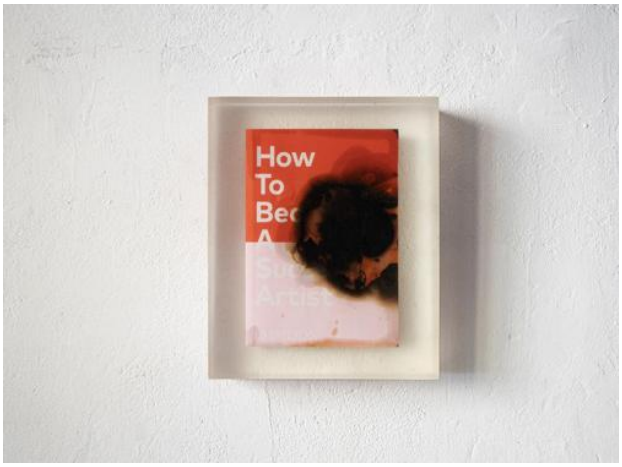
Your sculptural works often transform everyday objects into contemporary totems. What draws you to these familiar forms, and how do you choose which objects to reinterpret?

Phillip Staffa | Candy (Silver Blue)

The subjects choose me, not the other way around. I move through the city with my radar open, and certain forms just stay with me—days, weeks, sometimes years. Most ideas hit in transit: between places, overheard lines, tiny moments. They need time to shift until I see them clearly. The cigarette sculpture, for example—I carried the thought for ages, but the spark came in a bar in France, looking by chance at the twisted butts in an ashtray. That moment the idea shifted into a realm of the tangible, something I knew I could give an outer form to. I know I've hit something when my blood rushes a little and the idea opens up into into a path with possibilities, not a dead-end result.

Many of your pieces play with scale, material shifts, and glossy or reflective surfaces. What role does transformation play in your artistic process?

An idea needs material to manifest. Transformation is an integral part of the idea itself. Changing scale or material breaks the object open and gives me distance. It lets me see the idea fresh, evaluate it, and push it further. Materials are not just tools—they're filters that force me to rethink the original impulse. And yes, I'm drawn to glossy and reflective surfaces. They pull the viewer in, throw their own image back at



Phillip Staffa | Successful Artist

them, and turn the object into something alive and interactive. A reflective surface is never still — it's open, and transforming with the world around it.

Your pieces—oversized candy, cigarette butts, melting ice cream, inflated lips—balance humor and critique. How do you navigate the tension between playfulness and deeper commentary?

I love joy, and I love approaching life playfully—it makes things easier to digest. But I am also wired for overthinking, obsessed with concepts. I need both, and my works need to nourish both sides. If something only satisfies the playful impulse or only the intellectual one, it usually falls away over time. In that tension the idea becomes three-dimensional for me; it grows axes in all directions.

Coming from a background in music, how does compositional thinking influence the way you construct or arrange sculptural forms?

Music for me is rhythm, form, colour, improvisation, ritual, freedom – essentially everything I care about in sculpture. I spent years studying proportion, structure, articulation—so these things root deeply in my thinking. I don't consciously apply them, but they shape how I build and arrange things. They're there, like a second skin.
Several pieces capture traces of urban life: worn objects, discarded materials, playful re-creations. What relationship does your work have with Berlin and its visual language? My collecting practice is rooted in the streets—especially Berlin. I walk into these contrasts and tiny abysses every day: beauty, decay, humour, waste, disgust, life. Berlin throws objects and situations at you constantly. It's a visual language that's raw, direct and unfiltered, and it feeds my work in the most honest way.

Collaboration is central in your process, especially with MONAS Collective. How does working with musicians, scientists, or researchers expand your artistic language?

Collaboration is how I learned creativity. After 25 years in music, I've often experienced how a group can arrive somewhere none of us would have reached alone. I'm lucky to have people around me whose thoughts inspire and challenge me. That exchange fuels my work. At the same time, I've discovered a new beauty in working alone—thinking things through, finishing a piece without relying on anyone. It's again a balance.

Your practice revolves around transformation and perception. What shifts do you hope occur in viewers when they encounter your work?

I love when there's a physical reaction—laughter, surprise, a sound, a sudden stop. In my old studio in Berlin Neukölln I often worked on the pavement, and people constantly stopped to engage, observed, commented, asked questions. Kids pointed at things, older people marveled or disliked what I was making. Those encounters meant a lot to me. Once a child walked past a freshly painted dropped-cone sculpture, looked at it, and instinctively said: "Yummy." If a work can trigger something that immediate, I'm happy.

Phillip Staffa | Cigarette Butt

Artem Vitsinsky

I don’t sign my paintings—not out of modesty, but out of conviction. Any work is not only my brushstroke, but also the labor of those who mined the minerals for the pigments, wove the canvas, grew the flax, created the tools, and developed the knowledge. In this sense, a painting is the result of a shared human effort.

I paint according to my worldview. That means the world influences me and shapes me. That means the world paints through me. I have no interest in making detached, decorative images—“sunsets,” “little houses,” “birds”—that allow us to escape reality. The world contains too much pain and injustice for me to paint as if none of that exists.

To me, a painting is a letter to the viewer—a way to encode an experience that is difficult or impossible to put into words. That is why my works are an attempt to speak sincerely in an era when sincerity is especially fragile. In my recent works, I leave only the year and month of creation—my way of helping the viewer understand the context in which the painting was born. It is not a signature, but a point of reference that makes it possible to see the connection between time, circumstances, and the inner state from which the image emerged.

Artem Vitcinskiy | Dawn Again | 2024

Artem Vitcinskiy | Insomnia | 2024

Marina Bojanic

Your paintings often depict the human figure in states of tension, silence, or inner conflict. What draws you to these psychological and emotional states?

Marina Bojanic | Silence | 2023

I am drawn to moments that exist just before an emotion becomes visible — states of inner pressure, silence, and unresolved tension. These psychological spaces feel more honest to me than explicit narrative or action. I am interested in what the body carries when words fail: suppressed fear, vulnerability, endurance, and quiet resistance. Painting becomes a way to give form to what is usually hidden or unspoken.

Many of your works seem to balance between visibility and erasure — faces blurred, bodies fragmented, gestures interrupted. What role does disappearance or obscuring play in your artistic language?

Obscuring is essential to my visual language because it mirrors how identity and memory function — incomplete, fragile, and constantly shifting. By erasing or fragmenting the figure, I create space for ambiguity and projection. The absence becomes as important as the presence. I am not interested in describing a specific individual, but in evoking a psychological state that could belong to anyone.

Red appears as a recurring and powerful element in your paintings. How do you personally interpret this color — emotionally and symbolically?

Marina Bojanic | Reflection | 2023

For me, red exists between contradiction and intensity. It carries associations of life, flesh, violence, passion, and sacrifice. Emotionally, it represents exposure — something raw and impossible to ignore. Symbolically, red often marks a wound, a threshold, or a point of no return. It is not decorative in my work; it appears when something essential must surface.

How does your academic background in painting influence your current practice, and at what point do you consciously step away from academic rules?

My academic training provided discipline, structure, and a deep respect for material and technique. However, I consciously step away from academic rules when they begin to limit emotional truth. Once technical control is internalized, breaking it becomes necessary. My current practice balances precision with intuition — allowing accidents, distortions, and raw gestures to remain visible when they carry meaning.

As someone trained in restoration and conservation, how does working with historical artworks affect the way you approach creating new paintings of your own?

Working with historical artworks has given me a heightened awareness of time, fragility, and responsibility toward material. Restoration teaches patience and humility — you are never the owner of the artwork, only its temporary guardian. This perspective influences my own painting process: I work slowly, deliberately, and with respect for the material, while also accepting decay, imperfection, and vulnerability as part of the work's life.

How has your transition from student to professional artist influenced your sense of responsibility, freedom, or pressure in making art?

Becoming a professional artist has intensified both freedom and responsibility. The freedom comes from trusting my own voice, while the pressure comes from sustaining it honestly. There is no longer an external structure to hide behind. Every decision feels more exposed, but also more necessary. This tension has pushed my work toward greater clarity and sincerity.

What questions or emotions do you hope remain with the viewer after encountering your work?

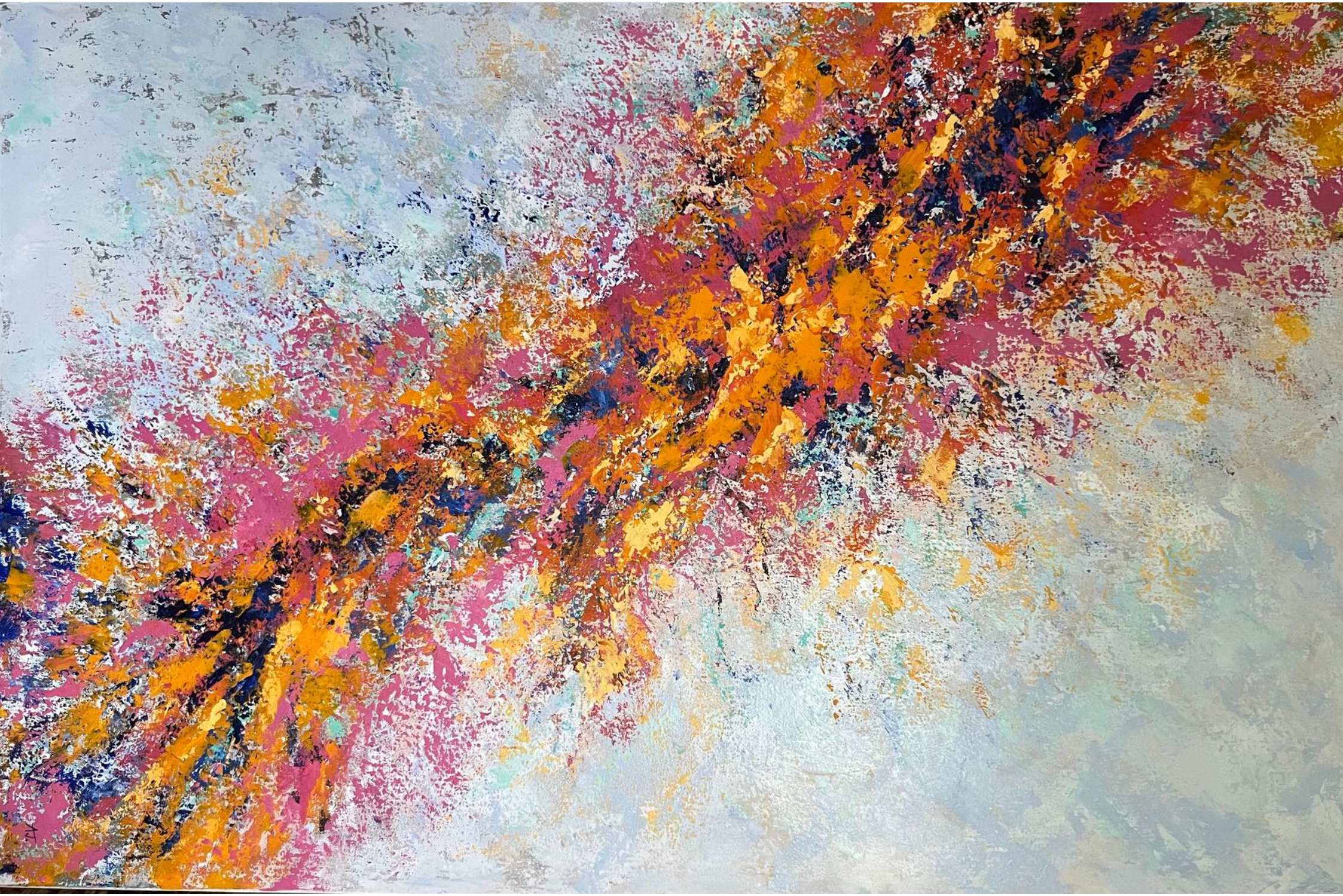
I hope the viewer leaves with a sense of unease mixed with recognition — a feeling that something personal has been touched but not fully explained. I want the work to linger as a quiet question rather than a clear answer, inviting reflection on vulnerability, silence, and the complexity of being human.

Marina Bojanic | Pain | 2024

Aneta Tamulienė (@netta_paintings) is a Lithuanian artist working in abstract painting. Over the past five years, she has created more than 300 works and participated in 17 exhibitions across Lithuania, the European Union, and the United Arab Emirates.
Her recent projects include presenting her artworks in a group exhibition in Paris and being featured in the spring issue of ELLE Decoration Lithuania, which published an article about her creative process.
Aneta's paintings are defined by color, rhythm, and organic forms that emerge through a slow, layered working process. She explores how color and texture can shape atmosphere, emotion, and a sense of quiet presence.

Artist Statement
My work is centered on color, rhythm, and the quiet emotional states that appear through a slow, layered painting process. I paint intuitively, allowing shapes and textures to develop gradually, often forming organic structures that suggest movement, growth, or natural formations.
Painting is a way for me to explore inner landscapes — the shifts in mood, clarity, and stillness that are difficult to express in words. I aim to create works that offer a sense of space and calm, inviting the viewer to pause and experience their own interpretation.
Color is my main language. I use it to build atmosphere and to create subtle emotional tension or harmony. Each piece is constructed from many small marks and layers, which accumulate into a visual texture that feels alive and quietly energetic.
Through my work, I hope to bring warmth, presence, and a sense of grounding into the spaces where my paintings live.

Aneta Tamulienė | Curage | 2025



Aneta Tamulienė | Wholeness | 2025

Wojciech Jachyra

How did your education in art history and film studies influence your current approach to fashion and portrait photography?

At first glance, art history and film studies seem like disciplines that might not have much in common. Nothing could be further from the truth! They are sister fields and closely intertwined. Studying both fields significantly broadened my knowledge and horizons – they showed me how I could explore the topics that interest me and broaden their spectrum in photographic images, where to seek inspiration, and how to interpret them so that they guide the viewer through the topics discussed in the sessions.
I remember the time spent among students and listening to the qualified professors of the Polish Academy of Sciences from the Institute of Art in Warsaw as an incredibly creative time, fertile with new ideas, which I later successfully implemented.

Wojciech Jachyra | CONCRETE COWBOY | 2025

In your series dedicated to the male body, you reference classical aesthetics and Greek ideals. What attracts you to this timeless representation of masculinity?

There came a point in my professional career when I was a bit tired of creating fashion photography. Everything was meticulously crafted, every frame, every styling, every pose. There was no room for spontaneity. Models were usually dressed from head to toe. I didn't feel their true personality. I decided to change that. I thought, "I want to undress the models, see them as they really are, without the fashion image..."
I started creating male nude photography sessions four years ago and I continue to do them to this day. These projects initially served as a break from the commercial work I did every day, but now I see it differently. These projects allowed me to step outside my comfort zone and test my skills in a different field of photography. I looked at the male body in a similar way to how ancient sculptors viewed their models. I wanted to show the delicacy, ephemerality, and etherealness of the male body, but also the fragility and TRUTH that I felt

Wojciech Jachyra | CONCRETE COWBOY | 2025

was missing in commercial photography.
I decided to create nude photography that would be universal and timeless in its reception. It's also beautiful that nude photography has begun to evolve in my work, and today I also create digital collages that incorporate elements of this discipline. The projects I've created so far have been recognized in several important competitions and exhibitions in Poland and the UK. The projects in question are: "PILLARS OF CREATION", "Double Portrait of Daniel," and "CONJUNCTION OF THE SPHERES".

You often mention being inspired by Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden and Alfons Mucha. How do their visions manifest in your own photographic practice?

Both artists are incredibly important to me. I love their aesthetics and the way they depicted the male body. Gloeden's photographs had a delicate and sophisticated aesthetic that harkened back to the art of Ancient Greece and Rome. Mucha, on the other hand, played with the suppleness of lines (including the body) and references to Slavic folklore, which also flows through my veins. This blend greatly stimulated my artistic vision.
Inspired by the work of both artists, I knew I could experiment with the form of the body and the use of certain symbols that are sometimes hidden in my photographic images. Thanks to them, I learned that I don't have to show everything literally. Sometimes it's worth sneaking in one key element that will capture the viewer's attention, hold them before the image, and encourage them to delve deeper into the subject.

Your works freeze the body in motion, simultaneously introducing new context through composition. What interests you most about capturing movement in a static medium?

Movement and all its forms are an invisible language that communicates with the viewer. It invites us to peer into the world of the creator of a given project. My projects are no different. The body in my photographs tells its own stories, and each one deserves to be heard, analyzed, and reflected upon. The body can convey beauty, delight, dance, but also pain, suffering, and loss. After delving deeper into this world, we often realize how similar we all are... The body is clay, which can be molded in any way to convey what we wish to express through a photographic image to the viewer.

Fashion photography is a field in constant visual flux. How do you combine contemporary trends with a commitment to classic form and symbolism?

Fashion photography has the unique ability to be a universal language of communication with a wide range of audiences. Through fashion editorials, you can address important topics related to current events in the world. That's why I love it and continue to do it.
From the beginning of my work as a fashion photographer, I focused on male models. Living in Warsaw, I noticed this was an untapped niche that needed to be filled. I was one of the first photographers to strive to restore men to their rightful place in the world of fashion and photography. At the same time, I knew I wanted to do it on my own terms. I wanted this man to be unique and unconventional, feisty, and unafraid to experiment with fashion. Hence, in my photographs, men wear skirts and heavy combat boots, wide shirts, and colorful, avant-garde hats with BUFFALO-style newspaper torn-out designs, makeup, and archetypal symbols combined with Polish folklore. I included some of the fashion editorials I created, which were shown in Poland and abroad, in my own book "BOYS", which was published by the Warsaw publishing house Anagram in 2022.

How does living in London influence your current creative process compared to your previous years working in Poland and Paris?

London is amazing! This city is a cradle for artists from all over the world. I have access to an endless supply of inspiration here in the form of museums, fashion events, workshops, and exhibitions. All of this really drives and stimulates me to continue creating and defining the world of fashion and photography through my own perspective. For that, I'm incredibly grateful!
Every place I've had the opportunity to live and work in has been unique, and I realize, looking back, it was essential for me as my artistic personality and unique perspective developed. Each city inspired me and stimulated my imagination in a different way. France, then Poland, and now the United Kingdom and the United States. Each country has something different and beautiful about it that attracts me on many levels. I'm thrilled to be able to travel more and more, create my projects with the biggest agencies and their models, and expand my work internationally. I'm a lucky man!

Kakha Berelidze is a 33-year-old artist based in country of Georgia,Tbilisi. He works across various media, including oil painting, watercolor, 3D video art, sculpture, and other forms.
Since 2012, following his admission to the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, he has participated in numerous exhibitions and projects both in Georgia and internationally, including in France, where he has realized several significant projects. His works are held in private collections in various countries.

Kakha Berelidze | Crab with Cross | 2025

Kakha Berelidze | A Lamb Under the Engine | 2025

Mahshid Gorjian

Your work beautifully weaves memory, heritage, and atmosphere. What is your earliest memory that you feel shaped your artistic voice?

One of my earliest formative memories is growing up surrounded by quiet domestic rituals, light moving through rooms, objects carrying emotional weight, and unspoken histories embedded in everyday life. These moments were not dramatic, but deeply atmospheric. Over time, they taught me that meaning often lives in what is subtle, fragmented, and half-remembered. That sensitivity continues to shape my artistic voice, especially my focus on memory as something felt rather than narrated.

How do you choose which cultural symbols or visual motifs to highlight when exploring themes of identity and belonging?

I'm drawn to symbols that feel lived-in rather than decorative, objects, gestures, or spaces that carry emotional residue. I don't aim to represent culture in a literal or folkloric way; instead, I look for visual elements that quietly suggest displacement, continuity, or longing. These motifs often emerge intuitively through the process rather than being predetermined, allowing the work to remain open and personal rather than didactic.

Many of your pieces feel deeply nostalgic yet contemporary. How do you balance tradition with modern digital storytelling?

Mahshid Gorjian | Rustic Pathway Under A Dramatic Sky

Mahshid Gorjian | Field Workers At Dusk

For me, digital tools are not opposed to tradition, they're extensions of it. I use contemporary digital techniques to reinterpret themes rooted in memory, heritage, and emotional history. The balance comes from treating technology as a language rather than a spectacle. While the tools are modern, the emotional core remains slow, intimate, and reflective, much like traditional storytelling or painting.

To what extent do personal memories influence your work, and how do you decide what to keep intimate vs. what to share visually?

Personal memory is often the starting point, but not the destination. I translate lived experiences into visual atmospheres rather than direct narratives. What I keep intimate are the literal details; what I share are the emotional traces. This approach allows viewers to project their own memories onto the work, transforming something personal into a shared emotional space.

Your imagery often carries a dreamlike, almost cinematic mood. What artistic or cultural influences shaped your visual language?

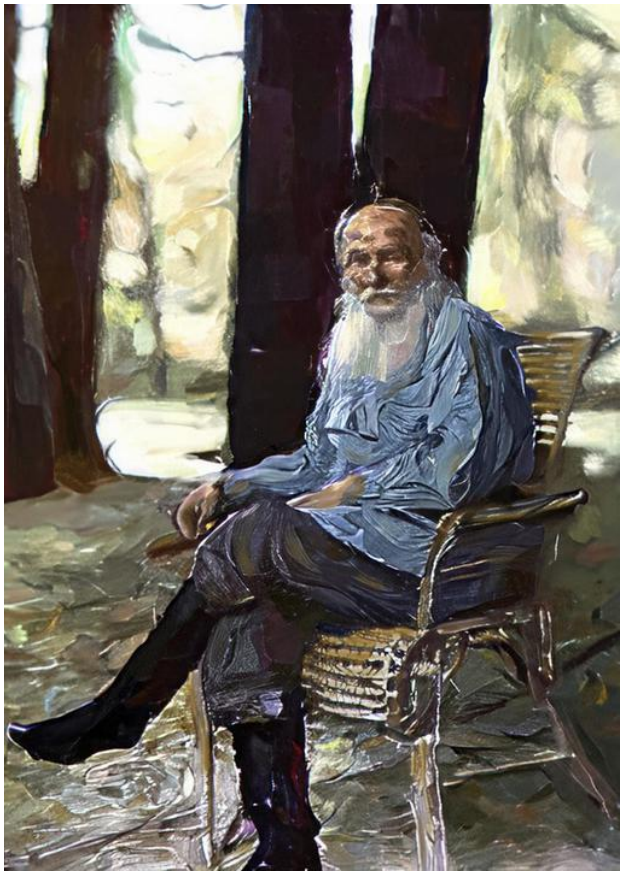
My visual language has been shaped by a combination of cinema, literature, and visual art, particularly works that prioritize mood over plot. I'm influenced by slow cinema, poetic realism, and visual storytelling that embraces ambiguity. Culturally, living between places and identities has also contributed to this dreamlike quality, where reality and memory continuously overlap.

You often capture quiet, intimate scenes of everyday life. What makes these small moments powerful in an artistic sense?

Small moments carry universality. A still room, a paused gesture, or a fleeting expression can hold layers of emotion without explanation. I'm interested in how everyday scenes can become emotionally charged when isolated and reframed. These moments resist spectacle and instead invite contemplation, which I believe is increasingly important in a visually saturated world.

How do you hope viewers from different cultural backgrounds connect with the emotional layers in your work?

While the work may originate from specific personal or cultural experiences, I aim for emotional accessibility rather than cultural specificity. Feelings like nostalgia, displacement, tenderness, or quiet longing are universal. I hope viewers connect not through recognition of symbols, but through shared emotional states, finding their own memories reflected in the atmosphere of the work.



Mahshid Gorjian | The Wisdom Of Time

Wu Jidi (Shanghai, b. 1985) graduated from the Oil Painting Department of Shanghai University of Arts and Sciences. Currently, he works and lives in Shanghai. The 2015 work "Portrait of The Trimmed" was shortlisted for the 2015 Primio Combat Prize in Italy. In 2022, the work was shortlisted for the Visual Art Open 2022 UK & International Emerging Artist Awards. The works "Gluttony of Night" and "Carnival" were shortlisted for the 2nd Edition ART EMPIRE AWARD 2022 in Germany. The work "Anthropology Theatre - Stage Play" won the Osaka Art Now + Golden Artistry Award (2025)

Artist Statement
Through figurative painting, I "fictionalize" the real attributes of the characters I want to express, and then integrate them into the fictional space I constructed to discuss again the "real role" of each person in the private state. With the proliferation of the era of personal we-media, people on the screen are in a state of role playing, and in reality, people also separate themselves from their work and private lives. Often in the sketch stage, I will outline the series and echo of body movements to open the beginning of a new work. Secondly, my work is also constantly experimenting with the intricate relationship between spatial assumptions, displacements and fictional human assumptions (such as the intervention of geometric figures in space). In recent years, I have tried to break the restrictions of traditional painting by using alien canvases. In the performance of materials, the combination of high saturation resin feeling of acrylic materials and traditional oil painting materials can better convey the visual presentation between reality and fiction in my works.

Wu Jidi | Theater - Stage Play | 2024

Wu Jidi | Anthropological Theater – Gluttony of Night | 2022

Harold Herb

Your work investigates how art will exist and evolve over the next 1000 years. What do you imagine will be the biggest transformation in how humans experience visual culture in that future?

Hopefully, they are surrounded by better visuals.

Many of your pieces combine minimalism and science fiction aesthetics. How do you balance restraint and imagination in your compositions?

With tact.

Harold Herb | AK47

The name "HI-TEK ARTIFACT" suggests both technology and archaeology — the future and the past. What does this duality mean to you?

Today's technology becomes the artifacts of the future. Artifacts of today, were the pinnacle of technology yesteryear.

What role does nostalgia play in your exploration of futuristic design?

The visual themes shown in the first year of my oeuvre, are heavily inspired by graphics that had a profound resonance on my youth.

Your works often resemble early digital graphics or video game environments. Is this intentional commentary on how early media still defines our visual vocabulary?

When I hear early media, I think cave drawings, and papyrus. I think pixel based graphics were quite short-lived in the visual vernacular, historically speaking.

How do you see the relationship between physical and digital art evolving — will there still be a need for tangible works?

I'm not sure how imaginary artwork would be sold.

If your works were to be discovered 1000 years from now, what message or emotion would you hope they communicate?

Minimalism, perfection, thoughtfulness, and restraint.

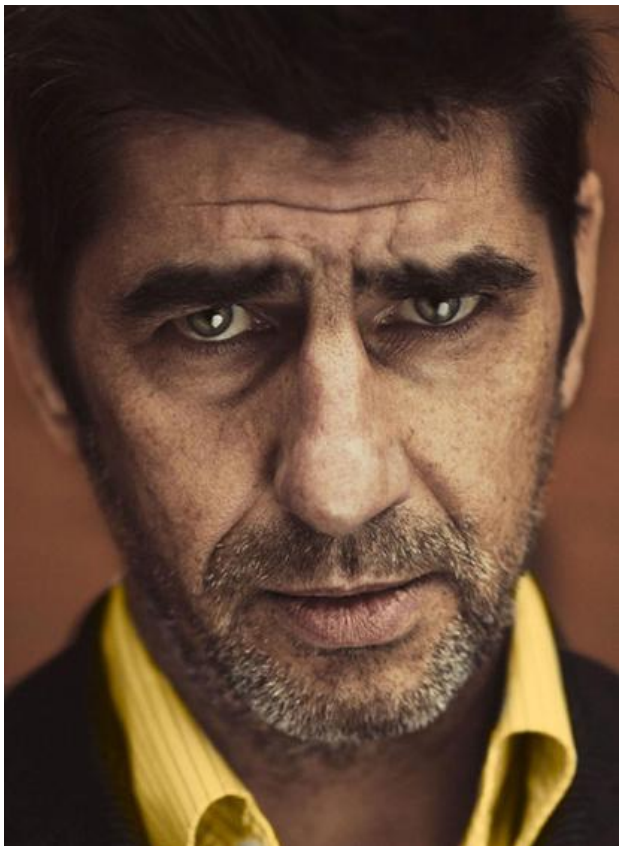
Rumore Bianco
Founded by Alessandra Natalino and Salvatore Ambrosone, Rumore Bianco is both a graphic design studio and a creator of Digital Fine Art. Imagination begins where reality fades.
Our work emerges from sensitivity and quiet observation. From inner silence, from an emotion that seeks its own language through images and words. We explore what cannot be spoken: the softness of a memory, the muted sound of passing time, the shifting contours of identity.

Project Statement
Taste - Antomia del Piacere / the Five Senses Series, 2025.
In Taste, the quiet surface conceals an inner conflict between attraction and refusal. The face, surrounded by ripe fruits , doesn't eat but simply observes: pleasure stays suspended, like a thought held back. The beauty of the image offers no comfort; it shows the fragility of desire and its constant, silent pull toward what is absent.
Touch - Superficie dell'Anima / the Five Senses Series, 2025.
Touch sketches the instant in which the inner world asks for protection rather than exposure. The hand placed on the mirror doesn't hide the gaze — it preserves it: it shields that fragile instant in which identity begins to recognize itself.
The butterfly, resting like a delicate seal, announces a freedom taking shape at the point where the soul stops defending itself. In this gentle suspension, Touch becomes the act of seeing oneself without getting hurt: a minimal embrace, yet enough, offered to the most delicate part of oneself.

Rumore Bianco | Taste - Antomia del Piacere | 2025

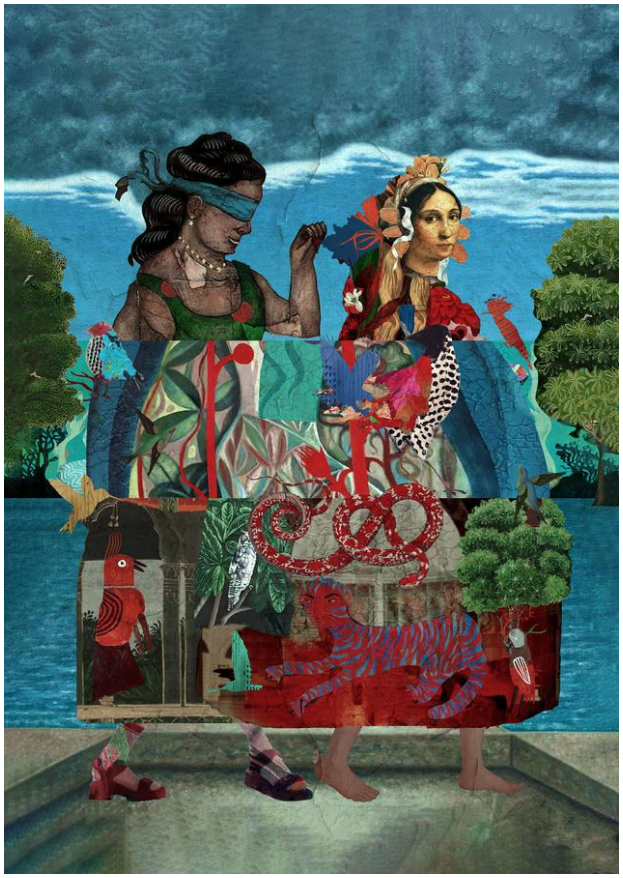
Rumore Bianco | Touch – Introspezione dell’Anima | 2025

Bob Holmes



Your work often merges myth, dream imagery, and contemporary ecological concerns. What initially drew you to this intersection of the mythical and the environmental?

I was drawn to this intersection because myth offers a language spacious enough to hold the emotional weight of our possible ecological collapse. Myths reveal how humans once saw themselves as part of a living, intelligent world, and I use that symbolism to re-imagine our relationship with nature today. Dream type imagery lets me bypass literal representation and speak to the subconscious, where fear, grief, and hope for the planet are often tangled. Bringing these elements together allows me to explore environmental concerns not as distant issues but as intimate, inner experiences.



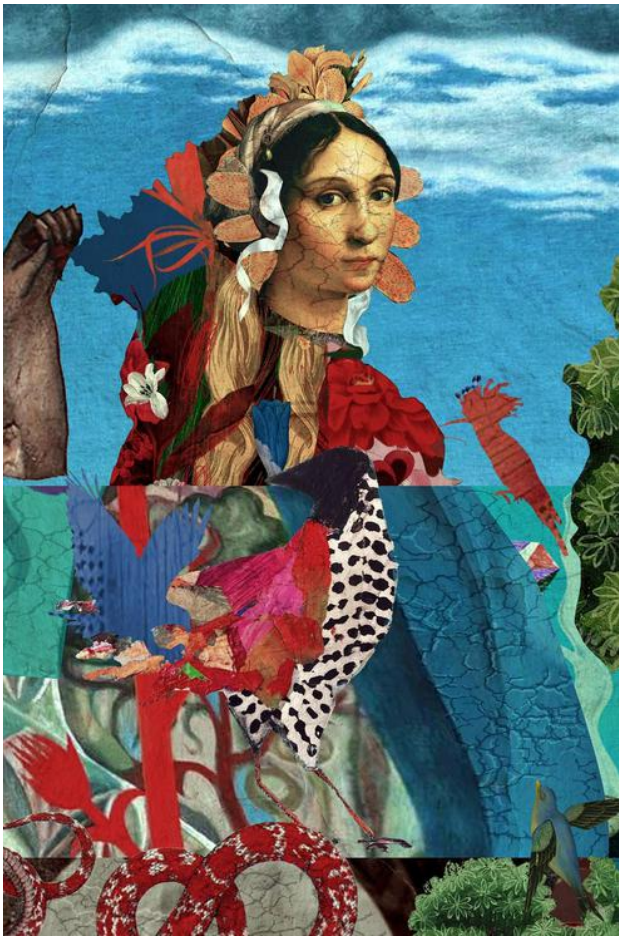
Bob Holmes | Broken Continuum

In "Broken Continuum", two female figures become one fragmented entity. What inspired this exploration of duality and fluid identity?

These figures, assembled from fragments, emerged from an interest in how identity is layered, unstable, and shaped by multiple internal and external influences. The idea of deconstructed figures disrupts the usual borders of the body and tries to reflect themes of fluid gender identity, cultural hybridity, and the idea that identity is continuously constructed rather than predetermined. By seemingly fusing two women into a single, shifting entity, the work explores ideas of the self never really being one thing, it is a continuum, constantly in the process of becoming.

Animals, birds, and botanical forms frequently appear in your compositions. How do you choose the symbolic roles they play within each piece?

I choose their roles intuitively at first, letting their natural behaviors suggest emotional or symbolic functions. As I researched art symbolism,I found that there was already a strong tradition: birds for example often represented



Bob Holmes | Broken Continuum

freedom, spirituality, and the soul, other animals embody instinct or vulnerability, and plants reflect cycles of growth or memory. As the composition evolves in my work, I refine those roles so each form supports the atmosphere or narrative the piece needs.

You mention that nature in your work is a living, sacred force rather than a backdrop. How has your understanding of nature evolved throughout your artistic practice?

My view of nature has indeed shifted from seeing it as scenery, to recognizing it as an active presence with its own agency. In my earlier work, I treated landscapes as settings, but over time I became more aware of their rhythms, fragility, and depth. Now nature functions as a kind of collaborator in the work: shaping mood, symbolism, and meaning rather than merely framing it.

Your technique blends classical painting aesthetics with digital collage and mixed media. How did you arrive at this hybrid visual language?

I arrived at this 'hybrid' language by experimenting over many years. I trained in traditional painting and printmaking techniques, but using digital tools daily opened possibilities that felt equally tactile and intuitive. In time, I stopped treating them as separate practices and began layering them, hand-painted textures, scanned materials, found objects, and digital collage all informing one another. The mix lets me shift between precision and spontaneity, tradition and invention, until the image finds its own equilibrium.

Your art often highlights a subtle tension between beauty and unease. How intentional is that emotional duality in your creative process?

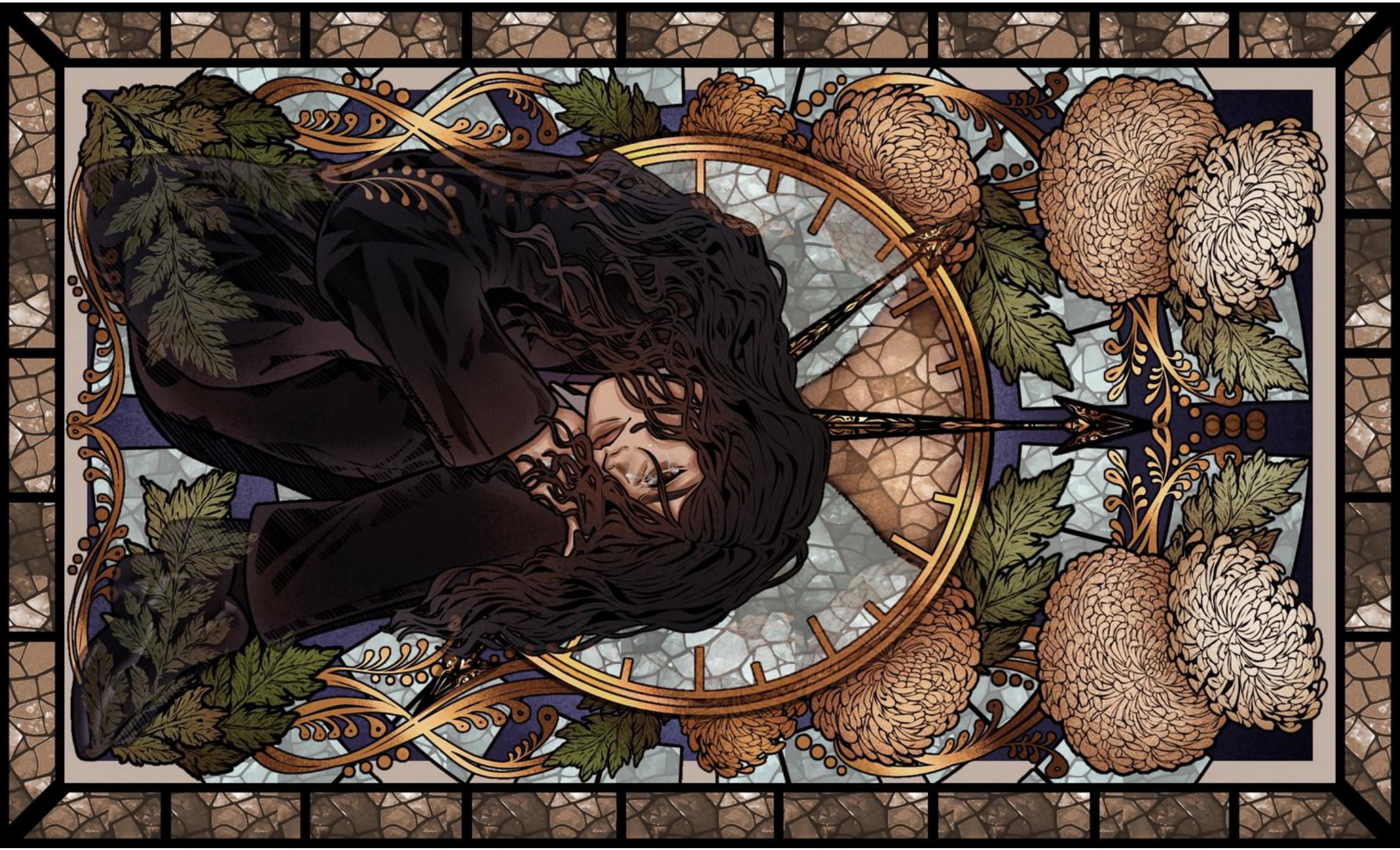
That is completely intentional. I begin by trying to pursue compositionally balanced forms, using inviting colors, but I let small disruptions remain: an odd shape, changing perspectives, a tension in scale, a detail that feels slightly off. Those elements introduce unease, which I see as essential. It keeps the work from becoming decorative and invites viewers to look more deeply. The interplay between harmony and disquiet is where the emotional truth of the piece often emerges.

Living and working in London, a highly urban environment, how does your surroundings shape your reflections on humanity's relationship with nature?

Living in London lets me explore the tension between urban life and the natural world. Amidst the noise and concrete, hidden green spaces often reveal history and resilience. They shape how I think about our relationship with nature, how we overlook it, rely on it, and how it endures even in dense cities. I seek out those small moments where urban and organic meet, and imagine what a more balanced connection could be.

Bob Holmes | Broken Continuum

Roxy Anne Perlas is a Filipino multimedia illustrator who currently specializes in digital art. They are heavily inspired by art nouveau and surrealist styles, and tend to create works with themes on memory, nostalgia, time, transience, mortality, and philosophy. Most of their personal works are either self-portraits or illustrations depicting people in their personal life, but they also work for their university's local student publication as an editorial cartoonist. They have participated in local and regional art competitions, and have won numerous awards within their school and city.



Roxy Anne Perlas | To Mourn for the Living | 2025

Tor N. Johnson

Your artist statement emphasizes contrast and color. What first sparked your fascination with dramatic lighting and bold palettes?

Tor N. Johnson | Hot Air Geometry

There are a couple influences from my childhood that I suspect sparked this... firstly, I was raised on a steady diet of old movies (especially film noir) where there was lots of high-contrast and moody lighting OR brilliantly bright technicolor. Separately, one of my favorite things as a child were trips to the Meads store where there was a vast wall of felt-tip pens in every color imaginable. There were so many possibilities with those pens.

Tor N. Johnson | Lantern Festival

Many of your images capture quiet, abandoned, or decaying spaces. What draws you to these environments, and what stories do you hope viewers will find in them?

I can't entirely explain this one. Historic places have always been an attraction to me and I've loved the stories of history for my whole life. The forgotten places just call to me. While I don't often get to indulge in shooting abandoned places, it's so much fun. From a visual perspective, they are oddly colorful in unexpected ways and have great shadows. Separately, it's odd to stand there and realize that what is now quiet was once busy and full of activity. I will admit to trying to hear the rhythm of the space when it was alive in my mind's eye. For the viewers of any of my images, my first and most important hope is that they say "wow, that is a beautiful picture". The mission is aesthetic first and foremost. It's a bonus if they can picture themselves standing where the image was shot and feel what it was like.

Your architectural photographs show a

Tor N. Johnson | A Forsaken Bed At Pennhurst

strong sense of symmetry and structure. How do you approach composition when photographing historic or ornate buildings?

For many years I worked as a graphic designer creating print advertisements. When photographing a strongly geometric scene, my instinct is to try to organize the image into symmetry and structure to balance the image. I'll frame until it feels right (and then shoot 3-5 more shots just in case I was wrong the first time).

Several of your works highlight textures — peeling paint, aging wood, fabric, or patterned surfaces. What role does texture play in your visual storytelling?

This is absolutely the designer in me… there's actually not a major story in these patterns beyond "isn't this pattern and color gorgeous?". These are shots where I saw a little spot that I though looked beautiful and tried to capture it. The peeling of paint is a fertile ground for interesting shapes combined with colors and contrast. These are images that can be printed, hung up, and be enjoyed without the distraction of messages or deep meaning.
I simply like the looks and hope others can relax and enjoy them as well.

You've worked with 35mm, medium format, large format, and digital. How has each format influenced the way you see and photograph the world?

Starting with 35mm film taught me patience and acceptance… so many pictures simply didn't work, needed a different composition, or didn't come out for some technical reason. Medium and large format (along with the quest for more megapixels) are the direct result of my love of re-cropping images and a quest for better quality. Why be limited to just the frame shape of 35mm? Sometimes I might decide to crop square or to a different aspect ratio. The larger film formats and high-res cameras let me adjust the cropping after the fact without sacrificing quality.

When shooting, do you plan a narrative ahead of time or allow the environment and lighting to guide you spontaneously?

Out in the field, I absolutely let the lighting guide me spontaneously. My goal is to capture the beauty in the moment. I carry the camera while exploring and shoot as the opportunity provides while also reading the historical placards of what I'm seeing.

How do you balance your work in the technology sector with your creative practice? Do they influence each other in unexpected ways?

I don't see these as opposites or even all that different. There's an old World War 2 pilot's adage about aircraft: if it looks good, it probably flies good. There is an aesthetic to good engineering, and an order to good design. On a conceptual level, creative and technology are just two sides of the same coin.
On a mundane level, it doesn't hurt to have the technical background to understand resolution and geometry to know how some of the more technical techniques work and how to output images to different display mediums.

Tor N. Johnson | Architectural Details Imperial Library

Daun Suh

Daun Suh | Swelling Time | 2025

Your paintings often emerge from layers of darkness. Can you describe what "darkness" means to you — both visually and philosophically?

For me, "darkness" is not the absence of light, but a paradoxical form of light. It becomes a refuge that protects me by allowing a retreat from a world saturated with noise, crowds, and excessive brightness. Within it, seeing slows and perception sharpens.

You wrote that "darkness is light." How do you translate that paradox into your painting process?

I see darkness and light as complementary, which is why I define darkness as light.
In my paintings, darkness becomes the dominant structure rather than acting as a backdrop.
For the sake of clarity, I refer to the brighter areas as light.
As I paint darkness cast within light, or light seeping into darkness, I build up layers to modulate the boundary between the two. What matters most in this process is the subtle shifts in color and value that remain on the surface without overwhelming the subject.

Daun Suh | Again, The Dawn | 2024

When you begin a new work, do you start with a specific image or idea, or does it gradually reveal itself as you build the layers?

I often start with a clear idea or image, but as layers build, the image begins to dissolve and transform. Because of this, the subjects in my paintings are not always immediately recognizable. I'm drawn to this aspect of the process, as it closely reflects my philosophy of allowing meaning to remain in flux rather than fixed.

The figures and landscapes in your works seem to appear and disappear, as if caught between existence

Daun Suh | Silent Thirst | 2025

and absence. What draws you to this threshold?

When I felt an aversion to the ambiguity of life and existence, heightened sensitivity only accelerated a sense of separation between the world and myself, the soul and the body.
Over time, I have gradually come to accept that there may be no clear or stable forms through which these conditions can be fully grasped.
The figures and landscapes in my work inhabit this uncertainty, responding to the possibility that existence itself may be incomplete.

How do solitude and contemplation influence your creative rhythm?

Solitude and contemplation are indispensable conditions in both my life and my work. When I remain without solitude for an extended period, I begin to feel a sense of anxiety, as though I am losing myself. For this reason, writing and painting are not ways for me to resolve solitude, but rather ways of sustaining it through contemplation.
My work always begins in quiet. Only after external stimuli and noise have settled does concentration become possible, and it is then that sensations and thoughts slowly rise to the surface. This contemplative time naturally slows my creative rhythm, guiding the process away from immediate conclusions and toward gradual accumulation.

I believe painting is a deeply private language. Repeated experiences of wanting to understand the world, and to be understood by others, yet failing to do so, have extended my periods of solitude. Through contemplation, that solitude is translated into work. In this sense, the act of creation becomes a way of confronting myself by releasing what is inside me. That internal dialogue, once the work is placed into the world, expands into a silent dialogue with others.

You've studied both in Seoul and Chicago. How have these two cultural environments shaped your artistic voice?

In contrast to Korea's relatively homogeneous cultural environment, living in Chicago allowed me to encounter a wide range of personal narratives shaped by diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. When my advisors mentioned that there was something distinctly Korean in my work, I came to understand it as my own interpretation of han—a history of sorrow and accumulated emotion. What I once believed to be purely personal gradually revealed itself, after coming to the U.S., as a Korean story, and further, as an emotional language that could be shared across cultural boundaries. This realization became especially tangible through my Scraping the Life series, which draws from my experience as a Korean woman and from narratives surrounding my mother. Hearing that many women felt resonance and emotional connection with the work was a moment in which I deeply sensed that sense of solidarity.

Finally, what do you hope viewers experience when standing in front of your paintings — a sense of calm, of mystery, or of something else entirely?

I don't experience stillness as clarity. Even in silence, my mind remains tangled and unsettled. Perhaps for that reason, I hope viewers encounter a sense of mystery held within quiet rather than a passive calm. In the end, I want each viewer to arrive at their own emotions and interpret the painting through their own way of seeing.

Daun Suh | Seeping Within Light | 2025

Hong Liang

Your floral series captures quiet, intimate moments of everyday life. What draws you to these small, fleeting scenes as your primary subject matter?

These tiny, fleeting scenes are essentially the embodiment of time and life. I have always believed that truth reveals itself in the minutiae. The blooming and withering of delicate flowers, and the fleeting moments of tranquility in daily life, are just like those easily overlooked yet most precious instants in our lives. Though seemingly ordinary, these scenes hold the most authentic rhythms of life, and that is the core reason they captivate me.

How has your academic background in Fine Arts and Aesthetics shaped the way you observe and translate daily life into your artwork?

Hong Liang | Sunlit Window & Lilies | 2024

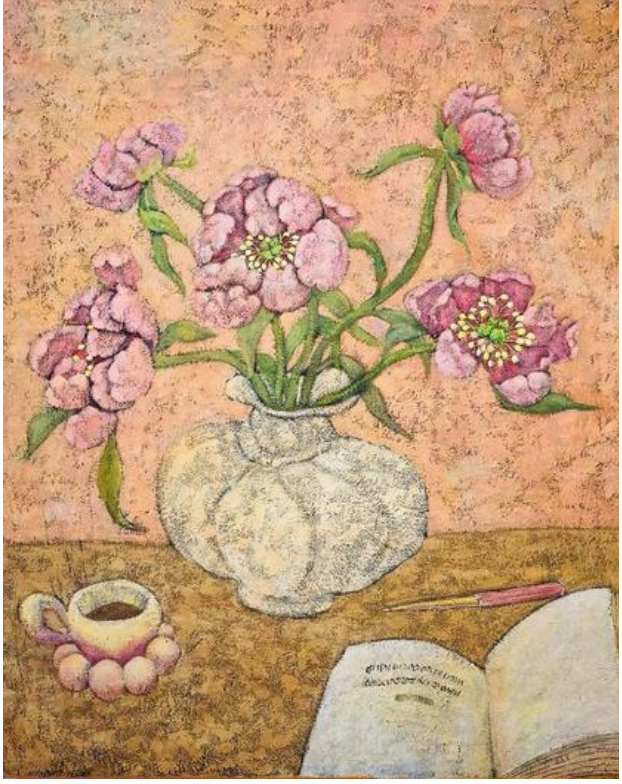
My Bachelor's and Master's studies in Fine Arts equipped me with the techniques and aesthetic logic, while my doctoral research in Aesthetics provided me with a more systematic theoretical perspective. This academic grounding has taught me to view daily life through an aesthetic lens. For instance, the books and teacups on a daily desk are not merely decorative elements in a scene, but witnesses to the passage of time. Academic training has allowed me to move beyond merely depicting scenes, and instead focus on exploring the emotions, concepts and aesthetic value behind everyday objects, achieving a transformation from the mundane to the poetic.

Your works often feel serene and contemplative. Is there a particular emotion or atmosphere you aim to evoke in viewers?

I have always sought to convey an emotion of serene healing through my works, and to create a unique atmosphere where time slows down. Much like the tranquil scenery of the British countryside, my pieces are understated yet possess a soothing power over the mind. I hope that when viewers stand before my works, they can feel as if wandering through a misty morning field or sitting quietly by a window breathing in the fragrance of flowers, finding inner peace and engaging in introspective dialogue with themselves.

Having worked in an auction house, museum curation, and university teaching, how have these diverse experiences influenced your artistic practice?

My diverse professional experiences have infused my practice with multi-faceted inspiration:
In university teaching, my students' innovative approaches to deconstructing natural forms inspired me to integrate distorted forms with artistic charm, lending my works a more contemporary edge.



Hong Liang | Peony Reverie | 2024

My museum curation experience taught me to embed narrative details in my pieces，such as placing pens or books alongside flowers，turning each artwork into an unsolved narrative puzzle that encourages viewers to actively explore its layers.
Meanwhile, my academic research and auction house work allowed me to deepen my understanding of the narrative logic and aesthetic core of artworks from ancient to modern times, enabling me to forge a personal style through cultural integration between tradition and modernity, East and West.

Many of your characters and scenes are bathed in sunlight. What role does light play in your storytelling?

I see light as the emotional catalyst in my storytelling. For example, in my work Lilies, the sky light filtering through the window and the warm orange tones create a cozy, gentle atmosphere that conveys a sense of joy and contentment. Similarly, across my other pieces, the presence of light makes flowers and figures feel as if they are gently embraced by time.

Could you describe your creative process? Do you begin with a memory, an emotion, or a visual impression?

My creative process has no fixed starting point，inspiration can be sparked by visual impressions, emotional reflections, or past memories:
Sometimes, concrete visual moments like bamboo shadows by a window or indoor flowers directly ignite my creative urge.
At other times, abstract thoughts about the passage of time or the joys of daily life emerge first, and I then seek out carriers such as flowers or figures to materialise these ideas.

There are also occasions where cherished memories serve as the hidden source of my inspiration.
Once the starting point is confirmed, I first conceptualise the composition, atmosphere and narrative logic of the piece. I then conduct material experiments with quartz sand mixed with acrylic to create a textured ambience, while embedding metaphorical details like books or fountain pens.
Ultimately, through multi-dimensional dialogue with my inspiration, materials and subject matter, I transform my inner thoughts into tangible visual works.

What do you hope viewers take away from your floral series and your broader artistic practice?

I hope viewers gain dual value from my works:
First, in this fast paced life, they can find spiritual healing and tranquility through the serene atmosphere and quartz sand texture of my pieces.
Second, through the blooming and withering of flowers and everyday scenes, they can reflect on the essence of life, cherish the present moment, and discover the beauty in ordinary life.
I wish my works to act as a bridge connecting individuals and the world, allowing viewers to find inner peace through aesthetic experience and foster greater harmony between themselves and society.

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Author Biography: Hong Liang (b. 1984), female, born in Dezhou, Shandong Province, holds a PhD and currently serves as a Lecturer at Huizhou University. Her research interests encompass art theory and contemporary art practice.

Hong Liang | Orchids With Crimson Fruits | 2024

Ryanne L Bonde

Your paintings often feel like familiar scenes tilted slightly out of balance. What draws you to that "almost-but-not-quite" feeling in an image?

That "almost-but-not-quite" feeling mirrors how I experience daily life: recognizable initially, but full of strange undercurrents; anxieties, memories, private narratives. I'm interested in the moment when a scene stops reading as purely ordinary and starts to feel slightly biased by my perspective or by the subject's. I want the image to hover in that space where viewers recognize the setting but sense that something is skewed, that they are seeing it through someone's specific lens. I like to leave the discomfort or unknowing unresolved.

Ryanne L Bonde | Devices Of Discipline | 2025

How does your background as a school psychologist influence the emotional language of your work?

For me it's a bit of a chicken-or-egg situation. My sentimentality and sensitivity probably pushed me toward both school psychology and painting, rather than one field directly causing the other. My day-to-day work is writing the narratives of students' lives; identifying their needs and tracing root causes. I've always been an impassioned girl. That same emotional intensity shapes my art. The work and the paintings come from the same place: a tendency to look under the surface of behavior, to hold multiple truths at once, and to stay with discomfort.

Many of your pieces explore the boundaries between observer and subject. What interests you most about that relationship?

I often feel an impulse to paint certain subjects even if that content ends up coded in symbolism. I know exactly what the viewer is looking at because it has passed through my mind and my private association with that story. In that sense, the subject, the painting, and I share something the viewer may never fully access. I like the idea that I can immortalize something ghastly, frightening, or historically violent and quietly force viewers to gaze at it, sometimes without them ever knowing the source material. They feel the strangeness and sense that there is more underneath, but the specific connection can remain private between me and the work. That gap between what is shown and what is known is the boundary that interests me.

Your compositions often hold tension and tenderness at once. Is this contrast something you plan intentionally or does it emerge naturally during the process?

This contrast emerges very naturally. The images usually arrive in my mind as fully formed flashes, and I honor them as they come. I make surprisingly few changes to the original mental picture. Often, the meaning only reveals itself later, through coincidence, research, or odd little "signs" that connect the image to something larger. Because I'm not over-engineering the concept at the front end, tension and tenderness tend to coexist in the original vision. I follow the image's initial charge first, and only later understand why those opposing qualities needed to sit together.

You frequently use muted palettes punctuated by sudden contrasts. What role does color play in shaping the psychological atmosphere of your work?

Honestly, I just prefer muted palettes in life, in clothes, interiors, light. I like things quieter, calmer, dimmer, softer, and that preference has generalized to my painting. A subdued palette keeps the atmosphere low to the ground and lets the emotional content feel lived-in rather than theatrical. But at the core, the muted colors reflect how I want to move through the world: without too much noise.

Animals appear frequently in your paintings—sometimes innocent, sometimes unsettling. What draws you to them as emotional or narrative carriers?

I use animals both as stand-ins for human stories and as subjects in their own right. When I'm thinking about forcing a gaze onto injustice, animal welfare is an obvious, ever-present example: cruelty and adaptation happening all around us. In my work, I like to free animals from the toil we put on them and preserve moments of their resilience or vulnerability. For example, my Siena horse painting is based on a racehorse, but the jockey and gear are gone. The horse exists alone; no spectacle, no control, just the sprint.

Your works feel like thresholds—spaces between states. What do you hope viewers experience when they step into these in-between worlds?

I hope viewers observe my work thinking more deeply and feeling more softly toward others. If the paintings function as thresholds, I want them to open onto a slightly altered emotional disposition, one where empathy is more available. I'm not interested in closing everything down to a single interpretation. I want the work to be a place where ambiguity is allowed to exist, where beauty and unease sit together without being resolved. Ideally, viewers leave with a sense that the image is still working on them after they've looked away.

Ryanne L Bonde | Christina | 2025

King x Indigo (Dalvion J. Fields)

Your childhood experiences of grief and feeling like an outsider seem foundational to your practice. How do these early emotions continue to surface in your current work?

Notably grief and rejection from other kids turned a lot of my attention inwards because I knew that I had to create a safe space for myself. One in which I felt there was more possibility than the version of the world that I was experiencing. I absolutely believe the work still encapsulates and translates this feeling that's essential to understanding my broader view of the world and my experiences. I think that I'm always questioning reality with my work, a feeling that continues to connect me to my childhood mindset when I first started creating.

King x Indigo (Dalvion J. Fields) | Hidden From Summer | 2025

Nature, video games, anime, and fantasy all shaped your inner world growing up. How do these influences merge visually and conceptually in your surrealist language today?

Two common themes often found throughout my work are escapism and magic. These are ideas that I think a lot of people can often relate to even in subconscious ways! Surrealism comes so naturally to me as a mode of visual creation because I encourage the viewer to question the world they perceive through my stylized depictions of what's mostly just found out in our natural world (trees, flowers and such). Inadvertently studying so much fantasy has taught me how to craft a believable world with believable characters and how to suspend disbelief.

Many of your works balance bright, playful colors with darker emotional undertones. What draws you to this tension between joy and melancholy?

I think about duality and multiple perspectives a lot and how this manifests in our lives and influences our emotional responses to things. Contradictory emotions, light and dark, with and without, life and death etc. are all a part of that sense of questioning I spoke of. I take a lot

King x Indigo (Dalvion J. Fields) | Imagine Days | 2024

of opportunities to bring darker topics and emotions to the surface, but I often like to present them in more vibrant ways. It's somewhat like finding a silver lining in an unfavorable situation. The same subject matter can mean so many different things to different people, and even to yourself at different points in time.

Your characters often feel introspective, almost withdrawn, yet deeply expressive. Are they self-portraits, emotional avatars, or something else entirely?

I'm still figuring that out hahaha! I think they're more emotional avatars, just conduits for my emotional expression and not necessarily depicting myself. I'm usually a logical person, but when I'm working through some specific emotional state, it definitely influences and manifests into the work and into the characters.

How does your Creole and Haitian ancestry inform the symbols, colors, or narratives within your work, even in subtle or abstract ways?

Color speaks to me first in any creative process and I consider how that could be true for the viewer as well when looking at the art. I think there's an innate need and intention to communicate in bold lines, colors, and often "simplified" forms which I commonly find in other Haitian artwork and motifs. Creole identity for me culturally speaking, has always been about intersectionality and embracing a layered identity as someone who has ancestors from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Creole artwork often features vivid colors, detailed patterns and deals with themes of identity, history and memory. All of which I identify with culturally and creatively, letting my natural instincts guide my ideas and techniques when working.

You speak about reshaping cultural and diasporic grief. What does this process look like for you through painting and material experimentation?

I believe for black people (specifically African-Americans born in the U.S.) there is a current rebuilding and reclamation of culture and identity. There's been so many stories and diasporic cultures that were suppressed or even completely distorted in the past but thankfully people are tuning in more into history and even ancestral wisdom, allowing for more nuanced and truthful storytelling which influences the art as a whole. Additionally as a bisexual/queer person, I want to capture this feeling of "home" and "shared space" that I find comes with catharsis. I'd like to think that I encourage this mindset with my work, knowing that modern culture is always evolving and changing, I want to help steer it to a more accepting place with nuance and possibility for those who are marginalized or left out.

How do you want viewers to emotionally engage with your work—through empathy, reflection, discomfort, or imagination?

The only expectation that I have for viewers and my audience is for them to approach the art with open imaginations and minds. I think there is a lot of tangible meaning and feeling woven throughout the work that's ready to share itself through multiple lenses, whether it be empathy, melancholy, whimsey or even sometimes discomfort. These feelings and facets of my emotionality are a culmination of my experiences and I'm confident in my visual language and storytelling in conveying them. I always hope that everyone who views and spends time with the work walks away feeling a little freer to express themselves than before.

King x Indigo (Dalvion J. Fields) | Conflict Of Interest | 2024

Liudmila Abramova

Your painting "The Legacy of Mevlana" is rooted in deep cultural and spiritual symbolism. What was the first moment of inspiration behind it?

The first impulse came when I began living in Turkey and moved my creative studio here. I visited cities with profound historical significance. I was captivated by the spirit of antiquity, its unique atmosphere. I witnessed the Sema ritual—the mystical dance of the dervishes in their white garments—and I realized that I wanted to create a painting that would convey these emotions and values. It became a true source of inspiration for me.

Liudmila Abramova | Mosaic Of Times

Why was it important for you to place the dervishes specifically between Hagia Sophia and the Galata Tower?

I would like to briefly delve into the history behind why I chose these two symbols, these two landmarks of Turkey.
I approached this from a historical perspective: Hagia Sophia is considered a symbol because of its multiple transformations throughout the history of two great world religions and empires — Christianity during the Byzantine Empire and Islam during the Ottoman Empire. A similar transformation occurred with the Galata Tower, which was originally built by Europeans — the Genoese — but after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the tower was rebuilt by Sultan Mehmed II.
Therefore, the Galata Tower also serves as a reminder of the multilayered historical heritage where East and West intersected and evolved into two great cultures.
Accordingly, the dervish dance that I painted against the backdrop of these two great symbols of history, preserved to this day, acts as a bridge between the past and the present. It connects two worlds and serves as a reminder that everything around us is interconnected, regardless of time or place.

You intentionally included three figures to represent past, present, and future. How did this idea shape the composition?

Yes, indeed, these three figures are an important element of the painting. Each of them, in a way,

Liudmila Abramova | Mosaic Of Times

tells its own story. I tried to make them different in form.
The central figure represents the present, while the two others, set slightly apart, represent the past and the future. They interact with one another, and this composition adds a dynamic of lines and movement to the painting, helping the viewer more easily feel the connection between the three times — the present, the past, and the future.

The Mevlevi Sema ritual carries profound philosophical meaning. What does it personally evoke in you?

This Sema ritual, I want to emphasize, is not just a ritual — it is an expression of inner search and a striving for unity with the world. When I witnessed this ritual in person, I felt a deep sense of peace and inner inspiration.
The whirling dervishes' dance reminded me of the importance of inner balance and of the fact that each of us — myself included — is searching for our own life path. These are the feelings I wanted to convey in my painting, and I hope I succeeded.

You often work with premium interior techniques, crystals, mirror potal, and natural stones. What draws you to these materials?

In my paintings, I use both acrylic and oil techniques. This artwork, "The Legacy of Mevlana," is created in oil paint, paying homage to the academic multilayered painting tradition.
However, I often incorporate crystals, mirror leaf, and rhinestones into my works, which add light play, depth, and dimension. Natural stones bring texture and uniqueness to the artwork. These materials help me create pieces that are not only visually appealing but also emotionally rich—resonating with both viewers and collectors.

How does living in Turkey influence your artistic thinking, aesthetics, and subject matter?

Life in Turkey is a constant source of inspiration for me — a country rich in history, diverse culture, and spiritual traditions. Every day I encounter new ideas and images that influence my paintings, and I try to absorb all these elements and reflect them on my canvases. I also create works that resonate with my buyers and collectors.

Your works balance visual beauty with spiritual depth. How do you maintain this harmony?

For me, it is essential that each artwork is not only aesthetically pleasing but also meaningful. I pay close attention to details and symbolism, striving to create multilayered compositions.
Visual beauty draws the viewer in, while spiritual and historical depth encourages reflection on the more important questions in life. This balance is achieved through careful planning and an intuitive understanding of every element in my work. When I reach harmony between outward beauty and inner meaning, I feel truly happy.

Liudmila Abramova | The Legacy of Mevlana

Interview

DOORAE LEE

Your work often places figures inside layered, abstract environments. How do you decide where the figure belongs within these parallel systems?

I don't think of the figure as something that needs to belong to a specific place. Instead, I position figures where multiple systems overlap — places where paths, roles, and possibilities coexist without offering a clear direction.
The figure is not meant to resolve the space, but to quietly register what it means to exist inside such an environment.

You describe technology as a means rather than a subject. How does AI function in your process without becoming the main focus of the work?

I work with AI-assisted tools such as Midjourney, but technology itself is never the focus of the work.
Depending on the piece, I may directly compose or adjust elements within the image, while in other cases I work primarily through language — defining conditions through prompts and observing what emerges.
AI produces visual material, but it does not determine meaning or direction. My artistic practice lies in setting conditions, making selective interventions, and recognizing moments when an image aligns with the state I want to record. In this sense, AI functions as an interface — a tool of translation rather than a subject of the work.

DOORAE LEE | Where We Stand | 2025

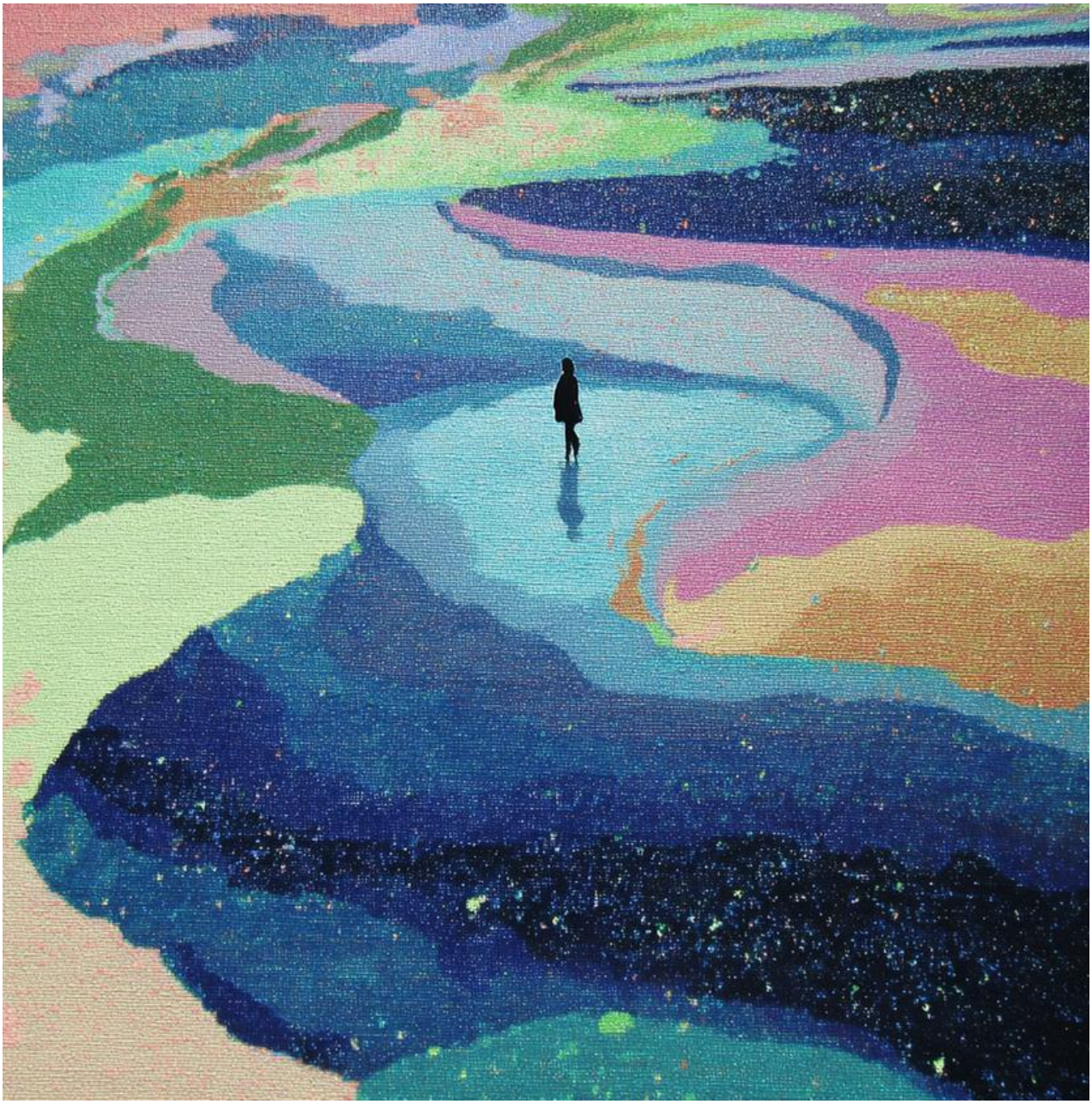
The figures in your images appear neutral and emotionally restrained. What does emotional neutrality allow you to observe that expression might obscure?

Emotional neutrality allows the surrounding environment to become more visible. When expression is minimized, attention shifts away from individual emotion and toward the systems that continue to operate — repetition, structure, and distance.
I am less interested in what the figure feels than in what keeps moving around them, often unnoticed.

Movement is present in your work, yet you mention that meaning does not accumulate. How do you think about time and progression within your images?

Time in my work is not linear or progressive. There is movement, but there is no arrival. This reflects a condition I often observe in contemporary life — constant activity within environments full of options, where direction remains unclear and meaning does not settle.

In your statement, you describe your practice as a form of "quiet record." What do you feel is being recorded — a moment, a condition, or a long-term shift?



DOORAE LEE | Where We Stand | 2025

What I record is a condition. I have written as a way of recording myself and the world I live in, and one form of that practice has been making picture books. After a personal experience in which language no longer felt sufficient, I began to turn toward images as another way of recording.
Image-making did not replace writing; it became an extension of the same impulse — a quieter way of leaving traces of states that could not be fully articulated in words.
In my earlier visual work, many viewers described the images as warm and emotionally moving. At a certain point, however, I began to sense a different condition around me. The world appeared increasingly colorful and saturated, while the people within it felt gradually emptied. This work marks an exploration of that simultaneous contrast.
It is not meant to explain or resolve, but to quietly remain. For me, this work is a record — and I hope it remains in the world as an artwork.

The spaces in your work feel immersive but distant at the same time. How do you balance visual richness with emotional restraint?

The environments appear visually rich and saturated because the world I observe feels that way — full of options, stimulation, and individuality. In contrast, the figures remain restrained and emotionally neutral.
This contrast creates distance, reflecting a condition in which external possibilities expand while inner orientation gradually fades.

What questions do you hope viewers ask themselves when encountering these parallel, directionless environments?

I hope viewers reflect on their own position within similar environments. Not where they are going, but what keeps them moving — and what may remain quietly unresolved beneath that movement.

I'm **VOĹGA**, an artist-illustrator, and surface pattern designer. I have been working in the creative realm 15+ years.
I studied graphic design at Belarusian State Artistic High School named A. K. Hlebova and I continued my studies in art history at Belarusian State Academy of Fine Arts.
Already in the last years of my studies I began to work on Belarusfilm as a background artist and cartoonist. After a year of working at Belarusfilm, I worked as a handmade postcard designer in Minsk (Belarus) at a small production facility. This work taught me to respect manual labor. After a few years in that company, I realized that I could work as a freelancer.
So far I've been illustrating products and making surface pattern designs since 2015. I twice became a finalist of the Textile Design Talents Solstudio Award – in 2019 and 2022.
2022 Participation in the exhibition with illustration «Dream Big», The 1st edition of the «Ciclismo ilustrado» illustration competition, promoted by the Torres Vedras City Council.
2024 HAAM#2 Show, Hamburg, Kraftwerk Bille
I currently live in Krakow, Poland.

Artist Statement
I attribute my cultural background, and people's behavior as my main subjects and sources of inspiration. I also enjoy interpreting art history, creating a mixture of the lyrical and humorous in my work.
And last, but not least, I search for the meaning of creativity in life and "representation of the art as accessible to everyone."

VOĹGA Michalska | I Was Looking For | 2025

VOĽGA Michalska | Organic Life | 2025

Clara Fortis

Clara Fortis | The Posture Of Hearing | 2025

Your work often revolves around gestures of listening, speaking, and being silenced. When did the idea of hearing become central to your artistic language?

I suffered an injury to my middle ear several years ago that resulted in hearing loss and the development of severe chronic tinnitus. For a long time, I avoided engaging with the theme of hearing because it was too painful to confront an ongoing conflict in my life. When it entered my work, it marked a shift toward accepting the loss of a fully functional body and toward processing something that continues to affect me deeply. What began as an attempt to find comfort through research into medical, historical, and mythological references surrounding the ear gradually became part of my artistic practice. Through this exploration, I began to realise that the need to be heard is a fundamental aspect of being human, opening a wider field of inquiry in which hearing is inseparable from communication and social dynamics. Some of my artworks focus solely on the act of hearing, while others move toward speech and silence. Although the subject matter is deeply personal, my work is rarely autobiographical. I am interested in how my personal experiences can be transformed, buried even, within a work that allows viewers to encounter and reflect on their own relationships to listening, communication, and being unheard.

Clara Fortis | Unanswered Prayers | 2024

Steel is a recurring material in your sculptures. What does steel allow you to express emotionally or conceptually that softer materials cannot?

My practice is research based, and I often avoid referencing existing artworks, instead using objects as catalysts. As much of my work draws from medicine and psychology, I became interested in how a metallic appearance recalls the medical devices that inform my art and shape my understanding of the body. Steel also allows me to work with ideas of permanence. Harsher materials like metal insist on remaining and have an inherent relationship to sound. The process of working with steel is loud and resonant. Cutting, welding, and grinding make sound unavoidable during the act of making. Even when the finished work is silent, that sonic history remains embedded in the sculpture, alongside the sounds viewers might imagine when encountering metal. Using a material that evokes sound allows me to address themes of hearing without using sound itself as a medium. It suggests vibration and resonance while refusing to perform them directly, mirroring the complexities of hearing.

Many of your works reference body fragments—ears, teeth, limbs—rather than complete figures. What draws you to fragmentation as a way of speaking about human behaviour?

I can trace my interest in fragmentation back to a long-standing personal practice of journaling and writing poetry. Much of this writing is abstract and metaphorical, often centered on the body, and it becomes the emotional material I return to when beginning to conceptualise an artwork. I believe that for others to form an emotional connection to my work, the concept must originate from a place of personal vulnerability. My poetry functions as a reference point throughout the making process, and I always arrive at a title and concept statement before a physical work is complete.

Clara Fortis | Muscle Memory | 2023

Although I mainly work in sculpture and installation, my process often feels closer to collaging, combining personal writing with research drawn from psychology, philosophy, and medicine to develop a specific idea.
In this sense, the bodily fragments in my work are mimetic of how I write, research, and conceptualise, through the isolation and recombination of different areas of inquiry. Focusing on a part of the body or a fragment of identity also allows me to draw attention to what is often overlooked in behaviour: gestures and moments of contact that shape how humans perceive one another. Ears, teeth, or limbs become a site of attention rather than a detail, allowing me to focus on parts of the body which are essential but are often taken for granted. Fragmentation creates both intimacy and distance, mirroring experiences of isolation and the difficulty of being fully seen or heard.

How has living between multiple cultures shaped your sensitivity to exclusion, miscommunication, and social hierarchies?

Living between multiple countries has made me aware of how my identity is read differently depending on context. Much of this awareness comes from navigating the world as a woman and continuously reassessing how I present myself across different environments, in which moments of miscommunication become more visible. While my sculptures are intentionally open-ended, I frequently recognise in them, retrospectively, patterns drawn from my own experiences. Beyond my initial engagement with hearing impairment, the recurring theme of feeling unheard in my work often intersects with experiences of gendered communication, particularly in relation to men.
One example is “Muscle Memory”, a steel sculpture that combines the motifs of human teeth and a bear trap, both methods of defence, to convey the exhaustive process of always needing to keep one’s guard up. Although not conceived as an explicit commentary on gender, I later recognised how the work echoed my own experiences of remaining guarded around men.

You have worked across fashion, photography, and installation. How do these disciplines inform your sculptural thinking today?

Working across several disciplines has influenced how I think about sculpture as something closely tied to the body. Even when my works are not physically activated, they are almost always built with a body in mind. In “The Posture of Hearing”, for example, the sculpture directs the body into a position of hearing by focusing on the act of cupping one’s hands behind the ears, while also confining the body into a kneeling position. Although the artwork could be used, I chose to restrict interaction during its installation and instead invite viewers to move around the work and imagine themselves within it.
Fashion has shaped how I think about constructing for the body, introducing a sense of performance, even when that performance is imagined. Photography comes in as a way of extending the work beyond the exhibition space. Collaborating with photographers allows the art to be reinterpreted with a body present, serving both as documentation and as another layer of interpretation.

Several of your installations create environments rather than isolated objects. What role does space play in shaping the emotional experience of your work?

My relationship to space begins in the studio, where I move between shaping clay and assembling steel. Sculpture as a medium inherently demands a reasoning for its existence, which may be why my process is so research based. Working at a larger scale brings a more vulnerable experience compared to two-dimensional work, as some of my sculptures approach the size of a human body. There needs to be a purpose behind why a sculpture or installation fills a room. The act of occupying space also resonates directly with my conceptual exploration of the desire to be heard. Because of their scale, I often allow my sculptures to interact with their surroundings, sometimes incorporating existing objects such as chairs or architectural elements. In some cases, the viewing position is intentionally altered, with works meant to be encountered from the floor, further shaping how the viewer engages with the artwork.

What questions or emotional states do you hope viewers carry with them after encountering your work?

I see my work as presenting a very specific problem or concept, often rooted in vulnerability and emotional experience. I hope viewers either find comfort in seeing their own inner thoughts or feelings reflected, or use the encounter as an opportunity to reflect on their own philosophies of hearing, communication, and presence. I want my work to invite contemplation about how we relate to one another and how our actions affect the emotional landscape of those around us, encouraging a moment of empathy and awareness.

Clara Fortis | Cast A Veil | 2022

Aleksey Artemyev

Your works often reveal the hidden mechanisms of society. What inner conflict or social tension most often becomes the starting point for a new painting?

Most often, it's a conflict (or sometimes even an open confrontation) between what we truly want and what our loved ones, society, or even complete strangers expect from us. (Whispered aside: and it works the other way around too — we often expect things from others that they never intended to do, yet we've already assigned those things to them as obligations.)
I've always been irritated and deeply affected by this universal tension of "having to conform." The painting "Awakening and Realizing the New" is precisely about that — the sharp, painful moment when your old points of reference (your parents, familiar environment, or even long-time friends and mentors) stop working, while the new ones are not yet clear. You begin to glow from within with new ideas, and the people around you often perceive that glow as a threat.
This is a fundamental — or I would even say almost standardized, according to some unwritten GOST or DIN of human experience (a metaphor for those common technical abbreviations in manufacturing standard parts) — situation that repeats itself in different forms throughout life: in youth (straight out of Dostoevsky's Fathers and Sons), in our careers, in relationships, and even in our internal beliefs.
And that last part is the most frightening: when you yourself break your own long-held moral principles. I simply try to catch this feeling of inner fracture and look for a visual form or symbolic formula to express it.

Aleksey Artemyev | Awakening and Realizing the New | 2024

You combine a rough, emotional palette-knife background with precise brushwork for symbolic details. How did this duality in technique become your artistic language?

Honestly? By trial and error. I started by trying to control everything — drawing every detail so precisely that there wouldn't be a single extra stroke... The result was lifeless and frankly bad. Then I tried working only in a rough, emotional manner... but the idea got lost, and the small elements — the symbols — were drowned out by the burst of expressive brushwork.
And then my engineering habit of assembling two mechanisms kicked in. First, I create the background emotionally, sometimes even chaotically. It's like modelling

Aleksey Artemyev | Playing With Toy Cars, Through The Eyes Of A Child | 2025

the weather or the environment. And then I "place" the object into this environment — the idea or the "question." That part needs to be done calmly so that it becomes readable, like a technical drawing of a component.
This contrast is what creates the tension I want to convey on the canvas.

You describe your paintings as conversations rather than decorative objects. What is the most surprising reaction or interpretation you have ever received from a viewer?

The most surprising moment was when someone saw in the painting "You're still here?! Finish up and close it." not a comment on spending too much time at work, but a story about long, worn-out relationships. He said: "This is about that moment when both people know it's over, yet they keep sitting in the same room and at the same table because they're afraid to step out into that world of colors and lights."
I hadn't intended such a specific context, but the essence was understood correctly (just from a different angle) — the painting is indeed about that universal fear of new freedom and the old, exhausted expectations we often create for ourselves.
It's actually the best kind of compliment — when a metaphor is interpreted in a personal way, and that interpretation enriches the overall meaning of the artwork.

Your background in industrial engineering and your work trips to the northern regions, close to the Far North, may seem distant from the world of art at first glance, yet they clearly influence your creative practice. How do these experiences — and the contrast between the harsh northern environment and life in a big city — continue to shape your themes and visual language?

Yes, that experience gives me a sense of scale and a feeling for material. In the northern regions of oil fields, all processes — and their impact on materials and people — reveal themselves in a very particular way: corrosion, heating pipes freezing during accidents, the erosion of nature in these areas on the one hand, and on the other — the very warm and supportive relationships between people in conditions of brutal cold and icy winds. In a big city, all these processes are hidden and "turned upside down" — both socially and psychologically. And this sometimes creates a strong sense of dissonance.
I simply transfer this cup of dissonances onto the canvas as engineering processes. "Lost in the Depths" is essentially an engineering metaphor: the message (signal) never reached its recipient, the communication system failed. And the failure itself is multifaceted. Experience in design teaches you to see not just an object, but its function, its future behaviour, and its "tension" within the overall structure.
The same goes for my paintings: each element is a component of a system called "conflict."

Many of your works encode messages about loneliness, environmental damage, or social pressure. How do you decide which symbols to use to express these ideas?

I try to use simple or even everyday symbols — those a person encounters in daily life — and slightly transform them (and sometimes even break their usual perception). For example, the theme of loneliness is not just a solitary object (or the image of a person placed within it), but the very process of walking into loneliness. Let's return to the painting "Lost in the Depths": a bottle with a message that is slowly filling with water. Hope is physically sinking, and there will soon be no air left to carry even a cry to the world — ahead lie only dark depths.
Another example is the painting "Wash Your Hands Before Eating...". The fear for one's child is not only parental embrace, but also the attempt to shield them with a kind of warning tape that begins to melt from parental anxiety and control (as a parent of two children, I'm already noticing this tendency in myself).
One more example. Social pressure? Look at "Awakening and Realizing the New" — this pressure comes from all sides, even from those who, in theory, were supposed to offer support.
A symbol needs to be strong and preferably simple — like a steel nut with a chrome coating — able to withstand the weight of meaning while remaining instantly recognizable.

How do you think viewers should approach your works - analytically, emotionally, or intuitively?

The main thing is—no "musts." First, just look. If something catches you emotionally and you like it (or even if it annoys you—after all, a negative reaction is still a reaction), then "welcome aboard." Read the "user manual"—that is, the painting's description (eh... it seems my engineering background still hasn't fully let me go, since I keep using technical terminology). And then "take off": listen to your inner feelings.
For example, with the painting "Playing With Toy Cars, Through The Eyes Of A Child" there's no need for deep analysis. Just remember what it was like, or watch how your own children play. The stream of thoughts will naturally lead you to a simple realization: "When was the last time I looked at things with a clear, simple, childlike gaze?" And from there, you can even go deeper into self-reflection—if you wish, of course.
That's how the mechanism works. But the very first moment is always that inner "click."

If you could describe your artistic mission in one sentence, what would it be?

To paint complex and carefully overlooked feelings as something visible, so that they can be talked about and not feared to discuss.

Loan Tran

How do emotions and memories transform into gestures, colors and textures in your painting process? Could you describe this transition?

Emotion and memories can be shown through many forms, but in art they become a unique language that allows ideas and stories to be expressed in a very specific way that words sometimes can't reach. Pablo Picasso once said " Painting is just another way of keeping a diary" and this perspective speaks to how I understand painting. When I paint, whether I am in a state of chaos, calm or emotional intensity, each brushstroke or gesture often surprisingly display and reveal something I wasn't fully aware of. The process usually begins with the internal feelings but it requires time, attentions and effort to translate those inner state into a visual form.

Loan Tran | A Quaver Rest

Color plays a central role for me and it is one of the most potent influencers of human psychology and mood. Through colors, shapes and textures, we can communicate feelings such as joy, anger, peace or sadness. Blue may evoke the sky, ocean, calmness; but it can also blue represents depression or justice depending on its context. Warm color like orange and yellow can carry joy and energy. Therefore, I gather these associations and shape them into the artwork through my own experience. Somehow it will depend on our perception of color from day to day. The same blue feels different under the sunny sky versus a rainy day. In this case, I will follow and move with these shift instead of resisting them.

After collecting the color and grounding sensation, I begin transforming these memories and feelings on canvas into a visible gesture. I allow myself to experience as much as possible, from using different sizes of the brushes, how to shape a foam, how I can apply the amount of the pressure or also the speed of the hand, I keep moving until the painting reaches the certain time or the internal affection has been fully translated into material form. Moreover, layering and texture are essential in building depth; they help me give the sensation weight to the piece and create connection between my inner and the audiences.

For me, these steps are important parts because art is not only a way of expression but also a way of connecting. Through the visual language of gesture, colors and texture, I hope to create a refuge where others can find reflections of their own memories and

emotional sensation across communities, cultures and even generations.

Your background in law, culinary arts, and wine studies is unconventional for an artist. How have these different disciplines shaped the way you observe human behavior and sensory detail in your work?

My background in wine study, culinary art and law has shaped how I see and feel. In wine and culinary training, I learned to read textures, color, and the materials to understand how subtle shifts can transform an entire experience. Therefore, that sensory discipline taught me to be patient, to fully focus on the presence and take a deep attention to process.
Meanwhile, attendingUniversity of Law and especially during my research on criminal psychology for my graduation essay encouraged me improve the ability to observe details, notice human behavior, body language, examine motives, hidden narratives. I developed a habit of looking beneath the surface, questioning what is visible; reading the tension between appearance and intention; noticing what is shown and what is hidden.
Together, these fields guided me to look at the world through two lenses at once: one sensory and one psychological. My practice is an exploration of perception: how emotion, memory and the unseen layers of our psychecan be translated into gesture, texture and visual form. I don't just paint what the body looks like, I try to paint what it feels like.

Nature seems to have a symbolic, almost intimate presence in your works. How does the natural world help you express the inner emotional landscape?

We are loved and blessed by nature. This relationship is so deep that humans depend on nature not only for survival, physical but also mental health and even psychological affection. This connection is embedded in our histories, cultures and our everyday rituals.
I can sense a strong link between nature and human emotion. Theories like Stress Reduction or Attention Restoration explain how natural environments can calm the mind, restore focus and ease internal tension. And I experience this in a very personal moment. Some days ago, I noticed that my ginger plant had grown taller, and the small tree by my door had a new branch. They are living and enjoying their life quietly which remind me that each day carries its owns possibility and we all can start something wonderful, growth can be slow but still deeply meaningful These plants struggles too in their own way with the chaos, the cold weather or the big storm out there. Their resilience mirrors the emotional journey many of us go through.
A flower bouquet can change your mood.
The ocean under the moonlight can soothe you instantly.
A bowl of warm vegetable soup can comfort you after a long day.
For me, I feel like being held by these gentle encounters. They remind me of the beauty in small things – the moments we often overlook while searching for something grand. In my work, nature becomes a way to express that quiet emotional landscape: the tenderness, the transformation, the fragility and the resilience that shape our inner world.

You write about intimacy, distance, and presence as emotional imprints. How do these themes manifest visually in your paintings?

The painting has a life of its own and I try to let that life come through. It fascinates me how a canvas can hold the depth of one's inner world and express it visually. We all connect to people and moment, and yet we can lose them, miss them and watch them turn into memory. What we hold today becomes yesterday when we look back. It is beautiful that art is one of the way to keep those fleeting moments alive.
Painting is an attempt to come to terms with life when I start a painting, somehow it is outside but at the end, I find myself moving inward. In my practice, I explore the silent dialogue that unfolds within; the quiet negotiations between closeness and distance, intimacy and boundaries - how emotion and memory inhabit a body.
Intimacy, for me, is not confined to relationship with others but appears from the internal fragile and conflicting conversations. Art is powerful enough to connect with the past, understand the present and

Loan Tran | Inhaling

dream about future. I love to capture intimate moments from everyday life and express through small subjects. Some details such as fabric, a red thread or floating fish can bring me to a quiet confession with my own, they invite me to sense the closeness, the private moment when I can have a private space where I can speak to my inner voice and translate them visually by the texture, brushstroke and colors. Moreover, through using the personal reflection and narrative, I can create a direct connection with the viewers and somehow it can relate to a part of their story as well.
Alongside the warmth and tenderness, there is also distance. In "Thread of Intimacy", I brought in an emotional boundary. We can see the closeness that remains slightly apart, the space between touch and distance, also the attachment and independence. These gaps create the psychological pause. I'd like to put both type of emotion in the painting so as describing the quiet conflict deep inside our soul, the inconsistency between internal thinking and the outside reactions. I often leave the empty space, blurred area or the slight transition between forms. This creates a feeling of stepping back, of something that can be sensed but can't be fully reached There are moments I allow myself to detach from the external world, give my mind space to observe and experience the internal emotions deeply to turn them into the "image". And for me, stepping back is not avoidance; this process provide the ideal area for me to refresh the perspective and see the whole. Besides that, I also set a painting or a project aside for a period of time. . The important thing, for me is how I can connect deeply with the art, how I can make it happen. Distance allows me to return with clarity, and understand more of my work. I've realized that it often takes more time than expected. But actually it is meaningful that remoteness in time can change the expectation and appreciation of the artwork.
Presence becomes visible between those two states. Presence appears as the tension between closeness and detachment, it causes the state that emotion has solidified and became visible. Through the floating fish, two hands, a blooming flower, or a small piece of fabric, I purposely let them act like the elements and these elements play the role as the signature, mark the point where memory and emotion turn tactile. We can choose the way we want the artwork to be seen and how the story can be revealed. So through the brushstroke, the layers and colors, I shape this state of presence and allows the inner voice to be translated emotionally.
Overall, the visual language is built from fragments, surreal objects, shifting moments. The way intimacy can pull you in, distance push you back and the presence get you close to a specific emotional moment. Together, they guide the viewer toward a specific emotional moment.

Loan Tran | Vein Of Time

Was there a specific moment when painting shifted from personal therapy into a dedicated artistic practice?

Five years ago, I made a very conscious decision to reconnect with art. At that time, painting wasn't a full time pursuit but I committed to giving it real time and effort. From that moment, I began with gratitude and appreciation for every sketch, every small canvas and even imperfections. I found a class, went back to the basics, adapted my schedule and set a discipline around it. It felt like an opportunity I shouldn't miss again, and something inside kept telling me to listen. There was also a very intimate moment of realization. One evening, while sitting in my room, I noticed the brushes, the box of colors and paper that I had always kept but never touched. They had always been there – beside me for the whole time but I was the one who had abandoned them. That night, I pulled out the acrylics and painted a simple "Still life" on a piece of Canson paper. It was the first time in years. The next day I was exhausted but I felt alive. I loved the color I put down, the shapes I formed and the effort I poured into it. After that I recognized it helped me lower stress level and softened the depression. I didn't pressure myself, I simply painted with my heart and sincerity, letting emotions turn into shapes and colors. That was the positive attempt and I admitted painting can shift focus from negative thoughts to the creative process

Loan Tran | Thread Of Intimacy

and for me it became a quiet form of meditation.
I have always loved looking at art, and later I learned that looking at a beautiful piece of art can increase blood flow to the brain by up to 10 percent. It has been found that when we see something beautiful, a tiny dose of pleasure hormone accompanies the feeling of falling in love. In real life, when I engage deeply with an artwork, it is like a process that workouts for the brain and affects mental changes. Gradually, through this practice of seeing and making, my connection with art became more stronger and meaningful. Step by step, that personal refuge transformed into a serious artistic practice. I built discipline, followed schedule and kept showing up for the work. Painting still is not my full time job but I am proud of how intensely and consistently I've maintained it.
In the beginning, I never planned or prepare for the exhibition or any kind of public. It felt like a distant dream. But at the end of last year, my teacher encouraged me to join in the first exhibition and although I was terrified, I trusted myself and followed her guidance. The first show at the Fine Art Museum was surreal. It was insane for me that time and I still feel grateful for my family and my teacher who always believed in my work before I fully believed in it myself. Looking back now, everything came from the intense practice and the decision to keep going, keep looking forward and trust the direction I am moving in.

Your figures often appear fragmented or intertwined with natural elements. What draws you to this interplay between the human body and nature?

We are part of a whole. The human body and nature share a deep connection, reflect in stiking visual and structural similarities. Just as rivers and streams bring water across lands and into the ocean, humans have veins and vessels transporting blood throughout our bodies. The branching of the lungs mirrors the structure of tree branches, serve the essential purpose of sustaining life. The rings of a tree stump tell of its age and history, much like the unique swirls of a human fingerprint narrate our individuality. Or the veins a leaf align with the folds of a human hand. These reminds me that humanity and nature are deeply intertwined, reflecting a unique relationship that has existed for centuries.
I am drawn to specific fragments of the body such as texture of skin, hair, hands or even scars. Despite the imperfections, they carry a quiet beauty of their own. Nature enters my painting such as blooming flowers, floating fish or soft green leaves,... These elements make it alive and deepen the emotional layers. By placing natural elements beside them, I want to oppose the contrast: fragility against growth, heaviness against hope. Nature become the counterpoint, softening the emotional weight and sometimes reflecting the hidden thoughts within one self.
In the end, this interplay between human body and nature is my way of reminding myself and hopefully also the viewers that no matter how fragmented we feel, we are always connecting to something larger and alive.

Your work has been shown internationally. Do you notice cultural differences in how audiences interpret your imagery and emotional themes?

Yes , I do notice the differences, though they appear often in subtle way. Each culture brings own language and emotional habit, so I can see people focus on different aspects – some read the natural elements symbolically while other pay attention to gestures or psychological tension.
What remains is the core emotional response. Even if the symbolism is different, viewers still connect the feelings like softness, longing or loneliness. I think it is because emotions are not limited by geography; they are all human experiences. Depending on the different regions and cultures, some people will ask about concept, technique or narrative structure, meanwhile the others tend to focus on sensation, mood or quiet emotional change between the image. I really appreciate all the approaches, they simply reveal different cultural habits of seeing.
For me, the most meaningful part is witnessing how the same work speaks differently to everyone and each viewer can unlock a different layers. I can see that these cultural differences don't separate reading, they can add depth to them. And they remind me that while arts may travel through different cultures, emotion can remain a shared language.

Michelle Alexander

Your work explores the body's responses and the tension between inner and outer experiences. How did this focus on the body begin in your artistic practice?

It began when I noticed that my body was reacting long before I understood why. Anxiety surfaced as tightness in my chest, a shaking hand, or a sudden heat rising under my skin. I became hyperaware of these small betrayals. My body felt unreliable, as if it was working against me at the moments I needed it to stay composed. Eventually, I recognized those reactions as a kind of vocabulary. My body was communicating in signals I had spent years trying to ignore. Working with it became a way to give form to what I could not yet articulate. The body stopped being a subject and became a language, one that let me name what had previously been unspoken, avoided, or suppressed.

Michelle Alexander | Scratching Away | 2021

You describe your work as a process of making the unseen visible. What does "the unseen" represent for you personally?

For me, "the unseen" is the emotional residue we carry but rarely show: anxieties lodged in the gut, the feeling of being displaced inside your own skin, the quiet instability beneath a composed exterior. It's also in the contradictions, how you can feel fragile and heavy at the same time. My work tries to give form to those internal states that don't have a clear physical counterpart but deeply shape how we move through the world.

How do personal experiences of discomfort or being "confined in one's skin" influence the materials and forms you choose?

Discomfort has shaped the way I choose materials. I am drawn to things that look delicate or shell-like, materials that could easily be dismissed as fragile, decorative, utilitarian. I take those elements and devalue them on purpose, altering or distressing them so they carry a different weight. Fabrics, wigs, resin, and other skin adjacent surfaces become stand-ins for the body, but also for personal history. They stretch, sag, crack, or resist control, much like the body does under pressure. The forms often emerge from negotiating with these materials rather than mastering them. The sense of being confined, held in, or held back becomes literal. The materials mirror the internal experience of discomfort, but they also hold the memory of what they once were, and what they are forced to become.

Michelle Alexander | Censored Lights | 2024

You mention a "crumbling self-image" and the struggle to reclaim identity. Do you view your art as a form of healing or confrontation?

I see it as both, but confrontation usually comes first. Making the work forces me to face parts of myself I've tried to push aside like fear, shame, doubt, and vulnerability. Only after that confrontation is there room for healing, and even then, the healing is not neat or complete. It's more of a reclamation: taking ownership of the fragments rather than hiding them. The work becomes a place where I can sit with the instability instead of trying to fix it.

You treat materials almost as a body — as skin. What materials do you find most effective for translating these bodily associations and why?

Fabric, glue, and soft plastics are the materials that feel most connected to the body in my practice. They behave like skin: thin, elastic, and always on the verge of giving out. Fabric is where memory settles. It creases, stretches, and carries the imprint of whatever has touched it. Glue has a fleshy quality. It thickens, sags, and resists in ways that echo muscle or tissue struggling to hold something together. Soft plastics feel almost dermal. They seal, protect, and create a surface that looks stable, yet can split or warp without warning. These materials do not simply reference the body; they perform like it. They respond to gravity, pressure, and time. They shift, fail, and endure. That instability is what makes them so effective. They capture the tension of inhabiting a body that is both container and constraint.

In your installations, objects often clash or create friction. What role does conflict play in your creative process?

Conflict is not something I add for effect. It is already present in me, so it shows up in the work. I am always caught between wanting to disappear and wanting to be seen, between holding it together and letting everything fall apart. That push and pull becomes physical in the studio. Materials fight for space. Structures sag, scrape, or strain against what they are supposed to support. When things do not sit neatly, when the work looks like it could shift or fail, it feels honest. That friction is the truth of living in a body that is never fully at ease. The tension is not a problem to solve. It is the point.

You create spaces where the viewer can "see themselves and be seen." What kind of emotional response do you hope visitors experience when encountering your work?

I am not interested in making people comfortable. I am interested in making something felt. I want viewers to recognize themselves in the work, even if they do not have the language for it. I want them to notice their breath, their stance, the twitch of a muscle they did not realize was tense. The work should draw them in and unsettle them at the same time. I am never trying to hurt anyone. I am trying to create a space where reckoning becomes possible, where something that has been buried or ignored finally surfaces. If they walk away carrying a sensation they cannot quite name, or a sharper awareness of the tensions they live with, then the work has done what it needed to do.

Michelle Alexander | Studio

Ivan Yushkov

An artist, photographer, and technical producer whose practice evolved from working with photography and multimedia installations. Initially focused on photography to capture singular moments, he gradually transitioned to painting—a medium where both images and states of being can be captured.

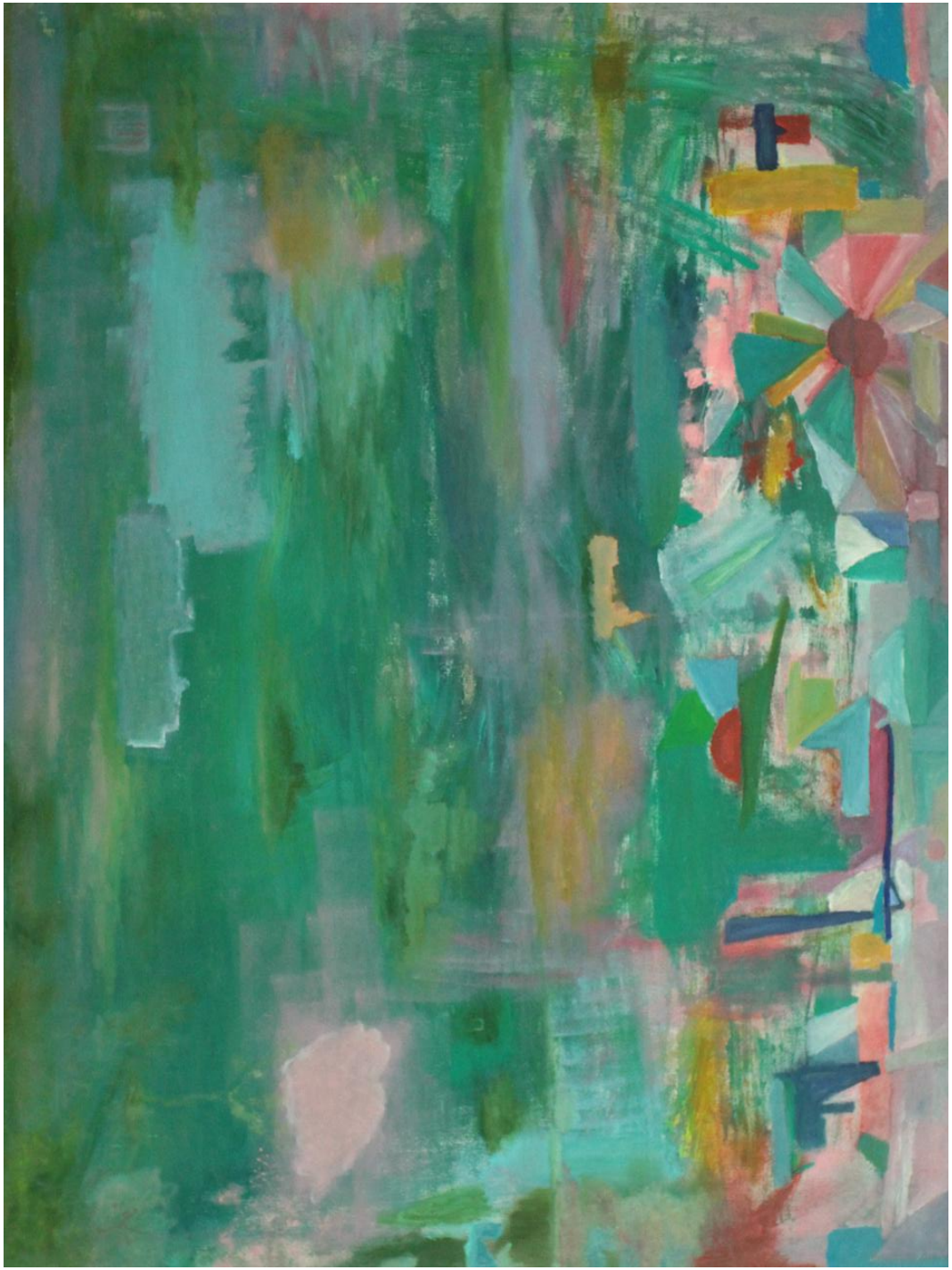
Moving beyond the static frame, he turned to the canvas to preserve the fragile interplay of light, silence, and inner experiences. His works are narrative-free, existing beyond fixed coordinates, providing viewers the chance to immerse themselves in sensation rather than story.

Drawing from a rich background in multimedia, he blends technical precision with the subtlety of artistic expression. His paintings place a strong emphasis on the vibrations of colour and texture, as well as on light and introspective depth—reaching toward the place where silence is born.

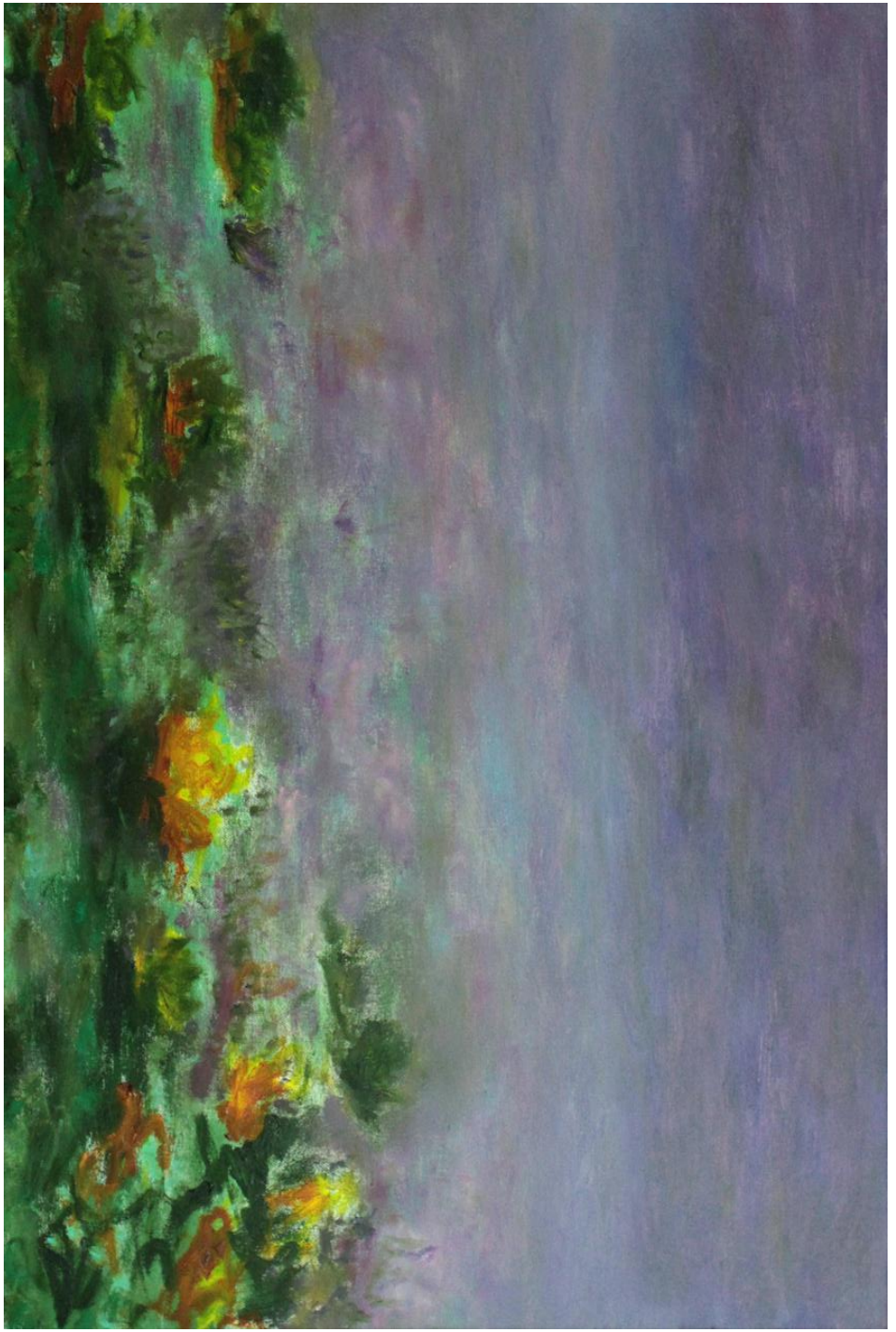
Artist Statement

Each work becomes a gateway: to the past through memory, to the present through contemplation, and to the future through dreams. The way the canvas functions is up to you, not me. Look closely and take your time. Don't rush to decode it; pause and reflect. You might express, better than I ever could, what this canvas—crafted from colour, light, air, and emptiness truly conveys.

Ivan Yushkov | MEMORY_Time U



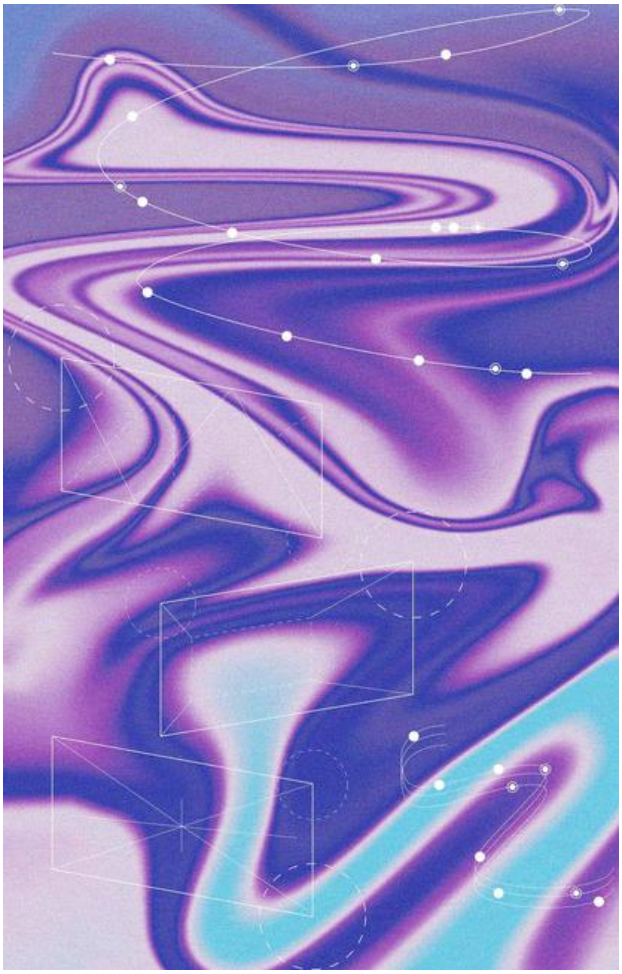
Ivan Yushkov | DREAMS_Dream #1| 2025



Ivan Yushkov | GARDENS_Silence | 2025

Yinxue Zou

Order and chaos, this tension that recurs in many of your works. Is it a preoccupation? When you start a new piece, does it usually originate in an ordered or a chaotic impulse? What is usually the seed of the first structure - a grid, a text, a visual memory?

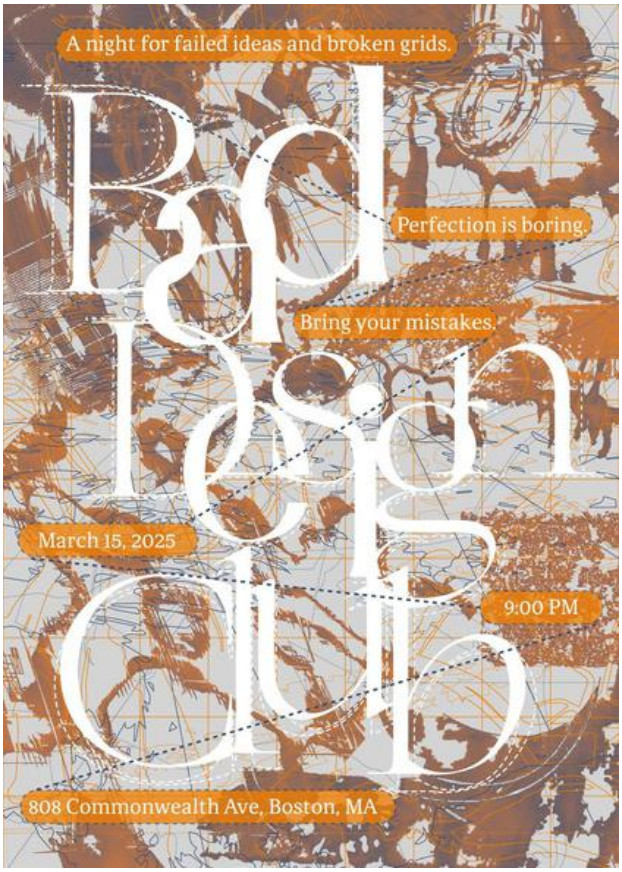


Yinxue Zou | Dream

Order and chaos are not so much antithetical for me as two stages in the same cycle, and for that reason, the scaffolding for a new piece rarely emerges from a single source. The first element to coalesce is usually some vague visual memory: the blue reflection of headlights on a backseat at 3 a.m., the palimpsest of advertisements on a subway car, the stray margins of a city seen through the window of a moving car. I rarely recall something as a literal image; it's more that a certain temperature lingers from a particular place or time, and it's this emotional residue that seeps into the intuitive core of a new work. At the same time, at this early stage I often recall (not think, but recall) one or two short phrases—sometimes in Chinese, sometimes in English—that come as close to a voice as these things have when they first appear. Instinctively, they give a work a sense of direction. But structure usually only settles once a grid is present. A simple grid gives a provisional skeleton for all these other things to latch on to before they begin to break apart, slide out of alignment, or otherwise deform. In this way, memory provides emotional inertia, language provides a conceptual axis, and the grid provides minimal order. The work begins to cohere in their tension rather than at one specific point of origin.

Many of the posters and zines in your archive feature bilingual and mixed-script typography. How do you know when you're treating language as content, and when it's content as visual material?

Language and text almost always begin as content for me - they have a semantic weight, cultural and



Yinxue Zou | 坏设计俱乐部

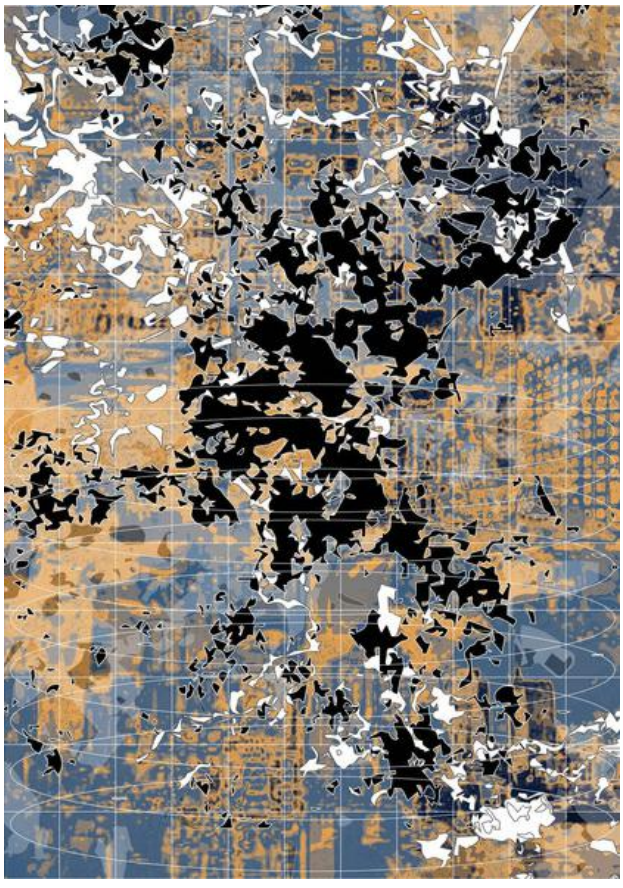
autobiographical resonance, and intentional narrativity. In the natural ebb and flow between Chinese and English, my own movement through different contexts also finds an echo. But once language becomes part of a composition, I rarely let it remain a semantic signifier. I often push it into a liminal space between readability and abstraction: spacing is expanded or contracted, syntactical structures are fractured or truncated, layers are misaligned, sentences are duplicated, interrupted, partially erased, or superimposed. In this process of estrangement, language is gradually pushed from the side of meaning to that of visual matter. The way it lands on a page, its shape, density, rhythm, directional flow, becomes more significant than its literal content. The decision of where to push it depends on two questions: if a given sentence or word needs to be clearly legible for the work's core meaning, and if the presence of language—as residue, noise, or structural trace—is more important than meaning itself. Content and form are not competing imperatives; they're different folds in the same system.

In several works, there's a sense of the emotional landscapes you're creating - fluid, dreamy, even glitchy. When you're in this intuitive process, how do internal states find their way into decisions about color, texture, and motion?

I rarely start with a specific theme or concept; more often a long-term emotional condition approaches a limit and intuitively becomes something else, something visual: color, texture, motion. When I'm in anxious or unstable phases, my default positions are high contrast, cooler temperatures, sharper edges, and more fractured structures; noise, glitches, misalignments build the way my thought processes do at those times. In calmer or more reflective moments, everything naturally flattens into slower gradients, diffused forms, desaturated grays and blues that are almost atmospheric. Color becomes a register of intensity; saturation and value are less aesthetic decisions than emotional intensities. Texture serves as a way of indexing time, a record of friction, attrition, sedimentation. Motion—actual or implied, suggested by directionality or through repetition and rhythm—becomes psychological pacing. In general, I like to hold a piece in a state that's not so much resolved as tenuously suspended. This is partly because I tend to work quickly and iterate a lot, but also because this threshold condition is the closest to the way I experience the internal world. It is dynamic and uneven and continually reassembled.

Your series have both analog qualities (grain, scratch, noise) and digital interventions. How do you balance the tactile and the technological in your practice?

Balance is not really the right word for me; it is more a

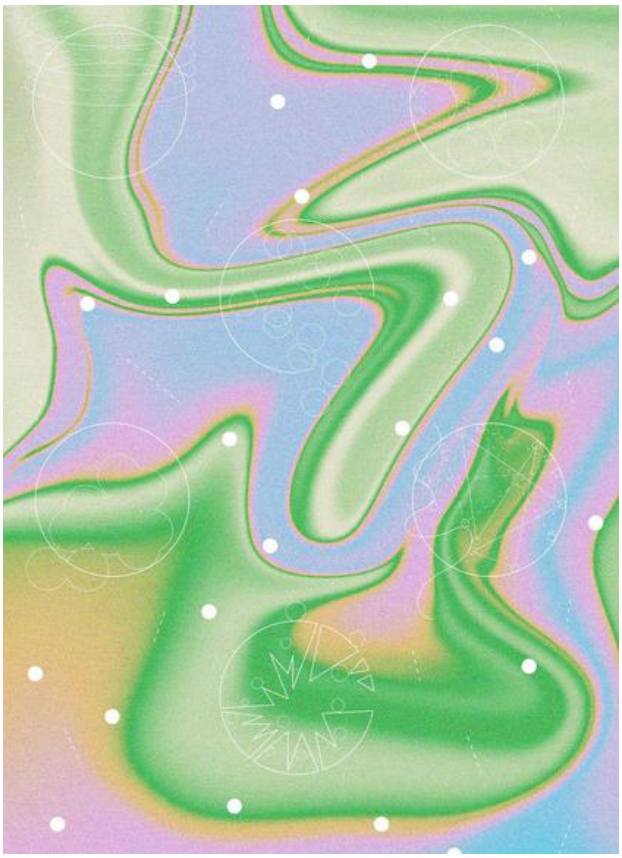


Yinxue Zou | Order And Chaos

circulation. The analog components reintroduce tactility and temporality to the work (grain, scratches, paper fiber, printing imperfections): material that slows down the image, that accumulates material memory. The digital operations (pixelation, algorithmic disturbance, compositing errors, compression artifacts) push that materiality toward abstraction, reorganization, or reassignment. In general, I acquire tactile source material (through scanning, photography, or hand-made components), deconstruct the fragments and then compose and layer them digitally, and I try to leave in the "failures" of digital intervention (random noise, misalignments, unstable color bands): these become the logic of the image. What results is not a point of equilibrium but of productive tension: both touchable and unstable, resting and volatile.

As a teaching artist, how does your work with young people influence your creative process? Do the workshops generate new ideas or ways of thinking for you?

It reactivates my intuition. In the classroom and during workshops, I see students who use images, text, or materials in a direct way that's often unconventional or completely outside normative design logics. Their willingness to break stylistic consistency, their interest in "wrong tools" or accidental process, their comfort with error, all challenge me to remember that making is a form of thinking, not a tidy sequence of operations



Yinxue Zou | Zou Dream

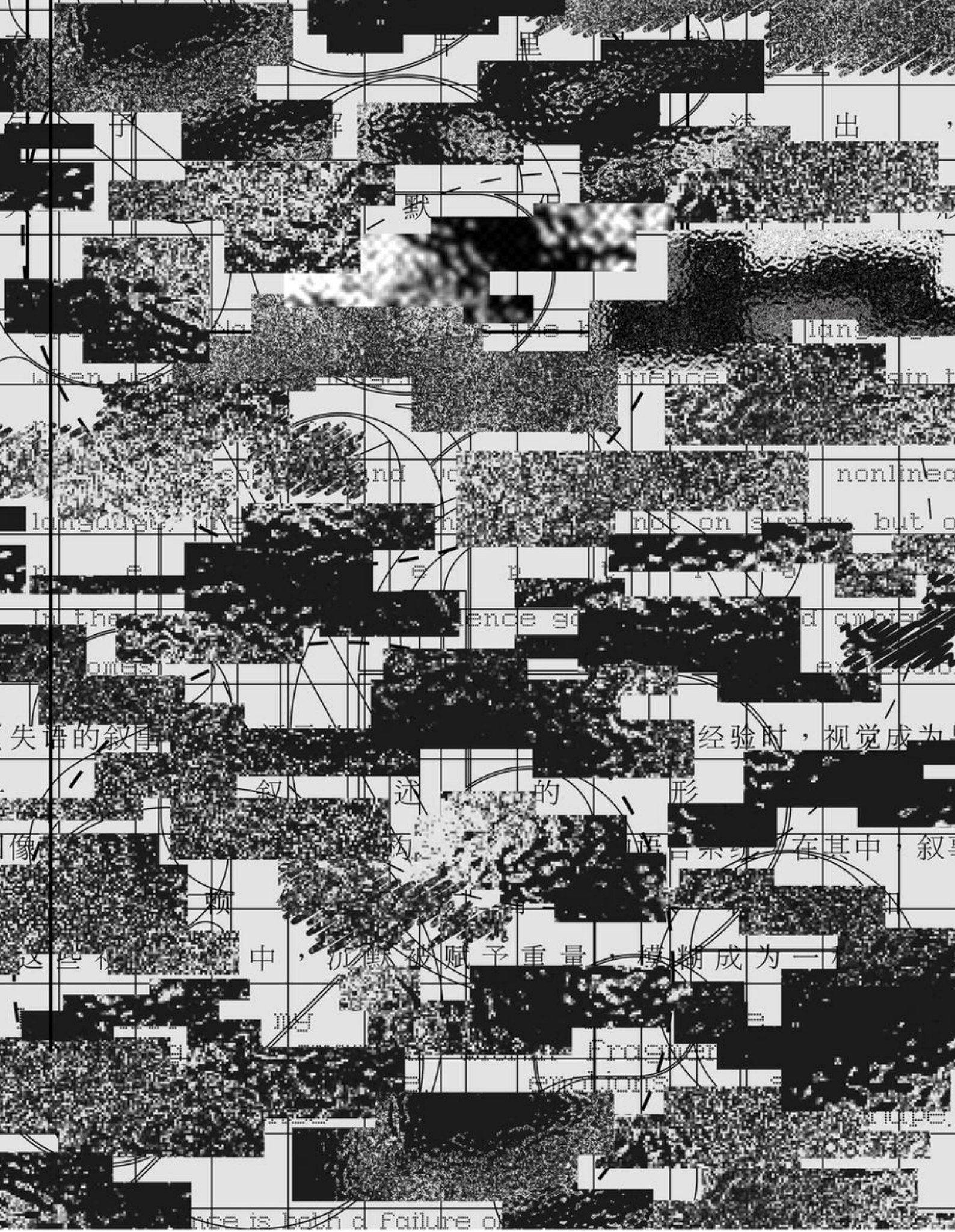
but an open process. For me, many of the later visual systems (shape variations built from simple grids, layered textures that come out of iterative error, modular language systems) first originated from exercises I developed for students or from the ways students would deviate from those exercises. Teaching and making form a feedback loop: what I design for students becomes part of my own process, and their divergences from my systems often open up other possibilities for me. I learn from their approach to failure.

Your visual systems often feel like they are collapsing or reorganizing themselves. Is this instability intentional, and what does it symbolize for you?

Yes, it is intentional. It's about my experience of moving across multiple geographies, languages, and professional identities. In practice, many systems—architectural, linguistic, cultural—feel like they are in a state of collapse or reorganization, rather than functioning seamlessly and in unity. For this reason, I tend to let grids fracture, let alignments go out of register, and just let visual logic fall apart right at the last possible moment. The state of "almost falling apart but not quite" is both a descriptive choice and a resistant one: it resists a single fully stabilized identity or narrative and instead suggests an ongoing process of adjustment, re-learning, and renegotiation. Symbolically, it speaks to histories of displacement and linguistic multiplicity, but also to the cultural state of the moment, in which the systems we live in always already have cracks in them. Making visible those cracks is one way of refusing to smooth everything over.

What do you hope viewers experience emotionally when they encounter your work—especially the more abstract or deconstructed pieces?

I don't expect viewers to arrive at a single "right" interpretation, but I do hope they can enter a space where language and systems of conceptual framing start to loosen. For me, abstraction and deconstruction are interesting for that very reason: they shift the focus from interpretation to sensation. If a viewer encounters a field of blue, a broken grid, or a spike of unstable text and experiences something—an alien memory, a vague tension, a quiet recognition—then I am content. The work should function as a minor reflective surface, one that does not produce an answer but instead generates internal resonance. For me, for the abstract work in particular, that is enough: not comprehension but attunement, a moment of being made aware that something has touched you even if it is not available to easy language.



Speechless Narrative

失　語　的　叙　事

Ivanna Swan

I am a musician who never quite became one; I play a little on different instruments, enough to feel their breath. Music fills my home for two-thirds of every day. And when it is not coming from the speakers, it sounds within me — constant, insistent, alive. This inner sound is what I carry onto the canvas. I paint while listening to music; what I hear is exactly what appears on the surface. This is not a metaphor — this is my process.

I listen to a great deal of classical music and instrumental jazz. The works from my "Musical Mosaic" series were created under Piazzolla — his sharp, contrasting harmonies, his polyrhythms, the sudden bursts of expressive intensity. Yet behind it all stands a human being, a composer — there is always a "conduit" who leads us into the intricate world of music. My graphic pieces were shaped by Paganini's "Caprice No. 24 in A minor, Op. 1," with its dramatic flare, its urgency, its vivid emotional charge.

Lately I find myself immersed in melodic instrumental jazz — Tord Gustavsen Trio from Norway, the Swedish Bobo Stenson Trio, Aldo Romano, Lars Danielsson, Etta James. Thoughtful, beautifully crafted jazz. They are masters of contemporary European sound, with a profound sensitivity to atmosphere, weaving melancholy with hope, reflection with warmth. Within their music live both emotional intensity and a contemplative, human tenderness.

When did you first realize that music and visual art merge into a single language for you?

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawing music — even as a child, my hand instinctively reached for lines and contours. Music has always lived within me, and giving it shape on paper felt less like a choice and more like a necessity.

Your works portray not musicians themselves, but their "breath" and inner resonance. How do you translate a sound or feeling into a visual form?

Ivanna Swan | Girl With Guitar | 2025

Ivanna Swan | Girl With Electric Guitar | 2025

Your compositions combine geometry, abstraction, and figurative elements. How do you build the structure of a painting before you begin?

I never consciously plan the structure. The image of a painting appears in my mind first, fully formed. I work quickly; each piece is created in a brief, concentrated burst. I simply transfer the sketch from my inner vision onto the surface of the canvas. Along the way, certain details may shift or evolve, but these changes are minor — the essence of the work is already there from the very beginning.

Many of your artworks show only fragments of the human face. Why do you choose to portray the musician through essence rather than a full figure?

Yes, in all the works from my musical series there is always a stylized face or an eye — a subtle guide into the musical realm. An instrument, by itself, is silent; without a human being it remains lifeless. In each painting, the instrument is rendered in strict, almost architectural geometry and occupies one half of the composition. The other half belongs to a stylized human presence — a face, an eye, a fragment of a profile. On this "human side" we see the full turbulence of musical imagination: emotion, intensity, even rebellion against conventional harmony. These two stylized entities — the instrument and the performer or composer — together make the painting begin to sound.
A guide into the world of music is essential, especially when the music is complex or demanding. Once I gave a lecture on classical music to a group of young people who had little connection to it. It was an introductory journey through the history of music, filled with examples and accompanied by my paintings. Six months later they wrote to tell me that their interest in classical music had grown markedly; they were listening more, understanding more. There is always someone who must lead us into the world of challenging music. That is why, in my paintings, there is always a reference to a human presence — a "conduit," a bridge.
And there is something more. Many musicians I have known throughout my life are deeply solitary; people often say of them: "He lives in his own world, not quite of this one." I see their vulnerability before the storms of fate, and how only the instrument becomes their shield, while the world of music becomes their refuge. Music offers a shelter — fragile and steadfast at once. I feel this within myself as well. This is what I express in my series "Musician and Loneliness."

How does being a musician yourself influence the rhythm, harmony, and movement within your paintings?

I sense the rhythm and harmony of a painting long before I ever pick up a brush. Because I play different instruments myself, I understand how sound is born — from touch, from breath, from intention. This physical, embodied knowledge of music gives my lines their phrasing and my colors their inner dynamics. The rhythm of the strokes, the harmony of the color fields, and the movement within the composition are not invented on the canvas — they are translated. Painting, for me, is simply another language through which I let the music speak.

Instruments in your art feel alive — as if they "speak." Do you imagine a specific sound or melody while creating each piece?

Yes. For each painting I create, I hear and remember a specific melody by a particular composer or performer. The instruments in my works feel alive because there is always a human presence beside them — with their emotion, their uniqueness, their inner state, whether it is trembling, solitude, or quiet sadness. This tension passes first into the wooden body of the instrument, then onto the canvas, and from there it reaches the viewer.

How has living and working in Antalya influenced your artistic process and themes?

Living in Antalya has allowed me to paint often and freely. The climate is gentle, the nature here is beautiful and calming. I walk the Lycian Way frequently, listening to music through my headphones — and those walks inspire me deeply.

Ivanna Swan | Man With A French Horn | 2025

Svetlana Kliukina

Her favorite subject in painting is the sea and everything related to the water element. Svetlana is interested in conveying different moods of the sea, feeling the movement of the waves and the character of each artwork. Each of her works is emotionally charged and dynamic. Svetlana has studied with well-known Russian artists and refined her skills through advanced master classes. She continues to develop her practice across various genres, including seascapes, animal art, portraiture, landscape, and Impressionism. She creates original works for personal expression as well as commissioned pieces, always putting her soul and emotions into every artwork.

Svetlana Kliukina | Eternity | 2025

Svetlana Kliukina | There Was a Thunderstorm | 2025

Jooyeon Lee

Your works often invite viewers to experience instability physically or emotionally. What draws you to creating situations where the audience must confront hesitation or uncertainty?

I am interested in the quiet moment before action—the pause when the body doesn't yet know whether to approach, touch, or retreat. Instability is not something I ask viewers to solve; it is a condition we all inhabit. By staging environments that tremble, resist, or fail to behave as expected, I make visible how people negotiate doubt. The work becomes a site where risk, care, and misalignment coexist, and the viewer's body becomes the thinking instrument. Uncertainty is not something I offer resolution for; it is the terrain where meaning emerges.

Many of your pieces involve bodily interaction—touch, balance, or shared tension. How do you think the body functions as a tool for understanding emotional or relational vulnerability?

The body is often more honest than language. A flinch, a hesitation, or a leaning-in reveals more than a verbal statement. When viewers engage with a precarious surface, a trembling object, or a cold ceramic form, the body registers uncertainty before the mind rationalizes it. That sensory encounter mirrors interpersonal dynamics—how we approach someone we love, how we defend ourselves, how we are held or disappointed. The body becomes the first site of emotional truth.

In your statement, you speak about the "collapse of expectation." Can you recall a personal experience that first made you aware of the creative potential in disruption or dysfunction?

I learned early on that things rarely turn out as promised. A roller-coaster incident where someone's phone struck me in the face taught me that control is often an illusion—yet what mattered most was how I chose to inhabit that instability. Instead of reacting with anger, I observed. That moment crystallized something that continues in my work: breakdown exposes structure. When something doesn't function, we suddenly see what we take for granted—care, responsibility, friction, and repair.

Your materials range from ceramic and metal to silicone and digital interfaces. How do you decide which material carries the emotional or conceptual weight of a particular piece?

Material is never neutral. Ceramic holds memory and touch but remains cold when embraced. Metal carries

gravity, authority, and risk. Coding introduces systems of instruction, failure, and algorithmic tension. I choose materials by sensing what contradiction the work needs—softness that resists, weight that wobbles, or technology that doesn't fully obey. The emotional charge lives in friction between expectation and encounter.

Migration and shifting cultural contexts are part of your personal story. In what ways do these experiences shape your exploration of instability, care, or dependency?

Migration taught me that infrastructure—emotional, cultural, or systemic—breaks quietly and often. You learn to adapt, to depend on structures that don't fully hold you, and to build alternative forms of support. This sense of precarity informs my practice: build installations where support fails, tension shows itself, or contact is both desired and resisted. It also sharpened my sensitivity to care—who receives it, who performs it, and how often it is unnoticed. My work is an expanded reflection on displacement—the instability we carry and the negotiations that form belonging.

Your practice touches on relationships—motherhood, intimacy, trust, and separation. What are you currently most interested in exploring within these interpersonal themes?

I am currently most interested in the moment before closeness—where desire, fear, and hesitation coexist. Rather than depicting resolution or intimacy achieved, my work lingers in the threshold where connection is possible but not guaranteed. Intimacy, trust, and separation all contain this suspended state: the longing to be held, the instinct to protect oneself, and the risk of collapse inherent in leaning on another. My recent works—interactive ceramic pieces, fragile surfaces, unstable supports—materialize this pre-relational space, where bodies or forces might meet but must negotiate uncertainty first. What draws me now is how people approach vulnerability: how trust is tested through hesitation, how intimacy forms not through safety but through risked proximity, and how relationships persist even when resolution never arrives. I am interested in the psychological and bodily negotiations involved in deciding whether to step closer, to rely, or to remain suspended.
In this sense, my work asks:
What does it take to stay near another when stability is not promised?
The unresolved, affective terrain of that question is the most fertile ground for my practice at present.

As someone working between sculpture and interactive installation, how do you see your practice evolving with new technologies such as creative coding or digital interfaces?

I see technology not as enhancement but as another material that can fail, misread, or resist. In my work, digital systems act like infrastructures—they sense, respond, misfire, or break. Creative coding allows me to externalize hesitation into logic, delay, or glitch. I'm interested in interfaces that reveal rather than hide vulnerability: systems where the viewer's action triggers something incomplete or disproportionate. That tension aligns with my sculptural language.

Julia Sorokina

Julia Sorokina | Vivia La Vivienne | 2025

You describe working digitally as "conducting an orchestra in a digital kitchen." Can you explain this metaphor and how it reflects your creative process?

Well, I have to explain why exactly I chose digital art. The materials artists use to create the artworks - watercolor, oil, acrylic, gouache paints, markers, pencils, clay - all of them have a very strong influence on the art and personality.
It's like talking to someone about something personal. Being in dialogue with someone is being under the influence of that person. Dress colors, voice timbre, linguistic features, smell... Someone becomes your environment when you are in dialogue. And if you are actually in this dialogue, you don't think, 'Oh, should I talk to someone else right now?' So also the material that an artist uses.
I used to create artworks with alcohol markers, so I went through a lot of them to find mine. And then I began my paper journey—to find that very paper. And in the process of creating, I've never thought, 'What if I add some charcoal?' Because I was in the dialogue with markers. It was a very strong impact on my art life. I was in there surrounded by all of these markers with my hands and face stained with markers. It was incredible. And I always started from question 'What more can I do by with this instrument?'
One day I decided I needed more brightness, and added pencils (I almost ransacked all shops in town to find that ones), and then I thought about watercolors... And my apartment started to look like an art studio with my husband trying to survive in there. Then I began to understand that I don't have space for myself. Different kinds of stuff were everywhere... I said, 'It's samsara; it's absorbing me. It's not my way.' I don't like attachment to physical objects.
And now I open my Mac and I have everything at once. And here I start only from my creative thoughts - how exactly do I see my idea? As if I had subjugated the instruments. I can't touch them, or smell them, but I can see them and use them and include them into my visualized musical composition. It's my freedom.

Julia Sorokina | To Play With | 2025

Julia Sorokina | Nina | 2025

Also, I'm not tied to a place (just to an outlet), and that has hippie vibes and a bit more of a sense of freedom. I'm obsessed with the idea of freedom. It's one of the really precious and priceless feelings.

Your works often combine strong graphic elements with narrative tension. Where do your stories usually begin — with an image, a concept, or a person?

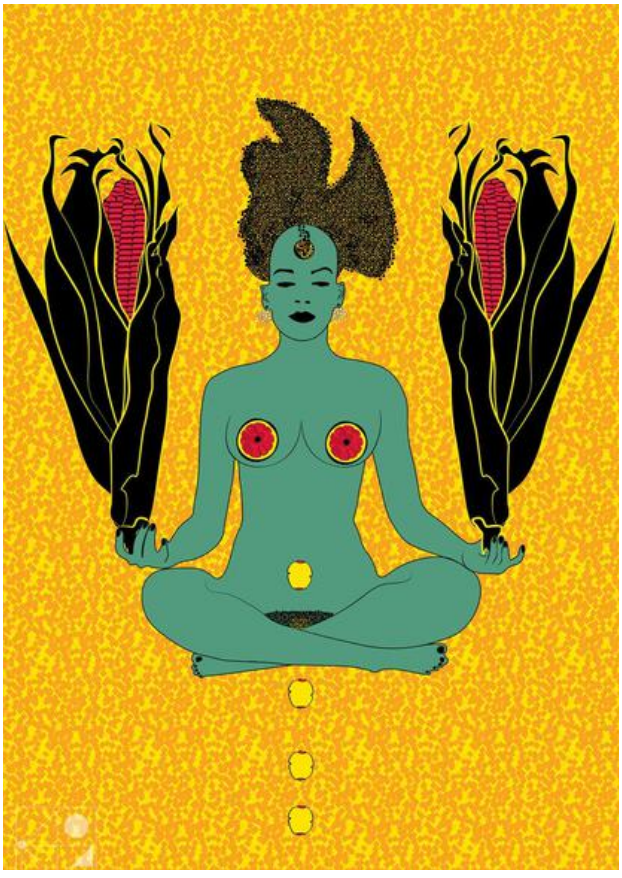
Usually, I begin with a person. It can be an existing person (like in 'My Women' portrait collection) who inspires me, or an imaginary character who sometimes has his own history or whom I endow with some qualities.
For example, in my 'Pepper & Salt' collection, there is a guy in a big champagne coupe glass coated with black caviar. I started with a guy who definitely wears a suit, goes to the office, knows everything about a wide smile to the right people, knows the right doors, and knows where he sees himself in at least 80 years. He has a pretty secretary and maybe a beautiful girl whom he does not take seriously. I can even say I feel a little disgust toward him. And he feels that he owns this world; he is a winner. And... How could I describe this feeling? This kind of guy on top of the world?
So we see him in his hot bath. I believe he is high. Anyway, he feels good. He comes from another crazy party. Imagine: you sink into a hot bath, your butt touches the bottom of it, and you exhale. And it's so good. And everything else does not exist. But this 'everything else' is also good by the way! And it happens! I look at him and think - why does it always happen in somebody's life?

This guy obviously does things for which he should be hated or even burned in hell. But think about this feeling that I've described. How can I hate him in this moment? I sincerely wish to be at his place at this moment! And tension appears! I hate him - I love him, It's disgust - It's awesome!

In the "Pepper And Salt" collection, these everyday elements become almost symbolic forces. What do pepper and salt represent to you beyond their culinary meaning?

I depict salt and pepper as crystals, almost with an alchemical meaning. They are elements that are always on the table; they are attributes of our everyday life; they come into our organism with food and become a part of us. They are elements of our life. I see something magical in them.
Black and white crystals represent Yin and Yang, the Beginning and the End, Life and Death, Good and Bad. I always saw magic in pepper and salt shakers. It has different forms, and I imagine them like Buddhist figurines with magical content.
That's why in 'Pepper' artwork I represent the girl who reached nirvana like a pepper shaker. When you are full of pepper or salt, something beyond the ordinary should happen.

You suggest pepper and salt as the 6th and 7th elements after the classical four and pop-culture mythology. Why was it important for you to elevate them to this status?

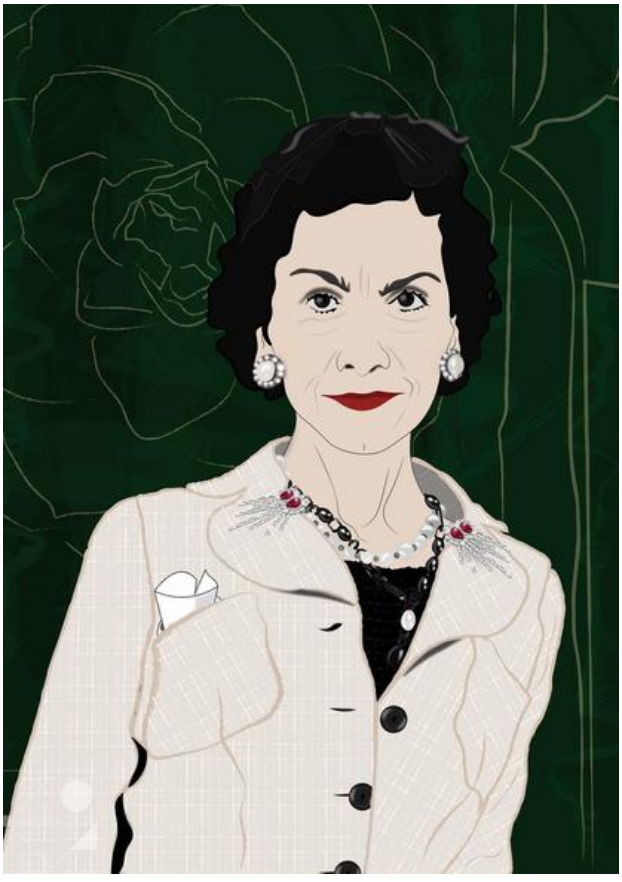


Julia Sorokina | Pepper | 2025

Well, salt and pepper occupy a very important place in human history.
In many traditions, black pepper symbolized protection, wealth and power. It's part of rituals to ward off evil spirits. In different stories, it played a role in blessings or sacred ceremonies. In Europe, it was once considered a gift fit for royalty and sealed alliances between nobles.
Salt is used to ward off evil and purify spaces. It's considered a bridge between the world of the living and that of the ancestors.
Salt takes place in religious teachings. In Judaism, it symbolizes permanence and covenant; in Christianity, it signifies wisdom and soul preservation.
We can find pepper and salt in many superstitions, idioms and proverbs, and they can also tell us about the place of those elements in our culture.
We carry pepper and salt through centuries by our minds, by our bodies.
It's everywhere! And I decided to emphasize it.

The female figures in "My Women" feel both iconic and personal. How do you balance homage, portrait, and interpretation when depicting women who inspire you?

I always try to be delicate because too personal means not enough iconic; too much iconic means insentient. And I think admiration and respect always come to the rescue. Admiration helps you to avoid familiarity; respect – something that comes when you start to compare somebody with you, and so it becomes human to you, not just a symbol.



Julia Sorokina | Coco | 2025

Anyway, it's so interesting how much we can feel close to people who do not know us.
On the one hand, these women are only my idea; they highlight strokes in biography novel about me. On the other hand, they are not merely my imagination; they are humans, somebody's mothers, children, lovers, friends… The world doesn't stop amazing me.

Fashion, texture, and surface play a strong role in your illustrations. What attracts you to clothing and ornament as narrative tools?

In every portrait, I always try to tell a visual story. Every detail makes sense. I want to study every portrait with interest during the creative process and afterward. I can then show my work to somebody and suddenly exclaim, 'Look how her jewelry glitters!' as if I hadn't spent five hours creating it just moments before. When I want to touch my Mac's monitor, I feel that I'm on the right track.
All of these women are famous people; somebody else is more likely to know much more about them than I do. And if I were to create them as is, it would be their story, or a photographer's story. But I want my story, how I see them. Through the details that I have found. I am a person of those little nothings. This is my material.
In 'Coco,' I created her jacket, inspired by Chanel's famously woven-fabric jacket. But I created it in beige colors because, as I know, she gave preference to natural colors. In 'Viva la Vivienne,' there are many sequins; they are shiny and mischievous like Vivienne in my mind. In 'Nina,' there was something wonderful in the color of her skin and how her headscarf complemented it. I tried to choose the right shade of color, but it's so varied and complicated that I decided to take a base tone, create a special pattern, and put this pattern layer by layer until I felt satisfied, until I heard her skin begin to sing. Her face is very textured and plays with forms. To complement this beauty, I add pearl earrings. And now when I look at my Nina, I always feel admiration for her strong spirit and beauty. It's become visual for me.

Your color palettes are bold and sometimes deliberately unnatural. How do you choose color, and what role does it play emotionally in your work?

Color is something that I feel. My visual stories always begin with color. I usually know what the main color will be, but sometimes I just wander through the palette looking for it. Something should catch my eye. One color. It will unfold my color narrative.
I always knew that 'Coco' would be emerald green and beige; I love this color so much. It's very deep and noble. When I created Vivienne, I knew it would be something rich and warm to complement her hair. In the 'Pepper and Salt' series, I just knew that those stories must be on the verge of madness cause it's about magic, something psychedelic.
There is too much gray color in my real world, and I mostly create bright and sunny pictures unless narrative dictates otherwise.

Alexandru Crișan (b. Bucharest, Romania 1978) is a visual artist interested in the existential complementarity of objective and nonobjective forms of expression. As far as the latter is to be unpacked, his "counter-professional" career in photography began in 2008; his paintings stand, for almost three decades, as the most intimate, borderline atavistic, acts of divulgence. Assuming that taxonomy is of any consequence, he is partial to fine-art photography and Abstract Expressionism. The eclectic nature of his projects is, therefore, a given. When it comes to the acrylic heart-chambers of his work, there is an uncanny sentiment of intimacy that gradually found its safe house within the lyrical abstractions spectrum. In the aftermath of incipient spiritualist art etudes, transcending a surrealist period of emancipation from the confines of geometry, not to mention a stint in the magical realism of overpainted photographic negatives, an obsessive chase for the "taming of the light within the organic pool of colors" ensued. While this pursuit found its default creative outlet within architecture, it also pushed him towards the logic of abstract expressionism. A decade after he found his eclectic (often nonrepresentational) niche, the most spectacular results were the series "The Human Comedy" (acrylic Balzacian musings on intersectional dead ends), "Discorsi" (color-coded existentialist Q&As), and "Q" (a chromatic synthesis triggered by anxieties and saudade). His works evolved into a symbiosis which he calls "Brutalisme lyrique". He describes this artistic approach as "a filiation in which the Abstraction Lyrique is a phenomenological motherly figure, while the nybrutalism may claim ontological paternal custody, yet the – ultimately needed – IVF-like metabolic praxeology is delivering the visceral coherence. To put it differently, I now act as a painter (abstract, perhaps) and I final-cut as an architect (deconstructivist, probably)." The "Entropy" series is the pinnacle of this process. Crișan's works have been presented in over a dozen international exhibitions, have been published in several peer-reviewed magazines, have received several international awards and nominations, and are part of several privately owned collections and art galleries.

About artwork:
This work is part of a series that mixes ideological narratives with Expressionist contours. When I say ideology, I refer exclusively to its original meaning, as Antoine Destutt de Tracy defined it, in 1796, as a "science of ideas". When I say Expressionist, I underscore emotional overreactions, I underline a nurturing Modernist sentiment of angst, and I chip away at the reactionary panache of any Realist praxeology. Finally, I nuance these contours with a convoluted impulse to hyper-inflate Abstraction, with acrylic spices such as an Outrenoir (apud Pierre Soulages) inquiry, some palette-knife(d) cacophonies (à la Jean-Paul Riopelle), or a handful of non-cognitive kinetic alliterations (via Georges Mathieu).
Being an artist, I twist reality to make a point. So, sometimes, I feel like a poet – which is a pedantic way of admitting that you should not necessarily trust me, as several long lines of canonical wisdom, from Plato ("The Republic", Books II, III and X) to the Quran (Surah 26 Ash-Shu'ara, Ayat 221-227), have emphasized with gusto. But being an artist means that I am, sometimes, in the mood to become a trigger. This particular work is about the Berliner Mauer. It's about Brexit. It's an open invitation for the viewers to trespass their borders (or "backstops") of choice, to bisect their own biases, and to bookmark Balzac in their browsers.

Nastasya Kudryashova

Nastasya Kudryashova | Yala | 2024

Your project "CÂMAX: Whiter Than White" immerses the viewer in a symbolic, mythopoetic space of Chuvash culture. What was the initial impulse that led you to create this work?

Nastasya Kudryashova | CâMax Whiter Than White

First of all, this is a photo project on behalf of my short artistic meter about Chuvash mythology through the prism of modernity, so the basic principle was laid down with the existence of the film – through a woman's hand, through a woman's face and a story to clothe mythology in a visual. Chuvashia is embroidered with a female costume line, skirting the depth of thousands of generations through centuries of history, eyes and whispers. And on the banks of the Volga River, tukhya granite (a national head ornament) lies like scales, illuminated by the sun. The Chuvash woman, like her wealth and a fairy tale, put on something that could become an extension of a person, a thing that preserves and transmits information about the personal qualities and properties of her kind. The most ancient beliefs in folk beliefs dictate that the undershirt was perceived as a "second skin", and the pure ringing of jewelry cleansed, protected and protected. The silver on her chest and head, as well as the white color, was guarded by a symbol of purity. In the lines of her palm is the Volga, in the steps tapping on the ground with the heel of a boot is the rhythm of alternating cold, in the beating of her heart is the echo of the steppes. "The mother is sacred, you can not quarrel with her," says the Chuvash proverb. In this world, the feminine maternal essence is sacred and inviolable.

Nastasya Kudryashova | CâMax Whiter Than White

How do the landscapes of the Chuvash village - its fields, skies, and architecture - influence your visual language and directorial decisions?

Influence is rather the wrong word to describe it, because Chuvashia is a part of my being, in my bones and in my blood, I feel tribute and honor from her for the right that I can represent her on different levels and in different forms. My entire visual language has been absorbed into me since my mother's milk, where fields, sky, wild wind, sweeping hills are not just a participant in the life process; it is the whole core, a symbol of unity, wealth and traditions. Our veins are her embroidery, our bones are the gold of her trees, our voice is the ringing of her meadows. And so, the edge of the plot looks out from the picture, where a statuesque figure, hunched over under the shadow of doubt, fear and power, gives the spirit and the sacred tree, trembling, his armful of faded jewelry to sacrifice, awarding the costume the title of Martyr, from where the story paved its way directly to the Patron Mother, granite opening her arms to the clouds and caressing her through the Chuvash side of the Volga River. I guess I was just lucky that from an early age I didn't have to look for meaning and language, because it existed in me right away.

The imagery in your series seems deeply connected to ritual, sacrifice, and transformation. What role do ancestral traditions and folklore play in shaping your narrative concepts?

All I'm doing is looking for a solution to preserve the legacy that is fading into oblivion, so the role of ancestral traditions and folklore is not just the main role, but is the beginning, middle and end.
I have a law degree behind me, not art at all. I don't have any artistic or directing education at all, so the process of work and creation – from conceptual to technical – always comes from my feelings and feelings of loyalty to one path or another. It's like the etymology of village life: A village is not just a geographical concept, it is an entire ecosystem that has shaped cultural, social and economic aspects of life over the centuries, from which one of the main epics of all disputes about art, about the “traditional” form of creativity, that is, academic, has forever emerged. Behind all the arguments about the correctness of modern art, there is always an example of traditional knowledge of culture, which came straight from the villages, from folk art, when the traditional form of culture is based on a personal feeling - without school, rules and formulas, only an inner feeling: this is how what we rely on to this day was created. And so I create, starting from the history of my family. The history of my family began long before them, but they have become its center, and the only thing left for me is to keep and be. And maybe I'm still very happy that the Chuvash language in Cannes was heard from the lips of my grandmother in my short meter through her female history.

You work across multiple disciplines: filmmaking, creative direction, performance, visual art. How do these practices inform each other in a single project?

When I see the finished picture in front of my eyes, when the process hasn’t even begun, I already understand in what context, with what hands, with what intensity or subtlety, and where I can take the stage of work under my wing so that the final result is exactly what is called a competent presentation of cultural value. I work within the artistic reflection of the historical process and national traumas, so there is one oversight, one overlooked or overlooked detail, and the whole line breaks down to the ground. History does not tolerate mistakes. I have always adhered to the principle of "history is culture", "politics is art". One stands guard over the other, as a gateway to a reasonable society and the state of people during the change of centuries, catastrophes, climate and changes. Even while studying law, the main priority for me has always been "Art is not the result of politics, but art is a mirror as a history is a meaningful state of culture," so now, adhering to this formula, I try to keep

my finger on the pulse within several disciplines that touch in one project.
Maneuvering between administrative and artistic project management at the same time, I found a balance, and more than that, I found my own work formula: self–control + discipline + passion. Remove one coefficient and everything immediately collapses. For example, the work on my first play began not with technical processes, but with searches: In early summer, when we were discussing upcoming collaborations, my friend stopped me at my wedding performance idea with the words: "Save it, let's hit it as a full-fledged play after the festival." And it's not that I don't need to be told twice, give me the opportunity to fulfill a dream that I dreamed of, but which I didn't approach, because the theater play.. What is a theater? I took only small steps towards theatrical art, starting with performances during concerts or with performative screenings, making mistakes, naturally doing what was in my power, but not doing what was ideal in my dreams. One of my favorite theatrical performances from my experience in the creative industry is the accompaniment of the old ensemble of the x Fashion x Music club at the concert “Winter Dream” in December. And then the opportunity to put on a full-fledged hour-long performance in my favorite walls with the unification of gastronomy, which has never been created in the Republic, looks cautiously into my eyes. Being a discoverer is, as usual, a favorite thing. And so many discussions, thoughts, conversations and sleepless nights have passed in understanding the idea. Throughout August, I rewound to reread almost every play and essay on the mythology of the Chuvash wedding of distant village times, after which I switched to Tatar, Bashkir, and Yakut mythology, and the roots of inspiration, surprisingly, took me by the hand in the Georgian play "Khanuma" by Avksenty Tsagareli in 1882. And after the rehearsal, the selection and sketches of costumes, budgeting, lighting, and more.

The characters in the photographs carry strong symbolic weight - particularly the figure offering jewelry to the sacred Keremeti tree. How do you approach building characters through costume, gesture, and myth?

Nastasya Kudryashova | Tianutsyastadakvodopoiu | 2024

Rather, it's not me who creates the characters, but rather the mythology of the people itself that gives me the right to use its soil for my own vision. To a greater extent, I was raised by my grandmother in my early childhood among the rural steppes and thick wind, and since then her voice and attitude to the world around me have been fixed through me in a context where you are just an observer behind the scenes, anxiously guarding the main stage. And on the main stage – the nation, the characters of mythology and the original culture, taken straight from history. Therefore, here the costume, gesture and myth are independent characters that have already been created and correlate with each other with one main problem – disappearance, and somehow I had to find out and show it.

Your artworks are held in private collections of well-known actors. How do you feel about your art living in personal spaces rather than exclusively in institutional contexts?

It seems to me that this has the same respectful meaning as the storage of works in institutions. Museum curators often happen to be more enlightened in the idea of preaching the faithful preservation of works than in personal spaces. The main thing is for art to live, and it doesn't matter where.

As a researcher and cultural producer, how do you balance the desire to preserve tradition with the need to reinterpret and innovate?

I don't find the balance. It's a thin line between two eras, where every time you fall over one edge or another, crossing your own boundaries. But history doesn’t stand as a vertical straight line without ravines and high hills, imitating nature, then dying, then being reborn. Also here. The balance is understood and finds itself by itself after the result and the final picture of the whole process. The preservation of traditions and their transmission into the future through the present is not at all the preservation of any old rules in the oblivion of an untouched formula, it is a sensitive offering of oneself to the hem of folk art of the old school of art, where the concept of “old school of art” didn’t exist at all. And after that, there is a rethink. It is very easy to take traditional art, thoughtlessly put it through the prism of modern fashion and pass it off as a reinterpretation, when in truth it is an all–encompassing process of a large number of steps, where the most important thing is to listen to the origins and allow yourself to hear the truth, and not what you yourself want to hear.

Interview

Vanessa V. Garcia

You often mention that your art is a way to create hope for those who feel unseen. When did you first realize that your work could have this emotional impact on others?

When I was young, I created art mostly in silence and imagination. For many years, from middle school through high school, I experienced bullying, and art was the only way I could express myself. It was my safe space, a way to tell stories and share emotions I couldn't say out loud. For a long time, no one really noticed my work. I was just a simple kid drawing alone.
It was only later, when I slowly started showing my art, that people began telling me my work felt emotional and inspiring. That's when I first realized it could reach others. I think it started the moment someone told me, "Your art made me feel something." I don't even remember exactly when that was, but I remember the feeling. In that moment, I understood that what I draw from my heart can speak to someone else's.
Since then, I keep creating not just for myself, but to remind others, especially those who feel small or unseen like I once did, that their dreams matter and they shouldn't give up. To show that even a dream that started quietly can travel far.

Vanessa V. Garcia | Only You | 2025

Your journey as an artist began at age seven. What early memories or influences shaped the way you create today?

I began creating art at the age of seven. Some of my earliest memories are of drawing in my own little world. Watching anime inspired me, making me imagine stories and characters. Growing up, I faced bullying and loneliness, and art became my companion, my way to express emotions I couldn't share with anyone else.
My influences were simple the world around me, my imagination, and the desire to turn my feelings into something beautiful. These early experiences taught me that art isn't just about technique ,it's about sharing your heart, telling stories, and connecting with others. That's why today, every piece I create carries emotion, hope, and a little piece of my journey. As talented artist I already know I wanted to be a artist in the beginning.

Many of your characters feel alive, expressive, and deeply emotional. How do you approach character design to achieve this sense of storytelling?

When I create characters, I always start with emotion and story. I imagine who they are, what they feel, and what moments they've lived, not just how they look. I give them gestures, expressions, and small details that reflect their personalities and struggles.
For me, character design isn't just about visuals. It's about bringing a soul to the page. I want people to feel a

Vanessa V. Garcia | Orange | 2025

connection, to see a part of themselves or someone they know in my work. Every line, color, and pose is meant to tell a story and evoke emotion.

Your portfolio spans both digital and traditional media. How do these two mediums complement each other in your practice?

I started my art journey with traditional media, and it's the foundation of how I understand form, color, and texture. I've been practicing traditional art for many years, and it continues to be a space where I explore ideas freely and deeply.
I learned digital art later for almost six years. And Having experience in traditional art for more longer years , I've still been learning as an artist. For me, nothing is impossible if you can draw in traditional media, you can also create digitally. With practice, you can work in both mediums. Digital art allows me to experiment faster, refine my work, and bring more versatility to my creations. Both mediums influence each other the discipline and depth of traditional art guide my digital work, and the flexibility of digital art inspires me to try new approaches in traditional pieces. Together, they expand the way I tell stories and express emotion in my art.

Several of your artworks depict strong, magical, or introspective women. What inspires the themes and personalities of the characters you portray?

The characters I create are inspired by myself, my emotions, experiences, and dreams. I portray women who are strong, magical, and mysterious because they reflect the resilience and depth I've discovered within myself.
Through these characters, I explore strength, wonder, and the unknown, inviting viewers to connect with the power and emotion in each piece. They are a reflection of my journey, my imagination, and my desire to show that even in vulnerability, there is magic and courage.

Your art includes elements of fantasy, romance, and realism. How do you balance these different artistic worlds in your creative process?

I blend fantasy, romance, and realism because each part lets me share a piece of my heart. Fantasy allows me to create worlds beyond what's real, where emotions can be bigger and more magical. Romance shows connection, warmth, and love, while realism keeps the artwork grounded so people can feel and relate to it.
When I create, I let the story guide me what the characters feel, what the scene needs, and how it will touch someone's heart. Balancing these worlds is about listening to the piece itself, making sure every element serves the emotion I want to share. Art...for me, is about giving hope through every layer of imagination and reality.

How has your Filipino identity and cultural background influenced your artistic voice and themes?

My Filipino identity and cultural background are at the heart of everything I create. Growing up in the Philippines, I was surrounded by stories, colors, and traditions that shaped the way I see the world. The warmth, resilience, and hope in our culture inspire the emotions I bring into my art.
I often include elements of Filipino whether subtly in colors, motifs, or the strength and spirit of my characters. My art is a way to share a piece of my culture with the world, showing that stories, dreams, and creativity are powerful.
As a Filipina artist , I draw strength from my faith and experiences, and I hope to inspire others to face any challenges with courage and determination. I believe in following heart dreams with faith and not letting anyone else dictate what you can achieve.
Your future is in your own hands, and through my work as an artist, I am proud to represent my creative and pursuing my lifelong passion.

Vanessa V. Garcia | Where Petals Meet Twilight | 2025

— *Interview*

Irina Need

Growing up inside a theater environment, how did the language of performance and backstage life shape your visual thinking as a photographer and artist?

From childhood I was surrounded by the theater images and sounds, it helped me to develop a strong visual awareness very early. My mother was a sound engineer, so music was always present in my life. In my opinion music can reflect emotional states, and this deeply influences my work, especially in video art. It helps me create images, moods, and emotional atmospheres rather than just visual forms.

You describe the body as a "living story." What draws you to the human form as a central subject in your surreal and abstract work?

It comes from my life experience. I believe that the body never lies. You can read a lot about a person through their body, even things they don't know themselves or don't want to talk about. The outer form always reflects the inner state.

Many of your works blur the boundary between presence and disappearance. What role does illusion play in expressing truth for you?

You don't always see the whole picture with your eyes, probably you feel it stronger. Feelings appear as illusions or abstract forms. Images are very important to me. The brain creates sensations and completes the image on its own, filling in what cannot be seen directly.

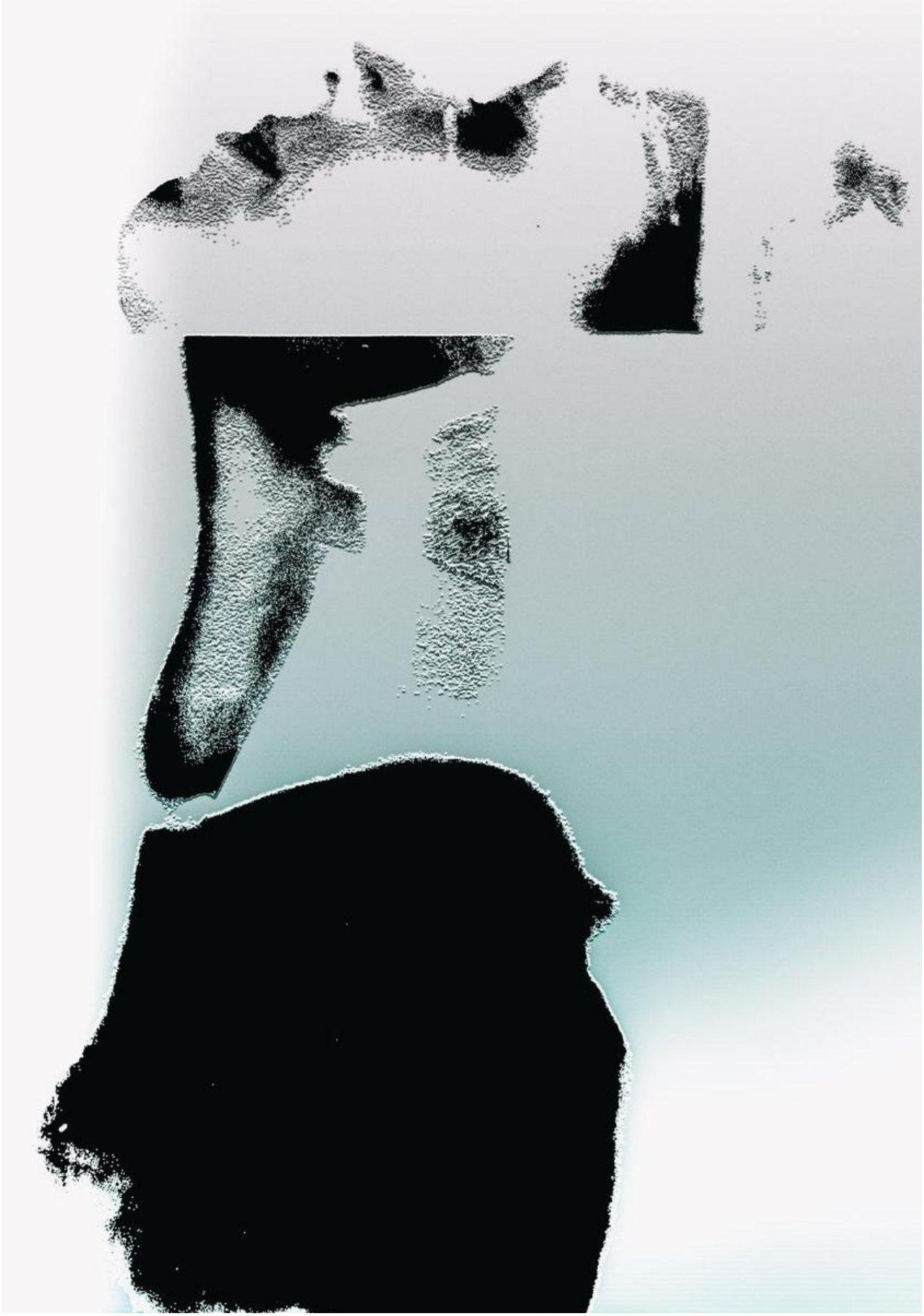
How did your years as a school photographer influence your later, more experimental artistic practice?

Working with children taught me a lot. It's very difficult to shot stage photographs with them, so I learned not to give instructions, but to wait, observe, and catch the moment when it naturally appears.

You often work with distortion and layered imagery. Is this process intuitive, or do you plan the transformation in advance?

Everything happens in flow. I never plan the result, and I never know in advance how the final image will look.

How do you decide when an image is "complete," especially when working with abstraction and evolving forms?



I stop when it feels enough, when the image starts speaking to me and has its own context, when it can live independently. If I still want to say something, I prefer to start a new work rather than keep adjusting the old one that was done and completed before.

What do you hope the viewer experiences emotionally or physically when engaging with your work?

I hope for positive emotions, a sense of support from my side. I want people to feel that what they experience (problems, illness, other bad things) can be shared with others. That they are not alone.

elisELIS (miss e.) prostoTak

I began my artistic visual practice through film photography in high school. then at university i went deeper into fine art photography and video performances. then in 2018 i discovered collage, then moved to performance-happenings, installations, poetry, digital art, experimental theatre, and i keep exploring, and trying new things. just like a feeling- no medium for me is final. it all happens intuitively and based on observations, sometimes logically, sometimes out of curiosity. Mediums are interconnected, one can inspire the other. In the past I wrote a poem that became an inspiration for the performance, or a collage can become an idea for a video.

Your work moves fluidly between collage, performance, and installation. How do you decide which medium becomes the "voice" for a specific idea?

You describe collage not only as a technique but as a way of thinking. Could you expand on how this "collage logic" manifests in your daily life and creative process?

It's like multi tasking, multi thinking, multi lingual, polyamory, multiple personalities, my selves. Reading a few books at the same time. everything is layered and exists simultaneously, and I catch it (metaphorically or sometimes literally) and make use of it, either it is an idea, or multiple ideas at the same time, through poetry, through visual languages, through dance, through silences.

Many of your pieces explore the body as both a landscape and a political site. How has your own physical experience shaped this exploration?

Throughout my growing life, I was obsessed with (my) body image: i went through bulimia, anorexia, binge eating, dietings, body dysmorphia, and all other types of eating and body disorders. Drug and alcohol addictions. And conquering all that on my own without help of therapists, so I consider that a valuable and huge achievement. i used collage as therapy sessions with my selves and others. Then performance art became my door into going through fears and understanding its challenges. My hobbies became - psychology, anatomy, people-watching, improvisational dancing. I consider myself healthy psychologically and physically - and in our society it is almost a revolution to stay grounded and free from addictions. So whenever I use (my or someone else's) body in my art I don't put any preconceived stereotypical notions into it, for me it becomes a representation of power and beauty.

What role does improvisation play in your performances compared to the more constructed nature of collage?

For me it is important to have some sort of idea which I imagine as a skeleton, and then "the full body" will emerge during the actual performance, so sometimes I don't even know which course it will take. My art direction happens in a collaged way, thoughts appear while we rehearse, or in a dream, or before the beginning of the performance or during. I am open to spontaneous interactions and various unplanned situations. A collage artwork can become an inspiration for a performance or poem or else. And the other way around.

In works like your analogue collages, you merge human forms with objects or natural elements. What draws you to these hybrid, often surreal combinations?

Experimentations with materials. questions: what if I do that. Not worried about mistakes and fuckups, and actually looking out for them because mistakes lead to new discoveries. Natural elements are a reminder that this world is important and needs care, escaping into nature is one of the best anti anxiety tricks. "happiness is holding a flower in each hand"- Japanese proverb.

You have created performative ikebana works and digital experiments with augmented reality. How do you see technology transforming your approach to embodiment and nature?

Actually I am only in the beginning steps of discovering augmented reality for my ikebana-based project. But it makes so much sense, in a way, it is another form of collage, so it is almost an extension of an existing visual form. My creative practice still consists of mostly organic and natural ways of making things, but digital experimentations and additions are inevitable because they are so intriguing and invisible, almost like mythologies with their goddesses and gods.

Katrin Felice

Creates mixed-media artworks with textured surfaces, sometimes incorporating elements of mirrors and crystal when the concept calls for it. Through her practice, she explores one of the most ancient laws of the Universe: how our inner world shapes what we perceive around us. Our external reality is, in essence, a reflection of our inner self, and our spiritual fullness influences our ability to see beauty in the world. Each of us strives for harmony. Nature is a source of inspiration and energy, allowing us to replenish what is lacking within. In her paintings, floral motifs, figures intertwined with flowers, and the animal world of our planet appear most often. By combining painting with mirrors and crystal, her works become filled with sunlight, reflecting it back to us along with our surrounding environment.

Katrin Felice | The Gold of Women's Tears | 2025

Katrin Felice | Morning Dew

Kelly Qi (Zixuan)

Kelly Qi (Zixuan) | If I Were An Aquarius

Your work often uses "your childhood self" as the main protagonist. When did you first realize that childhood imagery could become a central narrative tool for exploring emotional and psychological growth?

This August, while sorting old photos at home, I found some childhood pictures I had never seen before. I was smiling and looked very confident in them. That was very different from how I remembered myself. Looking at my younger self in the photos warmed my heart. It made me realize that childhood images have a comforting power. It also made me start to think differently about how emotions begin and subtly change.

After that, I started using "my childhood self" as a character in my work. Using my own photos in collages feels more meaningful and real to me than using images from magazines or old books. This storytelling approach also helps me draw the viewer into the emotional space of my work and reflection.

Kelly Qi (Zixuan) | If I Were An Aries

In this piece, Aries is represented through fire, rams, and a sports car. How do you translate astrological symbolism into visual language without falling into clichés?

When creating this artwork about Aries, I didn't start with the "symbols" themselves. Instead, I thought about her personality and energy. I wrote down Aries' strengths and weaknesses, such as drive, directness, impulsiveness, and making quick decisions. Then, I looked for visual elements to represent these feelings, using familiar things from our daily lives.

Fire, the ram, and the sports car aren't just "Aries labels" for me. They are three different expressions: fire represents immediate drive, the ram is like instinct and defiance, and the sports car symbolizes speed, desire, and control. I avoided using symbols like "instruction manuals," such as pasting constellation images. I wanted these elements to appear as characters in a story. So viewers, even those who don't know astrology, could feel that the image represents someone who is eager and relate to it.

Kelly Qi (Zixuan) | If I Were A Libra

For me, astrology is a metaphorical language. I wanted to translate it into a more intuitive visual experience, making it understandable even for those who aren't interested in astrology.

The Stardust Journey series explores “multiple selves” and self-healing. How do you define the concept of “multiple selves”, and how does it manifest visually in your work?

For me, "multiple selves" is not an abstract idea, but a very common feeling. We change constantly as we grow. In different stages, relationships, and emotional states, we show different versions of ourselves. Some parts remain, while others are slowly hidden, but they don't really disappear.
In the Stardust Journey series, I used three different versions of my "childhood self" to represent these different selves. They are not specific characters, but different parts of the same person: some are more open, some more defensive, and some more quiet.
Visually, I use digital collage to take apart and put back together these three faces, making a new one. This process is like organizing and understanding myself. It's not about removing differences but letting them coexist. For me, this is also a gentle way of healing.

The handmade-collage effect -linen, felt, stitching - is an important part of your aesthetic. What draws you to this tactile language, especially in a fully digital medium?

I like these materials because of the feelings they give me, not their ideas. Even when I create things digitally, I want the image to feel real, like you can touch it.
Linen feels calm and natural to me. Its fibers and rough surface create small, unpredictable details in the digital world. When I place my hand-drawn nebulae on it, it looks like a soft, breathing night sky. Felt has a stronger emotional effect. It is relaxing to touch and look at. Making it makes me feel happy and comfortable, and that feeling stays in the artwork. Stitching is more of an action. For me, sewing, connecting, and fixing things are things I do often to "rebuild myself." So, stitching is an important symbol in my work.

The symmetrical rams connected by stitching suggest integration of conflicting energies. How does your own emotional or astrological experience inform this symbolism?

This image shows how I feel. I am an Aries, but my rising sign is Capricorn. This often makes me feel torn between my feelings and my actions. One part of me acts quickly without thinking. The other part plans carefully before acting. This is not a simple conflict. The two parts of me exist together. I often have to balance "acting now" with "planning first."
For me, the stitches connecting the face and the ram are like trying to bring these different energies together. The stitches don't get rid of the conflict, but they help the energies support each other. This creates a more stable and real balance.

Color plays a soothing role in your practice. How do you approach color when working with themes like conflict, inner turmoil, or emotional healing?

When dealing with conflict or strong emotions, I usually don't use dark or heavy colors. I focus on whether the image can make me pause and reflect.
I begin with bright, saturated colors that feel lively and warm. Then, I slowly make these colors lighter and softer, like a feeling of peace after strong emotions. This process feels natural and personal to me. As the colors become brighter and calmer, I feel the image come to life. I want the viewer to feel relaxed when they see my art. Even if it's just for a moment, if they can forget their worries, that's enough for me.

Fashion design and patternmaking were your first creative fields. How have these disciplines shaped your approach to composition, texture, and narrative in digital collage?

The biggest impact of fashion design and pattern making on me is that it helped me develop the habit of thinking creatively in a three-dimensional way. When designing clothes, I usually start with the overall structure rather than small details. This way of thinking also influences my digital collage creations.
In terms of how the images are put together, I see all the symbolic parts as a single body. I think about their size, rhythm, and feeling, similar to how I create the shape and layers of a garment. I intentionally leave empty spaces to avoid a cluttered image and to give the viewer space to look.
Regarding texture, I consider the overall atmosphere of the work. I shape emotions using color, layers, and touch, a method I developed in fashion design, now using a different medium. As for the story, I see each piece as part of a series. Like different outfits in a collection, they stand alone, but together they reveal a more complete emotion and story. That's why I focus on the connection within a series rather than the narrative of a single piece.

ESINA ART Ekaterina Esina

Your works often explore the connection between the material and the spiritual. How does this dialogue begin for you when you approach a new piece?

One may recall Van Gogh, who once said: “The only time I feel alive is when I am painting.”
I do not see a finished painting — I hear it. A dialogue is born from silence. I pour all my energy into the work, because there is no goal more desirable than creating beauty.
This is not merely the absence of sound, but a special, deliberate state of inner emptiness. Before a blank canvas, I make no plans. I create a space for an encounter — I spread the canvas, arrange stones and pigments, breathe.

And then it is not an image that arrives, but a sensation. A pull toward a particular color. A physical impulse in the hand, calling either for a broad gesture or, on the contrary, a precise touch. It is resonance — as if the materials themselves, the earth and the light, begin to speak through me. In this moment, the material (canvas, minerals, water) and the spiritual (intuition, memory) cease to be opposites. They become the poles of a single magnet, between which a spark leaps.
My task is not to invent, but to transmit. To hold this fragile bridge along which the inexpressible descends into the world of form. Each new layer on the canvas is a step in this journey, where decisions are made not by the mind, but by the whole being. The painting grows like a crystal, following its own logic, one I can only intuit. I do not create a masterpiece from the outset — I allow it to reveal itself through a dialogue with silence.

You frequently use natural stones, organic textures and layered pigments. What role do natural materials play in shaping the meaning of your artworks?

In the rhythm of contemporary life, in this constant rush between screens and obligations, we lose touch with the true measure of things. We forget that we ourselves are made of the same substance as mountains, seas, and stars. My art is an attempt to restore this broken dialogue. Natural materials here are not merely a palette, but principal co-authors and guides.
They are material carriers of eternity. At the center of the painting Winning by Loving from the Sanskrit collection, a shell is a compressed geological epoch, serving as a symbol of harmony and inner peace. Moss and shells in the painting Yggdrasil are a memory of the myth of the Tree of Life, where a mystery is created—one that invites unraveling. By creating

works from organic materials, I invite Time itself into the process, in its purest, non-human dimension. These textures become traces of an authentic process—an alchemical transformation rather than an illusory image.
Materials possess their own soul and vibration. When I use organic and natural elements, I invite a living, ancient presence into the space of the painting. The viewer often senses this energy on a subconscious, tactile level, even without putting it into words.
This is precisely where the essential meaning lies. The contrast between the fragility of a leaf and the eternity of stone, between the fluidity of pigment and the hardness of crystal, forms a microcosm of our own existence.
We are at once fragile and eternal, temporary and yet part of the great cycle of matter. My works are a reminder, materialized in stone and paint: look around. Touch. You are part of this. You are here.

Many of your pieces resemble cosmic or mythological landscapes. How do cosmology and mythology influence your visual language?

For me, cosmology and mythology are both external sources of inspiration and two native languages of the same reality. Put simply, cosmology gives me scale, and mythology gives me narrative. But this is not illustration. I do not paint nebulae, nor do I retell sagas.
I work with the primordial states they describe. The cosmos is a single act of creation from chaos. Galaxies are an ode to transformation. My paintings are always an inner cosmos, a cartography of the soul—a direct, nonverbal translation of inner processes for which we simply have no words.
This is pure alchemy of perception, and in my works it meets on a single plane of the canvas. For example, in the painting "Aura of Power: The Golden Ratio of Chaos"—this is not something you look at. It is something that looks at you.

Ultimately, my works are not an answer, but a space in which one can ask questions and experience them physically—encountering something as ancient as the sky itself, and as intimate as one's own heartbeat.

Your paintings feel like visual meditations — dynamic yet contemplative. What internal states or practices guide your creative process?

Absolutely right — this is visual meditation. The core practice is mindful presence. I do not "compose" the image in advance; instead, I follow the process the way one follows the breath. The first layers are often chaotic, intuitive gestures, as in the interior painting Cosmos, resembling a meditative state in which the mind releases control.
Then a phase of deep contemplation begins: I study the emerging forms as one looks at clouds or fire, allowing images to reveal themselves naturally. The sense of dynamism arises from spontaneous bodily movements, while contemplation grows out of hours of attentive observation and precise, almost jeweler-like interventions. It is a dance between action and non-action, between impulse and patience. I do not paint — I listen.
The first layers almost always emerge in a state close to free meditation. It is within this state that the layers are born: one from chaos, another from silence, a third from a flash of light.

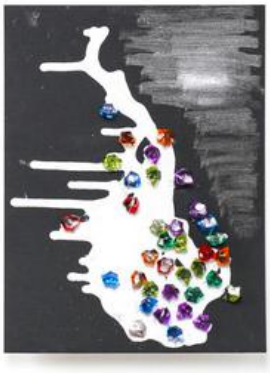
You mentioned that each artwork is a multilayered metaphor. Could you share an example of a hidden layer or meaning that viewers rarely notice?

Certainly. Let us take the painting "..." (Ellipsis). On the surface, it reads as a poetic metaphor of a journey: a golden trace within a black abyss, a flash of pink light, shells as markers along the way. It is a visual invitation for the viewer to complete the narrative, to find a personal answer within the silence.

The golden path, born from the black abyss, becomes a dialogue of opposites, where a vivid pink beam meets mysterious depth. The whimsical shells appear as milestones on a route leading into the unknown. This is a painting-as-question, a painting-as-contemplation. In its meaningful silence, each viewer discovers their own answer.
Each day inspires movement forward—each day serves as a reminder of your own path and the possibilities it holds.
Thus, the painting transforms from a landscape into a cartography of thought in the making. It functions as a visual catalyst: the viewer projects unrealized possibilities onto this field, and the encounter with the bold flash grants an inner permission to take a step. The title “Ellipsis” is the key—the meaning is not complete; it continues within the space of the observer. The hidden layer lies not in the details, but in the resonance between them; this is why many feel that the work somehow “knows” something intimate about them.

Your art exists at the intersection of philosophy, symbolism, and contemporary aesthetics. How do you balance intellectual concepts with visual emotion?

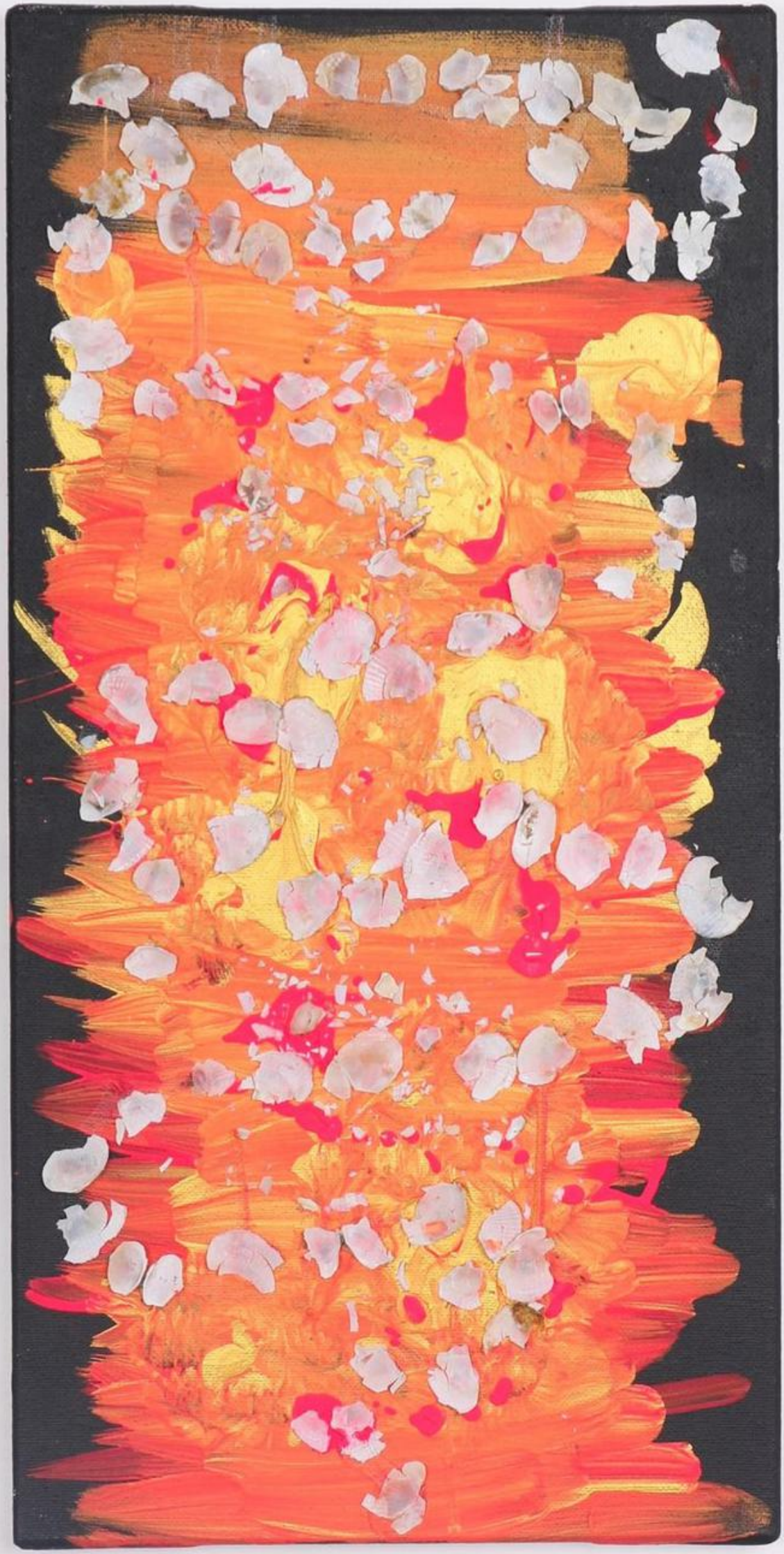
I believe that true intellectual depth must be emotionally felt; otherwise, it is nothing more than rhetoric.
Conversely, a powerful emotion, when passed through the prism of philosophical reflection, acquires universality.
Balance is born through sequence: first comes a pure, unfiltered emotional and sensory impulse (color, texture, gesture). Then, through a process of layering, intellect and intuition enter the work — I recognize, construct visual analogies, and engage with symbols as a living fabric rather than as fixed signs.



Contemporary aesthetics is the language through which I speak. I do not illustrate a concept; I cultivate it from the material itself, allowing idea and emotion to fuse into one.
I never begin with an idea. The idea comes later — as an explanation of feeling. First comes emotion. Then the material that embodies it. Only at the very end does a philosophical context emerge, like an echo.
Balance is achieved when the viewer feels the work with the body and thinks about it later, lying awake at night with open eyes. Art must first pierce — and only then explain.

Some of your artworks integrate reflective or gem-like elements. How does light influence your compositions and the interpretation of the piece?

Light and organic elements act as a final, living co-author. They transform the artwork from a static object into a dynamic event that changes depending on the time of day, the viewer’s movement, and the angle of perception. The composition is constructed with this in mind: there are zones of stillness (matte, deep surfaces) and zones of activation (light-bearing areas). This creates a rhythm and draws the viewer into a physical dialogue with the work and into reflection. You do not simply look at it—you search for the light, moving around it.
Reflected light and materials symbolize not external luxury, but inner enlightenment—something that cannot be seen directly, only caught in the corner of the eye by changing one’s position.
All of this makes the paintings alive: they change together with the viewer. In this lies a metaphor of perception—truth reveals itself only through movement.



Patricia Lee Jeffree

Your sculptures often begin with discarded or forgotten objects. What is the first moment when you recognize that an item has the potential to become a new character or artwork?

The first time I recognise the potential of a item to become a sculpture is when I see the shape, the core of a sculpture. An instant vision of what the item will become. I do not see a old wire basket I see a beautiful maiden, or a giant turtle. A lamp post I see a tree, or curved golden statues.

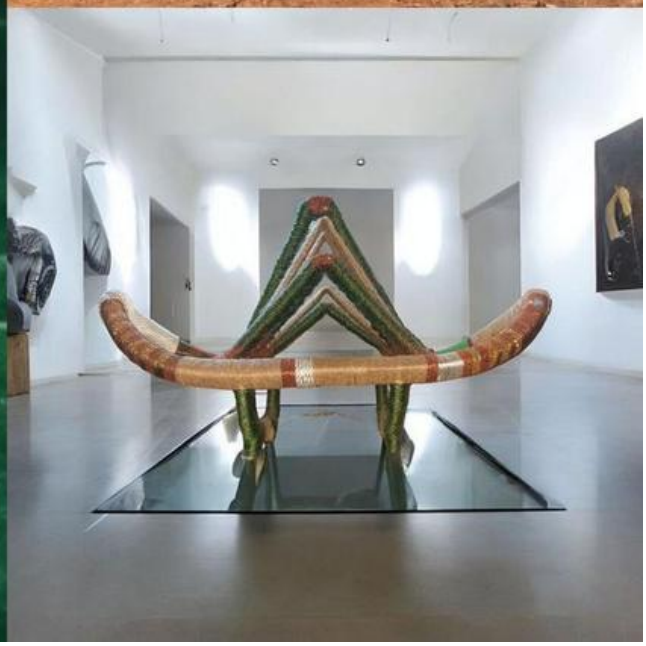
Many of your works - such as those created from driftwood, wire baskets, or lamp posts - seem to contain a personal history. How much of that found object's story influences the final sculpture?

Each found object has a story, starting with a meeting, a voyage, then at the final destination, a story of its travels.

Your practice spans sculpture, painting, drawing, poetry, and fashion design. How do these disciplines influence each other in your creative process?

My disciplines influence each other often, Fashion desighn and metal work created Fashion Folly where material meets industrial. I paint my sculptures like a canvas, my drawings are poetry.

There is a sense of mythology and symbolism in your figurative forms. What themes or



narratives do you find yourself returning to most often?

I lean towards peace, strength and beauty with my sculptures.

What role does the Central Coast environment play in inspiring your work, especially your use of natural and repurposed materials?

The central coast is inspiring, we have abundance of earthly materials, mountains, oceans, lakes, wildlife. There is a place called Patonga here on the coast, a peaceful campground where the ocean meets the river, I often go there and draw.

Many of your figures appear elongated, elegant, almost ceremonial. Is this stylistic choice inspired by specific cultural or artistic references?

I like to create sculptures with grace, style, of elegance and beauty. Often they look towards our heavens, Faith.

Your sculptures seem to embody a strong emotional presence. What emotions or messages do you hope viewers experience when encountering your artworks?

I hope when viewer's look at my art that just for a brief moment they forget there troubles, worries, and heartaches.

Yulia Gordeeva

How did the idea of creating one-of-a-kind artworks with handwritten stories first appear in your practice?

I have been studying at the art academy for almost a year now. And I can't really say that it all began as an "idea" in the usual sense. It was more like a moment of oh, now I know what I need to do. In the field of spiritual development, this is often called recognition — as if you suddenly remember something you once knew.
At some point in my life, words stopped fitting into books, and images stopped fitting onto canvases on their own. It was as if they were searching for each other through me. One day, I simply took a pen and wrote text directly over a still-wet layer of oil paint — and the world came together as a complete picture. Since then, I no longer create "paintings" or "texts" separately. I create portals in which the story and the image exist as a single world, inseparable from one another.

Yulia Gordeeva | Timelessness | 2025

My training as an art historian, of course, leaves its mark on the way I convey my art. I know what it was like "before" and what it became "after." My work unfolds along the boundary of the here and now. That is precisely why I titled this series Through Time and Space. It is a kind of buffer zone, a timeless realm where everything exists simultaneously.
I have written a book for this exhibition — a novel-training — where, in the form of a fictional narrative, I explain how all of this "works." The official launch of the book is planned for the end of January 2026.

You write each text by hand with an old nib and ink. What inner state do you enter when you begin this process?

I've only just realized that your questions are wonderfully helping me to structure the work I've done over the past year. During this year, I wrote three books as part of a cycle about life transformation. And the second question relates directly to the second book — about how text, advertising, films, and everything an author or creator puts into their work affects us. It is incredibly important in what state you enter the process of creating your art objects.
It is a state of silence without inner emptiness. Like before a storm, when the air already knows what is about to happen. My personal "self" steps back in that moment. I do not bring my own experiences, programs, or moods into my works. I become a kind of channel through which information, codes, and energy pass. Only breath, the hand, and the flow remain. I never know exactly what will be written. I know only one thing — it will be said precisely. This has been confirmed by many people.

Yulia Gordeeva | Symbol Of The Year | 2025

Your project is based on the concept of a shared human historical code. How do you interpret or connect with this code while creating the stories?

I do not "connect" to it — I live inside it. This code resonates through the fears, desires, losses, and hopes that repeat themselves century after century.
When I write, I do not think about time.
As I said, the aim was to create a sense of timelessness — a space where every visitor can take exactly what they need.
I feel how the same pain and the same love have passed through thousands of lives and have once again chosen to be heard now.

Each story on the canvas is unique and unpublished anywhere. How do these stories come to you?

They do not come "to me." They come through me. This is very important. As an author, I usually have a waiting line of characters eager to speak (laughs). But as a creator, no — it's as if the work appears out of nowhere and transforms into an art object. Like a quiet knowing that has simply reached the moment when it must be spoken. I can never recreate any of them, because each one comes exactly at the moment when it is needed by the world, not later. And indeed, just a few days after completing a painting, I can no longer remember what was written there.
I also love the "after" state: a slight tremor, emptiness in the mind, silence in the body, and an overall feeling of calm. The main thing at that moment is not to get behind the wheel (just kidding).

Many of your painted figures appear turned away or immersed in themselves. What meaning do you find in this posture?

I would say the opposite — it is a return to oneself. When a person turns away from the viewer, they turn toward themselves. These figures are not hiding; they are listening. It is the moment when the external world stops dictating, and the inner world begins to speak. When the viewer looks at the painting, a button of focused attention is pressed within them, triggering the process of hearing themselves.

Your artworks are intentionally created without digital replicas. Why is the absence of digital trace important for this project?

Because not everything should be a mass-produced commodity. These works exist according to the laws of a precise, individual request. In my case, the paintings find their buyers on their own. It is as if they were created for someone specific — for the person who feels something shift inside when coming into contact with the piece. This cannot be put into words. You will certainly feel it if it is yours.
Look at the painting. How does it speak to you? It has weight, the smell of oil, the trace of a hand, the trembling of a line. Digital reproduction erases uniqueness. But my works are about presence. About the fact that this is a one-of-a-kind moment.
Of course, I do have pieces that will be reproduced — I am a businessperson as well. But not this series.

What do you hope a collector feels when holding an artwork that exists only for them and cannot be repeated?

I want him to feel the encounter — the very thing he has been waiting for for so long. That state of "Hello, I've been waiting for you for so long," followed by a breath of relief... As if life itself looked straight at him for a moment and recognized him. I want it to be not about possession — "this is mine" — but about resonance: "this is about me." And along with that, a strange sense of calm, as if something important has finally fallen into place.

Yulia Gordeeva | A House That Remembers The Real You | 2025

Leah Freundlich

Leah Freundlich | Deja Vu

Your artist statement speaks about "quiet moods" and "stillness." How do you translate such intangible emotions into visual form?

For me, "quiet moods" and "stillness" translate into visual form through a combination of strategic planning, layering, and atmosphere. I try to invoke emotions using subtle shifts in color, light, and texture to suggest a feeling rather than force it.

Leah Freundlich | Discord At Sea

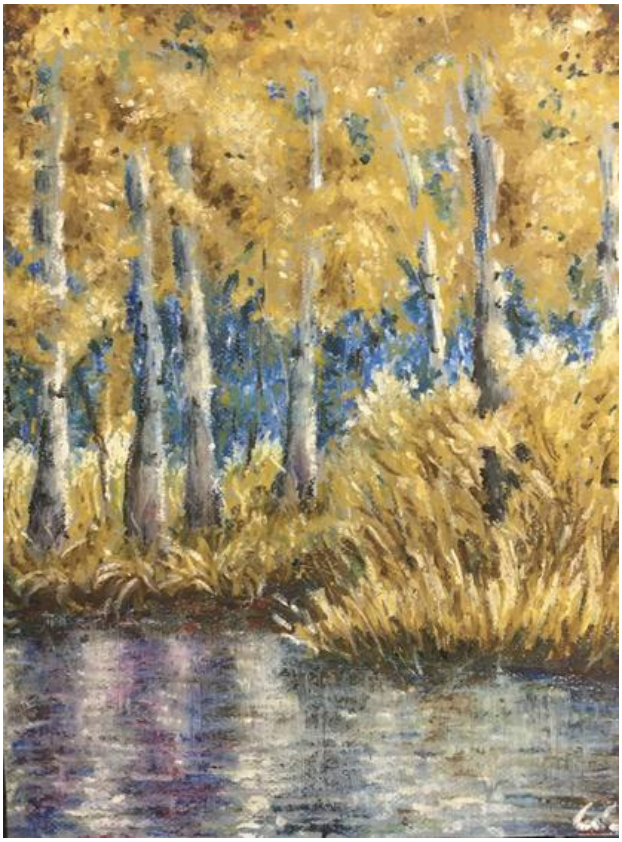
What draws you most to autumn landscapes — their color palette, atmosphere, or symbolism?

I've always loved the season, with its colors and wonderful texture. There's something energizing about the way the world shifts during that time of year. Every Autumn is like a new beginning, a new hope. I think there's a quiet optimism that comes with the season, and I think that feeling of positivity is what I'm constantly trying to infuse into my work.

You mention working in acrylics to achieve an oil-like depth. What challenges or discoveries did this technique bring?

It definitely brought many challenges at first! Acrylics dry so quickly, I had to rethink how to layer the colors and subtle tonal shifts (like you can achieve with oils). It forced me to be precise with every brushstroke. I pushed myself, since I usually lose patience and stick to the mediums I feel comfortable with. It also taught me to trust my instinct when it comes to creating, because there were times I had to react intuitively and not think about it so much.

How does light function in your compositions — is it a purely visual tool or an emotional language as well?



Leah Freundlich | Autumn Birches

Light in my compositions is far more than just a visual element. It's an emotional language that shapes the entire mood of the piece. I've always been drawn to Impressionism, especially the masterful use of light. In my own work, light not only directs the eye and creates depth, but it also serves as the emotional anchor. Soft, understated light can suggest calmness and carry the sense of stillness I hope the viewer experiences. As an expressive tool, it becomes a way of revealing the inner tone of the work.

Could you describe your creative process from the first sketch or idea to the final brushstroke?

I always begin by focusing on the feeling I want to evoke before moving into any technical sketching. This includes any themes that I want to be present, or if I have a specific message I hope to communicate. I prefer working from my own photographic references because they already hold a personal connection and a sense of place for me. From there, I'll experiment, shifting details, adjusting composition, until the image aligns with my vision. I always listen to music when I paint. I find that it just helps turn my logical brain off and allows me to be completely present. Especially when I'm painting over a long period of time. The music helps shift me back into the right mode, so it feels like I never left.

In what ways does texture influence the emotional tone of your work?

It took me a while to figure out the kind of texture I like to work with, and I still experiment with different mediums. I even went through a phase of layering acrylic with plaster to get that three-dimensional look (as you can see in Discord at Sea). Using a dry-brush method with acrylic paint allows more subtle shifts in texture, and I'm drawn to the softer effect it creates. I think when executed properly, texture can shape the emotional temperature of a piece. Softer textures are naturally calmer, while more pronounced textures can introduce tension or movement.

Are there specific painters, movements, or natural places that have shaped your aesthetic vision?

Absolutely. The Impressionists, especially Monet, have been a foundational influence on my work. Their sensitivity to light, atmosphere, and the emotional resonance of color deeply shaped how I think about painting. Tyrus Wong is a major inspiration as well, with his concept art for Bambi being a masterclass in tone and mood. Animation and film have always fueled my imagination in that way. The intentionality of movement and color in animated storytelling, like in Eyvind Earle's work for Sleeping Beauty and his later landscapes, constantly inspires me. Kay Nielsen's ability to convey narrative in a single image continues to influence my own illustrations and drawing style. With so many artists and mediums that inspire me, I feel like I'm always learning and evolving.

Leah Freundlich | Autumn Leaves

Julia Khramtsova

Portrait By Tessa Camilla Photography

Your recent projects aim to inspire creativity in your local community. What motivates you to work in this socially engaged direction?

Working as a teacher for many years after the graduation from university I noticed that I really enjoy working with people. As a creative person, I observed a lot of a creative input from my students' side as well. In the most cases, they just needed a kind of guidance to work on their own projects and tasks.
That's why after a covid pandemic I've started giving workshops to a local community to bring the people together. Many of workshops' participants became friends. It gives me and the others so much energy and leads us to new ideas and experiments. It also helps getting together as a community and have fun working on own masterpieces.

Julia Khramtsova | Memory | 2024

Every person is creative, we just need a starting point or accessible materials to create a little piece of art to be proud of. It even doesn't need to be a piece of art in our general understanding. It's more important for me to show how people can get an idea what it means for them to be creative and what is all possible to do.

Many of your artworks incorporate expressive textures, imaginative landscapes, and symbolic elements. What themes or emotions do you explore through this visual language?

I think a lot about connection and communication with nature and other living beings around. Everyone and everything we feel, see or touch is different and has its specific elements. And everything in life and in the world is connected. First of all, I prefer to have an idea or a concept what exactly I'd like to express in my works and choose the best suitable technic for it. For example, landscapes present a magical world of flora which is quite interactive within itself. Nature is such a miracle on our planet, it gives so much inspiration for artistic people. I would say, due to my painting style I explore such human emotions as excitement, joy, sadness and sometimes I need this process to understand better situations that I'm experiencing in life.

Several of your works seem to reflect ecological concerns or commentary on modern life. What role do environmental or social themes play in your art?

Environmental themes play indeed a big role in my personal life, and I can't cut it off from my artistic life as well. Multiple crisis and catastrophes, human disrespectful behaviour towards animals and nature prevail at the moment everywhere, so I decided to reflect on our habits as consumers and speak up about problems implicating them in paintings. During my fashion design studies, I pointed out to bad fast fashion image and learned about upcycling technics by myself a lot and continue taking part in fashion projects.

Julia Khramtsova | Separation | 2025

You work across different mediums - painting, drawing, illustration, and even sewing. How do these practices influence one another in your creative process?

You're right, there are lot of technics and practices in my work because I can't choose only one. The mixture is more interesting and influences for sure the composition, texture, structural elements and impression by looking at a piece. If I can put some of them into one painting or illustration, I'm going for it. About 15 years ago I wanted actually to start with book binding but ended in the oil painting class. Classical drawing was more or less a sketching tool to build a composition for a later artwork. During learning process I've started experimenting and trying different technics – Chinese ink, watercolour pencils, and I did book binding as well. But my biggest passion is fashion design and I discovered a totally new world during sewing garments. Colourful and soft fabrics inspire me all the time. I'm passionate about upcycling and sewing garments out of fabric leftovers. I create a structure and ornaments on garments which could be also painted on paper. Sometimes the garments look like pieces of wearable art. Or illustrations I create could be printed on fabrics as well.

What draws you to paint on unconventional surfaces such as wood furniture, and how does this format change the way you develop a piece?

Oh, painting on wood furniture or little wooden objects takes a lot of time! That is good for practicing some patience, try it . I did an art project on demand a year ago and fell in love with painting on freshly processed wood surface. Sure, I did some pieces before but the affection to it came about a year ago. Since then, I can't stop myself painting on upcycled furniture or wooden objects saved in the neighbourhood if people don't need them anymore. I can create a beautiful colourful object for decoration or use an object again for purpose (chair, wooden storage box, coffee table). Using different surfaces gives me an opportunity to get to know and learn about new materials and try painting differently. Using colours for painting on wood or house walls makes an impact on creation of textures and colour mixing.

How do the places where you have lived - Shanghai, Munich, and others - shape the atmosphere of your paintings?

I think, this is a bit a philosophical question ... I never preferred black and white in life, I always needed colours in-between, a wide palette of everything. Born and raised in a big city I have continued to spend my life in (very) big cities traveling or living there. Locations, environments, people and animals of different places include so many feelings, thoughts, cultural habits and traditions which have bright sides. Interaction, ambiguity, diversity, pluralism, various cultural lifestyles and my personal experiences create an atmosphere of communication within a space or environment and influence universal themes which are understandable to anyone of us despite the exact living spot.

How do you hope viewers will feel or reflect when looking at your works, especially the ones dealing with nature, memory, or everyday objects?

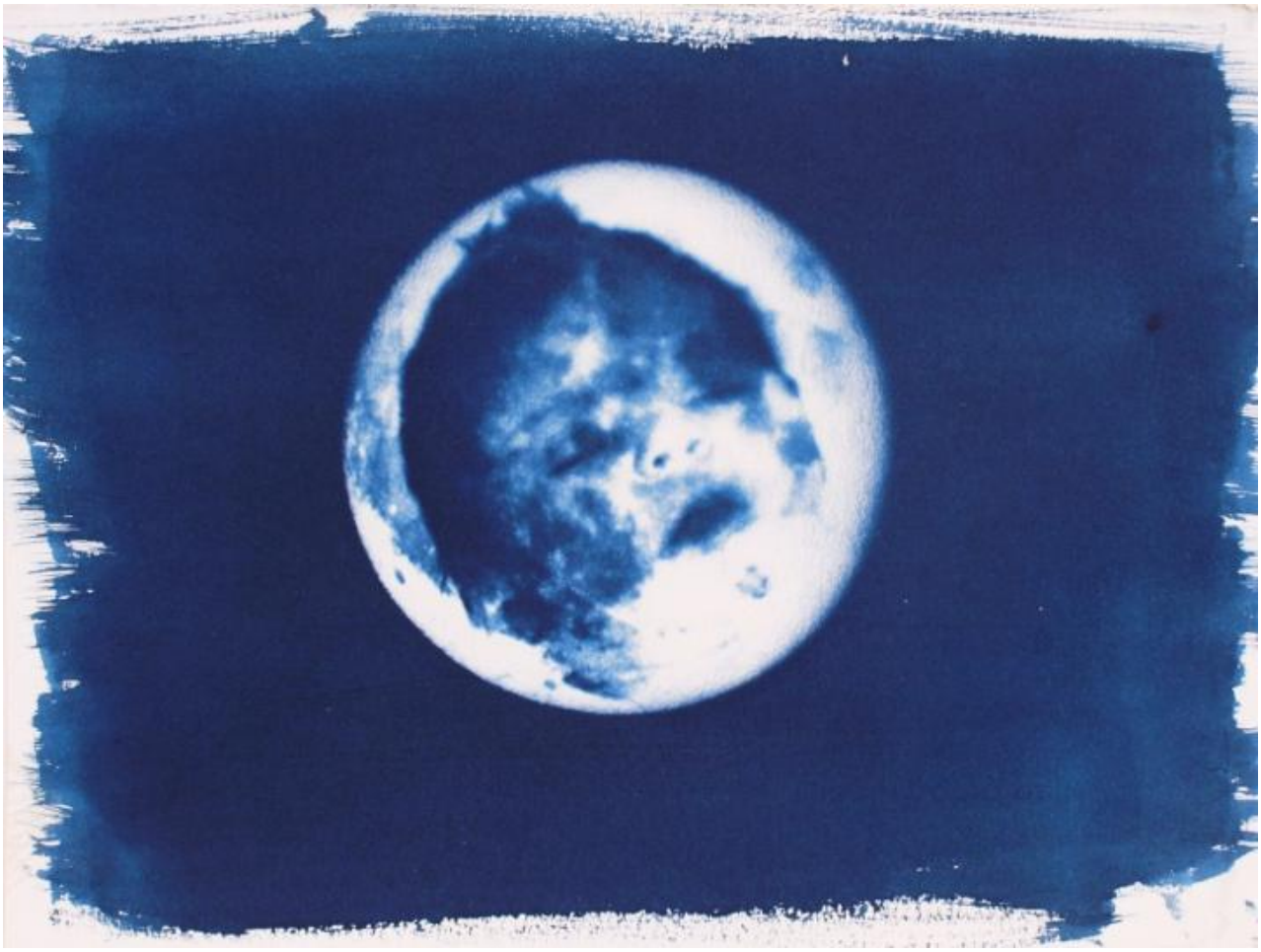
I hope, viewers become curious about paintings or illustrations and are eager to discover all little details and meanings hidden in artworks. It's kind of a game between us – creator and viewer. And of course, I hope that some people recall their memories and reflect about their own experiences looking at my artworks.

Julia Khramtsova | And It'S Going So On And So On | 2025

Katherine Leone is a visual artist based in New Jersey who works with a variety of mixed media, including painting, photography, and ceramics. She is graduating this December from Drew University with a BA in studio art, with minors in media & communications and film studies. Katherine works to highlight symbolic connections between humanity and its place on Earth that encourages individuals to look introspectively. She finds that her artistic process is the most fruitful when interweaving human history with the events of the present day. Katherine has been recently exhibited in Drew's Winter Exhibition 2025, her third year. She has also proudly exhibited in the college's Eco-Feminism Art Show for over 2 years. During the Summer of 2025, she worked as an art instructor at New Horizons Daycamp in Florham Park, New Jersey. She currently works at an animal inn as a pet photographer and marketing assistant. She aspires to be an art educator to young children, and to travel the country to artistically archive stories from all walks of life.

Artist Statement
Our shadows leave imprints on the Earth, symbolic of the space we take up simply by existing. Shadows receive a negative reputation, but are nonetheless proof that there is light. My art brings light to the similar ways we view both women and our planet in our patriarchal society. Growing up, many people, especially little girls, are conditioned to be ashamed of the role of femininity they're expected to encapsulate. Similarly, our society assigns a role to the Earth as a tool for the progress of mankind. Utilizing ultra-violet light, I create impressions of objectivity using UV-reactive paints and cyanotype chemicals.The various flora and natural materials that cast shade onto the painting help illuminate a unique, organic expression all on its own. The surrounding environment, from the sun to the foliage, assists in the creation of the piece. The abstractions are meditative and intuitive, with minimal planning. The process is a way for me to reconnect myself with my patience, curiosity, and appreciation–emotions often inspired by being in nature. The abstract forms on my solar-reactive pieces are impressions of what previously resided there. They act as a metaphor of the lasting impacts we leave behind us. My art pays homage to the millions of women and people in the past that have continued to fight for humanity, whether or not they were erased from human history due to the patriarchal narrative that overcasts our society.

Katherine Leone | Moon Baby Cyano



Katherine Leone | Spinal Structure

Milena Valkova, Elena Burudjieva

Your artistic identity is built around the idea of being "astral sisters." How did this shared creative language emerge between you, and what does it mean in your artistic practice?

The idea for our astral sisterhood initially came from the happy coincidence that we are both born on the same day. But not only do we share a birthday, but we also share very similar and often complimenting aesthetic interests, ideas and creative pursuits. The emergence of our shared creative language was sudden and mysterious, but very natural, bringing a spontaneous and casual creative dynamic between us ever since.

Many of your works blur the boundary between dream and waking reality. How do dreams influence your visual narratives and the forms your characters take?

Milena Valkova, Elena Burudjieva | In Dreams | 2025

The work explores the shifting boundaries between memory and dream — spaces where perception falters and new realities emerge. We are interested in the creation of personal virtual worlds shaped by errors in seeing and remembering, transforming distortion into a generative creative act.
In this sense, the Dream influences our visual narratives as methods of seeing. In dreams, forms are allowed to shift, dissolve, and reassemble without resistance — and that fluid logic becomes the architecture of the images. We are drawn to the way a dream holds contradictions effortlessly: how a figure can be familiar and entirely other, how a space can feel known yet impossible.
When we create, we try to approach reality with that same loosened gaze. The dream world teaches us to trust the moment when something slips out of definition, when an image reveals more in its blur than in its clarity.
By letting dream-logic guide the work, we invite each image to exist between realities — where waking perception falters just enough for something deeper and uncertain to come through.

Your images often feature otherworldly figures that appear both human and ethereal. What do these beings represent in your symbolic universe?

The beings embody a Daemonic expression of the inner states that possess us. They represent the parts of ourselves that travel through unseen layers of perception —the inner wanderers who move ahead of conscious thought, whisperers of dreams, bearing fears and unfulfilled desires, as well as incorporeal mirror images of ourselves, a reflection of the endless inner metamorphosis.
They exist in the threshold between human presence and something more fluid, more ancient — a hum that moves beneath reality.
These figures are also mediators. They allow different realms to touch: the waking world, the dream world, the remembered, the imagined. When they appear in an image, they act as points of conjunction where

Milena Valkova, Elena Burudjieva | Rain Ritual | 2025

colours, textures, and spaces begin to leak into one another. Through their presence, something hidden surfaces — a glimpse of the strange beauty that arises when familiar boundaries dissolve.
In essence, they are embodiments of transition: beings shaped by crossing, by movement, by the subtle merging of worlds. They stand for those quiet forces that guide perception from one reality into another, whispering the possibility that what we see is only one layer of a larger, shifting landscape.

The landscapes in your works feel inverted, surreal, or digitally re-imagined. How do you choose and transform these environments to shape the mood of your pieces?

The environment is a part of the Dream and as such is subjected to wild transformations and instability. The familiar gives way for the unknown to peak through in the inflection points with otherness, opening portals to other realms.
In this way, mood emerges from the merging itself. The surreal quality is not an imposed effect, but a natural result of worlds overlapping — a visual echo of how the unseen breathes through the everyday. The transformed environments become invitations into this layered reality, where the sense of place is both unstable and strangely resonant, as if glimpsed in a dream just before waking.

Could you describe the collaborative process between the two of you? How do your roles intersect, complement, or challenge each other?

Our collaborative process is very natural and spontaneous. It often feels like our visions belong to the same realm that we can channel effortlessly when we join creative forces. We both participate in all aspects of the process, always willing to exchange ideas and go in the direction that fits the project best. Working together is both inspiring and challenging because of our shared admiration of each other's way of thinking and desire to keep up with the creative flow.

What emotions or states of mind are you hoping to awaken in viewers when they encounter your dream-creatures and surreal worlds?

Above all, we hope to evoke curiosity — a deep, lingering fascination with what cannot be fully named. The images aim to bring the viewer closer to the sublime and mysterious aspects of reality that flicker beneath the surface of their imagination. We aspire to shift their attention towards the mystical and unknown, and spark curiosity of the duality of their own nature, originating and intertwined with the collective space of dreams and symbols.

As a duo, how do you envision the evolution of your artistic world? Are there new themes, mediums, or directions you wish to explore next?

Our collaboration has unfolded intuitively, guided by a rhythm that feels organic, and we intend to continue following the path it reveals. Each of us brings her own artistic interests, and we are interested in finding the points where our practices meet and can grow together. One of our next goals is to create an audio-visual zine - a place where sound, image, and texture can merge into a single, drifting experience.

Milena Valkova, Elena Burudjieva | The Double | 2025

Kunle Fajemirokun

Kunle Fajemirokun | Dream Walker

How has growing up in Lagos shaped your eye, your themes, or your relationship with materials?

Growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, has given me a broad understanding of how to take advantage of any situation, regardless of social or economic background. For example, I recycle 304 stainless steel from salvage yards to create my sculptures.

Your sculpture is titled Alarinkirin Ala (Dream Walker). What does the "dream walker" symbolize for you, and how does this idea relate to the astral plane in your practice?

Alarinkirin Ala, which means "Dream Walker" in English, refers to a person who has mastered a higher state of consciousness, enabling them to travel through multiple dimensions and timelines without restrictions.

From an African cultural perspective, dreams can be viewed as messages, journeys, or connections. Are there particular Nigerian or broader African philosophies, stories, or spiritual frameworks that influenced Dream Walker?

The natural rose quartz gemstone on the forehead has naturally formed phantom lines crisscrossing into a triangle—a symbol of spiritual ascension. Together with the green obsidian and clear quartz behind the rose quartz, it creates a powerful energy combination to aid astral travel.

When did you first realize sculpture would become your main artistic language, and what pulled you toward it?

In Oduduwa culture, it is believed that astral travel is a way to maintain continuity of life, leading to reincarnation. Many people possess the ability to astral travel from a very young age, which can be a scary experience without guidance from elders who are knowledgeable in this regard—or from a seasoned dream walker. Knowledge acquired across multiple dimensions or lifetimes can be put to use in this dimension if one knows how to properly navigate the astral plane. The advent of Christianity and other religions has led many people to abandon traditional cultural beliefs and practices for fear of being judged by the public.

You're currently the Assistant Secretary General of the Sculptor's Association of Nigeria. How does this leadership role shape your own studio practice? Does it push you toward community, legacy, or mentorship?

Sculpture plays an integral part in our culture as a way to maintain a connection with our deities and ancestors in this realm after their passing. I knew it was my calling when I carved my first sculpture at the age of eight, with no formal training. It felt like I didn't acquire the skills in this dimension —I simply knew what to do naturally.

What advice would you give to young sculptors in Nigeria who want to build a sustainable career?

My appointment as Assistant Secretary General of the Sculptors' Association of Nigeria has given me a platform to

Kunle Fajemirokun | Dream Walker

impact others by highlighting the importance of community, with the hope of sharing knowledge about how to stay true to the art—balancing the passion for creation with the need to make money, without over-commercializing artworks. Otherwise, the quality of the work—and the longevity of an artist's career—can be diminished.

What themes or questions are you most excited to explore in your next body of work?

The theme of my next body of work is water, as it connects to our origin, our present, and our future in a higher state of consciousness.

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