VISUAL ART JOURNAL

VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

NO. 38

OCTOBER 2025

— *Intro*

Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello dear reader,

In your hands is the 38th issue of our journal.

In this edition, we've gathered a number of artists who work in the collage technique. At first glance, it may seem simple—cut and combine pieces from existing paintings, newspaper clippings, or materials. But if you look closer, you'll notice that every fragment is in its rightful place, each chosen for a reason.

To me, this is a wonderful metaphor for life itself —where seemingly incompatible things come together to form a complete picture, encompassing a spectrum of emotions, events, and people. In that sense, we are all authors of our own collages: filling them with what we wish, choosing our focus, and finding harmony in the colors and balance.

Thank you for continuing to read and support us. Our team truly values each and every one of you! Enjoy your reading!

On the Front Cover:
Taghari18
Masterpiece forms
2024

On the Back Cover:
Patricia Carr Morgan
Blue Tears

ISSN 3051-2352
9 773051 235004

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

Interview

Kasia G

You resumed painting after a ten–year break. What prompted you to return to your artistic practice in 2018, and how has your vision evolved since then?

After a ten-year break, I returned to painting in 2018 because I realized that creating art was the most genuine way for me to engage with the world.
The transition back was not easy - it was gradual and at times frustrating. In the beginning, I explored many styles and experimented with different mediums, but for a long time I struggled to find my own voice. Gradually, I began to develop my own artistic language. It felt less like a decision on my part and more like something that found me - almost like a calling.

Kasia G | The Core Was Empty | 2025

The forms and imagery began to rise out of the fragments and rhythms of everyday life, capturing both what is visible and what often goes unnoticed.

Your portraits often balance classical references with surreal or symbolic elements. How do you decide which symbols or interventions to include in each work?

Each element I include - whether symbolic or surreal is chosen intentionally. Classical references give the work a sense of familiarity, while surreal or symbolic interventions introduce deeper layers of meaning and reflection.
I aim to create moments that encourage viewers to pause and question, rather than offering fixed answers. These gestures, objects, or alterations are meant to open a space for interpretation, allowing each person to engage with the work in their own way and discover their own meaning.

Growing up in Poland during the communist era and later immigrating to the United States must have deeply shaped your perspective. How do these experiences surface in your art?

Growing up in a small town in Poland and later moving to the United States gave me two very different

Kasia G | Not Who You Think | 2025

perspectives on the world. Experiencing such a dramatic change made me realize just how much our surroundings shape us, often altering our perspectives in lasting ways.
This sense of shifting identity is reflected in my art. I find myself exploring what we show to the world and what we keep hidden, the parts of ourselves shaped by memory, culture, personal experience and observations. These influences filter into my work through gestures, symbols, and the figures I paint, almost like echoes of where I've been and what I've carried with me.

Many of your works position the female figure as both historical and contemporary. How do you see the role of women in your paintings—as subjects, symbols, or reflections of yourself?

In my paintings, the female figure is more than just a subject - she is a witness to the world around her. She carries hints of history through classical poses or vintage clothing, yet her face feels distinctly of today. This blend creates a bridge between past and present, inviting us to see her as part of our own time. Through subtle symbols and surreal details, she encourages thoughtful reflection and personal connection. Each figure holds an openness that expresses the rhythms of daily life and the hidden, often unseen emotions we all carry.

In a visually saturated culture of trends and curated appearances, your art embraces restraint and stillness. What draws you to this aesthetic of quiet reflection?

I am drawn to stillness because it offers a rare pause - a space where both the artwork and the viewer can breathe and engage beyond the noise of a fast-paced, image-saturated world. In a culture filled with trends, spectacle, and constant consumption, calmness becomes an act of resistance, an invitation to look more closely.
Through restraint, I shape the work to allow emotions and ideas to emerge freely. Delicate gestures and surreal elements highlight contrasts and surprises in my collection. I purposely place unexpected details to provoke thought and reflection.
This approach encourages viewers to engage with the work, connecting to their own feelings, memories, and often overlooked moments in everyday life.

Several of your works incorporate surreal imagery —like the hollow apple or figures with unconventional headpieces. What is the relationship between these dreamlike elements and contemporary identity?

When I weave surreal elements into my work - like a hollowed-out apple or an unexpected headpiece - I am adding small twists on the everyday that make us look twice. These are not meant to point to a single meaning, but rather capture the complex experience of being human today.
By placing these dreamlike touches alongside familiar forms, I hint at the blurry space between the self we show the world and the self we carry inside. It's like holding up a mirror to those quiet, contradictory moments we all feel.
My goal is not to hand out answers - it's to spark curiosity, a sense of life and mystery, inviting viewers to pause, reflect and perhaps see their own inner world in a new light.

How do you hope viewers will engage with your paintings? Do you want them to interpret the symbolism, or simply to pause and feel the atmosphere?

Ideally, I hope my paintings offer an invitation, a chance to step back and connect with yourself. I want viewers to feel that space, to breathe with the work and sense its atmosphere deep within.
At the same time, the symbols in each piece open doors to deeper layers, encouraging a gentle exploration that reveals new meanings the longer you stay with it.
More than anything, I want the work to stay with you, not just visually, but emotionally and imaginatively - inviting your own questions and reflections long after you have stepped away.

Sara Monteiro, 27 - Born and based in Porto, Portugal.
Painting is my Valium — a ritual that quiets the noise of the world and tunes me back into my own frequency.
The canvas is escape, catharsis, meditation. Each piece is a quiet exorcism, where fragmented memories and untold emotions take visible form. Through acrylic and oil, I build layers of shadow, memory, and light — not to escape the dark, but to understand it. Even as a being of light, I know that the truest eeflection is often found in the shadow.

Project Statement
Shaping the formless, bringing color to the grey.

Taylor Smith

Your practice bridges photography, screen printing, painting, and collage. What usually sparks a new piece—the material you find, an image from art history, or a social observation?

Most often, the spark comes from the material itself. I'm drawn to objects that carry memory—like floppy disks, scraps of packaging, or images on the verge of being forgotten. These fragments already hold stories, and painting allows me to weave them together with cultural icons and art historical references. My time in Germany studying artists like Polke and Richter taught me to blur the lines between photography, screen printing, and painting. Ultimately, I see each work as a way to reflect on how memory, history, and cultural observation intersect.

Taylor Smith | Grizzly Bear

You speak about "reimagined life within everyday things." What does the "redemption" of obsolete technology mean to you?

For me, redemption is about giving forgotten or obsolete technology a second life—one that resists erasure. A floppy disk, for example, once carried someone's work, their data, their memories, and then, almost overnight, it became worthless, destined for a landfill. By pulling these objects into my paintings, I rescue them from disappearance and let them continue telling stories in a new way.
I never open the disks to see what was inside; the mystery of that abandoned information feels important. It's an unintended collaboration with anonymous people from decades ago, and it reminds me that memory—whether personal or cultural—is fragile but still worth preserving.
The act of redemption is also ecological. These materials don't decompose, and left behind, they break down into harmful microplastics. So, in reimagining them through art, I'm not only reflecting on memory and history but also insisting that what we discard still matters. In a sense, the work redeems both the material and, symbolically, the idea of memory itself.

Why floppy disks? How do you source, sort, and curate their labels, and what role do original inscriptions play in a piece?

Floppy disks fascinate me because they sit at the intersection of memory, obsolescence, and technology. They were once cutting-edge, holding people's work, photographs, and even fragments of personal lives—and now they're essentially useless. I'm drawn to that tension: the fragility of memory preserved on a medium that the world has already abandoned.
I source them from many places—collectors, thrift shops, donations, and sometimes entire boxes found in storage clean-outs. Each disk carries traces of a past life, whether it's a blank surface or a handwritten label. I don't open them to see what's inside; I prefer to preserve the mystery, letting the physicality of the object itself speak. The handwriting, the smudges, or even the way someone cataloged their data becomes a kind of portrait of an unknown person.
When I'm building a piece, I pay attention to the rhythm and pattern of the disks, sometimes highlighting labels and

Taylor Smith | Celestial Freestyle

inscriptions, sometimes obscuring them in layers of paint. They create both texture and narrative—fragments of anonymous stories embedded in the work. For me, those inscriptions are a reminder of how personal technology once was, how data lived in our hands rather than the cloud, and how memory itself can be both intimate and ephemeral.

Do you ever recover or read data from the disks before using them? If so, has anything you found shaped a work?

No—I never recover or read the data on the disks. From the very beginning, it's been important to me to leave them sealed, to respect the privacy of whoever once used them. The allure lies in the mystery: knowing that each disk once carried something personal—work, photographs, fragments of someone's life—but choosing not to unlock it.
For me, the power is in imagining what might be there without ever intruding. The labels, handwriting, and physical traces already reveal enough to spark curiosity. By leaving the data untouched, I allow the disks to function as relics of memory—closed containers of the past that now take on new meaning in a painting. That locked, unknowable quality is part of what makes the work resonate: it reminds us how much of history and memory is forever out of reach.

Appropriation is central to pop art. Where do you draw the ethical and legal lines when recontextualizing brands and iconic portraits?

Appropriation has always been central to pop art, and I see myself working in that lineage. My intention is never to replicate or sell a product but to transform cultural icons, brands, and visual relics into something entirely new. These symbols already live in our collective memory—whether it's a Hollywood face, a fashion logo, or a fragment of advertising—and my work reimagines them in the context of painting, memory, and contemporary culture.

I don't concern myself with the strict legal or commercial boundaries, because I'm not making handbags or neckties for the department store. I'm making singular works of art that reinterpret imagery we already share as a society. In my paintings, appropriation isn't about reproduction—it's about transformation. I filter these symbols through layers of collage, paint, and found material, so that they carry the weight of both nostalgia and critique.
For me, the ethical line is about intention. I'm not exploiting these icons but rather reflecting on how they've shaped our ideas of aspiration, memory, and the so-called "American Dream." In this politically and ideologically divided world, my work offers nostalgic reflections on those shared cultural roots, even as it questions how fragile and fractured they've become.

Your mother's Warhol story and assisting on Keith Haring's Berlin Wall mural are formative moments. What did each teach you that still guides your studio today?

Warhol's story, told through my mother, taught me the courage of vision—how something ordinary could be transformed into culture-changing art. Assisting Keith Haring on the Berlin Wall mural in the 80s showed me the urgency of art in public space, its ability to speak directly to freedom and history. Both lessons still drive my work: to take risks with materials and imagery, and to create art that resonates beyond the studio.

Many works have a candy-colored surface with darker subtexts (consumption, waste, mortality). How do you engineer that tension?

I use bright, candy-colored surfaces to echo the glossy allure of consumer culture, but beneath them I layer themes of waste, memory, and mortality. The tension comes from that contrast—the seductive polish on the outside and the fragility or darkness within. In a way, the paintings act like packaging: shiny and attractive, but concealing something more complex inside.

How did living in Germany shape your sensibility—design, typography, post-Wall Berlin culture?

Living in Germany shaped me in countless ways, both visually and conceptually. I studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and was immersed in a culture where design, typography, and visual clarity are deeply valued. That sense of precision and boldness in graphic language still informs my work today, even when I'm layering paint or collage.
Berlin in the years after the Wall came down was especially formative. It was a city in transition—raw, experimental, full of artists who were questioning history while inventing new futures. That atmosphere gave me permission to take risks, to collapse boundaries between mediums, and to think of art as something that could exist just as powerfully in the street as in the gallery.
Being surrounded by the work of German artists like Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter also shaped my sensibility. Their ways of reinterpreting photography, printmaking, and painting gave me a framework for blurring those same lines in my own practice. Ultimately, Germany taught me to see memory, history, and culture as layered surfaces—always shifting, always open to reinvention.

Nikita Dubrovsky is a ceramic artist working in the genre of miniature sculpture. At the center of his practice are filigree vases no taller than 9 cm. Working within the traditions of formalism, Nikita explores the limits of ceramic possibilities: on a small scale any inaccuracy becomes critical, and every movement must be measured to the millimeter. These miniatures are not merely objects, but a demonstration of attention to material and form. The miniature scale is a way to focus attention—on a curve, on the shift of shadow, on the line where the eye lingers.

Project Statement
My works are a challenge—a challenge to the material, to space, and to my own craftsmanship. By creating ceramic vases only a few centimeters high, I deliberately choose conditions where there is no room for error: the curve of the wall, the thickness of the glaze, the balance of the form—everything must be flawless.

Patricia Carr Morgan

Your project I love you don't leave me grew from photographing glaciers in Antarctica and Greenland. What first compelled you to turn those field images into an immersive installation rather than a traditional photo series?

Climate change was foremost in my mind, and for some time, I had been interested in doing an installation addressing that concern, but had not found the right path. After my trip to Antarctica, I was awestruck and knew what the focus would be, and I have continued working on it for the past ten years. I had been involved in another project at the time, but as soon as it was completed, I went to Greenland to photograph Arctic glaciers and icebergs. To learn about these images, I printed them in both color and black and white, focusing on the vast landscapes as well as the subtle details. I treasure the beauty of these images, but in the back of my mind, the possibilities of an immersive installation were being explored. As an installation artist, fully engaging the viewer is my utmost concern. I believe the viewer's physical motion plays a role in shaping their cognition, and therefore, both the size and shape of the installation were crucial. I wanted to share my experience of unexpected awe and the sharp sense of loss I was feeling. Looking at the completed installation in Blue Tears, the viewer stands beside the seventeen-foot-tall silk organza veils that have a slight motion in response to the air around them. They continue down to the silken imagery of undulating ocean and ice images below. To discover more, the viewer walks around the circumference to see between the layers of fragile, arctic imagery from Greenland and Antarctica.

Patricia Carr Morgan | Ice Greenland & Antarctica

From a small inflatable boat you focused on fractured ice instead of monumental vistas. What does this shift from the sublime to the granular reveal about climate change for you?

The sublime is awe-inspiring, the granular is an intrigued look at small, subtle details, and both are part of a personal exploration. This shift from sublime to granular is at play throughout the series I love you don't leave me. The height of Blue Tears references the sublime, while at ground level, the imagery is more life-sized. Then, one by one, throughout the exhibition, the veils float to the floor, the installation is smaller, until, at the end, twisted and skewed, only one veil is left, but the ticking clock continues. Further exploration of the granular is realized in the two-dimensional images that I crop to highlight

Patricia Carr Morgan | Hubbard Glacier, Alaska | 2024

details in the icebergs and faces of the glaciers. These details are created by moraine that is carried by glaciers for centuries, and ice compressed until the only light it reflects is the deepest of blue. It is ancient ice that has revealed itself. Captured in photographs, these details are elegant, quiet, and contemplative moments from a bygone era, a record of what remained.

What materials, printing techniques, and lighting choices were key to achieving the translucent, sculptural presence of ice in the gallery?

For Blue Tears, many substrates were tested. In addition to translucence, it needed to float down in a gentle manner while also having sufficient body to create the illusion of movement and depth as it rested on the floor. In addition to those characteristics, because global warming threatens the mulberry trees the silk worms depend on, the silk organza has physical and conceptual qualities that add to the project. Early proofing for body and translucence was conducted in my studio, where I hung half-size veils to experiment with the arrangement of images and the veil separation required for optimal transparency. Stage lighting was used in the museum to achieve optimal translucence.

What practical and ethical questions did you face while working in fragile polar ecosystems?

I have photographed in Antarctica twice now, and fortunately, it is highly regulated. For safety and preservation reasons, no one is allowed to travel without being part of a group. When on land, to avoid introducing foreign pathogens, there are strict rules against touching rocks or wildlife. Tourism in these regions has become increasingly popular, and I'm concerned that there is insufficient education about the impact glaciers have on everyone's quality of life.

Did you collaborate with scientists, guides, or local communities, and how did those exchanges inform the work?

My current project is inspiring. It's a collaborative project about the Malaspina and Hubbard glaciers in Alaska with Jack Holt, PhD, who measures these glaciers for NASA, and Ozlem Ozgur, PhD, who is the Arts and Culture Producer for AZPM.
We were in Alaska together to document the culture of the Yakutat tribe and their historical connections to the Malaspina and Hubbard Glaciers. The Malaspina Glacier is the world's largest piedmont glacier, characterized by a terminus of sand and vegetation, while the Hubbard Glacier has a rugged, crevasse-filled surface. I photographed these from a boat and a helicopter, and adding cultural and scientific perspectives creates different and vital imagery that energizes viewer interaction.

Beauty can sometimes anesthetize urgency. How do you negotiate the tension between aesthetic seduction and ecological alarm?

Alarms are ringing about us at an increasing rate, and they are becoming so numerous and sometimes deafening that many have resorted to turning them all off. Instead of sounding another alarm, I want to continue leading people to a personal experience. If, rather than viewing glaciers as a distant stranger, we build a personal connection, there is hope.

What responses from viewers have surprised you most?

That people had tears in their eyes during the performance of the falling veils in Blue Tears.

Patricia Carr Morgan | Blue Tears

Anastasia Suvorova

Your project “Flowers and Times of Day” explores how light transforms perception. What was the initial inspiration behind this series?

I love flowers and always try to surround myself with their beauty. My apartment has a large window that spans an entire wall. On the windowsill, I arrange flowers in glass vessels so they can enjoy natural light.

Anastasia Suvorova | Lavender at Night | 2025

One day I noticed how the sunlight played on the roses standing in that window. Each rose was placed in a separate bottle, and I delighted in watching how the light transformed their appearance throughout the day. In another room, I paid attention to tulips in a glass vase. As the sun set, the flowers became less visible and only the vase itself remained noticeable. But in the bright glow of the setting sun, the tulips came to the foreground, while the vase receded into the background.
These observations inspired me to create a series of works exploring the contrasts and changes that occur with flowers under different lighting. I discovered that the same plants and vessels can look completely different depending on the light. Sometimes even the most striking details disappear when the illumination shifts. These transformations amazed me with their beauty and became the source of inspiration for my project “Flowers and Times of Day.”

You use Korean script (Hangul) as a graphic element in your works. How did this idea come to you, and what role does Hangul play in your visual storytelling?

As part of the artistic component in my projects, I often use naming—the art of creating and applying memorable and meaningful words or phrases to the canvas. Naming not only helps attract attention but also conveys key ideas and concepts through a single word.
As a graphic element, alongside the English language, I often use Hangul, integrating its forms into my visual compositions. For me, Hangul is not just an alphabet but a powerful tool for expressing ideas and emotions in my work. The Korean writing system, consisting of 24 symbols, plays an important role in my artistic projects. I am drawn to this alphabet for its

Anastasia Suvorova | Lilies at Dawn | 2025

simplicity and orderliness; it is easy to perceive and visually appealing. I use Hangul as a means of expression, a way to create rhythm, or as a design element to reveal my concepts more deeply.

I first encountered Hangul by chance while browsing poster designs on the internet. The unusual and beautiful signs that I couldn't recognize captivated me. Later I learned that it was the Korean alphabet. To work freely with this language, I studied it for nine months. This experience gave me the ability to express my ideas, read, write, and confidently navigate the language. Although I do not yet speak Korean fluently, my knowledge is sufficient for accurately conveying my artistic intentions.

Hangul was created in the mid-15th century under the initiative of King Sejong the Great of the Joseon dynasty. The scholars of that time sought to create a simple and logical writing system for the entire population. In my opinion, they succeeded in creating a concise and easily comprehensible script distinguished by its logic and elegant design.

Having a background in both design and photography, how do these disciplines influence your painting practice today?

Experience in these disciplines allows me to experiment with composition, color, and form, and to convey visual imagery with maximum precision. Design has taught me how to structure space on the canvas, select harmonious combinations of elements, and work with visual hierarchy. Photography has strongly influenced my perception of color and light. Working with photography helps me better understand how light and shadow can model the shape of objects, as well as how different color schemes can create a specific mood. Playing with perspective and focus also inspires me to seek new angles and approaches in painting. By using all available digital tools, I can experiment with various techniques and styles, applying programs for creating and transforming images. This allows me to express my ideas more freely and to find original solutions for each work.

The project connects light and time of day with emotions and spiritual states. Which part of the day resonates with you the most, and why?

I like the time from sunset until three o'clock in the morning. It is the most expressive time of day for me: from the vivid colors of sunset to the slow fading of daylight. I especially love watching how darkness descends and everything around falls silent, sinking into a ringing stillness.

Your works combine elements of pop art, photography, and contemporary art. How do you balance these influences when creating a composition?

The foundation of my work is built on several key principles. First, I carefully develop the core concept of each piece—its idea, meaning, and purpose. Next, I focus on the color palette of the composition, which may involve contrasting bright, saturated hues with more subdued tones, or using unexpected forms. I also draw on photographic framing techniques, combining them with design composition theory to create harmonious and balanced visual structures. Finally, I consider how individual elements will influence the viewer.

Do you consider your works to be more decorative and design-oriented, or do you see them primarily as carriers of deep philosophical meaning?

I have a degree in design, so it's important to me that my works are not only beautiful and functional but also meaningful. My paintings can serve as interior decoration. However, I don't classify my works either as pure design or as paintings with an overt philosophical subtext. I love creating vivid visuals with a clear purpose—emotion. And I like to stay at the crossroads, without forcing my art into any particular format or concept, whether it's pure design or contemporary art. Nothing in my works is accidental—that's my philosophy. The beauty of the world lies in impulses, in responses to something striking, and it is within this plane of ideas that my art exists.

Anastasia Suvorova | Tulips at Sunset | 2025

Cazoshay Marie is a multidisciplinary artist, poet, and advocate whose work explores resilience, identity, sustainability, and cultural heritage. A traumatic brain injury survivor, she creates through lived experience, blending visual art, digital art, poetry, and storytelling as acts of healing and empowerment. Her African mask–inspired mirror paintings and mixed media pieces emphasize accessibility, reclamation, and ancestral connection, while the use of reclaimed materials underscores sustainability. She has exhibited nationally, including at the Spectacular Black Girl Art Show (Washington, D.C.), Art Enables "Outside Forces" (D.C.), The Monastery's "The Grand Art Show" (Arizona), Awita Artist Studio's Echoes of Fall (Brooklyn, NYC), and Yavapai College Art Gallery's Transforming Traditions (Arizona). Her writing and poetry appear in The Black Disability Anthology, Ave Astra Magazine, and We the Diaspora x All Black Creatives: The Creative Legacy Project. Featured by PBS NewsHour and in multiple publications, Cazoshay's work bridges art and advocacy, fostering dialogue, empathy, and community across diverse audiences.

Project Statement
Art is my language of resilience, transformation, and empowerment. As a multidisciplinary artist, writer, speaker, and traumatic brain injury survivor, my practice is rooted in lived experience, advocacy, and storytelling. I create to amplify underrepresented voices, challenge perceptions, build community, and explore themes of identity, healing, and sustainability. Through visual art, digital art, writing, and content creation, I foster dialogue that reflects the complexity and beauty of life after trauma. My African mask–inspired paintings on secondhand mirrors invite viewers to literally see themselves within the work, while my use of reclaimed materials underscores reclamation, environmental consciousness, and self-discovery. Sustainability is a core pillar of my practice, guiding both materials and techniques while shaping community engagement. Ultimately, my art is an extension of my advocacy: a catalyst for empathy, inclusion, and reflection that encourages others to embrace resilience and engage more mindfully with the world.

Cazoshay Marie | When I Think of Home | 2025

Cazoshay Marie | She Is Us | 2025

Masahiro Okayama

You first studied marketing before turning to art. How has your background in marketing influenced your artistic journey?

Masahiro Okayama | Walking People

Masahiro Okayama | City | 2023

Marketing views people not as individuals but as groups with shared attributes, and builds strategies and tactics accordingly. Perhaps unconsciously, this perspective influences me to paint not portraits of individuals, but crowds as a recurring motif in my work.

What motivated you to pursue a second bachelor's degree in art at Kyoto University of the Arts in 2023, after already establishing yourself as an artist?

After learning the fundamentals, I wanted to challenge myself academically. It was an important place of learning that helped me find answers to how I should face painting and what I should express.

In your statement, you mention "colors that explain shapes" and "shapes that explain colors." Could you explain how you achieve this balance in your watercolor works?

Colors and shapes are inseparable. Sometimes color defines form more than lines, other times forms suggest colors. I seek their dynamic balance.

Watercolor has a strong element of chance. How do you embrace or control these unpredictable effects in your painting process?

Watercolor is dialogue with water. I encourage accidents that enrich the work. Unpredictability is not a flaw, but watercolor's vitality.

Masahiro Okayama | Blue Motion

Your works often depict city crowds and urban life. What draws you most to the atmosphere of cities as a subject?

Cities embody both order and chaos. The tension between architecture and fleeting human presence fascinates me.

How do you translate the emotions of people in a city—joy, fear, melancholy—into abstract forms and colors?

I avoid depicting faces directly. Instead, I express emotions through contrasts in color and the rhythm of brushstrokes. Gentle blue washes or rhythmic shifts of color fields suggest hidden intentions, passions, and determination that do not appear on the surface.

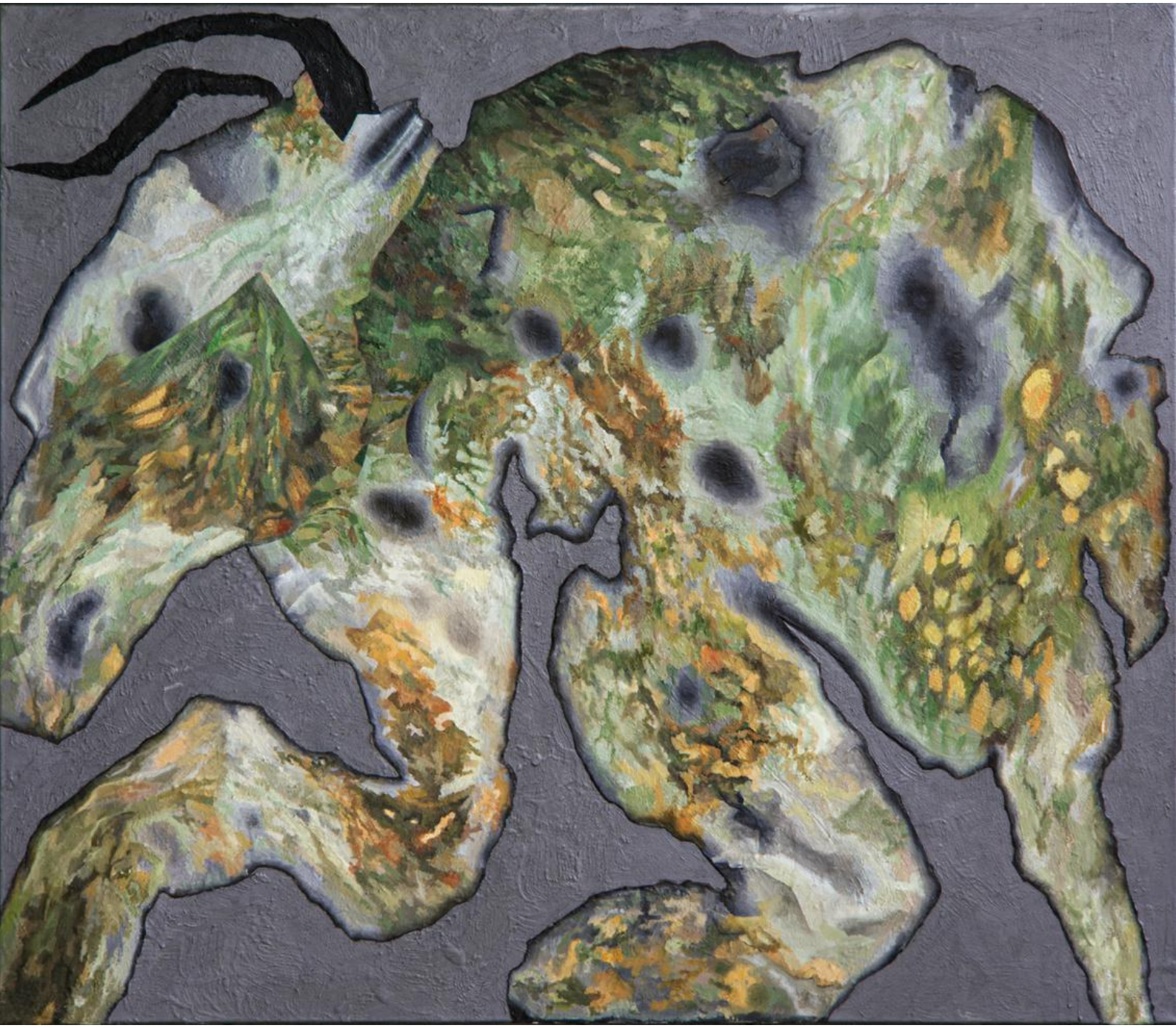
You have participated in many international watercolor events. How has international exposure influenced your artistic vision?

Meeting artists worldwide showed me diverse approaches. My cityscapes became part of a global dialogue on how we live in space.

Patrycja Czajkowska is a 23-year old painter from Poland. She was born in Bydgoszcz. She has been studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź for four years now. Before that she had attended the Bydgoszcz School of Fine Arts for six years. Her main art medium is oil painting, although she also explores other mediums like different kinds of digital art, drawing and photography.

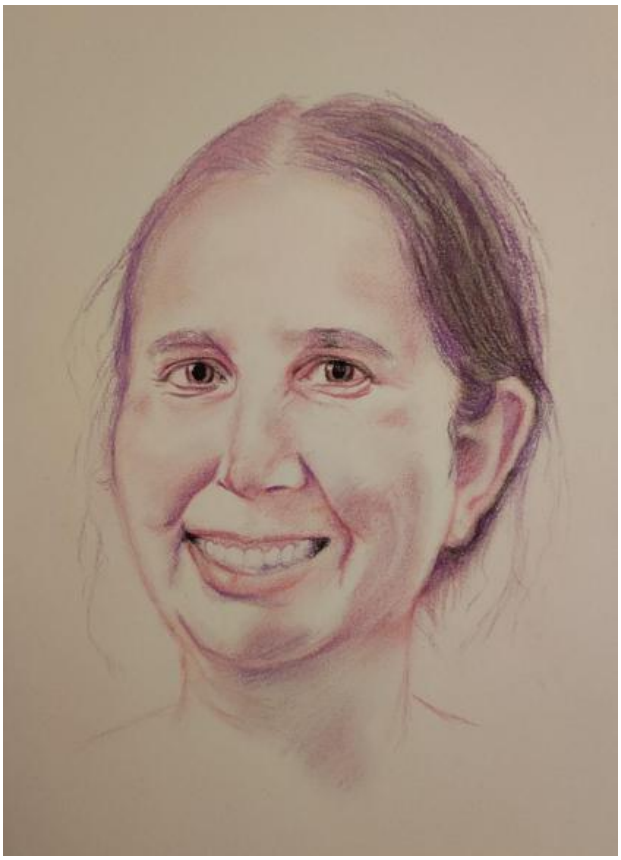
Project Statement
Themes in Patrycja Czajkowska's work vary from abstract, sometimes oniristic to animalistic portraits. It's important for her to be able to be flexible, so whatever feeling she wants to convey can be expressed with a theme that fits it best. Most of the decisions regarding her art are made during the act of painting, her creative process tends to be mostly intuitive. Her artwork is intended to operate on gut feelings and impressions.

Patrycja Czajkowska | Bull | 2025



Patrycja Czajkowska | Baran | 2024

Barbara Wesolek



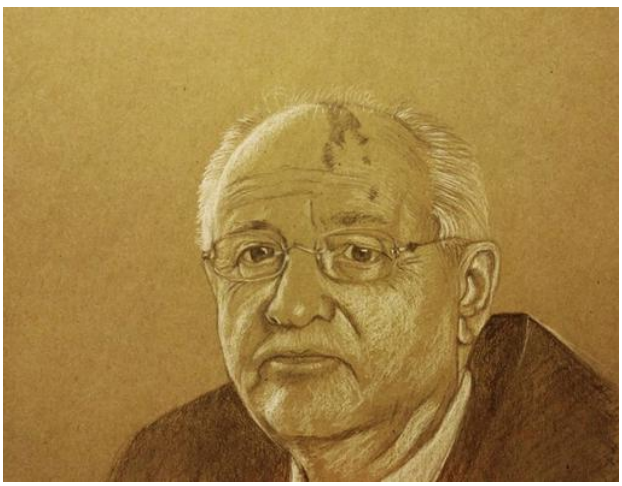
Barbara Wesolek | Self Portrait | 2025

You often work with portraits. What attracts you most to portraying people?

I have a deep interest in feelings, emotions, human values and existence, meaning and sense of life.
For me personally, portraits are not only about the anatomy – the shape of head, lips, or nose, or other superficial things like the eye or hair colour.
Of course, when you portray someone, and want to do it in realistic way, you also must put much effort into all these details. But what fascinates me at most lays deeper. I'm always searching for emotions, feelings, moods, thoughts in that person, or even some aspect of their personality. I want to pour it all on paper or canvas. Show how I see and feel them.
I admire at most the portraits of such great masters like Rembrandt or Van Dyck – they are not just perfect painters or drawers from the technical point of view. They have managed to depict so much more. Emotions, characters, souls...

How do you choose your models – are they people you know personally or historical figures?

Actually both. Mostly I choose the closest people – family members, friends, the loved one. But sometimes I choose historical figures or famous people. Even by choosing other people than my closest ones, these are rather people I mostly feel a special connection to. I am somehow fond of them.
As an example – I created the drawings of Mikhail Gorbatchev or Yitzhak Rabin, because I have much respect for them. Apart from that, there seems to be something really human about them, which I can't explain quite precisely.



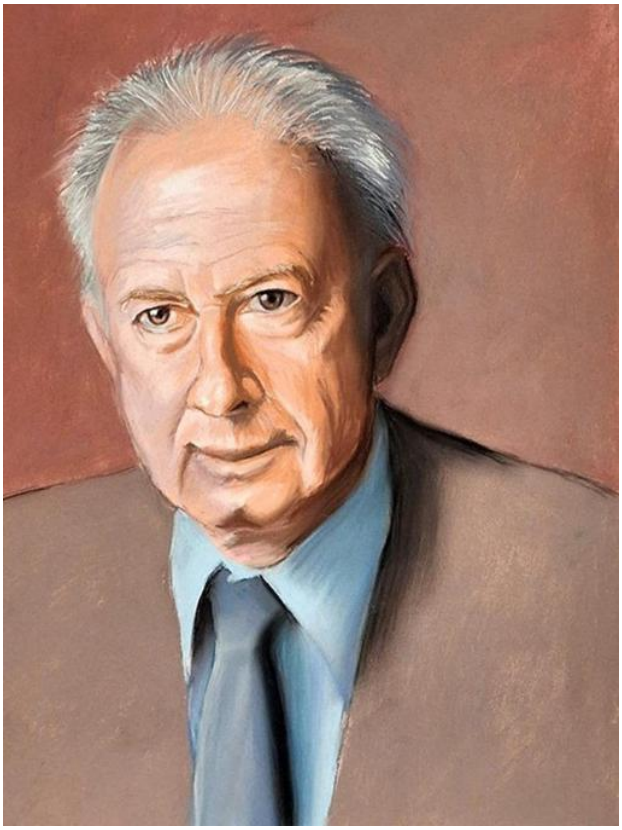
Barbara Wesolek | Portret Michaila Gorbaczowa

Your techniques include watercolor, gouache, and charcoal on beige paper. How do you decide which medium to use for each portrait?

Actually I feel comfortable in soft pastels, white and black charcoal on beige paper, seldom ink - when it comes to drawing; and in painting I prefer water paints – gouache, acrylic paints, watercolour.
In case of creating something more monochromatic, I choose charcoal on beige paper, or even ink. If I want to go for colours, then soft pastels or water paints.

What role does color play in your artistic expression, especially when you use unusual palettes like purple, yellow, or green?

It's easier to explain it on the basis of examples. To crate the portrait of Edvard Grieg I chose blue, green, and yellow watercolour. These colours express the best my peaceful emotions while listening to the „Morning Mood" from the suite "Peer Gynt". Of course it's strongly individual – somebody else could choose for their expression for instance pink, beige, and yellow. What is beautiful about art, one can express themselves in many ways. And the viewer can perceive it on their own way either.
You can use colour in emotional way. It's nothing new – many much greater than me used colours as a form of emotional expression or symbolic, like Edvard Munch or Marc Chagall.



How did your postgraduate studies at Magdalena Abakanowicz University of Art influence your artistic style?

I studied there both artistic graphics, and painting. The first direction was a great time of experimenting with various graphical techniques like: lino print, dry needle, or metal. It was an enriching experience. During the painting studies, the best time for me was the first semester. It was really hard work on drawing and painting. Intensive learning and studying.
Both of these postgraduate studies were a great opportunity to meet inspiring individuals – as well among the teachers, as students.
When it comes to your question, this intensive work had to have some effect on my perception or technique.
Additionally, crucial was the final conversation with one of my teachers. He looked at all the drawings I have prepared in the first semester. Some of them were in pencil, some in black and white charcoal on beige paper. He told me: „You know, when I look on your drawings, I have a feeling that sometimes they were made by two different persons." „Yes, because I don't like pencil. I don't feel it." – I replied. „So do what you really feel you want to." – He told me.
There was also another exchange of sentences during the same conversation. „What would you like to do?" – he asked me. „I want to do portraits." – I answered. „So do them. Just they need to be really good. And if they are, then you can also experiment."
That was a significant talk. It opened my eyes for the right direction. It reminded me what's important for me, and where I want to go.
Actually, I would like to continue studying further at the University of Art, this time non-stationary. The Magdalena Abakanowicz University of Art still doesn't offer however such possibility. So I need to wait for my chance.

Can you share the story behind one of your favorite portraits?

The Portrait of Bianka, my good and close friend, was created on the basis of a photography. It was a snap from her bachelorette party. I believe it was one of really happy moments in her life, and a joyful event for all of us - all the girls attending the party. I wanted to depict her wonderful, striking energy of joy, eyes shining with happiness, and wide smile. The colours used for it are intense and vivid. Exactly as her joy.

Do you approach painting historical figures differently than painting someone close to you?

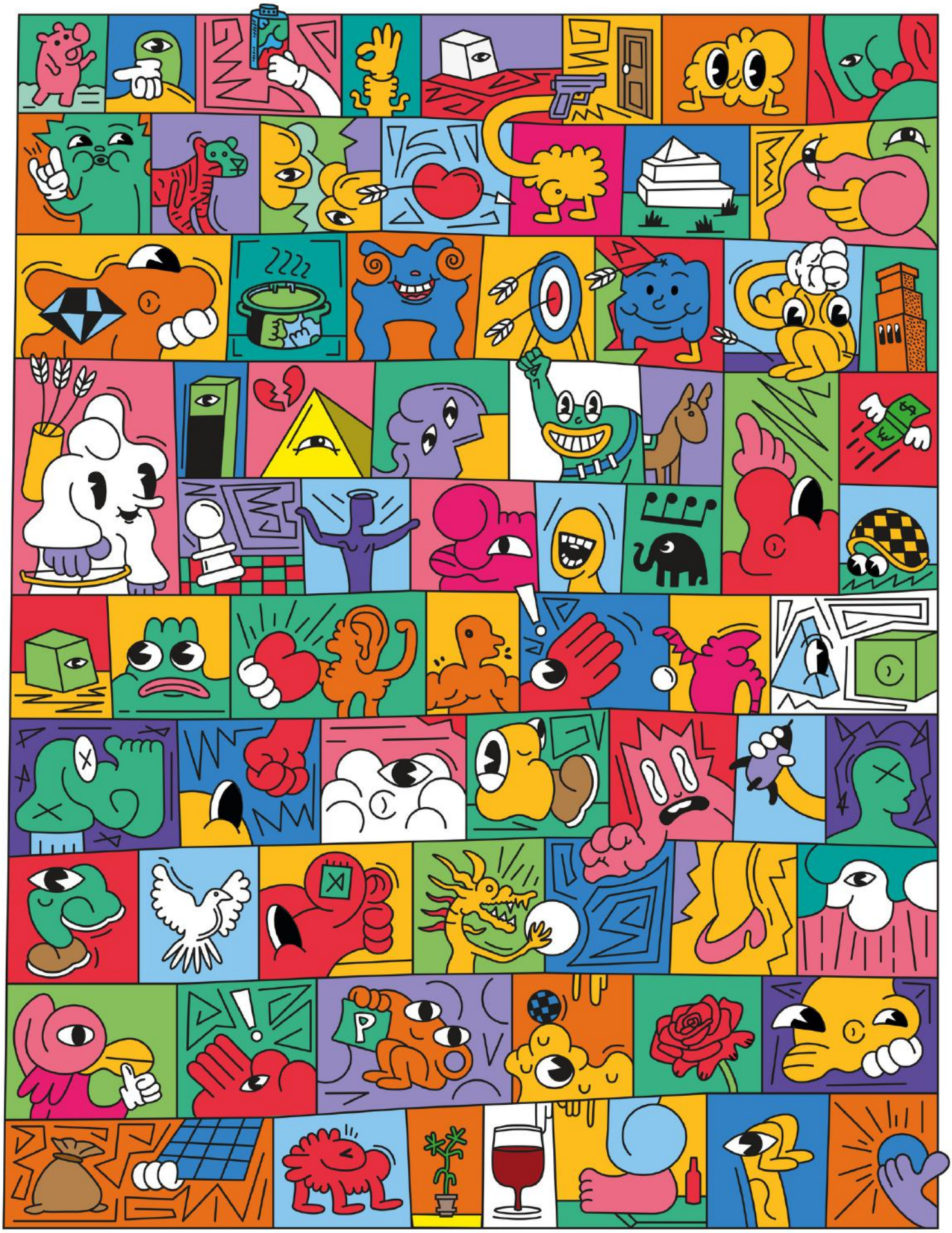
There is surely a difference. Even if you always draw or paint all the portrayed personalities as you perceive them, you know the closest ones the best – you know their attitude, complex personality or behaviour, their strengths and weaknesses. So the image you have is more realistic and detailed.
If you paint a historical, famous figure, or a stranger - it's an impression. How they seem to you. You don't know them usually personally – you have your own, private image of them, relying on historical facts or gossips. It's not realistic. It's much more intuitive, your gut feeling.
But what remains in common – I am fond of them.
We talked with my good friend lately, and she told me that - as for her - the essence of my drawings or paintings are subtle and delicate markings, as if I wanted to be gentle towards these people.
Probably she's right. Drawing somebody is for me similar to soft touch. A gentle feel of their self.

Barbara Wesolek | Portrait Of Bianka | 2024

Phil Huelz is an illustrator based in Cologne, Germany, working across analog and digital media. His creative practice includes playful marker drawings, detailed stencil work, and vibrant digital illustrations, often merging bold linework with cartoonish character design and emotionally resonant symbols. Born with a heart condition, Phil frequently uses the heart as a recurring motif, a visual reminder of vulnerability, resilience, life and human connection. His compositions are built on high-contrast forms and expressive color choices, reflecting a visual language that balances emotion with a sense of narrative play. Phil's practice spans commercial and experimental spaces. Whether designing posters, painting on canvases, creating physical installations, or building limited-edition art, he approaches each medium with the same core intention: to connect, inspire, express and visually translate emotion. His work has been featured in international exhibitions, public art projects, digital showcases, art exposition and he continues to explore new ways to shared meaning and his thoughts into visual form.

Project Statement
I'm Phil Huelz. I create playful, emotionally driven illustrations and art that often feel like a kind of visual playground. My work explores themes like love, heartbreak, connection, music, violence, friendship, and betrayal, but always through a fun, approachable lens. For me, that balance between childlike visual language and real-life experience is a powerful way to talk to people, not at them. I love to work with bold lines, strong colors, cartoonish character design, and meaningful symbols. I'm deeply inspired by graffiti and underground hip hop, their raw energy and creativity. I grew up sketching, hanging out at the skatepark, and listening to old- school hip hop. These influences still shape my style and mindset. I also draw from pop culture, the colors, the energy, the way it shapes the streets. From cartoon figures to iconic visuals, I enjoy reimagining familiar things and blending them with my own art style. I want my work to feel alive. I'm not trying to impress people; I want to connect. And if someone sees a piece and feels even just a little more understood or less alone, then it's done what it needed to do.
„For me, art is personal. It's a heart thing — literally" - Phil Huelz.

Phil Huelz | Betrayal | 2025



Phil Huelz | Mosaique of Moments | 2024

Artem Mayer

You trained as an economist and finished music school earlier. What was the precise moment you realized instrument-making was your path?

The realization came to me during my time at the institute, around my third year. I even took an academic leave to focus on something new and try developing my own business related to musical instruments. At first, it was more of an experiment: I earned my first income by repairing and tuning guitars, combining this with teaching — after all, I had started giving guitar lessons back in 2005.
Gradually, I realized it wasn't just a side job or a hobby. Every new task — whether a minor repair or a more complex modification — brought me a special sense of satisfaction. I could see the results and knew I was succeeding. Over time, this interest grew, gaining knowledge, experience, and confidence. At some point, I understood: this is my path, my true direction. I began doing what I both knew and loved, and that turned out to be my calling.

What most influences your creativity?

For me, creativity is not just an activity or a profession, but a natural, fundamental need, akin to breathing or sleeping. A person may be tired or sleep-deprived, but if they are passionately creating something, they are ready to neglect even the most basic physical needs in order to bring their
idea to life and complete the image. In this sense, art stands above ordinary human needs—it is nourished by the depths of the inner world and does not always obey the logic of everyday life. When external factors such as market trends, expectations, or commercial demands start to dominate the process, it becomes more of a business than genuine creativity. For me, it is important to preserve the purity of the source—that state in which the creative impulse is born not from calculation but from inner necessity—so that it gains true power.

Artem Mayer | Donut Guitar | 2025

What materials do you use? How do you choose them? What draws you to them?

The foundation of my work is almost always wood. I complement it with paints, metal, or plastic—everything depends on the idea and on the task that the artwork itself sets for me. The choice of material is never random: it must correspond to the image born in my mind and help bring the concept to life. But of course, as a guitar maker, I love working with wood most of all. I have been creating musical instruments for twenty years and have learned to sense the material not only with my hands but also with my ears. The choice of wood determines the color of the sound, its depth, resonance, and even the character of the instrument. One and the same instrument, made from different types of wood, will sound completely different. Everything matters: the species, the place where the tree grew, even the way it was sawn.
For example, swamp ash is a rare wood found only in certain regions of the United States. It is expensive and

Artem Mayer | Donut Guitar | 2025

difficult to transport, but it gives a unique tone. Honduran mahogany and Sitka spruce are also rare species that grow only in limited areas of the American continent. I have to search for them literally board by board—sourcing from specialized suppliers all over the world.

Wood has an amazing journey: it travels across the planet before becoming part of a work of art. I have a supplier in Australia, for instance, who sends me ebony for fingerboards. The tree itself doesn't grow in Australia—it was brought there from another part of the world. Then it arrived in my workshop, became part of a guitar, and eventually went to Germany. Who knows where it will end up? There's something symbolic about this: every piece of material carries its own story and continues it in a new form.

At the same time, I love working with many different materials. Each of them opens new possibilities and presents challenges that require study, problem-solving, and experimentation. It's always an experience, a source of knowledge, and a new result. By mastering new materials, I grow not only as a craftsman but also as an artist—and even as a person. After all, every new material is another facet of the world that you discover through creativity.

Tell us about your favorite techniques and materials. Which technique do you enjoy the most? Why did you turn to this particular approach?

I try not to confine myself to any single technique. In my case, the choice always emerges during the process—the work itself dictates how it wants to come to life. Sometimes familiar tools are enough, and sometimes achieving the desired effect requires materials and methods I've never worked with before. This, for me, is the special magic of creativity: constantly exploring, expanding boundaries, and combining what might seem incompatible.

As a result, my practice takes shape as a mixed technique that, over time, might even be recognized as my own. After all, any new style is born this way—through enthusiasts and pioneers who take elements from different fields and create something unique. In my case, it might mean, for example, working with wood that demands sculptural precision and finishing it with liquid plastic, a material from a completely different, more technological and chemically complex sphere. Their combination gives rise to a new visual language, new meanings, and sensations that would be impossible to convey within a single traditional technique.

Each donut is hand-carved wood with a liquid-plastic "glaze." What was the trickiest technical problem to solve?

The most challenging task turned out to be bringing this idea to life at all. For example, I originally planned to create the "caps" of the donuts using the impasto technique, applying a thick layer of acrylic paint. But it quickly became clear that this idea wouldn't work: the decorative sprinkles for the glaze started to dissolve before the paint could dry. The reason was that acrylic paint contains water, and the sprinkles simply melted in it. I had to look for new solutions, and that's how the liquid plastic option emerged, allowing me to achieve the desired effect. This became an example of blending techniques, when an artistic goal required stepping beyond familiar materials.

All the other technical aspects were fairly manageable and routine. Much more questions arose on the artistic side: how best to treat the surface, which

Artem Mayer | Donut Guitar | 2025

texture to choose, whether to paint the “dough” on the neck of the guitar, and which options among the many possible would turn out to be the most expressive. So the main challenge was not so much the technology itself, but finding the perfect balance of form and image to make the final result as convincing and striking as possible.

How do you position the Donut Guitar: sculpture that can be played, or a stage instrument that happens to be sculptural?

The Donut Guitar balances on the edge of two worlds. On one hand, it is a fully functional musical instrument — with its own sound, comfort, and the ability to perform on stage. After all, I am first and foremost a guitar maker, and music has always been my top priority. At the same time, it is an art object, a sculpture containing a hidden idea and image. It works both as an instrument and as a work of art, and it is precisely in this dual meaning that I find its value.

Pop art thrives on the familiar. Why donuts? What cultural meanings did you want to plug into?

The Donut Guitar is not a standalone story but a continuation of my series of guitar-sculptures. Before it, there were guitars made of French fries, iPhones,

Artem Mayer | Donut Guitar | 2025

Artem Mayer | Donut Guitar | 2025

and instant noodles. Each of them can be viewed on its own, yet together they form a single narrative that reveals the core idea.
That idea is quite simple: it’s a playful take on pop art and the blending of different popular objects. In the music world there are also “pop” forms—legendary guitar silhouettes popularized over decades by famous musicians. Everyone recognizes them; they have become part of mass culture. Donuts, French fries, instant noodles are the same, only from the world of food and everyday life. They are commercial, quintessentially “pop” symbols that have turned into universal markers of mass culture.
For me this is a kind of irony about familiar images. At the same time, it reflects the essence of art: nothing is absolutely new, everything is in some way a compilation. Music has only seven notes, and every piece is a variation on old themes. It’s the same here: a donut remains a donut, a popular guitar shape remains a guitar. But when they meet, a new object is born—a Donut Guitar—embodying the very idea of pop art: to take the recognizable and rethink it, to unite the familiar in an unfamiliar context.

Your text reframes reproducibility in pop art as audience-driven via social media. Do you see shares/memes as part of the artwork itself?

Of course, I do. That’s exactly the point. Art is made for

Artem Mayer | Donut Guitar | 2025

people, and if it brings them joy, stirs emotions, or inspires them to share it, then everything has been done right. Take Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, for example: its popularity grew largely because its image was widely reproduced—appearing on posters, postcards, and notebooks. That reproduction helped make it one of the most recognizable paintings in the world. And it's worth remembering that at one time the Mona Lisa "gathered dust in attics" for years, yet today it is the most famous painting on earth.
Today, media work even faster. Reposts, memes, and viral images spread across social networks instantly, giving a work of art a new life in the digital space. Leonardo da Vinci didn't have such opportunities, but contemporary artists do, and it would be strange not to use them.
Pop art was originally built on the idea of reproducibility and quick replication. What was once impossible on a large scale has now become part of everyday life. That's why this style is so close to me: it naturally connects art and mass culture, and in the age of social media it feels especially relevant. You could say that today, for the first time in history, an artist can witness their own immortality.

Have any notable musicians played or recorded with the Donut Guitar yet? What did they say about feel and sound?

Yes, as part of the video about the Donut Guitar I invited my friend Alexey Strike — a well-known Russian guitarist, composer, and teacher, founder of the band Strike, author of solo albums, and participant in many music projects. He played this guitar and made a recording. His impressions were very vivid, and he said verbatim: "It looks sweet, sounds sweet, and the music coming from it should flow sweetly." In short, he really liked the instrument.
The guitar itself is in my workshop, where many famous guitarists and teachers have their instruments serviced. It's hard to miss: everyone who comes in inevitably reacts, takes pictures with it, and tries to play something. Sometimes people even come specifically for the Donut Guitar, just to see it in person and hold it in their hands.

What's next in your series that "collides craft and the irony of consumption"? Can you hint at the next unlikely material or icon?

We are preparing a collaboration with a well-known musician. A European guitar tour with this artist is planned for October. To be honest, it happened almost by chance: we were talking on the phone, and he said it would be great to go on tour with one of my unusual guitars. I shared an idea, and everything unexpectedly fell into place—the stars aligned, and the project turned out to be truly extraordinary.
It continues the pop-art line, but we decided to move away from the food theme. Here's a hint: after the "Donut Guitar" dessert, it's time to... lie back. This will be a bass guitar we are creating together with Stoun Guitars. The music industry in Russia is now on the rise; there is a steady trend toward the development of Russian musical instruments, new brands are emerging, and I am glad to contribute to this process. Overall, I have many ideas and plans. The pop-art direction remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration for me, and each new material or image opens up fresh horizons.

Bianca Paraschiv (b. 1998) is an emerging artist whose profound artistic vision is expressed through painting and graphic arts. A graduate of the National University of Arts in Bucharest, she obtained her Bachelor's degree in Painting in 2020, followed by a Master's degree in Strategies of Plastic Representation in Painting (2022). As a member of the Romanian Union of Fine Artists, Bianca has carved out a distinct place for herself within the contemporary art scene.

Her artistic discipline was shaped early on through three years of piano studies, followed by six years of ballet during adolescence—experiences that cultivated a deep understanding of movement, form, and precision. These influences are evident in the compositional balance and expressive fluidity of her works, where each brushstroke seems to reflect the grace and control once demanded on stage.

To date, her works have been showcased in approximately 70 group exhibitions in prestigious galleries and museums in Romania and abroad, including art salons, biennales, art fairs, and major international competitions. She has also held three solo exhibitions, each adding a new dimension to her artistic universe.

A defining moment in her career is her selection to represent Romania at Expo 2025 Osaka, within the Romanian Pavilion. This prestigious international exhibition brings together outstanding contemporary artists from around the world, fostering innovation and creative exploration across diverse fields. The World Expo is a global event that reflects nations' achievements in technology, culture, and art. The 2025 edition, themed "Designing Future Society for Our Lives", resonates deeply with Bianca's artistic approach, and her participation highlights her essential role in promoting Romanian contemporary art on the international stage.

Her artistic exploration is strongly influenced by philosophy, psychology, architecture, and human anatomy, naturally blending graphic art with painting. Bianca works across a wide variety of media—acrylic, oil, charcoal, liner, and pastels—each contributing to the complexity of her visual language and the expressive power of her works.

In the past four years, her artistic journey has been recognized with 21 national and international awards, receiving distinctions from Italy, Spain, the USA, the UK, Canada, Belgium, and Romania. Her works have been published in numerous art catalogues and magazines, consolidating her presence on the European art scene.

Beyond her artistic achievements, Bianca has also contributed to the academic and cultural field, being selected as a jury member for the LSRS Gala 2024 (League of Romanian Students Abroad), a prestigious competition recognizing academic excellence across various disciplines, including fine arts. This role confirms both her expertise and her impact on the contemporary artistic and intellectual landscape.

With a bold vision and an innovative approach, Bianca Paraschiv continues her artistic journey, creating works that challenge perception, invite introspection, and transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries.

Project Statement

In my artistic practice, I embark on a journey of deciphering human emotions, weaving them into a visual composition that speaks the universal language of the soul. My works are a celebration of the profound and often ineffable aspects of human experience, intended to evoke a visceral response that transcends the barriers of language and culture.

I explore the interplay between light and shadow, form and void, seeking to capture the very essence of emotions and inner states through color—referring, on a subliminal level, to the concept of synesthesia. I choose to work with diverse techniques—acrylic, oil, charcoal, liner, and pastel—in order to achieve maximum expressiveness, transforming each work into both a visual and conceptual experience.

For instance, in my most recent series, Artificial Paradise and True Colours, I have explored the relationship between appearance and essence, between the artificial identities we wear daily and the human need for authenticity. This project visualizes the complex process of discovering the true nature of the self, unveiling the authentic being hidden behind social masks, all through the lens of color theory and the emotions it conveys.

We claim to know ourselves, yet in reality we continue to decipher the infinite facets of our personality, character, and mental processes. Art, as a profound form of self-discovery, has given me the courage to look at myself with honesty and to understand my own true colours.

Bianca Paraschiv | Mirage | 2023

Bianca Paraschiv | Enigma | 2023

Julia Euteneier

Your series With Closed Eyes explores perception and inner states. What initially drew you to the idea of connecting leaves and eyes?

This connection between eyes and plants has been with me for quite some time. About three years ago I worked on a tarot deck, an intuitive hand-illustrated card set that became a tool for self-encounter. In this deck, eyes appeared very frequently. For me, they symbolized intuition and inner perception: everything that moves within us, what touches us, nourishes us, or hurts us. The eye was like a symbol of the ability to perceive what lives inside us, often before we can put it into words.
After completing the tarot deck, I felt the need to explore something more reduced and minimalistic in my drawings. I wanted to work with less, with clearer forms. Even in terms of color, I reduced everything to a single nuance, blue. This color has accompanied me since childhood; it brings calm, depth, and a quiet clarity into my work.
During this phase I began to draw plants, simply because I felt drawn to them. And as I was drawing, I discovered that the shape of the leaves almost naturally suggested eyes. It was not a planned idea, but something that emerged in the process, an organic convergence of forms that had already been moving within me for a long time.

Julia Euteneier | Blooming Retrospective

You mention that your practice follows an inner impulse and is free from academic instruction. How do you see the role of intuition in your creative process?

Intuition plays a central role in my creative process; it is the beginning of everything. For me, intuition is a kind of knowledge that has not been learned, and words I have never consciously thought. Sometimes it appears as a quiet voice, sometimes only as a subtle feeling.
This process is not always straightforward. There are moments when logic intervenes, a logic that judges and evaluates and thereby interrupts the creative flow. At such times I feel how important it is to let go of this inner noise in order to create space for what wants to emerge.
For me, intuition has a great deal to do with trust, with trusting something that wants to reveal itself even when I do not yet know where it will lead me. I believe that we as humans often sense more in the body than we know in the mind. When we follow this inner knowledge, a quiet space opens up in which something can become visible that has always been there. It only takes the courage to trust this silence.
And when I follow this inner impulse, I often feel that I am merely the hands that make visible something that has long existed but until then had no form.

In your works, the eyes do not look outward but rather inward. What personal experiences or reflections inspired this inward gaze?

I was fortunate to grow up with a mother who showed me from an early age how important it is to look inward. She not only taught me this, but lived it herself. That shaped me deeply, this knowledge that in silence and self-perception

Julia Euteneier | Network Of Attention

there is so much to discover, and that it is essential to look inside oneself first instead of focusing on what is said, thought, or expected on the outside.
The deeper transformation within me, however, began when I became a mother myself. Through my three children I experienced an entirely new dimension of self-encounter. They mirrored me, challenged me, inspired me, and showed me that in order to truly see them, I first had to see myself. Through them I came to understand that true love is only possible when it also includes oneself. This process moved a great deal within me; it was not always easy, but it led me into a depth that is now present in everything I do.
Today this inward gaze is not only an essential part of my work, but also an essential part of my life. I cannot imagine living in any other way than the way I now feel and live. My path unfolds in such a way that, no matter what happens on the outside, I first look inward. I ask myself: What does this show me? What does it do to me? What can I learn from it? It is an ongoing process of reflection, of recognizing the world we live in, how it functions, and by which rules it operates. And it is also the realization that in life we do not receive what we want, but what we are.

Many of your drawings transform plant structures into hybrid beings. Do you see these beings as symbolic, autobiographical, or something entirely different?

For me these plant beings do have a symbolic meaning. I see a deep connection between us as humans and the plants I draw. Plants have roots that lie invisibly in the soil. We cannot see them, but they are there, firmly anchored and full of strength. It is the same with us humans: we also have roots that are not visible. They are our origins, our family, our ancestors, all the generations before us from which we have emerged.
These invisible roots carry so much within them: our talents, our view of the world, our patterns, preferences, and also our resistances. Everything that shapes us is anchored in these roots. I see them as gifts. Some people recognize these gifts very early, while others need half a lifetime or more to understand what lies within them and how to use this potential for themselves.
Just as plants need their roots to absorb nutrients and water, we too need these invisible roots to find strength, orientation, and energy in life. They are our quiet source, something that carries us, nourishes us, and helps us to overcome challenges or to set out on new paths.
The theme of growth also connects plants and humans. A plant never stops growing. And we too are constantly in motion, not in the sense of optimization or performance, but in the sense of unfolding. There is the visible growth that we can feel, and the inner, quiet growth that continues throughout our whole lives: in our patterns, in our perception, in our understanding of ourselves and the world.

How does your background in fashion design and dressmaking influence the way you approach composition, texture, or rhythm in your artworks?

I am not sure whether my background in fashion directly influences my art. But what I can say about myself is that there was a reason why I chose to study fashion. Even as a child I had a strong need to surround myself with beautiful things. The atmosphere of rooms, the aesthetics of objects, beautiful clothing – all of this was always important to me. Perhaps this sensitivity now flows naturally into my art. Not in a conscious or deliberate way, but as an inner urge toward beauty, harmony, and something that feels coherent.
Creating beauty is what drives me, whether I am painting, designing fashion, or baking a cake. I simply have to create something that feels beautiful to me.

The series suggests a dialogue between self and world, language and silence. Do you think your art is a form of non-verbal communication?

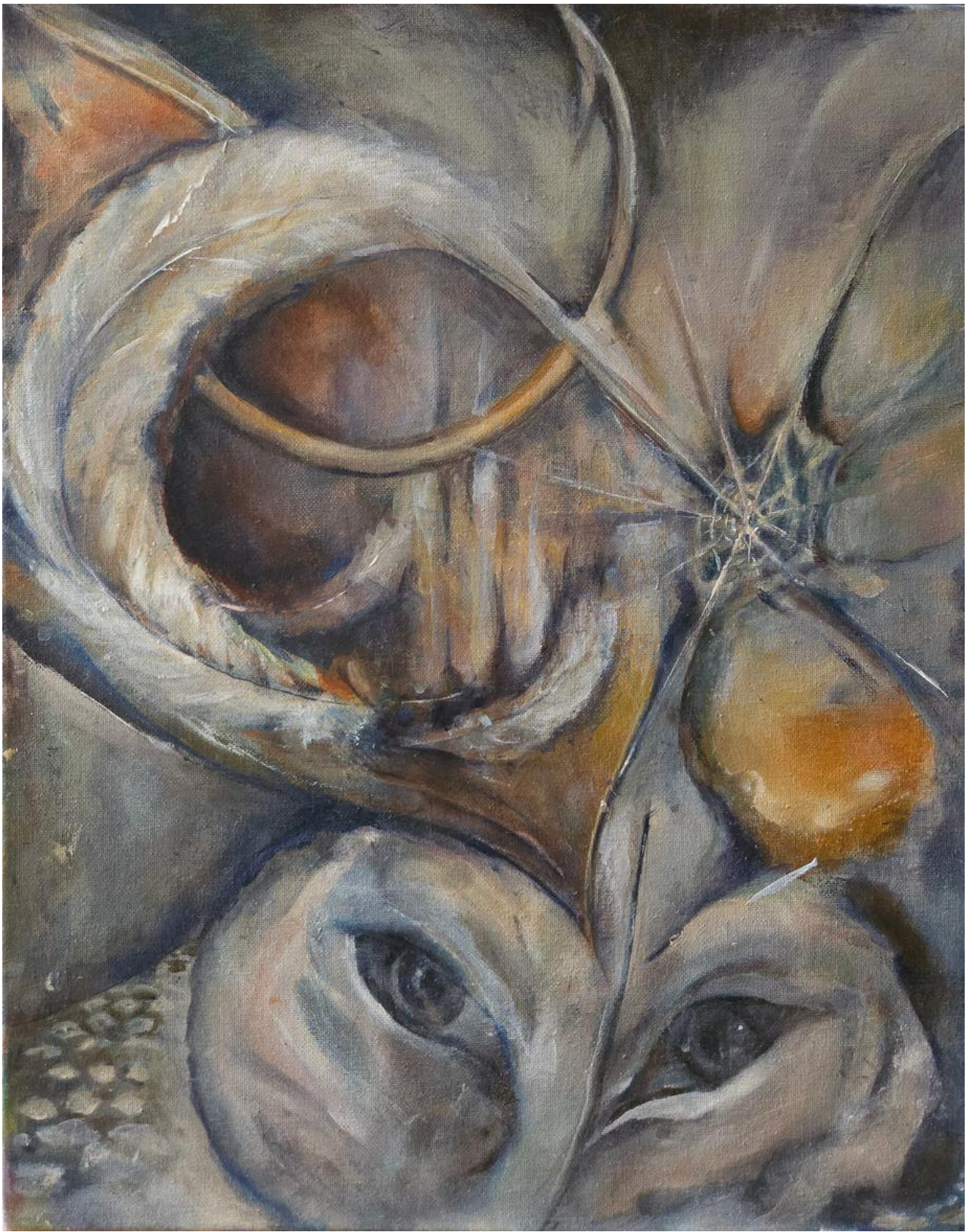
Yes, absolutely, and not only my art but art in general. I believe that this is precisely why art exists: so that we can perceive, sense, absorb, and carry something further without the need for words. For me, art is always a form of nonverbal communication. It opens a space where language is no longer necessary, because what touches us becomes directly perceptible.
A work of art is often much more to me than just a beautiful object. It communicates with me. When I stand in front of a painting, I feel something, sometimes joy or lightness, sometimes comfort, sometimes the memory of a particular time. And I also believe that it is no coincidence when something appeals to us or when we are drawn to a work. It means that something within us, perhaps something we cannot yet put into words, has resonated with the work and touched something in us that words often cannot reach.

In our fast and noisy times, you create a space for slower perception. What do you hope viewers will feel or experience when standing in front of your works?

I have no concrete expectation of what someone should feel or think. It is not about sending a message. It is enough for me if someone stands in front of a work and feels something, even if they cannot name it. If it opens a quiet dialogue in which the person is simply with themselves for a moment, then that is already enough.

Liana Asol is a self-taught,visual artist from Lithuania,whose journey into painting grew from a lifelong connection to photography and nature. What began with a souvenir painting,soon envolved into larger,more expresive works,each created by hand,often accompanied by music,and guided by instinct rather then plan.

Project Statement
I believe that photography,painting, and music are topics that do not require lengthy discussion. These art forms either touch heart or they beauty do not reveal their meaning.



— *Interview*

Jiayi Luo

How has your move from New York to Dublin influenced your creative process?

Jiayi Luo
Luo Jiayi Chinese New Year Gatherings

Relocating from New York to Dublin was a seismic shift—both creatively and personally. I had never set foot in Ireland before moving, and suddenly I found myself in a foreign country with only work colleagues as my initial connection. I've always considered myself adventurous, but the transition was far more emotionally complex than I anticipated.

In New York, loneliness felt like being lost in a crowd—overstimulated, anonymous, constantly in motion. Dublin introduced a quieter solitude, one that urged me to slow down and listen inward. It was like stepping into an actual forest after years in a concrete jungle. That stillness became fertile ground for introspection, and drawing evolved as my way of navigating this new emotional terrain.

Creatively, the contrast between the two cities has been transformative. New York's frenetic energy gave my work urgency and edge, while Dublin's tranquillity has brought depth and reflection. I've become more attuned to subtle details and feelings, and my art now explores how culture and memory shape identity. There is a dialogue in my work between the familiar and the foreign, the chaotic and the serene.

This move didn't just alter my process, it reshaped my perspective. It challenged me to reinterpret my experiences through a new cultural lens, and in doing so, it expanded the

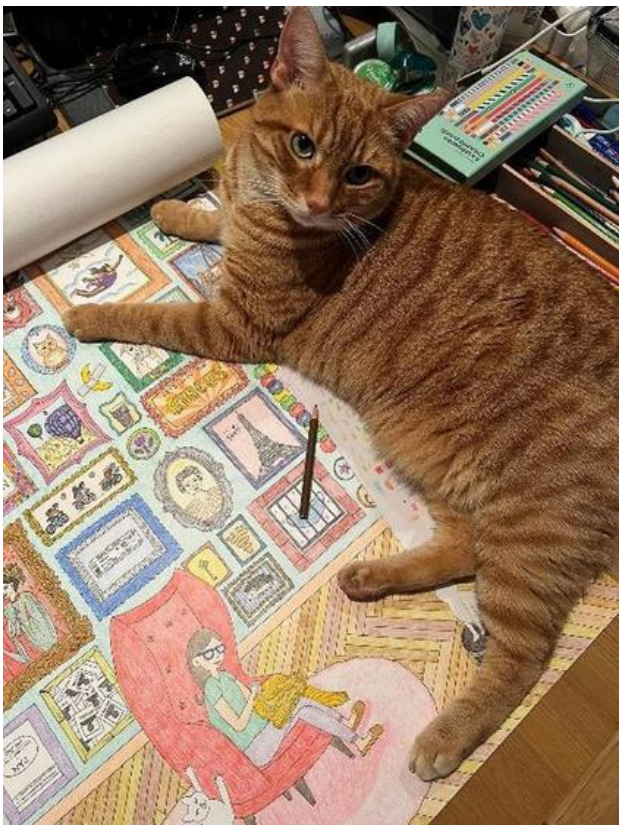
emotional vocabulary of my practice.

What role does your background in math and finance play in your art, if any?

My background in math and finance influences my approach to art in several meaningful ways. It has given me a deep appreciation for structure, discipline, and detail, all of these qualities are essential when working on my large-scale drawings, each of which takes over 100 hours to complete. Over the past decade, I've completed 23 pieces in this series, each measuring 46cm by 61cm. Every work begins with a theme that prompts research and observation. For example, for Series No. 1, Passing by a Bodega, I spent weekends walking through Manhattan, studying the layout, pricing, and character of local bodegas. It became a social engagement project that deepened my connection to the community. Mathematical principles like symmetry, proportion, and balance often guide my compositions. I break down complex ideas into visual elements, assigning meaning to objects and weaving them together into a cohesive narrative. Each component and colour must work in harmony, which makes the process both labour-intensive and deeply meditative.
That said, working full-time in data can be a double-edged sword when it comes to art creation. It sharpens my analytical side, but sometimes I find myself overplanning, debating every detail, becoming too cautious. As I grow older, I've noticed this tension more acutely: the push and pull between control and spontaneity. Drawing, for me, should be liberating, it is a space where rules dissolve and intuition leads. It's a mindfulness practice, a way to enter flow and blur boundaries.
Interestingly, this duality shows up in my mediums. While my illustrations are meticulously curated, my oil paintings are the opposite – rough, bold, and expressive. They are my way of letting go, of reclaiming the freedom that first drew me to art.

How did the "Once Upon A Time" series evolve from a farewell to New York into documenting your European life?

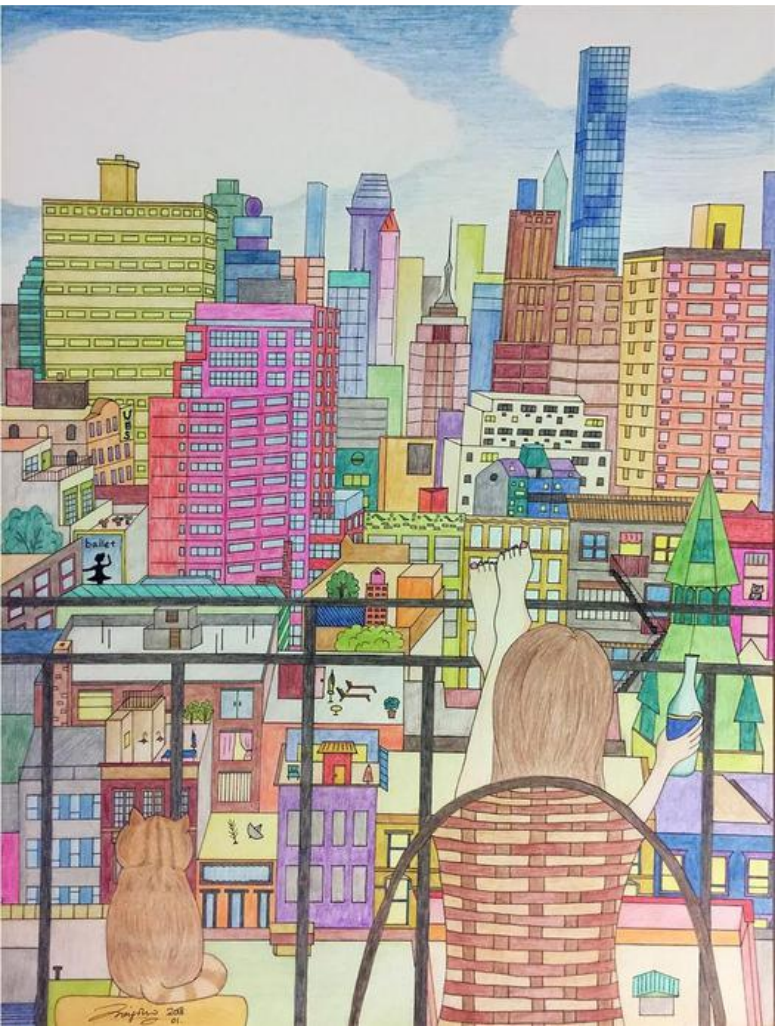
The "Once Upon A Time" series initially emerged as a deeply personal farewell to New York, it is an artistic attempt to preserve the fleeting moments and emotions of a significant chapter in my life. At that time, I was navigating a difficult period marked by a complicated marriage and an impending move away from the city I loved. What started as a form of catharsis and a way to say goodbye gradually transformed into a continuous exploration of memory and emotional discovery.
But once I moved to Europe, the series took on a new life. What began as a documentary of departure gradually evolved into a reflective journal. It started capturing not just memories of New York, but the unfolding experience of building a life in unfamiliar places, forming new relationships, creating new rhythms, and the quiet process of finding belonging in a foreign land.
The latest piece, No. 23: A Decade on the Wall, is a culmination of that evolution. It features individual drawings arranged like fragments of memory, each representing a significant event from the past ten years. The series is no longer tethered to geography or culture, it has become a visual diary of emotional journey. It documents the complexity of cross-cultural adaptation, from nostalgia and longing to discovery and



acceptance.
Each drawing is a reconciliation between past and present, a testament to resilience and growth. Through this series, I've come to understand that art isn't just about capturing what was, it's about making sense of what is, and imagining what could be.

Could you share more about the recurring motif of the orange cat—what does it mean to you personally?

The orange cat in my work is named Omelette, and he is far more than a visual motif. He is a symbol of love, comfort, and quiet companionship for those navigating solitude. His presence throughout my series offers a gentle reminder that connection and warmth are never truly out of reach, even in emotionally turbulent times.
My affection for orange cats goes back to childhood, watching Garfield with fascination. I was drawn to his independence, his sass, and his unapologetic confidence. The colour orange itself carries emotional weight for me, it radiates warmth, optimism, and resilience. Omelette embodies those qualities, serving as an emotional anchor in my work. He represents self-compassion, a reminder to be kind to oneself when life feels uncertain.
Over time, Omelette became a personal narrative device, a quiet companion who travels with me across geographies and emotional landscapes. He becomes a symbol of continuity, of the love we carry within us no matter where we go. In many ways, he is also a role model: independent, confident, and unshaken by chaos.
Then, about three years ago, something unexpected happened. My local vet called to ask if I would consider adopting an orange cat found in the neighbourhood. I said yes without hesitation. Omelette is now real! He sits beside me as I draw, no longer just imagined, but a living presence in my studio and my life. I love him to bits!



Jiayi Luo
Luo Jiayi An Afternoon In Manhattan

How do you balance your full-time data-related work with your artistic practice?

Balancing a full-time career in data with my artistic practice is a delicate but rewarding process that requires intention, discipline, and a deep respect for time. I allocate specific blocks of time, often during evenings, late nights, and weekends, to dedicate solely to creating art. That consistency helps me maintain a steady rhythm and ensures that art remains a vital part of my life, not just a side note.
Interestingly, I see my work in data and my art as complementary. Both demand analytical thinking, patience, and focus. The structure and logic of data work often inform the way I plan and execute my drawings, while my creative practice offers an emotional release, a space to recharge, reflect, and reconnect with myself.
As I've grown older, uninterrupted time has become a luxury. In my twenties, I could lose entire days in drawing, forgetting to sleep or eat. Now, with adult responsibilities stacking up, every minute feels precious. That scarcity makes the process even more meaningful. Drawing has

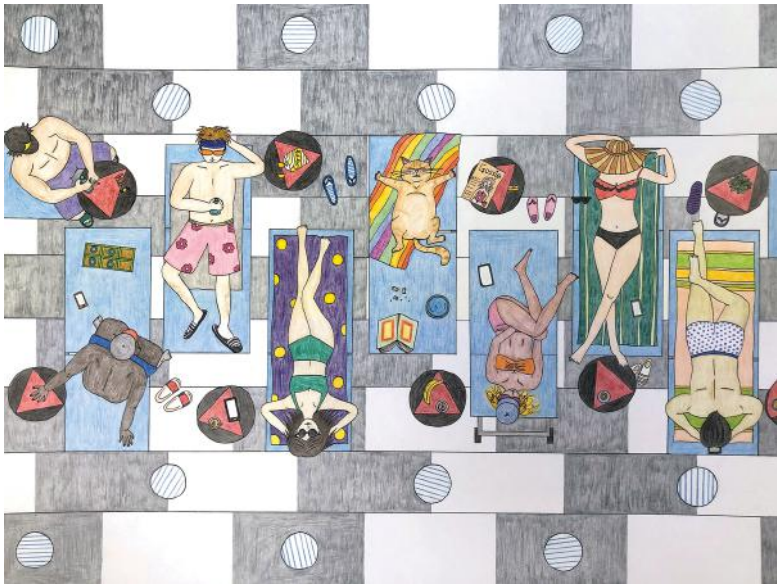
become my escape, a way to quiet the noise and step outside of the daily life demands.
I'm an introvert by nature. Solitude isn't just a preference, it's how I refuel. Corporate environments require constant collaboration, and while I value teamwork, I often find myself emotionally drained by it. Art gives me the solitude I crave. It's where I feel most myself, alive, and at peace.

Each drawing takes about a month to finish. What is your creative routine during this time?

My illustration process unfolds in four distinct stages: brainstorming, drafting, outline tracing, and colouring. Each piece takes over 100 hours to complete, and with a full-time job in data, I rely on evenings and weekends to make steady progress, which takes usually about a month if I stay disciplined.
Brainstorming is where the magic begins. I reflect on my current emotional landscape to decide which story feels most relevant to tell. This stage also involves choosing an artistic approach. For instance, No. 20: Oktoberfest in Munich was inspired by Martin Handford's Where's Waldo, while No. 18: Stories of Barcelona draws from Antoni Gaudí's iconic mosaic style. Once the concept is set, I dive into researching mode, gathering memories, visual references, and cultural context. It's a liberating phase, full of imagination and possibility.
Drafting is where the composition takes shape. I carefully consider how each element contributes to the narrative, ensuring that every detail aligns with the emotions I'm trying to express. I often explore different ways to draw an object, for example, to decide whether it should be more detailed or more cartoon-like. After the sketch is complete, I trace the outlines with ink, a fast but irreversible step that locks the story into place.
Colouring is the most time-intensive stage. I'm meticulous about colour harmony, testing each shade on draft paper before applying it. This slow layering process allows the emotional depth of the piece to unfold organically.
It's a meditative routine that not only brings the illustration to life but also gives me space to reflect and reconnect with the story I'm telling.

Do you see your art as more of a personal diary or as something meant to connect with a broader audience?

My illustration began as a private diary, it is an intimate space where I could process delicate emotions and document personal experiences. I never intended to share it publicly. These pieces were created during moments of vulnerability, and for a long time, they felt too personal to expose.
I practiced graphic design besides illustration, therefore I always maintain a social media presence for my design work. But when I started posting my illustrations on social media, something unexpected happened. People reached out to say how deeply the illustrations resonated with them—how they felt seen, comforted, even joyful. That response shifted my perspective. It made me realize that while the stories are mine, the emotions they carry are universal. Moreover, people tend to appreciate art that's made by hand and comes from the heart.
Today, my work still serves as a visual diary, capturing memories, transitions, and emotional landscapes. But I also see it as a bridge that invites others to reflect on their own journeys. Themes like belonging, resilience, and emotional vulnerability run through each piece, and I hope they create space for empathy and connection.
Sharing my art has helped me feel less alone. It has given me a sense of community, and reminded me that even the most personal stories can speak to something collective. So while the origin is deeply personal, the intention now is to connect, to offer comfort, to spark dialogue, and to celebrate the shared human experience.



Jiayi Luo
Sunbathing On A Rooftop
2020

Svetlana Golofaeva
My paintings are embodied experiences, emotions I have lived through, expressed on canvas through images and objects. Painting for me is like breathing. In the moments of working on a painting, everything around ceases to exist—there is only me, the paints, and the canvas.

"Onions and Garlic"
It was a most beautiful Indian summer day! The air of the kitchen was filled with the scents of autumn drifting in through the open balcony window… On the black countertop lay ripe bulbs of violet and golden colors. The composition of a future still life appeared before my eyes on its own… "Burlap, hanging from the darkness onto the wooden surface, onions and garlic in all their beauty, lying upon it"! I wanted to draw attention to and emphasize the charm of vegetables—unpretentious, simple, and accessible.
People have different attitudes toward onions and garlic: some love them, some cannot stand them, some are allergic, while others cannot imagine a day without the aroma of a freshly cut onion. Yet everyone is united by one thing—the desire to receive aesthetic pleasure from contemplating beauty, whether created by nature or by human effort. Let us enjoy it together!

"Daisies in a Pot"
Ancestral home, family house, native home—what is it like? We know all its cracks, the dried-out window frames, the wooden canopy built over the porch, the bench pressed close to the wall—everything familiar and dear…
Like our lives, with birth, blossoming, and decline, so too does our Home pass through these cycles. And just as the lives of those who dwell within it, the fate of a family lineage, so also the House itself is directly influenced by Nature. It reflects in the clear blue sky through old windows, in the bright sun casting highlights on surrounding objects and giving them vibrancy, in the grass boldly growing through cracks in the porch, in the freshly picked daisies from the field.
There are many daisies! So many! They stand in a simple clay milk pot on an old handwoven cover, so as not to wet the already dried wooden boards of the bench. The sun! There is so much of it! So many bright colors! Life goes on.

Svetlana Golofaeva | Onions and Garlic | 2023

Svetlana Golofaeva | Daisies in a Pot | 2025

Olha Vasyshcheva

You started your career in digital technology and graphic design. How did this background influence your transition into painting?

It gave me an understanding of the clarity and structure of digital systems, the importance of error analysis, and extensive experience in illustrative graphics. At the same time, it showed me how valuable a mistake can be in a well-organized system: sometimes a glitch or an accident sparks the creation of a new technology, a new direction, or even a new masterpiece.

In 2020 you received a formal art education. What was the most important lesson you learned during your studies?

I realized that drawing follows strict rules and does not forgive mistakes, whereas painting embodies all your inner impulses and aspirations—it is the artist's song, a reflection of their inner world.

Moving to France seems to have played a significant role in your work. How did the landscapes and atmosphere of France shape your artistic vision?

I love the authentic, cozy seaside towns of France, the clusters of houses with tiled roofs, the gentle azure sea and palm trees, the white masts of boats swaying in the harbor—everything reminds me of my native Crimea, from where I moved. In addition, I worked in France as a landscape designer, so my knowledge of plants and love of nature help me express on canvas my admiration for harmony and beauty in nature and in life around us.
We live in a time when awareness declines, when there is a shift from deep reflection to simplification of forms and feelings, to primitivism and superficial thinking—from spiritual values to material ones. Hence comes the pursuit

of hedonism, the reckless attitude toward ecology, and human isolation. Yet, as Thales said, we are all one. We are all children of Mother Earth, a living self-regulating organism according to James Lovelock's theory. We are all sailing in the same "ark." That is why I am drawn to themes that critique the Anthropocene, explore ecology, the role of women, self-knowledge, and self-realization.

Your manifesto focuses on "freedom from networks." What personal experiences inspired this theme?

We live in a digital age where social networks increasingly take over our lives. I see how the younger generation becomes addicted to gadgets and how the time for live, direct contact between people shrinks. I love to communicate offline, to look into a person's eyes and feel their presence. It is painful to realize that we are losing this living connection. Therefore my angel, with an anxious, questioning gaze, calls God from a canvas set against the skyscrapers of a modern city.

How do you balance between criticizing digital hyperrealism and using modern digital tools in your own creative process?

Artificial intelligence has firmly entered our lives—this must be acknowledged. I also use AI in my practice. But I call for maintaining a balance between artificial intelligence and your own creative thinking, which must be developed. No intelligence can replace my vision, my expression, my experiences, reflections, metaphors, and associations that I pour onto the canvas. Yes, AI can be trained in your style and manner, but you should rely only on your own mind and life principles.

Many of your works feature metaphors and references. Could you describe your process of choosing symbols for your paintings?

Symbols and metaphors emerge unconsciously—from the subconscious, from experience—during the process of embedding meaning. Later I consider how justified their use is in the painting, how they connect with the concept, and whether they can deepen the meaning or emphasize the problem. In my painting Attraction of Energies there is a reference to the Polish artist Karol Bak and a metaphor of Earth's energy, warming, protecting, and reflecting with warm highlights on the girl's face.

Your works combine oil, acrylic, and textured paste. How do you decide which material or texture to use for a particular painting?

I paint in the technique of realistic impressionism with elements of metamodernism, using oil paints on canvas. I contrast the transparency, smoothness, depth, and colorfulness of shadows with the rich impasto and strength of highlights. When it is necessary to emphasize fluidity, lightness, or the three-dimensionality of a composition, to intensify the impression or convey an image, I use texture paste and acrylic paints. I engage in dialogue with the viewer through the eternal themes of love and kindness, so that, as Boris Groys proclaimed, through transforming our environment and changing our behavior we can change the world for the better. After all, we are all responsible not only for our own lives but also for the lives of future generations.

Margeaux Lim graduated from the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP), where she focused on installation and ceramics. She has participated in numerous residencies and received several awards, including Treasure Hill Artist Residency, Starworks AIR, Odyssey ClayWorks AIR, The Steel Yard AIR, the Society of Experiential Graphic Design (SEGD) Award in 2022, the Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award in 2021/2022, the Emerging Artists Exhibition at Summerfair 2021, and contributions to the DAAP National Conference on the Beginning Design Students (NCBDS) in 2019.

Project Statement
Margeaux Lim is an artist with an environmental agenda who aims to bridge the gap between humans and the environment, addressing the disconnect caused by our anthropocentric culture. By working with found objects, natural iconography, and symbiotic cycles, she creates immersive and ephemeral installations that engage the senses. Lim's work is not merely observational; it speculates on kinetic energy and relationships among various forms of life, both macro and micro.
She explores the ecology of human and non-human relationships through the study of growing organisms, flowing water, and the juxtaposition of natural and industrial materials. These elements become collaborators, producing new events and encounters that result in a continuous orchestra of art taking root. Her work highlights the regenerative abilities of nature, prompting a reevaluation of how humans engage in this ongoing cycle—an effort to restore ecocentrism. Lim believes that when we begin to view life less as a hierarchy and more horizontal, we can start to work with nature rather than against it.

Margeaux Lim | Spirit of Resourcefulness | 2025

Margeaux Lim | Spirit of Resourcefulness | 2025

Taghari18

Taghari18 | Masterpiece forms | 2024

Your works combine architecture-like structures with abstract compositions. How do you usually begin a new piece — with a concept, a shape, or a mood?

I usually begin with “shapes.” I start by drawing lines or structures that come to mind, and these gradually evolve into concepts or emotions. The architectural structure serves as a kind of foundation, and by adding abstract elements and moments of chance, the work takes shape.

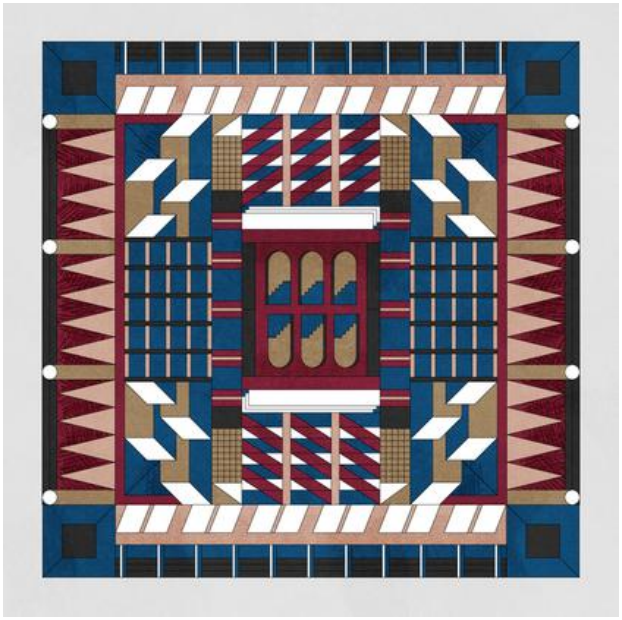
You explore the intersection of media and storytelling. How do you see graphic design functioning as a narrative tool?

I believe graphic design is a powerful medium of storytelling because it conveys emotions and images without words. The relationships between shapes and colors tell their own story, and the narrative is completed through the viewer’s imagination. That open space for interpretation is what I find most compelling.

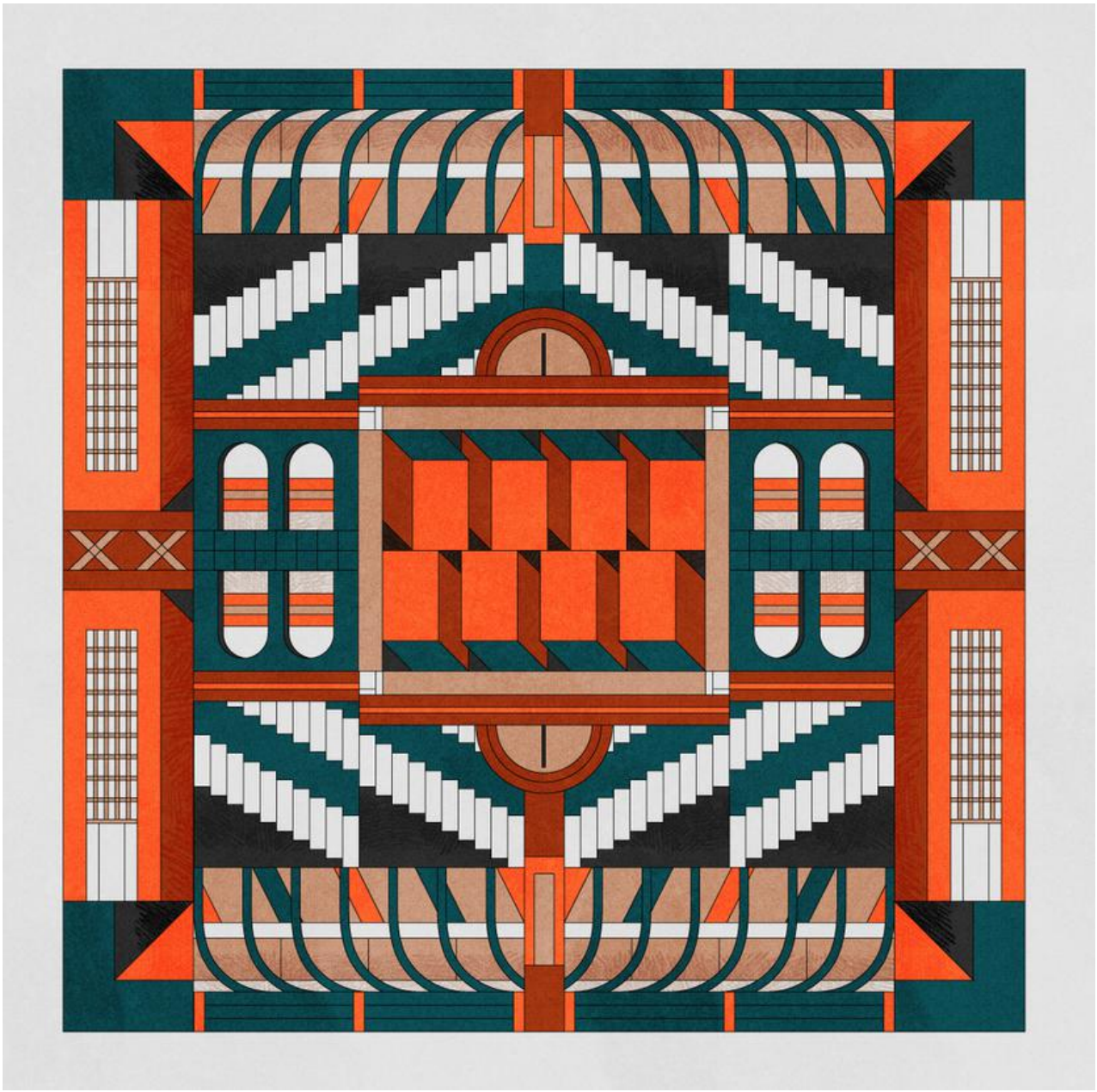
Many of your works include symmetry and strong geometry. What attracts you to these forms?

Symmetry and geometry represent “stability” and “order,” yet with slight disruption they can create strong tension and rhythm. That balance feels very musical to me, and it has become a highly comfortable means of expression.

How do you balance between client-driven projects (event visuals, spatial design, motion graphics) and your personal artistic explorations?



Taghari18 | Dawntown | 2024



Taghari18 | Dawntown | 2024

Client work is about responding to “the goals of others,” while personal work is about facing “my own questions.” Moving back and forth between the two allows them to stimulate each other, leading to new perspectives and techniques.

In your works blending character design with abstract graphics, what role does “human presence” play in your art?

In my work, the presence of the human figure serves as an “entry point” for viewers to interpret emotions and narratives. By abstractly reconstructing historical paintings or well-known motifs, I aim to create a new interpretation while keeping a recognizable human form. By simplifying the face to its bare minimum, it is not received as a specific individual but rather as a “universal human presence.” This allows viewers to project themselves or others into the work.

Which techniques or digital tools do you use most often in your process?

I mainly use Adobe Illustrator and Procreate. Illustrator helps me explore shapes and structures, while Procreate allows me to add intuitive drawing and subtle nuances of color. Hand-drawn sketches are also essential, as analog spontaneity brings freshness to digital work.

Who or what has influenced your visual language the most?

Music has had a major influence on me. I reflect rhythm and a sense of composition in my work. Architecture and urban landscapes are also strong sources of inspiration. As for people, I was deeply influenced early on by the Bauhaus movement and by Japanese graphic designers.

Kasper (Anastasiia Pohorelova)
I am a young artist from Ukraine. I studied in art school of Kyriak Kostandi in Odessa. Currently I am living in Vienna and studying art history! I am planning to build my career in art industry as an artist and illustrator.

Anastasiia Pohorelova | Black Queen | 2025

Anastasiia Pohorelova | Still Life with the Leg | 2025

Spring Break Jake

Spring Break Jake | Nightlife Rags

Your artist statement mentions "death on holiday" as a recurring symbol. Can you explain how this idea developed and why it resonates with you?

The full development actually goes all the way back to childhood. My happiest memories were family trips to Florida for spring break, so even at 36, the idea of being on a beautiful tropical vacation still looms large in my mind as being representative of the good parts of life. However, I recognize that while I might be in paradise, the fullness of life still takes place outside of my tourist lens.

Basically, the idea of death on holiday became the simplified way for me to visually convey the contrast and contradictions that make up the human experience. Everything is temporary, and we simply can't have the good without the bad. Truly accepting those facts can bring a lot of inner peace to our lives when times inevitably get tough.

Spring Break Jake | Painting Bedtime

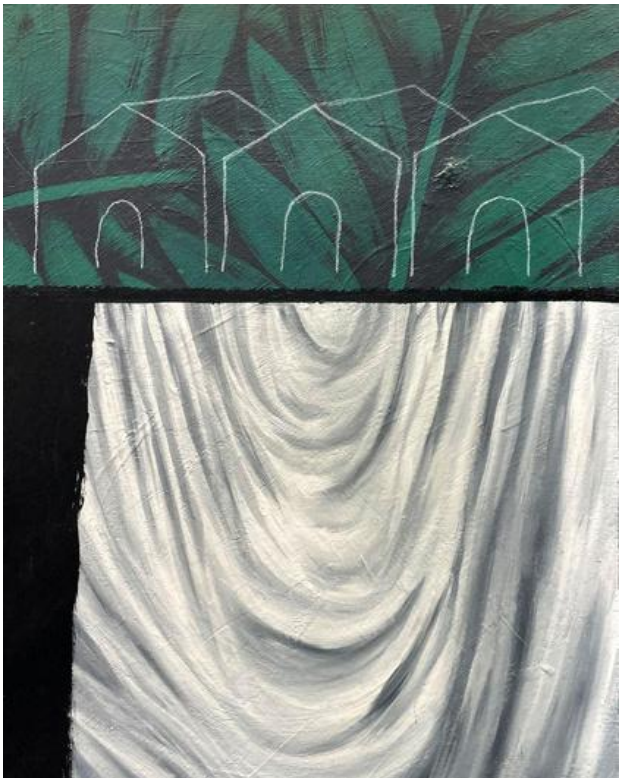
Many of your works balance light and darkness, paradise and mortality. How do you approach this duality in your creative process?

In large part, through color.

I try to see which ones come to mind when I think about being in that state of tranquility, the one I find most when sitting on a warm beach with the sun on my face, and then contrast that with the rich blacks and tinted greys that often represent difficulty and death. And it's the same idea with the imagery I use.

The use of fabric-like textures and drapery is striking in your paintings. What role does this motif play in your visual language?

That imagery is a recent evolution in my work to specifically talk about mental health through the lens of sleep, or more specifically, sleep deprivation and insomnia. I started painting soft,



Spring Break Jake | Handle With Care

draped bed sheets along with my usual amount of heavy texture in an effort to convey the dual realities that can exist at night. While a dark bedroom might appear quiet and still, an insomniac's inner world is often loud and chaotic.

Nature, especially tropical plants, appears frequently in your works. What is the symbolic or personal significance of this imagery?

It kinda goes back to the whole "death on holiday" theme. I get so much joy from looking up and seeing palm trees and huge, lush monstera plants or tall, arching banana leaves. Tropical plants are so tied up in my mind with joy, happiness, and peace that they're meant to represent the good in life.

How do found materials and textural layering influence the way you think about mental health in your art?

The layering and texture that comes from using found materials was really the basis for thinking about mental health in my art. We all have so much going on in our minds that may never be seen or known by anyone else, but those hidden thoughts and feelings play a massive role in shaping who we are and the way we interact with the world. In my paintings, a lot of the layers end up hidden or only lightly affecting the surface, but all of them together still add up to be a whole, complete piece.

Do you see your art more as a personal therapy or as a message to others about vulnerability and acceptance?

To be honest, I think it's a pretty perfect 50/50 split. I get so much joy and fulfillment out of the painting process that I'd be naive to think my work is more a message to others than it is personal therapy. I suppose the hope is that the viewer will get more from a piece than I do, but because I'm able to express so many thoughts and feelings through my art, it's probably more so the other way around.

What advice would you give to emerging artists who want to embrace vulnerability in their practice without fear?

Start by embracing vulnerability in your day-to-day life. For me, therapy has helped immensely in this regard, but even starting to slowly open up about certain parts of yourself to friends and family will lead to increased comfort around vulnerability in your artistic practice.

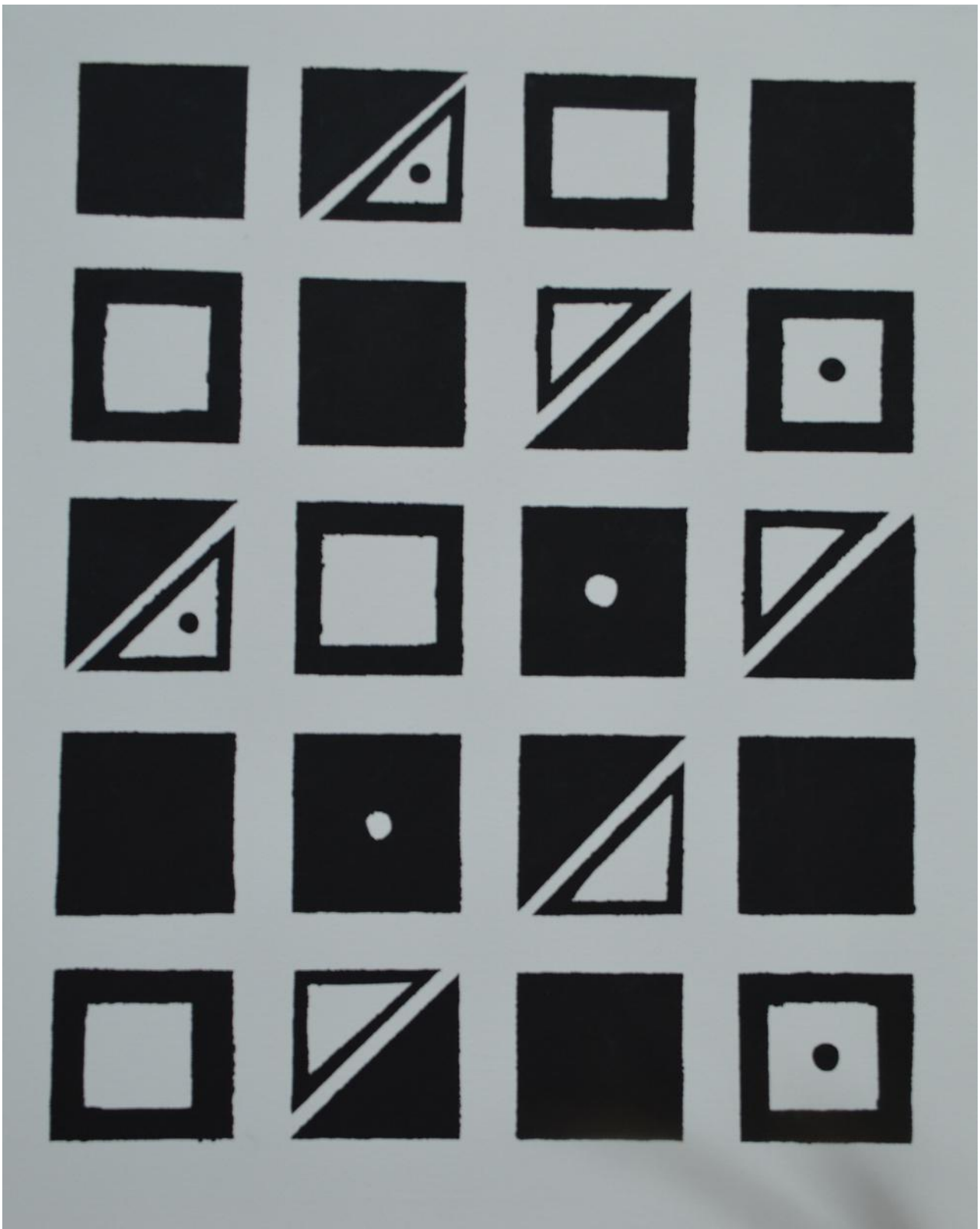
Spring Break Jake | Nothing Stops The Sun From Rising

Oksana Aldendeshe

I am a Los Angeles–based artist and law student whose work blends abstraction and minimalism to reflect on human relationships and personal experience. My passion for art stems from my estranged father, an abstract artist, and was reignited during the challenges of early adulthood. For me, creating art is both an outlet and a way to give form to the complexities of life.

Project Statement

Through abstract and minimalistic forms, I explore the connections and tensions within my relationships and environment. Working with color, texture, and shape, I aim to capture such experiences through painting.



Oksana Aldendeshe | Squares | 2025

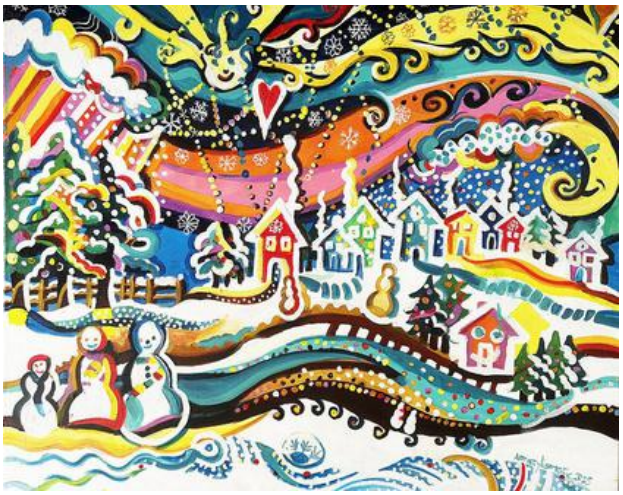
Oksana Aldendeshe | The Lovers | 2025

Amarylismatic (Maria Matic)

Paintings are unspoken words and unheard music that have been used since ancient times to showcase presence, existence, hopes, and prayers for a better future. They were embracing the walls of caves and buildings.

How did your upbringing, surrounded by art, literature, and music, shape your artistic vision?

Growing up in an environment filled with art, literature, and music greatly influenced my artistic vision. Art, in its various forms such as music, acting, writing, painting, and photography, serves as a powerful medium to express emotions, ideas, and thoughts.
I find that the best painting experiences often occur while listening to good music, as the rhythm and melody inspire my brushstrokes to dance on canvases. The titles of my paintings and the stories behind them are like small, important narratives that resonate with ideas and connect with the public.



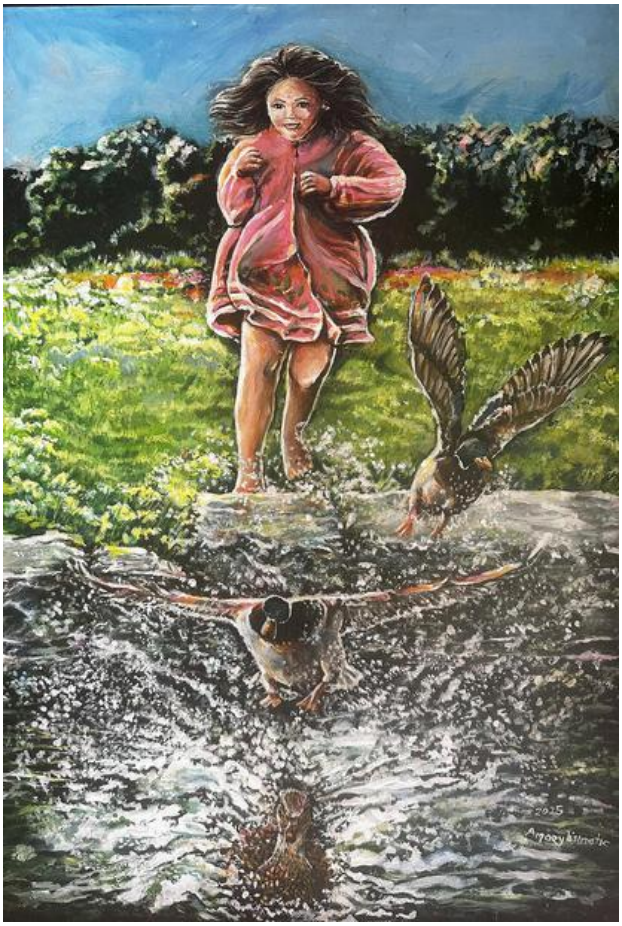
Amarylismatic (Maria Matic) | Winter Magic

What role did your father's artistic journey play in inspiring your own path as an artist?

My father's artistic journey has played a significant role in inspiring my own path as an artist. I have always been captivated by stories of family members or close friends who inspire younger generations to pursue similar creative and professional paths. In my case, this was the profession and hobby of my father. My father's passion for drawing life portraits when I was just a child left a lasting impression on me. Even now, my greatest delight is in portrait and figure painting set against a landscape.

You've lived and worked across multiple continents. How has this multicultural experience influenced your art?

My architectural professional career spans over 5 continents (North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia). To accomplish a successful architectural project, it is crucial to understand the place and what will bring a positive outcome to the people who will be using, working, and living in that building. In the same way, I approach painting with the same mindset. I would like to transmit positive energy and positive outcomes through painting. For instance, my painting "Tree of Life in Spring," which will be exhibited at the



Amarylismatic (Maria Matic) | Who Is Faster

Venice Art International Show this year, is achieving this goal by connecting with viewers and evoking positive emotions.

Nature is a recurring theme in your paintings. What is it about nature that resonates so deeply with you?

Nature is a profound source of inspiration. We are all interconnected with nature, and its vast beauty and complexity continue to inspire and challenge us. The intricate organic forms, geometry found in nature have been a subject of study and admiration for centuries by artists, scientists, and mathematicians alike. Nature is a source of a unique and endless color palette. It was explored and cherished by great artistic and scientific minds like Leonardo da Vinci.

What role do layers and transparency in paint play in achieving the luminosity in your works?

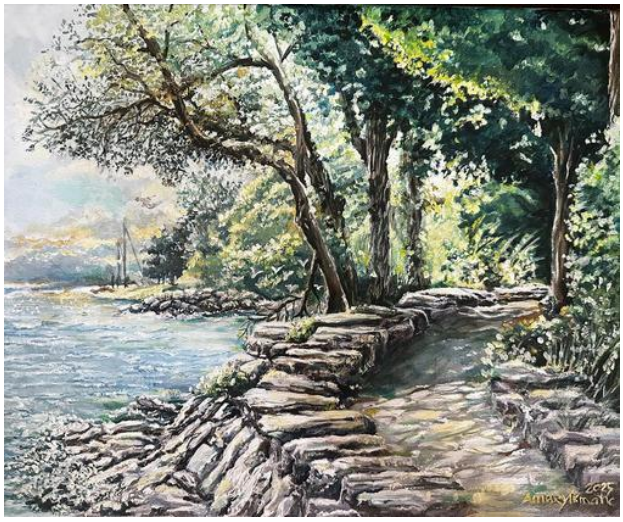
I believe that the layering technique is essential in creating luminous and dynamic paintings, making them come alive. When I paint with acrylics, I utilize multiple layers to add depth, light, and a sense of movement to my work. Despite the common perception that acrylics create a plastic effect, I find that the layering technique can mimic the richness and luminosity of oil paintings, enhancing the overall visual impact of my art. I also paint in oils layer by layer.

Viewers often say they can "hear birds" or "the sound of waves" in your paintings. How do you feel about these sensory associations?

I am delighted when viewers connect with my paintings on a sensory level, hearing sounds and experiencing emotions that resonate with the artwork. It brings me joy to see people engaging with my art, sharing their life stories, emotions, and finding personal connections within the paintings. These sensory associations create a dialogue between the audience and the artwork, enriching the overall experience and giving the paintings a deeper, more meaningful purpose.
Some hear birds, waves, they see themselves in the painting, and some start to mimic flying like a bird. When a painting evokes emotions and encourages the audience to talk about their experiences, then the painting is finished, and its purpose has been achieved.

Your art radiates joy, harmony, and positivity. Is this an intentional choice, perhaps a response to today's world challenges?

People face various problems and daily challenges throughout their lives, experiencing hurtful words and ignorance. They witness loved ones battling serious illnesses, loss of loved ones, loss of values. To cope with these challenges, people can use various techniques like meditation, yoga, etc. At exhibitions, I have had the opportunity to meet psychologists, doctors, and nurses who view the painting process as a form of relief, promoting well-being and health. I recall an old motto that advises, "Close your eyes and remember the beautiful and happy moments you have experienced." Creating paintings that capture these joyful moments reflects the same sentiment, but with eyes wide open.



Amarylismatic (Maria Matic) | Spring Renewal

Salamadra

My name is Sasha, I am an artist. I was born in a small town in Belarus, now I live in its capital, I am 21 years old. I have been drawing all my life, when I was 5, my parents took me to a drawing club, because it was my favorite activity. In the future, I did not have a professional art education, I remained self-taught. As for me, fine art is the most important thing I have.

Alexandra Gorevaya | Piece Oneself Back Together | 2025

Alexandra Gorevaya | Devil | 2025

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Nuss

Your practice involves sanding, erasing, and transforming printed images. What first led you to this unique method of working with existing supports such as catalogues, posters, or photographs?

The development of my seanding practice was quite gradual but also fairly swift… The action was more conscious than I was myself at that time (2022)… The

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Nuss | For Every Act, Oblivion Is Needed | 2024

creative act has its own awareness; it knows and sees before the artist does… It perceives distant connections and relationships: in my case, the abrasive act was already aware of its relation to an earlier process, namely frottage (2018/2020). Both revealed to me the deep, submerged energy beneath the printed image. Working on images found in catalogues, posters, or photographs allows me to maintain a mobile and dynamic approach during the process… On reflection, it also makes me realize how subtle and sometimes fragile the image is under the hands—or why not—the yoke of the artist.

How do you decide whether an image will be completely erased, partially revealed, or left to "survive" in its altered form?

It's not really a decision but more of an intuition… It's what I feel about the structure, colors, shadows, and lights of an image, and how much I resonate, relate, or oppose its observed forms that leads me to take positions and pause in areas of visual-perceptual interest.

Sandpaper and abrasive sponges are unusual artistic tools. Do you see them more as instruments of destruction, of transformation, or both?

I wouldn't call them unusual… Maybe just rarely used in contemporary drawing. Yet the poetic legacies of Robert Rauschenberg, as Sara Fontana mentioned a few years ago during the presentation of my "Untitled" (2022) at the "Premio Città di Treviglio", and William Kentridge's legacy are still vibrant and relevant. Over the years, I've come to see them as companion tools,

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Nuss | Lethe | 2022

guides to explore the submerged, underground flow of images. I can't say if it's destruction, construction, or reconstruction... I do know they are more like apparitions or whispered dialogues, and it's hard to keep that in mind—so my results are what I've managed, despite myself, to remember and carry forward from what the images have passed on to me.

Many of your works seem to oscillate between presence and absence, memory and disappearance. Is this tension a metaphor for broader human or cultural experiences?

I experience each image, just as you say, as a possibility of oscillation between presence and absence, apparition and disappearance, memory and forgetting, between "Mnemosyne" and "Lethe", the two Orphic rivers. It is about facing images and embracing this as an open, dynamic, and evolving spiritual journey. In this way, image after transformed image shapes a micro and macro cosmos, a compositional, sign-based, and internal dramaturgy of images. The support, the paper, is the boundary where the original image is inscribed and printed, within which gestures, rhythms, and tensions act. Through observation, I perceive them as whispers, so I dwell on them, focusing precisely on those points and begin working from those suggestions, following mental and perceptual signs—much like the mystical Kabbalists with the repeated and combined letters of God, or like Giulio Camillo's ordering and juxtaposition of symbolic and meaningful images for mnemonic techniques. Thus, the organism of the image that lives beneath the surface is given a voice.

How important is the role of time in your works—for example, the gradual erosion of images versus the sudden act of erasure?

Considering images as organisms and structures where forces and tensions interact, and the means I use to reform the image, time plays a central role. Its presence is at least twofold: the time of the act and the time of the image. The first is instinctive, immediate, and swift; the second is reflective, slowed, and anachronistic because it carries references and fragments of past and distant images and times. Erasure, like Lucio Fontana's cuts and holes, is necessary not so much to enter a space within and beyond the canvas, but rather within and beyond the time of images.

You moved from Russia to Italy at a very young age and studied both sculpture and painting in Bologna. How did these experiences influence your artistic language?

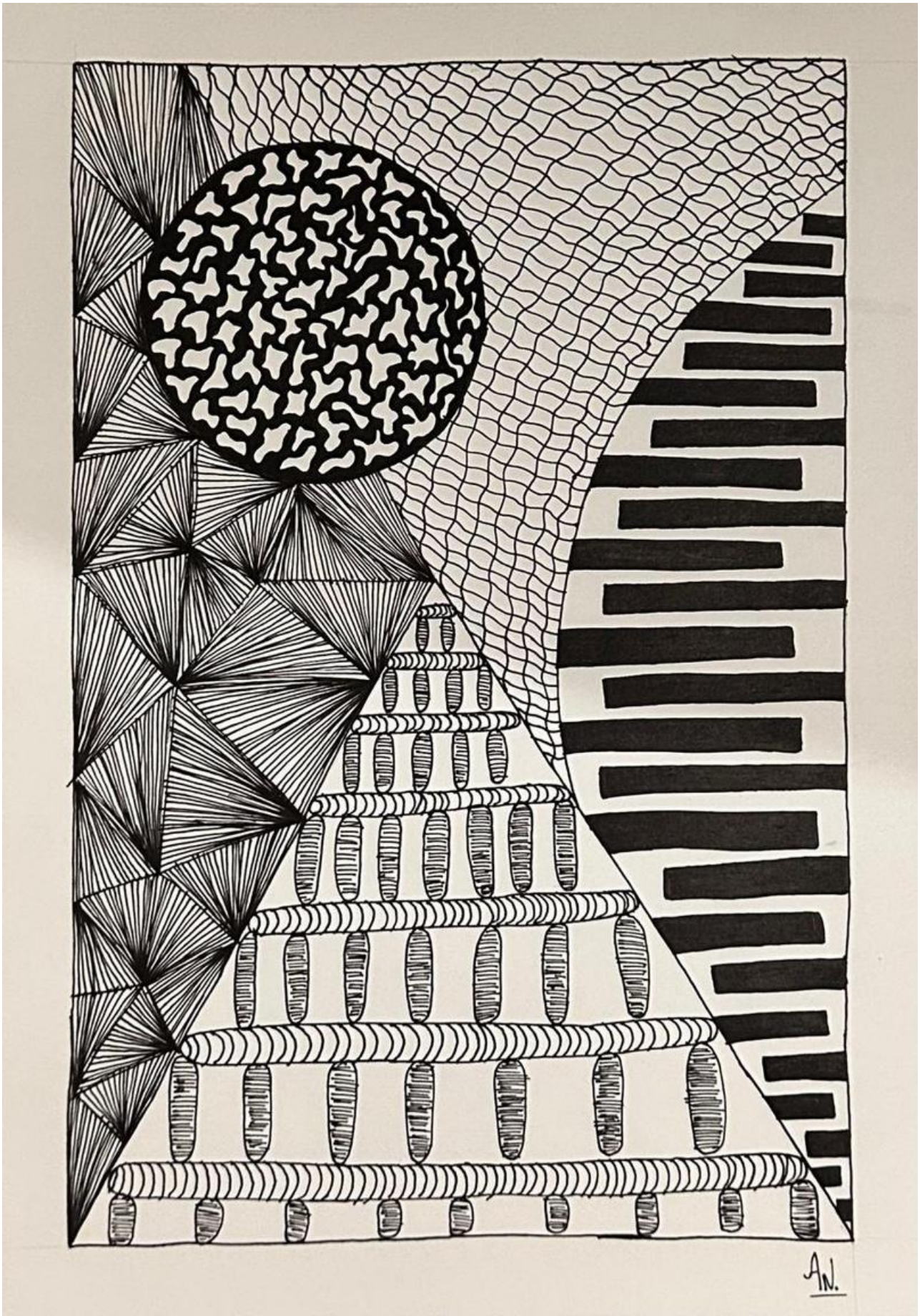
I was born in Saratov, Russia, and since 2001 I have grown up in Italy, but it was not a simple relocation—it was an adoption by an Italian family. It hasn't been so much the places where I studied sculpture and painting that influenced me, but rather the people I met with whom I was able to deepen my understanding of who I am today—my education, my visual, poetic, and spiritual culture. Some aspects of my Slavic heritage have managed to survive in the present, interacting with what I was taught and inherited in Italy.

What directions do you see your research taking in the next years? Do you plan to continue working with erasure, or to explore new forms of dialogue with images?

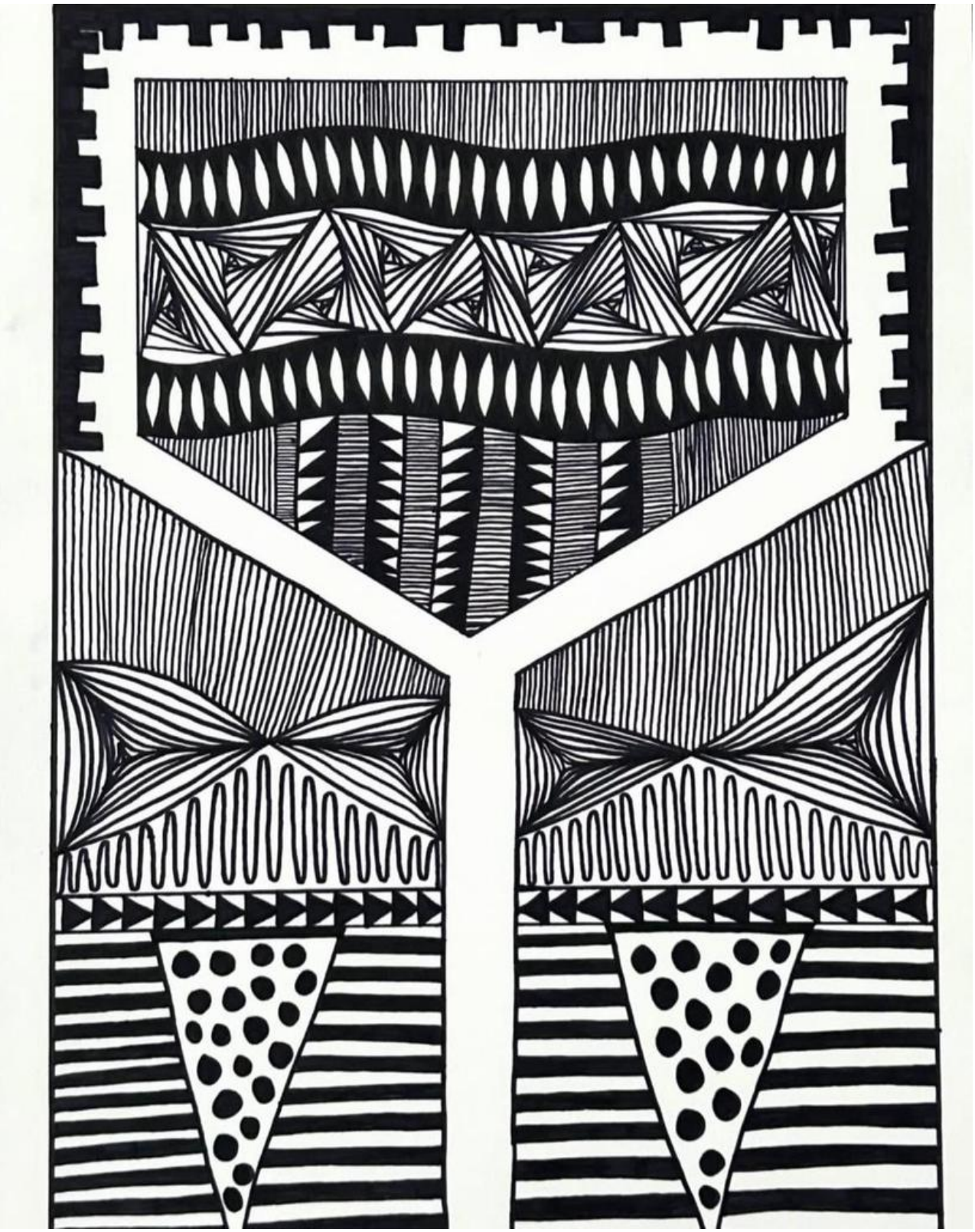
My first solo exhibition is currently in preparation, and my visual research will continue. It will evolve in step with the exhibition's design choices: sometimes the abraded support will remain physical and tangible; other times, by sanding slides or acetates, the image will become pure projected light. Through abrasion, I believe and hope to rethink and complete a still unrealized project: the "Books of Dreams 2004-2024."

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Nuss | Like Ash Settling On The Eyelashes | 2024

I'm **Areena Nadeem**, a hobby artist. Art has always attracted me ever since I was a kid. From drawing cartoon characters to making self-design art, I have learned a lot and still keep going. I hope I can show my talent to the world!



Areena Nadeem | One Touch | 2025



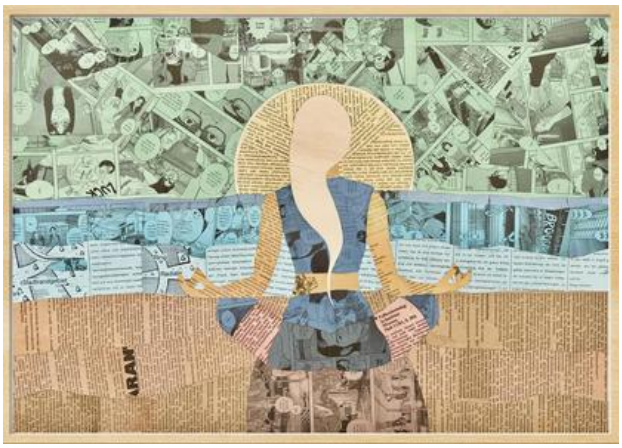
Areena Nadeem | Twisted | 2025

Jessica Farrell

How has your nomadic lifestyle influenced your artistic approach and the materials you use in your work?

My nomadic lifestyle has shaped every part of my artistic approach. Traveling through so many different cultures, from the Caribbean roots of my father, to my time in Hawaii, the Maldives, Australia, and all across Europe has given me a deep appreciation for diversity in aesthetics, storytelling, and materials. I've always been drawn to things with history: vintage magazines, old comics, second-hand clothes, objects that already carry a story.
Because I moved around so much, I started working with what I could find: paper, fabric paint, old prints, forgotten books. I began making collages using materials I picked up along the way, and experimenting with techniques that didn't require a studio or expensive tools, just curiosity and imagination. My art is deeply connected to movement, memory, and transformation. I love turning overlooked or discarded things into something new and meaningful. It's like giving fragments of the past a new voice.

Can you tell us more about the connection between your Caribbean-Indigenous roots and the themes in your collages?



Jessica Farrell | Meditation | 2025

I've always been a seeker, searching for places, experiences, belonging, and ways to express myself. That inner search has deeply influenced my art. My Caribbean-Indigenous roots are not always visible in a direct or literal way, but they're part of my inner compass. They show up more emotionally, intuitively. Like an undercurrent guiding me.
It's less about specific cultural symbols and more about a feeling, a connection to depth, to history, to something greater than myself. In my collages, I assemble fragments, paper, color, texture. Much like how identity is built when you come from multiple worlds. That layering, that sense of in-betweenness, is perhaps the strongest reflection of my roots. So my work isn't necessarily a direct expression of where I come from, but more like an echo, quietly woven into everything I create, alongside all the experiences I've gathered on my journey.

Your work often incorporates vintage materials like old newspapers and comics. How do you select these materials, and what stories do they carry for you?

Most of the materials I use, old newspapers, comics, sewing patterns etc, come from flea markets, classifieds, or platforms like eBay. I love the treasure hunt aspect of it. Each paper, each book or comic I find, has its own story — and sometimes, I get to hear it directly from the people letting it go. There was a woman whose mother had kept decades of sewing magazines, and after her passing, she wanted them to go to someone who would make something meaningful out of them. Moments like that stay with me.
Many of the materials I use come from former East Germany, or from the 60s and 70s — and it's fascinating to see how much of history lives in these pages. Ads, language, layouts, even what was considered important back then — sometimes it's deeply political, like articles on environmental

Jessica Farrell | Horse On Horse

issues from 1972, and other times it's playful or naive, like the comics from childhood. Both sides interest me. They show how people dreamt, feared, loved, organized their lives — it's all there, between the lines.
I'm also drawn to typography and the visual character of text itself. I often choose materials not just for what they say, but for how they feel — the color of the paper, the fonts, the way the ink has aged. My process is intuitive: sometimes I find the story in the material, and other times, the material finds its story through the collage.

Sustainability is a core theme in your art. How do you feel your work contributes to the conversation around repurposing and memory?

Sustainability is present in my work in a very organic way, not just as a practice, but as a mindset. I work almost exclusively with materials that already had a life. These were never meant to be "art," but they carry stories, emotions, and traces of the past. By reusing them, I'm not just recycling, I'm honoring memory, and inviting it into a new conversation.
Repurposing, for me, is a way of slowing down. In a world that constantly pushes us to consume and move on, I choose to pause and look at what's already here to find value in the overlooked. There's a real beauty in what has aged, been folded, scribbled on, or forgotten. These marks of time are part of the soul of my work.
I think that's where sustainability and memory meet: in the act of transformation. It's not about preserving things in a museum-like way, but about keeping them alive by letting them change. My hope is that my work reminds people that everything, even what seems outdated or broken, can be part of something new, meaningful, and beautiful.

How do you balance the nostalgia of the past with the creative reinvention you aim to achieve in your collages?

For me, nostalgia isn't about looking back with longing. It's more like a soft filter through which I see the materials I work with. Old paper, vintage comics, forgotten texts, they all carry emotional weight, echoes of another time. But my goal isn't to recreate the past. I use it as raw material, as texture, as voice, but I rearrange it, disrupt it, reimagine it.
There's a fine balance between honoring what something was and letting it become something else. That's what I find exciting in collage. it's a conversation between past and present. I don't just collect. I intervene. I might cut a page from a 1960s sewing magazine and pair it with a manga scene from the 80s, then dye it with textile paint and layer it into something completely new. The result often feels familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Like a memory you can't quite place.
So the past is always present in my work, but it's not fixed. It's fluid, playful, sometimes ironic. I think that's where the transformation happens. When nostalgia becomes a springboard, not an anchor.

Could you share the process behind transforming old materials into new narratives through your collages? What is the most rewarding part of that transformation for you?

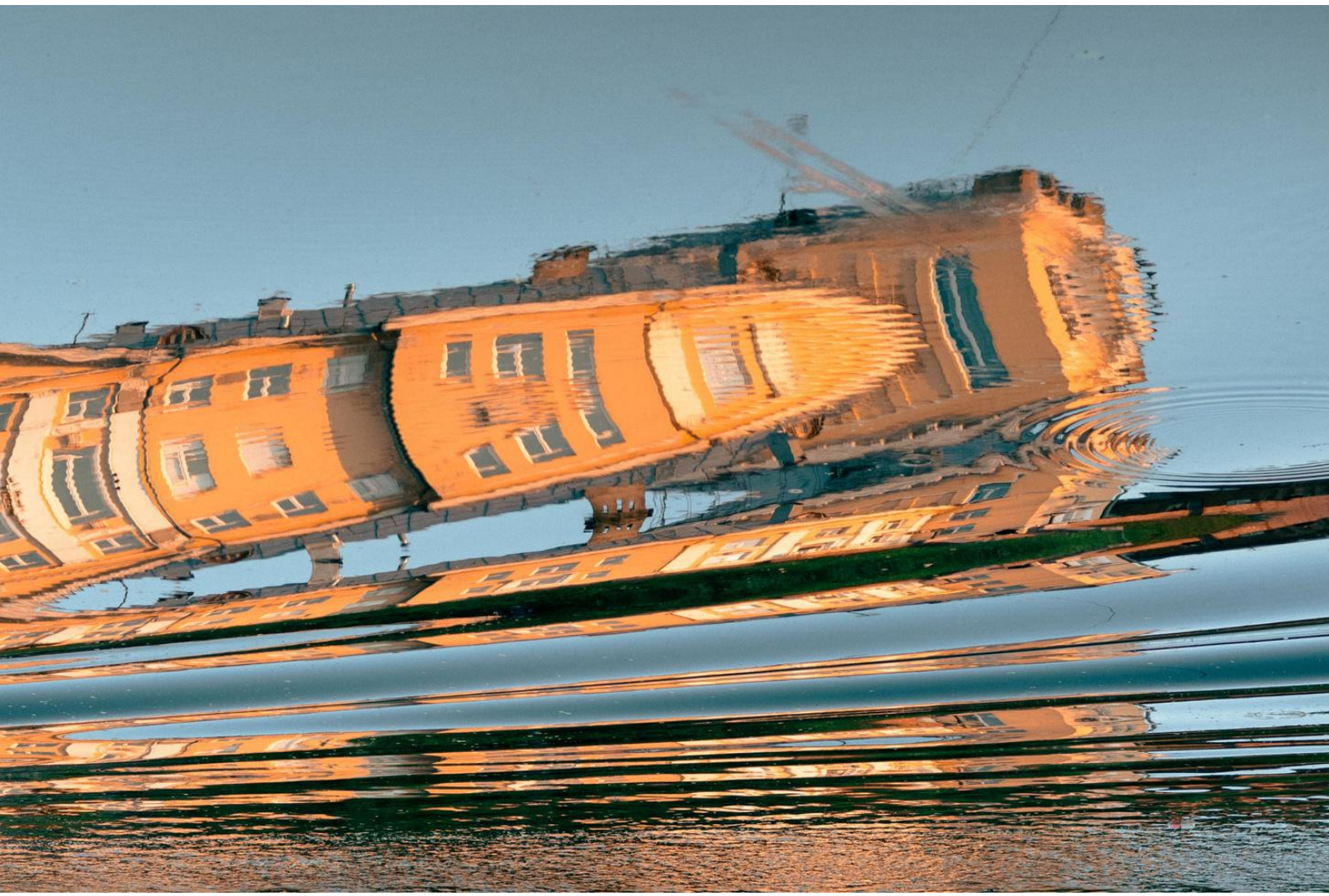
When I start a collage, I usually begin with an idea or a theme. Right now, I'm working on a "Western series", it's playful and a bit ironic. I've always loved the aesthetics of old cowboy films. The colors, the attitude, the sense of drama. Once I have a concept in mind, I make a rough sketch and think about the color palette I want to use.
I always keep rolls of hand-dyed paper ready. Magazine pages, comics, vintage prints, all tinted with textile paint. From there, the process becomes intuitive. I often discover new ideas while I'm working. Even though I'm quite a spontaneous and energetic person, this kind of work has taught me to slow down, to focus, and to be precise. It's a meditative process of cutting, layering, stepping back, changing direction.
The most rewarding part is that final moment when I look at the piece and feel surprised how it came together. It's as if the fragments have found their own rhythm, and I've just helped them meet. That feeling, when chaos becomes harmony.

How do your travels across Europe continue to shape your creative output? Are there specific experiences or places that have particularly impacted your art?

Travel has always been essential to my creative process. Each place I've lived or visited has left a mark. Visually, emotionally, and energetically. The landscapes around the Salton Sea and Palmdale in the California desert had a big impact on me. The textures, the light, the rawness. Hawaii in the early '90s also shaped me deeply. The surf lifestyle, the beauty and connection to nature, the laid-back energy. All of that still echoes in my work.
But it's not just the iconic places. Every journey, even small ones across Europe in my van, feeds into my work. It's the people I meet, the stories I hear, the objects I find. They all become part of the layers I create.
Lately, I've been thinking more about turning inward. I feel a strong pull to explore my own story more openly. The complex parts, the imperfect chapters. Like every good story, mine has had its struggles, but it's made me who I am. I think my future work will reflect that more. Not just the places I've been, but the emotional landscapes I've moved through. For me, that's also part of the journey and maybe the most meaningful one.

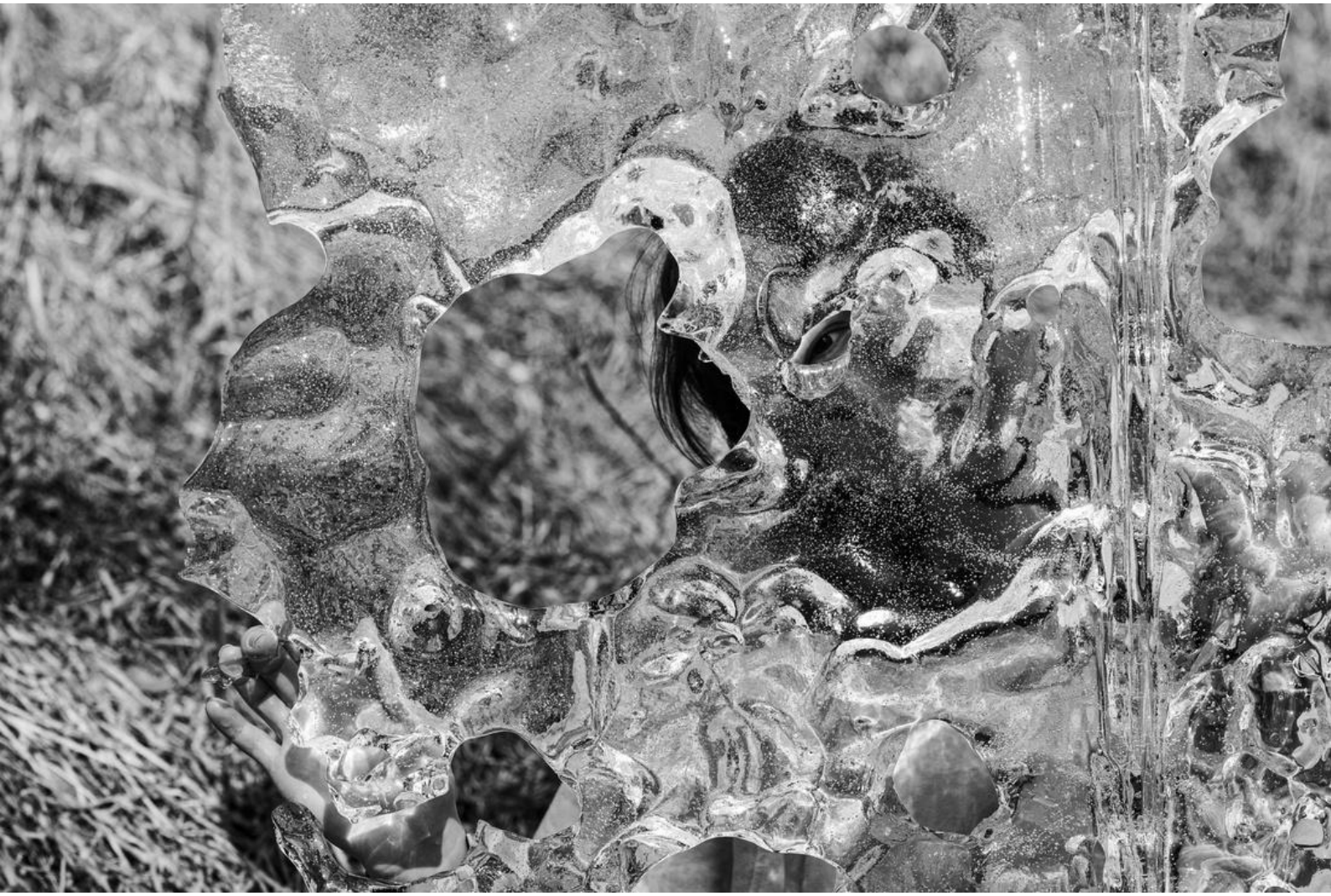
Nadya Sedova (*1991) is a photographer and an artist. She lives and works in Russia. Graduated the Faculty of Graphic Arts of MSUP (2014). Student of International Academy of Documentary and Art Photography “Photographics” (2024-2026) Explores the world through various visual techniques. She works in several directions in photography: - Single shots in which she tries to convey her impression of the moment. - Project and serial photography related to the history of people, objects or phenomena. Photography helps the author to convey her inner worldview. Creativity is influenced by nature, people, and philosophical reflections.

Nadya Sedova | The Reality | 2025



Nadya Sedova | Water Lilies | 2025

Nadya Sedova | Recognition | 2025



Ziyan Liu

Ziyan Liu | Knitting Botany

then translate them into textile form?

I am drawn to living systems, especially plants, and I study them as images and as working systems. My research begins outdoors, touching surfaces, measuring spacing, and sketching so that the rhythm of a form, not just its silhouette, enters my hands. I also attend workshops at the Royal Botanic Gardens in London, where conversations with botanists and plant focused artists help me decide what to keep literal and what to translate. Of course, reading books is essential, and artists' botanical drawings also form an important part of my research. Back in the studio, I rely on sustained drawing and on site sketching to distill information from plants, and through drawing and reflection I give these forms a second life.

What I value most are the unique characteristics of each plant. In my knitted cactus series, the spines suggest a natural defensive quality, and people often associate them with resilience, danger, and a warning to keep their distance because they can cause injury. However, if you look closely, beneath each spine is a soft, water rich body.This leads me to use textile art to translate and magnify these often overlooked details, turning them into soft

Your works often resemble extraterrestrial plants and surreal organisms. Can you describe how you research natural growth systems and

Ziyan Liu | Knitting Botany

Ziyan Liu | Knitting Botany

plant forms that reveal the cactus's inner essence. Color is a strong way to amplify each plant's personality, so I use bold, high-contrast color to heighten the visual impact. Therefore, I focus on a plant's character and inner life, and when I spend time with a plant I treat it as a private conversation between us.

You often speak of "letting the textiles happen." How do you balance spontaneous creation with the technical planning required for large-scale knitted sculptures?

This idea is a guiding principle for me, not a response to scale. "Letting the textiles happen" means allowing a piece to grow from a single strand with as few interruptions as possible, so form emerges from the inner logic of material and structure rather than from layers of added technique. Much textile art today values stacking methods and complex steps, but what matters to me is returning to the earliest attitude of textile making: begin with one yarn, aim for one piece, and let the interaction of fiber and stitch generate vitality and presence. It is about freeing the nature of the textile so it can "happen" in front of you. Planning still matters, but it serves as gentle guardrails rather than a rigid blueprint. I set a simple gauge and a few clear rules, then allow controlled drift while working so the fabric can find its own path. So, when the work is large, the concept does not change. I may scale proportionally, change gauge, hold multiple yarns together, or stage sections on different beds and then join them in a way that preserves continuity. The choices are technical solutions to size, but the core remains the same: trust the material, keep the process direct, and let the textile speak.

Color is a key element in your work. What is your process for choosing and combining colors to achieve such vivid and unexpected palettes?

Color to me is mood and judgment made visible, a system of memory signs through which each palette records a day like a diary entry, with pages of color that carry sensation as well as thought. Observation comes first, not as isolated snapshots but as continuous scenes in which gardens after rain, markets at dusk, and neon reflections on wet pavements offer chromatic relationships that already breathe; I gather them through quick sketches, small swatches, and simple photos in order to study how hues meet and change in real light.
In the studio, these notes become a steady, exploratory process that nudges a color from the familiar toward the surprising, favoring balances where a saturated tone gains depth beside a quieter neighbor and where subtle contrasts wake a hue without overwhelming it. Memory is also

Ziyan Liu | Knitting Botany

important, it keeps steering the work, since palettes from earlier travels, artworks that linger in the mind, and plants studied up close form a living archive that I revisit whenever a piece asks for direction. Thus my color choices emerge through a calm, deliberate phase in which one color may step aside to let the others speak, or a single accent may enter to tilt the atmosphere, so the final palette feels vivid, layered, and a little unexpected, yet remains grounded in the visible world I move through each day.

You frequently integrate non-textile materials such as building debris, glass, and 3Dprinted parts. What inspires these cross-material experiments, and what new possibilities do they bring?

I regard every material as a unique product of our planet, and each carries a distinctive, irreplaceable character. That leads me to be a material lover who enjoys studying and collecting different substances, whether soft or hard. I also believe that combining them can spark unexpected effects, provided they are introduced in measured and appropriate ways so their interplay can create real chemistry.

Ziyan Liu | Knitting Botany

I often collect things that seem useless or unrelated to textiles because they can open new directions and inspire me. This not only makes my practice more engaging and interesting, it also prompts me to imagine what role each could play in textile art, especially when I touch a material and feel an immediate connection. In particular, construction debris and other seemingly worthless materials can be reused and given new life. Materials such as glass or resin, in my view, offer dramatic visual tension while balancing the suppleness of textiles, and they can make the inner toughness and endurance of textile work visible. To me, that is the charm and pleasure of mixed media, and a form of cooperation and friendship between materials.

Your "Knitting Cactus" series and "Knitting Glass" project explore very different textures and concepts. How do you decide when a new series or material direction is ready to begin?

For me, a new direction never begins at the computer. It begins in the hands and out in nature. I usually wait for three clear signals. First, the material starts speaking back. I handle the same yarn, a shard of glass, or a piece of discarded rubble again and again, and the same sensation returns to my fingers each time. Sometimes there is a faint sting beside softness, or a cool shine that insists on being seen. Having a daily material practice is also important, such as keeping small samples in my pockets and on the studio table and living with them to see whether they keep calling me. When I feel blocked, I slow down and observe the world around me. Quiet looking helps, as do exhibitions; learning from other artists is often a fast and effective way to spark fresh ideas.
Second, the movement becomes fluent. If I can move in one breath from a quick drawing to a small test and then to a first wearable or hanging piece, without adding extra decoration to make it work, I know the idea has momentum. The process feels like a path that appears as I step forward. Then I return to research, visiting material markets and different workshops to test things in person, building a clear mental catalogue of materials.
Third, a clear question arrives, one I want to answer with a whole project of works. Knitting Cactus began when I kept asking how sting and tenderness could live in one skin. Knitting Glass began when I noticed the cold light of glass next to the warmth of fiber and wondered how to let both remain visible. When these signals align, I stop hesitating, clear a wall, name the direction, and begin, trusting the

work to tell me what comes next.

As both an artist and a PhD researcher, how does your academic investigation feed into your studio practice—and vice versa?

In the academy, inquiry helps me frame better questions for the studio, and the studio gives those questions a body. I keep a steady rhythm that moves from reading to making and back again. After a period of focused reading, I write short prompts in plain language and turn them into small trials in yarn, color, and form. Each trial has a clear aim and a simple checklist of what to observe, such as hand feel, drape, changes under light, and durability after gentle wear.
Creating feels open and low in limitations, while research is a cautious and rigorous process, so everything is documented: I keep dated notes, quick sketches, and photographs of each stage, along with a materials log that records source, treatment, and outcome. This record lets me compare results over time and separate what is repeatable from what was a lucky accident. When a result looks promising, I scale the test into a first piece and invite feedback from peers. Their questions reveal blind spots that I take back to reading and writing.
Moreover, academic habits sharpen the studio and my creative thinking. Drawing on methods from art history, design studies, and material research helps me name what I am seeing and avoid vague claims; in turn, studio habits sharpen the academy. When unexpected behaviors in fabric or color appear, they lead me to new sources and conversations, and sometimes to a different way of looking. For example, exhibitions become real world case studies, while essays help me clarify decisions and set the next round of trials. Meanwhile, reading essays remains an efficient and relaxing way to explore the project and keep up with recent work in the field.

Digital culture and cyber aesthetics play a strong role in your work. How do you imagine the future relationship between textiles and virtual worlds?

About the future relationship between textiles and virtual worlds, the two can be joined through many technological paths, and they should be partners rather than rivals. This means fabric is not only worn but also experienced, collected, and rehearsed in digital space before and after it exists in the studio, not only on a gallery floor. For example, textile techniques can be translated into gesture inputs that a computer or an AI system can read; with tools such as TouchDesigner and other digital platforms, human gestures and movements can build a piece on screen in real time, showing how a textile grows under the hands and even with the whole body. Another interesting approach is to make dyeing and printing interactive so that anyone can control electronic components to create a personalized printed fabric. In this sense, virtual worlds and textiles collaborate, and for public audiences that collaboration can be playful and inviting.
As for how the two meet in practice, the future may lean toward a more digital sensibility in textiles, not only inside virtual scenes but also as tangible art that can be touched. The visual language of virtual worlds can be translated into materials through colors, forms, and concepts that do not yet exist in everyday life, supported by collaboration with artists from other fields, which definitely gives us more possibilities to explore. So I think the exchange runs both ways: virtual worlds offer textiles new stages and tools, while textiles give virtual ideas warmth and presence. Together they will continue to grow in exciting ways.

Ziyan Liu | Knitting Botany

Karine Eyamie, the artist behind MizDragonfly, creates surreal and captivating artwork by merging AI with human inspiration. Karine's collections explore new artistic frontiers, producing a body of work that is distinct and contemporary. Her pieces are characterized by vibrant, contrasting colors and dreamlike compositions, showcasing a seamless fusion of technology and artistic expression.

Karine Eyamie | Awakening Muse Collection | 2025

Karine Eyamie | Theta Under Hypnosis Collection | 2025

Mariia Shevchenko

Mariia Shevchenko | Solerentia

Your works often balance between darkness and light, pain and hope. How do you approach capturing this tension on canvas?

I do not consciously strive to create a balance between darkness and light, it occurs naturally because life itself contains both elements. I begin by using dark colors to depict profound moments, and then add brighter tones that break through the dark, creating a sense of contrast. In this way, the canvas becomes a place where these opposites interact, helping the viewer to empathize emotionally.

You describe the body as a map of memory. Could you share more about how you translate personal or collective memory into visual form?

I see the human body as something that holds all of our experiences. Every person carries their history in the way they hold their shoulders, in the lines around their eyes, and in the smallest movements of their hands, and I try to capture these subtle signs of lived experience in my paintings. Collective memory appears through these shared bodily languages: a bent shoulder that speaks of weight carried too long, the expressive position of fingers that can show vulnerability and strength at once, or eyes that remain open even when they hurt. In this way, the body becomes a visual language that is deeply personal, yet also universal.

Mariia Shevchenko | Silent Swing

In your statement, you mention that you "do not depict, but testify." What does this testimony mean to you as an artist?

When I say I don't just depict things but testify to them, I mean I'm sharing real truths from life rather than only showing a pretty picture. This testimony is about being honest and giving a voice to experiences that might be hard to talk about. As an artist, it pushes me to pour genuine feelings into every piece, ensuring that what I create connects deeply with others by reflecting authentic parts of the human story.

Many of your works seem to emerge from dreamlike or fragmented spaces. How does memory, trauma, or dream imagery influence your choice of forms and colors?

My work looks fragmented because that's how memory actually works - it comes to us as pieces that float up from our subconscious at unexpected moments. When I remember something important, especially something emotional or traumatic, it often

Mariia Shevchenko | On Fire

comes as a flash of color, or a particular feeling, rather than as a complete scene I can describe logically. I try to paint these emotional memories as they feel to me, which means sometimes combining elements that wouldn't normally go together, or using colors that represent feelings rather than realistic appearances. For example, I might paint skin in an unusual tone or place figures in impossible spaces because that's how the memory exists in my mind, suspended between what actually happened and how it affected me. This approach allows me to capture something more truthful about the experience of being human than if I tried to paint everything exactly as it appears in reality.

Silence plays an important role in your art. How do you create this sense of silence in a visual medium?

Silence is a big part of what I want to convey in my art, and I build it by keeping things simple and open on the canvas. I use large areas of calm, empty space with muted colors, so the viewer's eye isn't overwhelmed and can rest in the quietness. This approach makes the painting feel peaceful, drawing people into a moment of stillness where they can reflect without any visual noise interrupting.

You speak of painting darkness with light. Could you explain how you use contrasts—both in subject and technique—to achieve this?

When I speak of painting darkness with light, I don't see them as enemies in conflict, but as two parts of the same human experience, capable of existing together and even giving strength to one another. Technically, I build my paintings in layers: darker undertones first, then lighter colors added on top, but always in a way that lets the darkness show through, so the light gains depth and the canvas glows as if from within. In subject matter, I am drawn to figures and moments that carry this same duality—people who are strong yet vulnerable, painful situations that already hold the seed of healing, relationships shaped by both closeness and distance. I believe human experience rarely lives in pure states of joy or sorrow, hope or fear; instead, it dwells in mixtures, and my aim is to capture this emotional truth through the shifting interplay of light and shadow.

In your works, incompleteness is not a flaw but a reflection of memory. How do you decide when a painting is "finished"?

In my art, leaving things incomplete reflects the way memories are never fully whole, so it is a deliberate choice rather than a mistake. I consider a painting finished when it expresses what I intended, when the unfinished areas feel necessary and add meaning. Completion for me is not about covering every inch of canvas or defining every shape, but about whether the work conveys an emotional truth—even if that truth remains partial and open to many interpretations.

Mariia Shevchenko | Madonna Codicis | 2025

Svetlana Loskurinskaya

How do you build a dialogue between interior design and painting?

In my work I explore the relationship between painting and interior design. As an artist, I view space as a canvas where my artworks become a central element that defines the atmosphere and the way people perceive it. By selecting colors and textures, I create a dialogue between art and interior, striving for each

piece to enrich the viewer's experience and fit harmoniously into the overall concept.

Texture plays a central role in your works. Which techniques or materials help you achieve such depth and volume?

My technique of creating fabric panels is based on using linen canvases of various textures. By carefully selecting and combining these elements, I create multifaceted compositions where the fabric gains a new life as a relief pattern and three-dimensional design. Acrylic paints serve as the final touch, emphasizing volume and adding expressiveness.

Many of your works create the feeling of a "window" into another space. What message or emotion do you want to evoke in the viewer?

My panels explore the relationship between interior and exterior spaces, erasing the boundaries between them. I bring elements of the exterior—facades, colors, and textures—into the interior, creating an "open-window" effect. This is more than a visual device: I want to awaken in the viewer a sense of inner freedom and expand their perception of the surrounding world. Space is not only a physical category but also an emotional one. My works are meant to remind us that there is always room for growth and change, and that new perspectives free us from limitations. I hope viewers will feel inspired to explore both the space around them and their own inner horizons. Each panel is an invitation to dialogue with oneself and with the world, an opportunity to see beyond the familiar and to open new paths to self-expression and understanding. It is an attempt to create a space for reflection on how we perceive the world and how it influences us.

You have experience in both design and painting. Do you consider these practices separate disciplines, or do they naturally merge in your art?

Although I have no practical experience as an interior

designer, I believe there is a deep connection between design and painting that enriches the creative process. Design creates a functional space, while painting explores emotions and ideas through color and form. Applying the principles of painting—composition, color, texture—to design allows for the creation of harmonious and expressive interiors where each element interacts to form a coherent and aesthetic whole. This synthesis makes it possible to create unique solutions that reflect individuality and vision. I believe physical space can be expanded when elements of facades and entrances echo what is inside. This creates a harmony that allows the viewer to feel part of something larger. When colors and forms from the outside world are reflected in the interior, there is a feeling of freedom—as if the walls become transparent and we can breathe more easily.

Could you tell us more about your recent participation in international exhibitions and what this experience meant for you as an artist?

Participating in international and solo exhibitions has been an important milestone in my development as an artist, significantly broadening my horizons and inspiring new creative projects. In 2025 I took part in ARTDOM, an international exhibition of furniture, interior solutions, and art. This gave me the opportunity to present my works on an international scale, exchange ideas with colleagues, and see my pieces in the context of contemporary trends. Equally significant were my solo exhibitions. In 2024 I organized a show at the design studio of Ekaterina Rebrova, and in 2023 at the GRUNGE design gallery in Novosibirsk. These events allowed me to establish a deeper connection with the audience, share the thoughts and emotions embedded in each work, and receive invaluable feedback that helped me view my pieces from a new perspective and plan further artistic directions. These exhibitions enriched my experience and inspired new experiments.

Your works resonate with the themes of freedom, scale, and dynamism. How do you translate these abstract concepts into concrete forms?

In my works, freedom, scale, and dynamism become living essences that I strive to convey through texture, color, and form. I use elements reminiscent of nature, architecture, and the surrounding world to create a sense of infinity and depth. Each brushstroke, each line, is a step toward allowing the viewer to feel this freedom. Scale in my works is not only about physical size but also about playing with proportions to evoke a sense of grandeur. Dynamism emerges through the movement I embed in my compositions, reflecting the rhythms of life. My goal is to express the dialogue between the inner and outer worlds and to open for the viewer a “window” into infinite possibilities, conveying the emotional states that arise in interaction with the environment.

Shimpei Miura

Shimpei Miura | Symbolism | 2025

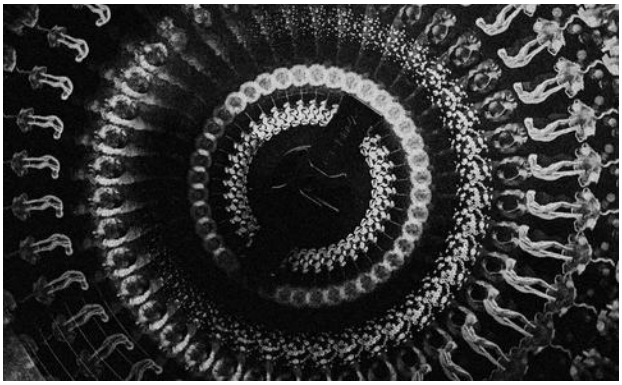
What first drew you to reinterpreting ancient symbols like mandalas and the I Ching trigrams in your work?

In Japan, it is not uncommon to encounter symbols such as mandalas or the eight trigrams of the I Ching at temple fairs or cultural gatherings. These symbols represent a distinctly Eastern way of systematizing how humans perceive and make sense of the world. They embody a fusion of structure and visual art that continues to provide deep insights today.
My own fascination with the diagrammatic forms of mandalas and trigrams is deeply connected to my background in information engineering, which I pursued through graduate school.
What draws me in is the act of visualizing structures and systems—mapping out the intricate interrelations between different elements and uncovering the hidden frameworks behind them. When logical refinement merges with poetic richness, I sense a unique interplay between thought and perception, intellect and sensation.
At the same time, in contemporary society, our perception itself is being reshaped by information overload and the rapid evolution of technology. In my artistic practice, I treat this transformation as a core question: how does technology alter our senses and bodily awareness, and how does that, in turn, affect our understanding of the world's structures? In this regard, mandalas and trigrams—which inherently diagram ways of perceiving the world—serve as a natural reference point. By reinterpreting these ancient symbols through AI and visual programming, I am not simply pursuing an aesthetic exercise, but questioning the very frameworks of recognition they embody.
Applying contemporary technologies to these ancient motifs allows me to explore how we attempt to understand an ever more complex world. For me, this is not merely an experiment, but a process of challenging, dismantling, and reconstructing existing worldviews and epistemologies.
Ultimately, my work seeks to discover new meaning at the intersections where technology and culture, vision and thought, and reality and the virtual converge.

Shimpei Miura | Symbolism | 2025

How do you see the relationship between traditional spirituality and today's digital or AI-driven visual culture?

I see traditional spirituality and today's digital or AI-driven culture not as opposites, but as resonant counterparts. Mandalas and the hexagrams of the I Ching are symbols of how humans have long sought to understand the world. At the same time, AI and digital technologies allow us to visualize complex information and structures in new ways, expanding the scope of our perception.
For me, what matters is connecting these traditional symbols with contemporary technologies, layering past wisdom onto present-day challenges to explore new possibilities for perception and thought.
In this sense, the traditional and the contemporary are not in conflict. Rather, they resonate as two different yet complementary approaches to broadening human understanding.



Shimpei Miura | Symbolism | 2025

Why did you choose the phenakistoscope—a 19th-century optical toy—as the central medium for this project?

With the explosive growth of AI-generated imagery, we are now surrounded by an overwhelming abundance of visual information. At the same time, I feel that the embodied experience of "seeing" itself is fading. Our active engagement —the pause to reflect on what we encounter, to discern its truth or falsehood—seems to be weakening in the flood of images.
The phenakistoscope, with its delicate interplay of light and rotation, can make an animation suddenly collapse into mere afterimages or disappear altogether. This instability compels us to become acutely aware of how our eyes and bodies form images and, ultimately, how we perceive the world.
In this sense, the phenakistoscope is not simply a 19th-century optical toy, but a device that renders the mechanisms of perception visible and restores a sense of physicality. In an age when AI and digital technologies are constantly expanding the frameworks of recognition, returning to this antiquated apparatus becomes, paradoxically, an act of reinterpreting the very origins of seeing.

What was the most challenging part of translating AI-generated video loops into a physical analog format?

For this project, I began by generating several one-second loop videos with AI, which I then layered and composited using video editing software. These were broken down into forty individual frames and arranged in a circular sequence to construct the phenakistoscope. The completed design was printed onto a vinyl record, placed on a turntable rotating at 33⅓ RPM, and filmed in live action.
There were two particularly challenging aspects of the process. The first was how to design the very method of converting looped video into a phenakistoscope format. To solve this, I devised a custom expression in After Effects that automatically arranged the specified number of frames evenly around the circle. The second challenge was balancing the "visual beauty" of the disc as a static object with the "smoothness of motion" when the disc was set into rotation. For example, achieving fluid motion required at least 26 frames (24fps × 1.1 seconds ≈ 26). However, with only 26 frames, the static disc lacked sufficient visual density. After repeated experimentation, I ultimately settled on a 40-frame structure, filming it in live action on a turntable rotating at 45 RPM.

What role does physicality—the vinyl record, the rotation, the afterimage—play in your artistic vision?

The analog elements of my work—such as the rotation of the disc and the phenomenon of afterimage—play a crucial role as mechanisms for "restoring physicality." The slight fluctuations and imperfections inherent in the turning record or the flickering images of the phenakistoscope become triggers that make viewers bodily aware of what it truly means to see.
In my practice, I often move back and forth like a pendulum between digital and analog: producing something digitally and then converting it into analog form, or reversing that process. Within this oscillation, the unique qualities and contradictions of each medium surface, opening up new spaces for visual experience.
While digital and AI technologies allow for infinitely precise and seamless expression, they also risk obscuring the processes of perception and sensation. This is why I deliberately work with analog rotation and afterimage: to present an "imperfect, visceral experience" mediated by vision, time, and the body, and to discover new meaning through the contrast with contemporary technologies.

Could you tell us about your collaboration with videographer Suho Kim and Human BeatBoxer KAIRI?

This work originally took shape in the process of developing a music video for KAIRI's track Symbolism. While keeping my own artistic themes in mind, I set myself the challenge of expressing the world of the music solely through the animation of the phenakistoscope. For the live-action shoot, I collaborated with videographer Suho Kim, experimenting with shutter speed adjustments and other techniques to find the optimal form.
Together with Suho Kim and human beatboxer KAIRI, I am part of the Tokyo-based artist collective ARTIFACT. The collective consists of seven members, including a graphic designer, an ikebana artist, and others from diverse fields. By bringing our different sensibilities into dialogue, sometimes even in collision, we explore the possibilities of experimental expression.

What do you hope viewers reflect upon when encountering your work—both conceptually and physically?

What I hope viewers take away from my work is a fundamental question: How do we perceive the world? By layering ancient symbols such as mandalas and the I Ching trigrams with contemporary technology, I seek to unsettle the visual and informational frameworks we so often take for granted.
On a conceptual level, I want my work to create a moment of pause—a chance to look again at our complex world and reflect on the hidden orders and connections within it. On a physical level, through analog phenomena such as afterimages of light, the flicker of rotation, and the synchronization of sound and image, I invite viewers to become acutely aware of what it means to see, and of how they experience the world through their own bodies.
In this sense, my work is not meant to leave the viewer in a passive state, but to function as a space where thought and sensation move back and forth, enabling a rediscovery of one's own perception and presence.

DAMN TRUE

Can you describe the moment when you first realized you wanted to explore the boundary between digital and physical images?

realized that this wasn't just a "border," but a seam that could be pulled on. I distorted a heavily compressed photo, crumpled it, scanned it, and overlayed AI fragments and a collage of my iPhone photos. The image breathed in two rhythms, paper and pixels. The "mistakes" became meaningful.

What inspired you to focus on distortion and deformation as central themes in your "UNTITLED" series?

Distortion is like memory telling the truth: crooked, but honest. I grew up in the visual environment of the first low-quality images on the internet, and behind

DAMN TRUE | «Un[Titled]» | 2024

I their digital scars, you could read the story of the last person who uploaded that image. In UN[TITLED] I amplify these scars by stretching, re-encoding, printing, crumpling, rescanning, and layering AI textures and physical debris. Deformation becomes a form of testimony.

How do you balance chaos and beauty when creating these "distorted" worlds?

I call it "digital memory" for myself. The proportion is around 60/40: there's enough chaos to make the work lively, and enough beauty to make you want to return to it.

How do you see the role of Web 3.0 in the future of art and image-making?

This is not only a market, but also an infrastructure for authorship and evolution. It allows works to change their state while remaining verifiable. It is also about multiple authorship, where artists, collectors, and algorithms collaborate with code incentives.

Which of your exhibitions has been the most meaningful to you, and why?

The most powerful were the small, deliberately

DAMN TRUE | «Un[Titled]» | 2024

"rough" shows, where the viewer could pick up the crumpled prints and compare them with their digital counterparts. People would run their fingers over the creases, and only then would they notice the AI seams —this delayed recognition was powerful. I've found that my work works best when tactility and screen are juxtaposed in the same space.

Are there new technologies or mediums you would like to experiment with in the near future?

Yes: realtime, mixing optical communication with AI interpolation; large-format video transfers to non-standard bases.

If you could collaborate with any other artist or researcher, who would it be and why?

A perfect triangle: a computer vision researcher who studies biases in datasets; an urban ecologist who studies the flow of material waste; and an artist like Sougwen Chung or Ian Cheng who works with living systems. Together, they can create images that literally "digest" urban data and transform it into visual distortions—works that change as the world around them changes.

— *Interview*

Mulin Qiao

Could you share some memories from your childhood in Chongqing that first sparked your desire to create art?

I began drawing when I was about three or four years old. Growing up in Chongqing, a city that feels almost cybernetic, I was surrounded by a vibrant street culture where old neighborhoods and new developments intertwine through layers of murals and urban textures. This environment—at once raw and welcoming, steeped in both local heritage and restless growth—ignited my earliest desire to create. It gave me the confidence to root my practice in personal experience and to experiment freely, unconstrained by any single material or medium.

Who or what were your earliest artistic influences when you began studying curatorial practice and later fashion marketing?

During my curatorial studies, I was inspired by contemporary art and experimental cinema—especially Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculpture, which revealed how art can become both social action and a form of healing. Later, while studying fashion marketing in Milan, I was profoundly influenced by Miuccia Prada and the Prada Foundation. Her pioneering vision treats fashion as a cultural laboratory, seamlessly weaving architecture, contemporary art, and narrative display. This approach reshaped my understanding of fashion's intellectual depth and cross-disciplinary possibilities, encouraging me to work freely across materials and to create immersive, story-driven worlds of my own.

What draws you to create narrative spaces where private memories become shared reflections?

During my undergraduate studies in public art and curatorial practice, I was introduced to a wide range of

creative methods beyond traditional painting. It was then that I discovered my fascination with narrative spaces. Working with spatial storytelling allows me to evoke empathy and transform private memories into shared emotional experiences. Many of my projects draw directly from my own life and growth, and I am often moved by viewers who tell me they feel a deep resonance with the work. Looking ahead, I hope to further develop this approach, continuing to weave personal history and collective memory into immersive environments.

In Orchid Spine, you transformed chronic pain into a powerful visual metaphor. How did this idea emerge, and what personal meaning does the orchid hold for you?

In creating Orchids bones, I drew on Chinese painting techniques and traditional symbolism. The work envisions orchids sprouting from cross-sections of the spine, inspired by my long struggle with chronic spinal pain. During moments of discomfort, I would imagine each vertebra quietly rooting and blossoming within. In Chinese culture, the orchid symbolizes purity and elegance, and in my meditation it became a metaphor for the opening of inner chakras—a transformation of physical pain into spiritual growth and resilience.

Your film Talk to Me but Don't Speak experiments with silence and gesture. What surprised you most about non-verbal communication during that project?

This street-based art film explores what communication becomes when words are no longer available. What surprised me most was how eager people were to connect despite the language barrier. They instinctively turned to more primal forms of expression—hand gestures, improvised drawings, even sketching directly on the pavement. The moment when we drew together on the ground was especially striking: although we shared no common language, understanding emerged instantly. It made me imagine how early pictographic writing might have evolved from such direct, visual exchanges.

Living between Milan and Hangzhou, how does moving between cultures influence your artistic voice and themes?

My life often feels provisional and nomadic. Through residencies and curatorial projects I have moved across five or six countries, with Milan and Hangzhou as my main bases. Milan's annual Design Week and its rich landscape of exhibitions have been formative, helping me define my artistic direction and leading me to join both the official Milan artists' association and a Sino-Italian cultural exchange organization. Hangzhou, meanwhile, offers the vibrant energy of China's new generation of artists. Immersed in the China Academy of Art and collaborating with West Lake cultural institutions and local museums, I have gained an equally vital perspective. These experiences of cultural interplay and global mobility continually expand my vision and push me to evolve my artistic practice.

How does your experience as a curator shape the way you create and present your own artworks?

I see the roles of curator and artist as two inseparable sides of the same practice, each enriching the other. I am grateful to work with both the intuitive sensitivity of an artist and the structural, spatial perspective of a curator. Curatorial training has taught me to think through spatial storytelling and audience experience: how circulation, lighting, installations, and text can create dialogue between the work, its environment, and the viewer. This perspective not only deepens my attention to the relationship between artwork and space but also cultivates a cross-disciplinary mindset, allowing each piece to unfold like a miniature exhibition layered with visual language, emotion, and thought. Moving fluidly between these identities enables me to continually push the boundaries of art, so that every project becomes both an artwork and a fully immersive narrative experience.

Owen Brown

Owen Brown | Three Roses In Milk Bottles, From The Byzantium Series | 2025

You began as a classical musician before turning to painting. How has your musical background influenced your visual art practice?

An understanding of visual rhythm, and a deeper appreciation for abstraction. For music that is not song, is abstract.

Your works are held in significant collections, from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco to the Weisman Museum. How do you feel about the institutional reception of your work

Owen Brown | Tulips In A Glass Vase, From The Byzantium Series | 2025

compared to private collectors?

Being in a museum secures bragging rights and make me more collectible, but I would rather my works find a more permanent spot on a wall than be warehoused and only trotted out for scholars or special exhibits. That, so far, has been the fate of my pieces acquired by art institutions.

Could you share more about your experience with residencies, particularly how the environment at Black Mountain Ranch or Berlin's Milchhof Kunstverein shaped your creative direction?

I find residencies clarifying in intention and valuable for finding new routes, or reinforcing and strengthening old ones. I am determined by my environment – who is not? When placed in a new, somewhat alien one, I am squeezed by different factors into something new. So Black Mountain Ranch, with its mandate to "paint the ranch," and its request to use, as much as possible, "natural" materials, found me painting mainly figuratively, with "natural" paints - to better represent the timeless "now." The Milchhof, a stone's throw from the Berlin Wall, pushed me in the direction of history, lost time, failing memory, and how could that be created but for its essence – not figurative but emotional, hence abstraction, for the "then." The Leipzig International Art Programme has offered me a three-month residency in 2026 and who knows? Perhaps both of those elements will be combined then.

In your Byzantium Series, you draw inspiration from Orthodox iconography. What did you find most powerful in this visual tradition, and how did you reinterpret it in your still lifes?

Owen Brown | Irises In Glass Vase From The Byzantium Series | 2025

My shallow understanding is that post-Byzantine Orthodox church iconography operated in a condition of relative stasis, glorious visually though it was, prior to the works of the 16th century Albanian painter Onufri. This at least as compared to the experimentation enjoyed by the West. I don't mean to deny the unmistakable genius of the Russian Andrei Rublev, the transgressions of El Greco from the Cretan school, or the influence ofVenetian "corruption," where an extraordinary exchange of traditions occurred. But I think what most impresses me is the utterly didactic nature of these works, their call to worship, and their provision of an image which, end in itself, is also a shining gateway into the heavenly sphere.

You mentioned the challenge and allure of working with gold leaf. What do you think this material brings to your art that other mediums cannot?

Gold leaf is the glory of the heavens, both an artifact in itself and a symbol, redolent of religious mysticism equally in the Orthodox and Western Churches, and Theravada Buddhism. It's an anchor into particular traditions and ways of knowing.Technically, for my own paintings, its reflectivity interrupts the "painting" – it provides a non-porous medium that refuses the transformation and depth of traditional glazing. Its brilliance at the same time reminds us of painting's artifice and through impermanence, obliquity and impermeability, throws into relief the temporality of figure, or even abstraction.

Many of your works play with layers of meaning—history, spirituality, and personal emotion. How do you balance these elements without overwhelming the viewer?

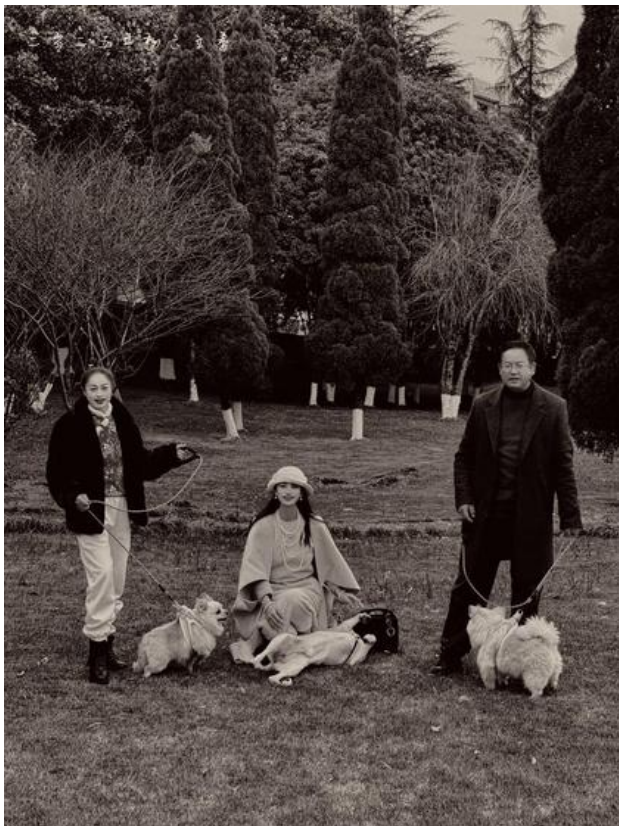
In part by concentrating on the formal composition of the painting. What colors to use, their level of saturation, the narrative positioning within the picture frame, and either the espousal or the rejection of particular models of armature. The technical is as important as the story - where are you going to place visually prominent elements, and for what purpose? All of this, in theory, can serve to retard, retain, and reinforce the patience and interest of the viewer… if they look carefully enough. Or they might just give the painting a glance and walk right on by.
I have been doing this long enough that some of these systems are automatic – I don't recognize that I've used them until the painting is considered finished and set aside for a few days. Post this I can look with new eyes, and decide whether it is finished, and finished "correctly," or not! After which, it's either varnished, or becomes a different painting.

You've lived and exhibited across the United States and Europe. How do different audiences respond to your art? Have you noticed cultural differences in interpretation?

European audiences, in particular German audiences, seem more attuned to historical references, more trained in the visual arts, and more willing to locate my paintings within a particular emotional context: one critic pronounced that I was firmly within the tradition of "die Sehnsucht", that is, longing. Maybe so.But this is all a matter of degree, and self-selection. Art exhibits don't attract a "mass" audience, perhaps they are more "mass" in the United States, less self-confident, less comfortable about their understanding of art historical topics and controversies, and so less willing to express an opinion.

Owen Brown | Blues In 4 Glass Vases From The Byzantium Series | 2025

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan



Your work bridges Eastern and Western cultural influences. How do you navigate and merge these two perspectives in your creative process?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: Eastern and Western cultures seem to be naturally integrated into my works that view the world from the perspective of a China-born, Canada-raised female film director. Mermaid in the Garden of Escapism is a film of particular significance to me. It marks my debut as a filmmaker, born during a period when I was grappling with countless life choices and the chaos of surroundings—its inspiration is drawn from an 18th-century English poem about mermaids. Its narrative weaves through the initial portrayal of the Mermaid by Gloria Gao, the final version of the Merman played by Huang Baoguo in reshoots, and the symbolic performance of Fung Kun who acted as the Butcher slaying two fishes without showing the face. A white tablecloth, an oversized white shirt, lemons that fate hurls at each of us...Regardless of gender, we seem trap in the cages forged by society's imposed frameworks. The film's ending ascends on the wordless melody of Deeper Than the Ocean—much like the Yin and Yang of Eastern philosophy, the two fish stand as a symbol of balance between feminine and masculine forces, neither complete without the other, for a world cannot exist with only one. After all, "Strength has no gender." That unspoken finale might be love for some, struggles against fate for others, or perhaps an awakening of self for many. This film, conceived in 2019, premiered at CIFF in Canada on May 25, 2024. Spanning five years from filming, editing, and script refinement to production and promotion, it mirrors my own journey—like a silkworm shedding its cocoon, breaking free from a predetermined life path, and ultimately emerging transformed, having achieved self breakthrough and renewal.

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan | Mermaid In The Garden Of Escapism | 2024

In Mermaid in the Garden of Escapism, surrealist imagery plays a central role. What draws you to surrealism as a visual language?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: Dreams are the wellspring of my inspiration. Since childhood, I have been fond of sleep, and I often experience dreams that are surrealistic and visually ethereal—some even turning out to be precognitive, which unfolds in reality later on. In my works, I have used the transition between metaphorical scenes: the shift between dreams and reality, between slumber and awakening. Such symbolic elements—dreams, liminal spaces, and those seemingly random yet distinctive people and things that emerge in life—are in fact indicators guiding us to the answers within ourselves.

I maintain the daily habit of reading and writing, so over the years, I have amassed a vast library of information and knowledge. My reading spans a wide spectrum: from business, finance, and politics to culture, art, and fashion, and even extends to obscurely niche domains. Whenever I dream of or encounter something unusual, I research its connotations and symbolic meanings across different cultures, and write down my findings. In time, a rich, massive "database" has taken root in my mind. Take one dream as an example: I dreamed of a spider crawling toward me from the old courtyard of my late grandfather's house. It grew bigger and bigger, swelling to a gigantic size, as if poised to attack me—in the dream, I seized the giant spider with one hand, just like one would grasp a large crab, and snapped off several of its legs with a crisp crack. Later, when I delved into the cultural symbolism of spiders and explored dream interpretation, I came to realize that part of my inner fear likely stems from patriarchal society—particularly the norms and constraints imposed on women by traditional families in East Asian societies. Yet my actions in the dream also seemed to symbolize that, deep down, I possess the courage and capacity to break free from such bonds, which are also shackles. Interestingly, I later used an AI tool to render this dream into a Tarot card: an elegant young woman calmly and gently capturing a giant spider with her bare hands. The image is quite amusing—the spider, flustered at being caught, even looks a bit cute. On the whole, it bears a resemblance to the "Ace of Pentacles" in Tarot, signifying the reconstruction of material

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan | Mermaid In The Garden Of Escapism | 2024

foundations and other cornerstones of everyday life. Elements like the spider, when incorporated into audio-visual storytelling, can evoke emotions such as danger, unease, and fear. Films and other works of art, in essence, are the abstract transmission of emotional perception through a tapestry of such elements. The use of surreal imagery can craft an imaginative ambiance that transcends the boundaries of space and time. And the value of a creator lies in fostering emotional resonance that bridges cultures, spaces, and time.

The mermaid is a recurring figure in mythology. What made you choose this symbol to explore themes of gender and agency?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: Andersen's The Little Mermaid is one of my favorite fairy tales. The Mermaid is a character that has been repeatedly reinterpreted as women's social status evolves—she is a hopeless romantic who sacrifices herself to save the prince, and also the sea's daughter and princess, one who yearns for freedom and turns into foam to soar toward the sky. Meanwhile, she is an independent individual who must break free from the bondage of "the sea as a metaphor for patriarchy"—a force that serves both as a powerful refuge and a personal constraint—to claim a sky that truly belongs to her.

In my film Mermaid in the Garden of Escapism, I selected six female AIs from diverse age groups and cultural backgrounds to do the voiceover, and synthesized their voices to recite the same 18th-century English poem about mermaids. This poem, in essence, tells a universal female fate: though she is beautiful, noble, and pure, she ultimately remains trapped in a gendered social framework that objectifies women, with "being a good wife and mother" as its final chapter. The difference between the subject and the object lies in this: a subject's life is a story of "who I am," while an object's life is a story of "whose I am." When we examine such established social frameworks through the lens of gender, we will find that men are expected to achieve success throughout their lives, whereas women are expected to "marry well." Most people spend their lives in a hasty blur, trapped in these gendered frameworks and invisible social norms—they neither attain the so-called "success" they truly desire, nor stay ignorant of what lies beneath the surface of "marrying well."In reality, people are taught how to achieve success or how to "marrying well," yet few are guided on how to "be oneself". Among East Asian cinematic works, Big Fish & Begonia (2016) by Chinese animation directors Liang Xuan and Zhang Chun, The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (2013) by Japanese animation master Isao Takahata, and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) by Chinese Taiwanese director Ang Lee all explore the conflict between the awakening of individuality and collectivism. When an individual enters a family, a clan, or any specific collective, they usually bear the inescapable shared responsibility and karmic fate of "prosperity for all when one prospers, and ruin for all when one falls"—a fact that is often overlooked in the grand narrative of collectivism.

Returning to the unique symbol of the Mermaid, she represents the awakening of female individuals. For "being yourself" is, to some extent, a privilege. During my tenure as a mentor at a non-profit organization for female entrepreneurs, I was introduced to a tool for the equality movement—the Wheel of Power/Privilege. By deconstructing contradictions within social hierarchies, it provides a theoretical foundation for understanding equality. Twelve color spectrums list a series of indicators that can be quantified by hierarchy, such as identity, age, gender, wealth, and education. The closer one is to the center, the more privileges they possess; conversely, the farther one is, the more marginalized they become in society. In essence, it resembles a form of order that constitutes the collective world. In this chaotic era ushered in by the pandemic, people are mired in various confrontations—bickering about gender conflicts, talking about class solidification, and worrying about the uncertainties of what is to come tomorrow and next year. Yet, the inherent strength derived from each person's unique self knows no categories: it transcends gender, has no hierarchy, and carries no distinction between nobility and inferiority. It requires no proof to others, nor does it depend on how many positions one holds on the Wheel of Power/Privilege or how close one is to its center—it is something that enables people to unconditionally accept and love themselves in every moment, especially the present. We can call this "love"—starting with self-love, extending to love for others, and finally reaching out to the broader world. This is also the core theme I proposed in a TEDx talk earlier this year: "Embrace Your Uniqueness." It is also a privilege in the ideological realm—a privilege that many people never truly notice or realize they can freely possess at any time: the power of being yourself.

The film uses vivid color contrasts and layered literary metaphors. How do you approach balancing visual beauty with thematic depth?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: A work from a filmmaker's perspective—an artist's expression—is essentially a manifestation of how the storyteller observes and engages in dialogue with the world. I don't think they're contradictory or conflicting in a way. It's like—when the right conditions are met, women actually don't need to balance family and career. The depth of a theme depends primarily on the early stage of creation—essentially, the story itself—and the core of that lies in what kind of story you want to tell. Visual appeal, on the other hand, is a matter for the filming and production process, which is something built on the foundation of the story. To frame it vividly, we can liken the art of film to a tree: the story is the roots, and the visuals are the branches. At its core, the art of cinema is a form of conveying ideas. So the essence of what it seeks to express far outweighs how aesthetically pleasing its presentation is.

As for visual allure, I've nurtured a passion for painting since my childhood. I garnered awards and had the artworks published when I was a kid. When I first started as a young entrepreneur in the creative domain, I chose the fashion industry as my path of passion. In the capacity of a creative director, I crafted a multitude of fashion art editorials and films for the magazine in circulation at that time. When it comes to aesthetics, it's like a foundation built up over time—so I never really polished it on purpose. Instead, there are times when I need to check myself the other way around: will the composition and setting end up looking too much like a fashion editorial? This is something to which I must pay extra attention in the future, particularly when filming and producing content that embodies a more life-like essence. When filming surrealistically, people don't notice this issue.

You deliberately used AI-generated voices in the film. How do you see AI as both a tool and a metaphor in your storytelling?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: AI voiceover in the film reflects a lack of voices. In this chaotic, complex world, we encounter artificial intelligence also searching for order. Fear, surprise, anxiety, trust...When these emotions intermingle, who could have imagined that right now, and for years to come, those supposedly cold super Artificial Intelligence systems may crave nothing more than the fleeting emotions that make us human? The role AI plays in human society is much like that of power: a double-edged sword with intersecting impacts. Just as power itself is neither right nor wrong—what is wrong lies only in the people who misuse it to harm others—the same logic holds true if we replace "power" with "AI."

AI, as a tool can be customized, yet it may also create information cocoons that deepen cognitive divides. Take the six AI female robots I intentionally selected—each representing different ages and cultures: their speaking speed, tone, emotions, and content can all be tailored. This mirrors human experience, especially for women, who have long

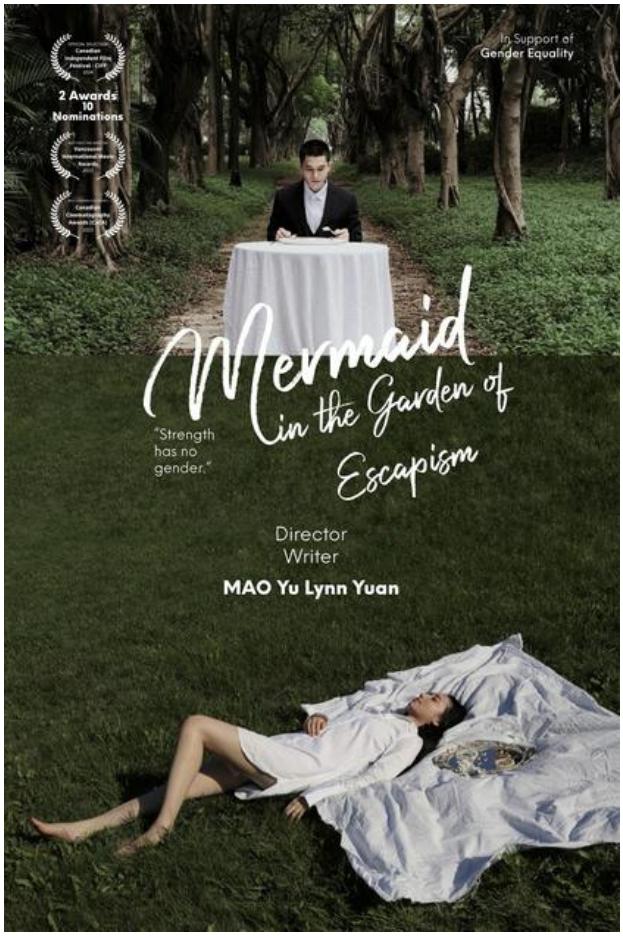
lived within frameworks that objectify them. It seems they spend their entire lives surrounded by pre-customized voices. It's not that opportunities don't exist for them; rather, more often than not, the "voices" around them act like an information cocoon, telling them: This is the only path your life can take. And this applies to men as well. AI is also much like a mirror reflecting our human society. If algorithmic models are the "brain structure" of AI, then data is the textbook that shapes this brain. If those textbooks hold biases, AI inherits them, creating closed loops that makes problems unseen and away from a solution. Yet many now call AI their "best friend," using it to project emotions and resist nihilism. In this sense, AI doesn't just reflect collectivism—it gives individuals the option to step outside of it.

How has your dual education in Toronto and Hong Kong shaped your views on individuality versus collectivism in art?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: To a certain extent, collectivism is associated with unity, yet it also harbors inevitable dark sides of human nature such as rivalry and envy. Individuality is often linked to solitude, which is accompanied by inner freedom and self-exploration. An individual who does not engage in energy exchange with the outside world can hardly develop spontaneous, diverse views on the world—this is much like the balance one must strike between "this-worldly path" (engaging with society with a sense of responsibility) and "other-worldly path" (focusing on oneself with as few human connections as possible). In the film Mermaid in the Garden of Escapism, the Eastern philosophical concepts of "Yin" and "Yang" are embodied through two fish that repeatedly appear as metaphors. This explains why the male and female leads are portrayed as the male and female versions of a mermaid: they not only symbolize men and women, but also represent the masculine and feminine forces in the world. This can be seen as a philosophical wisdom of seeking balance amid numerous contradictory dualities.

I was born in mainland China, moved to Canada as a teenager, and later relocated to Hong Kong, China in the wake of the pandemic. I see myself as part of a generation raised amid the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. My childhood was steeped in fairy tales: back when China had just joined the WTO and globalization was gathering momentum, every time my dad returned from a work trip, he would bring me a multicultural gift—Barbie dolls, Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale collections, DVDs of Japan's Anmitsu Hime and America's Betty Boop from that era...I still keep all these to this day. As a teen, I attended an international school in Shenzhen—a "window city" of China's reform and opening-up—where I received an education that wove together Chinese and international values. Starting around my teens, as I entered adulthood, I chose to embark on an entrepreneurial journey during my college years while observing society—and all these life chapters unfolded in Canada, my second homeland. My undergraduate studies in Arts Management at the University of Toronto afforded me the freedom to create freely and nurtured a critical mindset. Having loved reading and writing since childhood, I can express myself fluently in Chinese characters and shift between Chinese and English translation with literary grace—a unique bond I share with Eastern culture, particularly Chinese culture. Many subtle nuances of artistic conception in Chinese are irreplaceable in English; conversely, the distinctive beauty of numerous English words defies precise conveyance in Chinese. This is an inherent trait of every culture, much like how an individual's uniqueness is nearly impossible to replicate. Yet it was only in recent years—when the pandemic allowed me to live continuously in my homeland, China, for three years as an adult for the first time—that I truly began to delve into in-depth research and integrate Eastern culture into my cognitive framework.

In my first year back, I planned to take a family portrait, but my grandfather—who had chatted and laughed with me just a week prior—suddenly fell ill and passed away in the hospital. It was the first time I witnessed the death of a loved one: I held his hand and watched his ECG flatline amid the beeping sounds. The following year, my grandmother also passed away in her twilight years. In the third year, coinciding with the production of the mermaid film, my cat—who had been my companion for over a decade—died of cancer in Toronto. During these years, some friends endured hardships due to their parents. In the typical East Asian social structure, where families are



MAO Yu Lynn Yuan | Mermaid In The Garden Of Escapism | 2024

bound by the principle of "prosperity for all, adversity for all," an individual's fate often rises and falls in tandem with their family's. Endowed with a strong sense of empathy since childhood, I observed these events of friends—unrelated to me yet emotionally resonant—from the sidelines. When it came to life's profound questions of life and death, separation and reunion, and individualism versus collectivism, I felt as if I was "taking intense lessons" through others' life stories, with one after another, with more lessons still to come. For a long time, I was deeply affected by the negative impacts of these tales of others' fates, which eventually gave birth to this debut mermaid film. Later, I learned to let go of the savior complex and respect the fate of others. It wasn't until I sat down to draft my own TEDx speech script that it suddenly dawned on me: Oh, those are other people's life stories. THIS IS the story of my own life journey.

I fly frequently between China and Canada. One moment, I might be immersed in discussing filming plans with friends in Toronto; the next, I'm switching to a conference call with friends in Beijing to talk about quadruped robotic dogs; soon after, I'm coordinating with friends in Hong Kong on which international forum to attend. My master's studies in Sustainability Leadership and Governance at the University of Hong Kong, coupled with Hong Kong's role as a bridge for cultural exchange between China and the world, have provided me with a perfect platform to leverage my strengths as someone raised with both Eastern and Western cultures. Cultural shocks are inevitable, but I have never viewed Eastern and Western cultures as opposites. On the contrary, when they merge deeply and strike a balance—much like the Yin-Yang harmony emphasized in Eastern philosophy—this unity becomes a form of art, a strand of life wisdom, and a reflection of the high-level harmony attainable in our human society.

To be honest, the past few years of navigating Sino-Western cultural shocks have felt like stepping aboard a light-speed spaceship in a dream. The world around me seems to peel away layer by layer; as the spaceship passes through different places, the people I encounter blur and sharpen in my memory in equal measure. I have long stood outside one comfort zone bubble after another, overcoming one fear after another. At first, it felt like traversing one tunnel after another; later, it was like driving down one dark highway after another. But in

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan | Mermaid In The Garden Of Escapism | 2024

the end, I realized that all my fears were nothing more than "fears I've crafted in my own mind"—much like how I always rely on GPS, treating it as a habit and a source of inner security. One day, my phone died, GPS ceased to work, and there was no one ahead to guide me forward. In that moment, I felt insecure and briefly panicked. But the key insight emerged: I have always known how to find my way, with or without GPS—or rather, I no longer need it. After all, a change-maker doesn't need GPS; they themselves are the direction. When Shakespeare wrote, he likely didn't dwell on the "thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes." If he had overthought such things, we wouldn't have the masterpieces we cherish today. This mirrors how people need to choose the "this-worldly path" to engage with the collective for energy exchange, yet ultimately must return to their inner selves—the "other-worldly path"for refining life wisdom in solitude to become a better version of themselves.

What conversations do you hope audiences will have after watching Mermaid in the Garden of Escapism?

MAO Yu Lynn Yuan: One lies in the power of "being oneself" amid individual awakening. Awakening does not mean abandoning the ambition to become a better self, sinking down to nihilism, or withdrawing from the world to be free and caring about nothing. Instead, it means gaining clarity on who you truly want to be, where you truly want to go, and what kind of life path you truly want to forge from the depths of your heart—and earnestly tending to the driving force behind your life: your mind. When reflecting on every pivotal breakthrough in life, nearly all of them stem from the strength brought by "being oneself". You did not take the path everyone else chose, nor did you worry about whether others liked it or not. You did not even fret over whether the value of investment matches the gain. Instead, you followed your inner voice and did what you believed in and desired without needing a reason. And surprisingly, it "succeeded." The strength comes not only from "being oneself" but also from the inner stability fostered by the sense of selfhood gradually built over time—you no longer search for the meaning of the present in hesitation, the past, or the future. For the world inherently has no meaning, yet you come to understand that your existence is the meaning itself. Society may seem to impose numerous rules and frameworks to restrict us, but in truth, the greatest limitation we face has always been the ones we set on ourselves.

Another lies in the boundaries within collectivism. This year's Zhongyuan Festival—a time to honor ancestors—I did not follow the traditional rituals of burning incense, paper offerings, or lighting lamps. Instead, amid my reverence and remembrance for my deceased ancestors and loved ones, I fed a flock of geese and a few squirrels, and continued reading chapters from a novel about three generations of Jewish women in America. Even in privileged middle-class American families, there exists a first-generation mother who died in a mental asylum after suffering domestic abuse at the hands of her husband, a successful and independent second-generation woman who treated "marrying well" merely as an "accessory," and a third-generation daughter who lived in the shadow of her mother—a glamorous, successful woman who was rarely home. There are no perfect people in this world, let alone perfect families. "Not quite forever, almost forever"—this line, from the book, was spoken by the third-generation daughter to the second-generation woman (her mother) when talking about this female bond of kinship. I find it beautifully poignant; it also vividly depicts the invisible thread of female connection that tethers them to each other amid the fleetingness of life.

When it comes to the father's role in the collective unit of "family"—a role that often symbolizes strength, serving as both a protective shield and a restrictive cage—and the other form of connection that is male intergenerational inheritance, I once wrote a poetic passage from the perspective of "a son/daughter writing about his/her father":

Seeing a mountain as a mountain;
Seeing a mountain not as a mountain;
Seeing a mountain still as a mountain.
After all these years,
The mountain remains a mountain,
And I remain myself.
The mountain has been the mountain;
I have been myself.
I am myself.

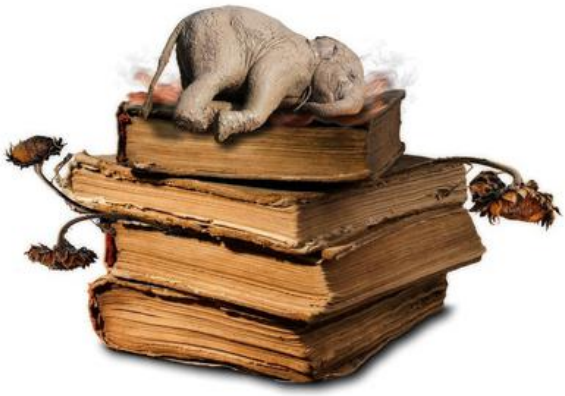
When we discuss the value of individuality, collectivism, and the relationships and boundaries between people, the inescapable conclusion is ultimately humanity's inherent loneliness, and the essence of life: resisting entropy. People strive to live to counteract the chaos of the world. Isn't it true that AI and AI-driven robots designed to "resemble humans" are trying so hard to gain the same ability as humans to resist such chaos? When more and more of us humans learn to love ourselves, respect our own lives and the lives of others with kindness, the inequalities in those seemingly opposing orders—marked by hierarchy based on gender, wealth, and power—may gradually diminish, just like the process of resisting entropy. And these are also the ideas behind the stories I aim to tell in my second film, which is currently a work-in-progress. The answers we so eagerly seek in life have always been within ourselves. May you find yours as well.

Interview

Oscar

You describe your art in three words as "Hope, Hope, Hope." Why do you choose to emphasize hope so strongly?

I see the visual world as having an immediacy that is however not straightforward in an interpretive sense; understanding of the world through what we see or what we think we see. Subjectivity at times plays a great part in how we understand the world. You asked me why I described my art in three words; Hope, hope, hope, they could be seen as underpinning the work that I'm trying to put into the world. I hope that the work will be interpreted in the way I intended it to be; I hope that it will touch people in a way that they will feel motivated to go further with the work's message, to dig deeper into its meaning through other media; I hope that the work is in tune with the current zeitgeist and it shines, to some degree, with hope for a better world.



Oscar | Lost Hope

How did your early experience in advertising shape your current visual language?

Advertising is a very demanding environment; advertising is unforgiving of failure; therefore you have to make sure that your technique, visual language and aesthetic is sound, that your pre-production and post production is very solid. You have a limited time in which to achieve an image; so the discipline advertising gave me was one that has been very useful in producing my artwork. I wake up in the morning, I have an idea, usually around something I've read or discussed with friends perhaps the night before and then I immediately set out to create an image from those experiences. Advertising's impact on my work was that it made me see the value of a complicated idea expressed in a simplified form. My visual language is embedded in the work through the ideas I bring to the work, I try to keep the visual language clear and free from obfuscation.

Your works often deal with pressing issues such as climate change and democracy. Do you see your art as activism, or more as personal reflection?

I see all art as having to some extent a political dimension. I set out to convey my response to the current flow of news with a focus on climate, war and injustice to humanity and the natural world. I think all art is a personal reaction to what is happening in the world. Sometimes it manifests by responding to local or domestic issues. In my case the work attempts to

Oscar | Earth Axe

express broader themes on a more universal level than a local level.
One interest I have is the claim a country has of being a functioning democracy. This can in one way be tested by the amount of freedom that the country gives to art; by not shutting it down or hoodwinking the people by saying art that challenges the establishment has no place or no meaningful voice in that country. Art has a long tradition of activism; I'm just following that tradition.

How do you balance clarity of message with preserving a sense of mystery or discovery in your images?

Preserving a sense of mystery or discovery in my images is obtained by not making them too obvious, but obvious enough so that messages are revealed. There's always going to be a little bit of flexibility in the image's meaning, but hopefully the viewer is sent in a particular direction and hopefully there's enough signifiers in the image to have a clarity of message. But I think an image is like a free radical and once it's out there peoples' interpretations and understanding and fancies cling onto it. I don't think clarity is an easy balance to achieve. I hope I have in some ways done that; for example the image of the elephant lying on a mound of books I hope is fairly clear. The books, they're very old books, they have a lot of history to them and the elephant is in this particular case a symbol of knowledge, it too represents something old, it's been around a long time. The sunflowers, well they are a symbol that's used quite a lot in art; If I think of Anselm Kiefer's use of sunflowers they have a meaning to them one of decay and death, but also the possibility for new growth and rebirth, here is my hope for the future again, and of course the image is a kind of funeral pyre because the elephant is sitting on books that are being burnt, that in itself is quite provocative as an image. We live at a time when knowledge is being challenged by forces that want to suppress it for political gain.

With AI and digital manipulation becoming more present, how do you think trust in images has changed?

The reality is you could never really trust an image. It was only an equivalent of a particular viewpoint. The photographer could in some ways be seen as a nascent picture editor. Their use of 35mm, medium or large format cameras, and even a smart phone are all ways of framing and editing the world to a particular viewpoint. Before the digital age, black-and-white film was thought to offer a true rendering of the scene yet the manipulation of the analogue processes was quite considerable from its beginnings. Image cropping, the type of lens and the paper grade used, all these factors would give a different mood, a different emphasis, a different interpretation. It's not only that you can't trust the image anymore, the question is can you really trust the producer of that image and Is it coming from a reliable trusted source? Ask what are the politics of the paper or the magazine or platform it's produced in? Who owns it? What are the vested interests?
Don't be passive, don't allow political amnesia to rule; then in the age of AI you might get to a reliable truth.

You mentioned staying anonymous so that the art speaks for itself. Do you think anonymity gives your work more freedom?

It frees me up in terms of ego, it's not about a name, it's the art that's important; not having my photograph displayed helps in that process for focussing on the art; as I said earlier, images are free radicals and my picture will not add in any meaningful way to the images, if anything it introduces a personality that can only get in the way. At the end of the day I hope to have done my job well and those images are actually conveying something of what I'd like to get out into the world. It's the image that's important, the effect of the images that is important. I'm just some dealer in images helping them on their way.

What emotions or reactions do you hope a viewer takes away after seeing your art?

What emotions and reactions? I hope the viewer takes something positive away after seeing my art, but when they are out in the world they are on their own. I hope I just pointed them in the right direction. I hope they find a good home.

Tianyu Chen

Can you tell us more about your early inspiration from magazines at newspaper stands, and how those first impressions continue to influence your work today?

As a child, I often lingered at newspaper stands, flipping through magazines. My favorite was Children's Literature, which featured illustrations from artists around the world: a piano flying across the sky, a colorful owl, a girl speaking with a whale. The images were vivid and delicate, each of them carried me into another world. I remember seeing a tiny house at the edge of the sky and wondering if fairies might live there.

Those pictures felt magical, as if the stories were truly happening somewhere. These early encounters shaped how I see images today. An image is never merely an image; every color, every stroke carries emotion, and stories quietly unfold within them.

Tianyu Chen | The Crack | 2023

How has your experience of studying in Taiwan and now in London shaped your artistic identity?

They shaped how I observe and create. My time in Taiwan was a journey of inward exploration. It was a quiet and tender process that taught me to be honest with myself and with my artwork. My tutor often said: "Don't make the work I like, make the work you like." At first it just sounded like a simple piece of advice, but it took root in my heart and quietly grew. I stopped chasing approval from others and instead sat with myself, listening more carefully, sensing emotions and even the subtlest shifts of the body. Those sensory experiences became the core of my artistic practice. They still guide how I translate perception into visuals today.

In London, my practice opened outward. I began asking what is happening in the world around me. In my recent projects on belonging and displacement, conversations with people of different regions and generations became an important part of the process. Their stories made me reflect on the multiple interpretations of identity and home. This also became a question of visual storytelling: how can visuals create space for connection, and how can they invite viewers into a dialogue where senses and emotions intertwine? This intersection between inner perception and collective conversation has come to define the approach of my practice.

What role do cross-cultural experiences and migration play in your practice?

Tianyu Chen | The Crack | 2023

At first, cross-cultural experiences felt confusing, almost overwhelming. Moving between places meant being surrounded by new environments and unfamiliar ways of thinking. I felt I had to quickly find answers, a clear destination, a fixed idea of who I was or where I belonged. It was like carrying the pressure of defining myself all the time. As I engaged in deeper conversations with myself and opened fully to sensing the world around me, that urgency began to dissolve. I stopped looking for one final answer, one destination, and instead began to focus on the process itself —the in-between spaces, the drifting moments. The "destination" is not the only goal. Migration and cross-cultural experience taught me to embrace this openness; each creative practice does not have to be a perfectly concluded entity, but rather a process that continually opens new perceptions. They can be an ongoing journey, holding processes, fragments, and uncertainties.

"The Crack" draws inspiration from higher-dimensional geometry. How did you translate such abstract scientific ideas into visual forms?

For me, geometry and science were never just formulas. They felt like hidden worlds. When I first encountered superstring theory and models like the Calabi–Yau manifold, I was fascinated by the idea that entire dimensions could be folded within our universe, invisible yet present. In superstring theory, these manifolds are described as compact, multi-layered spaces where time and space can bend, collapse, or extend in unpredictable ways.
In my work, I deformed geometric forms, letting the interwoven rhythms of images become a medium to visualize these abstract concepts. The forms suggest space and time that stretch, fold, and overlap. What I tried to capture was not a literal explanation of science, but the experience of exploring higher dimensions: the instability, the wonder, and even the disorientation it brings.

Why did you choose the silkworm and cocoon metaphor to explore humanity's search for higher dimensions?

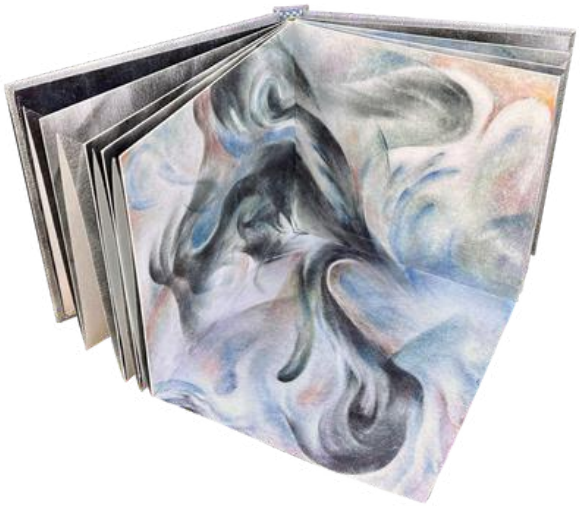
A silkworm spends most of its life enclosed, unaware of the world outside. In many ways, this mirrors how human beings experience our own dimension. We faintly sense a greater realm beyond us, yet remain confined by the boundaries we live within. The moment of breaking free and becoming a butterfly is a symbol of reaching higher dimensions. The silkworm not only sheds the cocoon, but also transforms its very form, along with how it moves and perceives the world. This metaphor became central to The Crack. I wanted to convey that even though we are trapped in our own dimension, the desire to explore always drives us to push beyond those limits, just as the silkworm becomes a butterfly and flies into a wider world.

Could you describe the creative process of making the cubic storytelling book? How do structure and format affect narrative in your work?

I wanted viewers to feel that they were opening a new space each time they encountered the work. The cube allowed me to create this experience in a physical way. The act of unfolding becomes a part of the story itself.
Using 3D software, I folded and arranged images so that each cubic space became an independent dimension. The structure itself became a metaphor for multi-dimensional space: layered, folded, intersecting. It invites viewers to follow the silkworm's path, wandering through corners and edges of the cube, gathering fragments of the story as their gaze moves.

Your scroll painting is twenty meters long. What challenges and possibilities did working at this scale bring?

Creating a twenty-metre scroll was both exhausting and exhilarating. The scale itself was a challenge. I could never see the whole work at once, so I had to trust the rhythm of my hand and body as I moved along the paper. The process felt almost like a performance, with my entire body engaged in drawing continuous lines and shifting forms, resonating with them.
At the same time, the scale opened new possibilities for viewing. A scroll inherently carries movement. The viewer has to walk with it, unfolding it slowly, letting time become part of the experience. I wanted to echo the journey deeper into the universe: continuous, never fixed, always flowing forward. Through color and line, I hoped to let viewers feel the rhythm of the cosmos.



Tianyu Chen | The Crack | 2023

Natalie Kukushkina

• Member of the Association of Free Artists of Saint Petersburg
• Member of the Professional Union of Artists
• Member of the Saint Petersburg branch of the Creative Union of Artists (IFA)
• Member of the creative association “Mitki”
• Participant in solo and group exhibitions
• Participant in seasonal and thematic exhibitions of the Union of Artists

Education:

• Art School
• Pedagogical College with honors (specialization: Building Restorer)
• Ilya Repin St. Petersburg State Academic Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture of the Russian Academy of Arts (2016)

Natalie Kukushkina | First Love | 2025

Natalie Kukushkina | El Toro | 2025

Curt Walter

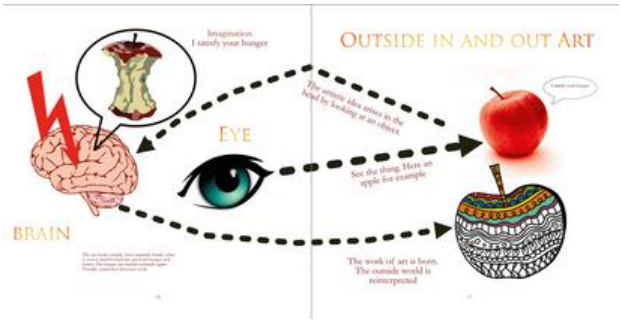
You have been creating artworks almost every day for decades. How does this daily practice influence your creative process and your understanding of art?

When I lived in a thatched cottage in Holland (1976–77), my credo became: realise an artistic idea every day, regardless of the material. At that time, I created terracotta sculptures every day over a short period of time. These were sculptures that I modelled in five to twenty minutes. Sometimes I spent several hours

modelling. The mini sculptures appear large and monumental. The time and distance of the form from bottom to top, from back to front, is manageable for the eye and its perception and opens up a depth that takes on an existential dimension. What does that trigger in you? I would rather classify these artistic ideas in the category of the method of randomness. Through the movements involved in modelling clay, forms arise unintentionally, by chance, which then remain relevant for further processing. This credo is still anchored in my daily artistic approach today. The search for artistic ideas became an art research that deals with the material and craftsmanship on the one hand and the emanation of the work on the other.

You invented the concepts of Inside out Art and Outside in and out Art. Could you explain how these two approaches differ and how they complement each other?

The difference between “outside in and out art” and “inside out art” lies in the stimuli that manifest themselves on and in the retina. In “Outside in and out art,” what is seen is converted into electrical signals, which are then transmitted to the brain via the optic nerve. Consideration is given to how the object can be transformed into another function and then renamed as a work of art. The path to this idea led first through observation from the outside in and then through reflection to a supposed work of art. In “Outside in and out art,” the retina is stimulated from the outside. In “Inside out art,” the retina is stimulated from the inside, i.e., the stimulus comes from the inner eye, the



subconscious, which stores an archive of images in the invisible. I access this archive through meditation. The images appear and I capture them in my drawings. Each meditation produces 8 scenographies.
In "Outside in and out art," my retina was stimulated from the outside by inspiration or by contemporary artist colleagues. I was also inspired by old masters with their stories, techniques, and styles, or stimulated by my empathy for nature, flora, fauna, animals, and their emanation. I also found objets trouvés, which I declared to be works of art. I reflected on the nature of things, objects, landscapes, and design, and experimented with the ready-made. Again and again, I set "signs of rebellion" in the aesthetic debate on topics such as nuclear disasters, military threats, control or non-control of fire, space debris, climate protection, nitrogen peroxide, apparence and apparition, lyrical landscapes, or playing with chance, or the forest in danger. Cognitive abilities have different origins. A precise answer to the question of where the inner images come from has not yet been found. The retina is stimulated from both sides. There is a hypothesis that the images perceived visually are stored in the subconscious outside the eyes. The creation of works that are influenced by external factors can lead to a mixture with images from the subconscious. Due to a lack of knowledge, I am unable to provide a precise answer to this question.

Meditation plays a central role in your Inside out Art. How do you prepare yourself for this meditative process, and how does it shape the images that emerge?

Preparation for meditation is done as follows: Charcoal pencils, colored pencils, sharpeners, watercolors, brushes, water, a bowl, paper, suitable lighting, and a singing bowl are laid out in preparation. The first step is to light a Japanese incense stick. The right environment is essential to ensure the concentration required to perform the activity. The tools are selected taking into account the specific requirements of the task at hand.
A prayer is said and the universe is invoked to the sound of the singing bowls. Then I have to yawn. Is yawning the gateway to the universe? When looking at a dark tunnel, a light can be seen at the end. My visual perception encompasses the entire area that spreads out before me. I approach the object until I finally see the image or sign. A thorough analysis of the object at hand is necessary to grasp the details, design, lines, and color. The image is memorized for further analysis. The focus of observation returns to the drawing, with the depicted motif anchored in the imagination. As part of my artistic practice, I interpret what I see on paper. It is not possible to view the image again under the given circumstances, as it is not possible to return to the tunnel. The image has been deleted. I am forced to repeat the process from the beginning. A new request is necessary. The process of creation is then initiated. The attempt to give the experience an aesthetic form is based on inner feelings. It should be noted that signs and writing cannot adequately express the event in its entirety. The signs therefore represent a mental echo. The present situation has no relation whatsoever to questions of personal taste. The image is conceived by the right hand, which can be regarded as a kind of projection of the mind. The process begins again. It is advisable to consult the universe. At the end of the session, a number of 8 to 20 signs were recorded on paper.
For further information, please refer to the social media platform Instagram, where the artist is active under the name "curt.walter.drawings." All drawings created since "Atlas of Imagination" are

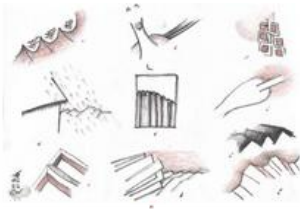
listed below.

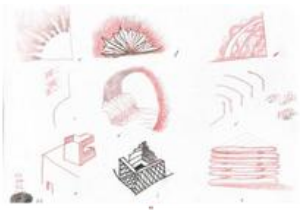
Many of your works reflect the tension between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. Why is this theme so important in your art?

A detailed analysis of the 2,500 drawings on the Instagram page https://www.instagram.com/curt.walter.drawings reveals a recurring use of certain motifs or subjects. Depictions representing the potential in the fields of architecture, jewelry, landscape, ornaments, fashion, and people are evident. According to the doctrine of ideas, everything that appears and flourishes in visibility manifests itself as an image of invisibility. The present study deals with the question of what role invisibility plays in relation to the archive of images from the inner eye. The motif of the presence of absence manifests itself repeatedly in the drawings. The drawings presented here are to be considered incomplete, as they do not contain certain elements. These are left to the viewer to supplement independently. The nature and character of my thoughts and feelings manifest themselves in the scenographies. This process enables me to gain a deeper self-knowledge and achieve greater authenticity in my artistic expression. This is of significant relevance.

In your statement, you said: "Artificial intelligence has no subconscious. And cannot replace the artist." How do you see the role of the artist in today's technological world?

This study examines the role of the artist in today's world. The aim of the study is to discuss the extent to which the role of the artist should confuse people. There is a violation of copyrights and the dissemination of false images and texts. It is essential that artists find their own unspoiled authenticity and draw from their subconscious. A

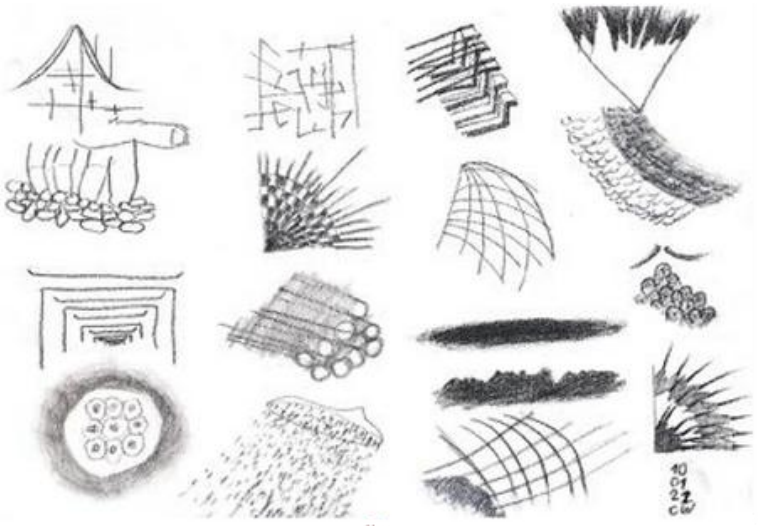


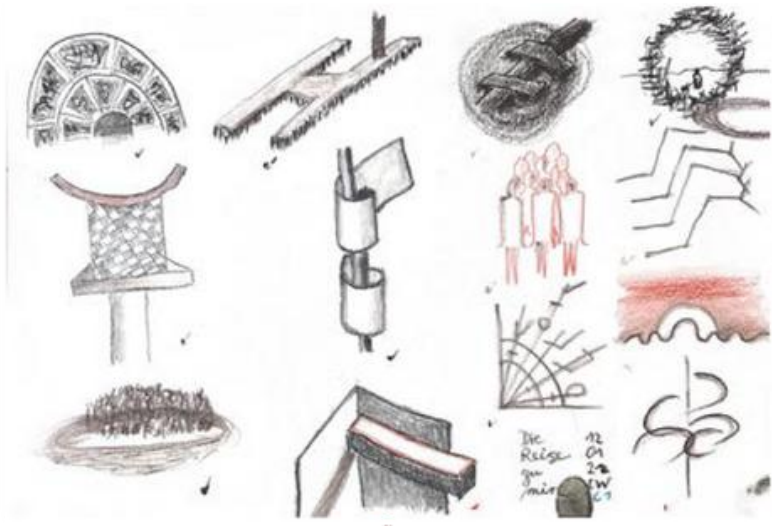


change in the methods of producing works of art is necessary. This text deals with the contemporary perception of art and concludes that the traditional "outside-in-and-out" imagination no longer meets current aesthetic and cultural demands. It argues that it is time to finally perceive and see pure, authentic art. The resulting artwork lacks its own authentic idea from the inner eye, something from the artistic inner self, the archive of images from the parallel world of each individual. It lacks the artistic inner self, the archive of images from the parallel world of each individual.
The development of a technology capable of locating, visualizing, and making visible the image archive in my subconscious would be a remarkable achievement.

You often describe your drawings as "hieroglyphs" from the subconscious. Do you see them more as personal language or as universal signs that connect to collective human experience?

The method of image search used in meditation, in which the universe is asked to send visual impressions related to universal laws, is called "hieroglyphics." The symbols presented are considered universal and undergo a transformation into a personal form of expression in the visual arts, more specifically in drawing and painting. The term has not been used correctly in this context, as the symbols were not carved in stone and therefore cannot be considered sacred. The term "scenography" is more precise in this context. The human subconscious is an essential aspect of the human psyche. Not everyone has access to this knowledge. The hypothesis that humanity is capable of collectively participating in the experience of the inner images of all people requires empirical evidence. The question of which artists tend to seek their works in an alternative reality, the subconscious, should be discussed. I am not aware of any others of this



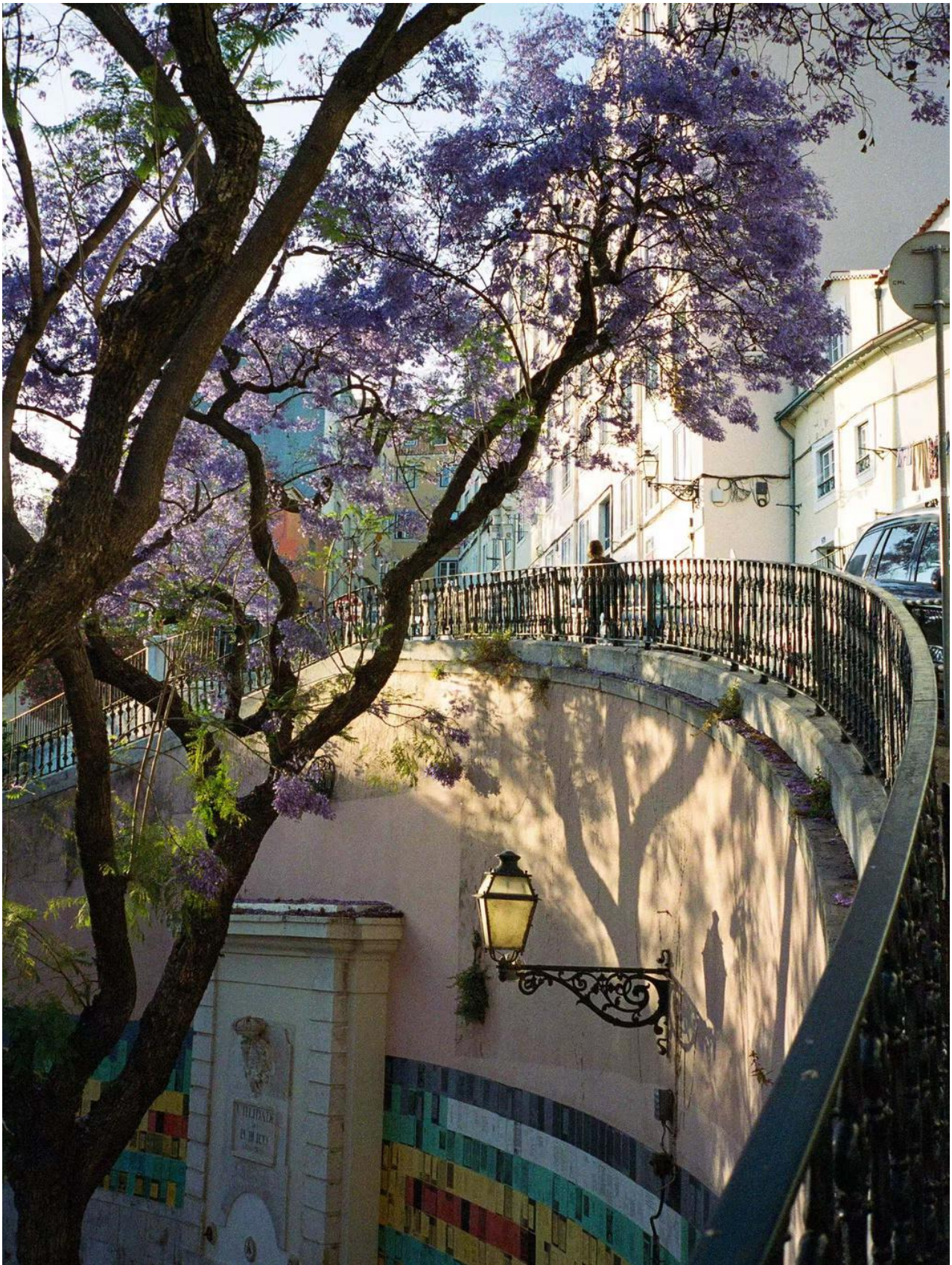


kind. It is quite conceivable that there will be an exhibition presenting works that have been created in a similar way to mine. Can you track down the artists? I would love to meet them!

You studied and worked in Paris during a time of great artistic experimentation. How did this environment shape your artistic journey?

In 1971, Paris was hit by a wave of major unrest. On several occasions, I was forced to flee by the police. During a personal encounter, I was introduced to the son of the sculptor Laszlo Szabo. At that time, his father's art school, the "Académie du Feu," was undergoing a phase of reorientation. The artist had moved from Paris to Germany, leaving behind a series of studios on Rue Delambre, Rue Daguerre, and Rue de la Tombe-Issoire, as well as a castle in Ravenel. Peter Szabo asked me if I would be willing to revive the academy. First, it was necessary to take measures to promote the academy and provide the necessary premises. A brochure was printed and sent to various diplomatic missions and consulates. The students began working together, and within a short time, there was a lively flow of visitors. Over the course of about one summer, we had about 40 people of Japanese origin in our care.
At the same time, I attended the Beaux-Arts de Paris, Etienne Martin's sculpture class. He acted as a catalyst for my individual development. I rejected the reproduction of the female model in front of me because I came to the conclusion that it was already a work of art and that imitating it was not my goal. Etienne Martin put it this way: "I believe that I take a similar approach to Paul Klee in my artistic practice. I refrain from adopting visual or thematic elements, but instead seek inspiration in other places."
The Musée Cernuschi offered painting classes in which participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Asian arts. My research focused on the Dadaists, Surrealists, and, in particular, the artistic and art-theoretical debates of the time, with Marcel Duchamp being a particular source of inspiration for me.

Jiayue Wang was born in China and currently lives and works in London, UK. Taking experimental film as her core medium, she extends her creative practice to photography and intermedia art, exploring the themes of fluid identity, sense of belonging, and emotional memory within a cross-cultural context.
Her creation is inspired by the concept of fluid identity. From the perspective of the "Third Space", her works not only reflect on cultural differences but also construct new narratives of self. By employing low-saturation tones, minimalist compositions, and multi-layered sound structures, she juxtaposes real memories with fictional imagery, creating an immersive viewing experience that lies between reality and imagination.
She focuses on the interweaving of personal and collective experiences in her moving images. Her works serve not only as a form of observation and documentation but also as a process of self-reflection and emotional resonance. She hopes that at the moment of viewing her films, the audience will be triggered to recall their own memories and establish an "empathic" emotional connection with the works.



Jiayue Wang | Jacaranda Shadows on the Curved Street | 2025

Jiayue Wang | Street View The New and the Old | 2025

Jiayue Wang | Wandering · Gazing | 2025

— *Interview*

Xeze

Your works are filled with vibrant, almost overwhelming colors. How do you decide on your color palette for each piece?

I don't decide, I just bullshit it all until it feels like it's right. Do I have red? Do I like red? I'll use red. Did I contaminate my yellow paint? Guess it's green. I also like to use colors I like. And if I don't like them, I won't use them.

You describe your art as coming from the most painful parts of your existence. How do you transform pain into such vivid and surreal imagery?

I think my work is less about depicting pain and more about putting a spotlight onto the dichotomy between different states of being that can all exist at the same time. It comes out all bright and colorful and swirly because I can't make myself pay attention to it otherwise. I think the transformation of pain into art is a distinct point that can't really be pinned down. I don't know if the pain ever becomes the art, but instead it contaminates my view of the world and I just can't stop myself from subconsciously vomiting it all out onto the canvas.

There's often a mix of humor and darkness in your paintings. Do you see your work more as catharsis, satire, or a bit of both?

I feel that my work falls somewhere between satire and meaningless-bright-color land. Most of the time, I'm not thinking about what I'm doing until after I'm done.

The characters in your works seem to live in a psychedelic, uncanny world. Who are they to you—self-portraits, archetypes, or entirely imagined beings?

They're just my guys.

Nostalgia and childhood pressure appear as recurring themes. How has your past shaped the visual language you use today?

I think about all the shit that happened to me and laugh until I cry. Then I think about commercial entertainment, and shopping, and theme parks, and rollercoaters. And then I think about myself. I feel like I always think about myself. I think about how I will sound in this interview. Crazy, self absorbed, 18? I think that's why I've been putting it off.
I don't know, I don't think much about my visual language, my style is a combination of things I like, combined with the limitations of my ability as an artist.

Your art could be seen as both grotesque and playful. How do audiences usually respond, and does their reaction matter to you?

People gravitate towards it because it's bright and shiny and colorful and in your face. It takes a certain kind of person to appreciate the yucky parts. Some people say it's great, and some people say that I'm talented but I'm wasting it and I should just paint realistic landscapes.

Brooklyn has a very diverse and energetic art scene. How has living there influenced your practice?

The city is good, it kicks me up the ass sometimes.

Piotr Syguda (b. 1965, Poland) is a self-taught photographer whose artistic journey began 18 years ago. Without formal art education, Syguda developed a distinctive voice through experimentation and dedication to traditional photographic techniques. His practice centers on wet plate collodion photography, a 19th-century process that demands precision and patience. Working exclusively in a studio environment, he creates evocative still life compositions featuring steel and industrial objects, exploring their textures, forms, and quiet symbolism. Syguda's work bridges craftsmanship and introspection, offering a timeless perspective on materiality and memory.

Piotr Syguda | Bachelor | 2025

Piotr Syguda | Walker | 2025

Shelina Khimji

You are a self-taught artist and also a chartered accountant — how did your artistic journey begin, and how do you balance these two worlds?

I was always found glued to easels in my play school. My teachers noticed this and remarked on it. However, I studied in an era where it was not common to start developing a child in their natural abilities.
As I grew up, we didn't have art classes in school but I enjoyed drawing in various classes.
Creativity was always a part of me, so I took part in theatre arts, school plays, concerts, poems, and anything that was to do with talent.
In my spare time at home, I would be lost in my world weaving a tapestry of all kinds of art. Since I started as a child artist my career spans various creative fields and mediums such as mixed media crafts, fabric painting, paper collage, glass painting, ceramic and clay.
Many a times I got remarks saying I would make a good architect as academically my strength was drawing, math and physics.
Unfortunately, I couldn't pursue it as I needed an art portfolio and my academic career took its own course. At some point, when the course got too intense, I moved to London to complete it and I forgot all about art.

I rapidly climbed my career ladder and became an audit manager. Years after, there came a point where I was looking for an outlet as a stress buster and to take me to another realm. Throughout those years, I observed that I became strongly drawn to colors, my surroundings, and creativity around me. I would look at paintings and get lost in. the beauty of them. It led me to buy some canvases and colours on the spur as a sudden urge to paint and that is how I discovered my own talent.
In 2009, I created my first acrylic painting and actually exhibited it locally.
As I went along, I used to return home from work and take a few mins or half an hour to draw or paint whatever inspired me.
For a few years, I juggled my full time career with art and participated in exhibitions both locally and internationally such as the East African Art Biennale, The Sketchbook Project, The Coffee Art Project to mention a few.
In 2018, I visited World Art Dubai and I witnessed creativity buzzing all around me. I was like a kid in a candy shop. My dream was to have my own booth at the World Art Dubai.
It pushed me to take a short career break and

paint full time and I felt very fulfilled which is why I then decided to freelance professionally.

What does it mean to you to be a Tanzanian artist with a multicultural background that includes Zanzibar, Britain, the US, and the UAE?

Having lived in difference cities, my identity was molded by observing layers of different cultures some of which shaped my personality. This identity became my lens to perceive the world and it influenced my appreciation for different cultures, my artistic style, colour choices and themes.
I began to notice the overlap between my own culture and other cultures so it allowed me to create unique and original works of art that blend different cultural elements and artistic forms cultivating modernism and pushing the boundaries of traditional art forms. I realised in doing so, I could engage with a wider audience creating a platform for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding and bridging cultural divides. This diverse storytelling tradition, has fostered empathy and challenged preconceived notions to reflect an unbiased world weaving cultural complexities.
Since being multi-cultural ingrained in me appreciation of diverse cultures, I realized we needed to preserve culture. My artworks therefore depict fresh and insightful perspectives on identity, heritage and legacies amplifying underrepresented perspectives that get lost in the modern world.

Your work has been featured in exhibitions and publications worldwide. What moments in your career have felt most meaningful or transformative?

In 2020, I registered for a solo booth at World Art Dubai. I took some of my pieces and traveled to Dubai, as the event was scheduled for April 2020, however, I ended up being locked down in Dubai while the exhibition got postponed to October.
I was disappointed but it was then that I came across, a project by Art Painting Lab on lockdown art which they were intending to display as murals all over UAE.
We could do as many pieces as we wanted with the hashtag United Art Emirates. The project unexpectedly became a sensation and every local newspapers featured it.
One day, they put an update saying CNN would feature some artworks and the deadline was in a few hours. I got to work and just made it to submit it in the last minute.
A month later, my artwork was showcased by CNN style marking a massive breakthrough.
I then proceeded with WAD however, it made me feel as if I had bitten off more than I could chew. Since I had a solo booth I had the responsibility to pack and carry all my pieces, fill out a zillion forms, install them, price them, etc. At the end of the show, I realized how transformational it was for my art career since in the process of it, I already had a website, business cards, a professional resume and all that it takes to become a professional artist.
I realized my dream and the icing on the cake was to be featured by Art & Lusso magazine and the National UAE. This led to more features in publications like the Khaleej Times and our local newspaper the Citizen Tanzania to mention a few.
Later, when a UK based TV channel invited me toparticipate in their live talk show on the topic, art and the purpose it serves, I got a platform to engage with an audience and forge a meaningful connection to create a lasting impression.
I was also approached to paint my very first mural jointly for a play room in the Children's Cancer Ward at our largest local Governemt hospital, Muhimbili National Hospital in Dar es Salaam. Since I had not done murals before I took up the challenge as a stepping stone and the fulfilment was overwhelming since I witnessed the joy I brought to all the children who used to play in the playroom while we painted.

How has your experience as a woman shaped your voice and visibility in the art world?

Since my childhood, I have been surrounded by creativity because both my grandmother and my mother were talented. My grandmother was an all rounder, good at crochet, sewing and cooking, while my mum was a dress designer naturally talented in style, colours, interior décor and fine tableware having also inherited cooking skills. I

have witnessed their creativity without having to think about stereotyping what women should do as they pursued their passions.
So when I started playing with colours and enjoying creating crafts as a child inspired by them, it never occurred to me that the art world was male dominated. I was a child lost in my own world of storybooks and crafts, building a relationship with myself while pursuing my passion. My mum encouraged me to ensure I do well academically while inspiring my creativity too and today I have a balance of both.
Havinng experienced this in my upbringing, my artworks therefore depicted my inner child, dreams and nostalgia. Eventually I realized, I had been breaking some societal norms because I graduated in an era when women were to be domestic while I was working as an audit manager and pursuing my passion.
When I got recognition in the art world, I sensed the necessity to illustrate my journey and legacy as a woman who can be as domestic as any other woman yet be creative and professional. This pushed me to create artworks that relate to women, giving voice to the voiceless, and forging paths that will inspire generations to come.
Some of the themes I picked were identity, recognition for their hard work and values they have upheld as well as be the force with which they have brought a difference in this world while breaking stereotypical barriers.
It is due to that, I have participated in the Zee Arts Gallery – Art Connects Women on two occasions, where I represented my country, Tanzania among 115 women from different parts of the World as well as Rangi Gallery's Ode to Women illustrating women in my paintinngs.
Currently, I am a part of a group called AWEDACITY having created my own immersive web3 space exhibiting all my artworks. This year, I was invited by them to attend the Women's Empowerment Virtual Summit and talk about my art journey.

What drives your commitment to community and social causes, such as cancer awareness and environmental protection?

I believe art is a universal language. It therefore, allows me to use its unique ability to stir a shared sense of humanity despite having diverse cultural backgrounds. I connect with my viewers to inspire empathy and provoke a dialogue as an instinctive and emotional response. When I feel connected on a deeper level, it gives me a sense of unity and makes me feel my artwork has tremendous power to capture my viewers core beliefs.
Besides that, I have a very expressive and unbiased personality. Thus the sense for bringing a change, speaking up for the underprivileged and supporting various causes are intrinsic to my nature. We have all heard of the phrase, "one picture is worth a thousand words," and I use my talent to my advantage. And finally, the fulfilment that comes with it is what keeps me going and gives my creativity a meaning.

You describe colour as powerful symbolism in your art. Could you tell us more about your emotional relationship with colour?

Colour is my powerful symbolism because it reflects my happy persona and my ideal world imagery. Whenever I imagine the world in black and white and no colour, I feel how boring this world would have been. Would we have been as excited to see a rainbow without colour?
This attraction and enchantment to colour dated back to my childhood memories of being in nature such as the aqua sea, the whitest of the sands, or the pinkness of the popularly known 10 o'clock flowers or Portulaca grandiflora.
These sensory impressions transpired into my everyday life and shaped my personality reflecting from my choice of colours.
A remark I have persistently heard from my viewers when they see my work is how my work "soothes" them. This is because I have a very serene air and an idealistic personality.
Colour evokes my inner child and when I see swatches of colours, like a box of crayons, a pan of watercolours, or pots and tubes of paint, I start to imagine and wish the world was filled with avenues of empty canvases, and I could stroll with my brushes, splattering hues everywhere, creating art freely.

Your paintings often depict nostalgic, dreamlike scenes. What stories or emotions do you hope viewers take away from them?

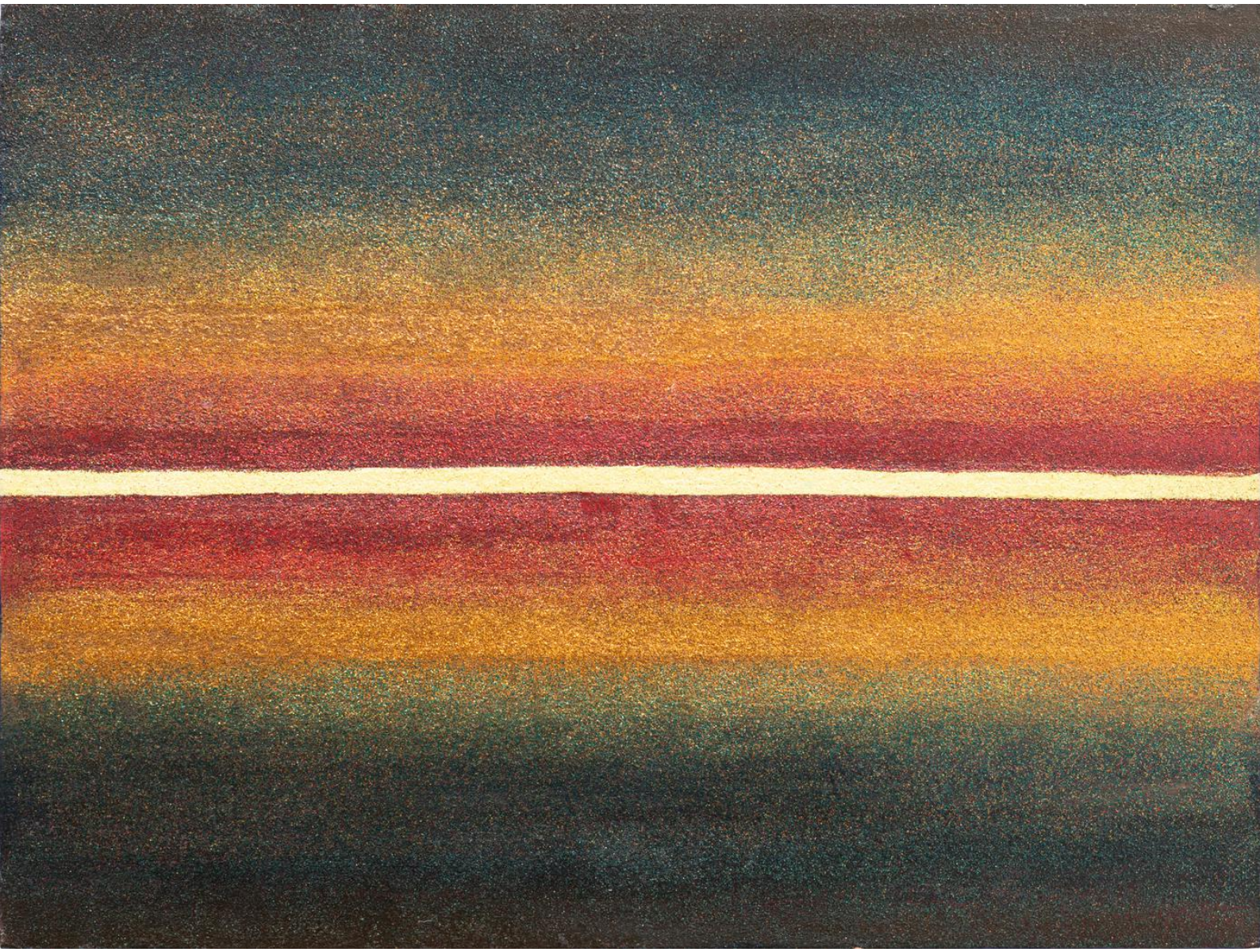
Shelina Khimji | Fusion Of Arabic-African Style

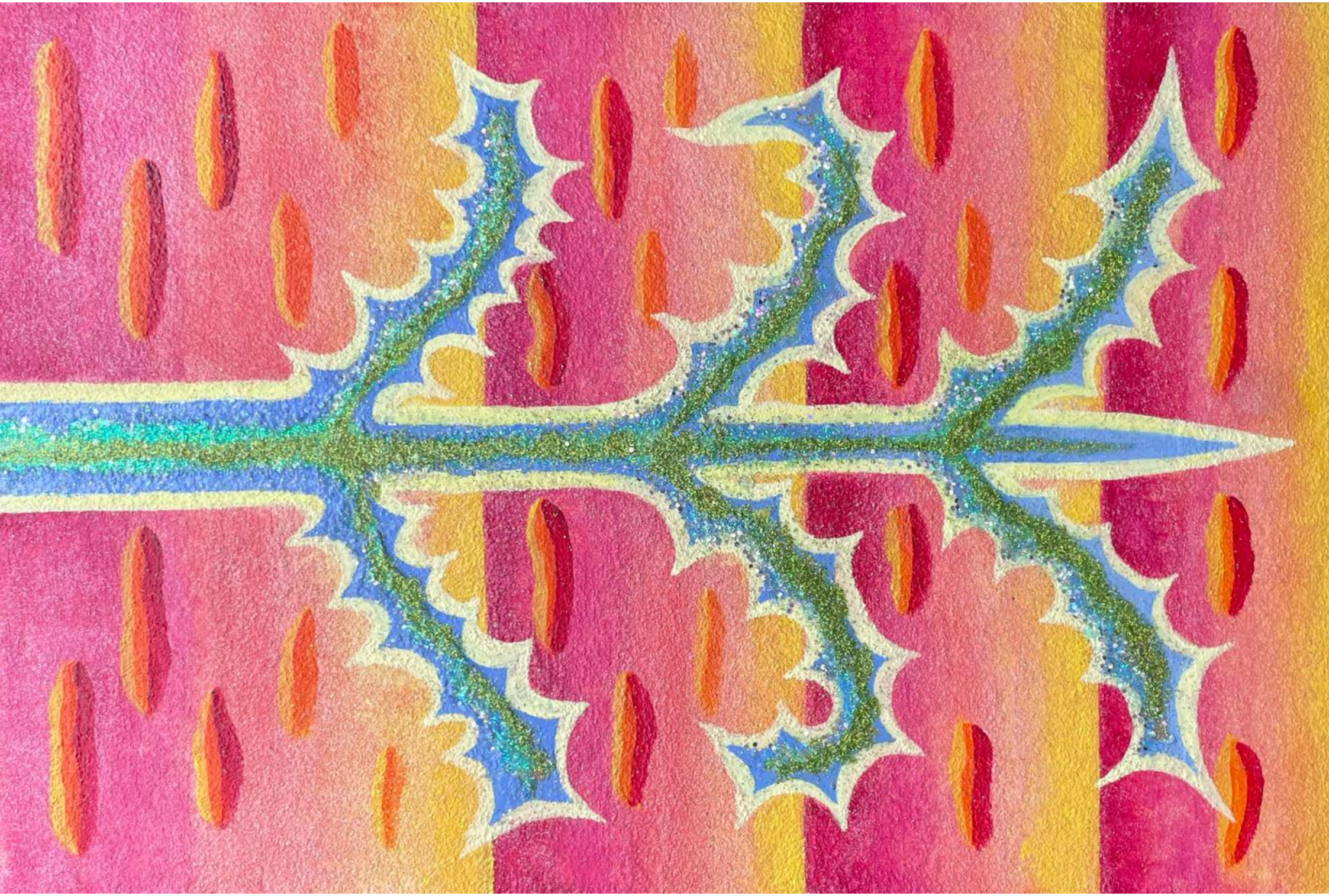
I have a tendency to paint away my inner longings and fantasies, ancient history and culture, narrow alleys, the crashing waves, any memory, a thought, or maybe just a glimpse of the world through rose coloured glasses.
I aim to stir my viewers' emotions through my artwork because I enjoy connecting my perspective with theirs. In doing so, I love to paint something incomplete leaving it to the viewers imagination and my paintings give an inkling to light them up by reminding them of a moment, a memory, a thought, a fantasy.
I have managed to start very interesting dialogues due to that and also commissioned work based on their description of their own memories or imagination and those are the most interesting pieces I have done.
Those pieces makes me feel like I have brought to life someone’s close moments or imagination just as they see it.

Ekaterina Okiforova (b. 1994) lives and works in Saint Petersburg. She received her Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Asian and African Studies at Saint Petersburg State University, specializing in "Languages and Culture of West Africa (Bamana)." In 2017–2019, while participating in an exchange program in the USA, she attended undergraduate courses in printmaking and painting and took part in the graduation exhibition. Upon returning to Russia, she continued working in these media.

Artist Statement
My artistic practice began with the exploration of personal family history and pathological mental states. The current series of paintings was created as the result of completing a cycle of studying the Shadow of the personality and its reintegration with the conscious part of the psyche. A sense of wholeness of consciousness was achieved and expressed through the reproduction of the resulting visual experience. Understanding myself allows me to perceive scenes of the surrounding world more fully, while the compositions of the works unfold both the material and mystical experience of existing in reality.

Ekaterina Okiforova | Insomnia 2020 | 2020





Ekaterina Okiforova | Aloe | 2025

Susan Lugar

Susan Lugar | Pomegranate

Your artist statement mentions a desire to create art that "soothes the world's pain." How do you see color and pattern contributing to this healing process?

I don't remember a time I wasn't doodling or mesmerized by color. My Mother laughed often saying, "She HAS to be making something!" I thought I loved Science but what I really loved was creating shadow boxes for Science class. Thoseassignments made a way to drag color from words, creating part of the universe, in miniature! I find that the act of being creative soothes the parts of life that aren't so colorful! The process itself is calming. That planets could drip fishing line strong from the top a shoebox was a challenge gladly accepted. Or, how about a Saturn hung in a ping-pong ball with nearby stars winking from tiny bulbs. Instead of every course dotted with color, I saw kaleidoscopes whirring, jerking the rainbow into every discipline. Just give me a topic and shoebox, Oh let's go! (Well, Algebra was stretch!)

Susan Lugar | Large Peony And Stamp | 2025

Growing up in the US South, how did those cultural and natural surroundings shape your relationship with color and creativity?

Whether we walk hand in hand with Pooh Bear or have joined Tinkerbell, marveling wide eyed through starry nights, stories provide escape routes! Imagination stirs fragrance as a calming pot in this sometimes crusty world. Art sings a similar stanza. The South lies rich in floral beauty as cotton fields sway in prickly-swishy balls. Moonflowers' creamy petals yawn away steamy summer nights. Though the heatand humidity swells thicker than the morning fog it helps push out gorgeous peony blossoms and magnolias! To this day fireflies twinkle in backyard skies over honeysuckle blossoms that perfume neighborhoods. Growing up, natural beauty called out a politically troubled milieu, draping despair with possible escape routes... to wonder. So it's no surprise that I have many bubble gum pink peonies in my art, magnolias, poppies and gardenias as well. Bring them on!

You started with watercolors and later embraced digital work. What was the turning point that led you into digital art?

Rather than a moment in time where I skipped from watercolors to digital art it was more of a merging than a snapping to a new venue. Growing up just three hours from the Gulf of Mexico and visiting there often, I compare this to that breathtaking body of water. In rhythms lead by the moon, water pools up to the sand and some of the gritty texture floats back, gulping puddles from the sea. Both water and sand are in the slurry mix. Similarly, adding digital art to watercolors simply mingles the two and sometimes in the same work of art. Though the digital often splays boldly and the watercolors, mostly tender, occasionally there's a marriage of the two! (Ex. The one with the hummingbirds, butterflies and wisteria).

Susan Lugar | Red Grapefruit & Ferns

You've worked in HR and traveled to the Orient, the Middle East, and South America. How did those global experiences influence your artistic vision?

I've had several jobs, one as an English teacher and later work in HR (Oasis international Schools). We actually lived in the Orient for over a decade in South Korea and two years in Hong Kong (where I left part of my heart!). Later with the HR work I traveled extensively though was then based out of the US home office. Wherever I went as I worked with international schools (www.oasisis.org). I always had a sketch pad or iPad. Oh, the airport waiting hours often spun with productivity. Forevermore, some idea brewed anxiously begging to crawl out on paper. If Hong Kong doesn't slay you with her high rises and mountainous perches around the world's showiest harbor, maybe you just can't be slain! I love my home: inspirational packed America lies coast to coast. There is also something intriguing about Asia. In Hong Kong old regularly meets new with fragrant frangi pani blossoms spilling perfume through each. The same street may tout a fauna-rich park laden with bird cages- hanging in the trees. Grandfathers often bus in with their tiny rubied treasures and find just the right limb for a caged bird… to sing. Chirp! Chirp! As nearby free birds join the chorus it's a milieu not found in just any country. And this park scene may lie in the shadow of a multi story high rise with an airplane whirring overhead. Now that's a mix that taps into ones creativity! If it doesn't, just check your pulse!

You've mentioned your visits to Afghanistan and the contrast between your artistic freedom and the limitations faced by women there. How has this awareness shaped your own artistic journey?

I would say that the most impactful place in relation to creativity, trial and curiosity was Kabul, Afghanistan. I could summarize this in one word, "Gratitude." I found that artistic vision expands like a hot air balloon when you realize you have the freedom to pursue art. Of course many Afghan women have talent far beyond my own, but they are often constrained by war and poverty. Parts of the culture strangle any hint of a professional pursuance in creativity. On one of my arrivals to Kabul, the US embassy had been recently attacked and the international grocery was also hit. Flocks of goats meandered in the city streets with a shepherd herding them from the front of one business to another. It was trash day. Everyday is trash day. No bins just trash covering the grass. The animals chomped and chewed the rubble til their tummies bloated so they skipped the next few store fronts. The smell outweighed the shock. Along the same busy streets that cried in horn horn blasts, mothers in full burka walked the traffic carrying a baby, hoping to make it through the next meal. Gutwrenching at best. And I wonder how many of these precious women are a Picasso without time and a brush, trapped in poverty. Anyone within earshot of these words and has the desire, means and freedom to pursue art…why not? I'm grateful every time I pick up a watercolor brush or reach for the iPad for that next design that needs a push into color. "I get to try." And I'm so grateful.

Many of your works are now connected to major retailers such as Bed Bath and Beyond, Target, and Amazon through Stupell. How do you balance creating art for personal expression and for commercial platforms?

* (Michaels and Wayfair have now been added to the above thankfully).
My styles vary somewhat. Sometimes it's fairly tight with feathers and veins visible. Then with the florals a gestural loose style often takes sail. As a Christian I feel that any work that is growing green in strength and pleasurable displays a creative freshness from God. A divine gift. Yes, hard work and education expands the giftedness, but I literally pray for His blessings in creativity. I'm always a student! Within the scope there are styles I don't enjoy or feel talented in at all: full on abstract art and ultra tight botanicals, like illustrations for botanical texts. I admire those who can and do. The lane labeled Susan includes painterly soft watercolors, bold black and whites and sprightly holiday designs via Procreate. So there's a giddy mix. I relish staying within the boundary that provides artistic liberties. But, I don't entertain designs that demand I pull a line this way and that because the Fibula has to be connected to the Tibia. Count me out on those!

Your practice often includes florals and surface pattern designs. What draws you most to botanical imagery?

We've circled back to creating soothe things in this sometimes harsh world. If I can be part of solving the customer's challenge of a blank wall, I'd be tickled pink to throw a flower or fruit on that canvas! The gentle fascination of a split grapefruit, the surprise of snowdrops poking out in late winter are nature's show stoppers. The challenge of trying to create something gentle and painterly yet at the same time stay somewhat true to its form is delightful (and sometimes, hair pulling!). With having a website as well as workbook.com there are landing places for art directors to review possibilities and many of these designs are fruits and florals, by choice. I feel if I painted peonies 1,000 times, I'd still probably want to paint them…just one more time.

Nikola Gocic (born in Nis, 1980) is an architect by formal education and a film reviewer, collage artist and film festival curator by passion. He has frequently and successfully collaborated on film-related articles with filmmaker Rouzbeh Rashidi – the founder of Experimental Film Society, with six of his essays published in the book 'Luminous Void: Twenty Years of Experimental Film Society' (Dublin, 2020).
As a collage artist, he has created numerous promotional images for NYC-based underground artist Martin Del Carpio. For Hungarian avant-garde filmmaker Péter Lichter he designed the poster for his found-footage feature 'Empty Horses' which was shown at the 2020 edition of International Film Festival Rotterdam. He has also worked alongside German composer and film director Martin Gerigk on his animated shorts 'Otonashi' (2021), 'Once I Passed' (2022) 'Demi-Gods' (2022), 'Demi-Goddesses' (2023) and 'Demi-Demons' (2024) which have been screened on more than 400 festivals around the globe, and received recognition.
Five of his solo exhibitions were presented in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2024, and from 2019 onward he has co-curated International Festival of Analog Experimental Cinema 'Kinoskop' based in Belgrade. A couple of his short collage comics – 'Exhausted Peace' and 'F Mode' – were exhibited at the Belgrade International Comics Festival in 2018 and 2019. His collage 'Ultrafantasia: The Spirits Gathering' was selected as one of the 10 finalists for the Artbox.Project Venezia 1.0 exhibition held in Tana Art Space, Venice, during May of 2022. Following were two group exhibitions – Kaos, international festival of modern collage in Slovenia, and 'Collage 2022' at John B. Aird Gallery (online) based in Canada. As a semi-finalist, his 2023 piece 'The Axis of Imagination' was a part of Artbox.Project New York 2.0 exhibition (April 17-26, 2023). His works have been published in Artist Portfolio Magazine, Contemporary Collage Magazine, Visual Art Journal and Trois Points Magazine. In 2024, his collages were once again picked for John B. Aird online event, as well as for the Kaos festival, and several pieces were digitally presented in Paris, Berlin, Dubai, Palma, Zurich, Basel, Zug and New York via Artboxy partner galleries and events.

Project Statement
Under the weight of accumulated anguish, colors have dried up again, their deceptiveness now shrouded in shadows, scorned by light. In small flocks, the echoes of Truth travel from an ungraspable distance, falling unto lost, despondent souls. Silently and intuitively, they transform into the whispers of demonic wisdom, between the purity of Image, and Eternity inscribed in concrete…
The MONO series can be viewed as a 'poem' built on the austere, yet fragile harmony between the ostensibly indestructible concrete and an anti-conformist, melancholy-bound spirit often incarnated in chiseled bodies. Its chapters also pose as frames from some imaginary experimental film(s) – forgotten artifacts of the last century or smoldering sparks that may ignite someone's imagination in time to come.

Nikola Gocic | Comforting Darkness | 2025

Nikola Gocic | Cosmogonic Lullaby | 2025

Nyana Z Bennett

Your collages beautifully reflect themes of identity, migration, and nostalgia. How do you begin the process of creating a new piece?

The process always begins with an emotional spark—something internal. It might be a memory, a piece of music, a line from a poem, or a conversation that lingers with me. As an immigrant, a Caribbean woman, and a single mother, my life experiences are deeply embedded in everything I create. My work is a way of processing those layers—identity, resilience, displacement, and belonging.

Once that initial feeling settles, I start to mentally map out the composition. I don't always sketch it out formally, but there's a clear emotional and visual direction in my mind. Then comes the part I love most: diving into my collection of materials. I use magazines and printed ephemera. I sift through them for textures, faces, colors, or objects that resonate with the idea I'm holding onto. Often, I don't know exactly what I'm looking for until I see it. The physical act of cutting and arranging is very meditative and intentional. I'm drawn to the tactile nature of analog collage—it allows me to physically deconstruct and reconstruct fragments of everyday life into something new.

My work is a heartfelt reflection of my Caribbean culture, heritage, and the nostalgia that binds them. As an immigrant, a single mother, and a woman, I pour my experiences—both the struggles and the triumphs—into each collage I create. My pieces are analog stories of resilience, identity, and memory.

The creative process begins internally, with a mental composition shaped by thoughts, memories, emotions, and lived experience. I draw inspiration from a wide spectrum of sources—poetry, music, conversations, spiritual reflections, and the emotions that linger from everyday life. These elements stir something within me, and from there, the idea for a new piece begins to take form. Scenes and subjects that captivate me are often rooted in my cultural background and the immigrant experience. These influences pull me in, urging me to explore the complexity of my

journey and the richness of the traditions I carry. There is a deep emotional and metaphysical connection to the work—I'm not just creating images; I'm building narratives from the fragments of life.
Once the vision starts to form, I sift through collected materials—magazines, clippings, and paper fragments—looking for images that speak to the mood and message I want to convey. It's a hands-on, tactile process: gathering, cutting, arranging, and pasting. Each piece is meticulously assembled, allowing me to physically reshape everyday imagery into something new and extraordinary.
Through this method, I aim to elevate the ordinary into something deeply meaningful. My collages invite viewers into my world—to see not only the beauty of my Caribbean roots but also the layers of experience, spirituality, and emotion that shape who I am.

What role does your Caribbean heritage play in shaping the stories you tell through your art?

My heritage is at the core of my artistic identity. It influences the themes I explore, the colors I gravitate toward, and the rhythms that pulse through my work. Whether it's through visual symbolism, storytelling, or cultural references, I find myself drawing from the resilience, and vibrancy of the Caribbean.
There's a deep sense of legacy—both joyful and painful—that I aim to honor. The fusion of African, Indigenous, European, and Asian influences in Caribbean culture creates a layered narrative that I feel compelled to represent authentically. My work often reflects on identity, diaspora, spirituality, and memory, all rooted in that heritage.
My art is how I preserve cultural memory while also contributing to the evolving story of what it means to be Caribbean today.

You describe collage as a ritual. Can you share what this ritual looks like for you—mentally, emotionally, and physically?

Describing collage as a ritual means recognizing it as a practice that goes beyond just assembling images—it becomes a meaningful, often meditative process. Here's how that ritual might unfold mentally, emotionally, and physically:
Mentally
Collage begins with a shift in perception. It's not just about finding images, but about seeing differently, seeing potential in scraps, textures, fragments. The mind becomes more open, associative, playful. There's often no fixed outcome in mind; instead, intuition leads. It's about embracing randomness and then discovering connections where none were obvious before.
It can feel like the quieting of the inner noise. Thoughts begin to flow laterally—more poetic than logical.
Emotionally
There's a subtle emotional excavation that happens during collage-making. Images pulled from old books, magazines, or printed materials carry their own histories. When you cut them out and recontextualize them, you're creating new emotional narratives—sometimes surprising yourself with what emerges.
There's catharsis in cutting, tearing, arranging—transforming fragments into something whole. It can feel grounding, tender, even rebellious.
Physically
The tactile nature of collage is key to the ritual. Touching paper, feeling the edges, the pressure of scissors, the glide of glue—these physical actions slow the body down and anchor it in the moment. There's a rhythm: gather, cut, arrange, pause, adjust, glue. It becomes embodied.
Many collage artists describe their workspace almost like an altar—materials laid out in a way that invites attention and care. Sometimes there's music, silence, incense—anything that supports presence.

Nyana Z Bennett | Brasa Mi. (Hold Me)

In short, collage as a ritual is less about producing art and more about being with process: listening, noticing, assembling meaning from the overlooked. It's a dialogue between self and material—a quiet but powerful act of creation and reflection.

How did your experience as a social worker and a mother influence the emotional layers in your artwork?

My experience as a social worker deeply attuned me to human vulnerability and the quiet strength people carry even in the darkest moments. I've sat with stories of trauma, loss, hope, and survival—those narratives became a part of me and inevitably found their way into my artwork. It gave me a profound respect for raw emotion and subtle expressions of pain, healing, and connection. Motherhood, on the other hand, brought a different kind of intimacy and emotional depth. The intensity of love, the fragility of life, the constant dance between letting go and holding close—it sharpened my sensitivity to the unspoken language of emotion. Through both roles, I learned to observe closely and feel deeply. In my artwork, I try to create spaces where those layered experiences can be felt and seen, not just understood.

The materials in your pieces often feel deeply symbolic. How do you choose your images and textures?

Symbolism often emerges through repetition and contrast. I'll pair softness with something rigid, or decay with a sense of quiet order, to reflect the kinds of internal conflicts or transformations I'm interested in. I also look to dreams, cultural stories, and literature for inspiration.
I treat image-hunting like a form of listening. It's rarely about what the image is, but what it feels like. A torn edge, an unfurled flower, a strange silhouette—these things hold a kind of emotional charge I can't always explain at first.
For me, collage is about creating a visual language out of what's been discarded or overlooked and letting new stories rise through the layers.

Your return to art during the pandemic sounds like a powerful moment. How has your artistic journey evolved since then?

Returning to art during the stillness of the pandemic brought a kind of urgency in creating—like I needed to make sense of the quiet, the grief,

Nyana Z Bennett | Blenchi (Hummingbird)

the uncertainty. At first, it was raw and instinctive. I wasn't thinking about the outcome, just expression. Since then, my practice has deepened. I've become more intentional, more curious about the dialogue between materials and meaning. I'm exploring slower processes, giving more attention to texture and repetition. There's a clearer sense of voice now—still evolving, of course—rooted in that same impulse to piece together what feels broken or forgotten.

In what ways do you hope viewers connect with your work, especially those who share similar immigrant experiences?

I hope viewers—especially those who share similar immigrant experiences—see themselves reflected in my work. Whether it's through the sense of dislocation, the quiet resilience, or the blending of multiple cultural identities, I want them to feel seen and validated. I hope they can see the complexities of their own journeys reflected in mine. There's often a loneliness that comes with straddling different worlds, and if my work can offer a moment of recognition or comfort, then it's done its job. More than anything, I hope it encourages conversations—within families, communities, and across cultures—about the nuances of belonging. I want my pieces to be both a mirror and a bridge—connecting individual stories to a broader, shared human experience.

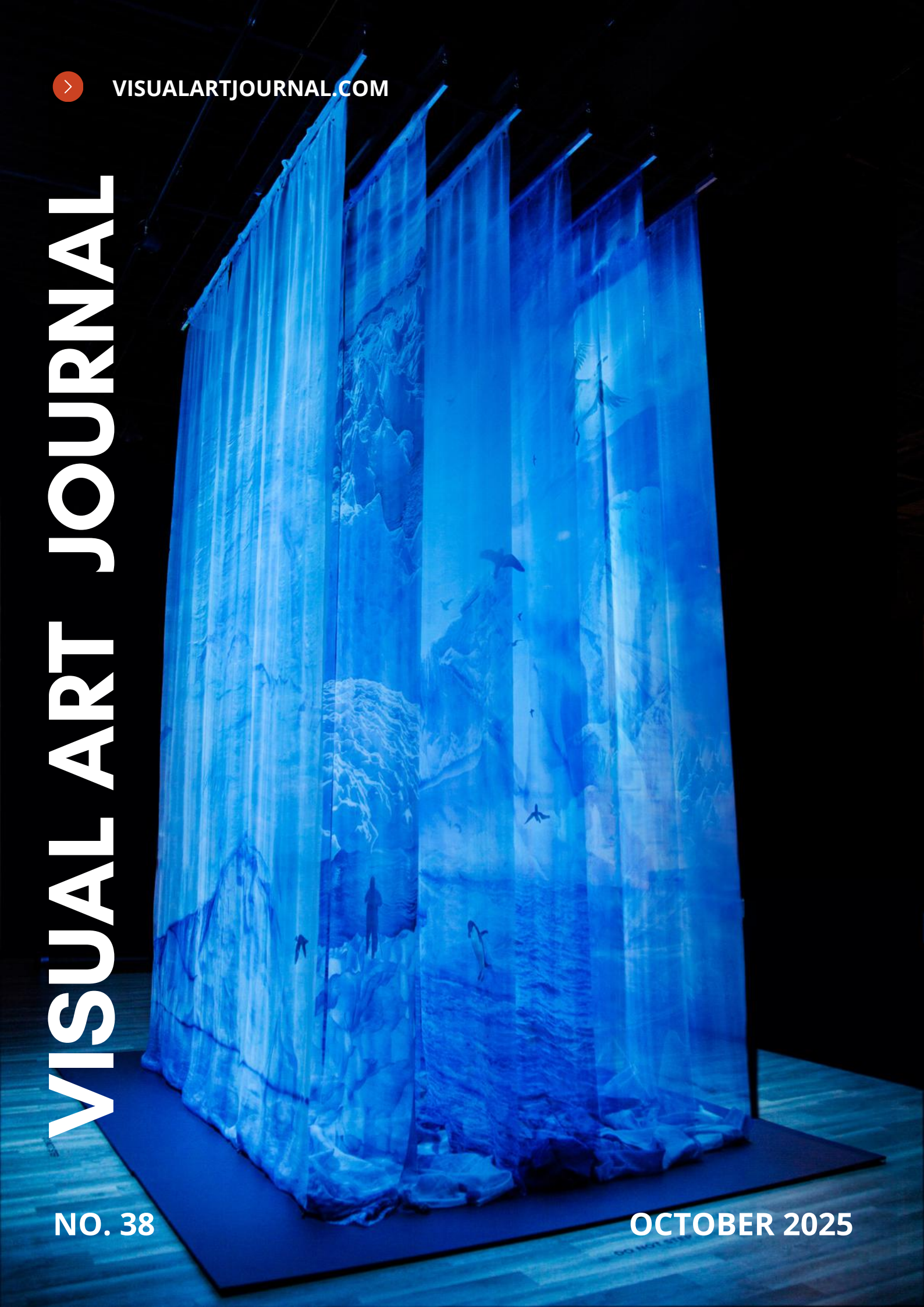
Contents

Interviews

Featured artists

VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

VISUAL ART JOURNAL



NO. 38

OCTOBER 2025