

# VISUAL ART JOURNAL

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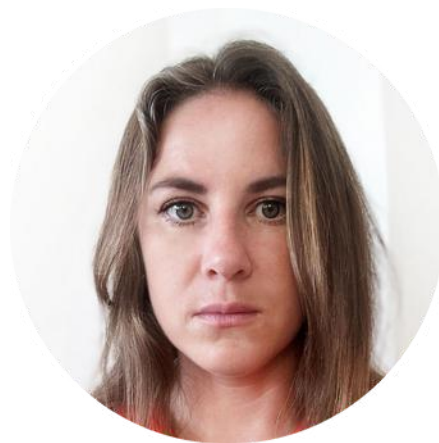
# — *Intro*

Hello dear reader,

You're holding the 29th issue of our magazine — and each month, we continue to be amazed by the response our publications receive. This wave of support and appreciation gives us the strength to keep moving forward and developing the project. So first and foremost, thank you! In the Northern Hemisphere, summer is in full swing — and it's impossible to ignore. Even on cloudy days, the lush greenery creates a joyful, fulfilling atmosphere.

As for me, I find myself already looking forward to autumn — to the creative fruits shaped by the warmth and brightness of summer. I believe they will carry the energy, richness, and light that will continue to warm us through the winter months.

As always, I wish you an inspiring read. Ahead lies a vibrant collection of styles, materials, and stories!



**Anna Gvozdeva**

Curator of  
Visual Art Journal

*On the Front Cover:*  
**Ashwani Verma**  
Rainy Day New York  
2024

*On the Back Cover:*  
**Paulina Wróblewska**



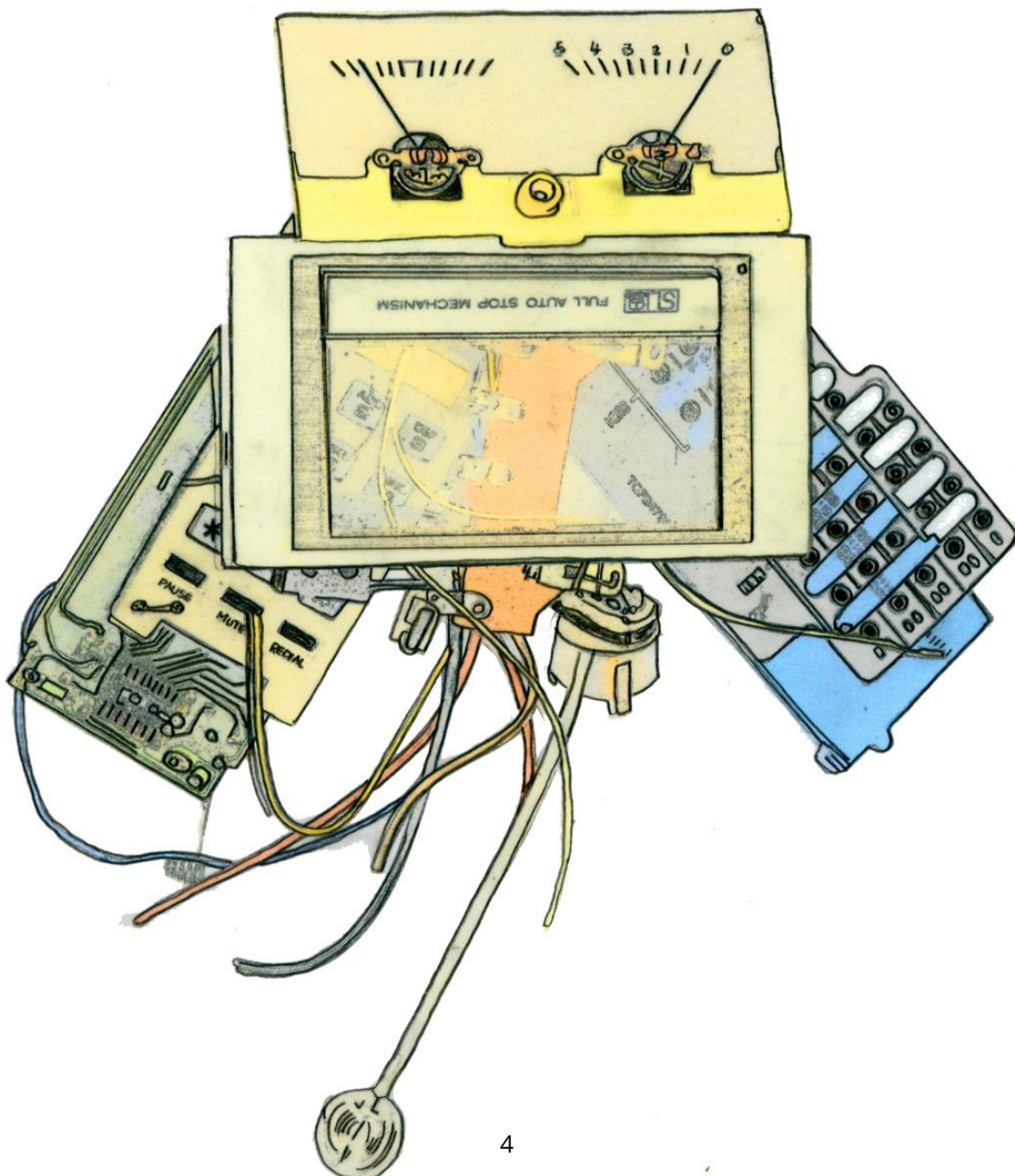
We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: <https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/>

## Amy Vaillancourt

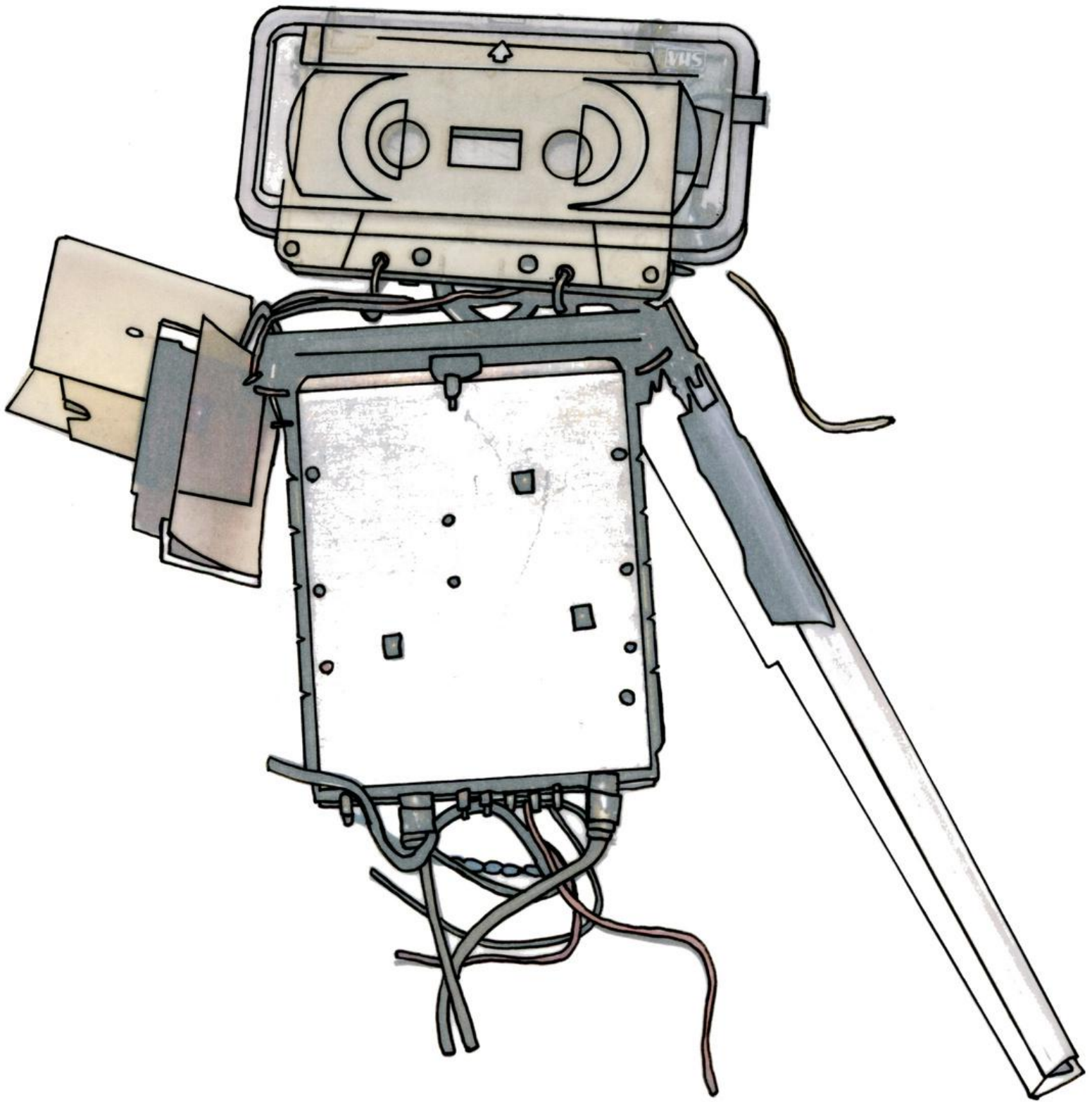
Vaillancourt grew up in a small town in Quebec. Fascinated by cities, she moved to Montreal to pursue a degree in urban studies. Her work grapples with her unique perspective on urban space, as defined by her upbringing in a close-knit community, her experiences living in larger cities and her academic training. She has an intimate relationship with nature that is demonstrated in her work through a variety of textures, colors and ideas. As a multi-media artist, Vaillancourt is able to navigate numerous materials that allow her ideas full expression. Her larger serial work consists of paintings, sculptures, print media and photography.

### *Project Statement*

The original sculptural robots were crafted from discarded technology such as guts of Game Boys, Boob boxes, calculators, remotes, keyboards, cellphones and other devices. The electronics were deconstructed and pieced together to make delightful characters who are quirky and reminiscent of once important devices. We consider our technological devices as easily dispensable. As quickly as they become important intimate features in our lives, they arrive in the trash as used, discarded friends. This project hopes to highlight the relationship people have developed with their technological devices and depict it in a playful way.









# — Interview

## Vera Sol

**You have a background in business and IT. What was the turning point that led you to fully embrace painting?**

After 20 years of building my own IT company, which eventually became a market leader, I began to feel that I had almost lost touch with myself. Throughout those years, I never stopped drawing — even if it was just on scraps of paper with a pencil or pen. For a woman, it's especially important not to lose that creative spark — it's what nourishes the soul. When my three sons grew up and the company became



stable, I felt it was time to devote myself to my inner world — a world of intuition, kindness, and art.

**How does your experience as an entrepreneur influence your creative process?**

Entrepreneurship taught me discipline, resilience, and strategic thinking — all of which I now apply to my art. I know how to set goals, work systematically, and embrace innovation. My experience in sales and marketing helps me not only to create but also to present my work effectively and connect with audiences around the world.

**Your artworks radiate a deep sense of calm and introspection. Where do you draw this emotional energy from?**

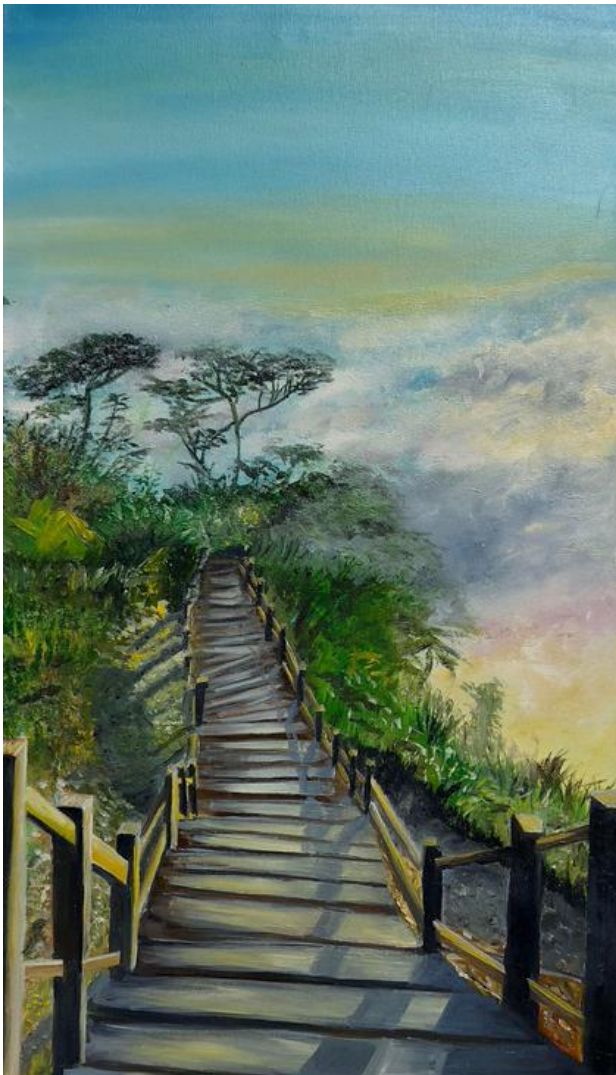
Mostly from silence, solitude, and the contemplation of nature. Painting is my way of experiencing emotions and transforming them into beauty. It's a form of meditation where color and texture become the language of the soul. The depth of my work reflects my personal journey — filled with loss, inner growth, and the search for my true self, supported by meditation and yoga.

Besides painting, I've written a series of practical books for women focused on emotional healing and



Vera Sol | Morning in a Hammock | 2024





self-harmony. They are 21-day journals — honest and hands-on, offering space for inner dialogue, daily rituals, and affirmations.

Everything I create — with words or a brush — is aimed at restoring inner balance and awakening feminine power. My art is about forgiveness, acceptance of the past, and finding quiet strength in love, kindness, and peace.

### **What role does intuition play in your creative process?**

Intuition is the foundation of my creative work. The image of a painting comes to me as a response to what I feel the world needs right now. I sense an energetic request — invisible, but real — and I respond to it with color, form, and texture. It's a dialogue, where the canvas asks its questions, and I respond with inner insight. Sometimes it feels like I'm not creating — but transmitting what needs to be said.

### **How has returning to art changed your perspective on life?**

It reminded me that life is not just about

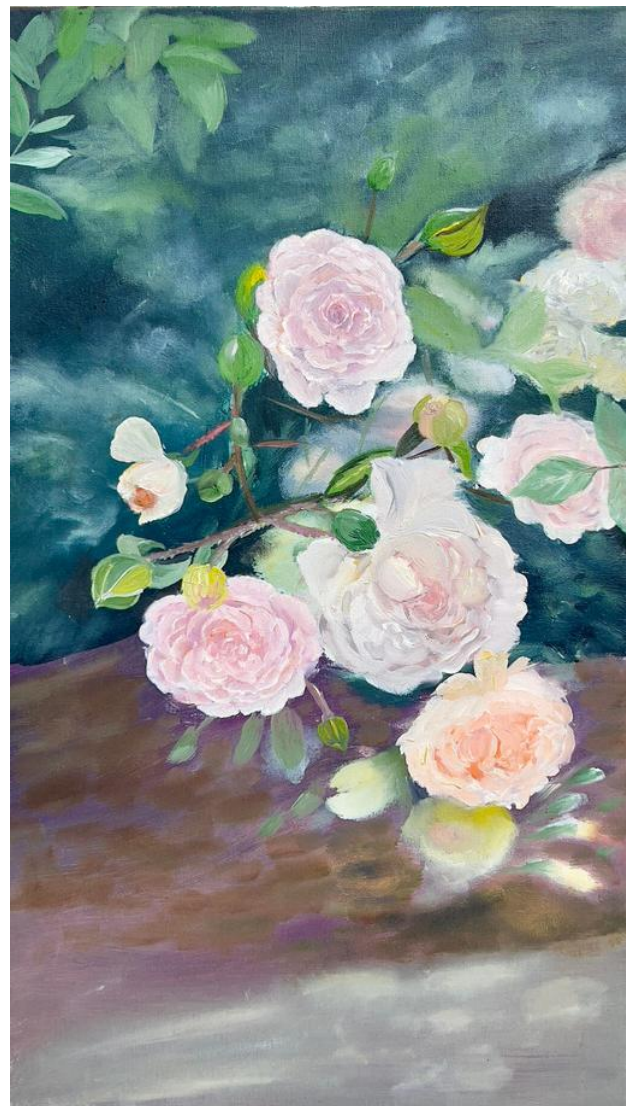
achievements. It's about presence. The ability to feel, to live fully, and to be vulnerable. Art has softened me. It taught me that beauty can be born even from brokenness — and that through creativity, we can heal, not only ourselves, but others too.

### **How does the landscape or spirit of Kyrgyzstan influence your work?**

The mountains, sky, and sacred silence of Kyrgyzstan deeply affect my emotional palette. I don't always paint literal landscapes, but their spirit — vastness, mysticism, grounding — is present in my colors and forms. The stillness of this land resonates in my work.

### **Do you approach painting with a clear vision, or do you allow each piece to evolve organically?**

When I begin a painting, I usually have a clear inner image — a vision of what it's meant to be. But during the process, new ideas and feelings often emerge, and I welcome them. It's like starting a journey with a map, but discovering magical detours along the way. I trust this process — it's alive, like life itself.





## Ashwani Verma

Ashwani is a London-based IT professional and watercolor artist with a strong passion for painting urban landscapes. His work is recognized for its mood, atmosphere, and expressive handling of light in both sunny and rainy scenes. Largely self-taught, he has developed a refined style using a limited palette and mixing grays from primary colors. Artistic Approach & Techniques Ashwani begins his process by sketching a subject and exploring composition through small watercolor studies. Once resolved, he creates a full-scale work using techniques such as:

Wet-on-wet

Dry brush

Layering for depth and vibrancy

Custom grays mixed from primary colors

### *Project Statement*

Ashwani is an IT professional based in London with a deep passion for art and painting. Watercolor is his preferred medium, and he specializes in cityscape scenes. Over the years, he has honed his skills, mastering the use of a limited palette and mixing his own grays using primary colors. He is known for creating atmosphere and mood in his paintings, often depicting both sunny and rainy days. His techniques include wet-on-wet, dry brush, and layering to add depth and vibrancy to his work, always bringing energy and emotion to his compositions. Ashwani's creative process begins with selecting a subject, followed by a loose sketch. He then creates a watercolor study in his sketchbook. Once satisfied with the composition and color harmony, he moves on to a larger-scale painting, capturing the essence of the scene with his signature style.

Ashwani Verma | Aerial View Paris







MERK

Ashwani Kuma



# — Interview

## Leah Sanata

**Your artistic journey began with pencil sketches and has evolved to include watercolour, oil paints, and acrylics. What prompted this transition, and how has it influenced your work?**

My transition from pencil sketches to watercolour, oil, and acrylic was a result of my desire to express the complex nature of human emotions. The pencil was my tool for learning line and form, but watercolour revealed a world of transparency and uncertainty, where water dictates its rules. With oil, I am able to create a sculptural volume by casting light and shadow with careful attention to detail through its texture and drying time. Acrylic is a material that gives freedom—its speed and brightness are perfect for conveying the essence of modern life. Each technique is a new language, expanding the palette of my utterances, whether it be meditative tenderness or explosive colour energy.

**You mention that women can be both muses and creators in their own right. How do you convey this idea through your art, and how do you ensure that your work inspires women to embrace their creativity?**

According to critics and art historians, male artists have become the norm in the art world, while women are perceived as an exception or anomaly. Through my art, I



Leah Sanata | Contemplation | 2024



Leah Sanata | Rose | 2023

consciously highlight the dual power women possess—we are not just muses but also creators, innovators, and storytellers. The energy of self-expression and empowerment is embodied in every piece I create. I make it a point to show women in positions of strength, emotion, and transformation, because I want every woman who experiences my work to see a reflection of her own potential. Women can create wonderful things. We just need to trust in our voice and vision and take that first bold step. My journey and work aim to remind us that creativity is something we can explore without permission. It is already within us, waiting to be released.

**In your statement, you mention integrating your knowledge of mathematics and psychology into your art. Can you elaborate on how these fields influence the way you approach painting?**

The balance of light and shadow, curves and lines, tones and half-tons is a mathematics-driven aspect of painting for me as an artist. To me, each brushstroke is a manifestation of an inner rhythm, with proportions and symmetry creating harmony, even when they emerge intuitively. Light and space on my canvases are not just visual effects, but a reflection of geometric laws I unconsciously turn to in search of balance. A deeper meaning lies behind this precision. Art is a way to express emotion. Through colour, form, and composition, I express what words cannot: happiness, tenderness, care, or inspiration. This allows the viewer to experience their own emotions while also seeing and feeling the meaning embedded in the canvas, creating an invisible connection with the artist.

**How does living in the United Arab Emirates influence your artistic practice, especially considering the cultural and environmental contrasts with your Siberian roots?**



Living in the United Arab Emirates has not only been a change of geography, but also a profound personal and creative experience for me. Although I was born in Siberia, I've always believed that boundaries only exist in our own minds. My openness to everything new and lack of limits have made it easy for me to adapt to the local culture and lifestyle. Of course, the contrast between the harsh, tranquil Siberia and the vibrant, dynamic Emirates is significant. The contrast provides me with inspiration, including the colours of the East, traditions, architecture, and desert light and shadow. I am discovering ways to view the world differently, to observe subtle details that may have gone unnoticed before. The UAE has helped me express myself in new ways, and the cultural differences have not become a barrier, but rather a source of growth. Each new day presents a chance to broaden my horizons, and this is where I find my freedom.

**Your work has been exhibited internationally in places such as Italy, the UAE, and Russia. What do you hope to convey to diverse audiences through your paintings?**

International exhibitions are not just about displaying artworks; for me, an artist, they represent a space where boundaries—geographical, cultural, and mental—are eliminated. Their aim is to demonstrate that art is not a matter of nationality; it is a universal language that expresses emotions and ideas. I participate in these exhibitions to convey a simple truth—art is free from prejudice, boundaries, and labels. It reflects the inner freedom of a person, their ability to choose who they want to be, what they feel, and how they live. We are the creators of our own destinies, and painting is my way of reminding everyone who looks at the canvas of this truth.

**As a mother of five, how do you balance your artistic**

**career with your family life, and how does this role impact your creative process?**

I learn to see the world in a new way through my children, who are like five universes. At first, they were like spring streams that brought colour to life; then, they turned into summer storms that shattered old patterns. As they grow up, I see them as autumn winds that carry seeds for new worlds. Motherhood is not a sacrifice for me—it's a synergy. Although I could sleep more or travel more often for exhibitions, the sound of our home, where we discuss philosophy, quantum physics, and street art over dinner, cannot be matched. We are creating one painting, a canvas that stretches across a lifetime. Their bold strokes are beyond my imagination, and I teach them to see what's not always evident. We are creating not only art, but a living heritage in which love is not just a plot, but the art of being together, and this exchange is the secret to my creativity. When gallery owners ask how I manage, I simply respond with a smile. The answer lies in the laughter of my daughter woven into the texture of the canvas, in my sons who carry my works to exhibitions, just as I once carried them, sleeping, to their cribs, and in the fact that even at night the studio is never empty—we often gather there to drink tea and debate the philosophy of life and classic art. Art is created not because of chaos, but because of it, just as a grapevine produces its best grapes when it grows between stones.

**What is the significance of roses in your artwork, and how do they relate to the themes of femininity and strength that you often explore?**

Visualise 40 roses that don't require water—they require a conversation. These are not flowers; they are forty stories of femininity that defy clichés. Vintage, as if torn from the past, yet breathing the present. The purity of white hides experience. Red is the colour of passion and pain, both shouting and whispering. This isn't a painting; it's a diary drawn with a brush. Each rose is a paradox. While its petals follow the golden ratio, its soul is a rebel. Do you see softness? Take a closer look: there's strength beneath the surface. The energy of self-expression and empowerment is embodied in every piece I create.





## Andreas Starke

### *Project Statement*

I'm a hiker, traveler, and adventurer and a seeker of horizons, a soul drawn to the wild embrace of nature. In the years past, my journeys have taken me to breathtaking destinations around the world, where the land whispers secrets and the sky paints its stories. Through snowstorms, rain, golden sunrises, and sudden weather shifts, from the calm of snow-covered peaks to the intensity of storms, I've experienced nature in all its beautiful and unpredictable. Every step, every shift in the weather, has gifted me with unforgettable memories, as though the Earth itself is an artist, constantly shifting its canvas. I've had the privilege of experiencing unforgettable moments in the wild. From stunning landscapes to incredible natural phenomena, I've witnessed nature's beauty and power in its purest forms. Every step, every shift in the weather, has gifted me with unforgettable memories, as though the Earth itself is an artist, constantly shifting its canvas and it's teaching me that nature is as beautiful as it is untamable and the world itself is whispering its stories to those who take the time to listen. There is a certain poetry in the way the wild embraces us—both gentle and fierce, beautiful and untamed. I invite you to take a closer look at the photographs I had personally chosen from these adventures, to be featured in your magazine, which is called The visual art journal, each one a silent story of joy and discovery as well as a reflection of my experiences and a delicate moment in time I think . My hope is that, as you look upon them, you too will feel the heartbeat of nature and the spark of excitement that I felt in the moment those images were captured and that you'll feel a sense of connection to the places I've been.



Andreas Starke | Cerro Chaltén | 2023



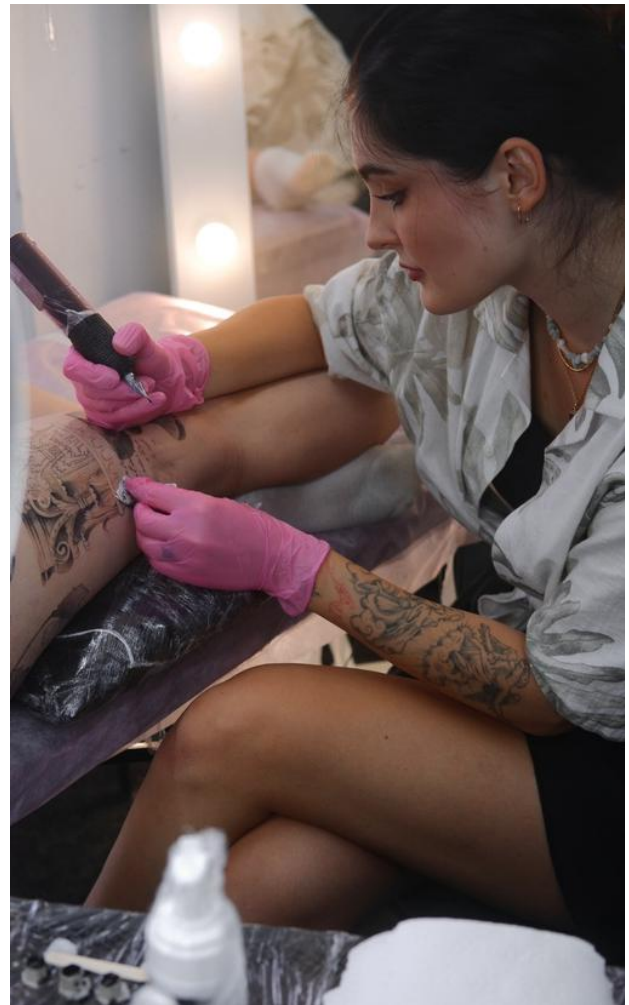


## — Interview

# Elizabeth Gromova

**Can you tell us about your first memories of drawing and how your passion for art developed over the years?**

I remember painting with my nanny using watercolors when I was just three years old. Even then, I fell in love with the process. Since I wasn't restricted by art school as a teenager, I had the freedom to experiment and draw inspiration from books and exhibitions. Even at school, I was constantly sketching—on notebooks, loose sheets, and later in dedicated sketchbooks that I



carried to classes. Later, as I grew older, I began studying academic drawing, more professionally.

**You took a tattoo course while still in university. What was it like transitioning from academic drawing to tattooing?**

I took a tattoo course at a studio during my summer break, right before starting my studies in architecture. It was my dream and a present from my family. Meeting tattoo artists there was an incredible experience—they seemed so free and unique in their artistic expression, and that inspired me deeply.

**Moving to Turkey must have been a major shift. How did this relocation impact your career and artistic growth?**

Moving to a new country made me completely rethink my life and step out of my comfort zone. Before that, I was in a somewhat childlike mindset, without a strong drive to work hard toward my goals. But the move acted as a kind of



shock therapy—it made me realize that I needed to push forward. That's when I started defining my artistic style, becoming more active on social media, and learning the language.

**Did you notice any cultural differences in tattoo preferences between your clients in Moscow and those in Antalya?**

Comparing Moscow and Antalya is difficult because Antalya is more of a resort town, while Moscow is a major cultural and artistic hub. In Moscow, clients are very interested in the designs I can offer—they want something exclusive, reflecting the vision of a specific tattoo artist. In Antalya, people care less about the artist's style and ideas; they are more focused on getting something personal to them.

**You describe tattooing as a form of artistic expression. How do you balance personal creativity with client requests?**

In the past few years, the clients who come to me already know my style and are open to my suggestions. However, I always listen carefully to their ideas and take their references seriously. I never insist on drastically changing their concepts; instead, I offer several variations they can consider.

**In your opinion, what makes a tattoo not just a design but a true work of art?**

A tattoo becomes a true work of art when it has depth and meaning. It's not just an image on the skin, but a carefully thought-out composition where everything matters—style, composition, detail, and how it flows with the body. A great tattoo isn't just a copy of a reference; it's an artistic solution designed specifically for the person wearing it.

**If you could tattoo any historical or mythical figure, who would it be and why?**

I love working with paintings that depict historical figures and mythological beings. Living in Turkey, I've discovered its rich mythology, and for example I would love to tattoo Shahmaran—the half-woman, half-serpent from Eastern legends. I'm also fascinated by characters from Slavic and Greek mythology. In general, I'm drawn to human or humanoid figures because they always carry a story, an expression.





## Kamourange

After studying fine arts and applied arts in Lille and Paris, I began my career in fashion design with my clothing brand "Kamou'Ra" — a vibrant line blending African and European influences, combining raw and refined materials. Today, I express my creativity through my favorite medium: acrylic painting, often mixed with textiles and a variety of natural, industrial, and recycled materials. Fascinated by the world of dance and its expression of movement, I strive to bring my characters — often dancers — to life, infusing them with energy and a sense of vitality. Their unconventional postures and frequent upward gazes reflect self-determination. The body in my work is sometimes sacred and symbolic, with skin tones emphasized in contrast to golden backgrounds or textile surroundings; other times, the body becomes a trace — a passage — leaving behind marks, drips, and an essential role for chance. This element of chance permeates my art as it does life, with textured backgrounds incorporating natural materials (such as clay, tea, linen) set against industrial ones (aluminum, plastic, upholstery fibers). I invite the viewer to immerse themselves in the canvas through the presence — both tangible and intangible — of my female figures, almost “palpable” as they take shape on linen. My work explores the identity of women, my own identity, the glorification of the female body, and its non-conformism — affirming a desire for full self-expression.

Kamourange | The Magic of Dance







M. Amge



## — Interview

# Paulina Wróblewska

### **How did your journey as a self-taught artist begin?**

Before I started painting on canvas, I spent a lot of time drawing digitally – using a stylus pencil on a graphic tablet. I created countless realistic sketches, and I think that's where I really built my artistic foundation. I learned to observe, understand proportions, light, and shadow. Painting came a bit later – quite spontaneously. I picked up a brush one day just to try, and I immediately felt that this was what I wanted to do. I've been painting ever since. I never went to art school – everything I know, I learned on my own through trial, mistake, and persistence.



### **Why did you choose big cats as the main subject of your work?**

Big cats have something deeply magnetic about them. Their power, grace, and presence fascinate me. There's a wildness in them, but also a sense of calm and dignity. I feel a strong connection with them. Through my paintings, I try to tell stories – not just about the animals themselves, but also about strength, vulnerability, and emotion. They allow me to express what I sometimes can't put into words.

### **Your work features a striking level of realism. What techniques do you use to achieve such detail?**

I work mainly with acrylic paints, which let me build up layers and work very precisely. Before I even touch the canvas, I spend a lot of time analyzing the reference photo – studying the anatomy, texture, and light. Once I'm happy with the base, I transfer it to canvas and build the painting layer by layer. I always start with a sketch directly on the canvas to map out proportions and key areas. I often revisit the same section multiple times until the result feels just right.

### **What emotions or messages do you aim to convey through the intense gazes of the animals you paint?**

For me, the eyes are everything. I want the painting to look back at the viewer – to create a connection that lingers. Through those gazes, I try to express emotions: strength, sadness, alertness, even



vulnerability. I hope my paintings make people pause, feel something, and reflect – even for a moment.

**How long does it usually take you to complete a large-scale painting?**

It depends on the complexity and size, but usually between four weeks of focused work. Large formats like 120 × 100 cm are technically and emotionally demanding. I often work on several paintings at the same time to keep a fresh perspective.

**Do you work from photos, live observation, or imagination?**

Mostly from photos, but I create my own compositions. I often combine multiple references, adjust the lighting, and modify the setup digitally before I start painting. Sometimes I add something purely from imagination, guided by intuition – but I always stay true to realism.

**Which animal was the most difficult to portray and why?**

Probably the black panther. Capturing its form and the way light plays on dark fur is incredibly challenging. It's easy to lose depth or overdo the contrast. But when it works, the result can be truly hypnotic.



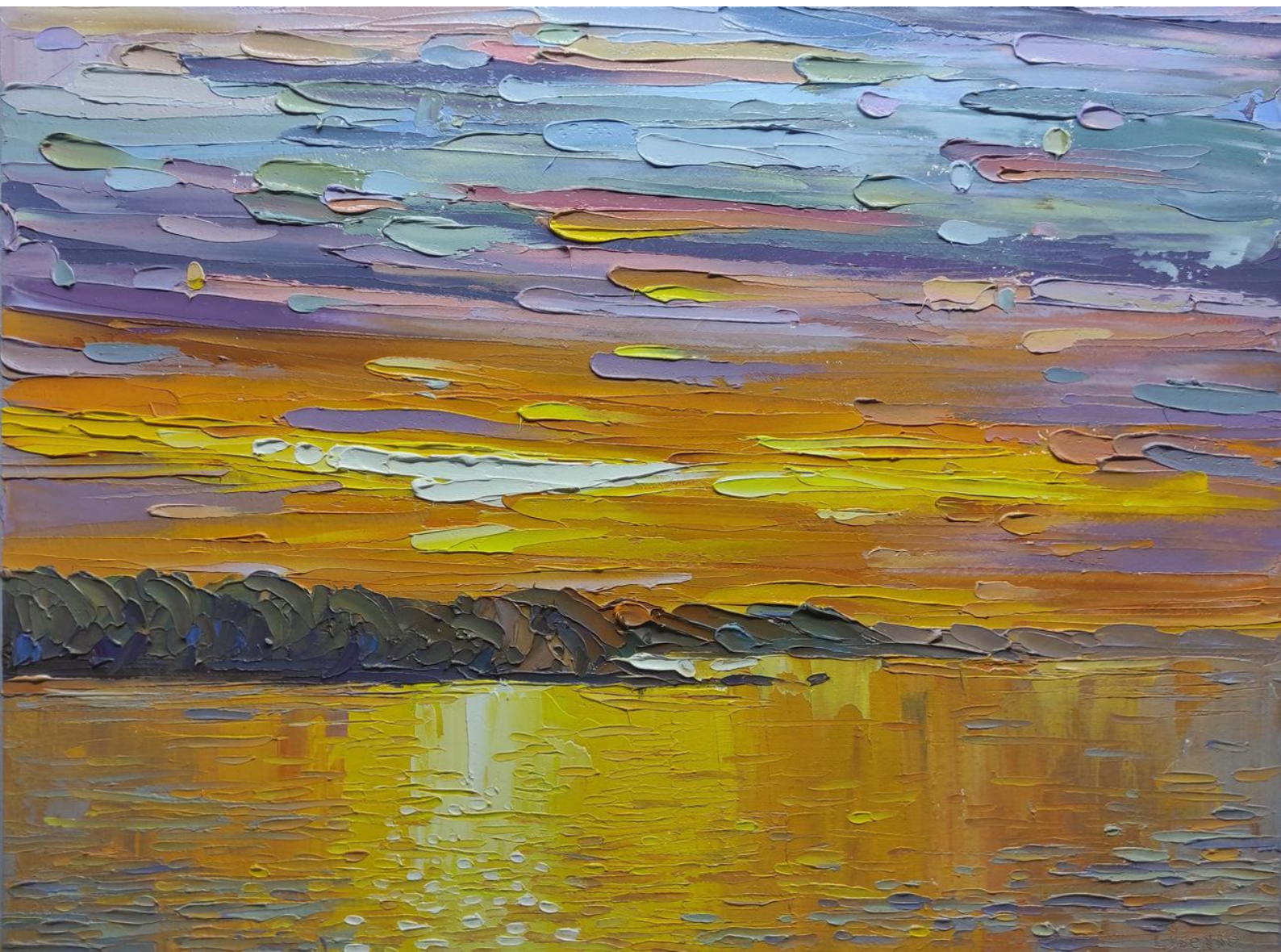
## Hanna Lysenko

I am an artist and educator from Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. In 2002, I graduated from college with a degree in Fine and Decorative Arts. Later, I earned a Master's degree in Pedagogy from the Classical Private University in Zaporizhzhia. In 2023, I completed my postgraduate studies at the Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts, and in 2024, I successfully defended my dissertation, obtaining a PhD in Art Studies. Currently, I am pursuing a Master's degree in Psychology. My research interests lie in the fields of art and art therapy. For many years, I have been working as a lecturer at the Department of Design at Khortytsia National Educational and Rehabilitation Academy. Alongside my academic career, I am actively engaged in artistic practice. I am passionate about painting and watercolor, exploring these art forms in depth. I have participated in regional and international exhibitions.

### *Project Statement*

I have recently begun working on a series of paintings titled "Breath of the Elements". This series is a visual exploration of the primal forces of nature as a metaphor for the inner world of a person. I use the language of elemental forms, movement, and color to convey the universal rhythms of existence—breath, pulsation, and transformation. Each work captures a moment of transition between states: light and darkness, calm and motion, emergence and dissolution. These images do not depict literal nature but rather archetypal sensations of elemental breath, present in both the cosmos and the human spirit.

Hanna Lysenko | Sunset Over the Dnipro River Near Zaporizhzhia | 2024







Hanna Lysenko | Light Through the Storm | 2025



## — Interview

# Haru Mihoko

**You describe your palette as soft and expressive. What emotions or memories do you hope to evoke through your color choices?**

I believe there is strong beauty within gentle imagery and ambiguous colors. When selecting colors, I focus on vibrant hues that I sense in my everyday life, cherishing the calm flow of time and drawing on memories to express them. I would be happy if those who view my work feel healed or moved in some way.



**How has your experience living and studying art in the UK influenced your current artistic approach?**

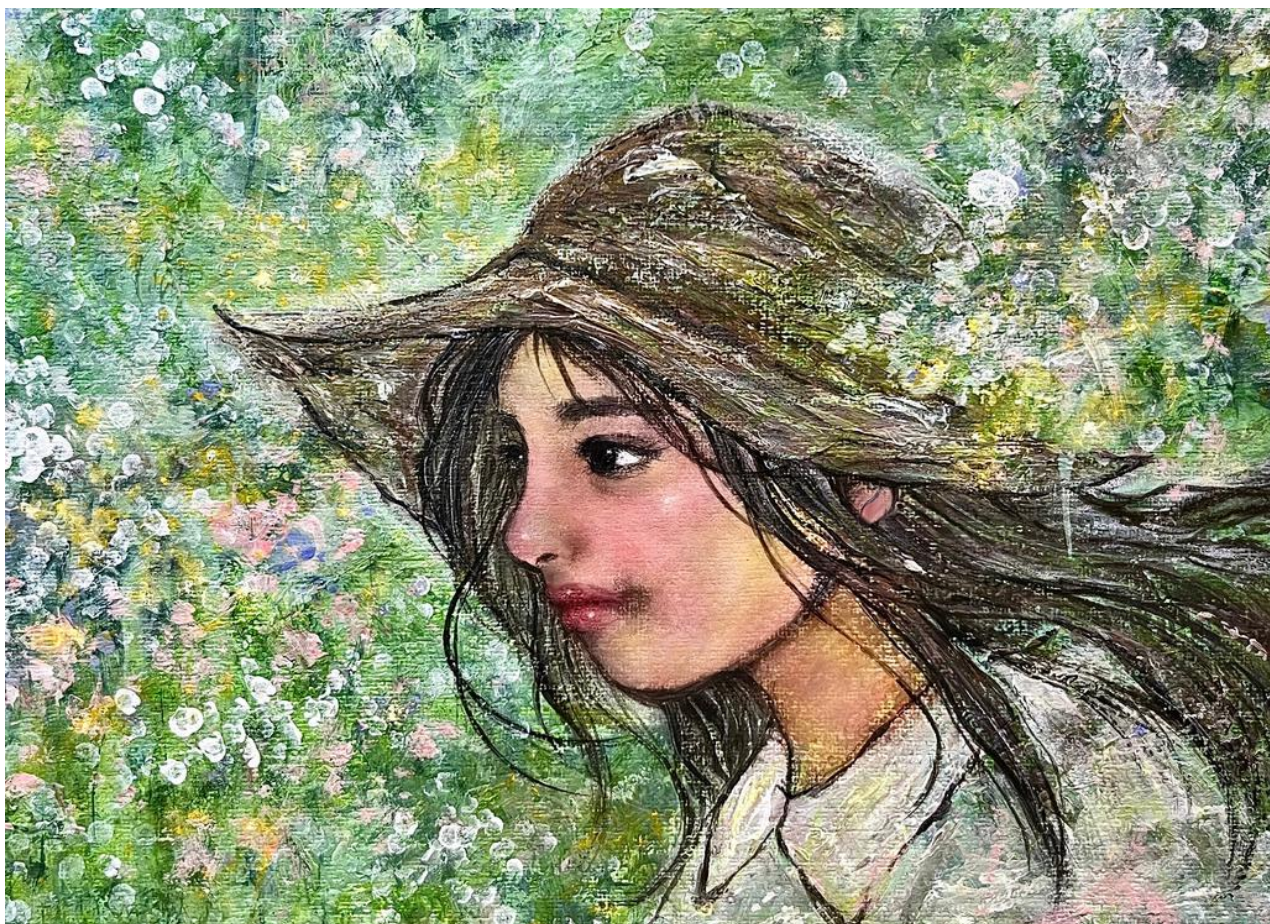
England has many art museums and galleries, and while living in London, I visited many of them to appreciate art. At art school, I mainly studied abstract and expressive painting. I also spent a lot of time in parks and libraries, sketching cityscapes and scenery. The art street in Brick Lane is very popular among young people, and I often explored it with a German designer friend I met there, enjoying the vibrant and cool pop art. My fresh and inspiring daily life in London remains a treasured memory for me.

**What role do traditional Japanese materials play in your mixed media work?**

I primarily use mixed media techniques, combining acrylic paint with mineral pigments to achieve delicate color nuances. Mineral pigments (iwa-enogu), made from finely ground minerals, add depth and unique texture when layered with watercolor.

**Your portraits and floral compositions carry a**





**sense of nostalgia. Do you draw inspiration from childhood or personal memories?**

As a child, I was physically weak and often watched other children playing from the windows of the hospital or school. During those times, the beautiful blue sky and flowers blooming by the roadside gave me strength. Nature filled me with hope, and painting it gave me courage. As I grew healthier, I developed a love for travel, inspired by my childhood, and began visiting different countries and art museums. I continue to draw inspiration from artworks around the world and aim to create my own expressions every day.

**Can you walk us through your typical creative process—from idea to finished piece?**

I reflect on landscapes I've visited and draw inspiration from daily life. I begin by repeatedly sketching ideas on paper. Then, I break down the composition and build up the painting using

mixed media techniques.

**What does nature mean to you in your work? It appears frequently in your themes.**

The seasons in Japan are truly beautiful, and I often envision and paint scenic landscapes in my mind. I try to capture the sense of color, the light, and the fine details with my brush. Experiencing nature's transitions and continuing to create in tune with them holds deep meaning for me.

**How do you balance traditional techniques with contemporary expression?**

By visiting museums and viewing diverse exhibitions from around the world, I learn to interpret techniques and understand artists' intentions in my own way. I want to continue valuing tradition while embracing the beauty of contemporary art — observing with my eyes, feeling with my heart, and learning from paintings in my own personal way.



I'm **Diego Navarro**, an Argentine photographer living in Boston with over 20 years of experience. I specialize in fashion, street, and landscape photography, with my work showcased in both national and international exhibitions. My photography has also been featured in publications throughout the Boston area.

*Project Statement*

Aurora: Aurora signifies dawn — the quiet start of a new day, a chance for growth. Sunrise, with its promise of renewal, brings light after darkness. This work reflects the idea that true renewal comes when we pause and simply observe. Nature has its rhythm, and we are part of a cycle that's been unfolding long before us. In this stillness, we are reminded that we are just passengers on this journey, witnessing a process far greater than ourselves.









## — Interview

# Massimo Rossi

**What first inspired you to become an artist? Was there a moment or person that made you realize this was your path?**

Good morning, first of all, I want to thank you for this interview and for the interest you've shown in my art. Your artistic sensitivity is truly flattering. I believe that inspiration has always been within me — it came out naturally. Even as a child, I used art as a personal outlet, expressing



my emotions on paper or canvas and often leaving those who saw my work amazed. Passionately, I began attending a painting course, where I had a great teacher who supported my talent and encouraged me to channel it into another artistic form as well: goldsmithing, which eventually became my future profession.

**You've worked with drawing, jewelry, sculpture, and painting. Which of these came most naturally to you, and which was the most challenging to learn?**

In my case, goldsmithing probably required greater attention, since the raw materials used are often of significant value. However, I would like to emphasize that even abstract art — which may sometimes appear more instinctive or impulsive — actually requires study, just like all other artistic disciplines.

**Your works often feel like energetic explosions—are there recurring emotions or themes you consciously return to?**

Yes, it's true — my works are pure energy, explosions of what I feel inside: water and fire, good and evil, joy and pain, peace and anger. They are often characterized by the strong contrasts that life presents to us.

**Do you consider yourself more of an alchemist or an architect when creating a painting—do you plan structure or let chemistry and spontaneity take the lead?**

In reality, I do both — I always try to plan the structure like a true architect, to ensure that my



Massimo Rossi | Emotional Porthole





works have a clear focus and a sense of order. But then I let myself go to the most beautiful part: I half-close my eyes, blur my vision, and let the emotions flow. My soul transforms into color, transferring itself onto the canvas with passion and energy.

**Looking back at your first works—how do you think your style or thinking has changed since then?**

My style has changed a great deal over time, because inevitably, as a young man, my work was focused on study and, as a result, was mostly landscape- or figurative-based. Then, over the years and with a bit more self-awareness, I began to let go and started to reveal a different kind of landscape — emotional landscapes that push their way out with force. I love to define my art as free, because my way of painting is free — a way to unconditionally express what I feel.

**Can you share more about your solo show**

**titled “Percorso Emotivo”—what emotions guided that exhibition’s selection of works?**

I’m glad you were struck by the title “Emotional Journey”, which I gave to one of my solo exhibitions held in Italy, specifically in Bracciano, in the province of Rome, in December 2023. It was an event where I aimed to create a true journey that would lead the visitor to observe my artistic evolution over time. The works were carefully selected to move the viewer through a crescendo of emotion, from one piece to the next.

**Finally, what advice would you offer to emerging artists who are trying to find their own voice in abstract art?**

To emerging artists, I recommend never abandoning study and artistic exploration. Look around, take inspiration — but always preserve your uniqueness. Listening to yourself will be your greatest strength.



**IlkesOrbit**, also known as Ilia Zahariev, is a self-taught 3D artist and animator based in Bulgaria. With a professional background in graphic design, Ilia discovered his passion for 3D art during his final year at university while studying 3D modeling. Over the past five years, he has refined his skills in creating captivating 3D models, animations, and visualizations for various projects. His expertise in software applications such as Blender, 3ds Max, and Adobe Creative Suite allows him to bring his artistic visions to life. Ilia is dedicated to continuous self-improvement and enjoys taking on new creative challenges, always striving to push the boundaries of his craft and deliver visually stunning works that resonate with audiences.

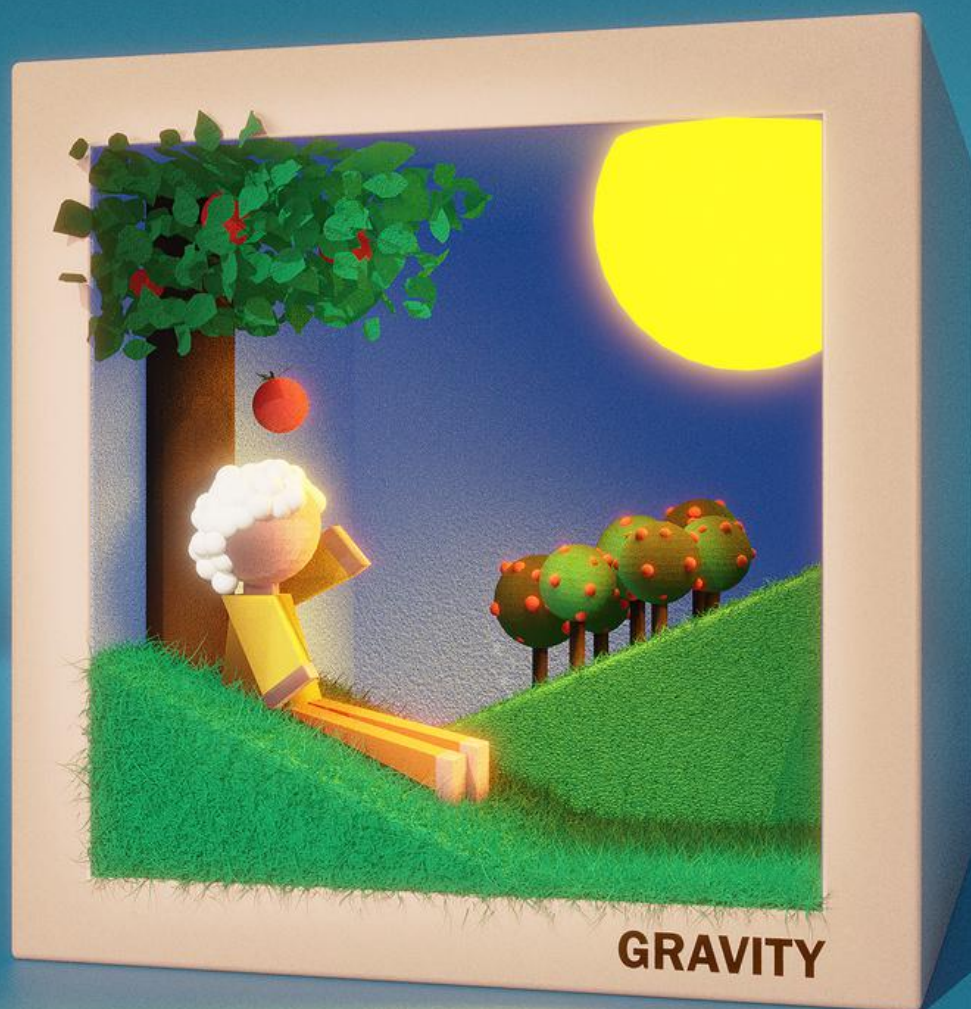
### *Project Statement*

As a 3D artist, my work is driven by a fascination with the stories that shape our understanding of the world. Through my collection "Nameless Moments" I explore significant historical and contemporary events that have left an undeniable mark on humanity. Each artwork represents a key moment in time, capturing the essence of the figures and events that defined our existence. Using advanced 3D modeling techniques, I aim to create immersive visual experiences that invite viewers to engage with the narratives behind these moments. My commitment to detail and depth allows me to convey powerful messages through my art, inspiring reflection and dialogue about the world we live in.

Ilia Zahariev (IlkesOrbit) | Original Sin







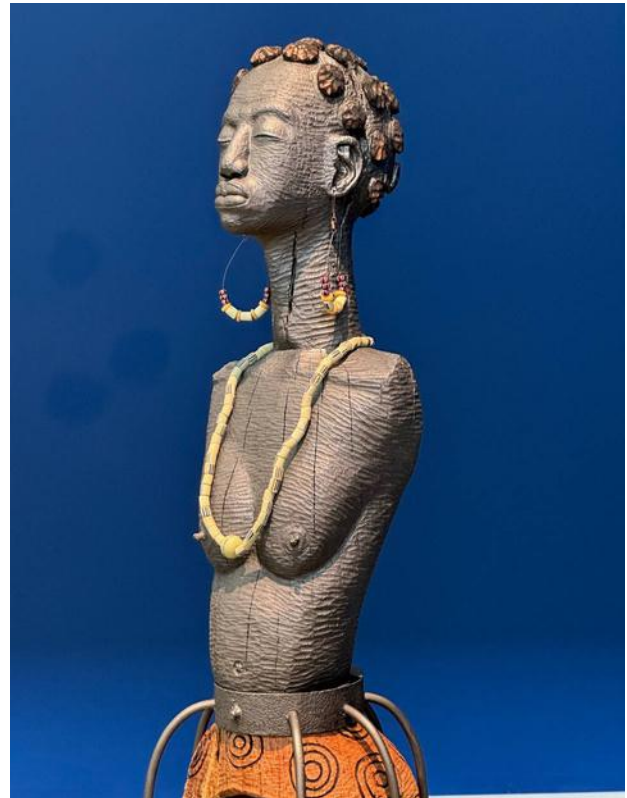
Ilia Zahariev (IlkesOrbit) | Gravity



# Reginald Ayivor

**Can you describe how your Ghanaian heritage influences your sculptural practice?**

My Ghanaian heritage is deeply woven into my practice. Growing up, I was surrounded by traditional crafts, oral histories, and ceremonial objects, which allowed me to develop an early appreciation for the symbolic power of form and material. These cultural influences inform my aesthetic choices and thematic direction, whether in the motifs I explore, the use of indigenous materials like beads, or the storytelling that runs through each piece. My sculptures are a



Reginald Ayivor | Aku | 2024

contemporary continuation of that heritage, engaging with memory, identity, and the richness of African traditions.

**Many of your sculptures incorporate both wood and metal. What does the combination of these materials represent for you?**

My fusion of wood and metal speaks to the dualities I often navigate, tradition and modernity, softness and hardness, organic and industrial. Wood connects me to the earth and ancestral practices, while metal introduces a raw, enduring strength. Together, they mirror the layered nature of identity and experience. The process of merging these materials is also a metaphor for adaptation, resilience, and transformation, central themes in my life and practice.

**Your works often include cage-like structures, masks, and vessels. What symbolic meanings do these elements carry in your art?**

These elements are potent symbols. The Cage-like structures speak to confinement and protection, often reflecting internal struggles or societal constraints. The Masks represent layered identities, how we present ourselves versus what lies beneath. The Vessels (Lanterns), on the other hand, symbolize the spirit within as light to the entire being. Each form carries emotional and cultural weight, allowing viewers to project their own meanings while connecting with mine.



Reginald Ayivor | Mental Slavery | 2023





### How do personal experiences and memory shape the narratives you convey through your sculptures?

My work is deeply personal. Each sculpture becomes a physical manifestation of a memory, an emotion, or a lived experience. Whether I am processing moments of displacement, belonging, or cultural pride, the act of carving and welding becomes cathartic. Through form and texture, I give rise to feelings that are often hard to articulate, hoping they resonate with others on a universal level.

### You use tools such as chainsaws and grinders alongside traditional carving tools. How does this process affect your relationship with the material?

Using both power tools and hand tools allows me to engage the material in multiple ways. The aggressive nature of chainsaws and grinders brings immediacy and raw energy to my carving process, while chisels and gouges demand patience and precision, which I am all about. Working this way creates a tactile

dialogue with the material, where each mark carries intention and emotion.

### What role do traditional Ghanaian beads and body adornments play in your sculptures?

Beads and body adornments are more than decorative elements, they are vessels of history, status, and spiritual meaning in Ghanaian culture. Incorporating them into my sculptures bridges the gap between object and body, tradition and innovation. They allow me to infuse my work with cultural codes and personal symbolism, creating layers that invite closer inspection and interpretation.

### What challenges and revelations have you experienced transitioning from Ghana to the U.S. art scene?

Transitioning into the U.S. art scene has been both challenging and enriching. One challenge has been navigating different cultural contexts and expectations around art-making and critique. However, it has also expanded my perspective and exposed me to diverse practices and conversations. This journey has reinforced the universality of art while affirming the importance of staying rooted in my identity and culture. It's a continuous dialogue between my origin and my evolving self as a global artist.





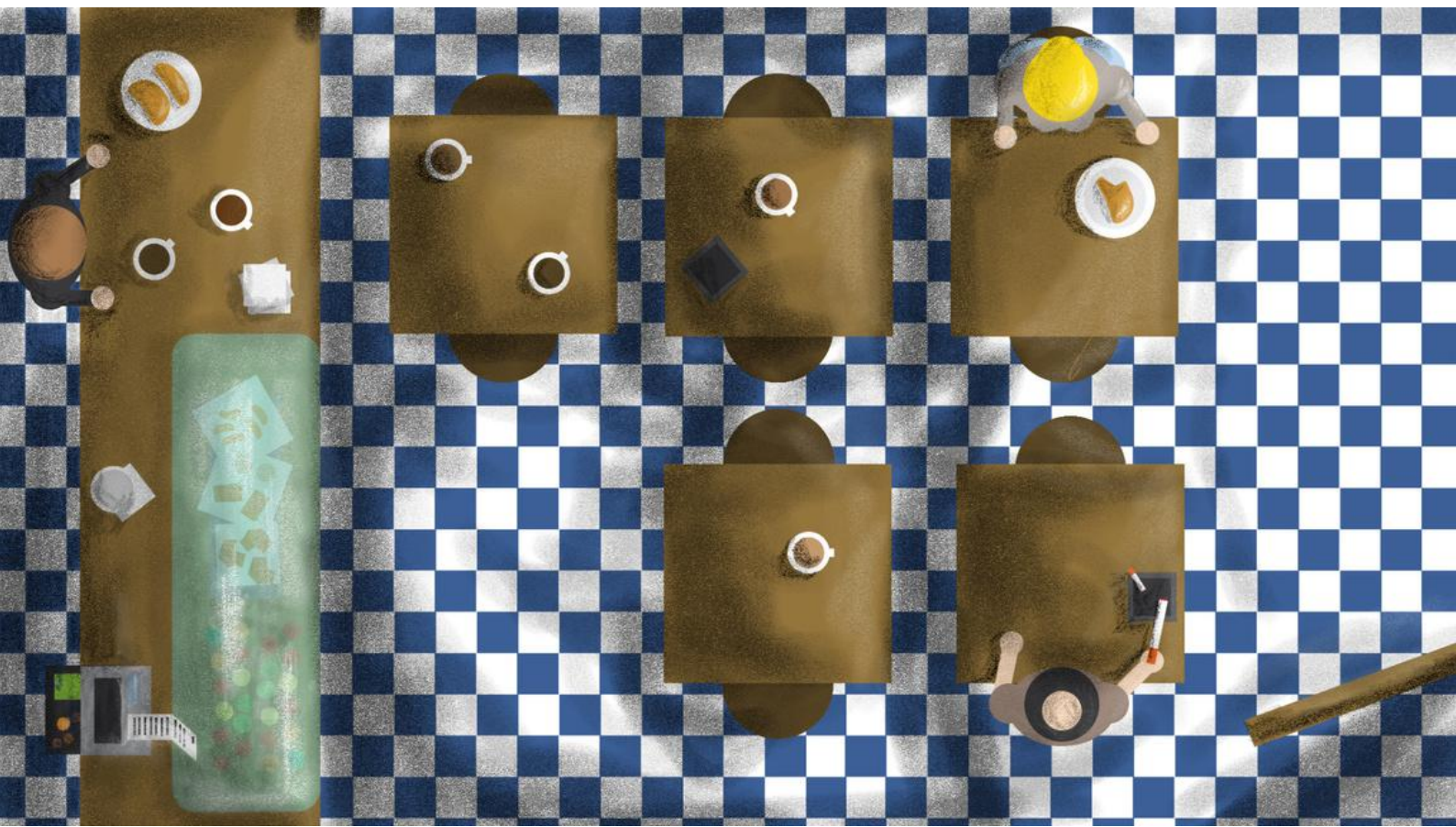
# Francisca Niny de Castro

Based in Lisbon. Audiovisual and Multimedia course at Escola Artística António Arroio. Degree in Cinema with a specialization in cinematography from the Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema. Motion Design course at Noble desktop in New York (2022), Advanced Motion Methods course at the School of Motion (2023) and Expression Session (2024). I've worked as a camera assistant, freelance editor and videographer. In 2016 I co-founded a collective called Pagárrenda, where I currently work. I've participated in group exhibitions with illustrations and digital art, as well as making a short film that has been shown at several small festivals. Lately I've realized that digital art has always been present in my personal projects, so I decided to give it a try.

## Project Statement

I've noticed that I have serious problems focusing and a lot of difficulty accepting this. That's why this group of pieces is called Embracing Chaos.

Francisca Niny de Castro | Rissol







Francisca Niny de Castro | Mosca



## Jane IV

My inspirational muse is a modern Venus, who reflects the ideals and challenges of our time. She symbolizes beauty, strength, and independence, as well as the internal struggles faced by the new NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) generation. Often criticized for their passivity, this generation actually represents a unique perspective on life, where values and priorities are changing. My works are an attempt to visualize this internal struggle and the search for one's place in the world. They reflect both the lightness of being and the weight of expectations that society imposes. Using a blue-light palette, I create an atmosphere in which the viewer can immerse themselves in their thoughts and feelings, find solace or inspiration. I hope that my paintings will not only be a visual experience, but also a stimulus for reflection on how we perceive life and ourselves in this ever-changing world. Each work contains a call to accept yourself and find your own path, regardless of what others expect.









# — Interview

## Matt Sheridan

**You refer to “a plug-and-play attitude” in your practice. Has this mindset allowed you more freedom, or are there limits you’ve discovered in this modular approach?**

My plug-and-play attitude provides objectivity. I stick things together quickly, interchange parts, and ascertain three to five variations on a movement in short order. For me, modularity removes fussiness and adds speed, getting me out of my own way to discover each composition. Designing digital collages was the initial outcome of that methodology. New questions for animations and painting revealed themselves from that generative path forward. The only limitation is me.

**Movement and gesture are central in your work. How do you choreograph visual rhythms without relying on traditional narratives or figures?**

Starting in monochrome focuses me on action, reaction, collision, glances, obstructions and obfuscations, limiting myself to a series of discrete, interchangeable “moves.” When moves are associative, they’re relatable; demonstrating exchanges, transits, or in a vulgar sense, sex and/or violence. Story and characters become superfluous to situations and characteristics: my paintings and animations exhibit plenty of



available information to locate common feelings and attitudes between viewers’ perspectives and my own in the work. After visually setting terms for thought, telling audiences how to think about it is overkill in my opinion.

**You mention using scanned paint marks and re-materializing them digitally. Do you see this process as a form of collaboration between the physical and the virtual?**

Oh yes. Due to my animation training, moving through, across and into an abstract painting with my eye, though satisfying, is often not enough for me. Physically painted textures and marks sequenced into animation exhibit organic, mechanical, transformative and chaotic frequencies, to name just a few.

Reverse-engineering this attitude into paintings, I choose color systems and textures based on a spectrum between harmony and dissonance. Mechanical implements beyond brushes get me there, using sprays, scrapes and scratches to build up textures on surfaces. Then my inquiries revert to projecting animations on rough surfaces! I seek to demonstrate actual material consequence rhythmically, rather than depicting textures using 3d software.

**Your work blends elements of Constructivism, Abstract Expressionism, and digital animation. How do you navigate the tension between structure and spontaneity in your creative process?**

Tension between structure and spontaneity in my process lights my way. As artist/educator, there’s certainly a tension regarding time management on both fronts. And as a contrarian who makes things, I find myself setting my own course as much as I’m reacting against conditions set for me. For an art historical angle on my “why,” I’m thinking about painting and video by way of Helio Oiticica / Nam June Paik framing Franz Kline / Kazuo Shiraga / Sam Gilliam / David Reed as organized by El Lissitzky / Aleksander Rodchenko / Pipilotti Rist. I am thinking globally, while figuring out how my influences interact in time and space as fragments organized together from project to project.



Matt Sheridan | Humphrey Bogart | 2016





Where prior abstract artists insisted upon their practices' supremacy over others, I use abstraction to address questions which in turn, generate more questions, moving my practice forward.

**You describe abstract painting as the "R&D wing" of your practice. Can you walk us through how a single gesture might evolve from canvas into a projected animation?**

All my work begins as digital collage. My collages are sketches or demos from which I can build out / rematerialize performances over time on canvas or animated videos. As I paint and build surfaces, I wonder how those surfaces might move as animations, which is the research and development part, as well as testing color systems.

So I'll repeat a gesture in, for example, a sequence of 12-15 positions, as it grows and dissipates, on a scannable sheet of paper. Then I digitally clean up and sequence those positions into cycles, including but not limited to a beginning, middle and end.

From there I apply a color system, at which point loops are composited together, either nested into a larger, pre-conceived multi-component cycle designed for a particular shape / site, or mixed live using video jockey software, live "painting" in real time before a live audience recorded for cinematic editing.

**How have residencies in places like Brazil, Japan, and France shaped your understanding of abstraction or altered your visual language?**

Really what I learn on residencies are local philosophies, both what they have in common with western continental

philosophy, and how they diverge from it. Contemporary and modern art exhibitions in France illuminate our world's universally fragmentary condition as a century-long spectrum using space and time in ways American market-driven, narratively decorative painting and reductive identity politics-driven polemics seek to gloss over in deference to American narcissisms.

Japan and Brazil also prioritize culture, in that art is everywhere in both places, from temples and vending machines to boats and dances in each respective country. Brazilian baroque syncretism, Japanese wabi-sabi essentialism, and the elegant brutality of the French are all visible in my work.

My interest in dialectics — and particularly intersections — between global philosophies inspires me to abstractly demonstrate these exchanges in my work, which is why I'm collaborating with artists in Mumbai this summer 2025.

**Your work has appeared at prestigious venues like the Centre Pompidou and in public installations. How does the scale or environment influence your compositional choices?**

Sites frame the work: this is tricky because ideally my work can move from site to site while being bespoke to each. In group contexts I want my animations to "hang" with paintings and sculptures, as smaller projections or as monitor-based works, not isolated in a black box. I like when my work converses with other works in the room.

Sometimes a curatorial program, sporting event or festival requests a single-channel cinematic edit for a theatrical screen presentation. Sometimes there's an interior or exterior facade, even a protruding corner of a building. Building facades provide interesting shapes and surface "traction" for projection, whether as bricks or slats or overpainted surfaces.

Sometimes there's so much traction a surface becomes "slippery" to a projected image — many southern California interior ceilings are already beautiful and multi-layered with constructed textures and movement, making a hostile environment where projected adornment is redundant and unnecessary. Likewise, a white cube can be slippery as there's no context beyond what else is installed on the walls or floor, so I'll either project a shape surrounded by transparency or go fully immersive from floor to ceiling to ends of the walls. I participated in a New Delhi group show where my immersive work was projected as a shape in the main gallery with paintings and sculptures, only possible because the projection area was recessed, making my work "proportionate" to other works nearer the viewer. Ideally my work is not only an optical experience, but also a bodily excursion engaging instinct as well.





**Valentina Khodnevich** is a Multidisciplinary Artist and Photographer based in London, with work specializing in Video Art with a focus on choreography and experimental media. Over the past year, Valentina has created several art films and dance films that have been screened at prestigious festivals in Cannes, Berlin, and London. In 2024, Valentina received a GOLD at 1.4 Awards for her video art work "N25", that has been also shortlisted at YDA. Her latest work "PUMP" has been featured on Director's Library and NOWNESS. Currently, she is working as a Mixed Media Artist in London.

### *Project Statement*

In my work, I love to explore the perception of what the human eye can see, and the languages through which it speaks. Dance and movement often become my tools for storytelling, a way to translate emotions into something tangible. With a background in film and visual arts, my work is often rooted in video and photography, always with a deep emphasis on music. I love catching fleeting moments, whether it is a person or nature, and transforming them into something special, layering them with editing, retouching, and sound design to create a deeper immersive experience.









## Natstky

I'm a 24 year old Salvadoran Nahua woman who focuses on the many diverse Nahua villages back home, especially Texistepeque and Nahuizalco.

### *Project Statement*

I like to depict aesthetically depictions of our cultures to not only push back against the racist imagery often shown of us but to also prove we are still thriving in the modern day.

Natstky | Legend of Chasca | 2024









# — Interview

## Natalia Averianova

**Can you tell us more about the process of creating your watercolor works? How does the medium allow you to express emotion and meaning?**

I'm in love with watercolor because of its spontaneity. That's why I work on large sheets of paper it gives the paint space to open its full delicacy and beauty. Watercolor has a unique nature, with effects that I appreciate, even the ones that might seem like mistakes at first glance. I do experiment out of traditional techniques, opening up a world of freedom, spontaneity, acceptance, and things left unsaid. It's this sense of "leaving things unsaid" and the imagery in my paintings that invites viewers to interpret the story through their own personal associations, connecting into their deeper perceptions.

**How has your background in fashion and textile**

Natalia Averianova | When the snow melts | 2023



**design influenced your approach to watercolor and your artistic expression?**

My time studying the Italian school of elegance and trends shaped me into an aesthete with a conceptual mindset. Whether in fashion or painting, I pay close attention to lines, proportions, plasticity, and details. These elements are key to create a visual message. Color scheme is a separate exploration for me. I carefully plan the palette for each painting, testing swatches to find the most impressive and delicious combinations. It's a process similar to designing a clothing collection.

**You mention the concept of vulnerability in your artist statement. How do you translate this vulnerability into your visual work?**

Every artist is vulnerable in their openness. For me, that vulnerability is about accepting my imperfections loving my weaknesses and accepting processes I can't fully control. An artist can't claim to hold the ultimate truth, but through sensitivity and raw vulnerability, they touch the unknown and infinite. Through my art, I share sophisticated layers of life with the world. Take my series \*Metamorphoses of My Ego\* as an example. It's a personal exploration of the inner shifts in a woman's mind and body during motherhood. This isn't a polished, idealized version of motherhood it's an honest portrayal of the complex emotions and challenges a woman faces. The paintings reflect a sense of losing parts of your body, time, freedom, and ordinary way of life. There are themes of fragility,





despair, and the urge to escape responsibility. These works are traces of a crisis, marking a transformation from “me for myself” to “me for others.”

**Your works are described as having both sensuality and meaning. How do you balance these two elements in your art?**

The balance occurs naturally. It starts with an impression. Then I sketch capturing moments from my inner world or the world around me. Once I feel I've caught something valuable, I begin the painting. I'm a visual poet, and I use watercolor because its fluidity and unpredictable effects beautifully capture the subjective, elusive nature of emotions. At first, I work intuitively pouring paint and letting my feelings guide what happens on the paper. Then I observe the shapes that emerge, checking if they align with my original idea. I refine details, balance the composition, and layer in deeper meaning. This journey from spontaneity to emotion to intent fills the painting with allegories and significance.

**Could you elaborate on how you see the relationship between watercolors' spontaneous nature and your desire to convey deep emotional themes?**

Watercolor's spontaneity comes from the interplay of water, air, and pigment an uncontrollable process, like a higher force at work. You have to let go of the ego's need for total control and appreciate the unexpected outcomes. This act of acceptance, of loving what's given, naturally brings out subtle connections, depths

of the subconscious, and emotional themes on the paper.

**How do you perceive the role of everyday beauty in your work? Is there a particular scene or moment from everyday life that inspired one of your pieces?**

Inspiration can come from the most ordinary things like a banana peel. It's lying on the table after one of my kids ate the fruit and left it behind. I pick up charcoal and start tracing its lines, studying the grace of its curves. The lines twist and dance, and soon I sense the theme of a future painting. As I explore, I realize the peel is just the shell of the banana. Sure, it has its own aesthetic charm, but the real value is inside. This sparked an idea for a painting where the banana peel becomes a metaphor for how outward appearances often overshadow inner substance. In today's world of social media and beauty culture, looks can matter more than what's beneath. The painting shows just the peel, but your eye is drawn to a spreading yellow stain a symbol of the soft, deep, boundless essence hidden behind the surface.

**You've had a significant influence from your teacher, Vladimir Rynkevich. What aspects of his work shaped your approach to watercolor, and how do you incorporate those influences into your art today?**

You're right Vladimir Rynkevich, my teacher, deeply influenced my watercolor practice. It's not just about specific techniques, though I do use his masterful tricks like imprints, drips, layering, and scratching his own creative inventions. More importantly, his lessons went beyond that. He taught me to cultivate an authentic, personal voice, to build a cohesive visual story, and to harmonize the emotional message in my work. Those principles are the foundation of my approach to art today.





## Katherine Dusza

I am a Phoenix based photographer. I shoot 120 film, 35mm film, and digitally. I specialize in portraiture and day in the life editorial work. I have a bachelors of science of psychology and a minor in photography. I specialize in shooting in an emotive style that both provokes thought and promotes confidence. Photography allows me to express myself when words can't carry the meaning.









**Maria Papa** comes from Cyprus. She has obtained a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Information Technology. She is working as an IT Officer at the Government. She started a long time ago with pencil portraits. Her love for painting led her to attend painting lessons. Her works are dominated by symmetry and strong, vibrant colors printed with acrylics on canvas. But they have also been used other materials. Through her works, she enables viewers to engage with the stories hidden in each subject and the harmony of locations. She has participated in exhibitions in Cyprus, Greece, England, Italy and America. One of the most important exhibitions he participated in was at the Museum of History of the University of Athens in an exhibition organized by the Club for UNESCO Art- Literature and Science of Greece. Some of her paintings have been shown on a screen at Times Square and at Passeig de Gràcia metro station at the heart of Barcelona. She has been awarded with the "International Prize Leonardo da Vinci - The UNIVERSAL ARTIST". Her project moved on to the 25 finalists of the EMERGING ARTISTS AWARDS COMPETITION 2025 from the Art Team Magazine in Ireland. Her paintings have been moved on to the Artist of the Year Award organized by ItsLiquid Gallery in Rome , at the 100 Emerging Artists: 2025 Women's Edition by the Arts to hearts Project, and Itsliquid Artist Competition. She has also won an award in the "12th OPEN International Juried Art competition", April 2025, by the Teravarna Art Gallery and in the 3rd Micro & Macro Art Contest by Gallery 4%. Her paintings have been presented at the #4 issue of the Arteammagazine, a visionary Irish art publication and the '101 Artbook - Abstract Edition', published by Arts To Heart Project team. She has participated at the ARTEOMAGAZINE N. 6 by being interviewed as an artist. Furthermore, for the upcoming 2025, her projects will be presented at exhibitions in Venice, Milano and Athens. Some sites in Greece and in Cyprus as well as some shows on television have written about her joint journey in painting with her sister. To her credit, she has illustrated 2 books.

#### *Project Statement*

My love for painting led me to take classes. I am inspired by nature, landscapes, unique images, people I love or admire, or both, human relationships, in general, everything that has a soul. I have drawn landscapes, scenes from theatres or films and people I admire. When I create one painting I aim to capture the real features without some artistic interventions or elements of the unreal, but I like to use vivid colors, mainly using primary colors to convey the immediate impression that the image evokes. My works are dominated by symmetry and strong, vibrant colors printed with acrylics on canvas. In some of my works, materials such as oils, gouache, chalks, charcoal, pastels, and pencil have been used either on canvas or paper. Through my works, I enable viewers to engage with the stories hidden in each subject and the harmony of locations.



Maria Papa | A boat Called Maria | 2024







## — Interview

# Dunja Messer- Jourdain

### **How did your family's background in bespoke tailoring influence your journey into art?**

I simply grew up in a creative environment where plans were discussed, made and executed at a pace that created a sense of excitement and with materials that I was attracted to and were a pleasure for me to handle, early on- and I was involved, or I involved myself. Lol. There was a lot going on. Precision, craftsmanship and attention to detail were valued. That early feeling, that I can now recognize, as an adult, as a sense of fulfillment from having followed the creative process all the way through to the final product, is something that never left me. In other words, the bespoke tailoring background introduced me to a real, backstage version, so to speak, creative process that involves work as well as the ability to dream and imagine. This ethic is an integral part of making art.

### **What inspired you to blend fashion design with abstract painting?**

It started out with fashion design for me because I had access to a great deal of fine fabrics. Those fabrics were more than an education in color and texture. It became a lifelong fascination. For me, working with



fabrics was more of a creative endeavor than a purely technical one. In fact, I created my early patterns by eye, without bothering to measure. I was combining and using materials to create a piece, a garment that would be a conduit of self-expression. Eventually, I became interested in other mediums. The core inspiration remains the same.

### **Could you share more about your experience studying textile design in India and how it shaped your approach to art and fashion?**

I wanted to know more about how exquisite fabrics are made and through a company that is dedicated to fair trade, I was able to get in behind the scenes of Asian fabric production from silkworm farms to the entire Indian villages dedicated to hand loom production. In my position I was also given the opportunity to create designs for printed fabric. Studying in India, a country rich in textile traditions and techniques, exposed me to a wide array of cultural influences. This influenced my aesthetic

Dunja Messer-Jourdain | With Roman Candle







sensibilities and color choices. I am more inclined to experiment with unconventional materials, techniques and forms than I would have been otherwise. Learning about textile manufacturing gave me a strong foundation in the understanding of different materials, techniques, and processes. This knowledge translated into innovative ways of incorporating textures, patterns, dying techniques, weaving techniques, and print, etc. into art and fashion designs.

**How do you balance your roles as a painter and fashion designer? Do these two creative fields influence each other in your work?**

I am in love with fabrics and different creative materials in general. Sometimes I find myself purchasing a fabric just to own it. It simply gives me so much pleasure. While I went through a phase of collecting Japanese fabrics used in wedding ceremonies, I nowadays am more into novelty fabrics with rich textures, for example French dotted tulle or Italian metallic brocades. This is eye candy for my senses and gives me lots of inspiration for my paintings. The color-palettes, textures, and patterns I experiment with in my paintings often find their way into my fashion collections, and vice versa. This interplay keeps my work dynamic and fresh.

**Your art celebrates femininity and explores its evolving standards. What aspects of femininity do you find most inspiring, and how do you express them in your paintings?**

Women are feral, curious, playful, flirty, coquettish, adventurous, passionate, moody and open to the use of vibrant color to attract, uplift and express. Women are often the catalysts of the memorable events and, dare I say, drama in life. I express all this, the hidden, and the unspoken with color, texture and shiny objects on canvas.

**You use reflective materials such as glitter in your artwork. What role do these materials play in conveying your artistic message?**

These materials serve as a metaphor for the feminine spark- luminosity, and brilliance but also strength. The interplay of light and texture created by these materials adds depth and complexity to my pieces, inviting the audience to engage with the art more closely.

**How does living and working in New York City impact your creativity and artistic style?**

New York is frenetic and demanding in so many ways that most people are familiar with, but one can find a way to do things your own way and not worry about say, necessarily matching your outfit if you're too busy thinking about your project or just don't care today. I learned to trust myself in New York to listen to myself more seriously because in New York quite often the only way is to go your own way. The city's energy, diversity, and relentless pursuit of excellence serve as catalysts for pushing boundaries, fostering innovation, and shaping unique artistic perspectives.



Dunja Messer-Jourdain | Pink green



**Aleksandra Stefanović** was born in 1996 in Prokuplje, Serbia. After completing her studies in International Relations at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, she devoted herself to art, developing a distinctive and authentic style. One of her most notable works is "The Dragonfly Cycle", a collection that combines painting and short stories to explore different stages of artistic creation, transformation, and inner processes. In 2024, she held her first solo exhibition titled "Summer Fairytale" at the Đura Jakšić House. Her work has also been exhibited in various galleries, including: SKC BAZA ("November Salon of Classical Interactive Art"), King Peter I House ("The Dynamics of Diversity"), ŠTAB ("The Artist in Challenge"), Nikola Radošević Gallery (group exhibition organized by "Fireflies in the Dark"), Green Door ("Imprint of Transience"), Akademija 28 ("May Encounters"), the International Fractal Festival ("Codes of Awakening") at the Đura Jakšić House, among others.

"A painter by soul and by calling, Aleksandra paints what is in fact the hardest to paint—and she does it so well, it seems effortlessly unreal..."  
- Miša Mihajlo Kravcev.

#### *Project Statement*

"The Dragonfly Cycle" was born out of a deep need to express myself and give voice to all that I had suppressed within for a significant part of my life. At the same time, I wanted to unite image and word, the visual and the narrative, the rational and the intuitive. This collection comprises 18 paintings and 13 short stories, forming a unique artistic narrative about transformation, inner awakening, friendship, love, personal authenticity, and the freedom of choice.

At the heart of my creative process are dragonflies, chosen for their beautiful symbolism — in most folk traditions, they represent transformation. Through them, I explore universal human questions:

Who are we when we forget what others expect of us? Can art become a mirror of the soul rather than a product of the market? Can friendship save the world? Does true love only arrive when we dare to be vulnerable?

To me, art is something that transcends me — but it is also a process of inner dialogue. I do not seek perfection of form, but truth of expression. I'm not interested in external validation, but in inner connection. I believe that every genuine work of art carries the energy of change — both for the creator and the observer.

Each painting in this collection is an invitation: to listen more closely, to reconnect with oneself. Because, as one of my characters says:

"It's not the wings that make the dragonfly. It's the melody of the heart that matters."



Aleksandra Stefanović | In Vortex | 2024







**Mamak Razmgir's** artwork is a storytelling journey through an imaginary world that combines aspects of Surrealism and Persian miniature painting, among other sources. This allows her to explore ideas of freedom, agency, and the strength of women. She is inspired by the power of contemporary Iranian women striving for freedom and using dance as a way of fighting for their own basic rights. The evocative world of surrealism allows a similar freedom for her as an artist, and dance is an essential metaphor for freedom and agency in Razmgir's works. Razmgir is Master of Fine Art candidate, Texas Tech University, Lubbock. She previously earned a BFA in Graphic Design from Tehran University of Art and an MFA in Illustration from the University of Tehran. After illustrating books for children and adults published by Iranian publishers in Iran such as the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults Publication, She came to United State in 2022 to pursue her dream of being an international visual artist. An artist who tells the stories of her own life in relation to contemporary issues in Iran to create a space for conversation, rethinking and changing our minds.

#### *Project Statement*

My art is a storytelling journey through an imaginary world that reflects indirectly upon the world and political realities in which we live. Combining aspects of surrealism and Persian miniature painting, among other sources, I explore ideas of freedom, agency, and the strength of women in Iran, where I come from. In recent years, the Iranian government's effort to control and restrict the movement of female bodies has made dance into a tool for resilience and political resistance to the regime as part of the Women-Life-Freedom movement. In this way, dance is not only an expression of joy, but also a weapon against oppression. This duality is central to my paintings, drawings, and wearable pieces. I seek to blend Eastern and Western elements, virtue and violence, beauty and deformity, tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, women and war, and reality and imagery that is both realistic and fantastical. Through an imaginative lens, I paint the reality of my life as an Iranian woman, employing metaphors and symbols in a surreal manner to bridge ancient and modern narratives. In painting, I find the freedom that is withheld from me and other women in Iran, filling my canvases with imaginary characters, dreamlike scenes, historical images, and personal iconography. I juxtapose ancient mythologies with real life, employing the traditional stylistic techniques of Persian miniature painting but modernizing them with contemporary concepts and imagery. Departing from the conventional canvas rectangle, I incorporate 3D elements, design shaped surfaces, and embrace a variety of challenging media such as photo transfer, embroidery, and found objects. Characters from my paintings also become the subjects of metalwork and jewelry, such that the story can be worn and carried on the body, allowing these works to extend beyond the gallery and enter into everyday life. I try to break from painting conventions to create new formal expressions and meanings that invite reflecting upon and critique of contemporary issues. Through my art, I attempt to foster empathy and encourage liberation. By interpreting the paintings' nuances, visual metaphors and coded messages, I invite viewers to draw upon their own memories and experiences and enter into the story imaginatively. This creates a space for dialogue, reconsideration of social issues, and changing of our minds. It is through such conversation and connections that we can stay curious while living with solidarity in the face of oppression. Solidarity and creativity are essential not only in Iran but also in all around the world to ensure that our societies do not lose their direction or values. By standing together and fostering dialogue, we can protect and advance the freedom that define us.

Mamak Razmgir | In pursuit of home | 2024









## — Interview

# Agafia Polynchuk

**You've been creating mixed media dolls for over 25 years. How did you first get into this art form, and what has kept you inspired throughout the years?**

As a child, I explored different activities, such as synchronized swimming, singing in a choir, participating in a theater studio, and even joining a hiking club. However, what drew me the most was creating things with my hands. Drawing and ceramics did interest me, but they didn't captivate me like making soft toys.



Agafia Polynchuk | Swizzles Sprinkleycorn & Wishey Flicker



When I was 10, I attended my first soft toy-making class, and that passion has stayed with me for life. At first, I worked with ready-made patterns provided by my teacher, but over time, I felt the need to create something of my own, something unique. As I grew older, I started experimenting with materials, designing my own patterns, and adding new elements to my work.

The skills and experience I accumulated made possible the dolls I create today. Why haven't I lost interest in this craft after so many years? I believe it's because these dolls have become my way of self-expression. It's more than just a hobby or a job — it's who I am, and I can't imagine doing anything else.

**Your work explores complex themes such as psychological defense mechanisms and existential needs. How do you approach such profound concepts through the medium of dolls?**

My dolls, whether they represent a person, an animal, or even an inanimate object, reflect human essence and the psycho-emotional state in general. In a way, they serve as allegories, similar to how animals are used in fables to convey ideas and feelings. The doll becomes a mold for many emotions, including fears, pain, joy, memories, and hope, illuminating different aspects of human nature. When exploring psychological defense mechanisms, I often present them as "masks". Through the doll, I investigate how people accept or deny reality, how they endure and simply





survive, or, conversely, rebel to change their lives for the better. For me, a doll is a means to look inside a person and express what is sometimes difficult or impossible to articulate in words.

Non-ideality, asymmetry, and altered proportions all emphasize the desire to be heard and understood — a desire that resides deeply within each of us.

**You use deconstruction and collaging of meanings as your main methods. Can you explain how these techniques manifest in your dolls and the stories they tell?**

When I speak of deconstruction, I refer to a process where I take an object apart, analyzing its structure and elements. From each part, I take something — such as texture, color, or shape — and then reassemble it according to my own vision and format. In this process, absurdity, irony, and black humor become my main methods and principles for assembling images and stories. They also act as psychological defense mechanisms, allowing me to detach from reality and view it from a different perspective.

For example, the Swizzles Sprinkleycorn unicorn doll embodies the joy and festive atmosphere inspired by the Birthday Confetti Cake. Birthdays are always magical, just like the unicorn itself, which symbolizes dreams and childhood. I took the cake's colors: the rainbow sprinkles are represented by bright dots on the doll's body, and the pink hair and shoes resemble frosting. The unicorn horn acts as a candle, ready to fulfill a wish, while the golden spoon in her hand hints at dessert. It's as though she's prepared to taste herself, waiting with curiosity and trepidation for what comes next.

In addition, I often combine elements from different eras and times. For instance, I may merge modern synthetic fabrics with antique beads or vintage accessories. This juxtaposition of past and present creates a new story — one that is not always obvious, but deep and layered.

My dolls are not merely decorative objects; they invite dialogue. I aim to create more than just an object. I want everyone who looks at my work to see something of their own, to ask questions, to reflect, and perhaps to gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

**What is the significance of the grotesque and absurd in your work, and how do these elements help convey the themes you explore?**

The grotesque and absurd help convey the complex psychological states and inner conflicts of my characters. These elements allow me to distort, exaggerate, or reduce reality, enabling me to transcend conventional logic and reveal the absurdity of life — both comical and tragic. The grotesque heightens tension or distracts the viewer, making not all details immediately apparent. Exaggerated proportions can highlight a character's inner state while maintaining an element of surprise. Through this absurdity, I explore existential questions about how people confront chaos and navigate the balance between tragedy and comedy in everyday life, reflecting the contradictions and absurdities of our world.

For example, look at my dolls "Lovers". They explore the metaphorical and literal concept of "exchanging eyes", drawing on the Victorian tradition of lovers exchanging portraits of each other's eyes. With a limited color palette and vintage elements, it highlights the complexities and traumas of love, capturing the essence of companionship through grotesque distortions of form on a Berlin alley bench, a symbolic space for lovers to meet and part.

**Many of your dolls draw inspiration from German fairy tales, traveling circus aesthetics, and folklore. How do these cultural elements shape your artistic vision?**

German fairy tales have their own unique features: they are filled with mythology, didactic elements, a special understanding of good and evil through symbolism, and an ominous atmosphere. I would say they shape my artistic







perception. I appreciate their dark, disturbing side, which is especially evident in Grimm's fairy tales, such as Frau Trude (where the witch turns a curious girl into a log and throws her into the fire) and "On the death of a chicken" (where everyone dies in the end), as well as in my favorite, Red Riding Hood. There is a harsh reality in them, as life can sometimes present events that feel like nightmares — dangerous, unpredictable, and even life-threatening.

I enjoy playing with the themes of good and evil, and by mixing characters, I create new, unexpected realities. For example, in my interpretation, Little Red Riding Hood might wear a wolf coat or be his wife. These explorations of traditional images allow me to search through deeper themes related to human nature and our struggle with the outside world.

My birthday falls on Halloween, which likely influences my inclination to play with the themes of fear and festivity. I love atmospheres that blend horror and joy, reflected in the traveling circus aesthetic that brings celebration, theatricality, absurdity, and fantasy into my work. This circus aesthetic allows for various metamorphoses, paradoxes, and transformations, yet there is always an underlying hint of sadness and melancholy.

My dolls exist on the boundary between fictional worlds, fantasy, and harsh reality. They blend joy with sadness and celebration with drama, reflecting the complex emotions and layered symbols found in fairy tales and folklore.

**Your dolls are not just visual objects but are often staged theatrically. How important is storytelling in your work,**

**and how do you use it to evoke emotional responses in your audience?**

I believe that narrative plays a crucial role in my work. Each doll is not merely a decorative object but a complete character with its own story. When creating a doll, I consider not just its appearance but also its character, dreams, fears, and past and present. This is reflected in the details I choose, such as fabrics, accessories, textures (buttons, vintage brooches, dollhouse items, lace, etc.). Every detail is significant and carries symbolic meaning; even a small change can transform a doll into an entirely different character with a unique story. It is important to me that each doll tells its own story and evokes emotions in the viewer. Recently, I have been reinforcing the images of my dolls by giving them speaking names and accompanying them with short texts that serve as a starting point for perception. These texts are written by a friend of mine and help the viewer to enter the world of the character and to understand their story more deeply.

Staged photographs of my dolls extend the narrative they convey. These images aren't just a way to document or preserve the doll's appearance; they are an opportunity to create an immersive atmosphere. By carefully crafting the scene, I can add layers of emotional depth and enhance the character's portrayal, supporting their story and helping to reveal their inner world.

Photography allows me to highlight the mood of my dolls and visually express what can be difficult to articulate. It serves as a window into their world, enabling viewers to either discover





new dimensions of the character or confirm an image already formed in their minds. By placing my dolls in real-world settings, I create an interaction between the imaginary and reality, deepening the connection between the character and the viewer. Each photo becomes a story in itself, full of meaning and personal interpretation.

**You mention using materials like cotton, vintage accessories, and elements of your own photographs. How do these materials contribute to the narrative or emotional depth of your dolls?**

For the base of my dolls, I use unbleached calico, which is a strong, dense cotton fabric that for me is like a blank canvas for a painter or a white sheet for a writer. From it I create shapes, which I then dye in the colors I want. This allows me to not depend on factory fabrics with their predetermined colors and textures, which gives me the freedom to create my own world. After dyeing, the dolls become even more rigid, which adds a certain coldness and detachment to them. This helps me convey the feeling I strive to put into my work. I

often use cotton fabric for dolls' clothing, which reminds me of the time when I was a kid. Its colors and patterns evoke a sense of nostalgia that I try to convey through my characters. Vintage accessories found at flea markets give my dolls a sense of time and history. These details make them more realistic and authentic, and also help 'transform' the dolls into people. This duality allows the viewer to see the dolls not just as objects, but as individuals with their own destinies. Each detail adds a new page to the character's story. As a result, the viewer is confronted with a reflection of human experience and emotions, which makes the interaction with the dolls even more meaningful. It is as if these pieces tell the story of a life that the dolls have already lived. They carry a note of nostalgia, like heirlooms passed down, something special and sacred.

As for photographs, I integrate them into my dolls through techniques such as cyanotype on fabric or using Polaroid shots to create details. This allows me to add a personal element to my characters, to bring in a part of my own story, which makes the doll more mysterious and deeper in terms of narrative.



**Anna Zieba**

I studied art at UQAM University in Montreal, Canada, and though I stepped away from painting for several years, I have recently returned to express my deep emotions through my work. Now living in Tychy, Poland, I create in my cozy home art studio, where I work primarily with acrylics and watercolors. My favorite subjects are women and children, and I strive to portray them in a mysterious and soulful manner.

***Project Statement***

I create primarily with acrylics and watercolors, mediums that allow me to express the depth of my emotions and the nuances of my subjects. My work focuses on women and children, as I am drawn to their innate strength, vulnerability, and the stories they carry within them. I strive to portray these figures in a way that captures their mysterious essence and soulful beauty. Each stroke of my brush is a dialogue, inviting the viewer to connect with the emotions and narratives woven into each piece. Through my art, I aim to evoke feelings of empathy and introspection, encouraging audiences to see beyond the surface and discover the deeper layers of human experience. My paintings are not merely representations; they are explorations of identity, emotion, and the intricate tapestry of life.







Angela  
2018



My name is **Yulia Stulnikova**, I am an artist, designer and teacher from Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. Year of birth: 1980. I graduated from college in 2002 with a degree in fine and decorative arts. Later, I received a master's degree at Bogdan Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University, specializing in fine arts. After graduation, I worked almost all the time and still work at the Khortytsia National Educational and Rehabilitation Academy as a lecturer at the Design Department. At the same time, I am engaged in art and design practice. I am fond of vytynanka (paper cutting), graphics and printing, and I explore these arts comprehensively. Accordingly, I work on various projects related to these techniques. I have participated in regional and international exhibitions. Currently, my work "Rainbow World" (graphics with acrylic markers on canvas) is exhibited at the VI International exhibition "Graphics in Kharkiv". I also plan to take part in The Belgium International MiniPrint for a cause project Exhibition.

#### *Project Statement*

The presented works "Muse", "Storyteller" and "Wings of Fantasy" belong to the cycle of graphic works using monotype. The chaotic and unpredictable art prints of stain on paper, which gives rise to fractal patterns, has always fascinated me. And the work on creating these color prints is similar to the practice of meditation. So is the search for images in the resulting paint stains. It's like an artistic improvisation, when you sit down to work without any expectations or plans. And then, the resulting colors and outlines of the patterns lead your imagination to certain associations. The result depends on your mood and, moreover, your desire to see the positive and inspiring things.







Yulia Stulnikova | Storyteller

Yulia Stulnikova | Muse





# — Interview

## Yang Weifeng

**Your project, “Heaven and Earth: The Hexi Corridor,” spans an extensive 20,000 kilometers across a historic and unique landscape. What inspired you to explore this specific region, and what did you hope to uncover during your journey?**

The Hexi Corridor is steeped in historical and cultural legacy—once a vital artery of the ancient Silk Road and a convergence zone of four major civilizations. It holds dazzling remnants of the past and unique natural landscapes, including deserts, mountains, oases, and the Gobi. A profound tranquility and vitality runs through it, drawing me in with an almost mystical force.

Throughout my journey, I often felt that I wasn't choosing Hexi—the Hexi Corridor had chosen me. In every location, I encountered moments that felt like they had waited for me for a thousand years. As I lifted the camera, I would silently say: “Thank you for waiting.”



During this project, I aspired to be someone “looking up at the stars,” tracing the enduring wisdom embedded in the daily lives of the locals and capturing the subtle intersections between human activity and the natural world. My goal was to express the unique vitality, spiritual temperament, and ethnic character of the Hexi Corridor.

**The Hexi Corridor holds significant historical importance as part of the ancient Silk Road. How do you balance capturing its historical and cultural essence while also addressing modern-day ecological and social issues?**

I explored historical landmarks like Yumen Pass, Jiayuguan, and remnants of the Great Wall, documenting their emotional significance to locals and the cultural narratives they embody. For instance, standing atop Wushaoling, the eastern end of the corridor, I imagined the heroic spirit of the Han general Huo Qubing, immortalized in the moment he turned back toward the Central Plains on horseback. As for contemporary challenges, I paid special attention to ecological issues such as desertification and water scarcity. I photographed drip-irrigation fields and water-saving farming practices to highlight efforts to rehabilitate the land. Through this, I aimed to remind viewers that as beneficiaries of the Earth, we should cherish and give back to our environment. Socially, I focused on agricultural cooperatives and new labor formations, depicting how traditional ways are intersecting with modern transformations.

**How did your work in industrial photography influence your approach to capturing the natural and rural landscapes of the Hexi Corridor?**

My early industrial photography transitioned from poetic form to a more rigorous documentary process. The structural discipline I developed—keen attention to line, form, and order—deepened my ability to see and capture rhythm in both natural and built





environments. The expansive and solemn tone of industrial imagery also shaped my choice to approach the vast landscapes of the Hexi Corridor with a wide-angle, reverent gaze.

**You mentioned a “calm yet keen observational perspective.” Could you elaborate on how this approach guided your creative process throughout the project?**

I integrated the philosophy of “investigating things to acquire knowledge” (格物致知) from Wang Yangming into my practice. “Investigating” involves rational and patient observation, and “acquiring knowledge” is driven by inner resonance. I avoid pressing the shutter impulsively.

For example, a lush cornfield on a dry slope attracted me—not just as a sign of vitality but as a metaphor for human extraction from nature. This duality is what I seek in my work: culturally and geographically resonant imagery unique to the Hexi Corridor.

**The juxtaposition of desolation and vitality in the Hexi Corridor is central to your work. What do you hope your photographs communicate about the relationship between humans and the land?**

I aim to portray a relationship that is both symbiotic and filled with tension. The land nourishes civilizations, as seen in farming and pastoral scenes. Yet its harshness—desert winds, isolation, scarcity—tests the resilience of its people. I hope to convey the idea that humans and land form a shared destiny. We must learn to revere the Earth, not conquer it, and strive for a path of sustainable coexistence.

**Can you speak more about the challenges you faced while traveling through such remote and diverse areas? How did the environment itself shape your work?**

There were many challenges. The terrain is vast and

varied, often requiring me to hike alone for long distances. Weather patterns were unpredictable, especially in mountainous regions. Though infrastructure is surprisingly good, solitude posed a psychological challenge—especially when facing desolate or unfamiliar landscapes.

As a naturally timid person, I sometimes performed personal rituals—like pouring a bit of alcohol and speaking softly to the land—to soothe my fears. I never turned off my car engine in remote areas, fearing the ignition might fail. My 13 years as a petroleum worker taught me perseverance, which enabled me to complete this 8-month, 20,000-km solo journey—sleeping, eating, and living in my car.

Ironically, solitude became a gift. It allowed me to engage deeply with the land and channel my thoughts into visual form. The landscape—vast, quiet, defiant—shaped the epic and introspective mood of the series. This is why I often composed my images with wide, panoramic views—the broader the visual field, the more space it allowed for metaphorical hope to emerge. This macro perspective is not only an aesthetic choice, but the spiritual anchor of the entire Hexi Corridor series.

**In your artist statement, you express reverence for the land. How do you think photography can serve as a tool for preserving and honoring the landscapes it captures?**

As the French painter Jean-François Millet once said, “The mission of art is a mission of love.” I believe that photography should begin with compassion, reverence, and a sincere connection to the subject. We must create with dignity and empathy—not as distant observers, but as respectful witnesses.

When an image is infused with soul, it transcends documentation. It becomes a vessel for awareness, a mirror for the viewer’s conscience, and a quiet force for protecting what might otherwise be overlooked. Photography, for me, is a spiritual practice, a way of healing, and an ethical response to the fragility of both land and life.





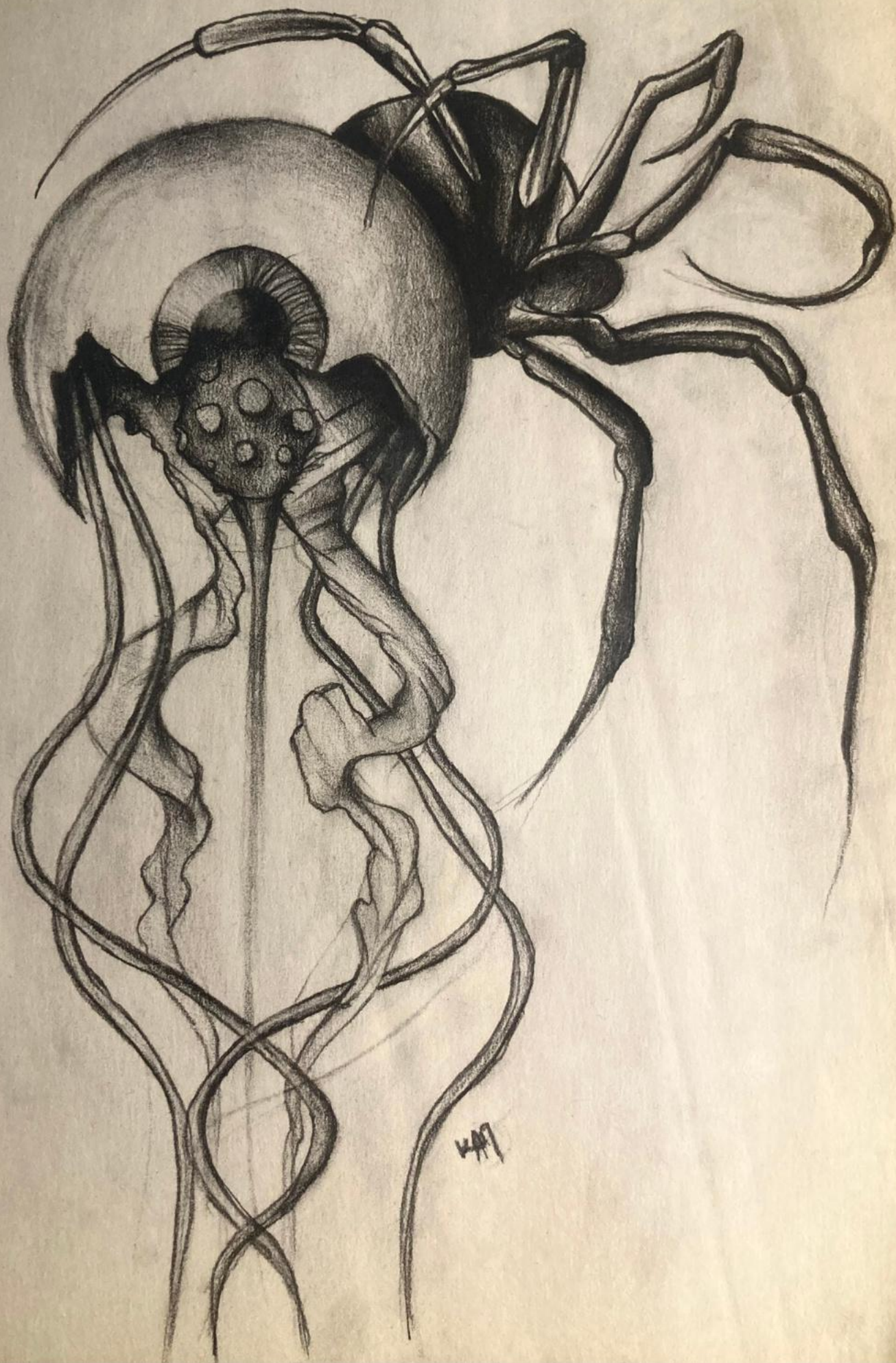
## **Konstantina Atalanti Prasoula**

I studied Architecture at the University of Patras and currently live and work in Greece. As an emerging artist, I explore themes inspired by nature, psychology, and the world of dreams. My work is characterized by a surreal and, at times, dark atmosphere, brought to life through the expressive use of pencil and the intense interplay of light and shadow. Through my drawings, I aim to initiate a dialogue between the viewer and their inner experience, evoking emotional outbursts and moments of introspection.

### *Project Statement*

A hybrid creature with a surreal character, whose composition resembles a biological fusion of natural species (such as a spider and a jellyfish). Their enigmatic merging evokes a sense of dark dreaminess.







# Night8bird

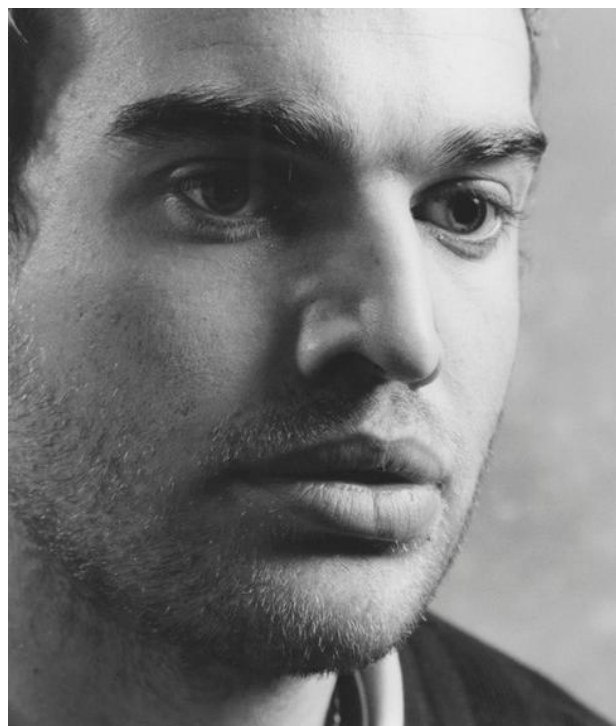
**You discovered photography at 16 — what do you remember most vividly about those first experiments with your father?**

I think what left the biggest impression on me when I was young and just starting out with film photography with my father was the darkroom he set up for me. Thanks to that, I was able to start working in black and white and experimenting with photograms.

**How did Man Ray's work influence your early explorations in photography?**



Gaétan Changeur | Liquid Soul 1042 | 2024



Man Ray influenced my early experiments and guided my first steps in artistic exploration—especially with rayographs and solarization. I was, and still am, fascinated by his techniques, which helped me find my own path in creative work.

**“Liquid Soul” explores transformation and fluidity — how do you approach capturing such ephemeral phenomena?**

At the beginning, ‘Liquid Soul’ was born out of an experiment. I found a small aquarium on the street, without really knowing what I would use it for. I poured in some inks just to see what would happen and whether it might be visually interesting from a photographic perspective. Now, almost ten years later, I follow a shooting protocol that’s often the same: a larger aquarium, continuous lighting, and my mixtures of acrylic paint. Even though the results remain unpredictable, I try to control as many shooting parameters as possible. I use a macro lens because I find the texture and material more visually compelling that way, even though focusing is more challenging than with a standard lens.

**How do you choose the materials — inks, paints, etc. — that become part of your compositions?**

I choose my paint based on how it interacts with the water in the aquarium. I mostly use acrylic paint, which I dilute very little to achieve the richest possible texture. I initially used milk because I found its density offered a good balance. But now I have different mixtures of paint stored in various containers—the most important thing for me is color harmony. I use





inks to tint the water and create different backgrounds. Just like a painter, paint is my starting material—and nothing else.

**Do you plan your images in advance, or is the process more intuitive and improvisational?**

I often try to plan my photographs in advance by working on the framing and lighting. But more often than not, the best results are completely random. That's what makes each shot unique—something that can never be exactly reproduced. It's frustrating, and at the same time, it's the magic of this kind of experimentation. You can never fully control the final outcome. Everything lasts only a few seconds before it all becomes blurred.

**How do you achieve balance between control and chaos in your underwater scenes?**

It's often difficult to find a balance between control and chaos. More often than not, chaos wins that battle. There are many failed attempts for only a few interesting photographs. Over time, I try to better control that chaos, but it always proves stronger. A method that worked once doesn't necessarily guarantee a good result the next time.

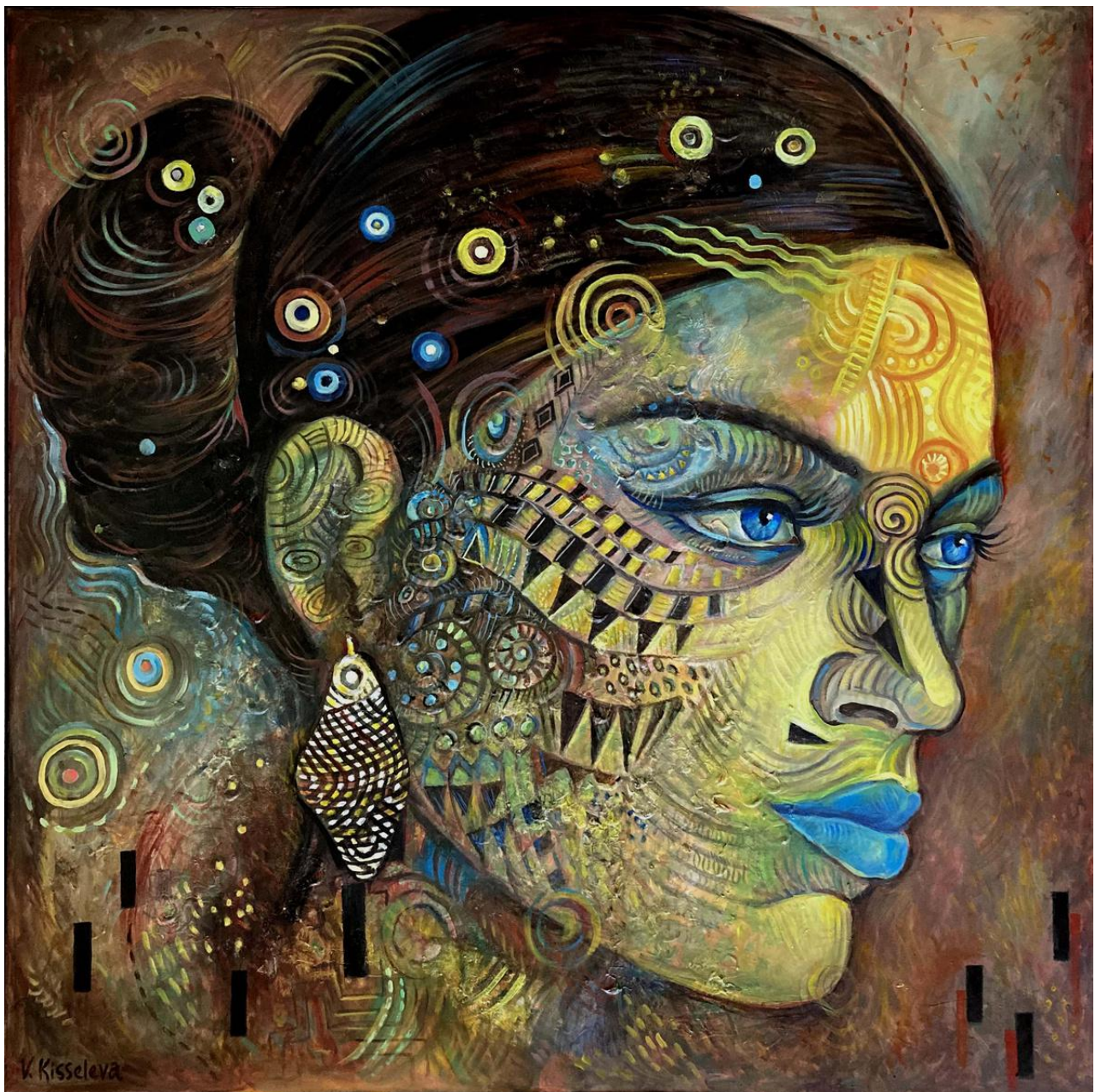
**Your images evoke otherworldly forms — what kinds of reactions or interpretations from viewers have surprised you the most?**

What I love about this photographic work is that the interpretation is entirely up to each viewer. Personally, I often see life forms from the deep sea or beings from another planet. People often tell me they see intertwined human bodies, faces, or visions of extraterrestrial worlds. I'm always surprised by how viewers interpret my photographs.



**Valentina Kisseleva** was born in USSR and has been an American artist. Her artistic style was formed through her study of artistic graphics and the academic style of painting at the Academy of Arts. The combination of different art schools and Valentina's understanding of art have formed a recognizable author's style. The school of graphic design led her to a kind of secession-symbolic mixture in painting, where graphics that appeal to symbols, expressive deformation, stylization of figurative forms and the autonomous function of color play a key role. It uses means to deprive reality of its objective impact. In accordance with the mood of her psyche, she seeks to fill her works with new meaning on the basis of a spontaneous, irrational, unconsciously inspired presentation of realities, that do not obey the laws of spatial relationships, proportions, and perspectives. With the help of excited lines, signs or text, she defines and rhythmizes the plane of the canvas. The artist's paintings are in many private collections in the United States and abroad. Her name is included in the catalog of the Union of Graphic Designers of Belarus. For over ten years Valentina Kisseleva has a workshop in the Sawyer Yards art complex in Houston. In 2013, Valentina was named one of Houston's 100 Best Creative Artists.

"Valentina has created a unique style of painting that raises her above the vast mass of contemporary artists and allows her works to be easily recognizable and memorable,"  
- Irene Lingard, Master of Arts.



Valentina Kisseleva | Evening Premonition







# — Interview

## Yuhao Liu

**Your work often deals with themes of identity and displacement. How has your experience moving between cultural contexts influenced your artistic vision?**

I grew up in China and now live and study in New Zealand, often caught between two educational systems, two languages, and two modes of life. This cultural and emotional in-betweenness profoundly shapes my artistic perspective. I see image-making as a form of questioning and self-exploration—a way to



examine how identity is constructed, fractured, and reassembled through movement and transition.

**You mention being inspired by Wong Kar-wai, who often features McDonald's in his films. How did this influence your decision to use McDonald's paper bags in your work, and what does this symbol reveal about the emotional landscape of modern social interaction?**

One of my inspirations is the Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-wai, who often features McDonald's in his films to reflect the emotional undercurrents of modern life. For me, the McDonald's paper bag symbolizes a contemporary mode of social interaction—one shaped by speed, surface, and performativity. It represents the illusion of connection beneath fast-paced exchanges, where relationships have become increasingly formalized and instrumental, losing warmth and sincerity. This metaphor forms the emotional tone of my work: outwardly polished, yet shadowed by emotional emptiness and a sense of disconnection. One of my inspirations is the Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Karwai, who often features McDonald's in his films to reflect the emotional undercurrents of modern life. For me, the McDonald's paper bag symbolizes a kind of contemporary dating culture—both romantic and platonic—shaped by speed, surface, and social performance. It represents the illusion of connection beneath fast-paced social interactions, where relationships become increasingly





formalized and instrumental, losing warmth and sincerity. This metaphor informs the emotional tone of my work: bright on the surface, but shadowed by a sense of emotional emptiness and distance.

**How does your background in philosophy and psychology influence the way you construct photographic narratives?**

Interdisciplinary thinking adds depth to my work, allowing me to view things from multiple angles. Philosophy and psychology especially help me express states that are hard to articulate—emotional tensions, internal contradictions, the unspoken. I don't tend to construct linear narratives. Instead, I use images to create emotional and conceptual space, allowing conflicting feelings to coexist rather than resolve.

**Many of your photos evoke both humor and melancholy. How intentional is this contrast, and what do you hope viewers take away from it?**

Yes, the contrast between humor and melancholy is very intentional. Humor draws the viewer in; melancholy asks them to stay. I'm drawn to this tension because we're often expected to appear optimistic under pressure, even while carrying emotional weight beneath the surface. My work aims to expose this contradiction—how unease seeps through objects and gestures. I rarely want to offer a

single, fixed interpretation. Instead, I hope the work evokes recognition and encourages reflection.

**Can you talk about the concept of “roots and flesh” in your work? How do you explore this tension visually?**

“Root and flesh” is the way I think about belonging—not as a place, but as a bodily memory. “Root” stands for origin, ancestry, and language, while “flesh” refers to presence, vulnerability, and the lived body. In my work, I use visual fragmentation, layering, and distortion to express the tension between these two forces—they pull apart and intertwine at the same time.

**How do you hope your work resonates with audiences who might not share the same cultural or educational background?**

I don't expect audiences to fully understand my cultural background. What I hope is that—even for those from entirely different contexts—there's a space in my work where they can find their own resonance. That's also why I aim for openness in interpretation. The work allows for difference; it embraces being read in multiple, even contradictory ways.





**Kevin Derosa**, also known as Hellperz. I'm a digital artist based in Florida, and my work focuses on a blend of surrealism, symbolism, and emotional transformation. I've been creating digital art for about seven years now—mostly self-taught—letting my experiences, emotions, and influences from music, film, and other art forms shape my visual language. Over time, that process has helped me carve out a style that feels uniquely mine.

### *Project Statement*

As you journey through my art, you can sense a blend of realism mixed with dreamlike overlays to touch on emotionally challenging themes such as detachment, psychological tension, mysticism, the subconscious, and the beauty within chaos. I'm drawn to the blurred line between the real and imagined—where the psyche becomes a landscape. Each of my pieces is meant to be a visual diary that captures moments that feel familiar yet dreamlike, intimate yet abstract.







## **Bibi Budzynska**

I was born in Poland and lived in Sweden for some time before moving to the. After years of painting, I've realized that beauty and perfection are not the most important. What truly matters is the message behind the artwork the emotions, memories, and life experiences I want to share. I paint everyday moments, but also my past. Unexpected moments are part of this process, giving each piece its unique.

Bibi Budzynska | There are not always sweet dreams









# Pia Wessels

## Can you tell us more about the influence your childhood neighbors had on your artistic journey?

I had two wonderful neighbors. One of them was a dancer in big shows during the 1920's and 30's. The other one used to know all the famous Berliners during the 1920's Claire Waldorf, the young Marlene Dietrich etc. and worked as a singer and actress. Both had a selection of old stage dresses, hand-knotted ostrich's feathers, beads and pearls in tins. They gave me trousers



Pia Wessels | Mammon | 2022



Pia Wessels | Shooting | 2022

they wore in the 1920's, red velvet dresses or skirts made of military coats. All these pieces of clothing seemed to have a secret. I felt connected to the past and to a hidden world. I was enchanted and my curiosity came alive and I started to learn more about textile history and fabrics. All these wonderful pieces of clothing set my desire for costume and fashion on fire.

## What draws you to historical costumes and theater fashion, and how do they inspire your current practice?

I see the knowledge of historical fashion as the basis of my work. It is always an inspiration. I always discover new things that I find interesting. And I take the liberty to transform them or mix them and therefore give to a garment new meaning.

It enables me to create a new world - talking about the theatre. Or it converts a piece of clothing into something new - a new piece of textile art.

## Your work often blurs the line between object and garment — do you consider your textile installations more as sculpture or as wearable art?

It always depends on the topic. Part of it are sculptures, others are installations and the third part of my work is wearable. These are coats I made with a new interpretation of an old "inlay technique". They can be used as a garment, rug or wall hanging.

## In your installations, how do you approach the relationship between fabric and space?





Very often it is only a very vague idea. I want to fill the space. Blur the line between fabric and space. But I can never foretell how I am going to achieve it. It is a process with different layers of ideas and experiments. And very often it turns out completely different from the initial idea. So I start working with it. I follow the thread.

**How do you choose your materials? Do they come first, or does the concept guide your selection?**

It is always both ways. Sometimes I see a wonderful piece of fabric that triggers me. But often I start with an idea and then start searching for a piece of fabric or garment.

**The themes of 'border crossing' and 'experimentation' are central to your practice. Could you elaborate on what these mean for you artistically?**

They both give me freedom in my art. Crossing borders is a journey and I never know what the result will be. I try to surprise myself and the observer.

And of course working as an artist contains the experiment. I never know if I succeed or fail. But it is a liberty and liberation of my work. I feel not bound to any obligation.

**Your projects often involve collaboration and dialogue. What role does community play in your creative process?**

Dialog has always been a central part in my work. As I am a curious woman, I find it interesting to hear other stories, ideas. Listening to others is a wonderful thing to do. Working together on ideas is even more so.

Community and dialog give me the chance to reflect on my work with the help of others or even better- friends.

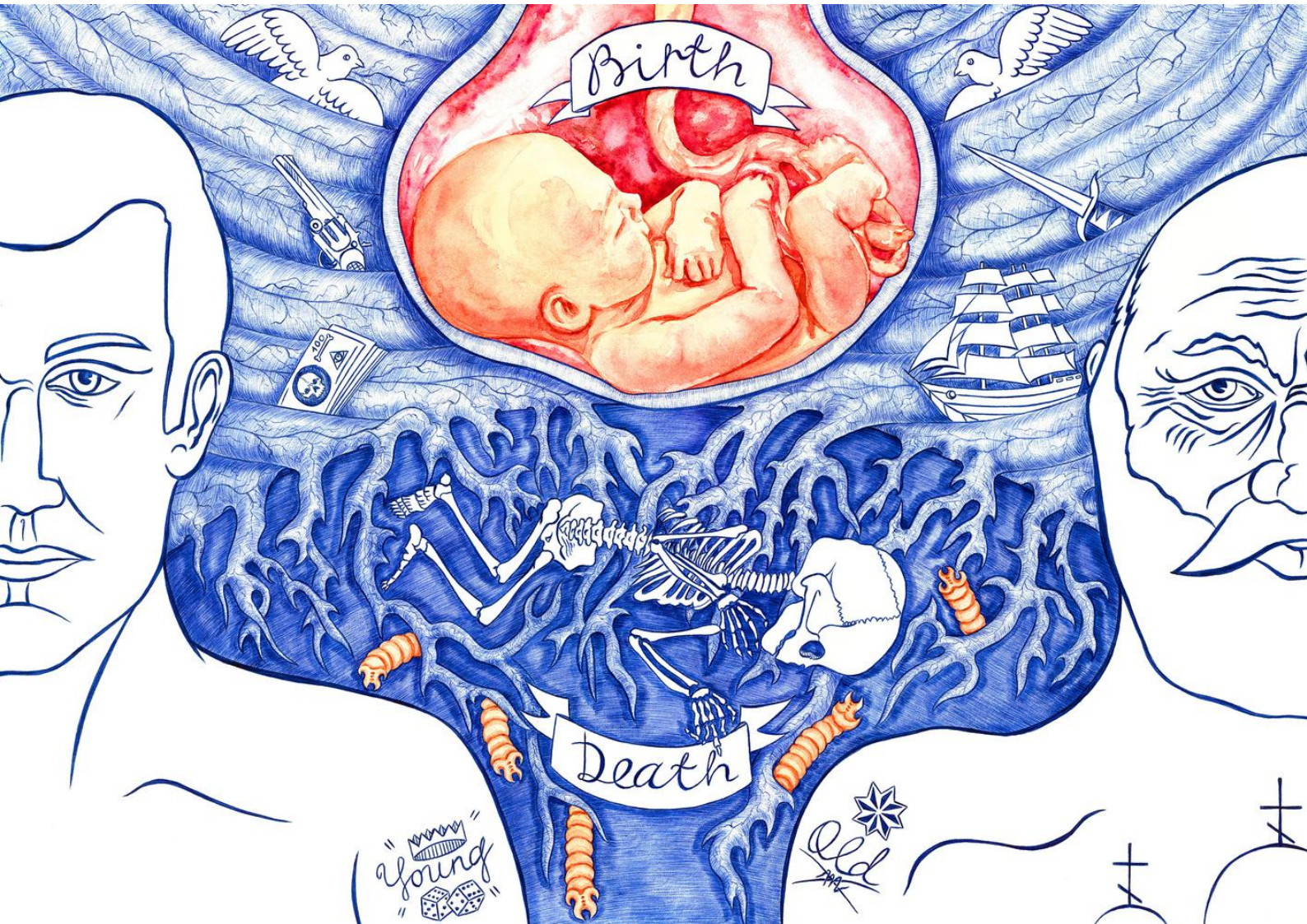


# Alexander Stepanets

## *Project Statement*

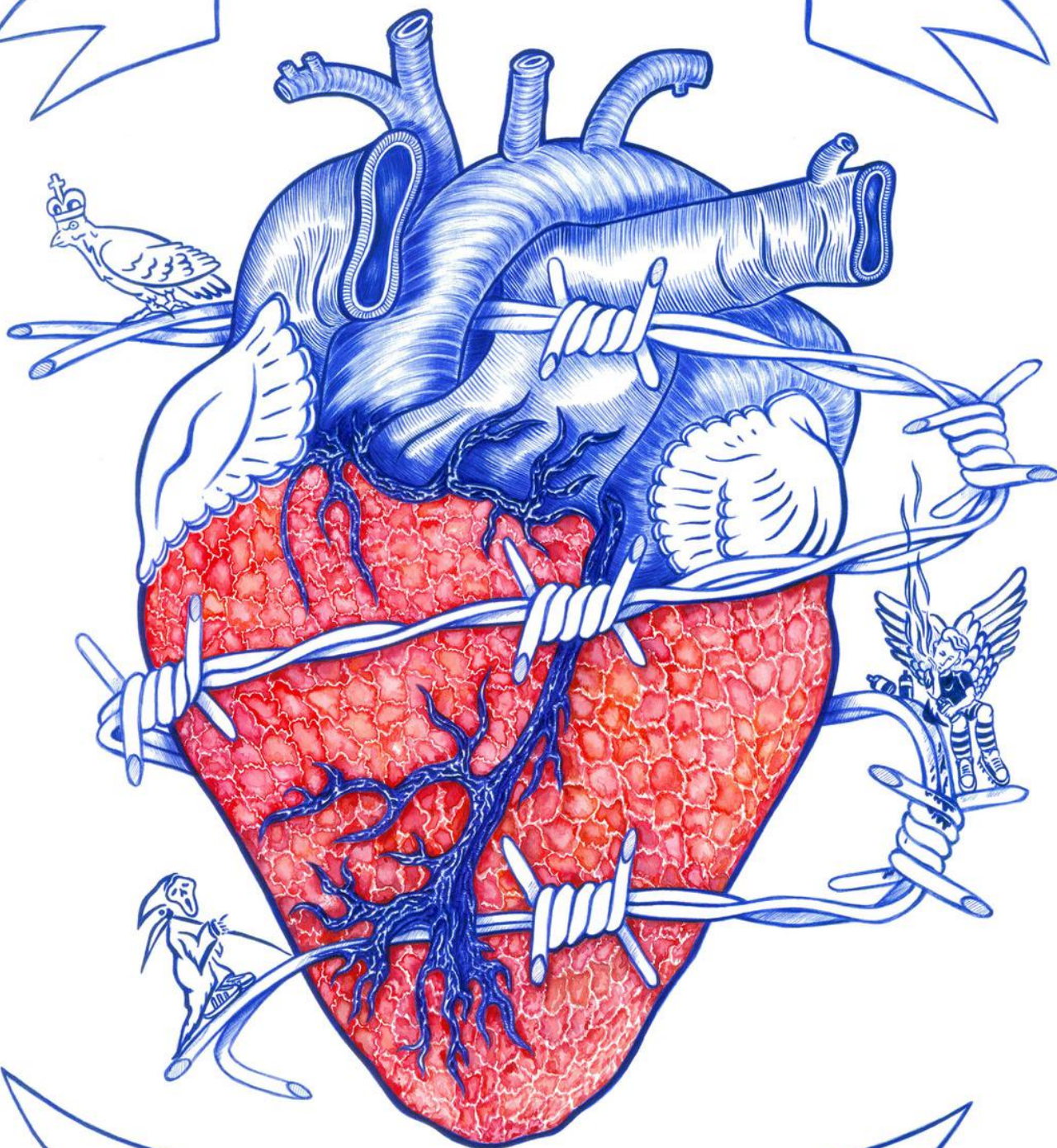
For many years, I have been creating illustrations using ballpoint pen and watercolor—mediums that allow for both precision and emotional depth. This body of work is part of an ongoing art project through which I explore strong philosophical themes. Each piece invites contemplation; it embodies ideas that are both accessible and profound, challenging the viewer to reflect on beauty, courage, and sadness. My goal is not only to create something visually compelling, but also to communicate a deeper sense of meaning—one that resonates with the quiet, often unspoken layers of human experience.

Alexander Stepanets | Young and Old, Part 1: Birth and Death of Man | 2019





If it hurts, it's alive!



The dead don't feel pain!





# — Interview

## CFLMT

**Your portraiture work seems deeply intimate and emotional. How do you create such a safe and open space for your models during a shoot?**

I welcome them into my living room! My priority is the model's well-being, so I take the time to greet them, understand their energy when they arrive, assess their needs, and let them express themselves without constraints or directives. Listening and kindness are my allies. The shooting environment isn't neutral; it's a living space, which creates a relaxed atmosphere. My models don't pose; we spend time together chatting, testing textures, exploring emotions, and having fun. Photography takes a back seat so the model can feel completely free in a timeless bubble without judgment; photography is a witness to the moment. I reassure them about confidentiality, that at this moment we're a team, the creative process is shared, which puts us on equal footing and balances power. There's no right or wrong position or expression since we evolve together; there's no right or wrong way to do things, there's our way of creating. They can shout, laugh, sing, cry – everything is okay. I'm hypersensitive, and this helps me perceive feelings and support them throughout the shoot, taking breaks if needed. When we're done, we take time to discuss the model's feelings, before and after, and I reassure them about the pictures, even though I don't show them anything right away because I want them to just enjoy the moment.



CFLMT | Edits de Sand | 2025



**You describe your photographic sessions as moments of “letting go.” What does that mean for you, and how do you guide others into that state?**

To let go is, for me, the freedom to be oneself without judgment, neither our own judgement nor others'. It's a state of mind. There are several ways to achieve it. Props are very important; they divert attention and are also tools for expression. They allow a connection with the body and have a playful and regressive side. Awakening the inner child is particularly helpful. A child acts without worrying about others' gaze, expressing themselves spontaneously. It's sometimes difficult or painful for some models to let go because they're in control of their lives and image. Sometimes we don't achieve it, which is rare but okay. Sometimes they only let go for a few seconds or minutes; I need to be attentive to this. I learn about the intricacies of human functioning every day, and the model learns about themselves; it's always constructive. We let go when we're in acceptance of emotions and express them without thinking. I try to open dialogue about the emotional realm; props help connect emotion and expression. It's not an exact science and will be unique to each person. We're all different, and it's important to keep this in mind at the start to avoid specific expectations and follow the energy of the moment, not what we imagined or wished for.

**Why do you choose to leave your photos unretouched? How do your models usually react to seeing themselves in such raw, authentic form?**

I aim to help models appreciate and love themselves in their individuality. For this, I feel it's essential not to retouch their





pictures. If they like the photo but it's retouched, how can they reconcile with an image that isn't really them? It doesn't make sense. The authenticity of the photography is proof of their beauty. Actually, I ask them to come as they are in daily life to the session. No special makeup, none at all ideally – as they are every day, and no particular hairstyle. They'll be as they are on a daily basis; it's the model being photographed, not a pimped-up or sanitized version.

Models' reactions vary. They know beforehand that the photos won't be retouched. They sometimes find it hard to believe it's really them because they never see themselves like this. Often, they like it, find themselves beautiful. It can be painful at first because the initial look can be very critical, but most often it's a revelation like "wow, that's me." And above all, it reminds them that they allowed themselves to take time for themselves, and it feels good; they dared. They often wonder when the photos were taken because they were in the moment and forgot about the camera for a few instants. And often they tell me afterwards they appreciate that their loved ones say "we really recognize you." However, when some like it but don't recognize themselves, they question their own gaze because the photo isn't retouched, so it is indeed them, and this opens the door to indulgence, self-reflection, and more self-kindness.

### **How has your training in art therapy influenced your photography process and interactions with the people you photograph?**

Concept of well-being photography was there long before the art therapy training. I hadn't necessarily put precise words to

it. It was a tool to help me better welcome and support models, to develop my skills and know-how. It allowed me to improve the method, which continues to evolve. It's also a way to reassure models; French people tend to love diplomas, it reassures them. I continue to be interested in human nature, psychology, neuroscience, and to train in whatever can help me best support models.

### **What role does vulnerability play in your portraiture?**

For me, vulnerability is showing oneself without artifice and without armor. I think we often confuse vulnerability with weakness, and we are wrong. Showing our vulnerability is also showing our fragilities. I believe it's in letting go that we're most fragile but also strongest because it gives us access to our whole self and our instinct, to all our resources. When we connect to our deep nature, it's also where we shine because we fully express who we are, and it shows. There's a question of energy, of vibrations that we emit to the world, which makes us beautiful because we're aligned with who we are and the place we take in this world to form a harmonious whole with what surrounds us.

### **Do you see photography as a form of healing or self-discovery—for you or for your subjects?**

It would be an exaggeration to claim it's a form of healing. It can be part of the journey. Like any art form, it's a powerful means of expression that brings out our unconscious. The latter always finds a way to invite itself into photographic work during the shooting, in the choice of models or photos. I prefer it to evacuate cries and tears this way rather than through somatization; in this sense, it's more a prevention tool than a healing one for me. Photography is a real outlet; I put into it what's difficult for me to say with words but also what drives and moves me forward. Sharing it with others is a communication ground that's easy for me. Sharing is one of my values, and it's a nice way to be in contact with others; if it can lighten someone's burden or pain even for just a few minutes, then all is for the best.

### **Your series feels very tactile—glitter, paint, gestures. What inspired this sensory and expressive direction in your visual language?**

Sensuality is a way of life for me. Life is made of physical, emotional, and spiritual sensations. To feel is to live. It's part of me and inevitably, I imagine, of my photographic work. I love to communicate; I need to share, and senses are the means to exchange with others. All senses receive stimuli, and we translate them as positive, negative, neutral, often neutral actually! Fortunately, otherwise we'd be exhausted from a firework of sensations! I think this allows sending a message, which is why I insist that models choose their movement, so it remains natural and true to their way of expressing themselves. The paint and glitter that the model applies themselves allow an inner communication; the model chooses the colors, the quantities of material, which first allows them to express themselves fully and then to get in touch with their own body and awaken their senses, respecting their sensitivity.



# Darious Shan

**What originally inspired you to create Light Shell: Earth Fantasy Series? Was there a specific idea or moment that triggered this series?**

The project began with a hypothetical question: How would people living on Mars in the future interpret the cultural relics of Earth, especially the private everyday objects once worn by women? I am very interested in the concepts of 'misinterpretation' and 'cultural amnesia.' This concept stems from my concern about radiation, emotional distancing, and the need for gender-specific protective measures. 'Light Shell' is the vision of a poetic and protective object that provides both a physical barrier and emotional concealment.



**Your work blurs the boundaries between fashion, technology and science fiction. How do you strike a balance between narrative and design when creating these objects?**

The core of this project is conceptual design. Fashion and technology are part of its aesthetic and functional language, but the works are ultimately rooted in cultural foresight – imagining future scenarios based on current trends. I draw inspiration from everyday life, for example from 'What's in my bag?' videos on social media, and from elements such as biometric camouflage (e.g. a chameleon's ability to change colour) and the glowing weapons in magical girl transformation scenes, which symbolise emotional power. These references help me construct visually appealing and narratively rich objects. Design always serves the story.

**Each object is rich in symbolism and narrative. Do you see them more as works of art, design prototypes or fictional artefacts?**

As conceptual design projects, they exist primarily as fictional artefacts. They are similar to design prototypes, but they do not exist in a current production environment, but rather in an imaginary future. At the same time, they are also works of art – they are meant to provoke thought, not solve problems. They exist at the intersection of fact and fiction, presenting a future that reflects our current fears and hopes.

**Application interfaces play an important role in expanding the narrative world. How important are interactivity and digital media for your creative work?**





Interactivity is central to concept design because it invites people to enter the world I have constructed and imagine themselves in it. The goal is not only emotional resonance, but also critical reflection – to make the future seem possible and then question it. Digital media act as a bridge between physical objects and the audience’s imagination. Although I craft physical objects by hand, I use interface design and visual storytelling to deepen immersion in the world and make it seem real.

**How do you imagine the audience interacting with your projects? Do you want them to interpret the work from an emotional, critical or playful perspective?**

Ideally, all of the above. I want viewers to connect emotionally with the aesthetic elements—the flickering, soft, magical imagery—while critically reflecting on the imaginary misunderstandings and exploring future scenarios through play. By combining object photography, app prototypes and textual

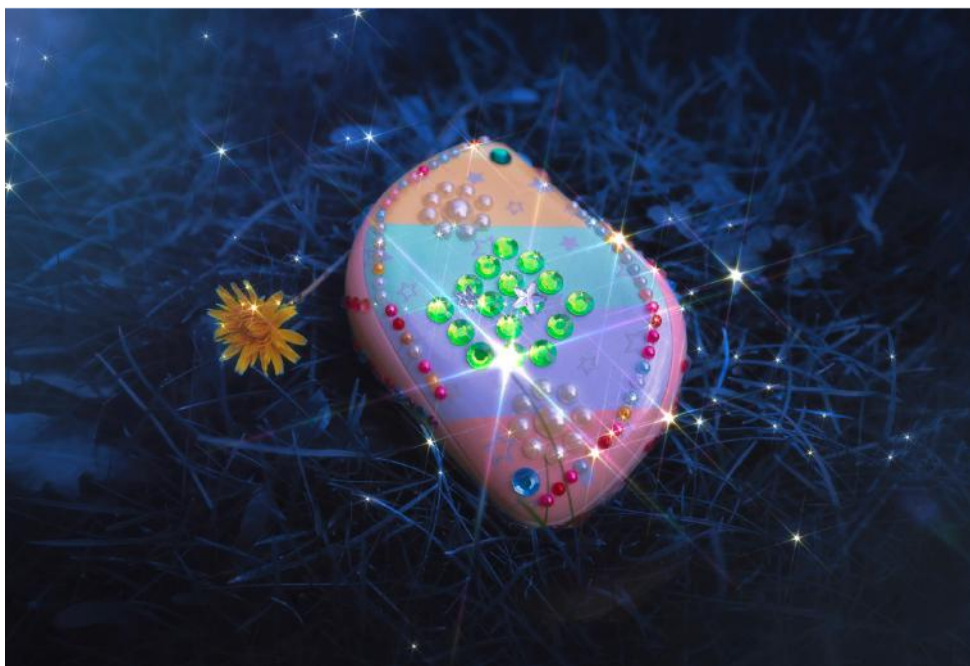
descriptions, I invite people to immerse themselves in this alternative timeline and rethink the meaning we attach to personal objects.

**This is your final year. How does this project influence your vision for the future as an artist and designer?**

This project has deepened my understanding of speculative and emotional design. It has allowed me to integrate different design methods – narrative, UI/UX, physical fabrication – into a coherent narrative system. I have also explored how soft aesthetics and protective themes can be meaningful for marginalised experiences. In the future, I would like to continue creating projects that blur boundaries and spark the imagination – particularly in the areas of critical design, visual storytelling, and future-oriented interface design.

**If you could present one of your works in a real museum or exhibition, what story would you want it to tell future visitors?**

I hope it would tell a layered story – about how the future misinterprets the past, about emotional survival, and about how we encode meaning into objects. Each object in the Earth Fantasy series is accompanied by a fictional explanation based on how future Martians misinterpret its original purpose. For example, a small hand mirror is presented as an ancient navigation tool that reflects sunlight. I hope that museum visitors will use this object as a starting point to come up with their own fictional stories.





## Victoria Plotnikova

### *Project Statement*

"Ways of alarm" is a series of limited-edition linocuts and monotypes (30×40 cm) that explores the emotional and psychological toll of war through the expressive use of the human body. Each artwork embodies a different facet of conflict—displacement, despair, numbness, hope, and connection. The series invites viewers to confront the deep scars left by violence while acknowledging the resilience of the human spirit. Symbolic elements such as tears, flowers, rivers, and sunflowers serve as metaphors for trauma, memory, and the persistent will to survive and rebuild.









## Faber Engelhardt

*Birth: 15 June 1979, Berlin, Germany*

Faber Engelhardt is a leading German abstract expressionist artist, widely recognised in the international 'private art circuits'. Born on 15 June 1979 in Berlin, Germany, Engelhardt has left an indelible mark on the art world with his unique and provocative approach.

The son of scientist parents, he grew up in an environment where creativity and intellectual exploration were encouraged. After completing his education in Switzerland and Japan, where he was influenced by both local arts cultures, he embarked on an artistic career that would bring him to the forefront of the Abstract Brutalist Expressionist movement.

His work, characterised by a bold colour palette and organic forms, has captured the attention of private collectors and art enthusiasts worldwide. Renowned for his ability to convey deep emotions and moods through colour and form, Engelhardt has been privately praised by critics and curators.

Among his most notable achievements are exhibiting outside certain venues, Zurich from 2012 and Tokyo in 2015 respectively. His works are seen in private collections in Europe, Asia and North America, a particular and inexhaustible challenge on the contemporary art scene.

Faber Engelhardt | Souvenir VI





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# — Interview

## Rita Kirsner

**Your work explores color as a catalyst for memory and emotion—can you share a specific memory or feeling that influenced one of your recent pieces?**

Color plays a pivotal role in my work, serving as both a visual and emotional conduit. For example, the color yellow is often associated with brightness and warmth, reminding us of sunshine and light, yet it also carries darker connotations, symbolizing cowardice and treachery - an association dating back to medieval times. Color has an intrinsic impact and influence on us, from cultural and historical contexts to personal emotions.



My recent piece, *Stay Home*, depicts a house engulfed in wild, untamed flames in the interior and exterior of the structure. Notably, these red and pink flames are highly saturated to purposefully draw the viewer's eyes to the flames.

Conversely, the background of the painting and the silhouette of the man in the doorway are both blue - the color of water as opposed to red, the color of fire. Blues are often used to suggest calmness, melancholy, and divinity. Meanwhile, the color of the house and roof have been left neutral and unassuming so as to not detract attention from the focal points.

Upon conception, this piece was meant to represent the human tendency to remain passive in the face of danger, even when we are aware of impending harm. I am guilty of exhibiting willful ignorance towards destructive forces in my life in favor of the mentality 'ignorance is bliss'. While I knew that I would be burned, I chose to look the other way to avoid dealing with the issue.

My use of color throughout this piece evokes a sense of detached calmness to highlight the dissonance between the urgency of the fire and the man's indifference to it.

**How does your use of digital techniques influence the emotional or sensory impact of your work?**

The use of digital techniques is quite new to me, and it was not until 2022 that I began to fall in love with digital art. As I learned through trial and error, I realized how different it was to look at a digital painting compared to a physical painting. In the digital realm, tools like custom brushes allow





me to create a variety of textures. I found value in simplicity - particularly in creating smooth, flat surfaces - no texture as a texture. The visual smoothness I achieve through the use of these techniques allows me to create a silky, buttery quality.

For instance, in Chomps, the polished, smooth textures contrast with the jagged subject matter of human jaw bones. By flattening the texture, potentially distressing subject matter becomes more accessible and comfortable to view. In the 17th century, memento moris (remember you must die) were a common practice. Chomps could be referred to as my contemporary memento mori - a reminder to live a meaningful life.

The inherent digital qualities of symmetry and precision in Chomps enhance the sensory experience.

Our senses are unequivocally connected to our emotions. The way it feels to hug a loved one, the taste of your favorite home cooked meal, the smell of your home after a long day at work. All of these sensory experiences evoke strong emotional responses.

The use of digital techniques open new ways to manipulate and communicate texture, color, and form while engaging the viewer on a deeper, sensory level.

**In your opinion, how has the increasing role of**

## **technology changed the relationship between artist and viewer?**

The increasing role of technology has profoundly reshaped the dynamic between artist and viewer. In the beginning, art was a way to keep records. We have been making art for thousands of years. Ancient humans left us with cave paintings. Aside from their bones, this was oftentimes the only physical evidence that they ever existed. Art endures, and will outlive us all.

Throughout history, patrons of the arts commissioned artists to paint and record battles, leaders, deities, and to erect statues and architectural wonders of the world. Hiring an artist was the only way to obtain tangible images of loved ones. The public also depended on artists to depict what they were unable to read in books prior to widespread literacy.

In the early 19th century when photography was invented, artists ceased to be the predominant recordkeepers of society.

In 2025, the relationship between artist and viewer continues to evolve. Anyone can go online and access more information and art than has ever been available. We are constantly bombarded with images on our phones, computers, and televisions. This has created a seemingly overwhelming amount of competition - not just from other creators, but from the constant flow of information and AI-





generated content.

While this has created difficulties for us, it has also made art more accessible to viewers around the world, allowing for wider distribution and exposure. I am grateful to be an artist working with the aid of technology. While it would be interesting to have been an artist during the Renaissance, for example, I believe that humanity's perpetual progress should be celebrated. Ultimately, we are emotional beings, and we will never stop creating art.

**The textures in your pieces often suggest tactility—do you consider the physicality of your materials when designing digital works?**

In school, a desire of mine was to make paintings that could be physically engaged with. Over time I realized that allowing every viewer to touch a painting would be impractical given my techniques. Eventually I came to understand that suggestion can be just as effective when given the proper visual cues to guide the viewer's perception. In my digital work I focus on creating the illusion of texture through deliberate brush choices, color gradients, and variations in line weight. For example, in a piece like Chomps, I pay close attention to how textures are communicated visually, even if the work will never be physically touched.

Owning a physical piece of art is important to some viewers. Luckily, transferring a digital piece to a print is relatively simple. When doing so, I consider how the painting will translate to the medium on which it is printed. A flat digital painting might be best suited for a glossy surface, while a more textured piece could be better suited for canvas. These decisions are crucial to successfully transform a digital piece into something tangible. Even when confined to a screen, I aim to make the viewer feel as though they could reach out and feel the texture of the painting.

**How do you approach abstraction without losing emotional connection with the viewer?**

Abstraction has been a recurring theme in my practice. It is an ongoing process of testing boundaries: How much can I take away? How much can I add? How far can I distort the image? What makes sense and what does not? What does the viewer need to take away?

Many of my abstract works have gone through a series of "failures". These failures are invaluable learning experiences. Over time I have come to

understand that abstraction is less about perfecting a formula for success, and more about trusting the process and learning from missteps.

Feedback from fellow artists and casual viewers can also provide valuable information from an outsider's perspective. Such feedback can be useful in deciding what works and what does not.

Throughout my time at SCAD, I was spoiled by constant access to other artists to critique my art. Once that resource was removed, I had to become my own critic.

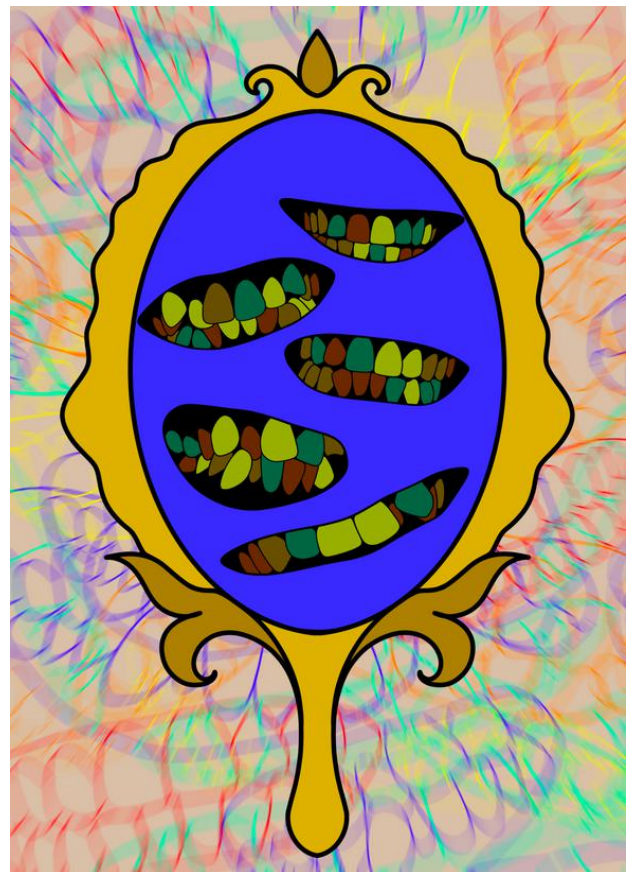
It is easy to overlook certain aspects of your own art that appear obvious to the viewer. One of the cardinal rules I was taught by my favorite painting professor was to step about ten feet back from my painting at least once every 10-15 minutes to freshen my eyes. Likewise, showing my work to others tends to offer similar benefits.

While my art is the ultimate expression of myself, it still needs to 'land'. This is especially true when working on commissions.

At its core, art is subjective - I will never be able to please everyone (although that would be nice).

Finding the right audience and focusing my practice towards them is a challenge I continue to work on to maintain an emotional connection.

**Tell us about the process behind one of the works from this series—what was the initial**



Rita Kirsner | Cheese | 2025





### idea, and how did it evolve?

Hand Holders IV is the fourth installment of my Hand Holders series that explores and abstracts the form of human hands. Unlike earlier pieces in the series, there is no mirroring used in this piece, which allowed for a simpler composition.

The goal was to evoke feelings of discomfort in the viewers while maintaining a semblance of visual appeal. Trypophobia, or the fear of holes (often irregularly shaped and clustered together) was kept in mind throughout the creation of this piece.

After sketching out the hands, I colored them in with a sickly, muted green. I wanted to play with dimension, so I gave more depth to the hands by adding highlights and shadows. Upon creating the irregular shapes on the hands, I colored the outlining rings with a flat chartreuse while adding variations to the reds in the middle. The finger nails are not a focal point, so I added minimal shading, less detail, and no white outlines.

The background remained white until the final stages, as I wanted to introduce a contrast that would enhance the hands. I opted for a bright, saturated yellow, which vibrates against the muted tones of the hands. I often leave the background for the very end when working digitally, since I see it as a way of enhancing the main subject matter.

Initially the predominant cause of discomfort was intended to come from the hands themselves, but as the work evolved, I realized that color played a significant role in amplifying that unease.

### Do you see your art as a personal form of therapy or more of a universal emotional experience?

Art functions as a form of preverbal communication for me, often providing insights into my emotions before my conscious mind catches up. It functions therapeutically in the sense that it helps me process my feelings, however it can also be frustrating when things do not go as planned. I have learned to step away from a piece when needed, although I always return.

In its most therapeutic form, art allows me to express myself when words fall short. In fact, art is used as a therapeutic modality by many mental health professionals to help patients process trauma, grief, depression, and more.

Although not every person wants to express themselves through art, but everyone does crave an outlet to channel their emotions. This is universal. For some this could mean working out, for others it could mean singing in the shower, and for me - I make art.



## **Bridgette Toigo**

I am a visual artist, yoga student and guide, nature lover, introvert and creative soul exploring my humanness through collage and mixed media. I am currently based in California where I live with my husband and two dogs. However, I grew up and spent most of my life in Michigan. In 2004, I received a BFA with a focus in graphic design from Michigan State University. I later went on to complete an MFA in Fine Art photography from Kendall College of Art & Design in 2011. My current collage work often incorporates the human body intertwined with nature. Internal and external worlds coexist, and finding new ways of seeing while trusting my intuition guides my hands.

Bridgette Toigo | As Above, So Below | 2023









## Ignacia Munar

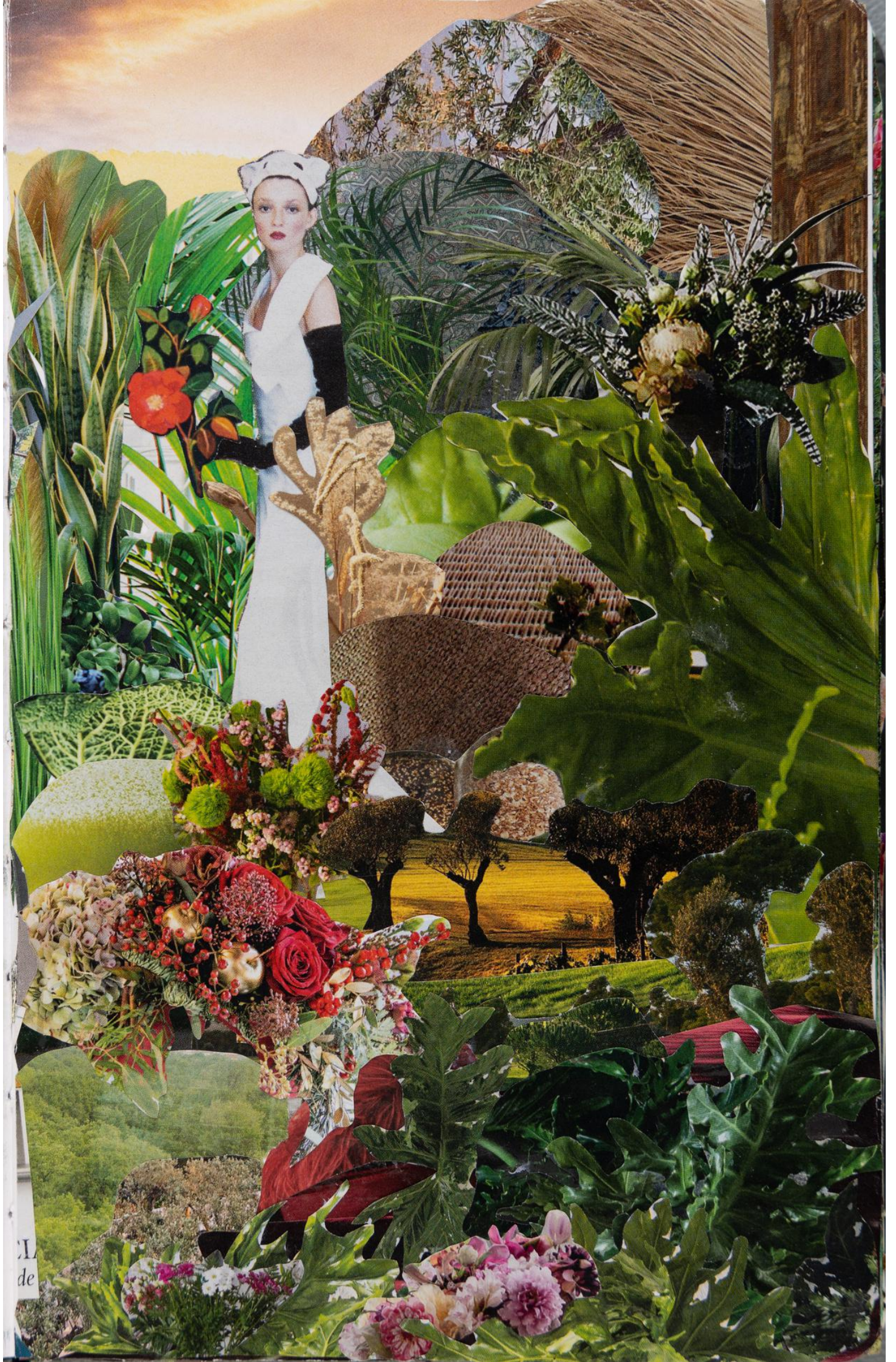
I was born in Mallorca, although I have a "Basque touch." I became a mother for the first time at 30. My profession is teaching, but I have other vocations, such as composing music and creating art in its various forms and expressions. My first love was the Mediterranean Sea, and six years ago I ended up living in Deià, a small village in the Tramuntana mountains that, with its history, its people, its gigantic mountains, and its turquoise waters, has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

### *Project Statement*

Using artistic expression as a therapeutic tool was one of the most important discoveries for my mental and emotional health. Something we do naturally and unconsciously as children and, sadly, often abandon when we reach adulthood. Art, in its different forms, was the escape route for my tormented mind. I experienced motherhood as the greatest joy of my life and at the same time as the greatest sadness, anguish, and feeling of loneliness possible. This duality, which is often hidden out of fear or shame, is much more common than we think. Thanks to art and therapy, I was able to let the monsters out for a walk and piece by piece reconstruct what made up my new self as a woman.









## — Interview

# Monica Moon Sophia

**Your art often blends feminine figures with elements of nature. How do you select specific animals or natural motifs to accompany your subjects?**

I basically focus my shots on which element will suits my theme better, and follow my intuition and then slight logic to decide which suits best.

**You've participated in various international exhibitions. How do different cultural contexts influence your artistic expression?**



Monica Moon Sophia | My Secret Garden | 2025



Monica Moon Sophia | Potrait | 2025

Every exhibition gave me each a difference experience and knowledge in return. They make me grow each time learning from my experiences and interactions with other artists as well.

**Can you share an instance where a particular artwork challenged your usual creative process?**

Every piece is challenging to me in a different way. Each unique and rewarding in its own way.

**How do you balance the use of traditional techniques with contemporary themes in your paintings?**

Depending on each and every piece of artwork that I face with, I will use my intuition to guide me with what to use and combine techniques to present the results. Then I'll define the final result by taking steps back to have a good look at the artwork before putting the final touch.

**What role does color play in conveying**





**emotion in your semi-abstract works?**

Colour tells a story in my artworks. The Hues, Value, Saturation etc, each plays a part in my consideration when laying down my colours, layer by layer.

**How do you approach the storytelling aspect within your semi-abstract compositions?**

I would first think of the idea of what kind of woman and animal I needed to portray my message. Then the connection between the

woman figure and the animal will rely on the position that I wanted them to be at. Lastly the ultimate integration between both of them by using colour and the medium.

**What advice would you give to emerging artists aiming to develop a unique style?**

Your unique style relies on your own intuition of what medium to use, layering of colours, bold expression as well as your unwavering faith in yourself as an artist.



**Danalynn Kunik**

Artwork played a crucial role in my healing journey through a challenging childhood. It served as an escape, a way to express emotions that I couldn't verbalize. Creating art allowed me to transform pain into beauty, helping me process trauma and find solace. After college, life took over, and I put my passion for art on hold for about 15 years. However, I've recently returned to it, rediscovering the joy and therapeutic benefits it brings. This revival has reignited my creative spirit, allowing me to explore new techniques and express my story in profound ways.

*Project Statement*

I draw auras, each drawing represents the aura of that person I drawn.









# Michael Becker

**Your artist statement mentions that you hear flowers “mumbling” and try to reproduce the time you spend with them—can you tell us more about how this idea came to you?**

I think there’s something really beautiful about the idea that the world speaks to us through things like flowers, and that paying attention to everyday moments can open up a sense of wonder. I love to take long walks and I try to step outside of myself when I’m surrounded by the ordinary and appreciate the details of the world. I feel a connection with the world when I open myself to presence. Sometimes I hear the flowers mumbling and I know in that moment we’re sharing something real.

**How do your poetic sensibilities influence your visual art—and vice versa?**



Michael Becker | Les cynorhodons savent quelques chose



My work is figurative and unfolds in series, statements that reflect an experience of being with. I make flowers that feel like poems: visual expressions of attention, wonder, and time. I’m not trying to capture an individual flower so much as to make portraits of the time I’ve spent with them, and of the presence they’ve shared with me, and the brief connection we held together. Painting flowers gives me a way to look at the world more carefully, with reverence and curiosity. Through art I can say: I was here, it was beautiful, and it passed.

**Your technique combines cut blocks, oil, and ink—what led you to this particular process, and how has it evolved over time?**

Reduction relief painting is a kind of reflective restatement of thought, like a sketch with a sharpie done over and over. Layered colors obscure and suggest form and presence and impermanence, everything always shifting and fading and becoming. It’s a dialogue between the matrix as it grinds to outlines and the painting that’s becoming. The process invites approximation and iteration, each painting in a series belonging to the others like echoes of a shared moment. And I’ve learned that flowers blossom on the canvas for me most beautifully when I work within thoughtful limits, and I imagine the flower as it discloses itself in reduction.





**Many of your works feature a rich texture and vibrant outlines. What role does texture play in your storytelling?**

Texture reveals chance and chance plays a central role in my work. There's a fluidity of what could be in my technique and form reveals itself. Chance saturates encounter with the world, that I stumble at all on a flower that's mumbling, much less any in particular. This engagement may be textural: repetitive and attentive and animated by affection, it produces in my art a recognition of something, a ghost of what's passed. My paintings are small odes to the transience of things and mark a past that meets the present. This is explicit in my digital work.

**How does your environment in Minnesota shape your practice and your relationship with flowers?**

Minnesota is my home and there are many lovely flowers here and it's mostly where I find myself and take my walks, and it's only ever where I am in any given moment that I may find wonder in the everyday. There's a similar meditative quality between making art and taking a walk that lends to each a stillness, and space for contemplation. I take a walk to find communion with the world through something, and my mind wanders, and I make art to utter a reflective stance against the world, a description of experience.

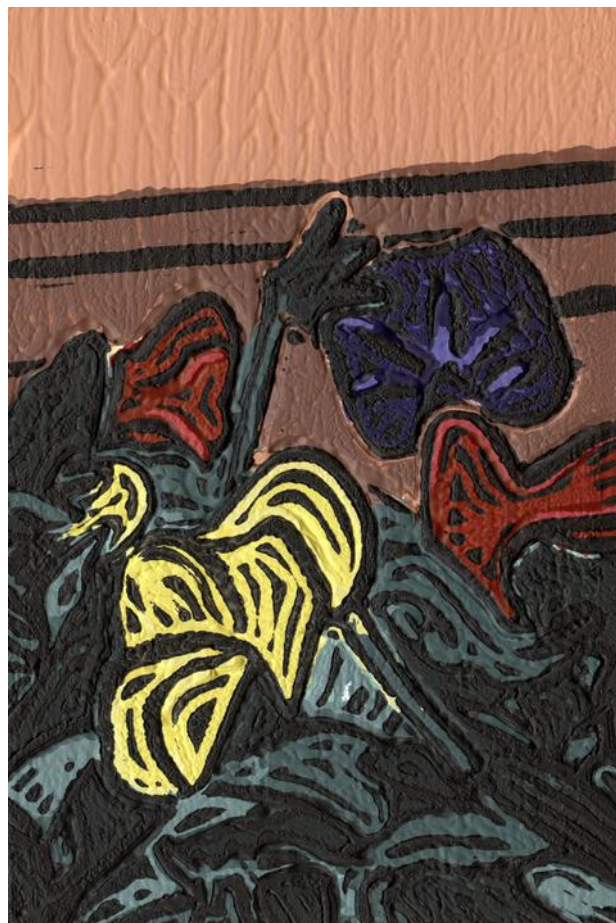
**Do you see your work more as documentation of**

**natural encounters, or as a form of personal mythology?**

My work is a poetic discourse between me in a moment and the moment's finitude, marking time. The expression of a copula, the suggestion that in reference to a thing there is or was another thing, weighs some expression of identity. And this discourse opens a field of conceptual possibility that voices a practice of belonging. Experience with the world in quiet reflection stands me outside of myself, and in company with the world. But my paintings ultimately only speak an inarticulate thing. They are blurry mirrors of experience.

**What do you hope viewers feel or realize when they engage with your floral portraits?**

I hope to convey a sense of calm in my work, and to invite a deeper want for the immediacy of presence, and I want for my art to consider a reflective stance that acknowledges the fundamental instability of a depicting object. My paintings are dependent on experience with the world and of the everyday and they reflect a practice and attitude towards layered colors making forms and welcoming presence. And they're also simply pretty pictures on the wall and presenting a form to what was, like cut flowers in a vase.





**Khushboo Jarwar** (born 1996) is a visual artist and sculptor currently based in Lahore, Pakistan. She completed her BFA from the Centre of Excellence in Art and Design, Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro in 2018 where she specialised in sculpture and received a distinction for her efforts. Khushi then went on to pursue and complete an MA ADS from the Beaconhouse National University, Lahore where she was awarded a fully funded scholarship. Khushboo 's art practice deals with memories and the strategy of cameras, which have the ability to take us into the past, and evoke in the audience a nostalgic feeling about the lifestyle back then. Her goal is to show the worth of arguably the most important tool in history, the camera, which brought about a new way to capture and record memories, events, and history and its influence on our personal and social identities. Khushi believes that these advancements have enabled us to capture our moments of joy, love, and sorrow in a way that was not possible before. In her words "Memories are always a special part of our lives, and with every moment we make memories that become the record in our conscious and subconscious minds". Khushboo has exhibited her artworks at various art institutions both locally and internationally such as at Chapter 1 at art Number 123, Athens; DICE Conference, London in 2019; Broadcast Volume II at O Art Space, Lahore; First Sculpture Exhibition at Sambara Art Gallery, Karachi in 2021; Creative Ground: Sculptors Across Pakistan at PNCA, Islamabad in 2022. She has also been interviewed for various media channels and publications. Her artworks are housed within the permanent collection of the Ambiance Boutique Art Hotels.

#### *Project Statement*

My Art practice deals with the strategy of cameras, which takes us to the past, and gives the audience nostalgic feeling about the life style back then. To show the worth of the most important tool in the history, The invention of the camera brought about a new way to capture and record memories, events, and history, influencing our personal and social identities. These advancements have enabled us to capture our moments of joy, love, and sorrow in a way that was not possible before. Memories are always a special part of our lives, and with every moment we make memories that become the record in our conscious and subconscious minds, but the record of memories as photographs is a precious treasure, and it is a universal language. Today, after all these years of industrialization, it's not just about changing perceptions in taking photographs and recording a moment, it's also about changing the way we experience it. I found these 80-100 years old original photographs and letters exchanged from Pakistan to all over the world to the families, I have actually find these photographs and letters from a junk market, which was not less than a tressure for me. Inspired me to go back in past and live a moment there and created an entire series by these stories in the letters.









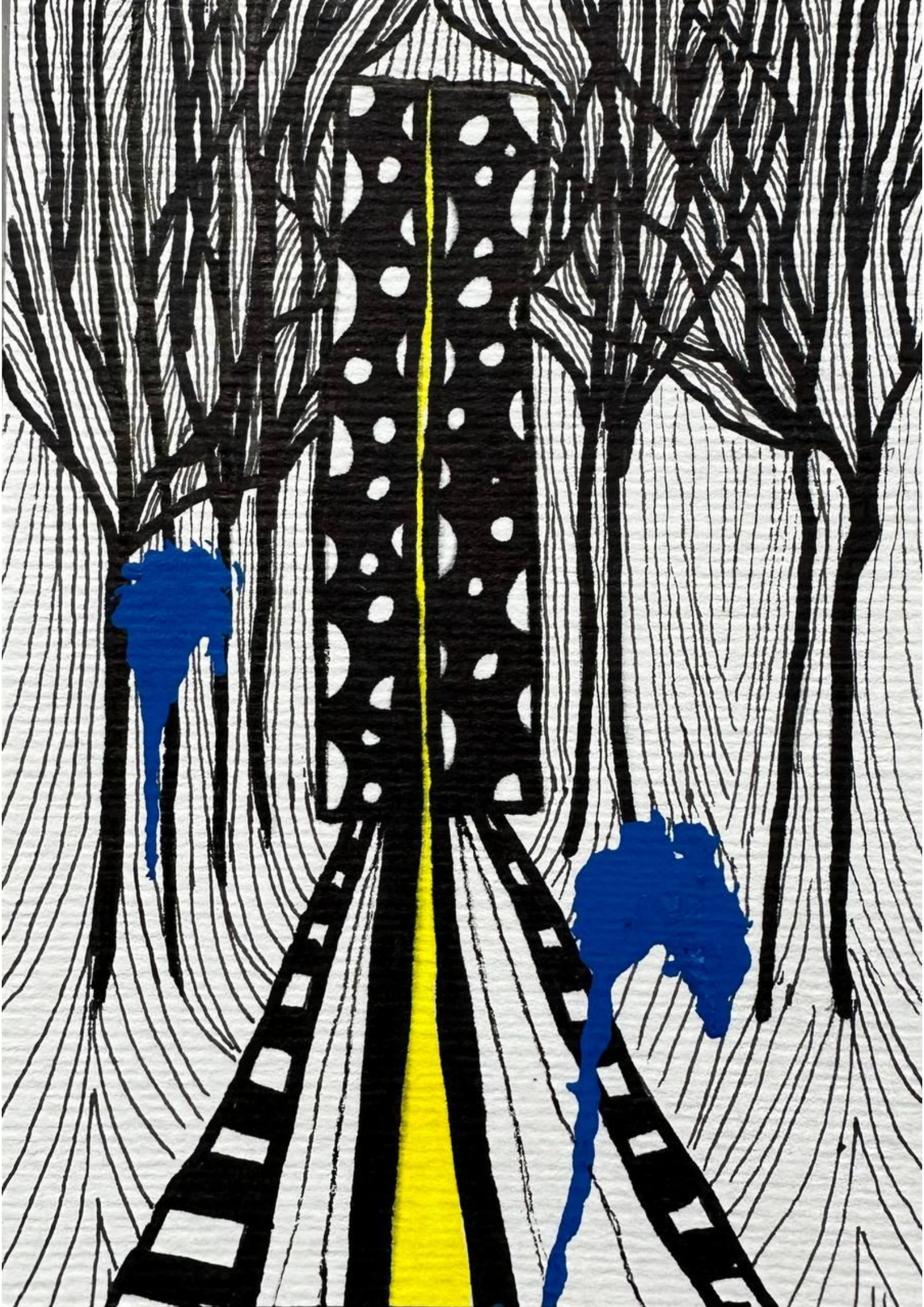
My name is **Darina Kharaman**, born on October 29, 1999. I am an artist from Mariupol, Ukraine, currently based in Cologne, Germany. I work primarily with photography and graphic techniques, aiming to portray the world through the prism of my perception. I extract textures and details from the surrounding environment and reflect them in my artworks. I perceive the world in elements and fragments, and this fragmented vision becomes the foundation of my artistic expression.

*Project Statement*

The project "Little Worlds" reflects inner journeys shaped by the perception of the external — the feelings and thoughts that arise as visual impressions through what is seen by the eyes. It explores the worlds of internal search and emotional states, the transformation of the self, and the transitions between inner realities.









## — Interview

# Stella Papa

**Your portraits are described as “human forms of emotions.” How do you choose which emotion to paint next?**

My paintings are my feelings calendar, it reflects my strongest feelings. But sometimes my paintings reflect the feelings of the other people who is connected emotionally with me.

**What role does color — especially gold, silver, and black — play in conveying you?**

Colours and their combinations play the most important role in the creation of a painting and in my attempt to give human form to emotions. Gold



Stella Papa | Optimism | 2024



is a bright and flexible colour. Gold sometimes has been transformed into a warm and peaceful and sometimes has been transformed into an intense based on its combination with other colours. The above characteristics of gold are reminiscent of the human behaviour. Human emotions resemble the colour gold. Human behaviours are flexible, change rapidly and “transform” depending on the time, place and company. Silver is different, it is a metallic, durable and has been used by people to protect surfaces. So, as an artist, I use silver because it help me to express the “hurt and strange” behaviour of the people, silver is resemble the mask that is been wear by people every day, to prevent others from seeing their emotions and to protect their emotions from the harsh behaviours of other people. Usually, I use black to create contrast and make the painting look three-dimensional.

**You often depict men in your portraits, noting they have more expressive faces. Can you elaborate on what you see in their expressions?**

Men rarely express their feelings in words. I believe that every man’s body language, eyes and facial expressions are the mirror of his thoughts, feelings and concerns which he cannot express in a simple sentence.

**How does your background in finance influence**





**your creative process, if at all?**

My background in economics helps me to find the answers to the problems of division, multiplication of the humans emotions and thoughts with my acrylics, charcoals and my artistic intuition which are giving human form to those problems that the mind, soul and heart cannot solve with arithmetic operations.

**You've exhibited internationally, including Times Square and the Louvre. Which exhibition has been most personally meaningful to you, and why?**

All my international exhibitions are important, each for its own reasons. For example, the exhibition at the Carrousel de Louvre was precious because my artwork is exhibited in one of the most famous museums in the world in which art is the protagonist. The projections of my paintings in Time Square and the Gracia metro station in Barcelona were specials and unique because they were held in places where thousands of people cross every day, and they are "collecting" images of what they see around.

**Many of your works explore the conflict between darkness and hope. What draws you to**

**this emotional duality?**

The life and artistic career of an artist is full of contrasts and conflicting emotions. The artist, while is happy, suddenly becomes sad, sometimes is a dreamer and optimist and sometimes pessimistic from the cruelty society. All these changes of emotions and the strange things of the world inspire me and they 'awaken' my imagination.

**You've been awarded and recognized globally. How do you stay connected to your artistic intuition while navigating success?**

I believe that my asymmetric and strange artistic intuition is give me the awards and the global recognition, so I cannot be unconnected from it. My Intuition in art is rooted in emotions which arise from my inner experience. My artistic intuition is my source of inspiration which has been guiding my personal choices and helps me to stay connect to the creative process and to imagine new art projects without to change my unique style and technique which is generate from my inner world. Noone awards can reconnect me from my inner artistic' s imagination and creativity.





## **EffeCi - Francesca Calloni**

I am a self taught creative. I live in Italy, near Venice.

### *Project Statement*

My body of work stems from the idea that the meaning we give to images can be transformed, even subverted by using the collage technique. Using mainly photographs from fashion magazines I physically rework photographs, creating unusual combinations and overlapping. In this way I re-elaborate, transform, and paste together images to create new thoughts and meanings.



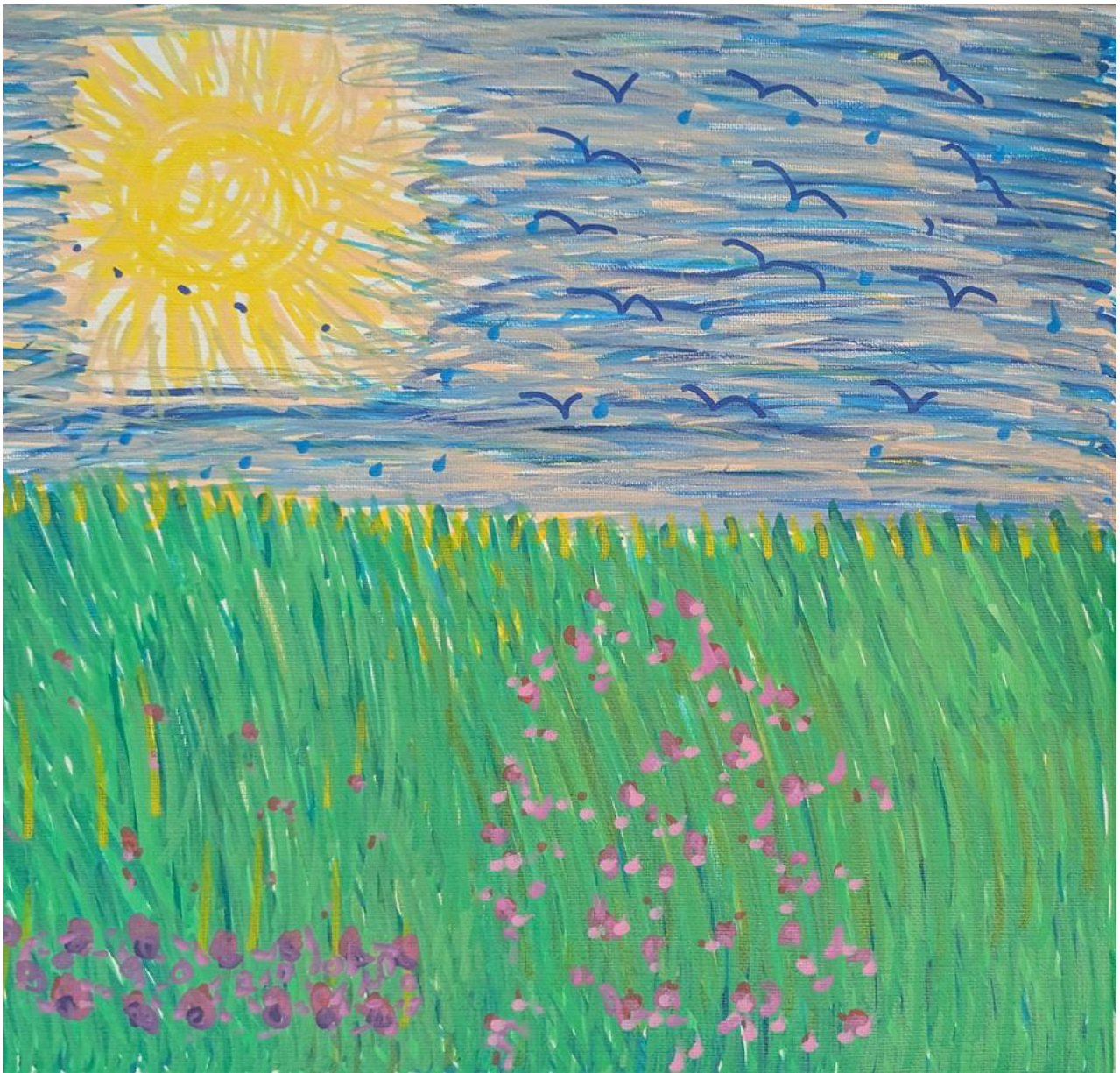




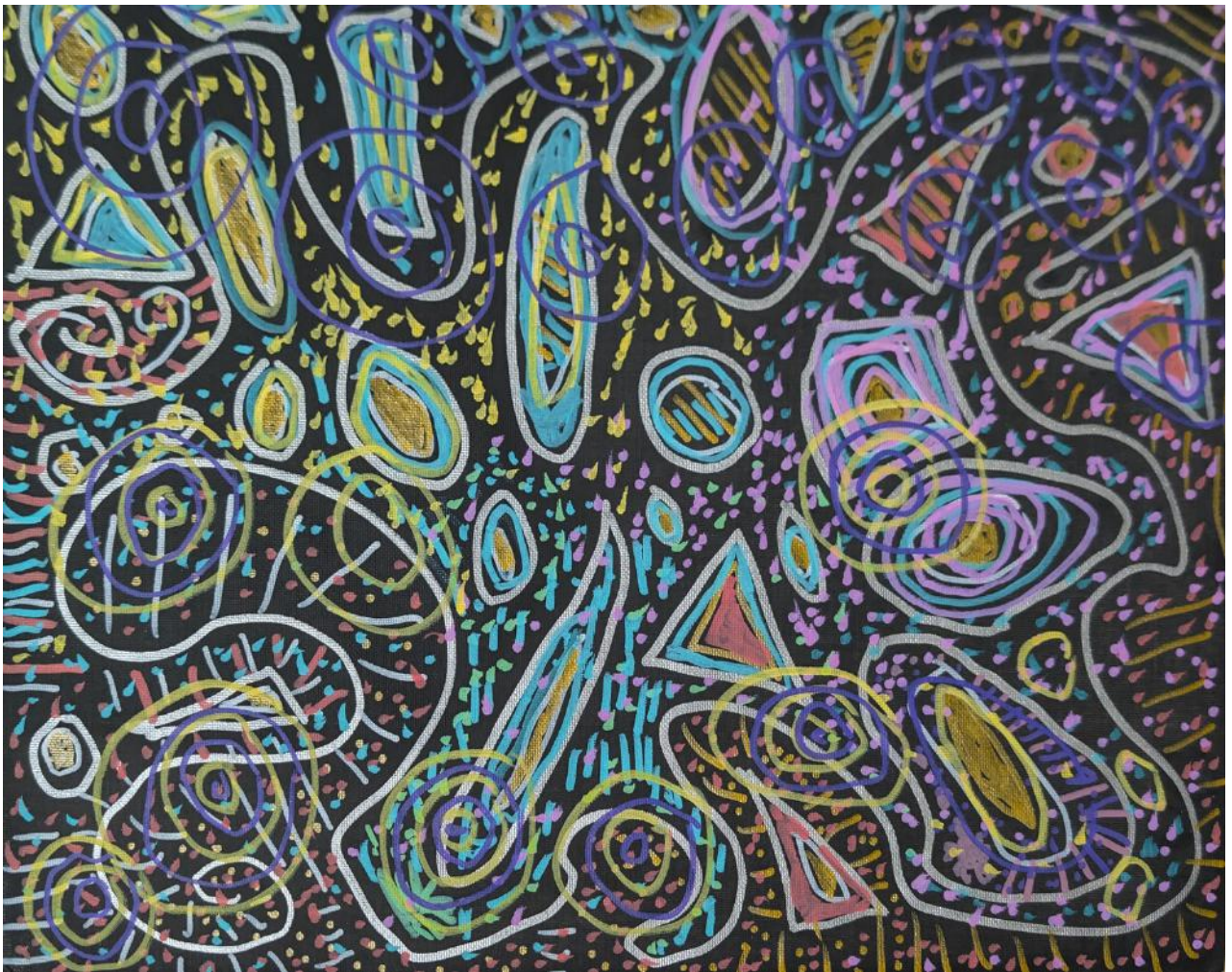
**Judith Berman** was born in nyc. She is the daughter of a father who is a Holocaust survivor and a mother who lived through the Depression. Judith began art work as a child and it was actually recognized when she was a brownie in girl scouts she used creative crafts that earned badges including creating yarn dolls Judith is self taught but also always attended art classes and has been acknowledged many times for her artistic strengths creativity and passionate love of color. Judith is a honors graduate of Queens college. Judith has mastered graphic design and computer art and she is good in math and computers. She always reverts back though to pastels and acrylic which are where she started and is most comfortable. Judith loves Abstract art and has been inspired greatly by Andy Warhol. A recurring theme has been the hippie love fest peace and love flowers and cats and she is truly a peace and love hippie and earth mother. Judith has been acknowledged and recognized as an honor student good citizen community activist and an artist. The passion of art has brought solace in times of life trauma as she has helped her sons also with mental illness Has gone through a divorce and been single parent raising two sons and loved through 911. Most recently as a member of Fountain house Judith has found comfort and healing and sense of belonging her love of the gallery as she thrives surviving mental illness and depression.

#### *Project Statement*

Judith Berman was born in NYC. Judith has known systemic trauma since childhood and has been a self taught artist since childhood. Judith embraces bold vivid color and uses impressionist art style as a release. She embodies her own signature style.. She expresses her love of design and cats and flowers through her art. Judy is inspired by pop artist Andy Warhol. Art is a passion for Judy and she utilizes art by hand as well as digital. Judith expresses her inner child and a safe inner place in her art.









## **Mercedes Grassi King**

Through the duality between being a passive and active subject, it reveals a dark and dreamlike universe. Her self-portraits, fusing Fine Art and Trash, are an invitation to explore the inner abyss. Unusual compositions challenge norms, empowering her art. Self-taught, she extracts sidereal images from her melancholic universe, composing pieces that question existence. Her own style, Fine Art Trash, fuses aesthetic elegance with the raw darkness, inherited from Punk, creating striking photographs. Each image, a piece that challenges norms, immerses the viewer in a sea of contemplations, inciting emotional and intellectual responses. Her art, a visual symphony that screams the chaotic and provocative essence of challenging established norms.

Mercedes Grassi King | ANFIBIA







Mercedes Grassi King | Confusion Onirica



# — Interview

## Rizlane

**Your photographs possess a painterly and almost otherworldly quality. Can you walk us through your creative process—how does a piece begin and evolve?**

The most essential element of my artistic process is energy—particularly the embodiment of movement and presence. My work begins with a vision or an inner impulse, often rooted in a poetic or symbolic intention. In the studio, I revisit this vision through breath, gestures, and spoken word, allowing it to guide the body and atmosphere of the session. Movement plays a central role in my compositions. I often work with long exposures—ranging from 0.4 to 2 seconds—so that the camera captures the ephemeral, the in-between, a kind of consciousness within randomness. This technique allows me to dissolve the mechanical nature of photography and evoke a sensation that feels closer to a brushstroke or a surreal flow of energy.

After each session, I am left with a multitude of images. I carefully select and blend between 15 to 20 photographs, keeping only the fragments that carry emotional resonance or visual transformation. Through layering and compositing, I sculpt a final image by both subtracting and adding—until what remains speaks with a universal language, something beyond the visible. The final piece is an alchemical process of transmutation—where photography becomes painting, and



the human form becomes a vessel for the unseen.

**You describe each session as a ritual. What role does spirituality play in the conception and execution of your work?**

It begins for me with the idea of the blank page—an infinite space where creation is unstoppable. Spirituality becomes a vortex, a place where everything must be rediscovered, reconstructed, and reinterpreted. In my photographic practice, it is the primordial light entering the lens—an invisible force that mirrors the very nature of how an image is formed, through fragments of light. In that sense, spirituality is both the source and the substance of the image: a sacred breath that animates the unseen and transforms it into form. In my artistic universe, spirituality is deeply intertwined with consciousness, meditation, and the embrace of the present moment. It allows both myself and my muses to ground ourselves, to become fully present, and to embody a deeper awareness. I see creation as a direct connection to our inner source—our personal power—and in that space, spirituality becomes both an ally and a guide. It feels like a presence beyond the visible, like a sacred friend who whispers the rhythm of the process.



Spirituality invites me to surrender, to trust the unknown, and to listen. It reconnects me to what has been forgotten—our inner fire, the myths and ancestral knowledge where humans were once considered as sacred as the gods. It reminds me of humility and awakens curiosity. I believe we've forgotten that we've forgotten, and through art and spirituality, we begin to remember...

This curiosity leads us back to ancient ways of living and believing. It opens a space where the sacred feminine and masculine can be explored and reclaimed. Spirituality encourages us to question, to ascend, to seek. It offers a form of freedom.

Thus, spirituality forms the very foundation of my creation and of my photographic-paintings. It is the invisible thread that runs through everything—present even before the image is captured, guiding the intention and energy behind each gesture.

Art, then, becomes the ultimate act of reconnection—with mystery, with memory, with the sacred. It's a portal where the human and the magical converge, where we can rediscover our real reality—the one we carry within.

**The use of pearls, flowing fabric, and motion in your images evokes a strong sense of feminine power and vulnerability. How do you choose the symbols that appear in your work?**

There are two simultaneous forces at play when I choose the



symbols that inhabit my images—one intuitive and abstract, the other more tangible and grounded.

As a photographer, I work with what I call “material pigments.” Unlike painters who use oil or natural pigment on canvas, I work with textures, objects, and matter itself: fabrics, jewelry, precious stones, costumes, natural elements. These become my palette. Each item I select—whether a pearl necklace, a piece of silk, or a stone—is not simply a prop, but a pigment of meaning, charged with intention. Their presence arises from an inner call, a desire to explore, to heal, to ascend, to understand, or simply to feel.

These objects become symbols—vital keys to our incarnation as human beings. They carry energy, memory, and archetypal resonance. For me, the use of matter is not about consumption or aesthetic decoration, but about embodiment. It's about returning to the essential role of matter as a vessel for spirit, for transformation. I see these objects not just as adornment, but as sacred tools—humbly grounding the body in something real, while also pointing to something ancestral and invisible.

There is also a personal evolution at play. The symbols I use—pearls, serpents, veils, stones—often arrive unannounced, like echoes from within. I do not choose them so much as they choose me. Over time, I begin to understand their deeper meanings. A strand of pearls, for example, is not merely an aesthetic element. It becomes a pigment of femininity, fluidity, memory—perhaps a prayer. Where a painter might use blue acrylic to suggest the ocean and evoke birth, Venus, or abundance—I choose a pearl necklace. It carries the same symbolic weight, but embodied in form, light, and presence.

Ultimately, each symbol is a living metaphor—an offering to the viewer, a mirror of our collective mythology, and a thread connecting the physical and the spiritual realms.

**What does it mean for you to sign each artwork with a diamond? How does this act elevate photography into the realm of precious, sacred art?**

The idea of the diamond came to me instinctively. It felt like a quiet revolution, a symbolic gesture rooted in reverence. Today, the diamond is central to my artistic practice. It evokes time, secrecy, rarity, divinity, and most importantly—light itself. And light is the very essence of photography.

To sign each artwork with a diamond is to return to something alchemical, to honor the image as a living relic. In a world where photography can be infinitely reproduced, this gesture asserts uniqueness. The physicality of fine art photography is essential to me—its weight, its texture, its presence. It's only when a piece is printed, framed, and held in space that it reaches its full potential. At that moment, it becomes a jewel. And the diamond, placed with care, seals it—both materially and symbolically—as a singular work of art. Each diamond is a reminder of rarity: like a snowflake, a grain of sand, a human soul—no two are ever the same. The diamond contains within it the full spectrum of light, making it the ultimate metaphor for the photograph itself. In this way, it's not simply decorative; it is deeply conceptual. It honors the image, not as a reproduction, but as a sacred offering.

This act also represents a promise to my collectors—an assurance that each piece is a one-of-a-kind (1/1) creation, crafted with devotion. The diamond becomes a signature, a talisman, a final whisper of magic. It speaks of value not just



in the economic sense, but in the spiritual: the photograph as relic, as icon, as a fragment of something eternal.

**You explore archetypes and cycles of rebirth. Are there specific myths, philosophies, or traditions that inspire your themes?**

I feel I am only at the beginning of a lifelong apprenticeship. I believe certain themes will continue to reveal themselves more clearly in my work over time. I'm deeply drawn to ancient texts and mythologies that speak of our forgotten origins.

Some sources that profoundly inspire me include the Alphabet of Ben-Sira, an early Hebrew text where the figure of Lilith appears—not as a demon, but as an autonomous feminine force, cast out for refusing to submit. I'm also fascinated by stories of the Nephilim—the giants born from the union of divine beings and mortals—and the Book of Enoch, which recounts the tale of the 200 Watchers, fallen angels who descended to Earth and altered the fate of humankind.

The Sumerian mythologies—particularly the narratives surrounding the Anunnaki—continue to ignite my imagination. These stories invite us to question linear history, to reconsider the divine in the human, and the human in the divine.

I'm also deeply inspired by the philosophies of Paracelse and the principles of alchemy—not simply as a science, but as a spiritual metaphor for transmutation, inner purification, and rebirth. Even the reimagined myths of Lucifer, the light-bearer, offer a radically different lens through which to view duality, exile, and illumination.

All of these traditions offer me a kind of sacred archive—echoes from civilizations that perceived reality in ways we have largely forgotten. They remind me that art can be a vessel of remembrance, a ritual of reconnection. Through them, I explore archetypes not as static symbols, but as evolving truths that whisper.

**How has working between Montreal and New York shaped your artistic identity?**

Moving abroad to present my work has, so far, been the greatest revelation of my career — a phenomenal accomplishment. Going to New York allowed me to truly position myself as a high-end contemporary artist. It's a city of energy and audacity, where recognition happens in real time, and where the art world feels alive, pulsating with potential.

New York and the U.S. gave me space to expand, to radiate. I've met incredible artists like Angela Nikaulo, J. Ruel Martin, and Sebastian Piazza, and I've had the blessing of connecting with my collector-angels — precious souls with whom exchange flows in abundance, respect, and mutual vision.

At this stage in my journey, I feel that the art market in Québec and Canada is not yet as open to high-end collecting as cities like New York or Palm Beach. This is not a critique, but a reflection on the cultural differences surrounding the value and acquisition of contemporary fine art.

As a Québec artist, I believe it is essential to step beyond national borders to grow and truly be seen. It's a bold investment — financially, emotionally, and spiritually — but

one that is vital. I see my art not only as a vocation, but also as an investment in myself, in my destiny.

**What is the significance of blur and abstraction in your compositions? Is it a way to capture emotion, movement, or something beyond the visible?**

Movement and blur are definitely ways to feel and capture emotion and energy. There is also a second reason related to today's society. We are constantly bombarded with information, advertising, and hypersexualization.

Photography is often associated with many commercial and advertising industries, which makes it even more essential for me to offer a pause—a moment frozen in time—that opposes this other, fast-paced form of photographic consumption.

Through movement and blur, my approach invites viewers to experience visuals differently—beyond rapid consumption—opening a space for deeper perception and reflection.



Rizlane | La gardienne | 2024







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