

VISUAL ART JOURNAL





— Intro

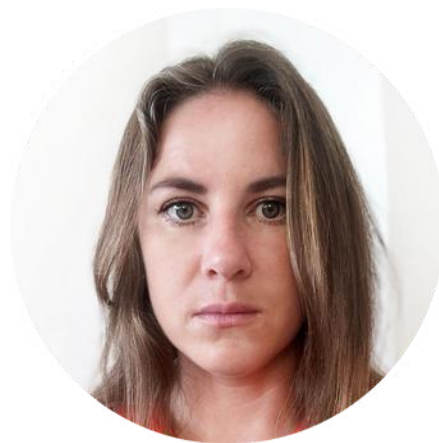
Hello, dear reader,

This is the 37th issue of our magazine, and I am endlessly grateful for how our project has grown and for the many talented people it has brought together. When we first began, I was amazed to discover that the creative community - contrary to many stereotypes - is deeply supportive. Artists encourage one another, uplift one another, and inspire one another. Surrounded by such people, one cannot help but want to keep creating.

Along the way, we launched a new magazine dedicated to photography - Visual Poetry Journal. We felt that photography deserves its own space, as it is a vast world of artistry and passionate people who live within it.

Another exciting venture that continues to thrill us each time is our showcases in Times Square. Who would have thought that one day our project would appear on the most famous stage in the world? Seeing the joy and inspiration it brings makes us eager to keep moving forward.

Thank you for staying with us, thank you for joining us. Let's continue to grow and evolve together!



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

On the Front Cover:

Hitoshi Morita

Facing the Curve
2024

On the Back Cover:

Magdalena Zukowska

Into the unknown
2024



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

— Interview

Kim Van Liefveringe

You have a background in archaeology—how has that shaped your eye as a photographer?

In many ways, my interest in photography grew hand in hand with my studies in archaeology. While based in Belgium, I spent long stretches in Greece for excavations and research, always with my camera in hand. I was compelled to capture not only what I was studying, but also the world around me: the Greek landscape, steeped in history, became a constant source of inspiration. Archaeology also gave me a strong technical foundation. Every artifact and every stratigraphic layer required meticulous documentation, and that's where I truly learned how to use my camera. I experimented with light,



exposure, and aperture until it became second nature. Over time, I began taking on creative projects outside academia. One that truly planted a seed was a collaboration with a historian friend on the history of food, which evolved into a published cookbook of historical recipes. I photographed, she wrote—and that's when I realized photography wasn't just a tool for research, but a creative path of its own.

What was the turning point when you decided to leave academia and dedicate yourself fully to photography?

The turning point came toward the end of my postdoc at Stanford. I had to decide what came next, and while the research itself was inspiring, I was confronted with the reality of an academic career—the constant pressure to publish, chase tenure, and navigate endless politics. It no longer felt like the path I had once imagined. Photography, meanwhile, had always been a source of joy and creativity. When my fellowship ended, I chose to stay in California and pursue it fully. The first years were difficult, but the openness and encouragement I found here gave me the confidence to keep going. In the end, the leap didn't just change my career—it opened the door to a life that feels far more authentic. And I carried the best parts of academia with me: the drive for research and the curiosity to explore the unknown, now on my own terms.

You often describe seeing the world through “stratigraphy.” Could you explain what that means for your creative process?

Kim Van Liefveringe | Through The Fog | 2017





Yes, that idea is crucial to my process. In archaeology, “stratigraphy” refers to the study of layers—soil, debris, and artifacts that build up over time at a site. It’s based on the geological law of superposition: the oldest layers at the bottom, the newest at the top. By analyzing those strata, archaeologists reconstruct timelines of human activity and history.

In my art, I use stratigraphy more symbolically. To me, everything in this world has layers—a story, a history—that only becomes visible when you dig deeper and ask questions. Unlike in archaeology, I’m particularly drawn to non-human actors: landscapes, ecosystems, animals. They don’t have voices in the same way humans do, yet they’re profoundly shaped, and often harmed, by human activity. My work is a way of giving them presence, of offering a platform where their stories can be seen and felt.

That process doesn’t start with the camera. It begins with research: studying the history of my subject, where it comes from, how it has changed over time. It’s about peeling back layers of context before I even make an image. And visually, that layering often comes through in the work itself—through texture, color, or composition—so that the final piece reflects both the surface and the depth beneath it.

What first drew you to the story of the tule elk at Point Reyes?

I first encountered the tule elk on a day trip to Point Reyes while living in the San Francisco Bay Area. I was struck by the landscape and the animals themselves, but it wasn’t until later that I learned their full story—the fence and the fact that so many were dying of thirst each summer. I was horrified. That realization pulled me back to the area, determined to document their story more closely.

I returned on a summer morning, when the Bay Area fog rolls thick along the coast, thinking it would add an eerie, fitting atmosphere. But the fog was so dense I could barely see a few feet ahead. After two hours of hiking with no elk in sight, I was ready to turn back when suddenly the wind shifted. The fog lifted over a field, and the elk appeared, emerging from the grass like a vision. It was an unforgettable moment, and two of my images come directly from it.

How did you balance the emotional weight of the

tragedy with the hope for renewal in your images?

That balance is always the challenge. Any activist knows you have to enter spaces most people avoid, because they’re painful, overwhelming, or make you feel powerless. As a photographer, my role is to translate those realities into stories people can engage with more easily than, say, a dense academic study. Even if it reaches just one person, that awareness matters. This was never art for art’s sake—it was about giving visibility to a struggle.

I also see the images differently now, since the fence has finally come down. For me, they’re now both a tribute to the elk that perished and an acknowledgment of the activists and lawyers who fought for years to make change possible. In that way, the photos carry both grief and hope, honoring what was lost while celebrating renewal.

How do you want viewers to feel when they encounter “Through the Fog”?

I hope the images leave people with a sense of relief and recognition. It’s rare in wildlife preservation to witness a “good ending,” and I didn’t know we would when I took the photos. The tule elk are majestic creatures, and for me these images are about their beauty as much as their survival. It’s about the simple right to live in their native environment without being killed or driven out. That theme is, unfortunately, universal—woven through history and still pressing today. In the current political climate, questions of land, rights, and survival feel more urgent than ever. My hope is that viewers not only see the beauty of the elk, but also reflect on what it means to share space and responsibility—with other species, and with one another.

How do you navigate your dual identity as Belgian-American in your creative work?

Living between two worlds has made me more open. After eleven years in the U.S., I don’t feel fully American, but no longer entirely European either. At times it feels rootless, but that in-between space has shaped me into a better photographer. It keeps me curious, observant, willing to listen—all, I believe, crucial parts of the creative process.



Violet Naylor was born in 2006 in Nottinghamshire, England and is an experimental multi-media artist whose work blends abstract expression, psychology, and personal narrative. Their practice is rooted in the exploration of complex emotional struggles, mental health, biology, and nostalgia, resulting in vivid, layered works that push between chaos and control.

Having studied art throughout their life, Violet has cultivated a distinctive visual language that spans painting, drawing, and mixed media experimentation. Currently training as a nurse at university, they fuse their passions for art and biology, drawing parallels between the fragility of the human body and the intensity of the human mind. Their work often oscillates between expressive portraiture and abstract mark-making, reflecting the themes of emotional intensity, and the universal need for connection.

Alongside their visual art, Violet channels their creativity through playing guitar and singing music in the metal band 'Damzul', and draws inspiration from the rhythm, improvisation and intensity of sound that resonates within the dynamicity of their work, allowing them to explore bold ideas and express themselves without limits.

Project Statement

My work is guided by intuition and a willingness to follow where each piece leads me. I create with little to no planning, allowing chance, instinct, and what feels right in the moment to shape the outcome. Through this process, By letting the materials, colours, and forms dictate the direction of each composition my work is shaped by intuition, rather than control.

In my work, the faces take shape in distorted, psychedelic forms, while lines, symbols, and splatters draw inspiration from both biological systems and mental environments. By embracing experimentation, I push against traditional boundaries, creating art that feels raw, visceral, and deeply engaging.

Each piece becomes an immersive experience, both for me and the viewer, capturing emotion, movement, and the unpredictable energy of creation itself.



Violet Naylor | Chromanova | 2024



— Interview

Ekaterina Siedugina (Kordeliz)

Your journey into professional art began in 2021. What triggered the decision to turn your passion into a career?

A certain chain of circumstances served as the turning point, leading me to reassess my values. “I want to live my life as an artist,” I told myself in the summer of 2021.

By then, my life had stopped being familiar and predictable: I had become a mother, left my hometown, and stepped away from a promising career. Living in an unfamiliar city, far from my family and my usual way of life, forced me to rethink many things: it felt as if the “white noise” of public opinion and expectations had been switched off, and I began to hear myself more clearly. What do I truly want? Where is my strength? What gives me energy? Creativity.



Ekaterina Siedugina (Kordeliz) | Moment Of Calm | 2023



I have a fine sensitivity to color, I look at life metaphorically, and I want to share this with the world. I want to be an artist—not as a childhood dream, but as a conscious choice of path.

I deeply believe that a person can achieve anything if they truly want to. That's why I began to grow as an artist, devoting myself fully to this path and turning my passion into a profession.

In the first two years, I created and sold more than 50 works. This strengthened my feeling that I am exactly where I am meant to be.

You describe yourself as a self-taught artist who also learns from admired artists. How does this hybrid approach shape your creative process?

I began my journey as an artist at the age of 35, without having an academic art education. In this, I see both strength and weakness. The strength lies in preserving an intuitive perception: I am like a child who has been given materials and complete freedom to create. The weakness is the lack of a formal foundation, which I am gradually filling in through every possible means — including private lessons with artists whose mastery and path resonate with me.

This approach is very valuable to me. On the one hand, I retain my own vision and freedom of self-expression; on the other, I acquire the tools that help me bring this vision to life more precisely. In addition, I deeply value the very process of communicating with artists, exchanging experiences and stories — it is always inspiring and broadens horizons.

In your series “The Path to Self,” each painting represents a stage of inner transformation. How did this concept come to you?

The series began with the painting “In Anticipation of the Thinker.” This image lingered with me for a long time, but I hesitated to paint it because hyperrealism required a certain level of technical skill. Curiosity and the desire to challenge myself eventually outweighed the fear, and completing the painting became an important personal victory.

It reflected my love of color as an independent entity that



shapes the perception of everything, my interest in surrealism as a metaphorical depiction of the world, and my acceptance of solitude as the most resourceful state. In essence, the painting became my inner self-portrait at that moment.

New subjects then emerged—still with the same small objects set against exaggerated backgrounds. Only after finishing the fourth painting did I realize that this was a series, “The Path to Oneself,” where each work tells the story of a small person in a vast world—a story of solitude, inner strength, and choice. In them, I search for answers to the questions: What sustains us from within? Where do our own resources lie? What does our comfortable reality look like?

The series is not yet complete, and I continue to walk this path with it.

Fabric appears prominently in several of your works. What does it symbolize for you?

Dynamics, the uniqueness of lines, softness and plasticity, warmth, and an enveloping quality. These properties of fabric help me sculpt a new reality to reveal the narrative. The play of light in the folds of silk perfectly brings out the depth and radiance of a particular color, drawing one deeper into it. And silk itself is, for me, the pinnacle of tactile delight.

“Moment of Calm” was created during your relocation. How has migration influenced your artistic voice?

Montenegro gave me a sense of safety and tranquility, which was essential for creativity. Migration always reveals a person through new experiences, and although my artistic language has not changed drastically, I became bolder in my ideas and their realization. Here I held my first solo exhibition “Color. Time. Consciousness,” dedicated to the plasticity of consciousness under the influence of society, and received a very warm response from the audience. Of course, the move was not easy—both because of the reasons behind the migration and the need to adapt to a new country and a new art environment. Yet it is precisely such

crises that strengthen and help one gain a deeper understanding of oneself.

This inner work became the foundation for the painting “A Moment of Calm,” which explores how tranquility can be found in everyday routines. Water symbolizes the unpredictability of life—sometimes calm and embracing, sometimes raging and sweeping everything away. And in this life it is simply essential to know how to find moments of peace: even in something as simple as hanging freshly washed laundry out to dry.

By the way, the painting “A Moment of Calm” was selected for the London Art Biennale 2025 among 340 works by artists from all over the world and was exhibited in July at Chelsea Old Town Hall.

Through migration I also realized that no matter how distorted reality around us may become or how unstable the environment may be, one must remain true to oneself, believe in one’s identity and purpose, and keep moving forward. This was the theme of another painting in the series —“Habitat.”

You often use color as a tool for introspection. What role does color play in your emotional or philosophical storytelling?

For the past several years, I have been studying color and realized that its perception is highly subjective. Throughout history, civilization has managed to assign completely opposite meanings to the very same shade. That is why I moved away from conventional associations linked to color and focused only on the physical properties of the light wave and its impact on our physical sensations. For example, the red fabric in the painting *In Anticipation of the Thinker* is meant to provide energy and stimulate reflection; the blue in *The Short Path* invites a meditative state; and the predominance of green in *A Moment of Calm* serves to soothe and relax.

I use color as one of the main elements of the painting, because in dialogue with the viewer it can reveal itself in unexpected ways. My role is only to give color the space for that dialogue.

What kind of inner dialogue happens while you’re painting? Do you begin with a clear idea or allow the process to guide you?

A good question, because in my practice I use both approaches. At the moment, I am working in two directions — color abstraction and surrealism.

For me, abstraction is intuitive painting. It is born directly on the canvas: I don’t use references and often don’t make sketches. I begin with a single shade and let the process guide me — adding new colors, moving layers of paint, mixing them directly on the canvas. Oil allows me to work slowly and calmly, and within a few days a unique world of colors emerges. Here I completely surrender to the flow. With surrealism, it’s different. First comes an idea or an image connected to what concerns me at that moment. I may carry the idea of a painting for a long time, asking myself questions, writing down thoughts, sometimes making sketches. This process helps me reach the essence and express it as precisely as possible.

That’s why there are fewer such paintings, and each one becomes a complete statement.

I'm **Caterina Rubichi**, an Italian not professional illustrator, known as C.come.c.aos. I live in Parma, but I was born in Salento, in the South of Italy in a small city near the sea. I like to go back there to watch the sea waves in summer and winter. I need to draw what I feel, mostly reading books or listening to music. My passion comforts me, like an embrace in dark days. I think it's my best form of expression.

Project Statement

This Project is called "Everybody lies to stay together": it's a verse of one of my favorite songs of Black Marble called Private Show. The next verse says "Everybody tries to stay together" and I think there is true in these words about the relationships and the expectation of it.



— Interview

Katerina Kokkinaki

You hold a PhD in Space and Visual Arts. How has your academic research influenced your artistic practice?

It helped me in two ways. Firstly, it showed me how to examine my ideas in a deeper way. It taught me how to interpret my thoughts, to connect my inner world with cultural motifs and how to recognize patterns in my work. The second thing was an issue that I discovered during my dissertation: eco-learning and deep ecology. The movement of deep ecology simply confirmed my attitude towards the world, that all living beings have the same value, but also the importance of non-living beings in our lives. And this is one of the basic elements that permeates a serious amount of my work.

Katerina Kokkinaki | Where The Crabs Sing | 2024



Katerina Kokkinaki | Avatar Portrait | 2024

Your project #this_is_no_eden presents an imagined Eden shaped by human choices. What personal experiences inspired this theme?

Most of this work was created during COVID period. On a personal note, the period of the pandemic, when isolation took place, became a point of discontinuity, and it showed me a new reality that I had no choice but to accept. I followed it becoming a tele-presence at work, with friends and parents, and that's when I realized that an era had ended. Post-humanism was there, signifying a change of course for all of humanity, but also the transition to the digital age. During this pause in real life, I had time to realize the transformation of an individual's identity within a modern, complex, and constantly changing environment. Transcending human nature, extending life expectancy, merging humans and computers, revising human subjectivity.

All of these redefine the new concept of what it means to be human, overturning our established ideas about existence and the place of the individual in the universe. It looks like something different, strange, utopian, absurd, and dystopian at the same time. The pandemic period contributed dramatically to the atmosphere of my paintings, to this rich and artificial experience excess, encased in small and isolated realities, in an allusive way.

In your paintings, there is a strong connection to childhood and memory. How do these elements shape the atmosphere of your work?

The reference to childhood has to do with the child we carry within us as a psychological identity, which is not bypassed but carried over and relived until the end. Thus, the characters in the works have the gaze of



maturity, compassion, awareness, or even complicity, but always through their youthful icon. After all, in the future (according to post & hyper-humanization) thanks to the advances of biotechnology, individuals will be able to avoid aging and maybe death. We are talking about the vanity of human existence, but also an insult to the superiority of human imperfection.

The figures in your works often appear both close and distant, familiar yet otherworldly. How do you approach the representation of relationships and identity?

In today's world, individuals constantly interact with virtual entities in virtual environments. Life within online communities consists of a psychological reality, while immersion in virtual life is part of disembodiment. Relationships are in crisis. All relationships, not only with others but also with one's inner self. Emotions are becoming scarce, now they exist in a measurable form, no one can be very happy, joyful, in love, sad, it is better for all to feel neutral.

Biophilic and tropical motifs appear frequently in your art. What draws you to this imagery?

In an extended reality, natural entities are integrated into virtual and real environments, creating an inclusive world. Post-humanism transcends

boundaries and integrates them into an open, holistic system without dividing lines and differences. Nevertheless, ecological harmony seems like a distant dream, and so these works are dominated by a disconnect between the individual and the natural microcosm. Nature is artificial, the space is not real but a staged setting. There is no naturalness because I do not paint naturalness. There is nothing self-evident or given. We are talking about a virtual reality with some notes from the plant and animal alphabet.

Your statement mentions a “climate of contrived bliss” where emotions may be forgotten. Do you see this as a reflection of today's society and technology?

The rise of non-relationship has transformed individuals into feeling more like unique entities than belonging to relational networks. Digital isolation transforms individuals into empty, emotionless manifestations of people. An “avatar” that states emotions, but ultimately it is doubtful whether it feels them too.

How do you balance the poetic, almost surreal qualities of your art with the critical commentary it contains?

Balance comes through implication. Nothing is clearly or precisely true. Thus, individuals can play roles or personalize social and political ideas. A sense of bliss prevails, but it is deeply critical and thought-provoking. Many artists, especially directors, work in this way, using implication in order to raise questions about existential issues. Consider Eric Rohmer, Luca Guadagnino, Lars Von Trier, and others.



Ross Gravance

My name is Roswell, but most people know me as Ross. I create ordinary things for out-of-the-ordinary people.

Project Statement

I am a working-class artist, trying not to lose my passion for creating while in the clutches of a full-time job—and in the bottomless pit of social media. Like many artists, I struggle to maintain my creative and generative hobbies when it seems like everyone favors consumptive scrolling.

I want to re-visit an old project of mine that I started in 2019, spontaneously painting on the pages of an old book whenever any inspiration strikes. No sketching, no planning, and no trying to make a bigger project of it until the page is filled. I use very cheap, old powder paints, ink washes from markers, and watercolor crayons the most. Supplies I am not concerned about "wasting". I'm often petrified by the sight of a big, blank canvas, and expensive materials. It makes art feel like an assignment, and if I'm already stressed by work or other things, it can sap the creativity out of me. Using inexpensive materials and an old book makes it very easy to just get up and start.

Doing this in 2019 and 2020 also helped me out of a big creative rut that I was in, due to a repetitive strain injury severely limiting my ability to do technical or large-scale artwork. Some of these book pages, which all start as quick doodles, became some of my favorite paintings I have ever made. I open the book from time to time when I really need to shake out my "artist brain" and loosen up.



THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

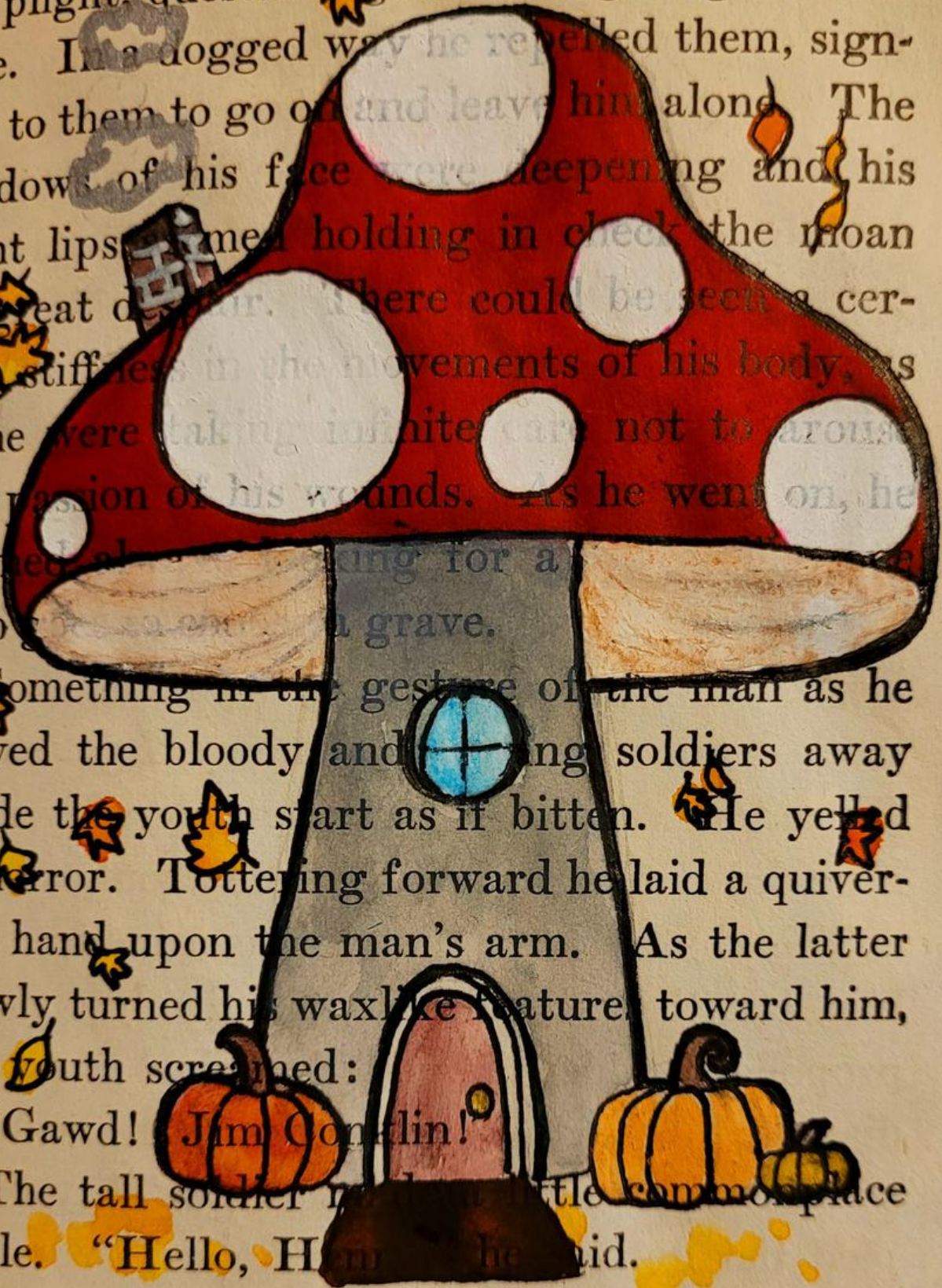
his plight, questioning him and giving him advice. In a dogged way he repelled them, signing to them to go on and leave him alone. The shadows of his face were deepening and his tight lips were holding in check the moan of great despair. There could be seen a certain stiffness in the movements of his body, as if he were taking infinite care not to arouse the passion of his wounds. As he went on, he seemed almost waiting for a man who would dig a grave.

Something in the gesture of the man as he waved the bloody and dying soldiers away made the youth start as if bitten. He yelled in horror. Tottering forward he laid a quivering hand upon the man's arm. As the latter slowly turned his waxlike features toward him, the youth screamed:

"Gawd! Jim Conklin!"

The tall soldier made a little commonplace smile. "Hello, Henry," he said.

The youth swayed on his legs and glared strangely. He stuttered and stammered.



— Interview

Gaye Bezircioglu Senvenli

Your collection “Following the Route of Celebi” blends architectural memory with fictional narratives. How did the idea for this collection first come to you?

This collection wasn't born out of a fixed concept, but rather evolved over many years as part of an ongoing visual and conceptual accumulation. Since 2013, I've been working intermittently on these pieces, with a more focused production between 2023 and 2025. What began as depictions of old Ottoman architecture gradually shifted toward compositions inspired by rural and Aegean settlements. Over time, a shared



visual language emerged, allowing the works to come together as a coherent collection.

The title of the collection came much later. 'Çelebi' is an old Turkish title, derived from the word Çalab, meaning a man of virtue, a gentleman, or someone devoted to the divine. In older times, it was used to describe those who were educated and could see the world through a broader lens. "Çelebi's Route" draws inspiration from the journeys of Evliya Çelebi, the author of the Ottoman's famous travelogue, and presents a timeless narrative grounded in history. His travels were not only physical explorations but also acts of cultural and temporal memory, traversing spaces as well as epochs.

In this sense, the works weave fictional narratives with real architectural traces, creating dreamlike spaces where the familiar meets the imagined. Sometimes an invented structure reflects a tangible cultural memory; other times, a real element is reimagined within a poetic atmosphere. Each piece invites the viewer into a personal journey — through history, space, and memory.

As both an architect and an artist, how do you balance technical precision with imaginative storytelling in your works?

Architecture and art are two disciplines that feed into one another, though they operate through different logics. In architecture, technical precision, material knowledge, and structural balance are essential — but on their own, they're not enough. A space needs soul, a narrative, something that allows it to connect with people. In my work, I try to maintain a balance between technical sensitivity and imaginative storytelling. Sometimes this balance emerges intuitively, and other times it requires a very conscious effort.

Architecture is grounded in reality — shaped by its context, historical layers, and physical limitations. Art, on the other hand, offers a freer space for expression,



Gaye Bezircioglu Senvenli | Window | 2024



where imagined places can emerge beyond the constraints of the real world. My background in architecture allows me to depict built environments with structural awareness and historical sensitivity, while my artistic practice gives me the freedom to explore fictional contexts that transcend realism. Each work often begins with a loose sketch, but the final composition unfolds organically through the painting process. This intuitive approach fosters a dynamic interaction between color, pattern, and texture — resulting in works that are both coherent and individually expressive. While certain architectural motifs reappear throughout the collection, each piece creates its own fictional setting and narrative. Over time, the visual language has grown more layered and complex, reflecting an evolution in both form and conceptual depth.

Many of your paintings reference Balkan and Aegean architecture. What specific elements of these regions inspire you the most?

I live in Urla, a region where rural life and historical layers intertwine — rich in traces of various civilizations, fertile landscapes, and the characteristic spirit of the Aegean. What fascinates me most about both the Aegean and the Balkans is their layered histories, cultural transitions, and the intimate connection between life and architecture. I'm particularly drawn to modest yet soulful structures, their harmony with nature, their tactile materials, and the way they carry time within their surfaces. As both an architect and an artist, I see these buildings not only as aesthetic references but as vessels of memory. Elements like bay windows, vaulted interiors, and ceramic tiles appear frequently in my work — reinterpreted within fictional narratives that evoke

familiar yet imagined geographies. The collection explores a kind of fictional realism, using architectural motifs rooted in local and historical forms to build a world where built environment and nature coexist. In this way, I aim to reflect not only architectural heritage, but also the intertwined lives and stories of different cultures and faiths that shaped this region.

The circular and mirrored compositions in your works create a sense of timelessness. Could you talk about the symbolism of these recurring shapes?

The compositions in this collection bring together elements that reference history while evoking a sense of familiarity in the present. These dreamlike spaces, where the boundaries of reality are intentionally blurred, invite the viewer to lose their sense of time and place.

Circular and mirrored forms frequently appear in my work — not merely as geometric choices, but as symbols rich with meaning. Across many cultures, the circle represents infinity, continuity, and wholeness. It suggests a cyclical understanding of time, where beginnings and endings converge. For me, it reflects how we experience memory — not in a straight line, but in loops, layers, and echoes.

Likewise, mirrored surfaces and symmetrical compositions challenge the viewer's perception of space and reality. Gilded textures, reflective gold elements, and contrasts between light and dark go beyond visual effect; they shape the emotional atmosphere and narrative tone of the work. These reflective layers encourage active engagement — inviting viewers to glimpse themselves within the painting and become part of its imagined world.

How do you use materials like gold textures and



contrasting dark-light backgrounds to shape the atmosphere of your paintings?

I follow a consistent color palette for the architectural figures in my paintings — earthy tones inspired by the clay-rich soils and Byzantine terracotta of the region. In contrast, natural elements like trees, water, and grass are often depicted in vibrant greens and deep blues to create visual tension and balance. This approach helps establish a coherent visual language across the series, even though the works were created over a span of nearly ten years.

Gold textures, dark-light contrasts, and layered surfaces play a key role in shaping the atmosphere of each piece. Gold leaf adds both symbolic depth and a reflective quality that brings the viewer into the composition. Dark areas suggest silence or mystery, while lighter zones often become focal points — drawing the eye and guiding the viewer into the narrative. These contrasts not only structure the image but also create a rhythm, a tension that encourages a more contemplative engagement with the work.

What role does your academic research play in your artistic practice? Do you see them as parallel or interconnected worlds?

I see academic research and artistic practice as deeply interconnected. My academic background provides a critical foundation — a historical and conceptual framework that deepens my understanding of space, memory, and form. In turn, my artistic practice allows me to re-engage with these ideas on a sensory and visual level. In a way, each informs and expands the questions of the other.

My earlier academic work, rooted in architecture and



Gaye Bezircioglu Senvenli | Gilded Sky | 2024

urban design, focused on rural and historic urban fabrics — which naturally brought an attentiveness to cultural heritage and local context. The first pieces of this collection emerged during that time. Later, I delved deeper into theoretical research on drawing and design thinking, which gave me new ways to reflect on how we relate to the act of drawing — both consciously and intuitively.

While these academic insights don't always translate directly into the artworks, they shape how I perceive the process. I began to see each painting as the outcome of a series of technical, sensory, and sometimes accidental decisions — more of a journey than a fixed plan. This helped me embrace open-ended, process-driven approaches rather than rigidly defined sketches.

In your opinion, how can art help preserve or reinterpret cultural heritage in today's fast-changing world?

To me, art is not just a carrier of cultural heritage, but an ongoing dialogue with it — transforming and reinterpreting traditions in a constantly changing world. Rapid digitalization, globalization, and cultural blending can distance us from our roots. Art steps in here by giving contemporary form to the traditional, making heritage visible and alive.

Art is not a static archive but a living, breathing carrier of culture. It preserves and transforms, helping communities reconnect with their identities, especially in times of intense cultural questioning. Moreover, art dares to question the past — not just conserving it but sometimes critiquing and reimagining it. This allows us to see heritage not as a museum piece, but as a dynamic, evolving structure. In this way, art deepens and renews our relationship with cultural memory, giving voice to the past in the language of today.



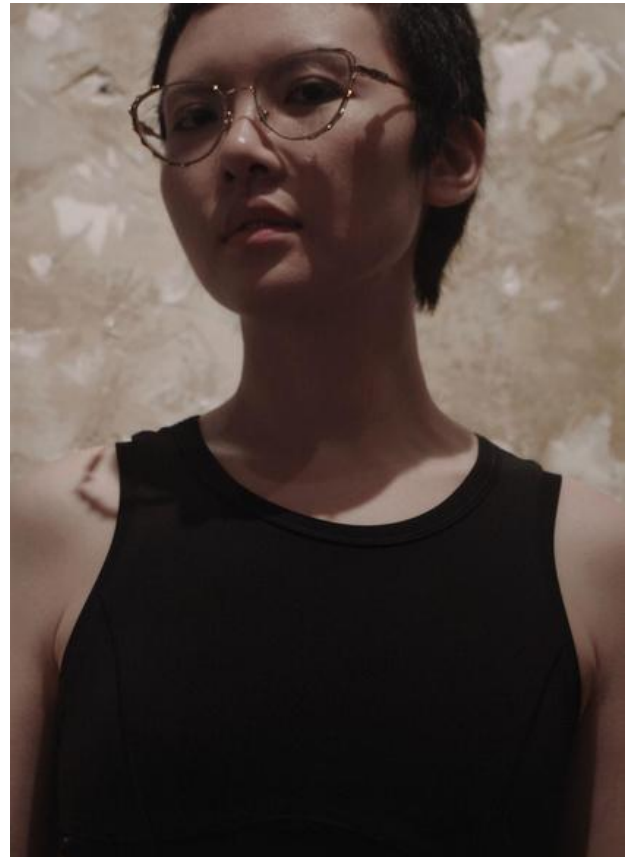
Gaye Bezircioglu Senvenli | Round And Round | 2023



— Interview

Wen Liu

You describe your work as an exploration of “liminal space.” How did you first encounter or develop this concept as central to your practice?



I first became aware of the concept of “liminal space” when studying both philosophy and cultural theory. For me, it represents a state of in-betweenness, a moment of transformation where things are undefined and open to new meanings. I found this idea deeply resonant with my own experience of moving between countries, languages, and identities, and it naturally became the core of my artistic practice.

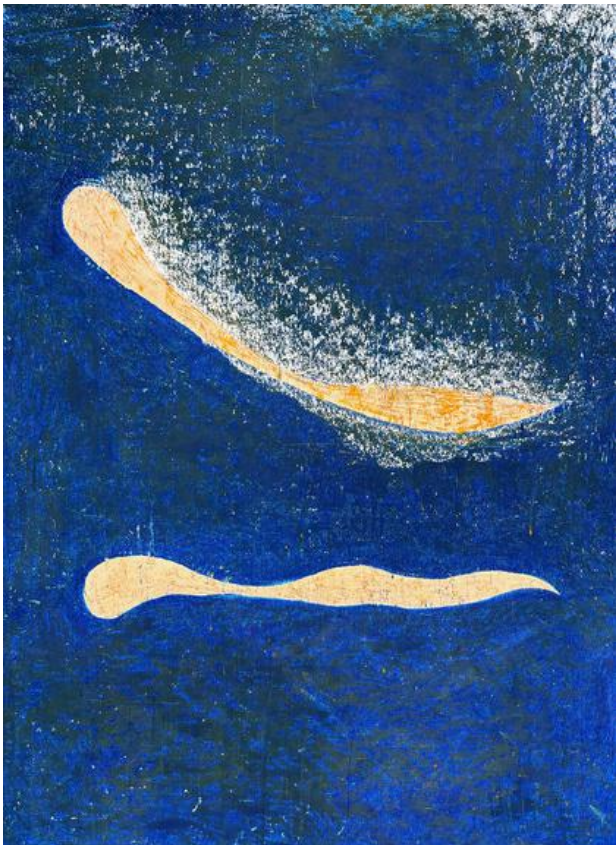
Your art combines painting, sculpture, ceramics, and installation. How do you decide which medium best serves the idea you want to express?

The concept always comes first, and the medium follows. Sometimes a painting is enough to capture ambiguity, while other times I need the physical presence of sculpture or ceramics to give form to liminality. Installation allows me to create immersive spaces where the audience can experience transition themselves.

In your statement, you mention the influence of Heidegger, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. How do philosophy and spirituality guide your creative process?



Wen Liu | Currents Of Liminality | 2025



Philosophy gives me a framework to think about being and time, while Daoist thought reminds me to embrace fluidity and transformation. I don't approach art as a solution, but as a way to dwell in questions. These philosophical and spiritual traditions teach me to accept ambiguity and to let the work grow organically.

Living between China, the United States, and Europe, how has your multicultural experience shaped your understanding of identity and belonging in your art?

Living across different cultures constantly shifts my perspective. Instead of seeking a fixed sense of belonging, I embrace hybridity. My identity is not one thing but many things in dialogue, and my work reflects this fluid condition.

Your works feature bold colors, textures, and contrasts. How do you use color to evoke the sense of ambiguity and transformation you associate with liminal spaces?

Color, for me, is both emotional and symbolic. I use strong contrasts to signal moments of transition—where one state dissolves into another. Bright hues often suggest possibility,

while darker tones hint at uncertainty. Together, they create tension and openness at the same time.

What role does interaction design play in your artistic practice, and how do you see the relationship between technology and traditional fine arts?

Interaction design allows me to consider how audiences move, touch, and respond to art. Technology is not separate from fine arts—it is simply another medium. I am interested in how traditional materials and digital tools can coexist, creating new forms of experience that resonate with contemporary life.

How do you want audiences to feel or respond when they encounter your paintings and sculptures?

I don't want to prescribe a single reaction, but I hope audiences feel a sense of openness, of being in-between. If they leave with more questions than answers, and if they feel both unsettled and inspired, then the work has achieved its purpose.



— Interview

Tm Gratkowski

Your practice centers around paper and discarded materials. What initially drew you to paper as your primary medium?

When I was in art school, having enough money to afford the cost of materials like oil paints or metals to sculpt always put me at a disadvantage - I never had enough of either money or materials to work with. At some point I started to look outside the basic art making paradigm of materials and searched for something more readily available. Paper could be found everywhere and I thought it interesting that I could turn what was so readily thrown out into art. In most cases you could find what you needed, for free, via magazines or posters and even paper scraps thrown on the streets. The use of paper in my work was gradual. As I was using more and more paper in my early mixed-media work I eventually limited the use of other art materials and realized I could achieve everything I wanted and more by just using paper. Since that time of my early collage experiments I have never used anything but paper.

Many of your works transform waste into layered collages. Do you view this process as an environmental statement, a cultural critique, or both?

I refer to it as an anthropological study of paper. The purpose of which is both a cultural and a sociological critique to reuse paper and the information that has been printed on it in a different way. I am reminded of a quote by Jasper Johns: "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something to it again." I think it is only by default that using the material I



Tm Gratkowski | Ideas Dreaming | 2023

work with can be considered environmental. I welcome that, but that is not the agenda behind using paper- a definite benefit- yes! In many ways, I am recycling and appropriating the medium and the message to create a new way of defining the ready-made and collage.

It's interesting to consider, by what your question implies, that my studio practice has "zero-waste". I save every bit of paper and do not throw it away because I may have a use for it at a much later time.

There was a series I made about 10 years ago where I emptied my paper-filled trash can onto the floor and made a series of works only using all these random pieces of paper. I was kind of recycling what I had already used to make something new. Maybe that's the new environmental paradigm - to recycle what's already been recycled.

Having studied both fine art and architecture, how has your architectural training influenced your approach to structure and layering in collage?

This is always a sensitive topic and question for me to answer. Just to be clear, I was an artist well before my interest and involvement in architecture. My primary interest in architecture was to explore sculpture on a grand scale as an artform. My art process has always had an influence on how I envisioned what I was doing as an architect. My designs incorporated a similar process of multiple layers and had a structural system that enabled things to appear to float to become an amalgam of materials and layers. In the alternative education systems I went through, the one overlap that has helped define both art and architecture that I benefited from is the ability to envision, design, fabricate, and a practical understanding how to build anything. This definitely gives me an advantage as an artist. I think that, like most of us, we are not one-dimensional people and possess many experiences and skills which contribute to our understanding and development of anything we participate in.

When I think about what I am creating in the studio now, I can help think about art and building and maybe a little about architecture, or more specifically about the space between things, whether it be buildings or layers of paper. The current body of work I have been creating for the past three years began when I started exploring ideas on what the



Tm Gratkowski | From Fear To You | 2024



Cubists did by manipulating the flat picture plane. This led me to look at ways to “build” my art and how space was considered and created between all its compositional elements and layers rather than laying material down flat on a 2-D surface - in reality, it’s kind of like how we walk through and experience the world and all its advertising constructs like signs, surface, billboards and even the many windows open on our computer screens. In this sense what I’m doing now leans in the direction of a built art.

Your works have been featured in exhibitions ranging from Documenta in Detroit to the El Paso Biennial. How do different audiences respond to your exploration of culture and waste?

That’s an interesting thought/ question. This may be a backwards way of answering your question, but I think I would be making different work if I was living in another country other than the US but I would not be making it differently. I try to focus on subjects that are universally shared and understood, but I would definitely be adjacently influenced by where I was living, kind of like how Rauschenberg was making work all over the world through ROCI and it changed based on where he was. Generally my art practice tries to focus on a universal point of view where the humanity in all of us look at most things in the same way. My work can and has definitely focused on very specific cultural centric points of view, but I am never trying to delegate a message. My work tries to focus on a subject we are all trying to better understand in one way or another. What I think my work does best is it sets up a universal platform for a dialogue or a conversation to take place. As long as it is a subject matter we are all engaged with and gets us thinking and asking questions then I think the work has been well received and we are all trying to better understand each other’s point of view and engage in a dialogue about it. So, to answer your question... I think it has

received universal acceptance and understanding if at least by the conversations it has generated.

Many of your pieces carry a sense of density and visual overload. Are you aiming to mirror the information saturation of contemporary society?

Well, it’s definitely a critical commentary on it. And yes, we are all part of it whether or not we like it. As an artist I am appreciating and influenced by the scenery and technology. The layering is about the system overload we are surrounded by all day long and the multiple devices open on our computers- what are we really paying attention to? Like Blade Runner, we now seem to be living inside the environment we are looking at. What I am trying to do is simplify the noise by mimicking the same visual patterns as if they were all overlapping in a similar manner, but in a more aesthetically appealing way to get you to slow down long enough to see what I see.

Your collages sometimes incorporate recognizable imagery from consumer culture. Do you see these works as a critique of consumerism, or as a way to document its visual language?

Both, but it’s definitely documenting, even mimicking, a visual pattern language I recognize. I like to call it a social anthropology of information and images. For the work to be relevant, I believe, it must talk about and use the environment or culture in which it came from to make sense. I’m not trying to paint a landscape or create an anachronistic Surrealist collage trope to convince you I’m trying to talk about the world we live in today and how and what information is being disseminated. In a lot of ways it is about an awareness to look at this information clutter in a different way and to consume a different kind of knowledge - one that makes you think or question what you are looking at.

Can you talk about your use of color palettes—such as the dominant reds, greens, and greys seen in your recent works? What do these chromatic choices symbolize for you?

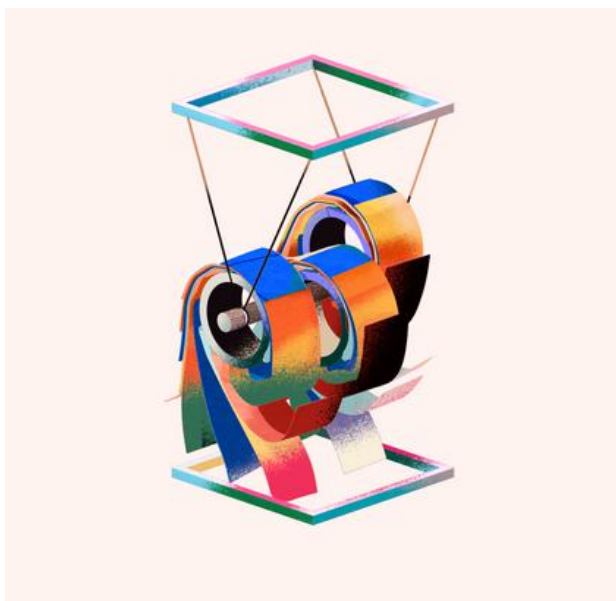
Color is such a difficult process for me. Not to be misrepresented, but I’m really good with color- the science of color and color theory, but I prefer things more monochromatic, especially when making art, specifically when using many different random pieces of paper to make art. I feel when I minimize the palette it is easier to hold your attention and to create a mood for the subject matter or message to be more appropriate. When I started this new series I’ve been working on for the past three years now, I told myself I wanted to use more dominant bold colors. A lot of the color choices were derived from a color palette I developed before I even started the larger pieces that I am currently working on now - it was kind of a goal or focus. I was primarily interested in focussing on a designer color palette that was not a local or primary color. I quickly looked at developing more complex depth to those choices. In the end and started looking at various color chakras. This seemed to fit well with the subject matter I’ve been focusing on about energy shifts between individuals or groups of people/ cultures. They are still work in progress so the exploration and experimenting continues.

— Interview

Hitoshi Morita

Your works often balance geometry and fluidity. How do you decide when to keep order and when to introduce disruption?

Because I often work with 3D software, my starting point is usually order. Geometry, physics, and structure provide a clear framework to begin with. But during the process, I listen to the work itself. When it feels too controlled or distant, I



Hitoshi Morita | Motion | 2025



Hitoshi Morita | Built | 2024

sense the need to introduce irregularities. For me, this decision is intuitive rather than calculated. Sometimes the disruption appears in movement, but more often it comes through light or color. A subtle shift in brightness, a tone that breaks harmony, or a glow that feels unusual can add warmth and human presence. I find beauty in these small deviations, which make the work more alive and emotionally resonant.

Many of your pieces are loops. What attracts you to loops as a form of motion design, and what do you think they reveal about rhythm and perception?

While I often create loops in my personal practice, my professional work is not limited to them. Many commissioned projects involve sequences with beginnings, transitions, and endings. Still, I am deeply drawn to loops as a form. They carry a sense of continuity and infinity—you can watch them without needing to know where they start or end. For viewers, this creates a meditative quality, a rhythm that feels endless. For me as a creator, loops are also a useful format because they allow me to focus purely on the movement itself—the feeling of motion, its rhythm and texture—without the need for narrative progression. This combination of infinite viewing and concentrated exploration is what makes loops so compelling in my practice.

Could you describe the role of intuition versus technical planning in your creative process?

Intuition often comes first in my process. I might begin with a feeling, a mental image, or a rhythm I want to explore. But at the same time, I also find inspiration in technical aspects. Sometimes a new tool, a specific shader, or even the constraints of 3D software suggest directions I would not have imagined otherwise. For me, intuition and planning are



not separate stages but parts of the same dialogue. Intuition provides energy and emotion, while technical structure gives clarity and form. Toward the end, I often return to intuition again—adjusting timing, light, or color until the work feels alive. In this way, intuition and technique constantly inform each other, each capable of sparking the other.

How do Cinema 4D and After Effects complement each other in your practice?

In my current series, Cinema 4D is where most of the motion and timing are resolved. It provides the structure, geometry, and rhythm of the work. After Effects, in this context, plays a different role. I rarely adjust timing there—instead, I treat it almost like a renderer. It is the place where I refine the look: adjusting color, contrast, and light, adding subtle layers of texture or distortion, and shaping the final atmosphere of the piece. Of course, there are projects where I use After Effects more actively for motion or compositing, but in this ongoing body of work, its main function is to give nuance to the visual surface. Together, Cinema 4D and After Effects complement each other as construction and refinement, foundation and finish.

Your work is shared widely across design communities. How does audience feedback or visibility influence your evolution as an artist?

Sharing my work daily has created an ongoing dialogue with the design community. Audience feedback often gives me fresh perspectives—sometimes people notice qualities in a piece that I was not fully aware of myself. These responses do not determine what I make, but they remind me that the work can live in many different ways once it is out in the world. Visibility also brings connection. Because my work circulates online, I have been able to reach artists and studios around the world, leading to conversations and opportunities I would not have had otherwise. In this sense, feedback and visibility influence me less by shaping my decisions directly, and more by reinforcing the idea that motion design is part of a larger exchange. They encourage me to keep exploring, knowing the work continues to resonate beyond me.

You often mention the relationship between geometry, light, and texture. Could you expand on how you explore this triad in your daily practice?

In my daily practice, I treat geometry, light, and texture as three elements that constantly interact. Geometry provides the foundation—the rhythm and order of forms. Texture adds tactility, grounding the image with imperfections that make it feel more human. Light, however, is the most playful element for me. I approach it almost like paint on a canvas. It is where I allow my whims and intuition to enter most freely. A slight shift in brightness or a color glow can completely change the mood, turning a strict structure into something warm or poetic. By experimenting with this triad every day, I explore not just how things move, but how form, surface, and illumination can come together to create an emotional presence.

What do you find most challenging in maintaining both consistency and constant exploration in your work?

The challenge is that consistency and exploration can easily pull in opposite directions. If I focus too much on consistency, the work risks becoming repetitive. If I pursue exploration without limits, I can lose the thread that makes the work recognizable as mine. In my current series, I address this by using a loose format—a recurring diamond-shaped frame, placed at the top and bottom or sometimes only at the bottom. This framework gives the work a consistent identity, while leaving space inside it for experimentation. Within that boundary, I can test new rhythms, colors, and textures without losing coherence. Daily practice also helps: small experiments accumulate, and the balance between stability and change emerges naturally over time. The ongoing challenge is to keep the core alive while letting the surface evolve.



Rita Torres

As a children's book author who enjoys illustrating using graphic design through digital art, I have come to love creating art through this medium. I now create digital art on canvas and coffee mugs, and combine photos with artistic backgrounds, as well.

Project Statement

My love for nature, the ocean, tropical settings, Latin culture and food, and dogs have hugely influenced the subjects of my artistic creations.

Rita Torres | Lush Vibrancy | 2025





Rita Torres | Cactus Beauty | 2025

Rita Torres | Mexican Breakfast | 2025



— Interview

Marleen Hulst

Can you tell us how you first discovered stamp carving and printmaking?

I think it was on YouTube last Summer that I saw something about carving small stamps from erasers for printing bookmarks and cards. As I have had a fascination for patterns for many years, and I have always liked rubber stamps – bought ones from a store -, the idea of carving your own stamps really appealed to me. I knew immediately I wanted to try that myself.

So I bought a cheap stamp carving set and a pack of erasers, and got started. With some inkpads that I already had I started to print my first patterns. And I loved it!

Later I continued with stamp rubber and better carving tools, still searching online media each day trying to discover what I liked best and really wanted to do, without just imitating what already existed. In December 2024 I started sharing my work on my Instagram account @48patterns.



What inspires you the most when creating your patterns?

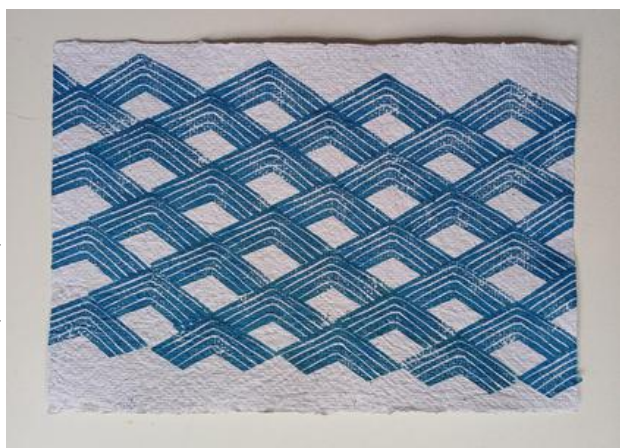
All kinds of things from daily life, like napkins, tea towels, flower pots, wrapping paper and such. Patterns are literally everywhere. A single shape can also catch my attention. A while ago I carved a stamp inspired by something I saw on a t-shirt and used it to create a pattern.

But half the time I randomly pick a rubber stamp and just go ahead filling a page, without thinking ahead about any motif. It happens kind of intuitive. Those spontaneous patterns are in fact the ones I like best. Printing with a 'fixed' result in mind doesn't always work for me.

Why did you choose to work with simple shapes instead of more complex imagery?

When I first started carving stamps, I chose simple shapes just to see if I liked the process of carving itself. Then I began printing one pattern after another and enjoyed myself so much that I couldn't stop! Basic shapes work for me and they all what I need for the - mostly abstract- patterns of my choice.

I never imagined that circles, ovals, squares, triangles and rectangles etc. could be applied in so many different ways. Think of the variety in size, proportion, or colour. Used in a one stamp pattern, or combined with another shape – or shapes. The possibilities are endless.



Marleen Hulst | Waves | 2025



Could you share a bit about your process of making stamps and printing on handmade paper?

After seeing a nice motif for a stamp I draw it on a piece of paper. When happy with the size and shape I copy it on stamping rubber with transparent parchment paper, the same that you can use for baking in the oven. After carving I make some test prints and continue adjusting the stamp until it is what I want it to look.

Printing on handmade paper gives an extra dimension; I like that it's more personal, all made by me instead of 'easily' bought in a shop. Making paper at home is a time consuming process. From collecting waste paper, tearing it into small pieces, letting it soak in water for 24 hours, putting it in a blender to make pulp, making paper using a deckle, letting it dry, and finally press the pages underneath a pile of heavy books for several hours.

And then you have a pile of fairly soft, slightly uneven though beautiful and very unique pages, all made piece by piece. To have this result is immensely satisfying. And the texture of handmade paper also appeals to me, even though it is not always ideal for printing. But that's also the charm of it.

Apart from handmade paper I use small sketchbooks a lot for my prints, and occasionally a piece of coloured paper. Every now and then I enjoy making small books like zines and fill them with patterns. Kraft paper bags are also fine to use for printing. It's nice to explore things.

What role does repetition and rhythm play in your work?

Without repetition my patterns simply wouldn't exist. The stamps I carve are small ones, so repeating them in order to create a pattern is what they are meant for. Once a pattern is printed it should have a certain rhythm. I think rhythm is what makes a pattern inviting and interesting to watch. It is what stops you when scrolling through your Instagram feed to have a

closer look. I think repetition and rhythm can't be seen apart in my work; there's no rhythm without repetition, and repetition should lead to a rhythm to make a pattern come 'alive'.

How do you decide on the colors for your prints?

Colours obviously mean a great deal to what I do. Strong colours work best as they make a pattern stand out, like a vivid red, orange or blue. I don't often decide beforehand which colour to use for a print, that is a random choice.

Softer and lighter colours do not work, unfortunately I must say. A while ago I bought an inkpad with a lovely 'sand dune' colour, but when I used it for a print it just didn't come alive. Nothing happened, even though I loved the pattern itself. So these are no good, at least not for me.

If you've seen my work on Instagram you know that I very rarely use black for a pattern on white paper. It's true that it is not one of my favourite colours. But for printing on kraft paper black is perfect!

Do you have any favorite motifs or patterns that you return to often?

Of course there are some motifs and patterns that have become favourites. It doesn't happen often though that I print a motif a second time in the same sketchbook or on handmade paper. When I return to a favourite pattern it's on pages of a zine or folding book I made, or on a different surface like a brown grocery bag which then gets a compilation of several motifs. I also have my favourite rubber stamps. And some I return to often. The advantage of simple shapes is that they can be applied in many different ways. A triangular stamp with stripes for instance can be used for printing a one stamp pattern, but can also be combined with a circle shaped stamp or maybe a rectangular striped stamp and form a totally different pattern. As I mentioned before, the possibilities are endless. I challenge myself to vary with motifs as much as possible.



— Interview

Huaqi Liu

Your work often connects clouds with the concept of destiny. How did you first discover this poetic association, and how has it influenced your artistic journey?



Huaqi Liu | Clouds series | 2024



The association between clouds and destiny emerged for me from my Chinese cultural background, where the character for “destiny” (運) contains the character for “cloud” (云). This discovery was both surprising and deeply poetic: it suggested that destiny, which often feels abstract and intangible, could be embodied by the ever-changing image of clouds. Clouds are guided by invisible forces such as wind, atmosphere, and climate, much like human lives are shaped by circumstances beyond our control.

This realization became the foundation of my artistic journey. Clouds are never fixed; they shift in form, texture, and color, mirroring the uncertainties and transformations of identity, migration, and belonging that I explore in my work. Through painting, I seek to capture both the material presence of clouds and their symbolic meaning, creating a space where viewers can reflect on their own relationship to fate, culture, and environment. In many ways, clouds have become the lens through which I approach painting, guiding me toward new materials, processes, and questions that continue to evolve with my practice.

As an immigrant artist, how does your personal experience of migration shape the way you paint and think about clouds?

Migration has profoundly shaped how I paint and think about clouds. Clouds appear and form in different spaces and environments, carrying distinct features and shapes, just like people who embody their own characteristics and cultures. Yet, as destiny moves people across borders,



clouds too are carried by the wind into new conditions. In both cases, transformation is inevitable: the original qualities remain, but they are reshaped by new surroundings, acquiring different cultural layers, ideas, and identities. As an immigrant artist, I see this parallel as a way to understand both personal and collective experience. My paintings of clouds reflect not only their mutability in nature but also the way migration reshapes human identity. By layering different materials such as oil and ink, I mirror this process of change, where chance and environment leave their mark on the image. In this way, clouds become a metaphor for survival, renewal, and the creation of hybrid identities that carry traces of both past and present.

Many of your paintings capture the fleeting and ever-changing forms of clouds. What is the role of impermanence in your work?

Impermanence plays a central role in my work because clouds embody the fleeting nature of existence. They appear, transform, and dissolve within moments, never repeating the same form twice. For me, this impermanence is not only a visual subject but also a philosophical way of seeing life. It reflects how identity, culture, and experience are continuously shifting, shaped by forces both within and beyond our control. Destiny is particularly fascinating to me. It cannot be touched or seen, yet it is undeniably felt. Just as clouds are carried by the invisible wind, human lives are guided by unseen powers. We may not perceive the wind directly, but we sense its force through the shifting forms of clouds, much like we sense destiny through the transformations of our own lives.

When I paint clouds, I try to capture both their beauty and their temporality. My process of layering oil, ink, and other materials often resists permanence, allowing unpredictability, dissolving textures, and accidental marks to become part of the final image. In this way, my practice accepts change as essential, not something to resist. Impermanence also echoes my own experience of migration. Moving between cultures is itself a state of constant transition—leaving, arriving, and redefining. By painting clouds, I embrace this transient quality and turn it into a language of resilience and renewal. Each impermanent moment of a cloud becomes a way to reflect on how people, too, carry traces of change, memory, and possibility within their shifting forms.

Could you describe your process when creating a cloud painting? Do you work from observation, memory, or imagination?

My process of painting clouds follows two main paths. One is rooted in materials. I often bring together different mediums such as oil, ink, and other substances on surfaces like canvas, wood, or Xuan paper. The collision of these materials produces unpredictable outcomes—textures, stains, or dissolving marks that echo the uncontrollable transformations of real clouds. I see this unpredictability as essential, because it mirrors the way clouds are constantly reshaped by invisible forces in nature. The other path comes directly from nature itself.



I do not photograph or record clouds, because I want to avoid fixing them into a static image. Instead, I walk into nature and immerse myself in the sky, observing the movement, rhythm, and direction of clouds. Through this close attention, I absorb their spirit and mutability, which later re-emerges in the studio through memory and imagination.

In this way, my practice becomes a dialogue between material experimentation and lived experience in nature. One path allows chance to guide the image, while the other cultivates a more meditative awareness of impermanence. Together, they shape a painting process that is both intuitive and deeply connected to the philosophical questions at the heart of my work.

Your work brings together cultural symbolism, philosophy, and material exploration. How do you balance these elements in your practice?

Balancing cultural symbolism, philosophy, and material exploration is at the heart of my practice, and for me they are not separate but deeply intertwined. Clouds are my primary subject because they carry symbolic meaning in Chinese culture, where they are closely linked to destiny and spirituality. This symbolism provides the foundation, giving my work a cultural and philosophical depth.

At the same time, I approach clouds as metaphors for broader human experiences such as migration, transformation, and impermanence. This is where philosophy enters, allowing me to reflect on questions of identity, fate, and the relationship between human beings



Huaqi Liu | Clouds series | 2025

and nature. My paintings become a space where these ideas are not explained directly but felt through the dynamics of form, texture, and atmosphere.

Material exploration is the way these concepts become tangible. By combining oil paint, ink, and other media on surfaces like canvas, wood, or Xuan paper, I allow each material to carry its own history while interacting unpredictably with others. The process mirrors the themes I explore: hybridity, chance, and transformation. In this way, cultural symbolism, philosophical thought, and material experimentation are not balanced as separate components, but rather merge into a single language that continually evolves through painting.

Clouds appear in many cultures as metaphors for spirit, transience, or destiny. How does your Chinese cultural background specifically shape your interpretation of clouds?

My Chinese cultural background shapes the way I see clouds at the deepest level. In Chinese philosophy and language, clouds have long been connected to destiny and spirituality. The character for “destiny” (運) even contains the character for “cloud” (云), suggesting that fate itself is carried, like a cloud, by unseen forces. This poetic overlap has profoundly influenced my interpretation of clouds, because it makes them more than natural phenomena; they become carriers of meaning, symbols of life’s mutability, and signs of a spiritual aura within nature. This perspective is also deeply connected to the I Ching (Book of Changes), which teaches that transformation is the underlying principle of the



Huaqi Liu | Clouds series | 2025



universe. It speaks of three layers of truth: “bian yi” (constant change), “bu yi” (certain patterns that remain), and “jian yi” (the simplicity underlying all complexity). Clouds embody these ideas perfectly. They are always in motion, constantly changing in form and texture, yet within their transformations there are rhythms and structures we recognize, and through them we glimpse the simplicity of natural law. Growing up in this cultural context, I learned to see clouds as part of a larger cosmology where human beings, environment, and the universe are interconnected. In my paintings, I carry this tradition forward by using clouds as metaphors for destiny, migration, and the search for equilibrium in a shifting world. By weaving the symbolism of clouds with the wisdom of the I Ching, I hope to show how ancient philosophy continues to illuminate the uncertainties and transformations of our present lives.

What artistic influences—painters, philosophers, or cultural traditions—have shaped your way of seeing and depicting clouds?

Several painters and traditions have shaped the way I see and depict clouds. From the Western

canon, I am inspired by Claude Monet’s sensitivity to light and atmosphere, Mark Rothko’s exploration of spiritual depth through color, and Giorgio Morandi’s quiet attention to subtle variation. Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter resonate with me for their material experimentation and the way they confront history and memory, while Cy Twombly’s gestural language captures the fleeting quality of presence.

My father, a calligrapher, has also been a profound influence. Although I am not a professional calligrapher, learning from him gave me an appreciation for brushwork, rhythm, and the energy of the line, which continue to shape my paintings. Classical Chinese landscape painting and the philosophy of the I Ching (Book of Changes) further guide my thinking, where clouds and mist are metaphors for impermanence, destiny, and the interconnection between humanity and nature.

Together, these influences create a dialogue in my work. Western and Chinese traditions provide different but complementary languages, which I merge through material experimentation, so that clouds become not only visual subjects but also metaphors for migration, memory, and transformation.

Alexandra Stroganova was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. In her native city she was engaged in creating objects from ceramics. In 2023 she moved to Paphos, Cyprus, where she began her path in painting. Alexandra regularly participates in exhibitions across Europe and in Cyprus, including the group show *Mythology* at XeniArtSpace in Limassol (2025). Her works are held in private collections in Cyprus and the UK.

Project Statement

In my work I explore feminine grace, sensitivity, bohemian beauty and nobility. It is important to me to express the fragile but stable harmony that exists in the life of modern human: at the intersection of comfort and roughness, completeness and imperfection. I express this balance through the combination of graceful forms and deliberately careless details - in them, emotional tension and depth are born. The source of inspiration for the colors and nuances of the images of my characters is nature. For me, it is the pristine beauty that manifests itself in bright and natural colors combined with delicate shades. I am inspired by the viewer's ability to grasp not only form, but also meaning - with both mind and heart. The moment of catharsis creates an almost mystical connection between us, allowing us to communicate on a deep level beyond the boundaries of language, culture or personal experience.



Sasha Stroganova | Binded | 2025



— Interview

Thalissa Valery

Can you tell us about your early artistic influences growing up in Florida?

Although I grew up in Florida I believe my Haitian roots played more of a role as far as influences go. Some of my most cherished memories have



Thalissa Valery | Bag

been when family members would come to visit and bring paintings along. Mostly in the style of portraiture, which I now mostly focus on, have always captivated me. As for Florida it comes up in my work more now as an adult. Honing my skills was my main priority growing up but with maturing I find creating (open) stories within my work to be less daunting. Subtly incorporating southern and floridian iconography as a nod to my love of the state. Peaceful and gloomy.

How did your discovery of watercolors at 14 shape your creative direction?

Fourteen was the turning point. I found watercolors by accident, and it cracked something open in me. There was something about how uncontrollable they were and how the water decided where the pigment moved. It forced me to loosen my grip and let the art breathe on its own. That unpredictability became a metaphor for how I navigate both life and art.

You mentioned limited formal training — how has self-teaching influenced your artistic voice?

Thalissa Valery | Doubt





Being self-taught gave me the freedom to build my own lane. No rigid rules, no one telling me how art “should” look. I learned by messing up, remixing styles, studying old masters and digital renegades alike. That DIY mindset taught me how to trust my instincts and turn my flaws into fingerprints. I used to strive to appear polished, now I much prefer being messy and raw.

What themes or emotions do you most often explore in your digital illustrations?

I orbit around themes like identity, isolation, resilience, and rebirth. There’s usually a tension between softness and strength in my work. My digital illustrations are kind of like emotional x-rays: layered, intimate, and not always comfortable. I like to explore what it means to carry legacy, especially as a child of diaspora navigating modern chaos.

How does your faith play a role in your creative process?

Catholicism raised me with a deep reverence for rituals, symbolism, and silence. Even when I questioned parts of it, the core ideas like grace,

redemption, suffering as transformation its never left. My art is how I pray sometimes. It’s less about doctrine and more about wrestling with the divine, visually. I treat creation like communion.

I have always felt as though I was cast out, painting was the fruit that brought me to paradise.

What does your process look like when blending watercolors with mixed media?

It starts analog, watercolors first, to lay down emotion and atmosphere. Then I layer in digital elements like line work, textures, or motion. Think of it like mixing jazz with break beats, old soul meets future noise. The blend gives me range to play between softness and sharpness, nostalgia and innovation. It’s where chaos meets control.

Can you share more about your transition from traditional to digital art?

The shift wasn’t planned, I needed to move faster, experiment more. Diving into merchandising it made more sense to take it on. Now I flow between both worlds. Digital gave me space to expand, but traditional taught me patience. Together, they help me speak fluently in visual emotion.

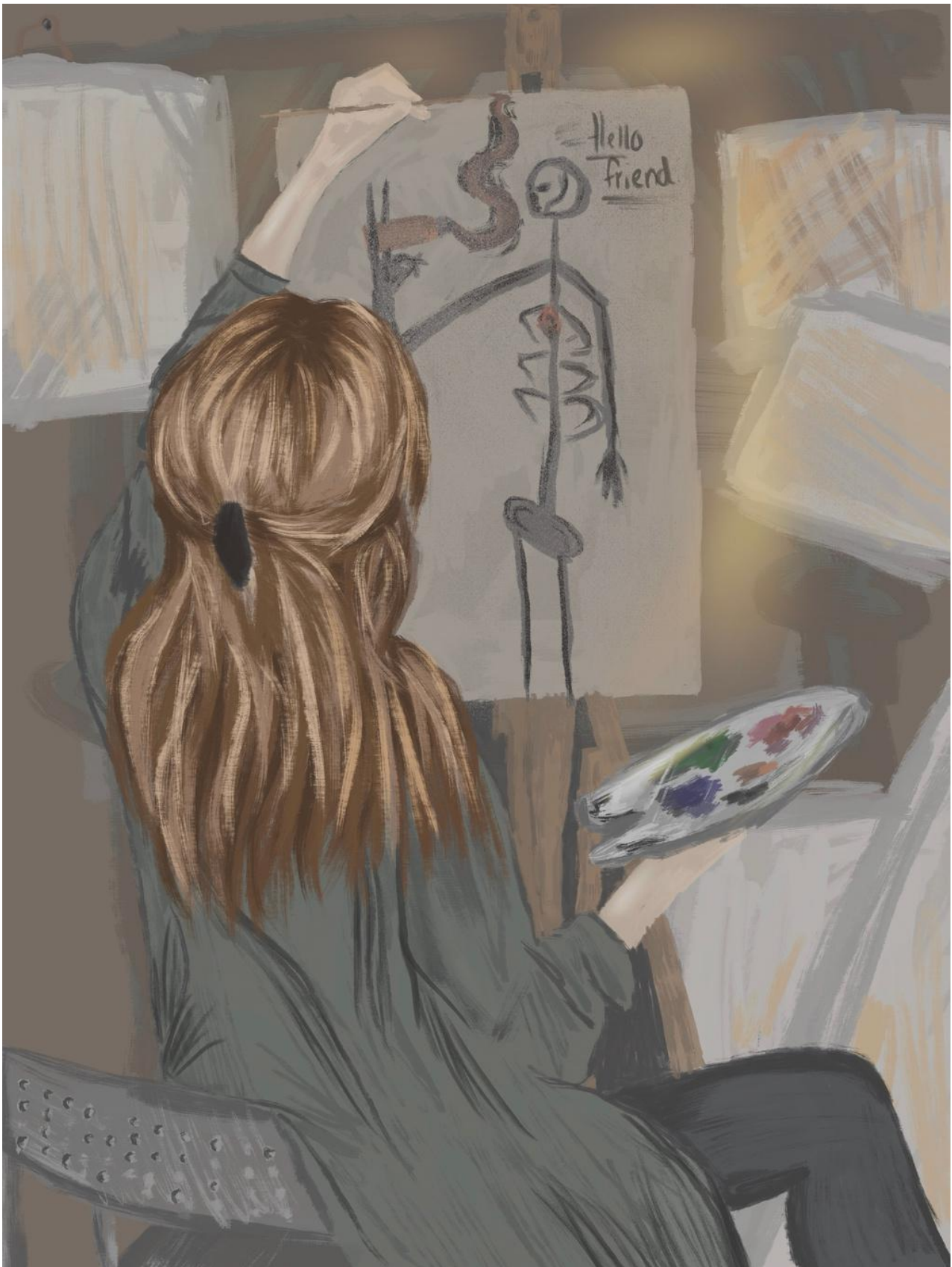


Hallie Richardson

A small upcoming digital artist who's recently graduated from Trinity Saint Davids art and design foundation course.

Project Statement

My project includes two print pieces of both the Autumnal and Summer aesthetic, I then also have a digital oil painting piece of myself in the future of who I want to be. The prints were something new I wanted to try out as I had never tried creating digital prints before, as for the oil painting I wanted some sort of motive for it so I went down the road of who did I want to become and what would it look like.





— Interview

Zhuyang Liu

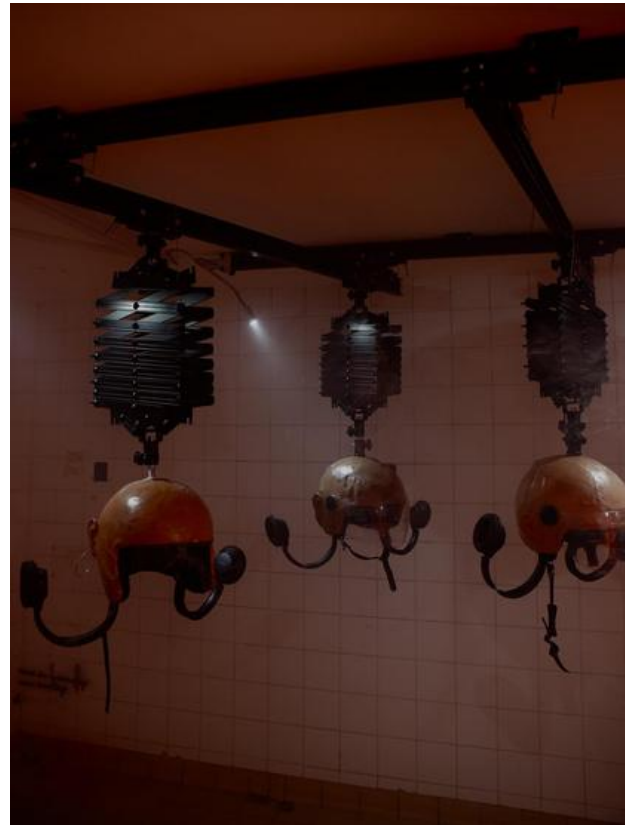
Your work often blends humor, absurdity, and chaos with deep socio-political commentary. How do you navigate the balance between playfulness and seriousness in your projects?

Humor for me, is more like a temperament—a way of catching reality, and also a survival mindset. It's like a “color” that accompanies how we live in the world, carrying a certain texture. Of course, the themes I deal with can be heavy, but the form of expression doesn't always have to be. I often treat the process of making itself as part of the work, so play and seriousness flow in and out of each other. Sometimes I start with a very serious idea but approach it in a way that makes even me laugh. I guess I do “play seriously”

The “Human-Skin Helmet” is both unsettling and intimate. What inspired you to create this object, and how do you want audiences to feel when wearing or encountering it?



Zhuyang Liu | Helmeting | 2025



Zhuyang Liu | Helmeting | 2025

The initial impulse was simple—I wish to make a wearable, almost fashion-like object. I love vehicles and am often around instruments, systems, and mechanical materials. I've also always been interested in making what I call “soft installations.” For instance, I once created a giant teddy bear whose head was stuffed with a vinyl record, and inside its belly was a mechanical sound system—the bear could only be “activated” if I DJ'd on its head. I love exploring the relationship between operability and installation. What you said is interesting to me. The helmet, to me, is already a device of protection and isolation. But adding “skin” makes it ambiguous—it becomes both an outer shell and another body. I'd like to leave it open for how people should feel. Some may feel safe, others may feel violated. What matters to me is that it creates an ambiguous zone—between self and other, between protection and exposure. And when it intersects with fashion, installation, and the body, it extends into a larger question that runs through my practice: how we understand identity and body politics, especially when those are continually reshaped by capital and technology.

In HELMETING, sound is experienced in a very physical and bodily way. How do you see the relationship between sound, the body, and identity in your practice?

Sound is not abstract—it penetrates the body and makes you feel resonance directly. In that moment, you realize the “self” is not isolated, but part of a flow with others and the environment. Identity in this sense becomes like a frequency: it can be tuned, disturbed, or reorganized. I also think of sound as a deeply collective symbol. It is triggered by physical phenomena but accumulates into shared memory and cultural markers. Sound is a medium of communication, a marker of group identity, even something



like a token, a currency, a digital grammar. In **HELMETING**, I used sound in a very direct way: it is the thread of the work, but also a metaphor for the social systems we live in. In an age when AI algorithms increasingly shape how we listen and communicate, I'm interested in foregrounding the power and grammar behind sound itself.

Many of your works intervene in public or social spaces, sometimes creating confusion or destabilization. What do you hope these disruptions reveal?

It's like when a glitch appears in a system—it shows that the everyday is not natural. Daily life is maintained by rules, habits, and orders, but it's constantly interrupted by the sudden and the improvised. For me, "disruption" is less about destruction and more about creating an opening for other possibilities—an attempt to "reopen the world." Instability is not total chaos; it's a relative motion within stability, the interplay between change and persistence, like an ecosystem. When those orders temporarily fail, people may glimpse other ways of living.

And sometimes such disruptions also expose how exhibitions themselves aren't just exhibitions: they can be advertisements, capital operations, entertainment products. Confusion, then, becomes an opening—it reveals the layered, blurred logic behind our daily structures.

Your works are often described as "meta-concepts" that evolve over time. How do you decide when a work is finished—or is it always ongoing?

I prefer to think of works as ecosystems rather than objects. They grow and mutate across contexts and mediums. "Completion" feels more like a temporary pause than a final endpoint. A project might be a performance today, an installation tomorrow, and a piece of writing the next day. What matters is how it continues to speak to reality. For example, one project I began as a music album. I invited a 3D artist to design the cover, but the process transformed into me creating an installation-like album. As we worked, we started meeting weekly, learning together, and unexpectedly extended the narrative into an audio-visual piece shaped around AI. That, in turn, opened entirely new directions. So my works often contain multiple "units," each of which could stand alone, but which can also connect into something larger—like a hybrid organism that keeps growing, mutating, and reproducing. This ecological unfolding mirrors the way I observe contemporary grammar itself: a work can be an artwork, but also an advertisement, a interface. I'm interested in the ambiguities that arise in that overlap.

In *The Gourmet Critics*, humor, horror, and sonic experimentation are tightly interwoven. How do you use absurdist performance to address issues like body politics and social critique?

Absurdity allows me to translate complex social mechanisms into bodily experience. In this performance we "eat each other's brains," which is ridiculous, but it makes consumption, critique, and identity suddenly visceral. The audience laughs, but also feels uneasy. That mix of amusement and discomfort mirrors social reality itself: both absurd and real at the same time.

Aesthetically, the piece is amplified by cross-genre collisions: the noise energy of hardcore punk, the extremity of death metal, and the performative stance of drag culture. These elements, when layered together, create a disjointed absurdity. The collage not only disrupts aesthetic conventions but turns the performance into a site of cross-material collaboration and conflict. I'm fascinated by this tension—when different sounds, bodies, and performance traditions collide, new meanings emerge. And often this uncertainty itself is labelled as "absurd," which I find very telling. To me, absurdity isn't emptiness—it's the mirror image of social logic pushed to its extreme.

You often experiment with non-traditional instruments and sound-making devices. What role does instrument-building play in your artistic philosophy?

Instrument-building is a way of redistributing relationships for me. Traditional instruments carry history, discipline, and standardized modes of playing. I perform traditional instrument; I enjoy it in this aspect. But when I use a suitcase, a helmet, or a household appliance to produce sound, there are no pre-given instructions—you have to renegotiate the relationship. These objects become companions, tricksters, even potential weapons, rather than neutral tools.

I think of these devices as part of what I call the "sonic arsenal"—a term I coined in my writing. An arsenal implies both storage and tactics. Sound here is not just aesthetic material but energy that can be deployed. Improvisation becomes its tactic: unlike composition as a long-term strategy, improvisation is about immediate response and constant adjustment. Building an instrument is like inventing a new grammar—it forces both performer and audience into the unknown. That unpredictability is the energy my sonic arsenal tries to unleash.

With the scientific/engineering aspect, the sonic arsenal connects to acoustics, physics, and computer science: from resonance and noise control to ultrasound applications, from speech recognition to algorithmic composition. On a philosophical level, it is not just a repository of sounds but of modes of perception. We rarely hear vibration itself; what we hear are culturally coded shapes like melody and theme. In that sense, instruments are grammar generators—they determine how we listen and make sense of sound. Building instruments means producing new grammars, loosening the grip of established perceptual structures.

In this way, the sonic arsenal resonates with what I described earlier as hybrid organisms: each instrument is a unit that can exist on its own, but also combine with others to form a living energy body. And "arsenal" here is not a metaphor for war—it points to how perception itself can be armed, manipulated, and reconfigured into generative tactics.

Maria Di Gaetano is a multidisciplinary artist and educator whose work explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of place, memory, and transformation. Born in Italy and since 2015 based in the UK, Maria draws on her background in scenography, art history, and education to create evocative pieces that span oils, watercolours, charcoal, ink, and digital media. Her practice moves fluidly between figurative and abstract modes, often reflecting inner landscapes shaped by personal experience and collective memory. Maria's charcoal drawings recall the quiet elegance of Victorian green spaces, while her abstract compositions delve into subconscious emotion—responding to both spontaneous encounters and reflective states. Her work is deeply informed by philosophical inquiry and the belief that art can articulate what language cannot. For Maria, art is Kintsugi: a golden repair of life's fractures, where vulnerability becomes a site of beauty and resilience.

Alongside her studio practice, Maria is a qualified teacher of Art, Design, and Technology, and an advocate for inclusive, student-centered learning. She is active member of For Art History, the Visual Artists Association, the Oscar Wilde Society, and Cambridge Open Studios and Parish Councillor.

Project Statement

In the era of AI and strong technology imprint, I am taking a step back. Back to go forward. Through my Landscapes of the mind project I am rediscovering the beautiful and mindful use of charcoal on paper, exploring zen visions of wilde landscapes of mind. I am healing and filtering my thoughts from everyday life, enjoying the recalling of Victorian times and sometimes the known and less known British landscapes. My landscapes create themselves from the charcoal strokes and aim to give the viewer a sense of silence, reflection and introspection in this frenetic world we live in.





— Interview

Yage Si

Your project “What Have They All Experienced” deals with themes of destruction and healing. What inspired you to use chairs as the central medium for this exploration?

Chairs are one of the most essential objects in daily life. They are closely tied to human presence and experience, so for me, they naturally became a metaphor for people. In this project, the chair stands in for the human body and spirit.

Can you describe the emotional process of subjecting the chairs to violence and then



performing acts of care on them? How did that affect you personally?

This work is rooted in a Christian reflection: human beings inevitably go through suffering and become deeply broken, yet God heals us through many different means. He gathers our fragments, brings us out of darkness, and restores us with love. My process mirrors this journey—I subject the chairs to violence, then stitch and mend them as a symbolic act of care. For me, it was a way of experiencing love as guidance, healing, and ultimately rebirth.

The use of medical gauze, bandages, and stitching techniques creates a strong association with the human body. Do you see the chairs as metaphors for people’s lives and struggles?

Yes, absolutely. This is a process of treatment and recovery. As I mentioned earlier, the chairs stand for human beings. On the path of life, everyone experiences pain and struggle, but healing and restoration also follow. This series is ongoing, and I plan to explore different forms of treatment in future works.



Why did you choose metallic spray paint as the final layer in this project? What does it symbolize in the context of rebirth?

The original chairs were wooden, so coating them in metallic spray paint created a stark contrast with their natural material. For me, it symbolizes transformation after suffering. Rebirth means not simply returning to who you were before, but becoming something different—stronger, and perhaps more radiant.

The photographs you included resemble old, fragmented memories. How important was the act of documentation to the meaning of this work?

The photographs are integral to the project. They represent memory—specifically painful memories. Painful memories often leave the deepest marks, and they are the ones that can most directly reach the inner life of the viewer. By including these images, I hope to evoke reflection and even positive emotional responses through the confrontation with pain.

Your work often merges fiber art traditions

with sculpture. How do you see the relationship between softness (fabric, thread) and hardness (wood, furniture, destruction) in your art?

For me, this duality is essential. It's full of contradiction and tension, which reflects my own personality—I often feel pulled between opposites, carrying inner struggles that I can only express through materials. Combining soft and hard, fragile and strong, destructive and restorative is almost like a self-portrait of my inner world.

What was the audience's reaction when encountering these transformed chairs? Did they interpret them in the way you expected, or were there surprises?

The audience spent a long time looking at the works and the photographs. In the exhibition space, there was a sense of quiet, as if people were thinking deeply. That was exactly what I hoped for—not necessarily that viewers would interpret the work in a single way, but that my reflections could spark their own.



Simone Sanna graduated with honors in Architecture in June 2022 from the Department of Architecture, Design, and Urban Planning at the University of Sassari (UNISS) – Alghero campus. Since October 2023, he has been a PhD student in the 29th cycle at the School of Doctoral Studies in Architecture and Environment in Alghero, with research on Generative AI and Architectural Design, included in the ICAR/10 disciplinary field. Since 2023, he has been a member of the UID “Innovation” Committee | Group on the Use of Artificial Intelligence and author of scientific articles on the relationship between Generative AI and Design.



Huijia Wei

You describe this project as a “conversation with your twenty-year-old self.” How has revisiting that period shaped your current artistic voice?

I look back on my twenties because I believe it was the most emotionally unstable period of my life. During that time, my emotions were out of control, and I also let myself go. I felt like I was feeding on the pleasure and inspiration that came from pain. My desire to express myself felt like a gift from God. My words, speech, and paintings all poured out uncontrollably, and I created a large number of drafts, which became the basis of this work. Seven years have passed, and I am now in a new stage after leaving school. I don't have a job, but I don't dare to stop, always keeping busy. Free time has become a kind of confusion. I fill my days with things but gain very little in return. For some time, I have been trying to keep myself healthy in body and mind. I try to control my feelings, afraid of falling into an emotional whirlpool, and I try to keep myself in a state of indifference. In fact, I have lost myself a little. So my current artistic style is a kind of pretending: I pretend that I am facing the sharp emotions I once had, but in fact I am using thick paint to cover up the waves of the past; I pretend that my mental state is calm and relaxed, but in fact it feels like I am tied up while painting, and my heart trembles with every stroke.

What first drew you to simplify the human figure into faceless, linear forms, and how has that approach evolved since you began?



Huijia Wei | Raising People Is Like Raising Flowers | 2025



My personal style has evolved through continuous learning, with Egon Schiele being my greatest influence. My current paintings don't seem to bear any trace of his style, but rather than that, I capture his way of depicting figures as tense and brimming with emotion.

From studying classical sketching to subjective linear simplification, to losing the structural curves of the human form, these gradual changes represent my subjective disentanglement of the concrete, real existence of "human beings," from a specific individual to a period of time, and finally to a momentary, vague feeling and emotion.

My characters, whether joyful or sorrowful, almost always stare expressionlessly (a common theme in Schiele's works). I believe that directly expressing laughter or crying with facial muscles makes the characters' emotions too one-dimensional; conversely, through expressionlessness, I can convey more complex emotions.

I also tend to paint figures that maintain their gender identity while being thin and unhealthy. Whether depicting my own story or empathizing with the viewer, the feelings of being in different gender roles can be very different. Furthermore, skinny figures evoke in me a sense of exerting all my strength to preserve the last vestiges of emotion. But I think this kind of character image will continue to evolve as the self-state changes.

How did your studies at Northwest University influence your path as an artist, especially in developing your own visual language?

Now that I've graduated, my feelings about campus are even clearer than they were during my time there.

In fact, I've always had an envy eye for specialized institutions like the Academy of Fine Arts, believing their faculty commitment and artistic atmosphere were unmatched. However, I attended a comprehensive institution like Northwestern University for both my undergraduate and graduate studies. While I was quite pessimistic about this when I was younger, I persevered and continued through my studies.

During that time, I encountered open-minded professors who encouraged us to explore art beyond our perceived boundaries. During this time, I read *The Interviews with Marcel Duchamp*. Through the relatively relaxed management, guidance from my professors, and extensive reading, I gradually escaped the grand, technically oriented visual language of traditional Chinese art education and moved towards a relaxed, personalized approach.

In my later years of graduate school, I no longer held the



same obsession with other schools as I had in my early years. As a product of our environment, I was willing to accept, enjoy, and utilize it. But at the same time, I lost some of my reckless energy. This acceptance felt like a compromise, and the lines I drew resembled the random curves of a moment when tension breaks.

Your work often reflects solitude, intimacy, and longing. Do you see these states as opposites, or as deeply interconnected?

I believe these states complement each other, or rather, form a cycle. I am constantly surrounded by friends; I look for small, positive joys in my family relationships; I am searching for a lover who will love me. I think I am inherently lonely, but fortunately, I am not alone because of my longing. In general, I value interpersonal relationships; for me, they are proof of my real existence in this world. But when my mental state is negative, everything feels isolated. I choose to give in to solitude, losing desire and naturally rejecting intimacy. It is exactly because these two are both connected and contradictory that relationships can continue to grow and hold such conflicting elements. I am always struggling with relationships—both with others and with myself.

Can you walk us through your process of transforming deeply personal emotions into visual forms?

This is both natural and hard to grasp. I have loved painting since childhood. Before I even understood emotions, I used pictures of pretty little girls to express myself, capturing joyful states of mind. At that time, I felt pure love and happiness. Later, like many teenagers, I began to turn my attention to a more sentimental way of living. Writing, though somewhat forced, became a window into my understanding of myself and the world.

Later, I received “professional training” in painting, a method I did not approve of, because it limited my perspective for a long time. However, painting became the quickest response in my mind. As I grew older, my understanding of emotion changed—from something like invisible but ever-present air, to something I could no longer live without. So, when I am overwhelmed with emotion, images appear in my mind on their own, and my hand records them. This recording is not like writing with clear symbols, but rather the strong emotion pressed onto the tip of the pen. The state becomes the image, and the emotion becomes the brushstroke.

You use both oil paint and oil pastel. How does the material choice affect the way you capture emotional intensity?

I will roughly divide materials into water-based and oil-based, and also, from my own view, into Eastern and Western. To me, water-based materials are Eastern. They feel more indifferent, calm, and gentle, such as Chinese ink, watercolor, and black ink. Western oil-based materials, on the other hand, give me a strong, direct, and even fierce feeling. To me, water-based materials are Eastern. They feel more indifferent, calm, and gentle, such as Chinese ink, watercolor, and black ink. Western oil-based materials, on the other hand, give me a strong, direct, and even fierce feeling. Instead of using oil pastels only for sketches, I now use them for finished works because they are both direct and gentle. They can hold everything visible on the canvas and set the tone for the whole composition. Oil pastels are like the highlights in classical painting. I love their free brushstrokes, which strongly catch the eye and express emotion on the canvas, just like my own expectations of myself, and they exist in a real and solid way.

Do you hope your paintings resonate with viewers on a universal level, or do you prefer them to remain highly personal?

I don't think resonance and personalization conflict. On the one hand, it's about whether my communication connects with the public's state of mind, and on the other hand, whether my communication is authentic. The former is undoubtedly true because people are products of their environment. My feelings are by no means unique to those who lived through the same period as me. Resonance doesn't come from me penetrating others' hearts, but rather from others digging out their own memories through my expression. Whether this resonance is universal or not is not particularly important to me. Everyone is different, and I believe resonance is a momentary eye contact in a crowd. As for the latter, I believe the fundamental tone of an artist's creation is their own. Even if this process involves endless learning or imitation, both the starting point and the result are personal. Personalization is authenticity: observing oneself, facing oneself directly, and recording oneself. And the self, in turn, emerges from the environment; it's just that the environmental elements we subjectively capture differ. When people capture similar elements, the “special” individual is no longer alone.



WHO I AM

A designer driven by creativity, often find refuge in drawing, using it to communicate new emotions. I'm **Tiziana Illuminati**, a designer with an academic background in architecture and design, working across fashion, visual communication, and interior design. My practice weaves together aesthetics and storytelling, ranging from textile graphics and packaging to 3D modeling and photorealistic rendering for interiors and objects. I collaborate with brands and artisanal businesses, translating ideas into visuals, surfaces, and spaces. Alongside this, I engage in digital communication—crafting visual content for social media and websites to enhance brand identity through design and strategy.

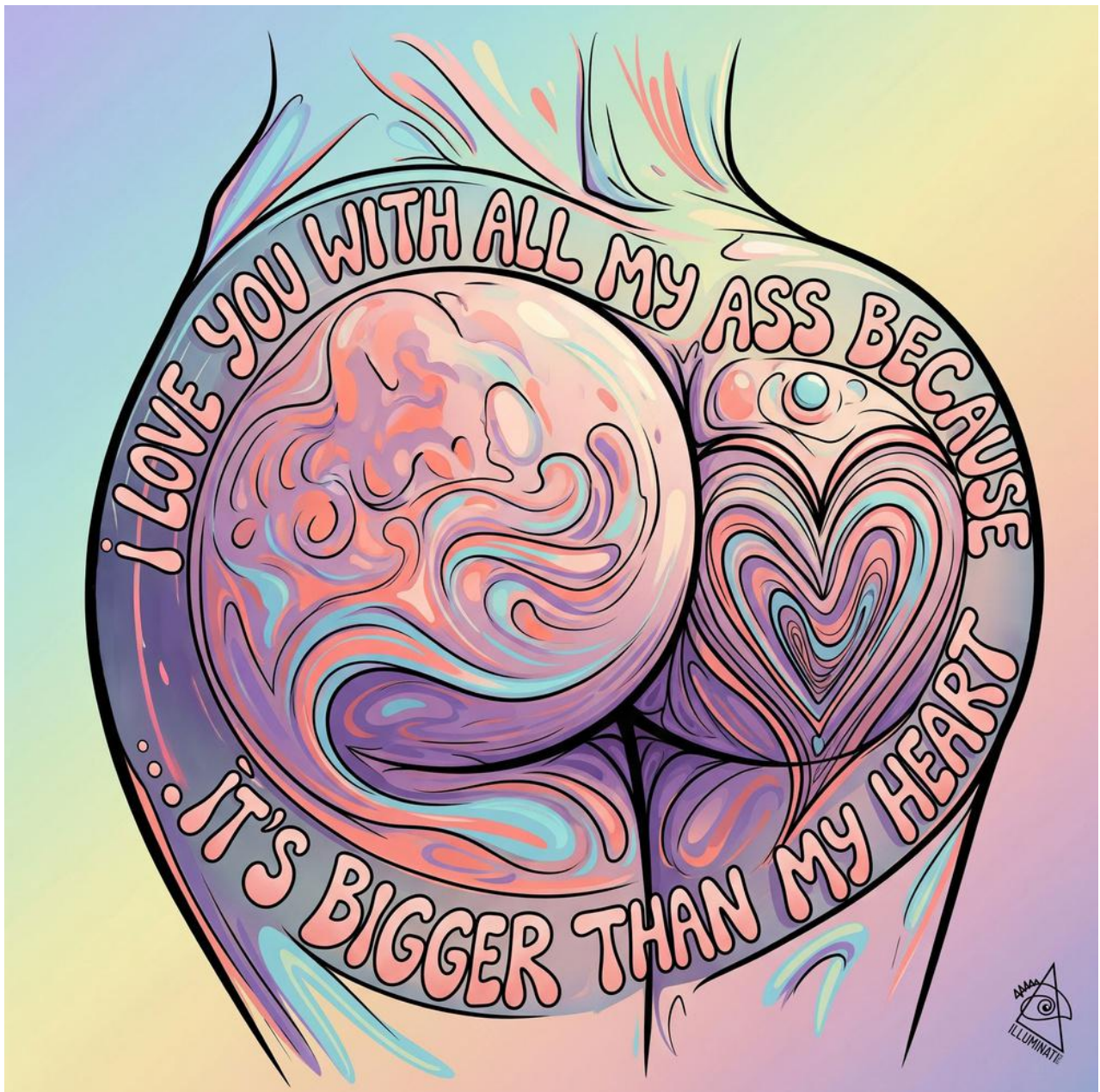
In my personal artistic journey, I explore drawing as an emotional language, a space where I challenge myself and cultivate a sensitivity aimed at expressing inner states through line and form.

Project Statement

After years of dedicating my skills to others' projects, I embarked on a journey of personal rediscovery. Art, particularly the exploration of pop culture and new digital techniques, has become my means of finding my identity and giving voice to my inner world. I don't define myself as an artist in the traditional sense, but rather as an explorer in constant search. These works represent my experiments and reflections, which I now wish to share to evoke a smile or offer a new perspective.

My goal is not to provide answers, but to pose questions through images that merge the depth of the themes addressed with an aesthetic that speaks of subtle irony and a sincere curiosity for the world.

Tiziana Illuminati | Modern Love | 2025





Tiziana Illuminati | Deep Blue Space | 2023

— Interview

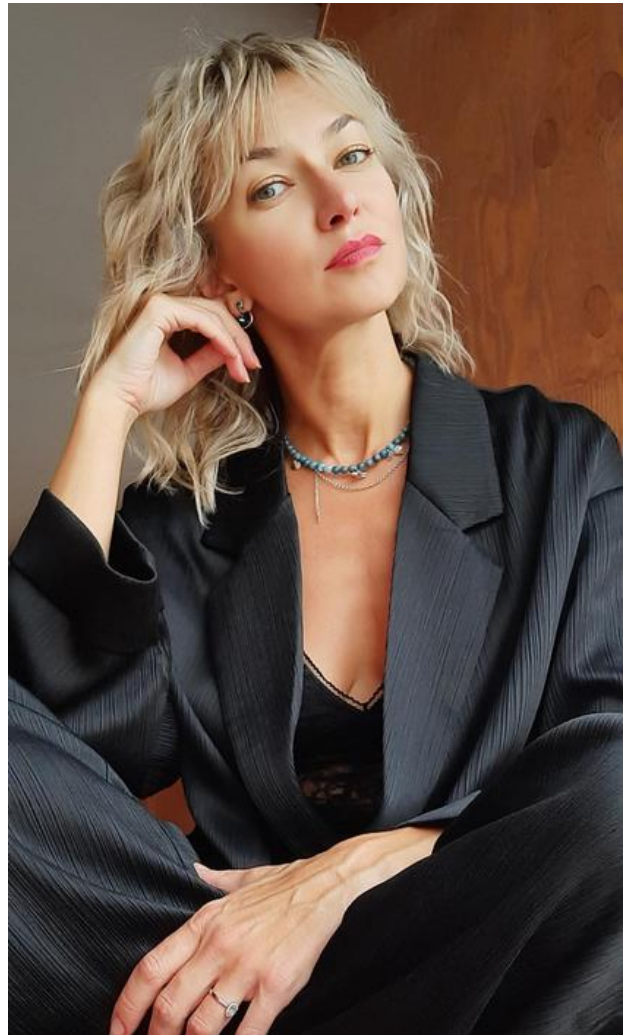
Marina Kovalkova

Your artist statement describes painting as “flight and absolute freedom.” Can you tell us about the first time you felt this sense of freedom while creating?

For the first time I felt the painting process like a flight and freedom on the plain air on Garda lake in Italy. The beauty of that place, where everything all the elements are in harmony and all nature is full of beauty, perfection and peace. It was in that exactly place I felt the force of the willing and dreams and realized everything is possible and all the barriers are mostly in our head. And I was confirmed in this feeling every time I took a brush or a palette knife and made my first strokes on a white canvas. Painting for me is a freedom



Marina Kovalkova | Red Baltic Dogs



because starting to paint on the white canvas you are absolutely free to fill this snow-white space with everything you want. You are limited only by your own feeling, imagination and mood. And, of course, when you create your own worlds, you rise above the physical world, and that's why painting feels like flying to me.

The first people who helped me feel and understand this were Sveta and Federico Perotti, who were my first teachers in Italy.

Oil painting is clearly your favorite medium. What makes oil unique for you compared to other materials you've worked with?

By using different materials, you can achieve various effects, set accents and dominants, add texture, enhance and emphasize, and make your paintings multi-layered. I often experiment with different materials, but oil paints remain my favorite because I believe they are the most vital, vibrant and versatile. I love the thick, impasto-like quality of oil paints, which allows me to create a rich and expressive visual experience.

You often use a palette knife and even your fingers in your process. How does this tactile connection with paint influence the emotions in your work?

Just like using different art materials, using different paint



application tools allows to achieve different effects and make the painting more complex. I often use different-shaped palette knives when working on a painting. Grigory Kuznetsov who is my main teacher is the great Master of palette knife and the main techniques and methods of use I tried to learn from him. Palette knife is one of the best painting instruments if a painter needs to reach synthesis or generalization, which are so important in the process of reality transformation to the unique art works. Besides, fingers, as you have already quite correctly noted, could help to get some interesting fleur visual effects, and rise tactile bridge to connect two universes - the reality and the new art world that appears on the canvas under the fingers movements.

Many of your works radiate bright colors and a sense of movement. Do you see your paintings as reflections of inner states, or as independent worlds of their own?

In a way, it's both. The serie of my works "Baltic" is absolutely independent universe, where the heros, scenes and plots came from nowhere. The sailor in "LOVI BLESNU" work appeared suddenly and after finishing. It was as if he had just stepped off a ship after a round-the-world voyage and immediately stepped into my work at the very last moment, when I thought the painting was already finished. At the beginning this work was intended to show the architecture of Sevkael Port, without any heros. However, the sailor decided in his own way to be the main hero on it.

In your view, painting is a "song glorifying joy of life and pure love." How do you sustain this positive energy in your art in today's complex world?

In my view, in all times the one of the most important aims of art is to keep the focus and attention on peace, harmony and beauty, however the world around is complex. Once taking

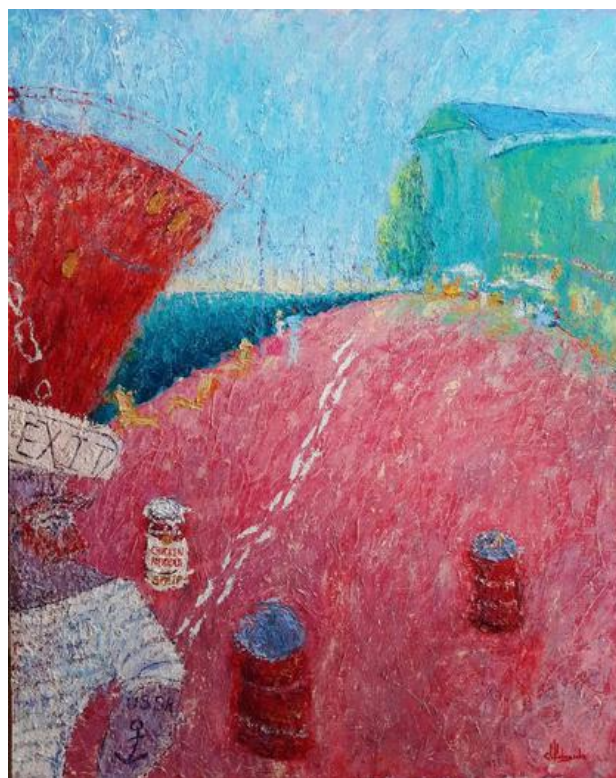
the art instrument into his or her hand an artist is responsible for the reality that he or she is creating. I do believe we are able to double everything we are focused on. Pure love and joy of life for me are the most beautiful things, the reasons to be and create. Thus, pure bright colors are very often on my works. Henry Matisse and his great pure colored works obviously have great influence on my way I see the world and convert it through my own perception into the painting.

You've exhibited in major art spaces like the Tretyakov Gallery. How has the reception of your work in such institutions influenced your artistic journey?

When I saw my works in the Tretyakov Gallery I felt one of my cherished dream had come true. My works were exhibited at the Tretyakov Gallery at the same time when Mikhail Vrubel's masterpieces were displayed in the adjacent gallery hall. Undoubtedly, this was a significant event in my creative life, which inspired me to create new works and explore new techniques. This is how the idea for the new art series "Mountains" emerged.

If painting is a "door to the fifth dimension," what would you say that fifth dimension looks or feels like for you?

In the fifth dimension, time is synchronized, and everything happens in the same place and at the same moment. I experience the same thing in the process of creation, when I am immersed in the process and focus my attention on something, the answer or experience is provided exactly where and when I am focused. This is reflected on the canvas. In the process of painting, as in the fifth dimension, there is no need to go anywhere for answers and experience; all the answers and solutions come naturally and effortlessly, requiring only the focus and vibration that you have chosen for the moment. And everything is possible.



Alexandra Kashina (Harufeel)

My name is Alexandra, and I was born and live in Russia. For a long time, I tried to fit into others' standards and expectations, but now I'm focused on understanding my true self. My art is a way of fighting to exist and a call for self-awareness and inner peace. It reflects different moods and feelings, with each piece being an attempt to understand and express complex emotions.

I create not only to share my personal feelings but also to support those going through inner struggles, showing them they're not alone and that they can find strength in my work.

Using different techniques and styles, I make unique pieces that reveal subconscious signs and thoughts that often go unnoticed. I believe art helps us get through tough times and gives us the strength to keep moving forward.





— Interview

Pavel Malakhov

Your artist statement speaks about the privilege of having both a body and imagination. How do you personally experience this duality when creating art?

Like many creative people, I easily slip into the world of my own imagination. Most often, while drawing, I find myself there completely. Working with what I imagine and at the same time directly engaging with the canvas, I almost stop noticing that my hand is holding a pen or that my eyes are registering everything around me - everything except the subject of my drawing. I don't feel the fan blowing on my back or the spotlight warming my forehead. I'm fully absorbed in the work, in imagination itself. And yet, it feels incredibly rewarding to return to the body: to step outside and feel the wind on my skin, to squint against bright sunlight, or to shiver under cold rain. Having these two very different ways of existing - the inner and the outer - I truly see as a privilege. We can live both in the world of imagination and in the world of physical sensations.



Many of your works explore the human form in a stylized yet anatomically aware way. How do you balance abstraction with realistic anatomy?

Good stylization, in my view, comes from enhancing what already exists in nature - lines that are meaningful compositionally or simply pleasing to the artist. In my own work I try not to invent but to gently emphasize the impression I see in reality. Choosing what to emphasize is not an easy process. I often rely on my inner compass: sometimes lines seem to demand to be highlighted, while others naturally recede into the background, leaving space for what matters most. Over time I noticed a pattern: I allow the most stylization in areas with soft tissue, while bony landmarks - the collarbone, knees, acromion - I try to render as close to nature as possible. This approach creates a balance between flowing, even grotesque lines and precise anatomical structure, forming a harmony of abstraction and realism.

You've worked extensively in the game development industry. How has that experience shaped your approach to fine art and illustration?

Above all, art for games requires structure and confident knowledge of what you're doing. Most projects are made by teams - animators, artists, game designers - and there is no room for mistakes that could create a chain of problems. For example, an animator will struggle if a character's proportions are inconsistent. In game art, nothing should be accidental or excessive: there should be exactly as many elements as are necessary to convey the idea, not one more. I think this practice has influenced my taste in my own creative work. I've learned to stop at a certain point, to accept a piece as finished. Earlier it was



harder for me to know when to stop; I could endlessly rework sections, asking myself what else to add, instead of focusing on what I truly wanted to express.

How do you choose the poses for your figures? Are they more often based on life reference, imagination, or a mix of both?

I love attending life drawing sessions. In a single session I can produce 20–30 sketches of poses and movements. They may be unfinished, but they capture the living line and energy of the body. These sketches become a strong foundation: I pick the most successful ones and refine them from memory, adding elements from imagination. This method sets some boundaries and limits, but at the same time it helps me avoid slipping into entirely invented, unrealistic movements.

You mention integrating AI tools into your creative process. Could you share an example where AI helped you arrive at an unexpected result?

I usually use AI in three ways. The first, and most common, is as an assistant. It's great at organizing files or writing simple shader code. In this case, surprises are rare. The second is for prototyping different kinds of art projects. Here unexpected results appear more often, but for me they're not the main value. I think it's much harder to achieve predictability with AI than randomness. Still, it can be fascinating to build something coherent out of that chaos. And the third I would call experimental research. Once I tried to build a game prototype using various AI tools: I generated images, 3D models, and code. In just a few hours, I had the first version of a game made by me

together with AI. A few years ago, this would have taken much more time, and I doubt I could have done it alone. That experience was truly striking - and probably one of the most unexpected results I've had in recent years.

How does your background in pixel art influence your line work and shading techniques in more traditional-style illustrations?

It's hard to judge, since I've never met a "version of myself" who draws people but has never done pixel art. My guess is that the influence is minimal, because they are two very different poles of visual art. Perhaps that's why I enjoy working with plastic forms and the human figure, where lines can be sketched freely, guided by feeling. Pixel art, in contrast, demands precision, accuracy, and calculation. Maybe alternating between these two opposite styles is what allows me to enjoy both. If I get tired of one direction, I can focus on the other. This variety of paths makes moving forward easier and freer.

In your opinion, what role should technology play in the evolution of visual storytelling?

We've all witnessed the "inflation" of simply making a good-looking image. Just four years ago, finding a striking illustration could amaze us, and we might even thank the artist with a comment or a like. Now we live in a world where AI services can generate finished works that match that level of polish, but in much larger quantities. What becomes truly significant are works in which the artist fills the image with personal meaning and experience, using AI only as a tool. When making a "beautiful picture" became so easy, artists had to become more ambitious - focusing on ideas, messages, and the experiences they want to share with the viewer. Perhaps the era of "just pretty images" is fading, and artists will have to seek new forms of expression - including larger projects created in collaboration not only with people, but with whole teams of AI agents.



Magdalena Żukowska, known online as MZK.designs, is a Polish artist currently based in Milan, Italy. After years in the fast-paced world of product management, she turned to painting as a way to reconnect with creativity and balance. Art has always been present in her life, from childhood crafts to the colorful canvases she now creates.

Her work blends tranquility with playfulness, inviting viewers into spaces of calm while sparking memories of joy and innocence. Colors and whimsical figures run through her paintings, inspired by the idea that as children we embraced color fearlessly, yet as adults we often forget its power to lift and inspire us. For Magdalena, art is both a return to that childlike wonder and a reminder that peace can be found in simple, everyday moments.

She has exhibited at Le Biciclette in Milan, and continues to share her work with a growing audience through her Etsy shop and Instagram.

Project Statement

My paintings live at the intersection of calmness and playfulness. They are born from a desire to slow down, to hold onto the simple joys of life, and to reconnect with the childlike wonder we often leave behind as adults.

I draw inspiration from everyday moments and from the nostalgia of childhood - those warm, fleeting memories that stay with us and shape who we are. Through colors and whimsical characters, I try to capture the lightness of being, a sense of tranquility mixed with a spark of fun.

I hope my art gives viewers a pause - a gentle reminder of calm, of joy, of the colorful magic we once embraced so easily. Each piece is meant to be lived with, to bring comfort, and to remind us that serenity and play can coexist beautifully in our lives.



Magdalena Żukowska | Sweet Idleness | 2024



Magdalena Zukowska | Flying Away | 2024



Magdalena Zukowska | Memories Kept Close | 2024

— Interview

Monika Molloholli

Can you tell us more about your journey as a self-taught artist? What first inspired you to start painting?

As I mentioned before I was born in Albania and I am a self-taught painter. I didn't attend any academies or painting courses, but since I was a little girl I have always loved spending my free time drawing and admiring the paintings of my uncle (a well-known Albanian painter) who instilled in me a passion for this wonderful art, painting and music. For me painting is a way to communicate without words. It allows me to express feelings and desires through shapes and colors – desires that can be difficult to express verbally. It's a way to completely free my mind and express myself freely and naturally. Painting is very important to me because it



allows me to express my feelings and strengthen my character. Painting increases my self-confidence and helps me be happy.

Your works often use strong contrasts of black, red and white. What do these colors mean to you?

For me the color black in my paintings has many meanings: fear, pain, mourning, mystery, sadness, and at the same time it represents elegance, authority, power and depth. It depends on how you view a painting (positive or negative).

The color red signifies passion, love, energy, strength, power but also anger, danger, and violence. For me red represents the strength of my life, my heart and the warmth of relationship. Red draws the eye and expresses the joy within me.

White for me means purity, innocence, peace and tranquility, simplicity and light within me, within my soul.

Many of your paintings feature women – sometimes abstract, sometimes symbolic. What message do you want to convey through these feminine figures?

For me the female figure means breaking down prejudices, and fighting gender inequality and difference. In Middle Ages Art period, women were seen as sacred figures like the Virgin Mary, while during the Renaissance period they were seen as beauty, vital force and love. Today, in my opinion, it represents civil rights. A woman must be fully free to live her physical and sexual essence,



Monika Molloholli | Viola's Beauty | 2024



her femininity free from the prejudice that always accompanies it. It goes without saying that we women have not fully achieved equality, even when women are still killed, raped or brutally beaten today.

I would like to quote a line from Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud: The man who loves many women knows women. The man who loves one woman knows love.

How did you develop your signature minimalist yet expressive style?

This style has turned my life upside down, or rather my existence. Becoming a minimalist has improved my life in so many ways. I have fallen in love with this style. It gives me so much energy, so much strength, and improves my life by reducing daily stress. The minimalist yet expressive style makes me happy. For me, it's not a style, it's a way of being, against noise and visual clutter. For me this style means purity, serenity, silence, eternity.

You have exhibited in many cities around the world – Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Rome, Florence, Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, Milan. Which exhibition was the most memorable for you and why?

This is not an easy question for me. Each performance left an indelible mark on my soul, it was a pure, unforgettable emotion. But most memorable for me is my performance in Milan and Miami, where I performed with my daughters Viola and Virginia: each of us presented her own painting. Performing in Milan with the two of them made me feel alive. It was an unforgettable night that will forever remain in the memory of the three of us. Every time we saw our paintings on that large screen, it was as if a ray of light illuminated the entire square, and the music in the background touched our souls. It was such an intense experience that time seemed to have stood still. It was like a "wave of energies" or like a "firework of images" and it was "breathtaking", "magical" and

"transcendent", so all of this made those moments more vivid. The other memorable performance for the three of us was also this one in Miami. Unfortunately, we weren't there and followed the entire event live online. Seeing our paintings on those wonderful little trains along with other people's works was a wonderful and exciting thing. The Miami exhibition was the true artistic mastery of people from all over the world.

What role does symbolism play in your work? For example lips, hands, and silhouettes appear frequently.

For me, symbolism in my work means exploring the artist's inner, subjective and spiritual world. Through symbolism, I reveal my emotions, sensations, deepest thoughts, and the secrets within me. Lips are a symbol of sensuality, attraction and seduction – or emotional wounds and the power of words. Hands mean creation, power, love, faith, hate, hope, prayer. Hands represent the human capacity to love, hate, create, or destroy someone or something. The silhouette is like a dark figure. It's a secret or a mystery (a dark side) that each of us holds within.

Do you feel your Italian background influences your artistic vision?

Even though I am Italian by adoption, my true origins are Albanian. Yes, of course, Italy greatly influences my work through its artistic and cultural heritage, which includes monuments, artworks and traditions, and is a constant source of inspiration for me. Italian art, through movements such as Mannerism, Baroque, and Futurism, contributes to a diverse and influential artistic landscape. Many contemporary Italian artists integrate tradition into their work. Italy has always been at the center of key artistic eras such as the Roman Empire and the Renaissance, leaving behind an enormous legacy that is reflected in modern works.

Finally, I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the entire staff at Visual Art Journal magazine, especially Lady Anna Gvozdeva for this beautiful interview. Thank you so much, everyone.



Aja Dandridge is a self-taught visual artist who graduated from Hiram College with a major in Creative Writing and BA in Fine Arts. While she's married to her written prose, she's always loved the world of art. Aja is from Cleveland, OH but her imagination extends far beyond the city's borders. She's an acrylic painter who creates striking color contrasts and interesting figures, breathing life into each of her paintings.

Aja has studied other artists through YouTube and social media to help develop her own artistic style. She often explores various painting techniques and experiments with unique materials, such as gold foil, crystals and artificial flowers. This method has allowed her creativity to flow freely without any limitations.

Much of her artwork is inspired by her love for Urban Fantasy books, Mythology and her own real-life experiences as a black woman. Aja's acrylic paintings have a large focus on Black Representation and female empowerment, all immersed in a backdrop of fantasy. Aja hopes to contribute to the growing need for more Black Representation and female empowerment in the art world.

Furthermore, Aja's award-winning artwork has been featured in several literary magazines, art festivals and gallery exhibitions throughout Ohio. This past February, her Solo Art Exhibition See Through Her Eyes was held at the Ashtabula Art Center in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Most recently, she completed four commissioned art pieces for the Cleveland Guardians in April 2025. The sports team made a commemorative plaque in Aja's honor and it was installed, along with her four paintings, in the administrative building of Progressive Field in May.

To learn more about Aja's artistry, check out her social media pages. More of her art can be found on her facebook page Fantasy Art of Aja Sheppard and her Instagram page My Art Studio @aja_acrylicartist.

Project Statement

I'm a self-taught visual artist residing in Cleveland, OH. Despite graduating from Hiram College with a major in Creative Writing, I've always been passionate about art. I'm an acrylic portrait painter, whose work focuses heavily on Black Representation and inclusivity. I've always wanted to create art that features women who look like me, who are strong and empowered.

Their intense gazes signify that strength and mysticism. Almost every painting offers notes of fantasy, spirituality and mythology, breathing life into the women portrayed in my paintings. When people view my art, I want them to see through their eyes and feel a wide range of emotions. I want people to feel a connection with my art.

That's why I believe my art aligns with UCI's mission to bring about a sense of community and connection through Cleveland's booming art scene. I've performed art demonstrations for the Euclid Arts Association and have taught online classes through my Facebook page, engaging with my community. Furthermore, the Cleveland Guardians National Baseball Team publicly installed four commissioned art pieces I completed for them at Progressive Field back in May 2025. My commemorative plaque was placed alongside the unifying pieces.

Furthermore, my award-winning artwork has been featured in several publications such as The Athena Review, CURA Magazine, Tint Journal and The Scribe Newspaper. Additionally, my art has been showcased at several gallery exhibitions and festivals throughout Ohio. These venues include the Akron's Black Artist Guild's "Outlined In Black" 2024 Group Exhibition, Actlocle's 1st Annual Juried Group Exhibition of 2024 and UNDERSTORY Gallery 2024 Holiday Group Exhibition "I Only Have Eyes For You."

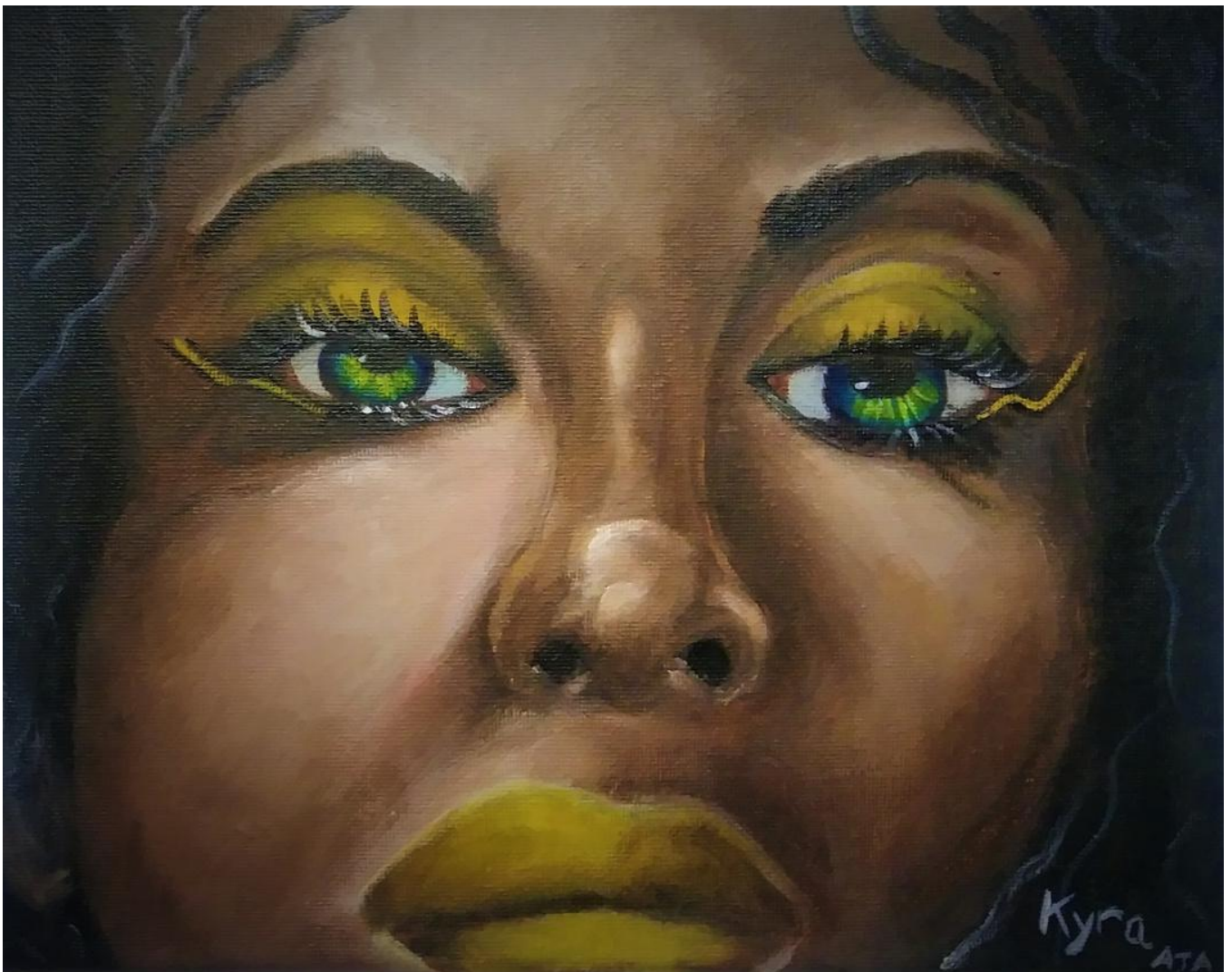


Aja Dandridge | 005 Judy | 2025



Aja Dandridge | Always Watching | 2025

Aja Dandridge | Kyra | 2023



— Interview

Marina Domogatskaia

Your works often feature women with blue hair and red lips, which you describe as talismans. How did this symbolic language emerge in your practice?

It started almost unconsciously. Blue hair appeared in my sketches as a simple way to mark presence, and I kept it... I love that strange shade of greenish-blue, I used to dye my hair a similar shade. Red lips are a minimal gesture, yet they hold space for femininity. Together, they became my symbolic code.



Marina Domogatskaia | Snake Pit Is Sweet | 2025



Snakes, smoke, and flowing hair appear frequently in your paintings. Do you see them more as protective forces, or as threats — or both?

Both. Snakes, smoke, hair — they all shift depending on how you look at them. A snake can mean danger, but also wisdom and renewal. Smoke can feel suffocating, or like something sacred in a ritual. Flowing hair might be vulnerability, but also freedom and power. I like working with these images because they don't stay still — they're always changing, like emotions, — like me.

Your art balances beauty with unease, vulnerability with resilience. How do you personally navigate these tensions in your life and work?

I often find myself moving between sensitivity and strength, fear and courage. Painting gives me a way to hold these contradictions without resolving them. Maybe that's what balance really is?

I push myself to do things that scare me — expressing myself in art and sharing it publicly is one of them, and it still feels like a leap into the unknown.

As a self-taught artist, what role does intuition play in your process compared to formal artistic techniques?



I'm learning to embrace intuition as my main teacher. For me, painting is less about applying formal rules and more about trusting what surfaces — an image, a symbol, a gesture. Intuition makes the work feel alive, like it knows more than I do.

You mention being influenced by folklore and contemporary femininity. Can you share a specific myth, story, or cultural reference that strongly shaped your imagery?

I'm drawn to female cultural images that embody duality — like Kali, the Hindu goddess who, despite her fearsome image, represents both destruction and rebirth, or Baba Yaga from Slavic folklore, who embodies the ambivalence of nature and magic.

At the same time, I find it fascinating how contemporary femininity still echoes these old archetypes. Women are often seen as alluring or dangerous, fragile or powerful — usually both at once. In my paintings, I try to capture that tension.

Travel and language seem to play a big role in your life. How do your experiences in Vietnam, and your studies of German and Chinese, influence your visual vocabulary?

Learning a language is like slipping on a new lens over reality. German came first — my father taught me, reading Grimm's fairy tales, and they

gave me a taste for beauty mixed with cruelty. I first started learning English from hip-hop songs, amazed by confident artists and dancers, dripping in rhinestones. Living in China opened a whole new world: guóhuà brushwork, incense smoke, mahjong tiles, neon streets. Now Vietnam surrounds me with chaos and brightness, a constant visual explosion. I want to fold all of it — languages, places, atmospheres — into my paintings like overlapping layers of memory.

In your artist statement, you describe your paintings as “psychological mirrors.” What kinds of reactions or reflections from viewers have surprised you the most?

The most surprising responses came to my Snake Pit series. People told me it felt like looking at something forbidden, yet they couldn't look away. One viewer said it made them think you always have to stay alert, never fully trust anyone — to them, the snakes were pure danger. I love that duality: the paintings are dark yet alluring, seductive yet unsettling. That tension is exactly the space I want to hold.



Zoe Zuniga

Zoe creates hand painted and digital illustrations and surface design for art licensing. Zoe has been doodling in the margins from childhood and worked in the visual art field as an illustrator and painter in Boston and San Francisco. She lives and works in Palo Alto, California. She began her work as illustrator over 20 years ago for textbooks, product illustration, and editorial work and lives in Palo Alto California. Zoe has a degree in illustration from Massachusetts College of art and design. Zoe paints fantasy and reality with equal gusto, with a fondness for fairytales, fantasy and children's subject matter. Zoe's Background as a dancer, Pilates instructor and movement educator shows in her vibrant energetic colors and designs.

Zoe Zuniga | Eve Awaits Adam – Sistene Chappel Ceiling Redo





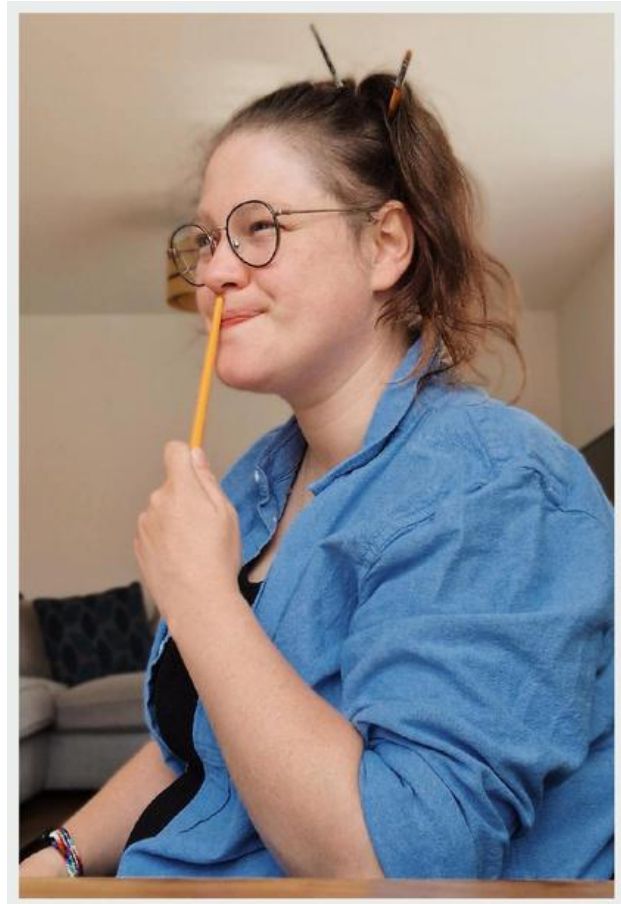
Brunch with Ms. Mablette Bailey Zoe Zuriga

— Interview

Ellie Goodliffe

Your works combine mushrooms with human emotions, often showing sadness or inner struggle. What first inspired you to choose mushrooms as the central metaphor for mental health?

I'm captivated by mushrooms, drawn to their distinctive beauty and remarkable ability to flourish in unexpected places. Each year, my sister April and I embark on mushroom hunting adventures in stunning forests. These walks are invigorating,



offering us a chance to embrace nature and spend quality time together.

In your statement you mention that mushrooms are usually associated with euphoria, yet you wanted to challenge that perception. How do you hope viewers will reinterpret mushrooms through your art?

I use art to highlight emotional pain and societal issues, promoting awareness and fostering empathy. I play with juxtaposition, as mushrooms are often linked to euphoric experiences and joy in pop culture. In contrast, I aim to redefine mushrooms, not just as symbols of sadness but as embodiments of it. This reflects nature's paradox, where mushrooms thrive and transform amidst decay and darkness, mirroring human struggles I've personally witnessed. Additionally, mushrooms possess a stunning complexity in their appearance—much like humans themselves.

How does your personal experience with mental health shape your mushroom artworks, and are they more self-portraits or universal figures of shared struggles?



Ellie Goodliffe | Insomnia | 2025



I want to openly share my journey with mental health struggles over the years. Growing up in a challenging environment inadvertently led to insomnia, depression, and anxiety during my teenage and early adult years. Much of my art reflects these personal emotions, serving as a safe space to explore, express, and empathize without judgment. Through the Miserable Mushroom series, I've also depicted other common challenges, including eating disorders, schizotypal disorders, and addiction. I see these mushrooms as universal figures, representing shared struggles that resonate with many of us.

What role does humor or irony play in your work? Some of the mushrooms are sad, but they also look slightly whimsical.

The mushrooms create an ironic cognitive dissonance, highlighting the clash between reality and perception. I find that humour helps resolve this dissonance, at least for me. So, in response to this question, I'd say that both humour and irony are essential elements of this art piece. I invite viewers to reflect on life's contradictions with a lighthearted approach. The whimsical appearance of the mushrooms is a deliberate choice to soften the impact of the real struggles many faces. It's not an attempt to mask or sugarcoat those issues but to make them more accessible, encouraging viewers to engage with difficult questions in a comfortable way.

You are also a team leader in a brewery and a new parent. How do these life roles influence

your creativity and themes?

I've put in tremendous effort to reach my current position in both my career and personal life. I'm confident and assertive, equipped with a range of skills that contribute to my success. This journey was built on overcoming broken self-esteem and a fear of confrontation. Self-awareness, continuous improvement, and reflection have shaped my communication, empathy, and approachability. I strive to be nurturing while encouraging exploration, qualities that serve me well as a parent. I take great pride in fostering healthy, strong relationships and find immense value in sharing and teaching others what I've learned.

Can you tell us more about your process? Do you begin with an emotion and then translate it into a mushroom form, or do you start with a mushroom shape and build a story around it?

The Miserable Mushroom process began by reflecting on what addiction might resemble as a mushroom—far removed from the clichéd image of a drunken mess or a partying joker. I aimed to capture the aftermath, the profound sadness that lingers long after the festivities have ended and the hangover has faded. This expression tells the story of a life wasted in selfish indulgence, escaping from inner turmoil. I approached similar emotions for insomnia and depression by sitting with these feelings for a brief, controlled period, using drawing, painting, and feeling to explore them. Other conditions were sketched first and then assigned their deeper meanings later.





Critical Review — Linyao Cheng (Lin Zi)

by *Anna Gvozdeva*

Linyao Cheng, also known as Lin Zi, emerges as one of the most compelling voices in contemporary ceramic art. Born in Jingdezhen, the historic capital of porcelain, she embodies both the weight of heritage and the urgency of innovation. As an inheritor of China's intangible cultural heritage of blue-and-white porcelain, Cheng is not merely a guardian of tradition — she is its transformer.

Tradition as a Living Language

Her mastery of underglaze cobalt “fen shui” brushwork and overglaze detailing is evident in each piece, yet she resists nostalgia. Instead, Cheng treats porcelain as a living organism — one capable of carrying cultural memory while simultaneously absorbing new rhythms of modernity. The series *Sequence* speaks to repetition and geometry, embedding motifs of fruits and vegetables into architectural forms. In *Flowers*, the delicacy of petals is charged with emotional intensity; each bloom is rendered as an entity vibrating between fragility and resilience, reflecting the quiet strength of femininity. Meanwhile, the *Hidden Rhythms / Enigmatic Shadows* masks demonstrate Cheng's boldest departure — porcelain becomes a vessel for psychological depth, where shadows and silence are as significant as form.



Linyao Cheng (Lin Zi)
Mask





Linyao Cheng (Lin Zi)
Flowers

Between East and West

Cheng's art is not confined to a single geography. The symbolic resonance of her works translates across cultural contexts, bridging Jingdezhen's centuries-old porcelain tradition with contemporary global aesthetics. By fusing folkloric memory, natural motifs, and sculptural experimentation, Cheng opens up new conversations about identity, continuity, and the adaptability of tradition in an era of global exchange. Her practice reminds us that heritage is not a static archive, but an evolving rhythm.

Linyao Cheng (Lin Zi)
Flowers



Brighter than White, Darker than Blue

Critical Review by Anna Gvozdeva

Staged at Fitzrovia Gallery in London and co-curated by Hongqian Zhang and Huan Zhou (ArtFlow Studio), *Brighter than White, Darker than Blue* succeeds in creating an immersive cosmology of cobalt blue. The exhibition is not simply a display of ceramic mastery; it is an orchestrated rhythm where objects, space, and atmosphere are choreographed to speak in unison.



Curatorial Rhythm

The show unfolds in three movements — Sequence, Flowers, and Hidden Rhythms / Enigmatic Shadows — each occupying a distinct emotional register. The progression from structured geometries to floral gestures, and finally into the psychological interiority of masks and organic forms, mirrors a musical crescendo followed by a pause. The curators' decision to situate porcelain works in translucent, white-dominated displays against desaturated blue walls enhances the sense that these objects float, suspended between tradition and contemporaneity.



Atmosphere and Spatial Poetics

The gallery becomes a space of silence and resonance. Small framed works punctuate the walls like fragments of memory, while the central pedestals showcase porcelain plates, vessels, and masks as though they were constellations in a cobalt universe. The window installation — with oversized floral motifs and layered porcelain objects — creates an immediate dialogue with the street outside, extending the exhibition into the urban landscape. What could easily have become a didactic homage to Jingdezhen instead feels dynamic, alive, and deeply contemplative.



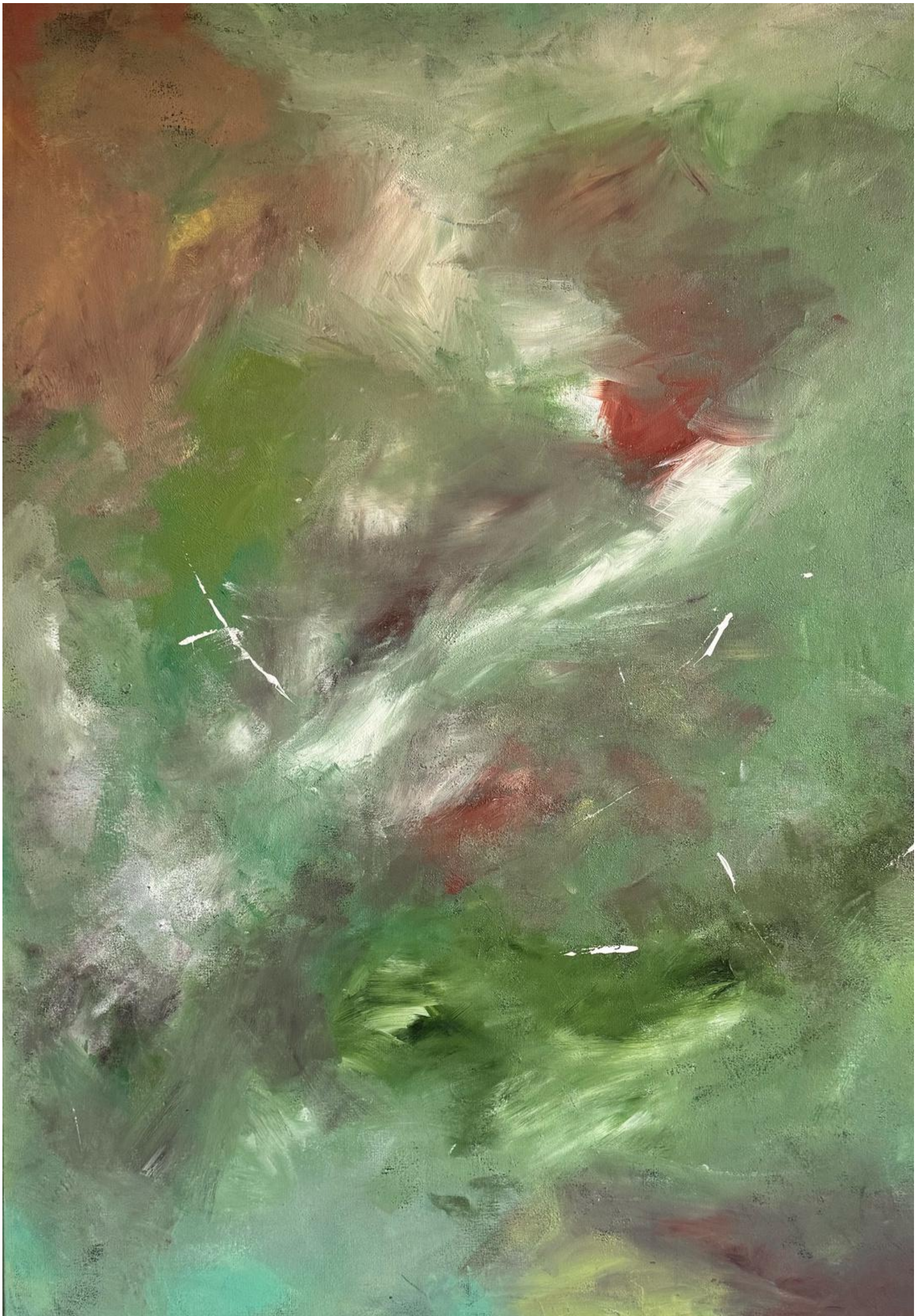
A Global Reframing of Porcelain

The exhibition's achievement lies in how it reframes blue-and-white porcelain from decorative tradition to conceptual art form. By presenting Cheng's works as vessels of rhythm, memory, and identity, ArtFlow Studio situates ceramics within the discourse of contemporary art rather than craft alone. It is a show that makes silence visible, fragility powerful, and porcelain — often considered static — vibrantly alive.

Natalya Safronova

Based in Voronezh, Russia, I have been engaged in drawing since childhood. Without formal art education, my artistic development has been shaped through independent practice and experimentation with a variety of media and techniques. My current focus lies in abstraction and landscape, where I explore form, texture, and atmosphere.

I have participated in group exhibitions in Voronezh, including presentations of both painting and urban photography. In addition, I have held a solo exhibition as a portrait photographer. My artistic work continues to evolve across disciplines, combining elements of visual art and photography.



Natalya Safronova | Return to Life

— Interview

Stavri Georgiou



You have a background in Media and Digital Media. How has your academic path influenced your artistic vision in photography?

Stavri Georgiou | The Sheep | 2019

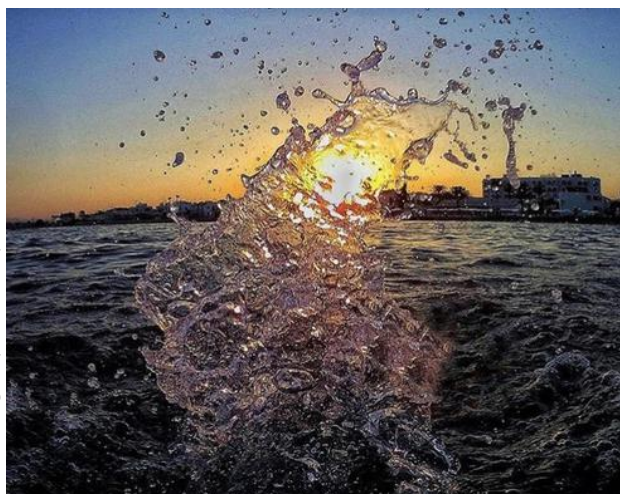


My academic background gave me a strong foundation in visual storytelling, critical thinking, and understanding how images function within culture and communication. It trained my eye to see beyond just aesthetics and think about the message an image conveys. That awareness pushes me to create photographs that aren't only beautiful but layered with meaning, whether in fashion or conceptual work.

Your portfolio ranges from fashion photography to more conceptual and artistic works. How do you balance commercial assignments with personal projects?

I see both as part of the same creative journey. Commercial assignments challenge me to deliver on a brief, to collaborate, and to adapt my vision to a brand or client. Personal projects give me full freedom to experiment, to take risks, and to explore themes that are deeply personal. I try to let one feed the other—the precision of commercial work strengthens my personal projects, and the imagination of my personal work makes my commercial photography stand out.

Mirrors and reflections appear in some of your works. What do they symbolize for you?



For me, mirrors are about duality—how we see ourselves versus how the world sees us, reality versus perception. Reflections carry a dreamlike quality, a distortion that can reveal something hidden or unexpected. They allow me to play with perspective and create layers of meaning in a single frame.

Nature also plays a strong role in your photography, from waves to landscapes. What draws you to these subjects?

Nature has always been grounding for me. I grew up appreciating its quiet power, something I shared with my dad who inspired me creatively. Waves, skies, landscapes—they remind me of something bigger than us, timeless and ever-changing. Photographing them feels like both a return to simplicity and a way to channel emotion into form.

How do you approach creating an atmosphere in your photos—through composition, light, or post-production?

Atmosphere begins in the vision. I think carefully about composition and light while shooting, because those are the bones of the image. Natural light in particular is something I love to sculpt with. Post-production for me is about amplifying what was already there—enhancing mood without overpowering authenticity. It's a combination of instinct and intention.

Your work has been published in Vogue Greece and exhibited internationally. How do these achievements shape your artistic

confidence and career direction?

Seeing my work in Vogue Greece and in international exhibitions was both surreal and affirming. It reassured me that my vision resonates beyond my own circle, that it can stand in dialogue with other artists globally. It gave me confidence to take bolder steps, to trust my instincts more, and to keep pushing forward in exploring where art and fashion photography intersect.

Photography today is closely linked with social media. How do you navigate the space between being an artist and a content creator with a following of over 12k?

It's a balance I'm still refining. Social media is a platform where I can share my work widely, connect with people, and even attract opportunities—but I try not to let algorithms dictate my creativity. I see it as a gallery space I curate, not just a place for quick content. Having a following is meaningful, but staying true to my vision is what matters most to me as an artist.



As **SEAMILK**, I distill the vibrancy and rhythm of South Florida into my paintings. From a place of immediacy and intuition my work translates the everyday into bold, simplified forms. By embracing a primitive and childlike style, I strip away excess detail to reveal essence—fleeting gestures and the pulse of color in the tropics.

Each painting is playful and contemplative; a lens into my movement through the world: attentive, curious, and open to the wonder of the ordinary.

I aim to create imagery which is captivating not for capturing reality, but for reimagining it—an invitation for viewers to pause, reconnect, and experience life with the same sense of discovery that fuels my practice.

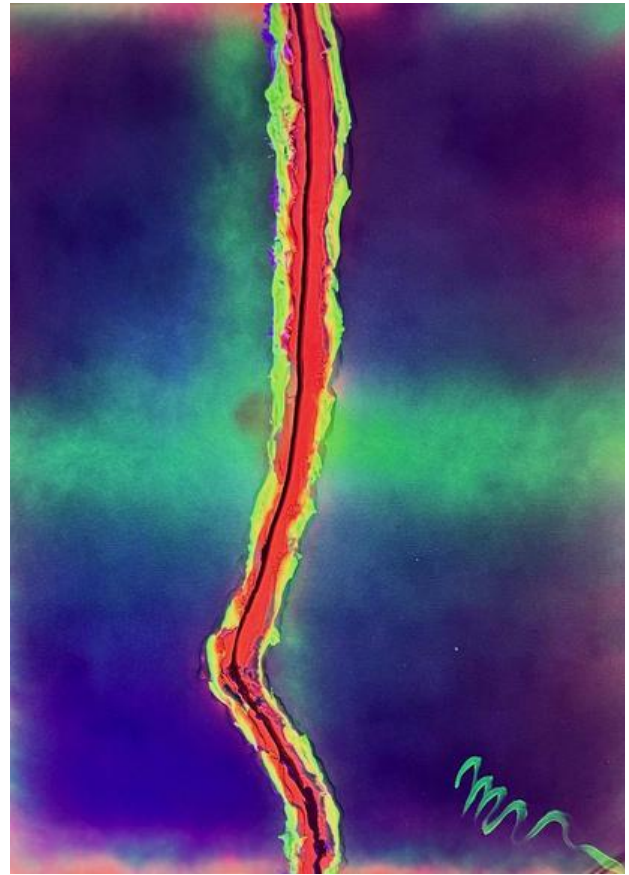
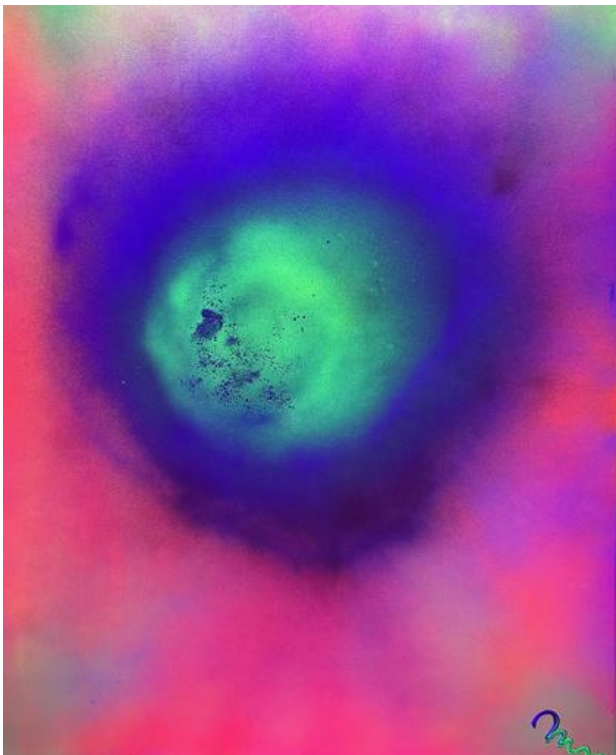




— Interview

Marc Noël Avatar

Your biography speaks of a life-changing experience after your car accident. How did that moment shift your perspective on art and creativity?



It is actually quite simple to understand. When I had my car accident, I lost all control and mobility in my hands and even in my legs. Even though my brain was still sending commands for actions that people typically find normal — like opening and closing my hand, writing an A, a B, a C, or drawing a circle — all those actions became completely impossible for me.

With the help of a skilled therapist, I began in-depth work to restore the connection between my brain and my limbs in order to regain my motor skills. As I progressed, I became aware of the complexity involved in thinking about something and then translating that thought into action through hand movements. I realized that I was not just drawing or writing; I was fully engaged in the precise moment when a pencil or brush made contact with paper or canvas, as well as the specific movements involved.

This experience was not just about the act of writing; it incorporated a physical experience rooted in sensation. Every single millimeter I drew on paper or canvas became a profound physical experience that transcended what I could see.

Through practicing Shodo, the Japanese art of



calligraphy, I learned to draw and write with an expression of breath, known as Chi, where each movement is accompanied by that breath. This made the experience truly special: it was not just about drawing lines; it was about expressing my breath.

You describe yourself as a man beyond all norms. Can you elaborate on how this perspective influenced your approach to quantum painting?

Yes, of course. I love the feeling I have—it's something I've experienced since a young age. I've always looked beyond boundaries, which often created challenges with my teachers, as they struggled to keep me within their limits and norms. When I asked "why", and they responded with "because I said so," it only fueled my desire to explore further.

This drive to venture outside the box and past those boundaries led me on a remarkable journey of recovery, even when doctors told me that healing from my injuries was impossible. As I began to develop my quantum paintings, as I have mentioned, I drew through my breath, through the Chi. When I created art, I noticed forms and creations emerging on my canvas that

couldn't be fully explained in words—it was something that had to be felt.

With every single stroke I made and every painting I completed, I focused on the feelings that arose within me. I realized that once a painting was finished, it generated a vibration that transcended what was visible on the canvas. This realization led me to what I call quantum painting.

You mentioned being guided by another dimension in your artistic process. Can you describe what that guidance feels like and how it influences the final work?

When I had my car accident, I also experienced a near-death moment. This experience took me quite some time to articulate.

What I share here is my perception of reality of course. During this transition in my near-death experience, I encountered a presence that told me, "No, you don't have to go yet; you have to return because you still have so many things to do."

I describe this encounter as a voice—a voice that conveyed to me that it was not my time to leave. Since that moment, I have developed a strong feeling that is difficult to describe. Often in life, I can feel and hear that guiding voice in various situations. Particularly when it comes to my paintings, I start with a specific idea or intention for a piece.

As I begin painting, whether using a particular technique or focusing on my original intention, I feel as though I am being guided from, let's say, above. While I always maintain control of my hand and my actions, it is as if I am receiving subtle suggestions for different areas of my canvas—suggestions about certain colors or specific subjects to create in certain areas of the canvas.

This is why the titles of each of my paintings are deeply connected to the creations themselves. They are not just titles; they carry a vibration that resonates with the essence of each artwork I produce.

Your work is not limited by classical techniques. How do you feel your quantum painting complements or challenges traditional art?

For me, it is extremely important in life to always offer a complementary perspective on aspects that are constrained by our perceptions of reality, techniques, and even laws. I strive to ask questions about why certain boundaries exist and why techniques are limited to specific forms. This is not an act of resistance; rather, it is about raising awareness and encouraging people to consider, "Why do you limit yourself to this form?"

Everything I do and teach reflects this approach. When I teach quantum painting, I often work with artists who have classical training, and they sometimes come from different countries or cultures. I invite them to showcase their techniques and share what is important to them. In doing so, I can introduce elements that are compatible and complementary to their approach.

This allows them to stretch their boundaries, whether they are classically trained artists or contemporary ones, national or foreign. Even if they wish to stay within their traditional techniques, they can incorporate new elements that will make their art even more unique. It is essential for me to offer a complementary perspective and provide a vision that goes beyond conventional boundaries often found in academia.

However, I will never judge a technique. Instead, I observe it and consider how I can contribute to it. My goal is to help expand those limitations, making the artistic process more enriching and enjoyable for the artist.

You've said your paintings evolve daily for the observer. Can you explain how the interaction between the observer and the painting works on a quantum level?

Yes, of course. First, I want to clarify that when we delve into quantum physics, we find that the results of experiments are influenced by the scientists or observers conducting these tests. This phenomenon is well-documented in science. Regarding quantum paintings, I notice this every time someone visits my exhibitions or purchases one of my artworks: The more they engage with a painting, the deeper their connection becomes. Initially, when they buy the painting, they perceive it through their own limitations, which



includes not just what they see with their eyes but also what they feel.

For instance, if I have an exhibition featuring six paintings, a visitor might start by looking at the first painting, then move on to the second, third, fourth, fifth, and finally the sixth. Once the visitor returns to the first painting, every visitor I have encountered at my exhibitions has told me that the first painting looks completely different upon their return.

I explain to them that by experiencing the other six paintings, they undergo a shift in energy and perception of reality. Just as a scientist's perspective influences the outcome of their experiments, a visitor's perception of the first painting also changes. Therefore, when they revisit it, they are not simply seeing the same painting; it has, in essence, transformed into a new, seventh painting.

This means that the insights they gained from the other five paintings enhance their understanding of the first. It evolves into a richer and more profound experience.

This effect is even more remarkable for someone who buys a painting and lives with it daily. Many share their documented experiences on my website, describing how their lives—and the lives of those around them—change over time.

It's truly beautiful to witness how a buyer initially purchases a painting for what it represents at

that moment, but as days go by, the painting grows alongside them. This illustrates that a painting can evolve with its observer, transforming as far as the observer allows.

How does the idea of feeling outside of the box come into play when creating your artwork?

For me, creating these quantum paintings is such a beautiful experience. Why? Because I feel so free while doing it.

When I paint, regardless of the subject, form, or intensity, each moment is filled with pure joy. Every second spent on my artwork brings me pure happiness. It feels as if something deep inside me is building, growing, and enriching every single cell of my being. The more I paint, the more fulfilled I become, and I am very grateful for this experience.

I will continue painting as long as that feeling keeps growing. I know my painting is finished when I feel a sense of fullness, satisfaction, and perfect harmony.



It becomes very clear to me when I reach that final stroke of my brush on the canvas, marking the closure of the piece. In that moment, I feel that it is complete and ready.

Your artwork is available on digital platforms like NFTs. How do you see the future of art in digital spaces, and how does that fit into your vision?

For some time, I have been observing and testing various NFT platforms. While I find some aspects of NFTs interesting, I am not yet fully convinced by them. Therefore, I have decided to put my NFT project on hold for now. This doesn't mean that I won't pursue it in the future; just that I've paused it for the moment.

In the meantime, I have developed a metaverse platform in collaboration with a team in Hong Kong. We thoroughly explored different platforms within the metaverse and, as a result, I created an active platform that features 3D experiences and allows users to navigate using special headsets. I am also integrating artificial intelligence to enhance the overall experience. I continue to offer people the opportunity to visit both my physical and digital exhibitions. Through my metaverse platform, visitors can view artwork they may have seen in physical or digital exhibitions, but in the metaverse, they will also encounter additional dimensions and artistic creations that I cannot showcase in the physical world. This is particularly exciting because the metaverse is accessible 24/7. People can visit, travel, explore, and engage with my creations whenever they wish.

For me, the objective of the metaverse aligns perfectly with my work in physical and digital exhibitions today. This integration adds significant value to my artistic endeavors, and I find great enjoyment in this process. I believe that when used appropriately, digital mediums can have a major impact on society. "Used appropriately" means that they should be constructive for art and allow viewers to still feel the artist behind the creations.

D'Marlyd Salort is a Puertorican artist who started her life journey with creative expression as a toddler; coloring the family home's walls with crayons, much to her parent's dismay. Though she briefly studied graphic design at Atlantic University, D'Marlyd is mostly self-taught as her interest in artistic mediums shifted towards painting and printmaking. Last year she participated in the first LGBTQ+ Pride exhibit at La Linea Art Studio where several of her works were on display during the month of June, an exhibition that was repeated this year with several of her new pieces. She has also exhibited at various locations on both sides of the Arizona-Mexico border, including the Nogales Art Museum in Sonora, Mexico, and is working on her first solo exhibition. D'Marlyd is currently based in Southern Arizona with her wife and dog.

Project Statement

I am a multidisciplinary artist from Boriken, also known as Puerto Rico, and my work is inspired by observations and lived experiences. I work primarily with acrylics and oils on canvas. I use painters knives, spray paint, and bold gestures for my acrylic pieces to express intense emotions. These works tend to come about rather rapidly as I strive to sustain the original idea as much as possible without interference from outside factors. For my oil pieces I use thin, diluted layers of paint applied hours or sometimes days apart to convey unstructured notions that require more contemplation. I am flexible throughout this process and often the finished work presents differently to the initial concept. While my acrylic and oil work tend to showcase explorations into my inner world, my printmaking focuses on storytelling, and educating viewers about my culture. As an artist I see myself as a guide, and my work as a path to inspire viewers to be in tune with their humanity should they choose to walk with me.

D'Marlyd Salort | People Have Me Bad | 2024





D'Marlyd Salort | Let Them Go | 2025

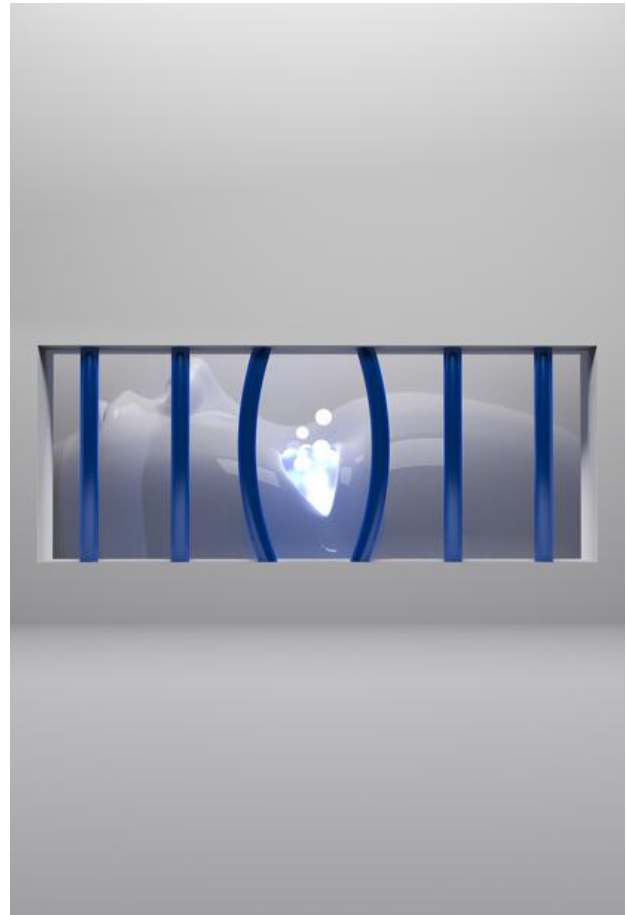
Daniele Palaia

You mentioned that your work explores the tension between reality and imagination. How do you decide which elements of reality to preserve and which to distort?

It's a theme that creates constant inner struggles for me. It has been a long journey, one that actually began with photography. For several years, it was my preferred medium because it allowed me to include surreal elements within reality. Over time, however, it became limiting, as my need was to explore an increasingly surreal world. To answer your question more directly, I believe that both elements must coexist and find balance. The most important aspect is that the result reflects the thought behind the work, that is always the priority. In my creative process, I always start with an idea, placing it in an everyday context; the surreal element represents the emotional side that transforms the scene. Following this principle, I try to maintain a constant "real anchor" in all my works, whatever it may be, and then build other worlds upon it.

Your background in advertising and art direction must influence your artistic vision. In what ways has this professional experience shaped your current practice?

My background in advertising has strongly influenced, and still influences, my artistic vision. I've always considered this experience to be both an advantage and a limitation in my path. On one hand, it gave me



Daniele Palaia | Locked | 2025

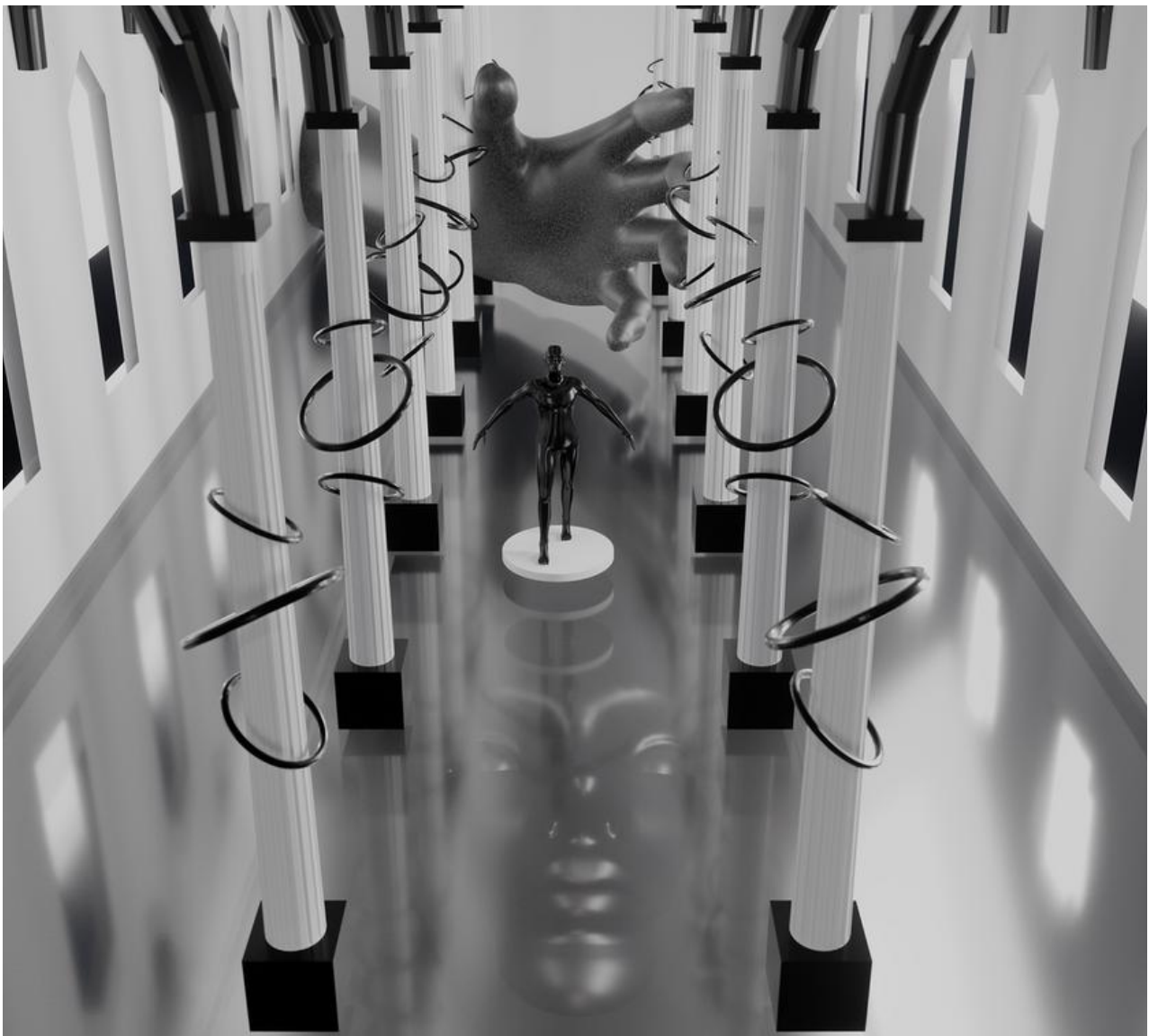
tools such as social analysis, self-criticism, and the ability to envision the overall impact of my projects. On the other hand, the constant necessity of communicating horizontally in a way that could be understood by everyone, was a significant obstacle I had to overcome in order to grow artistically and build a solid foundation for my research.

In *Where I am not*, there is a strong sense of surreal architecture and human presence. What role does space play in your artistic language?

Space is always at the service of the message. In some works, it plays a smaller role; in others, it becomes central. In *Where I am not*, space is as important as the main character itself. The architecture provides a physical dimension to a mental concept that, over time, grows increasingly overwhelming. In truth, the idea almost entirely resides there: space itself represents the state of being "outside of oneself."

Many of your works feature fragmented or abstracted human forms. What do these figures symbolize for you?

In my artistic language, the human figure is a mutable symbol, capable of embodying a thought, an act, or an emotion. It is not a portrait of someone else, but a



mirror, a reflection of the viewer, or of a self they may have once inhabited, just as I have in my own experience.

Your statement reflects on the search for meaning outside of oneself. How does this philosophical idea translate into your visual choices?

This is a very important point in my stylistic research, especially in *Where I Am Not*. The choice not to depict human figures characterized by skin color, gender, or any other connotative element is deliberate. The sense is that ideas themselves have no specific features: they simply exist, independently of the form they are given. To remain faithful to that thought, it's essential for me that the elements appear "impersonal," so that the message always comes first.

How do you see the relationship between your 3D models, canvas prints, and sculptures? Do they function as independent works or as parts of a continuous dialogue?

It depends. Some works were created to be part of a continuous dialogue, while many others function as independent pieces. As for the medium, it always depends on the specific work. The idea reigns over everything else, and the choice of medium depends on which support best allows the work to express its message.

Surreal environments often provoke both fascination and discomfort. What emotions do you hope viewers experience when encountering your works?

I always hope for a sense of connection. To me, my works are a true emotional diary: some have a lighter, more joyful tone, while others are decidedly more melancholic. What I hope is that, whatever emotion is sparked, it will later lead to a critical reflection. The thought that a viewer might still be carrying the work in their mind on the way home, and that it might provoke further reflection, is perhaps what I desire the most.

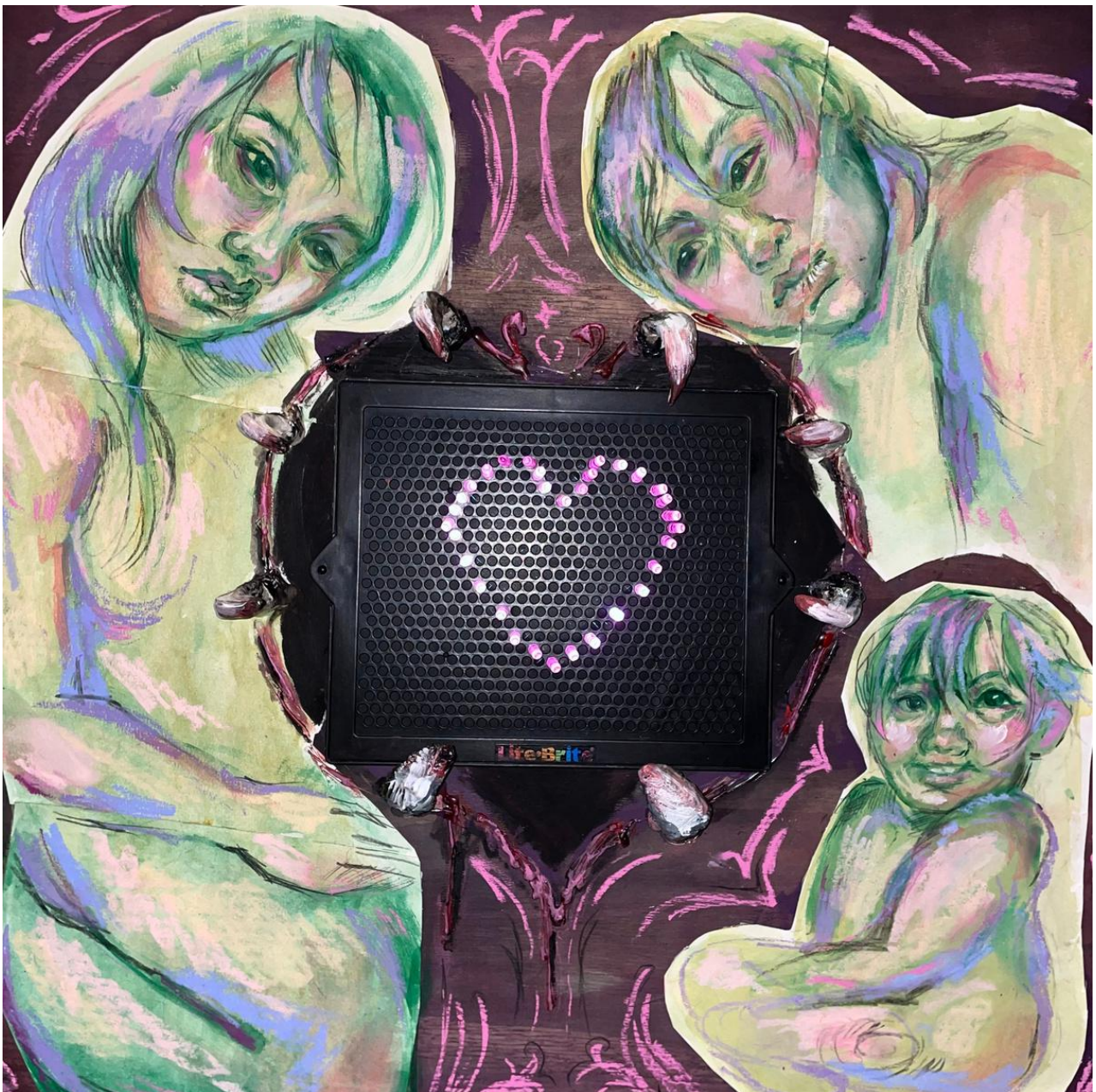
Xai Chase

I'm a mixed Filipino American artist based in NYC and NJ. I'm currently a BFA honors freshman at SVA in New York City. Growing up I was already surrounded by creatives yet my art sprung out of pure curiosity of self discovery. Mostly escaping to the confines of painting and art projects, I found myself so deeply connected with art from the very beginning of childhood. The trans childhood also added to my creativity pushing my creativity rather out of the "ordinary".

Project Statement

I focus my art on all the beautiful yet disturbing chaos of life blending my style with stories of both my own experience especially as an Asian trans man but the word of unique nature as well. I hope to present to the world art that helps the audience connect to reality— even if it's uncomfortable.

Xai Chase | Trans Childhood





— Interview

Gracija Grošić

You have degrees in both German language and literature, and art history. How does this academic background influence your artistic vision and your drawings?

Languages and art are my two greatest passions and for that reason they have a significant impact on the way I approach artistic expression and drawing - by encouraging exploration and refusing to limit myself. A dual-degree program itself opens up more career opportunities, but more importantly, the combination of art and language creates new possibilities in terms of creativity. These two fields do not exclude each other, rather they complement one another. Therefore, my academic education greatly deepens and stimulates my creativity, as it broadens my perspective and encourages me to see things differently, to connect ideas and elements that may initially seem incompatible or challenging. Boundaries often exist only in our perception, but not in reality, especially not when it comes to creativity.

What role does teaching play in your life as an artist? Do your students inspire you in any way?

As a teacher I strive to be a role model and inspiration for my students because I believe that at a young age,



Gracija Grošić | ŠKarpina (Scorpaena Scrofa) | 2020



it is important for children to have support in the process of discovering themselves. In school, they don't just learn; they also grow and develop as individuals. Today's problem is that teaching has become a demanding job because new generations are changing just as quickly as the world we live in. I try to keep up with innovations and make the learning process interesting and educational, but always with a touch of creativity. I teach German, but I try to give my students tasks that combine language knowledge with creative expression - like creating projects where they add something of their own, something original and unique. I often give them starting ideas to help them begin, and it's fascinating to see the whole process, how they gradually open up and put something of themselves into their work. I'm always surprised by how many different creations and ideas can come from the same initial guideline. My goal is to encourage students to be creative and to think outside the box. In return, I receive a colorful range of diversity, a sense of fulfillment and happy and proud students. There's nothing better than that. My students often remind me that it's important to stay childlike, to be honest and true to yourself, to explore the world and it's the same when it comes to artistic creation.

You often explore the concepts of love and the sea in your drawings. Why are these two themes so central to your art?

As a little girl, I spent my summers by the sea, and now



I can't imagine a summer without it. I'm fascinated by its vastness, its power, and its depth, which hides a magical world of plants and animals. When I'm by the sea, I feel calm, and it fills my soul with peace and joy. I associate those emotions with love, which both calms and uplifts the soul. I believe that the concept of love is a universal theme present in all forms of art and an eternal source of inspiration for all artists, including myself. Love is one of the most complex and powerful emotions and I see it as something that drives and motivates us. It's difficult to explain, but it becomes easier to express what we feel through drawings or any other form of artistic expression. Love is art, and art is my love.

Could you tell us more about your series "Sea animals" — what inspired you to create 33 drawings, and do you have a personal favorite among them?

Although numbers hold special importance and meaning for me, the number of drawings of the 'Sea animals' was actually predetermined by the space in my seaside house where the drawings are displayed. My personal favorite among them is 'Turtle'. Besides being my favorite sea animal, it is also one of the first drawings in that series.

Your series "We" consists of 225 works. How did your personal experiences shape this project, and what kind of reactions have you received from viewers?

The "We" series of drawings is my way of expressing love. When I draw, I give myself completely and show my view of the world, my feelings, wounds, but also desires and dreams. I wanted to show how our experiences can be transformed into a new dimension through art and how moments can be brought to life and preserved forever in the form of drawings. It all began with a single piece, created simply to express my emotions at the time. But soon after, I started five more, which quickly grew into fifty drawings and the

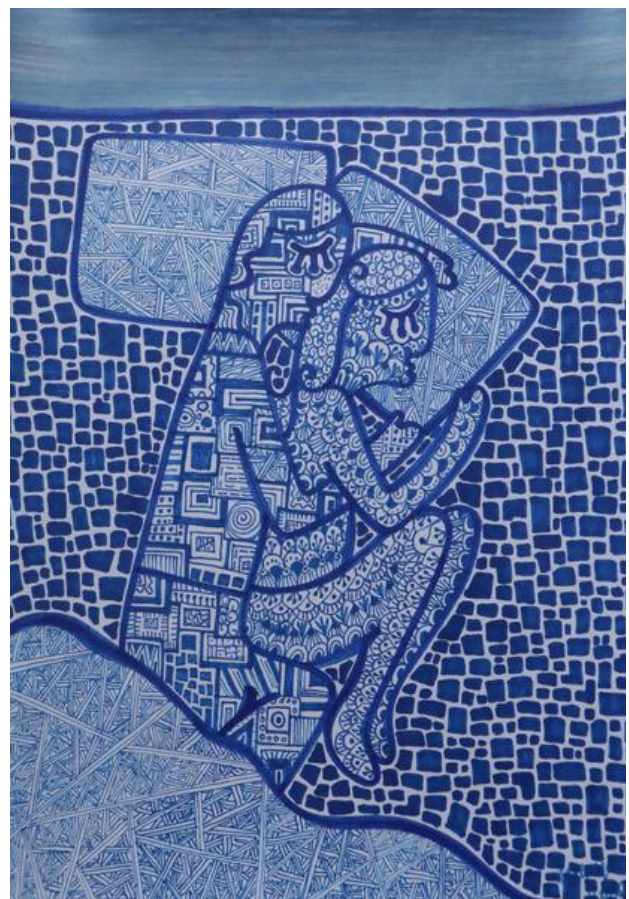
number kept rising, as I felt the need to express everything I was feeling. Viewers relate to these pieces too, because they evoke emotional responses, creating a shared space of feeling and reflection. "We" is all about love.

Blue is a dominant color in your art. What does blue personally symbolize for you beyond the meanings you've already shared?

For me, blue symbolizes infinity, freedom, beauty, depth, vastness and strength. It is the color through which I express my deepest emotions, mostly love. Blue is what calms, comforts, and gives hope.

You pay great attention to details in your work. What is your process like — do you start with a precise idea, or do the details grow intuitively while you draw?

I have a clear idea of the elements I want to draw, whether it's a figure, animal, plant, or something else. Once I draw the main outlines, the details come intuitively. I have motifs that I often combine and repeat, but I don't plan this in advance. Each tiny motif is special up close, but when viewed from a distance, details create a whole. I believe this is what makes my drawings interesting and it is something that reflects life philosophy - the little things are the most important.



Savannah Milton

Savannah is a Baltimore born artist who creates surreal work surrounding her emotions. Art having been the constant in her life has kept her steady and never led her astray.

Project Statement

These are pieces related to my emotions and how I process them.

Savannah Milton | Words You See





Danting Li

Your artistic statement mentions combining symbolic abstraction with pixel art precision. How did you arrive at this unique visual language?

I developed this visual language by merging my interest in symbolic abstraction with the disciplined precision of pixel art. My process often begins with breaking down a larger subject into its most essential traits—distilling complex forms into abstract yet highly symbolic shapes. From there, I translate these distilled symbols through the structured lens of pixel art, which allows me to preserve clarity and intentionality while also embracing a distinct digital aesthetic. This approach enables me to communicate meaning in a way that is both minimal and visually striking, creating a dialogue between tradition and contemporary digital expression. Ultimately, I enjoy this language because it lets me balance simplicity with depth, giving viewers room to interpret while still anchoring the work in recognizable symbolic forms.

Several of your works, such as *Coral Bleaching*, address ecological fragility. What role do you see design and art playing in raising awareness about environmental issues?

I believe design and art play a powerful role in raising awareness about environmental issues because they can transform abstract concerns into visceral, memorable experiences. By using dramatic and imaginative visual styles, I aim to amplify the urgency of ecological fragility, such as *Coral Bleaching*, and make these invisible or distant problems feel immediate and personal to viewers. Art has the ability to bypass technical language and statistics, speaking directly to emotion and empathy, which can inspire reflection and even action. In this sense, design and art become a form of



Danting Li | Familiar Yet Far | 2025

activism—bringing hidden crises to the forefront, sparking conversations, and encouraging people to reconsider their relationship with the environment.

How does your experience in branding, UI/UX, and motion graphics influence the way you approach conceptual art projects?

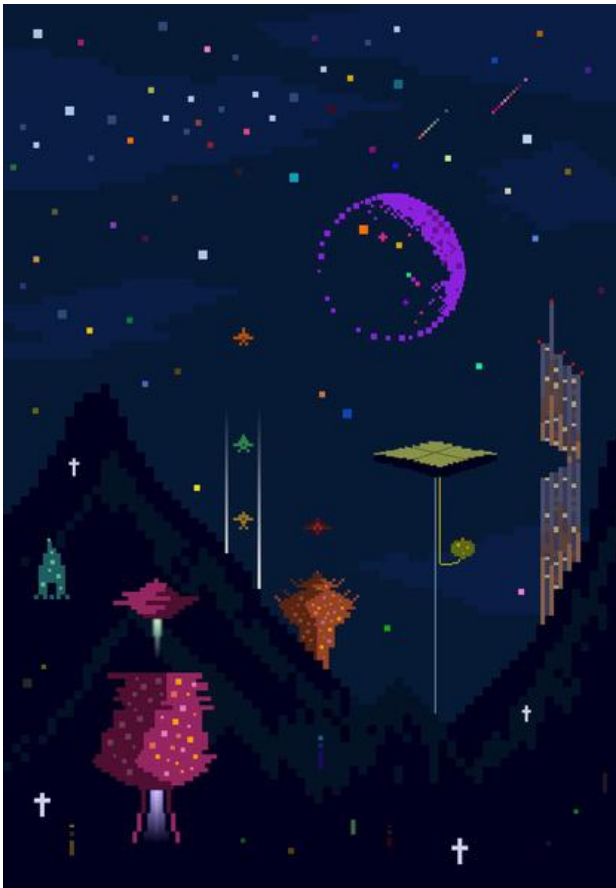
My background in branding, UI/UX, and motion graphics strongly shapes how I approach conceptual art projects because it has trained me to think across multiple dimensions—technical, aesthetic, and experiential. Branding work has taught me how to distill complex ideas into clear, impactful visuals while also balancing client needs, audience perception, and practical constraints like budget. UI/UX has sharpened my ability to design with empathy, always considering how people interact with and interpret visual language. Motion graphics, on the other hand, expanded my understanding of rhythm, pacing, and storytelling in a dynamic way. When I shift to conceptual art, these experiences allow me to explore ideas with both creative freedom and disciplined design thinking, giving me the flexibility to push beyond surface aesthetics while still communicating meaning in an engaging, accessible way.

Collaboration is central in design practice. How do you navigate the differences between working on commercial projects for clients and personal conceptual artworks?

When working on commercial projects, collaboration naturally involves balancing the perspectives of multiple stakeholders—clients, business goals, budgets, and technical limitations all play a central role, and the client's vision



Danting Li | A Road To Nowhere | 2025



ultimately guides the direction. This requires me to adapt, negotiate, and design within constraints while still finding creative solutions. In contrast, personal conceptual artworks give me the freedom to work from a place of pure expression, where the focus is entirely on the idea and how effectively I can convey it to an audience without external limitations. The two approaches are very different, but I see value in both: commercial projects sharpen my problem-solving and adaptability, while personal work allows me to explore deeper artistic questions and push the boundaries of my own voice.

As both a designer and co-founder at SparksGlo, how do you manage the tension between creative freedom and business goals?

As a co-founder, I recognize that business goals are vital because they directly impact the company's growth and sustainability, so they often need to be prioritized first. At the same time, I believe creative freedom is essential—not only for artistic integrity but also for driving innovation and long-term value. If we only chase short-term business objectives, we risk losing the originality that makes our work stand out. I try to manage this tension by treating it as a balancing act: respecting deadlines, budgets, and client needs while still protecting space for experimentation and artistic exploration. In my experience, the strongest outcomes often emerge when creative freedom and business strategy inform each other, resulting in work that is both commercially successful and artistically meaningful.

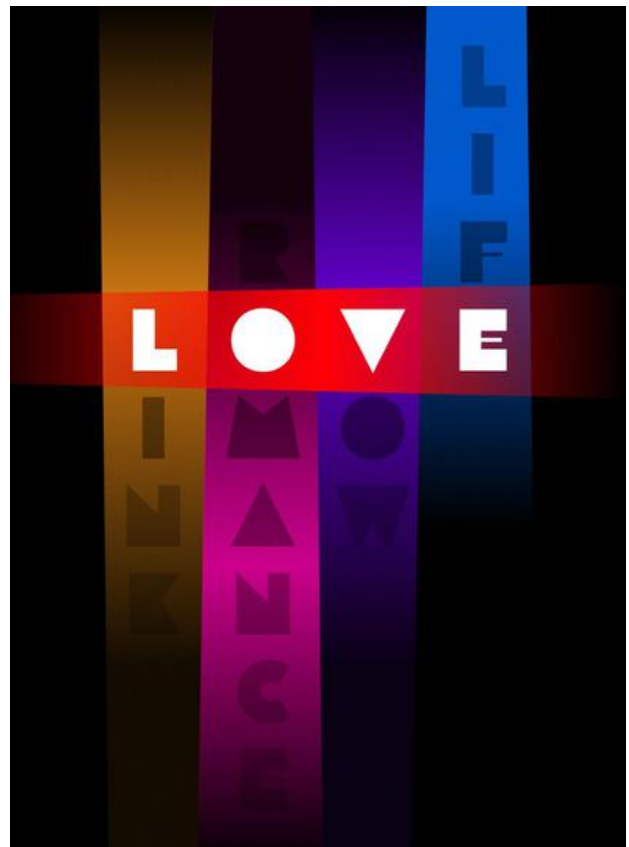
Your works often invite reflection on human vulnerability and resilience. Do you see your art more as a mirror of your personal experiences or as a universal

commentary?

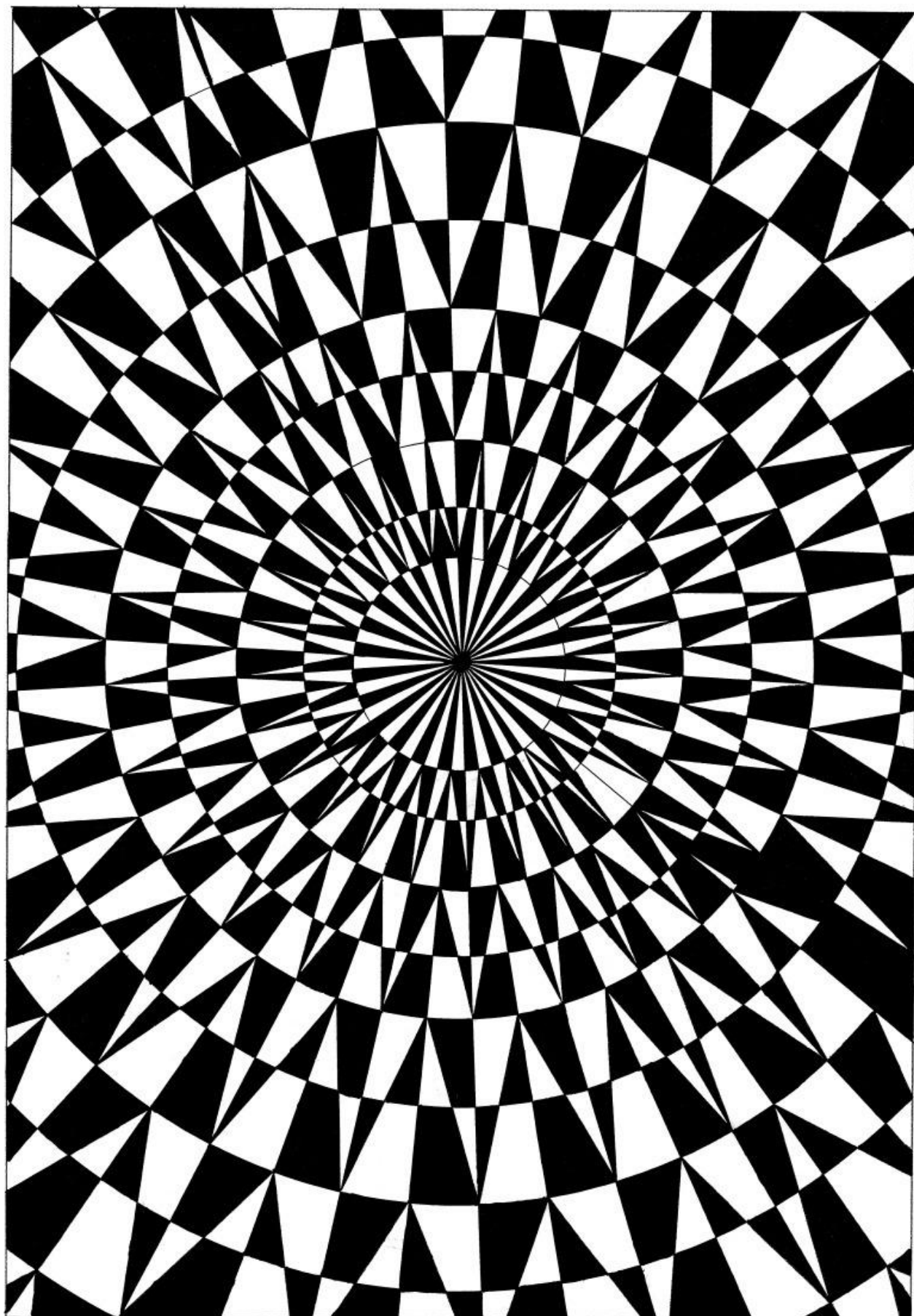
I see my art as both a universal commentary and, at times, a reflection of my personal journey. Works like *Coral Bleaching*, *Her Pain*, *The Bleeding Hearts*, *Lit by Love*, and *Behind Love* are created to address collective concerns and emotions, inviting viewers to reflect on human vulnerability and resilience in a broader, shared context. At the same time, pieces such as *Neon Dreamscape*, *A Road to Nowhere*, *Familiar Yet Far*, and *Embrace the Infinite* are more personal in nature, shaped by my own memories, dreams, and inner reflections. In these, I translate my imagination and lived experiences into visual form. Together, these two approaches allow my practice to oscillate between the intimate and the universal—using art both as a mirror of my inner world and as a platform to speak to themes that resonate across humanity.

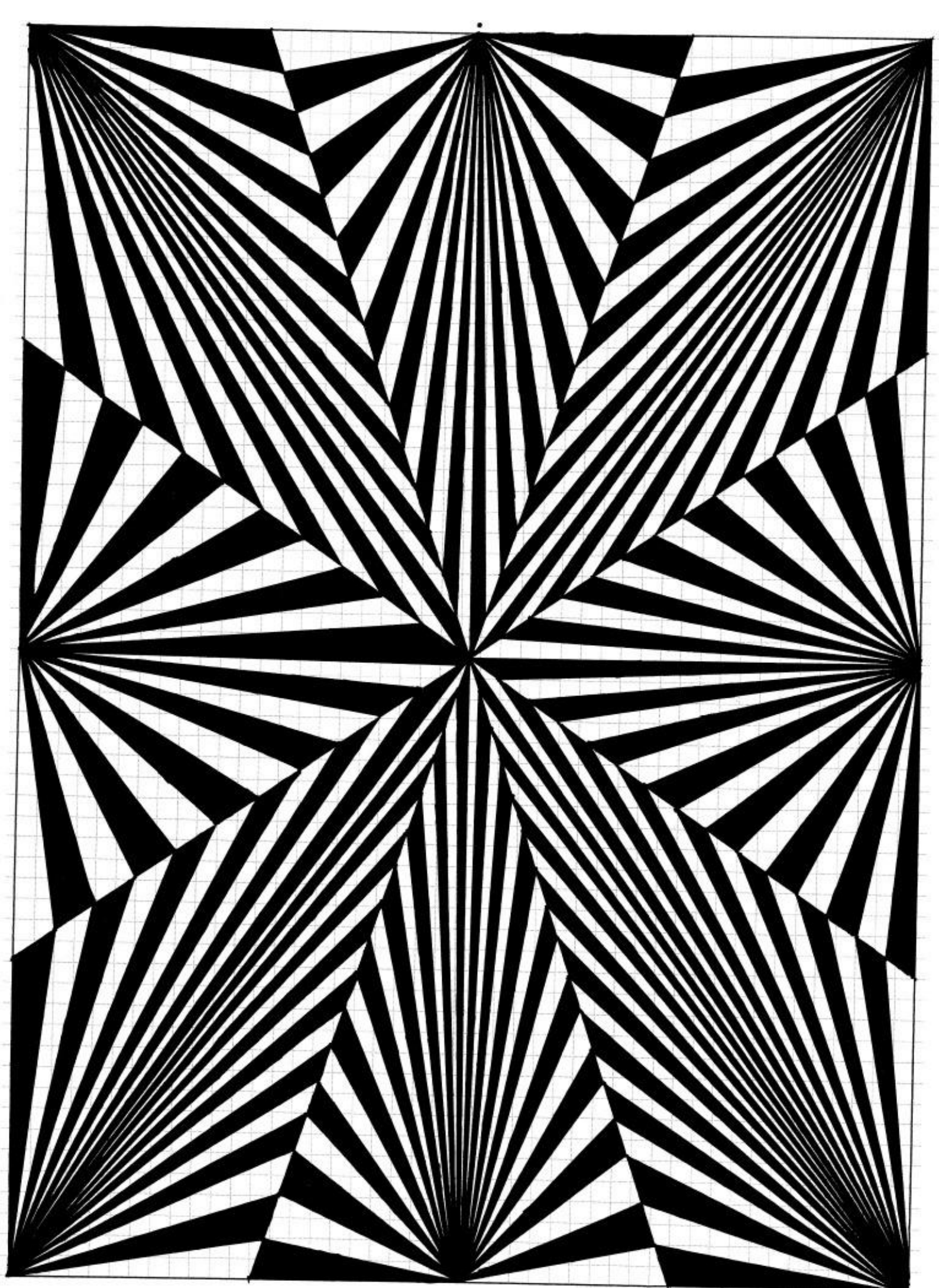
What role does color theory play in shaping the emotional resonance of your works?

Color theory plays a central role in how I shape the emotional impact of my works. I often employ strong contrasts to guide the viewer's eye and highlight the areas I want them to focus on, using color almost as a form of visual punctuation. Beyond directing attention, I see color as a powerful emotional language—capable of heightening mood, tension, or empathy. For example, in *Her Pain*, I use deep red tones to intensify the raw emotion of the tears, while in *The Bleeding Hearts*, red becomes symbolic of both fragility and suffering, evoking the visceral presence of blood. Through these choices, color becomes more than an aesthetic decision; it is a deliberate tool to amplify the narrative and immerse viewers in the psychological and emotional landscape of each piece.



I am **Ifrah Noor** from Pakistan. I use 'ij' as mt artist name. I draw monochrome illusion patterns with lines and shapes.





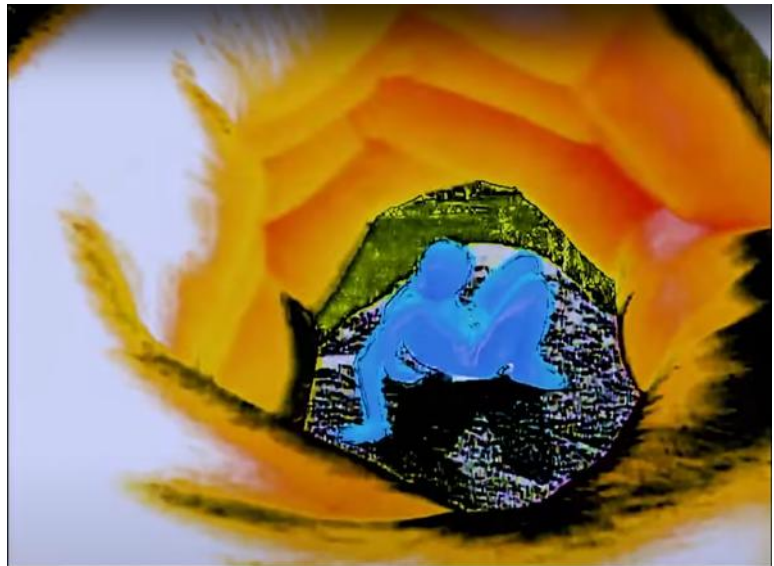
Critical Review of Maxim Frumkin (Max Naum)

by Anna Gvozdeva

Maxim Frumkin, also known as Max Naum, stands at the intersection of contemporary visual art and experimental media. His artistic practice—art video, photography, and mixed media—reflects a sustained inquiry into the instability of identity and the fractured nature of memory. What distinguishes Frumkin is his ability to merge highly conceptual frameworks with an affective immediacy, drawing viewers into works that are both intellectually rigorous and viscerally unsettling.

Frumkin's art videos and installations employ repetition, fragmentation, and disruption, echoing the mechanisms of memory itself—unreliable, looping, and often ruptured. Unlike artists who rely solely on shock or spectacle, Frumkin creates subtle disorientations, compelling viewers to confront the porous boundaries between presence and absence, performance and authenticity.

Maxim Frumkin
Coin Celleil



His references to Magritte, Nam June Paik, and Gregory Crewdson are not mere citations but rather points of departure: Magritte's destabilization of image, Paik's playful yet critical exploration of media, and Crewdson's staged ambiguity are absorbed into a practice that refuses closure and certainty.



Maxim Frumkin
Yamashiro LIVE!
2023



Maxim Frumkin | Yamashiro LIVE! | 2023

An art video such as *Yamashiro LIVE!* exemplifies his exploration of shifting personas and the performativity of identity. Here, Frumkin treats the self not as fixed but as something perpetually staged and revised. Similarly, *Coin Celleil* explores memory as a fragmented architecture, where the viewer becomes a participant in piecing together a past that never fully coheres. Both works highlight his capacity to make instability not a flaw but the very condition of contemporary subjectivity.



Maxim Frumkin | Yamashiro LIVE! | 2023

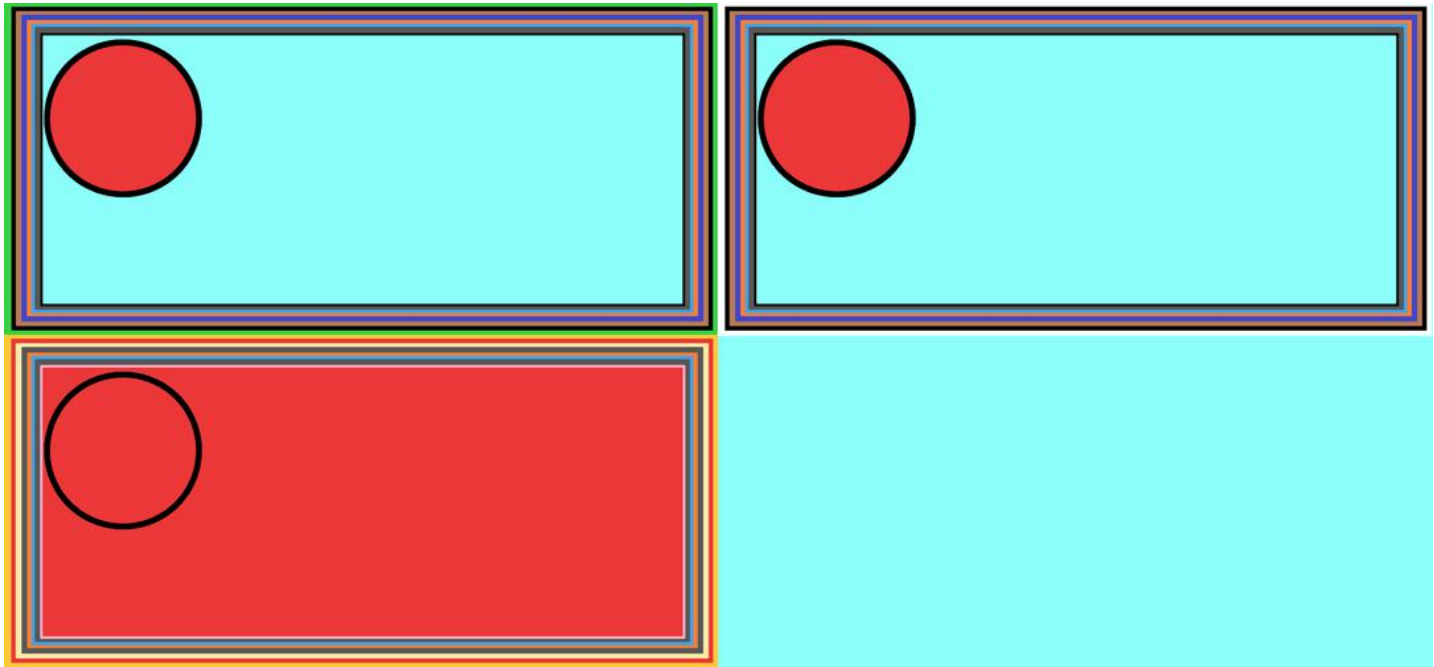
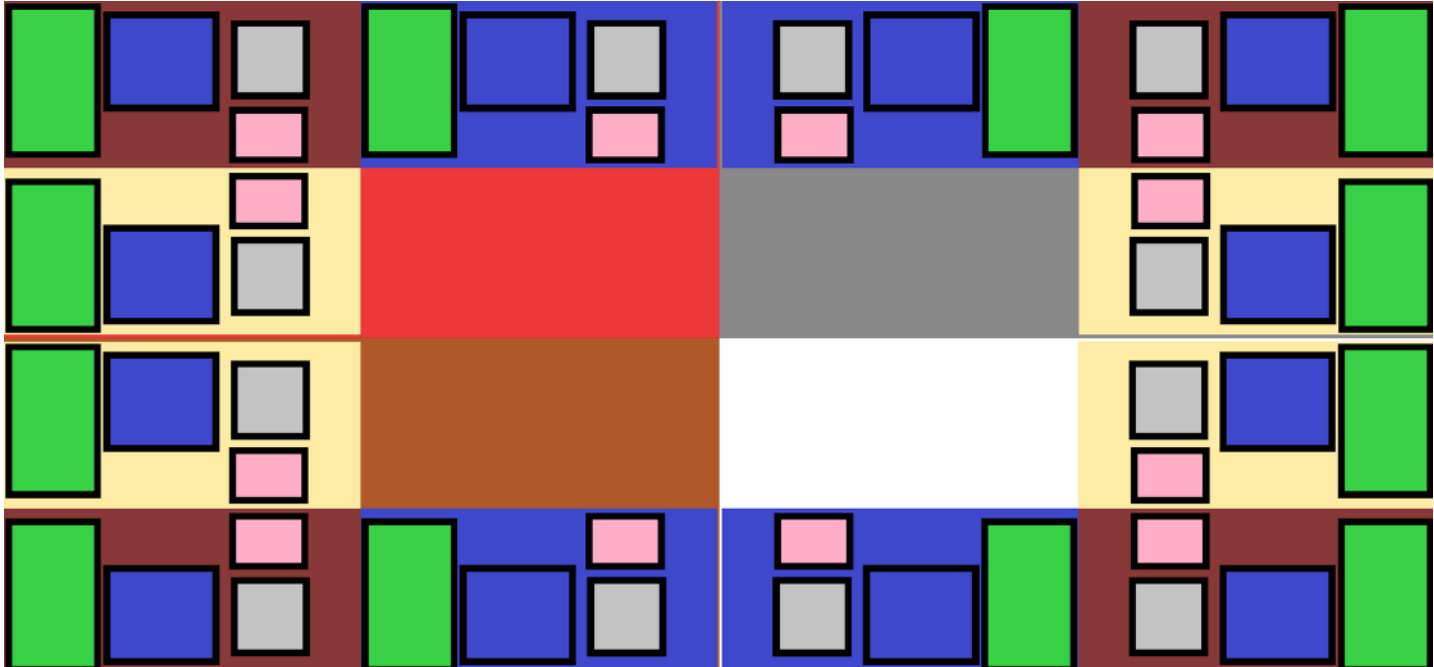
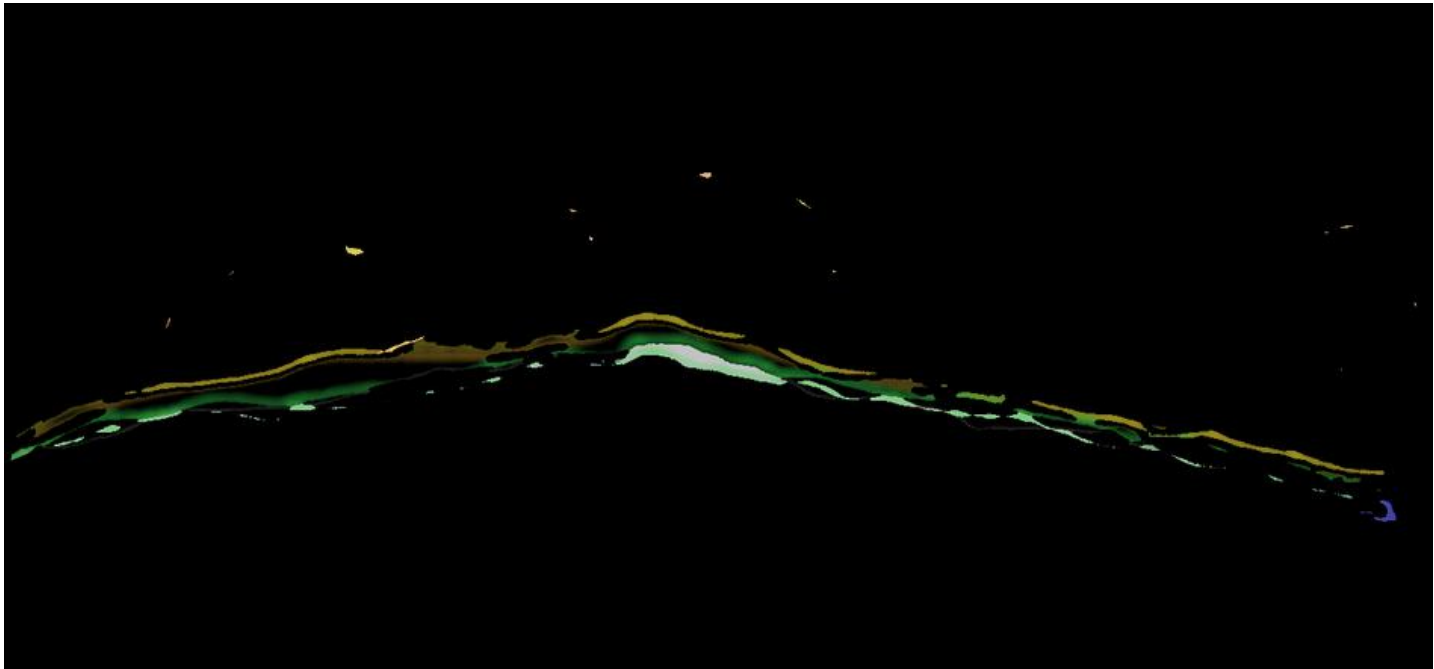
Frumkin's recognition at the 2024 Pratt Institute's School of Art Annual, where he was awarded Best Art Video, confirms the critical relevance of his practice. Yet beyond accolades, his art videos resonate because it embraces contradiction rather than resolution. In a cultural moment where clarity and coherence are often demanded, Frumkin insists on ambiguity, opening a space where reflection lingers and meaning remains fluid. His art is not an answer but an invitation: to dwell in uncertainty, to question the images we consume, and to reconsider how memory and identity are constructed and dissolved.

My name is **Paris Kyrtatas**. I am 33 years old and I come from Greece. I am musician and poet. I like art and I tried create digital artworks. I would like to share my artworks with viewers and make my ideas more accessible.

Project Statement

Artworks that combine color, shapes and dimensions.





— Interview

Christine Cianciosi

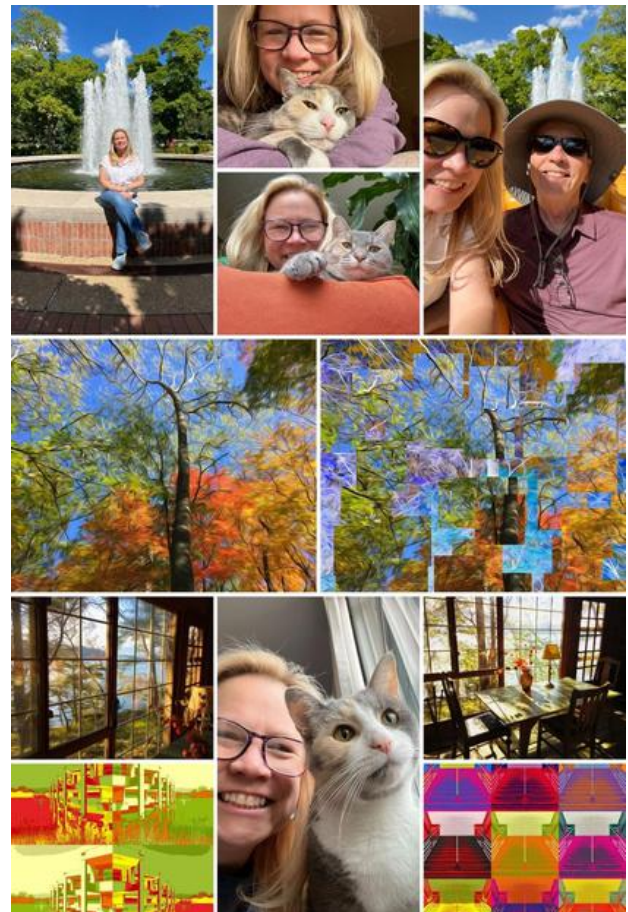
Your work combines graphic design, photography, and writing. How do these different practices influence each other in your creative process?

All three practices: graphic design, photography, and writing, are interconnected in my creative process. Photography helps me stay present and aware of the world around me, noticing light, color, and symbolism in everyday moments. Writing allows me to reflect on these experiences and translate creative thoughts and spiritual insights into meaningful concepts. Then, graphic design becomes the visual vessel to bring it all together, whether it is a logo, a digital painting, or a layout. Each discipline feeds the other, allowing me to capture both the seen and unseen, and turn inspiration into something artful and expressive.

Nature appears to be a recurring theme in your artworks. What draws you to capturing trees, skies, and birds in such expressive ways?



Christine Cianciosi | Sunlight's Flight | 2015



Christine Cianciosi | Artist Collage

Nature is one of my deepest sources of inspiration. Trees, skies, and birds carry symbolic meaning in my work because trees represent life, growth, and the connection between the earthly and the divine. In *Sunlight's Flight* the birds act as a spiritual messenger, encouraging one to rise above challenges and view life from a higher perspective. These elements appear in my art because they bring me into the present moment while also pointing toward something greater. Through them, I express how we can feel connected to this world while remaining open to the vast, limitless sky above.

You mention that spiritual studies and metaphysics inspire your art. Could you share an example of how these practices have directly influenced a specific piece?

A good example would be my pieces *Rainbow to the Sky* and *Tiles in the Sky*. Both are based on the same original photograph, yet I digitally enhanced and painted one and then added a tile effect on the other. Thus, creating two unique perspectives. This approach reflects



metaphysical principles: how perception shifts as we evolve, and how familiar images can take on new meaning as our awareness deepens. These works visually express the idea that transformation is not just possible but constant, depending on how present and open we are.

The textures in your digital artworks feel almost painterly, as if they merge photography with painting. How do you achieve this effect, and what does it mean to you?

I love blending photography with digital painting in Photoshop because it allows me to create something that feels both real and imagined. I start with a photo, then use digital tools to paint and enhance the colors and vibrancy. I also use other filters in Photoshop to create a new perspective of the photo. This process allows me to infuse emotion, texture, and layers of meaning into the piece. It represents how life itself is layered; how there is always more than what we initially see. To me, it is about transformation and taking a captured moment and elevating it into a visual meditation.

In your artist statement, you mention the importance of meaning and connection. What role do you hope your audience plays when viewing your work?

I hope my work invites the viewer to pause, to truly see, feel, and connect with what is in front of them, and within them. Whether it sparks peace, curiosity, or inspiration, I want the experience of viewing my art to feel like a moment of presence and reflection. My intention

is not just to present an image, but to evoke something deeper, perhaps even inspiring others to create, notice beauty in their own lives, or reconnect with their inner world. I see my audience as co-creators in this shared moment of connection.

How do you balance commissioned graphic design projects with personal, more experimental work?

Balancing the two can be challenging, as time is always the key, but I try to approach both with presence and purpose. Commissioned work offers structure and the opportunity to collaborate, grow, and share my gifts with others. Personal projects, on the other hand, give me full creative freedom to explore my ideas and spiritual insights. I carve out time for them when I feel inspired and called to create.

You describe creativity as a way of exploring the outer and inner worlds. Do you find that one inspires the other more strongly?

They influence each other, but I would say inner exploration is often the starting point. When I am connected to my inner world through spiritual study, mindfulness, or simply being present, I see the outer world differently. That is when I notice the light hitting a tree just right or a bird appearing at the perfect moment. The outer world then becomes a mirror or a metaphor for what is happening internally. So, while both are essential, it is my inner world that often tunes my 'antenna' and makes me receptive to the beauty around me, and I love it. Enjoy this day my friend and go make some art!



Koshila Raja Sandow is a Malaysian textile and fiber artist whose practice blends traditional craftsmanship with contemporary expression. For this textile artwork, she works with techniques such as needle felting, hand embroidery, nuno felting, and punch needle, incorporating 24k gold leaf and luminous threads. Grounded in sustainable approaches, her work reimagines materials and techniques while exploring themes of storytelling, heritage, and the dream world.

Koshila presents two works, "The Whispering Lake" and "The Mind's Eye". Both pieces draw on landscapes and nature, inviting viewers into contemplative spaces where inner vision meets the rhythms of the natural world.

Project Statement

The Whispering Lake and The Mind's Eye are textile works that explore the relationship between inner vision and the natural world. Created with sustainable techniques such as needle felting and embroidery, the pieces transform fabric into contemplative landscapes where reality and dream intertwine.

The Whispering Lake evokes the quietude of nature, a still space that carries hidden voices and reflections, crafted without adornment to honor simplicity and depth. In contrast, The Mind's Eye incorporates luminous 24k gold leaf, symbolizing illumination, inner vision, and the unseen energies that shape our perceptions.

Together, these works invite viewers to enter a dialogue between the outer environment and the inner landscape, reminding us that sustainability, memory, and imagination are deeply interconnected. Each piece emerges through an intuitive process, making them impossible to replicate even by the artist herself.

Koshila Raja Sandow | The Whispering Lake | 2025





Koshila Raja Sandow | The Mind's Eye | 2025

My name is **Alisa Andreevna Samoshkina**, I was born in 2010 and live in Russia. I am currently in the 9th grade and study at home through family education, which gives me more time for my passion — creativity. I study drawing and sculpting with a professional artist, but my true inspiration has always been dragons. Since the age of three, I have been drawing them, sculpting from plasticine, and now I create unique polymer clay dragon figurines, both with and without frames. The world of dragons fascinates me: I have read many books about them, watched countless films and cartoons featuring these magnificent creatures. They have become my main theme and my true love. My works can be found: • in handicraft stores, • at fairs and festivals in the Krasnodar region, • and on my social media pages. Each dragon is created with soul, and every one of them is unique.

Samoshkina Alisa | Dragon Silver Sculpture | 2025





Samoshkina Alisa | Dragon Turquoise Sculpture | 2025

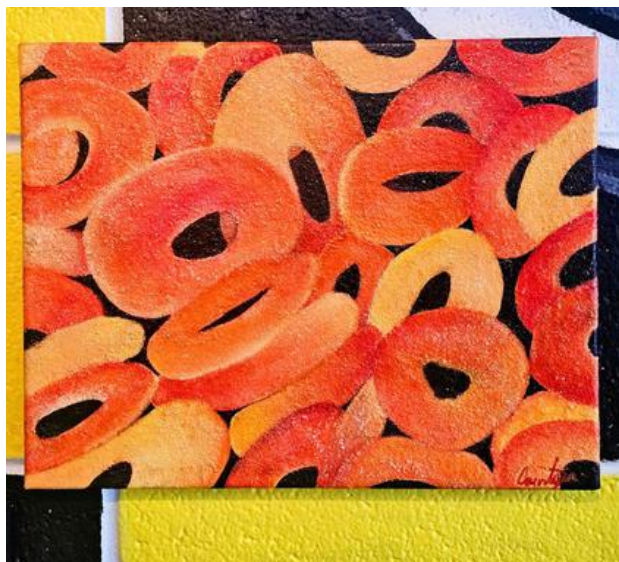


Samoshkina Alisa | Dragon-Scorpion Sculpture in Bronze | 2025

Courtlyn Sholten

Could you tell us more about your journey as a self-taught artist? What first inspired you to start creating art?

I have always been a creative person but never pursued art in school but threw myself into music. After I graduated and didn't have that creative outlet anymore, I started doing art



things as a hobby. I was not a great artist and had no art skills at all, but I have always had an innate need to create something. I started doing special effects makeup and drawing as hobbies in 2019 and eventually won a scholarship for makeup school in 2020 but was unable to use it due to Covid, so I went on to the next best thing which was painting. I started by painting small things for friends as I was figuring out the medium of acrylic paint and eventually did nothing but paint in any free time I had. Being self-taught has been cool because all my techniques are primarily my own and all my art feels authentically me since my skills have come from nothing but my own practice. Since I started doing art in 2019, I have gone on to rent a studio, have a gallery space, and now travel for shows, usually in Detroit.

How has living and working in Traverse City, Michigan influenced your artistic style and career?

Traverse city is a gorgeous place, and the landscapes up here inspire me so much. I sit outside and draw trees and rivers all the time, even in winter. The bay of Lake Michigan is vast and has incredible views that fill me with so much creative energy. There are also so many artists up here. We have an art museum at the local community college and several galleries that are impossible not get some inspiration from. After moving here in 2021 I was more confident in renting a studio and putting all of my energy into art after seeing how many other artists are successful in Traverse City. Many local businesses support artists around Traverse City, which inspired me to work with other local artists and have their work in my gallery as other businesses also have some of my pieces in them as well. I know I'll always come back to Traverse City to create no matter where my life takes me.

Your work includes very different styles — from surreal and horror-inspired pieces to colorful and playful paintings. How do you decide which direction to take with each new artwork?



Honestly, I don't have a process when it comes to deciding what kind of piece I'm going to do or the direction it will take. A lot of the time I get commission requests which feature different things that let me expand the subjects of my pieces and inspire me to do more pieces similar to my commissioned pieces. For example, I am currently working on a commission of David Lynch in a blue lighting, and I happened to find a Tim Curry portrait as him as Pennywise from the movie "IT" in the same sort of blue lighting as my current commission and was inspired to paint that as well to practice different lighting styles. Sometimes I scroll through Pinterest and find a reference photo that just speaks to me, or I think would make a cool painting. My process is just asking myself "will this be fun to paint?" or "will this piece push your current skills?" and if either answer is yes then I put that painting idea on my list.

What role does experimentation play in your creative process?

Being self-taught, experimentation is literally all I do. Of course, I find what kind of techniques work for me and then continue to use them but every piece I do has something that I have experimented with. Whether that be a new underpainting color to build on or a new way to create some sort of texture to a piece. With my two current works, I'm experimenting with the color blue and lighting. In a piece I did of gummy peach rings I experimented with using glitter to add the texture of the citric acid that the gummies have (which worked great). One of my largest pieces is a black and white painting of astronauts that I made just to experiment with a black canvas and black and white paint. Every time I do a painting and experiment while working on a project, I feel like I learn or discover something new or find a better way to do something and can make my future projects even better.

You mentioned that you began pursuing art seriously in 2019. How has your style or vision evolved since then?

My style has progressed so much since 2019. My first drawings were just practice and they were rather awful honestly, so any art I did besides special effects makeup were

just that, practice. However, by doing special effects makeup I learned a lot of skills like shading, making shadows deeper, and texture and all of those things are needed for 2D art as well. Between practicing my drawing and honing those skills I used for makeup I started to cultivate where my art is now. My art has went from simple one dimension paintings with little vision and thick layers of acrylic to what I would consider as fine art. I would consider my style / vision as still evolving everyday considering I've only been painting for 6 years and I'm very excited to see how my style continues to change and take shape.

What is it like running your own studio/gallery and also featuring other local artists?

This part of my art career is still developing as my gallery is newer in Traverse City. My small gallery, which is also part of my studio that I work out of everyday, is not as established as others in Traverse so currently we don't have many viewers currently. My gallery is different from many in Traverse as mine focuses on more modern art that may not be accepted to some more traditional galleries. I currently have one other artist whose pieces are on display in my gallery besides my own, but my goal is to have many artists' work alongside mine. This is my first gallery so there is a lot to learn with this process, but I'm very proud of how far my space has come. Eventually I hope to have a much larger space that can cater to not only paintings but sculptures and more 3D art.

Which artists or artistic movements have inspired you the most?

Van Gogh has always inspired me with his unique brush strokes and his use of color. I always felt mentally connected to him as I tend to throw my emotions into whatever I'm painting. His art really has always spoken to me, especially his self-portraits, I love seeing him as he saw himself, I think they are super profound. Another artist who inspires me just as much is Friedensreich Hundertwasser. He was known for his love of nature and putting elements of nature into his paintings. The way he captures the raw aspects of nature in abstract ways inspires me view and paint nature with less technicality. I also go to art museums often to study many different artists and art movements. My favorite time period of art is the Renaissance and I'm venturing into oils now due to the inspiration that Renaissance paintings give me.



My name is **Kuzheva Armida**. I am from the city of Kislovodsk in the Stavropol region. I have been drawing since childhood. I remember myself always with a pencil in hand. I drew friends, acquaintances, and relatives from life. I was always attracted to the portrait genre. I love conveying emotions, moods, and inner character. I always carry a sketchbook with me.

The strong desire to draw appeared after I first learned about the great artist Leonardo da Vinci in school. His works are true masterpieces. They are alive. Since Leonardo da Vinci is my idol, I create copies of his works, drawn by me in pencil on paper.

I will not speak too much about Leonardo's works, but I will say this: he was the greatest artist, and the copies I made with graphite pencil were my way of touching his genius. Of course, no one can ever solve the mystery of his works, but his Mona Lisa is a unique portrait. Each time she appears differently. From different angles, she may smile, feel sad, or show something ironic. He put his soul into this work. It is genius!

About his painting Salvator Mundi, I can say the following: deep inside, I feel that he wanted to depict the Savior as the Lamb of God. Leonardo da Vinci knew anatomy very well, and I can say he portrayed His face masterfully, especially the eyes. The eyes are unique — they embrace the entire world without judgment, and within them lies a gentle sorrow.

And the painting The Virgin of the Rocks is my favorite. The angel depicted there is unique in face and expression, just as the Madonna herself (the Mother of God). Her face is full of humility and, at the same time, quiet anxiety — not loud, but gentle.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that I chose this path because I love when a portrait is painted so well that it feels alive. That is precisely why I chose Leonardo da Vinci.

Armida Kuzheva | Leonardo da Vinci's Madonna of the Grotto | 2025





Ekaterina Bobrova

You began your creative journey with traditional embroidery at the age of 11. How did this early passion shape your artistic identity today?

I began my creative journey with a fascination for traditional embroidery. This early passion now allows me to freely combine various mixed techniques within embroidery, giving my hand a sense of freedom. I can embroider in cross-stitch, satin stitch, with ribbons, and with sequins. In a free form, I am able to merge all these techniques into a single work. Yet embroidery is not just about mastering certain methods and stitches—it is also about the ability to “read” ornaments and understand the deeper meanings of the images. Embroidery traditions of each people reflect both their history and the mutual influence of many cultures that met across the vast territory of Russia.

The oldest “language” shared by all peoples can be



considered the ornament. Schematic (and sometimes not so schematic) images existed long before the appearance of writing. To understand the meaning of ornaments, one must dive deep into the past, into the times of paganism. In ancient Russia, many tribes lived side by side. Sometimes they were neighbors, sometimes separated by great distances, but the world around them was one in its manifestations. The surrounding nature, ways of obtaining food, and everyday life of ancient tribes pushed our ancestors toward creating their own vision of the world.

The Tree of Life growing from the underworld, gods commanding the celestial fire, Mother Earth granting life—these symbols were present in nearly every culture. The first ornaments, it seems, appeared when humans wanted to pass on their knowledge of the surrounding world. That is how solar symbols, signs of water, sky, moon, and others emerged. Ornament is not merely a collection of individual symbols—it is a kind of interpretation of the rituals that existed at the time. This perception of embroidery makes it possible to “paint” with threads without relying on patterns, creating entirely new, unique, and incomparable works. My early passion for embroidery gave me the opportunity to master different techniques, solidify them, and, a little later, step away from rigid patterns. It allowed me to form an inner understanding of how ornament looks and how it is created. At first, I worked on the simplest pieces, following pre-designed patterns. Over time, however, I began to feel that these patterns limited me. At a certain point, once I reached a particular level of mastery, I was able to move beyond them and start creating my own original designs. This discovery of freedom in creativity is extremely important for any artist.

Your works often combine painting with embroidered elements. What do you think embroidery brings into painting that other techniques cannot?

I often combine embroidery with painting. At first, I would simply add some embroidered elements—like a sign, a kind of concentration of the idea embedded within the painting. Over time, I moved away from that style; now I try to integrate embroidery directly into the canvas. Threads, unlike paint, have a completely different texture—they are more tactile, raised, and they create a certain warmth. They make the painting feel very alive, something you want to touch and sense. If you look at works with textured embroidery, they appear completely different. Mixing paints with threads, beads, and ribbons allows me to create a one-of-a-kind pattern, to freely shape a unique art object without thinking about any limitations.



Ekaterina Bobrova | Jewelry Set Baba Yaga



In your artistic path, you also work in the library and have a background in philology and literary studies. How does your academic experience influence your art?

Let me begin with my scholarly work. After studying at the Philological Faculty of Minin University, I entered postgraduate school, successfully completed it, and wrote my dissertation. The dissertation explored a fascinating and complex topic, dealing with mythopoetic imagery and archetypes, as well as the work of the Silver Age poetess Elizaveta Yuryevna Kuzmina-Karavaeva (Mother Maria). Mythopoetics opens the way to studying a very intriguing layer in both literature and psychology, allowing one to explore how archetypes are closely interwoven with artistic creation. As a poet or artist, one can easily transform traditional archetypal images into an entirely new perception of them.

The artistic and historical fabric of the Silver Age is multilayered and contradictory: it intertwined numerous literary movements, individual unconventional styles, refined aestheticism, and profound religiosity; a paradoxical combination of the old and the new, the fading and the emerging. These years were marked by an exceptional intensity of passions, beliefs, and illusions, as well as a strong subjectivism tied to the author's desire to proclaim their "word" in this polyphony and to express their vision of reality. Out of these contrasts arose a harmony of opposites and contradictions—the hallmark of the Russian Renaissance, with its common essence and guiding principle: the striving for synthesis.

Important features of this artistic period included the acute question of the meaning of human existence in the world, the pursuit of a worldview synthesis that shaped a rich symbolic density, and the revival of mythmaking as a cultural force. N. Berdyaev wrote that "Russian literature is Renaissance in spirit. We create out of grief and suffering." Yet the models of

perceiving reality embodied in the mythopoetic motifs of the Silver Age works reveal a subjective view of the world, one that was unique to each remarkable artist at the turn of the century.

Such an artist was E. Y. Kuzmina-Karavaeva (Pilenko, Skobtsova, Mother Maria). On one hand, she was a typical representative of the Silver Age: in her personal fate (noble background, excellent education, fascination with modernism, emigration) and in her multifaceted creativity (poet, painter, publicist, critic, philosopher), she reflected traits common to many of her contemporaries. On the other hand, her destiny was extraordinary, vivid, and perhaps even contradictory. Her life and work combined deep religiosity with rebellion and humility, a constant search for her own creative and spiritual path.

Studying this is deeply engaging. You immerse yourself, you live through it, and at some point, you begin to feel that your perception of the world is unique and original. The task is simply to find ways to embody it—whether through painting, poetry, dance—it does not matter. What matters is discovering your own style. While I was studying the work of Elizaveta Yuryevna Kuzmina-Karavaeva—who was not only a remarkable painter and poetess but also an exquisite embroiderer—I found many points of connection. At that time, however, I was not engaged in painting, and I often said that although we were very much alike, she was an artist and I was not. Today I can say that I, too, have become an artist, and I am very glad for that. In a sense, Elizaveta Yuryevna became a motivator for me to take the step toward painting and artistic perception.

For many years, I have worked at the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Scientific Universal Library named after Lenin. This is the main library of Nizhny Novgorod, with an enormous collection of scientific literature and book monuments.





Working there has allowed me to study a vast body of literature, which greatly supported me in writing my dissertation on one hand, and on the other—it gave me the realization that creativity—whether painting, poetry, or any other form—is not just a way to express oneself, but a way to understand that you are part of something larger, something shared. You can say your word to the world, leave your trace, but this requires tremendous dedication: working diligently on technique, on style, reflecting deeply, and creating tirelessly.

Many of your works include symbolic imagery—eyes, masks, cosmic motifs, and fairy-tale references. Could you explain the symbolism behind them?

My fascination with symbolic imagery began when I immersed myself in the history of traditional embroidery and in the works of the poets of the Silver Age, where symbols permeate everything. The artists and poets of the Silver Age often “embedded” images of mythological origin into their creations, which fostered a return to myth and an increased interest in the mythologization of the philosophical, cultural, and social processes of that era. Authorial myth-making became a principle of Russian literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a unique part of spiritual existence. Myth attracted writers not merely as source material, but as a “recollection <...> of cosmic mystery” [Vyach. Ivanov], a “transmutation <...> of historical images into something immanent” [Andrei Bely], the ancient myth being “remembered as in the prophetic memory of dreams” [Dmitry Merezhkovsky]. The “flow” of myth into literature and art took place, on the one hand, through the revival of ancient mythology, and on the other, through neomythologism. Neomythologism is understood as the creation of a “second poetic reality,” when a work acquires the qualities of a “myth-text.”

Mythopoetic imagery in any work is represented through conceptual images, a system of motifs, leitmotifs, and mythologemes, which record and designate the subtlest features. It is achieved by combining symbolic and concrete images through a special memory that refers to something else, emphasizing nuances (shades, details, particulars) of something general and well-known, not requiring special mention.

It is enough to recall the works of the Symbolists, Acmeists, and Futurists, where the symbol and the archetype became the object of study for many creative individuals, becoming a kind of instrument of creativity.

I truly have many symbolic images, as has been rightly noted—eyes, masks, the cosmos. I would call them esoteric symbols. Concealing one’s face (putting on a mask) compels the viewer to peer into the mysterious image in order to recognize the hero—this is the theme of many of my paintings. Within the framework of Christian teaching, Pavel Florensky considered the face: “the face is what we see,” “the countenance is the manifestation of ontology,” whereas the opposite of the countenance is the mask. The author’s concept is tied to the possibility of recognizing the one who hides behind the masked image, as well as the search for one’s true countenance among various masks, disguises, doubles, and shadows. But how can one see without eyes and a gaze? The eyes reflect the inner light of the soul. “The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is pure, your whole body will be full of light...” [Matt. 6:22; Luke 11:34].

As for the fairy-tale references, I greatly enjoy the lubok technique. I especially like working in the style of fairy-tale illustrations, because they contain our traditions. Traditional archetypes can reach the heart of any person who has grown up with these images, since all of us as children heard Russian folk tales read by our grandmothers and lullabies sung by our mothers. All these images and motifs we understand perfectly on a subconscious level. We absorb



them with our mother's milk. Fairy-tale imagery allows thoughts to be expressed, on the one hand, very simply—especially in the lubok style—and on the other hand, it allows one to disguise very complex ideas that make the viewer seriously reflect on what the artist wished to convey, to extract something from their own mind and heart, to look within, to search for understanding. It must be said that every person will form their own perception of a painting; sometimes their interpretation may diverge from the author's intent. But the essence of creativity lies precisely in this: to evoke in a person a stream of thoughts, empathy or rejection, emotion and reflection. Only then is art truly alive.

You are also passionate about photography. Do you see photography as a separate practice or as something that complements your textile and painting works?

Yes, I am truly passionate about photography. At first, I thought it was a completely separate practice, one that allowed me to express a particular idea through an image, to convey a certain vision—or rather, my perception of it—and to share my thoughts with the world. Later, I realized that photography is actually a continuation of my artistic practice. My fascination with fine art photography helped me understand that a photo artist can also share their own vision and perception of both reality and imaginary, artistic images. Photography allows me to reveal the inner world of an artist through the lens, letting the viewer see the world through my eyes. And it doesn't matter what kind of photograph it is. You might notice a small detail that captivates you, recognize its beauty, capture it, and share it. Some may say, "Oh my God, what a trivial thing she's photographing!", while others—like the photographer—will see in it a fragment of beauty, a piece of the artist's soul.

As for photographs based on imagery—which I also create myself, since it's hard to find something suitable in the mass market—I currently have the idea to create photo cosplay based on my own paintings. This would be a dialogue between the artist and the self. I've already taken the first steps in this direction, and I hope that this project will succeed, allowing me to establish a unique dialogue between myself as an artist and myself as a photographer.

Travel and museums inspire you a lot. Could you share one memorable trip or exhibition that had a strong impact on your creativity?

Yes, indeed, traveling and visiting museums are a tremendous source of inspiration for me. The most powerful impression and influence on my work came from visiting the Gorgippia Museum in Anapa — more precisely, from the exhibition dedicated to the works of Mother Maria. I remember buying a ticket and entering the exhibition hall. The first thing I saw was a huge full-length photograph of Mother Maria in her monastic habit. At that time, I had just defended my dissertation, and I was still under the strong influence of both her work and the enormous effort I had put into my research. I recall bursting into tears, and the museum attendant could not understand for a long time what was happening to me. Eventually, I calmed down and began carefully exploring the exhibition. That was when I saw with my own eyes the embroidery of Elizaveta Yurievna and her artistic works. In



Ekaterina Bobrova | The High Priest

that moment, I realized that I wanted to live up to her level — to attempt to synthesize all my accumulated creative material, including in painting.

Being part of over 100 exhibitions worldwide, what do you think is the most important message international audiences take from your art?

Why should an artist even take part in exhibitions? Many people ask me this question. Yes, it is a way of transmitting one's creativity, yes, it is an opportunity to show viewers one's inner world, one's perception of reality, and the results of one's work.

As for participating in international exhibitions, especially in other countries, it is a chance to enter into a dialogue with viewers of another nationality and to see from the outside how symbolic, archetypal images familiar to locals are perceived by a person of a different faith or nationality, and what emotions they evoke. In fact, archetypal images are to a large extent universal in the world; indeed, there are global artistic symbols that are perceived more or less the same way by people on this planet. Of course, there are differences, there are variations, but still these images make it possible to establish a dialogue with the viewer and to be understood. Common mythopoetic images, which are perceived almost identically, allow us to understand one another despite our differences.

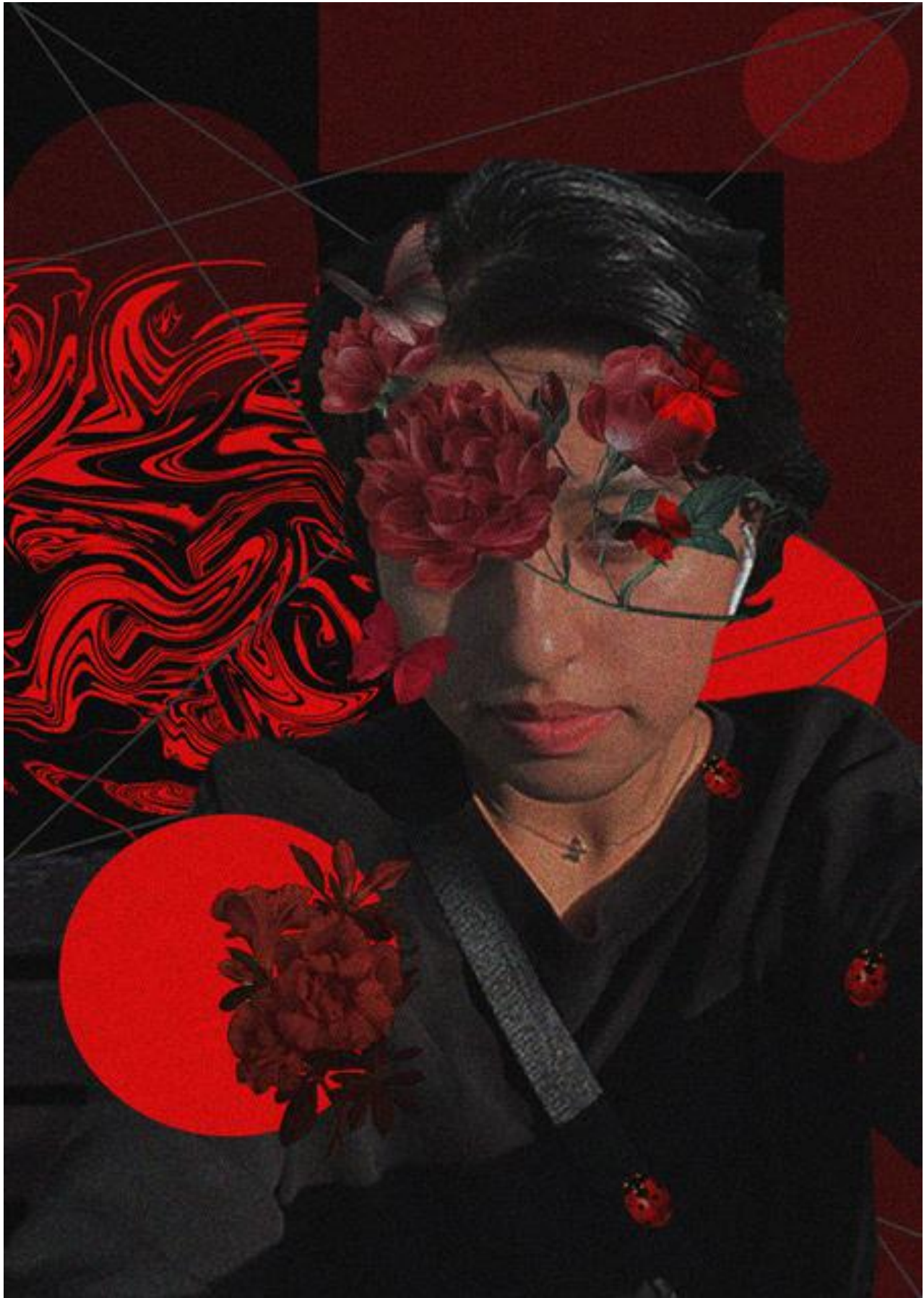
For me, participating in exhibitions, especially international ones, is an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with the viewer, to broadcast Russian art, Russian style, and to convey Russian identity to the audience. Today, this is very important. We are all people of one Universe; we must all understand each other and live in peace and dialogue—both with ourselves and with one another.

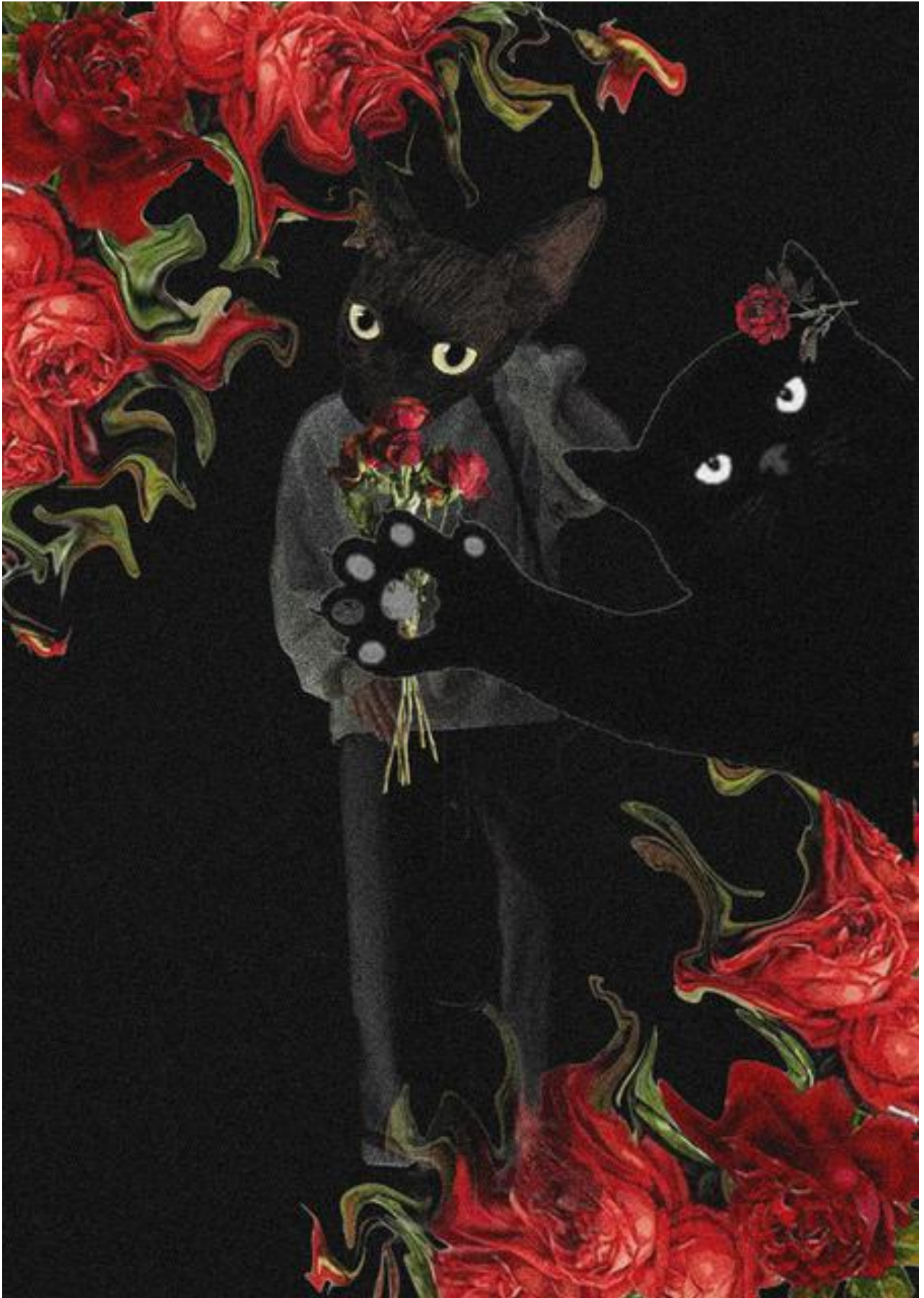
Arena Qadir

From young age I participated in different art competitions. I drew a book cover for Russian Cultural Centre. Studied in art school for one year, finishing with IGCSE in arts and design with 5* grade. Starting from this year bachelor degree in University of Nicosia in graphic and digital design. Besides I took IELTS examination in English and studied in English school for 10 years.

Project Statement

"Chase Beauty" by Arena.





Arena Qadir | Chase Beauty | 2025

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