

VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

# VISUAL ART JOURNAL



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# — Intro

Hello, dear reader,

You are holding the 56th issue of our magazine — an issue we have tried to fill with creativity from every corner of the world.

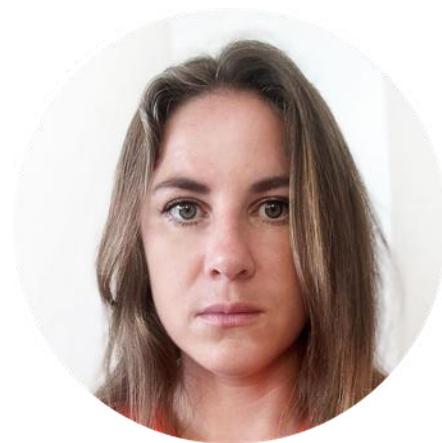
Painting, photography, sculpture — there are so many different forms through which human feelings and emotions can be expressed. Color or monochrome, classical style or avant-garde — every artist chooses their own language. And although we may speak different languages, the language of art exists on its own, becoming accessible to every viewer who is willing to engage with it.

Since the beginning of our magazine's journey, we have had the opportunity to connect with hundreds of artists, staying in touch with them and following their updates to this day. It is truly inspiring to witness their development: their creative growth, the sale of their works, and their search for their own style and audience.

In turn, we want to continue being a platform for artists' self-expression and for introducing audiences to their work — both for professionals in the art world and for those who are only just beginning to find their path.

Make yourself comfortable, as always: ahead of you are more than 100 pages filled with creativity.

Enjoy reading!



## **Anna Gvozdeva**

Curator of  
Visual Art Journal

*On the Front Cover:*  
**Gabriel Mateus**  
Semicupula Do Bairro Da  
Malagueira  
2021

*On the Back Cover:*  
**Michele Fesani**  
Dust in the Light  
2025



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

# — Interview

## Oleksandra Fomchenko

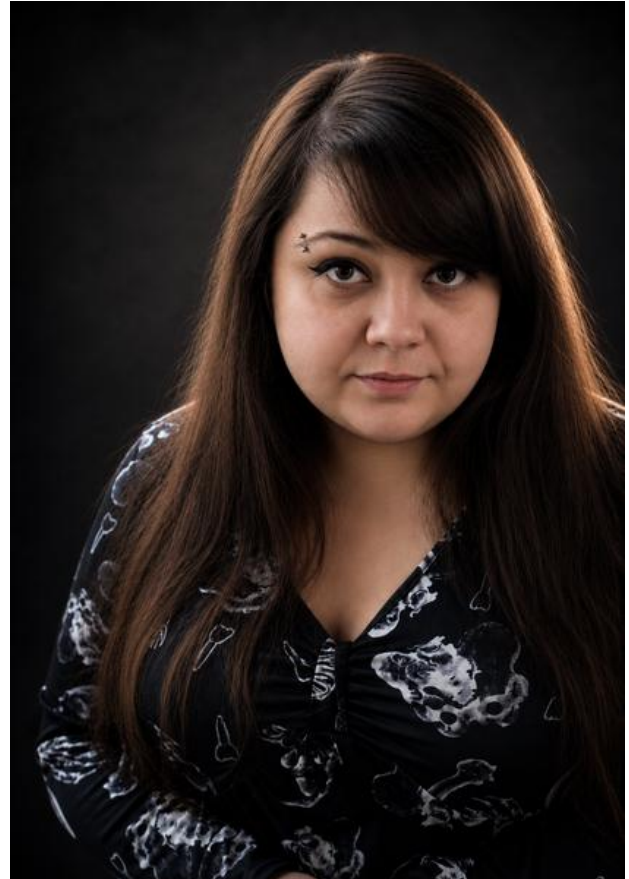
**Your works exist between jewelry, sculpture, relic, and emotional archive. How do you personally define the objects you create?**

I do not see my works as traditional jewelry. For me, they are sculptural vessels of memory. Each piece is a self-contained world where fragments of nature, history, technology, and personal associations coexist. They can be worn, but their purpose extends far beyond adornment. I see them as objects that preserve traces of time, emotions, and stories that can literally be carried with you.

At some point, I grew tired of decorative art that strives only to be beautiful, comfortable, and easy to consume. I have always been drawn to art that evokes emotion, raises questions, and creates a dialogue with the viewer. My work does not attempt to beautify reality. Instead, it explores memory, mortality, transformation, and the beauty that can exist within imperfection. It is important for me to create objects that are honest, meaningful, and emotionally resonant.



Oleksandra Fomchenko | The white noise | 2026



**You describe resin as a material of preservation and transformation. What attracts you to resin as a medium, both technically and conceptually?**

I have always been fascinated by the fact that resin simultaneously preserves and transforms. From a technical perspective, it allows me to protect extremely fragile materials that would otherwise deteriorate or disappear over time. But what interests me even more is its conceptual nature.

Once an object is embedded in resin, it no longer exists within ordinary time. A dried plant, an insect, or an old metal fragment becomes part of a new reality. Resin transforms into a kind of time capsule where memory is preserved while simultaneously acquiring new meaning.

I am captivated by this paradox: the material prevents decay, yet completely alters the context in which an object exists. This tension between preservation and transformation lies at the heart of my artistic practice.

**Many of your pieces contain insects, organic remains, industrial debris, screws, wires, and fragments of vintage electronics. How do you choose the materials for each work?**

Most of my works begin long before I enter the studio. I spend a great deal of time thinking about future compositions, visualizing details, imagining forms, and mentally assembling materials. Some of my strongest ideas arrive late at night, just before sleep, when reality and imagination begin to merge. During these moments, I try to envision the atmosphere, symbolism, and emotional weight of an entire piece.



If an idea appears unexpectedly, I immediately record it in my notes so I can return to it later. Every work is connected to a specific thought, emotion, or internal state. Because of this, my compositions are never random. Each material is selected deliberately and becomes part of a larger narrative. Some pieces take months to complete. Beyond building the composition itself, there is an extremely demanding process of casting, refining, sanding, and polishing the resin until it achieves a flawless glass-like finish. The process requires patience and precision, but it is essential for creating the sense of depth and permanence that defines my work.

**Your resin domes create optical distortion and a sense of hidden depth. How important is this visual effect to the emotional experience of the piece?**

This effect is extremely important to me. I want the viewer to feel as though they are looking into an object rather than simply looking at it. The resin lens creates depth, reflections, distortions, and hidden details that cannot be fully perceived at first glance. This mirrors the nature of memory itself. Memory never reveals everything immediately. The longer we observe it, the more layers begin to emerge. I want the viewer to experience that same gradual discovery when engaging with my work. I spent years developing and refining my resin techniques to achieve this effect. My goal was never simply to create decorative objects, but to build miniature worlds enclosed within transparent forms. Each piece functions as a small universe that can be explored repeatedly, revealing new details and relationships over time. Unfortunately, photographs and videos cannot fully capture this experience. In person, the interaction of light, depth, and

perspective creates something much more immersive and captivating. Many of the smallest details only become visible when the piece is viewed from different angles, making the experience deeply personal and constantly evolving.

**The works seem to preserve fragile or damaged things inside a flawless polished surface. Is this contrast between vulnerability and control central to your practice?**

Yes, this contrast is one of the central themes of my work. I have always been drawn to the idea that the most fragile things are often the most valuable. Insects, dried plants, antique lace, forgotten objects, and fragments of obsolete technology are all inherently vulnerable to time and decay. By preserving them within resin, I am giving them a second life. At the same time, the flawless polished surface creates a sense of order, permanence, and control, while inside remain objects that carry traces of age, imperfection, and fragility. I believe this contrast closely reflects the human experience. We often present ourselves as strong and composed while carrying memories, wounds, and vulnerabilities beneath the surface. In this sense, my works are not only acts of preservation but also metaphors for memory, resilience, and the complexity of human identity.

**You do not create duplicates of your works. Why is uniqueness so important in your artistic process?**

Every work I create is a complete and self-contained story that exists only once. I have never been interested in mass production or repeating successful designs. Instead, I value rarity, individuality, and the unrepeatable nature of each piece. The materials themselves are unique. No two insects, plants, fragments of lace, or found objects are ever exactly the same. But beyond that, every work emerges from a specific thought, emotion, or moment in my life that cannot be recreated. I am drawn to the idea that the collector becomes the owner of a one-of-a-kind artifact that will never exist again. In a world where almost everything can be reproduced endlessly, uniqueness becomes increasingly precious. I want each piece to retain the feeling of a discovered relic or a rare object from an unknown collection—something deeply personal, irreplaceable, and impossible to duplicate.

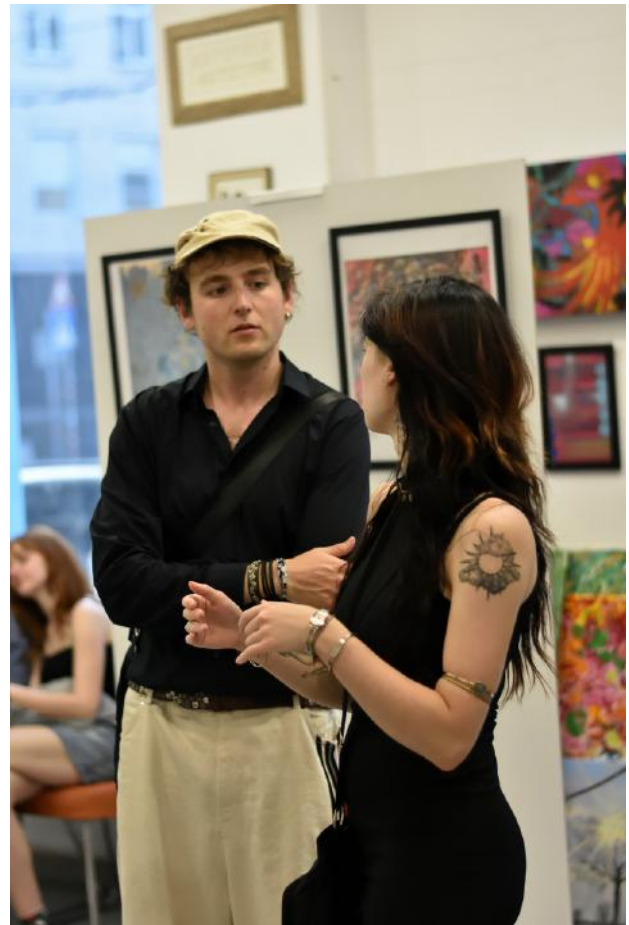
**How does the wearable nature of your objects change their meaning compared to traditional sculpture?**

Traditional sculpture usually exists separately from the viewer, while my works become part of a person's daily life. The ability to wear an object creates a completely different level of interaction. The work is no longer something observed from a distance; it becomes a personal experience. I am fascinated by the idea that someone can carry a small world, a memory, or a story with them wherever they go. Once worn, the object begins a new life and enters into a dialogue with its owner. Each person brings their own experiences, emotions, and interpretations to the work. For this reason, I see my practice as a form of wearable sculpture. The works retain the conceptual and artistic depth of sculptural objects while becoming more intimate, personal, and emotionally connected to the individual who wears them.

# — *Exhibition review*

## **The Names Gallery in Vienna – 30–31 May**

On May 30–31, The Names Gallery presented a two-day contemporary art exhibition in Vienna, bringing together 50 artists from different countries, generations, and creative backgrounds. Curated by Anna Gvozdeva, the project created a compact yet vivid international dialogue, where painting, photography, mixed media, digital art, textile-based works, and



experimental practices could be seen side by side within one gallery space.

The exhibition was held in collaboration with The Last Abstraction Gallery, whose Vienna space provided a thoughtful and welcoming setting for the presentation.

The exhibition was built around the idea of visibility: giving artists a shared platform while preserving the individuality of each artistic voice. Rather than imposing a single theme, the curatorial approach allowed the works to form connections through contrast, rhythm, and atmosphere. Figurative works appeared next to abstraction; intimate photographic compositions met expressive painting; delicate, quiet images were placed alongside more dramatic and emotionally charged pieces. This openness gave the exhibition a dynamic character and invited visitors to move through the space as if entering a conversation between many different visual languages.

A particularly strong aspect of the exhibition was the diversity of artistic approaches. Some works



explored the human figure, identity, memory, and emotional states; others focused on gesture, colour, texture, and materiality. Several pieces carried a poetic, almost cinematic quality, while others engaged with humour, symbolism, or personal mythology. Together, they created a sense of international artistic presence — not as a unified style, but as a shared space of observation, experimentation, and expression. The visitors' interaction with the works also became an important part of the exhibition's atmosphere. People paused in front of individual pieces, photographed details, discussed images, and followed the visual transitions between framed works and the screen presentation. The gallery became not only a place of display, but also a place of encounter — between artists and viewers, between different cultural contexts, and between traditional and contemporary exhibition formats.

The participating artists were Olga Kölsch, Zoe Sou Eat, Shu Wang, Jiayi Gu, Willy van den Berg, Vanessa Del Bel, Daniel Roberts, Tim Clarke, Joanna Wieniawa-Narkiewicz, Denis & Julia Zelenykh, Tatyana Chizh, Murielle Mobengo

(Ellébore Guimon), Cheng Guo, Dimitrinka Kuncheva, Eva Karaba, Aleksandra Efimova, Monica Miranda, Yulia Abalyaeva, Aleksandra Wlodarz, Cyril Cichy, Anna Weichselbaumer, Rodrigo de Toledo, Yuliia Balasheva, Dovilė Nalivaikaitė – Venslauskienė, Ani Doykina, Karolina Wdowiarz, Dinara Aristo, Maciej Wichnowski, Anna Novakov, Beatrix Szabó, Ülle Kuldkepp, Griselda Rivilla Tort, Moozhan Gholinataj, Meera Yegnaraman, Vlasta Črčinovič Krofič, Olga Puzikova, Sana Javed, Çağla Ünal, Noémi Eva Marian, Hannah Berrisford, Anastasia Leshkova, Yulia Filyushchenko, Yaroslava Prigotskaya, Ira Payweather, Alla Mokhova, Ksenia Pamphil, Alasseya, Kadkalo Konstantin, Liza Gruzdeva, and Alina Baimagambetova. The Names Gallery in Vienna demonstrated how a short-format exhibition can still create a meaningful and memorable artistic experience. In just two days, the project offered visitors a concentrated view of contemporary creativity across borders, mediums, and personal narratives. It was an exhibition about presence: the presence of artists, of images, of stories, and of the many ways contemporary art continues to connect people through visual language. We sincerely thank all participating artists and everyone who visited the exhibition.



## — Interview

# Lethabo Maboyane



**Your biography mentions that you were raised in a household shaped by strong female figures. How has this influenced the way you understand care, strength, and belonging in your work?**



Growing up in a female-led household taught me that strength isn't always loud. Sometimes it's showing up every day, working toward the life you want, while still making time to care for the people around you. I saw that in both my mother and my sister. They were ambitious, hardworking, and determined, but they were also nurturing and always made me feel heard. Their support allowed me to take my own interests seriously and gave me the confidence to pursue them without feeling like I had to fit into a specific mould. Because of that, care has become an important part of how I think about my work. I want people to feel something when they encounter it. I want them to feel a sense of warmth, humanity, and belonging. In many ways, the environment I grew up in taught me that being cared for gives you the freedom to become who you are, and I think that idea continues to shape my work today.

**Many of your works seem to explore childhood, memory, and family intimacy. What draws you to these early personal experiences as artistic material?**

I often return to childhood because, to me, it represents freedom. When you're a child, there are fewer expectations placed on you, and imagination comes naturally. You can create entire worlds out of almost nothing. Looking back, some of my most meaningful memories are tied to family, my sister, and the friendships that shaped me growing up.



What interests me isn't necessarily nostalgia. It's the feeling that exists within those memories. There is a sense of hope, curiosity, and possibility that I think many people lose touch with as they get older. When I paint, I'm often trying to reconnect with that part of myself. I'm searching for the same sense of wonder and play that existed before life became so concerned with outcomes and expectations.

I want viewers to feel that freedom too. Even when a work is rooted in a personal memory, my hope is that it encourages people to reflect on their own experiences and reconnect with something meaningful within themselves.

**You often use the human figure, gesture, and posture to communicate emotion. How do you decide what kind of body language will carry the feeling of a piece?**

A lot of my work begins with old family photographs. I spend a lot of time looking through albums because those images hold real moments and real emotions. What interests me isn't only what people looked like, but how they carried themselves. The way someone sits, walks, kneels, or even turns away from the camera can reveal something about what they were feeling in that moment.

When I'm creating a piece, I rely heavily on intuition. Sometimes a pose simply feels right, and I trust that feeling. A person walking can be incredibly powerful because it raises questions. Where are they going?

What are they leaving behind? What are they moving toward? I think body language often communicates things that words cannot.

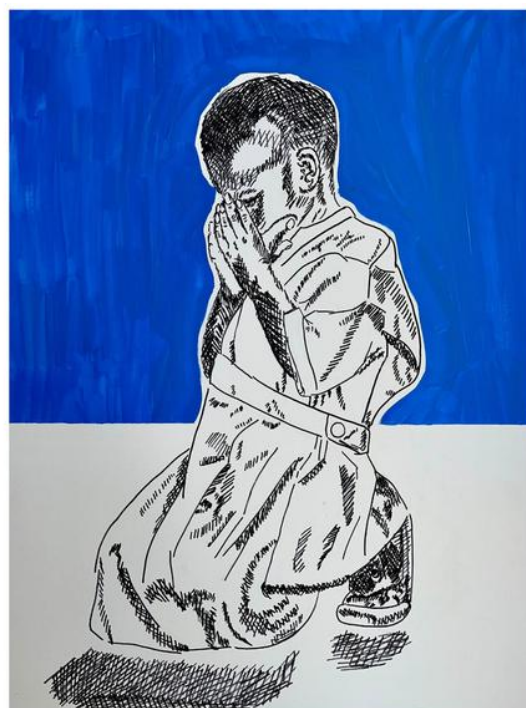
In some works, I choose to turn a figure away from the viewer. I'm not trying to hide their identity. If anything, I'm creating space for people to see themselves in the work. I want the viewer to bring their own memories, emotions, and experiences into the image.

**The contrast between detailed black linework and bold areas of colour appears strongly in your works. What role does colour play in your visual language?**

For me, both linework and colour carry meaning. My use of cross-hatching comes from an appreciation for process. A single line doesn't create a drawing. It's the accumulation of lines over time that gives the image its form. I often think about life in a similar way. We are shaped by countless experiences, conversations, decisions, and attempts. Every line has a purpose, even if it isn't perfect.

Colour is where emotion enters the work. I don't approach colour through strict rules. I approach it through feeling. Certain colours create different emotional atmospheres, and I'm always thinking about how a colour might affect the way someone experiences a piece. A blue can feel hopeful, calm, or distant. A red can feel powerful, grounded, or deeply emotional.

What matters most to me is not whether a colour is traditionally beautiful, but whether it feels honest to the story I'm trying to tell. Sometimes a colour choice





only makes sense because of how it felt in that particular moment. I think colour has the ability to connect with people emotionally before they even understand why.

**Your sister's drawings were one of your earliest introductions to art. Do you still feel a connection between your current practice and those first moments of observing and imitating?**

Absolutely. My sister was the first person who showed me that art could be more than just something you see, it could be something you create. Watching her draw felt almost magical to me as a child. I didn't fully understand how she was doing it, but I knew I wanted to try. I would look at what she made and attempt to recreate it, not because I thought I could do it better, but because I was fascinated by the possibility of it. That connection has never really left me. Even today, she remains one of my biggest inspirations. Whenever she responds positively to my work, it still means a lot to me. As an architect, she continues to create spaces that improve people's lives and allow them to experience dignity in the environments they inhabit. I admire that deeply.

When I think about my own practice, I realise that many of the values I care about are connection, dignity, care, and humanity as values that I have also seen reflected in her work. In some ways, I am still connected to that young version of myself who was amazed by what his sister could create and curious enough to try it for himself.

**You spent time away from art while focusing on business and economics, and later returned to creative practice. What changed in the way you understood art during that period?**

Stepping away from art wasn't a conscious decision. At the time, I was exploring different interests and trying to understand who I was. I became interested in business, entrepreneurship, fashion, and the opportunities that came with those worlds. Like many young people, I was influenced by the people around me and the paths they were taking.

Those experiences taught me a lot, but they also came with challenges. There were moments of uncertainty, disagreements, and questions about what I truly wanted from life. During one of those periods, I found myself returning to painting almost by accident. I wasn't thinking about a career in art. I wasn't thinking about exhibitions or recognition. I was simply looking for a place where I could process what I was feeling and reconnect with myself.

That experience changed the way I understood art. I realised that creativity wasn't just something I enjoyed doing; it was something that helped me make sense of my experiences. Art became a space where I could be honest with myself. Looking back, I think I returned to painting because it gave me something I couldn't find anywhere else: a sense of clarity, peace, and purpose.

**You have expressed a desire for young Black artists to see themselves reflected in your work. What message would you like your practice to offer to the next generation of artists?**

I want young Black artists to know that their stories matter and that their voices deserve to be heard. Growing up, many creative opportunities felt distant, and it wasn't always easy to imagine a future built around art. Discovering that a creative life was possible changed the way I saw myself and what I believed I could achieve.

I didn't follow a traditional path into the art world. I didn't attend art school. I simply followed my curiosity, paid attention to what moved me, and continued creating. In many ways, not having all the answers allowed me to keep learning and discovering new possibilities.

If there's one thing I hope young artists take from my work, it's that they don't need permission to begin. They don't need to wait until everything is perfect. Their experiences, perspectives, and ideas already have value. South Africa is filled with extraordinary talent, and I believe some of the world's most important artists are still waiting to be discovered. I hope my work encourages people to believe in themselves, trust their voice, and create with courage and hope.

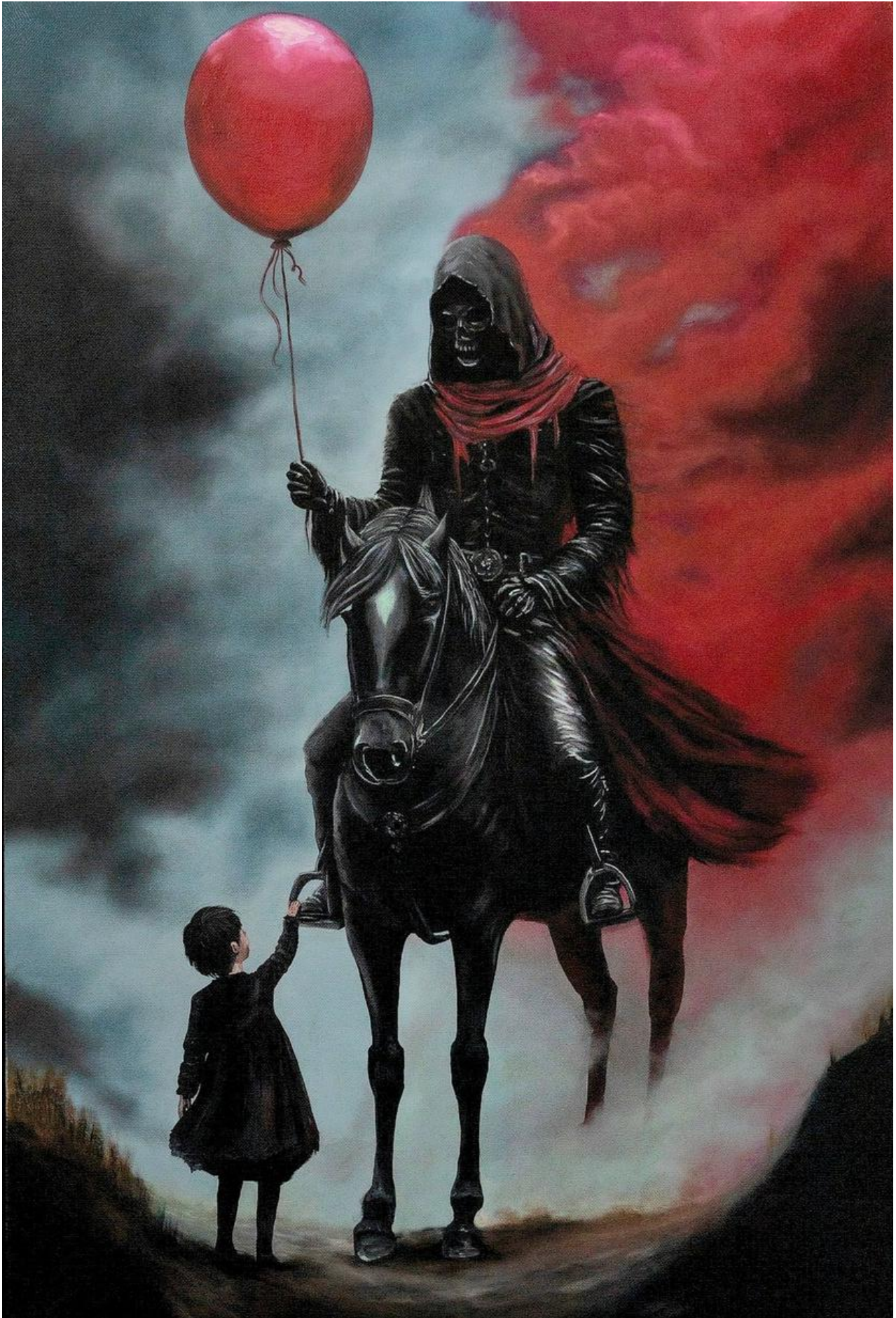


**Nadezhda Safronova**

I studied painting independently.

Creative path:

I work in the style of magical realism and symbolism. I paint with oil on canvas. The foundation of all my works is irony, the aestheticization of darkness, and narrative imagery that exists on the border between beauty and fear.





# — Interview

## Bree Mercado

**Your work often explores the feeling of being both visible and unseen. How does this tension shape the way you approach portraiture?**

Portraiture, for me, is less about capturing a physical likeness and more about capturing emotional truth. I'm interested in the tension between what is revealed and what is hidden — the parts of ourselves we allow others to see versus the parts we protect. Many of my portraits exist in that in-between space. The figures may be looking directly at the viewer while simultaneously obscuring themselves through gesture, texture, or fragmentation. That contradiction reflects



my own experiences navigating identity, belonging, and visibility within different communities and environments.

**Many of your figures appear fragmented, partially obscured, or emotionally guarded. What role does concealment play in your visual language?**

Concealment plays a significant role in my work because I see it as both protection and resistance. Fragmentation and obscuring the body or face can symbolize emotional barriers, internal conflict, or the ways people adapt themselves to survive socially and emotionally. At the same time, concealment creates space for ambiguity and reflection. I want viewers to feel invited into the work rather than told exactly what to think. The hidden elements mirror the complexity of identity — especially for people who exist between cultures, expectations, or versions of themselves.

**In works such as *Refraction* and *Retraction*, the face and body seem interrupted by sharp lines and layered textures. What does this visual fragmentation represent for you?**

The fragmentation in those works represents the experience of being pulled between internal and external identities. Sharp lines and layered textures mimic emotional interruption — moments where memory, expectation, anxiety, culture, or perception distort how we see ourselves. I often think about identity as something fluid rather than fixed. Fragmentation becomes a way to visually express that instability while also revealing resilience. Even when the figure feels fractured, it still exists, adapts, and takes up space.



Bree Mercado | Retraction | 2022



**Color feels very emotionally charged in your paintings - from deep reds and pinks to greens, greys, and metallic tones. How do you choose your palette for each work?**

Color is deeply intuitive in my process. I usually choose palettes based on emotional atmosphere rather than realism. Reds and pinks often represent vulnerability, intimacy, intensity, or emotional exposure, while greys and muted tones can suggest isolation, numbness, or uncertainty. Greens can symbolize growth, healing, or tension depending on how they're used. Metallic elements introduce reflection and shifting perception — they change depending on light and perspective, which mirrors the themes of identity and transformation present in my work. I think of color as another emotional layer within the painting.

**Your artist statement mentions the experience of existing between cultures and communities. How has your multicultural background influenced your artistic practice?**

My multicultural background has deeply shaped the way I understand identity and belonging. Growing up between different cultural experiences often created moments where I felt connected to multiple spaces while also not fully fitting into any single one. That tension appears throughout my work. I'm interested in the layered nature of identity — how culture, gender, community, and lived experience intersect and influence how we move through the world. My work often reflects the emotional complexity of navigating visibility, acceptance, and self-definition within those

overlapping spaces.

**Mental health and emotional vulnerability appear throughout your practice. How do you balance personal storytelling with creating space for viewers to find their own reflections?**

I try to approach vulnerability with openness rather than explanation. While many of the emotions in my work come from personal experiences, I intentionally leave room for interpretation so viewers can bring their own experiences into the piece. I'm less interested in creating a direct narrative and more interested in creating emotional resonance. When someone connects to a work through their own memories, struggles, or healing, the painting becomes larger than my individual story. That shared reflection is important to me. While at the same time I find personal storytelling creates a safe space to share their story. I find this important in order to broaden our perspectives of the world and grow our empathy for others.

**Transformation is an important theme in your work. Do you see transformation as healing, survival, resistance, or something more complex?**

I see transformation as all of those things simultaneously. Transformation can be healing, but it can also come from survival, grief, resistance, or necessity. I don't think growth is always graceful or linear. Sometimes transformation happens through rupture, discomfort, or rebuilding. In my work, transformation often exists in the tension between breaking apart and becoming. I'm interested in how people continue to evolve while carrying memory, vulnerability, and resilience with them.



## **Michele Fesani**

I was born in Cesena, Italy in 1991. After earning a degree in Biomedical Engineering, I embarked on a self-taught artistic journey, dedicating myself to painting.

### *Project Statement*

My expressive research develops as a fusion of figuration and abstraction. My subjects—faces, human bodies, and animal presences—emerge through a language made of essential marks and layered colors, which settle on the canvas in the form of fissures, scratches, drips, and broad fields of color. The figures move away from the academic tradition of drawing, reaching a more instinctive and contemporary dimension.

My work seems to engage in a dialogue with the major avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, from German Expressionism to French Fauvism, reworking their emotional intensity in a personal key.

Character, emotion, and identity become central elements of my painting, giving life to a unique and unrepeatable expression. My works move toward an analytical and introspective dimension, in which the subjects' eyes turn into mirrors of inner depths, inviting the viewer into an intimate and direct confrontation.

Michele Fesani | Alberto | 2024





Michele Fesani | Dust in the Light | 2025

# Gabriel Mateus



**You originally trained in Architecture. How has this background shaped the way you construct space, perspective, and atmosphere in your paintings?**



Gabriel Mateus | Butterfly Chair In Empty Courtyard | 2025

I would say that Perspective, Proportion and Composition have influenced me the most. Not only do I try to represent space with a reasonable degree of technical accuracy, I also tend to focus on choices that emphasize the clarity of spatial hierarchy: foreground, middle, background.

I also tend to use a similar structure to organize my spatial view of the scene: Up=Sky, Left=Distance, Right=Home, Down=Earth.

When constructing space, I do not try to paint something that could eventually be built, as I would as an Architect. Instead, I use the freedom of painting to ignore practical constraints and focus primarily on atmosphere: how a space is entered, crossed, and paused within. There is also a tendency towards reduction without loss of structure. I like to strip away detail while preserving intent. I think it is this selective abstraction that allows the spatial truth of a space to remain intact.

**Your works often contain sparse architectural environments. What attracts you to empty or almost empty spaces?**

Sparse spaces reduce distraction. As a result, what remains becomes structurally readable. I also think that emptiness amplifies the atmosphere. With few objects present, light, scale and proportion carry greater emotional weight.

From a psychological point of view, I would say that sparse environments often function like paused systems. They feel as if something could happen there, but has not yet, or has just passed. That ambiguity between presence and absence creates a sense of suspended time. The space also seems to anticipate human occupation, but its emptiness removes the human figure and allows the space itself to become the



protagonist.

**There is a strong sense of silence and stillness in your paintings. Is emotional quietness something you consciously seek in your work?**

There is definitely a sensitivity to quietness in my work, but I do not approach it as my primary means of achieving a particular emotional state. Rather, it emerges from the way I chose to construct spaces, often simplified architectural environments in which most narrative noise has been removed by default. What remains is light, proportion and structure, and these elements naturally carry a sense of stillness. I try to develop and enhance the emotions that arise during the process. Because I am naturally drawn to spaces where silence is what remains once everything non-essential is removed, I often find myself shaping the space in response to an emotion that emerged while making the work. In that sense, the atmosphere is not predetermined, it is discovered and refined throughout the process.

**In Butterfly Chair in Empty Courtyard, the chair becomes the central figure of the scene. What symbolic or emotional meaning does this object hold for you?**

The courtyard represents an architectural condition waiting to be used, whereas the chair suggests the trace of use or the anticipation of it. It implies that someone has been there, or will be, but refuses to confirm either. That subtle tension aligns naturally with my interest in still sparse spaces. The chair also represents a soft interruption of architectural order. Courtyards tend to be bounded and controlled:

introducing a chair brings comfort rather than structure. It can function like a human figure inserted into a system that is otherwise impersonal.

The chair further implies pause: the moment of rest between movements. In an empty courtyard it becomes less about sitting and more about the possibility of stopping. Space is no longer merely something to pass through, it becomes a place where one might remain, even if only for a moment.

**Many of your compositions feel minimal, but they also suggest a possible story. How do you balance abstraction with narrative?**

As the space emerges, narrative begins to appear through the process of simplification. As elements are reduced, the viewer starts to project ideas of use, time, and presence onto the space. I like to keep the composition open enough to suggest a situation without fully describing it.

I am drawn to this minimal context that remains psychologically active. While I simplify space, I am interested in the point at which that simplicity begins to imply a story without requiring me to define what that story is.

In my work, I see abstraction as a method of reduction, and narrative as something that emerges in the gap between what is shown and what is implied or withheld.

**Your works seem to invite the viewer to slow down and observe small details. What kind of experience would you like viewers to have when looking at your paintings?**

Since the spaces I paint are often reduced and quiet, there is less immediate information to process. This allows light, proportion, and shadow more time to register. If there is an ideal viewing experience, I would say, it is a kind of gradual observing. At first, the image might feel simple or still, but over time it begins to open up, and the viewer becomes aware of spatial relationships and subtle shifts that were not obvious at first glance.

I like the idea that the painting does not fully explain itself immediately but instead rewards attention. The viewer is not just recognizing a space, but spending time inside it, in a way.

**Do you usually begin with a real place, a memory, a photograph, or an imagined composition?**

In the painting Butterfly Chair in Empty Courtyard, there was no specific place or memory behind the image. The space was entirely imagined and emerged through a composition structured around the Fibonacci sequence. I was exploring the possibility of using golden proportions to shape architectural space. I carried out several studies before arriving at this particular composition.

In the painting Semicupula do Bairro da Malagueira I began with a drawing by the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Vieira, for a building that was never built. I became interested in exploring the drawings associated with a project that remained incomplete. It was fascinating to engage with a neighborhood that had been extensively designed and documented, yet only partially realized.

I felt naturally drawn to the idea of using painting as a means of exploring how the unbuilt parts of the project might have appeared had their construction been carried through. In this sense, painting became a way of occupying the space between architectural intention and physical reality.

# — Interview

## Adam Land

**Your background in engineering seems to strongly inform your artistic language. How did this technical experience shape the way you approach abstraction?**

My background in engineering has had a lasting impact on how I approach abstraction. It shaped the way I think about structure, organization, and problem solving. Even in the studio, I still approach materials with a level of testing and refinement. I will evaluate how a surface responds, how layers interact, and how certain decisions affect the overall outcome. That process is not separate from the work. It is part of the language.

At the same time, engineering gave me a way to think in systems rather than isolated elements. When I build a painting, I am not only concerned with individual



marks or colors. I am thinking about how each part contributes to a larger structure. That awareness allows me to approach abstraction with both intention and flexibility, where precision and openness can exist at the same time.

**Your compositions often feel architectural, almost like imagined city structures or invisible urban maps. How important is architecture in your visual thinking?**

Architecture plays an important role, though it often enters the work through a combination of observation and intuition. During the process, certain marks or areas begin to suggest something familiar, such as a window, a threshold, or a structural opening. That moment prompts a deeper internal investigation about place, function, and context.

I also spend time looking at cities and the visual language of infrastructure. There is a logic to how spaces are constructed and organized, and that logic becomes a source of inspiration. The work does not aim to depict architecture directly, but it carries a sense of spatial awareness and constructed form that reflects how we move through built environments.

**In your work, geometric forms coexist with softer, atmospheric layers of color. How do you balance structure and spontaneity during the creative process?**

The process is intuitive from the beginning. The first layers are often there to remove the blankness of the surface, but they quickly begin to create areas of interest. Those early moments establish a kind of foundation that I can respond to instead of fully controlling.

Structure begins to emerge as I recognize relationships within the painting. At that point, I start to make more deliberate decisions, but I remain open





to unexpected shifts. The balance comes from allowing the painting to evolve while still guiding it toward a coherent outcome. It is a constant negotiation between what is discovered and what is resolved.

**You mention infrastructure, power lines, crosswalks, conduits, and data transmission as sources of inspiration. What attracts you to these often overlooked systems?**

What draws me to these systems is the contrast between their importance and their invisibility. They are essential to how we live and move, yet they are rarely noticed in a meaningful way, especially in developed environments where they are fully integrated into everyday life. There is something compelling about that condition. These systems represent a level of engineering complexity and coordination, yet they exist quietly in the background. That duality between significance and anonymity creates a sense of curiosity. It invites a closer look at the structures that support our experience without demanding attention.

**Many of your paintings suggest both physical space and invisible networks. How do you translate something intangible, like communication or data flow, into color and form?**

I approach intangible systems through qualities such as rhythm, density, movement, and connection. Rather than trying to illustrate a specific network, I focus on how it behaves. Repetition can suggest continuity, intersections can imply exchange, and variations in color or opacity can create a sense of layering or transmission.

The goal is not to define a system, but to create an environment where its presence can be felt. By working through spatial relationships and subtle shifts in structure, the paintings begin to reflect the way information moves and interacts. It becomes less

about depiction and more about constructing an experience that parallels those invisible processes.

**Your work invites viewers to slow down and observe subtle shifts in tone, line, and space. What kind of experience do you hope people have when standing in front of your paintings?**

I hope the work encourages a moment of attention. There is so much constant input and visual saturation that it can lead to a kind of detachment. I am interested in creating work that resists that response. When someone spends time with a painting, small details begin to surface and relationships become clearer. That slower engagement allows for a more active experience, where the viewer is not just observing but also interpreting. The goal is to move beyond indifference and create a sense of awareness, even if it is subtle.

**As President of the Visual Arts Alliance, you are actively involved in the arts community. How does this role influence your perspective as an artist?**

That role has expanded my understanding of how positioning and communication shape the way work is received. It has pushed me to be more intentional in how I articulate my ideas, both visually and in writing. Clarifying those ideas has become an important part of the practice.

It has also shifted my perspective beyond the studio. Being engaged with other artists, organizers, and audiences reinforces the importance of visibility and connection. The art world is not only about making work, but also about creating opportunities for that work to be seen and understood. That awareness has made me more open, more engaged, and more conscious of how a practice exists within a larger ecosystem.



# — Interview

## Yuange Sheng

**Your background is in architecture. How has architectural thinking influenced the way you approach sculpture and material form?**



Architecture taught me to think through relationships rather than isolated objects. During my studies, I became interested not only in how structures function, but also in how they fail, adapt, and accumulate traces over time. This way of thinking continues in my sculptural practice. I often begin with architectural systems—grids, modules, support structures—but instead of pursuing stability or efficiency, I use sculpture to explore what happens when these systems become unstable. Sculpture allows me to move beyond architecture's practical constraints and focus on processes of transformation. The work becomes a space where structure is no longer fixed but constantly negotiating between order and disorder, construction and decay.

**You often begin with grids, modules, and structural fragments. What attracts you to these systems as a starting point?**

Grids and modules are interesting because they represent a desire for control. They are systems designed to organise space, materials, and behaviour. At the same time, they provide a framework that can be disrupted. I am attracted to the tension between the rational logic of these structures and the unpredictable ways they can deform or evolve. Starting from a recognisable architectural language gives the work a sense of familiarity, but as the process develops, these systems begin to break apart, merge, or mutate into something less certain. The grid becomes less a tool of organisation and more a field where different forces interact.



**Your works seem to exist between construction and collapse. Why is this tension important in your practice?**

I see construction and collapse as inseparable processes rather than opposites. Every structure contains the possibility of failure, just as every ruin contains the potential for reorganisation. What interests me is the moment where these states overlap. In that condition, forms become unstable and open to transformation. This tension reflects how environments, bodies, and social systems continuously change rather than remain fixed. By placing the work between construction and collapse, I want to challenge the idea that architecture or objects can ever achieve a final, stable state. Instead, they remain in a process of constant negotiation.

**In this sculptural series, the object appears both architectural and body-like. How do you understand the relationship between structure and the body?**

I am interested in the body as a form of architecture and architecture as an extension of the body. Both rely on systems of support, protection, circulation, and repair. In this series, the sculptural units begin as architectural fragments, but through rupture and intervention they start to resemble bodily forms—wounds, scars, organs, or skeletal structures. The steel framework and mesh operate almost like prosthetic devices or stitches. Rather than separating architecture from biology, I see them as sharing

similar processes of adaptation and vulnerability. The works occupy a space where structure becomes corporeal and the body becomes architectural.

**You describe materials as active agents rather than passive elements. How do concrete, plaster, steel, and mesh "guide" the final form of the work?**

I approach materials as collaborators rather than tools. Each material has its own behaviour, limitations, and tendencies. Expanding foam grows unpredictably, mesh stretches and resists, steel imposes linear force, while plaster records pressure and texture. During the making process, I try not to fully control these characteristics. Instead, I allow the materials to respond to one another and influence the direction of the work. Many formal decisions emerge through these interactions rather than from a predetermined plan. In this sense, the final form is negotiated between intention and material agency.

**Rather than presenting a fixed object, your work suggests an ongoing process of becoming. How important is instability to the meaning of the piece?**

Instability is central to the work because it reflects how I understand both material and life. Nothing exists in a completely fixed state; structures are constantly changing, adapting, and responding to external forces. I am interested in creating forms that appear unfinished or temporarily suspended between different conditions. This sense of becoming allows the work to remain open rather than resolved. Instead of representing a final outcome, the sculpture captures a moment within a larger process. The instability is therefore not a sign of weakness but a condition that enables transformation.

**What do you hope viewers feel or question when they encounter these fractured, repaired, and transforming structures?**

I hope viewers experience a sense of ambiguity. At first, the work may appear architectural, industrial, or even familiar, but on closer inspection it becomes difficult to categorise. I am interested in creating a space where people question what they are looking at and how it came to be. The fractures, repairs, and exposed interventions suggest histories of damage and adaptation, but they do not provide a single narrative. Instead, they invite viewers to think about how structures—whether architectural, bodily, or social—are continuously constructed, maintained, and transformed. Ultimately, I hope the work encourages a different understanding of stability, one that embraces change rather than resisting it.

# — Interview

## Nikola Glavan

**How did your journey into fine art photography begin, and what first drew you to architecture, light, and urban landscapes?**

My journey into fine art photography wasn't a direct one. Over the years, I explored many different genres, from wildlife photography to portraiture, always searching for the style that felt most natural to me. Through that process, I realized that fine art photography gave me the greatest opportunity to express creativity and develop my own visual language.

What drew me to architecture, light, and urban



landscapes was the challenge of seeing familiar subjects differently. Buildings and structures are often things people pass by every day without a second thought. I became fascinated by the idea of transforming those ordinary scenes into something visually striking—an image that makes someone stop, look again, and discover a new perspective.

Living in Qatar played a significant role in that development. The country is home to remarkable contemporary architecture and bold urban design, which constantly inspired me to explore shape, form, light, and geometry. Over time, architecture became more than a subject for me; it became a way of expressing how I see the world through composition, simplicity, and visual storytelling.

**In works such as *Between Two Realities*, reflection becomes almost as important as the city itself. What role do reflections play in your photography?**

Reflections play a very important role in my photography because they are something I am constantly looking for when I explore a city. Whenever I photograph a building or an architectural structure, I naturally start searching for ways to incorporate a reflection, whether it's in water, glass, or another reflective surface.

What fascinates me about reflections is that they allow the same subject to exist in two different forms within a single image. On one side, you have the real structure—sharp, solid, and defined. On the other, you have its reflection, which is often softer, distorted, and more fluid. That contrast creates a visual dialogue between reality and perception.

In *Between Two Realities*, the reflection is just as important as the city itself because it transforms the scene from a straightforward architectural photograph into something more open to interpretation. I find reflected images more engaging because they encourage viewers to spend more time with the photograph, looking beyond the obvious and creating their own meaning from what they see.

**What do you enjoy most about photographing Doha at night?**



Nikola Glavan | Geometry Of Silence | 2026



What I enjoy most about photographing Doha at night is how the city transforms after sunset. Many of the buildings take on a completely different character once they are illuminated. The lighting highlights architectural details and shapes that often go unnoticed during the day, while the changing colors give familiar structures a new visual identity.

Doha is especially rewarding to photograph at night because its modern skyline was designed to be seen after dark. The combination of innovative architecture, reflections, and carefully designed lighting creates endless opportunities for creative interpretation. Every time I go out with my camera, I feel like I am seeing the city from a new perspective.

**Long exposure photography can reveal things that the eye does not normally perceive. What does this technique allow you to express that a regular exposure cannot?**

What I enjoy most about long exposure photography is its ability to transform ordinary scenes into something that exists beyond normal perception. Water becomes smooth and almost surreal, while clouds stretch across the sky in ways we never see with our own eyes. It allows me to create a different interpretation of reality rather than simply document it.

I am also drawn to the light trails created by passing cars and boats. While they may appear simple at first glance, creating them effectively requires careful planning, timing, and patience. These trails add movement and energy to an image, helping guide the viewer's eye through the composition.

Another aspect I appreciate is the ability to simplify busy urban environments. By removing the distraction of passing people, the focus remains on the architecture, light, and atmosphere of the scene.

**What challenges do you face when shooting long exposure photography?**

One of the biggest challenges in long exposure photography is the weather. Conditions like wind or sudden changes in the environment can easily affect the outcome of an image and sometimes completely ruin an

exposure.

Another challenge is working in crowded urban locations, where finding a clean and controlled composition can be difficult. I often have to wait for the right moment when the scene clears or simplifies enough to make the image work.

I also don't always carry a tripod with me, so I sometimes have to improvise in order to achieve the long exposure effect, depending on the situation.

Finally, patience is a key part of the process. With long exposures, each attempt can take several minutes, and before you know it, you can spend hours refining the same shot until everything aligns the way you want it to.

**What kind of atmosphere do you try to capture in your work?**

In my work, I try to capture a calm and almost cinematic atmosphere within urban environments. I am drawn to scenes where architecture, light, and geometry come together in a way that feels minimal and balanced, often removing distractions to focus on form and structure. Overall, I aim for a sense of quiet and stillness, even in busy urban environments. I want the viewer to pause for a moment and experience the city in a more abstract and contemplative way.

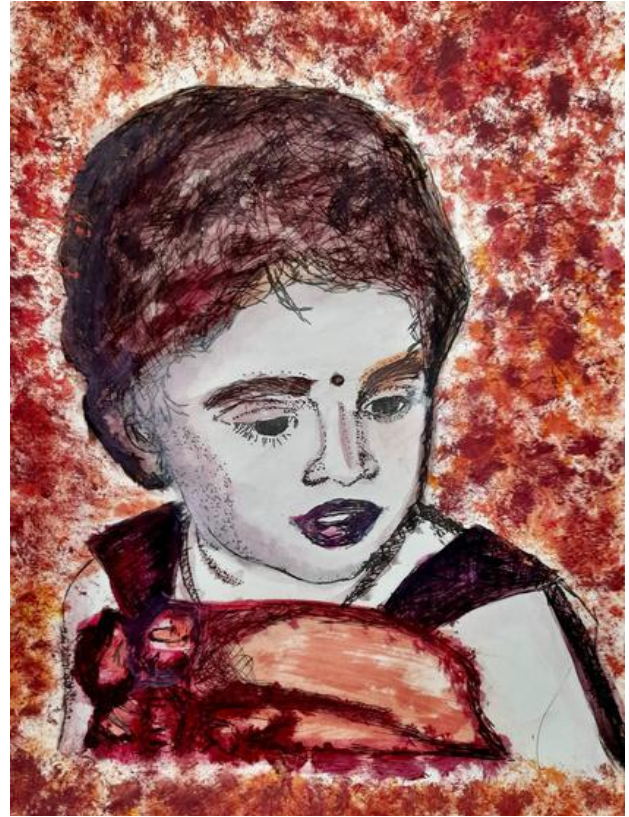
**Looking ahead, how would you like your photography to evolve, and are there any new places, themes, or visual ideas you would like to explore next?**

I see my photography continuing to evolve in a more intentional and focused direction. I would like to further develop my visual language, especially in how I use architecture, light, and long exposure techniques to create more minimal and atmospheric compositions. I am also interested in exploring new environments beyond Doha, as experiencing different cities and architectural styles naturally influences how I see and interpret urban spaces.

On a broader level, my goal is to continue building towards more cohesive bodies of work that could eventually be presented in a gallery setting. I see that as a natural next step in my development, but for now I am focused on refining my approach and taking smaller steps that gradually lead in that direction.

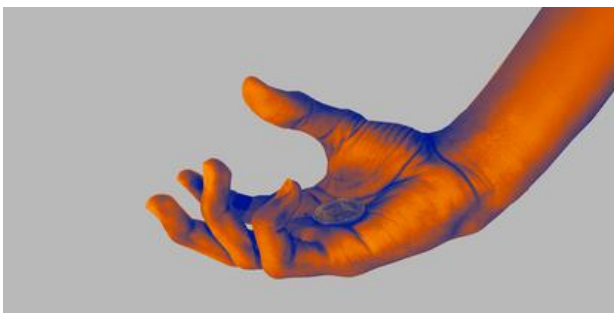


# Akshita Srivastava



**Your project statement for Escape speaks about the space between confinement and release. What kind of emotional or personal “escape” were you exploring in this work?**

This work of mine explores emotional ‘escape’ through the personal experience of confinement, reflecting a tension of where we are and where we aspire to be. At its very core the idea is that change can begin with a single step, taking the decision that limitations are not permitted to define us. The



contrast between the dark, enclosed space and the vibrant world beyond showcases a journey towards freedom, self discovery, and possibility. The unity of colour on my figure and landscape represents a sense of belonging and authenticity, while the strings are a metaphor for the subtle forces that always seek to hold us back. I always believed that rather than breaking those restraints, we have to navigate ourselves around them, the figure in my work suggests that growth often comes not from force, but from finding the courage that carries us forward. In many ways, this piece became a reflection of my own journey towards trusting myself to pursue the things I truly want.

**Identity and displacement appear to be central themes in your practice. How has growing up in New Zealand while carrying another cultural origin shaped your visual language?**

Growing up in New Zealand while carrying an Indian cultural background often left me feeling I was caught between two worlds. As a child, I was consistently navigating through different expectations. Fitting into the culture around me while remaining connected to the one I came from created a sense of displacement. I felt as though I never fully belonged to a space. Over time, I came to understand that my identity exists within the intersection of both, and this experience became the central to my visual language. The themes of multiple worlds, self discovery, and belonging appear throughout most of my work. Art became my way to express myself beyond the cultural labels, allowing me to communicate the ideas of my experience that felt authentic through bold imagery. While I may move between two different worlds, I explore the idea that I belong within the one I have created for myself, and I think growing up in a different culture origin while belonging to another has



ultimately given me this advantage as a creative.

**In your works, figures often seem caught between movement and stillness. What does the body represent for you as a form of storytelling?**

For me, the body is nature's sculpture. A powerful form I explore that is filled with visual language that reflects both creation and destruction. It became a shared point of connection as we all inhabit a body that regardless of our differences, carries both physical presence and inner consciousness. In my work, I use the movements to represent what we express outwardly, such as impulses, reactions, and moments of openness that can lead to negative or positive outcomes. Stillness reflects the inner world of thoughts, fears, and emotions that remain unspoken but constantly exist within us. The contrasting states of both allow me to present the body as a vessel of external and internal expression revealing the human condition in its most true form. Leaving the viewers to reflect on what is shown, what is hidden, and everything in between.

**The contrast between dark, restrained spaces and bright, dream-like horizons is very present in your work. How do you use colour to express emotional transition?**

For me, colour is a powerful tool that sets an emotional tone, with each shade carrying their own expressive weight that I approach with intention and respect. I like to think carefully about the mood I want to create, using contrast as a way to build tension between more restrained areas and brighter, dream-like spaces. I try to create compositions that allow each layer of opposing forces to coexist rather than one emotion to replace another. By creating an environment where emotional shifts feel simultaneous and unresolved, the viewer's eye moves through these transitions. As intensity rises and fades, the echoing moments of clarity emerge from uncertainty before dissolving again, and through my process colour becomes a way for my pieces to hold memory, identity, and emotional conflict all at once.

**You mention cinematic realism and filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese and Satyajit Ray as influences. What aspects of cinema do you bring into your painting process?**

The aspects I bring from cinema into my work often relate to internal states, much like Martin Scorsese who uses framing, colour, and aspects of symbolism to externalise the inner

world of his characters. By using a similar approach, my subjects and objects function less as their literal forms and more as emotional symbols that build visual motifs and subtle contrasts. The tension between beauty and unease, echoing through the emotional complexity is found in many of Martin Scorsese's films, applying a similar approach to my colours. Satyajit Ray has also deeply influenced my visual language through his openness and restraint that allows emotions to coexist. My work, similar to his, invites interpretation rather than a fixed meaning. The themes of self-awareness, escape, and identity remain intentionally unresolved, reflecting the cinematic sense where some moments are captured in transition. They both act as something that is being remembered, felt, or realised rather than reaching one conclusion.

**Your works feel intimate, but also unresolved. Why is it important for you not to give the viewer a complete or immediate answer?**

In works of mine such as "Escape", the colours feel intentionally unresolved, with selective tones emerging through others as though emotions are being processed rather than arriving at an emotional endpoint. The viewer may get a sense of change actively unfolding. I find that this opens allows for a deeper engagement experience as it invites the viewer to participate in completing the meaning rather than being given a singular answer. My symbolic elements and layered colour relationships aim to create an open space for interpretation and emotional response. It is within that vagueness where I reveal just enough, but never everything so that a sense of intimacy is formed between the work and the viewer.

**What do you hope viewers will feel or question when they spend time with your work?**

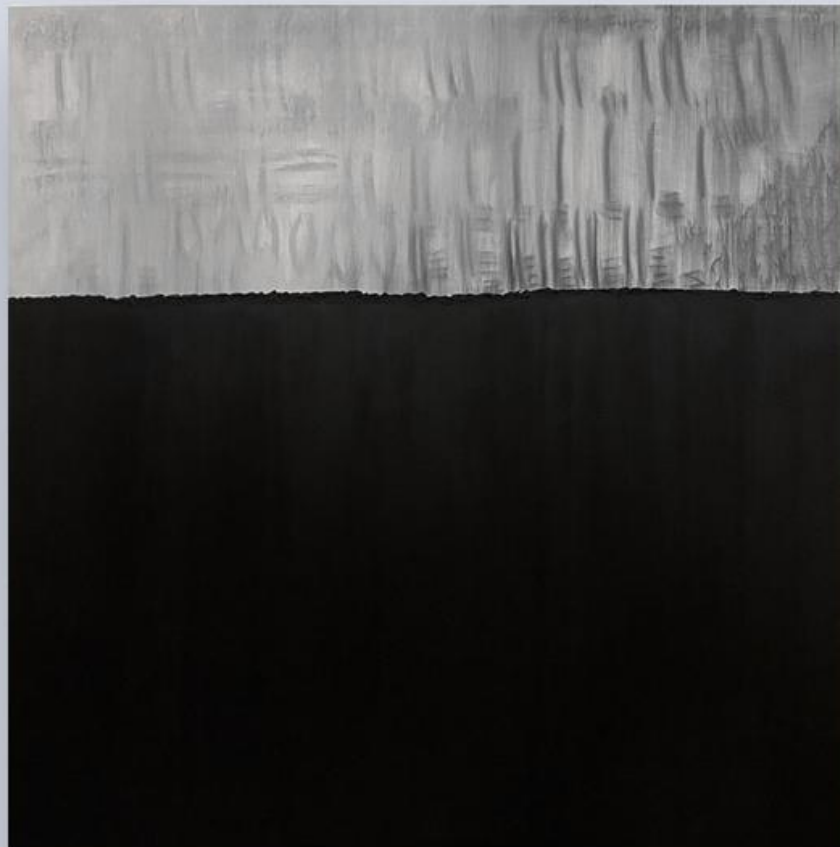
I hope that viewers will experience my work as a sequence rather than a single fixed feeling. I want the experience to begin with curiosity towards the imagery and colour, gradually moving them into a space of reflection and questioning. Over time, they can begin to project their own experiences onto my work allowing the shift and surfacing of personal meaning and identity. The work then invites a return visit, sometimes allowing for something unnoticed to become something significant. The symbols that I use are intended to feel emotionally familiar without a clear explanation, I want the paintings to feel like confessions that paused midway leaving the viewer with a lingering sense that something within this body of work remains open and is worth exploring.



**Abir Almaged** expresses herself through abstract art as a way of processing certain thoughts or emotions. It's a space to allow her grief to be present, by visualizing elegies or inner dialogues; she is unafraid to show her vulnerability by intentionally adding elements of imperfections to her work in order to embrace it, inviting viewers to sit with what is usually unspoken.

Black and White serve as the foundation of Almaged's color palette, yet she occasionally introduces colors in some way or another; the addition or deliberate absence of color, enhances the overall idea of each painting.

Abir Almaged | Plan B





# Amanda Atallah



**Your artistic name, @AlmondVanGone, feels playful and memorable. What story or idea stands behind this name?**

My name is Amanda, and in French, Amande means almond. I've always loved that connection, which is why my personal

profile has long been associated with "The Almond." When I decided to create a separate space dedicated to my art, I wanted a name that combined these identities into one. I wanted something that felt personal, creative, and true to who I am. That's how @AlmondVanGone was born, a playful variation that merges Amanda, amande, and almond into a world of its own.

The name represents the artistic side of me: the place where my paintings, thoughts, emotions, and imagination come together. If someone wants to dig a little deeper and get to know me through my work, they will probably find a part of that story inside AlmondVanGone.

**Your paintings often feature expressive, symbolic characters. Are these figures fictional, autobiographical, or emotional reflections of human experience?**

People, emotions, and lived experiences inspire my work the most. I am fascinated by what people carry internally like fear, survival, love, memory, vulnerability, and emotional tension.

My figures are rarely portraits of specific individuals. Instead, they become emotional reflections of human experience. They can be me, they can be you, or they can be anyone willing to look honestly at themselves. Through symbolic forms and colors, I translate invisible emotional states into something visible.

**How does your Lebanese background influence your visual language, choice of colors, or emotional themes?**

Living in Lebanon means emotions rarely stay in one shape.



Amanda Atallah | Intuition Vs Technology



Everything coexists: beauty, chaos, tenderness, pressure, and resilience.

It changes quickly, almost like emotional weather.

That constant movement naturally enters my work.

I often transform intensity into color, and instability into form. My paintings don't describe Lebanon directly, but they carry its rhythm, fragmented, layered, sometimes loud, sometimes silent, but always alive.

It is less about representation and more about translation.

**Your work combines Neo-Expressionist energy with a futuristic atmosphere. How do you balance raw emotion with ideas of technology and artificial intelligence?**

Emotion always comes first. Everything else follows.

Technology appears as a mirror more than a subject. I use robotic and artificial forms to question what remains human inside a digital future.

In *Echo of Us*, a 3 meters canvas; I bring together humans, nature, the sun, pyramids, and robots within the same space, creating a controlled sense of chaos between them.

Flowers represent emotion, while robots reflect a constructed, digital reality almost like a dream shaped by us. We have always lived alongside these elements, and we continue to do so in different forms.

Machines respond to how we interact with them. We build them, we focus our attention on them, and they evolve through that engagement.

When they are neglected, they lose their presence in our daily life, like anything that depends on care and use.

The mechanical flowers act as a bridge between these worlds, grounding the artificial in the human. They suggest that machines are not separate from us, but extensions and reflections of our presence.

In this space, what we see is not just technology but a reassembled image of ourselves.

**Many of your compositions feel cinematic, almost like scenes from an inner film. How has filmmaking shaped the way you build visual narratives?**

Filmmaking taught me how to think in sequences, emotions, and visual storytelling. Even when I paint a single image, I

often imagine that there is a story before and after that moment.

Many of my paintings feel like frozen scenes from an unseen film. I think about atmosphere, emotional tension, symbolism, and character presence in much the same way a filmmaker thinks about a frame. The canvas becomes a stage where emotions perform.

**In works such as these, eyes appear as a strong recurring element. What role does the gaze play in your paintings?**

The gaze is important in my work because it brings the painting to life. But sometimes I want to ask viewers, in a playful way: people always notice the eyes first. The mouth is probably wondering what it did wrong.

Each gaze carries a different emotional state depending on the painting. Sometimes the eyes express love, exhaustion, curiosity, fear, hope, or resilience. I believe the eyes reflect what exists beneath the surface.

Often, viewers feel as if the painting is looking back at them. That silent exchange creates a conversation that does not require language.

It is only one part of the story. My work is bold, raw, and beautiful because life itself is often all three at the same time.

**If your paintings could speak directly to the viewer, what kind of message or feeling would you want them to leave behind?**

I don't want a single emotion to remain.

People often reduce what they feel into only two categories, sad or happy. But most emotional life exists far beyond that language.

My paintings are not about sadness. They are about emotional range, intensity, and being fully alive.

They hold contradictions instead of resolving them.

As artificial intelligence becomes more present in our lives, I believe we are being reminded to stay human to protect emotional depth, imagination, and complexity.

Maybe the role of art now is not to explain everything, but to keep emotional space open.

To remember that feeling is still a form of intelligence.

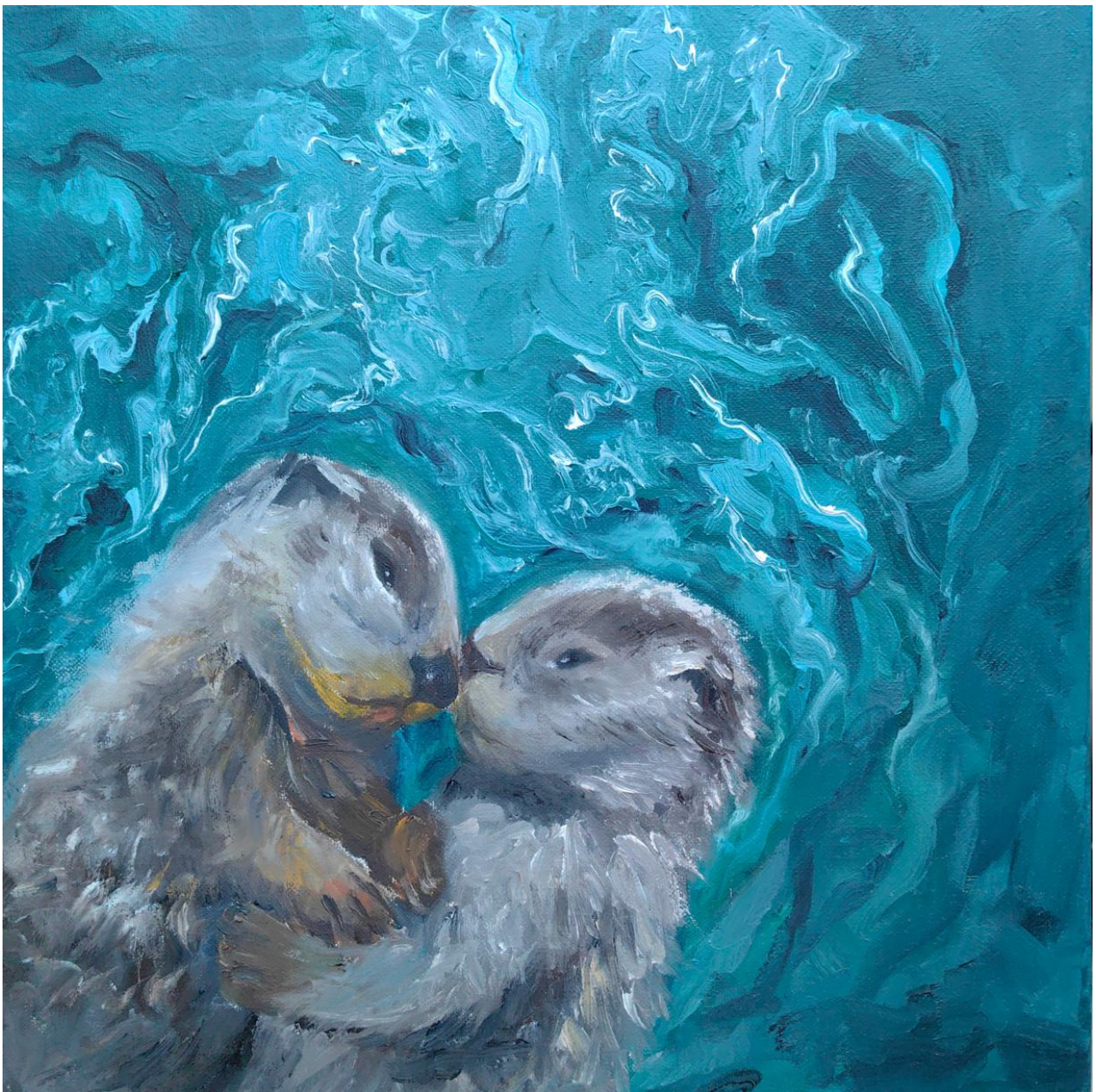


## Alla Erygina

I have been engaged in painting since 2008. I work in the animalistic genre, contemporary Impressionism, Pop Art, genre painting, and combine various techniques. At the moment, I exhibit my works for sale on art platforms and create commissioned pieces.

I experiment with techniques, materials, and color in order to convey the right mood. My paintings are a synthesis of artistic skill and psychological knowledge.

In my works, I create an atmosphere filled with warm emotions. My paintings are not just decoration. I am convinced that painting can change life and help one find balance.





# Paulina Ramos Moreno

**Your background combines Fine Arts and Psychology. How has the study of the human mind influenced the way you approach portraiture and the human figure?**

I have always believed that the body is merely the outermost layer of something far more restless. Psychology taught me to listen beneath the surface. When I stand before a model, I am not cataloguing anatomy. I am attending to what cannot quite be contained: the emotion that presses outward through the skin. My portraits are not likenesses. They are attempts to give form to the interior weather of a



human being; to breathe humanity back into a body that the world so often reduces to mere appearance.

**You describe painting as “an emotional excavation.” What does this process look like for you in the studio?**

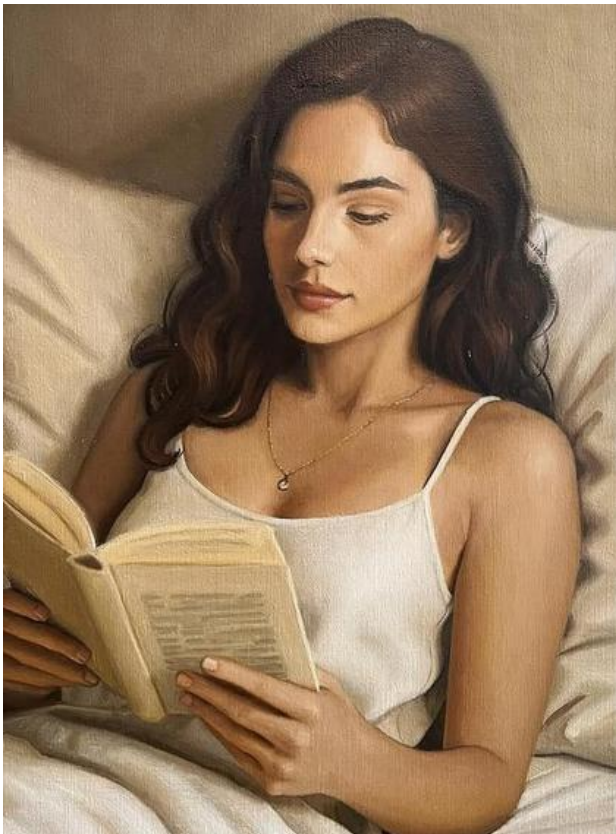
To excavate is to go downward, carefully, with full attention to what might break. In the studio, I work like an archaeologist of feeling, brushstroke by brushstroke, I uncover what the face almost conceals. It is the subtle things that tell the truth: the barely-parted lips, the heaviness gathered beneath the eyes, the tension held in a jaw. I do not invent emotion. I unearth it. And when I have found it, I place it on the canvas so that the viewer must ask. The painting becomes a question the subject poses to the world, one they may not even know they are asking.

**Many of your portraits seem to capture a moment of silence, introspection, or emotional suspension. What draws you to these quiet psychological states?**

There is a particular kind of stillness that is not emptiness; it is density. When a model holds a pose for twenty minutes, the body grows inward. Movement ceases, but the interior does not. What I find extraordinary is that in the forced pause, everything the person carries becomes visible. A single delicate gesture, a hand resting against a thigh, the slight fall of a gaze, these small acts contain entire narratives. I am drawn to the suspended moment



Paulina Ramos Moreno | Time And Hope | 2023



because it is where the soul, for once, cannot hide.

**Your work often creates a dialogue between classical painting traditions and contemporary emotional sensitivity. How do you balance the old and the new in your practice?**

The old masters gave me structure; the architecture of light and shadow, the Zorn palette with its strict and beautiful constraints, the chiaroscuro that carves form from darkness as if releasing it from stone. But I cannot live entirely in the past. I carry the present inside me, and it demands its own language. So, I introduce color, vivid, insistent and geometry that cuts through the realism like a modern interruption, a reminder that the figure exists not only in classical time but in this moment, this century, this fractured and luminous world. The tension between the two is not a conflict I resolve. It is the conversation itself. It is where the paintings live.

**Studying at the Florence Academy of Art gave you direct contact with traditional European techniques. What was the most important lesson you took from that experience?**

That you must learn from the living world, not from its photograph. A photograph is a closed door; it gives you an image but withholds the reason behind it. It cannot tell you why a shadow falls where it falls, what quality of light is producing that particular warmth along a collarbone, what the air itself is doing. Working

from life is working from truth. Nature becomes your teacher, endlessly patient, endlessly complex. You begin to understand volume not as a concept but as a fact. Florence taught me that to paint from life is an act of humility and sincerity.

**In your paintings, light often feels almost psychological rather than purely visual. What role does light play in revealing the inner world of your subjects?**

Light, for me, is never neutral. Light is the first thing a viewer encounters, the first silence before the painting speaks, and I use that moment of first attention to draw the viewer toward something essential; the brightest point, yes, but also what surrounds it, what the darkness is protecting. Light and shadow in portraiture are not opposites. They are collaborators in the work of revelation. The light shows what a person carries toward the world; the shadow holds what they have not yet surrendered.

**How does your Mexican-American background and your connection to Chihuahua shape your artistic identity and visual language?**

Growing up in Chihuahua, I was surrounded by the weight and beauty of tradition. My parents also brought me books of European masters from their travels : Velázquez, Rembrandt, figures who seemed to reach across centuries and speak directly to something I did not yet have words for. When I came to the United States, I encountered new mediums, new perspectives, new ways of seeing. My identity now lives at the crossing point of these cultures. I do not belong entirely to one or the other; I belong to the conversation between them. And that, I have come to understand, is not a limitation. It is the very source of my language.



**'Ruka'**, American artist born in Okinawa, graduated from the University of Washington, Seattle, with a Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Design. Post-graduation, he has returned to creative arts and illustration while pursuing a career in architecture. A prominent goal held through university was connect with others emotions through the built environment. This goal still remains, but now in through the pursuit of art.

*Project Statement*

Voiced through the character 'Satoru' , the work of Ruka is grounded in reflections on emotional struggle, loneliness, and the process of emotional understanding. Rooted in personal experiences and introspection, the work seeks to connect with a broader audience through shared emotional realities.



Ruka | Shapes | 2026



# Maria Tabet



The themes themselves have remained consistent throughout my practice. What evolved was the way I chose to communicate them: incorporating strong colors into themes of existential weight, felt more digestible. When I began introducing vivid, saturated colors into works dealing with anxiety, mortality, and existential uncertainty, the subjects became more accessible without losing their depth. We live in a world that is constantly searching for the next distraction, the next image that captures attention and offers momentary escape from difficult realities that have been normalized. In that context, using bold color felt entirely appropriate. It mirrors the way contemporary life packages even the heaviest experiences in visually appealing forms. At the same time, bright colors allow me to express the contradictions of beauty and despair which rarely exist separately; they often occupy the same space. The vibrant palette draws viewers in, while the underlying themes ask them to confront something more uncomfortable. That tension between attraction and unease has become central to my visual language.

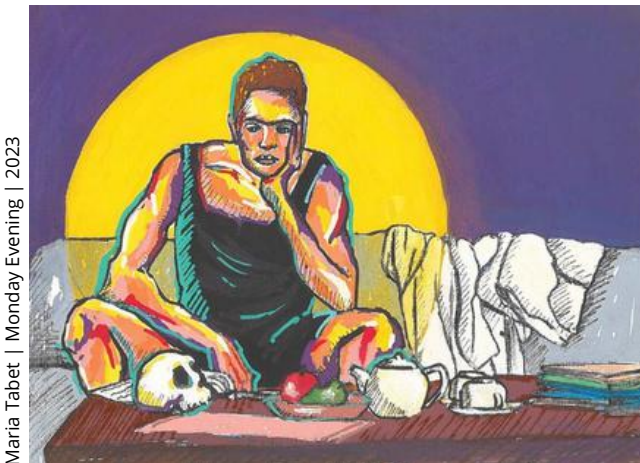
**You describe Lebanon as an unstable homeland that shaped your awareness of mortality from a young age. How does this personal and cultural background enter your paintings?**

Lebanon is where many of these anxieties, questions, and emotional sensitivities were first planted, watered, and nurtured. It is a country of extraordinary beauty, yet it carries immense historical and psychological weight: through its past, its present condition, its people, its neighbors, and the ways it is perceived by the world. My work reflects the complex coexistence of beauty and sorrow that comes with loving a place like Lebanon. At the same time, it engages with the absurdity of global politics and the external forces that have contributed to cycles of instability and despair in my country much like other places. The paintings emerge from this tension of affection and grief, attachment and disillusionment.

**Many of your figures appear fragmented, distorted, or emotionally tense. What does the human body represent in your work?**

The human body functions as a vessel for raw emotional and

**Your work often connects vivid, saturated colors with themes of anxiety, mortality, and existential reflection. How did this contrast become central to your visual language?**



Maria Tabet | Monday Evening | 2023



psychological experience. It is the site where anxiety, consciousness, vulnerability, and mortality become visible. By fragmenting these figures, exposing, and distorting them, I explore states of emotional unease and existential dislocation. These bodies exist between presence and absence, familiarity and estrangement, reflecting the instability and the fragility of the human condition.

**Food, dining tables, and domestic rituals appear in several of your works. Why are these everyday scenes important for exploring deeper existential questions?**

As someone who experiences intense anxiety, I am fascinated by the way people move through daily life while carrying the knowledge of mortality. We cannot function if we constantly dwell on our inevitable end, yet there is something so profoundly absurd about performing ordinary rituals as though existence were entirely self-explanatory. The elements also represent the unfairness in many parts of the world, where awareness of mortality arrives so early and becomes woven into everyday life- just as naturally as dinner plans, grocery shopping, or taking a shower. Heavy realities normalized and ignored, mainly to not cause unease for the majority.

Domestic scenes allow me to explore this paradox of the coexistence of mundane routine and the existential uncertainty. And allow the viewer to face a familiar scene that is meant to make them consider their reality.

**Your paintings can feel both visually seductive and psychologically uncomfortable. How do you balance attraction and disturbance in your compositions?**

When I feel overwhelmed or psychologically triggered, my instinct is to translate that experience into a visual form.

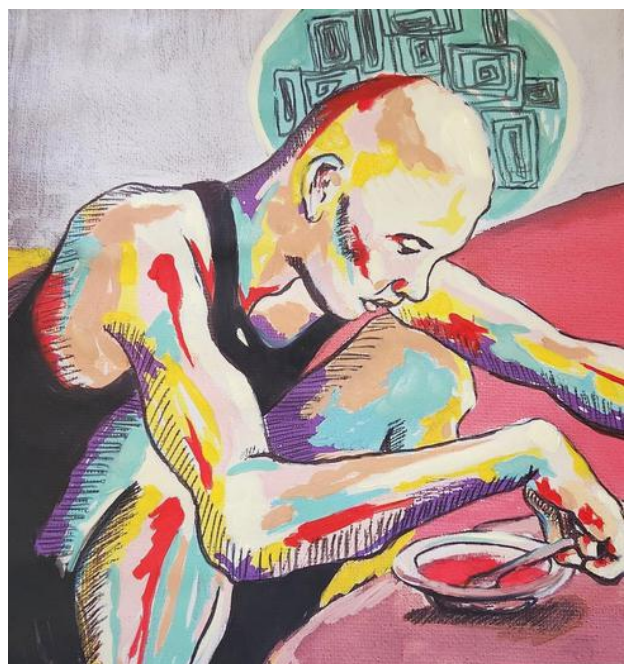
Once an emotion becomes an image, it shifts from something I am immersed in to something I can examine objectively. It becomes a study: how should it be represented, what colors best communicate it, what compositional structures support it? This process creates a certain distance that allows me to approach difficult emotions and heavy thoughts with clarity while preserving their intensity. The visual beauty invites the viewer in, while the underlying tension encourages them to stay and confront what lies beneath.

**As an artist pursuing a PhD, how does research influence your painting process? Do theory and practice develop together for you?**

For me, painting and research are inseparable. Theory does not sit alongside practice because it generates it. The deeper I engage with philosophy, psychology, history, and other fields of inquiry, the richer my visual language becomes. Research has always been driven by genuine curiosity and fascination, but theoretical exploration offers frameworks that can be translated into visual forms and representations. Paintings grounded in philosophical inquiry feel especially rewarding because they allow complex ideas to be experienced emotionally as well as intellectually.

**What do you hope viewers experience after the first visual attraction of bright colors fades and the darker emotional layers of the work begin to appear?**

People often describe the work as sad and express a preference for more optimistic imagery. Yet, for me, this is not a sad place, it is simply an honest one. The bright colors remain, familiar objects remain, and the compositions continue to operate through visual harmony, but they coexist with deeper truths that are impossible to ignore. With raw feelings that are barely confronted because it is just not convenient. I hope viewers connect with the fear, curiosity, vulnerability, and frustration that shape our shared human experience. More than anything, I hope the work offers a space where difficult emotions can be acknowledged rather than avoided and embellished.



**Nursena Tetik** was born in Ankara, Türkiye, in 2003. She completed her secondary education at Eskişehir Atatürk Fine Arts High School, where she was admitted to the Painting Department with distinction. In 2025, she graduated from the Department of Visual Arts at Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Faculty of Art and Design, ranking first in both her department and faculty, and earning the title of High Honor Student. Throughout her undergraduate studies, Tetik served as the Student Representative of the Department of Visual Arts. In addition to participating in numerous group exhibitions, she took an active role in their organization and coordination, gaining experience in exhibition planning and cultural event management. She is currently pursuing an M.A. in Painting (Thesis Track) at the Graduate School of Anadolu University. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that bridges art and design, Tetik integrates her knowledge of visual arts and museology into her artistic practice. Through her work in visitor engagement and museum communication, she has developed strong skills in audience interaction and cultural mediation. She has also undertaken projects focusing on corporate identity development and branding strategies, expanding her expertise in visual communication and design. Drawing inspiration from diverse disciplines, Tetik continues to develop her practice through an innovative and holistic perspective. Her work centers on the intersections of art, design, cultural heritage, memory, and visual culture, and she remains actively involved in projects that foster interdisciplinary dialogue. Alongside her academic and artistic pursuits, she has participated in various professional training programs and earned certifications in related fields.

*Project Statement*

Nursena Tetik is a multidisciplinary artist whose painting-based practice investigates the relationship between material, process, and surface. Working through layered structures, her practice is shaped by intuitive decisions, repetitive gestures, and accumulated traces on the surface. Her work revolves around the concepts of nature, transformation, and the in-between state. The surface is approached not only as a visual field but as a site where memory and experience are layered and recorded. Rather than a completed object, her practice is understood as an ongoing field of inquiry in constant transformation. Processes guided by material, chance encounters, and interlayer relationships define the structure of the work. Her works are conceived as open structures that gain renewed meaning in the moment of encounter with the viewer.





# — Interview

## Jonathan Muyal

**Your artistic practice is rooted in photomicroscopy. How did you first begin to see the microscope not only as a scientific instrument, but also as an artistic tool?**

My photos were once considered mere documentation, a collection of data. At best, they appeared—as small vignettes—in scientific publications. Yet, unconsciously, I took pleasure in photographing the microstructures of gemstones, until those around me began to express their enthusiasm and appreciation for my work. Then, in 2017, I won the "Photographer of the Year" competition hosted by the Gemmological Association of Great Britain (Gem-A). I began to realize that not only did I thrive in this practice, but that I possessed real potential. I saw that it was much more than a scientific tool—it had become my artistic medium.

Jonathan Muyal | Interferences | 2021



By definition, an artist-photographer has their own vision and interpretation, which is reflected in their work. I adopt this same approach, in contrast to the gemologist's documentary work and photomicrography created for purely scientific purposes.

**Your images reveal entire visual universes hidden inside gemstones. What fascinates you most about these invisible microcosms?**

What constantly fascinates me is the infinite universe waiting to be explored, as well as the messages and emotions contained within these gems.

These microcosms prompt us to reflect on our own perception and understanding of the world and the cosmos. As I delve into the microscopic realm, I open the doors to an infinite universe.

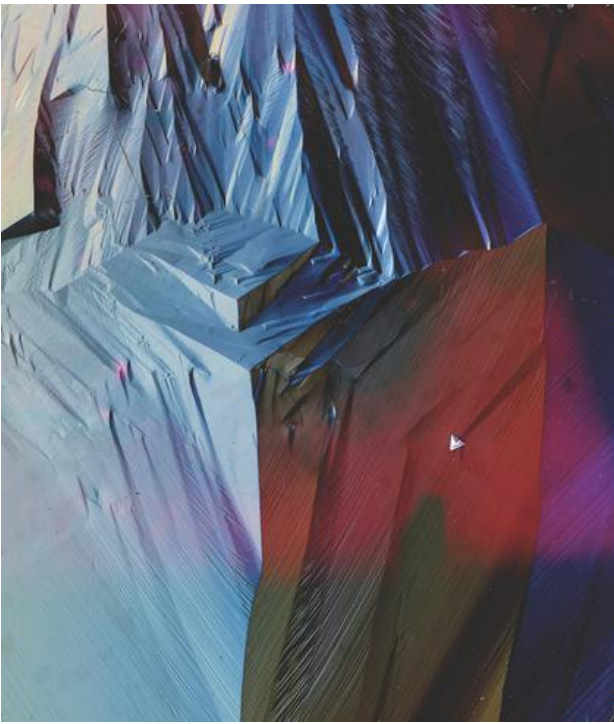
This creates a parallel and a reflection on the concept of scale—a realization that our world, and indeed we ourselves, are microscopic and insignificant in the grand scheme of the universe.

A sense of humility arises when faced with landscapes millions of years old, serving as a testament to our planet's deep history.

**As a gemologist and visual artist, how do you balance scientific accuracy with poetic or conceptual interpretation?**

There is always a duality in my work, which I strive to transform into complementarity, for one does not preclude the other. The pragmatism of science and documentation can also convey a poetic, emotional message inherent in the nature of gemstones.

Depending on the project, I aim to share work that, beyond gemological information, evokes the notion of the sublime found in nature. I examine my work from both scientific and artistic perspectives to convey a message rooted in questions specific to contemporary art. To this end, I constantly study numerous disciplines related to science and the arts to stimulate intellectual inquiry within my photomicrography. In terms of form, I continuously reflect on the presentation of my photographic subjects, experimenting extensively with composition, lighting, and color. This often allows me to create a balance between scientific accuracy and poetic or conceptual interpretation.



**Inclusions in gems are usually studied as geological evidence. How do they become visual narratives in your work?**

The internal characteristics of stones are a subject of study for scientists, but as we explore these microcosms, our imagination is unconsciously stimulated. One of the first reactions is, of course, pareidolia. The shapes we encounter begin to be interpreted, imagined, or dreamed about, causing us to naturally drift away from pragmatic documentation. The very act of diving into the microcosm can become an introspective experience. Thus, each image or photomicrograph reflects not only the imagination but also deeper and more intimate thoughts. The microscopic universe could be, like Surrealism, an image of the unconscious.

By seeking references to numerous artistic movements influenced by stones—such as Surrealism—as well as philosophical concepts like the sublime, and historical and sociological contexts, a coherence and substance emerge. This translates into a visual narrative.

**Many of your images seem to resemble landscapes, cities, ruins, or cosmic spaces. Do you intentionally search for these associations, or do they emerge unexpectedly?**

Absolutely. These images are part of a series exploring the textures and topography—literally—that stones naturally possess, reflecting the landscapes we observe in our daily lives or on a cosmic scale. These works also reference the ancient Greek philosophical concept of the microcosm. The landscapes observed are merely a miniature version of the universe, or a metaphor for our world. In ancient Greece, the "microcosm" did not refer to what one observes under a microscope, but rather to our planet—a fundamental building block—multiplied within the macrocosm, which is the universe.

However, this is not the only theme I explore through

gemstones. There are countless other fascinating and infinite aspects to investigate and experiment with, particularly regarding light, color, and abstract compositions.

**Gemstones carry a history that reaches back millions of years. How does this deep geological time influence the emotional or philosophical dimension of your work?**

It is certainly a unique, moving, and deeply spiritual experience. When I realize that I am observing a universe invisible to the naked eye, and then witness landscapes millions or billions of years old that reflect a part of our planet's genesis and history, I feel like I am receiving a profound lesson in humility. It reminds us just how fragile and insignificant we are.

If we reflect on the history of humanity, Homo sapiens—our species—has existed for only about 200,000 years. Gems were here before us and will remain here after us; they represent resilience and humility, and they embody color, light, energy, and eternity. These are concepts that refer to the philosophical notion of the sublime and exert a profound influence on my work.

**How have your experiences in Southeast Asia, the United States, Europe, and mining regions around the world shaped your visual language?**

My family background is multicultural in itself, and my experiences living abroad have only confirmed and reinforced this. These experiences have made me more open-minded toward others, allowing me to discover the world and embrace different cultures. I am also multilingual; I have studied more than a dozen languages, many of which I speak fluently. I consider myself a citizen of the world. My travels around the globe and in mining regions have made me realize that our world is very small compared to the microcosms I explore. This realization underscores the importance of including one another, breaking down barriers, combating injustice and poverty. We are all part of the same microcosm: our planet Earth. We must cherish and protect it together, as there is an urgent need to do so if we wish to leave a better future for our children.

Therefore, this multicultural background, life experiences, and concerns about our world strongly influence my research and the visual language of my work.



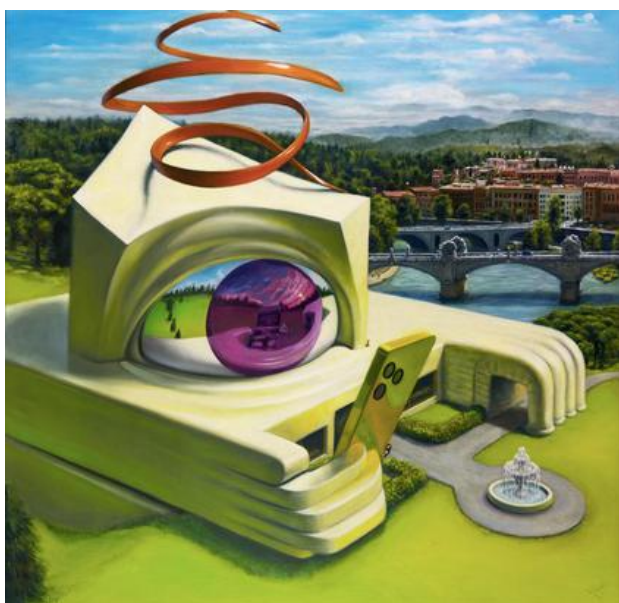
## — Interview

# Jerome Chia-Horng Lin

**Your practice moves between oil painting, 3D digital tools, animation, and augmented reality. How do these different media help you explore the relationship between the spiritual cosmos and the material world?**

Oil painting possesses a distinct materiality; its touchable textures arise directly from physical pigments and canvas. In contrast, digital tools feel inherently virtual, intangible, and almost spiritual during the creation process. Categorizing them this way is certainly not incorrect.

However, when considering Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of the "Flow State" from his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, a paradox emerges. During the creative process, I actually achieve a state of flow much more frequently while working with oil on canvas. In other words, traditional painting allows me to delve into a spiritual cosmos far more easily than digital mediums like 3D animation or AR. Traditional tools—like pencils and brushes—capture concepts efficiently and intuitively. Digital tools, conversely, present significant technical hurdles. They are rigid and highly logical, forcing artists to follow strict, procedural steps. Furthermore, the electronic fields



generated by computers introduce a subtle, often unnoticed interference that disrupts this deep psychological flow.

**In your statement, you describe art as part of a spiritual journey. How does this journey appear in your recent works, especially in the *Look @ the Egg* series?**

In the beginning, I simply made digital collages to map out my ideas and create the reflections inside my Egg Yolks. Later, a Google search led me to stainless steel spheres, which are perfect for capturing a 180-degree view of a location. I started traveling with these spheres, taking photos across Venice, New York, Zurich, and several towns in Germany. Lately, I have shifted to using a panoramic camera, a technology that is becoming much more advanced and affordable. The only downside is the extra time required to post-process the videos and photos in a 3D program, but it is a time-consuming issue rather than a technical hurdle for me. This new workflow opens up great possibilities. It allows me to go beyond just collecting photos; I can now deeply explore new ideas using digital tools as a core part of my art practice.

In his book *Secret Knowledge*, David Hockney reveals the tricks of the old masters, showing how they constantly adopted new apparatuses for their art. Traditional oil techniques might not change much, but I find it exciting to explore modern alternatives. Since I already use digital tools to compose the images I want to paint, it made perfect sense to bring them into Augmented Reality (AR). Viewers have reacted very positively to this combination of traditional oils and AR.

**The egg-like forms in your paintings often function as reflective lenses or filters. What does the egg symbolize for you, and why did it become such an important visual element?**

Water is the source of life, and the egg represents its very

first stage. My Egg series grew out of my previous Water series, and I have spent over a decade working on both. For centuries, eggs have been filled with rich cultural metaphors. Easter eggs, for example, symbolize rebirth and renewal, where the hard shell represents a sealed tomb and cracking it open represents resurrection.

Like water, eggs are essential to our daily survival, yet we often take them for granted. They remind me to pay attention to the minor, quiet details around us—things that seem trivial but actually sustain our livelihood. I treat the reflections in the egg yolks as mirrors to observe my own inner thoughts and mindset.

**In Look @ the Egg, you explore how perception is shaped by experience, mentality, prejudice, and assumptions. How do you want viewers to become aware of their own "filters" when looking at your work?**

Scientists conduct the Mirror Self-Recognition (MSR) test to verify whether an animal possesses a sense of self-awareness, with a passing result widely considered a hallmark of higher intelligence. Historically, before the invention of the camera, the wealthy paid handsome sums to have their portraits painted by skillful painters. However, once photography emerged, many of these painters shifted their career path to become portrait photographers. Today, smartphones have pushed this evolution even further, igniting the global selfie phenomenon and largely pushing traditional portrait photographers out of the picture. In this contemporary landscape, one could almost claim that everyone has become an artist to some extent.

This modern obsession with taking selfies spurred me to create my artwork, Look @ the Egg II. The overwhelming presence of social media has fundamentally reshaped how we perceive ourselves, trapping people in an idealized world filled with heavily filtered and retouched images.

The Look @ the Egg series reflects its surroundings in panoramic views, resulting in an intentional image distortion. In a way, it operates as its own kind of processed image, viewed through a special camera and filter. Through this work, I aim to delve into the mental filters of the human mind. Ultimately, this touches upon the subconsciousness—a realm that may require some psychological insight to fully grasp in depth. In short, we all view the world through certain invisible filters, often without ever realizing they exist or understanding why.

**Many of your paintings contain reflections of architecture, landscapes, people, or viewers holding phones. What role does reflection play in your understanding of reality?**

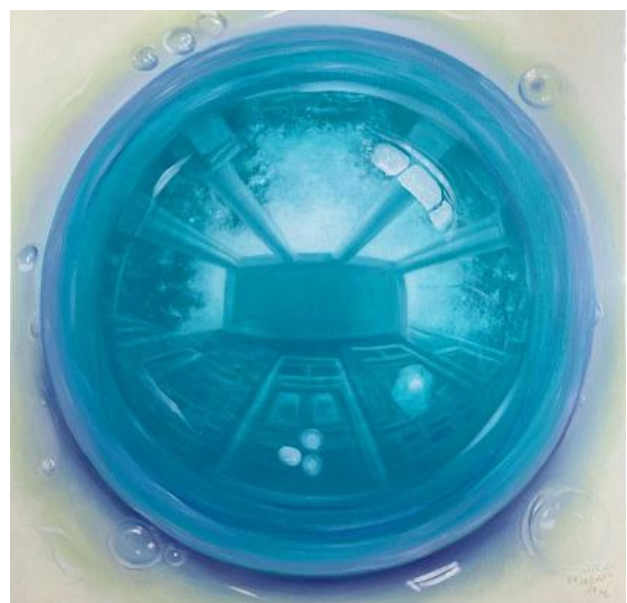
From a biological standpoint, our sensory organs—like our eyes, nose, or fingers—translate the physical world into electrical impulses. The brain then takes these various inputs and acts as a prediction engine. Rather than passively recording data like a camera, it relies heavily on past experiences, expectations, and context to actively construct our environment. When we look at the world, we often ignore this constructive process, much like a fish is unaware of the water it swims in. However, catching our reflection in a mirror can interrupt this autopilot state. It serves as a brief wake-up call, prompting us to ponder the profound gap between objective reality and our subjective perception.

**In Egg Go, the traditional black and white Go pieces are replaced by yellow and purple egg yolks. How does the idea of strategy, observation, and being observed connect to this work?**

Go is a globally renowned strategy board game often used to sharpen logical thinking. In this piece, the reflections on the Go pieces reveal different viewers holding cell phones from various angles. While the player contemplates their next move, the audience watches, deeply engaged in their own calculations. As we look at the Go pieces, we are simultaneously being watched from multiple perspectives. The irony lies in the medium: the pieces are made of egg yolk—a soft, jellylike substance completely unfit for a strategic game. Adding to the surrealism, each piece reflects a totally different, unrelated environment, bizarrely juxtaposed next to one another. This imagery mirrors our chaotic world, where everyone operates within their own distinct mindset and calculation. My intention is to portray this phenomenon while remaining detached from it, positioning myself simply as a watcher.

**As both an artist and an educator in visual communication design, how does teaching influence your creative thinking, and how does your artistic practice influence your teaching?**

Many artists find themselves navigating a complex, winding career path, and my journey is no exception. After college, I started out as a high school art teacher, but eventually pivoted to pursue opportunities in the 3D animation field. Once I gained substantial experience as an animator and designer, I was invited to teach at the college level. One thing led to another, and I am now back to teaching full-time. While unexpected, I believe this diverse background deeply benefits my students. Academia serves as my financial backbone, but it offers much more than stability; it immerses me in a youthful environment where I can constantly sense ongoing trends. Engaging with my students forces me to rethink my identity as both an educator and an artist. The creative surroundings spark fresh ideas, ultimately inspiring me to integrate AR and other emerging technologies into my own studio practice.



# — Interview

## V Holecek

**Your artist statement describes you as a “multi-disciplinary visual artist and existential shitposter”. How important is humor, irony, or self-mythology in the way you present yourself and your work?**



V Holecek | Hexennacht | 2025



V Holecek | Equinox | 2026

I don't know how much humor figures into my work necessarily, although it definitely finds its way into the mix. It's a matter of personal conviction that I cannot take anyone seriously who already takes themselves seriously enough for both of us. I admittedly have a low threshold for pompous twats.

My mythology, on the other hand...I do get some enjoyment at the possibility that I exist as some sort of “internet cryptid”. When I was originally registering the domain for my website, I eventually landed on the mythology around “Schamballah” (Shambala, Shangri-la, etc.), which is referenced in various cultures on the Eurasian Continent, invariably taking the format of a hidden realm away from the world of regular men; a front-end acknowledgement of just how niche I figured I was going to end up being. In my more delusional moment of grandeur, I like to imagine people having debates over what I did or did not mean with a particular image or thing that escaped the confines of my mouth.

More realistically, I figure that most of the “value” of my work will come much after my departure when my pieces sit in the investment portfolios while physically crated in warehouses where they never see the light of day and exist merely to be traded back and forth by the kinds of people who wouldn't have bothered to spit on me while alive. And that, to me, is kind of comical.

**Many of your works feel like visions from a dark ritual, a dream, or a post-human world. What emotional or philosophical space are you trying to open for the viewer?**

Being alive in 2026 is kind of a dark ritual in and of itself. Dark and surrealist artwork is kind of having an underground renaissance moment right now on the internet. I attribute this largely to the fact that it mirrors the absurdity of the world around us.

Dark times call for dark art.

People, oddly enough, consume grim or dreary content more when the worldly outlook is bleak. Don't get me wrong, there are those who seek out uplifting materials, but I feel like a lot of people just need to know what someone else recognizes how fucked up things are. Dark art becomes a shorthand where they can find catharsis with something they can't necessarily put into words.

Its not even a new thing.

The draw of dark and unsettling imagery during grim and uncertain times goes back as far as recorded history, but it also transcends contemporaneous zeitgeists. People share Francisco Goya or Hieronymus Bosch paintings on social media centuries after those artists stopped consuming oxygen, possibly moreso now that many feel that we are spiraling into some form of tech-dystopia. They still hold resonance.

**Your visual language often combines the body, machinery, bones, cosmic symbols, and occult atmosphere. What draws you to these hybrid forms?**

The entire visual language of H.R. Giger's "biomechanics" was incredibly formative for me. Being GenX, I probably saw ALIEN way younger than any parent these days would probably allow. That's kind of the standard gateway drug into the larger aesthetic world...ALIEN lead to me finding a copy of H.R. Giger's NECRONOMICON in my teens, which lead to finding artists like Zdzislaw Beksinski, Dariusz Zawadski, Chet Zar, Oenameus Dack, Mariusz Lewandowski, and so on.

I also grew up on doses of H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King, Douglas Adams, and shows like The Twilight Zone and The Outer Limits and the projects of David Lynch. Of course, growing up in the 80's and 90's, there was basically no chance that I was not going to be a social freak show. I made friends here and there, but some time around the 1996-1998, there was this sudden vogue moment for social misfits that came with the advent of the internet.

Being a freak on any level tends to imbue you with a gravitational pull between you and other freaks. The internet only amplified this pull by removing the physical barrier of geography, so being an oddball in the late 90's put you on intersecting paths with a lot of fascinating and eccentric individuals.

The other contributing component to this is my love/hate relationship with the tech sector. I grew up at a time when tech was actually genuinely

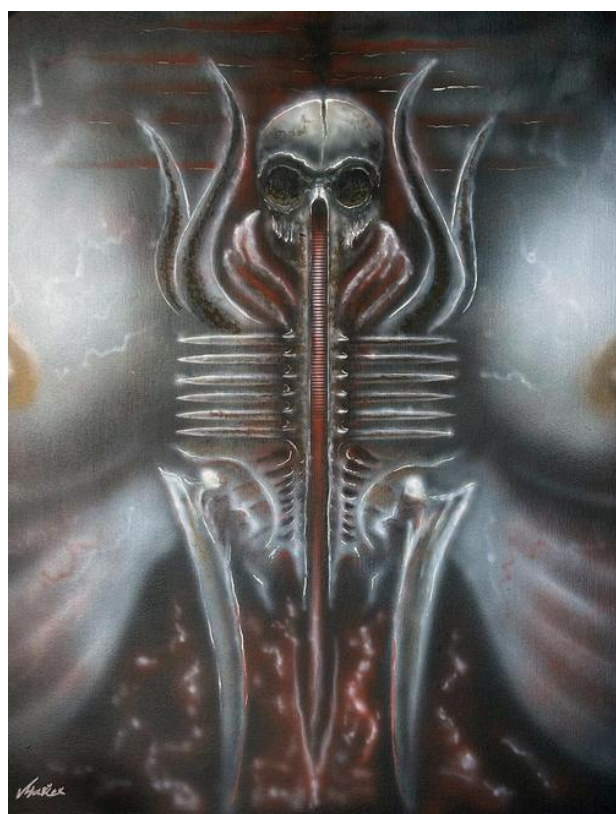
experimental and innovative in a lot of ways that it just isn't today. This was back when tech was still largely run by actual tech people, rather than executives.

Nowadays so much of the tech sector is just a hollow cash grab to strip away previously ubiquitous features and functions only to sell them back to you as an adapter or an app. Even something like just aimlessly browsing the web is something that so many people just don't do like they used to, as social media companies do everything they can to keep all your contact with the outside world contained in their little sandbox.

Its funny, because I went into the Air Force to pursue a tech-related field, and ended up maintaining some of the most archaic Cold War Era systems you could imagine. Some of my aesthetic comes from that exposure...the big, clunky cabinet of circuit boards and arrays of bulky cables connecting them to other clunky cabinets in all directions. I worked on systems so old that their most recent "upgrades" were SCSI hard drives run off of a tape emulator module so the system could still read the data like reel-to-reel magnetic tape.

**Several of your works use a strong contrast between darkness and pale, almost glowing forms. What role does light play in your compositions?**

Darkness is the backdrop that gives light its context and meaning. Without it you're left with just a white void, which is no more revealing than a black void. Shadow is what helps determine dimension. It gives



V Holecek | Malign | 2024



form, contour, and depth. It literally defines the difference between the second and third dimension.

**Your drawings and paintings often seem both sacred and disturbing at the same time. Are you interested in the tension between beauty and horror?**

When I am in a situation where I have to give my initiatory blurb to someone to explain what I do as an artist, my go-to answer is typically something to the end of: "I make beautiful images of terrible things". Over the past decade I've found myself increasingly inspired by the "feral women" movement that has kind of taken off. My partner is one of these women who has adopted the practice of "reclaiming her femininity in threatening ways", and I'm finding that influence informing the direction of a number of my compositions these days.

**Many of your figures feel transformed, haunted, or caught between human and non-human states. What interests you about transformation as a subject?**

I am reasonably certain my name exists on some sort of watch list somewhere because of the books I checked out from the school library. If the library had something to offer with arcane topics, unexplained phenomena, or conspiracy theory, I'm pretty sure I checked it out at least once. As such, I am what you would call "casually superstitious", in that I have a lot of placeholder beliefs

for more esoteric things that serve as functional answers until such time as a better explanation and data is available. For example, I don't necessarily believe in souls, but I do believe in hauntings. In my mind, I have rationalized it in ways that a particularly brutal or grief-stricken death can alter the environmental currents in and around a given locality, depending on the severity. I have zero scientific basis for this theory, and I'm not so attached to it that I'm unwilling to entertain a better explanation with more grounding in science. I keep these beliefs as a little treat, and I don't require anyone else to subscribe to them.

I have found that holding space for some level of magical thinking makes for more creative exploration. That's why most of the visually powerful art in history tends to be religious. Militant atheists who fetishize logic make terrible artists...and I say that as an atheist.

**When people encounter your work, do you hope they understand it, feel unsettled by it, or simply enter its atmosphere without needing a clear explanation?**

My artwork isn't really narrative-driven, but is more of the coalescing of a mood into an image. I guess if I have any kind of goal for a response when someone is encountering my work for the first time, I think I'm really striving for is to create something that makes someone stand there a utter a quiet "Fuck..." to themselves. Something to that end.





V. Hovětka

# — Interview

## Luna Naseh

**Your work often explores identity as something "built". How do you personally define the architecture of identity in your practice?**

I think identity is something constantly under construction. We build ourselves slowly through memory, grief, love, migration, survival, culture, and all the people we meet along the way. In my work, I often think of the self almost like a mapped out geometry, something with hidden sides, cracks, foundations, and histories layered into every aspect. A lot of my portraits explore the idea that we carry entire landscapes within us. The geometric elements in my work are less about perfection and more about trying to give shape to emotions that are difficult to explain out loud. I think I'm



Luna Naseh | Geography Of Being



Luna Naseh | Atouryast

always trying to understand how a person can feel fragmented and whole at the same time, and that identity is built slowly over time through both what we inherit and what we choose to become.

**Growing up between cultures, how has this experience shaped your visual language and the emotional tone of your work?**

Growing up between cultures shaped almost everything about the way I see the world. There's a strange beauty in constantly existing between places, but also a quiet loneliness to it. You learn very early on how to adapt, how to translate yourself, and sometimes how to rebuild parts of your identity depending on where you are. Visually, I'm drawn to contrasts: softness and structure, familiarity and distance, nostalgia and reinvention. Emotionally, I think my work carries a quiet longing to reconcile different parts of the self. A lot of my pieces explore themes of displacement, memory, resilience, and the search for home, both physically and internally. Even when the imagery is calm, there's usually an underlying tension between feeling rooted and feeling untethered.

**You have a background in industrial design — how does this influence your approach to composition and form in illustration?**

Industrial design taught me how to think structurally, but also emotionally. Good design isn't only about functionality, it's about how something makes a person feel when they interact with it. I carry that mindset into my illustrations. When I build a composition, I think a lot about rhythm,



balance, negative space, texture, and movement through the image. But underneath all of that, I'm usually thinking emotionally first. How certain combinations of shape and color can carry completely different emotions. The structure exists to support the feeling. I think my background in design gave me a sensitivity to form, while illustration became the place where I allowed myself to become more vulnerable and intuitive.

**Your portraits feel both structured and deeply emotional. How do you balance geometry with intimacy?**

For me, geometry is not separate from emotion, it's a way of containing it. The structured elements in my work often act like emotional architecture, giving shape to feelings that are otherwise difficult to articulate. The intimacy comes from the human feeling and concept in each piece. Underneath all that structure—the textures, the expressions, the quiet details, the emotional weight carried by the figures themselves. I'm interested in that balance between control and vulnerability. I think many people, especially women, learn to appear composed while carrying entire emotional worlds internally. My work often lives in that tension.

**The female figures in your work appear calm yet powerful. What does feminine strength mean to you today?**

To me, feminine strength is not always loud. Sometimes it is quiet, tired, grieving, soft, or still learning how to stand again—but persistent. Feminine strength is the ability to hold complex emotional worlds inside of you while still showing up for others. I'm very interested in the kind of strength that doesn't announce itself, but survives anyway, in kindness and connection.

The women in my work often appear calm. But that calm is

layered with memory, endurance, softness, inner movement, and sometimes grief. I think feminine strength, to me, is the ability to remain open and feeling in a world that often asks women to harden themselves. It is the ability to keep rebuilding without losing tenderness.

**How does your experience in production design influence the narrative aspect of your illustrations?**

Production design taught me that a space can tell a story before a character ever says a word. A room, an object, a color, or a texture can hold memory. It can reveal who someone is, what they have lost, what they are hiding, or what they are trying to become.

I think that way of seeing has deeply influenced my illustrations. Even when I'm making a portrait, I'm thinking about the world around and inside the figure. I want the image to feel like a still from a larger emotional story, as if the viewer has arrived in the middle of a moment, and something has happened before and will continue after. But that one singular moment can hold the weight of the story.

**What do you hope viewers feel or discover about themselves when they engage with your work?**

I hope viewers feel invited to pause for a moment and look inward. My work comes from very personal places, but I never want it to feel closed off. I want people to find their own memories, contradictions, grief, softness, or resilience inside it.

More than anything, I hope the work makes people feel less alone in their complexity. We all carry so many versions of ourselves—the person we were, the person we are becoming, the person we had to leave behind. If someone sees my work and feels even briefly understood, or reminded of their own inner world, that means a lot to me.



**Anastasia Vorfolomeeva** is a contemporary Russian artist working in the genre of urban landscape. She was born in 2001 in Zelenograd and currently lives in Moscow.

She began her artistic education at an early age: at the age of nine, her interest in art emerged and gradually developed into a serious passion. From 2015 to 2019, she studied at ZTDiM. In 2026, she completed the courses "Painting" and "Sketching" at the Faculty of Continuing Education of the Moscow State Academic Art Institute named after V. I. Surikov.

Anastasia's creative journey began with copying images, which became the first step in mastering the fundamentals of composition and form. Gradually, her interest shifted toward sketches of the surrounding environment, allowing her to develop her observational skills and attention to detail. Over time, her creative range expanded significantly: the artist began experimenting with different directions, eventually focusing on landscape with an emphasis on urban motifs and scenes of everyday life.

At the beginning of her artistic path, Anastasia worked with a simple pencil, mastering the basics of graphic art. Today, her artistic toolkit includes pen, liners, charcoal, and watercolor. Her style is distinguished by careful attention to the depiction of light and shadow, which gives her works depth and volume. Black predominates in her palette, creating contrasting and expressive compositions. The key theme of her work is the urban landscape and everyday life captured through detail.

The artist Valentin Alexandrovich Serov has had a particular influence on Anastasia's creative development. She also draws inspiration from the works of other masters, studying their techniques and approaches, which helps her develop her own style and discover new artistic solutions.

At present, Anastasia continues to explore the urban environment through the lens of graphic art and watercolor, paying particular attention to the contrasts of light and shadow in city landscapes. Her works reflect a desire to capture the beauty of ordinary moments and convey the atmosphere of the modern city.



Anastasia Vorfolomeeva | Palace of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich



# — Interview

## Jane Oliveira

**Your artistic journey began after a transition from the medical field to fine art photography. How did this shift influence the way you look at the human mind, emotion, and vulnerability?**

Although my professional path began in medicine, I have always been interested in the human mind and visual expression. Medicine allowed me to witness vulnerability,



resilience, and the many emotional layers that shape our lives. Over time, I realized that photography was the perfect way to bring these interests together. While medicine explores the human experience through science, my artistic practice explores it through symbolism, dreams, and metaphor. To me, these paths are simply different ways of understanding what it means to be human.

**Dreams and unconscious imagery play an important role in your work. Do your photographs usually begin with a clear concept, a dream-like image, or an intuitive feeling?**

Most of the time, they begin with a dream. Dreams have always played an important role in my work. Sometimes I wake up with a strong image in mind, and that image becomes the starting point for a photograph. From there, I gradually build the scene, choosing symbols, objects, and light that help transform an invisible feeling or idea into a visual image.

**Why did you choose Ball-Jointed Dolls as the central figures in your visual narratives? What do they allow you to express that a human model might not?**

At first, my choice was a practical one. At that time, finding opportunities to work regularly with human models was not always easy, so I began creating my own worlds on a smaller scale. What started as a practical solution gradually became an essential part of my artistic language. I discovered that their stillness offered something unique. It challenged me to create emotion, narrative, and a sense of life through light, symbolism, and composition. Unlike human models, they are not tied to a specific identity, age, or personal history. This gives



Jane Oliveira | Sad Clown | 2025



viewers more freedom to bring their own emotions and experiences into the image.

**Your works often feel suspended between life and stillness. How do you create this sense of quiet tension in your images?**

Natural light plays a fundamental role in creating that tension. Inspired by Baroque painting, I use chiaroscuro - the dramatic relationship between light and shadow - to guide the viewer's eye and build atmosphere. Composition is equally important, as well as the posture of the dolls and the relationships between objects within the scene. I am often looking for a balance between stillness and movement. Even though the figures are motionless, the composition, gestures, colors, and symbolic elements can suggest that something is changing, emerging, or about to happen. That is where much of the tension comes from.

**You mention the influence of Baroque and Renaissance painting. Which elements of classical art are most important for you: composition, light, symbolism, atmosphere, or something else?**

All of these elements are important because they contribute to the narrative. If I had to choose one, it would be light. I am deeply influenced by the Baroque use of chiaroscuro, where light and shadow do more than shape form; they create mood, emotion, and meaning. For me, light is a visual language that guides the viewer's

journey through the image. Combined with composition, symbolism, and atmosphere, it helps transform a simple scene into a layered and contemplative visual story.

**Many of your images have a theatrical quality, almost like silent scenes from an unknown story. Do you imagine narratives behind each photograph, or do you prefer to leave them open-ended?**

Yes, I usually begin with a narrative, although it often starts with a dream, an emotion, or a question I want to explore. From there, I develop a concept and gradually build the visual story around it. At the same time, I intentionally leave the narrative open. My art is not meant to close the story but to open a window into it. The images contain fragments of my own reflections, dreams, and questions, yet I hope viewers will bring their own experiences and interpretations to the work.

**Your works invite viewers to project their own memories and emotions onto the figures. What kind of inner response do you hope your images will awaken?**

I often say that my work is about opening windows rather than closing them. My photographs are built from personal fragments, but they are not meant to provide definitive answers. Instead, I hope they create a space where a dialogue can emerge between the image and the viewer, inviting them to reconnect with their own inner landscape. If an image resonates on a deeper level and allows someone to discover a fragment of themselves within it, then it has fulfilled its purpose.



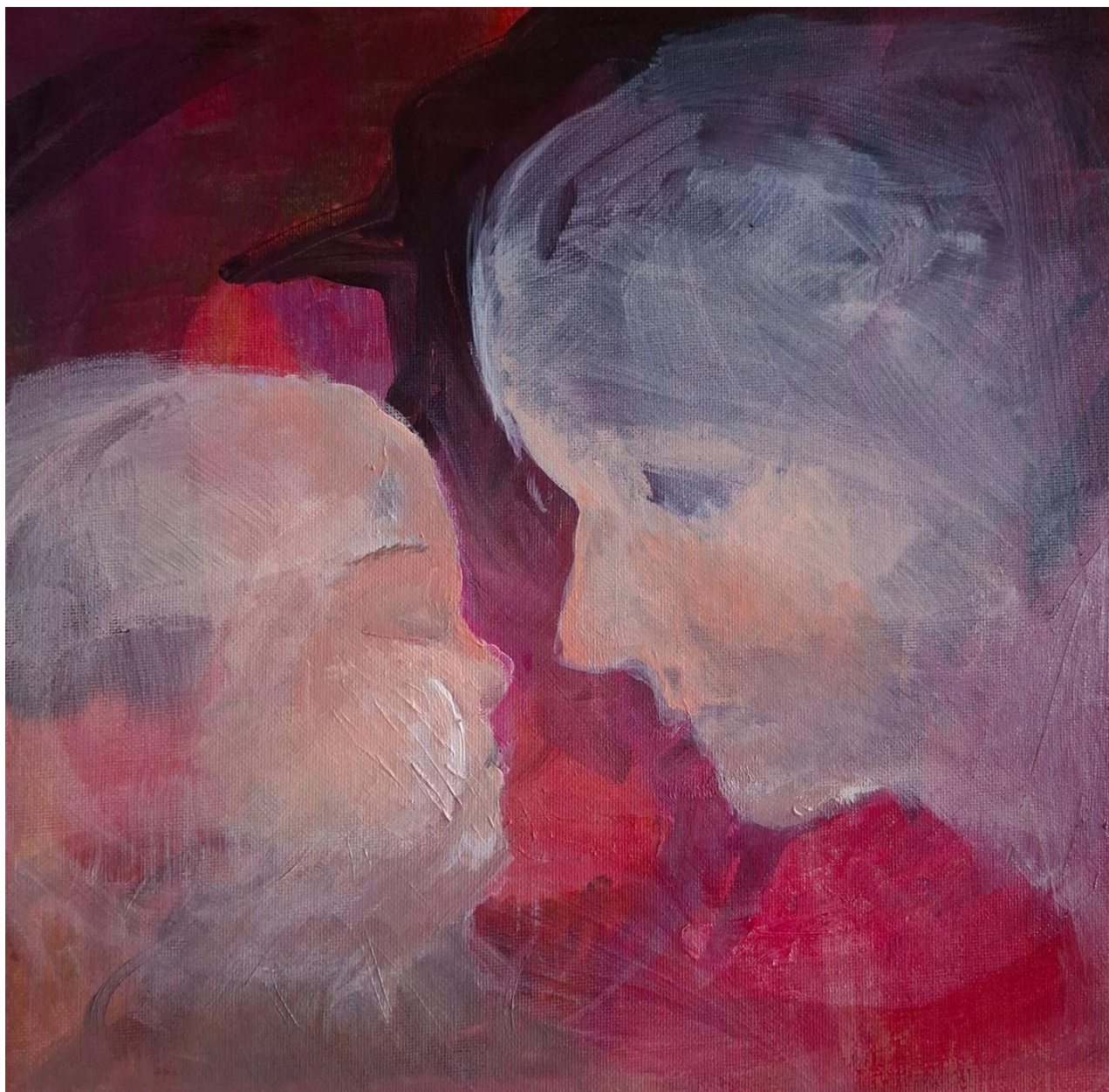
## Marina Bul

I was born in a small Siberian village, where the concept of an “art school” did not exist, and my desire to become an artist was met only with good-natured laughter.

I never became an artist in the traditional sense, but I still preserved my love for drawing.

A dry historical education, depression, and the uncertainty of life shaped my desire to try to capture on canvas weightless human feelings — emotions that cannot always be given a name. I am currently studying for my master’s degree and wish to regain the same ease with which I looked at a blank sheet of paper as a child.

I mainly work with gouache, although I have recently begun exploring acrylic.



Marina Bul | Connection | 2026



Marina Bul | Time | 2025

# — Interview

## Amalia Poulli

**You are both a doctor and an artist. How do these two parts influence each other?**



Amalia Poulli | Orange Story | 2025



Medicine and art influence each other constantly in my life in deep ways, as both as both are fundamentally about observing, understanding and responding to human experience.

Art improves doctor's observation skills leading his empathy and emotional intelligence to higher levels, offers an outlet for every day stress and pressure and strengthens the communication between doctor and patient.

On the other hand medicine makes the doctor's artwork emotionally rich and authentic and influences visual precision in artistic representation of human body and movement.

**Has your experience as an anaesthesiologist shaped the way you understand the human body, emotions, or states of consciousness in your art?**

My job has deeply influenced my artistic work as in operating theatre the body can become simultaneously intensely present and strongly absent while the person's subjective consciousness temporarily disappears.

Anaesthesia changes also the patient's relationship to time, memory and emotions. Those gaps, discontinuities and alter perceptions affect my artistic practice conceptually and visually.

**You have been painting since your early years. What first drew you to art and what keeps you connected to it today?**



I believe that painting as a child was a way to release my subconscious world absolutely instinctively.

What keeps me connected to it today is that it remains unpredictable. Every work begins with uncertainty and I enjoy the moment when control dissolves and the painting begins to speak back, revealing something subconscious and unplanned.

**For the last 25 years, you studied art under the guidance of an artist and teacher in Cyprus. What was the most important lesson from this long art education?**

My teacher often emphasised that a painting carries the energy of the creator. When I realised that I stopped trying to control every outcome and began listening more deeply to silence, gesture, rhythm and instinct.

The most important lesson through that long experience was that an artwork should not simply be viewed but be felt.

**Your works are full of energy, movement and bold color contrasts. How do you usually begin a painting? With an idea, an emotion or an intuitive gesture?**

The beginning of my paintings usually remains open, instinctive and unpredictable.

As the color plays an emotional role, the first

gesture is extremely important, immediate and intuitive. In those early moments I try to stop thinking as I trust movement and energy to guide the painting forward.

**You mentioned that you would be happy to show your work outside your country. What does international exposure mean to you at this stage of your artistic journey?**

At this stage of my artistic journey I see international exposure as both a learning experience and a chance for growth. It would allow me to discover new ways of thinking about art and place my work within a broader context. Every exhibition outside my country would be an opportunity not only to present my work but also to learn from others and continue evolving as an artist.

**What do you hope viewers feel or discover when they stand in front of your paintings?**

When viewers stand in front of my paintings I mainly hope that they can discover their own stories through the colors, gestures and layers which are meant to spark emotions, memories and intuition.



**Michal Polo**

Beginning.





# — Interview

## Xinyu Yu

**Your practice seems to move between memory, construction, and emotional atmosphere. How would you describe the central question that guides your work?**

At the core of my practice is an ongoing inquiry into how human emotions are shaped, preserved, and transformed through constructed environments and cultural memory. My background allows me to approach this question from both artistic and design perspectives. I am not only a fine artist, but also a designer trained in spatial and architectural thinking, which deeply influences the way I construct visual narratives. Rather than creating purely representational images, I build psychological environments where emotion, structure, and atmosphere coexist. My work often investigates the fragile relationship between intimacy and

Xinyu Yu | Grain



control, permanence and impermanence, asking how contemporary systems shape human perception and emotional experience.

**You were trained in ink painting and watercolor in China. How do these early experiences continue to influence your current visual language?**

My early training in ink painting and watercolor was not only technical training, but also an immersion into a long cultural lineage rooted in philosophy, rhythm, and perception. Traditional Chinese painting emphasizes the relationship between emptiness and presence, restraint and expression, which continues to shape my visual language today. At the same time, I see these traditions as evolving rather than fixed. My practice explores how cultural inheritance can coexist with experimentation and reinvention. Even in my contemporary works, the fluidity of ink aesthetics, layered transparency, and sensitivity to atmosphere remain central, while being reinterpreted through abstraction, mixed media, and contemporary spatial compositions.

**In your work, Eastern artistic sensibilities meet contemporary urban and design-based thinking. How do you balance tradition and reinvention?**

I see tradition as an evolving visual language rather than something fixed in the past. My practice does not aim to preserve historical aesthetics unchanged; instead, I reinterpret them through contemporary urban experiences, abstraction, and interdisciplinary experimentation. Reinvention in my work also extends to the exploration of



materials and media, particularly through combining traditional techniques with contemporary processes in ways that reflect sustainability and adaptability. By combining the contemplative qualities of Eastern art with the structural and conceptual language of contemporary design, I aim to create works that feel culturally connected while remaining innovative and forward-looking.

**Your paintings often blur the line between organic forms and structured spaces. What draws you to this tension?**

I am fascinated by the contradiction between the organic and the constructed because it mirrors the contemporary human condition. We constantly negotiate between instinct and control, vulnerability and systems of order. In my work, natural forms often appear confined within geometric structures or artificial spaces, reflecting both protection and restriction. This tension allows me to explore how modern environments shape emotional experience and alter our relationship with nature and ourselves.

**In Afternoon, ordinary objects such as wooden utensils and bamboo vessels become almost meditative. What interests you about everyday handmade objects?**

During my time in Jingdezhen, I was studying traditional pottery and ceramic-making techniques in the city internationally recognized for its deep ceramic history and craftsmanship. Living within that environment heightened my awareness of how handmade objects carry traces of labor, ritual, and human presence. In Afternoon, the wooden utensils and woven bamboo vessels are not treated simply as still-life objects; they become quiet carriers of memory and time. I am fascinated by the emotional weight embedded

within ordinary materials and how craftsmanship can transform functional objects into vessels of cultural continuity and contemplation.

**How has studying at Pratt Institute and the University of Pennsylvania shaped the relationship between art, design, and spatial thinking in your practice?**

My academic experiences at Pratt Institute and the University of Pennsylvania profoundly expanded the intellectual and spatial dimensions of my practice. At Pratt, I developed rigorous artistic and visual communication training within one of the leading art and design environments in New York. My graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania further strengthened my interdisciplinary approach through advanced research in sustainable architecture and spatial systems.

These experiences allowed me to move beyond traditional image-making and approach art as a form of spatial and conceptual construction. The combination of fine art, architecture, and design thinking enables me to create works that operate simultaneously as emotional landscapes, structural compositions, and cultural reflections. This interdisciplinary foundation has become one of the defining strengths of my practice, allowing me to bridge contemporary art, design innovation, and critical spatial thinking in a distinctive way.

**Now based in Phoenix, Arizona, do the desert landscape and shifting urban environment influence your color palette, forms, or sense of space?**

Absolutely. The desert landscape has profoundly influenced my perception of light, scale, and silence. Phoenix possesses a unique spatial openness that contrasts sharply with the density of the cities where I previously lived. The intense sunlight, muted earth tones, and vast emptiness of the desert have gradually entered my work through more simplified compositions, heightened contrasts, and an increased sensitivity to negative space. At the same time, the rapidly changing urban environment continues to reinforce my interest in impermanence, transition, and the relationship between human construction and the natural world.



# — Interview

## Oleksandra Roche-Newton

**Your creative journey began from a need to translate the ideas in your head into paintings. What kinds of images or emotions usually appear first in your imagination?**

I notice many small details first and then build these up to form the bigger picture. Each artwork is like a puzzle in my mind. As soon as all the pieces come together, I see a clear image that I feel excited to bring to life on canvas. This puzzle usually begins with an idea or something that inspires me. Then, over days or sometimes months, I continue to reflect on it—exploring concepts, details, colors, and how everything will come together in a composition.

I also like to focus on messages—my feelings and thoughts that I want to share with the world. Painting gives me a sense of freedom. It's my way of preserving beautiful moments, expressing what I carry in my heart, and escaping into my own imaginary, colorful, and peaceful world.

**After moving to Austria in 2015, painting became an important way for you to cope with relocation and adaptation. How did this experience change your**



Oleksandra Roche-Newton | Pink Mountains | 2019

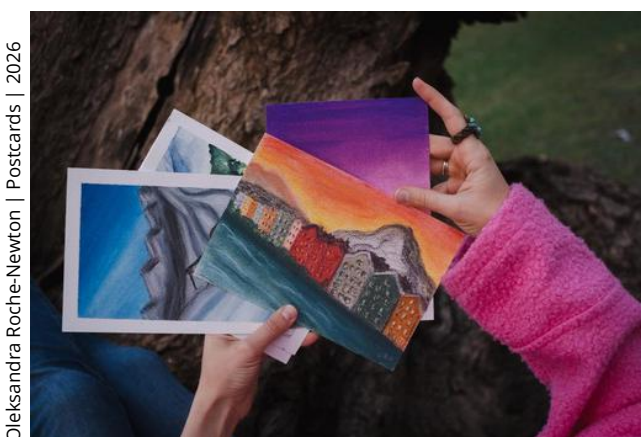
**relationship with art?**

Emigration is a major life challenge—often difficult and overwhelming. You can feel lonely, scared, even depressed, and at the same time torn between wanting to meet people and wanting to hide from them. In those moments, art became my therapy and my meditation—a way to release stress, to find balance, and to feel a sense of happiness and acceptance.

The beautiful nature of Austria has had a strong influence on my work. It's impossible to remain indifferent to it. When I lived in Kyiv, I dreamed of seeing the Alps. Now I live so close to them—and I can paint them. These moments, like many others, stay with me and are preserved in my art.

**Your works often combine bright color, nature, and emotional symbolism. How do you choose the colors for each painting?**

It's mostly intuitive, to be honest. I usually start by imagining a color scheme that I'd like the painting to have. Then I look for accent colors that catch the eye and harmoniously complement the composition. Once I feel confident with these choices, I begin painting—although, of course, everything can evolve and change during the process. I like to use bold and vibrant color combinations to brighten everyday life and bring a sense of positivity, strength, and energy, while still holding space for emotions and meaning. In a way, it also reflects who I am—I'm naturally drawn to bright, colorful clothes as well. They give me a sense of joy, motivation, and confidence.



Oleksandra Roche-Newton | Postcards | 2026



**Flowers, mountains, water, and sky appear frequently in your paintings. What does nature represent in your artistic world?**

It represents the source of beauty in this world—the origin we come from, the flow of life, and a place of energy. Our lives are often filled with tasks, duties, and responsibilities, and sometimes we forget who we are and what we truly need. The flowers, mountains, water, and sky in my paintings serve as gentle reminders of that inner source—especially in moments when we don't have the time or space to be in nature.

Living in Innsbruck, I saw the mountains every day—from my window, on my way to work—along with incredible landscapes, soft pink sunsets, and beautiful architecture. It helped me stay connected to myself and recharge. I believe that once you fall in love with nature, it stays with you forever.

**Several of your works feature calm, closed-eyed female figures. Who are these women for you - portraits, symbols, alter egos, or emotional states?**

The first painting from the "Frida" series, a manifesto of inner vision, was created after watching a movie about Frida Kahlo. I was deeply moved by her story and her strength.

For me, these portraits of women with closed eyes and a monobrow represent a hidden part of each woman—a character she may feel the need to conceal because it is seen as inappropriate, inconvenient, or outside of societal expectations and narratives, or because she is simply afraid to express it openly. When we close our eyes, external noise fades away, allowing us to finally hear our true voice. With these paintings I aim to convey a message about self-discovery, inner strength, and the importance of finding moments of pause in a turbulent world. I want to remind us that the most important thing is to listen to ourselves.

**Your paintings feel very emotional, but also playful and accessible. How do you balance personal meaning with visual joy?**

That's a thoughtful question—and honestly, the balance isn't something I calculate consciously, it's something that happens in the process.

For me, every painting starts with a feeling or a story I want to express. Sometimes I just want to capture a beautiful moment, sometimes it's something very personal, sometimes heavy—but I don't want it to stay heavy. I translate it into color, symbols, and characters that feel alive, a bit naive and playful. That's where the transformation happens.

The "visual joy" comes with bright palettes, soft or exaggerated forms, small details that invite you in. I think it makes my work approachable, so the viewer doesn't feel pushed away by the depth behind it. Instead, they can enter gently—and then, if they want, discover the deeper layer. I think of it like this: the surface smiles, but underneath there's a quiet conversation.

Also, I don't try to explain everything. I leave space for people to bring their own meaning into the painting. That's important to me—because then the work becomes not only about my emotions, but also about connection. So the balance comes from honesty in the feeling, and freedom in how I choose to express it.

**You have said that every brushstroke is a conversation between your inner vision and the beauty you see in nature. What do you hope viewers feel when they encounter your work?**

I hope that at first, viewers feel something positive—light, warm, perhaps even a small sense of curiosity or joy that draws them closer. I love hearing what associations they have with my paintings, what they see in them, and what emotions they experience. And if they're curious, I can share my story. Ideally, there is a moment when they slow down—when they notice a detail, a color combination, or a character, and it gently opens an emotional space. It could evoke inspiration, imagination, motivation, playfulness, or a deeper awareness of their own feelings, or even a need to pause and reconnect. Perhaps it also brings back a childlike way of seeing the world, where everything feels a little more alive and meaningful.



# — Interview

## Cynthia Cavalieri

**You received a Gold Key Award for pen and ink drawing in 1974. How did that early recognition influence your confidence and direction as an artist?**

My art teacher submitted the drawing, and I was surprised to find out about the award. I only realized its significance when I attended the event.

Validation is a wonderful motivation. I would have continued drawing and painting because I love the creative process, but it definitely fueled my confidence and inspired me to study art.



Cynthia Cavalieri | In Prayer



Cynthia Cavalieri | Eucalyptus

**You studied Fine Art at St. Mary's College of Maryland and also describe yourself as self-taught. How have formal training and personal exploration shaped your artistic path?**

Formal training is eye-opening. To study the masters, to understand artists' processes, techniques and approaches to aesthetics, is invaluable. It is truly inspiring, and provided the impetus to explore different mediums. I took classes in every medium possible—printing, ceramics, sculpture, silver jewelry, painting, drawing. With endless resources, I would still be taking those classes. It was a huge playpen of exploration.

I was offered the opportunity to produce art for book covers for a small literary press and was involved with a network of poets and writers—so I was very lucky to have that opportunity. I focused on drawing and pen and ink, and it gave me the discipline to work with intent. I was allowed to apply what I learned.

I am not sure formal training sparks the desire to create something—the curiosity, to explore and experiment. Formal classes provide ideas, techniques, and you learn what really works and why—but the creative process, the joy of play and wonder—I'm not sure it can be taught.

**What first drew you to eco-printing, and what keeps you connected to this process today?**

Eco-printing is a new world of possibilities, and I am still learning, really. I love experimenting with different leaves and flowers, different natural elements that can be introduced in the process. I am focused on it because there are so many things to try! There are quite a few failures, honestly, but I keep working at it. I read and study artists who are experts, but I enjoy trying different things.

**Eco-printing involves leaves, flowers, plants, steam, and**



**time. Do you see this process as a collaboration with nature rather than a fully controlled artistic technique?**

It is definitely a collaboration with nature, and it's not a controlled process for me at all, which is part of the enjoyment. There are specific techniques, but there is a great deal of trial and error to find out the amount of tannin in certain leaves, for instance. Nature gets to decide the outcome, and I like that.

**Your works have a very delicate, atmospheric quality, with natural forms appearing almost like memories or traces. How do you approach the balance between image, texture, and abstraction?**

That is such a nice compliment—thank you. When eco-printing, I may work with a larger piece of silk, with the best of intentions, but there may be a specific area on the silk that catches my eye. Sometimes the aesthetics of a smaller section of the fabric will speak to me. I love abstract art, and knowing what 'works' is partly gut feeling and partly study

and observation.

**How important is unpredictability in your work? Do unexpected marks or transformations often lead you in new creative directions?**

Unpredictability is fun, and the surprise will often spark a new idea. Unexpected marks can also be expensive and demoralizing, but I learn what I should or shouldn't do. Sometimes it turns out to be aesthetically pleasing, so I look at it objectively and see if it is a 'happy accident'. The unpredictability intrigues me.

**When viewers encounter your work, what do you hope they notice first: the natural materials, the process, the atmosphere, or their own emotional response?**

I try to provide a piece of art that is interesting to explore. I think the process lends an element of interest, of depth, and hopefully invites a viewer to examine the work more closely and find their own surprises—as I did.

# Comfortable Art Is a Form of Lying

by Nabil Mousa

When art begins to exist primarily to reassure us, something essential to its purpose quietly disappears. The work may remain beautiful, technically accomplished, even emotionally pleasant, but it stops doing the one thing that art has always been known for: showing us what we have been avoiding. In a cultural moment that rewards immediacy, affirmation, and frictionless visual experience, the pressure on artists to produce work that confirms rather than challenges has grown enormously.

Algorithms favor familiarity, collectors often reward predictability, and visual culture is increasingly consumed as décor, as branding, or as an extension of personal identity. Art that never risks alienating us, however, rarely reveals anything we do not already know, and the works we still return to across centuries tend to share one quality, which is not pleasantness.



## What We Actually Mean by Comfortable Art

Comfortable art is not the same as art that is serene, beautiful, or easy to approach. Agnes Martin produced paintings of light-colored grids, which were themselves expressions of restraint yet also confronted the viewer with loneliness, silence, and concentration. The work of Mark Rothko employed saturated colors not as decoration, but as a means of approaching something like existential profundity. They were not decorating, even when their works looked good on a wall.

In fact, it becomes an act of deception by denying the intricacy of contradictory emotions, by producing the illusion of depth through visual clichés without venturing into the emotional terrain they are meant to evoke, by substituting certainty where there should be moral uncertainty, and by maintaining style while lacking the capacity for discovery. The question here isn't whether such art is nice. The question is whether pleasure has come to serve as a substitute for wonder.

### **Comfort Was Never The Historical Role of Art**

The historical record on this point is almost embarrassingly clear. Francisco Goya's Disasters of War rejected the heroic conventions that had governed depictions of conflict for centuries and instead presented the dismembered and the executed without the consolation of meaning. The reason why Manet's Olympia made the bourgeois art salon feel uncomfortable was not its nudity but its look back at the spectator, with a level of awareness that violated all the rules of academic painting. Picasso's Guernica showed how modernist painting could serve as the bearer of politics in ways unprecedented in a visual medium. Käthe Kollwitz made images of mourning, starvation, and corpses of children in a way that made those in power feel that it was nearly impossible to endure. Francis Bacon twisted the human body beyond recognition to make viewers see the psychic violence they were already living in.

This same formula occurs beyond painting. Dostoevsky crafted characters who held opposing moral stances within a single breast, thereby depriving the reader of the satisfaction of aligning himself with the correct character. Toni Morrison confronted her American audience with the historical pain that genteel society sought to deaden. Ingmar Bergman brought silence and existential questioning into the very fabric of film, while Nina Simone sang of beauty and outrage in the same song. Therein lies a commonality across these diverse artistic endeavors. Those works that endured did so because they discomfited their original audience before being embraced, and this truth is no accident.

### **Why Contemporary Art Risks Becoming Too Comfortable**

A combination of several factors, none of which are new in themselves, has made comfortable art much easier to create and harder to resist at this point in time. The first of these is algorithmic. The social platform rewards images that make sense in less than a second, leaving ambiguity, slowness, and complexity of tone economically disadvantaged before they even get a chance to be seen. In a way, an artist who creates something that requires viewing in situ is structurally competing with an entire ecosystem designed to ensure no one does so.

Secondly, there is market pressure. Often, galleries and collectors favor something that bears a familiar signature, creating an environment where the artist is subtly compelled to embody a trademarked version of themselves, constantly making the same gesture, using the same color scheme, and creating works of identical size and scale. This does not necessarily stem from the artist's cynicism, but from survival. Nevertheless, after years of doing so, the artist ends up making copies of their own discoveries rather than new ones.

Pressure number three is institutional. A large percentage of the current work consists of articulating preconceived moral stances rather than undertaking inquiry. The result is preordained from the start, and the piece merely serves as an illustration of the point, which runs counter to the very process by which art creates knowledge, since the goal is unknown at the outset.

The final pressure is perhaps best described as the aestheticization of everything. Trauma, dissent, migration, intimacy, and loss are all possibilities as visual styles; the implication here is that a painting can now convey political weight without actually having any. As early as Andy Warhol, the value of such a practice lay in its seeming lack of content, as it was in repetition, fame, and image that Warhol found his emptiness. In the hands of Banksy, this idea is taken a step further, with dissent becoming the most marketable commodity of all. None of this is to say that political art is no longer possible; only that it requires much more effort.

### **Difficulty Is Not the Same as Pretension**

In order to present an authentic account of this argument, some recognition must be made. In itself, difficult art does not necessarily constitute truthfulness, and many pieces are shrouded in ambiguity not due to the nature of the topic but due to the artist's mistaken conception of obscurity being the equivalent of profundity.

Shock tactics soon lose their effectiveness on second use, and when the shock requires nothing of the performer, no enlightenment comes from it either. One such case is Marina Abramović's performance art, which succeeds only when the performer is truly vulnerable; when she acts, it becomes a completely new entity.



### **What Honest Art Actually Does**

Authentic art runs the risk of misinterpretation. Authentic art leaves room for contradictions, since it refuses to transform contradictions into a message and makes an impact on the artist as well as on the work, making him or her change, which is the main thing that proves that something authentic is going on within the work.

What stands the test of time usually combines conflicting elements into a single entity. Beauty and violence, harmony and chaos, intimacy and detachment. Anselm Kiefer addresses Germany's past through heavy materials that ensure the subject is never detached from its concrete context. Louise Bourgeois made her own pain universal but never gave up its specific origin. For fifty years, Gerhard Richter refused to commit to any artistic style, seeing in every change another step in his research process rather than a failure of brand identity.

This same logic continues to operate in artists whose subjects are migration, faith, and identity in cultures that have not made room for all three at once. Working across recycled fabric, found objects, collage, geometric designs, religious texts, and layered pigment, Syrian American painter Nabil Mousa has built a practice that treats abstraction as a method of inquiry rather than a style. His Veil of Ignorance series incorporates pages from the Bible, the Koran, and the Torah into the same surface, refusing to grant any of them the final word and refusing

to mock any of them either.

The way in which he discusses the issues of queer identity in an Arab context, the issue of religion, as well as that of cultural dislocation, cannot be summed up as any kind of slogan, and that's why his work deserves another look. It's because many years have gone by studying all these subjects.

### **The Artist's Responsibility in a Comfort-Driven Culture**

What is more important for contemporary artists than whether their works are beautiful or not is whether they use beauty to enhance their perception or to evade it. Are they using repetition to explore or retreat into something familiar? Is there really something to be at stake for the artist when making this piece, or is the artist just putting on airs because of expectations? These are among the questions asked by artists who have preferred rigor and evolution to instant satisfaction.

Comfort is not inherently antithetical to art. Comforting works of art, however, become a decorative language of avoidance, and there are plenty of them already in existence within our society. The true purpose of art lies in much more than simply making us comfortable with the world in which we live. Rather, art should make us realize that we are asleep in the world we live in.

It is exactly this kind of approach that makes the work of artists such as Nabil Mousa relevant even today, since his work constitutes a subtle yet important critique of a culture that confuses visibility with substance. The works of Nabil Mousa do not offer any definitive solutions. On the contrary, the artist asks questions that linger on long after the viewer has left the canvas behind.

Talks such as this are crucial, not because they provide consolation, but because they open up room for investigations that markets, institutions, and algorithms cannot accommodate. So long as artists continue to create art that can lead to misunderstanding but reveals the truth about the world we inhabit, the necessary role of art endures, allowing culture yet another opportunity to take a hard look at itself.

## **Nabil Mousa**

### **BIO:**

Nabil Mousa is a Syrian-born, American artist whose multidisciplinary practice spans painting, sculpture, printmaking, performance, and community engagement. Born in Syria in 1966, he emigrated to the United States at age 12. His work has garnered national recognition, including front-page coverage in *The New York Times* and a solo exhibition at the Arab American National Museum. His current projects explore religion, identity, and transcendence.

### **Website:**

<https://www.nabilmousa.com/>



# Necmi Enes KIŞ



**You describe repetition and rhythm as central elements of your artistic practice. What first drew you to these ideas, and what do they allow you to express?**

When we look around today, it is possible to see repetition and rhythms everywhere in life. From this perspective, I am inspired by today's uniformity and the way our society and environment proliferate from a 'meta-object' that repeats the exact same things. By multiplying these objects as a means of expression, I position people to be more visible and accepting toward the objects I use.

**In *Entropi Negentropi*, the human figures appear in repeated or mirrored pairs. What is the relationship between these figures, and do they represent different psychological states?**

No, I don't look at the figures' emotions at first glance in my artwork; rather, I wanted to employ the repetition of two opposing sexes. The mirrored appearance is related to contrast and coexistence.

**The title refers to entropy and negentropy - forces of disorder and order. How do these opposing concepts shape the meaning of the painting?**

I chose a title that harmonizes with the presence and repetition of these two opposing figures, just as I utilized meaning through form in the painting. Furthermore, the glowing light in the background references the end and the beginning of the universe.

**Repetition in your work creates both visual harmony and a sense of tension. How do you balance regularity with disruption in your compositions?**

I seek order in my paintings through contrasts and hierarchical arrangements. Mathematically, I aim to achieve balance through similarities, such as harmony and symmetry, combined with the repetition of units and rhythm.



**The figures in this painting seem introspective, tired, or emotionally distant. What kind of inner experience were you interested in portraying?**

I attempted to symbolize a gaze that turns the inner world inside out, but most importantly, one that immerses the viewer in a thought-provoking atmosphere.

**How do you use the human body, gesture, and facial expression to create rhythm within a painting?**

The bodily postures, arm movements, curves, and verticals form a distinct repetition and

rhythm, operating independently from the overall composition.

**You were born in Malatya and studied in Konya and Ankara. Have these different cities and environments influenced your visual language or choice of subjects?**

Frankly, I cannot specify particular influences. In terms of urban scale and opportunities, Ankara is expansive and all-encompassing, while Malatya is a more insular city. Yet, I cannot determine if this contrast has a distinct effect on my phenomenal realm. I encounter certain objects quite often in Ankara, which ultimately yields a richer content in my artwork.

# — Interview

## Ekaterina Stolyarova

**You grew up in Nizhny Tagil, a city known for its massive factories and harsh industrial landscape. How did this shape your worldview and your artistic vision?**



Ekaterina Stolyarova | Serene Shade



Ekaterina Stolyarova | Shaded Solitude

Nizhny Tagil is a city of incredible contrasts. On one side, you have the majestic beauty of the Ural nature; on the other, giant factories and skies gray with smoke. Seeing this stark contrast with my own eyes from a very young age deeply influenced me. It made me realize both how profoundly human activity can alter the environment and how fragile the natural world truly is.

But rather than feeling discouraged, I became determined to explore this tension through art. My childhood experiences taught me a vital lesson: nature possesses extraordinary resilience and a remarkable capacity for renewal, but it is not invincible. This understanding became the foundation of my artistic philosophy. The lifelong search for harmony between humanity and the natural world continues to inspire every work I create today.

**Your works frequently feature fragile ecosystems and solitary trees surviving in abstract landscapes. What do these recurring natural forms symbolize for you?**

The solitary tree is the central symbol of my work. To me, it represents resilience, endurance, and quiet inner strength. Trees survive storms, harsh winters, droughts, and human intervention, yet they continue to grow and sustain life around them.

I intentionally avoid depicting specific, recognizable locations. Instead, I create emotional landscapes that exist somewhere between memory, imagination, and ecological reality. I want viewers to bring their own experiences into the work and form their own personal connections.

A single tree standing within an abstract environment can symbolize both vulnerability and hope. It reminds



us that even the smallest element of an ecosystem holds immense value and that strength often emerges from fragility.

**You stepped away from conventional acrylics to create your paintings using natural pigments. How did you develop this technique, and what is the biggest challenge it presents?**

It began with a desire to create genuinely sustainable art. I wanted to explore materials that would maintain a direct connection to the Earth while reducing the environmental impact often associated with conventional artistic production.

That curiosity led to years of experimentation with mineral-based and earth-derived pigments. Over time, my artistic exploration evolved into scientific research, ultimately resulting in the publication of a peer-reviewed scientific article focused on the conservation and restoration of artworks created with eco-friendly paints and natural pigments.

Working with natural pigments is significantly more demanding than using ready-made acrylic paints. Every pigment behaves differently. Particle size, mineral composition, humidity, water absorption, evaporation rates, and surface tension all influence the final result.

Natural materials always retain an element of unpredictability. Yet it is precisely this dialogue between artistic intention and natural forces that makes the process so meaningful. The materials become active participants in the creation of the artwork rather than passive tools.

My research on natural pigments has also contributed to broader professional discussions surrounding sustainable art practices and the long-term preservation of environmentally conscious artworks. Today, this distinctive methodology has become one of the defining characteristics of my artistic practice and has been presented through museum exhibitions, international art fairs, publications, and professional art platforms in the United States and abroad.

**The textures and organic flows in your work often resemble geological cross-sections or biological cells. How important is the role of natural processes and chance in your compositions?**

They play a fundamental role.

I am fascinated by the way rivers carve landscapes, how roots spread beneath the earth, how minerals crystallize, and how natural systems organize themselves without external control. Nature itself is an extraordinary creator.

Rather than maintaining complete control over the image, I create conditions that allow natural forces to become collaborators in the artistic process. The movement of water, the dispersion of pigments, evaporation patterns, and material interactions generate textures and forms that could never be fully planned or replicated.

This balance between intention and unpredictability mirrors the complexity of nature itself. Nature is neither chaotic nor entirely controlled - it exists within a dynamic equilibrium. That living balance is something I continually strive to capture in my work.

**Your paintings often suggest landscapes that appear damaged yet resilient at the same time. Is this duality a reflection of your environmental concerns?**

Absolutely.

I believe one of the defining realities of our time is that environmental degradation and ecological resilience exist simultaneously. My goal is not to present nature solely as a victim, nor to ignore the serious environmental challenges facing our world. Instead, I am interested in exploring the space between vulnerability and regeneration. Ecosystems can be damaged, yet they also possess remarkable capacities for recovery when given the opportunity. This duality reflects both concern and optimism. While environmental issues are undeniably serious, I believe awareness, education, innovation, and collective responsibility can contribute to meaningful change. I hope my paintings encourage reflection and inspire people to see themselves as active participants in protecting the natural world.

**As someone deeply engaged with eco-art, what role do you believe artists should play in addressing environmental issues today?**

Scientific data and environmental research are essential, but facts alone do not always inspire people to change their behavior. Art speaks through emotion, imagination, and personal connection.

I believe artists can serve as cultural translators, helping audiences engage with environmental issues

on a deeply human level. Through exhibitions, publications, educational initiatives, and interdisciplinary collaborations, artists can contribute meaningfully to conversations about sustainability and environmental responsibility.

As an internationally recognized eco-artist, I see this responsibility as extending far beyond the creation of individual artworks. My practice includes exhibitions at major international art fairs and museum exhibitions in cultural centers such as New York, Miami, and Los Angeles, alongside scholarly research, publications, jury service, and educational outreach.

In addition to exhibiting internationally, I have served as an expert juror and evaluator for international art competitions and have contributed to professional discussions surrounding sustainability in contemporary art. I am also the Founder and Chair of the Jury of the International Eco-Art Award, an initiative established to encourage artists from different countries to engage with environmental themes through contemporary artistic expression. Through these activities, I strive not only to create artworks, but also to contribute to the advancement of eco-art as a professional field and to support the next generation of environmentally conscious artists. Art has the power to influence culture, and culture ultimately shapes the choices societies make.

**Many viewers describe your paintings as meditative or contemplative. What kind of emotional or psychological experience do you hope your audience takes away?**

We live in a world defined by constant speed, digital noise, and endless streams of information. Moments of stillness have become increasingly rare. When viewers encounter my work, I hope they experience a pause - a temporary shift away from urgency and toward reflection. The abstract forms and organic textures are intentionally open-ended, allowing each person to bring their own memories, emotions, and interpretations into the experience. If a painting helps someone reconnect with nature, discover a moment of calm, or simply look inward with greater awareness, then I feel the artwork has fulfilled its purpose.

**Could you share your experience presenting your work in Los Angeles during Oscar week, specifically at the private event hosted at Warren Beatty's residence? How did the film industry respond to your eco-art?**

It was a truly memorable experience. The event brought together distinguished figures from the film industry, cultural leaders, collectors, and creative professionals, creating a unique environment

for meaningful artistic dialogue. Presenting my work during Oscar week in Los Angeles was both an honor and an opportunity to engage with audiences from outside the traditional art world.

What impressed me most was how naturally conversations evolved beyond aesthetics and into broader discussions about sustainability, environmental responsibility, and humanity's relationship with nature. Many guests were intrigued not only by the visual qualities of the paintings, but also by the philosophy behind them and by the use of natural pigments as an environmentally conscious artistic medium.

As an artist whose work has been exhibited at major international art fairs and museum exhibitions in the United States - including New York, Miami, and Los Angeles - it was especially meaningful to see eco-art resonate so strongly within a community known for storytelling through film.

The experience reinforced my belief that environmental narratives can transcend disciplines and cultural boundaries. It demonstrated that conversations about environmental stewardship are increasingly becoming part of mainstream cultural dialogue.

For me, the evening was not only a professional milestone, but also a reminder that art can create meaningful connections between people, industries, and ideas. Seeing influential creative leaders engage deeply with themes of sustainability reinforced my conviction that environmental awareness can be advanced through culture, storytelling, and artistic expression on an international scale.



Ekaterina Stolyarova | Chaos Canopy



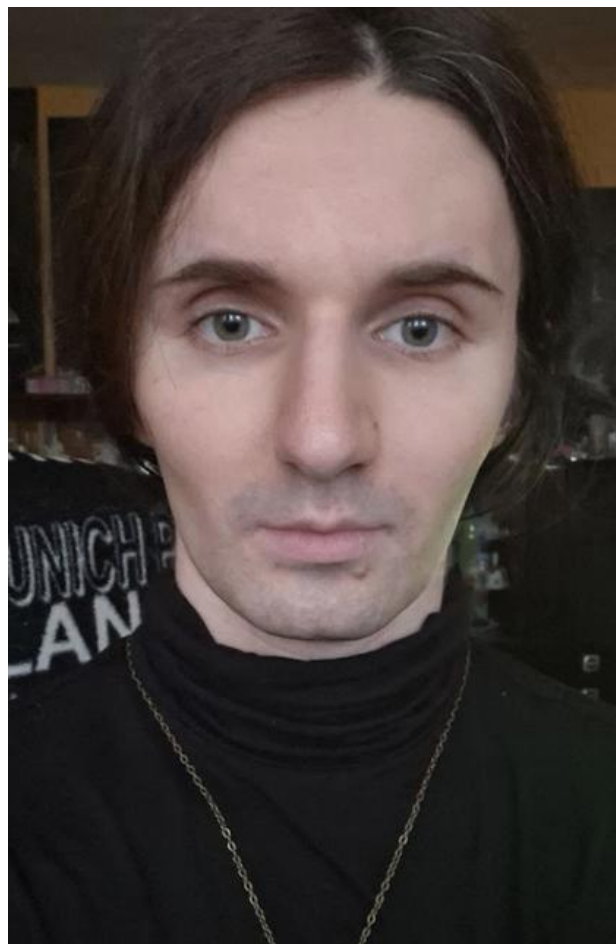
## — Interview

# Stefan- Valerie Popescu

**Your artistic path began with graphic arts and later moved toward painting. What attracted you to painting as a medium, and what did it allow you to express differently?**

It is true that my artistic journey began with graphic arts, and I was fortunate to achieve recognition in that field at a young age. However, I ultimately chose to continue with painting because I felt that color offered me a much greater sense of freedom and emotional expression than graphic art alone.

That being said, my background in drawing and graphic arts remains deeply embedded in my visual language. Its influence can still be seen in my paintings, especially in my earlier works, where whites, greys, charcoal textures, and strong contrasts dominate the composition. A clear example is the painting depicting the distorted face of a soldier, where black-and-white elements play a central role. I believe it is natural for any artist to seek new means of expression and to constantly expand their practice. In a sense, every artist strives to become more



complete, while remaining aware that such completeness is never fully attainable. Throughout art history, even the great masters went through periods of experimentation that significantly transformed their artistic identity. This is even more evident in contemporary art, where the boundaries between painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, digital art, and other media are increasingly dissolving. Today we encounter many works that can no longer be categorized as purely painting or purely drawing because they exist between disciplines and are shaped by multiple influences. Personally, I do not see this as a problem; I see it as something wonderful. Contemporary artists enjoy a level of creative freedom that previous generations could hardly have imagined. They are no longer required to conform to rigid rules, schools, or dogmas, and that freedom allows for a much richer and more diverse artistic landscape.

**Portraiture plays an important role in your practice. What draws you to the human face as a space for exploring emotion, memory, and trauma?**

Everything about the human face fascinates me. Within my work, it serves as the most direct and powerful vehicle for conveying meaning. Through the face, I can explore the complexity of human nature,



the contradictions of identity, and the individual's ongoing struggle with the self.

I am not interested in creating portraits that are conventionally beautiful, nor am I concerned with producing images that are shocking for the sake of shock. What interests me is the possibility of communicating emotional states, psychological tensions, and inner conflicts. The face becomes a territory where vulnerability, memory, anxiety, resilience, and transformation can coexist.

In many ways, the subjects of my paintings are engaged in a form of warfare, but not necessarily an external one. Rather, they embody the internal battles that define contemporary existence. We live in a world that is increasingly alienating, technologically mediated, accelerated, and constantly changing. Against this backdrop, the individual is often forced to negotiate questions of identity, belonging, purpose, and self-understanding.

For me, portraiture is not simply a representation of a person; it is a way of reflecting on the human condition itself.

**In several of your works, faces appear fragmented, erased, or partially hidden. What does this visual language mean for you?**

The fragmented, erased, or partially concealed faces that appear throughout my work reflect the inner conflicts of the individual and the complexity of human identity. I am interested in identity not as something fixed, stable, or fully defined, but as an ongoing process of transformation.

These interventions on the face function as metaphors for the tension between who we are, what we choose to reveal, what we conceal, and what we aspire to become. By disrupting the integrity of the portrait, I seek to create a space where certainty dissolves and multiple interpretations become possible.

At the same time, these visual strategies engage with ideas related to transhumanism and posthumanism. They suggest a questioning of traditional notions of the self and point toward the possibility of identity being reshaped through technology, memory, digital culture, and contemporary experience. As our relationship with these forces becomes increasingly complex, the boundaries of what we understand as human identity also become less stable.

The absence or fragmentation of the face should not be interpreted as a loss of humanity. On the contrary, it is an attempt to explore its many layers, contradictions, and future possibilities. What interests me is not disappearance, but transformation.

**Your work often touches on invisible suffering and intergenerational trauma. How do you approach such sensitive themes without making them too literal?**

As I mentioned before, although my work is fundamentally figurative, it incorporates many elements that some viewers might perceive as abstract. I often use distortions, fragmented faces, symbolic figures, altered backgrounds, and other visual interventions that move beyond straightforward representation. These elements allow me to suggest emotional and psychological states rather than illustrate them directly.

My intention is never to shock the viewer. In fact, over the years I have gradually introduced more color into my work, even though some people may still recognize what they describe as a darker or almost Gothic sensibility within it. For me, however, the focus has never been darkness for its own sake. The central theme remains the individual's internal struggle and the ongoing process of self-discovery.

There are moments when I may include more „graphic“ elements—such as blood or scenes that evoke violence—but these are never the true subject of the work. They usually function as symbols or traces of a deeper psychological reality rather than as ends in themselves. What interests me is not the external





event, but the emotional and existential consequences that remain beneath the surface.

I believe that themes such as suffering, memory, and intergenerational trauma are often most powerful when they are approached indirectly. Suggestion can sometimes communicate more than explicit representation. By leaving space for ambiguity, the work invites viewers to bring their own experiences, memories, and emotions into the encounter. Ultimately, interpretation belongs to the viewer. If you ask a thousand people what a painting means, you will likely receive a thousand different answers. Some may connect deeply with it, others may interpret it in completely unexpected ways, and some may not understand it at all. I do not see that as a problem. Authentic art is not something that must always be intellectually decoded; often it is something that is felt before it is understood.

**Your paintings combine traditional techniques with references to digital culture and technology. How do you balance the handmade and the technological in your practice?**

I think this aspect of my practice is largely influenced by my professor, Liviu Nedelcu, who helped broaden my artistic perspective and encouraged me to look beyond the traditional boundaries of painting. Through his guidance, I began exploring different media, methods, and ways of thinking about art, which ultimately allowed me to move beyond the conventional stereotype of the painter working exclusively with canvas and pigment. For me, there is no real conflict between the handmade and the technological. I see them as complementary languages that can coexist within the same artistic space. My foundation remains rooted in painting, but over time I have experimented with a variety of approaches that introduced new visual and

conceptual possibilities into my work.

This has led me to incorporate elements inspired by digital culture, such as glitch-like aesthetics, technological motifs, LED installations, collage, illuminated cables integrated directly into paintings, as well as photographic, video, and holographic installations. In some cases, technology functions as a physical material; in others, it appears as a conceptual presence that reflects the increasingly dominant role technology plays in contemporary life and in the way we construct our identities.

What interests me most is not really technology itself, but the dialogue it creates with traditional artistic practices. I am fascinated by the tension between something handmade, tactile, and deeply human, and something mediated by screens, data, and digital systems. That tension mirrors many of the broader questions explored in my work regarding identity, transformation, and the changing nature of human experience.

My artistic trajectory has gradually moved from traditional painting toward increasingly interdisciplinary and conceptual forms. One of my most recent works, for example, exists primarily as a concept rather than as a physical object. This evolution has opened new directions for me, and I am excited to continue exploring them. In the future, I would like to further integrate virtual objects, interactive installations, and other emerging technologies into my practice, not as replacements for painting, but as extensions of the same artistic inquiry.

**You have experimented with holograms, LED strips, 3D printing, and 3D pens. How have these technologies changed the way you think about visual art?**

These technologies have significantly changed both the way I think about art and the way I relate to it as an artist. More than anything, they have expanded my sense of freedom. While painting remains central to my practice, experimenting with holograms, LED installations, 3D printing, and 3D drawing tools has allowed me to move beyond the limitations of a flat surface and imagine new ways for an artwork to exist in space.

Through these experiments, I began to see art less as a specific medium and more as a field of possibilities. Technology opened doors to ideas and forms of expression that I would not have imagined when I was focused primarily on traditional painting. It encouraged me to think conceptually, to question the boundaries between object, image, light, space, and viewer, and to consider how different media can work together to create meaning.

Looking back, I remember being strongly attracted to technical skill and realism during my years at

university. Like many young artists, I was fascinated by the ability to reproduce reality convincingly. However, I gradually realized that technical mastery alone is not enough. Art needs a deeper purpose. It needs a message, a direction, a question, or an idea that extends beyond the visual result itself.

In that sense, technology did not pull me away from art's essential concerns; it pushed me closer to them. It helped me understand that the medium is only a vehicle. What truly matters is the ability to communicate something meaningful about the human experience, contemporary society, or our changing relationship with the world around us. For me, the adoption of new technologies has therefore been a very positive development—one that has expanded both my creative vocabulary and my understanding of what art can be.

**You describe yourself as an artist in continuous evolution. What direction would you like your practice to take next?**

To be honest, I do not believe there are fixed limits to where an artistic practice can go. As long as I continue to live, learn, and respond to a world that is constantly changing, my work will continue to evolve alongside it. Art, for me, is not a destination but an ongoing process of exploration.

At the moment, I remain deeply interested in the themes that have shaped my work so far—identity, transformation, memory, technology, and the human



Stefan-Valerie Popescu | Ashes Of Obedience | 2018

condition—but I am increasingly drawn to expanding the forms through which these ideas can be expressed. Alongside painting, I would like to further explore virtual objects, interactive installations, and other emerging technologies that can create new relationships between the artwork and the viewer. What excites me most is the possibility of creating experiences that exist somewhere between the physical and the virtual, between traditional artistic practice and new technological realities. I see these developments not as a departure from painting, but as a natural extension of the questions I have always been asking.

At the same time, this is a difficult question to answer with certainty because I genuinely do not know what my work will look like in ten or twenty years. In many ways, that uncertainty is precisely what keeps art alive. The future of my practice remains open, just as the future of humanity itself remains open.

Perhaps this connects to some of my interest in posthumanist ideas. We often speak about the “post-human,” yet no one can fully define what that might be. We can only imagine possible futures: a being that still retains traces of humanity, one that becomes increasingly intertwined with technology, or perhaps something entirely new that we cannot yet comprehend. I think artistic evolution works in a similar way. We can sense directions, possibilities, and transformations, but we cannot fully predict where they will lead.

For now, I am less interested in arriving at a final form than in remaining open to change, experimentation, and discovery. That openness is what continues to drive my practice forward.



Stefan-Valerie Popescu | Digital Legacy | 2024

## — Interview

# Nihat Fırat



**You were born in Çekören, a village in the Hilvan district of Şanlıurfa. How did the place where you grew up shape your way of seeing people, nature, and everyday life?**



Nihat Fırat | Osiris | 2020

Being born on bloody soil brought me an early maturity, allowing me to perceive life with greater depth. Growing up in the very cradle of Mesopotamia and roaming through the remnants of ancient civilizations led me to learn the sheer magnitude of history during my youth. Beholding Mesopotamia as a child and feeding on the myths born of that regional oral tradition radically molded my mindset. Indeed, discovering that the fables whispered to us by our grandmothers were, in essence, remnants of the Epic of Gilgamesh further profounded my awakening to my ancestry.

This profound heritage anchored my artistic stance, turning my gaze away from the sophisticated cultural and artistic paradigms produced by Euro-American centers, and directing it toward a perspective uniquely rooted in the East and its own soil. Rather than embracing Western aesthetics, I chose to adopt the mystical and primordial philosophy of my native geography as my refining filter.

**Your background is in civil engineering, and you currently work in the construction sector. Does this technical profession influence your artistic eye, composition, or sense of structure?**



It absolutely has a major impact. First and foremost, it forces me into a more rational mechanism of thinking. To be honest, I don't always like this; science and art are opposite poles, and spiritually, I stand on the side of art. However, this rationality does have its advantages in my creative practice; it has taught me a profound sense of 'structure.' A building requires a strong load-bearing system and accurately calculated balances to stand. I look for that exact same balance when writing a text, structuring a screenplay, or creating a visual composition.

Professions also directly shape how people view living beings and nature. For instance, when examining historical structures, you look at them through a completely different lens; you grasp with technical depth just how aesthetic, functional, majestic, and solid they were built. It is precisely through this technical eye that you clearly see how contemporary architecture traps people inside soulless, colorless, tasteless, and weak rectangular boxes. And catastrophically, you realize during earthquakes just how cheap human life is in the eyes of systems and governments. This reality that engineering forces me to see is a deeply bitter picture, yet it is one that profoundly fuels my art.

**You have also written articles about art for web blogs. What role does writing play in your creative practice?**

A writer once said: 'I would rather be understood than loved.' Writing, drawing, or producing works in various forms... For me, all of these serve a single purpose, and that is 'meaning.'

Writing is the sharpest and most concise form of expression; yet sometimes, it falls short. For instance, depicting abstract concepts like the 'soul' with words is one thing, but painting its picture or capturing its photograph is quite another—much like Modigliani painting those famous eyes, which he left blank until he could truly see the subject's soul. However, this difference is not a separation but a way of bringing one another into being; for art forms, in the end, constitute a monolithic unity. The Gospel of John states, 'In the beginning was the Word,' implying that the universe began with meaning and intention; whereas John Berger reminds us of the pure and naked priority of the image by saying, 'Seeing comes before words.' Writing, drawing, capturing, thinking... In truth, they are all different rivers flowing into the exact same sea. In short; I believe that only when the word and the sight, the writing and the image, come together to form a whole, can they reach a state of true maturation.

**Your works move between photography, drawing, portraiture, nature, and still life. How would you describe the main themes that connect your artistic practice?**

The transition of my work between portraiture, nature, and still life stems from the fact that I view them all as different pieces of the same whole. To me, a human face, a leaf of a tree, or a silent object resting on a table are all entities that feed on the same source and are connected by invisible bonds.



The main theme uniting my artistic practice is the search for that common and singular essence lying behind this apparent diversity. Through photography, I capture the reflection of the moment, while through drawing, I reshape it within my inner world. For me, genres and techniques are merely tools; my true endeavor is to touch that silent, deep, and shared truth hidden within every object and every face.

**Many of your photographs use black and white. What does monochrome allow you to express that color sometimes cannot?**

For me, black and white possess a far more colorful, profound, and ontological resonance than any other colors. Just like perceiving the truth in darkness, we can only discern the primordial light of the stars against a black canvas. Truth is much the same; it requires a spectrum to manifest and be made visible. Another cornerstone of constructing my works upon these two poles is faith. I believe that every stage of existence and the initial creation initially consisted of absolute darkness, and upon God's command 'Be,' it assumed multiplicity—transmuted into diverse forms and colors. In this regard, black and white are a divine passion that purifies me from the transient noise of the world and brings me closer to the pure truth of that first moment of existence.



Nihat Fırat | Kafka Yalnızlığı | 2022

**Your artworks often balance beauty and unease - blossoms, children, storms, books, shadows. Are you interested in showing the tension between life's tenderness and its darker side?**

Yes, it is precisely this tension and balance that I am pursuing. All these images you have mentioned—flowers, children, storms, and shadows—are not mutually exclusive contrasts to me; on the contrary, they are intertwining elements that weave the very fabric of life. Just as in the ancient cycle of Eastern thought, darkness and light, compassion and the uncanny do not destroy one another; they nurture each other. Just like that white dot at the heart of the deepest black; a storm of succumbing to time is hidden in the bosom of the most fragile flower, while an unshakable serenity rests within the



Nihat Fırat | Tuhaf Bir Kadın | 2023



fiercest tempest. While we perceive all the vulnerability of life in a child's innocence, we feel the inevitable, dark side of the earth in the shadow right behind them.

Throughout human history, art has been a silent fortress, a gateway of consolation where humans take refuge against their own weakness and that ongoing conflict between good and evil since Cain and Abel. In my work, I bring these contrasts together not to pit them against each other in a war, but to make visible that fragile balance where these two poles meet—a balance that is both painful and deeply comforting.

**What direction would you like your artistic practice to take in the future? Are there new themes, techniques, or projects you want to explore?**

Looking ahead, I desire to extend my artistic practice toward cinema and theater, carrying my exploration into these realms. To this end, I have

already developed several concepts and projects that are currently maturing in my mind. Cinema, above all, is a domain worth consuming a lifetime for—a space where I wish to lose myself entirely. Tarkovsky's poetic metaphysics, the profound equilibrium in Kurosawa's portrayal of human nature, Kiarostami's minimalism, and Yılmaz Güney's raw realism are actually distinct cinematic manifestations of the very 'singular essence' I am constantly seeking. To be able to convey life's fragile tenderness alongside its stark reality through moving light and shadow, just as they mastered, is my ultimate ambition. Of course, I hold a deep affection for photography, drawing, and other artistic genres; immersing myself in them yields a sublime pleasure. However, through my lens, all these disciplines are merely separate streams feeding into the same river. My goal is to eventually dissolve the secret truth I pursue in photography and drawing into the greater, breathing, and animate totality of cinema and theater.

## — Interview

# Anansya Latka

**You grew up between India, Singapore, and Tokyo before studying and working in the United States. How has living across different cultures shaped the way you observe people and construct characters?**

Growing up across different countries made me very aware of how much of communication happens beneath the surface. Every place has its own social rules, rhythms, and assumptions, and moving between them taught me to pay attention to what people mean



rather than just what they say. As a writer, that has made me interested in contradictions. I'm drawn to characters who are navigating multiple identities at once, or who are trying to belong somewhere while carrying experiences from somewhere else. Even when my stories aren't explicitly about cultural displacement, they're often about people translating themselves to others and struggling with the gaps that remain.

**Your stories often explore grief, transition, and the distance between what people feel and what they are able to express. Why are you drawn to these emotional spaces?**

I'm interested in moments when people are forced to confront change, because those moments tend to reveal who they really are. Grief, transition, and uncertainty strip away a lot of the narratives we build about ourselves. At the same time, most people aren't particularly good at articulating what they're feeling in those moments. They deflect, avoid, joke, or focus on practical concerns instead. That tension between inner experience and outward behavior feels deeply human to me. As a writer, I'm less interested in what characters say they feel than in the ways those feelings leak into everything else they do.

**Roommates is told largely through Steve's perspective, while gradually revealing the limitations and contradictions of his version of events. What interested you about working with an unreliable protagonist?**

I've always been fascinated by the fact that most people see themselves as the protagonist of their own story. Steve isn't trying to deceive the reader; he's trying to convince himself. He interprets events in



ways that protect his self-image, and because we're so close to his perspective, we initially accept many of those interpretations. What interested me was allowing readers to slowly recognize the distance between Steve's version of reality and what everyone around him is experiencing. That process felt more revealing than simply presenting a character who knows he's in the wrong.

**The repeated idea that Steve is "reasonable" becomes increasingly ironic as the story progresses. How did you develop the balance between humor, discomfort, and emotional complexity in his character?**

I never wanted Steve to become a caricature. Most of the humor comes from the gap between how he sees himself and how his actions appear to others. At the same time, I wanted readers to understand why he behaves the way he does, even when they disagree with him. The discomfort comes from recognizing parts of ourselves in him—the tendency to rationalize, to avoid accountability, or to frame our own needs as objectively reasonable. I think comedy is often most effective when it's rooted in something emotionally true, so I tried to let the humor emerge naturally from his blind spots rather than treating him as the punchline.

**Although Roommates centers on a conflict within a group of friends, it also examines personal space, entitlement, miscommunication, and the stories people create to justify their actions. Which of these themes was the starting point for the project?**

The project really began with the idea of self-justification. I was interested in how people construct narratives that allow them to see themselves as reasonable, generous, or fair, even when their actions suggest something more complicated. Once that idea was in place, themes like entitlement, personal space,

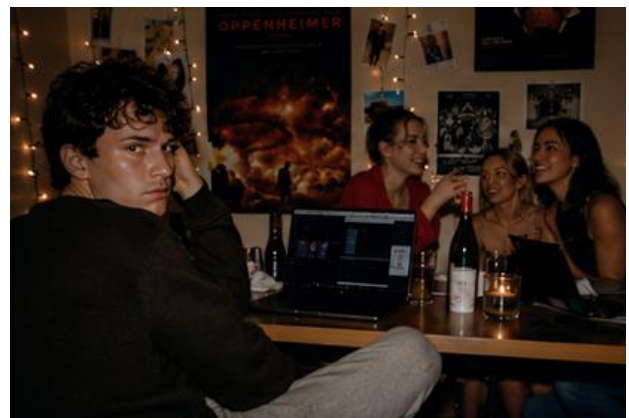
and miscommunication emerged naturally because they're situations where competing narratives often collide. Two people can experience the exact same event and come away with entirely different understandings of what happened. Roommates grew out of that tension.

**The project contains highly specific details—radio shows, film sets, shared rooms, unanswered messages, and small domestic conflicts. How do these everyday details help you build a larger emotional narrative?**

I've always believed that emotional truths are often revealed through ordinary moments rather than dramatic declarations. Everyday details create texture, but they also create pressure. An unanswered text message, a disagreement over a shared space, or a casual conversation can carry years of resentment, affection, insecurity, or disappointment beneath the surface. Those details make the world feel lived-in, but they also give characters opportunities to reveal themselves through behavior. For me, the emotional narrative emerges from the accumulation of those small moments.

**Your work moves between comedy, grief, tension, and psychological observation. How do you determine the tone of a scene without simplifying the characters into heroes and villains?**

I try to approach every character with curiosity rather than judgment. Most people aren't purely right or wrong, and they're rarely acting from a place of complete self-awareness. A scene's tone usually emerges from the emotional truth of the situation rather than from a decision to make it funny or dramatic. Life is often contradictory—we can be grieving and amused, frustrated and affectionate, confident and insecure at the same time. Allowing those contradictions to coexist helps create characters who feel more human. I'm generally less interested in assigning blame than in understanding why people make the choices they do.



# — Interview

## Guy Kinnersley



**You describe your practice through three values: "Imagine, Create, Inspire". How do these ideas guide your process from the first concept to the finished artwork?**

Everyday, something intrigues me; could be a flower, animal, or a colour, & each time I immediately imagine how it would look as a piece of Art. Then, I'll design a concept sketch to determine composition & size of the

Guy Kinnersley | Cold Blood Colour | 2025



work.

When I structure a painting, it's all through intuition, with my use of colour, brush work & mark making to create the finished piece.

Afterwards, I will compare the rough concept sketch to the finished work, which often inspires me, as I see the idea that came to life via pencil, then through paint.

But, ultimately when I see feedback from my collectors that say how they connect deeply with the work, & how a piece inspires & uplifts them each day, it truly means a lot, & continues to inspire me even more!

**Your works are bold, colourful, and full of movement. What role does colour play in expressing emotion and energy in your paintings?**

Colour, to me is everything, I love the vibrancy of the brights, the delicacy of darks & when paired together correctly, create a beautiful contrast.

From an emotional perspective, colour is an expression, you can look at a colour & feel the energy within each stroke - joyful or sadness.

I embrace colour, it makes you reflect, gives you perspective, clarity & transforms the energy.

When you view a painting of mine, the colour captivates you & provokes the reaction.

**You often work between realism and abstraction. How do you decide how much of the subject should remain recognizable and how much can become expressive or abstract?**

Many pieces of mine, I'll centre the subject as intended,



using colourful strokes to depict the focus of the work, whilst combining a playful background, with loose splashes of colour. The idea being that you are drawn to the subject, but can get lost in the background. It often changes where the background will be a solid tone & the subject will be recognizable, yet expressionistic.

The style in which I paint is fascinating & as I say, it's all intuitive; Art is freeing, so I like to play around with colour, composition & create something remarkable.

**Wildlife appears strongly in your work, especially in pieces such as Cold Blood Colour and Dive. What draws you to animals as artistic subjects?**

Wildlife fascinates me, their presence, movement & traits are inspiring. And I look to transcend their qualities & characteristics into a piece of artwork.

Cold Blood Colour is the largest piece I've created (60x40 inch) & I wanted to depict the Crocodile with its viscousness yet vulnerabilities. The colour & realism of the Crocodile on top of a plain, flat background, gives you the presence & energy, but also a sense of calm.

Dive is a piece that's more meticulous, yet chaotic, the idea of how Dolphins are known to be clever, but also playful, is how I wanted this work to be interpreted. With bold colours flowing through, alongside a powerful background of splashes.

Animals are extremely intelligent, quirky & deliberate in the way they live, that's what I look to capture within my Wildlife work.

**Your animal paintings feel both powerful and playful. Do you see them as portraits of the creatures themselves, or as reflections of human emotions?**

I want the viewer to be mesmerised by the work, to feel something that brings an emotional response.

My Artwork is bold, expressive & intriguing.

I look to capture the animal in their natural form, with

colours playing a vital part to create a depth within the painting; On the surface, they can seem playful, but if you spend time observing a piece, you will find yourself reflecting in the work, which is what provides that powerful, atmospheric feeling.

**You have been creative since childhood. Can you remember a moment when you understood that art would become an important part of your life?**

Creativity is an outlet like no other, & when you realise that an idea can become reality through colour, paintbrush & canvas, still fascinates me to this day! I knew early on that Art would become a key component to my life, I've always been inspired to create, & that passion has never gone away.

Its an escape from the "real world" & gives me the freedom to express, convey my ideas, which motivates & inspires me.

**What do you hope viewers feel when they encounter your paintings in person?**

I want a reaction, (positive or negative) Art is subjective, created to be polarising; One person could dislike a piece, whereas 100 could love it & vice versa. That's what makes it brilliant!

Currently, I am creating a seven piece expressive portrait collection, & I'm looking for the viewer to observe each piece individually, looking at colour, facial expression, composition & to see themselves within each painting. Then when they hear the title of the work, hopefully it resonates with them in a way that they felt towards the portrait.

I want the viewer to connect, have an emotional response to my work, get lost within a piece, & inspire them!



## Iwona Chrzanowska

An economist by training, I'm currently retired. I've been painting on canvas since January 1, 2020. I'm self-taught, learning from my own mistakes. I experience life very emotionally, and painting, like the written word, has become a way for me to convey my way of perceiving the world and the feelings associated with it. I paint eagerly and extensively, drawing inspiration from nature, but I'm also fascinated by the cosmos, interpersonal relationships, and what happens in people's heads, hearts, and souls. Using AI and my own lyrics, I create music videos in which I animate my paintings and publish them on YouTube as Iwona Nowina art silverka.

### *Project Statement*

My works have participated in 11 national exhibitions in Poland, and one of them, the painting "Heron Ballet," took second place in a national competition in April 2026. In April 2026, I received a certificate from Blue Koi Gallery for outstanding artistic work and participation in the international online art exhibition "Her Canvas/Women Only." In May, my painting "Cry of the Earth" was among the winners of the "One Image - 100 Winners" competition and was exhibited in the permanent international exhibition at Blue Koi Gallery.

Iwona Chrzanowska | Mona Lisa Winter Panorama | 2026





Iwona Chrzanowska | Trotting at a Gallop | 2025

## — Interview

# Elena Batanova

**Your biography contains very painful and transformative experiences. How did art become a way for you to process grief, memory, and healing?**



I have always been a creative person. In childhood, when things were difficult, singing and poetry became a place where I could breathe. That was where I felt safe. Later, I realized that art is not only a way to escape, but also a way to live through pain. Not to hide it or deny it, but to give it form, a voice, and meaning. Through creativity, I learned to accept my story and transform it not into a wound, but into strength. For me, art is memory, healing, and an opportunity to speak to people on a very deep level. I believe that personal pain, if you go through it honestly, can become something greater — support, light, and hope for others.

**You began to immerse yourself in creativity after the loss of your mother in 2023. What changed inside you at that moment?**

After my mother passed away, there was a lot of pain inside me, and I understood that I could not simply carry it all within myself. At some point, fate led me to photography. For me, it became not just a new direction in creativity, but a way to continue living in acceptance — not running away from grief, but gently touching it. Through the image, I was able to speak about things that could not be expressed in words. Photography gave my pain a form. Grief, memory, love, pain, regret, resentment — all of this began to transform into images. Beautiful, deep, sometimes very quiet, sometimes piercing. And perhaps it was then that I understood that art cannot erase pain, but it can help us endure it. It can turn loss into memory, and memory into light.



**In your artist statement, you say that you explore the female soul. What does “the female soul” mean to you?**

For me, the female soul is like a diamond — multifaceted. Strength and tenderness, pain and beauty, fragility and incredible resilience can all exist within it at the same time. A woman can be gentle, yet still endure what seems impossible.

When I say that I explore the female soul, I do not mean one specific image of a woman, but rather the embodiment of everything feminine: the inner world in all its complexity. Her memory, traumas, dreams, love, fears, intuition, her ability to heal, to be reborn, and to forgive.

It is important for me to show a woman not only as a beautiful image, but as an entire universe — with her light and shadow, her vulnerability and strength. For me, the female soul is a depth that is not always visible at first glance, but if you look closely, it reveals many facets: through what she has lived, what she feels, what she hides, how she heals, and how she finds light within herself again.

**Your works feel blurred, fragile, and almost dreamlike. Is this visual softness connected to memory, trauma, or the feeling of distance from the past?**

Absolutely. This visual softness is connected to memory, trauma, and the feeling of distance from the past. I believe that everything that happens to us shapes us — as human beings, as individuals, and as creators. Our experiences do not disappear. They remain inside us and change our gaze, our sensitivity, and the way we see the world.

My images often resemble dreams because, for me, memory also has a dreamlike nature. It is rarely clear and direct. It comes in fragments: through sensations, light, smells, faces, shadows, and inner states. The past seems to blur, but at the same time it continues to live inside us.

The blurriness in my works is not only an aesthetic choice. It is a way of showing how I feel memory: fragile, elusive, painful, but still beautiful. In a way, our whole life eventually becomes similar to a dream — what remains are not exact events, but their emotional traces. This trace is what I try to convey through my images.

**Many of your images seem to exist between disappearance and presence. Are you interested in showing what is hidden rather than what is clearly visible?**

Yes, you are right. It is truly important for me to show not so much the obvious, but what is hidden. What lies on the surface is often only a shell, the first visible form. The most important things are almost always deeper — in a state, in silence, in a pause, in inner tension.

I am interested not simply in capturing an image, but in coming closer to its essence. Sometimes, in order to do that, you need to dive very deep — beyond appearance, beyond gesture, beyond familiar beauty. There may be pain, memory, fear, tenderness, strength, loneliness, or hope there. These invisible layers are the most valuable to me.

That is why my heroines often seem to exist between presence and disappearance. They do not always reveal themselves immediately. I like leaving space for mystery, so that the viewer does not simply look, but feels, searches, and recognizes something of their own in the image.

**Do you see your creative process as a form of therapy, ritual, confession, or transformation?**

Yes, absolutely. For me, the creative process is therapy, ritual, confession, and transformation all at once. Otherwise, I probably would not understand why one should make art at all.

For me, art is not simply the creation of a beautiful image. It is an inner process in which you meet yourself honestly — with what hurts, with what is impossible to say out loud. Through creativity, I can live through my feelings, give them form, and release at least part of their heaviness.

And this is where transformation happens. What was chaos inside becomes form. What was a wound can become beauty. What was personal suddenly begins to speak to other people. For me, this is the meaning of art — to transform lived experience into something greater than the pain itself.

**After going through pain and healing through art, what do you hope your works can give to other people?**

I would like my works to give people the feeling that they are not alone in their pain. That even the most difficult experience can be lived through, understood, and transformed into something beautiful.

I believe that the best thing we can do with our pain and trauma is not to let them destroy us, but to try to create something from them. Art does not erase what has happened, but it helps us embody it in something beautiful. If my works can become a quiet support for someone, a reminder of their own strength, or the beginning of inner healing, that would be very valuable to me. I want a person looking at my images to feel that pain can be not only an ending, but also the beginning of transformation. From it, depth, beauty, compassion, and new life can be born.

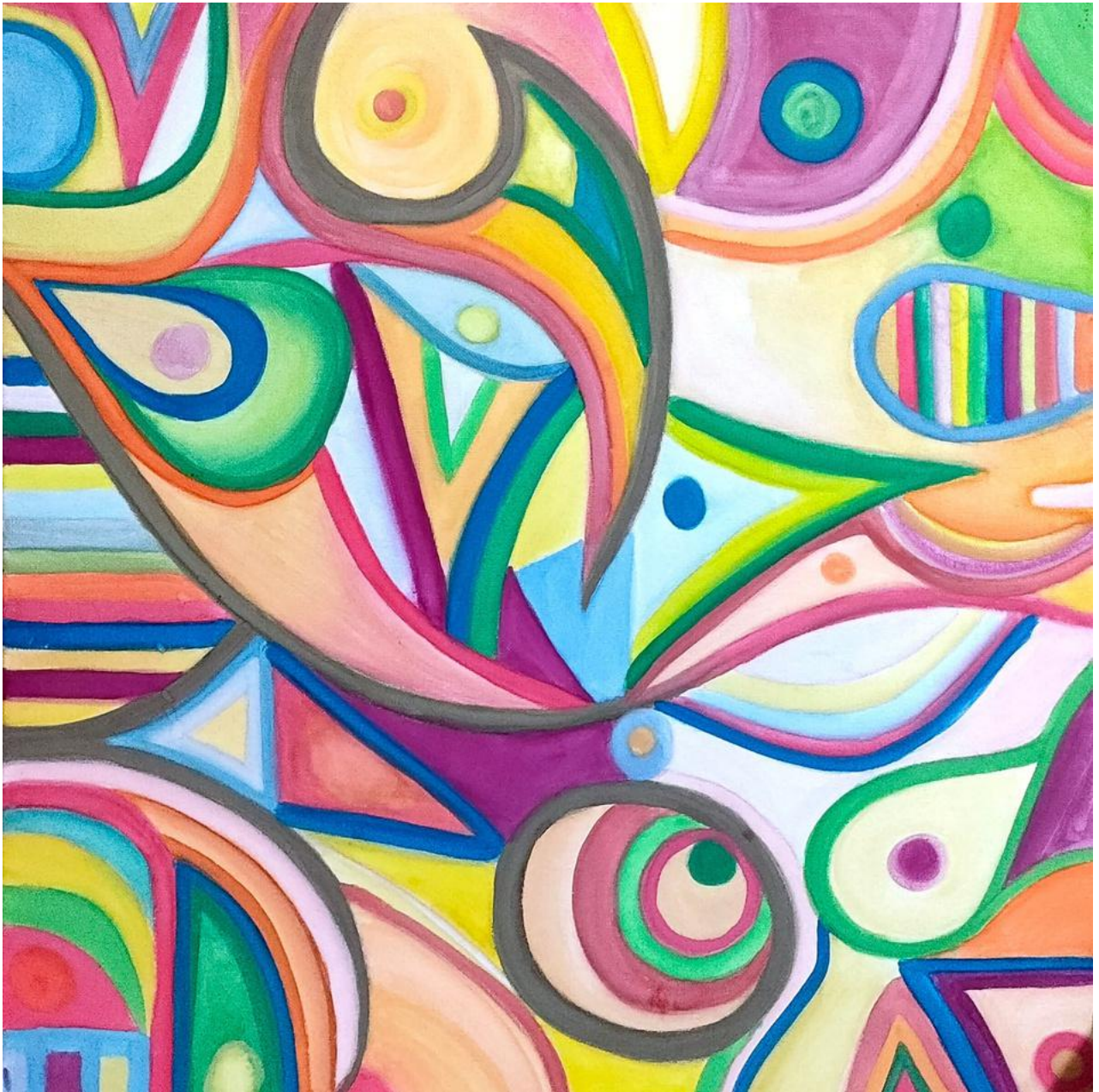
My name is **Meriem Arabi**, and I'm a theoretical physicist from Oran, Algeria. Alongside my love for the mysteries of the universe, I've always been drawn to painting. It's a passion that began in childhood and it has only grown stronger with time. My artistic style blends influences from psychedelic, abstract, and surrealist art, allowing me to express emotions and ideas that words alone can't capture.

### *Project Statement*

I paint and draw in a mixture of surrealist, abstract, and psychedelic styles. I express myself through a malleable and extravagant environment. My passion for physics is intrinsically linked to my art. I draw my inspiration from everything around me.

Meriem Arabi | Psycho-Tropical Self | 2024





Meriem Arabi | Genesis | 2020

# — Interview

## Chenglin Li



I see my role as designing conditions rather than determining outcomes. Rather than creating a fixed image, I build systems of relationships, constraints, and behaviors that allow forms to emerge over time, much like cultivating an ecosystem rather than producing an object.

Once the system is established, my role shifts from direct author to observer, curator, and interpreter. I study its behavior, identify meaningful patterns, and make decisions about which moments best communicate the ideas I am exploring. Human intention remains embedded in the framework, while the final work emerges through an ongoing dialogue between structure and autonomy. That balance between guidance and unpredictability is central to my practice.

**In works such as *Algorithmic Current* and *Chromatic Emergence*, color and form seem to evolve like living organisms. What attracts you to this sense of visual emergence?**

Visual emergence interests me because it reflects the systems that shape reality. Biological organisms, ecosystems, weather patterns, and social networks often arise from simple interactions repeated over time, producing complex behaviors without a single controlling entity.

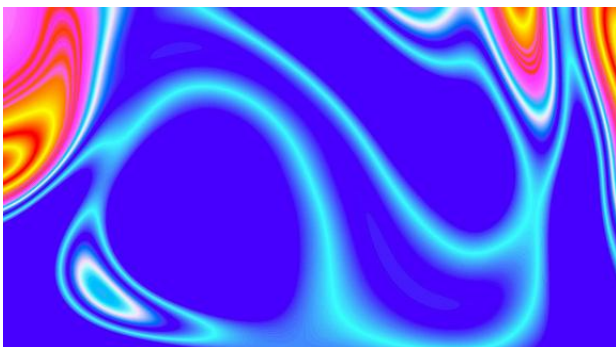
In works such as *Algorithmic Current* and *Chromatic Emergence*, I create environments where similar behaviors unfold through computational systems. As color, movement, and structure evolve, they reveal how complexity can emerge from simple rules. This ambiguity opens space for reflection on the increasingly intertwined relationship between natural and technological systems. Works from this series have been exhibited internationally, including at Artexpo New York, Palazzo Albrizzi-Capello in Venice, Casa Cava in Matera, and Halle des Blancs-Manteaux in Paris, where audiences often bring diverse interpretations to the relationship between nature and technology.

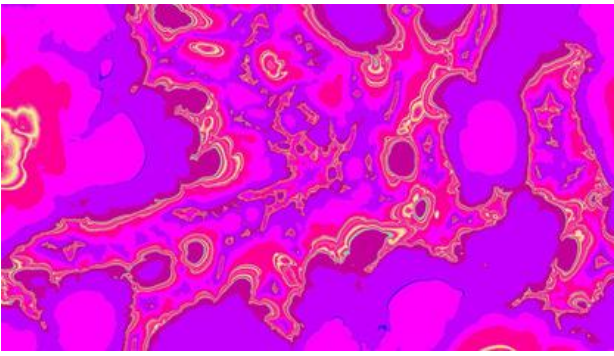
**How do you decide when an algorithmic work is complete, especially if the system itself is capable of continuous transformation?**

This is one of the most interesting questions in generative art, as these systems are often capable of continuous transformation and may never feel truly finished. For me, a work becomes complete when it reaches

**Your practice often explores the boundary between human intention and autonomous algorithmic behavior. How do you define your own role within a work that is partly generated by a system?**

Chenglin Li | *Algorithmic Current* | 2026





conceptual clarity rather than technical finality. I look for moments when the system's behavior effectively communicates the ideas or questions I am exploring. The artwork is not the entire system itself, but the experience framed from it. Completion occurs when that experience establishes a meaningful relationship between the viewer and the underlying process, encouraging reflection, even as the system itself continues to evolve.

**Your project statement mentions the tension between control and unpredictability. How much randomness or instability do you allow into your creative process?**

Unpredictability is one of the primary reasons I work with computational systems. I design systems with clear rules and constraints while allowing space for unexpected behaviors to emerge.

My focus is the balance between structure and randomness. Too much control makes a system feel fixed, while too much instability reduces coherence. The most compelling outcomes emerge between these extremes, where the system remains grounded in logic yet produces results I could not fully anticipate. This balance makes discovery an integral part of my creative process and continually reveals new possibilities within the system.

**What role does code play for you: is it primarily a tool, a collaborator, a material, or something else?**

Code functions simultaneously as a material, a process, and an environment. Unlike traditional materials, it is inherently dynamic. Much of my practice involves designing computational systems and defining the logic that guides their behavior. The strength of the work lies not only in writing code, but in the critical thinking required to structure rules, anticipate interactions, and build systems capable of meaningful emergence. Through this process, I direct the conceptual and technical development of each system, while observing how it unfolds to reveal unexpected possibilities within structured constraints.

This approach has informed works across computational art, product design, and emerging technologies, several of which have received international recognition through awards including the iF Design Award, Creative Communication Awards, International Design Awards, European Product Design Award, and Grand Prix du Design Paris. It demonstrates how computational thinking can shape both digital and physical experiences.

**Many discussions around AI and generative systems focus on authorship. What does authorship mean to you in an age of machine-mediated creativity?**

I believe authorship is evolving rather than disappearing. While generative systems produce outcomes that are not fully predetermined, the artist remains central to the process. Authorship lies in designing the system, defining its conceptual framework, and guiding the decisions that shape its behavior. Although forms may emerge autonomously, they do so within a structure intentionally created through human creativity and critical thinking.

In that sense, authorship becomes less about controlling every detail and more about designing meaningful possibilities. Through international exhibitions spanning Europe, North America, and Asia, I have had the opportunity to engage with diverse audiences across cultural contexts and bring these ideas into dialogue with the global art community. Witnessing how different cultures interpret and respond to algorithmic systems provides valuable insights, expanding the conversation beyond technology itself toward broader questions of creativity, agency, and human imagination.

**Your works often blur the line between natural growth and artificial construction. Do you see technology as separate from nature, or as an extension of natural processes?**

I do not see technology as separate from nature. Human technologies emerge from natural materials, human cognition, and the same evolutionary processes that shape all forms of life. In that sense, technology can be understood as an extension of nature rather than its opposite.

Many of my works explore this continuity by creating forms that feel simultaneously biological and computational. Projects such as Post-Human Bloom draw inspiration from coral growth and cellular expansion, while OceanLung merges technological infrastructure with ecological themes. By blurring the boundaries between the natural and artificial, my work invites audiences to reconsider technology as part of a larger and evolving ecosystem.

This relationship felt particularly tangible when exhibiting work at the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris and the CICA Museum in South Korea, where themes of nature, technology, and cultural memory converged within distinct architectural and cultural contexts.



# — Interview

## Dina Melnik



**You began your professional path in medicine before turning more deeply toward painting. How has your medical background influenced the way you observe the world and approach art?**

You know, these two seemingly very different fields can, in fact, intersect with one another. At first, I wanted to find myself, to discover an interesting

hobby, to create something, to bring beauty into the world — and I managed to do that. I can say with certainty that medical images and concepts, such as growth, fading, healing, and wounds, have become powerful metaphors in my art. They allow me to speak about broader themes of life through the lens of medical knowledge.

**You have been drawing since childhood, but fully immersed yourself in painting only in 2023. What made that moment feel like the right time to begin seriously?**

In Kaliningrad, where I lived for half a year, I happened to see a street advertisement for art therapy classes. I began attending them, and the woman who led the classes invited me to an art studio run by the local Kaliningrad artist Boris Viktorovich Zhigalov. That was where I first tried working with oil painting. That moment — this accidental turn of events and my meeting with Boris Viktorovich — became the very impulse that allowed me to truly immerse myself in painting. Before that, drawing had been more of a childhood passion, but there I felt that it could become something more than just a hobby.



Dina Melnik | Sunrise Over The Rooftops Of St. Petersburg | 2025

**Saint Petersburg became your home after you moved there in 2011. How does the atmosphere of the city affect your artistic vision?**



Saint Petersburg, which became my home in 2011, has had a profound influence on my artistic vision. This city is a true magnet for the soul, and its unique atmosphere reaches deep into the heart. I am fascinated by its extraordinary aura, woven from history, culture, and a special kind of melancholy. Even the harsh climate cannot overshadow the charm of this place; rather, it gives it a particular depth and drama. Its picturesque streets, each with its own story, and its majestic architecture, as if frozen in time, are an endless source of inspiration for me. I see in them not just stones and façades, but reflections of human destinies, eras, and aspirations. For me, Saint Petersburg is the most European city in Russia, and this feeling runs through all of my work. It gives me a sense of belonging to something greater — to the world’s cultural heritage — and this feeling constantly nourishes my artistic vision, encouraging me to search for new forms and meanings.

**Dance, landscape, and city scenes appear in your works. What themes are most important for you at this stage of your artistic journey?**

Life itself suggests the subjects of my paintings. There are so many interesting things and places around us. I love creating sweet, colorful paintings. I love bright colors. I draw inspiration from my surroundings.

**You work with oil, watercolor, and pastel. What does each medium allow you to express differently?**

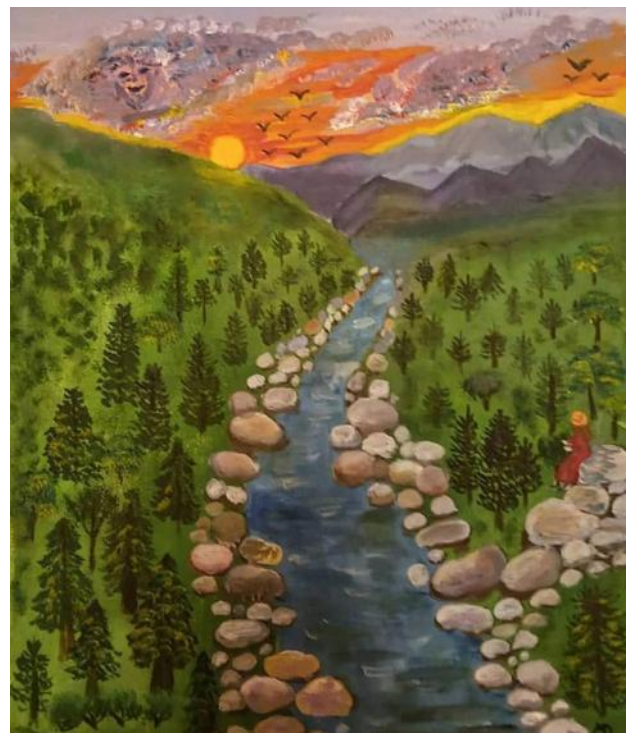
Oil paint dries slowly, which gives me a lot of time

to work, mix colors directly on the canvas, make corrections, and refine details. This allows me to develop complex compositions more carefully and achieve the desired result.

Watercolor is fluid and unpredictable, which is why it is more difficult for me to work with than oil. Watercolor is ideal for conveying delicate, fleeting states of nature — fog, for example, or water. It allows me to create a sense of fragility and subtlety. Pastel is different. I work with it very rarely; more precisely, I have created only one or two works in pastel as part of my studies at the Matisse Club art studio in Saint Petersburg, where I continue to improve my skills. What attracts me to this technique is its tactile quality. You touch the chalk directly and blend it with your fingers, which creates a strong sense of contact with both the material and the image.

**Your paintings feel very emotional, yet they also contain calm, reflective moments. How important is emotion in your creative process?**

Of course, emotion is important. For me, creating each painting is a form of meditation, art therapy that lifts my mood and heals the soul. When I take up a brush, I am not simply applying paint to canvas. It is a deep immersion into myself, into the world of my feelings and experiences. Each painting is, in a way, a diary of my soul, where I try to express the emotions that fill me at that moment. It may be intense joy, quiet sadness, exciting anticipation, or deep peace.



## Between Terrain and Body: Yiyi Song

by Anna Gvozdeva

Yiyi Song's ceramic practice occupies a precise and compelling threshold — between the geological and the biological, between object and organism, between ruin and resilience. Across six recent works, the London-based artist deploys hand-built clay not as a neutral medium but as a body in its own right: one that registers pressure, movement and time with uncommon directness. Graduating from Central Saint Martins, Song has arrived at a formal language that feels neither inherited nor derivative, but genuinely worked out from within the material itself.

The most immediately striking quality of Song's work is her command of surface as a conceptual register. Where the celadon-glazed *A Fold in the Tide* presents layered, shell-like planes with a liquid depth reminiscent of aged verdigris, *Folded Ground* (2026) operates in total chromatic withdrawal — raw, sandy stoneware whose only interruptions are small dark circles embedded across its ridged surface, like fossilised eyes or erosion marks. The contrast is not incidental: each palette generates a different phenomenological relationship with the viewer. The dusty yellow and blush tones of *Sunken Bloom* invite a haptic intimacy that is almost flesh-like in character, while the dark, richly glazed totem of *Vessels of Becoming* — surrounded by a dispersed field of smaller satellite forms — carries a different weight altogether: archival, familial, ceremonial.

Yiyi Song | *A Fold in the Tide* | 2025



Yiyi Song | *Folded Ground* | 2026



The folding and extrusion that define Song's formal vocabulary are deployed with considerable intelligence. Rather than imposing a resolved silhouette, she allows her forms to remain structurally ambiguous — readable simultaneously as terrain, bodily fragment, and botanical specimen. *Green Terrain* is exemplary in this regard: compact yet radiating, its upturned planes suggest both tectonic uplift and the opening of a flower or a fist. The negative spaces Song carves through her forms are as active as the material itself, creating internal shadows and passages that pull the eye inward and refuse any single reading.

*Lines of Departure* represents a formal departure in scale and mood. Two small, dark stoneware pieces — horizontal, low, and spare — carry a compressed energy that the larger works do not. Their partial teal-green glaze sits against a raw brown body like an afterthought or a scar. They resist the viewer's desire for legibility more aggressively than the surrounding works, and this restraint is effective. If the larger sculptures make their themes accessible through expansive form, *Lines of Departure* withholds, leaving the question of what has departed — and from where — genuinely open.

Yiyi Song | Sunken Bloom | 2026



Yiyi Song | Green Terrain



The ambition of *Vessels of Becoming* is the most conceptually visible of the group. A central form attended by scattered satellites in varying colours and scales, the composition reads as dispersal — perhaps migration, seed-fall, or the aftermath of rupture — and here Song's stated concerns with unstable ground and the relation between a body and its context are most literally enacted. The piece carries real visual authority in its chromatic richness: deep greens, rust reds, dark oxides and flashes of crimson. Yet it is the quieter, more autonomous works that ultimately demonstrate the deeper formal confidence, precisely because they ask the material to carry meaning without narrative scaffolding.

Yiyi Song | Lines of Departure



Yiyi Song | Vessels of Becoming



Song is an artist working at full stretch with her material. Her practice resists the familiar binaries of natural and artificial, whole and broken, settled and in transit — and the resulting works hold tension without resolving it. In ceramics, where the temptation toward surface virtuosity or resolved prettiness is constant, that refusal is harder than it looks. What emerges across these six works is a sustained inquiry into what it means for matter to endure: not intact, but still open.

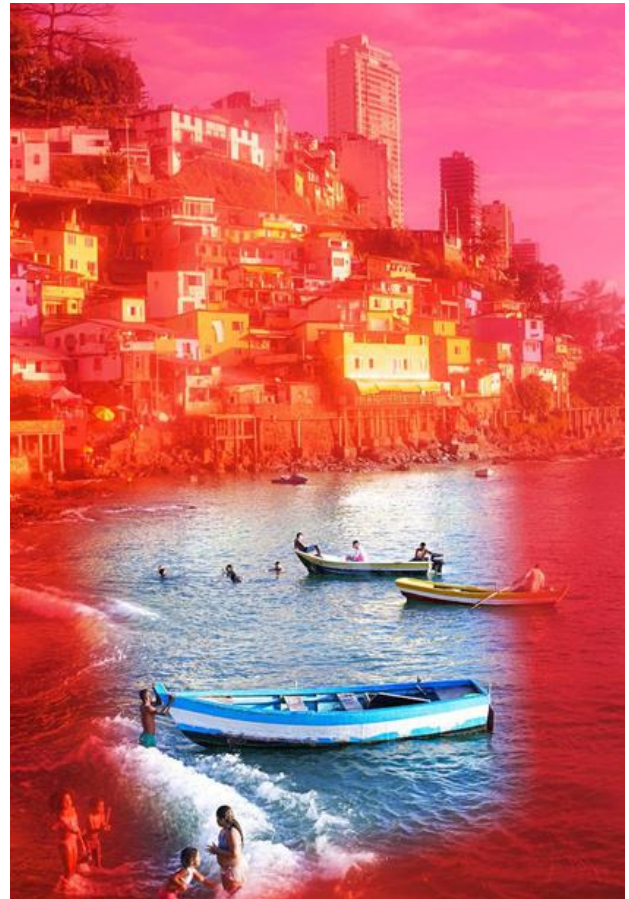
# André Nature

**Your background is in International Relations. How did studying cultures, history, politics, and society influence the way you see photography today?**

My background in international relations was the beginning of everything. First of all it has



André Nature | Salvador Bahia Re Dressed In Reds



André Nature | Salvador Bahia Re Dressed In Reds

broadened my knowledge in several fields, than it connected the stuff of different fields, and then it turned on my ability for critical thinking. I've met some authors I had studied in international relations years later, when I was reading photography theory, so things intersect a bit. But at the time I was studying international relations and in the beginning of my study and practice of photography, I understood photography mostly in a documental way, my photography took some more years to develop into art.

My first photo series, which is still a work in progress, Belvedere XXI, is a documental series in black and white, about the radical transformation of a neighborhood in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, from a partially empty natural space into a very developed area, becoming the richest neighbourhood in Belo Horizonte. When I began it I was using Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* for my international relations monograph.

Last time I've been there, in 2024, I've noticed there are dozens of luxury milionaries's cars over one of it's main streets every weekend, I've photographed several of them. I had never seen



this kind of thing in Belo Horizonte before.

**You mentioned that you eventually had to choose between music and photography. What made photography become your main creative language?**

I didn't feel that pull for a music career as much as for photography. Besides I've been interested in travelling, and travelling and photo is a best match for me. Musicians travel very fast, from one place to another. I travel slowly, on my own pace.

**Your practice includes nature, music, travel, surf, and fine art photography. What connects these different directions in your work?**

Nature, music, surf and travel are my main themes. I just work around them, and use my creativity and art the best possible way for each one, and it's a different thing for each one, of course.

My fine art work (fine art photography in portuguese translates to "fotografia autoral", which means author photography) is produced in nature to a great extent, but I do not limit myself to this: as long as it is appealing to my creativity and to my sense that as a photographer I am shooting something meaningful, it's enough.

For example, I've spent the carnival of 2024 in Salvador, Bahia, and I figured I had a great opportunity to shoot this popular celebration in one of the best places in the world, it is culture at it's best, so I carried my camera to Pelourinho and shot some percussion and folklore groups and the people dressed up, and it was great. As

long as it is appealing to my creativity and to my sense that as a photographer I am shooting something meaningful, it will do.

**In some of your recent works, color plays a strong expressive role and seems to transform the image into something almost dreamlike or spiritual. How do you approach color as an emotional or symbolic tool?**

I started focusing more on the development of works using colors in a creative way recently, and I've produced three series of work of this kind so far: Salvador Bahia Dressed in Reds, Colorful Experiences, and some Light Painting works. Color can be approached in several different ways, there are many possibilities to be explored when working with colors.

If you photograph something in it's natural colors it's as if it's telling you something, and if you use colors creatively on your photograph it modifies what it's telling you, so color changes the language photography speaks.

Colors can be used as a symbolic tool, so when somebody looks at Salvador Bahia Dressed in Reds and all the photos are pretty much reds, with an exception of a small part of it in each picture, that maintains natural colors, many people will relate it symbolically to the meanings of red. It can be interpreted this way, but it was not what I meant. To me color is mostly sensory material, so when you write that in my works "color often transforms the landscape into something almost dreamlike or spiritual", I think that's a good description of what I'm doing.

I started producing light painting photography last year, most of it in natural landscapes, and some of it related to traveling. During the second semester of 2026 I'll be producing a lot more on





the landscapes of the northeast region of Brazil. I'll be posting on Instagram.

**Your surf photographs carry a strong sense of adventure and positive energy. What attracts you most to surfing as a visual subject?**

Surfing is nature, surfing is energy, surfing is challenge, surfing is traveling, and more. I'm not really interested in surfing as a competition, but as a practice and as a culture relating to nature and lifestyle.

I like to capture surf's visuality, the moments of action, and whatever I can imprint about this sport and it's energy on my photos. But what I like the most in surf photography is to be in action in the sea, using a waterhouse.

Surf photography is very challenging. I was born and lived most of my life in Minas Gerais, a state that's got no beaches. So when I got into surf photography I already had a pretty well developed fine art and music photography work, surfing photos was a very new thing. First of all I was very afraid of the sea, and tried to be as careful as I could, so I've built my confidence gradually and I'm still building it.

First I bought an Outex plastic waterhouse, cause some surf and water photographers I admire are Outex's ambassadors, but soon water got in it and I lost a Canon 5D MarkII camera and a 24-70 2.8 lens. I had no insurance at the time.

I've waited a while to gather more experience and decided to invest in a real waterhouse, so I bought the latest and best version of Pedra do Mar, the main waterhouse sold and used in Brazil, it costs about US\$1000.

I had a terrible experience with it, and soon lost a brand new Canon EOS 6D Mark II camera and a 50mm 1.4 lens. I had no insurance because the

marketing and research made me consider it pretty safe.

I've been photographing outside water since them and missing the best times I intend to have. From now on I'll be using insurance. And I need a sponsor to get me an Aquatech waterhouse... Anyone there?

The investment in surf photography is very high, the action is risky, and the return is too low. I sell my photos to surfers through a surf photos website, I'm often disappointed with the lack of financial return and avoid working. This market needs serious adjustments.

**How does photographing the sea differ from photographing concerts, where the energy comes from people, music, and performance?**

Music is a totally different thing. Concerts are about artistic performance and expression. I'm truly into music, I've collected vinyls and CDs, listened to a lot of music, and been to several concerts just as a spectator and attentive listener.

My music photography work is a curated work, that is, I select the musicians I am going to photograph according to my appreciation of their music, and to some extent their relevance in the music scene and history.

So it's about my relation with the musician too, the way I'm into his/her work and his/her performance. Their performance, movements, expressions, stimulates my creations. I also like to use the stage lights creatively, and this is another element that's not present in sea and surf photos.

Besides when I shoot surf I shoot common people, and when I shoot music I shoot accomplished musicians.

So far I've build a collection of about 300 great musicians in international jazz, brazilian instrumental music, brazilian singers, and a little bit of reggae, blues, and others. Some of the musicians I've shot are Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, Mike Stern, Ahmad Jamal, Stanley Clarke, Stanley Jordan, Richard Bona, Joss Stone, and brazilians Hermeto Pascoal, Naná Vasconcelos, João Donato, Lobão, Tom Zé, Milton Nascimento, Pepeu Gomes.

**When viewers encounter your photographs,**



**what kind of emotional or sensory experience would you like them to have?**

I would just like them to get into it, for real. How they're gonna engage to the experience doesn't matter to me, as long as they do. It could be emotionally, sensory, intellectually, creatively. And it's a different thing for each kind of work. Music, for example, is emotional in its nature. Maybe someone is really into music and admires the musicians I've photographed and will be emotionally engaged with my work. Or maybe someone will see my complete music photo collection and be emotionally involved because it's as if it's a chapter on the music scene and history, and find it meaningful and beautiful. The spectators will get into my work Carta de

Voo (Flight Chart) for example once they realize the pole, the airplane and the spiritual temple are the same thing. That could be a sensory and spiritual experience.

In Enigmaticweb the involvement will probably happen once the spectators realize there's a visual plot going on, and read the series this way. But the individual photos of this series could speak by themselves sensorially.

In Observing Observers of Sunset there's a sensory experience, but it's also about understanding the play I've created in order to make that work. That's why there's a text on the bottom of the page.

In fact I've made bilingual texts english and portuguese for each work on my website [www.andrenature.com](http://www.andrenature.com)

## **Natalie Angel:** Art, Connection, and Catalyst for Change

My name is Natalie Angel. I am a visual artist, a mother of three, and an advocate for social justice. For me, the name "Angel" represents my deep belief that art can be a powerful force for positive change. Through my work, I strive to inspire reflection and build bridges between people. Our reality is deeply shaped by our personal journeys and childhood experiences. By expanding our self-awareness, we can unlock a deeper, more profound sense of compassion for one another. Instead of focusing on division, I choose to focus on connection and the pursuit of a fulfilling life for everyone.

### Healing Through Creation

I am a self-taught artist. While I have taken various painting courses to refine my techniques, my style grew organically out of necessity. Art is my essential outlet. It has allowed me to transform deep personal pain and trauma—including domestic abuse and a recent divorce—into something tangible, beautiful, and meaningful. This creative process has been the catalyst for my own personal growth. It is proof that visual expression can turn survival into strength.

### Global Issues and Recognition

My artistic practice is fueled by an urgent social mission. I use my canvas to speak out on pressing global issues: from the horrors of femicide and domestic violence to the urgent need for world peace and environmental responsibility. My work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. Most recently, I was deeply honored to receive the Olympus Art Award at the Museo d'Arte e Scienza in Milan. This recognition strengthens my resolve to keep pushing boundaries and raising awareness.

### Empowering Neurodivergent Talent

Drawing from my own lived experience with autism, a key goal of my practice is to support and uplift fellow autistic artists. Many neurodivergent creators possess extraordinary talent but lack the financial means to develop it, leaving immense potential completely untapped. My background as a social worker for refugees gave me extensive experience in guiding people toward independence, development, and empowerment. I want to combine this professional expertise with my artistic platform to collaborate with autistic artists, ensure they are fairly compensated, and give them the professional stage they truly deserve.

### *Project Statement*

"If it does not feel right, don't do it. Follow your heart and intuition."



Natalie Angel | | See Your True Colors

# Ekaterina Coquillon Anganova

**You grew up between Kazakhstan, Ivory Coast, France, Finland, Spain, China, and Colombia. How has moving between such different cultures shaped the way you understand identity and belonging?**

For me, questions about identity and belonging have always been the most difficult to answer. Growing up between Kazakhstan, Ivory Coast, France, Finland, Spain, and China, exposed me to very different cultural environments, all of which



Ekaterina Coquillon Anganova | Freedom Protects Them With Its Wings | 2026

have profoundly shaped who I am. I do not feel that I fully belong to a single place, and perhaps I never will. Instead, I see myself as a living mosaic, shaped by many cultures, experiences, and ways of seeing the world.

What allowed me to embrace this diversity without feeling disconnected was the strong sense of heritage I inherited from my family. I was fortunate to grow up within a cultural tradition that places great importance on ancestry, memory, and connection to one's roots. I come from a Cossack lineage, and in our tradition it is important to know and honor our ancestors for at least seven generations. Growing up with this awareness gave me a deep sense of belonging and continuity. Knowing where I come from created an inner stability that allowed me to remain open to other cultures without losing myself.

Over time, I came to understand identity not as something fixed, but as something layered and evolving. My roots give me a foundation, while my experiences across different countries continue to expand my perspective. This understanding is also reflected in my artistic practice, where I often bring together visual languages, traditions, and symbols from different cultures to create dialogues rather than boundaries.

**China became an especially important part of your artistic development. What initially**

**attracted you to traditional Gongbi painting, and what continues to fascinate you about this technique?**

I have always been a perfectionist by nature, and I tend to be drawn to details. In painting, I often feel that the more detail there is, the more rewarding the experience becomes. Gongbi immediately resonated with that aspect of my personality. It is a technique that demands extraordinary patience, precision, and discipline, qualities that I value deeply both as an artist and as a person.

What fascinates me even more than the technical aspect, however, is the cultural legacy that Gongbi embodies. Traditional Chinese painting is not simply a method of image-making; it represents thousands of years of accumulated artistic knowledge, philosophy, symbolism, and cultural development.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Chinese painting is the sense of responsibility that comes with it. There are established principles and conventions that have been carefully preserved over centuries. Learning them requires humility and respect. At the same time, those boundaries create an interesting challenge for contemporary artists. Innovation cannot come from rejecting tradition, but from understanding it deeply enough to contribute something meaningful to its ongoing evolution.

**Gongbi painting requires precision, patience, and a deep respect for tradition. How do you balance its established principles with your desire to develop a personal and contemporary artistic language?**

To be honest, I am still learning how to balance it. Learning Gongbi required me to rethink my relationship with art from the ground up and let go of many assumptions shaped by my European upbringing. Immersing myself in traditional Chinese painting fundamentally changed the way I understand both art and the world.

The second challenge began when I left China. Suddenly, I had to find a way to remain faithful to a tradition I deeply respect while communicating with audiences who may not be familiar with its history, philosophy, or visual language.

For me, that balance comes from creating a respectful dialogue between the foundations of Gongbi and Chinese philosophy, European philosophy and artistic elements, and the many cultural influences I have encountered throughout

my life. I approach Gongbi with great respect because it is part of a cultural legacy that has been preserved and refined over centuries. At the same time, I allow my personal language to emerge through the stories, symbols, and questions I choose to explore.

And from a personal standpoint, no matter how my practice evolves or what medium I choose to work with, I never lose the essence of who I am as an artist. My work remains deeply rooted in softness, femininity, imagination, and an attention to detail that has always been part of my personality. Whether I am working through Gongbi or exploring other artistic approaches, those qualities continue to guide me. There is often a subtle sense of wonder or magical realism present in my work, alongside a fascination with intricate details, symbolism, and storytelling. The language may evolve, but the core remains the same.

**Freedom Protects Them with Its Wings emerged after you returned to Kazakhstan as an adult. What did you discover about your homeland that you had not been able to understand as a child?**

As a child, I often longed for a stronger connection to my roots. Growing up far from Kazakhstan, I sometimes struggled to understand why my mother had chosen to leave her homeland. I felt a deep curiosity about the place where I was born and a desire to belong to it more fully.

When I returned as an adult, I rediscovered not only the beauty of its culture and traditions, but also some of the realities that had shaped my mother's life as a woman. As I began to understand her experiences more deeply, I also became more aware of the experiences of other women around me. Through conversations and observations, I encountered stories that were often kept private due to social expectations or fear of judgment. This helped me understand that every culture, no matter how beautiful and meaningful, also carries its own struggles and contradictions.

For the first time, I understood that leaving had not been a rejection of her roots, but an act of courage and protection.

That realization became the foundation of *Freedom Protects Them with Its Wings*. The work was born from the complexity of loving one's homeland while recognizing its contradictions, and about the sacrifices women sometimes make to create greater freedom for the generations that follow. It is about love for one's roots, but also about the

freedom to grow beyond the limitations that any culture can sometimes impose.

**In this work, you combine Chinese painting techniques with Kazakh ornaments, poetry, wood, and an almost sculptural composition. How did you develop this unusual combination of materials and cultural traditions?**

The combination of materials and cultural references developed quite organically from my experience of returning to Kazakhstan. I was deeply moved by the vastness of the steppes and by the relationship between people and nature that has shaped life there for centuries. I wanted that sense of freedom, resilience, and connection to the land to be reflected not only in the imagery, but also in the physical structure of the piece, which led me to incorporate wood and a more sculptural composition, to create something that felt grounded, almost as if it had grown from the land itself.

A key inspiration was my friend, the Kazakh poet Medina Zhumabay. Through her poetry and our conversations, she shared stories about her ancestors, the culture of the steppes, and her experiences as a woman. We connected immediately on a human level, despite coming from different backgrounds.

She also introduced me to the symbolism embedded within Kazakh traditions. Symbols have always been important in my own cultural background as well, so I felt a deep respect and affinity for their role. I wanted to incorporate them thoughtfully so that they could extend those qualities not only to the women represented in the painting, but also to the women who encounter the work.

For instance, The Kus Kanat, or “bird’s wing” motif, became especially significant because it embodies freedom, movement, and protection, themes that are central to the painting. The Koshkar- Muiz, the ram’s horn motif, symbolizes strength, endurance, and connection to the land. Both symbols resonated deeply with Medina’s story and my own. In that sense, the work became a meeting place where different cultural traditions, personal histories, and shared values could coexist and support one another.

**The two women in Freedom Protects Them with Its Wings represent different cultural backgrounds but are connected by the same land. What does their relationship express**

**about female solidarity, shared memory, and cultural continuity?**

Their relationship reflects a realization that emerged through my friendship with Medina and through reflecting on my own family history: across cultures, women are often the primary guardians and transmitters of memory.

In both our lives, it was our mothers and grandmothers who kept us connected to our roots. My great grandmother passed down stories, songs, and traditions that had survived generations of migration and historical upheaval. Medina shared similar memories of learning about her ancestors and cultural heritage through the women in her family. Although our backgrounds were different, we recognized the same thread connecting them. This is what shared memory means to me. Culture is not preserved only through official history, but through everyday acts of care, storytelling, teaching, and remembering. Very often, it is women who carry that responsibility.

The work is also a reflection on female resilience, most of the time it begins with a lack of freedom. Throughout history, many women have lived under social pressures, restrictions, or difficult circumstances, yet they continued to nurture families, protect cultural knowledge, and create a sense of belonging for future generations. To me, there is immense strength in that quiet perseverance.

Ultimately, the relationship between the two figures expresses the idea that, beyond cultural differences, women often share similar hopes, struggles, and responsibilities. They carry memory, preserve culture, and help future generations remain connected to their roots. Above all, they embody a universal desire for freedom, dignity, and the ability to shape their own future while remaining connected to those who came before them.

**The abundant orchids and Amazonian water lilies in La Madremonte create an imagined vision of nature flourishing without threat. How do beauty, ecological concern, and hope interact within this work?**

In La Madremonte, beauty, ecological concern, and hope are inseparable. I wanted to raise awareness about the importance of protecting nature, but not through fear or shock. Instead, I chose to approach the subject through beauty.

Although the orchids and Amazonian water lilies



may appear idealized, the plants themselves are real. The biodiversity they represent exists today, and that is precisely why it deserves our protection. For me, hope begins with recognizing that these ecosystems are still alive and that there is still something left to preserve. Personally, I have always felt that images of destruction can be powerful, but their effect is often temporary. They shock us, move us, and make us aware of a problem, but over time people can become overwhelmed or emotionally

exhausted. Beauty works differently. When we encounter something beautiful, we develop a desire to protect it. We want it to continue existing. We imagine a future in which it remains part of our lives. That is why hope is so important in this work. I did not want to create an image of loss, but an image of possibility. Art can inspire preservation through wonder, and rather than focusing on what we have already lost, I wanted to remind viewers of what still exists and what we still have the power to protect.

## — Interview

# Brechin Flourney

**Your artistic practice is deeply connected to dance and movement. How did your background as a dancer and choreographer shape the way you approach photography?**

My photographic practice is an outgrowth of my lifelong studies in dance, and my extensive training in Butoh, a contemporary dance genre originating from Japan. The training requires exceptional physical discipline in balance with Buto-Fu (words and poetic imagery that inspire or trigger internal movements and transformation). I approach photography as a dancer first, drawing from the perspectives of the body as an extension of the environment. It is not separate, rather it is an alchemical relationship that shapes space.

The lens is an extension of my body and my eye as I'm drawn into the scene. When photographing dancers in performance, I'm often seeing the choreography for the first or second time. Drawing on my background, I can read the moments of preparation for a jump or a split second composition. I am constantly experimenting with the camera to figure out a way to elevate the subject into something extraordinary. When photographing natural elements, I manipulate my body so that it fits into the curve of a tree or flat against the ground, or hanging from certain vantage point to capture something that I see. In this way, I am as much a part of the environment as the subject of my attention.

**You describe movement as your “mother tongue”. What does photography allow you to express that movement alone cannot?**



I've been experimenting with movement and dance as long as I can remember. It is my first language, a refuge, and one of the constants of my life. Movement is a life-long conversation. I don't perform anymore but movement doesn't need a stage. As my body has aged and my physical abilities have changed, I've adopted the practice of dancing whenever the moment strikes, whether it's on a street corner, in the club, at a concert, in the kitchen. Dancing is always there. But where the body has limitations, photography is limitless. I can play with color, light, and spatial relationships. The freedom to combine imagery and elements is a way to continue the creative journey in a new world. Photography utilizes my arts background while demanding growth and new skills.

**Many of your works capture bodies in moments of suspension, flight or physical tension. What draws you to these transitional moments?**

The power of the moment. When seeing the jump or leap in real-time, we see the arc of movement. The continuation of a body as it slices through space. Capturing the moment through photography allows us to ponder, with perfect clarity, that split second when the body is at pinnacle of achievement.

**In the submitted images, the figures appear to defy gravity. How do you understand the relationship between freedom, strength, and vulnerability in these works?**

The image of a dancer framed by two buildings is a documentary image of a site-specific, aerial dance performance by Flyaway Productions (dancer: Megan Lowe). The second image is of a child – my daughter- jumping into a pool. The silhouette in the front grounds the image to emphasize the feeling of flying. Both images represent freedom and expression of physical power. That moment



when strength meets risk. I'm reminded of being a child on a swing, furiously pumping the legs to create a certain velocity and that moment of suspended stillness before the swing descends back to earth. That was a moment of fearlessness, accomplishment, and giddy joy. The submitted images evoke the same feelings. Both are physically vulnerable to the environment. The wind can blow the apparatus and dancer's ropes in unpredictable ways. The sun can heat the dancers metal frame and affect the grip. The child jumping into a pool can have a hard landing in the water. But the subjects are in control, being bold and joyful. This interdependency is what makes us – as the viewer – take that moment to fully appreciate the casual elegance of these moments.

**Your work often explores the connection between the body and the environment. How do specific locations or surroundings influence the final image?**

The natural world has a personality. It has secrets. It has a rhythm that influences our visceral connection to natural and urban environments. Lens-based work is a record of my conversations with the elements – earth, water, air, fire – as a photographer and a movement artist. Different environments demand different expectations and a willingness to work with the immediacy of the moment. In a studio setting I can control the lighting, the backdrop, and the pace of the session. But much of my work is photographed outdoors or in a theatrical setting, where I have considerably less control over the conditions that shape the image. I enjoy the exercise of adaptation and improvisation to navigate unpredictable lighting, shooting conditions, and visual distractions. When shooting aerial dance on the street, in particular, the techniques are oriented towards capturing the dancers' body in a state of precarious motion balanced by the weight of the building façade. Or focusing on the moment of emotional urgency. A different approach is expressed through my self-portraiture, which tends to be embedded in the earth. In my self-portrait series about my experiences with breast cancer, I buried myself in the garden soil to feel the sun in my soul. It was a ceremonial burial and rebirth staged for the camera. The ground and dappled light provided a haven- a grounding element of sensory comfort. Courage was found in nature's impermanence and its promise of rejuvenation. Radical healing took on a kinetic energy. The practice of connecting the sensory body with the details of our environment was more than satisfying- it was medicine. In many of my works, I layer organic overgrowth, or a landscape with images of my body in frozen motion. The images are synthesized through an alchemical process of combining documentary images

with fantastic elements to shape a new reality.

**Your long-term self-portraiture project reflects a deeply personal journey of the body, healing and transformation. How has self-portraiture changed your relationship with your own image?**

I am fascinated with the details of our changing forms. I consider my body to be a house – or spaceship- that holds my consciousness. One of my teachers, Akira Kasai, would refer to our bodies as stardust and matter as constantly changing. Photography has been a tool that gives me the ability to converse with my physical state. This perspective was developed.

F\*ck Strength - a self-portraiture project about my experiences navigating breast cancer from my first diagnosis at age 42 to my second round in 2020 at age 54- is the externalization of deeply personal negotiations with serious illness and reconciliation with my new body. Cancer changed my body. Internally, my cells mutated and expired. Externally, my physicality evolved into a new shape with scars and discolored skin as evidence of the struggle. Throughout this journey, photographic self-portraiture became my language of confrontation and self-acceptance. Photography was a powerful tool as a language and a witness. Frame by frame, my lens recorded years of internal conversations with my body and its mercurial emotional states of existence.

The camera is a witness to my corporeal struggles and an extension of my emotional and energetic bodies. It is a record of my conversations with the physical world and the synthesis of kinesthetic and spiritual realities; an intuitive diary of color, light, and captured movement.

The act of capturing my image on camera, then manipulating the images into new realities, externalized my emotional relationship with the body through life stages and serious illnesses. I reject the notions of the 'tragic female body' and the bypassing of "being strong". Through vulnerability and self-acceptance, I present an unflinching gaze that asserts a woman's right to exist as an emotionally whole, sovereign being.

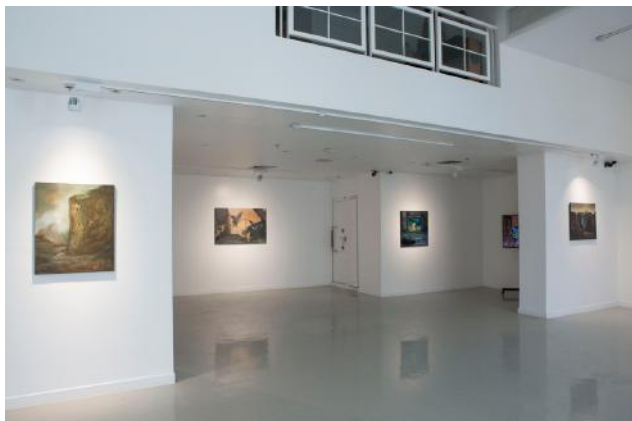
**What do you hope viewers feel or reconsider when they encounter your photographs of bodies in motion?**

I have so much respect and admiration for the people that I photograph. They are exceptional athletes doing incredible things. Watching the performance, or moment in real-time, we see one thing. Picking a moment and showing frozen motion asks the viewer to consider something familiar as a hidden creature or a deeper meaning. I hope to inspire the question "how?" How did that body defy gravity? What are the lines and shapes that the body can make? I want the audience to consider the impossibility of flight and the power of risk. And that female bodies are powerhouses that do seemingly impossible things. So often I see images of women and female-identified people portrayed as tragic, sexual, shy, retiring, sweet, wholesome or slutty, confrontational... the list of negative stereotypes goes on. I reject this interpretation and I want to show us as the multi-faceted, complex, powerful people that we are. We can be messy and we can be precise. The images of bodies in motion are the ultimate expression of selfdetermination. This is the moment we are exercising controlled precision against all odds.

## Internal Terrains, External Forces: A Review of Psychological Landscapes

By Tabitha Ysart Green

The group exhibition Psychological Landscapes is currently on display at the 1215 Gallery until June 24th 2026. The exhibition brings together works across a range of media that investigate how one's environment can shape and manipulate emotion, desire, memory, and psychological perception. The artists explore the "Psychological Landscape" as an internal terrain, creating visual representations of experiences and processes often hidden from outside perception.



Installation view from Psychological Landscapes, Courtesy of 1215 Gallery



Installation view of "Institutionalised Desire" from Psychological Landscapes, Courtesy of 1215 Gallery

"Institutionalised desire" by Chenyu Wang uses the symbolic apple to begin a dialogue about consumerism, and the tactical exploitation of desire, herd mentality, and envy by modern advertising. Through the repeated motif of the apple the artist taps into a number of established cultural associations, including Eve's Apple from the Bible, the Apple of Discord from Greek mythology, and the poisoned apple from Snow White, and the associated negative connotations. One may even extend the metaphor to the tech giant Apple, whose monopoly of the tech world, and continuous turnout of new products echoes the artist's expression of algorithmically produced desire.

Wang indicates that in an environment of commodification, desire is no longer an individual's impulse, but a produced condition shaped by systems of advertising and consumption. This surreal digital work seems to illustrate the internal processes one goes through on the way to being seduced by an advertising campaign. Products are repeatedly elevated and displayed, while figures appear as both participants in and spectators to a cycle of consumption. Through repetition and spectacle, desire gradually shifts from suggestion to inevitability. The artist emphasises this critique through the central symbol of the gem-encrusted apple - a gem-encrusted apple with no actual use, it is simply desired because others do, and because of the manipulation of desire. The utilization of digital video as the medium adds an extra dimension to the piece, allowing these processes to unfold over time, tracing the gradual assimilation of the individual into systems of consumption and market logic.



Installation view of "Institutionalised Desire" from Psychological Landscapes, Courtesy of 1215 Gallery



Installation view of "Future Distribution" from Psychological Landscapes, Courtesy of 1215 Gallery

"Future distribution" moves from a generalized and population-wide experience to one more close to home; the control of a child's future by parents. This artwork draws on the artist Jiangyu Huang's personal experiences with their parents, and how they feel that their imagination has been limited by their parents' visions for their future. The parents: a pianist and a dancer, are shown in both past and present states - once free and creative, now limited by the bounds of their own societal perceptions.

Installation view of "Future Distribution" from Psychological Landscapes, Courtesy of 1215 Gallery



The visuals of this piece are accompanied by narration from the perspective of the mother and father, each expressing the uselessness of creative freedom, and expressing the necessity of boundaries and fundamentals within an artform. This artwork speaks to the commodification of artistic skills in the modern era, once forms of personal expression, piano and dance are presented as professions increasingly shaped by economic necessity - this is most effectively expressed through the limitation of the dancer, once a stage performer is now literally confined by the four walls of the phone screen as they dance for social apps rather than a live audience.

The parents strive to place limitations on the freedom and creativity of the child to prevent them getting hurt, and to ensure they may continue to pay for the life they have grown up within. The work seems to question how free this child is, and whether our futures are simply predetermined by the people and algorithms which govern life decisions. The digital video format allows for the expression of multiple viewpoints, including internal dialogues from the parents, as well as memories of the past and projections of the future. These overlapping temporalities create a portrait of parental influence that is both restrictive and deeply rooted in lived experience.

Works by Guy Lapierre, Elias Vey, Étienne Roy, Jianguyu Huang, and Chenyu Wang touch on similar themes, examining the ways in which external environments - from family structures to systems of consumption - shape an individual's experience. Collectively, the artworks presented in Psychological Landscapes display the psychological landscape as a realm continuously formed through interaction with the social, economic, and technological forces that surround us, rather than something insular and private.



Installation view of "Future Distribution" from Psychological Landscapes, Courtesy of 1215 Gallery

## Victoria Morozova

I started experimenting with photography while I was still at school. Who would have known that one day, by pressing the shutter, my heart would be broken.

Native Americans believed that photography takes away a small part of the soul of both the main subject of the image and the photographer. There is always a certain magic inherent in photography. Perhaps this is exactly why it attracts me so deeply. In my work, I always turn to theatricality, while remembering Shakespeare's words: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players".

### *Artist Statement*

If at least one person sees my photographs and finds something in them that changes their life for the better, then it means I have not lived in vain by creating them.

The concept of value is different for everyone. My value is measured by the response it awakens in the heart.

It is precisely this response of the heart, and the value of the moment, that makes us feel real and alive.

Victoria Morozova | A Pianist's Nightmare | 2024





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