

VISUAL ART JOURNAL





— Intro

Hello, dear reader,

I am truly delighted to welcome you to the pages of our magazine. We have worked tirelessly to gather some of the most fascinating artists and their thoughts. Ahead, you will find works in various styles, inviting you to dive into a world of fantasy and reality, discover what inspires artists, understand the challenges others face during the creative process, and learn something new about this world.

This is our eighth issue, and I must share that I never anticipated the work on this magazine would be so captivating and enlightening. Engaging with the artists has been both inspiring and energizing, and I'd like to believe that everyone involved in our magazine feels the same way.

Today, I wish you enjoyable reading, a cup of something delicious by your side, and the same creative energy, wherever it may take you.

Thank you to everyone!



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

On the Front Cover:
Sara Dürst

On the Back Cover:
Ernest Compta Llinàs

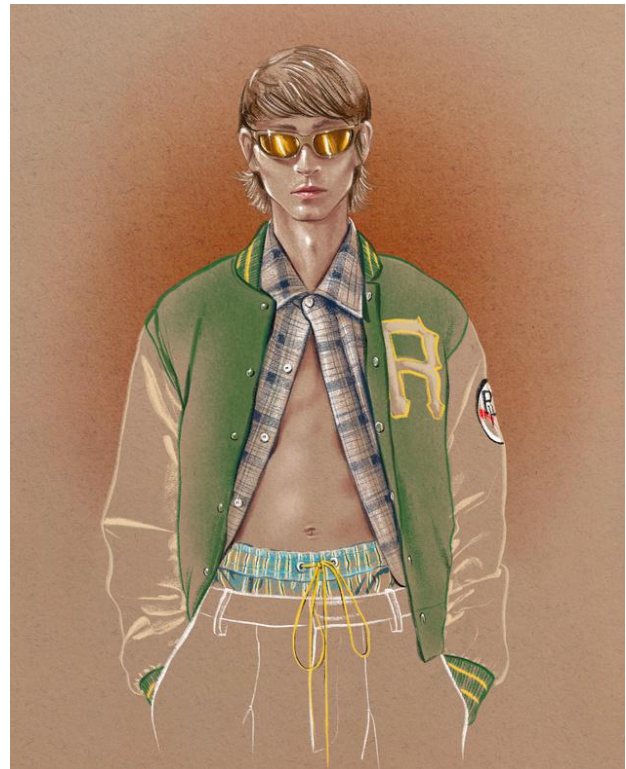
We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: <https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/>

— Interview

Bianca Beltramello

Your artistic journey began with portrait painting. How did your background in portraiture influence your transition into fashion illustration and textile design?

My background in portrait painting has greatly influenced my approach to fashion illustration and textile design. Portraiture demands a keen eye for realism and anatomical accuracy, which is evident in my illustration style. Unlike traditional fashion illustration, where figures are often abstracted and elongated, my work focuses on capturing the natural expressivity and presence of the model. I believe the model's face and emotions should harmonize with the outfit, creating a powerful synergy between the person and what they wear. To me, a successful illustration showcases how clothing can complement and enhance the model's inherent character, allowing both to stand out.



Bianca Beltramello | Simone | 2024

Fashion is an extension of identity in your art. How do you choose the subjects and garments you illustrate, and what story do you aim to tell through them?

When selecting subjects and garments for my illustrations, I'm guided by the emotions they evoke in me. Whether the model is someone I know well or just an acquaintance, I'm drawn to their unique expressions, movements, and the overall energy they convey. I pair these qualities with garments that resonate with similar feelings, creating a visual narrative that is both personal and evocative. Ultimately, my work reflects my own perspective and interpretation of the subjects and clothing, often revealing more about my own vision than the subjects themselves. It's about capturing a moment, a feeling, and a connection between the person and the garment they wear.

As a textile designer, your work merges art with functionality. What are some of the challenges and rewards of transforming your artwork into wearable patterns?

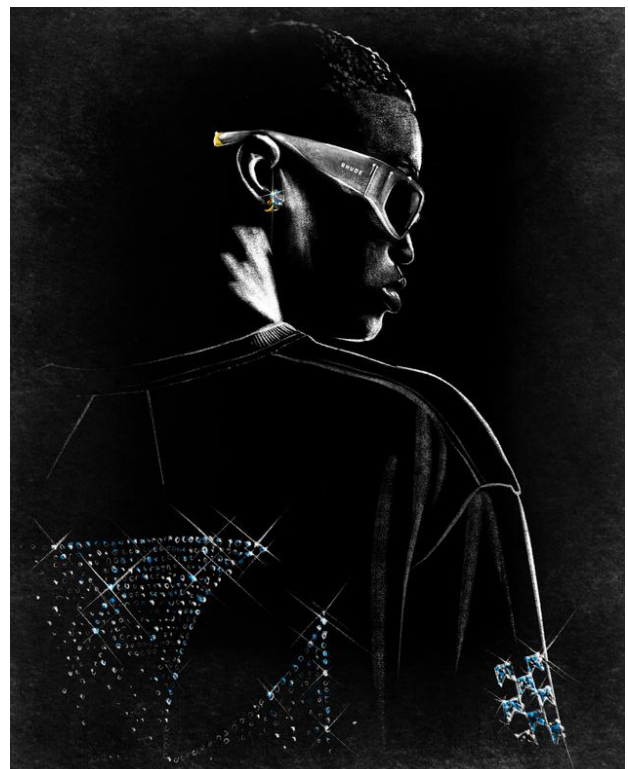
One of the main challenges I face in textile design is balancing my personal style with broader market appeal. My designs are often quite bold and eccentric, and while they excite me, I've learned that not everyone shares my taste. There's a need to adapt and sometimes simplify my designs to ensure they are wearable for a wider audience. Despite this, I've come to appreciate the commercial aspect of design. Seeing someone on the street wearing one of my patterns is incredibly rewarding—it's a tangible connection between my artistic vision and everyday life.

Your illustrations often blur the lines between the subject and their surroundings. What message or emotion are you trying to convey through this technique?

This technique reflects my belief that people are deeply influenced by their environments. We are constantly shaped by the places we inhabit and the people we surround ourselves with. By blending the subject with their surroundings in my illustrations, I aim to depict this interconnectedness. It's a visual metaphor for how our identities are not just a result of who we are, but also where we come from and what we choose to engage with.

You've collaborated with both luxury and emerging fashion brands. How does your creative process differ when working with these different types of brands?

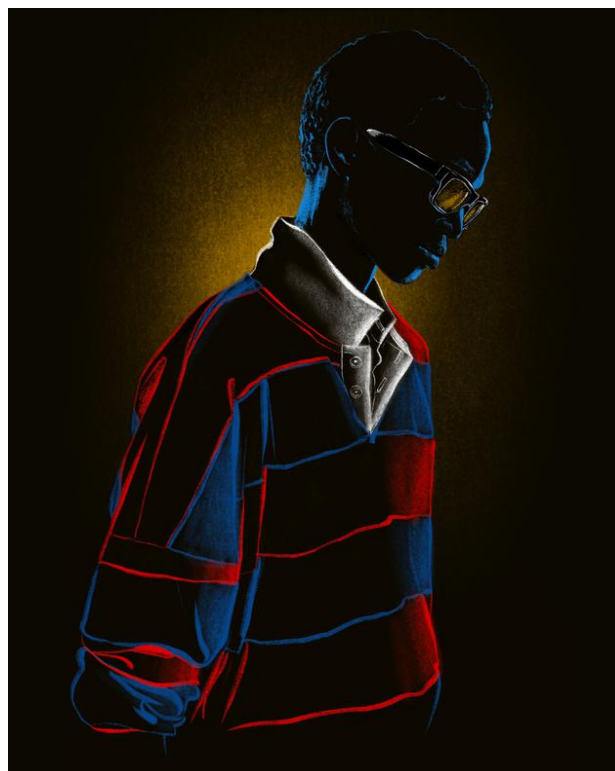
Working with emerging brands is often more intimate and exciting. There's a palpable sense of passion and innovation as these brands strive to carve out a unique identity in the fashion world. The creative process is more collaborative and experimental, focusing on bringing fresh ideas to life. In contrast, collaborating with larger, established brands tends to be more commercially driven, with a stronger emphasis on aligning with existing brand identities and market trends. Both experiences are valuable: while the latter teaches the importance of art in a commercial context, the former allows for a more personal and creatively fulfilling experience.



Bianca Beltramello | Cheikh | 2024

In your opinion, how can fashion illustrators and textile designers influence the broader fashion industry?

Fashion illustrators and textile designers play a crucial role in shaping the visual language of fashion. Even in minimalist trends, the essence of design is evident, whether through subtle patterns, logos, or distinct prints. The impact of illustration and textile design is visible across all facets of the industry—from the graphic tees of streetwear to the iconic monogrammed patterns of luxury bags. By infusing their creativity into garments and accessories, designers add depth and personality, making fashion not just about functionality but also about expression. Their work ensures that fashion remains a dynamic and evolving art form.



Bianca Beltramello
Gaye
2024



Bianca Beltramello
Shunto
2024

What advice would you give to young artists who wish to explore the field of fashion illustration and textile design?

My advice to aspiring fashion illustrators and textile designers is to master the technical aspects of your craft. Understanding printing techniques, color management, and the various applications of different drawing styles is crucial. While creating stunning artwork is important, knowing how to translate that into wearable designs or digital formats is what truly makes it impactful. Technical skills provide the foundation that allows your creative vision to shine and be appreciated in the real world.



— Interview

Marek Świątek



Your artworks depict characters losing their identity and becoming shapeless. What led you to explore this theme, and how do you see it connected to the broader human experience?

This theme came into my work quite naturally, as if fate (yes, I believe in fate) wanted me to fully immerse myself in it. I've always been interested in human nature and how it changes over time. The more I explored this subject, the more I began to see different layers inside all of us—layers of emotions and outside influences that we often hide to avoid showing them to others. The result of hiding these feelings in the figures I paint is the loss of their identity and their deformation. Looking at my surroundings, especially in today's world of fast-developing technology and social media, I see people slowly merging into one homogenous, shapeless mass. It's a bit like mixing all the colors of the rainbow—you just end up with a dull brown in the end.

In your artist statement, you mention that your works are a form of self-portraiture and analysis. How has this process of introspection shaped your understanding of yourself as both an individual and an artist?

As I mentioned earlier, I've always been intrigued by human nature in my creative work. Naturally, the starting point for exploring this theme was to begin by analyzing myself. After all, how can we begin to evaluate others without fully knowing who we are and why we exist? As a result, one of my first tasks as a young artist was to analyze myself as an individual and a human being. It was a kind of self-therapy. Rather destructive, but in the end, very effective. This self-analysis continues to this day. I'm a natural overthinker, so it was important for me to find a way to deal with the excess of intrusive thoughts. This creative therapy has allowed me to learn how to cope with my own self, with my fears and the struggles of everyday life. Introspection has helped me

understand how to silence the inner screams in my head. And as we know, artists, in particular, often have many of those.

You studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław. How did your education there influence your style and artistic philosophy?

This is a very interesting question! On one hand, my five years at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław were a lifesaver for me. As a lost teenager, I bet everything on my passion for art and jumped into the unknown. The Academy allowed me to explore the world of art from the inside and experiment with many different techniques, from painting to digital art, ceramics, street art, and sculpture. Over the years, I realized that oil paint on canvas is the most important part of my work. I learned how to master this technique and present my work to a wider audience. It was also my first time dealing with criticism in different forms, which taught me that the life of an artist is not always as smooth and easy as you think.

On the other hand, I often felt like an outsider trying to fit into what professors and other students expected of me. The strict discipline and academic style didn't quite match my very graphic and literal way of showing the world and portraits. I often felt trapped, unable to express the world the way I really saw it. Finishing my studies was a turning point in my personal growth. Only then did I feel completely free. The world opened up before me.

Your paintings often depict convulsive, distorted forms. What emotions or messages are you hoping to convey through these visual distortions?

My first thought was the questions: Hey, do you see yourself in this painting? Do you feel the pain? Do you feel like you're not fully yourself? Do you notice the mask you wear every day? Do you feel like your body is melting and deforming under this mask? Now is the time to do something about it. Now is the time to turn those demons inside you into a strength that can change your life. The goal of my paintings is not to make the viewer feel depressed. The goal is to give them the courage to face the next day in a better way.



Marek Świątek
Wiktoria II

How has working as a graphic designer at a leading music label influenced your analog art? Do you find intersections between your graphic design work and your painting?

Starting a full-time job as a graphic designer was a complete game changer for me. My experience in digital art was minimal up until then, but now I can't imagine creating without it. It has become an extension of my hand, where my paint and canvas transform into pixels, entering a new dimension. When it comes to my personal work, I often use the traditional paintings I've created as a base for digital experiments. I transform them into collages, posters, album covers, adding new layers of meaning. And these experiments (with digital media offering unlimited possibilities) allow me to take my creativity to new levels. In my professional work, I have the opportunity to create album covers and



Marek Świątek | Malgorzata



Marek Świątek | Magdalena IV

entire album packaging for music artists known worldwide. This aspect helps me reach a wider audience and showcase my skills to people from different parts of the world. It's made me realize that I don't have to limit myself to just one medium, and that digital art has evidently always been a part of my DNA.

Your artworks seem to express a struggle with identity and existence. What role does this struggle play in your creative process?

I think we all have inner demons that torment us every day. They could be mental health problems, depression, aggression, relationship issues, self-harm, addictions, or losing ourselves in the digital world—the list goes on. My creative process is a conversation with these demons. It's an attempt to understand them and ease our relationship. Ignoring these feelings only leads to self-destruction. I hope that when people look at my paintings, they

realize that sometimes it's worth analyzing ourselves. Even though it can be an uncomfortable and painful experience, in the end, it can only bring positive outcomes.

What feedback do you receive most often? How do people perceive your art?

The first reaction people usually have is a combination of disgust and typical human curiosity. A bit like seeing a roadkill on the street. On the one hand, you don't want to look, but your subconscious automatically draws your eyes there, even though you know what you'll see. There's a strange feeling of sadness mixed with disgust. In the end, I

often hear that my work is appreciated, but probably won't end up on the walls of too many homes—it's likely too drastic for that.

Some people, however, start sharing their own life experiences, telling me that in those deformed, inhuman faces, they see themselves. Years ago, I had a brief conversation with a woman who told me she had been in an abusive relationship with a man who had often physically harmed her. After each incident, she felt as though her skin had been turned inside out, just like in my painting. She wasn't herself in her own body. This made me realize that people can indeed find themselves in the portraits I paint. This is definitely the powerful impact they [paintings] carry.



Marek Świątek | Magdalena III

— Interview

Sleepr

Your work deeply engages with the concept of hidden dimensions and other worlds. How do you translate these abstract ideas into visual art?

Strangely one of the most difficult things I've ever experienced is trying to document what some of these interdimensional objects look like. They are the most baffling, complex and exotic forms I've ever seen, or ever could imagine. They are so completely hyperdimensional that my mind actually has a very difficult time in comprehending them – and as such – a difficult time remembering what they look like. There's an amnesia quality I'm constantly battling. I sketch and scribble, make mental notes, use memory techniques, verbally record diaries – anything to just get some of these qualities down.

In your immersive performance at Art Basel Miami, you spent five days in an opaque chamber. How did the experience of isolation impact your perception of the 'other side,' and how did the public's interaction through the red phone affect your artistic expression?

It was a really long and committed



Sleepr | Its All In Your Head | 2024

process – I made art continuously for 5 days, while wearing a mask, with bright lights focused on elevating the artist up. No one could see my identity, and yet I spoke with hundreds of people. I was completely hidden, and yet I was present and accessible to all. Thematically, my work is all about the artist documenting “the other side,” and so the box represents this, this moat for the viewer unable to reach over to. Most things in our life are easily accessible, and yet these spirit realms are very inaccessible – they are “hidden spaces.” It's very symbolic and alchemical.

You describe your art as a conduit to communicate the aesthetics of hidden realms. Can you elaborate on the role of shamanic practices and magic plants in your creative process?

Magic plants have been one of the only constants in my life, and I've explored them consistently for 20 years. They are sacred tools, and the role of the artist in my eyes is to document and channel the information they present – to be a conduit between the here and there. Despite having hundreds and hundreds of ceremonies, and experiencing more in

this lifetime than many say they ever have, I feel as though I have explored not a single inch of the spirit world. It's truly a remarkable place, filled with infinite wonder beyond our comprehension.

Your projects often challenge the boundaries between anonymity and identity. How do you navigate these themes in both your digital works and performance art?

My work continually explores the intersection of anonymity and authenticity, and how these two sides of the coin chase and fuel the other. I think people see me wearing a mask and think initially – “he’s hiding who he is!” – but strangely, by wearing a mask I can actually be more authentic than in the

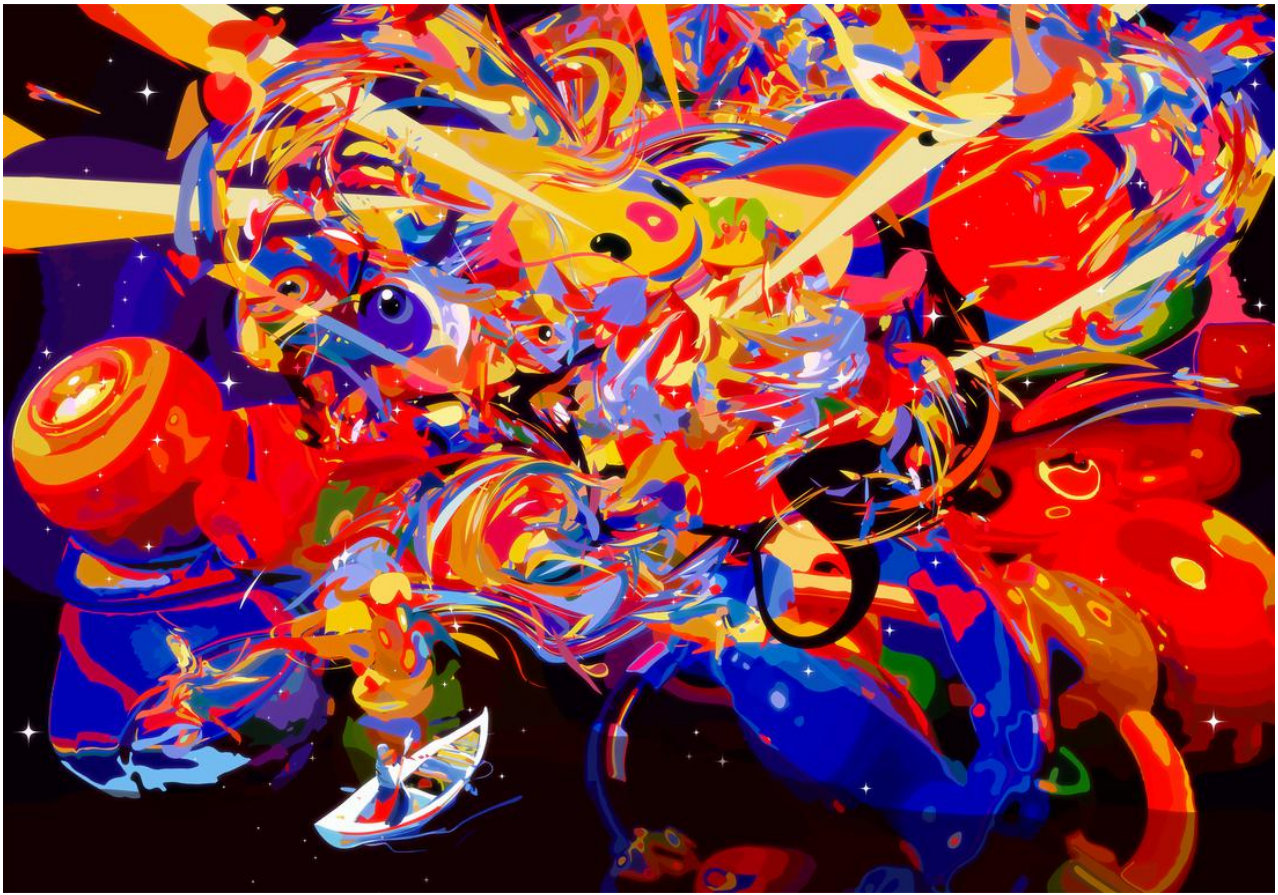
real world. I think we all wear masks every day with whoever we speak to.

How do you balance the scientific research aspect of your work with its artistic expression?

There is a difficult and fine line between artistic representation and scientific truth. But just in the same way that anonymity and authenticity elude and discover each other in surprising ways, I feel the same endless woven nature exists between art and science. This polar spectrum isn't as clear cut as many believe. In fact, Western scientific dogma has restricted much study of complex and repeatable topics. It's just a framework of exploration that's useful, but has many gaps. Art on the other

Sleepr | The Bedroom Explorer | 2024





Sleepr | The Source Of Novelty | 2024

hand is like cloud watching – it forms truths as clear as day and then slips away like a dream. It’s a very useful tool that fills some of the gaps. They need to work together, hand in hand.

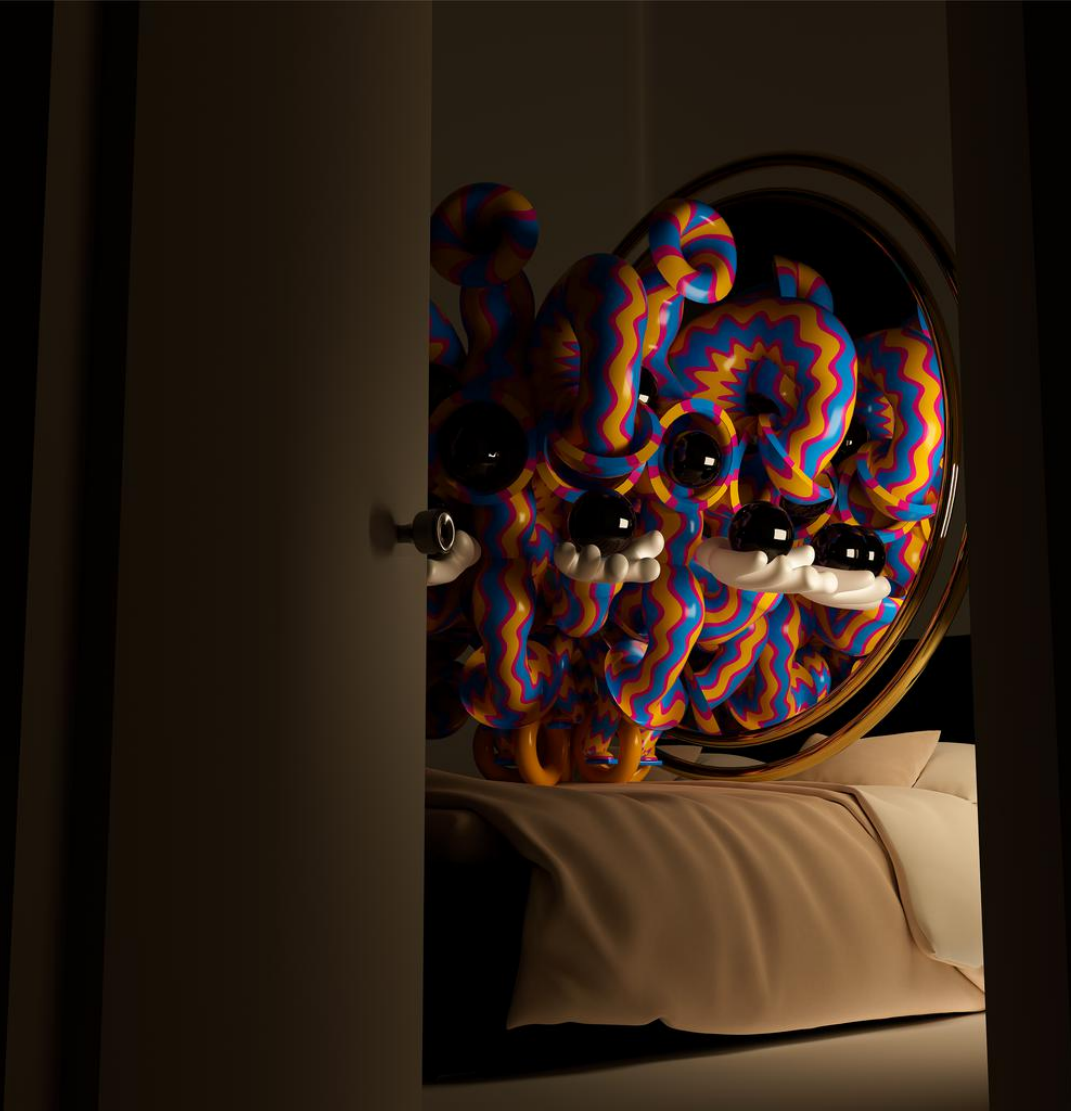
Your digital paintings often feature intricate and exotic geometry. Can you explain the inspiration behind the visual complexity in your work?

I cannot even begin to describe some of the things I’ve seen. In fact, my own mind doesn’t have the comprehension capability. There simply isn’t enough of a foundation or boxes to be able to understand what I’m witnessing. And so often, my art reflects that incapableness, rather than the truth of the work. It’s very raw; I often feel so discouraged, humbled, and ashamed that I can’t document what I see correctly – but I’m

trying and I believe this mission of trying is very important to give hope to others to keep trying too.

Given your international exhibitions and rising global recognition, how do you envision the future of digital and immersive art evolving?

I am traveling to the Amazon jungle in Peru to take ayahuasca with traditional indigenous Shipibo-Conibo shaman soon for a month, where I will study and document the nature of these visionary spaces in a series of new works. The digital works will be stored forever on the blockchain. I couldn’t think of two more remote aspects – the digital future and the organic past colliding together in a beautiful synthesis. William Blake said: “Nothing is lost...” – we only really ever move on.



Sleepr | An Exotic Trade | 2024

Sleepr | The Hidden Circus | 2024



My works are designed for curious people,
people with a cosmic attitude and fanciers
looking for a key to reading the superreal. And
also for those for whom the uniqueness of
human being, his soul and connexion with the
Earth and Heaven is important...

— Natali Antonovich
Painter and Photographer

Natali Antonovich
Blue study
Oil, Linen
2010



Reilly Antares
2010

— Interview

Ben Randall

Your artist statement mentions the intricate beauty of nature and the complexities of humanity as inspirations. Can you share a specific experience or moment in nature that has significantly influenced your work?

When you look at my work, you may not immediately link the subject of nature and humanity together. But it's there, and for me, this is the magical part of abstract painting. These two subjects inspire me greatly to create. It could be that hour before darkness encroaches to become night, and all the colors are hyper-magnified; or it may be that feeling when a warm spring breeze hits your face and makes all the leaves on the tree dance like ballerinas. It may be that moment that is lost in time, where a song or a place reignites a memory or feeling deep within. One you thought lost. This is my inspiration.

A good example is my painting *Pilgrim of a Traveling Gypsy Queen*. It is about a trip to Barcelona, walking and spending time down Las Ramblas. The street is so full of color and life, it's hard to ignore. I remember sitting in a café just off Las Ramblas, and the song "Sinner Man" came on. I was young, full of life, and ready for adventure. Many years later, I played this song, and it took me back to that café in Barcelona, and I decided to paint that feeling. I could taste the coffee, I could feel the energy of the people, I could see the view out onto Las Ramblas with all the stalls and street performers. The magic of that time never left me, and that song gave me permission to visually document that time in my life.

You aim to create art that evokes emotions and provokes contemplation. How do you select the colors and shapes in your paintings to achieve this effect?



I believe colors and shapes play an integral part in everyone's life; it could be the color or pattern of your favorite piece of clothing, the color of your furniture, or how you decorate your house. Colors and shapes mean something different to all of us.

The colors and shapes I use to help build a composition appeal to me first and foremost. Each piece must have meaning, its own life, and its own voice. My environment also plays a big part in the colors and shapes that inspire me to use. Last year I moved from the city to a place that is more rural. I have seen a shift in my work and a growth that was a little unexpected.

Your paintings are deeply personal but left open to interpretation by the viewer. How do you balance personal meaning with the potential for diverse interpretations?

I paint from deep within me, from a place that is both beautiful and ugly. For this reason, I do not like to influence a viewer's interpretation of my work. It may be that I am scared to do so, scared to show what I like about myself and also what I loathe about myself.

I am in awe of someone like Tracey Emin, who is so magnificently raw and unfiltered that the viewer has to love what I would consider to be my ugly side, but you fall in love with her openness. For me, that balance is a dance between artist and viewer; and I believe that is also what attracts viewers to abstract art, that it is interpretive. It's not a landscape, portrait, or still life. The meaning of the artwork comes from the viewer having a deep connection with the artwork. The meaning or purpose is the viewer's own interpretation, and I do not wish to encroach on that interpretation. This is what I think is so magnificently wonderful about abstract painting.

You mentioned that you don't want viewers to ask, "What does this mean?" but instead let the artwork speak to them. How do you guide or influence the viewer's emotional journey without explicit narrative?

I purposely try not to guide a viewer's emotional journey; or if I do, it is subtle. Perhaps, if I am being truthful, a little emotional guidance is offered through the title of my artworks. Titles are precious to me and an important part of each of my paintings. I would like to think I take on a similar premise as Quentin Tarantino does with his movie *Pulp Fiction*. In the movie, why



Ben Randall
Hypnotized By An Untethered Harem Lullaby
2024

do we never see what's in the suitcase? Well, I like to think that is because Tarantino wants the audience to come up with their own narrative on this. He asks the audience to complete the movie, and in doing so, there could be a million versions of what is in the suitcase—and none are wrong.

This is how I see my work. I wish for the viewer to see what they want to see in my paintings, to feel what they want to feel, and ultimately, the viewer completes my work for themselves. Every interpretation of my work is not right, but nor is it wrong. It's personal.

Your use of abstract forms invites self-discovery and introspection. What kind of feedback or reactions from viewers resonate with you the most?

Luckily, I have been very fortunate with how people view my work. I have received a lot of positive feedback, and this, in turn, pushes me forward. Some view my work with interpretations that are wildly different from mine. Some can see figures or images in my

Ben Randall | Heart Beat Breaks, Slave to the Kiss | 2024



paintings, where there is no intent to paint any type of figure or image into my work. Some just like the colors I use. Either reaction is completely okay with me. Recently, I sold a piece to a buyer, and she messaged me and mentioned that the piece she bought really resonated and spoke to her. That means a lot to me. That's the response I am after; she has completed my artwork with her own interpretation of it. Beautiful stuff!

Given that your work often leaves room for individual reflection, what do you hope viewers will take away from their interaction with your art?

A connection. I hope viewers find a connection with my art.

I really love this Hans Hofmann quote: "The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak." For me, the "necessary" that may speak is my audience or the viewer. It's their view and their interpretations of the artwork. I use my visual voice—colors, shapes, forms, brushstrokes—to offer a painting that hopefully speaks to a specific audience. I use a lot of different techniques to engage a viewer, but mostly, I hope they look deep into my artwork, and then



Ben Randall
The Majestic Royal We...
2024

have some self-reflection. I hope they look at my work both up close and from far away because this is how I paint each piece.

I like to hide little bits of detail. One example is that I use a gloss medium and randomly place this through my pieces. If the light hits the gloss medium, it reflects, and the art takes on another life, but you have to look hard.

I like to paint with thick oil paints as I believe paintings need to be touched and felt; that makes the viewer closer to the artist. But, ultimately, I wish for viewers to be connected to my work.

In creating abstract art, do you ever find yourself surprised by your own work after it's completed? How do those moments of surprise inform your creative process?

Yes, almost always. It is fair to say I have had more bad artworks than good. However, this is

Ben Randall | Moon Hatched Gardens Gated By Pleasure | 2024



part of the process when you create. It took me a long time to understand that not every painting is a good one.

To quote Phillip Guston: "I stand in front of a blank canvas and have no clue as to how I created before."

This is literally me. When the process starts, I am unsure where it will precisely end. There are tricks and tools I use to help start the artwork, and I generally have a color palette in mind, but where the artwork ends is a big guessing game.

I still look at some of my pieces and wonder how I achieved certain aspects that I like. The key is to experiment and play with the paint on the canvas, not to be afraid of making a "mistake."

But what I love most is just painting and being creative.

Ben Randall | Queen3



Izabela Ciastoń-Pałus was born and raised in Myslowice, Silesia, Poland. She's a painter, illustrator and graphic designer with M.F.A degree, working with different mediums and still exploring new ways to express. She decided to truly commit to her passion for Arts and painting. Some of her works find place in private collections. Beside the passion to create she fulfills herself as a mother.



Izabela Ciastoń-Pałus | Flowers | 2024



— Interview

Rayna Loos

Your artwork often features vibrant depictions of marine life. How has your background in marine science influenced your approach to art?

Throughout many labs during my time in college, we would draw diagrams of the subjects we were working on/studying and that was always one of my favorite ways of learning. For a while I viewed these drawn diagrams simply as notes for my science class and never made the connection to art and how I could actually really utilize my art skills and go further with scientific illustrations. It actually wasn't until the Art Meets Science Workshop I attended when I realized what scientific illustration is and that artists will create these illustrations to be utilized in the science field. At this point my background in marine science influences how I approach art by allowing me to utilize my artistic skills to learn more about a subject in scientific terms. I am not just creating these pieces because they're beautiful (however, that's definitely a factor) I create these pieces to learn. There is a lot of planning that goes on before the painting process like finding accurate reference photos, choosing accurate colors, and then setting up the composition of my painting. It is almost similar to the scientific method. Currently I am working on two separate projects consisting of scientific illustrations, a collection of Southwest Florida Seashell illustrations and a working Manatee Necropsy Illustration which is still in the early stages.



Can you tell us more about the Art Meets Science workshop at the Bimini Shark Lab? How did that experience change the direction of your artistic journey?

The Art Meets Science workshop was hosted at the Bimini Biological Field Station, AKA the Bimini Shark Lab, for a week, curated by Rosie's Collective LLC and Chelle Blais and taught by Francesca Page. During that week a group of like-minded ocean loving artists and artistic scientists came together for the most amazing experiences we could've imagined. Each morning we would go out on a new adventure with species of elasmobranchs and spend time observing and sketching them, like swimming through mangrove tunnels to find a secret lemon shark nursery, taking a boat out to an island surrounded by southern stingrays, or, my personal favorite, swimming with a 13-foot long Great Hammerhead Shark named Gaia. Along with these expeditions we would get to listen to lectures by all the incredible scientists conducting research at the Shark Lab and learn more about all the species we were observing. Each afternoon, Francesca Page would have a new art lesson for us and would give us assignments like doing really quick brush pen sketches or playing around with color

combinations. The art lessons focused on watercolor, which helped my watercolor skills improve greatly, but I was also able to take those lessons to other mediums like acrylic paint. This workshop not only gave me knowledge, but also a community, a community of other artists and scientists like me that I still keep in touch with to this day. That workshop completely changed the focus of my art and how I make art, it bridged the gap between my science and art background. I hope to return to Bimini one day and create even more art inspired by the wildlife of that beautiful island. The pieces that I created while attending the Art Meets Science workshop are Gaia and an illustration of a blacktip reef shark, but after the trip I painted many pieces inspired by the the wildlife we saw like Caribbean Conch Shark, Photobomb, Gaia Among the Moon and Stars, and Resilience, all which can be seen in my portfolio.

How do you balance your roles as both a scientist and an artist? Do you find that one discipline informs or inspires the other?

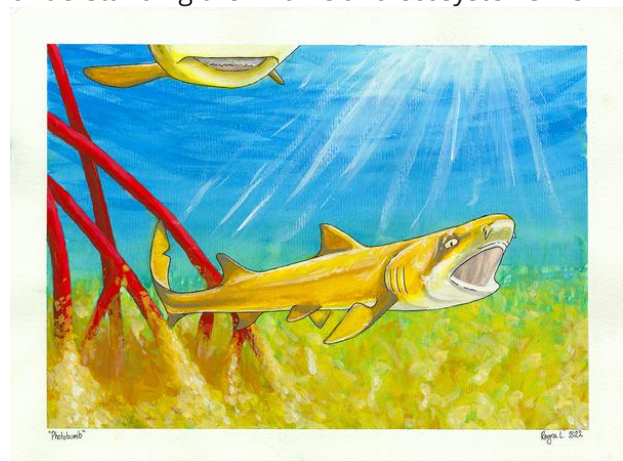
I think both of my disciplines inform and inspire the other, it's amazing how much science and art go hand in hand. Thanks to my artistic background I have an attention to detail, and can use my creativity to solve problems. From my scientific background I have critical thinking and scientific knowledge that I used in my painting process. I balance the two by finding ways to combine them, which is why the subjects I study in the world of science are what inspire my paintings, and I use my artistic skills to create diagrams and scientific illustrations to be used in the world of science. The artist in me gets inspired by the work of other scientists and makes me want to create art based on their findings, and the scientist in me gets fascinated by artists and their art processes and figuring out how to create a piece like them. I think science is so beautiful and I'm grateful to have that background to mix in with my art and make me stand out as an artist.

Your pieces like "Caribbean Conch Shark" and "Sea Angel" show a unique combination of realism and fantasy. What inspires you to blend these two styles?

A lot of my early art was inspired by fantasy and that is where I first started to grow my roots. As much as I love doing scientific illustration and depicting accurate subjects, at the same time I don't want to replicate exactly what you see in nature because that's already been done. I want to represent certain subjects in the way that I see them to make my pieces unique to me as an artist. Fantasy gives me this freedom, and it's a way to heal my inner child who just so happens to love bright colors and glitter. This is also a way for me to give these real animals a touch of magic to represent how magical they truly are just for existing in their own form. For Caribbean Conch Shark, I did this by painting the shark pink, but besides color the entire piece is an accurate depiction of a Caribbean Reef Shark. The pink is because I was inspired by all the pink around Bimini like pink sunsets, pink queen conchs, pink houses, and since we spent so much time with sharks I loved imagining a pink shark. For Sea Angel I added the fantasy aspect by saturating its natural colors to make it more vibrant. Sea Angels are also typically found in dark waters, but I didn't want a plain black background so I added a bunch of glitter which gave it a starry night-sky look.

What role do you hope your art will play in marine conservation and education?

I hope my art can be used as an accessible tool for education and outreach pertaining to marine science and conservation. Oftentimes lack of knowledge in conservation comes from lack of understanding the wildlife and ecosystems we



Rayna Loos
Photobomb
2022



are trying to conserve. Not everyone has access to wildlife and these natural spaces so art is a way for them to observe without actually being there. On top of that, art gives us artists the freedom of imagination, so if we don't have access to seeing certain wildlife, we can use reference photos to create our own experience. For example, my painting, Tree of Life, is not something I saw with my own eyes but rather a collection of experiences I have had in Mangrove forests. Tree of Life shows the audience the connections that many species have with each other and the Red Mangrove Tree and the importance of conserving Red Mangrove Forests. Photobomb features two baby Lemon Sharks, one swimming through the roots of a Red Mangrove and the other bumping into my camera, that I witnessed in a secret nursery in South Bimini and the purpose of this painting is to allow the audience to relate to silly behaviors even a baby shark can have in their playground and why we need to conserve Red Mangrove forests in order to protect this species of shark. Resilience shows how much human development has affected nature and wildlife, with a hermit crab using a bullet casing as a shell.

My paintings can be used to teach the viewers about the morphology, behaviors, ecosystems, and so many other details of wildlife to further help the viewer understand the need for conservation. In the future I hope to create more scientific illustration posters and working illustrations for my audience to experience and learn about things they may have never had access to.

Living in St. Petersburg, Florida, how does your environment influence your work?

St. Pete is also known as Sunshine City and it is full of such beautiful wildlife and views, plus we have some of the best beaches in the United States. All these factors keep me curious and always exploring the outdoors which is where I find the most inspiration. Living in Florida means my hobbies have to include paddle-boarding and hiking, and I always take my sketchbook with me to all my expeditions and try to take moments to sketch my surroundings, en plein air. I find most inspiration out on these adventures and often take a lot of reference photos for future paintings when I'm out exploring. I am also a shell collector and my time shelling inspired my Southwest Florida Seashell illustration project. Plus, my city is full of artists and the arts. We have so many galleries, art spaces, and murals all around the city, and the art community here is so beautiful, diverse, and supportive. I am grateful to live in such a beautiful place with a vibrant artistic community.



Do you have any advice for aspiring artists who are also passionate about science?

Never stop being curious and never stop creating! When it comes to art and science the possibilities are endless. It's amazing how many of us there are out there and how many scientists are looking for artists like us to bridge the gap between art and science. Use your creativity and critical thinking skills to discover new ways to combine art and science. If you work as a scientist and spend time out in the

field, the subject for your next painting might be out there. I work as an Eco-Tour Guide which means I spend a lot of time outside and I take a lot of pictures at work to use for future paintings. If you work as a wildlife artist, find ways to get involved in science like volunteering or doing citizen science and you may learn more about the subjects you are so inspired by. I volunteer at a lab so I can learn more about marine mammals and have utilized my artistic skills while volunteering and have created art for members of the lab.



Rayna Loos
Caribbean Conch Shark
2022

Christian Gainey is an emerging abstract artist with a Bachelor of Arts from The University of North Carolina Wilmington. In addition to painting, she also enjoys photography and creative writing.

Artist Statement

Abstract art is one of Christian's means of self-expression and a way to connect with others and herself on a deeper level.

Christian Gainey
Blue Awakening
2021





— Interview

Alix Gaytan

Your work prominently features insect-humanoid hybrids in chaotic, fragmented environments. Can you explain the symbolism behind these hybrid creatures and what they represent in your art?

I decided to use the human body and insects together to disrupt the idea of our "normal" bodies. The symbolism and representation behind the insect humanoids are a physical manifestation of a mind whose systems and borders have been fragmented by violence, trauma, or chaos. These acts can disturb the subject's identity and transform it into something vaguely recognizable. Something that automatically alienates them as they have become object beings. These new forms threaten everything we are supposed to be and everything that we understand as our wholeness. The boundary between the human and the animal becomes transgressed and then blends to express a disturbing new reality. In essence, I wanted to depict the stage where we are the scariest to ourselves and others and bring it to the spotlight for confrontation.



As I wrote in my artist statement, my drive is to offer a visual statement of the durability of the human mind and how the lack of individual and societal stability affects us.

Your artistic journey is deeply connected to your personal experiences growing up in a tumultuous environment. How do your upbringing and the challenges you faced influence the themes and subjects in your work today?

As a child, the TV was my best friend because it was the only way to escape what was happening around me. I loved cartoons, but also, I found myself captivated by horror movies. I remember watching movies from the 70s and 80s, especially Cronenberg or Carpenter. I did not know who they were then, but their

characters terrified me just like they hypnotized me. I created a strong connection with the monsters and villains. I recognized them. I saw these strange creatures as the people around me whose life was in chaos. Eventually, I grew out of the fear and became curious to understand why people could act violently or erratically. I wanted to know how our minds can be broken down so much and still be willing to survive. As I started my artistic career, I decided to use horror movie aesthetics or character depiction as the source of my creatures and atmospheres because they were my way of coping with my experiences since childhood. Now, my work involves an even more profound view of the human body and its anatomy as a reflection of chaos in society, not just the individual mind. I am now curious about systems and what happens when they get fragmented, broken, or transgressed. For example, we are a series of constantly moving systems. To me, our bodies are perfect chaos that, at any moment, can fall apart if something goes wrong. The same concept can be applied to society's systems. We are constantly living in chaos, which is necessary, but at the same time, it can provoke many disasters at any second.

Your work often blurs the boundaries between human and non-human forms, creating something uncanny. How do you balance creating something that's recognizable yet unsettling?

I do not focus on any balance between recognizable and unsettling, at least not

on a conscious level. When I create my characters, I start by doing small photo collages. I play with the images and leave it up to chance. I love this moment because it is just cutting and pasting. It is almost like being a kid again. There are no rules, main ideas, or expectations. It is liberating. As I start putting cut-outs together, things begin to happen, and eventually, I end up with little versions of my strange creatures. Not all of them make it into paintings, just a few. I choose the ones that have a strong sense of narrative or dramatism. The Renaissance and Mannerist painters influenced my work in the way they dealt with creating narratives with the use of the human body. The position of the body, hands, feet, eyesight, everything contributed to the narrative. This is a characteristic that I am always trying to develop further.



Alix Gaytan | A Place For My Head | 2023



Alix Gaytan
Close Encounters
2023

There's a strong interplay between vibrant colors and disturbing imagery in your work. Can you discuss your approach to color and how it enhances the emotional impact of your pieces?

There are two reasons why I use a lot of color in my work. The first of them is that I adore colors. My artwork, since the very beginning, has been colorful. It makes me feel excited about my compositions. It just brings me joy personally (even though I mostly dress in black). Now, to be more serious, color is the fastest way to attract people's attention to an art piece, in my opinion. Therefore, I use extravagant color palettes to trap people into looking at my work. The viewer approaches the bright, colorful image and then gets hit by the disturbing imagery. It creates this attraction-repulsion towards the image. This effect connects to the content of my work by emphasizing how we can feel repulsed and attracted by what is different or unknown to us, even if we cannot fully explain this situation.

How do you want viewers to engage with your work? Are there specific emotional responses you hope to evoke?

I leave this part to the viewer. As the artist, I finished my part by creating the object and putting it out there for people to experience. It is up to the viewer to decide how to engage in or react to my work. I welcome any emotional response. Each person will experience it differently, and I love that. To me, this is the beauty of art. I love to see how we can connect through an image and share our human existence. However, suppose I could control the viewer's reaction. In that case, I wish they would be curious about the narratives. I like to leave some mystery. I purposely do not give much of the exact story behind each image because I want the viewers to create their own stories and connections. Hopefully, this curiosity will create an introspection about themselves and their relation to others.

You've explored various mediums, including painting, drawing, and printmaking. How do you decide which medium is best suited for a particular concept?

I do not choose any medium over another because of the concept. I do not think about concepts early in the making process. I focus on the formal aspects of the images, like lines, patterns, shapes, colors, etc. If the composition does not pierce my interest at an aesthetic level first, then I do not even start to think about concepts or references. As the



artwork grows, concepts appear; maybe the image resembles a particular narrative or emotion. Also, it might remind me of something specific about my life experiences. One fact about my practice is that my paintings feed on my print work. My paintings would not progress without my screenprints. Printmaking is the process where I experiment a lot, and it helps me be braver in my paintings. Sometimes, I find compositions, patterns, or layering effects in screenprints that I translate to paintings. Also, my way of handling paint is like how color layering in screenprint works. I separate each color and blend very little. Lastly, when I get stuck or lack motivation, I often do prints just for fun, which then transforms into more serious work, either screenprints or paintings. It is like printmaking is my safe space.

As both an artist and educator, how do these roles intersect and inform each other in your practice?

I mainly teach art foundation classes at a college level. I meet students who are barely starting their artistic careers. They are scared, anxious, and dealing with all the changes that come with becoming an adult. However, they are also eager to learn and give their all to make something meaningful in their practice.

My favorite moments are when they are proud of the artwork that they just created. This contagious excitement reminds me that it is all about progress, not perfection. My students keep me on my toes to continue doing what I love without wavering. Being an educator keeps me motivated as an artist. First, being an art instructor without artistic practice would be strange. I could not teach the students properly or transmit any motivation for art if I did not create artwork myself. They get to see the actual working artist who still struggles to find the answers to her work. I talk to them about my upcoming ideas and exhibitions. I even share with them when plans do not work out and I must start from scratch. They see that this profession is not about overnight success but relatively constant practice and taking advantage of opportunities. Celebrate the small wins and continue pushing forward when rejection occurs. Or that's what I wish to communicate, at the very least.



My name is **Maria La Rosa** and I was born in Italy in a small town in the province of Ragusa in 1978. I have lived in Brescia (IT) since 2001. I discovered drawing as a child thanks to my family: my father, a small artisan, was a self-taught painter, while my mother, a housewife, was a skilled drawer very jealous of her works. Thanks to them, and the moment my father put a pencil in my hand, I began to put my world on paper. Ultimately, drawing and painting for me are not just a passion, but an expression. My expression and experimentation.

Artist Statement

Through art, I can represent my concept of duality, two worlds, two souls: the real-visible one and the mental-invisible one.

Maria La Rosa | Romana Brixia | 2024





01/01
the 2023

— Interview

Harold Khan

Can you tell us about your artistic journey, and how growing up in both the Philippines and Singapore influenced your style?

I grew up immersed in the vibrant worlds of anime and cartoons, exposed to Manila's energetic and somewhat chaotic vibe and Singapore's modern and organized environment. Manila's vibrant, bustling atmosphere is characterized by its sensory overload—colorful street markets, lively festivals, and the constant hum of city life while backed by folklore. This energy impresses my work with a dynamic, raw quality, capturing the essence of spontaneous moments and the vibrant chaos that defines the city.

In stark contrast, Singapore's modern and meticulously organized environment introduced a new dimension to my artistic practice. The city-state's sleek skyscrapers, pristine streets, and efficient public spaces offered a different kind of inspiration—one grounded in precision, clarity, and sophistication.

I hope that these contrasts find themselves blended and is reminiscent of vintage movie posters, where dramatic flair meets precise artistry.

I hope that my portraits not only reflects the essence of both cities but also resonates with the nostalgia and grandeur of classic cinematic visuals.

Your works seem to blend vibrant colors and cultural symbolism. What is the significance of these elements in your paintings?

Growing up in both the Philippines and



Singapore, my work is deeply influenced by the vibrant cultures and rich histories of these two places.

The use of bold, vibrant colors in my paintings reflects the lively spirit and energy of the Philippines, where every day is filled with hues that seem to dance in the tropical light.

I've always been drawn to the vividness of our festivals, the brilliance of our sunsets, and the everyday warmth of our surroundings.

These colors are my way of celebrating life, and they remind me of my roots and the beauty of my homeland.

In Singapore, I was surrounded by a melting pot of cultures and traditions, where each community contributes to a tapestry of diversity. This experience has shaped my understanding of cultural symbolism and its power to communicate deeper meanings and stories.

I often incorporate elements from both Filipino and Singaporean traditions in my work – whether it's through patterns, motifs, or symbolic imagery – as a way to honor my heritage and the shared narratives of Southeast Asia. Through this blending of color and symbolism,

I hope to create a visual language that connects with people, sparking a sense of familiarity and dialogue across different cultures.

You've chosen to focus on both Eastern and Western influences in your work. How do you decide which cultural aspects to emphasize in each piece?

Living in a modern city like Vienna, where history and innovation coexist, has greatly influenced how I approach blending Eastern and Western influences in my work.

Vienna is a city that treasures its classical roots while also embracing contemporary thought, and this duality has inspired me to explore how different cultural elements can intersect and complement each other in my art.

When deciding which cultural aspects to emphasize in each piece, I think about the stories I want to tell and the emotions I want to evoke. Sometimes, I lean more towards Eastern influences, drawing on the traditions and spirituality of my upbringing in the Philippines and the cultural diversity I experienced in Singapore.

Other times, I'm inspired by the Western ideals of progress, individual expression, and freedom that I feel so strongly in Vienna.

I often let the subject matter or the themes guide me—whether it's exploring identity, celebrating heritage, or reflecting on modern life.

Being in Vienna, I've realized that a better life isn't about choosing one cultural perspective over another but finding a balance between them.

This city's unique blend of old and new, East and West, encourages me to weave together the contrasts and similarities of both worlds.

How do your travels and experiences in diverse urban settings inspire your creative process?

Traveling and experiencing diverse urban settings have been incredibly inspiring for my creative process. Each city I visit offers its own rhythm, colors, textures, and stories, and I find myself absorbing these elements like a sponge. When you're constantly moving through different environments, you start to see the world from so many new angles — it's like a door opens, and suddenly, your perspective is much wider. You begin to realize how small you are in the grand scheme of things

and how much more there is out there beyond what you know.

These travels teach me that there is no single story or perspective; there are countless narratives woven into the fabric of every city. I've learned to approach my art with a sense of curiosity and openness, allowing the diversity of the world to shape and transform my creative expression.

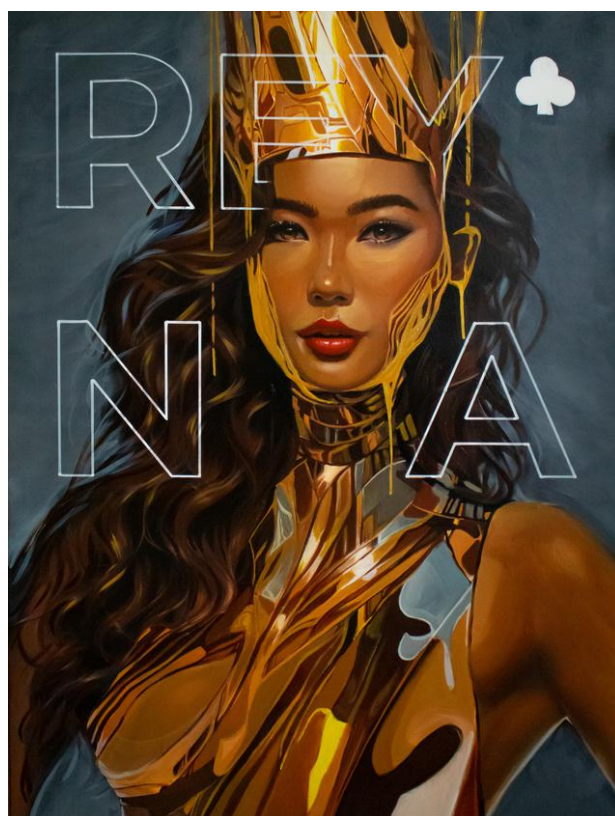
In the end, it's about understanding that we are all connected in some way, and my art is my way of exploring those connections and bringing them to life on canvas.

Many of your paintings have a surreal quality. What role does imagination play in your work, and how do you balance fantasy with reality?

Imagination plays a crucial role in my work, often serving as the bridge between the tangible and the fantastical.

My love for manga, anime, comics, and film has deeply influenced my artistic vision, infusing my paintings with a surreal quality that blurs the lines between reality and fantasy.

These forms of media have taught me to appreciate the power of storytelling and visual imagination, encouraging me to explore beyond



Harold Khan | Golden Smile | 2024

the confines of the everyday world.

You hold a degree in Advertising Arts. How does your background in advertising influence your approach to creating fine art?

My background in Advertising Arts has had a significant impact on how I approach creating fine art. In advertising, I learned to communicate messages effectively and visually engage audiences.

This experience has taught me the importance of clarity, composition, and the power of visual storytelling, all of which I apply to my fine art practice.

My background in advertising has encouraged me to experiment with different styles and techniques, always seeking new ways to engage and captivate.

It's given me a keen eye for detail and a strategic approach to art-making, allowing me to blend creativity with purpose.

Which artists or movements have inspired you the most, and in what ways do they manifest in your work?

I've been inspired by a range of artists and

movements, each contributing to different facets of my work.

Akira Toriyama's vibrant, dynamic style and imaginative storytelling in manga have deeply influenced my approach to color and composition.

His ability to create engaging, otherworldly worlds with a distinctive visual flair resonates with my own exploration of surreal elements and fantasy in my art.

Osamu Tezuka's pioneering work in manga and his narrative techniques have also left a significant mark on me.

His storytelling depth and innovative use of visual language have taught me the importance of integrating strong narrative elements into my paintings, much like how I strive to weave stories through my use of symbolism and imagery.

Yoshiyuki Tomino's contribution to anime, particularly with his epic and complex worlds in the Gundam series, has influenced my appreciation for intricate, layered compositions. His ability to blend futuristic elements with deep, personal themes inspires me to explore similar contrasts in my own work.

Stan Lee's creativity in comic book storytelling has been a major influence as well. His knack for developing compelling characters and epic narratives has encouraged me to focus on character-driven themes and the emotional impact of my work.

Frank Frazetta's masterful use of color and dynamic forms in fantasy art has greatly influenced my approach to depicting movement and energy.

His bold and dramatic style inspires me to push the boundaries of visual intensity and to bring a sense of motion and vitality to my paintings. These artists have shaped my creative vision in various ways, helping me to blend fantasy with reality, and to create art that is both visually striking and rich in narrative depth.

I love cats, I sometimes paint our cats too.



Harold Khan | Reyna Dalisay | 2024

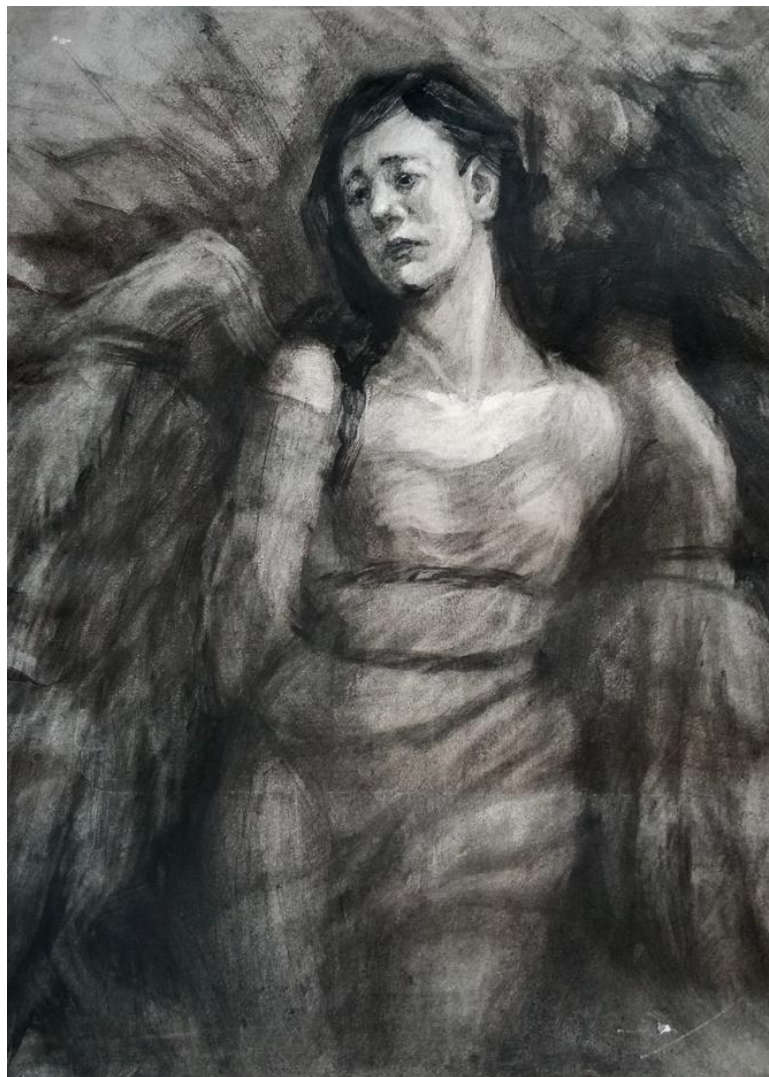


KHAN

The presented works are psychological portraits created using soft materials (sauce). I have always been fascinated by studying the human being, their depths, emotions, and experiences. In my work, I strive to create not just a portrait but a psychological portrait rendered in a realistic and emotional manner. A particular piece ("Allegory of Freedom") serves as an allegory for freedom—a bound angel trying to free itself from its ties.

I believe that art should be accessible to everyone. I consider the most noble aim in art to be the depiction and exposure of human and societal flaws, as well as the ability to find beauty and light where it seems that complete darkness has already set in.

— Anna Grigorenko



Anna Grigorenko | Allegory of freedom | 2022



— Interview

Sara Dürst

Can you tell us about the moment when you realized that art was your true calling, especially after studying economics?

As a child, I was always drawn to creative activities—whether it was drawing, inventing stories, or even making comic books for my brother. I knew I wanted either to do something artistic or work with animals. But as I got older, those dreams started to feel out of reach. I completely lost touch with my creative side during my teenage years and early adulthood.

I chose the “safe” path and started an apprenticeship in the office and went on to study International Management. I kept thinking, “Once I get to the next step, I’ll find something I like—maybe marketing? It’s business, but still creative, right?” I was always focused on the next thing, so I didn’t really question my life choices too much.

But when I finished my studies and started working in the corporate field, it became clear that this wasn’t it. It felt like I was stuck in a loop, and each day started to feel heavier. I began to question, “Is this really what being an adult is supposed to be like?”. The need for a change became too big to ignore. That’s when I decided to take a break and travel through Asia, hoping to find some inspiration and a new direction by talking to people who were doing different things.

Coming back from that trip, I felt a sense of inner security that I hadn’t had before—I knew I would find something that truly resonated with me. So, I entered a phase of experimenting. I read a lot, learned a lot, started to meditate and worked on myself.

I explored web design and online marketing,



seeking ways to work more independently. Eventually, I picked up painting again after years of being away from it. What really surprised me was just how much I fell in love with creating art—especially because, for the first time, I was bringing my imagination to life. What started as a simple hobby quickly turned into passion. I’d rush home from work, excited to paint, and often got so lost in the process that I’d forget to eat, only realizing the time when it was nearly midnight. The sense of flow I experienced was incredible, leaving me energized and fulfilled. It took some time, but eventually, I could say, “Yes, I am an artist, and yes, this path is achievable for me.” Looking back, even though I took a few detours, I realize now that they all led me back to where I was always meant to be.

How has living in the Spanish countryside influenced your creative process and the themes you explore in your work?

Living in the Spanish countryside has had a huge impact on my creative process, especially in terms of the materials and mediums I now use. I was painting on canvases with acrylics when I first got here. But renovating an old caravan into a tiny house and art space with a friend introduced me to a whole new set of tools—from machines to woodworking. These skills have become a valuable part of my creative process. We also upcycled a lot of materials, which really trained my eye to see the artistic potential in everyday objects.

Since being in Spain, I haven't touched a canvas! Instead, I've been painting on anything I can find — pieces of wood, discarded materials, you name it. I've really embraced upcycling, turning old or overlooked objects into something new and exciting. I've also started creating more dimensional artworks, experimenting with different materials like clay and, most recently, gypsum.

As for the themes in my work, mental health continues to be a significant focus for me. But over time, I've noticed my art has become a bit quirkier—or as I like to say, “weirder.” I used to draw more traditionally beautiful subjects, but now I'm mostly more interested in creating art that's “ugly & cute.” It's a way for me to explore both sides of life: the lovely, colorful, and bright aspects, but also the messier, not-so-perfect parts.

You work with various mediums, from acrylics to upcycled art and digital creations. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular project?

I enjoy working with various mediums, and I tend to switch between them depending on the project or my mood. When it comes to physical art, I really go with the flow. It's all about the idea I have in mind or what I feel inspired to create in the moment. Whether it's painting on found objects, upcycling materials, or experimenting with new textures, the hands-on nature of it is something I truly appreciate. Since mistakes are not so easily erased, it really forces me to think creatively and adapt, turning potential errors into something new.

Digital art, on the other hand, plays a different role in my creative process. I often use it for conceptual pieces, client work, or for projects like my coloring book. The flexibility of digital art is fantastic, especially because I can take my iPad anywhere. Wherever I am, it allows me to keep creating, no matter where I am. I find that my digital works often reflect the experiences and encounters I have while I'm on the move.

For example, this summer I volunteered in Pisa with an association that incorporates art therapy.

Even while I was there, I could keep creating and process my experiences through digital art. It was a way to make those moments even more memorable and meaningful. So, in a way, the medium I choose depends on the context and how I want to express the ideas or emotions at that time.

Mental health and self-connection are central themes in your work. How do these themes manifest in your art, and what message do you hope to convey to your audience?

Mental health and self-connection are indeed important in my work, and they manifest in various ways, sometimes subtly and sometimes more directly. One of the projects I'm particularly proud of is a coloring book I created, which combines the concept of flow—a state of being fully immersed and focused—with self-reflection exercises. The idea is to help people tap into a relaxed state of mind where they can explore new insights and reflect on their thoughts and feelings through art.

I want to encourage people to engage with their minds actively—seeing the mind as a tool, like a



muscle that can be trained. Through my art, I hope to inspire others to overcome limiting beliefs, going more into the flow state, and improve their well-being.

Could you share more about your second (first)! coloring book and how it integrates mental health themes? What do you hope people will gain from engaging with it?

My coloring book, *Colorful Reflections*, is designed to be much more than just a creative outlet—it's a tool to help you explore and enhance your mental well-being while nurturing your creativity. Coloring itself can be incredibly powerful for relaxation but with self-discovery, I wanted to take it a step further.

The book is filled with illustrations paired with thought-provoking prompts. These are specifically designed to deepen your understanding of mental health, self-exploration, and self-care. For example, exercises like guiding your life with values, practicing self-affirmation, or going through the process of releasing, accepting, and transforming your thoughts are all part of the experience.

As you engage with the book, not only will you be creating art, but you'll also be reflecting on important aspects of your life. The final artworks you create can even be used as decorations, serving as daily reminders of the personal growth and insights you've gained. My hope is



that people will walk away from this experience with a deeper connection to themselves, a sense of calm, and practical tools to continue their journey toward well-being and self-discovery.

You have hosted co-creating events that bring people together through art. What has been the most rewarding aspect of these events for you?

Art, for me, is not just a solitary activity—it's something that truly comes alive when shared with others. While there are definitely times when we need to retreat into our own space to create, there's something incredibly powerful about making art together. The connections we form, the energy we share, and the ideas that emerge when we collaborate can be truly transformative.

Creating something as a group brings a sense of satisfaction that's hard to replicate alone. There's a special magic in those moments when everyone is in the flow, which is why I named my events "Flow Zone." Seeing people leave with a good feeling, having actively participated in the creative process, is the most rewarding part for me. It's even better when they're inspired to start creating more regularly in their own lives.

Art has this amazing ability to connect us, and when we create together, we not only make beautiful things, but we also build a sense of community and shared experience. That's what

makes it all worthwhile for me—knowing that others are leaving with that same sense of joy and fulfillment.

In what ways do you believe your background in economics has influenced your approach to art, if at all?

I'd say my background in economics hasn't directly influenced my art—at least not consciously. You won't find me painting graphs or sketching supply and demand curves, that's for sure! But the themes of mental health in my

work definitely emerged from my time trying to find my place in the corporate world. That experience taught me a lot about the importance of self-care and staying connected to what truly matters.

On the practical side, though, I'm glad I went down the economics path. It's given me some handy tools for managing the business side of being a self-employed artist and teacher. So while my art might not scream "economics," the knowledge definitely helps keep the creative chaos somewhat organized!



I am a landscape painter and a proponent of the biophilia hypothesis, which is the love and attraction of humans to nature and all living things. I have studied how the natural environment affects people and realized that interaction with nature is essential for our emotional and psychological well-being. Therefore, I have dedicated myself to studying this issue, and my mission is to help people who have little interaction with the natural environment to engage more with it through painting. After all, it has been scientifically proven that a real landscape outside the window and a landscape in a painting have a similar effect.

— Maria Pankratova

Maria Pankratova | Wildflowers | 2023





Maria Pankratova | Lilac branch | 2023

— Interview

Mezerahyah

Your artistic journey began relatively recently, at the age of 25. Can you share what initially inspired you to start drawing and later painting?

I started drawing because I felt like I never accomplished any outwardly expressed gift that was tangible. I taught myself almost everyday after 25 because I was determined to prove to myself that anything is possible. And I proved myself right. Going from drawing to painting showed in my art journey that are levels to this. I always thought that I would only be drawing because painting seemed too complex but drawing seemed too complex and I still conquered it. It's a constant reminder that we should always challenge ourselves.

You've described your work as "conceptual portraiture" with spiritual and biblical inspiration. How do these themes influence the way you approach each new piece?

I tend to enjoy putting my own twist on pieces I create. A lot of people may think of ancient or religious style paintings which may seem like a more literal approach. Since the God I believe in spoke in parables, so do my paintings.



We have to remind ourselves that no matter how ancient our beliefs are, we still live in a modern world and we can use it to our advantage to speak to the people currently here on earth.

Many of your paintings are described as having spiritual connotations and symbolism. Could you elaborate on how you incorporate these elements into your work?

Well, I am a vivid dreamer quite literally so my perspective and perception of the world may be taboo or sometimes entertaining depending on how you perceive it. I also consider my art prophetic. The process involves picking a topic that I typically resonate in my world and whoever is considered to be in a photoshoot for that painting most likely is a message for that model. Then finally, I find a scripture that connects with that painting, usually positive ones that speaks life into that person. Then you have other times where I will create a painting without any knowledge of a

person's situation and the painting will be "speaking" specifically to them. An example of that is my piece called "Two Can Play That Game".

"Freedom Cry," your first large-scale painting, has significant dimensions. What motivated you to take on such an ambitious project so early in your painting career?

Since I was young, I told myself if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it big and I'm going to do it right. It probably came from me trying so hard to be a perfectionist. However, once I let that perfectionism go, it came naturally. You have to understand that I was completely shocked when I realized I could accomplish something so massive. That's why I wholeheartedly believe that everything has a spiritual backing. I had the understanding that if I can teach

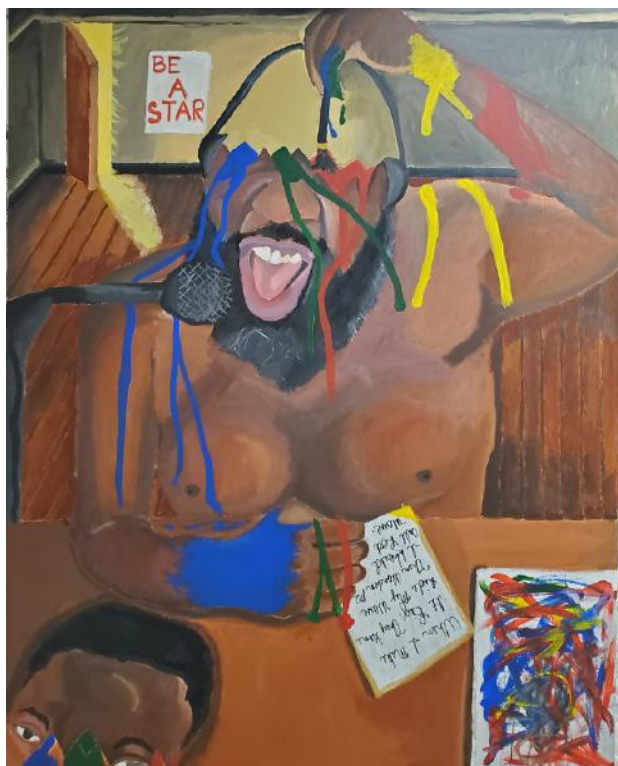


Mezerahyah
Thug Purity

myself how to draw then I can learn how to paint.

Your art often seems to be "coincidentally" connected to the model's life. Can you talk about a specific instance where this connection was particularly striking?

In my piece, Two Can Play That Game, you can see the words "Cafe Lorenzo". There is a male and female figure in the drawing "fighting" each other in a spiritual way. First, I thought of that name Lorenzo for no reason, it seemed like. A couple days later, I told myself that I wanted to name my car Lorenzo, forgetting that I had come up with the name on the painting. A few days later I leave my studio, I reverse my car and I run into another car that belongs to a person that has a studio in the same building as me. Because I didn't want to



Mezerahyah
A Man of Many



Mezerahyah
Two Can Play That Game

have a guilty conscience, I decided to go back in the building and knock on the door, to whom I believed the car belonged to. Lo and behold, I was correct and it was the person whose studio was right next to mine. His name is Lorenzo and I would always hear him and his lady going at it. I can't make this up. They were cool people though.

You mentioned that you were unaware of your artistic abilities until you began creating art. How has this discovery impacted your view of yourself and your creative potential?

I had complete doubt and disbelief in my mind about all of my ability to create. So, the minute I was clearly able to do anything remotely artistic, it sparked something in me so great that I even made a song called Say I. In this song, I'm basically proclaiming that we can do anything because i truly believe it and I've experienced it myself. When you go from thinking you're not able to do anything to in fact doing everything you wanted to do, you start to feel insanely

powerful but the power is not rooted in myself.

Given your fast learning pace, what advice would you give to aspiring artists who may feel discouraged by the time it takes to develop their skills?

I would say to them they can do anything. We all know how cliché that sounds but it's true. Getting closer to God and controlling my sexual energy was my formula. There is something called transmutation, where instead of releasing sexual energy, you keep it in and let it pour into what you're creating or doing. A lot of people are probably looking for direct answers that have to do with art but usually, it's the troubles within that are blocking us.



Mezerahyah
Heart of Gold



Ana Salinas Mata

Ana Salinas' pictorial work "Floral Still Life / Bodegones, Centros Florales" is inspired by the still lifes of the 17th century, a period when flower arrangements reached their highest artistic expression. In her current series, Ana enlarges the scales and abstracts the floral motifs to explore new dimensions and perceptions of these traditional arrangements. Using oil on canvas, she captures the richness of colors and the depth of textures, creating works that invite the viewer to a sensory and reflective experience.

Ana's creative process is a meditation on form, color, and light, influenced by her architectural training and love for nature. Each work is a tribute to the ephemeral beauty of flowers and a testament to the ability of art to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Ana Salinas Mata | Centerpiece





Interview

Natasja Knap



Your work is heavily influenced by storytelling and personal narratives. How do these elements shape the visual aspects of your art?

Storytelling is the core of my art. I see every object, colour, and texture as a part of a narrative—a piece of a larger story. My work is like an evolving archive where each visual element contributes to the unfolding tale. I explore the idea of blending fact with fiction, using personal stories as the foundation of my visual compositions. These stories bring depth and meaning to my work, allowing me to connect with the viewer on a more personal and emotional level.

You mentioned a childhood dream of becoming an archaeologist. How does this passion for discovery influence your current artistic practice?

My childhood dream of becoming an archaeologist was always about uncovering hidden stories and understanding the layers of history that shape our present. This passion for

discovery is at the heart of my current practice. My art revolves around this process of excavation—not of physical artefacts, but of memories, emotions, and narratives that lie beneath the surface. It's a continual process of discovery and reinterpretation, much like the work of an archaeologist.

In your project "There Once Was a Village," you explore the way children depict their world in drawings. What do you think we can learn from these unfiltered and symbolic understandings of place?

Children's drawings offer a raw, unfiltered perspective on the world—a kind of visual honesty that we often lose as adults. These drawings are not constrained by the rules of perspective or realism; instead, they capture the essence of a place through emotion and symbolism. I believe this teaches us to value the emotional and personal connections we have to our surroundings, rather than just their physical or aesthetic qualities.



Your art seems to delve into both comforting and unsettling aspects of memories and places. How do you balance these contrasting emotions in your work?

Balancing comfort and unease in my work is about embracing the full spectrum of human experience. By juxtaposing comforting and unsettling elements, I create a narrative tension that reflects the complexities of memory and place. It's not about making everything feel harmonious; rather, it's about allowing these contrasting emotions to coexist and inform one another, creating a richer and more nuanced exploration of the themes I'm addressing.

How do your personal experiences and memories influence the themes and imagery in your collages and mixed media works?

My personal experiences and memories are the seeds from which my work grows. They are the raw materials that I archive, rework, and reinterpret into new forms. Each collage or mixed media piece begins with a fragment of my personal history, whether it's a memory, an old photograph, or an object with sentimental value. These fragments are then woven together into a narrative that reflects my ongoing journey of self-discovery and artistic exploration.

What role do attics, depots, and archives play in your creative process, and how do they contribute to the stories you tell through your art?

To me they are treasure troves of hidden stories and forgotten memories. They represent the past, the overlooked, and the spaces where our personal histories accumulate, often unnoticed. I find it important to honour these personal stories—these spaces are where they live. My creative process often involves metaphorically "rummaging" through these spaces, unearthing objects and memories that I can reimagine and bring to life in my art. These archives are the foundation of the stories I tell, providing a deep well of inspiration and connection to the past.

What message or feeling do you hope viewers take away from your project "There Once Was a Village"?

With There Once Was a Village, my goal is for viewers to connect with their own experiences of place and to see these spaces as dynamic, living entities that shape and are shaped by our stories. Ultimately, I hope this project invites contemplation about the ways in which our personal and collective histories are embedded in the environments we inhabit.



Natasja Knap | Female Disruption I | 2024



Natasja Knap | There once was a Village VI VII | 2024





It is said that the face is the mirror of the soul. I am interested in the face of the soul. Or the infinite possibilities that painting can reflect, in my case, turned into that mirror. Music is important in my creative process because it helps me to stop thinking. I forget everything and start painting. In this way, reason or self-criticism stop bothering me and I can concentrate only on what the painting asks of me. I don't listen only to a certain style of music or a particular artist. I like jazz and electronic music. Painting with music accompanies me and makes the creative process less solitary. The intention of my works is that the viewer travels inward and connects, through the painting, with some emotion or feeling that he or she has experienced in his or her life. Exhibiting in different places has meant a lot to me: that my painting can connect with very different people, but with something in common, intimate and at the same time universal.

— Ernest Compta Llinàs



— Interview

Lori Evensen



Your artistic journey began at a very young age. How do you think this early start influenced your development as an artist?

Starting to paint as a child gave me the freedom to experiment with ideas I might have been too self-conscious to pursue as an adult. As adults, we are often concerned about profitability, exhibition acceptance, impressing others, and striving to surpass our own previous work – but these are pressures that we don't experience as children because nobody (including us) expects a child's art to be any good. The earlier you start, the more time you have to create without the burden of expectation influencing your creative choices. Luckily, I started painting before I could even talk, so I had many years to experiment in ways that I may not have had the courage to attempt had I started painting later in life.

Can you describe how your experiences studying abroad in Rome and Tunisia have shaped your artistic vision?

Rome's stunning architecture certainly inspired me to explore a more geometric style. But I was equally captivated at the Villa Borghese by the way sunlight filtered through the leaves of the plants, illuminating them like stained glass. Such beauty made me eager to incorporate plants in my work a lot more than I previously had. Tunisia's vast landscapes also left a deep impression on me, fueling my desire to create surreal versions of them – a theme that frequently appears in my art.

Your work is known for its vivid colors and eccentric patterns. What inspires your choice of colors and patterns in your artwork?

My color choices are driven by a desire to create a specific atmosphere and evoke a particular emotion in the viewer. It could be about presenting a landscape of quiet contemplation, conveying a sense of growth and renewal, or showcasing the multifaceted complexities of a particular subject. The eccentric patterns I use stem from noticing the intricate tessellations in jewelry, textile designs, and plants when viewed up close, and then choosing to recontextualize them.

You mentioned that your art originates from a quirky and optimistic view of the world. How do you translate this perspective into your creative process?

Mostly, I brainstorm what themes, color combinations and unusual patterns might pique the viewer's curiosity and reveal how beautiful the world can be despite its imperfections. After all, the goal of my art is to offer viewers a much needed escape from the stresses of daily



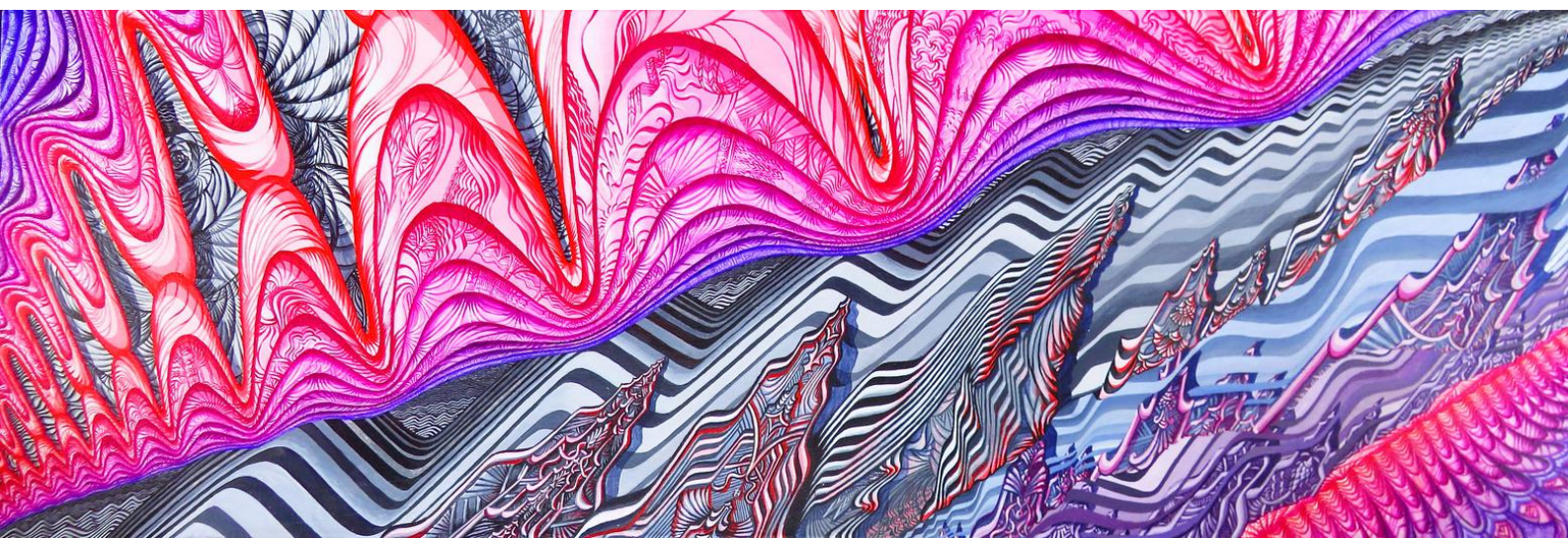
Lori Evensen | Ruler of Two Worlds | 2022

life by inviting them to immerse themselves in captivating parallel universes.

Your paintings often explore the concept of parallel universes. Do you draw inspiration from any specific literature, science, or philosophy for this theme?

Yes, my inspiration is drawn specifically from the visual aesthetics of Alice in Wonderland, Dr Seuss, and Avatar. I aim to lead viewers 'down the rabbit hole,' so to speak, guiding them through fanciful realms that seem straight out of a dream. Rather than depicting these

Lori Evensen | The Great Unveil | 2017





Lori Evensen
Rainbow Road Trip
2024

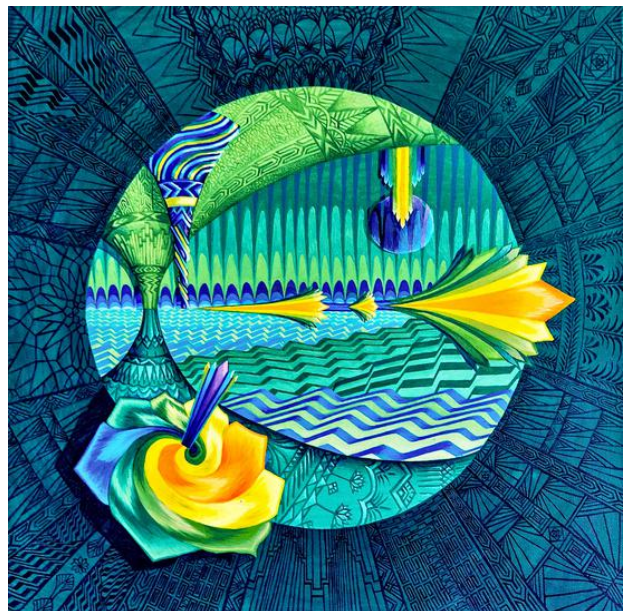
lands realistically, I draw on Dr Seuss' whimsical illustrations and Avatar's otherworldly feel to incorporate bizarre and imaginative elements that defy reality but feel perfectly normal within such a parallel world.

As an artist who has exhibited in various cities, how do you see the role of place and environment in influencing your art?

I like to think every travel experience adds a new color to my art palette, as each unique place offers distinct feelings and perspectives that shape my next piece. But the environment in which my artwork is displayed also influences how it's perceived. For example, one of my bright, vibrant paintings that seemed to stand out in an expansive gala benefit appears rather quaint on the wall in my living room.

What advice would you give to aspiring artists who want to develop their unique style and voice?

Study the work of other artists to find ways to distinguish your own style. Apply to as many shows as possible, but don't hesitate to decline opportunities that don't align with your specific type of art. Most importantly, experiment with as many different styles and materials as you can. Doing so will inevitably lead to unexpected and valuable insights you would not have otherwise discovered. For example, an instructor in college once suggested that I ought to rotate my paintings while working on them because my compositions often felt too bottom heavy. Though initially skeptical, trying it significantly expanded my creative process, and I ended up developing a way to create paintings that could hang in four different orientations, allowing viewers to experience it differently with each rotation.



Lori Evensen
Cave in Bloom
2019



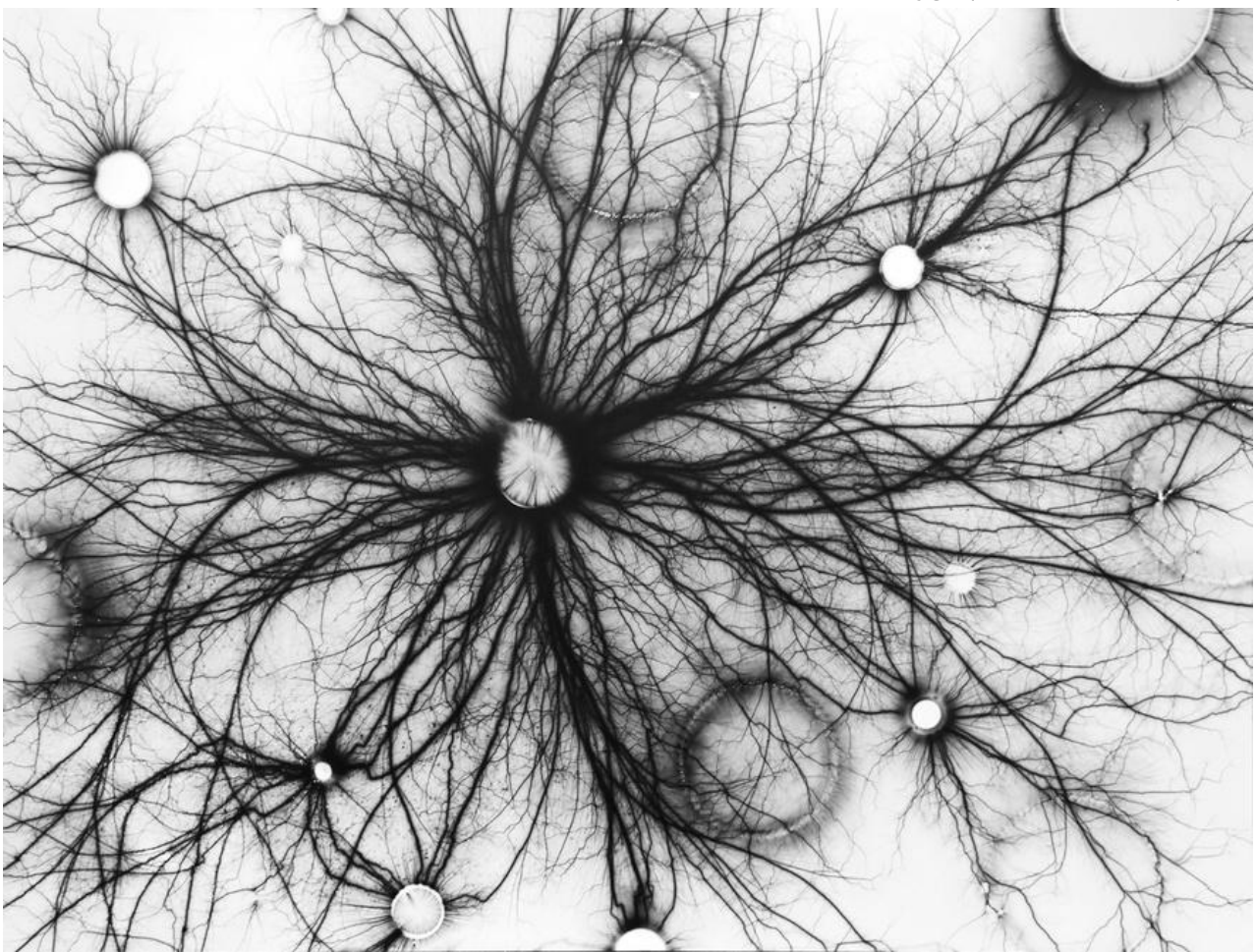
VOLT IN HOLT (Paulina Nadia Weremczuk and Dominik Kuryga)

Paulina was born in 1993 in Warsaw. She graduated from design studies with a specialization in product design. Paulina is interested in topics at the intersection of art, technology, and science. She also designs jewelry, decorative, and utility objects. Dominik was born in 1994 in Warsaw. He is an independent researcher and constructor involved in plasma physics, electrical engineering, and industrial implementation projects. He is passionate about capturing the beauty of physical phenomena. Paulina and Dominik have been cooperating as VOLT IN HOLT since 2020. In late 2021, they developed their technique of painting with electricity to create abstract works. They primarily work on paper but also explore mediums such as canvas or glass. The duo began presenting their works in 2022. Paulina and Dominik currently live and work in Warsaw.

Artist Statement

Our creative process is driven by our fascination with electrical discharges. We are captivated by their unpredictable nature and encouraged by the opportunity to capture their beauty, while also having the ability to control them to some extent to create the desired composition. It all begins with an idea, followed by a concept or sketch of the composition. Then, we arrange it on photosensitive material in almost complete darkness. The final effect remains a surprise until the work is developed. Through our exploration of the unexpected, we have learned to embrace the unknown and turn unwanted situations into opportunities. We share this experience with our audience to illustrate that accepting the volatility and unpredictability of life is liberating for the mind. Each person can derive different meanings and connotations from our works, making them a source of introspection..

Paulina Weremczuk, Dominik Kuryga | δ-ADVELO-403 | 2023





— Interview

Regina de Geit

Can you describe the role that both the "silent world" and the "hearing world" play in your creative process?

As a creator, I am always in the silent world; I am deaf. I find that silence delightful. It brings peace to me, allowing me to capture my emotions directly. The spontaneity I feel is a game between me and the artwork. How will I react to it, and how will the viewers react to my works? It sparks curiosity in me.

As a participant in society, I function as hard of hearing. The world is full of surprises, questions, falls, and recoveries. There is less peace, I am more alert to what is happening, but I also miss some of what is said. This influences the emotions I express when I no longer hear as a creator.

How do your personal experiences with cochlear implants and sign language influence your artwork?

At the age of three, I received a CI. This cochlear implant has had a significant impact on my life, enabling me to



Regina de Geit | Sensory sensitivity | 2024

manage speaking the Dutch language. It expands my world, making sign language less important for me. On the other hand, sign language remains important because it requires less energy to follow a conversation. These two languages influence my brain between seeing images and making great efforts to understand sounds. This combination brings vibrancy to my artworks.

What emotions or themes do you aim to express through your use of color and form in your artworks?

There are different emotions that are part of life, such as fear, tension, love, hope, joy, struggle, and a touch of humor. Throughout life, I aim to capture human emotions and reinforce them through form and color. The emotions I've captured are those I have felt. From this foundation, I want to raise awareness of a particular theme. The

figures are figurative; I want to show that there is no distinction in gender or how people look. It is up to you, as the viewer, to decide what you want to see. These emotions are universal and meant for all cultures.

Your works often explore feelings of limitation and resilience. How do you hope viewers will respond to these themes?

My goal for the viewer is that they truly feel the emotions, understand them, and gain insight into the emotions of people who are limited. That it's a journey of trial and error, and that they can play a role in that. That they become critical of the impact of their actions and what the system within society can do for that group. And let's not forget that they also see that these people are happy despite their limitations.

How do you navigate between the challenges of the hearing and silent worlds in your professional art and educational work?

The challenge of the hearing world is that most people can hear. Many have not learned from their home or environment how to deal with that. In education, I've noticed that many teachers don't take the time to figure out what works in the lesson for a hard-of-hearing student. I've had to fight for my rights, and that was exhausting and lonely. I was often told that I couldn't handle the level, that they didn't know how to deal with me, or that they didn't want to talk to me. However, I also had

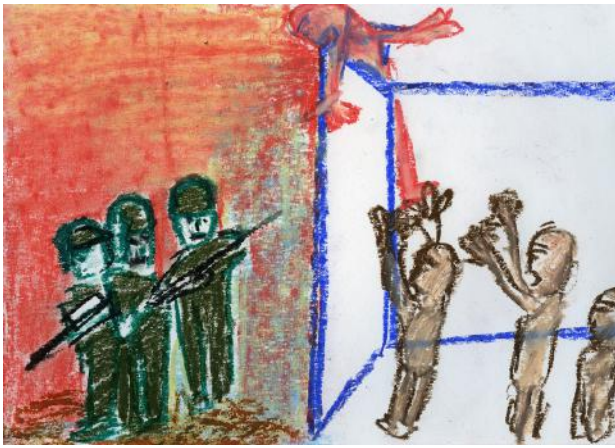
great teachers who cared about me, took the time to see what was possible, and that is very valuable!

With my works, I want to raise awareness among teachers that they need to make space for students who are struggling in education. It's not the difference that limits students, but it's society that limits them. It also lies in the education system; teachers have little time for extra attention, but they do have a great influence on the generation. There definitely needs to be a change there. It's getting worse due to the growing teacher shortage in the Netherlands.

In the silent world, I find space to express myself when creating artwork. But when I'm in the hearing environment, where communication is easier with a CI, I notice that I'm



Regina de Geit | no title | 2024



Regina de Geit
Make a choice
2024

different. I communicate differently and use my concentration on different aspects than hearing people. I have to work hard to follow the conversation, while the other person doesn't have to. So, I get tired more quickly. But if I ask the other person to communicate with me in sign language, then they get tired faster than I do. Most people don't learn sign language because it's not their language. So, it depends on what you ask of each other, and finding balance with the other person is important. I realize this more and more in professional art and educational work. That's something that remains difficult in today's world.

What role does sign language play in your identity as both an artist and a teacher?

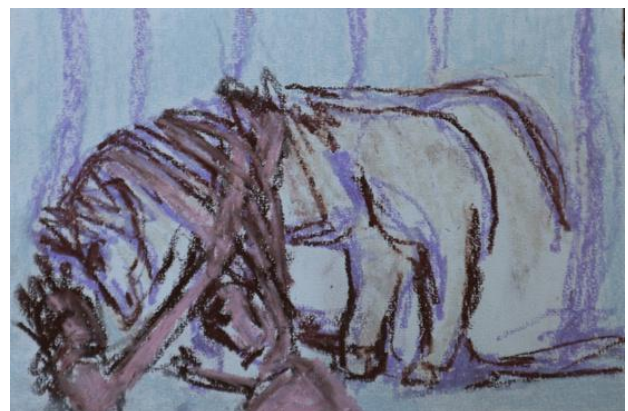
Sign language mainly influences the way I read people differently, allowing me to express myself directly through my hands. This influences my desire to express myself through my hands when painting and drawing.

What do you want to achieve as an art historian?

As an art historian, I want to investigate how we can make society more inclusive for people who are different. That it becomes a given that people take each other into account in education, the workplace, and society. It is very important because this group faces assigned injustices that they do not deserve because of who they are. We must take care of each other and bring about change in society for our generation and the next. Art plays a big role in this.



Regina de Geit
Crowd
2024



Regina de Geit
Mirror
2024

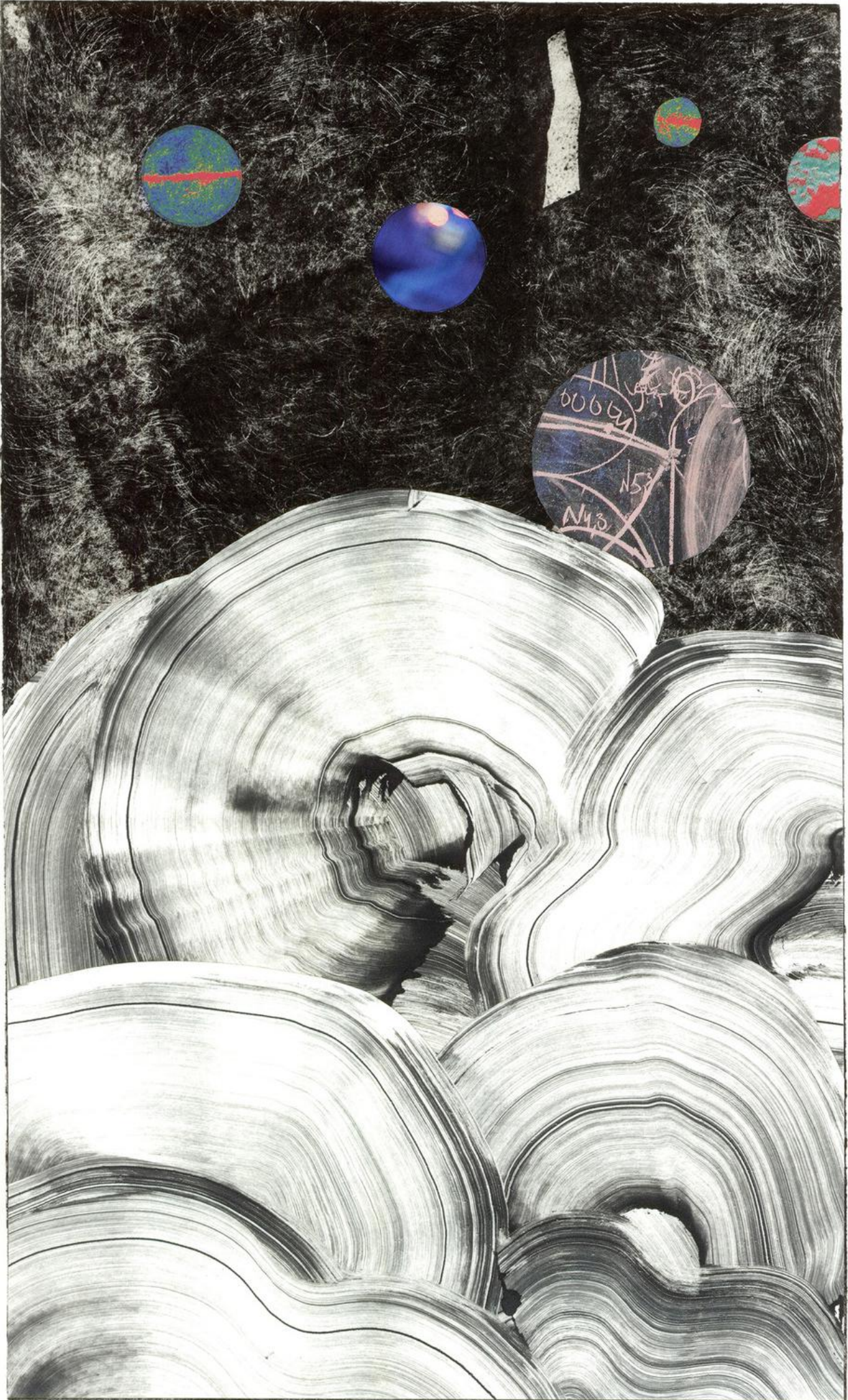


My attraction to art has been present since childhood, a time when I used to draw, paint, and model. At the age of nine, I began creating my first collages in a self-taught and intuitive manner, like a personal diary, capturing my emotions and thoughts about my surroundings. Later, my compositions evolved into a means of artistic expression, continuing to develop up to the present day. I also work in other artistic disciplines such as printmaking, photography, assemblage, and painting, exploring different creative possibilities. The works I present here, in this series entitled ECHOES, are made using the technique of collage, combining monotype, collagraph, and photography with press clippings. This discipline provides me with great creative and expressive freedom, allowing me to merge different textures that enhance my message. In the immensity of the universe, we are barely a dot, something insignificant. There are other worlds we do not know, yet we are not taking care of our own as it deserves. I wonder about the beginning and the end of the universe, the depletion of natural resources, and our role in this dizzying course. How long will the forests and wildlife endure? The echoes of their clamor resonate in infinite space, calling for respect. Where are we taking planet Earth? Where are the limits of human intervention, so harmful in recent times? Through my work, I raise all these questions, as environmental conservation is one of my greatest concerns, and I maintain a close connection with nature, actively involving myself.

— Marta Canals

Marta Canals | It's Not a Game | 2023





Marta Canals | The Last Weave | 2023

Marta Canals

— *Interview*

Julian Bachur

Your works are described as an exploration of the soul and spirituality. Can you elaborate on how these themes influence your choice of colors and forms in your paintings?

When I paint, I materialize my emotions and transfer them onto the canvas. My works are the result of a continuous internal dialogue. As you can see, the primary means of expression in my paintings is color and how it is used. I've always been captivated by color, both in daily life and, for example, in the work of other artists. The choice of colors and their symbolism plays a crucial role in how my pieces are perceived. Often, before I even begin painting, I envision the color palette and the impression I wish to evoke. I enjoy using vibrant, pure colors, but I also blend them with unexpected tones of somber browns or greens. I also focus not only on the color itself but also on the application of paint. The gestures I use while painting are very expressive, sometimes even aggressive. I enjoy applying thick and dense layers of paint and mixing them on the canvas with other still-wet



shades. Creating my paintings involves layering various colors and forms repeatedly to achieve a sense of depth—an effect where each layer seems to hide another, making it feel as though the exploration never truly ends. This is why you might notice subtle hints of color emerging from beneath the surface, though they are never in random places. Balancing these hues and the shapes they fill is a critical part of my process. My paintings are deeply expressive and emotional, yet each stroke and shade is thoughtfully placed on the canvas. The arrangement of particular forms and hues is intended to create tension and drama, to contrast and clash with one another. However, all these elements come together to form a cohesive and unified composition.

Your paintings often reimagine organic shapes to connect the

tangible with the elusive. What inspires this interplay between the real and the abstract?

Our understanding of reality is influenced by our subjective experiences and emotions. By blending the tangible with the abstract, I aim to capture the essence of how we internalize and interpret our surroundings, creating a visual language that resonates with the viewer's own perceptions and feelings. The abstract elements in my work often represent internal landscapes and emotional states, which are triggered by specific situations or experiences. By juxtaposing these abstract elements with recognizable forms, I explore the tension and connection between our external reality and internal experiences, reflecting the complexity of the human psyche. This interplay between the real and the abstract is a way to bridge the gap between our concrete experiences and the more elusive, subjective realms of thought and feeling. It invites viewers to engage with the artwork on multiple levels, encouraging a dialogue between what is seen and what is felt. Forms and colors spread into reality to entwine the viewer. I want to lure him into my world in order to find a piece of himself.

You participate in various art competitions like Arte Laguna Prize in Venice and Bielska Jesien Biennale. How do these experiences shape your creative process?

I think that all kinds of art competitions are an excellent opportunity for both young and experienced artists to

showcase their work. As a creator, I see them as a platform where I can present my paintings to a broader audience. However, they are not my primary motivation for creating. On the other hand, these competitions provide a cross-section of artistic work from around the world, so they are undoubtedly a source of inspiration. I am open and always eager to share my work and engage with the artistic community. I believe that such confrontation is positive and contributes to further artistic development.

The titles of your works are known to be ambiguous, encouraging multiple interpretations. How do you decide on the titles, and what role do they play in guiding the viewer's experience?

I believe that a title, in addition to being a way to identify a painting, also serves as a form of complementing the work.



Julian Bachur | I Threw a Brick at the Window | 2024



Sometimes the title comes to my mind during the creative process itself, but there are times when it takes a while to find the right name that fits the piece. The process of painting is very important to me; the painting lives within me before, during, and after its creation. Similarly, with the title, fragments of words constantly swirl in my mind. However, when I finally come up with the name, I always feel that it's the right one. It's hard to describe exactly, but there's an immediate connection between the painting and the title, as if they had existed together from the very beginning. That's why, if I have even the slightest doubt that the name might not be adequate for the painting, I let it rest and come back to it later. Depending on the specific work and what I wanted to express, some titles are more or less literal than others. Especially when working on my latest series of abstract

pieces, I want the titles to be ambiguous, sometimes playful and poetic, and to reflect the mood of the painting, which in turn encourages the viewer to form their own interpretation. I believe that a title often provides context that can help in interpreting the work, but it's important to ensure that it doesn't overshadow the painting itself. I want the title to provoke and make the viewer think, rather than provide a ready-made answer.

Your art seems to ask more questions than provide answers. What are some of the questions you find yourself repeatedly exploring through your work?

The inspiration and impulse for my painting come from everyday life and observations of the world around me. The issues I explore often involve universal themes, such as human



relationships or the passage of time. However, I believe it's not always about finding answers to the questions posed; it's about the journey itself and the contemplation of the issue at hand. My works are the result of this kind of internal dialogue over various problems. The painting itself is really just a starting point for reflection, serving as a bridge between the artist and the viewer. I might even go so far as to say that it's not really about the painting itself, but about the viewer. That's where the art truly happens.

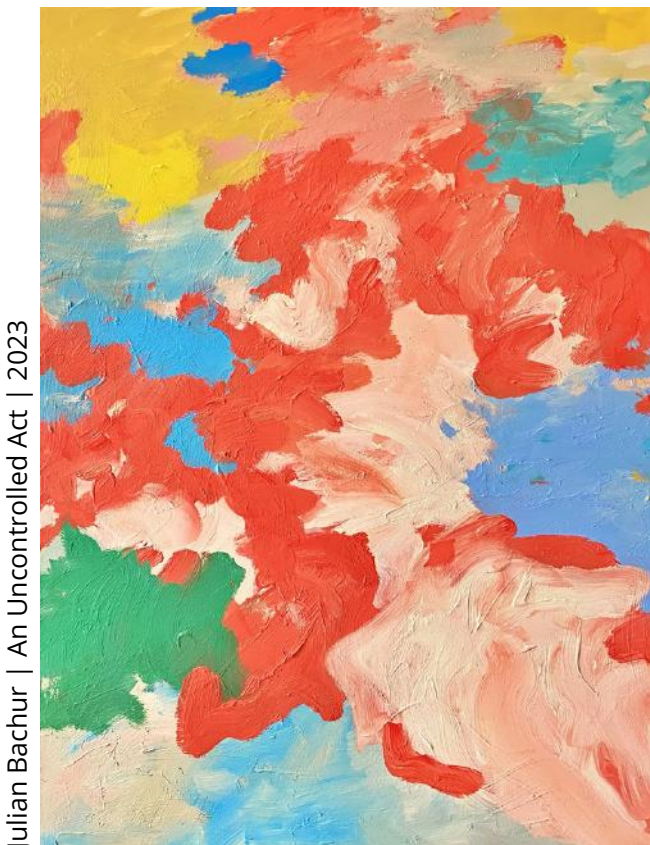
Can you discuss a specific painting where your emotions and frustrations were particularly influential in its creation?

In reality, each of my works is a result and reflection of a collection of my emotions during a particular period and



Julian Bachur | The Last Cigarette | 2024

the events surrounding my life. I believe that some of these aspects should remain unsaid, preserving an air of mystery. However, I strive for my intimate and personal experiences to serve as a starting point and a trigger for deeper contemplation. I want the painting to be universal, allowing the viewer to partially create their own narrative. When I work, I am accompanied by a range of emotions, from joy to anger or frustration. I often grapple with the painting, as reds and blues tremble and intertwine in forceful brushstrokes. The creation process can be very brief at times, while at other times it lasts for many days. It is a record of my thoughts and emotions; even what lies beneath many layers of paint is as important as what is ultimately visible on the surface. As I mentioned earlier, the viewer should develop their own interpretation of the finished work, as they might see something entirely different than I do. And I think that is precisely what it's all about.



Julian Bachur | An Uncontrolled Act | 2023

My work Void was realised during a year-long journey. My personal problems and my lack of faith in the future made me want to return to nature and search for the foundations. The keywords of my photo series are "emptiness, absence with positive value and silence", which also refer to philosophical content. I also update these themes by relating them to the sense of life, loneliness and insecurity of people in modern societies, perhaps offering a cure for these diagnoses. Some of the photographs depict details taken from nature (i.e. landscapes constructed by me), most of which give a glimpse of the journey's stages. Some of these 'capture' monumental landscapes that are terribly empty, eerie and yet majestic or timeless. They are incredibly free spaces in which a sense of silence and 'complete absence' is easily realised. Other pictures present motifs that are subjective associations of mine and are concerned with harmony and the search for a way. Other photographs suggest traces of human presence and the absence of man.

— Ács Anett Kitty

Ács Anett Kitty | Void | 2024







— Interview

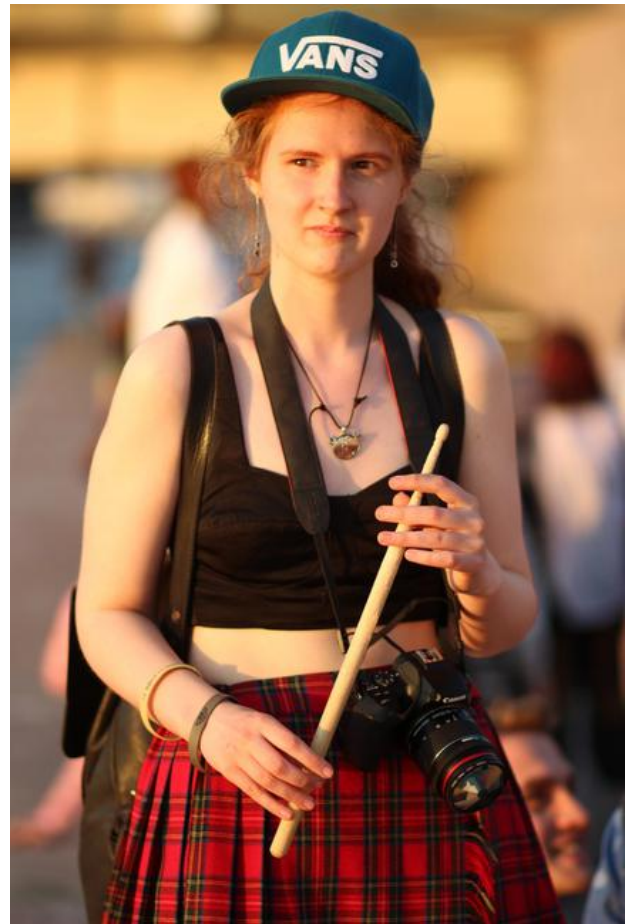
Veronicka Nowickowa

Your artistic journey started at a very young age. How did your early exposure to both music and visual arts shape your creative expression?

The vision of colors, shades, and images was formed back then. During that time, my favorite artists, performers, and styles in music and visual arts were defined. All of this, combined, created a worldview that stays with me to this day.

Your group portrait 'In the Village Club' was recognized early in your career. How did that recognition influence your future work and development as an artist?

It became one of the pivotal events after which I firmly decided that I wanted to pursue this path. For me, it was like the signal "On your mark! Get set! Go!" It meant I needed to keep creating works and participating in various projects. It also played a role in my choice of university.



You have a deep connection with both music and visual arts. How do these two disciplines influence each other in your creative process?

Music often helps in forming images. The sound creates the atmosphere and mood suitable for the work. Even in childhood, I wanted to create animated music videos. Now, having completed my studies at university, I can not only use music as a source of inspiration for static works but also create something dynamic.

Your use of dry pastels seems central to your work. What is it about this medium that draws you to it, and how do you use it to convey emotions and energy in your portraits?

What attracts me to dry pastels is that you literally shape images with your fingers, like a sculptor. It's very flexible and dynamic. With dry pastels, a certain haze is created at the junction of shades, which helps to give the image the character of the model.

You've experimented with different materials and techniques throughout your career. Can you share some of the most unexpected discoveries you've made in this experimentation?

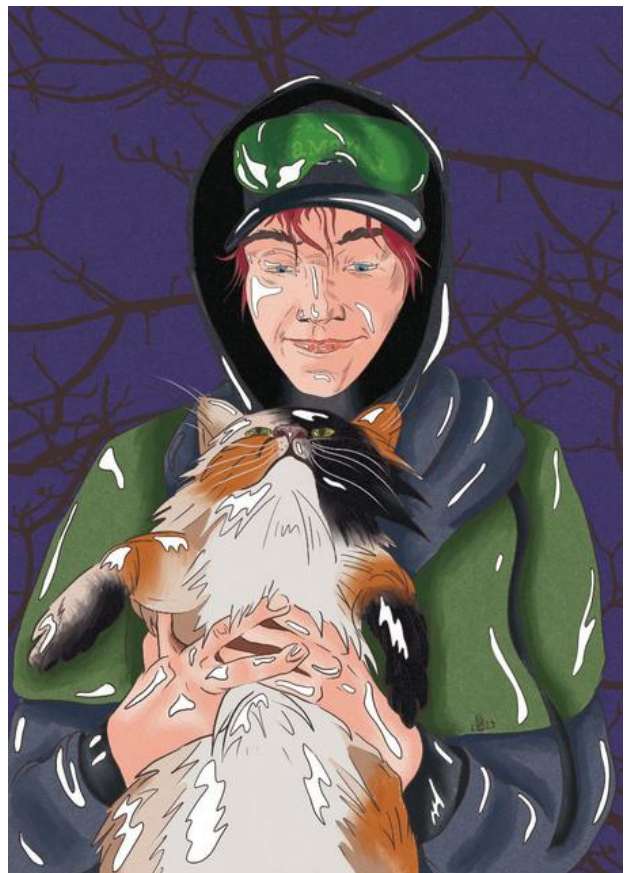
At some point, it was a discovery for me to create a work with oil paint, but not by painting, rather by drawing with a dry brush. No solvent or anything else added—just a dry brush and a tube of paint. It was also interesting to dilute oil pastels with a solvent. Right now, I'm working on a piece using three skateboards. They are joined into one canvas and primed. Because of the specific shape, it was initially unusual.

Portraits seem to be a significant part of your work. What do you believe makes a portrait powerful and capable of conveying emotions to the viewer?

I think it's the reflection of the individuality of each person. When I see someone I want to draw, I immediately think about what additional elements would suit their personality, what would best reveal their character and emotions. It's not only the image itself that plays a role, but also the choice of technique, because each person corresponds to a specific material.

How do you choose the subjects for your portraits, and what draws you to the particular individuals you depict?

Usually, an image immediately forms in my mind when I see a person. It is shaped by their facial expressions, gestures, some elements of clothing, and sometimes their interests or activities. There is no specific type or principle when choosing a model—it could be absolutely anyone. It's just that a detail or something else catches my eye, and I feel the urge to capture it. Some portraits were even created from photographs of random passersby I took while walking around the city.



Veronicka Nowickowa
Friends
2023



2/18/22

— Interview

Djamila Fierek

Your artwork combines spirituality with a variety of techniques and materials. Can you share how your spiritual beliefs influence your creative process?

My spirituality is deeply intertwined with my creative process. I believe that my artwork is a reflection of my connection to a higher power (or inner self), which guides and inspires me. When I create, I feel a sense of alignment with something greater than myself, and this connection flows into my work, shaping its themes, colors, and forms. Through my art, I explore and express the core beliefs and values that my spirituality teaches me. Whether it's the concept of unity, love, or the transcendence of the soul, these ideas find their way into my work, allowing me to communicate my spiritual journey visually.



For me, creating art is a meditative practice. My spirituality encourages me to listen to my intuition, to be present in the moment, and to let go of the need for control. My spirituality sees art as a tool for healing and transformation, both for myself and others. The act of creating allows me to process emotions, transcend challenges, and find inner peace. I hope that my work can offer a similar experience of reflection and healing to those who view it.

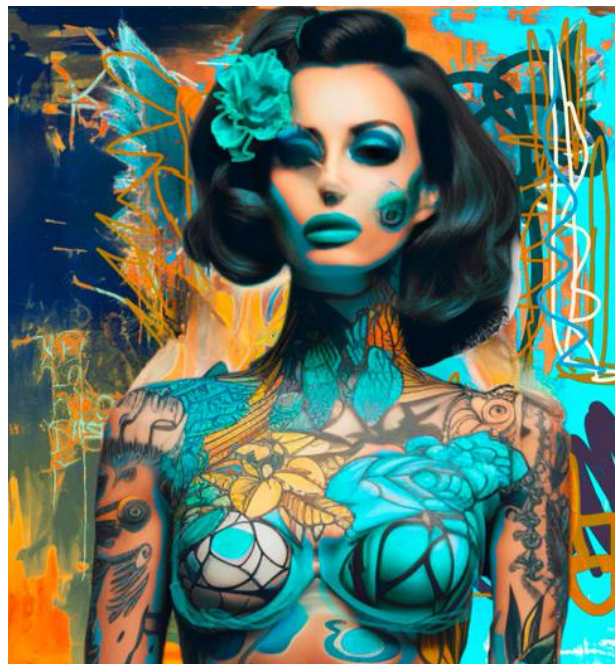
You have a background in art history and psychology. How do these disciplines shape your approach to art-making?

My master's in art history provides me with a deep understanding of various artistic movements, techniques, and cultural contexts. This knowledge allows me to draw inspiration from past masters, experiment with different styles, and integrate historical references into my work. My art often reflects a dialogue with the past, reinterpreting classical themes through a contemporary lens. My master's in psychology equips me with a profound understanding of human emotions, behavior, and the subconscious mind. This insight influences the themes I explore in my work. I try to create paintings that evoke emotional responses.

What drew you to experiment



Djamila Fierek | Bowery Bandit | 2024



Djamila Fierek
Calypso
2024

with unconventional media combinations, such as mixing acrylic paint with recycled materials?

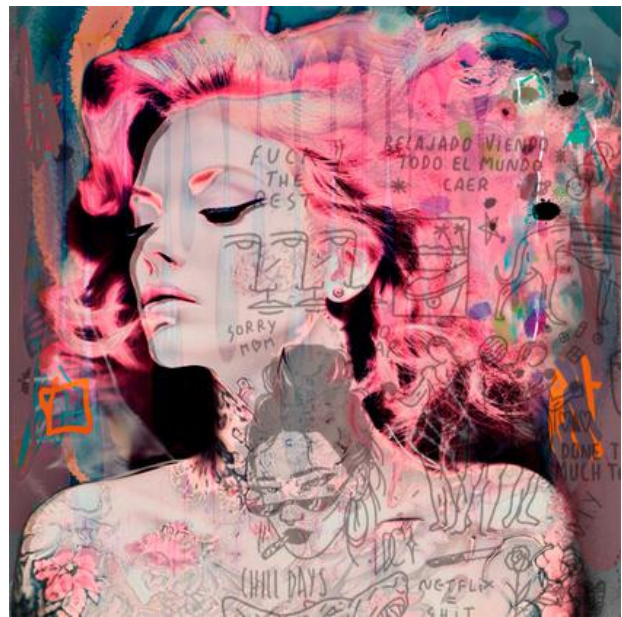
Recycled materials symbolize transformation and renewal. Just as I breathe new life into these materials, my art seeks to convey the idea that beauty can be found even in the overlooked. Acrylic paint enhances this process, allowing me to bring out textures in materials.

Your work is characterized by vibrant colors and dynamic compositions. How do you select your color palette, and what role do colors play in conveying the message of your art?

I use vibrant colors and dynamic compositions in my work to provide a sense of energy and emotional intensity. Bright, bold colors have the power to evoke strong emotional responses. I want to create pieces that are visually stimulating, inviting the viewer to explore every corner of the canvas.

You split your time between Munich and Scottsdale. How do the cultural and environmental differences between these locations influence your work?

The cultural richness of both Scottsdale, Arizona, and Munich, Germany, shapes my artistic perspective. Splitting time between these locations gives me a dual perspective on the world, which



Djamila Fierek
Lulu
2024

I express in my artwork. Arizona's indigenous art and the spirit of the Southwest inspire me to incorporate motifs and themes related to nature, spirituality, and resilience. Meanwhile, Munich's deep-rooted artistic traditions and European history influence my approach to composition and technique.

In your artist statement, you mention the importance of asking "Why?" as an artist. How has this question evolved for you over the years, and how does it reflect in your current works?

I regularly ask myself why I am doing art, which drives me to explore the deeper purpose and



Djamila Fierek
Sandstone Skyline
2024

meaning behind my creative practice. This ongoing self-reflection leads me to question what I want to communicate through my work and why it matters. As a result, my current work is more intentional and infused with a sense of purpose. This introspective process forces me to confront my motivations, fears, and desires.

Your pieces often have a strong narrative element. Do you start with a story in mind, or does the narrative emerge organically during the creation process?

My artwork unfolds organically as I create, guided by intuition rather than a predetermined plan. I start painting with a smudging ceremony, loud music, allowing my instincts and emotions to lead the way. I believe that this spontaneity brings a sense of authenticity and vitality to my work. This process allows the work to grow and change direction freely, resulting in a final piece that feels alive. My process is fluid and open-ended; it's a result of the beauty of letting go and trusting the creative process.



Djamila Fierek
Sakura
2024



Djamila Fierek
Spaceman in Love
2024

I am a lawyer with the soul of a poet and artist. My journey in visual arts began back in 1988 in the basement of a small studio under the guidance of teacher Elena Takmakova. I attended the art studio for six years, during which the foundations of my drawing skills were laid. For 27 years, I didn't draw at all. In 2023, I actively started attending painting workshops at the local V.A. Igoshin House-Museum and the gallery-studio of artist G.S. Raishev. This love for beauty was rekindled. Thank you to my teachers! I mostly paint at home using gouache, oil pastels, and occasionally watercolor, tempera, oil, and acrylic. I enjoy mixed techniques.

— Tatiana Igosheva



Tatiana Igosheva | Marathon | 2024



— Interview

Simona Gazzotti

What inspired you to start working with plastic caps as a medium for your mosaics?

A waste material such as plastic bottle caps to create a work of art.

«The tradition is not to worship the ash, but to preserve the fire».

This phrase represents my ecomosaics: a very ancient classic artisan art, the mosaic, evolving with the use of new material, the caps of plastic bottles, very colourful, unnatural, waste.

Recycling that becomes art.

How do you select the colors and arrange the caps to achieve the desired effect in your works?

After collecting the caps, I cut them into small regular tiles, then I compose the work with the Roman and Byzantine mosaic technique: small regular tiles placed directly on a support. Fragmentation and recomposition of the material. The mosaic is like a skin that creates a new work, in direct relationship with the light. My favorite characteristics of the mosaic are the lines that are created by placing the tiles together and the reflections of light that are



generated on the surfaces.
The mosaic is light incarnate.

Can you share the process you follow from the conception of an idea to the completion of an ecomosaic?

I think and choose the subject or work to reproduce, then the ecomosaic grows on its own, the prophetic aspect of art: creating a new work is always a terrain and realm of possibilities. At the beginning of the work, I don't know where it will lead, coming to do things that I didn't even know or realize.

How has your background in traditional Roman and Byzantine mosaics influenced your current work?

My passion is influenced by Ravenna, my "locus amoenus" (enchanted place), which has always inspired me with its impressive, ancient, and evocative mosaics, with the reflections of light generated by small "vibrant" tiles. I attend traditional Roman and Byzantine mosaic courses in Ravenna. The execution of mosaics becomes my way of creating after having drawn and painted for years, because with the mosaic, my



tiles.

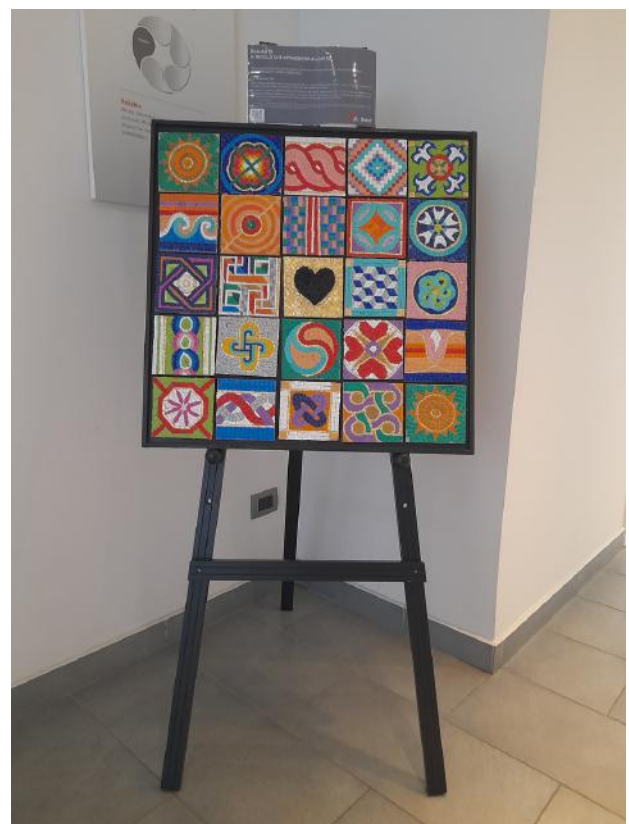
How has the birth of your daughter influenced your artistic journey?

I started with Roman and Byzantine mosaic using traditional materials (marble, glass, stone) before the birth of my daughter. Then, not wanting to miss even a moment of her growth and in the impossibility of having a dedicated studio, I thought of a material that allows me to work at the kitchen table, without leaving home. Plastic caps are perfect!

horror vacui is resolved, all the voids are filled, and with the positioning of the last tile, the work is finished. The lines are my favorite feature of the mosaic. The curved lines that I compose by aligning the tiles in the backgrounds of my ecomosaics are the characteristic of my works.

What challenges have you faced while working with plastic caps, and how have you overcome them?

No problem. The plastic caps are very colourful, unnatural, simple to cut, easy to find (I involved friends, relatives, and acquaintances in the collection). This type of material allows me to "renew" the mosaic while maintaining the traditional technique of installing small regular



What role does environmental consciousness play in your work, and how do you incorporate sustainability into your art practice?

I like and am passionate about using waste material, and spreading this awareness of reuse satisfies me a lot. When I explain to people and especially to school children that they can transform plastic caps into art, I am happy. Recycling that excites art.

— Interview

Irina Talalay

How did your journey as an artist begin, and what inspired you to create art in 2008?

I have always loved to draw. In early childhood, I drew jewelry and little people with long arms and legs, and a bit later, I started drawing various animals. My parents supported my passion and enrolled me in an art school. I enjoyed the classes a lot, as we not only drew but also molded, sewed, and made appliqué. Later, I became fascinated with folk crafts. This greatly helped me learn to mix and see shades, as there are strict color and compositional canons in folk painting.

After graduating from school, I entered a college to study art. At the same time, I attended various courses taught by artists. Even now, I am constantly learning new techniques and



Irina Talalay | Ignite | 2023



improving my skills.

During school, I fell in love with the works of Salvador Dalí. His works inspired me to create pieces where reality mixes with fantasy.

Could you share your philosophy of teaching art? What is the most valuable aspect for you in working with students?

I believe that every person on earth knows how to draw. In teaching, I moved away from standard programs to my own, structuring lessons so that students leave their first class with a finished, high-quality painting. I periodically adjust to the requests of the students, as they make great progress, and we begin to explore many complex techniques. The most valuable thing is feedback. I love to see the spark in students' eyes, their joy from the results, and I am proud of their achievements: their first exhibitions and sales. It is always pleasant to hear people praise the students' work and to know that, even just a little, you were part of their success.

Your works involve different materials, such as oil, acrylic, and pen. How do you choose which material to use for each piece?



It's often based on my mood. I usually use a pen to capture ideas for new works. Sometimes these sketches look complete when done with a pen and remain as such. I paint with oil on commission. Acrylic brings my sketches and ideas to life.

Many of your works feature symbolic elements, such as the eye in your recent paintings. What deeper meaning do these symbols hold for you?

The eye indeed frequently appears in many of my works. As they say, the eyes are the mirror of the soul. With this symbol, I convey emotions—calm, fear, pain, strength, deep thought, openness, and trust—in different works. Every person is subject to attention, whether a public figure or an ordinary one, like a teacher. So, sometimes, the eye in my works represents observation and surveillance; everyone is being watched, everyone knows.

How do you approach creating a new work? Do you plan the composition, or do you allow intuition to guide you?

I am inspired to create new work by rock music. When listening to a composition, images and ideas appear in my mind. I transfer all this onto

paper, and it turns out to be quite strange and quirky. I like it. I enjoy the freedom of creativity, the ability to express my vision, emotions, and feelings. It's all like music, but on paper. Sometimes music makes me reflect on something, and that appears on the canvas. Sometimes it's images inspired by the lyrics of a song, like in the work "Ignite" (inspired by the song of the same name). I also find inspiration in the fact that everyone sees their own meaning in my works, sometimes so deep that I hadn't even thought about it.

What role, in your opinion, does art play in contemporary society?

In my view, art is a powerful tool that can change perspectives and thinking, making people reflect and eliciting emotions. It encompasses traditions and established canons, but at the same time, everyone can bring something of their own, be heard and understood. It is an unlimited form of self-expression.

What advice would you give to beginner artists just starting their journey?

Don't give up on what you've started, believe in your abilities, try new things, and keep searching for yourself. Even the strangest and quirkiest works find their audience and inspire new creations.



— Interview

Earl Rina

How has your Filipino Canadian heritage influenced your approach to art, especially in your exploration of identity and culture?

My Filipino Canadian heritage is a mix of nuances, society, and lifestyle that have shaped my upbringing and continue to be an integral part of my journey to Canada. Born and raised in the Philippines, I immigrated to Canada, bringing with me the strong culture and traditions of my homeland. From a young age, I was immersed in the Filipino Canadian lifestyle through my relatives and the LGBTQ+ community in the Philippines. This early exposure to the unique blend of cultures and my community profoundly influenced my artistic choices and approach. Now, as a resident of Winnipeg, Manitoba, I am continually inspired by the multicultural nature of Canadian society. Living among my Filipino Canadian relatives and the 2SLGBTQ+ community, I have gained a deeper understanding of our shared experiences. This ongoing exposure has made me more curious and passionate about exploring my identity and culture through my art.

Understanding my heritage has been an essential part of my creative process. The challenges faced by the Filipino Canadian and 2SLGBTQ+ communities have provided me with several stories and themes that often make up the core of my artwork. I hope that my work will spark conversations that uplift and celebrate my community, while also addressing societal perceptions and issues. Through my work, I always try to honor and share the rich culture of the Filipino Canadian and 2SLGBTQ+ communities, developing a greater appreciation and understanding of our collective journey.

In your work, there seems to be a strong connection between natural environments and human emotions. How do you approach blending these two elements in your art?

In my artistic practice, I often explore the interplay



Photo by Bren McKay

between emotional experiences and the natural environment, reflecting the complexities of our daily interactions. My work addresses social themes such as sexuality, identity, and my Filipino Canadian heritage. By immersing myself in social issues and the natural world, I gain a deeper understanding of my emotions and the context surrounding these issues. I pay close attention to details such as the location of events and the elements of the natural environment involved. My creative process is a journey of exploration and connection. It begins with inspiration and observation. I often take time to be in a natural environment to observe the world around me. This could be a walk in the park, a visit to a new place, or simply spending time in my garden. I pay attention to the details—the colors, textures, patterns, and how they make me feel. This initial stage is crucial as it sets the foundation for my work.

Next, I engage with my community to understand their perspectives on various social issues. This involves conversations, interviews, and participating in community events. I gather insights on topics such as the challenges faced by the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the experiences of Filipino-Canadians with immigration. This research and community engagement provide me with a wealth of information that I can draw upon in my art.

Following this, I reflect on my own emotional responses to the natural environment and the societal issues I've researched. This introspection helps me understand how these elements resonate with me

personally. It is a very personal process that allows me to connect with my emotions, many of which I have not explored before, on a deeper level.

With these insights and emotions in mind, I move on to concept development. I take the insights and emotions I've gathered and form them into a cohesive concept. This involves sketching, brainstorming, and experimenting with different ideas. I think about how to visually represent the themes and emotions in a way that is playful and picturesque, showing whimsical exploration of movement, figurative visuals, natural patterns, and symbolic landscapes. This stage is where my first ideas start to take shape and form.

Once I have a clear concept, I begin the actual creation process. I use various mediums—paint, canvas, digital tools—to bring my vision to life. I focus on creating movement, figurative visuals, natural patterns, and symbolic landscapes that convey the themes I'm exploring. This is the most exciting part of the process as I see my ideas come to life.

After completing the piece, I take time to reflect on it. I consider how well it communicates the intended message and emotions. I may make adjustments or refinements to make sure it matches my vision. This reflection and refinement stage is needed to ensure that the final piece is true to my original concept.

Finally, I share my work with my friends, family, and community to seek feedback. This helps me understand how others perceive my art and provides valuable insights for future projects. Sharing my work is a rewarding experience as it allows me to connect with others and see how my art resonates with them, even if it does not always match my intentions.

Overall, my artistic practice is a deeply personal and reflective process that combines emotional experiences with the natural environment. By engaging with my community and immersing myself in societal issues, I gain a deeper understanding of my emotions and the context surrounding these issues. This allows me to create art that is both meaningful and thought-provoking, offering a unique perspective on the world.

You use a wide range of media and techniques in your work. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular piece?

As an interdisciplinary visual artist, my practice is fueled by a strong curiosity and a sense of wonder for exploring diverse mediums. In this contemporary era, the possibilities for artistic creation are boundless, with new discoveries constantly emerging. This spirit of exploration, creativity, and experimentation is at the heart of my work, allowing me to convey deeper themes and emotions through my art.

Choosing the right medium is never a straightforward task. Each medium offers unique possibilities and

challenges, and I embrace the openness of all mediums, allowing myself the freedom to explore and experiment. This approach ensures that my artwork resonates deeply, reflecting the dynamic nature of human experience. Whether it's traditional painting, digital media, sculpture, or mixed media, I find that each medium brings a new aspect to my work, and through this, I can create stronger narratives.

Moreover, I am mindful of the availability, eco-friendliness, and economic considerations of the materials I use. In an age where environmental consciousness is so important, I try to integrate sustainable practices and thoughtful resource management into my creative process. This means selecting materials that are not only effective in conveying my artistic vision but also minimize environmental impact. By doing so, I aim to create art that not only speaks to the human condition but also respects and preserves our environment.

This holistic approach enriches my creative process, making each piece connected to both artistic innovation and environmental consciousness. It allows me to create works that are not only visually and emotionally compelling but also ethically and environmentally responsible. Through this balance of creativity, experimentation, and sustainability, I hope to inspire others to see the potential for art to make a positive impact on both individuals and the world at large.

Your work is often described as whimsical yet thought-provoking. How do you maintain this balance in your creative process?

Yes, my artwork is indeed whimsical and thought-provoking, though there are times when it may not fully embody both qualities. The key to maintaining this balance lies in having a solid foundation of concepts, ideas, and knowledge.

When I start a painting, I immerse myself in the subject matter, gathering inspiration and information from various sources. This preparation phase allows me to explore different perspectives and ideas, which I



Earl Rina | Motion | 2024



Earl Rina | Wild | 2024

then blend with my natural creativity. By allowing myself to play and experiment with these ideas, I can add a sense of delight and curiosity to my work. At the same time, I remain mindful of the deeper messages I want to convey. This involves reflecting on the themes and emotions I wish to evoke. By balancing playful creativity with thoughtful introspection, I can create pieces that are both engaging and meaningful.

Ultimately, it's this interplay between lightheartedness and depth that defines my creative process. As long as I stay true to my vision and continue to nurture my ideas and knowledge, I can maintain this delicate balance in my artwork.

How do you navigate the balance between your artistic practice and your ongoing education in fine arts?

Balancing my artistic practice with my ongoing education in fine arts has been a deeply enriching experience. My Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours program is not just a separate entity but an integral part of my artistic journey. The coursework, critiques, and theoretical studies directly inform and inspire my creative process, creating a symbiotic relationship that allows me to continuously refine my concepts and themes.

Through my education, I have been exposed to a wide range of artistic theories, historical contexts, and contemporary practices. This exposure helps me develop more nuanced and sophisticated concepts in my artwork. I can experiment with different styles and mediums, informed by the knowledge I gain in my classes. The academic environment encourages exploration and experimentation, providing access to resources, workshops, and mentorship that might not be available outside of an educational setting. Most importantly, this support system allows me to take creative risks and push the boundaries of my practice. My education provides a structured way to expand my knowledge base. Whether it's learning new techniques,

understanding art history, or engaging with critical theory, this knowledge directly feeds into my artistic practice. It helps me make informed decisions and adds depth to my work. One of the most valuable aspects of being in an academic setting is the regular feedback and critique from peers and instructors. This feedback loop is crucial for growth and improvement, helping me see my work from different perspectives and refine my approach.

Balancing both can be challenging, but it also teaches me valuable time management skills. I learned to prioritize tasks, set realistic goals, and maintain a disciplined approach to both my studies and my practice. In essence, my ongoing education and artistic practice are mixed together, each enriching the other and contributing to my overall growth as an artist. This balance has significantly impacted my recent projects, allowing me to create work that is both conceptually rich and technically proficient. The integration of my education and practice has not only enhanced my artistic abilities but also deepened my understanding of the art world and my place within it.

As someone who has exhibited both online and in physical galleries, how do you see the future of art exhibitions in the digital age?

The future of art exhibitions in the digital age is a fascinating and evolving landscape. As technology continues to advance, the ways in which art is created, displayed, and experienced are undergoing significant transformations. I think that three key trends shaping the future of art exhibitions are virtual and augmented reality, hybrid exhibitions, and global accessibility.

One of the most exciting developments in the digital age is the use of virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR) in art exhibitions. These virtual spaces allow for interactive and engaging experiences, letting viewers explore art in a three-dimensional environment from the comfort of their own homes.

Hybrid exhibitions blend physical and digital elements, and they are becoming increasingly popular. Hybrid exhibitions combine the tangible experience of physical galleries with the accessibility and innovation of digital platforms.

Furthermore, digital exhibitions are breaking down geographical barriers, allowing artists to reach a global audience. Online platforms and social media have made it easier for artists to share their work with a wider audience, regardless of their location. This increased accessibility is particularly important for emerging artists who may not have the resources to exhibit their work in traditional galleries. Additionally, digital exhibitions can be more inclusive, providing access to people with disabilities who might find it challenging to visit physical galleries. This not only enhances the viewer's experience but also opens up

new creative possibilities for artists.

What advice would you give to emerging artists who are also navigating their identity and heritage through their work?

Exploring my identity and heritage through my art has been a deeply personal and rewarding journey. As an emerging artist, I have found that embracing authenticity is very important. Staying true to my experiences and perspectives allows my unique voice to shine through, making my work more genuine and impactful.

Experimentation and research have also played significant roles in my artistic journey. I have learned not to be afraid of trying new techniques, mediums, or styles. This willingness to research has helped me find the best ways to express my identity and heritage, allowing my art to evolve and grow.

Connecting with the community has been invaluable. Engaging with other artists and communities who share similar backgrounds or interests has provided me with support, inspiration, and opportunities for collaboration. These connections have enriched my work and helped me feel less isolated in my journey. Telling my story through my art has been a powerful way to connect with my audience. Sharing my personal narrative allows others to understand my perspective and creates a deeper connection between my work and those who experience it.

Staying open to feedback has been essential for my growth as an artist. Constructive criticism has helped me improve and refine my work. While it can be challenging to hear, I have learned to trust my instincts and balance feedback with my vision.

Finally, seeking mentorship has provided me with invaluable guidance. Finding mentors who can support me through my artistic and personal journey has been

a source of strength and inspiration. Their experience and wisdom have helped me navigate the complexities of my path.

I would like to share with you my recent artwork themed "Playful Picturesque." This collection represents a whimsical take on the exploration of movement, emotions, and adventurous colorful figurative visuals. Through this theme, I aim to illustrate the connections between our daily encounters with our sexuality, identity, culture, and natural environment.

In my artwork, I use bright colors, along with figurative shapes and humorous elements, to deliberately create contrast and irony. This approach allows me to explore these serious connections in a lighthearted yet thought-provoking manner. As an interdisciplinary visual artist, I blend my works with these themes to create new pieces such as my self-portraits and the "erotic gay gaze," which are a blend of digital art and mixed media.

Additionally, my works titled "Grassland," which showcase the beauty of local grasslands, are incorporated within my "Playful Picturesque" artworks. These pieces highlight symbolic landscapes and natural patterns. The playfulness in my works explores and discovers the intricacies of movement, natural patterns, and symbolic landscapes.

My approach to art is multifaceted, reflecting a commitment to creating a dialogue on the inevitable connections that shape our world. Through "Playful Picturesque," I aim to engage viewers in a conversation about the complex interplay between our personal experiences and the broader cultural and natural environments we inhabit. This collection reflects my dedication to exploring and expressing the deep connections that define our existence.

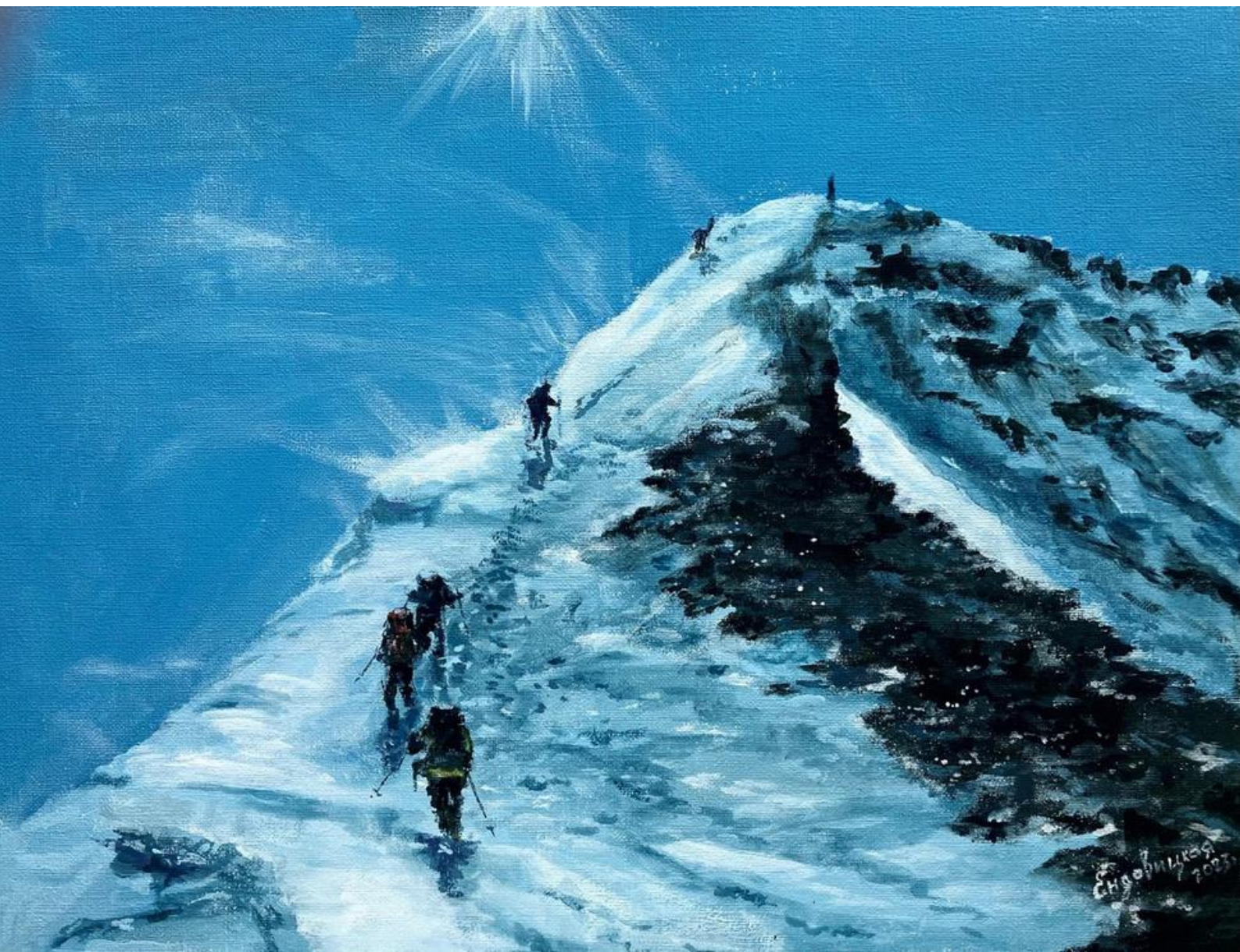


Earl Rina | Hop Out | 2024

The majority of my works are landscapes. Creating landscapes is a wonderful way to share my love for nature with others. I live and work in Krasnodar. An artist not by profession, but by desire.

— Zoya Endovitskaya

Zoya Endovitskaya | The Summit is Near





Yuda

— Interview

Cierra G. Rowe

Your artwork captures a deep sense of emotion and vulnerability. How do you channel these feelings into your work?

I was a very sensitive child who grew into a very sensitive woman. As a painter, I lean into this. The coldness and warmth of the past have, in part, shaped me. As an artist, all that you have are the things that you are composed of, to channel and capture into any given work of art. My paintings hold that sense of emotion and vulnerability because as a person, that's a very big piece of who I am. I translate the intimate and erratic combination of pain and beauty through paint, often favoring positive aspects over dark. I encode myself within my paintings through my selective palette and style by focusing on what is important to me and blurring everything else. There is an intense hunger in painting. I am addicted and once I've completed a new piece I feel satiated.

In your artist statement, you mention that your painting style was born out of trauma. Could you share how these experiences have



Cierra G. Rowe | Affection | 2024



influenced your creative process?

Trauma makes you see things differently, sometimes it reduces you to a shell of yourself. When you break, you break and there's no manual for how to unshatter yourself. Eventually it makes that which is truly important stand out and that which is not, fade. I remember caring about dumb things — silly things that, in hindsight, should not have mattered. Then things happened and in the aftermath I realized that I did not care about those things and felt shameful that I ever allowed them to distract me. Trauma has influenced my creative process by allowing me to wholly understand that I do not have to prove anything to anyone and that I do not have to keep up with the chaotic speed of modernity or the digital world and how it shrinks people. As an artist, I represent myself through my paintings. I'm allowed to change. I'm allowed to evolve and become better or fall down and get up again. I can transcribe soul and significance through my paintings, while holding tight to my artistic traditions, knowing that there is great liberation in being true to oneself.

Color seems to play a crucial role in your paintings. How do you choose the color palette for each piece, and what do these colors represent to you?

My sensitivity towards color guides my palette. It has always been a natural thing for me, going back as early as the age of 10 when, upon

viewing certain colors I became physically ill from seeing them. Colors have an intense effect on me. This in turn makes me fairly sensitive to them. The colors that I use within my paintings are, I would say, a source of comfort for me or an extension of personality.

You mentioned that you often wonder why it's called 'painting,' implying a deeper connection between pain and creation. Could you elaborate on this connection and how it manifests in your art?

I feel that there is always a reason behind the creation of any given work of art - unseen things that compel an artist to create their masterpiece or go further by throwing themselves into their craft. Often, that reason is revealed to be pain. The most tortured people often create the most beautiful works of art. Their sadness, strife and anguish seem to turn them inward, over and over until they have formed a bond with their tools, leading to works of art that inexplicably connect with others on a much deeper level than surface. Personally, I began isolating myself at a very young age and because I was reclusive - I only communicated through my art. Overtime, that led to me grasping a deeper understanding of art as a whole and what color and emotion is capable of.

Your work seems to blur the lines between abstract and emotional expression. How do



Cierra G. Rowe | Euphoric | 2024

you balance these elements in your art?

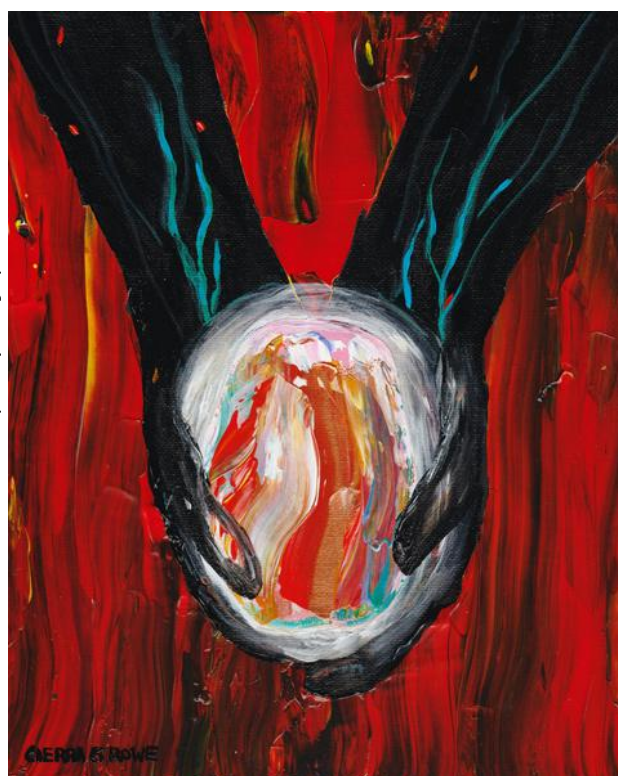
I am not sure that there is a way for me to balance them. One feeds the other. I think, more than anything, I let what is inside come out, with the only focus on balance being how light and dark work together in the medium.

What messages or emotions do you hope viewers take away from your paintings?

As an artist, I have no control in how someone else interprets my paintings. To some, art is nothing and to others, it is everything. A painting that I spend 6 hours on may be extraordinary to me and hold great meaning, whereas to others maybe it's only a picture on a screen or in a book, nothing more nothing less. One has to stop themselves from getting caught up in how others perceive their creations, it's bad for the mind and poison for the soul. Regarding painting; there is a work of art out there for everyone, of this I am certain. I feel that most works of art have their mysteries. It is stimulating to feel as though you are a part of them - through gazing into them. Beyond that, I can't honestly say that I hope for any particular reaction or takeaway.

Looking back at your artistic journey, what advice would you give to young artists who are just beginning to explore their own forms of self-expression?

Acceptance and praise are temporary — passion and growth are what stick around. Build on that passion. Believe in yourself.



Cierra G. Rowe | Empathy | 2024

— Interview

Christin Margaret Zelenka

Your work often features insects and birds intertwined with natural elements. What draws you to these subjects, and how do they reflect your connection to Southern Louisiana?

My living in Southern Louisiana brings me in direct communication with diverse wildlife and habitats. My painted subjects are directly reflected by my surroundings. My studio is encircled by old trees and overgrown gardens filled with, yes, insects and birds, but even small mammals and reptiles. Butterflies, bees, birds, etc., are alive around me when I paint and sketch. I try to paint a glimpse of their world.

Can you walk us through your process of creating an encaustic painting? What are the



challenges and rewards of working with this medium?

My encaustic process begins with a detailed drawing and a wood panel. My drawings are traced onto vellum and, depending on the size of the drawing, I will paint the vellum in oil or gouache. The vellum paintings determine my background colors and the amount of encaustic medium layers applied to the wood panels. I fuse the layers with a heat gun, building up to three to five layers. My greatest challenge with working in the encaustic medium is the layering process. Too much encaustic medium, and you lose the integrity of the vellum image or background painting, and not enough means the vellum image is not secure. What I love about the encaustic medium is its flexibility. I can create texture by carving, depth with layering of objects, movement by reheating the encaustic medium, or make the surface of the encaustic painting as smooth as glass.

The writing on the back of your vellum paintings sometimes shows through to the front, adding an extra layer of meaning. What role does this hidden or partially revealed text play in your art?



Christin Zelenka | Treasure Thistle Bee | 2024

About the writing, the viewer is drawn in by what looks like readable text behind the vellum painting. However, after close examination, the writings on vellum appear in mirror form. Even if the viewer had a mirror, the graphite gets smudged, and letters by chance are removed due to the heat of the encaustic medium. The text becomes archaic and non-readable, but the viewer recognizes a language. The writing becomes a secret language between nature and the mystical world, something dreamlike that remains a mystery. A mystery that lingers in the viewer's mind.

You incorporate mica and other mixed media into your paintings. What guides your decision to include these elements, and how do they enhance the overall atmosphere of your work?

Mica and elements on the surface of the paintings create something tangible, something that one can grasp. However, it is an illusion, and we can't wrap our hands around it. The elements and mica add to the dreamlike quality of the encaustic paintings, creating a glimpse of something, for example, a bird in flight. We register movement and imagery, but it is fleeting.

You mentioned that your paintings have a dreamlike quality due to the multiple layers of encaustic medium. How do you decide on the number of layers, and what effect are you trying to achieve?

To create a dreamlike painting, I layer encaustic medium over the background so the viewer will see glimpses of background color. To create



movement, I will build up to three to five layers. But I don't stop there. I will then burn off layers to show more background and create movement in the encaustic.

How does your background in Southern Louisiana influence the color palette and themes of your artwork?

Rich olive greens, browns, and dark blues are my color palette, which calls to mind the murky swamp water and beautiful bald cypress trees that make up Southern Louisiana. Growing up in Southern Louisiana, you are comfortable being surrounded by water, heat, and humidity. Here, humans are an afterthought. The sidewalks crack because plants are breaking through. Houses bend under the weight of vines. To escape the hot summers, my family would take us out in a small boat to enjoy the breeze and relief of the lake and rivers. It is here that I grew to love the moss that hangs on the bald cypress trees and the beautiful birds that sit and watch. I learned to share the same waters with alligators who move along when they hear loud noises. Even now, when I need inspiration, I will head out to a body of water and breathe in all my surroundings.

Can you share more about your studio, Softly Painted Stories Studio? How does this space contribute to your creative process?

Softly Painted Stories Studio is a shed that I converted into a creative workspace. Having a designated space to paint helps me to have clear intentions about what I am doing in the space. As I open the studio doors, I know what needs to be done and let the wildness of nature in.



— Interview

Carly Maling

What inspired the concept of "Origami Pinhole"? How did you come up with the idea of using photographic paper in this unique way?

My early work was very performance-based. A lot of the work I was creating was still based in storytelling but in the more stereotypical sense. And a lot of the work I was creating was rooted in spoken word. But I wanted to break out from that and start exploring ways of taking the performance concepts I was working with and applying them to more traditional art forms - drawing, painting, printmaking.

At the time, I remember I was working on a performance where each movement I made was centered around a particular set I designed. But the set was actually tape on the floor (in the shape of a house) that dictated my movements depending on how my character felt at the time. There was a lot of research involved, and I can't remember the particulars, but it all boiled down to how each mark and shape I made out of tape related to



different emotions. For example, a broken staggered line was meant to convey a sad emotion.

So I ended up taking that idea and applying it to photographic paper in the darkroom.

Can you describe the process of creating an "Origami Pinhole" piece? What challenges do you face while working on these pieces?

Once I got the theory down, the process was fairly straightforward. I'd take a piece of photographic paper and do an action with it. And every time, I would have to ensure that the chemical side was being folded in on itself. So, I would either be scrunching it up, folding it, or tearing the paper in on itself. Cutting a very small hole for the light to go through (usually in a corner). Putting the paper in a tray, running outside - for at

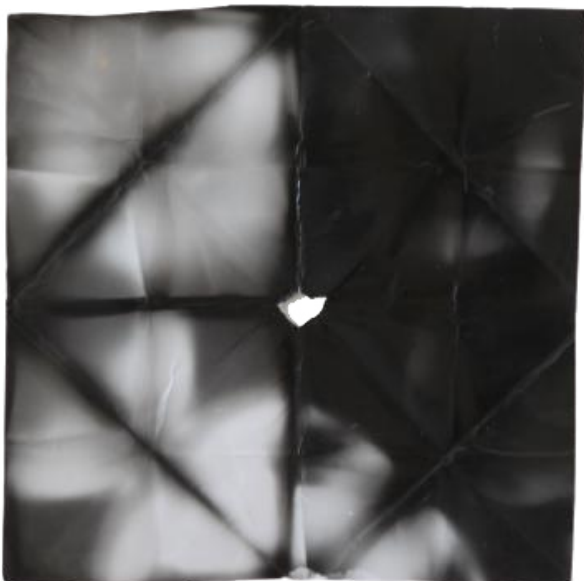
most 30 seconds. And then going through the developing process.

The greatest challenge was figuring out how long to expose each piece to light for. A lot of the first pieces I created came out entirely black because I was outside for too long.

What's next for you in your creative journey? Are there any new projects or ideas you're excited to explore?

This body of work was created all the way back in 2017 when I was in the first year of my first degree. Since then, I've gone on to do a lot of different things. But at the moment, I'm really focused on teaching while starting to build up stock for craft fairs. I've spent a long time working on stuff for other people, so it's going to be great striking out on my own.

Can you tell us more about your journey into the creative industry? How did you start working in such diverse creative roles?



Honestly, it's been out of necessity. I got made redundant from my role at Laura Ashley very early on in the pandemic. Then the industry completely shut down, and I really struggled to get any other work in a photography studio. So, I just had to adapt. And quickly. I found that a lot of the accessible work was in marketing. So I started writing more and asking people I knew for paid work. It was okay for a while, but the further I got, the more I found it wasn't for me.

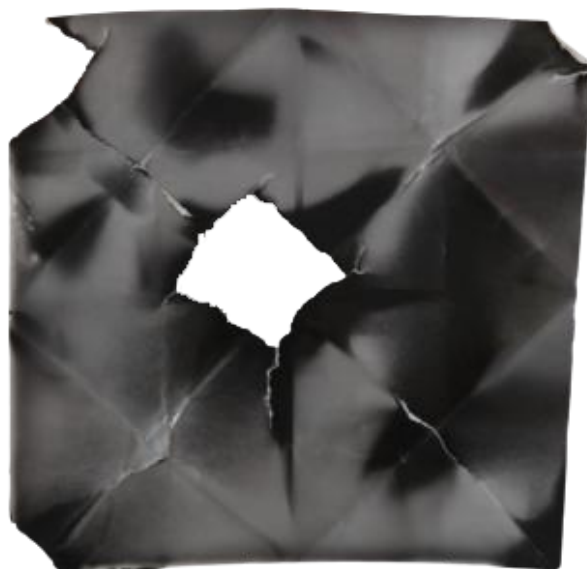
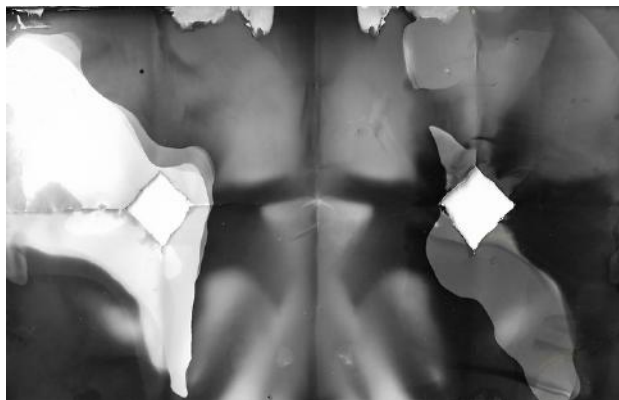
I'm a visual person. And unless I really know what I'm talking about, I find it incredibly difficult to put things into words. After one burnout too many, I finally realized it was time to make a considered change away from freelancing. I've been teaching in some capacity for a while. I've spent the past year working as a teaching assistant at Ashcroft Technology Academy. Before that, I worked at several summer camps and youth care homes, which I thoroughly enjoyed. However, I always felt that the creative aspect was missing. So, I suppose art teaching has been the

more natural fit for me.

What role does teaching play in your life now, and how has your varied career influenced your approach to education?

I've always been really passionate about trying to provide opportunities for young people. I spent a large part of my youth as part of a group called ART31, where we would band together to create social change in an area where the arts were underdeveloped. I found myself talking to the local council about how more young people should have more opportunities to be involved in the arts. I got to work with the arts council on a few projects, which eventually led to me taking part in the Margate Bookie Young Producers programme, where I got to lead on my own exhibition turned art festival for a few years with the same focus in mind.

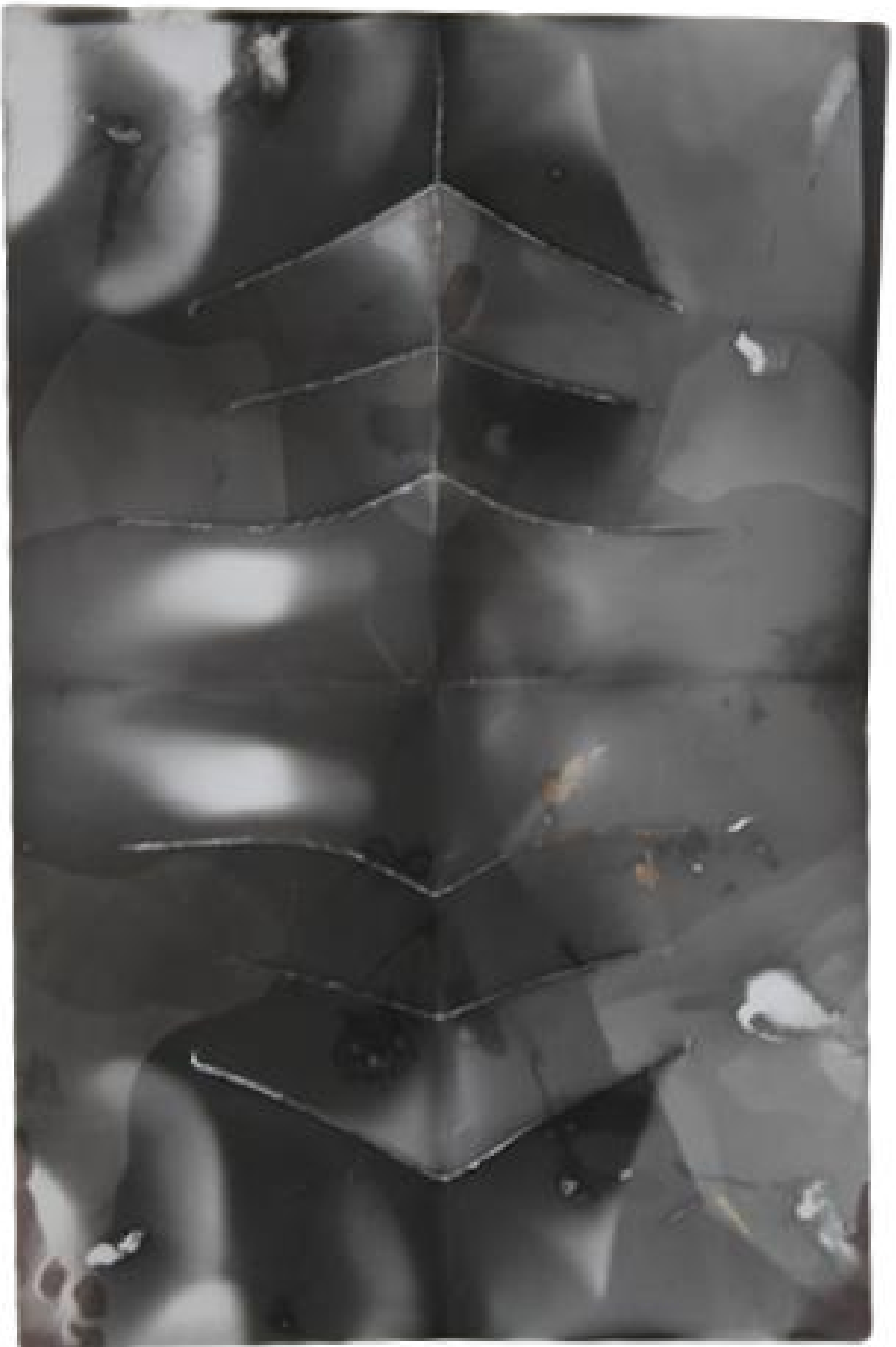
But trying to run your own business, company, festival, exhibition, or whatever alone is incredibly difficult. Especially while working full time alongside it. So, I decided to pull the plug on that and bring all of my learning from these experiences into a new full-time teaching career.



As a neurodivergent artist, how has your experience shaped your creative process and the projects you choose to work on?

Honestly, in the past, I've put my neurodivergence to the side. Employers have become a lot more inclusive in recent years. But when I first started out, I felt like I had to hide that part of myself, which only caused problems for me later down the line. So, now I've learned to prioritize myself and only take on projects that serve me well as a person.

LinkedIn influencer Ellie Middleton says it best. She's a very clever person, but she spent so long working in corporate roles, which only led to her having meltdowns and being unable to focus. But at the time, she didn't know why she was the way that she was. Eventually, she got an ADHD diagnosis and then changed her career and life to suit her needs. The body has this weird way of showing you how you really feel, even if your brain tries to ignore it.



My name is **Natalia Danilova**, and I am a graphic designer and artist (the member of International Federation of Artists and national Artist's Union of Russia, department). My journey in art began in a school art studio, where I created my first painting and realized that I have the soul of an artist. Later, I graduated from the Ural State University of Architecture and Art (Yekaterinburg) with a degree in Graphic Design, and the Saint Petersburg State Academic Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture named after I. E. Repin with a degree in Art Theory and History. I manage design projects, as well as dedicate significant attention to hand-drawn graphics, and participate in various Russian and international exhibitions.

Natalia Danilova | At the Edge of the World | 2019





— Interview

Monika Benkovic

Can you tell us about the inspiration behind your 2024 photography series?

My 2024 analogue photo series was inspired by capturing special moments as they were happening. I captured many digital photos during this time but I reserved the film rolls for special moments that would come up spontaneously. The camera was always by my side but I was careful of when to use it. Each photo not only captures a moment but has a backstory, weaving together pivotal points in my travels.

I think it is worth mentioning that my goal for 2024 was to actually release an e-zine each month which shared poetry and short stories from my travels as they were happening. The photo's became complimentary to these stories.

What were the most significant influences during your travels?

I am most drawn to culture and locals when I travel. The most significant influences were my interactions with locals. I am always very grateful for the time and exchange of energy and for the permission to take their photo. Sometimes I am interacting with total strangers, other times the photos depict a memorable experience with a very special person/people in my life. Architecture and lighting typically draw my attention as well, often in combination.



How does analogue photography enhance your storytelling compared to digital photography?

Analogue captures the moment as it's happening and you have to wait to experience it a second time unlike digital photography where you can instantly go back, edit and redo. There is a practice of patience and selection with analogue. My rule is generally one photo per experience/moment/environment. I am never in a rush to complete the roll just to develop the film. There is a bit of "divine timing" to the experience. And of course, when I get the photos back, the first viewing is like opening the greatest present, often filled with a rollercoaster of emotions as each image takes me back to the story that has been captured.

Each of your photos seems to tell a story. How do you approach capturing these narratives through your lens?

Thank you for recognizing this. Yes, there is most certainly a story behind each image. I have always written stories - writing is my first love.

Typically I'll be having an experience at a place or with a person during my travels and I'll have my camera ready to capture the story in image form. Other times I'll see a framing of objects that I feel inspired to capture. This happens a lot when I'm walking. I walk a lot, it's probably my favourite thing to do in a new place because I get to know the culture in a different way, I always meet people and I get a real feel for the energy of a place from walking.

What challenges did you face while photographing in different cultural contexts, and how did they shape the final images?

I like taking candid photos of people but don't want to be rude or sneaky, so asking for permission is important to me. Sometimes this can be challenging if there is a language barrier or if the opportunity has passed. It rarely happens as I generally form some kind of connection first - a friendly smile, a hello, a hand gesture. Even when language is a barrier or in challenging moments, I do find that energy can speak volumes and this has been helpful.

Your work blends visual and literary elements. How do you balance these two forms of expression in your art?

I think that my genuine interest in people from all walks of life from a very young age has influenced the places I travel to. And through this I have learned to balance the visual and the literary - when I couldn't take photos, I was writing. When I couldn't write, I was listening. Basically, I had to put the experience somewhere and that fostered a balance between these elements. I enjoy merging the written and the visual elements of the stories I am sharing together.

Can you share a specific moment from your travels in 2024 that had a profound impact on your work?

There are definitely a few that come to mind but one in particular was when we found a pregnant cow in the back of the ashram I was living in in Rishikesh. The calf had breached and the mother was in severe pain. A group of us stayed with her

Monika Benkovic | Agni | 2024





Monika Benkovic | Vrindavan | 2024

until the vet came and eventually we were all helping to pull the baby out who had passed away hours prior, unbeknownst to us. I did capture this experience with my camera. It was very intense, between the two extremes of life and death at the same time. When I developed that particular roll and came to the photo, I was overwhelmed with emotion as if reliving the experience again. For me, this cemented that storytelling photography has the same impact as sense memory, similar to how scents (smell), textures (touch) and other senses can generate these impacts. Also waiting for the roll to develop gave some space to process that experience, as opposed to if the photo was captured digitally and I could see it right away. That space in between the capture and the developing time was needed.

What advice would you give to aspiring photographers who are just beginning their journey in analogue photography?

Analogue photography is beyond point-and-shoot - it is feeling, it is revelation into the topics/subjects you are capturing. My advice would be to pay attention to that feeling, capture what inspires you and know that it is not just about "taking" the photo - you are giving something, there is an energy exchange and a great trust in your intuition. Intuition is like a muscle - it strengthens through practise and this also helps nurture our empathy towards others.

I would like to invite readers who are interested in more of my work with travel storytelling and photography to my Medium and Substack platforms. Here are the direct links:

Medium:

<https://medium.com/@dirtythoughtsinchurch>

Substack:

<https://dirtythoughtsinchurch.substack.com>

Instagram: @monika_benkovic



Monika Benkovic | Block Boys | 2024

Monika Benkovic | Street Art | 2024



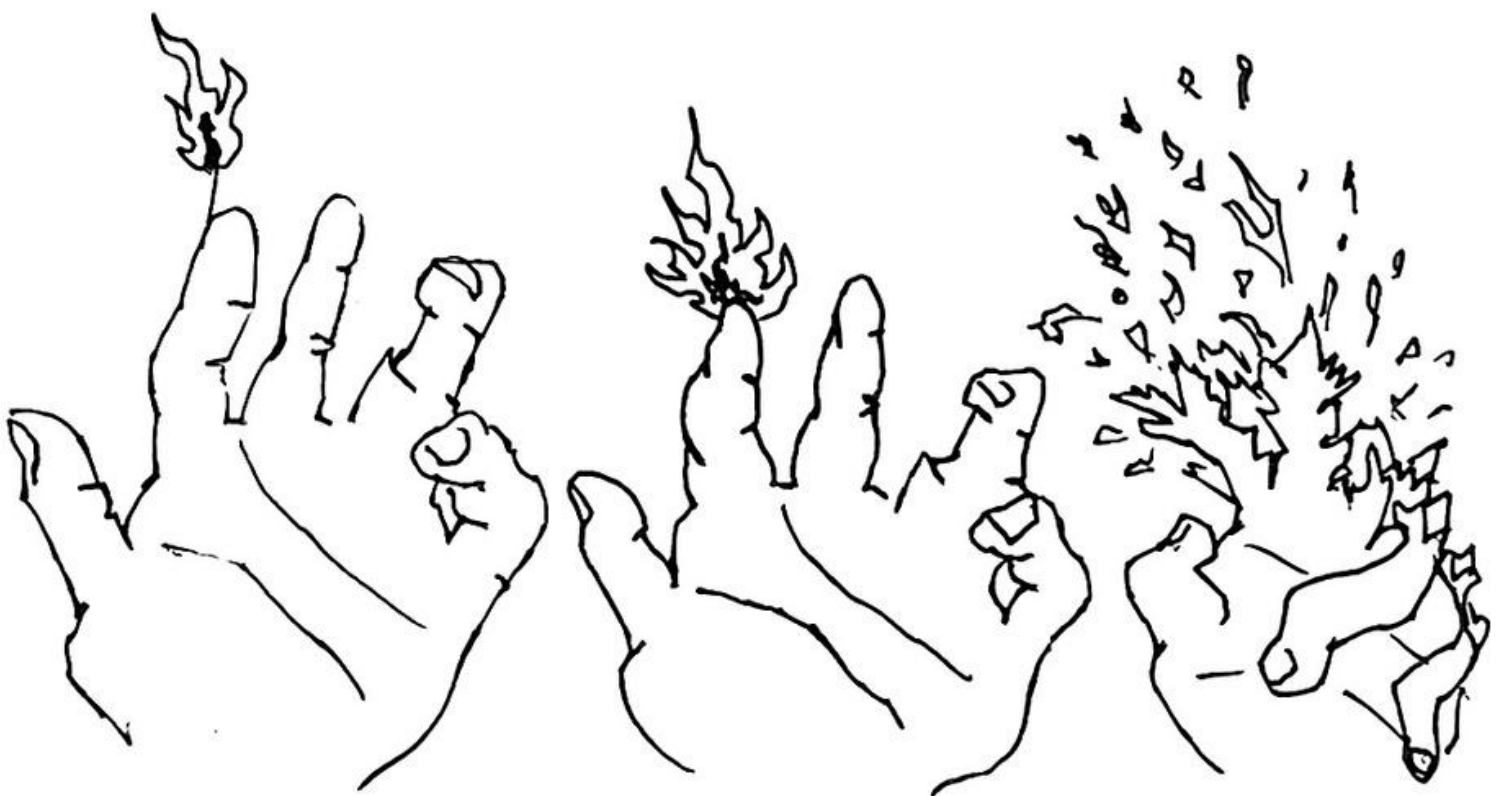


Harris Singer is a Queer and southern illustrator, performance artist, playwright, and poet. In his work, he explores intimacy and violence through queer maximalism, meditative creation, and absurdism. His work has been seen at La MaMa Galleria in NYC and on many peoples bodies as tattoos.

Artist Statement

I seek out moments of extreme passion within painful and scary experiences of love and lust. Much of my illustrative art uses wrestlers as a reference point to both explore queer magnetism within hyper-masculine landscapes and to contemplate the innate violence of intimacy.

I started drawing every day after a psychotic break three years ago. You might see the influence of that in my work.



— Interview

Ekaterina Sycheva

Can you share more about your artistic journey, from your beginnings in a small industrial town to becoming a multidisciplinary designer?

The directions of my artistic path have undoubtedly been influenced by my professional work. I've always enjoyed learning additional skills. Each workplace allowed me to gain experience working with different materials and to try myself in various fields of design. My first job was at a small printing house located in a remote industrial area of Chelyabinsk. The value of this experience lies in the close acquaintance with various printing techniques and material processing methods. I could observe and control how everything I imagined materialized. After moving to Saint Petersburg, I got involved in event design. This period marked the beginning of my exploration of motion design and animation. Currently, my work involves developing branding and communication design for an IT company. This activity requires the skill of creating 3D graphics. Thus, I have gained experience in creating visuals in many different ways, but collage technique has always been my favorite.



How do the environments of industrial towns and residential districts influence your work, particularly your fascination with depicting decay and abandonment?

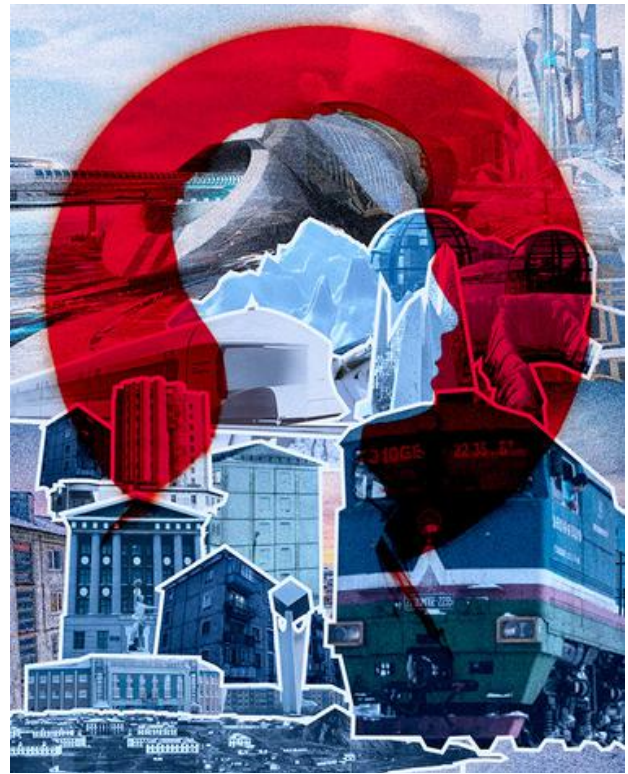
I see a certain romance in the ordinary course of life. Neglected houses, and districts express through their appearance a memory of the past. Abandoned places look mysterious, inviting you to uncover their secrets. In my works, I show how time can "stop" in such locations. I am interested in expressing this through the contrast of decay with the rapid development of the surrounding world. If I depict a specific place, I include interesting facts from history in the work — revealing its secrets.

Your work often incorporates visual metaphors. What is your process for developing these metaphors, and how do they connect to your themes of social issues and emotional dramas?

To create a visual, I first need to formulate my idea in text. I like to play with words when searching for metaphors, turning the figurative meaning of words into the literal and vice versa. This process generates visual images in my mind. I may look for aphorisms, proverbs, quotes, historical references, and statistical data on the chosen topic. Often, I draw analogies between things/phenomena from completely different areas of life. The greater the differences, the more interesting it is to talk about the points



Ekaterina Sycheva | Cyberpunk in Russia | 2018



Ekaterina Sycheva | Vorkuta | 2021

of contact. This approach allows me to vividly express various social issues and convey my feelings through visual examples.

How do you approach the integration of typography and hand-drawn elements into your digital collages?

Typography is an integral part of poster art, and in collages, it looks just as organic. Since my ideas often start with text, in the finished works, the graphic forms of words and visuals resonate and reveal each other's meaning. Hand-drawing elements in collages add an element of surprise to the result of the creative process. This technique turns photo fragments into the main source of inspiration, into the starting point for organizing the space and structure of the visual work. The objects drawn on top of the collage become accents, connecting elements for the overall meaning of the work.

You participated in significant exhibitions like the 2021 'My Page' exhibition at the Erarta Museum and the Uruguay Cartel Biennial in 2023. How have these opportunities shaped your artistic practice?

Large projects, especially international ones, have a positive impact on motivation and inspiration. I like to think that my works start to "live their own lives." They "meet" people, travel to other countries, which I have not yet had the opportunity to visit. I am also interested in learning about the creative paths of colleagues with whom I exhibit in the same project and apparently share a common wavelength. Exhibitions are not only about attracting attention to something beautiful or problematic. They are an opportunity to discover inspiring contemporaries and become part of the design community. In my work, I have begun to study both modern visual trends and historical graphic styles more deeply.

What message do you hope to convey through your work addressing social issues and mental struggles?

In everyday life, we get caught up in routines that prevent us from being aware of many things; we do everything automatically. I would like to show things from a different angle, things that perhaps no one pays attention to. I want to talk not only about problems but also to show beauty and curiosities where they are hard to notice. My works are imbued with melancholy but at the same time with a sense of attachment, a sense



Ekaterina Sycheva | Yard | 2023

of kinship with the place. We do not choose where to be born and whom to love. We only decide what to do with our feelings next. While advocating for fighting certain problems, I would not want people to get stuck in negativity and stop seeing the beauty in the world around them. Life consists of contradictions, and we need to learn how to exist in this paradigm.

You are now part of the Intercontinental Biennial with a poster on 'Andy Warhol.' How did Warhol's influence inspire your creative process for this project?

I imitated the pop art style in color and the character of the graphics. The texture of the cans is used as a reference to Andy Warhol's works. The creation of the main visual metaphor was inspired by Andy Warhol's quote, "As soon as you stop wanting something, you get it." The central objects of the collage are hands. Each of us has lines on our palms, and some people believe that these lines chart our destiny. Therefore, the collage depicts lines in the form of a path from the starting point to the point of achieving the goal.

ANDY WARHOL



AS SOON
AS YOU STOP
WANTING
SOMETHING
YOU GET IT

Contents

Interviews

Bianca Beltramello	4	Julian Bachur	72
Marek Świątek	8	Veronicka Nowickowa	78
Sleepr	12	Djamila Fierek	82
Ben Randall	18	Simona Gazzotti	88
Rayna Loos	24	Irina Talalay	90
Alix Gaytan	30	Earl Rina	92
Harold Khan	36	Cierra G. Rowe	98
Sara Dürst	42	Christin Margaret Zelenka	100
Mezerahyah	48	Carly Maling	102
Natasja Knap	54	Monika Benkovic	108
Lori Evensen	60	Ekaterina Sycheva	114
Regina de Geit	66		

Featured artists

Natali Antonovich	16	VOLT IN HOLT	64
Izabela Ciastoń-Pałus	22	Marta Canals	70
Christian Gainey	28	Ács Anett Kitty	76
Maria La Rosa	34	Tatiana Igosheva	86
Anna Grigorenko	40	Zoya Endovitskaya	96
Maria Pankratova	46	Natalia Danilova	106
Ana Salinas Mata	52	Harris Singer	112
Ernest Compta Llinàs	58		



VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

VISUAL ART JOURNAL

NO. 8

SEPTEMBER 2024

