



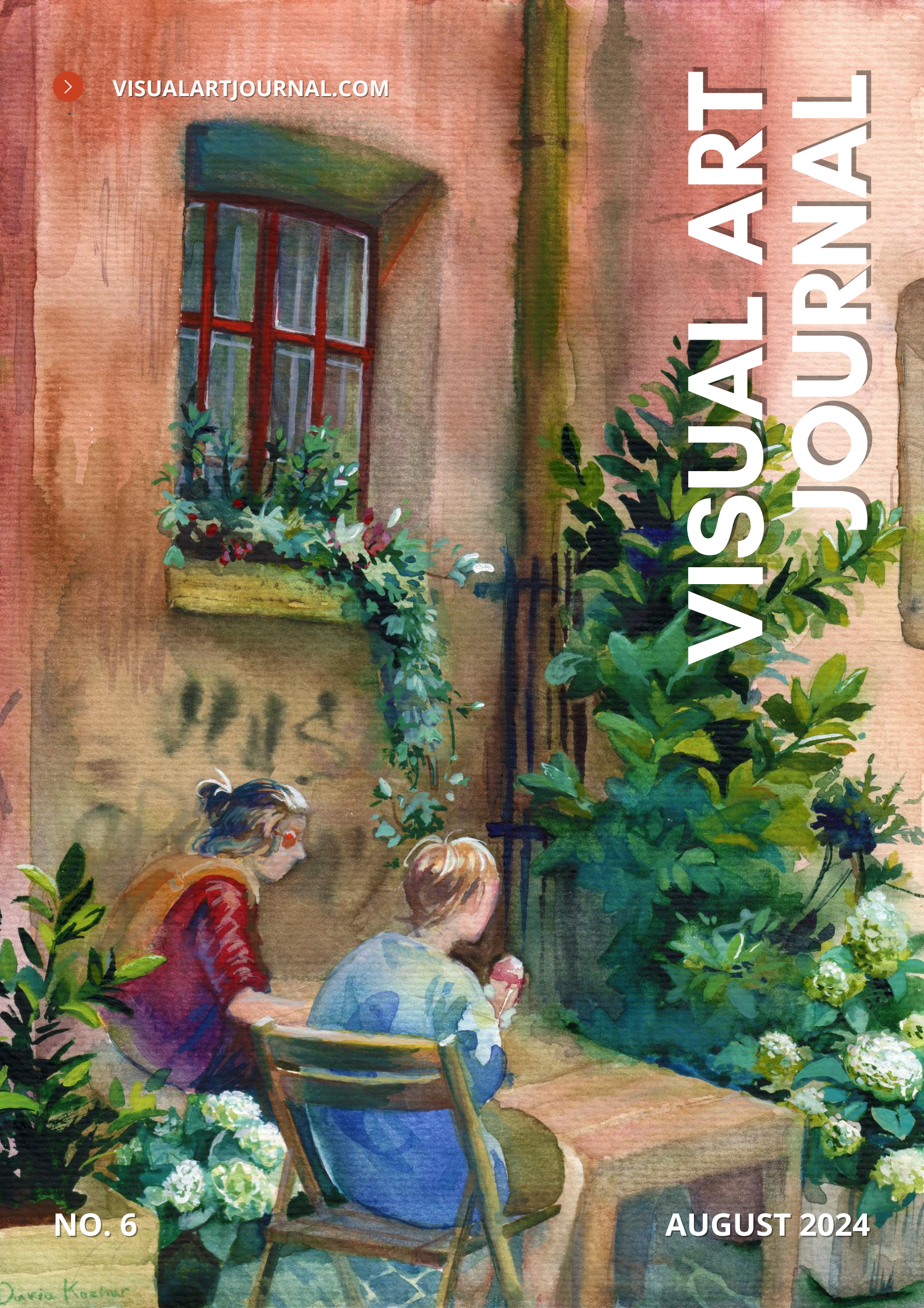
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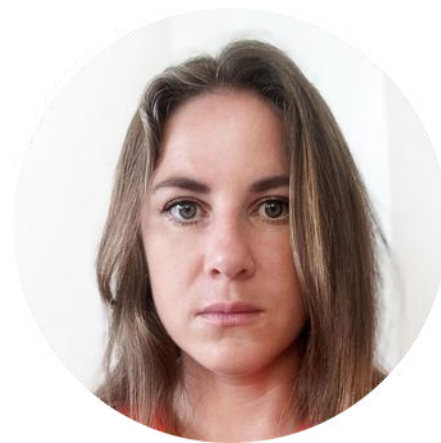
AUGUST 2024

David Kozhur





— Intro



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello, dear reader,

You are holding the sixth issue of our magazine, and I am incredibly happy to welcome you. I hope you will enjoy this issue just as much as we did while working on it.

This edition is vibrant, juicy, and full of color and unique characters—just like August should be. Summer has reached its peak, filling many of us with joy, light, and warmth. For some, this is a time of active work when everything around inspires creativity, while others prefer to take a break and fill themselves with new experiences.

For our magazine, this summer has been a milestone. We released our first issue and received a warm and positive response, realizing that what we are doing is important and needed.

Enjoy reading—more than 100 pages of aesthetic pleasure await you!

On the Front Cover:

Daria Kozhar

Alley
2024

On the Back Cover:

Kathleen Demeyer

The journey

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

Born in Paris in 1994, **Clara Vardanian** is a collage artist. She draws her inspiration from the roots of her dual culture: Franco-Uzbek. Clara VARDANIAN's collages are now exhibited in many private collections.

Clara Vardanian | Affiche lacérée | 2024



My art delves into the labyrinth of the human psyche and the inner self, capturing the delicate interplay between our conscious and unconscious worlds. The textured canvas of the handmade paper serves as a portal, merging the tangible and intangible. Through dreamlike scenes and vibrant hues using mostly watercolour, natural pigments along with glistening gold and Archival Ink. Through a fusion of abstract forms, symbolic imagery, and surrealist elements, I strive to reveal the hidden emotions, thoughts, and dreams that shape our identities. My work invites viewers on a journey of introspection, encouraging them to confront and embrace their inner landscapes. I create layered, evocative pieces that mirror the complexity of the mind. Each artwork is a window into the depths of self-discovery, offering a space for contemplation and connection with the universal human experience. Through my art, I seek to illuminate the unseen and to celebrate the beauty of the higher self.

— Archanaa Manavalan



Archanaa Manavalan | The am nyc





2023
ELLIE LEE
COLLECTION

아홉번째 달력



— Interview

Ellie

Could you tell us a bit about your background and how you got started in digital art?

Although I majored in life sciences, my internships at Yahoo and SK Telecom, a South Korean telecommunications company, steered me toward a career in product management and business development within the app/web sector at a Korean IT company. My job required me to communicate with professionals from various fields, including designers. To enhance my interactions with designers, I learned to use Adobe Illustrator, where I began creating digital art.

Utilizing functions such as line drawing, shape forming, and color filling, I designed my own character, “Cabbit,” initially for PC wallpapers. This marked the beginning of my digital art activities. Over time, viewing all objects as collections of shapes enabled me to draw diverse themes using just a mouse. After 2022, I started drawing with Wacom tablet and iPad. I have compiled my annual drawings into calendars, including the most recent one for 2024, which is the tenth calendar I’ve designed.



What inspired you to create 'Cabbit,' and how has this character evolved over the years?

During my youth, I frequently visited a café near school to spend time with a friend. One day, I casually doodled on a napkin, drawing an animal from my imagination that turned out to be quite cute. This doodling became a regular activity and gradually turned into a medium for self-expression. Some people thought the character looked like a rabbit, while others saw it as a cat, which led me to naturally combine these views into the name “Cabbit.” People who know me can recognize my work, even if it’s just Cabbit instead of my name on a card.

Cabbit’s appearance has changed based on the tools I used: its form was slim with long ears when I drew with a

mouse, but has become rounder and more bear-like now that I use a Wacom tablet or iPad. The evolution of Cabbit over the past decade is evident in the calendars I've created, with changes such as the presence, absence, and reappearance of whiskers.



Ellie | Cabbit History

How do you integrate elements of traditional Korean art into your digital works?

I consider digital just a tool for drawing, similar to a sketchbook but existing in a

digital environment. I observe Korean cultural heritage sites across various cities and depict them in my digital sketchbook. During this process, the results are reinterpreted in my unique style and captured in the sketchbook.

Do you think the rise of digital art has changed the way people perceive and appreciate traditional art forms?

In modern society, we encounter numerous new technologies. This has given rise to digital art, which is becoming more visible in our daily lives. However, I do not believe this has changed the way people perceive and appreciate traditional forms of art. The public has become aware of "digital art" as a new field, and the proliferation of exhibitions where people can experience digital art indicates that the influence of this field has grown somewhat.

Ellie | NFTNYC2024





Ellie | Water party in the moon jar | 2023

How has the experience been exhibiting your work in different cities around the world? Have you noticed any differences in how your art is received in different cultures?

One advantage of digital art is the ability to apply online and submit works as digital files, which eliminates the need for physical transportation of the artwork. This has allowed me to exhibit in various cities while residing in Seoul. I was surprised by the number of exhibitions seeking “digital art” when I searched for “open call for artists.” People have shown interest in the blend of traditional Korean objects and the 12 animals, and I often heard that the 12 animals are cute.

Can you share any memorable moments or feedback from your exhibitions?

In 2022, my growing interest in the NFT sector led me to connect with other digital artists and participate in my first

group exhibition. I have since continued my active involvement in the NFT field. In April 2024, I took part as an artist at NFT.NYC 2024 in New York, where my artwork was displayed alongside those of artists from around the world. During the event, I visited New York to view the works of other digital artists and engaged in discussions about art with them, making it a particularly memorable experience due to our shared passion for art.

What message or feeling do you hope to convey to viewers through your art?

I strive to create warm, relatable stories that are easily understandable to anyone. It would bring me great joy if my artwork could provide healing to someone.

Recently, I have started a new initiative where I physically paint the digital drawings of animals that I had previously worked on. I plan to continue exploring the exciting connections between digital and physical mediums.

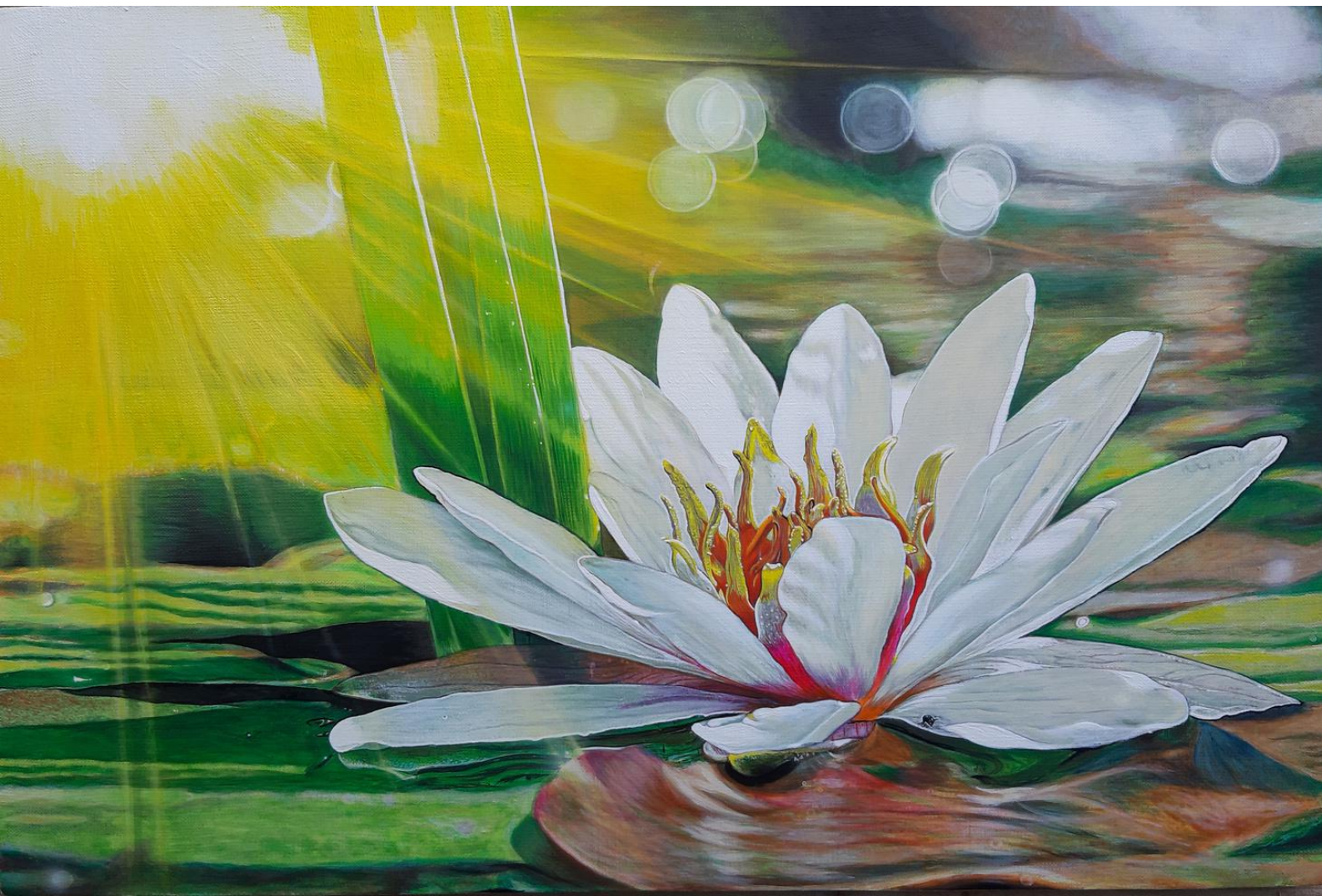


Ellie | White Porcelain made by Ellie | 2023

I paint moments, encouraging people to cherish every instant and live in the present. Some force, an energy within, leaves no choice; it's impossible not to create. It bursts forth, grows, and cannot be stopped. Each painting symbolizes its reflection in beauty and grace. I use vibrant acrylic paints, and through a unique technique of multiple layers, working through each texture and drawing every detail, I embed this meaning, trying to inspire, awaken, and revive the same force and energy in the viewer. This force leaves no choice... My sensitivity to everything, the importance of details, connect the inner meaning and the painted image into one.

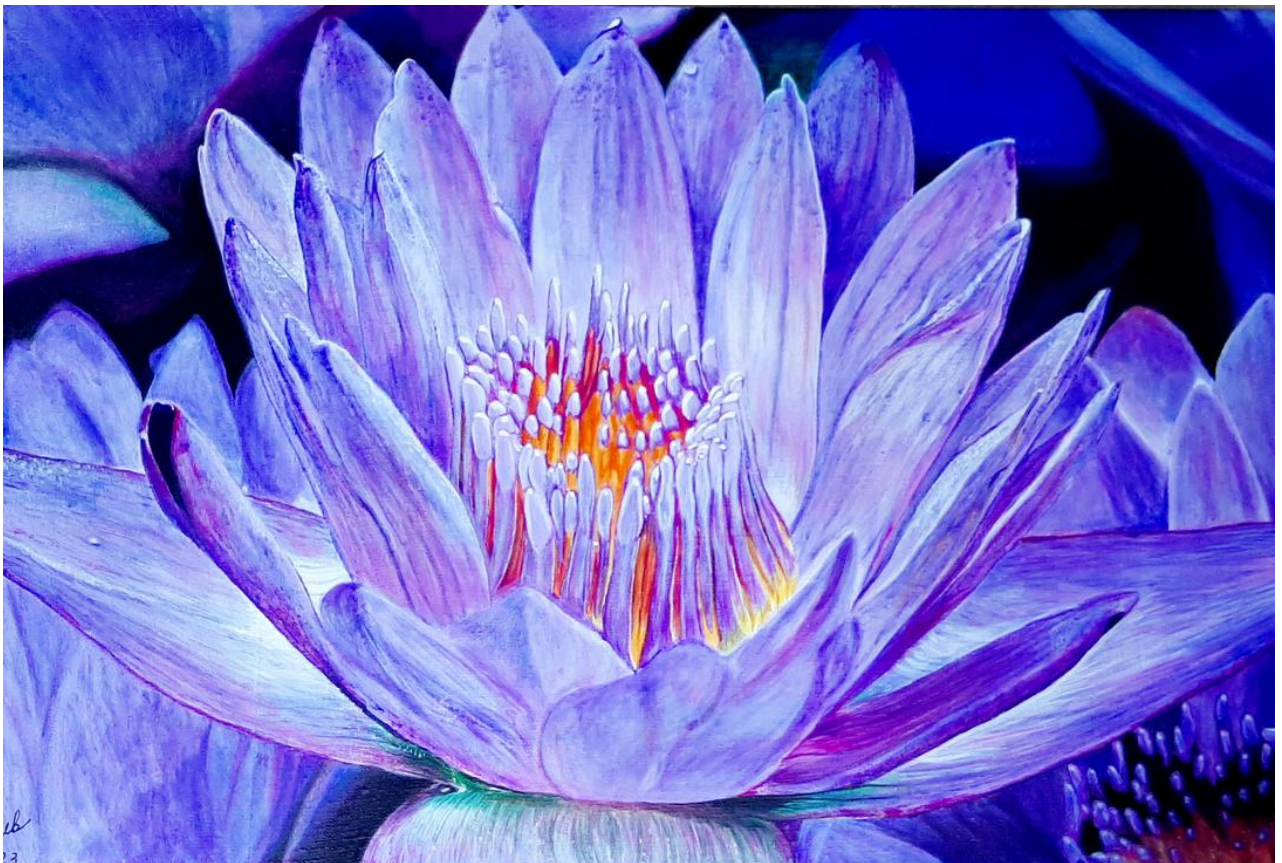
— Lazarev Evgeny

Evgeny Lazarev | Petals of Happiness | 2024





Evgeny Lazarev | Magical Petals | 2024



Evgeny Lazarev | Petals of Equilibrium | 2024

Irina Vaneeva is a graphic artist who lives in Copenhagen. She loves to draw food illustrations and botanical motifs for commercial graphics. Since 2015, she has successfully created graphics for microstocks and her food illustrations are in high demand for packaging design and cafe decoration around the world. Irina enjoys mixed media, paper applications, and collages. She is skilled in vector graphics, and digital and traditional techniques, including sketching with watercolors, ink, and liners for food illustrations. She often creates both individual elements for designs and complete compositions for interior posters. Her dream is to illustrate a recipe book.



Irina Vaneeva | Birds | 2024



— Interview

Vikky Mir

Can you tell us about your artistic journey and how you started creating vector graphics and illustrations?

I always knew that I was meant to be an artist. I've been drawing for as long as I can remember. However, I used to earn a living in other ways, having mastered four non-creative professions. The fifth profession I learned was as a vector graphic artist.

At 28, I was hospitalized due to heart problems. I thought I might not survive. At that moment, I regretted only one thing – that I hadn't tried to show the world my art, even though it always seemed to me that art was the one thing I was born for. Less than a year after that hospital situation, I began drawing professionally. Since 2019, I have been a vector graphics artist for microstocks."

What inspired you to begin selling your paintings in 2023, and how has that experience been for you?

Undoubtedly, drawing is one of the things that makes me happy in life. I enjoy creativity in all its forms, but at one point, I realized that working with vector graphics didn't fully reveal my potential. I wanted to experiment with different



materials, create three-dimensional paintings with oil paints, use acrylics and textured paste, and work with space.

You could say that vector graphics became 'too small' for me. I am very grateful for this direction and have learned a lot from it; moreover, I still sometimes love creating vector images. At the same time, I feel that it's time for me to move forward. Working on canvas provides that experience.

Your project "Women: Inside and Outside" is very intriguing. Can you elaborate on the themes and messages you aim to convey through this series?

Thank you very much for the high praise of the 'Women: Inside and Outside' project! One of my favorite subjects in art is the depiction of people. Often, how a person looks on the outside reflects

their inner world. I am interested in the spiritual and psychological aspects of personality, and this is what I would like to convey in my works.

The theme of women, as I see it, is not fully explored in art. Sometimes the image of a woman can be used as an object, but I would like to achieve a completely different result. I try to make each female image complex and multifaceted.

Women are everywhere: on the street, in transport, next door. Ordinary women: alive, natural. Each with her own character and unique set of personal qualities. I am a woman myself.

How do you incorporate your personal experiences and internal processes into your art?



Vikky Mir | Birds of the World Nearby | 2024



Vikky Mir | 28 Days Per Year | 2024

You know, I consider myself a very sensitive person. Sometimes I feel that every event I experience in life stays within me forever, and I collect these feelings drop by drop like a vessel.

For example, I attended group therapy sessions with a psychologist. We had a women's group. Each participant shared life situations that will remain in my memory and heart forever, as I perceived them so deeply. Later, these feelings are realized in my paintings. This is how the 'Women: Inside and Outside' project was also created.

What role does nature and the surrounding world play in your creative process?

People are often busy with their thoughts, immersed in solving everyday problems, and do not notice what is



Vikky Mir
Dancing with a Flamingo
2024

happening around them. It is beneficial for each of us to stop and watch how the grass grows, how clouds float across the sky, and to think about what place we occupy in the world.

Of course, a person does not live separately from the surrounding world. We all harmonize with it. I live in a climate with pronounced seasonal changes. Even the change of seasons can affect my inner state.

Do you know when I rest? When I walk in nature. All the rest of the time, my thoughts are occupied with work, projects, new ideas about creativity, or the video blog I run.

I bought a lot of plants for my home to create a little island of nature. When I take care of them, I rest and distract myself from all tasks.

How do you balance working with both digital and traditional media, and do you have a preference between the two?

Of course, when working with both digital and traditional media, you need to manage your time well. There should be a daily routine and an understanding of the priority of tasks. There are periods when I have projects for custom vector illustrations or need to paint paintings for an exhibition within a deadline. If I have commitments to certain people, I fulfill that work first.

If there is no work that needs to be completed by a specific time, then I set priorities at my discretion. At this period of my life, I prioritize traditional media.

What advice would you give to aspiring artists who are just starting out in their careers?

Work hard, constantly improve your skills, no matter what level they are at. Learn, experiment, don't be afraid to try new things. Believe in yourself. Provide yourself with strong moral support that will help you overcome any difficulties along the way.



Warren Muzak

Warren's interest turned passion for illustrating started early, captivated by the visual narratives found in comics. He studied Graphic Design in college and from that worked at a few print-shops in pre press. His abilities creating digital art got him a job as a production artist for a high end carpet manufacturer where he took beautifully hand-painted gouache artboards and redrew them digitally to be used in manufacturing. This job exposed him to amazing painters, interior designers, and some fantastic pattern makers. In 2016, he met a seasoned UK stop-motion animator while working under contract for a small media production studio. This sparked a new direction—2D animation. Warren embraced it, finding a natural knack and genuine joy in the work and atmosphere in the studio. By 2018, freelancing became his full-time pursuit, honing his craft through persistent bids on online platforms. This dedication opened doors to collaborate with renowned film directors, award-winning studios, theater companies, and marketing agencies. Warren's goal is to reintegrate into the artist community, showcasing my distinctive and set myself apart from his commercial work, aiming for recognition based on my unique artistic voice.



Warren Muzak | Hollow Screams



— Interview

Liliia Palatnik

Can you tell us about your journey as an artist? What inspired you to pursue this path?

It all starts with my amazing family. In a sleeping district of Moscow with no bright colors outside the window our apartment was full of art, music, cinema, books and creativity. My parents worked in a theater as actors, but also my mother was a yoga teacher and my father staged plays and wrote books. I also spent a lot of time with my grandmother, who would befriend interesting people of all professions and then casually get them to tutor her four grandchildren. We would study languages and arts at home, combining the lessons with tea time and conversation. We had albums of all kinds of artists, catalogues of museums at home and they were not just gathering dust on the shelves, she read them with us, asked us about our favorite pieces from them. I can say that by the age of six I already had quite a fine taste in art because of such education. I loved looking at pictures in albums and in books and my perception of the world was and still is mostly visual. The funny thing though I remember vividly that as a child I would always say "never an artist, I will never be an artist", I wanted to be a spy, a ballerina, an actress but never an artist. And for the whole period of middle school the artistic thing stayed dormant until my mom found an art studio of real working artists in our district and suggested that I try going there

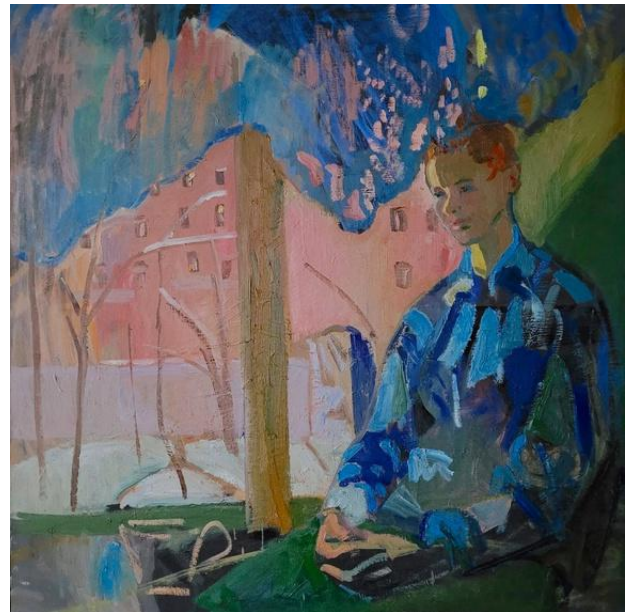


as they were taking students, they took me as a real family and creativity became interesting again. Like that by the end of school I decided to go for art history studies. That was when all became clear, studying art history was too distant because I already knew the language of art, it felt like I could actually talk to artists of the past if I would only use their language - color, line, composition - instead of just reading stories about them. I decided to pursue the art path.

How has your education at Moscow State Academic-Artistic Institute and the Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma influenced your artistic style?

These two institutions are so different one from another that they seem like two different lives. I remember how I set up my mind on entering Moscow State Academic-Artistic Institute. One normally has to go to an artistic college before entering, and I was a self-built artist, so I felt really insecure. I went to their preparatory course first. And it

was there that I learned painting. I genuinely believe that I learned how to paint in one day. Our painting teacher decided to give us a master class on oil painting. She came from vanguard school, she only taught the preparatory courses. She took a huge canvas, huge brushes and just started throwing colors on the canvas and kind of dancing from the palette to the easel. That was a revelation for me, she was so bald and had no fear. That master class had inspired me for a whole year. Unfortunately I didn't get through entering exam that year and had to go to the preparatory course again. I had a goal – to enter, but I also had lost my confidence and had a lot of fear. I worked hard and I did enter the second time. But the insecurity stayed with me. I felt like I didn't belong. There were professors who didn't allow the freedom of vanguard art, there was rigid academic system built on rules and hierarchy. The students who knew their own value did great things, I however believed to be inferior to everyone, I wanted to do everything right and that is not a good attitude when it comes to art. For me studying there was a struggle – I wanted to do things the way I felt but I was afraid to stand up to the professors. I could stand up to them in conversation but when it came to my work all the academic rules would start suffocating me from inside. So when I finally graduated I was seeking new inspiration, I wanted to get rid of all the unnecessary rules and find myself, revive the love that I once had for art. By that time I already had been teaching various groups and it gave me a lot to think about. I noticed that many grown up people who had status, achievements when came to art classes became all shy and frightened and insecure from the very start and I recognized myself in those feelings. I decided to set aside many rules and teach giving space to people's feelings. And there were a lot of feelings and memories and conversations in my classes.



Liliia Palatnik | A winter morning | 2022

All that got me thinking about the therapeutical power of art. I took a short introductory course in art-therapy and it was exactly what I had needed. It gave me a new perspective, a new approach to art, art became not the destination but the way. I entered the masters program in art therapy in the roman Academy of Fine Arts and so far it was the best decision of my life. At the academy there is a lot of group work, we study collective art, how to involve people in art, how to communicate better, how to consider other people's feelings. So the first thing we do is we get rid of artistic snobbism, of prejudice on what is right and wrong in art. We share experience and we learn from each other, we try new techniques, we try things that might seem silly, like body painting. So I would say that my first education gave me the basic rules and technique and my second education is giving me the freedom and wideness of perception.

You have a background in art therapy. How do you incorporate art therapy principles into your work?

First of all, I learned how to use art as a help mechanism. I notice all the little soul movements that emerge in me while I create



art and I give them space and understand myself better. It also helps in teaching. I can understand what people I teach feel in the art process. I stopped criticizing myself so bad, I know that a mistake communicates something and also can lead to unexpected results, and in art as well as in art therapy unexpected is good. I also started using a lot of new techniques- collage, print, markers, embroidery- all these techniques have a therapeutical sense in them but also give expressivity to an artwork.

Your portraits seem to capture the essence of the subjects deeply. What is your process for creating a portrait?

I love painting live model. Because this way I have more fun. The main thing in a portrait for me is the conversation I have with the model. It is actually a very intimate atmosphere, the two of us looking at each other, the smell of oil paints. The person posing usually senses my whole attention on him or her and to not make them feel uncomfortable I start asking them questions about themselves, I also start explaining my art process, and as my art is a reflection of

me, I inevitably start sharing some feelings and the person in front of me also opens up. It is beautiful. Much more beautiful than the portraits that come out in the end. Of course, I paint from photos as well but it is more difficult, it requires abstract thinking, as the photo never sees what I see in person, so I have to use the photo only as a reference and try to imagine what I actually would like to say.

How do you balance your time between creating art, conducting workshops, and collaborating with various organizations?

Balancing time is the hardest thing. It feels like in Alice through the looking glass- you have to run really fast just to stay where you are. Right now I am balancing studies, motherhood, work and my own art and projects. I want to do so many things, like I want to make an exhibition dedicated to motherhood, I am currently working on a collective anti violence art project, I want to improve my painting but also I feel like I have to study more to work in all the fields that interest me, I recently started studying performance and I would really like to try myself in it. But there is simply not enough time for it all. And sometimes I feel overwhelmed even before starting the day. The important thing I learned though is to never neglect my mental health. If I feel tired, I must rest, if I feel overwhelmed, I must take a brake even from thinking. And the funny thing is, I noticed that when I slow down, time kind of slows down too. It is hard to believe unless you try. The Italians know this secret, so I am lucky to learn from them. Oh, and of course I wouldn't have done anything with my life without people who are around me, I am really lucky to have not only creative but very supportive family, my parents my husband who helps me with everything, my friends and my colleagues, I feel like on the social scale I have won the

lottery. But I also feel that social skills and I mean not small talk but making friends, asking for help are underestimated in modern society. I literally don't believe that one can achieve any big goal without help and support of others.

How do your personal experiences and background influence your artwork?

I would say that all my experience had led me to who I am now. My knowledge of art broadens my horizons, gives me ideas of what I could try and also gives me the feeling of not being alone ever, because I can always find an artist, an artwork that would support me in a certain moment and that I have had from my childhood. My parents used to work as actors in a theater when I was a child and I learned a lot about space, composition, rhythm, use of one's body from theater performances that I watched with them. It helps me a lot in teaching, in organizing groups of people and in creating my painting compositions as well. I must admit that at the Moscow Institute of Fine Arts I actually learned how to draw and paint easily, I notice now that it does not take me too much time to almost finish an artwork (then of course the last details, the finishing process can be endless), and art therapy gives me a lot of personal support and new opportunities. And one of the best influences on my art has my three year old daughter. She opened the world to me, she taught me how to play, how to try new things, how to be courageous.

What role does the city of Rome play in your creative process?

Rome is my dream, my love. Not only is it full of antique and renaissance and modern art, to me Rome is art itself. When I came here as a child I was dazzled by the blue sky, how blue it was, you see I came from a grey



Liliia Palatnik | Sofie with lillies | 2023

country where winter lasts at least for five months. And as a ten year old I just loved this pure blue sky that seems like blue paper with a collage of green trees and red houses on it. And on that blue sky I saw the migration of birds that seemed absolutely cosmic. It was artistic perception – perception of the color and of the form. And then I came here in the year 2019, when I was living a personal and artistic crisis, and this city brought me back to life, that year I had decided that I was going to live in this city no matter what. Again, it was like therapy- because Rome awakened my senses and it still does. I drink the colors with my eyes- the red of the house paint, the green of the trees. But at the same time the brightness of the sun demolishes, eliminates the colors and the objects making one think about what is beyond the material world, sun makes everything sacred. Rome shows you the complexity of life. The flow of the Tiber river, the noises of the traffic and conversations and the bells and the birds, the smells of fruit and pines and trash and food. And yet you always notice the time- the gray behind the cheerful red paint, how the platans lose their skin, the ruins. I hope to learn from Rome to make my art more complex and more alive.

Maria Shargátova is a visual artist born in Russia in 1994. Now she lives and works in Portugal. Maria uses paintings as the main way of translating her message, but experiments with embroidery and ceramics a lot. Her artworks explore the concept of femininity and touch on emigration themes. She completed her studies in choreography in 2010 and graduated in Intercultural Communication from the Faculty of Foreign Languages in 2015. During the university years, Maria started working as a dancer in various projects in Russia, Qatar, and the UAE and then began studying the body and movement as women's yoga teacher. Therefore, her works convey a personal, subjective view of body image and are driven by a deep exploration of the body, movement, and feminine energy reflecting emotional landscape and behavioral patterns.

Maria Shargatova | DREAM IN A GARDEN №1 | 2023





Maria Shargatova
DREAM IN A GARDEN №2
2023

— Interview

Aniella Maggie Ajete-Balog

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

My journey began when I was around 5 years old. I was very interested in drawing and I would trace all of my favorite cartoon characters and draw them until I was able to draw them from memory. It was not until I was 8 years old where I actually picked up a paint brush and paint. My parents seemed to realize that I had a talent or an interest for art so they signed me up to go to a children's art studio and I painted there every Saturday for a couple of months. Once it began to get a bit expensive, my parents took me out of the art studio and bought me an easel and canvas so I could paint at home for a lot less. I think the idea of being able to get something blank and turn it into something I could envision in my mind really inspired me to keep going and then, eventually, it became my safe haven for expressing my inner feelings. From then on, I alternated between painting and writing in order to get out how I felt. It was an



on and off kind of love for a while. It wasn't until I was in college where I realized that I didn't want to study or do any sort of job that did not revolve around being creative and I picked up painting and drawing again.

How has your background as a Latina woman influenced your artwork?

My parents are Cuban immigrants and they came here to the United States with hopes and dreams of becoming someone and chasing the "American dream". Although, I could say that my upbringing with them was not as strict as I have seen with my friends who are also latina, there is this sense of the kind of woman you are to be. I went a couple of years not creating art because I felt like I had to do more and everyone around me would tell me I'm talented, but "art does not pay the bills" and that made me sidetrack into some more serious

studies, but I always found my way back to making art. I have a series called "(Not) So Ladylike" that really captures the essence of being the "perfect lady" and how I do not need to follow these rules made by society, especially the latino community, to be considered a lady. So much is expected of you, but I am only human. My mother also knows how to paint and my father is pretty crafty and I believe I inherited that from them. Growing up in Miami, being surrounded by people I could relate to, my family, my upbringing - it all influences my art.

What significance do the bright, saturated colors, especially blue, green, and pink, hold in your pieces?

I originally chose the colors of blue, pink, and green because I remember reading somewhere about mastering color palettes to achieve a cohesive work of art. I think my brain just really liked the colors because of my childhood obsession with the Powerpuff Girls, but I feel as though it's a good sturdy color palette. This does not mean I refuse to use other colors in my art work, because I do have pieces that do not match this specific color palette, but it just works so well for me. The pink compliments the green and the blue and green are analogous so I always go with those colors. It is also fun trying to see how many different ways I could use those colors and their shades to create something new yet cohesive with the rest of my works. I also believe that I subconsciously used saturated colors to force others to look at my paintings.



Aniella Ajete-Balog | All I want is intimacy | 2021

They are bright and in your face. So much of art, whether it's films or paintings, that are made today are so dark and dim that I like to use these colors to brighten up the world, which is kind of ironic since most of my paintings involve some sort of pain, but through pink pearled tears or blood.

Can you elaborate on the motto "cry responsibly" and how it reflects in your work?

"Cry responsibly" was something I came up with when I was like 22 as play on of the "drink responsibly" disclaimer. I had it written everywhere and then, I painted my first piece with pearled tears and it just became a constant thing in my artwork. For me, it is a reminder that it is normal to feel uncomfortable and negative feelings, but you cannot dwell in it forever or excessively. Moderation is key for a majority of things in life, but

maybe, I do cry a little more than I would like to. Just a little reminder that I am human and not alone when it comes to feeling emotions.

How did studying Graphic Design Technology at Miami Dade College impact your approach to art?

Well, I originally got in for chemistry. I went through several changes in my major, which include architecture, journalism, and education, before settling with graphic design. I think I just realized that I did not want to work in a boring environment where everyone is serious or my surroundings would look bland. I realized that I could take my art skills and talents and put it to use by studying graphic design. I really did not think studying graphic design would be a

game changer for me, but it was. It really helped me figure out how to properly prepare myself for any project I would like to do. Before, I would simply just tackle my projects, but now, I actually make it a thing to sketch out on a post-it or in my sketchbook what exactly it is that I am seeing in my head and deciding what color goes where. I also believe that the drawing class we were required to take really helped me get better with proportions, even though I tend to exaggerate my eyes in my artwork. I used to strictly draw and paint on a smaller surface area, but I have been more confident in letting my art take up more space after taking that class. Thanks to graphic design, I was also able to land a job for a bit as a graphic designer at a print shop and was able to gain some experience and knowledge on



Aniella Ajete-Balog | Such a softie | 2019

the printing process, especially those that deal with color.

Can you talk about a particular piece that holds significant personal meaning to you?

All, if not most, of my pieces are personal. You could pick any and I could tell you everything I was feeling while I was painting it and all the thoughts I had running through my head in the process, but I think one of my most recent paintings, "comfort in myself" really does it for me. I have had this idea of painting this particular piece for a couple of months before actually sitting down and sketching it out. Originally, it was supposed to represent my maternal grandmother and how much her loss affected me as a child. I read this book last year called "It Didn't Start With You" and it really solidified things I have experienced or I inherited from my mother and my grandmother. I do not know why, but I was thinking about her a lot even before I read the book. A part of me misses her a lot and wishes I got to experience more time with her so I could at least remember what it was like to have her around. My parents always tell me that we were each other's world. I always catch myself asking what I should do to heal my inner child and honestly, picking up art always did that for me. I cannot run away from it. So, in her honor, I wanted to honor myself by doing a somewhat self portrait as I am now at 29 holding what would be 3 year old me with my favorite flowers, sunflowers, that remind me of my grandmother.

What advice would you give to other self-taught artists who are just starting out?

My biggest advice is to keep going. Many people will try to sway you away from art or someone will tell you that your art is no good, but you must ignore them. Keep practicing. Keep experimenting. You will find your way through and you will look back and feel accomplished from how far you have come. It took me years of practice and comparing myself to others to finally decide to just go for it and do what I want to do in order to get to where I am today. I did not even know that I had a specific style until I was about 6 paintings in. Keep going and only stop if you feel as if you are burning yourself out. It is okay to take a break for your well being, but you must chase your passion.



Aniella Ajete-Balog | Comfort in myself | 2024

Pamela Torres is a happily married emerging artist living in New Port Richey, Florida and is formerly from New Jersey. A Monmouth University graduate, Pam has participated in various shows in Carrollwood, Spring Hill, Tampa and St. Petersburg. Rather than paint, she developed a knack for creating eye-popping images with marker, soft pastel and colored pencil.

Pamela Torres | Bontecou Brahmin





— Interview

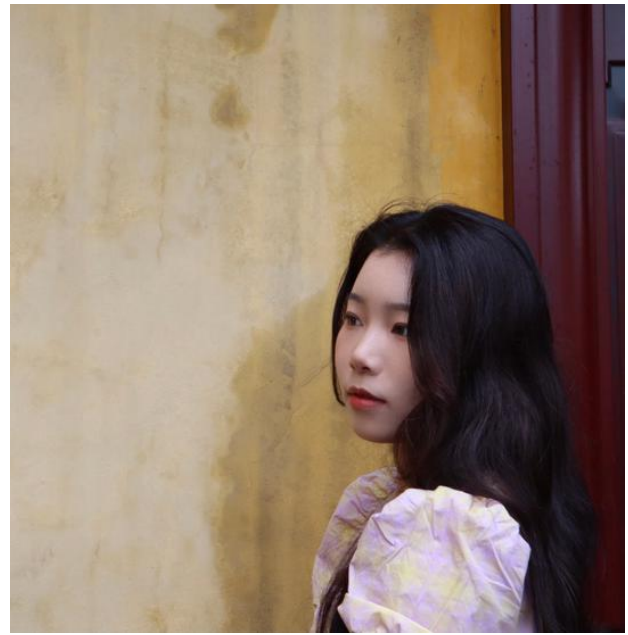
Leyan Wang

Can you tell us about your journey as an artist? What inspired you to pursue illustration as a career?

I graduated from the University of Edinburgh last November with a master's degree in Illustration, marking the official start of my career as an illustrator.

Growing up in China, my hometown Hangzhou is a city with a rich history and deep artistic heritage, which I believe is why art has always had an innate attraction for me. My interests are actually quite broad, I love exploring the unknown and emerging fields, and I enjoy trying out different skills. However, throughout my long academic journey, I discovered that drawing is something I am consistently passionate about and eager to explore. Therefore, I decided to pursue what I love most as my future career.

With this in mind, I chose to study Visual Communication Design in Shanghai Theatre Academy during my undergraduate years. This experience allowed me to understand how art and design influence and contribute to the world, and I truly experienced the diverse charm of this field. Illustration,



being my favorite medium in the realm of art and design, led me to pursue further specialized studies and opportunities in the UK, where I now live. Illustration has broadened my horizons, and I hope it will continue to be my driving force as I explore the world.

How has your background and upbringing influenced your art style and subject matter?

I believe this is a process of constant exploration and iteration.

I remember that during my childhood, I was very fond of reading Chinese and Japanese comics and watching animations. At that time, I was fascinated by the delicate lines and intricate colors in these works, as well as the mythological and legendary storylines. Gradually, I became curious about the backgrounds and inspirations behind these stories, which led me to explore the unknown world bit by bit and learn about cultures and fields I had never encountered before. I enjoy this process

of unraveling mysteries like a detective. My mother, who is very supportive and open-minded, encouraged my efforts to explore the world. She took me to different countries, allowing me to visit the lands I had imagined and to establish my own connections with the world. As a result, I enjoy the process of combining colors, shapes, and elements, and finding different narrative structures. More importantly, I love transforming memories and feelings into traces of stories.

Your works often feature a blend of the real and fantastical worlds. How do you approach creating such unique and dreamlike scenes?

I think this is related to my habit of divergent thinking. Sometimes, my inspiration comes from a specific object or a real moment, and then I keep expanding my associations based on these real elements, which I thoroughly enjoy.

For example, I have a piece called "Offline" in which I included many concrete and abstract elements such as a switch, building blocks, a monitored space, screens, a relaxed self-moment, and so on. I wanted to use these real and imaginary symbols to construct a moment of being overwhelmed by an information explosion yet yearning for a brief escape to find oneself. However, the initial inspiration for this piece simply came from seeing the word "offline" on a piece of paper.

I believe there is no clear boundary between reality and fantasy, fantasy is an extension of reality. Whenever I start



creating, fantasy and reality converge under my brush, blending in a dreamlike and wondrous way.

What is your creative process like? Do you have any specific rituals or habits that help you get into the creative zone?

My creative process is not fixed. Sometimes, it even involves a great deal of randomness. I don't restrict how or when I draw inspiration or delve into a theme. Instead, I enjoy the process of exploring various possibilities, even though this often leads me to scrap and redo my work countless times. There's only one habit I've consistently maintained during my creative process: I create ambient sound for myself. I prefer working in a quiet, private space, but at the same time, I play music, audiobooks, or videos in the background. This



provides just the right amount of companionship for me and sometimes even brings new inspiration and surprises.

How do folklore, mythology, and everyday life inspire your artwork? Can you share a specific example?

Last July, I created a series of works titled "Good Night" which also served as my graduation project. This series depicts my feelings of solitude during the year I studied in Edinburgh. Before coming to the UK, I had never experienced living alone, so this year in Edinburgh was a novel experience for me, giving me plenty of time to be by myself. I would walk through the medieval streets with a sketchbook, sit in the gardens beneath the castle listening to the Scottish bagpipes telling ancient tales, and join the crowds to celebrate during the

Samhuinn Fire Festival. Through these experiences, I learned how to enjoy solitude and how to explore different cultures and ways of life. I then condensed these precious memories and feelings into images where fantasy and reality intertwine. It felt quite magical, as if I had the ability to weave dreams.

The reason folklore and mythology always fascinate me may be because they are so deeply intertwined with reality. Even though I no longer live in Edinburgh, every time I hear bagpipes, the scenes I once captured come back to me like hidden gems in a film, as my memories begin to blur. As I mentioned before, memories and emotions leave traces in stories.

What challenges have you faced in self-publishing and editorial illustration, and how have you overcome them?

I think the biggest challenge of self-publishing for me is the uncertainty of audience feedback. As a first-time self-publishing illustrator, creating content often consumes most of my time and



Leyan Wang | Recall | 2024

energy. This makes it easy for me to become so immersed in my own work that I neglect to consider the target audience. When I realized this, I started bringing my sample books to exhibitions and markets, which gave me the opportunity to observe how audiences reacted to my work. For example, my first zine told a Chinese folktale, and when viewers at a London exhibition browsed through it, they asked me questions about elements in the story they didn't understand. These questions were incredibly helpful, prompting me to adjust the text in the book to address potential confusion that may cause by cultural differences.

As for editorial illustration, the challenge I most frequently face is balancing my personal style with the client's needs. I was once commissioned to create illustrations of some historical buildings in Shanghai, but among the sketches I provided, the client chose the one I was least satisfied with, which left me feeling quite conflicted. Later, I realized that this

situation is quite common, different perspectives naturally lead to different choices. I found that I can still express my stylistic features while meeting the client's needs. This experience also taught me the importance of proactive communication and seeking feedback.

What message or emotion do you hope viewers take away from your art?

I hope my work can evoke a sense of curiosity and the desire to express oneself in the audience.

For me, illustration is the language I use to explore the world. I always feel fortunate to be able to understand new things, express feelings and communicate using this unique visual language. Therefore, as long as the viewers feel even a small amount of resonance with my work, it is incredibly meaningful to me.



Leyan Wang | Growth | 2024

An artist from Poland, currently studying painting at Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź. Mainly interested in painting but also enjoys other media, for example, digital art.

— Patrycja Czajkowska

Patrycja Czajkowska | Untitled | 2024





— Interview

Isabel Warrington

Can you describe the journey of your artistic career, starting from your first formal training at the Malta School of Art?

Drawing and painting have always come naturally to me, however, my first formal training came at the age of 18 at the Malta School of Art. I was at an age where I wanted explore all possibilities but wasn't sure where to start. Living on an island in the late 1980s was limiting, especially when it came to earning a living from art. My day job was as a bank teller and my evenings would alternate between art lessons and dance classes. Fast forward to my mid-20s when I decided I didn't want to work full-time at the bank any longer and I had to find an alternative that would get me into a more creative environment. I enrolled at the College of Aberdeen since my boyfriend was based there at the time. I had a very vague idea of which direction I was heading, thinking all the while that I needed to earn a living from whatever it was that I chose to do. I figured graphic design would be a good avenue to pursue. My sister, also an artist, had a successful career in that field so I headed in that direction.



How did your experience at the College of Aberdeen shape your artistic style and approach?

I spent one year at the College of Aberdeen then returned to Malta when my funds ran out. My experience there helped me believe in myself as an artist. The freedom I felt there opened up my small world and gave me the impetus to change my career path. I soon found a job as a graphic artist. It was exciting and new, and I learned a lot about marketing, advertising and publishing, but deep down I still didn't feel fulfilled. I persevered for 25 years, even starting my own company and publishing my own lifestyle magazine. In 2002 and 2003 I had two solo exhibitions. Freestyle painting was sporadic then as most of my time away from my day job was spent rehearsing in the theatre. My acting career was thriving and I gave it

most of my time and energy.

What prompted your transition from a career in graphic design back to traditional drawing and painting?

Graphic design and working in the advertising industry started to feel very limiting and stressful. I was tired of dealing with demanding clients and working towards their brief. The economy in Malta was booming, the world had opened up through social media and I had amassed a good client network, so I felt it was a good time to diversify and reinvent myself. My priority was to do what I enjoyed and let the rest follow – a calculated leap of faith so to speak. Experience, perseverance and focus paid off. For the last 10 years or so my time has been



Isabel Warrington | The Comfort Zone



Isabel Warrington
Ambivalence

divided between designing and creating costumes for the stage, sketching caricatures at events, doing private commissions, creating for my own pleasure and acting. I don't do everything all the time, of course, but time management and picking my projects carefully have been crucial to my success.

How has your acting career influenced your artwork and creative process?

The theatre has been an important part of my adult life. The discipline and creative process have given me the foundation and courage to try new things. I had little or no confidence when I was growing up. Acting in front of a live, audience gave me the tools to overcome

my shyness and be confident. Showing my artwork can sometimes be terrifying especially when I try something new. You are open to scrutiny, you are 'naked' in front of an audience... only this time you are yourself, you are not playing a character. It has taken me years to muster that confidence, although there are often times when I would happily hide away where it's 'safe'.

Can you tell us more about your experience designing costumes for the opera and how that has impacted your art?

When it comes to designing costumes, or anything else for that matter, I use the same principles as I did with graphic design. You have a brief; you discuss the

ideas you have presented, based on that brief; you look at all aspects – the visual aspect, practicality, budgets, possibilities, the team you are working with, etc; then you set to turning an idea into reality. I've designed costumes for a variety of genres, each one with their own style and necessities. Each piece needs to be functional and not only visually impactful as the actors have to work in them, sometimes for several performances and in less than adequate conditions. I tend to love bold and opulent colours when I paint. The characters I tend to draw are either comical, ethereal or distorted. This is all influenced by the theatre.

Isabel Warrington | In spite of



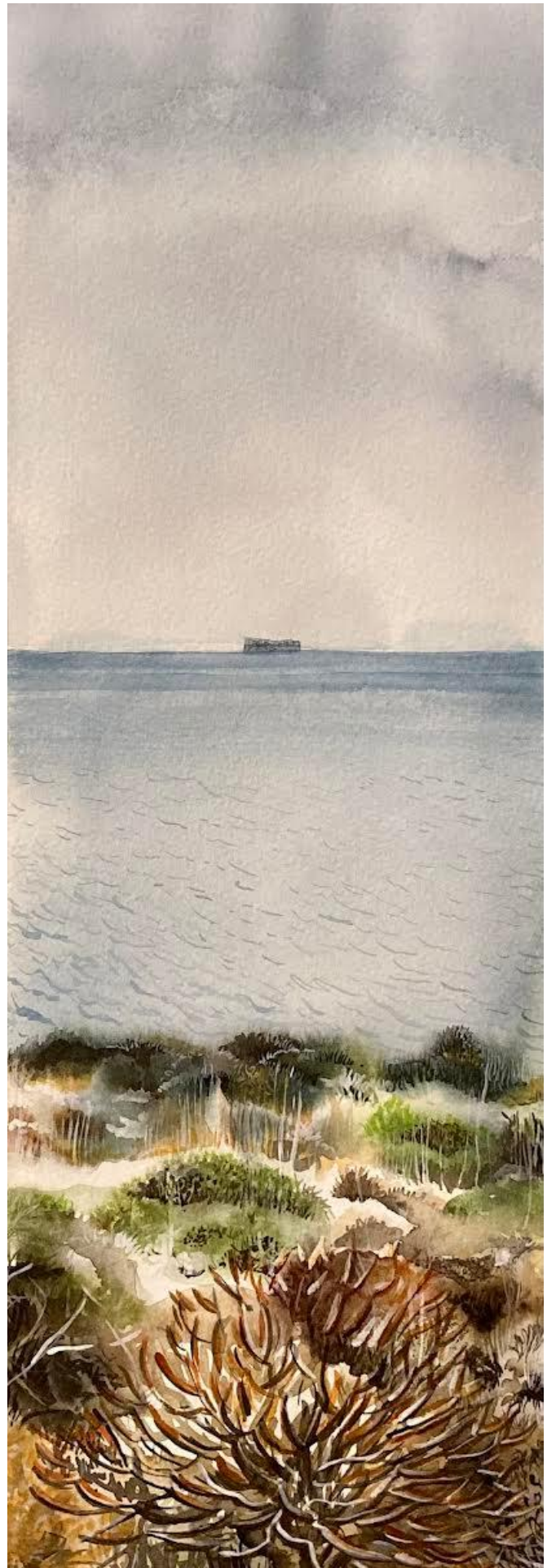
What inspired you to experiment with found objects and recyclables in your costume design?

I like to think of myself as an environmentalist, albeit a flawed one. The impact we are having on the planet is something that is of great concern to me. This is one reason that spurs me on to create costumes and art from recyclables. The other is that I like to explore different media, using the items we discard as the 'raw material' for my work. It helps me push my boundaries and explore new possibilities. With every new experience comes growth and I find this very exciting.

How does your statement, "Creativity is play," manifest in your work, and why is it important to you?

The best way to learn is through play. My best ideas and work emerges when I'm 'playing', because I am not constrained in any way. If I make a mistake I learn from it, it's no big deal.

I try something else, experiment, learn. When we are children we are the most creative, then we are conditioned and constrained by society. One of my biggest struggles has been to free myself from that in order to be more playful and more creative. My work is forever evolving. With every new skill I learn I develop and create new work.

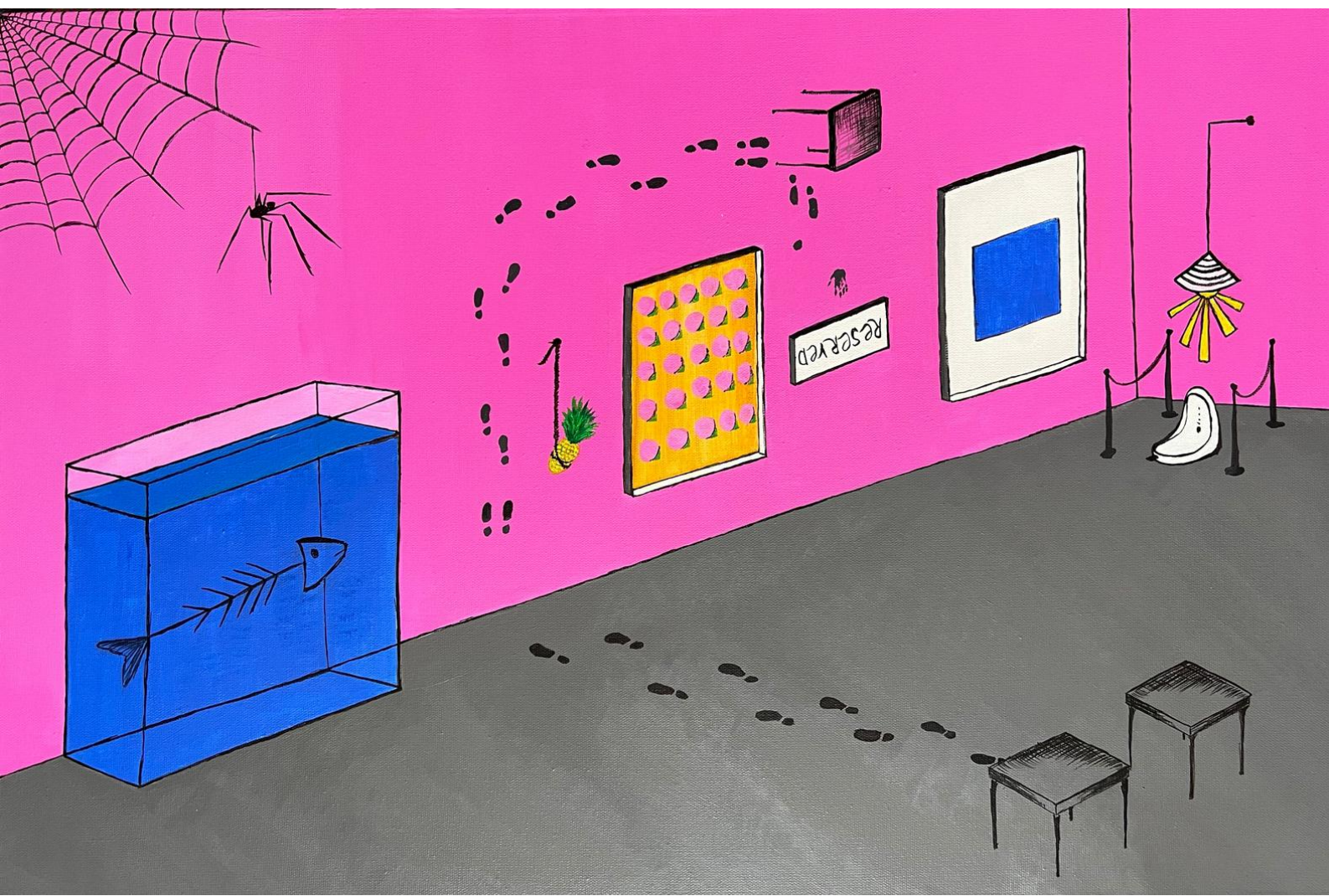


Isabel Warrington | Landscape painting

The artist is always slightly beyond the edge... beyond the edge of the possible... beyond the edge of the conceivable... beyond the edge of the real... It is thanks to this very delicate boundary that a connection between a person and art is formed—a fine bridge, stepping onto which, you realize that everyday life is not as "gray" as it seems, that there is always a "way out," and that time is the most valuable thing we have. In art, there are no rules, no limits, no boundaries—there is only time for its creation, understanding, and love.

— Olga Molebnova a.k.a. Olga Mo (O.Mo)

Olga Molebnova a.k.a. Olga Mo (O.Mo) | Beyond the Edge of the Possible | 2024





— Interview

Matthew Morpheus

Your work is described as a 'labyrinth of perception'. Can you elaborate on how you approach this concept in your art?

The term 'labyrinth of perception' perfectly describes my artistic vision. My work aims to create a multi-layered experience that challenges conventional ways of seeing. Through the interaction of light and shadow or, if we take collages, then it can be figures and objects, where I invite viewers to explore complex visual and emotional landscapes.

Each piece is designed to evoke a sense of discovery and introspection, prompting viewers to question their own perceptions. My art is a journey through the mind's intricate corridors, revealing new insights and perspectives at every turn.

What drives your exploration of 'alternate realities' in your creations, and how do you define the 'unseen' that you seek to reveal?

My exploration of 'alternate realities' is



driven by a profound curiosity about the boundaries of perception and existence. I am fascinated by the idea of worlds that lie beyond our immediate understanding, and my art seeks to bring these hidden dimensions to light. The 'unseen' in my work represents the myriad possibilities and perspectives that exist just beyond the veil of our everyday reality. Through my creations, I aim to reveal these hidden layers, inviting viewers to question their own perceptions and explore the unknown. Each piece is a portal to a different reality, a glimpse into the infinite potential of the human imagination. Using various innovative techniques from the author in my works, from a combination of non-standard colors and graphics to collages, I think I can do this.

Your art has received international acclaim in places like Beijing, Moscow, and New York. How do different cultural contexts influence your artistic expression?

The diverse cultural contexts of Beijing,

Moscow, and New York have profoundly influenced my artistic expression. Each city offers a unique tapestry of history, traditions, and contemporary dynamics that enrich my work.

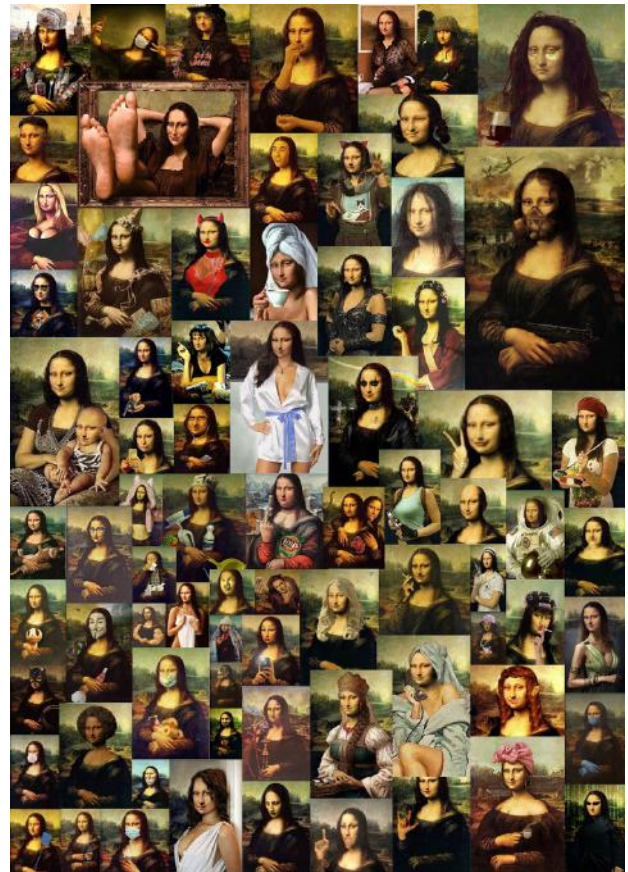
In Beijing, the deep-rooted traditions and rapid modernization inspire a blend of ancient and futuristic elements in my art. Moscow's rich cultural heritage and complex political landscape encourage me to explore themes of identity and resilience. New York's vibrant, multicultural environment fuels my creativity with its endless diversity and energy.

These varied influences allow me to create art that resonates on multiple levels, reflecting the interconnectedness of our global society. Each piece becomes a dialogue between different cultures, inviting viewers to see the world through a broader, more inclusive lens.

The idea of light dancing with shadow is prominent in your work. Can you discuss how you use light and shadow to convey deeper narratives?

The interplay of light and shadow is central to my work, serving as a metaphor for the dualities of existence. I use light to reveal and shadow to conceal, creating a dynamic tension that draws viewers into a deeper narrative. And it doesn't matter whether it's collage art or work using different types of paints.

By manipulating light and shadow, I aim to evoke emotions and provoke thought. Light can symbolize hope, clarity, and revelation, while shadows often



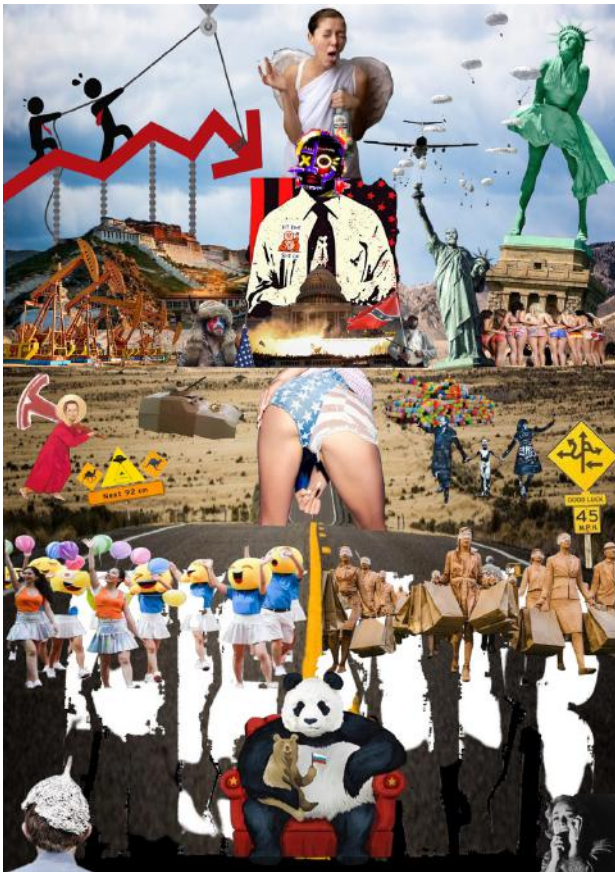
Matthew Morpheus | Secret Life of Mon Lisa

represent mystery, ambiguity, and the unknown. This contrast allows me to explore complex themes such as identity, memory, and the passage of time.

Each piece is crafted to guide the viewer's eye, using light to highlight key elements and shadows to create depth and intrigue. This dance between light and shadow not only enhances the visual impact but also invites viewers to engage with the underlying stories and emotions embedded in the artwork.

What role does symbolism play in your art, and how do you decide which symbols to incorporate into your pieces?

Symbolism plays a crucial role in my art, serving as a bridge between the visible and the hidden. Each symbol I



Matthew Morpheus | New World

incorporate is carefully chosen to convey layered meanings and evoke deeper contemplation.

My process of selecting symbols begins with the themes I wish to explore. For instance, I often use symbols of transformation, duality, and concealed truths to reflect the complexities of human experience. These symbols are not just decorative elements but integral parts of the narrative, guiding viewers to uncover the underlying messages within each piece. For example, pay attention to collage works.

By weaving symbols into my art works, I aim to create a rich tapestry of meaning that resonates on multiple levels. This approach allows me to engage viewers in a dialogue, inviting them to interpret and connect with the art in their own unique way.

How has your artistic practice evolved over the years, and what are some key experiences that have shaped your current approach?

My artistic practice has evolved significantly over the years, shaped by a combination of personal experiences and professional growth. Initially, my work was heavily influenced by my early explorations in traditional techniques and materials. However, as I traveled and immersed myself in different cultures, my approach began to incorporate a broader range of influences and mediums. I currently live in Scotland. And this is a great place to find new inspiration.

Key experiences that have shaped my current approach include collaborative projects with other artists from "Abandoned artists" (<https://www.abandonedartists.co.uk>), which have opened my eyes to new perspectives and techniques. Additionally, my involvement in international exhibitions has provided valuable feedback and inspiration, driving me to continually refine and expand my artistic vision.



Matthew Morpheus | Wheel of Fortune | 2018

Today, my work is a fusion of these diverse influences, characterized by a dynamic interplay of light, shadow, and symbolism. Each piece is a reflection of my ongoing journey as an artist, constantly evolving and seeking new ways to engage and inspire my audience.

What advice would you give to emerging artists who are interested in exploring similar themes of perception and alternate realities in their work?

To emerging artists interested in exploring themes of perception and alternate realities, my advice is to embrace curiosity and experimentation. These themes require a willingness to venture beyond conventional boundaries and to question the nature of reality itself. Start by immersing yourself in diverse sources of inspiration—literature,

philosophy, science, and different cultures. This will help you develop a rich conceptual framework for your work. Don't be afraid to experiment with various mediums and techniques to find the best way to express your ideas. It's also important to cultivate a sense of introspection. Reflect on your own perceptions and experiences, and consider how they shape your understanding of reality. This personal insight can add depth and authenticity to your art.

Engage with other artists and audiences to gain new perspectives and feedback. Collaboration and dialogue can open up new avenues of exploration and help you refine your approach.

Finally, be patient and persistent. Exploring complex themes takes time and dedication, but the journey is incredibly rewarding. Trust in your vision and continue to push the boundaries of your creativity.



Matthew Morpheus | Universe Apocrypha | 2013

Sdraswi is my path to the beauty of the visible and the deep. I use original photographs, vintage magazines and current publications. Each piece I cut is fitting to express an idea, illustrate a thought or give graphic support to any text. The brave women who try again inspire me, the magic of change is feminine. I have fun and return to the essential in a free and authentic way. I am self-taught, since I was a child I felt a special concern for everything artistic, and I really enjoyed my painting classes. I am a seeker and with age you learn to read life, in a moment of job uncertainty, I dedicated my time to the accumulated cuts of so many years and trying to tell through collage what I was feeling. All the collages I make are manual, and I like to think that through them I share beauty and inspiration so that other women can also explore their creativity. We are small but powerful, with introspection we will reach our essential part, I want to inspire that path to beauty through creativity. No matter what you have lived, the time is now, the world will appreciate that we share the best of ourselves. I want to bring beauty, beyond aesthetics, to be a channel of creativity. In order for women to feel powerful they must explore their full capacity to create.

— Sonia Sdraswi



Sonia Sdraswi | Artemusa | 2023



— Interview

Katheleen Demeyer

Can you tell us more about your journey from studying at the Academy of Antwerp to founding Merritmentha in 2019? What were some of the key moments that shaped your artistic path?

The journey through my education actually began back in high school. This period has been just as formative for who I am now as the Fine Arts Printmaking program I pursued at the Academy in Higher Education. I was incredibly fortunate to be able to follow an arts track from day one of high school. For six years, I observed, read, and learned. That path exposed me to a wide variety of art forms. We studied photography, video art, life drawing, painting, printmaking, and worked with clay and stone. We learned to engage with conceptual art, visited museums—in short, we were allowed to play in a wonderful playground that inspired us to develop ourselves. It was there that I truly discovered the freedom of thought, the love for art, and the joy of philosophical exploration! It was a liberating journey, especially during that



phase of life when you're just beginning to discover yourself.

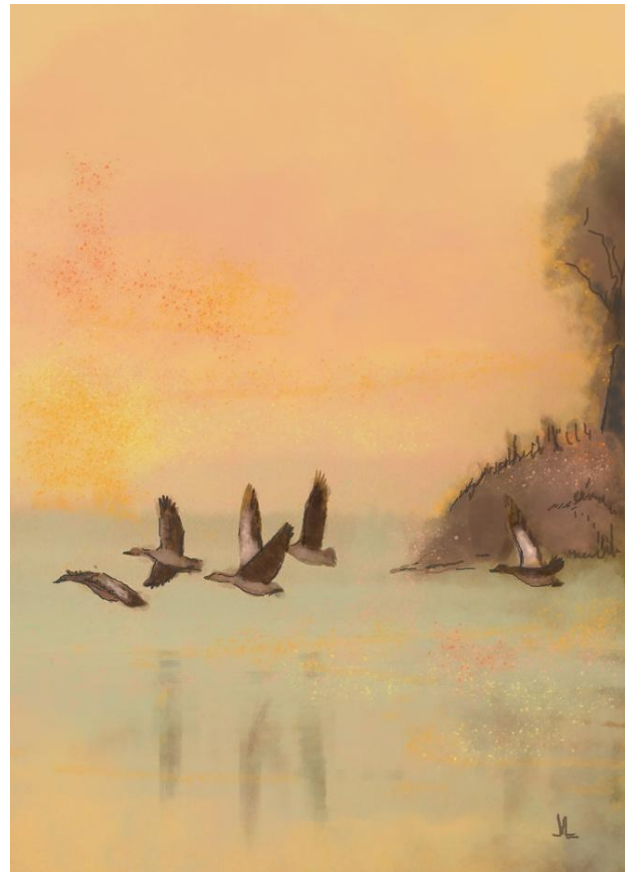
The Academy, and more specifically the Fine Arts Printmaking program, provided the perfect opportunity to zoom in on a specific craft, a trade. It was a chance to refine your knowledge and embrace the technicalities of your chosen art form. However, it also instilled in me a bit of a distaste for the seriousness with which "art with a capital A" is often "preached." There was a lack of understanding for my love of color and the mixing of techniques. It wasn't until years later that I regained the desire to share my creative work with the world.

The most significant turning point came when I was asked to create a series of illustrations for a book about the history of a large school group in the area. What joy! What pleasure in exploring a request

and developing a project! Since then, I've alternated between creating personal work and commissioned pieces. More and more, I find myself exploring the intersection between illustration and art. What is a print, and what is art? Why does the title of "illustrator" give me such a sense of comfort? Is it the safety of not having to call myself an artist? Is there still that lingering feeling that art must be grand, and that my pursuit of beauty and love, color, and magic is too small for that big word? Or do I embrace the term I use to describe myself—illustration artist?

Your work is described as weaving softness and beauty into the small corners of life. Can you elaborate on how you achieve this in your illustrations?

I love beauty. I love color. The mission I've always set for myself is to make the world a little more beautiful. How? Through the channel that suits me best: my drawings. But beauty is just one aspect. Beyond the aesthetic, pleasing side of my work, I firmly believe that there can be a deeper layer in what you do as an illustrator, as an artist. In every drawing—and I mean every single drawing I create—I place an intention. A deeper, invisible layer where I embed a personal message for the viewer. A message of love, self-love, comfort, or understanding. A message of equality, of loyalty, of the strength that resides within a person. Every piece I create is made with such a thought or message in mind. Often, it's meant for a specific individual or a particular character or



Kathleen Demeyer
The journey

personality type. The person behind my illustrations is always of crucial importance. Ultimately, people always play a significant role.

The drawing I made for a friend who needed to free her inner child a little more, the drawing for the friend who needed to show herself a bit more love, the couple who carries a burden but shares an infinite bond of love, and so on. That's what lies behind those beautiful prints with warm colors. And the remarkable thing is that people often keenly sense this intention. The portrait of all that strength is visible.

Such an approach often requires complete silence and calm when I start working, but sometimes the right music

can also help me immensely. I simply immerse myself in my own world and let all the emotions flow out.

What inspires you most in your creative process, and how do you translate those inspirations into your artwork?

As I mentioned, it's usually the people around me who inspire me. They shape the personalities, and their characters, quirks, and behaviors become the real figures I work with. But of course, the places I visit, the landscapes, and nature provide the backdrop to place these characters in. The journeys I take, but especially the daily walks, truly provide me with the right setting. All the small, everyday joys I encounter are the wishes



Kathleen Demeyer
Justbe

I express for those other people. No matter how small, it's these wishes that I embed in my illustrations. The hope that this small happiness can contribute to making the recipient's day a bit brighter. The first sun after a rain shower, the butterfly that briefly lands on your arm, the rainbow—all these things around me, I try to capture and depict or connect to the intention I place in my artwork.

While drawing or painting, I truly try to relive how that specific moment of happiness felt, or how the wind on that hill caressed my cheek. You might not be able to literally translate that feeling, but you can emphasize it through color or effect. I also love working with watercolors, for example, because the accidental effects can bring an extra playfulness and depth that I can later highlight with a sharp pencil line in the next layer.

How do you approach illustrating a book compared to creating a single artwork like a greeting card or a print?

In both my personal work and when illustrating a book or commission, I always start from a story. Whether it's a big or small story, filled with many words or just a single desire or feeling, I tell that story through my illustrations. When illustrating a book, I'm telling someone else's story; in my personal work, it becomes more about my own interpretation of the world around me. When working for someone else, you work within the framework they create,

in a world you share. With personal work, you create your own world. Both are equally fascinating and equally challenging.

I'm fortunate enough to be able to move freely within the world of another and to gradually make that world my own. In my personal work, I draw within the boundaries of the intention I set.

The day I realized that what I do is "illustrating a feeling or story" and not creating grand art was incredibly liberating. I know I often come back to this point. It might seem as though I dislike art that is unsettling, frayed, or harsh, but that's not the case. I can deeply appreciate works intended to shock, offend, or convey rawness. However, it was essential for me to show that art can also be light, full of color and love, and can tell a story that helps and gently holds up a mirror.

Your artwork has a unique softness and ethereal quality. What techniques do you use to achieve this effect?

Thank you for the compliment! I believe the layering in my work adds the right depth and unique softness. An illustration can sometimes consist of 12 to 20 layers that I carefully build on top of each other. I usually start with a pencil sketch that depicts the character, which I then digitize (a big word for scanning or photographing) to further incorporate it into a setting or landscape. After that, I either print it out again or continue working with my digital toolkit, often using watercolor or pastel, and I keep layering until I achieve the right "depth"



Kathleen Demeyer
My daughter

in my work.

The digital process has given me a lot of freedom! For instance, I can quickly mix different materials. In the physical world, there's drying time, and sometimes a pastel layer can become too dense, but digitally, there are far fewer limitations. Additionally, you can quickly erase or adjust mistakes without ruining your entire drawing, and you can (just like in printmaking) add an extra layer for more color and effect. The space required is also much smaller. I don't have a large studio (oh, what a dream that would be!), but with digital work, a table provides enough room! I really see digital work as a big magic box, where I can endlessly dig—wonderful and unlimited.

What does a typical day look like for you as an artist? How do you balance your creative work with other aspects of your life?

I am an illustration artist, and this work is taking up an increasingly large part of my life.

But beyond that, I also have a regular career.

Fortunately, it's a career where I can pour in a lot of passion and conviction—I give advice in a company that focuses on bio-ecological building and living.

I haven't been working full-time for a while now, and it's such a pleasure that my weeks are no longer solely filled with that career—wonderful!

I usually draw at every free moment that presents itself, but of course, the life of an illustrator/artist isn't just about drawing or creating prints. There are sales points to visit, shops to supply, exhibitions to organize, and, like in any other freelance job, connections to maintain. Fortunately, I enjoy all of that just as much, but the day I can dedicate even more time to my art—oh, what a dream that would be!

My absolute favorite days involve getting up early, taking a brisk walk, and drawing until I forget everything else!

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring artists, what would it be?

My most important advice would be: be gentle with yourself. The world around us is already harsh and sometimes angry enough. Believe in yourself, not with arrogance, but with the unconditional trust you would give to a good friend. Whatever you want to do—whether it's creating art that's edgy and raw or art that's soft and gentle—it's all okay. But take the time to explore what you want to achieve and to master the craft.

Kathleen Demeyer
Stories under the moon



My mission is to reshape narratives and perceptions through the transformative art of sculpture. I create portraits of inspirational figures from underrepresented communities, particularly people of colour, to challenge stereotypes and cultivate empathy, as well as animals to raise awareness about the importance of respecting our planet and its creatures. My sculptures serve as powerful symbols of inspiration, stimulating dialogue and contemplation on justice and equality. I am committed to making our art accessible to everyone, including the visually impaired. My vision is to transform the art world and society by reshaping narratives and perceptions through the power of sculpture. I envision a world where sculptures of inspirational figures from underrepresented communities, especially people of colour, are prominently displayed in public spaces and galleries. My sculptures are created for everyone, including the visually impaired. My ultimate goal is a more inclusive and empathetic society, where sculpture promotes understanding and celebrates differences.

— Maria Goldson



Maria Goldson | Spirito Italiano





Tiffany Duong
Packing Is Almost Done I Think

Tiffany Duong

Your work often features melancholic dreamscapes. Can you tell us about the inspiration behind this particular aesthetic?

My work is fueled by the choppy, hazy nature of memory, and I take on a photomontage-like approach in composing my work. Movies such as Wong Kar Wai's "Fallen Angels," "Trainspotting," and Hou Hsiao-Hsien's "Millenium Mambo" are big influences for me in the way that they visually capture the act of recollection: raw, bittersweet, and tinged with the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia. While my works are not always collages, the manner in which I juxtapose images take inspiration from dadaists and surrealists and I enjoy using transparency to convey how memories overlap, are recalled, and eventually recede into one's subconscious. While the melancholic aspect of this aesthetic draws upon the complex emotions attached to one's memories, I consider my works as "dreamscapes" because they seek to present and preserve parts of our finicky memories as fleeting moments which can no longer exist, besides within an ethereal realm.

How do fairy tales and folklore influence your art, and do you have any favorite stories that you draw from?

Fairy tales are often thought of as a way to instill moral values in children in a manner that attempts to be both grounded in, yet distant, from reality. The absurdist nature of these stories, alongside their didactic depictions of good and evil, can be used as vessels for explorations of the human condition, which are always more complicated than fairy tales make it out to be. However, I find that the inherently inconsequential world, whimsy, and ridiculousness of fairy tales allows my work to find humor in itself and the world - to make the mundanity of reality feel fantastical. As such, my favourite story is Alice in Wonderland. I find that, as there isn't really a clear moral story, it can be interpreted in and applied to so many different aspects of our lives. Its escapist undertones, or Alice's shame and struggle with her size,, for instance, hold true to my own perspectives towards my womanhood and girlhood. It veers from traditional children's storytelling in a way that allows it to remain relatable in my

adult life, and affects that manner of storytelling I take on within my own practice.

You mentioned that your work is like a diary. How do your personal experiences shape your art?

Growing up, my mom would read through my diary. She would confront me about things I'd written, and from then on I could never write freely, knowing nothing could be private. I had to find a different outlet - one that would not be accessible to her - and was drawn to the idea that my work could be protected by symbolism. As such, every atom of my experiences influences my work: my joys, discontent, rage, mundanity - I consider my work as a way for these feelings to take form in secrecy, without consequence. In my artworks, I am liberated to both construct and dissect my experiences as a woman in the contemporary world. Furthermore, as diary-writing is something that I largely associate with my childhood, the themes of nostalgia, girlhood, and memories prominent with my art are perhaps a result of the diary-like manner in which I approach the art-making



process.

Your project "Packing is almost done, I think" addresses the standards set by patriarchal structures. Can you elaborate on the emotions and thoughts that drove this project?

This piece was inspired by a text from my friend, who was packing for a family vacation abroad. I'd asked her how her packing was going, to which she responded: "Packing is almost done, I think." As a woman, I find packing to be a stressful task because I feel obligated to bring so many things with me to maintain societal standards of beauty, and the defeat that tends to come with the nature of packing could be expanded and exaggerated to reflect on my taxing existence as woman within patriarchal contexts. I wanted to use the humour of packing a tiny suitcase to represent this in a relatable manner, and the project allowed me to put my old doll clothes and 1998 Barbie carry case to use, which allowed me to deal with my frustration in a playful and cathartic way.

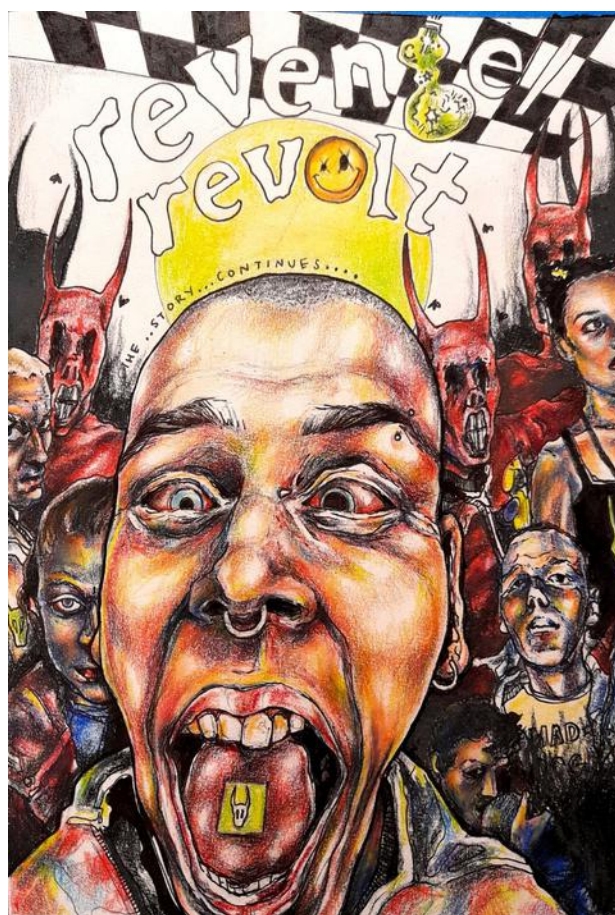
How do you balance whimsy and humor with the serious themes of womanhood and human relationships in your work?

As I am not drawn to wholly realistic representations of life and the world, I use notes of fantasy and absurdism to balance the serious themes of my work. Imagery from fairy-tales, for instance, is very common in my work as the childlike wonder associated with these stories allow my investigations of bleak

experiences to take shape defiant of its grim situation. I find the distortion and subsequent separation of these experiences from the world as it exists, governed by physio-chemical and spiritual laws, can be used as a means to deviate from demands to adhere to reality, bringing forth a sense of mischief and frivolity to my work.

How do you think your work challenges colonial and patriarchal narratives in society?

As my work is intrinsically involved with my experience as a woman within the patriarchal structures of Western culture, I use art as a means of allowing myself to take up space and by extension, insert the validity of my existence through the dominating, almost monstrous, scales of my female figures. In doing this, I reject the ideals of feminine beauty, amplifying the grotesque and bastardly. Meanwhile, my works on memory are significantly tied to my relationships with my female friends and family members, especially my mother. Despite the various experiences with womanhood, these connections are all linked to the fact that my reality, as a woman's, will never be liberated to the sense of man's being-in-the-world: the patriarchy stands to reject my humanity when I am always doomed to the gaze of the Other, reduced to objectness. Since a lot of women share this experience, I want to emphasize the beauty and warmth of these relationships in spite of how women are pitted against one another.



Tiffany Duong | Revenge/Revolt

How has your background and life in Toronto influenced your artistic journey?

Toronto is flawed. VERY flawed. And perhaps it is this total lack, or even rejection of perfection, that inspires the experimentation of my work. I used to have an idealised vision of this city, and while the diversity and strong sense of community here has definitely assured me in my pursuit of artistic ambition, the rapidly changing landscape has inspired me to be more mindful of my memories and experiences, which fuels my practice. It is difficult to long for something that you briefly encounter, and futile when you know that its destruction is permanent, but there is beauty in the hubbub.

My name is **Daria Antonescu**. Painting helps me express myself and follow my intuition. Through sensitivity, I aim to highlight into my art concerns and worries about climate change, nature conservation, travel, and human relationships. I find inspiration in painting and photography, exploring social and ecological themes. Among the artists I admire are David Hockney, Basquiat, Tiger Tateish, and Alessandro Mendini.

Daria Antonescu | Musical Experience | 2024





— Interview

Stepheny MacLeod

Your work is described as a celebration of the creative process. Can you elaborate on how this theme influences your approach to art?

My creative process is driven by exploration and experimentation of new materials. When I encounter an unfamiliar medium in an art supply store, I am eager to incorporate it into my current projects. As I become more comfortable with the material, I then focus on how it can uniquely portray specific subject matters.

The primary themes I explore in my work include nature, movement, the expression of abstract emotion, and relatable still-life items. For instance, I am currently working on my "Sippin' Summer Series," which highlights vibrant, summer-inspired drinks. This series aims to resonate with people by capturing the joy and essence of summer through the delicate yet impactful use of watercolor pencils and paint.



Stepheny MacLeod | Wave | 2024

How do you balance experimentation with traditional mediums and new materials like resin and modeling paste?

My artistic foundation is rooted in traditional materials that I've been using since childhood and during my formal art education. These include graphite pencil, charcoal/conté, and acrylic paint on paper and canvas. However, I've never confined myself to a single medium, like an oil painter or a graphite artist. With so many different art forms and materials available, it would be limiting to focus on just one. By incorporating materials such as modeling paste, resin, and relief outliner, I can literally elevate my art through added texture and depth. While some pieces may not require multiple materials to highlight the subject matter, in certain instances the Christmas Cookies I created last December. I used

modeling paste to create a 3D texture for the cookies and a pouring gloss to make the jelly filling look more realistic.

You mentioned fostering a dialogue between the viewer and the artwork. How do you achieve this interaction through your compositions?

I focus on subject matter that resonates with me personally, drawing inspiration from places I've visited, experiences I've had, and topics that hold significance in my life. This connection to my work often extends to my audience, as many of the experiences I have had are shared by others. For those who haven't had similar experiences, my art can provoke reflection or initiate conversations, encouraging them to consider how my work might relate to experiences they have had. It's fascinating to observe the commonalities between the human experience.

As you expand into digital art, what new possibilities or challenges are you excited to explore?

My latest venture in art involves delving into the digital space. I'm enthusiastic about experimenting with different software and tools to transform my traditionally created pieces into something entirely new. While this exploration brings the challenge of mastering digital tools, I remain committed to staying true to the essence of my art and its original creation.

Digitally, I can manipulate and alter my artwork in ways that would be

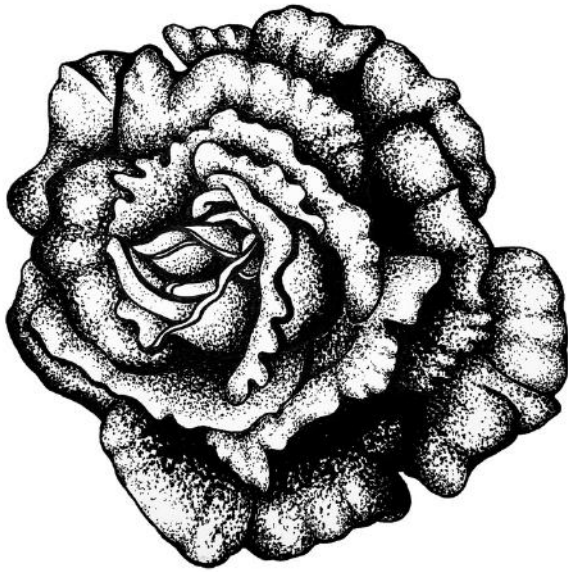


Stephany MacLeod | Edible Buckthorn | 2024

impossible using traditional art materials alone. This digital exploration opens up new possibilities for creativity and expression, allowing me to push the boundaries of my art beyond what conventional techniques can achieve.

In what ways do you think your background in traditional art informs your digital work?

I believe that my understanding of composition, space, and color, developed through traditional art, seamlessly translates into my digital work. The fundamental principles of art remain central to my creative process, but digital art offers a unique approach to manipulating colors and shapes within a vast and expansive screen space. This allows me to explore and experiment with these elements in ways that differ from traditional methods, yet still honor the core values of my artistic practice.



In your view, what makes a piece of art truly engaging or impactful for an audience?

To create an impactful piece of art, it can either emphasize the subject matter, the overall visual impact, or a combination of both. Some artworks may not be conventionally visually appealing, but the significance of the subject matter can make a profound impact. This allows the audience to connect with or gain insight into issues they may not have been aware of, sparking meaningful conversations and engagement. Alternatively, a piece might focus more on visual impact, where the subject matter isn't as thought-provoking, but the composition—through shapes, colors, details, and overall layout—captures attention and invites discussion in a different way. Both approaches can be powerful in their own right, depending on the intent and message behind the work.

What advice would you give to emerging artists who are just starting to develop their own unique style?

The advice I would give to fellow artists is to take your time. Developing "your style" doesn't happen overnight, especially if you're a mixed media artist like myself, working with different materials that require various techniques and yield diverse results. Patience is equally important when building your art career. It takes time to build your confidence, brand, skill set, and inventory of artwork. Additionally, take the time to discover what success as an artist means to you. Whether it's participating in multiple art shows and galleries, gaining a large social media following, making significant sales, creating social impact, or mentoring other artists to develop their careers, success is deeply personal and varied.

This is advice I continually apply to myself. It's easy to feel discouraged when you see other artists seemingly closer to a goal you aspire to achieve. However, it's crucial to remember that everyone has their own artistic journey, and the most important thing is to focus on your own path.



Stephony MacLeod | Sandy Shores | 2024



Stepheny MacLeod | Discovery | 2024

I am an artist from Belarus, but now I study and live in Poland. I have been drawing since childhood, but I started drawing thoroughly in 2016, and on the computer in 2018. All my creative life I have been experimenting with styles and learning something new and I am still looking for myself as an artist.

— Daria Kozhar

Daria Kozhar | Field of flowers | 2024





— Interview

Parmon Alexandra

Can you tell us about your educational journey and how it has influenced your artistic practice?

I have gone through a very long and fairly standard educational path for an artist. Art school, art college, several universities. After graduating from university, I realized that my level wasn't sufficient, so I continued to study individually in the studios of artists, receiving knowledge directly from master to student. All these years have greatly influenced me both as a person and as an artist, nurturing me step by step. Nothing came easy; there were difficulties, but I confidently moved towards my goal and dream. I had more than 100 teachers with whom I had to work, and each left a piece of themselves in my development as a master. I have several specialties, such as design, photography, and decorative and applied arts. During my studies, I was able to try many different materials, techniques, and styles, which helped me decide on the direction in which I wanted to continue developing.



Your artwork spans various mediums, including painting, graphic art, photography, body art, and mural painting. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular project?

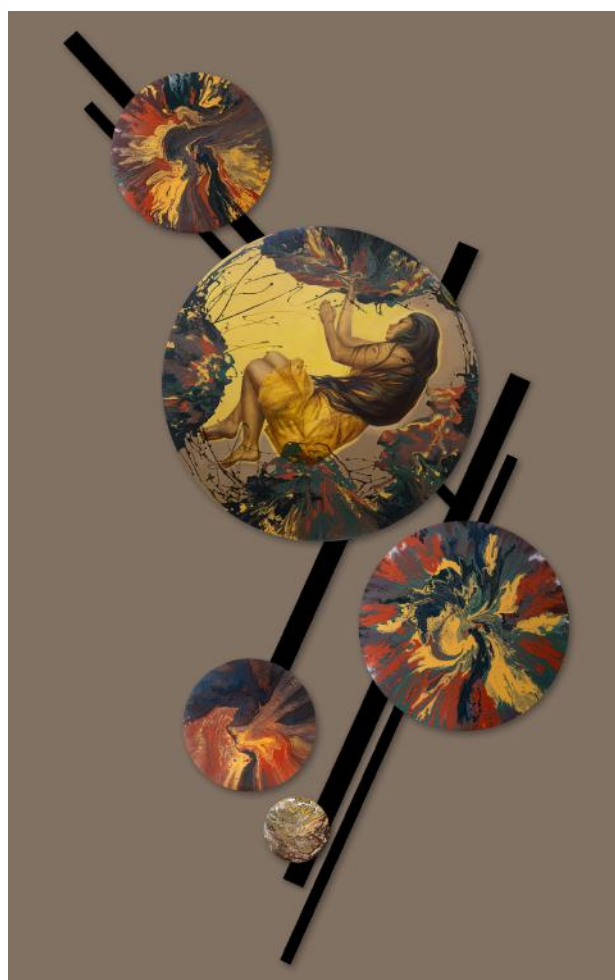
Yes, indeed, I work in various media. The idea and the method of its realization often go hand in hand. Sometimes the concept comes from the client, a residency, for example, or the project organizer, and in that case, the material is already predetermined. If I am the initiator of the project, I choose the medium that fully reveals the concept. Here, I rely on my inner instinct and response.

You mention that your painting technique is inspired by old masters and involves layering with long drying times. Can you explain this process in more detail?

I really love the technique of the old masters, especially the Dutch method. This technique allows for working from start to finish without errors or corrections, addressing one task at a time rather than all at once. It also gives the painting an internal glow, a sense of being handcrafted, with smooth transitions and softness. Such paintings have survived since the 15th century, and there's a high probability that paintings created with this technique today will also last for a long time. Unfortunately, this technique requires long drying times for the layers, from one to two weeks, which is impossible within the framework of an academy, so this technique has largely been lost and is rarely used. A painting takes at least a year to complete; old masters often painted for 10-15 years, and some even for a lifetime, like Leonardo da Vinci with his Mona Lisa. This also has to be explained to clients, as there is a significant difference between this technique and, for example, alla prima, where a painting can be completed in a few days, while my execution time is at least a year. My last commissioned canvas took me 2.5 years to complete.

How do modern styles and techniques influence your traditional painting methods?

They have a strong influence. Most likely,



Parmon Alexandra | Rem Phase | 2024

because my education is not purely in painting, my thinking is more formal, and there is also an influence from contemporary artists. I chose painting as my medium because I really love the process, but I also try to use all its possibilities.

What themes and subjects inspire your work the most, and how do you incorporate them into your art?

I am inspired by the world around me, bright people, the sincerity of children, the beauty of the human body and nature, the constantly changing feelings and events of life. Simply being in a body and experiencing each moment is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for new paintings. The main theme of my



Parmon Alexandra
By The Lake
2018

work is the supernatural, the exploration of the inner world of a person, their dreams, fantasies, and sensations, as well as the phenomena and circumstances they encounter. I am inspired by the study of topics in quantum physics, lucid dreaming, and psychoanalysis.

Can you share more about your art studio "Almira" in Minsk and the type of education you provide there?

I opened my art studio in 2010. Over this time, more than 1,000 students have passed through it. At the moment, we have a wonderful, well-coordinated team. Several teachers work here. We

have groups for the creative development of children, where the focus is on compositional sense, color perception, the ability to stylize, fantasize, and create their own worlds and stories. I prepare children and teenagers for admission to creative universities and colleges in our country and abroad. With many of them, we have developed such close relationships that we continue to communicate even after their admission and after they have already graduated. Some of my students are now established artists. I mainly prepare them for specialties such as design and architecture, but there are a few who pursue painting.

How do you balance your roles as an artist and an educator?

I work as a teacher because I can't help but do it; I feel it's my calling to pass on knowledge. I have an 85-98% success rate for those who apply, and I have very warm relationships with my students, with many turning into strong friendships. Sometimes our lessons go beyond just drawing lessons; we touch on various topics, communicate, and enrich each other.

However, this takes up a lot of time and effort, so I have to sacrifice time for painting. But this doesn't upset me because I teach only a few days a week, which gives me inspiration, and the rest of the time, I paint and draw. I believe that a teacher should first and foremost be a good artist themselves, and then a teacher. That's why I always strive to develop myself, grow, and learn.



Parmon Alexandra
Edges of Possibilities
2022

Casey Lee is a graduate from Florida Southern College, receiving a Studio Art Degree and Art History Minor during her time there. She also studied museum studies and film while being a student. All of these areas and the combination of classes she has taken, have influenced her work. Casey Lee is constantly trying new methods and learning more about art and the art community she lives in.

Artist Statement

The majority of Casey Lee's work, especially her most recent, revolve around the history of the circus and its influences on society. The gaudy and extravagance of it all, the abundance of stimulation, and the objects and paraphernalia associated with it. Her main medium is paint, but it often provides a base, with other media to layer on top of it. The mixed media can provide a visual texture, or add to the concept she speaks to. With a collage technique, which is used in much of her art, the audience is almost forced to investigate where each part of the composition ends and where the next begins. The pieces are layered and blurred and complex, as are our collective memories of circuses, fairs, and carnivals.



Casey Broker | Girls, Girls, Girls | 2021



Casey Broker
Round and Round
2019

— Interview

Junyi Xie

Your work "Pink" is described as capturing the essence of fluidity and movement. Can you elaborate on what inspired this particular piece?

My inspiration mainly drawn from fleeting moments in everyday life. 'Pink' is one of my liquid colors series pieces, which focus on exploring color change in beverages motions. Since when I go to a bar or drink shops, the choice I made an order depends on the characteristic of beverages in the menu, especially various colorful elements. I started to pay attention to the colors that surround our daily life, as color is one of the most attractive features on the first impression by consumers.

While as consumers, we do not know or aware how does bartender make various kind of colorful drinks. And usually, people may miss some unexpected motions when they interact with the daily objects. So, I began to consider some interactions with my daily objects like cups, plates, kettle that I used every day, and observed their conditions during my actions. Through recoding those daily moments, I seek to transform the fleeting movements into my art practice.



You use a variety of materials such as acrylic, quartz sand, clay, plaster, resin, plastic, and wax. How do you decide which materials to use for each project?

My choice of materials depends on what characteristics I wish to present and effects in series experiments. For instance, in my beverages experiment, I used butterfly pea flower tea that is natural blue dye transforms to purple with lemon juice and deep blue with soda water. During the process, I think the most exciting moment is where the collisions of different substances emerge the chemical reaction, creating uncontrolled and unexpected liquid flows. That evoked me to use transparent materials to reflect the constant change and present the

ephemerality in that mix moment. So, at this point, materials of resin, plastic, and glass offer the transparency I seek. Other features like melting I would consider using wax, desserts form I would use clay and plaster with acrylic paints to make creamy effects.

Your artistic process begins with personal experiences and observations of everyday objects. Can you share a specific moment or object that has particularly influenced your work?

One of my personal experiences was interacting with the glass cup I used to make my morning drinks every day. During making, I snapshotted fragment images of recording different conditions in the glass cup, by pouring our usual food ingredients like milk, coffee, matcha, jam, etc. observed its mixing movements and capture its motions. I divided them into three main moments for materializing some extraordinary characteristics in practice: static, mixing, remnant.

Based on the snapshots recording, I also gathered those drinks moments in a dairy form on a week, which become a zine for collecting more moments on those liquid motions in glass. The zine also forms a diary of my drink's menu, and becomes a reference for gathering my impressions in sketches to capture the mixing movements in glass cup, trying to through sketches express those exciting mixing moments' characteristics that would help me to transform into marvelous objects making.



Junyi Xie
Pink
2024

How does your background in Environmental Design and Interior Design influence your sculptural and visual art practices?

During my study of Environmental Design, I was encouraged to explore our surroundings and the ways in which environments impact human emotions and perceptions. This perspective drawn my inspirations by exploring fragment scenes surrounded us, and instilled me to consider how my works could incorporate and interact with our surroundings.

Then when studied interior design, with its focus on materiality, color, and sensory experience in space, has shaped my approach to the tactile and visual qualities of my sculptures. My fascination with colorful beverages and sweet foods is heightened by my design practice, since when I did a bar design project. Through design project, I gradually foster to practice creating immersive experience in space to evoke specific moods and multisensory.

Your pieces often evoke the vibrant hues of beverages and sweet foods. What is the significance of these subjects in your work?

I strive to convey the fluidity and transience of everyday experiences, colorful beverages and sweet food has strong allure and always bring me pleasure moods. While at the same time, those things are also ordinary in our mundane world, I seek to inspire viewers to see the potential of everyday aesthetic in common things, fostering a deeper connection to the ordinary moments that define our lives.

What role do you believe color plays in conveying the themes and emotions in your work?

The use of bright, enticing colors in my works usually highlight the often-overlooked beauty in everyday objects, transforming the mundane into something worthy of deeper contemplation. I believe the vividness of these colors conveys the joy and indulgence associated with sweet foods and beverages, drawing attention to the fleeting moments of happiness they bring. At the same time, I consider these colors serve as a reminder of the

Junyi Xie | Pink | 2024





Junyi Xie | Pink | 2024

transience of these experiences. That is, how quickly a moment of pleasure can pass, leaving only a sweet memory.

Your works invite viewers into a world of sensory pleasure. How important is it for you to engage multiple senses in your art?

The sensory engagement is crucial because it deepens the connection between the viewer and the subject matter. Visual appeal alone can captivate, but if it could stimulate other

senses, such as the imagined sweetness of a dessert or the coolness of a drink, viewers are transported into a more intimate, personal resonance with the work. So, I incorporated colorful beverages and sweet food with my sculptural works, designed to evoke the textures, smells, and even imagined tastes of these familiar objects by presenting in visual art. By doing so, I wish to create an immersive experience that draws viewers into the allure of these ordinary yet captivating moments.

— Interview

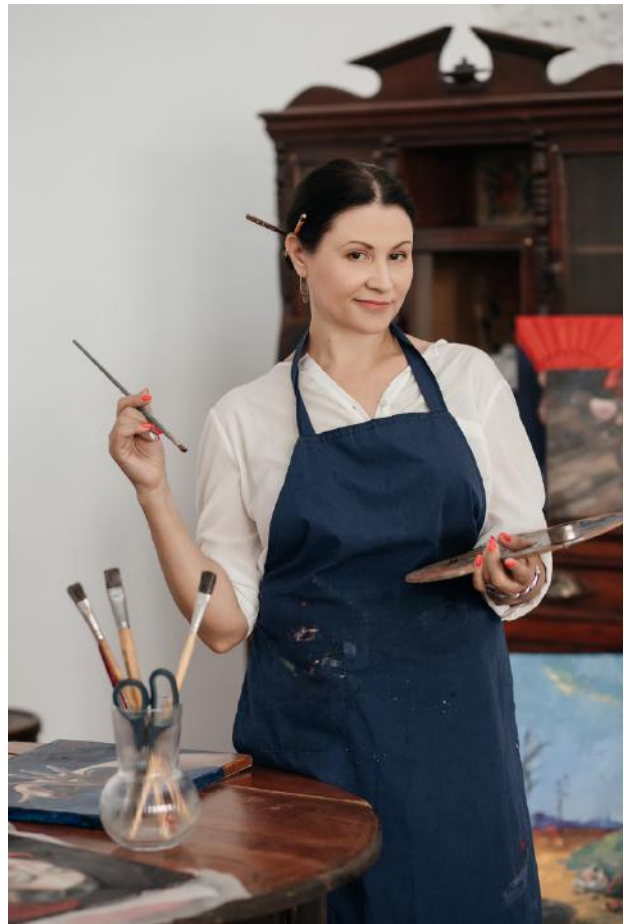
Margarita Smirnova (Margo Miro)

Your series "Fantastic Beasts" combines female portraits with fantastical hybrid animals. What initially inspired you to explore this unique blend of elements?

The "Fantastic Beasts" series emerged from my interest in the duality of human nature and the interaction between humans and the surrounding world. I've always been captivated by the idea that every woman holds an entire universe within herself, full of unexpected facets and mystical sides. We are not just people; we are fantastical beings with rich inner worlds that sometimes manifest in surprising forms.

I enjoy exploring metamorphosis and transformation, both internal and external. The animal symbols intertwined with female images reflect our natural essence, our connection to instincts, strength, and freedom. It's a way to say: "We are more than what meets the eye." Within each of us lies both the wild and the gentle, as well as something that goes beyond ordinary understanding. Perhaps my sense of humor and passion for fantasy just couldn't resist creating such unexpected and delightful hybrids.

Can you elaborate on the symbolism present in your paintings, particularly in how the hybrid creatures reflect human vulnerabilities and fears?



In my works, the hybrid creatures are not just fantastical images but metaphors reflecting deep aspects of human nature. They symbolize not only our strength and instincts but also the vulnerabilities and fears we often hide from the world.

Each creature, whether it has predatory traits or mysterious mythological features, embodies specific characteristics, emotions, or internal conflicts. For example, the animal features might represent the instinctive side of one's personality—those aspects we strive to control or suppress, but which nonetheless exert a strong influence on us.

Vulnerability and fears are inherent parts of human nature. They can manifest as anxiety in dreams, unconscious fears, or internal demons that each of us carries. These hybrid beings offer a way to visualize these feelings, bringing them to light, giving them form and face, so that we can understand

and accept them as part of ourselves. Ultimately, by exploring our fears through art, we become closer to understanding our essence and finding inner harmony.

So, my "Fantastic Beasts" are not just fantasy; they are a dialogue with our own nature, an invitation to look deep within ourselves and see not just darkness but also light, and to make peace with our "inner monsters."

You mentioned that the idea for these paintings began with a dream of a woman with horns. How do dreams and subconscious imagery influence your creative process?

For me, dreams are a kind of parallel reality where those aspects of consciousness that remain in the shadows in everyday life are revealed. The dream about the woman with horns became a real catalyst for creating the "Fantastic Beasts" series. There was a strength and enigma in that dream that I couldn't ignore—such images often spark the beginning of my creative explorations.

I often sketch my dreams; it's like a "guidebook" to my inner world. I store these sketches in a separate folder, an archive of sorts for my subconscious searches and discoveries. Interestingly, sometimes these sketches, forgotten for many years, unexpectedly "wake up" and find their way into new works. It's as if my dreams have their own life, waiting for the right moment to become part of my art.

The subconscious is an incredible source of ideas and images, often far more vivid and emotional than anything found in real life. Working with such imagery is like engaging in a dialogue with myself, trying to decipher the messages from within. In the end, dreams become a bridge between what I



Margarita Smirnova | Medusa Gorgon | 2023

feel and what I can express through painting.

As someone with a background in fashion design, how does this experience influence your approach to painting, especially in terms of composition and the depiction of your subjects?

My experience in fashion design has greatly influenced my approach to painting, especially when it comes to composition and depicting characters. In the world of fashion, every element of a costume carries a specific meaning, and I transfer this principle into my work as an artist.

When I create an image, I always think about the costumes of the characters because they are an integral part of their story and the message I want to convey. Clothing in my paintings is not just a decorative element but an extension of the character, mood, and inner world of the figure.

Fashion and painting intertwine for me, creating a unique visual language where every detail matters and finds its place in the overall picture.

Do you find that your background in various artistic disciplines (such as fashion design, interior design, and caricature) influences the way you approach your current artistic projects?

Absolutely, my experience in various artistic disciplines significantly influences my approach. Each of these fields has contributed to how I see the world and express my ideas through painting.

For instance, working with caricature taught me to capture the essence of an image and convey it with irony and humor. This experience helps me create characters that, despite their fantastical nature, remain recognizable and evoke an emotional response in viewers. My paintings often feature a subtle play with character traits and features, making the images lively and multi-layered.

In design, whether it's fashion or interior design, I always strive to understand the essence of the problem a person faces and find the optimal solution. This analytical approach seeps into my art as well. When creating a piece, I view it not only as a



Margarita Smirnova | Halo-Eyed Bird | 2023

painting but as a tool for resolving inner conflicts, questions, or experiences. It's important for me to understand what lies behind external manifestations—be it emotions or behavior. As a designer, I'm used to searching for underlying causes and designing solutions that are not only visually appealing but also functional, "usable" for the viewer.

In painting, I apply this approach by analyzing the psychology and physiology of my characters. I try to understand what drives them, what inner problems they are trying to solve, and how that can be expressed through art. Here, ergonomics takes on a metaphorical meaning: it's about how the painting "works" for the viewer, how it interacts with their inner world, and what emotions and thoughts it evokes.

My works are not just about creating an image; they are a search for deeper meaning, an attempt to penetrate the essence and offer the viewer a visual solution that can be the beginning of a personal dialogue or even transformation.

Your paintings are deeply symbolic and evoke a sense of mystery. Do you have a specific message or feeling you aim to convey to your viewers through this series?

My paintings are indeed full of symbolism and mystery, and this is a conscious choice. I'm not trying to convey a single specific message; rather, I'm interested in creating a space for interpretation where everyone can find something of their own.

It's important to me that art remains open to different readings. In each work, I embed certain themes—inner strength, vulnerability, transformation—but I leave enough space for the viewer to experience it

in their own way and find their own meanings.

The sense of mystery is an invitation to dialogue, to reflection. I want my paintings to evoke not just visual admiration but also an internal resonance, stirring emotions and thoughts that the viewer might not even have been aware of. It's like a journey into the unknown, where each step reveals something new and unexpected.

So the main message I strive to convey is an invitation to inner exploration. My goal is for the viewer, while looking at my works, to ask themselves questions, find answers, or simply enjoy the process of searching. In the end, art should awaken feelings and open new horizons, and if my paintings do that, then I have achieved my goal.

Your work has been exhibited both in Russia and abroad. How do audiences from different cultures respond to the themes of your "Fantastic Beasts" series?

The "Fantastic Beasts" series has yet to reach physical international exhibitions, but it has already found its way to an international online gallery, where it's beginning to attract viewers' attention. I'm still working on this series, preparing for the moment when it can step into the light and captivate audiences from other countries.

Audiences from different cultures have always responded to my works with interest. Art is a universal language, and although each culture brings its unique perspective, the core themes in my work resonate with people's hearts worldwide. Perhaps someday the "Fantastic Beasts" will embark on their triumphant tour in exhibitions, but for now, they remain in the creative development stage—gathering their mythical power and waiting for their

moment to shine.

So, you could say that my "menagerie" is still on its way to international stages, but I'm confident that when it finally emerges, viewers will eagerly dive into its magical atmosphere.

In my work, I strive not only to explore the inner world of a person but also to touch on global issues that concern us all. I am deeply moved by themes of war and peace, globalization, and digitization—the significant shifts that shape our future and determine what the world will be like for future generations.

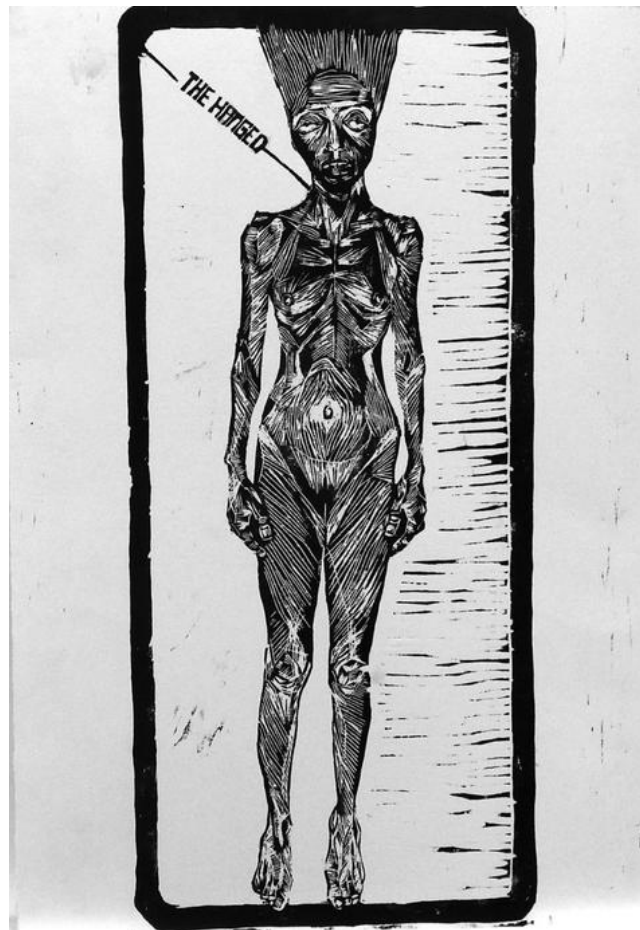
These ideas are reflected in one of my projects, where through homage to famous artists, I draw historical parallels to ask questions and stimulate reflection. I believe that art has the power not only to create beauty but also to serve as a tool for discussing serious topics. In this project, I explore how past art can intersect with contemporary issues and how lessons from the past can help us comprehend current challenges.

For me, it's essential that my works not only please the eye but also encourage dialogue, make people think about what's happening around us, and how we can influence it.



Margo Miro | Fishing | 2024

Federica Frati was born in Brescia (Lombardy, Italy) in 1977 where she lives and works. She attended an art school where she learned the main artistic techniques. After two years of attendance at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera, she graduated at the University of Milan in modern literature. In addition to teaching literature, since 2009, Federica creates engraving prints. From her prints derive several other works, such as paintings and monotypes, where the color and black ink scratch the sheet and turn into a new material. Her practice investigates the inner reality of human being meant as a defenceless creature at the mercy of an empty and cold Firmament.



Federica Frati | The hanged



THE EMPRESS

— Interview

Mithun Nath

Can you tell us about your journey as an artist in the gaming industry?

I have always been passionate about art and craft since childhood. I used to make models and character designs of my own and was amazed to see art moving in computer applications in one of the 90s trade expo. Since then, I was very eager to learn and explore this area and started seeing my future where I can give life to my art and creations. I felt nothing could be better than having a passion as a profession and got into the business of art with technology. My journey started in the gaming world that has been very exciting as every day I have to innovate and create new art and animation that fits in the technical framework. My creation must go through many approval levels of artists and non-artists that measures every art as per business values and goals. I started with the usual computer gaming, simulation and animation path that moved me from India to the world's slot gaming capital in the USA and actively involved in slot gaming development where I have a bigger digital canvas with state-of-the-art hardware technology to showcase my art in public. Working in the gaming industry, I understood the



demography of art trend, player psychology, math model, working in restrictive gaming engine memory footprint and policies that I designated to deliver and build successful games over years. Artists in the gaming world are always encouraged as there is in house training, recognition and awarding as the art catches the attention primarily. There are continuous changes with art styles and supporting technologies that I must remain motivated to adapt to the changes and present the best of my designs and thoughts. So, traditional art forms, particularly sketching and color theory are an everyday practice that is initially the fundamental block of my thought process in presenting the idea. The journey has been challenging and fulfilling till date.

How do your experiences in digital 2D and 3D design influence your traditional artwork?

Since I am into the job of digital creation, the computer generated light and shadow definition are easy to study and

apply the concept in traditional form. 3D design helps in understanding the depth and volume of a shape that is greatly implemented and compared on canvas. Talking about the 2D, the arc of action and balance line testing of character help me to get the proper weight of my character art on paper. Digital art form always helps in colorizing and shaping my idea quickly so that I can take reference to a map on canvas by hand. My experience in digital platforms gave a good understanding of focus subject and composition layout of fit-form and function that I can follow in my paintings. So, in many ways digital exposure has helped getting better on traditional art creation.

What inspires your traditional art forms, especially your oil on canvas works?

It is the random thoughts that I feel to project on canvas. I mentioned, I have been drawing all day back in my school and was recognized as an art kid. The passion grew with time and thoughts wanted to come out in colors and forms. The world I see around, and the moments are the inspiration to quickly print in mind and connect with hand to sketch on paper. The free world of my own with no restriction inspires me to sit and start painting in many moods. The best medium I found was oil and studied fine arts where I can keep changing and blend colors in layers easily and can store art for years. My oil portraits feel special to find space in a few galleries that are an absolute inspiration. Museum visits and other galleries



Mithun Nath | Darkness to Love

inspired me with this technique of great satisfaction and promising output. However, being in the digital world of art, I still connect with oil colors as it gives immense pleasure and happiness to touch and feel a visual piece in the real world shaped by my own passion.

How do you balance your work in the gaming industry with your passion for traditional art?

Gaming output is digital; however, it starts with a traditional approach. It is mostly an in-idea level with rough state of color choices and for concept approvals. So technically a part of traditional art practice is there every day. There are thoughts that can be kept out of gaming and wanted to bring it on the canvas for visual treat. I find my time occasionally after work and participating in art shows helps me with a target date



to submit for art calls. I have the necessary art gear, and this is the medium of stress reliever for me. So, time is managed well to cultivate this passion outside work. I use my vacation time from work for a few art projects a year.

How has your cultural background influenced your artistic style and themes?

I am originally from India, a land of diverse culture, heritage, and many colors. My upbringing in different locations has greatly inspired me to look at various local styles. There are art and sculpture displays across the nation depicting lives in mythological stories from ancient times. I shared the art with a mesmerizing face of calmness, beauty of music and spiritual strength in many colors and patterns that are purely

Indian by heart. This theme is showing my background connection as the way I thought of Krishna's personality and blended in the festival of colors Holi. Most of my creations will have colors that came from my cultural influence. Similar color band is seen in Taj paintings. Although I brought my unique mixed style of Eastern and Western to my present workplace, I adapted to Western and Asian as well to cater the art package to these demographics.

What message do you hope to convey through your traditional art pieces?

Water, Fire, Air, Earth - Found life in the light of hope (Earth), dipped in calmness (Water).. Let the flowing thoughts (flowing hair in Air) spread the warm positive energy (Fire) all over to win the darkness..

The basics of life building are based on these elements. These are not destructive but appear fierce and deadly sometimes. Life is in good hands (Goddess of Nature) when these four elements are respected and taken care of in a continuous flowing manner.

Darkness to Love - Darkness induces dreams of oneness.. when music touches the soul, a little flier can trace her aromatic goal. A small light blends, intensifies colors of all races and minds together.. with peace, harmony and love forever..

The beauty of darkness is amazing. Music is a universal of one language and doesn't need light to see but loved by all around the world equally, a flower fragrance can be smelled in darkness as

well.. and a little light of empowerment in darkness can be strong and amplify all positive beautiful thoughts together to greater mission on humanity of love leaving behind inequality and sufferings. In darkness all are equal.

Krishna - Life is a color of multiple shades.. Turn darker ones to brighter with melody and calmness. A smile is always winning in all situations.

Taj - A wonder in a wonder of colors.. Floating amidst sky and water in dusk and dawn. Start a day wonderfully and the day's achievement in the end makes it wonderful again..

How do you see the relationship between digital and traditional art evolving in the future?

Digital art is enormously evolving at a greater pace with AI these days, however traditional art I feel to be valued forever. As I am very connected in digital media, still my heart follows traditional art forms. The feel of thoughts and being unique of its kind will always be there in want. I would compare it with Violin instrument. There are electric ones too but still there is such a unique attachment to the traditional one that



Mithun Nath | Krishna

has been there for ages. Knowledge of traditional art forms is the basic criteria to work in digital art media. Digital is in business demand as it is quickly done and can be replicated but the original idea is planned somewhere on paper and pencil mostly. Concept art is formulated traditionally for digital production from games to movies. The future could be promising for traditional art forms with more encouragement to talents from art houses and strict policies on original copyrights. Business would always follow a faster pace where traditional art will lag behind unfortunately. Art is non technical and I believe more people would love to do art if that is directed in making a competitive living. I am seeing more exhibitions and visits happening that are very hopeful. There are street arts, hand painted billboards and interiors sponsored by big agencies to present uniqueness in decor. More buildings and architecture can provide opportunities to bring up local artists and manual art installation. Future is largely dependent on how the awareness and support from various schools, government agencies and appreciators are interested. I will do my part as much as I can in my capacity.

Mithun Nath | Taj

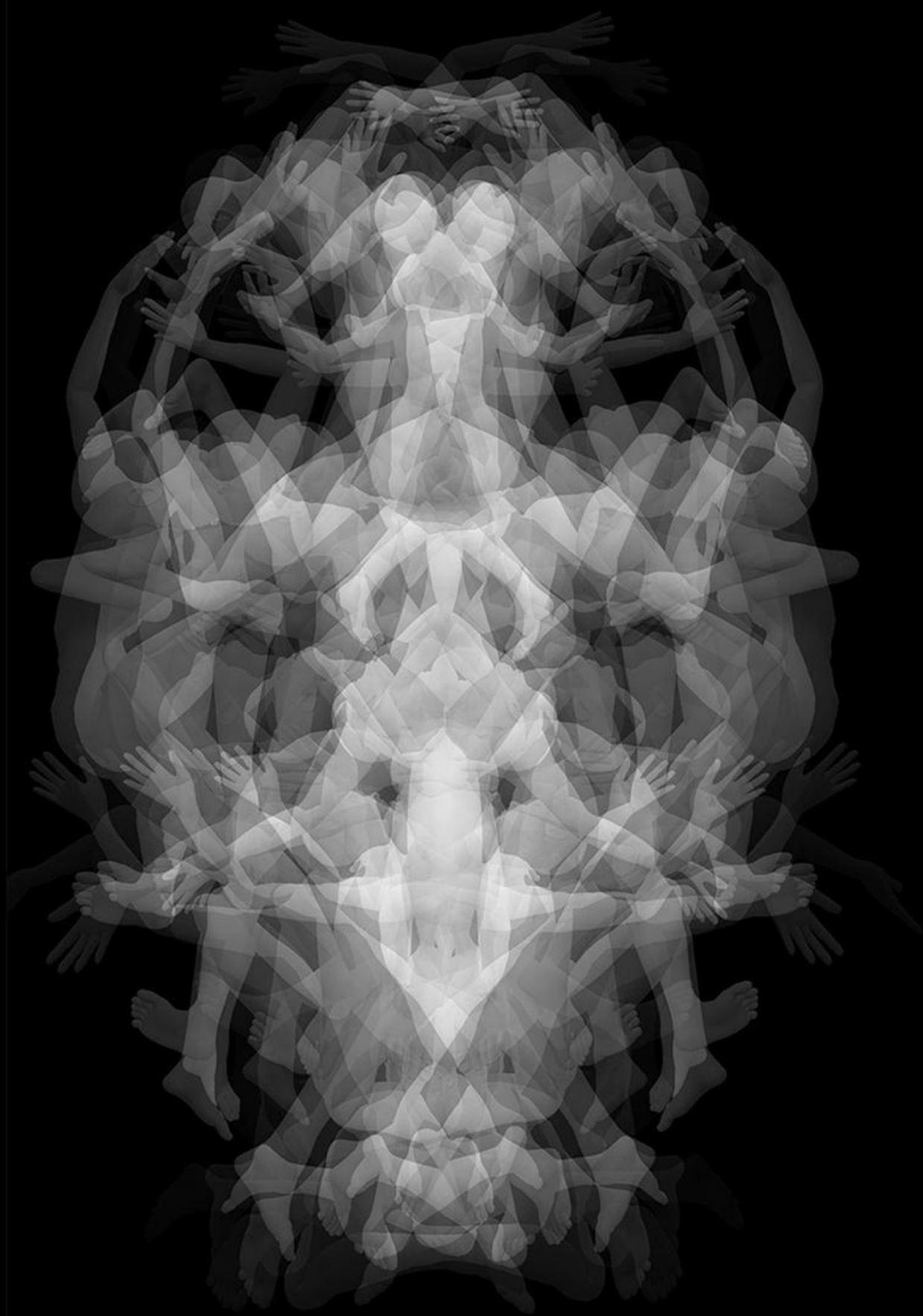


I grew up studying art and completed my understanding of myself and the world through Making and appreciating art. I went to college to study fine art and photography and started making mixed media works. My artworks focus on the exploration of the self and the spiritual world through bodies. Regarding art as alchemy and life as ritual, I seek to redefine time and space, inviting spectators to glimpse themselves through my work.

— Zihan (Jenny) Zhou



Zihan (Jenny) Zhou | Square Inch Series (2) | 2021



— Interview

Laura Barrado García

Can you tell us about your journey from Spain to Belgium and how it has influenced your art?

I was actually in the middle of my bachelor's degree in fine arts when I decided to move to Belgium where my parents also live, in fact, I moved here because they came first and it was my chance to live outside of Spain. At that time I was doing more traditional art and it was only a few months before I made the decision to move out that I started to learn how to paint digitally. So suddenly here I was, back to live with my parents after 2 years apart, this time in a new country where I had to learn a new language, very different from my own or even English, and try to apply to university again.

I would say that it was quite a change from what I knew and what I was used to do with my life. With no proper classes and only 2 years of learning the language and English, I had plenty of time to relearn how to draw this time digitally. So I opened my Instagram account and started making fanart of the



different things I got interested. At the same time, I got quite depressed for a while and I threw myself into fantasy like fandoms as a comfort, Harry Potter, Adventure Time, Carry On... you can still see all those old drawings on my Instagram and how my style changed from one illustration to the next. However I would say that keeping it "magical" actually helped me through that time. Sometimes I think my style would be different if I had stayed in Spain, maybe something more stylistic or refined, who knows!

What initially inspired you to pursue a career in illustration?

This is a difficult question, because as long as I can remember, all I have ever wanted to do with my life was to create and to draw.

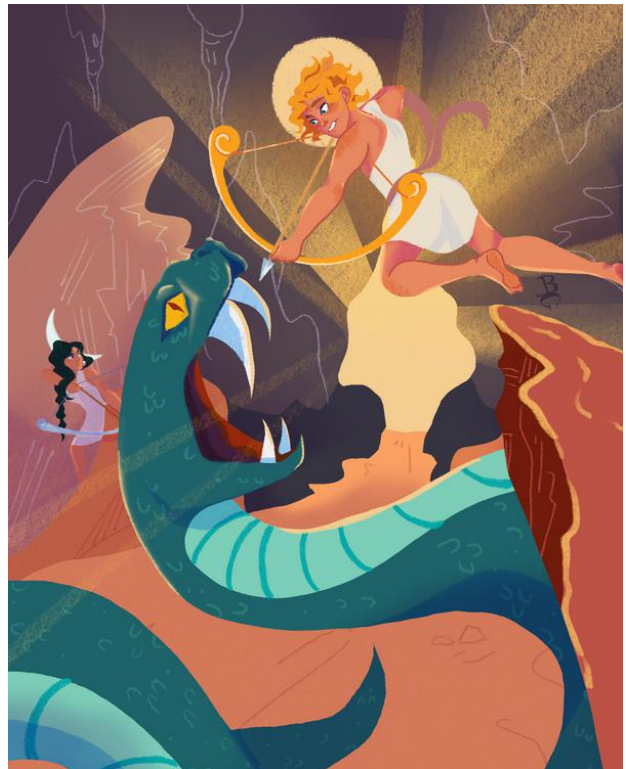
There was never any doubt in my mind

what I wanted to do with my life, but of course I didn't decide right away that I wanted to be an illustrator, I think I went through several processes, I wanted to be a comic book artist, a concept artist, and I even thought about animation, but then, I don't know, one day I think it just clicked. Apart from drawing, my other great passion is reading. I love imagining all the scenes in books in my head, and I guess the realisation that I wanted to be an illustrator came naturally.

How do your two greatest passions, drawing and reading, influence each other in your creative process?

Honestly, I think they are so connected at this point that they are one and the same!

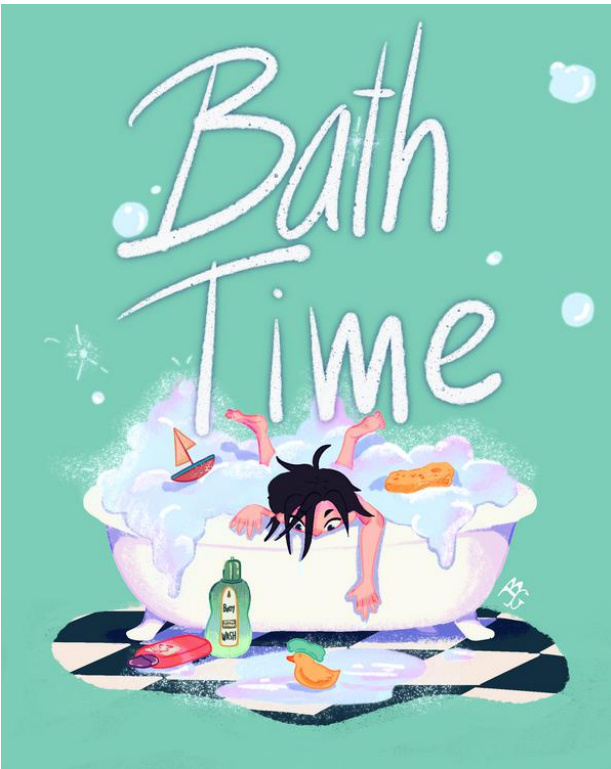
When I was a kid, I used to have the usual arguments with my parents about the obligatory summer books from school. I was so against reading that it's a recurring joke in my family these days. Then my mum signed me up for one of those book companies where they come to your house with a catalogue and you choose the books you want and they deliver them to you, and that is how I got into fantasy books. I was quite young, so of course my fantasy books had illustrations in them. Geronimo Stilton, Fairy Oak and I don't know how many others. I read so much about dragons and fairies and witches and other magical creatures that by high school it was all I could think about and therefore all I could draw! Fantasy is still my favourite genre, so it hasn't changed much over the years.



Laura Barrado
Apollo and Python
2024

Your work often features elements of magic and fantasy. What draws you to these themes?

There's definitely comfort in it for me, as I said, it's usually the genre I read the most. Life is often hard and sometimes boring, it becomes repetitive when you follow a routine in your daily life and I find a bit of happiness and relief when I draw fantasy. Like adding colourful sprinkles to an ice cream! Life can be very good, but what if there could be more of it? There are many things we don't know and as children we all believe in fantasy and magic. We lived in a world where anything was possible, that's what I like about drawing fantasy, the illusion, the wonder in ordinary things or mythical creatures, but also the silliness and chaos that magic usually represents.



What role do daydreams and imagination play in your illustrations?

I would say they are the engine of everything I do. I have had a very active imagination since I was a child, in fact I was often punished at school for being in my own world. Often little ideas come to me and it's like untangling a knot, sometimes you pull on the thread and it goes on revealing more information, new characters, their backstories, their worlds and so on. My mind gets restless until I have created enough of them, I throw myself into giving them life, I write mini stories and I do some illustrations. It's just a constant thing that happens, like when I'm walking my dogs and the next song that comes on fits a certain atmosphere as we walk through the park. I just imagine fairies or big adventures! Or maybe it's more quiet and I imagine how my dogs are feeling as we walk.

Can you describe a particular piece of art that you are most proud of and why?

There is this piece that I have not posted yet, or maybe I have, depending on when people read this interview.

There is this young magician arguing with his crow in his magic studio. It's not a very complicated piece, but it's probably one of my favourites at the moment.

It has this whimsical feeling to it. It's playful with beautiful colours that I associate with magic and celestial bodies like blues, pinks, greens... in the background there are 3 paper lanterns in the shape of stars and a stained glass window that fills the whole illustration with these colours. It's a simple



Laura Barrado
Magical
2024



Laura Barrado
To be born 1
2024

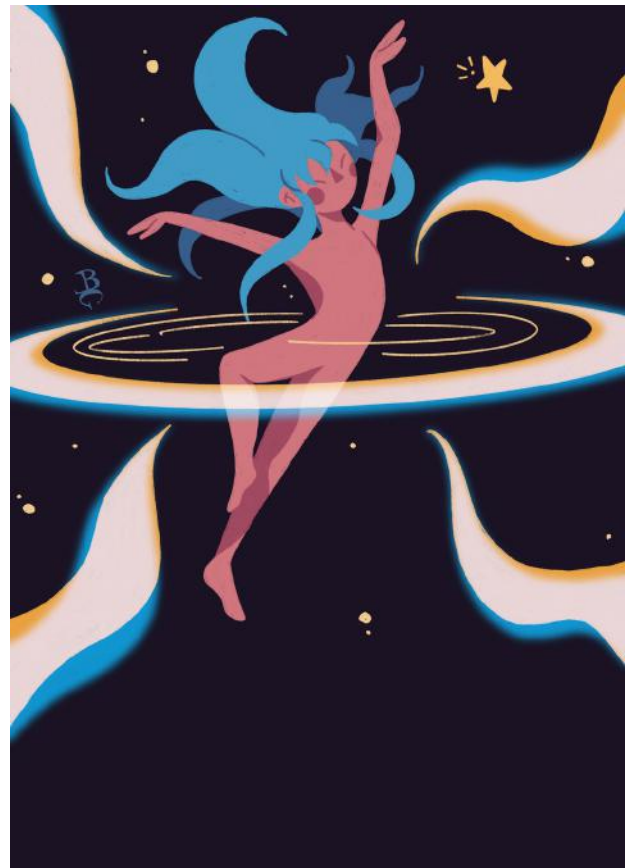
want to do right, I know you want to be seen, you want to jump right in and you will. You will do so much good once you get out of your own head. Be brave, be kind, be loud, be who you want to be. For this is your dream and it will be worthy. Do not be afraid and keep fighting, do not give up! Don't think you will fail because you won't, even if things don't go as planned, take a deep breath, count to ten and look carefully, have you ever really failed or was it just the right window opening for you when the wrong door closed?

Laura Barrado
To be born 3
2024

illustration, but it feels very cosy to me. The chaos of magic is there, there are books that are about to fall and a cauldron of bubbling potion, but even in the chaos, it's a place I'd like to be, to grab one of those books and find a cosy spot next to the stained glass window under the paper lanterns.

What advice would you give to aspiring illustrators who are just starting out?

It's funny, I'm starting myself, so this is going to sound like advice to myself, which I hope will actually reach people who are in my shoes right now. So what I'm going to say is: I know this is scary, I know you want to do good, you



I am a self taught artist in Phoenix, Arizona. I was born from Peruvian immigrant parents and my family is very STEM oriented. I've graduated from the state university with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Animation in 2023 and since then I have experienced the true starving artist life. My works reflect my journey in finding my identity in the art world, and the piece that I have submitted is a tribute to my partner who has pushed me to continue creating art and not to give up on my life dreams.

— Bri Rios



— Interview

Art_LOwie2y

Can you tell us about your journey as an artist?

It has been interesting time actually. My artist journey has never been easy. Many professional artists do not call or categorise me as artist because I am 'self-taught artist' and I do not live on doing art. I haven't sold many arts to support my family yet. However, I do believe that artists can be in many ways. Many traditional artists believe their way is better as artist. But we are in a different century now. Cost of living is sky-rocketed and not many people have jobs that they really like. Likely I have both. (To ethical boundary, I keep confidential about what I do for living). If people believe that they are artist, I respect that. I do create different forms of arts so I do think I'm artist though. Sorry if it's off topic.

What inspired you to start creating art?

My grand father and my mother are good at drawing. When I grew up with my mum drawing, Yes I learnt how to draw quickly.

My mum is minimalist so she doesn't like to have toys at home. My mum always



Art_LOwie2y | Beauty in quirkiness

tell me 'if you don't have one, you make one'. So when I was little, went to library to borrow art and craft book. Then me n my mum spent time to creating toys or something. I do appreciate my mum teaching me this.

I spent lots of time outside observing cloud, playing with nature's which give me curiosity to the world. When I wanted to do quite time, I tended to spend time drawing or painting even when I was little.

In traditional Japanese culture, people are taught to respect others by listening and keeping own opinion inside. Because of this, I tend to struggle with verbal expression. However, I utilise art as my expression and communication in older age.



I do enjoy art as therapeutic purposes too. As older age as professional, it is not easy work to work with communities and people who are in need.

How has your experience of "being different" influenced your artwork?

It is every single experience I'd say. In many cultures, being in Group is the important to feel belonging.

When I was as little as I was 5 years old, I was chasing after different people. When I was in primary school, I saw a girl with hearing aid and used hands to communicate. So I borrowed dictionary to learn and communicate with the girl.

In middle school, I had tough time. I was bullied because I was more fair skin than other Japanese girls, I didn't have some trend brand clothes or bags for school,

so on. At the same time, issue with family, relationship with friends, mental health which struggled to sleep, pressure at school and not doing well at school.

I have had quite good experiences which now I was kind of glad that I experienced. Because I can feel other people who struggle.

My art is very different from one to another. I haven't set my style yet. But I have also learned n enjoyed exploring different styles.

You mentioned that your art draws inspiration from personal experiences and social issues. Can you share a specific piece that reflects this?

All of my artworks are inspired by my personal experiences.



What was it like to have your work exhibited in international galleries such as in London and New York?

It was unreal. I started sharing my artworks to challenge. Then, Horly Art Gallery, Art House NY, and Arteom gallery love my artworks.

I'm so thrilled to be in some of exhibitions with other amazing artists. I am still can't believe my arts were there.

You use a variety of materials and art styles. Do you have a preferred medium, and why?

I love oil pastel because it can be blended. I can create many different forms. I like medium because I feel

comfortable too I guess.

How do you incorporate themes of minority groups and social justice into your art?

So I create art which are bit controversial, such as gay right, war, mental health. Then I share the art though social media or big exhibition to tell the world. When I post them on social media, I use additional stories to express how important it is.

What message do you hope people take away from your artwork?

Be opened mind. I do not force everyone to like my art.



Art_L0wie2y | On my way...



My name

Who I am young girl
I want to be
an engineer, and work
in big company. I have
a big dream. No one tell me
what to do.



I speak many languages.
I have big families.
I am elderly in my family. I have 5 siblings.
They are still very young. My mum needs to
stay at home and look after them.
I have lived in many countries. My family
migrated here. Everybody here looks very
different to me. BUT I continue wearing my cloth
This is my culture, respect for my self, family and
my friends. I like to play soccer with people. make
my own state board. Its so cool. Now I am proud
NOT to hear you know? We are human, have ears
just define the who I am. I am normal girl...
I cover my skin and body does
not want to be as some other girl...
I often go to play, talk & sit with me...

Car

— Interview

Rayeon Kim

Can you tell us about the inspiration behind your project "Fly Over"?

So far, most of the artworks I have created stand for one theme - freedom. The project "Fly Over" is the same. But at this point, I wanted to capture the specific moment of a bird flying over. Because I think the desire to fly like a bird is a pure emotion of a human being. That is the emotion of the people who created flights as well :)

How does the concept of "flying over" relate to your personal experiences or artistic journey?

The 2 photographs of the project are portraying the perfume store I actually worked for over a year and a half. I learned the skill to manage the store, a sensitivity to distinguish different scents, and experienced many kinds of customers who have specific tastes. I believe those times influenced me deeply as an artist, in a way to broaden the world view. The artworks I created in the past and the experiences I made inside of society and travels became great steps before my moment of "Fly Over".



Your work seems to capture a sense of movement and freedom. How do you approach conveying these feelings through your art?

Firstly for the painting, I try to match my sense of body to the theme. I turn on music which makes me feel free - Kings Of Convenience's songs are nowadays my favorite !

And I see the images for free emotion, such as the walking videos in the foreign cities and the photographs I took on travels. Also, I always spray fresh perfumes on the workplace.

For photography, I capture the moment when I feel the emotion of the theme in real life. If the moment does not come naturally, I direct the scene by myself. The three photographs of the project portraying the street views follow my direction.

I secretly took a walk outside of the store when there was no customer, and

conveyed my real free emotion through those photographs.

What challenges have you faced as a young, emerging artist in Seoul, and how have you overcome them?

I had a lack of artistic network in relationships and lack of space to only focus on creating artworks.

So I took part in the painting classes runned by several contemporary artists who are actually active in the art field in Seoul.

And I visit lots of art exhibitions. It helps me not only for my artistic inspiration but also to have a conversation with the artists.

For the art workshop place, I rented a rental studio. It could be a little bit exhausting to make a reservation every single time.

But there are positive sides as well - the price is affordable and I can choose the atmosphere of a town and theme of the studio suit for the artwork :)



How do you see your art evolving in the future? Are there any specific themes or projects you would like to explore next?

I want to evolve the projects in a more detailed, sensitive way. "Fly Over" is quite pioneering and mighty.

The next artwork will be about the sense you feel through the delightful citrus scent.

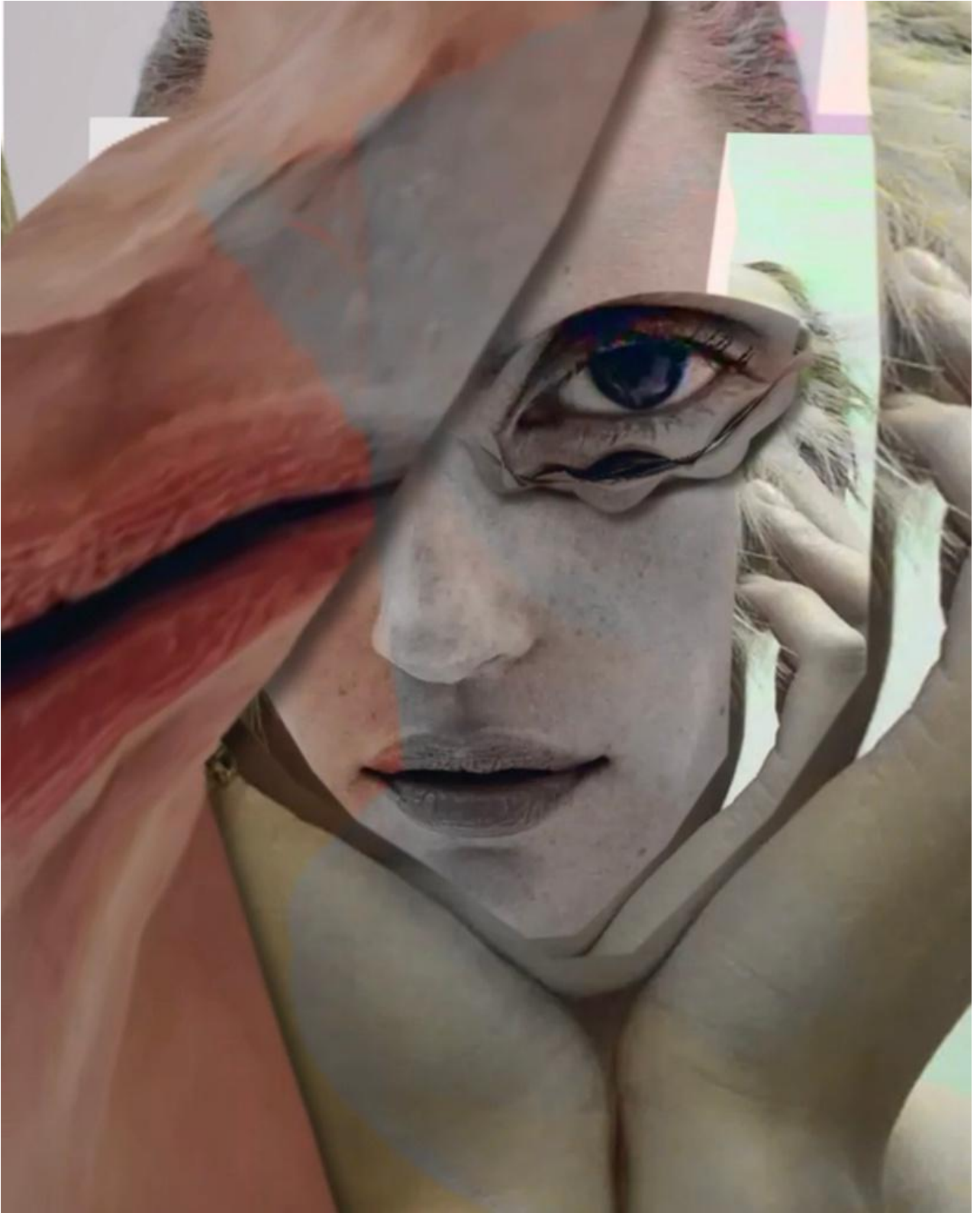
I will use the canvas sized 90.9 X 72.7 and it will be a serene, dreamy mood acrylic painting captures your happiness.

What advice would you give to other emerging artists who are trying to find their unique voice in the art world?

Do not disappoint with the background you have got at the moment. Just focus on protecting your values and energy. Every experience becomes a foundation for your artistic journey.

So believe in yourself, think deeply about what only you can do, and how to show your works to the world :)

Rita Zielinska publishes under the name **Vanessa Banani** is multidisciplinary visual artist. She creates videos, animations and illustrations. In her works she mainly uses the collage technique. Her biggest inspirations are fashion magazines and beauty industry. She likes to combine various incongruous elements, playing with scale and texture. She uses parts of the human body and plant elements to illustrate her surreal ideas. Especially animation becomes for her an unlimited support for her imagination.



Vanessa Banani
Face
2024



— Interview

Christy Brown

What inspired you to start exploring photography and graphic design?

I've been drawing on every piece of paper in sight ever since I was a kid, I always knew I was bound to work in some kind of creative field, but I was never sure what. But then I found graphic design, and I realized its potential opportunities.

Graphic Design permeates our lives, when you go to work, buy a product, or even walk down the street and see a poster or sign, that piece was made to attract your attention and curry your favor to buy it. Its both artistically and psychologically interesting. Plus it also makes for a somewhat steady job. Photography was also something I got into at a young age. I used to steal my parent's small digital camera and take pictures of everything in sight. It wasn't until I became a teenager that I fully understood the artistry of photography and how it can be used to create an interesting visual style.

How do you approach the creative process when working on a new project?

How I approach a project depends on how I come upon a subject or idea. I've



often been inspired by films I've seen, books I've read, or images or phrases that pop into my head. Sometimes I have experiences and times in my life that way heavy on me, so I have to process them into art. Last summer I was going through a bout of insomnia, so I ended up taking those experiences and turning them into a series of photos that later got made into a collage. The series of photos here were inspired by the fact that I had discovered a love for wearing dresses. This made me question the meaning of an identity and what it means to be a person. The confling ideas and emotions that can fill someone. But sometimes its not as philosophical as that. Sometimes I get a new piece of equipment that can open up a new avenue of ideas and possibilities. Many things can give me ideas on where the project should go. Even during the development of the prints, they can give me some good ideas. It just just depends.

Can you tell us about your favorite project to date and why it stands out to you?

I'd say the one that I'm presenting in this magazine is my favorite. I was pleased with where it went and how it turned out. It had to do with the form it took, but also the subject. The many layers of a person's identity, what it means to be a singular person, and what conflicts come from that. Its something that still fills my head.

How has your education at the University of Kentucky influenced your work?

The University of Kentucky really helped me broaden my horizons when it came to my perception of art. U.K. is where I learned the end and outs of photography and how to develop and make prints. I got a more explorative look at art history. I knew a little about a



few movements, but I learned about multiple movements, the artists, the works, and what they meant within they're history context and to us today. But what it did was loosen my preconceptions of what could be considered art. From Dadaism to Post-Modernism, I realized what made art was a wide margin. Whether it was good was, of course, subjective.

How do you stay inspired and continue to grow in your creative field?

I always try to keep my mind open to new and interesting things I see around me. Like I said before anything can stir up a new idea within me, so always being open to new methods, ideas, and styles, helps me keep from going cold. Life experiences are always important sources for ideas. But there are still times when I do hit a slump and I have a

hard time coming out of it. With this its always important to know when to press on and when to step back and take a break. I have found that taking a break can often help refresh you artistic mind.

How do you balance your work between photography and digital design?

It can be hard to balance, especially when photography usually takes longer to do, especially with film. But I usually find myself working with photography more because I find it more interesting. I can usually take a photo and build off that with how I edit it or print it. But I do like when I am able to combined both to create much more interesting piece. Things like ads, posters, and album covers often please me just as much as a

simple photo.

What advice would you give to aspiring photographers and designers who are just starting out?

The advice I would start with is don't be afraid to go to more vulnerable topics, either personal or not. It can be very hard, especially for someone like me who can be very private, but I think if you fine a good way to express it I think can pay off in the end. For a while I felt that my early art work, while good, didn't really have that dept and that my work had when I became more open with the subject matter I tackled. Another I would advise is to leave time to play. Some of my best ideas and pieces came from a fucking around and seeing what might come out of it.



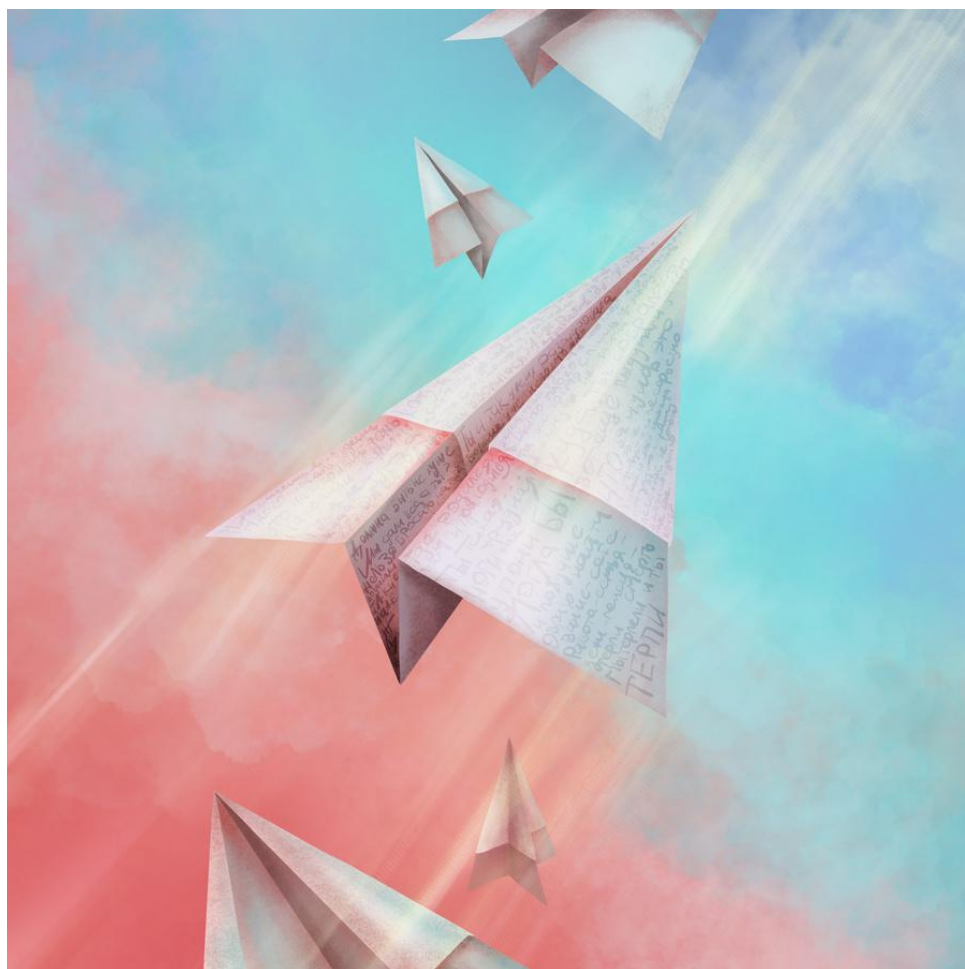
My name is **Evgeniia Gorelova**, I'm 34 years old, and I'm still searching for myself. In art, in life, and in my mind. Through art, I want to show people that they are not alone in their thoughts and feelings.

Let them go

Sometimes our thoughts are overwhelmed with external beliefs and the voices of parents/teachers/society, which hinder us from living, growing, and enjoying every moment. But it's so inspiring when you let go of all these limitations, seal them in a paper airplane, and release them into the sky. Watching it fly away, you finally feel true freedom.

Klimt now

This piece is based on one of Gustav Klimt's most famous paintings, "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I," but with a modern interpretation—symbols of the pain and vulnerability of today's generation. The painting reflects the idea of a rift between the past and the present, showcasing the anxieties of the modern world—the inability to see what truly matters and the traumas of a generation.



Evgeniia Gorelova | Let them go | 2023



— Interview

Olga Naumenko

Could you please tell us more about your past and what led you to transition from a legal career to fully immersing yourself in painting?

My career in law was quite successful. Even as a student, I realized that law was my path, and I had made the right career choice because each subject fascinated me. General Theory of Law, Criminal Law, Civil Law, Administrative Law, Forensics, Investigation, Judiciary—these opened up a new world to me, and I enjoyed it and my involvement in it! The legal profession is full of discoveries due to the wide range of activities in different fields of law. I was passionate about it and fully immersed myself in the processes. I worked for 15 years in a wonderful, close-knit team of like-minded people, diligently fulfilling my duties, defending and upholding my employer's interests in negotiations with partners, in arbitration, in courts of various jurisdictions, as well as in relations with government agencies and third-party organizations, constantly honing my professionalism.

As a responsible employee, I often placed my employer's interests above my own, and this imbalance turned out to be extremely destructive for me. The situation worsened during the liquidation process of the company and the breakdown within a once unified team. All this led to emotional burnout. As a lawyer, someone with a vast amount of knowledge about the company's activities accumulated over 15 years, I couldn't just leave suddenly. So, I witnessed my colleagues leave one by one. It was painful to say goodbye.

Yes, the last year at the company, 2021, was very tough... Every morning, I woke up already feeling tired and apathetic. I performed my duties



automatically, without feeling, without emotion... there was none left. And was I even there? I felt broken, crushed, destroyed. The feelings of bitterness, failure, and guilt were constantly oppressing me. I didn't want to eat, didn't want to sleep, didn't want anything—I had no desires left. I don't know how it would have ended if one weekend I hadn't forced myself to pick up a canvas. I knew I needed to find a way out of this dead-end state, and creativity could help. Apparently, my depressed soul somehow reached out to my consciousness with a quiet voice pointing me in the right direction. I sat for a long time staring at the canvas, searching for inspiration. But what can be found in inner emptiness? Nothing in the outer world brought me joy.

It seems that emotional burnout rebuilt and renewed my consciousness, changing my outlook on the world around me and on myself. Everything changed. As they say, 'To build something new, you need to tear down the old.' I went through my own destruction; it was time to build my new world and recreate myself. I was gathering myself piece by piece, collecting the fragments of my soul. My creative nature took over and led me to a new level of mastery. I embarked on a new path with a new name: Asseya!

How did attending the painting studio in 2018 influence you, and how did this decision change your life?

Since childhood, I have been passionate about drawing, participated in competitions, and won. My school notebooks were 'decorated' with intricate drawings, much to the displeasure of my teachers and parents. Creativity was always an integral part of my life. As I developed as an individual and a professional, it receded into the background. However, events in 2018 put everything back into place.

My younger daughter, Miroslava, is a very creative person. In 2018, when she was six years old, I decided to take her to an art studio where talented artist-teachers taught children how to paint. As it happened, the creative process captivated me as well, and it still hasn't let go. I am immensely happy about that.

It was a curious sight: the class was in session, with the children painting their pictures at easels, while I stood nearby—'Aunt Olya,' as they called me—working on my own oil painting on a large canvas. I painted picture after picture, meticulously honing my skills. I couldn't stop. One day, the studio administrator jokingly said, 'Since you joined us, Olga, the children have been choosing their themes based on what you paint: If Olga is painting peacocks, everyone paints peacocks; if Olga is painting peonies, everyone paints peonies.' In reality, the studio employed very talented young artists who generously shared their knowledge and skills with the students. I am incredibly grateful to them!

That's how painting entered my life. At that time, I was still working as a lawyer, but I always found time for my favorite activity—for creativity. Everything in our lives happens at the right time, and painting came to me when it was meant to. More than once, it has saved me during emotionally difficult situations. It is a new resource for me! It's a vast potential! It's a separate, rich, and mysterious world!

You could say that in 2018, my life was divided into 'before' and 'after.' Thanks to painting, everything around me gained new colors. I began



Olga Naumenko | Human

to notice things I hadn't seen before: shades, colors, shapes, details...

You mentioned experiencing emotional burnout in 2021. How did painting help you cope and recover during that difficult time?

For me, painting is not just a mechanical process. It might sound crude, but I'll explain. Painting is a conversation with yourself, with your soul, with your inner world. I approach the canvas with a concept in mind, with certain thoughts, but in my case, creativity isn't about the mind or thoughts. The painting creates itself. The brush dances over the canvas, and this dance is only understood by it and my soul. Often, when the painting is finished, I study it closely, trying to comprehend the conversation that took place in a world beyond the grasp of reason. And I do understand. I see the enchanting and powerful energies that permeate my paintings.

When I paint, I enter a special altered state of consciousness, a state of mental calm. My soul creates, and through creativity, it has healed. The restoration of my spiritual world was followed by physical healing. The harmonizing, healing energies remain on the canvases forever, working wherever and with whomever they end up.

Could you describe the process of creating your abstract textured paintings?

Oh! It's amazing, I must say! The essence of this process, its energetic aspect, I described in my



previous answer. Now, let's talk about the technique.

In creating a new work, aside from textured paste, primer, acrylic and dry paints, sprays, and wax pastes, I use a wide variety of materials—different types of gold leaf, foil, paper, glass granules, fabric, tree bark, and even sand. To create various textures, I use different application techniques as well as special varnishes like crackle varnish to achieve cracks on the texture or paint. I won't reveal all my secrets—I'll leave some mystery.

To be honest, for a long time, I didn't understand abstract art. Now, I can't help but paint it. I guess I've come to understand and appreciate abstraction for what it is. It's not easy to break away from the conventional understanding of the world around us, to depart from familiar depictions and abstract them, to represent them using purely formal elements like line, plane, color blotches, and so on. It's a different way of thinking, a different perspective. It's thrilling!

So, let's return to the painting process. With an idea in mind, I first select a canvas for its realization, then gather the necessary materials and paints. I apply textured paste to the canvas using various palette knives, brushes, and, when needed, other items from my material collection (foil, paper, bark...). The painting then needs time, about a day, to rest and dry. If multiple layers of texture need to be applied in stages, each layer dries for a day. That's the technique.

After the texture dries, I give it color, glow, and age it using special methods. The white, seemingly lifeless texture gains character, depth, movement—the plot comes to life with a myriad of colors. I love layering colors; it gives the paintings a certain mystery, depth, and multidimensionality.

The creation process is always unpredictable because the soul has its own plans. The mind decided to paint an interesting textured spiral, but the soul said, 'This will be a writhing dragon.' And that's how I paint my works.

What themes or messages do you aim to convey through your works, especially in paintings like 'Human,' 'Earth's Waters,' and 'The Soul's Journey'?

I must admit, without false modesty, that the deep meaning and symbolism of the painting 'Human' amazed even me! The idea was there, but what my soul expressed, its thoughts reflected on the canvas, are worthy of admiration.

The abstract painting 'Human' reveals the essence of a person as a combination of conscience, spirit, soul, and body. The inner light of a person—the light of the spirit, conscience, a symbol of the divine origin of humans—is represented in the painting by shades of yellow partially covering a golden background. In this way, the inner light of a person, their spirit and conscience, manifests itself.

The painting shimmers and sparkles depending on the angle and the light, which is also symbolic—a symbol of a person's multifaceted nature, a symbol of their manifestation as a creator in different areas of life and various life situations. The depth and complexity of the soul are depicted through the interplay of many shades of blue and indigo with glowing thin silver and gold veins, symbolizing the manifestation of a person's soul in the material world. The connection between spirit and soul, the manifestation of spirit and conscience through the soul in our material world, is shown through the texture in blue tones. The red splashes on the foreground represent matter, the physical

body, one's blood ties, one's lineage. The breadth of the splashes symbolizes the tree of human kin. The artificial aging of the painting speaks to the centuries-old history of the essence of every person and humanity as a whole.

I hope this painting, and the meanings embedded in it, will inspire people to explore themselves, to reflect on their essence and value, their place and role in this world.

The abstract painting 'Earth's Waters' is dedicated to our beautiful planet. It is also filled with symbolism and meaning. The upper and lower waters of the Earth (the top and bottom parts of the painting in blue tones on foil) combine to give life (the part of the painting in the color of young greenery), vibrant and diverse, rapidly developing, symbolically depicted by a silver stream on the blue and green bands in the center of the painting. The depiction of the depth, purity, and transparency of the waters is enhanced by the foiled base. The blue horizontal stripe in the center of the composition represents our world, situated between the waters, where life materializes in all its forms.

The painting is aimed at human development and harmonization, giving motivation for movement, improvement, and growth. It also encourages the viewer to reflect on the need for careful treatment of Earth's waters, its plant and animal world, and Earth as our home overall.

In the abstract painting 'The Soul's Journey,' the path of the soul homeward is depicted—its return to its origins. When a person is born, perhaps only in early childhood do they remember their soul, hear it, and follow its call.

They are one, as intended, living in the same flow. Through such unity, the soul can realize the purpose of this incarnation. However, as one grows, they 'acquire' beliefs, principles, and convictions and forget their soul, stop hearing it. And it grieves, it cries, causing suffering in the person who doesn't understand the cause. But from the start, the entire path of a person is a journey to oneself—it is the soul's journey, the journey of growth in Spirit! Many people live with an inexplicable, aching longing, not



Olga Naumenko | Earth's Waters

understanding its nature. It's quite possible that their soul is simply yearning for its native home. This painting is a guide in finding one's path.

What role does symbolism play in your art, and how do you integrate it into your abstract works?

Symbolism is one of the languages an artist uses to communicate with their audience. This language is close and understandable to me, as the paintings I create are filled with mysterious sacred, mythological plots and meanings that, in my opinion, can only be conveyed through symbolism.

What does abstract painting mean to you, and why is it your passion?

Yes, it's truly a passion! That's the only way to describe my relationship with abstract painting. After all, it's a mystery waiting to be solved, a secret hidden beneath formal elements, and I am drawn to everything mysterious, mystical, and sacred. I love to set riddles and solve them. In abstract paintings, where there are no obvious forms or understandable objects, sacred meanings, algorithms, and energies fit harmoniously. My paintings have a special kind of magnetism because they are imbued with my love for painting, for abstraction; they are filled with transformative energies that bring people the long-awaited change.

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