

# VISUAL ART JOURNAL







# — Intro

Hello, dear reader,

You are holding the 24th issue of our magazine, brimming with creativity.

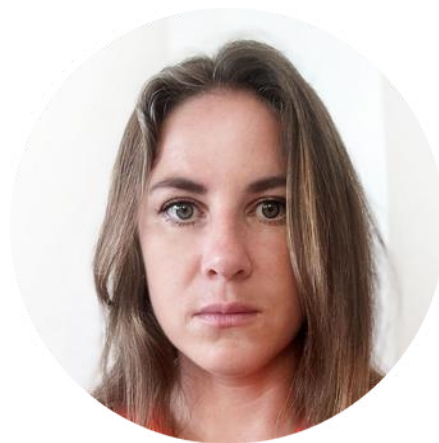
After so many interviews, I keep wondering: what is the secret? Why do some artists so quickly find their path and the confidence to walk it, while others search for years without success? If we set aside chance — those serendipitous encounters with the right person at just the right moment — what else could help?

Perhaps growing up in a rich environment, supported endlessly by family or friends, lays a strong foundation. Maybe it's in childhood that we gain the ability to stand our ground and listen to ourselves. A broad outlook could also offer access to a variety of tools to choose from.

We may not be able to change our own childhoods or past selves, but we can shape that reality for today's children. I believe it's vital to become the kind of adults who accept, encourage, and nurture — to move away from control, obedience, and molding children to fit our expectations.

Ahead of you lie pages filled with the creativity of many people with diverse stories. It's a fascinating world to dive into — and perhaps, along the way, discover something new about yourself as well.

Enjoy the read!



**Anna Gvozdeva**

Curator of  
Visual Art Journal

*On the Front Cover:*

**Yazhi Zheng**

Flower Shop  
2023

*On the Back Cover:*

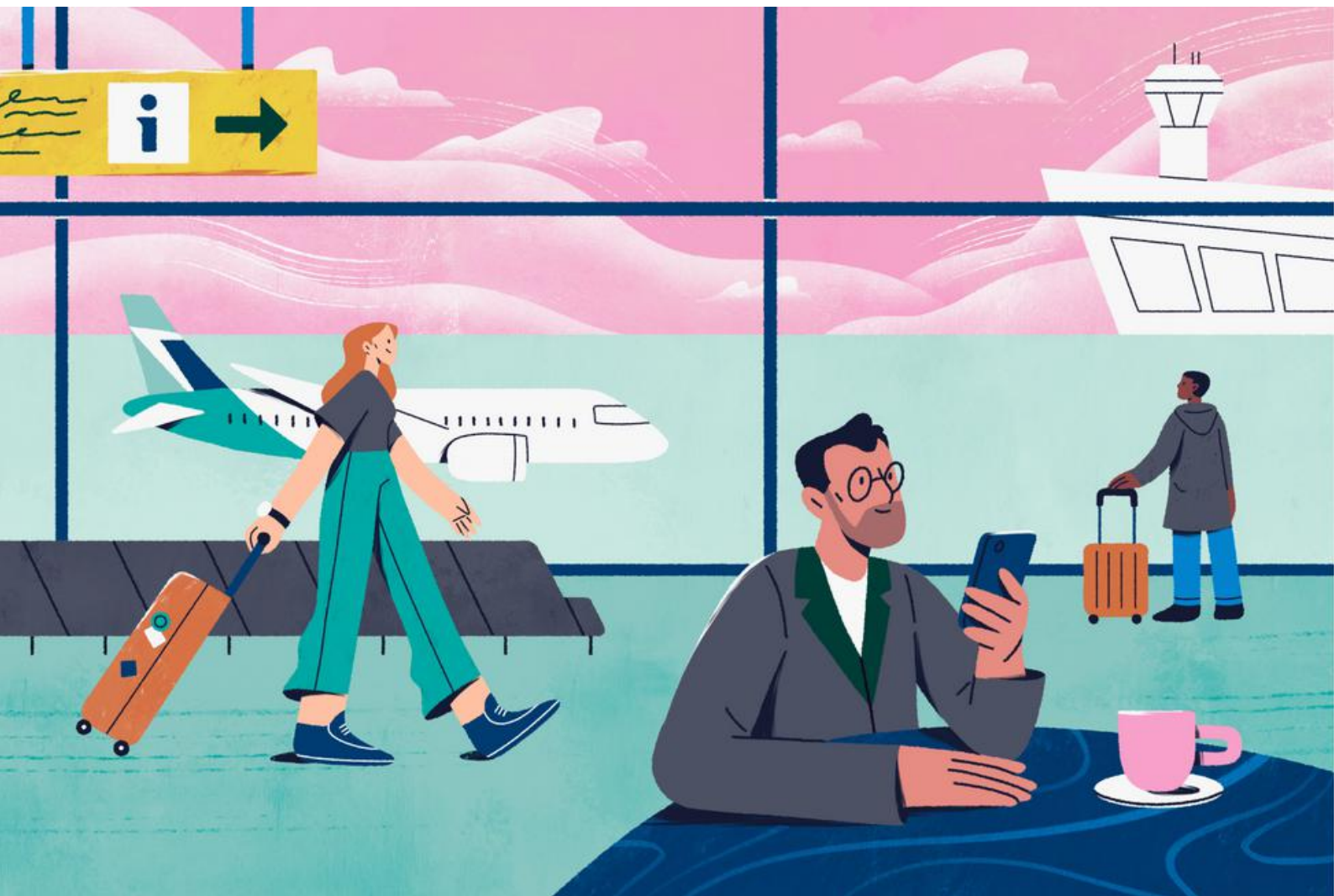
**Chiara D'Ambrosio**

The Handmaiden (fanart)  
2018

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

**Irene Neyman** is a self-taught illustrator and graphic designer, currently based in Calgary, Canada. She specializes in commercial illustration and also loves working with packaging design, character design, graphics for motion, and editorial. She also runs her design studio Deeply and collaborates with other artists on clients' projects worldwide. Irene's illustration style is about a balance of bright colors, simple shapes, and experiments with textures and details. Her work has been recognized with multiple design awards and featured in creative blogs and publications. She writes her own blog for creatives and business leaders, helping bridge the gap between the creative and business worlds while improving their collaborative workflow. On a daily basis creates illustrations that bring power and emotion to brands.

Irene Neyman | WestJet Test Illustration | 2024









# — Interview

## Yazhi Zheng

**You've mentioned that growing up by the sea had a significant impact on your work. Could you elaborate on how this connection with nature influences your creative process?**

Growing up by the sea has had a profound impact on my creative process, and I often draw inspiration from the flow of water, the sky, and the stars. The calmness and movement of the sea mirror the emotions I want to express in my work -- tranquility, flow, and depth. I strive to bring the beauty of nature into my paintings, especially the rich imagery, amazing textures, and vibrant colors found in the natural world. The fluidity of nature often influences how I use color and texture visually, particularly in my use of bright rainbow tones, which I believe capture the beauty and energy of the natural world very well.

**Your art blends a variety of media, from traditional oils to 2D animation. How do you approach transitioning between these different techniques, and what does each medium bring to your vision?**



Yazhi Zheng | Flower Shop | 2023



Each medium has its own unique advantages. I started with traditional media and gradually transitioned to digital. Traditional oil painting or watercolor gives my work a warm texture and allows me to directly engage with the creative process. The handmade feel of drawing lines and applying colors with a brush on paper is something I deeply appreciate. On the other hand, digital media offers more flexibility, allowing me to experiment and create more fluid, dynamic effects, and is more conducive to the dissemination of my work. When switching between techniques, I focus on the emotional tone I want to convey -- traditional media often imparts warmth and texture, while digital tools help me present vivid, fantastical ideas more clearly and dynamically.

**Your color palette is striking, often featuring rainbow-like hues. How do you decide on the colors for each project? Do they have a specific emotional or symbolic significance?**

Color is one of the most important elements in my work. I choose colors based on the emotions I want to evoke in each project, and the colors amplify the feelings I want to convey -- whether it's the tranquil blues and greens of nature or the vibrant hues of a sci-fi world. Unlike the solemnity of sketches or the serious black-and-white compositions, I prefer to use color as a reflection of attitude and emotion. I hope the use of color can serve as a bridge, becoming a symbol of emotions and providing the audience with the most intuitive emotional experience. My rainbow hues are meant to convey a sense of wonder and endless possibilities, while also reflecting my love for the world around me.

**As a motion graphics designer, how do you balance the visual storytelling aspect of your animations with the need for aesthetic beauty in your static illustrations?**

For me, visual storytelling and aesthetic beauty are intertwined. In motion graphics, the story unfolds through movement, but I ensure that design elements like color, composition, and flow still create a visually pleasing experience. While focusing on the beauty of the design, I also consider the visual impact of movement and incorporate these features into the animation. In static illustrations, the beauty of the design often carries the emotional weight of the story. Whether dynamic or static, I strive to find a balance between beauty and meaning, allowing the audience to feel the ups and downs of emotion through the visuals.



**Your works explore both realistic and sci-fi themes. How do you reconcile these two genres, and what do they reveal about your perspective on the world?**

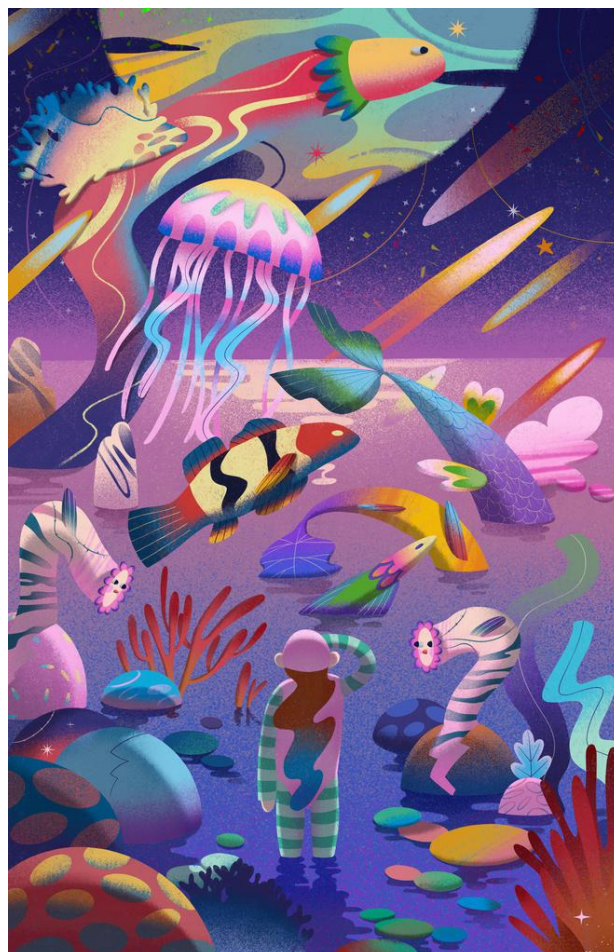
I think real and imagination complement each other. Realism allows my work to address emotions and experiences that we all share, while science fiction allows me to express imagination and possibilities beyond reality. Together, they help me explore the tension between "reality" and "possibility," reflecting my desire to convey both tranquility and depth of emotion in the flow of time and space.

**In your artist statement, you talk about using your work to "help people breathe" in high-pressure modern society. What role do you see art playing in mental well-being, and how do you hope your art contributes to that?**

Art has the power to transport people to another world, to offer a space for escape, or to reconnect with something beautiful and peaceful. I believe art can provide people with a moment of reflection and calm. I hope my work encourages people to slow down, take a deep breath, and embrace the beauty of the world and nature around them, offering temporary relief from the stresses of daily life.

**You often incorporate nature in your work. How do you ensure your depiction of nature is not just a visual element but also a meaningful part of the narrative or theme of the piece?**

In my work, nature is not just a visual element. It is an integral part of the story. I don't simply depict nature as an object but make it a meaningful part of the narrative. Whether it's the flow of water, the vastness of the sky, or the stars and universe, nature often reflects the emotions or



Yazhi Zheng | New World Adventure 1 | 2023

themes I explore in my work. I hope that nature is closely connected to the emotions and themes in the work, allowing the audience to feel the deeper meaning it carries.



Yazhi Zheng | Insomnia | 2023



Yazhi Zheng | Flowing In The Ocean | 2023



## **Luccia Lignan (*b.1980, Córdoba-Spain*)**

### **Color, beauty and passion**

#### **Painter and Sculptress . Lives and works in London United Kingdom.**

She has painted portraits from an early age, and an explosion of colour is found in her first attempts with paintbrushes at the age of nine. She paints the portrait of her maternal grandmother "Small artwork on canvas", which she still maintains, (Private Collection). Her great-grandfather, a French musician, whose family was mostly composed of theater actors, was an essential influence for Luccia in that universe of her artistic creation, and he was married the first cousin of the famous Bullfighters José Gómez Ortega, better known as Joselito El Gallo and Rafael Gómez Ortega Her elegant and reliable work, perhaps showing the legacy of her English great-great-grandmother. She goes to a painter's studio to receive private painting's class and finishes her education at The Faculty of Fine Arts Santa Isabel de Hungría at Seville University.

Her personal imprint and the beauty of her brush stroke have culminated in designs that merge the political, avant-garde, and collector communities. She likes her characters look, observe, rather than being observed. Her portraits are like the Beautiful Florence, elegant and somewhat reserved, they are pure simplicity, when you gaze at them, the most element emotions get back to you.

Luccia Lignan not only offers a creative panoramic aspect in painting, her artistic activity includes the cultivation of sculpture as well. Her first sculpture works show us an admirable irresistible personality, and her colourist talent in her polychromatic works, woodcarvings or bronzes. It is worth noting that since finishing her education, she makes a small scale sculptures anthology dedicated to characters with naive, tempting and exquisite faces, beautiful looks filled up desire... incendiary expressions "Challenging Destiny".

Her painting and sculpture are inseparable. The feminine polychromatic woodcarvings and bronzes, run in parallel and are tied up to her pictorial creations.

As she is in painting, Luccia Lignan is a source of incessant creations.

The statuary of Luccia Lignan is a search for the satisfaction and liberty with the forms and colours, whether it be it in the luminosity of her nudes or the attitudes of her characters' faces, depicted or not.

Her pacesetter is to bravely conquer us with tempting and far from naive forms, at the same time a complementing tone defines a pattern in volume. The predominance of colour in some of her works lets us go into a high range of feelings and passions. Her work can be anything from small size to compositions of monumental character with all passion and splendor.

Her portraits, executed both in painting and in sculpture, describes the character for us with seductive and scattered colour shapes with the idea of not only linking volumetric lines which make it possible to recognize to the person portrayed. Her search is broader, and more incisive and intelligent.

Therefore, we are in the presence of a strong trifecta of painting, sculpture & drawing.

As a painter, the nudes of Luccia Lignan talk to us about sensuality. Her women demonstrate the ideal "Eternal Woman with Classical Echoes, but under the Modern vision of 21st century Eroticism". The Nude is an art for her, an expressive form, a cry of freedom, a call to the beauty. She structures the shapes with rich colour modeling. Before undertaking any work, she thinks instinctively for days and weeks, establishing personal rules create by her imagination. Her sense of order, balance, and audacity ensure proper orchestration of the compositional elements, and sweeten her canvases with flowing colours of great expressivity. Her women are sensitive and relaxed, they are grateful to be alive, and they demonstrate this gratitude in their body language. Despite being very conscious of their charm, their voluptuous and sensual bodies and their gazes directed unabashedly at the viewer, they nonetheless evince an air of innocence. Whether they appear as individual figures or in more complex compositions, Luccia Lignan's nudes participate in theatrical scenes.

Still-life and landscape form part of her production, demonstrating her pictorial discipline in the International Contemporary Art Scene. Her splendid abstractions depict a universe governed by textures and harmonic colours, stimulating in the viewer with a fountain of pure pleasure.





Luccia Lignan | Distortion in process

Luccia Lignan | Bullfighter

Luccia Lignan | Les poissons rouges



**Sini Rueda** is a Peruvian flutist from “Conservatorio Nacional de Música”, now “Universidad Nacional de Música”. She studied with teachers Rosa María Lazón, Ulla Suokko, César Peredo and César Vivanco. She has won in “Concursos para Jóvenes Flautistas”, has performed as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra, and has participated in plenty of flute festivals in Peru and abroad. In 2024 she began a series of recitals showing works of Peruvian composers. She performed this program for flute and flute duets along with flutist Laurel Swinden in Laurier University- Canada, and with pianist Carlos Arancibia as Aurum dúo in Lima. Sini has been part of Orchestras and music ensembles since a very young age, works as flute teacher at Markham College, is part of PanAmerican trío and Aurum Dúo, part of Flautistas del Perú team, and performs as a freelance flutist. Sini is masters in musical pedagogy by UNIR University and a Suzuki teacher. Since a young age Sini was keen to drawing and painting, activity which she left after school years and then recovered since the pandemic began. One of her illustrations has been exhibited in “El Salón Bicentenario” organized by “El Arte es vivir” art gallery, in Trujillo-Perú on 2021, and recently has two works selected by Cuentaartes magazine for the next digital issue.

### *Artist Statement*

As I'm a musician, I reflect our life and create music related scenarios in an cartoon animal style. I make mostly orchestras in different situations or views, and flute related illustrations. I paint mainly using a mixed technique of watercolors and calligraphy pen or Chinese ink, and work in small formats.

Sini Rueda | Ensayo de Orquesta | 2024







Sini R.



## — Interview

# Sonia Hernández

**Could you tell us more about your artistic journey and what led you to explore abstract expressionism and informalism in your work?**

My artistic training began in the world of dance. I studied classical and modern dance during my childhood and youth, and then entered the Faculty of Fine Arts, specializing in Visual Arts. Initially, art students worked with classical models and realistic, figurative references. This somewhat constrained me; although I admire highly finished forms in other artists' work, they seemed rigid to me. As a result, I began to experiment with different styles to build my own language. This is how I arrived at abstraction, where I felt very comfortable and free to express myself.

Informalism and abstract expressionism allow me to imprint very diverse rhythms and tempos onto my works. In the end, I experience a similar feeling to the one I had with dance, where energy and momentum drive the creative process. My relationship with painting could very well be likened to dance—a dialogue of advance and retreat. The four corners of the canvas place me in space, and through the elements of abstract visual language, I construct what I want to express, which of course begins with a minimal idea that always changes and develops in different directions. But you still recognize it when it appears, as part of the final result.

**Your project "Mystique Garden" is inspired by Japanese culture, particularly sumi-e painting. How did this cultural influence the aesthetic and overall theme of the series?**

On a personal level, I've always enjoyed using brushes, Chinese inks, and Japanese papers to play and simply enjoy the random stains they create, the different thicknesses in the density of the stains, and the



intensities of different black tones. I believe that with very simple materials, a great pictorial richness can be achieved. Initially, the drawings came from my personal artist's journals. As I mentioned in the previous question, I wasn't doing sumi-e painting in its strictest, most realistic sense—like birds, bamboo canes, flowers, etc.—but rather creating from free and spontaneous forms. On the other hand, pink is a color that really appeals to me, and I love Japanese prints filled with cherry blossoms. So I started adding pink to those compositions, and little by little, the idea of creating the series began to take shape.

**You mentioned that "Mystique Garden" is a representation of imaginary landscapes. How do you approach creating these landscapes without falling into realism, and how do you encourage the viewer to interact with them?**

Linking to the previous point, Japanese painting is very much about the landscape, and it was on my mind while making those first sketches. The forms that appeared were so diverse that I thought they could very well be some kind of living organism, like a garden where multiple species find their home. This, of course, is my fantasy, and it's also something I like to present—the idea that I don't fully understand what emerges. That's why the title "Mystique Garden" seemed so appropriate. Presenting the paintings to the viewer as places they can freely explore allows them to find their own spaces, which helped me further develop the series.



For me, it doesn't make much sense to paint a realistic-style landscape. Many artists do that very well. In my case, I'm seeking something else that has little to do with literal representations—like Mount Fuji—but then the viewer can believe they see it represented in one of my paintings. I think that's perfect. I paint the painting, but it's the observer who gives it an identity, making it their own. I love that.

**How important is the idea of "movement" and "fluidity" in your work, especially in relation to the marks and textures created with ink, acrylic, and watercolor?**

These two concepts are fundamental, especially in this series. Working with stains involves a constant element of risk because, in principle, you can exercise very little or no control over them. If you add materials where water is the protagonist, such as watercolor and ink, the uncertainty about the outcome is total. Then, in the creative process, you must flow first in order to give shape to something that is so elusive at first.

The movement of the materials themselves—their marks and paths on the canvas—gave me clues on how to work in one direction or another, either allowing a certain form to emerge or covering it with a new one that wasn't initially predictable. The paintings have several layers until they achieve their final appearance, and in the creative process, I've already experimented with both ideas, which is why they are so present. Here I could also connect with what I mentioned at the beginning of the interview: how the impulse that comes from dance, from bodily expression, underlies my pictorial work, which often has that "rush" of energy.

**Could you tell us about the intuitive process you use when creating your pieces, especially in relation to the freedom offered by ink stains and textures?**

In my work, there's always an initial theme—something that ignites the spark. I've worked in series with diverse references, such as clouds and their multiple ways of forming and dissolving, fragments of poems by authors I like or that I write myself, or places that have particularly impacted me and awakened me on a sensory level. These experiences are later translated into the painting, like the series before *Mystique Garden*, born after a trip to India.



That's the beginning, but as you say, there is an intuitive process. I make very few sketches; it's a very on-site work. I usually have a clear idea of the materials and color palette, but the rest emerges little by little, and that's what motivates me—the almost uncertainty of what will emerge. The freedom of stains, gestures, lines, textures, and supports allows for a dialogue that can change every day. I think there's growth for me as an artist and results that can be interesting for viewers later.

**The concept of "journey" is significant in your work. Could you tell us about the personal journeys or emotions that influenced the creation of "Mystique Garden"? How do you perceive the idea of the "puzzle" in your work, where individual pieces come together to form a larger whole? Does this reflect a deeper philosophy or theme in your practice?**

The concept of journey is fundamental, first of all because, for me, artistic creation is a journey in itself. It's an experience you enter without knowing what's next, and it's a discovery. If I already know everything, then it's pointless. I'm going to quote Edward Hopper here when he said that if you can explain it in words, then there's no point in painting it. Going into the unknown is in itself traveling.

And I like the idea of an emotional journey because it's true that there's a heartbeat in my work. In the case of *Mystique Garden*, it's curious because the idea of landscape suggested to me the possibility of serenity that lies within contemplation itself, which is even meditation—something I practice daily and is deeply rooted in me. However, when I exhibited the work, many people told me they saw great strength and dynamism in some pieces, so it was evident that other emotions were at play. This is related to that part of my work in which, in principle, I neither have nor want to have control. On a formal level, *Mystique Garden* can function as a large puzzle; the pieces work together and separately. This doesn't necessarily occur in my other series, but it does on an aesthetic level and as a theoretical discourse. The idea links one painting to another because I usually start a series after that initial spark and develop it without knowing if there will be 5, 10, or 20 pieces. So it unfolds on its own until I realize it's exhausted, and then I want to start something else. Although I may have in mind to return to this, it doesn't always happen.





**Jason Au** is an acclaimed photographer renowned for his striking black-and-white imagery. His unique vision has earned him a multitude of international accolades, including being shortlisted for the Sony World Photography Awards, securing 2nd place in both the LensCulture Street Photography Awards and the Xposure International Photography Awards, and winning two 1st place honours at the International Photography Awards. His work has graced exhibitions across the globe, from New York, London, and Barcelona to Ghent, Johannesburg, Sharjah, and Athens. His photographs have been prominently featured in prestigious publications such as the South China Morning Post, The Guardian, and The Observer.

#### *Artist Statement*

My photography is a visual exploration of the urban landscape of my hometown, transforming the streets of Hong Kong into a fine art narrative. My composition highlights urban subjects and geometric forms, capturing their essence amidst the city's bustling chaos. By focusing on fleeting, everyday moments, I portray the diverse characters of the city, framed within their environments. These images evoke a sense of isolation and stillness, creating a striking contrast to the perceived frenzy of Hong Kong's urban life. The individuals depicted appear unconsciously trapped within an artificial labyrinth of their own making—confined by the very structures that define the city. This visual metaphor speaks to the modern condition, where people are both captivated and constrained by the urban landscapes they have constructed. The work reflects the relentless pace of metropolitan existence, offering a contemplative perspective on the complexities of life in a bustling metropolis like Hong Kong.

Jason Au | Solitude | 2023







Jason Au | Working Platform | 2020



Jason Au | Social Distancing | 2020



## — Interview

# Nikolett S. Koltai

**Your passion for art began at a very young age. How did your early experiences shape your approach to art today?**

When I was a child, my mom used to draw a lot for me. It was a magical feeling to see how anything could be created with just a piece of paper and a pencil, so I started trying it myself. Besides my mom, my grandmothers also supported me a lot. For every special occasion (birthday, Christmas, etc.), I would ask for paints, crayons, paper, and colored pencils, and I had the opportunity to study in art schools. When I paint, I completely shut out the world to create a new one. At the time, I didn't know there was a word for this feeling – it's called flow, which I quickly and easily mastered to this day. I want to teach this experience to my little son.

**How do you decide on the color palette for each of your pieces? What role do pastel tones play in your work?**

First and foremost, my journeys and current



Nikolett S. Koltai | Balaton



emotions shape the primary color palette of each creation. In fact, it's mostly the colors that dictate the painting process. My color palettes serve to bring calm, peace, and a sense of slowing down in today's fast-paced and noisy world.

**Your work often balances soft, vibrant colors with bold, expressive strokes. Can you share how you find that balance in your artistic process?**

I experiment a lot and constantly seek the path that truly defines me, as well as what I want to express through my work. Even today, approx. one in five of my creations is something I'm truly satisfied with, but the remaining four—those that didn't turn out as expected—are the ones that teach me the most. It's important to understand that this is not a linear process; there are deep lows and soaring highs. My work reflects this wave, where soft, pleasant tones are accompanied by bold, decisive lines.

**In what ways do your personal experiences and memories influence the themes and emotions expressed in your art?**

I love traveling, hiking, and being present in nature, so this usually defines the themes of my artwork. I want to capture the beauty that surrounds me.

Even in my abstract paintings, the colors of nature, blooming flowers, sunsets, or the changing seasons serve as the foundation, which I express through colors. When I want to depict something more concrete, I usually use my own



photographs as a reference or try to visually recreate my memories.

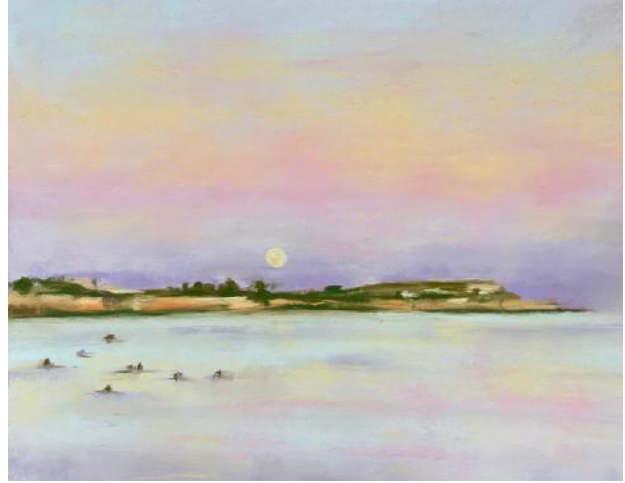
**Your art seems to evoke a sense of tranquility and introspection. How do you want viewers to feel when they engage with your work?**

I've realised that everyone lives in their own lonely, closed-off world and doesn't see the beautiful world they live in. With my art, I want to encourage my viewers to pause for a moment, be present, take a deep breath, slow down, and reconnect with themselves.

**How do you approach the use of contrasting strokes in your paintings? Do you see it as a way to create harmony or tension?**

I think this is a journey of self-discovery, so I'd say it's both about harmony and tension. In a way, when creating, a person both rises and sinks at the same time. When I work on contrasts, I tend to feel more excited rather than calm.

**What is your creative process like from concept to finished piece? Do you rely on any specific techniques or mediums to bring your ideas to life?**

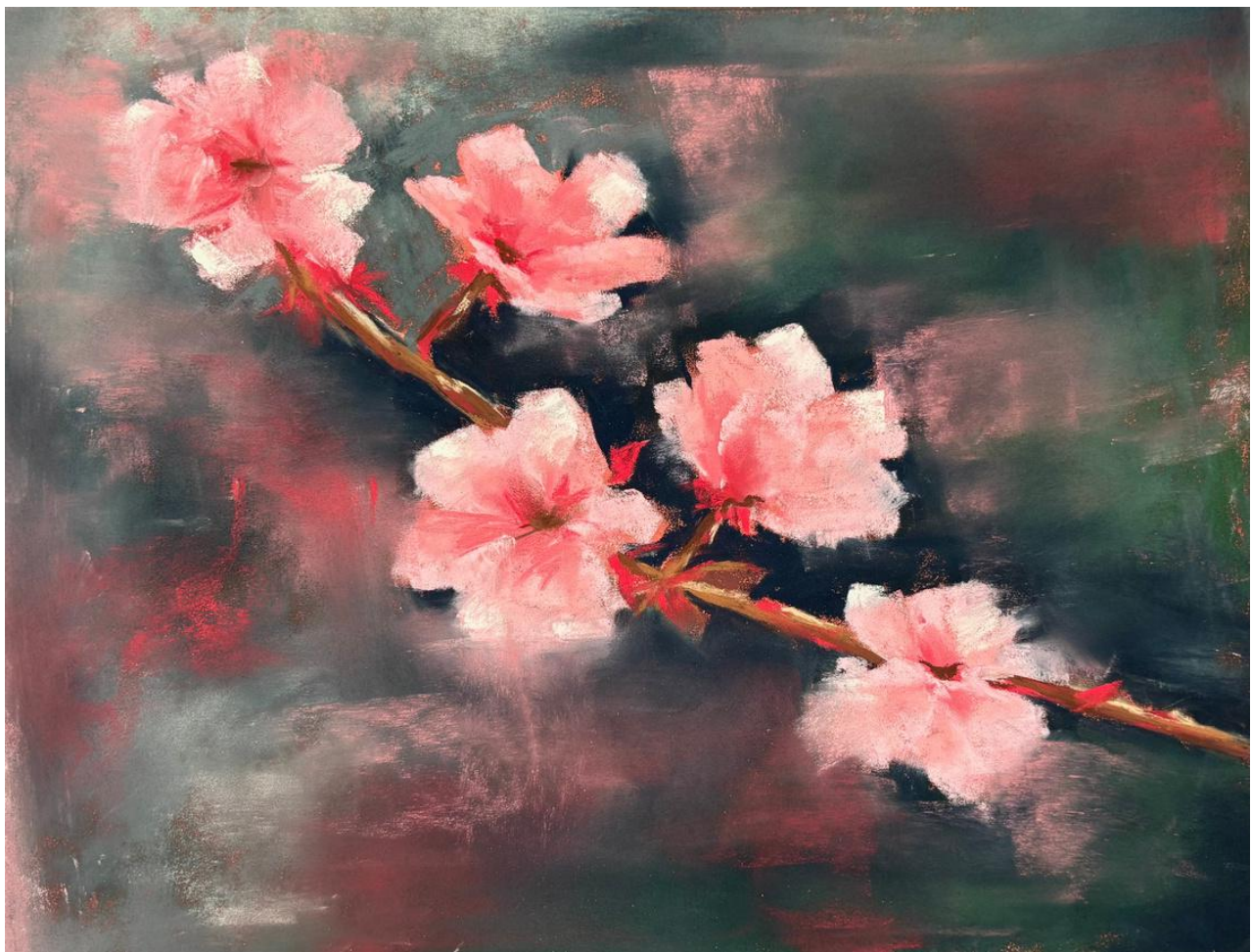


Nikolett S. Koltai  
Cyprus

Sometimes it takes days to find my rhythm in creating again. During these times, I immerse myself even more deeply in my surroundings and thoughts.

Once the idea is born, I plan how to bring it to life and what color palette to use. In this phase, I start selecting the dominant colors and tones. Next, I quickly sketch the composition, then work on the contrasts and depths, using neutral dark and natural light shades. At this stage, I often squint at the artwork to better perceive the sense of space.

After that, I refine the painting layer by layer, color by color, until the final touches. I take occasional breaks, stepping back to view the whole piece with fresh eyes before making any final adjustments.



Nikolett S. Koltai | Cherry-blossom



My name is **Lisa Seng** and I am 24 years old. I graduated in space design, set design speciality in 2023. Now I work in movie set design in France and I have recently embarked on illustration. As far as I can remember, I always draw, for myself, not seriously, an activity like another. In the end, only the drawing has always followed me as the most faithful friends. On my free time left by my profession, I was published in a french magazine called "Furtif Magazine" in the theme of Fantastic Creatures and that is how I started to take it seriously. Apart from that, I had many personal project like 2D animation, comic book or travel painting, full of project that come out of my head that I never finished one yet. I am an autodidact "artist" and I found the way for me on how to express the best my vision and I intend to pursue it.

### *Project Statement*

I submit the painting that I did for the Furtif Magazing in the theme of Fantastic Creatures. For this universe, our world had different layout, one visible to our eyes and another that isn't but sometimes, they collide. They are the feeling of cold in the back, the silhouette at the corner of the eye, the emptiness that the cat is looking. They are neither good nor bad, they exist without measures. They live what we experience, see what we do and sense what we feel. They are born of effervescence and energy, absorb everything and become everything. Sometimes they come to us but never show themselves. Being a reflection of us and them. They are before and will be after us and will surely succeed us, witness of existence.









## — Interview

# Marcus Venegas

**Your work often delves into autobiographical memory and the concept of the 'remembering self.' Can you explain how you incorporate this psychological theory into your artwork, and how it shapes your storytelling process?**

Memories are sacred and stories are told differently by every person depending how we remember those memories. Most of my process starts with poetry inspired by these vulnerable moments of which marked themselves as a core memory. Using that as a foundation to immerse myself into the impulsive pictorial language I then execute. Channeling myself with music, as well as (occasionally) smoking cannabis, i truly feel connected to the unique language and universe I created for myself conceptually.

**The use of symbolic materials like cigarette ash and the act of burning your pieces is central to your art. What does this process represent for you, and how does it contribute to the themes of impermanence and transformation in your work?**

The flame not only represents that fiery passion of love that exists in a relationship, but also reflects



that dangerous desire that comes with love. It burns and feels so good to burn, but hurts so bad, even though I know what fire is capable of. Even Though I know what's going to happen, it's inevitable. It slowly eats away at me and burns through, gradually revealing my vulnerability. Leaving holes that act as glimpses of memories that are permanently stained like a tattoo, left as a reminder of what once was. The cigarette coincides with the flame that symbolizes that obsessive nature that love can carry. Once too reliant on it, becomes dependent and addicting. However, once the flame is out, and once the cigarette is dead, only smoke is left, and I will be left dumbstruck and alone.

**How does your identity as a gay Mexican-American influence the way you approach your art, especially when it comes to the themes of love, trauma, and memory?**

Queer/POC people experience life differently, obviously. Not necessarily only in a political sense, but historically, we've learned to love in secrecy. Meeting up places, and hiding away from others, as if it's a "Romeo and Juliet" forbidden love complex. This tension leads to passion and true intimacy. These interactions however may be traumatic and not so lovely. These experiences are empathized within the gay community and universally unite us through relatability. Capturing moments such as these, through art, is significant.

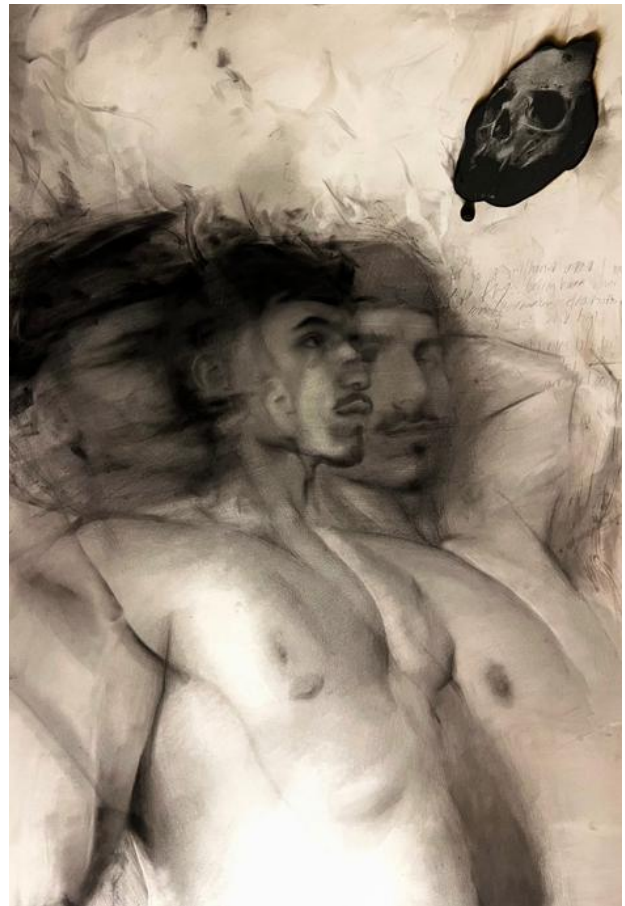


**You mention using black-and-white drawings to convey honesty and truth. How do you feel these colors impact the emotional tone of your pieces?**

I am not opposed to color, in fact, color was a big part of my earlier practice. However, my work is ever evolving, just like any artist. As I started delving deeper into my story and seriousness of my work, I realized that my use of color felt forced and unauthentic to what I was making. This then led to the transition of using solely black and white. It was non-distracting, cut straight to the point, and felt justified toward the narrative. It's emotional and further pushes the raw vulnerability I try to convey

**Your work has been described as 'artistic activism.' Can you tell us more about how activism is embedded in your creative process and how it serves as a tool for social change?**

I hope to create a feeling of relatability by beautifying the disturbing. There is a need for more queer art, and having the privilege of making art for my community to bond with is very special and dear to my heart. My goal is not to change our political environment, but to create a sense of safety and empathy for the community. Using my art as a tool of awareness, rather than a harsh statement that comes off aggressive.



**With your exploration of the theatricality of romance, how do you balance personal vulnerability and universal themes in your art?**

Personal vulnerability and artistic expression are nearly the same concept to me. Being able to pour my heart into writing and then into pictorial poetry reflects how I felt at a specific moment in time, thus creating denotative documentation of the chronology of my life. What I feel and create now does not reflect what I will feel and create in the future. Everything is about "now". If I feel tense or contain a strong sense of desolation, that will translate with my work through intense mark-making, heavier compositions, etc. While other emotions might lead to a lighter and angelic approach.

**How do you see your work evolving over the next few years? Are there new mediums or themes you're eager to explore?**

I'm open to anything and everything that presents itself to me in time. I've been using cannabis ash lately as a substitute for cigarette ash to tell the same story. My work, as mentioned above, is forever evolving. I see myself working larger as well as honing in on an intimate size. I've noticed myself incorporating more graphite into my work, and the need to render a bit more than before. Lots of exciting new stuff to come in the near future.



**Kris Davis** is a mixed-media artist based in Macon, Georgia. For over 25 years, she has exhibited and sold her work throughout the Southeast, developing a distinctive style that layers paint, collage, and texture to reflect the complexity of time, memory, and place. She has always been drawn to art, and over the years, mixed media and abstraction became her focus, offering the kind of creative problem-solving she finds most fulfilling. Kris finds inspiration in the history and geography of her hometown, the effects of nature on man-made structures, and small, often-overlooked moments of daily life. Her recent solo exhibition at Macon Arts Alliance showcased a collection of abstract works inspired by Macon, highlighting her deep connection to place and history. Beyond her artistic practice, Kris has worked in fields that emphasize observation, care, and problem-solving—qualities that deeply influence her approach to art. She enjoys gardening, crafting her own frames, and embracing artisan traditions. Through her work, Kris invites viewers to look beyond the surface, uncovering the rich textures, hidden layers, and stories embedded within each piece.

#### *Artist Statement*

I work in layers—layers of paint, collage, print, and pattern—to create compositions that reflect depth, tension, and memory. My process is influenced by the way history builds upon itself, how experiences accumulate, and how nature and human structures interact over time. Each piece I create is a visual representation of this interplay, where colors and textures combine to evoke both the seen and unseen elements of place and time. I am particularly inspired by my hometown, Macon, Georgia, where history, nature, and urban development continuously shape one another. My recent body of work, exhibited in a solo show at Macon Arts Alliance, explores Macon's layered past and present through abstraction. My art also captures fleeting moments—subtle shifts in light, weathered surfaces, or the quiet beauty of everyday life. I see abstraction as a form of creative problem-solving, where each layer builds upon the last, sometimes revealing, sometimes obscuring, much like memory itself. My goal is to create works that draw viewers in, encouraging them to explore the depth beneath the surface and to reflect on their own connections to history, place, and time.







Kris Davis | Where it All Began | 2024



## Alina Sahakyan

Born in Yerevan, Armenia, I began studying fine arts in 1987, focusing on drawing from 1992 to 1997 and expanding my knowledge through the graduate program at the Yerevan Pedagogical University of Fine Arts. From 1998 to 2001, I attended the Art Academy Maximilienne de Meuron in Switzerland, followed by studies in Graphic Design at New Image College in Canada in 2004. In 2006, I completed a life drawing and photography course at Central Technical School in Canada. Since 2009, I have also been teaching art and working with children, using my own program to develop fine motor skills through creative activities. As an artist, my journey has taken me through various stages and aesthetic explorations, each filled with new inspirations and ways of self-expression. Initially, my chosen media were classic and academic - oil, ink, and clay, but years ago, I discovered the joy of working with wool. Living in Canada, surrounded by breathtaking natural landscapes, I felt inspired to experiment with felting. Now based in Prague, I continue to create needle-felted artworks inspired by the rich textures and colors of the natural world, using a unique technique to bring each piece to life.

Alina Sahakyan | Harvest







Alina Sahakyan | A state of tranquility



# — Interview

## Vera K

**Your work blends elements of surrealism, music, and sustainability. Can you tell us more about how these themes intertwine in your practice?**

Since I have been in art school I love to implement surrealism in to my art. To confuse the viewer a little, make them think, zoom out and observe the artwork again, and leave them with a smile. Alongside surrealism I've tried to be as sustainable as possible while making art, because it's important to me to make the world a better place, starting with my own environment.



Vera K | Hummingbird | 2024



Vera K | Pulse of Sound | 2024

And spread the message through my art. For my current collaboration I chose to include music, because sustainable brand Jekkah uses the slogan: 'Join the Rhythm' and the owner of the brand is a musician. This is also why I used 'Join the Rhythm' as the name of my project. Jekkah's role in this collab is to supply me with leftover material of their sustainable clothing line, so I can make canvases out of it.

**You've worked as an art director in the film industry before fully transitioning to illustration and painting. How did your background in commercial art influence your current style?**

Actually Art direction was a little bit in between. In art school I decided I wanted to do an internship in the film/commercial business. Mainly because during art school all the creativity was sucked out of me and I needed to change my perspective and do something completely different. What I have learned from that time, is to work under pressure, be well organised and keep your work light, fun & inspiring.

**Can you describe the process of creating the**



**sustainable handmade canvases with Jekkah's leftover fabrics? How does this collaboration reflect your values as an artist?**

After I pick up the pieces of textile, I wash them, cut them into the right sizes and iron them. When I have stretched the fabric onto the canvas I treat it with various products to prevent the fabric from stretching and shrinking. While the canvases are drying I start brainstorming and sketching. During this process I keep the pattern of the canvas in mind, so it blends perfectly into the painting.

I believe this collaboration reflects the core values that I work and live by. Such as be authentic, be the change that you want to see in the world, keep discovering new ways to create art and I want to give people a positive feeling when they see my work.

**How do you choose the colours and patterns in your work? Is there a specific meaning behind the vibrant, joyful energy in your pieces?**

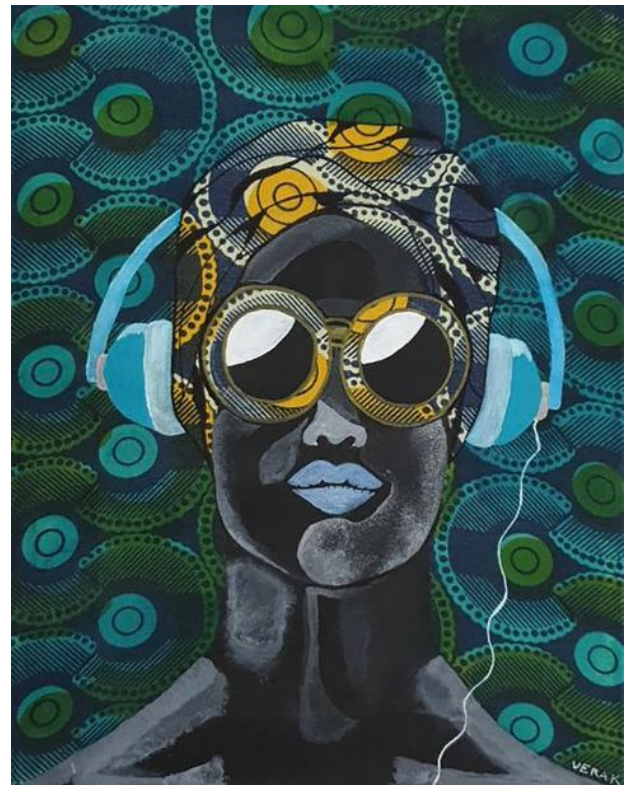
In this collaboration I do not choose the canvas colours or patterns, because it depends on what is leftover. But use of vibrant colours in my work is important, that is also why I chose to collab with Jekkah, because they use traditional African prints in their clothing line. It is important because colours vibrate positivity and that is exactly what I want radiate with my work.

**What role does music play in your creative process? How do you translate the rhythm and emotion of music into visual art?**

Music plays an important role in my creative process. Not only do I love to listen to it while painting, music is



Vera K | Join The Rhythm | 2024



Vera K | Music in My Mind | 2024

also intertwined into my paintings. I decided to use music as a theme, because the owner of Jekkah is also a DJ and the slogan of Jekkah is 'Join the Rhythm'. So through the colours of the fabric and the painting I choose to make on them music and rhythm are always present, in a suggestive or more surreal way.

**What message do you hope to convey through your art? What do you want viewers to take away from your vibrant, music-inspired works?**

That life can be pretty colourful and positive. Because the world can already be a dark place, so I believe that making vibrant and positive art I can make a difference. It's easy to make dark negative art and express our suffering. If we can focus more on the beauty of colour, nature and music for example, maybe we can make the world a better place, starting in our own bubble.

**How does living and working in Amsterdam influence your art? Do you find inspiration in the city's culture or environment?**

To be honest, Amsterdam does not influence my art. My time in Portugal on the other hand did! Because I was connected to nature all the time. Which made me open up so much more for the small magical things in life, that make this world also a wonderful place. I was in a constant flow of creativity there. Which I brought back to Amsterdam. But once in a while, I really do have to recharge over there, because the fast life in Amsterdam can be harsh from time to time.

## Nicola Twa

I am a painter, printmaker and arts educator currently based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Much of the inspiration for my work comes from my experience of living overseas in Istanbul, Türkiye. I am also inspired by abstract expressionism and playful, exploratory approaches with media. I utilize bold, expressive brushstrokes to replicate the colours, textures and patterns found in the everyday world around me.

### *Artist Statement*

I lived and worked in Istanbul, Turkey from 2013 until 2020. These were some of the most formative years of my adult life, as I grappled with living in a foreign country, and at the same time, starting out in my profession. I began processing memories of these years through the painting of my photographs in a sketchbook.

Nicola Twa | Patterns In The Ordinary | 2021

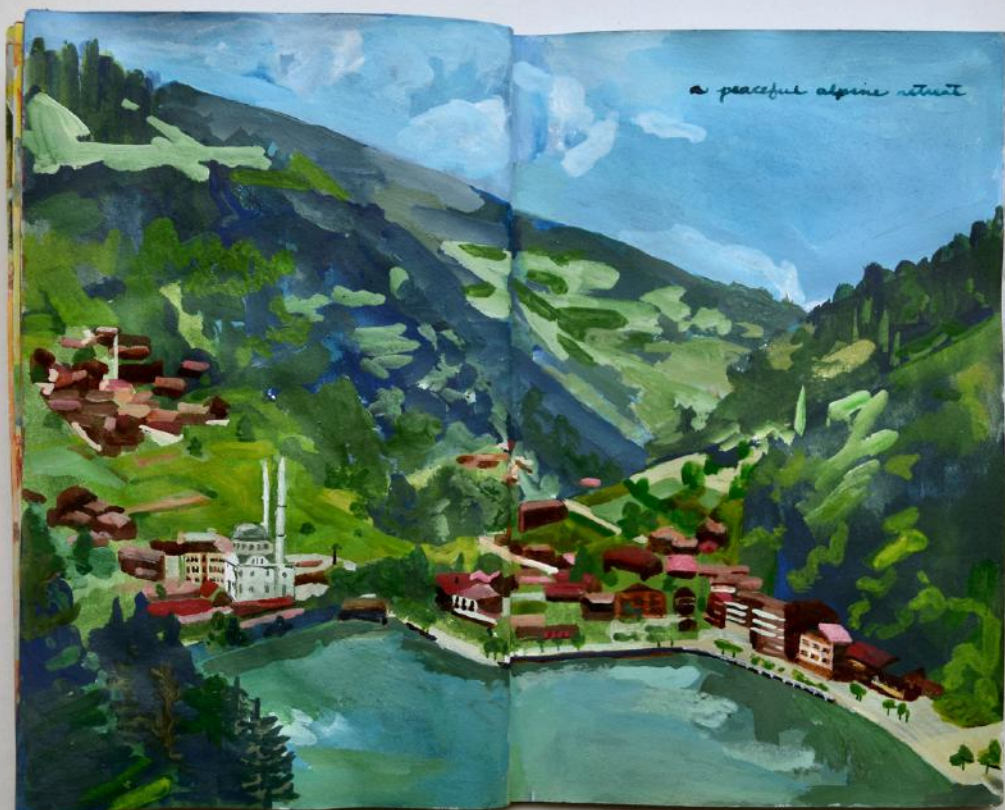






Nicola Twa | Growth In The Silence | 2020

Nicola Twa | Peaceful Alpine Retreat | 2021





**Tianrun Shi:** *Witnessing Absence, Photographing Resilience*  
By Anna Gvozdeva

In his poignant photographic series *Ash Still Falls*, photographer Tianrun Shi turns his lens toward the haunting aftermath of the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires. Through the quiet endurance of chimneys and fireplaces—structures once built to tame fire, now standing as its final survivors—Shi presents an introspective narrative on memory, vulnerability, and the paradox of resilience.

Rather than focusing on the chaos or human drama often associated with natural disasters, Shi's approach is meditative. He documents the silence left behind: skeletal remnants of homes, landscapes veiled in ash, and the eerie stillness that follows catastrophe. "The absence itself became the story," Shi reflects. "I wasn't interested in photographing people directly, because their absence spoke volumes."

The fireplaces—stoic, timeworn, exposed—became symbols at the center of the project. To Shi, they hold emotional weight: "They once represented safety, routine, and warmth. Now they stand alone, stripped of walls, of life, but still upright. They're the bones of memory." These remnants, once intimate hearths, now serve as architectural elegies—monuments to lives disrupted, yet not entirely erased.

Shi chose to shoot the entire series using a 4x5 large-format film camera, a technical and deliberate decision that shaped both the tone and the pace of the work. "The process slows you down. Each image requires patience and



Tianrun Shi | *Ash Still Falls*



intention. It's almost like standing before a grave—you have to look carefully and quietly," he explains. The clarity and detail afforded by the large format helped capture every crack in the brick, every ash-covered surface, allowing these fragile structures to speak with quiet dignity.

While his compositions are stark, they never feel empty. In fact, it is through absence that Shi creates a powerful presence. "I think of absence as the emotional architecture of the work," he says. "By not showing people, I hoped to amplify their presence in the viewer's mind—inviting them to imagine the stories, the lives once lived in those spaces."



Tianrun Shi | Ash Still Falls

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Drawing inspiration from photographers like Hiroshi Sugimoto and Stephen Shore, Shi embraces stillness as a form of empathy. His images, often in soft monochrome tones, are quiet but not passive. They resist spectacle. Instead, they ask the viewer to pause, to reflect, to see what remains.

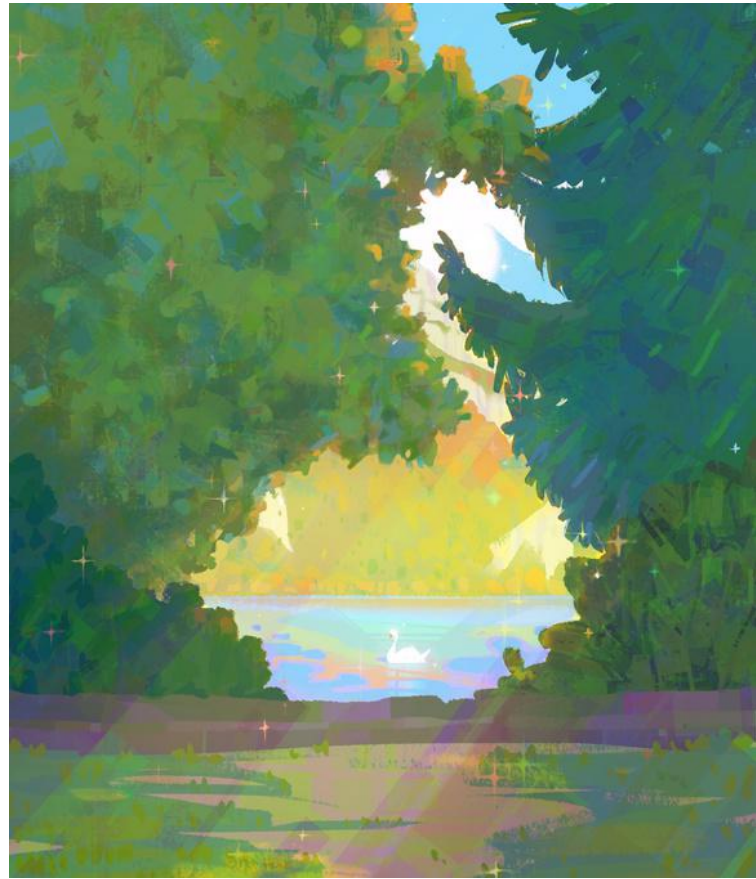
One of the most striking elements of Ash Still Falls is its exploration of fire's duality—as both a destructive and constructive force. "Fire gave us warmth and civilization, but it also takes everything away when it escapes our control," Shi says. The irony of chimneys—structures built to contain fire—being the last to remain after a wildfire, is not lost on him. "They represent our oldest attempts to make fire safe. Now, they stand surrounded by destruction. That contradiction became the soul of the project."

The physical process of capturing these images came with its own challenges. Photographing post-fire landscapes meant navigating unstable terrain, inhaling smoke, and balancing a large-format camera on uncertain ground. Yet Shi approached each scene with restraint, mindfulness, and respect. "These weren't just ruins," he emphasizes. "They were private losses, homes once full of life."

Ultimately, Ash Still Falls is not merely a documentation of destruction—it is a meditation on survival, memory, and the emotional residue of what we call home. It invites the viewer to consider resilience not as loud defiance, but as quiet presence. "Sometimes, what remains is the most powerful testimony," Shi says. "Not everything needs to shout to be heard."



**Chiara D'Ambrosio** is a French artist with a multi-cultural background who recently graduated from The Animation Workshop (Denmark) with a Bachelor's Degree in Character Animation. She is now back in her hometown in France. It was her father who introduced her to animation as a child, particularly Japanese animation, which she was heavily immersed in throughout her childhood. She is an eager learner of languages, and to her, animation is not only a language but the ultimate universal language. Which she wanted to learn as an avid linguaphile, and is how she came to follow this path. Fascinated by the world, life, humankind, and the many cultures around the globe, she enjoys depicting colourful worlds and characters that breathe life. She specialises in animation, but whether it's animation, illustration, writing, or other forms of expression, she is invested in the idea of conveying emotions through various mediums.



Chiara D'Ambrosio  
Cygne  
2022

### *Artist Statement*

I've always been more comfortable working digitally ever since I first got my hands on a drawing tablet in my pre-teen years—probably because it allows me to play with a wide range of colours and high levels of saturation. I think I have a very colourful vision of the world; I find its diversity beautiful, and I believe that has naturally translated into these vibrant pieces. I feel like, most of the time, being colourful—literally in the sense of owning a rainbow-like wardrobe, but also in the sense of being many things at the same time—isn't so encouraged. It's in fact even discouraged, I'd say. We're always expected to pick one side or another, to specialise in something, to fit into boxes, but I think that our colourfulness is what makes us so interesting as humans. I hope we can start embracing and tuning into our own complexity more freely. I think it's time for us all to be unapologetically colourful! This actually ties into a crucial point in my own artistic journey as well. One of my main concerns as an artist has always been my style, which is not the most consistent (though that may not necessarily be obvious when looking at the pieces I selected for my submission). I used to see that lack of consistency as a flaw in my art. But over time, I have learned to embrace it. Now, I simply see it as a reflection of my curiosity.







**Sara Monteiro** is a multidisciplinary artist in fine arts and illustration, with a background in neuropsychology and neuroscience, currently based in Paris. Sources of inspiration are found in the exploration of life through science, meditative thoughts and metaphysical philosophy and poetry, as well as archetypal imagery and classical art to depict these ideas.

### *Artist Statement*

My work reflects a deep fascination with the inner world—where memory, identity, and perception blur into symbolic and surreal forms. With a foundation in neuropsychology and a lifelong connection to classical and symbolic art, I explore how internal experiences can be transformed into visual language. Drawing from surrealist traditions, I use dreamlike imagery, anatomical echoes, and archetypal forms to evoke psychological landscapes that feel both personal and universal. Each piece is a meditation on the unconscious, an invitation to pause, reflect, and engage with the invisible layers that shape who we are. The aim is to evoke sensations unknown to the viewer and confront them with their deep seated, innermost self.

Sara Monteiro | The Protean | 2021







SARA  
MONTEIRO



## — Interview

# Sophie Schmidtlein

**What initially sparked your love for art, and how did you start exploring the world of urban sketching?**

I have been drawn to painting and sketching since i was a kid. I used flowers and leaves to paint with them on Paper. My parents took my brother and me museums and exhibitions a lot which inspired me. I remember the first time i tried to draw a river and some trees outside. I found it very difficult to bring what i see on paper. So i researched courses you could learn to sketch outside and thats how i discovered the magic of urban sketching. Since then i have been doing at least one course a year and spend many hours sketching outside.

**How do you decide what to sketch when you're out in the city? Do certain scenes or subjects draw you in more than others?**

When I walk through a city i am constantly drawn in by what i experience as interesting "frames". Sometimes its little things like an old advertisement poster enlightened by the morning sun or a old, run down wooden door overgrown by plants.



Sophie Schmidtlein | Ebnet



**What role does light play in your outdoor sketches, and how does it affect the final piece?**

Light is one of the main reasons i love to sketch outside. I find that when you sketch outside it allows you to bring the light situation on paper right at this moment. The most interesting light is in the early morning and at sunset. I love to sketch outside on sunday mornings as its still quiet and it feels like the rest of the world is slowly waking up. The weather has a big impact aswell especially the sun. When its hot, watercolours dry really fast which is an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. When its raining i tend to draw in coffeshops where you can sit by the window and sketch people outside. When sketching outside the scene is changing constantly. People come and go. A car that was there in the beginning might be gone by the end of the sketch. People often stop by take a look and ask me questions. Sometimes people tell me something about the place that i am sketching that i didnt know before.



**Why do you focus on old houses, people, and the sea? What about these subjects speaks to you personally?**

My parents are architects maybe thats one reason i am inspired by old buildings. May it be churches, farm houses, or city flats.

I find a great way to observe and sketch people is in busy places like a train station or airport. Its amazing how much gestures, clothing, the way people walk and sit can give you an impression of a person before you have even met them. I try to capture that in my drawings.

I am in love with the sea and im sure i am not the only one. Sometimes i imagine the sea as a person. Everytime say hi its in a different mood; calm, angry, playfull. This imagination helps me with my paintings too.

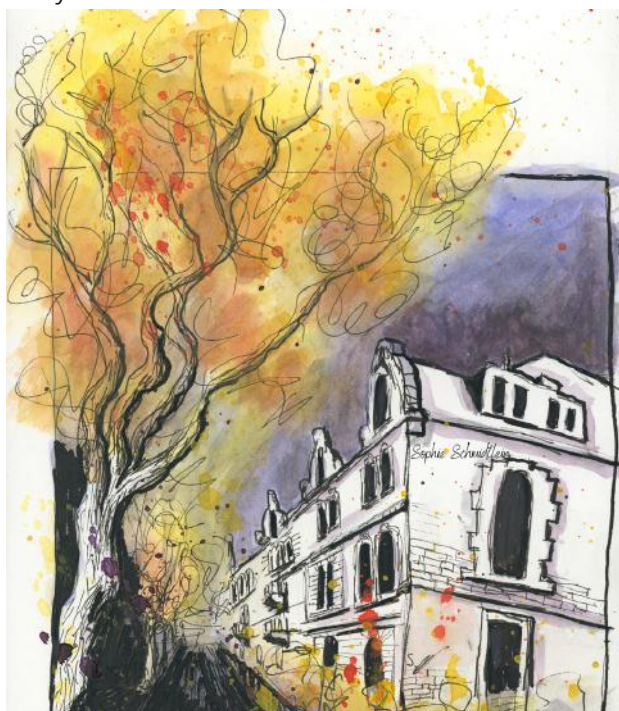
**How do you choose the locations for your sketches when you travel? Are there any specific memories attached to these places?**

When i travel i just sit down wherever i find a pretty and interesting spot. i can be boats on the river, a cat on a Restaurant table, or and old house with a pretty balcony.

I feel a lot less self concious sketching outside when i travel as mostly nobody knows me.

In my home town i felt self concious just sitting down outside with my sketchbook but the more i did it the more i could relax into it.

I love to sketch when i am on the road and travelling. Its a great way to dicover new places. it forces you to sit down, pause, take in the szene and the vibes and really look.



Sophie Schmidtlein | Allee



Sophie Schmidtlein | Stühlinger Cafe

**What materials do you typically use for your urban sketches, and how do you feel about the combination of watercolor and ink?**

Which materials i use really depends on the situation, the motive, time and the weather. On a sunny sunday morning i like to get a cappuccino find a sunny spot, sit down with my large watercolour sketchbook and use watercolours and ink pens. When i am waiting for a train i might just do a quick 15 min sketch with pencil and colour pens.

**Can you tell us about your creative process when working on a new piece?**

I find that ideas come to me all the time. I find going on long walks especially helpfull to find inspiration. To start on a new piece of art i draw a few quick sketches in my sketchbook to get a rough idea about the image. Then i start on canvas or larger paper again laying out roughly the forms and then slowly adding more detail, shade and colour.

I mostly go back and forth from one painting to another to keep it interesting. I love to drink chai tea and listen to female rap while painting. It keeps me going.



**Leah Byck** was born in Manhattan, NY, grew up in Chappaqua, NY, and is a graduate student from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Leah is a certified K-12 art teacher with an MFA in visual art, has shown in a number of solo and group exhibitions and is a recipient of the Flora Brown Music scholarship for their years of study at Ithaca College as well as a recipient of the Center for Arts + Social Justice Fellowship Grant from the VCFA Center for Arts and Social Justice. Currently, Leah is working on new research, art projects and plans to continue showing art and perform in drag across NYC and abroad. Leah is a performance artist, a visual artist, as well as a percussionist and multi-instrumentalist musician that goes by the musician name Waring. Through a PhD program in visual art, Leah hopes to continue to incorporate drag and music studies into their future visual artwork and push the boundaries of what visual art is, as well as what music is and how these mediums all intertwine.

### *Artist Statement*

The art I create stems from my experiences and it is my way of communicating with the world. It provides insight into the multiple social justice movements in our political world such as racial justice, identity politics, disability justice and climate justice. As I grapple with my own intersectional identity and notions of truth, the artwork I create centers around all aspects of today's social injustices and the issues surrounding justice for marginalized communities. Although my main medium is painting, I continue to produce work through several other mediums, including video, printmaking, sculpture, ink/pencil drawing, music and performance. My projects are directly connected to community care, collective experiences and my own experiences in fighting for intersectional social justice movements across the United States and the world as I travel through different states and countries. At all times, the focus is to create safe spaces for individuals, communities and to create communities organized around intersectional perspectives. My communal interview research is how I've built on and continue to develop my studio practice and now correlates with intersecting social justice movements. My work is influenced by artists such as Kehinde Wiley, Mores McWrath and LJ Roberts, who challenge the notion of who and what is presented and represented in visual art.









**Dakota Henry** is a multimedia artist, illustrator, and graphic designer from Chattanooga, TN, USA. In 2012, he moved to Atlanta to attend Georgia State University, earning his Bachelor of Arts in German Literature in 2016, later returning to earn a BFA in Drawing, Painting and Printmaking in 2019 after teaching English in Shenzhen, China. As a professional artist, he has worked in advertising and the event industry. In his private practice, he illustrates for games while maintaining a separate body of painting work wherein he criticizes the Anthropocene world, capital, and western philosophy.

### *Artist Statement*

My works primarily in the media of painting, printmaking, and digital graphic art. Since 2020, they have all shared one attribute: that some element of each stage of work remains present in the final product. Whether an errant line remains in the background of a figural painting or a solid mark remains the subject of a larger abstraction, no stage of work is fully replaced or obscured.









## **Anastasiia Korsakova**

I was born on May 8, 1994, in St. Petersburg, Russia. As a child, I was very active and passionate about athletics, particularly pole vaulting, running, and long jumping. This early interest in sports would later influence my first artistic works. From 2012 to 2016, I studied at the Leningrad Regional College of Culture and Arts in St. Petersburg, where I was mentored by renowned Dagestani artist Oktay Alirzaev. After college, I began to immerse myself in painting, searching for my own artistic voice. In 2018, I enrolled in the Repin Institute of Arts in St. Petersburg, studying Art History. In 2022, I emigrated to the United States, where my artistic journey continues.

### *Artist Statement*

My artistic journey began with a deep connection to sports, inspiring me to capture fleeting moments and suspend time in my paintings. I sought to strip away the unnecessary, blending realism with surrealism. However, after emigrating, my style evolved as I encountered new cultures, landscapes, and languages. The theme of sports gradually receded, and I found myself drawn to the intricacies of detail, focusing more on texture and volume. I became fascinated by the tactile effects they create. Now, I aim to explore a more surreal world where these details come to life.

Anastasiia Korsakova | The fringe | 2025









## **Trine Tafjord-Klokk**

Born in 1970 in Aalesund, Norway.

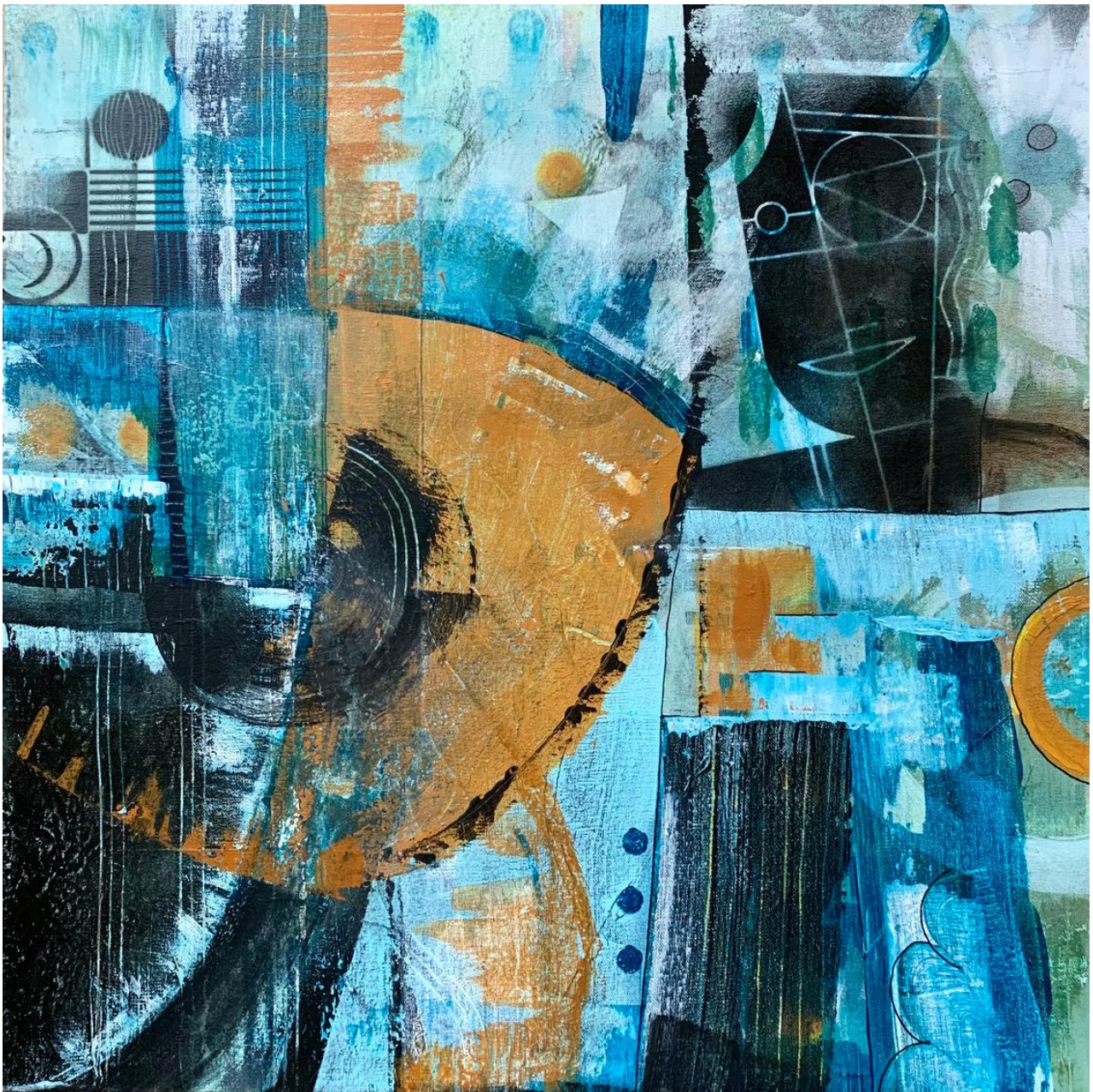
Name: Trine Tafjord, married name Trine Tafjord-Klokk.

3 grown up kids: Robin, Magdalena and Kaja Elise.

Have been painting with acrylics and mixed media for almost 5 years, and digitally painting for some years before that. Mainly abstract and semi abstract expressionism. Have had 2 separat exhibitions and 2 corporate exhibitions ( «Det lille stasjonsgalleriet» in Gjøvik and «Fossekunst» in Hoenefoss. Both in Norway). Paintings sold: 25, and some prints. Love painting, and paint alot.

### *Artist Statement*

I want my art to be known around the world, and I will continue painting as long as I can. I want my art to get into people's minds and hearts.









# — Interview

## Julia Poppy



**Your work uses a unique technique involving epoxy resin and acrylics. Could you explain the process and how you developed this approach?**

In fact, the idea of using epoxy resin with acrylic for artistic purposes was invented before me. It works similarly to oil — the material is the same, but the styles, directions, and application techniques vary.

For several years, I experimented in my studio, mixing colors and applying the resin in different ways to achieve the exact effect that would best express my artistic vision and become a fully-fledged stylistic technique.

My method involves first constructing an approximate composition, selecting the paints, calculating the resin's curing time, and applying it at a specific angle — this way, the colors set in a particular manner without blending into each other. I also use my own signature technique of applying dispersed elements, which are seamlessly integrated into the overall composition of the painting at the final stage.

Instead of canvas, I use special MDF boards ranging from 60 cm to 2 meters in length, so creating a single piece takes quite a lot of time and physical effort.

**In your artist statement, you mention exploring how emotions affect one's perception of time and state of mind. What inspired you to delve into these themes?**

This research is the result of my long-term observations. Most of us are familiar with the feeling that time moves differently depending on the situation. Time can stretch out, or on the contrary, it can be catastrophically scarce. For example, when we are with someone we love, it feels like there's never enough time to "breathe them in," while during routine tasks or while waiting for an important decision beyond our control, time drags on unbearably. Often, even when we understand the nature of certain

emotions, it can still be difficult—or even impossible—to contain them. We may want to always stay in control of our emotional state, but emotions have their own rules. It has always been important to me to learn how to respond calmly to irritants and, more broadly, to unpleasant things that happen to me. We cannot change other people, but we can strive to understand the essence of human actions.

It is precisely the ability to manage emotions that helps preserve inner balance and strength.

**How does working with resin, a material that requires letting go of control, influence your creative process and the final outcome of your artworks?**

Since I experimented with this material for quite a long time and often ended up with completely different results than I expected, I realized something important for myself: there's no need to rush, no matter how hopeless the situation may seem. The stronger the control, the more intense the resistance.

From my observations, I find the greatest joy in the results that came when I tried the least to control the process. This doesn't mean everything should be left to chance, but a gentle relaxation, trust in your hands and the material—these are what help convey the intended image most effectively.

**You describe your work as meditative. How does this meditative approach impact your daily life and artistic practice?**

In today's world, with its overloaded information field where we are constantly bombarded by stress and anxiety, there arises a need for regular reboots of our personal space.

As someone who is deeply sensitive to negativity,



injustice, and other unpleasant aspects of life, I find it absolutely essential to retreat from time to time into my own serene world.

There, I shift my focus to the joy of living and simple pleasures, I admire the beauty of nature and feel grateful for the ability to slowly sink into a barely perceptible, gentle feeling of happiness...

My personal way of tuning into a positive frequency is a kind of meditation that helps me recharge, feel the wholeness of the planet, and sense myself rising above the weight of the world—allowing me to keep soaring lightly, both in life and in the process of creating my paintings.

**What do you hope viewers experience or feel when they engage with your abstract works?**

The entire message of my artistic expression lies in helping people and, of course, in the deep desire to make this world a little kinder. I want the viewer to feel that the positive aspects of life ultimately always outweigh the negative ones.

Utopia may be unattainable, but everyone can contribute to it in their own way.

One of the most important aspects for me is conveying the positive energy that the painting radiates to the viewer. Of course, much depends on the viewer's own sensitivity.

Nevertheless, if someone happens to be overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety, or some misfortune, then by looking at my painting, they might feel a bit of relief. They may remember that life contains vivid colors and gentle nuances.

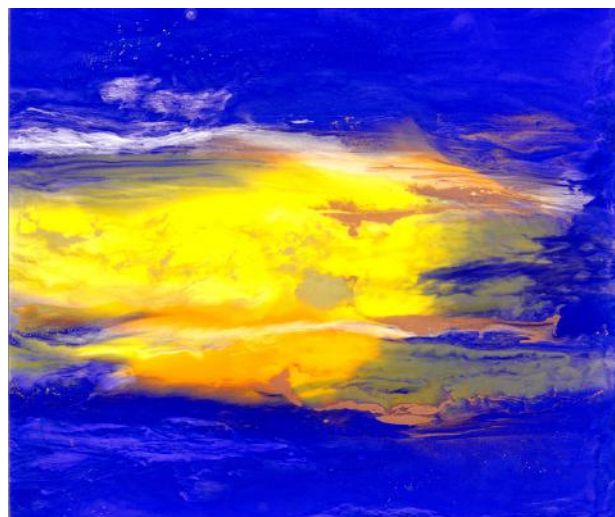
Beyond the darkness, there is always light—and it can be seen, no matter how hard it might be at times.

**Your works have been exhibited internationally, in places like Monaco, Madrid, and New York. How do different cultural contexts influence the reception of your art?**

An interesting observation for me has been that, depending on the cultural context, gallerists and



Julia Poppy | The Ultimate Pleasure | 2020



Julia Poppy | Nightlife#2 | 2024

curators tend to favor different color palettes. For New York, the curators selected works from the Nightlife series, where a dynamic composition is combined with rich cobalt and electric blue tones.

In Monaco, the showcased works featured delicate light shades of lilac and sunny hues, with subtle golden shimmer. Meanwhile, Madrid opted for a bright red, passionate piece with a telling title — The Ultimate Pleasure!

Now, a group exhibition is being prepared in London with my participation, and the painting selected by the jury reflects the colors of London's very own neighborhoods. Still, despite these differences, I believe one of the most important functions of art is to bring people and countries together — to create a world where borders are merely symbolic, where human values come to the forefront, and where we all realize that Earth is our shared home.

**You explore themes of emotional instability and transforming anxiety into constructive experiences. How do these themes reflect your personal journey or challenges?**

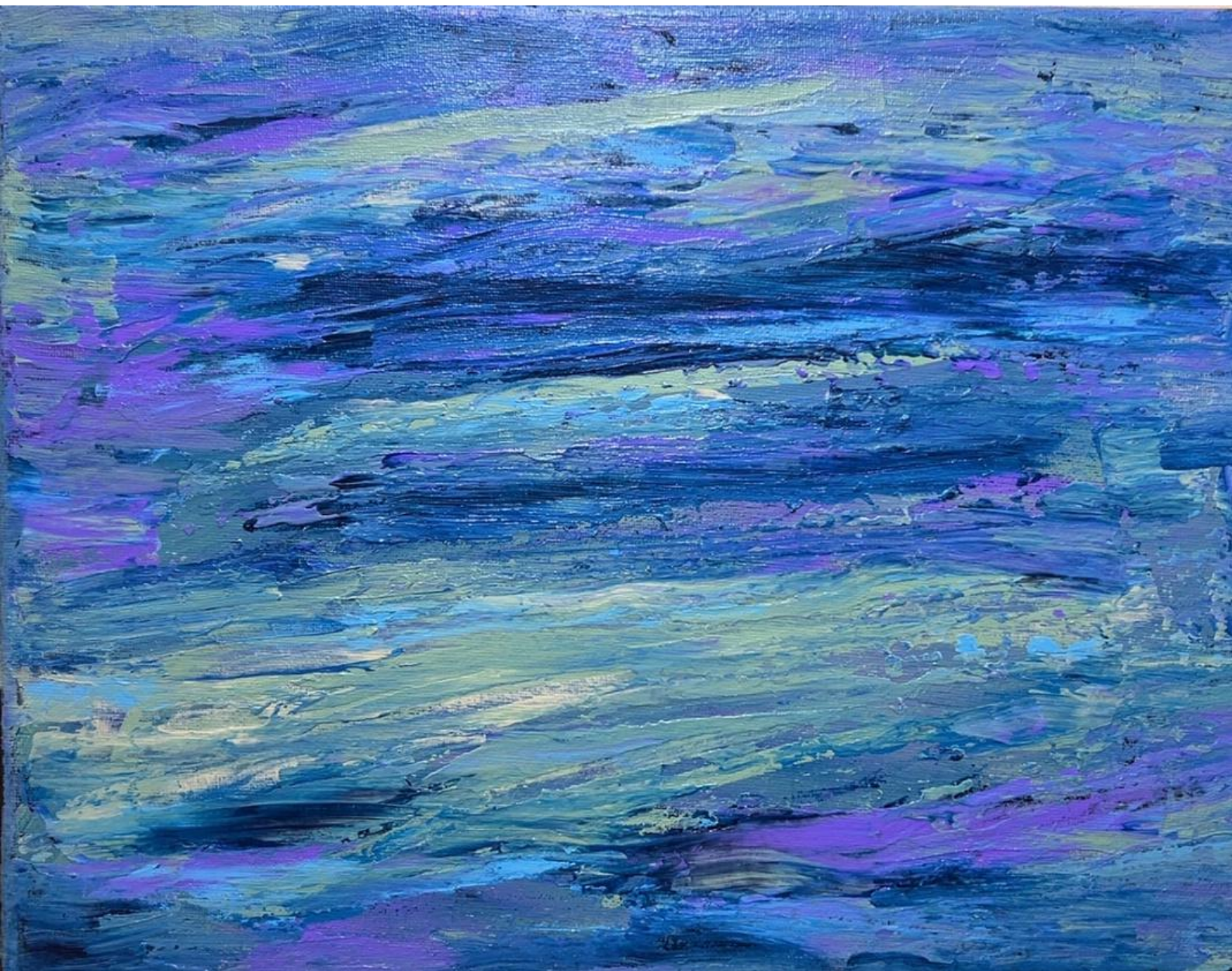
Sometimes, our greatest enemy is ourselves. We resist and refuse to take action simply out of fear. Yes, circumstances can also be unfavorable, and it may feel as though we've lost all external support. Nevertheless, it's essential to remember that any tension is an opportunity for growth—both mental and physical.

My personal journey has always been about battling emotions and anxiety. Since childhood, I've had to face criticism directed at me and often found myself misunderstood. This applied not only to my appearance and intellect but also to my creativity. Support was rare, so I had to deal with all my inner struggles on my own. As an adult, especially after the age of thirty, emotional upheavals started to hit harder each time. I realized it was becoming unbearable to handle them alone—so I turned to professional psychologists for help. Ultimately, my experience taught me that the most reliable path is to truly listen to my inner voice—my intuition has always guided me in overcoming critical situations and transforming them into valuable skills.



**Jessica Kramer** is a multimedia artist based in New Jersey. She combines various elements and techniques through her use of paper, paint, photography, ink, and mediums to construct a tactile landscape that is both visually and emotionally compelling. Her works include ink drawings, watercolor paintings, and abstract acrylic paintings. Jessica has a background in law, education, and psychology.

Jessica Kramer | Caribbean Blue | 2025







Jessica Kramer | Yellow Collides | 2024



# Santiago J. Henríquez

## **How did your background in philology and literature influence your approach to visual arts?**

My professional career in English Philology, particularly in Anglo-American Literature, as a researcher and university professor, came later in life. From a very young age, I had a passion for painting. Over time, I also developed an interest in linguistics, as well as reading and writing. Before enrolling in Philology, I devoted myself to Fine Arts. Very few people know this, but that was the case. I remember my parents being quite upset because, in the 1980s, they didn't see any future for painting as a career for one of their sons. In other words, they didn't see a clear future for one of their two sons in this field. I learned to draw and paint with my mother. She once told me, "This summer, you will dedicate yourself to painting 40 free-drawing sheets." And that's what I did. When she was young, she also painted, although she eventually devoted herself to classical music. There was always a creative atmosphere at home. My father was a hard-working farmer, and my mother was a virtuoso musician in every sense. In my case, as with my brother and sister, I didn't focus as much on classical music as I did on painting. What I mean is that my dedication was first to painting. Later, because I enjoyed reading, I studied the history of Anglo-American literature, ultimately becoming a



senior professor in the field at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. My knowledge in the art field has influenced my literature classes. When I was in front of my students, I always drew many parallels between literature and painting. My classes were greatly enriched by using this combination. As a result, I've published dozens of articles and several books explaining many of these approaches, some of which are freely available online.

## **Your works range from still life painting to vintage images. How do you decide on a theme for your paintings?**

I started by drawing Walt Disney characters. It was very simple for a seven-year-old boy, as I just had to choose a color and paint. I didn't need to mix colors to get a new one or constantly think about the direction of light to avoid ruining the picture. Later, I dedicated myself to drawing still life. I remember painting several pictures of apples, oranges, lemons, prickly pears, and a large-scale painting of a man on a donkey selling his fruit harvest in Teror, one of the most typical villages in the north of Gran Canaria. I lost that painting, and I always think about it because it was so beautiful—it was my



masterpiece at 16. They were all created in a house my father had in the middle of his banana plantation. I continue to paint in the same old house 45 years later. Isn't that curious? The only thing that has changed is the interior decoration of the rooms and my technique in composition and painting. Now I use acrylics instead of oils because I find this medium clean, pure, and natural. I love the way acrylics have evolved. I enjoy how the water glides across the canvas, both blurring and creating clearly visible shapes. I love still life, of course, but I also love vintage compositions that invite us to travel back in time and relive experiences around objects that are now in museums. All of this comes from the past: from my father's farm, from the old house in the middle of San Lorenzo Valley where the old plantation is... it's as if I never wanted that time to end, although both my paintings and technique have changed a lot.

### **What role does color play in your work, and how do you choose your color palette?**

For me, the choice of color is fundamental. In most of my paintings, there must be a dark area and a light area. I am always looking for a transition of colors from a dark area to a lighter one in my pieces. I study how this transition will reflect on the canvas before I begin. Each color offers an infinite number of possibilities that increase in relation to others. I enjoy studying tonalities. I'm not exactly a tonalist, but when I look at an apple, a lemon, or a lettuce, whether at home or in the market, I always see new and surprising tonalities. The eruption of colors in objects depends on knowing how to look at them with an artist's eye. Vision is essential for acrylic painting, as it allows you to observe the subject, simplify shapes, and capture the essence of the image.



Santiago J. Henríquez | Cerezas

### **Can you share more about your process of creating large-scale paintings with oils and acrylics?**

Now that I have a bit more time to paint since my recent retirement, I read a lot about using acrylics and try to stay up to date. In a year or two, I hope to be better prepared. Painting with acrylics requires a constant process of study and updating. You can't rush it, paint hastily, and finish the work as quickly as possible—that's absolutely impossible; the paintings wouldn't turn out well. I'm very concerned about the artist's conscience. By this, I mean finishing a painting only when all the previous objectives of the painting have been met. Water evaporates quickly, and the colors for each canvas must be prepared beforehand to avoid wasting time during the process. Sometimes I have to prepare specific mixtures in advance and store them in small glass jars for when needed. You must choose a topic that you enjoy from start to finish. And, most importantly, you must enjoy the painting process throughout. Only then can a painting turn out well enough to be proud of and share with others. Don't be alarmed, but in my case, it takes more than 150 hours on average to finish a painting. As I mentioned earlier, acrylics require you to find new tones as you progress with the painting. A prior study of what you want to do is 100% necessary, but the real confrontation with the painting inevitably arises during the artistic process.

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

In almost all of my paintings, I try to present the viewers with the beauty of colors. I like to play with colors just as much as with perspective, light, unity/variety, contrast, emphasis, and balance. For me, the overall composition and the little details play on the same team. The placement of each element on the canvas is as important as the details that make the image appear truly unique and beautiful. The language I use when writing a paper, a book chapter, or an article suddenly becomes a paintbrush when painting a picture. God has gifted us each with our own style and the ability to engage creativity with our thoughts and mind. In my case, I would really like viewers to appreciate the beauty of simple, everyday things: to stop for a moment and look at, appreciate, and discover the variety of colors that light awakens in each object. Drawing doesn't deceive, as Salvador Dalí said during Catalan surrealism in the early 20th century. Beauty



will always bring us eternal joy, as John Keats wrote in "Endymion" during the early 19th century. I simply try not to forget these two things. Art is in the eye, which is the one who truly looks and paints.

**Your work often features vintage and universal images. Are there any specific stories or experiences that inspire these subjects?**

Yes. All my paintings have a bit of me in them. In "Angela and Santiago's House with a '58 Opel Kapitan," my grandparents' house appears in the background. It's located on the main highway of the city, with my parents' original blue car driving right in front of it. I spent many years traveling back and forth, like any child, to my grandparents' house. I traveled countless times in that blue Opel of my parents. This painting is a tribute to them, to my childhood, and to all the family work. All the elements in this picture mean a lot to me. It took me a lot of time to compose and paint it. I worked on it for about 250 hours. It was hard to work on because there are so many important details, and, as you can see, each detail has its light and shadow. The initial drawing, the search for proportions, the inclusion of some characters, the roundness of the wheels, the metallic shine of the car... everything plays an important role. Even more so, since it was about recovering something that belongs to the history of my family, my life, my childhood, my youth... though the house still exists, and the model of this magnificent German car is still a collector's item in Europe. Unfortunately, my father's car was lost in an accident. However, he survived thanks to

the durability and protection offered by the '58 Opel Kapitan model. I remember it fondly. This is the reason I decided to dedicate my time and leave a part of my soul in it. The result was definitely worth it.

**You have a rich background in literature and art theory. How do you combine these disciplines in your creative practice?**

This is a very interesting question. It could take a long time to answer, but to summarize, I'll say that, in my case, willpower and patience have brought me great results. I've never believed that rushing or being urgent about finishing something brings good results. Everything takes time. Every task—whether reading a good book, pruning a tree, tidying up the garden, decorating your house, or preparing for a final exam—requires a process. Every process takes time. I wouldn't like to explain this with metaphors or concepts that are difficult to understand. What I mean is that all of us, absolutely all of us, are masters of our time. Time is what makes us strong, great, and even genius. Art museums are full of great works, but also of the time so many artists dedicated to giving meaning to their lives. For me, literature and art, in general, are gifts for which I must give thanks to life. The in-depth study of both disciplines has brought great moments to my life. My time and dedication to these two topics have given meaning to my life. As a result, I enjoyed the opportunity to be a university professor for many years and the organizer of four successful exhibitions where I had the chance to display many of my earlier works.

Santiago J. Henríquez | Limonero









## **Gabriela Ruxandra Paraschiv**

I am an amateur photographer, 51 years old. My profession is ENT specialist doctor. I am a lover of the sea and sunsets.

### *Project Statement*

The photos were taken during one of my holidays, and they make me dream of coming back 'home,' as I consider the seashore at sunset my soul's home, where I have happy conversations with God and the Universe.







## — Interview

# Amira Haider

**What inspired you to pursue both Psychology and Studio Art? How do you balance these two areas of study in your creative process?**

What inspired me to pursue Psychology is my deep interest in understanding why people are the way they are, particularly how childhood experiences shape who we become. I've found that these themes often surface in my artwork as well. Art has been a powerful creative outlet for me since childhood, especially drawing. Although Studio Art wasn't part of my original academic plan, I took the introductory course in my third year of undergrad with the intention of it being a creative outlet. I realized I had enough space in my schedule to pursue a minor in Studio Art during my final year, and doing so felt like a natural continuation of my creative journey. As I began exploring ways to integrate both fields, I discovered art therapy and have since been volunteering at an art therapy clinic, helping run wellness workshops. This experience has deepened my appreciation for the therapeutic potential of art. I balance these two areas by treating my art as a meditative and reflective practice— one that complements my academic journey. For me, both disciplines are deeply interconnected: psychology helps me understand emotion and behaviour, while art allows me to explore and express it.



**Your use of bright, saturated colors is one of the most distinctive elements of your work. What draws you to such vibrant palettes?**

I've always been drawn to bright, saturated colors because they genuinely make me feel happy. There's something about vibrant colour palettes that evoke a sense of joy and energy, not just in art, but in my everyday life too. I love how colour can completely change the mood of a piece, and using bold hues helps me in creating artwork that feels uplifting. I think vibrancy naturally catches the eye, but more than that, it reflects how I want to feel and how I hope others might feel when they see my artwork. Surrounding myself with colour has always been comforting, so it feels natural to carry that into my creative process.

**How do you believe your background in Psychology influences the themes and emotions expressed in your art?**

Psychology has really shaped the way I think about my art. Learning about mental health has given me new ways to understand and express emotions, and it's made me more intentional with the stories I tell through my work. I want to create art that resonates with people, that makes them feel something. One painting I made was based on an old childhood birthday photo of me, and I wanted it to capture that feeling of nostalgia and whimsy that so many of us associate with being little. Psychology has taught me to look deeper into the human experience, and that shows up in my art through introspection and emotional layering. Both disciplines encourage reflection and storytelling, so my creative process often becomes a way of exploring the psychological themes I care about, like memory and identity.



**Can you talk about a particular piece that stands out in your mind as a major turning point in your artistic journey?**

One piece that really stands out as a turning point in my artistic journey is my large-scale raspberry painting. It measures 36"x40" and took over 30 hours to complete. It was the first time I felt a deep sense of pride in something I created- I remember stepping back when I was finished and just feeling genuinely proud of the work I had put into it. I loved everything about it: the subject matter, the texture, and especially the rich magenta tones, which are my favorite colours. Raspberries are also my favorite fruit, so the piece felt very personal. It was a moment where I realized how much dedication and emotion I could pour into a painting, and it made me feel more connected to my art than ever before.

**What role does personal experience play in your art? Do you see your works as an exploration of your own thoughts and feelings?**

Personal experience plays a huge role in my art. A lot of my work is deeply personal in that it reflects who I am. My taste, experiences, and stylistic preferences all naturally come through in what I create. I definitely see my art as an exploration of



feelings and subject matter that resonate with me. Whether it's a memory, or even just a colour palette I'm drawn to, there's always a part of me embedded in the work. Making art is a way for me to process, reflect, and connect with myself on a deeper level.

**Who are your biggest artistic influences, and how have they shaped your current style?**

Two of my biggest artistic influences are Frida Kahlo and Claude Monet. I've always been inspired by how Frida wove her personal story into her artwork. She didn't shy away from vulnerability, and that honesty truly resonates with me. I also admire her use of vibrant colours, which is something I try to incorporate into my own style. On the other hand, I'm also drawn to Monet's work. His focus on natural landscapes and his soft use of pastels have really influenced the dreamier side of my practice. I think my style sits somewhere between those two worlds.

**How do you see your art evolving in the future? Are there any new techniques or themes you're excited to explore?**

As I finish off my undergraduate degree, I've been reflecting a lot on how much I've grown as an artist. I'm really grateful to Western's Studio Art program for opening me up to so many new styles and techniques I hadn't explored before. I'm excited to see where my artistic journey leads from here, and I think no matter what direction it takes, creating from personal experience will always be at the core of my work. Lately, I've been especially interested in experimenting more with new mediums I was introduced to this year, such as embroidery and silkscreen. Both offer such unique textures and possibilities, and I'm really looking forward to pushing myself creatively in those areas.





## Teresa Kent

At 67 I finally found my art niche - colored pencil and pastels. Now at the age of 71, I am starting to enjoy competitions and painting the endangered animals of the world.

### *Artist Statement*

I hope to enlighten the patrons of art to the danger of losing our most beautiful and needed animals by showcasing their images with my art.

Teresa Kent | African Wild Dog









## **Koloina Rabemananjara**

I'm a malagasy graphic designer based in Brussels, I love illustration and photography and I'm experimenting 3D.

### *Artist Statement*

This illustration represents the market in my hometown, Antananarivo, Madagascar. I put specific elements from what I remembered like the big plastic bags for the rices and peas, the cans to measure a portion the "sahafa", there is no traduction for it but it refers the plate made of plant fibers and the beverage crate holding the planks where vegetables are put. This illustration is for me a way to share a part of the malagasy landscape and it's identity, to battle against the false representation and the image internet gives about Madagascar.







## — Interview

# Asya Baykara

**You describe your creative journey as an evolution from self-doubt to embracing your identity as an artist. Could you elaborate on this transformation and the turning point that allowed you to fully embrace your art?**

Deep down, I am someone who meets life with love — in its flow, its wildness, and its quiet grace. I look upon it with a gentle gaze, believing that everything it holds is something to be adored. I suppose, at times, I adored life so deeply that I forgot I was a part of it. I watched it from afar, so mesmerized by its beauty that I drifted out of its current — lost in dreams that pulled me further from the shore of reality. And the farther I drifted, the more fear crept in; the more afraid I became, the harder it was to create.

Placing mirrors inside my own mind — observing myself, dissecting every gesture, meeting my thoughts with sharp reflection — had never exhausted me. If anything, it felt like home. Until 2025.

This year held up its own mirror and showed me how often I had stepped into the fire just to keep others warm — and how, all along, it was my own tenderness I had been longing for.

Then, drawing turned into something different. It stopped being a way to escape life. It became the way I stayed. A way to wrap myself in something gentle. I believe my return to essence — my reaching for art — began the moment I realized just how merciless I had been to myself.

The less I feared seeing myself, the less I feared being seen. And that was the moment everything began to shift, that was my turning point.

**In your statement, you mention the concept of Kairos, the right moment in time. How has this idea influenced your work, and can you share a**



**moment in your artistic practice when this concept became pivotal?**

Kairos Portfolio was born in a sudden breath — almost impulsively, yet deeply inevitable. Without knowing where it came from, I found myself writing, sketching, envisioning — as if caught in a current I couldn't see but couldn't resist. It wasn't just a burst of inspiration. It felt more like an eruption — the kind that comes not from stillness, but from years of self-silencing. It was the voice of someone who had spent years dimming her presence, rejecting recognition, denying her art, and unraveling her own light, finally rising up from within: "Enough."

It wasn't just a rebellion against a single moment — it was a quiet uprising against the version of myself I had outgrown. A reawakening. The beginning of recreating who I was.

And maybe through the power held in its name, Kairos, something changed. From that point on, when inspiration knocked, I didn't hesitate. I stopped negotiating with fear. I simply showed up — and drew. I began moving with instinct, and the more I lost track of time, the more alive I felt. The creations I brought to life began to surpass my expectations, and that gave me strength. At its core, Kairos is a peace agreement I made with myself — a promise to live moment by moment, to feel fully, to follow freely, and to finally trust in the rhythm of life. Because now, every moment feels like the right one.

**The idea of perception, particularly the fragile**



**boundary between seeing and being seen, plays a central role in your work. How do you explore this theme in your visual language, and how do you think your audience engages with this idea?**

I believe life and time are always in search of a witness. It is witness that gives depth to our relationships, meaning to our lives, and shapes both our actions and thoughts. We are trapped in a cycle of seeing and being seen. At its core, this may be the deepest drive that connects us to the flow of nature. Days spent unseen, unnoticed, are days filled with silent suffering.

This need to be witnessed may manifest as a yearning for the world to see our pain, as a silent cry for our suffering to be acknowledged, or as the quiet search for someone who will bear witness to our memories as they unfold with time. But in the end, we all seek to be seen — sometimes by strangers, sometimes by the ones who have caused us harm, and sometimes by the very hands that raised us.

Yet, sometimes, the very gaze we've spent a lifetime avoiding is the one that catches us off guard. In the moment we wish to remain invisible, we are struck by the most piercing gaze. In those moments, when we most wish to remain unseen, we are confronted by eyes that see too deeply. Despite the discomfort rising within us, we remain caught in the gaze we can't escape. We are drawn into them, captivated by the depth of their understanding, even when we wish they didn't.

**You mentioned that each of your drawings represents a single face in infinite variations. What**

**does this exploration of the human face signify for you, and how does it relate to your personal experiences?**

Having experienced different aspects of drawing at various stages of my life, my deepest aspiration has always been to find my own style. My goal was to blur the boundaries between myself and my work, creating a seamless whole, where the lines between the two could no longer be distinguished. When someone looked at my work, I wanted them to instantly recognize that it was mine. This is why I constantly sought to create pieces that would strengthen and define my style. The repetition of my lines is an effort to make my work — or more precisely, my style — feel familiar, to make them more intimate with each glance.

After years of tracing my own asymmetry within the harmony of nature, I intentionally sought to emphasize this asymmetry in every creation, shaping each face with my own hands.

Though the repetition of my style, I ensured that each element within my pieces remained unique. But at their essence, the shared structure of my works is not solely defined by their thematic unity; it is also marked by the unease they awaken. This discomfort, this unease arises from the recurring faces — faces that, much like those we pass by on the streets, silently witness our existence and the fleeting moments we live. They are, in truth, the faces we never truly see — faces that slip from memory, as we slip from theirs. Perhaps they are the eyes that dissect, that judge, or that silently diminish us, leaving us with the weight of our own invisibility.



Asya Baykara | Şehika



**Your collages represent a departure from traditional boundaries, and you've described this process as a way to reconstruct reality. What does "reality" mean to you in the context of your work, and how do you reconstruct it through collage?**

Reality, to me, is not a fixed construct but a fluid, ever-shifting experience. It is shaped by memory, perception, and the unseen forces that govern our existence. In my collages, I reconstruct reality not to define it but to unravel it—to expose its contradictions, its echoes, and its fractures. Through layering, repetition, and fragmentation, I seek to capture the feeling of time slipping, of identities dissolving, of moments folding into one another. Each composition is a dialogue between what is remembered, what is imagined, and what is left unsaid. I spend a lot of time creating collage works, and the harmony between each element shapes the theme. Instead of following a specific theme, I allow the theme to be shaped by the pieces themselves. I give them space to create their own reality.

**The works you create combine both illustration and narrative. Can you explain how these two elements complement each other in your pieces, and do you feel one medium is more important than the other in conveying your message?**

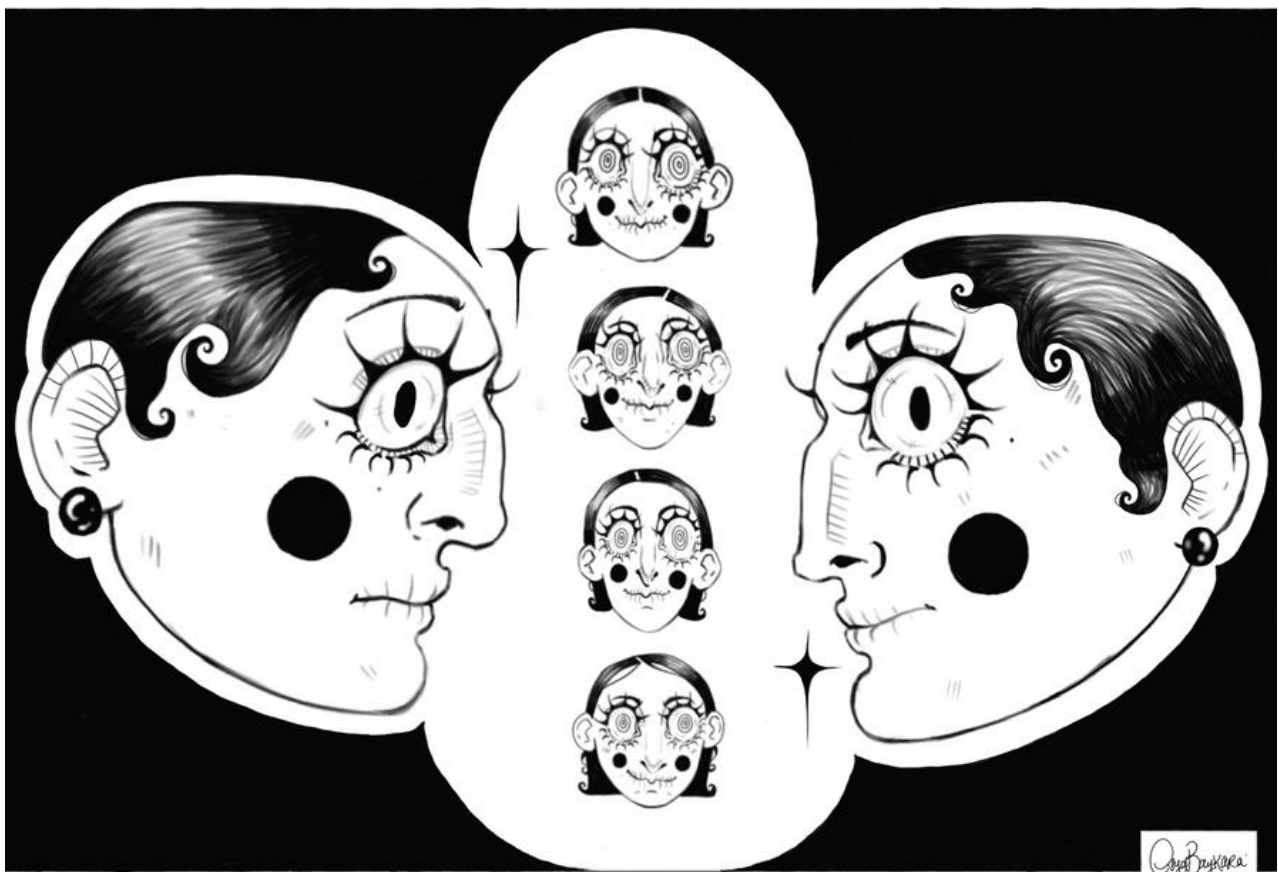
For me, the true explanation of an art work lies in the emotions it evokes. This is why the narratives I write

about my works are not meant to convey what I intended to express, but rather what I felt when I completed them. Each piece of writing follows the completion of the artwork and speaks not to what I saw, but to what I experienced in that moment. I find unique joy in expressing myself through every form of art, which is why I continue to explore various fields, contemplating how to bring these disciplines together. Writing is a precious art form to me, and that is why I seek to put into words the emotions I experience in my works, emphasizing the importance of feeling.

**Your work seems to explore both the familiar and the unfamiliar. How do you approach this balance, and what role does uncertainty play in your art-making process?**

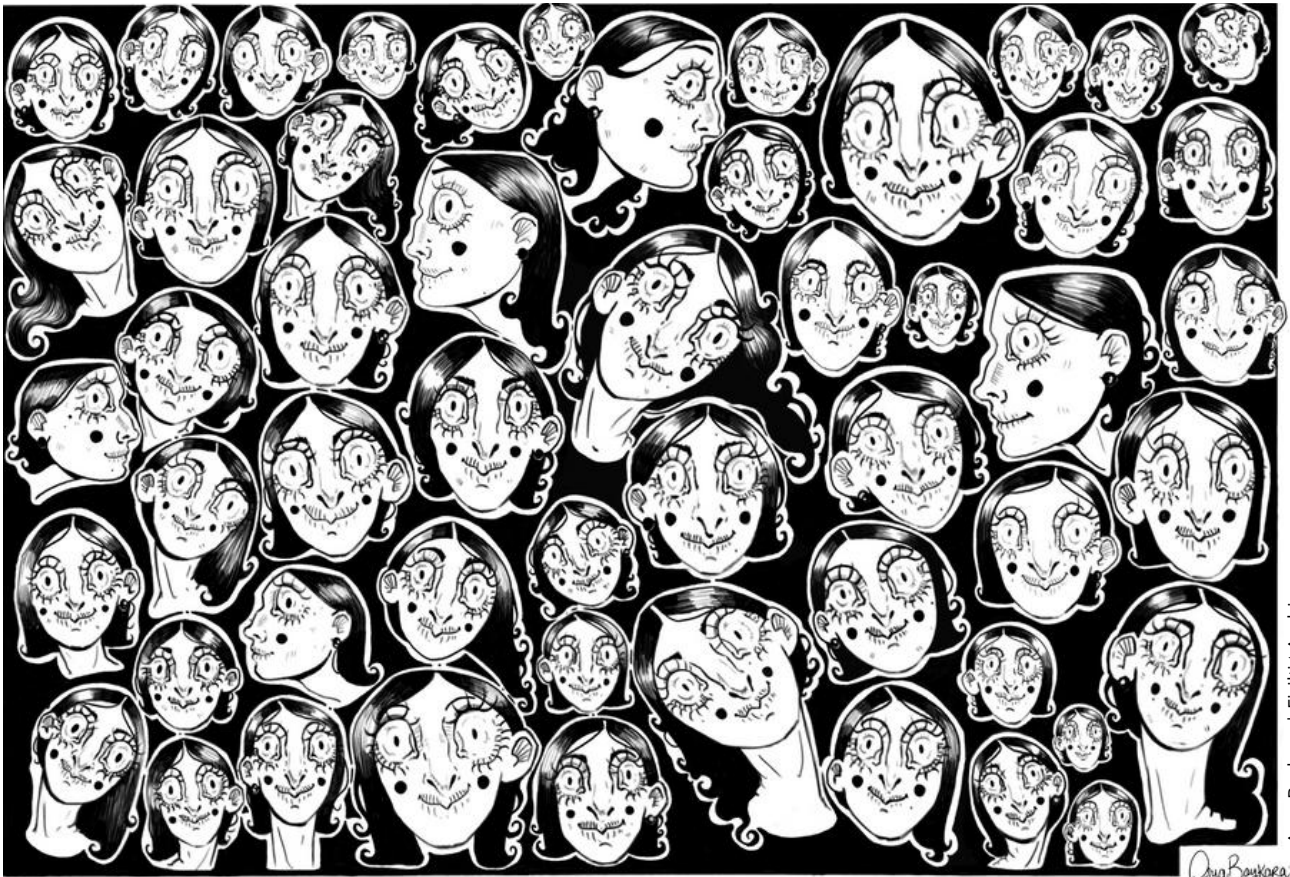
I often find myself drawn to the threshold between the known and the unknown — the delicate space where recognition blurs into uncertainty. I don't try to resolve that tension; I invite it in. In fact, uncertainty plays a central role in my creative process. It allows me to stay curious, to respond instinctively rather than impose control. The familiar elements in my work serve as anchors, while the unfamiliar invites exploration. It's in that dissonance — where clarity slips just out of reach — that the emotional weight of the piece begins to form.

I want the viewer to feel both connected and slightly unsettled, as if they've stumbled into a memory they don't fully recognize but somehow still feel.



Asya Baykara | Ayna ♦ Mirror





Asya Baykara | Fisili ♦ A whisper

Asya Baykara



## Anna Ryczkowska

Born in 1998, she graduated from the Graphic Arts Faculty at Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 2024 and obtained a degree in Biology at the University of Warsaw in 2023. She studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Universitat Politècnica de València and Università degli Studi di Palermo. She works on the verge of art and science. Nature and the biological world are both her inspiration and space to use her artistic skills in a utilitarian way. Areas of her creation entail painting, animation, illustration and graphic design. Passion for both art and science has accompanied her throughout her whole life. One of the more difficult decisions she had to make was choosing studying at the Academy of Fine Arts over attending the Medical University. In that moment it seemed like a definite choice between art and science, but when after two years she started parallel studies at the Faculty of Biology, the similarities between those two areas became clear. She then realised it's never been about giving up one for the other but working in an area in between them, finding what they have in common and how they can enrich one another. In her artistic activity she draws inspiration from the biological world, especially the organic, hardly accessible but visually stimulating world of the microorganisms but also the inner world of personal experiences and emotions. In the scientific field she seeks to use her artistic skills and aesthetic sense in creating visual material for scientific content. An example of such work was her diploma project, which involved designing a book on a scientific topic with the use of custom illustrations and a few accompanying animations. In the future she would like to use her skills to promote science and use her art to deal with the problems that we face as a society, especially those related to the Climate Crisis and human impact on the environment.

### *Artist Statement*

I work on the verge of art and science; nature and the world of biology are a source of inspiration for me, as well as a space to use artistic skills in a utilitarian way. I work in art and design but I also graduated in biology, which is reflected in my constant search for new ways to combine these two fields. Seemingly distant, they not only have a lot in common, but can enrich each other. I believe that the common categorization and hermeticism of both artistic and scientific environments is a source of limitation for their activities. I see potential in their cooperation, which can lead to new discoveries and creations that would not be possible for either of these fields separately. Works that carry aesthetic value affect the recipient's emotions keeping them longer with a given issue, but also helps them remember the content. On the other hand, science is a source of inspiration, as well as knowledge about the world, which can be used in creation in various ways. I believe that as artists we have both the means and the privilege to reach our audience in a unique and effective way, which has the potential to be used, among other things, in popularizing science or publicizing important and difficult topics. By evoking emotions in the recipient while simultaneously conveying substantive content, we create a connection between them and the issue being discussed, which becomes something personal, increasing the effectiveness of the message. Presented works are the metaphor of emotions that accompany them. It can be a feeling of overwhelm or unwanted distance that can't be overcome for internal or external reasons. At times it's an attempt to escape or a desperate intent to keep something that's already lost. Transformations and difficult emotions they evoke can be related to other areas of life that we face, not only as individuals but as a society — drastic changes caused by the Climate Crisis or uncertain, dynamic, even tragic situation in the international arena. Presented artworks form part of the "Phantoms" series. They exist between abstraction and figuration, the animate, inanimate world and humanity. They stand against the common tendency to categorize; they belong to many worlds and none at the same time. They are the effect of contemplation on constant, unescapable changes, which accompany us in every sphere of our lives, and emotions that correspond them. The change and evolution tend to be necessary or inevitable, often difficult. There are times when we feel tangled, limited by inner or outer forces, helpless and transformation happens slowly, seems like vibration rather than linear movement. Some of such constant changes are those within interpersonal relationships. Their soft flexibility transfers the ephemeral nature of emotions and states while the use of contrasting colours emphasize the intensity of experiences and inner conflicts.



Anna Ryczkowska | Phantom | 2023



Anna Ryczkowska | The Forest | 2024







## — Interview

# Daniel Feinstein

### **What inspires you to take photos of things that catch your eye?**

The emphasis there is on my eye, I'm not interested in taking photos for other people. I always work with the assumption that no one else will see my photographs, which may sound pessimistic, but it keeps me focused on making art that I enjoy and that is truly my own.

### **How has your move from Boston to Philadelphia influenced your photography?**

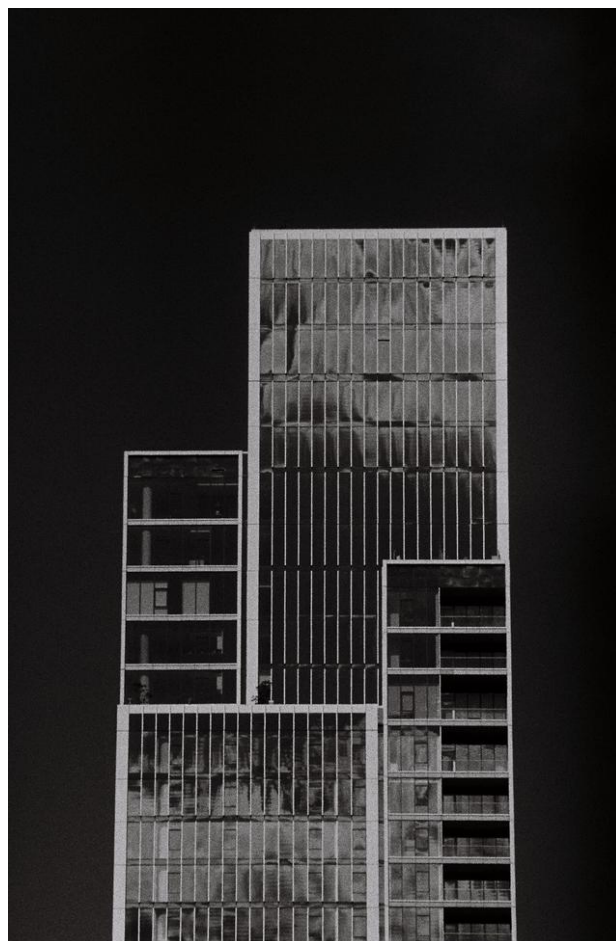
Moving to a new city has given me a new playground to explore. I feel freer in a new space, less restricted by my previous experiences and expectations.

### **Could you share more about your process in the darkroom? How do you feel it adds to your work?**

I love spending time in the darkroom. Seeing my photo fade into existence out of a blank sheet of paper never gets old. The physical process of setting up the enlarger and using test strips builds a stronger connection to each print than scanning and editing a negative digitally. And, like



Daniel Feinstein | Untitled | 2025



Daniel Feinstein | Monumental | 2025

any creative endeavor, going through the trial and error of multiple drafts can create a final product that I never would have expected. Many of my favorite photos have been pleasant surprises. Plus, it's a great way to meet people who can inspire and educate me.

### **You mention that your photography is an excuse to explore your new city. How do you approach these explorations visually?**

I am a street photographer; I don't do any studio work. To me, photography is about being in the right place at the right time. I use what's around me, so I owe everything to where I am. All my photos come from taking long walks in new and familiar neighborhoods, so my photos reflect my physical path. They are how I see the world.

### **Do you find that your work has evolved since you started this journey just over a year ago? How?**

I've gotten more comfortable and familiar with the practical aspects of using a camera and film, but of course I am still learning and exploring my



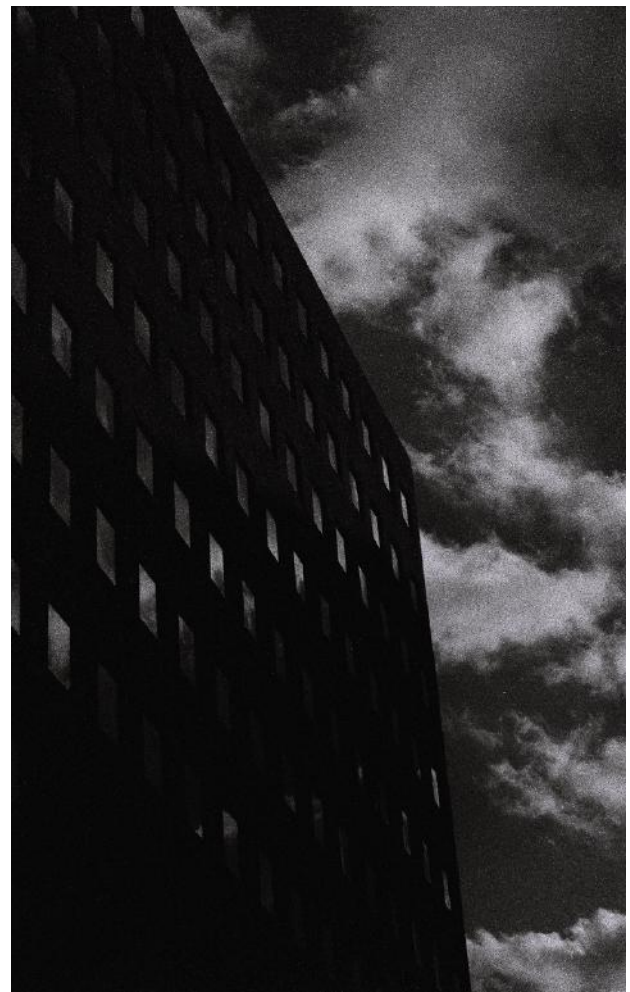
personal style. I am very proud of my work so far, but I think that I am restricting myself too much. Recently I am trying to be more open minded in my shooting and more outgoing and free. I hope that my photos will become more organic both in subject and composition. Once I can do that, I will see what I prefer and narrow my scope back down.

**You often capture architectural details and reflections in your photos. What is it about these elements that attract you?**

I consider myself an abstract artist, which is difficult to do as a photographer. Of course, every photo is of something, but I am not interested in what it is but what it looks like. I rarely take photos of people because once a person (and especially a face) is in the frame, it becomes about who that person is rather than how they fit into the picture. It's very selfish. I challenge myself to show you nothing while showing you something. People are too obvious, but a blank wall or a window can be anything I want it to be.

**How important is the use of black and white film in your photography, and what do you feel it adds to the atmosphere of your work?**

At this stage in my creative career, I think it is essential for creating a dreamlike feeling. I don't



Daniel Feinstein | Hell | 2025

want my photos to feel real; I want to remove all possible context and show you my own world. However, I feel like I am using it as a crutch, and in the future, I would like to challenge myself to create this same feeling using color.



Daniel Feinstein | Home | 2025



## Veronika Podlasová

Visual artist, performer & ecological storyteller

Veronika Podlasová is a visual artist and creative collaborator whose interdisciplinary practice merges environmental awareness with poetic visual language. Through printmaking, performance, and installation, she explores the fragile relationship between humans and the natural world, often drawing on glaciology, geology, and ecological philosophy. Veronika pursued further education in the UK, completing a UAL Diploma in Fine Arts. She later gained experience at the Makerie Studio in London and organized art workshops both in the UK and the Czech Republic. Her work has been featured in exhibitions across Europe, New Zealand, and Australia, where she took part in several artist residencies. Her time in New Zealand, including a collaboration with Māori communities on a children's book based on indigenous stories, deeply shaped her artistic direction. A significant chapter of her practice began with her participation in the Czech Antarctic Programme. As part of the research expedition, she collected glacial water and sediments from Nelson Island, which she later incorporated into her work. This journey resulted in the exhibition *Blue Fragility*, which highlighted the disappearing beauty of the Antarctic landscape. Her current highlight is the interdisciplinary performance *A68 – Echoes of Ice*, which reflects on the life cycle of one of the largest icebergs to break off from the Larsen C ice shelf. The performance combines movement, sound, and scientific insight, and serves as both an artistic expression and an urgent call for climate awareness. Veronika believes that art and science are not opposites, but parallel ways of understanding our world: "They use different tools, but ask the same questions – and both need imagination."

### *Artist Statement*

My work lives at the intersection of science and art. I use visual language to explore the stories hidden in glaciers, sediments, and the silence of remote landscapes. Whether working on canvas or through performance, I'm drawn to the invisible processes shaping our planet – cycles of melting, erosion, transformation – and to the human emotions they echo. One of my central inspirations is the iceberg A68, whose journey from Antarctica became the foundation for my performance *A68 – Echoes of Ice*. This story of slow disintegration, ancient air released, and disappearing mass speaks not only of climate change but of time, memory, and fragility – both planetary and personal. In my paintings, I often incorporate glacier water and organic materials, blending scientific data with abstract forms. I don't try to illustrate science, but rather to create space for feeling, for slowing down, and for reconnecting. I believe that emotion is a powerful entry point into ecological awareness – and that art can be a way of listening, rather than speaking over. Through my work, I aim to invite viewers into a shared reflection: What does the Earth remember? And are we still willing to listen?



Veronika Podlasová | Memory of Ice







## — Interview

# Theresia Zhang

**Can you tell us about your journey as an artist, from your early inspirations to studying at the Maryland Institute College of Art and your current work at the New York Academy of Art?**

The only thing I was certain about as a lost high school kid was my love for beautiful things and figures (humans). So at first I applied to somewhere that I thought I could do fashion illustration. COVID hit half way through my first year at Parsons School of Design, and by that time I realized my focus is not dressing up dolls, but the stories these dolls might have—aka relationships that form society. This interest may have stemmed from all the comic books and illustrated literature I collected since childhood. So, in 2020, I transferred to the Maryland Institute College of Art which has a strong illustration program.

However, even within the illustration department, I was somewhat of an outlier. Due to my obsession with the Golden Age of Illustration from the late 19th to early 20th century, I almost exclusively painted digital illustrations with an oil painting finish. Later this desire escalated, and I picked up a real bristle brush. Narration has always been at the heart of my work—I paint literature and also write my own novels. So I took a narrative painting class in the painting department. My painting professor saw my assignments and recommended the New York Academy of Art as a potential graduate option. A small but prestigious school that hides in the heart of New York, and perhaps the only representative-focused contemporary art school in the United States. Thereafter I have never considered other graduate school options. I had never related myself to a pure painting major and never imagined moving back to New York, and it turned out to be a great fit. Now I'm at NYAA preparing for my Master Thesis, and I'm painting my own voice interpreting knights and shiny armors.

**Your work explores the delicate femininity within the traditionally masculine symbol of knights. What**



**inspired this concept, and how do you balance these two opposing themes in your work?**

Even though armor is often perceived as a soldier's protection—designed specifically for men—many historical suits of armor actually look more feminine compared to the modern designs seen in video games and TV shows. Today, male characters are given bulky, rugged armor to emphasize their masculinity, while female characters are often stuck with bikini armor or, at the very least, breastplates with exaggerated metal curves. As a woman, I don't even like wearing underwire bras—so I can't imagine how uncomfortable that would be in battle.

However, if you visit a museum and examine real armor from the 1500s, you'll notice a very different aesthetic. These historical suits often feature a pronounced upper body, rounded hips, and a narrow waist, accentuated by delicate etchings and decorative details radiating from the center where the torso meets the hips. Beneath all that, the armor still follows the shape of well-modeled male legs. To me, the way the waist is designed is reminiscent of a corset—it intentionally highlights the body's curves. Anyone could be hidden beneath these beautifully crafted shells, whether man or woman. The intricate decoration and delicate, almost feminine beauty of these armors did nothing to diminish a knight's masculinity.

**In your statement, you mention the metaphor of humans being like mollusks, enclosing soft interiors within hard shells. How do you see this idea reflected in the modern world and within your own artistic practice?**

In my painting *Pearlborne*, I depict knights' armor with a rough, oyster-shell-like finish. Humans are inherently



vulnerable creatures, and we adopt different personas to blend into the herd—much like oysters shielding their delicate flesh. In this way, knights become both human and mollusk, embodying this duality in my work. Knights are like walking oysters with two legs; beneath the polished sheen of metal lies a reflection of modern society, where beauty and strength serve as both armor and disguise. In essence, humans are no different from mollusks—we enclose our soft, fragile interiors within rigid exteriors, seeking protection from the world.

**The symbolism of knights is central in your work. Could you elaborate on why you chose this figure and what it represents to you personally?**

Painting knights in my work is both a recollection of my childhood growing up in Europe and a way to create an imaginative space—a journalistic ground on my canvas, where history, fantasy, and personal narrative intertwine. I call myself *Reversed-Chinoiserie*—fetishizing the West through my Chinese lady eyes, observing Western aesthetics and mindsets objectively while expressing them subjectively. As a Gen-Z artist, my creative soil is the internet; I play too many games and read too many comics. What fascinates me most are works created by people who are not inherently part of the cultures they depict—recreational fantasies built on deep research and observation. Some of my all-time favorites include *The Adventures of Tintin*, *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, the *Dark Souls* series, *Final Fantasy*, and many Japanese and Chinese comics.

My obsession with knights originates from video games. Their character designs blend classical and bizarre elements, appealing to modern tastes while preserving the essence of knighthood as a symbol. This connection fuels my love for role-playing in games, allowing me to embody these figures in different ways.

**You discuss the intersection of gender fluidity and societal allegories within fairy tales and mythology. How do you plan to explore these themes through your upcoming projects?**

I merge these influences with literature. To me, the resonance people feel while reading novels is a fluidity of consciousness—one that transcends gender, class, and



Theresa Zhang | Sinking Chivalry | 2025



Theresa Zhang | Hermaphroditus | 2025

any real-world identity, allowing readers to connect with characters entirely different from themselves.

I plan to create a series based on Greek and Roman mythology, drawing inspiration from *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. With my signature dainty character designs and explosive colors, I aim to explore androgynous love and hate in a way that feels universal, using the beauty of my painting revealing these hidden emotions.

**Your artistic practice includes the use of both oil paints and soft pastels. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular piece?**

Actually, I don't mind what medium I use. Oil, acrylic, and pastel are all the same as long as you know what finish looking you wanna achieve. It just depends on what I feel like playing with at the moment. Even my acrylic paintings often get mistaken for oils. That said, I wouldn't use pastel for large pieces since it's too delicate to ship, but when my intention is to highlight the freshness of pigment and mark-making, pastel is always my first choice.

**Could you share how you integrate your academic background in illustration with your current studies in painting?**

My background in illustration helps me simplify the process of creating intended visual qualities, and over the years, I have learned how to communicate with people through pictures to let my audience know exactly what I am trying to convey. The alluring beauty of my visuals attracts people and makes them spend an extra second stopping in front of my paintings—maybe they will think about the meanings behind them.

As an illustrator, I have to have the ability to execute a fully elaborate painting within a five-hour window to meet an emergency commission deadline. Now that I am painting for myself, this ability buys me more time for thinking and planning or altering parts later instead of wasting time struggling with form or shape. People say it looks like witchcraft watching me paint, but of course, that ability comes from a ton of practice over the years. Painting allows a work to elaborate more on the deeper meaning behind visuals. The vagueness that illustration doesn't tolerate becomes the soil for critical thinking since illustrations always have text alongside them to assist. My visual communication skills, sharpened in the illustration industry, help me aim at the target more accurately and efficiently.



I am **Letterio Scopelliti**, a former high school history and philosophy teacher who has always been passionate about photography and literature. I have published philosophical essays, novels, short stories, plays and poetic texts. In 2023 I won the second Dostoevsky prize with the novel Tokyo Roof Top Bar. As for photography, in 2007 I curated a solo exhibition in Florence, I participated in group exhibitions at the Strozzi and for a few years I have dedicated myself to artistic photography, participating in group exhibitions or video exhibitions in various galleries in Florence and also in Rome, Venice, Milan, Bologna, Pisa, Madrid, Vienna, Barcelona, Turin, Catania, Lecce.

Next October I will be present at the Florence Biennale 2025 with 4 photographs.

I favor naturalistic and urban photos in color and black and white, photos of details and lately I have been exploring the vast territory of the abstract.



Letterio Scopelliti | Fiori di vetro





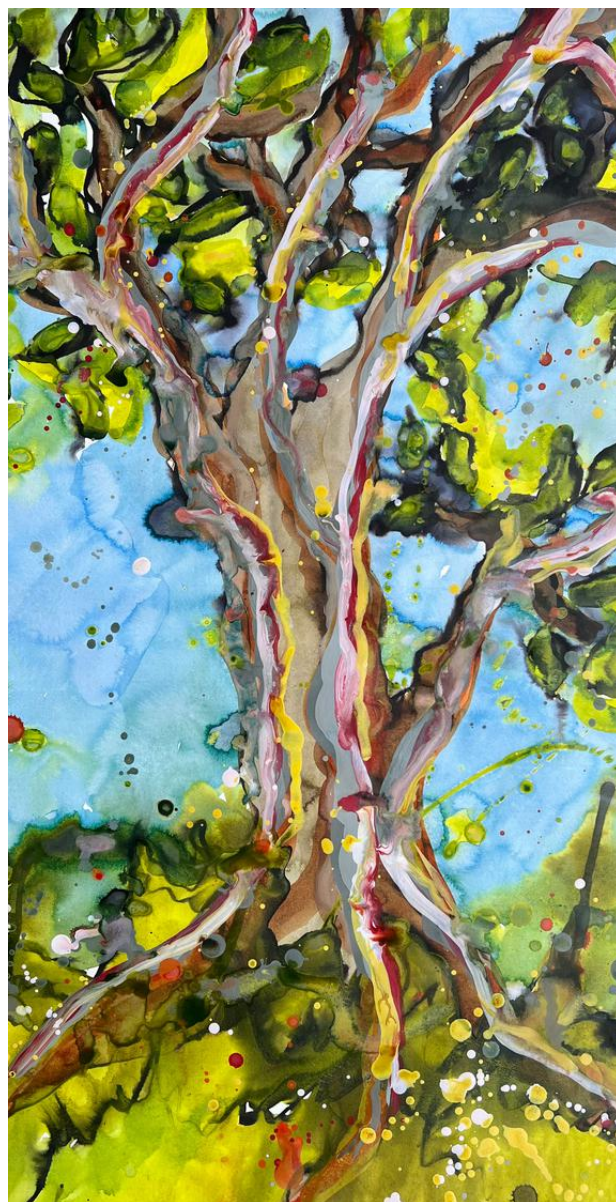
Letterio Scopelliti | Mistery 2



# Emily Lewer

**What drew you to the Australian landscape and wildlife as the main subject of your artwork?**

Growing up in Australia, I was immediately captivated by the landscape, as I was immersed in the bushland from a young age. My father often took me and his colleagues on bushwalks, where I learned about native flora and fauna. He instilled in me an appreciation for the importance of protecting the environment, which has become a vital aspect of my artistic practice. I continue to explore the Australian landscape through constant research and artistic experimentation.



**How has studying at the National Art School influenced your creative process?**

My first year of a Fine Arts degree at the National Art School has allowed me to fully commit to my art-making practice. This intensive learning environment has helped me focus on refining my skills and developing strong conceptual ideas for my work. The full-time study has significantly enhanced my creative process, enabling me to push my artistic boundaries.

**Your work involves both acrylic and calligraphy ink. How do you decide which medium to use for each piece?**

I often explore the combination of acrylic and calligraphy ink, as the two mediums complement each other beautifully. I typically begin with calligraphy ink, as it creates bold, contrasting outlines. When mixed with water, it forms stunning golden and navy blue washes. I also apply the ink with a stick, reinforcing a



connection to the natural world through organic, expressive forms. I then use acrylic ink for colour and finalise my work with white acrylic paint to highlight key elements.

**Can you describe the role of fluidity and expressiveness in your work?**

Fluidity plays a crucial role in my work, allowing me to capture the organic essence of wildlife and landscapes. The expressive nature of ink enables me to depict the beauty of the natural world as I perceive it, emphasising movement and vitality in each piece.

**What do you hope your audience takes away from your paintings of Australian wildlife?**

My goal is for my audience to develop a deep connection with my work and leave with a renewed awareness of the environment. I hope my paintings inspire people to consider their impact on nature and take steps to reduce harm, ultimately helping to preserve the vibrant and beautiful world that my artwork portrays.

**How do you approach capturing the habits and energy of animals in your paintings?**

I use organic and fluid materials, such as ink, to authentically capture the natural energy of the animals I paint. The expressive quality of these materials allows me to convey movement, character, and the unique essence of each subject.

**Can you share a memorable experience from one of your exhibitions or competitions?**

One of the most significant moments in my artistic journey happened in 2022, at the age of 17, during my first exhibition at the Hunter Wetland Centre in Newcastle. As I was taking down my artwork, a man approached me and asked if my magpie goose painting was still available. He shared that he had volunteered every day for 30 years, feeding the geese at 10 o'clock, and that my painting deeply resonated with him. This moment stays with me as a reminder of the powerful connections my art can create, reinforcing my passion for capturing the essence of Australian wildlife.



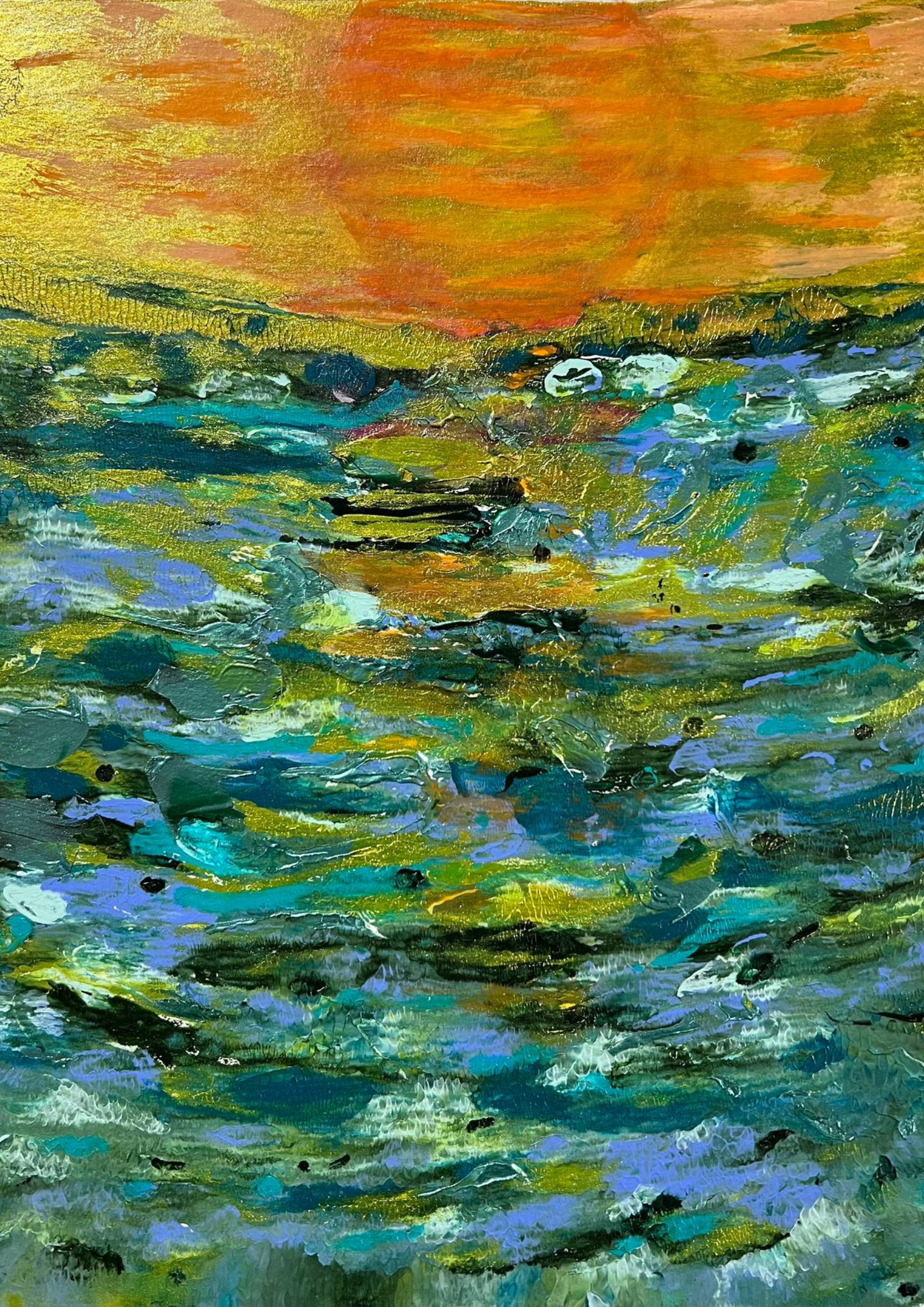


**Maria Kramer** is self taught artist. She learned to draw before learning to write the alphabet. Born in the tropical island of Puerto Rico, she grew up watching beautiful sunsets over the ocean, seeing how the sun would dance it's colors over the waves. She would later capture those moments in her acrylic paintings, cement sculptures, mixed media, and photography. She studied classical piano at the Conservatory of Music in Puerto Rico, moved to New York, and later started a landscaping business in New Jersey. The land was her canvas, which she filled with flowers. After surviving cancer, she went back to her calling, started painting again, and hasn't stopped since.



Maria Kramer | Living waters always moving | 2024







## — Interview

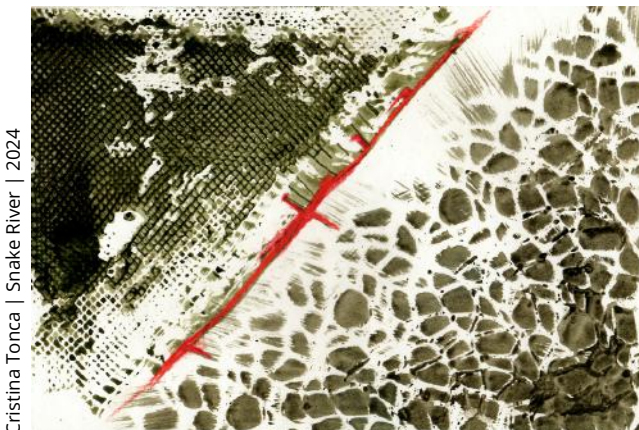
# Cristina Tonca

### How do you choose the themes for your watercolor works?

The themes for my watercolor works emerged naturally, as if they chose me rather than the other way around. I found myself experimenting with unconventional materials, bringing unexpected household items into my creative process. Bubble wrap, soap bubbles, scraps of table runners, and even salt became part of my toolkit, each adding its own unique texture and influence to the paintings. What started as a playful exploration grew into an extensive series of experimental patterns, each piece revealing new possibilities and complexities. Through a process of trial and error, distinct themes began to evolve, one of the most captivating being the texture of snake skin.

### Are there recurring symbols or motifs in your art? If so, what do they signify?

The fish has become the most significant and



Cristina Tonca | Snake River | 2024



Cristina Tonca | Nutshell | 2024

recurring motif in my artwork, appearing in nearly all of my long-term projects. Each time, it evolves, taking on various forms and stages of stylization, reflecting the shifting nature of my artistic journey. My fascination with the fish motif began unexpectedly after reading an article about Paul Klee's painting *The Goldfish*. In the article, the fish is described as "miraculous in itself, its size and its beauty. Everything is subordinate to it, everything else is present purely for its sake" ([www.PaulKlee.net](http://www.PaulKlee.net)). The simple image of the goldfish unlocked something within me. Since then, the fish has become a central symbol in many of my projects, representing various concepts and emotions—sometimes serenity, other times transformation or vulnerability. It has grown to represent not only my artistic vision but also my evolving understanding of beauty, symbolism, and the interplay between the natural and the abstract.



## Which artists or movements have influenced your style?

The works of artists like Paul Klee, MUTI, André Ducci, and Zaha Hadid evoke some of the most profound emotions in me. Each artist brings a unique blend of abstraction, color, form that challenges and expands my perception of the world. Their creations inspire me to craft my own artistic voice by drawing from their diverse styles and movements.

I also deeply admire the work of scenographer Helmut Stürmer, whose costumes and stage designs captivate my imagination. He has a remarkable ability to blend creativity with technical precision, transporting the audience into entirely new worlds. His designs, whether dystopian or surreal, create atmospheres that evoke powerful emotions and tell compelling stories. The way Stürmer balances tension and beauty in his work moves me profoundly, as his designs make the audience feel both the weight and the beauty of these imagined worlds.

For me, a great artist is someone who can provoke deep emotional responses through their work. Stürmer's ability to merge artistic expression with storytelling, creating immersive environments, is truly inspiring. His ability to transport people to another world through his designs is what I strive to achieve in my own creative journey.

## How does your cultural background shape your artistic vision?

I was introduced to the world of art at a very young age, and it has since become an integral part of my life. As a toddler, my grandmother took me to various exhibitions and introduced me to art books, which sparked a fascination that has only grown with time. These early experiences shaped my artistic vision, teaching me to appreciate the beauty in diverse forms and perspectives. I learned to see the world not just as it is, but as it could be, through the eyes of the artists who interpret it in unique ways.

As I grew older, I continued to nurture this passion by attending multiple art classes and ultimately enrolling in a fine arts high school. These formative experiences



Cristina Tonca | Crash | 2022

provided me with a solid foundation in various artistic techniques, allowing me to refine my skills and express my growing ideas across a variety of mediums. The ability to convey complex thoughts and emotions through art became my driving force, and it continues to inspire my work today.

However, I believe that true artistry extends far beyond technique alone. To grow as an artist, I feel it is essential to be well-versed in a wide range of subjects, including mathematics, politics, psychology, philosophy, literature, music and more. Each of these fields offers a unique lens through which I can broaden my understanding of the world and, in turn, enrich my art. For me, art is not just a creative endeavor; it is a means of exploring and engaging with the complexities of life.

So, I am constantly seeking knowledge in these diverse areas, as I believe that a well-rounded education is crucial to creating art that is not only technically proficient but also meaningful and impactful.

## Are you planning to explore new mediums or scales in future works?

During high school, I specialized in scenography, which provided me with a solid foundation in various artistic and technical skills. This experience not only sharpened my abilities but also sparked a broader range of creative interests, particularly in the world of model making. I was captivated by the intricate and hands-on nature of creating physical models, which eventually led me to explore the fascinating world of stop-motion animation.

With this newfound passion, I created my first stop-motion animation, "PEȘTELE DE LA CAP SEMPUTE." This project marked the beginning of my journey into animation, and through it, I discovered a deep connection to the medium. Stop-motion animation is a perfect blend of the skills I developed in scenography—such as set design, sculpting, and painting—while also incorporating storytelling and editing techniques that allow me to bring my ideas to life in a unique and dynamic way. The ability to meticulously craft every frame and detail resonated with me on a personal



Cristina Tonca | Desk Job | 2023



level, and it quickly became clear that this was a medium I wanted to explore further.

As I continue to experiment with and refine my skills in animation, I feel an increasing desire to push the boundaries of what I can create. Looking to the future, I am excited about the possibility of conveying my stories through animations on a larger scale. I am particularly drawn to the idea of creating immersive worlds that invite audiences to experience a narrative in a more expansive and detailed way, blending art and storytelling in ways that are both visually captivating and emotionally resonant.

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

I believe that the purpose of art is to evoke emotion. While anyone can learn the technical skills required to draw, not everyone has the ability to stir the deep, raw emotions of their audience.

This is the greatest challenge and most rewarding aspect of being an artist. It's not simply about creating something visually pleasing, but about crafting a piece that resonates with the viewer on an emotional level. That's why I leave a part of myself in every piece I create. Whether it's a fleeting thought, a personal experience, or a feeling I've struggled to articulate, I make sure that these elements are embedded in my work. For me, this is the truest way to infuse emotion and meaning into my art, allowing it to transcend mere aesthetics and become something that speaks to

the heart and mind. Art, at its core, is a powerful medium for connection—and I strive to make that connection as genuine and impactful as possible.

**Have you ever been surprised by how people interpreted your work differently than you intended?**

Art is always open to interpretation, and one of the most intriguing aspects of creating is knowing that my work may be perceived in ways I never anticipated. Every individual brings their own unique background, experiences, and emotions into how they interact with art. This diversity in interpretation is, to me, one of the most fascinating qualities of artistic expression. For example, when I look at my watercolor pieces, I see a landscape—perhaps a serene lake or a winding river—because the colors and fluid shapes remind me of specific moments in my life and memories I hold dear. These visual elements speak to me on a personal level, stirring up emotions tied to those experiences.

However, the beauty of art lies in its ability to transcend personal boundaries. For someone else, who has lived a completely different life, those same colors and forms might evoke something entirely different—perhaps a portrait of a loved one, an animal they once encountered, or even a dream that feels just beyond reach. The power of art is that it has the capacity to speak to people in ways that are personal, yet universal in their emotional resonance.







Cristina Tonca | The Birth Of Ultra | 2025



**Cristian Romero** was born in Valencia (Spain) on August 25, 2003. He began to dedicate himself to art from a very young age. At the age of 9, he won a drawing competition proposed by the zoo "Bioparc". He appeared on TV, in the Valencian program "Vent de Llevant", of which you can find the interview on YouTube. At 11, he won another competition by drawing a fruit shop. At the age of 15, he was commissioned to make comics for a "casal fallero", for the typical festivals of Valencia. There he created some characters for kids. At 17, he studied art at the IES Fuente San Luis, where he began to develop his talent for painting. His teacher was the botanical artist Nuria Ferriol. His technique seeks to show reality from his point of view. At 19, he entered the EASD, where he is currently studying a degree in illustration. The vast majority of the paintings he currently produces are made in his free time. In addition to painting, he enjoys classical music and nature. Although he does not like social networks because they consume a lot of life and are addictive, in 2022 he created an Instagram account so that the whole world can see his catalog of works and make himself known. On November 20, 2023 he registered as intellectual property the script of a film that he intends to produce in the future. He currently has about 24 paintings. Since he's just starting out and still have room for improvement, he makes them in a remarkably small format, normally an A3 (29.7 x 42 cm). When in the future he achieves more pictorial realism, he is proposed to move on to large canvases. He does not use a specific technique. He has always been told that he paints too fast. This is a virtue or even something to improve. The normal production rate is 1 to 2 paintings per month. Almost all of them are his originals, from things he has witnessed live rather than on the Internet.

Cristian Romero Sánchez | Muscovy ducks in Viveros gardens | 2024







CR Sam



## — Interview

# Gabriella Azzopardi

**You have explored a variety of artistic styles, from still life and landscapes to more surreal and symbolic art. How do you decide on the direction of your work for each piece?**

It was part of my initial Art studies to practice different techniques; painting and drawing, from different subjects; still lifes, figure drawing, sculptures and landscapes. Such practice is essential to achieve a more realistic, clean and detailed individual technique to then use in my expressive paintings which show my more personal style.

By time, my artistic style has evolved from a semi- abstract to a more figurative, surreal and symbolic one. I think this gradual change has been affected through various interests that I have, such as; history of art, literature, architecture, antiques, the interest in psychology and also through personal life experiences.



Gabriella Azzopardi | Voices of Majestic Thunder | 2024



An artist needs to keep exploring and exposing oneself to different experiences, learning and interests as this will reflect positively in their personal work.

**Your paintings often evoke a sense of emotional depth, especially with the use of symbolism. Can you describe how you integrate your personal experiences into your art?**

Intrinsically, my mind associates a thought from an experience or an emotion to a surreal scene, or a particular object, ethereal figures, etc. With the initial subjects I see, I start the paintings which I then elaborate, adding other subjects and details while I work.

It is a form of externalising thoughts and emotions in a visual way. Though not shown in a straightforward form, it is there enclosed in the paintings for the viewer to observe and discover.

**In your biography, you mention studying both art and psychology. How do these two fields intersect in your creative process?**

I have recently started basic studies in psychology as a personal interest, which I hope to further to an advanced level.

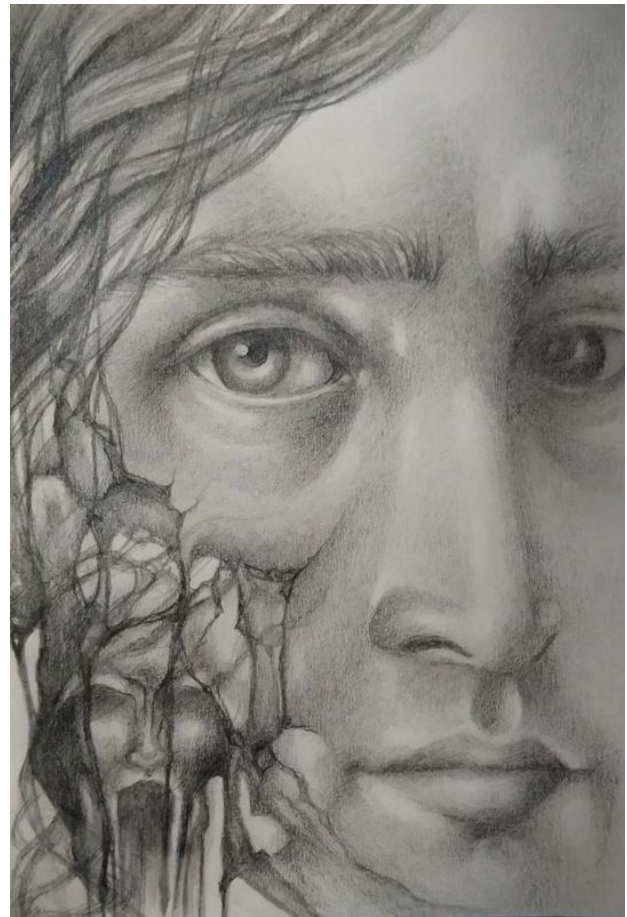


Psychology helps understand the brain; thoughts, behaviours, feelings, etc. It also generates new thoughts and life observations, which in my case, are inspirational for new Art works.

Learning more about human behaviours, has come to help me understand famous artists' lives more, their behaviours and their art expressions.

**Your portfolio includes a wide range of mediums, from traditional painting to digital photo manipulation. Do you prefer working in one medium over another, or does your choice depend on the concept you want to explore?**

I appreciate every creative medium as each can give you a different type of outcome and expression. In previous years I used to produce more commissioned work which involved photography and digital manipulation, either for creative photo sessions or graphic design. Recently, I have become more focused on traditional painting and drawing, particularly on the human figure and portraiture. At present, I feel the need to keep practicing in such subjects to keep refining and improving detail and technique, and also because the paintings I am producing involve the human figure more than before.



Gabriella Azzopardi  
I love your smile  
2025

I still do enjoy taking my photo camera with me at times and snap interesting photos by chance as a hobby.

**As you continue your studies in psychology, how do you see the relationship between the mind, emotion, and visual expression in art?**

I think that psychology and my style of Art closely connect very well together. The study of the mind and emotions opens up new artistic expressions and visions. At the same time, being able to express these sentiments through Art is a form of therapy as well. It helps process these thoughts whilst forming beautiful Art pieces. In my opinion, Symbolic and Surreal Art encourages the viewer to not only keep observing the painting or drawing for its visual beauty but also to think about the meaning and symbols behind it. They can each interpret it in their own way as well and generate new or underlying thoughts in their mind. Listening to peoples' interpretations and sentiments about my paintings is very important to me.



Gabriella Azzopardi | Out beyond the stillness of daybreak and nightfall | 2024



Based in New York, **Gabi Rykiel** is a first-generation Polish multimedia artist whose work strives to be loud, vibrant, and in your face. Currently pursuing a BA in Communications, they use their visual storytelling abilities to showcase themes of queerness, selfhood (or lack thereof), and the overall strangeness of the world in their art. Their inspiration ranges from 1950s housewife advertisements to early-2000s internet culture, creating a unique mesh of styles. They specialize in graphic design, with experience working on magazines and designing photo series.

Gabi Rykiel | Bedroom Access | 2025



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Dancebooks Number One

Pas de Deux

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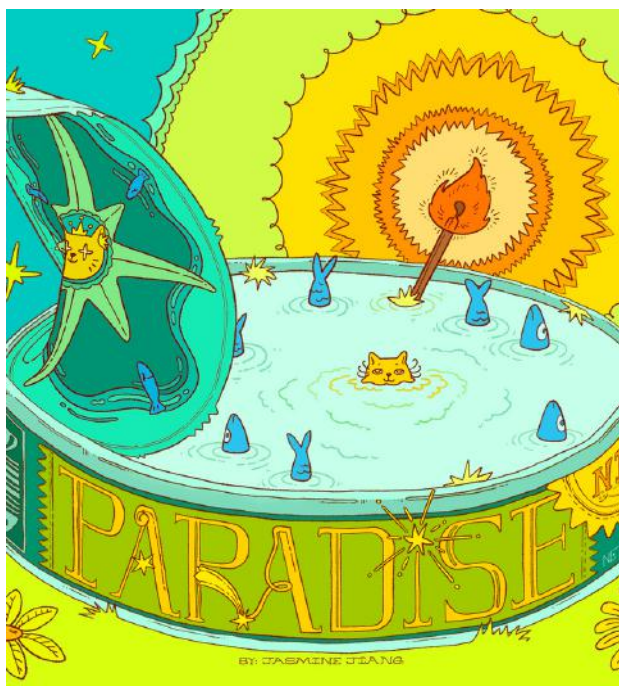
## — Interview

# Jasmine Jiang

**Your work is full of colorful and whimsical characters, particularly Cat and Fish. Could you tell us more about how you developed these characters and their relationship in your universe?**

I love cats, especially chubby, fluffy, orange color cats, so I created this character. At first, I did a very traditional image of a cat eating a fish. That starts the background story.

Initially, the story was only about the cat, and its design was quite different from how it looks now - more realistic. It wasn't until I finished the second drawing that I realized the fish would also be a permanent member of this story. I imagined an everyday relationship between two beings with a vast power difference. In the second piece of this series, you can see that no matter what the cat wants to do, the fish can only silently accept it, as it has no power to resist.



I kept following my thoughts and drawing until I created an image where Cat (from the real world) enters a world filled only with fish. In this place, their power dynamic is reversed. That's where the real story began. I don't deliberately add too many settings to the story—everything happens naturally. Sometimes, I wonder if this is a world reflecting itself through my hands.

**You describe the dynamic between Cat and Fish as a blend of "hyper-awareness phobia" and "inverted power." Can you explain what these concepts mean in the context of your art?**

"Hyper-awareness phobia" is a sense of unease caused by excessive attention or being intensely watched, even when the attention itself is not necessarily malicious. It is similar to 'Scopophobia', but it also brings anxiety and intense self-doubt—"Am I being too sensitive?" In the Cat and Fish universe, Cat's intense focus on Fish embodies this concept—whether out of curiosity, affection, or hunting instinct, Cat's gaze is always fixed on Fish, making the fish a passive object. I believe that our gaze determines the division between subject and object.

"Inverted power" is not just a reversal of size and strength; it is also a social power shift. This inversion begins with the dynamic of aggressive watching and being watched. When Cat, as the subject, gazes at the fish, Fish's existence is almost entirely defined by Cat's attention. But when Cat enters the fish's world, its identity and status are reversed—it becomes the one being observed and defined. Here, I would also like to



point out that the cat and fish have different genders.

**In your recent project "Encosystem," Cat transforms into a caterfly. What inspired this transformation, and how does it relate to your personal exploration of psychological states?**

The answer is actually simpler than anyone could imagine: one night, I just had a sudden idea—if B can have a Butterfly, then why can't C have a Catterfly? And it only makes sense for it to grow from a Caterpillar into a Catterfly. The story of "Endosystem" is actually not set in the Cat and Fish universe; it is an adventure story that belongs solely to the cat.

**How does your love for animals, especially cats, influence the storytelling in your artwork? Are there any personal connections or experiences behind these themes?**

Cat is one of the core elements of my creations. Cat is a reflection of my emotions; what the cat feels is what I feel. The cat represents my exploration of individual identity, emotions, and growth.

**Your illustrations feature bright, playful colors and surreal scenes. How do you choose your color palette, and what role do colors play in conveying emotions or themes in your work?**

I prefer warm tones, with the combination of the sun and the sky being the inspiration for my color palette. I enjoy creating a cheerful and relaxed atmosphere with bright colors, while the content of the story and the visuals serve as a contrast and challenge to this mood.



This contrast between color and narrative adds a dramatic element to my work.

**Could you share how your artistic process typically unfolds from concept to final illustration? Are there any rituals or specific techniques you follow?**

My doodle process often begins with daydreams or late-night inspirations. I let my thoughts wander to unfamiliar places to collect fresh ideas. The convenience of a tablet allows me to start creating anytime, anywhere. My school never treats drawing during class as a distraction. I make sure my work is timely. I rarely create sketches, as they interrupt my flow of ideas; each moment of inspiration is a unique opportunity that can only happen once. A good mood and beautiful weather also help me in the creative process.

**As a self-described "Harry Potter expert," do you find any elements from the Wizarding World influencing your work, even if indirectly?**

Harry Potter was my magical awakening. What captivated me the most was not the characters, but the world-building. After reading Harry Potter, I could no longer fall in love with any realistic stories. I have been waiting for my owl for over ten years now, a mature me now believes that it hasn't arrived yet, perhaps because they don't have a U.S. visa or because of international animal protection laws such thing.

My favorite characters in Harry Potter are the Weasley twins. I deeply admire their courage to joke around even in the face of danger and war. I have always been fond of humorous things, and the circus theme in my work is inspired by them. I love Warner's design of the Weasley series products.



## Kelene Monsterlove

I have been creating art since I was a small child. I started finger painting at a young age and was hooked on art from then on. I enjoy creating art which helps me strive to push myself as far as I can go in imagination. Flowers, nature and human emotion trigger my inspirations. I mainly use acrylic paint. I work on canvas but also on wood and paper.

### *Artist Statement*

All the artwork has a similar theme. Life and the emotional part of it. It can include nature, images of humans or what seems to be human. Nothing is realistically drawn except the feeling of the subject or subjects. I tend to use bold colors, and lines throughout my work. I like open spaces and other times all enclosed. I always like to switch things up but basically my work has the same sort of elements in it.









My name is **Victor Suchkov (Yabiy)**, I am 19 years old, and I am an aspiring landscape artist focusing on the beauty of clouds and the sky in general. I believe that the sky can evoke any of the most profound emotions in a person. In my works, I try to convey unusual feelings of solitude or tranquility. I am a self-taught artist, mainly focusing on painting on canvas with acrylics combined with pastels.



Victor Suchkov | The loneliest church in the world





Victor Suchkov | Clouds near the cathedral



# Quanel Davis

**Your work intersection of abstract and landscape art. How did you develop this unique approach to landscape painting?**

In retrospect, my exploration ironically began in the middle of my discovery process. In 2016, my interest in abstraction began when I attended the University of South Florida. Our professors encouraged us to have a conceptual approach to art. This definitely resonated with me as I went on my artistic journey. I studied artists' works from various art movements and styles such as the Renaissance, as well as Impressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Graffiti Art, Modernism and more. Yet, at the time, I still didn't know how to create abstract work in my own style. One day, I remembered a taped-together 50-page notebook drawing I made when I was between 14 - 16 years old. The drawing is 5 rows down and 10 columns across -- a secret imaginary city I created back around 2006 - 2008. The inspiration came from a movie called "Take the Lead"; one part of the movie had an aerial view of New York City. I wanted to recreate a map or a new city in my own unique way. That specific scene motivated me to pick up my sketchbook and influenced what became my abstract style.

My art contains elements of design, Google map imagery, and random photographic compositions. All of it combined to give each work its own visual clarity. This intersection of landscape and abstract helps breathe life into each piece I create.

**Can you tell us about the role of organic and geometric shapes in your pieces and how they**



Quanel Davis | Piece of the City | 2022

**influence the viewer's perception of the landscapes you create?**

A universal theme is important in my work. I interpret organic shapes as feminine or natural, and omnipresent. Geometric shapes are seen as masculine or artificial. Historically, landscape paintings have shown mankind's juxtaposition with the ever-present landscapes of Mother Nature. But utilizing both organic geometric shapes, I can play with new ways to emphasize on form, balance, unity and space. I take photos of random things to build my own reference library of natural and man-made objects. The photos provide me with unending opportunities to combine in new juxtapositions of compositions. My intent is to create work that the viewer perceives as fun, thoughtful, and exciting.

**How do you decide on color palettes you use in your work, and what emotion or conceptual significance do they hold?**

The foundation for my color palette originally came from my college professor, who encouraged experimentation and color use based on fabrics and found objects. For a while, I used this as my standard for experimenting with varied color schemes. I used a blend of pastel, complementary, muted color, and tertiary colors. I believe an artist's choices of color are essential. The appropriate color application guides the viewer into the artist's



world and lets the viewer experience the art in a tactile sense or feel specific emotions. For instance, if I choose to use a monochromatic color scheme instead of pastel, will my intended emotional nuances be lost?

Color can help the viewer navigate through the picture. I've learned that if you use complementary colors in specific ways, such as one color being greyed and another one being more pastel, the effect creates a certain vibration. Using colorful linework over wider areas of color on the canvas creates depth. In my work, I use shadows and contrast, which is not usually what most people expect in abstract or semi-abstract work. Finding balance between using shadows and colorful blends gives the paintings an expressive look. Those tiny decisions make a big impact on the viewer's perception.

**You mentioned that your art evokes a sense of familiarity and escapism. How do you balance these aspects with the deeper meanings and abstraction embedded in your pieces?**

I feel that those words -- familiarity and escapism -- resonate with this crazy time period of the 2020's. There is so much worldly chaos.

We all want to find something familiar that we can escape into. I purposefully make those aspects prevalent and well-balanced in my work. My dental hygienist once called my work "abstract realism". I found her interpretation to be applicable to my artistic concept.

As for familiarity, I've always wanted my work to possess a certain domestic appeal. The viewer should feel the desire to be present in my work. A viewer's sense of "I've seen this before" or "this looks like something" is all a technique of engagement. We have all looked in the clouds to make out what we see in the clouds that connects back to our real world. That visual sense of escaping creates a mental refuge.

Escapism is a more elusive term, which I try to visually and creatively define as evoking more of a feeling for the viewer rather than physical. I've learned that titles often dictate the viewer's overall understanding as to what they should or shouldn't think of artwork. For example, Terraformation: Imaging City on Mars (2023) commentates for the viewer the work centers on travel and the colonization of Mars. The title explains the artwork, which depicts an image of a congested city with rivers flowing through the martian landscape. Nevertheless, not all titles match with the images

displayed within an artist's artwork. But in my work, I plan for the viewer -- and even I -- to still experience the allure of wanting to be one with the work.

**Your work has been featured in both private and public spaces, such as murals and commissions. How does the environment or public space influence your creative process?**

My main objective is to create artwork for interior spaces such as commercial, private, residential, restaurants, and other business spaces. I believe every business should have a budget for art in their buildings. To me, being commissioned to create artwork for private/public spaces means that people value my artwork. As a child, there were no black artists in my community. Historically, black artists are predominantly portrait artists. To be honest, with me being a black artist that creates abstract art, I was afraid that I would never make money.

In the beginning, I found it scary having to figure out my artistic style with little outside direction. But, of course, with constant work to perfect my concept, I grew into my style, which led to the creation of my portfolio. Once I had a portfolio, I had a range of work to sell. I've even created digital design work for my T-shirt brand name called QLaron.

And just like any artist, I want to be compensated for my art after all the years I've been creative, consistent, and tenacious in my artistic progress. When I was a University of Southern Florida undergraduate, artist Jake Troyli was in his master's program. He once told me, 'that artist at first have gig with only the exposure. You have to value that as you would a paid gig. With that exposure, your name is out there. get recognition. As you create more art, network, research, and opportunities then the pay will come.' That day came when I was commissioned to do five paintings over the course of 2021 for the Lakeland Mirrorton apartments. The value in the experience of creating a proposal or a budget for my work is just as important as the price I've put on my commissioned work.

**Your series often suggests abstract narratives. How do you approach the storytelling aspect of your work, and what do you hope viewers take away from it?**

I believe choosing a title for your art sets a theme for your work; the organization of objects and



grounds in your work creates a narrative. Landscape alone does not inherently provide a narrative; in most artwork, usually people are the main subject matter. I believe a strong title is an important factor for my narratives. I also like to create two types of variants or different styles -- the peculiar variant and suspended variant -- in my conception of an art piece to help with narration. The peculiar variant has normal identifiable aerial imagery, but focuses more on design. For example, my painting *Metrosynthesis 22: Hanger Bay* (2021) is about a city near a bay going through a storm, but they are holding on to dear life. I chose to embrace similar traditional landscape attributes, such as the placement of the ocean to land in relation to the horizon line. The peculiar part is the flattened landscape distortion; the gray tones, even after the land meets the greenish grey ocean. The water is still exposed under the ground area creating a shortened chaotic feel. In this piece, I incorporated symbols, which I placed at the top of this painting, meaning tender, love, and devotion. The suspended variant style often has a surrealistic feel to it when I want the viewer to focus more on the artwork's concept. I purposefully don't take into account the piece's horizon line particularly when I want to put more focus on the concept. For example, *The Crossing* (2023) has a more open narrative but with minimal focus on the ominous background, which consists of a majority of white with some blue tones in the middle. All of it is outlined with black lines. The foreground choice, of placing the map upon this unknown mass of an object, directly challenges the notion of conventional landscape paintings. The linework in the map portion was to portray a congested city over a depleted green natural area. This piece talks about deforestation and overpopulation. Although this painting can be open for multiple interpretations, one interpretation is death to the earth as we cross from one extreme to another. In this suspended environment that could be viewed as purgatory.

**As an artist who has exhibited in multiple venues, how has that experience in events like the Lakeland Art Crawl influenced your artistic development?**

Overall, Art Crawl has encouraged me and helped me realize my art is marketable. Exhibiting with them, I've learned how to present my artwork in public. Interacting with the public and my fellow artists at Art Crawl, I've had

opportunities to sharpen my art marketing and networking skills.

My most rewarding Art Crawl experience was winning second place in our call back in 2022. I gained confidence from that recognition of the work I put into my art.

Ultimately here in Lakeland, I aspire to showcase black artists who create conceptual abstract work. I want to encourage the youth that they don't have to do a portrait or a mural to be considered good artists. As I said earlier, my main focus is to be a catalyst for artistic change in Lakeland.

I want to contact up-and-coming businesses in Central Florida to create artwork for them. I plan to restart QLaron, my shirt design business.

I'd love to do an art residency; I want to travel to find new inspiration. I want to have my work in prestigious art museums throughout the country.

As far as my impact in the art world, I want to present something new with my art. I'm truly grateful for the opportunities I've had so far.

Life brings you struggles, pain, and, yes, anxiety, but it also brings so much more. Nevertheless, it is truly a blessing to have a talent and gift I'm able to share with the world.



Quanel Davis | Terraformation Imaging City on Mars | 2023







**Laurence Paryzak** lives in France, near Lyon. In her photographic work, she enjoys experimenting with each project. She seeks to suggest moods and emotions, to express a sensitive and poetic vision of the world. Her blue series, "A fragile branch hanging over an abyss" reveals a melancholic winter atmosphere, an introspective journey, a quest for meaning. A man walks in the cold and solitude. Nature, essential and omnipresent, is the silent witness to an inner adventure, a journey among intimate ghosts, his path to resilience.



Laurence PARYZAK | Une branche fragile | 2022







## Barbara Bazger

Born in 2001 in Katowice, Poland. A fifth-year student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice. In her work, she explores themes related to the female body, scars, and medical deformities. Her art deals with societal norms of beauty and aesthetics, challenging patriarchal standards that often marginalize and stigmatize features of the female body by labeling them as imperfections. The artist draws inspiration from medical photography and publications, using them as tools to expose the complex relationship between art and medicine, where the female body is often reduced to an object of clinical analysis. Her works serve as a voice of resistance against cultural norms that impose an idealized image of the female body. Through her art—often created by using her own body as the brush—she demonstrates that bodily transformations, both visible and invisible, are not only expressions of physical change but also profound psychological and existential transitions that shape the way women perceive themselves and the world around them. Barbara Bazger weaves these elements together, creating a narrative that celebrates the strength, courage, and resilience of the female body in the face of challenges.









# — Interview

## Lea Laboy

**Your work beautifully balances between impressionism and minimalism. How do you decide when to incorporate elements of each style in your pieces?**

In my opinion, painting is a very personal process and like most artists I have developed my own language of expression. My paintings are never created with the assumption that the characteristic features of one style or another will be present there. If I were to make such an assumption, as a consequence of this decision I would be forced to reject conscious view, which is contrary to my painting principles. I believe, however, that I often subconsciously draw from minimalism, striving for simplicity through the use of a minimum number of elements or leaning towards a monochromatic palette. In the case of impressionism, however, it is certainly a focus on the play of light, color and an unconventional composition.

**In your artist statement, you mention the relationship between objects and how the brain and eyes transform these into an image. Can you explain how this concept influences the composition of your still life paintings?**

The subject of composition is a very interesting topic because there are many subjects at the Academy of Fine Arts that either teach it directly or indirectly refer to it. Generally, assuming that composition is an arrangement of elements put together in such a way that they create a harmonious whole. However, there is nothing more treacherous for an artist when one is seduced by a thought pattern because composition is more than a set of rules.

For me personally, composition is the structure on which the image is built. I consider some of my images to be "static", i.e. well-balanced, you can't add anything



here, you have to accept it as it is, but there are also images that have internal dynamics, when I play with the composition using a number of procedures of dividing the plane, such as using a simple procedure of moving the center point in the image by just a few millimeters. The viewer is not able to see it, but subconsciously feels that "something is happening" in this image, because a certain dynamic has been introduced.

**You emphasize simplicity in your art, with a modest palette of colors. How do you select the colors for each piece, and how does that impact the emotional tone of the artwork?**

I always work based on three basic colours. I use white to a limited extent, which I have recently replaced with a colour I created for my own needs, which I call dove-colour because it is neither definitely blue nor definitely grey. The colour I never use is black, if I want to achieve it, the starting point is always the right proportions based on the three basic colours. Black as such does not exist in nature, however, its definition tells us that it is the darkest of colours and therefore contains them all. The painter's task is only to examine its nature, because black is not equal to black. So, returning to your question, my color asceticism results from the fact of conscious observation of what is happening in front of my eyes, in order to train my eyes in this way of seeing, I often resort to creating monochromatic images. This broadens my horizon of vision while at the same time narrowing the unjustified use of a great number of colors in the image. I have also developed my own method that allows me to achieve color consistency in the image.



**As a theorist and researcher of painting techniques, can you share how your academic background has shaped your approach to painting and your creative process?**

I believe that my studies at the Academy of Fine Arts provided me, above all, with a very solid classical education. They allowed me to participate in lectures held in museums as well as independently prepare didactic content and conduct lectures. I could therefore be not only a passive but also an active student, which probably broadened my perspectives. As for the practical side, it was a state of hibernation. However, it made me realize that being a painter means deciding on a very specific lifestyle, in which you often have to sacrifice a lot, if not everything, so that painting does not become just a trendy hobby on Instagram or a job that is commonly called a side job. As for my approach to painting, it was never shaped by the academy, but rather by painters who knew their craft perfectly, which gave them the status of authorities in this field.

**You have created your own paint formula. What inspired you to do this, and how has it affected the final result of your work?**

Many factors prompted me to create my own paint formula, including the quality of the ingredients that extend the "life" of a painting or shorten it. My uncle, who is an art collector and an expert working for the court, has often shown me works by old masters that I know well from art history textbooks, which required thorough renovation not only due to the passage of time but also, among other things, poor quality paints. I think that X-rays, infrared and UV photos of paintings are not only a mine of knowledge for art historians but also a valuable source for painters. Few painters wonder how their painting will change over time because they used certain paints. I think that the process of creating my own paints, although difficult and demanding, simply allowed me to enter deeper into the conscious creative process.



Lea Laboy | Morning in the Forest



Lea Laboy | Persia

**How does your work reflect your thoughts on the "Theory of Seeing" by W. Strzemiński? How does this theory manifest in your still life paintings?**

For me as a painter, W. Strzemiński's "Theory of Vision" was revolutionary in every respect. It occurred to me that I was looking at a still life, a model, a landscape, but I did not really see all of this in a conscious way, because as Strzemiński noticed, seeing is not only a passive physiological reception of visual sensations, but above all a complex cognitive process, the ability to perceive through the senses or the mind. It was a shocking discovery, which immediately provoked the question of how to free oneself from the previous way of working. It seems that man by nature has a tendency to duplicate, whether consciously or not, but always to duplicate. I decided to "trick" my mind. Assuming that the mind works on the principle of associations and that it only takes a few seconds to define the thing seen and name it. I decided that I would serve it something that it would not be able to clearly identify and verify on the principle of associations, assign it a name, function and refer to memory, in which there are known things. This is how a series of still life was created from deformed objects that were difficult to define, indicate their function and also compare them with any object known to the mind. Summing up, thanks to W. Strzemiński's "Theory of Vision" I changed not so much what I paint but how I do it.

**You are a member of both The Aristotelian Society and the British Painters Club. How has being part of these prestigious groups influenced your artistic journey?**

First of all, I want to say that I am extremely honored to be part of such distinguished community. In my opinion, it is above all an extremely invigorating intellectual experience that simply wipes the dust of everyday life. It certainly also stimulates my "gray cells" and simulates my thought processes, thanks to which I am still a painter asking questions and searching, who never gives up.



## Catherine Hawthorn

From Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

BFA University of Guelph

MA photography Falmouth University

Socially engaged photographer, working with those people experiencing homelessness

### *Project Statement*

This project involves the creation of a collage and focusses on women who are experiencing homelessness. This process extends the artwork beyond the moment of the portrait and into a deeper exploration of the participant's lived reality. Through the collage, each woman's story, is told by mixing visual elements to reflect her unique journey—whether that involves her struggles, her hopes for the future, or the identities and roles she carries within herself. The collage gives the woman's voice center stage creating a visual narrative that is not just about homelessness, but about identity, survival, and strength. It might include symbolic imagery—perhaps photographs of family, found objects that hold personal meaning, or even fragments of text that reflect her emotional landscape. The collage allows for a deeper, more intimate portrayal than the portrait alone can convey, turning the project into a conversation between the artist and the subject, as well as between the subject and herself. The photograph freezes a moment in time, offering a glimpse into the subject's resilience and humanity, while the collage extends that moment into an ongoing complex, evolving, and inherently personal narrative. The final work combines both the external and internal realities of the participants life. It is a space where the rawness of their lived experience intersects with their agency redefining that experience through art. Working collaboratively with the participants, art is created reflecting the complexities of identity, the impact of systemic forces, and the quiet power of personal transformation. Through the stool, the portrait, and the collage, the project becomes an act of resistance against the erasure of these women's voices and experiences. It challenges the viewer to see beyond the labels of "victim" or "other," offering a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the realities of homelessness and the strength required to survive it.



Catherine Hawthorn | Dark Magic, Cheryl | 2025







**Sarah Niksa** is an interdisciplinary artist who is heavily inspired by her experience living with a mental health disorder. She finds herself taking experiences from her subconscious and bringing it to the surface through an intuitive process. Bold colors and sometimes muted palettes are expressed through her works as a way to express her inner world to the outside world. Sarah uniquely expresses her personal experiences with psychosis with tenderness and humor, but also with an added layer and depth of seriousness. She shows the strange worlds that exist within her psyche. She obtained her Bachelor of Fine arts with a 2D emphasis from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point in 2019. Sarah is currently working towards her Masters of Fine Arts in Visual Studies at Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

### *Artist Statement*

An inner world of curiosities, of humor and distorted reality, enlivens my artworks. Looking at the work, it's seemingly innocent and joyful; upon a closer look the work becomes darker, but with glimmers of hope. I typically use bold colors to communicate feelings of hope and renewal as well as an intricate system of symbols scattered amongst these images. Black hearts and X's are used to represent the characters' inner feelings. The use of windows teleports the viewer into the inner worlds of our characters, known as "The Wibbles." There is sincerity to these characters as they express a childlike sense of wonder but also find themselves in unpredictable situations. They sit in an in-between space of neither being fully present nor absent, as if in a lucid dream state. Taken together, these characters and their worlds encapsulate a true expression of myself. In some ways they are an exaggeration of how I see myself, but also an honest view of how I see and have seen the world at various stages in my life. Through this lens, the work takes on a dynamic and introspective view in which interpretive layers are eventually uncovered. These layers consist of immense joy, but also of the grim reality happening in the outside worlds beyond the psyches of "The Wibbles." The viewer is invited into psychologically-charged artworks and is left to unpack their many delicate layers.







Niksa | Dinnertime | 2023



# Mosaz

## Tracing Memory and Spirit: The Layered Worlds of Mosaz Zijun Zhao

By Anna Gvozdeva

In an age where visual culture is often defined by immediacy and spectacle, Mosaz Zijun Zhao's work invites a different kind of encounter—one that is slow, introspective, and emotionally resonant. A New York-based artist originally from China, Zhao weaves a rich tapestry of tradition, personal spirituality, and cultural memory through her intricate, line-dense compositions. Her work does not shout; it whispers, drawing the viewer into layered emotional landscapes where reality and imagination coexist.

Born in 2000 and educated at the School of Visual Arts with a BFA in Illustration, Zhao occupies a unique position in contemporary fine art. Her practice is rooted in an exploration of identity—both inherited and self-defined—and her pieces are vehicles for both introspection and cultural dialogue.

At the heart of Zhao's work lies a deep negotiation between tradition and her evolving spiritual self. This is not a static reconciliation but an ongoing dialogue—an interplay of reverence and reinvention. Her artistic process often begins with the deconstruction of traditional symbols and motifs, which are then reassembled in new, intuitive ways that reflect her inner emotional and spiritual terrain. This layering becomes a visual language through which the past is not only remembered but reimaged.

Her technique reinforces this conceptual approach. Zhao's hallmark is her use of meticulous, interwoven lines—each stroke deliberate, yet seemingly spontaneous. These lines are more than aesthetic devices; they are symbolic representations of memory, thought, and emotion. In this way, viewing her work becomes an act of contemplation, mirroring the meditative process through which it was created.

Memory is not just a theme in Zhao's work—it is the medium itself. Drawing upon fragmented recollections of cultural rituals and personal experiences, Zhao constructs visual narratives that are at once intimate and universal. Her memories, incomplete and nonlinear, serve as fertile ground for reinterpretation. She fuses these fragments with research and historical iconography, yet always filters them through her personal sensibility.

"The ambiguity and layered details," Zhao reflects, "encourage contemplation, emphasizing how memory is both a personal archive and a shared human experience." Her works become emotional palimpsests, where history is neither static nor objective but a living, breathing force in her artistic imagination.

Zhao's exploration of emotional and spiritual worlds is perhaps most vividly expressed in the way she translates abstract internal states into concrete visual elements. A strand of hair may symbolize confusion or emotional entanglement; an ethereal female form might embody softness, strength, or vulnerability. These recurring motifs act as bridges between the unseen and the seen, the felt and the rendered.

Subtle yet potent, these symbols pull viewers into a visual dialogue that transcends literal interpretation. Zhao's work demands—and rewards—close looking. It is through this sustained gaze that meaning begins to emerge.

While grounded in real-life experiences and cultural references, Zhao's art frequently traverses into the realm of the dreamlike. Her process often begins with observation but ends in abstraction. The result is a kind of visual ambiguity—spaces where memory, fantasy, and reality collapse into one another.

This blending allows her to pose larger questions: What is real? What is remembered? And what is imagined? In Zhao's world, these distinctions are not binary but fluid—mirroring the way we all navigate our own internal landscapes.

Zhao's Chinese heritage remains a central axis around which her work revolves. Her upbringing steeped in traditional narratives and rituals—some remembered clearly, others distorted by time—provides the symbolic



vocabulary of her art. These cultural touchstones serve not as static references but as evolving elements that she continuously recontextualizes to reflect the nuances of diasporic identity.

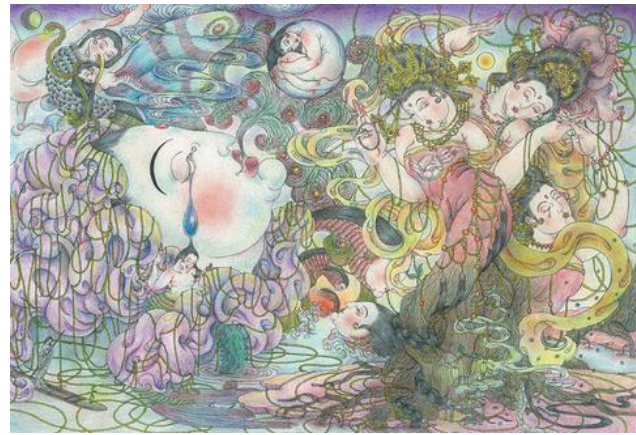
Through this lens, Zhao explores themes of displacement, belonging, and transformation. Her work becomes a visual bridge—linking the deeply personal with the broadly cultural, the historical with the contemporary.

Zhao's impact on the international art stage is already considerable. Her work has been exhibited at prestigious venues including the National Museum of Science and Technology in Milan, Palazzo Bembo in Venice, CICA Museum in South Korea, and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan. Her accolades include the International Prize Leonardo da Vinci and the Premio Firenze XLI Edizione.

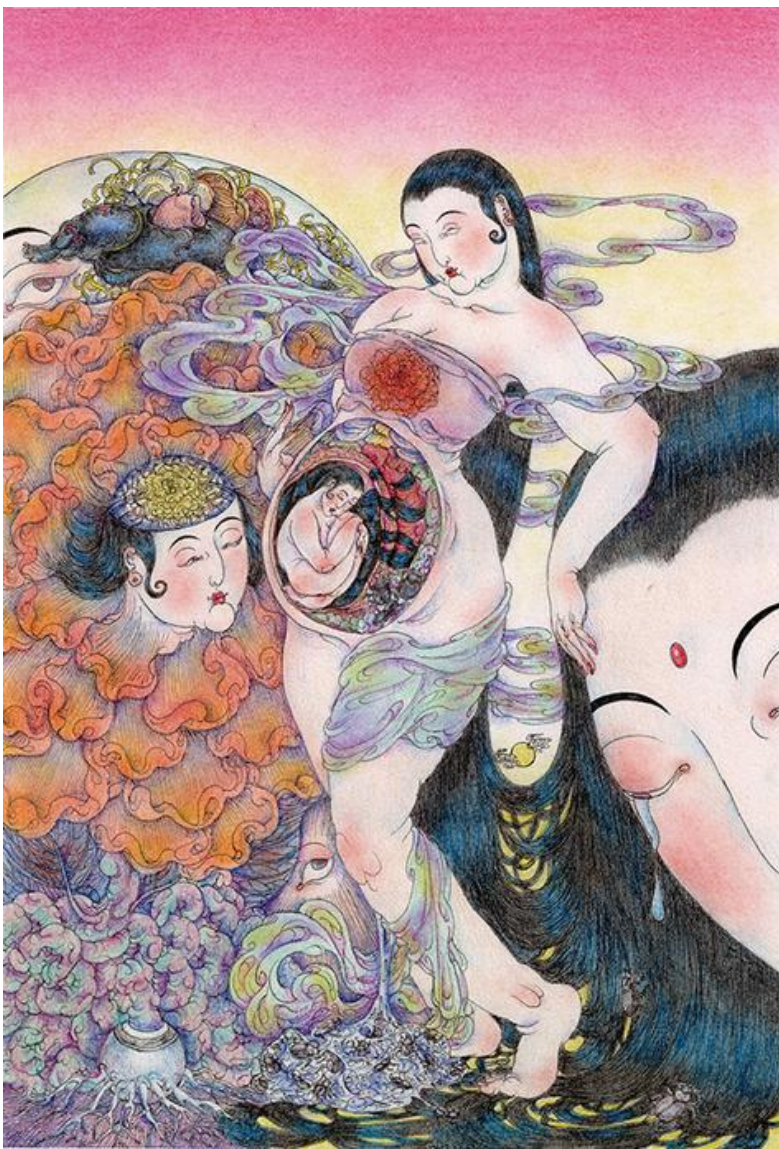
She has also been featured in prominent art publications such as Art Maze Mag, BOOOOOOOM, The Woven Tale Press, and Al-Tiba9 Art Magazine, underscoring the international reach of her artistic practice.

To describe Zhao's work in three words, as she once did herself: emotive, myself, layered. These descriptors are not only fitting—they are essential. Her art is a mirror of her inner world, carefully layered with emotion, memory, and cultural resonance.

Zhao's artistic vision is already mature and distinct. She reminds us that art can be both quiet and powerful, both deeply personal and broadly relevant. In a world that often demands instant understanding, Mosaz Zijun Zhao offers something far more valuable: an invitation to slow down, to reflect, and to enter a space where the seen and unseen dance together in delicate, intricate lines.



Mosaz  
A Joy Funeral  
2021



Mosaz | Maternity | 2021



Mosaz  
Erysichthon  
2021



## Haruka Fujii

In 2018, started art communication through overseas social media.









## — Interview

# Cristina Flores

**You mentioned that your photography invites viewers to see the world through your lens. What inspired you to combine your love for travel and photography?**

I grew up in the Philippines in a humble family, where traveling beyond our region or neighboring towns was a luxury we couldn't afford. Yet, my curiosity for the world was sparked by postcards, calendars, and magazines—I would lose myself in those images, dreaming of the places I longed to explore. I promised myself that one day, when I had the means, I would travel the world. After finishing college, I started working, and years later, I moved to the U.S., opening new doors to exploration. In November 2021, I launched my YouTube channel to document my travels and share my experiences. My mission is twofold: first, to inspire kids and individuals who may not yet have the opportunity to travel, helping them see the beauty of the world, appreciate diverse cultures, and broaden their perspectives. And second, to breathe life into the countless photos and videos I had captured over the years—transforming them from personal keepsakes into meaningful stories that educate, inspire, and connect people. Along the way, I taught myself professional photography, mastering composition, lighting, and angles to better capture the essence of each place I visit. Then, in April 2024, I launched WanderLensArtistry.com, a space where I showcase my travel memories through photography, original artwork, and a travel blog filled with stories from my adventures. Through my lens, I hope to invite others to see the world not just as a destination, but as a tapestry of stories waiting to be discovered.

**Could you share how your journey from the financial sector to pursuing your artistic**



Cristina Flores | Sandhill crane

**passions has shaped your creative process?**

My journey from the financial sector to the art world is deeply personal and shaped by both responsibility and resilience. Coming from a humble background and being the eldest child, I had an obligation to support my family. While I always had a passion for art, my priority was to provide financial stability—helping my siblings earn their degrees, building a home for my mother, and ensuring my family's well-being. For nearly 20 years, I dedicated myself to this responsibility, putting my artistic dreams on hold. Working in the financial sector not only gave me the means to support my family but also allowed me to save, travel, and ultimately invest in my art business. When I lost my job in December 2023, I faced a crossroads. Fear of failure was there, but so was the realization that if I didn't take this leap now, I might never do it. I chose to embrace the uncertainty, betting on myself to turn my passion for art, photography, and storytelling into something meaningful. We only live once, and I am determined to carve out my place in the art world, creating work that inspires, resonates, and leaves a lasting impact.

**You focus on capturing the essence of different locations. What is it about Florida's coastal**

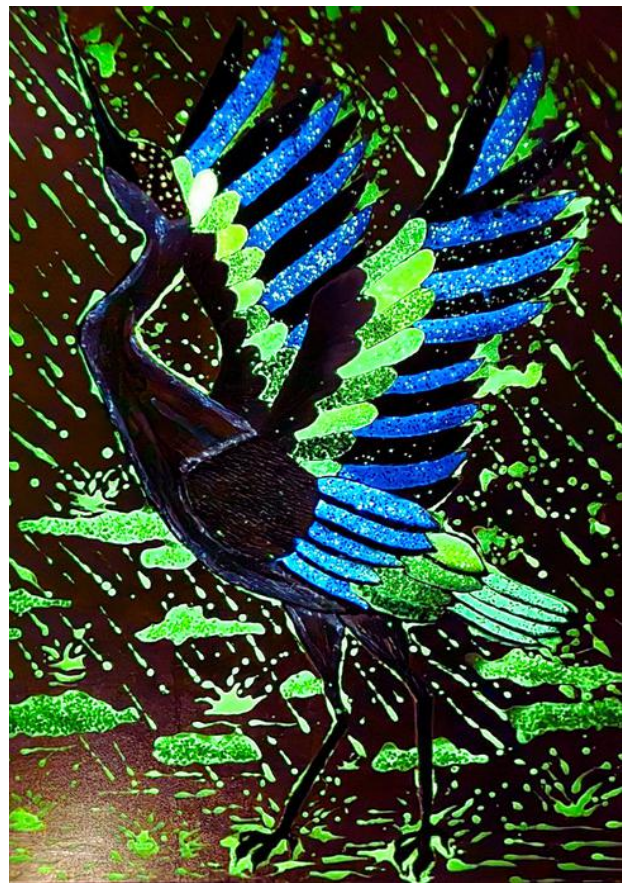


## landscapes and wetlands that inspires you the most?

Florida, my home state, is a constant source of inspiration with its breathtaking coastal landscapes, diverse wildlife, and unique ecosystems. From the vibrant bird species and serene marine life to the crystal-clear springs and sun-drenched white sand beaches, nature fuels my creativity every day. What fascinates me most is how Florida seamlessly blends urban life with nature—preservation areas thrive even in the heart of cities, where I can observe flourishing wildlife on my daily walks by the lake or while watching the sunset over the ocean. This ever-present connection to nature provides endless inspiration for my arts (original art and/or photography), allowing me to capture the beauty and tranquility of Florida's landscapes in a meaningful way.

## How do you balance the duality of fine art and documentary photography in your work?

Balancing fine art and documentary photography comes naturally to me, thanks to my background in program management, where I was responsible for overseeing projects from planning to execution. That experience instilled in me a strong sense of



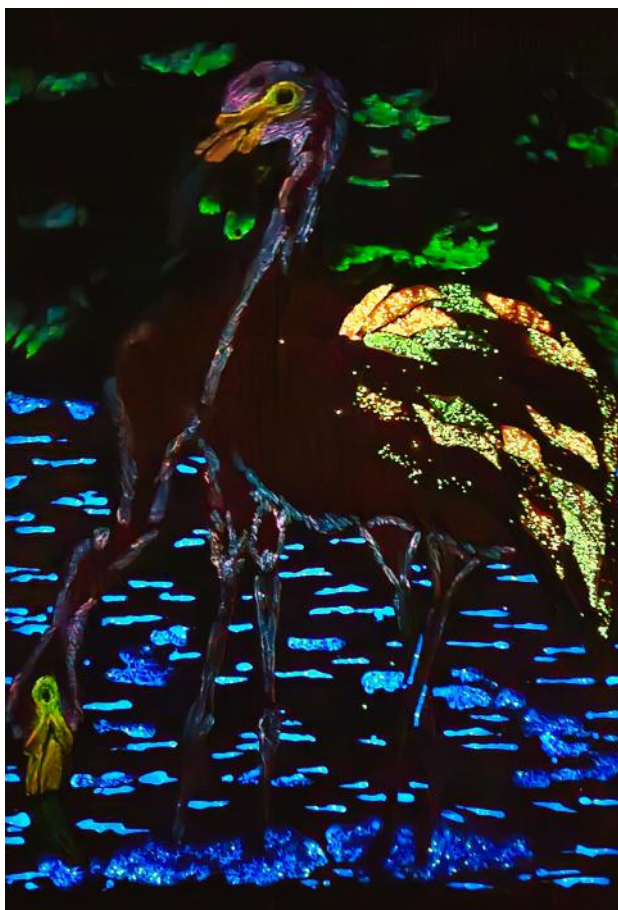
Cristina Flores | Sandhill crane dark

organization, time management, and prioritization—skills I now apply to my creative practice.

I structure my week with a clear planner, dedicating specific days to different aspects of my work. Some days are focused on creative planning—conceptualizing, developing, and executing art projects for exhibitions and galleries. Other days are dedicated to updating my website, managing content, SEO, blogs, and design layout. I also allocate time for marketing efforts, including video and photo editing, ad copywriting, and digital content creation across multiple platforms. Engaging with my audience on social media is another crucial aspect, allowing me to connect with followers and share my journey.

To keep my creative energy flowing, I make it a priority to explore new places—whether locally once a month or internationally at least once a year. These experiences not only fuel my artistic vision but also help me bridge the worlds of fine art and documentary photography, capturing both the emotion and reality of the places I visit. By balancing structured planning with creative spontaneity, I ensure that both sides of my photography practice thrive harmoniously.

**Your mixed-media art is quite unique. How did you develop the technique of using acrylics, textured paste, and glow-in-the-dark resin?**



Cristina Flores | Flamingos dark



The art world is incredibly competitive, and I wanted to create something that would truly set me apart from the millions of artists out there. I experimented with various mediums—watercolor, oil, and more—but I found the most joy in pushing creative boundaries and offering a unique experience to my audience.

This led me to develop my signature technique, combining acrylics, textured paste, and glow-in-the-dark resin. The textured paste adds a three-dimensional quality, bringing depth and movement to each piece, making it feel almost alive. The glow-in-the-dark resin introduces a magical transformation—by day, my artwork is rich with vibrant colors and textures, and by night, it takes on an ethereal, luminous glow. This dual experience allows viewers to engage with my work in two distinct ways, making each piece not just a painting, but an evolving, immersive experience.

### **How does travel shape the narratives you create through your art and photography?**

Travel is the lifeblood of my creativity and continuous learning. Each journey deepens my understanding of a place—its history, origins, and cultural significance—while also broadening my perspective on humanity. Through travel, I've come to appreciate that while we may look different, speak different languages, or follow unique traditions, at our core, we all share the same fundamental desires: to be understood, to love, to be respected, and to find connection. Whether I'm observing wildlife in its natural Florida habitat, exploring a centuries-old castle in Austria, witnessing the passion of a live Flamenco performance in Andalusia, or immersing myself in the vibrant energy of Spain's Las Fallas festival, each experience shapes my artistic vision. These moments influence how I capture my photographs, compose my videos, and tell stories—allowing me to create work that not only documents places but also conveys the emotions, culture, and essence of the world around us.

### **Could you describe a particularly memorable moment or place that has deeply influenced your artistic journey?**

One of the most pivotal moments in my artistic



Cristina Flores | Turtle

journey came in December 2023, when I lost my job and found myself at a crossroads. Fear of failure crept in, but so did the realization that if I didn't take this leap now, I might never do it. It was a moment of reckoning—an opportunity to finally bet on myself and turn my passion for art, photography, and storytelling into something meaningful.

At first, I wondered if it was too late to pivot my career, but then I reflected on inspiring figures like the following:

- Vera Wang, who launched her fashion brand at 40,
- J.K. Rowling, who found success with Harry Potter at 42,
- Julia Child, who published her first cookbook and launched as celebrity chef, at 50
- Anna Mary Robertson Moses, who began painting at 78 and later sold a piece for \$1.2 million.

Their stories remind me that success isn't bound by age—it's driven by perseverance, dedication, adaptability, and continuous learning. With that mindset, I embraced this new chapter with determination, knowing that it's never too late to create, inspire, and leave a lasting impact through my art.







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