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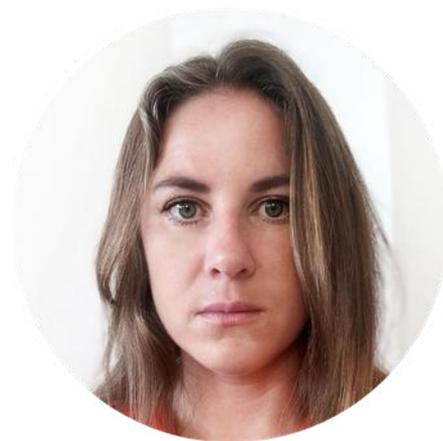
— Intro

Hello dear reader,

You are holding Issue No. 49 of our magazine. As always, we have filled it with creativity and conversations with artists. We spoke about many things - about artistic formation, about the role of art in the contemporary world, and about the challenges that creative individuals face along their journey.

This issue features a significant number of works created in an abstract style. I never cease to be amazed by how our minds can recognize familiar forms within brushstrokes that only remotely resemble them. Even more astonishing is our ability to perceive emotions through these images. I am certain that you, too, will discover something meaningful - perhaps even something about yourself - within them.

Make yourself comfortable: more than 100 pages of art await you ahead. Enjoy the reading!



Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

On the Front Cover:
Lara Vihernik Pilko
Beneath the surface
2025

On the Back Cover:
Sofia Gullstén
Silent night
2025



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

— Interview

Sofia Gullstén



Your portraits often feel quiet, introspective, and emotionally restrained. What draws you to these subtle inner states rather than more overt expressions?

I am very interested in the psyche—how people think and feel, often without realising it themselves. Self-reflection and exploring why we feel the way we do are central to my work. I am drawn to these inner thoughts because they shape how we relate to ourselves and others. I search for deeper truths in our lives and how we learn to live with them, even when they are difficult or unresolved.

You describe yourself as an outside observer of the people you paint. How does this position influence your emotional connection to the sitter?

Although I work from photographs, I want the result to feel as if it was painted from life. By being an outside observer, I focus less on the sitter's actual emotions or opinions and more on light, shadow, and subtle shifts in colour. The portrait becomes an interpretation of the image as it exists in my own mind, rather than a direct depiction of the person.

Watercolour is known for its unpredictability. How do you balance control and chance when working with such a fluid medium?



Sofia Gullstén | Beautiful Facade | 2025



At the beginning of a piece, I allow chance to take over almost completely. The blank paper feels open and forgiving, so I take advantage of that freedom by making my bravest marks first—sometimes even splashing colour directly onto the surface. As the work develops, control gradually enters through building shapes and proportions, turning the initial chaos into something believable.

You mention that what remains unpainted is just as important as what is painted. How do you decide when to stop and leave space untouched?

It is a balance between planning and intuition. Before starting, I consider which areas are essential and which are less important. Early on, I focus only on what interests me most, leaving other areas untouched. I build the image until it reflects what I had in mind, then stop and revisit it the next day to see if the feeling still holds.

Your use of deep violets, maroons, soft pinks, and greens is very distinctive. What

emotional or symbolic role do these colours play in your portraits?

I am drawn to these colours because they work strongly as contrasts and enhance one another. For me, they symbolise tension and vulnerability, while their earthy qualities give them a grounded presence. Deep violets and maroons, in particular, feel closely connected to my ideas of mortality.

Do you see your portraits as representations of specific individuals, or more as studies of universal emotional states?

I do not see my portraits as depictions of specific individuals. They are more about observing emotional states and moments of being, rather than portraying a particular person.

What do you hope viewers feel or recognize in themselves when they encounter your work?

I hope viewers recognise something familiar—an inner state, a quiet tension, or a moment of reflection. The work should invite them to pause and consider their own thoughts and emotions.



Christopher Barry

Switzerland-based and born in Mauritius Island, Chris is an expressionist painter known for his vibrant, powerful works that blend bold color, raw emotion, and lived experience into striking paintings.

Raised in Mauritius, he pursued further studies in Australia before exploring different countries in Europe, eventually settling in Switzerland. Shaped by movement across cultures, languages, continents, constantly moving between coastal and urban areas, his work reflects a constant dialogue between roots and exploration, memory and discovery.

Each painting becomes a meeting point between intuition and structure, where emotions guide gestures and composition. Through raw and organic forms, expressive faces, and intense colorful energy, he explores themes of identity, travel, inner landscapes, and the unexpected beauty found in fragments of everyday life.

Christopher Barry | La Vie en Rose





Martin Blanco

Your works often balance beauty and discomfort. At what point did you consciously decide to soften the darker aspects of your early aesthetic, and why was that shift important to you?

Martin Blanco | The thin line



I believe my style is highly influenced by the kind of culture I've been exposed to since my teenage years. In addition to Renaissance and Baroque art, this includes horror in all its forms —movies, comics, and books— as well as heavy metal. All of this ultimately creates a certain aesthetic and, I suppose, ways of thinking that feel comfortable within those dense and oppressive atmospheres. Over the years, I've softened that aesthetic a bit, incorporating beauty as another characteristic of those characters and environments, in order to prevent the viewer's gaze from feeling uneasy in front of one of my works —which, I must admit, were much darker in my early years. And in this way, I enable the viewer to access the work and connect with the message, which, in the end, is what truly matters.

Horror culture has played a significant role in shaping your visual language. What does horror allow you to express that other genres or traditions do not?

I think Horror once served as a way for me to connect more naturally with the feelings of anguish, oppression, and vulnerability experienced by the characters I portrayed, since we tend to associate that genre with the fear and anxiety provoked by the unknown. And to a great extent, the unknown is connected to what cannot be clearly seen — which is why dark and oppressive atmospheres work so effectively.

You reference Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and Dalí as key influences. How do these very different artistic minds coexist in your creative process today?

The truth is that I consider all three of them major influences, especially on a technical and aesthetic level. I would say that the dialogue with them —if I



may dare to call it that— lies in the fact that my way of understanding art, particularly in my relationship with the creative process, is very close to Michelangelo's, whose approach was not playful but rather tortuous. Caravaggio has given me that somber atmosphere of extreme contrasts that I've tried to capture not only in the scenery but also in the mood of the characters. And Dalí, along with surrealism, has opened a door to exploring different universes that allow me to play with the rules —especially those of composition— without losing a realistic aesthetic.

Light and shadow play a central role in your compositions. Do you approach lighting intuitively, or do you construct it deliberately as part of the narrative?

From a strictly aesthetic point of view, the way I use light and shadow is directly connected to the artistic influences that inspire me — particularly the Renaissance and the Baroque. For me, the most important thing is that the artwork develops through a message, and that all visual elements —such as composition, color, and the contrast of light and shadow— are subordinated to the way that message is conveyed.

Many of your characters appear suspended - emotionally, physically, or psychologically. What draws you to this sense of liminality and transition?

In some cases, it responds to a desire to represent the volatile nature we possess as human beings, where everything is subjective — not only from one person to

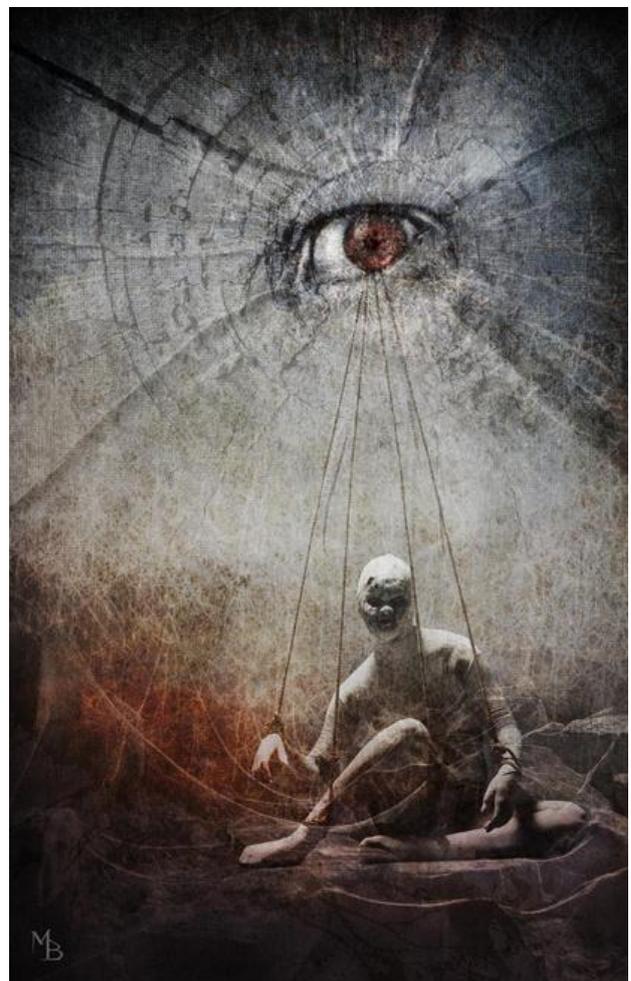
another, but also across different circumstances, even within the same individual. In other cases, it is simply the use of purely aesthetic solutions and resources.

You have exhibited in both classical art spaces and contemporary, multimedia contexts. Does the exhibition environment change how you think about the viewer's experience?

Different exhibition spaces can create distinct visual experiences, but I try not to think too much about that when I'm creating my work. Ultimately, the perception of art depends on many personal and subjective circumstances unique to each viewer, so it is not solely determined by the space in which the works are displayed.

What kind of emotional or intellectual response do you hope stays with the viewer after encountering your work?

I hope viewers can connect with my work and that the message moves them, makes them think, and —if in the end the piece is well executed and I've managed to convey everything I originally intended— that their dialogue with what they've seen offers them a new perspective.



Lara Vihernik Pilko (born 5 January 2000 in Žalec, Slovenia) is a Slovenian painter whose work focuses on the female figure and contemporary emotional experiences. She completed her secondary education on the art programme at Gimnazija Celje Center, subsequently pursuing painting at Arthouse – College of Visual Arts in Ljubljana, from which she graduated with honours in 2024. She is currently studying for a Master's degree in Painting, focusing her research on Pre-Raphaelite art and the fusion of realism, symbolism and psychological presence within the figure. Her work has been exhibited in numerous group exhibitions across Slovenia, most recently at Art Expo International in Brdo.

Project Statement

My painting practice centers on the female figure as a site for exploring inner states, emotional presence and lived experience. I am drawn to moments of stillness—instances in which the body appears quiet, yet holds a subtle psychological tension. Rather than constructing explicit narratives, I work through reduction and restraint, allowing the figure itself to carry meaning. Gesture, posture and atmosphere become vessels for what remains unspoken. Within this space, I reflect on what it means to be a woman today. We exist in a constant in-between: granted more freedom and visibility than ever before, yet still shaped by expectations that have not disappeared. There is choice - over body, identity, work, and relationships - but also the pressure to choose correctly, to embody strength without losing softness, independence without becoming "too much."

Lara Vihernik Pilko | Liberation | 2025

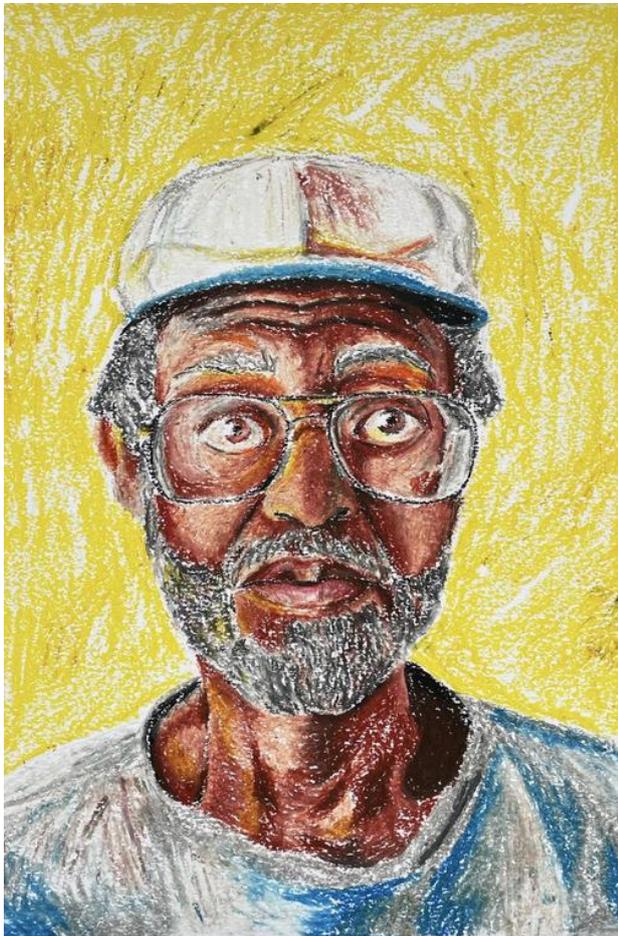




— Interview

Camila Reznicek Dominguez

Your portraits feel very direct and emotionally present. What usually draws you to a particular person as a subject?

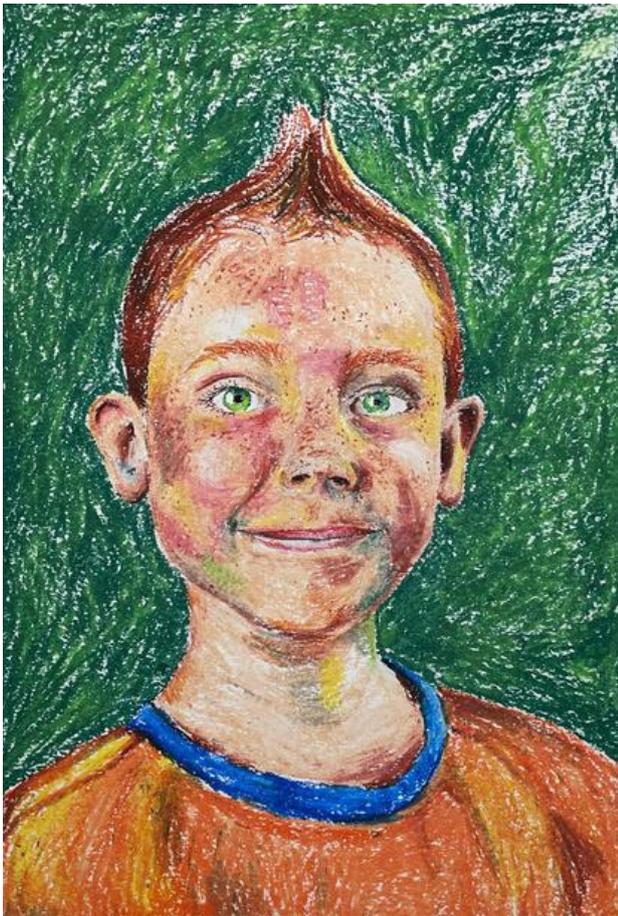


Camila Reznicek Dominguez | Earl | 2025

I'm usually drawn to people who carry something unforgettable, an intense gaze, a particular expression, or a presence that lingers in your memory after a single encounter. I'm interested in faces that awaken curiosity, people who make you wonder who they are and what stories or experiences shaped them into someone worth portraying. While drawing, I feel a sense of freedom in observing and studying each face, allowing the image to evolve naturally rather than forcing it. These subjects give me the opportunity to play with texture and color, translating their presence through my own perception and materials. In a way, each portrait becomes less a reproduction and more an emotional reinterpretation — a way of bringing someone back to life through my own gaze.

You describe portraiture as an invitation to imagine someone's story. Do you invent narratives for your characters, or do you leave that entirely to the viewer?

In the same way it happens to me, I believe the portraits remain open to the viewer's interpretation. I've often shared with friends the simple pleasure of sitting on a park bench and watching people pass by, imagining where they come from, who they are, or what their lives might look like beyond that brief moment. My drawings work in a similar way. Rather than defining a fixed narrative, I prefer to leave space for uncertainty and imagination. The viewer is free to decide why these figures look the way they do, who they are, where they come from, where they might be going, or what they might be feeling — whether they are happy, loved, or lost in



their own thoughts. The portrait becomes less a story I impose and more a quiet invitation for others to project their own narratives and emotions onto the image.

Pastels play a central role in this series. What does this medium allow you to express that other techniques do not?

I tend to be quite perfectionistic, and while that has helped me develop technical precision, it can also make the process feel overly controlled. With mediums like acrylics, I sometimes find myself obsessing over small details until painting becomes more frustrating than enjoyable. Oil pastels introduced a completely different physical experience. Their dense quality makes every mark immediate and visible — color is applied directly, without hesitation, and pressure naturally transforms into texture. The material encourages movement rather than correction, allowing layers to build intuitively over time. Because of their intensity and vibrancy, oil pastels invite a more direct and instinctive approach. The process becomes less about refining and more about responding to the image as it evolves, making the act of drawing feel playful and alive.

You mention that with pastels there is “no space for being perfect.” How does imperfection function in your artistic process?

Imperfection plays an essential role in my process because it introduces honesty and unpredictability. For a long time, I associated good work with control and precision, but I eventually realized that trying to eliminate every flaw also

removed part of life from the image. Small irregularities like an unexpected mark often carry more emotion than something overly refined.

Allowing imperfection means accepting that the work has its own rhythm and that not everything needs to be corrected or resolved. These moments of instability make the image feel more human and present, both for me and for the viewer. I now see imperfection not as a mistake, but as evidence of vulnerability and process. It allows the work to breathe and leaves space for something genuine and unexpected to emerge.

Many of your figures seem to look straight at the viewer. What kind of relationship are you trying to create between the portrait and the audience?

Perhaps the direct eye contact began almost unintentionally, but over time I realized it creates a more immediate and intimate connection with the work. When we meet the eyes of a portrayed person, the distance between viewer and image begins to dissolve. The figure no longer feels passive, it seems to acknowledge your presence. This direct look suggests communication, it invites the viewer to engage emotionally and imagine the stories behind the image. What initially exists as paper and colored marks gradually transforms into something almost alive. The encounter becomes a shared moment between viewer and the art.

Being currently based in Bolivia, do you feel that your cultural or geographical context affects the way you observe and portray people?

I left my country many years ago to pursue my studies and artistic path, and returning to my roots with new experiences and knowledge has changed the way I see everything around me. Coming back has allowed me to reconnect with my culture from an artistic perspective — something I hadn’t consciously explored before. Being here has made me more aware of the richness and diversity present in everyday life, and I feel a growing desire to translate that into my work. Most of this portrait series was created while I was living abroad, and I feel that continuing this exploration here, engaging with the features and identities of my own people, could become a powerful next step. I’m interested in portraying Bolivia through my own perception, allowing viewers from elsewhere to experience its beauty and complexity through my colors and my way of seeing.

What do you hope viewers feel or question when they encounter this series for the first time?

I hope viewers experience something similar to what I feel when I look at these faces myself — an initial attraction to the vibrant colors that slowly turns into a sense of connection with the portrayed figures. Beyond the visual impact, I would love for viewers to engage in the same imaginative exercise I mentioned before: to create their own inner worlds where these characters can continue to exist and evolve. If the portraits invite people to pause, to imagine, and to move from one image to another with growing curiosity, then the work has achieved what I hoped for — creating a space where the drawings can keep living beyond the paper.

I am **David Lachashvili**, a professional sculptor. I have graduated from the Tbilisi Art School and the Art Academy. I have been involved in the creative process since childhood, and this is an integral part of my life. I am also an architect and the builder and designer of many temples throughout Georgia.

Davit Lachashvili and Tea Kobakhidze | The Time Seashell





— Interview

Elizabeth Barlow

You often describe your flower paintings as portraits rather than still lifes. What does it mean for you to "portray" a flower as an individual being?

Portraiture (in a loosely defined way) was a key theme of my work during the years I lived in San Francisco. I developed a series of paintings called "Portraits in Absentia" in which I used my subject's belongings to



Elizabeth Barlow | Pirouette



create their portraits. I loved exploring my subject's lives through their belongings. It was a kind of archeology in paint.

When I had an awakening to devote my art to flowers, the habit of seeing my subjects as potential portraits flowed naturally into my practice, but with an added dimension. At the same time that my art shifted to flowers, I began a meditation practice. Through meditation and wisdom study, I began to see flowers not just as beautiful individuals to portray, but also as universal symbols of presence, awareness and being.

Your process is intentionally slow and layered. How does time function as a material in your work, alongside paint and linen?

I wish I could say that the awareness of material time is absent from my paintings and my studio. But I am lucky to be a busy working artist, and I have tight deadlines and the same metaphorical ticking clock that many people have with their jobs.

My paintings are made up of countless hours of silent (sometimes intense) dialogue with the painting. In these hours, time speeds by and I am lost in shapes, colors and values. Sometimes when I end a painting session, I feel as if I have been in a trance and must snap myself back into the "real" world.

Woven into each layer of oil paint on my canvas is a thousand micro-moments of emotions, of exhilaration, clarity, uncertainty, regret, discovery, calm and joy. Eventually, the painting stops "speaking to me" and I know that it has become itself and is ready to go out into the world.

Moving from San Francisco to Carmel-by-the-Sea marked a turning point in your practice. What shifted internally when your environment changed so dramatically?

I loved our busy urban lives in San Francisco, filled with opera, ballet, theater, restaurants and art openings. But I remember something so clearly that happened as I drove to my weekly Pilates classes through San Francisco's busy city streets. As I approached my destination, I would top a



big hill and come face to face with the giant trees of the Presidio park. Every single time, I would exhale and feel a wave of calm and joy when the trees soared into view. When we moved to Carmel-by-the-Sea, I found a studio in a church in the center of our village. Each day, I walk to and from our home to my studio. My senses are now filled on a daily basis with ocean mists, twisting cypresses, redwoods and year-round-flowers in the cottage gardens of our town. These exterior things rhythmically match the interior energy I seek on a daily basis through my meditation practice and daily mindfulness readings. But I honestly think the biggest shift internally came about when I decided to dedicate my energy and life to painting flowers. Flowers serve as a wake up call to pay attention. They use their beauty to seduce us into slowing down, noticing, savouring and just being present for this one moment.

Flowers are traditionally associated with beauty and delicacy, yet you emphasize strength, resilience, and life force. How do you visually express this tension in your work?

Thank you, this is such an interesting question and no one has asked it of me before. Flowers are indeed delicate and fragile, yet they are also incredibly powerful. Inside every flower is the potential for growth, wholeness, decay, transformation and re-emergence. So, to capture this power inside every flower, I do two things. First, I decided to always paint my flowers in golden hour light. For my reference photos, I always shoot the flowers in the early morning or late afternoon. This gives me long, moody shadows and rich highlights to work with. I am seeking a kind of light that takes your breath away when you encounter it. I want to impart a sense of wonder and marvel.

Also, I choose to exaggerate the scale of the flower. The flower is no longer a pretty thing in a garden or a vase. It is now a kind of sacred symbol, ready to remind us to

slow down, wake up, pay attention and be transformed.

Your father, Philip Barlow, is described as your most important artistic influence. In what ways do you feel his presence in your work today?

My late father was my first and greatest teacher. He is with me every day in my studio, not only as a material memory in photos and in my journals, but in my being. I learned from him the great example of a person who just was an artist. He supported our family as an illustrator and graphic designer, but he was also always painting, even to the end of his life at age 85. Art is something that he just did, and that is how I live my days as well. He gave me so many important lessons that I carry with me each and every day. One is the power of being self-critical in our work. This goes against much of what we hear today about not being a perfectionist, etc. But true artists of all kinds (writers, pianists, dancers, etc.) know that you must be ruthlessly critical of your own work, and persevere through moments of artistic doubt and dissatisfaction. When we are willing to “kill our darlings” and not be happy with something that others think is good enough, our work continues to grow and evolve throughout our lives. The amazing thing is that the more we are willing to be heartlessly critical of our work, the easier it becomes to work through the problems and find new, deeper ways of expression.

If your Flora Portraits could offer one quiet message to the viewer, what would you hope it is?

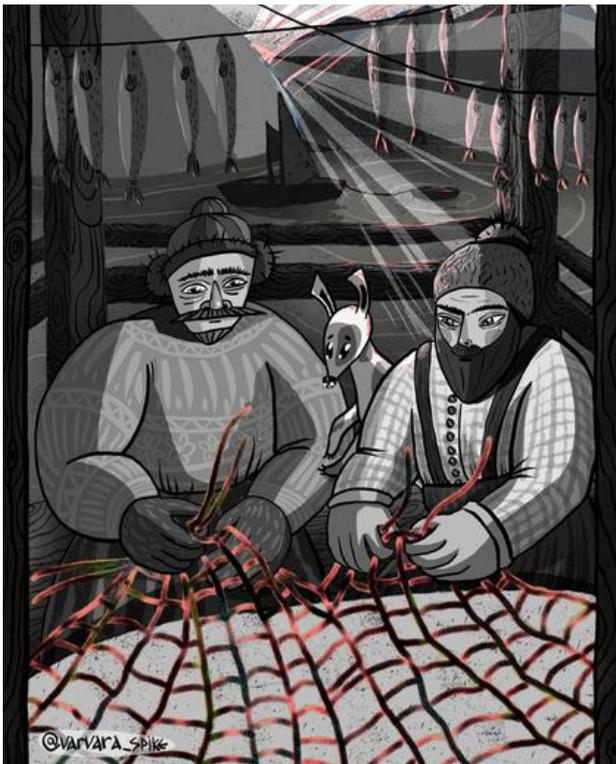
My paintings are a wake-up call to pay attention to beauty. Beauty is everywhere if we learn to look for it. It may be something dramatic like a stunning sunset or something tiny like a bee wobbling on a small blossom. All beauty stops us in our tracks and awakens us from our lives of busy-ness into small moments of pure being, and these are the moments that enrich our lives beyond measure.



— Interview

Varvara Obrosova

Your works depict fishing as a ritual rather than an everyday activity. When did you first start perceiving fishing as a symbolic or sacred act in your artistic practice?



Varvara Obrosova | Netting | 2025



I have been fishing since childhood, and I've always felt a sense of passion while doing it. About five years ago, I became interested in the theme of the fear of aging, so I started working on a project dedicated to elderly people. While viewing many photographs of seniors as references for inspiration, I really liked the texture and external monumentality of the indigenous people of the Sakha Republic. Studying their traditions and daily life inspired me to create my first works about fishing. During this research, fishing in my paintings ceased to be a mundane activity and became intertwined with motifs of shamanism and images of other worlds.

Many of your characters seem to exist in a liminal space - between worlds, times, and states. How do you personally understand this "in-between" condition?

I view this "in-between" state from two angles. The first is when the character is like a cat: they see both our world and the otherworldly one, but perceive it as a unified whole. The second is a certain moment of timelessness, as if the flow of time has been paused; the significance of the backstory is lost, and only the current moment remains.

Folklore and mythology play a key role in your work. Are there specific myths, rituals, or cultural traditions that most strongly influence this series?

This project is a totality of my knowledge, ideas, visual experience, and background. Here, I did



not rely on specific myths or plots but pulled it out from the depths of myself. However, in general, this series of works was influenced more by the European tradition than the Asian one, as was the case in my earlier paintings.

Your visual language combines dark melancholy with subtle humor and surreal elements. How do you balance darkness and irony in your storytelling?

It is a pleasant surprise to me that irony can be seen in my works. How do I manage to balance it? It is such a natural part of my worldview that I don't even notice it myself.

Your figures often appear anonymous and archetypal, inviting viewers to intuit their stories rather than presenting them directly. How has your background in screenwriting and documentary filmmaking shaped this approach to narrative and character in your visual art?

The story in my paintings is assembled like a mosaic from a multitude of details and attributes: the imperfection of the characters' belongings, their facial expressions, and their poses. From all of this, the viewer can intuitively

read the characters' past and imagine what brought them to the current moment in time. It is not my goal for the viewer to immediately read the personal stories of the characters. For me, it is primarily important to convey the truthfulness of the moment, not a retrospective. I carried this approach over into my art from my time as a documentary film director. History and plot are certainly important, but in my works, they are not the main object, but rather additional content.

What do you hope the viewer experiences when entering the world of this fishing series - contemplation, discomfort, recognition, or something else?

I would like the viewer, when looking at my paintings, to undergo a certain spiritual experience, to feel curiosity, and a desire to get involved in a wild adventure.

I would like the viewer to have the desire to return to the world I have created for them, and to want not just to immerse themselves in the atmosphere, but to decipher this world like a hieroglyph. I want the viewer to feel like Indiana Jones solving a mysterious riddle.



Juliette Martineau is a Vienna-based artist working in hybrid visual and literary forms, combining ink, watercolor, and digital processes, shaped by a long-term artistic practice. Her work includes published poetry and centers on atmosphere as a shared emotional language, bringing lines and linear structures into asymmetrical dialogue with human presence. Meaning emerges through the viewer's or reader's individual perception.

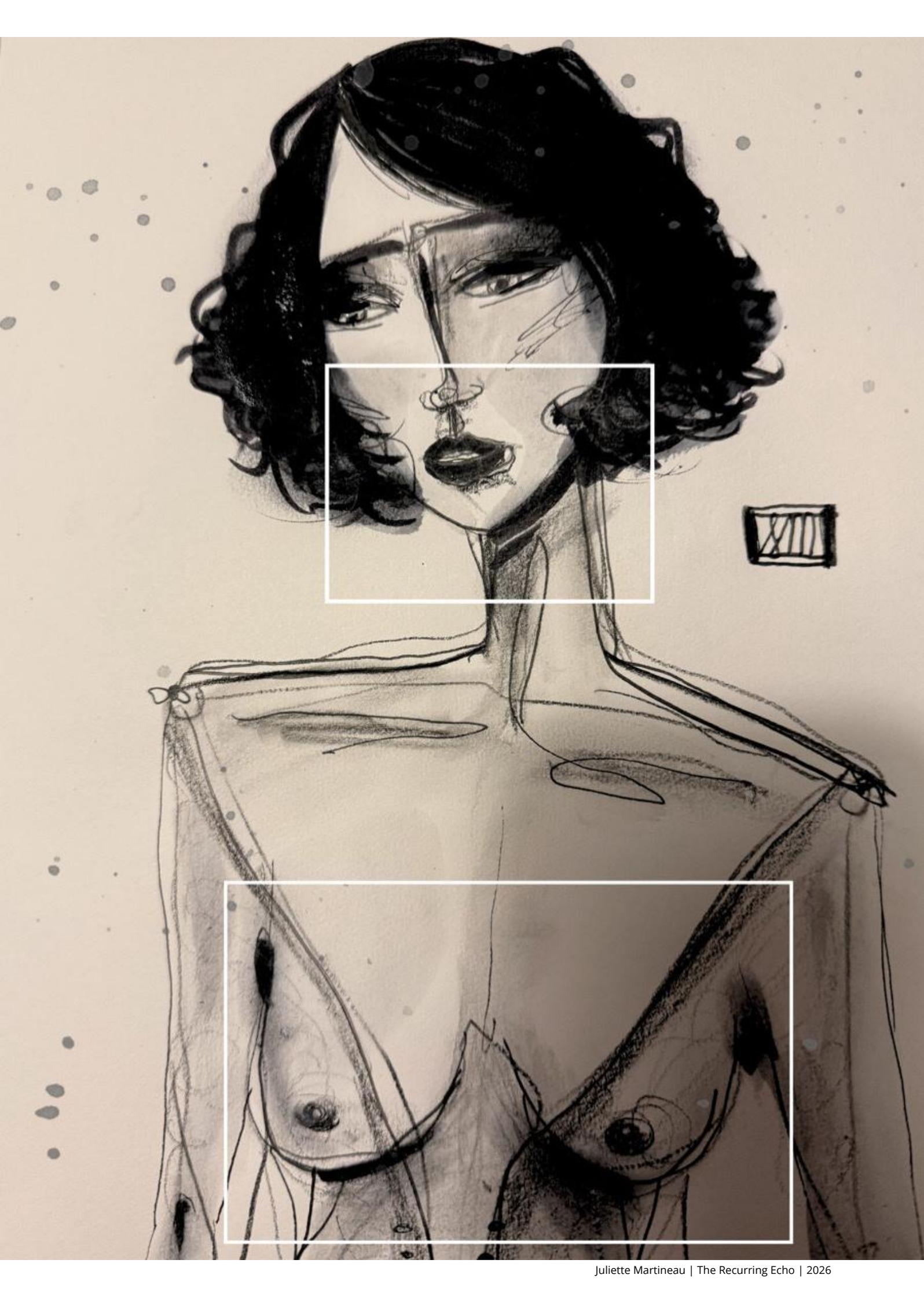
Project Statement

I work with the in-between spaces of human presence, translating silence and emotional distance into atmosphere.

My hybrid visual and literary practice invites the viewer to enter these spaces and form meaning through perception.

Juliette Martineau | Ada | 2026

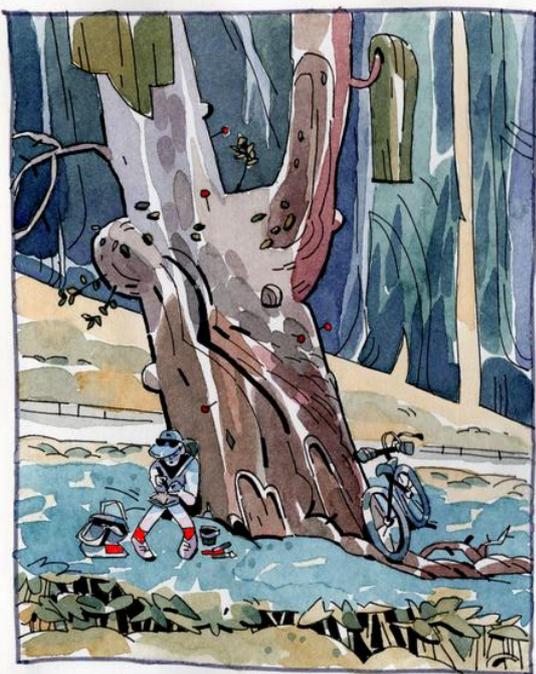




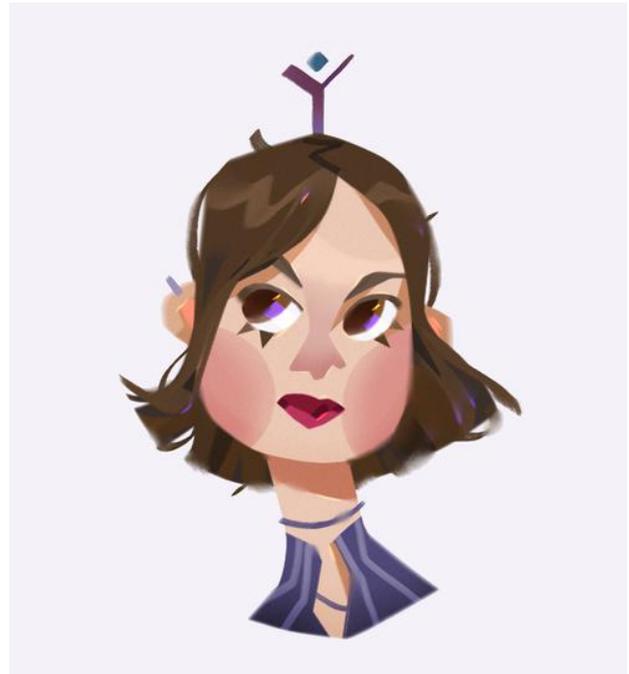
— Interview

Sasha Khorosheva

Your artist statement asks a simple but profound question: “Can you feel at home every time you move?” What first inspired this idea, and how personal is it for you?



Sasha Khorosheva | Fellow Sketcher | 2025



For the past seven years, I have been constantly on the move, searching for a place to call home. Friends often ask how I am not afraid to leave everything behind and move somewhere without knowing anyone, assuming it must be terrifying. For me, however, moving feels natural. Through creating these works, I try to understand how I adapt to new places time after time, and how they come to feel like home. Eventually, I realized that my sketchbook might be the answer. By always looking for something interesting to draw, I explore more, notice more, and find beauty wherever I go.

Many of your works are based on direct observation and plein air sketching. What does drawing on location give you that studio work cannot?

Drawing on location gives me something that working from photos in a comfortable studio cannot - a sense of momentum that is both so alive and fragile. On location, time, materials, and space are limited. And as it often happens, these limitations spark creativity and lead to unique solutions that would not emerge in more controlled conditions. You don't have the luxury of overexplaining the image visually, which forces you to focus on the essence of a place and its feeling.

You often depict environments that feel lived-in rather than idealized. How do you decide which details are essential to capture the atmosphere of a place?



I am someone who loves details, but if a detail does not help tell a story, I keep it secondary or leave it out altogether. When I sketch, I don't chase perfection, precise proportions, or a polished image. Instead, I focus on less obvious details, like mossy walls, cracked paint, torn paper or stained fabrics. These elements often describe a place more honestly than a broader view. They tell a story about the kind of life being lived there. Environments are shaped by people, and people are shaped by environments.

Travel and movement seem central to your practice. Do you feel that sketching helps you build emotional connections to new places faster?

Absolutely. Sketching helps me build familiarity and create memories. When I walk with friends, I often find myself saying things like, "I sketched this spot," or "I saw a fun character in that cafe," or "The light hits this tree beautifully in the evenings." I may not remember exactly how every sketch I made looks, but I always remember what drew me to a place and what made me open my sketchbook there.

You work with markers, pencils, and watercolour. How do these materials influence the mood and emotional tone of your drawings?

When I find something I want to draw, I decide intuitively which materials to use. Pencil work is

more about texture, structure and details for me. I do have a strong love for linework, which is why I often choose watercolour and liner pen over gouache. It allows me to preserve expressive lines and sprinkle them with some colour. The combination helps me balance structure and shape the emotional tone of each piece.

Several of your works suggest quiet transitions - arrivals, departures, pauses. What role does time play in your visual storytelling?

Because I am often on the move, there is rarely a sense of permanence. Every sketch might be the last one I make in a particular location before moving again, so I approach each with care and attention. These sketches also document my life and help me remember the places I have called home, even briefly. After all, a sketchbook is really just a collection of moments frozen in time, which is a comforting thought when starting a new drawing.

When viewers look at your work, what do you hope they recognize or feel from their own experiences?

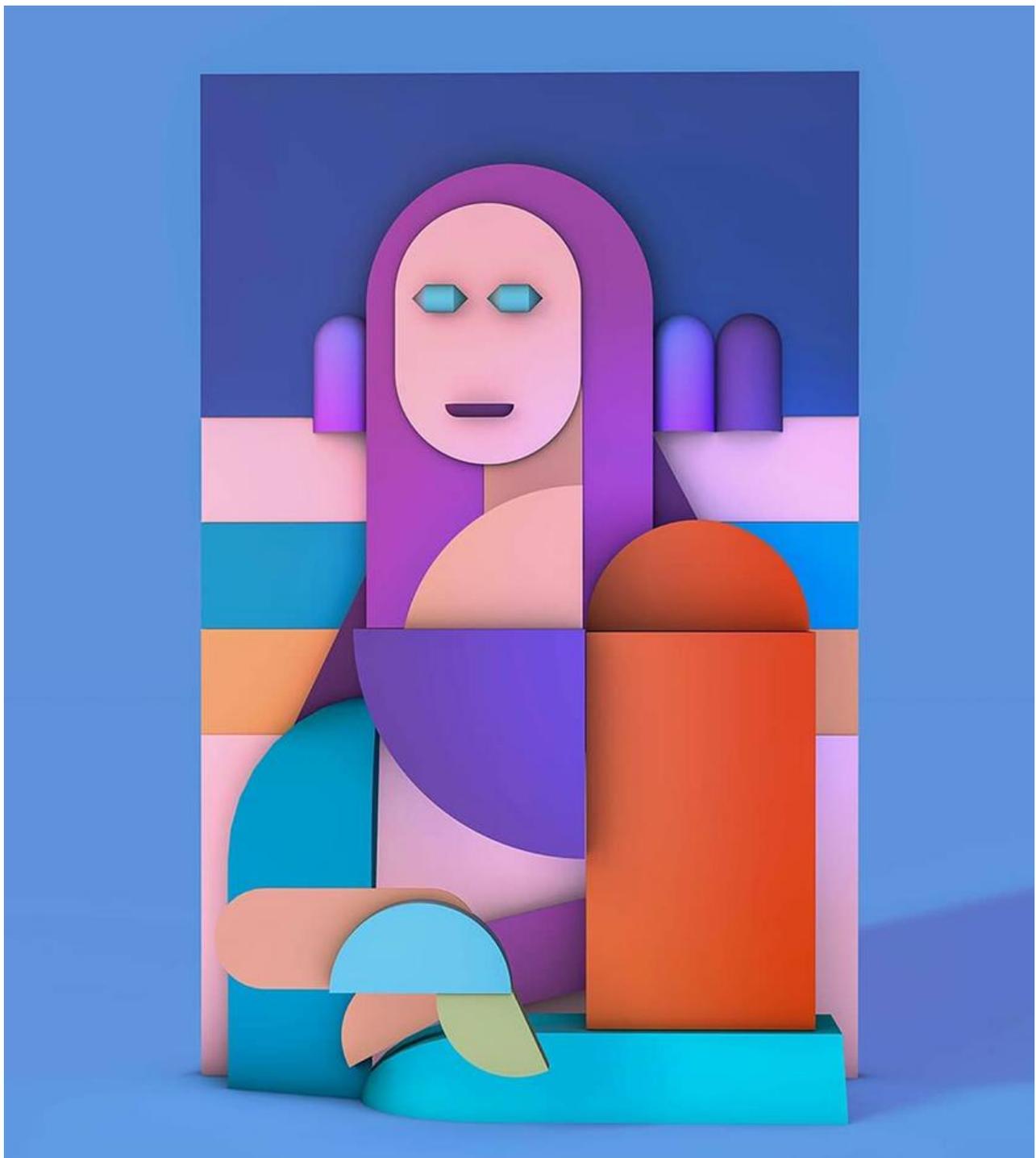
I hope viewers recognize something personal in my work. The most meaningful response for me is when someone connects my images to their own memories and experiences. I also hope my work encourages people to notice beauty in simple, everyday details and appreciate the ordinary a little more.



Masters Reborn: A Critical Review of Reawakening the Masters in the Digital Age *by Anna Gvozdeva*

Masters Reborn is a conceptual digital art series by Syed Ali Yaqteen (professionally known as Ali Shah) that explores how different periods of art history can be reinterpreted through contemporary digital practice. The project draws inspiration from three iconic paintings, each representing a distinct era and artistic language, and reimagines their spirit within a modern visual context. Masters Reborn demonstrates a thoughtful and research-driven engagement with art history, positioning digital practice as a serious contemporary extension of fine art traditions. In a time when digital imagery is often fast and surface-driven, the series reasserts slow, concept-led visual thinking.

Ali references **Mona Lisa** by Leonardo da Vinci, representing the Renaissance and its focus on humanism, balance, and subtle emotional expression. From this period, he draws the ideas of compositional harmony, soft lighting, and psychological depth. Rather than recreating the portrait, he interprets the essence of Renaissance portraiture by translating its calm intensity and human presence into a contemporary digital form.



The second reference is **Girl with a Pearl Earring** by Johannes Vermeer, which reflects the Baroque period's sensitivity to light, intimacy, and quiet narrative. Ali responds to Vermeer's mastery of light and atmosphere, using digital techniques to explore how subtle emotion, silence, and visual tension can be communicated through modern tools while preserving the poetic stillness of the original tradition.



The third inspiration comes from **The Son of Man** by René Magritte, representing the Surrealist movement and its engagement with identity, mystery, and visual paradox. From this work, Ali draws the idea of symbolic obstruction and psychological ambiguity, using digital composition to explore how identity and perception can be challenged through contemporary visual language. Through this series, Ali Shah bridges historical painting and contemporary digital art, demonstrating that digital media can preserve the intellectual and emotional integrity of fine art traditions while opening new pathways for interpretation, experimentation, and cultural relevance.



By selecting these three paintings, Ali intentionally spans three major artistic periods:

- The Renaissance (Leonardo da Vinci)
- The Baroque (Johannes Vermeer)
- Surrealism (René Magritte)

This structure allows Masters Reborn to function as a visual timeline, showing how artistic language has evolved and how each era continues to inform contemporary image-making. Rather than copying these masterpieces, the project interprets their conceptual and emotional foundations, transforming historical aesthetics into original digital compositions.

What defines Masters Reborn is its focus on dialogue rather than imitation. Each piece is built as a response to the philosophy of its source period, not as a reproduction of any specific artwork. The project explores how classical composition, symbolic storytelling, and emotional depth can remain relevant within digital art, positioning contemporary practice as a continuation of artistic heritage rather than a break from it.

Through this series, Ali Shah bridges historical painting and contemporary digital art, demonstrating that digital media can preserve the intellectual and emotional integrity of fine art traditions while opening new pathways for interpretation, experimentation, and cultural relevance.

— Interview

Jingyi Wu



Can you describe your artistic journey so far and the key moments that shaped you as an artist?

Art has been a lifelong passion and my professional path. I completed my BA in Experimental Art at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, and later earned my MA in Illustration at Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University in the UK. Publishing my first comic as a child and studying abroad have shaped my artistic identity. Today, international exhibitions and awards continue to inspire me to grow and share my work globally.

What initially led you to study illustration, and how did your time at Anglia Ruskin University influence your way of thinking and working?

I am fascinated by visual communication. For me, visualising ideas on paper is powerful and magical. At Anglia Ruskin University, I learned to embrace mistakes as part of the creative process. This mindset encouraged me to document my process and become both reflective and determined in my practice.

Your practice focuses on colour, layering, and pattern. How did you first discover these elements as central tools in expressing emotion and movement?



Jingyi Wu | Ghost | 2025



Through experimentation, I discovered the emotional power of colour. By testing layering and creating patterns, I realised they add visual depth and create narrative focal points within the image. These elements add depth and rhythm, helping me create dynamic and engaging compositions.

You often draw inspiration from everyday life. How do ordinary moments become meaningful material for you as an artist?

I observe everyday life closely, first through comics and later through drawing. For example, when someone walks in the cold wind and lifts their shoulders, that small gesture already suggests the weather and environment. Ordinary moments are powerful—they can reveal a larger context while remaining accessible.

Your use of coloured pencil involves meticulous layering and mark-making. How does this slow, detailed process relate to the themes of rhythm and energy in your images?

I want my images to convey growth, motion, and

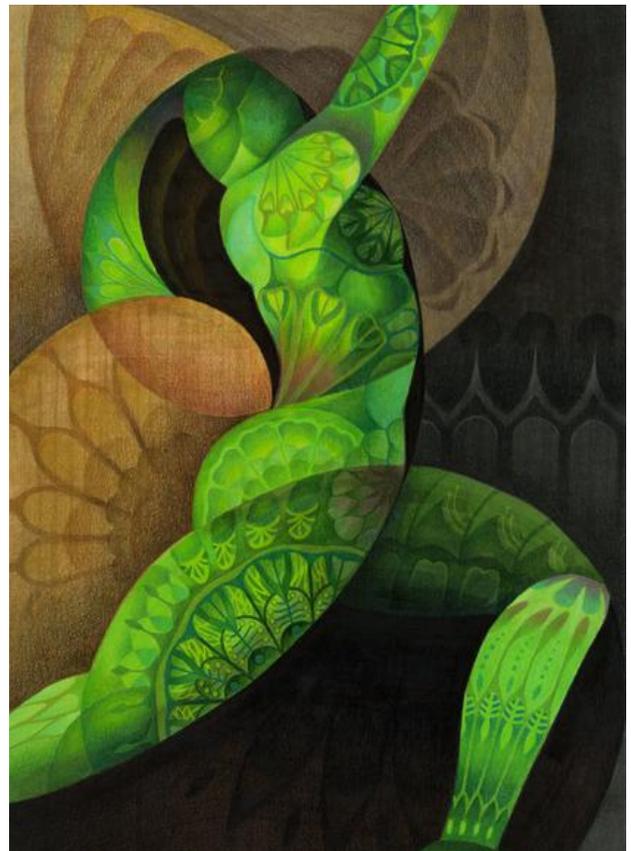
transformation. My detailed layering process builds rhythm, texture, and visual depth, reflecting the flowing energy found in nature and the human body.

What do you hope viewers feel or notice after spending time with your work— especially in relation to their own bodies, movements, or everyday experiences?

I hope viewers feel the beauty and positive energy of the human body in motion, and feel proud of their own bodies. My work is inspired by ancient Greek art and Futurism, and I aim to encourage people—especially women—to embrace physical activity, strength, and body confidence.

How do international exhibitions and awards impact your sense of direction and motivation moving forward?

International exhibitions and awards have given me confidence and motivation to continue developing my practice. They help me connect with a global audience and explore new possibilities in my work.



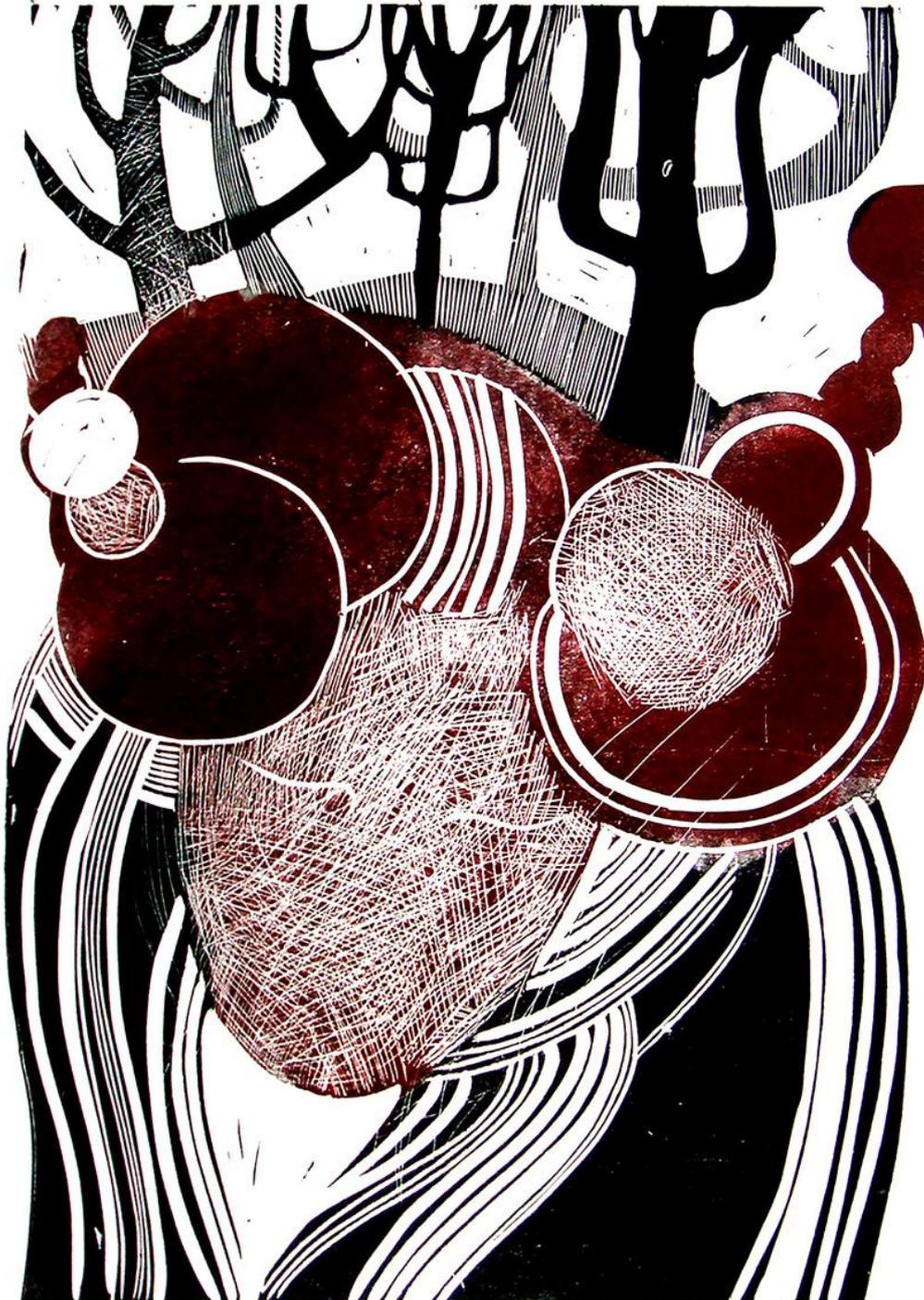
Nadezhda Ershova

The themes depicted in the works are reflections on life, conveyed through images of birds, nature, and human figures. Human forms are integrated into natural imagery, as seen in the series Spring (2020), Winter Sleep (2020), and Awakening (2024).

These works symbolize unity and interconnectedness in life - a space where people and nature find moments of stillness and renewal. Just as a person can turn inward, nature too enters a state of quiet during the winter season. The ability of nature to begin life anew reflects the human capacity to rediscover hope and find a path toward rebirth.

All works are created using printmaking techniques on paper.

Nadezhda Ershova | Winter Sleep | 2020





— Interview

Kjersti Ochsner

Your work is built from thousands of tightly rolled paper elements. At what point does repetition become meditative rather than purely labor-intensive for you?

At this point, the repetition feels more meditative than labor-intensive. I've rolled so many pieces over the years that the physical action doesn't require much thought anymore. It becomes rhythmic and steady. While it's still labor-intensive, the rhythm of the process creates a kind of quiet concentration.

You describe your process as intuitive and



Kjersti Ochsner | Cluster | 2020



Kjersti Ochsner | Excavation | 2019

organic. How do you recognize when a piece is “finished”, if there is no predetermined composition?

Once the elements are adhered, they're not easily removed. I guess that it's this permanence that shapes the way I work. Each decision builds directly on the last, so there's a level of commitment involved at every stage. Because of that, I'm constantly evaluating how the surface is developing as I go. I'm looking at balance, density, and the overall movement across the panel. There isn't a predetermined image I'm trying to reach, but there is a point where the surface itself eventually defines the endpoint.

Recycled magazines and discarded paper carry traces of previous lives. Do you think about the original content of these materials while working, or do they become purely formal elements?

The original content isn't something I actively think about during the process. Once the paper is cut and rolled, it becomes primarily about color, density, and structure. The paper loses its narrative function and operates formally within the composition. I initially used recycled magazines simply because they were readily available. I began using this material in college while trying to complete a project without purchasing additional materials. I



had a stack of magazines and catalogues on hand, so I decided to experiment with what I already had. Over time, I came to appreciate the practicality of that choice. These are materials that would typically be discarded, and there's something satisfying about repurposing them and turning it into a work of art. The emphasis, though, remains on structure, rhythm, and surface rather than on the printed content itself.

Light and shadow play a crucial role in how your works are perceived. How important is the viewer's movement and distance in completing the work?

Light and movement are central to how the work is experienced. I cut the rolled elements to varying lengths, so as a viewer moves around the piece, the surface shifts. Changes in light, whether natural or artificial, alter the shadows and subtly shift the visibility of color.

Distance also plays an important role. Up close, the work reads as a dense field of individual forms. From farther away, the surface begins to soften and unify, and larger patterns become more apparent.

Many of your pieces suggest natural, architectural, or cellular structures without depicting them directly. Are these associations intentional or emergent?

The references are emergent. I don't begin with specific imagery in mind. As the repetition builds, certain patterns may suggest natural or architectural forms, but those connections develop organically.

I think it's natural for viewers to look for recognizable patterns within abstraction. I appreciate that different people see different things in the work. That openness is important to me. The

pieces leave space for interpretation rather than directing it.

The surfaces of your works resist quick reading and demand slow looking. Do you see this as a response to contemporary visual overload?

I didn't initially frame the work as a response to visual overload, but I do think it asks for a different kind of attention. Part of that has to do with the absence of a single focal point. There isn't one area that directs the viewer's eye immediately. Instead, the surface unfolds gradually.

Because the composition is distributed across the entire panel, the viewer has to move through it rather than absorb it all at once. That structure naturally slows the experience down.

What do you hope a viewer feels or notices after spending extended time with one of your pieces?

I don't approach the work with a specific emotional outcome in mind. If someone spends extended time with a piece, I'd like them to notice how it changes, how light shifts across the surface, how color emerges at different angles, how the structure softens or intensifies with distance.

If the work creates a sense of focus or quiet, that's meaningful to me. But I'm equally interested in viewers bringing their own interpretations to it. The pieces don't prescribe a narrative, so whatever associations or responses arise belong to the viewer.

Interestingly, reactions vary. Some people find the work calming, while others find the density or repetition slightly unsettling. I think that range of response is part of what makes the experience active rather than passive.



Natalia Matveeva

Her years of study at the institute became a formative stage in Natalia's professional development - a time of searching for her distinctive painterly language and defining herself as a creative individual. A notable feature of her artistic practice is the richness of themes and techniques that captivate her interest. Her portfolio includes both romantic rural landscapes created with graphic materials on paper and painterly works exploring industrial subjects. In her practice, the artist investigates various genres, giving particular preference to narrative compositions, while continuing to develop landscapes and still lifes, which hold an important place in her artistic body of work.

Natalia Matveeva | Tea Drinking in Kyrgyzstan | 2023





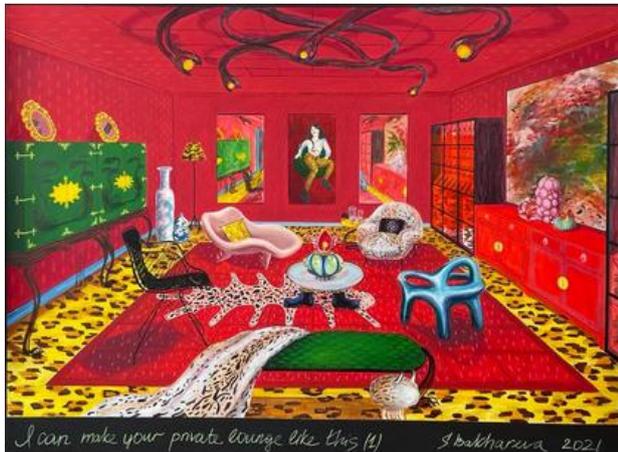
Natalia Matveeva | Falconry | 2023

— Interview

Svetlana Bakhareva

Your projects often take the form of immersive "capsules of experience". How did this concept emerge in your practice, and what does a "capsule" mean to you today?

My practice initially developed within the idea of painting as an expanded field. However, over time it became clear that painting alone was not sufficient to fully hold complex states or to construct a threshold where an encounter with non-human could take place. This realization led to the emergence of what I now call "capsules of perception." A capsule is a container — a spatial, temporal, and perceptual vessel designed to sustain a threshold.



Svetlana Bakhareva | I can make your private lounge like this | 2021



Within this threshold, the viewer encounters something non-human and non-rational: a force, a state, or a presence that cannot be reduced to representation. Today, the capsule functions as a framework for this encounter, allowing complex inner states to be held, experienced, and approached without being interpreting them.

In the series I can make your private lounge like this, you construct highly stylized interiors that feel both seductive and unsettling. What psychological or emotional space are you inviting the viewer into?

The psychological space of this series is deliberately ambivalent and liminal.

It exists between the familiarity of a private lounge — a place associated with comfort, intimacy, and control — and the unsettling intensity of a space capable of provoking deep inner shifts.

Functioning as seductive traps, they borrow the visual language of comfort and domestic luxury, only to gradually destabilize the viewer's perception. Gradually, the environment turns into a liminal space rather than a place of rest.

The viewer is invited to remain inside this tension — between attraction and unease — where the interior ceases to be a backdrop and begins to act as an active agent of shifting the perception.



A character seems to emerge in each project - someone you physically and emotionally inhabit. Who are these characters, and how do they transform you as an artist?

They are states that emerge from the unconscious and pass through my body, gradually becoming personified. My body temporarily becomes a conduit — a site where an archetypal state condenses and begins to unfold as a myth, a world, a parallel reality. Through this embodied process, the state is translated into material form: painting, spatial environments, objects, video, performative gestures and digital traces. Each of these figures that passes through me alters my perception, my physical awareness, and my artistic language. I do not remain the same after inhabiting these states.

I believe the encounter affects the viewer in a similar way. These works are not meant to be passively observed; they operate as experiential fields that subtly displace perception and continue to resonate beyond the moment of contact.

Your work combines painting, objects, performance, and sometimes digital elements. How do you decide which medium becomes central in a particular project?

Each project begins with a specific state or tension that gradually reveals its own logic. The central medium emerges from this process rather than being chosen in advance. Some projects demand the stillness and density of painting, others require spatial construction, bodily presence, or digital extension. Painting often functions as a trace — a residue of an embodied or spatial experience — rather than its starting point. What matters to me is not the dominance of a medium, but its precision: how accurately it carries the state that initiated the work.

The interiors in your paintings appear like theatrical stages or parallel realities. Do you see them as utopian spaces, traps, fantasies, or something else entirely?

These interiors resist a single definition. They can be read as utopian spaces, seductive traps, or constructed fantasies — often all at once.

Rather than offering a fixed meaning, they mirror the viewer's internal landscape. The same space can feel inviting, disorienting, or oppressive, depending on where viewer's perceptual focus is directed at the moment. In this sense, the interiors function as a specific manifestation of a broader approach in my practice. Across different media, my work operates as a perceptual device — a structure designed to interrupt automatic modes of seeing and to shift the viewer out of habitual perception.

Having studied in both Russia and internationally, how have different cultural contexts shaped your visual language?

For me, Russian cultural context is deeply connected to a sense of roots — to archaic, pre-Christian layers of culture shaped by transformation, darkness, and chthonic forces operating beneath conscious structures. This gave the density, intensity, and corporeality present in my visual language, while internationally context gave me the opportunity to step outside inherited frameworks, that allowed my visual language to become more self-directed.

What kind of transformation do you hope occurs in the viewer after encountering your "capsule" worlds?

I don't aim to predetermine what kind of transformation will occur. What matters to me is not the outcome, but the condition for possibility.

My role is to construct a site of encounter — a threshold where the viewer comes into contact with something non-human, non-rational, and not fully nameable. This threshold is shaped through art, but it does not demand passage. One can cross it, remain standing at its edge, or turn away.

The work operates precisely in this suspended zone. By creating a perceptual threshold, it disrupts automatic modes of perception and opens a space where change may become possible, without being prescribed or controlled.



Svetlana Bakhareva | I can make your private lounge like this | 2021

Henry Jentsch (HenJen)

You describe your practice as "painting without ifs and buts". What does absolute freedom in painting mean to you today?



Henry Jentsch (HenJen) | On The Road | 2025



"Painting without ifs and buts" means making no compromises—neither in the choice of subject nor in the manner of technical execution. All of this must be my own decision; commercial and other considerations must play no role in the process.

You deliberately avoid committing to a single style, technique, or theme. How do you decide when a painting is finished?

Fixing myself to a particular painting style, technique, or theme is not an option for me. The choice of an image often arises spontaneously. An impulse for it can crystallize out of many different "stimuli." This then condenses into an idea that continues to develop further and further until its execution. A painting never really feels finished. Yet if one cannot find a point of completion, there is a danger of "overpainting" the work — and then its quality gradually deteriorates.

Your works often combine pop-cultural symbols, irony, and painterly precision. What role does humor play in your artistic thinking?



My works draw on Pop Art, that is true. I am drawn to the clarity and directness of color. The symbols are immediately understandable to everyone. Painterly precision further emphasizes the overall composition.

In a world where the constant confrontation of pros and cons, in all its forms, shapes everyday life, responding with irony and humor becomes a way to view life more positively. After all, it is still worth living this earthly existence.

How did growing up and being educated in East Germany shape your visual language and worldview as an artist?

Grown up in East Germany, my talent for painting was already recognized at school, and I was allowed to create works depicting Lenin, doves of peace, and similar subjects. These works were then exhibited at school and occasionally beyond it.

Then came the summer of 1968. I returned home from fishing to find my father sitting by the radio—Woodstock was playing, with Jimi Hendrix. I was struck like lightning. From that moment on, rock 'n' roll became the embodiment of freedom for me. Pop Art, Andy Warhol, and many others naturally became part of this world as well. Artistically, in the late 1970s, I was given the opportunity to complete a three-year painting and drawing course with Prof. Ullrich Bewersdorff (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg). There I learned to work in a disciplined and precise manner.

This was followed by training as a metalworker, then once again rock 'n' roll—this time as a sound engineer for a band. In 1986, the state had had enough of me, and I of it: I moved to West Germany and completed new training as an environmental technician, after which I worked in the public sector. A few years ago, I returned to Halle (Saale).

All of these experiences, consciously or unconsciously, certainly play a role in my visual world.

American symbols appear frequently in your work. What attracts you to this imagery, and how do you approach it from a European perspective?

During a road trip through the United States, my wife and I noticed that the U.S. flag was almost always present. This has since been reflected as a recurring motif in many of my images. The country remains fascinating to me despite its problems — though America is not the only place that has them.

Is there a message you consciously want to communicate through your work, or do you prefer leaving interpretation entirely to the viewer?

I largely refrain from interpreting my own images. If a work needs to be extensively explained, I believe that something is not right with the image itself. The viewer is free to form their own interpretation.

Art in any form is always a positive response.



Henry Jentzsch (HenJen) | Gozilla Möchte Einen Eierlikör | 2025

I am **Tea Kobakhidze**, a sculptor and designer. I have completed a one-year course at the Tbilisi State Academy of Art. I am mainly a self-taught artist, I have been passionate about creative processes since childhood, and this field is a part of my life.

Davit Lachashvili and Tea Kobakhidze | Transformation





— Interview

Ramos

You were born and raised in the USA. How has your cultural environment influenced your artistic vision?

The artistic vision has narrowed into Americana from the 1900's: Pulp from the 1920s-1950s, twentieth century Illustrators, and love for classic movies.

Your bio states that your passion is creating. When did you first realize that art would become central to your life?

Very early on. When I would pick doodling over anything else as a boy.

How would you describe your artistic practice and main areas of focus today?



Ramos | Sheriff Bell



Ramos | Rodney Mullen

My artistic practice depends on whenst areas I can find work in. Though trained in traditional, I mostly find digital work. I manage to get paid on projects that have me train my digital skills. My main areas of focus today are self-made comics, digital drawing and painting as previously mentioned, graphic design via schooling, and soon I will broach oil painting.

What role do digital tools and platforms play in your artistic practice?

Platforms serve to market my artwork to the general public. So far social media has not garnered any jobs, though there have been near misses. Digital tools have become a strong suite, as mentioned prior. Digital has become my mainstay, for now.

Are there artists, disciplines, or non-artistic fields that strongly influence your work?

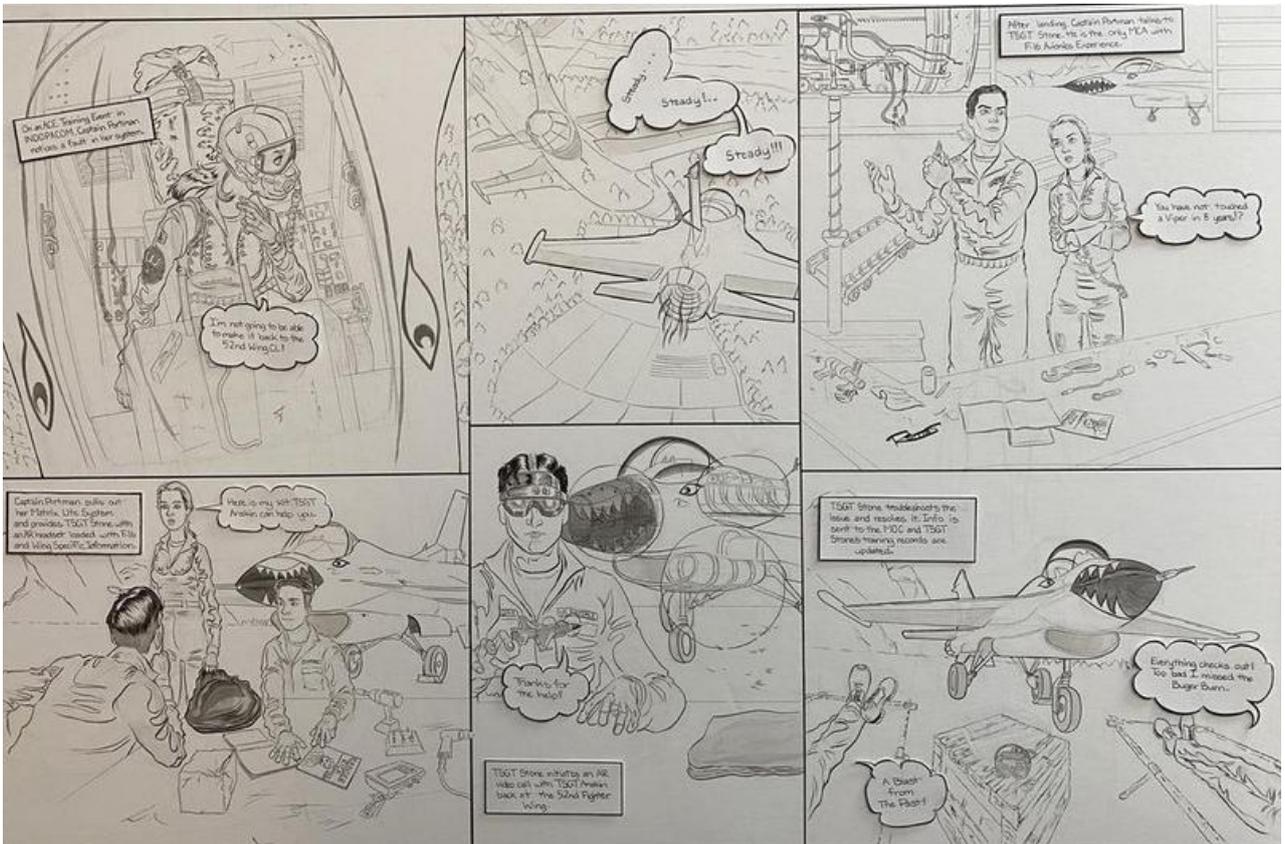
Frank Frazetta, J.C. Leyendecker, Petar Meseldija, Dean Cornwall, Paul Bonner, Mead Shaffer, Albert Dorne are just a few of the artists inspiring me. Brushwork, painting, and drawing are the artistic mediums that heavily influence me. Movies are the mainstay that have permanently etched their mark into my work. I have not watched movies regularly since 2012, and yet my early years as a cinephile left their signature.

What challenges do you face as a contemporary artist working in the digital space?

Competition from AI, and the fact that it is such a broad medium. Getting your voice heard can be tricky.

What emotions or thoughts do you hope viewers experience when engaging with your work?

Their own. I work for the money, and anything I do of my own is for personal pleasure. I leave it to the viewer what they will take away from works.



— Interview

Suylen Guellati

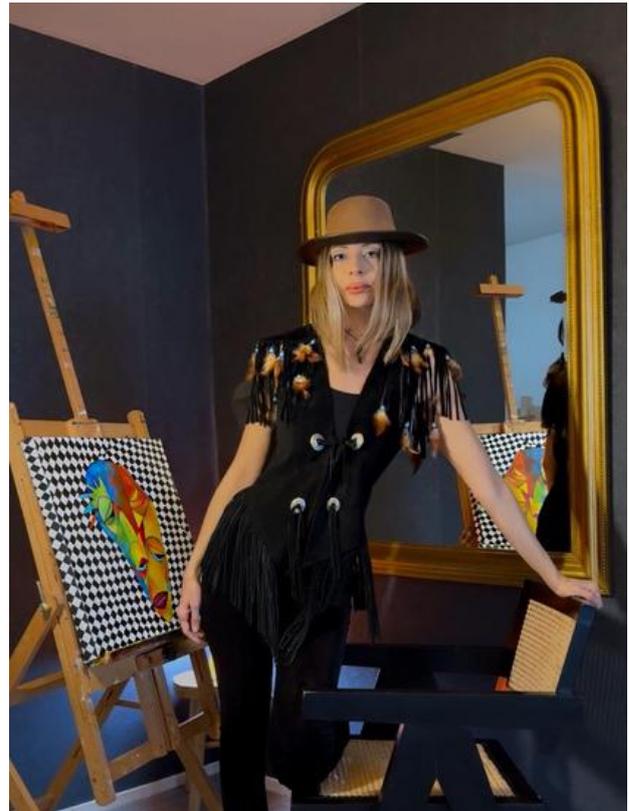
In your biography, you say: “I don’t write about the world, I write from what I live through.” At what point does personal experience, for you, become a universal image that can be understood by the viewer?

Yes, that is exactly it: my personal life is intimately connected to my painting.

The starting point is my solitude. But it is a chosen solitude, almost a necessary one. It is within this silent space that I am able to enter myself, to move beneath the visible layers, and to touch something more essential. At times, this inner life becomes more intense than what unfolds externally. Ruptures with the world, spiritual impulses, moments of doubt or clarity — all of this forms the raw material of my work. Yet on the canvas, the event does not remain a narrative. It transforms.

What I paint is not the lived scene itself, but the inner state it opened within me. The emotion is passed through, deepened, sometimes even distilled, until it becomes form. An experience becomes universal the moment it has been worked deeply enough to no longer belong solely to me. It retains its intimate truth, yet it reaches a symbolic dimension.

In *Metaphysics of the Heart*, the central red axis was born from a deeply personal sensation — a need for alignment, an



inner quest. But once placed on the canvas, that axis ceases to be “mine.” It becomes a vertical presence that anyone can recognize within themselves.

You work extensively with oppositions: love and despair, vulnerability and strength, light and pain. What matters more to you in the process - capturing the conflict or revealing the possibility of its transformation?

The two are inseparable. We live constantly moved by opposing forces: love and absence, light and darkness, strength and fragility. These states coexist. They create an inner tension that is almost vibrational. At times, that tension is difficult to sustain. But it is alive.

In a vision that is deeply personal to me, suffering and trial are not detours or mistakes. They are places of revelation. What we call “conflict” is often a moment of stripping away — something breaks so that something more essential can emerge.

I do not seek to beautify pain, nor to resolve it too quickly. I seek to move through it. To inhabit it fully. Because it is only by accepting to descend into the shadow that we discover the light.

To immortalize conflict is necessary, because it is a threshold.

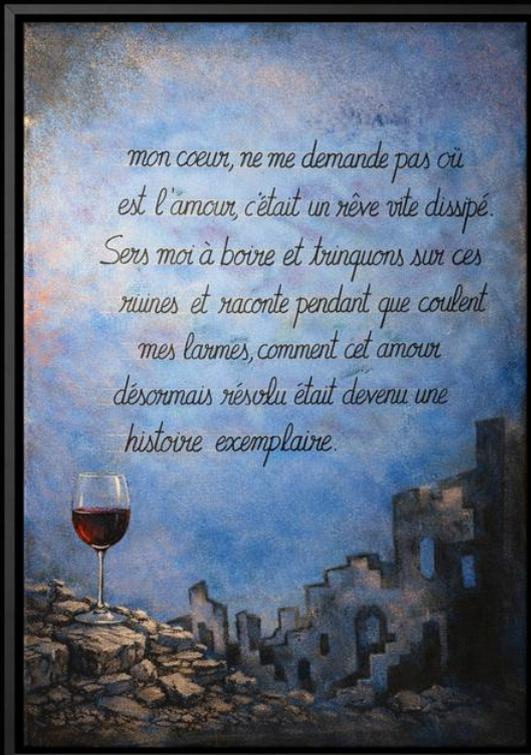
To show transformation is essential, because it reveals what the conflict was silently carrying within it.

In your new collection, you speak of a more “stripped-down and legible” visual language. Was it difficult to arrive at this simplification, and what did you have to let go of along the way?

It emerged naturally. This collection arrived at a moment of inner maturity.

Technically, I worked more with breathing within the space. I





*mon cœur, ne me demande pas où
est l'amour, c'était un rêve vite dissipé.
Sers moi à boire et trinquons sur ces
ruines et raconte pendant que coulent
mes larmes, comment cet amour
désormais résolu était devenu une
histoire exemplaire.*

accepted emptiness. I allowed certain areas to remain unlayered, so that tension could circulate. The line became more direct, sometimes more raw. There is less layering, but more decision.

In *Electric Night*, the composition is reduced to essential tension: a few black axes, a vertical red mark, bursts of light. Nothing decorative. Everything is energy.

On a more interior level, this simplification reflects a personal stripping away. Like in certain spiritual traditions where one removes in order to reach the essential, I stopped adding what was not absolutely necessary.

This collection made me happy. It also made me cry deeply. But I held nothing back.

Texts and words in your works play an almost poetic role. Do you think first in images or in words? What comes first - the phrase or the visual sign?

In words, always in words!

My relationship to writing is as intimate as my relationship to painting. At a very young age, I understood that one could make diamonds out of words — that they could condense an emotion, a thought, a wound, into just a few syllables. It was almost a shock. Since then, I have never separated these two languages.

In *The Ruins*, the calligraphed text acts almost like a confession. It does not describe the painting — it extends it. It creates a second depth.

I love the idea of bringing together two immensely powerful forces — image and language — within the same space. Painting touches through immediate sensation. Words touch through inner resonance. Together, they create a denser vibration.

If your painting were not an image but a gesture or an action, what would it be: resistance, prayer, confession, or an invitation to dialogue?

Definitely a prayer! Two hundred percent!

If my painting were no longer an image, it would be an inner movement directed toward something greater than myself. For me, prayer is a state of stripping away. A moment when one leaves the turbulence of the world and enters a silent verticality — where the ego recedes, where something within aligns.

Painting is very close to that state. When I work, I withdraw from the noise. There is a precise moment, almost imperceptible, when the gesture no longer comes from will, but from surrender.

Prayer, in its most universal sense, is a movement of love and awareness. It does not ask — it elevates. It transforms the one who becomes it.

Paris is a city of art, philosophy, and history. Does the city you live in influence the rhythm, pace, and content of your painting?

Yes, Paris is my city. I was born there. I grew up there. It shaped my eye before I even knew I was looking.

Paris is not simply a capital — it is a crucible of modern art. A city of avant-gardes, studios, manifestos, and intellectual fire. Here, art is not decoration. It is necessity. One grows up surrounded by history, museums, philosophy, literature. That density creates rigor. It demands position.

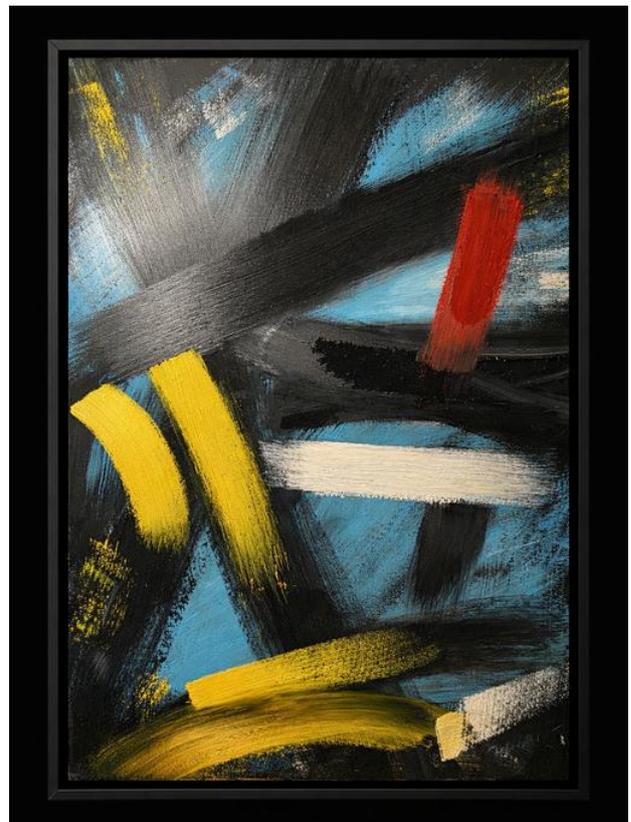
Paris taught me discipline. It taught me how to look. It taught me how to enter into dialogue with art history.

But my work does not belong to a geography.

I come from Paris but I paint for the world.

This series is presented as a turning point in your practice. If a viewer were encountering your work for the first time at this moment, what question would you like them to take away with them?

What is the true meaning of our existence?



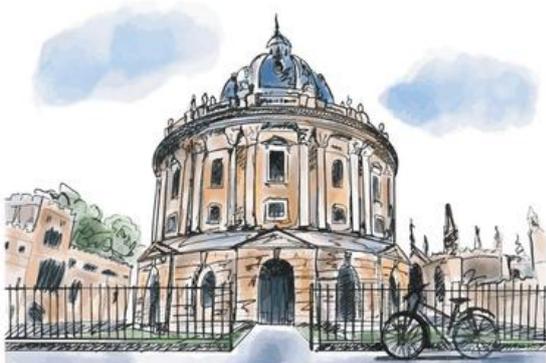
— Interview

Urvashi Sharma



You completed your MA in Illustration in London. How did studying and living in the UK influence your visual language and approach to storytelling?

My approach to illustration evolved significantly during my MA in Illustration in London, where research and conceptual thinking became central to my practice. Rather than beginning with style, I learned to let ideas, context, and narrative guide my visual decisions. This shift helped me create work that feels more intentional, thoughtful, and story-driven.



Urvashi Sharma | Redcliff camera

Living in London further strengthened this development. The city's dynamic design culture, diverse communities, and constant visual energy encouraged continuous observation. Being immersed in such an environment naturally influenced my visual language and refined the way I communicate stories through images.

Many of your works depict iconic places such as Oxford and London. What draws you to these locations as recurring subjects?

London and Oxford represent the global history and identity of England, which naturally draws me to them as subjects. When I began working as a designer creating gifts and souvenirs, I wanted to represent these iconic cities in a way that feels modern, fresh, and accessible.

Both cities offer a compelling balance between historic architecture and contemporary everyday life. My aim is to reinterpret their cultural significance through simplified forms, bold compositions, and a contemporary visual language, making these places feel relevant and engaging for today's audience.

Before working on illustrated souvenirs, you explored themes related to mental health. Do you see a connection between your earlier conceptual work and your current practice?

During college, I chose mental health as a research focus because I felt it was an important and often overlooked subject. I wanted to explore how complex emotional experiences could be expressed



and understood through visual language. That way of thinking continues to influence my current practice. Although my work has shifted towards illustrated souvenirs, I still see illustration as a powerful tool for storytelling, emotional connection, and clear communication. The context has changed, but the intention to connect meaningfully with viewers remains the same.

You currently work as a full-time designer creating souvenir designs. How does working in a commercial context shape your creative decisions?

I genuinely enjoy working within a commercial and decorative context because it challenges me to think beyond personal expression and consider audience needs, business objectives, and usability. It has helped me develop a more mature approach, where creativity works alongside clarity and purpose.

Designing souvenirs requires understanding what people are visually drawn to and how they emotionally connect with a product. Balancing storytelling, visual appeal, and market awareness has strengthened my ability to create work that is both engaging and accessible.

Can you walk us through your creative process from initial idea to final image?

Research plays a key role in my creative process, as it allows me to fully understand the subject before moving into visual development. Once I establish a clear concept, I explore different drawing approaches and select the style that best supports the idea.

From there, I focus on composition, ensuring the arrangement feels strong and balanced. Colour is used intentionally to enhance mood and clarity. By

simplifying forms, I aim to allow the narrative to come through clearly while maintaining a visually striking final image.

What role does visual storytelling play in your work today?

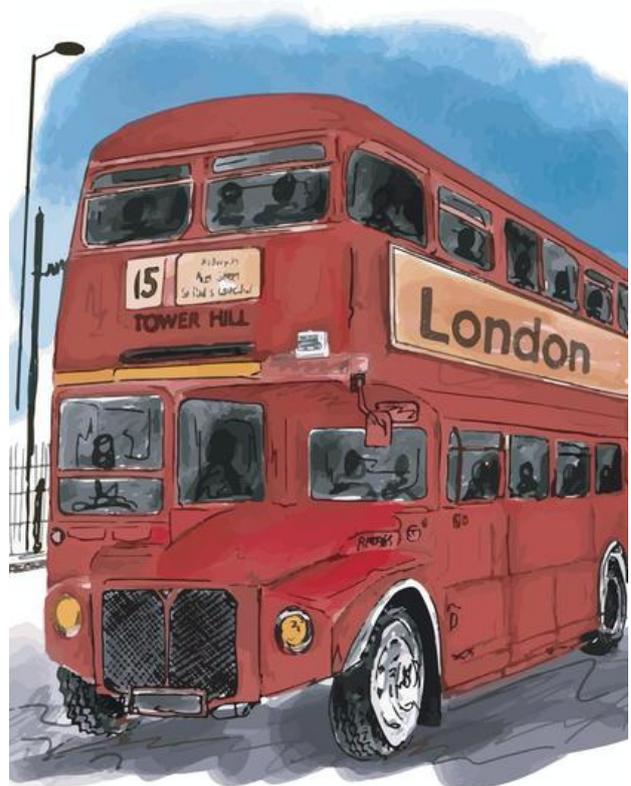
Visual storytelling remains fundamental to my work. It allows me to create connection and emotion through imagery, whether I am illustrating places or broader concepts. I strive to communicate ideas in a way that feels approachable and relatable, inviting viewers to form their own relationship with the work.

Storytelling helps me move beyond decoration and create visuals that feel meaningful and engaging.

Looking ahead, are there particular themes or directions you would like to explore further?

Alongside commercial illustration, I am interested in engaging more deeply with social issues, particularly mental health, through illustration and volunteering. I aim to balance decorative, market-driven work with projects that contribute positively to society.

For me, illustration is not only about aesthetics or products, but also about using visual storytelling as a way to encourage empathy, awareness, and meaningful connection.



— Interview

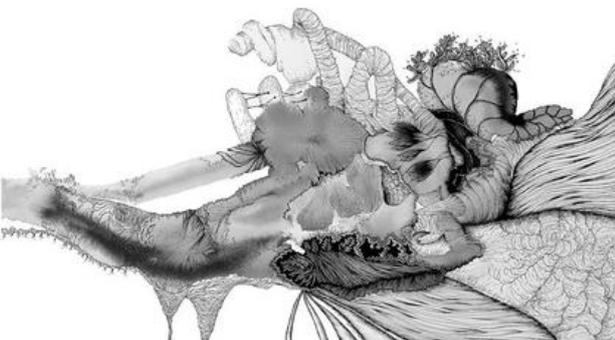
Sophie Jaffro



I have always been interested and inspired by organic forms. As a student, I chose to work for my degree and my thesis on the lines and the creation of shapes, both in art history and in nature. It led me to study, observe, and draw natural structures and shapes. I had to understand and spot natural expansion systems in growing and living things such as plants, lichens, mold, fungi, and mineral structures. Alongside my China ink work, I also work on an imaginary bestiary inspired by animal oddities. I rearrange and assemble elements observed on existing species and this project is fed by observation sketching. In all aspects of my work, I pay particular attention to our environment and the forms that compose it, which allows me to translate them through art.

Your work begins with observation sketches of natural forms. What draws you to these organic structures in the first place?

Sophie Jaffro | Micro-organique IV



You often describe ink stains as a “seed” for the drawing. At what moment do you decide to intervene and start guiding the form?

The stains made with China ink are indeed the base of my drawings. The decision of taking back control comes from a question of spatial composition. I start imagining the drawing during the staining process and begin to see shapes.

The empty spaces mean a lot to me in my work. The balance between very saturated detailed areas and empty spaces is important in order to read the image and give it room to breathe. I actually stop the random stains and start drawing thinking about the space which will remain empty.



In some work, on the contrary, the surface of paper is saturated, the shape goes further than the edges of the support and its limits are not visible. In this case, the stains cover more surface and the drawing happens later in the process.

How do you personally define the balance between chaos and organization in your practice?

It is for me a balancing act. In my work, I'm passionate about details and realistic drawings. This way of working takes a lot of time and doesn't allow much expressivity.

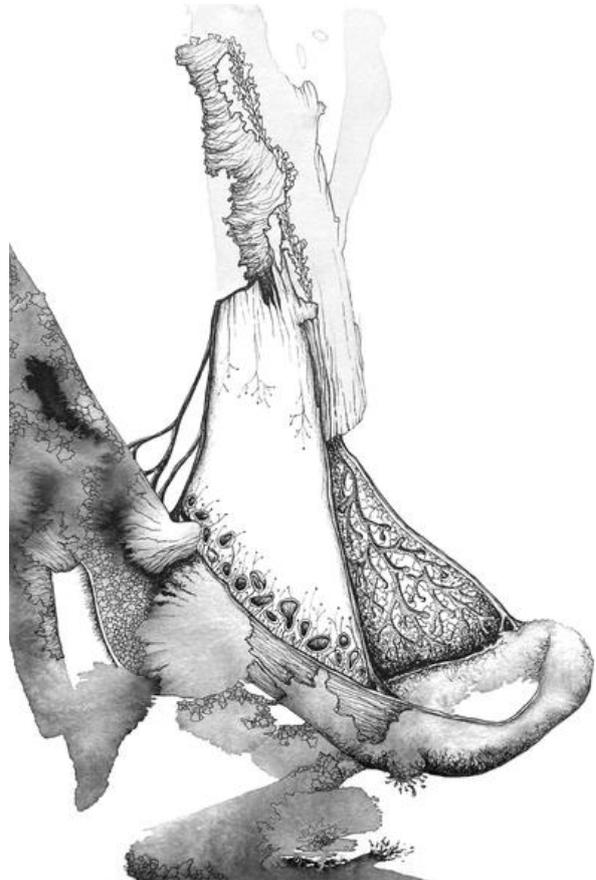
At the beginning, I forced myself to let go, to lose control and try to work in a more instinctive way. For that, I started using ink stains to generate randomness and abstraction. It is sometimes hard to set up due to the fear of failing or losing control. But it is exactly what gives birth to my work today. The chaos of the first steps of my process is uncomfortable because it's out of my control, but it is also liberating. Creativity is no longer limited by the fear of failing, because nothing becomes an error. That allows me to create from everything, whatever happens. Taking back control with rational drawings is a way to sooth that kind of vertigo that happens with the loss of control, a way to reassure myself. That is what I also would like the viewer to feel by showing some parts of the stains, raw, untouched. The general shape of the drawing is also completely abstractive, but some details can be reassuring by looking like natural familiar shapes.

Working exclusively in black and white, what possibilities does this limited palette give you compared to color?

By using almost only black China ink, I work with the idea of scientific research. I apply a methodology, a process with limited and controlled parameters, exploring their possibilities. With the use of this protocol I explore what is offered by simple understated elements with curiosity. For that, I set constants - the use of black and white - and play with other parameters, like the wetness of the paper, the saturation of the ink and the different levels of grey, the size of the stains... Comparing the different pieces of my work shows variations, like esthetic events, thanks to the stability of these constants. However, colors tend to appear progressively in my recent work. To shake up my habits, to keep on surprising me and to feed my work. New possibilities appear, only with the way ink reacts on the paper, their pigmentation, their viscosity. The new shapes that come from it are a new parameter for me to work with.

Many of your forms evoke microscopic worlds, organisms, or imagined landscapes. Do you consciously think about scale while drawing, or does it emerge naturally?

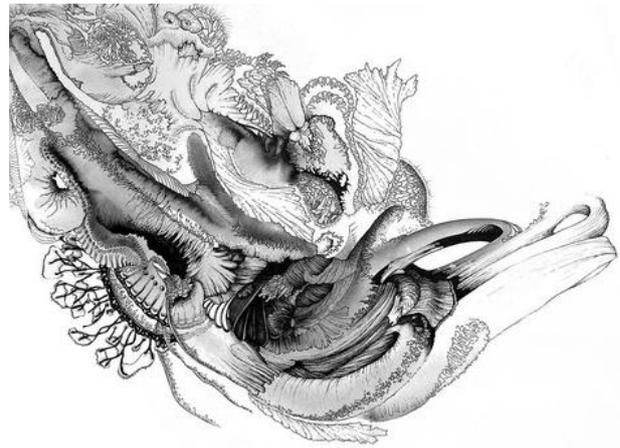
The idea of scale often appears randomly in my work. However, there are elements that will always matter.



For example, when I expand the drawing to the edge of the paper, without leaving any empty space around it, it evokes the idea that we only see a part of something bigger. In some cases, it gives the impression of flying on top of something infinite, like a map of a territory of which we only see a part. On the contrary, it can evoke a microscopic world as if you were seeing details through a magnifying glass. The interpretation is personal and depends on everybody's perception. I often noticed that infinitely large structures and microscopic structures can look alike. Like crystals on a small scale can evoke the shape of a mountain chain, or a detail of coral can look like the overall shape of that same coral. The fractal notion in natural shapes gives this idea of blurred scales, and I think that my drawing can also be perceived in different scales.

Your process allows accidents and randomness to play an important role. Have there been moments when an unexpected accident completely changed the direction of a work?

Every piece of work comes from randomness. But there were events that led to major changes in my process. It's often from trying concrete changes that unexpected things happen. For example, I worked for a long time on a drawing table, on a horizontal support before I decided to work by setting my paper



Sophie Jaffro | Micro-organique V

on a wall. By putting it vertically, the shapes of the stains drastically changed. Drips and runs appeared. Lines happened in the composition, with directions. Gravity had a direct impact on what could be seen, the shape no longer expands in every direction, but from the top to the bottom. That led me to also make decisions about how to hang the piece, whether to keep the orientation that I had during the making of the piece or turn it once it's done to play with the directions that the shapes took.

Having to work on the floor also led to important changes in my work. Because of the size of some pieces, I started putting my paper on the floor, because it simply couldn't fit on my table. Being further away from the paper because I have to stand on top of it, the ink stains are way more expressive, splatters happen, and the drawing has to adapt. It is mainly because of technical obligations that new events happen in my work. However, in every single work there might be drips or clumsy moves that I have to accept, not as failure, but as unexpected events to work with.

Your work blurs the boundary between abstraction and depiction. How important is it for you that the viewer recognizes something familiar in your images?

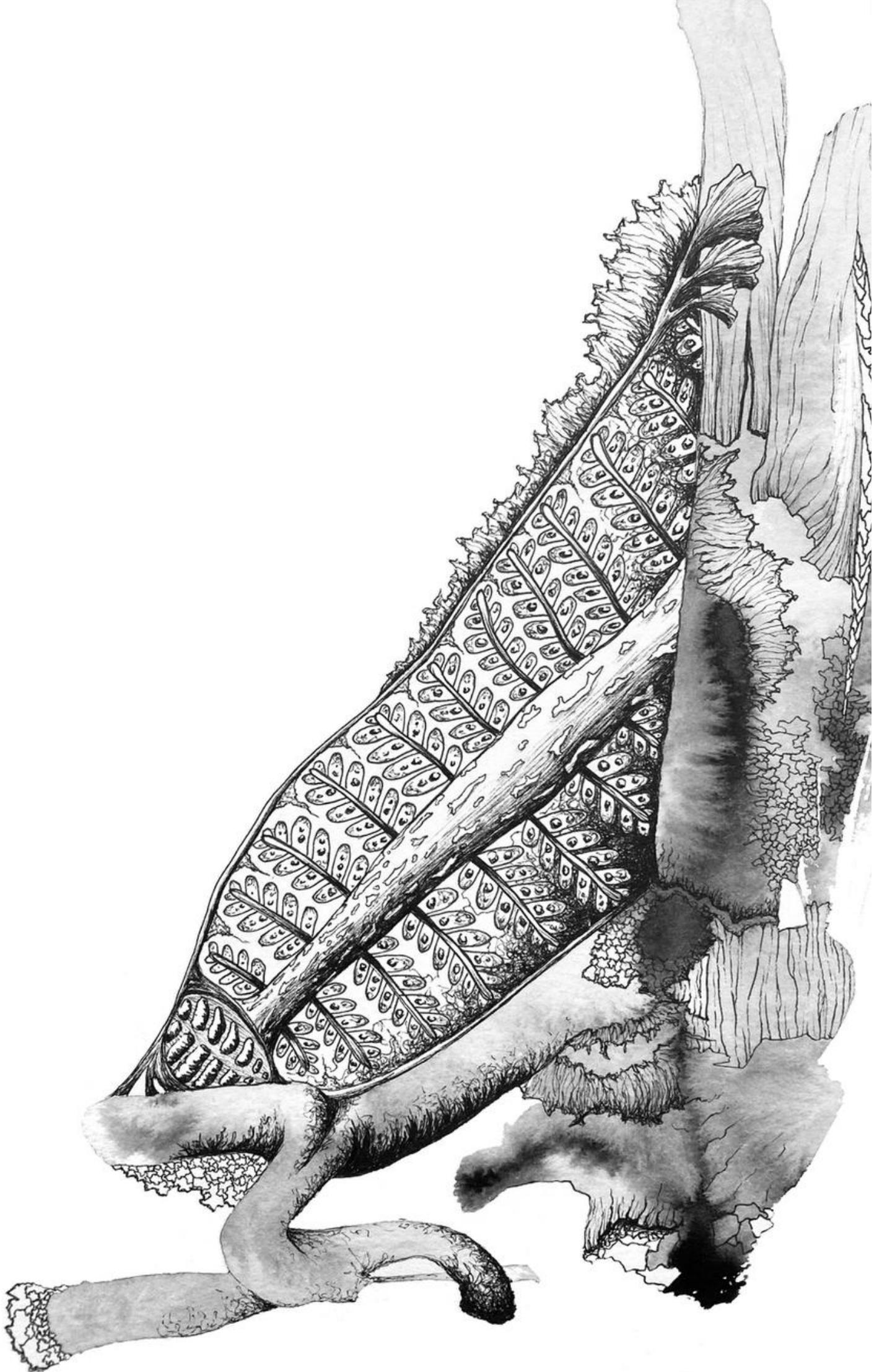
I try to stop drawing before it starts to look like something recognizable. Even if in detail some shapes can be identified and look like natural forms, I first try to create an almost uncomfortable feeling for the viewer by not giving familiar information for the first gaze.

By this instability in processing my work, I try to lead the viewer to approach the piece not knowing what they will find in it. That is similar to my own mindset in the creative process, that I approach not anticipating what will happen.

Like the Rorschach tests, which are a series of abstract ink stains, the interpretation is free for the viewer. What the image evokes depends on the esthetic and cultural references within each of us.



Sophie Jaffro | Immersion



Caroline Morris is a multifaceted Artist who works mainly in collage and painting. She was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and attended the University of Arkansas, graduating with a BFA in studio art with a concentration in drawing. She lives and continues to work in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Her work is appreciated for its ability to navigate various genres, bringing a creative and versatile touch to image-making. Caroline fuses ethereal environments and colorful portraiture of the human spirit with inspirations of the sublime and otherworldly by experimenting with different styles. Caroline details dreamlike environments that focus on both individual and universal experiences.

Project Statement

Through a complex process of layering drawing, painting, and collage, I explore fantastical portraiture and ethereal environments. The subjects become obscured and revealed amidst the complexities of textures, form, and depth of the image.

The act of nurturing and growth extends beyond just a person—it intertwines with the imagery of plants, greenery, and the body itself. The loving and compassionate nature of a mother has profoundly shaped me, fostering my growth into who I am today. Motherhood and caregiving embody both sacrifice and generosity, a dynamic that is often complex yet deeply comforting. The character in my work is not simply a reflection of myself but rather a visual dialogue between a child, an entity of my own creation, and the process of care, growth, and transformation.

The fantastical, ethereal landscape serves to juxtapose the unique simplicity of the individuals' designs, employing vibrant colors to conceal and reveal the essence of the entity simultaneously.

Caroline Morris | Offering | 2025





— Interview

Ozma Van Het LLum // The House of NonSense

Your biography feels poetic and fragmented, much like your collages. How does your life experience shape the way you assemble images?

My life has always unfolded in fragments: languages, places, movings, jobs, identities, phases that don't follow a linear narrative. So, I guess, collage naturally became my way of making sense of that and of recomposing myself. As a translator, a traveller and a linguist, I'm used to working between meanings, inhabiting gaps and ambiguities. When I assemble images, I'm doing something similar: I let fragments speak to one another, allowing intuition, memory, and lived experience to guide the composition rather than logic alone.

You describe yourself as a paper lover and a collage maker. What is your relationship with paper as a material and as a carrier of memory?



Ozma Van Het LLum // The House of NonSense | ReLOVEtion



Ozma Van Het LLum // The House of NonSense | ReLOVEtion

Paper is a living material to me. It holds nature itself—time, touch, erosion, intention. It creases, yellows, tears, and in doing so, it remembers. I'm deeply attached to its fragility and its resilience at the same time; it often feels like a mirror of the human soul. Working with paper is an intimate act—almost like listening to what it has already lived before asking it to become something else. Much like life.

Many of your works are built from recycled images and fragments from the past. What draws you to what has been left behind?

Since I was a child, I have been fascinated by the appearance and presence of my ancestors—their gestures, their belongings, their way of inhabiting the world. My great-grandparents were born at the end of the 1800s, and I feel that I carry the traditions of many generations within me. Perhaps that is why I am so captivated by abandoned pieces of the past. What is left behind often holds the strongest emotional charge—soulful stories, forgotten meanings. Discarded images, freed from their original function, become open, available, unresolved. I am drawn to their silence and latent potential. Working with them feels both like an act of rescue and of re-signification: offering them a new voice, a chance to speak another language.

You mention “reassembling the scattered pieces of the world.” Do you see collage as a form of healing, archaeology, or storytelling?

Sofia Budakova is a realist artist working in the genre of documentary historical still life. Her practice explores historical eras through material objects associated with significant figures of their time. The individual is not depicted as the main subject, but serves as a mediator through which the spirit of an era — its values, tensions, and internal processes — is revealed. Her ongoing project Time Capsule is based on in-depth archival research, historical documents, and authentic artifacts. In this approach, still life becomes a visual document preserving historical memory through material evidence.

Project Statement

Time Capsule is an original artistic and research based project by Sofia Budakova, developed within the realist tradition in the genre of documentary historical still life. The project is dedicated to the study of historical eras through material evidence: authentic objects, archival sources, and items associated with specific individuals and the time in which they lived. At the center of each work is a historical figure who influenced their era. The artist deliberately rejects portrait imagery and proposes to speak about a person exclusively through objects connected to their life, destiny, and historical moment. These objects function as documentary carriers of historical tension — they register not only biographical fact, but also the resonance an event creates within the very structure of time.

Principles and Method

The works are built on the strict principle of documentary accuracy. Only historically verified objects, archival materials, and attributes of the era are used — including personal belongings. Objects not directly belonging to the historical figure, but characteristic of the time, are introduced as elements that expand the historical field and allow for a more precise transmission of the spirit of the era, its visual and cultural codes. All still lifes in the series are constructed according to a unified spatial principle: objects are placed within an enclosed volume — a kind of “capsule” resembling a wooden box, storage container, or archival box. This is an isolated zone of memory, where every detail carries semantic and documentary weight. An important constant element — the vessel. Its form changes depending on cultural and historical context, but its function remains unchanged: a metaphor for accumulated experience, latent tension, and the fragility of the historical moment.

Artist's Position

The project consciously avoids interpretation and authorial judgment. The artist does not express a personal attitude toward the events depicted and does not formulate conclusions. The task of Time Capsule is the maximum accurate fixation of history through material evidence, leaving the viewer complete freedom for their own analysis and reflection. This is not an illustration of history nor a reconstruction of the past. These are letters from other years that have finally found their addressee — the viewer.



Sofia Budakova | Three Pearls | 2025



— Interview

Prof. Shirley Yeung

How did you come to define yourself as a life artist, and how does this shape your practice?

Life with experiences to shape your pathway with compassion, passion, courage and resilience. Learn how to stand in the wind with artistic creation to influence the communities.

How can art contribute to mental health and well-being in the context of SDG 3.4?

"SDG Target 3.4 | promote mental health and well-being Dr. Shirley Yeung's projects target to advance SDG 3.4 (mental health/well-being) with nature appreciation, Positive Inner Peace with an awareness of the changing world via understanding of ESG (environment, social, governance). Her initiatives, such as "Restore the Nature with Innovations," focus on balancing sustainability, wellness, and digital transformation, often incorporating Chinese calligraphy techniques in western style and AI-driven delivery with NFT, when needed for traceability and transparency. For example, Dr. Shirley's works regarding SDG 3.4 and technology include:

ArtTech and Wellness: Projects use art and technology (ArtTech) to promote mental wellness and happiness at home via homeware in nature drawings of Dr. Shirley Yeung, focusing on SDG#16 positive peace, emotional, and SDG#3mental well-being.

You work with green fashion and upcycling that combine



calligraphy, painting, and ESG values. How can sustainable fashion become a tool for education, healing, and systemic change rather than just aesthetics?

Green Entrepreneurial Education: Initiatives incorporate AI and SY paintings in apparel for SDG#13 climate change with #12 responsible consumption and production to foster sustainable design and wellness.

Positive Peace Framework: The design for sustainable development with SDG#4.7 knowledge transfer work integrates the 8 pillars of Economic Positive Peace for SDG#8 Decent Jobs Creation. This is more than just aesthetics in traditional art fashion.

Key Projects: The SDG x ESG led initiatives of Dr. Shirley Yeung, e.g. "Restore the Nature with Innovations via SDGs and ESG/Positive Peace" and "Green Entrepreneurial Education Project with Art Tech + Environmental Products of 2025 for 2030 demonstrate.

What is the value of women-led collaboration in sustainability-focused art projects?

Most of the projects of Dr. Shirley Yeung involved with female students, entrepreneurs, professors, artists, and social entrepreneurs from Cameroon, Kenya, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Russia, US, UK...etc. on applying environmental materials in drawing, apparel, homeware for social impacts and a project was selected to display in the UN Conference Center (UNESCAP) in March 2023.

Dr. Shirley also collaborates with organizations like





ICENECDEV, UN Global Compact member since 2014 on empowering Miss Environment to draw in Chinese way and works on integrating AI into sustainable development initiatives.

Education plays a central role in your work, from students to industry practitioners and NGOs across different cultures. How does participatory art help communities internalize values like equity, inclusion, and shared responsibility?

Values of calmness, inner peace and resilience courage for social inclusion are a mission of Dr. Shirley. She is a volunteer in Muslim Centre on Chinese Calligraphy drawing in environmental materials to convey a message that cultural understanding and heritage preservation are important in the creation and transformation journey.

Many of your projects sit at the intersection of policy, business, and creativity. How can artists meaningfully engage with governance and institutions without losing artistic freedom or critical voice?

Dr. Shirley Yeung's SDG x ESG and Green Entrepreneurial Projects: Rebuilding Art Communities for Global Well-being and Peace.

Dr. Shirley Yeung's innovative approach at the intersection of SDGs and ESG principles exemplifies how art, entrepreneurship, and sustainability can converge to foster resilient communities and promote global well-being. Her projects in the Curtain City, rooted in her vision of integrating environmental consciousness with cultural vitality, highlight the transformative potential of creative industries aligned with sustainable development goals.

At the core of Dr. Yeung's initiatives is a commitment to SDG 4.7 (Knowledge Transfer), ADG 8 Innovations with AI, NFT and design thinking, SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By embedding ESG principles and 7 principles of PRME into her projects, she emphasizes responsible governance, environmental stewardship, and social inclusivity.

Her green entrepreneurial social business models leverage policy frameworks, e.g. STEAM education and Halal

Sustainability that encourage design for sustainability with a focus on revitalizing art communities that have historically been marginalized.

One of her key contributions is developing a new workflow operation that harmonizes artistic freedom with structured 3 layers of creators, manufacturers and consumers. This approach involves establishing a transformative and flexible way of operating creative business that safeguard artists' creative independence while ensuring SDG sustainable practices with PRME principles of values, research, practice and partnership.

Creativity plays a pivotal role in these projects, serving as a catalyst for meaningful community engagement and social cohesion. Dr. Yeung's initiatives involve collaborative green/blue art, tech, business projects with sustainable design practices, and cultural exchange programs that revitalize local and global arts community while aligning with environmental goals, for example, 6vi project with the value of peace, engaged artists from 60 countries with cofounder Xin Liang. These activities empower artists and SMEs to generate economic value and contribute to social inclusion and peacebuilding efforts across miles.

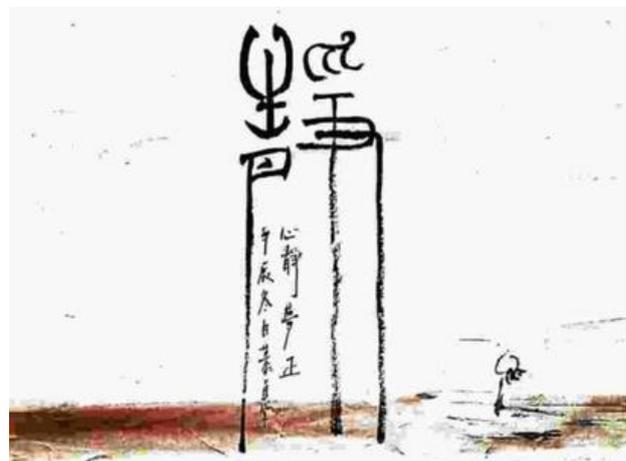
Moreover, the projects of Dr. Shirley sets a practical role model on visualising green / blue entrepreneurial education for sustainable development, fostering a sense of ownership of creation. The creative expression of Dr. Yeung's work nurtures a vibrant ecosystem where art becomes a tool for social inclusion with women empowerment, environmental awareness, and inner peace.

In pursuit of SDG 2030, her initiatives aim to rebuild and sustain art communities as vital contributors to global well-being.

Design for sustainable art practices, driven by responsible management education of UN PRME principles foster cultural resilience, social harmony, and environmental sustainability.

Looking toward 2030, what role should art communities play in global well-being and peace?

Through the persistence of SDG x ESG book and research publication and recent projects with Hong Kong Brand Curtain City project and Genesis-one.co, Dr. Shirley sets a powerful driver of art for inner peace, creation for resilience, and tolerance for business transformations, inspiring a new generation of artists and entrepreneurs to forge a sustainable future rooted in creativity, responsibility, and shared values.



Jovan Vesković

Student at the Faculty of Contemporary Arts in Belgrade.

Project Statement

With black and white photography, I try to emphasize the contrast and dramatic elements of the photo. This series of photos was taken during a trip to Corfu.

Jovan Vesković | Boat to Vido | 2025





Jovan Vesковиć | Fisherman | 2025

— Interview

Oswaldo Dumont



I would describe it as a constant creative process of traditional drawing, practice, discipline, and adaptation to new times, taking advantage of technological benefits, combining forms, and experimenting with blends of both worlds.

You spent 19 years as Lead Illustrator at Diario El Universal. How did working in a daily editorial environment shape your artistic discipline and creative thinking?

Working for the newspaper for so many years taught me to think and generate ideas quickly and precisely, adapting to the ever-changing nature of national politics in my country, Venezuela, where a new chapter in the country's events was written every day. But it wasn't all smooth sailing; the censorship imposed by the government's dictatorial regime and the laws created at that time made defining the illustration I had to create an uphill battle. I often faced creative blocks that forced me to pause, breathe, and go for a walk, before once again confronting the news event as captured in the newspaper's articles.

Editorial illustration requires reacting quickly to complex political and social issues. What was the most challenging topic you ever had to visually interpret?

I think the most difficult subject I ever had to interpret visually were undoubtedly the opinion and politics articles, as I had to be very careful with direct criticism. I had to find a creative alternative to

Your illustrations often combine strong graphic structure with expressive line work. How would you describe the evolution of your visual style over the past 25 years?



4-6 OPINIÓN

Democracias despalomadas

CARLOS RAÚL HERNÁNDEZ

U n libro del argentino Alejandro Portes, publicado en España por el sello de la editorial Planeta, es un estudio de los procesos de migración y de integración de los inmigrantes en los países de destino. El libro, que se titula 'El extranjero en el mundo', es una obra que merece ser leída y discutida, ya que aporta una perspectiva crítica y actual sobre un fenómeno que afecta a millones de personas en todo el mundo.

La democracia siempre será amonaciada por quienes buscan simplificar y 'ordenar'.

La democracia siempre será amonaciada por quienes buscan simplificar y 'ordenar'. Este es el mensaje central de la obra de Portes, quien argumenta que la democracia es un proceso constante de negociación y adaptación, no un estado fijo que puede ser simplemente impuesto o 'ordenado'.

El autor del artículo es Oswaldo Dumont, un artista y diseñador que utiliza su experiencia en la ilustración política para comentar sobre la actualidad.

wheels. Moving between these two visual languages is easy for me; although they operate on different levels, I enjoy both, and they are both part of my life as an artist.

After decades in editorial illustration, what inspired you to transition into wearable art with DumontArtDesignsUS?

DumontArtDesignsUS was born because a designer friend sent me information about two platforms (Canva and KITTL). He told me that both could be connected to suppliers and it was very easy to create an online store, plus they worked with the print-on-demand model. Back in 1995, I worked for two years at a textile company Textiles GAMS in my country, where I was responsible for creating designs for children's clothing prints. Without wasting time, I started researching a bit, watched several tutorials, and took some master classes. I thought, this resource is very interesting, and I decided to create my own store. I combine both without any problem.

How has relocating to the United States influenced your creative direction and future ambitions?

I arrived in the United States in 2017. My work as an illustrator for the newspaper came to an end for many reasons, and my family and I had to make the decision to move to Utah. I have family who are members of the Mormon religion, and they received us and helped us greatly. This country, thank God, opened its doors to us, and I have realized that there are infinite possibilities in the field of illustration and design. As for my future ambitions, I have been working hard on them, learning new ways of creating, transitioning from analog to digital, combining both, maintaining a balanced artistic essence, and experimenting with new art forms for myself.



Alice Chan is a passionate art lover, based in Hong Kong. She loves to learn about art and collects art pieces in any form. Her ways to connect with art is to make art everyday, through using different art supplies and anything from nature.

Project Statement

Still Life

This painting uses apple, orange and banana to illustrate a scene which a female and a male in a “face to face” kissing posture with a half covering fan. As apple, orange and banana are always the most chosen objects of classical still life paintings due to their essentiality in our daily lives, I attempt to paint them in a less traditional way to show the importance of pure love in human being, which is indispensable and fundamental to our nature and integrity.

Alice Chan | Still Life | 2025





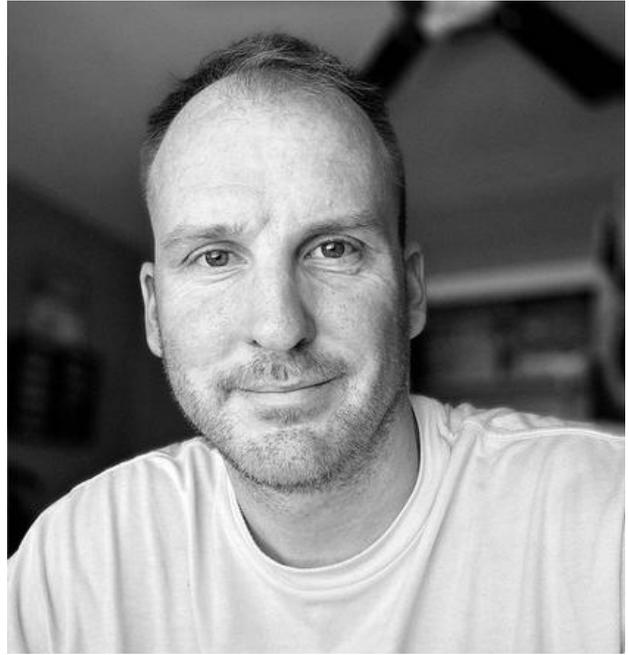
Alice Chan | Parallel Universe | 2026

— Interview

Seth Michael

After a 10-year hiatus, what made you return to art at this moment in your life?

Art has been something that has always been a part of me and who I am. My 10-year hiatus was an unfortunate sacrifice I made while attending to become a nurse. Between my work and school schedule, I saw my art as a luxury that had to be sacrificed. After graduating from nursing school in 2017, I



developed a “bad” habit of not creating art. I had many failed attempts to bring it back into a daily habit. Over the past year, I was reminded how much I need art in my life. I made a conscious effort to get back to my art. I started working on paper portraits again last year and my art became a habit again. I am glad to have it back.

How did that long break change the way you see art and your own creative process?

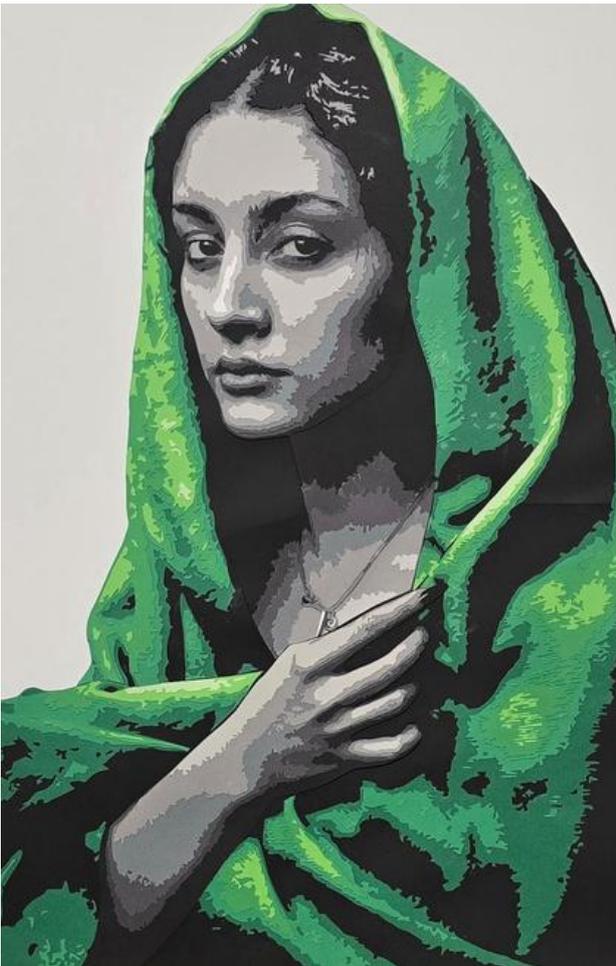
When I came back to art, I was very self-critical of the work I was creating. It did not feel as good as the art I created before. I doubted and criticized; every pencil stroke, every brush stroke and even the colors of paper were wrong. If it was not perfect on the first attempt, I abandoned the piece. My creative process was at a standstill. I had all these concepts and ideas for pieces I wanted to create but when I sat down to create art, there was a disconnect between my brain and my hands. It made me realize that art is a discipline, that it needs to be practiced on a regular basis. I worked hard to get back to my art. I went to art museums to get inspiration to start creating art again. I found that even in those museum quality pieces, there are still crooked lines, simple brush strokes and even the original pencil sketches were still visible. It taught me that perfection isn't the goal. The goal is to trust the process and enjoy the ride.

You primarily work with paper - what attracts you to this medium, and what limitations or freedoms does it give you?

In my mind, paper is a foundation of the art world. I think that artists and non-artists alike start their journey with a blank piece of paper and crayons or markers. We move from there to sketches, drawings, and doodles. Paper is a medium that is easily found and can be used in so many different ways. I love transforming and evolving that foundation into something more complex. Using simple sheets of paper to make a portrait creates limitations that I find fun and enjoy solving. Working primarily with 12"x12" scrapbooking



Seth Michael | Maiden | 2025



cardstock can severely limit the colors available. It can make any subject difficult, and finding a solution can be a fun challenge to my artistic abilities.

Your works feel quiet, introspective, and emotionally restrained. What role does silence or stillness play in your art?

Art gives a glimpse into the artist's mind and soul. Creating art enables me to silence my anxiety. It gives me a chance to self-reflect; it's my way of meditating. I don't want my art to say, "this is what I was going for," rather I want the viewer to create their own thoughts and opinions of the piece. I don't think art is meant to be just one thing, it's meant to be different to everyone viewing it. In my pieces, turning the background into negative space, the focus moves primarily to the subject. This creates isolation, stillness, and silence which allows the viewer to focus on the subject. My hope is to disconnect them from the distractions of the world around them.

Many of your recent works focus on female figures. What draws you to this subject matter?

Female figures demonstrate not only beauty but, wisdom, bravery, passion, and elegance with just a simple gaze. It's the hidden qualities, the silent emotions, and the raw energy I want to capture.

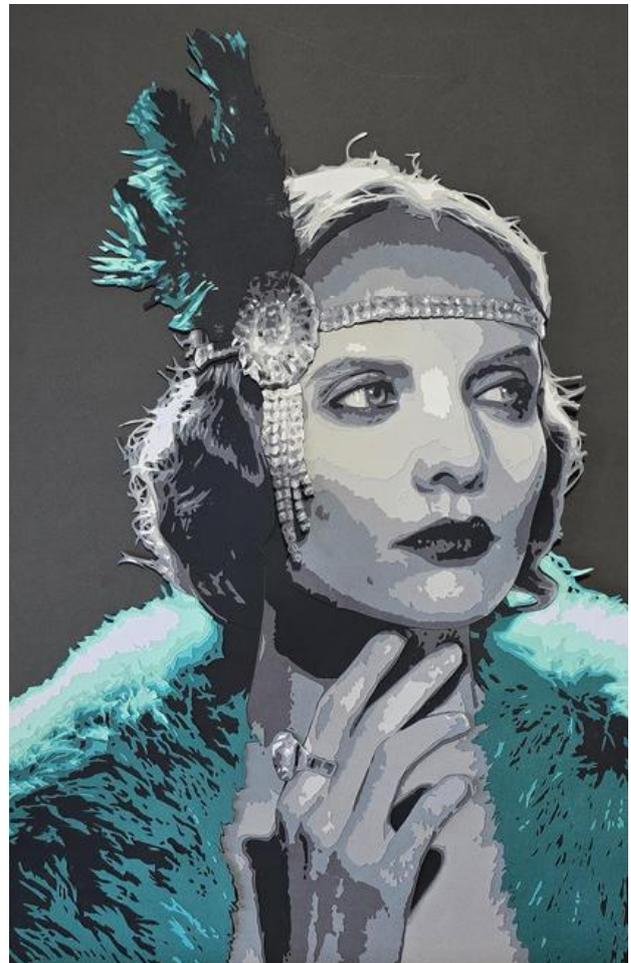
Color plays a strong symbolic role in your pieces. How do you choose your color palettes, and what do they

represent for you?

Up until recently, I have always used the color of the reference photo as my guide. With limited color options it may not have been an exact match, so this gave me artistic license and the challenge I enjoy. Skin tones are frustrating as they are hard to match especially when most of my pieces need 5 to 8 different values of the colors. I did a few in just black and white, but I always loved working with colors. I decided to mix the two and complete the portrait in black and white but chose a single color to highlight the portrait. I picked the color palette first, then found the subject that best fits that color. This led to an art deco teal for "Flapper", the calming and hopeful green for "Lady in Green", and the contradictory yellow for "Maiden". It depends on what colors I can get a hold of.

Living in Las Vegas, a city known for excess and spectacle, how does your environment influence - or contrast with - your artistic vision?

As a local, Vegas is like any other community, except our bars have poker, the gas stations and grocery stores have slot machines. Being away from the overpowering scene of the Las Vegas Strip when I'm creating, it doesn't usually directly influence my art. As I have returned to creating, the Arts District in Vegas has been growing. Through that I have met some amazing artists who have been very supportive in my return to creating art. It has turned into much bigger influence on this amazing journey and I cannot wait to see where this will take me.



Varsha Khatri

Once immersed in the fast-paced world of IT, Varsha discovered her true calling in art after moving to Dubai. What began as a lifelong passion evolved into a full-time artistic journey in 2018, and by 2021 she was professionally exhibiting her work across the city.

A self-taught artist, she works primarily with acrylics, textured mediums, and gold leaf, creating vibrant compositions inspired by culture, nature, and the beauty found in everyday moments. Her art radiates positivity and connection, inviting viewers to pause, feel, and carry a sense of joy into their spaces.

For Varsha, art is not just expression — it is connection.

Project Statement

Art, for me, is a celebration of life and connection. Through layers of color, texture, and mixed media, I translate emotions, memories, and everyday moments into visual stories. I am drawn to bold, radiant hues and tactile surfaces, often using acrylics and texture paste to create depth and movement.

My work is inspired by culture, nature, and the quiet beauty that surrounds us but often goes unnoticed. Each piece is created intuitively, allowing the process to guide me. My intention is simple: to spread positivity, spark curiosity, and leave the viewer with a sense of joy — the same joy I experience while creating.

Varsha Khatri | Enlightenment | 2023





— Interview

Gala Reya

Your work often operates through the idea of superposition - between "I" and "We," material and immaterial. When you begin a new project, what usually comes first: a philosophical concept or a sensory experience?

At the core of my practice lies not an abstract concept, but a continuous observation of how attention and sensory experience shape reality. This is not a separate stage, but a paradigm I never step outside of, which makes it difficult to say what comes first. However, each specific project is almost always initiated through sensory experience. It is this experience that creates a point of tension from which an image takes shape and an idea for the work emerges.

I often perceive a future work immediately as a visual model — not as a sensation, but as an already assembled structure. This image, of course, arises within the broader logic of my practice. Frequently, a project begins as an exploration of a theme: once the thinking process is set in motion, the means of its realization appear almost simultaneously.

Gala Reya | Bifurcation Point



When I begin working directly, rational control gradually weakens, and the process turns into a flow in which the sensory comes to dominate. One of the most important moments for me is recognizing the need to stop and bring the work to completion. It is precisely at this point that the dialectic of my practice emerges: a personal, bodily experience of the "I" passes through form and becomes part of a shared language — a space in which individual experience can be shared and read by others.

You use quantum physics not as science, but as a system of metaphors. Where do you personally draw the line between scientific inspiration and artistic intuition?

My practice is largely shaped through vulnerability and the sensorial depth of personal experience — in this sense, I consciously work with what might be described as a "feminine" way of knowing the world. For this reason, the boundary between scientific inspiration and artistic intuition is unclear for me; it is fluid, or rather shifted.

I am genuinely interested in quantum physics not as a set of striking metaphors and not as an abstract theory, but as a way of thinking about reality as it is experienced from within. Consciousness — as something ephemeral and ultimately unknowable, yet at the same time as an active energy — has always been the subject of my personal inquiry and practice. Thus, I would say that in my work I tend to erase this boundary. Science, for me, is not a distanced system of knowledge, but an experience refracted through conscious personal perception. As a result, my works become an act of imagistic fixation of an invisible process that unfolds within each of us, but which I observe first and foremost through my own qualia.



Moving to Georgia became a turning point in your practice. How did the Georgian alphabet transform from language into a visual and conceptual code in your work?

Relocating to Georgia truly became a decisive moment in my practice, though not so much as a change of geography, but rather as a resolution of an inner conflict and the determination of my own place in life. This state of harmony became the foundation for the development of a narrative that had been forming within me long before.

I am half ethnically Georgian, yet I spent most of my life in another country. Returning to the Georgian cultural and linguistic context, and encountering the local nature, people, and environment, gave me a sense of inner alignment. It felt as though I finally allowed myself to be fully myself. This period coincided with a rethinking of my artistic practice. Almost intuitively, I began to use Georgian letters and script in my works—at first as collage elements, as a visual structure. Over time, this approach transformed into a deeper level of expression. The Georgian alphabet, which I consider unique and aesthetically self-sufficient, became for me not a language in a utilitarian sense, but a code of consciousness. In my works, I perceive these signs as a universal code, connected to the idea of a unified field of consciousness. I deliberately do not translate them into everyday communication, preserving their sacred status for me as a language that remains not fully deciphered. This is neither folklore nor a decorative device, but a way of recording personal experience—a method of working with what exists at the boundary between individual experience and a universal structure of meaning.

You describe consciousness as a quantum field where the personal and the universal constantly interpenetrate. Do you see art as a way to synchronize individual consciousness with a collective one?

Yes, I do indeed conceive of consciousness as a quantum field with an infinite number of potential states, in which emotional surges, thought-forms, long-entrenched patterns, and the most luminous visions of beauty coexist simultaneously. This field is in constant motion and encompasses both individual and collective experience.

Within this framework, the question of the ecology of the mind is particularly important to me. The individual “I” does not exist in isolation, but in a state of continuous superposition within the “we” — if this “we” can be fixed at all as a stable category. Our inner states are inevitably woven into a shared field and influence one another, even while remaining invisible. In my paintings and installations, I do not so much seek a direct synchronization of the personal and the collective as I create conditions for their temporary convergence. In this sense, art becomes a space of attunement — a moment in which the viewer’s individual experience can resonate with broader, universal structures of consciousness. This point of resonance is not predetermined; it emerges through the act of experience itself, as a fleeting state of coherence.

Many of your works visualize processes that cannot be directly observed - thought, memory, entanglement. What role does ambiguity play in your visual language?

In my works, ambiguity is intentional—just as it is inherent in the quantum structure itself. Any angle of





perception at a given point is always a bifurcation of the personal “self” in relation to the wave of information, whether it takes the form of a word, an image, or another mode of interpretation. Visible reality does not exist outside individual experience; it is reconstructed anew each time through sensation, memory, and the inner states of the perceiving subject.

We tend to believe that through symbols, signs, and language we are able to share our experience with others. For me, however, this process always remains incomplete. In truth, every act of perception is personal, and in this sense we are far more alone than we are inclined to think. It is precisely this tension between the desire to share and the impossibility of complete overlap that lies at the core of my visual language.

My exploration of invisible processes is merely one of many possible ways to visualize them. I draw upon my own experience and my own qualia, without proposing universal interpretations. At the same time, I allow for the possibility that these images may become, if not an answer for the viewer, then a bridge—a means of touching upon the experience of their own deeply personal inner states.

Augmented reality plays a crucial role in extending your paintings and installations. What does AR allow you to express that the physical object alone cannot?

In my practice, augmented reality does not function as an extension of visual spectacle and does not aim to impress the viewer through technology. On the contrary, it is used as a tool for reducing external stimulation and re-tuning attention. The physical object establishes a point of presence, while AR makes it possible to work with what cannot be materially

fixed — the inner state of perception.

For example, in one of the installations the AR layer is activated only after the viewer remains motionless for an extended period of time. At first, the viewer encounters only a static physical composition. Only in the moment of pause do signs and structures begin to slowly emerge in augmented reality — they do not flash or move actively, but seem to “surface” from emptiness. Any sudden movement or shift of focus causes them to disappear. In this way, the viewer physically experiences the necessity of stopping: the image exists only for as long as the state of inner silence is sustained.

In another project, augmented reality operates as an unstable field: visual elements are in a constant process of disintegration and re-assembly, never forming a fixed shape. The viewer cannot “hold” the image — it responds to the slightest fluctuations of attention. This creates an experience of the fragility of perception and emphasizes that the image does not belong to the object, but arises in the moment of attunement between body, consciousness, and space. Such states cannot be conveyed through the physical object alone, which always remains stable and complete. AR allows me to work with processes rather than forms — with temporal, transitional states between the visible and the perceived. It is not an additional layer of information, but an in-between space where the viewer is left alone with their own perception.

In this sense, augmented reality in my practice does not intensify the image, but dilutes it. It does not add stimuli, but creates a pause — a moment in which the sensory flow is suspended, making a deeper and more personal experience possible.

Your installations often invite the viewer into a state of participation rather than observation.





Gala Reya | The Color of My Note

What kind of inner experience do you hope the viewer leaves with?

I do not set out to lead the viewer to a specific conclusion or a predetermined emotional state. What matters more to me is creating conditions in which a person can temporarily step out of their habitual mode of interpretation, evaluation, and control. In my installations, the viewer is not given ready-made meanings; instead, they find themselves inside a process where attention becomes the main active element.

In this context, I am interested in a new form of mediation of the viewer: not as an interpreter decoding a message, and not as an active participant performing an action, but as a presence. The viewer becomes the mediator of their own experience — the one through whom the work unfolds, but not the one who is required to decipher it.

If we speak of a possible outcome, it is neither catharsis nor an emotional peak, but a state of quiet attentiveness. A certain slowing down, in which the sense of one's own presence and the perceived moment becomes sharper. In this state, a person may notice how they look, feel, and think — without the need to immediately explain or name it.

It is important to me that after the experience, what remains with the viewer is not knowledge, but a trace — a barely perceptible shift in perception. An awareness of the fragility of one's own states, their impermanence, and their connection to the surrounding context. This is not a moment of collective unity, but rather an honest encounter with oneself within a shared field. And if, upon leaving the space of the work, a person carries with them a little more quiet and sensitivity to their inner processes, then for me this is the point at which the work has truly taken place.

— Interview

Margaux Sion



Your collages are instantly recognizable for their boldness and excess. When did you first realize that “too much” could become a strength in your visual language?

Probably the moment I stopped trying to be tasteful.



Margaux Sion | Girls Girls Girls | 2025

I realized that what I was instinctively drawn to — excess, accumulation, visual noise, pleasure — was exactly what I had been taught to tone down. Once I embraced “too much” as a position rather than a flaw, everything clicked. Excess became my grammar. It’s how I talk about desire, femininity, joy, overwhelm — all the things that refuse to stay quiet or minimal.

You often speak about reclaiming femininity through a consciously female gaze. How would you describe the female gaze in your work, and how does it differ from traditional representations of women in visual culture?

The female gaze in my work is playful, self-aware, and unapologetic — and very often, it’s a female gaze on the male gaze.

I frequently start from images originally created by men, for men, and reappropriate them through collage. By cutting, reframing and exaggerating, I turn these representations into something else entirely: a woman looking back at herself, on her own terms. These figures know they are being looked at — and they’re not trying to please anyone. They flirt, they pose, they enjoy themselves. Unlike traditional representations that frame women as passive or consumable, my figures are collaborators. They enjoy visibility, desire, and authorship.



Coming from a background in mental health and psychology, how does this training influence the way you construct images and narratives in your collages?

My background in mental health made me very interested in what we project onto images. I think in layers, contradictions, defense mechanisms. At the same time, I allow myself a very intuitive, almost childlike freedom. Bright colors, stickers, playful compositions — joy is not superficial to me, it's psychological. My collages often mirror internal states: abundance, fragmentation, overstimulation, tenderness. I'm less interested in linear stories than in emotional landscapes — the kind that feel familiar before they make sense.

Many of your female figures appear confident, sensual, and fully aware of being seen. What does visibility mean to you – is it power, vulnerability, or both?

Definitely both. Visibility can be empowering, but it's never neutral. Choosing to be seen — especially as a woman — is always a negotiation. In my work, visibility becomes a conscious act rather than a passive condition. It's saying: I know you're looking, and I'm still in control.

You use glamour and seduction not as decoration, but as strategy. What kinds of norms or expectations are you most interested in challenging through this approach?

The idea that seriousness must look serious. I've always loved fashion — its language, its excess, its

ability to shape identity. I use glamour, beauty and seduction the same way fashion does: as a statement, not an ornament. I'm interested in challenging the suspicion toward pleasure, softness, and visual indulgence — especially when they're associated with femininity. Glamour can be critical. Seduction can be intelligent. I like using what's considered "too pretty" or "too much" as a Trojan horse.

Many of your compositions confront the viewer directly. What kind of dialogue or reaction do you hope to provoke in those who encounter your work?

I hope people feel slightly caught. Like when something attracts you before you've had time to judge it. Ideally, the work pulls you in visually, then gently messes with your expectations. If it makes you smile first and think second — or the other way around — that's even better.

You are currently focused on expanding your international presence, particularly in the United States. How do you see your work resonating across different cultural contexts?

Themes like desire, visibility, excess, and femininity travel very well — they just speak with different accents. In the U.S., I feel a strong resonance with pop culture, boldness, and unapologetic self-expression. My work doesn't aim to explain itself culturally; it invites people to recognize themselves emotionally.



Tijana Kostić (b. 2000, Belgrade, Serbia) is a visual artist working in painting. She completed her BA studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 2025 and is currently pursuing an MA in Painting at the same institution.

She has exhibited at the annual exhibitions of the Faculty of Fine Arts (2022–2024), participated in the 51st Drawing and Small Sculpture Exhibition at the Youth Center of Belgrade (2023), realized a mural at the Clinical Center of Serbia as part of an art support program for children with autism (2024), and took part in a humanitarian exhibition at ULUS (2025). She is also scheduled to participate in a group exhibition at Galerija Šira in Zagreb, Croatia (March 2026), commemorating the centenary of Surrealism.

Project Statement

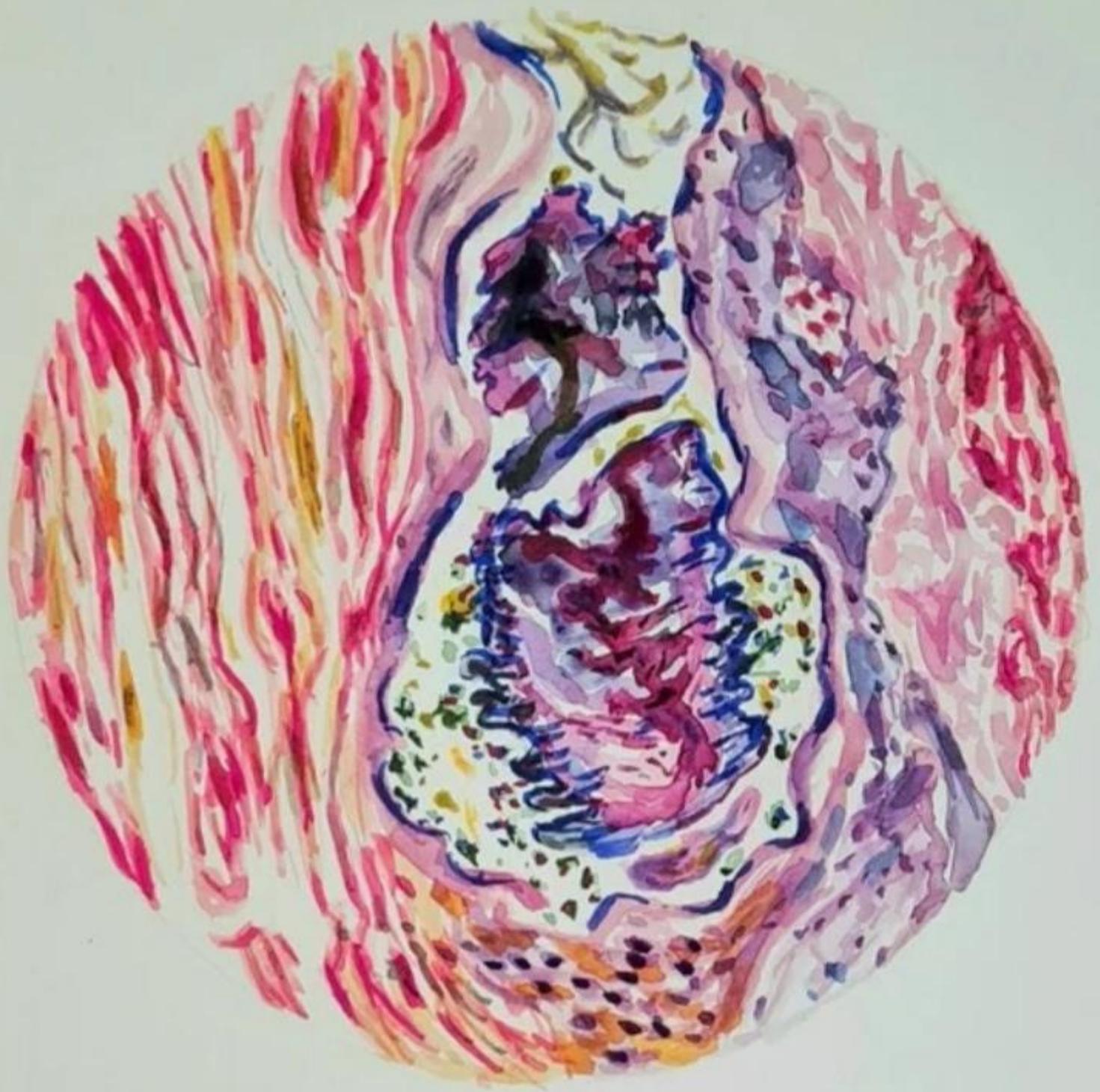
My work explores the body as an archive, a site where biological processes, psychological states, and traces of time intersect. I am particularly interested in the tension between vulnerability and structure, life and decay, visibility and concealment. Through painting, I reinterpret medical imagery, microscopic forms, and internal bodily landscapes, translating clinical documentation into layered visual compositions.

Rather than illustrating illness, I approach the body as a space of ongoing transformation. Medical records, diagnostic images, and anatomical references function not as objective data, but as starting points for reflecting on fragility, memory, and the instability of physical existence. The act of painting becomes a way of slowing down and re-examining what is usually perceived through the detached lens of medical observation.

By merging scientific references with expressive painterly gestures, I aim to create works that exist between analysis and intimacy—where the body is neither purely biological nor purely symbolic, but a living, shifting terrain of experience.

Tijana Kostic | Diseased Lung Tissue | 2025





— Interview

Huskee



formed, and I can see it so clearly that I feel compelled to make it. I don't consciously choose a visual language in those moments; the image arrives already knowing what it wants to be. This is mostly how my illustrative work begins. It has a form and an emotional charge that demands to exist. My abstract work is different. It is completely fluid, unplanned, and freeform. Movement, color, and texture emerge almost as if the piece is dreaming itself into being. I am not trying to capture anything specific. I follow the flow of sensation and memory, letting the work take shape organically.

Sometimes my technical skill is not strong enough yet to capture what I see in my mind. That means carrying an idea with me for years, letting it live in notebooks or memory while I refine my abilities. I don't experience that gap as failure. It is part of the relationship I have with making art, trusting that I will meet the image when I am ready. I write many of these ideas down and return to them when the time feels right.

Many of your horror-inspired works feature distorted, character-driven figures. What do these characters represent for you — are they personal, symbolic, or purely intuitive?

They're a blend of personal, symbolic, and intuitive elements. Some grow from specific memories or emotional states, while others carry broader symbolic weight: fear, grief, vulnerability, or the hidden parts of ourselves we lack words for.

I usually start with a feeling I need to give form to, and the character becomes a vessel for that emotion. Their bodies stretch, twist, and distort because emotion itself is not neat or contained. Physical distortion lets the work breathe in a raw, immediate way, revealing what lives beneath the surface. These figures exist to make the invisible visible; a bridge between inner experience and outward form.

Emotion and memory play a central role in your abstract paintings. Can you describe how personal experiences translate into color, line, and form in your work?

I don't always recognize my personal experiences while I'm working; the connection usually reveals itself later. Memory isn't linear, and neither is my process. Color comes first, carrying emotional temperature before I understand its

Your practice moves between abstract fine art and horror-inspired illustration. How do you decide which visual language to use for a particular idea or emotion?

It usually happens when I'm driving, walking through nature, or sitting alone in silence, in moments when my mind isn't trying to produce anything. A random image appears, fully



Huskee | SOFA Mural | 2024



source, while linework emerges unconsciously when I let my body lead. Lines trace and connect like routes or boundaries, turning the painting into a map of internal terrain that I'm still learning how to read.

You've been drawing since childhood and expanded into mixed media as a teenager. How has your relationship with materials evolved over time?

I started with the basics: graphite, colored pencils, markers, and crayons. Working with them was playful. I experimented freely, letting curiosity guide me rather than trying to make anything perfect.

My relationship with materials shifted in high school, when my art teacher introduced me to watercolor, ink, oil, acrylic, and sculpture. I could ask for guidance, but mostly I explored freely, discovering what each material could do on my own. College at the Maryland Institute College of Art was very different. Compositions, color, and form were scrutinized, and we were graded on mastery of each medium. That rigor taught me to understand materials deeply, but it could also feel creatively stunting, as I worried about making a "worthy" composition.

Expanding into mixed media broadened my ability to express myself creatively. Today, I choose materials based on concept and emotion, letting them guide the work as much as I do.

Horror and surreal imagery often provoke discomfort. What kind of emotional response are you hoping viewers will experience when encountering your darker works?

I'm not aiming to provoke fear or disgust, and I'm always a little surprised when people react that way. What I hope for is reflection, that viewers engage with their own emotions and stories through the work.

I'll never forget one of my first shows in high school. A little girl lingered in front of my horror illustrations while others came and went. At the end, her mother asked to buy a sketch of an emaciated scarecrow nailed to a wooden post. Perhaps her daughter saw something beyond the horror, creating her own story within the piece. That was the first art piece I ever sold, and I still have a copy of the check on my refrigerator.

In 2011, you founded Whisky Kettle Collectives. How did building and managing an artist collective shape your perspective as an artist today?

I started Whisky Kettle Collectives because I knew so many incredible artists whose work was otherworldly, but who were introverted or unsure about sharing it. I enjoy connecting with people and learning about their work, so I thought I could help bring their art to the world. Running the collective was my first business, and it was intense and all-consuming, with very little capital and little experience. I learned about problem-solving, marketing, organizing events, and managing creative projects, and like any first business, it taught me lessons I still carry today. It also shaped how I approach my own art, helping me understand how to share it with others.

Since launching Huskee Art and Designs by Huskee, how has running your own art business influenced your creative freedom or direction?

Running my own art business has taught me about almost every aspect of life. It has taught me patience, resilience, and how to trust my instincts even when the path ahead feels uncertain. I constantly check in with myself to make sure my work comes from curiosity and inspiration, not from what I think will sell. At the same time, I have to consider what works professionally and what captures attention. Balancing creation, learning new skills, and managing the business has strengthened my confidence, sharpened my discipline, and pushed me to take risks in how I approach my work. It has also encouraged me to explore new creative paths, expanding the boundaries of how I make and share my art. Running my business has not only shaped the art I make; it has also shaped the way I show up in the world, with authenticity, humility, and grace.



Vlada Liaskalo

My name is Vlada, I am 27 years old, and I have loved drawing since early childhood. My very first drawings were of my family, our garage, and our car. I created them when I was about three years old. They were funny and simple, but my mother saw talent in me.

As I grew older, I began attending art school and was placed directly into the third grade. There, we mainly worked with watercolor, and only occasionally used acrylic paints and graphite pencils.

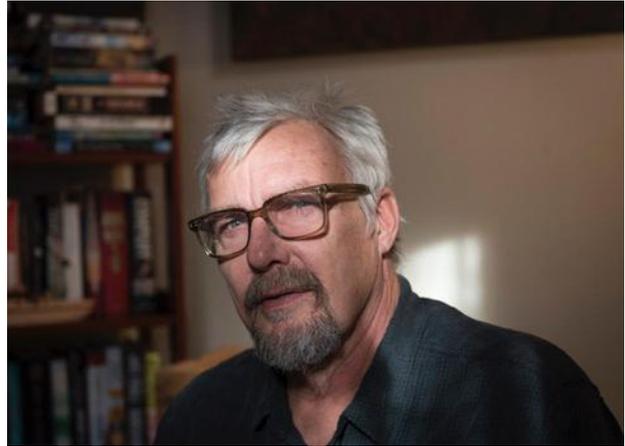
Many years have passed since then, and I continue to draw and improve my skills, as my dream of becoming a successful artist has only grown stronger. Your magazine is like a springboard for me — an opportunity to introduce myself and my art to a wider audience.

Project Statement

My painting reflects the symbol of the current year, as well as a sense of lightness, relaxation, and humor. The horse wearing glasses and a bathrobe, holding a cup of coffee, represents the spirit of a day off.



M.J. Hartwig



I do not really have a decision making process in deciding whether a subject should be addressed one way or the other. The only way I can describe it is that an idea manifests itself, generally when I am just going about my business, and that notion, then, is either in the form of something that demands to be expressed in words or as an image. In other words, the idea presents itself in the form it wants to take.

Having worked as a mariner, laborer, attorney, and farmer, how have these lived experiences shaped the philosophical foundation of your art?

We are, in my view, the sum of our experiences and knowledge. I have long held that view and, thus, although I left home and school when I was 15, I made a conscious effort to experience, read and learn as much as I could in order to expand my horizons. Experiences served to develop my voice, which was then sifted through my acquired knowledge. And, because the former have been fluid and the latter an ongoing process, my views have evolved over time. I firmly believe that true intellect is the capacity to abandon one's ego, to the extent possible; mooch and plagiarize ideas; filter them objectively; and then, allow what emerges to infuse what is already there to create something new. My experiences, in the work I have done and the life I have led, exposed me to a broad array of people in all walks of life and I have learned from all of them. I also believe, again this is my point of view, that people who have done and experienced very little, no matter how well renowned and technically talented, tend towards dogmatic outlooks and ultimately have very little of any consequence to say or create.

Your work often places political and social tension within natural or symbolic landscapes. How do you decide when a subject demands to be addressed through painting rather than words?



M.J. Hartwig | Let Them Eat Kale | 2024

Many of your paintings confront viewers with discomfort rather than reassurance. Do you see discomfort as a necessary condition for critical thinking?

Discomfort is necessary to critical thinking because if one is embarking on that course honestly, then the first casualties of that process are the ideas one has already allowed to become entrenched in one's self. This is equally true of one's audience. We humans seek security in the static universe, including worldviews, that we create for ourselves. If these are challenged with a degree of validity, it makes us feel insecure. And, if we can accept those challenges, then we can grow; if not, we become intellectually bankrupt and stagnate.

You speak about entropy and decay as natural processes.



How do you translate such abstract philosophical ideas into visual form?

I do not believe that the concept of a fluid universe is an abstract concept. It is a fundamental law of nature - that nothing remains in the same state forever. That said, and perhaps this would be less of a problem if I were a better artist, I am only capable of capturing an instant in time within a sea change and hope that the viewer can envision that it is a mere instant within an ongoing transition. Thus, I can paint a shipwreck and hope that the audience will recognize that it was once something else, a living thing, home to a crew going about their business, while plying the vessel's trade, and that it will eventually decay into even less than the moment it was captured. Or, that a painting that attempts to make a political statement raises questions about the events leading to the need to make that statement and what will ensue.

Your political works critique engineered conformity and techno-totalitarianism. Do you believe painting can meaningfully resist these forces? If so, how?

The forces at work, particularly in the western democracies, will ultimately prevail in the destruction of individual liberty interests for all, save the elite. History has proven the fragility of those few democratic systems, among which I count republics, that have ever existed on any scale. The advent of the technology, including its capacity for social engineering and the concomitant ignorance, we now see, has made it more than likely that these political systems will never again see the light of day. Hence, I can only say that while I do not believe this trend to be reversible, painting, as are other art forms, is akin to a drowning man in the middle of the ocean swimming instead of allowing himself to drown, in spite of knowing that drowning is inevitable. Hope, then, is the driving force. And, while hope is the ultimate four letter word, it nonetheless urges the will to resist even that which may be inevitable.

In several pieces, human figures appear diminished, distorted, or anonymous. What role does anonymity play in your narrative language?

We have become anonymous. The notion of individuality has been displaced by our conversion into commodities, ATM machines and useful idiots manipulated by a select few with distinctly ulterior motives. Bill Gates would have us eat "kale,"

while not foregoing the consumption of Wagyu for himself. Jeff Bezos has us buying cheap goods from China, while silencing those who point out that it is a totalitarian and genocidal state. Peter Thiel portrays himself as a "libertarian," while investing in companies that suck every bit of data imaginable about all of us into a centralized collection center. Elon Musk . . . Enough said. We now have left wing/right wing/race/gender and other political movements that garner popular support through the creation of attractive ideologies, without ever revealing the realpolitik objectives of those financing them. In the interim, we have seen the diminishment of the middle class into a distinct minority, a correlating increase in the poverty class and public polarization on a scale that far outstrips anything seen in the 1960s. This, then, is the point I am trying to make when I paint human figures that depict we the masses in my political paintings. My distortion of Gates, Bezos and Buffett, for example, in "Let Them Eat Kale" is an attempt to depict my interpretation of them as they really. Corrupt and broken and dangerous. Conversely, my diminishment of Don Quixote and Sancho Pancho in "Mierde," speaks to a lack of hope that we can, or even want to, overcome all of the foregoing.

If viewers walk away unsettled or questioning their assumptions, do you consider that a successful outcome for your work? Why or why not?

If viewers walk away feeling unsettled or questioning their assumptions then absolutely, yes, I consider this a successful outcome! The times we live in should make us feel unsettled. Let me be blunt. The political leaders we see, both on the increasingly extremes of the right and the left are not the root causes of anything. They are symptomatic of the policies and technological trends that have been in play for decades that have led us to where we are today. Thus, some form of each of these "leaders" was preordained by those trends. As a society, we have moved from responsibility to entitlement; from education aimed at teaching critical thinking to the production of "good citizens"; and, from questioning what is happening to accepting free cheese, like mice lured into a trap from which there is no escape. We have accepted that Orwell's book, "1984," is now a blueprint, rather than the warning it was meant to be. And, as AI and other forms of social media inputs increasingly infuse our assumptions, by designing the knowledge we are to have and the narratives we are to believe, we should increasingly question the foundations of those assumptions.



Alexey Vladimir

Fine art photographer based in Chisinau, Moldova. Photographer of the year 2023 in Fashion by Fotomax Moldova. Member of the Jury in 6th International Photography Awards 35AWARDS represented Moldova.

Alexey Vladimir | Ballerina | 2020





— Interview

Raven Dubh



Your work often balances darkness with tenderness. When you begin a painting, do you start from an emotion, a story, or a visual image?

I begin with an emotion rather than a fixed story or image. It's usually a quiet feeling that stays with me or something contemplative rather than explicit. The visual language develops gradually as a way of holding that emotion, allowing the painting to unfold at its own pace. I live in the West of Ireland with a view to the Atlantic Ocean



Raven Dubh with Beyond The Shadows

and I can hear the waves crashing on the rocks, This scenery brings the stories to my head and the stories to my paintings.

You describe darkness not as fear, but as calm and contemplation. What does darkness represent for you personally?

Darkness represents stillness, peace and safety for me. It's a space where emotion can exist without urgency or explanation. Rather than something to be feared, it feels grounding, a place of reflection, protection, and emotional honesty.

Many of your paintings feel like suspended moments, as if time has paused. Why are you drawn to emotional stillness rather than dramatic action?

I'm drawn to the pause like where the moment nothing is happening outwardly, but everything is felt inwardly. Stillness allows emotion to settle and deepen, giving the viewer space to connect without being directed or overwhelmed by narrative.

Ravens and solitary figures appear repeatedly in your work. What symbolic role do they play



in your visual language?

Ravens function as quiet guardians in my work like observers rather than symbols of foreboding. Solitary figures reflect introspection and inner presence. Together, they suggest awareness, protection, and a sense of calm companionship rather than isolation. Ravens also bring the story of my paintings together.

Protection, love, and loss are recurring themes in your practice. Do these themes come from personal experience, or do they evolve intuitively while painting?

They emerge from a combination of lived experience and intuition. Some themes are consciously present from the beginning, while others surface through the act of painting itself. The process often becomes a way of understanding and holding those emotions rather than defining them. My paintings have a romantic vibe and some include love whether its a Guardian protecting his love or a Painting of a book with ship and ocean are all romantic in different ways. So the story is different for every viewer.

What role do silence and space play in your creative process, both in the studio and

within the final image?

Silence is essential to my practice. It allows me to listen closely to the work as it develops. While I paint I will listen to classical orchestral music and that sound travels and guides my paintbrush to a story. Within the final image, creamy paintings I hope bring a sense of calm and openness, inviting the viewer to slow down and engage gently with the painting.

Do you hope viewers find their own stories within your paintings, or do you prefer them to sense something more open and undefined?

I hope the viewer feels held with a sense of calm. I don't aim to overwhelm or unsettle. I want the work to offer stillness, a soft place to rest emotionally. If a viewer feels seen, comforted, or momentarily removed from the noise of the world, then my painting has done its work. I hope my paintings create a quiet connection — something intimate and unspoken — where emotion is felt rather than explained, and where tenderness exists alongside darkness without fear.



Aisel Thakur is a mixed-media artist and writer living in Queens, NY. She is the founder of Moonshadow, a creative studio where spirituality, storytelling, and visual art converge. Her work draws from her Jewish heritage, Hindu spirituality, and lived experiences, weaving myth, memory, and transformation into powerful visual narratives. From bold paintings to intricate jewelry, each piece is both deeply personal and universally resonant. It is an invitation to explore cycles of change, identity, and resilience.

Project Statement

It is experience that breeds her, not the womb.



Ludwig Fernando Acero Pinzon

You describe your work as an exploration of the "fourth dimension". When did time become a central subject in your artistic research?

I started experimenting with movement, fire, and trails on the photographic negative while visiting Villa de Leyva, a colonial town in Colombia founded in 1572. That day, I took some pictures of a procession where people were holding candles. I used an analog camera. When printed, I saw people had disappeared and traces from the flames remained among the buildings. The images and the context of colonial architecture suggested that there were different realities all at once. In that moment, it felt like discovering an outer world not visible to the human eye. What I was seeing felt almost out of place. This sparked my interest and I



Ludwig Fernando Acero Pinzon | I remember my life as a motionpicture | 2010



began my exploratory journey to unveil the hidden fourth dimension and replicate it in my work.

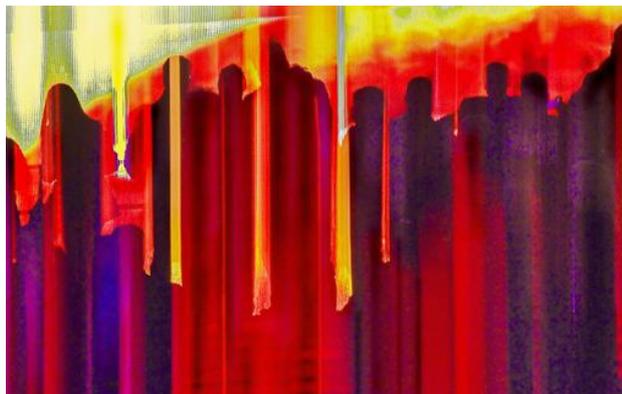
Photography is traditionally associated with freezing a moment. How do you challenge this idea and turn photography into a medium of movement and duration?

It was necessary for me to avoid attempting to freeze time. I challenge the idea of freezing a moment by using intentional camera movement, moving the camera across the scene. This brings out the contrast between stillness and movement.

I began working with an analog camera and introduced camera movement with a digital camera, which allowed me to immediately see the result. I use lenses of different focal lengths. I allow the same subject to appear many times in the same picture with a fixed background. The captured moment gives the notion that there is something happening not only now, but also before and after. It is an extended moment. Movement gives the scene the aura of a temporary event.

Light plays a crucial role in your work. How do natural and artificial light differently affect the way you perceive and construct space?

I stop down to increase the length of exposure and move the camera during the exposure. This allows the traces of light to stand as testimony of the passage of time. I accomplish this by shooting in spaces flooded with light. I prefer to shoot backlit. Light then becomes an object itself, it's not a tool to illuminate the subject. Light floods the space and stops being incidental. Objects in the resulting scenes stand out with more depth, even beyond the three dimensions. Both natural and artificial light allow me to achieve desired results. In this collection of photos, I used



artificial, colored light. Colors with artificial light are shinier, and the transition from color to color is sharper like in the case of "Flashback." However, the opposite can also be achieved. For example, in the case of "Distortion", the human bodies transform into colored light objects and almost blend into translucent layers.

Many of your images blur the boundaries between architecture, landscape, and human presence. What attracts you to these intersections?

Despite the human presence happening within the confines of a space, this also implies an opening for transformation in time. What attracts me to these intersections is the reality of my own existence being limited but also changing.

The boundaries of space are not permanent. They can be reconfigured by camera movement. As the camera moves, the composition changes, tracing a new architecture where surreal objects reveal themselves. In these new spaces the objects start to float, sometimes it seems that they are ethereal.

Architecture is a durable part of the landscape. The presence of the human body is a temporary part of the landscape. Body and architecture exist within the confines of the landscape. The landscape holds them in, imposing limits with the rules of the three dimensions. Light, color, and movement add the element of time, which is the 4th, freeing body and architecture as they intersect. For example, in "Flashback," the light in this case does not set boundaries but widens the space. The objects seem to dissolve and mix. They blend with the surroundings taking an airy nature.

The human figure appears in your work as a fleeting presence rather than a central subject. What role does the human body play in your exploration of time?

We can experience time and we can have the experience of a three-dimensional object. However, we cannot experience time in the same way. We

cannot touch it, for example. The experience of the human body is the evidence of time, that there is a past, present and future, and that the physical body will end. The human figure is the central subject in my work, although this subject appears to be fleeting. So, I pose the question, how can we experience something that is not matter in a body that is matter? Could the body even move in dimensions beyond the 4th? The human body is the medium to explore the idea that we experience dimensions beyond the three dimensions.

How have your experiences as a muralist in Colombia and Peru influenced your photographic and installation practice?

They influence one another. I try to use movement and textures, breaking the boundaries of the body. What I am currently working on in photography has been influenced by the "Mochica" culture in Peru. They used to build monumental palaces like stepped pyramids made with sun-dried mud bricks made from clay, sand, and organic materials. I take from their design elements like patterns and abstract representations of nature.

Teaching has been an important part of your career. How has teaching art shaped your own way of thinking and working as an artist?

Teaching helps my views to evolve as I am exposed to opinions and points of view from students of all ages. It is sometimes like reading a non-written book with different new messages and new faces of the same topic. I enjoy the way kids, teenagers, and adults receive new knowledge and shape their understanding. This opens new pathways to explore, to be curious, allowing questions that call to create new things.



Ludwig Fernando Acero Pinzon | Flashback | 2010

SITU Festival. Inhabiting the margins: site-specific as method and relation

Text by Viola Lo Monaco and Francesca De Chiara

In a time when places seem to dissolve into digital maps and non-places, returning to situate oneself becomes both a political and poetic stance. As Miwon Kwon writes, “To be ‘specific’ to a site is to be engaged in a dynamic definition of site, one constituted through social, political and institutional processes.”¹ Kwon’s reflections on localized artistic practices open up a fertile space for understanding the wandering trajectory of SITU Festival, a project that has chosen to inhabit the margins — not as voids to be filled, but as possible centers from which to rethink the making of art and community. In *One Place After Another*, Kwon deconstructs the notion of site-specificity, freeing it from the romantic idea of place as mere “background” or passive context. The site is instead a field of forces, a relational construct where the artwork is both situated and situating: it negotiates powers, temporalities, desires, and histories. To operate in situ, from this perspective, means to listen to the material and human ecologies of a territory, to recognize its tensions, and to act artistically as a gesture of care, cohabitation, and restitution.



With this attitude, SITU Festival—founded in 2020 by Nicola Tineo and promoted by the association Zona Blu A.P.S., together with Viola Lo Monaco and Francesca De Chiara—has been moving across Sicilian territories for six editions. A nomadic festival that, instead of rooting itself in a single place, chooses to weave a network among the island’s inland villages. Like a spider spinning its web, SITU Festival creates invisible threads between different communities—connections waiting to become enduring structures. It is a poetic yet political choice: remaining in motion allows the drawing of new cultural maps, crossing landscapes often excluded from the mainstream narrative of the contemporary. Edition after edition, SITU responds to the invitations of the communities that host it: Militello Val di Catania, Acate, Chiaramonte Gulfi, Modica, and now Ficarra.



In the heart of the Nebrodi mountains, between Palermo and Catania, the village of Ficarra hosted the festival’s sixth edition (August 18–31, 2025), transforming itself into a laboratory for experimentation and reflection on the relationship between art, place, and community. Here, the stone carved by local stonemasons, the traces of the Lancia and Piccolo di Calanovella families, the Benedictine Abbey, the Convent of the Hundred Arches, the Fortress Prison, and Palazzo Milio became not just landscape or backdrop, but living matter through which the festival reinterpreted the practice of site-specificity as a tool for territorial reactivation.

SITU festival 2025

Itinerancy: Problem or Potential?

Among the themes that continue to emerge, edition after edition, in SITU Festival’s public program, itinerancy stands out as one of its most debated and defining issues. The decision not to take root could be seen as a limitation, a potential fragility of the project; yet this choice also opens up a broader and timely reflection on how cultural systems are redefined today in peripheral and marginal territories—far from the urban centers traditionally recognized as sites of production and attraction. One might then ask: is it truly necessary to settle in a place to generate transformation? Or could it be, on the contrary, that movement itself, if carried out with attentiveness, listening, and responsibility, can produce a lasting and meaningful impact? The itinerancy of SITU Festival is configured not merely as spatial movement, but as a process of territorial weaving—a network connecting distant realities marked by depopulation, infrastructural fragility, and cultural silence, yet also by a heritage of memories and latent potential. Often criticized as a lack of rootedness, this nomadic condition actually raises a crucial question: does the capacity to generate transformation and community belong only to those who settle, or can it also arise from continuous movement—capable of making different spaces and communities dialogue, triggering new forms of proximity and relation? If we think of SITU’s practice as rhizomatic—built from below and rooted underground—its center no longer lies in static rootedness but in the ability to generate subterranean branches, to produce new nodes of encounter, and to activate developmental processes in continuous motion. In this sense, the metaphor of the spider web effectively conveys the project’s essence: it is not necessary to occupy a single point to leave traces, but to weave ties, threads, and relations that make each village a node and each encounter a living, persistent memory. As the founder explains, itinerancy also arises from the direct response of communities—from spontaneous invitations, from young people wishing to reinterpret their home, from villages eager to become co-protagonists of a shared cultural process. SITU thus becomes a practice of social and territorial dialogue, involving artisans, local administrations, agricultural producers, and residents in a coexistence that demands listening, care, and mutual responsibility. SITU’s rootedness, therefore, is not absent but diffused and decentralized: a form of presence renewed each time in different contexts—north to south, east to west across Sicily—maintaining a strong connection with every territory

it traverses. The strength of the project lies precisely in this capacity to combine decentralization and contextualization, building a cultural model that is mobile yet deeply situated.

Speaking from the Margins: The Strength of an Alternative Center

The festival's talks, gathered under the title "Starting Again from the Margins," formed the theoretical core of the event. But what does "margin" mean today? The term was not understood as a declaration of marginality, but as an open question—a lens through which to reread the contemporary art system and its hierarchies. Margin for whom? Is centrality defined by the market, or rather by the ability to generate new networks, new forms of knowledge, new ecologies of making? This question became the starting point for a broad and participatory conversation throughout the public program, exploring the notion of margin not only in a geographical sense but also as a critical and epistemological category. In a territory like Sicily—marked by strong asymmetries between center and periphery, coastal cities and inland villages, institutional networks and autonomous practices—the question "margin for whom?" opened up a fertile field of reflection. The margin emerged not as a condition of lack, but as a space of possibility: a site of misalignment with the mainstream art system, and at the same time, of freedom, experimentation, and self-definition. Conversations with guests—including Fondazione Oelle, Fondazione Brodbeck, the duo Aterraterra, artist Diego Miguel Mirabella, Studio La Siringe, curator Mario Bronzino, Daniela Bigi, Fondazione Studio Rizoma, Gianluca Collica, and Mauro Cappotto—highlighted the need to rethink models of curatorship, sustainability, and transmission capable of rooting themselves in both time and territory: sensitive commissions, distributed collecting, and non-extractive alliances among artists, institutions, and citizens. It was not about finding immediate answers, but about formulating new questions: How can we build a cultural ecology that does not exhaust itself in the event? How can we sustain an artistic practice that does not occupy but inhabits places? And above all, how can these processes continue without falling into the rhetoric of "regeneration," truly challenging the hierarchies of value that shape art, territory, and community? In this sense, Ficarra, site of the most recent edition, functioned not only as a case study but as a possible archetype of a polycentric and relational Sicily, where margins cease to be peripheries to fill and instead become critical, generative nodes from which to rethink the cultural system as a whole.



Ficarra: A Permanent Laboratory

Within SITU's wandering journey, the stop in Ficarra was not just another point along the route but an encounter with a context already rich in layered artistic and cultural experiences. Since the 1980s, the village has hosted central figures of contemporary art such as Massimo Bartolini, Urs Lüthi, Lois Weinberger, Mark Kremer, and Atlas Projectos, gradually building a shared memory of hospitality and experimentation. In this context, collaboration with La Stanza della Seta—an artistic residency project active since the 1980s and recently reactivated by Mauro Cappotto—represented a natural convergence. While SITU was conceived as a nomadic festival activating marginalized territories through site-specific practices, La Stanza della Seta stands as one of Sicily's earliest examples of artistic hospitality rooted in deep engagement with context. Both initiatives share a non-decorative vision of contemporary art: not as a tool of territorial promotion, but as a form of knowledge, intervention, and transformation.



ROSSANA LA VERDE | Ho provato a dare peso al dolore che mi hai donato | SITU Festival 2025

The artists in residence interpreted this vision through works that dialogued with the materials, stories, and people of the village: Margot Kalach, with Olio Lampante, transformed oil barrels into pinhole cameras, offering the Oil Museum a sensory and autobiographical portrait of the “City of Oil”; Rosa Frazzica and Gregorio Vignola, with Stone Knows, created a process-sculpture in the courtyard of Palazzo Busacca, intertwining stone, iron, and water into a secular altar to manual labor and everyday spirituality; Alessia Talò, with Soft Points and Stone Roads, reimagined crochet as a participatory gesture, transforming the windows of the former fish market into a relational archive; Rossana La Verde, with I Tried to Give Weight to the Pain You Gave Me, performed an act of memory and care within the Fortress Prison, burdening her body with olive pits as symbols of weight and lineage; Camila Curiel, with Maybe There's God, Maybe It's Me, built a perceptual path between reality and illusion, using a green-screen veil as a threshold between public space and imagination; Silvia Muscolino, with Goodbye, evoked the presence of female figures from the past in an impossible gathering, intertwining domestic memory and collective ritual; and Nicola Tineo, with 98062, paid homage to Lucio Piccolo, evoking with feathers and chains the tension between lightness and grounding, poetry and imprisonment.

These experiences reveal key constants: the use of local and humble materials as vectors of memory, the relationship with inhabitants as a condition of authenticity, and the preference for hybrid formats (installation, performance, documentation) that resist the commercial logic of the art object. All of this makes SITU less a showcase festival and more a project of cultural infrastructure. Here, the works do not decorate Ficarra—they inhabit it, question it, and listen to it. Site-specificity thus becomes a practice of knowledge and restitution, where the artist is both guest and interpreter, and the territory becomes medium. Not a technique, but an ethics: a way of inhabiting places, listening to their stories, and reactivating their memory. In this light, the experience of Contemporary Divan, also in Ficarra and promoted by Cappotto, aligns closely: a platform for dialogue among artists, curators, scholars, and residents that, like SITU, places the material and immaterial landscape of the village at the center as a source of meaning. The convergence between SITU's nomadism and La Stanza della Seta's local genealogy has given rise to a shared laboratory where experiences, visions, and networks overlap. On one hand, SITU found in Ficarra a place not to “activate” but already alive, carrying kindred practices; on the other, its presence revitalized and amplified the relational and



Nicola Tineo | SITU Festival 2025

polycentric vocation of contemporary art in the village. SITU worked among the streets, courtyards, shop windows, and museum spaces of Ficarra's Museo Diffuso, collaborating with local entities such as Lenzo Winery and the broader social and productive fabric of the town. The festival did not invent places; it reactivated them, giving new voice to existing spaces and transforming the everyday into a stage—the margin into an alternative center of meaning. In this way, Ficarra becomes the point where SITU's itinerant path roots itself without becoming fixed—an example of inter-territorial cultural ecology capable of connecting past and present, local and global, art and life. In Ficarra, the process was not one of regeneration, but of reactivation—of ties between materials and memories, between artists and community, between public and private.

In a village that speaks through its stones and its memories, SITU has not planted flags but threads. Each work, each exchanged word, each artistic gesture has been a stitch between past and present, between art and life, between what is invisible and what may yet happen. The challenge emerging from Ficarra is to think of site-specific not as exception, but as method: a way of producing culture from the places, stories, and people who inhabit them. In this sense, the margin is not the opposite of the center—it is the space where the center can be reimagined, where culture is not consumed but constructed, through time and relation. Here, the festival—understood as the closing moment of a residency process—does not signify an ending, but opens a threshold, an expanded time in which dialogue continues, works endure, and communities reclaim their own narratives. In Sicily, the margin is not a limit but a point of departure: the place from which to rethink culture as a shared and transformative practice. SITU Festival is its moving laboratory—a device that unites, listens, and restores meaning to the territories it traverses.



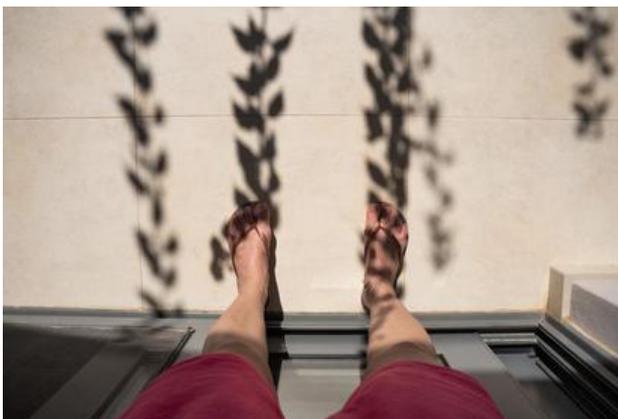
Silvia Muscolino | Goodbye. Annina, Bimba, Carmela, Concetta, Macalda, Sofonisba, Viridimura

— Interview

Nelli Polle-Zengin



Your project *Longing / Between Worlds* is deeply personal. At what moment did you realize that this journey back to Kazakhstan had to become an artistic project, not just a private experience?



Even before the trip. I had long dreamed of being able to fly back to my homeland. Finally, I had the opportunity to do it, and immediately thought: I want to document this with photographs. Originally, I thought I could tell the story of the so-called Russian Germans. But those around me convinced me to tell my own story instead.

You speak about living "between two worlds" - the past and the present. How do you personally feel this tension today, after so many years in Germany?

I still dream of my homeland, even though I left Kazakhstan almost 34 years ago. I am constantly drawn back there. I visit Russian grocery stores and look for my favorite products, listen to old songs loudly and play them for my children. I am passionate about my homeland; whenever the word Kazakhstan comes up, I go crazy—at least that's what my children say.

Memory plays a central role in your work. How do photographs help you preserve, reinterpret, or even challenge your own memories?



Photos are the best memories for me. That's why I like to photograph other people and capture moments in their lives. That's how I create their memories. I keep my old photos and photos of my parents and grandparents like a precious treasure. The fact that I take photos today has opened up a new, priceless opportunity for me: to portray the world around me as I really see it. I have rediscovered the nature of Kazakhstan. As a teenager, I didn't have the opportunity to travel. On this trip, I traveled with my friends to some natural treasures so that I could show the beauty and diversity of my home country.

Returning to your birthplace after 28 years must have been emotionally intense. Was there a moment during this journey that changed your perception of "home"?

Oh yes, very emotional. As I sat on the plane, I wrote down my feelings in my little notebook: "My heart feels an indescribable power. Power that can move mountains. Power that comes from the call of home. Longing. Dreams mingle with reality..." My perception of "home" was not changed, but rather confirmed. When I entered my best friend's parents' apartment after three decades, I saw that it had remained exactly as I had last seen it. An inexplicable energy flowed through my body: joy, incomprehensibility, sadness, longing, but also happiness and a lot of love. Even the old rotary dial telephone was still there. I couldn't utter a word. I had the desire to experience the same moments as I had in my childhood and youth. So I had my picture taken drinking water from the tap in the bathroom, lying on the familiar bed with the carpet on the wall, drinking tea at the familiar little kitchen table, racing down the stairs like a rocket, and so on... When I look at my pictures from that summer today, I always feel the same thing: I want to go back!

In this project, you photograph not only places but also people who shaped your life. How did your personal relationship with them influence the way you photographed them?

It was absolute trust. I was able to take photos without words, without tension, and on the same energetic level (is there such a thing? 😊). When I told those around me about my project, everyone was always willing to help me: friends, teachers, neighbors, family friends, people I knew and strangers. That's why it was easy and very enjoyable for me.

Your images balance between documentary photography and emotional storytelling. How do you decide when to observe quietly and when to intervene artistically?

I almost always began by documenting a particular scene. I only intervened when I saw that my influence could deepen it. I added my artistic ideas through positioning, lighting, shifting attention to something specific, enriching or reducing the scene. My friends always showed patience and trust. They just let me do my thing. My enthusiasm was contagious. They had fun because I was having fun.

Migration, displacement, and longing are global themes today. What kind of emotional response do you hope viewers will have when they encounter your work?

The connection through their own experience, interest in a completely different life, and/or understanding of people who had to leave their homeland behind. A Ukrainian colleague saw my pictures and said, "For the first time, I feel like I want to go home. My heart is pounding. I feel a sense of longing." I smiled broadly. Because that was exactly the feeling I wanted to convey with my work.



Vitalii Zelenko

In his artistic practice, the author follows an academic tradition; his primary medium is sculpture - working with material, its form, and texture. He explores themes of contemplation, unity with nature, memory, and motherhood. Through continuity with classical models, careful material selection, and continuous work from life, he investigates ways of representing and reinterpreting genre sculpture in a contemporary context. The entire creative process - from material preparation to final painting - is carried out by the artist himself.

Vitalii Zelenko | From the series Alone, sculpture | 2025





VZ

— Interview

Vito Antonio Lerario

Many of your portraits feel theatrical, almost staged. How important is storytelling and dramaturgy in your figurative works?

The theatricality in my portraits is not accidental, but a deliberate choice born from my direct experience in the theater. I've worked on building identities in the theater, and this has taught me to think in terms of paintings, in terms of dramatic compositions.

Dramaturgy is fundamental to me: every portrait is a stage photograph. I work extensively on composition, on light, which is my primary narrative tool.

However, my theatrical approach remains spare, free of frills. I believe in essentiality: by eliminating the superfluous, I can get to the heart of a person's identity, to what I truly want to emerge.

Vito Antonio Lerario | Fuga a Notre Dame



This search for essence has taught me to trace the power of images with just a few strokes, creating a strong visual impact. I don't want to decorate or embellish—I want to delve into, reveal. "Staging" paradoxically becomes a way of stripping away, to reach the subject's truth through a few powerful and necessary elements.

You work across many fields - fashion design, tailoring, photography, illustration, performance, and curation. How do these disciplines inform and enrich one another in your practice?

I'm a multifaceted person by nature, and I believe this multiplicity isn't a source of dispersion, but rather a source of enrichment. All the fields in which I work—fashion design, tailoring, photography, illustration, performance, curation—are deeply intertwined and constantly interact in my practice.

This interdisciplinarity allows me to have a comprehensive vision of aesthetics: I can curate every aspect of an image or project, from costume construction to lighting, from performative gesture to visual composition. I never have to delegate my vision; I can control it entirely.



The result is images that appear constructed—because indeed they are, in every detail—but which at the same time emerge naturally. This naturalness comes precisely from the fluidity with which I move from one discipline to the other: they are not separate compartments, but different tools of the same language. Tailoring teaches me precision, photography composition, illustration the synthesis of the sign, performance the body and movement, curation the overall view. Everything comes together in a single artistic vision.

Fashion illustration plays a central role in your career. What can fashion teach contemporary figurative art that traditional fine art sometimes overlooks?

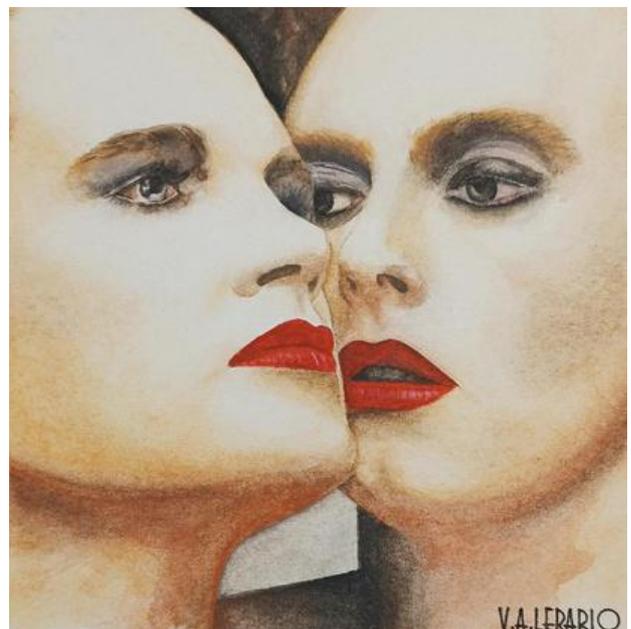
Fashion can teach contemporary figurative art a great deal, especially an attention to detail that is often overlooked in traditional art. Clothing is a fundamental part of a subject's, a person's, identity. It should never be overlooked because the color of a garment, the shape of a garment, convey very specific messages. Even in works of art with the most essential compositions, the clothing worn by the portrayed

subject certainly has an impact on its shape and color—it shouldn't be overlooked altogether, because these elements also communicate precise messages to the viewer. Fashion illustration has taught me an almost obsessive precision: every detail counts. The drape of a fabric, the way light strikes a surface, the relationship between body and clothing, between form and material—these elements are not embellishments, but a true language. I am convinced that in contemporary art, the attention paid to clothing is fundamental. All artists should pay more attention to this, because neglecting clothing means losing a very powerful narrative tool for expressing the subject's identity.

Your watercolor portraits, especially of women, balance technical rigor with emotional intensity. How do you approach the tension between control and spontaneity?

Watercolor is a technique that by its very nature imposes this dialogue between control and spontaneity, and it is precisely this tension that fascinates me.

The technical rigor in my work stems from my training: my background in design, in the construction of clothing identities, and in fashion illustration have taught me precision, the ability to plan every element. I approach watercolor with a clear idea, with a careful study of



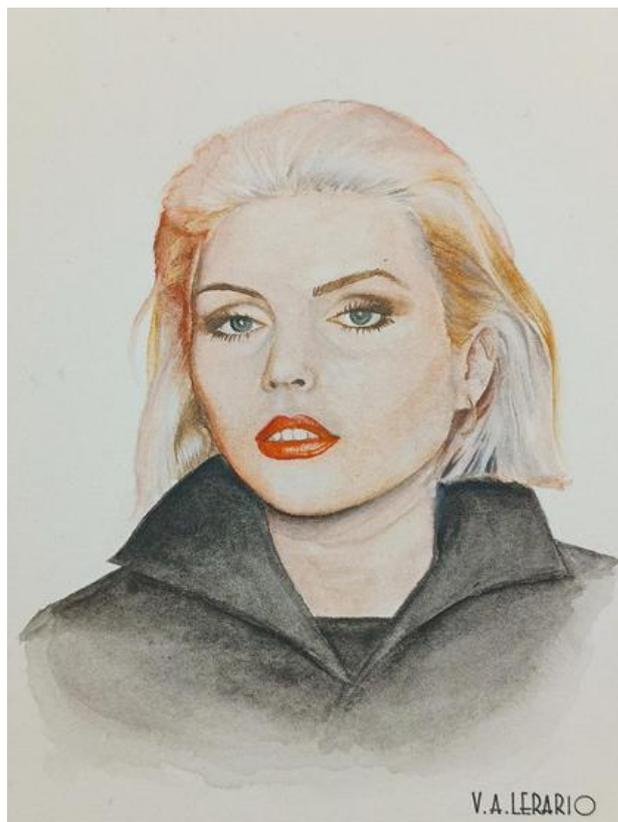
composition, light, and volumes. But watercolor is unforgiving—and doesn't allow you to control everything. There comes a moment when you have to let the water, the pigment, and the paper dialogue with each other. You have to accept the unexpected, the unpredictability of the material. And it is precisely in this space, between what I planned and what happens spontaneously, that emotional intensity is born.

In female portraits, I always seek this truth: a balance between rigorous structure—the shape of the face, the anatomy, the light—and the free, instinctive gesture that captures something ineffable and intimate. Control gives me form, spontaneity gives me soul.

It's a precarious balance, but a necessary one.

As a teacher at Ideacademy in Bari, how do you encourage students to find their own balance between formal discipline and expressive freedom?

As a teacher at Ideacademy in Bari, I try to pass on to my students what I've learned from my practice: that discipline and freedom are not opposed, but rather nourish each other. I always start with the technical foundations—



Vito Antonio Lerario | Blondie

drawing, understanding anatomy, studying light, and knowing materials. I firmly believe that without a solid formal discipline, there can be no true freedom of expression. It's like learning grammar before writing poetry: you need to know the rules to then adapt them to your own personal language.

But at the same time, I encourage my students not to be afraid of mistakes, the unexpected, or instinctive gestures. I push them to find their voice, to understand what they want to say through images, what identity they want to build or reveal.

Every student has a different balance: some need more structure, others more freedom. My role is to help them recognize where they are and where they want to go, providing them with the technical tools but also the confidence to experiment.

Ultimately, I teach them the same process I experience every day in front of paper.

How has teaching influenced your own artistic practice and way of thinking about image-making?

Teaching has profoundly transformed my way of working. It forced me to verbalize processes that



Vito Antonio Lerario | Elvira



were intuitive to me, to make conscious gestures that I used to make automatically. When you have to explain to someone why you choose a certain light or how you construct an identity through clothing, you are forced to question your own method.

This has made me a more aware artist. I learned to look at my work with different eyes, to recognize my stylistic choices, to understand where my aesthetic comes from. Teaching is a form of continuous self-analysis.

Furthermore, students constantly challenge me. Their questions, their points of view, even their mistakes, open up new perspectives. They force me to take nothing for granted, to question established certainties. It's a precious exchange: I pass on technique and discipline to them, and they restore freshness and curiosity to me. Teaching has taught me to be more rigorous in my work, but also more open. It's a dialogue that enriches both parties.

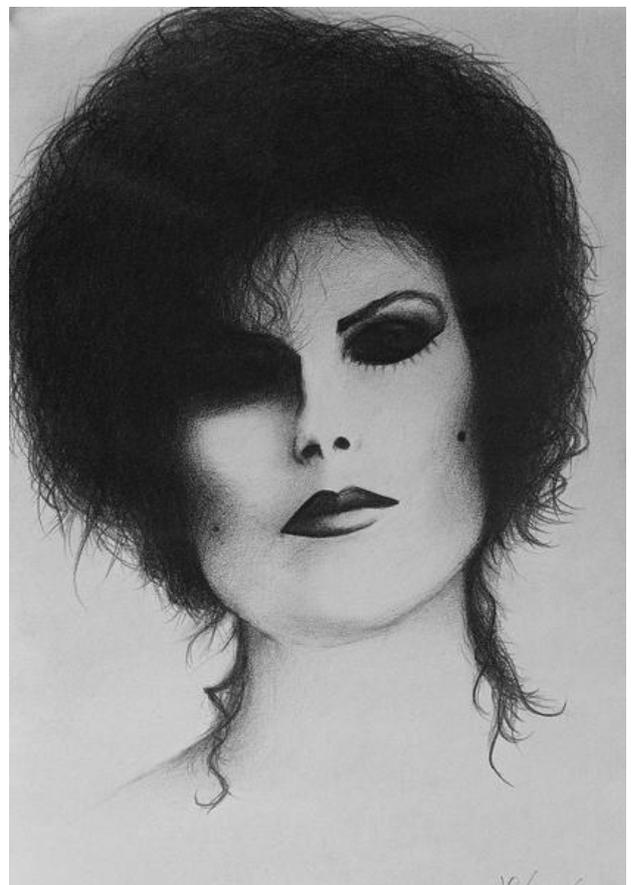
Your work often explores metamorphosis - physical, emotional, or symbolic. Why is transformation such a recurring theme for you?

Metamorphosis is at the heart of my work because I deeply believe that identity is never fixed, but always evolving.

My work with costumes and clothing has taught me that dressing is already an act of metamorphosis: when you put on a dress, you become someone else, or rather, you reveal a different aspect of yourself. In theater, this transformation is explicit—the actor becomes a character—but I believe it happens continuously, even in everyday life.

In my portraits, I try to capture precisely this: not a static identity, but a moment of transformation, a transition. I'm interested in instability, the tension between what one is and what one is becoming, between concealing and revealing. Even technically, watercolor is a technique of continuous metamorphosis: the water transforms the pigment, the paper absorbs and modifies, nothing is ever completely under control. There is always an element of unpredictable mutation.

Ultimately, painting metamorphosis is my way of saying that none of us is ever complete, never definitive. We are all works in progress – and it is precisely in this incompleteness that I find the most authentic beauty.



Ulrich Jacquot-Préaux

Born in 1977, Sculi lives and works in Montfaucon in the southern Aisne region of France. His studio is surrounded by nature. He is a free-spirited, self-taught artist. He has been creating art since the age of 14. He began exhibiting his work in 1995 and was immediately encouraged and supported by the artists and art lovers he met.

Sculi explores every material available to him, every work of art or thought he encounters. Sculi wants to discover art, and particularly visual art.

His work reflects a journey he shares with as many people as possible, using the medium of art. What is captivating about his work is its universal appeal. From the beginning, he has strived for his creations to reflect this philosophy: to be understood without any explanation, not even a title.

From 1994 to 2013, Sculi explored stone, wood, and metal.

For him, an artist must always move forward in their creative process; they cannot remain fixed in a single style. Artists must constantly evolve: technique and materials are merely tools. Changing them means questioning oneself, opening up new possibilities, and discovering a new language. Consequently, his work is open, with variations in style across a multitude of materials.

The common thread in Sculi's work is his commitment to the planet and the elevation of the spirit.

In 2013, his encounter with resin and fiber optics inspired a study of humankind, which he sees as made of light and energy. This led to "Nitescent Flux," his current project.

In this project, he aims to utilize every art form: volume, color, sound, light, digitization, and scenography. In exhibitions, the artworks take on a unique dynamic, transforming the exhibition itself into an installation.

In these works, Sculi composes with color using pigments he mixes with resin. He doesn't seek color harmony but rather the creation of energy, although with practice his eye has become more refined, and he creates his own harmonies.

Fiber optics allows for the generation of light within the artwork in a permanent way. The light is generated by an LED placed in the base of the piece, which is easily replaceable, thus simplifying maintenance. The fiber optics are guaranteed for life, unlike the lamps or LEDs embedded in other sculptures.

The fiber optics are installed in such a way as to keep pace with the technological evolution of light generators.

And it is for this reason that Sculi confidently integrated fiber optics into his work using a proprietary technique, registered with the INPI (French National Institute of Industrial Property), and unique in the world.

2017, from anthropomorphism, the forms become vegetal, or vegemorphic.

In 2019, the avant-garde work transitioned to experimental, reflecting the evolving state of thought, form, materials, and techniques.

In 2020, Sculi intensified his studies in cosmology and created his first cosmomorphic works.

In 2021, he began his first experiments with light sculpture, a long-standing project. The artist sought to give specific forms to the optical fiber he was working with, resulting in his light drawings.

By 2025, Sculi's work had become a profound, multi-layered exploration, creating a unique dialogue through its forms and colors, worked in interactive layers. His light drawings are visible day and night, constantly revealing the secrets of each piece's composition.



Ulrich Jacquot-Préaux | Twist



— Interview

Felicitas Yang

Growing up between Chinese and German cultures in Paris, how has this multicultural background shaped the way you observe and represent places through photography?

Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz describes cosmopolitanism in Cultural Complexity as more than the idea of existing beyond a single society or nation — it is a willingness to engage with the “Other.” I can intimately relate to this in the context I grew up in. It taught me that cultural identity is never fixed but fluid, and that every place contains multiple cultural interconnections. As a result, I developed a slightly distanced way of looking at things; that feeling of always being a little bit of an outsider never really left me.

There’s a part in *The Keeper of Sheep* by Fernando Pessoa that goes: “From my village I see as much as from earth one can see of the Universe... Therefore my village is as big as any other earth, because I am



Felicitas Yang | Go-Between | 2025

the size of what I see, and not the size of my own height...” Growing up in a place neither of my parents are from while juggling between languages is like living in a village of its own — a “floating village,” slightly removed from everything. Pessoa’s poem implies that reality is measured through one’s perception, which isn’t limited by physical constraints. It is like a limb: the more you stretch it, the farther it can reach.

Photography works the same way. It’s not about documenting any given subject as it is “supposed” to appear, but about observing it without assumptions. In that sense, the way I photograph places is intimately linked to my upbringing: I am always observing, never entirely inside, never entirely outside. There’s a word I really like: immanence (as opposed to transcendence). It refers to meaning and experience emerging from being fully present in the world, without looking to an external or transcendent notion — a kind of lucidity without metaphysical consolation. Photography can accept the world’s indifference and embrace it; it can show that the world is exactly enough and become a way to situate oneself perceptually and register what is present without projecting something beyond it.

You initially wanted to become a painter and later studied film directing. How does your cinematic education continue to influence your photographic practice today?

Watching movies, I became increasingly interested in the work of filmmakers who like to linger. Leaning into stillness and duration is a way to exercise our attention. I used to think that a moving camera automatically made an image more compelling. But with time, I’ve come to perceive most camera moves as superfluous, usually there to dazzle rather than serve the narrative. This



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gradual disinterest toward movement is, paradoxically, what developed my respect for photography. Its static nature asks something else of the viewer: you're incited to study the image as opposed to letting yourself be entertained. In that sense, the relationship becomes more active. We allow for the majority of video content to happen to us; it's an often passive relationship we turn to for comfort. Photographs, on the other hand, demand attention. Filmmakers like Chantal Akerman, Yasujiro Ozu, or Abbas Kiarostami resist the use of artifice in their work and explore a more sustained kind of attention.

Photography naturally contains this restraint: it can't rely on movement, so it has to communicate through more subtle or conceptual means. Ultimately, I think all practices influence one another. Today, I still make short films with my partner, Armando Milano, and photography and film constantly inform one another. Film taught me how to look at photographs, and photography, in turn, has taught me how to think about time in film.

You work exclusively with analog photography. What does shooting on film allow you to express that digital photography does not?

Shooting on film is as much about principle as it is about expression. Analog demands an

attentiveness and technical awareness that digital rarely does. More importantly, it keeps me from being greedy: I cannot rely on taking fifty shots to get one good image. Each choice must be deliberate. The process slows one down, which creates a tangible connection to the specific time and place of the photograph.

Choosing restraint over excess, slowness over speed, is my way of resisting what Paul Virilio calls dromocracy — the rule of speed. Virilio argues that modern life, accelerated by technology, constantly compresses our perception, making us more reactive than deliberative. Digital images contribute to this by erasing the subtle transitions between moments. The image appears all at once and skips the very passage of time that gives experiences their depth. This is the disappearance of duration. Analog, by contrast, ties the image to a physical process, allowing it to embody the lived experience. Jean Baudrillard's analysis of Disneyland complements this idea: even neutral, transitional spaces — like the theme park's parking lot — are absorbed into the spectacle and emptied of their mediating function: "You park outside, queue up inside, and are totally abandoned at the exit... inside, a whole range of gadgets magnetise the crowd into direct flows; outside, solitude is directed onto a single gadget: the automobile." This idea of being abandoned at the exit illustrates how

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the “in-between” disappears because it’s made inconsequential.

Shooting on film is stating that you care about the parking lot. It allows me to reclaim that in-between, that passage of time and the breadth of perception. In that sense, using film can emphasize immanence because it creates a direct relation to the world, reminding us that the world exists prior to and independently of its representation.

In Go-Between, the project began after a seven-year absence and the loss of your grandmother. How did grief and time shape the way you approached photographing these places?

My grandmother passed away during COVID. Less than 48 hours following her passing, her body had been incinerated and her ashes sent home in the hands of my cousin, uncle, and aunt. Efficiency is not compatible with grieving. The day she passed, my father tried to hide how upset he was. To this day, he’s never expanded on the matter. Since the pandemic robbed us of our capacity to mourn her, it charged a return with the weight of loss. This created a sense of urgency to record what was familiar in case it would disappear. The camera became an insurance of remembrance as well as a form of protection: the physical elements of the camera — the viewfinder, the mirror, the shutter, the lens — acting as filters and introducing a layer of separation that creates space for reflection.

Many of your images feel suspended between movement and stillness. How do you think about time when composing your photographs?

When composing an image, I’m constantly negotiating with time. How long am I exposing it for? When is the right moment to press the shutter? I used to work a lot as a focus puller. Time was always of the essence: you’re pulling focus alongside the actors’ movements. Taking photos with an analog camera is very similar. I love the challenge of photographing things in movement, notably events and dance performances. It’s silly, but getting an analog photograph of a moving subject in focus gives me a ridiculous sense of accomplishment.

From a less practical standpoint, I think of time as deeply subjective and reliant on each individual’s perception. That being said, modern life’s velocity will often come to destabilize the natural rhythms of our personal perception. In *Science and Sanity*, philosopher Alfred Korzybski observed a cognitive



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mismatch arising from the speed of technological advancements, saying that modern communication allows us to act faster than we can fully process. As a countermeasure, he proposed a type of semantic training designed to slow down mental processing to keep pace with reality.

Similarly, Paul Virilio argues that modern vision is no longer human vision but machine vision — that cameras, radar, satellites, and screens have come to replace direct perception (or immanence). The way media is presented on social platforms, for instance, is within spaces where time and attention are fully mediated and vision is commodified. As a photographer, I’m implicated in that system but feel the need to resist it. I like to think about my practice as using images to resist the regime of images.

You often use telephoto lenses to isolate details and blur context. What draws you to this visual strategy, and how does it relate to memory and perception?

I used long lenses a lot in the past, specifically for series like *Windsong* or *I Wanted to Call but Nobody Answered*. Our perception shapes our memory, and we often remember very specific details that may seem insignificant to others. A long lens doesn’t just isolate details; it compresses space and channels focus. This allows a subject to appear bigger and amplifies its importance. For this series, however, I changed my approach by using (but not exclusively) wide lenses. This was to see more of the spaces — there was this underlying notion for me that the camera would allow me to revisit memories of things that were likely to disappear the next time I’d be there.

Human perception is deceptively fallible, which is why I feel as though I can rely on my camera to “set the record straight.” Photos will often show us more or something different from what we initially thought we saw. This is why I believe that taking a



photo is inseparable from the process of selection. It's an additional filter that allows me to reassert my intent as an artist. I'm cautious discussing photographers whose selections weren't their own — like Vivian Maier, whose photos were published and sold without her consent, removing her narrative control.

For me, the selection process is what Owen Knowles calls a "re-entry into past experience." In his introduction to Joseph Conrad's *Congo Diary*, Knowles observes that literature is an imaginative re-engagement with the past to pursue a more impersonal but human truth. In photography, the delay between shooting and reviewing creates the same re-engagement and thus allows for insight and deliberation. The act of looking and then selecting from what we've perceived is where agency emerges and where choices really matter.

Returning to a place that no longer matches one's memory can be disorienting. Did the act of photographing help you reconnect, or did it emphasize the distance you felt?

It did both. Photographing helped me process the experience, but it could also act as a barrier

between myself and what I was looking at. The camera can be a distraction, at times an obstacle. Photographing can be aggressive because of its intrusive nature. But it can also be gentle. I feel as though we don't focus enough on the kindness that can ensue from someone else's viewpoint. I believe that if a photographer has love in their heart, it will seep through. Chantal Akerman, for instance, has a very kind eye. She pays attention to what is easily ignored and lingers generously. Her work suggests that attention itself can be a form of care. In her memoir, *My Mother Laughs*, she writes: "I listen to her laugh. She laughs over nothing. But this nothing means a lot." The "nothing" is everything. Attention becomes a doorway to empathy, and truly looking at something requires patience and respect, which can contribute to expanding one's sensibilities. Carl Jung speaks of "individuation," integrating opposing parts of oneself to reach internal coherence (or peace). A camera can direct attention, both outward (toward the subject) and inward (at oneself). For this particular project, it became a compass to navigate my emotions and anchor myself to the places and people I encountered, to ground and situate myself in the world, and assert my position in regard to the past.

Alessio Bonini (Genoa, 1986) is a visual artist and contemporary art theorist. His research spans neuroscience, phenomenology and metaphysics, converging in his concept of Adimensionalism — a pictorial language that explores the perceptual thresholds between internal and external space, between the visible and the invisible. His work explores how colour, matter and gesture are organised as states of consciousness, translating mental and perceptual processes into visual structures.

Trained at the Art School in La Spezia, Bonini began painting at the age of four in the studio of his maternal grandfather Franco Giuseppe Rossi (aka Francus), a historical figure who collaborated with Warhol, Lichtenstein, Fontana, Tacchi and Mattiacci, protagonists of the Genoese scene between 1966 and the early 1970s at the Galleria La Bertesca. His long and intense mentorship with Francus, which lasted until the master's death, formed the foundation of his aesthetic education and his orientation towards freedom of expression.

In the following years, he explored the dimension of gesture and dripping with the painter M. Bertonati, while experimenting with materials and techniques in ceramics, bookbinding and leatherworking workshops. At the same time, he devoted himself to the independent study of philosophy, neuroscience, colour therapy, visual semiotics, art psychology, aesthetics and neuroaesthetics, elements that converge in his interdisciplinary approach.

At sixteen, he reached a turning point that would definitively shape his research: he abandoned hyperrealism to explore perception as an inner, intangible phenomenon, the origin of his journey towards abstraction and the principle of dimensionlessness.

In 2018, he founded the Carneviola Art Gallery, which he directed for four years, subsequently evolving into the travelling platform Art-Hub.it — still active today as a space dedicated to curation, training and the fusion of visual arts and new technologies. During the same period, he conceived the Onirica Film Festival, officially founded in 2019, of which he is still the artistic director. The festival aims to be an observatory on the image as an expanded experience, a meeting point between visual art and cinema in the realm of dreams and perception.

Among the most representative projects of his research are Eterna, an investigation into the relationship between energy flows, neural networks and wind, in which atmospheric movement is translated into a constantly changing perceptual network; and the performance Percorsi Sensoriali (Sensory Pathways), in which he converts sound frequencies into chromatic correspondences, transforming the auditory experience into a visual phenomenon.

These experiments testify to his desire to fuse languages and disciplines, where art, science and philosophy are integrated into a single experience of expanded consciousness.

Among his most significant awards and appearances: - Mention at Miami Art Basel – Spectrum Pavilion (2023) – Publication in the volume *The Evolution of Modern Art between the 20th and 21st Centuries*, archived at the T.J. Watson Library of the MET in New York – Inclusion in the volume *Masters of Contemporary Art*, in collaboration with Sony and Warner Bros – Participation in the performance *Life Uninterrupted* with G. H. Rabbath (2018)

In 2024, he presented his solo exhibition *Arabesque Mantra* at the Galleria Civico 1 in Carrara, considered the most mature outcome of his investigation into the relationship between gesture, harmony and colour perception. For Bonini, art is a form of expanded consciousness, an act that dissolves the boundaries of the visible to access dimensions where soul and matter coincide. It is the place where vision is transformed into presence, and presence into light.

Project Statement

Bonini's art recounts slices of real life, moments in which all perceptions are connected to the Universe in a symbiotic relationship between soul and environment.

Wild and primitive existence violates what the eyes feed on, dissecting absolute truths.

The profound feeling of a timeless reality that involves and disrupts the journey he makes on this earth.

An artistic journey that feeds on visions, philosophy and matter to transform itself into a unique and recognisable language, capable of changing perception and awakening the gaze.



Alessio Bonini | Othello



— Interview

C Bangs

Your practice brings together art, science, and space exploration. Do you remember the moment when these fields first merged for you personally?

This began when I entered graduate school and was asked to make a piece based on the Voyager Message Plaque. It became work I would continue to do when I met my husband, Dr. Gregory Matloff who is an astrophysicist. As well I had a 15 year dialogue with a quantum consciousness physicist, Dr. Evan Harris Walker whose equations and key phrases I used in my paintings with his permission.

C Bangs | Dragonfly astrolabe star



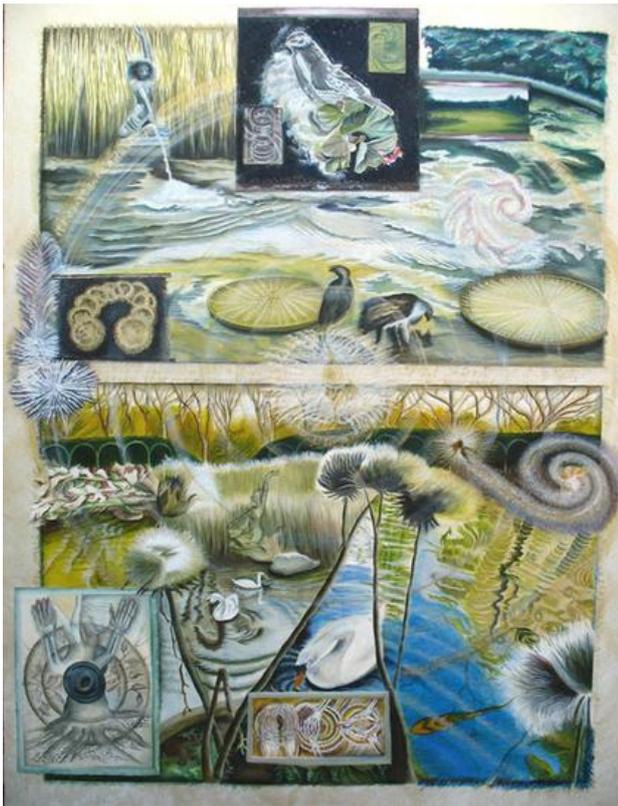
C Bangs | Treeskeletonme

You work with both traditional media and highly experimental technologies like holography and retroreflective materials. How do you decide which medium is right for a particular idea?

I began working with holography in 2000 when I was hired to construct a prototype holographic interstellar message plaque at NASA's Marshall Spaceflight Center to demonstrate holographic application for solar sails. I worked with my husband to test holograms for use in space. All my holographic work has to do with applications for use in space. The retroreflective materials were sent to me for use with Cornell's Alpha CubeSat so it would increase the ability to view them in space.

Many of your works are not just representations of space, but are physically connected to real space missions. How does knowing that your holograms are orbiting Earth change your relationship to the artwork?

It makes me very conscious on how to optimize them for the particular space mission they are planned for. The fact that my holograms are



orbiting the Earth makes me very grateful to have the opportunity to be part of the important mission conceived by Cornell University's Prof. Mason Peck and the current Program Manager, Dr. Josh Umansky-Castro titled Alpha CubeSat. This mission consisted of having my holograms affixed to Alpha CubeSat that contained a folded up solar sail with chipsats that communicated with Earth upon deployment.

The Holographic Messages project proposes art as a message carried beyond Earth. What do you think art can communicate to non-human or extraterrestrial intelligence that language cannot?

Visual images are a more universal language but we must also take into consideration how extraterrestrial intelligence could perceive an object which is why the Voyager message plaque consisted of the golden record.

Your work often exists at the intersection of aesthetics and engineering. What kinds of challenges arise when collaborating with scientists and aerospace engineers, and what do you enjoy most about that dialogue?

During the Renaissance many artists were

trained as engineers. My father was an engineer and so I was used to approaching problem solving in that way at an early age. I enjoy exchanges with scientists and aerospace engineers because it makes the most sense to me as a way of approaching a problem.

Nature, insects, and organic forms frequently appear in your imagery alongside cosmic and technological elements. What draws you to these biological motifs in relation to space?

As Carl Sagan said we are star-stuff and part of your understanding of the cosmos is grounded in the realization of this.

If one of your holographic messages were discovered far in the future, what question would you hope it might inspire rather than answer?

I would hope that it would make sense to whoever was viewing it.



Kowalski Art (Nicola Peruzzi)

Kowalski is the pseudonym of Italian artist Nicola Peruzzi. His practice operates within contemporary figurative and conceptual art, focusing on themes of memory, childhood, and collective identity. Through iconic and symbolic figures, often drawn from the imagery of toys and everyday objects, he constructs silent narratives that explore the tension between fragility and responsibility, the individual and society.

His visual language combines strong narrative elements with conceptual reflection, creating works in which apparent formal simplicity carries emotional and universal meanings. Kowalski also employs artificial intelligence as an expressive tool within his creative process, while maintaining the artist's central role in shaping the final work.

Alongside his visual art practice, Nicola Peruzzi also creates children's books, developing both text and imagery, guided by the same sensitive and narrative-driven approach found in his artworks. He lives and works in Italy.

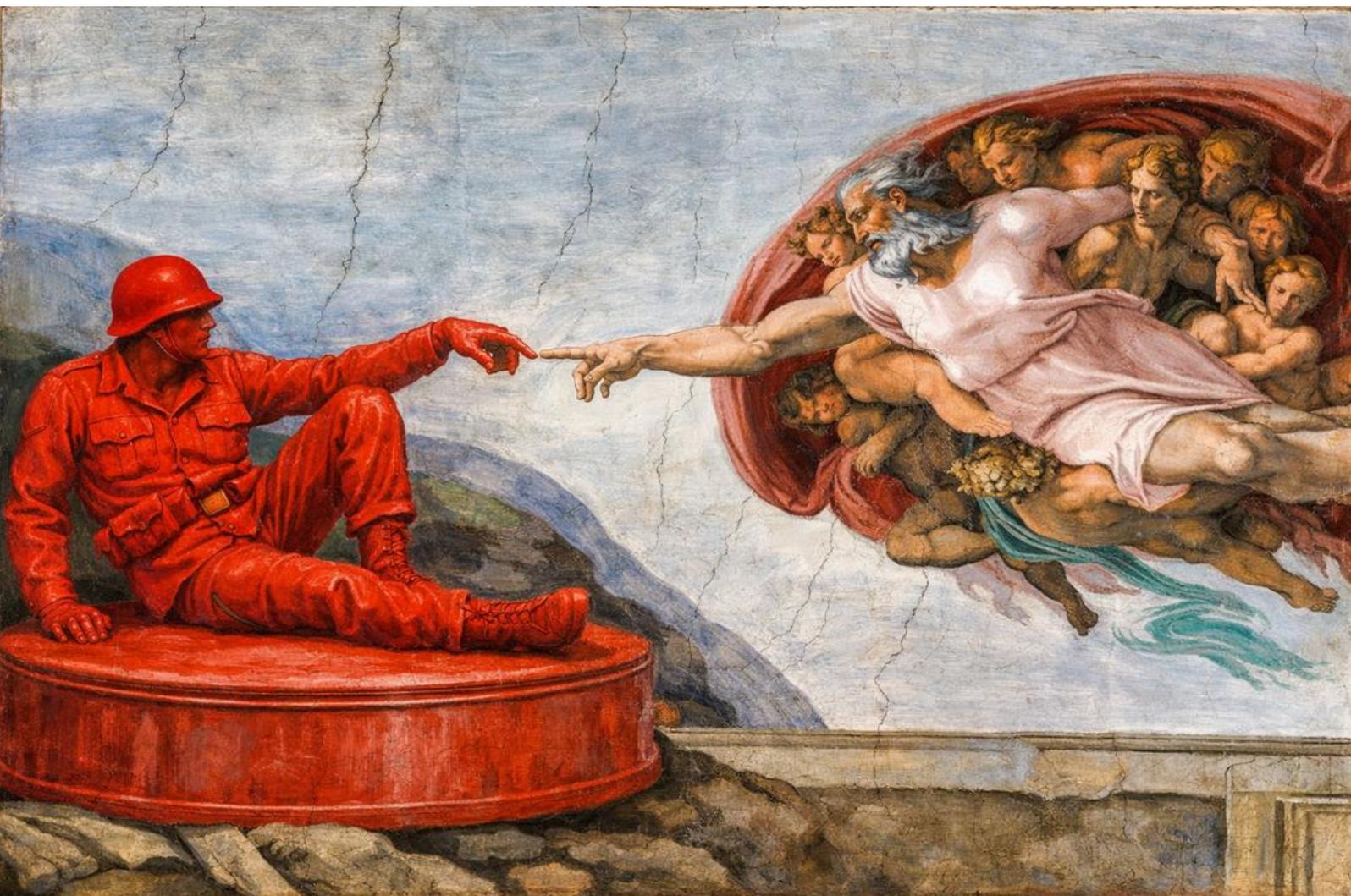
Project Statement

My work investigates how simple, familiar forms can carry complex emotional and collective meanings. I often use the image of the toy soldier as a neutral, anonymous figure (neither hero nor victim) placed within quiet, everyday situations.

By shifting this object from play to contemplation, I explore themes of responsibility, inheritance, and fragility. Color becomes a symbolic language rather than a descriptive one, separating the figure from realism and placing it in an emotional space.

I use artificial intelligence as a generative tool within a controlled artistic process. Each work is guided by a precise narrative intention, where technology serves the idea rather than defining it. The resulting images aim to create moments of pause, inviting viewers to project their own memories and experiences into the scene.

Kowalski Art | Adamo | 2026





— Interview

Lærke Helene Askholm

You began drawing very early and then paused for many years. What made you return specifically to analog drawing, and why did it feel like the right moment?

I had missed drawing for all these years, and when I finally received acceptance by a publisher for my second children's book, I thought it was obvious that I should illustrate it myself. My first children's book as a writer (published in 2023) had a fantastic illustrator, Lilian Brøgger, for whom I am very grateful. Back then, I was also unsure how well I could draw, since it had been so long. But with the second book, it was as if I had simply made the decision. I thought that even if it took time, it had to be in my hands, thoughts, and eyes all the same. And then I discovered that it was right there inside me, just waiting to come out on paper, once I started.



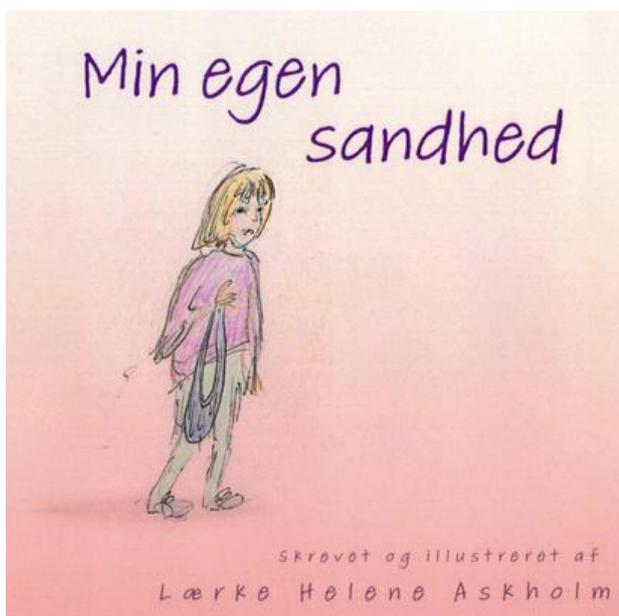
Portrait of Lærke Helene by Luca Berti

Your book *My Own Truth* is told through a child's perspective within family conflict. Why was it important for you to let the child's inner world lead the narrative visually?

Both the text and the drawings are from a child's perspective, and the visual aspect can be a very important part to include in stories, because it, like music, shows something that doesn't always have words. Therefore, the drawings strengthen the text, which is not extensive, as each page contains few words and simple, expressive drawings that one can either talk about or reflect on further. Some children may also feel inspired to draw themselves. The simplicity is important, as it gives the children reading the book the opportunity to fill in what they feel suits them – what they can relate to and perhaps feel understood and inspired by. A book can provide hope in difficult situations if one is met in their own perspective, so they don't feel completely alone with their feelings.

Your illustrations feel restrained yet emotionally charged. How do you decide what not to draw, what to leave open or unfinished?

I try to capture the inner feeling, and it can be very introspective—sometimes it's a character that doesn't have much movement or many outward features, but whose gaze is strong, and where a few elements hint at what is at play. It's about communicating something profound without too much filler. The filler is created by the gaze that meets the illustrations and senses something, and I want to give space for that, so I don't put everything in a closed frame. A sketch line can be stronger than a meticulously colored illustration



with many elements. I have ruined very simple drawings either by over-coloring or by adding too much background. I do like simplicity, but when it comes to color, I am also open to experimenting with different materials.

You work with fast sketches and a high working speed. What does speed give you emotionally or intuitively that slower processes might not?

When I don't overthink and just draw—preferably quickly, letting my subconscious take over a bit—it becomes much more alive than if I fuss over it in the main line of a sketch. My line can sense if I'm thinking too much while drawing, and then it can end up looking strained. Something happens when you let the line run free, because details and expressions appear that you couldn't have figured out beforehand, and you can continue to develop them with the line. When it comes to adding color, it's fine to take more time, but speed really does something to a line's expression, especially when it comes to living beings. Animals and people come alive in a different way. Backgrounds, objects, and buildings I can shade in a slightly quieter and calmer manner. My great-grandfather, Frode Lund (1900–1980), was an artist who illustrated many landscapes and old buildings, and I think that as a child I absorbed some of his drawing style because my grandmother showed me many of his works. I have several of his originals, as well as his published book, which contains 455 illustrations.

Many of your figures appear slightly fragile, as if caught mid-gesture or mid-thought. Are you more interested in moments of action or moments of inner stillness?

That's a very good question, because I think of action as something that is not limited to physical movement, so that's why I would not be able to choose. A figure can be in action even when it is still, if something is happening inwardly—such as reflection, emotion, or inner tension and that is what I try to capture. Both forms of action, the inward and the outward, contain something visually and emotionally compelling that can be captured in a figure. This is what makes these moments so exciting to work with, as they often hold many layers of emotion, even without dramatic movement.

After undergoing surgery on both hands, choosing to illustrate an entire book must have been a profound decision. Did this experience change your relationship with drawing or your body?

The time I had surgery on both hands, in May 2024, could easily have been a moment when it made sense to give up on ever drawing again. At that time, I wouldn't have believed I could ever do it again either. There were many stitches in both hands, and both index fingers were cut open and sewn back together. I had to start over using those fingers, and the rehabilitation took a very long time. On top of that, I have lost some sensation in them. Instead of giving up completely, I suddenly felt motivated to draw again. In a way, I insisted on it, and I don't really know why—but perhaps this is how adversity can make us defiant and encourage us to try to make the best of the worst through creativity. It has undoubtedly been good for the continued rehabilitation of my fine motor skills.

Having lived many years in southern Spain, how has Spanish culture, color, or everyday life influenced your visual language?

Flamenco is about expressing emotions through words, music, and dance, and it is a form of poetry and expression that is a significant part of southern Spain, Andalusia. In my view, there is no doubt that their daily connection to emotions through this poetry is an incredibly healthy element, something you simply do not find in the same way in northern Europe, where there is a greater distance. The contact with, and respect for, the right of emotions to be felt is very comforting and inspiring for me, both personally and artistically. In the visual arts, I love to draw the intimate, the calm, and the intense from Andalusia. It makes me want to express myself creatively and encourages me to feel more deeply—even when I am drawing other subjects.



Vakim Pirdon is a digital artist and painter with a strong background in both traditional and digital art. As a conventional painter, he has exhibited his work in notable venues, including the Montserrat Gallery on Broadway, New York, and in El Escorial, Madrid. He is also an accomplished poet, with four poetry collections published by various publishing houses. His digital work is rooted in traditional figurative art, reinterpreted through a digital palette and the creative use of modern tools. He produces digital paintings using graphic tablets, specialized software, and pixel simulations, achieving a distinctive and highly personalized aesthetic. His creative process is entirely manual within the digital environment, consciously rejecting the use of Artificial Intelligence or generative computation, thus reaffirming human authorship and artistic control over every detail. Vakim Pirdon's digital works can be reproduced on traditional physical supports such as wood panels, fabric, canvas, or methacrylate, as well as adapted into audiovisual compositions that expand the sensory and emotional dimension of his art. His visual language blends collage, mixed media, and pixel art, often presented on black backgrounds that symbolize the space of thought and emotion. Each artwork is accompanied by a poetic or philosophical phrase, an essential element that deepens its symbolic meaning and connects the visual with the spiritual. His art, marked by symbolic depth and philosophical reflection, explores the relationship between matter and metaphor, reason and mystery, transforming technology into a medium of introspection and poetic expression. Was awarded as Finalist in the Gallery Blue Koi Fluid Abstract Competition and Mention of Honour in the Teravarna Abstract Competition 2026.

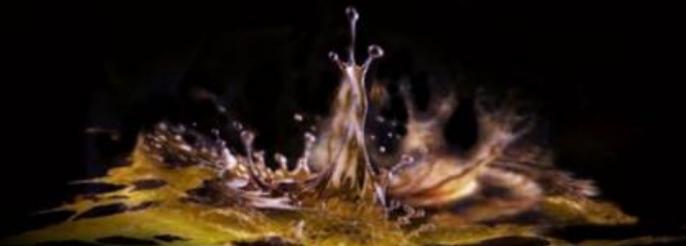
Project Statement

His visual language draws from collage, abstraction, and poetic symbolism, often set against deep monochromatic backgrounds that evoke the inner landscapes of thought and emotion. Each piece is frequently accompanied by a phrase or poetic fragment that enhances its conceptual depth and connects the visual with the spiritual. Through his art, Vakim Pirdon explores the intersection of perception and philosophy, body and metaphor, transforming technology into a space of contemplation and poetic revelation.

Vakim Pirdon | The Infinite Whispering It's Immortal Silence | 2025



*I Lost a Treasure
in the Silent
Garden of
Ignorance.*



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