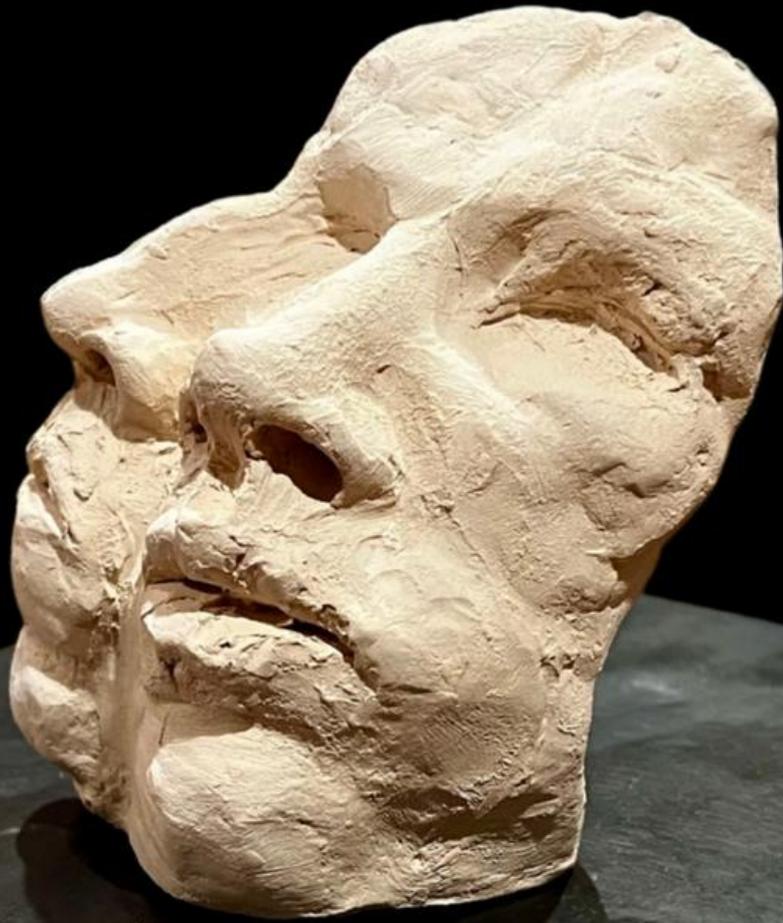


VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

# VISUAL ART JOURNAL



NO. 12

NOVEMBER 2024



# — Intro

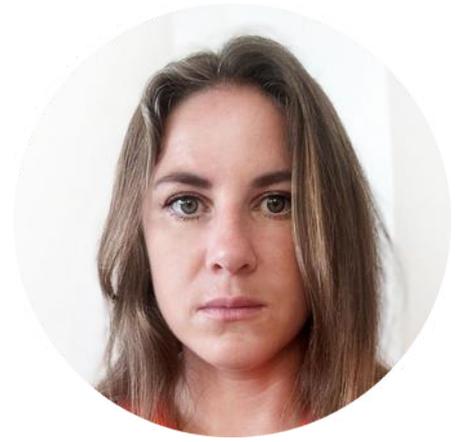
Hello, dear reader,

I am happy to welcome you to the pages of the twelfth issue of our magazine. I am very glad that our magazine is receiving so much feedback, and it inspires us to continue our work.

While working on this issue, I reflected on the role of beauty in an artist's work and the idea that, ultimately, one of the goals of a master is the ability to find beauty. Some create it, some capture it in the moment, and others find it where the average person might not notice it. Sometimes we cannot even explain why something is beautiful to us. Whether it's another person, a combination of colors, or simply the light that illuminates the street at sunset. There is a saying, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and I cannot help but agree with it. After all, a person who is open to beauty, who looks at the world with genuine interest and love, will undoubtedly see it. And if that person is a master, with the talent to convey beauty through various tools, then others, the viewers, will also be able to see it.

On the pages ahead, you will find a world filled with beauty: paintings, photographs, sculptures, people, and their thoughts.

Enjoy your reading, I believe that you will find as much pleasure in this issue as we did during the process of creating it.



**Anna Gvozdeva**

Curator of  
Visual Art Journal

*On the Front Cover:*  
**Aleksandra Scepanovic**  
Cluster  
2024

*On the Back Cover:*  
**Weizhi Cao**  
Veil of Steam 2

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

## — Interview

# Ke Yu (Diana) Liu

**What initially drew you to animation and storytelling as a career? Was there a particular film or moment that sparked your interest?**

My love for animation came later than most of my peers. Initially, I set out to become an illustrator, but everything shifted during my first year of college as an illustration major. I visited my best friend from high school, who was studying at ArtCenter with dreams of becoming a visual development artist. Touring the school, I was captivated by the stunning student work—visual development paintings, character designs, animated projects, and more. That visit sparked something in me, and I realized I wanted to be part of that world. Not long after, I prepared my portfolio and applied to transfer to ArtCenter. Interestingly, no single film initially sparked my decision to pursue animation—it was more of a gradual realization. However, one film has played a significant role in shaping my passion: *How to Train Your Dragon*. I first saw *How to Train Your*



*Dragon 2* in theaters, and I loved it so much that I decided to watch the first film on my tiny, worn-out iPad. Instantly, I fell in love. I couldn't believe I had gone 14 years without experiencing this movie!

Still, to this day, *How to Train Your Dragon 1* is my favorite film. While it's not traditionally a tear-jerker, it moved me to tears. I'm usually pretty stoic when it comes to watching movies, but the sheer beauty, excitement, and emotional depth of the story overwhelmed me. Every time I rewatch it, listen to the soundtrack, or even think about it, I feel that same sense of wonder and inspiration. Looking back on my journey into animation, *How to Train Your Dragon 1* has been, and continues to be, a source of inspiration—a film that reminds me of why I love what I do.

Diana Liu | Trailer Park Final





**In your role as an Art Teacher, you inspired young students. How did teaching art impact your own creative process?**

I wholeheartedly believe that to truly improve at something, you need to teach it to others. Teaching pushes me to tap into every aspect of my artistic skills and knowledge, constantly reinforcing what I know. When I teach, answer student questions, or break down complex concepts, I'm essentially re-teaching myself those same ideas. It's especially true when I'm planning lessons. Over time, many aspects of my work became muscle memory—things I did without thinking. But when I teach, I have to break down what feels second nature into digestible steps so that my students can understand and apply them to their own practice. In doing so, I revisit the fundamentals and embed them deeper into my own process. It's truly a win-win situation! Teaching also influences my creative process in unexpected ways. My students inspire me constantly, especially the younger ones. Children's art possesses a raw, unfiltered creativity and energy that adults often lose as they become more skilled. Their art is innocent—motivated purely by the joy of self-expression, which I find incredibly beautiful. I often draw with the goal of improving in areas like perspective, color theory, or anatomy. But children? They draw out of love. They have the freedom to create whatever comes to mind, even if it doesn't resemble anything that exists in reality. Their imaginative approach often reignites my own passion for drawing and gives me fresh ideas, especially when it comes to color. They don't

worry about rules like color harmony or traditional shading; they just splash colors on the page because it feels right. And sometimes, that gives me entirely new color palettes to explore. As Picasso once said, "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child." I hope everyone, no matter how skilled, can hold onto that freedom and paint like a child.

**Can you share a bit about your transition to working at Pixar and DreamWorks as a Story Intern/Trainee? What have you learned from your time there so far?**

My experiences at Pixar and DreamWorks were vastly different but equally challenging, and both helped shape me as an artist in unique ways. At Pixar, the structure was very much like a classroom. We received new assignments almost every week from different directors, drawing non-stop for three months. It was an incredible opportunity to put everything I had learned in theory into practice. I discovered that despite the immense workload that comes with being a storyboard artist, I truly love it—and could see myself doing it for the rest of my life. DreamWorks, on the other hand, was more of a production-based experience. I was thrown into the heart of an actual movie production, working alongside fellow storyboard artists, the Head of Story, and the Director. I had to learn the specific workflow of that production on the go. I started by handling revisions, and once I demonstrated that I could deliver quality work on deadline, I was trusted with short sequences. Over time, as I grew more comfortable with the story and the

director's vision, I was assigned longer, more pivotal sequences. My confidence grew as I became more familiar with the characters and the production itself.

At Pixar, I learned how to construct shots, scenes, and sequences. I discovered how to convey emotion through character acting and interactions. I found my storytelling voice, gained a deep understanding of story structure, and learned to work effectively in a team environment. I also had the chance to tell my own stories, which were well-received and gave me even more confidence in my abilities. While at DreamWorks, I gained a real-world understanding of what it's like to work on a production. I spoke to people across various departments and learned how a movie is made from start to finish. This experience further solidified my dream of making my own movies one day.

Both experiences were truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. I grew both artistically and personally at each studio, and I made lasting friendships with people I would love to work with again in the future.

**Your career includes both art education and animation. How do these different experiences complement each other?**

My experiences in both art education and animation complement each other in ways that continually enhance my skills and creativity. Teaching forces me to break down complex

artistic concepts, such as perspective, anatomy, or composition, into digestible parts for my students. In doing so, I revisit and strengthen those same fundamentals, which directly improves my animation work. The process of explaining art to others reinforces my own understanding and helps me refine my skills. On the flip side, my work in animation brings a practical, industry-focused perspective to my teaching. I can share real-world applications of the techniques we discuss in class, giving my students insight into how the skills they're learning translate into the animation industry. Animation also keeps me creatively energized, which translates into more dynamic and engaging lessons. The inspiration I gain from working on animated projects often sparks fresh ideas for the classroom, and my students' uninhibited creativity reminds me to approach my own work with that same sense of wonder and exploration.

Ultimately, both roles feed into each other—teaching makes me a better artist, and my experience in animation makes me a more effective, insightful educator.

**How do you stay inspired and continue to develop your storytelling voice in such a fast-paced industry?**

I find inspiration in the small moments of life—whether it's memories, time spent with friends and family, or even stories I come across online. I love taking something seemingly simple and

Diana Liu | Store Front Final Day

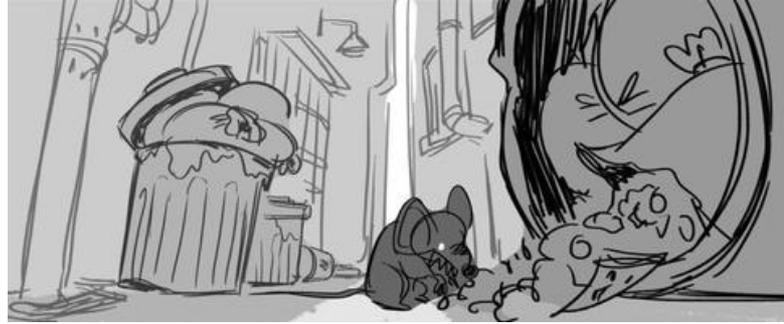


expanding it into a fully realized story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. For instance, my most recent sequence, *Parallel Parking*, started as a casual joke between my roommate and me. We were talking about how frustratingly hard it is to parallel park, and how it feels like it takes forever to get a car into a spot. That lighthearted conversation eventually grew into a full story.

My friends are another source of inspiration for me. I love diving deep into discussions about storytelling with them. In fact, I'm starting a podcast with a friend where we plan to bring on guests and talk all things story and animation. Talking with other passionate people always gets my creative gears turning. When we share our viewpoints, they often clash, merge, and challenge each other, which is always refreshing. It's important in this industry to hold onto your own opinions, but it's just as important to stay open-minded and respect different perspectives.

### **What advice would you give to young artists who want to pursue a career in animation and storytelling?**

Start small. It's easy to feel overwhelmed when you look at someone's IMDB page or portfolio and see the sheer amount of work they've done. But remember, everyone started somewhere. Nobody draws a *Spiderverse*-level chase sequence the first time they pick up a pencil. Focus on practicing the fundamentals—perspective, anatomy, color theory, shape language, and so much more. These are the essential tools you need to create from imagination. Don't expect massive growth in just

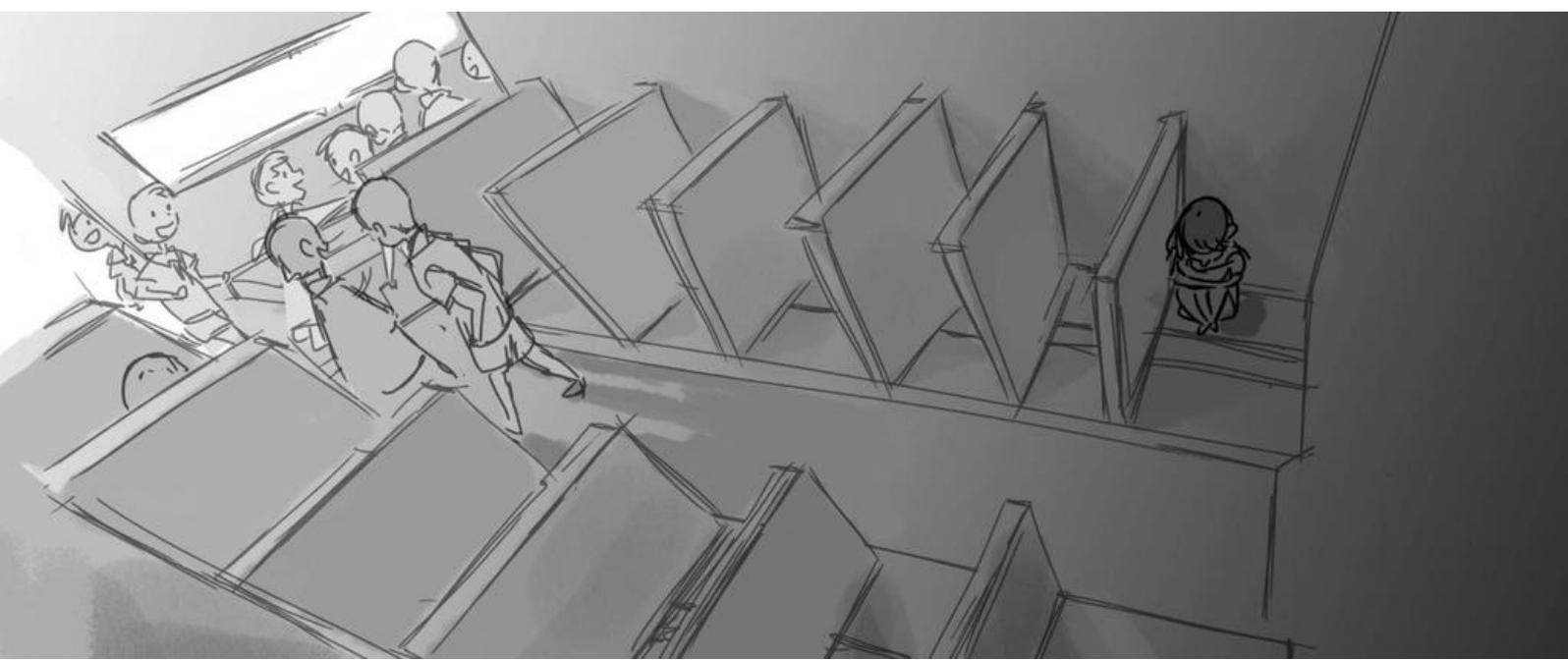


one month, but don't underestimate how much progress you can make in a year.

Be yourself. The competition in animation is fierce, especially now that the internet has made it more accessible as a career path. With so many people referencing each other, it can feel like everyone's style is starting to look the same. There's nothing wrong with referencing artists you admire or works that speak to you, but if you're only referencing someone because they're famous or following a trend, you risk losing your own voice. Always ask yourself: What made you want to become an artist in the first place? Why does your work matter to you, and how do you want it to matter to others? In a world where so many people are blending together, standing out by being your authentic self can resonate not just with the online audience but also with companies looking for something unique—something they haven't seen before.

### **How do you continue to push your creative boundaries while staying true to your unique style and voice?**

I always have a wealth of ideas lined up in my mind, each representing stories I want to tell and visions I want to create. With every project, I set specific goals for myself to ensure I'm continually growing as an artist. For instance, if I've recently worked on several emotional sequences, I'll pivot and focus on comedy for my next endeavor. This





not only keeps my work fresh but also encourages me to explore different facets of storytelling.

Recently, I began developing a comedy-action sequence that incorporates a musical element—an area I had never tried before. This project has been a thrilling challenge, pushing me out of my comfort zone and allowing me to experiment with new narrative techniques and visual styles. By stepping outside my usual boundaries with each new concept, I find that I'm constantly improving my draftsmanship and refining my storytelling skills.

Additionally, I like to reflect on the themes and emotions I want to convey in my work. This helps me stay true to my unique style and voice while still exploring new ideas. Getting feedback from other artists really sparks my creativity. Their insights can lead me down unexpected paths and open up new possibilities for my work.

## What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced working on animated productions, and how did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge I faced while working on animated productions was overcoming self-doubt and imposter syndrome. When I first entered the industry, I often questioned my skills and my place among such talented peers. Being surrounded by artists whose work I deeply admired was intimidating, and I sometimes felt unsure about my ability to contribute meaningfully.

To address these feelings, I focused on accepting myself and my current skill level while continuously striving for improvement. I reminded myself that everyone, regardless of their experience, experiences moments of doubt. I was fortunate to be mentored by many wonderful artists whose guidance helped me navigate challenges in the animation pipeline. Their reassurance that my feelings were normal and shared by many provided a comforting perspective. Hearing their stories of struggle and triumph inspired me to embrace my journey, knowing that every artist encounters hurdles along the way.

Ultimately, I learned to appreciate my unique perspective and the valuable contributions I can make to a team. This shift in mindset not only boosted my confidence but also enriched my

Diana Liu | Good comp





creative process, allowing me to engage more fully with my work.

**How has your experience been working collaboratively on short films with a team of artists and independently?**

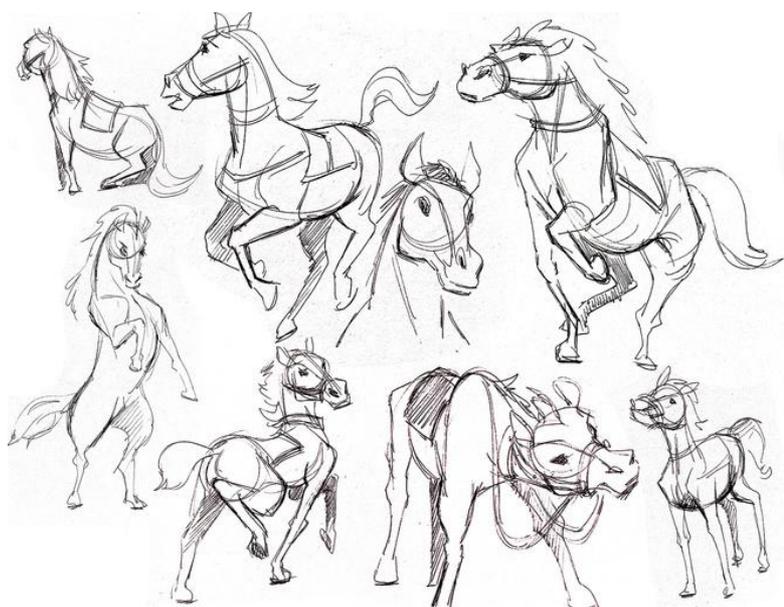
I've had the privilege of working on a number of short films—some independently, others with friends, classmates, and even volunteers from the industry. Each project offered unique experiences that have helped shape my understanding of the animation process.

My first real production experience was on a school project, MORRY. At the time, I didn't fully grasp how to collaborate with others, especially when their ideas were vastly different from mine. But through that process, I learned the importance of effective communication, offering constructive feedback, and balancing creative input with practical production needs. I also gained insight into how storyboarding fits into the larger production pipeline, which was a game-changer for me.

After MORRY, I decided to create my own short film BLUE. This project allowed me to take full control of the pipeline, from pre-production to animation, and it was also my first dive into 2D animation. Through this solo experience, I developed a deeper understanding of filmmaking and fell even more in love with the process.

Since then, I've contributed to a variety of professional and student short films, handling

storyboarding, background design and paint, and animation cleanup. Each project, no matter how big or small, taught me something valuable—whether it was refining my technical skills or discovering new ways to work with a team. I'd highly encourage any aspiring artists that want to break into animation to find a group of passionate people to collaborate with, but also to try making something on your own. Both experiences offer invaluable lessons and provide a well-rounded understanding of the animation pipeline.



**Hunter Deorum** is an award-winning multidisciplinary artist specialising in illustration, graphic design, and animation. Central to Deorum's practice is the exploration of the intersection between art and psychology, particularly focusing on how aesthetic experiences influence cognitive and emotional responses. By investigating how visual stimuli impact perception, Deorum creates works that not only engage viewers but also challenge and encourage their understanding. A key component of Deorum's art is its potential for activism and education. By blending artistic techniques with psychological insights, Deorum crafts pieces that provoke thought, evoke strong emotion, and inspire meaningful change. His work consistently delves into the complexities of the human psyche, using art as a tool for reflection and dialogue.



Hunter Deorum | From The Ashes

### *Artist Statement*

This body of work is a celebration of adaptability—of art, of nature, and of the artist's evolving role within both. Through a range of mediums and themes, from a deeply realistic portraits to the washes of gouache capturing the colours of autumn, Hunter Deorum explores the flexibility inherent in the creative process. Each piece represents a journey between styles and subjects, mirroring the fluidity that is both demanded by and gifted to artists.



# — Interview

## Oxana Akopov

**How has your experience as an immigrant influenced the themes and messages in your artwork?**

My experience as an immigrant has had a big impact on my art. Moving to a new country meant adjusting to a completely different environment while discovering new possibilities. Like many immigrants, I felt a sense of lost identity, as if starting over in a place where everything was unfamiliar. This journey made me think a lot about identity, a sense of belonging, and how we find our place in a new culture. My art reflects that journey - finding a new version of myself while holding onto my roots. I use symbols that show this mix of old and new and the feeling of being "in between." It's about trying to find your place in a new world, with all the challenges and surprises that come along with it. Creating art in this way lets me study contemporary American society, its values, and the cultural roots I want to grow here.

**Could you elaborate on the concept of "Little America" that you explore through your art?**

"Little America" is my way of sharing how I see this country through my own eyes. It's a blend of my experiences, impressions, and the cultural symbols that have shaped my journey here. It's not about capturing America literally, but rather, how it feels to me as someone building a new life here. Through my art, I explore this mix of traditions, new norms, and personal reflections that create my own "little" version of America - a blend of my past and the present. It's about the dreams, challenges, and small, everyday moments that make up my experience here. Moving



Oxana Akopov | Freedom Lottery | 2023



to a new culture has given me a fresh perspective and the role of an observer, and this is what "Little America" reflects: the balance of new and familiar coming together.

**Your installations combine elements of photography and painting. How do you decide which medium will best convey a particular message?**

When I start a new piece, I focus on the idea I want to communicate and how I want people to connect with it. The choice of medium - whether it's photography, painting, or installation - depends on what will best bring that idea to life. Photography is great for capturing a specific detail or mood, while painting creates a more emotional or abstract feel. Installations let me build a space where viewers can really step into the concept. Moving here has inspired me to revisit different media and start using a multimedia approach, allowing each piece to speak its own visual language. I see each medium as a different way of telling a story, and I pick the one that feels right for what I want to say.

**What role does symbolism play in your work, and how do you want viewers to interpret these symbols?**

Symbolism plays a big role in my artistic practice, because it lets me express ideas in a way that's

relatable and open to interpretation. I choose symbols that are simple and familiar, like an egg, a nest, or a dollar bill, but that hold deeper meanings. I don't aim to give viewers a specific interpretation; instead, I want them to connect with the symbols in their own way. My hope is that these symbols spark curiosity and encourage people to think about their own experiences. I see them as starting points for a deeper conversation between the artwork and the viewer. Each symbol, like each piece of my work, reflects part of my own story but leaves room for the viewer to bring in their own perspective.

**How has your background in journalism and communication shaped the way you approach creating art?**

My background in journalism and communication taught me how to connect ideas with people. Now, instead of using words, I use visual metaphors to make those connections. I see my art as a way to bridge ideas and emotions, creating a dialogue with the viewer. Just like in storytelling, I try to find the clearest and most engaging way to share what I want to express. Communication is a process that connects people on different levels, and my art follows that same path - it's about creating context and letting each viewer find their own meaning and interpretation.



Oxana Akopov | California Dream | 2024

be curious about what else it might mean. These cultural symbols help me study and understand American society on a deeper level, blending my personal experiences with a wider cultural perspective.

**How do you see the balance between freedom and self-identification reflected in your art?**

In my art, the balance between freedom and self-identification feels like a journey of figuring out who I am. Freedom gives me the space to experiment, try new things, and break away from old ideas. But at the same time, it's important for me to understand my true self - what matters to me, where I come from, and how I fit into the world around me. My work shows this balance: the urge to explore and push boundaries, while also staying connected to my personal story. It's about finding who I am through all the changes and being open to both the new and the familiar. For me, it's not about choosing one over the other but letting them exist together, so my art reflects that balance. The whole process mirrors my own journey as an immigrant, blending tradition with new opportunities.

Oxana Akopov | Just Another Day at the Office | 2023



Oxana Akopov | Natural Exchange | 2024



**Many of your works feature cultural innuendos. How do you decide which cultural elements to incorporate into your pieces?**

When I choose cultural elements for my work, I focus on things that feel meaningful to me and express the stories I want to tell. I look for symbols or references that people might recognize but that also have a deeper layer to them. It's important that these elements fit with themes I'm exploring, like identity, adaptation, or finding a place to belong. Then I reduce them to a certain visual code. I want viewers to feel a connection to it, to see something familiar, but also to

## Birgit Wilfling

Growing up in a small town in Austria with little art around me, I have always been fascinated by creating art. My passion for illustration and animation was influenced by Disney movies and anime from an early age. During my studies, I specialized in 2D animation and graphic design and had the opportunity to live in countries like China and Portugal, which at times influenced my way of creating art. For the past year, I have also been running an art channel on Instagram and post there several times a week. My style is a colorful mix of everything, as you can see in my art.

### *Artist Statement*

Because of my different styles, I don't have one core statement that describes my art. In the past I would always say "my art should influence in a positive way", and that is still true today. However, I now use my different styles to move in different ways. Sometimes my style is colorful and playful and simply serves as a distraction from everyday life, sometimes it is more realistic with more serious themes. For example, my work "everything for the gram" alludes to our society and the urge to share everything. What characterises my art, however, is my passion for painting plants.

Birgit Wilfling | Hangzhou | 2022





## — Interview

# Jesper Krijgsman

**How did your background in graphic design influence your transition to visual storytelling and nature-focused art?**

My journey in graphic design was crucial to my evolution as an artist. Working with image editing software and developing layouts taught me discipline and detail, but my creative spirit always craved something more immersive. In the structured design world, I was often asked to simplify or strip away complexity, and that nudged me toward personal projects where I could fully explore intricate scenes and ideas. Gradually, I found that creating supernatural landscapes—these dreamlike, detail-rich compositions of flora and fauna—was the freedom I'd been seeking. In my art, I get to blur the boundaries between design and storytelling, building paradisiacal landscapes that invite the viewer into an emotional experience beyond the visual.

**What initially sparked your fascination with nature and its mystical qualities?**

Nature has always drawn me in with its quiet yet powerful beauty. I see nature as a world of intelligence and purpose—each plant, and each animal seems to tell a story of survival, resilience, and cohabitation.



Jesper Krijgsman | Serenity



The diversity and ingenuity of life forms fill me with wonder, almost as if nature holds its kind of emotional intelligence. When I began capturing this feeling through photography and editing, it became clear that my art was more than representation; it was an exploration of these qualities, amplifying the mystique and deep emotional resonance I see in nature. Every landscape I create is an invitation for viewers to connect with this unseen wisdom and mystery.

**How do you select the subjects or landscapes for your work? Do you feel a specific connection to certain types of flora or fauna?**

Choosing my subjects is often intuitive, guided by a deep curiosity. I spend countless hours in nature, moving through forests, mountains, or fields, drawn to shapes and colors that spark my imagination. Flowers captivate me, not only for their vibrancy but also for their resilience—they bloom, adapt, and flourish through the seasons, mirroring nature's persistence. Birds, too, with their movement and vibrancy, feel symbolic to me of freedom and connection. Each plant or animal that I photograph has an aura, almost a character of its own, and I'm passionate about amplifying that essence in my work. I feel that collectively, these elements can evoke certain emotions or even tell stories.

**Your art often emphasizes the emotional resonance of natural landscapes. Can you share a specific moment when nature deeply moved or inspired you?**

I like to go on hikes and explore new regions. This helps me to sometimes let go of the troubles life

presents. An experience that profoundly impacted me was during an afternoon hike in a remote Swiss forest. The atmosphere was so still, with beams of sunlight weaving through dense trees and casting a surreal glow. I had much on my mind beforehand but going through nature, an omnipresent force that is all around us and has for billions of years before, my troubles didn't seem all that large in the scope of things. I didn't feel so alone as well, as I was surrounded by life that was alive, breathing, and watching. That sense of connection, of being part of something ancient and wise, was overpowering. It's moments like these that I try to distill into my art, crafting scenes that evoke the same emotional pull and allow others to feel nature's quiet, awe-inspiring presence.

**How do you approach the process of photographing and editing your scenes? Do you have a specific workflow or routine?**

My creative process starts with hours of photographing individual plants and animals, capturing their unique details. I work hands-on, drawn to the textures, colors, and intricate structures of each subject. This meticulous, almost meditative process gives me a connection to the elements I use. I then bring them into my digital workspace, where I layer and arrange these elements to create supernatural landscapes. My approach is intuitive—each composition feels like it has a life of its own, evolving as I work, almost as if it's "growing" on the canvas. This allows each piece to unfold organically, with the same unpredictable beauty I see in nature itself.



Jesper Krijgsman | Aeterna V



Jesper Krijgsman | In Paradisum II

**Can you explain what you mean by nature embodying 'emotional intelligence'? How do you try to convey this concept in your work?**

Nature's 'emotional intelligence' speaks to me in the way life adapts, grows, and coexists. Every living thing in nature has found its place, thrives in harmony, and communicates through its existence. This depth of connection and empathy, rooted in survival and coexistence, is something I try to portray in my work. By emphasizing details that often go unnoticed—the unique texture of a petal or the fragile veins of a leaf—I hope to capture the intricate beauty and resilience in nature. My work invites viewers to pause and connect, recognizing an intelligence and emotional resonance that feels both familiar and awe-inspiring.

**How does living in different places, such as Amsterdam and Switzerland, shape your artistic vision?**

Amsterdam and Switzerland each hold a distinct place in my journey as an artist. Amsterdam, with its energy and rich artistic heritage, is always pushing me creatively and giving me a sense of belonging within the art world. Switzerland, on the other hand, gave me the solitude and vast, awe-inspiring landscapes that shaped my connection to nature. I lived there for over a decade, and its mountains, forests, and quiet spaces left an imprint on me that's deeply personal. The contrasts between these places—urban vibrancy and natural tranquility—are reflected in my work, where I seek to harmonize intricate detail with a sense of vastness and calmness.

**Loisel** is an artist focusing mainly on BW street photography. Lines and light catch her eye and are the foundation of her work. Over the years she has addressed social issues supporting awareness for the many people in the community.

### *Project Statement*

Capturing the essence of light and lines of the foundation of my work in BW Street Photography allows for unique and different perspectives and ways to look at the world.



## — Interview

# Stefania Andrada Budan

**Your artistic journey began during the pandemic. How did this challenging time influence your work and style?**

I have been passionate about painting since I was a child, but I took a different academic path due to various circumstances. I come from a small town in Romania, not very developed, where a sense of isolation combined with social pressures and the prevailing ideology suggested that becoming an artist was a dead end in life. Although the pandemic was a very difficult time for me—I lost my job and the professional



network I had built in Brussels—my passion for painting and drawing called me back. I believe that the mental freedom I experienced during the pandemic opened the door to a new life and reconnected me with my old passion. I rediscovered myself through art, and I want to emphasize that art is not about doing; it's about being. My journey with my artistic style is still ongoing, and, fundamentally, art is a journey through one's life.

**You work with a variety of mixed media, such as oil pastels, soft pastels, markers, and colored pencils. What is your process like when choosing which medium to use for a specific piece?**

I started using oil pastels during the pandemic, and there was something magical about this medium. The texture is absolutely beautiful and creates a strong atmosphere in a painting, especially when capturing the features of a portrait. Using oil pastels makes the portrait resonate deeply, and I believe it enhances the emotional impact. At some point, I also shifted my focus to colored pencils and soft pastels. All of these mediums have a vibrant quality, and working with them feels almost whimsical. My

Stefania Budan | Fearless Woman | 2024



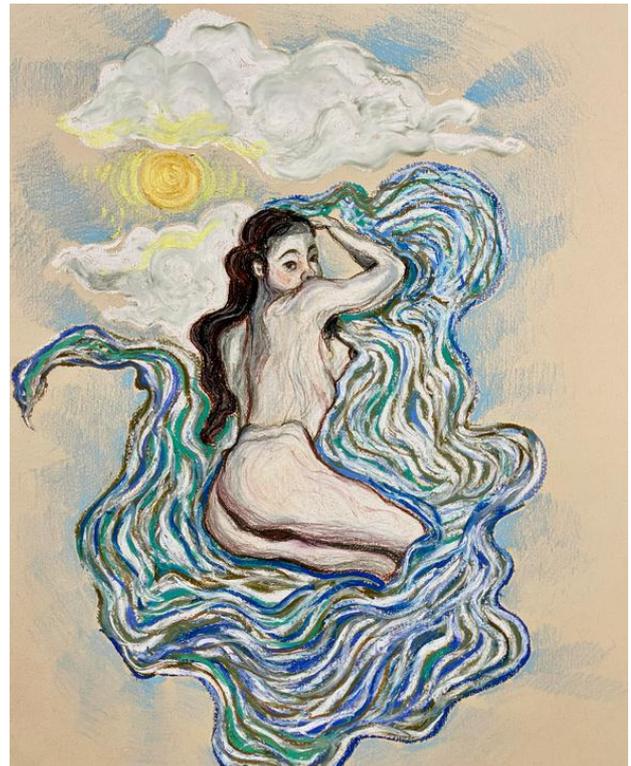
process is quite spontaneous; I visualize the painting or drawing, then I enjoy playing with textures, hues, and intensity. I love the complexity these mediums create when combined with emotions.

**You mentioned that peculiarity is a source of inspiration. How do you incorporate this sense of peculiarity into your portraits?**

As I visualize my models, I look for that special, peculiar quality that is often hidden. I enjoy bringing it to the surface because peculiarity is not something negative; in fact, it is a unique trait or feature of a person. This peculiarity can be physical, but it can also be mental. I find that it invites me into a sort of mental game, and it's fascinating to play with hues and colors to describe something that may be so abstract in someone's portrait.

**Your work focuses on people's expressions and features. How do you decide which emotions or stories to convey through your portraits?**

I can't exactly explain how I decide, but it's more of a spontaneous choice or feeling. As I observe people, even in cafés, I sometimes see someone

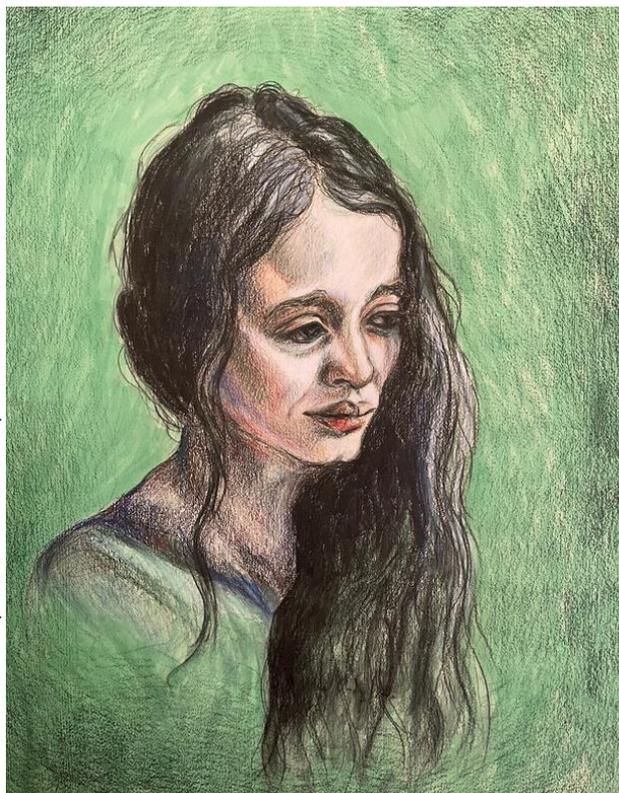


Stefania Budan | Midday Dream | 2024

process is quite spontaneous; I visualize the painting or drawing, then I enjoy playing with textures, hues, and intensity. I love the complexity these mediums create when combined with emotions.

**Your art combines accurately drawn characters with vibrant, raw environments. Can you tell us more about the contrast between these two elements and how they come together in your work?**

I recently developed the idea of creating paintings or drawings where the character is rendered more accurately while the background remains raw and vibrant. I believe that the vibrancy and texture of the background make the character pop out and also show more of the notes of peculiarity. A note of peculiarity can be a mental feeling or a physical feature. Sometimes, I like to deform the body or a hand a bit so the character can speak more about itself. My inspiration comes from my childhood home, particularly my grandparents' house, where they always had a wall carpet with raw motifs. I used to touch it constantly, fascinated by its vibrancy and raw elements. Combining two styles is part of my artistic journey, and it also symbolizes a bridge between two dimensions, which can have so many meanings.



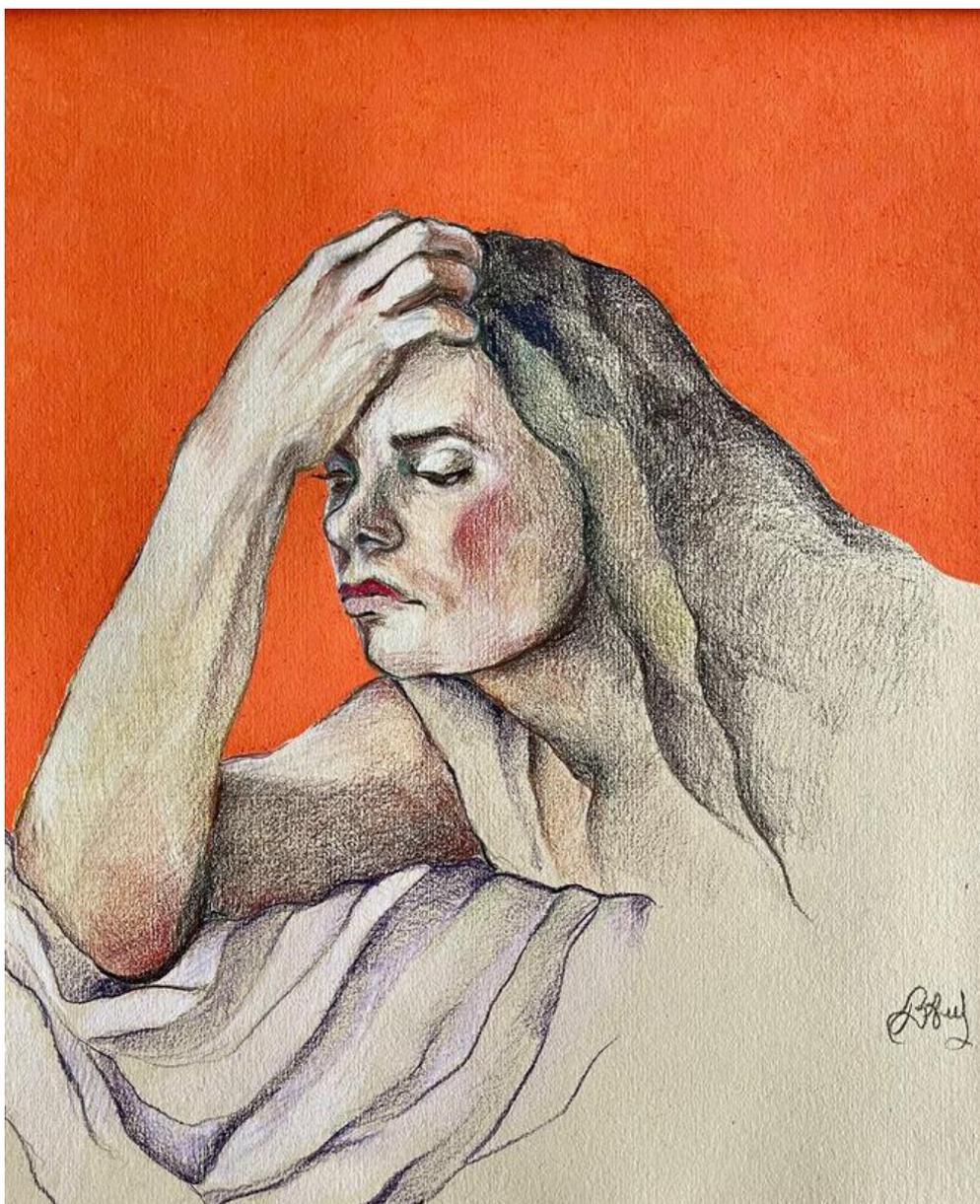
Stefania Budan | Wilted Blossom | 2024

**As someone with a background in political science, do you find that your academic studies influence your artistic practice in any way?**

During my studies in political science, I took a very interesting course on art and politics, which had a profound influence on my artistic journey. Not only did it bring me back to my true passion, but it also deepened my understanding and appreciation of art. As I mentioned earlier, art is not about doing but about being, and exploring various artistic movements under different political regimes broadened my perspective on society and individuals. I do this by truly observing people and reflecting on how I feel about them as I paint or draw, and how my feelings meet theirs in my art.

**How do you feel your work has evolved since your first exhibition in 2022 in Brussels?**

After my exhibition in Brussels, I was still hiding in my shell, convinced that I needed to change careers and pursue a "real career." However, I eventually realized that I couldn't truly be myself if I wasn't painting. In 2023, I moved to France after working as a tech specialist for Apple in Ireland. I decided that, despite my fears, I would pursue art and find myself through it, and I did it. What followed were months of insecurity and intense fear, but I would never give this away. I flourished, allowing myself the freedom to explore and evolve in ways I never could have imagined.



Stefania Budan | Searching Ideas | 2024



Blue

**Natalia Titova** is a digital artist specializing in concept art and digital collages.

### *Artist Statement*

The triptych of digital collages is dedicated to my favorite female authors. The collages were inspired by the profound emotions evoked by these unique writers and their works. Virginia Woolf, Tove Ditlevsen, and Clarice Lispector are outstanding representatives of women in literature. Each of them is both modern and classic at the same time, inspiring women to create and find their own way to express themselves.



## — Interview

# Aleksandra Scepanovic

**Your work is deeply influenced by your experiences during the Balkan conflicts and your career as a war reporter. How do you translate the emotional intensity and turmoil of those memories into your sculptures?**

The emotional intensity of my past finds its way into the physicality of my sculptures. The clay, in its pliable state, mimics the fragility and tension that existed during those times of conflict. The way I mold the material often reflects the sense of displacement and disorientation I felt—shapes teetering between balance and collapse. War, for me, was a constant confrontation with the unknown, and my work seeks to engage viewers with the unease that comes from navigating chaos while seeking peace.

**Migration and displacement are central themes in your work. How do you think your sculptures help viewers connect with these experiences on a personal level?**

Migration, for me, is more than a physical movement; it is an internal shift in identity and belonging. When visitors see my work, I hope they



Aleksandra Scepanovic | Cluster | 2024

recognize pieces of their own fractured experiences. Displacement is not only about leaving a homeland; it's about the continuous search for home within yourself. My sculptures invite people to explore the cracks and breaks, not as weaknesses, but as spaces where new life emerges. The act of looking closely at these ruptures, these interruptions in form, is my way of connecting others to their own journeys of finding wholeness amidst fracture.

**You describe your sculptures as reflecting the balance between chaos and order, war and peace. Can you share a specific piece that captures this tension particularly well, and explain what it represents?**

One piece that stands out is *The Vanishing*. In this sculpture, I explored the idea of something slowly disappearing yet remaining palpable, its form incomplete but still standing. It reflects the tension between destruction and perseverance, much like the moments of war when survival seems precarious, yet somehow inevitable, at least in retrospect. The piece embodies the balance between forces of war that try to erase and the quiet defiance of existing despite it.

**How did your transition from war reporting to sculpture impact your healing process? Did you find that art offered a form of therapy or catharsis?**

In recent years, art has become a channel for what I couldn't put into words during my time as a war reporter. Where journalism was about facts and



immediacy, sculpture allows me to slow down and allow my hands tell the stories my mind has long held onto. The tactile nature of working with clay, shaping and reshaping, has been deeply therapeutic. It's not about resolving the pain but learning to live alongside it. Sculpture has offered me a way to heal by creating from the same place that once held so much turmoil.

**Working in Woodstock, NY, alongside other sculptors, how has this environment influenced your creative process or the themes in your art?**

Woodstock offers a kind of stillness that I find essential in balancing the complexity of the themes I explore. The community of sculptors I work with is collaborative, not competitive, which mirrors the ethos of rebuilding that runs through my art. In a way, the natural landscape and the human landscape here—both raw, untouched, and always evolving—reflect the dualities I navigate in my work. There's a quiet encouragement from the environment and the people around me to keep searching, keep creating, and find peace in the process.

**The process of working with clay is often tactile and intimate. How does the medium itself contribute to the emotional quality of your work?**

Clay has a memory of touch, and that is indescribably powerful to me. When you press into it, it responds, records, and even resists in some ways. This back-and-forth creates a relationship with the material that feels like a conversation—one rooted in emotion. The medium of clay allows me to work through the fragility of life, but also its resilience. The softness of wet clay and the hardness it takes on once fired symbolize the



Aleksandra Scepanovic | The Hollow II | 2024

transformations we endure as individuals and communities. The very process echoes my internal world—pliable, yet capable of holding form after enduring the fire.



Aleksandra Scepanovic | Inbetween | 2024

**Can you discuss how your upbringing in socialist Yugoslavia has shaped your perspective on identity and belonging, which are recurring subjects in your sculptures?**

Growing up in socialist Yugoslavia, identity was shaped by a collective narrative, not by the individual. That experience has made me question the nature of identity itself—whether it is something imposed or discovered. My sculptures often deal with fragmentation because that's how I experienced my own sense of self during those years and through the later collapse of the country. In many ways, I am still exploring what it means to belong—to a place, to a people, or even to an idea. The struggle between the self and the collective continues to inform how I approach every new piece.

Aleksandra Scepanovic | Birthing | 2024



## Weizhi Cao

I am digital artist at the forefront of blending AI with traditional art to create a unique visual language that bridges technology and creativity. My work has received international recognition, showcased in exhibitions and honored at major film festivals. With a dedicated following in China, I am committed to exploring AI's transformative role in digital art, pushing boundaries to redefine artistic expression.

### *Project Statement*

In this piece, a woman has just stepped out of the shower, her hazy silhouette reflected in the mirror, surrounded by steam that creates a soft and mysterious atmosphere. This “hazy beauty” not only embodies the curves of her body but also hints at the initial encounter in love—a moment that is both unfamiliar and filled with a desire to understand. The foreground is enveloped in darkness, symbolizing the stagnation and confusion often present in relationships, akin to an uncharted journey of the soul. As the gaze shifts, the vibrant orange blocks in the background contrast sharply with the black, foreshadowing the impending passion and fervor. This clash of colors captivates the eye and conveys an emotional tension—depicting the transition from initial acquaintance to romantic connection, which is both enchanting and uncertain. The entire artwork explores the delicate relationship between love and desire, encompassing both beauty and potential danger. Each moment is infused with infinite possibilities, as the future remains unknown and exhilarating. It is this haze and ambiguity that form the beautiful facade of love. Through this artistic expression, viewers are invited to experience the heart's flutter of first encounters and the thrill and anticipation in exploring emotional depths. It is a journey where fantasy intertwines with reality, showcasing how love blossoms amidst uncertainty, both beautiful and daunting.



Weizhi Cao | Veil of Steam 2



## — Interview

# Kai Sebek

**Your project "Woven Worlds" integrates real landscapes with fantastical illustrated creatures. How did you come up with the idea of combining photography and illustration in this way?**

I feel like it happened kind of naturally. I've been doing a lot of documentary photography in the past and I've been drawing pretty much since ever. If we're talking exclusively about photography, I've always been particularly fascinated by the ability to freeze the present moment, something that will never happen again. Around the age 15, I fell into documentary photography and sought out these moments especially among people - the grimaces, the tension, the gestures, the coincidences, the emotions captured right on the street. My greatest heroes have always been among photographers, and I also consider that medium the best option to convey information in the world in a way that is easily understood by all audiences.

So my path went in that direction at some point, but unfortunately when I started studying photography at art college, all that passion disappeared for a moment... I didn't make the best choice at the time, but that doesn't mean the school was bad. It just wasn't for me. I dropped out of school and started to pursue illustration and drawing full time, and discovered another medium that I started to enjoy - tattooing.

Paradoxically, everything I have drawn since I was a child has always been at odds with reality. My illustrations revolved around the world of fantasy, and maybe because reality was quite stifling at the time, it was my safe place and a momentary escape for me. In fact, I was always bouncing back and forth between the two worlds and when reality got too much for me, especially in my childhood, I would escape into the imaginary one where there were no rules and I could really "play". I think every



child has this kind of escapism and I was just capturing it in progress on paper. That's how the first fictional characters began to have "substance" and basically the whole core of Woven Worlds was born, although I had no idea at the time what it would eventually become.

I didn't touch a camera for four years after I left school, but the more I travelled and explored the world around us, the more I began to realise how much it had in common with the one I had carried around in my head since I was a little girl.

The turning point came when I found out that maybe I was living in that fantasy world of my dreams, I just needed to change my point of view and learn to "play" again. That was the moment I picked up the camera again and everything became clear. Capturing that beautiful reality was not just an option in the form of an illustration. I wanted to make it obvious at a glance that the landscape really existed.

So my two passions (actually three, including the adventurous one) merged and Woven Worlds began to emerge.

**Nature seems to be a significant source of inspiration for you. What specific elements of the natural world do you find most inspiring, and how do they influence your work?**

When I need inspiration, nature is the place I go to. Everything I'm looking for is there. I work with lots of structures in my work, and nature provides me with an inexhaustible source of these structures and fragments... There are a thousand micro worlds out there, and to be able to look into them whenever I need to is a great privilege. I feel home there, so I try to spend as much of my free time as possible in nature.

**You mention that you've often been told you live in your own world. How does this personal "world" manifest in the art you create?**

Basically everything I create now comes somewhere from that childhood world of mine... I want to capture this world and reworked it into fantastical stories, because that's actually my reality. I believe that we can live in our childhood dream world as a grown up if we want, we just have to rediscover it. And those worlds can be all around us. You don't have to travel to the end of the world to find it. Sometimes you can just go for a walk to the misty forest behind your house, let your imagination run wild and find yourself in a moment in the Rivendell from Lord of the Rings or in the landscape of one of the Ghibli stories. Simple as that. I am trying also to capture these moments.

**The project aims to evoke a sense of childhood wonder and respect for nature. What kind of message do you hope viewers take away from your work?**

At first glance, it may seem that Woven Worlds are mainly dedicated to children, but the opposite is true. In most cases, children have not lost their imagination, have not suppressed it and have not let it be drowned out by the "real adult world" full of facts and rationality. They are only meant to encourage children to want to explore our world, to respect it and to play out stories far beyond the virtual world of computer screens. To become the protagonist in their own story and retain this sense of adventure into adulthood. In adults, on the other hand, perhaps to reawaken that rationality-oppressed dreamer who once ran through the woods with a wooden sword and fought an imaginary enemy, came to first grade

with a leashed dragon, and ran outside when the first snow fell to look for the tracks of ice giants. Or something completely different, but I believe that the majority of us have had some sort of fantasy world as "safe place" at one time or another.

Woven Worlds are only meant to evoke these places, perhaps to make you smile when you remember your adventurous childhood. They are meant to stimulate the desire to experience something similar again and to implement it in a world full of clearly defined structures and conventions. Maybe even pack a backpack and go on an adventure of your own.

I believe that what amazes people can often naturally awaken in them not only respect, but also the desire to preserve that amazement. To become more sensitive to the places that amaze us and that our planet has to offer, and to start approaching them a little more like an explorer, a traveler and an adventurer of stories than a consumerist tourist.

**You're embarking on a journey to the Arctic as part of an artist residency. What are you most excited to capture there, and how will it contribute to "Woven Worlds"?**

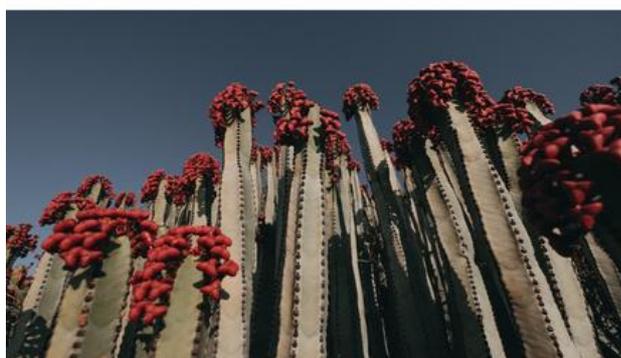
My dream has always been the polar worlds. As a



Kai Sebek | GAN GANDI | 2023

child I read probably every book that existed about polar expeditions and when I once saw a photo of a diver and a whale in the middle of the frozen ocean in NG magazine, I knew I wanted to be there one day to say hello to that creature. To trade places with the diver. I suspected that whatever I did in life, I would try to gradually work my way there. I was both touched and saddened by the photo, as the article had already been accompanied by an educational line about how these frozen worlds gradually melt away. That one picture affected me so much that I became obsessively interested in the issue of polar worlds and the beautiful giants that are part of our planet and yet look like something out of my childhood dream world. It has stayed with me and to this day I would remember that photo in every detail.

I believe in the power of visual storytelling. But in my work I don't want to openly pressure people's consciences or moralize about climate change. Thanks to a lot of amazing scientists, photographers or filmmakers, who are bringing real



Kai Sebek | DESERT STEPE

raw documentary from these lands, a lot of people already know what's happening. At least those who want to know. It's just that the world of glaciers is so distant to many that not everyone can imagine it, much less the impacts that may come when these worlds disappear. I live in the land of the four seasons, and permafrost is more science fiction than reality for most people here.

I want to capture the beauty and uniqueness of these worlds and complement it with a fictional story that playfully takes the viewer through this distant world full of ice and gentle giants. To grasp it from the other end and build the fantasy story of the Arctic on the pillars of real photographs, real stories, so that the viewer gradually recognizes at the end that the fantasy story is taking place here, in our reality.

I'd like to let people see the most remote parts of the world through the eyes of the explorer (a neutral figure with a red hat), and just as the little diver next to the whale once made me want to trade places with him, perhaps the traveler of the Woven Worlds will also make someone want to see into that world. Not necessarily physically, but often all it takes is that childlike enthusiasm for a unique landscape, a desire to learn more about a place. I think fantasy is slowly disappearing from this very rational world, just like icebergs, and I believe that through it even the saddest stories can be conveyed in a more easily digestible form. Knowledge is the greatest power, and this is my way of trying to help to spread awareness of the beauty of the worlds we have so far. That's what Woven Worlds is all about.

**How do you balance the line between reality and fantasy in your work? Do you find one more challenging or rewarding to depict?**

Mostly not at all haha. In my inner world this line often overlaps, sometimes it doesn't exist and everything I create is done pretty much automatically. When I go to photograph something, I rarely have a strict plan. I know where I'm going, but I want to be surprised by what I'll be able to capture. That's the game. Who ends up in the illustration often depends on what I capture. Nothing is predetermined and so no boundary is drawn. I don't outright plan, and equally I want everyone in my work to find that boundary for themselves. For some, what I create may be pure fantasy, while others may be more in search of those elements of reality. I want to give people the

freedom to interpret my work in their own way, because everyone who sees into Woven Worlds is meant to play a starring role in it and be their own hero.

**What role do you think art can play in raising awareness about environmental issues, particularly with projects like yours that emphasize nature?**

Huge. I believe that art has the ability to interpret

complex science in a way that can be understood by a broader spectrum of observers. For example, a photograph of the same melting glacier taken at a different time can express the facts in numbers and graphs quite clearly. Visuals have the power to serve as proof of science. And getting that evidence to the widest possible group of people is what can ultimately be the main driver of change. Awareness.



Kai Sebek | FLY WALKER | 2023

**Zoey Boss** is a digital and traditional artist with an emphasis in digital illustration and animation. Her work centers around character design and storytelling, with most of her digital work being done in ProCreate. Her work has a realistic, elegant style for her digital paintings. Boss is a current student at Bellarmine University working towards gaining a Bachelor's of Art with an emphasis in Digital Art in May of 2025.



Zoey Boss | Melon Boy | 2024

# — Interview

## Erin Dixon

**What inspired you to work with stained glass as your primary medium, and how does it allow you to express the themes of vulnerability and strength?**

I remember learning that when lightning strikes sand it can make glass. Cementing that intense moment in time fascinated me. Since then, I've learned that glass has qualities of both a liquid and a solid (an amorphous solid) so the scientist part of my brain gets excited by glass as much as my artist brain. I think it's trying to achieve this balance that feeds into my approach to glass - strength and vulnerability, science and art, overall exploring the fluidity of the elements. More and more I want to explore larger pieces, meaning my work will need to be structurally sound, but I want to push the limits of what I can create, heading into that space of vulnerability. It's always possible that a piece of glass you've selected and started working with may break throughout the process - the best is when you're first cutting the pattern and the worst, as you finish cleaning the piece. Finding a



Erin Dixon | Gray Feather | 2024

balance of commitment to the artwork and the flexibility of allowing things to happen as they will is an approach I also try to incorporate into daily life.

**Stained glass is often associated with historical and religious settings. How do you approach making it more accessible to everyday life, as described in your statement?**

I want people to experience beautiful glass artwork outside of a religious context. There's no reason to keep its storytelling possibilities exclusive to religious teachings. Your home, your office, your studio, a tool shed - anything can be brightened up with colored glass.

**You mention wanting to make stained glass more relatable and approachable. How do you think art can impact daily life, and what role do you see your work playing in that process?**

Cultivating the ability to see beauty in your everyday life is a skill. I appreciate the



Erin Dixon | Juniper | 2024

opportunity to fill my home with color and beauty, so I try to share as many art pieces with loved ones as I can. I enjoy the idea of the piece becoming a part of their home. I grew up around artwork created by my grandmother - little did I know that years before I was born she made the stained glass suncatchers displayed throughout their house. In the same way, I like the idea of our sons growing up around my artwork and always try to encourage them creatively.

**Could you share more about the creative process behind one of your recent stained glass works? How do you balance the use of color, line, and light in your designs?**

I worked on "Reno" for a year from inspiration to completion. A lot went into the planning and execution, I definitely learned a lot along the way through trial and error. I even made a prototype of just her to check the glass I had chosen for the hat (I'm glad I did). Balancing the composition, I knew I wanted a distant



Erin Dixon | Reno | 2024

landscape to complement the close foreground of her glove. The red glass I chose reminded me of the Southwest, where I had imagined the setting of this piece. Also, I knew I wanted the left side to be much more simple in comparison to the details I would bring out on the right.

**Can you talk about a specific project where your work has been integrated into a public or personal space? How did people react to it?**

"Reno" is scheduled to hang in Steel City Coffeehouse & Brewery in Phoenixville, PA from Nov 2024 through Jan 2025 and I couldn't be more excited. This is the second time I've been able to showcase my work in this way and I'm thrilled by the opportunity.

**Do you have any influences or inspirations from other art forms or artists that have shaped your approach to stained glass?**

Everything is inspiration - I run through art museums because I can't absorb everything quickly enough. I try to keep my mind open to everything I can, snapping pictures or screenshots to preserve what presents itself to me. I recently categorized inspirational photos from the past year into a separate folder - the total was over a thousand photos. I know I'll be adding more for sure - Life has so much to see.



Erin Dixon | Chestnut Pony | 2024

# — Interview

## Kailin Xu

**Your performance "404 Reading Club" combines literature, video, sound, material, and body movement. Can you elaborate on how these elements come together to create a 'spiritual connection' with the audience?**

Divided into four chapters, the performance, titled "reading event", take this "reading" starting from literature and progressively incorporating new media such as spatial sounds, imagery, flowing symbols, and body movements. With these media, the audience experiences an interactive process of emotional shifts in the "reading", ultimately achieving "Nonverbal Communication" experiment through this performance.

**What was your primary inspiration for exploring 'hidden communications' in your work? Are there specific historical events that influenced this project?**

This project began with my observation of the plight of people who have lost the right to speak out under the authority of the government since the Covid Pandemic period. However, I also discovered on the internet that when people are unable to express their accusations in their native language, they use a reworked language as a hidden communication method to avoid the



ensorship of official ideology. In my research, 'Book clubs' also had a special political significance in many eras. During the White Terror in Taiwan, there were many people secretly organizing book clubs to fight against the authority and official consciousness by reading. There were similar book clubs in China during the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768, Witch-hunting in Salem, McCarthyism also gave me inspiration.

**How did your background in fashion design influence the spatial and visual design of your performance projects, including "Partita" and "404 Reading Club"?**

I think my background in fashion design has made me aware of the diverse possibilities of shaping the human body. When applying this exploration to performance art, I consider the relationship between the body, movement and the space. Like in the "404 Reading Club", I covered the costumes with the cipher I designed, and combined them with projections to create a effect of words flowing from the human body into the space and audience. Additionally, my knowledge of materials and techniques during fashion courses has equipped me with the ability to reshape the body through



clothing or wearable installations, which I intergrate into performance production.

**Could you explain the concept of the 'coded language' in "404 Reading Club"? How did you create this secret language, and how is it used during the performance?**

Inspired by the secret communication ways in the history, I want my project to resonate with the audience through a "coded" approach. I consider all kind of media as language, which can be read, and I want them to convey the information and emotions in the scenarios I create. In addition to using sound, imagery, and body movements as "languages," I created an actual cipher for this project. It is based on the rules of the Pigpen Cipher and combines the design of witchcraft symbols. At the same time, I made it possible to be typed on PCs so that it can actually be used by people. Through this approach and design, I hope to convey a positive signal to people that even if we can't express what we want to say with the official language, there are still many ways we can connect with each other.

**You mentioned that audience participation is a key element in your performances. How do you guide the audience into transforming their perspectives and identities during the process?**

Audience Participation is crucial in making this performance complete. When I was working on this project, I aimed the audience not only watch but also to have a real sense of engagement. To achieve this, I designed the performance in a way that break the boundary between performers and audience, making the audience become a part of the performance itself. The reading material papers people read plays a critical role in their transformation of the audience's identity, working both as the material to be read and became into the stage itself by the audience under certain



Kailin Xu | 404 Reading Club | 2024

guidance. Thus the identity of the audience is transformed from the "spectator" to the "participant" in this "reading", or the "ritual".

**The interdisciplinary nature of your work is quite fascinating. How do you approach integrating architecture, sound, and theatre into your multimedia performances?**

I think it's the establishment of a mindset that combines the way to connect people in different fields, and the combination of skills from different fields to create a diverse sensorial experience. My experience at architecture school made me aware of the impact of space on the audience's perceptual and emotional response, and my study of fashion made me focus on establishing the body's role in space. In sound, I enjoy exploring ways to introduce the audience to a more three-dimensional sensory world through audio effects, music and ambient sound, while theatre provides the narrative structure and emotional connection to the audience for my multimedia creations.

**Your performance touches on both visual and auditory senses. Do you believe that performance art has the power to communicate in ways that go beyond verbal language?**

I think it is. Humans don't need language to communicate in the beginning, and children don't need language to express emotions. The conveying of information and feelings doesn't depend wholly on a specific language. There is a Chinese idiom called '心照不宣', which means that when people have the same feeling, they can understand each other's meaning without speaking, and I think this is the same case with performance art. Performance art can use much more media than verbal language, and as we engage more senses such as vision, sound, touch and so on, it can establish information and communication that will transcend the boundaries of culture and language.



Kailin Xu | 404 Reading Club | 2024

As a mixed media artist, I find inspiration and liberation in the act of creation, akin to the freedom I experience in my musical process. My work, characterized by the fusion of acrylic painting and collage techniques, falls under the category of figurative abstraction. This amalgamation allows me to explore the vast spectrum of emotions and themes, reflecting my desire to evoke personal interpretations and connections from the viewer. Recurring themes in my art include self-portraits, faces peering into the world, and reflections on current events. I am particularly drawn to conveying specific emotions, such as fear, while also employing codes and ciphers. My intention is to provide viewers with the space to craft their narratives, encouraging an individualized experience rather than imposing a predetermined meaning. The heart of my artistic philosophy lies in the process of creation. I begin by painting colors onto cardboard, often salvaged from the abundant supply found in the streets of NYC. The improvisational nature of my work emerges as figures and ideas gradually materialize through the layers of paint. This organic development prompts me to integrate collage techniques, further unveiling the hidden concepts that surface during the creative process. Deeply rooted in improvisation, my art draws inspiration from my musical life. As I am primarily a musician, I integrate concepts from improvisational music into my visual work, creating a dynamic interplay between the two art forms. In my connection with the audience, I seek to provide just enough visual information for viewers to construct their own narratives. Rather than prescribing a specific interpretation, I aspire to facilitate a diverse range of experiences, allowing each observer to engage with the art on a personal level. Despite having exhibited only once thus far, my aspiration is to share my work more widely. I am eager to expand the dialogue around my creations, inviting others to join the exploration of emotions, themes, and the boundless possibilities inherent in the intersection of mixed media and musical improvisation.

— Greg Sinibaldi

Greg Sinibaldi | Crazy Town | 2024





Greg Simibaldi | Red Neck | 2024

## — Interview

# Nelli Polle-Zengin

**What inspired you to create the "Selfmade Dress" project, focusing on the life of Marie Semrau?**

The idea came when I was thinking about the topic of "home". What does home mean for old people who have often had to leave their homes. At night I suddenly remembered aunt Marie, whom I only saw once in my life many years ago.

**How did Marie's story resonate with you personally? Was there a moment that particularly moved you during your conversations with her?**

I was particularly touched by the detailed stories, even though the days Marie talked about were more than 80 years ago. How she immediately knew what colors her first selfmade dress was. And her answer that the happiest time of her life was in Berlin during the war.



Nelli Polle | Selfmade Dress | 2024



**Could you share more about the significance of sewing in Marie's life, and why it became such a central theme in the project?**

Sewing ensured Marie's survival throughout her life. During the war and especially afterwards, when there was great poverty and she also had 4 children. She always had her sewing machine with her. Even when she immigrated to the rich country Germany in her old age, she took the train instead of the plane just because she wanted to take her sewing machine with her. That machine is still there. It also shows the role of craftsmanship in the past.

**The idea of "home" is deeply complex in this project, especially for someone who experienced displacement multiple times. How do you think Marie's perception of home evolved over the years?**

You might think that people who often have to leave their homes don't have a single home, but several places where they felt at home. But in most cases, home remains connected to the roots. Home is where you were born and grew up. Perhaps because we have happy memories of childhood and a sense of security. This is also the case for Marie: her home is the parents' house where she grew up.

**The photographs capture both the present and the past through the use of light, shadow, and archival images. What role does nostalgia play in your approach to storytelling through photography?**

I'm very happy that I was able to convey these feelings. Since I had to leave my home country at the age of 17, nostalgia plays a special role for me. I had a deep bond with my grandparents, who had a similar life like Marie. I could see her stories with my heart.

**How did you choose the visual style for this project, and what aspects of Marie's experiences did you aim to emphasize through your artistic choices?**

I wanted to do a portrait of Marie, using my creative ideas. When I was with her, I saw that Marie spends most of her time sitting on her couch. Because of her leg pain, she can hardly walk, so I decided to capture her life today and

make a documentary series without stressing Marie. After a while, Marie found our conversation great and ran with walking aid around the house to show me the memories. It was very nice.

**In what ways do you think Marie's resilience and life story can resonate with today's generation, especially considering the experiences of displacement and migration in the modern world?**

Marie's story demonstrates how adaptable a person can be. Marie's example shows that even in a difficult life, you can and should find positive moments. She told me that her best time was in Berlin, despite the war and displacement from her home, and that made me think a lot. Migration is always an opportunity. Life is the product of our thoughts and actions. We can leave the victim roles, taking the opportunity and make the best of our situation.



My name is **Lisa Sharova** and I am a digital and traditional artist from the United States. In my work, I try to combine a surrealistic art style with abstract ideas and aesthetics. I am also an aspiring writer and plan to illustrate my work.

Lisa Sharova | Portals | 2024





## — Interview

# Leah Oates

**Can you share what initially drew you to explore the concept of "transitory spaces"? How did this theme emerge in your artistic practice?**

I and everyone lives in a world of change and transition and the landscape is also always changing constantly. My work aims to reflect this flux and change in the photographic image and within human perception and experience. Transitory Space conveys the visual and thematic aims of my work.

**Your work often involves multiple exposures to capture the complexities of time and space. What does this technique mean to you in expressing the fleeting nature of these environments?**

When I look back on a moment it's full of impressions and multiple exposures capture this. I make multiple exposures on specific frames in camera which allows me to display a more complete correlation of experiences that a single exposure just misses.

Every moment captured on film is over as soon



as the shutter clicks, recording the ephemeral. Yet, in reality, there is always a visual cacophony of experience. We are always living in many realities at once. Multiple exposures express the way we experience the world more accurately.

**In "Transitory Space," you speak about the coexistence of contradictory realities. How do you navigate these contradictions through your photographic process?**

A camera can capture an essence of a moment in life but any art media has limits compared to actual life yet art is also a record of life.

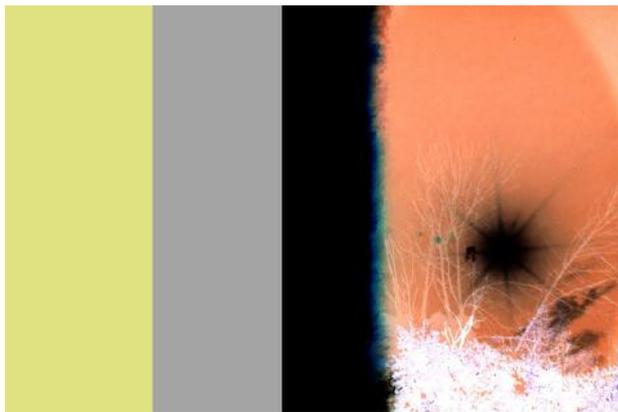
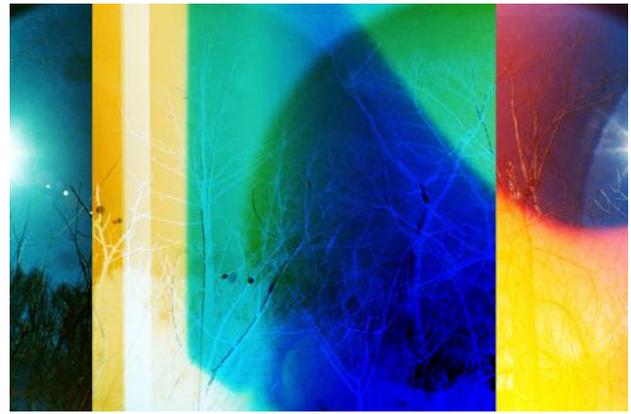
Time is layered and not frozen into one single moment. Photography is directly connected to time as the camera shoots in fractions of a second. Time is always slipping and fracturing from the present, past and future. We are often living in all these levels at once. But when we're not, we experience flow—or an absence of time. Multiple exposures are close to the experience of "flow." When I look at a moment in time I "feel" more than can be recorded with a simple click of the shutter. I use multiple exposures on film to record a more accurate picture of how we can recall time transpiring.

I sometimes think of my work like x-rays or ghost images of the land under the surface that is unsettled, under threat yet is also so very beautiful, magical and enigmatic and that the colored panels are to show these transitions of feelings, perceptions and of time passing and in the landscape itself moment by moment.

**The idea of capturing "visual cacophony"**

**seems central to your work. How do you decide what elements to layer in a single frame?**

I edit and play with my negative scans and I know visually when the work is done. There are series of works that are edited and created fast and other times its slower or I pass on working in certain negatives. I've been doing this for over thirty years and it's a visual intuitive process when editing and playing with my negatives.



**Urban and natural environments are both present in your series. How do you approach these different settings when capturing images, and what do they symbolize in your work?**

I've lived in urban areas for most of my life and I seek nature in these city environments as I love both. I don't see them as being that different really and I approach both urban and natural environments the same which is to try to see them fully in all their beauty, changes and chaos and to attempt to capture the feeling, essence and energy of the place in a photograph.

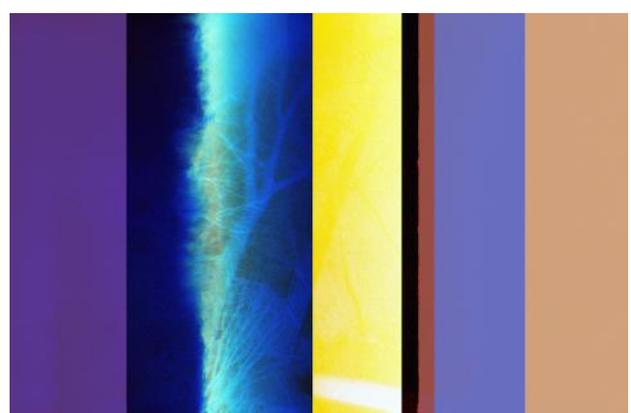
**Your images evoke a sense of both beauty and fragility. How do you balance these qualities in your compositions?**

To me both beauty and fragility are strength and love and are in harmony with each other. It takes strength to show fragility and for beauty to keep existing as it's under constant assault on many fronts from climate change and disaster, war and politics, ignorance and unkindness. Beauty keeps us alive and it's life sustenance itself and sometimes it's seen as insubstantial yet it's the

opposite as we can't live without beauty. I once gave a presentation on being an artist to my son's class where one of the students asked me why art is important. This began a discussion of what if all the arts just disappeared for a day and everything was just blank and grey. Without beauty and all the arts what a bleak and harsh world we would occupy.

**How has your understanding of time and impermanence evolved throughout the "Transitory Space" series?**

As I age, I see time as fleeting and impermanence as part of everyday life. I hope to live to a very old age and I aim to capture and understand via photography the landscape I inhabit in all its beauty, chaos, flux, fragility, randomness and its magic and light.



## Jadzia Korzeniowska

I graduated from the University of Folk Arts and Crafts in Wola Sękowa. I completed an instructor qualification course in artistic crafts and passed the apprenticeship exam as an embroiderer and weaver. I also graduated in art. Education in Fine Arts at the University of Silesia in Cieszyn. Since 2019, I have been a teacher of artistic handicrafts at the Youth Palace in Katowice. I take part in group exhibitions.

Jadzia Korzeniowska | Industria 2 - Co po nas zostanie | 2019



## *Project Statement*

„Industria” in this series of works, I interpret the industrial heritage of places that I grew up around heavy industry, mainly in Upper Silesia. The embroidery that appears in my work – elements of folk art – refers to women coming along with the men who moved to Silesia and worked very hard there. The task to create a home was on those women’s shoulders; they also brought with them what we now call non-material culture: customs, traditions and folk art. I embroider on photos of industrial monuments photos on fabric. The embroidery is inscribed into the walls, the machines, the fences of places once bustling with life, becoming in that way a record of the intersection of two intertwining worlds, inventing a magical space of an unreal world, created by years of coexistence.

Jadzia Korzeniowska | Industria 3 - Najważniejsze jest niewidoczne dla oczu | 2019



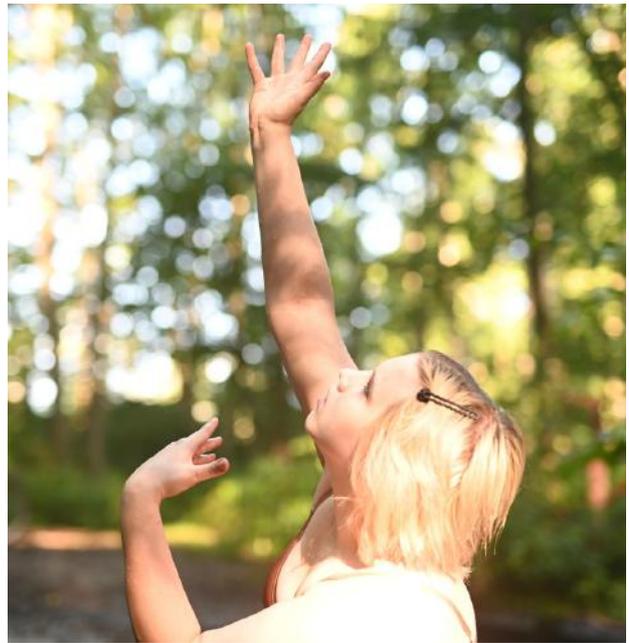
## — Interview

# Natalia Nala Skrzypczak

**You describe your work as guided by experimentation with matter and expanding media. Can you tell us about the creative process behind one of your recent pieces and how experimentation influenced the final result?**

In reality, experimenting without the aim of achieving spectacular, perfect results comes to me with difficulty. By wanting every action to be as precise as humanly possible, I can't always focus on simple actions that are intended to be enjoyable. Nevertheless, I overcome this with an equally strong desire to learn and develop, which forces me to keep testing new techniques and tools in order to expand my personal range of possibilities. Frequently, in the absence of a particular theoretical knowledge, through a simple experiment I discover new potentialities which, with the right approach, I am able to use in the final project.

**How do you approach the concept of 'common ugliness' in your work, and how do you think this theme contributes to a deeper message?**



When there is no aesthetic beauty, people seek it elsewhere, for example in what it represents. With ugliness it is easier to reach an audience and express a specific concept. If the creation is not conventionally pretty, it will be judged on its message.

**Your interest in cybernetics and futurism is clear in your works. How do these concepts influence your artistic decisions, both in terms of form and content?**

I got into futurism after moving to the city centre. I currently approach these topics from a quite different perspective than I did at the beginning of my journey. I do believe that new technologies can develop art and open it up to other senses. I'm moving progressively towards digital art, but I'm still in the habit of making it at least a little bit

Natalia Skrzypczak | Dać Ciała | 2023



materialised and tangible. Modern achievements in technology allow us to make art without any boundaries and we should take advantage of them as much as we can.

**You mentioned that the tools you use should 'say' as much as the creations themselves. How do you choose your materials and tools, and what role do they play in shaping your message?**

I believe that tools are not just utensils with which we can create something, but they are part of the piece that is made with them. This is demonstrated by the amount of possibilities we have to use them to articulate an emotion or a certain thought. A brush, a pencil or even an object not originally intended for art will, depending on its handling, bring a different effect and have a separate impact, just like the colours that are widely used to convey an impression.

**How do you balance traditional and contemporary elements in your work, especially with such a strong focus on futurism and technology?**

I was originally educated in very traditional mediums and valued realism as well as perfection the most. Relatively recently I have opened up to contemporary art which has significantly changed my perception of the world. I suppose that the traditional elements visible in my art are the remains of my old mannerism, which I have not been able to successfully eradicate from my life yet.



Natalia Skrzypczak | AUTOMATIC PORTRAIT | 2024



Natalia Skrzypczak  
Electrical Installation  
2024

**In one of your works, there is an intriguing use of mixed media, including electronic components. How do you decide to incorporate such unconventional elements into your art?**

Works consisting of abnormal elements usually arise from being inspired by them more than from a concept. Seeing a junk deprived of its former life located in a bizarre place makes me so fascinated that I need to take it and restructure it in the way I felt when I first looked at it. Of course, not all of my assemblage artworks are created in this chronology of action, occasionally I go from sketching to gathering the necessities. I don't lock myself into ways of depicting a particular vision, not everything needs to be painted or made from scratch by me. The use of simple objects can sometimes be more unorthodox and effective than a realistically made piece.

**Futurism often deals with visions of the future. In your art, do you aim to depict an optimistic or dystopian view of what's to come?**

So far, most of my artworks have oscillated in the past tense, which has most often had a heavy, emotional impact on the near present. At the moment, I am trying to deal with more universal issues and treat art as a more abstract form of scientific research, so I believe that the next creations will be more focused on the current time or will drift into an undefined space. For the time being, I don't think of acting as a prophet yet, and I can only consider the themes of the future as a form of creation.

## David Moon

Art. Comics. Illustration. A creative visual storyteller, graduated from the MFA program at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, CA. Skilled in narratives and visual storytelling, I blend comics, illustration, and speculative design to inspire fresh perspectives. Through both digital and traditional media, my works encourage reflection on society, not with criticism, but with humor—prompting audiences to consider deeper, layered narratives.

David Moon | Fox and Grape



## *Project Statement*

“Depicting one episode of the Talmud into a Korean woodcut printing style.” I described the tales of “Foxes and Vineyards” in the style of Korean woodcut. The first picture depicts the joy of having a fox sneak over the fence and find the grapes late at night, while the other picture shows the embarrassment of the fox hanging on the fence. By reinterpretation of the western fable into eastern graphic style, I challenged myself to expand the humor in between different cultures.

David Moon | Fox and Grape



## — Interview

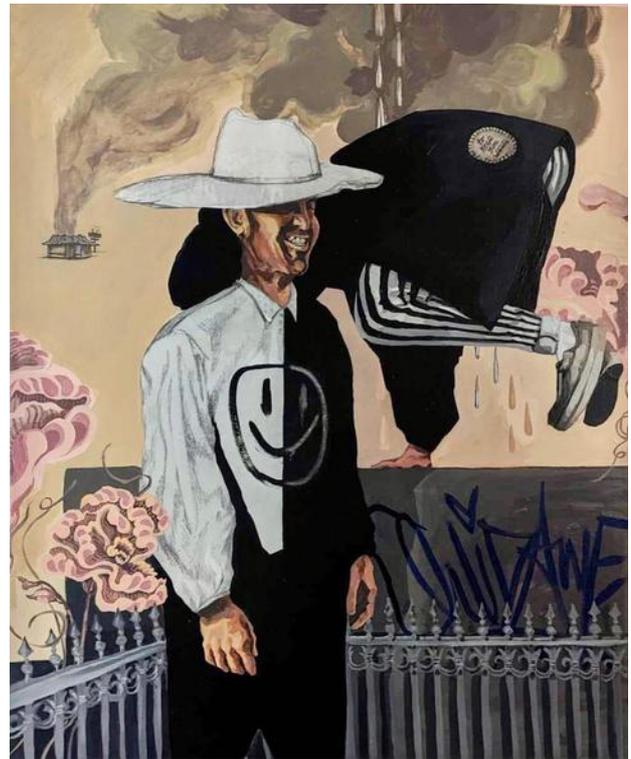
# Quidame Vidvil

### **How did your journey from literature to visual arts influence your artistic expression?**

I always keep in mind that what I'm trying to convey is actually a story—a narrative. When I think I'm done with a painting, the big question is whether the story comes through. I see each piece as a little novel, believing that an image is worth a thousand words. Although sometimes, I'll throw in actual words to drive the meaning home when I feel like the message is too muddled and needs some clarity.

### **Your series delves deeply into trauma and healing. What personal experiences have inspired this body of work?**

I won't dive into all the ugly details, but I'll say I'm the lonely child of a nasty divorce that pulled me toward dangerous people. It ended with me being put in a juvenile center until I turned eighteen. I also struggled with substance abuse from my teens into my early thirties. Like many people, I've faced trauma and spent years trying to cope in self-destructive ways, which only deepened my pain. But through it all, painting has been my anchor—a way to reconnect with myself and unpack my true feelings in a safe space. When I finally started to turn my life around, I realized I could use art to explore the darker corners of my healing, to face my hurts and hopes, and to share the raw struggles and small victories of learning to know myself without shame. Healing those wounds is a lot like developing an art practice: It takes time, resilience, and the grit to face the discomfort that comes with growth. In this body of work, it goes in a lot of different directions within this spectrum.



### **How do your travels and diverse experiences as a translator and event planner shape your creative process?**

At first, it was all about “getting out” and trying to validate my existence through the world around me. But somewhere along the way, I learned to understand people. I've been lucky enough to connect with all kinds of folks—from street kids to wealthy elites—who let me into their lives. This experience opened my mind to different opinions and viewpoints, showing me how our surroundings shape our perceptions and how those perceptions shape our reality. I realized that everyone thinks they're the good guy from their angle. Traveling forced me out of my comfort zone and helped me build both tenacity and adaptability. It made me face my own boundaries. In the end, no matter what you're doing, you need to be flexible enough to handle the messiness of human interactions and self-aware enough to set clear limits. Being open to different perspectives is crucial; if you can't do that, you risk becoming an intolerant jerk.

### **You use both tattooing and silkscreening alongside painting. How do these mediums influence each other in your work?**

Diversity means everything to me. When I paint, I

often think about tattooing: both should be “clear,” need solid composition, a good grasp of color theory, and, most importantly, a real understanding of light. My characters often rock tattoos, and I like to think my tattoo work sharpens my painting skills and vice versa. Silkscreening, like tattooing, is something I picked up in the underground scene, mostly as a side hustle. It feels like “real people” art—accessible, wearable, and identity-driven. My characters often wear patches that reflect this vibe, and sometimes I even throw in actual silkscreen work to add texture and pay tribute to artists who did this before me, like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol. I’m really drawn to the tension between what’s unique and what’s everywhere—the idea that something can be both one-of-a-kind and part of something larger. This struggle fascinates me and shapes my work, as I dive into how “individuality” needs to coexist on an equal footing with “community.”

**Your artwork features industrial architecture intertwined with nature. Could you explain the symbolism behind this combination?**

Like a lot of people in the West, I find this era of late-stage capitalism really uncomfortable. Our society feels so disconnected from nature in every sense, and I can’t shake the disgust I have for our harsh, self-suppressing way of life. I guess you could say I’m a doomer; I can’t help but see parallels between my world and ancient Rome, which now exists only as ruins that nature is slowly reclaiming, and the bitter memory of something that could have been great but turned shitty. I’m also playing with the idea that the walls I build to protect myself from past wounds, anxiety, and avoidance are starting to crumble. Those man-made structures inside me are falling apart, making way for something more raw and wild. It’s messy, but it feels essential to embrace that chaos and authenticity.

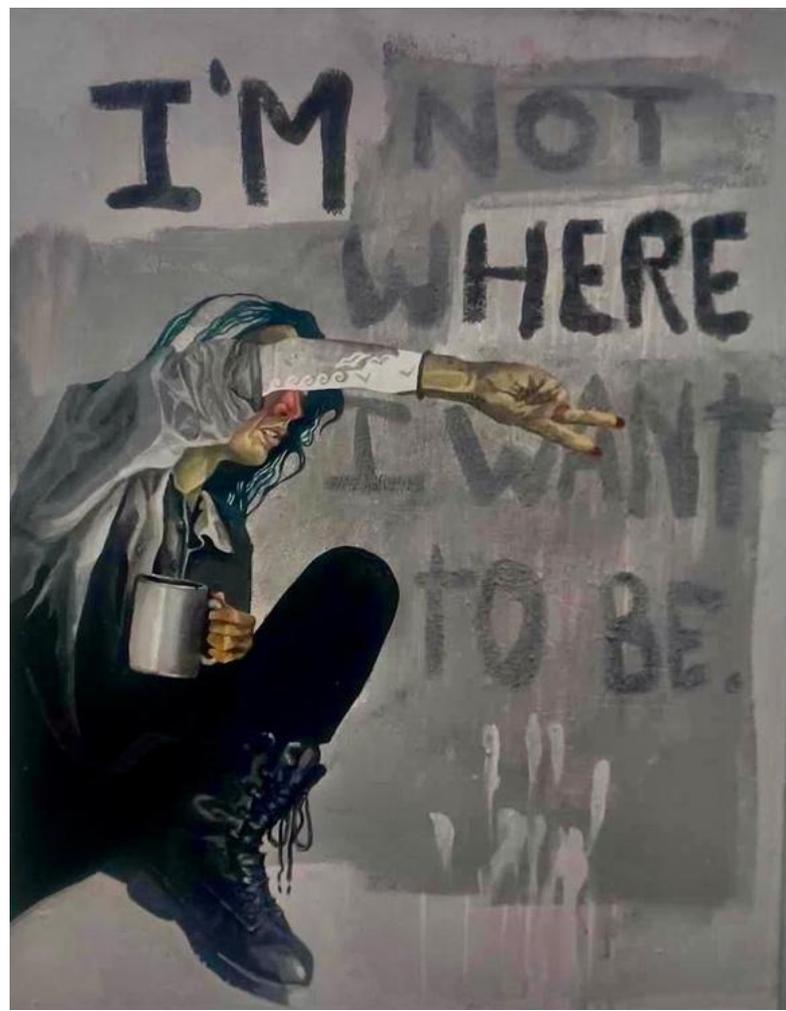
**How do you approach the challenge of conveying complex emotions and experiences, like trauma, through visual art?**

The best way to approach it? Don’t overthink it—let your gut lead the way. Just jump into what you feel like creating without questioning why. The

meaning will come later, and then you can refine it with your technical skills to make it resonate with others. For me, it’s all about getting everything out first. Let it be weird and confusing—get all that stuff out of your system before you try to make sense of it. Art is therapy for every artist. You don’t have to understand what you’re doing when you start; just trust that the meaning will show up once you clear the space inside yourself to hear it.

**How do you find a balance between the destruction and renewal themes in your art?**

Isn’t life just a constant cycle of destruction and renewal? There’s no way around it. Finding balance means accepting that fact. When you’re creating, don’t be afraid to start over. Let go of what you’ve made. If something on the canvas used to feel good but doesn’t anymore, don’t hesitate to change or erase it. Trust yourself: if you created it once, you can do it again. By ditching what no longer serves you, you make room for fresh ideas—stuff that truly reflects who you are and what you want to say right now. That’s how you grow as an artist and as a person. That’s how you embrace renewal.



## Lee Rayne

I'm an artist based in Berlin, and photography became my way of preserving the emotions I experience in fleeting moments. Rather than capturing just an image, I aim to evoke the mood, the mystery, and the subtle undercurrents of each scene. While studying Media Science, I discovered filmmaking and took part in several projects, not only as a visual artist but also as an actress. I've also been dancing since I was a child, which perhaps explains my fascination with movement—something I try to incorporate into my photography, allowing each frame to feel alive.

### *Project Statement*

In "Thresholds," I've tried to capture those fleeting moments we all experience, when we're on the verge of something—standing at the edge between what we know and what comes next. Through soft reflections and textured shadows, this series traces the quiet beauty in transition, in that tender pause before stepping into the unknown. Each image reflects a journey inward as much as outward, where mirrors become portals into a shifting sense of self and place. The reflections aren't just of a person; they're echoes of memories, glimpses of who we've been, and hints of who we're becoming. There's a sense of mystery in these frames, like a whisper between past and future, a reminder of how delicate and beautiful these in-between spaces can be. "Thresholds" is an invitation to linger for a moment—to see yourself within these mirrored worlds and consider your own thresholds, the spaces where you're quietly transforming. Here, in this pause, there's a kind of grace and a gentle reminder: sometimes, it's in the softest moments of change that we find ourselves most deeply.

Lee Rayne | Thresholds | 2024





## — Interview

# Charles Chao Wang

### **How did you first become interested in incorporating these elements into your photography?**

In the early stages of creative works, I tried to find out what my own instinctive desires were, what I had longed for. I tried to understand myself more clearly. After continuous thinking, I decided to make a breakthrough in one of my habits. In the past ten years or so, I often rode a motorcycle alone in my hometown of Shanghai, and most of the places I rode were in the countryside, where the quiet roads and the vibrant nature surrounded me. I found that behind this behavior was my greatest desire in life, and then I started to read a lot of books and materials to study it in depth, and fortunately I came across the Zen philosophy of D.T. Suzuki, and realized that riding a motorcycle alone in the countryside and the theory of Zen meditation had something in common with each other for me, and that both of them could make me feel calm and amplify my perception, and that I could obtain my creativity through riding and Zen practice. I get inspiration for my work through riding and practicing Zen. In the process of practicing Zen, I realized that nature has a healing effect on me. My childhood home is on the edge of a wheat field in the suburbs of Shanghai, and my fondness for nature is deeply buried in my memories, and this part of my memories is perhaps the most joyful experience for me, and most of my works are full of emotions, and photography is the most important way of self-healing for me.



Charles Chao Wang | Away Way

### **Social commentary and spiritual healing seem to be key themes in your art. How do you balance these two elements in your work, and what impact do you hope to have on your audience?**

Social commentary is mostly the source of inspiration in my work, while spiritual healing is the aspiration and aim of my art practice, and the two complement each other in my work.

I hope that my photographs can provide the viewer with a way to cope with the feeling of powerlessness in situations that cannot be changed, to detach ourselves from the emotions of the moment, to take a deep breath, and to feel the peace that comes from within.

### **Your project “Allow To Be” focuses on the societal constraints placed on women in contemporary Chinese society. Could you share more about what inspired this project and how you approached capturing this theme?**

The inspiration for this project came from a female friend of mine who returned to her hometown after receiving a Western education. The two cultures clashed strongly, and I was deeply touched by her courage in questioning

traditions and standing up for herself in the face of public opinion. I began to pay attention to some women's issues in China, and I realized that Chinese women's mindset is still largely controlled by various power institutions, such as social media and the press, which reminds me of Foucault's theory of the panoramic view of the prison. The power of these institutions is mostly in the hands of men, so I use some symbols of male power in my works, such as fire extinguishers, carts, tires, etc., and at the same time, I spray these things with soft colors in an attempt to "feminize" these things. In my opinion, the gender equality pursued by Chinese women is to a certain extent detached from reality in the current Chinese society.

**In "Away Way," you explore Taoist principles like "the unity of heaven and man." How do you see these philosophies intersecting with your personal experiences growing up in China?**

I believe that for the younger generation growing up in China, many mental illnesses are due to social problems. Under the long history of oppression and curbing of nature, it is difficult for young Chinese people to have a healthy mental state. And Chinese society as a whole does not value the mental health of its people. Mental illnesses are marginalized, and from childhood to youth, many young Chinese people live on a mapped out path, and few are able to think about what they really want to pursue in their lives in such an environment. I am just like one of the above mentioned young people, as a teenager, I questioned the authority and the homogenized brainwashing education, but I couldn't change any of the external environment, during high school I had a serious depression, it was not until I came into contact with photography and contemporary art that I had a way to express my emotions and my mental problems were cured. During the course of the project, I learned about Taoist philosophy, the idea of "the unity of heaven and mankind", which aims to develop the inner strength of each person, to let nature take its course in the face of force majeure, and to accept the present moment. This was exactly what I needed. My upbringing in China has pushed me closer to



Charles Chao Wang | Away Way

these ideas, and through practicing Zen and meditation, I have come to understand myself and reconcile with my past.

**Your work, such as in the project "Nobody Spaces," addresses the isolation experienced during the pandemic. How did your own experiences during this time shape the creation of this project?**

I was in London during the enforced lockdown of the Shanghai pandemic. As my family and friends were in Shanghai, I kept in close contact with them on a daily basis, during their 2 months of enforced quarantine at home, during which time there were food shortages, emotional breakdowns. I tried to help them find some of the good things about the situation as I continued to encourage and reassure them. As I continued to encourage and comfort them, I tried to help them find something beautiful in the situation, I would ask them to take selfies at home every day and send them to me, and I found something interesting in their selfies, which is how the project "Nobody Spaces" took shape.

Being in London at that time, I felt the pain of my family and friends from an onlooker's point of view, and it was the first time that I strongly experienced the insignificance and powerlessness of the individual in the face of a powerful system. As the myth of Sisyphus describes, all we can do is change our mindset in the face of powerlessness. I am currently still working on the project "Nobody Spaces", through which I hope to show the greatness and

power of the individual, and to challenge the system of contempt for the individual.

**Many of your projects aim to create a form of utopia. How do you envision your ideal utopia, and what role does photography play in its creation?**

Yes, many of my works present an image of a utopia. In my opinion, my ideal utopia is one that can free people from social values, where people can live freely within the limits of morality and law, where everyone has his or her own thoughts, and where people can feel peace and strength from within.

Photography, on the other hand, is the carrier of my thoughts. For me, photography is both close to reality and can show beyond reality.

**Your art reflects on both personal memories and societal issues. How do you navigate the tension between these two when you create new work?**

I think the causes behind both good and painful memories are more or less rooted in social issues, and the good and painful things in my personal memories will become my creative

inspiration. For example, my new project on the urbanization of my hometown, which I started shooting this year, is inspired by my longing for my hometown and my helplessness in the face of the government's forced conversion of ancient buildings into modern tourist attractions. My hometown is a 1,000 year old town that I have lived in since I was born, and after completing my undergraduate degree I left to pursue a career as a photographer in a more developed area, the town was a spiritual anchor for me as I drifted and moved around. Nowadays, however, this old town is becoming stranger to me day by day, with historic houses and buildings being demolished and rebuilt in their place as gorgeous, vapid shells under the government's remodeling. The local residents and I understand that the government wants to develop and develop the local tourism and culture, but the government has neglected the heritage of the traditional culture and the destruction of the local community. Many of the local residents have lived in the town since birth, but are now forced to move out of their homes and into government-arranged apartment buildings. For this project, I was faced with the insignificance and helplessness of personal emotions and memories in the face of social change.





Originally from Latvia, **Marija Morozova** is an emerging artist who lives and works in Melbourne, Australia, working primarily in acrylics. She often employs bold colours and large brushstrokes in a figurative tradition. Marija's practice is centered on exploring women's strength through their vulnerability. Celebrated for an unusual and unique treatment of colour her works can be found among collections internationally.

### *Project Statement*

Painting "Ophiuchus" , named after the 13th constellation sign. All the "star signs" in the painting are inspired by star maps, astrological and mythological themes and neoclassicism, making modern interpretations of classical subjects, with an emphasis on the female human body.



Marija Morozova | Ophiuchus

# — Interview

## Alice Li

**Could you tell us about your experience studying both Design at the China Academy of Art and Illustration at Kingston University? How have these different environments influenced your approach to art?**

During my studies at the China Academy of Art, I was exposed to collaborative interdisciplinary research. By taking different courses, I have tried different aspects of graphic design and product design. Our teachers also gave us great support and guidance in our various endeavors. As a result, I have enjoyed experimenting with different materials and media in my paintings. As a freshman, I never imagined that my final project would be a short theater film. Our program also starts various Chinese-foreign collaborative workshops in the semester before the summer holidays, which allow students to be exposed to art and design works from different cultural backgrounds and to interact with professionals. During the illustration workshop in my first year, I met illustrators from the UK as well as teachers who had graduated from UAL's illustration program. With such a strong learning atmosphere, I was eager to study illustration in the UK.



Alice Li | Prague | 2024



Kingston University is located in London, UK, and has world-class workshops and equipment that can meet my needs for creating with different materials. London is rich in art and cultural resources. I visited various museums, galleries, and exhibitions during my time there, and our main program included field trips where our teachers took us to museums and galleries to visit and learn. We combined the methods taught by the teachers with our individual interests to create our own works of art.

When I enter a new environment, I am full of curiosity and more willing to explore. During my undergraduate studies, I had very little time to explore a new place with my heavy course load. During my time at Kingston, I have explored more places and found myself and my own creative style and rhythm.

**Your sketches capture a sense of daily life and personal experiences. What do you find most fulfilling about documenting life through sketches?**

I love to paint, travel, and share, so I decided to combine all three. During my travels, I use a paintbrush to make notes of the sights and later share them via text on my social media

platforms. One of the things that makes me feel very accomplished is that by documenting my life in this way on the platform Xiaohongshu, I have gained thousands of followers in less than a year, which has attracted the attention of publishers. I have also recently signed a contract with a Chinese publisher to publish my personal sketches, and I hope they will soon be available to everyone!

When I draw my sketches, I look more closely at my subjects and discover more details, while at the same time I subjectively leave out some content to achieve a balanced picture. Because drawing is not as quick as taking a picture with a mobile phone, I will spend more time concentrating on what is in front of me, looking for the right composition and what is worth capturing in the picture, and interpreting the master's work from my own point of view. This also makes it easier for me to find the beauty and interesting things in life. It can be said that sketching has influenced the way I look at the world.

**You experiment with various drawing media and mixed materials, such as RISO printing and digital painting. How do you decide which medium to use for a particular project or idea?**

Influenced by my design studies, I take into account the emotions and ideas I want to express through the project when deciding which medium to use. Different projects have different qualities that they carry and express, so I don't fixate on one form of expression. For me, different painting media have different characteristics and bring different feelings and experiences to people. I take this into account when I paint.

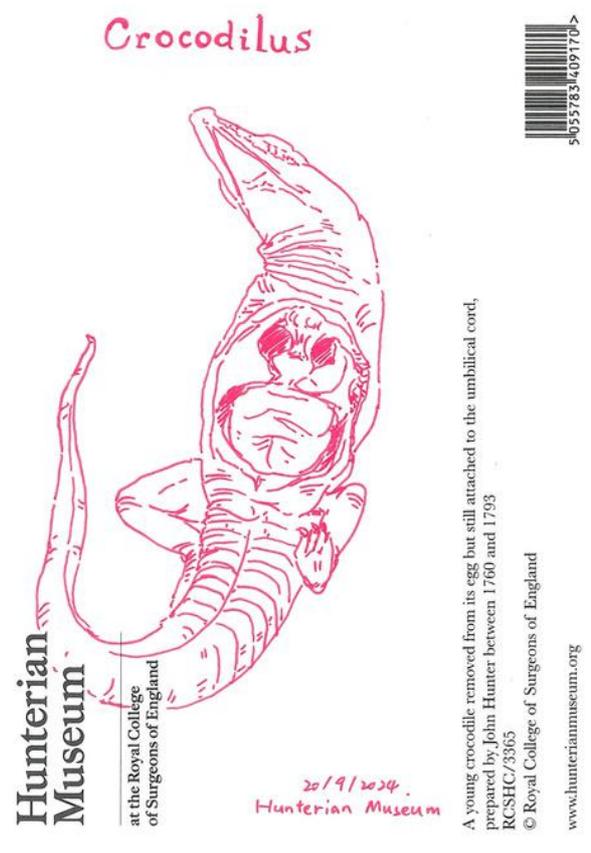
Sometimes I also create works specifically for a particular medium in order to experiment with it. For example, RISO gives me a vintage feeling, and the form of my composition will be more vintage. Watercolor sometimes gives me a feeling of tears dripping on the paper, making the painting dense, so I will use watercolor to paint some melancholic paintings. In the process of mixed media painting and combining hand-

painting with digital painting, or imitating hand-painted effects with digital painting, every detail conveys the mood and idea I want to express, not just for the sake of 'beauty.'

When I make a formal drawing on paper, I might first try to match the colors on the iPad. After drawing on paper, I sometimes continue to make minor adjustments and refinements on the iPad. The reason I use different materials for sketching is because I take different materials in different colors with me when I go out, and sometimes the colors I need to use are only available in a certain material, so I use different materials to meet the color needs of the painting.

**The drawings you've shared depict a range of subjects, from detailed skeletons to natural landscapes and cityscapes. What themes or emotions do you aim to explore through these diverse subjects?**

In the beginning, I was in the mood to explore painting with the intention of documenting the beauty and interesting routines of everyday life. I drew things and subjects that I hadn't drawn before, and I drew the objects that moved me the most in a situation. I can say that with each



sketch, I can tell an interesting story behind the image. For example, in a small shop selling freshly squeezed orange juice in Camden Market, London, when there were no customers, the shopkeepers would attract customers by pretending to be busy. Sometimes they would move the orange juice around on the counter, and sometimes they would rearrange the oranges in the boxes at the front of the shop. These are all details that you can't see at a glance.

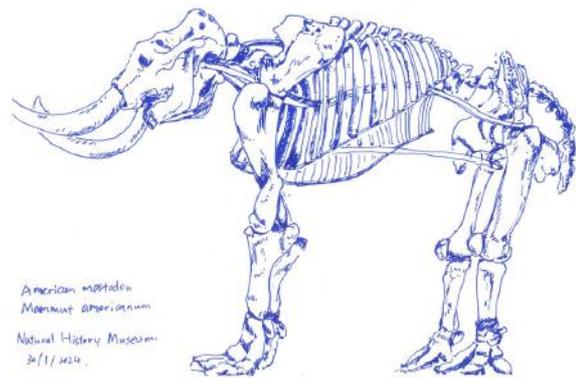
I hope my work can make people in this fast-paced society put their feet down, slow down, be curious like a child, and appreciate the interesting and pleasant side of life. Perhaps there are many people who have never been to the places I have traveled, so I would like to pass on the scenery and my feelings at the time through my brushes. I also want to leave a different record of memories for people who have been to the same place. My works will also attract my followers to visit that place or to revisit the objects I have painted with my brush that they have not paid attention to before.

**What role does spontaneity play in your creative process, especially when sketching in everyday settings?**

Before I left to study in the UK on my own, my friend sent me a postcard of the place she had traveled to, writing about how she felt at the time and how happy she was to share the beauty with me. The postcard arrived at the same time as her return, and I was even more surprised to see my friend. My other friends also said they wanted me to share more of my life with them. I can say



Alice Li | Sir Henry Unton | 2024



Alice Li | Mammoth | 2024

that I drew the things in my daily life with the feeling of sharing my joy and surprise with my friends. When I went back home, I gave the sketches on postcards to my friends and relatives, and they were all very happy. There was a very popular mobile game called 'Traveling Frog' in China. They said I was like a real-life version of the Traveling Frog and brought them postcards and souvenirs from my trip. At the same time, the encouragement of the teachers in Kingston is one of the motivations for me to keep creating.

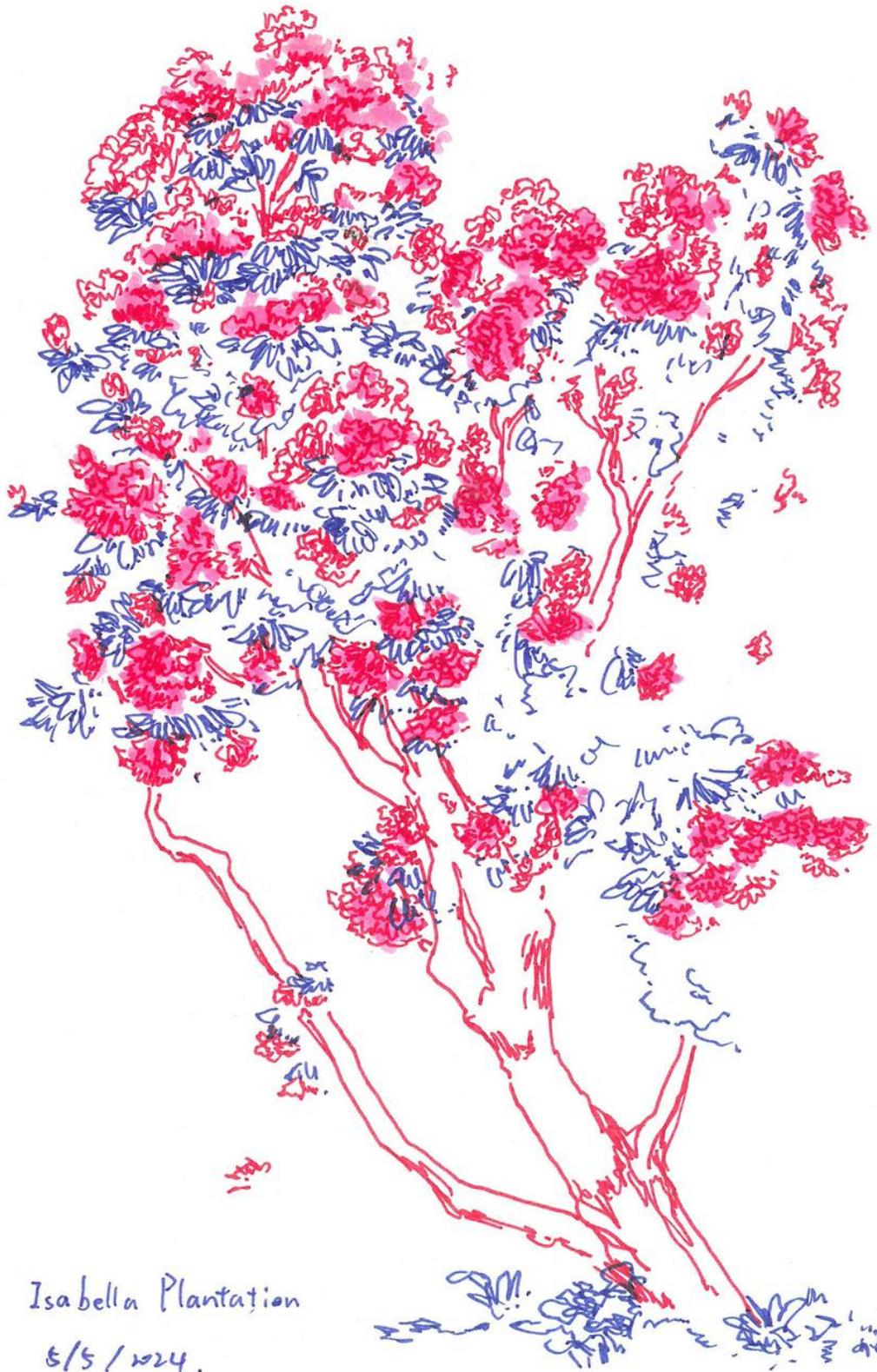
**Could you share more about your interest in mixed materials? How do you incorporate them into your artistic projects?**

I first became interested in mixed media because I saw the work of many different types of artists. They experiment with other media besides painting to create their work. For example, Dali, Picasso, Mucha, and so on. Therefore, if the use of a single material does not satisfy my creative needs, I will try to experiment with other different media. Sometimes you can't predict the final result because new ideas come to me during the process, which makes the project more interesting. Whether a project is interesting or not is one of the criteria I use to judge whether or not I am satisfied with my work. Sometimes mixing materials can make a simple project more detailed and present the project from different angles. This time it may be that design thinking is more dominant. Which materials bring warmth? Which materials make people feel fragile? I will continue to ask myself these questions throughout the design process, looking for the option that comes closest to answering my subjective feelings.

**Have any of your recent travels influenced your artistic style or subject matter? Could you share a memorable experience that translated into your art?**

I recently returned to the Tate Modern in London. With a new picture book project in mind, I was able to appreciate different artists' explorations of materials and different ways of presenting images. It gave me a lot of ideas

about what I would like to do next. At the same time, because of my love of the theater stage and Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, I went to see the ballet Alice's Adventures in Wonderland at the Royal Opera House a few days ago and was also impressed by the stage presentation and the story, which inspired my work. I used purple and green watercolor pencils to sketch and simulate the effect of RISO and the dizziness of falling into a dream world.



Isabella Plantation  
5/5/2024.

## Sofia Aguilar

In my works, I use a combination of oil, acrylic, ceramics, mixed media, and ink & pen to help my images represent different forms of culture, biology, religion, and structural forms in architecture that I find inspiring. Some illustrations reference and symbolize religious topics that were restricted from me in my childhood such as witchcraft, deadly sins, and visual themes from other religious beliefs and sources. Other artworks represent my interest in animal biology in which I blend with unique embellishments found in architecture. The precision and unique shapes in architecture have inspired me to create my own representation of structure in my images, there is also the atheistically pleasing scenes in shapes such as the organic and cluttered collision in lines that helped me create comforting and calming works that are surrounded by different lifeforms whether it's realistic or fictional. My interest in the cryptic and morbid side of religion has helped and inspired me to create works that showcase the symbolism represented in 'Memento Mori' and the Seven Deadly Sins.

Sofia Aguilar | Crimson, Buttermilk, Dine! | 2024





# — Interview

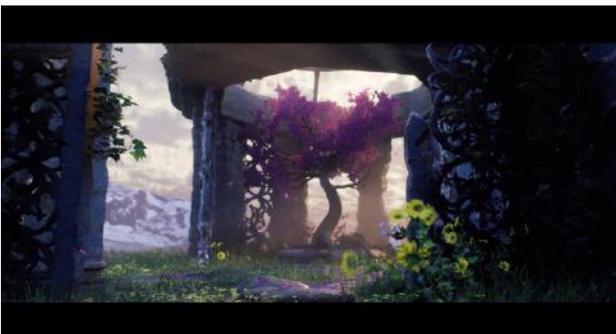
## Joyce Jiao

**Your work often incorporates themes of surrealism and architectural preservation. What first inspired you to explore these areas in your art?**

Growing up, I was always drawn to exploring spaces that could evoke emotions and create lasting memories. These spaces ranged from the narrow piano practice room I frequented at the Youth Center to the well-worn path I took to school each day, even extending to everyday places like bathrooms at home or school. I came to deeply value these experiences and the feelings each space instilled in me. This sensitivity to atmosphere and memory informs my work today—I believe that a truly impactful, environment-focused artwork should resonate with its audience, inviting them to feel and even imagine themselves within it.

**Can you share how your experience at York University, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Gnomon has shaped your artistic journey?**

At York University, I pursued a double major in Visual Art and Art History, where my Freshman Art History classes profoundly impacted me. These courses taught me to interpret and analyze art from both traditional and unconventional perspectives, expanding how I



Joyce Jiao | Into the Garden | 2023



thought about and engaged with visual storytelling. However, I soon felt the desire and urge to further immerse myself, leading me to transfer to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. There, I was able to focus more intensively on fine arts within an environment that fostered exploration and experimentation in various mediums and techniques, strengthening my foundation as an artist. During my time at the SAIC, I was able to explore my interest on both Architecture Design and Cinematic Studies.

**You mentioned the impact of the Notre Dame fire on your perspective about digital preservation. How do you see the role of digital artists in safeguarding cultural heritage?**

When the Notre Dame fire happened, it really struck me that many historical sites are at risk of disappearing, whether from natural events or human impact. As digital artists, we have this unique chance to preserve these places by capturing them in virtual form. By recreating them digitally, we can make sure that future generations get to experience and appreciate their beauty and significance, even if the originals might fade or change over time. I think sharing these digital spaces not only keeps history alive but also makes it accessible to people everywhere, in a way that's meaningful and lasting.

**In your work, there's a recurring theme called the "dream of gold." What does this concept mean to you, and how do you express it through your art?**

In my CG work, which is often focused on spaces and environments, the concept of the "dream of gold" represents a special feeling or moment I

strive to bring to life. It's like when a photographer sees a perfect sunset and feels compelled to capture that fleeting beauty—the 'golden hour' unfolding right before their eyes. For me, being a good CG environment artist means being able to create these immersive, golden moments from scratch, moments that draw people in and make them want to experience the space. Through lighting, composition, and staging, I work to craft that 'dream of gold' feeling, creating scenes that resonate deeply and stay with the audience.

**How do you approach balancing technical skill with emotional expression in your work, especially when creating immersive environments?**

For me, the quality of a project always comes first, especially with non-traditional computer-generated art where technical precision plays a big role in defining the strength of the piece. Solid technical skills allow me to bring out the emotions I want to convey in a way that's both effective and impactful. When creating immersive environments, technical expertise enables me to shape a space that doesn't just



Joyce Jiao | Se Son Rose Fioriranno | 2022



Joyce Jiao | Flooded Library, Midsummer Day | 2023

look impressive but also resonates emotionally, making the experience feel real and memorable for the audience.

**Could you describe a project that you found particularly meaningful, and why it stands out to you?**

For me, this project has to be the one called "Se Son Rose Fioriranno". This was the first high-quality still-life rendering I completed as a CG artist, and it holds a special place in my journey. The title itself—Se Son Rose Fioriranno, an Italian phrase I stumbled upon—connected instantly with a beloved short novel by William Saroyan, \*Knife-Like, Flower-Like, Like Nothing At All in the World.\* I love the feminine grace and delicate mystery in these words, and I wanted to weave that same feeling into my own art. The result was a quiet, intimate scene: a bokeh rose sword framed on the wall, capturing a serene, contemplative moment.

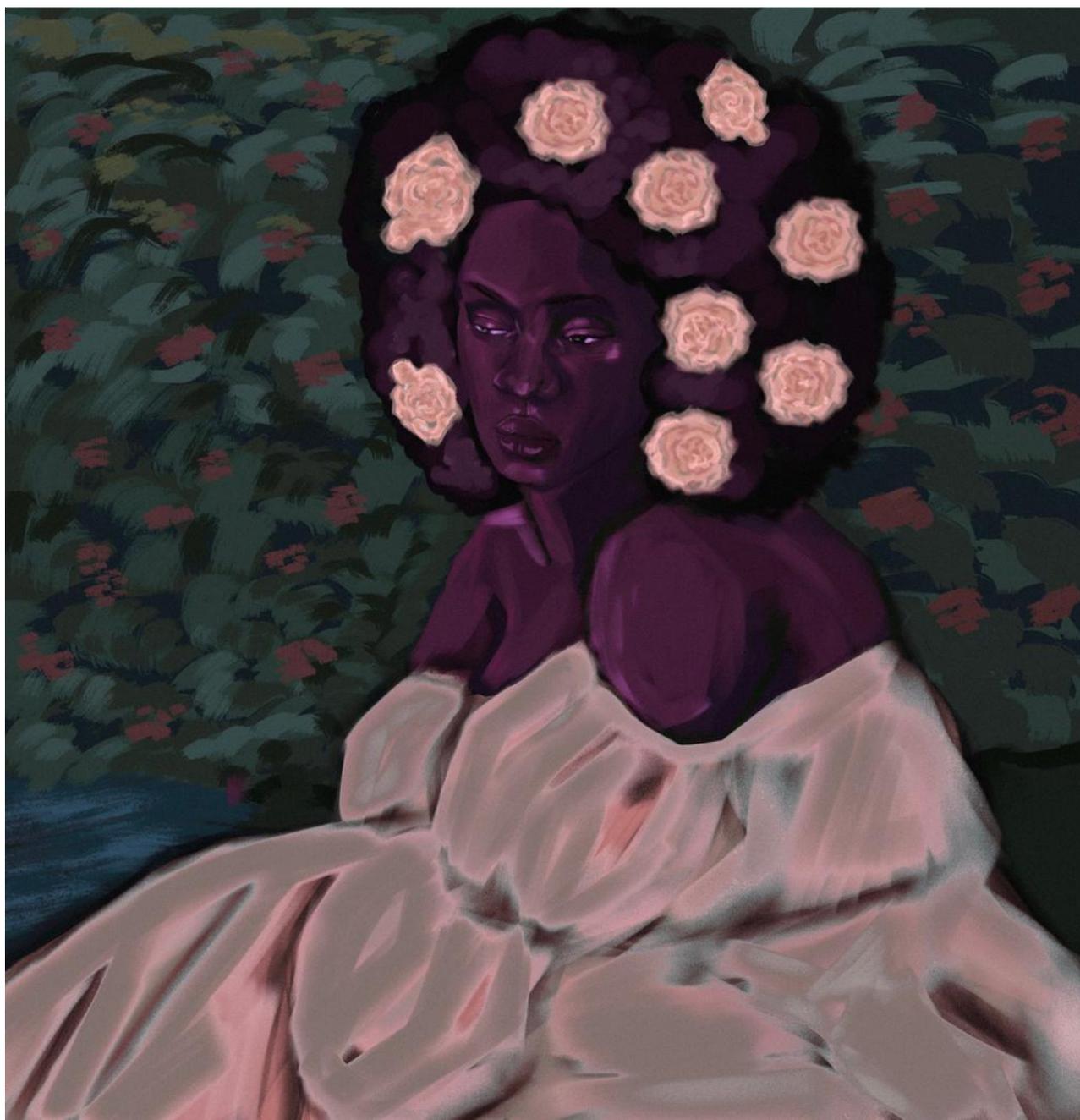
**How do you keep your skills and creative approach evolving, considering the rapid advancements in 3D art and digital technology?**

Keeping up with the rapid changes in 3D art and digital technology can be challenging, but I make it a priority to stay updated on industry news and advancements, even during times when I'm not actively creating. I believe that constantly reading, observing, and staying informed helps me stay connected to the latest techniques and trends, allowing my skills and creative approach to evolve with the field.

**Clerie Eugene** is a Calgary based artist, growing up in the area introduced her to a diverse world full of vibrancy and life, which is reflected in her digital portraiture and figure work, with bold colours and diverse features. A self-taught artist Clerie aims to uplift women who's features are not often depicted in media and the visual arts, along with exploring themes of mental health and identity.

### *Project Statement*

These two paintings are from my a soft nature collection which depicts black women in nature, as I've always found the two to be extremely beautiful.





## — Interview

# Zhanna Hurkina- Sysina

### **What inspired you to start painting, especially since you have a background in economics?**

The impetus for the beginning of creativity for me was a feeling of emptiness and confusion in a difficult period of my life-I was going through a series of difficult events related to me and people close to me. Trying not to get depressed, one day I went to a bookstore and bought a pack of drawing paper, a simple pencil and an eraser. When I got home, I sat down and started drawing the first thing that came to mind. By drawing, I was leaving reality and it helped me to discover new things in myself and cope with difficulties with dignity. A few days later, I was already learning the basics of drawing three-dimensional shapes and the anatomy of a human face. I had never studied drawing before and all my drawing skills were reduced to drawing lessons in high school. After a while, I switched to drawing with dry pastels, and a few months later I bought my first tubes of acrylic paints, brushes and canvas.

### **How does your academic experience in economics influence your approach to abstract painting?**

It has no effect whatsoever. And it's true. I am

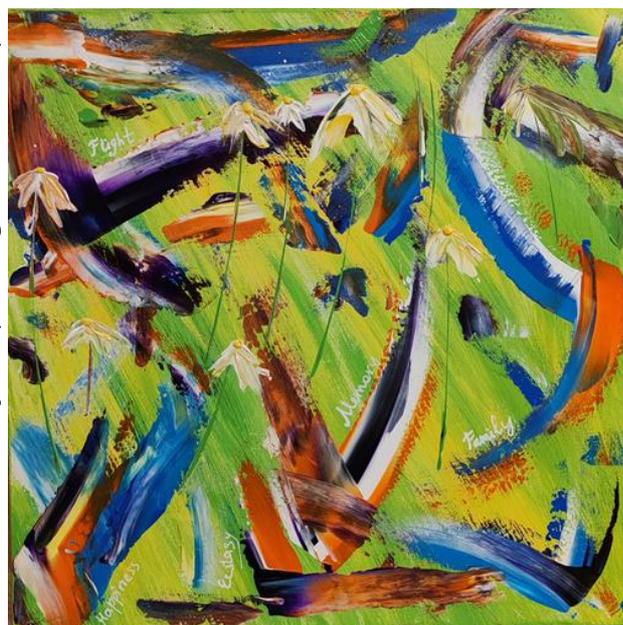


an economist, an accountant who has been working in the profession all my working life and has defended my dissertation on economics. I was a senior employee, the head of a department, and this obliged and influenced my behavior, the manifestation of emotions and a lifestyle dominated by dynamics, rigor of style and behavior, specificity and formality. Art has given me the opportunity to see myself and the world around me in a different way - without focusing on time, rules and cliches.

Abstraction allows to see the complex in the simple, and the simple in the complex.

### **Could you describe your creative process from the moment you choose your colors to the final brushstroke?**

I start working with canvas by choosing the colors of the paints that I want to apply. From the palette, I intuitively choose the colors that I want to use right now. In my work, I use a palette knife and sometimes a golden potal. After choosing the colors, I start applying them to different parts of the canvas, and then I start working with a palette knife, mixing them together right on the canvas. Before I start painting, I never know what I want to paint.



After applying paints to the canvas and mixing them, images and accents are born in my imagination, which I draw and refine on the resulting color combinations. I like to make accents with thick and sweeping strokes of paint, creating texture and giving the viewer the opportunity to literally touch the stroke with a palette knife.

**What do you hope people feel or experience when they see your work?**

I hope that the positive, energy and desire to consider the details of my work, which change the first impression of the painting as a whole, revealing the whole story I told on the canvas.

**You often use bright and juicy colors. What role do colors play in conveying your artistic message?**

There are a million colors and shades, semitones in the world, but the modern frenzied rhythm of life forces people to hurry, fuss, plunging into the dullness of everyday life and events. In my paintings, through colors, I want to awaken the audience's memories of moments in their lives and events that are continuously connected with colors. We all remember the color of our favorite toy in childhood, the color of the foliage in the park



Zhanna Hurkina-Sysina | Tanderine Sorbet | 2023

when we walked with the guy who became our first crush, the color of the mown and fragrant grass on which we ran to meet the wind with a kite, the color of our beloved mother's vase that we broke. There is a lot of magic concentrated in color and I believe and feel it.

**How do you decide when a painting is finished? Is it an intuitive feeling, or do you have specific criteria?**

This is purely intuitive.

**Can you share a story behind one of your favorite paintings and what it represents to you?**

I think it's "Visavi". The painting was created specifically for the first in my life, as a participant in the general republican exhibition in Minsk in March 2024. In the process of creating it, I used thick layers of paint and various shapes of palette knives. Already in July of this year, this painting became a diploma holder of the 3rd degree at the international competition in London.

Born in Rome in 1973, some of his works have been displayed as backdrops in the windows of various shops in Rome and throughout Umbria in recent years. In 2015, he participated in the first edition of the Biennale of Art and Culture in the city of Rome, "RomArt 2015."

Art, for BENZ, is the sharing of a dream between the artist and the observer through the realization of a finished work. This transformative process has a flavor that BENZ dares to define as magical. His passion for art emerged from the very first moment he could admire the colors of life that unfolded before his eyes day after day. From an early age, he appreciated the emotions evoked by nature, which continuously offers itself and represents one of the art forms that captures attention, causing those pleasant shivers on the skin.

Art is sometimes a provocation but also an invitation to observe the world without setting conceptual or conflictual limits. It is a stimulus to unite or at least bring people closer together. Looking at a work of art not only connects us to a specific time period but also to everything that follows. Above all, it allows us to live a part of the time that the artist dedicated to it, making it accessible to all.

"I would like to sculpt my life, but often it is you who draw the steps."

— Francesco Santangelo aka BENZ



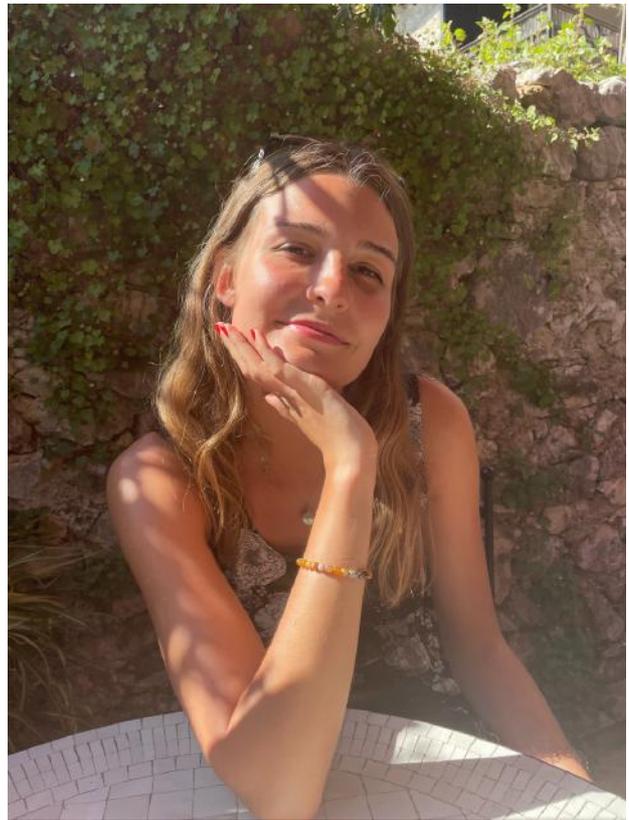
## — Interview

# Brandusa Draghici

**How has your multicultural background, having lived in Romania, France, and the UK, influenced your approach to painting?**

My multicultural background, shaped by my experiences in Romania, France, and the UK, has profoundly influenced my approach to painting. Growing up surrounded by diverse artistic expressions allowed me to explore various art forms deeply. My mother played a crucial role in this journey; she ensured that my sister and I regularly visited museums and engaged in art-related activities, fostering our creativity. I am particularly grateful for her passion for artists like Monet and for the unforgettable experience of attending a Salvador Dalí exhibition, which left a lasting impression on me. This exposure to surrealism has inspired me to delve deeper into this art style as I continue to develop my own artistic voice.

**Can you describe your creative process when working on landscapes or still life pieces? How do you begin a new painting?**



My creative process for landscapes and still life pieces is deeply influenced by my travels and the connections I feel to the places I paint. I seek to capture a sense of peace, memorable moments, or meaningful symbolism in the landscapes I choose. In my still life work, I often incorporate symbolic elements. For example, in my piece "Pomegranate and Lilies," the pomegranate signifies knowledge, while the pink and white lilies represent my rebirth as an artist. This painting holds special significance as it commemorates the work that reignited my dedication to painting over a year ago. When beginning a new painting, I first define my reference. This may involve altering the color composition of a photograph I've taken, researching stock photos for inspiration, or creating digital collages. Once I have a clear vision, I prepare my gessoed canvas and start the underpainting, carefully basing it on the reference I've established.

**Your work often explores light, color, and texture. What inspires you most about these elements, and how do they influence your compositions?**

My work often emphasizes the interplay of light, color, and texture, with a particular focus on creating balanced color schemes that complement one another. I tend to enhance the vibrancy of my paintings, often making them more colorful than

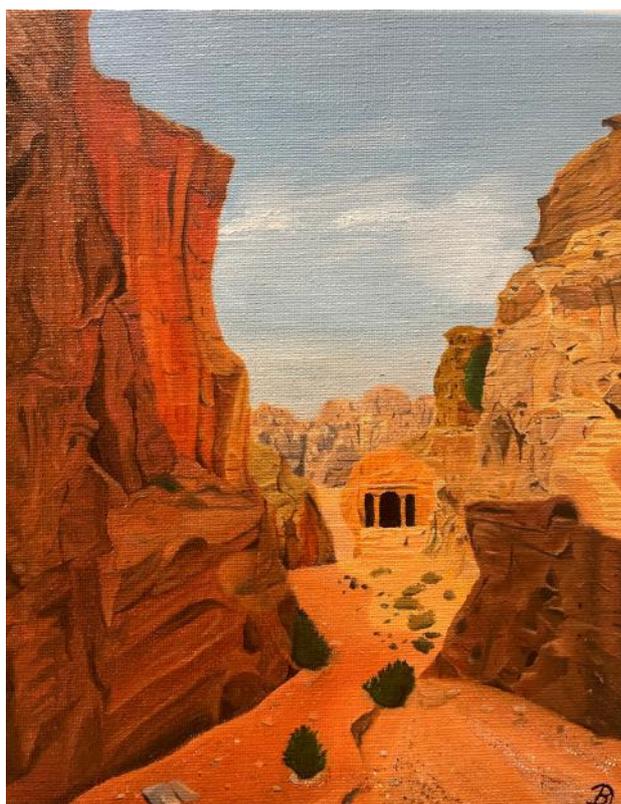
my references. This has become a signature aspect of my style, emerging organically rather than through deliberate intent. In terms of light, I strive to ensure that the lighting in my references is effective, though I find it challenging to accurately represent light and shadows. Improving this aspect remains a key goal in my artistic development.

**You specialize in oil painting. What drew you to this medium, and what do you find most rewarding about working with oils?**

I specialize in oil painting, a medium I transitioned to from acrylics just last year. I often felt frustrated with acrylics, as they didn't feel intuitive to me. Recognizing that I might enjoy oils, I invested in the materials, explored tutorials, and quickly found my passion for the medium. What I appreciate most about oil painting is the flexibility it offers—I can take my time to blend and adjust, making mistakes along the way. Working in layers allows me to see my pieces evolve, creating depth and richness that is immensely satisfying.

**Nature seems to play a central role in your work. How do you decide which aspects of nature to depict, and what do you hope viewers take away from your representations of natural elements?**

Nature plays a central role in my work, reflecting a



deep connection I've had since childhood. When exploring, I remain attuned to my surroundings, seeking inspiration in the places I visit. If a location resonates with me, I capture it through photography, focusing on composition, which I later use as a reference for my paintings. My hope is that viewers experience the same sense of peace I felt while creating these works, connect with the symbolism, and feel inspired to explore the natural world themselves.

**Can you tell us more about how you experiment with texture in your paintings? What techniques do you use to create depth and vibrancy?**

Texture is a key element in my paintings, and I often experiment with physical textures, particularly in depicting water, such as splashes from waterfalls or the sea. I also challenge myself to replicate various textures within my compositions, like glass. In my painting "Pomegranate and Lilies," for instance, I aimed to capture the nuances of four different types of glass, pushing my technical skills and enriching the visual experience.

**Your pieces invite viewers to engage with nature's beauty in a contemplative way. How do you balance dynamism and peacefulness in your compositions?**

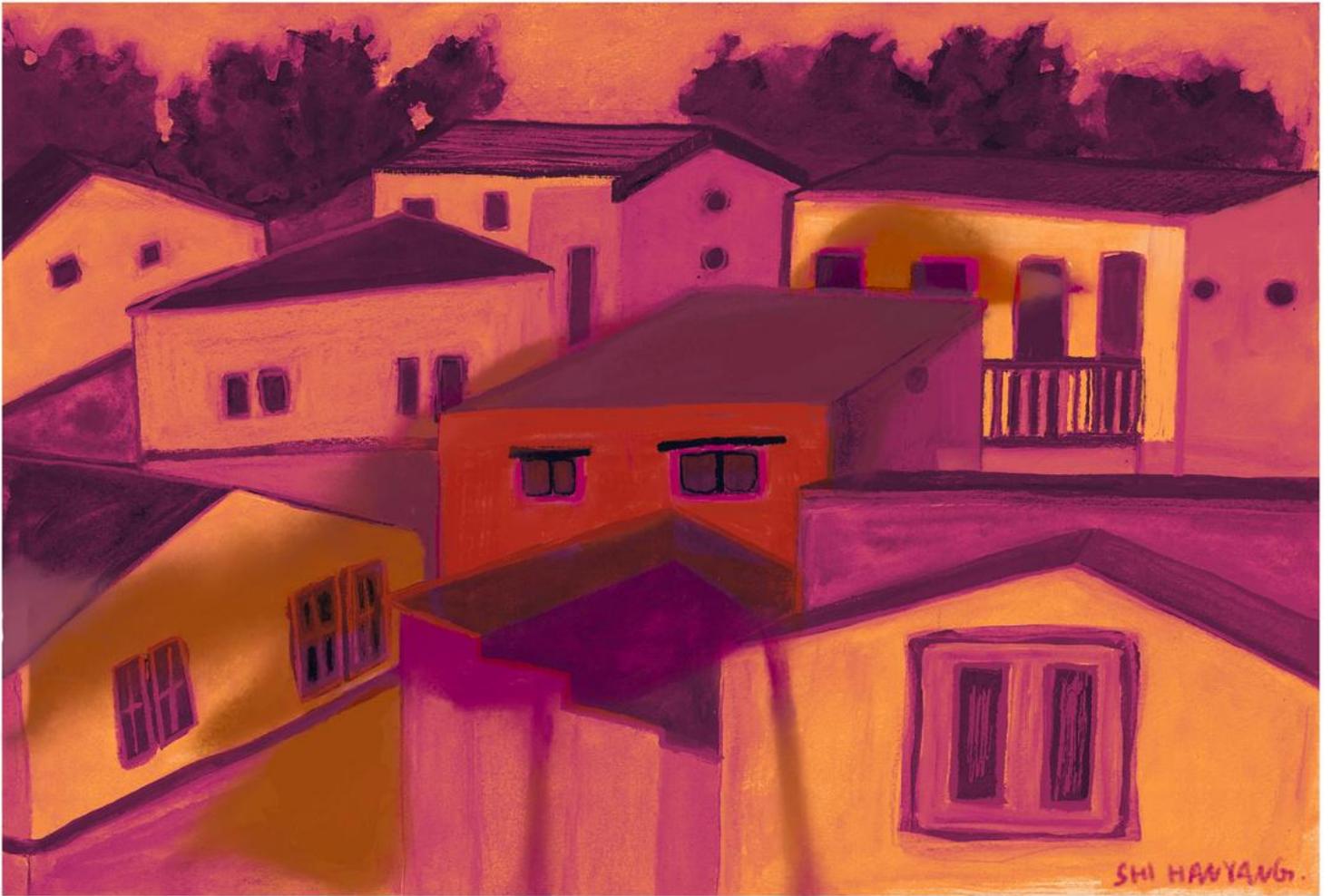
My pieces invite viewers to engage with nature's beauty contemplatively, balancing dynamism and peacefulness in my compositions. While some works are more dynamic, I tend to gauge the overall feeling as I paint. For example, in "Mystical Waters," I added a waterfall at the end because I sensed something was missing. Generally, I aim for a peaceful aesthetic, hoping to inspire viewers to reflect on their own experiences in nature and evoke memories of places that resonate with the tranquility and beauty depicted in my art.

## **Hanyang Shi**

Freelance illustrator based in Tokyo. Paint trees, animals etc.

### *Project Statement*

This painting tells someone stayed up whole night for the fear of a crow might sneaking into her room.



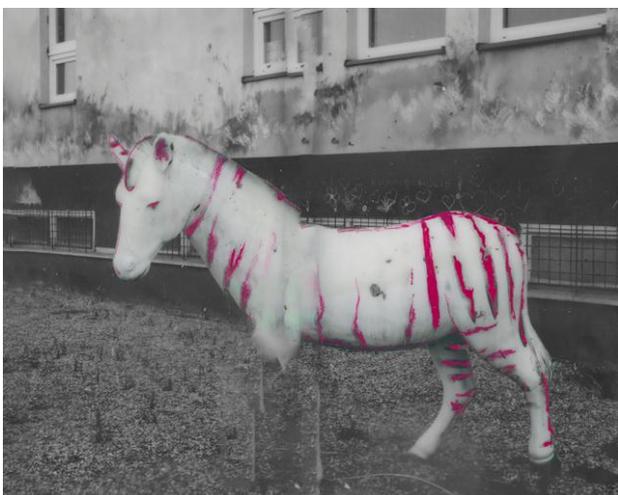
Hanyang Shi | Shadow of a Crow | 2024

## — Interview

# Iwona Germanek

**Your project "Nitki niepamiętania" / "Threads of Unremembrance" touches on memory and forgotten narratives. What inspired you to start working with archival materials from flea markets?**

'Threads of Nonremembrance' is one of the earlier works that touches on the problem of memory in the family context. This theme came to me by itself. It was brought to me by life itself. One day, I found a family photo album of my grandmother in my mother's wardrobe. This woman died shortly after my mother was born, so neither of us remembered her. But it struck me that no family member had ever mentioned her as if she did not exist. I had beautiful old photographs before me, but the memories were gone, missing. It made me wonder what role photography plays in our lives. Is it a kind of bridge between the past and the present? Is photography enough? Suddenly, I started to see a lot of pictures sold at flea markets, unwanted and forgotten. Whole photo albums filled with human stories can sometimes be bought for peanuts. So, I started buying these stories. My family photo archive was enriched by photos and albums of



Iwona Germanek | From the Series Smell | 2024



Iwona Germanek | From the Series Smell | 2024

complete strangers. Their frozen faces looked at me calmly as if waiting for something. So I started with family photos and made collages or, as in the case of the triptych 'Threads of Nonremembrance', assemblages.

**In "Zapach" / "Smell," you combine contemporary photography with personal mementos. How did your experience with your mother's dementia influence the development of this series?**

My mother has been suffering from dementia for many years. The disease progresses gradually, and with each passing month, with each passing year, Małgorzata becomes an entirely different person. She loses not only her memory but also her lucidity. Everything becomes confusing for her: faces, events and time. It's as if she's caught in a sticky web from which there's no way out. Over the last few years, I have often tried to imagine how a person suffering from this kind of disorder feels. I have tried to put myself in her shoes. 'Scent' is a story about the fragility of human nature and the helplessness of man because dementia is an irreversible process. There is no hope. Sometimes, life provides the stage for the truly grotesque. Tears of sadness mingle with tears of joy. Thus, in the series, we also see certain dissonances, paper cracks or digital manipulations that paint a distorted picture of

reality. The narrative is not fluid; the leaps in time and place are characteristic of those struggling with the disease. While working on this series, I used a small analogue camera that wouldn't catch my mother's eye or irritate her. As a result, I got imperfect photos with flaws, very grainy, and sometimes underexposed. Their plasticity reinforces the message and conveys a feeling of unease.

**You use a wide range of materials such as wax, Japanese paper, and old photographs in your works. How do these materials help convey the themes of memory and fragility?**

In my work, I try to use materials that contribute to my stories outside the visual level. For example, in the 'Pink Doesn't Exist' project, I used Japanese tissue paper to wrap my daughter's portraits printed on collector's paper in a protective gesture, but at the same time, this delicate paper, which was applied to the photograph with rice glue, was brutally peeled off in places by my own hand. Peeling off the paper was like removing a band-aid from a wound. Symbolically, it alluded to the process of therapy that Wiktorja, who was struggling with depression, was going through. The whole story is a testament to winning the battle against illness. There are also archive photos that I have taken of my child over the years. I poured wax over some of them after printing, creating a cloudy shell on the paper. Under this shell, the image of a young girl shone through. I used iron to remove this waxy layer from the photograph, trying to help it come to the surface and emerge. Wax also appears in the 'Scent' series, where I use a sharp tool to interfere with the surface, and the resulting scratches create an aura of unease in the viewer looking at the seemingly idyllic scene of horses grazing in a meadow. The deep scratches in the photograph shatter this image. I think the black and white work depicting the zebra in disturbing blood-red stripes, standing on three legs, evokes a similar feeling. These are all deliberate efforts to create a certain tension in the viewer.

**Collage and photomontage play a significant role in your artistic process. Can you talk about how these techniques enhance the emotional depth of your work?**

Not unlike the artistic means I mentioned earlier, collage or photomontage also help me to achieve the intended feeling evoked by my works. When

combining different types of materials, I act quite intuitively; on the other hand, I know what I want to achieve by using these or other means. However, I must admit that my choices are marked by a great deal of experimentation. I never know what the outcome of this experiment will be. It's a kind of dialogue I have with the process itself. In constructing the 'Pink Doesn't Exist' set, I reproduced my daughter's self-portrait paintings. When I recorded one of the pictures, the camera saved the file incorrectly. I only got the coloured stripes recorded on the memory card. I thought I'd superimpose this grid on Wiktorja's portrait. A work was created that is an icon, a star of this series. The creative process of my works can be long. It's a path that sometimes leads me astray, but along the way I learn a lot, including about myself.

**Your works often evoke a sense of the surreal and grotesque, especially in the way you alter old photographs. What draws you to these transformations, and how do they relate to your exploration of memory?**

The grotesque or surrealism appeared in the 'Scent' series. This is inextricably linked to what we experience when faced with memory loss caused by diseases such as senile dementia. The scenes we experience while caring for someone with this condition evoke extreme emotions: helplessness, fatigue, sadness and anger, but also laughter through tears. It is a bit like taming a ghostly reality. A good example of this would be a photograph of a small child, in this case my mother, with hair rollers on her head. This work also illustrates a certain suspension of time in a patient struggling with



Iwona Germanek | From the Series Pink Doesn't Exist | 2023

senile dementia. My mother, who is 84 years old, can at the same time feel like a little girl who wants to be taken home, to her mother. She is waiting for her mother who died 30 years ago and there is no way to explain to her that this person is long gone.

**How do you feel your personal exploration of memory and family has evolved between your projects, like "Zielnik" / "Herbarium" and "Różowy nie istnieje" / "Pink doesn't exist"?**

Working on 'Herbarium' took about two years; I finished it in 2020. It was a time to explore the theme of human memory, the transience and fragility of life. But it was also a time to reflect on the role of the photographer in recording mortality. The photographs, after all, show the fragility of life as it moves towards destruction. They are a remnant of life. My photographic herbarium alludes to this. Old photographs, like plants drying out in a herbarium, lose their colour, change their scent and lure us with their nostalgia. For this series, I combined archival photographs of my family with plants from our family garden. I created a series of collages and photomontages that reference dried, catalogued plants preserved for posterity. Through the photographs, each family creates its own chronicle, recorded with portraits. They are a testament to life together, and photography is a ritual of family life. This ritual prolongs memory in and of us. The photographic archive was also a source of imagery for the 'Pink Doesn't Exist' series. These works deal with what I would call the memory of the soul, the memory imprinted deep within us, in our psyche. For what is depression if



Iwona Germanek | From the Series Smell | 2024

not a reaction to that record? We already know that we also inherit the memory of fear, of anxiety, outside the genes. Traumatic experiences leave their mark on subsequent generations. I have dealt with this issue delicately in a series of photographs entitled 'Brooch' from 2020, where I have tried to show the impact of family trauma stories on our reality, the here-and-now, through metaphors.

**Your project statement mentions the fear of losing one's memories. How do you channel this fear into creative energy, and how does it shape the narratives you create?**

In my latest series, entitled 'Scent', I touch on the area of memory as one of the functions of the human mind. This function allows us to store and reproduce information. It is through memory that we know who we are. What happens to us when our brain is denied access to its resources? How do we function in the world when we lose control of ourselves, of our own lives? How do we function in the world when we lose control of ourselves, of our own lives, when illness takes away what we have worked for over many years? In 'Scent' we find traces of the anxiety of this experience in the form of disintegrating faces. Their contours are blurred, details are degraded. I degraded my own face in a similar way. It's a kind of decay when you're alive and in despair.



Iwona Germanek | From the Series Pink Doesn't Exist | 2023



The work of **Michael Stockfish** (1971, Hengelo, Netherlands) consists of both (magic), realistic portraits and figurative impressions of busy worlds of organisms and objects that are inextricably linked. His oil paintings and ink drawings provide for interpretation in a world where business increasingly is chewed and handed over in the most convenient form. Our truths are based on assumptions and therefore we indirectly admit that our thoughts only guarantees subjectivity. Besides visual arts Michael Stockfish creates music and texts. Recently he started Stick Magazine featuring his comics, cartoons and artwork.

### *Artist Statement*

The logic which our view is made of is unable to hold against the constant adaptation and adjustment of the dynamic interplay of forces.

Michael Stockfish | Game Set and Match | 2023





## — Interview

# Kirsten ter Avest

### **Can you tell us more about how your fascination with fantasy and owls influences your artwork?**

My fascination with the fantasy world began when I saw The Lord of the Rings movies for the first time, I was 13 I think. I already collected little fairy figurines but I got really into fantasy when I saw those movies. I was so impressed with the huge beautiful world with all these beautiful landscapes, villages and creatures. It was a place that I could escape in and forget reality. This inspired me to create worlds for myself on paper, worlds that felt like an escape to me and that would bring me peace, joy and freedom. The world around us is always in a rush and kindness is sometimes hard to find. I find all these things in my little worlds. I often choose animals to be the characters in these worlds and most of the time I choose an owl. In 2019 I created my very first picture book named "Oelie the Owl search for the Moon". Oelie is a curious little owl who wants to visit the moon because he's really impressed by this big glowing ball. I created this little world of Oelie full of wonders. I felt so much joy while creating this book. The best thing with picture books is that everything is possible just like in fantasy stories and movies.



### **How has your self-taught experience shaped your creative process, even after attending art school?**

I experience a lot more freedom since I graduated from art school. To be honest when I look back at my time at art school I felt restricted. Even though the teachers encouraged me to do things my way in the end they still shaped it to their idea or vision. I tried to develop my own style. I wanted to explore this style and let it grow. They kept saying that I had to do something completely different, to do things that didn't suit me. I understand they wanted me to try out different things, but I was in my third year and thought it was very important that teachers would encourage their students to develop their own style. I already graduated from another art school so I was already in my seventh year you could say. I thought it was about time to work on my own art style. I feel a lot more freedom now that I can paint, draw and write what I want. In art school I always had to make moodboards, a lot of sketches and my first idea was never

the one that I should go for the teachers said. Of course, sketching is a super important part of the process but too much sketching, especially if you have a deadline isn't fun anymore. For me it felt like I got tangled up in all my sketches and didn't know what to do anymore. Right now, I feel a lot less pressure and enjoy the process a lot more because I can do it at my own pace. If I have an idea in my head, I don't need permission anymore.

**What inspired you to start working on picture books, and how do you approach the storytelling aspect?**

My mother always read picture books to me and my brother when we were little. I loved looking at the illustrations and listening to the stories. My mother sometimes tried to skip certain parts of the book to get us to bed earlier, but me and my brother would always notice and told her 'That's not what the book says'. Once I grew older I forgot a bit about picture books until I was about 19 years old. I had to make a picture book for a school assignment and I immediately fell in love with picture books again. I enjoyed the process so much from writing the story to making the illustrations. The imagination of children is endless so I loved creating the world of Oelie for them. With my stories I always try to go back to myself as a kid and think about the things I liked and made me happy. I also try to incorporate things that are important to me as an adult and which I wish to share with children to help them. I would like to show them they are not alone, even adults sometimes struggle with these things. 'Oelie' is about never stopping to dream and to never give up. My second picture book 'Leo' is about a left-handed polar bear. I'm left-handed myself and I struggled so much with certain things in primary school. Very normal things like cutting shapes with scissors or tying your



Kirsten ter Avest | Sherlock Owlmes | 2023

shoe laces. I wished there was a book for all these 'easy' things and how to deal with them so that was my inspiration to write a book about left-handedness.

**You mentioned that some of your artworks deal with darker themes. Can you share how creating these pieces helps you process your emotions?**

I went through some really tough years and art was my escape. I've experienced the feeling of almost losing the people you love, anxiety, loneliness, the feeling of being unsafe and being in a place you never wanted to live. I've always had trouble talking about things that were on my mind because I didn't want to bother other people with my problems. Meanwhile my head was overflowing with all these negative thoughts and I didn't know what to do. That's when I decided to pick up my pencil and paintbrush and give these thoughts a place. I created two picture books about everything that was going on in my head. One book was almost entirely made with black and white ink and the other was split up in two parts. One part was really colorful.

This was my escape to not face my emotions. The other part was also entirely black and white. You could choose at which side you wanted to start but either way you had to go through both sides and face all your emotions and thoughts. The stories that I wrote for these books were based on my own thoughts and things that I experienced in live. For example, loss, anxiety and sadness. Through this book I was finding a way to communicate with people and talk about what was really going. In the end it paid off and I talked with my parents and friends about everything that I was feeling at that time. By creating these books I hoped that I could also get some peace in my head. It helped because it created an opening to talk.

### **How do you balance the different styles in your work, from children's picture books to more mature, emotional art?**

It really depends on how I feel and what I want my audience to be. Certain thoughts and emotions are better suited for portraits. Sometimes I want to connect with adults to start a conversation or discussion about something that I'm feeling or thinking. I often go bold with heavy black inks and very dark colors when I'm making more mature art and I absolutely love this. It gives me so much freedom and feels like a relief to me. The chaos in my head transfers to my paper. I would never use this in a picture book.



Kirsten ter Avest | Unmasked | 2023

Even though not all topics are suited for picture books, I still think it's important to sometimes address heavier topics to children. Death is a great example because unfortunately children will experience it from a very young age. They sometimes don't know how to deal with everything they feel and sometimes a book will help them. I would approach my illustrations in a very different way than when I'm making something for adults. I won't use black ink, but make my illustrations more colorful and would try give them some kind of warmth. It needs to feel like a warm hug and sometimes I need this warm hug too.

### **Could you describe your technique when painting portraits of movie characters, especially your use of watercolor?**

I always start with a good reference when painting portraits and a sketch. I'd like to start with the eyes and from there I built up the rest of the face. It's really helpful to keep in mind that if you would like to measure the distance between the eyes there's (most of

Kirsten ter Avest | Starry Night | 2024



the time) a third invisible eye between them. Good watercolor paper is also a must. I use Fabriano and Arches. For my portraits I mainly use Van Gogh watercolors. I started using these when I was 18 and till this day, I really love the brown shades from them. Recently I also switched to Winsor & Newton and Holbein. I use one shade of brown for my portraits and built up the shadows by adding more or less water to it. For more intense shadows I add less water to my painting. I prefer using the wet on dry technique. It gives me more control. If my shade of brown is too dark I simply add more water to my painting to make the shadows lighter.

**How do you hope your art connects with people, whether it's through children's books or more serious themes?**

My dream is to become a picture book author and illustrator. To write and illustrate my own books. Like I said I just love creating cozy worlds. Whether it's about something happy or something more serious. I hope to give children some joy and escape from this busy world, but also to help them with certain issues. I'm trying to find a publisher for my book 'Leo' so I really hope I will find one. I sold some copies of it myself but I would love to go all big with it and share it with people all over the world. I would also love to do commissioned paintings and visit Cons like Comic Con to share and sell my work with the world. I'm really looking forward to see what the future has in store for me and I hope that people grew enthusiastic about my work by reading this article.



Kirsten ter Avest  
Autumn Day  
2024

**Leszek Piotrowski**, known as "Lesstro" is an internationally renowned realist painter. He was born 19th December, 1984 in Gdynia, Poland. In 2009 he was graduated from European Academy of Arts in Warsaw, earning Master Degree in painting. Lesstro is dealing with figurative, classical painting. He feels best by creating big and very big scale paintings. By watching his artworks we find universality and vitality of great, classical art. Lesstro's focus has been mainly on painting historical, genre scenes, orientalist subjects, female nudes, portraits, horses.

*Artist statement*

Even though it is still a bald artistic decision I create very classical art pieces. I am hoping to build a new movement of European art modeling itself after Dutch, Flemish, Spanish and Italian schools. Bringing together and reawakening enthusiasm for the Old Masters work and the urgent need for renewed reverence for reality, by bringing back skills and spirit of the pre-impressionist painters. My desire is to remind the audience we carry as human beings emotions, memory and dream. There are things in life that unite people. Art seems to be universal. So what is about art that makes it universal? Feeling, color, our sensory reaction to it. I create visual art of perfect workshop, without falling back on experiment just for exercising experiment.

Leszek Piotrowski | Motherhood | 2019





## — Interview

# Lana Reiber

**Your creative path began at a later age, at the age of 45. What inspired you to start creating art at that moment, and how did your life experiences shape your artistic vision?**

My life has been full of adventures. Moving from Kazakhstan to Russia, then to England and finally to the United States brought a variety of experiences. As the seeker grows older, he asks himself questions about his place in the world. When I was 45 years old, I visited the Byodo-In Temple in Hawaii. And it was there, in meditation, that the answer came to me: there is something else in this world besides physical matter, and I must become a guide between the Spirit and the visual embodiment of an idea that carries meaning and looks to the future.

**You often use recycled materials in your sculptures. What attracts you to the idea of giving objects a second life, and how do you choose materials for your works?**

One of the problems that worries me today is overconsumption and, as a result, the growth of garbage around the world. I want to contribute to the reduction of waste and use materials that I have at hand in my sculptures: cardboard, plastic containers, as well as wooden children's blocks from second-hand stores. From paper, I make paste for sculptures for the final finishing. People are embarrassed to say that they buy second-hand things, but I think it's important to promote this idea. 70% of my wardrobe consists of such things. I'd rather buy good quality clothes from a flea market than support fast fashion. By using discarded materials in art, I draw a parallel between discarded animals that are suddenly no



longer needed, old people who are not useful, and once beloved things that have served their purpose.

**Your works explore topics such as ecology, life and death, cyclical processes. How do these topics reflect your personal philosophy or experience?**

I am concerned about the state of society and our planet. I try to clean up as much as I can, even collecting garbage in our area. I grow plants, shop with reusable bags and distribute both to everyone. My husband and I have been helping animal shelters for a long time, promoting the idea of adopting animals instead of buying them from the breeders, and involving others in this. Animal rights are something that needs to be paid close attention to. The realization that animals have intelligence and feelings led me to vegetarianism. Although this idea is very difficult for society to understand, I do not give up. After all, once terrible things like segregation or violence against women were considered the norm. The time has come for a new sincerity, vulnerability and human feelings.

**You have lived in several countries, each of which has its own cultural heritage. How have these different cultural experiences influenced your art and creative process?**

Let's start with the fact that I was born and lived most of my life in Kazakhstan, where national traditions and foundations are very strong, often not the healthiest. Some of them are male dominance and violence against women, as well as treating animals as expendable material. The horse is one of the most intelligent animals, and it is used both for hard work and as food. In Sicily, I saw many horses tied up and abandoned on land without a drop of water! It completely shocked me! In my paintings, it is the horse that symbolizes beauty, purity and spiritual development. I formed a conscious attitude towards animals, especially towards dogs, in the United States. Also, in my works, there is often a dog, which embodies friendship, loyalty and a figure equal to a human.

**The concept of artworks choosing their viewers is intriguing. Can you elaborate on how you perceive this connection between your art and your audience?**

At the time of creation of the work, the stars come together in a special way, and you will not be able to "go into the same river twice". Your hand is guided by something, some spirit, and it is this spirit that fills the work with its essence, as at the conception of a child. And the author creates in order not to keep his child nearby, but to let him go free. The art object begins its acquaintance with the world, going out into public space. It already contains its meanings and values, and only the viewer who shares and understands them will stop and start a conversation with it. That is, it is not the viewer who chooses what he likes and what he doesn't. The work that has already been completed offers this interaction and is waiting for a person who is able to understand it, for the one who is interested in the same thing that is already embedded in the work. And the viewer who declares that he does not like the art object cannot diminish its significance. It's as if two people with different views would claim that one's values are more important than the other's. This is unacceptable.

**How did your time in Europe, especially your acquaintance with the great masters of the past, influence the development of your**



**artistic style?**

Europe is a unique region full of history and art. There you finally agree with Socrates that "I know that I know nothing." Today, when all the works of genius have already been created, when the world's museums are full of treasures of masters of the past, it remains for us to rethink these works in our current context. In addition to the history of art, the creation of my works is influenced by philosophers of the past, history, and literature. And it's not about artistic style, but rather about meaning and one's place in the world.

**What challenges did you face when becoming an artist later in life, and what advice would you give to others who might want to make art at a similar stage?**

When you are quite old, you can rely on experience and knowledge, and this is a huge plus. I worked hard and raised children, and later I had the opportunity to create something new with my own hands. Now is such an interesting period, and I want to have time for everything, to learn and to try a lot, but it's a pity that I won't have time to implement all this. Although I do have time, I'm only 58. I'm so grateful to the universe for giving me this chance, and I want to tell everyone: it's never too late to start! Serve your truth and do Good! And take care of our planet!

## Tomoyo Banshoya

I am a Tokyo based self-taught artist who works with acrylics, oil pastels, and ink, as well as digitally. I was born and raised mainly in Tokyo, but lived in the United States for 3 years as a child and spent 1 year studying abroad in France. I have been making art for as long as I can remember. Throughout my life, art has been an outlet to digest experiences and emotions that I could not verbally articulate. My art is a raw reflection of my desires and the world as I experience it, with an aim to connect with different versions of myself, as well as others. The tones of my work vary depending on where I am at in life, but they retain a certain rebellious nature accompanied by humour.

### *Artist Statement*

My art is centered around a desire to be honest with my emotions and curiosities, as well as femininity and sexuality. In a world that demands order and tamedness, I find myself often hiding behind a facade, toning down feelings of genuine excitement or curiosity. Through my art, I tap into a version of myself that is carefree, creating works that are fun and raw. I enjoy working with oil pastels for this reason, as it reminds me of my childhood, when I would scribble on whatever surface I could with crayon, unencumbered.

Tomoyo Banshoya | Synchronicity | 2024





# — Interview

## Turi Break

**How did your journey as a tattoo artist begin, and how has it evolved over the years?**

Well, I discovered the tattoo world and became passionate about it subsequently at the same time I discovered the hardcore punk music and scene during my high school years. It was a blast. Seeing all those kids full of traditional tattoos around the social spaces and punk squat during that period (2000 - 2001) and starting to buy vinyl and records about American hardcore bands was great. Lots of inspiration, attitude, words, and tattoos, of course. So I had a first experience with an old friend of mine from Palermo, we were 19 years old. He started to make tattoos in that period, and he gave me my first 2 tattoos in the same day, at home, his first home outside Palermo, our city. We were in Bologna, and it was totally crazy. After that, I started to collect tattoos on my skin, going to a lot of tattoo conventions, first of all, where I met a lot of great tattoo artists of traditional and Japanese culture. In 2006, exactly, I did my first tattoo on a kid. Horrible, to be honest. That was the beginning of this history.

**What draws you to American traditional tattoo styles and Japanese/Oriental art, and how do you integrate these influences into your paintings?**

The stories behind the subjects of traditional American tattoos are fascinating, mystical, romantic, true. This has always fascinated me. Hearts, knives, daggers, skulls, women's faces, tigers, stormy seas exist because there are stories that have been told and then told again since the early years of the history of this art. We don't know if all these are true or not, and



we will never know, and this is precisely what characterizes traditional tattoos and traditional art, becoming legendary. This is the way for me of a true cooperation between every tattoo flash and every subject of my art, on paper or canvas. About the Japanese tattoo and all Japanese art, well, I can only say that there is no such high-level technicality, especially regarding details, in any type of pictorial or tattoo genre. The religious, chromatic, and visual meanings of Japanese enchant me, and I believe they are incomparable, ever.

**How do you balance your roles as a tattoo artist, painter, musician, and author? Do these different creative outlets influence each other?**

Of course, yes. I think that having experience with the hardcore punk world first of all, in addition to the artistic and political influence of my family—my mother is also an artist—has done a lot. By the way, graffiti influenced me so much since I was a teenager. I do graffiti right now as well. Understanding spaces, always looking beyond, wanting to achieve more and more goals, being hungry for information, wanting practical as well as artistic experiences—this binds the various parts of me; well, it's the exact construction of me. Hardcore punk music with all the positive mental attitude inside, art and creativity have always walked together with me. No space for superficiality, and mostly autonomously, learning from the 'do it yourself' practices typical of the punk environment.

**Can you tell us about a memorable tattoo project that had a significant impact on your artistic style?**

It's really difficult. Every tattoo and subject I wear has a deep meaning or reminds me of an important moment or place. The same goes for the works that I



draw myself or that I tattoo on someone. Certainly, the factory that I carry in the middle of my chest is memorable for me for the meeting and the experience lived in contact with the tattoo artist who did it for me, the great Rudy Fritch, who has always been an artistic reference and a master for me. The same goes for the signature of one of the founders of Californian tattoo, the best Good Time Charlye, that I had the honor of having tattooed by him in America a few years ago. A memorable moment for me in relation to my works is, I think, having covered a swastika on the arm of a tortured Afghan political refugee. It was done to him during his years of imprisonment, and once he found his daughter, he asked me to cover it for him. I offered him a swallow, so it was, and together we freed his skin from that nightmare.

**What challenges do you face when translating tattoo art onto canvas or paper, and how do you approach them?**

It's a challenge. Building and then painting a traditional tattoo table on paper requires an almost copying technique. I would say that over time, if you are passionate and willing to study, you always assimilate and replicate. The black colors are very useful, and the shades give shape to each subject; the solidity of the line especially creates everything. Transferring this onto canvas is very difficult as far as I'm concerned. I always try to remove the maximum of dark shades to give space to soft, pastel, brighter, and more open colors. I try to give more volume also through the layers of color applied. This leads me to often eliminate too many details and enlarge the shapes. I love transferring traditional animal subjects onto canvas: tigers, eagles, snakes, dragons. I must say that having done a lot of graffiti helps me a lot with the combination of colors and the choice of patterns or background shades. It's a challenge, but it's also a game, and I will continue to throw away at least three or four works before arriving at the final one.

**Could you share your experience writing about the underground history of Italy? How did your background as an artist and musician shape the book?**

It was simple from the beginning because it was and is what I consciously chose to live. Once I got in touch with the punk and political as well as musical world around me, all of this became part of me. You can't find the ease with which, within these environments, you can form solid friendly relationships and maintain them over time anywhere else. The music, from the rhythm to your days. The colors, ideas, stimuli, and approach to life itself come from there. In fact, the idea of writing that book "Black Hole, a look at the

Italian underground" together with the Turin editors Eris was not only to give a real voice to those who had always been there and to those who are still there but to tell in a very simple mood the great story of the underground to all those who have never had any idea. I was born so far—Palermo is out, it was out every time from the rest of Italy and Europe—but I had the chance, and I traveled a lot with my bands without ever having too much money in my pocket for this. I had the opportunity to meet many activists, musicians, authors, artists, and tattooers in this. It's my life. This comes with many pros and many cons.

**How do you think your Sicilian heritage influences your artistic approach and choice of subjects?**

I owe everything not only to being Sicilian but above all to my mother. Since I was very little, there were more times when she took me around Palermo and Catania to observe the monuments and told me the fantastic stories of the people in Sicily than anything else. At home, we always drew together with art or painting books next to us. The Bellafiore, a well-known historical guide to the city of Palermo where inside you can find all the city monuments drawn and told in a totally romantic way, is a book that I will never forget. And I also owe it to the socio-political and historical charisma of my father who gave me the fortune of living part of our years in Cefalu, one of the most historic places in Sicily, telling me about the professions and economy of our land, part of my Sicilian identity precisely which it is perceptible in what I draw.



Hi i'm **Elisa Bertocchi**, i'm 23 and i come from Italy. Last year i graduated in painting at the Academy of Fine Arts and i'm currently working as a fashion designer in a clothing agency.

### *Artist Statement*

I've always been fascinated by human beings; attracted to people in their imperfections, flaws and contradictions. But at the same time i'm quite frustrated by the world we live in; a world full of technology that keeps getting further from nature. Through my works i try to recreate imaginary scenes where people find, once again, their relationship with the surroundings.

Elisa Bertocchi | Untitled | 2024





## — Interview

# Olha Markiza

### **How did you first discover your passion for abstract art, and what drew you to work with acrylics, texture paste, and gold leaf?**

My passion for abstract art emerged many years ago when I began traveling and discovering the world—I was always captivated by the aesthetics of these pieces in various spaces, whether in hotel interiors, restaurants, office lobbies, magazines, or the cultural venues and events I attended. Abstract art has always been that unique detail for me, adding completeness and character to any space. While decorating my own home, I sought something unconventional and modern, and I discovered textured artworks. Each day, seeing them sparked new ideas and inspired me to try creating my own. My first experience working with texture paste, acrylics, and gold leaf was transformative, and it quickly became a true passion.

### **You mentioned that your fashion industry experience influenced your sense of aesthetics. In what ways does it impact your approach to creating abstract paintings?**

Yes, working in the fashion industry leaves a lasting imprint. Collaborating with designers, stylists, and organizing fashion shoots refined my sense for color, texture, proportion and general composition. This experience guides me in creating paintings where each element holds significance, and even the smallest detail can shift the overall impact. Just as in fashion, where details define style and transform a person's



appearance, an interior painting brings a space its own unique atmosphere and sense of completion.

### **Your work often explores freedom from rules and limitations. How do you translate that concept into the colors, shapes, and textures in your paintings?**

Freedom from rules means creating intuitively, without preset boundaries in colors or forms. I allow myself to respond to my feelings in the moment, and it's this freedom that shapes my work. Textures, colors, and lines emerge as guided by inner inspiration, becoming embodiments of true spontaneity.

### **How do you balance the artistic expression in your work with its role as interior art meant to complement a space?**

I strive to create pieces that stand alone as works of art but also interact well with their surroundings. Sometimes it's about finding a delicate balance, and other times it's more intuitive—how the colors and textures of my work might resonate with an interior, enhancing its atmosphere. I believe harmony between a painting and a space emerges when the work has its own life, bringing a distinctive accent to the environment.

**Can you describe a significant challenge you encountered in developing your own style, and how you overcame it?**

Like many artists, at one point I felt the importance of finding my own style, my "signature." This question can create a tangible pressure, especially when seeking a distinct "hand." However, for me, abstract art is, above all, about freedom, and I realized that I didn't want to confine myself to rigid boundaries. I embraced the idea that my style could be dynamic and evolve over time, which allowed me to experiment freely, make mistakes, explore, and discover. Ultimately, this openness is the foundation of my art, helping me grow and stay true to myself.

**How do you choose the titles for your artworks? Do they reflect the emotions you felt while creating them or the message you want to convey?**

The titles of my works come about in various ways. For some pieces, the title arises first,

carrying an idea that unfolds in the creation process. Other works receive their title during creation, as emotions shape the core of the piece. Some are named afterward, adding an affirmation or wish for their future owner. However, a few pieces remain untitled, allowing the viewer to freely discover their own meaning and find a personal connection.

**In your opinion, what makes contemporary abstract art appealing to a wide audience, especially when used in interior spaces?**

In my opinion, contemporary abstract art appeals to the audience because it allows for personal perception and interpretation. Everyone can find their own meaning in abstract works. In the interior, such pictures are not just decorative - they become an accent that inspires, awakens emotions and adds a unique character to the space. Thanks to its versatility, abstract art fits into a variety of styles, becoming a reflection of the owner's personality, his individuality, and for some, perhaps a way to emphasize status with a unique piece.

Olha Markiza | Golden Threads of Moment | 2024

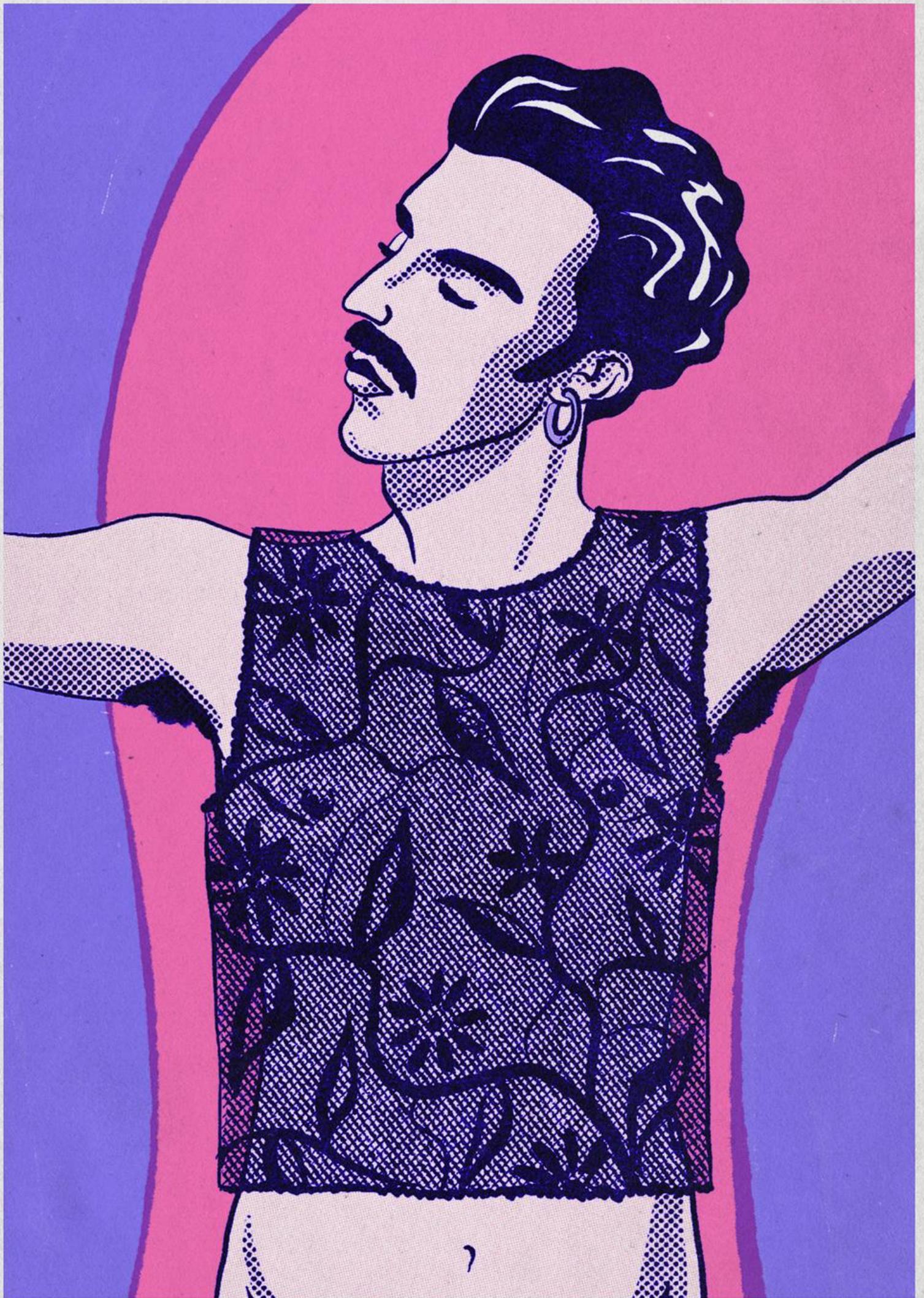


Olha Markiza | Clouded Thoughts | 2024

My name is **Marco Amerigo Latagliata**, and I work as an illustrator and graphic designer. I arrived at illustration after a creative journey in fashion design; in fact, my work is influenced by fashion and design, as well as by pop aesthetics and echoes of the past. My most personal project is *Delicate Guy* (2022), a leporello printed in risograph and published by Morsi Editore, in which I explore a different and contemporary idea of masculinity through the depiction of young men with an androgynous and ethereal appearance. Among my collaborations: Feltrinelli Editore, Jacobin Italia, Kering, WeReading Festival, Cheap Festival, Yanez Magazine, Associazione Musei Ossola, etc.

### *Artist Statement*

My artistic research is strongly tied to the exploration of queer identities, with a focus on narratives that challenge heteronormativity. In my work, I aim to create space for visions outside traditional frameworks, offering a more inclusive representation of the various nuances within the LGBTQIA+ community.



## — Interview

# Diana Norka



**Your work often reflects a strong connection to nature and everyday life. How do these themes influence your creative process?**

Nature and everyday life, I feel, are always very inspiring. In them, you can find both a sense of solitude when you're alone with a beautiful view or notice something about yourself through the mundane tasks that prompt personal reflection, as well as a sense of universality, since we are all connected to the natural world and the same routines.

**You mentioned that beauty is a central theme in your art. What does beauty mean to you, and how do you express it through your various mediums?**

A phrase that comes to mind is, "Inspiration is always within, and beauty is in the eye of the beholder." This resonates deeply with me because art not only reveals the artist's soul but also brings out new meanings that others see in their work. If your painting sparks reflection in someone, it means you've conveyed that beauty. An artist only encourages us to ponder our own deep feelings or experiences, and this beauty can be awakened through paintings, photographs, poems... People can recognize themselves in any form of art, which serves as a reflection of their own beauty.

**Your paintings are characterized by lightness and bright colors. What techniques do you use to achieve this effect, and why is it important in your work?**

The use of oil paints helps to create rich colors and textures, while lightness is achieved through smooth color transitions with blending. This technique makes the painting easier to perceive, as it conveys fluidity, softness, and draws the viewer deeper into the main subject. This immersion, ideally, should be as gentle as possible.

**Can you share more about your transition between different media, such as painting, digital photography, and text? How do these forms complement each other in your projects?**

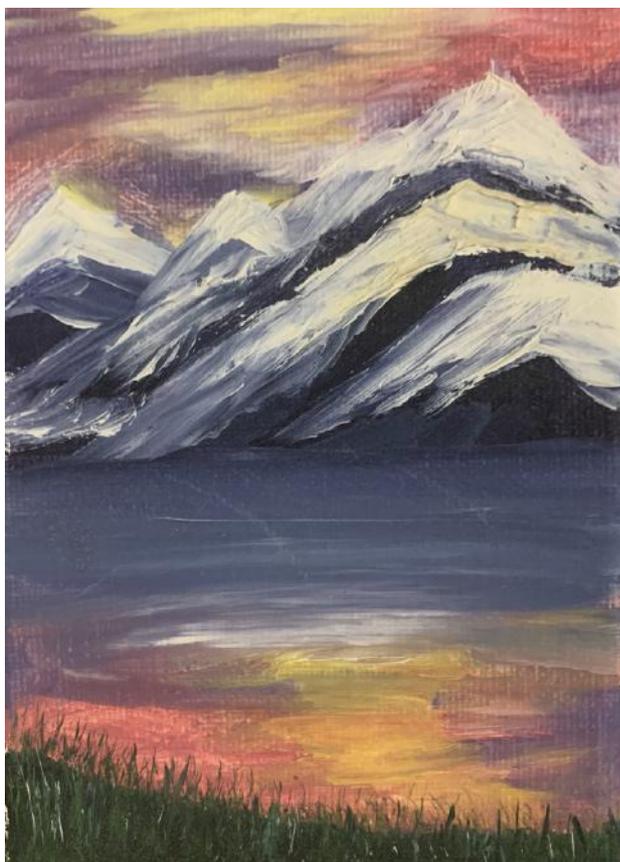
Each period of my growth has been expressed through a new medium. I started with poetry and performing on stage, then I began photographing things I liked, participating in various competitions, and two years ago, I turned to painting, choosing it as my profession. Now, all my experiences help in creating paintings, as photography allows me to see my perspective of the world from different angles and situations. Through poetry, I learned to express my emotions, which helps in understanding the meaning and composition of a work. In the future, I certainly

want to integrate various mediums to help deepen and feel what I wish to convey to the viewer. Currently, I'm focused on studying academic-scale painting.

**Surrealism is one of the themes you explore. What draws you to surrealism, and how do you incorporate elements of it into your landscapes and still lifes?**

I think my interest in psychology sometimes finds expression precisely through surrealism. Creating based on fantasy, dreams, and imagination, without adhering to boundaries, helps me engage with the subconscious, which fascinates me. For instance, in one of my paintings, a desert serves as the background, while in the foreground, there's a living flower and a dried-up tree, symbolizing a paradoxical situation. The point is that the same environment can be comfortable for one and destructive for another. It sounds logical, but the absurdity of the situation still makes me ponder.

**You aim to help people see the beauty in**



**the world. How do you think art can influence people's perception of everyday life?**

Art can have a profound impact because many things go unnoticed in the routine. But when you start paying attention to details, a person can't help but notice these things afterward. In other words, they'll be "forced" to see what they previously missed. This shift in perception changes one's outlook, then routine, and eventually life itself.

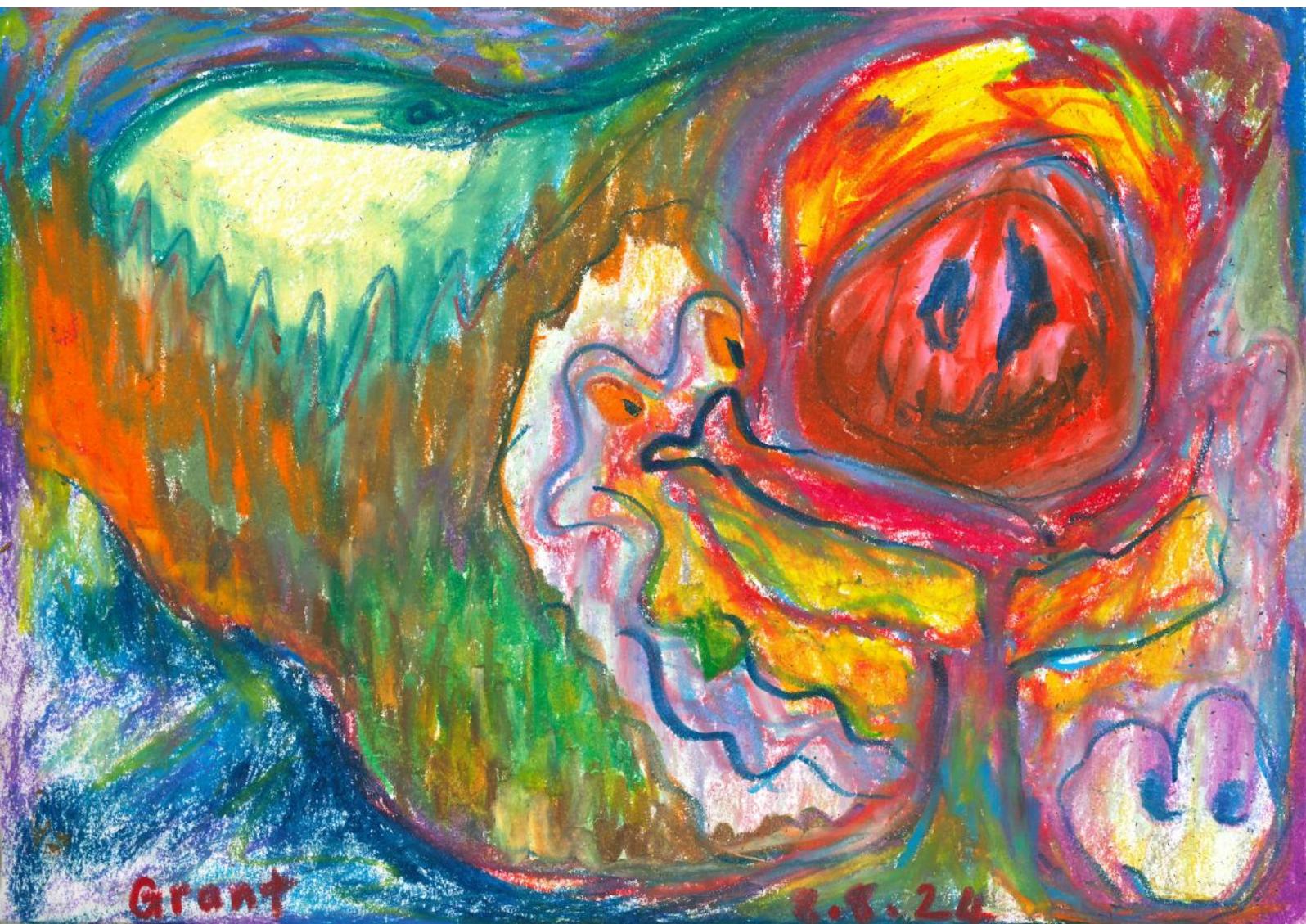
**Your statement mentions the sincerity and kindness in your paintings. How do you ensure these qualities come through in your art?**

By adding more tenderness and brightness! I'm always looking for color combinations that create harmony in composition through visual contact. This connection between viewer and art creates beauty in the moment. And this beauty doesn't fade over time; instead, it grows brighter, more refined, and more valuable each year.



**Grant Arendse** obtained his Fine Arts degree from the University of Cape Town in 2010. In that same year he was also a top 100 finalist in the Absa L'Atelier art award and was part of the group show in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2018, he completed the Graduate diploma in Teaching (Primary) at the University of Auckland. In his role as a classroom teacher he enjoys exposing his students to art, particularly collaborative art as a means to promote positive relationships in the classroom. After a break from creating art, he rediscovered his love of creative expression. Since August 2023 he has begun producing artworks in a variety of mediums, ranging from oil pastels to acrylics. The creation of his work is an intuitive process, drawing inspiration from his subconscious mind. His work is an expression of his psyche and innermost world, and has been exhibited in both Monaco and Spain. He is currently completing the Postgraduate diploma in Creative Arts Therapies at Whitecliffe College in Auckland, New Zealand.

Grant Arendse | Resilience



### *Artist Statement*

These artworks form part of a project that is very meaningful to me. I collaborate with a very dear friend of mine, Trent Nightingale, who I have known for over 20 years. Trent is a self taught musician based in Cape Town, South Africa and he plays the frame drum, channelling an abstract noun. It is completely improvised. While Trent plays, I create artwork inspired by his music and that abstract noun. It is the combination of our two passions, while we follow our intuition. For me it is also an exercise in trust and surrender to the present moment, as I don't know in advance what will emerge; it's completely dependent on Trent's playing, the noun and the emotions it brings up within me, in that moment in time.

Grant Arendse | Acceptance



## — Interview

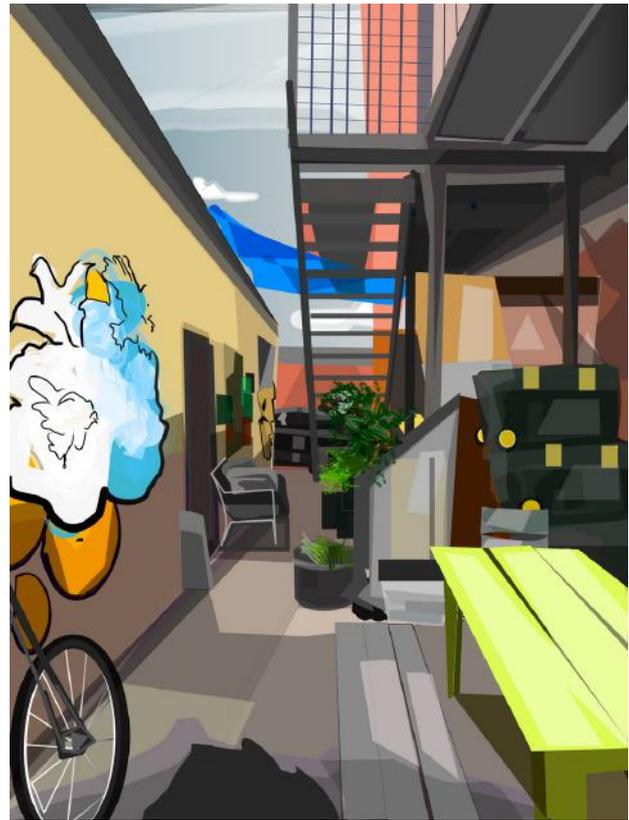
# Michael M Agyepong

**Can you tell us about your journey into art? What initially inspired you to become a multi-media artist?**

I've been obsessed with creating and imagination since I was young, and it naturally spilled over to art. I had a very active and full imagination while having the drive and energy to follow my ideas through. Growing up in America, my family believed very much in the value of education and, subsequently, formally learning about art played much more of a role in fueling my curiosity in my life. As for an initial inspiration for me becoming a multi-media artist, it was by both experiencing wonderful works in person as a child, and the scarcity of resources I had. I would obsess over certain paintings and, wanting to create my own, I would mix anything I had, like a marker, crayon, tape, or pen, simply because I never had fine art supplies in the house and was constrained. Really, I love all pieces of art.

**Your work often explores themes of fantasy, black identity, contrast, and duality. How do you approach these themes in your different mediums (oil painting, illustration, digital art)?**

I'm very selective in approaching these specific themes I like to explore. As I get more experienced, I noticed that I lean on certain themes for some mediums more than others. My portraits, for example, are very cropped on the idea of blackness and black identity, my subjects are mostly African or African American because, on one hand, as a



Michael Agyepong | GR1 | 2023

black man myself, I grew up with many of my subjects in my community and I naturally painted them in my practice, yet on the other hand, I think that we as black people aren't monolithic and there's a multifaceted nature in the personality and identity every person of color I paint. I've painted black people from different social strata, with different emotions and stories that I, in all honesty, could never fully bring to light in the fullness that they deserve. I want to communicate this message in my paintings that, even though we came from the same place, our identities are also so diverse and that there's a beauty in that contrast.

**Breaking down the barriers between reality and underlying emotions is a central aspect of your work. Could you explain how you use shape and color to achieve this?**

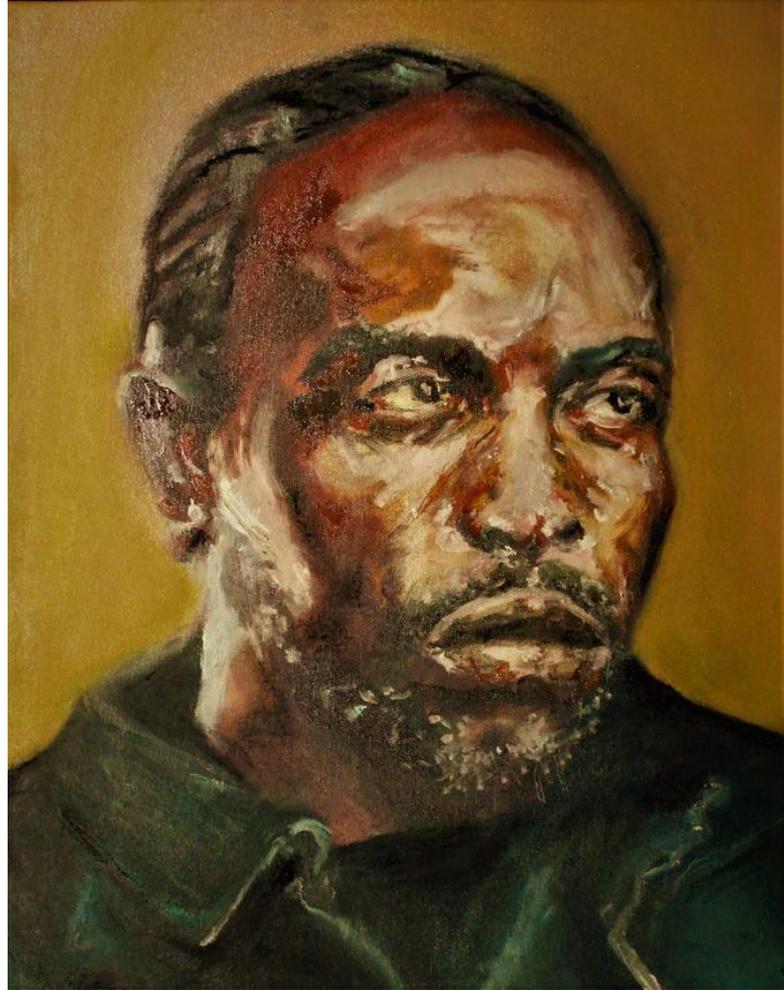
I have a digital piece called 'Lovers'. I found the reference image of that piece while shuffling through ads one evening and I found the image quite powerful. Within the piece, the textures, loose brush strokes and the bleached-out colors used were intentional to hopefully create a euphoric and dream-like mood which hints at the feelings of both subjects. It was never about creating incredibly clean, perfect brush strokes seen in the Renaissance era, rather it was about creating an emotion or feeling when looking at the piece.

**You've exhibited in venues such as the Davis Gallery and the Made in Colorado Group show. How has exhibiting your work influenced your artistic development?**

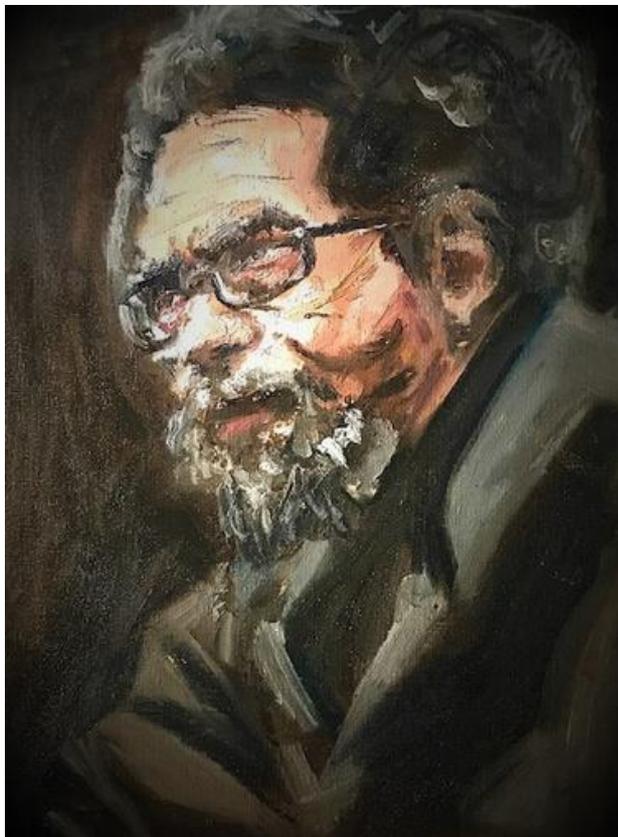
Exhibiting my work at spaces in Denver, and even in your publication, has made me hungrier. For me, that hunger is good for art and creativity because it lets me know that processes that I have matter to at least someone else. Funnily enough, it forces me to be more authentic to my style and my intuition, which is ultimately great for creativity.

**What role do you think public collections and exhibitions play in shaping the perception of black identity in art?**

I think as one of the most common modern places for art to be seen by the public, collections and exhibitions have a great responsibility in reframing the public perception of black people in art. These spaces are ultimately how many speak of and think of art like movie theaters and concerts. Yet, these collections and exhibitions, in my opinion, must additionally call attention to the incredible work all artists of color do and the communities they represent.



Michael Agyepong  
Michael  
2022



Michael Agyepong  
Cornell  
2022

**In what ways does living in Denver influence your creative process and the subjects you choose to explore?**

Denver's only getting bigger and the number of people coming in and doing new things here serves as very inspirational to me. There's such a mix of people in Colorado I feel, there are so many lives and stories that are lived daily here. I also feel that Denver's art scene is strong and always evolving which helps me push my work further and to explore subjects that are really different.

**Are there any particular artists or movements that have had a significant impact on your style?**

There are so many artists and movements that have impacted my style and work. Contemporary artists like Riley Holloway, Alberto Mielago, Ron Hicks, Angel Ricardo Rios, Jean Michel Basquiat, Chuck Jones, Robert Henri, and Moe Gram are some of the many artists who have influenced me.

## Gilbert Morales

After a professional career in architecture, pictorial art came to me to satisfy my need for creativity that my profession brought me. After 2 years of figurative creations where I was able to experiment with different techniques and test useful materials. Then I gradually moved towards abstract art, which was a revelation for me. It was my entourage that pushed me to show my creations, so in February 2019 I officially launched my activity and since then I have been exhibiting in different exhibition halls.

Gilbert Morales | Fascination | 2024





## — Interview

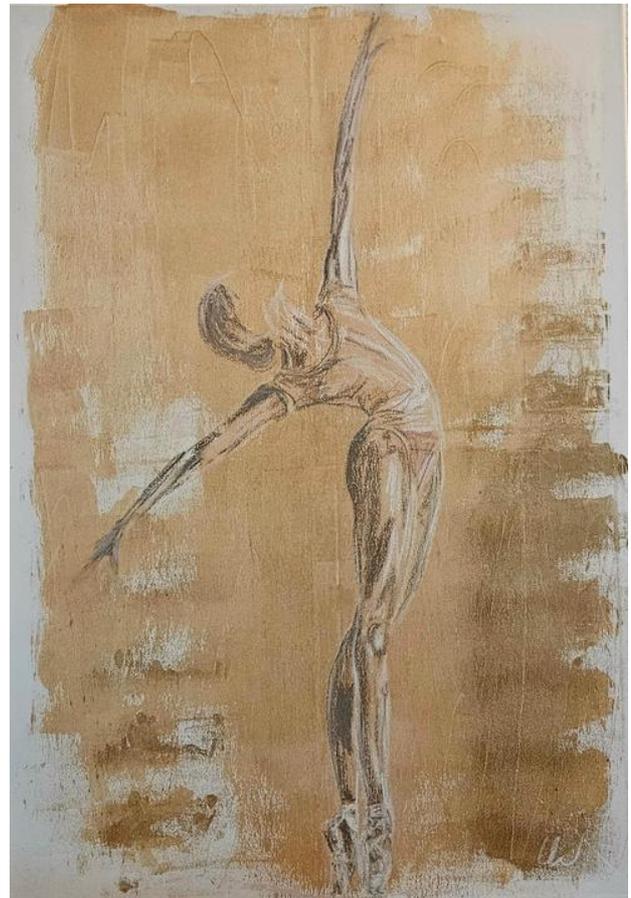
# Carola Helwing

**Can you tell us about the moment when you decided to combine your passion for dance with painting? What inspired this connection?**

After my professional dance education training I started to combine these two creative passions. It was and still is a way for me to handle and assimilate all the experiences and impressions of this intense time. I had and still have the need to deal with dance in another way of creativity beside dance itself.

**How does your background in dance influence the way you approach painting? Do you find parallels in the creative processes of both art forms?**

I usually get captured by a photograph or a dance performance and the specific emotions it releases on me. So I get an idea of what I want to paint. I have to be in a special mood or flow for it. It's mostly the same in dancing: it's kind of needing an inspiration, an idea that wants to be implemented. But it's also discipline and a kind of routine or training. For both types of creativity the right kind of music is very important to me to get in the flow.



Carola Helwing | Ballerina, gold

**Your work captures the energy and emotion of dance performances. How do you go about translating these dynamic movements onto canvas?**

I think it's about the right pose and colours. It's like taking a snapshot of a dancer or performance: you choose a specific moment and try to capture it. And this snapshot – of a specific pose or a specific arrangement or composition – reflects the characteristics I want the observer to see in my pictures, such as strength, power or grace for example. And the appropriate colours and the interaction between light and shade should emphasize and point out these characteristics.

**How important is it for you to capture not only the dancer's movements but also the intensity and emotions of the performance?**

In my opinion the intensity and emotions of a performance are the centerpiece of dance. That's why I try to figure out the specific characteristics that represent these emotions and the intensity and translate them into that one pose or composition on my canvas.

**Could you describe a specific piece or series that best represents the intersection of dance and painting in your work?**

There are several self-portraits that represent different phases of development in my dance and in my painting.

Among these there is a piece called „Begeisterung“ (enthusiasm). The title expresses what I feel dealing with dance and painting. This piece includes my emotions about dance and my own dancing experiences in one strong pose.

**Are there certain dance styles or techniques that inspire your paintings more than others? If so, why?**

For me there are two dance styles that inspire me the most.

First of all it's the classical ballet. I grew up with it and it had a great influence on my development in dance. For me it represents characteristics like power, strength and vitality and also grace and a special kind of fragility. It takes a lot of hard work and discipline to let something look so lightly and easily on stage. That's fascinating. And it's transferable to other kinds of art.

The second one is contemporary dance. The characteristics like dynamic movements, momentum, open energy and flow are those I experienced myself and I



Carola Helwing  
Enthusiasm

try to reveal them in my paintings.

The combination of discipline and flow (co classical ballet and contemporary) reflects my painting process and influences my pictures.

**Do you ever use live models or specific dance performances as references for your paintings?**

Mostly I use photographs of dancers or performances, because dance is so fluid. I take pictures of dance scenes on stage or in training sessions trying to capture exceptional or specific moments and transfer them onto canvas in a second step.

**Tabitha Gimbel** is a mixed media Collage artist and self published poet. Her art often includes her poetry, and she also enjoys making artist trading cards and Oracle card decks. She lives on beautiful Vancouver Island BC, near the ocean that feeds her creative spirit .

### *Artist Statement*

I enjoy making collages of all kinds, and I often create pieces that are themed around my poetry.



Tabitha Gimbel | Dragon Lady | 2024

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VISUALARTJOURNAL.COM

# VISUAL ART JOURNAL



NO. 12

NOVEMBER 2024