

# My Hometown: Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva

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*The Bulgarian artist Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva is currently living and working in the Netherlands. She is moved and inspired by her travels, both in nature and the urban landscapes, her emotions, memories, pleasant feelings and philosophical thoughts. Textures and colors spontaneously arrive on the canvas,*

*though structured layering is carefully thought out. We recently caught up with Vania to learn more about her background and artistic process.*

How does your hometown inform your art? What was it like growing up there?

I was born in a picturesque little place called Aprilovo, just outside of Sofia, Bulgaria. Now that I think about it, I guess the place where I was born left a permanent influence on my color sensitivity as well as my love for nature. I have many memories from those surrounding pretty hills changing their looks completely through all 4 seasons and I never got bored of them. As a child, I grew up playing outside often or drawing something with pen or pencil: animals, portraits, houses.

The love for drawing and painting lead me to art schools later on. I went to a high school of Fine Arts in Sofia where I learnt the craft of painting, drawing and composing as well as sculpting, perspective, anatomy, and of course, the beautiful history of art was introduced to me then, in detail.



Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva, 'French Bluebells,' 2018. Acrylic, Oil on Linen ,  
80x160cm.

I continued my education at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia graduating with a Masters in set design. Throughout my set design studies, I experimented with many techniques, imitating different surfaces and materials. My love for textures and observing different materials is still present nowadays, which you can see in my painting series "New materials".

I like the play of light in the theater. I like spotting an accent in my paintings just like I would do if I am building a stage. I guess my love for painting was bigger than my love for set design. I did some work for a puppet play in the Pretoria State Theater in South Africa and at the Johannesburg Youth Theater. I continued painting and exhibiting and found that was what I wanted to do more than anything else.

*I left Bulgaria because I was curious to meet the rest of  
the world.*



Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva, 'Times Signature 16,' 2017.

Acrylic, Oil on Linen, 70x150cm.

**What led you away from Bulgaria? Was there a specific  
turning point in your life?**

Through all the years of study I was always dreaming of one day seeing all of the cultural treasures and paintings of the masters abroad that I had been studying. I left

Bulgaria because I was curious to meet the rest of the world. I was thirsting to travel and to see the things I had been reading about. I needed to move on, to meet other cultures to look for new inspiration and opportunities. I grew up in a country where traveling outside the borders did not happen easily or often in the past. The

reason was, for many years, political, and later on, economical. I worked in Bulgaria for a few years after I graduated and then I decided to move on and follow my dreams, see the things I wanted to see.

I must say that not only my past in Bulgaria shaped into who I am now, but also the few years I spent in South Africa living and working there and meeting, for the first time, people and artists belonging to a culture so different from the culture where I came from.

The nature in sunny Southern Africa is unbelievable. The Art of the San in Botswana made a huge impression on me. Zulu people are so gifted and unique in their artistic languages. I was fascinated by the shapes and bright colors they use in their art, crafts, and houses.





Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva, 'Moon Light', 2018. Acrylic, Oil, Cement on Wood, 85x80cm.

What's your favorite thing about Bulgaria, or Bulgarian art?

Bulgaria has a very old history. The first Bulgarian Empire was founded in 681 led by Asparuh. There are many ruins, (Ruins of Pliska capital of the first Empire)

tombs (Kazanluk tomb and frescos) and treasures to visit in Bulgaria (Thracian treasure). The folklore traditions are very colorful. They are reflected in the old architecture and also in the local crafts and arts. Murals in old monasteries as well as icons have always been interesting for me. They preserved the Bulgarian culture and identity during the 500 years of Ottoman invasion and occupation.

I like revisiting these old places, they are a great source of inspiration. I like the nature, the climate with its four dramatically different seasons and the mountains. The pure folklore traditions, music and food. I go back to Bulgaria a few times per year, to visit my parents and meet old friends. I always take a trip to climb Vitosha mountain right next to Sofia or to climb up to the seven Rila lakes with their stunning crystal clear views. Or I go to the Black sea. There are many places to go.

One of my favorites Bulgarian artists, and the one who inspired me so much in the past because he painted so colorfully these traditions, is Vladimir Dimitrov, aka "The Master". There are of course many very good artists from Bulgaria but the one I am most proud of and whose work I totally admire is the one most people have probably heard of, Christo Javacheff or Christo and Jeanne Claude Art. The size of their art has no borders or limits. Their messages are so powerful and the sites are so surprising, unexpected and beautiful. I wish Christo good health and many, many more creative years.

*My paintings started to get richer in colors while I was living  
in South Africa.*



Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva, 'Times Signature 5,' 2017. Acrylic, Oil, Colored pencil on Linen, 60x120cm.

Do you have any particularly artistic memories or moments of inspiration from your many travels?

My travels are always an inspiration for my work. They have been challenging me to change my color spectra, and the way the composition in my paintings is built but also to develop new techniques. My paintings started to get richer in colors while I was living in South Africa. Of course it was influenced by the local arts but also the bright sun nature and the lifestyle there.

Later on we moved back to the Netherlands. My husband is Dutch and I followed him back to where his roots are. It felt right to come back to Europe after all, even though I had to learn a new language. I feel happy to be in the heart of the old European culture. To be able to visit so many European Museums, theaters and galleries so close to me.

I like the size of Europe. I love the size of Gouda the old medieval town center. It is



so compact and rich in culture. It is not difficult to fall in love with it and to feel at home. I often take walks through the narrow old streets and stone cathedrals. I watch the walls and the water in the perfectly manipulated regulated canals. I like the morning mist in the low lands.

Working in the Netherlands made me look deeper into layers and transparency. I am more interested in observing materials. I often go for a shoot with a camera in my hand at sunset or at dusk. That is how I get recharged to keep being inspired and working. Many of my paintings are named after the places I have visited. I wonder if other people see these places a bit like I see them in my paintings?



Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva, 'Petra,' 2016. Acrylic, Oil, Colored pencil, Cement on Linen, 90x120cm.

Where do you call 'home' now? How has living in the Netherlands changed your artistic expression, if at all?

To be honest, I feel at home here in The Netherlands. I've been here for a very long time now, since 2000. I am able to paint and to develop myself.

Oh yes I have changed my artistic expressions. I've been experimenting a lot trying to find what is the best suited me technique bringing me closer to achieving the results I was hunting or to express the emotions I felt. I've been closely studying some of the artists that inspired me throughout my youth and still do. Van Gogh, Mondrian, and many more great artists exhibiting in contemporary galleries these days. The Netherlands is a tiny country with an enormous number of world famous artists. If you come for the art in the Netherlands you might just forget to leave, there is so much to see.



Vania Bouwmeester Pentcheva. 'Bologna,' 2016. Acrylic, Oil, Colored pencil, Cement on Linen, 60x180cm.

## Any must-visit art addresses you can recommend in Bulgaria and the Netherlands?

In my opinion the most valuable things to see in Bulgaria is the really old heritage.

When visiting Sofia, you should start with the beautiful Alexander Nevski cathedral, below is a crypt with a large permanent exhibition of Icons. The National Art Gallery and The Ancient Serdica in the hart van Sofia

Just at the foot of Vitosha mountain above Sofia, included in the Unesco's list of World Heritage sites is Boyana Church famous with its frescos: portraits of Sebastocratot Kaloyan and his wife Desislava from 13th century. Heading in the direction of the Rilla mountains you could see the Rilski monastery. Visit Kyustendil for seeing "Vladimir Dimitrov Art Gallery" and then, if you enjoy climbing, take a hike to the 7 Rilla lakes on the top of the Rilla mountains.

I mentioned above the Thracian treasures the oldest golden treasures in the world nowadays kept in the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia.

The Thracian tomb in Kazanlak and the Sveshtari Tomb in the ancient city of Perperikon (Unesco World Heritage list) Tsarevets (fortress) in Veliko Turnovo and the old town. You should visit Plovdiv old town and Roman Amphitheater and Zlatyu Boyadzhiev Gallery. If you land on the coast of Black Sea visit The Ancient town of Sozopol.

I think if I continue I will never stop.





*Thank you, Vania! See more of her stunning abstract works on [Singulart](#).*

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