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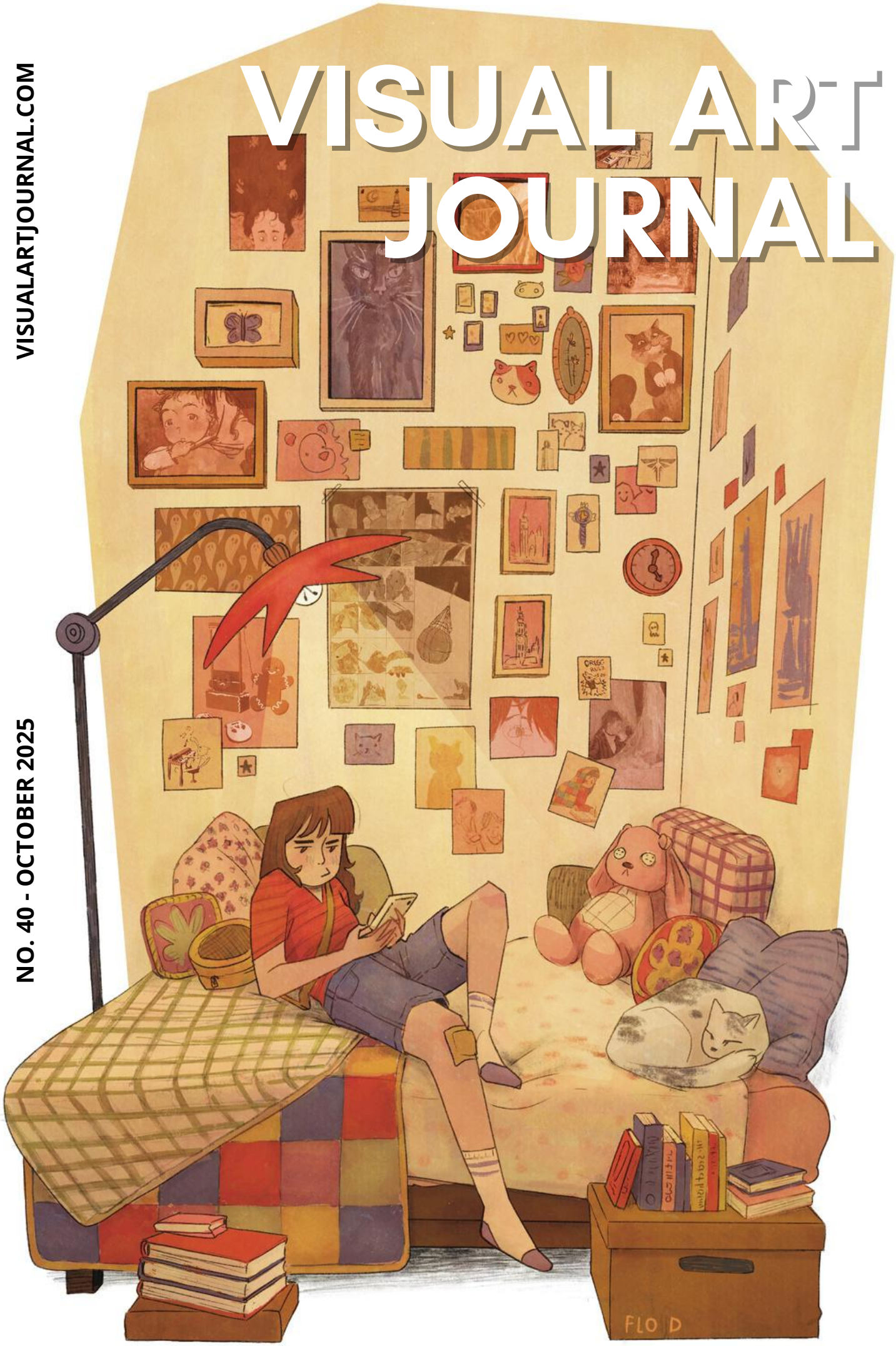

— *Intro*

Anna Gvozdeva

Curator of
Visual Art Journal

Hello dear reader,

In your hands is the 40th issue of our magazine — and what a joy it is to continue creating it!

Shapes, colors, and textures fill these pages. This issue celebrates the moment when creativity steps beyond the visual — when it becomes something tactile, something you can almost feel with your fingertips. When color bends through shadow and finds a new depth.

The endless world of visual art is truly boundless; there is always something to explore, to learn, to rediscover. It never ceases to surprise — each time revealing something new, unexpected, and deeply personal.

And I would especially like to note the conversations we've had — the themes we've touched upon. How many differences there are among us: social, cultural, even climatic. Yet the questions that move us, that make us reflect, remain remarkably the same.

Ahead lies a hundred pages filled with art and thought.
Enjoy the journey!

On the Front Cover:
Flo Dierckens
Cece's room
2025

On the Back Cover:
Dima Smolyaninov
Beings
2024

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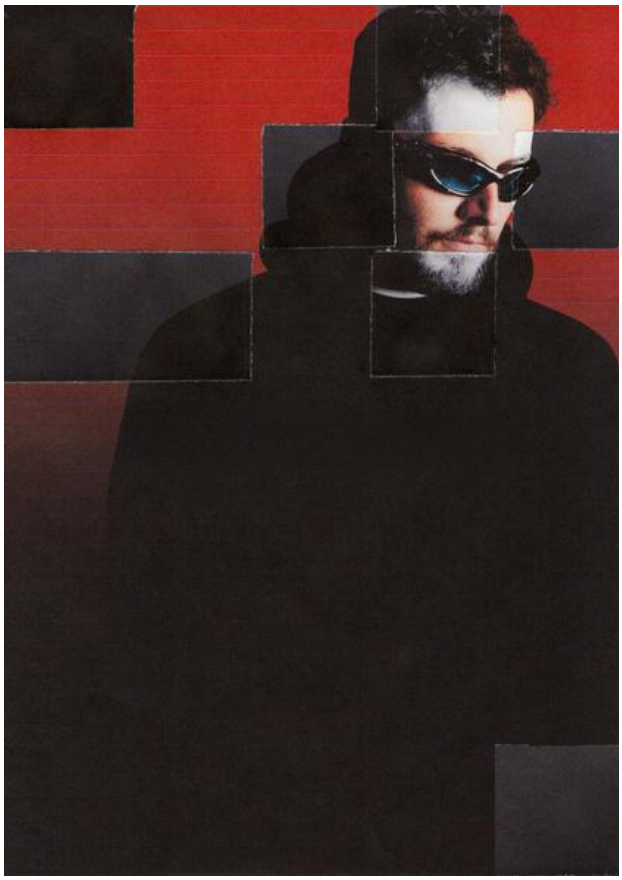
We invite artists to submit their works for publication in our magazine: **https://visualartjournal.com/call-for-artists/**

Zaur Tedeev



Your path began with architecture and led to photography, painting, and sculpture. How does your architectural training continue to shape the way you create and compose visual works today?

Architectural education, by its very nature, is interdisciplinary. To succeed as a future professional, an architect must possess broad knowledge in composition, color theory, academic drawing, painting, sculpture, model making, physics, geometry, materials science, history, religion, philosophy, and many other fields. Such a comprehensive approach to training shapes a flexible specialist, capable not only of switching between disciplines but also of working competently in each.

That is why it was relatively easy for me to transition to photography, as it is largely governed by the same principles as architecture and related arts. Photography requires an understanding of composition and color harmony — just as an architect balances volumes and color solutions, a photographer seeks balance within the frame and harmony of shades. Knowledge of academic drawing and painting helps one perceive light and shadow, build perspective, and create rhythm within the image. Sculptural thinking translates into the ability to "mold" space through light and depth of field. The laws of geometry appear in the construction of lines, proportions, and symmetries of the frame, while physics provides the foundation for understanding optics, exposure, and the interaction of light with surfaces.

Even history and philosophy play a role: photography, like architecture, never exists outside a cultural context and always conveys a certain worldview. In essence, moving from architecture to photography was not a shift into another field but a continuation of the same principles in a different medium.

Zaur Tedeev | Distant Times | 2023

What initially drew you to painting, and how did this practice grow alongside your photography?

I started painting much earlier than photography, around the age of eight. Until I was 16–17, I focused only on painting, and then I enrolled in drawing classes to improve my skills and apply to the architecture faculty. During my studies, I became

Zaur Tedeev | Euphoria | 2024

interested in photography, began shooting a lot, received my first commissions, and photography became my main activity.
In 2020, when the world was struck by COVID and everyone stayed at home, I returned to painting and began creating music album covers for various performers. Later, related techniques came into play: graphics, appliqué, collage, sculpture—essentially everything I had studied within my architectural education.
Today, when developing a particular idea, I have the opportunity to view it from different technical perspectives and choose the medium in which it will best reveal its potential.

Your paintings feature rich colors and layered symbolism. How do you develop your color palettes and compositional structures?

I love color very much. I believe this is one of the features of the southern temperament. The bright hues found in building facades, natural landscapes, and the extroversion of people create a kind of "southern visual-emotional DNA" that one absorbs with mother's milk. There are countless artists who support my point: Armenian painter Martiros Saryan, Ossetian artists Makharbek Tuganov, Azanbek Janaev, and Lavrenty Kasoev, Georgian artists Lado Gudiashvili, Rezo Gabriadze, and Zurab Tsereteli, Italian painter Guglielmo Sansoni, Mexican painter Diego Rivera, and many others.
The composition and color palette of my works are often built intuitively — or rather, the knowledge and skills I have acquired have dissolved so deeply into my consciousness and subconscious that composition and color have become a kind of "inborn reflex." When, in the process of creating a work, some element falls out of place in terms of composition or color, that feeling haunts me until it finds its proper spot. Everything, therefore, comes down to something simple — until the elements take their rightful place, I continue working, and this is precisely how the integrity of my works is born.

Many of your works mix watercolor, gouache, and collage. What attracts you to these particular techniques and textures?

Watercolor painting for a long time was beyond my grasp; it is a truly difficult technique that must be "tamed" and controlled so that it is not the work that dictates to you, but you who shape the work and remain faithful to your idea. Thanks to many years of refining my watercolor skills, I grew close to it, and for some time watercolor became my main way of bringing different ideas to life.
As for gouache, that is where I first began painting. When I want to create a more graphic, almost poster-like work, I turn to this technique. But that does not mean that gouache is not painterly—quite the opposite. It is just that at this stage I tend to use it in a more graphic way.
My first attempts at collage also happened within the painting course at the architecture faculty. I remember we had an assignment to create a still life from cut-out magazine pieces, and I want to emphasize that it is a wonderful exercise for developing one's search skills, color analysis, and sense of combinations. Some time later I continued working with collage while designing album covers for musicians, and the results were very interesting pieces.

Your collaborations range from international magazines to album covers for musicians. How does working with popular culture influence your fine-art practice?

Working with mass culture gives me the opportunity to test my artistic techniques on a broader audience. It disciplines me, teaches conciseness, and helps me better understand how visual language functions in different contexts. At the same time, I do not view such projects as a compromise — rather as another platform for experimentation, where new solutions can be found and later transferred into my personal works.

Your art bridges local traditions and global audiences. How do you balance authenticity with accessibility for an international viewer?

I try to work with images that feel organic to me and come from the local context. At the same time, I use a universal visual language — color, form, rhythm. Thanks to this, the works remain authentic and yet understandable to viewers from anywhere in the world.

Are there particular places, communities, or collaborations you dream of working with in the coming years?

Yes, of course. As for collaborations, I would like to work with representatives of various creative fields: Kendrick Lamar, Tyler the Creator, and Kanye West — I resonate with their interdisciplinary, "umbrella" approach to creativity that goes beyond music alone. Also, architects such as Tadao Ando, Santiago Calatrava, Bjarke Ingels, and the Herzog & de Meuron studio. I like when figures from "monumental," serious professions such as architecture meet representatives of pop culture within the creative process to generate new contexts for dialogue and experimentation.
I would also like to take part in various biennales (for example, in Venice, Moscow, Saudi Arabia, Manifesta, and others), as well as different art fairs. The list is quite extensive.

My name is **Flo Dierckens** (2003) and I'm an illustrator from Belgium. I was born and raised in the city of Antwerp and I love living in a city that played such an important role in art history. Currently I attend Luca School of Arts in Brussels where I'm working on getting my masters degree in graphic story telling. I like making illustrations and comics, both digitally and traditionally, and in my free time I like to practice as many creative hobbies as I can.

Flo Dierckens | Cece's Room | 2025

Flo Dierckens | Shadow Play | 2025

— *Interview*

Julia Karrys

I blend creative writing and clinical counseling with the belief that both are foundational to life. I use creative writing with the principle that our stories matter, and that creative expression is both healing and fundamental to our very nature and history as human beings. Ceramics and therapy carry that same truth: expression shapes meaning. My counseling background provides the foundation to hold that process safely, using research-based tools to care for trauma. Together, they allow me to honor both the raw, creative act of storytelling and the responsibility of supporting people through their most vulnerable experiences.

You hold degrees in both Creative Writing and Clinical Mental Health Counseling. How do these two fields influence your approach to ceramics and art therapy?

In your artist statement, you mention that clay "holds memory." Could you expand on what this means to you in both a personal and therapeutic sense?

Clay quite literally holds memory in its particles, meaning that no matter the shape you make with it, it will retain traces of that movement and may attempt to shift back. In a therapeutic sense, our bodies also hold meaning, memory, and often trauma—mimicking clay in its soft form. Clay is the medium closest to human touch.

Masks are a central motif in your work. Why did you choose this form to explore grief, identity, and transformation?

I love people and am interested in every person's natural beauty, evident in their differences, perceived flaws, and uniqueness. Be it wrinkles or asymmetry, I wish we no longer felt the need to use a filter to look similar to one another. I think masks are a beautiful way to explore identity, transformation, and grief, as they give us a look into ourselves—how we show up internally vs. externally. Faces hold grief as they get older, and this is how I know to honor the human experience.

Your exhibition HIGH FIRE connects the firing of clay with the body's own transformation. How did this concept first emerge, and what does it reveal about the human experience?

The concept emerged as I was researching the temperatures at which clay fires and connected it to my own personal experience of the loss of my mother and honoring her ashes, so to speak. I felt the similarities held meaning for me. I think it reveals the human experience—to change and shift over time, leaving lasting meaning in the world, whether through the permanence of objects, memories, storytelling, or family legacy.

How does working with clay in community workshops differ from working alone in your studio?

Working with clay in community workshops is an external experience of giving to those around me, while working alone is navigating my internal world and doing my own personal healing. I sculpt to connect with myself, and teach sculpting to connect with others.

What role does poetry play in your artistic practice, alongside your sculptural work?

Poetry is my original art form. I started writing poetry as far back as I can remember. Like sculpting, it's another way I've learned to make sense of my inner world. Blending the two is pure joy for me.

Do you see your masks more as portraits of others, self-portraits, or symbolic representations of inner states?

I see my masks as portraits of grief.

María Emilia Hendreich
Professor and Bachelor of Arts with a focus on painting from the Faculty of Arts at the National University of La Plata (UNLP). She has completed the AB-ELE program with Carla Barbero and Javier Villa and participated in the Biennial Campus at the Recoleta Cultural Center, El Oráculo artist program, PAC at Gachi Prieto Gallery, and the «Future Career Perspectives for Artists» seminar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Her work has been published in Papel Cosido, a UNLP publishing house, and in Página 12. She works in the Education Department of the Provincial Museum of Fine Arts Emilio Pettoruti and has served as a judge for several art exhibitions in the Province of Buenos Aires.
Awards and distinctions: Hito Cultural Grant and Special Mention at the Manuel Belgrano Salon of the Sívori Museum (2024); Honorable Mention at the National Visual Arts Salon at the Palais de Glace and Honorable Mention at the Federated Foundation of Rosario (2023); Honorable Mention at the Félix de Amador Visual Arts Salon (2022); Central Bank Painting Award, Oda Gallery 321 Award, and Finalist at the Buenos Aires Biennial (2021); Public Choice Award for Artistic Creation at the Timoteo Navarro National Salon in Tucumán (2020); UNLP Par Grant (2017).
She has had various solo and group exhibitions in recent years, including Curtir in Paris, Misshapes at Praxis New York, Infinite Learning at the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, La piel de la Psiquis at the Rojas Cultural Center, Lo que brilla antes de desaparecer at Núcleo contemporáneo Santa Fe, Pintado a mano at Laboratorio Festival; Nostalgia at Oda curated by Eduardo Stupía, Reflexiones at Vincent Gallery, Si amanece nos vamos at Gachi Prieto, Atravesar el espejo at Praxis; Las horas at OSDE Foundation, Y ahora qué hacemos? At the Recoleta Cultural Center, Selfportrait galleries at Laboratorio Festival, Rituales equivocados at Gachi Prieto, La siesta de las cosas at Ramos Generales, among others. Her work is part of «La pinacoteca errante,» a project by the Pettoruti Museum and Javier Villa.

Project Statement
Working in the education department at the Emilio Pettoruti Provincial Museum of Fine Arts has been a profound experience, surrounded by a collection of over 5,000 works of art that span more than a century. This exposure has deeply influenced my current series of paintings, where artworks and objects that carry images, stories, and memories are central. Initially, this series was a way for me to explore the value of art, but it has evolved into a broader reflection on how objects reveal humanity's presence and absence. For me, art is the ultimate expression of the human experience.
My practice often explores self-referential themes, infusing traditional subjects like self- portraiture with a personal, contemporary approach. I'm particularly interested in the contrast between the constant documentation of life and the intimacy of realistic painting.

Emilia Hendreich | Self-Portrait in the Neighborhood | 2023

Emilia Hendreich | The Escape from Myself | 2023

Mickey Bertram Jeppesen Jensen / MadeBySatelite

Your background as a cabinetmaker comes from a long family tradition. How has this heritage influenced your approach to contemporary design?

I grew up in a family of boatbuilders – craftsmanship has always been a part of life. My grandfather was a boatbuilder, and his workshop was a place filled with sawdust, the scent of wood, and pride in good work. I learned early on that true craftsmanship is about respect – for the material, for the process, and for the story behind what you create.
That heritage has stayed with me all the way. It's an anchor in everything I do. I try to unite classical Nordic craftsmanship and tradition with modern design and technology.
My goal is to carry the legacy forward – but in a language that speaks to both the present and the future.

Mickey Bertram Jeppesen Jensen | Dobermann Chair

You describe your furniture as carriers of memory and belonging. Could you elaborate on how these emotional ideas translate into material form?

Every piece I design carries a part of my story. When I work with wood, I think of my grandparents and everything they gave me – both spiritually and emotionally.
It's not only about creating something beautiful, but about capturing something that feels alive and genuine.
I use organic shapes, soft transitions, and proportions that echo the human body and the movement of nature.
In this way, my furniture becomes more than functional – it becomes an expression of love, faith, and legacy. It's something to be felt, not just seen.

Mickey Bertram Jeppesen Jensen | Deer Chair

The Deer Chair beautifully combines organic shapes with symbolic meaning. What was the original inspiration behind its antler-like form?

The Deer Chair was created as a symbol of strength, grace, and roots.
The antlers represent both the power of nature and the branching of family – how we grow outward into the world while remaining connected to our origins.
For me, the deer represents my grandparents – the gentle yet powerful love they showed me.
Deer is a tribute to them, but also to my children.
The chair is therefore both a piece of furniture and a memory – a poetic image of calm, nature, and loyalty.

How do you balance the sculptural and functional aspects of your work when designing pieces such as the Dobermann Chair?

For me, a piece of furniture must feel alive – both visually and physically.
The Dobermann Chair is a clear example of how I combine strength and aesthetics. It is sculptural in form, yet ergonomic and balanced.
I think of my designs as personalities. The Dobermann Chair carries power, posture, and a sense of loyalty.
It must be as beautiful as a sculpture but also functional – every line must have a purpose.
There should be soul in the proportions, but also precision in the details.

You use AI as a tool for 3D visualization. How do you see technology's role in the evolution of traditional craftsmanship?

Technology is a modern tool – not a replacement for the hands.
I grew up with the scent of wood and the feeling of tradition, and I carry my grandparents' spirit in everything I create.
AI allows me to quickly test ideas, balance, and proportions that I used to see only after many hours in programs like Fusion 360.
Now, I can sketch my thoughts on paper, explain exactly what I mean – and see it visualized instantly.
It saves time and opens new perspectives, but the idea, form, and design always come from me.
Technology helps me carry the legacy forward – not replace it.

What emotions or reactions do you hope people experience when they encounter your chairs in person?

I hope they feel the soul.
I want people to sense a connection – to nature, to craftsmanship, to the story behind each piece.
To feel something genuine that moves them.
My furniture should evoke both respect and calm. I want people to feel strength in simplicity and peace in the sculptural. If that makes sense.

Both the Deer Chair and the Dobermann Chair represent strong personalities – one gentle and poetic, the other bold and protective. Do you see them as reflections of different sides of yourself?

Absolutely. I believe both chairs reveal two sides of the same soul.
The Deer Chair reflects my calm, sensitive, and thoughtful nature – the part of me that seeks harmony and closeness to nature.
The Dobermann Chair represents strength, courage, and determination.
Together, they tell a story of balance – between gentleness and resolve, between heart and hand.
I believe that when you design, your work always reveals who you truly are.

Joana Verdasca Amorim

I’m a 50-year-old Portuguese woman, and I have been painting in watercolor for about two years.

Project Statement
My paintings are non-realistic, created through a deeply intuitive process. Most of the time, what becomes the final work comes from deep within me.

Oleg Tsyba

You originally trained as a doctor and studied anatomy deeply. How does your medical background influence your artistic vision and technique?)

Hi! I think that a deeper study of anatomy really set me free.
Understanding the structure of the body on different levels — including the psycho-emotional one (I once even passed exams in psychology) — allows me to break or bend these rules to achieve my own form.
In my opinion, painting a beautiful body just as it is — that's the most boring activity one could imagine.
If I don't feel irony or a sense of drama in the work, I experience boredom of a cosmic scale — that's what I mean when I talk about breaking the rules of anatomy.

In the series MAMA, you explore motherhood from the perspective of a son and a father. What was the most challenging aspect of representing such a powerful and universal theme?

Oleg Tsyba | The Son Of Zeus Has The Best Basketball Sneakers

I think it's the realization that for all of us — and for me in particular — there is a MOTHER.
If you stop for a moment to think where we all came from, the answer is simple: we literally emerged from another human being — and as you can guess, it definitely wasn't the father.
Half of the people on this planet possess a superpower: to create another human being inside themselves, and yet we all continue to turn a blind eye to this fact.
I witnessed this from the front row, standing beside my wife, and I still can't fully grasp how this is even possible. I mean, in theory everything made sense back in the department of obstetrics and gynecology, but in practice, I simply cannot comprehend or truly feel it.
In my story, I try to capture the symbols and signals that each of us sensed and saw as a child — the symbols of that very chthonic maternal energy. Undoubtedly, this force created everything around us — just as it can destroy it. I mean both Mother Nature, who can nurture a tree and then destroy a forest with drought, and a caring mother, whose words can either give you boundless confidence or instill insecurities and limitations that shape your emotions and behavior for the rest of your life.

The MYTH series draws from Jung's ideas of the collective unconscious. How do you see myths functioning in today's world, and how do you reinterpret them on canvas?

Well yes, in psychology there is a phenomenon called the collective unconscious.
It's somewhat like our unconditional reflexes (I actually had that topic on my physiology exam) — such as swallowing when there's food or saliva in the mouth, sneezing, or instinctively pulling your hand away from a hot iron. No one teaches us these things — they are simply encoded in our DNA.
The same applies to psychological reflexes — or rather, reflections, behavioral and emotional patterns — which all people share, without exception. Even though we live in an age of lonely individuals, we still feel connected to

Oleg Tsyba | The Adventures Of Dante

others, sometimes even to those far away from us. According to Jung, myth is one of the ways this connection and these feelings manifest themselves on the surface. And Sigmund Freud (incidentally, the uncle of one of my favorite artists, Lucian Freud) even found a link between myths and the delusional states of the mentally ill. So myth is something we understand intuitively, even when we don't consciously grasp it.

Essentially, every artist has written their own essay on the subject of myth — so for me, as both an artist and a psychology enthusiast, the choice was obvious.

As for the timeliness and relevance of myth today — I believe that human nature will always remain the same. Yes, our clothing and living conditions change, but the essence of humanity never will. What fascinated us a thousand years ago still fascinates us now — and always will. People want to eat, feel passion and desire, experience hatred and blissful oblivion — and then they die.

So when someone naively thinks that people have changed, they should take a look at the times of Caligula — I think they'll notice some similarities with our own era. In fact, I believe that for a couple of decades now we've been living in the age of the "Soft Caligula."

Myth is always about the human essence. That's why, even though my Venus is sleeping on an inflatable mattress, this work is still about that same eternal beautiful woman.

Who are your main artistic influences besides Kandinsky and Malevich, and how do they resonate in your work today?

Oh yes, Kandinsky and Malevich — or rather, their theories — influenced my understanding of art. Rubens is the greatest painter of all time. But when it comes to visual experience and sensation, I absolutely adore Philip Guston; the way he commands color and composition haunts me. Also Francis Bacon, with his fractured and distorted depiction of the human body. And, of course, Richard Diebenkorn, whose technical mastery of paint is remarkable.

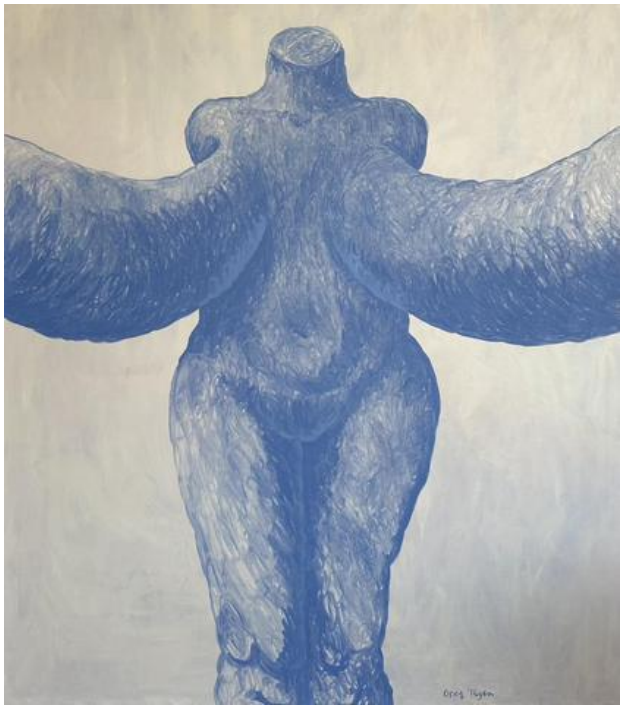
As for composition itself, I think I still draw on what I learned from a Soviet manual called "How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way." The title sounds rather absurd to me. I inherited the book from my sister, who, unlike me, attended art school. Incidentally, that edition contained one rule that I try to apply in every area of my life, not just in drawing: "Never add black tones just because you have leftover ink." It's about having a sense of proportion and the ability to leave a feeling of light incompleteness.

Some of your works are monumental in size. How does scale affect the way you construct meaning and engage the viewer?

Oh yes, about the sizes. Especially at the very beginning, it was psychologically very difficult for me to paint small works. Compositionally, it was hard for me to fit into a limited frame. But I'm working on it — over time, I've created some comparatively small pieces.

Your art is now part of international collections, including in Spain. How does exhibiting abroad change the way you think about your own work?

Of course, I'm very pleased that my work is being recognized internationally. At the beginning, my artworks were first noticed in Europe — I think that's partly because there isn't such strict censorship there as we have here.



Oleg Tsyba | Mother

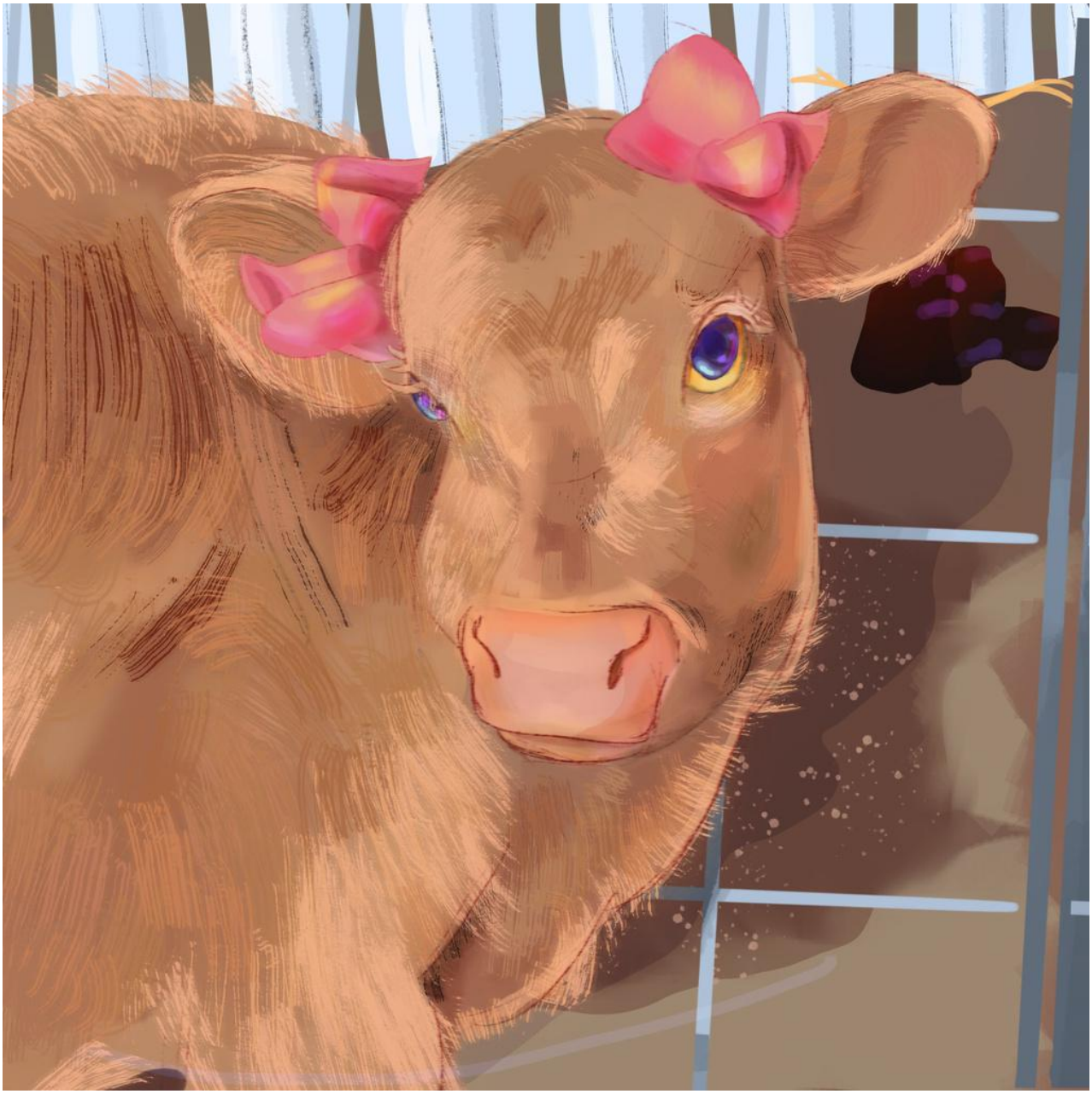
Indira Amore

I am a self taught illustrator, aspiring writer, big dreamer, light sleeper designated driver, and stuffed animal lover. Born and raised in Pennsylvania.

From a young age I've always loved to draw. All thanks to the cartoons on the tv screen and the books in the library. My family would call me a zombie whenever the cartoons would come on.

When I was in high school I attended the Reading-Muhlenberg career and technology center where I got my trade school diploma for Advertising design and commercial art. Where I also received an award from the Scholastic Art and writing awards for animation and film. Within the same year I also attended a fellowship at the Goggleworks center of the arts- a community art and education center in Reading, Pa. I've had my art in multiple exhibits over the years from the Goggleworks to local hospitals.

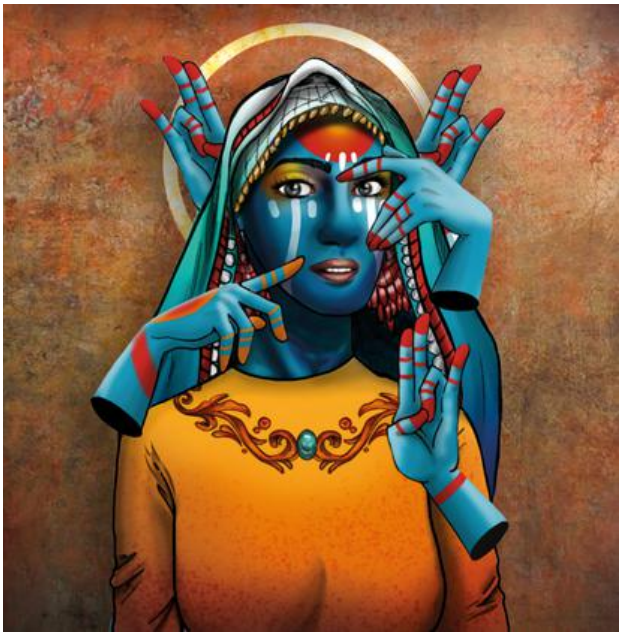
Indira Amore | Cutest Cow | 2025



Amal Karim

Women of Empires was born from a desire to explore identity as something fluid, layered, and ever-evolving. By using my own face as the foundation of each portrait, I wanted to reflect how one self can contain multitudes — cultures, stories, beliefs, and ancestral echoes that transcend time. Traveling, learning different languages, and witnessing diverse traditions deeply influenced me. This series became a way to honor that richness and to question how identity is shaped by the empires — visible and invisible — that have built us.

Your project Women of Empires beautifully combines cultural diversity and strong symbolism. What inspired you to create this series?



Amal Karim | Shiva

Each character in your work has a distinct personality, yet they share a common structure. How did you approach balancing individuality with unity across the series?

The shared facial structure is intentional — it's a visual metaphor for the shared humanity that underlies all differences. From that common ground, I build individuality through symbolic layers: colors, textures, ornaments, rituals. It's a dialogue between sameness and uniqueness, between the universal and the particular. In a way, every portrait is a facet of the same self, but shaped by a different cultural and emotional landscape.

Amal Karim | Spring

You mentioned that your art reflects a mixture of textures, histories, and cultures. How do you decide which visual elements to merge together?

The process is both intuitive and research-driven. I begin by studying historical references, spiritual practices, or natural motifs from a specific culture. Then I allow them to blend organically with my own personal symbols and contemporary aesthetics. It's not about recreating a culture faithfully, but about weaving together traces of memory, resonance, and meaning — creating new narratives from fragments of many.

What role does color play in your creative process, and how do you use it to emphasize emotions or cultural nuances?

Color is the heartbeat of my work. It speaks before form does. I use it as an emotional compass — to express power, vulnerability, divinity, or resistance. At the same time, color carries cultural memory: certain palettes are tied to rituals, empires, and spiritual practices. Through color, I try to create atmospheres that evoke both the emotional tone of the character and the cultural echoes they embody.

Some of your illustrations reveal anatomy or spiritual references. What meaning do you intend to convey through these layered details?

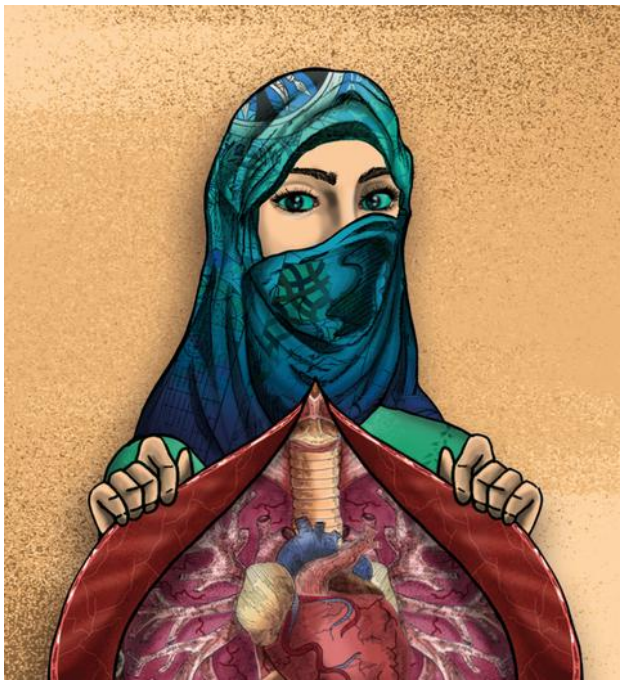
The anatomical or spiritual elements are metaphors for what lies beneath the surface. They speak of inner worlds — emotions, memories, ancestral forces — that shape our external identities. By revealing them, I suggest that identity is not just what is visible, but also what pulses beneath: the roots, the wounds, the sacred. It's an invitation to look beyond appearances and contemplate the invisible layers that make us who we are.

How do you think contemporary digital illustration can contribute to conversations about identity and cultural heritage?

Digital illustration allows us to bridge past and present in powerful ways. It's a medium where ancestral stories can be reimagined and reinterpreted with contemporary language. I believe it can challenge stereotypes, reclaim narratives, and celebrate cultural hybridity. Through digital art, we can create spaces where heritage is not static but alive — evolving and expanding with each new perspective.

Working as both a corporate designer and a freelance illustrator, how do you navigate between commercial demands and personal creative freedom?

It's a constant balancing act. My work as a designer sharpens my discipline and teaches me how to communicate clearly, while illustration gives me the space to explore deeper questions and personal visions. One side grounds me, the other liberates me. I think they feed each other — my commercial work benefits from the soulfulness of my art, and my art gains structure from the clarity of design thinking.



Amal Karim | Anatomy

Paulina Nowak

My artistic journey began in 2024, following a series of significant events in my life that transformed my perception of consciousness and reality. Before this, I had never engaged in drawing or visual art. However, these experiences inspired me to explore the unseen dynamics of awareness through pencil drawings — a medium that allows me to merge meditative, tactile practice with conceptual and scientific curiosity.

Project Statement

My work is a visual exploration of Consciousness — the invisible architecture that structures reality and connects all forms of existence. Through vivid color, geometric precision, and conceptual depth, I translate ideas about thought, energy, and awareness into form.

Each piece is a fragment of a larger system — a symbolic map where geometry and color merge into a single language. The vibrant compositions echo the flow of information and emotion within the human mind, while the structured forms suggest the balance between order and chaos, logic and intuition.

Ultimately, my practice examines how consciousness evolves, divides, and expands — how it functions as both an individual and collective intelligence. Each artwork reflects a moment within that process: a visual trace of awareness discovering itself through form, color, and motion.

Paulina Nowak | Consciousness and Tradition

Paulina Nowak | Consciousness Tool

Paulina Nowak | Humanity Monument

Paulina Nowak | Meeting with Your Consciousness

Paulina Nowak | Dimension Monument

Shirley Yang Crutchfield

Your paintings incorporate 14th-century Italian water-gilding. What first drew you to such a meticulous, historical technique?

I've always been drawn to intricate details and craftsmanship. Water gilding fascinated me because it's a centuries-old technique that requires patience, precision, and a deep respect for material and process.

How do you balance the demands of traditional gilding with the freedom of contemporary artistic expression?

Shirley Yang Crutchfield | Caroline Herschel

It's a balance of discipline and creativity. The traditional techniques give me structure and depth, while contemporary expression lets me interpret the subject, composition, and mood. I see the gilding as a foundation and a way to elevate my subjects, while the painting itself allows me to tell a personal and modern story.

Byzantine, Renaissance, and Baroque influences meet modern fashion in your work. How do you weave these different eras together?

I'm fascinated by the craftsmanship and symbolism of historical art, and I love the storytelling found in fashion. Combining the two allows me to highlight strength, elegance, and personality. I often pull motifs, textures, and forms from historical references and reinterpret them with contemporary colors, fabrics, or styling to create a bridge between eras.

Strong female figures are central to your art. Which historical or contemporary women inspire you most, and why?

I'm inspired by women who embody resilience, intelligence, and quiet power. Historical figures like Caroline Herschel, the first female astronomer employed by the English royal court, or Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra, embody perseverance and a strong will to fight. Contemporary women who push boundaries, lead with integrity, and show resilience in their work also inspire me. Their stories reflect the dedication and complexity I aim to capture in my portraits.

Shirley Yang Crutchfield | Pallas Athene

Gold leaf gives your portraits a luminous, almost sacred aura. What does gold symbolize for you beyond beauty and luxury?

Gold is about reverence and recognition. It elevates the subject, highlighting their achievements, strength, and dedication. Beyond luxury, it's a symbol of focus, care, and respect for both the subject and for the craft itself.

You were a technology entrepreneur before becoming a full-time artist. How has that experience shaped your artistic career?

My entrepreneurial background taught me discipline and resilience. Building and scaling a company requires lots of patience and skills that translate directly to managing my art practice, from building relationships with collectors to planning exhibitions and navigating the art world.

What parallels do you see between the entrepreneurial spirit and the process of creating art?

Both require thick skin and persistence. In entrepreneurship, you're building something from the ground up and adapting along the way. In painting, you start with a blank surface and iterate until the work is complete. Both involve vision, creativity, and a willingness to push through challenges to create something meaningful.

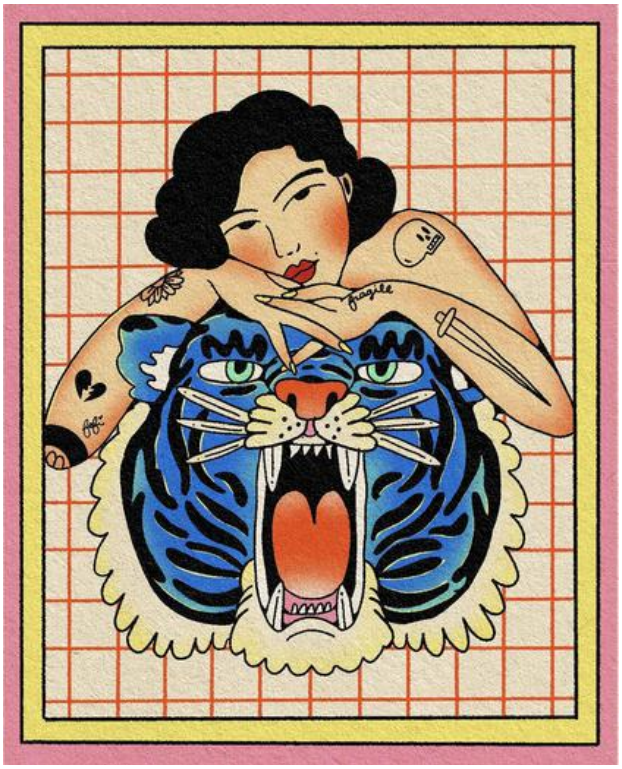
Halil Xhafa (b. 1985, Mitrovica, Kosovo) is a professor and visual artist whose creative language spans graphic design, photography, illustration, and painting. He holds both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Graphic Design from AAB College in Prishtina — where he currently serves as a professor in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Mass Communication — moving fluidly between digital innovation and traditional expression. His works have been showcased in numerous prestigious international exhibitions worldwide and have received significant acclaim. Xhafa maintains strong professional connections with renowned international artists, including the world-famous Vik Muniz, who personally thanked him for creating his portrait.
He is the recipient of several notable awards, including the Special Prize and the First Prize at the "Prishtina - International Poster Festival 2024." His practice is conceptually rich and deeply visual, pushing the boundaries of poster art with intelligence and emotion.

Project Statement
This portrait reimagines the figure of Vincent van Gogh as a psychological landscape built from fragments, textures, and stark contrasts. It reflects his paradox: an artist who created luminous visions of the world while remaining confined in silence and turmoil.
The fractured composition mirrors the tension between his inner wounds and his immortal legacy, while the minimal typography acts as a visual pause — a quiet space against the intensity of the image. This fragmented approach, captured in the title “Fragments of Silence”, lends the portrait a poetic and introspective dimension. The work is both homage and confrontation: an attempt to see Van Gogh beyond the myth, as a reminder that behind every light of art stands a restless soul.

Stephanie Castedo

When I was little, I loved playing outside with my cousins. Our backyard was basically a tropical forest, we climbed trees, played hide-and-seek, and explored all the animals, plants, and fruits around us. One of our favorite adventures was collecting motacú, a fruit from the Amazon. Those moments of being free, fearless, and adventurous continue to inspire me today, pushing me to explore new ways of expressing creativity with that same sense of wonder.

Growing up in Bolivia's Amazonian region clearly shaped your art. Can you share a childhood memory that continues to influence your creative process today?



Stephanie Castedo | Empowerment

Your works often balance chaos and beauty. How do you personally navigate that tension in your own life?

I try to find the beauty in everything. Shifting your perspective is so important, what looks like rejection can really be redirection, and mistakes often turn into lessons. Life is full of ups and downs, but by approaching challenges with a positive mindset, I've learned to grow both personally and creatively.

The tiger appears in several of your pieces as a symbol of strength and resilience. What does this animal mean to you on a personal level?

The tiger represents courage, protection, independence, and passion for me. As a woman and a Latina, I've learned that I have to stay strong no matter what challenges come my way. In the creative world, it can sometimes be difficult to be

Stephanie Castedo | Beauty

taken seriously, so the tiger is also a reminder to stand firm, that my art is more than just pretty flowers or a pretty face behind it. It embodies my fight to claim space and be seen for the strength behind my work.

How do you see the relationship between your digital illustrations and your painting practice? Do they feed into each other?

Absolutely, they go hand in hand. In my digital work, I aim to keep things organic, emphasizing movement and embracing imperfections. I don't want my illustrations to look too clean or mechanical, because to me, beauty lies in imperfection, it's what makes us human. That same philosophy carries into my painting. I love when brushstrokes are visible and alive across the canvas, always flowing, always carrying traces of my flowers as a reminder of where I come from.

Your art often incorporates eyes as symbols of awareness. Can you explain how this theme connects to your understanding of human emotions and self-reflection?

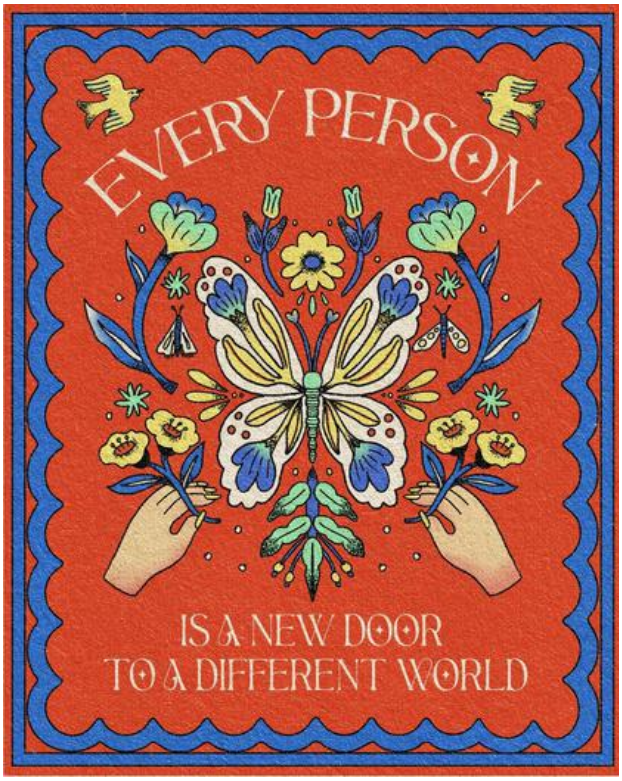
For me, the eye is a reminder to always stay true to yourself. Being aware of your own emotions is essential to growth, and I try to honor both my feelings and the feelings of others. Vulnerability can be intimidating in this world, but I believe it should be celebrated. Through my work, I hope to create a space where honesty, self-reflection, and emotional openness are not only welcomed but embraced.

Many of your pieces use floral motifs. What role do flowers play in your storytelling?

Flowers remind me that we are all constantly blooming. Like flowers, we go through cycles, dying, growing, and blossoming again. To me, that reflects the process of life: we are always evolving, and in that evolution, versions of ourselves fade away so that new ones can emerge. I see that as the beauty of growth, nurturing ourselves through each stage until we bloom into something new and beautiful.

You describe your art as a form of healing. How has making art helped you overcome challenges in your own life?

Art has been part of me for as long as I can remember. I grew up in a household where expressing emotions wasn't always encouraged, so I learned early on to channel my feelings through creativity. Art became my therapy, it gave me a way to express emotions I didn't yet have words for. Over time, it's helped me process my feelings, clear my mind, and pause in the present moment. In a world that moves so quickly, making art gives me space to slow down, reconnect with myself, and find healing through creation.



Stephanie Castedo | Open doors

Kenneth Ricci
K.G. Ricci, a self-taught New York City artist, made a collage on a file cabinet in 2015. The creative possibilities of the medium immediately inspired him. Fifty cut and paste panels followed, visual improvisations on 20" x 40" or 2' X 4' hardboard. Next, Ricci completed another series on 8" X 24" hardboard with implied literary reflections or narrative lines. He categorized hundreds of his panels in line with the evident themes of "Femma Dilemma", "Hotel Kafka" and "3:43 A.M."
Recently, Ricci sustained his implied narrative focus in "Numbered-Not Named", a series of original pieces, 6" x 9" on black stock. He followed the idea further with two projects: "Random Thoughts in the Waiting Room" and "Wait...what?" ~ a pair of visual flash fiction series of books with a single word or a fragment of text in each collage 7x10 composition. His current series "Incongruities" explores the narrative on a larger scale (18x24, 11x14) and with extended text.
K.G. Ricci has exhibited in 27 galleries including solo shows and many more online galleries. His collages have been published in poetry and literary magazines nationally and internationally online and in print.

Artist Statement
"I work in a sort of literary/philosophical framework so within that context my reference points are the parables of Kafka and the aphorisms of Kierkegaard. Because elements determine content, the process of creation is both constrained and liberated by the available elements at any given time and it is the improvised procedure of choice, assembly and judgment that settles the argument".

Ken Ricci | After the Miracle | 2025

Ken Ricci | A Different Door | 2025

Ken Ricci | And So We See... | 2025

Isaac Cuevas Ruelas

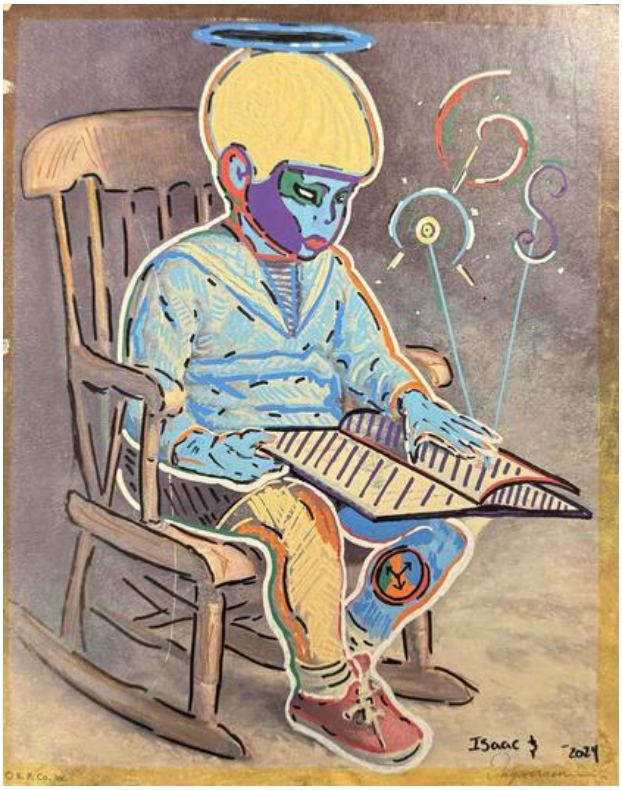
Your description mentions that your art is "a mix between childish, degenerate, and spiritual." Could you elaborate on how these three elements coexist in your creative process?

The way my creative process coexists between childish, degenerate, and spiritual is the way I create and what I create. The way I create is like a child — giving no care of the end product, just creating for the fun of creating. I like to use childish tools like crayons, colored pencils, and markers. I don't like to take myself too seriously. My degenerate side is always present when I create as well — I typically drink or smoke to get myself loose. I find myself not caring as much when I do. And my spiritual side is in what I create — I believe everything I create is spiritual and has a higher purpose. Sometimes I can get in my head and think they are silly drawings, but something within me tells me there's a higher purpose for my drawings. Sometimes I imagine the cavemen who were staining the walls of their cave being made fun of by their peers and being told to hunt instead of doing their "meaningless" paintings.

Isaac Cuevas Ruelas | Divine Insanity | 2024

You mentioned that you started creating art after your brother passed away. How does his memory influence your work today?

His memory influences my painting in almost every way. Before he died, my sister and he used to pick me up on their days off — they would sip on wine and paint with me. I remember we would try to paint some Bob Ross paintings — they never turned out great... but those were my first memories of painting and creating. My brother Jesus was a weird dude; he had very mystical and ambiguous paintings hanging up in his house that he would create. I take inspiration from those every day. He also dabbled in making music — something I have really gotten into these last few years.



Isaac Cuevas Ruelas | Adam | 2025

Many of your paintings have both innocent and mystical tones — like a child discovering something sacred. How do you balance light and darkness in your imagery?

I think that's just a natural balance of light. I have this conversation a lot with my friend Fabian — we always discuss how without light there is no darkness and vice versa. But in my paintings' case, I tend to view life through a cartoonish lens. For me, nothing is real — life is an illusion. Or maybe that was just my brain's way to deal with most of my trauma.

Some of your works reference Aztec gods and indigenous spirituality. What role does your cultural heritage play in your artistic vision?

My heritage plays a huge role in my work.
I am Mexican American, so you will always see images of the Virgin Mary, Aztec mythology, and other Mexican iconography — because that's what I grew up with.
Before every meal, I pray and bless myself because that's what I was taught.
I love my culture — its people, its food. My favorite part is that everything is colorful: from the sauces in the food, to the colors of the bricks in the houses, to the flowers of the traditional dresses — everything is a splash of color and very beautiful.

Your color palette is extremely vivid and expressive. Do colors hold symbolic meaning for you?

Yes, I really enjoy colors. Like I mentioned before, it could be because of my culture, but I think that eyesight is a beautiful gift that allows us to see color — one of God's most beautiful mysteries. I think if someone's gonna paint, why would you want your paintings to be bland? Color is where it's at.

In your creative journey, what comes first — emotion, concept, or intuition?

It all depends on the situation. Honestly, sometimes I have a concept in my mind, but when I go through to actually making it, it always changes and becomes something I've never seen before. Sometimes I draw a line and see where I go from there — I really have no blueprint. I just create for the sake of creating. I do like keeping things simple though — well, simple enough.

How do music and clothing design influence your visual art — do they share a similar emotional language?

Yes, I think my music and art share similar tones — each piece being so different from the other. There is no genre that you can put all my work under, except that I made them all. They all have different flavors and concepts that I was feeling at the time. My clothing is also another "love letter" to my other older brother Ceaser, who would take me on his trips to Las Vegas to make custom pieces. Everything I make and am today has been passed down to me accidentally from my brothers and sister.

Isaac Cuevas Ruelas | Flowers In The Garden | 2023

Matteo
I'm a Rome-based street photographer. I work primarily with film (Kodak 400TX) and shoot exclusively on medium-format cameras (Rolleiflex and Mamiya). Medium format helps me examine the human condition within the urban environment.

Project Statement — ***Same Time Tomorrow***
Same Time Tomorrow is an ongoing project. I walk the streets of Rome—and New York City when I can afford to get there—with my Rolleiflex around my neck. This camera lets me study how people move through the city and how space shapes them. The square frame helps me concentrate on the subject, and I want viewers to focus on the gaze—on eyes and emotions. Most of the people were unaware of being photographed and didn't mind.
For me, photography is a page torn from life. And because of that, it has to be real.

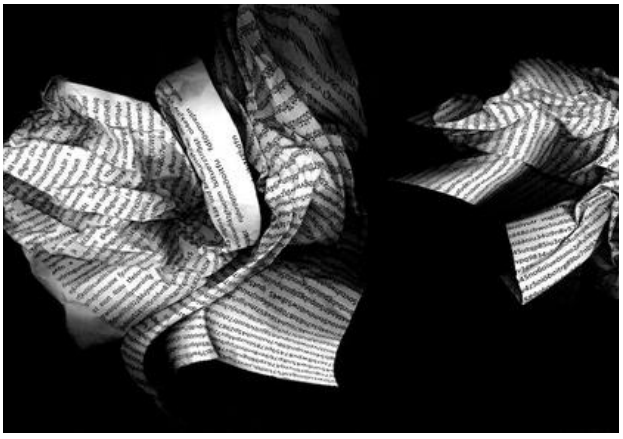
KODAK 400TX
45
4

Claudia Ungersbäck

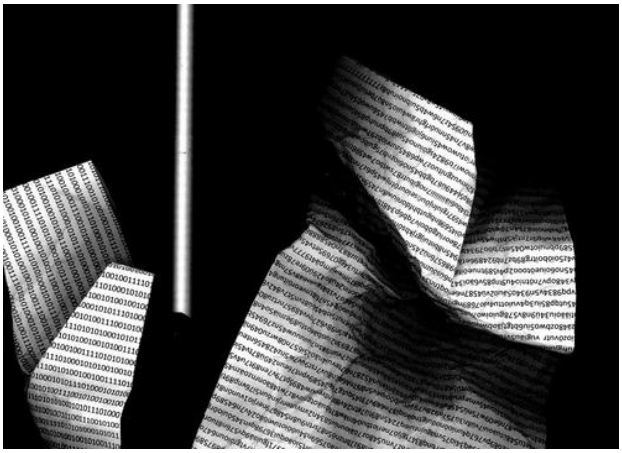
printmaking have influenced your artistic language today?

I liked studying fashion design – the scholl, the classmates, full of creativity and embition in drawing, pattern making, and how to sew my own designs. I experimented a lot, and most of my designs were studies in technique. In printmaking I learned how to place figures in space and how tot hink in reverse for printing. I painted and drew from magazines first and also used them as material in my copy art.
Philosophy was hard form me – being patient in reading and writing, taking exams – and I stopped studying several times. At one point I finished my BA, and looking vack, I encountered so many philosophers and schools of thought, found many answers and new ideas. In Philosophy there is a lot of critique, assertion, and refutation. It made me calmer to know most oft he questions have been discussed somewhere before. I often stood out with my questions – and those I now persue in art. I am not particulary good at academic writing, but my questions continue in a different form.

Could you tell us more about how your studies in fashion design, philosophy, and



Claudia Ungersbäck | Sculptiturity | 2020



Claudia Ungersbäck | Sculptiturity | 2020

What first inspired you to work with paper as a sculptural and poetic material?

In my exhibition „out of the blue“, a paper sculpture emerged accidentially - I wanted to cover the floor with paper. At that time, I was working with plexiglass as a contuniation of a printmaking plate. I also see my copy art and digital works as developed forms of printmaking surfaces. I always wanted too make sculptures out of language, and that's how Sculptiturity emerged – at first as scetches. Each sheed became like a sentence, a fragment of language that grew into something spartial.

How do you decide when a work is finished, especially when you work with improvisation and automatism?

At one stage I simply get fed up with working – that either another step follows , or the work is finished.

Your series Sculptiturity merges sculpture, architecture, music and poetry. How do these different disciplines interact in a single piece?

I work in series, in cyckes. One work leads to the next. I wanted to create something that merges all surroundings – fragments and elements of everything – into one form. Each discipline informs the other, and together they shape a space that is material and poetic at the same time.

You mention “machine poems” based on console sounds. How do you capture and translate sound into visual form?

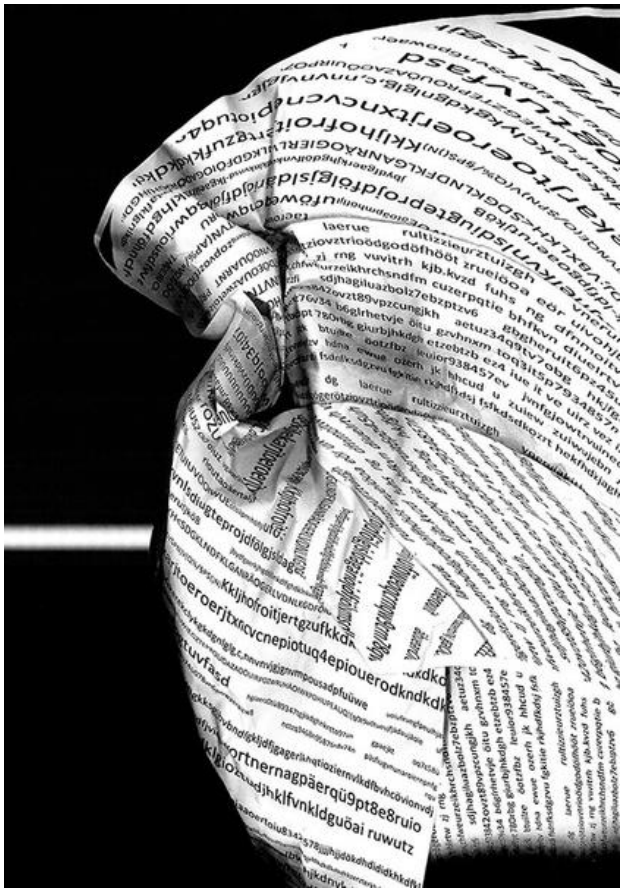
I know how to play keyboard. While typing templates for Textkörper I became aware of the sounds – even when I play music, I compose poems. On the console I had shorter rows, and a kind of Fluxus feeling emerged – tapping the keys rhytmically. One thing flowed into another.

How do you hope viewers will feel when they encounter your artworks—should they read them, listen to them, or simply experience them physically?

When I work, I think with the material and develop a concept while experimenting. Then I think about the concept and continue. I hope viewers perseive my work with all senses – openly, without prejudice, and freely.

Could you share a moment when someone’s interpretation of your work surprised or inspired you?

When I presented Moments at Textkörper und Musikbilder, someone told me that my work shows how deeply humans are „thrown into language“. That inspired me to develop the concept for Sculptiturity.



Claudia Ungersbäck | Sculptiturity | 2020

Rolla
Rolla's artistic journey began in childhood, when he first discovered his passion for drawing. Quickly noticed and encouraged by his teachers, he naturally went on to study at the Saint-Luc Institute in Tournai (Belgium), where five years later he graduated at the top of his class with the jury's highest honors.
After completing his studies, he initially devoted himself to portraiture, completing over 150 commissioned works from photographs using pencil and charcoal. He later developed an interest in animal art and began exploring new techniques, particularly acrylic painting.
In 2024, Rolla began to explore through his canvases the deep connections between sound and image. Through his technique, he developed a unique visual language, depicting animals interacting with musical instruments. In doing so, he created a harmonious visual dialogue between living beings and the musical universe — a silent symphony captured on canvas. This exploration gave birth to the series Instinct Musical. In this collection, music transcends the act of listening: it becomes energy, light, movement, and emotion. Each of Rolla's works invites the viewer to listen with their eyes, to feel invisible rhythms, and to rediscover the intimate bond between nature and sound.

Project Statement
At the crossroads of visual art and the sonic realm, Rolla's paintings explore the dialogue between music, movement, and nature. Through his series Instinct Musical, each piece invites the viewer to sense imaginary vibrations and visual sounds, transforming the silence of the canvas into an inner auditory experience.

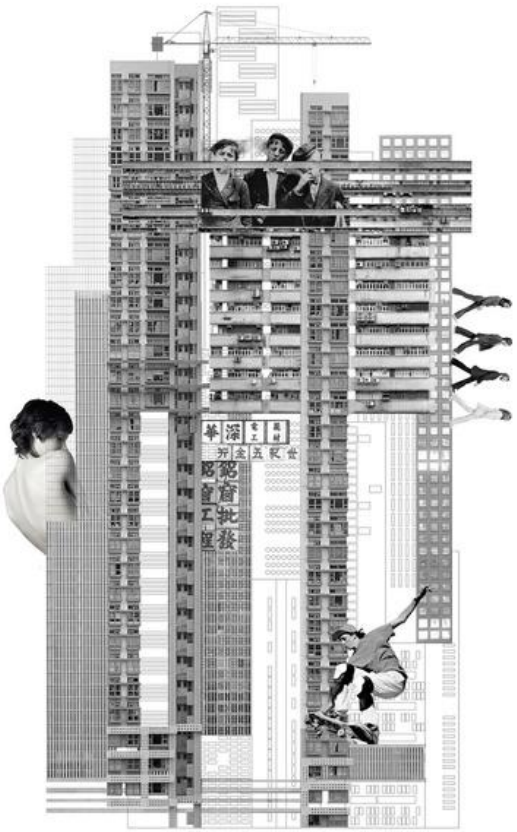
Rolla | Immersive Solo | 2024

Rolla | Royal Cry | 2025

Rolla | Sound Trace | 2025

— *Interview*

Lei Ye



Lei Ye | Homo Ludens | 2023

Your practice often transforms data into memory. Could you share how a specific dataset first inspired you to create an artwork?

One of the first datasets that truly struck me was income and education level data across racial groups in the U.S. At first, it looked like a series of numbers, but when I started mapping the disparities visually, I realized each data point represented a family's opportunity — or lack thereof. This dataset inspired Data-Driven Narratives: BLM, where visualization became a way to transform abstract numbers into a shared memory of struggle and resilience.

Lei Ye | ReImagine Avant Garde On The Moon | 2024

In your statement, you mention that "behind every number is a lived experience." Can you tell us about a project where this idea became especially powerful?

In Beyond Number (BeyondNO), I invited participants to generate personalized posters from datasets related to social justice issues. Each poster was a memorial object, reminding us that behind every statistic was an individual story — someone's life, someone's community. When participants saved their poster, they weren't just archiving data, but also reflecting on the human experiences it stood for.

You are trained in both architecture and design. How do these disciplines shape the way you approach your artistic projects?

Architecture taught me to think spatially — about scale, structure, and how people move through an environment. Design trained me to consider interaction, accessibility, and communication. Together, they allow me to treat data not just as numbers, but as something inhabitable: a space you can navigate, a narrative you can interact with, or a memory you can hold in your hands.

Many of your works engage with themes of social justice and equity. What role do you believe art plays in making data more humane and accessible?

Art can soften the rigidity of data. Numbers are often seen as neutral or distant, but art gives them texture, emotion, and story. By making data more humane — through visual storytelling, participatory experiences, or tactile installations — art helps audiences not only understand inequalities but also feel them, which I believe is the first step toward collective action.

Your projects move between digital platforms, immersive installations, and print. How do you decide which medium best serves a particular narrative?

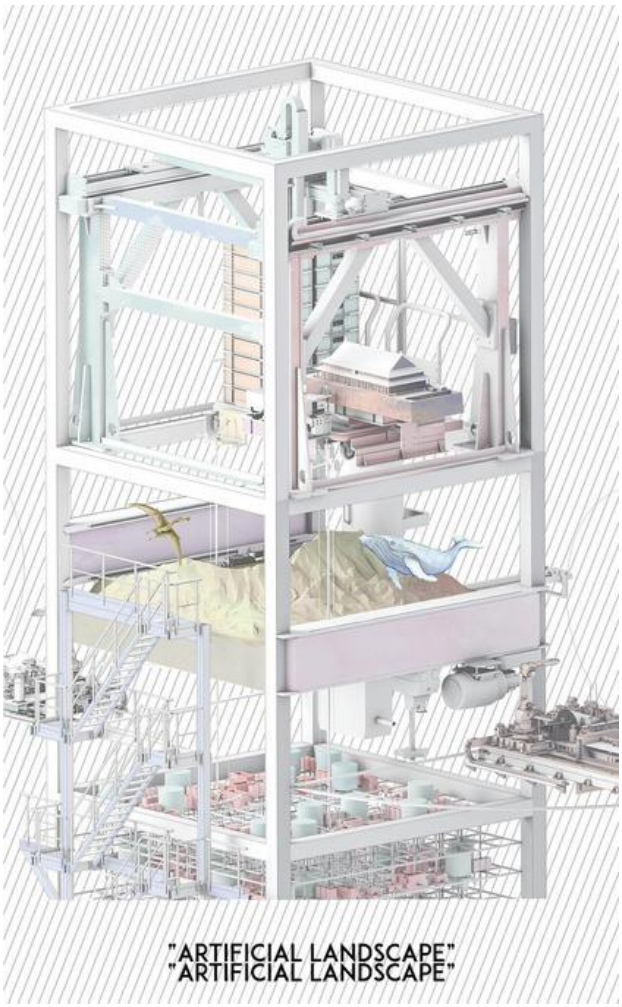
I let the data and the story dictate the form. If the goal is to invite reflection, print becomes powerful because it creates permanence. If the goal is accessibility, digital platforms allow for wide reach. For immersion and empathy, installation creates embodied encounters. Each medium has its own language, and I try to choose the one that best amplifies the narrative behind the numbers.

Beyond Number and Data-Driven Narratives: BLM both reimagine data visualization. How do you balance scientific accuracy with poetic expression?

Accuracy grounds the work in credibility, while poetic expression opens space for interpretation and empathy. I see them not as opposites, but as collaborators. I always preserve the integrity of the dataset, but I also design moments where visual metaphors or distortions invite audiences to think beyond the graph — to consider the story, memory, or silence hidden behind the data.

Your works have received international recognition, including Red Dot and DNA Paris Awards. How does this global acknowledgment influence your practice?

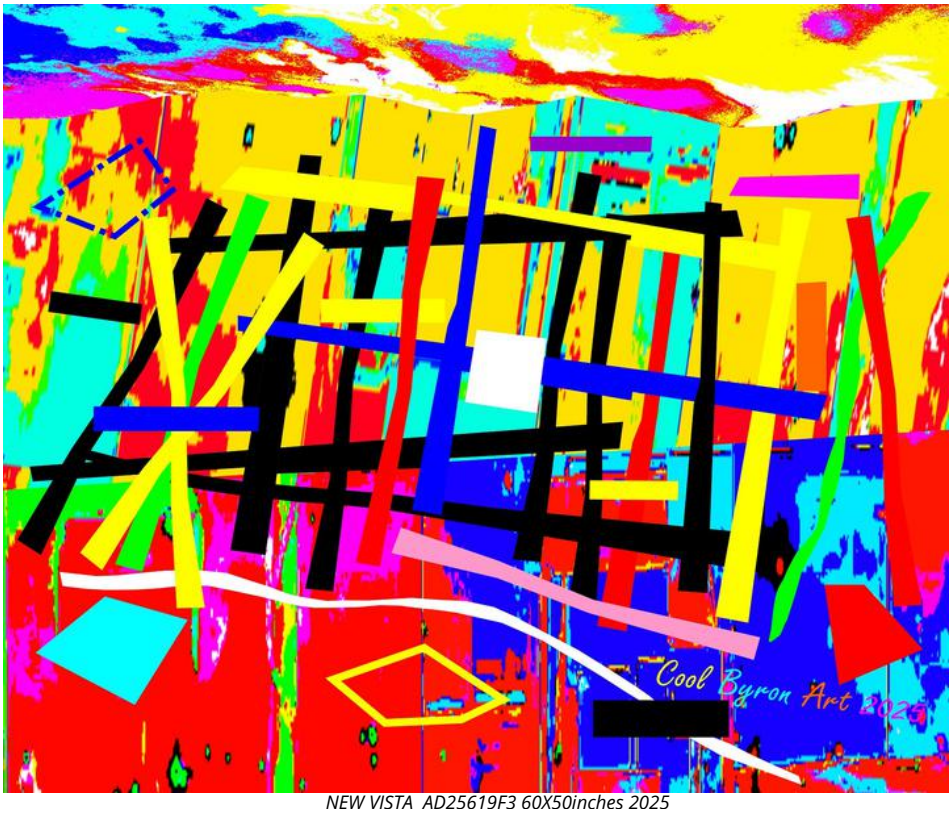
Recognition affirms that the issues I address resonate beyond their immediate context. It reminds me that questions of justice, memory, and empathy are not confined to one culture or geography. At the same time, global acknowledgment pushes me to hold myself accountable — to continue creating work that is both rigorous and generous, both critical and accessible.



Lei Ye | Sci-Fi Californiascape | 2023

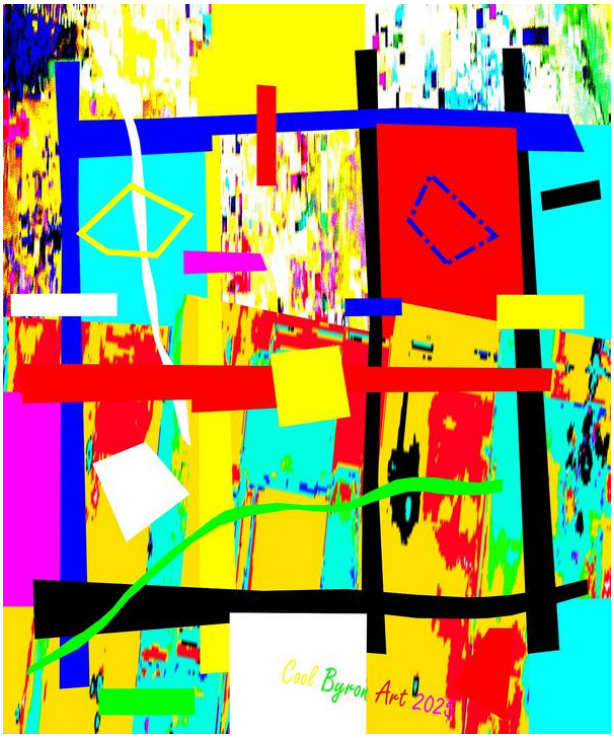
COOLBYRON

THE ARTIST: COOLBYRON my art name BYRON WINFIELD KEENER international VISUAL ARTIST with over 40 years of experience in ART and DESIGN with several academic degrees and professional experience as an artist, designer and architect. The artworks range from abstracted integrated paintings, landscapes, mixed media integrations, mural developments, to environmental Marco Art. He is an Abstract Art Master with over 200 finalist and awards. I am a contemporary abstract COLORIST.

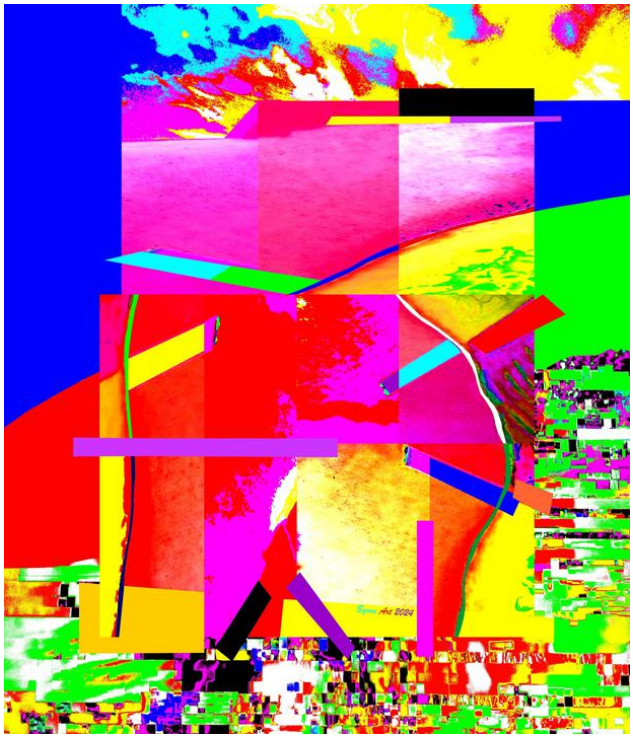


NEW VISTA AD25619F3 60X50inches 2025

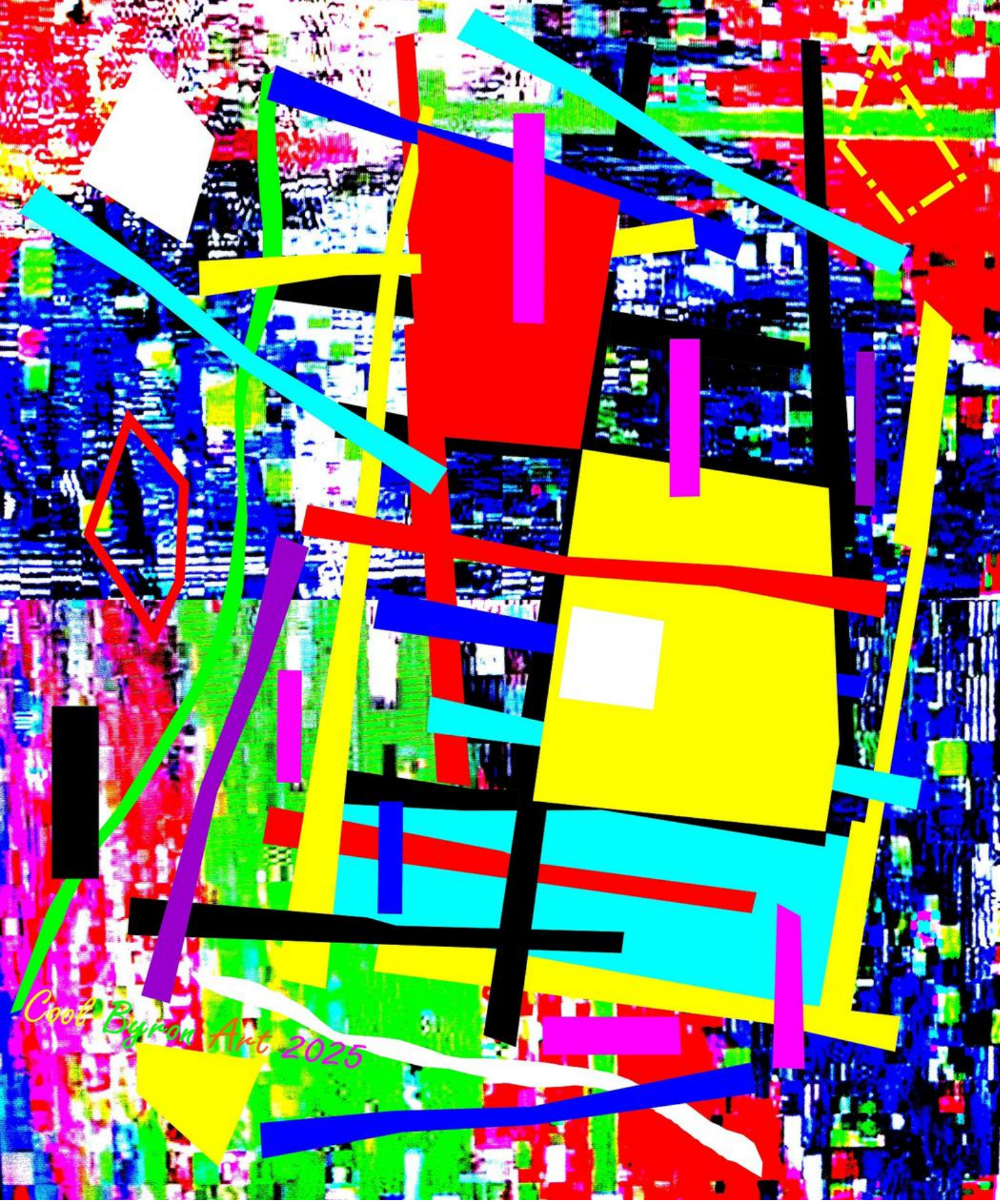
THE CONCEPT: is developed from ART AND TECHNOLOGY OF DESIGN. The idea is developed from a sophisticated Concept of Intrinsic Value of Space. It combines the visual and emotional relationship in a Color Strategy. It integrates the spatial aspects to promote depth, perspective and proporitionalism and to explore the nature of Color and abstracted impressionism in Contemporary Art. I investigate ideas related to Man's Impact on Nature.



NEW VISTA AD25628A2 60X50inches 2025



NEW VISTA AD24455K1 60X50inches 2025



NEW VISTA AD25635A2 60X50inches 2025

THE ARTWORKS: artist created new style of TECHNO-EXPRESSIONISM incorporates both hand and digital technologies. The composition is an image that integrates COLOR FIELDS from Abstract Expressionism and STRUCTURED FORMS from Hard Edge Abstraction. The artworks are integrated paintings using latex mediums, encausto, pigments, acrylics on canvas or prints. My focus is the COLOR ADVANCEMENT to create new art image and form. coolbyrondesigner@yahoo.com

Dima Smolyaninov

Dima Smolyaninov | Beings | 2024

Your paintings are described as surreal fantasy filled with dreamlike, mysterious imagery. How do you usually begin developing these imaginative compositions?

The first sketches of my paintings happen spontaneously. When I find a random piece of paper, I just start moving my pen over it without thinking, and my hand draws the first shapes and images on its own. I don't really understand what's going on or what the characters are doing. The scenes look incomplete, like pieces of a story left unfinished. But sometimes ideas come ready-made. For example, my wife saw a pink concrete fence in a dream. She told me about it, and I painted it. I just added a shadow of a fish for some reason.

Dima Smolyaninov | Concretefence | 2025

What inspires the soft pastel palette that appears so often in your works?

I try to use calm and soft colors so the paintings are pleasant and don't strain the eyes. Even red, I make as safe as possible. This kind of palette creates a light, relaxed mood—like looking at

Dima Smolyaninov | Spring dance | 2024

something from a dream or daydream, where everything feels comfortable and peaceful.

Many viewers sense different meanings in your paintings. How do you feel about these varied personal interpretations?

I enjoy it when people see different stories and meanings in my paintings. It's really interesting when everyone experiences the work in their own way, like a personal little world of associations and imagination. Since I don't really know what's happening in the painting myself, I'm always curious to hear all kinds of interpretations. It's important to me that the work leaves space for that kind of individual immersion.

Do you ever include hidden details or symbols, or is everything meant to stay completely open to the viewer?

There are no hidden or obvious meanings in my paintings. Everything is open so everyone can imagine and find something of their own.

How has your style evolved over time, and what influenced these changes?

I've only been painting for a short time, so it's too early to talk about development or a fixed style. I experiment and don't stick to one style. Right now, freedom to show imagination and atmosphere matters more to me than specific genres or techniques.

How do you see the relationship between imagination and reality in your art?

The only real connection my art has with the world is the canvas and the viewer. Everything else is fantasy and imagination born in their head.

What emotions or sensations do you hope visitors experience when they stand before your work?

I want the viewer to feel lightness and pleasant surprise, like they're looking at a dream that's not scary or heavy, just something that makes their eyes and imagination happy. I want it to leave a feeling of something interesting but easy to take in, with a smile and a gentle mystery.

Dima Smolyaninov | Flamingos | 2025

Sabina Puppo is a Leesburg, Virginia United States based visual artist. Her oil paintings have hints of a modern primitive or contemporary folk naturalist style and the freedom of an intuitive self-taught artist.
The lines she deliberately traces on the oil of her paintings create a personal language and imagery that makes her style readably accessible. She has been called a Naturalist, for her themes are based on nature connected to the everyday world: rolling hills splashed with vineyards and olive groves, seas with playful waves, majestic trees with extensive roots, forests with intricate designs, and an intimate nether world transport the viewer to idyllic, peaceful settings.
Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in the United States, Italy, Spain, France, England, Japan, India, Bulgaria, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil. Her paintings are in private collections on every continent.

Project Statement
I take my role as an artist with lightness and delight. I have endless amounts of joy and find fulfillment when creating visual stories in my studio. Whenever I experience feelings of awe in my life, I find a way to portray them in my art. My way of painting and drawing on the oil allows me to create a language and rhythm filled with textured colors, playful lines, moving patterns, and curious inhabitants within majestic landscapes. My paintings capture the natural world in connection with human relationships full of love, mundane activities that warm the heart, and the encouragement to slow down, be light, and notice the present. I prefer to be an usher of good news in this confusing world of ours, and find that color and images have immense power to restore and lift the spirit. My intent is to offer through my art a message of tranquility, delight in Nature, and appreciate the experience of being alive.

Sabina Puppo | Autumn Hues

Sabina Puppo | Caring

Sabina Puppo | Sea Storm and Us

Interview

Interviewer: Anna Gvozdeva (curator)

Veronika Ryndina

You work across multiple media — watercolor, acrylic, digital, and mixed techniques. What attracts you to each, and how do you decide which medium to use for a new piece?

Usually, I have a clear vision in my mind of how the final piece will look, and that vision naturally includes the medium I'll use. It's as simple as that. My biggest love is watercolor. I'm fascinated by the process itself: watching the pigments blend and granulate, seeing how particles move across the paper. It's mesmerizing and deeply meditative. I even make my own shiny watercolor paints and love observing how the tiny sparkles flow on the surface.

Veronika Ryndina | Italian Fields

I usually choose acrylic over watercolor when I want to create impasto textures or simply prefer working on canvas instead of paper. Mixed techniques appear mostly in my sketchbooks - that's my experimental space. I used to work digitally a lot, but with all the new AI tools, I now feel a stronger desire to return to real brushes and paints, to experience the process with all my senses rather than through a screen. These days, I use digital tools mostly for sketches or color studies - it's a great way to explore ideas without wasting paint.

Your portfolio moves fluidly between botanical realism, expressive landscapes, and abstraction. What connects these directions for you on an emotional or conceptual level?

I've always been deeply connected to nature - it has been my energy source since childhood. That's where my botanical realism and expressive landscapes come from. But simply capturing nature as the human eye or a camera sees it feels boring to me; I always want to add something expressive or unexpected. Even in my realistic botanical pieces, I tend to include small imaginative details that wouldn't exist in real life.

My connection to abstraction comes from my background in environmental design, where you learn to think in shapes and volumes. During my studies, we often had creative exercises based on abstract compositions, and that shaped the way I perceive form. Abstraction allows me to express deeper philosophical ideas and maintain a sense of dynamic movement that realism sometimes limits. Over time, I started mixing these directions; working in different styles helps me stay balanced. When I get tired of realism, I switch to abstraction, and vice versa. It keeps my mind fresh.

How does your background in architectural environment

Veronika Ryndina | Inner Gravity

design influence the structure and composition of your artworks?

My academic training taught me that every artwork should have a concept, and every stroke should have a reason. Before I start a piece, I ask myself many questions: what is the best composition, what color scheme will serve the message, what emotions do I want to evoke, and what's the underlying idea behind the image? I always think about both the direct and the hidden messages within the artwork. This mindset came from design where every decision must be functional and meaningful. Abstract art, especially, requires even more intention. It might seem spontaneous or effortless to the viewer, but there's always a complex thought process behind it.

Could you describe your creative process — from the initial idea to the finished piece?

I usually begin with a very clear mental image of the finished work. I think in detailed visuals, so once I can "see" the piece, I reverse-engineer how to achieve it. I decide which methods or tools will best serve the vision - for example, whether I'll need an airbrush for smooth gradients or fine brushes for detail.
I start with black-and-white sketches to explore composition and tonal balance, often making several versions. Then I move to color studies, beginning with the vivid hues I first imagined and gradually testing more limited palettes. After setting the sketches aside for a day or two, I come back to them with fresh eyes and choose the version that feels most balanced. Then I create a detailed final sketch before starting the actual painting.

Nature plays a strong role in your work. Do you paint from observation, memory, or imagination?

It's usually a combination of all three when I work realistically. I like adding something personal and imaginative to each piece. Even in abstraction, I rely on my academic foundation; so memory and imagination are always part of the process. They merge naturally.

How do you approach color — is it intuitive, symbolic, or analytical for you?

It depends on the purpose of the work. If I'm creating a painting for a specific interior, I start analytically: I study the space, its atmosphere, and how the artwork will interact with it. I think about how color can complement the environment and the emotions of the people who live with the piece. That's my designer mindset.
But when I paint for myself, color becomes purely intuitive. Sometimes you just feel an urge to paint, and overthinking color can interrupt that flow. I can always analyze it later and adjust future works. Art isn't always about symbolism, sometimes we love colors simply because they make us feel alive.

What do you seek to evoke in the viewer through your paintings?

I want people to feel joy, calm, and inspiration. There's already too much sadness and negativity in the world - I've never wanted to add to that. That's why I never paint when I'm in a bad mood; every piece carries an emotional imprint. When I look at my own paintings, I can still recall exactly what I felt while creating them. Even if a work looks perfect technically, if I painted it while feeling low, I'd probably paint over it later.
For me, each artwork is like an emotional artifact: it holds the energy of the moment it was created. I want that energy to be uplifting for anyone who sees it.

Veronika Ryndina | Wispers In Magnolia

Samuvel Benhursha

Your projects range from large-scale urban developments to highly imaginative digital concepts. How do these two worlds—practical architecture and speculative AI-driven imagery—influence each other in your creative process?

For me, the two worlds aren't separate—they feed into each other constantly. On one side, I work on large-scale urban developments where every decision must stand up to gravity, budgets, codes, and the realities of how people live in cities. That practical rigor keeps me grounded in the technical, material, and human aspects of architecture.
On the other side, I explore architecture through imaginative narratives where function, landscape, and culture collide in unexpected ways. I often start by asking: what happens if a familiar typology is placed in an unfamiliar setting, or if a building takes on the qualities of a landscape? From there, I introduce a twist—something surprising, playful, or symbolic—that transforms the scene into more than just a visual experiment. It becomes a way of questioning how we perceive architecture and how deeply it can connect to human emotions, cultural memory, or even social commentary.
When the two converge, I find that the speculative

work expands my vision of what architecture could be, while the practical work ensures those visions can someday be realized. Together, they create a cycle: practice informs imagination, and imagination pushes practice forward.

Many of your works feature bold juxtapositions of landscapes, cultures, and styles. What inspires you to combine such contrasting elements?

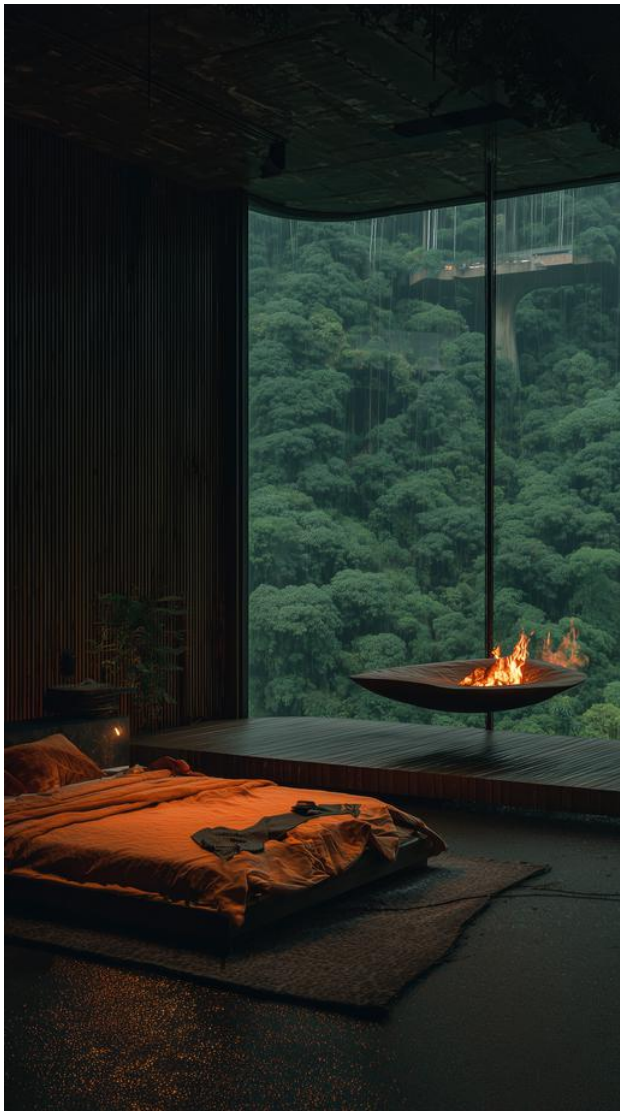
What inspires me is the tension that emerges when opposites meet. I've always felt that architecture becomes most alive when it holds contrasts—landscape against structure, history against the present, or one culture's visual language intersecting with another. These juxtapositions aren't just about aesthetics; they reveal deeper stories about how we live, migrate, remember, and dream.
I approach these combinations almost like composing music—different notes may seem dissonant at first, but together they create resonance. By placing contrasting elements side by side, I want to spark curiosity and invite viewers to see architecture from a new perspective, as something that can carry both familiarity and surprise, rootedness and imagination at once.

How do you balance the technical demands of real-world architecture with the freedom of artistic experimentation that digital tools provide?

I see the two as parallel disciplines that constantly check and challenge each other. The technical demands of real-world architecture keep me precise—every line has consequences, whether it's structural stability, code compliance, or the way a space supports human life. That rigor disciplines my thinking and ensures that design never becomes detached from reality.
At the same time, digital experimentation gives me a freedom that the real world cannot—an open field where architecture can merge with forests, oceans, or cultural metaphors without worrying about gravity or budgets. This is where I can push ideas to extremes, treating architecture as narrative and speculation.
The balance comes from letting each world inform the other. Technical practice teaches me where limits exist; artistic experimentation teaches me how those limits might be stretched or reimagined. Together, they create a creative loop—practicality grounds me, imagination expands me.

Your artist statement compares architecture to poetry. Can you share a moment or project where you truly felt that poetic connection?

One moment I felt that connection was walking toward St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco. As I approached, the geometry seemed to shift with each step—different parts of the structure moving at different rhythms, almost like the building was alive. Inside, the way light breaks across the vast concrete folds creates an atmosphere that is both precise and deeply human.
For me, this is what I mean when I compare architecture to poetry. It's not about words—it's about the way space, proportion, and light come together to create an experience that resonates beyond utility. That moment reminded me that architecture, at its best, isn't just shelter or structure—it's a lived expression that can stay with you long after you leave.



In what ways has your experience working in both the United States and India shaped your understanding of architecture's cultural role?

Working in both the United States and India has shown me how deeply culture shapes architecture—not just in form or material, but in the way spaces are lived in and valued. In India, architecture is inseparable from community life; streets and courtyards blur private and public realms, and even modest buildings often carry layers of ritual, symbolism, and memory. In the U.S., I've experienced a different rigor—an emphasis on systems, codes, and precision—where architecture often reflects individuality, efficiency, and urban order.

Moving between these contexts has made me more sensitive to architecture's cultural role. It's not just about designing a building; it's about understanding how people see themselves in it, how they gather, and what meanings they attach to space. This dual perspective pushes me to design with both cultural resonance and technical clarity, aiming for work that respects context while also imagining new possibilities.

Instagram has become a key platform for your work. How has the instant global feedback from social media influenced your artistic direction?

The instant feedback has been eye-opening. In architectural practice, it can take years before a design is built and experienced, but on social media I can see within hours how people respond to an idea. That immediacy doesn't dictate my direction, but it does sharpen my awareness of what resonates universally and what sparks new conversations.

The statistics also reveal fascinating patterns. Certain age groups respond more to futuristic juxtapositions, while others connect with cultural or historic blends. Some countries favor minimal, atmospheric works, while others gravitate toward bold and playful experiments. Even gender plays a role in the kind of imagery that resonates most.

These insights help me see architecture not just as a technical discipline, but as a cultural language with different dialects across the world.

What I take from this is not simply what "performs well," but what these patterns say about people's relationship to architecture. It reminds me that beyond construction, architecture lives in the imagination—and that imagination varies, but also connects us globally.

If you could build one of your surreal digital concepts in reality, which one would it be and why?

If I could bring one of my digital concepts into reality, it would be Rustic Isolation. The idea of a weathered, rusted structure embedded in a dense, almost untouched forest has always fascinated me. What I love about this concept is the dialogue between permanence and impermanence: the building is strong and monumental, yet its surface is constantly changing through oxidation and weathering.

To me, this is architecture that embraces time as a material. Rather than resisting the environment, it allows nature to leave its mark season after season. Building something like this would create a powerful coexistence—where the isolation is not about disconnection, but about finding resonance with the landscape, and where decay itself becomes beauty.

Anna Freeman is a professional ceramist and sculptor with expertise in hand-building and pottery wheel-throwing techniques.
She was born and raised in Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg), Russia, a historically multicultural city that absorbed Polish, German, Russian, and many other influences. From an early age, she was surrounded by a rich, inspiring atmosphere that included folk art, literature, natural sites, and architecture, and she practiced art in many forms, including painting, sculpting, drawing, dancing, embroidery, and lace knitting.
Following her family tradition, Anna pursued a career in education, earning a BA in Teaching and an MA in Educational Psychology in Russia. She later earned an MA in TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and an MA in Fine Arts (Ceramics) at the University of Delaware in the United States.
Her historical, cultural, and professional background as a teacher and psychologist informs both her personality as an artist and her artistic style. Her work resonates with audiences' inner child through imaginative fairy-tale characters and natural objects, exploring themes of humanism, forgiveness, generosity, innocence, and kindness, all within the context of preserving, disseminating, and developing folk art.In 2023, she taught teenagers at the YMCA Summer Camp 2023 organized by the Delaware Contemporary Art Museum.
In May 2023, she took part in the University of Delaware's inaugural State of the Arts Festival which showcased a visual arts gallery in the Studio Theatre at the Roselle Center for the Arts.
In 2024, she participated in and received a reward for her work in the juried exhibition "Reclaimed: Transformations Through Clay!" at the University of Delaware.
In 2025 she took part in the Old College Exhibition "Colors, Land, and Building Old College and Delaware" at the University of Delaware.
From September 2022 to May 2025, she served as a ceramic instructor at the University of Delaware in Newark, DE.
Ceramic sculptures have been exhibited in an interactive 3D virtual gallery in Explore Art, September 2025.
Ceramic sculptures have been exhibited in an interactive 3D virtual gallery in Through the Eyes of a Child, Culturally Arts Collective, September 2025.

Project Statement
Words can diminish meaning. No single word can fully capture how miraculous and fateful our childhood memories are. The silence in my ceramic studio where I create my sculptures, speaks volumes. Soft, pastel colors whisper of innocence, kindness and the openness to the world that many of us lack today. I take my viewer by the hand and guide them into the realm of their inner child through images of folklore, folk art and childhood memories hoping they in will awaken the world with kind, childlike eyes and strive to change it for the better. However, do not be misled by the apparent simplicity and naivety on display. Kindness is not a weakness.

Anna Freeman | Candy | 2025

Anna Freeman | Soroka Beloboka | 2024

Elena Alyoshina

Painting has always been an inseparable part of my life, though for various reasons it remained only a small part. But a few months ago, I felt an irresistible passion for immersing myself more deeply in creativity... I no longer wanted to postpone this part of my life, as I had done before, and I hurried to the market for brushes and paints...

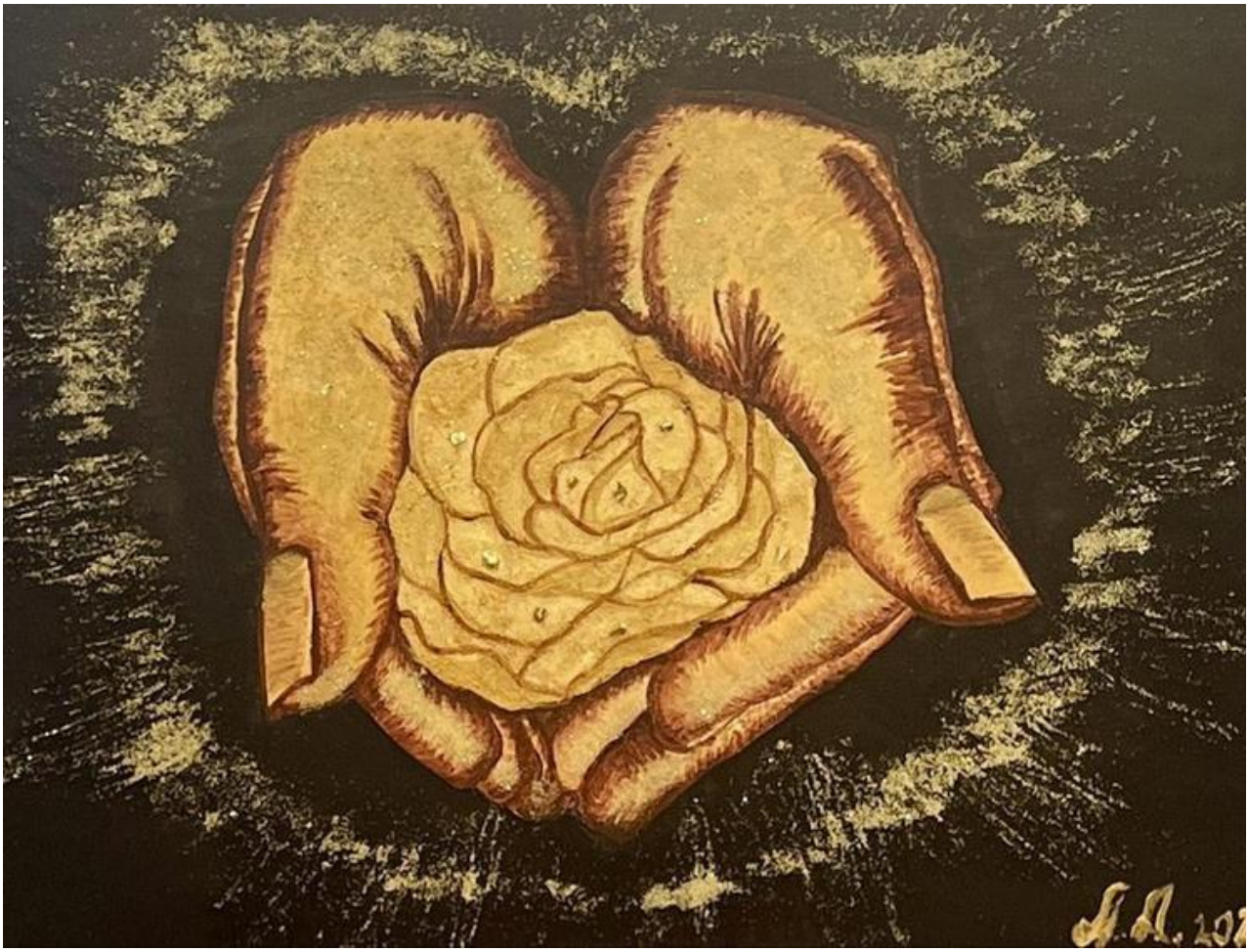
You have a background in economics and work in the oil industry — how do these two worlds (corporate and creative) coexist in your life?

Indeed, at first glance it may seem that these worlds are absolutely polar, but in reality they complement each other quite harmoniously: my office work, with the necessity of following various corporate rules, and my art, which provides freedom of thought and space for imagination... it is like the change of seasons, each original and beautiful in its own way.

Many of your works feature gold, textured elements, and strong feminine figures. What themes are you exploring through these visuals?

Through these images in my work, I strive to express the multifaceted essence of womanhood

Could you tell us about your journey into painting? What inspired you to start creating artworks recently?



in this world, highlighting it with shades of gold and various textural elements — such as mirrored chips and quartz sand.

Do your paintings reflect personal experiences, emotions, or symbolic stories?

A priori, my works are a mix of personal life experience, real stories, and lived emotions with a certain degree of fantasy.

Can you describe your creative process? Do you plan each painting in advance or is it more spontaneous?

My creative process is an unpredictable thing. An idea comes suddenly, and I create a sketch; after that, it depends on whether I have the time and energy to paint. Sometimes I can't touch a painting for several months, and other times I lose track of time—after working in the office, I crave diving into creativity and paint late into the night.

What materials or techniques do you enjoy working with the most?

I use mixed techniques, but my current favorites are acrylic, texture paste, and the whimsical gold leaf... For a more vivid visual effect, I also incorporate elements such as mirror chips and glitter.

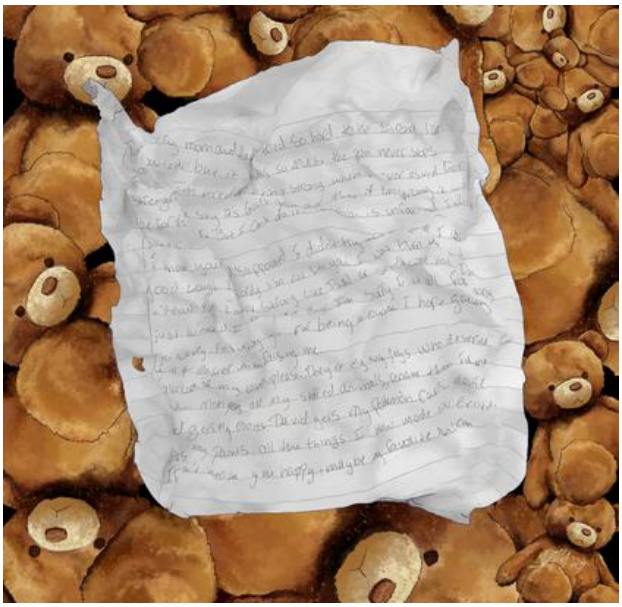
Is there a message or feeling you hope viewers take away from your art?

Through my works, I invite the viewer to immerse themselves in reflections on the emotional dimension of the inner and outer worlds of people, as well as on the presence of duality as a whole. The ultimate goal of these reflections is discovery - a conscious understanding that becomes a source of strength. In other words, my artistic concept is a flow of experience and feelings expressed through art.
My works are not enough to simply look at - they must be felt.

Dakota James Honaker

What first drew you to art when you were 12, and what kept you practicing even when it was challenging?

My sibling has always been an amazing artist, I watched them draw since I was tiny. I always wanted to be like them but I always gave up after trying and failing. When I was 12 though, I started struggling with my mental health. I wanted an outlet and decided I was FINALLY going to practice. I wasn't going to just try, I was going to practice. I was terrible at first but I enjoyed it, especially the coloring. It was one of the few healthy outlets I had at the time so I stuck with it! It also gave me and my sibling something to bond over. That was very important to me looking back.



Dakota James Honaker | Ideation Of A Ten Y O Me | 2024

How did your early struggles with drawing influence your style and determination as an artist?

My early style taught me what NOT to do. I tried too hard to be clean and pristine with my work. It really frustrated me when I couldn't do realism or smooth line art like I wanted to. I learned to, figuratively and literally, loosen up. I realized if I didn't embrace my hand tremor and just the way my brain worked then I wouldn't improve. I was determined to figure out how to draw in a way I enjoyed physically and emotionally. So around 15 I gave up on clean and started going messy. I just let my hand and brain do what they could. This was also around the time my brother started pursuing graphic design. Seeing him go into an art field and succeed was inspiring! Art was once again a way to connect with my siblings.

Can you share more about the mentor who inspired you to change your major from science to art?

At 15 I joined a technical theatre crew as a way to socialize after COVID. This was my first REAL creative environment I thrived in. Designing and building sets, running shows, and helping with creative decisions was new but so exciting. I was so pumped every Tuesday and Thursday to go and just make things. Once I began college at 16, starting in physics, I

Dakota James Honaker | My Love Will Fall With Grace | 2024

realized how much I truly didn't enjoy science . Compared to tech theatre it was just draining and exhausting. I spoke about it on and off, especially to one of my two teachers, Matthew. Matthew was our director but he was also an artist! It was nice to have someone in my life who also found art so worth while Seeing his art encouraged me to continue practicing at home. My other tech teacher, Mr. Allen, as we all called him, kept pushing me to try more and do more. He told me often he could see me going far in theatre or a creative space. It was encouraging especially since I rarely got encouragement to pursue the arts. The summer of 2023 I realized, man I'm miserable like this. Allen and Matthew came to a show I was working and both gave me that final shove to switch majors. They both told me they were so proud of me and that's what I needed. I can't thank them enough for giving me the confidence to pursue my creativity.

Could you describe the feeling you get when working with ceramics compared to drawing or painting?

They certainly do give me different feelings and outlets! Ceramics is where I get my big emotions out. The clay takes all my anger, sadness, guilt, etc. and becomes solid. It makes the feeling real and it took form of art. Drawing and painting is what I do when I want peace. It's simpler for me, a skill I'm more familiar with. My more calm emotions flow into drawings, my more loving emotions too. I love to draw mindlessly, it's a nice break from the frenzy of ceramics. Essentially 2d art is calm and 3d is hectic.

How do you decide which medium—ceramics, drawing, or another—to use for a particular concept?

This is going to sound weird but when I get an idea I try to picture myself holding the idea. If I can't turn it or grasp it, it'll be a drawing, if I can though, it'll be a sculpture. Some ideas feel solid and heavy whereas others are airy and wispy.

You wrote that creating art "has saved your life." Can you talk more about that transformative role of art?

The act of creation is how I get my emotions out. My life has been hard and continues to be difficult and boy is it hard to express that with words! The only way I can get all the chaos out is through art. There were and still are a lot of days I don't think it's worth pressing on. The effort of living feels so heavy sometimes and there's so little to do about that. When I feel like that, I make something. It doesn't matter what but I make it. The action of making something with my own hands is so soothing. I get to physically see the manifestation of whatever feelings I'm having! I know that even on my worst days, on days I can't get out of bed, I can still make something. Because as long as my hands make it, it's art, and it made the day worth it.

Dakota James Honaker | Wrath | 2025

Ekaterina Timofeeva

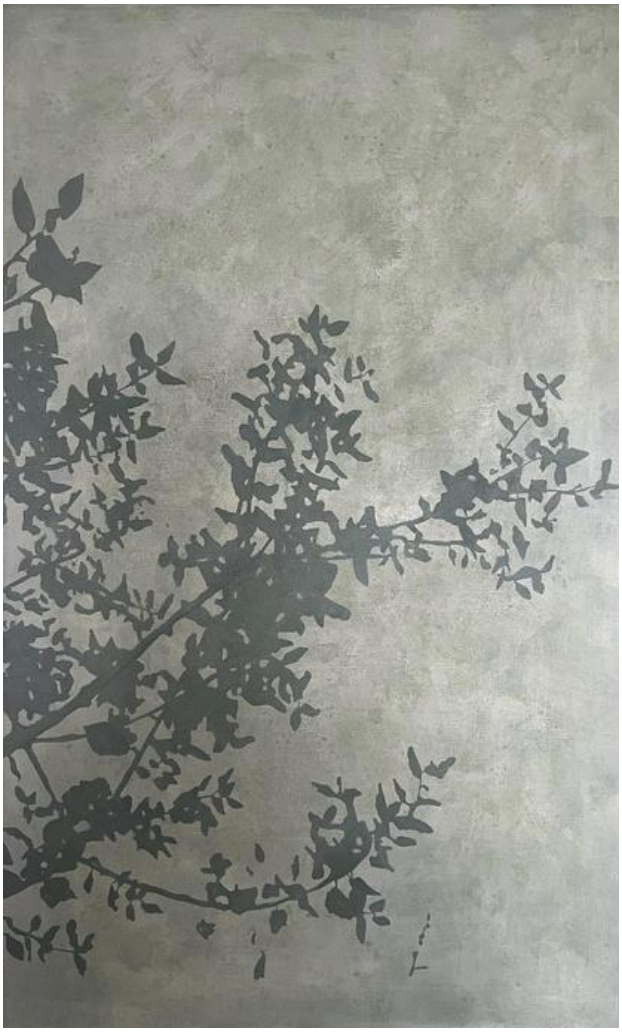
Ekaterina Timofeeva | Harmony | 2024

Could you tell us a bit about your background - how did growing up by the sea influence your artistic vision?

On the island where I spent my childhood, nature created a truly unique masterpiece - a harmonious blend of hills and mountain ranges, boundless plains, winding rivers, and picturesque shores. The dense forests that cloak the island like a green veil offer incomparable vistas that both captivate and inspire.
These unforgettable images of natural diversity are forever etched in my memory, becoming a wellspring of inspiration. Each time I pick up a brush and begin a new painting, I return to these cherished memories, filling my works with sincere love and gratitude for my homeland.

When did you first realize that you wanted to dedicate yourself to painting?

In childhood, I happily attended an art school, where I discovered new techniques and absorbed knowledge from experienced mentors.



Ekaterina Timofeeva | A Moment Of Calm | 2025

However, the rush of adult life gradually pushed this passion out of my daily routine. Only about five years ago, when I began searching for my true calling, I returned to painting. That decision became a real revelation for me: old skills came alive in new forms, and the inspiration I found in art helped me regain harmony and self-understanding. Now painting is no longer just a hobby — it is my way of self-expression and a source of inspiration in every new creative day.

Which emotions or ideas do you try to convey through your works?

My art is an attempt to convey the quiet beauty and tranquility of nature, to evoke in the viewer a sense of peace and harmony. In a world full of noise and haste, I wish to offer a corner of calm and contemplation — a reminder of the importance of nature and its silent power of inspiration.

Your paintings often depict branches, leaves, and trees. What draws you most to these natural forms?

There is nothing more perfect and harmonious in nature than the forms of plants. Branches and leaves are true works of art created by nature itself. I am fascinated by their endless diversity - from graceful, delicate twigs to powerful tree trunks, from tender young leaves to mature ones rich in color.

Many viewers describe your art as peaceful and meditative. Do you intentionally seek to evoke calmness and balance?

Indeed, many people note the calming effect of my works. And while I don't set out with the direct goal of creating exclusively "peaceful" paintings, the pursuit of harmony is a fundamental part of my creative process. Calmness in art is not simply the absence of dynamics — it is a special form of expression that allows the viewer to immerse themselves in contemplation and find their own emotional resonance within the work.

How do you think nature and art are connected in today's world?

Nature has always been a primary source of inspiration for art. Artists, musicians, and writers draw ideas from natural phenomena, forms, colors, and sounds. Art reflects the beauty and harmony of nature through painting, music, and poetry. In turn, art helps people better understand and appreciate nature, fostering ecological awareness. Many artistic movements —such as landscape painting and Impressionism —directly reproduce natural motifs. Contemporary artists use natural materials in their works, while architecture strives for harmony with nature through the use of "green" technologies.

What do you hope people feel when they look at your paintings?

As I mentioned earlier, I strive for the viewer to feel harmony and tranquility, a desire to reflect on beauty, a sense of connection to the created world, and inspiration for new ideas.

Haochen He

Your background in architecture clearly informs your artistic practice. How do you see the relationship between architecture and visual art evolving in your work?

Architecture has been the foundation of my creative path and continues to shape my perspective on art. My training taught me to observe how space is structured, which made me attentive to the systems that underpin design, from structure and circulation to regulation and social protocols. Initially, I worked within these frameworks as part of an architectural practice; however, over time, I grew curious about how to challenge and rethink these systems. In my artistic endeavors, this curiosity evolved from architectural philosophy to a broader examination of how frameworks impact human perception and how questioning them might lead to fresh perspectives.
As a result, the link between architecture and visual art in my work is dynamic. While architecture offers clarity and precision at the beginning, art, in turn, fosters the ability to ponder, question, and challenge preconceptions. Together, they start to create a dialogue that deepens with every project; one provides me with structure and discipline, while the other lets me examine and challenge them. As a foundation, architecture led me to art, and art now feeds back into architecture by prompting me to think critically about the systems it relies on.

Haochen He | 404 Stair Not Found Fragmented Logic | 2025

In your statement, you describe fragmentation, concealment, and distortion as reflections of human psychology. Could you share how these themes first emerged in your creative process?

These themes first emerged while I was working on a portrait project that later shaped my ongoing practice. I have always enjoyed conversations with my models and collaborators, and my works often take form through these exchanges. During one session, a model told me she wanted to remain partly hidden because she was tired of being seen only through expectations of perfection, always smiling, always composed. We experimented with ways of retreat. What began as a technical adjustment became an emotional discovery. In partial concealment, she seemed more present, as if the act of hiding allowed her to exist more freely.
That moment stayed with me. It reminded me of how, in architecture, we study the relationship between solid and void, between positive and negative space. The same principle seemed to exist in the emotional dimension of portraiture. Fragmentation, concealment, and distortion became ways to express that delicate balance between presence and absence, exposure and protection. Since then, my creative process has focused on that in-between space, where dialogue becomes a structure and vulnerability becomes a form of expression.

Many of your works incorporate glitch aesthetics and digital disruptions. Do you view these as metaphors for contemporary identity, or as purely formal experiments?

I first became interested in the glitch after observing how digital images are constantly remade by the systems that store and share them. Compression, transfer, and repetition slowly erode clarity, leaving traces of distortion that feel strangely human. These visual imperfections echo the

Haochen He | Identity Matrix Escape | 2025

instability of how people construct and present themselves in modern life. What appeared as a technical flaw began to reveal something about perception and vulnerability.
In my work, glitch aesthetics evolved into a reflection on identity. The fragmented and misaligned image speaks to how individuals navigate the tension between visibility and disappearance in a world defined by constant mediation. It reminds me that even when representation fails, presence endures in another form. For me, the glitch is not decoration, but a psychological condition made visible, a space where selfhood resists complete resolution.

How do you balance your parallel practices of architecture, fine art, photography, and writing? Do you find that one discipline often leads or dominates the others?

Architecture was where I began, and for a long time, it shaped my approach to everything else. My first instinct was always to think in spatial terms, to look for order and logic before emotion. Even in other mediums, I carried that framework with me. Over time, I realized that there might be some limitations, so I began to let photography, art, and writing interrupt that system.
In practice, the balance happens through rhythm rather than separation. I do not work on four different projects at once. Instead, I let one practice lead and allow the others to echo in the background. A concept that begins in architecture might later return as a photographic composition or an essay that reflects on the same idea. When I move between disciplines, I notice how each shift changes the pace of thought. Architecture provides structure, art brings freedom, photography sharpens my perception, and writing helps me to summarize. What used to feel like competing identities has become a single process that unfolds in cycles of creation, reflection, and rebuilding.

Your projects often blur the line between clarity and rupture. What role does ambiguity play in how you want viewers to experience your work?

Ambiguity is the point at which perception becomes active. I want the viewer to pause, to question what they see, and to notice the moment when the image shifts from representation to suggestion. For me, clarity delivers information, but ambiguity invites reflection. It asks the viewer to complete the work through their own associations and emotions.
In many of my projects, this ambiguity is not a lack of resolution but a deliberate threshold. I am interested in how people transition between understanding and uncertainty, and how this movement can reflect their own internal states. When an image is neither fully open nor entirely closed, it becomes more personal. It allows the viewer to find meaning that cannot be fixed or named, which is the most honest kind of encounter I can hope for.

The installations and digital artworks you create often feel immersive. How important is the concept of "space" in your non-architectural works?

Space is often where an idea begins, though the work eventually grows beyond it. My background leads me to think spatially, so many projects start with questions about distance, boundaries, or the relationship between the body and its environment. As the work develops, those spatial ideas often evolve into something more symbolic.
I see space less as a subject and more as a way of thinking. It provides a framework for the work to begin with, but it never confines it. As each project unfolds, I allow it to extend beyond formal composition into emotion, memory, and perception.
What remains constant is the awareness of how people occupy both visible and invisible spaces, within the world and within themselves. In my projects, space is never a backdrop but an active agent that reveals how people live, move, and sense their surroundings.

Having exhibited in both Europe and America, how do you feel audiences respond differently to your work in various cultural contexts?

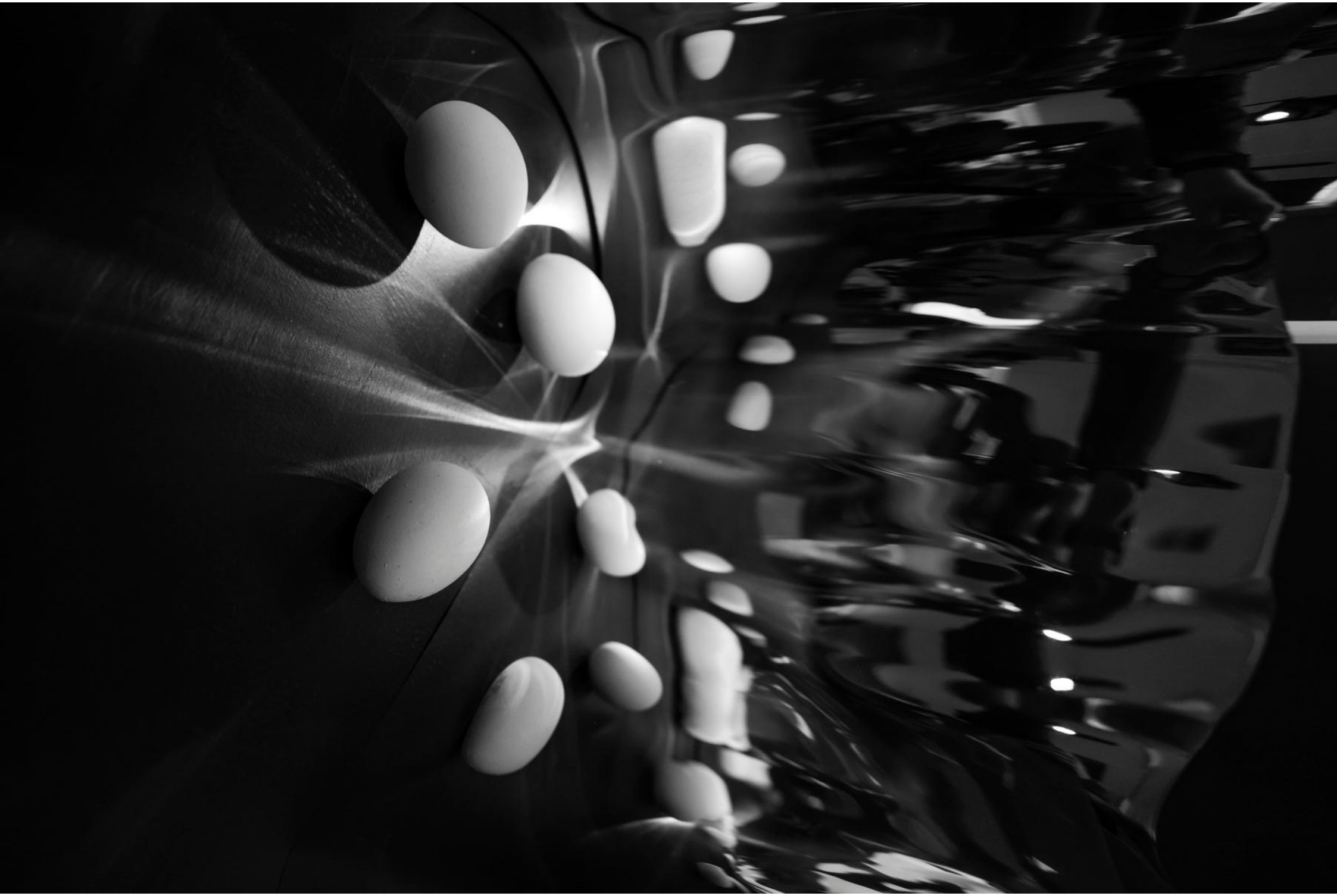
In past exhibitions, I collaborated with the curators to place a sketchbook where visitors could write or draw freely. The notes they left often revealed cultural differences in how people relate to images. In Europe, many responses focused on concept and process, asking how an idea developed or what kind of theory inspired it. In America, people often shared emotions or stories that the work reminded them of, using the page almost like a form of dialogue.
Across these contexts, what I find most meaningful is how viewers connect through uncertainty. Whether they respond through reflection or emotion, they often describe a sense of recognition in what feels incomplete or unresolved. That shared sensitivity to ambiguity reminds me that the work's meaning continues to grow beyond my own intention.

Kira Ponyatovskaya

I am a student of the Photography Department at the Stroganov College.
Before that, I was in love with cinema, and now I transfer what I've seen into the format of photographic works.

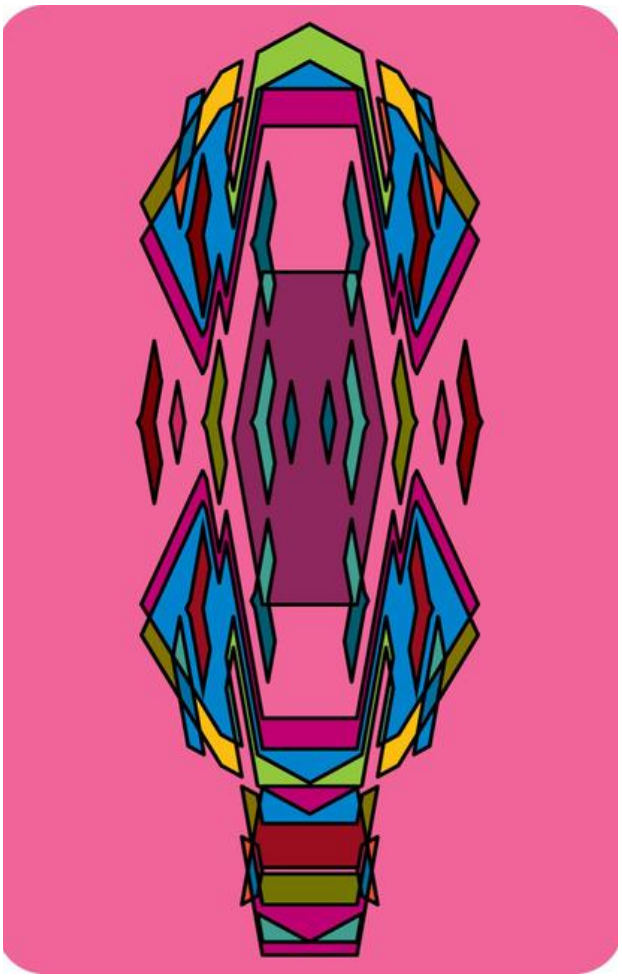
Artist Statement
Inspired by the works of James Casebere.

Kira Ponyatovskaya | Smooth surface | 2025



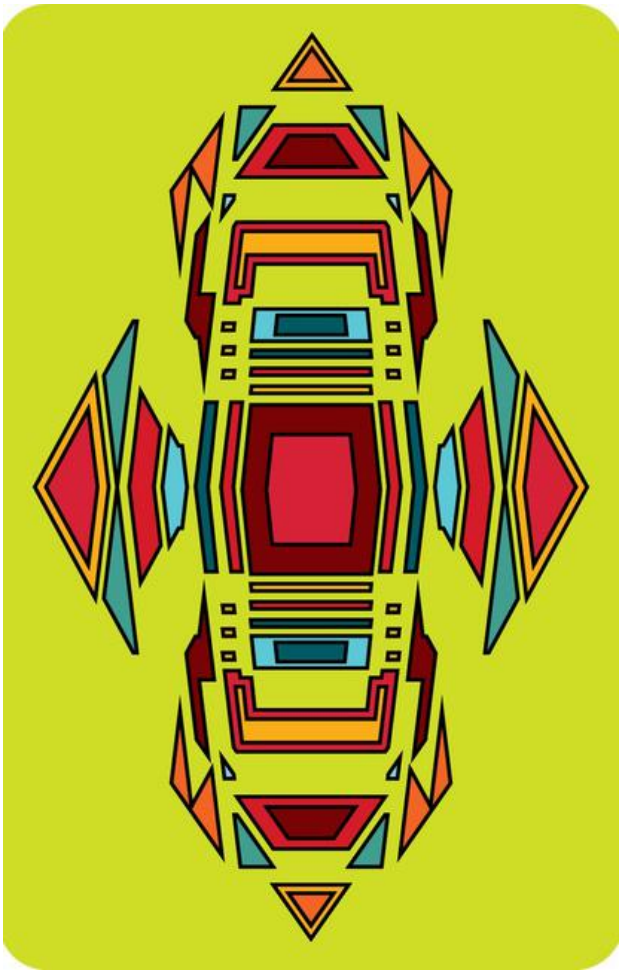
Kira Ponyatovskaya | Ringing | 2025

Sergio Yepes



Sergio Yepes | Zafiro | 2023

You've mentioned that your work is deeply influenced by your encounters with Amazonian elders and the Yagé tradition. How did those experiences first enter your life?

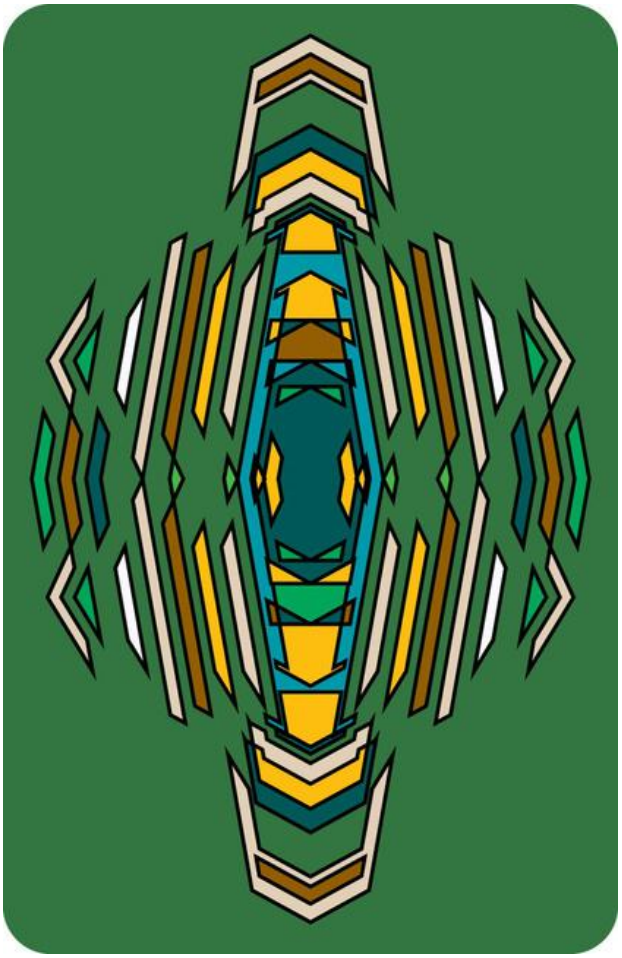


Sergio Yepes | Obsidiana Mahogany | 2025

A friend of a cousin invited me to a Yagé session back in 1995. At the time I was deep into a drugs, sex, and rock and roll kind of life, street fighting a lot. But it took me three years and getting to a regrettable place in my life for me to heed the invitation.
It wasn't until a psilocybin mushroom experience with a girlfriend that I really felt a call from the elders, a U-turn for my life.
I had a visionary experience where I saw as many as thirty Yagé Taitas in a ceremony in the Amazon; one of them approached us and told us to get ready. That was 1997, but it took almost a year for the door to open again: mid-1998, it saved my life; they saved my life.

What aspects of the Yagé ceremonies or teachings most strongly shaped your artistic vision?

A little context: at age 9, 1975 to be precise, my mom returned from a six-month stay in the Vaupes region; amongst many things, she brought back two traditional wooden benches, "pensadores" or knowledge benches: one for me and one for my brother.
Its simple yet sophisticated geometries awed me then and still awe me now, so the influence of Amazonian shamanism was already in my life.
But if I need to put it into words, it would be the search for balance from within and its expression on any given canvas through geometric patterns or drawings. In an attempt to manifest sound, vibration, and healing through those patterns and combinations of colors. Respect for our



Sergio Yepes | Cuarzo De Mamo | 2023

common Native ancestors, and respect for Mother Earth.

How do you translate a spiritual or visionary experience into a geometric visual language?

It's a meditation, a conversation with the spirits of the jungle. With the spirits of Yagé and other medicines I had the opportunity of meeting, normally I sit with my Mambe (roasted and pulverized Coca leaves and ashes of Yarumo tree leaves) in order to concentrate and reach deep within me and my experiences and memory of visions. I deconstruct my original visions; I let myself be permeated by all my cultural and aesthetic background, and I sift it until I can read the imagery, until it is clear enough.

When you create these digital "crystals," do you begin from a specific vision, or do the forms emerge intuitively as you work?

As I said before, it all starts as a meditation, a deep dive into my memories, in my inner image bank of visionary experiences, and my frequent visits to the Gold Museum in Bogotá.
That said, the process is indeed pretty much intuitive. I start with some basic geometric figures, and I mix them, I mesh them, and I cut them into smaller pieces and mix them again. Meanwhile, I follow my mood of the day or the evening; sometimes I get to a point where I find a basic form that tells me something, and it leads me somewhere into the elder sphere, the Amazon, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, shamanic gold figures, or beadwork.

How do color vibrations and symmetry play a role in the healing or meditative qualities of your art?

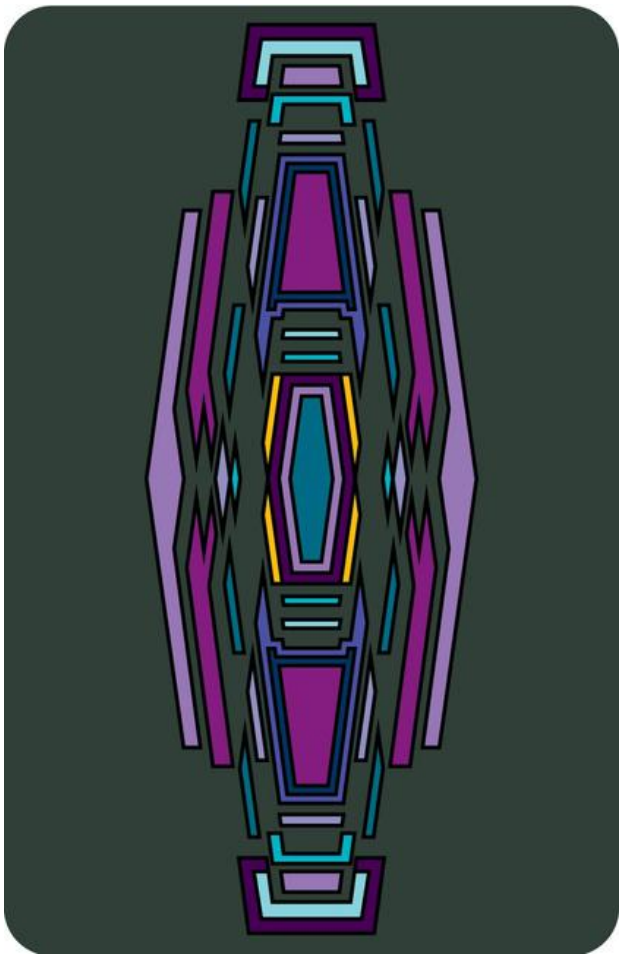
If my art can be perceived as contemplative and soothing, then there is your answer: it works. Beyond that, it's a matter of how the colors talk to me; what color combinations do the resulting geometries ask for? I have a tendency for earthy, vibrant, flowery, luminous colors.
Since it is digital art, I work with a Pantone Coated palette, my favorite.

You've spoken openly about being neurodivergent and living with bipolar disorder. How does this affect your creative rhythm and perception of reality?

I do my best to lead a balanced life; I do not overwork myself, and I meditate and exercise regularly. I eat good food, and my sleep patterns tend to be normal.
About perceptions of reality, shamanism has given me tools to better understand myself, and as long as I do not walk into a manic state, I perceive reality just fine, lol.

Do you find that your art acts as a form of therapy or self-balance for you?

Indeed I do; in fact, I've been using my art practice as therapy. It has helped me navigate my darkest moments of depression, that and journaling. I use all creative tools at my disposal as therapeutic instruments, as outlets, and as forms of registry of my most intense manic states.



Sergio Yepes | Amatista | 2025

Lisa Shtormit-Rommé

Lisa Shtormit-Rommé | Saturnus | 2023

Your works often engage with olfactory elements. What drew you to explore smell as an artistic medium?

I've always been fascinated by experimenting with materials and exploring new, interdisciplinary territories within art. After receiving a classical academic education —where I studied almost every possible artistic technique —I felt the need to go beyond the familiar and find a language that hadn't yet been exhausted.
When I began working in Russia, olfactory art was practically nonexistent, or at least unknown to me before 2016. So when I decided to work with scent on a regular basis, it wasn't inspired by anyone else's practice—it felt like discovering a new dimension. My first project using smell was created for the Jerusalem Biennale in 2016, entirely built around tactile and olfactory perception.

Lisa Shtormit-Rommé | Nosense | 2023

Since then, scent has become an integral part of how I think and create. I perceive the world through smell, color, and texture—form comes later. Even when I paint, make objects, or stage performances, there is always a reference to fragrance.
Scent is among humanity's most ancient forms of communication. It acts on instinct, bypassing logic and reason. While we receive around 80% of our information visually, smell reaches the brain fastest, triggering memory and emotion. A scent itself is neutral; it becomes "pleasant" or "unpleasant" through personal experience, cultural memory, or emotional context.
This invisible magic fascinates me. From ancient rituals of embalming to the burning of incense in temples, fragrance has always accompanied humankind. Frankincense, for instance, is unique—it truly enters our lungs and, symbolically, our soul.
My work draws on the histories of alchemy, perfumery, pharmacy, and early medicine. I see olfactory art as a way to speak about time, faith, and human experience. Scientifically, olfactory memory is the longest-lasting kind of memory; one familiar scent can instantly transport us to another place and time. Isn't that a form of magic?
I create most of the scents for my works myself, and when the composition is particularly complex, I collaborate with professional perfumers. I also collect what I call "unclassified olfactory installations"—artworks that contain a scent but are not officially presented as olfactory art.

Lisa Shtormit-Rommé | nOsense | 2020

Ultimately, this path led me to study what I call “the invisible arts” during my time in France—a field dedicated to everything that exists just beyond the edge of perception.

How do you think memory and smell are connected in your work, particularly in the ‘nOsense’ project?

The nOsense project was postponed several times due to the pandemic, and by the time it began, my residency at ACME London coincided with strict lockdown measures. I found myself in a city I could neither truly see nor experience. The initial idea was to collect tactile and olfactory impressions of London as a foreigner—but under isolation, such impressions became almost impossible.
Smell became my only means of sensing presence. The only public spaces accessible during lockdown were churches—spaces filled with the scent of stone, incense, and silence. Through them, I realized that memory can arise not only from lived experiences but also from their absence. nOsense became a reflection on emptiness, on the impossibility of remembering when there is nothing to remember, and on scent as the final link between the body and the passage of time.

Can you explain the significance of the symbolism in your pieces, such as the use of colors and materials like black velvet and red neon?

The materials I use are chosen not only for their visual qualities but for their ability to retain and transmit scent. Texture and porosity matter as much as form. Velvet, for instance, absorbs and holds fragrance exceptionally well. It also carries a deep cultural charge — traditionally associated with monarchy, the church, and luxury — symbols that resonate on a subconscious level.
My color palette is intentionally minimal and symbolic. Red is the dominant hue: a color of life, blood, passion, and awakening, but also of tension and alertness. It activates perception and draws the viewer into the work physically and emotionally. Black, by contrast, is absorptive and introspective — the color of silence, mourning, and the unknown.
Neon, particularly red neon, functions as a sculptural light source. It creates an atmosphere of mysticism and suspension, as if the object hovers outside the laws of gravity. The dialogue between black velvet and red neon embodies the tension between the tangible and the immaterial, between the body and the spirit.

In your immersive installations, you mention that the audience becomes an active participant. How do you intend for the viewers to interact with your work?

In many of my projects, I use elements of gamification — I invite the viewer to play: to open a door, to smell, to guess, to touch, to read, to speak. These simple gestures become the key to understanding the work. I want the viewer not to merely observe but to explore, to question, to engage in dialogue.
Scent itself is a provocative medium. It instantly evokes memories, and many visitors begin to share deeply personal stories — about childhood, loss, pain, or love. The aroma becomes a bridge between the artist and the audience, creating a space of trust. I see my role as accompanying the viewer gently through that emotional journey.
As a teacher and curator, I’ve often wondered why so many people are intimidated by museums. Perhaps because everything there feels too formal, too strict, too “forbidden.” My installations aim to break that distance, to bring back a sense of direct, physical connection. Yet I

Lisa Shtormit-Rommé | nOsense | 2020

Lisa Shtormit-Rommé | nOsense | 2020

also value context and education — freedom in art must coexist with respect for it.
Some of my early works were built like puzzles: viewers had to guess what was hidden inside before discovering it. In these moments, the adult becomes a child again — curious, playful, alive. They crawl under tables, search for clues, recite poems, argue, and laugh. It's not just interaction; it's a rediscovery of sensitivity.
For me, gamification in art is a simulation of real life — a space where people practice being themselves. To sense, to wonder, to respond. That, perhaps, is the true participation my work calls for.

In your 'Saturnus' installation, you focus on ancient rituals and astrological symbolism. How does this tie into your exploration of time and existence?

Saturnus is a meditation on time as a living, almost tangible substance — heavy, cyclical, and irreversible. For me, it's not merely an installation but an inquiry into how ancient rituals and cosmological beliefs shaped humanity's sense of existence. In that way, I see art as a form of modern alchemy — a practice that bridges the material and the spiritual, the rational and the intuitive.
I don't believe that everything lacking scientific proof is meaningless. Ritual practices across cultures and "magical thinking" were often tools of survival and understanding. What we now call superstition was, in many cases, an early form of knowledge — a different epistemology. The absence of evidence does not necessarily mean the absence of essence.
In Saturnus, time becomes both subject and metaphor. Like the mythological Saturn devouring his children, time consumes everything it creates. It's slow, dense, and inescapable — a reminder of human limitation and accountability.
My research often intersects with various disciplines — from chemistry and physiology to forensic science, psychology, and pharmacopoeia — but also with their more speculative counterparts: alchemy, astrology, mythology, and healing traditions. I'm interested in how myth and ritual continue to shape our perception of the world. Contemporary art, in a sense, is just another form of myth-making — and within that framework, Saturnus exists as both question and ritual.

What do you hope the viewer experiences when engaging with your work, particularly in terms of sensory and emotional responses?

I have quite a lot of first-hand observations — I often invite visitors to write in the guestbook, to describe what they felt, saw, or remembered. During exhibitions, I like to talk to people directly, to watch how they enter the space, how their body reacts — the pause, the breath, the shift in posture.
Many describe a sense of harmony, aesthetic pleasure, and fascination. They are drawn to the mystery of the installations, comparing them to cabinets of curiosities — spaces that invite slow looking and exploration. I often see them captivated, surprised, or quietly delighted.
At some point, they seem to return to a childlike state — curious, sincere, and emotionally open. For me, that's the most meaningful response an artwork can evoke: when a person forgets to "analyze" and simply allows themselves to feel.
Of course, olfactory art cannot truly be experienced through images — scent is its living essence. Yet even through sight alone, one can perceive the atmosphere, that invisible vibration that binds form, material, and emotion into a single sensory moment.

You have worked in various art residencies. How have these experiences influenced your approach to curating and creating installations?

Residencies have taught me to adapt quickly, to conduct focused research, and to create with whatever materials and conditions are available. They trained my ability to see opportunity within limitation — to find, connect, and stay curious. This curiosity toward other cultures and ways of seeing the world has become an essential part of my artistic method.
Every residency adds another layer of perception. Everything we see, absorb, and experience becomes part of an inner archive that later unfolds in our work. The broader one's exposure, the more nuanced and complex the creative outcome — like a multilayered mixture of meanings, scents, and textures.
Art residencies are a time when I am completely focused on myself and fully immersed in my work. They are an excellent tool for limiting time and a kind of challenge. I would advise every artist to visit an art residency and discover their potential in new circumstances. I have visited nine art residencies, some of which taught me to quickly find information, conduct research, build communication with new art communities on site, and, of course, study the traditions, history, languages, prejudices, and legends of the place. All of this has developed and enriched my art practice.

Critical Review: Jingyun Guan - Between Softness and Sharpness

by Anna Gvozdeva

Jingyun Guan's practice unfolds within the intersections of personal mythology, feminist discourse, and queer identity. A London-based Chinese artist trained at the University of the Arts London, they create a distinct visual and material language that explores fragility and resilience, the body and memory, the private and the public. Their multidisciplinary approach - encompassing painting, performance, and installation - becomes a means of reflecting on belonging and self-discovery in both intimate and critical ways.

Material as Language

At the core of Guan's practice lies a sensitivity to materials and their contradictory qualities. The dialogue between softness and sharpness is not only formal but deeply conceptual. It embodies the experience of existing within and against systems of gender, culture, and emotion. By working with wax, tights, cotton wool, and silicone - materials often associated with domesticity or femininity - they transform the language of the everyday into a meditation on vulnerability and strength.

These tactile substances evoke skin, wounds, and scars, but also healing and regeneration. In *On My Way Home*, the use of flesh-colored stockings and stitched text turns banal materials into carriers of memory and pain. The translucent fabric suggests human skin, while the exposed stitches visualize the emotional labor of repair.

Jingyun Guan | Growing a new hand from the nerves

The Body as a Site of Transformation

In *Growing a New Hand from the Nerves*, wax becomes both a material and a metaphor. Guan casts their own hand, dissolving the boundary between self and sculpture. Wax, simultaneously pliable and fragile, reflects the dual nature of the body as both vulnerable and powerful. Its flesh-like color recalls skin after trauma, producing a visceral sense of renewal and metamorphosis.

Their feminist sensibility merges with surrealism here, as the fragmented body becomes a site of creation and resilience. This idea continues in *Date With The Snail*, a painting that presents biomorphic, dreamlike imagery - a pale amphibian creature, a butterfly, a spiraling shell - composed in an ethereal pastel space. Drawing on Zhuangzi's "Dream of the Butterfly," Guan reflects on the blurred boundary between reality and illusion. The snail's mucus emerges as a metaphor for adaptability and survival. Soft, fluid tones contrast with the underlying philosophical depth, transforming the composition into a meditation on transformation and perception.

Jingyun Guan
Date With The Snail

Jingyun Guan | On My Way Home

Embodied Emotion

The installation *On My Way Home* is one of Guan's most personal works. It reads as a poetic reflection on solitude, displacement, and the search for home. The flesh-like stockings filled with cotton and silicone, hanging from metal hooks, evoke a mix of domestic familiarity and unease. Stitched phrases such as "Home is the place the world wants you to die in" turn language into wounds. The piece carries both feminist and autobiographical weight: the forms recall scars on the artist's mother's body, while their collective shape resembles a uterus. Here, "home" becomes a metaphorical body - ambivalent, wounded, and alive.

The installation moves between the grotesque and the sacred, mirroring Guan's ongoing negotiation of belonging in a diasporic and gendered context.

Personal Mythology and Shared Experience

What distinguishes Guan's practice is their ability to weave deeply personal narratives into a broader emotional and philosophical framework. Their works are autobiographical yet open-ended, inviting viewers to engage with their own experiences of vulnerability, transformation, and memory. The childlike visual language - bright colors, simple forms, tactile textures - creates a disarming surface through which complex emotions emerge.

In combining surreal imagery with physical immediacy, Guan creates spaces where introspection and empathy intersect. The viewer is drawn not only to observe but to sense the work's emotional and material pulse.

Jingyun Guan
On My Way Home

Conclusion

Jingyun Guan's art reveals the strength hidden within fragility. Their work suggests that tenderness can be a form of resistance and that the process of healing is itself an act of creation. Moving fluidly between painting and sculpture, between dream and body, they construct a world where memory, desire, and trauma coexist.

Their visual language is poetic, unsettling, and deeply corporeal. It invites the viewer to look and to feel, to encounter the delicate balance between pain and renewal. Through the dialogue of softness and sharpness, Guan redefines strength as the capacity to bend, to heal, and to endure.

Tatjana Branislav

How did your path from IT project management lead you to creating textured relief artworks?

My path to visual art came through unexpected intersections. I have spent over a decade building my career in the IT industry, managing international projects and leading global teams in multinational companies. This profession demands structure and precision, nurtures curiosity, exploration, and a refined attention to detail, attributes that guide not only the successful delivery of complex projects but also the creation of thoughtful, layered, and harmonious artworks. At the same time my classical vocal training cultivated a sensitivity to rhythm, harmony, and emotional resonance. Painting emerged when I lost my father, it was my way to integrate this loss, to stay connected with him. He and I shared a very close bond, and in every painting I feel his presence. That moment of grief marked the start of a new creative chapter, where energy, intuition, and love converge on canvas. I approach my art as an autodidact, guided by intuition and a profound sense of connection with the essence of being, which makes each work an authentic expression of inner experience.

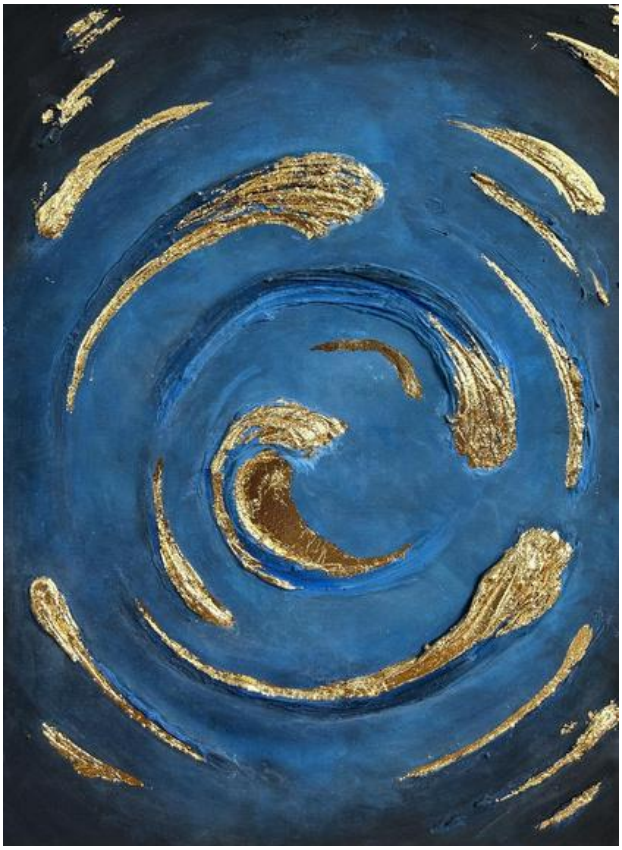
Tatjana Branislav | Vali | 2025

What experiences or inner transformations inspired you to merge natural elements, spirituality, and art in your creative practice?

I see art as a process of transformation of energy, healing and empowerment. Natural materials became central to my practice because they carry vibration from the Earth itself. Sand, soil, crystals, and gold are not just decorative they embody energy. This connects with my spiritual path as a Tarot reader, where I engage with symbols and archetypes as channels for subconscious insight. Tarot and painting are two facets of the same journey, they both translate energy into form and open space for reflection and inner connection.

Your works carry strong energy and symbolism. Are there particular life events or journeys that shaped this energetic approach?

The most defining moment was losing my father. Painting became a sacred space where absence was transformed into presence. My given name is Tatjana Miščević, but in my artistic work I chose to take the name Tatjana Branislav as a tribute to my father. By adding his name to mine, I keep his presence alive in



Tatjana Branislav | Vortex | 2025

my creative practice. That decision was more than symbolic, it was an act of love and remembrance. That profound experience of turning loss into creative dialogue is what gave my work its energy.

How do you select natural materials such as sand, soil, crystals, or semi-precious stones for each artwork?

The choice is entirely intuitive. I sense the vibration of each stone or crystal and let it guide me toward the canvas it belongs to. Each element feels alive, and the process of selecting them is almost like listening to their frequency. The Danube's sand is also among the primary materials I use in my art. Having grown up in Zemun, the river has always been a constant presence in my life both as a physical landscape and a spiritual current. I often collect sand directly from its banks and integrate it into my paintings, so the Danube becomes not only an inspiration but also a living, material part of the artwork.

What does texture mean to you as a visual language, and how does it help you convey energy and vibration?

Texture is the language through which energy becomes visible. Relief surfaces allow me to give vibration, form and rhythm, like music that can be touched. For me, texture is not only material but also energetic. Each layer, and fragment of crystal carries resonance. When viewers encounter the surface, they don't just see it, they feel it.

You speak of art as "energetic transposition." How would you explain this idea to someone new to your work?

Energetic transposition is the act of translating energy from one state into another. In my work, it is the transformation of emotion, memory and vibration into something material that can be experienced. This process connects deeply with my Tarot practice, where archetypes and symbols act as vessels for invisible energies. Just as Tarot cards transpose the subconscious into symbolic imagery, my paintings transpose inner states into textured, physical form. The canvas becomes a field where vibration, symbolism, and matter unite, allowing viewers to connect with the unseen in a tangible way.

What kind of emotional or spiritual experience do you hope viewers will have when encountering your art?

I hope they feel touched not only visually but energetically. My wish is for them to sense resonance, reflection, or even healing in front of the work. Art can open portals between the material and the spiritual, and if someone leaves my painting with a deeper sense of presence, empowerment or connection, then the artwork has fulfilled its purpose.

Tatjana Branislav | Wild Water | 2025

Valeria Gonzalez Borasca

You mentioned that reading National Geographic first sparked your love for photography. Can you share a specific story or photograph from those magazines that left a lasting impression on you?

The photo that I can always remember is the one taken by Steve Mc Curry in 1984, the Afghan girl, Sharbat Gula. Published in the cover of National Geographic in 1985. That photo was so incredible, had such power, told so much. I learned about the photograph when, in 2002, he went to find her and took a photo as an adult and got to know what happened to her years later. Two years ago, I went to an exhibition over 100 photos of Steve Mc Curry in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and finally I could see this photo, besides other photos of his trajectory. I remember thinking "I want to travel and get my photos published in magazine and show my photos to the world".
Another photo I loved is December 2000 cover of the face of a polar bear. This photo was so cute. Since I was little, I loved animals; I was the kind of person who wanted to touch every animal I saw. Since then, I would love to travel the world being I wildlife photographer and maybe, if I am lucky enough, let animals get closer and pups interacting with me.

How did receiving your first analogue Canon camera influence your early photographic style and approach?

When I was 15, I started developing an interest in taking photos. I told my parents about it. I used to talk with my father about photography, because he used to be a wedding photographer. So, it was a beautiful and thoughtful surprise when they gave me that camera. My analogue camera helps to understand how the camera really works and since you had a limited number of shots you really need to observe where you are to see your perfect shot. Also, when I went out to take photos, I needed to think where and what I was doing to know what kind of film roll I would buy.

Growing up as the daughter of a diplomat, you have lived in different countries. How has this international background shaped your way of seeing and photographing the world?

This way of life has made me a very open-minded person, and I have the capacity to adapt to diverse places and cultures. I love getting to know the customs, people, nature and food of the places I visited or lived, becoming part of the place. Sometimes searching places more pristine, not so touristic where I could find hidden treasures. Also, I learned how to be respectful, when to take or not take photos. And sometimes to look the beauty in small things; when you travel this much you learn how to observe and listen.

Among all the places you have traveled for marine science research and photography, which location has

been the most transformative for you and why?

That one will be the year a spent in the Mamiraua Reserve, in the Brazilian Amazon. I was working as a research assistance for the Boto Project. This is a project that started in 1994, studying the two species of river dolphins, grey and Amazon River dolphin. Me and the other researcher had to collect data and photo-ID the branded Amazon River dolphins. Because of these dolphins being branded is like they have a name, and some of them you keep seeing them regularly. You know which of them are related, in places can be spotted, …. After a year of photographing these amazing creatures, they became like your family; you get excited when you see the females with a new calf or you find out that they are pregnant (I remember feeling like an aunty when I found out).
That job became much more. From day one, it was an adventure just by living in the jungle.
Seeing different animals visiting your house: lizards, geckos, alligators, frogs, toads, bats, etc. Enjoying amazing sunsets, seeing the sky turning in different shapes of colors, as the sun went down. Getting up with the howler monkeys and to sleep with the sounds of frogs. Going to the different communities inside and around the Reserve, getting to know the locals, riverine people called “caboclos”. Amazing people that open their homes and hearts to me. A learned to cook fishes in different ways, learned canoe, to fish, learn Portuguese, etc. They used to say to me that I was another “cabocla”.
It was really happy year for me. And still today all those adventures stay in my memories. Learn to be one with the place.

Your work ranges from landscapes and wildlife to street and conservation photography. How do you decide which subject or story to capture?

More than me deciding what to capture, is the place that decides for me. If I am spending most of my time in a city, my photography will be more related to streets, gardens, places and people. When I was working as whale watching guide my photography was more focused in the marine life of the area. If I am in a barbecue with friends, they will be the main focus. I will take pictures of my friends without they noticing. In October I spent one week in Aruba, so I decided to investigate a little about the island, to learn what the island could offer me: beaches, sunsets, landscape, etc. My recommendation is wherever you are, investigate what the place has to offer.

As a marine scientist, you often combine photography with conservation work such as whale and dolphin identification. Could you tell us about a memorable project where photography made a real difference?

I would like to think that in all the projects I participated I made a difference, because the photos I have taken are part of a catalog that could help identified new or already catalogued individuals. My photos could be part of a poster, conferences or social media that could help raise awareness in the local public.
One project that could make a difference on my own terms is a social media site called “Valeriaaroundtheworld” (FB and IG), where I publish about some of the trips I have done. I like showing different species I saw with some information in each photo, as well as the places I see. One time I remembered making a post about how to photo ID fin whales and a colleague shared it in her social media; I remember feeling so proud.

What message about the environment do you hope viewers take away from your photographs?

That the beauty of nature is also dependent on the viewer; when you take a photograph, the photograph is yours; nobody else will take the same photograph because the photographer is unique, just like the scene is unique. When you take a picture, focus on what you believe only you can see, so the shot is yours. Share that and appreciate when you see somebody else’s photographs, because they are sharing more than just a photograph of nature; they are sharing the way they see the world, and we all can see the same thing and see it differently.

Interview

Nick DiLollo

Nick DiLollo | Wow I hate painting but love you | 2024

Your work often shifts everyday experiences into unfamiliar perspectives. How do you choose the ordinary moments to exaggerate or transform in your artwork?

It just happens. The world often inspires my work, and the fact that, as humans, we assign meaning to most things even if there's no reason to. I like to meditate on those moments, strip them down to their most basic concepts, and then build my story. For example, I created an illustration of two popsicles touching their tongues, causing them to melt into each other. The idea was to be a humorous reflection on self-preservation, drawing on the basics of human behavior and how relationships can be. I often find myself choosing moments as a reflection of the mundane happenings in my everyday life and those around me. The moments or experiences usually present themselves to me, allowing me to use my artwork as a tool to zoom out and embrace the humor surrounding those universally human experiences.

Nick DiLollo | Poofie | 2025

What is your process for capturing the absurdities of life while still maintaining some semblance of the mundane?

I often take a moment to reflect on what I am trying to achieve in my work, and hone in on the message that I want to convey. From there, I break a moment down into its simplest forms and begin my work. For example, in my piece “Saturn Devouring His Son, But Bread,” I took the concept of celiac disease and turned it on its head. Celiac, in its most basic description, is gluten triggering someone's intestines to essentially eat itself. So I made a giant bread monster out of clay, eating a human intestine. Essentially, I take a simple idea and push the concept as far as possible.

How do you balance humor with discomfort in your pieces? Do you feel the viewer’s discomfort is a necessary element of your art?

The balance tends to occur on its own. I start by looking for the part of the subject that lends itself to exaggeration, latching onto it as my point of interest in my storytelling. Due to the extreme levels of exaggeration, the viewer's discomfort and active participation are vital. However, I find an interesting connection in asking someone to engage with something new and offbeat, often inviting discomfort as a result.

As someone who also works in animation, do you see any overlap between your work as a cartoonist and your animated pieces? How do the two mediums influence each other?

Nick DiLollo | Planet crimson | 2024

Definitely! I find that storytelling is at the root of all my work the discomfort and humor infused into my work is often amplified by motion. Animation and illustration overlap, especially when inviting people into absurd situations and worlds. Illustration captures a moment in time and tells a story that the viewer is actively participating in. Animation works off of those moments adding context to those events. This actively pulls you into the world at large, making you an active participant in the story itself. Animation can create a connection with the viewer that static artwork cannot always capture.

Your work seems to focus on the feeling of familiarity but also strives to strip it away. What do you hope your audience takes away from this sense of disorientation?

At the very least, I hope that my art invites participation. I hope that my work invites the viewer to embrace that sense of disorientation and apply it to their own lives, taking an occasional step back to take the world with a grain of salt. I intend that through amplifying these moments, it becomes easier to find the absurdities in what we would deem normal. In a time where things are constantly changing, it's important to remind ourselves to let loose and laugh. I encourage the viewer to be vulnerable, ask questions, and sit with what makes them uncomfortable. Disorientation can be a tool to learn and apply the same sense of humor and questioning to their world at large.

In your opinion, what is the role of absurdism in art today? Do you think it's a way to cope with the absurdity in our everyday lives?

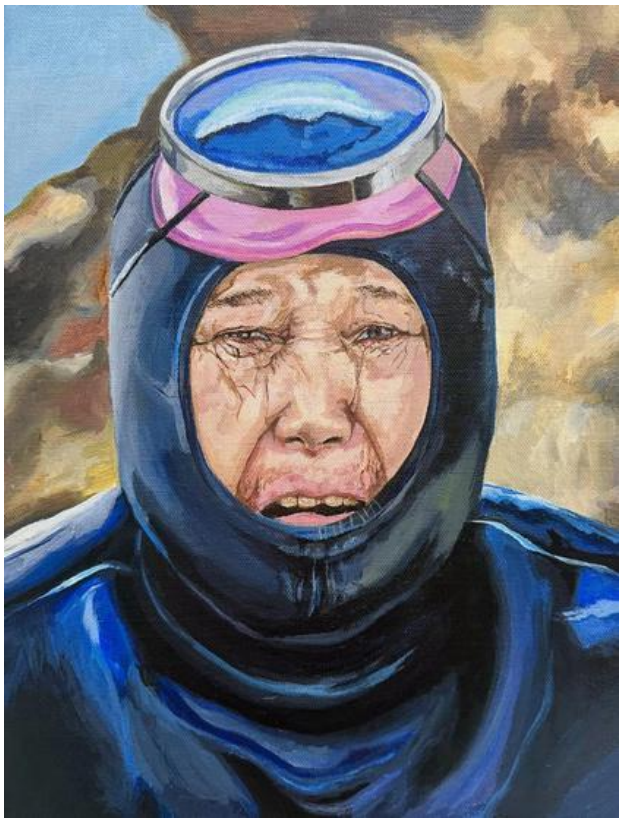
I believe that absurdism plays a large role in art. We live in an unprecedented time and we are experiencing a lot of changes globally. I know it can be very easy to get wrapped up in the shock and awe of the world, preventing us from taking a step back, look at everything going on, and just chuckle. That's where absurdism comes in. Absurdism is a way to cope with the ridiculousness of everyday life and make topics that can be extremely hard to digest, and easier to understand. It holds up a gigantic magnifying glass to everything. Humor is one of the best tools to inform and find the wackiness that exists within our daily lives, leaving the viewer no choice but to confront the absurdity that exists in the mundane.

How do you decide on the specific visual style for each project? Does the theme influence your artistic approach, or do you take a more spontaneous approach to each new work?

The theme influences the subject matter more so than my artistic approach. in my practice. I rely on spontaneity to guide the visual direction of each piece, allowing myself creative liberty. Being present in the moments that I am trying to depict allows for my process to shape itself in most cases. When I was working on my 2024 drawing collection of cats, I took the basic idea of cats, reflected on what I found interesting about them and just found as many possible ways I could accentuate those ideas through each piece in the collection, often just creating one piece after another with those basic touchpoints in mind.

Nick DiLollo | Nervendings | 2023

Lucas Choi



Lucas Choi | Haenyo The Last Of Their Kind

You work across so many mediums — painting, illustration, fashion, and even augmented reality. How do you decide which form best suits an idea?

It depends on what the story needs to breathe. Some pieces, like “Haenyeo: The Last of Their Kind”, demanded the texture and patience of paint—a way to honor long-term endurance and cultural resilience through brush and pigment. Others, like the “Modern Bojagi Project”, needed the precision and tactile repetition of hand-stitching, since it’s literally about mending and unity. For another project, where I worked with ballistic materials, I had to merge art and science as symbols of protection and creativity. Each medium also becomes a language: painting conveys emotion, fabric holds memory, and technology turns ideas into living, interactive spaces.

Lucas Choi | Modern Bojagi Project

Growing up between Korean and American cultures, how has that duality influenced your creative vision?

Art, to me, is a way of confronting fragility and piecing together beauty from what is broken. Whether it’s personal, spiritual, or collective, my work blends together realism, abstraction, and design to explore how people rebuild themselves after loss and rediscover meaning in color, faith, and form. As a Korean-American, I often felt suspended between two worlds: the discipline of tradition found in Korea and the freedom of modern expression found in the States. Ultimately, mixing these two areas and creating intersections between past and present, using modern materials to preserve tradition through painting and fabric became my bridge between those identities.
When I layer brushstrokes or hand-stitch fabric, I’m not just creating an image; I’m connecting the generations of perseverance within my ancestors with the restless innovation of my own time. The Haenyeo diving beneath waves, the Hanbok woven

Lucas Choi | World'S First Bullet Resistant Kevlar Batsuit | 2025

from painted Bojagi squares—these figures and symbols are more than subjects; they are reflections of my cultural inheritance/preservation and theme of personal resilience. My art becomes a dialogue between the past and the present, where color and texture carry unique stories mere language cannot. Still, even within destruction, there is design; within darkness, a glimmer of renewal. Through art, I seek not perfection, but peace and a reconciliation between heritage and individuality, faith and fragility, struggle and rebirth.

Your works often mix strength and vulnerability — can you describe how you balance these emotions in your compositions?

For me, strength and fragility are inseparable. In L'Ange Déchu ("The Fallen Angel"), I layered light and shadow to express how faith survives even through collapse. I think that tension between power and pain, between what protects and what breaks, is what makes a piece feel alive. My goal is to let both coexist, to show that vulnerability itself is a form of strength where resilience comes in.

What materials or techniques do you find yourself returning to again and again, and why?

Layering. Always layering. Whether I'm stitching fabric or blending acrylic on canvas, layering lets me tell stories of endurance. It mirrors how people rebuild after loss—layer by layer, moment by moment. I'm drawn to materials that carry meaning: silk, thread, and even digital fragments. Each has its own language of resilience. I return to them because they remind me that beauty often hides beneath what's repaired.

How do you see the relationship between technology and art evolving in your own work?

Technology allows me to expand what "art" can be. Through my augmented reality projects, from digital lenses on K-pop culture to educational CPR health tutorials, I've learned that AR and AI can turn static ideas into living experiences. My goal is to merge emotional storytelling with innovation, using technology as a bridge between imagination and reality. In the future, I hope to build immersive exhibits where viewers can move through digital layers of my work—like walking inside a Bojagi quilt or exploring a virtual Haenyeo dive beneath the sea.

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

Through art, I hope they feel the quiet persistence of healing... that even in brokenness, there's design and purpose. "Haenyeo: The Last of Their Kind" embodies that idea most clearly for me. These women dive into icy seas without modern gear, holding their breath for minutes at a time, relying only on endurance passed down through generations. Their struggle isn't loud; rather, it's silent, disciplined, and deeply human. I want viewers to feel that same strength: that survival can be graceful, that beauty can emerge even beneath pressure. Every piece I make is a reminder that resilience is its own form of art.

As a young artist, what challenges do you face when expressing complex emotions or social ideas through visual media?

One challenge is being taken seriously while still being vulnerable. People sometimes see age before depth, so I've learned to let the work speak first. Translating complex emotions into form can feel risky, especially when combining technical elements with human ones. But through art, I've found that honesty resonates more than perfection. I remind myself that creating isn't about proving something; it's about revealing something... even the parts that tremble...

Natalia Ivanova

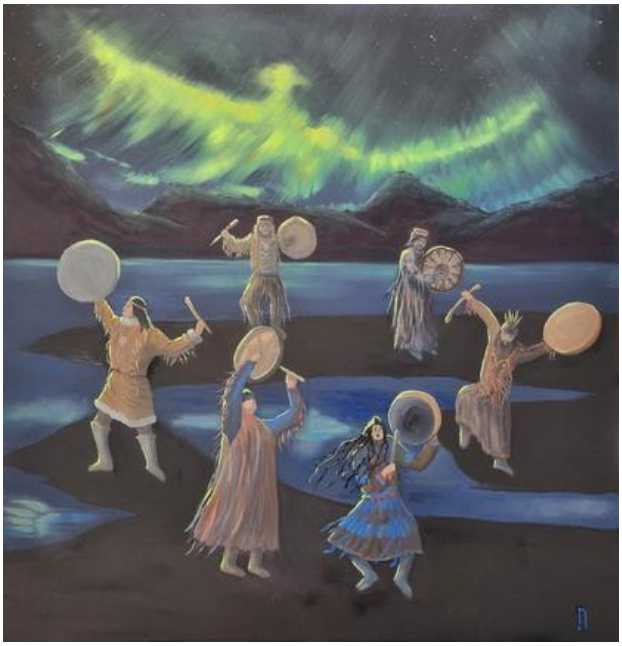
You mention that you began painting suddenly and unconsciously during the pandemic, as if your family's artistic genes awoke. Can you describe that first moment of discovery?

Natalia Ivanova | Don't Wait | 2024

Yes, unconsciously in the sense that I had no plans to become part of a professional community. During the pandemic, I had to switch to remote work (my main job is not connected to art), but the workload dropped significantly. A friend was sharing her paintings, so I decided to watch some online lessons and try painting myself. As a child, I attended a young art historians' club at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, where the theoretical foundation was quite serious. I also loved copying drawings of sculptures. This time, I tried landscapes. The process fascinated me so much that I wanted to paint more, better, and experiment with different styles and techniques. So, after starting to paint in 2021, by 2022 I already held my first solo exhibition "Hydrotherapy" at the studio where I practiced after restrictions were lifted. Visitors included my friends and acquaintances of acquaintances, and all the paintings were sold. That inspired me greatly.

Your grandfather and great-grandfather were artists and woodcarvers, and your great-grandfather also painted icons. How do these family traditions influence your own creative process today?

Unfortunately, only stories remain from my great-grandfather, and as a child I was once taken to a church to see the dome he had painted. That church no longer exists, and none of the icons survived. But my grandfather's example still inspires me. He studied at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (MUZhVZ). Just one course before graduation (in 1918), the school was closed and transformed into the Second State Free Art Workshops,



Natalia Ivanova | 6 Spirits Of Arctica | 2025

which were later reorganized into the Surikov Moscow Art Institute and the Moscow Architectural Institute. At that moment of reorganization and uncertainty, my grandfather decided to become an electrical engineer, since the country needed industrial specialists. That became his main profession, while painting remained his hobby—he also ran drawing clubs. In a way, I am repeating his path, except that instead of formal academic training I have taken various courses.

Much of your work explores the possibilities and choices of modern life. What personal experiences or observations inspire these reflections?

I am the kind of person who, the harder things get, the more I focus on what remains positive—I find it out of almost nothing, and that's what I live by. It's my choice. But I see that not everyone can, or even wants to, live this way. Many prefer appearances without substance, or embrace a sense of doom. That is exactly what my paintings "Moloch" and "Feed Fake" are about.

How do you decide which visual language—postmodern, symbolism, naïve art, or realism—best conveys a particular idea?

Usually, a painting comes to me almost fully formed in a prevailing style. For example, the entire "Liminality" series appeared to me in the direction of symbolism—the absence of visual noise allows the viewer to focus on the symbol and its message. At the same time, the first work of the triptych—Moloch—appeared with elements of Constructivism: simplified figures and corresponding architecture. The painting "Six Spirits of the Arctic" is also steeped in symbolism, but executed more realistically and vividly. Shamans, the upper and lower worlds, animal spirits in the form of reflections on the water—all this belongs to the beliefs of northern peoples. Even the number six represents the sides of the world and cosmic realms. The painting "Happiness Is Not Beyond the Seas" is based on an original photograph, where realism of the situation was essential. And "Tender Longings" was painted to the music of Baroque composer François Couperin, which is why it is stylized like porcelain figurines.

Many of your paintings contain hidden stories or open questions. Could you share an example where viewers' interpretations surprised you?

Yes, but that's wonderful—it means the viewer is trying to make sense of the work. Probably the most "multi-interpreted" painting is Deep Fake, though I thought its meaning was obvious. There is a clear reference to blogging through the blogger's lamp, and a double life is shown by splitting the figure into two halves—poor and rich. But I've heard interpretations such as that the girl became a blogger and achieved success, rather than hiding her bleak life behind a glamorous image.

Your landscapes often carry a touch of mysticism. What techniques help you create this special atmosphere?

Simply depicting nature can be boring—you can take a beautiful photo for that. A painting should not repeat a photo, but add something—story, mysticism, or an unusual focus. This is usually achieved through color, technique, or subtle nuances. For example, in the painting "Mysterious Mashuk Forest" the silhouettes of trees resemble human figures, with barely visible "faces." In "Night on Lake Lugano Island" it is the moonlight falling on the clouds—moonlight often gives a sense of mysticism.

You experiment with oil, acrylic, and gouache. How do you choose the medium for each piece?

I worked with gouache only at the very beginning. I think it's an excellent material to get accustomed to paints. I tried watercolor but realized it was not for me. Now I work with oil and acrylic. The choice depends on the technique of the painting—many visual effects require oil (for example, haze, gradients, smooth transitions of skin tones, glazing). Deadlines also matter—I work in layers, and one oil layer dries for at least a week, while the whole painting can take about a month. With acrylic, I can finish a work in a couple of weeks. Acrylic also allows for gold leaf and many other materials; mixed media can be very interesting. I also sometimes work with fluid acrylic when I just want beautiful spots.

Natalia Ivanova | Moloch | 2024

Aleksandra Koblova

Aleksandra Koblova | Ostrich

Your biography mentions a life-changing round-the-world journey. Which encounter during that trip most deeply shaped your artistic direction?

One of the most formative moments happened in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. For four days, we saw no land — only water and sky. That silence reset everything. And then I encountered a pair of manta rays — massive, calm, and completely unafraid. Watching them move with quiet confidence, I realized: this is what I want to paint — trust, freedom, and the peace that comes when we stop resisting and simply allow ourselves to be.

Aleksandra Koblova | Needlefish

How did leaving a legal career influence the way you approach art today?

After over 12 years as a corporate lawyer — including leading a legal department — I realized I was deeply disillusioned with the legal system. Stepping away wasn't easy; it meant letting go of structure, status, and the "serious woman" persona I had built. But once I allowed myself to become a free creator, everything changed. I began noticing beauty again — I finally had the time and emotional space to see it.
Now, I approach art with both freedom and precision. My legal background gave me the ability to structure, negotiate, and manage my practice like a business — but my paintings are a kind of quiet protest. Not political, not reactive — but restorative. As someone who spent years in high-pressure courtrooms, I now create art that helps people pause, breathe, and reconnect with something tender. My work is a counterweight to the world's noise — including the one I once helped uphold.

Was there a decisive moment when you knew you had to dedicate yourself fully to art?

There was no single dramatic turning point — the shift was gradual and deeply personal. I moved from being in front of the camera to behind it, from

Aleksandra Koblova | Kraken

photography to digital editing, and eventually, I found myself irresistibly drawn to painting.
Art came into my life only after I left my legal career, though photography had always been there. One experience finally made the decision inevitable — although I cannot share the details due to an NDA, it changed everything.
What helped most was support: my husband, family, and friends believed in me from the very beginning. I felt lost at first, but I began studying the art market and found solid ground.
Now, each finished painting reaffirms the decision. It wasn't a rejection of my legal self — it was simply another facet of who I am. And looking back, it feels less like a choice and more like destiny.

Your paintings often feature halos and complementary color pairs. How did these visual symbols develop, and what do they mean to you personally?

Halos and color inversions grew naturally out of my round-the-world sketches. I began giving the animals halos almost instinctively — not as decoration, but as a sign of their innocence. They are not symbols of power or mythology, but of a quiet, sacred presence I sensed in each encounter.
The complementary colors came later, as a way of showing reflection. In my paintings, the girl takes on the animal's color and the animal wears hers. It's a visual language for mutuality: we affect and transform each other.
For me, these elements are not stylistic tricks but reminders — of reverence, of empathy, of how we see ourselves mirrored in the more-than-human world. They make each work a small ritual of recognition rather than a portrait.

How do you choose which animals and landscapes will inhabit each painting?

The animals are not chosen — they appear.
Each one is linked to a place I visited on my round-the-world journey. It's not about exotic species or symbolism for its own sake. I pay attention to who stayed in my memory, who left a feeling behind. It's the animal I actually saw — like a giant manta ray in the Pacific or a penguin colony near Cape Town.
Each work becomes a small dialogue: between species, between emotions, between inner and outer space.

You emphasize non-toxic paints and sustainable materials. What challenges or discoveries have you faced in keeping your practice eco-friendly?

I believe that at this point, there are no real difficulties: all materials are readily available — linen, acrylic paints, recycled plastic for packaging. It's simply a matter of intention and willingness.

What kind of experience do you hope visitors have when they stand in front of one of your paintings?

When someone stands in front of my painting, I hope they feel calm — not just visually, but emotionally. I want them to sense a quiet pause, a soft exhale. My goal is to offer a space where trust feels possible again — in oneself, in the world, and in something greater.

Aleksandra Koblova | Moray Eel

Lindsay Cronk

Your work emerges from both chaos and resilience. How do you see the relationship between your mental health journey and the way your paintings come to life?

My paintings are born out of chaos, but they're not about chaos—they're about transforming it. Living with bipolar disorder means I experience both extremes: devastating lows and ecstatic highs. Painting became a kind of alchemy for me, a way to turn the emotional noise into color, shape, and joy. Every brushstroke is a negotiation between control and surrender. The act itself is healing—it's how I stay tethered, how I make something beautiful out of the parts of myself that once felt unmanageable.

Flowers appear repeatedly in your work as symbols. What drew you to them, and how do they reflect your vision of fragile yet persistent beauty?

Flowers are the perfect metaphor for being human. They're delicate and fleeting, but they insist on blooming anyway—often through cracks in concrete. I paint them not because they're pretty, but because they're defiant. They carry both joy and melancholy: they live briefly, yet they embody everything about growth, renewal, and grace. In my naïve art style, the flowers aren't botanically correct; they're emotional translations of how beauty feels when it's hard-won.

You describe your process as intuitive and unplanned. Can you walk us through what it feels like to begin a painting and allow it to "reveal itself"?

It feels like diving into a conversation with something unseen. I never start with a plan. I just start—throwing color, movement, and texture until the energy of the piece starts to take over. At some point, the painting begins to "speak back," and I follow its lead. It's instinctual. I know it's done when it hums—when the balance between chaos and calm feels just right. I think

that's why my work feels alive: it's as much about listening as it is about creating.

The titles of your works come from journal entries. How important is writing to your creative practice, and how does it connect to your painting?

Writing and painting come from the same impulse—to understand and to translate feeling into form. I've kept journals my whole life, especially during my bipolar cycles, and those entries hold raw truth. When I paint, that same voice comes through, just in color instead of words. The titles often come straight from my journals because they preserve the emotional DNA of the moment. Writing gives my paintings a heartbeat.

In your statement, you mention finding light even in the darkest places. How do you hope viewers will respond emotionally to your art?

I want my art to remind people that happiness is still available, even in the middle of pain. That joy isn't the absence of darkness—it's the decision to seek light anyway. My hope is that someone standing in front of one of my paintings feels a lift, even for a second. That maybe they see their own mess transformed into color and realize: beauty can come from brokenness.

Color plays such a powerful role in your canvases—wild, vibrant, and almost explosive. Do you choose colors based on feeling, memory, or something else?

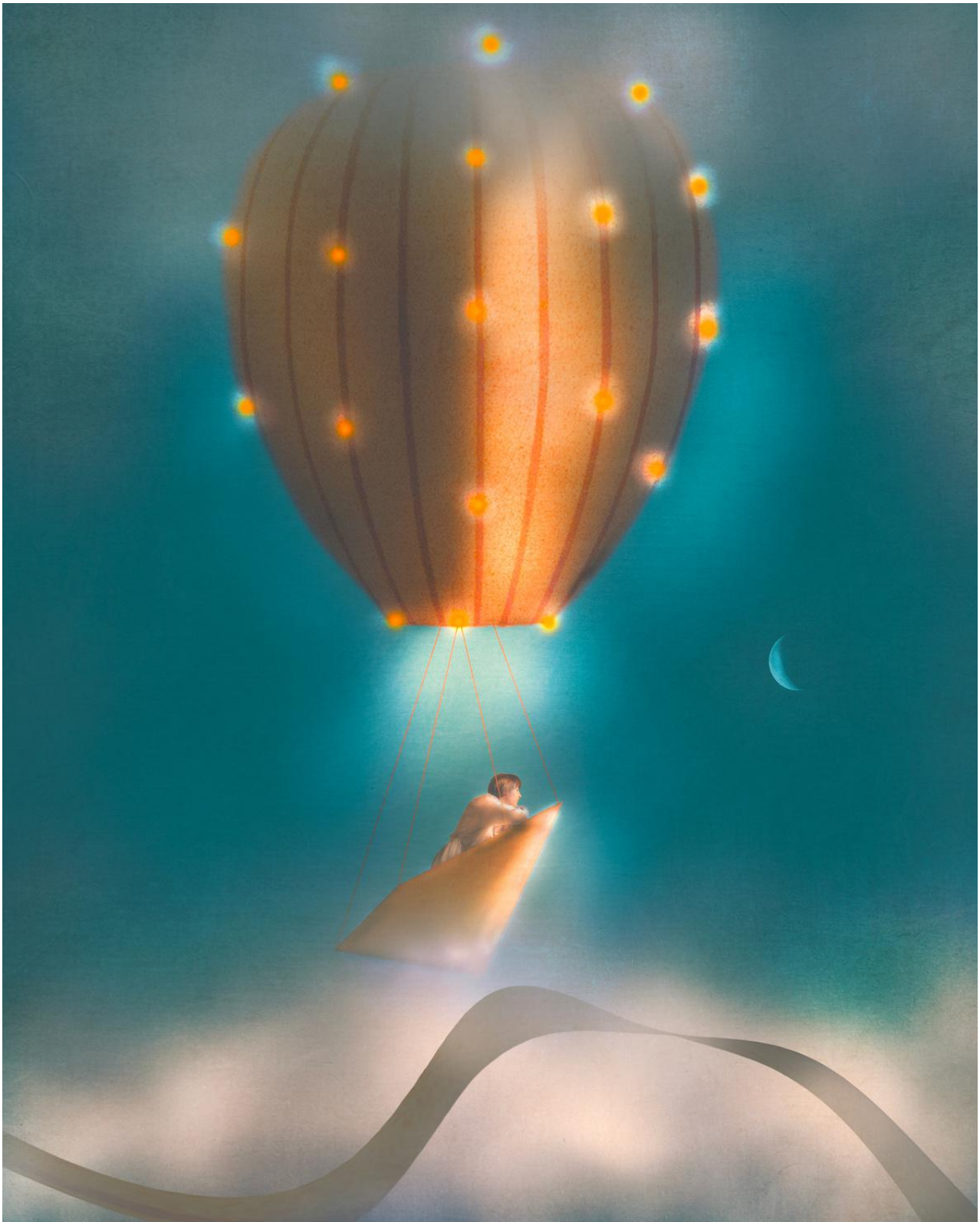
Color is my emotional language. I don't choose it intellectually—it chooses me. Sometimes a color feels like a mood I can't name, or like a note in music that resolves a dissonant chord. I use color to shift energy. There's research about dopamine and bright hues affecting mood, and I love that connection—painting happiness chemically, not just symbolically. When I'm mixing paint, it's like mixing emotion.

As a self-taught artist, what challenges have you faced and what freedoms do you feel this path has given you?

The biggest challenge is self-doubt—wondering if my lack of formal training makes me an outsider. But then again, that's exactly what gives me freedom. I'm not bound by academic rules or trends. My naïve style is pure instinct. It allows me to paint like a child again—honestly, joyfully, without judgment. That's the space where real art happens.

Melis Manav
I am a visual artist based in Istanbul. After completing my MFA in Photography at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and living in California for a few years, I moved back to Istanbul. In my work, I enjoy expressing my inner world, imagination, and dreamlike perspective through my images. I love capturing ideas, magical moments, and whimsical elements in my work, which brings me a great sense of freedom and joy. My work has been exhibited in galleries in San Francisco, Istanbul, and Muğla, and has also been featured in various publications and magazines. Internationally, I have received awards in competitions such as Neutral Density Awards, Fine Art Photography Awards, and Px3 Prix de la Photographie Paris. Some of my work will be exhibited at the Florence Biennale this year. If you would like to get in touch, you can reach me at: melismanav@gmail.com

Project Statement
I intersect the reality reflected in photography with concepts beyond what is visible, or with another reality created by my inner world. I use symbols, magical atmospheres, and a whimsical, painterly visual language. The imagination within me—sometimes fears, sometimes vulnerabilities, and a range of emotions—aims to connect with the viewer's heart and to make us aware of our shared, collective feelings.



Melis Manav | A Trip to My Heart | 2025

Melis Manav | Rising | 2025

Wei Han (Francine) Teng

You began painting at the age of six. Do you remember what first drew you to painting, and how that early experience still echoes in your current work?

Wei Han (Francine) Teng | Curiosity | 2025

I started painting before I had the language to explain what I felt. As a child, color was my way of organizing emotions I couldn't name. I didn't see painting as a skill then, it was simply a space where I could breathe and construct a world on my own terms. That instinct still drives my work today. I paint to build emotional space, not just an image.

Your practice bridges painting and interior design. How do these two disciplines inform and influence each other in your creative process?

Interior design taught me to think about space in relation to the body, how people move, pause, and emotionally register an environment. Painting, for me, is an extension of that thinking. Instead of walls and circulation paths, I use light, fragments, and openings. Both practices share one question: How does space hold feeling?

In your statement, you describe emotions as "spatial forms." Could you elaborate on how you visualize or construct psychological space in your compositions?

Wei Han (Francine) Teng | Rebirth In Darkness | 2025

I treat emotions like architecture, they expand, contract, press, or open like spatial volumes. When I paint, I'm not only depicting a scene; I'm staging a mental environment. A tear in paper, a corridor of silence, a floating object, these are all spatial metaphors for psychological conditions.

There's a distinct balance of control and softness in your handling of light and material. How do you approach this dialogue between structure and emotion?

I come from a background where precision matters, in development work, lines and measurements cannot be vague. But art allows me to soften those edges. I let structure exist, but I allow light, fabric, or symbol to interrupt it. That tension — between what is built and what escapes, is where my work lives.

The image of a child peering through paper feels symbolic of perception and discovery. Is this a recurring theme in your work—the act of seeing or awakening?

Yes. I am drawn to thresholds, the moment before entry, before understanding, before naming.

The child, the tear, the act of looking, they represent the desire to pierce through surface reality. I often paint this moment because discovery is never loud. It's a quiet rupture.

As someone trained in interior design, how do principles like proportion, rhythm, and circulation translate into your visual compositions?

Composition in my paintings follows the same discipline as spatial layout, there must be an entry point, a rhythm of movement, a pause. I design canvases like I design rooms: I leave breathing space, create tension through proportion, and guide the eye the way I would guide someone walking through a corridor.

Your works often evoke both serenity and unease—urban density, isolation, yet beauty. How do you navigate this emotional duality?

I don't try to resolve it. Life in cities teaches you that beauty and alienation often exist in the same frame. I don't paint harmony, I paint coexistence. The calm in my work doesn't erase discomfort, it hosts it.

Wei Han (Francine) Teng | The Leap | 2025

— *Interview*

Liudmyla Riabkova

Your paintings often merge recognizable forms with abstract rhythm and geometry. How do you decide where representation ends and abstraction begins?

For me, it's not a boundary but a smooth transition. Reality gradually dissolves into rhythm and color. I love when an image only suggests — when the viewer can imagine, sense, and complete it with their own perception.
Abstraction begins where form fades, and emotion and imagination emerge — creating a space the viewer enters on their own.

Color seems to be your main expressive tool. How do you approach building a color palette for a new work or series?

I start with a mood, which naturally reveals itself through color. From there, everything unfolds intuitively.
Color sets the rhythm for the entire composition.

The texture in your paintings plays an almost sculptural role. What draws you to the impasto technique, and how do you see it affecting the viewer's emotional response?

I love when a painting "breathes" through its surface. Impasto is not just a brushstroke — it's a touch that captures movement and emotion. Light glides over the texture, changing the mood of the painting depending on the angle of view.
It becomes a kind of living connection: the viewer can sense how the work was created — not only visually, but almost physically.

In your "Pears" series, Cubist echoes meet vivid modern color. What inspired this combination of classical structure and contemporary energy?

I've always been fascinated by how classical forms and contemporary vision can coexist in harmony.
Cubism gave me structure and form — but I wanted to fill it with life, color, and light.
"Pears" is an attempt to animate geometry with emotion, to infuse form with inner movement and light.
I see this series as a conversation between tradition and modern sensibility — between the clarity of form and the living breath of color.

You're part of several international art initiatives and recently exhibited in multiple countries. How do you see your art connecting with different cultural audiences?

Color, light, and emotion form a universal language — the one spoken by art itself. I'm always amazed by how people from different countries resonate with the same vibrations — peace, harmony, and light.
Art unites us because it allows us to perceive one another through inner response rather than boundaries.
This, to me, is cultural diplomacy, which I sincerely consider part of my mission.

Liudmyla Riabkova | Pears №4

You mention that you want the viewer to feel the painting through touch as well as sight. What kind of energy or emotion do you hope they perceive?

A living sensation.
Even when a painting is filled with contrasts or dramatic color, I want it to retain a sense of life — of touch and movement.
So that the viewer, while looking, can almost feel the roughness of a stroke — a tactile rhythm in which time itself seems to flow.

Can you share your process — from the first idea to the final layer of paint? Do you plan your compositions, or do they evolve intuitively?

I never make precise sketches. Everything begins with energy — color, rhythm, and light. Once I touch the canvas, the work develops naturally.
Sometimes it happens quickly; sometimes it needs silence and time.
The composition grows step by step — I respond to each stroke, allowing the work to evolve organically.

Michelle Hickey

How did growing up in Maple Ridge and later moving to Toronto influence your artistic vision and the way you observe nature?

Growing up in Maple Ridge inspired and influenced my artistic vision. It is a place full of green spaces. In my neighbour's backyard, there was a maple tree that hung over the fence into my yard, and I would often look out at it from the kitchen table. I also spent a lot of time at my grandmother's house—she had a big, beautiful garden with two willow trees. Summers were filled with camping, enjoying the woods, and swimming.

Michelle Hickey | Palettes Of Life | 2025

This year, in Toronto, my appreciation for nature has deepened. I now see nature as a teacher—it has even given me answers at times. It is good for the soul.

Have you always felt a strong connection with nature, or was there a specific moment that deepened this appreciation?

Yes, my love for nature goes way back. As I grow older, I have a new awareness and deeper appreciation for it. I find nature breathtakingly beautiful—it feels like a dream. I am grateful for its marvels, peace, honesty, love, and guidance. Nature brings something alive within me, which translates into creativity. My art is infused with and inspired by nature.
I feel like nature connects us to something much bigger. It has brought me closer to my late grandmother Martha Hickey, my late grandfather Gabriel Solomon Hickey, and my late aunt, Radha Curpen. My grandmother created sculptors, and my grandfather was an upholster—knowing that they also had art in their lives is an inspiration to me.

Your current visuals reflect life changes and new perspectives. Could you share one of those key life changes that shaped this series?

One of the key life changes is symbolized by the butterfly. I have gone through changes in my career,

Michelle Hickey | A Beautiful Shift | 2025

relationships, health, and within myself. I now feel that I am moving towards a life that feels beautiful and that is what I wish for others. My journey has particularly sparked the idea to explore how to create safe spaces for women of color—spaces where they can explore art and wellness, discover themselves, and learn to love themselves exactly as they are.
There is a quote that describes my journey beautifully:
"Everything that you want to be, you already are.
You're simply on the path to discovering it."
Photography and painting have become ways for me to express myself, and sharing my work is something new—and inspiring.
A favorite quote that comes to mind:
"Life is a gift."
To cherish life and live to our fullest potential. I believe nature illustrates how remarkable that gift is—every moment, whether marvellous, ugly, fascinating, or unknown, is all part of it. Capturing photos allows me to freeze some of these fleeting, gorgeous moments. I will continue to learn and share with others and see the world through an artistic lens that is full of possibilities!

How do you choose which scenes or subjects to photograph? Is it instinctive or carefully planned?

I choose scenes and subjects instinctively. My intuition and heart lead the way when I take photos. Usually, I see something and have a vision—and that's it. When I capture a photo, I also see a story behind it.

What role do color, light, and composition play in conveying the feelings of transition and beauty you describe?

I enjoy experimenting with light, especially sunlight through the trees. It accentuates the most radiant parts of nature. I also love black-and-white photography—the vintage look and feel speaks to me.

How do you balance spontaneity with technical aspects like framing and editing?

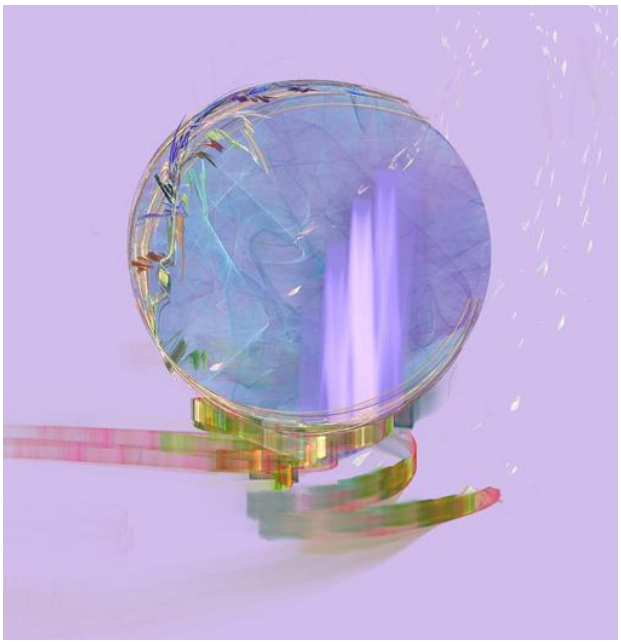
Spontaneity is a big part of my process. I am often on my toes when I take photos. I edit my photos directly on my iPhone.

Who or what inspires you most at the moment?

I am inspired to capture the beauty of nature and the stories it holds. We only have this moment, and I use photography to honor that—to capture those moments and the beauty in the world around us.
My paintings feel like a visual journal. I like to think of them as "Palettes of Life". I also journal regularly, and painting is another way I express myself. The magic of painting is that it comes intuitively and organically with no schedule. It happens when I feel something or when an idea pops up. It is like my inward world comes alive through art. As I go through my day, I see art everywhere. Art is healing—it gets me. Art flows, it comes and goes, like the ebb and flow of life. Lastly, I see art as freedom.

Michelle Hickey | Hearts That Dance Together | 2025

ILIA aka Leigh Ann Edrich



ILIA aka Leigh Ann Edrich | Saffire Embrace | 2025

Your works feel both ethereal and grounded — where do your "dreamscapes" begin? In imagination, in music, or in emotion?

My Dreamscapes begin with inspiration. The inspiration starts with music, either classical or old time jazz. Then it goes out from there to my yard where there's trees and plants growing in abundance, propagators, flocks of different birds that visit, squirrels, feral cats, possums, a bunny and a singing dog. As an aside, not only are the furry and feathered friends not bothering each other, they contribute to making the space chemical free. The other inspiration is the artists that I mentor - every success they have is also a success for me. The three items combined are the beginning of my "dreamscapes."

ILIA aka Leigh Ann Edrich | Pocket of Wishes | 2025

You mentioned that your art is always accompanied by music. How does sound influence the colors, shapes, or rhythm of your visual compositions?

Sound is always with us from the loud trains passing by to kids happily playing in a park to the crying that accompanies the loss of a loved one to the cheers of a magnificent achievement. Life around us is full of sounds. Sometimes, when life gets way too busy, sounds seem to blur together or become part of the background. Music evokes the full gamut of emotions. My choice of music is meant to lay a foundation of the beauty that can be found in the world.

Many of your pieces evoke a sense of serenity and inner light. What inner states or meditations lead you to these visual expressions?

My own journey in The Arts and The Art Book by L. Ron Hubbard are what I have utilized to accomplish my art. I applied the information in the Art Book and added my own natural talent to create it. Regarding my own journey, being in The Arts is sometimes very tough with the mocking, invalidation of one's art, the "for your own good" comments about how you'll never make it in The Arts, on and on. To be honest, I did stop a few times. I'm currently writing a book titled "I Became a Roofer" because one of the times I stopped,

ILIA aka Leigh Ann Edrich | Dream Waves | 2025

I did become one. However, an artist never truly stops. By persisting, working out what I want to communicate and finding out if I was successful in my attempts by asking others what they thought of my Dreamscapes, I realized that approximately 20% really don't like my art and 80% really enjoy it. With all the data and practice as my foundation, I can happily create my dreamscapes knowing that my message is getting across and the majority of people really like it. This has created a firm foundation for me to reach higher ranges.

Your story began with poetry and correspondence — do you still find poetry influencing your painting process today?

I believe it all works together. One time I wrote a poem because of being inspired by a painting. Another time I was inspired by the mountains and wide open spaces of the Arizona Desert and a poem was written. I create many dreamscapes while also writing books. When I'm writing, I'm describing the scenes that inspire me. While creating I'm working out what I'm going to write.

Your digital fine art has a very organic, almost living presence. How do you balance the technical and the spiritual aspects of digital creation?

That's such a lovely compliment, thank you.
I'm sure that you have encountered AI or other digital manipulations. Not only are the images absolutely perfect and breaking many copyright laws, but they're missing the spiritual and real side of life. When you view my dreamscapes which have a very organic, almost living presence, you are also viewing living, beautiful touches that I put into it. This is helped by the inspiration I surround myself with.

You describe your goal as "inspiring others to create." What has been the most fulfilling moment when you saw that inspiration reflected in others?

My most fulfilling moment was when I teamed up with another artist to deliver a workshop. My part of the workshop was called "How to Forget Everything You Were Taught About Art and Create Your Own Style." My part of the workshop was very fun and laid down some tools to use in order to accomplish what was aimed for. Then during the second part, run by my friend, the artists created a painting that was their own unique style. My smile never went away! From watching the paintings in progress to answering questions to the final result, I smiled because each painting was created with its own style, beautiful in its own way.

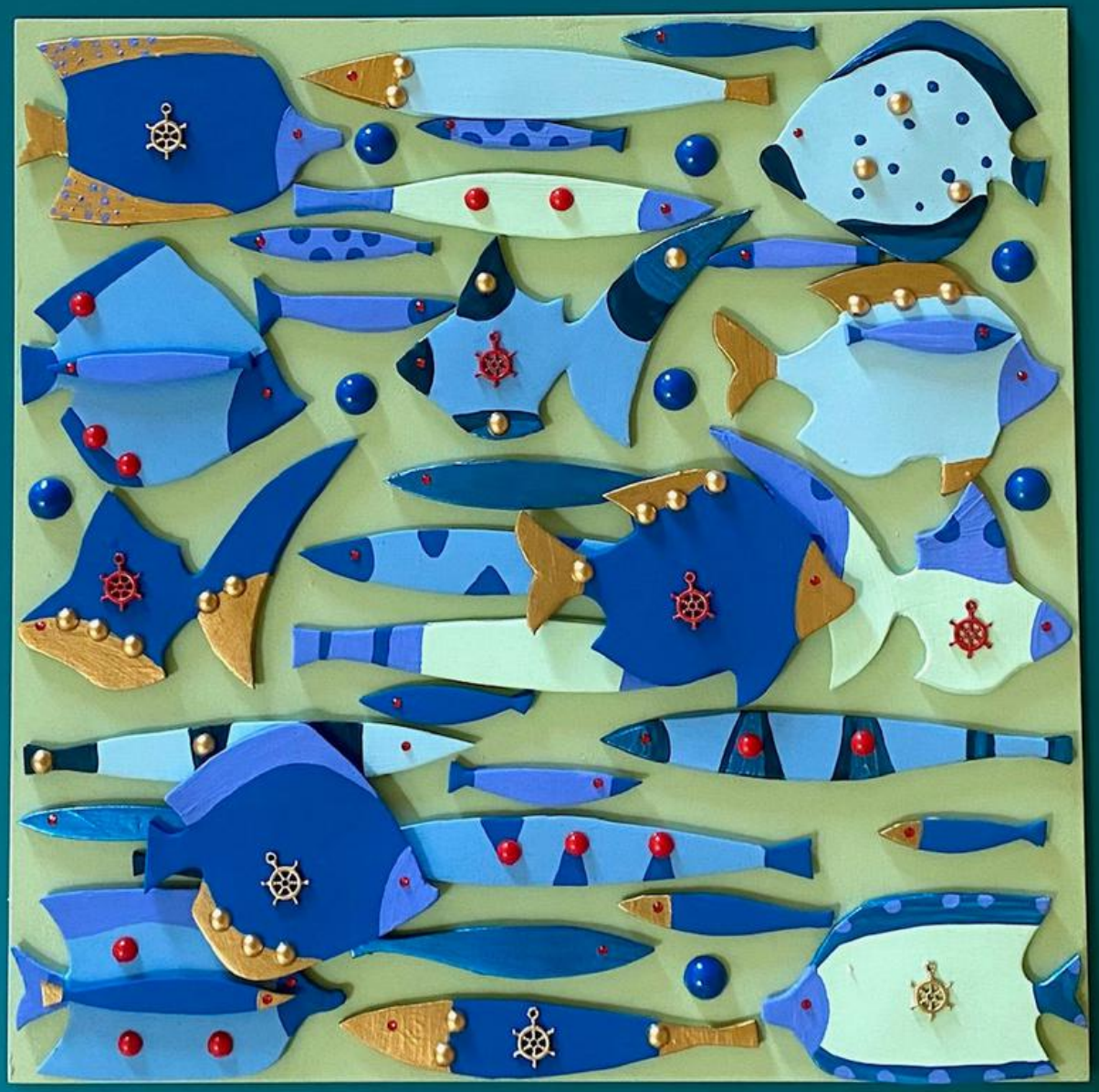
How do nature and the animals you share your space with — the birds, the bunny, the singing dog — shape your sense of connection and creativity?

Each one touches my heart! Pure joy when I see a bunny run up to me. Total happiness to be escorted from car to house by a feral cat. Amused beyond words when my four and a half pound dog breaks out in song. Extremely happy when the birds and squirrels will let me get so close to see how lovely their colors and markings are. Thankful to the birds and possums that take care of the bad bugs, eliminating the need for chemicals completely. Pleased to see so many pollinators working!
One of the above would produce a "how cute" or "that's nice" from another. All together, for me, it's nature right outside. Others notice the flocks of birds or huge numbers of squirrels arriving or departing which is also wonderfully inspiring to them, enough so that they mention it to me or ask questions in amazed disbelief.

ILIA aka Leigh Ann Edrich | Limitless | 2025

Nerida

After completing a five-year classical art school, she prefers to draw inspiration from nature, flora, and fauna, presenting the viewer with paintings combined with mixed-media sculptures and allowing them to immerse themselves in the wonderful tropical gardens she often creates in her works. Traveling and drawing inspiration from the French Riviera, Italian Tuscany, and the incredible gardens of India and Japan, she creates floral-themed ans animal compositions.



Lior Zelering

How did your early experiences with skateboarding and street culture shape your visual language and the themes you explore today?

They have profoundly influenced both my art and my worldview. The central aspect is DIY culture, which is integral to skateboarding and punk ethos—creating your own surroundings, scene, and opportunities through collective effort. This culture was amplified by bands and skate brands producing their own zines, logos, posters, and flyers. As a counterculture, its aesthetics featured chaos, broken typography, mixed media, and layered patterns and textures. Importantly, the work always carried a message or concept, often addressing broader social issues rather than personal ones. I am very much a product of my cultural environment—having started skating in 1988—and those values remain deeply ingrained in my art and in how I see the world.

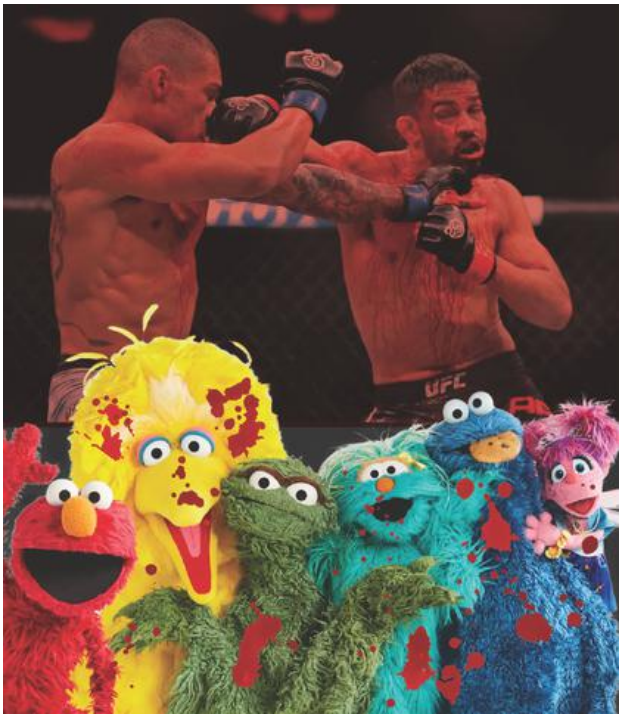
Lior Zelering | Let It Go

You mention admiration for the Dada movement and punk music. In what ways do these influences appear in your techniques, humor, and visual narratives?

I greatly admire Dada, which I consider perhaps the last art movement directly tied to a philosophical mindset. Though brief, it laid the foundation for satire, collage, humor, social criticism, and absurdity. Its legacy stretches through Monty Python, pop art, punk art, and early stand-up comedy. For me, the strongest influences are humor as a tool for critique and the use of collage, broken typography, limited hierarchy, strong contrasts, layered textures, and elements of chaos. One of my touchstones is Hannah Höch's Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Epoch of Weimar Beer-Belly Culture in Germany (1919)—a masterpiece of critique and fragmentation.

You often merge digital and analog elements. Can you walk us through a recent artwork and explain how you combine these two approaches?

This goes back to my early love of Mac computers—I got my first one at 14, became obsessed with computer-generated art, and by 22 was teaching graphic software at universities. Over time, I found digital tools too easy and predictable, so I began challenging myself by incorporating collage and physical materials. I then scanned these collages and layered them digitally,



Lior Zelering | Mma Show | 2024

creating a contrast between the raw, imperfect analog elements and the clean digital layer. This hybrid process not only enriches the work but also slows me down, giving me more time to think. For example, I made a series of three collages using Thrasher magazines—cutting logos, images, and pages, mixing them with my own drawings, then scanning and enhancing them in Illustrator.

Your art critiques both far-right and "woke" culture. How do you balance sharp social commentary with playful, ironic visuals?

In today's climate of division, I think it's vital to expose the absurdities on all sides. Most people can work together, but extremists—left and right alike—pull society apart. For me, this isn't a political issue but a personality issue: hard-headed people convinced they have all the answers. My approach is to pinpoint an absurdity and contrast it. For instance, I created a project where I layered photos of children scavenging in landfills with motivational Disney princess quotes—highlighting the cruel irony in slogans about limitless potential when set against harsh realities.

Superheroes, memes, and movies feature prominently in your work. How do you select which icons or trends to incorporate, and what role do they play in your storytelling?

Punk art is essentially a subset of pop art—it's immediate, responding to current cultural phenomena. The idea is to hijack an existing icon or trend to deliver a message. For example, I recreated Kim Jong-un's portrait in the style of Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe series, transforming glamour into grotesque parody. In another piece, I depicted Hello Kitty wearing a bomb vest. These icons are instantly recognizable, which makes them powerful tools to expose absurdities, provoke questions, or contrast ideologies.

As a multidisciplinary designer and creative director, how do your professional branding and UX projects influence your artistic process—or vice versa?

Honestly, I'd say they don't intersect much. As a designer, my role is to be a channel for brands and businesses, helping them express their philosophy and achieve their goals. In that context, I have to set aside my artist's mindset. Some designers—like Saul Bass or, to a degree, Paul Rand—developed their own signature style in commercial work, but I don't see myself there. I focus on problem-solving. That said, I once created a hybrid personal-commercial project called Zero in Command, where I introduced the concept of an "open-source brand." The idea was to give all design assets back to the community so users could print their own shirts locally, reduce waste, and reinterpret the brand however they liked. It was an inclusive, sustainable concept, though not pursued commercially.

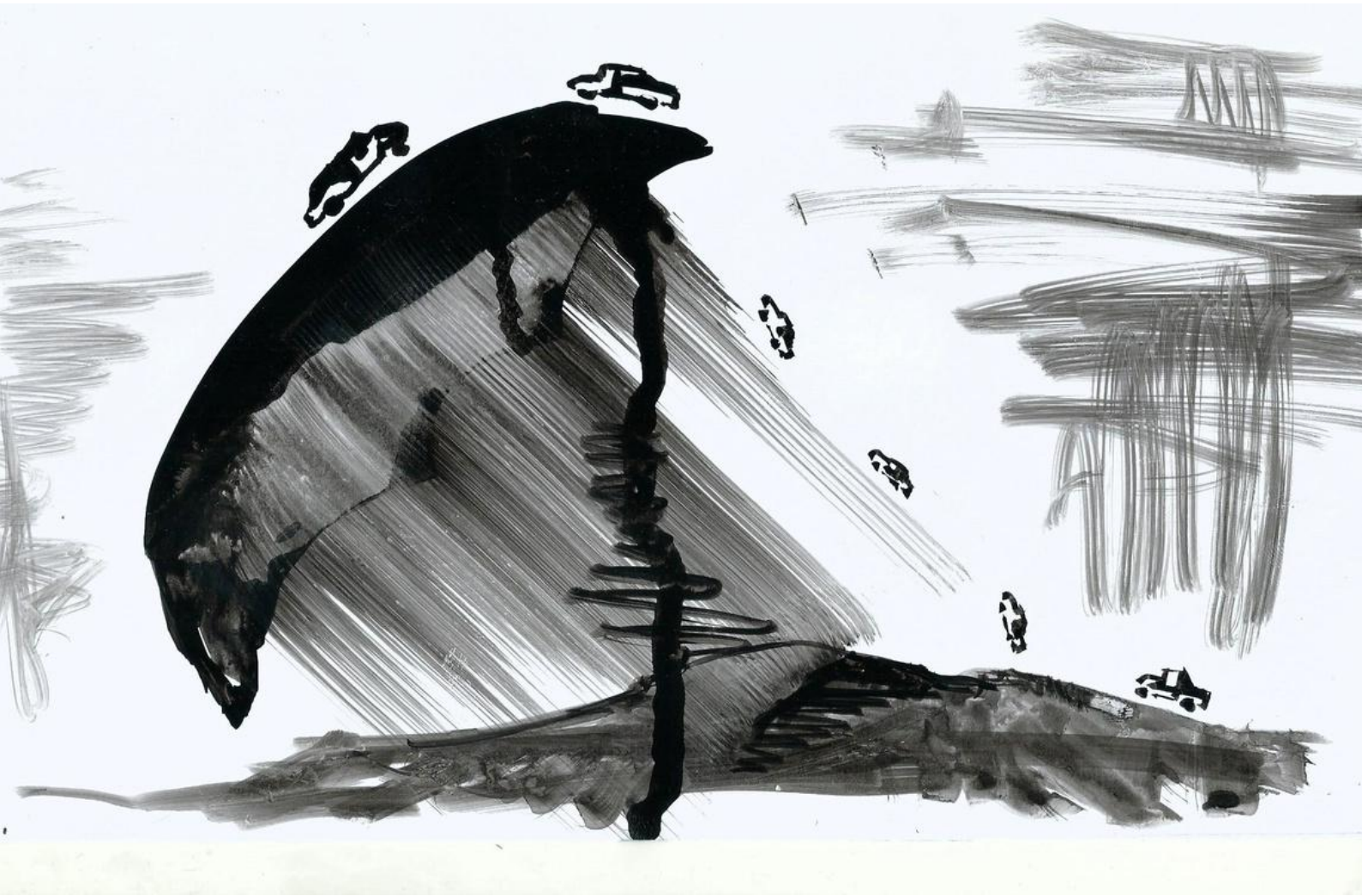
Having worked with international brands while living in Nova Scotia, how do local culture and global perspectives interact in your art?

Nova Scotia itself hasn't shaped my art—it's a calm, green, lake-filled province, the opposite of the chaos I tend to depict. Globally, though, American culture influences all of us, largely through the internet. I don't see that as inherently negative, but it has amplified global chaos. The real "culture shock" for me is often in YouTube comment sections, where toxic, ill-minded behavior gets normalized—reminding me how skewed and volatile the digital landscape can be.

Lior Zelering | Bomb Pop

Argiris Bakalidis was born in Thessaloniki in 2005.
In 2023, he was admitted to the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
Since the age of three, he has been actively painting as a member of the Kristiboni School of Visual Arts under the guidance of the artist Yiannis Palatzidis. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions in museums and art venues such as:
Art Gate Project, Project LABattoir, Thessaloniki 2025
The Big Experiment, Off Libris, Off Bratislava Festival, Bratislava 2024
More Words, Art Windows of OTE, Thessaloniki 2024
En Route, Residence of Princess Ljubica, Museum of the City of Belgrade 2024
Busts, Refugee Museum, Thessaloniki 2023
123, 40 Years of KETHEA, Helios Art Cultural Space, Thessaloniki 2024
Safety Net, Wisedog Modular Design Area, Larissa 2023
Group Exhibition, Tabya Art Space, Thessaloniki 2019
In 2024, together with artist Christos Kraniotis, he published the photobook The Big Experiment, which was presented at the Off Bratislava Festival in November of the same year. Previously, he had contributed to the publication We all feel the sun, edited by Jenna Banks and Amanda McHardy for Stupid Idiot Press, Washington D.C., 2024.
At the same time, he is developing his first solo project, using marker on monuments of the city of Thessaloniki.

Project Statement
The work reflects on the overwhelming “rain” of technological progress that shapes our lives and the world around us. Like a relentless downpour, innovation arrives with speed and force, transforming communication, labor, and even our sense of self. Yet this same storm leaves traces, polluted landscapes, fragile ecosystems, and individuals caught between empowerment and dependency. The piece seeks to capture this tension: the beauty and brilliance of human invention alongside the shadows it casts on our environment and society. It asks whether humanity can find balance within the rain, or if we risk being swept away by its flood.

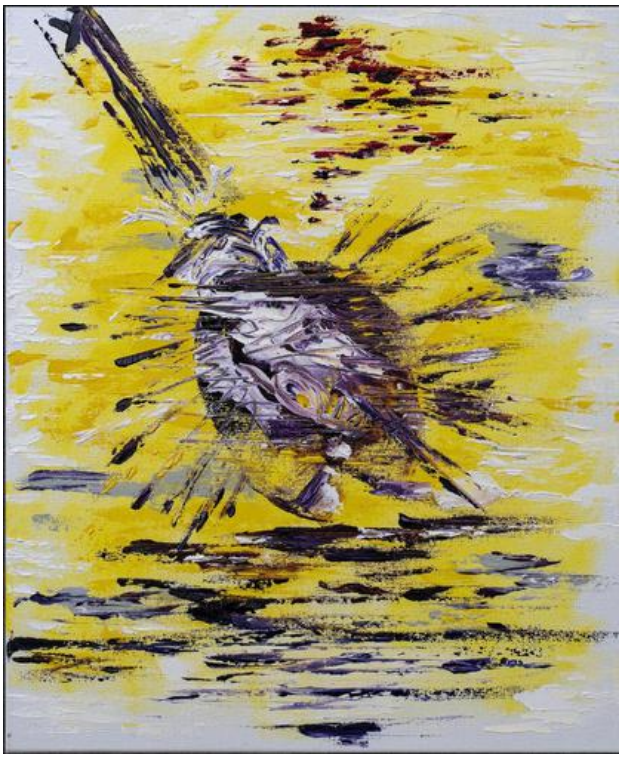


Argiris Bakalidis | Rain | 2025

Tina Lin

Music and visual arts are both creations of the imagination; one is generated by the feelings brought by sound, and the other is generated by the feelings brought by inner consciousness.

You have an extensive background in the music and entertainment industry. How has that experience influenced your visual art practice?



What prompted you to start painting in 2021 after so many years of working mainly in music and live productions?

I am a stage director who doesn't look at other artists' stage art, fearing it would interfere with my creative process. To communicate with my visual team, I had to paint what I imagined. It occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world became quiet. I had a lot of extra time, so I found a painting instructor who spent less than 2 hours teaching me the basics of oil painting. I also learned additional painting techniques from YouTube videos. The instructor told me not to be afraid to paint freely—to paint whatever I wanted to paint. That's how I've been painting ever since.

How does your work as a director and producer feed into your painting process, if at all?

I'm someone who sets very high standards for myself. I find directing and producing to be incredibly stressful jobs. During live performances, my team and I have only one chance to deliver a "perfect performance stage." Perhaps it's this pressure that makes painting a peaceful liberation for me. I can freely express any aesthetic within my own time.

You describe painting as an “unrestricted self-dialogue.” Can you share a specific moment when painting revealed something surprising about yourself?

When I'm creating, my mind is often preoccupied with other thoughts, and I let my hands follow my consciousness. Even though I have a theme in mind, my inner consciousness still guides my hand to paint what it wants. My consciousness only wants to paint what it wants to express. So, when I look back at my painting months later, I often wonder if they were mine.

Why do you prefer using a palette knife instead of brushes, and how does this choice shape the energy and texture of your works?

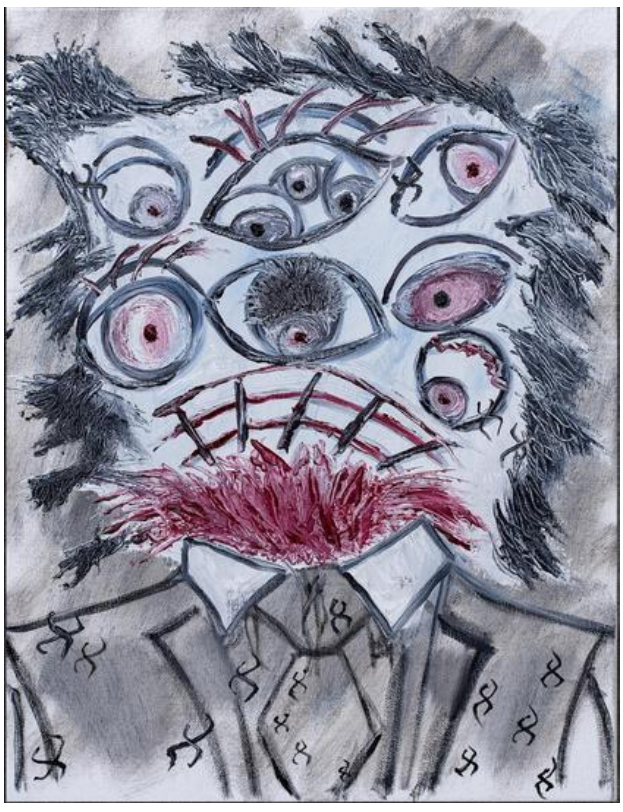
I use a palette knife instead of a brush to create my lines because I have not received any formal training in painting. This is the case with most of my works, although some may use brushes in combination. If you get a chance to see them up close, you'll understand.
The difficulty of palette knife painting lies in the fact that I have to blend all the colors I want within a few hours to create the desired layers and lines. The palette knife is difficult to control, so during the painting process, I focus solely on the "aesthetic balance" I perceive, not the final image. This often produces my paintings that most people see as different or unique.

Your paintings often feature eyes, fragmented limbs, and distorted plants and animals. What do these recurring symbols mean to you?

For a while, I really resisted painting eyes, as it felt like I only knew how to draw eyes. However, a friend told me that eyes were the hallmark of my paintings, so I decided to start painting them freely. I often say that I don't paint what I actually see. So, regarding eyes—imagine my body sprouting thousands of long tentacles, they may represent my consciousness's perception of the real world through my five senses. Perhaps through these eyes, I see something unknown, but I'm still trying to figure it out; it may remain a mystery forever, nobody knows.

You mention that your images may stem from “inner darkness, insecurity, and longing for the unknown.” How do these emotions transform while you paint?

I don't know how they transform, but I'm certainly aware of this: every time I finish a painting, I feel calmer and more understanding of things I didn't understand before. When anger, anxiety, and the unknown all form like a dark twister, painting acts as a medium to transfer this energy, allowing the emotions to manifest into a solid image. This process can be a bit like a relief for me.



Daria Skriptor
Born in 1998 in Naberezhnye Chelny. She received a secondary vocational education in Design and later graduated from Naberezhnye Chelny State Pedagogical University with a degree in Teaching Fine Arts and Technology. She has been drawing since early childhood, and over time her interest in visual culture and art theory led her to recognize the necessity of an independent artistic practice. After graduating from university, she began to actively exhibit her works in local institutions and independent spaces, working with various media — video art, installation, text, and art objects, among others. Her creative focus lies in exploring the boundaries of art and socio-cultural issues. Her artistic language is influenced by the Dadaists and conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Piero Manzoni, Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, and the Art & Language group.

Artist Statement
The subjects that interest me are the contradictions of art, the artist (author), and the figure of the viewer in the postmodern era, as well as social issues in the context of contemporaneity. In my artistic practice, I favor the material substrate, creating installations, art objects, and graphic works; less often — video art. I do not pursue aesthetic goals; the form always derives from the content. The starting point of my research may be statistical data, narratives from art theory, philosophy, and culture, combined with personal reflection. My aim is to place the viewer in a situation of mental experiment and/or liminality, encouraging an inner dialogue about the issue being explored. The task of each project is to find the precise medium and expression of the idea, while leaving space for the viewer's subjectivity.

Daria Skriptor | The Consuming Man | 2024

Daria Skriptor | The Consuming Man | 2024

Daria Skriptor | The Consuming Man | 2024

— *Interview*

Jade To - r4bbit.teeth

Your project reflects on mortality through animal symbolism — the lamb, deer, and rabbit. How did you choose these particular creatures to represent different stages of awareness about death?

During the conception of r4bbit.teeth, I knew I wanted to use symbols of innocence, purity, and naivety, and to put it plainly, cute things to both represent and contrast the darker themes of my work. I have always been drawn to the intersection of creepy and cute. For the narrative of the project, exploring the stages of acknowledging and accepting mortality and death, I wanted to create characters that embody each step of the process.
I came upon the rabbit, deer, and lamb as my main subjects both intentionally and by chance, as in my research, these three specifically stood out to me as the perfect vessels to embody the balance of sweet and unsettling that I am striving for. Each animal respectively are cultural and folkloric symbols of gentleness, innocence, and can have ties to the spiritual and supernatural. These three creatures also play a role in some brutal and gruesome human/animal dynamics, with rabbits and deer being hunted for sport, as well as being common victims of roadkill, and lambs being historically a sacrificial offering. With this all in mind, I found the three, the lamb, deer, and rabbit, becoming the characters in my story... of one being blissfully unaware to the realities of death, to later attempting ignorance and compartmentalization, to then dread its existence and fixate on the horrors of it, spirally over its inevitability.

The lamb, deer, and rabbit all embody innocence in different ways. How does each one evolve conceptually across your body of work?

In r4bbit.teeth, each animal is a representation of different stages in the process of coming to terms with our own death, and death as a concept.
The rabbit is the tainted innocence, the loss of naivety, fixated on the horrors of our own ephemerality, representing the spirally obsession in the temporary that fear of death can spawn.
The deer is the dread of trying to accept, or even just acknowledge the reality of our delicate

Jade To | Desecrate To Sustain | 2024

bodies and fragile existence, embodying the difficulty in trying not to compartmentalize the idea that everyone around us can be victim to circumstances beyond our control.
The lamb is purity, childlike innocence, not yet exposed to the truth of our own mortality, with the wool over their eyes, symbolizing how we like to try to shield the young from the darker, more macabre facts of life.
I chose rabbits to be the most morbid, since in my research, I found that they are subject to really strangely grotesque phenomena biologically. Rabbits became the main muse for my work in quite an interesting way. They stood out to me as a strong source of inspiration when I came across this image of a neglected rabbit with these overgrown and gnarled teeth. Something about cute, innocent creatures being marred and deformed is strikingly confronting, and I found that to be imagery I want to convey my ideas and story. This is where the name, r4bbit.teeth, is derived from, and this phenomenon so perfectly encapsulated the tone and essence of what I wanted to create.
The deer are representative of a middle ground between acknowledgement and hyperfixation. Deer are beautiful and graceful, with big doe eyes and a gentle, but skittish nature. I chose them to be an in-between, due to the contrast of their imposing, sometimes intimidating form being revered throughout history and culture, and the cruel fates they are subject to due to human circumstance, like roadkill and sport hunting. I find a lot of inspiration from biology as well, looking into the symptoms of prion disease, and the horror-movie-esque imagery of the antler velvet shedding.
The lamb are the most detached from the darker, more visceral motifs and themes, since I chose them to be a symbol of being less aware of the horrors. This is based on the idiom, “pulling the wool over your eyes”, even though the original meaning is to deceive. In this case, keeping one blissfully ignorant can be deception in itself, though no fault of the one being kept in the dark. The concept of the sacrificial lamb, spilling the blood of a creature so young, pure, and defenseless, goes against the inherently wrong feeling of bringing harm against the innocent, while showing what we are willing to slaughter for the common good. The lamb does not know why it must be sacrificed.

The series balances beauty and grotesque imagery — how do you find equilibrium between these two extremes?

While I like to delve into macabre narratives, I do not always wish to use in-your-face gore. As of right now, I have been trying to keep the visuals more subdued and implied to go along with the idea of the cognitive dissonance between the two extremes, beauty and the grotesque, and how they can both clash and oddly compliment each other.
I like to have the imagery be more understated, though I am not opposed to exploring more graphic and violent depictions. I am a big fan of horror movies/novels/manga, and I am not entirely opposed to one day leaning into jarring, grotesque visuals. For now, I like drawing a fine line between dark and disgusting, and I try not to lean into the extremes, since I still try to maintain the balance of cute and eerie.

You mention your first experience with death being a dead deer on the side of the road. How did that moment influence the tone and emotion of your later work?

I think like anything that sticks to the back of your mind, it’s an image that keeps coming back to me. Unfortunately, something like the first glimpse of how temporary life is and how gory death can be is not something that you can pretend doesn’t exist or pertain to you. No matter how much you try to learn about it in hopes of understanding it objectively, or how much you can try to bury it deep down, it doesn’t

Jade To | To Accept Is To Succomb | 2024

make it less scary. I think, broadly speaking, all life fears death.
A moment like that, driving past a dead deer on the side of the road, whisking past it so quickly that the scene is just a passing blur... It's probably a scenario in which the parents are hoping that the children's attention spans are short enough to take the little white lie of "oh honey, the deer is just sleeping," and move on to the next topic. Though, something like that really sticks with you, as it is something so visceral and confronting. At any age, it can be hard to dwell on the unknown and the inevitable.
In developing a concept for my creative work, I wanted to create selfishly and personally, as if the only target audience is myself. Thinking on what topics and visuals I wanted to explore, this memory of this specific experience came to the forefront. It was probably the catalyst for my morbid curiosity, as well as my interest in the horror genre and anatomy/physiology. I knew I wanted to use it as the backbone for my work, since it seemed to greatly influence me as a person, with my fixation on existence and its horrors.

There's a striking contrast between softness (animals, flowers, lace) and violence (flesh, decay) in your paintings. What do you hope viewers feel when confronted with that juxtaposition?

For r4bbit.teeth, I want to create an image that is conflicting, that at first can appear sweet and unassuming, but a closer look can reveal the brutality. This contrast stems from r4bbit.teeth's beginning, as the project started as my thesis for my BFA in Fashion Design as a knitwear collection. An initial series of illustrations I did, consisting of the rabbit, lamb, and deer, informed the apparel and fiber arts in my thesis, as well as my current paintings.
A consistent part of my work has been playing with the combination of unsettling imagery countered with inviting, familiar elements which create this sort of dissonance and confusion within the viewer. With cute, yet visually uncomfortable imagery balanced with a soft, comforting feel, the pieces can provide physical comfort in efforts to counteract the disturbing narrative.

The red spider lilies appear throughout your works — can you talk about their symbolism and how they function as a visual motif?

The red spider lily is one of my favorite flowers due to their meaning. As a character in the world of r4bbit.teeth, it is an omen of having to finally confront the end and full acceptance of our fates, choosing to live alongside the finality of death, instead of in spite of it.
In Japanese flower language, hanakotoba (花言葉), the red spider lily symbolizes death, final goodbyes, and abandonment. It is a flower that is, rather poetically, often found on roadsides and in cemeteries. The red spider lily is also quite significant in Buddhism in Japan, as they are believed to be the flower that grows in Hell that guides the dead in the afterlife to their next reincarnation. They are used frequently in media, such as anime and video games, in moments preceding a significant character death.
As a visual motif, their ominous beauty is so haunting that even if you do not know the meaning it can hold, the viewer can almost sense it as an omen. Its otherworldly appearance in tandem with its implications compliment my narrative quite well, so I use it as a concluding stage in the process of acknowledgment and acceptance of death.

How has living and working in New York City influenced your artistic philosophy and visual style?

New York City is an amazing place, and I cannot imagine living anywhere else. The diversity in the

Jade To | The Greed Of NaiVety (For They Do Not Know Yet Of Their Wrongdoings) | 2024

people, the neighborhoods, and the freedom you have to be yourself is what makes most people fall in love with it. Although, in a city with a saturation of creatives, a lot of artists can lose their authenticity in exchange for visibility and acclaim. It can be hard to decipher what are trends and shock value, as opposed to what feels honest and not performative. There can be such a strong yearning to be original and a pioneer, which can sometimes make creating and coming up with new ideas feel like a burden.

For my artistic philosophy and visual style, I believe the influence it has on me is that it pushes me to create more selfishly. I think of myself as my target audience and just hope that others can appreciate my vision as well, instead of trying to make what a massive demographic would like.

I also look at what's around me for inspiration, from apple cores discarded on a sidewalk, to an abandoned stuffed animal forgotten on the subway tracks, to a crude graffiti depiction of a rabbit. I think with a place so rich in art and creativity, looking beyond what other people are doing, and focusing on the beauty in the mundane can be the most inspiring.

Daria Sinaiskaia

“After Her” began as a deeply personal response to your grandmother’s passing. Can you describe the moment when you realized that photographing her belongings was becoming an artistic project rather than just a way to cope with loss?

It happened when I started sharing my first photographs with other people in the photography world. First, they were my fellow students in the online photography course from Michigan State University. Then, my first photography teacher and my friend, the layout designer Yana Rodina, helped me work more on the composition of the photographs. We met to discuss them, and for me, her feedback was incredibly important. It was my first photography project, so I was not confident in my skills and learned a lot while doing it. When the series was complete, she also designed the photobook, which became the final form of the project.
I am still grateful to the other people who helped me understand that what I do resonates with others—that it is more than simply documenting objects for my family and my own memory, but an artistic project. They supported me until I finished it, and I think without that support, finishing my first project would have been very difficult or even impossible.

Daria Sinaiskaia | Table | 2022

How did your emotional state during that time influence the way you framed or composed the photographs?

Those objects were very important to me. With my photographs, I wanted to express what I saw in them – a concentration of grief, the feeling of missing my grandmother, and memory. The composition is mostly simple – I placed most of the objects in the centre of the image, which gives them a significant visual weight. The way I composed my photographs may seem almost too simple, but I couldn't imagine composing them differently.
I took the photographs mostly at night, using a long exposure. I enjoyed the dim night light and the silence. It was like a silent dialogue between me and those objects, as if they were telling me their stories in the quiet, while the rest of the world was asleep.

Were there specific objects that were especially difficult to part with — or to photograph — and why?

I would say I still haven't parted with most of the objects. The small ones – like the portrait, some photographs and cards – are easy to keep, and I don't think I will ever part with them. But it seems to be an issue for me to part even with bigger objects, like the table. After taking many photographs of it, I started appreciating its beauty more and now I can't imagine throwing it away. My teenage children often make harmless jokes about how our kitchen looks: 'Mum, you promised to keep it only for your project, but it seems you finished it, so what now?'
Our kitchen still looks the same. I call it my 'Time Machine'.

How do you see the relationship between photography and memory — does the camera preserve, reinterpret, or even distort remembrance?

I think photography preserves, reinterprets, and distorts memory all at the same time. Even though I started with a

Daria Sinaiskaia | Grandma With A Guitar | 2022

wish to only preserve my memory, I found myself reinterpreting stories and narratives in the process. This project tells a story, and I am sure that in the process of storytelling, there is always some distortion—especially when I want to tell a good, understandable story with a clear plot.

You mentioned that each photograph is accompanied by a written story. How did you balance the visual and textual aspects — do they complete each other, or can each stand alone?

I believe the stories give more depth and significance to the images. My wish to write them was driven first by a simple thought: I know why each object is precious to me and the story behind it, but someone else—my children, for instance (I imagined them as my first viewers)—who sees it, often does not.
In the project 'After Her,' I wrote only what was needed to understand the stories behind the images. I think they complete each other. The part of the project about the beauty of the objects is told by the images, and the part about family history—my grandmother's life, first of all —is told by the written texts.
All the stories are available to read on my website in English language. When the project is exhibited, both parts are present: the images hang on the wall with the texts printed on tracing paper next to them. The curator Olga Matveeva helped me find this form for the exhibition.

Although this is a very intimate series, it resonates universally. What kind of reactions from viewers have moved you the most?

I feel very grateful when people reach out to me on social networks or in person during an exhibition to tell me which part of my project resonated with them. It is very interesting to hear what it is, because for each person, it's something different. Sometimes people simply say, 'thank you for what you did; it is so simple and touching at the same time'. But sometimes it is more precise.
One man who saw the project at the exhibition at the Photoplay school in Moscow, read all the stories printed next to the images. He was particularly touched by the story of my grandfather—by the fact that even though my grandmother separated from him because of his problems with alcohol, and they spent many years living apart, she took him back in his elderly years when he was no longer able to take care of himself.
Another viewer was moved by the story of my Aunt Vera. He said: 'Her story is evidence that she never recovered from the Second World War; some people did not.'
I know for sure it is not easy to find the strength and courage to reach out to someone to share your thoughts or words of gratitude. This makes the effort even more significant. Without this feedback, it would be difficult to understand if what I do resonates with other people's minds and hearts. I am very grateful for those who do it.

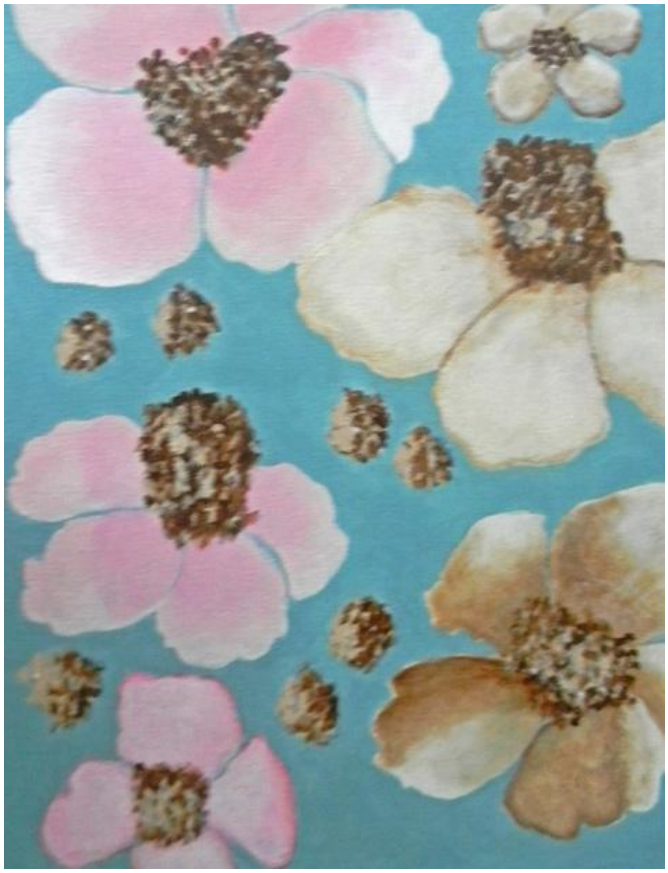
How do you hope "After Her" might inspire others to look differently at their own family histories?

I hope some people will rediscover objects they keep in their homes that belonged to their loved ones—that they will see the strange beauty and traces of history in them. I also hope that some people will find more significance in their family history and feel a wish to preserve it, whether through photographs, written stories, drawings, or video. For those who want to keep the memory of their family alive, even just for their children, I hope they can find their own way and approach.
I also dream about expanding this into a wider project where people could send me images of the objects they keep in memory of their beloved ones, accompanied by their stories. I have already started gathering some from my friends and plan to launch a website to collect these stories. My wish is to somehow make this project international, to gather stories about people not only from my country, but from around the world. I hope to find the way to do it in upcoming years.
All people have their family history. Many of us have objects that, for us, are a concentration of memory, love, and grief. This is something that still connects us as human beings in our often separated world. If my work can help to at least some people see their own family history as part of shared human experience—to see how much we all have in common, no matter where we live or what language we speak— I would be very happy for that.

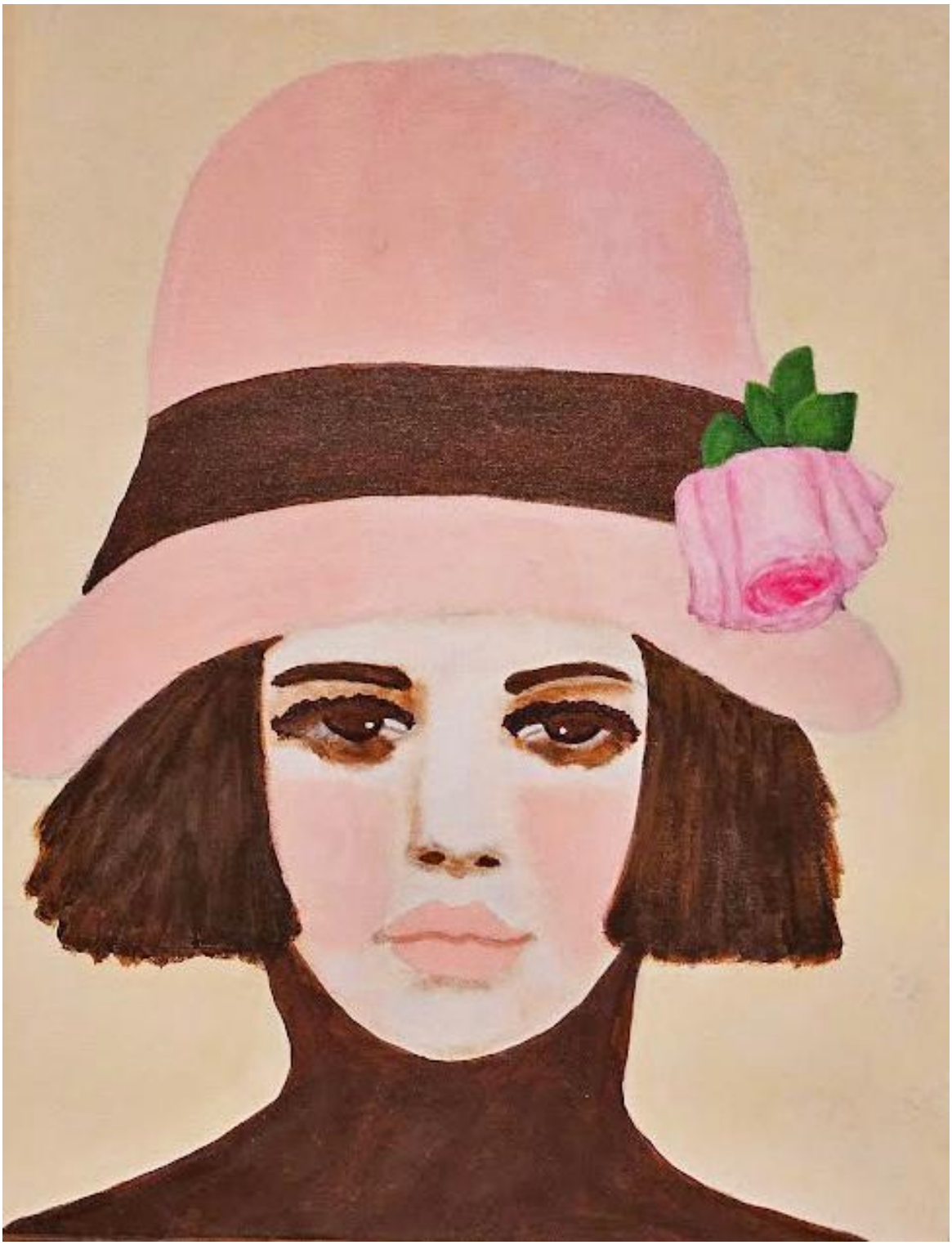
Daria Sinaiskaia | Grandma S Mother | 2022

Darlene Maciuba-Koppel
I make art on a daily basis and experimentation is a natural part of my practice. With each medium, I relish taking risks and trialing different supplies and tools. I do these things to encourage my artistic growth. I am a mixed media artist, working in acrylic and watercolor painting, collage, assemblage, pen & ink, charcoal, encaustics, air dry clay and spirit dolls.
My artwork - and articles - have appeared in the following Stampington & Company magazines: Somerset Holidays & Celebrations, Bella Grace, In Her Studio, Somerset Life, Art Journaling, Artful Blogging, GreenCraft, Somerset Home, Somerset Studio, Somerset Apprentice, Jewelry Affaire, The Stampers' Sampler and Somerset Studio Gallery magazines. I have written on assignment for Stampington & Company.
My artwork has also appeared in the following books, 1,000 Artist Trading Cards; 1,000 Artist Journal Pages: Personal Pages and Inspirations; and 1,000 Handmade Greeting Cards.
I belong to the Buffalo, Niagara Artists Association (BNAA) and participate in juried exhibitions at Western New York Art Galleries.

Project Statement
When I create art, time stops for me – and I cherish the solitude of silence.
Nature, especially trees and birds, have always captivated me. And they show up regularly in my art. I am bothered by deforestation and the meager protection of wildlife. This is why I submitted my doll to the Elemental Spirit Doll Exhibit to help Friends of the Earth.
I make art on a daily basis and experimentation is a natural part of my practice. With each medium, I relish taking risks and trialing different supplies and tools. I do these things to encourage my artistic growth. I am a mixed media artist, working in acrylic and watercolor painting, collage, assemblage, pen & ink, charcoal, encaustics, air dry clay and spirit dolls.

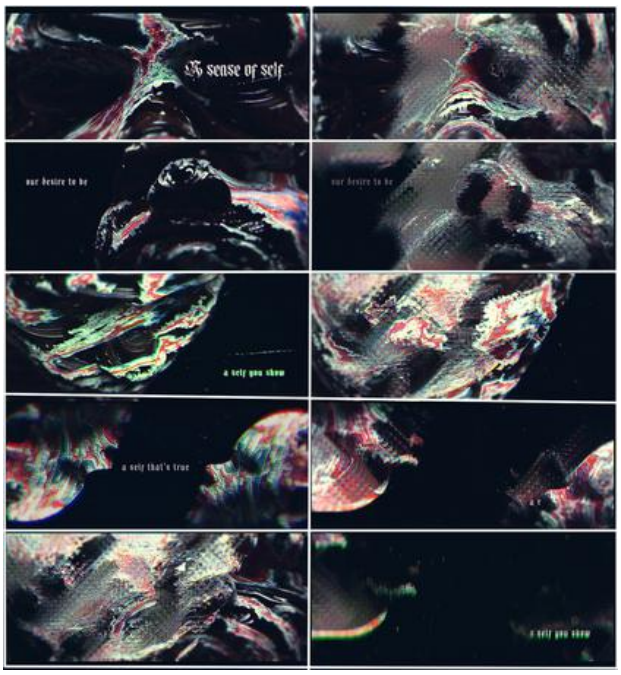


Darlene Maciuba-Koppel | Petal Medley



Darlene Maciuba-Koppel |Spirited Grace

Shamant Bagrecha



Shamant Bagrecha | SELF Style frames

Your work often bridges abstract digital forms with human perception. How do you decide what aspects of identity or connection to translate into visual metaphors?

I believe my work primarily stems from the experiences I'm navigating, the emotions I'm grappling with, and the aspects of myself I'm striving to comprehend. It's not born from self-obsession, though it might sometimes appear that way, but rather from a desire to articulate those feelings and trace their origins. From the raw grip of anger and fear emerged S I N S, and from waves of existential dread and a quest to unravel the essence of our social bonds came S E L F.

TouchDesigner seems to be central to your practice. What drew you to this tool, and how does it shape the way you think about art-making?

Actually, TouchDesigner is a tool I've only recently begun exploring—my mainstays remain Blender and After Effects. That said, I can pinpoint exactly what pulled me in: my first spark for motion design ignited from a deep fascination with audio-synced visuals. TouchDesigner elegantly fuses the capabilities of those two programs into a single, seamless workflow, transforming it all into real-time magic. It's incredibly versatile, brimming with boundless potential for anyone willing to invest the time and curiosity to unlock it.

In Concept-01, you used a face layered with shifting textures to signify transformation. What does the face symbolize for you, and why was it important for this project?

In that project, the shifting textures of the face symbolize fleeting emotions that we go through. And it was important to me, as an immigrant, someone away from my home and family, it brought in a lot of inexperienced emotions and being in my early 20's I went through a huge shift in life and perspective. I felt scared and lost. I was in search of any essence of meaning I could find to justify my existence. And it came along with this huge wave of emotions I had never experienced before. This continuous theme within the theme tries to express that overwhelming emotions we go through.

Your work frequently deals with questions of selfhood and purpose. How do your own personal reflections on these themes influence the direction of your projects?

Shamant Bagrecha | SIN Style frames

My work often grapples with selfhood and purpose because those themes have been constant undercurrents in my own inner world, shaping not just what I create but how I approach it. From a young age, I've been haunted by that big, childlike question: What is our purpose as a species, and why do we feel these raw, inexplicable things? It's not abstract philosophy for me—it's personal, woven into moments of doubt, joy, or disconnection that demand exploration. Visually striking ideas always catch my eye first, pulling me in with their "cool factor," but they become a canvas for those deeper reflections. I layer in the emotions I'm wrestling with—existential unease, the ache for connection, the search for meaning—and let them steer the project's direction. Take S E L F, for instance: it started with mesmerizing, morphing textures that fascinated me aesthetically, but my reflections on isolation as an immigrant in my early twenties turned it into a meditation on fragmented identity and the fragile threads of human bonds. In essence, these personal musings aren't just influences; they're the compass that transforms a spark of visual intrigue into something probing and profoundly human.

Collaboration appears in your practice, especially in your exhibition with your partner. How does collaboration change or expand the meaning of your work?

Collaboration is key in my eyes. Especially within art, understanding how one thinks and feels, is especially understood with art, the connection it beings is very important, as it a peek into the others mind, even if it's only a tiny hole into their universe. Since a lot of my personal work comes from trying to understand human connection and how we all experience different relationships, differently, collaboration is another way to understand such an experience.

The integration of sound and motion in your art creates immersive experiences. How do you see sound functioning as part of your storytelling?

To me sound plays a huge role when it comes to experiencing something. Without the sound to set the mood, we don't fully grasp what is going on. It's like watching a movie without the score. The visuals do half the job, which is fully captivating the viewers attention, and the sound does the other half, of holding that attention and making you feel what you see.

You mention threads and fibers as metaphors for human bonds. What inspired you to combine physical materials with digital systems?

This one particularly, is for the gallery show my partner and I are planning together. She is a Fibers artist, and I was experimenting with the concept of connections, and the two just fit in perfectly with each other. The threads symbolise the connections itself, and the digital visuals symbolise the influence of others on each other.

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