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Houda Bakkali is a visual artist and digital illustrator based in Spain. She has exhibited in Paris, Madrid, Cannes, Barcelona…, and her work, techniques and creative process have been recognised by different institutions and by various international magazines. Houda is expert in digital communication and online marketing, with more than ten years of experience in the sector. Likewise, she worked in print, digital books, video art and graphic publishing, one of her great passions.

She has been internationally recognized by art magazines, institutions and with different awards, including the Graphis Silver Award in New York, Annual Advertising 2019 and Graphis Silver Award Annual Poster 2020 in New York, the New Talent Award of the International Festival Artistes du Monde in Cannes 2018, the Excellence Award of the Circle Foundation For The Arts (Lyon, France 2019), the Honorable Mention of the Circle Foundation For The Arts (Lyon, France 2019) the Distinguished Artist by ArtAscent International Magazine in Canada, among other prizes and mentions.

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If you have a mental health condition that enables you to see life differently, then you might produce a different and unique perspective within your artworks. I’ve tried to use this thought to enable me to approach my new mixed media installation artwork ‘PYLON’, which is about a journey a psychotic young woman takes. I always seek to produce artworks that bring about a different angle on contemporary conversations.

We need to be free to express and talk about what we choose. For people to dictate how others should think is beyond me. In the western world, hearing voices has long been pathologized and seen as a problem for society. In places like Africa, Asia and Australasia voice hearing is often seen in a positive way. I personally feel this is a topic that needs further discussion.

Stigma is so severe for voice hearers, in order for other types of human experience to be seen as acceptable, we need to discuss openly about our thoughts and feelings. Be that in the everyday or about mental health.

We have been filming the video footage for my mixed media video installation ‘PYLON’. My collaborators and I prepared well for an intensive three days of filming. Wow, was it exhausting! Director of Photography, Rob Luckins kept us on schedule, his expertise proving valuable on the shoot. He also got what I was trying to portray within the film and help create the psychotic experience through his camera lens.

Prior to filming, with Amber Weyman I had been working on the character development of the main protagonist ‘Lily’. We did lots of rehearsals and workshops so Amber could make the transition from performing to an audience to being filmed, where the camera will pick up her every move. We also worked on hair,
make up and costume. Amber looked great whilst performing to camera and our preparatory work payed off! She has made the role of Lily her own and gave the performance I had in my mind and more.

Sound recordist Richard Gott is creating the audio soundscape for 'PYLON'. He has undertaken research for the project by reading academic and medical papers on psychosis. In his own words "Researching auditory hallucinations has been fascinating for me... understanding how they manifest, what type of sounds might be heard, how they are experienced and where the sounds appear to be located". Richard has also interviewed me about the sound elements of a psychotic episode. We are using binaural sound to offer the art viewing public and idea of how a psychotic experience is.

After an exhausting three days of filming physically and mentally, all involved delivered and wow, did we capture what I had in my head!

Amber was in costume, looking like a strong young woman beginning her journey on an acute stage of a psychosis mission. Amber has lived dissociative disorder so she had witnessed people around her who had full blown psychosis, she had experienced close to what I wanted to portray which was another land, another world. An alternative reality, that only some would have encountered until now. I wish to break down stigma and share the journey of a young psychotic.

We also had experienced actress Gillian Tully arrive on set (with Limoni the chihuahua and her owner). Gillian who captured in her scene, the intensity of the paranoid experience. We were all on location to deliver a blow, to established Western world beliefs of psychosis, then Gillian’s presence appeared. Her Character, strong piercing and uncomfortable. Just the type of person you would not want to meet on an acute psychotic experience. Amber and Gillian were in unison, yet, going up against each other, in a psychotic clash.

Now the filming is complete we will soon begin editing the audio and visual elements together. I will also begin building the sculptural parts of the 'PYLON' installation with the help of fellow artist David McDiarmid.
Houda Bakkali

the colors of happiness

HOUDA BAKKALI HAS BEEN AWARDED WITH THE GRAPHIS SILVER AWARD POSTER ANNUAL 2020 AND TWO HONORABLE MENTION (NEW YORK, 2019)

The international artist Houda Bakkali has been awarded the Graphis Silver Award for the artwork “Too many fishes, too few loaves” and with two Graphis Honorable Mention for the artworks “Don Quixote Time” and “Time of Nobody”. Graphis is one of the most prestigious international publishers of communication, design, advertising, photography and illustration books. Based in New York, is considered one of the greatest bastions of design and contemporary art.

Two of this artworks has been exhibited at the Parador of Lorca in a solo exhibition during May 2019. The Parador has one of the most important art collections in Spain. From Gothic carvings from the 14th century to Flemish tapestries made from Rubens illustrations, and much more. Since its founding in 1928, this hotel chain has nourished the walls of its monumental buildings with the best art. There is no other known hotel establishment in the world that has more than 9,000 pieces of art.

Too many fishes, too few loaves

This digital illustration is a colourful and pop representation of the world in which we live, a world with too few fish and too few loaves. Color, optimism, rhythm and freshness for a dark world in which every day there is more competition and fewer opportunities. The pop man observes his prey between ideas, moments and circumstances that appear in a thousand different colours. The pop man waits and observes serenely, capable of fighting and making his dreams come true, capable of achieving his dreams in an unpredictable world.
**Don Quixote Time**

This artwork (on the cover), based on the digital illustration in combination with digital collage, is a tribute to Don Quixote and to its universal values: reflection, conversation, understanding, humour and wit, colour, words for love and hope. It is the time of words and stories. It is the time of optimism and hope. It is the time of fantasy and dreams. It’s time for legends with happy endings. It is a time of reflection. It is the time of genius and madness. It is a time of the Don Quixote of the 21st Century.

**Time of nobody**

This is a reflection of our time. This is the time of filters and selfies. This is the time to share vanity. This is the time of anonymous friends. This is the time to speak with emoticons. This is a time of virtual likes. This is the time of a huge circus, empty of the beautiful sound of the words, the beautiful experience of conversation, the beautiful experience of looking at each other. This is time to follow nobody.

**Houda Bakkali**

Houda Bakkali is a digital artist, based in Barcelona, with more than 10 years of experience in digital art and visual communication. Likewise, she worked in print and graphics publishing and digital marketing.

Her first visual work dates back to 2008 when she published the series “Africa sweet and pop”, a personal, colourful, optimistic and full of hope tribute to her origins. Houda grew up in the Lavapiés neighbourhood, one of the most cosmopolitan and multicultural neighbourhoods in Madrid (Spain), a place that the artist always associate with her passion and motivation for art. Houda Bakkali has exhibited in Paris, Madrid, Cannes, Barcelona, Lorca, Biarritz..., and her work, techniques and creative process have been recognized by different institutions and international magazines.

She has been awarded the Prestigious American Illustration 38 Award (New York, 2019), the New Talent Prize in Cannes 2018, the Excellent Award for the Circle Foundation for the Arts in Lyon, France 2019, among others international distinction.
Alesha Art

Kazan, Russia

I think my art comes from nightmares and society that I leave in. Probably most of the people don’t like what I paint and what art install on the streets. They don’t want to believe that those characters surround them every day. Some of my subjects are scary, others quite beautiful. It’s up to you that you see and want to believe. I am just trying to inspire others to look at the world more carefully and show that art can exist and speak to anyone.

Alesha is alter ego - was born in Russia, Kazan in 1992. At the age of 16, he moved to England to study film making. During 4 years he spends time closely with painters and artists. That group of young minds inspired him to start painting and learn more about the art world which he never heard before. In 2012 he moved in America to continue his film making degree. Two years in NY and one year in LA brought a new vision for his art and interest in the street art world. These experiences formed and grew his style in his work today. Nowadays Alesha lives in Russia, continue to paint and keep growing as an artist.

On film making course he learned to focus on details but never forget about the entire picture. His style what he likes to call: "Beautifully Disturbing". With some bold and eye-popping colour, multiple layers of paint and characters that almost feels like a life - Alesha allowing the work to take on its own and switch off from what we call «opinion».
**Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?**

For me, its entire art scene with fresh amazing artists, it’s not always they have a spot under the gallery or collectors, but their energy and scale of work is just pushing me forward. I like when there is a challenge between street artists, who will make it bigger or smarter, more or local? Also, my art, when I look back at my painting, I am asking myself: “Seriously, I was painting that three years ago? Then what will happen in the next three years, then I will be looking back at my art with I create today”.

**What is the most challenging part of being an artist?**

Keep on going and don't give up. At one moment I can feel strength and energy in my mind about an art career, and a few hours later I will be so depressed and asking myself: “Why am I doing this?”. But I can't stop painting. Financial position isn't always on my side, but as long as I have a place to sleep, studio to paint and food to eat, I am good.

Once I didn't paint for a month, and I had nightmares with my characters who were alive and they were trying to eat me. After that, I don’t stop painting.

**In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?**

Sometimes I feel its just a new way of making money, it's so commercialised and more people are thinking about art as money investment. On one hand its not so bad for artists, we can keep on creating while they are buying and its much better than working 9-5 and only on Saturday and Sunday spend time in your studio. On the other hand, it's not about that, I create because I can't stop, something is inside me keep on pushing me forward, and money doesn't mean anything at all, but we all want to eat.

I am happy for the art industry, and how quickly it's growing, nowadays people who stand out from the others can get attention and create big projects because spotlights are on them. As before society wasn't ready for living artists.

**How would you describe the art scene in your area?**

“Local street art is so poor, that I feel so rich” - that's what happening with street art in my city and I feel same for my country, some people are trying to do something but its just not on that level yet.

About art in the galleries, well people who have money and actually buying art, not always mind open and that causes boring exhibitions with calm art. Sometimes young artists do something, small exhibitions or events but its just 3-5 times a year.

**Name three artists you admire.**

Michel Reeder, Anthony Lister, Revok

**What are your future plans?**

During summer time - organise last solo show in my city, paint on the streets, install as many installations as I can, complete two collaborations with shoe company and craft beer company, present my new clothing series.

For the upcoming year - Move to the other city «Saint-Petersburg», grow as an artist and make crazier projects.
люблю эту блинчики с вареньем
Radical transformation and regeneration is the core of Emma Balder's artistic practice. By reconstructing deteriorated textile waste, in its smallest form, Balder's works unveil beauty in the discarded.

Color, form and line work together to shape a new reality for these neglected parts. This culmination of visual elements alludes to the process of transformation: linework and form revealing the product of time, change, and new growth, while the emphasis of color and texture delineates stories of the past. Here, Balder's material exists not as waste, but as cultural compost, reincorporated into the soil that feeds her work.

The process is a visceral one: first composing the fibers intuitively, then extracting and highlighting recognizable imagery from seemingly abstract forms. Carefully manipulating the fibers, often using a paintbrush, tweezers, and matte medium, Balder pushes and pulls the fibers along the substrate, creating an intimate collaboration with her material. Mark-making with graphite follows as a response to the organic contours of the fibers, and synthetic color is accented with acrylic and gouache. The resulting image reveals each fiber dancing along the surface, exhibiting a dynamic energy and aesthetic that is as unique as the materials' histories. By focusing on the miniscule and most often forgotten, Balder breathes new life into neglected material, reconstructing reality and referencing a universal experience of transformation.

Emma Balder is a visual artist with a BFA from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Her work has been featured in Art Maze Mag, Fresh Paint Magazine, Dialogist, 303 Magazine and has exhibited extensively in the US and abroad, in spaces such as Trestle Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center, and Aqua Art Fair. The artist was awarded a Staff Artist Fellowship at the Vermont Studio Center and named a finalist of the Peripheral Vision Foundation Fellowship. She has facilitated fiber painting workshops throughout Colorado, including at the MCA Denver, and has received support for her work from organizations such as the Dave Bown Projects and Meow Wolf. She is currently an artist in residence at BOX13 Artspace in Houston, Texas and has a solo show in the fall of 2019 at Heidi Vaughan Fine Art.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

Growth, change, and discovering truth in my life experiences all influence my practice. My work is about transformation. Through transforming the materials that I use, I am processing my own experiences of change, and the growth which comes along with that. This process can be gentle and subtle, and often takes time, patience, and reflection. That being said, the natural world also has a lasting influence on my practice. Nature provides me that space for reflection, as well as research. Being in nature can be very similar to being in the studio: they both hold sacred space. Nature has a way of opening up the mind, body and spirit in a way that being holed up in the studio cannot quite capture. That natural opening brings a little more space and reflection into the work.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

Sometimes the most challenging part can be simply getting started. Once I begin painting, however, I easily find myself in a flow state in which stopping doesn’t feel like an option.

Another challenging part can be initially learning how to get your name out there. It’s certainly difficult as an introvert, and can be incredibly exhausting. Over time, however, it does become easier, and I think you figure out how to balance your time networking and self-promoting, and time resetting alone and in the studio.

In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

Art is a product of creative expression, and can often be a response to contemporary culture. However, I think good art is always ten steps ahead of what is contemporary. It may be a reflection of what is happening in the present moment, but it still holds some glimpse into the future.

I also think that in the tech-driven direction our culture is moving, art in physical form is becoming more and more important. I don’t want to say that viewing art in person is becoming obsolete, but sometimes it does feel that way. Technology is beautiful in that it allows us to access virtually anything from anywhere in the world, and it can provide the simulation of an art experience to people who may not have the privilege of being in proximity to museums or galleries. But technology can never replace the real deal. That goes for anything, be it art, community, relationships, etc. Of course, technology can bring awareness to many situations and experiences, which is a beautiful thing, but as long as we are experiencing life through the filter of a screen, we are creating a barrier to reality. In terms of art, technology can never capture the power and emotion of witnessing something in real life that is made by human hands.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

Spending time between Denver and Houston, it’s very interesting to compare the scene in both areas. Houston has so many museums, galleries, collectors, art organizations, institutions, etc. It’s a huge city, so obviously there are a lot more opportunities regardless of your field. Denver and Houston have very different scenes in terms of landscape, values and climate. It’s really comparing apples to oranges: both places have different skin, texture, taste, seeds, growing conditions, etc.

More specifically, in both art scenes, it feels like there’s some fear around honest feedback. I think people generally want to be very supportive, which is wonderful. However, there’s a lot to be said for speaking from the heart. From what I’ve heard, this isn’t a problem limited to these two cities, but there is a lack of critical dialogue and feedback in many artist communities. I see social media as somewhat to blame for that. It certainly makes it easy for us to connect with other artists, but it also drives us away from communicating authentically. Being able to express what we truly think, as well as digest and respond to criticism, is very important. It’s too easy to tell someone that you like their work. It’s challenging, but invaluable, to tell someone if something isn’t working for them, and to push them to do better.

In Houston, I also think it may be a bit more challenging to break into the scene as a newcomer without having community and people to introduce you to others. Houston is heavy on networking, and if you know someone who knows someone, you’re golden. Whereas in Denver, it feels like you can be an outsider, not know anyone, and still feel accepted and welcomed in a way that’s not exclusive to who or what you know.

Name three artists you admire.

Wayne Thiebaud’s use of color in his paintings is outstanding. His works were a big part of my desire to become a painter. I’ve been really into Meg Lipke’s work. The three-dimensionality of her paintings is quite captivating. I also was recently introduced to Adam Fowler’s drawings. His works are very gestural, yet so planned, precise, and intimate.

What are your future plans?

I’m currently preparing for an upcoming solo show in October 2019 at Heidi Vaughan Fine Art in Houston. I am excited to be focusing on bigger, more substantial projects and spending time diving deeper into my work. I will be having more solo shows in the future, creating much larger works, and more rentable art installations. I will also be participating in some more fairs, including during the 2019 Miami Art Week.
Natalie Christensen is a photographer based in Santa Fe, New Mexico and has shown work in the U.S. and internationally including London, Dusseldorf, New York and Los Angeles. She was one of five invited photographers for the exhibition The National 2018: Best of Contemporary Photography at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and has recently been named one of “Ten Photographers to Watch” by the Los Angeles Center of Digital Art. Her photographs are in the permanent collections of the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and the University of Texas at Tyler. In addition to pursuing her interests in art and design, Natalie has worked as a psychotherapist for over 25 years and has been particularly influenced by the work of depth psychologist Carl Jung. This influence is evidenced in her photographs, as shadows and psychological metaphors are favored subjects. Natalie is represented by Turner Carroll Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Susan Spiritus Gallery in Newport Beach, California.
Tell us a little about your background and how that influences you.

I had a successful career of over 20 years as a psychotherapist before beginning my career as an artist. When I am making my photographs, I am looking for scenes that speak to me and visually represent an idea or a current or past struggle related to my life. Sometimes I do not fully understand why a particular scene draws me in, but it is tapping on my subconscious mind - possibly a sliver of a dream or long forgotten experience creeping back in. I spent much of my career delving into the internal experiences of my clients, and, at this stage of my life, the conversation is with myself via these ordinary objects and structures. My aim is to further the inner dialogue with myself and reveal something new.

What is the most challenging part of working with photography?

The technical aspects of photography have been challenging because I am self-taught as an artist and photographer. I have never taken a course in the technical or artistic aspects of photography, so the learning curve has been fairly steep.

Name artists you’d like to be compared to.

That is a really tough question! I can list the artists that influence me a great deal, and I am always humbled and thrilled if a comparison to them is made - those artists include Lewis Baltz, David Hockney, Richard Diebenkorn and Aaron Siskin.

Do you think of yourself as a conceptual artist?

I would say yes, because all of my work is about an idea first. I make photos of very ordinary objects and structures, and the photos generally retain their "thingness"; however, I am altering the subject matter conceptually by how I represent it. These "things" are open to interpretation from a psychological perspective for me and the viewer.

Tell us more about “New Mexico Deconstructed” series.

This was my first series of photographs and it was an early exploration into abstract images. When I started this body of work, I had recently moved to New Mexico and I was visually overwhelmed by it! New Mexico is so different from other places in the US. Looking back, I think the camera was a way to “control” and “understand” this place. I was highlighting what I see as the most essential elements of my new environment - light, color, and shadow.

What are your future plans as an artist?

To keep making work that matters to me, and to find opportunities to show the work in places that are contributing to the conversation in contemporary art in meaningful ways.
Freddy D’azure-Hernández
San Pedro Garza García, Mexico

Abstraction, in painting, can propose a similar exercise to this as well. Allowing the viewer to come up with new constructions to the meaning of these shown images.

To edit a story and to be able to tell the essence of that tale in a few words is as valuable as adding every detail to it. Selecting bits and pieces of a story can, perhaps, lead us to think about the value and properties of those chosen pieces.

By having a background in Visual Arts, Freddy D’azure-Hernández has learnt to explore different media and techniques going back and forth from video to painting it is clear that, for him, the construction of a video has become a way of creating a succession of paintings. Through this visual exploration he seeks to transfer pictorial issues, like the density of the paint, textures, patterns, lay outs.

Every color pattern, arranged in a specific manner, like a precise composition in a painting and on videos has become a powerful source of visual stimulation while these may appeal you over using it may lead to different results, which has made D’azure wonder does overstimulation can making feel love or kill you? Since then, his visual interest has revolved around the concept of love or death through art to understand and appreciate life as much as personally and everyone around you or what surrounds you.

Being motivated or provoked by a work of art is a rare but not rejected event, what he seeks is to cause an effect on his pieces in which the viewer is to reach the inner part of the brain and open the possibility of shaking some things in your body through the simple act of seeing.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

My last influence in my artistic practice has two aspects that go in hand with the expression or contribution that has always been my source of inspiration since my beginning as a visual artist and musician that is the love and death (two important elements in the life that I live with much detail) but now with a slope that at this time is very important to emphasize and express for all humanity, I mean the protection of our garden, our roof, shelter and all that living being that belongs to the planet earth, creating an artistic mix with the traditional roots of production of the arts in tandem with technology (new media) every time to another higher level that is why I do not stop keep studying and experimenting with everything that is at my reach that sincerely I do not limit myself to reach the objective.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

It is a very complex question but my answer is that from the beginning of art as a profession and lifestyle both for conviction or a need to survive to cover all our needs and stay tuned in life that have been many centuries since It became a vocation that
started all this epic journey creating a tangible alternate world where thanks to many characters that left us marked and inspired us in so many directions that we decide be part of this medium to give a meaning of the life.

**In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?**

It is somewhat complicated and hard to answer but I will be very direct that at this time the cultural shock has been created some divisions between the new generation and those who are part of the vieja escuela creating conflicts of studies, expression and the way to produce art making us struggle of the lack of sensitivity of everyone and most of them are the all the people that never been involved in this area and now making arts a spectacular show business who also unfortunately is overvalued creating economic instability in all our work.

**How would you describe the art scene in your area?**

In a few words it is interesting, exciting and full of challenges that everyone has a really amazing proposal to contribute and we do not know where to look that every day there is a new element to respect and be on the spot of the reflectors that in my opinion, not only in my hometown, in my country but in every corner are rising titans of art that has reached that moment of the stage that marked a before and after in the history of art that will be a great moment in this new era.

**Name three artists you admire.**

- **Karen Reyes** (Mty, México)
  karenreyes.net
- **Gerardo Monsivais** (Mty, México)
  gerardomonsivais.tumblr.com
- **Gerardo Yepiz “Acamonchi”** (TJ, México/ San Diego, California)
  acamonchi-art.com

**What are your future plans?**

Move out of my city where I have always resided to another country and keep going on my art work with more challenges evolving my artistic expression without losing my vision and stamp that identify me and also achieve a better stability in every corner of my life.
dazure33f.wixsite.com/dhmond/about
Peter Davis
Manchester, UK

I attended the Manchester School of Art from 1987-88 before going on to complete a BA (Hons) in Design for Communication Media. After spending twenty-five years as an advertising creative, I became a semi-professional artist in 2015, turning full-time in 2017. Since then I have had a solo show in 2018 at Warrington Museum & Art Gallery, exhibited twice in the 'Artists of the Year' show at Mall Galleries (2017 and 2019), and was invited to take part in last year’s ING Discerning Eye exhibition.

I am a social realist painter. My aim is to capture the spirit of the age and create contemporary portraiture that tells stories about my sitters.

I always try to create a visual dynamic in my compositions. Establishing a deliberate dichotomy in my work forces the viewer to focus on what that person is doing - and in doing so, it creates a sense of isolation and divorce from the real world and a psychological conflict in the painting between humanity and technology. I hope the more you look at my work, the more complexities unfold from what might at first seem to be a series of straightforward paintings.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

These days, seeing people glued to their personal devices is so commonplace that we don’t give it a second glance. I am a social realist painter and my work poses questions about our digital age and the status of the human being within contemporary society.

As the American writer, Henry Miller, puts it “What the painter sees he is duty-bound to share. Usually, he makes us see and feel what ordinarily we ignore or are immune to.”

‘Zeitgeist’ is my ongoing series of paintings that explores the subject of humanity and its relationship with personal technology. My aim is to capture the spirit of the age and create contemporary portraiture that tells stories about my sitters.

I am particularly fascinated by how the physical and digital versions of ourselves are changing - personal technology is fundamentally altering the way we interact with each other, and this change is what I want to chronicle through my practice.

I started this body of work when I became a professional artist in 2015. Prior to that I was a full-time advertising creative and the campaigns that I worked on had become increasingly centered on people using personal devices as their primary touch point - this has definitely influenced my body of work as an artist.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

I am a self-taught painter, which brings with it a big serving of self-doubt. Like lots of other artists I regularly suffer from imposter syndrome, but my time in the advertising industry has taught me that publicity is key and, whatever state your heads in, you’ve got to keep getting your name out there.

Making a decent living as a professional artist is extremely difficult and there are only one or two people that I know who are fortunate enough to be doing that. For me it’s really important that my motivations for painting aren’t driven by the pursuit of achieving revenue. I feel that as soon as you start trying to make art for money, you’re not making art any more.

In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

Oscar Wilde famously said, “Life imitates art far more than art imitates life”. As a social realist painter, I am a great believer that the role of an artist is to hold a mirror up to society. For me, being able to focus on the often-overlooked elements of contemporary society is something I really enjoy about my work - whether that’s capturing the solitary absorption of a technology addict or highlighting the paradox of the anti-social nature of social media.

I think our ever-more consuming attachment to person-
Al technology is having a direct impact on the notion of what art means in contemporary culture. We are all now more visually aware than we’ve ever been. Social platforms like Instagram and Snapchat are encouraging everyone to tell stories using compelling imagery, and as a result, our generation is creating incredibly aesthetic visual content everyday without really thinking about it.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

The Greater Manchester Arts Prize for contemporary visual art is now in its fourth year and it’s a fantastic platform for both emerging and established artists to get their name out there. I was lucky enough to be runner up in 2018 and I am thrilled to be shortlisted again this year.

Alistair Hudson (2015 Turner Prize judge) was appointed as the Director of Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth last year. He passionately believes in art being a tool for social change, and likes engaging with local communities - so I’m hopeful for what he is going to do to help practicing artists in our region.

I am a member of the Manchester Academy of Fine (MAFA), a group founded in 1859 and who’s past members include the artists LS Lowry and Ford Madox Brown. There are now an increasing number of contemporary artists joining the Manchester Academy, which is great news not only to keep the society fresh but also to help it regain its prominence in the city’s art scene.

Name three artists you admire.

I absolutely love the work of Barkley L Hendricks (1945 – 2017), the American social realist painter famous for his paintings of black men and women during the 1960s and 70s. I find his life-size portraits that he did in his limited palette series of friends, relatives and strangers, especially powerful. His subject matter and graphic compositions are right up my street.

Amy Sherald is another American artist that I’m a huge fan of, and her work has many parallels with Hendricks. Her incredible 2018 portrait of Michelle Obama has pushed her into the limelight. Her paintings are also very graphical and full of social and cultural zeitgeist narrative, which is why I’m so fascinated with them I think.

Last but not least is Andrew Tift, a UK-based contemporary figurative artist that creates highly detailed and intensely realistic portraits. Just like Hendricks and Sherald, Tift doesn’t draw or paint from life. He openly admits to using photography as his sketchbook; honesty that I hugely admire when painters using photo reference are, sadly, still sneered upon by too many people.

What are your future plans?

Digital technology is now established as the force that governs modern life and I’m looking forward to continuing to document our relationship with our personal devices, through my ‘Zeitgeist’ paintings. There’s such a rich vein of inspiration for this body of work that I don’t ever see myself turning my back on it.

It’ll be fascinating to see how the stories that I am painting now will be viewed in ten or twenty years time – and how personal technology has moved on. Will we still be staring at our devices like zombies, or will technology be embedded into us by then?
Born in São Paulo, Brazil, I've had a great interest in photography since a was a young. I've taken some courses of photography in the Brazilian institute SENAC and in the last year I've moved to The Netherlands, where I'm now currently residing.

I try to create a mystery atmosphere around "normal" scenes of the day to day life in a urban/big city, showcasing a story that can have many interpretations and meanings, there's no right story or interpretation, the spectator knows as much as the photographer: nothing.

In the big cities you don't know (and probably never will) the people you see in the streets, you can only catch a glimpse or have an idea of who they are by what they're doing at the moment, how they're dressed, the way they're walking etc. This is what I try to document, those small moments, that can tell something about the subject or the location they're in, but the story that the spectator creates is just as valid as mine.
Briefly describe the work you do.

I use glass, burnt wood, mild steel, paper and liquid – materials that are capable of dramatic transformation. The intention is to emphasize transience at the level of materials and objects as well as within the viewer’s direct experience. I repeat processes as well as objects to stress that no thing or experience can really be repeated, each is unique and utterly fleeting. Sometimes the same sculpture is repeated so that the viewer experiences it twice in differing contexts. The time lag between the two viewings places attention on unfolding experience rather than on the idea of an autonomous object.

The differing contexts change the perception of the work as well as the way in which it is experienced. One, for example, might be walked on and barely noticed, like a grille on a doorstep, while its twin is placed on the wall and looked at, reminding us of modernist abstraction, and the way any object can be taken seriously in a gallery. Much of my work draws attention to unfolding transient experience, as well as emphasizing changeability at the level of basic materials. Rusting steel continues to decay, glass reflects the changing light and complicates the visual field with its fluid mutability. Dyed water, poured into bottles, starts off the same dark red, but then fades unevenly over the weeks. A minimalist aesthetic helps to highlight subtle change and difference, while long lines help to exaggerate the changing perspectives of the viewer as they walk around the space.

How has your background influenced you?

I was a Buddhist nun for 11 years and most of the monastic training was about developing awareness of transience, transience of a thought, a smell, a mood, a sight. The ultimate aim of which was to bring about an understanding of non-self at a fundamental level, that is, the non-existence of anything permanent within experience. This is an understanding that things in the world, as well as selves, are ultimately concepts – tools for operating, not the reality of present-moment experience. The fixity that concepts imply, the concept of self or a thing, be it a table, a chair or a mountain, is not substantiated when ongo-
ing sensory and mental experience is examined closely. This philosophical training permeates all my work as an artist. I also worked as a landscape designer, where the notion of ongoing maintenance is completely taken for granted. Several of my works fully embrace the constantly changing nature of things to the extent that they need work and care to maintain them, for instance polishing shiny metal to retain a reflective surface when its natural inclination is to grow dull and rust. Natural processes such as rusting, reflecting, burning, and chemical changes in liquid over time; these are integral to my work.

My first BA degree in painting continues to show even though my MFA (completed in 2014) was primarily about materials and therefore three-dimensional. I continue to emphasize surface texture, and surface reflection, without much attention to weight or volume. My primary interest is in the way the visual field keeps shifting and dancing.

Do you think of yourself as a conceptual artist?

In a strange way my work uses concepts in an attempt to challenge the belief in the reality of concepts, or the permanence and fixity that concepts imply. For example, the concept of an artwork that is on the wall of a gallery space is undermined by placing the same thing on the floor in a door threshold so that the concept changes and it becomes a foot grille. The concept, or label, is completely dependent on the context. I’m interested in highlighting the fact that concepts are just tools, necessary tools to order the flux of experience, but tools nonetheless.

I try to avoid representation – the material is the material and it is not there to represent anything else. In this sense, my work is not heavily conceptual. Of course different labels and associations will arise in the mind of the viewer, depending on their own experiences, but as far as possible I try to let the material do the talking, presenting it in a way that highlights its transient nature. This transience is the concept. Time is a concept, and transience is a concept too: they are inextricably linked.

How has your work changed in the past years?

I’ve moved away from making a single object. Instead I’ve been using the wall and the floor for one work, as well as two rooms to display one work. This allows the work to be experienced over time, it cannot all be seen or touched at once, it is something that unfolds; at one moment there are colours and shapes through the eyes, and at another moment, there are pressures in the feet; these separate sensory experiences are then given a label, a label that implies one fixed thing, as well as a solid reliable, objective world.

In the work that is situated in two rooms, the perception changes as the context changes. Where the room is a gallery, close attention is given and the glass work is highlighted; in the room that is a corridor, the glass work looks similar to all the glass doors in that corridor and is barely registered. The same thing is never the same.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

My area is London and Bath, I go between the two. Bath Spa University is incredibly dynamic and forward-looking, offering residencies and awards and generally supporting its alumni very well. London is of course London, exciting, stimulating, with an endless supply of contemporary art to see.

In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

The term is used to cover such a broad spectrum that anything might be called Art. For me, Marina Abramović uses it to increase attentiveness and Roni Horn uses it to question fixed identities and to underline transience and the ephemeral; I find both very inspiring.

What exhibitions have you had since your MA and what are your future plans?

Since I graduated with distinction in 2014, I’ve been working full-time as an artist, exhibiting widely across the UK with commissions in Cornwall and at Kew Gardens and exhibitions in London at Beaux Art Gallery, the Oxo Tower Gallery and the Nunnery Gallery, as well as galleries and a museum in the cities of Bath, Bristol and Oxford. I am currently working on a commission to commemorate the storm of 2014 in Porthleven as well as making paper and graphite works that break down the separation of drawing and sculpture.
The research is based on the relation that the human being has with the effects and the interferences of himself in the world. By incorporating often non-artistic materials into my works, the central idea is to create a reflection between body, form and world. The body is represented by the behavior of the human being, the form is composed by the use of textile elements and the world is the interpretation that relates gestalt psychology and philosophy of art. In the works, optical phenomena are developed, integrating the viewer by means of kinetic visual processes in order that the works extend in the space of the observer. In addition, also works in art is a style known as material painting in order to strengthen the relationship that art has with life.

My work shows technical and aesthetic, mixing materials of different characteristics and sensitivity in order to build in the viewer a subjective approach to reality. I seek singularities in the field of philosophy, especially in Existentialism, a doctrine that focuses on the analysis of existence and the way humans exist in the world. I look at human behavior the psychological configuration in which we relate to the objects of mass production in order to find a way to make sense of our lives.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

There is an invisible world, an invisibility that makes us feel, think and act. I have always reflected on the connection that we have with the objects that are created by the human being to facilitate and make practical our conviviality with the world. Between man and object there is something that we do not see, something that is rich in personal affection, and which dialogues in a common way among all of us, which is the feeling. If we stop to think about it, we have the artist who holds a brush, between the artist and the canvas there is something that is immaterial, nobody sees, but it's there, it exists, which is by many thinkers described as abstract, but which will help the artist to materialize his idea that will be called concrete. I believe that in this process the feeling is the concrete element, because both the artist and the canvas are abstract possibilities. Feeling moves the world, we are taken by it to all moments of our life, how could it be abstract being that it is that makes us exist? I believe nothing exists until we are driven by feeling. The materialization of the objects of the world is abstract, for the objects are lacking in feeling, thinking or acting. Then they will only exist if the human being exists to give emotion, reason and utility that object.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

I think building a name is one of the biggest challenges. The beginning for anything in life is difficult as it is very uncertain. In addition, there are other challenges such as acceptance of work, personal exposure and the argumentation that will sustain artistic research and give meaning to the work. But perfecting creativity becomes the reward.

In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

For me contemporary culture is based on mass culture, technological advancements, the introduction of artificial intelligence in people's lives, the exploration of Chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and pharmaceutical research. With the evolution of the internet things seem to happen very fast, even the days seem to be shorter. I believe that Art is the perception necessary to connect all this movement.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

My work is all based on the elements that can be found in the textile market. So much so that I develop a parallel career as a designer in the creation of fabrics for haute couture. Textile art has become more present, although it still suffers much prejudice, because it is described as a fragile and cheap art. Biennials of textile art around the world have encouraged many artists and greatly boosted this type of market. In the future, I believe that this artistic niche will be more receptive, because not the materials that should be taken into account, but rather the idea, the concept of the work of art being expressed.

Name three artists you admire.

My main influences are Eva Hesse, she presents the work of art as an object that extends into the space of the observer; Günther Uecker, studied the optical phenomena that integrated the viewer and Antoni Tàpies, worked in a style that became known as painting material. I also like the ideas of Robert Rauschenberg when he says that painting is about art and life, and that neither can be created. My idea for art is to approach a subjective style, which translates the feeling I have experienced in the world. I believe that feeling is the recognition of our existence.

What are your future plans?

When I think of the direction of my career, I think about what is happening to the world, and how we react to it is interfering in our future. On collective individualism and what we will leave as an inheritance for the next generations. As an artistic goal, I want to improve my work more and more, always reinforcing my researches with philosophical arguments that support in the psychological field. I have the observer as an important element for my creations, I want to have the opportunity to work more with installations that mix technology with textile art and possibly collaborate with other artists on exciting projects.
Larry Goode
Austin, TX, USA

In my work I draw a line between youthful experiences of places half-remembered — and now disappeared due to the natural deconstruction of things — and our use of idols through which we give our memories weight and meaning. The symbols I use in my work: water towers, billboards, lamp posts, abandoned drive-in movie screens, are craven idols that draw the viewer into my past through which they become aware of their own idols of memory. There is a texture I use that forces a vision of riding on horseback or wearing worn tennis shoes with no socks, guardedly picking a way around the hills and crevasses of the disrupted landscape of an abandon drive-in or cattle ranch. Caution is imperative as there are dangers just below the surface and hidden in the grass. The texture in the work is constructed using incongruous materials such as discarded paper, charcoal, dirt, metal and oil sticks melted and burned into one — like a bonfire smelling of gasoline and chemicals, churning dark smoke seen at a great distance. I create these pieces over a long period of time. Living with them, warily watching them, until I see, usually in a flash, what should be added or taken away. After the required adjustment, the process begins again until finally there is nothing left to change and the piece is finished and delivered to an audience of believers.

Larry Goode is a mixed-media artist known for thoughtful collages and paintings that explore humor, whimsy, and melancholy. Using found objects, antique paper, and paint, Goode creates scenes that clamor for touch, examination, and thought. “I try to instill in my work an ingenuous sense of wonder and curiosity, yet retain a sense of reflection and space. If I can achieve this, then I consider my work a success,” Goode received his BFA from The University of Texas at Austin, and his MFA from Texas State University. He currently lives and works in Austin, Texas.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

The natural world, affected by the human touch, influences and drives much of my work. A flat slab of concrete stained by time and reclaimed by nature, an abandoned swimming pool in an overgrown field, a rusty water tower with its functionality in doubt, are all inspiration. These are objects deconstructed by time that symbolize both the physical realm and my humany memory. Many of these memories come from my youth on a cattle ranch where the fields were populated by abandoned structures and roaming animals. I thought that it was curious that cattle were oblivious to the random, rusting, modern artifacts. They just stepped around them to nibble on chunks of grass. Nature continues even if the objects humans create do not, pointing out the temporal extremeness of life. When I come across an object that interests me, on the ground or in a second-hand shop, I wonder if it had held importance beyond the utilitarian for someone, and why it was thrown away, or in the case of large objects, why they were abandoned, stepped around and forgotten. I save these abandoned artifacts, either physically (if I can get them into my truck) or as images in my imagination, and give them a new purpose. My painting, Ascension Day, uses decorative metal flowers found at a yard sale. These rusted flowers, once superfluous objects of decoration, became a central part of the painting representing rebirth and renewal—elevated by assigning them a meaning beyond their original purpose. In my piece, Paradise, a rusted water tower represents the actual tower from my memory, and acts as a goal for the viewer (or myself as a boy) to reach for. As the only object in the picture it represents the only goal possible.

Continuing with the theme of nature and history, I am influenced by texture and objects that deconstruct over time, such as old peeling billboards that expose layers of ruined typography and decaying images. While these structures were originally created to advertise and inform, relentless deconstruction has created new compositions made with the random, but inevitable, forces of time and chance—altering the original images into something unexpected and inevitably beautiful. I use deconstruction as a tool in my work, adding and subtracting parts, using fire to combine and build, and scraping to reduce decaying layers until something beautiful emerges. Sometimes my paintings take months or more to complete while time shows me how to deconstruct the work.

Daily life influences me; when walking my dog, going to the store or scanning for unexploded ordnance, I study the ground searching for patterns, textures and artifacts to use in my work. Concrete becomes the sea. Grass becomes a forest. Torn paper becomes animals. They wait to be saved. I collect them up. It could be a bone, or a feather, or just a photo I take of an interesting crack in the concrete. If you are open, influence is everywhere.

I love storm clouds and turbulent weather. Unlike blue skies, that have always felt static, I love the movement, energy and potential danger in storms. I’ve seen large storms, from far away, coming straight at me. The wind turns cool and strong, and the sky darkens. Clouds throw off rain, snow, and hail that I shield my eyes from, but still want to watch through spread fingers. I “touch” these dangerous storm byproducts; weather textures I yearn to capture and communicate to the viewer. Like a blind person running their hands over a face, I want my work to be communed with by the viewers’ desire to touch and understand; to want to grab a piece of my clouds and take them away.

Film and photography have strongly influenced the way I see and compose my work. I love films that have a slow pace, muted colors, and lots of space—both visually and story-wise. The films “Ida” and “Cold War”, directed by Pawlikowski, struck me by the sparse framing. Each scene was like a carefully composed photograph with big sky and the actors relegated to the bottom third of the screen.
They convey a feeling of stillness and thoughtfulness. I love that they were shot in black and white and convey the qualities of early 20th century German modernism: themes I see and express in my work.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

I find that keeping up creative momentum, even when I’m feeling completely uninspired, is a real challenge. There are days I don’t feel like painting and must force myself to go into the studio and make something—and usually it’s these times that I come up with something unexpected and interesting. I might sit and stare at a blank canvas, or draw in my sketchbook, or just think and meditate. But when an idea does appear I like to be in a position to put it down on canvas or paper immediately. Another challenge is that I tend to get bored easily and will jump from technique to technique. This can be ok, and I find it interesting to experiment with different media, but it can be a drawback when trying to create a cohesive body of work over a long period of time. Jumping styles can break my chain of thought, making it hard to reclaim the meditative state that my best work comes from. It’s a bit like the “monkey mind” that Zen Buddhism speaks of, when one’s mind jumps from one thought to another, unable to find a quiet space to rest. If I maintain a focused stylistic narrative then I can push my pieces and see where they lead. Breaking the style and medium breaks the chain of marks making it hard to get back into the flow of the piece. In order to avoid this I’ll work in one style for a period of time, usually months, then let myself switch styles should I feel the need. For example in my Idolatry series, my current focus, I work towards sculptural painting using oil sticks, paper and lots of texture melted together with fire. In my “Theory of Flight” series that I worked on about 15 years ago, I painted on monotypes, gaining a much more flat feel. I also turn to altered books and 3-D sculpture on occasion. Over the last few years I find that I keep coming back to using texture and oil and wax, which has become my main method of expression, however I see parallels running through all my work using paper, texture, and painting as sculpture.

Taking time to consider the work and self-editing is important. As with many artists I have trouble determining when a picture is finished. There is always the danger of overworking it. I have found that if I hang the work on my wall and live with it a while- days, weeks, or months- and don’t feel the need to change anything, only then do I consider the work finished.

Name three artists you admire.

It’s tough just naming three, but Anselm Kiefer, a German painter, has been very influential on my work. I love his use of large canvases, muted colors, heavy texture and odd objects to create very penetrating, and sometimes disturbing moods. His work can be both aggressive and sympathetic at once. His use of earth and sky, foreground and background, resonates with me. His output of paintings and installations is incredible and much of my interest in texture and found object art comes from his influence. Otto Dix is another artist I admire. I love early German expressionist art and in Dix’s captured the New Objectivity art movement in early twentieth century. His drawings and paintings of World War I scenes are powerful and I like the way he constructs his compositions and renders his figures. His painting, “War”, is particularly powerful. His works have a commentary and pointed point to them. Finally, I find Antony Gormley’s sculptures strongly compelling. The way his pieces interact with the environment is wonderful, working together they form a singular piece, such as “Sight”, in Greece. His work has a presence that goes beyond the tangible and into the spiritual. A “Case for an Angel” and “Field” are probably my favorite pieces.
In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

I think art in contemporary culture is a tricky thing to define. So many ideas, imagery, films, and intellectual clutter are flying around that it is hard to know where art ends and entertainment begins. In this hyper-digital world everyone can be an artist (or think they can). It's easy now to take a picture, paint a digital painting, or make a film quickly. But I wonder now about giving breathing space to consider (dare I say study) a work of art, or time to make art without the pressure to quickly put it out to the world on social media. How long should someone spend looking at a painting? How long should an artist spend working on a painting? Is fifteen seconds long enough to study a painting before moving on? Recently I was at the Salvador Dali museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, and I noticed that more people were interacting with the art through their phones than by actually looking at the art itself. Within fifteen seconds (I counted) of looking at “Bouquet”, one woman took a photo of the painting, texted it to someone, and moved on to the next painting, seemingly reducing the experience, and the art, to the level of a vacation photo. Would she have experienced the painting differently if she had left her phone at home? I am happy with museums that allow photography and photographing work that is interesting, but I would hope as a fascimile to study later, and not a diversion from the actual piece. Another man sat on a bench in front of the painting, “Morphological Echo”, acting vaguely bored, not viewing the art but punching buttons on his phone and taking photos. Does the act of texting a photo now define the art experience in contemporary culture as much as just looking at the art itself? Is there a tendency to keep an intellectual scorecard by the number of texts and posts we can make of our cultural experiences? Perhaps contemporary art has been reduced to the visual equivalent of a sound-bite. I wonder.

Artists spend a lot of time crafting their work. A ceramicist friend of mine said it takes him around 4 hours plus 40 years to make a vase. In this immediate and rushed fifteen-second digital world do years of experience make any difference? Perhaps it is my yearning to give my efforts as an artist meaning, but I’m hopeful that people can become aware that they short-change themselves when they spend just a few seconds looking at a work of art—and objects that are crafted by hand, and not exclusively viewed through a digital screen, have a lasting value. Recently I sold a painting to a woman who loved it partly because it’s meaning about redemption and rebirth spoke to her. My favorite question at shows and art fairs is “tell me about this painting”. It shows that the viewer is willing to spend the time to understand the meaning of a painting that interests them.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

I moved to Austin in the 1980’s and have noticed a fundamental shift in the creative scene since then. I knew many people who created art and music, but very few had any illusions about making much money (even if they would like to). Art, music and movies were made for the joy of it and there was a comradery in creating art that was without a monetary motive. In Austin there were few galleries and fewer opportunities to sell art. This continued through the 1990’s but then the hi-tech industry exploded and the cost of living shot up. Understandably I noticed a shift away from art for art sake to art for money’s sake—where the number of sales became a yardstick for artistic success. Creativity became more monetized. Recently however, I have noticed a purer creative shift. As an educator, I see an increasing number of students (and also professionals) making sculpture, film, music and digital art because they find an intrinsic value in art that doesn’t necessarily have an obvious monetary component. There is recognition that art is good for the soul beyond material gain. They are going deeper, exploring their art and looking for ways to combine creativity with making a living. Because of this I think the scene is becoming more conceptual and interesting, if a bit fragmented and lacking an identifiable center. But I think this decentralization is inevitable the larger Austin grows.

What are your future plans?

I will keep painting as much as possible and see what unexpected avenues comes from it. This July I will be attending a residency at Chateau Orquevaux in France that I am very excited about. Other than that, I hope to get into more shows and connect with galleries and artists in bigger cities.
Cory Graham
Stanton, KY, USA

Born and raised in the foothills of Appalachia, I have experienced poverty unlike any in the United States. Ours is a third-world nation hidden in the shadows of the wealthiest nation on earth, and forgotten. Where moonshiners and marijuana fields grew for generations past, have sprouted pharmacies and pain clinics to distribute poison more effectively to our population. Drunk with power, tax breaks and lobbyists, pharmaceutical companies peddled their wares to the people of the hills like candy. Like sugary, summer sweets on a hot July day.

With this series, I hope to elicit the reaction of exactly that. A craving in the viewer, a desire to taste something so sweet while ignoring the warnings shoved under the rug. Something that in its simplest form appeals to us all with that basic evocation of happiness accompanying something as simple as a popsicle. Perhaps unaware that the center of that guilty craving is toxic.

**OVERDOSE**

**Symptoms and Symptoms**

Serious overdose with FEROCET (Oxycodone and Acetaminophen Tablets, USP) is characterized by signs and symptoms of oxycodone and acetaminophen overdose. Acetaminophen overdose can be manifested by respiratory depression (a decrease in respiratory rate and tidal volume), Cheyne-Stokes respiration, cyanosis, extreme tachypnea progressing to apnea or coma, skeletal muscle flaccidity, cold and clammy skin, papillary constriction (pupils may be dilated or the setting of hypotonia, and sometimes bradycardia and hypotension. In severe overdoses, apnea, circulatory collapse, cardiac arrest and death may occur.

In acute acetaminophen overdose, dose-dependent, potentially lethal hepatic necrosis is the most serious adverse effect. Renal tubular necrosis, hypoglycemic coma and thrombocytopenia may also occur.

In adults, hepatic toxicity has rarely been reported with acute overdoses of less than 12 grams and fatalities with less than 15 grams. Plasma acetaminophen levels ≤ 30 mg/L at 4 hours post ingestion should not cause the patient harm. Plasma acetaminophen levels > 30 mg/L at 4 hours post ingestion should be anticipated if plasma levels at 6 hours are ≥ 100 mg/L or ≥ 50 mg/L at 12 hours after ingestion.

Importantly, young children seem to be more resistant than adults to the hepatic toxic effect of an acetaminophen overdose. Despite this, the measures outlined below should be initiated in any adult or child suspected of having ingested an acetaminophen overdose.

Early symptoms following a potentially hepatotoxic overdose may include nausea, vomiting, diahyrexis and general malaise. Clinical and laboratory evidence of hepatic toxicity may not be apparent until 48 to 72 hours post ingestion.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

Growing up, I idolized Warhol, Basquiat, Herr- ing and became infatuated with graffiti artists like Blade and Cliff 159. When Damien Hirst and Matthew Barney appeared on my radar, it was like a seismic shift in how I perceived the world and even the most inane objects in it.

Above all, my culture and the place where I live (Eastern Kentucky) have the most influence on everything I do. It's a difficult place to live, but it builds a hell of a lot of character.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

Exposure. It's the double-edged sword of the 21st Century. There's an ocean of brilliant, creative people making beautiful works every day, and technology brings every bit of it right to your lap. But damn is it worth it. I'd rather toil in obscurity than be denied the things I've seen.

In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?

Art is everything. We're inundated with it every minute of the day, even when we aren't thinking specifically about it. Packaging, chyrons, logos, street signs, architecture. Everything in our society is so heavily marketed these days, and the creators behind those campaigns are just as much artists as folks like Banksy who make a career out of satirizing it.

Tell us more about the “Vendition” series.

I live in the Appalachian region of the South- eastern United States. Essentially since the birth of the US, we've been the target of exploitation from robber-barons in this endless multigenerational cycle. Whether it's timber extracted from our forests at pennies on the dollar, coal companies turning machine guns and bears loose on striking workers, chemical companies poisoning our water without consequence, or a dozen other attacks on our land and our people.

This generation's particular hell has been phar- maceutical companies and their willingness to turn an entire population into what amounts to a skeletal army of walking corpses in order to increase their own profit margins. In 10 months, McKesson Corp pumped three million pills into Kermit, West Virginia. Kermit is a town with a population of 400. 400 people, 10,000 pills a day. McKesson is trading at $125/share on the NYSE right now, while a kid in that same town can get picked up on a possession charge and thrown under the jail.
The bastards came into our towns, under the guise of "helping the chronically ill," and left us up like the dealers they are. Meanwhile lives are ruined, people are dying, and other than campaign lip service, not a damn soul in Washington actually wants to do a thing about it. But why would they? These same legalized cartels pour millions into their campaigns, and the rest of us get left to manage a war zone however we can.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

Absolutely electric. It's the best kept secret in the United States right now. Appalachia is the cultural hub of the universe, in my opinion. Every conceptual style of visual art, filmmaking, music... it's everywhere. There's a new festival popping up every week. My neighbor, Chelsea Nolan, is kicking in doors in the music scene, and her brother Josh Nolan has been a critical darling for years. He just released a new record, and it's brilliant. Everyone owns a guitar or a camera, and from Erica Chambers to Jeremy Townsend, my social media feed is constantly filled with gorgeous work from people I see at the grocery store.

Between the visual beauty of this place, the incredible talent, and the drive instilled in all of us to break our backs for our craft, there's not a place like it on the planet.

Name three artists you admire.

Right now there's just such a glut of inspiration out there, with people like Conor Harrington, Andrew Brischler and Jean-Baptiste Bernadet creating masterpieces that my son will never be able to afford.

What are your future plans?

To keep shaking my fist at injustice until I'm too old to raise it, and to hopefully by then have someone around to raise it back up for me.
Stephanie McGowan
Edinburgh, UK

McGowan makes large scale installations that play upon the dualities of painting and sculpture. Preoccupied with liminal space the work reflects on the abysses which punctuate everyday contemporary life. There is a threshold between what was and the next, a place of transition, waiting, and uncertainty.

Drawn to the intersection between the natural world and the manmade, her installations frequently collide these two components in irregular formations, whilst questioning what would become of the world if unoccupied by humanity. Her most recent work takes the form of wooden structures which act as architectural supports for linen dipped in natural dyes. These fabrics, manifold in their layered dipping, embody skin like surfaces and impressions of the natural environment that surrounds us. Where possible McGowan works with materials that are native to the location of her installations.

The work acts as an exploration of nature's language, somewhat foreign to us, as if a mute dialogue or acoustic camouflage, denoting the idea of further life beneath the surface. Though her works are enamoured by transition, many also echo society's feeling of anxiety. As we continuously edit ourselves in the search for perfection we are left in a state of unease. Her works capture a sense of this by playfully positioning the viewer in deceitfully precarious landscapes.

The gap in between the outer and the inner, the what was and what's next implies acts as a form of opening for narration. This distance is a thoughtful place where we can imagine and discover between fact and fiction new dialects and sceneries.

McGowan was born in 1992, County Antrim, Northern Ireland. She obtained a first in a BA (Hons) in Fine Art at the Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland. Selected for her first solo show, 'Fading Memories', at The Hyde Bridge Gallery, Sligo in 2017 and was shortlisted for The RDS Visual Arts Awards 2017 as a result of her degree show. McGowan completed her MA in Contemporary Art Practice at The University of Edinburgh in 2018. She now lives and works in Edinburgh.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

My work is in tune with its physical surroundings, both as a response to and something which stimulates its environment and as such my practice is driven by material enquiry. Obsessed by the relationship materials form in shared spaces and how colour and form change our perception of an object, I am drawn to exploring contradictory material pairings in natural and manmade environments that reflect upon our contemporary society. I am compelled to investigate their limitations and am intrigued by the wonder of possible incongruous material formations.

My aim is to create a space that has a timeless aesthetic, an atmosphere that excludes us from everyday life, a sort of liminal gap, open for interpretation and personal examination of the issues and controversy that face us in the contemporary climate. The materials used to possess a mysterious quality, creating an illusion so that it is not clear what is misplaced, discoloured or out of sync. Materials continue to influence a visual abstraction of everyday life through my visual narrative of installation, sculpture and painting.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

The most challenging part of being an artist for me is financial constraints. To work as an artist today is unbelievably hard as there's so much competition in the visual art world. As there are so many talented artists, most of us still have to hold down a job to fund our creative endeavours. I can always iron out the creases in my studio practice however the difficulty is finding the time to slot this in around a day job. I think it's important to be aware of what you consider success to be, this can be a challenge in itself, money isn't everything, although it can be a tricky obstacle. I measure success as a healthy day in the studio working towards a deadline for a project.

In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?

I think art in contemporary culture is diluted throughout society, it's everywhere; I'm just not sure how aware we are of it on a daily basis. It's in alleyways to corner shops and it's the beautifully erected architecture in the city to the restored bricks of original walls. We are continuously overwhelmed by the quantity of media and ever-evolving technology, and there is, therefore, a constant flow of information stemming from chat rooms, stores, galleries and social media online. How we view art has drastically changed, we can view it all day, every day. As we are increasingly saturated by images, the competitive nature surrounding what is memorable and what is not becoming more apparent, though individuals are drawn to different things, clear trends exist.

I believe this means that art is for everyone in contemporary culture, realising this, my work aims to create physical immersive and abstract environments that stop a viewer in their tracks through visual, smell, sound and touch paused in a moment of reflection of contemporary society.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

I live in County Sligo, Ireland but also recently completed a Masters in Contemporary Art Practice at the University of Edinburgh, so I'm based between the two. Sligo's art scene has grown exponentially over the years I have lived here with the Cairede Sligo Arts Festival annually celebrating the arts of many forms, all set to return from July 6th to 13th 2019. Most importantly there are many opportunities for both emerging and established artists. There are various art venues including The Model, The Hamilton Gallery and The Hyde Bridge Gallery. Edinburgh offers a larger scene, hustling and bustling with national and international talent, many artist-led initiatives and plenty of opportunities to show work.

Name three artists you admire.

Jessica Stockholder, Phyllida Barlow and Richard Tuttle.

What are your future plans?

My future plans involve a busy studio practice, working and showing nationally and internationally. A practice with no constraints or size limits, I'm not sure why, but I've always felt the urge to create big things while in the throw of making, but easily pull back due to practical points. I hope to show regularly and create a sustainable practice around my materials. As well as organising my studio life, I'd also like to keep my artistic inspirations fresh and sincere so in the future I certainly plan to travel more and continue my quest for personal fuel. I plan to make work that I enjoy making, be open to new possibilities and to new collaborations.
In my work, I have long been reflecting the relationship between man and his environment - and especially fauna and flora - the causes and consequences of his behaviour. Nature can be without us, but we can not be without Nature. My projects are touching ecological and environmental problems. I'm interested in issues like cutting trees, missing forests, losing homes of animals, domesticating wild animals, hunting animals.

I'm working in various branches of art - through graphics, video or installation, but my existential media is painting. I work mostly on wood - I cut it, carve into it, engrave it, burn it, paint on it. My work is dominated by dark colours and atmosphere of the night. I find inspiration in the world of animals such as wolves, bears, foxes and ravens. I work with my personal mythology - symbols of life, transformation, death. I like to work with humour or irony too.
Tell us a little about your background and how that influences you.

Within the core of my paintings is the notion of a subject that lives in a sophisticated environment such as a city while at the same time there, too exists a strong feeling of unrest resulting from the devastation of flora and fauna. Nature can be without us, but we can not be without Nature. My works always comprise some beings, creatures, animals or their shadows. These subjects may be more or less specified, sometimes only suspected. I’m basically a figural painter. Most of the topics of my work come from the night. World of phantoms and myths is more real than reality. Distortion, an element of the grotesque and the ironic, forms the basis of my world view.

I feel inspiration from something that was here before us and will remain long after we are gone – it is something mythological. I love myths, legends, fairy tales, and watch how they evolve from the time I was little. Someone once said that myths could only be narrated by those who have a myth of their own. I hope that within me, I have something like that as well.

What is the most challenging part of working interdisciplinary?

I’ve always liked to experiment with different materials and their contrasts by joining and blending a variety of elements. I work mainly with wood – I paint, engrave, carve, and even experiment with “fire painting”.

I like searching for new ways and techniques, crossing borders of traditional medium.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

I graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava (Slovakia), but I also studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (Austria).

I move on both so that I can compare both of these scenes. I feel that Vienna is much more open - dynamic, and there are many possibilities. There are still new project spaces and galleries. Different art festivals and art fairs are held throughout the year. Many of my colleagues (artists) are from different countries, so it’s exciting for me to watch their work with other positions and backgrounds. It inspires me.

Bratislava maybe does not have so many possibilities because it also depends on the support from public financers - city,
state – recently was founded the “Slovak Arts Council”, which has opened up new possibilities. So besides traditional institutions - like for eg. “City Gallery of Bratislava” - there are several interesting places such as “Cvernevka” - abandoned school, full of art studios, events, or “HotDock project space”, managed by artists. Certainly worth a visit!

Tell us more about “What comes around” installation.

The exhibition is touching ecological and environmental problems. The project follows my last cycles – but unlike the cycle “Animal vs. City”, in “Anima/Animals” I put my animals to be free in their natural habitat.

I paint animals that are considered to be “villains” – like wolves, bears, foxes, falcon, lynx, hawk ... They are precisely “those” about whom we listen in the daily news, as they are shot, killed or even poisoned. The installation of paintings hanging from the ceiling reminds the forest. Visitor can walk through and also can get lost.

The backside of works is coated with wood stain but also flame. The cycle is graduating into the red colour, that symbolises current situation in Nature. My very personal inspiration was the actual situation in my country - Slovakia, where the forests are disappearing, because they are cut down for business reasons. Animals on my pictures are not painted realistically, but more like ghosts hidden among the trees. This cycle is called “Anima/Animals” and refers to Aristoteles, who said – everything has a soul - even plants, animals, only a human is above them because he can think.

What are your future plans as an artist?

Now my two exhibitions have ended. One was in “Kunstraum Villach” (Austria) and the other one in the young and new Contemporary Arts Space “Pineapple Black” in Middlesbrough (UK). Nowadays I am preparing a big exhibition in Opava (CZ) for November. Exhibition space is amazing, one part of it is an abandoned church with a great historic atmosphere. I look forward to preparing a special installation there. After every big exhibition, I feel empty and need to recharge. I have to find new inspiration and think. I often do diaries, where I draw and write my thoughts. Then I return to these sketches and develop them into new ideas. When the muse has gone, you have to call her back by your work.

Name artists you admire.

There are a lot of... and it is changing according to my age. I like works of artists such as Adriana Šimotová, Peter Doig, Josef Bolf, street artist Klaus Dauven, then Baselitz, Czech decadence (mostly František Klobuha), then all older Japanese masters like Hiroshige, from nowadays Yoshimoto Nara, etc. But I also get inspiration from movies, for example, German expressionism like Cabinet of Doctor Caligari, Nosferatu, Movies of David Lynch including Twin Peaks. From literature, for example – Vian, Baudelaire, Kafka, Bukowski, Vonnegut and old Japanese poet Saigō.
Timo Ryhänen
Helsinki, Finland

My work is about creating a parallel world that deals with ecological issues, class struggles and the effects of technology. Mythologies, folklore tales and trash aesthetics are taking a more present day form with the help of digital technology. Figures in my paintings are depicting otherworldly feeling beings with futuristic appearances. The purpose of my work is to show the development of an imaginary world in the form of paintings.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

I am inspired by travels and holidays. That said I am interested in the positioning of a figure in different historical depictions and what type of humanity is being represented in terms of constructing a long-lasting representation of western culture. I think about the feeling aspect of the figure and how well it communicates a broader sense of time when the artwork was created. I try to think about the causality of religion and folktales, the reasons for industrialization and it’s effects on modernism. I concentrate on the facial expression and how the figure look alive like it could contain a life force or power instead of angst or fade away. By that type of demonstration, I am trying to act towards the idea that even the smallest piece of sand can sometimes contain will and interesting personal qualities.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

For me, it is a question of everyday life. The hardest part is keeping that inspirational feeling with the process. The challenge of contemporary culture is to keep searching for new inspiring things instead of the production of unique handicrafts in a modernistic sense. I try to avoid too much copying and variation so that my process would feel interesting to me even if the outcome would look similar to another person. In terms of selling art, I find it difficult for artists to place themselves in more market-driven cities. These days the rents are often so expensive that artists have to do a part-time job or live that type of life that has been leading them into a troubled life before. I hope that the state’s beneficiary systems or independent institutions would support professionals if they are going to plan a network for selling their work outside the borders of their home town or country.

In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

Art means a possibility to be extended into the mainstream culture as it has already been like. Art has a more abstracted structure that can be used as inspiration in other fields of making. I like to think about the future and what solutions digital technology might offer for the arts. Art means a more careful and humanistic approach for our western culture. In contrast to other forms of entertainment, art can offer a more personal experience that touches humanity and thoughts in a long-lasting way. Art and literature are important because the internet offers a way for finding a very specific painting or book that someone may like. Netflix is a good example that functions for younger individuals, but of course, later in life, we are going to need more specific things for making us happy in order of satisfying our need for progress.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

Finland and especially its capital Helsinki has developed a solid base for becoming an important but compact cultural influencer. Helsinki has now four modern art museums that have started to display great art during the last few years. All the museums are within a few hundred meters from each other. Helsinki has some galleries that sell art and more artist-run spaces or galleries that show a variety of art made by professional artists. Artists live mostly with a mixture of grants, work or social benefits. Quality of paintings is a bit polarized but video art and new media are becoming more well known. The scene itself is small and we have only a handful of internationally successful artists.

Name three artists you admire.

I like Francis Bacon, Steven Campbell and Joseph Beuys. Francis Bacon had the right amount of subjects in his work in order to make the figure look like an idea that could be generated in these days. That creates meaning for other people like myself to continue within the painting tradition. Steven Campbell was one of the Scottish painters and he had a very wide imagination. He is one of the few people in this world who have been able to construct a meaningful painterly world that mixes literary ideas with the old fashioned but clumsy painting technique. Joseph Beuys is an important influence in Finland because of the natural aspect of his ideas. Finland is mostly woods and half empty roads, which means that artists use it as a direct experience for generating subjects into their artistic practice.

What are your future plans?

I have an exhibition in the painters union’s gallery in Helsinki next September. It will contain canvases made with Ipad and photoshop and bigger two-meter sized paintings that have collaged imagery and a mixture of traditional oil paints. I am also going to have a vacation in Varna, Bulgaria in June that I am really looking forward into. Varna is cheap and it has a nice rhythm of the ocean. It also contains some history with the Soviet Union and large parks and walking pathways in the centre. I like the atmosphere of the city and the touristic beach because I can feel the past and the present time becoming more peaceful with the ocean. The place provides me with a feeling that after all, life will be fine and the waves will wash the baggage of the memories away and replace them with a sense of unity, open arms and good mood.
There is tangible, recognizable connective tissue that connects my work. From the vastness of the cosmos to the intricate branching patterns within each of our life-giving cells. I am drawn to the primordial spirals and organic structures and flow of nature.

I am fascinated, in particular, with the liminal state: the stage of in between, where massive dissolution of order occurs; where ambiguity and disorientation are the natural precursors to change. From this chaotic, fertile void, a fluid and malleable state occurs and births new order, no longer who we were, and not yet who we will become, new customs, new order, and new structures are born... each unique, yet universally familiar.

From expansion to contraction; from birth to death; from structure to chaos, this connected universe mimics the neuroplasticity of a giant brain, and the brain mirrors the expanse of the entire cosmos... and beyond. Each moment is unique. Each moment is identical.

I attempt to capture the states and stages of the connected universe. The dynamic energy that surrounds and fills us, our earth, our skies, our oceans, constantly shifting and transforming, too small to understand and too vast to comprehend. Connecting all living things as one.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

New York City and my father had the greatest influence on my being an artist. My parents were divorced, and my father loved art and painted in his spare time. We'd spend every Saturday together, and with him, there was always art involved. Either we were painting together or spending time at the Metropolitan Museum, or Museum of Modern Art in New York City, where I grew up. I didn't realize until much later how lucky I was to have him as my father and New York as my home. I was also very lucky to have The Art Students League a subway ride away. I started at The league studying anatomy with Robert Beverly Hale when I was 13 years old. Mr. Hale was a master and there was something very magical about him. He was sheer genius.

Growing up in New York City is like living in an art installation everyday... the lights, the clothes, the accents, the sounds.

And the Subway! OMG, the subway is a trip. The characters on the subway are truly unique and it can be scary. Watch your purse, your jewelry, and your body. You develop a sixth sense about it all.

It's also a city where, if you have the energy and drive, you feel you can conquer the world.

I started the first online art & culture zine, Urban Desires, in early 1994 with my husband Kyle. I ran that for eight years while we gained national notoriety with many innovation awards. From there, I went on to design educational art programs for Eyebeam Atelier with students from NYC schools.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

Not sure I can choose just one! There are many challenges... being a female artist, dealing with the business side of a creative business, and managing my expectations are all things I struggle with.

The most challenging part of being a female artist is all the juggling involved... working to pay studio bills and buy supplies, while pursuing sales, shows, residencies, and keeping a consistent studio practice going can be exhausting.

The most challenging part of the art business is just that. It's a business. And the gatekeepers: gallerists, curators, advisors, can seem like a pack of wolves. They sometimes lie, cheat, deceive, and make you feel like you're insane. It's tough, as an artist we have to be honest, open and vulnerable to create the art, but putting on the business persona sometimes feels like a suit of armor that can be hell to get on.

And then, when marriage and children are added to that mix, something always suffers. I took years off to be with my children and it was hard getting back to creating art the way I expect. I still haven't, maybe never will, but creating art is something artists don't have a choice in. We must create. It's the only thing that keeps the depression and the devil away from the door.

Yes, being an artist is challenging, but I am an artist, so regardless of how tough it can be at times, I'm in the studio everyday.

In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?

Contemporary art has, and will always, mirror back what is going on in society, culture and in our lives.

In 2011 I had a Traumatic Brain injury, the week I landed in Colorado. I was standing on a small ladder in the kitchen putting away dishes and I lost my footing and fell into the corner of a wall. I couldn't walk or talk for almost two years and it took 5 years to start feeling like myself again.

That TBI has shaped my work tremendously. I had an epiphany about how we are all connected while I was healing. My Brain was building connections again and I realized there is tangible, recognizable connective tissue that connects my work, just like the connections in my brain. Much of my work now is an exploration of the states & stages of the dynamic energy that surrounds and fills us all.
Our connected universes—constantly shifting & transforming, or the growth that takes place in Spring after experiencing the death that Winter brings. Too small to see and too vast to comprehend. I am compelled to capture these fleeting patterns of change which are the only constant we have.

I try and paint in a liminal state. It’s a glimpse into that fleeting space or ambiguity that is occurring in the very small threshold between where I’ve been, and where I’m going. It’s all about being in the present moment and surrendering.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

Denver’s art scene is really flourishing. I haven’t been here long but there are some very talented artists and great galleries, museums, and universities that are committed to supporting the art community.

Name three artists you admire.

Frida Kahlo - For her strength, tenacity and courage.
Helen Frankenthaler - for her courage, vision and gorgeous clear voice.
Alice Neel - Because she is one of a kind and changed portraiture.

What are your future plans?

I never think about the future, I find it causes anxiety. The past brings me the gifts of depression and regret. I try to stay in the moment so I can live and create in peace.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

Since I predominantly identify as a maker of political art, the main driving force behind my work is ultimately art as activism. The desire to create is innate to my personality and character. To have a purpose behind the work is of utmost importance personally. But in terms of artistic qualities, I am influenced by many of my past professional art tutors. From the experience of always having fantastic art teachers in school and within my portfolio preparation course, to the top artists and tutors that I’ve had the pleasure to work with during my Fine Art BA course in CIT Crawford College of Art and Design, in Ireland. I am beyond proud to have been taught by such exceptional artists as Jill Dennis, Simon English, Megan Eustace and Colin Crotty, among many others. Stylistically, I am influenced by surrealism, fauvism, and assemblage art with elements of pop art—though I am still learning and seeking to find my feet within any specific style. Currently, I am finding that appeal to me the most. Art history brings to mind lasting impressions of striking works by animalier Rosa Bonheur and the innovative creations of Robert Rauschenberg. Contemporary artists such as Elizabeth Magill, Walton Ford and Hartmut Kiewert are also at the top of the list.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

As a recent graduate, I find the main difficulty lies within supporting oneself financially while aiming to thrive as an emerging visual artist. Many of the opportunities that have presented themselves to me since finishing college, although seem great on paper, do involve a great deal of resources on my part. Estimating the value of these, and deciding on those worthwhile to pursue is an aspect of this career that I was not very aware of when first starting out. Juggling the many roles that are involved within this journey towards success as an artist, is also challenging. The struggle of some not seeing the real value behind the work sometimes also makes me doubtful of my contributions to art and the world as a whole. Though all of these drawbacks of this profession make the process of actually making the work so much more enjoyable for me. Creating art is my escape from the difficulties found within the world around us. And the most enjoyable challenge of this career is the constant evolution of my work and the questioning of its purpose—that keeps it all interesting for me.

In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?

Currently, it is more important than ever to use art as a catalyst for positive change within the world. Ownership of art has always been associated with certain status. Even the creation of it can be linked to an assertive privilege. The making process often involves detrimental consequences to the environment, not to mention the possibility of it to cause offence to someone, anyone. Thus, it is imperative that our culture establishes a more inclusive narrative of art. Art that is not symbolic of power, wealth and select personal opinion. Art as a vehicle for progress, intelligence and diversity. This I believe to be its true meaning nowadays.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

In Cork city, where I live, there is currently a great lack of viable representation for the many talented emerging artists. There are
public exhibition spaces - such as the Crawford Art Gallery and the Glucksman Gallery, which is part of the University College Cork campus. But these usually represent more established artists, who are not necessarily just local. Even the more accessible spaces, such as the CIT Crawford College of Art and Design Gallery on Grand Parade and the Lavit Gallery, have fierce competition for participation. Essentially more commercial spaces are needed within the city. This problem is currently offset with the many festivals and exhibitions organised by the creatives within the area themselves. So, although things could be better I believe there is much talent pushing local art on to the scene. And in terms of experiencing art as a viewer, the municipal public galleries mentioned above do present a wide range of artwork thanks to their showcasing of talent from abroad and from the capital city of Dublin.

Name three artists you admire.

Being inspired by so many artistically gifted individuals and discovering new talent among the community of creatives is such a joy, and there are so many who have left an impression on me. Constant favorites though are wildlife artist Emily Lamb, NYC based painter Jennifer Gennari, and vegan illustrator Kate Louise Powell.

What are your future plans?

In terms of the foreseeable future, I am looking forward to developing my work further during the residency that I am currently undertaking at the Backwater Artists Group in Cork, until the end of June. Then during the rest of the summer I am planning to expand my knowledge on the process of cyanotype printing and engage in some large scale drawings/watercolours. And hopefully, come September I will be embarking on my MFA studies.

Further future plans involve me pursuing the necessary training to teach art, and continuing to make work that will convince the viewer to care about the world around us with the same vigour and passion as I do.
Briahna Wenke
Charleston, SC, USA

Bri is an emerging artist who creates expressive and evocative work through bold and textural paint application. Channeling her fascination with the antiquity and complexity of the human story, she searches for a form of integrity, synchronicity between color, truth in form, and unapologetic confidence behind the strokes of her palette knife.
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

Writing, running, music, conversation, relationships with other artists, I try to consume as much as I can when I’m not painting. All of this keeps me motivated and stimulated to continue creating. Reading is the main one. I try to treat it like it’s part of my job to read every day. I’m able to solve problems, overcome blocks, and find inspiration, whether it’s Bird by Bird, on the creative writing process, Born to Run, about the ancient culture of runners in Mexico, or The Invention of Nature, about the early environmental scientist Alexander Humboldt.

Something I once read by Hemingway in Moveable Feast, that I actively use every day in the studio, is how he said he would only leave his type writer for the day when he knew exactly what he would write next. That way he could pick it up the next morning. I try to do that with painting, to stop when I know exactly what comes next.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

Self-discipline is a challenge for anyone who works for themselves. Self-discipline in sticking to your own schedule, and also in social media consumption. In order to stay relevant on this brilliant platform, which is responsible for many artists’ success in reaching a massive audience all on their own, one must interact and engage on a regular basis. But to do what we do, to create, we must be completely unplugged mentally. They’re such opposite concepts, so balancing all of it to get work done and stay engaged in the virtual community is one of the largest challenges of a modern artist.

And maintaining the well of confidence, making sure it doesn’t fall too low, learning how to nourish it. But I’m realizing that the internal battle never fully goes away, you just get better at managing it.

In your opinion what does art mean in contemporary culture?

I believe art has a very unique role in contemporary culture, in that we are living in an age of unnatural immediacy, and exponential advances in technology that we’ve never dealt with before. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence, which doesn’t seem to be slowing down in development, creativity may be the last fully human frontier.

Personally, I crave the tangible, I want to see the human hand in the work. Perfection is saturating our world; digital everything, advertising, seeing only everyone’s best face on Instagram, Photoshop, plastic surgery, etc. Paralleling all of this is the rise in mental instability including anxiety, depression, and isolation. I think my generation is looking to grasp something real, to educate ourselves on how we consume, food and knowledge, and to connect with each other in more meaningful ways. I believe art can help keep us tethered to our roots and stability as humans. Looking at our history, we’ve declared our prehistoric ancestors as fully developed humans as soon as we found our cave paintings! There is nothing more human than creating. It is what has set us apart from our ancient animal relatives, and I believe it will continue to set us apart as our world propels forward.

Taking risks, and I feel a sense of growth and stimulation around me, feeding my own work and development.

Name three artists you admire.

Well this is a challenge to narrow to three! Joseph Lee (josephleeart.com) is a Korean-American artist living in LA, and his work just slaps you in the face with his heavy oil paint knife strokes and dysfunctional undertones.

Paul Cristina (paulcristina.com) is a Charleston artist I admire immensely for his fearless depictions of human behavior.

Heather Day (heatherday.com) is an artist in San Francisco who captures a sensory interpretation of her physical world, and her evolution has been beyond inspiring to watch.

Other fearless contemporaries include Chrissy Angliker, Adrian Ghenie, Conrad Jon Godly, Salman Khoshroo, Alexa Meade, and Janine Robinson.

What are your future plans?

I’m currently working on a series of large evocative figures and portraits for an exhibition in the fall at the Grand Bohemian Gallery in Charleston.

A project that I am also developing is a series of works depicting some of the most resilient individuals I’ve had the honor of having in my life, since moving to Charleston.

This will be a series of large palette knife portraits of the Veterans and individuals involved with the Warrior Surf Foundation (warriorsurf.org), a non-profit co-founded by my partner Andy Manzi, that offers surf therapy, camaraderie, and wellness to Veterans and their families. I’ve had the privilege of watching lives take a complete 180 turn based on the offerings of this non-profit, and I can’t think of a better way to honor the enduring strength of these individuals, some of which have lived through experiences that most cannot begin to fathom.

I’m also excited about an upcoming collaboration with Sam Rueter (rueterart.com) in which we will be creating a large body painting installation depicting the concept of “slash and burn” complete with an elaborate setting of ash and decay, evolving into a lush and vibrant setting of rebirth. This will take place during a large event in Charleston in September.
Stéphane Vereecken
Brussels, Belgium
It’s your second time in our magazine, what changes since the 36th issue?

Since about one year since my first appearance in the magazine, I had several requests for exhibitions in Europe. I have exhibited several times in Greece and will soon be exhibiting in the United States. And the art gallery “Art Pistol”, the most progressive emerging artists in Glasgow’s West End, sell my works. My artistic work evolved into a more nuanced exterior view. I have always privileged the sociological aspect of my work. My images are for the other and only for the one who looks at it. He can interpret the surrealist message according to his experience, his unconscious and his dreams. I have a series called “The Garden” that talks about human beings broken by life. Disability but also exclusion. Anthropological and individual exclusion. The limits that we set ourselves. I met some crazy people too and I told an episode of their life and their story with my drawings on their bodies.

What is the most challenging part of working with photography?

I have several series and I look tirelessly for the improved ones. They evolve with the passage of time and I sometimes meet people who are more interesting to photograph than others. So, sometimes images of my series disappear. The most difficult part is to choose a story and an experience that goes to others, without disguising too much the reality and life and the intimate experience of the model. I can not tell things that are too intimate, of course. I tell a surreal story sublimated, and a dream.

The most difficult is to keep a balance between the experience and the too easy outbidding of graphics technical exploits, to put a full eye. It does not interest me. I remain sober in my artistic intention.

What is your creative process like?

When I meet someone for the photograph I explain to him in what niche his the image will be broadcast and in which series of my pictures are portrait will be admitted. I must often try to work with actors, such as actress and singer Stéphanie Schlessel. It is an incredible luxury to give me their talent so that I can photograph them. The expressions requested are just and perfectly reproduced. Then I tell a life sublimated and possible around them through my drawings and overprinted images. The themes are chosen according to the different series... White Wall, the Garden,... and the drawings tell a spiritualized story. The artistic intention remains surreal of a dream life.

What’s the best art advice you’ve ever received?

Renunciation. It is not useful to pick on an image if it is useless or bad. When I work on a work, it must push to give birth to the following work. It’s simply called evolution. I work my images as a painting, I do not make many copies of images in a series. A finished image must make you want to build a new one.

Tell us more about “the garden” project.

The project “the Garden” is more exactly “the garden of broken people”. He speaks us with surreal images the daily life and sublimated or dreamed history of broken, disabled and excluded people. For example, because they are too old or considered non-productive. The pictures are rawer than in my White Wall series. More explicit too. More political certainly.

I have an exhibition project where images will be placed on the wall at the height of people sitting or in wheelchairs. It will be necessary to make an unusual effort to look at them. This series made me want to build soon a new series of eleven images called “Homo Solvo”. This will be a bit the opposite of the title of the series “The Garden”. The opposite. I find it interesting to be able to oppose two series disinterment and visually. It will be interesting to see the visual result. As an intellectual challenge.

What are you working on right now?

For three months I have been working on a square format. The process is simple. A skyline, the ground and the sky. Who is at home a white wall and a wooden floor. I add a photo projection, a projection of life, and drawings. Depending on the case the process may seem abstract and if I go to more abstraction, I like it.

This series is called “Hotel Mutation”. There is in this series a concrete materialization of buildings, with cubes or forms and the material is cardboard.

A projection of images of characters generally that look very big, like Gods and drawings of smaller characters.

I always tell a story, but this time, this surreal tale turns into a projection on volumes. So there is also a sculpture in my pictures. I will evolve towards a total art. A romantic art that will express the unity of life.
Kim Youdan
Chester, UK

Through my creative endeavours I’m on a mission to inspire people to live full and creative lives. I choose to do this by creating hand-painted photography inspired by colour and driven by travel.

I am continually impressed by the innovation around me, my standard of living is improved as I experience and witness different artistic feats. The creation of ideas fascinates me and the development of artwork and other creative outlets is a big inspiration for my own work.

The technique of combining photography and abstract colour is currently my way of communicating experiences and I endeavour to inspire you, as other creatives have inspired me. Colour is my language, photography gets me all excited and mixing the two creates something that satisfies my soul. From architecture, landscape, wildlife and people, I use my own experiences of travel to create artwork which pops!
Who or what has a lasting influence on your art practice?

There are so many small and large influences that continue to inspire my work, choosing just one is such a challenge. I view my art practice as having two areas of creative outlet which I marry together. Firstly image making through photography which allows me to document. I love this part of the process and creating detailed and high contrast black and white image. This is then followed by painting abstract colour onto the image where I express my experience in bold colours using a limited palette.

In a broad sense I would say that education has a lasting influence, not in the traditional classroom sense - although I do love to read - but from building experience, exploring, travelling and soaking in the work of other creatives from all different mediums.

I am continuously broadening my horizons and this is one of the reasons why I choose to live nomadically and work remotely. The lifestyle allows me to educate myself through experience, continuously changing my surroundings is the energy that drives my creative expression.

When I travel I like to soak in a culture rather than pass through on a whim. I want to experience what a culture is all about and create work inspired by those places. I want to experience the changes in weather, take note of natural surroundings and explore the streets of new villages and cities. That’s a lot to do when passing by, I’d much rather take more time in the places I temporarily call home.

What is the most challenging part of being an artist?

The nomadic lifestyle I have chosen at this point in my career has many benefits from a content and inspiration point of view but it does mean I lack a consistent creative community. I engage with online platforms and always throw myself into the remote communities when we land somewhere new, but it is the creative community of artists, curators, designers and buyers that I sacrifice when moving around so much.

I deal with these challenges in a few ways and believe all artists go through seasons within their process. My seasons are fairly distinct and follow the travel that I do. I exhibit work whilst in the UK and do more photography whilst away from the UK. I am limited when not in the country and can’t always make the most of opportunities when they present themselves. I try to see the travel I do as a benefit to my story and reframe these challenges turning them into opportunities. I am hugely grateful to be able to travel and view the challenges as obstacles to overcome rather than road blocks.

In your opinion, what does art mean in contemporary culture?

I am a big advocate of living a creative life and believe everyone has the ability to create. Create rather than consume is my ethos, never far from the forefront of my mind and the underlying message in my choice to be an artist.

Art in my opinion is fundamental in our society. Creativity improves the standard of living for our communities, whether you actively engage or are an effected bystander. Art creates emotional impact, art is thought provoking, conversation starting, educational and a tool to express ourselves.

The term still has traditional vocations attached to it but this continues to change. Artisans are being noticed for their craft whatever their medium and more appreciation is given to previously unnoticed skill sets, within the food industry, up-cycle culture, even craft beer! These additions to art add to an ever evolving conversation to an already interesting debate.

Broadening the artistic realm and encompassing more creativity can only be a good thing. With the increase of technology and systems encroaching on society, creativity is becoming more sort after as the inherent skill of humanity. Computers cannot create ideas in the same way that we can and our culture is drawing attention to this at every opportunity.

How would you describe the art scene in your area?

When I return to the UK my home town of Chester is where I come back to. The city is trying to harness a creative culture and in developing parts of the city centre I have high hopes for what the future holds. Currently there are limited opportunities for emerging artists, I therefore take opportunities to travel within the UK to exhibit. Yorkshire is historically a hugely creative area, towns such as Hebden Bridge and Todmorden have a vibrant art scene which I’ve been tapping into for the past two years.

I’d love to be more active in Chester but currently when I’m in the UK I spend a lot of time driving cross country with a boot full of art! This has given me
insight to opportunities in micro markets in the UK and any chance to gain exposure for my work is of great benefit at this stage in my career.

**Name three artists you admire.**

Due to the mixed media approach I use in my own work I am inspired by a range of print makers, photographers and painters alike. I tend to navigate towards work which has elements of my own process such as bold colour and high contrast.

I have always loved the joiner photography work of David Hockney, his layering of images and use of composition is fascinating. Showing multiple angles of the same subject, different facades and views has always interested me, there is always so much to look at. My first foray into photography was a collage piece of the family home that I made at school, 100% inspired by Hockney and his use of multiple imagery. My parents still have it on the wall at home and Hockney continues to inspire me today.

Another photographer Sven Pfrommer with his slow shutter imagery and mixed media approach has also been a really important reference for my practice. Pfrommer’s use of saturated colour and high contrast certainly relates to my own creative expression. ‘Human Blur’ is a series of work which has guided a few decisions of my recent photography, imagery that I haven’t yet developed through my hand painted technique but that I’m very excited about.

An artist that has recently made an impact on me is London based print maker Hamish Macaulay. He uses bold colours, high contrast and strong shape, very much my cup of tea! I have experimented a little with print making but not yet added this technique to my regular practice, something I certainly want to develop as my self expression expands into others mediums.

**What are your future plans?**

It’s a great question and something that always takes up head space as ideas are continuously flowing. Practically I want my work to take on a broader perspective, rather than documenting certain places with my artwork I want to encompass larger themes within culture. I have loved exploring the theme of ‘Nature vs Architecture’ and using more materials and tools will certainly be part of my developing practice. I have many ideas of taking a more abstract approach with my photography, still combining the painted technique and using colour in both elements of the work but starting without the detailed documentary image.

Location wise, for the next year I will continue to live in different places across Europe, my partner and I are deliberating between Romania and Serbia for this autumn and we are pretty set to try out Bansko in Bulgaria early next year. Exploring new countries, experiencing culture and documenting where I go will always be a part of my life. Travel continues to be the best source of inspiration and keeps my creativity flowing in many different ways.