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Aliaksandra Markava

I believe that nature is the best artist. We were very lucky to observe the wonderful moments that it gives us and manage to capture them. This process itself brings peace and harmony to the artist's soul. Then the artist passes on this peace and harmony to other people through artworks.

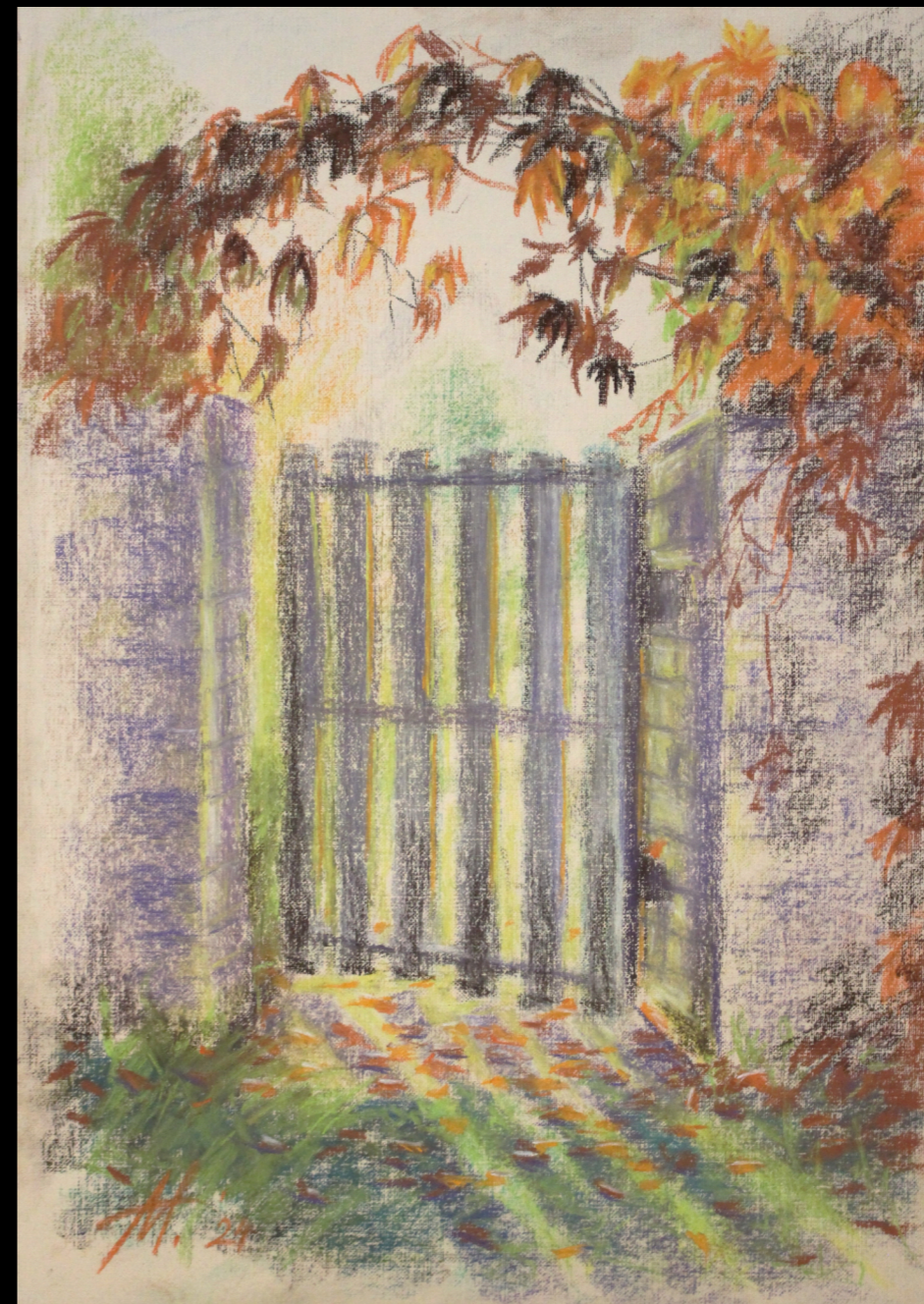
HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: All my works are made from life, during the plein-air, or just in the backyard of my house. I really love nature, and I paint while birds sing, enjoying the fresh air.



Winter Lake (2025)

pastel, pastel paper

The work was done from nature, during the winter plein-air. Frost covered the lake with a layer of ice, and the combination of cold sky and ice with wood branches and dried ochre reeds did not leave me indifferent.



Gate (2024)

pastel, pastel paper

This gate leads to my yard. I really love it when maiden grapes turn red in autumn, I always try to capture it.

Curator's Interpretation

Winter Lake (2025) presents a solitary scene set in the winter of a frozen lake; this peacefulness and solitude are exemplified by the use of pastel, which creates a soft and warm work. The work itself is plein air, which gives this lake a much more personal connection from Markava, helping us see the scene through this work as though we were there. The location itself is imbued into it due to this process.

To the right side of the composition, we have the tree, which is collecting snow and is weighed to arc towards the centre. These guide us from the warm colours of the landscape below to the horizon and the skies. The sky is clear and mostly light blue and white, which exemplifies the coldness of the winter atmosphere, while the landscape, still with colour, contrasts this work as it is still alive and not barren.

Gate (2024) radiates with light from the first viewing of the work, from the sides of the gate itself reflecting sunlight to the yellows of the flora

and the contrasts between the shadows. The gate thus invites us to step into the work - despite usually being something (due to the iron bars) that would keep you out, the warmth and lighting of this object instead have become inviting. The sun is filtered out towards us through the gate, drawing our eyes towards it, wondering what is beyond it.

Despite the stone wall being one that would conceal a building or an area; it fades into the paper in this work which gives it a much more organic appearance. Furthermore, the foliage above the gate creates a welcoming atmosphere to the work and crowns the entrance. The usage of pastel helps to turn this scene which would be one seen often by Markava (as it is her yard) into a dreamlike scene.



@aliaksandra_sea_mar



markava.art

Ian Bride

As an early career artist, albeit quite 'long in the tooth', my creative practice builds upon many years as an interdisciplinary academic/teacher/researcher/practitioner in biodiversity conservation, environmental education, and anthropology. I am also a qualified cabinet-maker and teacher of traditional woodland crafts. In 2020, following my 2018 experience of being an Associate Artist at Open School East, Margate, I took early retirement to exercise my creative muscles, primarily in the context of exploring human/nature discourses through a narrative practice engaging with objects (natural and human-made), representation, and a wide range of processes. In so doing, I seek to challenge some of the prevailing epistemological frameworks and positionalities that underpin prevailing environmental and conservation narratives and instead offer novel and interesting ways of engaging with and understanding these discourses whilst being an advocate for nature. I am comfortable experimenting with almost any materials and ways of making, whether when 'collaborating' with wood ants, 'releasing' exotic creatures (alebrijes) from driftwood, 'getting a grip' in my punning Touch of Clamp series, or 'artifying' other's objects (as in Ooops! my accidental mobile phone images project) – see website – ianbride.com. I am also keen to collaborate with like-minded creatives.



L'antscrape #5 (2020-22)
Wood
Sculpture created by wood ants (*Formica rufa*) and Ian Bride



L'antscrape #3 (2020-23)
Wood



L'antscrape #1 (2019-21)
Wood

L'antscrape Art – a symbiotic art practice. (*Formica rufa* and Ian Bride, 2020-23)

Wood ants are both 'keystone species' and 'ecosystem engineers', playing a critical role in maintaining the structure of their ecological community. Their activities affect many other organisms, helping determine their types and populations, and directly modulating the availability of resources to other species.

The Southern Wood Ant (*Formica rufa*) manages substantial areas of woodland, farming aphids in the tree canopy for their excreted honeydew, preying on other insects, cleaning up dead creatures, and building large composting, thatched nest mounds that cover a complex of tunnels and chambers penetrating far below ground. This creates a thermally controlled environment for brood development and also brings up significant volumes of minerals. It thereby generating valuable concentrations of nutrients, which become available to other organisms, particularly when a colony moves on to build another nest and gathered seeds germinate.

The nests also provide habitat for other species which live under the ant's accidental protection, many having evolved chemical defences or 'invisibility'. Moreover, these nests are also often interlinked with others to form vast matriarchal colonies with multiple queens and all female worker ants – one estimated to comprise 400 million individuals in 2.5 km². Yet despite such numbers the species is Red-list designated as 'near threatened' because each population depends upon a very small number of queens.

My L'antscrape series developed from noticing their removing the soft material from rotting timbers immersed in their nests, possibly aided by the action of the formic acid they produce, primarily for defence and as a disinfectant. I place selected pieces in their nests, leave them for 2-3 years, then carefully extract, clean, treat and mount the results of their endeavours. This



Sentinel #1 (2022)
Printed Photograph

produces beautiful objects, and offers an insight, both into the world of the wood ant, and the nature and structure of wood. It has also set me on a journey to study, monitor, and protect their nests, as well as promote an appreciation of these amazing creatures, which as the Formicinae have been around for ~ 92 million years, and as the *F. rufa* complex, a mere 15 million years!



Sentinels Set #6 (2022)
Mounted printed photographs
 Group of sentinel images

Curator's Interpretation

The L'antscape series showcases works with wood ants to create an active work that allows nature to mould, erode and transform the semi-rotten timbers placed to be terraformed into their nest. The resulting biological artworks (as they have used the ant's natural biological processes to create the work) are stunning, organic and highly intricate. Each is different and guides us through the excavation process that these ants undertook, likely with the help of the formic acid they produce, thus emerging the work seemingly a twisted network of caves. Rather than the wood being passive; its fibrous nature has become an active material shaped by ant activity. It has thus become documentative of the essence of wood and ants' movements and biological processes.

The result is unpredictable, creating a unique structure every time; only slightly controlled given the unknown depths of the timbers chosen. The work also functions as a message to the viewer as the Southern Wood Ant is designated as near threatened, pushing this to the viewer and demonstrating the importance of the ant as an architect of woodlands.

In *Sentinels (2022)* our attention is drawn to these trees' gaze as they observe us. It invites us to question what they might think about us and how our actions (destroying forests for mere profit, degrading their realm, and otherwise damaging them, thus challenging the viewer to reflect on these processes. The bark of these trees has been used to show the expressiveness of the underlying being, referencing aged, wrinkled human faces. By humanising the trees it exemplifies the fact that we are doing them wrong, together with the ecosystem as a whole, and encourages the viewer to rethink how we should be treating the environment.

Moreover, by framing and choosing faces in the trees, it also posits trees as being just like us and having memories of generations, centuries, and potentially millennia - judging our species for the damage it has caused as a relative youth (some 300,000 years old vs. 360 million years). The tree thus becomes the active survivor subject asking the viewer why humanity continues to destroy and hurt trees and ecosystems.

Greg Hodge

Greg Hodge is a Photographer and Visual Artist pursuing an MA in Photography at the Manchester School of Art. His work centers around creating impactful visual narratives, blending analogue and digital techniques to capture compelling stories. With a focus on documentary, street, and landscape photography, he explores themes of place, identity, and the everyday, using imagery to evoke a sense of connection and meaning.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: *A Roof Over One's Head* is a visual and conceptual exploration of 'home'—rooted in the landscapes we inhabit and the natural forces that shape our sense of belonging. Through photography and storytelling, the project examines how the environment—both nurturing and unpredictable—reflects the emotional and physical dimensions of home. By engaging with themes of stability, memory, and displacement,

the work draws parallels between human experiences and the rhythms of nature. Shifting terrains, changing seasons, and the interplay of light and space mirror the evolving concept of home, revealing its fluid and interconnected essence.

Beyond personal introspection, *A Roof Over One's Head* is influenced by wider conversations in contemporary art, design, and environmental thought. The movement between locations and the intimate closeness to the subjects throughout the book emphasise that home is not just a structure but a relationship—one shaped by nature's presence, absence, and transformation.

This carefully constructed narrative invites viewers to reflect on their own perceptions of home, encouraging a deeper connection between human identity and the natural world.



Growth (2024)
Photography

David J. Pittenger

I am an experimental psychologist teaching at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. My primary interest is capturing scenes that are often overlooked but, nevertheless, offer the opportunity to engage the viewer in a projective introspection.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: West Virginia and the surrounding states are known for their rugged landscapes, forests, and rivers. The images I have submitted are all within 200 miles of my home, places to which I return for continued inspiration.



Treefall (2024)
Photography



Untitled #4
Closeup of Dogwood Tree flower



Untitled #9
Dying leaves on a twig.

Curator's Interpretation

Growth (2024) is a photograph of the overgrowth of ivy taking over a concrete wall, which reclaims the usually industrial material with an organic and natural element. It has successfully captured nature, taking back the world from human interference and removing the rigidity and sharpness of human architecture. The viewer's attention is brought to the contrast between the organic and the artificial. The concrete is rough, controlled and gritty, while the ivy is uncontrolled, smooth and moving.

The house in the background of the work behind the concrete wall and growing ivy creates a form of stability. However, with the extreme growth of the ivy it suggests that this stability will not last forever as nature will eventually take everything back over time. If the home is stability then this creeping of the ivy towards the human built structures reminds the viewer that permanence is

just simply an illusion and it will eventually disappear.

Treefall (2024) directs the viewer towards the willow tree, which stands behind a river (or canal). Inspecting the tree aspect of this photograph, the title, "treefall", implies that something is happening to the tree, as though its leaves are falling despite the stillness of the image. This, thus, helps to invite the viewer to contemplate whether it is a moment where something will happen, or the willow may change into something else... perhaps it is a change in season?

However, nature is not the only subject in this photograph as to the distance you can see a row of houses. This gives contrast between the natural and the human worlds as they compete with each other.



Untitled #8
Sunrise at Pipestem



Untitled #5
Tree roots along Four Pole Creek.



Untitled #2
Tree trunks in fog



Untitled #6
Dead tree trunk along Four Pole Creek.

Untitled #1
Panorama of pine trees





Untitled #3
Winter at Pipestem [seen above]

Untitled #10
Foggy morning in Pikeville, Kentucky. [seen below]





Untitled #7
Panorama of hill top in Pikesville, KY. [seen above]

Untitled #12
Early morning in Pipestem during winter. [seen below]





Untitled #11
Secluded tree in fog.

Curator's Interpretation

Untitled #4 is a monochrome black-and-white photograph of a dogwood blossom. By stripping the colour of the blossom, we are brought to view the veins, shadows, and blemishes. These textures create an intricate flower that guides us as it seems to unfold, each petal seeming to do from the centre. Furthermore, this helps to give the image a sense of movement despite being static.

The black background has isolated the flower so that its elements are exposed to us to examine the shape of the petal, which gently curves. Contextually, as this is a native plant to West Virginia, it creates a personal connection to Pittenger and serves as a part of the home concept. Thus, we can assume that dogwood

flowers carry significance to the identity of the area, and thus, its importance is not just confined to its appearance but to the history that it serves as a point of inspiration and a reminder of a journey.

Untitled #9 presents a bunch of dying leaves connected to a twig- rather than exemplifying the details of the leaves like the flower in Untitled #4- this work, instead of the white background, becomes more of a dreading atmosphere. We are watching the life of the twig decay before us and thus reflecting on life as it lives and dies, just like us. Again, the background contrasts heavily with the subject, transforming it from simply being botanical to potentially having meaning. The leaves, twig, and stem are extremely brittle and

seem to drain and die slowly.

The details of the leaves, which are incredibly wrinkled, creased and tired of old age, are surrounded by emptiness and light, which could suggest they are parting. This white background emphasises these leaves and their sharper edges as they die rather than the smoother edges they would have at their prime. Hence, the photograph serves as a recording of their deterioration and perhaps gives the photograph an existential feeling.

Untitled #8 displays the sunrise beautifully as the sunrays pierce through the trees, which have become silhouettes that wonderfully separate the photograph between black and warm yellows and oranges. The sun's rays illuminate what would have been hidden in this photograph, as a fence is slightly visible in the background. Impressively, this results in a great contrast between the elements in the photograph and makes it seem like the light is moving throughout the work.

The shadows and lights within this work are also perfectly balanced, which helps to stabilise the composition. It allows the light to guide the viewer's eyes around the shadowed silhouettes of the trees and removes all other distractions from the image. The mist in the scene, which is diffusing the light, helps to soften the light and make it feel as though it's slowly changing, which helps to add peacefulness to the scene.

Untitled #5 is another monochromatic photograph- this time of a network of tree roots exposed to view at the Four Pole Creek. The roots are in a distinctly lighter colour compared to the rest of the scene, entangling the viewer towards them on first viewing. They twist, turn, and move gnarled, grappling onto the earth around them to ground the tree into stability. Meanwhile, the water has a slightly distorted reflection reflecting the roots' struggle.

However, as the soil does not cover the roots of the tree, it exposes the roots to erosion and damage. Thus, The tree is perhaps an ancient tree that is finally succumbing to its age; hence, this photograph is of a subject that would usually be overlooked and documents the tree's end. The roots could then be interpreted as living fossils of the tree as they look almost skeletal, and the lighting even pushes this as they are as light as bone against an almost black background like a medical x-ray.

Untitled #2 pairs two forms of tree together- one is a tree stump of a tree that once lived, and the other is the living tree. The stump contrasts the leaning tree as rocks surround it and seem decaying, which hints at the future of the other tree. In the background, it is foggy as the background trees fade into the mist, reducing the viewer's perspective to the closest leaning tree. Furthermore, the fog helps to make the viewer engage with what is visible and acknowledge or imagine what lies beyond the visible in the image.

Behind the tree and the tree stump, there is a tree that may potentially be dead, too, as it seems to have been snapped in half. The fog, in this perspective, could be alluding to the forest's dead period (during the winter), when the trees are hibernating. Or perhaps the trees are dying to be replaced by future trees.

Untitled #6 has a tree trunk coming out of the forest down onto the ground as though the tree

has just been felled. However, the tree seems to have had its bark removed, exposing its core to the viewer. This suggests that the tree may have been killed or damaged by the weather. Some of the leaves that are still connected to the dead tree are still slightly alive, suggesting that the tree's death was recent to the time the photograph had been taken.

The dead tree's colour is very light compared to the surroundings, drawing the viewer directly to it- it is as though it is sticking out, disrupting the area. Despite being dead, it looks as though there is growth starting to cover the tree, which will consume the tree and make it part of the land again. Hence, the photograph suggests that nature is reclaiming itself and turning the tree's death into new life.

Untitled #1 is a beautiful panorama of pine trees veiled in mist. The panoramic format, as with the later panorama photographs reviewed, allows the viewer to envision themselves in the scene. We are put into the area and can scan across this scene, taking in the atmosphere still moving from the mist and in extreme solitude. Due to the work format, there is no point that guides us, and we are left to move across the image on our own accord.

The ground is lightly textured and looks snowy, allowing us to fully focus on the trees and fog, which brings us into the landscape. The mist seems to layer upon the trees, and the panorama has great depth. The fog not only makes this scene feel much smaller than it is but also allows us to concentrate on what is there- which turns the concept of fog ironic as it is meant to conceal but increases our clarity of this scene as we imagine the rest.

Untitled #3 is the wintry landscape of Pipestem, where we observe the Appalachian mountains rolling, and the horizon and cloudy skies consume the distant mountains and landscapes. The contrast of the mountains themselves is shown the most in the first viewing of the landscape; the trees seem apparent, yet they are surrounded by the snow, carving a structure out for themselves. The panoramic format of the photograph allows us to imagine ourselves on one of the peaks of the mountains, looking towards the horizon, giving it clarity and power despite a cloudy day.

The skies and the landscape seem to go from shadow to light as there are vast swathes of shadow over the mountains. While for the clouds, it has a similar pattern (or perhaps texture when looked at from a distance) as it has ripples of shadow. The sky and the land complement each other and balance the composition as they similarly move between light and shadow.

Untitled #10 showcases a dark and foggy scene; the colour of the fog is a slight blueish-green, creating an air of mystery to the photograph. The way that the mist and fog envelop the mountains and the tree seems to be shifting, giving the photograph a feel of movement. The hills thus appear softened by the fog, making them as though they are translucent as they merge.

Furthermore, all regions (the skies above the mist and the hills) blend into each other, allowing us to wonder what is beyond these areas. This obscurity created by the fog, which hides what's beyond, allows for the scene to feel as though it is a memory- especially furthered by the dark blue-greens that give a strangeness to the air.

Untitled #7 is separated between the forested hills and an extremely dark sky that creates an ominous atmosphere. The trees are leafless and frozen in the photograph, which gives a feeling of dread as they seem lifeless, and the dark sky has clouds looming above. Incidentally, the skeletal appearance of the pale leafless trees makes them look as though they are reaching towards the sky, contrasting against the fog and pitch darkness.

The horizon is not positioned in the centre but rather downwards, which allows the foreboding sky to dominate the panorama. It thus gives drama to the composition while also making the viewer feel small in this foreboding environment. Furthermore, a more interesting part of the composition is that some trees are not evenly lit; some are thrown into shadows while others catch the light. It looks like the clouds are in front of us, which gives the photograph a great texture.

Untitled #12 is a winter morning in Pipestem, with its composition filled with a vast, dense amount of trees confined by the hills above them. We are moved downwards towards these trees to see their repetition and the texture that they create in the composition; we are thus invited to feel the forest as it is intended, where it seems endless yet within our reach.

The lack of the horizon causes the viewer's eyes to concentrate mostly on the trees and their density- the perspective and the way we are brought to perceive the scene disrupt what we would expect of traditional landscape composition and give a beautifully textured composition. This is furthered by the usage of mostly blues, which make it seem as though the entire landscape has been frozen in time. It also reinforces the coldness one would feel if they were in this scene.

Untitled #11 is a very contemplative scene. It presents a single gnarled tree, slightly slanted in the centre, enveloped by thick and vast fog. The entire composition is filled with this fog, simply leaving the tree and parts of the ground alone for viewing, thus creating a very solitary scene. We are invited to look at the weathered form of the tree, which seems to be barely hanging onto its life.

There are slight outlines of other elements in this photograph, such as the slightly darker parts of the fog, which suggest other trees. Yet to this gnarled tree, they remain obscured, out of sight, and swallowed up by the fog. The shape of this tree is worn down and seems to be damaged or aged, but it still stands despite looking as though it has taken a lot of damage throughout its years.

Interview with David J. Pittenger

Can you tell us about your journey as a photographer? How does your background in experimental psychology influence your practice?

I dabbled in photography in the 1970s when I was in high school and college, but stopped when I began my doctoral training as my studies and research consumed all my free time. About 15 years ago, I rekindled my "curiosity" in photography by enrolling in courses taught at the university where I work. Since then, I have been pushing myself to explore new and different forms of expression.

Much of my work is influenced by artists including Robert Frank, Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe, Willem de Kooning, Robert Mapplethorpe, Gordon Parks, Jackson Pollock, Man Ray, Mark Rothko, Alexey Titarenko, and Jerry Uelsmann.

My "curiosity" in photography reflects my training as an experimental psychologist. Since the 1800s, it has become clear that when we look about it, there are two sequential processes in seeing: sensation (the conversion of light energy into neural activity) and perception (how structures in our central nervous system automatically interpret the sensory information). The Gestalt psychologists of the late 1900s, for example, presaged much of current research being done to study the link between cognition and neural activity. In short, our entire brain is involved with looking and seeing.

The other component of being an experimental psychologist is studying how a change in one variable affects the change in another variable. In essence, picking up my camera, selecting a lens, and performing many other tasks is the same process when I decide to conduct an experiment. Most importantly, the results set the stage for the next experiment or photograph.

What was it that brought you to photography and how has your perspective on photography changed over time?

At first, I wanted to make simple pictures that others and I would like. Looking back, most of these images were mere snapshots that documented events and travel. As I became more comfortable with the technological aspects of the camera, I began to focus more on the aesthetic value of the images I was creating by addressing the questions, "What is interesting here?" or "How will this image turn out if I...?" Therefore, I set up a small studio where I can bring in objects for still-life images. I also began to use common objects, such as martini glasses and wooden cubes, to create abstract images. Overall, my experiences – thinking about the work of others and my work – have led me to conclude that fine art photography affords the viewer the opportunity to engage in projective introspection.

What inspired you to capture photographs of scenes that are often overlooked?

The professor of an art history course I took said, "You will not really understand a fine piece of art unless you look at it for at least three hours." "Who has that much time?" I thought. Forty years later, I was walking along the bank of a stream and noticed several large rocks that were partially submerged in the water. I stopped and stared for a long time and began to see a fascinating setting that reminded me of the concepts of wabi-sabi and examples of excellent Sumi-e sketches. I was hooked and learned the rewards of patient looking.

What do you hope that viewers will take away from your photographs showcased in this publication?

The pictures range from sweeping landscapes I found in parts of Kentucky and West Virginia, where I live, to intimate, detailed images of flowers and leaves. First, I hope each will evoke curiosity and the desire to "make sense" of the image. From there, I hope they will begin to examine their reactions and the components of the image that are most evocative.

Have you received any surprising or meaningful responses from viewers about your work?

I have only recently begun to share my work in public. Nevertheless, the response has been positive. Folks note that I have a definitive style and find my compositions engaging.

Do you think that people today are more or less attuned to the details of their surroundings? How does your work challenge that awareness?

I am not sure how others feel, but I often feel overwhelmed by my smartphone and instant access to internet streaming systems. I hope that others will find the inherent beauty of those things we overlook or dismiss as detritus and trivial.

Do you use any post-processing techniques to enhance any of your photography; if so could you walk us through your process?

I make extensive use of computer software to optimize my photographs. Having read the many books by Ansel Adams, I see that his work in the darkroom was central to his craft and art. Indeed, I found a version of his Moonrise Hernandez with no processing that is blotchy, with little contrast, and a bad overall image. Adams' craft was his development of the print. I do the same thing. I magnify the image and look for imperfections to remove. I then select parts of the images to improve the lighting and contrast. For black-and-white conversions, I make careful adjustments to the colour filtering.

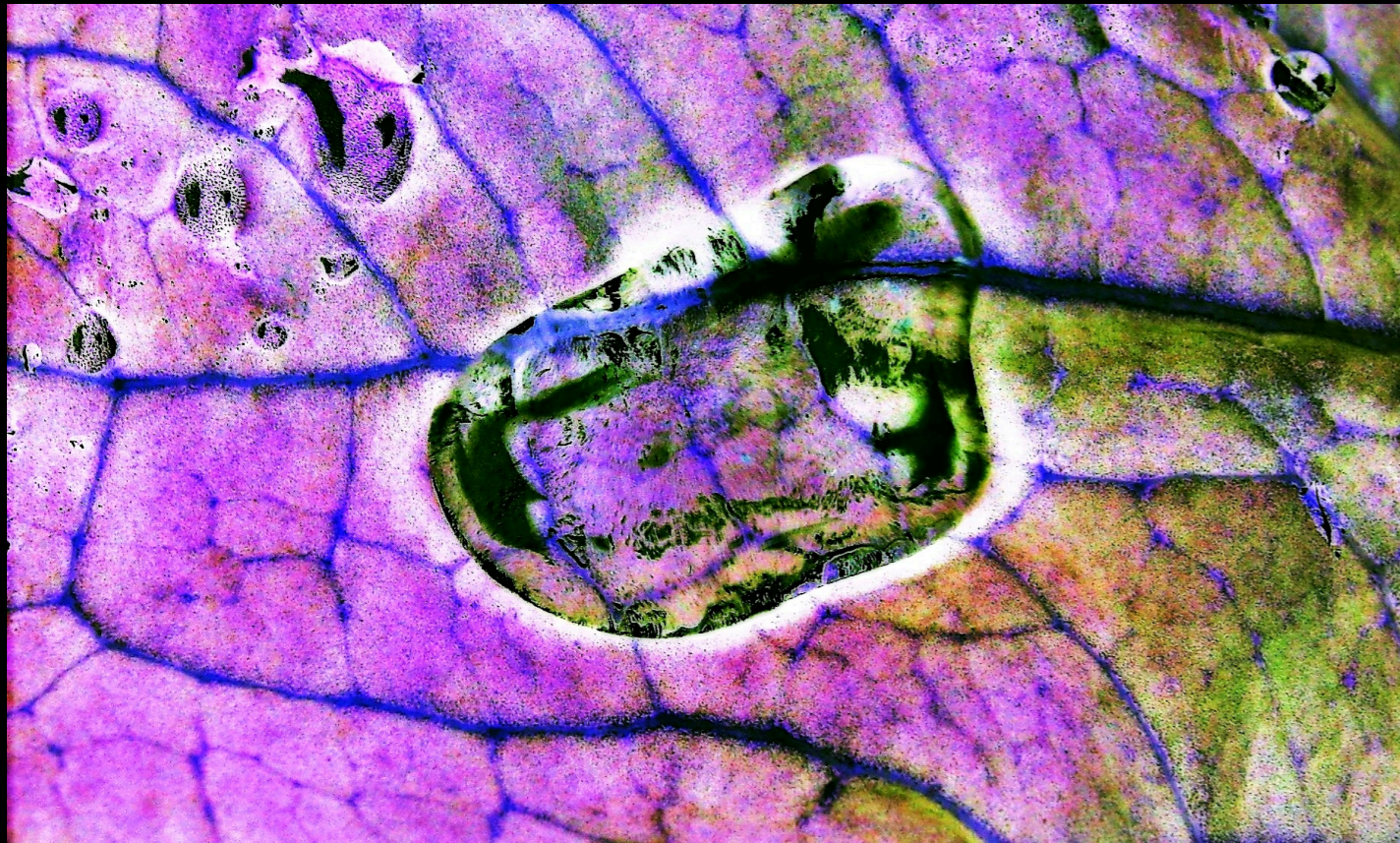
Where do you see your practice in the next ten years? Are there any projects you are planning that you want to share?

I want to continue to improve my ability to produce high-quality fine art photography. Currently, I am working on a project to convert images to follow the aesthetics of Japanese landscapes and Sumi-e illustrations.

Adam Wilson

"My practice encompasses photography, music and sound, writing, poetry and moving image. Instinctively, I try to showcase the less obvious – the hidden in plain sight, obscured patterns, the oddly humorous, ironic, coincidental, oblique, or just somehow out-of-place. My experiments with inter-disciplinary approaches are catalysts for innovation... diverse ideas colliding in photography's realm. My lifelong passion is for nature, in all its majestic diversity, beauty, simplicity, complexity, rawness and fragility.... clouds to flowers, birds to fungi, rocks to water – all the signs (good and bad) of our presence and influence on them ... and theirs on us."

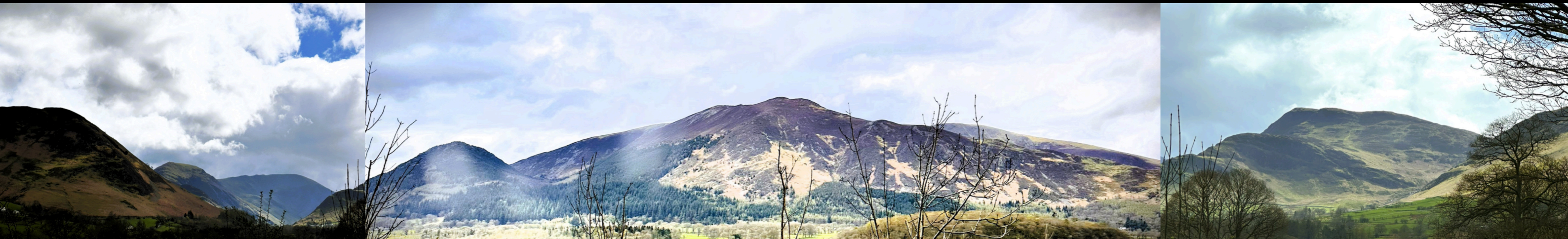
HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: Every piece of work in this submission has nature as its subject; even the most abstract pieces have at their core a digital photograph.



Water (2007)
macro image of a droplet of rainwater.



Erosion (2007)
Near Glossop, Peak District.



Lakeland Triptych (2024)

Digital Photograph
Panorama of three separate views of Helvellyn, shot from the passenger seat of a moving car.



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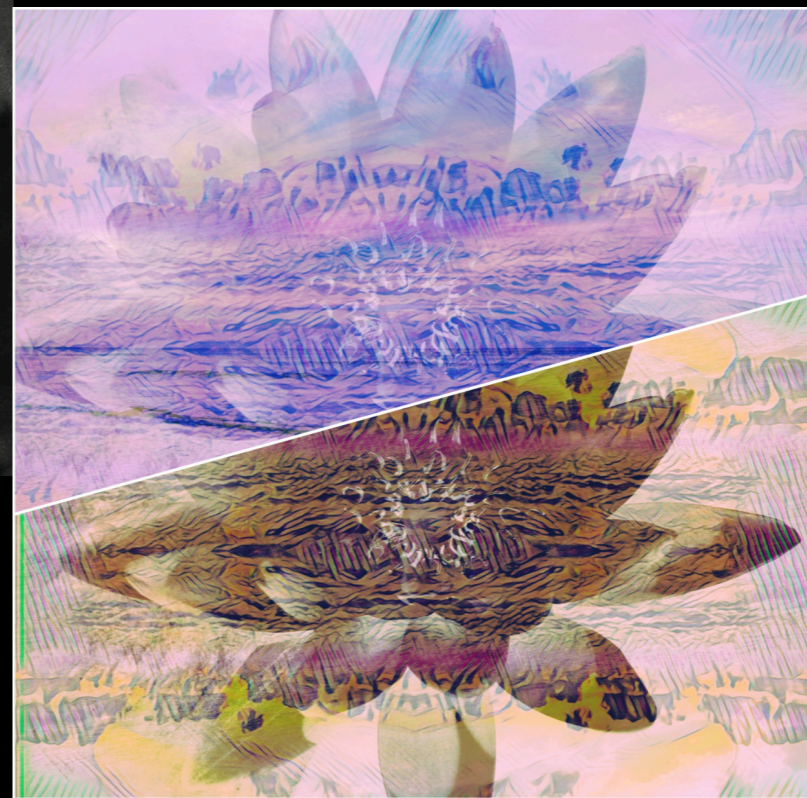


Fern (2007)
Growing in a shady Devon hegerow.

Woods (2021)
Coldfall Wood, north London.



Columbine in blue (2023)
Four Aqualegia portraits



Waterlily (2024)
Digitally remixed



Morning walk (2018)
Oak canopy at Hampstead Heath in London.



Curator's Interpretation

Water (2007) is a vibrant macro photograph of a water droplet. The leaf's colours and structure in the background make it as though the water droplet is perhaps a microorganism. The water droplet would usually just be something that a viewer would simply ignore or think is mundane; however, turning it into the focal point and making it look as though it's alive gives it a renewed interest in the droplet. We are thus studying the water droplet in this lens and entering into its quite microscopic world interacting with the plant, or perhaps the water is the dew from the plant, and it is a study of the plant's biological process.

The pinkish colour makes the photograph feel as though it is examining the plant's chemical properties and how it interacts with the water. Yet, there is still the more natural green that permeates through the right side of the image, keeping us grounded in the exploration of the natural world. Thus, the photograph creates a beautiful image not only artistically but also with a scientific appearance, inviting us to explore the more smaller details of the plant in which the droplet lies.

Erosion (2007) is set in a very monochromatic palette with a high amount of exposure that makes the photograph feel much more direct and gives it an abrasive texture. As a result of the extreme exposure, the lights and shadows contrast greatly and improve these textural elements in the photograph, which helps to isolate the centre region from the rest of the background. The black-and-white colour also helps to reduce the vibrancy of the natural landscape and reduce it to, as the title suggests, an eroded landscape.

The soil is gritty, and what is left of the grass tufts seem to look like they are dying, and the landscape looks polluted. We get to observe the process of erosion happening before us in this photograph as the vegetation seems to cling to the remains of what was there, yet it seems it is moving as it changes and shifts the landscape. We are stuck between a more lush scene and a more barren scene.

Lakeland Triptych (2024) is a wondrous panorama of the Helvellyn mountains- however, it is done in three different views, allowing for variation between each sequence. As each sequence is sudden and fractured, it allows for an elongated perception, as we see each part as slightly different. Being shot from a moving car's passenger seat directly challenges the conventional idea of landscape photography being still and taken in the same place as this panorama was taken while on the move rather than in stillness.

As the car was moving, it created a sudden change and added chance to each segment of the composition—there may perhaps be blurs, reflections, and other randomness from the road, giving it more personality than the conventional landscape photograph. It merges human movement (or perhaps mechanical in this case, as the car is the vehicle) with the landscape, showcasing both as a constantly changing environment.

Fern (2007) is a soft photograph of an undamaged fern that leans forward towards the left of the photograph delicately. Despite being stripped of colour, the photograph is teeming with life as the entire composition is filled with ferns and other flora. By stripping it of colour, however, we are invited to explore more of the texture and details of the ferns: the serrated edges, the triangular structure of the fern itself and their gentle lean. Usually, ferns are so common in hedgerows that they would often be overlooked- so by utilising the fern as a subject, it is given much greater importance as a natural object of beauty.

The darker background allows us to focus on the fern presented before us, though the background being of the same subject gives importance to the one highlighted—as it is the only flora given providence. The light that hits the fern paired with the higher exposure improves the textures on the fern, as they appear more fuzzier from the dark, grittier parts of the fern.

Columbine in Blue (2023) is a set of two angles of the same Aquilegia flower separated into four composition parts. The flower's colours have been inverted, turning the composition into a very abstract and contrasting work. The blossoms have changed from soft to metallic and ghostly, as though they have come from another world. The texture effect that seems to be applied to the set of flower blossoms looks like they have been digitally embossed, highlighting the flowers more out of the background.

Despite possibly being the same blossom, each section has been edited and changed to look like they are all unique blossoms despite the repetition. However, even if the repetition implies they are the same, the slight changes and variations in each one create a new, unique blossom. This could be linked to the fact that even if a plant is identical genetically, there are usually some subtle differences in its appearance that are unique to every blossom.

Morning Walk (2018) has captured a very nostalgic scene that is mundane yet feels as though it is a memory. This is furthered by the exposure of the sky, which has been reduced to a solid white. This gives the composition a feeling that the moment won't last forever and is disappearing, giving an atmosphere of absence as though it is leaving and becoming lonelier as the memory fades away. The figure with their dog in the distance is noticed in this path down this memory; however, their identity is unknown as they have become a part of this landscape as a part of their daily routine.

The photograph's sepia colour has not only removed the colour but also merged some of the shadows together and brings us to view the details of the forest itself - the textures and how everything feels like a silhouette against the bright heavenly sky. Furthermore, by putting the human and the dog in the distance and middle of the composition, the presence of people does not change the environment; rather, humans are a part of this environment and are not detached. This has successfully turned a mundane part of the day into a powerful scene and photograph.

Waterlily (2024) is another exploration of a botanical subject; however, this time, it looks like the flower (though duplicated) has been sliced into two. In these two sections- the upper section is much more mellow and dissolves into the background, while the bottom section contrasts much more evidently and presents itself against the background. This helps to question the viewer's sense of depth as both take two different forms and are above the background layer- one more evident.

Ironically, the top waterlily is slightly more submerged as the water should typically submerge the bottom half first. Furthermore, the top half is in a much more pastel colouration that gives it a much more dreamy aesthetic, while the bottom half is much more sudden. Yet, the textures that are embedded in the image are more visible, which creates a distraction to the bottom waterlily - despite it being more contrasting.

Woods (2021) tangles us in this dense forest of leafless dead trees in a very linocut print style. The colours are eliminated, and it seems mostly black and white without greys, giving it a distinct linocut stylisation. There is no softness to this forest in the winter nor any warmth that the atmosphere could have potentially provided. Instead, we are let into a seemingly endless world where everywhere we turn is a tree or branch, giving a claustrophobic atmosphere to the photograph as though we're stuck in this forested maze.

Due to this linocut-like exposure, the bark of the trees looks rougher and scarred, while the branches seem to penetrate into the light. The scene itself is not welcoming or peaceful but feels as though it is ghostly, as if something has happened, but is haunting and unsettling.

Interview with Adam Wilson

You mention that your work spans across photography, music, sound, writing, poetry and moving images- how do these different media influence each other in your artistic practice?

they are (or seem to be) inextricably linked. when I am focusing on music, I will always have an image in my mind's eye; three recent moving image shorts all have an original soundtrack (composed alongside effected or 'found' sound), some text somewhere (a haiku-esque epithet, perhaps)...it helps create an atmosphere and something resembling a narrative where there originally may not have been one; a sort of ice-breaker for the viewer.

In 2017 I was diagnosed with young-onset Parkinson's. Before that I had concentrated on music, but the condition made me realise I had effectively put all my creative eggs in that one artistic basket. It was a matter of rapid adaptation and quick-wins (with my fingers crossed) to find a new direction, a new modus operandi, in much the same way as a progressive neurological condition forces one to seek new ways of doing familiar things, as the old ways are soon lost.

You mention that nature is at the core of your work, how do you choose the subjects and what do you look for in a scene?

Nature has played an important role in my work since summer 1982 in Somerset, snapping butterflies with my mum's Boots disposable camera. I soon learned that creatures with wings can be unpredictable subjects, so developed my interest in the wider world of the landscape. I don't have to wait for hours for a mountain to turn up! If I have conveyed any sense of awe and presence through a photograph, it will have been worth the effort.

How has your relationship with nature evolved over time? How has this influenced your practice over time?

Having been closely involved with nature from age seven or eight, I see it has a huge influence on my life. I lost touch with nature when I moved to London, aged 18 in 1990. I didn't rediscover it until I met my wife in 2004. Twenty-one years later, I now know how much nature there is on my doorstep. Every trip or holiday we have had has centred on walking in the hills, through woods or by the coast. And lots of birdwatching. I would say 95% of my work looks at nature in its broadest sense, from lichen adorning a brick wall to the merest wispy nimbus floating silently overhead.

In Water (2007); the macro photograph is very colourful. Can you explain how you achieved this abstract effect?

Taken at a very close range with my first digital camera (Samsung L60), this is a droplet of rainwater on a beetroot leaf. With no agenda and using editing tools simply unavailable at the time, I

recently revisited it, just played around with colour and shade settings, enhancing the hidden translucent (pink) properties of the leaf which, in turn, add dimension to the droplet. Water is, after all, life itself.

What role do you believe that artists should play when addressing environmental issues?

This is a vital role, I believe. Now more than ever. Art has a unique power to engage, inspire and transform. Even people who don't 'do' art can be moved by art, changed by art, mobilised by art. Sometimes without knowing. Art can be a bridge of understanding between the truth and the public, the 'collective consciousness' — a bridge that must be crossed long before we come to it. My caveat...beware falling into the trap of the didact. On issues this critical, artists would do well not to present as patronising, or condescending, at risk of falling victim to the 'sceptics'...

Your work, you have described is experimental, can you share an instance where an unexpected technique or approach to the photography led to something you found brilliant?

The rain droplet case above is one such example. One that has proven most significant is the technique of the mirror image or 'Rorschach test' image, which I discovered on a free app by accident. what started off as a 'gimmick' now accounts for more than half my output. It is more design than photography but I love it because it's relatively easy and the possibilities are seemingly limitless!

How do you hope that viewers will engage with your work, have you received any memorable reactions to your work?

A friend generously compared some to that of Sussex painter and designer Eric Ravilious, otherwise nothing seismic (yet!), a few 'Beautifuls...I'll take those for now!'

Where do you see your practice evolving? Any upcoming projects you'd like to share?

I'm excited by the moving image route. Also I've started a series of abstract nature-based panels and triptychs inspired by and named after Cantatas by J.S. Bach.

Ayodeji Kingsley

My sculptures invite the viewer to explore the depths of the human psyche. I aim to evoke a sense of wonder and introspection, inviting viewers to connect with their subconscious. By blending surrealism, paronomasia, and proverbs, I seek to challenge traditional notions of form and meaning. My work is a visual language, a dialogue between the artist and the viewer. I invite you to navigate through my mind's eye, to experience the world as I see it, filtered through the lens of imagination and emotion. The intricate patterns and textures inspire me in nature, and I strive to incorporate these elements into my sculptures. I create strong and sensitive pieces by combining metal's raw power with organic forms' delicate beauty. Each sculpture manifests my thoughts and feelings, a tangible representation of the intangible. Each sculpture is a testament to the power of human ingenuity and the beauty of the natural world.

WHISPER IN THE WIND (2024)

Metal Scrap

Within the confines of a bustling metropolis, where concrete structures overshadow the verdant tapestry of the natural world, this unassuming bird serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring vitality of life. The sparrow, a creature often overlooked in the urban landscape, must navigate treacherous terrain, evade vigilant predators, and secure sustenance within a hostile environment. Yet, it persists, its spirit indomitable. Its melodious refrain, a testament to its resilience, infuses the air with tranquillity and serenity. The sparrow's remarkable ability to thrive amidst such challenging circumstances is a potent metaphor for the resilience of the human spirit. Like this diminutive avian, we also encounter numerous trials and tribulations throughout our lives, including setbacks, disappointments, and profound emotional distress. However, our innate capacity for hope, our unwavering perseverance, and our ability to discover joy amidst adversity empower us to overcome these obstacles. Just as the sparrow's melodious song pierces through the cacophony of the urban environment, so too can we illuminate the darkness with our unique brilliance. This poignant observation underscores the natural world's profound beauty and intricate diversity, reminding us of our interconnectedness with all living beings and the vital importance of preserving the delicate balance of our ecosystem.

The process of creating these sculptures is a meditative journey. I find solace in shaping, moulding, and bringing form to formlessness. It is a way to connect with the divine and appreciate the world's beauty and complexity. In a world adapting to the consequences of unrestrained consumption, my art poignantly reflects our togetherness with the environment. I utilise discarded metals, remnants of a society obsessed with material acquisition, transforming them into sculptures and installations that challenge our perceptions of waste and inspire a deeper understanding of our ecological footprint. By breathing new life into discarded materials, I strive to highlight the inherent value in discarded objects and advocate for a more sustainable and equitable future. My art also addresses over-consumption, waste management, and the need for a more conscious and responsible approach to our resources.



HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: My artistic practice intersects with critical environmental concerns. By re-purposing discarded industrial materials, I aim to raise awareness about the environmental consequences of unsustainable consumption patterns. My sculptures remind me of the delicate equilibrium between human progress and ecological preservation. I am drawn to the inherent aesthetic value within the imperfections of discarded metal, embracing the patina of time, the marks of rust and corrosion, and the scars of industrial use. These elements imbue each piece with a unique character, mirroring the natural world's cyclical processes of decay and regeneration.

Furthermore, my practice aligns with the principles of sustainability. By re-purposing discarded industrial materials, I contribute to a circular economy, minimising environmental impact and reducing the demand for raw materials. This approach minimises environmental impact and reduces the demand for raw materials, thereby lessening the strain on natural resources and minimising the carbon footprint associated with metal extraction and processing. My sculptures testify to the inherent value of discarded materials and the importance of responsible resource management in creating a more environmentally conscious future.

Interview with Ayodeji Kingsley

In your statement, you had described your work as a 'visual language' and a 'dialogue between the artist and the viewer'. What types of conversations do you hope your work will have with your viewers?

I aspire to engage viewers in dialogues concerning the delicate balance between human progress and ecological preservation, prompting reflection on our collective responsibility towards the environment. I aim for my 'visual language' to facilitate conversations about the inherent narratives embedded within materials, the cyclical nature of existence, and the complex interplay between human experience and environmental consciousness.

Can you expand more on how 'surrealism, paronomasia and proverbs' play a role within your work? How do these influence your creative practice?

My artistic practice is characterised by the deliberate integration of diverse conceptual and stylistic elements. African proverbs serve as a rich source of philosophical and social inspiration, while paronomasia, as a linguistic device akin to poetry, underscores the multiplicity of meaning and facilitates the subversion of conventional logic, aligning with surrealist tendencies. This multifaceted approach integrates linguistic strategies, unconventional compositional techniques, and impactful social commentary informed by African proverbs.

My work, 'Heat Maker,' exemplifies this approach. Conceived as a commentary on the Grammy Awards, colloquially known as the 'Hit Makers' awards, features a small, locally sourced heat cooker and a trumpet. 'Heat Maker' metaphorically addresses the necessary trials and perseverance required to achieve a state of artistic 'heat,' drawing parallels to the experiences of past Grammy winners and the scientific principles of heat conduction and convention.

Are there any specific landscapes, organisms or other concepts related to the natural world that frequently (or occasionally) inspire your work?

While my artistic practice is fundamentally rooted in the analysis of paronomasia and the social frameworks presented in Proverbs, the resilience of organisms in challenging environments serves as a significant secondary source of inspiration. This focus on adaptation and persistence directly informs my exploration of rebirth and renewal. In essence, my work draws upon both linguistic and biological phenomena to examine the overarching themes of change, adaptation, and the intrinsic beauty found within transformative processes.

You described your creative process as a meditative journey- can you take us through this creative process and how it has become meditative?

My creative process is intrinsically linked to the observation and conceptualization of natural phenomena, particularly the transformative cycles inherent in ecological systems. Initially, I engage in a period of conceptualisation followed by focused observation, meticulously selecting and arranging discarded metal fragments, allowing their inherent forms and patinas to guide my compositional choices. This process of deliberate selection and arrangement fosters a state of heightened awareness, akin to a meditative practice, where I become acutely attuned to the subtle nuances of each element. As the sculptural form begins to emerge, the repetitive and focused nature of the

construction process induces a state of mindful concentration, allowing for a deeper exploration of the thematic undercurrents within the work. This immersive engagement with the material and concept transforms the act of creation into a meditative practice, fostering a sense of inner tranquillity and profound connection to the artistic expression.

Are there any challenges with working with scrapped metal and how do you overcome these challenges?

The sheer physical labour involved in manipulating heavy and often unwieldy pieces of metal can be demanding. To mitigate this, I prioritize the implementation of mechanical lifting devices and specialized tooling to optimize material handling efficiency and minimize physical strain.

How do you hope that your work contributes to a more sustainable mindset?

My work aims to foster a greater awareness of the interconnectedness between human activity and the environment. My intention is to create a space for dialogue and critical reflection on sustainability challenges through the use of recycled materials. I aim to prompt viewers to question conventional norms and engage in constructive conversations about building a more sustainable future.

Has there been any viewer reactions that have surprised you to any of your works. Could share this reaction with us?

During a recent group exhibition private view, I encountered a particularly intriguing interaction. A visitor approached me, expressing admiration for my work, but then inquired if the sculptures were generated by artificial intelligence. While initially surprised, I perceived this question as a testament to the perceived precision and refinement of my craftsmanship. I explained that this was not the first instance of such a reaction.

I recounted a similar experience from several years prior in my home country, during the delivery of a commissioned piece. While taking a break at a service area, I overheard a group of young people debating the authenticity of my authorship. Some speculated that the sculpture had been fabricated in an automobile factory and I was merely contracted for delivery. Notably, this occurred well before the advent of widely accessible AI.

To the visitor, I clarified that I had no familiarity with AI-generated sculptures and that my practice predated the technology's emergence. I further emphasized that the final form of each sculpture is inherently dynamic and contingent upon the specific materials sourced, which are themselves influenced by geographical factors. This process stands in stark contrast to the static parameters of a programming language. The variability of materials and the organic nature of my construction process render each piece unique and unrepeatable, a characteristic fundamentally different from the output of algorithmic generation.

Where do you see your practice in the next ten years? Any future projects you are planning on doing? If so could you share them?

Over the next decade, I anticipate my artistic practice will expand through interdisciplinary collaborations and increased public engagement. My objective is to create monumental public artworks that provide critical commentary on significant social issues, including homelessness, knife crime, and immigration.

Curator's Interpretation

Whisper in the Wind (2024) is a sculpture made from discarded metal scraps which, incidentally, through this medium, revive and transform the material, thus making it a sustainable work. A much more organic form has been created using a usually industrial and artificial material that would have gone to waste or a landfill. Thus, it has converted this inorganic form into an organic form which will no longer harm the environment (through a landfill) and thus creates a question surrounding consumption and material use- in that we are challenged to understand that waste is damaging to nature and repurposing this waste is one way to prevent this.

The sculpture's subject is a mechanised sparrow perched onto what seems to resemble a branch. Despite the sparrow and the sculpture being static- the springs and what could be materials that would once be mechanical give it movement.

We can see gears, coils (/springs), pipes and metal wires. These tend to be objects that help a machine move or move (as in the case of the pipe) fluid materials. Thus, it adds texture and variety to the sculpture, allowing the viewer to inspect and explore it to admire its ingenuity.

Looking further into the sculpture's texture, we can see that it seems as though it has weathered, thus creating a slight darkness in the metal. This weathering could symbolise the decline of the sparrow itself, as it was once one of the most common birds in the UK. However, they have declined significantly. They used to nest in housing gaps. However, these have disappeared and thus are one of the reasons why sparrows are seen less in urban areas. However, the sparrow continues to live on despite these hardships and is showcased in this artwork by how it perches on the branch.



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Danting Li

"Neon Dreamscape" envisions a futuristic world where technology and imagination merge. Inspired by the fluid boundaries between reality and dreams, I explore how human progress reshapes our environment. Using pixel art, I craft a luminous landscape where a radiant moon, shimmering stars, and soaring aircraft illuminate surreal mountains crowned with futuristic cities. My goal is to evoke wonder, inviting viewers to question the future we build. Through vibrant colours and structured pixels, I capture both nostalgia and possibility, bridging past visions of tomorrow with limitless potential.

My work "A Road to Nowhere" explores the intersection of nature, humanity, and the cosmos, using pixel art to distil complex themes into striking visuals. Inspired by surrealism and environmental urgency, I create scenes that evoke both wonder and unease. This piece reflects a world in crisis—planets misaligned, fire raging, and a lone figure caught between forces beyond control. Through bold contrasts and structured simplicity, I aim to provoke thought on climate change, extinction, and our fragile existence. The structured grid of pixels mirrors both digital permanence and the fragmentation of reality. I strive to turn urgent global issues into compelling imagery, urging viewers to question, feel, and act. Art is my voice, a visual protest, and a call to awareness.



Neon Dreamscape

(2025)

Digital Media

In a futuristic world, under a radiant moon, stars shimmer as meteors streak across the sky. Futuristic cities rise atop surreal mountains, where aircraft and UFOs soar, reflecting humanity's peak evolution.



A Road to Nowhere (2025)

Digital Media

Sitting on an empty road, yellow lines fade into the unknown. Saturn looms close. Mountains stand still, fire rages. The universe shifts—is this the end or a new beginning?

Curator's Interpretation

Neon Dreamscape (2025) is a digital pixel artwork that imagines a world set in the future and creates a speculative challenge to the viewer to question what we will have in the future. The landscape in this work has been transformed by the neon lights from the flying objects and, most notably, the skyscraper in the far right centre of the work. This view of the future seems very utopian and shows the limits of human evolution.

Our eyes are almost instantly guided towards the moon, illuminating a deep purple glow. From there, we are met with random noises of different colours, which we can understand as UFOs, satellites, aircraft, and meteorites. These lights in the upper part of the work contrast very well with the night sky of this future setting, in which the bottom half of the artwork is filled with buildings (and the skyscraper mentioned earlier). The buildings also reflect their light onto the surroundings, showcasing this imagined future's 'neon dreamscape'.

A Road To Nowhere (2025) is composed of a road towards the planet Saturn with glowing lines that seem to dissolve into the void. This trajectory of us, the viewer, on this road seems to lead to nowhere, allowing us to interpret it differently. Where do we go on this road? Thus, The interpretation is left open-ended and seems symbolic of the concept of a journey with a meaning that has not shown itself yet.

Above this road, Saturn seems to loom above us, with which it is at a very close distance and as though it is approaching us. Rightwards on the artwork is a raging fire that looks as though it will engulf the road itself. These elements help to give the work a chaotic atmosphere, as though the path taken by humanity causes issues, such as the fire being interpreted as a wildfire. At the same time, the individual is stuck in this path caused by the collective. Thus, it creates a question: is this road to extinction- inevitable?



@atapayphones

Interview with Danting Li

What brought you to do pixel art as your primary artistic medium? How does pixel art help you showcase the messages you present in your work?

My fascination with pixel art arose from its unique ability to transform intricate ideas into striking, minimalist visuals with a timeless, nostalgic charm. The precision of pixel art allows me to communicate both clarity and emotional depth, while its inherent flexibility adds complexity and mystery to even the most ordinary scenes, elevating them to something extraordinary.

Can you take us through the creative process of your work? How does one work change from start to finish?

My creative process begins with a feeling—an idea sparked by a moment or scene that resonates deeply with me. I then listen to my instincts, do the necessary research, and shape a design direction before bringing it to life through thoughtful execution.

You describe your work as a 'visual protest' and a 'call to awareness'— what role do you believe art has in both activism and social change?

Art has a unique power to make people stop, think, and feel—it's a catalyst for change. Through my work, I want to challenge the status quo, stir emotions, and push people to see the world differently, ultimately inspiring them to take action.

Could you tell us what inspired you to create Neon Dreamscape (2025)?

Driving across the Bay Bridge one misty night in the SF Bay Area, I was captivated by the glowing lights of San Francisco's skyline, with office buildings adorned in red-top indicators. The scene, a surreal blend of vibrant, diffused color blocks, sparked my imagination about how future cities might look in a world shaped by advanced technology, inspiring the creation of Neon Dreamscape (2025).

How does the work showcase your thoughts on humanity's progress and evolution?

Neon Dreamscape captures my vision of a future where technology and humanity collide, creating a world that's both mesmerizing and uncertain. It's my take on how we'll evolve—where progress isn't just about innovation, but how we navigate the mysterious, ever-changing landscape we're creating.

How do you hope viewers will respond to your work? Have you received any particularly memorable reactions from a viewer?

I hope my work resonates with viewers, offering them profound insights and a sense of inner strength. One viewer once shared that my design brought her peace and renewed hope for an uncertain future—a reaction that deeply moved me, reaffirming my belief in the power of design to inspire and transform lives.

Where do you see your creative practice in the next 5 to 10 years? Are there any upcoming projects you are working on that you'd like to share?

In the next 5 to 10 years, I aim to expand my expertise in brand and web design across various industries, refining a distinctive design style through unique typography and aesthetics. I also plan to lead the design and development of industry-specific website templates, streamlining costs and production time for future clients. Currently, I am finalizing the Nutrigent website redesign and rebranding, a project in the healthcare sector.

Helen Birnbaum

I am an artist who has always approached society and science in a questioning way. My aim has always been to communicate ideas about the modern world in the most accessible and humorous way possible, and I strive to create exciting art that will always make you think. The quirkiness and energy of Modernist design excites me. I aim to harness this dynamism whilst commenting on aspects of our vastly altered world where the use of resources far outweighs our ability to dispose of them sustainably.

Through assemblage and ceramic hand-building methods, various materials are explored whilst I engage with viewers in a conversation about the ecological crisis that faces the world. The sculptures are partly made of the rubbish we discard and become symbols of how we treat our precious environments. Various ceramic hand-building techniques are employed to create the sculptures. They often incorporate found materials such as rusty industrial metal pieces, coiled telephone wires and found objects. Aluminium, steel and copper waste found in local scrap yards and recycling centres in the North West is used. Recycling old metal and plastic pieces has always played an important part in my artistic practice, bringing to fruition my design ethos and echoing the ecological themes I champion. Using sustainable materials reminds people of these pressing environmental issues.

Shed Salty Tears Part I (2024)

Ceramic and reclaimed media

Shed Salty Tears is a sculpture of a woman crying about the state of the oceans. In this image the head and shoulders represents the sadness of the planet. A single, very long necked bust of a woman is the centre piece of this section. The work is hand-built using moulds I make myself, slab building and coiling.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD:

Shed Salty Tears is my second large-scale installation that draws attention to the eco-crisis. In 2023, I commenced a Ceramics Residency at Blackpool School of Arts, where I created Shed Salty Tears about the bleaching of the sea bed and the damaging effects of the plastic detritus left on our beaches. I believe that this is important work to make in this famous seaside resort,

which has had its fair share of recent problems with pollution.

Warming ocean temperatures can lead to coral bleaching - the sudden die-off of large parts of coral reefs - and cause animals such as fish to seek cooler waters, shifting their habitats north. This can have a knock-on impact on human communities that rely on those fish for food. Our seas are being harmed by:

- Plastic and garbage pollution
- Pollution from fertilisers, pesticides, and insecticides
- Chemicals from skincare products, especially sunscreens
- Pollution from toxic industrial waste and sewage.



Shed Salty Tears is a triptych, with each of the three sections having their particular emphasis. These sections are Broadcast News; if you put a shell to your ear, you can hear the sound of the sea, and this ceramic shell is broadcasting news about the perilous state of our oceans; the Shed Salty Tears figure is a sculpture of a woman crying about the state of the seas. Jellyfish Escapes shows ceramic creatures escaping from a metal cage. Each of these central sculptures is surrounded by approximately thirty white and blue (suggestive of the bleaching of the ocean) shells, corals and other sea life. In contrast, brightly coloured red, orange and green ceramic drink cans, milk bottles and tins suggest the detritus at the bottom of the sea. The work is exhibited on three separate exhibition boards, each measuring 1.5 m x 1.5 m.



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Curator's Interpretation

Shed Salty Tears Part 1 (2024) is an installation of ceramic and reclaimed material sculptures which exemplify its concern for the oceans which are in the process of being destroyed by humans. The centre of the installation showcases a female bust that expresses sadness and has an elongated neck. This sadness seems to be directed as the voice of the planet, sorrowful at the state of environmental degradation which humanity's industrialisation and wasteful tendencies have brought upon.

Rusted metals, crushed cans, and discarded plastic are forms of industrial waste within the work, and by being used, not only is it sustainable, but it also implies how waste persists in our ecosystems and pervades everything within this natural world. These materials had become useless until being repurposed in the composition, which challenges the viewer to think about what they consume and where the object may go once consumed.

Upon the seascape (which could be represented by the blue fabric on which the sculptures sit), there is a set of three bleached corals. There is still a small amount of colour within these corals yet this colour looks like it could be pollution onto them rather than natural (as the colours are shifting from dark green to orange sporadically). The objects that float in this seascape (the cans) seem to surround the ocean life, taking the space away from the natural lifeforms.

Shed Salty Tears - Broadcast News Part 2 (2024) introduces itself instantaneously with the shell, which is wired to a rotary dial phone base. The connection of the shell to the phone base connected to the ocean, as seen in the installation, allows us to conceptually 'hear' the ocean itself from the shell. Through the artist's description, we know that the work is about refugees escaping to a new life on unsafe journeys across the sea- these sounds are not just of the sea but of those suffering to find a better life.

Thus, through listening, we are invited to become aware of the issue as the sea is no longer a peaceful sound but rather telling us of the unheard- those who are risking everything to find a new life. The outdated technology the shell is connected to could suggest that humanity is disconnected from what is happening. By using something old and potential (through the copper-looking cord), people are blind to the truth of the situation and thus look to the ocean, unaware of the treacherous journey and the pain that it causes to refugees travelling for a better life.

Shed Salty Tears Part 3 (2024) captures the viewer's eye directly to the cage, which is authoritative and holds three jellyfish captive; however, there are still some trapped within this cage. The cage itself is surrounded by the ocean's corals, clams and shells - however - these organisms are bleached and lack any colour. This points a finger towards the environmental degradation that humanity is causing, while the cage represents the objects of human waste which entrap marine life. Going further away from these sculptures, we find a trapped turtle entangled within a rusted wire net, pushing the message of artificial objects trapping and infecting the oceans and the life within them.

These objects were most likely used for a home interior, which one would use often for light; the metal lampshade, which would have served a purpose- however has become a cage in which thus it is transformed into an object which doesn't help spread light but is now restricting and causing suffering to life. The material from which the jellyfish sculptures (ceramic) are made is fragile, symbolising how fragile marine life is under human presence.



Shed Salty Tears - Broadcast news Part 2 (2024) [seen above]

Ceramic and reclaimed media

If you put a shell to your ear you can hear the sound of the sea; this shell is wired for sound and broadcasts news of the sea to the world. Maybe the news is about the perilous state of our oceans or maybe the fate of all those people making treacherous journeys across the seas to find new home. Whichever it is, the work asks us to listen to our ocean with urgency. Broadcast News consists of a hand-made shell attached by a phone wire to a ceramic dial.

Shed Salty Tears Part 3 (2024) [seen below]

Ceramic and reclaimed media

Three jellyfish escape from the metal cage that their companions are still imprisoned in. The cage is surrounded by coral, clams and shells which are devoid of colour, whilst a turtle is caught in a rusty wire net. The metal cage is a found object in fact an old metal lamp shade that I have turned into a cage for the jellyfish which are made from ceramic and reclaimed metal.



Interview with Helen Birnbaum

You mention that modernist design excites you, what about it excites you? How do you incorporate Modernism into your sculptures and practice?

Modernism, whilst mainly being thought of as an architectural practice covered different forms of art in the post 2nd world war period in Europe and America. Modernism rejected history and conservative thinking striving to find new ways of depicting the world. They rejected realistic depiction of their subjects and sought new ways to depict the world. Form, shape and colour were dominant themes and I strive to follow all of these practices in my own work. As a child I was enormously influenced by visits to the Modernist South Bank Centre in London and was aware of the stunning shapes of the buildings and use of materials. As a ceramic artist I am hugely attracted to form, materials and processes which align perfectly with Modernism. Whilst the Modernists were often Utopian in their thinking, as a 21st century artist I hope that by addressing modern concerns I might bring attention to how we might improve the world.



shedsaltytears.wordpress.com

Are there any particular artists, designers or movements that have influenced your creative practice and process?

Primarily Modernists but also ceramic installation artists such as Ai Wei Wei, Frances Goodman and Norma Grinberg. Their imagination and political thinking never fail to impress.

How do you choose the materials that you work with, do they inspire the piece or do you conceptualise the work first then choose the materials?

I mainly work in clay. I have always used Special White Stoneware ceramic which gives both the flexibility and strength to make my intricate works, also the plain background colour allows glazes and stains to respond with a vividness they could not achieve with a darker clay body. I always keep my eyes open for interesting reclaimed materials that excite and inspire new design ideas.

Are there any challenges in using discarded materials? How do you overcome these challenges?

I have collected discarded materials for many years, including at times when people were less conscious of using reclaimed materials in their art works. Since the pandemic the supply of materials has definitely shrunk, but I am in the lucky position to have a good store of materials I can pick from, but I never stop looking just in case.

Have you received any reactions from a viewer that have surprised you on this project?

People are fascinated by the size of the work and cannot believe how big it is or how many pieces it contains. People are becoming increasingly aware of pollution in its many forms that they respond with interest and knowledge to this work.

What do you think is the most powerful way that art can contribute to the conversation surrounding sustainability?

Art can make us view subjects in a completely different way and I aim to do this in my art works. The starting point of my work is contemporary society's relationship with world changing events such as climate change and my aim has always been to communicate these ideas in the most accessible and humorous way possible. I am an artist who approaches society and science in a novel and questioning way using sculpture, photography, film and sound by creating large scale installations consisting of many hand-built ceramic and metal pieces. Shed Salty Tears is my second large scale installation which draws attention to the eco crisis. I have chosen to look closely at the eco crisis because we are all increasingly aware of the problems we have made for ourselves in the world – art can bring further focus and attention. By actually placing discarded materials within my sculpture I emphasise the point that the rubbish we find on our beaches is becoming part of the sea creatures themselves and allows viewers to see this for themselves.

How do you want viewers to emotionally respond to Shed Salty Tears?

Warming ocean temperatures leads to coral bleaching, the sudden die-off of large parts of coral reefs and cause animals such as fish to seek cooler waters, shifting their habitats north. This can have a knock-on effect on human communities that rely on those fish for food. Shed Salty Tears is primarily about the bleaching of the sea bed, and the damaging effects of the plastic detritus left on our beaches. I first exhibited this work in Blackpool the famous seaside resort which has had its fair share of recent problems with pollution. I would like viewers to respond with interest and make them more aware of the global catastrophe and be aware of the impact this will have on their own environment.

Can you walk us through the creative process from start to finish of how you made Shed Salty Tears?

I always hand build in the same way, starting off by wrapping thin sheets of clay around formers made from cardboard tubes and plastic pots. Once the clay is leather hard, and this basic shape has formed, I attach different pieces as needed to create the forms and often incorporate found metal objects. I believe that the old metal objects, often rusty, add a quirkiness and character to the pieces that clay alone could not do and sometimes they even define the form itself. Once I have fired the works to bisque stage I then apply a variety of ceramic stains and glazes. Once I have done this I put the works in the kiln for a final firing. Sometimes metal pieces are fired in the kiln with the ceramics but on other occasions if they are too delicate I add them on after final firing.

Dr Jasmine Pradissitto

Dr Jasmine Pradissitto FRSA FLIS is an award-winning British artist, scientist, and academic whose interdisciplinary practice spans painting, sculpture, and technology. Holding a Ph.D. in physics from UCL and studying art at Goldsmith's, she has spent the last nine years pioneering NOXORB a ceramic material that absorbs nitrogen dioxide pollution from the air.

Her work merges future innovations with traditional techniques, focusing on adaptation in a post-industrial world rather than solely reflecting on past ecological damage. She has exhibited globally, and created public installations for The Horniman Museum Gardens (Museum of the Year Award 2022) and Camden People's Theatre as part of a Mayor of London environmental initiative (PEA Award 2021). Her upcoming solo museum show, 3rd May-31st October, Tender Machines: Holding Paradox (London Museum of Water & Steam, 2025), explores the evolving relationship between nature, humanity, and industry, set against monumental Victorian structures.

Manifesto for the Symbiocene, written by curator Richard Hore, calls for artists, engineers, and activists to reclaim a fractured world through Pollutialchemy—transforming waste into wonder—and Seraphic Rooting, reconnecting with the Earth. The Symbiocene is not a distant future but a movement of renewal, found in the next action, the next choice.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: Since 2005, my practice has been deeply rooted in nature, from Cymatics to Rewilding and Biomimicry. My work integrates pollution-absorbing ceramics with natural and found materials, examining the Anthropocene and humanity's evolving symbiosis with the environment.

Tender Machines: Holding Paradox (curated by Richard Hore) extends this exploration, engaging with the dialogue between industry and the sublime. It challenges the notion of separation from nature, embracing the concept that we are intrinsically part of it. I reject terms like environmentalism or sustainability, instead aligning with Greg Albrecht's Earth Emotions, which sees all living things as interconnected holobionts—dependent on each other for survival.

Aetherkind (2025)

Site specific Installation
3.31m x 1.13m fabric hanging,
created as a collage of my
watercolour paintings and plant
prints on Arches paper; Inspired by
the writings and illustrations of
marine biologist Haeckel against the
backdrop of The Bolton Watt
Engine, circa 1820, the oldest
engine at The London Museum of
Water and Steam





Me with 'Aletheflora; The Eternal Ephemera of the Mechanical Bride (2025)

Old copper ball cock, a discarded mannequin found on my street, autumn leaves collected near my home, bees wax, a second-hand veil, and a hand drill from the museum

Set against the backdrop of the 90 Inch Engine, the largest working beam engine in the world. This site specific installation, was inspired by William Blake's 'The Wedding Hearse', a metaphor for the paradox of permanence in the form of rusty metal against the transience of changing Autumn leaves.

The Seraphic Rooting of the Mothership (2025)

Hazel branches from the garden, diesel centrifuge circa 1960/'s? from The London Museum of Water and Steam, plastic.

The Gaia Theory proposed by James Lovelock in 1972 suggests that our planet functions as a self-regulating system in which living, organic organisms interact with inorganic surroundings to maintain the conditions conducive to life.

The Seraphic Rooting of the Mothership (2025) combines industrial debris and organic matter into speculative futurism that diverts between natural and mechanic. From the hazel branches, a mid-20th century diesel centrifuge to plastic components connects both organic and inorganic, showcasing them as inevitably symbiotic to each other. The human face within the work is fragmented and appears quite ghostly within the hazel branches as though it is transitioning into the branches but cannot be fully merged into the natural. Thus, as mentioned previously, it is symbiotic.

However, the work's title suggests that the Mothership is rooted on the planet Earth rather than leaving as one would expect a Mothership to do. It inverts the concept that technology will take us away from Earth, and instead, our survival is by staying on Earth to fix and use technology to become more symbiotic with this planet. The work uses the entanglement as something that becomes positive and engages possibility as the Earth calls for us to stay, salvage, and make better - something more complex than just escaping or making Earth perfect- but to reimagine Earth with technology.



Curator's Interpretation

Aetherkind (2025), at first glance, is set against the static Bolton Watt Engine while the installation itself is suspended, flowing down. The Bolton Watt Engine is one of the iconic engines that powered the Industrial Revolution, and it contrasts highly with the installation of plant prints and collages. Therefore, this has pitted industrialisation against ecology.

The figure in the installation seems to be merging into the fluid and dissolving into the shifting environment, dissolving into leaves and, eventually, a tree. This could potentially connect to the background, which is a steam engine that used steam, vaporous and flowing, to power the industry. In this context, it can be interpreted as something that is not opposing but speaking to each other, perhaps adapting to each other.

Aletheflora, The Eternal Ephemera of the Mechanical Bride (2025), is an installation surrounding the world's largest working beam engine. This gives a mechanical (old copper ball cock and a drill) tension against the organic (autumn leaves and beeswax). Despite the difference in permanence (in the mechanical) and the eventual decay within organic objects- they form a cycle. One side is strong and stable while the other becomes fragile, yet every object- no matter how permanent it may seem- will become something else in time.

However, The Marriage Hearse explores the collision between purity and corruption against beauty and destruction. This, therefore, is implied in the work as the title 'Aletheia' - truth and 'flora' are merged as it challenges how organic life exists within the current machinery of contemporary society.



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Jasmine Pradissitto



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasmine_Pradissitto

Yvonne Pethullis

My practice focuses on the close observation of the everyday. It delves into the repetitive patterns seen in our daily routines, finding pleasure in the mundane and minutiae that is overlooked and undervalued.

I explore the banal, the familiar, the ordinary and seek to focus the mind and find calmness and rhythm in the habitual routines that are fundamental to our wellbeing. My work references time and duration through marks, pattern and repeated imagery. I am a 'thing-finder' I search for everyday objects and materials, exploring how these found items can be used and elevated in a contemporary art practice.

By re-evaluating the objects common use and taking it away from its familiar role I transform its persona elevating its status, to create a new narrative. For me appreciating the minutiae of the everyday and taking note of the mundane is a therapeutic and thoughtful journey that brings context to my work. We can discover pleasure amongst the familiar.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: This piece of wood was embedded into the land. It was used for years as a stepping stone over a muddied path on York Knavesmire. Over the year I first noticed it, it decayed more and more until the mud swallowed up most of its surface. I rescued it, cleaned it up and gave it a new life!

Stepping Stone (2024)
Wood
Photograph of found wood, rescued from muddy path

Curator's Interpretation

Stepping Stone (2024) is found wood which is extremely weathered and textured from being used as a stepping stone and this texture is most likely a result of the wear and tear of people using it as one. The mud has decayed the wood; however, the wood was retrieved, cleaned and now serves as a decorative object. Thus its story has another chapter and this object will continue to be used by people adding to its history.

There are different layers to the decomposition that has been occurring in this wood which is visible; the darker parts look much more fragile than the more lighter areas. However, despite how fragile this wood looks- its preservation has redefined the object pausing it halfway through the decomposition process. Therefore we are invited to observe the objects aesthetic qualities which are the result of said process.

Due to its past use as an object that would've been used to step onto, it makes us reflect on how we interact with the environment. Stepping onto this object would have further pushed it into the ground, aiding the decomposition process. Once lodged too much into the ground, its use is no longer possible, and thus, it has been abandoned. However, its retrieval has reversed this and is now preserving and reclaiming the object, giving it meaning again.



Layla Messner

I am autistic art activist who grew up in the wilderness. My abstract expressionist acrylic paintings transmit instinctual energy. I am a process-oriented artist. Every painting is an experience of becoming. In order to complete a painting, I have to become the person who lays that last stroke--and that's different from the person who started the piece. The transformation itself is the art, while my paintings are more of a side-effect. My artwork is also gestural, embodied, and highly sensory. As an autistic artist, painting is my natural language. I find communicating in words effortful, because I have to break my experience into pieces and arrange them in a linear order. Painting allows me to communicate the gestalt, the whole. My work centres autistic/disabled joy and serves as a reminder of the natural, intrinsic worth of all beings, free from the need to earn or prove.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: Having grown up in the wilderness, my work is deeply informed by my relationship to the natural world. Each selected piece depicts a different microcosm of nature - bubbles in a stream, the cross-section of a tree trunk, and a honeycomb - in order to explore the theme of human interconnection with the rest of nature.



In the Flow (2022)
Acrylic on canvas

Dive into a world of flowing colours and textures with this triptych. Each canvas panel features its own distinct composition, which together create a cohesive theme. A stream of moving water in marine blues and greens carries the viewer's eye across the canvas. Floating bubbles contrast with the crisp white background and bold strokes of black, green, and gold. Overall, the artwork employs a vivid contrast in colours and a dynamic use of textures, to evoke the movement of water, while inviting the viewer's interpretation through abstract form. Panels can be hung perpendicularly or at different heights. The inspiration behind the piece... I created this piece while receiving the assessment that would lead to my autistic diagnosis. I had always thought I couldn't possibly be autistic because autistic people are portrayed in the media as unfeeling and robotic. One of the diagnostic criteria is actually lack of empathy. I discovered that the autistic diagnostic criteria are based on how boys present and that many autistic people, especially women and girls, actually have hyper-empathy. I had always known that I'm sensitive, but now I discovered that my sensitivity has a name; I'm autistic. For the first time, I understood my life experience and felt I belonged.

Curator's Interpretation



Forest Bathing (2024)

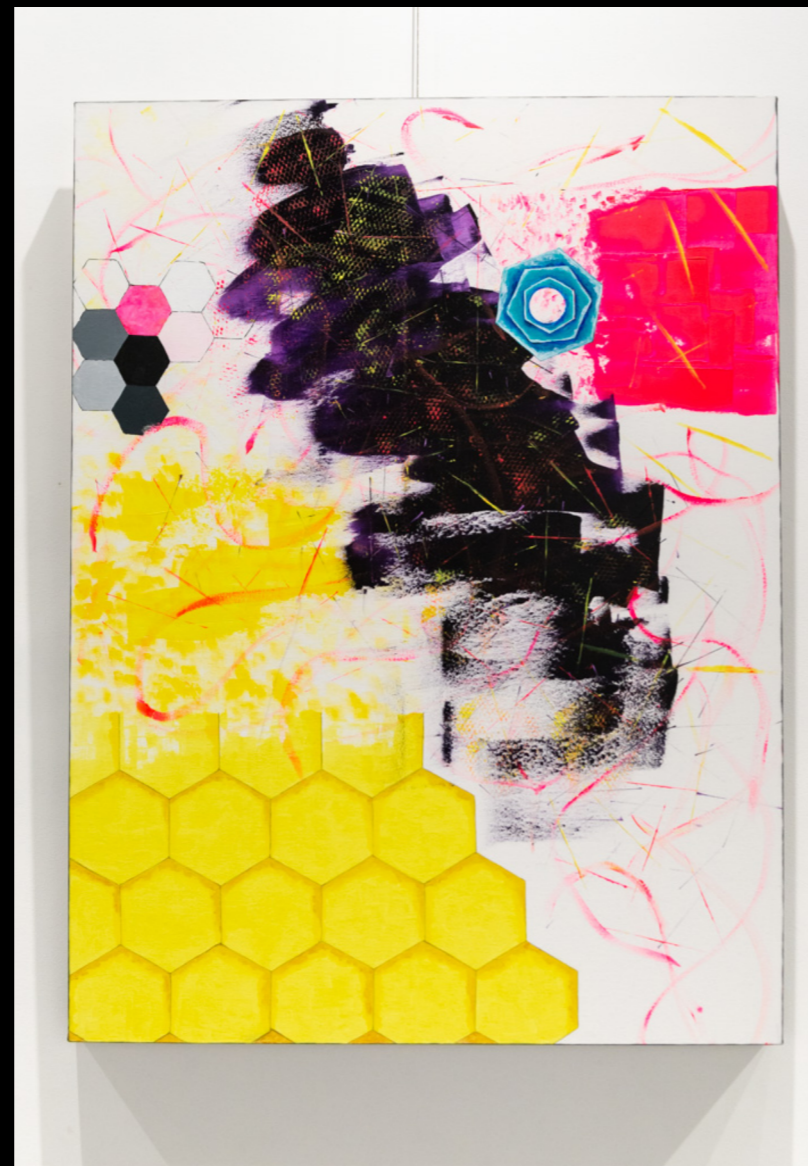
Acrylic on canvas

Forest Bathing is an abstract painting with a dominant circular motif that resembles a cross-section of a tree trunk, showing rings which traditionally indicate the age of a tree. The painting's palette includes various shades of green, metallic bronze, and touches of white and yellow, reflecting the natural, organic inspiration. The centre of the circular motif features a bronze circle, representing the core or heartwood of the tree and providing a focal point around which the other elements swirl. The brushwork is dynamic and expressive, creating a sense of movement and growth as the rings emanate outward from the centre. Graffiti detail and metallic elements speak to a beneficial relationship between humans and the rest of nature. This work evokes a tactile sensation, inviting the viewer to imagine the sensation of tracing the layered contours with their fingertips. The story behind the painting... This piece became highly significant to me when the forest near my home was cut down. Autistic people depend on routines to function and it had been my habit to walk in that forest every afternoon. I felt a deep bond with those trees and grieved for weeks when the forest was cleared. Now, the painting invokes the feeling of peace and connection I felt walking in those woods.

The Beekeeper (2022)

Acrylic on canvas

Urban Honeycomb blends the natural world with city aesthetics in a reflection on wildness in urban environments. The vibrant color palette includes bright yellow, neon pink, deep purple, and turquoise. The 36 by 48-inch size allows for a larger-scale exploration of pattern and gives room for the intricate 'beehive' graffiti to come to life. The influence of graffiti can be clearly seen in the intricate patterns and edgy design that outlines the beehive pattern, giving a nod to urban art styles. The artwork balances the chaos that often characterizes graffiti while maintaining a gentle rhythm and structure in the beehive pattern, evoking a sense of both calm order and rebellious freedom. The inspiration behind this piece... ~ Urban beekeeping ~ Nature in the city ~ Community and interconnectedness ~ Coexistence of city and nature, wildness and stillness ~ Graffiti meets modern art minimalism ~ The importance of honeybees to the survival of our ecosystems My creative process... I was inspired by the geometrical pattern of a beehive and the untamed style of urban graffiti. The combination of instinctual movement with minimalism give this piece a vibrant, urban feel. Hexagons and beehive patterns are significant to me, representing interconnectedness and community, both in the bee community and our human community. I loved the image of the beehive to allude to the city as the human hive. The Beekeeper represents how humans can contribute and tend to the rest of nature.



In The Flow (2022) is a set of three panels in acrylic on canvas, which all connect (or, more appropriately, flow) while also being distinct individually. The work was created while Messner was being assessed for autism, making the work much more personal to the artist and reflecting the growing discovery of this during its creation. The work features blues and greens, which sweep in a wave across the three canvases, which are thickly layered and create a texture like water, which suggests the flow.

The fluidity of the work seems to resist the categorisation that autism is often mischaracterised in a more conventional and binary way. Rather, it is fluid and cannot be put into a category. The black and gold areas in the set of three paintings seem to suggest society is attempting to put a binary label on autism, yet the flow ignores these blocks and continues without them resisting society's categorisation.

The Beekeeper (2022) instantly draws the viewer to the calm and orderly honeycomb patterns, while the more graffiti region balances this by adding chaos to the composition. The beehive pattern has sharp edges and is perfectly uniform, which gives the work order and structure, while the chaotic urban elements of graffiti add a stylisation of street art to the work, breaking the uniformity. This gives the work great contrast while also moving the viewer's eyes from uniformity to chaos as though they are leaving the beehive into the street. Or, perhaps, we are taking the role of the bee and are leaving the hive to the chaotic unpredictability of urbanism.

Both overlap, which seems to mimic the way that nature still finds a way to integrate itself into urban areas through lone trees, grass, moss, and even pigeons (and in this case, the beehive). However, rather than a criticism of the urban, it rather suggests that there can be an integration of both together, and one can exist in the other.

Forest Bathing (2024) has circular growth rings of a tree, which symbolise the tree's age with the lived layers of the environment it is a part of. The form of the growth rings suggests that the tree has endured a lot throughout its life as it extends to the left and right edges of the canvas. The colours of the work, green, bronze, white and yellow, symbolise the forest. The rings also seem to ripple out like water does, giving the memory of what it was like before it was cut down.

There is personal significance to this work as Messner grieves over the destruction of the forest that gave peace and solitude. The textural elements in the work allow the viewer to imagine themselves running their fingers along the grooves and the growth ring of the tree to feel the pain that the dead tree feels. Hence, immersing the viewer into the work and conveying the pain of the forest gives the painting a space where one can process the loss of the forest.

Interview with Layla Messner

You describe your paintings as your natural language, could you talk about how the sensory experience of paintings differs from verbal communication for you?

Verbal communication has always felt effortful to me because it requires breaking down experiences into discrete parts, arranging them in order, and simplifying them in a way that often loses the essence of the whole—or gestalt. My mind doesn't work in a sequential way. Instead, I think in what could best be described using the computer programming term N-dimensional—an unspecified, even infinite, number of dimensions. My thoughts exist as an ever-shifting matrix of sensory experience, emotion, data, concepts, and visuals, and I navigate this internal landscape using interoception—essentially, by feeling my way through my own mind.

This is why painting is such a natural language for me. Unlike words, which require translation and simplification, painting allows me to transmit the whole of an experience at once. Through movement, texture, and color, I can embody and externalize a multidimensional experience without reducing it to a linear structure. My paintings are

gestural and sensory, guided by the physical and emotional experience I'm trying to convey. When someone views my work, they aren't just interpreting an idea—they're stepping into an experience that is, I believe, much closer to what I intend to communicate than words would allow.

In what ways do you hope that your paintings contribute to the wider conversation about neurodiversity and accessibility in art?

My work is about bringing visibility to what is often invisible—high-masking autism and invisible disability. As a painter, I work in a visual medium, using art to contribute to the broader cultural conversation on disability and visibility. Through my work, I aim to create representation for high-masking autistic individuals and others with invisible disabilities—not only within the art world but in contemporary culture as a whole.

Are there any challenges you have faced as an autistic artist in the art world and what changes would you like to see to make it more inclusive?

Art itself embraces diversity—neurodiversity and disability included. Intrinsicly, art is for all voices. The barriers come from the structures of the professional "art world". Many of these are barriers to entry. In any exclusive space—such as the traditional art world—gatekeeping mechanisms inevitably favor those with more privilege. Because privilege is intersectional, the more someone has, the easier it is for them to access opportunities like MFAs, gallery representation, and networking events. The reverse is true for marginalized artists, including disabled and neurodivergent creatives.

Take something as simple as walking into a gallery to pitch your work or attending a networking event—situations that can be challenging for any artist, but for an autistic person with a communication-related disability, they can be even more difficult. It would really help if, when I arrived at a gallery's website, there was a clear and easily accessible email address with simple instructions on how to submit my work.

You mention that you grew up around the wilderness and that it has influenced your work. Can you share a memory from nature that continues to influence and contribute to your artistic practice and vision?

It honestly never occurred to me until this question was asked that others might think of "memories of nature" in a different way. Because I spent my early childhood in the backcountry, every single memory I have is intertwined with nature. Whether I'm deep in the wilderness, outside closer to town, or in my studio, that connection is fundamental to me. It's not that I want to be outside all the time—I actually really value coziness—but that state of freedom, stillness, and expansion is my most basic experience, one I've had since I was very young. When I'm not in the wilderness, I feel unsettled. The noise, the frenetic pace, and the presence of others always stand out. Painting is my way of returning to that natural state, even when I'm not physically in the wilderness.

What emotions and sensations do you hope that viewers will experience when viewing and standing in front of your work?

To paint well, I need to feel like a wild animal, the most untamed version of myself. When I paint, I am connected to my own nature, which means that I am connected to nature as a whole. By painting from that natural state, I hope that when someone looks at the finished painting, they will feel connected to their own nature. I think this is why viewers often say that when they look at my work, they feel peace or joy—feelings that I experience when alone in the wilderness or when painting. I'm trying to transmit a complete sense of liberation: permission to be wild, to be free, to be your natural self.

Have you had any memorable reactions from viewers that you would like to share?

One of my favorite responses came from a collector who described their experience after seeing my work:

"Layla works magic through her art. The magic she works is chain-breaking magic. She wants to free people of anything that makes them feel trapped or powerless. Everything she makes comes from that core place of wanting to help people be free. She's been through all these things that allow her to understand foundational truths to being human and so her work is easy to resonate with."

- Dani Redfern - Award-winning designer & advocate for the arts

Are there any new themes or ideas you are planning on exploring in your work?

Yes! The theme of disabled joy. Disabled people are often expected to mask our struggles or perform positivity to make others comfortable. Yet, if we appear happy, some assume we're not truly disabled, especially if we don't use a wheelchair. This is both wrong and limiting. Disabled people can experience joy just as fully as anyone else.

In 2025, I will be exploring disabled joy—for our own sake.

Evelyn Dennise Snyder

As a Visual Artist, I paint what moves me. I'm captivated by scenic wonders. Painting animal and human portraits, I tell their stories.

In 2020 I picked up the paintbrush when I retired. The following year I joined Kenneth Schilling's Fine Art Teaching Studio and Gallery in Mesa where I learned how to paint with oils. Oil has become my favourite medium and I enjoy experimenting with mixed media, mainly with Acrylics and Pastels.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: I live in Arizona, the US continental Southwest and often walk the Sonoran Desert with wildlife and plants that grow nowhere else in the world. Saguaro Cacti grow as tall as trees and its flower is the Arizona's state flower. I love where I live and that is why I paint my surroundings. My style is abstract realism, so while I paint what I see, I add my personal note, so you'll see the local desert landscape through my lens, which is quite colourful.



Saguaro Lake (2025)

Oil Painting

Three stylised mustangs stand in a vibrant, abstract landscape, partially submerged in a serene body of water, depicting the Saguaro Lake, near Mesa, Arizona. Majestic mountains and lush greenery form the backdrop under a bright blue sky.



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Lone Saguaro (2024)

Oil Painting

A tranquil landscape features vibrant brushstrokes depicting a colorful field with a single Saguaro Cactus standing prominently. Rolling hills in the background meet a sky filled with soft, wispy clouds illuminated by warm sunlight.



[evelynsnyderart](https://www.pinterest.com/evelynsnyderart)



artconnect.com/evelyn-snyder-uOM8gOEtuHoHYFARvUpX9



fineartamerica.com/profiles/2-evelyn-snyder

Curator's Interpretation

Saguaro Lake (2025) is both realistic and slightly abstracted simultaneously as it uses a slightly geometrically abstract stylisation. Snyder is personally connected to the Sonoran Desert, which gives a much more personal perspective on this scene. The angular way that the background and the horses are painted gives a pristine feel to the painting. The horses are not entirely realistic, which also allows the viewer to imagine more clearly what they would see if they were there, giving personalisation to the viewer as well.

The horses are also contrasted against the background as they are a warmer colour counterbalancing the cooler, more blue colours of the water and the sky. However, this contrast doesn't create jarring but rather gives the piece a much more peaceful and meditative feeling as they work together. The vegetation of the mountains also grounds the viewing from the audience towards the horses, and the geometric forms point us downwards.

Lone Saguaro (2024) is an impressively vibrant composition of the landscape of the desert, along with the Saguaro cactus that stands on its own in a bright blueish colour contrasting against the landscape. The lone cactus catches our eye as it pokes out of the landscape. It is also solid, unlike the more impressionistic desert flora surrounding it. Further out into the background are hills and warm skies, which give the work a peaceful atmosphere.

Though not surrounded by other cacti, the cactus does not seem lonely as it is present in the thriving desert flora surrounding it. The work's colours suggest that the flora are blooming and the desert is at its most beautiful period, and the impressionistic style seems to give the work an explosion of colours. Thus, it invites the viewer to put themselves into the work and explore the landscape rather than just observe.

Road to Monument Valley (2024) is a painting which brings the viewer to view awe of the vastness of the desert landscape as it makes us feel small due to the distance between the towering rock formations and the seemingly endless road. The road structures the painting as it is centred on us, the viewer and guides us towards the rock formations. Above the landscape and the road is a dramatic sky, and it appears to have a storm coming, adding great tension to the work.

Within the landscape itself, patches of vegetation seem to disappear the further outwards the landscape goes, which implies the ruggedness of the arid landscape. The strong orange colours of the landscape, along with the more coarse textures applied to it, also give weight to the ruggedness.

Interview with Evelyn Dennise Snyder

What drew you to painting after retirement?

I enjoyed painting already in my school years. My teachers believed in me, but in the end I could not see how art would pay my bills. So I went to a trade school instead.

All through my life I kept playing guitar and write songs in my free time. In 2018 my husband Bill and I moved into our current residence which includes an Arizona Room. That little place was the perfect room to start painting. It has natural light coming in through the windows that look into our beautiful backyard.

How has your time at Kenneth Schilling's Fine Art Teaching Studio influenced your artistic practice?

Kenneth Schilling is an artist and entrepreneur who opened his teaching studio and gallery in the Superstition Mall in Mesa, AZ. He taught me how to paint with oils and he is the reason that I fell in love with this medium.

You mention that your style is "abstract realism"; can you elaborate more on what this means to you?

None of my paintings are really influenced by Photo Realism. I did not even know that Abstract Realism is a "thing" so I would tell people that my paintings were influenced by Impressionism. Then my instructor Ken visited Gary Jenkins who is an oil painter known for his abstract / realistic florals. When Ken returned I heard him mention "Abstract Realism" for the first time. I find it's a better label for my artwork since I paint my personal vision of a landscape, not a realistic depiction.

What do you hope that viewers will take away from your depictions of the natural world?

I want people to go outside more often. Western societies are living their lives indoors these days, especially after the introduction of personal computers. When I am outside I always discover something that touches me. I usually take a quick picture with my phone, which is the first step to a painting since I use reference photography for the visions I paint.

How do people usually respond to your paintings? Could you share the most memorable response you've received?

I paint colorfully and in general people are usually attracted to colors. I get a lot of compliments with regards to my color palette. It is my intention to capture the essence of a landscape, which is like the soul of a person. Creation is living and breathing, in my mind even rocks and stones are alive. I speak to trees and animals and bless our plants and they respond well. I lean against a rock wall and I can feel its ancient history. I think that is why I like to paint my own neighborhood. I'm right here where the action happens. I paint stories. The most memorable response regarding my artwork came from a client in Germany who hung my Monument Valley painting into her living room. She said: "The colors correspond so well to our living room; it feels like your painting belongs here."

Can you share the creative process behind the work you're presenting in this publication?

All of my paintings start with reference photography. Before I begin painting I photograph a local landscape and/or its wildlife. I have roughly 10 years of scenic photography that I can go back to. When inspiration strikes I paint some of these scenes.

What brought you to the scene presented in Saguaro Lake (2025)?

The Salt River Mustangs roam in the Salt River recreational area roaming between the Salt River and the artificial lakes that were created via the Salt River. I took that picture on June 6, 2018, but didn't paint this scene until now.

You mention that you enjoy experimenting with mixed media, do you have any discoveries that you have enjoyed most while experimenting?

I mainly use acrylics as background and paint oil on top, but I also like to use oil pastels since they work famously in conjunction with acrylics. I have experimented with spray paint for the skies, especially with my large paintings (Example: The Burros" <https://www.evelynsnnyder.com/product/the-burros/>). And I have used texture templates (stencil technique) to achieve a more pixelated effect (see "King of the Canyon" <https://www.evelynsnnyder.com/product/king-of-the-canyon/>). This led to my 2025 painting "Saguaro Lake" where I lean into cubism as I paint horses and rocks using triangles rectangles and such. My pixels just got bigger.

Do you have any upcoming projects you'd like to share here and where do you see your practice in the next decade?

Recently I have had an interesting email exchange with Dennis Spiteri, an Australian Artist, who paints the music of classical composers like Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler. Inspired by his work I'm currently toying with the idea to paint "The Moldau" composed by the Czech Composer Bedrich Smetana. I am fascinated by this piece! While I have never been to the Czech Republic I hope that I can use some of my German photo footage I collected over the years. Most of all, it's a completely different approach less based on photography and more based on my feelings while listening to this musical piece. I love to experiment that way.



Road to Monument Valley (2024)

Oil Painting
A long, straight road stretches into a vast desert landscape adorned with monumental rock formations under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The scene combines earthy tones with vibrant purples and blues, creating an atmospheric and surreal setting.

Eliana Ruby | Davis



My process for my imagery is prayer in meditation. For this image I lay in a star shape on the ocean, my ears dipping below her radiant surface. I could hear the hum of a boat's engine, polluting the waters and life beneath. With my eyes closed I breathed whole breaths, wishing for no pollution and light and love to remain permanently. I opened my eyes and it felt like cosmic symbolism. There they were - The Swans floating towards me with grins on their faces, as if to say in magic here we are, we agree with you. They followed me up to the shoreline and this is when I took the photo. It wasn't until I got home and developed the image that it came to life, I hadn't even remembered the composition and near staged look of the image. I don't remember taking this photo at all. This image is completely candid. Since this beautiful moment The Swans have remained in my mind and this has urged me to spread the message of peace and no pollution. Later this year I will embark on a cycle ride protesting against pollution cycling on my own from the UK to Australia, all proceeds from my prints will go to this protest.

HOW THE WORK RELATES TO THE NATURAL WORLD: It encapsulates the natural world in my imagery but also the forethought, the prayer I made in meditation to reduce pollution and increase healing of the world around us.

The Swans (2024)

Photography
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Curator's Interpretation

The Swans (2024) seems, at first glance of the photograph, a peaceful and happy moment with two figures holding children on the shore watching a group of two swans swimming by. The swans seem to be drifting towards them, yet one can see the solitude disrupted when one looks above them and further out into the horizon. The motorboats in the distance imply the threat of humans towards the environment (as these motorboats affect the swans and pollute the oceans- even after being removed from use, they end up in landfills polluting the land as well).

The photograph seems as though it is staged; however, it is not- the figures are parallel to each other on each side of the photograph, creating symmetry. The land and the sea take up half of the composition, only separated by the horizon

and sky taking the upper half. The motorboats invade the space, which seems to be coming closer through the horizon and adding noise to the photograph. Hence, the photograph was taken spontaneously, snapshotting it perfectly.

The swans are not only swimming closer to the photographer but also away from the motorboats, which are starting to encroach on the scene. However, the lack of more swans in the scene could also suggest that they are at risk of disappearing as human pollution continues to increase in the oceans and on land. Therefore, it reminds the viewer of these issues and challenges them to confront them to help heal the world.