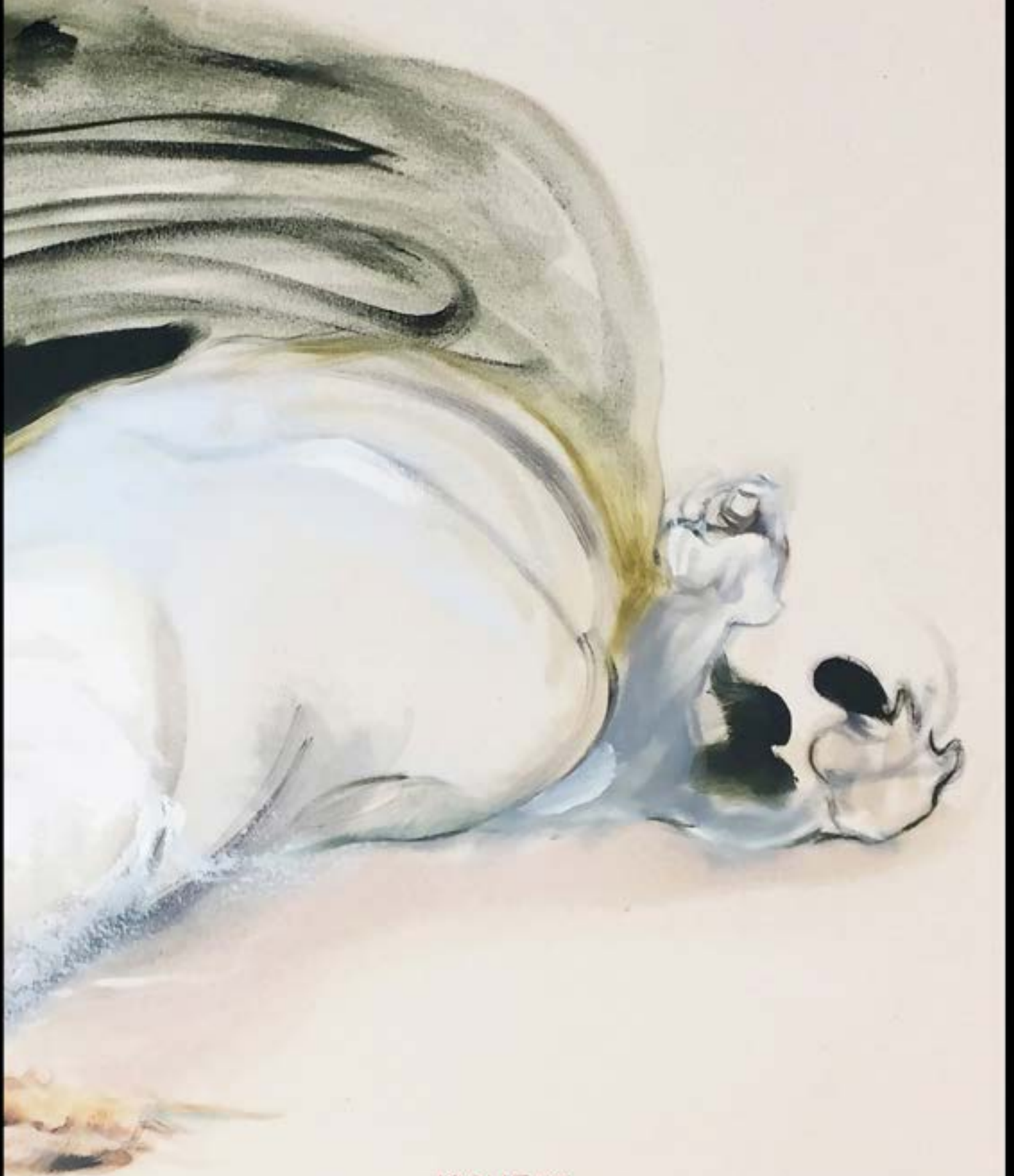


ART OF **SEMIOLOGY**



ISSUE#2



*Photograph by Ava Fersi
Model: Todd Lamming*

EDITORS QUOTE

Founder & Creative director

Anastasia Antonova

Editors

Natalia Barszcz • nataliabarszcz70@gmail.com

Suzanne Verheul • s.verheul@hotmail.com

Dagnija Leitane • dagnijaleitane@gmail.com

Otto Tylor • otto.taylor@outlook.com

Contributing writers

Tamara Chagaeva • taptunia@gmail.com

Dagnija Leitane • dagnijaleitane@gmail.com

Shankar Puri • shankarpuri.com

Alex Matraxia • Instagram: [@lamb_of_odd](https://www.instagram.com/lamb_of_odd)

Aron Mathe • aronmathe.com

Contributing artists

Alex Matraxia • Instagram: [@lamb_of_odd](https://www.instagram.com/lamb_of_odd)

Ava Fersi

Kerry Harding • kerryharding.co.uk

Araminta Blue • aramintablue.com

Jerry Florez • jerryflorez.com

Katia Kesic • katiakesic.com

Sanjay Gharu • Instagram: [@the.fashion.following](https://www.instagram.com/the.fashion.following)

Cygan Karol • Instagram: [@cygan.official](https://www.instagram.com/cygan.official)

Aron Mathe • aronmathe.com

Moin Roberts-Islam • Instagram: [@moinrobertsislam](https://www.instagram.com/moinrobertsislam)

semiology-mag.com

Instagram: [@semiology.mag](https://www.instagram.com/semiology.mag)

semiology.mag@gmail.com



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DIVINITY

Recently, church windows seem
as though they're displaying
drag queens in their fractured light;

eyeshadow of thick gold, for some
divine ball, posing by curtains of
absolute virgin blue. Such saints

speaking through the glass,
you'd think them God's reality tv,
towering orchids in modern darkness,

which sent children to summer camps
where electricity preached Word
& the flaming were exiled,

little boys with lipstick in their pockets,
kneeling in church isles, their
church shoes flat; they pray

to exchange silence for gossip,
unbounded when the child
found in the small darkness

the terror of the self
which was angelic at dawn
& naked at night,

from which all absolution
was construed through
sheer abandonment of blood.

The child was then carried
to the gardens of the metropolis,
to every stage or screen emitting

a camphor haze, a bright static
of sustenance. Now the windows
are open & a violent bird

hollers its righteous chant:
shaking windows with its violet frayed
throat; craft inaugurating craft

by letting the music play,
finding in the absence of guilt
a religion that finally creates.

AS

ALEX MATRAXIA

*Poetry and photography by Alex Matraxia
Instagram: @lamb_of_odd*

ON FIRE

ALEX MATRAXIA

Beside the window/ yellow
sodium light, a phosphorous
display of grief/ you are
a cruel bastard/ taking up
the sky with your column
of smoke/ I saw it from afar
though moths in the brain
like seraphim drawn to deadly
light as if heaven's gleam in ruin/
each window creases inwards
into burnt tissue/ undone sinew
where the past lingers only as
a charcoal sketch - failed beauty/
& even that beauty is demented,
again, like heaven/ & what
am I to do but call for help
while resting my breath
on a nearby road/ I'm not
made of fire, but am reduced
to such by your own undoing:
two buildings close together,
one catches alight/ we forget
that fire spreads/ I think I am
made of lighter things, lighter
than the air, just as flammable/
such a tall, mannish structure,
how in seeking ruin, you ask for more/
when you see half its form taken in
by the flames, you must accept
your own cruelty/ selfishness
verses selfishness/ & there's
nothing you can do but let
the burning building fall.

AS



Enshrouding these loose limbs of alleys,
the neon frame of each building brings
to this life a disarrayed spectacle.

Beneath rain, beneath breathing,
beneath the hot air of each commuter
& closet poet, there's a messy solace

in the tacky sheen which colours the city
like a broken printer, or a lost poster worn
to formlessness; this city bears its weight

like a florescent silence, each tube of smoke
& industry made flagrant, living,
in the candelabra citadel of neon;

these built brick faces made-up
before show-time in an electric brush-stroke,
eye-liner & shadow gleaming over the tired eyes

of theatres & corner-shops, each tiny
ecstatic temple selling something useless
& sweet: fast-food or sacrilege or divinity,

made exuberant by the master-stroke of light,
after light, after light; carnavaled surfaces
which parade the cheap queen as a celebrity;

a diva of furs, a diva of scaffolding,
& tonight as I undress in bed, your arms
seem as if they too were made of neon

as if you were this city's luminous memory.
You take off your shirt which I mistake
as your only skin. I have a thing for surfaces,

the source of all sadness. I have a thing for neon,
the tasteless light of grace.

AS

NEON

PHOTOGRAPHY

AVA FERSI

AVA FERSI IS A YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHER BASED IN-BETWEEN LONDON AND ROME. UNIQUE, OPINIONATED AND, SOMEHOW, SEEMING LIKE SHE HAS A FIRM GRASP ON YOU IMMEDIATELY AS SOON AS YOU STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION, SHE IS THE KIND OF PERSON WHO WILL UNDOUBTEDLY LEAVE A LASTING FIRST IMPRESSION ON YOU. NOW, THE KIND OF IMPRESSION YOU MIGHT GET DEPENDS ON A NUMBER OF FACTORS, ONE OF THOSE BEING THE WAY YOU ENCOUNTER HER. →

AVA FERSI



Portrait of Ava
Photographer: Todd Lamming



If your initial impression of the photographer is based on personal contact with her, then the first thing you'll notice will be the air of sublime, tangible... distance that is all around Fersi. Her velvety voice somehow has an atmosphere of its own, with a soft, hard to place yet pleasant to the ear accent, accompanying the vivid thought processes and interesting judgments and opinions that she conveys beautifully.

She still seems a little out of this world once you converse with her, being an intellectual powerhouse without this unpleasant false pretence of intellectuality. She does not belittle or look down at you with her words, it's just that you can still feel that there's something pristinely elevated about her that might just be a bit new and intangible to you.

If your first contact with the young photographer is through her work instead, then it also immediately strikes you as something spectacular. It is memorable in many ways, but especially so in how bare it is. 'Bare', here, comes with several meanings - all of which we are about to touch upon, so stay with us just a little bit longer while I turn this article into one of those apple pie recipes you might have Googled once, being all introduction and ten percent the actual recipe. →



As I walk into a small cosy bar upon the streets of Shoreditch I notice Ava there almost immediately, despite her sitting in a slightly hidden away spot in the opposite corner. Just at a nervous approach, forcing her to take her earphones out like an asshole.

"I'm a big mix," she says, as I ask her about her origins, both artistic and natural. "I was born in France, but I've been here in London for about ten years now. I've always been into art. I was into painting and sculpture at first, but I only seriously looked into photography way later, which is now my main medium."

Fersi describes herself as 'obsessive' – someone who will listen to the same song or eat the same food until it makes her sick – and that's what's happened to her art, too. At first she was more interested in fine art, as she'd mentioned; with time, however, she found photography to be a medium that she finds more inspiration in.

The photographer jumps between London and Rome a lot, working in both. When asked about her preference, she responds: "I don't really know. The environment really stimulates you differently here and in Rome. I'm a different person in both cities. I really believe in energy and connectedness to the environment – and Rome is warmer, Rome is brighter; they live differently, they really relish in this art-de-vivre with meetings and discussions over wine that last a whole night. Basically, when I'm there I'm really...chill." She laughs.

Fersi also highlights the difference in attitudes – in London, you could see a drag queen walking down the street and it would not be a big deal; in Rome, everything would stop at such a sight. So bringing her London side to her work in Rome is something she enjoys greatly. →



"I've always been greatly inspired by diversity and the bigger picture – it has always kind of been my thing." This is seen immediately as you look through Fersi's work, an aspect of the 'bareness' I had mentioned before.

Her work features a lot of skin – skin of others and her own. It's a lot of different skin, too – on people of all ethnic origins, body types, genders and sexual identities, diversifying her work and making it look more interesting immediately through solely the subject matter.

Despite the amount of diversity, Fersi says that she does not do it 'for the message'. She does not do labels, and does not identify as 'queer' herself; she thinks she's drawn to it because a) the politics of it all are something she relates to, and

are something important and beautiful overall; b) she is surrounded by a lot of 'queer' people; c) "Let's face it," she adds, waving her hand around in a motion of self-assurance, "all of modern pop-culture is based in the black queer community."

She finds it sad just how strictly white and binary pop culture has been for a long time, because "Who can really see themselves in that?" She does not consider herself as someone who gives the minorities a voice but rather just as someone who loves to show what diversity is and that it's there.

Talking about her style, she mentions being incredibly visual, and enjoying beauty, whatever sense and way she perceives it in. Always projecting what she sees in her mind, she wants it to be visually striking. →



Fersi herself calls her own work slightly 'invasive', and as such has developed a ritual of sorts. She never photographs someone straight away upon meeting them – she takes them out to dinner first and gets to know them. Why? For that invasiveness to be more comfortable and sensual, to be able to convey through such means – to some, perhaps, uncomfortable – exactly the emotion and the subject she wishes to show.

"What is more beautiful than your skin? So many things come through it," she says, elaborating on why her work features so much nudity. "And yet, despite being the very thing they were born in, so many people are uncomfortable in it."

Fersi herself models, but despite being a model and a photographer, she often finds herself quite uneasy in front of the camera – as such, she highlights this invasiveness and intimacy as the most difficult aspect of her work, too. She describes being observed through camera as something violent, hence the aforementioned ritual of hers. →



Her first exhibition happened in September 2019, but Fersi seems reluctant to celebrate. "I never asked for it." We laugh at that comment but then she elaborates and it all suddenly makes sense. "I'm not looking to exhibit. I don't see art as something sacred, and I think that seeing works in a white room with certain lighting kind of kills it." She describes art as an extension of oneself, instead, thus demonstrating how it loses something upon being sucked into the white vacuum of exhibitions – out of time, cut off from the world and one's experiences.

Instead of exhibitions and such exposure, and instead of making photography her breadwinner, she looks to collaborate more – with other photographers, models, stylists, everyone – because she likes putting things together, and she feels like she does a good job when she's in charge.

Still, that's not to say she doesn't work on commission. She definitely does, but she claims to be the difficult one when doing so. "I make it clear very early on that I'm not ready to compromise too much on my vision." Fersi doesn't like calling herself a photographer, even – she considers herself an artist. Being an artist comes with its own price for her, though – she needs to build the art direction, choose the people to work with and, overall, be in charge, because her artistry implies conveying her own vision. "I don't want my name to be associated

with something that's not me. If you're an abstract painter, why would someone ask you to make a portrait? It's the same here. I can advise someone else to work with on your idea, but if it's too different to what is mine then I might not take it up myself."

Fersi describes the camera as the means for her to capture something but not as something she cares much for. She uses it a lot, just as often as she uses other creative outlets – be it sketching, designing, modelling or whatever else – but if you start asking her specific questions about it, she blanks. "Aperture? ISO? What the fuck—I don't know?" she laughs. It's not the technology, it's just being able to capture what she wants. "The only thing I've actually studied and learnt was developing my own film."

"What my education in the arts did help me with, however, was finding references and inspiration. It introduced me to a lot of artists that helped me shape what I do – like ORLAN*, whose works are, in a way, about the relationship between the body and the soul. For them, the body is just a vehicle – and I think that's why I'm so interested in bodies and nudity. I don't try to adopt elements from my favourite artists' works, rather I've sponged up their philosophies."

However, overall the education she received in the artistic field wasn't the



*ORLAN is a French performance artist, famous for her daring work involving a mixture of philosophy with body modifications – a/n

biggest tool that helped Fersi become who she is, or do what she does – and to all who want to start on something similar, she advises to just let it happen naturally. It's helpful if you have something to say but even if you don't – as long as you want to try, you should. "There's no right or wrong. I don't think you should seek everybody's approval with your work either, which is a very important point for me. A lot of people call my work disgusting but I love that, actually – at least it causes a reaction."

Her biggest, most important advice would be do whatever you feel like doing. Try to not reproduce what you see on social media too much. Be original, yet don't force it. "And don't forget that even if nobody recognises you, it doesn't make you any less of an artist," which is a wondrous piece of advice to literally anyone. Especially coming from someone who has managed to make a name for themselves.

None of your work has to be public, unless you wish for it to be – what matters is that it comes from no one else but you. Being an artist is, first and foremost, about being sensitive to oneself and to the world surrounding us. Creating something and selling those creations is a nice bonus.

AS









RAWART

The background is an abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is dominated by warm tones of red, orange, and yellow, which are layered and blended together. Interspersed among these warm colors are cooler tones of blue and grey, creating a sense of depth and contrast. The overall texture is visible, with thick applications of paint and some areas where the brushwork is more delicate and linear. The composition is non-representational, focusing on the interplay of color and form.



Art by Kerry Harding
kerryharding.co.uk

SHANKAR PURI

WALK HOME

I walk the path that leads me home, down
the crooked concrete steps alone, the station
fading behind me.

I hear her whispers between the trees, as loose
and laconic as the breeze and I shake to say,
'don't remind me'.

I see the slopes of fields that seem somewhere
in between a cruel reality, a lucid dream.

Missing pieces hurt the skyline like deep cuts,
and I know that your heart is shut, a choking
love, I could not breathe.

The click clack of my heels echoing right back
as darkness sets in.

Grey hairs, a face worn down by the years,
once, I saw myself as thin.

The scent of food cooking, I imagine without
looking, the marrying of spices on a stove.

Take me back to my youth, a time of simple
truths and worn out shoes from all the play
and love.

I hear the distance laughter, sweet innocence
that I chase after, but staying just behind it.

The place we once were, covered up by aging
dirt but I'm so desperate to try find it.

Let it go, it's not for me. My fingers bleed from
frantic digging, you were my only beginning.

Among a place I once called home and the
only truth that I know is: in death I will be
forgiven.

AS

Narration by Shankar Puri
shankarpuri.com



SEARCHING

Hallucinations are secrets you must confront. Shadows are whispers of guilt that move with the sun. A familiar path loses shape. A piece of you that you see in the hills, disappears. Towering trees pass judgement. An autumn leaf glares. A blackened stain seeps right through. Light but no warmth. A breeze to shake an emotion inside of you. A raindrop to call a tear. How, (once) a sight so serene now tainted and torn into tragedy. Because of... Here you are. Chained to the change. Guided by the guilt. Writing the regret. Searching for solace.



ART IS A COMPLEX MEDIUM – IT CAN EXIST AS A MEANS OF SELF-EXPLORATION, CONVEYING IDEAS AND TEACHING OTHERS SOMETHING – EITHER ABOUT YOURSELF OR ABOUT THE WORLD FROM YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE – MAKING A NAME FOR YOURSELF, EARNING MONEY... IT'S A LOT AND IT'S LOADED WITH HISTORY AND IMPLICATIONS. BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT MAKES IT SO BEAUTIFUL. →



**ARAMINTA
BLUE**

aramintablue.com



'Aware'
200 x 110
Oil on canvas

Sometimes, art can be visible in people, and that's the first feeling you get when you meet the gorgeous Araminta Blue. We met the painter at one of the galleries in the heart of Islington, not far from Angel, where her work was being exhibited this summer.

Blue says that the world of art has always been a part of her life, even going as far as calling it her backbone. The thing is, it's not just visible through her appearance. It's also something very noticeable through her work.

It was a rainy day, dampened even further by the severe misbehaviour from the TFL (ah, London). The sullen state of the weak spirit of mine wouldn't last long, however, as Araminta was a bright ray of sunshine to make lemonade from the lemons I got given by life.

The first word that came to the me upon seeing her was 'colourful'. Fiery, short ginger hair, bright green outfit, a dazzling smile and, of course, the Blue in her name - a pure personification of the bright array of colours hidden in her soul.

Blue says that the world of art has always been a part of her life, even going as far as calling it her backbone. The thing is, it's not just visible through her appearance. It's also something very noticeable through her work.



'Passed Pulse'
110 x 420
Oil on canvas

Take 'Drifting Heroics', one of Blue's latest paintings: the vast canvas depicts both a completely humane, yet also otherworldly image of humanity, time and choices. Filled with catchy, pigmented, almost bloody reds, occasional flowing blues and the all too familiar visuals of human skin, it evokes different reactions and different analyses from most onlookers, but universally makes one empathise with the painting in some way, grabbing onto the sensation of what flows beneath the skin that the painter conveys so well.

"You don't know if they're putting the fish in the net, or if they're taking it out of the net. You don't know if it's destruction, or a rescue," Blue says, as she explains her vision. "I wanted to make the gestures look protective – but as the audience, you know that the fish is dying. Nurture can be suffocating, controlling, damaging. A thing that can seem very good can actually be bad, and I think painting, as a medium, is amazing at displaying that sense of in-betweenness."

The fish and its unavoidable fate are not the only things that spark discussion surrounding this painting. I saw something completely different, in fact: it looked like a confluence of four human bodies, struggling to separate, yearning for independence, for liberty; it gave off a feeling of longing, sadness, almost like the fish was a symbolism of smothering uniformity.

'Drifting Heroics'
120 x 170
Oil on canvas
2019

Blue says that I'm not the only person to see four backs in this painting, and not the only one to feel the strange inexplicable sadness. "Ansuya Blom [a Dutch visual artist - e/n] told me that my work evokes a feeling of abrupt melancholy. Before she said that, I don't think I'd realised just how much my art is connected to my memory. All of our present is, in a sense, built on layered memories and feelings we experienced in the past."

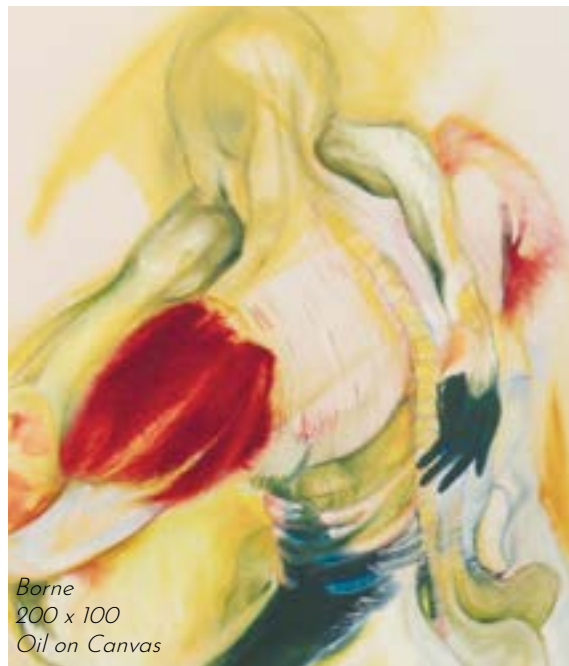
What mattered to Blue, though, was that the longing that I felt emanating from the lively, fluid lines didn't come off as passionate or originating in desire – not because she's opposed to sexuality, but because that was definitely not what she intended. It is definitely not something she sees, yet gets asked about a lot. Personally, I didn't feel anything passionate coming from it. If anything, I felt... desolation, which is an answer that Blue was satisfied with. →

When talking about her experience as an artist, and her own personal style, Blue says that the way she paints now is actually how she used to draw in her childhood. Instead of continuously trying to validate her works, she looks to remove 'an aspect of control' and move away from her endless perfectionism. Instead of obsessing over lines and colour, she lets it flow. She leaves parts of the canvas bare and empty, which even to Blue seems disturbing – but that's why she does it. It's disturbing because, according to the painter herself, it looks defenceless and exposed.

"There's a mixture of dominance of vulnerability, of exposing and concealing which is in all of my work. It's present in the craft itself, of course, with the more translucent layers of paint, but I explore it often even in body parts: ribs and spine look vulnerable, stripped away, but then shoulders, for example, are always powerful and armour-like."

Even in the choice of the paint Blue uses, this conflict is still there. The painter works exclusively in oil, because of how malleable it is. Capable of being both incredibly thick, yet also thin like watercolour, gives the artist a sense of incredible control over what she does, coupled, at the same time, with unpredictability that, with time, she's learnt how to trust, going where it takes her and embracing what could be seen as a mistake.

"I really feed off all of the different interpretations and associations, off human lives and interactions. One thing can have different meanings to different people, and even to yourself within your own timeline." She talks of how associations we make in life are layered – with memories, with experience, with beliefs and choices. Even the way people interpret her art can vary, and that can vary deeply depend on the onlookers' past and present.



Borne
200 x 100
Oil on Canvas



'Aquarium'
140 x 100 cm
Oil on canvas

"Do you work with an established idea from the beginning, or do you just start throwing things together?" I ask, foolishly perhaps, having seen how visibly fluid and multifaceted her work is, and how much she speaks of trusting the paint, trusting the process, embracing the mistakes. Blue, however, gives an answer that's both obvious, yet, at the same time, somehow almost unexpected.

"The idea is there from the start: with 'Drifting Heroics', I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to draw a human figure swimming with a fish. As I kept drawing, the figure transformed itself into two figures. And so it goes on. All of my ideas always develop into something else. You've gotta go with the flow. There's no interest to me in doing just exactly what I planned from the very beginning."

Any advice for other upcoming artists?

"Be less precious. Let it develop, and stop trying to validate every single step. It's a process."

In terms of guidance for those applying to Ruskin: "Ruskin is not just about painting – it's about fine art. Ruskin is good at helping you develop the skills, as your BA would be focused on a much wider net of theory. If I had to compare it to a phenomenon, it would be 'commentary.'"

As per applying to Slade, it's all about preparation according to Blue. A portfolio of twenty pieces, a statement that talks about your work – both in terms of what you do, and what you want – are the materials you'll need. Most of all, however, you'll need to have a direction with your work – because a Master's degree isn't there to help you find it; instead, it's there to help you learn specifically what you want to know to develop your work. "Comparatively to Ruskin, this one's 'the feeling'. My MA is what made me think of art critically."

Araminta Blue tells us to embrace the in-betweenness and not be afraid of letting the work take us somewhere by itself, without grounding itself into some precise, pre-developed framework. We have to agree – be it painting, writing, working with graphics or whatever else you direct your creativity into, you do have to trust the work as much as you trust yourself at times. If not more.

AS



Cover image
"Cold Shell"
82 x 102
Oil on Canvas





MIDRAH

AS OUR JOURNEY OF
DISCOVERING TALENTED,
DIVERSE, LONDON-BASED
ARTISTS CONTINUES,
WE ENCOUNTER MORE
AND MORE FASCINATING
PEOPLE.

THIS TIME, WE'VE A
STRUCK GOLD YET
AGAIN, AND ARE HERE TO
TALK TO KATIA KESIC. A
YOUNG AND AMBITIOUS
INDIVIDUAL, KATIA IS A
GIFTED, HARD-WORKING
SCULPTOR THAT
EXPLORES CERAMICS TO
CREATE CAPTIVATING
WORKS OF ART THAT
WILL LEAVE YOU WITH
A SPECIAL AFTERTASTE
IN YOUR MOUTH: HARD
TO DISCERN, YET SO
MEMORABLE YOU WILL
DEFINITELY WANT TO GO
BACK TO THEM AGAIN
AND AGAIN

USING ALL KINDS OF
METHODS TO CONVEY
IMAGERY, KESIC'S
CERAMIC VASES ARE
MULTI-LAYERED IN
MULTIPLE SENSES –
FROM INCREDIBLY
VARYING INITIAL DESIGNS
TO JUST AS IMPRESSIVELY
DIFFERENT MATERIALS
INVOLVED, ANYWHERE
FROM VARIOUS PAINTS
TO... FAKE NAILS. (MORE
ABOUT THAT LATER.)

katiakesic.com



KATIA KESIC

Q: How did you start working in the arts field?

A: *Everyone who knows me can confirm - I've always, always painted. I never questioned what I wanted to do when I grew up. I graduated from a famous academic art school in Moscow when I was 19. After that I got into the Stroganov Moscow State Academy of Art and Industry where I studied interior design. I also studied here in London for two years. It's been a long, studious path, but there was never any doubt that art is exactly what I want to do.*

Q: Rumor has it you didn't start out as a sculptor. What other areas have you explored?

A: My background is very classical; I spent a long time working with just oil, some of my paintings were even exhibited in London, in the Mall Galleries. The Royal Society of British Artists holds an annual show there.

The Royal Society of British Artists can be divided in many different camps - there are water colourists, oil painters, pastel society, etcetera; I exhibited as a portraitist and as a pastel painter. I also had another exhibition that same year with the Royal Watercolour Society; frankly, I could have kept going in that same direction without too much fuss.

Q: So what happened?

A: I wanted to create a piece that would be completed on some old, crumbling, peeling Soviet tiles. I was completely unaware, however, that painting on ceramics is a completely different process - glaze behaves in a totally different way than oil, the colours transform when you fire them. So I had to take classes to educate myself on the art of glazing. While I was taking these classes, one of the techniques that was taught was coiling [an ancient method of creating pottery, which allows for control of the walls of the sculpture - a/n] and I got so absorbed that I completely forgot about my initial tile-painting idea. I think the fact that I have architectural background also played a part.

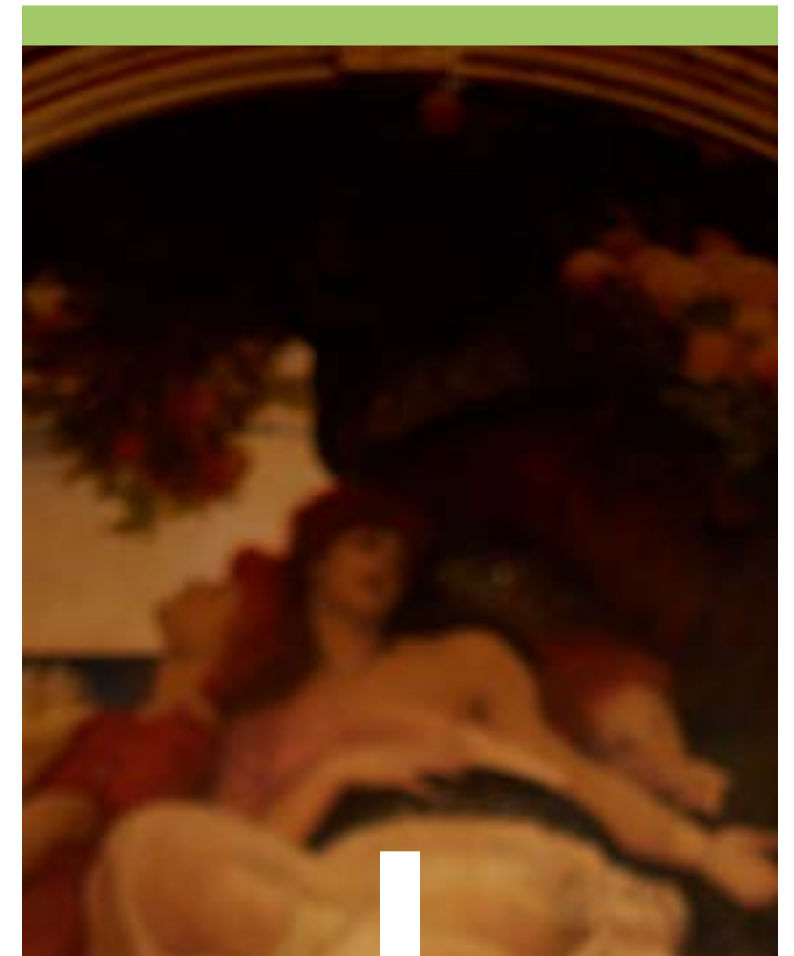
In the end, I feel more accomplished and like I establish myself more as an artist when I combine both 3D and 2D in my work. In addition, painting had been a little lost on me for some time - life-drawing had become boring, and drawing from imagination made me feel lost and out of my comfort zone. Sculpture had brought something back into my life; sources of inspiration and motivation, maybe.

Q: Do you think ceramics is getting more and more popular?

A: I think there's actually relatively few artistic ceramists. When you say 'ceramists', most people immediately think about potters. It's getting more popular these days, but still. I think ceramics are very cool - they involve sculpture, fine arts, and it has an element of magic. I think it's one of the more complicated mediums in terms of vision and perception. Also finding workshops with ovens is a problem, even here in London.

Q: So in regard to your education - people who study in Russia say that there's a bit too much technique there, with little imagination.

A: The [Stroganov Moscow State Academy of Art] is all technique. This is actually my favourite topic of discussion (laughs), because I've studied at four different schools, all very different, so I think I can make a solid comparison. For a technical background and development of art skills, I consider our universities to be the best. If I didn't have that base, I would never have gotten my work visa here in the UK. On the contrary, here it's mostly conceptual thinking. And that is good, but in my opinion, ideally, one's education should involve both. →





Q: So you would say that the emphasis on technique benefited you?

A: Definitely. I'm glad to have gotten that technical base back in Russia, and then to have polished that different approach to thinking here. However, I do sometimes feel like I'm less free than a lot of the artists here; I have to force myself to open up and let my creativity flow. In Russia, there's a certain template that you have to fit your works to, which stays. So in Russia you're asked to think inside the box. Artists here are braver, more assertive and surer of what they're trying to convey.

Q: Let's switch the topic to your work process now.

A: Let's go!

Q: Do you mostly work alone?

A: In sculpture? Yes. Well, I rent a space in a studio, but otherwise alone. However, I'm going to have three exhibitions soon, one of which is going to be quite challenging for me in terms of scale and working in a

team with a girl whose style is vastly different from my own. The theme of that exhibition is going to be 'body', and my partner and I want to make it more spiritual, revolving around your body being a vessel for your experiences, your spiritual background and whatnot.

Q: Why vases?

A: In ancient Greece, for instance, they used amphoras and vases to depict myths and Gods; they used them for their narratives. And, to be honest, I'm doing the same. A vase is a simple but good allegory for your body being a vessel. And, as I'd mentioned, I sculpt them myself.

Q: Tell us a little about the basics of the sculpting process.

A: I work with clay, but I want to try working with porcelain - it's different in structure. Everyone who works in ceramics has their own preferences. Some prefer terracotta, which is redder in colour; some prefer the simpler clay types, like I do. They can be harder, softer, they need varying temperatures - it's an endless array of materials.

First, you sculpt your item. Then you have the first firing, with lower temperatures. As someone who went through fine arts, I like to make my experience in that field show up in my work, so I paint on my ceramics. For that, I use the special painting material called 'underglaze' after the first firing, which stays almost the same after firing unlike regular glaze that blurs out; then I use transparent glaze on top of it and go through the second firing.

I know that most people listens to the music while working, but I need silence - otherwise I can't concentrate. I'm not sure if that counts as part of the sculpting process, but there you go!

Q: Is it very difficult?

A: Well, you have to have a great eye for details, spotting even the tiniest inconsistency. For instance, if there's even a tiny bit of air within the walls of your sculptures, it'll explode in the oven. Three months of work, gone in a second. So that adds some difficulty, certainly. I just kind of pray that that doesn't happen every time.

Q: What about the designs?

A: I love mixing materials. For one of my recent projects, I used artificial hair and nails. I also often use nail polish with glitter. Or textiles. I'd love to expand the number of materials I use, which is one of the big challenges for the exhibition I have this April.

Q: Why for that particular exhibition?

A: We need works that would take up a lot of space, and that's difficult to accomplish with ceramics. It's very laborious, it's very expensive and it's a process that's limited by the size of the oven you do the firing in. Something very large-scale has to be done out of a different material. It could be a lot of things, like even spray foam. →

Q: Where do you keep your works? It seems like space would be an issue...

A: In the pub that I live in. I am a part of this programme that allows artists to live in a cheaper and communal-type of space, in all kinds of locations, even empty pubs. It's called Property Guardianship, and this Guardianship allows for me to have much more space than I would in a private flat.

Anyway, when they're works in process I keep them in the studio, and then I bring them home to the pub. It being a pub, there's also a big basement in addition to the space I already have. If I ever have to move, however, it's going to become a problem. (laughs) Might just sell them all off then.

Q: Is it expensive to rent a space in a studio?

A: I rent a desk space for £150 a month, but that doesn't involve any materials or the firing, of course. You can rent just a couple of shelves for £100. I'd say that my studio is quite inexpensive – I'm quite lucky. Talking about fine art painters, however, I'd say it would cost £200-£300 a month.

Q: That's quite expensive.

A: Yeah, and that's a pain, especially if you're just starting out. Most artists do part-time jobs, which also interferes with the working process – you usually need daylight to paint. But if we're talking London, it's always going to be a struggle in some way, and you'll usually need some kind of support. Berlin, on the contrary, is a city of artists, because it's much cheaper to both live and create there. Living and working in Berlin and selling in London, Shanghai and New York is the goal, really. I still believe that if you're talented and hard-working it will work out and you'll get noticed.

Q: What about the materials?

A: Well, a single kilogram (0.16 stones) of the clay I use costs around £10-£12, and that's the least expensive of the materials. The glaze is expensive, but so is oil paint. The firing is expensive. Transporting the pieces is expensive – it's insurance, it's packaging, it's the people to transport it.

Q: Now let's focus on what happens inside your head – what do you usually get inspired by? And how?

A: I'd say I create my own mythology. The entirety of the information I take in throughout the day is the source of my inspiration. It can be anything – people, places, Instagram, even BBC News. Then I layer it all and pick things out. They're all independent elements that I then combine. It also involves a lot of self-reflection – a lot of asking myself 'who am I?', 'where am I?', 'why am I?' (laughs)



Q: Are you very pedantic with your designs and ideas?

A: I always sketch a lot. I start with simple doodles and notes and go from there. It's important to remember, however, that the result will never look exactly like your first sketch. Fifty to sixty percent of the result is predetermined by your own wishes, of course, but a lot will change in the process. And one thing that I like a lot about ceramics is that sometimes you'll accidentally add something, and then realise that it works. Then, to leave that new addition in, you start remaking your entire piece to fit it.

Q: Do you ever get stuck or annoyed by your pieces?

A: Let's start with the fact that as soon as I finish a piece I immediately stop liking it. It was even worse with fine art, but it's still present. I immediately shift into judgment mode. But I think that is what motivates me to create more; constant satisfaction wouldn't push me forward.

Q: Do you jump into new projects immediately, or do you take breaks in-between?

A: If a great opportunity presents itself, I jump head first. Sometimes, impatiently, I start working on two projects at the same time. If you don't seize an idea immediately it might simply evaporate or lose its importance and appeal.

Q: What advice would you give people who want to do something similar?

A: Well, the most important advice is do it if you want to. I think it's wrong to postpone your ambitions, saying things like 'I don't have time right now'. You need to work a lot, and you need to just do things. To be honest, I don't think that whether you should try or not can even be a question if you truly want to do it. Also, it is very important to go out and look at other artists and their works. It's enlightening and interesting to witness other artists' pieces, processes, and to discuss ideas.

Q: What about some more technical advice?

A: It's important to find a teacher or a workshop that would at least introduce you to the basics. My base is very small, but that's all I need for the type of ceramics I work with. Still, you need some regardless.

So what's next for Katia Kesic? Obviously, we ourselves can only get an idea from her own words. According to her, besides her already mentioned plans for exhibitions happening this year (and, hopefully, even more in the future), she also intends to generally devote more of her time to her art – that she adores, but also has to juggle with her career.



FRASIER

BOOK

Q: What was your first job in fashion?

A: In 2012, during my early years in fashion when I was just beginning to understand my pathway, I bagged myself a golden ticket to intern for Mulberry as a Press Coordinator during London Fashion Week. My role included duties such as organising samples for the show, arranging model castings, printing and posting show invitations (including Anna Wintour's) and various other press duties. It was a very insightful learning experience for me and gave me an idea of how the Press field was shaped and lead. For many budding young fashion enthusiasts trying to break into the industry, it is vital that you explore the idea of interning for 6-12 months in various roles in your field and for various brands in your industry before you find yourself applying for more established positions. This idea of internship based experience before accessing more senior roles, I find, often applies to the fashion sector.

Q: What is your proudest fashion achievement?

A: Some of my proudest achievements in fashion have to be the clients that I have been extremely fortunate to work with including Nicole Scherzinger for the 'X Factor' UK, Jennifer Hudson for 'The Voice' UK and Jay Z for his 'On The Run' global tour amongst many others. It feels quite surreal at times when I reflect upon my work and accolades, but it's exactly reflecting that helps to keep me grounded, humble and appreciative.

Q: What has been your biggest failure and how did you manage to fix it?

A: During my early days in the industry, my biggest failure was trying my hardest to never fail. You're probably scratching your head wondering what on earth that even means. Well, it can be very scary when you're thrown into the deep end with very prestige clientele and being such a perfectionist myself, I found that I was always trying to be perfect at everything. As time passed and looking back in hindsight, it is my failures that have made me stronger, more ambitious, more resilient and taught me a lot about myself. Never be scared to fail because it will make you more experienced. Fail again. Fail twice. Fail better. →

**CELEBRITY STYLIST
WITH AN ABUNDANCE
OF HIS OWN SHOW-
STOPPING LOOKS
TALKS ON HOW TO
MAKE IT IN THE
INDUSTRY AND FAIL
THE RIGHT WAY.**

SANJAY GHARU

Q: Do you think the fashion crowd is welcoming to newbies?

A: I think that there is space in the industry for every newbie and Fashion Week is a great example of this. When I started attending fashion shows approximately 5 years ago, fashion shows (particularly the front-row) were densely populated and specifically reserved for the industry's infamous Buyers, Editors, Photographers, Stylists, and Press/Media. Now, however, shows are studded with the latest generation of fashionistas also knows as influencers; largely due to the rise of social media. Influencers have taken the scene by storm and have created a reformed movement in the industry. And whether loved or loathed by the former front-row, their presence is certainly undeniable.

Q: What tricks do you use in your work as a stylist?

A: I wouldn't claim to use any specific trick to enable me to style my clients. In fact, I don't use much creativity at all. What I do use, however, is logic, understanding and listening skills. It is so important to listen to your client's needs, requirements and use consideration when choosing pieces that will work for them. Listening to your client is the biggest skill, which any stylist could offer, and the creativity will just flow.

Q: Do you have any style signatures for yourself and your clients? How did you develop them?

A: When it comes to my clients, I don't have any specific style signatures. It is all about tuning in with my client's needs and developing their style signature rather than mine, but I will, of course, encourage my client to explore colour, silhouette, fabric choice, composition and think more creatively. In terms of my personal style, it varies so much as for a stylist who is open to exploring and not afraid to push boundaries or get creative. My personal style really depends on my mood, so in that sense, you could say that psychology is my style signature. My mood and inner energy help deciding what to wear every day. In fact, the majority of us are influenced by our mood/energy when we choose what to wear without even noticing it.

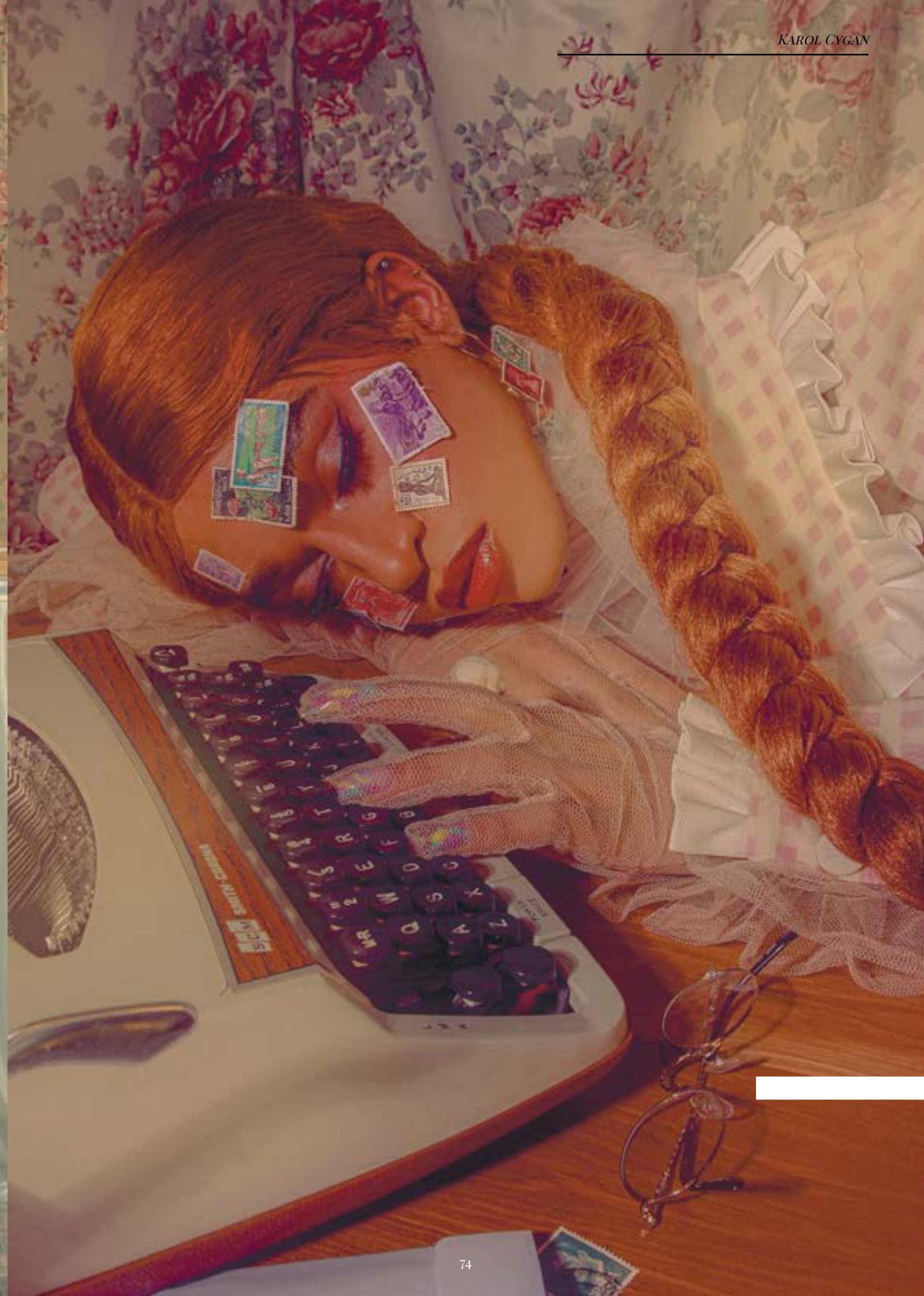
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Instagram: @the.fashion.following



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ARON MATHE

Nikos Akritidis: *Your research focuses on the paradigm shift that technological advances will bring in the 21st century. The evolution of space travel, advanced biotech and human augmentation are recurrent themes in your work. How do you see these technologies affecting artistic production in the coming years?*

Aron Mathe: *I see the emergence of an interdisciplinary crossover of fine art practices with scientific research. I believe that there will be a significant expansion of creative practices in relation to the development of space exploration and gene engineering.*



Q: You've mentioned extra-terrestrial colonies as a source of inspiration for art. How can aerospace technologies challenge creative thinking?

A: "We dream, it's who we are, bound to our bones that instinct to build, to drive to seek beyond what we know, it is in our DNA. We crossed the oceans, we conquered the sky's and when there were no more frontiers on Earth, we launched ourselves among the stars".

The quote above is sourced from the television National Geographic's series Mars. I believe curiosity has always been a drive for creative thinking, that space exploration is the next frontier in that only now technology is starting to get to a point where we can take it seriously. The space sector has had a close relationship with the Arts from its early development. I see this relationship as a source of inspiration effecting both the arts and the aerospace technologies.

The iconic 1865 works of Jules Verne's novel From the Earth to the Moon and Kubrick's science-fiction film 2001: A Space Odyssey has contributed to inspiring audiences for generations and has helped envision the future possibilities of Space travel. NASA's Apollo project gain popularity and founding due to Chesley Bonestell's (American painter) collaborations with NASA's rocket scientist W. Braun. His paintings, portraying landscapes of planets and illustrations of future space missions, convinced the public that expeditions to the moon were possible.

Access to space is increasingly becoming more affordable, enabling artist's to freely explore this phenomenon. Let's take the works of Trevor Paglen for an example. His Orbital Reflector produces a satellite space sculpture

that reflects sunlight, becoming visible from Earth. This inflatable Orbital Reflector was carried to orbit by Space X's Falcon 9 rocket.

Other planets have become a playground for artistic creativity, most evidently seen in NASA's phase 3 competition Marsha. The start-up companies Zopherus, AI Space- Factory and Kahn-Yates secured top positions by discovering a multitude of approaches constructing large architectural spaces on Mars with 3D printing technologies. With this new technology being developed, a new spectrum of artistic presence has gained momentum. Artworks have the potential to reach other planets far beyond human scope.

Yusaku Maezawa intensified this increasing interest of artistic presence in space with his controversial launch of the project #dearMoon. In essence, Maezawa purchased tickets for Elon Musk's private SpaceX programme which he specifically reserved for artists of his choice. This represents how artists have been prioritised in space exploration which, therefore, validates their importance of artistically interpreting and communicating space to potentially change the perspectives of humanity itself. Artistic presence in Space exploration has enabled such projects to develop that are increasingly pushing boundaries of the possible.

Q: Technological improvements enable artists to access space as a creative platform; with, for example, more affordable satellite and rocket construction becoming available. Do you see any dangers that could be associated with this kind of creative freedom?

A: Since 2012, there has been an increasing interest in synthetic biology and bio-tech industries.

The Arts are no exception. Thanks to CRISPR CAS-9 gene engineering technology has become cost effective and precise. Although there is still progress in understanding how genes function, the editing of plant, animal and human DNA has become a familiar practice within labs internationally. (CRISPRs are specialized stretches of DNA. The protein Cas9 is an enzyme that acts like a pair of molecular scissors, capable of cutting strands of DNA. This form of gene editing can be done by inserting a cut or break in the DNA and tricking a cell's natural DNA repair mechanisms into introducing the changes one wants.)

The possibility of creating new living organisms through abiogenesis and advanced gene editing has marked the introduction of a new terrain in artistic creativity. The interference of these fields accumulated in the Bio Art movement leading to the production of art such as the GFP Bunny, a transgenic rabbit that contains a jellyfish gene which makes the rabbit glow or Koen Vanmechelen's CCP (Cosmopolitan Chicken Project). Vanmechelen's method of using genetic breeding created an entire new race of chickens as an art piece.

I see biotech as being an increasingly inviting field for artists, as it provides an insight into the creation of life. Nevertheless, artist freehandedly altering life most likely will impact the public and commercial fields alike. The use of gene editing has to be considered very carefully as beside its positive potentials it carries a great danger that could result in an environmental disaster. For example, the use of gene drives such as mosquitos has the potential to change the genetic information of an entire species within a couple of weeks. →

There has been a growing need for directly communicating with the public the impacts of these technologies, for most people it is still as complicated as magic. I personally think art has a great potential in doing that. I believe it is becoming ever more needed to have an open discussion challenging these technologies, especially when it comes to the enhancement of humans

Q: What connections do you see between human enhancement and the Arts?

A: Artists for centuries have imagined the idea of modifying humans to gain better viabilities, longer life spans or enhanced bodies. In 1931 Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* portrayed a distant science fiction, today the technology is there to make it reality.

Human bionics have been pioneering in arts. Stelarc's robotic Third Hand and Exoskeleton body project are good examples on this early movement in the 80's. Today exoskeleton bodies and body insertable microchips are being researched and used by both military, healthcare and commercial fields alike.

In November 2018 in China, the first gene edited babies were born. He Jiankui used the CRISPR technology to edit the babies' genome for HIV resistance. Jiankui's lab got closed down, but I think there is no turning back from that. The birth of the babies opened a gate for edited humans, a path that foreseeably many more will follow.

Dr. Josiah Zayner, a pioneer Biohacker, became the center of attention after he attempted

to increase his body muscle by injecting genes modified with CRISPR technology. Even though the experiment was unsuccessful, it has inspired others to follow. While Zayer's actions were heavily criticized by the media, his work has brought him art awards for creating Speculative Science pieces and has been featured in museums across the world including NY MoMA PS1.

The first genetically edited humans are living among us and the growing interest in human enchantment is putting an increasing pressure on artists to communicate these practices with the public. When we can change the way nature operates what we consider to be natural and what we consider to be artificial has become relative.



Growing intelligence is foreseeably achievable by augmenting consciousness with the interlink of a strong neuron Ai network. Ai human connectivity carries a huge potential to radically transform creative thinking, nevertheless it can turn out to be rather dangerous as well. Musk fears that the technology could also be used as a weapon or as means to establish dominance by superior intelligence. In order to counter balance these assumptions he advocates that Neuralink; his Ai human brain interface technology will be available for anyone interested. Although it is hard to imagine this type of technology not being used by its developers to maintain superiority.

It's hard to dismiss these ideas due to their growing market potential. These alterations will dominate how humans will evolve in the next decades. Our life today contains the precious ability to not only witness but partake in this evolutionary step. In doing so, artists and creative thinkers will have a bigger responsibility than ever before.

Q: As you reiterated, these technologies carry huge promises but there are many things to consider in regards to dangers they could bring to society. What do you think should be the limits set to artistic practices in this context?

A: This is a very important question. I would say you can't limit creative practices by enforcing law, as creativity will find way to strive over that. I believe the important point is for people who use these technologies to really understand the potential consequences their actions may result in.

The innovative methods leading to an accessibility of space, altering life or upgrading humans provide a freedom for artists to construct their visions in a physical form. Nevertheless, it is crucial

to consider the possible consequences of these actions. An entire organisms' evolutionary line can be manipulated with gene engineering. Planets and space can be cluttered with object due to advanced rocket technology. Furthermore, humans can uptake shapes of deities or monsters by enhancement to one's imagination. Meaning that artists having the tools to create wonders and disasters carry a huge responsibility in shaping the future.

Due to space being a previously unexplored terrain, along with the development of Space tourism, space artworks will foreseeably become a public phenomenon. The incorporation of microorganisms with engineering has been becoming the next frontier for technological innovation, which increasingly will impact both the scientific and artistic field. The growing need of public involvement within these fields will invite an increasing number of artists to work with such pioneering tools.

I believe that it is important to work with artists to communicate the extent these technologies may alter life, but it is as important for artists to understand the consequences of their creations. Artist having the tools to alter living organisms have an accountability with their mark making in evolution. In a future that appears as bright as fearful I believe it is essential to take art into a serious consideration. These technologies provide an opportunity but also a responsibility to shape the future to our imagination.

Q: Can you tell us a bit about the project you are working on at the moment?

A: I am working on an arthouse documentary film presenting how humans could use genetics to adapt and survive in Space conditions in the future. I am planning to present the film together with a couple of new sculpture pieces that I'm currently

making.

The origin of the documentary will heavily use NASA's Twin Study as a starting point but then the film will aim to pick up where NASA left off, through introducing elements of conversation that will confront the ethical, social and economic impacts of human gene-editing.

NASA's Twin Study was a project that involved Scott Kelly, a NASA astronaut, spending the longest time human has ever been in outer space. His biological build up was compared with his identical twin brother Mark Kelley who stayed on Earth. The project aimed to provide an insight to what happens to the human body after 12 months in space.

The film will present documentary interviews with carefully selected experts in different fields of science, arts, design, engineering and philosophy. The project sets out to reveal the billion-dollar industry behind applied genetics, uncover promises it holds for long term Space exploration and present dangers it may hold if exploited for military or economic benefit.

For the sculptures I am using the most up to date available aerospace manufacturing technology developed by NASA and other partnering companies. I'm afraid that is all I can tell you at the moment.

Q: Thank you for sharing these insights with us! Is there any last message you would like to end with?

A: I think it's crucial to keep in mind that with great power comes great responsibility. Arts should be no exception to that.

AS

MOIN ROBERTS- ISLAM

Technology Development Manager at Fashion Innovation Agency

Instagram :@moinrobertsislam



Q: What was your first ever fashion project that sparked your interest in the industry?

A: We were commissioned to create a user-controlled colour changing fabric for a US-based fashion brand. The brief was to create a fabric which would change its colour/appearance at the touch of a button, but without using lights/LEDs. It was a tricky brief but, in the end, we found a solution. It made me realise the breadth of opportunities within the area of fashion tech.

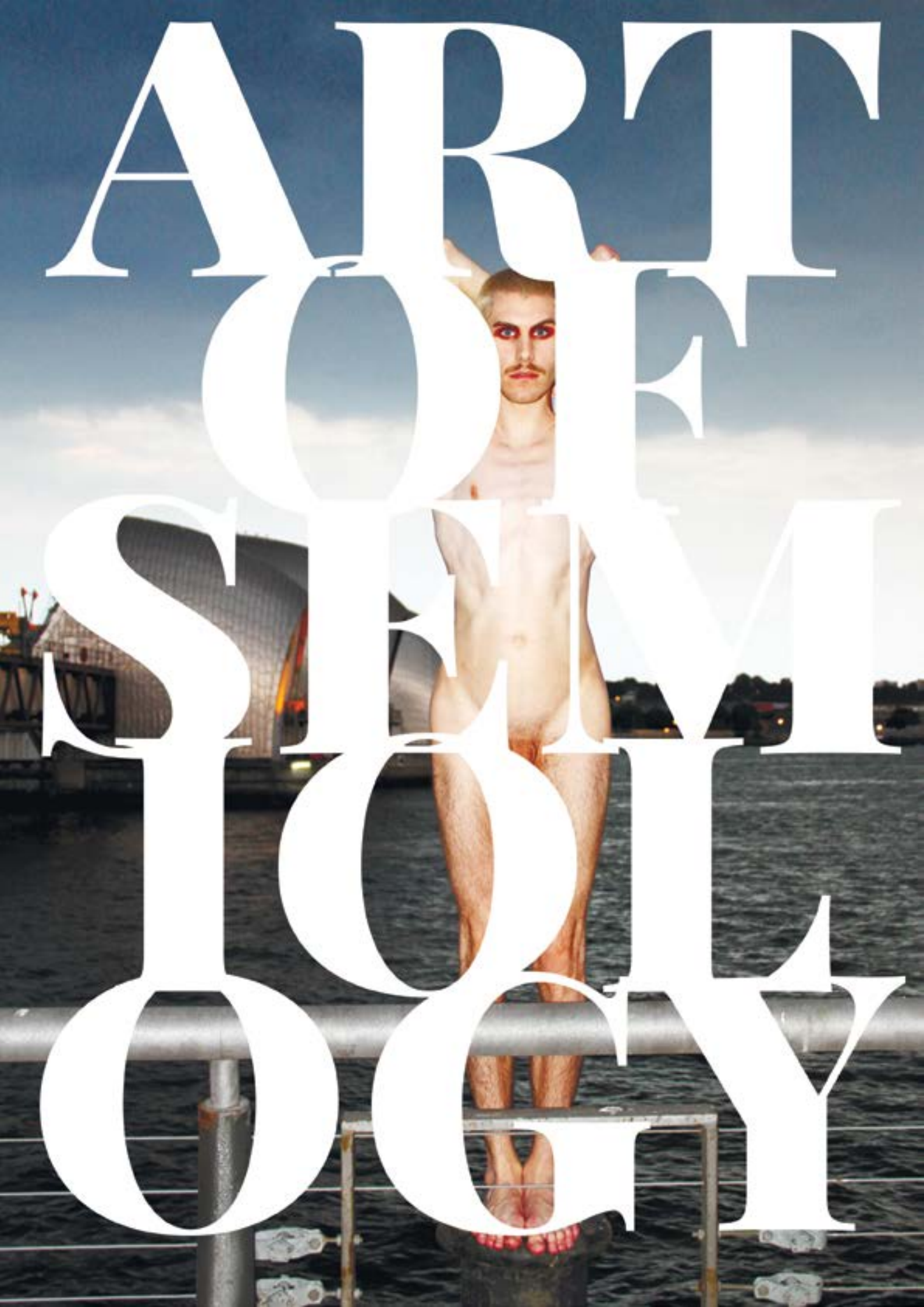
Q: Which project of yours are you the proudest of?

A: There are two that I can't choose between. One was an EU-funded project to develop a method for recycling offcut cotton and viscose material from the fashion industry and turning it into alternatives to paper, card and wood. We developed several successful processes within six months and achieved a lot of interest from industry, as well as being selected in the final 20 for the Global Change Award.

Another more recent project that I am very proud of is one where we worked with our collaborators to develop a method of scanning humans and clothes in photo-realistic detail, using just an ordinary smartphone, to create very realistic avatars and digital garments for virtual try-on. This project has huge ramifications for the future of retail and virtual fit.

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