

They are watching|2024

They are watching | 2024 showcases the creative works of:

Sergis ADAMOS
Moza AL FALASI
Giuseppe BARILARO
Clive BARSTOW
Martyna BENEDYKA
Izmer BIN AHMAD
Jennifer CABRAL
Lia DE JONGHE
Liu ENTUNG
Houra FARZANEH SABET
Stefano FAVARETTO
Gabriela GHILLANYOVA
Brian GONZALES
Soheil HOSSEINI
Reza KAHNAMOUYI
Joshua KANE GOMES
Nasim PACHI
Tor SEIDEL
Elham SHAF AEI
Marjan SHARIAT
Izumi UEDA YUU

Curated by Dr **Elham SHAF AEI**

They Are Watching, presents a diverse array of contemporary portraiture encompassing various artistic mediums such as painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture, digital painting, mixed media works, and AI.

Officially opened by Associate Professor **Lyndall ADAMS**

Gallery25

Opening: Thursday 2 May 2024 5pm–7pm
Exhibition dates: 26 April to 29 May
Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am–4pm
Building 10, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

ECU Galleries acknowledge the traditional custodians, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and elders past and present. We pay our respects for the great privilege of living, making and researching on these unceded lands.

ECU Galleries



Elham SHAFAEI

Curatorial Statement

Undoubtedly, portraiture holds immense significance within the history of art, making it one of the most crucial genres. Besides information that a portrait transmits to its viewers regarding the appearance of the subject, it's also important for contemporary art that a portrait contains a context, identity questions, social issues, etc. Despite the challenges that contemporary portraiture currently faces such as: representation and diversity, digitalisation and social media, technological advancements, financial sustainability, competition, and recognition, it remains vibrant, and popular, and will assuredly thrive in the future.

They Are Watching, aims to challenge preconceived notions about the genre and showcase its evolution in the contemporary world. Portraits are sometimes viewed simply as documents of appearance, recording how a person looked at a particular moment in time.

While this aspect is important, it overlooks the potential for portraits to convey emotion, narrative, and symbolism beyond mere physical likeness. This exhibition features a diverse selection of artworks from twenty-one international artists from different parts of the globe that push the boundaries of static portraiture while addressing contemporary themes such as: Identity and diversity, emotional expression, mythology, social justice, technology and digital identity, narrative, and storytelling. From oil paintings to AI and digital compositions, each piece offers a unique perspective on human experiences.

The intensity of portraitures selected for this exhibition extends beyond mere physical depiction, delving into the depths of psychological, philosophical, and emotional states. While Elham Shafaei captured the essence of loss. Her concept articulates that our existence will always be structured by loss and a sense of unbelonging, which entails our eternal desire to belong. Nasim Patchi created portraits to illustrate statements on identity, freedom, and gender. On the other hand, Izumi Ueda Yuu painted her dream, which pays tribute to the sea.

In the throes of rapid technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), Soheil Hosseini reimagined the very concept of identity. Liu Entung's work questions the definition of a person's existence in the new media era and illustrates how people heavily rely on technology, especially during a severe pandemic, implying the loss of identity on social platforms. Marjan Shariat's work fluctuates between human memory and memories with existence and presence, with a touch of reality.

Lia De Jonghe's imaginative creations raise questions about identity and its subjective

nature and Izmer Bin Ahmad was inspired by medical illustration. Sergis Adamos provides a profound exploration of artistic metamorphosis, where every glance reveals a deeper layer of storytelling. Tor Seidel's *Mannequins* share one common trait: the ability to recognise the inclination to anthropomorphise the mounted body within them. Stefano Favaretto's exploration delves into the intricate connection between an invisible universe composed of energies, frequencies, and vibrations, and the tangible, visible world. Joshua Kane Gomez on-going series of sculptures navigate the pitfalls of unhealthy dependencies within relationships, particularly the deterioration of one-sided infatuation into all-consuming delusions of intimacy. Giuseppe Barilaro embodies and opposes the essence of existence simultaneously, signifying not the origin or end, but rather the essence of change and transformation.

Clive Barstow's *Cruel Britannia* posits an uneasy and somewhat provocative narrative through overt references to colonisation in Australia and the resulting culturally specific folklore modeled under crown sovereignty and underpinned by power and privilege. Gabriela Ghillanyova's passion lies in portraying everyday women in a fantastical and whimsical way. Her portraits draw deep inspiration from traditional paintings, the Old Masters, illustration, and folklore. Martyna Benedyka expresses the sublime and the infinite, referring to the sense and power of the image in the real world. Her work strikes the viewer with power and raises the boundless question of whether the sublime in art can coexist with beauty.

Jennifer Cabral visually explores the ambivalence of her identity - a woman of colour in North America where she resides, and a white woman in South America where she was born. Moza Al Falasi's work seeks to draw attention to the overlooked nuances of everyday life—a profound yet often unnoticed reality—revealed only amidst the turbulence of grief. Houra Farzaneh Sabet's work is about solitude; she captures the feeling of being invisible in this vast, tremendous world. Brian Gonzales's series of screenprints reflects on the existential crisis that emerges from reflecting upon and evaluating the trajectory of one's life and one's place in the world, exploring themes of regret, resentment, triumph, and confusion. Reza Kahnamiy documented the lives of Afghan and Iranian immigrant workers within the spontaneous context of his architectural projects. Initially portraying authentic portraits of these workers' weary faces, the images undergo a transformative evolution, mirroring the changing contours of their experiences during successive work shifts.

Each artist brings a unique perspective and artistic voice to the exhibition, collectively creating a rich tapestry of narratives that captivate and engage viewers, inviting them to contemplate and reflect upon the complexities and importance of the portraiture in our contemporary era.

Dr. Elham Shafaei
January 2024

Sergis ADAMOS

(SOUTH AFRICA-CYPRUS)

Artist Statement

Enlightened, a captivating work from my 2023 *Strangers Forever* collection, showcases my distinctive approach to digital art. This technique breathes new life into old, deteriorating glass negative plates, creating a unique blend of past and present. The artwork is a fusion of two distinct images, originally separate, now serendipitously joined – one set horizontally and the other vertically. At the heart of this piece is the portrait of a young woman. Despite the partial decay of her image, she exudes an enigmatic allure. This beauty is harmoniously juxtaposed with the surrounding decay. Intriguingly, a green veil-like shape envelops her head – a creative interplay resulting from the second plate. This veil, on closer inspection, is a figure seated with hands in lap, seamlessly integrated into the overall composition. Adding a dimension of generational continuity and hope is the image of a young child in a reclining pose, clutching a mandolin. This symbolises a resurgence of life and hope, merging past narratives with future possibilities. *Enlightened* thus becomes a confluence of history and the contemporary, of disintegration and rebirth, highlighting the transformative power of art. *Enlightened* invites viewers to step into a world where time, memory, and beauty converge. It provides a profound exploration of artistic metamorphosis, where every glance reveals a deeper layer of storytelling. This piece is part of my broader *Metamorphosis Project*, an ongoing exploration of artistic evolution, drawing from a vast archive of aged glass negatives.

Biography

Sergis Adamos Hadjiadamos, born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1975, is a creative artist deeply influenced by his heritage. Both of his parents were immigrants who fled from Cyprus due to the Turkish invasion in 1974. The family later returned to Paphos, Cyprus in 1980 where Sergis grew up and inherited his father's artistic spirit. He was exposed to different cultures and environments growing up in South Africa and Cyprus, and he channeled this influence into his art.

Sergis began exploring art at the age of 15, following the passing of his father. He participated in workshops and classes with local artists, learning to experiment with different materials and approaches. In 1994, he moved to Athens to study art and completed a two-year fine arts course at Nicolas Stefos studios. He then earned a BA in Graphic Design from Campus Arts and Sciences in Athens in 2001.

Contact Information

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Moza AI FALASI
(UAE)

Artist Statement

As an artist, I navigate life's complexities through art, a journey that became profoundly evident after the tragic loss of my mother in 2020. Memories intertwined with identity form the core of my artistic exploration. My process-driven approach merges with research, emphasizing that the journey is integral to the final outcome. Employing a mixed media approach, I merge photography, painting, printmaking, and everyday objects, stripping them of their original identities. My creative journey often commences with a single guiding question, evolving as new inquiries surface. The catalyst for this introspection arose from the profound loss of my parents, especially my mother. Art has become my compass in navigating this tumultuous path, echoing universal experiences of grief while understanding its nuances. Whether my artistic process serves as a means of healing or a visual documentation of grief remains uncertain. However, I recognize grief as a universal human experience, transcending personal narratives to resonate with others. My aspiration is for audiences to engage in introspection, leveraging my experience as a catalyst for reflection upon their own lives. Through my art, I seek to draw attention to the overlooked nuances of everyday life—a profound yet often unnoticed reality—revealed only amidst the turbulence of grief.

Biography

Moza Al Falasi is a multidisciplinary Dubai-based Emirati artist. She recently graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts from the College of Arts & Creative Enterprises, Zayed University. Moza works with different mediums, such as drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpting and photography. She is interested in the art and architecture of the Islamic world, notably illustrated manuscripts. Additionally, she is interested in poetry, horseback riding and traditional jewelry. Al Falasi is a member of the Emirates Fine Art Society and Tashkeel Art Center. She exhibited her work in the annual group exhibition of Made In Tashkeel in 2017. Moza also participated in The 33rd and The 36th Emirates Fine Art Society Exhibition in 2016 and 2019, held at the Sharjah Art Museum. In 2021, she took part in the group exhibition 50 x 50: The Golden Exhibition of Emirates Artists, which marks the UAE's 50th National Day at Alowais Cultural Foundation in Dubai. She has won numerous regional and international awards, including a gold medal in the 5th China International Digital Photography Art Exhibition 2015. Moza aspires to pursue further studies to obtain a master's degree in Fine Arts.

Contact Information

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Giuseppe BARILARO

(ITALY)

Artist Statement

If one were to persist in the arduous task of selecting a single term to encapsulate the essence of my artistic practice and philosophy, the most fitting descriptor would be 'Trickster'. This archetype traverses through every mythology and culture, universally recognised as the intermediary between the immobile demiurge, from whom creativity is inherited, and humanity, often imparting or teaching action before knowledge. Possessing the spark of vitality, the 'Trickster' embodies and opposes the essence of existence simultaneously, signifying not the origin or end, but rather the essence of change and transformation. Consequently, the 'Trickster' draws skepticism from adherents of the old order, who perceive them as mad, unconscious, unrecognisable, subversive, and somewhat illicit. Conversely, they garner admiration from those who extol instinct and intuition, from those who innovate beyond imposed rules and boundaries. My actions are guided by styles discernible only to me, yet executed with finesse and artistry when I choose to reveal them. My evolution reflects a direct acknowledgment of the legacy of Informal Art and the material teachings of artists like Burri, Dubuffet, Vedova, Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns.

However, as a product of my era, I portray a discerning perspective that sees beyond illusions, comprehending the zeitgeist in which I exist. I embody a deliberate amalgamation of abstractionism, portraiture and the figurative, skillfully constructing content structures.

Biography

Giuseppe Salvatore Barilaro after studying arts at the school of arts in San Giovanni in Fiore, continued his studies graduating at the Academy of Fine Arts in Catanzaro, specialising in Decoration. His modus operandi prefers the manipulation of 'virgin' materials, wearable but also ductile, in order to trace the path of life on the material by himself; and it's with the wood that he, inherent by the previous features, has established a still present imprinting. In his works, it would be reductive to treat the study of the forms ignoring his correlation with the "substance" which is the protagonist of the work itself. The interventions the artist does on the body of the support are: combustion of the wood, skinning and incision of it; treatment with combustion acrylics, in order to show the soul, the energy and the past of the traced figure. His obsessive research of a truth hidden under the skin and under the appearances, that goes beyond a bivalent prejudice considering our beliefs, can be noticed firstly in an academic way, through the paradoxical representation of a "Christ exposed to Confession", in a work that made him win the first place of the National Price of Arts M.I.U.R; section PAINTING. Progressively, the artist starts getting away from the 'narrative' style, preferring basic forms and compositions, almost archaic, which remember the firmness and all the holiness typical of the icons.

Contact Information

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Clive BARSTOW

(AUSTRALIA)

Artist Statement

Cruel Britannia presents at first glance an innocent portrait of the late Queen Elizabeth. However, in terms of the construction of Australian history, this work posits an uneasy and somewhat provocative narrative through its overt references to colonisation by air and sea, and the resulting culturally specific folklore modelled under crown sovereignty and underpinned by power and privilege.

Jigsaws, as George Perec refers to in his classic novel *Life: A User's Manual*, offer a poetic metaphor for life's ill-fitting incompleteness where missing pieces represent a void of lost or repressed memories, or parts of history that have been purposely erased. The truth-telling of this land before colonisation has suffered from the effects of cultural erasure, a denial of ancient knowledge that has helped maintain systemic racism and othering that is still virulent today. *Cruel Britannia* is therefore a political statement about how history is written and preserved by the victors, as all dominant histories are.

Biography

Professor Clive Barstow is a practising artist and writer. His exhibition profile includes forty years of international exhibitions, artist residencies and publications in Europe, America, Asia, and Australia. His work is held in a number of collections, including the Musée National d'Art Moderne Pompidou Centre Paris and the British Council USA. Clive continues his international artist profile by exhibiting in China, Europe and Australia and publishes regularly on arts research and the creative humanities.

Clive is Professor of Creative Arts at Edith Cowan University, Honorary Professor of Art at the University of Shanghai Science & Technology China, and Honorary Professor of Design at Guangdong Baiyun University China. Prior to moving to Australia in 1992, Clive taught at Middlesex University in London and the Kent Institute of Art and Design. He trained under Eduardo Paolozzi at the University of the Arts London (Chelsea School of Art) and holds a PhD from Griffith University Australia. He was President of the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA) Australia's peak body for leadership in the arts from 2017-2021, and is also Director of the Open Bite Australia, which encourages the development and self-management of visual practices within a number of local indigenous communities. In 2019 Clive was awarded the lifelong fellowship award by the Australian Council for University Art & Design Schools, for his outstanding contribution to art and design education in Australia.

Contact Information

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Martyna BENEDYKA

(POLAND)

Artist Statement

The concept of the sublime in philosophical aesthetics and art history is mainly understood as the quality of greatness. Edmund Burke (1757), an Irish-born philosopher, claimed that the sublime is the most powerful experience. He also argued that sublimity and beauty were mutually exclusive. Burke presented his theory that beautiful objects are small and delicate, while sublime ones are dark and terrifying. One of the sources of sublimity is infinity. Exploring the infinite, we experience a deeper, often unforgettable, sense of wonder. Here, the infinity is realised through cropped compositions, blackness, and the potential to evoke a mixture of emotions and feelings in the viewer. According to Burke (1757), beauty brings relaxation and sublimity brings tension. The paradox of the sublime arises when we find peace in the things that overwhelm us. Both captivate us, despite the dangers. I decided to express the sublime and the infinite, referring to the sense and power of the image in the real world. Depriving it of details, a rather enigmatic portrait painting evokes notions of the sublime as an aesthetic experience and a monumental vision that strikes the viewer with power and raises the boundless question of whether the sublime in art can coexist with beauty.

Another source of the sublime is infinity; if it does not rather belong to the last. Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses, that are really and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure.

Reference

Burke, E. (1757). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. R. and J. Dodsley.

Biography

Martyna Benedyka is a visual and sound artist, photographer and coloratura soprano. Working in a wide range of media including painting, film and digital photography, collage, installation, video and sound art, she focuses on human existence, voice and identity, nature, and the clandestine life of objects.

She studied Art and Design at the Gray's School of Art in Scotland, UK and graduated with a First Class BA (Hons) degree in Fine Art Painting in 2014. She has exhibited in the UK, Italy, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Czechia, Romania, Estonia, Switzerland, South Korea, Canada and the USA. She is a member of Futures Photography, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (winner 2022).

Contact Information

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Izmer BIN AHMAD

(MALAYSIA-UAE)

Artist Statement

Pull III was first inspired by medical illustration where various regions of the body are made visible through words that label and name them. Each name levitates outside the body on the learning page and is held in place by a vector, thin line that connects the word and the depicted anatomy, usually puncturing the depicted body. *Pull III* vectors and commemorates this convoluted encounter with the (unmarked) gap between the label and line in medical diagrams that intend, nick, and sign the body.

As the work progressed, *Pull III* recalled the profile depictions of the human head in pharaonic hieroglyphs, ancient coins, renaissance portraits, and mugshots of modern policing. The latter underscores my conscious pictorial plot, a visuality that shares with profile portraiture and medical illustrations an essential passivity. *Pull III* offers to our field of vision a disinterested, mute, and incomplete symmetry of the individual. Her singular gaze commits away from a point on the neck that is revealed by the lifting of the hair, which is lined, captured, tied, and styled. This point is localised and named by a dutiful and insignificant animal intent.

Biography

Izmer Bin Ahmad is formally trained as a practicing artist as well as an academic researcher. An educator-administrator by profession, his contribution encompasses studio practice, scholarly research, and writing. Izmer's artistic portfolio focuses on drawing and painting, informed by interests in artistic research and the global contemporary.

Contact Information

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Jennifer CABRAL

(BRAZIL-USA)

Artist Statement

Bedridden is an imaginary exercise exploring identity and self-definition: if I were at the foot of his bed, how would I self-describe when I first introduced myself to my great-grandfather, who became blind at the end of his life?

In this work I visually explore the ambivalence of my identity—a woman of colour in North America where I reside, and a white woman in South America where I was born. My skin is reversed in this image, just like my role in the societies in which I find myself. My hand extended from the edge of the bed represents an existence on the margins, and the dichotomy between spaces I happen to occupy. The unacceptable white privilege I carried in Brazilian soil, finally unravels when transported across hemispheres - I am a person of color in the global north where I now reside. This image also represents white privilege and structures of systemic racial inequality in health services. In hospitals, nursing homes or assisted living facilities, large numbers of the caregivers in the global north are black and brown immigrants. In Brazil, my blind great-grandfather received care, help and assistance from black hands, until the end of his life, as did many of his direct descendants. At the foot of his bed my gestures are an attempt to touch my ancestral lineage at the heart of our colonial identity in order to transmute it - “Do you know who I am? Do you know who you were?” - I ask and whisper: “Know thyself”.

Biography

Jennifer Cabral is an accomplished photographer with a diverse educational background. She holds a degree in Arts from Escola Guignard, specializing in photography, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Social Communications from Puc-Minas, with a focus on advertising. After relocating to the United States, Jennifer pursued further education at the School of Visual Arts in New York, where she engaged in continuing education classes.

Currently, Cabral serves as a library collection photographer, meticulously documenting cultural heritage collections and manuscripts. In May 2022, she achieved a Master of Information degree from Rutgers University School of Communication, concentrating on archives and preservation. Her academic endeavors explored the synergies between photography and archival practices, investigating the transformative potentials they offer to collections. Cabral is a proud member of the National Press Photographers Association, leveraging her extensive experience in freelancing for newspapers in central New Jersey since 2002. With over two decades of independence in the field, Cabral’s expertise extends to darkroom printing, enabling her to skillfully reproduce negatives from esteemed archives such as The New York Times, Vanity Fair, and Vogue. Notably, her series of photographs depicting the aftermath of September 11th was featured in the book “Here is New York - a democracy of pictures” and was showcased in its international touring exhibition.

Contact Information

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Lia DE JONGHE

(Netherlands)

Artist Statement

The fascination with (double) portraits, particularly those of people, drives my artistic exploration. Contemplating the subjects, whether from old family photos, encounters, or my own imaginative creations, raises questions about identity and its subjective nature. The essence lies in the perspectives of both the creator and the observer. The subjects, ordinary yet uniquely individual, emerge through sketches on paper before translating into needle and thread on fabric. The meticulous stitching process, slower than drawing, establishes an intimate connection with the portrayed face. The space between the drawn and embroidered portraits adds an intriguing dimension. Though the portrayed individuals need not be real, a personal connection remains crucial. Using textile, especially secondhand, brings life and familiarity to the artwork. Embroidery, a deliberate and unhurried process, captures attention, concentration, and tranquility. The final piece reflects the journey – visible stitches set and undone, textiles stitched and removed – a testament to the meticulous and deliberate creative process. The medium of textile, ever-present in daily life, amplifies the richness and depth of the portraits, making them not just images but tangible expressions of connection and introspection.

Biography

Lia de Jonghe, was born in 1962, Den Helder, The Netherlands. Lives and works in Amsterdam. She has a special interest in embroidery. She said: “Concentration while stitching is essential in order to get the desired result. The embroidery is always exciting because I’m never completely certain of how it will turn out. This is a process of adding stitches and removing them, adding fabrics, cutting fabrics, and so on. This creates a worked-through image in which, for the viewer with attention to detail, the journey is often still visible”.

Contact Information

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Liu ENTUNG

(TAIWAN-USA)

Artist Statement

I Am Where I Am is a series of performative actions with staged photographs and videos made in 2021. The work questions the definition of a person's existence in the new media era and shows how people heavily rely on technology, especially during a severe pandemic. I shot the whole series within my house and uploaded it on Instagram every week. Each week had a topic related to an aspect of daily life, food, bathroom, sleeping..., and the process lasted for sixteen weeks. The screen is a crucial metaphor in work. People use it to receive and send data every day, and it is hard to live without it. The screen becomes a distorted window to observe others and a filtered mirror to reflect on oneself. To imply the loss of identity on the social platform, I replace my head with the pictures on screens, and it creates surreal illusions that question the truth behind the digital utopian. *I Am Where I Am* aims to reveal the issues like consumerism to the body, the controls of the algorithm, and the blurry boundary between real life and the digital world.

Biography

Liu Entung was born in 1995 in Taipei, Taiwan. As an interdisciplinary artist, Entung's works explore the intersection of multiple fields: visual art, performance, and technology with various methods like paintings, photography, performances, installations, videos, and sounds. She received a BFA in Multimedia Art at Taipei National University of the Arts in 2018 and a MPS in Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University in 2022.

Entung was one of the ten winners of the BBA 2022 photography prize by BBA Gallery and a selected artist for the Vision of Future NFT art collection by Saatchi Art. Her works have been exhibited at La Galerie du Génie de la Bastille in Paris, France (2022), Arena Berlin during Berlin Photo Week in Berlin, Germany (2022), The Other Art Fair in Los Angeles (2022), and The East Village Art Collection in New York (2022). LIU has performed at Treasure Hill Artist Village (2020), Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts (2019), and Fuzhong15 Animation and Story Gallery (2019) in Taipei, Taiwan. Her upcoming event is *Die Digitale Dusseldorf* in Germany. Currently, she is living in NYC and shooting the series, *Too Bright To Be Painful*.

Contact Information

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Houra **FARZANEH SABET**

(IRAN-ITALY)

Artist Statement

Have you ever had this feeling of being alone, even in a crowded room full of your friends? This feeling isn't about being with others; it resides in the deepest part of your soul, yearning to alert you how alone and desperate you are in this universe. This collection is about such a feeling of solitude; about being invisible in this huge tremendous world. This is the point where you can begin to believe in yourself, believe that despite being all alone you can take back your life into your own hands and as a small piece of this universe accomplish your own mission. So don't be afraid my friend, as you are not alone in this!

Biography

Houra (Lapis) has been an artist for more than 20 years. She started her journey as an artist with painting and then she went to the university and studied Sculpture at School of Fine Art at Tehran University. Later, she moved to Italy and studied Decoration in the Accademia di belle arti di Roma. Her artworks are about everything that she can see, feel, and think about; from war, social issues, mental disorders, and feminism, to animals and nature.

Contact Information

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Stefano FAVARETTO

(ITALY)

Artist Statement

In my artistic exploration, I delve into the intricate connection between an invisible universe composed of energies, frequencies, and vibrations, and the tangible, visible world. My objective is to dissolve the boundaries between physical and intangible matter, delving into human spirituality to unveil a universal energy manifesting in diverse shapes at varying frequency levels, all emanating from a singular source. My research centers on elements that historically serve as bridges between these purportedly distinct universes, such as myths and legends, focusing on the study of energies as integral components of a collective identity.

By probing the essence of energy, I aim to illustrate that humanity has perpetually sought to “look beyond,” acknowledging the existence of an unseen yet intrinsic universe. Through immortalising the imperceptible reality before us with my camera, I bring to light remarkable figures and portraits crafted from pure energy. This visual journey demonstrates that we are all interconnected within the same universal energy. In this work called *Hopyelf 1*, I photographed a luminous being within a soap bubble, capturing the sunlight filtering through.

This ethereal image serves as an invitation to delve into our spiritual depths, encouraging viewers to adopt diverse perspectives in exploring our existence.

Biography

Stefano Favaretto was born in Merano, Italy in 1969. His passion for photography led him right from the age of 15 to study photographic techniques and experiment with them. After his studies in human sciences, he worked as a psychologist and became a full-time artist in 2014. His passion for photography and human narratives propelled him to travel across continents.

Favaretto has exhibited his art all over the world with great success. In 2021 he became a pioneer in the world of NFTs as an artist, curator, and community builder.

Contact Information

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GABRIELA GHILLANYOVA

(SLOVAKIA-UAE)

Artist Statement

As a fine-art photographer, my passion lies in portraying an everyday woman in a fantastical and whimsical way. The light, editing, and the finish to my photographs draws deep inspiration from traditional paintings, the Old Masters, illustration and folklore. My portraits playfully convey longing, joy, hope, belonging, wonder. Emotions we all connect to and keep returning to, from the times we were read fairy-tales as children, no matter what age. Creating the portrait starts well ahead of the photoshoot, when I design and fabricate my own garments and props to help my subject diverge even further from the real and the mundane and into the world of imagination and subtle symbolism. I enjoy incorporating floating elements, the sense of elevation and movement, carefully choosing my colors to support the story being told in composition. I strongly believe the expression and the hands are the two most important building blocks to make or break an impactful portrait.

Biography

Award-winning fine-art portrait photographer. Specialising in Women's and Creative Portraiture. Exhibiting artist participating in multiple group exhibitions as well as two solo shows. Associate Level Photographer of the International Portrait Masters Accreditation System. Experimental digital collage artist dedicated to finding new and unexpected forms of visual expression. Deeply inspired by nature, 20 plus years of travelling the world, all things Orient, and figurative classic paintings of Dutch Masters.

Contact Information

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Brian GONZALES

(USA)

Artist Statement

This screenprint is one of a series of somewhat autobiographical artworks. The series of prints are not necessarily self-portraits or illustrating true stories but rather, as they say in the movies, “inspired by actual events.” The series reflects on the existential crisis that emerges from reflecting upon and evaluating the trajectory of one’s life and one’s place in the world, exploring themes of regret, resentment, triumph, and confusion. For my creative process, I started by photographing latex masks that I could mould into different facial expressions. After taking hundreds of photographs, I would sift through and select the most compelling expressions to build an image around. I also photographed textures, fabrics, and other objects that I could collage together to build a final composition and then produce the final artwork as a screenprint.

Biography

Brian Gonzales is an American artist born in Santa Monica, California. He received his BFA from East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina and his MFA from the Herron School of Art and Design in Indianapolis, Indiana. In 2016 Brian moved to the United Arab Emirates where he spent 7 years teaching drawing and printmaking at the University of Sharjah, College of Fine Arts and Design. He has recently relocated to Durham, North Carolina where he is an assistant professor at North Carolina Central University. In addition to being an artist and academic, Brian Gonzales is also an avid collector of fine art prints and printed ephemera with a personal collection of over 500 prints.

Contact Information

Instagram: www.illegitimatepress.com/home.html

Soheil HOSSEINI

(IRAN)

Artist Statement

In the throes of rapid technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), the lines between reality and imagination dissolve, becoming ever more fluid and dynamic. This transformative landscape presents a unique opportunity for contemporary portrait artists to reimagine the very concept of identity. Transcending mere depiction of physical features, contemporary portraits serve as a potent platform to explore the multifaceted nature of identity in our digital age. Artists increasingly leverage AI and other technological tools to forge hybrid entities, blurring the lines between human and machine, and challenging our deeply ingrained understanding of self. This paradigm shift sparks profound questions about the role of art in shaping our perception of identity. What does it mean to be human in this era of AI? How do we define ourselves when the physical and digital realms merge? And what role do artists play in navigating these complex questions?

Biography

Soheil Hosseini was born in Tehran, Iran in 1988. He is a painter, an artist, graphic designer and the founder of Tehran Studio and Tehran Gallery based in Austria and Iran where he works on the intersection of visual arts and humancentric design of information systems. He has participated in over 40 exhibits and conferences as a graphic designer. At the present time, he serves as an editor and graphic designer of 'Tehran Studio Book' and as a director at 'Contemporary Identities' International Online Art Magazine. Soheil has presented more than 20 single and joint exhibits in Iran and other countries. Furthermore, he is a member of a sustainable computing laboratory in Austria and an honorary member at The Institute for the Development of Contemporary Visual Arts in Iran. Nowadays, pursuing his projects at the NFT and his work has taken the attention of 'designboom', 'The New York NFT Club', 'Photographize magazine' and 'BeauxArts'.

Contact Information

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Reza KAHNAMOUIY

(IRAN)

Artist Statement

This series of photographs, captured solely with the iPhone 7, the primary photographic device at my disposal, documents the lives of Afghan and Iranian immigrant workers within the spontaneous context of my architectural projects. Initially portraying authentic portraits of these workers' weary faces, the images undergo a transformative evolution, mirroring the changing contours of their experiences during successive work shifts. The essence of their suffering, rooted in the cultural beliefs prevalent in the Middle East and echoed in the sacred texts of all three major religions, forms the narrative thread of this collection. Criticising these deeply ingrained stories is a taboo, met with stern repercussions. These narratives perpetuate the notion that suffering is a divine phenomenon, a belief explored within these visual reflections. A central objective of this collection is to challenge and dismantle the sanctity of mythical images and icons, often wielded as tools for the colonisation of their adherents' minds. Through these photographs, I seek to unravel the myths that uphold such beliefs and question the systems that maintain them.

Biography

Reza Kahn mouiy, born in 1979, resides in Rasht, Iran. Following his studies at the art high school in Rasht, he pursued further education in graphic design at Tehran University of Art. Reza is a versatile Creative Designer and Visual Artist, specialising in installation art, photography, illustration, graphics, and architecture.

Contact Information

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Joshua KANE GOMES

(MALAYSIA)

Artist Statement

Parasocial is an ongoing series of sculptures that navigate the pitfalls of unhealthy dependencies within relationships, particularly the deterioration of one-sided infatuation into all-consuming delusions of intimacy. Explored in relation to the mythos of the Wendigo, a cursed cannibalistic spirit that exists in a state of constant starvation, the works thematically parallel the illusionary familiarity experienced when engaging public personas, where the spectator-turned-stalker is driven to frenzy over time by an ever-increasing appetite. While morbid in a thematic sense, the sculptures underplay their ghoulish inspirations and grim desires; hiding behind playful shades of pastels and innocent expressions, alluding to how commonplace parasocial interactions are in our age of interconnectedness.

Biography

Joshua Kane Gomes (b.1993, Malaysia) primarily engages themes of identity and space in his art practice. Documenting his mental processes and states through the art-making process, Joshua peeks into the grey areas between cold rationality and sentimental sensibility. He often works with sculptures and installations that leverage evoking mood and atmosphere, be it through a form or material language.

In his current body of work, Joshua focuses on capturing moments of vulnerability with a sprinkle of levity, stemming from the artist's musings during periods of isolation. The works are the product of time spent lost in thought, wandering his own mindscape, the hazy recollections of sluggish days that blur into one another.

Contact Information

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Nasim PACHI

(IRAN-GERMANY-HONG KONG)

Artist Statement

My work explores the complexities of personal identity, often juxtaposing cultural patterns with the female nude or figures with concealed faces. These richly layered portraits challenge viewers, provoking thoughts on freedom, identity, and gender. Portraiture enables me to explore the influence of the cultural environment on my subject's identity. My journey through life, from growing up in Iran, studying abroad and living in various countries, has given me different perspectives and fueled my creativity. Experiencing new cultures and societies has inspired me to investigate and reflect on my own identity. My preferred medium is smooth linen or canvas, where I apply acrylic for patterns and oil for skin tones.

Biography

Nasim Pachi is an international contemporary painter whose work confronts culture, religion and the restrictions they impose, particularly on women. Her monumental canvases are richly detailed, contrasting the female form with intricate patterns of fabric or mosaics. Their enticing aesthetic draws in the viewer until we are forced to reflect on the importance of choice and individuality amid the complex rules of society.

Born in Iran, Pachi studied in Germany and has lived and worked in Europe, West Africa and Southeast Asia. Her experience has revealed that people and their actions are as complicated beyond Iran's borders as inside of them. Her paintings investigate this, encouraging both artist and viewer to reframe their own identity in a global context. Pachi's art has been internationally exhibited. She received both her Bachelor and Masters of Arts in Illustration from HAW University Hamburg, Germany. Pachi lives and works currently in Hong Kong.

Contact Information

Website: <https://www.nasimpachi.com/>

Elham SHAF AEI

(IRAN-UAE)

Artist Statement

The notion of Loss has been an integral part of my artistic temperament. In fact, Loss is a rather universal phenomenon for we all begin with a fundamental Loss, which is that of the maternal body. We began our being as a continuity with another body and became an individual by virtue of the cutting of the umbilical cord and thus we fell into the world. We enter the world as foreigners and forever submit ourselves to a profound sense of not belonging. Our existence will always be structured by Loss and un-belonging, which entail our eternal desire to belong. Love, family, friendship, patriotism, even work itself are among the names of this desire. My art extends the names of this desire through melancholic faces, cuttings and stitches that express the idea of being removed, displaced, transplanted and re-attached.

Biography

Elham Shafaei received her B.A Bachelor of Painting (Arts) in 2007. In 2010 She moved to Malaysia where she obtained M.A (Fine Arts) in Papermaking and PhD (Fine Arts) in Painting that examined the role of melancholia in creative life through studio research as well as a written dissertation. In 2016 she relocated to Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, where she currently resides and pursues her studio practice. Her art has been featured in various regional and international exhibitions. Elham is the Co-Founder and Co-Editor at *Contemporary Identities International*, an online art magazine-gallery. She has initiated and continues to develop curatorial projects that endeavor to connect practitioners of contemporary art across the world. In 2021 she founded i.e. Art Projects Online Art Foundation.

Contact Information

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Marjan SHARIAT

(IRAN)

Artist Statement

Gilles Deleuze, a thinker known for infusing philosophy with vitality, reanimates the history of philosophical inquiry by imbuing it with the essence of life. In his philosophical framework, Deleuze (1968) posits that life is characterised by its impersonal and unique nature, transcending the confines of individual consciousness. This perspective emphasises the significance of sensory intuitions, through which life manifests itself. These intuitions, according to Deleuze, remain elusive and enigmatic, resisting complete comprehension while persisting in the recesses of memory.

In parallel, Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory illuminates the nature of art as a product of the harmonious interplay between imagination and understanding. Kant (1987) argues that in the realm of art, neither faculty dominates; rather, they engage in a free interplay wherein art eludes fixed conceptualisation. This dynamic relationship underscores the ineffable quality of artistic experience, which defies straightforward interpretation or categorisation.

Drawing upon these philosophical insights, my artistic practice becomes a conduit for introspection and self-discovery. Through the medium of paint and pen, I navigate the labyrinth of my emotions and thoughts, seeking to articulate their complexities. My focus on the human portraits within spatial contexts reflects a tension between expressionism and realism, mirroring the fluctuation between memory and existence, dream, and reality. Within this creative exploration, the presence and essence of human existence emerge as focal points, inviting contemplation and interpretation. Utilizing a palette of grays, I convey the subtle interplay between dreams, concerns, and existential anxieties. Each brushstroke becomes a testament to the multifaceted nature of human experience, inviting viewers to delve into the depths of introspection and imagination.

Reference

Deleuze, G. (1968). *Difference and repetition*. (P. Patton, Trans.). Presses Universitaires de France.

Kant, I. (1987). *Critique of judgment*. (W. S. Pluhar, Trans.). Hackett Publishing Company.

Biography

Born in Iran in 1983, Marjan Shariat's passion for painting was evident from a young age. She pursued her interest by obtaining a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art from the University of Science and Culture in Tehran, focusing on the representation of women in contemporary Iranian painting. With ten years of experience as a magazine graphic designer, Shariat has also dedicated herself to creating art exhibits those nationally and internationally since 2016.

Contact Information

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Tor SEIDEL

(GERMANY-UAE)

Artist Statement

These creatures have one thing in common: in them it is possible to recognise the will to anthropomorphise the mounted body. They radiate their makers' desire to create people to transform the wasteland into an Eden. Stuck on the path to enlightenment, the creatures must remain in the form of existence in the desert that has been forced on them, as martyrs of human invention. Their signal lights are an expression of the existential horror of all dolls in the face of the hopeless rigidity and tedium of their existence – not knowing what they are or why they are condemned to this parody of the human form, to this life forcefully pounded together with nails. Bodies made from inexpensive material such as wooden crosses or poles, dressed in overalls and safety vests with reflecting stripes; their heads made from stuffed trash bags, soccer balls, rolled-up pairs of trousers, pieces of Styrofoam, or signal lamps with helmets on top; their faces obscured or hidden with sunglasses, face masks, or clown noses ... What kind of creatures are these? I sought them out in the Persian Gulf and named them mannequins. They appear to be traffic police frozen in motion – or dolls that have snuck away from their shop windows to seek the freedom of the street, where they no longer have to prostitute themselves in expensive clothing in front of avid shoppers.

Biography

German artist, curator, author and lecturer with many years of experience as a lecturer at universities and in the gallery and exhibition sector. Also active as a filmmaker and art book author. After an apprenticeship as a shipbuilder and the imposed military service, Tor first studied seafaring in Warnemuende/Wustrow and art in Berlin Weissensee (all 1984-1989), to study Latin and philosophy from 1991. Tor graduated with a Magister Artium in Philosophy/ Archaeology/ Religion/Cultural Studies from the Free University of Berlin. From then on he worked as an assistant, freelance photographer, artist, journalist and curator. Tor was active in several artist and action groups, such as Urban Catalyst or Haus des Lehrers. In his work as an artist, journalist and photographer, he has traveled to Europe, Asia, Africa and the Mena region, where he has been active since 2013.

Contact Information

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Izumi UEDA YUU

(JAPAN-PORTUGAL)

Artist Statement

Wave Portrait was created during the pandemic of 2022, soon after my studio/house shifted to Estoril, right on the coast up from Lisbon. When I got to Estoril, the road to the beach was closed. Still at night the sound of waves lulled me to the edge of sleep in a time of sleeplessness. The sea has always been familiar to me as I was born and raised by the Pacific in Japan. My body and mind recall the mélange of smells, waves, sounds, breezes, and vibrations, only now it's the Atlantic. Many weeks passed without seeing the ocean. Then I had a dream that I was wearing a boat and going down to a river, taking me to the sea. I felt blind but the dream was filled with light so bright that the dream has stayed vivid.

Wave Portrait is a tribute to the sea in me.

Biography

Izumi Ueda Yuu is a Japanese-born visual artist who moved to the US when she was 30 years old, going back and forth to Japan and then in Singapore. Since 2015, she is now living and working in Lisbon Portugal. Born in Yokohama City, she attended Kuwasawa Design Institute, Tokyo, received BFA in Sculpture from Maryland Institute of Arts of College in Baltimore/USA.

She is a two-time recipient of both Maryland State Art Council Individual Artist Grant and Baltimore City Art Council Individual Artist Grant. She was an artist in residences in Foundation Obras Holland & Portugal, Atelier OUTOTSU Printmaking Studio and Awagami Factory/Japan.

She is a finalist of the Luxembourg Art Prize 2019.

“My work is about making the connection between art and everyday life. I’m interested in the notion of animism that things we use in our daily life can be spirited, respected and loved. I create images and objects with familiar shapes drawn from daily life.”

Contact Information

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List of Works

Sergis ADAMOS

Enlightened, 2023

Digital Mixed Media, Deteriorated glass negative plates from the early 1900s, 90x60cm



Moza AL FALASI

Renovation in progress, 2020

Mixed media photograph, 40x33cm



Giuseppe BARILARO

Maria, 2022

Fire and painting on Wood, 70x50cm



Clive BARSTOW

Uncool Britannia, 2015

Jigsaws and Acrylic, 62x54cm



Martyna BENEDYKA

Before the mirror, 2021

Oil on canvas, 30.5x24cm



Izmer BIN AHMAD

Pull III, 2015

Pencil on paper, 15x14cm



Jennifer CABRAL

Bedridden, 2023

Photograph, 40x50cm



Lia DE JONGHE

Two women (3) 2019

Embroidery on fabric, 17x20cm



Liu ENTUNG

I am Where I am, Week 14, 2021

Photograph, 50x35cm



Houra FARZANEH SABET

Solitude, 2019

Digital Collages Series, 115.15x86.36cm



Stefano FAVARETTO

Hopyelf 1, 2022

Photograph and soap Bubble, 90x60cm



Gabriela GHILLANYOVA

Snow fairy, 2023

Photograph, 100x100cm



Brian GONZALES

Why Does Everything Have To Be A Goddamn Crisis, 2022

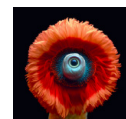
Screen-print, 38x28cm



Soheil HOSSEINI

Hallucination, 2023

AI and digital painting, 50x50cm



Reza KAHNAMOUYI

Iron Age, 2017

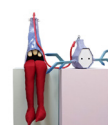
Photograph from iPhone 7, 100x80cm



Joshua KANE GOMES

Parasocial X, 2023

Steel, rope, emulsion coated foam,
fabric and polyester fiber fill, 109x53x92cm



Nasim PACHI

Molting I, 2014

Oil and acrylic on linen, 80x100cm



Tor SEIDEL

Mannequin 49, 2017

Digital Photograph, 37x45cm

Edition 3–10



Elham SHAFAEI

Wearn 7, 2021

Mixed media on canvas board, wearable painting 45x25cm



Marjan SHARIAT

Alzheimer, 2023

Mixed media on paper, 42x29.7cm



Izumi UEDA YUU

Wave portrait, 2022

Sumi ink, gouache and collage on paper, 59.6x41.8cm

