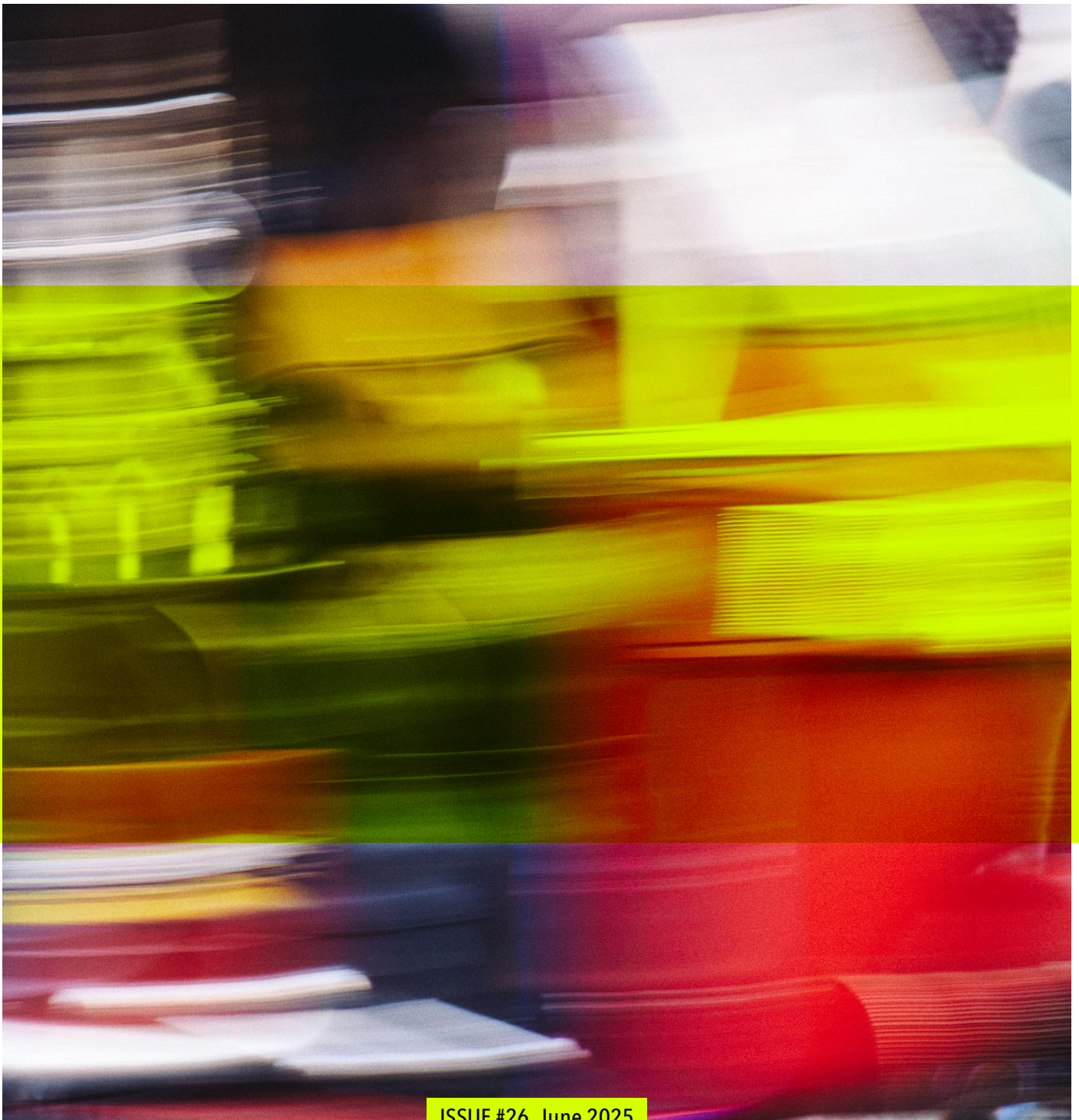


CONTEMPORARY

IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

Sama Alshaibi | Alessandro Aprile | Irma Blank | Aileen Bordman | Oriana Emma | Luca Freschi
Federico Grilli | Saleha Karimi | Ismaele Nones | Konstantinos Patsios | Zoltan Marek | Mano Martinez



ISSUE #26 June 2025

"The only thing I really believe in is
this moment, this sliver of now."

Kara Walker



SPOTLIGHT

FOR Galleries, Organizations, Art institutions and Artists

For details on our spotlight packages, and rates,
Contact us at: info@contemporaryidentities.com
to request our Media Pack.

For more information visit:
www.contemporaryidentities.com

Our Spotlight Ethos

ContemporaryIdentities Magazine is a leading digital publication dedicated to contemporary art, captivating a diverse global audience of artists, enthusiasts, designers, collectors, and curators.

We pride ourselves on being unique, innovative, and accessible. Our magazine embodies individuality and creativity, striving to connect with our readers in an engaging and approachable manner.

Why ContemporaryIdentities Magazine?

ContemporaryIdentities Magazine offers a unique opportunity to connect directly with an engaged and dedicated audience through our online platform. Our leadership includes artists, designers, makers, galleries, suppliers, cultural event promoters, arts colleges, and producers of distinctive goods. After six years, we are more than just a quarterly art magazine; we have evolved into a vibrant community—a voice, a platform, and a tribe!

Our readers are passionate about contemporary art and frequently engage with our content between issues. ContemporaryIdentities Magazine serves as a dynamic space where artists, art enthusiasts, and creators come together to connect, inspire, and support one another. This connection extends beyond just showcasing art; it becomes a place where conversations are sparked, creative dialogue flows, and ideas are exchanged—making it an ideal platform for article writing that reaches a thoughtful, engaged audience.

Galleries, organizations, art institutions, and artists are encouraged to reach out to us for spotlight opportunities. We provide a platform for showcasing their work, writing articles and promoting their stories to a wider audience.

For details on our demographics, distribution, spotlight packages, and rates, please contact us at: info@contemporaryidentities.com to request our Media Pack.

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Zoltán Marek, Urban Rush, 2025, Sri Lanka,
Digital photography, Fine art print, 90×60 cm
A fleeting burst of motion in the heart of the
city - speed turned abstract.

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EDITORS' NOTE

As summer unfurls its warmth and energy, we are delighted to welcome you to the 26th issue of ContemporaryIdentities. This season offers a unique moment for reflection, exploration, and immersion in creativity, and what better way to accompany that journey than through a diverse tapestry of artistic voices and visions.

In this issue, we continue our mission to bring you closer to the transformative power of art. With perspectives that traverse disciplines, cultures, and philosophies, our contributors offer insight into the ever-evolving relationship between self, society, and aesthetics. Each piece has been thoughtfully curated to expand your understanding and appreciation of contemporary artistic practices.

We are especially honored to feature an in-depth interview with photographic artist Zoltán Marek, whose compelling visual narratives capture moments of quiet complexity and spatial harmony. His distinctive style, shaped by years of experimentation and a keen sensitivity to form and presence, has garnered international recognition. As an Ambassador for Focus Nordic and a collaborator with Art Sommelier, Marek bridges the poetic and the professional with elegance and innovation.

This issue also showcases critical contributions from our growing network of global voices. We extend heartfelt thanks to our dedicated board member Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary), and to esteemed art writers and critics including Clive Barstow (Australia), Majid Heidari (Iran), Sophie Kazan (UK), Lenka Piper (Czech Republic), and Brajan Vojinovic (Serbia). Their thoughtful reflections and critical perspectives enrich our pages and your reading experience.

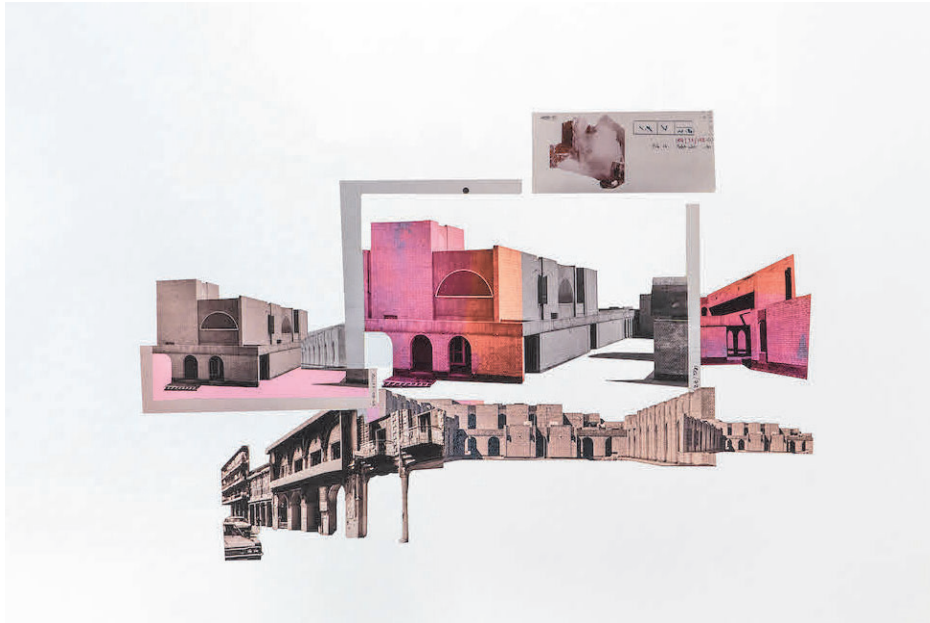
We are also pleased to spotlight the intersection of art and technology in our Artificial Intelligence section, curated by our editor Fabio Gamberini. This issue features a compelling conversation with Mano Martinez.

As always, we are deeply grateful for the participation of all our featured artists, contributors, and readers. We invite you to lose yourself in this issue's pages, let curiosity guide your way, and allow the summer sun to illuminate new understandings of art and identity.

Warmly,
Elham Shafaei & Sara Berti

Sama Alshaibi

Iraq-USA | Sophie
Kazan



In Miniature, 2025, Mixed media collage, 51x76 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, UAE

The artist Sama Alshaibi's multi-disciplinary art practice explores the liminality of time, place and her own Iraqi heritage. Her latest exhibition, [طرس] Tterss (Palimpsest) weaves together glimpses of the Baghdad of her childhood, a place caught in time and yet alive and vibrant in the memories of her community, her family and her own identity.

This is an idea relatable to members of any diaspora. "It wasn't just about imagining a place from afar—I went back, walked the city, photographed it, LiDAR scanned it. I was also gifted my father's archive by our family there and drew from the Rifat Chadirji archives at MIT's Aga Khan Documentation Center, among others. But even with all this material, the city remained elusive, both hyper-visible and out of reach.

Faced with this challenge, Alshaibi turned to collage and the idea of layering real and imagined, finely detailed and meticulously crafted images that function between time and space.

"No single image or document could carry the complexity of return, loss, and reassembly. With millions of Iraqis in the diaspora—we all have glimpses of what was lost and what remains. ..."

Rather than simple memorial to a people and a time gone by Tterss offers a singular imagining or aesthetic that is beautiful and complex. Like so many men and women of the world's diaspora!



Residue, 2025, Mixed media collage, 51x76 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, UAE



Duplicates, 2024, Mixed media collage, 51x76 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai, UAE

Alessandro Aprile

Italy | Lenka
Piper



Involuntary Contraction, 2024, monotype and mixed media on canvas, 120×150 cm, Courtesy of Zucchelli Foundation, Bologna, Italy

Alessandro Aprile is a Bologna-based visual artist whose work explores the fragile balance between stillness and movement, limits and rules. He creates emotionally charged compositions where figures hover in a state of constant tension. Through painting, drawing, and monotype, Alessandro creates haunting compositions that evoke fragility and latent collapse. His works stage painful scenes in stark contrast to the illusion of safety, confronting viewers with the rawness of human vulnerability. In his hands, immobile forms pulse with potential energy, suggesting movement within stillness. The canvases hold space for unspoken emotion, poised on the brink of disruption.



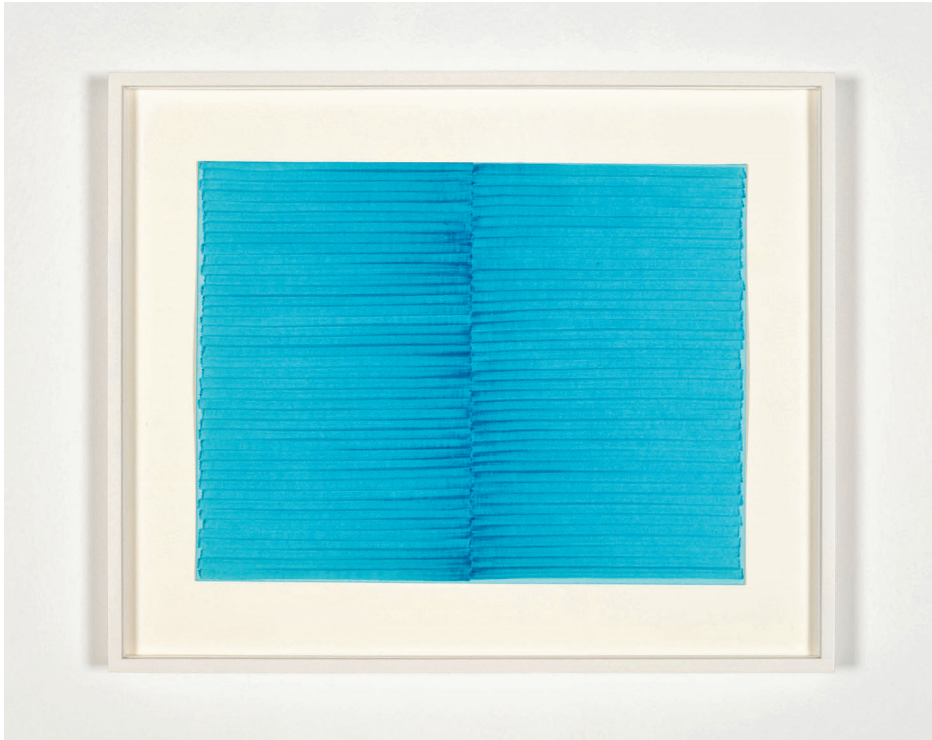
Cry Loudly, 2024, Monotype and mixed media on canvas, 150×200 cm, Courtesy of Zucchelli Foundation, Bologna, Italy



Reflex, 2024, Layered paper and acetate, 42x29.7 cm, Courtesy of Zucchelli Foundation, Bologna, Italy

Irma Blank

Germany-Italy | Majid
Heidari



Radical Writings, Exercitium ES-5, 1988, acrylic on cardboard, 25x32.5 cm, Courtesy Irma Blank Estate, Milan and P420, Bologna, Italy

Irma Blank (1923–1994) was a German-born, Italy-based artist renowned for her exploration of the boundaries between language, silence, and visual expression. Rooted in conceptual and minimalist traditions, her work investigates the act of writing beyond linguistic meaning, treating text as a visual and existential gesture.

She developed a unique vocabulary of mark-making—structured yet illegible—that she described as “writing purified of sense.” Drawing inspiration from semiotics, philosophy, and the rhythm of breath and time, her works reflect her commitment to transforming language into image, presence, and duration.

Her work resists interpretation in conventional terms, instead offering a meditative space where the viewer engages with silence, repetition, and the materiality of communication. Irma Blank’s practice stands as a compelling inquiry into the poetics of nonverbal expression and the aesthetics of inner experience, positioning her as a singular voice in conceptual art.



Gehen, Second life D, November 2018, Felt pen on tracing paper, double page, 29,8x42 cm, Courtesy Irma Blank Estate, Milan and P420, Bologna, Italy



Radical Writings, From the Total Book, 10-3-83, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 40x30 cm, Courtesy of Irma Blank Estate, Milan and P420, Bologna, Italy

Aileen Bordman

USA | Clive
Barstow



Giverny: 80, 2016 Archival Pigment Print Edition 1 of 4 + 1 AP, 101.6x152.4 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE

Aileen Bordman's photographs of the Giverny garden of Claude Monet are testament to her life's work and commitment to this most beautiful place. Building on her family's immense contribution to the restoration of the gardens, Bordman's images display a poetic and ethereal response that transcends what we understand to be documentary photography. Her carefully composed images pay tribute to Monet's unique and personal vision of nature, offering us a series of painterly and atmospheric moments that place us in the garden, allowing us to walk the meandering paths and to share the deep and profound sense of contemplation that was ever present throughout Monet's art. Bordman's embodied and sensual images transport us back to this time, allowing us to smell the flowers and taste the damp air in a place of unsurpassed beauty. The extensive research of her subject clearly shines through resulting in an unforgettable experience for her audience.



Giverny: 01, 2014, Archival Pigment Print Edition 1 of 4 + 1 AP, 101.6x152.4 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE



Giverny: 78, 2016, Archival Pigment Print Edition 1 of 6 + 2 Aps, 50.8x76.2 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE

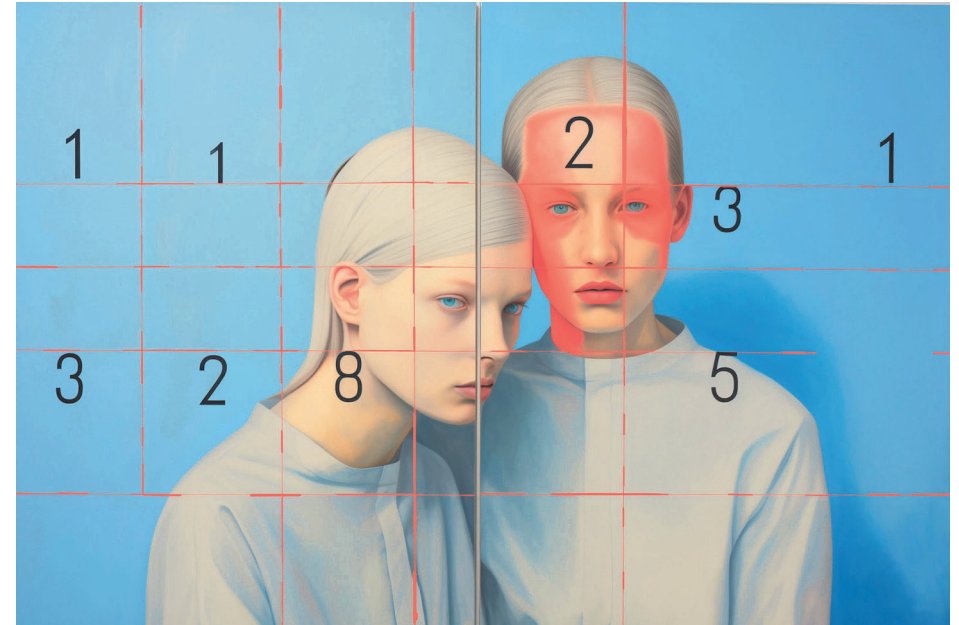
Oriana Emma

Italy | Lenka
Piper



Girl in Bloom, 2024, Digital Art and Generative Art, 43.2x64.8 cm

Digital artworks by Oriana Emma inhabit the intersection of hyperreal portraits and conceptual abstraction, exploring the entanglement of identity, memory, and technology. Using generative and AI art tools, she constructs intimate, yet otherworldly scenes where human figures float between emotional vulnerability and symbolic fragmentation. Her visual language blurs digital and painterly aesthetics, inviting viewers into spaces where perception, emotion, and virtuality merge. Through her art, Emma explores how technological mediation reshapes the way we perceive beauty, identity, and human presence.



Him Her, Across Generations, 2024, Digital Art and Generative Art, 43.2x64.8 cm



Nature Revolts, 2024, Digital Art and Generative Art, 43.2x64.8 cm

Luca Freschi

Italy | Zoltán Somhegyi



Presage, 2022, painted terracotta ceramic, found object, wood, and plexiglass, 35x35x35 cm

Luca Freschi has a strong interest in making the observers of his works think, in providing them with new insights through his pieces of art. In these creations he carefully selects and assembles elements that at first seem quite different from each other in function, in style, in execution, in carried meanings and in references. Fragments of antique-style columns, vases, jars – often turned upside down – portrait and animal sculptures and other types of found objects are assembled together. As a result of this artistic activity of selection and putting together the singular elements start to interact with each other to establish new associations, stimulate novel emotional impacts or other layers of meanings. Added to this, further allusions are created through the titles: see for example his work “Caryatid”, that evokes the antique female figures serving as shafts of columns, holding the capitals with their heads. Here however the female figures are substituted by vases and other objects. It is also worth noting how these pieces work in dialogue with the exhibition spaces, what sort of further interpretation can be developed if they are presented in a classicizing interior or in a sacred space.



Cariatide 05, 2019, Terracotta ceramic, found object, and corten steel, 390x40x40 cm



Santa Eulalia, 2023, painted terracotta ceramic, found object, and glass bell jar, 80x40x40 cm

Federico Grilli

Italy | Sophie
Kazan

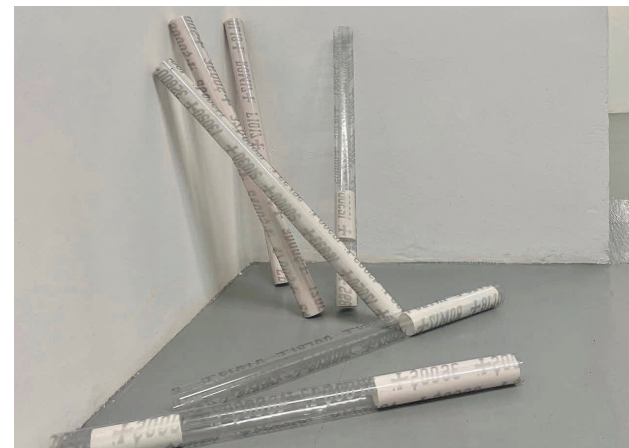


Alloglotto, 2023, Sculpture, Wood, aluminum tubes, wax, 160x200x40 cm, Courtesy of Zucchelli Foundation, Bologna, Italy

Federico Grilli is an Italian-born, multi-disciplinary artist and researcher of contemporary forms of expression, with a particular interest in visual art. His research and practice focus on developing multiple types of languages to express the doubts, uncertainties and suppositions of existence. He uses installations and images to draw attention to intimate and deeply personal themes and states of consciousness. In 2024, Grilli was awarded the Art Up Critics' Prize issued by the Bank of Bologna and he also received an honorable mention for the Zucchelli Prize. Grilli's work is ambiguous and defining, paradoxical and beguiling.



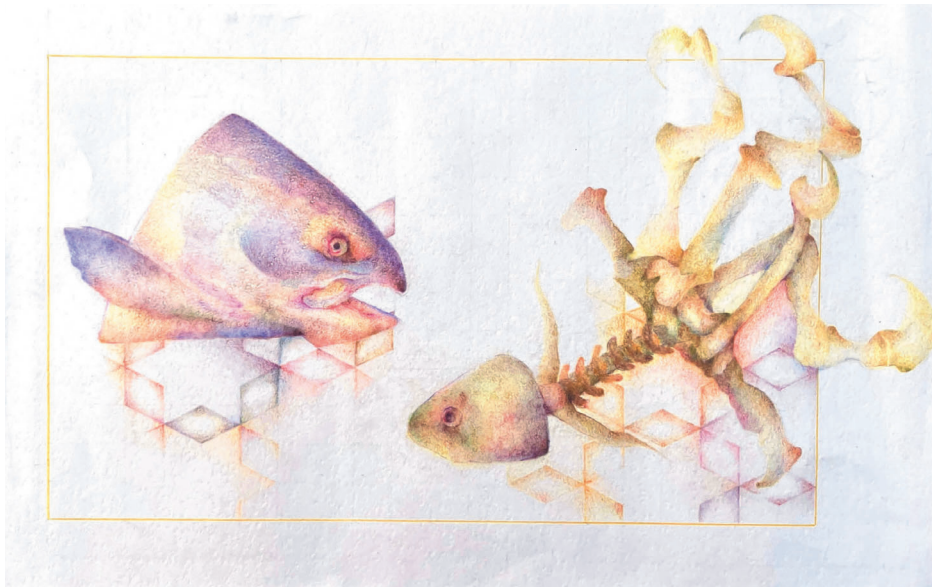
Desires of the Final Age, 2025, diptych, Photography print on fine art luster paper mounted on Dibond, aluminum frame, 100x150 cm, Sculpture in aluminum casting, 20x24 cm, Courtesy of Zucchelli Foundation, Bologna, Italy



Untitled, 2024, Foam rubber, print on acetate, 120x10x10 cm, Courtesy of Zucchelli Foundation, Bologna, Italy

Saleha Karimi

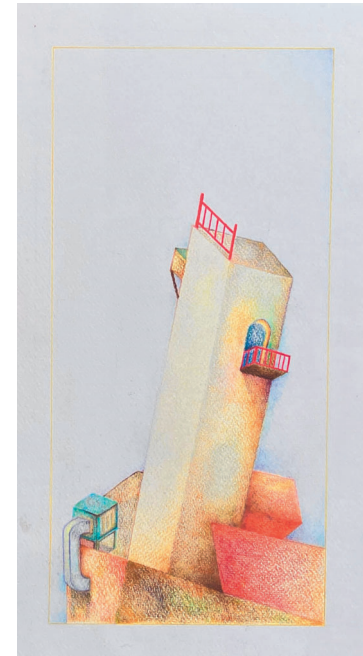
Afghanistan-Iran
Brajan
Vojinovic



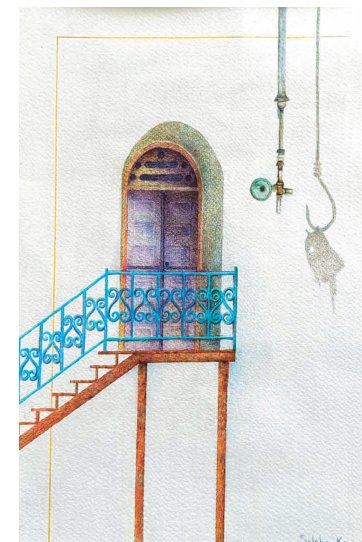
Untitled, 2024, Colored pencil on cardboard, 31x49 cm

In Saleha's pastels, there is something gentle and endearing—almost cute—that stands in contrast to their deeper meaning. Touching or stirring? Perhaps both. As an artist living between Iran and Afghanistan, her perception is divided. She reflects on her homeland, Afghanistan, and wonders whether staying just a little longer might have helped her make sense of it all. There is something morbidly familiar in her pastels—nostalgia not just as a common feeling, but as a unique sensation. Living between worlds, Saleha creates from a liminal space—a threshold where identity, memory, and emotion blur. She sees her art as a refuge, much like the river in her homeland where the Nowruz fish returns each year, inspiring a sense of timelessness and quiet continuity.

In the juxtaposition of life and death, structure and softness, her isolated architectural forms appear distorted and dreamlike. Solitude and disorientation echo through her work, and within its minimalism lies a potent emotional charge. A quiet surrealism unfolds through fine textures and a gentle ease of movement. Saleha's work inspires compassion and presence—anchoring us in the fragile poetry of the everyday.



Untitled, 2024, Colored pencil on cardboard, 42x24 cm



Untitled, 2024, colored pencil on cardboard, 36x25 cm

Ismaele Nones

Italy | Zoltán
Somhegyi



Cat on Cushion, 2022, Acrylic painting on canvas, diameter 100 cm, Courtesy dell'artista e Lunetta11, Cuneo, Italy

We can find an intriguing temporal disorientation in Ismaele Nones' paintings. Although we know and feel that they are contemporary artworks from recent years, they clearly take inspiration from Byzantine and Mediaeval art, from the frescoes in sacred spaces and from the world of manuscripts. This is evident for example in the rendering of the human figures that are intentionally flat, lacking real three-dimensionality in the representation – just like the perspective that is not linear. In this way also the other additional elements appearing in the paintings do not match their size and proportions. However, after these first impressions we can of course also note the items that are definitely from our own age, e.g. electric towers in the landscapes or modern furniture. This mixing of temporal perspectives, styles and references thus provides the artist with the possibility of investigating current questions concerning our existence, conflicts, relationships, way of life, duties or desires.



Study for Architecture, 2024, Acrylic painting on panel, 25×20 cm, Courtesy dell'artista e Lunetta11, Cuneo, Italy



Horsepower, 2020, Acrylic painting on canvas, 190×190 cm, Courtesy dell'artista e Lunetta11, Cuneo, Italy

Konstantinos Patsios

Greece
Brajan
Vojinovic



American breakfast, 2022, Painting and collage on canvas, 100x100 cm

Konstantinos's vibrant artworks invite us to explore the layered realities of our consumer society. Through the use of collage, the medium itself becomes a deliberate metaphor for his multi-layered storytelling—commenting on cultural consumption with a sharp undercurrent of satire. Through his work, we witness how history, art, and identity are continually marketed, replaced, and repackaged. Visually stimulating, the experience borders on dopamine-enhancing. Dislocation, cultural fragmentation, and the global commodification of identity, sexuality, and cultural symbols unfold as intentionally dissonant layers. Yet, a subtle harmony resonates within. Through a synthesis of metaphors, each piece is imbued with irony and mockery, culminating in a meditation on the paradox of being. Konstantinos's conceptually dense works reflect a saturation of art as both subject and critique. They provoke the question: Where does authenticity end and spectacle begin?



American breakfast, 2022, Painting and collage on canvas, 100x100 cm



Symphony in Red and Green, 2020, Mixed media on canvas, 100x100 cm

Zoltán Marek



New Yorker Pulse, 2023, New York, Digital photography, Fine art print, 90x60 cm An iconic sign glowing in the urban night – the heartbeat of a sleepless city.

CI: Please introduce yourself.

ZM: My name is Zoltán Marek. I grew up in an environment where photography was not just a craft, but a language, a way to think, to perceive, and to remember. My family carried this visual legacy, and from a young age I was surrounded by artists, painters, sculptors, thinkers, who moved through our home as naturally as light moves through a studio. I visited ateliers and homes the way others visit playgrounds. That world became my foundation.

As a child, I traveled extensively. Foreign cities, unfamiliar languages, and unfamiliar light left deep impressions. These weren't just beautiful places, but fragmented realities that taught me how to truly see, how to recognize visual tension, silence, atmosphere. The world entered me through color and contrast.

Photography has never been a tool in my hands. It's more of a companion like a dog you grow up with, who never speaks, but always senses the right moment to move. I don't search for images. I am present. The camera and I observe together. It records; I listen. And often, I'm no longer sure which of us sees first.

To me, my photographs are not pictures. They are states of being. I'm not telling stories or offering visual solutions. I try to capture a specific density of feeling a vibration of mood that we usually live through without

naming. A shadow in the backstreet at dusk. A shoreline where no one stands. A gaze that doesn't look back yet somehow addresses you. These are my "subjects," if I must call them that. But truly, they are internal images assembled through the external world.

Photography, for me, is not about communication, it's about connection. It is not a role, but a state of presence. In that moment, when the world grows quieter and something more fragile emerges, I try to hold space. That's what I seek: the subtle moment where something is not only seen but felt. And if I succeed in capturing it, perhaps it offers others a chance to pause inside, even if only for the length of a breath.

CI: Can you tell us about your early influences?

ZM: It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when it all began. Because for me, seeing not just with the eyes, but with the whole being—was never something I learned. It was always there. I remember a moment, perhaps when I was ten years old, when I realized: I see differently. Not better. Not more intensely. Just... differently. As if I noticed the edges of things, the quiet signals, the unnoticed gestures that others seemed to overlook.

This sensitivity to detail wasn't something I developed; it felt innate. The wear on a windowsill, the shift of a shadow across a wall, the fleeting glance of a stranger on a bench—none of these were background to me. They were events. And they stirred something inside, emotions I couldn't name, only hold.

I spent a lot of time sitting on benches. In new cities. In unfamiliar places. It wasn't a habit, but a kind of need—to watch, to listen, to feel the rhythm of people and places. I wasn't looking for anything. Yet everything was there. In a hand movement. In a hesitation. In the way a child gripped a toy, or how someone carried their solitude. These were my earliest teachers. Not people with names, but moments with presence.

I also went to a lot of exhibitions from a young age. Not just to look, but to understand how an image works. I wasn't drawn to what a piece depicted, but to what it evoked. I noticed that certain paintings or photographs didn't speak through content, but through resonance that unspoken moment when something inside shifts, and you're not quite the same person you were before.

These early experiences, fascinating with small details, the slow gaze, the emotional resonance all shaped the way I see the world today. The camera came later. It didn't start the process; it simply gave form to it. What I show in my images now, I already carried within me back then: on benches, in galleries, in streets where nothing seemed to happen and yet everything did.

CI: What art do you identify with most?

ZM: For me, art is not tied to styles or movements — it's tied to an inner search for balance, a quiet negotiation I carry out through my work. I've always been drawn to order, rhythm, the purity of parallels — lines, geometry, and composition. These aren't cold structures to me, but anchors — ways the world begins to make sense through form.

That's why I feel a deep kinship with the works of Maria Svarbova, whose sterile yet lyrical compositions orchestrate space and the human body into something like visual choreography — perfectly precise, yet open to disruption. And that's also why Platon resonates so strongly with me: his portraits have architectural gravity.

He renders the human face not just as an expression, but as a monumental structure full of dignity, full of tension. It's this visual duality that inspires me: the massive and the fragile, held in the same gaze.

I also relate to the surreal emotional world of Dasha Pears, whose visual psychodramas feel like dreams where something familiar has quietly shifted. And in Lukas Dvorak's minimalist imagery, I find a similar pull — an intimacy between light, space, and form, composed with absolute clarity, yet never sterile. I've long admired the Magnum photographers as well for their depth of seeing, their ability to tell stories not through spectacle but through patience and presence. And I deeply respect the ethos of the f/64 group: detail, light, form, discipline photography that doesn't manipulate but quietly reveal.

At the same time, I've come to understand the importance of allowing the world and myself to be imperfect. Behind every structured composition, I now welcome the crack, the blur, the unexpected layer. The perfectly arranged moment that's fractured by a shadow, a reflection, a breath of chaos. This tension between order and surrender has become one of the deepest questions in my work.

The Japanese concept of wabi-sabi speaks to me: the idea that truth lives inside imperfection, that the traces of time and decay don't diminish something but deepen it. I see the same attitude in minimalist and slow art where images aren't created to dazzle, but to be present. Where there's space for the viewer, for stillness, for the passage of time.

If I had to choose, I wouldn't name a genre.

I would name a state: the state of quiet attention — where details speak, and imperfection is not a flaw, but an invitation.

CI: Tell us about your current practice.

ZM: My current work doesn't follow a single theme. It unfolds from a kind of inner practice: a search for how an image can reach beyond itself, and become a passage into a state, a feeling, a world.

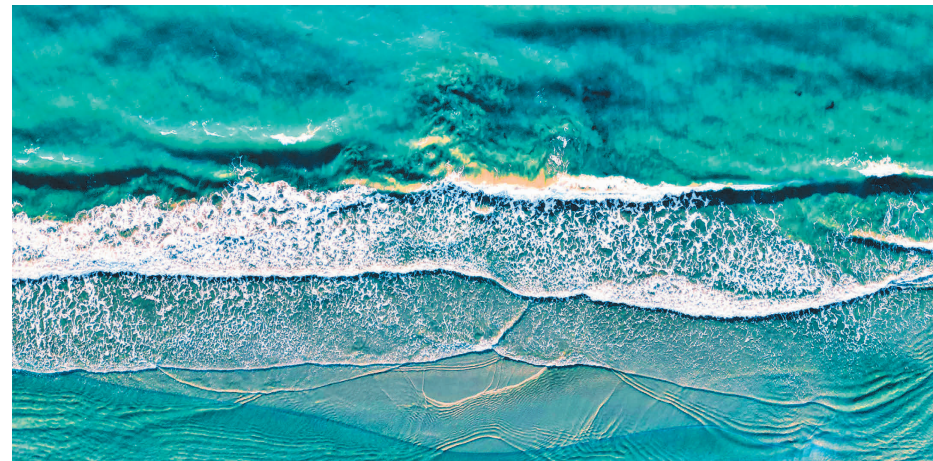
I often work on multiple projects at once, but what connects them is a shared intention: to create not just images, but experiences. Travel is essential to my process not just physically, but mentally. I don't move through places with a shot list. I move with openness, letting the location and my internal response to it guide the lens.

Right now, I'm developing an immersive exhibition built around a body of work from Sri Lanka. I don't want to show just photographs I want to bring humidity, light shifts, sonic textures, the slowing of time. It's a kind of audiovisual journal, not a document, but a state. Later this year, I'll embark on another significant journey, one I'm not speaking about yet, because I don't want to present anything before, I've truly felt it.

I've grown increasingly distant from traditional exhibition formats. Ten or twenty framed prints on a wall are not an exhibition to me, it's an archive. An exhibition must give the viewer a complete, sensory presence: sound, atmosphere, spatial rhythm, emotional access. If I can't convey what I truly experienced, I'd rather not show anything at all. I don't create to perform. I don't exhibit to be seen. I exhibit only when the space I build can hold the weight of everything I felt.

My most recent exhibition in New York was, surprisingly, sold out despite a heavy snowstorm that evening. And what stayed with me wasn't the turnout, but the energy that forms when something genuine is shared. Since then, at many events, I've been asked my favorite question: "When is your next exhibition?" To me, that's not pressure its presence. It tells me that what I create can become absence, and that's the highest compliment a viewer can give.

This is why I'm now working more and more with installation-based, sound-responsive, and spatially immersive formats where the image doesn't hang on a wall but surrounds the viewer.



Waves & Whispers, 2025, Drone photography, Fine art print, 100×160 cm. Endless tides carving poetry into the shoreline, one whisper at a time.

My goal is not to show something, but to offer a threshold something to enter. My photographs are less and less about endpoints. They are, more and more, gateways.

If I have nothing real to share, I remain silent.

But if I do — then everything is in it.

CI: What does your work aim to say?

ZM: I don't believe that images need to have clear, fixed messages. For me, photography is not a statement, it's an opening. I don't create anything to say something. I create a space where something can happen.

I don't offer answers with my work. I offer situations where the viewer might be left alone with a feeling, a memory, a personal recognition. Often, I feel that the image isn't even about me.

It's about what someone else discovers in it and what I've simply set the stage for.

My photographs are not meant to convince. They are meant to invite a presence. A slower kind of attention. The kind of rare moment when we stop — truly stop — and look. And maybe we don't even see what the image shows, but something that awakens inside us because of it.

If I had to name what I aim for, I'd say: connection.

A quiet, honest, human connection with us, with each other, with the world, the kind that rarely finds space in daily life.

My goal is not to be understood by everyone. It's to let someone feel at home inside a single image. And if I can, I want to set an example, especially in today's overstimulated world. That it's possible to slow down. That it's possible to open up. That it's possible to walk the path of your dreams. Not because you're lucky but because you choose to.

And I'm not walking alone. I want to sincerely thank my management team at The Art Sommelier, as well as Focus Nordic, Samsung Hungary, and ACG Agency, for believing in me and in the direction I'm taking. Their support has allowed this inner journey to become something that can also exist in the world.

And maybe that's what matters most to me:

That photography doesn't separate us, but leads us into a shared inner landscape, where no words are needed, because we are already there.



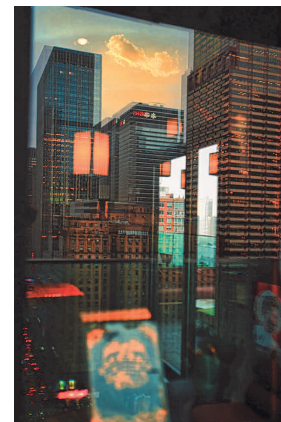
Architectural Echo, 2022, Hungary, Digital photography, fine art print, 90×60 cm
Lines and light converge in a cathedral of glass – where geometry breathes.



Fire walk, 2024, Albania, Digital photography, Fine art print, 100×160 cm
One silhouette step boldly into a sky ablaze – a moment between chaos and calm



Shorelines, 2025, Sri Lanka, Drone photography, Fine art print, 100 × 160 cm
Where land kisses ocean – a vivid meeting of texture, color, and calm.



Reflections of Tomorrow, 2023, New York, Digital photography, Fine art print, 120×80 cm
The mirrored skyline captures the essence of a metropolis constantly reinventing itself.

Interviewed with Mano Martinez

By: Fabio Gamberini



Traditional Chinese ceramics white and blue



A pastel cream and pink room

FG: Why are we here? Because as someone passionate about visual identity, I spend countless hours navigating the vast artistic engine we call Instagram. Some use it to post feet-in-the-water shots; others use it to express ideas—artistic, personal, and conceptual.

In the endless scroll, I stumbled upon something rare: an island of coherence. The beauty of generative AI is that anyone can produce visually striking content. But to go beyond that—to refine a distinct aesthetic, to research and craft a visual language—requires an artist.

Manu Martinez's profile stood out as a beacon. His use of the camera, his treatment of digital and real models, the consistency of his vision—everything spoke of authenticity and artistic depth. It's an honor to present him here and ask a few questions to better understand his creative process, his visual intentions, and perhaps even his philosophical approach to art and life.

FG: In your work with AI, the human figure is constantly being redefined. Do you see the algorithm as a filter, a collaborator, or an author?

MM: The algorithm, without my commands, is dead; I give it life to capture the ideas that spring from my mind; therefore, it is a collaborator. The AI does the work that, in film, for example, a wardrobe manager or location manager would do. I would be the film director and screenwriter. When I started out in classical photography, a renowned Cuban artist hired

me to photograph his artistic projects. He signed the project; I was just a collaborator—I was his AI. He was the artist; I only captured what his mind created. It's a similar story.

FG: Every dataset contains a set of stereotypes, desires, and biases. How do you select or manipulate the data to train your models? And how interested are you in preserving or correcting distortions and generative errors?

MM: Every time I search for an image, I need at least five free hours to get it. The work is tedious at first because working with AI is like learning a language. After giving instructions and marking the precise characteristics, modifying and altering them, and after hours of waiting for the magic to happen—for the AI to understand what you're asking—suddenly, bam! That first photo appears, very similar to what you visualized in your mind. From that moment on, incredible images emerge in torrents and variations, and you just must select the best. During the process, things emerge that, while not what I was looking for, are as or even more interesting than what I wanted. Those images are saved, and at another time I go back and select the best ones as well. I don't retouch the generations; everything I show is as it is generated. If I need to correct something, I prefer to discard the image. I follow the same pattern when I do classical photography. I hate retouching photos, whether they're AI or classical.

FG: Many of your works evoke common visual archetypes but distort them into something unsettling. What kind of visual imagery are you activating with AI? What are you trying to reveal that the human gaze alone couldn't?

MM: I like to create images that are hyper realistic yet incredible, that disturb and make you see beyond beauty. A man with Chinese porcelain skin or a man dressed in ornamental elements from a cathedral, for example. The impact of the images is caused by believing a priori that they are real models that I have worked on through AI to achieve situations that tell us a story I would otherwise have difficulty achieving—unless I were a millionaire.

FG: Collaborating with a generative model involves a negotiation between artistic intention and statistical results. Have you ever experienced frustration, surprise, or even revelation when working with AI?

MM: As I've said before, both surprise and frustration are part of the creative process with AI, but it's only a matter of time before those feelings dissipate and satisfaction and triumph emerge.



A skinhead man in his 40 years old



A very strong and athletic Caucasian man

FG: In a visual culture increasingly influenced by predictive logic, what does the word "originality" mean to you? Can a work of art retain its aura if it emerges from a shared process between humans and machines?

HM: I can explain this by comparing it to an artistic expression that, in its early days, had to go through what artistic expression with AI is going through now: it was doubted whether something that showed reality through a machine was art. I'm talking about photography. That debate is ridiculous today. The same will happen with AI in the future. There is a relationship between the photographer and their camera—the machine. The camera is the instrument that allows the photographer to express their vision, but the photographer is the one who gives meaning, context, and creativity to the final image. The same thing happens with AI. An original work reflects the artist's authenticity and unique style, distinguishing it from works that merely replicate or adapt pre-existing ideas. When I create work with AI, my concerns and style are the same as when I create with a camera. The only thing that changes is that I can afford to do it in places and with props I couldn't afford financially. I think much of the criticism of AI comes primarily from artists who, until now, have dominated the art world because they could afford to invest their fortunes in taking photographs. Now, anyone who can afford a monthly fee can create works. With Midjourney, you no longer have to belong to a wealthy or powerful family to create certain types of work, and that creates panic—because now what really counts is talent. On the other hand, just as anyone can take photos with their cell phone—and that doesn't mean you can consider yourself a photographer—the same thing happens with AI. Anyone can give orders and create, but only the artist can impress, stun, annoy, move, or dazzle with their creations.

FG: In your opinion, what distinguishes an artistic use of AI from a purely decorative or commercial one? What makes a generated image a work of art rather than a technical experiment?

MM: For me, both artistic and decorative work are art forms, but with different purposes and meanings. While decorative work seeks to beautify a space in its practical function, art goes further and seeks expression—to move, without necessarily being beautiful or practical. Sometimes artistic work can also be decorative if the context is right.

FG: Your work seems to question notions of authenticity, identity, and desire. How does AI allow you to explore these themes without falling into illustrative or literal representations?

MM: I simply contrast the natural with what is not—for example, objectifying the model by using wires around their head, croissants forming their hair, or dressing them in empty egg cartons. Searching for the image's punctum with details that destabilize the idea of gratuitous and hegemonic beauty.

FG: Looking to the future, do you think generative models will become a kind of common language between artists and machines? Or will they fade into invisibility, like Photoshop or paint pigments?

MM: AI is here to stay. The sooner we accept it, the faster we'll move forward without wasting time on primitive debates we've already experienced with other disciplines—and that should serve to prevent us from questioning it again. The important thing now is to legislate it. Just as forgery or appropriation is a crime, certain practices with this new discipline should be a crime. Let's all get to work to move forward, not backward. Art is much more than what we've known until now, and that's a wonderful thing.

FG: In your biography, you talk about "new masculinities" and the need to overcome gender stereotypes. How does this concept influence your choice of subjects and compositions, especially in the context of generative work?

MM: I think everything is construction. Gender stereotypes are unconsciously taught from birth and influence how we speak, act, dress, what interests we have, how we feel about ourselves, and how we relate to others. Because these predetermined roles don't always align with what people are and want to do, they can limit our potential, influence our choices and opportunities when it comes to education and careers, and affect our mental health and relationships. Based on this premise, I choose my stories with male models without considering situations or styles of dress that we hegemonically associate with masculinity. It's that simple.

FG: The history of male nude photography has often been relegated to private or marginalized spaces. How do you think

your work contributes to the normalization and artistic acceptance of this genre, especially when combined with emerging technologies?

MM: Although we've made progress in some aspects, men remain a link in the monkey's chain. The beginnings were very difficult, and—although to a lesser extent—the crudeness of representation continues to be criticized, with nudity generally considered obscene and suspected of being pornographic, even when the model has no explicitly sexual intent. This is even more evident in the case of the naked man, since his body has his genitals exposed. My work challenges social media, which are the most visited art galleries today. Thanks to this, I've managed to have what I do considered valid for exhibition in a physical gallery or art fair and worthy of being represented like an artist of any other artistic expression. I insist and educate, without flinching in the face of the absurd and false American morality that associates nudity with porn and turns on its fan of shit so powerfully that it shoots out and splashes the rest of the world.

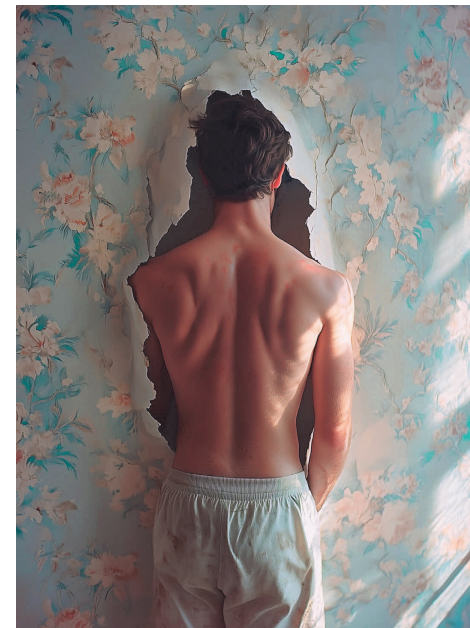
FG: Do you have any upcoming event or project you would like to share with our readers?

MM: I am currently participating with two photographs in VORTICE FESTIVAL, the annual art festival in Brazil: (<https://vorticecultural.com/galeria>)

SERGIO DEL BOCCIO's new single, SUPERNOVA, has just been released, for whom I have created his last two covers mixing classic photography with AI: (https://open.spotify.com/album/1Vf3OsunHzy2JRhp066xor?si=n97n7stQ960vLQz4KAZ_g)

I have just signed to be represented by an important art gallery in Barcelona: IMAGO DEI GALLERY: (<https://imagodei.es/>)

And soon, I will have the honor of contributing with images and ideas to the Takeover section of the prestigious AI ART MAGAZINE: (<https://www.art-magazine.ai/>)



The man has the build of a soccer player



CALL FOR ARTISTS

Artist
In
Residence

Apply by 20th August 2025

www.nexusartspace.com
Email to: info@nexusartspace.com

Theme: "Unwritten Maps: Belonging Beyond Borders"

Nexus Artspace, in collaboration with i.e. Art Projects Online Art Foundation, is thrilled to announce an international virtual artist residency with the theme **"Unwritten Maps: Belonging Beyond Borders."** We invite artists from diverse disciplines and mediums to explore the complex nature of belonging. This residency invites artists to examine the concept of Unwritten Maps: Belonging Beyond Borders. Participants will explore belonging beyond fixed notions of home or nationality. **Centered on themes of migration, memory, and cultural intersections,** this residency encourages artists to chart both personal and collective geographies shaped by movement, imagination, and in-between spaces. During this unique program, we'll host several virtual meetings, including some in the Metaverse, a space offering extraordinary possibilities for artists. Participants will be introduced to the Spatial platform, a tool for creating immersive digital environments, hosting events, and showcasing artwork. The residency also offers opportunities for networking and building a vibrant community of artists, art enthusiasts, and collectors.

Duration: The residency runs for one month, from September 1st to 30th, 2025, with virtual meetings scheduled twice a week.

Exhibition: The residency will culminate in a virtual group exhibition, showcasing the creative journeys and final works of participating artists. Although we are physically apart, this virtual exhibition aims to unite artists and audiences in a shared experience that reflects our collective humanity and community spirit.

Exhibition Venue: The group exhibition will be hosted virtually in the Nexus Artspace Gallery within the Metaverse.

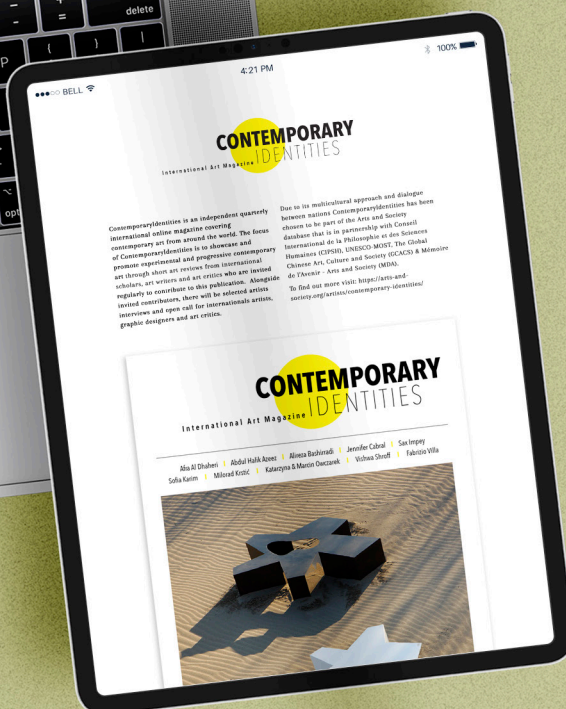
Submission Guidelines: Application submission is free. Please submit a portfolio of 10–5 recent artworks, along with your CV, bio, and artist

statement to: info@nexusartspace.com

This call is open to visual artists, sound artists, video artists, and photographers.

Residency Fee: A fee of 300\$ USD is required for participation. Payment details will be provided to the selected artists.

Submission Deadline: 20th August 12:00) 2025 AM CET)



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