

ARTICUL ACTION

Anniversary Edition

ART REVIEW



PREVIEW

Nicole Philippi

SCHEDULED FOR PUBLICATION

Nicole Philippi

Lives and works in Vienna, Austria

An artist's statement

Overall, I consider my art to be "inspired by life", not on a representational level but on an emotional level. I allow the unconscious to be the explorer, the developer and the creative guide. My creations happen in the moment and are therefore free from planning and preconceived thoughts; they are expressive and reflect images and ideas that the viewer associates into. I find it invigorating and insightful when people share their impressions and interpretations of my images with me, which at times assist me in getting closer to this unconscious inner guide. For me, it is the viewer who brings out the essence and meaning in my work, which is another cycle that aids in the completeness of a painting or drawing.

My favoured mediums are charcoal, acrylic paint, chalk/soft pastels, and at times I apply digital enhancements to photographs of my own work, which frequently receive post-processing after

printing by applying the above mediums, making each piece exclusive. I prefer to draw and paint on strong, recycled paper or canvas. These tools allow me to explore and to create balanced compositions that are mainly abstract and sometimes figurative, injected often with vibrant colours. I feel that my rough and yet expressive outlines inject a dynamic in to my works. My brushwork is seldom refined but displays the passion and energy of an instinctive mark-maker.

It is all the above that supports my open approach in releasing an energy into my work processes that delivers a uniqueness and variety to my portfolio.

"My creations come to life by releasing energy that fuels the images; a cycle of releasing and creating a buzz ... vibrations, surges and impulses that continuously spark the aliveness." ~N.P.

Nicole Philippi



Walking his armadillo

Nicole Philippi

An interview by **Dario Rutigliano**, curator
and **Barbara Scott**, curator
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Artist Nicole Philippi's works accomplishes an insightful exploration of the notions of human perception to walk the viewers through a multilayered experience, inducing them to elaborate personal associations and interpretations. Her style rejects any conventional classifications and is marked with freedom as well as coherence and speaks us of emotions, while encapsulating a careful attention to composition and balance. One of the most impressive aspects of Philippi's work is the way it provides her images with an autonomous life and aesthetics: we are very pleased to introduce our readers to her stimulating and multifaceted artistic production.

Hello Nicole and welcome to ARTiculation: we would start this interview with a couple of questions about rich and multifaceted background. You have a solid training in architecture and hold a BSc (Hons) and a Diploma in Design and Innovation and over these years you travelled a lot. How do these experiences influence the way you conceive and produce your works?

And in particular, how does the relationship between your cultural substratums due to the years you spend in South Africa your current life in Vienna inform the way you relate yourself to art making and to the aesthetic problem in general?

Hello Dario and **ARTiculation** team!
Thank you for this great opportunity on being featured in your magazine.

Personally, I feel that my multifaceted background has a 1:1 impact on how I conceive and produce art, as well as on how I see and experience life.

Overall, for me, architecture, design and art share line, form and aesthetics as a base, yet when applied within their own disciplines (may it be through a scientific and/or artistic methodology) each is manipulated and crafted into their own stimulating and/or practical outcomes, which contribute value within their dimensions of existence. This provides just a simplistic view besides the intricacies of the social, political or personal notions that can stimulate the intention of expressing construction, destruction or simple mark-making.

For me, the problem of aesthetics that you mention is tied up in all this and also in each one of us. Everyone has their own cultural traditions, history and experiences that will influence the way





Mongolian dancer

he or she sees, senses and defines beauty and that's the way it should be. I do think this is an important fact for each artist to appreciate. There will never be one piece of creation that is adored by and aesthetically appealing to everyone.

Even though I left South Africa some years ago, I still feel her strongly and consider her my home. I am grateful for the life and experiences I had in South Africa, aka The Rainbow Nation. Her multi-cultural and multi-lingual, open-minded, innovative and friendly people together with her strikingly beautiful, yet so diverse environments and socio-political complexities would undoubtedly leave marks on anyone who stayed there for some time. Austria on the other hand seems to be shrouded in melancholy that is steeped in history with a kind of rough and rugged beauty that is difficult to explain. Her people appear serious on the outside but have a wonderful, sometimes dark sense of humour and they have this astounding knack of looking both ways at once, which makes living here intriguing and the people endearing.

Yes, I do think that the overall feel of my art and the way I approach art-making has evolved by having experienced and embraced these multifaceted environments.

Rejecting any specific style, the figurative language you convey in your paintings is the result of a spontaneous approach that requires no planning: your inquiry into the expressive potential of embroidery combines together figurative as subtle abstract feature into a consistent unity. Moreover, in your practice you explore a wide variety of different mediums, including painting, sculpture,

photography as well as digital graphics. We would suggest to our readers to visit <http://nicole-philippi.pixels.com> in order to get a synoptic view of your work: while walking our readers through your process, we would like to ask you if you have you ever happened to realize that such multidisciplinary approach is the only way to express and convey the idea you explore.

Indeed, for me a multidisciplinary approach is a comfortable and resourceful way in expressing the multiplicity of the themes that come up for me. I am interested in many different aspects of art, as well as life, and each mentioned medium has its own special qualities to aid me in expression. However, I would like to say here, sculpture has been shelved for now. I have not found enough time to really delve into it and in the meantime I will go on enjoying sculptures made by other artists.

I love each medium for what it is and there are times when the different mediums merge in my works, like a painting may require an extra boost or it lacks a "certain something" for me to feel content in releasing it and then I may move a painting into the digital process to complete it. Once I'm satisfied with the digital tuning the work gets printed and thereafter personalized by me. It can be a lengthy process but I enjoy the moving in and out from the physical to digital and back to the physical doing. The result is a unique, one-off mixed media image.

I do however have a rather passionate relationship with painting. I thrive on the energy it releases in me, the feel of the paint and the movements that go with it all. I even treasure the mess I create; my

studio walls are covered in paint, despite the fact that I've shielded them <grins>. Painting is for me such an awesome all-rounder in that yes, one will have some result at the end but it also offers freedom within body and mind ... sometimes I sit while painting and, for example, meditate or I stand and use large arm movements to infuse the current emotional state into the canvas or paper. I am not surprised that painting is recommended as a form of therapy. It is a total balancer!

Photography has been with me since my childhood but I was always reluctant to learn the technical ins and outs of how a camera and lenses work . I thought, I had to be a mathematical whiz kid in order to grasp it, especially when being confronted by square roots! However, my life-partner, Don, who is a photographer, has encouraged me to explore and to get to know how my camera functions. I am rather grateful for his gentle nudging, as it has been eye-opening. Oh yes, I'm still a novice who is realizing more and more that just clicking the button doesn't necessarily present the image one hopes for.

This versatility, within the analogue and digital realms, suits my general approach to art making very well, which is typically spontaneous and intuitive. I think, it is mainly due to this impulsive attitude with the strong instinctive and emotional guidance that the style of my art cannot be truly categorized. It's just too varied, as your readers who are planning on visiting my artist page will see! Painting is rather a personal outlet in which I allow myself to free-fall, without expectations but realizing at the completion of a piece what was bubbling inside. Completion is





Woman with molten mirror



The hunted



always a moment of conscious recognition of what's been going on. Photography on the other hand requires me to be present in a different way, I need to be in tune with the subject, the camera and have to have an idea of what the shot should look like. Two different mediums with different approaches and yet the combination of the two can complete the balance for and in me ...

For this special edition of ARTiculation we have selected Walking his armadillo through space and time an extremely interesting work that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article. What has at once captured our attention of your work is its dynamic and autonomous aesthetics: in particular, it seems to communicate a successful attempt to transform tension to harmony, and it's really captivating. While walking our readers through the usual genesis of Walking his armadillo through space and time, would you tell our readers something about the your main sources of inspiration?

Through the painting "Walking his armadillo through space and time" I explored how to visually represent an interruption of habitual thought and action by freezing a moment in time on a two-dimensional surface. This was kind of my thinking when I approached this work. I'm interested in time-slices, hence my fascination with photography and I'm also curious about philosophical presentism where neither the past nor the future are considered real but only the present moment of an intended purpose. This study of being in the present moment while art-making has woven itself into the way I approach my work.

In "Walking his armadillo" I used acrylic paint, chalk and charcoal on recycled brown paper (70x100 cm). I enjoy medium to large sized paper or canvas and their roughish texture; it complements my coarse, sometimes violent line and brushwork. The process, as always when I paint, was drawing and painting by free movement without thinking of any particular outcome. This means there were no pre-defined mental images and colours to start from. This is how I approach most of my work, intuitive and open. And yet, I generally start my works with charcoal lines and shapes that eventually merge "into something". Here in "Walking his armadillo" the outcome was surprising, especially in view of the limited colour palette and the overall construct. It was pleasing to discover a type of layering of shapes, forms and colours on the physical plane that can call up different junctures of awareness for the viewer (including myself). That the image, especially the rough charcoal lines, depicts something close to a figure walking with arms in the air holding an "armadillo" was pure chance that I discovered once the painting was complete and while searching for a title. This is what I see, others may see something entirely different. My main sources of inspiration come from my subconscious, life, written text and in particular from music, not the lyrics but the rhythm, the tempo and the mood of a piece and, as always, the given moment when my hands and tools slide across paper or canvas. Even though music touches me on such a deep level, I seldom paint to music, as it can be distracting while something else wants to

come forward during my painting process.

The dialogue established by tones and shapes is a crucial part of your style: in particular, the effective combination between both delicate and intense nuances of tones sums up the mixture of thoughts and emotions. How much does your own psychological make-up determine the nuances of tones you decide to use in a piece and in particular, how do you develop a painting's texture? Moreover, any comments on your choice of "palette" and how it has changed over time?

Probably 95% of what I produce is influenced by my psychological make-up. Being an artist who draws from the inside, my unconscious and emotions will resonate in the images. Emotions don't necessarily have to be negative or filled with turmoil and by no means do they always stimulate an emotional response for the audience. I think, certain art, especially abstract art, can be compared to music, although non-representational, without characters or a situation, can trigger memories in us rather than a recognition in a reality.

For example the image "Mongolian dancer" started as a fast charcoal sketch that I turned into an upbeat and brightly coloured, almost sweet looking painting. As an image evolves so do the colours. I do believe that my psychological state of the day when I start a painting not only influences colour choices and their tonal values but the entire painting, including shapes and lines. If I would have been angry on that particular day, my line work would have probably been jagged and edgy, while the colours would have been more sombre, less bright with much



Dance of the severed scarecrow



Modern day reaper

less white. Readers may be interested in taking a look at “Dance of the severed scarecrow”, which reflects a melancholic

state or sadness, although I have used a similar technique as in “Mongolian dancer” and “Walking his armadillo”.



Hand in pocket

It almost seems as though, each painting, as it develops, takes on its own psychological expression <grinning>. I say this because I am a fairly balanced person and I have to be in a balanced state when I start a painting and often when I go back to a painting on a different day, in order to continue with it, I have to drop back into the state of the

painting to enable me to continue in the overall feel or mood. No, I'm not crazy! <laughs>

The textures in my works come about by juxtaposing different mediums, such as acrylic, charcoal and pastels, and application techniques using for example cloth, spatula and brush and some variations thereof. I have not applied any textured medium (such as sand or poured texture) so far. I think, it is also the way I work, for example, charcoal into the paint that provides the illusion of texture.

I have only been painting for about 4 years since I left school many years ago and quite honestly, I have not taken note of any colour palette changes. I usually select bold colours, straight out of the tube or container that I mix directly on the canvas or paper. I also tend to use reds, oranges, greens and blues with white and black most of the time. I did a brief check into my colour choices once I noticed that I use mainly these colours and it turns out that my default state seems to be fairly well balanced overall, considering that each colour has a positive and a negative side, according to colour psychology <grins>. I don't consciously play with colour composition or the symbolism that may apply to them; very seldom anyway.

We have appreciated the way your works conveys both figurative and abstract feelings into coherent balance: you seem to address to viewers to extract a narrative behind the evocative images you select, to establish direct relations with the spectatorship: . German multidisciplinary artist Thomas Demand once stated that "nowadays art can no longer rely so much on symbolic strategies and has to probe

psychological, narrative elements within the medium instead". How do you conceive such compelling narrative that pervades your pieces?

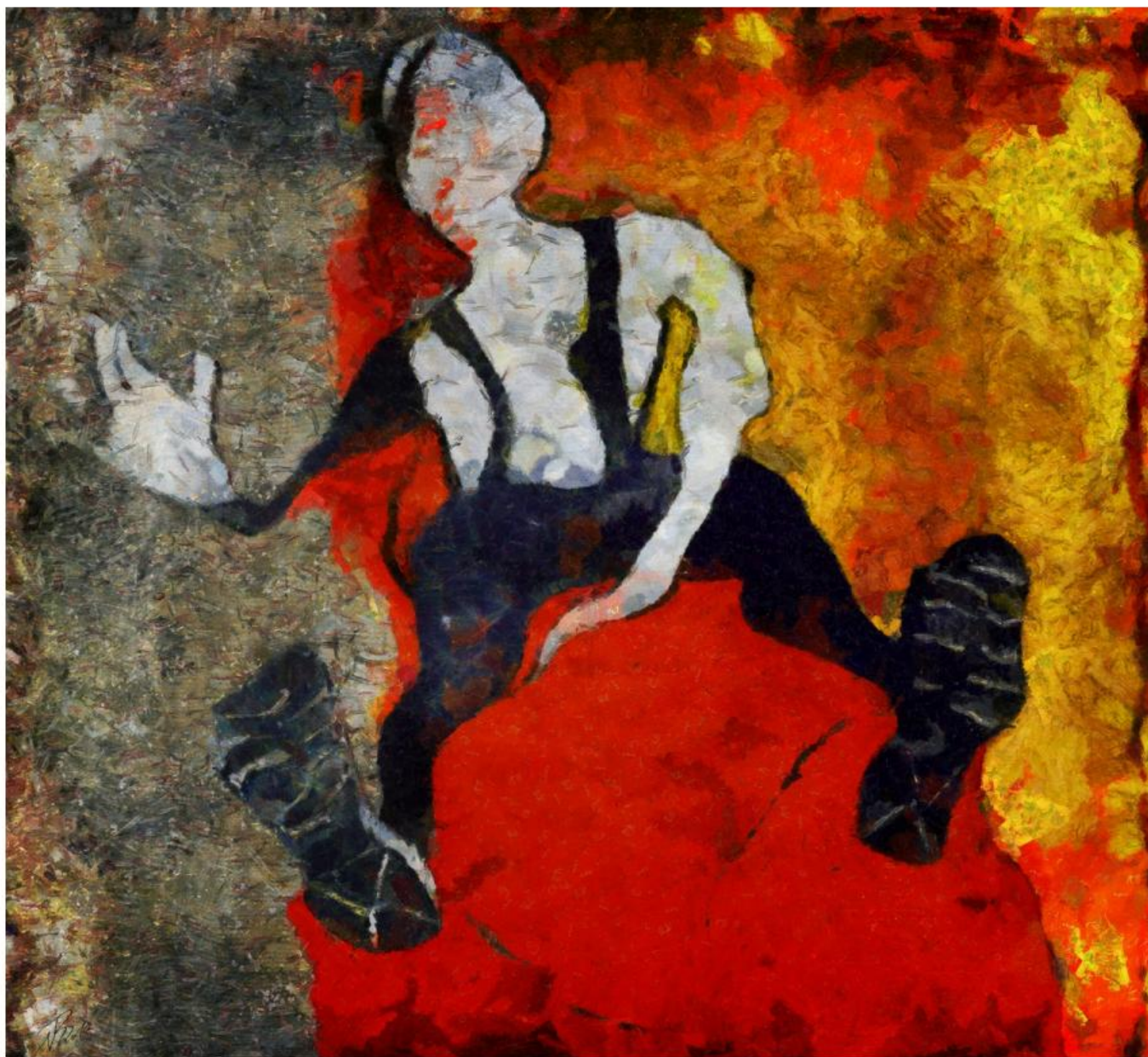
Past generations used storytelling to pass down information, traditions, superstitions and symbols, etc.; it used to be part of daily life. Nowadays it is perhaps the lack of narration, being replaced by abbreviations and emoticons, which in fact are symbols anyway that one finds on social media platforms, etc. There appears to be a general lack of enthusiasm and depth that some people seem to bring across in conversation ... perhaps it is globalization and a cultural phenomenon in which assimilation is taking place too quickly and people feel they may be losing their ethnical and, dare I say, human identity. I'm not too sure on this one yet. This question has touched on something that I want to explore some more. But there seems to be a general undertone of withhold and angst.

For me symbolism plays into this; traditions are steeped with symbols and rituals and even though we are driven to constantly update and reinvent, symbolism is still as strong today as then but like so many things within systems they adapt and change. Society as a broad concept is complex and I feel that symbolic strategies are an intricate part to aid us in deciphering some underlying concepts, perceptions and meanings. I think, Thomas Demand expanded on what has been part of our natural progression, especially in view of 19th and 20th century art where artists merged, synthesized, yet altered and compacted symbolism, psychology and the narrative elements. I think, if one

considers art as an emotional, psychological and intellectual stimulant, then what Demand said is almost a requirement that is brought about by artists who immerse themselves reflectively into the social and political mind-sets ... presenting an external-internal contemplation on how things are seen on the surface but also on how these things are felt on the inside.

In view of the above, my painting "Woman with molten mirror" may fit here due to its simplified forms and colours with black outlines but also the feeling of the subject. The painting depicts a hint of a naked woman holding something ... a mirror in front of her, surrounded by other flat forms all rendered in plain, unmixed pastel colours ... presented almost like ice-cream that is melting. The realization of what the deeper meaning of the image conveys came later when searching for a title. It struck me that this image is about ageing; the loss of youthfulness and agility. Youth is melting away and as we age we drift into the background of society ... we become pastel coloured and grey. Yet, we are still here and have presence, as marked by the black outlines. This is what the image communicates to me. A 20 year old might not get the same experience when viewing this painting, which to me is just as fascinating.

Based on my brief description of "Woman with molten mirror", challenging a narrative or cognition to come forward when looking at a painting seems like a gentle way of encouragement to open up and to feel what an image may mean to someone. By no means, do I assume that I can provoke this state in people nor is it my intention to do so. People have to be



On the red divan

willing to look and see* and add themselves into the equation and by no means do I expect them to see and feel the way I do. I feel, this would be very presumptions on my part. I enjoy the

interchange of emotions and intellectual stimulation that an image can trigger. It is often through these conversations with viewers that I have my own cognitions.



The lack of any theory

I have learned to rely on myself during the art-making process to approach my work sincerely, with honesty. Don't know if this makes sense ... each work (and many artists may agree with me) has the ... essence of the artist within it; the indispensable quality that is unmasked and pure. Hopefully it is my own openness, free from conscious thought that allows for a purer connection with the artistic intention during the process, which comes out in my work that people can identify with on some level, whether it is the overall mood, the subject or just the colour combination.

*To me there is a difference in looking and seeing: looking is regarding and acknowledging something passively and briefly, while seeing involves active exploration, where one engages perception, understanding and cognition by looking beyond the obvious or beyond the surface.

We have been particularly impressed with the way your hybrid approach accomplishes the difficult task of transferring into a liberated expressive realm the imagery you refer to. When developing a multilayered language, you capture non- sharpness and bring to a new level of significance the elusive still ubiquitous relationship between experience and memory. What is the role of memory in your process?

For me, memory has quite an elusive facet. Memory has this sneaky characteristic of distorting itself and therefore cannot be truly relied upon, especially when it is situation based memory. Recalling facts works differently, more on a cognitive level. To

me, our memories are formed through our experiences and feed our perception and imagination and for many artists, therefore, memory plays an important part in their process.

Death is an aspect of life that most people have been confronted with; so have I, far too many times. When I was younger, the author Terry Pratchett indirectly helped me, through his fantasy writings, to accept death and to see a gentler, even humorous side through his characterization of death. I am not saying that death is a humorous experience, by no means!

I have translated my own experiences on death into "Modern-day reaper" and instead of creating a morbid and solemn piece, this one is dynamic and colourful ... on the surface. In many images death is represented in dark, monochromatic settings that reflect the mood of the situation. My image is colourful, almost humorous, showing death on a bike-led type of harvester. Most people die in normal everyday surrounds that are colourful; there is no physical black, grey and white filter that can get switched while someone is dying. It is only when the viewer actively engages in "Modern-day reaper" that they might see or experience a shift away from the initial upbeat image and recognize the violent, unsettling undertone.

The image "Hand in pocket" was inspired by the Punk-days of the 80s but more so by the mind-set of one particular guy I met. He was what I like to call a "2-tone punk" on the outside; permanently dressed in a white shirt, jeans with braces and combat boots listening to punk rock and Ska. However, his general

attitude was sincere, moderate and sensible. He was a reliable and honest friend even though he hung out with the hard-cores who were perceived as the hooligans of the neighbourhood. I think this image depicts him well, in how I related to him at the time and still do now. Perhaps in this image one perceives symbolism through the mono-chromatic feel and the predominant blue tones, which for me underline the guys competent, calm and relaxed character but also the idealistic self-expression, which is further indicated by having one hand in his pocket but with the thumb showing. So moving back to my perception of memory when starting this answer. I think "Hand in pocket" illustrates the elusiveness of memory well through the bold, wavy outline and the general lack of detail, combined with its fuzzy treatment.

It is quite tricky to speak about an image when there was little conscious effort during its creation.

Your works often induce the viewers to abandon themselves to free associations: as you have remarked once, it is up to the viewer; in what they bring along while looking. When artists leaves their works open to interpretation, it is like giving the viewer permission to see anything in your works without anyone ever being wrong. Has that ever proven to be a problem?

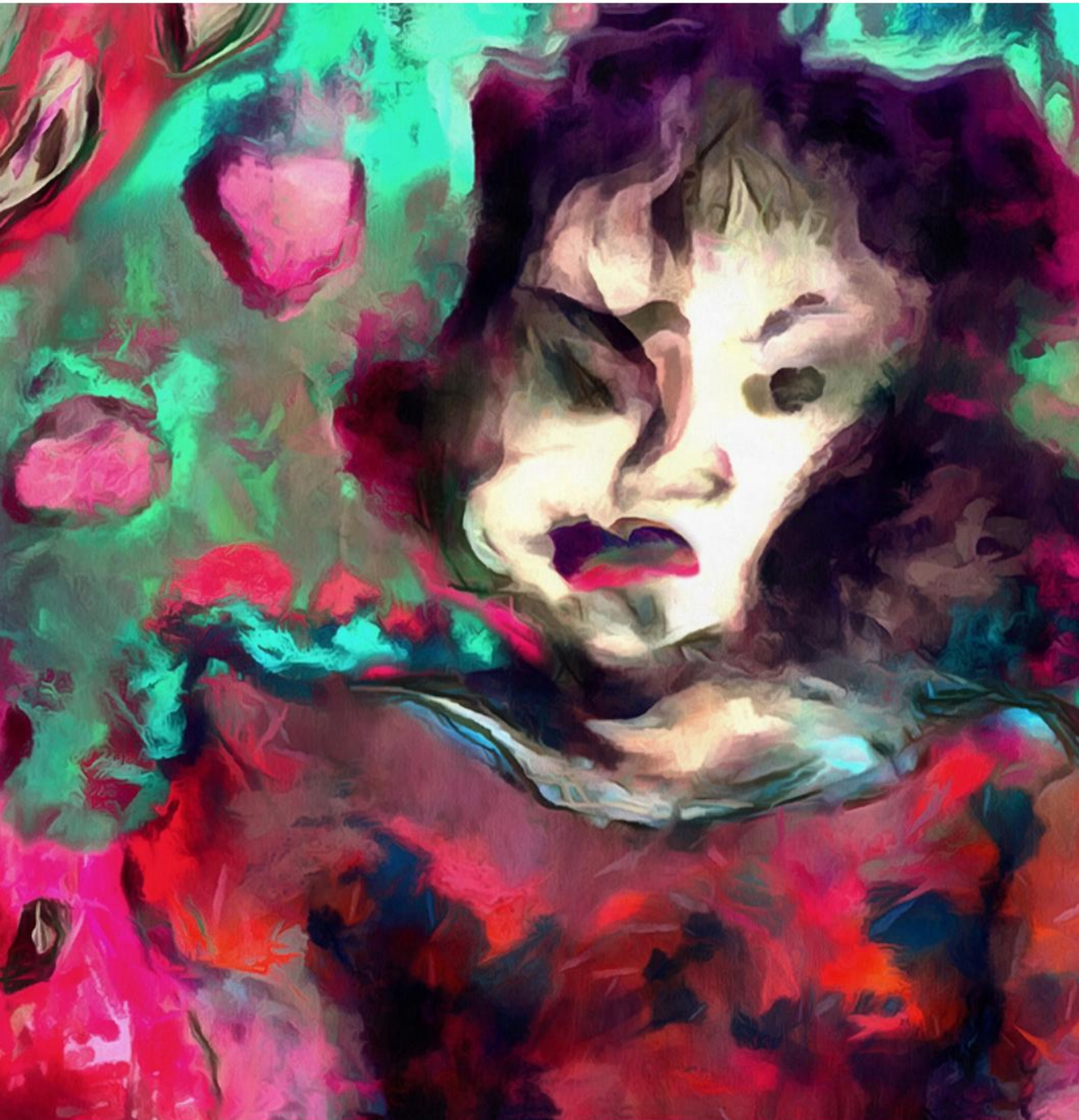
That's exactly right! I encourage the viewer to associate into my images. I would like for them to fall to a place inside themselves that elicits thoughts, memories, past experiences and/or feelings. No matter what their reactions

are, I would like them to share those with me. Allowing someone to be unrestricted fosters communication... and art is a form of communication. I cannot judge their feedback because we all have different experiences and interpretations. So no, this approach has never caused an issue for me. I rather enjoy the exchange and responses, as these are insightful for me and I consider this engagement with the viewer a part of the overall process. It kind of completes the circle of creating and learning, and yet can become the source of something new.

In order for me as an artist to convey or to express something that is seething inside me, I have to in a way expose myself to myself first; to free-fall; to become vulnerable; to be in the state of the present, and for me it is a great compliment if viewers are willing to do and be the same. Perhaps I'm a little surreptitious with the kind of titles I provide. I like to name each work straight after completion to capture the spirit of the process, on how I felt and what I saw after. It has been my experience that people appreciate named pieces. They find it easier to associate themselves into the image and, hopefully, will encourage them to talk about what they see and feel.

During an exhibition in Vienna, I had a rattling experience through the piece "The lack of any theory". A gentlemen visitor came up to me and said: "You have arrested my core in this painting. It depicts me through and through!" And while talking about how the image relates to himself, his hands moved in and around the painting, as though he was following a path of his own life-journey. His expressions that went along with his





The last dance



explanations were absolutely priceless, gave me goose-bumps and a lump in my throat. I was incredibly touched to receive such passion and identification from a viewer.

As you have remarked once, your art is guided by your internal visions, your emotions, instincts and perceptions at the time: the equilibrium concerning the composition of your works gives them a permanence to the intrinsic ephemeral nature of the perceptual process that inspires you. So we would take this occasion to ask you if in your opinion personal experience is an absolutely indispensable part of a creative process... Do you think that a creative process could be disconnected from direct experience?

How could it be? The process of making art alone is a direct experience for me. As mentioned earlier on, I do believe that memory fuels our imagination and forms our perceptions. An experience, on the other hand, marks an instance that we have been through personally and then we have a memory of an experience, which is the one that carries the most value for most people. And it is from those remembered experiences that we mostly draw reference from ... no matter how distorted they may be. Their impact can be so strong that the feeling becomes a subconscious sensation that brings about creativity. After all, it is the individual's experiences that have brought each one of us to where we are now.

It is experience and energy that guide me and allow me to tap into my internal resources and recesses. When I compose, for example, figures and faces, my reference may be an experience, not necessarily a memory, not a copy or

someone else's photo or idea. I think, it is exactly this aspect of my art-making that directs the overall abstractions and distortions in them. I never intent to work on anything that portrayals something that is real but rather something that generates emotion and/or memory. Experience is like adding herbs and spices to food, it infuses mood, humour, drama, etc. to a piece of art. I realize that I may be contradicting myself but this is what can happen when art is created from feelings rather than from a chosen reality. And yet, I believe that framework, structure, line and certain brushstrokes can be used as anchors that have been placed deliberately to draw the viewer in, this goes for the titles too but it is up to the viewer whether they use those anchors or not and/or bring something of their own into the analysis.

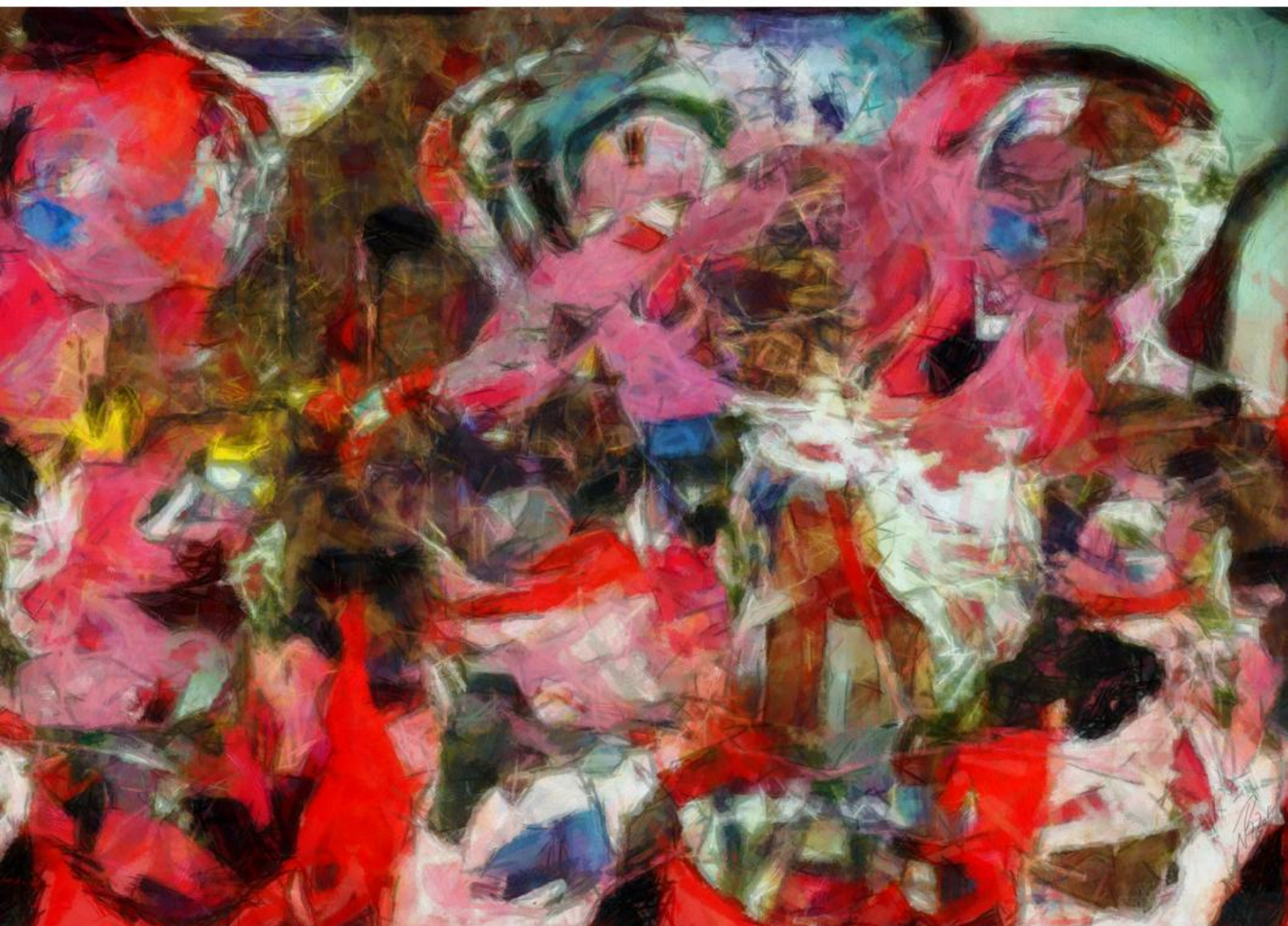
The image "The last dance" may instill different stimulants for different people. I started painting this image on the 31. December 2015. Year-end seems to be linked to reflection and a form of sadness that stretches not only over the year but seems to throw in the odd "way-back-when" memories too. In this case, I had flashes from my school leaving dance. It was festive and grand. We were all dressed in gorgeous attires and felt so grown up. I love dancing and literally took the stage with one of my classmates. It was an unplanned but incredible moment when we were suddenly alone on the dancefloor while everyone watched us move across it. We were caught up in the music and the rhythm and we moved in synch, so much so that people thought we had rehearsed this performance. These flashes of this moment made me realize that this is kind of what life is, we



The daily freak show

all dance, often alone, often with others, in and out of rhythm, in tune and out of tune with society and her expectations.

One of the hallmarks of your work is the capability to create a direct involvement with the viewers, who are urged to evolve from a condition of mere spectatorship. So before leaving this conversation we would like to pose a question about the



nature of the relationship of your art with your audience. Do you consider the issue of audience reception as being a crucial component of your decision-making process, in terms of what type of language is used in a particular context?

Hmm ... no, the prospective viewer is never part of my decision-making process. I have attempted to keep the

viewer in mind while working but I find this complicates, stifles and interrupts my otherwise open process, as too many aspects of my art-making just "happen". I guess, based on this, some people may see my behaviour towards this process as a selfish act, self-gratifying and self-rewarding ... and yes, there are these traits in it as well. However, as an expressive artist who leans on



abstraction, I am fuelled by an energy that's tied up in feelings and sensitivities that can only come about in my work when I can abandon restrictive and compulsive thinking, where my state is congruent and my mind and body are in harmony.

As quite a few viewers have mentioned to me, I do not paint pretty pictures but images that are alluring to the audience anyway, in one way or another. This

answer relates back to my previous reply in that the viewers' reactions and feedback is an integral part and completes the process once the image is ready to be shown.

Based on the above, one may perhaps appreciate that commissioned work can be extremely frustrating for me, especially when I receive briefs that are tight and hold fixed expectations from the



requester. On quite a few occasions I've declined taking on a project that didn't give me free reign on a subject. I am sensitive enough to appreciate that patrons want a representation of what they have in mind, no problem there at all; however, I do not understand people who seem to be taken in by artists' works and then expect them to produce something that is totally dissimilar to what drew them to the artist's work in

the first place. This is not a criticism just a paradox to my own thinking.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Nicole. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

For someone who creates in the moment this is a difficult question to answer and without wanting to sound obtuse, I have no idea how my art will evolve and I am not very concerned if and how my art will change or not. In the way I operate, I have no, nor do I want to, take control of it. I will let it happen, just as I have until now.

For the last year I have been focusing on photography, on getting to know the technical intricacies of the camera and how the knowledge of this influences an image. Although, consequently I have taken a hiatus from painting after having been involved in art-making almost non-stop for the last four years.

However, I thrive best when I'm creative and when I allow myself to let go, so you will see more of my work, although, as mentioned, at this stage I am unsure if my direction is going to change or if I will continue experimenting the way I have been.

Thank you for this inspiring set of questions and for selecting me to be part of your portfolio of artists.

An interview by **Dario Rutigliano**, curator
and **Barbara Scott**, curator
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