

## Interview with Aksiniya Misyuta

Beatrice Helman – January 18, 2018

The mise-en-scène against the background of distances is a reference to the old tradition of painting. Being hastily painted, they are the reflection of the past in the steamy mirror of the day: the details have been less of an issue in the world, which has gained pace. On their halfway to abstraction, they have still been narrative. This is where the pop culture, with its cartoon motives, sits side by side with the foretime allegories, somewhat like the red cherubs. The metaphoric pictures of our blurred interactions and self-cognition.



**Hi Aks! Thank you so much for talking with us. Can you tell us a little bit about what first drew you to creating in general and painting more specifically?**

Hey! Thanks for having me! I've been no an exception in my family in terms of creativeness. Everyone was good at painting or drawing. However, I'm definitely a renegade when it comes to career choices, as people in my family realized their potential in other, non-artistic areas. Except for my granny's ancestor almost a century ago (who was a prominent Russian artist). Drawing has been my thing from the early age. It's all about fine motor skills: I learned how to crochet very early, have been avidly doing a lot of crafts when a child. Never got bored. Being 13, I got my first commission as an illustrator (for the local newspaper) and it determined my future at some point. I've been obsessed with creating, and my natural bent for arts has been

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always a self-evident thing. However, my parents, both engineers, wanted me to have a “real” profession. I love writing, yes, but self-deception shouldn’t last long. Having got my diploma, I started pursuing another career. Painting appeared in my life on the regular basis as a relaxing routine, when drawing (which is more controlled, takes a lot of energy) became my full-time job. So it was some sort of a counterbalance for me.

## **In what ways have you noticed your work evolve over time, or perhaps how has your relationship to it changed?**

As a self-taught person, I can clearly see the altering of my focal point in my works. A while back it was all about interpreting reality through the prism of a reason, eyes. Finding and styling a right form was a thing, I guess. Now it is more of an attempt to catch a feeling, a whiff. My work gets less illustrative, as I less struggle with myself.

My aesthetic as a commercial illustrator has nothing to do with my approach as a painter. These two worlds are separated, but both evolving over the time. And I stick to a more precise palette, some colors comfort me more than others. I utterly trust my gut today.

## **What are some of the advantages, and limitations of using acrylic paint? Do you see it as an emotional or practical choice?**

I like to work fast, both in graphics and painting. I am a passionate person, who prefers to work within a ray of insight. At this point, the choice of acrylic as the main medium might seem utilitarian. The way you can apply it —thickly or diluted, evenly or texturized -- makes it the perfect to me. But I love oil as well, it is very romantic medium for me ( I used to work with it painting people).

## **Do you find that your choices when making a painting are driven by a desire for an aesthetic or a physical process? Are you a person who is drawn to texture, to layering, to the physicality of painting? What other materials do you love, besides acrylic?**

I paint to quench my own thirst, I like the process itself. I do not do any preliminary work, just follow the lines that come out of an empty surface. It’s magical and gives an euphoric effect. Sometimes it’s akin to an erotic feeling, something tickling and freeing. Being prone to experimenting, I try to not restrict myself with techniques and materials. I like working on paper in gouache and ink; engraving and 3d practice. From time to time I have insomnia from being overwhelmed by ideas.

## **Can you take us through the creative process that you go through before you start a new piece of work? Do you start off with a vision in mind or does it come to you as the work progresses?**

Before every painting, I have some sort of a phantom inside of me, some feeling that strives to be conveyed. No clear visualization, just the urge to thin out the mist in my head until I’d be satisfied. I always rely on my intuition, if it says to stop, I stop. Ignoring this signals has always led me to fail. I do not analyze while painting, just let it go, almost automatically. Drawing, on the contrary, I always see clearly in my mind and add details thoroughly ( different brain sides?). I always draw and paint from imagination. Having disappointed in a painting, I just paint it over. There are so many palimpsests among my works... All in all, I like the process of crystallization of an idea, the final result is always a surprise to me.

## **How does your work help you navigate your own experience of the world?**

Work always reflects experience and innermost thoughts, it helps to rethink priorities. Looking back at my older works I see the stages I’ve been through, as a personality. You know, being young and ambitious makes you think of huge horizons ahead, so you endlessly spill rough ideas on the paper in order to get noticed. There is nothing bad about it. But then you face the dilemma: you either should correspond

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someone's expectations (and be in demand), or you could try to stay true to yourself (and the appreciation becomes a matter of luck). This reality caused some unpleasant moments to me. Interaction with the world should be enriching, I'm against any outer dictate. Once I get rid of concerns on the way I see myself as a creative unit, it gets easier and the whole new horizon has been revealed. It is not escapism, it is romantic (at least, until I have a thing to do to pay bills). People like my figurative works and a lot of early paintings had found their new homes, they are loved. But I can spot my naivety in them and I feel like they were created by a different person.

## **Are there any themes you cycle back to, whether they be ideas, moods, colors, particular shapes?**

Absolutely. The idea of artificial is the main one in my work. I'd say "quasi", "pseudo" and "alleged" are vectors that inspire me. The idea of double bottom captives me. It is funny to see, that some plots are being used so many times. For instance, I have a bunch of paintings and drawings under the name of "Life of a flower": a placid flower with dew and bees and bugs, and fighting people at the background, ugly and furious, depicted blurrily. It kind of implies that life is just different at any moment. Speaking of colors and shapes, I can tell brain drops a lot of "presets". I call it morphology of my art.

## **What does a typical nine to five day look like for you? How do you stay focused, are you a person of routines or is every day drastically different?**

Working from home gives a lot of freedom. I have no time management issues though, being able to concentrate and work very fast. So I do my day job from 7:00 to 13:00–15:00 (if it's not an urgent project when a client wants it by tomorrow morning). If it was not a carte-blanche, and a person wants to communicate narrowly, my whole day would be dedicated to that. Intense work, with a lot of hand-drawing involved, always requires an "antidote", otherwise, my head is about to burst. Then painting helps a lot. In other days I can spend my time painting. Frankly speaking, for many people, this modus vivendi looks pretty boring. But I feel absolutely serene in this routine, never getting bored along.

## **Are there any other artists who have influenced your work or have inspired you to attempt new directions in your own work? Or is there one piece of work that's had a lasting impact on you?**

From my school years, I love Chekov's "There is nothing new in art except talent". So the creative genius itself, the ability to create has always fascinated me! I love museums, since there you can look closer at any exhibit and recognize the living hand and creative mind behind it, be it a piece from BC or a modern thing. It is so inspiring. For this particular reason, I like naive and outsider art, since it's a pure triumph of creativity. It couldn't leave you unmoved when you see pieces, created in the name of beauty, without calculations, outside of the world of shows and dealers. They are genuine.

Among masters, I have so many favorites, but some give me chills. I love Max Ernst, a truly multifaceted artist of many talents, Munch and Bacon. It doesn't mean I'd like to borrow something from their aesthetic intentionally, it doesn't work for me (it's like chanting something you do not understand). I do admire their creative freedom, it influences on some energetic level.

My mom has been a huge fan of Bruegel the elder for all her life. It certainly has an impact on me. Love his enigmatic world. Especially "The beekeepers", mesmerizing. As for the modern scene, it is so diverse... When you see Jordan Wolfson's "Female figure", or Oliver Laric's works you know it's 21 century, it's great.

## **What are some of the things that are important to you in your day to day process of being in the studio - how important is space to creation, for you?**

For me, it was ok to work at home, and I used to do. But obtaining a specific place, a sanctuary, really makes

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difference. Once you come here, it does mean you are serious about this part of your life, it is quality time. Gathering works in order to see your current progress, your path, encircling yourself with things that help to maintain your inner flame. But the main benefit is an opportunity to stay focused as long as possible and to see works from afar. The latter is very important to me since the trance of the process really prevents me from understanding the result very often. I just step back, close my eyes. And when I open them, for the first millisecond I can see a painting as something new...

## **Along those lines, what are you reading? What are you listening to? What are you watching?**

I love reading. Always loved this form of escapism. In my reading list there are always books on semiotics, religion, cultural studies, philology, philosophy. In a bookstore, I could be found at the section with Russian avant-garde (love Alexander Yakimovich works), books about Brodsky and Mayakovsky, anything on Ancient Egypt. There is a very special place in my heart for Aldous Huxley (my number one love), George Orwell and Ray Bradbury.

As I mentioned, I am a huge fan of Erich Fromm's ideas, although I've been through a phase of existentialism (Sartre and Camus) during my University years.

Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes is a very good reading to me. I'm a curious person, and parallelly reading something like a monography on Bruegel the elder and Le Bon's "Psychology of crowds" is a normal situation.

I do not have TV, haven't been watching it for more than a decade. But I love watching movies, tons of them: from old and new detective series and sci-fi movies to accidental gems from 70s, like "Don't watch now" and "3 Women".

My top list for my soul includes anything Tarkovsky (but "Mirror" especially), von Trier's "Melancholy" and Kubrick's "2001: A space odyssey" (having seen it before for several times, I started feeling it just a couple of years ago).

While painting I often listen to lectures on astrophysics by Sergey Popov.

## **What is your personal relationship to social media? Do you find that it supports your work, and your growth, or that it's dangerous to your creative process? Do you use it solely personally or for professional reasons as well?**

A lot of lovely things in my career happened because of the internet and social media. I started a blog dedicated to illustration 10 years ago, that helped me to meet a lot of interesting people. In 2000 when I studied at school I often visit Nick Night's SHOWstudio site (being in love with fashion then), in 15 years I myself became a contributor there, as Nick Night has always supported young artists, giving them an opportunity to be seen. For me it wouldn't happen if there'd be no social media.

I started a new IG account to share my pics with kindred spirits, I do not want to promote it intensively, I'm enjoying the way it is, as I feel no pressure. My previous IG account was a nightmare to me since after Gucci's GucciGram campaign I participated in, I faced with unrequested attention from people, who either wanted to receive my works for free or dropped me cheezy messages. Having banned them, I ended up being unable to use my account. And I finally started feeling relaxed.

It is possible to make a career with a help of social media today, yes, but I firmly believe you should be someone outside of social media as well.

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**Generally speaking, in your opinion, what are some of the benefits and detriments of social media in relation to the art world? How has technology changed things, even in the last few years?**

One could be discovered and proposed with great opportunities. It becomes easier to buy and sell, to swap, to organize activities, and even receive in expertise, being able to stay in touch with so many people around the world. However, it looks like supply exceeds demand, which generates a lot of unpleasant situations for artists. Frauds, unpaid purchases. It's a two-sided coin.



**I read a statement in which you said, “developing as a reply to the post-internet world, people of which are satiated with a never-ending stream of visual content.” Can you talk a little bit more about that?**

A couple of years ago a friend of mine asked me to take a picture of her, just a snap. But it turned into an hour of innumerable attempts to make something that would be “likable”, would fit into her instagrid and so on. This was more than awkward, surreal how we could be afraid sometimes to show our reality, choosing to create something artificial instead, just to fit the stream, be liked. The avalanche of imagery we see every day, scrolling kilometers of pictures makes us less sensitive in many ways. “We are morphing into facades, losing the depth “ —I thought. Moreover, it was in the perfect unison with Erich Fromm’s works (which I am a huge fan of) I was reading at that time. We consider ourselves products to be presented well, eventually to be sold well, caring so much about others opinions. Thus had come the idea of people as objects, sets of forms, still lifes. It is figuration half way to abstraction.

**Can you also talk a little bit about this idea of Seeing-Seeming that you mention in the same statement, saying that this exploration as led you to “Seeing-Seeming, within which I’m exploring the possibility of perceiving and judging without boundaries of enforced rating.”**

I believe, the way we live (in terms of perception) in the world of post-internet is a little different from what it

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was decades ago: our reaction becomes more and more of an automatic response, just because the amount of information (unsolicited) is just overwhelming. Using stereotypes is a powerful tool that helps us survive. I mean it is obviously a natural thing, but the scale nowadays is much grander, the room for thoughtful perception is shrinking, as it's more comfy to not look deeper. What we see might drastically differ from what it is, since we often superimpose and compile in order to save our time, thus the essence of things eludes. Our diverse world is categorized.

Seeing-Seeming (which in Russian—my mother tongue—expresses in two homographs “V’ideniye-Vid’eniye”) started as a project, where I depicted abstract objects under the names of mundane things.” Look at them, as you’ve never seen them before and your brain doesn’t have any data on them. Can you judge? Do you find them ugly or beautiful?”. Then I realize, that this concept shouldn’t be necessarily limited to a series of works within a project, this principle could extend beyond...

The effect of Adamic view, when you feel confusion looking at something is just amazing! Playing with this feeling is a part of self-cognition, I think since it helps to acknowledge what really fascinates you and what disgusts.

I absolutely love a historical anecdote (actually a true story), telling about an experiment that Russian avantgarde artist David Burlyuk had been practicing during his lectures. Showing Davinci’s studies he presented them as they were his own pieces, and an audience reacted as it was a trash. Needless to say, the audience highly scored everything allegedly belonged to the Master. The thing is we like to be told what is good and what is bad. When you make an effort to beat this habit, it feels so good. Kind of a forgotten pleasure.

## **Are there any accounts, websites, or blogs you follow that you love?**

Lately, I try to cut the time I spend on the internet. I used to love tumblr, as I’ve been following a lot of accounts from NASA and Egyptian Museum, to Contemporary Art Daily and pages of my favorite painters. NASA podcasts...

## **In what ways does your physical surrounding influence your work? In other words, how influenced are you by your physical location?**

Well, if you do not live in an ivory tower, surrounding would affect work in many ways. I don’t believe in “sterile” art, it always bears an imprint of a span of time it has been creating in, and where. For me it is like a compensation: if it is dark and gloomy around my work shows color and on the contrary. But it’s more about an emotional component, that derives from the surroundings, not about a place itself. I do not draw inspiration from physical location literally, more from its atmosphere.

## **You work in so many fields—fine art, illustration, animation, textile design. How do you find that all of these different artistic endeavors interact and influence each other? Have you found yourself drawn to different ways of creating over time, and have you seen an evolution in terms of one leading to another?**

For me, they are separate areas, it allows me to fulfill myself in different styles and techniques, as my nature requires a certain balance. I need regularly switching activity in order to feel peace in my soul. My illustrations are usually very detailed, but when it comes to painting I gravitate towards something bolder. But the leitmotif of all my work, in general, is avoiding of anything cloying, too sweet. Partly because of this I sometimes feel tired of fashion illustration, as the commercial overtone needs you to produce a lot of cliches, which is exhausting. All these endeavors complement each other, even though they may look like different stories.

## **Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between fashion and art, and how those things can inform and influence each other, particularly for you?**

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Fashion and art have always been going side by side. Applied art has always been a huge part of fashion, while fine art has always been reflecting fashion. So this interaction has a longterm relationship. The idea of wearable art is not new, likewise, artists working in fashion is not a sign of our time (eg Dali was very prolific in the field of fashion, Russian avant-garde, Mondrian). However, recently fashion strives to create some kind of symbiosis with art in a very intense manner, collaborating with modern artists, playing with artistic heritage (look at mastodons like Gucci and Louis Vuitton for example) in order to make more money -- it is no longer that special. It reminds me of a conveyor, where poetic ideas become somewhat down-to-earth (that has to do with sales and money).

Also I see that showing an interest in art, attending shows and studios is a huge trend. I want to believe it doesn't come from the desire to post a picture on social media (is it too naive of me?).

**You've said that you are "interested in human nature, in exploring the place of human being in the universe," and that as you get older, this "focuses more on the place of a person in the modern society." What are you feelings on the place of a person in modern society, and can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by that, what questions you're trying to answer and what answers you may have stumbled across through your work?**

Youth is always a tad exalted, I guess. In my 15 I was reading Shklovskii and Sagan, thinking about what we are in this vast space. Getting twice this age makes me change my focal point. People and some cataclysms taking place in our society are also interesting. People struggle searching for their identity, under the burden of double standards and uncertainty. I'm interested in exploring competitive nature of the relationship in general, the question of women's solidarity. The idea of substitutes borders on the idea of the hypocrisy of beauty standards today (although they always have nothing to do with well-being). All in all, my attention is drawn to the way human objects treat themselves and each other.

**You also mention the presence of romance and irony, and I wanted to ask about that, and how you see it manifesting in your work?**

Taking everything, including ourselves, too seriously is not a good idea. Sometimes translating an idea of appalling into something appealing may work: attracted eye would cause some thinking afterward. When you look at cute entities on the picture, something bright or even cartoonish, symbolizing frightful vices, for example, you can feel a dissonance, that worth pondering.

My characters are not ideal ones, the situations I place them are confusing but not hopeless. Inflatable Venus, a woman melting on a sofa, a lady laying next to a vase as a decor... I love metaphors and there is always a smile behind my works.

**As a former journalist, do you see any interaction and relationship between journalism and painting, or what your personal relationship is to words versus images?**

For me personally, visuals are more eloquent than any words. Sometimes pictures unintentionally show more, than any word can ever explain. But for some reason, any artwork still needs to be accompanied with an explanation... In order to express your concept, you should make a research for it to stay substantiated. So any artist today does some journalistic job: collecting facts, entwining them together, editing.

Creating any piece, be it a text or a picture, you should remember why you do it, otherwise, it would never open its gist to other people. At this point writing and painting bare resemblance. But I prefer visual language. A picture should speak for itself, it should invite for interpretation.

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**This idea of conveying fragility and alienation is so present in your work, and I wanted to ask about the ways in which you worked to express that in these works, in particular in relation to the piece Epigones?**

Often depicting lonely characters, I present them as closed systems. Even they are depicted in interaction, it looks like fighting because those systems collide. I think there are some secret corners within our mind which make us feel alienated even with co-minders. Thus we try to save our uniqueness from merging.

Epigones is about the feeling of being skinned-off, about some shadows that mess things up. Although it's told that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, sometimes seeing your ideas in someone's hands is just painful. This happened to me many times.

**What originally drew you to this theme of vulnerability? Do you see your work as an aesthetic rumination on your own emotional state, experiences, or anxieties ?**

There are so many situations when you are about to be broken. Losing people you love, supporting them in their struggle is a huge lesson. Circumstances might be cruel, and having nothing to oppose to them you start analyzing yourself. All my art is rooted in my anxieties and my experiences. You just can't borrow this kind of things from other people.

**The use of color in these works is so intentional and feels ultimately very profound— can you talk a little bit about the different colors you use here, your relationship to using color in general, and how they speak to the larger intention of the work as a whole?**

I chose color intuitively. It turns out that I stick to the limited palette, whilst some colors irritate me and I barely can use them. It's pretty hard to explain my relationship with color as it the rationale behind it is just vague even for me: the whole picture should comfort me.

Frankly speaking, I do not like bright colors, I like it more when they are dusty and muted. But the combo of light blue, white/ivory, and umber or red is the one embedded in my subconsciousness very deeply. It gives me a sensation of highlighted old memories.

**Can you talk about your work as a commercial artist, just about your experience with it, if and how you separate personal work from commercial work, if you work within the same themes and framework, if the process is different?**

As a commercial artist, I work in the fields of illustration (including fashion illustration), textile design. It is more about creating conventionally beautiful pieces, the pieces that would please the maximum number of people. Within this frame you are free. I like dynamic compositions, a lot of details, irony, yet keeping it elegant. When it comes to personal works, I prefer to diminish the number of details and lines, I strive to simplify the subjects, to make it less immaculate. I am afraid of everything cloying and pretentious and try to avoid it both in my commercial and personal works. There always be a touch to show it's not that serious.

**Do you have any projects, shows or residencies coming up?**

I've been working on the book project for a few months in raw, hopefully, I could finish it soon. For the moment I'm relocating to Istanbul, where I have some cool opportunities. But it's too early to say more.

**Thank you so much for sharing your work and talking with us!**