

The visual artist Loussine GHUKASYAN was among the artists exhibited at the previous HAYP Pop Up Gallery, "12 | 12 | 12 RETROSPECTIVE", in Yerevan last December 2018. She was also a contributing artist at HAYP Pop Up Gallery's «Lips of Pride» show in 2016, and «Downshift» in 2017.

Laure RAFFY: You studied design for 5 years at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Yerevan, what did this training bring you and how did it influence your artistic practice?

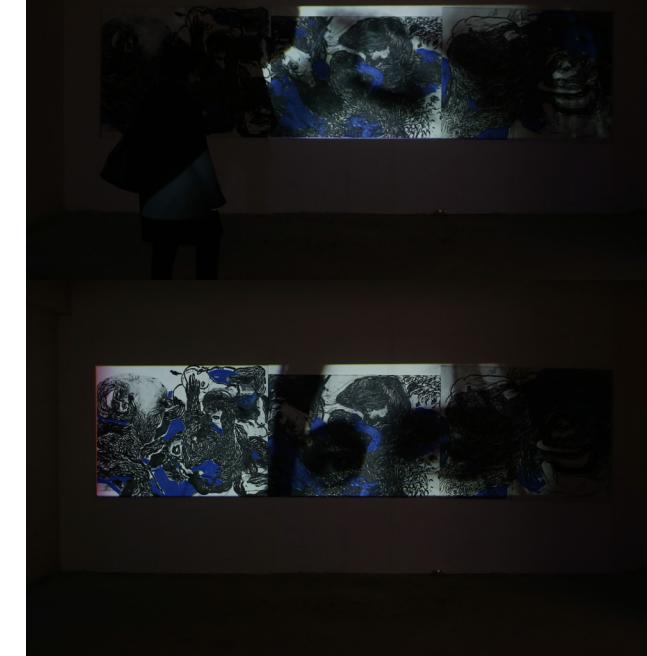
Lussine GHUKASYAN: Initially, I applied to study etching and print media. In Armenia, the situation for artists is quite complicated. It's not easy to take paths that differ from traditional ones, or to practice a profession that allows you to earn enough money to make a living. I decided to integrate design into my studies, thinking it would help me find work afterwards. But in the end, I chose to follow yet another path, specializing in painting. I loved the medium but not pedagogy at the Academy. The environment was quite rigid.

So, I used to take my tools upstairs, alone on the terrace where I would paint the whole day before coming back down to the studios to present my work. This reminds me of a funny anecdote, I used to leave lots of empty space on my canvas. One day, a teacher came to me and told me that I had forgotten to complete some parts, as the entire canvas wasn't covered.

I started to move away from the academy. Realism as a style and as a teaching method didn't suit me. I felt like something was missing, like I couldn't realize my ideas, my desires. I concentrated on drawing, which gave me more freedom. I felt more free to use white and black, a pallet i generally feel close to.

LR: Your works are quite abstract with distinct lines. We do not immediately guess what is hidden in these paintings, maybe that's why we could find your works a bit frightening?

LG: I think that «beauty» hits you at first sight, a first glance. What you discover afterwards interests me more. I hope that my work escapes from what I call «first look», I try to focus on the second encounter. My canvases reveal what emanates from form: noise, emptiness, agitation ... Occasionally I integrate color into my paintings. For instance, there's a lot of blue in my works exhibited at 12 | 12 | 12. The work is actually called "In the Blue". I have to say, naming my works is something really difficult for me. Titles don't matter in my artistic practice. But blue is an important color for me. It's the color of the night, thoughts, flowing water...



LR: Could you tell us about the context in which this work was produced?

LG: Two of the paintings presented in the installation were made when I lived in Marseille. I painted the third canvas when I was back in Yerevan. These paintings are the transcriptions of a wide range of emotions, encounters, important events ... You can read the agitation, the movement, the fall, the trouble. The blood flowing at full speed in the veins and the body at rest. That is what I tried to express.

LR: What does the video projected on your canvases bring to the work?

LG: My video reveals fragments of life: the footsteps of passers-by in the street, their feet, the blinking of a woman's eyes, all this slowed down.

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We don't always pay attention to the gestures of everyday life. I wanted to play with the paint / video contrast in this installation. Video is essentially a moving image. In that sense, it contrasts with painting, a fixed image. I decided to slow down the images of the video and project them on my paintings which are agitated and dark, in order to bring serenity and a slower pace to the experience. The second part of my video, a white screen without image, illuminates the painting. It represents the only moment when we can distinguish the works on canvas in isolation, without distraction or filter; exposed.

LR: Are your works on canvas preceded by sketches?

LG: My practice is spontaneous. I paint directly on canvas. I do not make a preliminary sketch. I like being alone when I paint, I like working without the eyes of others. When I make street art, for example, I usually don't talk to anyone about it beforehand. These pieces are discovered later, through photos, traces .. I'm not really interested in live-painting, I prefer to produce and reveal later. For example, during exhibition openings I used to escape when visitors arrive. I let them discover the work in the space. It's not me directly that I reveal but my work, which of course, is also a part of me. I like to disappear and to erase myself through my artworks.

These last few weeks I've been working outside in the street, more than in my studio. I really try to choose specific places that connect to the landscape in order to make my art.

LR: We can see that language, words, are also very present in your practice.

LG: Indeed, I don't always draw. I also like to write ... When I make murals, I use a paint brush or marker. I like to use the brush more on the wall. It allows me to feel the space, the movement and textures. I remember a project I did in Greece last summer. I went for a walk and brought some materials along with me, brushes, oil paints. Sitting in front of a huge wall, I thought about the notion of image. I wondered if it was really more useful than words and language. Spontaneously, I wanted to make a large-scale work. I grabbed a stick of wood to lengthen my brush and paint on this gigantic wall.

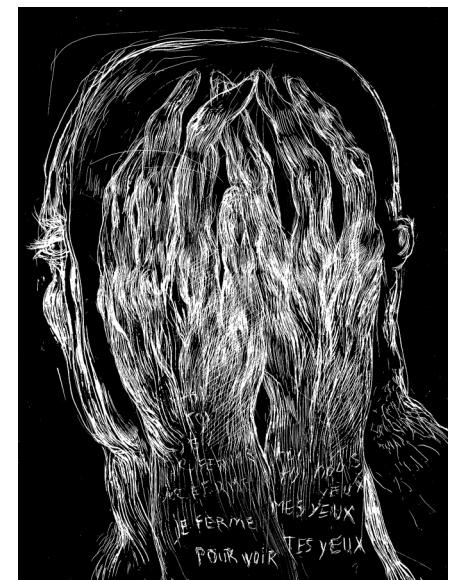
Here is what I wrote: «Be alone. Listen to the sound of the sea. Dance » I was on a remote, wild beach. I thought about the people who would come to the sea and see this message. I imagined them dancing. I thought at that moment of the peace they could find, alone with themselves, in this almost deserted place. I made other pieces when I returned to Armenia, other messages. For instance, a glorious day spent by the river, away from [the city of] Yerevan.

The river flow was forked by a hydro company so that some of the water would flow into large concrete pipes that would produce electricity. Meters and meters of tubing. On one of them I wrote: «Listen to the sound of the river. Dance.»

A suggestion to listen to the water flowing in the tube, to try at least ... These tubes completely break the cycle, the natural rhythm, I found it sad. These few words hoped to bring back a little poetry.

LR: How do you make a living here as an artist?

LG: It's not easy. When I paint, I'm not thinking about selling my works. I don't think they would interest collectors. They are quite dark and people would not necessarily want to exhibit them in their homes. To make an income, I do book illustrations for an agency in New York, mostly children's books.



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Shortly after this interview was done (and prior to publishing), Loussiné GHUKASYAN's works were on view at the Urban Festival in Yerevan in March 2019, a collaboration initiated by «Visual Gap Gallery» and the Goethe Institute in partnership with the German Embassy, where Loussiné participated in workshops led by a group of street artists from Hamburg, Germany.

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