



ARTIST ROOM

YULIA IOSILZON

21 September - 21 December 2020

THE
COLUMBIA

95 — LANCASTER GATE, LONDON — 99

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ROMAN ROAD

Image: Yulia Iosilzon, detail of *Pink Evening Light*, 2020. Oil on transparent fabric, 183 x 137 cm, unique. Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia

INTRODUCTION

Yulia losilzon's art practice hinges upon a singular approach to narrative that at once conforms to and subverts traditional notions of visual storytelling. Whilst the scenes depicted in her paintings are instantly identifiable to the viewer, featuring familiar figurative protagonists occupying semi-abstracted but still recognisable sites and settings, it is their place and purpose within a wider narrative that often alludes. This portrayal of representational yet indeterminate moments extracted from their surrounding story is evidence of both losilzon's interest in the fluctuating nature of anecdotal histories and their place within a contemporary culture of ephemerality.

Many of her works reference narratives lifted from fables or fairytales that are proliferated by means of an oral historical tradition, retold across generations, everchanging as elements are embellished, misremembered, appended or forgotten. It is therefore often the fragments of narrative that remain, that carry the weight and intention of broader understandings since lost, and become imbued with potential and suggestion as those portrayals in losilzon's paintings. Similarly, losilzon's works echo

our experience and engagement with published narrative intended for a social media society. Events and encounters are distilled to shareable snapshots and memorable moments, decontextualised and edited for quick consumption and even quicker consideration. However, just as the whispered snippets of age-old tales are enticing enough to demand further questioning and therefore continued circulation, so too losilzon's paintings elicit prolonged pause and invite increased contemplation.

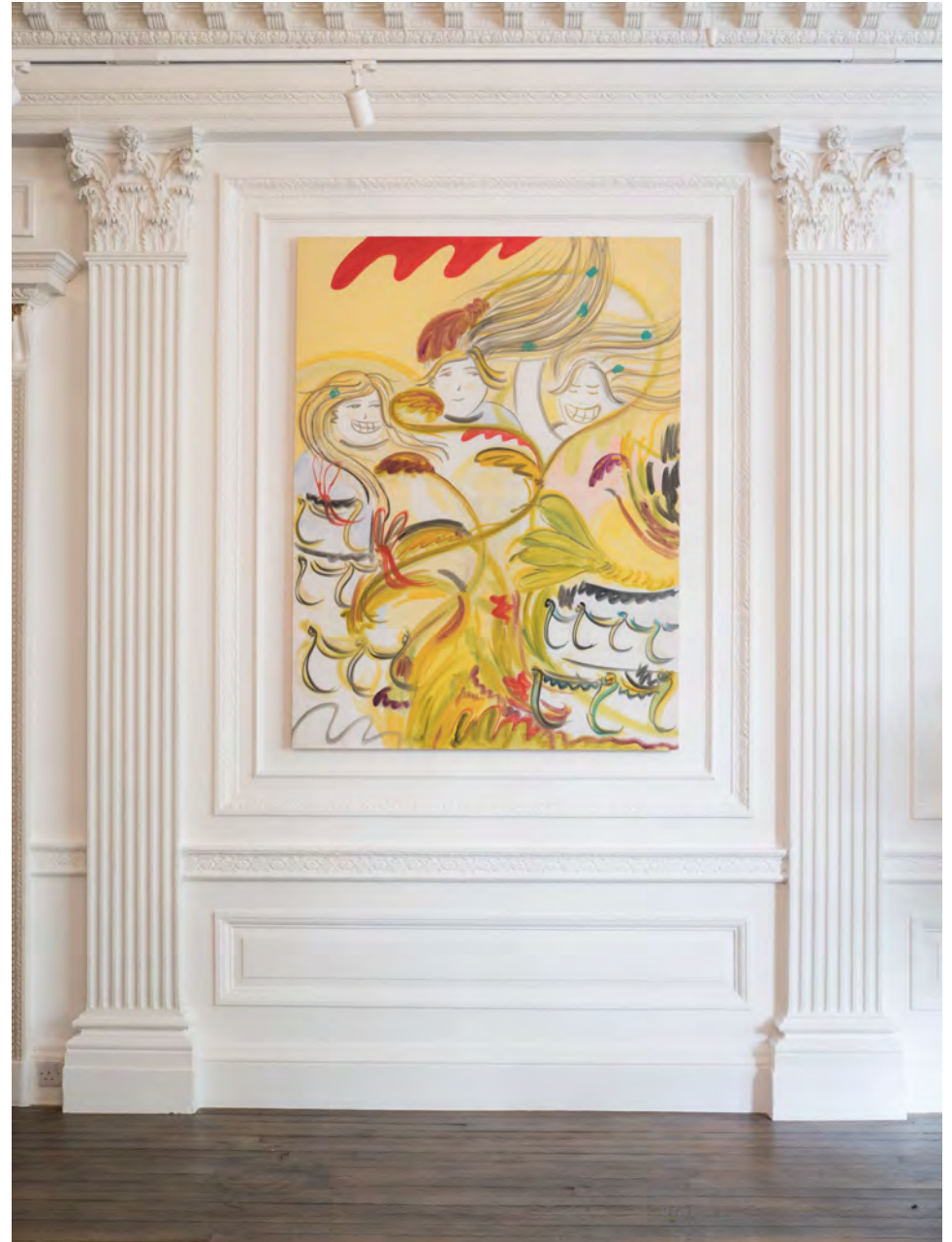
The works are embedded with imagery and iconography implicit to an extended field of vision, singular storyboards constricted by the canvas, indicators to a continuance concealed from the viewer. It is this allusion to an unattainable understanding that enamours losilzon's paintings to their audience.

losilzon's obscurantism is further encouraged through her selection of medium, comprehension of colour and employment of abstraction. The choice of translucent silk as her canvas serves as the physical manifestation of an ability to at once reveal and conceal, the material's opacity hinting at the paintings structural subsistence whilst simultaneously preserving their modesty.

Complete clarity once again proves elusive, as the viewer is lured involuntarily by the prospect of intimacy only to be frustratingly found wanting.

Finally, losilzon's implementation of approached abstraction only acts to give more agency to the figurative elements of her depictions, situating the latter within an ever-increasing diffusion of semblance. Boundaries are blurred as the audience struggles to discern the representational qualities of shapes, silhouettes and shadows in an attempt to reconcile them within their own interpretation of the imagery's implied narrative. Furthermore, losilzon's palette of vivid tones and vibrant colour combinations force the viewer to contend with their learned understanding of emotive alliances, evoking additional elucidations and once again heightening the alluring indiscernibility of the artist's unique narrative-driven constructions.

- Hector Campbell, Art Historian, Writer & Curator



Yulia losilzon, display curated by Marisa Bellani, Artist Room, The Columbia, 21 September – 21 December 2020. Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia. © Martin Eito



Yulia Iosilzon, display curated by Marisa Bellani, Artist Room, The Columbia, 21 September – 21 December 2020. Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia. © Martin Eito



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“I AM VERY INTERESTED IN DUALITY, IN DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS TO THE SAME SYMBOL.”

Yulia Iosilzon in conversation with Sonja Teszler for Floorr Magazine

Could you tell us a bit about yourself and your background? Where did you study?

I was born into a multinational family in Moscow and spent most of my very early childhood with my mom. I spent all my time drawing, painting and playing piano. I actually went to a professional music school because of my mom's dream to be an opera singer. She was from a very intelligent family; her mother was a physics professor and her dad was an engineer. Still, there was not enough money in her family to send her to the music school so my mom kept this dream long enough and then sent me to the music school instead. I think it's a common thing between generations. I realise now that I would of rather done ballet.

At the same time, I was always an art rebel. All the walls in the house were painted by me and weirdly enough, my parents fully supported it.

Then I went to school and was sent to an English boarding school. It was an all-girls Catholic school in

Ascot. I wouldn't say that I enjoyed it much; I dropped out and went to London to do my foundation in arts and design at Camberwell. I did my BA at Slade School of Fine Art and then I joined RCA for painting. I really enjoyed all the years spent in the studios with ongoing creative and not so creative discourse. I loved the tutors and they had an immense impact on me and my practice. I still hear their voices in my head when I need an opinion on what works in a painting and what doesn't.

Your works are quite innocent and playful at a first glance, both in terms of colour palette and the mise-en-scene. However, a closer look reveals more sinister motifs within the comical setting and characters. Could you talk about mixing 'cute' and 'dark' themes and some of your recurring symbols (such as the snake)?

I am very interested in duality, in different perceptions to the same symbol. This play allows me to be on the edge of personal and social. It is very useful when I

want to talk about reality outside, the reality that some people prefer to keep invisible. The method of 'packing the sinister' into the innocent present box creates the discomfort and sensationalistic connotation of the whole composition. Symbols in my works have a lot of things in common with associations; specific implications can set the direction of the whole story. The snake is one of my favourite symbols. It has so many different meanings generated through so many centuries; it creates the whole magical history behind it. When it appears in my works, it becomes almost translucent.

You're still at the beginning of your career, yet already with numerous prestigious exhibitions under your belt. Are you at all concerned people might pigeonhole you into one specific aesthetic and medium or do you feel completely free to experiment within your practice? Is there something you've always wanted to try that is vastly different from your work as it is now?

No, I don't have this fear because I have always been crazy about my projects and consistently work on them so that everything is in the right place. I think it's because I have so many different ridiculous ideas and absolute fixations towards something I should try and do. It could easily be some insane installation or some funny observation that I have to bring to life in

my paintings. It's always a matter of having many different creative dreams and being able to vocalise and build them into a physical object. I know that I do have my 'stroke' and even if I wanted to change it, I couldn't. It's like handwriting that is embedded in you. I am also very blessed and grateful to be surrounded by so many like-minded people who encourage me to bring to life the craziest installations or paintings.

I have certain people whom I trust and they are the ones with whom I share my ideas, dreams and doubts. My style has changed a bit but not my approach. I still remember when one of my best friends, Ileana Arnaoutou, and I decided to create a massive installation in a huge room and called it "Elephant in the Room". It had things hanging from the ceiling and some hand-built wooden pink water pools on the floor. Everything felt so united and satisfying. At the beginning, it felt like a giant project that we had to do in a week, but we made it. So I guess it's always a matter of being fearless and having the right people by your side, with whom you share the same vision.

Could you describe your main references and inspirations for your paintings?

I start my work with colour curves that have an emotion or a story behind them. I am always looking for any humiliating, exaggerated, satirical story for the

narrative... It can be a retold anecdote with some associative element in it. It can also be a snapshot of the history being removed from the original context, with just characters or symbols.

I get a lot of inspiration from conversations, movies and social culture. I find it very interesting to observe social behaviour. For me, it's important to be able to respond to disturbing social and political events, some things or stories that people don't want to hear about. There are also a lot of experienced moments or overheard conversations in my works, some with concealed narratives from the viewer.

Could you talk about the range of materials, such as the choice to paint on silk or your use of fur?

I work with transparent fabric because I love it's fragility and intimacy. My works often have a 'concealed' meaning, and the transparency helps me to navigate the viewer into the duality of the meaning of my paintings. The material allows me to develop controlled spontaneity over the pre-planned painting. I do spend a lot of time planning my paintings by making a lot of small drawings, first just with the colour and then tying it with the narratives. When I pick transparent material, I do make a deliberate decision to cultivate obscurantism, and sometimes in the middle of the process it drifts me away from the initial

plan of the painting.

Using fur, ceramics and installations extends my range of storytelling tools. Ceramics and fur have the exacerbated effect of the reality; they disturb and feed with a lot of things being still unsaid. Multidimensional aspects always help to set emotional undertones and to give a voice to some important fragments of the stories.

You also work in installation and ceramics – do you see these as autonomous works or are they an extension of scenes depicted in your paintings? Did you start making ceramics at the same time as paintings, or did they 'grow out of' your practice on canvas?

I have always looked at my works as installations. The feeling of fragility should have been remaining constant in all of my works. Bringing physical elements to the paintings in the form of ceramics reads very honestly. For me, it brings the same sensation of fragility and emotion given the nature of the material. Clay can be deformed and transformed during the physical making process - it works in the same way as the semi-opaque fabric that I use for my paintings. It can be read as the same story being retold by different people with different attention to detail, focus or the figurative composition. It can 'scream' so differently about the social issues but in the end it has different ways to

evoke emotions, to fascinate and disturb at the same time.

What artwork have you seen recently that has resonated with you?

Weirdly or not, I get very easily inspired by works of artists I personally know. Then it's not just a work; it's a beautiful personality behind it. I feel warm when I see the works of my friends at the shows and then it becomes very personal to 'crack the code' of those works.

If going from masters, the works that evoke all the salads of my emotions and really inspired me are Alex Katz' early works and Gerhard Richter's paintings of Betty.

How do you go about naming your work?

It is usually one or another method. The name can appear when I plan the work in my sketchbook and I use it to tag the story, anecdote or observation that goes behind it. Or the naming process comes as a last thing of the work. Then it becomes a very hard decision with a lot of different versions.

Could you talk about your new body of work for this exhibition at Roman Road?

For this new body of work, I was reallocating my childhood memories in a cartoon strip way. I was thinking about different questions we have about freedom and how childhood can manoeuvre this perception easily - putting it in a certain trajectory. In my case, the freedom and its aesthetic aspects were always within zooming in on nature and imagining things that could exist in some environment.

There also had to be some dynamic that is naturally connected to the windy places where I spent my childhood. It essentially explores the stories around the pond - the symbol of freedom in my childhood. The pond was a special place to escape for everyone in the countryside. This escapism was a version of freedom. With the works from this series, I tried to capture some frozen moments from that past.

What are you most interested in or most inspired by artistically at the moment?

I am trying to get my inspiration nowadays from paintings of old masters, the stories behind the paintings, Italian and Dutch art schools. Since I couldn't get to any of the museums during the lockdown, the online platforms and the books I once bought served as the main platform for my inspirations and thoughts. I am very interested in compositional arrangements and how it creates a special atmosphere in the painting.

At the same time, I am always hugely inspired by the movies with 'characters' that always stay in your mind. I bring these characters to my paintings so that they can be within different life settings.

Do you feel confident choosing exhibitions and people to work with for yourself, or do you feel ready to join a gallery? What's your ideal future plan?

I have developed such a persistent nature of fixation towards some projects I really want to make so that every opportunity makes me get some of my fixations out of the system. One thing at a time. It is probably the most exciting process for me to direct the show, to make it 'sound' like a song and be united and complete. Each of the shows I made felt so different.

I have only one future plan: to keep working hard and probably go into teaching one day. Let's see.

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Artist Room, The Columbia. © Martin Eito, 2020



Yulia Iosilzon, *High Heel*, 2020. Oil on transparent fabric, 168 x 137 cm, unique.
Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia



Yulia Iosilzon, *Jungle Pool*, 2020. Oil on transparent fabric, 183 x 157 cm, unique. Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia



Yulia Iosilzon, *Red Shorts*, 2020. Oil on transparent fabric, 183 x 137 cm, unique. Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia



Yulia Iosilzon, *Time Capsule*, 2020. Oil on transparent fabric, 152 x 122 cm, unique. Courtesy of Roman Road and The Columbia

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yulia Iosilzon (b.1992) graduated with an MA in painting from the Royal College of Art, London, and from the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London, in 2017. Iosilzon draws on fragmentary narratives, persistent duality between text and subtext, clarity and opaqueness, rendered through form in the use of transparent fabric. Her work is born from an inherent interest in the narrative - of stories anecdotally told and retold, fables proliferated and propaganda through word of mouth and fairy tales passed down from generation to generation. It is snippets and snapshots of these histories that are captured and immortalised in her paintings, removed from their original context and often reduced to, or solely recognisable by, their base emblems or characters.

Solo exhibitions include *Paradeisos*, Carvalho Park Gallery, New York (2019). Selected group exhibitions include *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*, South London Gallery, London (2019); *Wolves by the Road*, Assembly House, Leeds (2019); *We Can Only Have Fun on Certain Days*, Warbling Collective (2019); *Rub the Bronze Dog Nose*, Museum of Modern Art, Moscow (2019); and *Splodge*, Hockney Gallery, London (2019).

Awards include Bloomberg New Contemporaries (2019) and Audrey Wykeham Prize (2017).

ABOUT THE ARTIST ROOM

The Artist Room is a newly launched space at The Columbia, which combines relaxed hospitality and emerging artistry. An intimate, elegant and natural light-filled lounge bar, it provides a unique platform for artists to showcase their work outside of the traditional gallery space, with all purchases supporting the artists and the ongoing arts programme at The Columbia. The Artist Room showcases the works of a rotating artist in focus and each presentation will be accompanied by a digital catalogue, which will include a selection of images and informative texts about the artist and their practice. The Artist Room displays will be changed on a quarterly basis, instigating a dynamic and ongoing programme of emerging artistic talent.



Artist Room, The Columbia.© Martin Eito, 2020

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