

University of Dubai Magazine Interview By Richard Labaki

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<http://www.uni.ae/2013/03/19/yulia-pinkusevich/>

By Richard Labaki

Yulia Pinkusevich is a multi-disciplinary visual artist whose work is based on site-specific installations and immersive environments. Her art is very distinct and she expresses it to convey deep philosophical concepts (the artworks ultimately deal with questions that she has about life in general.) There is no one overarching concept that Pinkusevich is always delving into and exploring. Each project is unique and has a basis in a particular idea or question. One thread that has been running through her work in recent years, however, is concerned with global urbanization – a relatively new trend that Dubai understands far too well. Pinkusevich questions how this recent trend towards massive urbanization affects humanity and the planet as a whole. And how, if at all, this trend will affect the human psyche.

There is a haunting thread of morbidity or melancholy that interweaves your art-pieces. There is also a sense of loss and confusion. Do you agree with this perception?

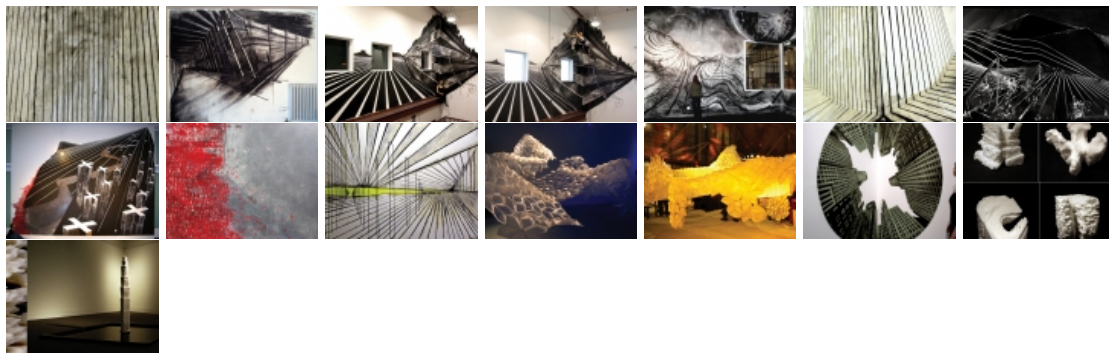
Yes and no. My work can be perceived as melancholic, because I am interested in form, composition and materiality in my art but less interested in colour and the individual experience. Thus, my recent body of work has been devoid of people and largely monochrome. To some, art that is lacking colour is perceived as austere. But for me, it gets to the essence of form without the distraction of another element – colour! The haunting perception can come from the concepts, which intrigue me.

For example, throughout my recent work I make images, which envision a world where contemporary architecture and modern cities are seen as relics of the past – long abandoned and in a state of reverting to its elemental forms. Envisioning a place like this implies a post human planet – an idea that can make some people feel very uncomfortable. But to me, this idea is wonderfully intriguing, because I am interested in exploring time through a different perspective – one that does not measure itself against a period of a human lifespan but instead thinks of time on a much grander scale.

Perhaps some see this as confusing. But my intention is not to make people feel bad about the world but to allow their minds to expand beyond their normal way of thinking about time, space and architecture.

Are you a sci-fi fan? It is as if a sci-fi feel permeates through many of your artworks.

Last year, a professor of mine at Stanford [Paul DeMarinis] said to me that he finds that artists from the Soviet Union naturally gravitate towards sci-fi aesthetics and concepts without doing so consciously. It must be in our heritage. Perhaps my personal history and background attracts me to the unexplainable things in life. I am intrigued by looking at things from a different perspective and imagining a world through alternate realities. To be frank, I am not a huge sci-fi movie fan. I don't like space adventure or horror films at all. Though I do like the films of Andrei Tarkovsky; many of which are quite strange and out of this world. I also love several fantasy and sci-fi writers such as Mikhail Bulgakov; his novel 'The Master and Margarita' is one of my favourite books, along with 'Brave New World' by Aldous Huxley. I've also been into Philip K. Dick novels recently, so I guess I am a sci-fi fan after all!



Had you not been an artist, would you have been an architect today?

I have pondered this question before and the short answer is yes. I seriously considered getting a Masters in Architecture several years ago; I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to take a summer course in Architecture at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. This Career Discovery course was intensive and taught me a lot about architectural design methodology. I loved the program and did quite well in it. But throughout my time there, I realized that I did not really want to be an architect as much as I wanted to acquire the skills of an architect in order to push my art to a new level.

I deeply respect great architects, because to me good architecture can be the highest form of art. It is a structure for the public, which is experienced by people from all occupations. It finds a perfect balance between form and function – it can be striking, complex, sophisticated yet humble or seemingly simple at the same time. Throughout my study of architecture, I realized I wanted to make art that possessed these qualities – to create work that presents people with an immersive visual environment. I am still working towards this goal in my art. And I hope to pursue some larger scale, multifaceted installation-based projects in the near future.

How much time and effort did you expend in refining your unique artistic style? And what were the major challenges in developing it?

It's hard to answer this question, because I did not set out to create a "unique artistic style". When I was quite young, I realized that the work I was making then was not at all like the work I was attracted to when I went out to galleries and museums. I started to ask myself a simple question, "If I saw this piece in a museum and didn't know it was mine, would I like it?" This stirred up many emotions in me, because I realized that the answer at that time was no.

So I made a list of the qualities in the artworks, which made me stop dead in my tracks. The list ignored all superficial aspects such as popularity, price point, gallery affiliations etc. Instead, it focused on something undefined – a personal gut reaction. After practicing this for some time, I found that there were very particular qualities that I was attracted to. With this in mind, I attempted to distil my own work down to its essence and consider the aesthetics, which I found myself drawn to. What resulted was this linear, architectonic, monochrome work. I cut out all excess – no figures and no colour in order to concentrate on what I was concerned with: Form, space, concept and composition.