

# Common Thread

Some things are worth the wait.

*Common Thread*, like many endeavors over the last 2 years, took a little hiatus. We're happy to return to print and, like everybody else, we're thrilled to be back in the world.

Time apart puts matters into perspective. Life is certainly more than clothes, but Drake's has always been about more than clothes. And *Common Thread* celebrates some of those things: art, design, cities, creativity. That sounds lofty but we appreciate more immediate pleasures: sitting down with good people and settling in to a few hours of conversation. If that happens in a Florentine trattoria then even better.

Drake's is a friendly place, if I may say that. And, as friend of Drake's, I feel that I may! So for this moveable feast we gather agreeable and stylish contributors to set the tone for ease and relaxation. Here you'll find profiles, original art work, interviews and a few unfounded but inspired theories.

There's a whole world in your hands. Drake's strides worldwide with a smile. It's a true pleasure to eat and drink (and eat and drink some more) with Michael Hill and his charismatic colleagues, from England to Italy. It starts to feel like family, but it actually is family. I look around the table and there's my dad, who's now part of the tradition too.

That sense of openness and generosity is part of what makes Drake's beloved. So it felt natural when they suggested my dad make some drawings of a memorable Drake's meal in Florence, which are in this issue as well. After time away from our favorite cities, they feel even more welcome.

And, yes, we're still here for clothes. It feels good to dress up again for culture and conversation. From Savile Row to Sostanza, let's raise a glass to the connections that can only happen face to face.

Salut!

D.C.

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Inside Cover: Gregory Pardlo, p.14

Rear Cover: John Spinks, p.39 (from *Black Pad*, 2019)

Common Thread

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# *Drake's*

A woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a light pink long-sleeved shirt and brown trousers, is seen from behind in an art studio. She is holding a large wooden frame that contains a vibrant, abstract painting with swirling green, orange, and blue colors. The floor is covered in paint splatters, and another abstract painting is visible on the wall to the right.

# Yulia Iosilzon

Yulia Iosilzon is an artist who lives and works in London. Her practice is centred around large-scale paintings on transparent silk, in which she uses calligraphic lines and bold colours to conjure up a world between fantasy and reality. We meet at her studio to discuss her wide-ranging references, the allegorical elements in her work and the importance of colour.

In the studio with Yulia Iosilzon.  
Words and photography by Cedric Bardawil.

Cedric Bardawil: Can you give us a brief introduction to your practice?

Yulia Iosilzon: My practice is primarily based around painting. I paint on a transparent silk fabric, which is unusual, but it gives me flexibility and control. It allows me to express an image that I have in my mind, as well as to experiment. My work is about the process rather than the final piece – the finished paintings are just frozen moments, or a glimpse into an imaginary world that I have in mind. The paintings are always based on a story line and move within their own scenes, which makes it easy to distinguish one series of work from another.

CB: How did you come to work on transparent silk?

YI: I tried working on many fabrics before discovering silk. The material is very delicate, which I like, and it gives a watercolour property to the paintings. I can manipulate it easily using silicone, latex and turpentine, to give different characteristics depending on what I want to portray. The material also allows me to highlight parts of the painting with more movement than others, creating contrast between parts which are opaque and others which are more layered. It shows the character of the brush and catches the calligraphy line well, which is another important aspect of my work. It's also fast drying, allowing my paintings to have this spontaneous, sketch like effect.

CB: How important is colour to your work?

YI: Colour is really important, my drawings and thoughts always begin with colour. I have fixations with different colour combinations – the ones I'm particularly interested in at the moment are hues of blue, pink and green. I'm experimenting with them all of the time.

The interesting thing about colour is that we all have different associations with them.

CB: There is a strong sense of fluidity in your work, how do you navigate the subject through your technique?

YI: It depends, at times it's considered, others it's spontaneous. Sometimes the painting dictates me, and the subject comes out of the painting process. Before starting I often picture different renditions of the same image, which could come from my initial sketch, my imagination or a feeling.

CB: Where do your narrative scenes come from?

YI: They come from different places: some are from imagination, others completely random. Some have been in my consciousness for so long; from books, fairy tales and cartoons, to animation from the 70s and 80s.

It's important for me to have fun when I draw or paint, so I make up stories, such as the Poseidona story I created for the Huxley-Parlour show. The idea of a girl leading crocodiles was a form of escape – from the lockdown as well. I was preparing for my last three solo shows during lockdown and it affected my way of thinking, I wanted to escape into some form of fairy tale. My imagination and this fantasy world lifted my mood, and I think it's important for it to come from a personal perspective, so that it feels real to the viewer.

CB: Where does your work sit between fantasy and reality?

YI: The works are connected to reality through my experiences, or a feeling I have in a particular moment – whether it is an emotional state, or a joke that I heard that I want to vocalise through a









painting. There's often a moment in which the fantasy overcomes. I'm constantly questioning whether the imagination is more real than the world we live in.

With all the current events I feel our imagination has a primary role in reality, serving as a road to escape. Fantasy and reality meet within my work, this meeting point is something that we cannot vocalise or visualise, so the painting steps in. Paintings can be unforgiving, spontaneous and sometimes radical. I use painting to invent a kind of language with different colours, emblems and symbols to navigate the viewer into a new emotional state. I think painting is special in that it can translate the non-verbal and non-visual, into something visual.

**CB:** Is your work about you? Are you ever a subject in your paintings?

**YI:** My work is often based on my experience or emotions, which could be projected onto figure that looks like me – you'll occasionally see me in my smiley works. The last work I put myself in was called "far away", where a girl is flying away on a bird. That painting was imaginary to reflect something I was going through during lockdown, an attempt to escape and find a comfort zone above the clouds. Usually though, I put my friends, or someone that I know in my paintings instead of me.

**CB:** Is there an allegorical element in your paintings?

**YI:** Yes, but it's usually a series of paintings that work together to deliver a message, rather than a single work. I deal with stories and get inspired by fairy tales because they are concise, each with their own meaning. My Fanfarria exhibition was based on mermaid stories, then the A Chorus of Beauty and

Menace show was about escapism. One theme I kept coming back to was the Poseidona work, which later developed into a triptych. There's often continuation of a message in different series of work.

**CB:** How do you title your works?

**YI:** I usually title them at the final stage, just before the show. On rare occasions I title the drawing that forms the basis of the painting. I like that the title can be a hint, giving the viewer an idea straight away. I also think about the entire series of works, and then name each painting in the way that one might title chapters of a book.

**CB:** I've noticed a shift in the themes in your work, what holds them together?

**YI:** My calligraphy technique and fascination for story telling holds them together, whilst the visual element might change.

One of my friends commented that it's interesting to look at my work like comic strips, which can easily be read. During my tattoo series I was interested in Tarantino movies; I was going into an underworld, trying to make sense of something that's often concealed. I wanted to explore what tattoos meant. It's a visual language that speaks for itself as well as a way of bringing different stories to the life of a person. The calligraphical element of certain tattoos also fascinates me. I've stopped that series but I'm still reading books about tattoos' meanings.

**CB:** Is the process of working with ceramics interesting to you?

**YI:** Yes. It's really similar to the making of the paintings on the transparent fabrics, giving me control over the brushstroke and calligraphy element, whilst at the same time being strong and fragile. This element of fragility is something

that keeps these practices hand in hand, together all the time. Ceramics help bring the painting element to life, in a three-dimensional format. I will be doing more ceramic paintings and sculptures in the next few months, because

I feel the elements of my paintings need some air, and something in three-dimensions communicates differently with the viewer. The other reason why I work with ceramics is because I want to learn about my subject and my paintings, for that I either need to make a lot of sketches or a ceramic piece and learn from it. The process of working with ceramics is always supportive of my painting practice.

CB: What are the influences other than painting on your work?

YI: Film, sculpture, I also really like performances and light art. Whilst I'm always looking at sculptures, I would say the biggest influence on my work is

film. A lot of my ideas come from film and animation – they often have direct story lines and work with emotional states, which are important in my practice. They give me space for new ideas, certain scenarios in my paintings come to life upon reflecting on films.

CB: How important is getting dressed for the studio, and for openings and how do they differ?

YI: When I get dressed for the studio, I have different goals – the clothes need to be durable. I need to have something soft on my knees, because I start my paintings on the floor. My body has to be malleable, like clay. In the studio I wear things that I'm not concerned about getting paint, silicone or turpentine on. For an opening it's different, I don't want to arrive as a craftsman, so I usually keep a pair of clean trousers in the studio. I think now, post lockdown it feels right to cherish a moment that we can get dressed up and gather together.



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Drake's,  
No.9 Savile Row,  
London, W1S 3PF

drakes.com  
@drakesdiary

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Editor  
David Coggins

Art Direction & Design  
Studio Batt

Print  
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Contributors  
Richer Baker  
Cedric Bardawil  
David Coggins (*Père*)  
Robbie Collin  
Randy Goldberg  
Daniel Penny  
Nathan Sharp

