

W O V O

HAYAL POZANTI: "Painting, Daydreaming and Dancing with artist Hayal Pozanti"

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January 14, 2015



Hayal Pozanti was born in 1983 in Istanbul and currently is based in New York. She has studied BA Visual Arts and Communication Design at Sabanci University and MFA Painting/Printmaking at Yale University. Pozanti is known for her acrylic paintings and animated GIFs – both of which depict anthropomorphic forms that evoke linguistic characters and fluctuate between imaginary machines, graphic symbols and figuration. She approaches data, and the storage and dissemination of data in an animistic way, creating hybrid forms; her hand-made digital figures seem to be in the dormant phase before receiving or expelling action. In various ways, the artist creates forms that begin to personify digital tools, a process that introduces a sense of existential physicality to seemingly immaterial networks and processes. With the increasing ephemerality and insecurity of the information age Pozanti's practice proposes an interface with digital tools that denies the inherent transience of networked data and proposes an Internet reality that is not dislocated from human history.

WOVO: When we met I couldn't tell where you're from and I thought your name sounded like a flower in Latin. Can you tell me more about where you're from; what do you do and also what does your name mean?

HAYAL POZANTI: Thank you, that sounds beautiful. I was born and raised in Istanbul, with an overlay in Houston for elementary school. I am an artist and have been splitting my time between New York, Los Angeles and Berlin for the past two years. My parents fell in love during a hitchhiking trip in the 70's, and on a later trip met a fisherman who had a daughter named Hayal. It means daydream in Turkish. They thought it was perfect for a girl.

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WOVO: You have created your own alphabet - have you always been into typography and language?

HP: Yes. In a way, I had to be. From an early age, language has presented itself as an obstacle to overcome. As an only child, I was tasked with finding playmates for myself on our summer beach holidays. At four years old, I was surrounded by European children and had to improvise gestures to communicate. We played for hours in the sand with not a common word between us. Later on, when I turned 8, as our impending move to the United States approached, I asked my father "Will they let me stay even if I don't speak their language?" My fears were unfounded and I became completely fluent in English within 3 months of our move. These experiences fundamentally changed my understanding of the world. Barriers of language seemed frivolous and obsolete. Presently, my work is an attempt to keep this idealism alive by creating a visual language that transcends the limits of speech.

WOVO: When I look at your work and read about it I can't escape some references to new materialism and semiotics. Are there any books that have transformed your way of making art?

HP: Yes. Too many to count. I'm far from my library at the moment but I'll attempt to make a list. Not in any particular order. Jean Baudrillard - Passwords, Boris Groys - Art Power, Hal Foster - Design and Crime, Peter Sloterdijk - Spheres, Paul Virilio - The Information Bomb, Jonathan Crary - Suspensions of Perception, Sherry Turkle - The Second Self, Life on the Screen: Identity in the age of the Internet, and Simulation and It's Discontents, Robert Motherwell -The Writings of Robert Motherwell, Jan Verwoert - The Beauty and Politics of Latency: On the Work of Tomma Abts, Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice - The Fall of The Studio: Artists at Work, All Tikkun, Hito Steyerel - Wretched of the Screen, Paul Graham - Hackers and Painters, Carolyn L. Kane - Chromatic Algorithms: Synthetic Color, Computer Art, and Aesthetic after Code.

WOVO: Artist Dafna Maimon once told me that she wants to speak 7 languages and that art is also one of them. Do you think that art is a language?

HP: No. I think all artists strive to communicate through art, but I wouldn't combine their efforts under a universal definition. I like to think that all artists speak their private language. There may be overlaps and families with similar roots, but the beauty is in their uniqueness.

WOVO: Once when I was working on a site specific projection I ended up with having 3x3m screen, a massive square. In person it was great and overwhelming but online every still looked like an image cropped to fit the Instagram realm. A friend told me then: 'Instagram killed the square'. But you use the square dimension in this particular reference in your work. Do the social media platforms and technology provide you with a symbolic framework?

HP: Yes, they have been. I studied Visual Communication in university, so my initial impulse is to analyze the world through this perspective. As my practice evolved to include painting, I simultaneously started to think of the work's representation within the digital world. Our eyes are confined to the dimensions of both the screen and the predetermined media dimensions within screens. It seemed logical to mimic these proportions both in terms of understanding their relationship to my body and also to ensure that the work could exist in both the digital and the physical realms. My paintings have so far been in the exact proportions of iPhones blown up to human size or have mimicked the square of twitter avatars, instagram feeds and Facebook photos.

WOVO: Do you feel that as an artist you have to deliver a concept manifest in the visual form which will be noticeable, liked and acknowledged by a certain group of people?

HP: This is a great question that I think about frequently. Certain aesthetic tropes have overtaken visual production merely because they look better on screens. Instant online sharing enforces us to dream collectively. How can one maintain uniqueness without unplugging? I've tried to find a solution to this

conundrum by inventing my personal shape system. A unique visual language that does not appropriate but seeks to invent new forms. I would of course like to be acknowledged by my peers whose work I respect, but I would not go out of my way to make my work look like what I believe they would like to see. I feel that all good art finds its audience eventually and the most important thing is to stick to your guns and make what you believe in.

WOVO: I know that you make digital sketches first and paint later. Why do you stick to traditional and tangible methods? Why do you need to paint a painting?

HP: I've come to paint in a roundabout way. I guess I used to be what you would call a net artist. In time, sitting for hours in front of a screen generated an undefined anxiety. It felt as if there were hundreds of voices screaming at me simultaneously for attention. I just felt a need to be alone with my thoughts. Or to rediscover what they might have been. I was also frustrated by printing. Printing things never looked as good as they did on a screen and I felt there was always a failure in translation. In short, painting for me is about making a statement by reclaiming my physicality. By painting, I am stepping away from the computer screen and the immobility it confines my body to. By painting, I am freeing myself of the imposed aesthetic sensibility of computer programs. I am embracing imperfection. Through painting, I can enjoy the physicality of my body without a gym membership. I can think about how colors exist in real life as I mix them. I can meditate on complex thoughts as I fill in large areas of color. I can dance while I work. I continue to make digital work and also program, but it feels great to have both realms coexist in my life. I feel grateful to be part of the lucky few who gets to step away from their computers for extended hours daily.

WOVO: Would you ever consider working with a fashion label? How would you feel as a new Caravaggio on Givenchy sweatshirt?

HP: I worked in fashion for 5 years after I graduated from university. I was designing and producing shop windows for the Turkish equivalent of Barney's; Beymen. Within the same company, I started designing clothes, t-shirts and fabric patterns (basically whole collections) for its sister street-wear label, t-box. I have also designed a best selling Istanbul t-shirt for Mavi. So it would not be a new experience for me, that's for sure :)

WOVO: You are based in New York, could you recommend WOVO some exciting places?

HP: Hmm I'm not sure about exciting lol but I like to walk by the river. It's super close to my house in Chinatown and perfect for morning exercise. I like the Parish Art Museum that's upstate. Beautiful building and drive upstate. My friends have recently opened a project space at PS1 called ALLGOLD, they've been hosting great sound projects.