

# POST

## Painting Patterns

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*Artist Hayal Pozanti crafts signs and symbols that draw new connections between digital data and physical presence.*



It has often been noted in recent years that while our new digital tools allow for greater connectivity, for friendships rediscovered and maintained long-distance, it can also reinforce our physical separation from one another. Plugged into our personal devices, we can find ourselves struggling to focus on real-life opportunities for contact when they arise. Our increasingly dependent relationship with technology is something that amuses, troubles and inspires painter Hayal Pozanti. She is quick to cite a 2015 New York Times article that reports a 34% increase in cell phone related pedestrian accidents, when we find the time to talk as the year draws to a close. At her studio in Long Island City, just a few blocks from MoMA PS1, she creates large-scale paintings of poetically encryptions that are familiar without being immediately understandable. They are seemingly abstract while retaining a determined set of rules, with each telling a story of what it means to be human in a digital world.

From her upbringing between Turkey and the US by a mother who could computer programme in seven languages, to her intensely rigorous MFA in painting at Yale, Pozanti gained an experience of language that crosses borders, biology and technology. At Yale she found the ability to articulate her practice with a precision necessary for work that is so immediately abstract, yet in actuality flooded with meaning. She has since developed an alphabet that forms the basis of her paintings and allows her to physically abstract the digitised data that might otherwise be overlooked.



**POSTmatter: How did you find and develop your distinct painting style?**

Hayal Pozanti: I have a background in visual communications and design, so my style will always be related to typography, letters and numbers. In terms of coming up with a shape system, that all started in my last year of Yale when I was trying to step away from the computer. The only way I could see myself doing that whilst differentiating myself and generating value in an image economy was by coming up with something new.

That's when I decided to go back to basics and examine how ancient civilisations came up with sign systems. Through research, I found this system of putting a circle inside a square and making indents in those. I started making hundreds of sketches from those shapes. I then began editing to eliminate the ones that I'd been repeating, and eventually that came out to be 31 characters.

**PM: Are there any real world alphabets that you drew inspiration from?**

HP: Cuneiform, a lot of the shapes on Runes, and kilim patterns on Turkish rugs with their geometric patterns and aboriginal drawings. The strange thing is that they all kind of resemble each other despite originating from such diverse cultures. Finding similarities between different systems of writing or shape-making throughout the world is inspiring. To me, the impulse of coming up with your own alphabet or language system is about finding commonalities between human beings: things that unify humanity as a whole. Language is one of the defining aspects of a nation state, so I've always been interested in the idea of a unifying language that disregards national boundaries.

**PM: Is your alphabet English encrypted?**

HP: After I came to the 31 shapes, I had the impulse to make a typeface. In order to do this I had to assign a letter to each shape so I could literally type with it; that's how the encryption came about. Words are made not by writing each letter from left to right, but by transposing two shapes on top of each other. It doesn't flow horizontally; it's more temporal.

**PM: Colour is clearly an important part of your paintings. What does it mean to you in the context of your work?**

HP: As I've been working on a computer most of my life, my intuitive sense of colour is influenced by what I see on screens. I therefore do tend to veer towards a black, white and grey aesthetic. Once I started painting I realised that screen colours are so different to physical colours because they're backlit; you can't duplicate a screen colour in a painting. I remember feeling frustrated because I would make sketches on the computer and then want to replicate this in a physical painting, but never could unless I juxtaposed two colours together.

When I started mixing colours I realised my brain to hand palette is much more earthly and warm than the screen colours. I was fascinated by this, and read a book about digital colour in which I found that our eyes and our aesthetic sensibilities are veering towards a colder palette because of the way the NTSC technology was developed. They realised that colder colours require less energy to transmit, which is why our screens were developed to be of a colder spectrum.

When I'm painting I always think about how colours look both on a screen and in physical life, so I intuitively mix warmer greys with fluorescent colour, juxtaposing the digital and the physical next to one other. Colour is very intuitive though, and I like odd, slightly off colour combinations. Not disharmonious, but rather harmonious in a sense that you wouldn't expect.



**PM: By extracting data from the internet and making it physical, are you resisting the increasing lack of control we each as individuals have over the internet?**

HP: I felt a sense of frustration at not being able to trust what I was seeing or reading online, questioning it all the time and not knowing how to validate anything. You can manipulate information with the touch of a button when it's in the cloud. In the past if something had been printed in the newspaper, I knew that it had been fact checked by someone, and that in 20 years that data would still remain. Whereas now, I find myself thinking "Oh it's just the internet, who knows if it's true." I wanted to take that and make it

physical again, preserving information that might be relevant to future generations. It's the same impulse as carving things in marble or stone.

**PM: What do you see as the future of painting?**

HP: It's so intuitive and inherent to human nature, I can never see it going away. It's impulsive to use your hand to make something, to draw or to communicate. As to the future of it, I think that it will probably incorporate augmented reality to activate a painting by looking at it through a screen. I think the most beautiful thing, though, about a painting is the actual presence of it and its relationship to your body. I hope that is why it will stay relevant; it's a reminder of our physical world.

All images courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery.