



# DETAILS

## LOOKING CLOSELY

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✕ ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

# **Details: Looking Closely**

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# Summary

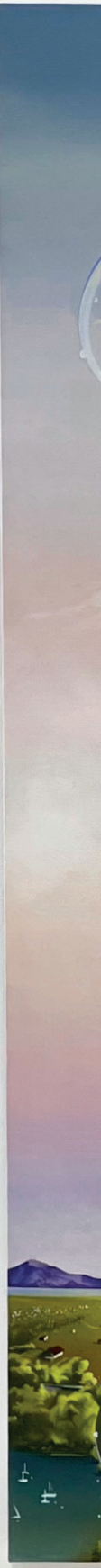
My master's thesis project, *Details: Looking Closely*, presented as a comprehensive painting installation at Kuvan Kevät 2025, aims to deepen the interaction between the viewer and the artwork by emphasizing the importance of detail and the fundamental role of curiosity.

My work explores the idea that details are repositories of untold stories, waiting to be discovered through careful observation. Drawing on the innate human impulse of curiosity, I interpret the elements that guide our life decisions and shape our values. Every artistic choice, from material selection to compositional arrangement, is a conscious reflection of my inquiry into the profound impact of these seemingly minute details.

In the exhibition, the themes of curiosity and values are articulated through a large-scale oil painting and four pieces of hand-embroidered silk that I found in Istanbul and painted with silk painting. My installation aims to demonstrate how focusing on details triggers a heightened sense of curiosity, encouraging the viewer to form a deeper connection with the artwork. The deliberate use of diverse materials and techniques throughout the piece also underscore the intrinsic meaning and importance of these details, inviting a contemplative examination of their symbolic aspects.

My written thesis, also titled *Details: Looking Closely*, serves as an academic reflection of my artistic practice. It establishes a continuous dialogue between the theoretical framework and the practical approaches shaped by my studio experiences and the evolving, iterative artistic process of this master's project. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive narrative of my personal inquiry into the significance of detail, revealing how thought, and creative action are intrinsically intertwined.







Installation view of  
my artistic works  
exhibited in  
Kuvan Kevät 2025,  
Photographer:  
Lal Doga Karakas

# Introduction

The idea underlying this project is that there is much more to everything than meets the eye. This fact inevitably led me to ask: ‘Do we really look at things with the desire to be captivated?’

In my opinion, people often only see what’s on the surface, but the chain of events that unfolds afterward shows that the critical point is precisely the detail that we failed to notice. This brings to mind the search for clues in detective novels. For example, Agatha Christie’s famous detective Hercule Poirot reaches the solution by noticing the tiny details that most people miss. For him, these details are the missing pieces of the picture he visualizes in his mind to complete the case.

So, do we approach life with such keen attention and curiosity? A phenomenon, an object, or even a person that we encounter for the first time or that we have been familiar with for a long time but have not thought deeply about, may actually have the potential to radically change the course of our lives. The first step to unlocking this potential is to be willing to go beyond the ordinary, to follow our curiosity and look deeper. But this kind of realization is often the result of a sudden realization, like a flash of lightning in our minds, rather than the result of a planned effort.

Life is a bit like that; every step we take, every decision we make is a new door to the unknown. That’s why taking the first step is always a bit scary. But we should not forget that every step we take, whether the outcome is good or bad, will open new doors for us.

So don’t give in to fear; be truly present and alive in every step you take and, most importantly, never lose your curiosity.



# Painting Process

Master's thesis projects often begin with a deep dive into how to shape the chosen topic and what approach to take. For me, it's a journey of figuring out which objects will make the narrative resonate with my own perspective, allowing myself truly to say, "This is me."

When I look at a painting, one of the first things that captures my attention is the artist's unique technique and distinctive personal vision that sets them apart. A simple example is how directors approach films with their own unique perspectives. Think about the stark difference between Wes Anderson's pastel tones, symmetrical and theatrical set designs, versus Tim Burton's gothic, whimsical and eclectic world. Yet, both masters use these distinct styles to perfectly reflect their inner worlds and unique viewpoints. My own painting process starts with this same careful consideration.

The subject of details has long fascinated me. The meanings, theories, and ideas attached to small pictorial objects in paintings have always drawn my attention. Not every detail may carry a grand meaning, but sometimes they can point us in a new direction. Like those subtle cues in life that tell us it's time to change course. These small details are often what guide our most important decisions.

With this idea as my foundation, my first challenge was to figure out, "How can I look closer?" I began to explore how I could create a composition based on the books I'd read, the paintings I'd researched, and the places I'd visited.

In my initial sketches, I focused on a more objective approach, trying to impose the magnifying glass motif in various forms, drawing inspiration from phrases like "looking closely" and "putting under the microscope." However, something felt missing; while the compositions suited the subject I wanted to convey, was such a direct approach truly necessary? Art compels us to ask more, encourages our curiosity and urges us to seek further.

To better explore the theme of curiosity, I sought an alternative path. The transparent appearance and fragility of lenses reminded me simultaneously of the delicate nature of bubbles.

In art history, particularly by 17th-century Dutch painters, the soap bubbles they frequently used are a powerful "memento mori" (remember death) symbol, describing the fleeting nature of happiness and the brevity of human life.



Karel Dujardin, *Boy Blowing Soap Bubbles. Allegory on the Transitoriness and the Brevity of Life*, 1663, Oil on canvas, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.  
<https://open.smk.dk/en/artwork/image/KMSsp561?q=bubbles&page=0>.

In Karel Dujardin's painting, *Boy Blowing Bubbles, Allegory on the Transience and Brevity of Life* as implied by the title, we see a figure standing on a bubble, remaining in its own moment. This figure emphasizes the fragility of life and the value of the present moment.<sup>1</sup>

The representation of the values I wish to use in my artwork could also be as delicate as these bubbles and as fragile as human life. In my painting titled *Curiosity*, which I created during my time at the academy, a figure with an indistinct face is seen inside a crystal sphere resembling a bubble. The figure's direct gaze, magnified by the sphere, creates an atmosphere that makes the viewer feel as if they are inside the painting. While the bubbles in Dujardin's work represent the moment, my crystal sphere also represents the present moment we are living in. I could have used this idea of a bubble to represent different time periods, rather than limiting it to a single one. This idea, in fact, played an important role in my compositional arrangement: the descent of the bubbles, from top to bottom, was a kind of indicator of time. While the values and experiences we gained in the past create a very clear vision for us, unforeseen and uncertain moments await us in our future.

This led me to decide on a composition centered around this new motif. Wishing the composition to also reflect the expression of curiosity, I chose to depict my figure in a curious pose. "Curiouser and curiouser!"<sup>2</sup>, a quote from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* written by Lewis Carroll, came to mind. In one part of the book, Alice mistakenly eats too many mushrooms, growing into a giant and seeing the world as tiny. I felt I could connect this scene with my themes of curiosity and looking even closer.

This figure could have been anyone, but at that time, I had one clear vision in mind: The figure would be in a contemporary fashion style, perhaps even leaning a bit towards maximalism, which is known for a vibrant and exuberant fashion style that embraces bold colors, intricate patterns, and eclectic combinations. Within the overall appearance, I designed the figure in the composition. I also aimed to incorporate natural motifs (such as flowers, leaves, branches, etc.).

I could achieve these natural motifs through the jewelry I planned to place on the figure. This was because, in my mind, a strong emotional connection to this subject emerged: the jewelry my mother designed. In this way, I would both capture a modern fashion expression and add a personal and meaningful depth to the design. After some research and sketching, I began the desired composition on my studio canvas.

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1. Eva de la Fuente Pedersen, "Boy Blowing Soap Bubbles. Allegory on the Transitoriness and the Brevity of Life", *Statens Museum for Kunst*, accessed July 7, 2025, <https://open.smk.dk/en/artwork/image/KMSsp561?q=bubbles&page=0>.

2. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (London: CRW publishing limited, 2004.), 15.



*Curiosity*, 2024, Oil on Canvas, 2,03x1,50 cm  
Photographed: Lal Doga Karakas

However, I had to address one (particular) aspect: While I intended to convey the composition symbolically, I also wanted to represent the concept of detail realistically. This led me to decide on demonstrating the subject through craftsmanship.

The already made handmade silks I had on hand could thus be incorporated into my work. With their hand-embroidered oya (lacing), these silks would offer visual detail while allowing me to reflect selected values from the painting, almost like visual notes. I planned to create a gravure-style pattern on the central part of the bordered silk. I was drawn to this technique for its detailed structure of fine lines.

As I mentioned before, because I wanted to present these values under the theme of “visual notes,” the gravure pattern would also create an illustrative image. Historically, gravure-style illustrations were used to convey a message visually. By drawing these patterns on a material as delicate and valuable as embroidered silk, I could demonstrate that the message carried by these values could be expressed through different painting techniques, complementing the large-scale painting.



# Methods

## Painting

To achieve the detailed look I envisioned for my paintings, I relied on my established technique. This process begins by stretching a cotton canvas to my chosen dimensions. After shaping the wooden stretcher bars in the sculpture workshop, I iron the cotton fabric to ensure a perfectly smooth surface. Following the canvas-stretching procedure I refined during my Master's program, I then sized the canvas three times with a mixture of water and gelatin heated to 60°C. The next step involved applying my first primer using the gesso technique. Based on previous experience, I then apply a thin layer of iron oxide red mixed with turpentine as a background color; this helps ensure my oil paints appear warmer and more vibrant. After completing a detailed canvas sketch in the same red tone and allowing it to dry, I proceed with the traditional layering technique.

The layering technique allows me to build up colors and details gradually in oil painting, making the final piece more realistic and profound. I apply this technique first to the background, then to the main figure, and subsequently to the details in a sequential manner.

Throughout the painting process, my primary focus was on color combinations. To highlight both the themes of curiosity and the meanings embedded in details, I meticulously research color balance, exploring the harmony of warm, cool or contrasting tones. Thanks to modern technology, I can now easily review color balances using Procreate after photographing my preliminary sketches. Through studies in graphic design books, I've observed that the soft, cool tones of the background, juxtaposed with the striking warm yellow tones of the figure, create a sense of depth in the painting. My choice of soft background colors was also intentionally harmonious with the hues of the oya (lace) on my silks, which I find visually complementary.

# Silks

Once the painting was complete, I used a fountain pen nib and silk paint to draw patterns on my chosen silks, aiming for an engraving effect. My research indicated that if I wanted the silk paint to flow like watercolor, I would need to stretch the silk over a wooden frame, ensuring the back remained open.

This method prevents the silk paint from spreading or bleeding into the other areas. However, this technique wasn't suitable for the fine, engraving-like lines I desired, which could only be achieved with a pen. If the stretched silk had an open back, the pen's firmness might tear the delicate fabric. So, I experimented with an alternative method.

Working with a separate piece of raw silk for testing, I placed it over pre-sketched designs on paper. The transparent texture of the silk allowed the underlying pattern to show through clearly. I then used a hard board as a support, fixing both the design and the silk, and carefully copied the pattern onto the silk. While some silk paint would transfer onto the design underneath, the risk of it spreading was minimized as long as I didn't move the silk. After several trials, I was able to draw my designs onto the main silks.

Afterward, I began testing how best to present the silks when hanging the paintings. To ensure my silks harmonized with the painting, I needed a presentation that was both simple and eye-catching. I envisioned the silks functioning as "visual notes" that viewers could intuitively understand. The thin pins used by lepidopterists (butterfly and moth collectors) to frame butterflies gave me an idea. By securing the silks with these pins on a simple background, they appeared as if I had tacked notes directly onto the wall.

# Description of the Work

In *Details: Looking Closely*, a painting is positioned on the left side of Kuva Tila's central wall, accompanied by four individual silk artworks to its left. The painting, titled *More Than You See*, depicts a female figure standing above a small cityscape on the right. Seen in the left-side profile, this figure adopts a curious stance, her hands clasped behind her back, bending slightly as if trying to peer closer into immense bubbles. A faint smile plays on her face. Her dark hair is adorned with small, gold-colored bee-shaped clips, and she wears a gold-colored, three-leaf earring. The figure is dressed in contemporary-looking attire: a golden-yellow jacket with a velvet appearance, inspired by natural patterns like black leaves and white flowers. Beneath the jacket, she wears a transparent, loose-fitting black fabric adorned with pearls. Her pants are silver-colored, featuring a spiral pattern edged with small stones. On her left-facing feet, she wears silver stiletto shoes.

The painting's background features a sunset effect sky, transitioning from blue to orange, then yellow. Below, lilac tones merge with large white and orange clouds that dominate much of the upper canvas. In the upper right section of the painting, there's a single large bubble, within which magnified white clouds drift to the left. The left side of the painting's sky contains six bubbles of varying sizes. Only one of these, positioned near the woman's jacket, shows a magnified view of the jacket's edge.

The lower part of the painting, moving from right to left, reveals a miniature landscape encompassing a town with a lake and lush greenery, transitioning into a city scene with large buildings characteristic of urban life. The town view on the right side of the painting appears more natural and serene compared to the cosmopolitan city view on the left. In the bottom right corner, small white boats and canoes dot the lake, surrounded by trees and a few houses. Beyond the greenery by the lake, balancing the lilac sky, a purple mountain stands on the right side of the painting, beneath the woman's shoes and past a wooded area, the cityscape continues with skyscrapers and large structures.

Seven bubbles float above the miniature cityscape beneath the woman. The first bubble at the bottom right shows only a fuchsia-colored flower facing right. Slightly above this flower, in a background bubble, a hand is seen reaching for a book from a shelf of leather-bound books.

In front of this bubble, a larger third bubble floats. The image inside this bubble depicts a woman wearing a brown sweater, holding a baby in her lap who is dressed in an ecru sweater and an ochre-yellow skirt with a square pattern. The woman's hand rests on the child's back, and the baby is positioned with its back to us. In the upper left of this bubble, a fourth bubble captures a bee perched on a flower surrounded by leaves. The next bubble, positioned in front of this one, contains two figures gazing at each other, with only their eyes and part of their noses visible. Behind the woman, within the cityscape, a sixth bubble shows two children, a girl and a boy, playing in a park-like green space. The girl, wearing a pink T-shirt and white overalls with a cap, extends one of her braided pigtails towards the boy's lips. The boy, wearing pink overalls and a turquoise T-shirt, grins, seemingly enjoying the moment. The final bubble, situated on the far left behind the children's bubble, features a woman's statue with her hand resting on her cheek, set against a lilac background.

To the left of the canvas in the exhibition, four handmade silk artworks are displayed, pinned onto a white foam board background. All four silks share the same woven pattern, but different subjects are drawn onto them in an engraving style using black silk paint. Each of the four silks showcases embroidery on a transparent, fine fabric in pastel tones. The embroideries form frame-like borders around the fabric, typically composed of swirling branches, stylized leaves and floral motifs. The borders are generally in shades of blue, highlighted with a denser line and feature darker blue polka dots in their center. Pastel pink floral embroideries adorn both sides of these borders.

Starting from the top, the first silk, titled *Art & Knowledge*, features stacks of books, with an open book in the center on which a fountain pen rests, and two paint brushes beneath the books. The second silk *Nature* displays a thistle flower with three bees heading towards it on its left. The third silk *Love* portrays a floating Cupid figure holding an arrow aloft, entwined with floral vines and a bow held below. The silk represented at the lowest level, *Friends & Family*, shows two young girls walking arm-in-arm with their backs to us. The girl on the right, partially visible, wears a mask and butterfly hair clips, despite having a butterfly wing costume on her back, her attire consists of everyday clothes: pants, boots and a vest. The girl on the left is depicted wearing a large coat, a skirt and clogs.



*More Than You See*, 2025, Oil on Canvas, 2,10x1,45 cm  
Photographed: Lal Doga Karakas



# Details

Details are indispensable complements for understanding the whole. Much like the final piece of a complex jigsaw puzzle, they deepen the meaning of a work and complete its story. Even a small facial expression in a portrait can strengthen the overall atmosphere of the painting, allowing the viewer to feel the mystery in a gesture.

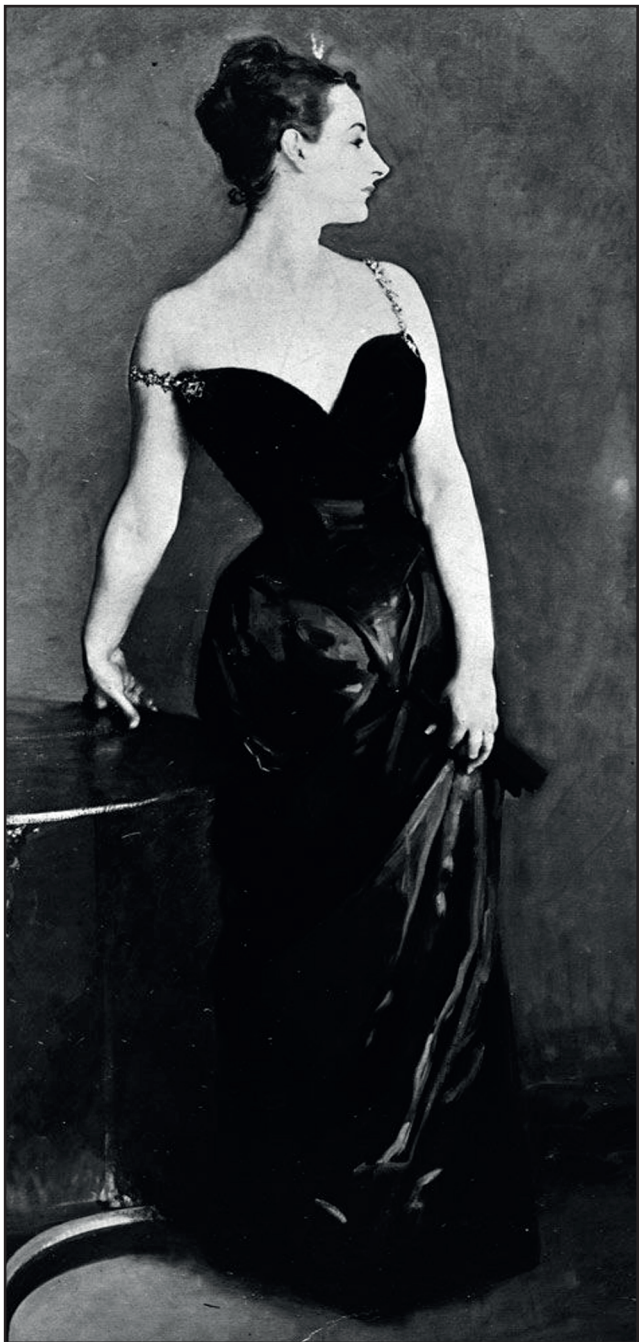
On the other hand, small details can open unexpected doors, leading the viewer to entirely different stories of interpretations. Sometimes, the symbolism, cultural reference, or a personal clue embedded with a detail can diverge from the main subject, initiating a narrative all its own. At this point, the detail is no longer just a complement but becomes a center itself. The viewer's eye is drawn to this detail, and from there, they begin to discover connections beyond the artwork, alternative readings, or the artist's hidden messages. This situation is akin to a detective finding a small, overlooked clue that changes the course of an investigation. One of the most striking examples of what can happen with the alteration of a single detail is John Singer Sargent's famous *Portrait of Madame X*.

This work was commissioned by Virginie Amelie Avegno Gautreau, one of the leading figures of 19th-century French high society. Sargent depicted Virginie Gautreau posing in a black evening gown. The chained straps in the painting are covered with sparkling stones, and it's notable that the upper part of the dress forms a deep décolletage. In the French fashion of that era, porcelain-white skin was considered a symbol of beauty and aristocracy. To highlight this feature, the artist created a balance in the figure by contrasting the woman's skin with the black evening dress and the dull tones of the background.

Currently exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the woman's two straps are on her shoulders. However, it was understood from X-ray images taken during restoration work that in the painting's initial appearance, only one strap was depicted as having fallen off her shoulder. Sargent aimed to display Virginie Gautreau's "unpaintable beauty and hopeless laziness", as he described it in his letter to his friend Vernon Lee.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Alina Cohen, "Why Madame X Scandalized the Art World," 2019, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-madame-scandalized-art>.



Left: John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Madame X* (x-ray image), 1883-84. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Right: John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Madame X*, 1883-84. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Images from Stephanie L. Herdrich, "From the Archives: How Madame X Came to the Met." <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/how-madame-x-came-to-the-met>

Although Sargent later named the work *Portrait of Madame X* \*\*\* to protect the model's identity when exhibiting it at the Salon de Paris, the striking and realistic appearance of the figure made the model's identity obvious. (The name *Portrait of Madame X* that we know was given later).

Even though a single strap falling off the shoulder may seem like a minor clothing adjustment to us today, in the late 1800s, in France, where strict religious rules prevailed, this work was labeled a scandal. The rigid adherence of French society of that period to sexual taboos and social rules led to severe criticism of the implied sexual content supposedly emphasized by a carelessly fallen dress strap.

This incident demonstrates that merely one detail was enough to create an entirely different narrative beyond the artist's intention to convey beauty. A single strap both created a new story and became an integral part of the whole in its current state. If that strap had remained on the shoulder as it is now, perhaps it would not have had as intriguing a story as it does today. Although this painting initially gained a negative reputation, now, thanks to the story of this small detail's alteration, it has become one of the most recognized paintings of the Realism movement which emerged in the 1840s, reacting to romanticism by focusing on contemporary life and everyday objects. Sargent's realism is evident in his dedication to painting his subjects as they were.<sup>4</sup>

## How We Want To See

One of the most powerful impulses inherent in human nature is the lifelong endeavor to approach the unknown. The truly captivating aspect lies precisely here: Imagine yourself in a museum; when you gaze at an artwork that appeals to your eye, we usually don't expect the artist to come and begin explaining their work, adding their own thoughts.

What truly matters are the feelings it evokes in you, the thoughts it triggers, and the unique experience it creates. This experience is unique and personal for every individual; the most beautiful aspect of art is precisely this diversity and its openness to varied interpretations.

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4. Kaylee Randall, "Naturalism, Realism, and Impressionism: Three Movements Explained," accessed September 10, 2025, <https://www.thecollector.com/naturalism-realism-and-impressionism-explained/>

Let's consider my painting, *More Than You See*. It's not really possible for us to view the entire piece for a long time, since our perceptual attention span, which varies from person to person based on factors like age, experiences, interest in the subject, and external distractions, is typically limited to just a few minutes.<sup>5</sup>

In such a situation, our eyes naturally shift focus to another point in the painting—to a specific detail. Perhaps to the bubbles in the lower part of the painting, or the city landscape, or the face of the figure.

This phenomenon is dependent on your personal interest, yet somehow, your gaze will invariably fixate on a particular section of the painting. That specific detail might evoke a memory, a piece of information, or an emotion and, by lingering at that moment, it can open other doors for you. Perhaps it will prompt more questions, or perhaps it will lead you to find what you were searching for. Sometimes, even a single brushstroke in the painting's simplest section can make us wonder, "How or why was this done?"

So, what is the origin of this curiosity? According to Freud and Lacan, while there are differing views on the precise definition of curiosity, both have emphasized the central role of this impulse in human psychology.

If we delve deeper into this topic, Freud largely links curiosity to biological and instinctual drives, especially childhood sexual curiosity. He believed a child tries to gain knowledge about the world and their own body by being curious about topics like their parents' sexuality, birth and origins. According to Freud, a child's questions like "Where did I come from?" or "How are babies made?" stem from repressed sexual impulses. For me, while the idea that curiosity arises from a drive is partly true, I think curiosity can be much more than just sexual curiosity. I believe the human desire to explore, understand and make sense of things covers a much broader spectrum.

This is exactly where Lacan comes in. He takes Freud's ideas but interprets curiosity differently. According to Lacan, curiosity isn't just a drive; it's also related to our inner desires and how others look at us—that is, how others perceive us. Curiosity is like constantly searching for something we can never quite fully find.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Leora B.H. Staff, "Average Human Attention Span By Age: 48 Statistics," accessed July 22, 2025, <https://www.leorabh.com/blog/attention-span-statistics#:~:text=Factors%20Influencing%20Attention%20Span,lead%20to%20shorter%20attention%20spans>.

6. Işık Barış Fidaner, "Curiosity and the Passion of Ignorance," accessed May 25, 2025, [https://zizekanalysis.wordpress.com/2020/12/19/curiosity-and-the-passion\\_of\\_ignorance-isik-baris-fidaner/](https://zizekanalysis.wordpress.com/2020/12/19/curiosity-and-the-passion_of_ignorance-isik-baris-fidaner/).

Another interesting idea from Lacan is the desire not to know. Sometimes, people might not want to know the truth about their own problems or why they desire certain things. This relates to avoiding unpleasant realities and not wanting to change what they already know. It's as if we think it's better for some things to remain hidden.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, while Freud mainly connects the roots of curiosity to natural instincts, Lacan explains it through more complex psychological processes like our desires, our relationships with others, and our wish to know or not to know. Both acknowledge that curiosity is very important to us, but they shed light on different aspects of it.

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7. Fidaner, "Curiosity and the Passion of Ignorance."

# The Meaning of Details

My supervisor, Jarmo Mäkilä, visited my studio just as I was beginning to sketch my large painting onto the larger canvas. I showed him my overall compositional plan and color studies. Since he was already aware of the master's project plan I had previously sent, our discussions primarily revolved around the painting's composition and color harmony.

Among our conversation, the advice he emphasized most became, for me, a truly different trajectory. My advisor told me, "You've planned everything and created a distinct composition; now, simply surprise yourself a little according to the subject you've created and find more opportunities to think while planning and painting the work."<sup>8</sup> This "surprising yourself" part was a comment on what values I might want to depict beneath the figure. At that point, I wasn't entirely sure what the subjects should be. It was going to be a surprise for me to figure out. I had to decide if I should focus on simple moments from everyday life—small details everyone encounters but which hold great importance—or if I should elevate the subject to a more universal dimension.

(In my view, the most important thing in a person's life is often themselves.) Just like protagonists in a play, their lives revolve around their own stories. Our journey from infancy to adulthood is shaped by what we see, and influenced by, what creates imprints on our minds, or even events we might deem insignificant or forgettable. Although we may share similar characteristics and lives, in our essence, we are unique from every other living being. It is certain values which I believe shape our lives that demonstrate this individuality.

I'm aware that countless value concepts exist in human life. Therefore, as I mentioned before, taking my own experiences into account and from a general perspective, I wrote down the values I deemed significant. After a process of elimination, the concepts I chose to focus on were:

Family, Friendship, Love, Knowledge, Art and Nature.

These concepts would allow me to draw upon both my personal experiences and their universal structures to connect with the viewer.

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8. Jarmo Mäkilä, interview by Lal Doga Karakas, February 14, 2025.

During my studio work, I constantly pondered how to depict these values. I had certain scenes in my mind, but I wanted to render them in a way that the audience could also understand.

Were they meant to be symbols? Not exactly, because I felt that would disrupt the realism balance in the painting.

Naturally, this is a symbolic narrative, but not in the way symbols are used in industrial design. A line from the film *V for Vendetta* comes to mind: “Symbols are given power by people. Alone, a symbol is meaningless.”<sup>9</sup> In the film, V understands that it is an idea that brings people together and instills in them a common purpose. This idea becomes more powerful and immortal when represented not by a hero or a person, but by a symbol.

From this perspective, had I only used the industrial symbols to depict my chosen values, the image would have been, in my opinion, devoid of both character and meaning. Therefore, it seemed more significant to me to depict these values from my own perspective—which is what truly gives them their power.

## Family

Undoubtedly, family is a fundamental and universal concept that extends beyond blood ties to include any living beings we love unconditionally. In this painting, I wanted to emphasize the most crucial building block of this concept: the bond between a mother and her child.

A mother’s unconditional love and tenderness have been an indispensable theme throughout art history, repeatedly explored in depictions like that of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus.

Adhering to this sacred tradition, I found portraying a baby in its mother’s embrace to be the most suitable way to convey the universal feelings of love and belonging.

## Friendship

I searched for the concept of true friendship by reflecting on my own relationships with those who built on understanding, empathy, and unconditional support.

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9. “V for Vendetta,” directed by James McTeigue (Warner Bros., 2005), 0:32:36.

In this painting, my goal was to capture the sincere intimacy of such a bond. I found the innocence of children, with their playful demeanor and unreserved self-expression, to be the perfect way to convey this theme. The worlds they create with their imaginations, and the purity within them, aim to reveal friendship in its warmest, inviting form.

## Love

Love has many versions, and I studied several of them in my painting. All these feelings are timeless and universal, but I specifically wanted to focus on romantic love, as it holds a significant place in most people's lives. While physical gestures can reflect love, I believe that understanding someone through their eyes holds a much deeper meaning. I've always been drawn to the saying, "Eyes are the windows to the soul." This is a very true statement, both scientifically (e.g., pupil dilation, direction of gaze) and emotionally.<sup>10</sup> With that in mind, I aimed to capture the profound moment when two souls seem to unite through a gaze.

## Knowledge

According to Aristotle, humans have the potential for knowledge, but they must actively pursue it to reach this potential. We need knowledge to understand ourselves and the world, to discover truth, and to grow personally. However, it's important to remember that individuals differ in their interests, talents, and existing levels of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Knowledge is both accumulated from past generations through written texts and shaped by our own sensory experiences from infancy onward. It is not limited to our own experiences; books, in particular, are a colossal resource that allows us to access the experiences and knowledge of others. For this reason, I created a composition of books in my work, as they formed a symbolic image that universally conveys knowledge in the most understandable way.

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10. David Ludden, "Your Eyes Really Are the Window to Your Soul," accessed July 18, 2025, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-apes/201512/your-eyes-really-are-the-window-to-your-soul>

11. Joshua Mendelsohn, "Aristotle: Epistemology," accessed July 20, 2025, <https://iep.utm.edu/aristotle-epistemology/>

# Art

In my opinion, art can be an imitation of nature, but it's much more than a simple copy. It's a reinterpretation and transformation of the inspiration we draw from the world around us. Art and design are woven into the fabric of our lives; art isn't static but an ever-evolving force. It acts not just as a mirror, but as a transformative power, creating its own unique path.

In my painting, I aimed to incorporate a work of sculpture to highlight the creative bond between nature and humanity. Sculpture is one of the most direct art forms where humans can give life to the earth with their own hands, shaping raw material and imbuing it with a soul. With this choice, I wanted to emphasize that art is not only a visual experience but also the profound human drive to create new life from the earth.

# Nature

Nature has always been an indispensable source of inspiration for countless artists. It's also a perfect, self-sufficient cycle of which we are an inseparable part, and an infinite source of knowledge.

However, humans have always had a tendency to mold nature to suit their needs. The ancient Chinese sage Zhuangzi captured this with a powerful saying: "Man putting a ring in an ox's nose." This phrase reveals our complex relationship with nature, our desire to dominate it, and the consequences of that intervention.<sup>12</sup>

While this idea accurately reflects the relationship between humans and nature, I created two compositions that draw on nature itself to reflect the breathtaking beauty and delicate ecosystems of our world. Drawing from my previous series of paintings focused on close observation of nature, I prepared scenes depicting the aesthetic perfection of a flower and how bees carry pollen, preserving the natural balance.

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12. John Doe, "The Philosophy of Zhuangzi," Philosophy Today (blog), accessed September 19, 2025, <https://www.philosophytoday.com/zhuangzi-philosophy>.

# My Work with Fantastic Realism

In my work, I aim to invite the viewer into an experience of reality that is both familiar and surprising, by blending the fundamental principles of the Fantastic Realism movement with my own artistic language. Fantastic Realism, as its name suggests, is a point where “fantastic” and “realism” intersect; it is the infiltration of the extraordinary and inconceivable into the ordinary and familiar. This movement challenges the boundaries of our accustomed perceptions by combining elements of the real world with dream-like, symbolic or truly fantastic components.

Following the end of World War II, a segment of society and art lovers, shaken by the period’s sudden shocks, had grown tired of Abstract Expressionism’s simplified and audacious style. During this period, the demand for detailed beauty in painting techniques and depth of meaning was steadily increasing. Furthermore, although the technological advancements of the era influenced imagination, existential questions in literature and philosophy could not be fully answered.

It was in this void that the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism emerged. This new art movement, fueled by a growing interest in science fiction, occultism, spiritualism, and the mysteries of the universe, was led by key figures such as Ernst Fuchs and Arik Brauer. By the late 1960s, the Vienna School had solidified Fantastic Realism as a visionary art style, which sought to pursue the unseen by combining surreal elements with a detailed and realistic style.

Fantastic Realism, which valued the traditions and techniques of the German Renaissance, Gothic, Art Nouveau and Expressionism, gradually further defined its color palette. The viewer, upon first glance at the canvas, was meant to feel like a child captivated by the magic of an eerie fairytale. Paintings featured beautiful nudes alongside fantastic monsters, humans and mythological characters, religious symbols and mystifications. In short, Fantastic Realism appealed to two senses: sight and intuition.<sup>13</sup>

For me, the mode of thinking inherent in Fantastic Realism forms a cornerstone in creating my artworks. The proponents of this movement did not merely content themselves with superficial, visible reality; instead, they focused on dimensions beyond matter—that is, on layers that cannot be perceived by the senses but whose presence is felt, akin to dreams or metaphysical realms.

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13. “Fantastic Realism,” n.d., Arthive, accessed August 10, 2025, [https://arthive.com/styles/fantastic\\_realism](https://arthive.com/styles/fantastic_realism).



Ernst Fuchs, *Observer Infinitor*, 1972. Oil on wood. Private collection.  
Image via WikiArt Internet Archive, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/ernst-fuchs/observer-infinitor-1972>

In movements when the rigid boundaries of the visible world feel restrictive, the artists allow themselves to break free by opening the doors to the boundless capacity of fantasy or imagination. This is not merely an escape, but also an attempt to question and redefine reality from another perspective.

Thus, fantastic elements become the spice of life; they make us question what is real and what is imaginary, often blurring the line between the two and creating ambiguity.

So, doesn't the perception of reality change from person to person? This very question forms the practical foundation of Fantastic Realism in my artistic process. A situation that is "real" to me might challenge the limits of someone else's imagination. A thought or desire that emerges as a dream in my mind today could be an attainable goal, a concrete reality, for someone else. This concept of subjective reality adds a layered depth to my artworks.

In my works, I utilize various visual metaphors to emphasize the permeability and intersections between these personal and universal realities. Realistic figures and objects are placed in unexpected contexts or a dream-like atmosphere, allowing the viewer to question their own perception of reality. This situation not only offers a visual experience but also encourages the viewer to explore the dialogue between fantasy and reality within their own inner world. In this context, Fantastic Realism becomes not merely an art movement but also a philosophical approach that opens the doors to an existential inquiry and a journey of personal discovery.

# Being with the Work

I had just completed the last touches on my artistic work just two weeks before the Kuvan Kevät opening. The lilac-colored edges of my large painting, which I had painted, were only just beginning to dry. Fortunately, the bottom part of the canvas had dried enough for me to place the painting in its predetermined exhibition spot; this gave me time to then collect the framing materials I had designed for my silks. After selecting the foam boards that would serve as passpartouts, I cut them into a specific form of headless pins I desired. After agreeing on a specific installation time slot with the technicians, our discussions provided me with ideas on how to hang the foam board. In initial conversations, I had used specially designed hooks for these boards to hang them, but since there was a possibility of a gap forming between the foam board and the wall when hung with hooks, we decided to secure the edges of the foam boards with nails, inspired by the pinning method I used for the silks.

(I was aware that the placement of my works was just as crucial as the painting itself.) Therefore, during a studio visit with professors while arranging the installation, we discussed the positioning of the silks. In my initial plan, I was undecided whether to opt for a symmetrical appearance or to place them closer to the elements I had chosen, as if placing a note on the painting. We exchanged ideas on this matter. Since most of the subjects I had chosen were in the lower section of the large painting, placing them close to each other was not an ideal choice for the presentation. In this situation, I would either place the four silks in pairs on both sides of the painting (because the postures of the objects and figures in the silks were painted to face two right and two left) or begin arranging them in a neat line on just one side of the painting.

Given that the figure's gaze and posture were directed towards the left, giving the appearance of looking at the silks I had placed, and also because we had no clear idea yet about how the adjacent installation should be placed, we began to arrange the passe-partouts in a downward line on the left side of the painting. As I placed them, I couldn't help but ponder; the positioning of the painting and the silks truly made a difference. The figure's posture and the composition allowed the painting to transition into another three-dimensional space beyond its own frame. This felt like stepping into another reality, because within the painting, there was a world I had created, and this world visibly seemed to establish a connection with our current reality.

I was also curious about the effect on this situation of the viewer: Would people be able to make a connection as I had intended, or would they see the two as separate works? I knew I could understand this by observing during the exhibition opening.

To understand people's reactions, I silently observed the visitors around me and my own artwork, just like them. The vast majority of visitors, upon entering the exhibition hall, first passed by the wall opposite mine before advancing towards my wall. This was a rather good decision in terms of exhibition layout, as the color balance evolved from a vibrant palette towards more monochrome and silver tones. My artwork, too, reflected the final appearance of vibrant colors. Therefore, viewers first looked at the section with the silks and then at my painting. Some, while looking at the figures in the silks, I pointed towards the values I depicted in the bubbles within my paintings. Another defined the silks and the painting as two separate works due to their distinct materials. This situation, as I mentioned before, demonstrates that even a common symbol seen in different thought patterns can be interpreted in another way. I also noticed this experience later during the Kuvan Kevät seminar.

During the seminar, I was able to discuss my artwork more extensively than at the exhibition opening. I explained my belief that, at times, it is more effective not to over explain the work, allowing its meaning to emerge through the viewer's own curiosity and interpretation.

Just as I had hoped, it sparked curiosity and meaning-making in the audience. To some, my painting represented a created world—perhaps an idealistic reality or a dream. Yet, despite everyone seeing the same objects, different realities emerged from different details.

For instance, a professor leading the seminar approached my work with a perspective that was surprisingly dystopian, a thought that had never crossed my mind during its creation. While the painting's overall appearance and color harmony presented a positive image to me, this professor saw a world where everything was arranged in a specific, almost rigid order. These varying interpretations helped me truly understand the unique and personal connection art creates with each viewer.

Overall, I believe this master's thesis project has allowed me to advance as an artist on a more comprehensive journey, both in terms of research and my interaction with materials. The subject of curiosity and details that I chose will, in fact, be an unending cycle throughout my life. Because, as I stated in my first painting seminar, while overcoming the challenge of attempting something new for the very first time in each project can be daunting. It also holds great excitement for me.

Therefore, to discover new ideas and continuously develop my artworks, I will always continue to fearlessly experience new knowledge, much like a perpetual student. In this way, I believe I can use my artworks as a microscope to show people other dimensions beyond what is immediately visible.

# **Images of the Exhibited Works- Kuvan Kevät Exhibition View**

Kuva Tila, Helsinki 17.05-15.06.2025

Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas

# List of Works

(Artwork no.1)

*More Than You See* (2025)

Oil on Canvas

2,10x1,45 cm

(Artwork no.2)

*Art & Knowledge* (2025)

Hand embroidered silk and silk painting

41x28,5 cm

(Artwork no.3)

*Nature* (2025)

Hand embroidered silk and silk painting

41x28,5 cm

(Artwork no.4)

*Love* (2025)

Hand embroidered silk and silk painting

41x28,5 cm

(Artwork no.5)

*Friends & Family* (2025)

Hand embroidered silk and silk painting

41x28,5 cm



Detail from the painting *More Than You See*  
Oil on canvas  
Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas



Detail from the painting *More Than You See*  
Oil on canvas  
Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas



Silk artwork *Nature*, 2025  
Hand embroidered silk and silk painting, 41x28,5cm  
Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas



Silk artwork *Art & Knowledge*, 2025  
Hand embroidered silk and silk painting, 41x28,5cm  
Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas



Silk artwork *Friends & Family*, 2025  
Hand embroidered silk and silk painting, 41x28,5cm  
Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas



Silk artwork *Love*, 2025  
Hand embroidered silk and silk painting, 41x28,5cm  
Photographer: Lal Doga Karakas

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