



Kesja Tabaczuk

This Polish artist paints from a small studio set in an old, converted factory in Oslo, Norway, accompanied by various genres of rock music and a calming view. *Ramsha Vistro* discovers more ►



Sleeping Child, oil
on linen, 90x90cm



BEFORE KESJA TABACZUK came into the world, her father wrote love letters to her mother, embellished with beautiful illustrations of flowers and birds in coloured pen. Kesja describes him as her first artistic hero and her mother – also artistically talented – dreamed of Kesja becoming a painter.

“Ever since I can remember I loved to draw; I think all children do. When I was seven, I started horse riding and drew horses for many years after that. I went on to study art at 13-years-old, mainly interested in creating figures,” shares Kesja.

She graduated from high school with the Best Painting of the Year award and was accepted into the University of Art in Poland at the age of 18, but decided against accepting the offer. She didn’t want to pursue a career as a contemporary artist and understood that what she would have been taught, was not what she wanted to practice.

Instead, Kesja moved to London to live with

her mother, following her parents’ divorce. She began self-educating; painting subjects that inspired her. Meanwhile, she was also contemplating her life’s purpose and came across Jehovah’s Witness teachings, which piqued her interest. “I started studying the Bible, became a Jehovah’s Witness; and started volunteering with them, while also working a part-time job at Zara. I never stopped painting though, but it became more of a hobby.”

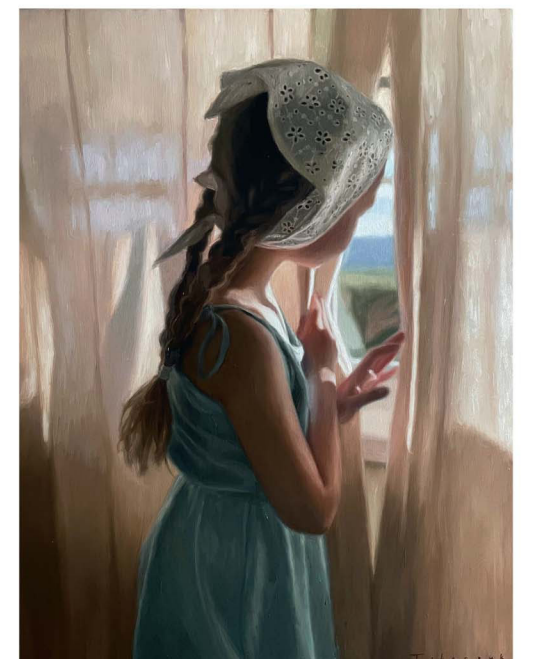
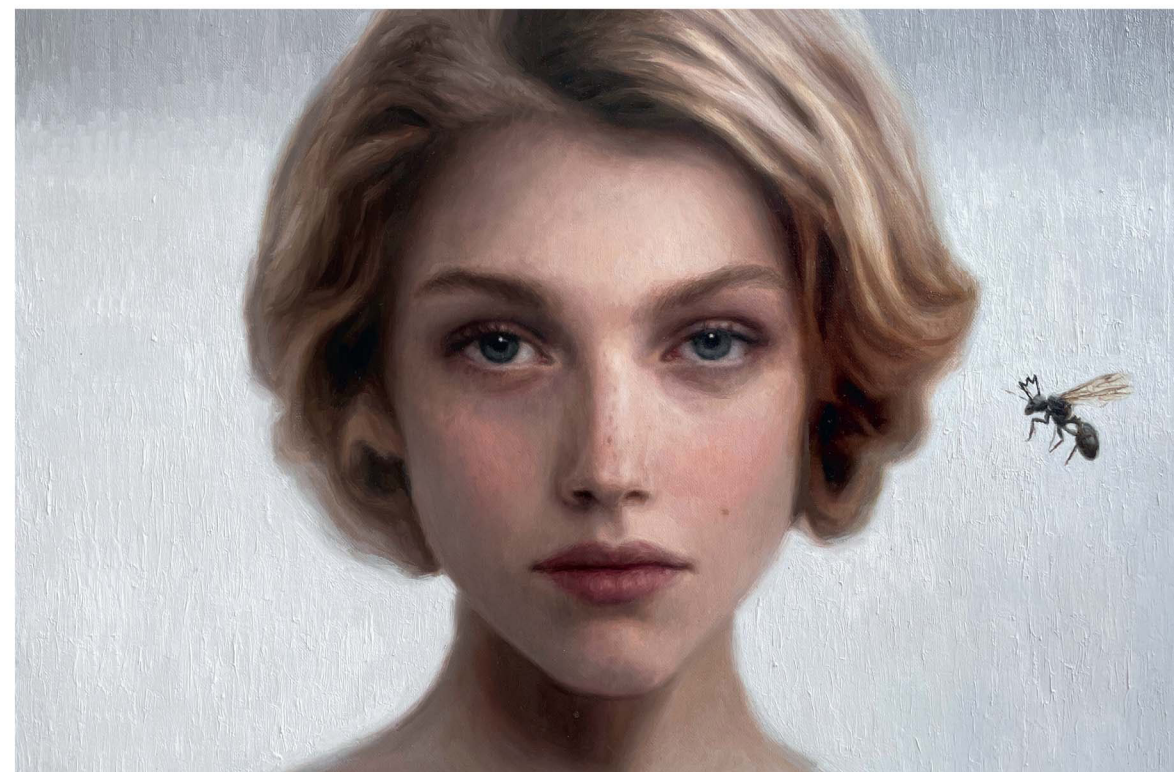
A couple of years later, in 2014, Kesja moved in with her boyfriend who lived in Oslo, and they married in 2016. She was still working her part-time retail job but was unfulfilled. She missed painting and so, her husband encouraged her to get back to creating art. “I told him I really miss it and the next thing I know, he bought me canvases, brushes, paints – the whole lot – and motivated me to paint. So, I did.”

A few years passed and Kesja eventually reached out to various galleries, one of which responded within the hour; asking her to bring in her work. It was only a month later

that her paintings were exhibited by Arcadia Gallery – and all sold out. After a little encouragement from Elisabeth Ramfjord, the gallery owner, Kesja quit her job to start making a living from art.

It was in 2019 that Kesja started painting seriously and became a full-time artist. She says, along with her husband and Elisabeth’s reassurance, it was American realist painter Jeremy Lipking’s art – particularly *Whispering Pines* – that played a part in inspiring her to take the leap. “I couldn’t stop looking at it. It was beautiful: the colours, light, brushwork. I remember thinking to myself, ‘I have always wanted to paint like this,’ but I didn’t believe people would ever buy my work; I thought it was all about abstract paintings in those days,” she laughs.

After experimenting with various subject matters throughout the years, Kesja always came back to figures. “I don’t know why, nothing excites me as much as painting human faces. I interact more with them. You can convey a lot of feelings through facial ▶



TOP LEFT *Girl with a bull*, oil on linen, 100x90cm
TOP RIGHT *Twins*, oil on linen, 100x80cm
LEFT *The Queen Bee*, oil on linen, 70x50cm
ABOVE *Lenka*, oil on linen, 100x80cm

HOW I WORK IN THE STUDIO

expressions, even the most subtle of them. It's very captivating. When I see other artists' works, I am most impressed with those representing people."

Kesja works from a 20-square-metre studio, in an old factory that has been converted into an atelier. "It has white walls, two windows – one with a view of trees and the river – and a few decorative plants. My easel is always near one of the windows; not because of the light (I use artificial light from daylight bulbs), but because I like having a view when I paint. I also have a sofa for naps, a coffee machine and a decent speaker."

She makes good use of said speaker, listening to various rock genres ranging from indie rock to grunge while she's painting. "Sometimes, I listen to podcasts or audiobooks and sometimes, I even watch movies; but it has to be movies I've seen before, otherwise, it's too hard for me to focus."

Kesja also has a *plein air* easel, and every year, she promises herself to take it with her on holiday so she can paint different landscapes as opposed to painting from photographs in her studio; which is the norm.

It takes her up to two weeks to create a painting; anything beyond the two-week mark and her fascination for the piece starts fading. She's also one to suffer from creative ruts; usually when meeting a deadline and trying too hard. "I like to have time for other activities; that's why I don't paint every day. I try to take care of myself too: I sleep a lot, eat healthy and exercise most days. If my body is healthy then so is my brain and that's where the ideas come from."

She describes herself as a "very messy but also clean" artist. "I have a rule: before I start a new painting, my studio must be perfectly clean. Starting a painting is the most stressful part for me and so, everything has to be tidy and in harmony as it makes me feel calm and focused. Then, as I progress with the painting, I start making a mess; throw everything everywhere and wipe my brushes wherever I can. And then I clean again."

Kesja uses a combination of approaches in her work, since she is aware that each painting demands an individual technique and approach – based on the message she seeks to convey to the viewer. She aspires to evoke positivity while showcasing the splendour of the world and its people; and puts a lot of effort into her paintings to do so.

Her constant attempt to capture the effects of nature is supported by relying on the progression of knowledge shared and learned from great artists of the past. As she is most inspired by humans, she frequently creates portraits and figurative art.

Oil paint is her favourite medium, which



I don't know why, nothing excites me as much as painting human faces



TOP *Field buddies*, oil on linen, 120x90cm

ABOVE *Dove and Crow*, oil on linen, 70x60cm

she uses to create art exhibiting a strong love of realism through the compositions of lines, shapes, values and textures.

Kesja says she prefers not to evaluate her work and likes viewers to take the reins. "Usually, there is a certain narrative I am thinking of when making a painting, but I don't expect the viewer to catch that immediately and I don't feel the need to share it with anybody either. I want to leave room for interpretation and I like it when people tell me what *they* see in my paintings.

"I also don't expect the viewer to be captivated in the same way I was when creating the piece, but I do want my paintings to spark a flame when they look at them. I want my paintings to evoke positive emotions and if they induce moments of reflection or feelings of nostalgia, that's great. I prefer art that isn't controversial, so I try not to touch upon difficult subjects in my artwork."

Kesja believes those who are creative but don't have the chance to fulfil themselves as artists will be continually frustrated. "When I had an ordinary job – and very little time to paint – I often had this feeling. I don't have it now. I am grateful I can make a living from doing what I love." kesjatabaczuk.com □