

Guest Artist
ANA MILENKOVIC

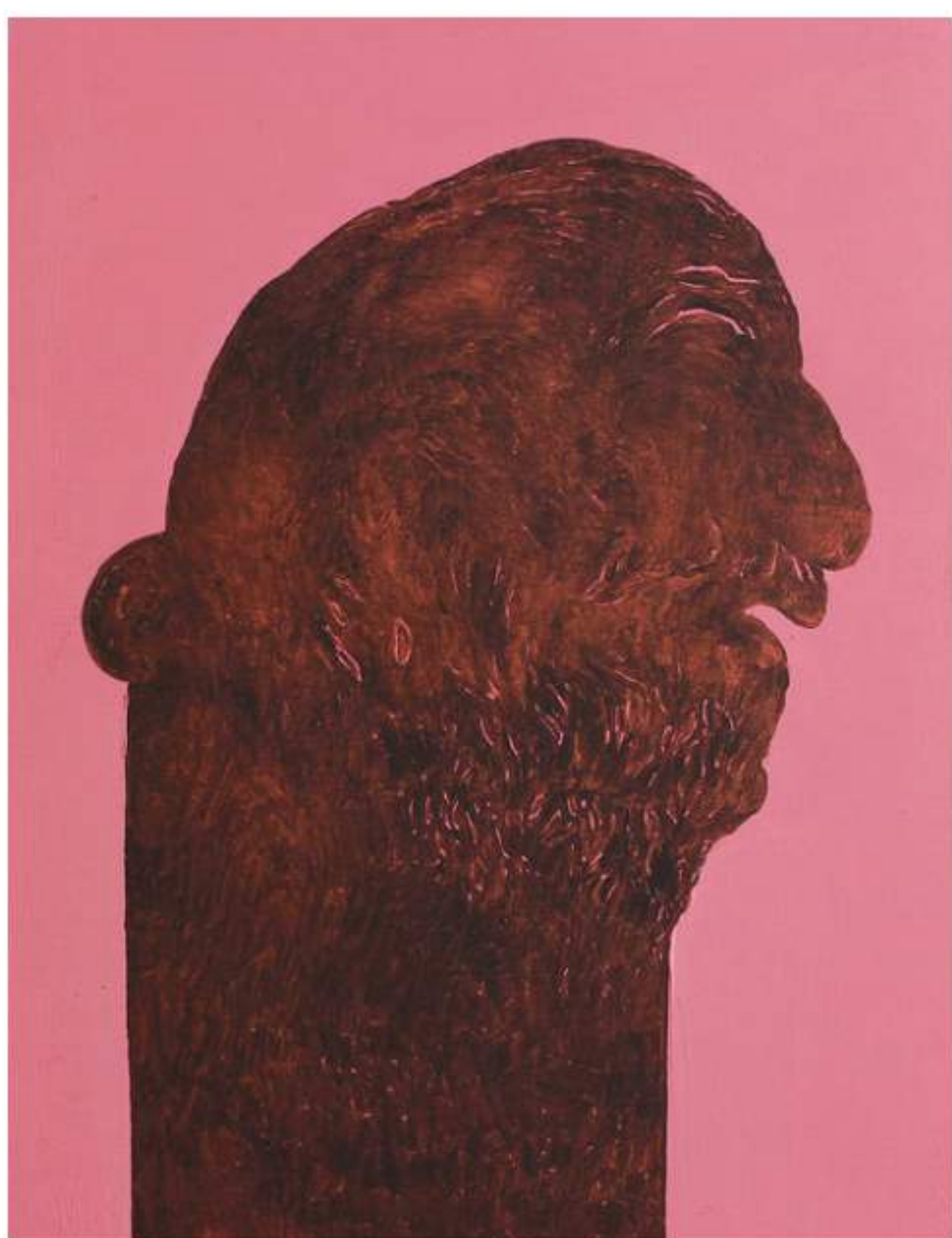
"CURIOSITY FEEDS ON UNFAMILIAR IMAGES AND STORIES, AND I AM PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH THEY REACH US."

Could you tell us a bit about yourself. How long have you been a practicing artist and where did you study?

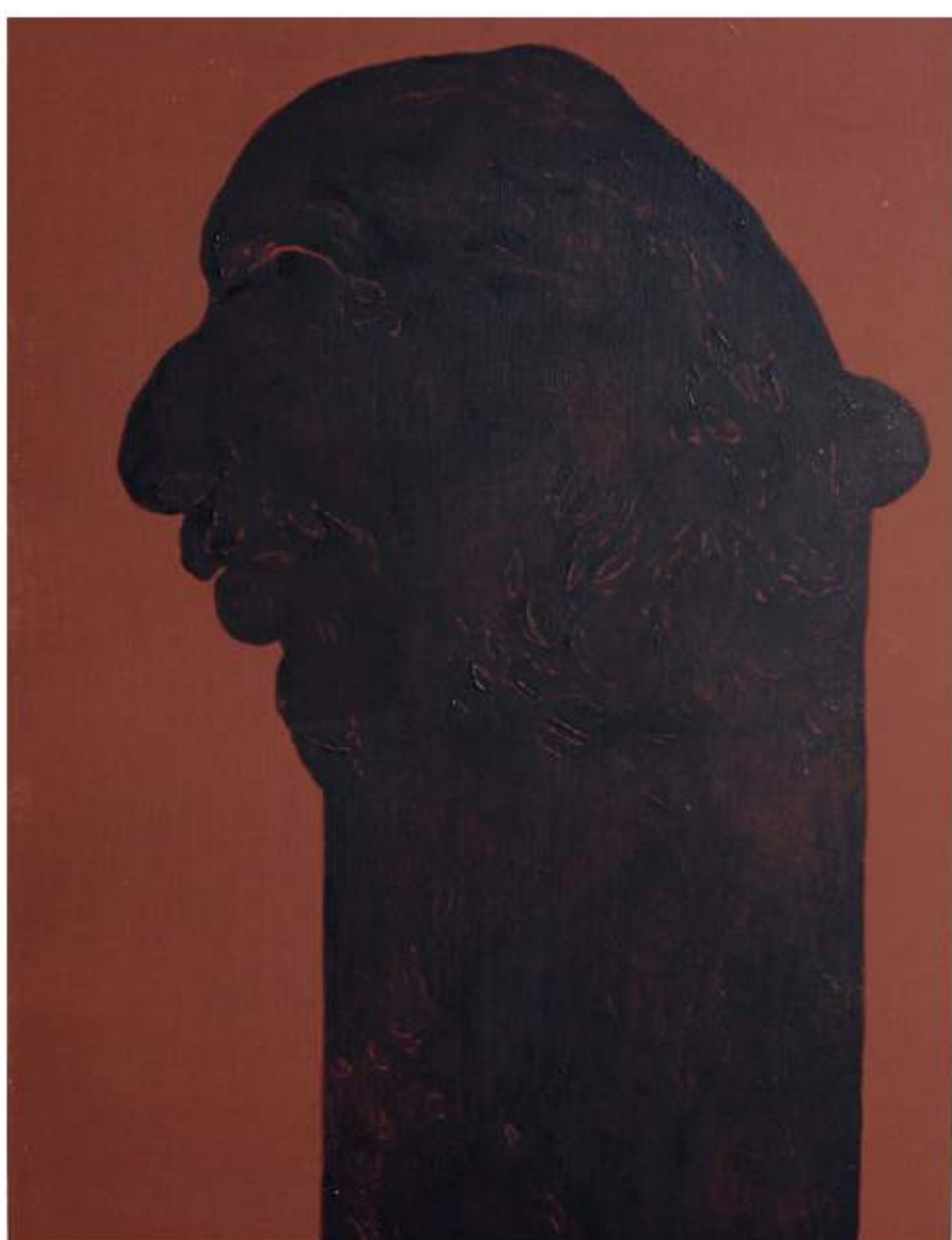
I graduated from Wimbledon College of Art in 2014, but I also hold a postgraduate degree from the Faculty of Fine Art in Belgrade. In total, I spent seven years in different art schools, and two years preparing for them. Nothing makes me more comfortable than libraries, funnily dressed people and grandiose ideas; art schools are temples of creativity and the notion of them turning into providers of career toolkit is the ultimate tragedy to me.

There is a side profile figure that often appears in your work, could you tell us about this and the reasons behind it?

Curiosity feeds on unfamiliar images and stories, and I am particularly interested in channels through which they reach us. My paintings are a syncretism between eastern and western traditions, real life stories and mythology, but pimped-up to have a solely visual logic with motifs that come from various directions. The profile figure is the only constant element in them, and it impersonalizes numerous phenomena – a double-headed emblem of conflicting thoughts, a hero of Cold War propaganda, a portrait medal, a warrior. It's a universal representative of human race who is never out of a job.



Profile I, 2015



Profile II, 2015

You recently won the Griffin Art Prize 2016, congratulations, how did winning it make you feel? Are you looking forward to the residency?

I like the Griffin Art Prize because it is realistic - it provides artists with a professional studio space, materials, accommodation and mentoring, without demands and deadlines. I find myself unfit for most residencies, as I need time to adapt, think, read, and make large work that cannot be rolled up in a backpack. I never saw myself as a pilgrim responding to imminent surrounding, and I want my art to resonate deeper than scratching on the surface.

What do you hope the viewer gains/reacts from looking at your work?

I recently came to a conclusion that when I want to say something – I say it, so whenever I want to paint something – I paint it. I don't see paintings as illustrations of written or spoken words, they "speak" for themselves and impose a very specific set of problems. My paintings do not have a narrative, and they do not preach. There are some obvious references in them, but I encourage my audience to make up their own mind about what they are looking at.



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How do you go about naming your work?

This question has backfired on me. I recently interviewed Ansel Krut and asked him the same; I now regret it, as my titles are not nearly as witty as his, and yet I am asked to analyse them. Basically, I think the greatest danger of a bad title is to make the painting self explanatory, and shut doors to peculiar interpretations. My solution is to title work when it's finished, and simply name the most obvious feature. For example, I made a painting in which two profiles faced each other, so titled it "Face to Face". Then I made another one with the same motive and titled it "Face to Face 2". It is that trivial.

What artwork have you seen recently that has resonated with you?

I recently saw The Idol by Gauguin at the Hermitage. I prefer most painters to Gauguin but the effect this paintings had on me could be described as disbelief of a disobedient teenager who just quoted their parent's most annoying phrase, and meant it.



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Tell us a bit about how you spend your day/studio routine, what is your studio like?

My daily routine is a standing joke among friends, since I like getting up when it's still dark and going to bed before CBBC concludes its scheduled programme. Most days I go to the studio first thing in the morning and spend most weekends working along Miroslav Pomichal, a brilliant artist and my partner. No matter how small the studio, having a mate is great – in my case it provides endless discussions about art theory, history, religion, Tolstoy and Donald Trump. This downside of this closeness is that I question everything and often change my mind, which started to show - I've been working on a single painting for almost a year now, breaking it down and rebuilding it. Although unfinished, it's my best work to date.

What does the future hold for you as an artist? Is there anything new and exciting in the pipeline you would like to tell us about?

Currently, I am completely immersed in making new work and finalising sketches for the Griffin residency. I always feel a bit distracted when faced with deadlines but I have an exciting year ahead – I am taking part in the Arca Project which will bring together contemporary artists and writers, I will be co-curating a show based around the term "Gothic", and also contribute to the exhibition of Serbian artists working abroad. In addition, the Sisyphean task on the above mentioned painting continues!

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Images courtesy of Griffin Gallery and the artist, photographer: Oliver Holms
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