

MFA graduate Ana Milenkovic wins 2016 Griffin Art Prize

DECEMBER 7, 2016 • BY SOPHIE KASSAY • NO COMMENTS

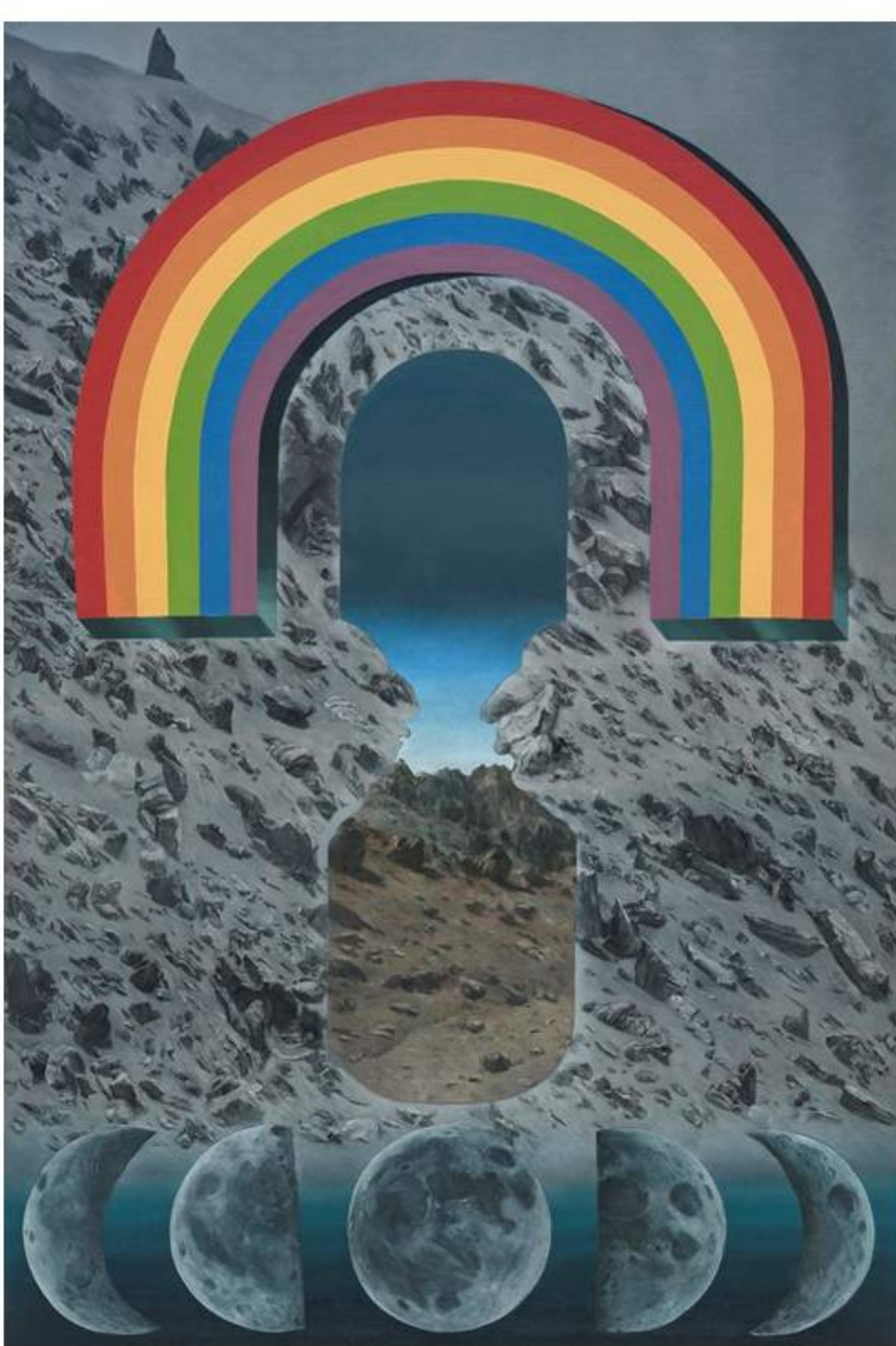


Wimbledon College of Arts graduate Ana Milenkovic is a Serbian artist who works with collage, assemblage and photography, often creating chaotic and disturbing images in the process. She completed her MFA Fine Art at Wimbledon in 2014 and was recently the recipient of the 2016 Griffin Art Prize for emerging artists, which includes a three-month studio residency at Gallery Griffin plus a supply of art materials.

We spoke to Ana about her multidisciplinary approach to her work, her Serbian upbringing and its influence on her practice and what she plans to do during her Griffin Gallery residency.

How would you describe your artistic practice?

Although I am a classically trained painter, I work across a wide range of media such as sculpture, photography, digital collage and print. I read, draw and observe, take photographs and keep a large collection of articles, notes and images, which I use to create assemblages evoking surprising, provoking and multi-layered meanings.



Work by Griffin Art Prize 2016 winner and MFA Fine Art alum Ana Milenkovic

What are some of the key influences on your work?

I consider Manet and Velasquez the greatest artists of all time, and examining images of their work is part of my bedtime routine. Speaking of the more contemporary influences, I admire Bob Thompson's interpretations of the old masters, Jonas Wood's and Dexter Dalwood's extraordinary paintings of the ordinary and Alison Schulinik's bold use of paint. Also, I recently discovered a young American sculptor Ben Reiss whose work brings back faith in contemporary art and shows that it can be clever, fresh and very trendy at the same time.

You use images of statues from different cultures/era in your work – do these have symbolic significance in your paintings and collages?

I have passion for unfamiliar images and stories, but also channels through which they reach us, and my works serve as meeting point where unrelated elements interact, sending the viewer through a variety of moods – nostalgic, comical, sublime, disturbing or grotesque.

Naturally, I am interested in the history of the Balkans, which I find intriguing and often misunderstood – reinterpretations of history, new mythologies and confusing ideas of unfamiliar cultures, resulting in ever-changing national customs, symbols, ideals and general beliefs in particular. Going back to my paintings, I would say they are an example of cultural syncretism between eastern and western traditions, but pimped-up to have a solely visual logic with motifs that come from various directions with obvious references.



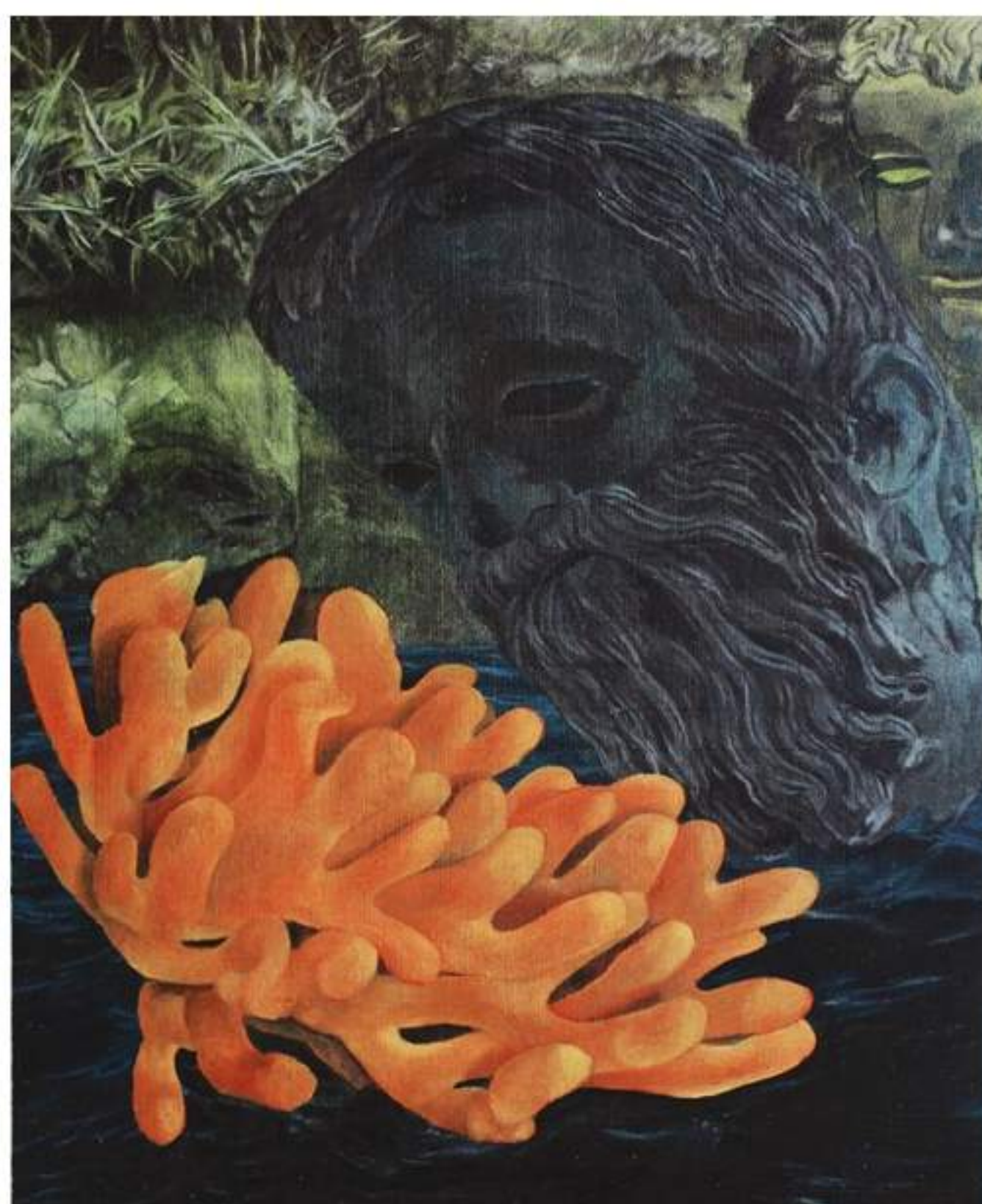
Ana Milenkovic's work on display at Griffin Gallery for the Griffin Art Prize 2016 exhibition

Has your upbringing and education in Serbia influenced your practice? Do you think you'll return to Serbia to live and work?

I noticed that art schools in the UK encourage students to play, experiment and place their work into some context very early on, regardless of their general knowledge. My education was more guided and theoretical; studies back in Belgrade included European history of art and art theory, and I can see how strongly this affected the way I think about my work. I will always see myself as an artist shaped by its strict academic code but polished by what I have learned during my time at Wimbledon. At the moment, my career and personal life are bound to London, but I keep a close connection with Belgrade, and I can definitely see myself living there in the future.

When and why did you decide to move to, and work in, London?

After I graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art in Belgrade I won the Award for Creative Innovation from the Milos Bajic Fund. I had my mind on it for several years, and after I finally accomplished my goal in 2012, I knew I was ready for the next step. Basically, I needed a bigger challenge and I wanted to have a taste of the global art scene so London seemed like a logical choice. I knew Wimbledon College of Arts was the place for me after I visited for the interview and discovered a community of talented and ambitious people working in a healthy, natural environment just a skip away from the London buzz.



Work by Griffin Art Prize 2016 winner and MFA Fine Art alum Ana Milenkovic

How do you plan to use your Griffin Art Prize residency?

I'm thinking of applying my brushstroke technique to 3-D models and also building two large-scale sculptural pieces. Basically, I will do something that I cannot afford to do in my small shared studio, but also not as demanding as a painting, which in my case require seven – eight months of work.

What has been your career highlight to date?

I come from a family with passion for classical music, theatre, opera and visual art, but which fades away with modernism. The fact I inspired my parents to tolerate contemporary art and devote a wall of their living room to mine and my boyfriend's paintings (although framed in heavy neoclassical frames) has to be the highlight of my achievements.



Ana and others at the Griffin Art Prize 2016 exhibition at Griffin Gallery

Have you got any other exhibitions or events coming up this year?

It's almost December so the only thing on the agenda is the Griffin Art Prize shortlist exhibition, but next year should be exciting – 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 Belgrade. And I cannot wait for February to begin the Griffin Art Prize residency!

You can find out more about Ana and her work by visiting her [website](#) and following her on [Instagram](#).

Learn more about studying [MFA Fine Art](#) at Wimbledon College of Arts.

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