

**EWELINA SKOWROŃSKA** graduated with honors from the University of The Arts London, her works have been exhibited in London, Ireland, USA, Canada, Poland, Denmark and Japan. In 2017, she was awarded the Print Prize by the ST Bridge Foundation, and in 2018 she was shortlisted for the 2018 Ashurst Emerging Artist Prize. Her prints are in the collection of the VA Museum London; Spiral Wacoal Art Foundation, Tokyo, Japan; Guanlan Art Museum, China. She currently lives in Japan, where she is an active participant in the Tokyo art scene.



Ewelina Skowrońska in her studio. Photo by Maciej Komorowski

## “I NEEDED THIS PATH” – AN INTERVIEW WITH EWELINA SKOWROŃSKA

**Paulina Świerczyńska-Brzezińska: How did you become an artist? After all, art was not your first studies?**

Ewelina Skowrońska: As usual, nothing happens suddenly. **My artistic path was different from the classically accepted style of education.** After Graduating from high school I applied to the Academy of Fine arts in Wrocław half year before exams. I hadn't drawn much before and was into sports at school. It was a time when I had a completely different vision of my career which my parents were not happy about. Unfortunately I wasn't accepted at the Art Academy and decided to study political science to my parents delight. Later in college there was so much going on that the initial plans were not continued, but nevertheless this desire to do something creative kept coming back to me. In political science I decided to specialise in political marketing which brought out my creative desire. This lead me into advertising. I still had the desire to create, to give something from myself and somehow try to express myself in a visual form. I participated in many courses: drawing, painting and interior design. **As an adult, a 33-year-old woman, I**

**decided I did not want to work in the corporate advertising industry, I had a great need to express myself.** That's why I decided to put all at stakes.

**However, you did not choose a university in Poland, you graduated with honors from the Visual Arts at the University of The Arts London.**

I couldn't imagine going through the whole system of exams in Poland and I was looking for an alternative way of education. I already had a master's degree, so I didn't have to go from the beginning. In the UK where I studied, the system is different. **If you have a strong portfolio, you can immediately jump to the next level. In fact, that's when I decided to make illustrations.** Thanks to working in advertising, I understood a lot about this area, which made things much easier. I was already doing illustrations for magazines and newspapers. It was also in a process of maturing to the decision that it was now or never. **I had to try it, otherwise I would have regretted it for the rest of my life.**



Exhibition *Intuitive Reminiscence - In the beginning, women as sun.* Pilipczuk Gallery in Copenhagen.

**Very brave. Is there any advice you would give to people facing a similar dilemma?**

I will not say anything extraordinary, except to follow what already is within you, **not give up and just trust your instinct.** I remember when I decided to make this change my mother was terrified, but I couldn't ignore it any longer. **It took me a while, but I think this path was necessary for me.** I don't regret studying political science as it gave me a lot of knowledge in philology psychology & political doctrines. This has a huge influence on my drawings today.

**Today we are talking about your exhibition at Pilipczuk Gallery in Denmark, and you are in Japan, where you currently live. You have spent most of your life in Poland and studied in England. Which of these places has had the greatest influence on you? Which most strongly defined the direction of your work.**

I needed these places at some stages of my life, so I have no answer. Of course what was happening in Poland was a kind of preparation to build strength, courage and steadfastness. **London was all new to me when I started studying illustration, but I fell in love with graphic arts and did a diploma in it.** I discovered a lot of artists in London, the cultural offer in this city is phenomenal. I was a sponge absorbing everything in. Tokyo is a time for me to search for my own language, what topics I want to focus on and what is important to me. I also went on many artist residences mainly in the USA which developed and broadened my horizons. It was a process that influenced me very much and I think it still continues. This process is never ending, as an artist you are always learning.



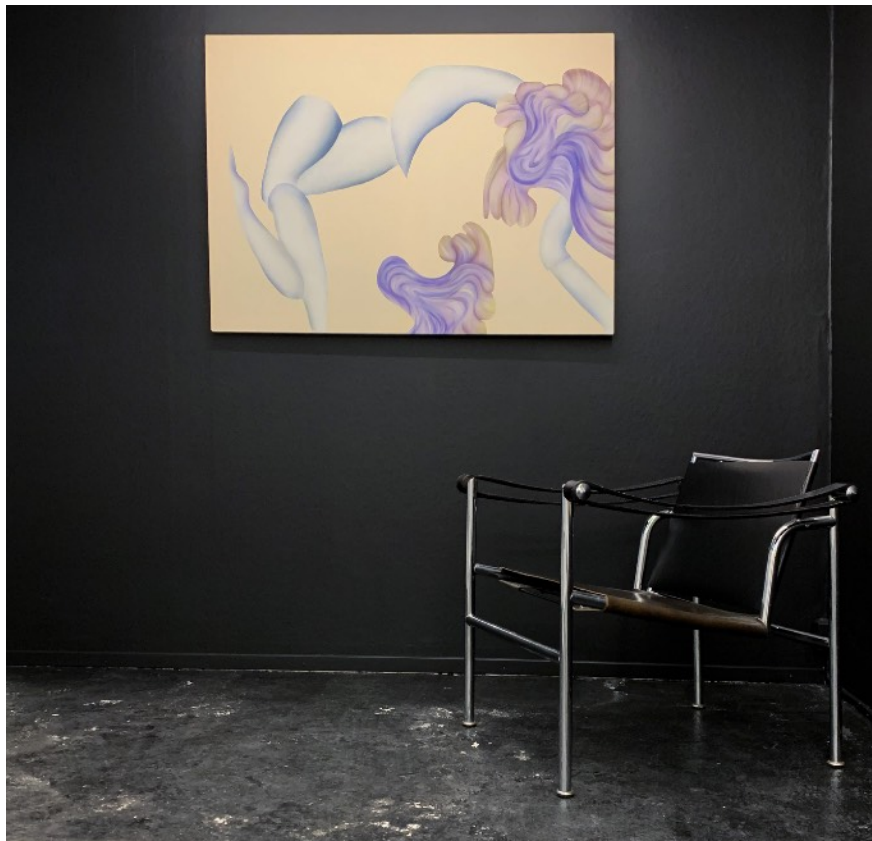
Ewelina Skowrońska in her studio. Photo by Maciej Komorowski

**You have already had exhibitions in many countries. Your works have been shown on three continents. Do you feel that they are perceived differently depending on where they are presented?**

To be honest I think it's people's perception of my work that differs rather than the country it is shown in. I think that people who are sensitive to what I do have something in common. **Perhaps the most moving for me is the reception of my works in Japan, because it is a very specific culture, very hermetic.** It is a patriarchal country where social changes are very slow and I think many women are not even aware that it can be different. However, I never thought about creating with a specific market or place in mind, quite the opposite. Initially, in Japan, I felt that it would be difficult for me to work here, so I was more focused on trying to exist in different places. During my exhibitions in Japan, I was shocked how many women felt very moved. **There were many women who thanked me for having seen something that touched them in some way, that something had happened in them that they were not fully aware of.**

**I would like to stay with Japan for a while. Can you tell us a bit more about the artist's life there?**

Japan, as I mentioned, is a cosmic place and it took me some time to find myself here. I think it all started to come together when I decided I needed to have my own studio. Previously, I used the available workshop graphics studio. I felt that this was the right direction, but there was no such spontaneity and direct contact with the material. I knew I had to start experimenting a bit. I became so good, especially at screen printing, that I made up different challenges for myself. But I also knew that it would be difficult for me to do that if I didn't have my own space. Tokyo, Japan in general is not a place to support artists. This is certainly a huge contrast compared to what is happening, for example, in London. I met friends who already had their eye on a place and we rented the whole building together. It is a small space in East Tokyo. The moment we created this place was the moment I felt that everything looked the way I wanted it to be. First of all, I feel that my work has developed very much and this has certainly had a positive impact on my self-esteem and belief that this is the way to go. In addition, downstairs we have a small space that can be a gallery, a meeting place. I figured since I have a place like this, I'd like to give something to the other girls too - something I didn't have when I came here. **Hence the idea to create the ONA Projekt Room, which aims to support women or people who identify as women.** Everything is done in the form of POP-up exhibitions organized once a month. With this place, I want to open fields for dialogue, conversation and asking questions. He wants it to be a place where you can not know something - have an exhibition without knowing all the answers. Where can you get dirty, because it may also be so specific to Japan that in many galleries you can't, for example, drill holes in the walls. In general, there are many things that cannot be done, there are many restrictions. That is why I am happy that I can co-create a space that is exactly the opposite of this phenomenon - it allows for discourse and spontaneity. **I feel I'm in the right place. I have a space where I can develop and create, but also support other artists.**



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*Intuitive  
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**Your latest series, currently presented at Pilipczuk Gallery, is inspired by Japanese literature. Can you elaborate on your inspirations in general?**

It's a mix of different things I read. Indeed, written things have a very strong influence on me - both literature, poetry and essays. **I'm not a Japanophile, but the fact of being here makes the local threads closer to me.** They are simply more understandable, and therefore interesting. Earlier, I had an exhibition that was inspired by Japanese mythology and the local myth of the creation of the world. I am fascinated by drawing different threads from what is happening around me. These are mainly topics that somehow break the stereotypical way of thinking. I think that mythology or poetry are perfect examples of how nothing is black and white. **Mythology as a way of describing the world, creating various characters based on people, shows how multidimensional we are and - depending on different situations - we simply change.** So these are definitely topics that are very close to me and automatically bring me closer to nature, with its constant change and specific energy.

**And when it comes to visual arts, do you have an artist that is particularly important to you?**

I don't have any artists that inspire me, but **I will never forget the first time I saw the works of Louise Bourgeois and how much they moved me.** Besides, the works of Marlene Dumas and Tracey Emin are important to me. Japanese artists, in turn: Ikko Tanaka and Tadanori Yokoo. And of course Hilma af Klint.

**Looking at your works from recent years, one can notice a certain tendency that brings them closer to the assumptions of organic abstraction. Is that the direction you want to go now?**

Yes. Definitely. It also has some element of my transformation - a very strong attention to what is happening around. As if I had already satiated with all this inside, she suddenly opened her eyes and saw how much we are a part of nature, which for me is strongly connected with the body. On the one hand, the body is beautiful, but on the other - disgusting. **It's the same with nature - it's beautiful but also cruel, it kills and it creates.** Recently, I also started experimenting with dyes from plants. It's amazing to me how many things we don't know are in nature. Things that we have already forgotten are a huge treasury of knowledge. This spectrum of colours can be really very large without using any chemicals, any toxic stuff. **I am fascinated by it - such an intimate contact with nature.**

**Let's expand on the technique of your works. It cannot be closed in a specific framework - there is both painting, drawing and - perhaps above all - workshop graphics.**

I think the mix of techniques accurately reflects my approach to life and my way of seeing the world. That we are not one dimensional. I have long learned to see it not as a disadvantage, but as an asset. In the world of art - probably as in every field - we like to label that someone is a painter, someone is a sculptor, and someone else is a graphic artist. Our brain just likes to simplify everything, so my way of working and embracing all my techniques is extremely satisfying for me. It's the use of all the things I've learned, feel good about, and find interesting. I try to combine elements of workshop graphics with painting, drawing or using an airbrush. It is searching for my own voice, an individual way of working. I really like to create on paper, which is probably also due to the fact that my background is in workshop graphics. For me, paper is something that opens up great possibilities. There are different types of papers. They have different textures that behave differently under the influence of human action. It's like talking to the material and getting the most intriguing out of it. I use screen printing mainly for background printing, obtaining gradation, which I use very often in my works. It is a relationship between what is flat, even perfect, and what is hand-painted.

In all this you can see the nature of these techniques that combine - like it or not. This is what interests me and makes me want to experiment and try.

**By choosing this way of creating, you must have everything perfectly planned? There is no room for chance here – what does the planning process look like?**

Contrary to appearances, workshop graphics give room for uncertainty and ignorance. I begin my ideas in a sketchbook, these are very loose and sometimes ugly sketches. I create them quickly using mainly watercolours and later I think about the order and what effect I want to achieve. I cut all the elements by hand, which gives some elements of inaccuracy and then I put these things in order. I use the computer to support colours and sometimes composition decisions. I treat it as a quick checking tool. It is important whether it prints on paper that is white or on a material that has a colour. This of course affects the final effect, as I have already planned the shapes imposed by screen printing. Then I know where I will go with an airbrush and finish with pastels or crayons.

**And what are your nearest plans?**

I try to function and live in such a way that I feel that I am constantly developing. Before, I worked a lot with ceramics, but during the pandemic it was impossible. Now I'm back to it. **My dream is simply to have my own kiln and my own place to make ceramics, so that I can delve even deeper into this topic.** I would like to have an environment to be able to create, to have a chance to continue to participate in various projects and constantly develop.



Ewelina Skowrońska in her studio. Photo by Maciej Komorowski