

Interrogating sveta Dorosheva



- How are you, Sveta? Glad to have you in our Mag!

- Thank you for inviting me©

- How, where, when, and why.

I come from Zaporozhye, currently a large industrial city in Ukraine, but at that time – part of the Soviet Union. I belong to the generation lost between two epochs – we've caught the tail of the decaying Soviet era, but the formation years fell on the time when 'there was nothing', complete chaos and disintegration of ideologies, countries and mentalities... If you were a teenager and didn't understand what was happening, no one could explain it to you, because grown-ups were confused, depressed and disoriented. They say my generation is very flexible and independent, can accept any change almost indifferently. Not sure, but flexibility is there.

When I graduated school, I wanted to study art, but that meant going away to another city and leaving on my own, and neither my parents nor I were sure at that time, that I could do that. It was a hell of a mistake, as it turned out later, but I did not insist on going and entered the local university. I majored in languages and literature. That was when I started to draw a lot, because studies were very, very boring, and also I noticed that when I draw I remember things by heart automatically. Until this day, if I need to remember or understand something really well, I just put the audio on, while drawing and it settles down effortlessly. I made a point with my husband about not retelling me movies while I am drawing...

After I graduated I was offered a translator's job in Kiev. The following years I worked as an interpreter, simultaneous translator (worst job of my life), personal assistant, journalist, and print designer. I continued to draw 'as a hobby', but thought I wanted a 'more creative' career, so I moved to advertising. I spent 7 years in a large network agency, and worked as a designer, art director and finally, creative director. And quit at the top of my career into 'nowhere'.

It's a hard time explaining to anyone why you quit from a top manager's position, where everybody loves you and wants to give you money and fame. Now, after five years of effort, it wouldn't look so lame, but at the time arguments like "This is not mine. I think I want to illustrate books" sounded ridiculous.

Also, while I was maturing to some decisions, life made them for me – I was pregnant with our second son. At that time, it seemed that the whole life was going 'elsewhere', so we decided it wouldn't make much difference if we moved to another country to be closer to parents and get some help with the kids (my parents moved to Israel when I was in the university).

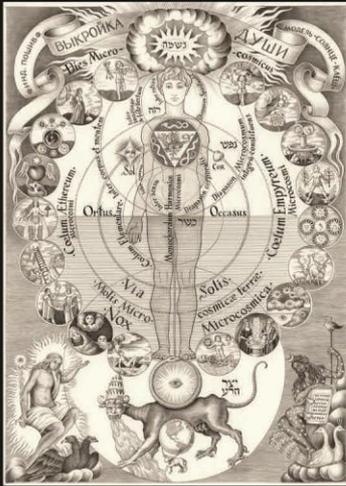
It's easier to start something new when everything is new©. Here I started to realize the life-long dream of making drawing my work. What, with small kids, it takes longer to find one's bearings in a new sphere, but all in all, I am very happy.

- You are an artist who carries two worlds within you: Ukraine and Israel. What is it like to an Ukrainian to produce art in Israel? How do those worlds merge in your drawing?

As I was saying, I belong to the generation that has a problem with traditions – during all of my younger years, everything was a complete havoc, change was happening permanently in all spheres of life. So, I wouldn't say I carry some authentic Ukrainian tradition, leaving alone Jewish. Also, I can't say I am very tied to Israel in terms of work. I get commissions from all over the world, I am not really working on the local market. So far I am even clueless about the local publishing business. But then, I am currently illustrating a book that spins off Jewish traditional literature. It's a lot of fun, and I am doing a lot of investigation into Jewish tradition and culture along the way (extremely interesting!)

- What do you usually read? Is there any text you always wanted to illustrate and never got the opportunity?

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To my regret, I haven't been reading a lot for the last years. I work in the morning, while kids are at school and kindergartens. From noon on, I am with them. I avoid reading in the evening for fear of falling asleep, because after kids go to bed, I have my second shift of precious drawing time. And the only time that I do read is right before sleep – at 3 a.m. or so. It seldom lasts longer than 10 minutes☺ If I am grabbed by a book, it ruins my work, which does happen from time to time. Because then I read instead of working on my morning drawing hours...

And yes, there are books which I dream of illustrating. I call them 'retirement books', meaning that when I am old and gray and sleepless and toothless and with loads of time at my disposal, I will put these first on my priority list (which is a very bad plan, I know, but so far - so good). These are: Francois Rabelais "Gargantua and Pantagruel", E.T.A. Hoffman's fairy tales (especially "Golden Pot" and "Devil Elixir"), and Gustav Meyrink's short stories, or maybe, his "Angel of the West Window". I'll start with Hoffman.

- How does it feel to be someone who graduated in literature and suddenly see yourself as a visual artist? Tell us more about that literary period of your life.

It feels very bad. I have regretted the choice of education ever since and am continuing to regret it every day. I feel the lack of academic training in art very acutely, and I have tried to correct that mistake a number of times, but at some point it got really weird: every time I plan on belated entering in an art academy, I got pregnant (no kidding! The coincidence is almost scary – three attempts – three kids!). I am still trying to patch up my gaps in education – mostly by self-learning (long, tedious, frustrating), short-term training (better, but insufficient and superficial), and learning from other artists individually (precious, but hard to get). As for the literary period, I had one, but it wasn't at the university. I wrote a book some years ago (and illustrated it). It's called "The Nenuphar Book" and it's written by fairy creatures about people.



illustration from the book "What is a man".

The book has been going through the excruciating process of print book crisis together with the publisher ever since, but I do hope it gets published some time. The point is, when I just wrote it and started to contact publishers, they mostly said the illustrations were wonderful, but the text eh... So I started to investigate into writing, read loads of books on writing, and discovered literature from a whole new perspective. I was literary amazed at how much work real writing is. I was so naïve thinking that writing is... well, you just invent something and write it down. Oh my, so stupid. So, I rewrote the whole thing, and even if the book never gets published, I am grateful to this experience for teaching me a lot about literature and writing (much more than in the university, by the way).

- Do your sons like your drawings? What do they say about it?

Ummm, I am not sure... Their reactions are so different. I generally think that my senior son (9 years old) is rather indifferent to what I am doing. He is slightly frustrated that I am not a comics artist, don't draw robots and transformers and fights, or something like 'Mr. Giantpants Vs. Pinktentacle'. Also, he thinks drawing naked women is disgusting, and drawing fairies and fairy tales is childish... But then recently he came from

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school and told me a story, full of suffering. They were cooking fortune cookies in class, and everyone had to write a secret wish on a piece of paper. "And I wrote 'I wish my mom to become the greatest artist on earth'" - says he. - "And then I am eating a cookie and suddenly feel something odd - I spat it out, and it's that piece of paper with a wish about you. So I thought somewhat and then swallowed it for the wish to come true." So, he's probably not as indifferent as I thought and after this sacrifice, you know... I am bound to become the greatest artist on earth, he's left me no choice©

My other son (5 years old) is rather taken by what I am doing. Every time he sees my drawing he exclaims "You know, Mom, you draw very well!" with such genuine surprise, that one might think he's just discovered the fact that I am drawing at all. Sometimes he asks me to tell him the story behind the drawing, which I do with pleasure.

My junior son (1,5 years old) is the most interested person on earth when it comes to my drawings, but his interest is dangerous. He craves to participate, and he is not fooled by me, drawing with him - he wants THAT piece of paper - the one I am working on, the one that's carefully guarded and securely stacked away from him.

- How do you manage to change between different styles? (for example, from The Alchemyst to Dancing Class). Is it a progressive thing from one to another, or you can manage to "change the key" and simply do otherwise?

Interesting question. I thought of that many times myself. You are perfectly right - I can feel these two styles or moods living paralleled inside (I've named them 'mysterious' and 'flippant'). And I switch between them, when I am tired from one of them.

- How is your process of planning the picture? All of your works are highly detailed, even with so many different styles, so how do you build your scene? Do you make decisions on the way, or think about it all beforehand?

Both. Generally, I do try to think of everything beforehand. But it seldom turns out the way I planned. Except maybe composition, all the decisions are subject to change in the process.

I usually start with a written idea. I write all the ideas for this or that illustration. Then I do rough sketches for them. At this stage it is clear, which is best in terms of composition, idea, and my personal obsessions (some things are more interesting to draw than the others, and these 'obsessions' are different with different artists). Then I go to google images for everything in the



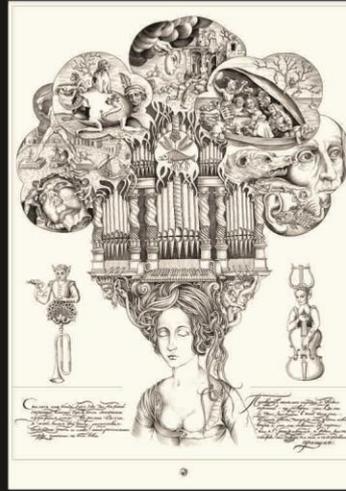
Idea Progress

picture that I do not know how to draw and collect references. Or contact the client for photos of a particular street or person, it depends... Then I do a detailed sketch, scan it and use my computer screen as a light screen to transfer it to the fair copy. If things go really well, the final sketch is the clean copy.

- Who are your characters? Where do they come from?

Mostly from fairy tales, myth and weird science and beliefs of the middle ages. I read a lot of fairy tales when I was a kid. Later I wrote my thesis on fairy tales and mythology, when at the university. And much later, when fast internet became a common place, I was looking for something in one of the public online libraries and accidentally stumbled into medieval

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emblemata. And then illuminated manuscripts. And then bestiaries. And then alchemical tractates. And then... I couldn't stop. It went straight to the heart, like meeting a love of your life. I still remember that first encounter. I felt brittle, like spun glass. And I remember my first drawing after I discovered this whole new world. These were some of the best and fullest days of my life, although to an outsider it would probably look like 'nothing is happening - this person is silent all through the days, moody, broody, taking long walks and generally behaving like someone who's just learned some shocking news influencing her whole life'.

- Major influences, heroes?

Major influences have changed. At first I was influenced by art nouveau and deco artists. Then I fell in love with the golden age illustrators (Edmund Dulac and Kay Nielsen still being my favorites). And then (now) - middle ages and early renaissance. I just noticed my influences move in reverse direction through time. I'll probably dig petroglyphs next.

And yes, there are heroes. Dürer is my superstar.

Also, I hold a personal inner Mount Olympus, inhabited by modern day book illustrators, whom I treat as celestials: Olga and Andrej Dugin, Kirill Chelushkin, Gennady Spirin, Lev Kaplan, Rebecca Dautremer, Lisbeth Zwerger, Shaun Tan... to name a few. I actually think we are living in the second 'golden age' of book illustration, book crisis or no book crisis.

Oh yes, and then there is Codex Seraphinianus. Talking of heroes...

- What are you working on right now?

My current large project is illustrating "Ferocious Holyman" - the book by Dmitry Deitch (Russian author, also living in Israel), which spins off Jewish tradition - I've mentioned it before.

It's such a rich text in terms of illustration, and it's fun and mysterious and tricky - all at the same time. Most of my 'obsessions' are there - myth,



Weird medicine 1 and 2, illustrations from the book "Ferocious Holyman" written by Dmitry Deitch

fable, fantasy, beliefs, tradition, demons, angels and tricksters, humor, beauty, and things weird and wonderful.

- Is there something you always wanted to answer and nobody ever asked you?

Cunning question! Generally, I am a person of questions rather than answers. But yes. I wish someone would ask me if I would like to do some art for a Tim Burton movie, and mean it:)