

PARK



ART & CULTURE

Art with purpose: how community, charity, and healing projects shape a new generation of socially-engaged artists

Park Avenue

By Kim Shaylor, Art Curator and Founder at Gone Rogue London, well known for curating

contemporary art in unconventional spaces

Over the past decade, the role of contemporary art has undergone a quiet but decisive shift. No longer confined to galleries as an object of contemplation alone, art is increasingly expected to engage with the realities shaping public life: displacement, social fragmentation, environmental anxiety and collective trauma. What has emerged is a growing field of purpose-driven practice, where artistic value is measured not only by formal innovation, but by emotional resonance and social consequence.

This development does not signal a dilution of artistic standards. On the contrary, it demands greater precision, ethical awareness and conceptual clarity from artists. The most compelling socially engaged practices are those that resist didacticism and instead operate through empathy, subtlety and sustained involvement. Ukrainian-born visual artist Liudmyla Akhonina represents this evolving approach, offering a practice that situates emotional connection as a core artistic criterion rather than an auxiliary outcome.

Art as a Social Act, Not a Social Slogan

A defining characteristic of socially engaged art today is its rejection of overt messaging. Rather than presenting solutions or declarations, artists increasingly work through lived relationships, shared experiences and small-scale gestures that accumulate meaning over time.

Akhonina's perspective reflects this ethos. She frames art as inherently social—not because it addresses specific issues, but because it exists within human exchange. For her, the decisive question is not whether a work aligns with a trend or ideology, but whether it genuinely touches feeling. This emphasis on emotional truth over formal alignment places her within a lineage of artists who view art as a catalyst for inner movement rather than public persuasion.

Such a position is particularly relevant in an era saturated with visual content. Emotional credibility, rather than novelty alone, has become a scarce and valuable resource.



Community as Medium: The London Portrait Project

One of the most illustrative examples of art functioning as social infrastructure can be found in

Akhonina's charitable portrait project at a North London primary school. Initiated after her displacement to the UK, the project did not frame refugee experience as subject matter. Instead, it embedded artistic labour directly into a local social ecosystem that had offered safety and continuity.

By creating watercolour portraits of schoolchildren—later exhibited within the school and gifted to their families—Akhonina transformed portraiture into an act of recognition. The work bypassed institutional mediation and entered domestic life, becoming part of family memory rather than cultural consumption. The lasting presence of these portraits in parents' everyday digital spaces speaks to the quiet durability of such gestures.

This model of engagement highlights an important shift: socially engaged art is no longer defined by visibility or scale, but by intimacy and trust.



Art in Spaces of Vulnerability: Hospitals

and Healing

The question of art's role in therapeutic environments remains contentious, often oscillating between decoration and instrumentalisation. Akhonina's hospital-based contributions offer an alternative framework—one in which art does not claim to heal but creates emotional conditions conducive to resilience.

Her large-scale painting *Summer Day*, donated to Ukraine's largest children's hospital through a charitable initiative, was conceived as a visual refuge: a space of warmth, light and relational calm. Installed in a leukaemia ward, the work functioned over time as a quiet companion to treatment rather than a symbolic intervention. The later destruction of the hospital during the war only underscored the painting's role as a cultural witness to care, vulnerability and loss.

Here, art operates not as an accessory to medicine, but as an ethical presence—one that acknowledges suffering without aestheticising it.

Collective Action and Cultural Memory

Akhonina's participation in nationally recorded charitable initiatives, including the project featuring her abstract work *Borscht*, situates her practice within a broader cultural effort to normalise philanthropy and collective responsibility in post-Soviet contexts. The project's registration by the World Academy of Science, Education, Culture and Arts reflects how artistic contribution can function simultaneously as cultural memory and civic gesture.

What is notable here is the balance between individuality and collectivity. While each artist retained a distinct voice, the project foregrounded shared intention over personal visibility—a principle increasingly relevant in discussions about ethical authorship in contemporary art.

Institutional Recognition Without Compromise

One persistent misconception is that socially engaged practice exists in opposition to institutional success. Akhonina's trajectory challenges this assumption. Her selection as a finalist at Wales Contemporary and the Art Shopping Expo at the Carrousel du Louvre demonstrates that emotional depth and technical clarity remain highly valued within professional curatorial contexts.

Curatorial feedback from Paris highlighted her command of colour, atmosphere and narrative

coherence—qualities that consistently drew sustained viewer attention in a highly competitive exhibition environment. Such recognition suggests that socially grounded practice can enhance, rather than limit, international artistic visibility.



Why Purpose-Driven Art Now Belongs at the Centre

As cultural institutions reassess their social responsibilities, artists who operate at the intersection of aesthetic rigour and human engagement are becoming increasingly central to contemporary discourse. Purpose-driven practice is no longer peripheral, nor is it confined to community contexts alone. It represents a recalibration of artistic value—one that acknowledges emotional labour, relational ethics and cultural contribution as markers of excellence.

Liudmyla Akhonina's work exemplifies this recalibration. Her practice demonstrates how art can move fluidly between schools, hospitals, conservation initiatives and major international exhibitions without losing coherence or integrity. In doing so, it offers a compelling model for how contemporary artists can respond meaningfully to fractured realities—without abandoning artistic

ambition.


In an age defined by displacement and uncertainty, art that rebuilds emotional connection may well prove to be one of the most enduring cultural forms we have.



Those wishing to experience Akhonina's work live can do so on [March 8th](#) at Broadworks Gallery in London, where her painting *Flamenco Dance* has inspired a flamenco performance created especially for the exhibition. The event will include a live dance show *Migrants*, a drawing and

photography session, and an open exchange between artists. This evening offers a rare opportunity to witness how her visual language extends beyond the canvas into embodied, communal experience.

ARTWORKS INSPIRED BY
Frida Kahlo®
 PASIÓN POR LA VIDA®



LUST FOR LIFE
 20 - 22 March

20 March 6:30 - 8:30 pm - Private View
 21 March 1-4 pm - Workshop Event
 22 March - 12-4 pm Open Hrs.

Marianne Frank, Chris Racher, Harinder Sahota, Jennifer Creek, Michael Granite, Marcin Krupa
 Esperanza Gomez-Carrera, Nicola Weir, Panna Chauhan, Angelina Moonstar, Val Racher
 Cheryl Sturge, Anne Mulkeen Murray, Marianne Sturtridge, Agita Janusevska
 Liudmyla Akhonina, Judy Sale, Christine Roychowdhury, Barbera Babiloni

The Chapel
St. Margaret's House
 21 Old Ford Rd.
 Bethnal Green E2 9PL




Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



art ask agency



the HUMIN LEGACY PROJECT



FLY ART



the artists' pool

← How to Choose the Right Custom Home Builder in 2026

Zelym Kotsoiev - gold medalist at the 2024 Olympic Games in the under 100 kg →
category

You May Also Like

LATE ORDER PLACEMENT



Mistakes Teams Make When Ordering Rings and How to Avoid Them





Gabrielle's Angel Foundation Youth Committee





Libby Klein's Journey Through Motherhood, Art & Heritage



Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Contact Us

Contact Us

Phone : 917.599.7289

Email : info@parkmagazineny.com

Address:

143 West 81st Street

NY, NY 10024

Footer First Menu

Disclaimer

Privacy Policy

Terms and Conditions

Contact Us

Social Media

Social Media

Social Media



Park Media Kit

Request Park Media Kit



