

When I was 18, my father and I took a train ride from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to Moscow, Russia, retracing the ancient Silk Road. We were traveling to Moscow so that I could compete for an art scholarship at the Moscow University of Art. We traveled for 4 days, over nearly 2000 miles, passing the mountains of Kyrgyzstan, the fields of Uzbekistan, the steppes of Kazakhstan, and the numerous forests of Russia. I was mesmerized not only by the changing landscape in front of me, but also by the appearance of the people that I observed through the train's windows. Glimpses of a joyful young girl walking with watermelons on a dusty road, a lonely old man selling dry, salty fish near the arid Aral Sea, camels walking in the desert, and grandmas with warm potato pirozkas near the train stations, all merged into one long, continuous cinematic image, like an endless Mongolian song. All the people that I spotted were so distant from me, but so intriguing for the stories and lives that each of them represented. My journey to Moscow at 18, and my later emigration from Russia to the United States, have made me think about all the other people who have undertaken an odyssey, relocating from home to a new and unknown land.

In my new work, I have recreated the impression of a train going on a long journey, but in this instance, the journey is through the time of human memory. My new series is connected structurally by format, as though the images were being seen through the curved windows of a real train. Within these evocative frames, the images appear in different focus and viewpoint, sometimes framed by the landscape of passing nature. As with my earlier work, in this new series, I'm depicting the relationship between the natural world and human history.

I work from old photographs, studying images of people from varying countries and time periods. Looking at their faces through the filter of time and retrospection, I see human beings swept by larger forces, each of them a very small part of the bigger world; like leaves on a tree, they move together, driven by the passing wind. In the end, all human temptations and ambitions, their conflicts and disagreements are wiped out by the wind and covered by fallen leaves, and nature takes over. I work with paper, ink and iridescent paint. The fluidity of the ink helps me to be both expressive and precise in revealing the contours of the trees, the fragility of leaves, and the details of the silhouetted figures I paint. I use metallic and iridescent mediums to push the boundaries of a flat surface, creating a shimmering atmosphere that evokes the diffuse quality of memory and suggests passing time. Through juxtapositions that contrast light with darkness, and transparency with opacity, my colors and brush marks gradually accumulate into characters and images that tell the story of human struggle and nature at rest. Ultimately, I feel as if my work has no beginning and no end; I am simply capturing and recreating the continuum of human history with ink marks on white paper.