

Ali Kursun: Painting From The Heart

Revisiting Art's Instinctual Power

Written by Sylvia Walker

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Ali Kursun—born in 1967 in Istanbul, Turkey, and who is residing and working in Geneva, Switzerland—is a contemporary artist who works in painting and photography. He is best known for his sublime and monochromatic, often monumental, textured tableaux offering a profound interrogation into the textures and tempos of human emotion. Ali Kursun paints from the heart. Instinctive, emotive, interactive, and immersive. In this article, we have the pleasure of exploring the life and work of the Turkish-Swiss artist, discussing notions of space, sensory engagement, and the often-forgotten power of our human instincts in art.

Kursun's work is unabashedly intense, marked by a directness that seeks to bridge the gap between the artist's inner world and the viewer's perceptual reality. His paintings are deep wells of sensory engagement, each canvas a site where the visceral meets the visual. He harnesses a palette of techniques that defy the orthodox, embracing the spontaneity of tachisme, dripping, and soaking. Yet, his approach is less about the creation of images and more about the evocation of feelings, making his work critically relevant in today's landscape of contemporary art. It is to say that Kursun's narrative is not linear but layered. His canvases are dense with emotional content, reflecting his belief that art should not only be seen but felt. This philosophy resonates deeply in a contemporary art world that often privileges the intellectual over the instinctual. Kursun counters this trend, offering a visceral reminder of art's potential to touch the raw nerve of human experience.

Imagine standing in front of a colossal canvas, engulfed by a singular, enveloping hue. This isn't just a painting; it's an ocean of color, a monochromatic entity that swallows the viewer into its depths of various textures and subtle tonal shifts that dance across the surface. The

technique is raw and experimental—acrylic and ink intertwine in unexpected ways, creating effects that pulse with an almost tactile intensity. Here, the canvas transforms into a living entity, where the color breathes, shifts, and mutates under the artist's touch. Each color tells its own story. A deep blue doesn't just rest; it swirls and undulates, echoing the abyssal depths of the ocean or the velvet of a midnight sky. A fierce red crackles with the latent energy of a storm or the visceral pulse of a heartbeat. Even a stark white becomes a field of frost, whispers of gray and ivory revealing the contours of an unseen landscape.

These paintings demand not just viewing but experiencing. It asks you to lose yourself in color, to explore the nuances that lie within what might first appear as uniform. These paintings aren't just seen; they are felt, and their resonances feel deeper because of their monochromatic commitment. The artist's use of acrylic and ink isn't just a method—it's a manifesto, a bold declaration of how much can be communicated within the confines of a single color, elevated by texture and the artist's daring to experiment and push boundaries. His canvases are large, almost confrontational, demanding physical and emotional presence from his audience. This scale and technique are not chosen at random but are integral to his method of engaging the viewer. By forgoing traditional brushes in favor of trowels, knives, and even pieces of carpet, Kursun's application of material to the surface becomes a performative act, each stroke a manifestation of emotion in its most tangible form.

Supporting his dominant painterly practice, we also encounter a series of photo-based works with his *Pull* series (2019-2021). The series in question stands as a defiant celebration of abstraction in contemporary photography. With these colossal works, each measuring 180 x 120 cm both in portrait and landscape orientations, Kursun not just captures but commands the viewer's attention, turning the act of viewing into a full-bodied experience. The effect is cinematic yet intensely personal. As the colors flow and merge, they seem to dance, almost alive, captured in a moment of transformation by Kursun's lens. These photographs transcend being photographs, feel painterly, and, in the end, they become events and experiences. Printed on acrylic glass plates, these images achieve an almost sculptural quality, mirroring the depth and texture we might expect from his paintings. This choice of the medium is crucial. The acrylic glass does not only carry the image; it enhances it, adding a layer of depth that is both literal and metaphorical.

The content of these photographs is a lush palette of colors, swirling across the frame in a choreography of hues that feel almost liquid in their motion. The colors bleed into one another, yet each retains its identity, creating a dynamic tension that is the hallmark of great abstract art. These are not static images; they are visual symphonies that play on the themes of movement and transformation. Kursun's use of abstraction is particularly poignant in a medium such as fine art photography, especially with AI lurking around the corner. He challenges this notion, pushing the boundaries of what photography can be and the genuine potential it has for abstraction. He asks us not just to look, but to see—not just at a picture, but into it.

In essence, Kursun's works are like visual poetry—rich, complex, and deeply moving. They are a testament to the power of abstraction and its ability to communicate emotions and ideas that transcend the limitations of language. Each piece, a portal into the abstract, challenges, and delights, urging us to explore the depths of our own imaginations.



Ali Kursun's studio in Geneva, Switzerland.

Through a series of exhibitions over the past thirteen years, Kursun unfolds this narrative that delves into intuition, unspoken truths, and the temporal dimensions of human experience, articulating a complex and deeply resonant exploration of how unseen forces sculpt our perceptions and interactions. Commencing with his seminal *Stubborn* (2011) exhibition at Athénée Gallery in Geneva, Kursun critically interrogated unknown and unacknowledged barriers that obstruct our understanding and communication. This initial engagement with the voids in our collective knowledge set the stage for a deeper, sustained inquiry into the cognitive foundations that underlie human behavior. The *Heartbeats* (2012) exhibition extended this thematic inquiry, where Kursun explored the essential rhythms that animate our emotional lives. Each work in this collection emerged as a celebration of the pulses that operate both as the literal and metaphorical heartbeat of existence, thus linking the concept of life's rhythm to the broader emotional spectrum—a theme he continued to probe in subsequent works.

With the *Soulmates* (2013) exhibition and series of works, Kursun transitioned from the physical to the metaphysical realm, exploring the profound connections that define and transcend human relationships. This exhibition broadened the conventional definition of soulmates to encompass not only people but also places, objects, and ideas, reflecting his belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms and experiences. The following year, in *Unspoken* (2014), Kursun revisited the theme of implicit communication, illuminating the myriad ways in which our deepest sentiments and truths circumvent conventional language. This series underscored the tacit, often unnoticed exchanges that structure our relationships and mutual understanding, reinforcing his ongoing fascination with the layers of human interaction.



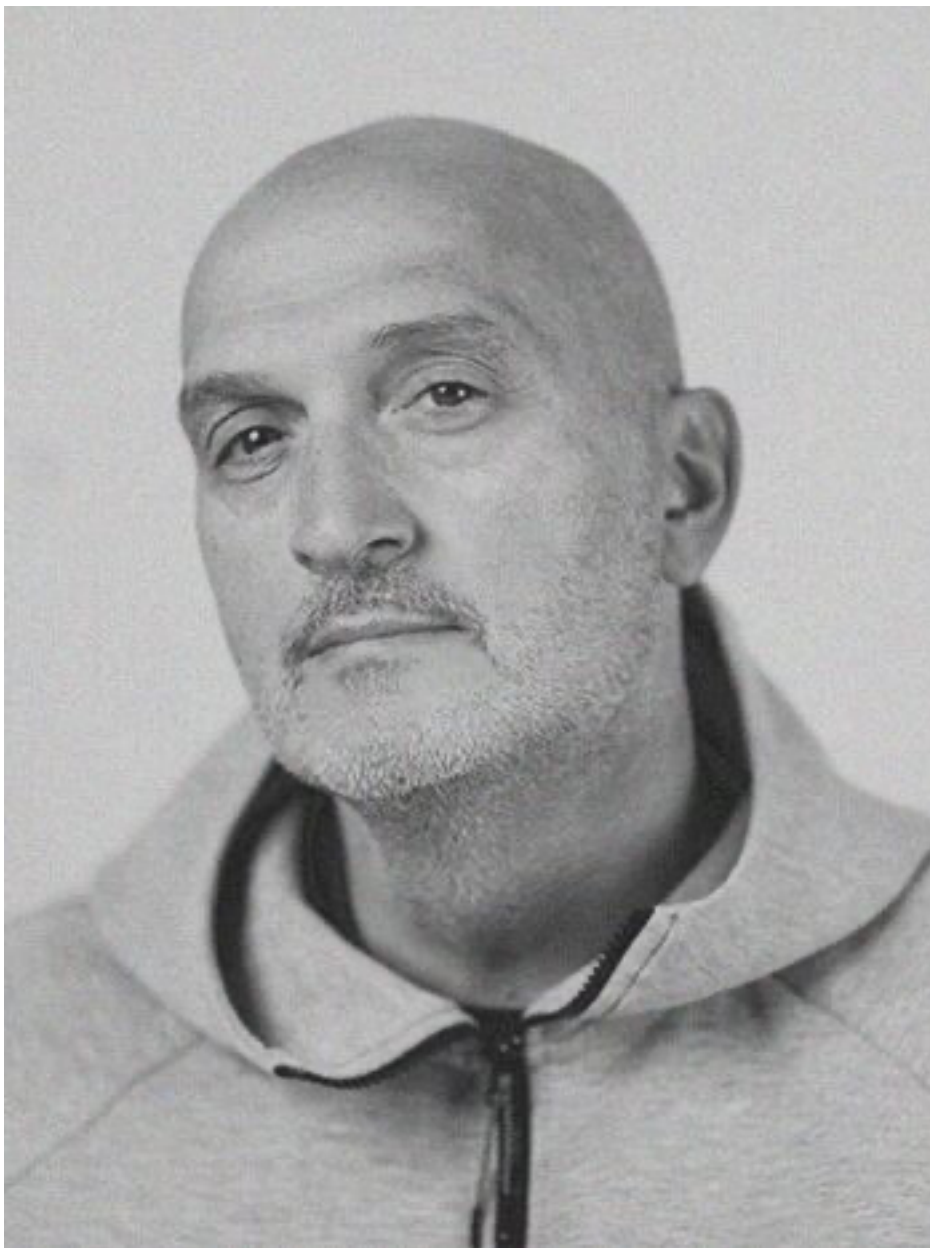
Installation view of Ali Kursun at Saatchi Gallery StART Fair (2023) in London, the United Kingdom.

Timeless Moments (2015) continued this exploration into the ephemeral yet profound instances that escape the linear constraints of time, proposing a continuum where moments of deep connection and understanding cyclically recur and resonate. Here, Kursun's canvases served as reminders of the fleeting yet enduring moments that stitch together the continuum of human experience. In *Unbelievable Truths* (2016) he addressed the assumptions and intuitive leaps that underpin our belief systems, challenging the audience to acknowledge the foundational yet often invisible beliefs that frame our realities. This exhibition invited a deeper contemplation of the constructs of our personal and collective truths.

In 2019, the *Irresistible* series delved into the dominant stimuli and thoughts that shape our psyche, driving our behaviors and molding our identities. This exploration extended his inquiry into the unseen, potent forces that influence us, emphasizing the interplay between consciousness and the irresistible subconscious currents that propel our actions. Most recently, Kursun's participation in the StART Art Fair at the Saatchi Gallery (2023) marked a significant phase, bringing his thematic explorations into a global dialogue. This international platform underscored how Kursun's themes resonate universally, highlighting the shared human experiences that his works evoke across cultural and geographical boundaries.

Looking ahead to the *You* (2024) collection, Kursun is poised to further these explorations into the complexities of self-identity. He promises to synthesize his recurrent themes into a focused

investigation of internal dialogues. This forthcoming exhibition aims to encourage viewers to confront and unravel the layers of their own identities, deepening the participatory nature of his artistic inquiry. Through this sequence of thematic exhibitions, Ali Kursun's oeuvre stands as a vibrant testament to the power of art as a tool for reflection, connection, and understanding. Kursun doesn't simply display art in his shows; he creates environments. These environments invite the viewer into a dialogue with the artwork, prompting a kind of introspection that is both rare and precious. His paintings do not merely document a journey into human emotion and perception; he revisits and reshapes the often-forgotten and almost instinctive power of art by painting from the heart.



The Turkish-Swiss artist achieved an MA at Webster University in Geneva, Switzerland. Notable exhibitions include the *StART Art Fair* (2023) at Saatchi Gallery in London, the United Kingdom; exhibition *Irresistible* (2019) in Geneva, Switzerland; *Unbelievable Truths* (2016) in Geneva, Switzerland; *The Other Art Fair* (2015) in London, the United Kingdom; *Timeless Moments* (2015) in Geneva, Switzerland; *Unspoken* (2014) in Geneva, Switzerland; *Soulmates* (2013) in Geneva, Switzerland; *PA(F) NYC* (2012) in New York, the United States of America; *Heartbeats* (2012) in Geneva, Switzerland; *Parallax* (2012) in London, the United Kingdom; *Stubborn* (2011) in Geneva, Switzerland; among others. His work has been featured in the 10th issue of *The Flux Review Magazine* (2024), a video presentation of *The Art Exhibitions Magazine* (2023), in an issue of *The Uptown Style Magazine* (2020), online features in Saatchi's online editorial (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017), an artist interview in *Dipnot Magazine* (2015), and more.

For more information, please visit www.alikursun.com