



“Dryads”—Portrait of Daria and Kambriel as Art Nouveau sisters

KAMBRIEL

The illustrated conjurings of

DARIA HLAZATOVA

Interview by Kambriel

Like her art, Daria is capable of magic. Paper is her cauldron, and pens are her wands. With these, she summons worlds wherein each person inhabits an infinite kingdom of which they become the prophetess, the king, the muse. All-seeing eyes guide, witness, and protect—animals are free to soar, wishes come true, and there is always a glorious strain of music floating somewhere distantly in the air...

What does a piece of blank paper represent to you?

DH: It is one of the most beautiful and luring things in the world, and also, no matter what size it is, it feels enormous, like space. In space you can't see what's going on at once. Only if you explore it, you can find planets, stars, etc. Blank paper has a similar effect on me: I can see its potential and in my mind's eye it can be absolutely anything. Another metaphor for a blank piece of paper is the beginning of the day, when I wake up and start creating my life; I have a choice of whether to smile first thing in the morning or feel grumpy, I fill my day with whatever I want depending on circumstances, and I may as well leave it empty and unused. For me, starting something is the most inspiring thing, like looking forward to Christmas, or your birthday as a child. It's the magic of anticipation of expressing yourself, but it is more exciting when you have faith in yourself and your work, as well as the discipline to finish what you started.

The theme of this issue is Art Nouveau, an art movement dating back to the Belle Epoque that celebrates the elegance of nature and feminine mystique. Are there parts of the Art Nouveau aesthetic that spark your imagination or naturally align with your own work?

DH: In Art Nouveau I have always been attracted to architectural elements and shapes. Growing up in a town that long ago used to be a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire, I was exposed to little bits of Art Nouveau style here and there: from stained glass on doors to beautiful staircases and tiles. This was my first, rather unconscious encounter with this beautiful style. Although my visuals, as I see them, are mainly inspired by Slavic folk art which is in my DNA, I have to say that I proudly share the same love for beauty as Art Nouveau artists and Pre-Raphaelites did. My goal has always been to celebrate beauty, to help open eyes wider and notice more with my drawings.

Where do you find enchantment?

DH: I am guilty of overusing the word “magic” but I don't believe in fairies or magic dust; I believe in hard work and that's real magic for me. Working hard on exploring yourself and the world, improving, not clinging to things but dancing towards, flowing, swimming, running, flying, walking, sometimes crawling forward is the process in which I find enchantment.

I believe enchantment can be found in being curious and

observant as well as in the ability to never take people or things for granted. Science is magic, art is magic, people are absolutely magical mechanisms. There is some level of enchantment everywhere but we are all tuned in to perceive it on different levels. I am working towards the goal of detecting “magic” even in the strangest, most difficult situations and things, because I think it helps to live a fulfilled and happy life.

You are a linguist and speak several languages, do you count art as one of the languages you're able to use to communicate?

DH: Absolutely! And it is my favourite one, too, because it doesn't have complicated grammar rules haha! I know a lot of artists and illustrators are asked to explain the messages behind their works, but as you say, art IS a language, so it speaks for itself. It just presses the keys of imagination, not the letters on the keyboard. We all need communication even if it's one-way; humans wither when isolated. We need to express ourselves in many ways and receive messages of different shapes through different media. Everyone understands a hug or a kiss. Everyone understands music and art. You can communicate these things to anyone from any part of the world and they will understand in their own way and feel acknowledged, receive the message. It is very important, as it connects us all.

Recently you worked on a series of illustrations for all sorts of little day-to-day things people do for each other to show love. What are some favourite ways you like to let someone know they're loved?

DH: Too many to name and of course some of them are personal, but generally speaking I love giving and receiving and, I think, the ability to do both, as well as the lack of fear, is the fundamental basis for love. My currency in love is probably communication through different media. I love telling, writing and drawing “love”. I am also big on postcards. People who know me well and who are reading this will probably laugh, as I can totally get carried away with giving postcards, so if you are uncomfortable with that, don't share your mailing address with me! On a more serious note, love is about trust, and I always trust and believe that goodness will prevail in people, not out of naivety, but because hope and faith in the good are things that make us human and help us on our life journey. We all have our

bad sides, fears and insecurities, and often tend to focus on ours and other people's negative sides, so I try to magnify the good things, and praise them. I like when people do the same for me. I think it is the kindest way of co-existing together in harmony.

Who are some artists (of any kind!) you'd love to host a dinner & dance party for? What would you make for them to eat and what would some of the songs on your playlist be?

DH: I love this question! I would definitely invite David Bowie, maybe from the era when he was still single (if he ever was!) Haha! How about that? And no-one else. Jokes aside, I would love to invite people who would make a good company and wouldn't argue or get bored. David Hockney and his dogs, David Lynch and David Bowie; I think 3 Davids are enough, plus Michael Palin (of Mighty Boosh). If Vincent Van Gogh could come, he would be very welcome, too. I would make them Ukrainian borscht and courgette pancakes and I know they would love it. I think I'd also ask Sir Paul McCartney to sing and Kate Bush to dance. Would you like to join us? **(Of course! I'll bring everlasting flowers, the poppy seed magic cake you taught me to make, and dance with Kate while you're holding court with all of the Davids!)**

If anything were possible, what is something you'd love to change in the world?

DH: Even one small thing would lead to consequences in all spheres of life that might be both beneficial and harmful. So I think I would choose something neutral, such as for the humankind to be less judgemental (not less curious or questioning opinions and motives, but judging each other less) and listen to each other more. I think that would be possible if we were willing to learn more about people and cultures on this planet. So the practical answer to your question is to give everyone a chance to travel around the world and learn, as part of high school education, for example, during the final year at uni.

What is something you adore about the world and hope will continue to exist?

DH: The world itself!

You use a lot of surrealist symbolism in your art—eyes for example are an ever-present icon. What are some of the visual “signatures” you like to include in your work, and what do they represent to you?

DH: I only realised I used eyes so often, after someone had pointed that out to me and asked whether it was related to the fact that the root of my last name means “Eyes” in Russian. And then I realised that my brain intuitively created my own “signature”. But I love eyes in art, because they open the image. Eyes can be the most attractive feature in a person. I like the idea

of the viewer looking at the drawing and the drawing staring back, because, as I've said before, it's communication, a dialogue. My other often-used element is stars and that grew out of my love and fascination for Kubrick's 2001: Space Odyssey. This film struck me so much as a teenager, that I guess the tribute to it is now present in almost every drawing of mine that has a starry background. But also, the black night covered with stars is a reminder that we live not only in our room, city, country, continent, world, but in galaxy and space and we are part of the universe.

What is your favourite time of day?

DH: It depends on what I am doing. I used to like working late into the night (which is a very bad habit I had to quit!) or early in the morning when the atmosphere is not cluttered with noises, other people's thoughts, and the city's hustle and bustle.

What makes you happy?

DH: Finding happiness in unlikely places, wonderful coincidences, making someone happy, myself, some routine things, some extraordinary things, unity, harmony, love, dancing, music, food...

Do you ever get nervous before starting a new piece?

If so, how do you convince yourself to take that leap and begin?

DH: That nervousness is part of motivation for me, so I don't dwell on it and just do it. Just do it is a very good piece of advice, in fact, when we are afraid of doing something. If I have a difficult email to send or an unpleasant conversation to have, I switch off my feelings and thoughts and just do it.

If you could take a little vacation in one of your drawings, which one would you most like to find yourself in for a while?

DH: I think my drawings are all set in the same country, which is some sort of Midnight Daria Land haha! I actually suspect that's where I often go in my sleep, but one of my favourite drawings is Tonight, tonight! in which I would love to ride my unicorn.

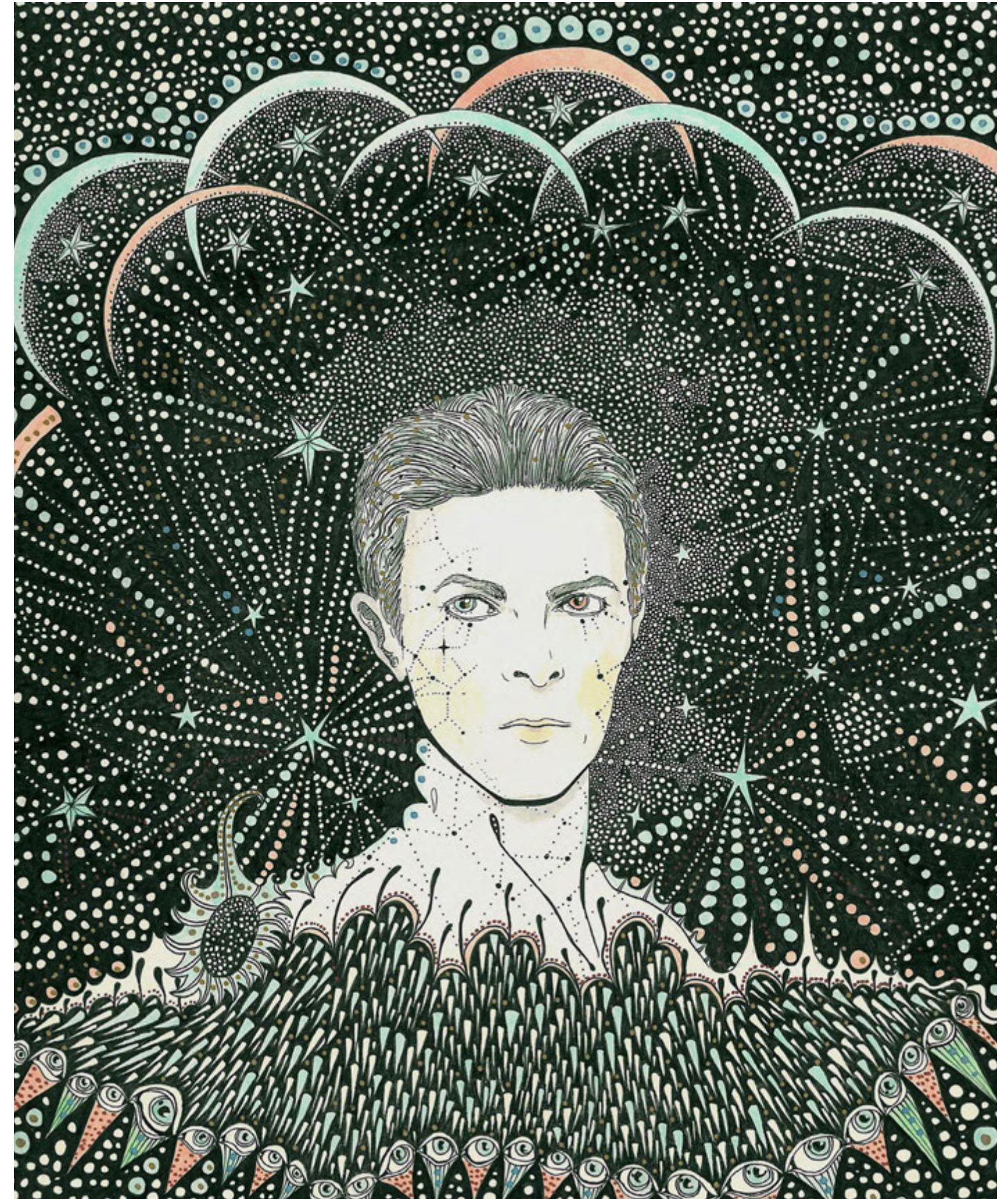
What do you like to think about in the quiet moments?

DH: I like to think about the quietness of the moment and how this moment is different from the moment before.

What do you think some of your more unexpected/surprising inspirations might be?

DH: The lack of opportunities and multitude of challenges. Funnily enough, it is in human nature to appreciate something that is hard to get and «to hunt» (the instinct I understand, but I wish we appreciated more what we have).

My work as an illustrator is very challenging. It was a difficult



“David Bowie”



“Alight”



“Aerial”

and risky step to decide to draw full-time for a living, because of the lack of opportunities for artists in Ukraine. We don't have a lot of services that are available to artists in many countries of the world. But I took a leap of faith and I think it was precisely the challenge that inspired me to do so. A blank piece of paper, a closed door, a mountain that I need to climb are the things that motivate me every day. Every day I solve a puzzle of how to do what I do, how to do it better, how to make my work seen, etc.

Growing up in the Soviet Union, are there any artists of the past you personally adore the work of, but think our readers might not be as familiar with?

DH: My favourite artist from childhood was Alexandre Benois, whose illustrated ABC I could look at every day. Alexandre Benois illustrated children's books, as well as painted and created set design and concepts for Russian theatre and ballet. Also, my family had an extensive collection of Russian traditional painted hohloma— a wood painting handicraft style and national ornament known for its vivid flower patterns, that may have had an influence on my work.

Did you have any favourite faerie tales as a child?

DH: Yes! My parents gave me a record of the fairy-tales by Astrid Lindgren and my favourite one was called Mirabelle, about a little girl who planted a magic seed and it grew into a flower with a beautiful doll inside.

What are some gifts you love to give?

DH: Besides time, attention, and pleasantly surprising people, I also love giving away my work, drawing for someone who means a lot to me; giving flowers to my friends and cooking for my loved ones.

What are some gifts you love to receive?

DH: Flowers, time, attention, compliments. I also absolutely love creative gifts, like music or art made for me. When I was a child my parents often hid little presents in our flat and gave me a puzzle to crack or a map to find them. I still enjoy challenges like that.

Make three wishes...

DH: To always be grateful and never take things for granted. To somehow improve the world or someone's life. To create something truly beautiful and inspiring that will last.

You can view more of Daria's art at dariah Lazarova.com.



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Kambriel's "Phoenix" violin, painted by Daria