

# The Yellow Brick Road

LYDIA JANSSEN's current art exhibition was inspired by a long and winding story – and a couple of sidesteps through COVID! We find out more about this Bali-based American artist.

Born in Michigan, Lydia received a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and pursued a dance career in New York City. A scholarship at the Merce Cunningham Studio School led her to perform with prominent modern dance troupes, though unfortunately her professional career was cut short by injury. Lydia then turned her focus fully to art. She studied at the University of Massachusetts before returning to New York to the Art Students League, where in her final year she won the prestigious Red Dot Award for Excellence in Painting.

Her current solo exhibition, Yellow Brick Road, is showing this month at REDSEA Gallery.

## What was your creative process in putting together this show?

I began this exhibition during COVID in 2020. That year, my family and I travelled between five countries in an attempt to get back to our home in Bali, and it was during that year where I started to investigate home as a concept, the psychology of space, and how one feels living a nomadic life. I began with small sketches, done on different tables, sitting in different chairs, in different places.

## Is there a painting from this exhibition that you enjoyed working on the most?

It's usually the last one, as it's the one I find the most challenging, and one I leave until the end. In this case, *The Rocking Horse* took me over a year to complete and took on many different personalities along the way. Ultimately, you must choose one and declare it's finished.





The Rocking Horse,  
2022, Oil and charcoal  
on linen, 200 x 330 cm

The Slight Swimmer,  
2022, Oil and charcoal  
on linen, 75 x 98 cm

### What led to you becoming an artist, and how did this impact your art?

I was always creative – from the very beginning I think my parents saw my different brain, my different way of approaching things and they encouraged it. I was a dancer all my life, having danced professionally in my 20's. A knee injury led to the end of my career and I turned all my creative energy to painting. There is no doubt that the largest inspiration behind all of my work is movement and my past as a dancer.

### What makes you feel at home? On the flip-side, how do you make a place feel like home if it doesn't?

I love to be surrounded by nourishing things, smells, art, people... over the years, we've collected art from friends and fellow artists and the joy these pieces bring me makes me feel at home. They act as nostalgic items full of mystery and memory. In terms of place, my parents' home during Christmas in Massachusetts especially, my in-laws in the south of England, and our home in Bali all calm my nervous system. Anywhere Luke and my kids are, of course. Finding a space within a place, even if it's a corner, that occupies only you, is something I try and find everywhere we travel, because if needed, you can make a home anywhere. Perhaps most of it is mindset then.

### What is your day-to-day life like as an artist?

I send my kids off to school at 7.30am, grab two takeaway coffees, then motorbike to my studio for 7.50am.

I leave for lunch around 12 and, depending on the state of a painting, I return after lunch or wait for the next day. My creative explosion time is early morning.

### How did your current art style come about?

*The Wizard of Oz* inspired this latest collection, and although I'm mostly known for my more abstract paintings, I felt I had to venture into a more figurative, childlike and almost surreal style for this one in order to properly convey the story.

### What's your favourite part of the art creation process?

Right at the very end, when I am marks away from the finish line, my heart usually starts beating faster and then I know it's done.

### How do you like to unwind from work?

I often describe the different personalities that an artist has by describing their hats... So, when I'm not painting, I usually have my parent hat on, as I have three kids. But art-making doesn't stop when you leave the studio; my art is a collection of things I experience in my life, some without my knowing it. It never stops really.

### What are some of your likes and dislikes, and how do these preferences affect your art?

I've always said that looking at work that you dislike is sometimes more impactful than only looking at work that pleases. I know when I dislike a work of art, and unless it's very obvious,

figuring out why is an interesting challenge and lesson. Right now, I'm really into photography highlighting both the mundanity and absurdity of everyday life.

### If you were to introduce your art to someone who wasn't familiar with it, what would you show them?

There are a few paintings that stand out as being a synthesis of my subject matters over the years. The painting *All the King's Horses*, in private collection in Singapore, depicts a horse-drawn carriage tumbling and trying to get up again, like Humpty Dumpty. Fairy tales are an inspiration for sure. In this collection, *The Slight Swimmer* I think ties in my old and new work nicely.

### What makes you happy in life?

Watching my children face the world, doing anything with my husband, daydreaming, having moments of reflection and space, good wine with good friends, looking at beautiful and challenging art, riding my motorbike in Bali, walking around London, seeing countries for the first time, eating dinners with our family abroad, knowing everyone I love is healthy.

### What's the best piece of advice you've been given, not just in art but in life?

Choose the right life partner, have grit, fall down, have a routine, see the world, ask questions.

### Lastly, what piece of advice would you give somebody who wants to make a living from art?

Make the decision that you will be an artist. Find the people that can help you along the way. Then, make that happen by surrounding yourself with all things art – read, see, explore, ask, move, find a space that is all yours, and create something every day.  $\alpha$

Lydia's exhibition is showing at  
REDSEA Gallery at Dempsey  
from 12 to 26 January. 6732 6711 |  
redseagallery.com