



# Yevgeniya Baras:

*"I have travelled to many ancient places out of the sheer desire to see them with my own eyes, but also so that I could experience that feeling of awe and humbleness as a dot on that long trajectory. Of course, that had an imprint on my work."*

[www.yevgeniyabaras.com](http://www.yevgeniyabaras.com)

text and interview by Christina Nafziger

Featured image:

Yevgeniya Baras  
*Untitled*  
oil on canvas  
20 x 16 inches



Yevgeniya Baras  
*Untitled*  
 oil on burlap  
 20 x 16 inches

Each painting created by artist Yevgeniya Baras is an exploration in meaning, material, and depth formed through her strong visual language. The materiality of each piece is an essential element of the artist's practice, which becomes evident upon inspection of her paintings' multifaceted surfaces. They are not just textured, but layered with a plethora of fascinating materials, not lacking in diversity or uniqueness. In this, a roughness is created that further traces the lines and forms that live within her work, leaving the compositions rich with a palpable physicality.

Baras rightfully refers to her work as a kind of "invocation", as each piece's symbol-like aesthetic conjures a thought, a message we are compelled to decipher. Influenced by ancient art history—which she of no coincidence teaches—her work often brings to mind the motifs and materials that perhaps might have been found on the wall of a cave. Baras explains that her most recent exhibition at the Landing gallery in LA, titled *Towards Something Standing Open*, draws influence from poetry. Join us as the artist shares with us her roots in art making, her experience after graduate school, and the way her practice reflects back on history and time.

*AMM: Where did your journey in artistic investigation begin?*

YB: I began learning to paint when I was six. That is when I became wired for becoming an artist. Not just by the formal lessons I was taking, but by learning the pleasure of being with the work. For hours I listened to records at home and painted. Storytelling is very important to me, maybe because I was read to from the beginning of my life. As a child, I preferred to narrate what was in my head on paper with painting and in gouache.

However, I think the most concentrated learning happened in the years after graduate school in New York when I did not have an artist community yet. I was encountering the city, with its plethora of culture and art to see; yet the only dialogue necessary to understand the information was occurring within me. I was still hearing the voices of my graduate professors in my head and was discerning which voices were valid and which voices needed to be silenced. I was trying to hear my own work and its needs by spending a lot of time alone in my studio. That is the time I began to recognize what it means to be an artist—the routes in the studio as well as what it means to lead a life as an artist, the fuller picture.



Yevgeniya Baras  
*Untitled*  
 oil on canvas  
 25 x 19 inches

*AMM: Congratulations on your recent solo show at the Landing gallery in Los Angeles! I love the exhibition title, "Towards Something Standing Open." What does this title reference?*

YB: "For a poem is not timeless. Certainly it lays claim to infinity. It seeks to reach through time. Through it, not above and beyond it. A poem is a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the - not always greatly hopeful - belief that somewhere and some time it can wash up on land on heartland perhaps. Poems in this sense too are underway: they are making toward something. Toward what? Toward something standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable. Through, toward an addressable reality."

This is a quote from a speech given by one of my favorite poets, Paul Celan. When I read it I thought about paintings and poems as a kind of invocation. They are porous creatures looking for someone to receive, to interpret, but they are also concerned with carrying the weight.

*AMM: Can you tell us about the work included in this show?*

YB: At the Landing there are 21 paintings, which are considering text,

short bilingual poems as well as notes occur on their surface. There are fringes that function as frames, hairs, macramé siblings and rug relatives. Some of these paintings I've worked on for years; they are each a kind of tightly wound universe. It is interesting to have an exhibition in a city in which you do not live because the paintings are out in the world humming somewhere and you cannot visit them. Also, the architecture of Los Angeles provides new issues for installation. I think the way my work is hugged by the vast space around it is quite lyrical. So much light and space there—my paintings are used to caves.

*AMM: Many of your paintings appear to have an aesthetic that harks back to prehistoric art or symbols found in ancient artifacts. Was this intentional?*

YB: There is a way one's life leads them back to their core concerns over and over again. I am interested in history, remembering, and lineage. I have travelled to many ancient places out of the sheer desire to see them with my own eyes, but also so that I could experience that feeling of awe and humbleness as a dot on that long trajectory. Of course, that had an imprint on my work.

Then, five years ago I began teaching ancient art history. I had to look at and speak about prehistoric art on a regular basis. The ancient lens



Image (top):  
Yevgeniya Baras  
*Untitled*  
oil on canvas  
20 x 16 inches

Image (bottom):  
Yevgeniya Baras  
*Untitled*  
oil on canvas  
20 x 16 inches

helps me think about time, reaffirmed and erased narratives, layers, the need to speak, cycles. It is one of the lenses through which I peek.

*AMM: You have a highly developed style that has a very textural aesthetic. What materials do you use in your work? Does your creative process happen directly on the canvas?*

YB: Some of my materials are found, some are inherited, and some are simply bought at an art store. Sometimes people close to me bring me materials as offerings. Sometimes I encounter a material that I have not touched before and the physical newness of the encounter gives me an opportunity to diverge in my process, serving as a fork in the road; a new problem to solve in as far as how that material can live in the painting. The physicality is important to my process. Touching materials and the process of transforming them leads me to understanding the image, which needs to occur on the surface of the paintings. I draw as well, but mostly directly on canvas.

*AMM: The surfaces of your paintings appear layered—almost sculptural. Has your work ever advanced into a three-dimensional form?*

YB: I do think of my objects as paintings in relief. There was a very brief moment eight years ago when I made ceramics. But otherwise no, I have not made sculptures. My paintings are often in low relief, maybe a bit like the bison at the Altamira cave, part protruding from the surface, part additive mark making: 12, 500 BCE.

*AMM: In some of your work, the canvas is exposed, becoming integrated into the composition of the painting. Do you consider the canvas to be another material used to create the piece itself, rather than just a surface in which the materials are applied?*

YB: Yes, since canvas can have different characters and levels of resistance. It can present various sorts of battles depending on the type of weave. I pay attention to that and I take interest in the way a material can play different roles, dress up in new costumes.

*AMM: Was there ever a time in your career as an artist when your artwork diverged paths dramatically, or perhaps you decided to go in a different direction artistically?*

YB: I think of building slowly. What may seem like a large leap to me for sure will not seem so to others. The biggest mental shift had to do with the switch from illustrating an idea to having the object embody the idea through process. This meant trusting my hands and my body more.

*AMM: What or who are your historical influences?*

YB: Chavela Vargas, Florine Stettheimer, Lin Jaldati, Anna Akhmatova, Elizabeth Murray, just to name a few.

*AMM: Do you have any upcoming projects that you would like to share with us?*

YB: I am excited to spend part of the upcoming summer at the Chinati Foundation making work and exploring Marfa. I am thinking about waking up very early and walking around vast empty spaces, the town, and nature.



Yevgeniya Baras  
*Untitled*  
oil on canvas  
20 x 16 inches