

Exhibition Proposal

(Title to be determined)

Albena Petkova, artist

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Exhibition Concept

The main theme of the exhibition I want to make is death. I want to paint several works depicting different aspects of our experience with it – the ideas we carry, the way it accompanies our lives, and how it is always creeping in the background.

Some works will deal with imaginings of death – like the sudden flashes of cautionary movie-stills one gets near a cliff's edge. Others will look at how we romanticize death in art, stories, and nature; how we celebrate things that, in their ending and decay, transform into eternity. I want to paint a scene where everyone is alive, but death is silently present.

Ultimately, I want to walk the threshold between life and death in these works and explore how that line might blur.

Artistic Motivation and Themes

What draws me to this subject is the need to understand it better – to take it from the background of my life into the light of the projector. There are many lessons that death offers.

I'm fascinated by that deep duality in our nature: the instinct to preserve life at all costs, and the capacity to end it ourselves. The moment when despair or futility overpowers the strongest survival instinct. It raises questions about how much of our life depends on imagination, on stories, on hope – and about how much power our thoughts hold.

Another aspect that unsettles and compels me is the waiting for death I've seen in very old people – their impatient readiness to die. A life spent with nothing left to do but wait for it to end. Like a really long, inescapable, boring ending of a movie.

It's not easy to imagine one's own death – but it's inevitable. It's abstract and final, terrifying and beautiful. In art, and in life, I think reflecting on it gives us something important and irreplaceable – it sharpens the senses and makes us more alive.

Artistic Process and Timeline

Currently I'm in the process of thinking, sketching, and planning compositions. My intention is to create a series of big and small oil paintings exploring the ideas mentioned above. They will be mostly figurative, in the style of my previous work.

Previous Work and Continuity

This exhibition continues the trajectory of my previous solo show– With Them, that focused on family and trauma. That show was, in part, a personal attempt to process old experiences – both mine and collective.

Throughout May, I have a show While Nothing Happens, consisting of mostly small paintings and drawings that circle around a few themes, including violence and connection, or the lack of it. (1–31 May, Kahaila, 135 Brick Lane, London).

With this new series, I want to shift my focus to universal mortality.

Medium

Oil paintings on canvas (both large and small scale)

London, May 2025

