

# NEW YORK STUDIO SCHOOL

## OF DRAWING, PAINTING & SCULPTURE

**Alumni Studio Visit: Maryna Bilak, MFA 2014**  
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**NYSS:** Describe a typical day in studio.

**Maryna Bilak:** Since I have to balance my studio practice with motherhood, I don't have a regular schedule and my typical day in the studio is extremely chaotic and ever changing. It reminds me of my early years when I painted around people en plein air with changing weather, changing light, and all the distractions that come along with it. These days the distractions are different, but they give me the same urge to stay super focused and dedicated. I am forced to think about what I want to do in the studio before I even get there and able about to throw myself into action right away when given the opportunity. My studio is right behind my house and it adds to the flexibility of working time.



**NYSS:** Walk me through your process. What are some of the parameters or problems you set up for yourself within your work?

**MB:** Lately I work mostly on frescos. This is one of the oldest methods of painting and requires a lot of preparation and making materials from scratch. I build the panels which contain several different layers; the last layer is a mixture of slaked lime and white sand is applied the day I plan to paint. Bueno Fresco is raw on raw painting. Nothing can be changed or erased. I have a working window of about five hours and after that window the surface becomes hard like a rock and no pigments can penetrate it. There is no time to overthink and there is no time to over calculate. But there is a tremendous chance of messing everything up, which opens doors to other possibilities. The imagery a result of spontaneity, but I think it is also a result of everything I've experienced till that specific moment.

**NYSS:** How has your practiced changed during this time of social distance? Have you had to adapt to a new way of working or tried new materials?

**MB:** I definitely had a pause. With all this extra time on hands I still couldn't force myself to make something, because I didn't see the meaning or purpose. The definitions started to shift and for a while I became a quiet observant of nature in my backyard at the studio building. Spring arrived and I noticed much more birds this year and even



flowers flourished with deeper energy ... nature does great when we stay away and this humble mood pushed me to zoom in. Every leaf on a tree opened up as pure perfection. After numerous hikes and hours sitting in our family garden, I decided to incorporate actual elements such as a variety of petals and leaves, as stencils into a new type of fresco. Natural earthy colors and simple clear imagery feel right at this time. Right now, dozens of small-scale frescos are all over the studio floor on their own, but I plan to create some sort of a mosaic by assembling them together. At least it is nice having such a thought, which works for me as a metaphor of being together with other people.



**NYSS:** What do you keep in the studio for inspiration? Reference material, artist monographs, music, fiction, found objects, foods etc.

**MB:** What I found to be inspirational is not about things in the studio but about what's happening outside of the studio. So far, my life has been giving me quite an intense material to digest and work with, and I don't mean only positive experience. My relationships with other people are a tremendous source of inspiration. I am a social type and human connection is important to me. And then, there are other things, which perhaps don't stick out right away as something that can make an impact on my studio practice, but as crucially important: Rwanda coffee, Ukrainian rock music, New Yorker magazine, a portrait of my mother-in-law, hand casts of caregivers, crayon scribbles of my daughter, and garage floor covered with plaster drops, to name a few.

**NYSS:** Do you listen to anything while you work?

**MB:** I love listening to the interviews of different people on variety of topics but only if I have some physical work to do like slaking lime, gessoing canvas, making or painting frames, or mixing plaster. When I am actually making work I prefer my space to remain silent.





**NYSS:** How did studying at the New York Studio School influence your current studio practice?

**MB:** When I was a student at NYSS, I thought I was reborn as an artist but it felt even bigger than that. Sounds like big words but I feel this way due to the fact that the Studio School taught me not only HOW to make art but also WHY, which was a question I had never asked myself before. Something happened to my ego. On one level, I learned how to put it away and become more humbler, but at the same time, my experience at NYSS made me want to become something bigger. I started to become more of who I am, and eager to grow myself into my best self. NYSS gave me a sense of a community and my world was greatly enriched by the friends I made from different countries. Additionally, the diverse faculty members had such a powerful impact on my artistic development that I still have dialogues with them in my mind.



**NYSS:** Are there any upcoming shows or projects on the horizon you would like to share?! And where can people see your work in person and/or digitally?

**MB:** My show CARE at Defner Judaica Museum in Bronx, New York which was scheduled for June 7th-August 30th, 2020, has been postponed due to COVID. This show covers five years of work made while caring for my mother-in-law who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. On my website [www.marynabilak.com](http://www.marynabilak.com) you can see selected work of frescos; drawings; plaster and ceramic sculptures; oil and acrylic

paintings; reliefs and installations. I also post work on my Instagram account [@maryna\\_bilak](#).

