

The Dream World of Artist Stephanie Guillen

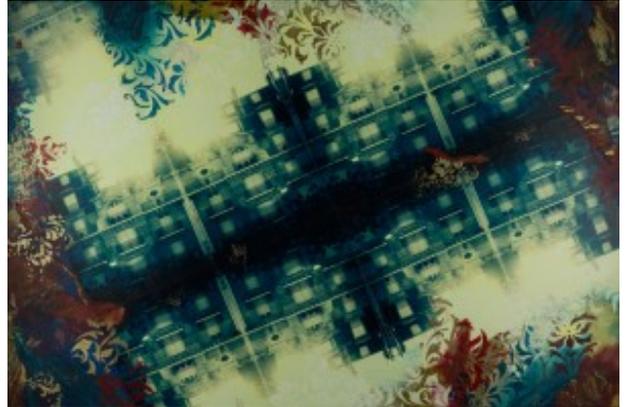
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Ask Jersey City artist Stephanie Guillen to take you on a tour of the world. She'll take you beyond the Louvre, the Pyramids and the Grand Canyon to surreal places born from both her earthly travels and her imagination.

Guillen has been an artist for as long as she can remember but says she really came to life artistically after moving to Jersey City from Zurich, Switzerland, about six years ago.

"I started painting in childhood and I kept doing it but I never exhibited because I did it for myself," says the 38-year-old, who is mostly self-taught.



"When I first came to this country, I didn't have a job and I had much more time on my hands to create, so I had a bunch of stuff and I decided to try to get it in somewhere. In Jersey City, it is easy to sell (work); so many people are so kind and friendly," she says. "There is so much you can do here and there are so many innovative shows. I've grown a lot since moving here; this is a really good place to grow as an artist."

Guillen's nostalgic, romantic paintings have a dash of fantasy that she says comes from within. "In my paintings, I show a dreamy world with a surrealistic touch... Painting is a more personal thing because it comes from somewhere very, very deep and it's very intuitive," she says. "Painting is inspired by myself and my soul."

For the past two years, however, Guillen has been focusing on other media like photography, which she took up after moving to America and traveling the world. While photography is a second artistic language for Guillen, she's become fluent enough to break its rules and coin her own conventions. "With my photography, I want to achieve a different access to reality," says Guillen. "I like to play with perception, work with reflections and special angles or merge things together which is hidden behind the obvious."

In April 2012, Guillen was part of "Art of Illusion," a juried exhibition at the Monmouth Museum which featured mind-bending images from many different artists. Her photography was also featured in *Artist Portfolio Magazine* and has appeared in several Jersey City exhibits including the Grace Church Van Vorst "Spring Photography Show" held last month. Currently, one of her photographs can be seen in "[A Time in Arcadia](#)," a nature-inspired show organized by Curious Matter and the Jersey City Free Public Library.

"The show is about botany and the plant world... I'm actually not a photographer or artist that does a lot with nature or landscaping, but I did have a project where I would go to abandoned places like hotels or villages and I realized how nature takes over after man leaves," she says.

"My photo was taken in Centralia, a small place in Pennsylvania where they had a lot of coal mines and there's one that's been on fire since the 1960's. All the people left but the structures from the village are still there. It's completely abandoned, but there's still earth



burning underneath... There was an abandoned highway there, and plants were starting to grow over," she says. "It's very, very creepy but very wonderful."

The Van Vorst Park resident has recently attracted the most attention for her collages, which merge mirrors and angles like her photographs and dreamy washes of color like her paintings, and also sometimes incorporate layers of other media like fabric.



"It's a new step for me artistically, and I might never have done that back home," says Guillen, who began creating collages about two years ago. "In Jersey City, having the possibility to get into shows, get things displayed, that inspired me to do more than painting and photography and to do something new. It's the atmosphere here, you know?"

One of her favorites is "Ma Belle Vieille" (seen above, right), French for "My old beautiful," a nickname for Paris.

"It's a photograph I took in Paris which I recently sold at the Cathedral Arts Festival at Grace Church Van Vorst," she says. "I just love the colors and atmosphere. I spend a lot of time in Paris and everything you see there is beauty, which is why I love Paris so much. I've made a lot of collages with the photos I took in Paris because I'm so fond of it."

She credits travel with helping make her the artist she is today, saying, "It certainly opens your horizons. You learn a lot about values. To me, to come to another country and build another life, another home, I received a completely different value.

"Things that were important before are no longer important because the world gets bigger the more you travel. It gets more and more interesting and helps you grow into the person you want to be."

Guillen's next project is a photographic series about her biggest journey, from Europe to America.

"I want to do something reflecting on my time in America since I've been here, something regarding immigration and the challenges that come with that, how I've changed, what is different in my life and what I learned," she says. "It's something I really want to do. I haven't done something like that before, so that's exactly why I want to do it."

For more information, visit Stephanie Guillen's [website](#).

Photos courtesy of Stephanie Guillen

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