

Gwendolyn Kassenaar

Visual Artist & Performer

Artist Statement

My work is deeply rooted in the lived experience of seeking personal liberation and female agency. I quit toxic, male-dominated investment banking to attend art college, defying paternal expectations, and dissolved marital bounds to live true to myself.

Bodily movement was instrumental in unleashing this self discovery, through practising esoteric method 5Rhythms. This notion of setting the mind free through bodily movement, as poignantly described by classical Persian poet Rumi, often features in my work. Since my recent accident, I'm ever more concerned with the physical body. I healed my brain injury with yoga poses; not the prescribed medication. I was told I would never walk barefoot again, but now I am! I want to share this story with others to highlight the power we ALL possess in our bodies.

Spirituality forms part of my ongoing quest and informs my work. I'm drawn to the principles of Zen-Buddism and Taoism, such as Wuwei, Li and water as metaphor. Through daily sitting meditation I feel outwardly connected to a higher cosmic force and inwardly I sense lava-like energy streaming through my body. This awareness manifests itself in my art through fluid motifs, vivid marks juxtaposed against a dark void and a reminiscence of the Taoist elements such as fire.

My process originates in this intense search for personal liberation and is grounded in deep gratitude to be able-bodied again and fully alive! Through vigorous movement, deep breath, meditation and deliberately chosen music, I enter an altered state of consciousness. I then improvise and 'let the brush dance by itself', as Alan Watts writes in 'By Way of Zen'. I create solitary in my studio as well as live on stage, often collaborating with musicians or dancers, aided by my synaesthesia. Painting live in front of an audience, entirely improvised, is a fully embodied act of practising freedom.

The physical act of creation is as important to me as the finished work. A gestural mark starts in my toes and flows up through my entire body before my brush hits the canvas. I even paint directly with my body using fingers, fingertips, hands, toes, heels and feet. For me, painting and drawing is a kinaesthetic experience. I'm fascinated by the phenomenology of mark-making.

I strongly believe that the human act of creation is irreplaceable by AI and that there is no technological surrogate for the unmediated human presence in live performance.

Biography

Gwendolyn Kassenaar (b.1973 Amsterdam) works across painting, drawing and performance. Having shed the suffocating straight jacket of investment banking to attend Chelsea College of Art, her work is rooted in the lived experience of seeking personal liberation and female agency.

She made her public debut with live mural Dance to Ecstasy (2021) in Shoreditch, London. She conceived A Trajectory to Unsuffocation (2022) for the Bloomsbury Festival, an embodied live painting performance addressing self-discovery and created Sole Riot (2025), inspired by her recent recovery from brain injury.

As part of her experimental practice Gwendolyn creates live improvised art on stage collaborating with musicians or dancers, aided by her synaesthesia. She recently performed at the Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh (2026), Citizen's Theatre Glasgow (2026), Swiatlodzwieki Festival, Poland (2025), Royal Musical Association conference at Goldsmiths (2025) where she was panel speaker and LightSounds Festival at the RichMix London (2024) where she was keynote speaker. She performed regularly at renowned London venues such as Cafe OTO, Hundred Years Gallery and Iklectik. She collaborates with highly regarded musicians including Orphy Robinson MBE, legendary feminist Maggie Nicols, Chinese virtuoso percussionist Beibei Wang and Korean flautist Dr. Hyelim Kim.

She performed in the Reciprocal Gestures festival at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff (2026) led by Florence Peake.

Her work has been exhibited at the Hundred Years Gallery (2025), Yehudi Menuhin Concert Hall (Music the Muse 2022), Toulouse Lautrec Jazz Club (Jazz in Art 2021), Vortex Jazz Club (EFG London Jazz Festival 2021) amongst others. She initiated solo show 'ENIGMA | In the Present Moment' (2022) at Boo's Gallery, Notting Hill, London. Her work features on album covers and in private and corporate collections in the UK, Netherlands, Germany and Spain.

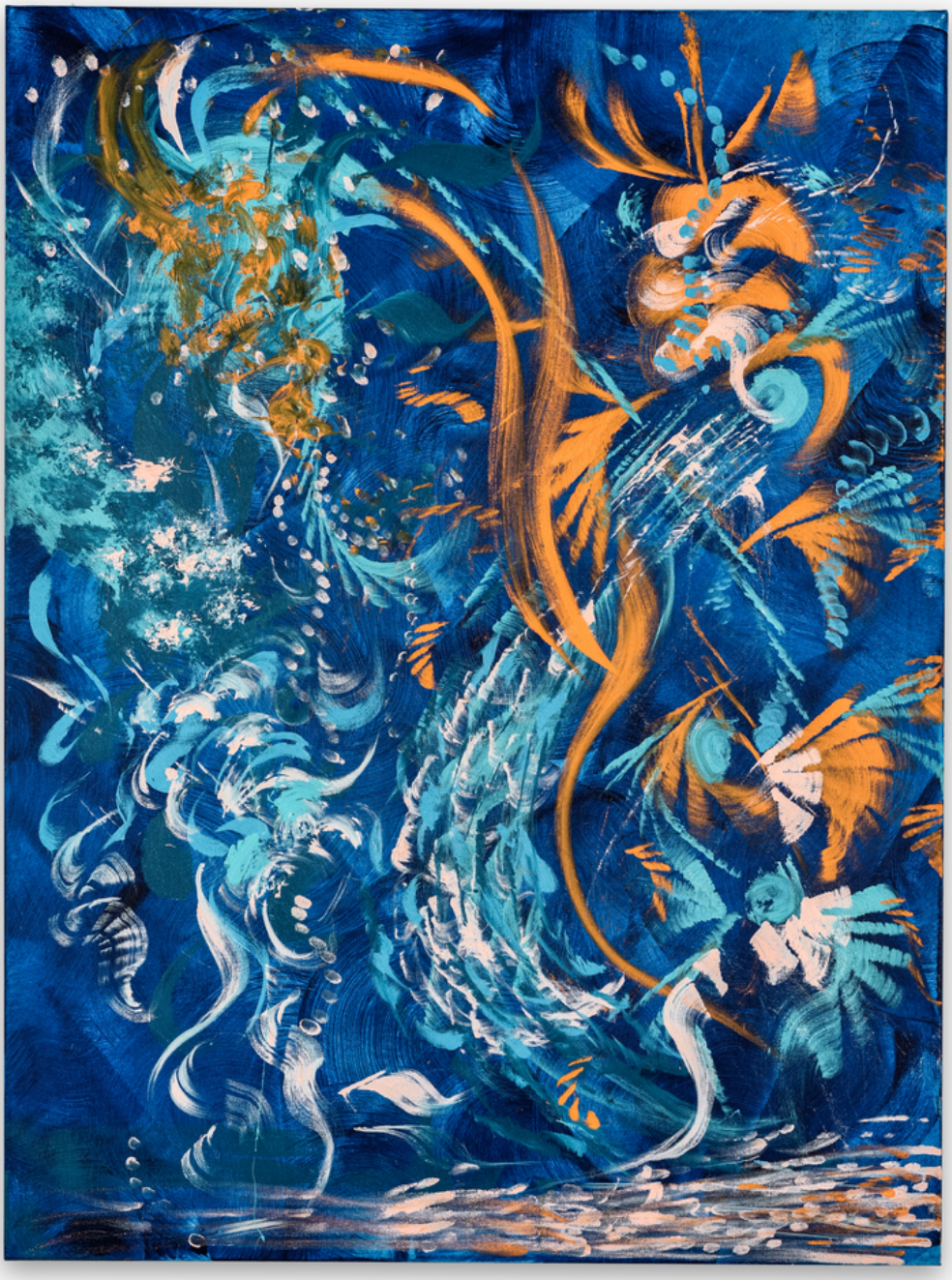
She won prestigious Serpentine Gallery Support Structures Award with interdisciplinary collective 'The Noisy Women'. Her work featured in iconic magazine The Wire and on Soho Radio and Portobello Radio. This autumn she will be resident at the Berlin Art Institute.



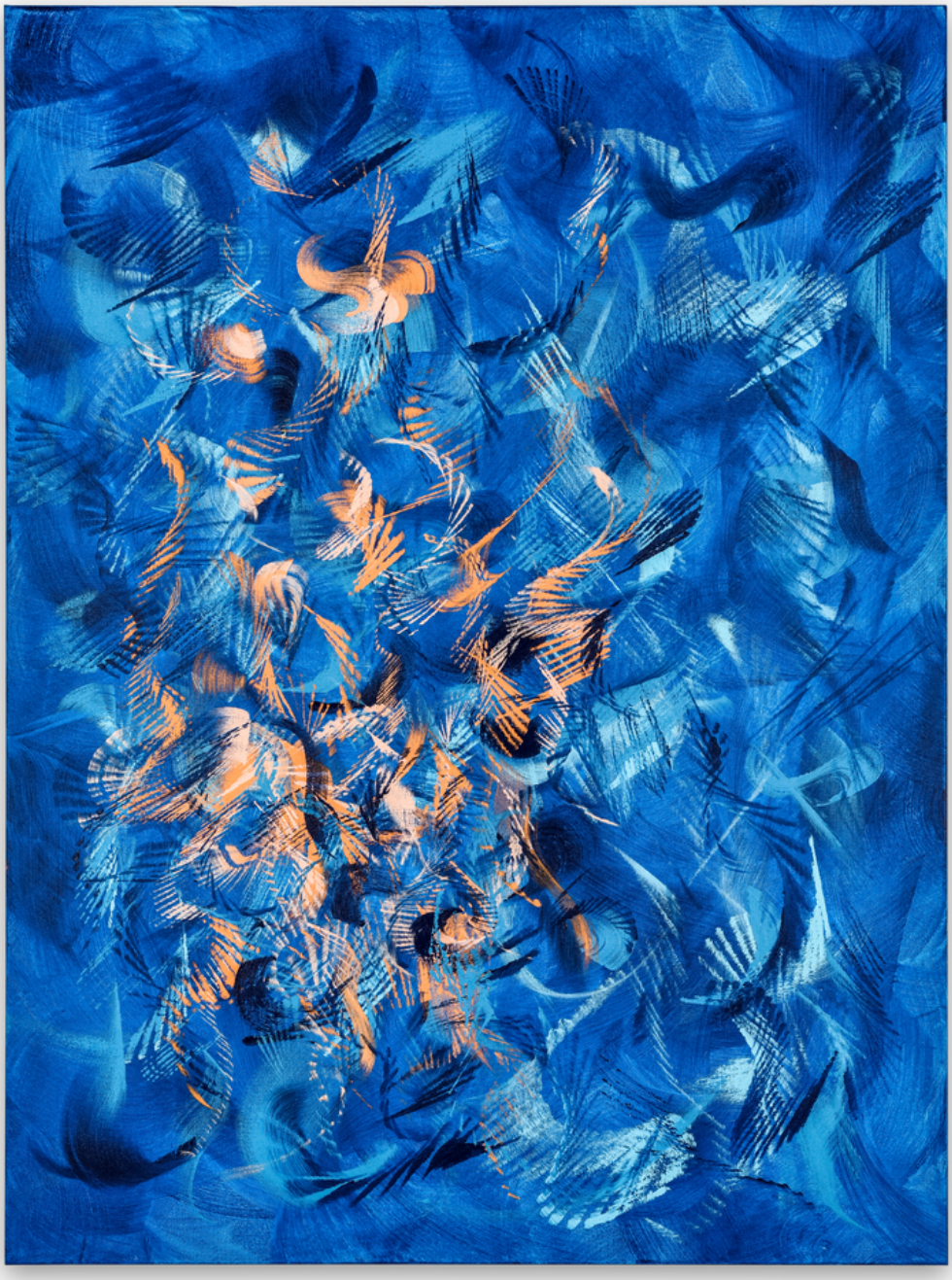
Dancing Naked by the Shores of the Ocean that She Is, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
120 × 90 × 4 cm



Through the Cyclone of Chaos, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
120 × 90 × 4 cm



Rub the Rhythm Raw, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
1204 × 90 × 4 cm



Burn Back into the Light, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
120 × 90 × 4 cm



Rise, Sep2025
Acrylics on canvas
120 × 90 × 4 cm



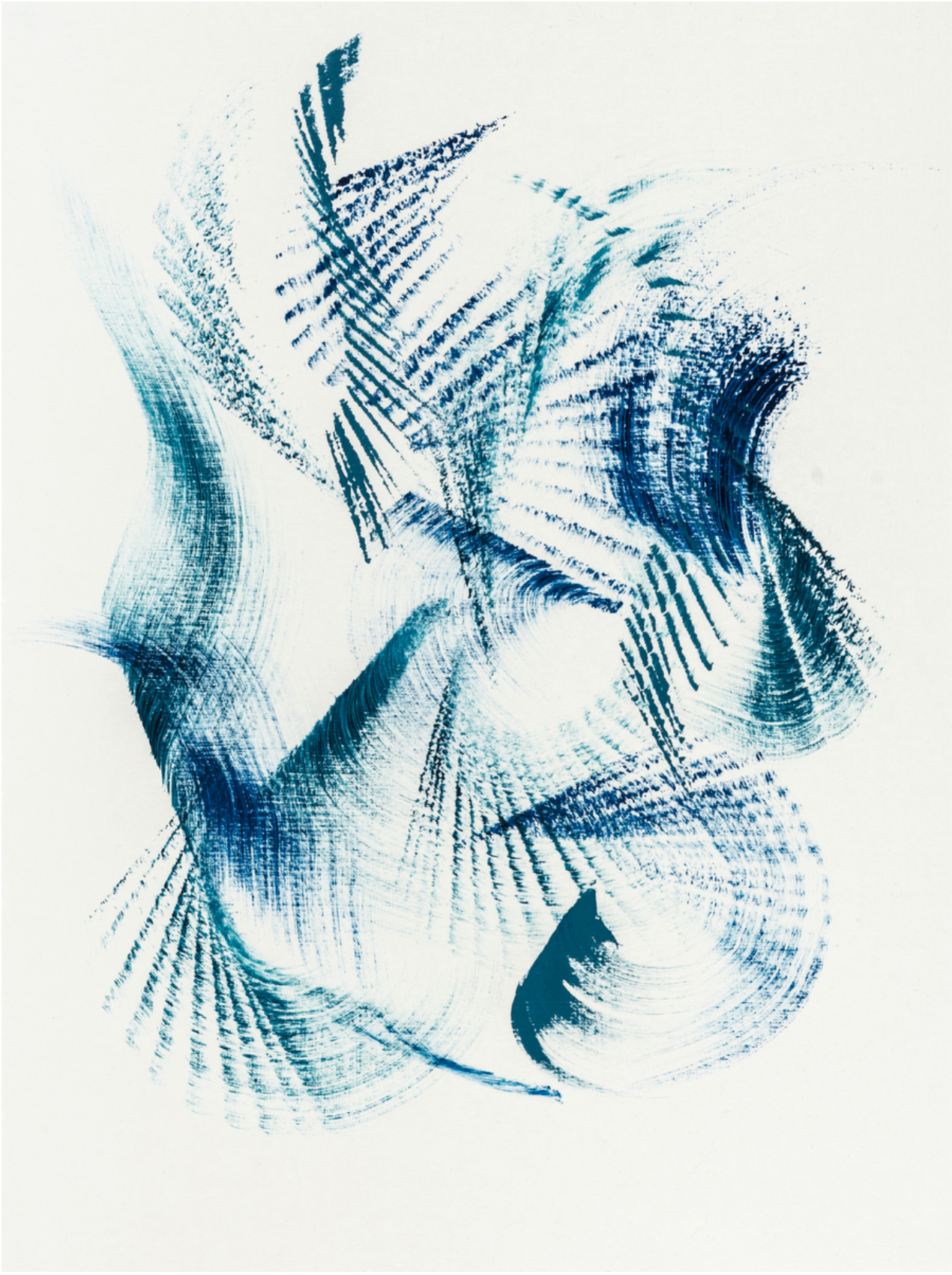
I Will Not Drown, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
120 × 90 × 4 cm



My Spirit Takes the Wind by Surprise, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
120 × 90 × 4 cm



One, 2026
Acrylics on canvas
50 × 40 cm



Scattering Stars Like Dust I, 2026
acrylics on paper
48 × 35.5 cm



Momentary Celebrations I, 2026
Soft pastel on paper
42 × 60 cm



Sole Riot, 2025
Performance
30 minutes



A Trajectory to Unsuffocation, 2022
Performance
1.5 hours

Short CV

EDUCATION

2002 Chelsea College of Art, Architecture & Spatial Design BA (Hons), London, UK

AWARDS

2024 Serpentine Gallery Support Structures Fellowship with Noisy Women collective

SELECTED NARRATIVE PERFORMANCES (Concept + Production)

2025 Sole Riot, Vortex Jazz Club, London
2022 A Trajectory to Unsuffocation, Bloomsbury Festival 2022, London

SELECTED IMPROVISED PERFORMANCES

2026 Reciprocal Gestures, led by Florence Peake, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales
2026 FTEH Series, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
2025 Światlodźwięki Festival, Centrum Kultury Zamek, Poznań, Poland
2025 Noisy Women Present, RMA Conference, Goldsmiths, University of London
2024 ACE-funded LightSounds Festival, RichMix, London
2022 Counterpoint, St. Paul's Church, Cambridge
2022 Black Top with Orphy Robinson MBE, EFG Jazz Festival, Vortex Jazz Club, London
2022 Maggie Nicols' residency, Cafe Oto, Dalston, London

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 E N I G M A | In the Present Moment, Boo's Gallery, Notting Hill, London
2021 Dance to Ecstasy, public mural, Shoreditch, London

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2025 The Tunnel, Hundred Years Gallery, London
2022 Music the Muse, Menuhin Concert Hall, Cobham
2021 Jazz in Art, Toulouse-Lautrec Jazz Club, EFG London Jazz Festival 2021, London

SELECTED TALKS

2025 Panel discussion, RMA conference at Goldsmiths, University of London
2025 Światlodźwięki Festival, Centrum Kultury Zamek, Poznań, Poland
2024 Keynote speech 'Convergencies: Art, Improvisation & Synaesthesia', ACE-funded LightSounds Festival, RichMix, London

UPCOMING

2026 Artist Residency at Berlin Art Institute October - December

Please note work pause most of 2023 and 2024 due to brain injury.

Selected Press

2026 All About Jazz, ‘Sound-ing Paint’, review of live painting performance by John Eyles

2026 ‘Music is Your Superpower’ bestselling book by Sammy Stein; interview and art on book cover

2025 PlatinumMind, 'In the Spotlight: Gwendolyn Kassenaar', Sammy Stein

2024 All About Jazz 'Gwendolyn Kassenaar at LightSounds Festival 2024', review Artist Talk & Performance by John Eyles

2022 Creatix Mag, review solo exhibition by Claire Zakiewicz

2022 Portobello Radio, interview solo exhibition with Piers Thompson & Greg Weir

2022 The Wire magazine, live performance and art review by Louise Gray

2022 Soho Radio, interview with Tamar Collocutor on art, improvisation and synaesthesia

2021 Jazz in Europe, ’Jazz in Art: In Conversation with Gwendolyn Kassenaar’, interview

2021 ‘Top Ten Defining Art Moments Outside the Zone’, Inspiring City, art blog

2021 Hackney Gazette, review mural and live performance by Holly Chant





SERPENTINE

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Announcement, December 2024

SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR SUPPORT STRUCTURES 2024

Fellowship to support five UK-based artists and collectives working at the intersection of art, and community practice returns



Image: Camila Bañol Montoya

Serpentine is delighted to announce the awardees of the *Support Structures for Support Structures* programme: Ashley Holmes, Janie Doherty, Roo Dhissou, Taey Iohe and Noisy Women Present co-founders: Faradena Afifi, Maggie Nicols, Gwendolyn Kassenaar and Marion Treby.

In its second iteration, the fellowship consists of an unrestricted grant given to each artist and collectives across the UK, a development from the first programme (2021)

The Serpentine Trust is a limited company registered in England under number 2150221

AllAboutJazz

Gwendolyn Kassenaar At LightSounds 2024



Courtesy Gloria Freeman

Artist paints dancer in motion in Shoreditch to mark the city's lockdown emergence

Holly Chant

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The Shoreditch performance fusing art and dance was streamed live online. - Credit: Dave Purgas

Gwendolyn's aim was to "shift the boundaries between art and dance", adding: " I wanted to ensure that visitors left the experience wanting to embrace life on a higher level.

"Ultimately, I [want to] encourage people to find out who they are and have the courage to live true to themselves."



Both Gwendolyn and Petra are both resident artists at the Vortex Jazz Club in Dalston. - Credit: Dave Purgas

Gwendolyn painted the huge six by three meter live and the event was broadcast on Facebook and Instagram.

The mural will become part of an extended residency called Transcendence which will see the artist move from Shoreditch to Old Street in coming weeks.

Contact

Thank you for your interest in my work. For studio visits, enquiries or anything else, please feel free to get in touch. I look forward to starting a conversation…

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