

Childhood in Únětice in the 1990s? Czech artist's paintings are now heading to New York and China



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An installation view: *The Children's Villa*, YveYANG, New York, with the artist Anastazie Anderson
Courtesy YveYang

From photographs of her own childhood in Únětice, she creates paintings in which people on the other side of the world can recognize each other. Czech-British painter Anastazie Anderson graduated from the Royal College of Art and was approached by a New York gallery shortly after school. Nevertheless, she speaks about her journey without embellishment. "In the art world, talent alone is not enough. There is also a huge dose of luck involved," she says in an interview for iDNES.cz.

In your paintings, you often return to the 1990s and your childhood there. How do you remember it?

I had a very nice childhood, a typically Czech one. But I was very shy, so while the other kids were fooling around on the playground, I would sit with my parents in the pub and draw. My parents also took a lot of photos of me and my sister, so our childhood is really well documented, and we always had those memories around us. Maybe that's why I work with photographs today.

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When I look at my childhood photos, I often find myself remembering a situation from a photo completely differently than it actually happened. So how much of your images are a real memory and how much are they a new interpretation of it?

That's exactly what interests me when I'm creating. How photography changes our memories. It's just a technology, but at the same time it carries something incredibly authentic because it connects with how we imagine and remember our childhood.

What does it look like in practice?

I grew up in the 1990s, so I mostly work with analog photographs and I imagine my childhood through them. Today's children may one day imagine it through iPhone selfies and it will be a little different. That's why I don't want my paintings to be purely photorealistic. At the same time, I always leave something in them that makes it clear that they are based on photography, such as an angle or light.



Martina (red), 2026, Courtesy YveYang

Your own family also appears in your paintings. How do they like being a part of your work?

I think they've gotten used to it. They're more likely to get annoyed sometimes that they can't just throw something away. What if it still comes in handy! Maybe sometime in the future, when I'm not creating from photos, because my work is always changing. But at the same time, I have to learn to say goodbye to some things, that's true.

Your path to professional art was not entirely straightforward. You thought about the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, for example, but in the end you didn't even apply to Czech art schools. Why?

I thought I wouldn't get in. I went to an English grammar school in Prague and we didn't have technical art classes there. At the time, it seemed to me that admission to Czech art schools depended a lot on technical skills, such as figure drawing. So I took a year off, worked and painted at home. In the end, I decided to go to England for my bachelor's degree, where the approach seemed a bit more relaxed.

What happened then?

After my bachelor's degree, I applied to the Royal College of Art in London for four years in a row. Every time they didn't accept me, I thought, "Oh, it's not the right time yet."

It sounds like you didn't really admit that it wouldn't work out in the end.

Later I wondered if I fit their taste and if I shouldn't try an American school, because my work is closer to American art. But pay for such studies...

I understand.

And that was the year I was finally accepted to the RCA. I was also very lucky because the painting program was a two-year program back then. Now it's a one-year program and it would be completely different for me. I think you need two years to really get your bearings. The London art world was quite a shock to me.

In what?

Probably in how professionally the art environment works there. I always perceived art as something freer, where it's mainly about the creation itself. Suddenly, students were talking about sales and galleries. In short, about practical things. There are also a huge number of private galleries in London. Before, I didn't even really know that such a sphere existed, yet today it's the environment in which I work myself. Some galleries are also very strange. You ring the bell, enter a beautiful building where there are, for example, five paintings hanging, even a Picasso, and no one is there. There are students like me who want to look at the works and learn something from them, and then there are people who can actually buy them. It's a strange meeting of these two worlds.

Are the English more open to the visual arts than, say, the Czechs?

Culturally, it sometimes seems paradoxical to me, more like the opposite. When I meet an "ordinary" Czech and tell him that I am an artist, he is usually enthusiastic and interested. When I tell an ordinary Englishman this, he often asks: "And how can you make money from it?" or he finds it strange why someone would want to study it. Maybe we have such a European relationship to art in the Czech Republic, the idea of an artist as someone exceptional. Here, the approach is more pragmatic. For a pragmatic person, art is not actually a career.

**Anastasia Anderson
(30)**

- Czech-British painter. Originally from Únětice near Prague, she lives and works in London.
- After graduating from the British Grammar School in Prague, she spent a year out of school working as an au pair.
- She subsequently graduated from Falmouth School of Art and later from the prestigious Royal College of Art in London.
- *She is represented by New York's YveYANG Gallery, where she had a solo exhibition , Imitation of Life , in 2024. The gallery also presented her works at The Armory Show and Art Basel Miami Beach 2025.*

Let's go back to RCA. They finally accepted you on your fourth try. What did you do differently the fourth time that made it work in the end?

That's interesting, because my paintings for all the entrance exams were almost the same. I think the difference was more in the written part of the application. Before, I wasn't good at contextualizing my work. This time, I probably understood what I was doing better, and I was able to explain it better. Although... Looking back, I see that I still didn't know a lot. That's what school taught me even more - to be able to contextualize my work. It's important for an artist to be able to somehow place themselves and understand where their work belongs in a given time and culture.

So where would you classify your art today?

Post-pop art. It comes from pop art, which worked with mass culture, celebrities, advertising, or generally images that we all know. I think post-pop art works with that a little differently. It's interested in how mass culture enters our personal lives. So we don't have to paint Marilyn Monroe anymore. A good example for me is Alex Katz. He often painted his wife, but he depicted her almost as if she were the most famous actress in the world. So he uses the visual language of mass culture, but he just transfers it to someone from his personal life.



Installation view: *Annie (head)*, 2026, *The Children's Villa*, YveYANG, New York, NY 2026

Courtesy YveYang

Competition and happiness

Shortly after graduating, you received an offer from a prestigious New York gallery. Is that common for recent graduates?

It was a terrible coincidence. Since I was studying at the RCA, a lot of people watched our final exhibition. Each of us could only show one painting there. Normally, you would show five paintings to give the viewer a better idea of your work, but I really only had one. Hundreds of people came to the exhibition and two people from the gallery approached me. They wanted to meet with me, and at first I didn't really know who they were. Luckily, I went to the meeting. We had a great time and I liked the way they talked about art. I got the feeling that they took it seriously.

What did they tell you?

That they wanted to take me to an art fair right away. Up until then, I had only exhibited smaller things, so that was my first really big opportunity. Right after the fair, they offered me a solo exhibition, which took place a few months later. Everything happened very quickly. I have been working with them to this day, for several years now. We gradually got to know each other better, they have supported me for a long time and have trusted me. I think I was very lucky. They didn't have to see that one painting at the final exhibition, there were thousands of others.

So, you can't do art without a certain amount of luck?

Absolutely. In the art world, talent alone is not enough. There's also a huge amount of luck involved. And it's no less important to understand what you're doing and be able to talk about your work.

What is the competition like?

Huge. Especially among emerging artists. But I guess there is a reason for that. Among the major artists, no one is a mistake. At least in painting, which I know best. When you see the works of these people, you understand why they exhibit in museums.



Table and Chair, 2026, Courtesy YveYANG

Czech roots

When we talk about New York, galleries and art fairs, it all sounds quite luxurious and shiny. Is it really like that?

You know it's not. Sometimes I feel like I paint twenty percent of the time and do other things the other eighty. The reality is that London is expensive – accommodation, a studio and painting itself. Canvases and paints cost a lot of money, so practically everything I earn I invest in my work. I can live quite cheaply, so as long as I can afford big canvases and paints, I'm happy. But the problem for a lot of artists is that they can't afford to create. That's why they have part-time jobs, like me. Right now I work in a café, for example. I think it's good to have a flexible job and some security if something happens. The art market is also quite uncertain right now, so it's better for me to have that kind of financial cushion.

Your paintings are bought by people all over the world, including collectors from China. Are you surprised that someone who grew up on the other side of the world can find such personal memories of their Czech childhood?

I sometimes wonder about that too. But I think photography can connect childhood experiences across different countries. People who grew up in the 1990s, for example, and whose parents took photos of them with an ordinary analog camera, often have photos that look quite similar. They have similar colors, clothing, or light. Moreover, I sometimes don't perceive my work as typically Czech. I usually have a pure English accent because my dad is English, so people don't usually ask me where I'm from.

And do you feel more like a Czech or a British artist yourself?

Probably both. I'm simply half Czech and half English. On the other hand, I don't have very many connections to the Czech art scene, so in that sense I don't really consider myself a Czech artist. I would really like to exhibit in the Czech Republic, though. Sometimes, however, I feel like my Czech is getting worse because I've been in England for so long.

It's not obvious at all, you speak perfectly.

Thank you. But it's actually funny that now in England I'm doing things that I never did in the Czech Republic. Now, for example, I've started listening to Karel Gott! Nostalgia does strange things to a person.



Installation view, Starting from the left: *Annie (sleeping) 2, 2026*, *Castle 1, 2026*, *Martina (red), 2026*
The Children's Villa, YveYANG, New York, NY 2026, Courtesy YveYang