

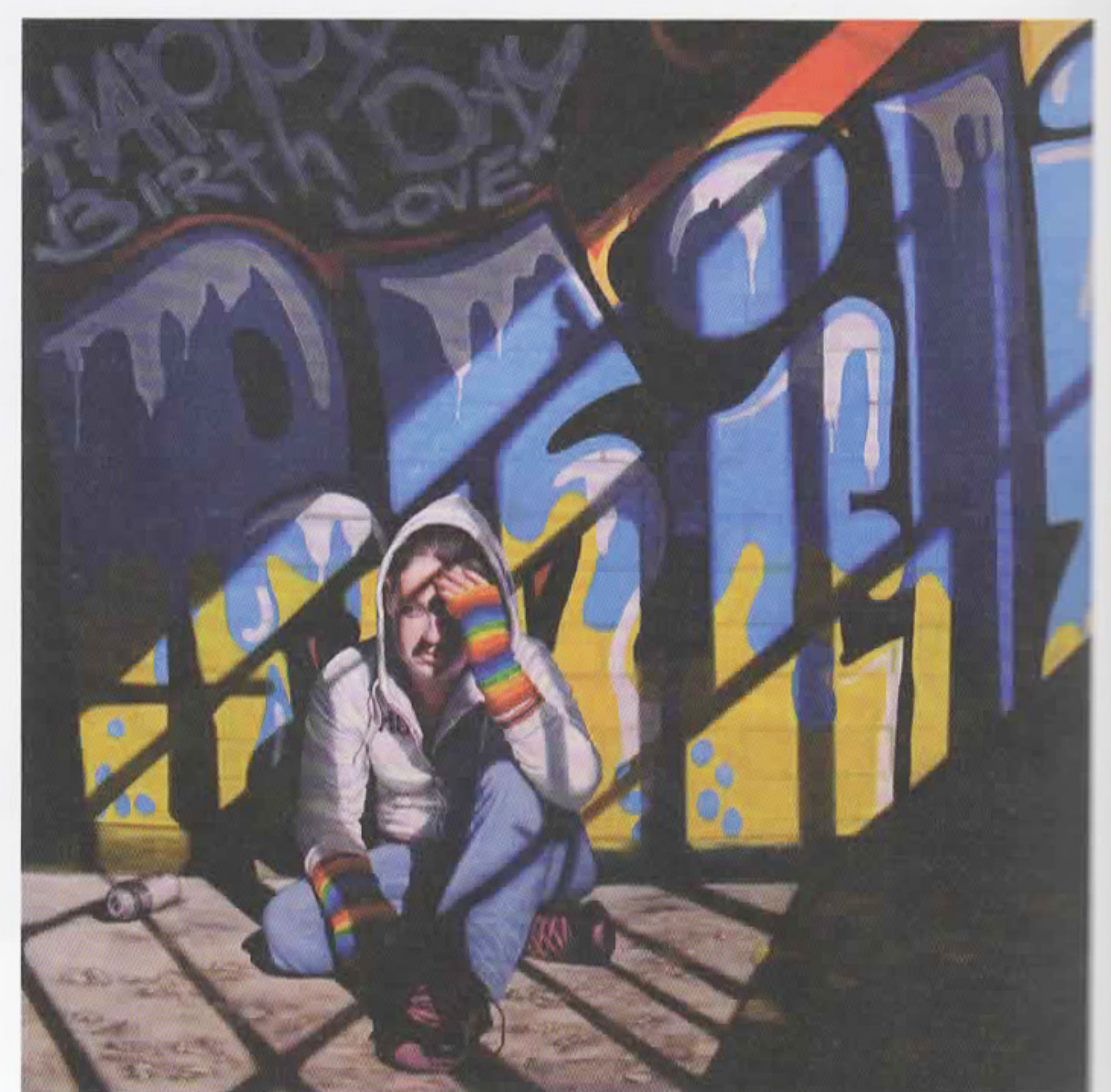
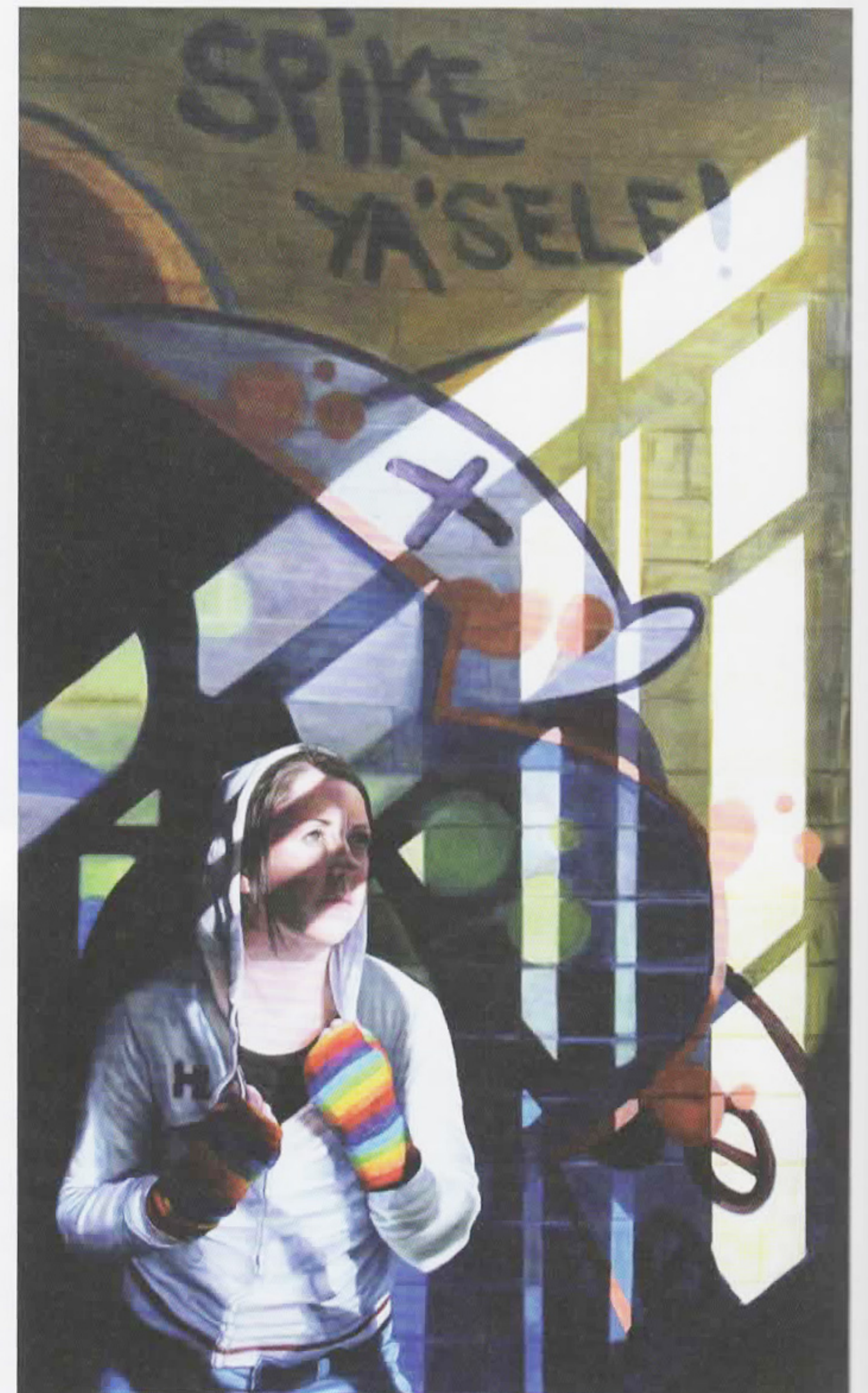
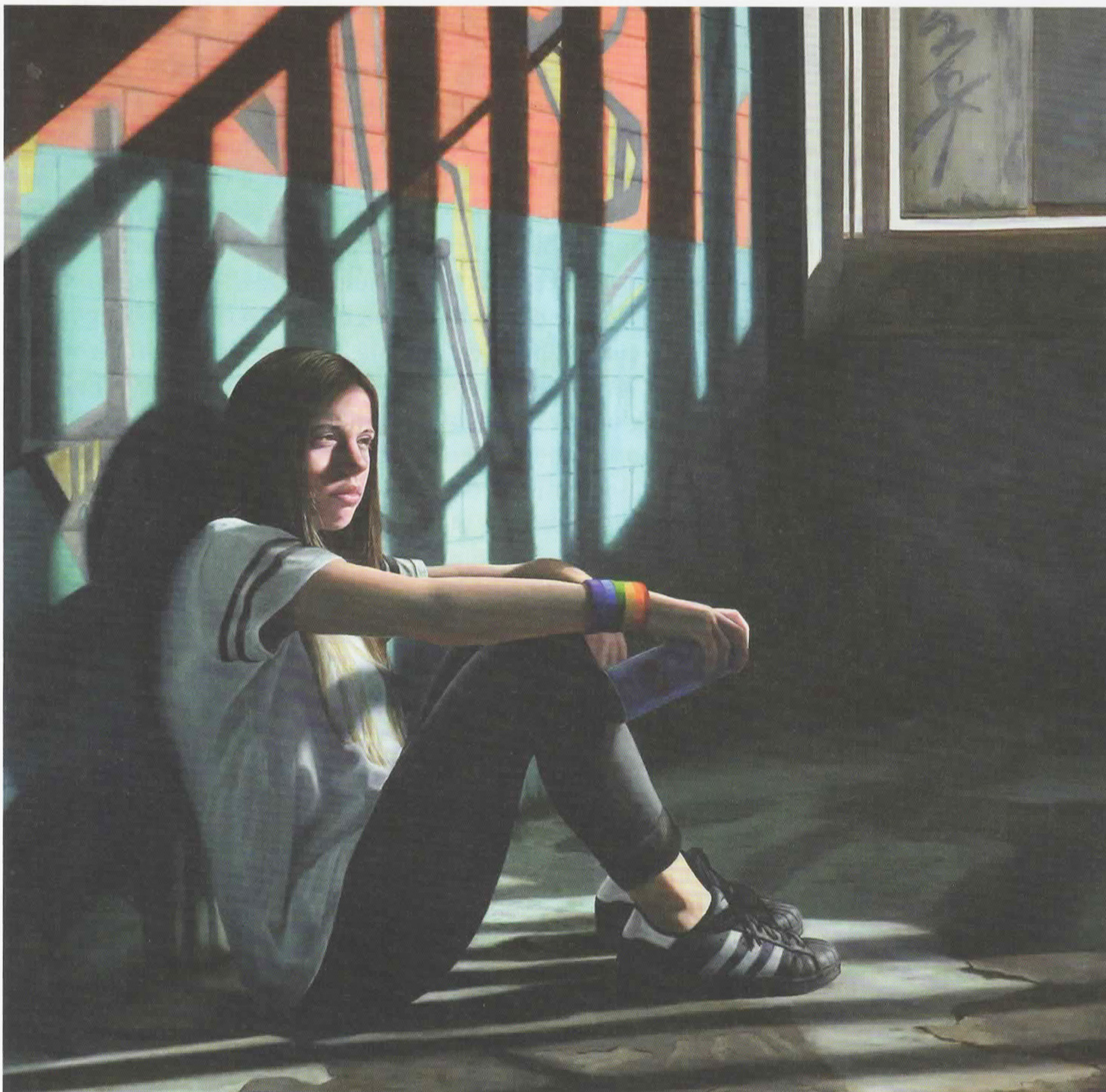
JANNE KEARNEY

A PERSONAL REBIRTH

jannekearney.com.au // words by Richard Pursey

There is something incredibly inspirational about Australian painter Janne Kearney's journey to become an internationally recognised, award-winning artist. This is no ordinary tale of a creative leaving school after having decided to pursue a career in the arts, making their way through art school and then their subsequent struggle for recognition before finding their niche and their audience. Growing up in an extremely underprivileged background, Janne did not even know that there was such a thing as art school. Constantly told by her family that it would be impossible for her to go to university, she left home before completing high school. Shortly after the death of her mother, Janne moved in with her boyfriend who later became her husband, but they struggled to survive on his first year apprentice wage. Janne even took cookery classes at school just to supplement their food.

Finding themselves unable to survive on her boyfriend's salary, Janne dropped out of school and took a job as a factory labourer, before finding a position as Australia's first female apprentice painter and decorator with the Ford Motor Company. Her trade school teacher took her under his wing and taught her how to be an expert in colour mixing and decorative paint finishes, a skill which later became invaluable in her fine art career. Rather than being celebrated in the



this page
Shattered, 2016
Oil on linen, 69" x 48"

opposite page, left
86 (Rhyming Slang for Worth Nix), 2018
Oil on linen, 40" x 40"

opposite page, top right
Spike Ya Self, 2017
Oil on linen, 69" x 48"

opposite page, bottom right
Happy Birthday Love, 2015
Oil on linen, 40" x 40"

workplace for her achievements she found herself subject to overwhelming levels of mistreatment and persecution.

"This was a brutal, totally male dominated and misogynistic place for a teenage girl to work. I endured daily bullying and rampant abuse, in my second year of this relentless harassment and after receiving death threats and being told by the independent industrial training commissioner that if I didn't like it to 'fuck off', I decided it was just too dangerous to continue."

For many years after that Janne worked in a paint shop selling and mixing paint, while renovating houses and raising a family with her husband. It wasn't until she was in her forties that Janne decided to follow her dream and become an artist. A decision spurred fittingly by a dream she had of her experiences with life drawing as a teenager, with an artist she met there who became something of a mother figure to her, after her own mother had passed away. Despite encouragement to take up portraiture, Janne was unable to take the time away from work to attend the classes, until her mentor was diagnosed with terminal cancer and she managed to rearrange her work and family schedule to come to the classes with her.

"I cherished those last few Mondays with her and had mixed feelings about painting after that, it was too painful to continue on without her, so I put painting behind me as a lost dream. One night some years later I had a dream of her so vivid it felt more like a visitation, this dream stuck with me and as if an epiphany I made the decision to leave work and start a career as a portrait artist."

Janne's work is very much a reflection of both her upbringing and of her personal struggles and triumphs. Her portraits are often set in the run-down surroundings of abandoned buildings, graffiti daubing the walls and broken glass and



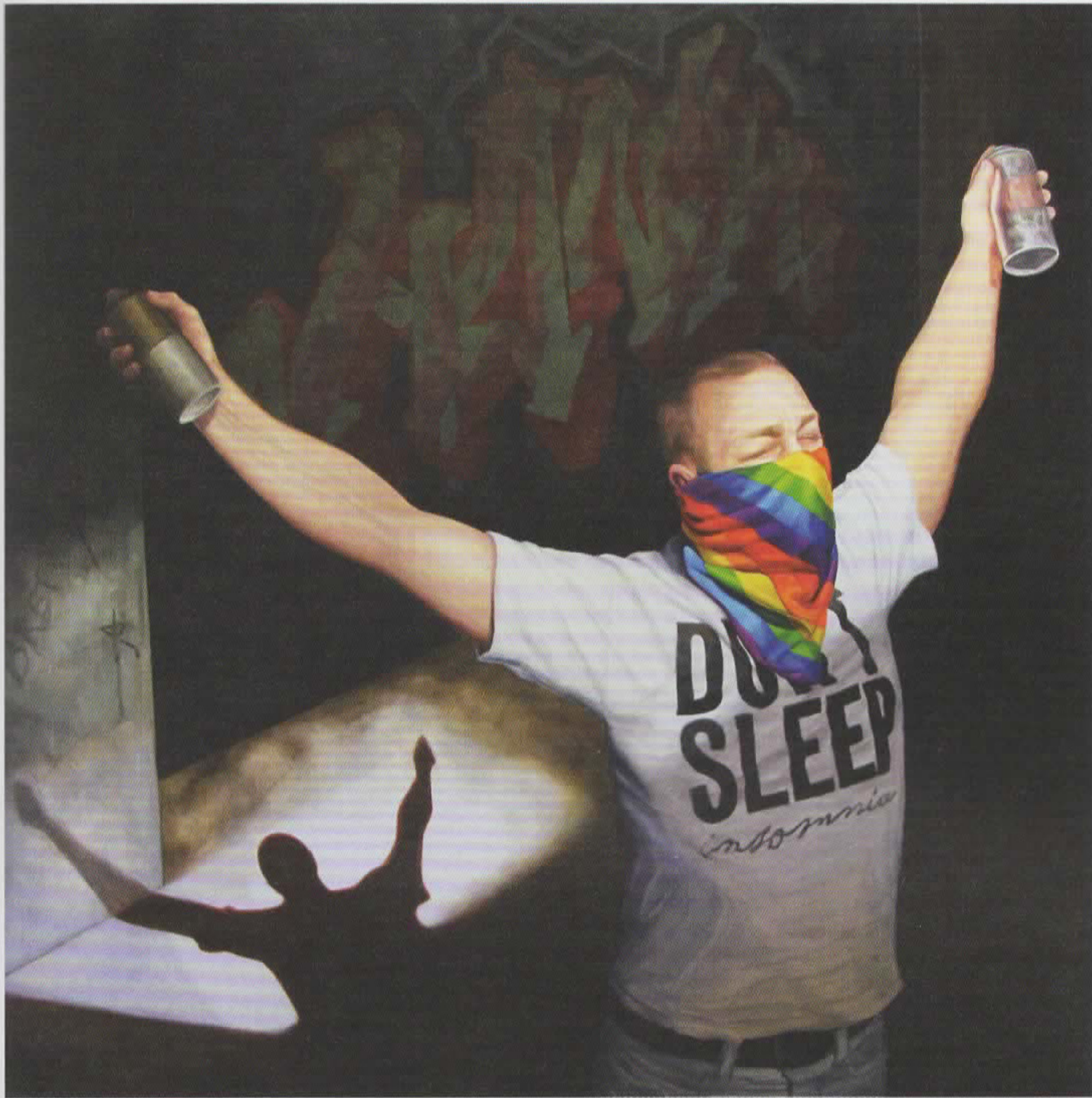
barbed wire much in evidence. While the environments portrayed may be grim, her use of colour, whether from the graffiti in the background, or brightly coloured articles of clothing or tattoos on her subjects, injects an undeniable element of hope, a realisation that there is also joy in the world. The use of light and shadow, masterfully executed in her work, also speaks directly to this sense of optimism.

"Painting with such high contrasting light is challenging and is something I have been concentrating on for a few years now and I love it, and will continue to pursue it. I love the symbolism of light and shade as much as I do the effect resulting from its use; it sends a powerful message that, even in our darkest of moments, if we search for it we can find the light."



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Painting with great technical skill, Janne shines in her oeuvre of figurative realism despite having had no formal training in the arts. With little support from the Australian fine art community as a self-taught female figurative painter, she has found her greatest success internationally, where attitudes towards the figurative and an appreciation of artistic skill and technique are changing to re-embrace this movement. In the brief number of years since taking up her passion as her career, Janne has taken part in over 25 exhibitions across Australia, Italy and the UK, and has been a finalist in over 70 prestigious national and international art prizes. After winning several smaller art awards, in 2017



Janne was a finalist in the BP Portraiture Prize at The National Portrait Gallery, London.

Most recently Janne was awarded the prestigious Fashion Week San Diego (FWSD) Award by the Art Realism Centre (ARC) as part of the 13th annual ARC Salon. Chosen from over 3750 entries from 69 countries, the ARC Salon is the most important realist painting prize in the US and the Americas. As a winner of this award a fashion designer will create an original couture outfit and look inspired by Janne's artwork. Her winning work along with the specially designed garments will be on display with live models at the FWSD18 opening night in October and remain on exhibition paired with the couture creations. The exhibition will tour internationally from October 2018, visiting prestigious galleries in LA, New York, San Diego, and the European Museum of Modern Art, Barcelona.

This is not to say that exhibiting her work is something that has come naturally or been easy for Janne. Just as the decision to make art her life's work was a leap of faith, so the inevitable outcome of that choice – having your work shown for public appraisal and judgement – is easier thought of as a concept to be dealt with in the future. Until, of course, that day inexorably approaches, as it must.

"The first time I ever showed my work publicly, it felt extremely uncomfortable, it was as if I was hanging my underwear on the wall. It took me many years before I felt comfortable even calling myself an artist, I didn't feel worthy enough and felt quite uncomfortable with the title. It wasn't until I started being juried into some major national and international competitions that I felt validated as an artist. What a silly thing to do, wait for validation from some higher being, such a waste emotion and energy."

Despite all of the accolades, Janne is not one to rest on her artistic laurels. Perhaps wanting to make up for her delayed start in the arts and trying to cram an entire life-long artistic career into a shortened

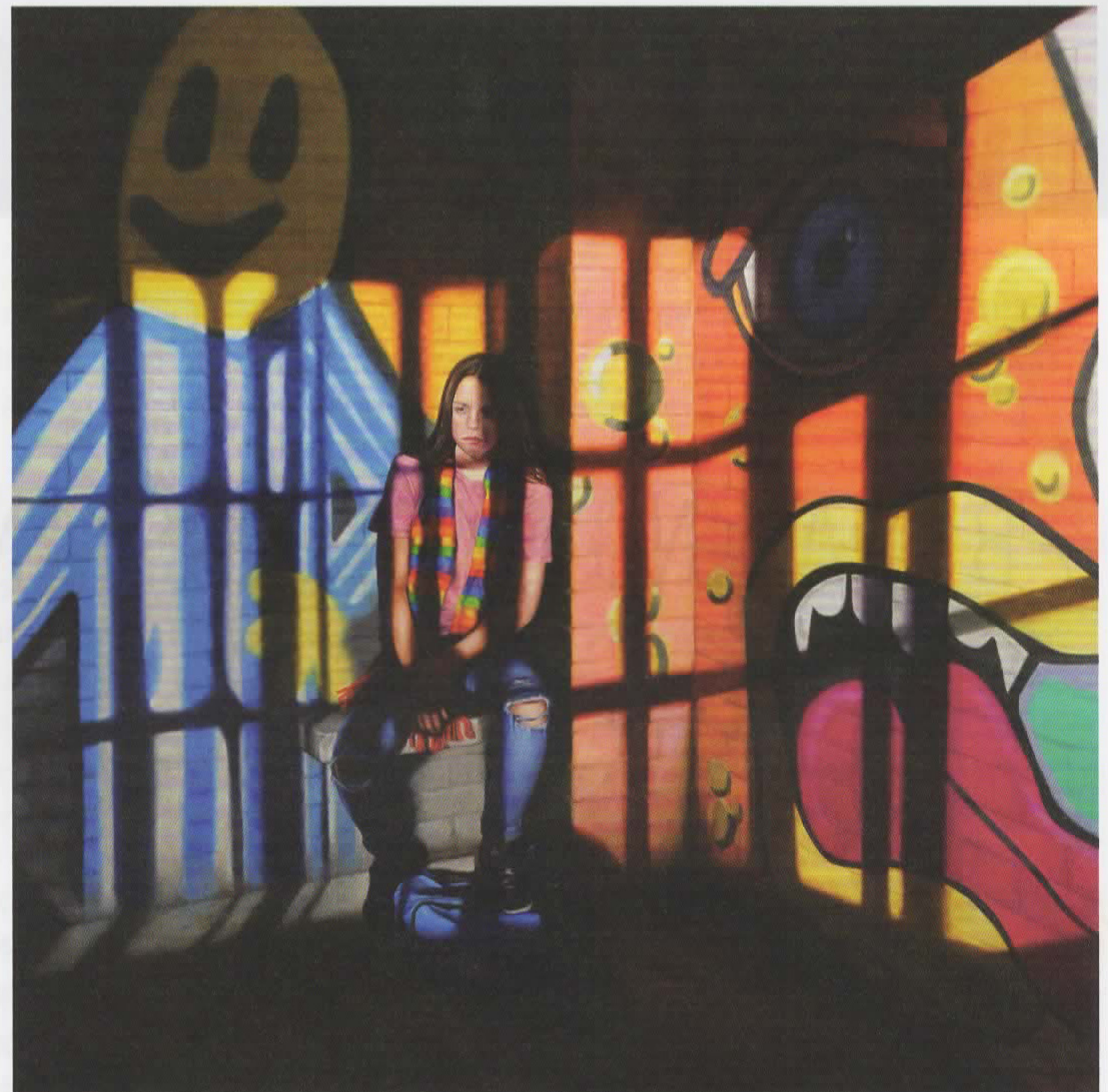
timespan, Janne has branched out into new and experimental works, but always keeping to her figurative core. In her latest series only now being realised, she has worked up an old technique to take it to the fine art world so that her paintings can be viewed as both two and three dimensional. Janne's December exhibition will consist entirely of 3D paintings that are very different from her traditional work. To the naked eye the works appear as Janne's always had, highly technique-driven realist paintings, but when wearing 3D glasses the third dimension emerges, all without any of the blurring that normally would accompany this type of work when not wearing the glasses.

"... these 3D paintings stand alone as 2D images until viewed through special glasses then, as if by magic the paintings leap off the canvas into a surreal third dimension. It is science converging with art, it urges us to renegotiate painting as being part of a reactive or static medium; objects and people are dissociated from their original construct... challenging and overturning traditional painting techniques the image literally."

EXHIBITIONS:

GROUP - September 2018: *ARC Salon Exhibition*
Salmagundi Club, New York NY, USA

SOLO - December 2018: *Perception*
Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, Australia



opposite page
Miasma, 2016
Oil on linen, 40" x 40"

top left
Insomnia, 2016
Oil on linen, 40" x 40"

bottom right
Once Upon a Time, 2018
Oil on linen, 40" x 40"