

10 Contemporary Roma Artists You Should Know

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's dignified storytelling, Ceijia Stojka's triumphant paintings, Gabi Jiménez's expressive portraits, and so much more.

Earlier this year, my friend walked by Roma artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's billboard "Beyond the Horizon" (2024-25), part of her *On the Journey* (2024) series. The work, displayed on a billboard on 18th street adjacent to the High Line in the heart of Manhattan, made her proud of her Roma heritage. I've lived in New York for over a decade, and seeing Roma artists spotlighted in such a visible way is as rare as, or rare, as can be. I marked my calendar to go see it.

My first exposure to the arts took place in the absence of institutional bodies, such as museums, theaters, and other cultural spaces. As a child growing up in a small town in Romania, I experienced it in a rather abstract way through a longing for beauty and possibility; that was my way to cope with a deep sense of stigma and a hostile environment where "Gypsies" were rejected, or at most, tolerated as second-class citizens. Properly called Roma, they comprise approximately 10 to 12 million people in Europe and a few million more in North America. As citizens of many different countries, the Roma are one of the most marginalized and neglected ethnic groups globally — entirely without a homeland to call their own.

Even after living alongside other Europeans for centuries, they are, to this day, treated as outsiders. Although Roma have always been part of the European arts and the entertainment industry, they were rarely identified or celebrated as such. In fact, the more success an artist received, the more obscure their heritage became. Furthermore, the heavy stigma and prejudice that still dominate Roma identity and narratives make many of us keep our identity secret for fear of being discriminated against, as was my own case for many years.

Today, for the most part, Roma art is not visible in mainstream American or European society. One could not easily access it in an art album or in exhibitions. And yet, beneath the surface, there is an expanding Roma art landscape, partially due to new institutions dedicated to promoting Roma cultural heritage, such as ERIAC in Berlin, and other emerging networks of Roma artists and scholars. "The Roma art scene has changed a lot in the last few decades, but especially in the last ten years," Isabel Raabe, Berlin-based curator and co-founder of the RomArchive – Digital Archive of the Roma, told me. "There is definitely more visibility. Roma artists are present at almost all international biennials and art festivals."

Below is a list of contemporary Roma visual artists whose works are finally getting the visibility and recognition they deserve.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas

Working mainly with recycled fabric from her own community, Mirga-Tas reinterprets well-known drawings and paintings as well as family photos, creating characters that are vivid, dynamic, and relatable and address universal themes of community, friendship, and motherhood. Take, for instance, "Daj he ćhaworo" (Mother with child, 2022), which depicts the intimate, tender moment of a child lying on his mother's lap as she protectively holds his head.

Her work invites the viewer into a space of wonder and imagination by telling the Roma story in a dignifying and hopeful way. For instance, when she encountered Jacques Callot's 17th-century series of engravings, "Les Bohémiens," which stereotypes the Roma as dangerous, unrelatable wanderers, she focused on creating an empowering alternative.

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That is part of the genesis of the series *On the Journey* (2024).

The materials she uses further convey her message: Second-hand clothes take on a new life and opportunity to shine in the same way her portrayal of people typically perceived as second-class citizens invites the viewer to get to know them and their humanity.

Ceijia Stojka

Another Roma artist whose work has been displayed internationally and in Manhattan in recent years is Holocaust survivor Ceijia Stojka (1933–2013). On the 90th anniversary of her birthday on May 23, 2023, the Austrian Cultural Forum New York organized the exhibition, *What Should I be Afraid of?* Roma Artist Ceijia Stojka, to honor the Austrian artist's life and work.

Stojka's childhood and teenage years were dominated by the Porajmos: the "devouring" (the Romani term for the Holocaust), during which she lost members of her family. It is well known that survivors of such horrific trauma often block and dissociate from their memories, let alone share them with others. Yet, later in life, Stojka began to write about them and created thousands of paintings and drawings, bringing visibility to a lesser-known aspect of the Holocaust: the estimated half million Roma who perished. She does so with the emotional disengagement and distance of a witness — but with the detail and nuance of a survivor.

For instance, in *"Liberation of Bergen-Belsen"* (1993), the predominant use of a striking pale yellow illuminates her vivid memory of the scene, while its flatness creates the sensation of a safe distance from the horrid past.

In addition to paintings depicting the unthinkable, often rendered in black and white, there are those such as *"Untitled"* (1993), which illustrate an idyllic life before the Holocaust.

As a Roma who, like most, grew up in a sedentary family, her portrayal provides insight into a way of life in our culture that is no longer common. Nature is presented in a majestic, fantastical style. Central to the painting is the caravan decorated with stylish curtains. Its proportional size makes it a home that does not dominate the environment, but is rather deeply interconnected with nature and the animals around them.

It is a testament to the triumph of her spirit

that even Nazis could not destroy her memory of the beauty of her early childhood years.

Damian Le Bas and Delaine Le Bas

The Roma art scene and struggle for visibility and recognition would not be complete without the trailblazing efforts of United Kingdom-born artist Damian Le Bas (1963–2017) and his wife Delaine Le Bas, born in 1965. Trained at the Royal College of Art and St. Martin's School of Art in London, they found their voice at the intersection of political activism and the art world. In 2007, both participated in *Paradise Lost*, the first Roma Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale.

In ways that both converge and diverge, Damian and Delaine look at the relationship Roma have with space, agency, and power. Through cartography, Damian quite literally put the Roma peoples on the map, reconfiguring the world's nations and their borders and proclaiming their agency. As one of the founders of the movement *Gypsy Dada*, he developed an artistic approach to fight anti-Roma sentiments and bring attention to our resistance and resilience.

Delaine also draws attention to the lack of representation and struggle for agency. In one work, she stood alone with a sign reading *"Roma Embassy,"* offering a jarring metaphor for how vulnerable Roma are without the legal protections and psychological security that come from belonging to a nation-state with its own territory and institutions.

She also explores the double oppression of being both Roma and female, and points to gendered experiences of marginalization.

In 2024, she was nominated for the Turner Prize, one of the most prestigious art prizes for British visual artists. She and Damian's son, Damian James Le Bas, is a writer and artist who continues the artistic legacy of his parents through various mediums.

Gabi Jiménez

Born in 1964, Gabi Jiménez is a French painter whose bold, expressive, and satirical work draws attention to the discrimination of the Roma people by the French.

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Often highly political, his work is vibrant, playful, and even excessive, highlighting the absurdity and injustice caused by racism and stereotypes. For instance, his 2008 work “Expulsions” is a visual expression of societal unrest, depicting Roma being forcefully evicted and their camps demolished.

Reminiscent of Keith Haring, his graffiti-like strokes evoke the gritty underground art world popularized by the New York subway. In 2013, the French state acquired two of his works, both titled “Le Grand Paris” (undated). In 2014, Jiménez received the Painting and Visual Arts award from Spain’s Ministry of Culture to acknowledge his human rights activism through art.

One of his most riveting pieces is a Cubist-style portrait of Raymond Gureme, a French and Roma inspirational figure and Holocaust survivor.

Another striking work is “Barrio Gitano” (undated), which depicts an outdoor clothesline commonly used in many European villages and small towns. A pair of pants drying upside-down has the words “mishto attitude” written on them, which roughly translates to “cool attitude.” In Romania, the word has entered the mainstream language, frequently used by Roma and non-Roma alike.

Along with Damian Le Bas, he exhibited in the 2007 Venice Biennale Roma Pavilion. The two also founded the aforementioned “Gypsy Dada” movement.

Farija Mehmeti

When American writer and Roma activist Paul Polansky encouraged the self-taught artist Farija Mehmeti to paint portraits of Roma women, she set out on a mission. Roma women have a long history of being depicted in the arts, but often in exotic ways by non-Roma male artists. Polansky’s encouragement, along with mentorship from Mehmeti’s brother, Bajram Mehmeti, also a painter, helped her find her artistic voice. Born in 1978, she grew up in a village in Kosovo and only attended primary school. Even today in Eastern Europe, many Roma women never attend school beyond the 5th or 6th grade. Through her art, Mehmeti is bringing visibility to them, “showing their emotions, their daily life, the inequality.”

Although each of the Roma women Mehmeti depicts gets their own individual portrait, a

luxury often reserved for those with means and privilege, their expressions, features, and hairstyles do not differ much from each other. The mundane Roma women look humble, shy, and non-imposing. Interestingly, their clothes and scarves have a unique style and bold personality, which in itself is a reflection of the condition of the culture: Clothes and fashion are designed to captivate, while the women themselves are often invisible.

The apparel — scarves, blouses — is conservative in style, but modern in pattern. It’s not by accident that Mehmeti pays so much attention to her characters’ outfits — as a little girl, she wanted to be a fashion designer.

The RomaMoMA library, which displayed 39 of Mehmeti’s portraits at the National Library of Kosovo, brilliantly captured the collective voice of Roma women. Along with the artist’s choice to portray her characters in conservative clothes with joyful patterns, the portraits’ clean and coherent visual narratives mark a new chapter in which Roma women are seen on their own terms.

Daniel Baker

Daniel Baker is a well-established artistic and scholarly presence in the Roma art world. Born in Kent, England, and based in London, he holds a doctoral degree in Roma aesthetics from the Royal College of Art, and works not only as an artist but also as a curator and art theorist.

As a Roma woman long struggling with internalized stigma that has shaped my self-image, I find his work with mirrors and reflective surfaces particularly relevant to larger themes of Roma self-representation, visibility, and marginalization. The reflective surfaces create an immersive personal experience for the viewer and a space to explore ideas, question stereotypes, and deconstruct Roma narratives, making space for new ones.

His mirror signs reading “No Entry” and “No Travellers” draw attention to the discrimination Roma often encounter. Despite the widespread stereotypes about our being free nomads and wanderers, our movement is, in fact, policed and regulated.

What is often labeled as a desire to be on the road and not follow societal rules hides a different kind of reality in which Roma are often evicted or forcefully “tethered” to the land due to centuries of slavery. By exhibiting these real signs denying entry to Roma, Baker exposes the hypocrisy of a mainstream society that has no problem romanticizing Roma, then vilifying them.

Baker also uses work with mirrors to write the names of different Roma subgroups, an essential aspect of the identity. Under the broad umbrella, there are many distinct subgroups with their own traditions and lifestyles, such as “sinti,” “kale,” and “romanichal,” which share as many differences as similarities.

Manolo Gómez Romero

When Manolo Gómez Romero married Joanna Artigas, he joined her family’s long artistic tradition in ceramics. Her father, Joan Gardy Artigas, and her grandfather, Llorenç Artigas, were ceramists who collaborated with well-known artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, and Alberto Giacometti. Born into a family with a long flamenco tradition, he started to explore his own artistic voice and ended up focusing primarily on abstract painting. Some of his works give visual expression to flamenco and bring a new dimension to a genre of dance and music that makes many Spanish Roma proud.

Born in Spain in 1967, as a child, he was intrigued by abstract shapes and marks, such as the pattern of lime that accidentally fell on the floor when the family home was plastered. He lived in traditional stone housing characteristic of Roma in the country, which they frequently needed to retouch. This early memory serves as a basis for his artistic style. Many of his works capture movement and color in a vibrant and mesmerizing way, like dance on canvas.

In 2012, he received the Premio de la Cultura Gitana, a prize awarded by a public foundation under Spain’s Ministry of Culture. His work has continued to be praised and widely exhibited in Spain and throughout Europe, including at the Veni that makes many Spanish Roma proud.

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Mircea Lacatus

Born in Romania in 1962, Lacatus primarily works in sculpture. He formally studied art at an early age in his hometown and continued his studies at the National University of Fine Arts in Bucharest. He graduated in 1989, right after the fall of communism, a tipping point in Romanian society. Afterwards, he continued his artistic career abroad in Austria for 22 years and later in the United States. In 2016, he held a religiously themed exhibition in Manhattan, Angels Go North, a collaboration between Gallery Riva and the Romanian Cultural Institute, New York.

“Mother and child – marble” (undated) depicts a baby exploring their mother’s upper body, touching her with their tiny hands and feet. The mother’s facial expression is calm and permissive of her baby’s curiosity; her hands are holding the baby, providing a foundation on which to balance.

“Mother and child, red marble” (undated), the signature image on the artist’s website, depicts another playful and dynamic moment between mother and child, their round faces looking towards the viewer. The mother engages her whole body, holding the baby with her legs. In my grandparents’ village, women would cradle the babies on their legs until they fell asleep. Nowadays, modern gadgets often replace these bonding traditions that Lacatus so masterfully captures in his sculptures.

Another example of his skill is “Mother and child limestone” (undated), in which the baby is peaceful in the safety of his mother’s arms, a powerful expression of attachment and deep comfort.

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The child's face is well-defined and visible, while the mother's is less so — a visual metaphor for a mother's sacrificial love in prioritizing her child's needs.

According to Glenn Dasher, sculptor and former dean of Fine Arts at the University of Alabama, his works are not only technically but conceptually strong. "Simple creations of ordinary stone are transformative and serve in his quest for rediscovering and finding expression in the 'sacred' in our daily lives," he says in a quote on the artist's website, "giving his sculptures an air of timelessness while being archaic and futuristic." Lacatus's work invites the viewer into a space of serenity, intimacy, and timeless beauty. It manages to capture the essence of the mother and child relationship.

Marcus-Gunnar Pettersson

Born in 1987 in Sweden, Pettersson is a young illustrator and picture book creator. According to ERIAC, he began his artistic career in 2014 with several books that feature Roma children as protagonists — a rare and much-needed contribution to the education and empowerment of new generations of Roma children. Pettersson, together with Marin Salto, co-authored a series of three children's books, all of which have been published in Swedish, as well as multiple Romani dialects such as Arli, Kalé, Kelderaš, Lovari, and Traveller-Romani.

In 2015, he was awarded the Swedish Albert Engstrom Youth Prize, and in 2018, he created his own picture book, *Modig Som Ett Lejon*, an endearing and humorous work with animal idioms. In one, a crow accompanied by a baby bird is up for all sorts of adventures. In a Romanian context, "crow" or "black crow" is as bad an insult as it gets, meant to dehumanize and hurt the Roma. Whether intentionally or not, his crow character with gentle, calm facial expressions rejects negative associations with the bird.

As the mother of two young children, I'm glad there are more materials available for them to learn about their Roma heritage and artists who share their background than during my own childhood. Despite all odds, the ability of these remarkable artists from so many different countries to share their stories through the visual arts is progress worth celebrating. They are part of a growing scene that includes theater, photography, cinema, art exhibitions,

and other venues for sharing their messages and talents.

I look forward to the moment when there will be art albums with Roma artists easily accessible in libraries, when art history departments will reflect on the portrayal of our culture and people in the arts, and museums invest in their first Roma exhibitions. As Raabe put it, "I would like to see a greater percentage of Roma artists in the collections of the world's major museums. This also means that these works should be shown and not just owned." Only then can Roma claim their rightful place in the global narrative of art history.

I recently returned with my five-year-old to see Mirga-Tas's work on the High Line, joined by his best friend and her mom. Seeing a Roma artist spotlighted in such a prominent public space was nothing short of incredible — something unimaginable during my own childhood. As the children looked over the horizon at the giant image alongside many other admirers, I shared the joy of the moment with the other mom.

Art sparks dialogue, fosters connection, triggers feeling, and makes us share more about who we are. On that sunny day with a clear sky and cool breeze, as I took in a piece of Roma history, I could only hope that such exhibitions continue to bring greater Roma visibility to the arts in New York City and throughout the world.

Editor's note 10/10/25 6:12pm: The last two paragraphs were added after the piece was first published.