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From Paddy Fields to Paris: Ta Thimkaeo's Artistic Journey

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July 17, 2019 by [Grace Ignacia See](#)



Image courtesy of the artist

Self-taught artist [Ta Thimkaeo](#) has had quite the journey with art. Growing up in a village in Thailand, her first jobs included working in paddy fields, a sweatshop, and even driving trucks until her early twenties. It wasn't until a chance encounter with a local artist that invigorated her artistic senses, motivating her to pursue painting and fall in love with the practice thereafter.

In true rags to riches fashion, her artworks now adorn walls internationally, from Paris to Peru. They beautify walls in Berkeley Square in London's Mayfair, 5th Ave in New York, Malibu Beach and Hollywood in California.

As part of 'On The Rise', a new segment showcasing emerging creatives on The Artling Artzine, we get to know Ta Thimkaeo and her practice a little more, how she comes up with her quirky subjects, their demeanors, and what series that she's attached to the most:

For those who aren't familiar with your background, could you tell us a little more about your journey as an artist?

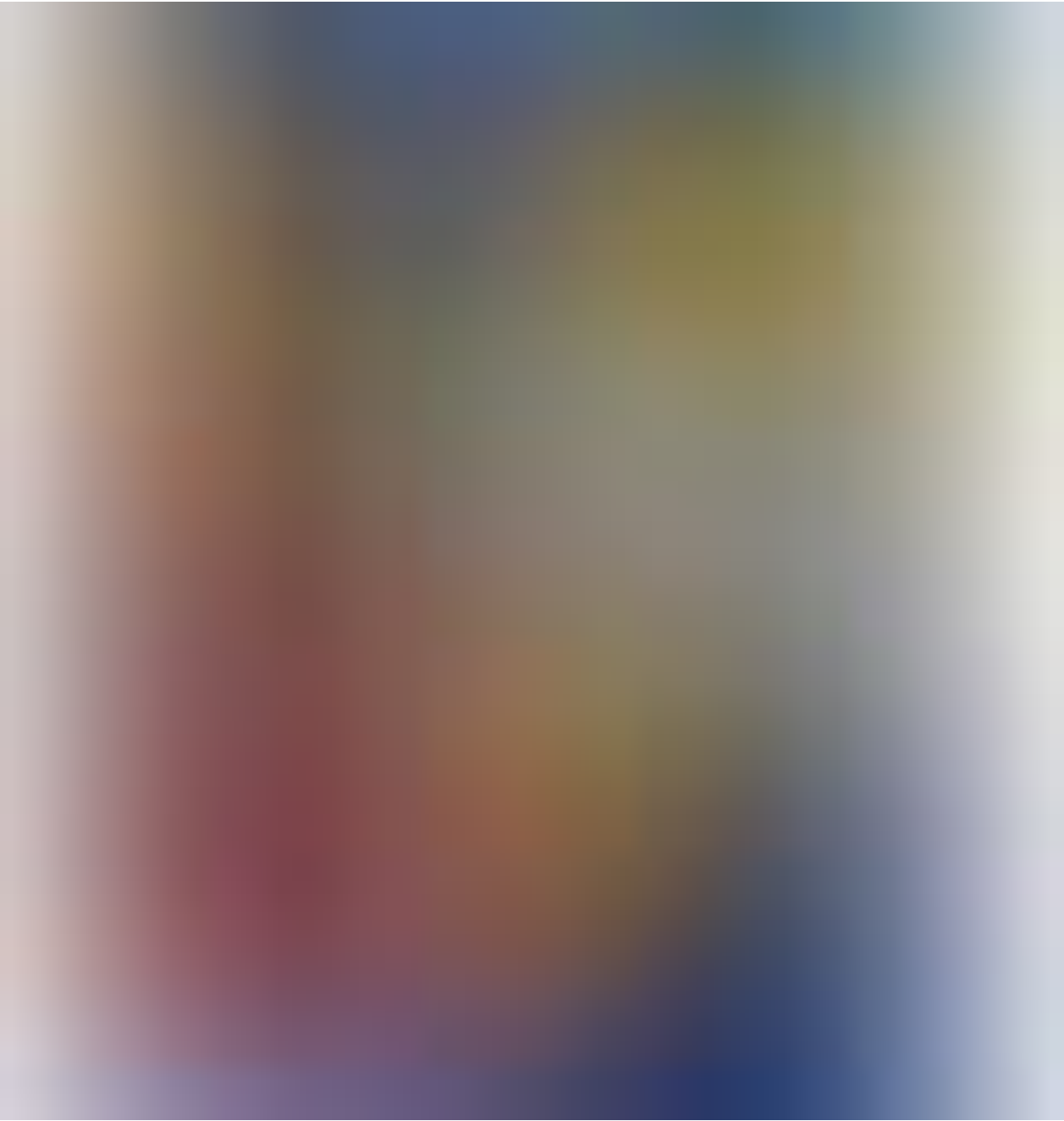
I once said that it would have been easier to walk on the moon than to become an artist, but later in life, I had a wonderful opportunity and grabbed it with both hands. That opportunity was art. I'm in it now and I'm not moving; I believe art will continue to change my life for the better and I love it.

I'm now living in a beautiful part of Thailand with my house and studio overlooking the stunning gulf, but it was not always like that. When I was a kid living in a rural village with little electricity and no running water, life was very difficult. It was a farming area, mainly rice and most people working in the rice fields. That was our life. There was little ambition to do anything else.

I was always different from the rest of the people in my village. I just wanted to escape; I knew there was a different world out there. I just didn't know where. I was always creative as a child; we had very little money and whenever I could get hold of a bit of paper and pencil I would sketch and draw for hours. Most people thought I was wasting time until one of my sketches completely changed my life.



Lovers. When I'm with you by Ta Thimkaeo



ladies of the night by Ta Thimkaeo

Why have you chosen your mode of practice?

I came from an impoverished, rural farming family but I was fortunate to have attended school until the age of 12. Lots of kids had to leave earlier to start working. At 12 years of age, I worked in the rice fields, at 13 a sweatshop in Bangkok making shirts, and at 14 I was driving a pickup truck seven days a week for 14 hours a day selling vegetables. I did this until my early twenties.

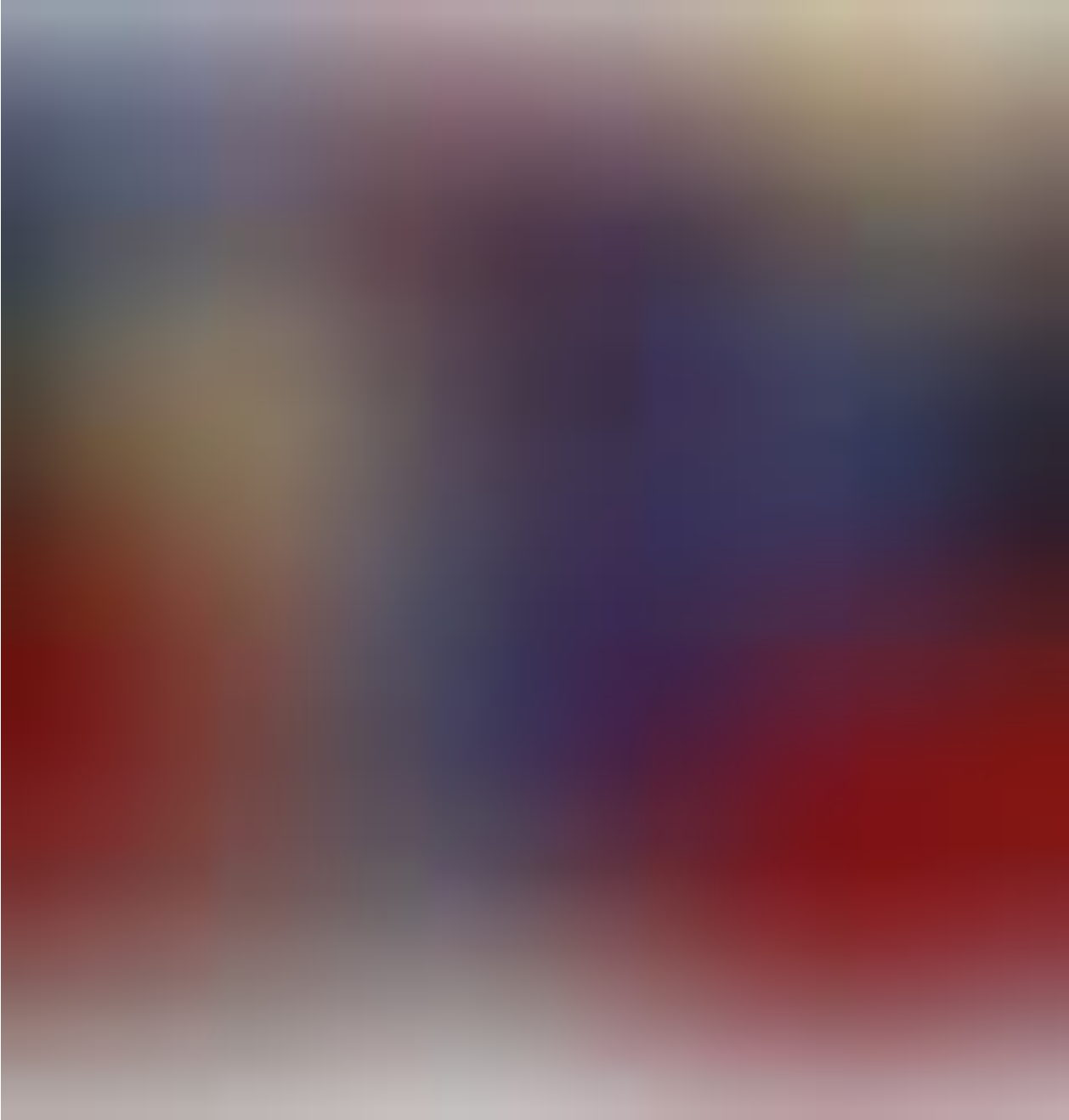
While working in the shirt factory in Bangkok I went for a walk. I didn't get far until I came across an old art studio with an old man painting. I stood and watched him for ages, he invited me in, showed me what he was doing and showed me around his studio.

I knew I wanted to be like that old man and paint, I loved that old studio. I loved the chaos and the smell of paint. It was fascinating, and I was well and truly hooked. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I knew one day I was going to be an artist and I knew I would work with oil painting.

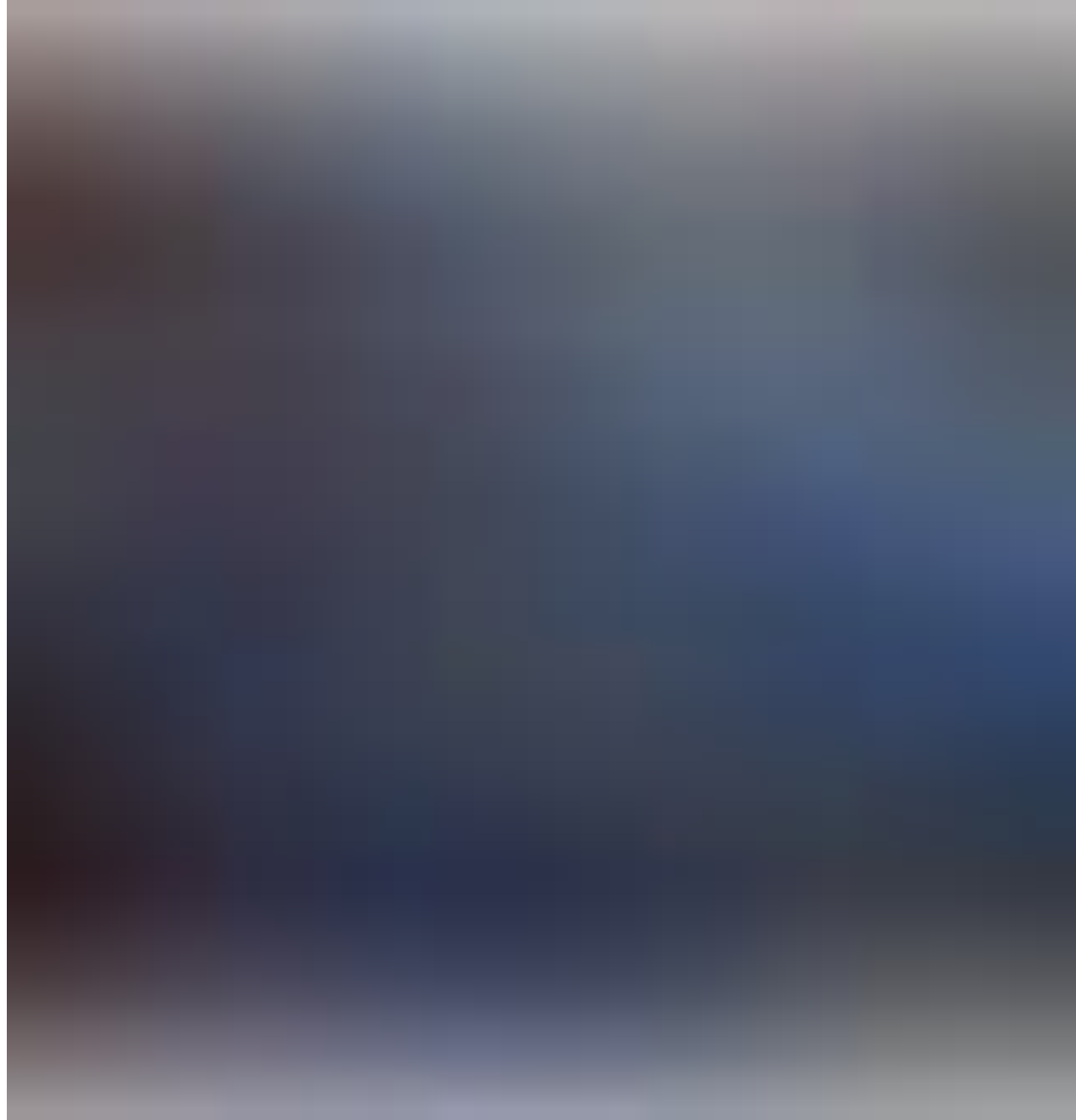
What are some themes you find yourself drawn to when creating your works?

I’m a people watcher; I could study a person for hours. We all wear masks to hide our true characters and some of my subjects wear an egg as a mask. Some wear hats, some are very confident like my 'goddesses' - but we all have something in common - we all have something to hide. Only my 'lovers' show their true feelings and the love they have for each other or sadness when apart, and my 'jazz players' come in all shapes and sizes.

For me nudes are interesting to paint, I’ve had people say some of my ladies are gross, grotesque, fat and ugly, I’ve also had people comment that they are profoundly beautiful.



Piano man playing the violin by Ta Thimkaeo



The Composer by Ta Thimkaeo

How do you find inspiration for your work?

I get a lot of my inspiration from three artists: Claude Monet with his use of colour, his expressiveness, detail and the softness of his beautiful paintings; Vincent van Gogh with his bold use of colour and his expressiveness - I like to think I'm a little impulsive like him; with L.S. Lowry how he unbelievably produced the works he did with just five colors.

What's your favorite museum to visit for inspiration?

Tate Modern London. A couple of years ago I went to the UK and spent nearly all my time in art galleries and museums. I was like a kid in a sweet shop. I also went to the Tate Britain and there was a Lowry exhibition on. I just walked around for hours looking at his work, completely spellbound.

Is there a work or series that you find yourself more attached to? What is it and why?

My Egg collection. When I was a kid at school we would have to take our lunch box to school as there were no kitchen or cooking facilities, when the dinner bell would ring we would all sit on the floor to eat our lunch.

Almost every day I had a fried egg on rice (we had lots of chickens). The other kids would say, “Ta, another fried egg and you'll begin to start looking like a fried egg”. One day I was frying an egg and thought that would make a great face, and now my eggs are hanging on walls all over the world.



Egg flowers in blue vase by Ta Thimkaeo



Egg flower in blue vase by Ta Thimkaeo

What has been the most challenging part of being an artist?

I don't live in Paris, London, Amsterdam or New York yet I've sent my work there thanks to online galleries. It would have been impossible only a few years ago with the internet. It's been extremely hard work to gain recognition and build my reputation. Now my works are displayed in over 38 countries, including some iconic places like Berkeley Square in London's Mayfair, 5th Ave New York, Malibu Beach and Hollywood in California and most recently Kazakhstan. My works are also on walls from The Bahamas to Germany, Monte Carlo to Peru. One of my best collectors is in Amsterdam, a city not short of great artists or galleries. I'm very proud of that.

Not bad for a girl from the rice fields of Thailand. Maybe I should have tried earlier to walk on the moon.

Name three artists who you'd like to collaborate with

Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, and L.S. Lowry.

What's next for you as an artist?

My plan is to get to showcase in an international art fair or exhibition in 2020

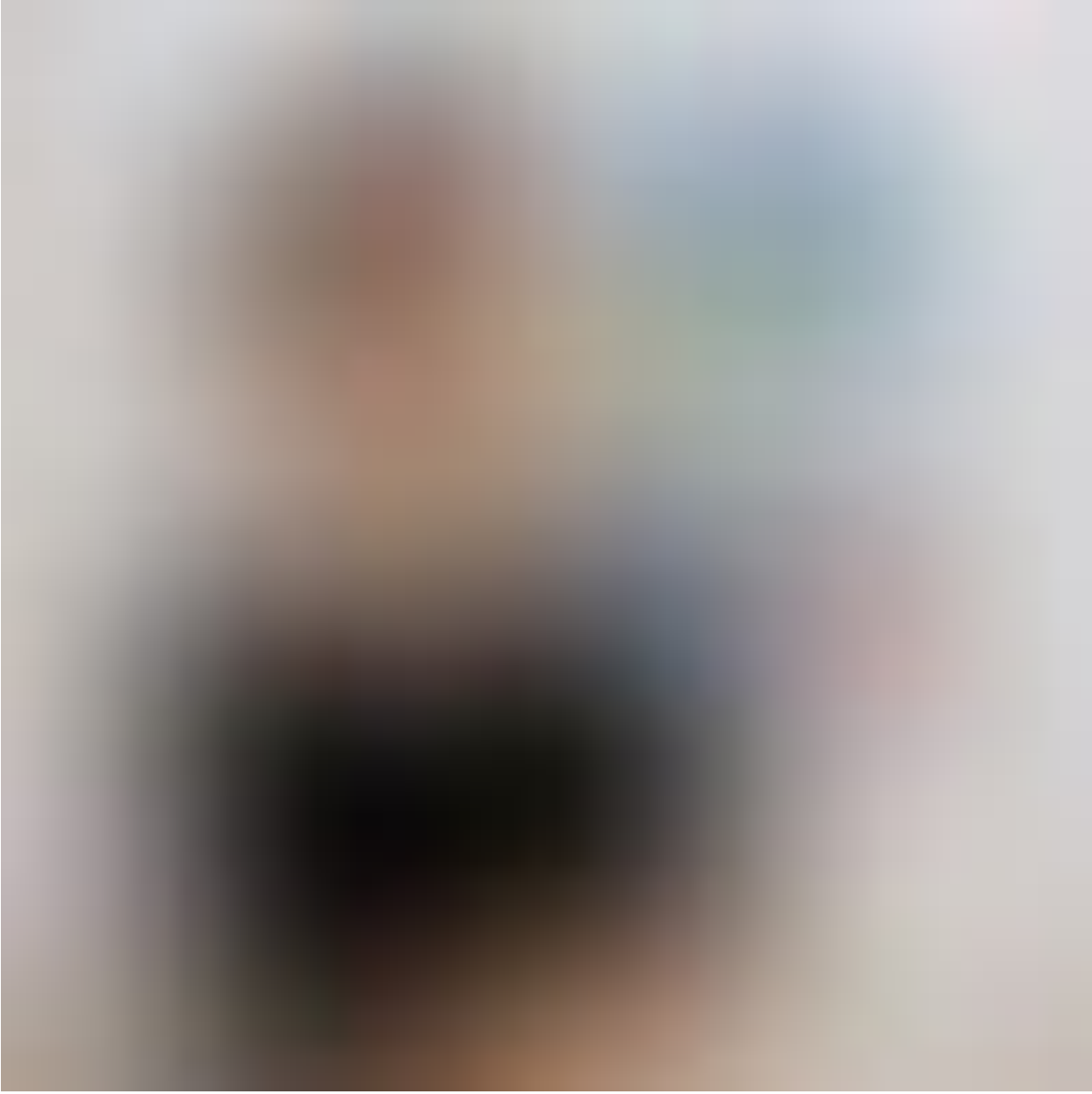
To explore more artworks by Ta Thimkaeo, [click here](#).

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