

ON THE COVER

Ballad of the Greatest Overthinker by Jessica Matier

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist conducted on July 9, 2025.

Psychologists may be aware of overthinking in the rumination of psychotherapy clients or as a trap to avoid with dissertations, journal articles, and conference talks. Yet how thinking about something too much and too long figures in our cover image is not obvious. In what way is overthinking expressed in this eruption of lava reds, frosty whites, and that partly hidden tongue of blue?

Ballad of the Greatest Overthinker was done on canvas with a mix of soft pastels, watercolor, and acrylic paints. Jessica Matier, the cover artist, uses brushwork sparingly and often augments with spray paint or may tilt the canvas to let the inks move and mingle. Soft pastels are a dry medium comprising concentrated pigment, water, and minimal binder. Their application yields potent color and allows smooth transitions to be made between different hues and forms. Colors have meaning for Matier, with red signaling action, blue signaling unconscious thought, and white signaling “the culmination of everything.” Those straight lines are “higher” thought, piercing the tumult. It is the convergence of these multiple movements and directions that exemplifies overthinking to Matier. Clearly, she has her own interpretation of the term. But then, as she sees it, the title of an artwork “is a door to walk through” and may lead to the trail left by the artist. Or it may lead elsewhere. Paintings are like mirrors, she suggests, and in them we should see ourselves.

Matier was born in South Korea and given up for adoption at the age of 3 months. Her mother gave birth to a succession of daughters instead of the preferred son, and so there was no place for another girl in the home—or in Korea for that matter. She was eventually accepted by a couple in the United States. Another loss came quickly with the death of her adoptive mother. Thus, Matier was raised in New Jersey by her adoptive father, who remarried only to divorce. She describes him as being “too busy and distracted with everyday tasks, trying to survive and pay the bills” to address her future. The upside of this situation was the freedom and autonomy it provided. Matier pursued art at an early age and

liked to imagine and create “worlds” like entire farms or cities. Her school years included drawing and painting but also theater, and she went on to study at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. There she switched from fine art to illustration, which she found more “useful.”

She was initially drawn to abstraction in her art making and less focused on portraying events from the past than on exploring emotion and the “magic” of the unconscious. Nonetheless, she thinks that the psychological experiences of her childhood influenced her work. Favorite artists include Thomas Cole, a major 19th-century American painter known for his moody and allegorical landscapes, and Kelti Smith, a contemporary painter who mixes abstract and representational elements in her work. Another favorite, the late Louise Bourgeois, added sculpture to this mix, evoking memories and themes from her life and family. Matier is also drawn to ancient Egyptian painting and to the symbolism of many cultures and belief systems including mysticism and alchemy. Living in New York meant access to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, another key influence on her development. She began painting full time in 2016 and shows and sells her work nationally and internationally. Apart from her skills in visual art, Matier has a gift for titles. Consider, for example, *The Blossoming Death of Diffidence* and *I'll Wield You a Sword Made of Feathers and Saccharine Curses*. She is also qualified in, of all things, accounting and enjoys the different kinds of activity it requires. Matier relocated to Kansas City, Missouri, in 2022 along with her husband and children.

An important recent event brought about a shift in her approach to art making. It was the experience of discovering and meeting her biological family, including her sisters. Before this event everything was a mystery and therefore abstract. But then it became tangible and known, which moved her to representation. Matier now paints flowers and landscapes as well as abstract forms and exercises her talent for titles that seem especially apt for a psychological readership.

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