

Artist in Focus

Henrik Aa. Uldalen Instagram Story Q&A

‘How do you blend the colours really smoothly?’

Henrik Aa. Uldalen: I use a medium names Liquin original. Gives the paint a very lose and smooth flow. I also use fairly soft brushes.

‘How did you start in JD Malat Gallery? How did you approach them?’

Uldalen: He asked me! I would recommend you to send submissions via email to the galleries you’re interested in exhibiting in. Don’t show up on the door with a portfolio.

‘Do you often take breaks when painting a big painting? What’s the average work time on it?’

Uldalen: I usually stay in the studio for a good eight hours a day, and out of those hours I physically paint for less than an hour. My production mostly requires problem solving and figuring things out. Painting is the fast bit.

‘How did you develop your style? And do you have any tips on how one can find their own style?’

Uldalen: Time! Things take time. I’ve painted for thirteen years and the style keeps evolving and changing. I will hopefully always keep changing and find new ways to express myself.

‘What inspires you the most?’

Uldalen: Life. (Beauty, grief, love, death, anger, rainbows).

‘What palette do you usually use?’

Uldalen: Burnt umber, cad red, alizarin crimson, olive/sap green, primary yellow/yellow ochre, manganese blue, ultramarine, titanium white and any black.

‘Why do you often blur the faces, especially the eyes?’

Uldalen: It’s part of a long going underlying concept of mine, implying that all my paintings are of allegorical metaphysical concepts, rather than portraits and narratives. An expression of something that’s on the inside. The disconnection from the paintings to the viewer is important to me, and closed eyes builds up under that motion.

‘Have you found that the recent social distancing is impacting your creativity?’

Uldalen: Not at all.

‘Does your work reference Neo-Classicism? And do you have a favourite art movement/period?’

Uldalen: I wouldn't say it references Neo-Classicism. I think of it more as a starting point in which I grew from. I loved it when I started painting, and it lingers in my system still, although I much prefer to be called an expressionist.

‘Do you overthink while painting?’

Uldalen: While painting, cooking, watching the news, washing clothes, laying in bed, eating breakfast, mixing paint, talking to the neighbours, watching YouTube videos, making Instagram posts, washing brushes, drinking coffee, drinking more coffee, having a shower, running...

‘When did you start to draw?’

Uldalen: As any kid did. Essentially when they got handed a pencil for the first time. But I started painting at nineteen after randomly trying out oil paints for the first time. It changed everything for me.

‘How did you teach yourself despite not going to art school?’

Uldalen: Most of the information you need about anything is out there. I looked things up online, in books, I wrote interviews to artists I liked. In my opinion the real strength in art school is getting to try out a wide variety of techniques and building lasting bonds with likeminded people. If you already know what you want to do, art school might not be essential.

‘Any tips for artists who want to get into painting?’

Uldalen: I would personally start out with very simple black and white master studies. Keep it simple, it's not about making a masterpiece in the beginning. Black and what makes it easier to work with values, in my opinion the most important thing in figurative painting. It's only about getting to know the medium and how the paint flows on the surface. You can expand to colours once you're comfortable with black and white.

‘How often will you be painting during the coronavirus period?’

Uldalen: Every day until I run out of paint.

‘What brushes do you use?’

Uldalen: Rosemary Brushes.

‘When you decided to be an artist, how did you balance between work and painting?’

Uldalen: When I first discovered oil paints and decide to become a painter, I had a lot more energy and fire in me. I would study to be a teacher but after studies I would go to a studio that me and a friend rented in order to paint for the remaining hours of the day. A few days a week plus weekends I would work as a pizza chef to earn money.

‘Are there any artists that inspire you or that you look up to?’

Uldalen: The greatest, David Lynch.

‘How do you find your models and do you look for something specific in them?’

Uldalen: By screaming out on Instagram that I’m in need of models. I’m not looking for something in particular, so everyone is welcome to reach out!

‘How do you get over artist block?’

Uldalen: Pretty much always. I have many ways to fight artist block thought. One of my most efficient remedies is to do a small study/sketch the first thing in the morning, completely free of thought and plan. Half way through I’ll remember why I love painting. Now that the brushes are wet, it’s much easier for me to start working on the bigger pieces in the back, the hard bit is usually just starting. Since these studies are less precious to me because it’s done so often and rapidly, I tend to experiment a lot more and have more fun with it, this often leads to great discoveries for me, ideas I can then use in my main pieces.

‘What would you recommend to artists who are burning out?’

Uldalen: Great question! I would say it’s paramount that you have something in your production that you find exciting or fun. You might not always talk about things that are fun (as I do), but I’m in constant search of ways to express myself in different mediums that might excite me. Right now, I’m working with pottery and wood carving. Change it up and chin up!

‘How much paint do you do through on one big painting?’

Uldalen: Surprisingly little paint. It might seem like I go through a ton of paint, but the bulk of it is cheap black and white. The colour tubes would last me for months. I would say I buy one small tube of paint every two months.

‘How do you prepare the surface when you paint oil on wood?’

Uldalen: I prime the surface with two layers of undiluted gesso (any brand). I let the gesso dry sufficiently in between layers. The next day I sand down the surface with water, to make the gesso ‘melt’ evenly out on the panel. Third day I apply a wash that consists of any sealer or oil paint medium, so the gesso won’t suck in the oil from the paint, making it look blotchy. On the fourth day I paint.

‘Do you prefer oil or acrylic?’

Uldalen: Oil baby!

‘If your art would be an item of clothing, what would it be?’

Uldalen: A tie. Kind of nonessential and half pretentious, initially used to hide the mundane sides of life.

‘Do you focus more on skills or ideas?’

Uldalen: Ideas! Anyone with a few thousand hours of training can become a master craftsman in anything. Skill in painting doesn't impress me at all anymore.

'How was your time in Mexico City? What did you learn about painting?'

Uldalen: Absolutely incredible. Loved it and will always remember my time there. The kindest people I've ever met. Also, tacos.

'How many years were you painting before you were committed to a gallery?'

Uldalen: I got accepted immediately, the same year.

'What's your favourite scale to work at? I especially love the big works.'

Uldalen: My most comfortable size is around 150 x 150 cm, but I love a big painting from time to time.

'If you had to choose one colour from your palette to keep, which one would it be and why?'

Uldalen: Black! I've always been a sucker for high contrast. You can describe light by adding darkness, but you can't describe darkness by adding light.

'How were you able to become so confident at knowing where exactly to paint all the features?'

Uldalen: Practice, practice, practice.

'How do you find working with gouache on your journal to oil studies?'

Uldalen: I find it really unusual and refreshing. It's so far away from painting with oil paint. I've been broadening my horizon lately, and find that mediums I used to hate are now really enjoyable, such as watercolour. I think the lack of control suits me better now than before.

'Have you ever tried to paint a landscape?'

Uldalen: Most of my works back in 2009-2010 were characters in landscapes. I didn't really enjoy painting them, but they suited the concepts of the exhibitions at the time.

'Are some pieces driven by the spirit of the model or do you already have a concept in mind?'

Uldalen: It's not about the model. It's about catching a fleeting emotion in a fleeting moment in time.

'The thick layers on some of your paintings, is it lots of paint or some kind of plaster?'

Uldalen: All paint! Sometimes mixed with some impasto paste for volume.