

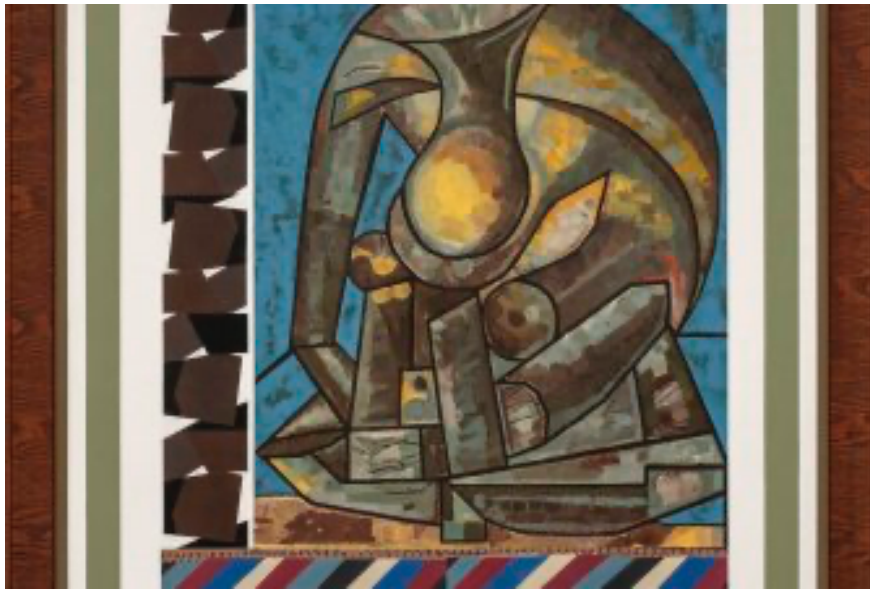
## The reclusive Melbourne artist who's mashing up a storm

by Nick Miller, *The Age*, 1 June 2021

Diena Georgetti is ready for our interview. She has set aside a room, lit some incense, got an energy drink to hand and some punk rock on high turnover on YouTube.

Georgetti rarely gives interviews. She happily admits she's a recluse. "I don't go out," she says. "I'm perfect for lockdown ... I don't do 'life' very well."

But she does art very well: her 2020 painting *Ampersand* has just won the 2021 Geelong Contemporary Art Prize: a prestigious award worth \$30,000.



A detail from *Ampersand* by Diena Georgetti, winner of the 2021 Geelong contemporary art prize.

In *Ampersand* a curled, double-headed Cubist form folds in on itself, reminiscent of the curvaceous, archaic "&" that used to be the 27th letter of the alphabet first found traced on a Pompeii wall. A repeated pattern of diagonal colours forms a painterly footnote. To the side, structural, almost sculptural marginalia.

"[Her] painting drew our attention for its conceptual pose and its elegant formal composition," says Geelong Gallery director and CEO Jason Smith, a member of the judging panel. "It is a precisely constructed but poetic image."

It's also not quite what it seems. Georgetti's process is akin to a musical mash-up (after the interview, we both go to YouTube to play *The Grey Album*, DJ Danger Mouse's inspired blend of the Beatles' *White Album* with Jay-Z's *Black Album*).

The judges call it "a creative process of sampling that reworks real and archival fragments in the spirit of historical collage".

Georgetti, born in Alice Springs in 1966 but now living and working in Melbourne, puts it like this: there are "multiple contributors" to this "post-modernist" work.

So who are the contributors?

"I don't know."

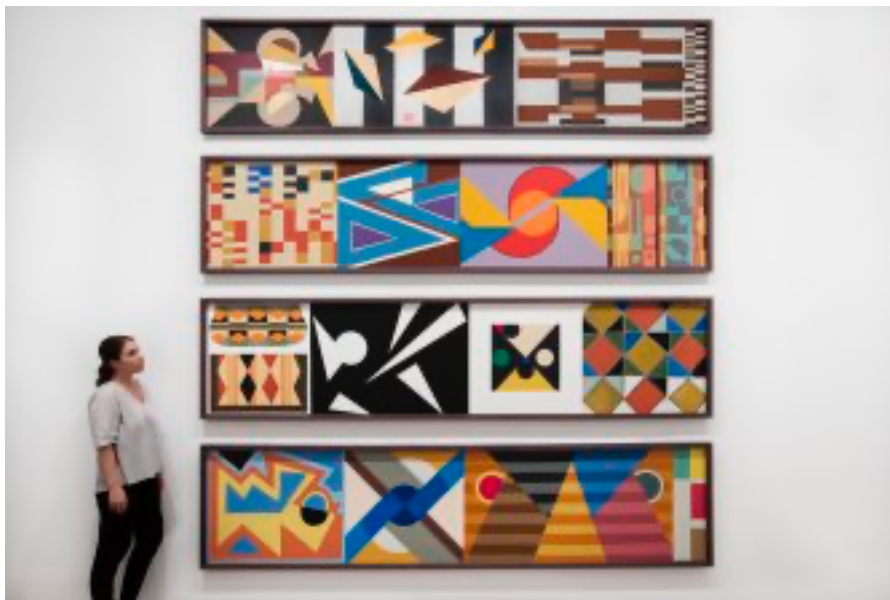
She goes online, she looks for images. She doesn't always get the names, the dates, the contexts.

"It's just an image that comes up and your DNA's going to respond to that, and you say, 'Oh yes, I need you desperately in my life, you represent so much for me,' or, 'I need to be challenged by you or comforted by you.'

"Usually I look for something expressive and then something austere."

In *Ampersand*, the figure is expressive. People can feel represented by it. "That did a lot of the hard work." Then, on the margin, "almost like a metal sculpture", an austere repeat of a drawing she found. The bottom is a doubled-up section of a rug pattern.

As she pulls the images together she interrogates her own reaction to them: should this oval be a circle? Should this be longer? Why is she flinching at these colour choices, even repulsed?



Diena Georgetti, *Superstudio*, 2015-2017, at The Commercial, Sydney. (Photo: The Commercial)

She doesn't have a singular signature or movement or style. That feels appropriate to her.

"When you put things together that are supposedly opposites ... I do look for the contradiction so that I can put them together. And you will get more from each, because of that."

She worries it'll be a controversial choice for the prize.

"The 'appropriation' aspect of how I make paintings has triggered a few people," she says. "I'm open to any reaction, and I think actually that one of the functions of art is to recognise the similarities and dissimilarities within [art]."

Georgetti started calling herself an artist only eight years ago. Before that, she says, there was a time when in the public mind "artist equalled drugged-up loser".

But her star continues to rise. Georgetti's *Superstudio* features in part two of *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, opening this month at the National Gallery of Australia.