

Kseniya Simonova (born April 22, 1985) is an Ukrainian young famous artist from Evpatoriya, a small city on the Crimean peninsula.

She painted, drew and designed since she was a little girl, helped in enlarging her talent by her mother – Irina Simonova – an artist, stylist, theatrical designer and teacher of fine arts.

Kseniya graduated twice: the first time in 2007 – with a specialization in Psychophysiology – and the second the following year, after studying for five years at the Ukrainian Academy of Printing on the Graphics Department. She got both university degrees with the best scores.

She started practicing drawing with sand in 2008 and the following year she became famous all over the world after participating in Ukraine's got talent, a television show similar to the well-known American format. On that occasion she performed a sand story (You are always nearby) which has become one of the most clicked video.

Between 2009 and 2011 Kseniya Simonova has created more than 200 sand stories and she has performed all over the world, often in front of various Heads of State.

She lives in Evpatoriya with her husband Igor and her son, little Dmitry.

I impulsively wrote Kseniya, after watching *You are always nearby*. She immediately replied me and accepted the idea of an interview by email. I thank Kseniya Simonova for her courtesy and willingness, and above all for giving me emotions through her art. I also thank Mrs. Pierangela Marchi who indicated me the YouTube video.

Since you were a child, you were surrounded by creativity. You usually painted and drew with your mother... afterwards you even studied with her at the Fine Arts School. What kind of teacher was Irina Simonova?

She is still working as teacher. Before that she had to take a vacation because she gave birth to my two sisters – Mariya and Anastasiya aged 9 and 7 now. Now she returned. Her students really love her because she has a position of a partner, not a teacher, she always gives full artistic freedom to a child – I appreciate that a lot. At the same time she has got many experiences as an academic artist, and she gives a strong drawing base to her students. When I was a child, she was always painting, and I did the same, though nobody insisted. At the weekends we went to the streets of our old place and made sketches together. That was a lovely time.

At school you started translating Ukrainian folk songs into English and English folk poetry (great poets, too, like Shakespeare, Byron and so on) into Russian and Ukrainian. You are keeping doing it. What poet or writer do you prefer? Who do you consider closer to your feeling?

I am keen on G.G. Byron, especially on his lyrical side: *My soul is dark...* Another beloved poet is Robert Burns who I think is now physically living in my brain. "Oh, my love is like a red, red Rose...", "Should auld acquaintance be forgot..."

Kseniya Simonova is a very eclectic young woman: would you like to tell us something about your first thesis, concerning a colour therapy in Psychology?

Firstly I can say that I had really amazing curators who taught me how to enjoy reading a serious scientific literature, how to feel a hunger from the lack of reading. That was a School! Concerning my specialization I can say that all I experimented and described proves my old belief that art is the best healing. Combinations of colors specially built according to the physical peculiarities of a person can provide good healing of neuroses, insomnia, fears... I took part in the experiments of our Professor and I am honored now to remember that. Though I never worked as a Psychologist, I can conclude that I had a precious base and experience of a scientific work.

***Chocolate* is not just something to eat...**

Right, it is also the name of the magazine I published together with my husband. It was a cultural glance magazine with good polygraph, all designed and hand-drawn by me. My pride is the fact that it was bilingual, and the translation part was also completed by me. We issued about 12 issues during a year, and it was known not only in Ukraine and was considered a good project, but the 2008 financial crisis changed that. Our advert clients refused from the ads because of the bad financial situation and we had to freeze the project. Now I am very often asked about the future of the *Chocolate Magazine*, but... I really don't have time! Igor, my husband, and I received a set of proposals to sell this project, but I will never agree! I hope some time I will restart it and it will be successful.

You and the sand. Early difficulties, sensations, projects for the future.

Yes, it started spontaneously, accidentally and became my lifestyle. Of course I met difficulties connected with the specifics of this technique, with the fact I was a mother of a very little boy, with the fact we really lost our work and had nothing to eat... But I am sure it was not me but God who decided to change my life and I am very thankful to Him.

Projects for future? A lot of. Big collaborations, personal concerts, continuation of work on my Sand Film *Worth Waiting* which I started in 2010, working on a big show of my husband, a theatric director Igor Pascaru. Working in my just built video-studio, creation of new sand stories. Helping others. Being a good mother and a good wife.

I know your great-grandfather died during the Great Patriotic War and this inspired you to create the sand story *You are always nearby*, which you live performed during the semi-final of *Ukraine's got talent*. Could you tell us something about your great-grandfather? Do you know how and when he died?

I don't know much. His name was Kosma Lobanov, he was an officer and took part in First World War in the Russian Empire Army, received an award... Then, after the Revolution, he defended our Motherland as a soldier of a Soviet Army and died in 1943. He was a Kuban's Cossack, a very noble and generous person, very educated. His daughter, Tatiana, is my father's mother who died very young. I have one only photo of my great grandfather Kosma and I am very proud of him, he is a really handsome person with big wisdom in his eyes.

Italian soldiers fought in the former Soviet Union, passing through Ukraine and going up to the banks of the Don river. But some Units of the Italian Navy were sent – as well as to Lake Ladoga – also to the Black Sea and settled their bases on the southern coast of Crimea. Have you ever heard something about that? Have your relatives or some friends of yours ever talked to you about the Italians' presence?

Actually not. In our country this information is not very well-known, almost all information concerns the German occupation. You know, though my great grandfather died and horrible things happened everywhere, I want to believe that a terrible mistake which was the WWII was understood by all the world and will be improved by the future peaceful attitude to each other, by love and friendship. I believe the Age of Peace is coming to our Planet...

You are very young and your interest in those bygone events struck me. On the contrary many young people in Italy look like they are not interested in those events, as they were part of a now distant past. But I am firmly convinced that memory of what happened is important, and that remembering the stories of so many people is History. Do you think so?

I agree with you. I love studying History and I am sure that only the knowledge of the past mistakes can help us avoid the future ones. That was also a reason for me to create the sand stories about the war to make young people interested in the History and think on the reasons and results.

I am happy if I managed to do it.

I watched some of your sand stories on the Internet and you seem to perform as if you were moved by an inner music. Is it just me or do you actually think of a particular music while drawing with the sand?

You are very attentive. Actually, in many cases it is true. I create my sand stories listening to Russian rock music – Boris Grebenshikov and *Aquarium* band, *Splean* band, Victor Tsoy, a legend of Russian rock. I also love Antonio Vivaldi's creations and many other classical composers, especially of the Renaissance period. But when I create the stories that visualize some amazing music, I am happy to listen to it while creating – that was when I created a big set of sand stories for the performance in Florence with Toscana Symphony Orchestra, with Japanese Sylvester Concert, with YouTube Symphony Orchestra, with my partners V.O.D.A. band and others.

You said you were in Florence. It was in June 2011. Tell us something about that, please. And... what did you enjoy – and what you did not – about our country?

I had a big honor to perform together with Toscana Symphony Orchestra in Teatro Verdi and it was an unforgettable experience. It was the first time I came to Italy and I fell in love with everything and especially with Firenze! *Bella Firenze!* I even started writing a small story about the fantasy world of Palazzo Vecchio. Since June 2011 I see Florence in my dreams and these are amazing dreams. I can tell about it a story which will be bigger than the whole interview! But now I will just tell that Florence is the place where an artist can go really crazy! The concert with Toscana Symphony Orchestra was a miracle for me – I performed with my most beloved creation of Antonio Vivaldi, *The Four Seasons*. The Orchestra is a great world of extremely talented people, and I want to believe I will return!

Let's talk about your Graphics. I like them, even if I am not sure to understand them completely. Those shapes, those colours... those very long legs strike me. The union between surreal and daily objects is fascinating.

Thank you! It is really important for me to know the opinion of the audience concerning my graphic works, because historically I am a graphical Artist, and only after that a Sand Artist. The graphic works are the result of my inner world's perception, of my dialog with my inner brain... I call it *brainwriting* and it is a very special way of work. That is what is inside me, and without drawing in this style – I think – I can go crazy...

Kseniya and the others. You said that helping people who are in need is your *personal need*, and that God gave you a very special talent just to tell – by sand – the stories of those who have to face hardship and difficulties.

Yes, because I don't think I was given such opportunity to talk with the audience just for my personal satisfaction. I am sure I must serve to others, to those who need it, with the help of my art. I feel a big need in it, in creating sand stories about ill children and adults to help them, in helping the children in Simferopol orphanage house which is already my two year old experience... I want to be useful and I'm happy if I am!

You have many hobbies... you have studied the history of Russian Empire for years; you collect antiques, you write and translate; you like practicing sports like water skiing and tennis, or dancing hip-hop. But your family is very important and I read that your son is the main hobby ☺ How can you manage all this?

It is very easy if you enjoy it ☺ That all makes me feel happy and healthy – in mind and in body. But the total priority is my family and it will be always like this. My little son Dmitry or Dima – as I call him – is a very good boy, with very kind heart, communicative and talented. Every day I say to God: "Thank you for all I have, let it always be like this, if possible!"

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!

For auld lang syne, my jo,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne.

And surely you'll be your pint stoup,
And surely I'll be mine,
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne!

We twa hae ran about the braes,
And pou'd the gowans fine,
But we've wander'd monie a weary fit
Sin' auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn
Frae morning sun til dine,
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne.

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine,
And we'll tak a right gude willie waught
For auld lang syne!
(By Robert Burns)

My soul is dark - Oh! quickly string
The harp I yet can brook to hear;
And let thy gentle fingers fling
Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.
If in this heart a hope be dear,
That sound shall charm it forth again:
If in these eyes there lurk a tear,
'Twill flow, and cease to burn my brain.
But bid the strain be wild and deep,
Nor let thy notes of joy be first:
I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,
Or else this heavy heart will burst;
For it hath been by sorrow nursed,
And ached in sleepless silence, long;
And now 'tis doomed to know the worst,
And break at once - or yield to song.
(By G. G. Byron)

Oh, my love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June
Oh, my love is like a melody
That's sweetly played in tune
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in love am I
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the seas gang dry.
Till all the seas gang dry, my dear,
Till all the seas gang dry
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till all the seas gang dry.

'Til all the seas gang dry my, my dear
And the rocks melt with the sun
And I will love thee still, my dear
While the sands of life shall run
But faretheewell, my only love
Oh, faretheewell a while
And I will come again, my love
Tho' 't were ten thousand mile
Tho' 't were ten thousand mile, my love
Tho' 't were ten thousand mile
And I will come again, my love
Tho' 't were ten thousand mile.
(By Robert Burns)