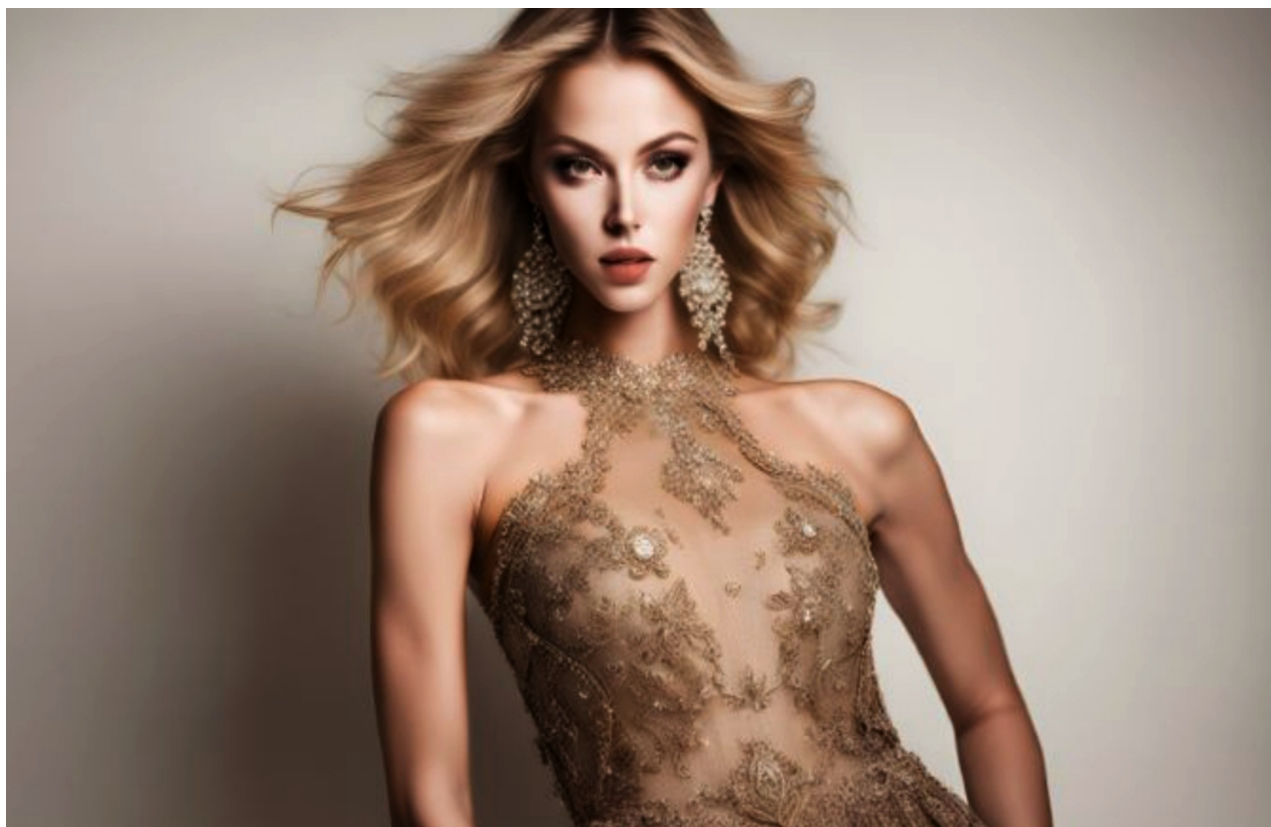


INTERVIEW

Exploring the Depths of Humanity: An Interview with Helena Barbagelata, Italian-Israeli Model, Writer, Activist and Multidisciplinary Artist

by Alessandra Rossi



As a renowned fashion model, an awarded contemporary artist, writer and passionate advocate and activist for human rights, Helena Barbagelata has transcended traditional boundaries, leaving an indelible mark on both the artistic and social landscapes, seamlessly weaving a narrative of elegance, creativity, and humanitarianism. In the enchanting fusion of two rich cultural tapestries, we sat down with her to delve into the realms of her recently published book *Enlisted Youth* (2023), her journey, career, and the projects that define her unique voice in the global artistic and humanitarian landscape.

Helena Barbagelata began her journey in the fashion industry at a young age, discovered by a high fashion photographer. Since her early debut she has graced runways, magazine covers and worked with some of the world's most renowned designers and fashion houses. In her own words: "Fashion was my introduction to the world, a canvas upon which I could paint expressions of elegance and beauty."

Beyond the runway, Barbagelata is celebrated as a contemporary artist and writer whose works have garnered prestigious awards and critical acclaim. Her art transcends traditional boundaries, exploring themes of identity and the beauty found in the intricacies of the human experience. Her body of work, marked by its vibrancy and emotional depth, has garnered acclaim in international art circles and she has held exhibitions across the world. From abstract compositions to thought-provoking installations, her art is a testament to the power of expression and the myriad emotions that color the human experience.

"In the canvas of life, art and literature have been my sanctuary — a place where I find solace, purpose, and the freedom to express the intricacies of the human spirit. Through my art, I aspire to create a sanctuary for others, a space where stories are heard, emotions are felt, and the beauty of diversity is celebrated."



Helena Barbagelata © Umberto Mattei

Beyond her creative pursuits, Barbagelata is a passionate advocate for human rights. Leveraging her platform, she has become a vocal proponent for causes close to her heart. From supporting refugee initiatives to championing gender equality, she believes in the transformative power of art to drive meaningful social change.

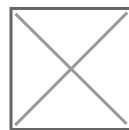
“I've been blessed with opportunities, and I believe it is my responsibility to use my voice and art to shed light on issues that demand our collective attention. Art has the power to inspire empathy, and empathy, in turn, fuels activism,” Barbagelata affirms.



Artwork from the series "Mazor", Mixed-media on canvas © Helena Barbagelata

Barbagelata is involved in several impactful projects. Her collaboration with Artvocate aims to raise awareness about equality, justice and social inclusion, through a series of art installations and public engagements: “Art has the power to shift perspectives and open conversations. I am proud to collaborate with Artvocate to shed light on the challenges faced by the world’s most vulnerable communities and to advocate for their rights through creative expression.”

Dedicated to making a tangible impact, Barbagelata channels her passion into philanthropic initiatives. She actively supports organizations that champion human rights, education, and healthcare, aligning her efforts with causes that resonate with her vision for a more just and equitable world.



Artwork from the series "Mazor", Mixed-media on canvas © Helena Barbagelata

“Being an advocate is not separate from being an artist or a model. It's an extension of who I am. I believe in using my influence to bring attention to the issues that matter, to inspire change, and to foster empathy in the hearts of those who follow my journey.”

Her recently published bilingual poetry book, written in both English and Hebrew, accompanied by her own evocative illustrations, unearths the harrowing realities of war, specifically delving into the poignant narrative of child soldiers.

Alessandra Rossi: Your book, *Enlisted Youth*, addresses the heavy theme of war and child soldiers. What inspired you to explore this topic?

Helena Barbagelata: The inspiration for *Enlisted Youth* arose from a deep sense of responsibility to shed light on the harsh realities faced by children in conflict zones. Having witnessed the impact of war on youth during my travels, I felt compelled to channel their voices and stories into a form that transcends borders — words and art.

Rossi: How do you see the current world situation regarding war, and what role can art play in addressing such global challenges?

Barbagelata: The current world situation is a complex tapestry of conflicts, each with its unique complexities and human costs. Art, with its intrinsic ability to provoke thought and evoke emotion, plays a crucial role in addressing global challenges. It has the power to bridge divides, fostering understanding and empathy needed for change. Through art, we can initiate conversations that lead to collective action.

Rossi: Your background is rich in multicultural influences. How does this influence your writing, especially when working in multiple languages?

Barbagelata: Coming from both Italian and Israeli backgrounds provides me with a multifaceted lens through which I perceive the world. This duality influences my writing profoundly, allowing me to seamlessly weave together different linguistic nuances. Writing in multiple languages is not just a practical choice — it's an artistic one. It enables me to create a tapestry of words that resonates with diverse audiences, breaking down language barriers and fostering a broader connection.

Rossi: The book features your own illustrations. Can you share the significance of the visual elements in conveying your narrative?

Barbagelata: Illustrations are a visceral extension of the written word, offering a visual language that amplifies the emotional impact of the narrative. In *Enlisted Youth*, each illustration is carefully crafted to evoke specific feelings and perspectives. The visual elements serve as a silent dialogue with the reader, enhancing the overall depth and resonance of the storytelling.

Rossi: Your illustrations often depict the impact of conflict on children. Could you elaborate on the message you intend to convey through these powerful visuals?

Barbagelata: The theme of children affected by conflict is deeply personal to me. Through my art, I want to shed light on the harsh realities faced by young lives caught in the crossfire of war. By humanizing their experiences, I aim to evoke empathy and spur collective action to protect and uplift these innocent souls who bear the brunt of geopolitical conflicts.

Rossi: Extremism is a complex issue. How do your illustrations contribute to the discourse surrounding extremism, and what message do you hope viewers take away?

Barbagelata: Extremism often thrives in the shadows of misunderstanding and fear. Through my art, I seek to expose these shadows, offering a visual commentary that challenges extremist ideologies. By portraying shared moments of humanity, I hope to encourage viewers to question preconceived notions, fostering a willingness to engage in open dialogue and reject the divisive narratives propagated by extremism.



"Enlisted Youth" Mixed-media on canvas, 90x60cm

© Helena Barbagelata

Rossi: In your opinion, how does literature, especially illustrated literature, play a role in addressing societal issues and fostering understanding?

Barbagelata: Literature, especially when paired with visual elements, possesses a unique ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. Illustrated literature engages both the heart and the mind, providing a multi-dimensional narrative that prompts introspection. By addressing societal issues through literature, we can sow the seeds of empathy, encourage critical thinking, and ultimately contribute to a more compassionate and enlightened society.

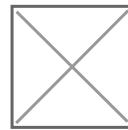
Rossi: How do you envision your art contributing to a world where dialogue and compromise are increasingly refused?

Barbagelata: Art has the power to disrupt stagnancy and stimulate conversation. In a world marked by refusal of dialogue, my illustrations aim to be catalysts for change. By presenting nuanced perspectives, I hope to encourage viewers to step outside their comfort zones, question their biases, and engage in constructive dialogue. Through the universal language of art, I aspire to inspire a collective commitment to compromise and understanding, fostering a more harmonious world.

Rossi: How important is literature and activism in your work, and how do they intersect in *Enlisted Youth*?

Barbagelata: Literature and activism are inseparable facets of my work. *Enlisted Youth* serves as a vessel for both, using literature to bring attention to critical issues and activism to drive change. Through storytelling, I aim to ignite a sense of urgency, encouraging readers to engage with global challenges and become advocates for a better world. Literature, in this context, becomes a powerful catalyst for social change, stirring emotions and inspiring action.

As Barbagelata continues to navigate the intersection of fashion, art, literature and advocacy, she hints at upcoming projects that promise to push boundaries and challenge conventions. “I am currently working on a series that explores the resilience of the human



"Enlisted Youth" by Helena Barbagelata

spirit in the face of adversity. It's a tribute to the strength that binds us all, irrespective of our backgrounds or circumstances. I am excited to share this journey with the world,” she shares.

She emerges as a beacon of inspiration, weaving together the threads of her diverse talents into a tapestry of creativity, empathy, and activism. Her journey serves as a reminder that art, in all its forms, has the power to shape narratives and spark conversations that transcend borders. As she continues to navigate these multifaceted realms, we can't help but be captivated by the depth she brings to each endeavor. In the words of the artist: “Art is a dialogue — an exchange of stories, emotions, and perspectives. It's a language that unites us all.”