

Poetry in Motion

ARCH HADES SPARKED GLOBAL HEADLINES IN 2021 WHEN HER POEM *ARCADIA* SOLD FOR MORE US\$500,000 IN NEW YORK. SUCH A FEAT SERVED ONLY TO FUEL HER CREATIVE AMBITIONS, LIKE EXPANDING INTO THE VISUAL ARTS, WHERE POETRY REMAINS AT THE HEART OF HER PRACTICE

words TESS DE VIVE DE RÉGIE



WHAT EXACTLY MIGHT it mean to be a poet in the 21st century? Take this, from Arch Hades' poem *Arcadia*: "I want to break free of this labyrinth/Switch off all these screens/Escape this simulacrum/Which makes man into machine."

Arcadia harnesses a centuries-old artform and remoulds it for a contemporary audience – one beset with anxieties about our hyperconnected, screen-infested world. Incidentally, it also became, by many accounts, the most expensive poem of all time, when Hades was only 29. Co-created by visual artist Andrés Reisinger and musician RAC, the multi-media NFT – a nine-minute film meditating on existentialism, in which Hades recites her poem – was sold at auction by Christie's in New York for US\$525,000 to a private collector in November 2021.

The collaboration came about when the three creatives – spread between London, Barcelona and Portland – were at loose ends during the pandemic. "[RAC]'s music tour was cancelled, my book tour [for her 2020 poetry collection *Fool's Gold*] was cancelled," recalls Hades. "We were all trying to figure out ways to continue creating. I'm very grateful that we were able to achieve what we did. I genuinely think that my colleagues and I were in the right place at the right time."

Arch Hades (not her birth name) was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia, in 1992, and is currently based in London. Her profile as a poet was built, in large part, via Instagram, where she began posting in 2018 to coincide with the release of her self-published debut poetry collection, *High Tide*. By November of that year, she boasted some 47,000 followers; they now number almost

one million. Further volumes – *Fool's Gold*, *Paper Romance* (2021), *Arcadia*, *21C HUMAN* (2023) and *All The Love I Gave is Yours to Keep* (2024) – followed.

Arcadia is not Hades' only work to have sold for top dollar. One poem written on a postcard fetched US\$71,410 in March 2021 at a digital auction. Her painting *Man of Many* achieved £25,200 at a March 2025 auction at Christie's in aid of a London children's hospital.

Hades' sophomore solo exhibition, *We Are All Just Passing Through*, ran from September-December 2025 in London's Mayfair – a multidisciplinary collection encompassing poetry, sculpture, painting and a clever "sound shower" that projects a poetry reading that can be heard only from one singular spot. The piece that greets you upon entry – a 120x90cm sculpture made from fibreglass and acrylic polymer with a concrete finish – reads, "I catch myself mourning the present like it's already a memory".

It's one of seven works from her *Confessions* series, all rendered with a crumpled finish to suggest a scrap of paper balled up and discarded, then rediscovered. She shows me a photo of her office bin with the original thoughts in situ. "All the *Confessions* excerpts come from diary entries I've been making for, honestly, 20 years now," says Hades. "Vulnerability is the price of connection. You have to write poetry with your throat exposed."

Also on display is *Murmuring Bark*, a copse of sculpted trees embedded with speakers through which Hades recites her poem of the same name (each tree represents a different verse).

Photography: courtesy of the artist.

“Performance is a cornerstone of my practice,” shares Hades. “I [wanted] to convey the point that a line of poetry is the beginning point of every single piece.” There are nods to titans of the art world dotted throughout. Metallic puddles drape along the base of her sculpture *Rain*, her “tribute” to Salvador Dalí’s melting clocks; her painting *Fig* gestures to René Magritte and the apples that crop up across his oeuvre.

Hades will present a solo exhibition to run alongside the 2026 Venice Biennale, to be held over three floors of Scoletta Battioro e Tiraoro, a decommissioned church, where *Murmuring Bark* will be expanded into a forest of a dozen or so trees. There will be more instalments from the *Confessions* series and an immense painting, 3x13.2m, spread across three walls like an altar triptych.

It was an eight-month stint living in Sydney in Hades’ mid-twenties that set her definitively on the path of becoming a professional poet. She was, she says, at a “particularly low point” in her life: in London, she had recently filed for divorce and had grown “incredibly disillusioned” with her then-career as a parliamentary researcher. “You think you’re going to be with this one person forever, in this one job forever,” she says. “My future was just shredded before my eyes.”

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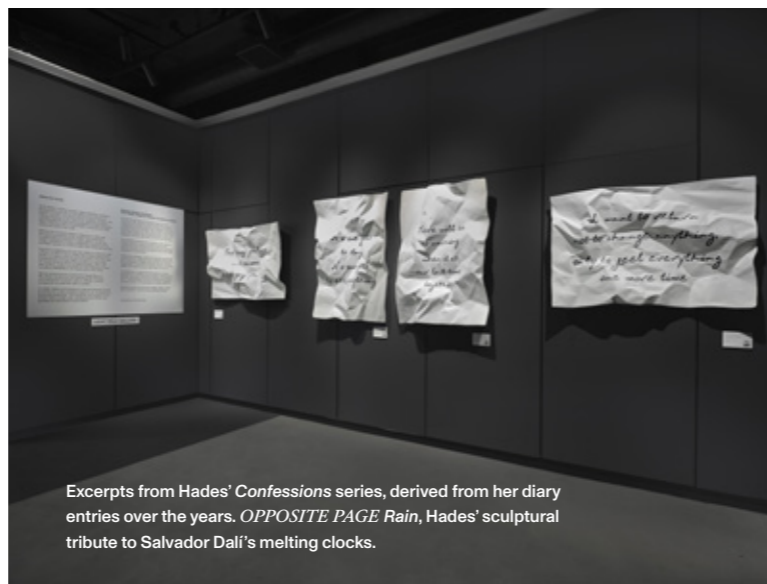
She began dating an Australian model who was about to move back home. He asked her to accompany her and, on a whim, Hades agreed.

Upon arrival, her boyfriend threw a party in her honour, where he introduced her to his friends as a poet. “At the time, I had dismissed it as a youthful dream,” describes Hades. “But he really took it seriously. It meant so much to me.”

She eventually moved back to London when the couple split amicably, but, reflects Hades, “I can hand on heart say that if it weren’t for that group of friends, I would not be who I am”.

Today, poetry is still a fixture of her work. She’s currently writing her seventh volume, due to be published sometime in 2026, and believes that each different artform “complements and amplifies” the others.

“It’s great to experiment,” she muses. “Most of the time, it fails. Eighty per cent of my creative ideas never see the light of day. But that’s kind of the point, because perfection is the enemy of the good.” HB



Excerpts from Hades' *Confessions* series, derived from her diary entries over the years. *OPPOSITE PAGE* *Rain*, Hades' sculptural tribute to Salvador Dalí's melting clocks.



Photography: courtesy of the artist.