



inner
worlds
outer
space

by

Raoul Olawale Da Silva

June 8th - September 15th, 2013

the Wheatbaker

Lagos, Nigeria

Cover Artwork: Untitled. Oil on Canvas, 1,80cm x 1,70 m, 2013.



Untitled. Oil on canvas- 1.80m x 1,80m, 2013.

Welcome

Raoul da Silva is deep. There is no other way to describe him. He is an artist with a deep history, multi-layered perspective, and a wonderful, shy sensibility.

Raoul's work is bold. His large oil paintings on canvas, draw us into an intense battle of color, spaces of tight and profuse strokes and patterns, interspersed with calm, languid moments of yellow and shades of blue, white and red. The few recognizable shapes in his work such as almost camouflaged human forms and faces, telephones dangling on black wires, a lone gas mask or a white bone— become almost minor symbols as a world of intricate cross hatched black and white space or vibrant colorful master strokes tell of an artist who is in control of his story as he presents us with a deep vision.

We coined the exhibition theme, Inner Worlds, Outer Space during a conversation, in which we touched on his Brazilian ancestry, and the differences of life in his fatherland Nigeria, and motherland Switzerland. And when one looks at Raoul's work, the title starts to resonate as we feel a clash and at the same time, a crazy co-existence of forces, some turmoil and frantic activity which culminates in an incredibly complex world of beauty and depth. Raoul's paintings and drawings are untitled as he wants his audience to see their own "selves" mirrored in these worlds.

What we see here is an artist with African and European roots, who has used multi-ethnic brush strokes to interpret life. A rich world of inner reflection, surging into an outer space of color.

Raoul's journey of expression, had its beginning in summer art classes at the Nigerian National Museum in Onikan, enriched by parents who had a deep appreciation of traditional and modern art and created a home environment full of paintings and sculptures of the best of our Masters. Raoul tells me of visits to Bruce Onobrakpaeya's studio, and how he never quite appreciated this exposure until much later, when he realized how these early experiences influenced his inner "artistic eye".

Childhood schooling was followed by four years of an in-depth apprenticeship in cabinet making, before completing an arts degree at the prestigious School of Applied Arts in Lucerne, Switzerland. This was followed by years of almost hermetic studio work.

Raoul is a skilled freestyle snowboarder, street skater and surfer, and has honed his technique to expert level. His passion for music and the outdoors and his deep understanding of the forces of nature, whether in reading the texture of snow and avalanche signs, or through understanding the force and patterns of ocean currents, have deeply influenced how he interprets and responds to his "outer space". Raoul's intricately formed sculptures and installations show how highly skilled his craftsmanship complements his brushwork and painting technique.

His commitment to environmental protection and the need to safeguard the Lagos coastline have led him to begin working on a large installation of found objects, which were discovered while scouring the beach landscape. His installation of discarded skateboards hanging in the Wheatbaker entrance are just a taste of a much larger installation of plastic, glass, and petrified wood, which will be presented on the beach in a few months. Raoul's beach sculpture will be produced with the help of youth living around the Taqua bay area and will help to raise awareness about the need to protect and clean our eroding, but beautiful Lagos coastline.

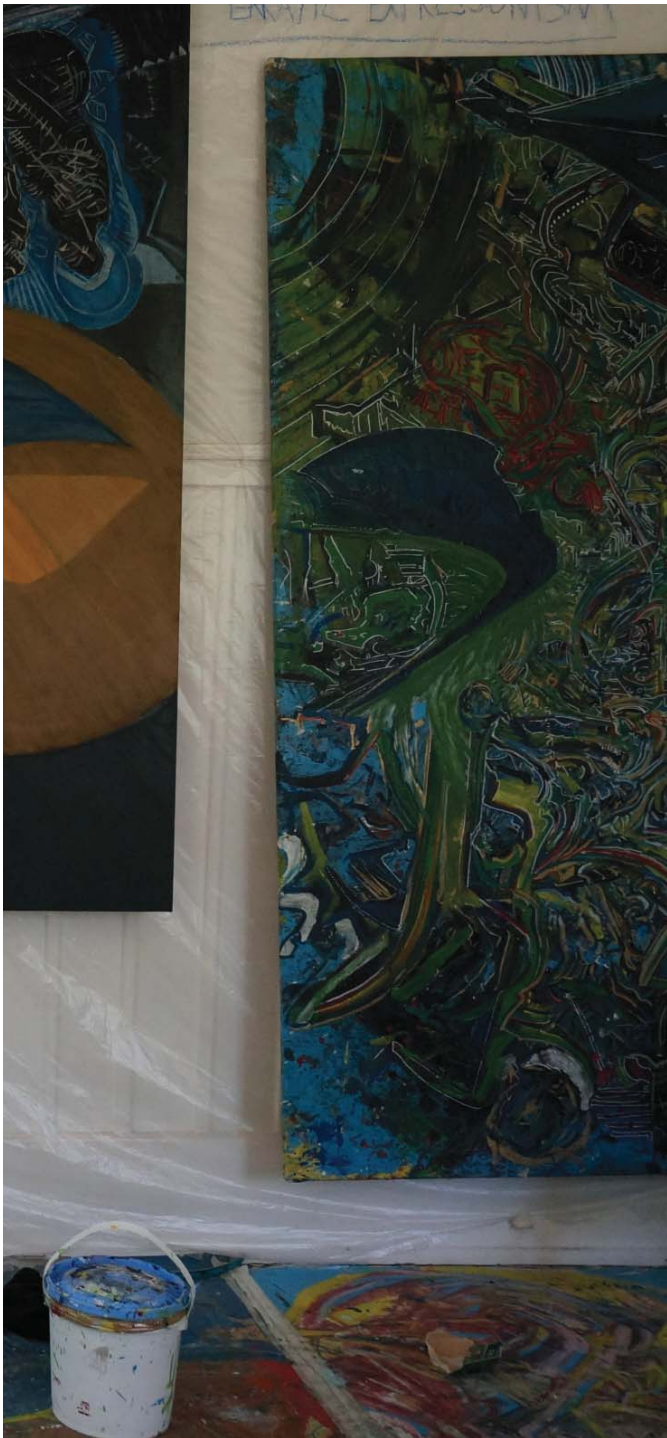
I hope you enjoy Inner Worlds Outer Space as much as I have, and I hope it provokes keen thought and questions. Above all, I hope it will heighten our appreciation of Raoul's amazing artistry as it reminds us of the complex worlds each of us carries silently within.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiango
Curator
Lagos, May 2013









Artists' Statement

When I start a piece of work, I mark the canvas in a somewhat unpremeditated way. Sometimes I use natural markings that are already present. These marks are orientation points from which I start my quest of creating the right tension, balance, imbalance, and rhythm. This changes constantly while I work, as I incorporate seemingly random movements, which are however very controlled. I adapt to the creation emerging on the canvas by carefully adding layers of colors which I work on over and over again, from different angles and sides. This process enables me to react to situations during production, and to use varied materials that sets me free to express multifaceted ideas and stories. These stories are affected, dominated, connected and guided by my state of mind made up of memories, reflections, observation, smell, taste and many other influences.

Raoul Olawale da Silva



Untitled. Oil on Canvas, 1,54 x .90 meters, 2013.

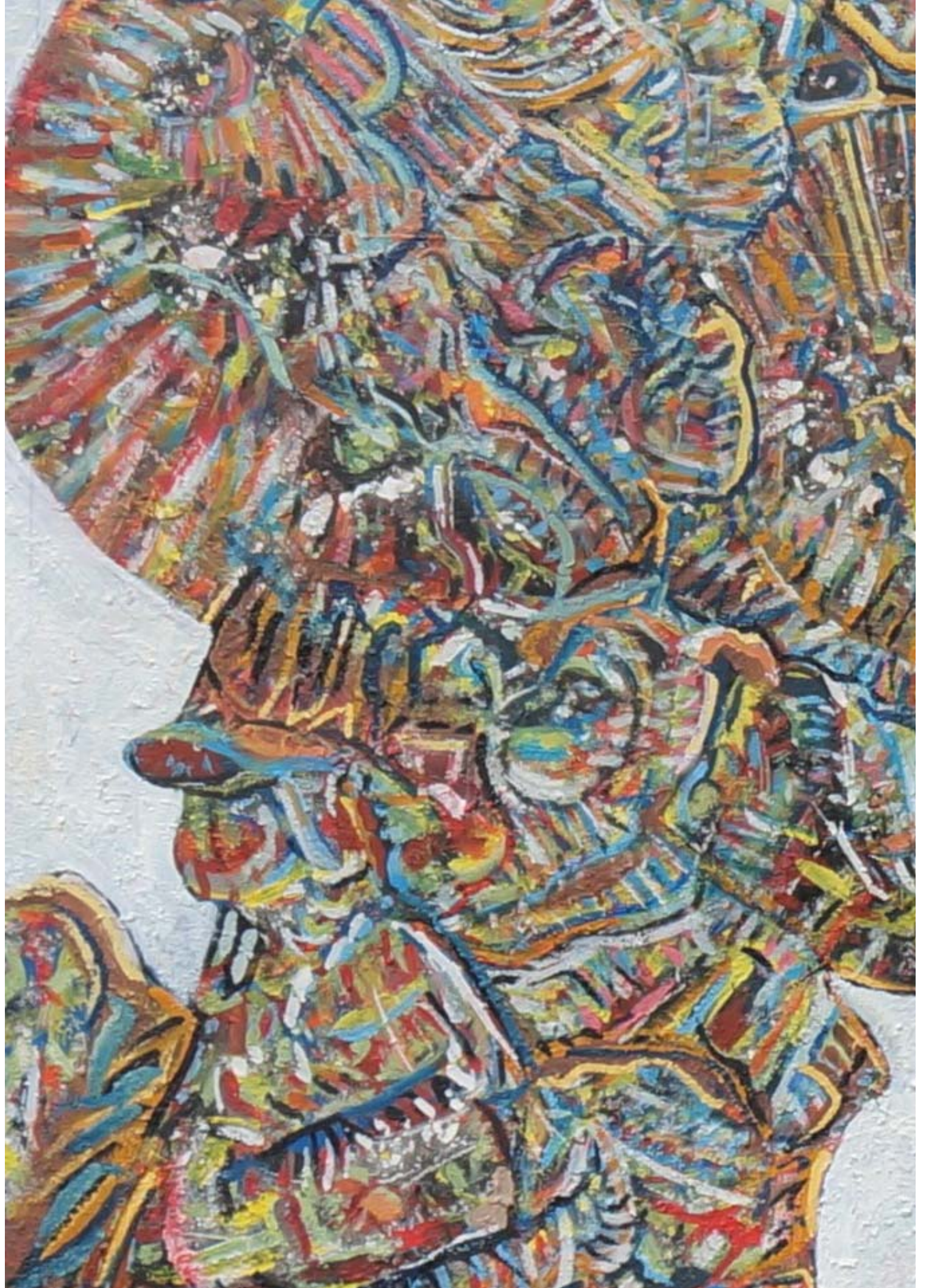
Raoul's World

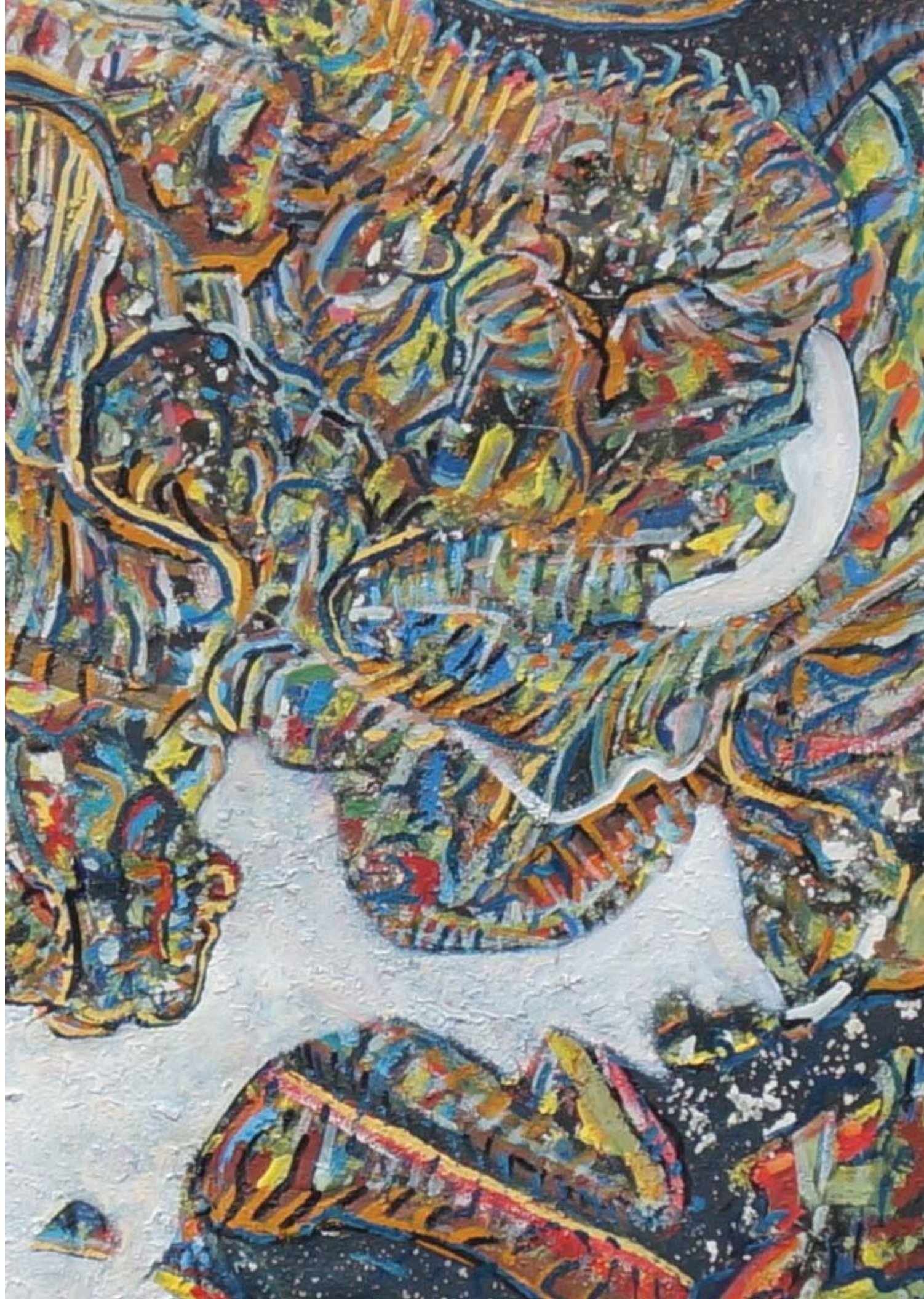
Seven years ago, I was invited for an exhibition at the National Museum, Onikan by an artist unknown to me at that time: Raoul Olawale da Silva. It was a good thing I decided to "risk" and visit the show. Surely, I was not the only one among the visitors that felt excited in front of Raoul's works. The exhibition goes in Lagos –and there are a few regulars out there- is rarely confronted with works of such intensity and character. Without knowing the artist, his background or his artistic trajectory, I was immediately struck by the works before my eyes.

Just two years ago, when I was exploring some contemporary art collections in Lagos, I visited Agatha da Silva –Raoul's mother- and was able to see in her house a good number of works left behind by Raoul. This time the experience was more intimate, deeper. These works -some of them uncompleted- were challenging me. I could not remain indifferent in front of them. Now, thanks to the good efforts of Sandra Obiabo and –of course- Agatha da Silva, we are fortunate to have him back in Lagos -the city he left in 1981, when he was just 12 years old- for another exhibition.

Raoul is a complex and intensely independent artist. His rich personal history is, no doubt, marked by the fact of having a Nigerian father (a Neurosurgeon from a well known Brazilian-Lagosian family) and a Swiss mother. His is a multifaceted creativity finding expression through different media: painting, photography, craftsmanship, music. Should I add skateboarding, an activity he considers a true –though ephemeral- form of art? He is passionate about it: "I am a street skater for more than 20 years now. Skateboarding is an art and an art form always crossing borders and boundaries, influencing and being influenced, always developing and staying young for the young state of mind. Maybe just like dance or Asian martial arts, it is a most direct and sincere form of expression".

It is difficult to fit Raoul's works into a neat, clearly defined artistic pigeon hole, to associate them to a recognizable name or qualifier. But, perhaps this search for "sincere forms of expression" gives us the key to access the paintings, drawings and installations in this exhibition. His works appear as an externalization, an "expression" of a many-sided personal world. And in this process of expressing -of bringing out- inner realities, spontaneity plays a central role. This is the way he explains how he starts a new work: "I start from somewhere deep within almost on a subconscious level letting the canvas or working surface to get stained or "randomly" marked, trusting that there is enough material inside me to work with that will come to show an idea or at least a route I can follow... This process is being repeated over and over till I feel I have something that can evolve into meaning for me. Then I try to transport/transform that aesthetic to a plane where I now sharply observe and act and react to what is going on on the surface and around it. Taking off, scratching off, peeling off paint and then putting on, slapping on, dripping on, brushing on paint till a harmony or dissonance starts to create tension which is a sign that I am on the right path".





In this exhibition Raoul da Silva juxtaposes works produced over a span of eleven years (2002-2013). This allows the viewer appreciate the continuity and evolution of his oeuvre. Two formal elements call immediately our attention. First, there has been a progressive increase in the size of the works. The use of larger canvases (some of them over 2.00 meters wide) shows a much more self-confident artist, not afraid to face increasingly challenging works. Second, the "painterly" works of ten years ago, with their blurred contours, broken shapes and overlaid colours, have evolved into pieces in which lines and boundaries are more defined and prominent than in earlier works, when gestural brushstrokes had pre-eminence. The organic, fluid, dream-like creatures have given way to more defined shapes taken from the real world. While some of these older works brought to mind references to Osogbo artists (specially, Twins Seven Seven), or to Pollock, the recent ones are more akin to the explorations of Basquiat, Bacon or Richter.

In addition, there is a more subtle development: these new works engage the outside world in a much more distinct and direct way than the older ones. For instance, the insertion of four telephone handsets in one of the 2013 works would have been totally out of place in the ones produced ten years earlier. It seems there is a gradual shift from works emerging from an "inner", self-referential universe to a messier, more real world.

But despite the development of his artistic identity, Raoul's works still grow from inside out. Their strength -and they are undoubtedly, strong- continues coming from within. Perhaps, that is the reason why they are so intensely personal. Like with good music, or with dance, the viewer is not encumbered by the demands of meaning, rationality and context. His works need not to be "understood", but to be enjoyed, letting them tell each of us a different story.

This is an exhibition to enjoy quietly. Raoul da Silva is allowing us a view of a personal, intimate, suggestive world of great formal beauty. This is a privilege rarely available. I am glad not to have missed it.

Jess Castellote





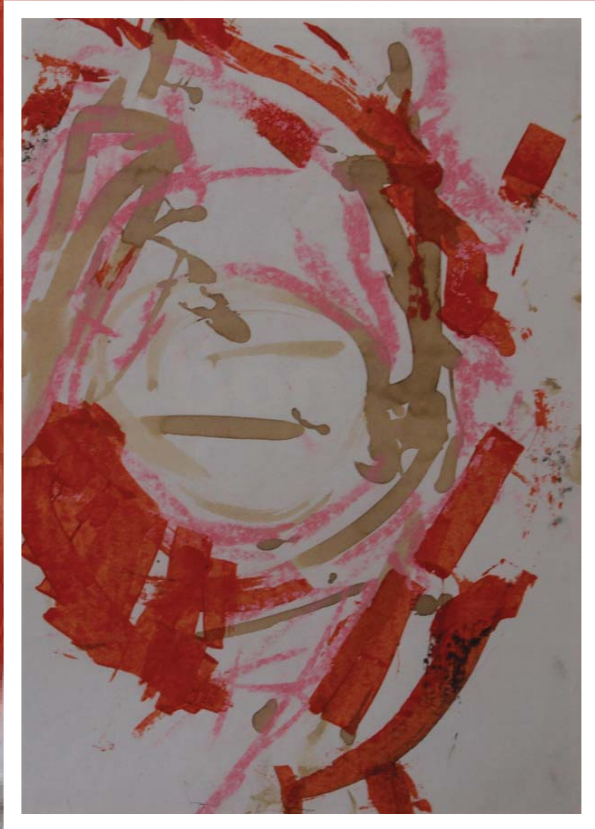
Untitled. Oil on Canvas - 1,80cm x 1,70 m, 2013.

“Olawale’s use of space may not exactly appear conventional, breaking nearly all the rules in the book; he closes the gap for any argument of academic kind, by creating a ventilation for a broader perception of his works. His work is filled with inexhaustible applications of lines and inorganic shapes that appears to have concluded that contemporaneity of art has its infinity that is personal to every artist. Enjoy the hidden treasure of Olawale's resplendent and timeless strokes.”

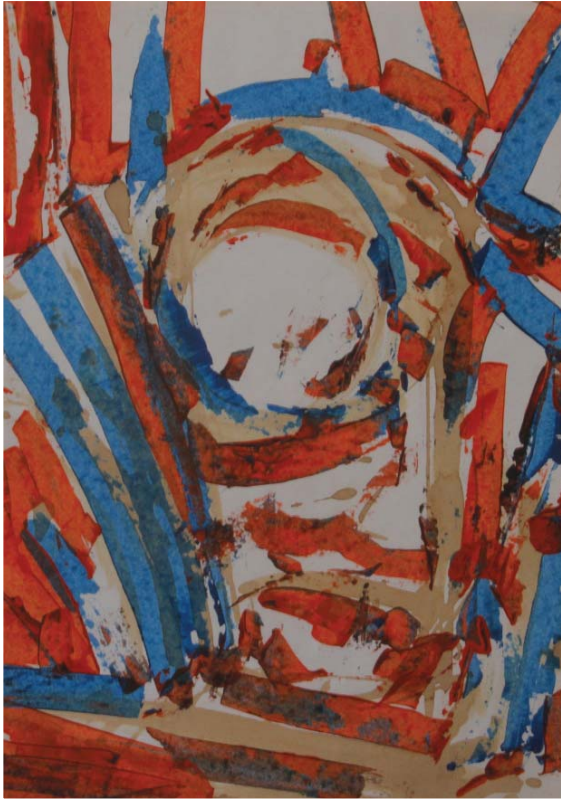
Alex Nwokolo
Artist

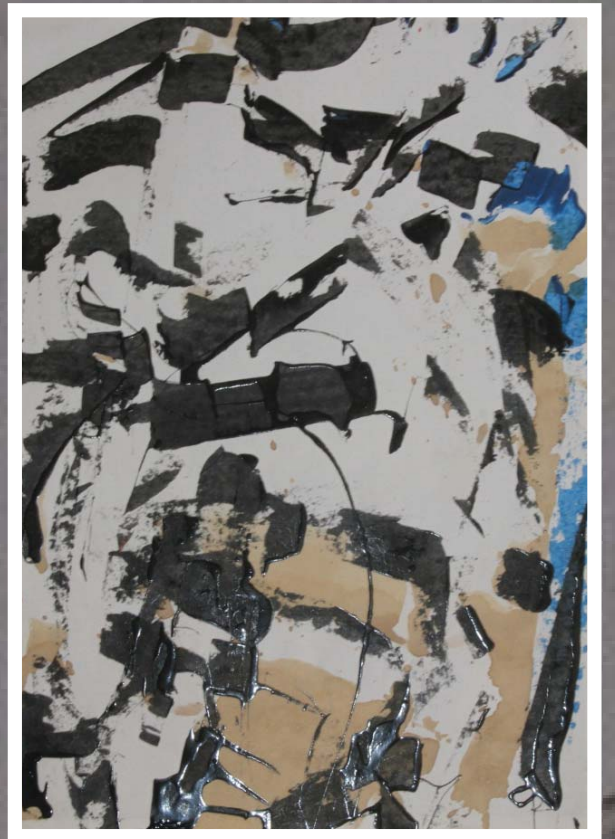
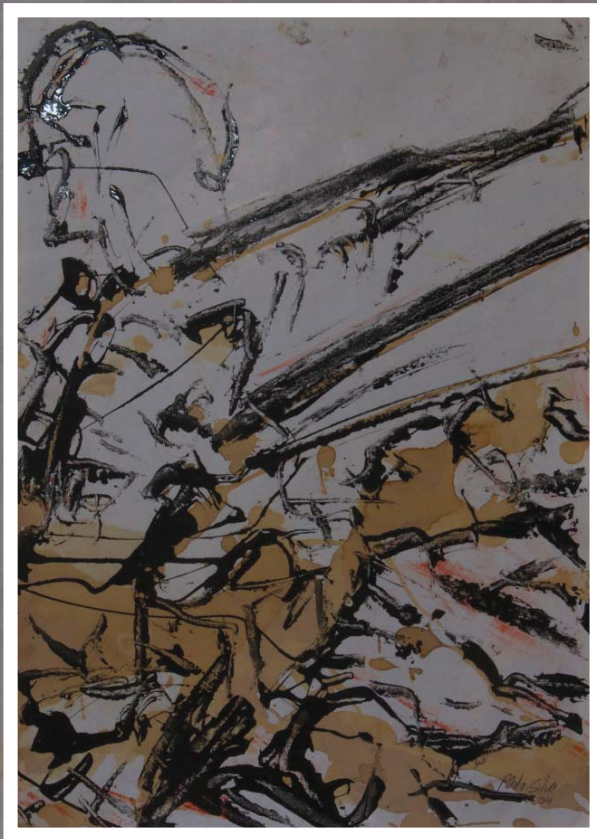






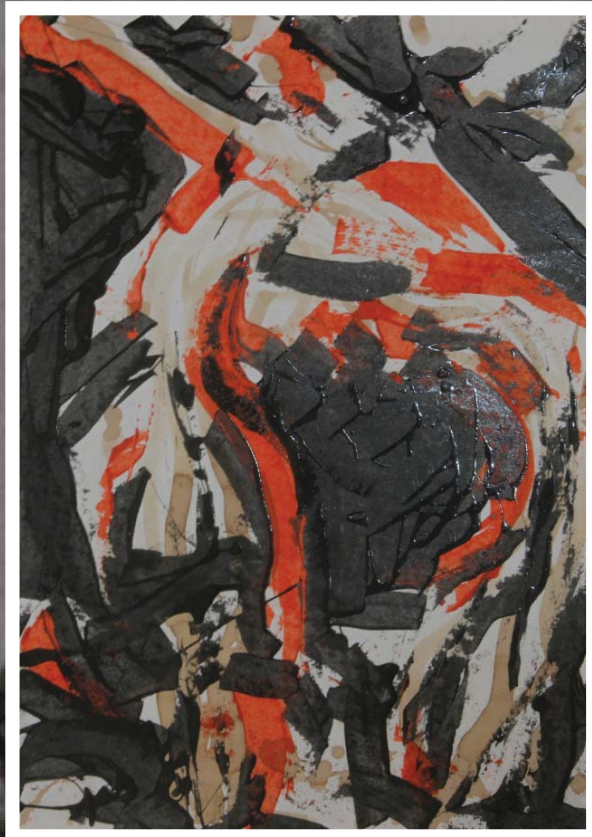
In the care. oil, coffee, paper, 29,5cm x 42cm, 2004.

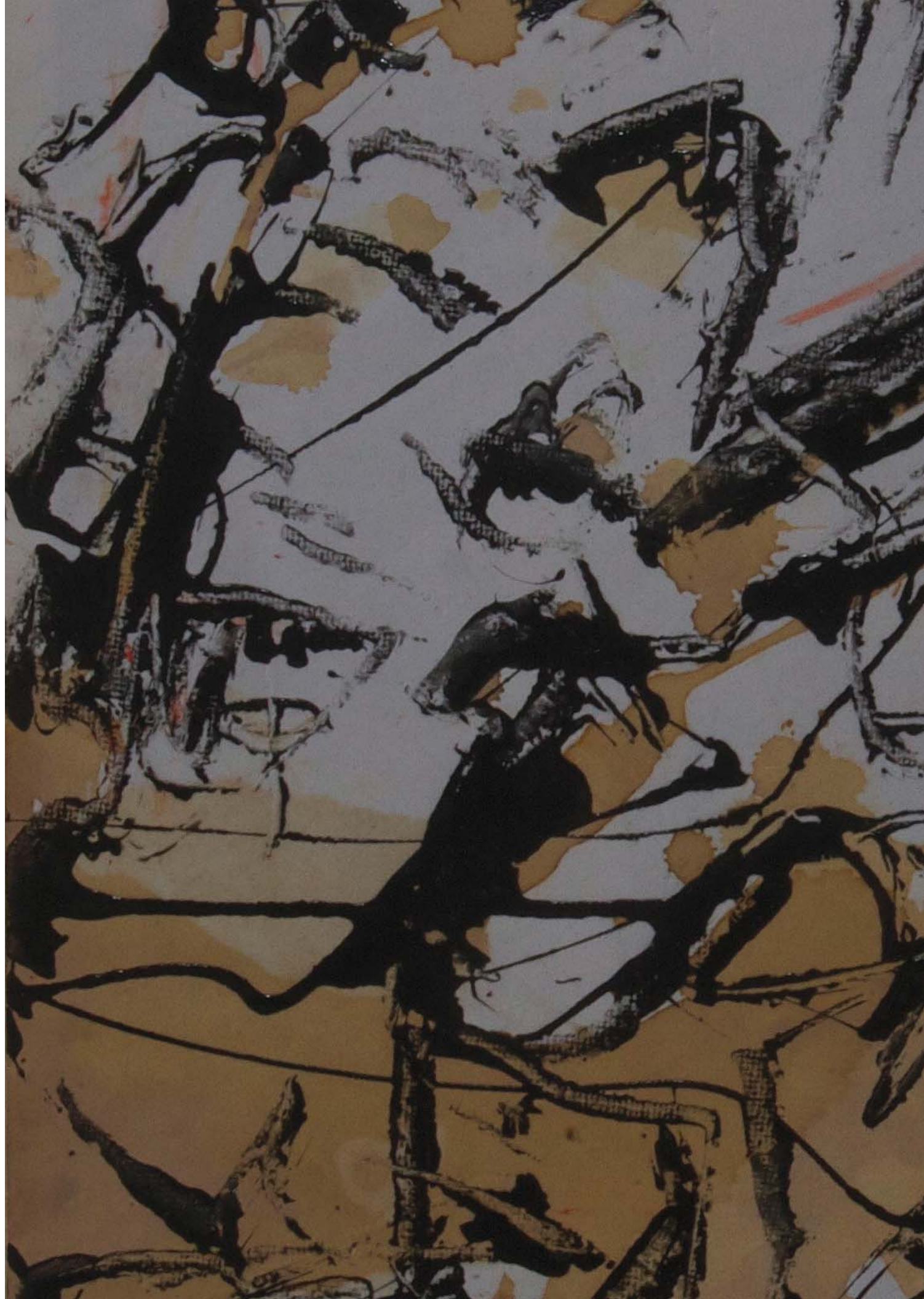




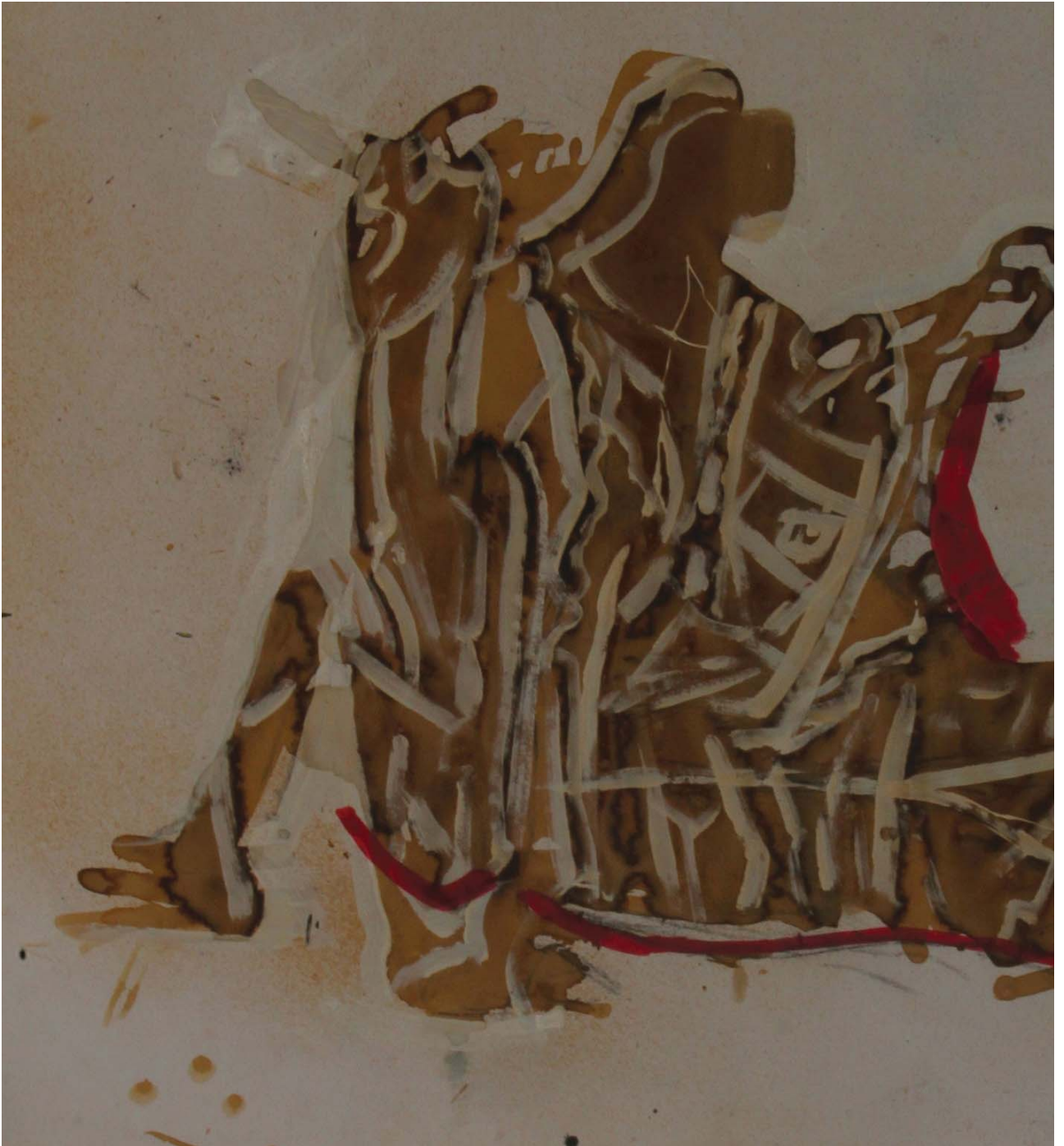
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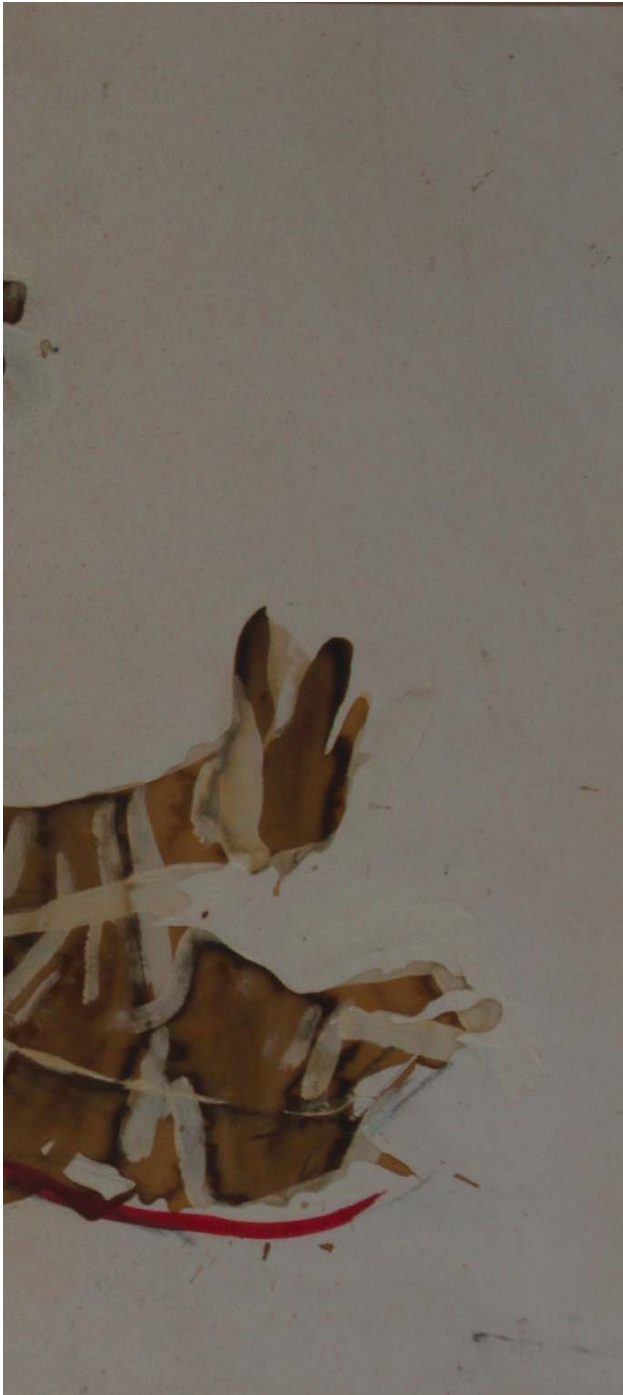






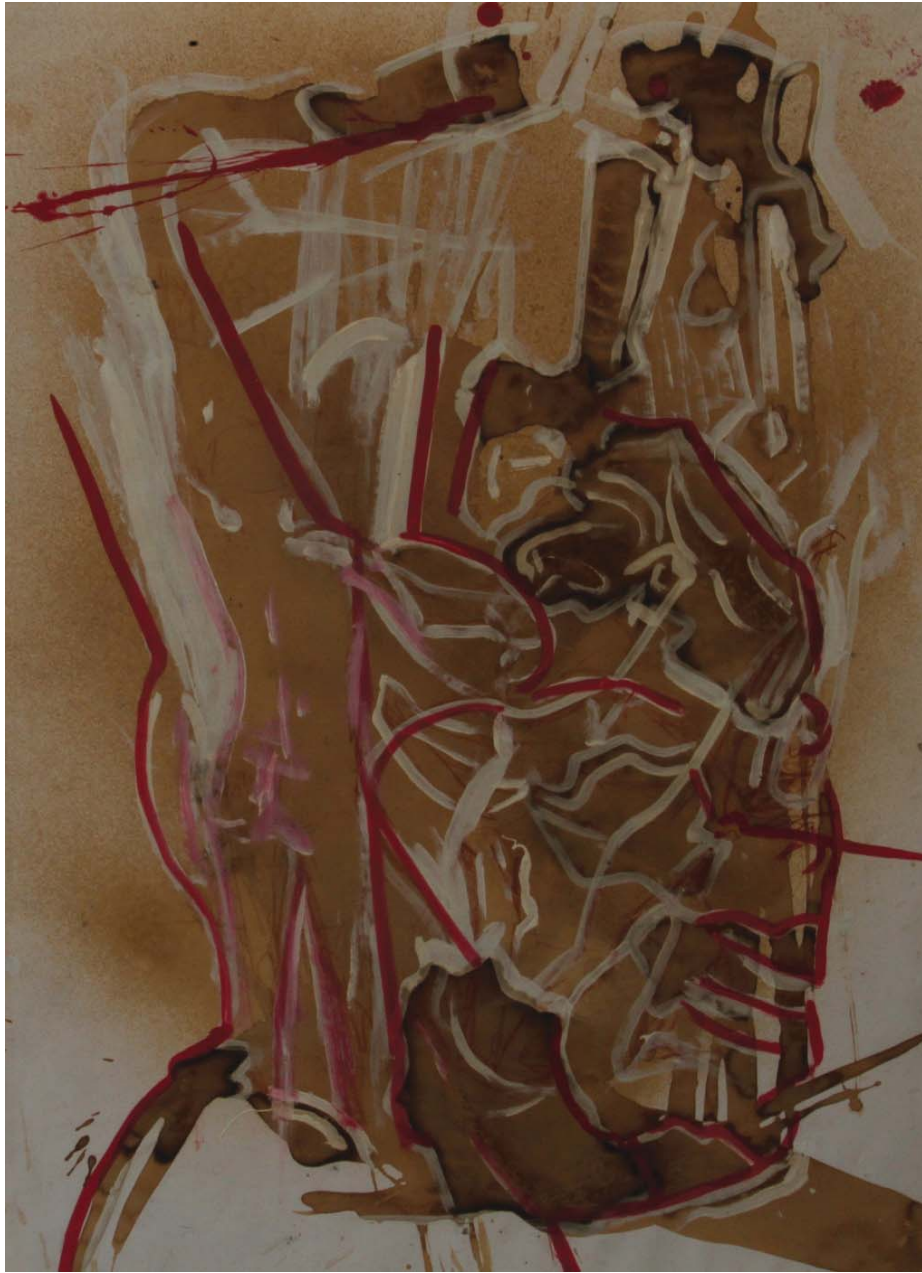


Untitled. 50cmx 70cm, oil, coffee, paper, 2004.



"Most of my works don't have titles. They are abstract and not realistic. I want to create a space where a kind of communication takes place between the viewer and my work. I believe that everyone has a different background and also a new view point. I want people to see my works and bring their own idea to it."

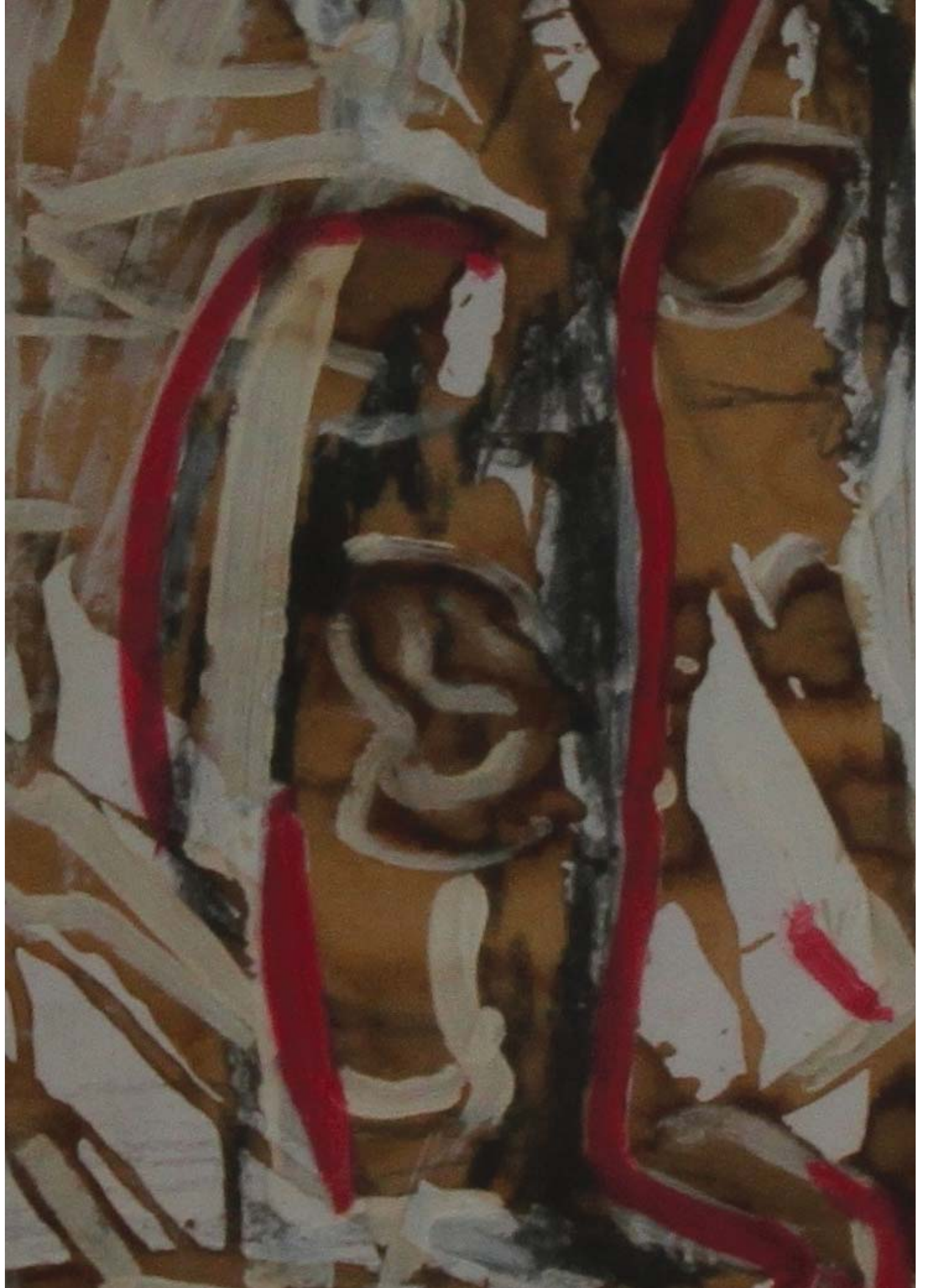
Raoul



Untitled. 50cm x 70cm, oil, coffee, paper, 2004.



Untitled. 50cm x 70cm, oil, coffee, paper, 2004.





“Raoul was a challenge to us, a brainteaser. He ignored our common mode of perception. Here (in Lagos) Raoul's work gain a different dimension; they are less African than in small Switzerland, rather they break open the African aesthetic to the benefit of a more global approach; they join the Swiss and the African roots to a strong, joyful mixture. They are music and dance that have become color. They embody an energetic world, which contradict the rather austere conditions of life (in Switzerland). From this viewpoint, they are also longing for this other rich and all encompassing world that only through chaos brings peace. Here, the forces that slumber within Raoul become visible. They are promising and point to an interesting artistic development: as an ambassador of several worlds.”

Prof. Nikolaus Wyss
Former Director, Lucerne School of Design

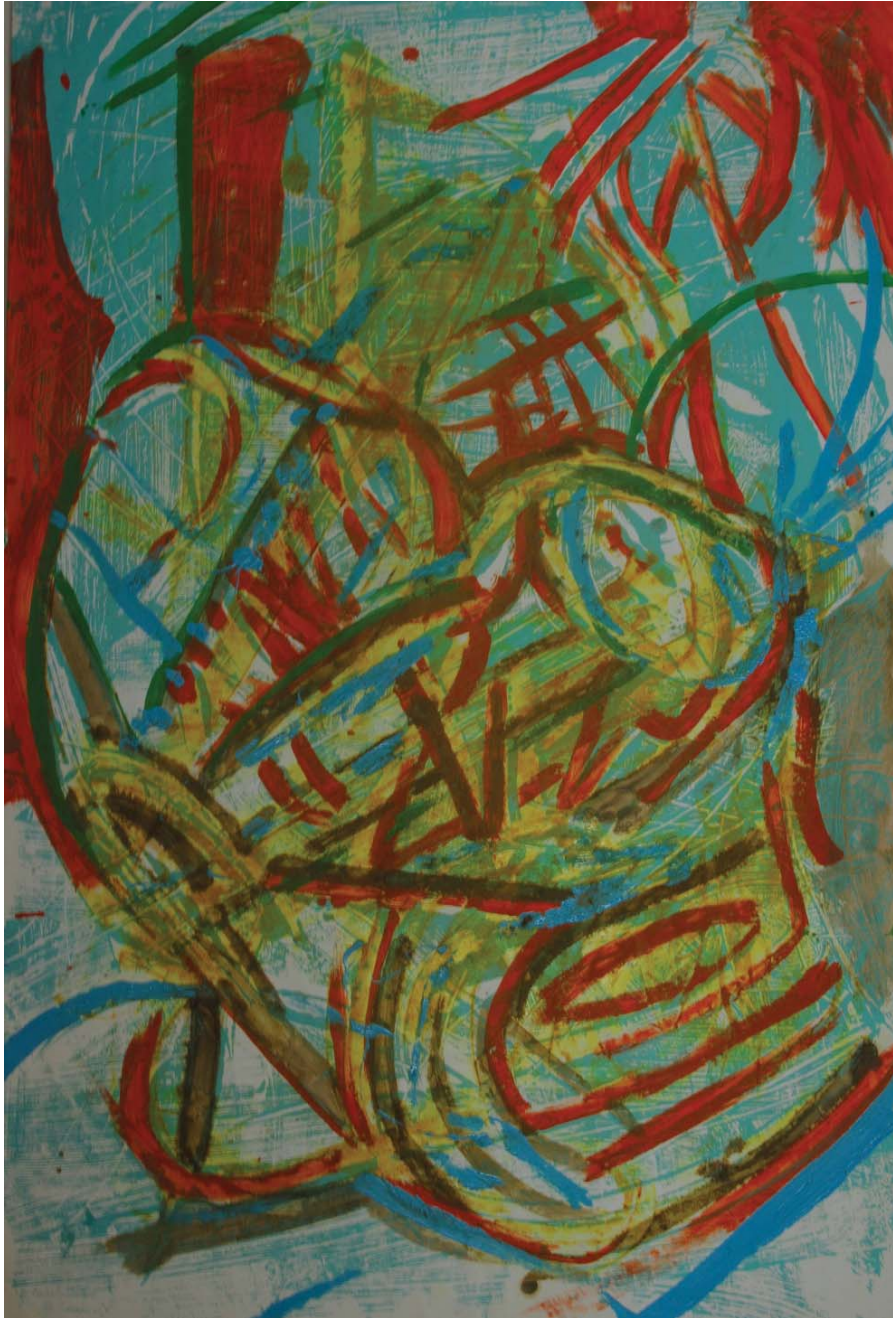


Untitled. 64,5cm x 96cm, acryl, paper, 2003.



Untitled. 64,5cm x 96cm, mixed media, 2002.



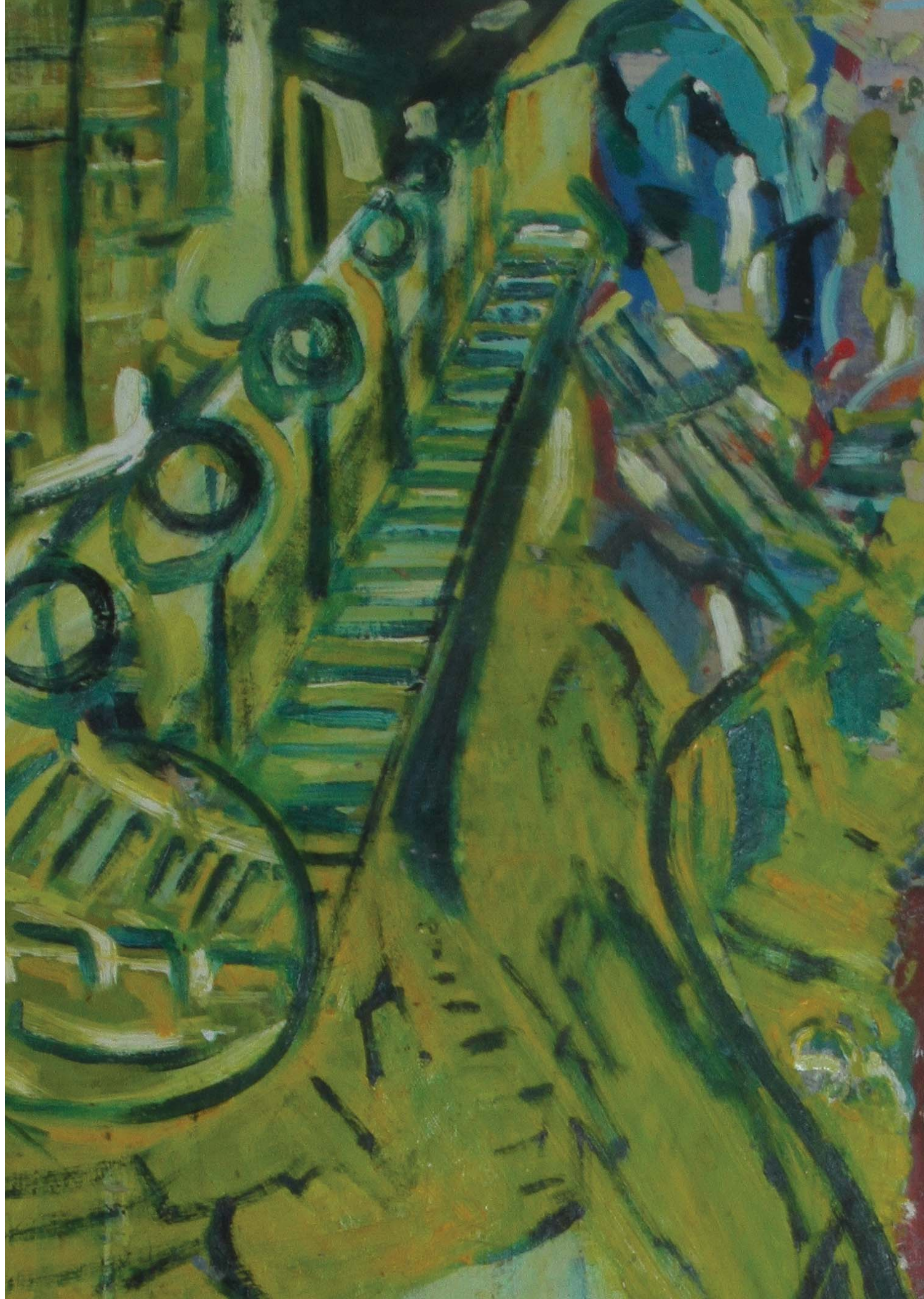


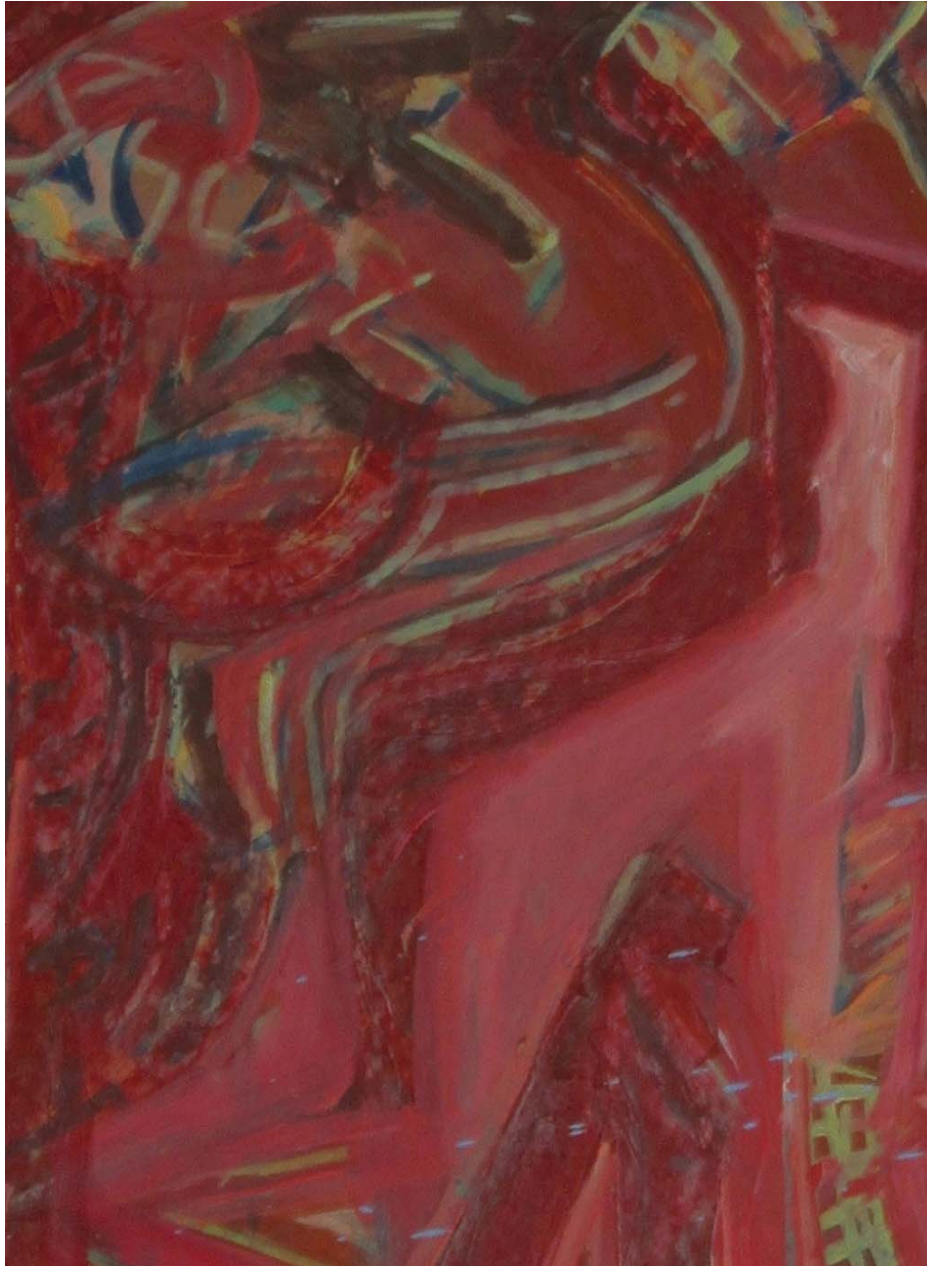
Untitled. 64,5cm x 96cm, mixed media, 2002.





Untitled. 80cm x 110cm, mixed media, 2002





Untitled. 75cm x 99,5cm, mixed media, card board, 2002.





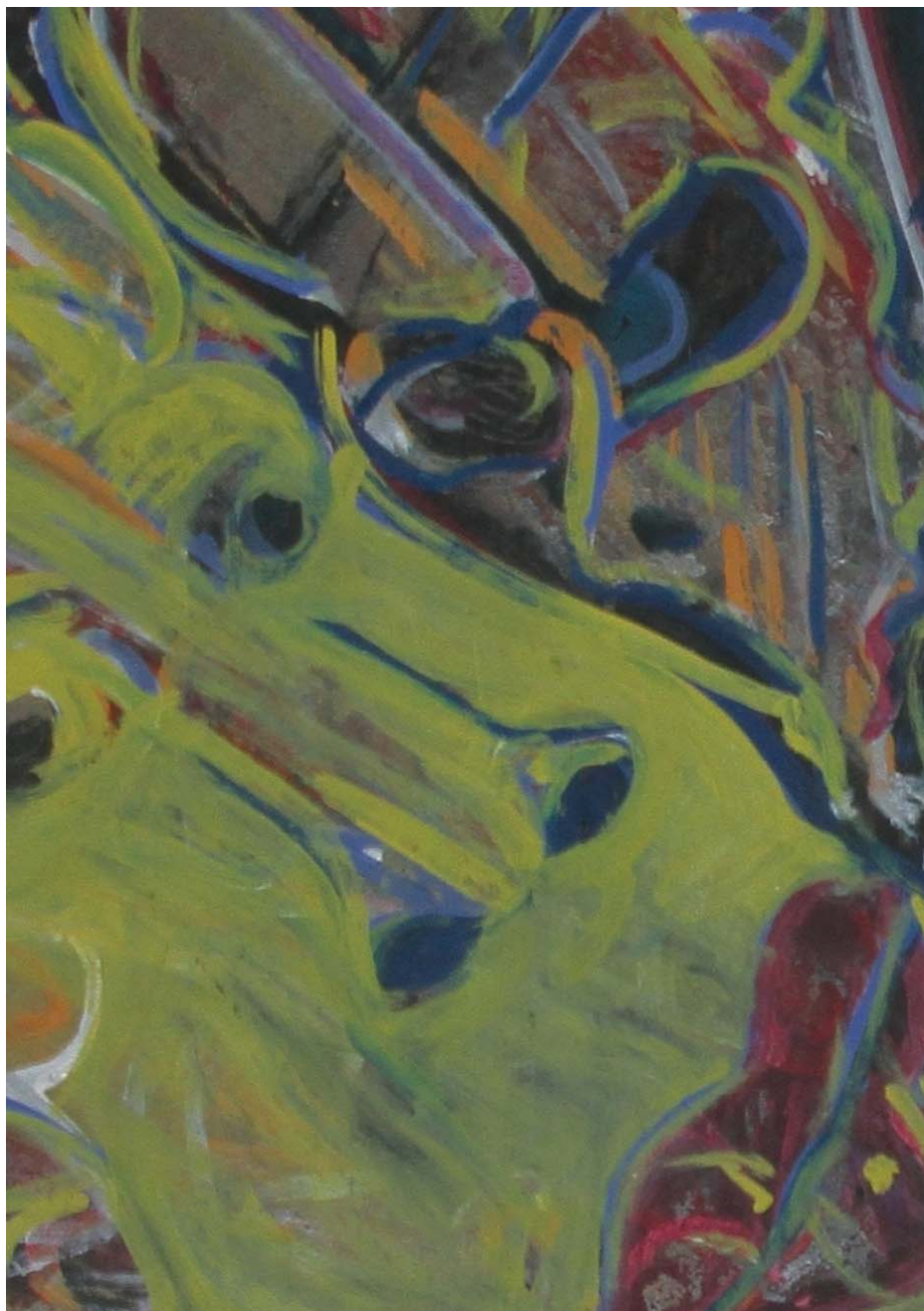
Untitled. 52cm x 63,5cm acryl, paper, 2003



Untitled. 52cm x 63,5cm acryl, paper, 2003.







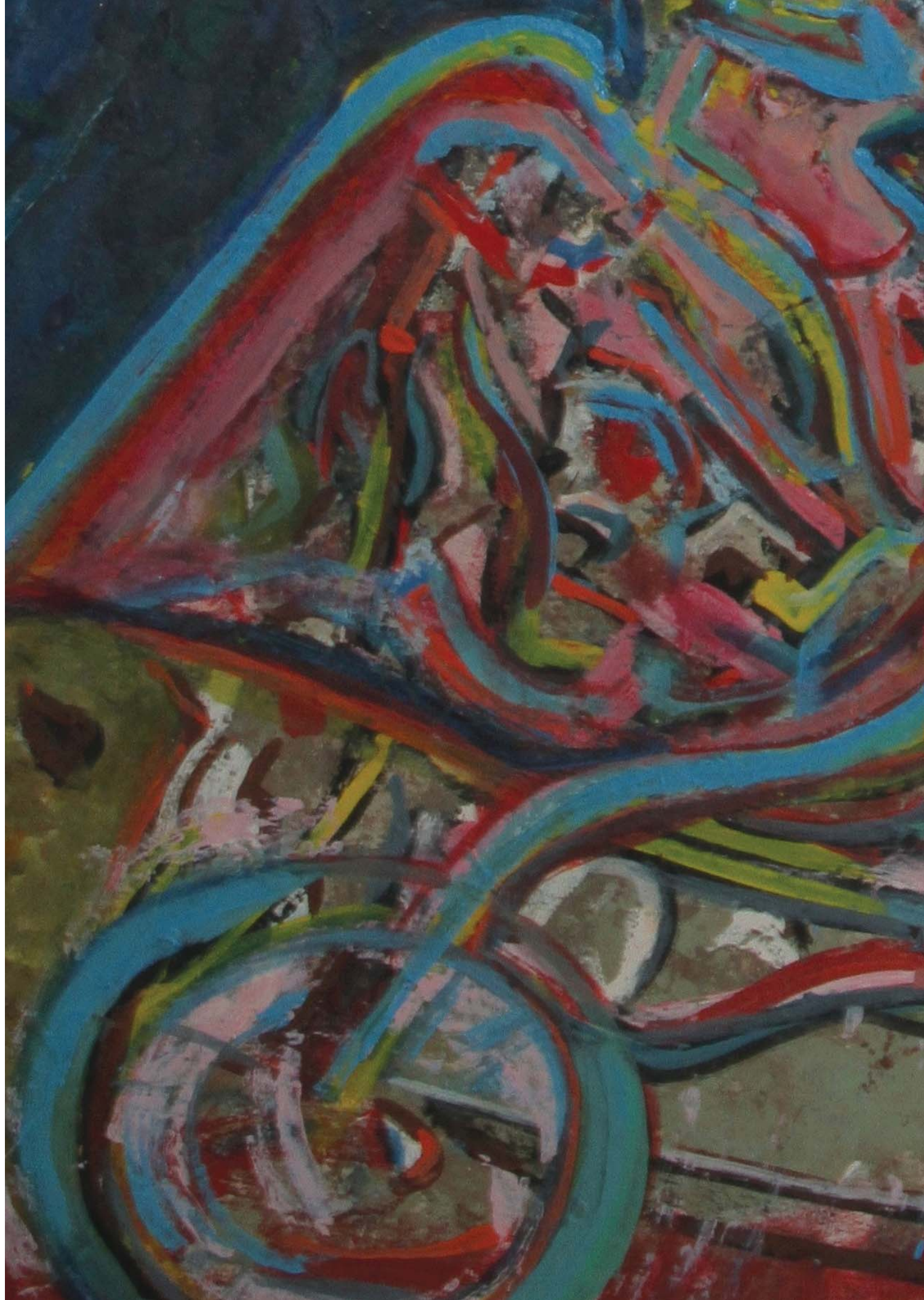
Untitled. 80cm x 110cm, oil on cardboard, 2002.

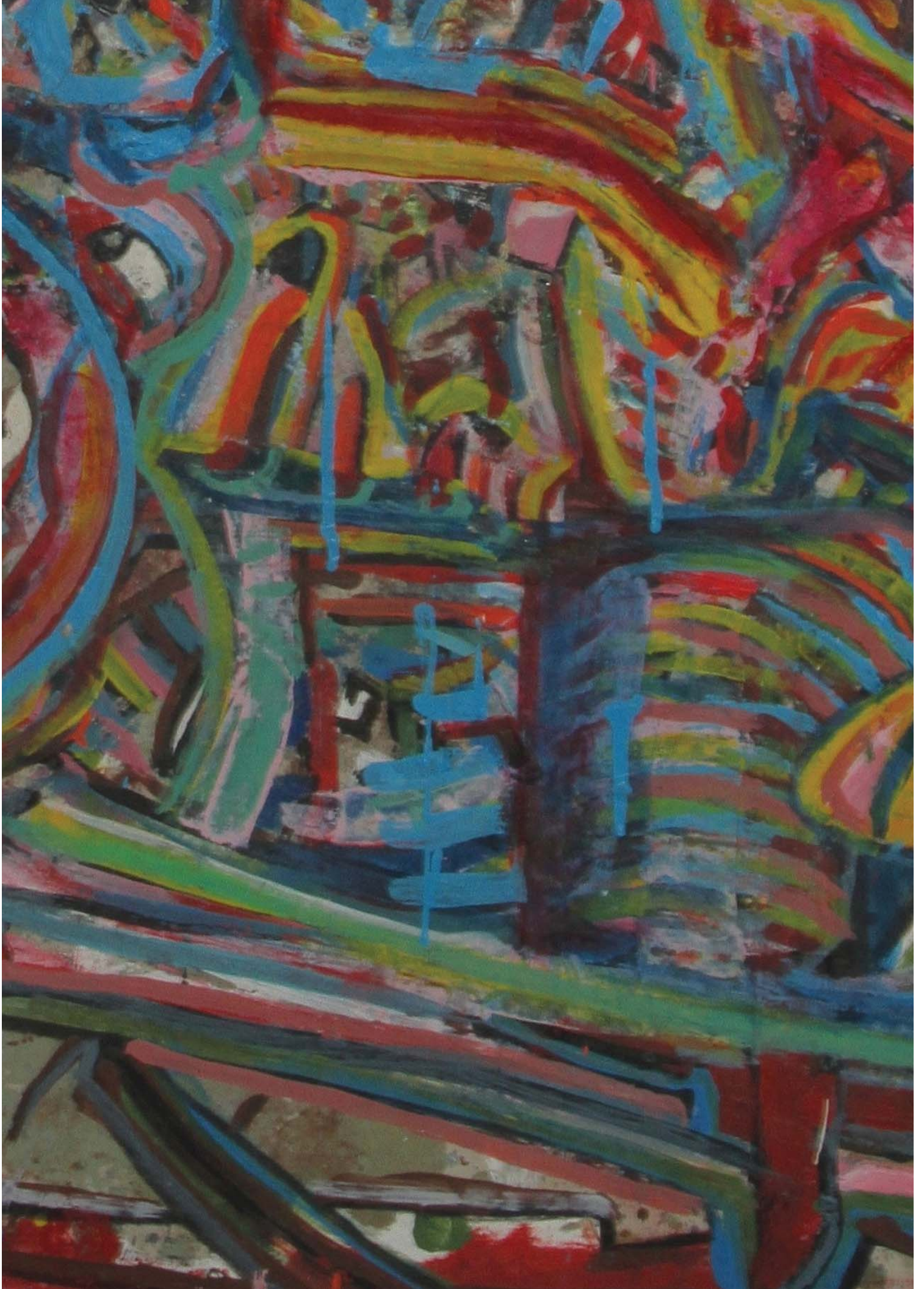




Untitled. 99,5 x 110cm, mixed media, 2003.









Untitled. 80cm x 110cm mixed media, 2003.





Untitled. 62cm x 88cm, oil, paper, 2003.



Untitled. 64cm x 95,5cm, oil, paper, 2003.



Untitled. 62cm x 88cm, oil, paper, 2003.











Raoul's studio

Bio

RAOUL OLAWALE DA SILVA

BORN 1969

EDUCATION

- 1986-88 Basic Arts & Crafts School, Farbmuehle, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 1988-92 Carpentry & Cabinetmaking Apprenticeship, Lucerne
- 1994-98 University of Applied Arts Lucerne
- 2000-02 Kunsthalle, Zurich

EXHIBITION & SHOWS

- 1987 Exhibition, Vitrine Kleintheater, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 1992-07 Concerts & performances across Switzerland, as percussionist and singer
- 1998 Group Exhibition at the Art Museum Zwischenraum, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 2002 Exhibition at CLIENTIS Bank, Schuepfheim, Switzerland
- 2002 Exhibition & music performance at *Scnt Bowl*, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 2003 Exhibition at Gromag Studios, Lucerne
- 2005 Exhibition at the National Museum, Onikan, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2006 Group Exhibition , Miniature Artfair 2006 , Lagos, Nigeria

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Nigeria’s artistic and cultural strength continues to evolve, combining a willingness to embrace new and modern approaches, with a clear recognition of the value and inspiration of our past. Our art sits at the forefront of a fast evolving African artistic renaissance, while our music and films continue expanding their sphere of influence and entertain wider and wider audiences across the continent and beyond.

FHN’s support for the arts spans our CEO’s founding role in the first Contemporary African Masters Exhibition in London in 2007, through to our support for Bonham’s African Art Auctions, our work with the legendary Afrobeat collective Faji Agba and our celebration of Nigeria’s cultural development through our support for the publication ‘Five.’



The Wheatbaker has keenly supported Nigerian arts and culture since opening its doors in 2011. The hotel’s commitment to celebrating the best of Nigerian creativity saw it dedicate its walls to showcasing exceptional traditional, modern and contemporary art. The Wheatbaker has hosted world class art exhibitions including The Collectors’ Series showcasing Duke Asidere, Kelechi Amadi Obi & Yetunde Ayeni Babaeko, co-curated by the Centre of Contemporary Art Lagos (2011), Making History showcasing Ancient Nigerian Art (2012), Sequel 1a showcasing the sculptures of Olu Amoda, Billy Omabegho’s metal and wood sculptures (2012), The WW Independence Series by WhiteSpace, featuring Tayo Ogunbiyi, Karo Akpokiery, Folarin Shasanya, Hakeem Salaa, Mode Aderinokun and Toyosi Faridah Kekere-Ekun (2012-13) and Flow showcasing ceramic and mixed media sculptures and installations by Nnenna Okore(2013). The Wheatbaker has also hosted three art auctions by Art House Contemporary.



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