ODE TO RESISTANCE

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for a Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art

University of Cape Town

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ODE TO RESISTANCE

"Let's do anal with Mrs (redacted). Oh wait, she is lesbian." Written on the suggestion board today by a 12-year-old at an all-boys school. The subject of the message is the first female vice-principal in the 171-year history of the school.

Excerpt from artist's journal, 9/10/2020

Reading this abhorrent message takes me back to Cape Town in 2002. I'm at the Refinery, my place of employment at the time. A male colleague announces to the entire bar that he dislikes me so much that he would like to fuck me "up the bum". There are those who would excuse this brutal and humiliating announcement as men's locker-room talk, as they did Donald Trump's Access Holly-wood remarks, but both these incidents serve to exemplify the muting of women through shaming and violence. As Assoc. Prof. Virgini MacKenny, my supervisor, put it in conversation about the incident, these are the unwelcome reminders of the "influence of the patriarchal worldview – present in even young boys – to women, especially women in authority."









What Would You Look Like As A BADASS Barbie?





MANIFESTO

'Ode to Resistance" is a body of work that celebrates female freedom by exploring my own complex relationship to patriarchy.

Patriarchy, translated from Greek, means "the rule of the father". This dominance, as described by feminist poet Adrienne Rich (in Thomas, 2002), seeks to control every sphere of life:

The power of the father: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor – determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

I fear patriarchy and, in turn, I resist it

Its impact on me has been lifelong. At 12 years old, I was encouraged to take home economics and typing as subjects instead of mathematics. I was told that if a young woman wore high heels she appeared so much more beautiful, and in my household women served the men at the dinner table. We ate, listened politely and then cleared the plates while the men stayed seated. My awareness of my otherness to these males stayed with me as I grew up, and I resolved never to marry. I did, however, decide to have a child without a male partner.

In endeavouring to find answers to this inequality, "Ode to resistance" deconstructs representations of the female form to elucidate society's repreThis body of work is intertwined with the disruption of the Covid-19 global pandemic, and I have found similarities between the pandemic and patriarchy: both are dangerous, restrict freedoms and are a threat to my survival. By researching and making art as the pandemic rages, I intend to transition from knowing that patriarchy is a threat to my survival and in turn being its victim, to exposing its short comings and ultimately finding personal freedom. For six months the University of Cape Town was shut down. The extreme measures that have had to be taken to fight the pandemic – constantly sanitising one's hands, wearing a mask and keeping one's distance from friends and strangers – correlate with my approach to my subject matter. I need to protect myself to avoid being infected by patriarchy.

Inspired by Joan Didion's (2017) statement, "I myself have always found if I examine something, it's less scary ... it is kind of how I examine pain, I want to know where I am" (Didion, 2017).

Resistance"

GROUNDWORK

Patriarchy first emerged in 2300 BC, the time of the construction of the pyramids of Egypt, when the Akkadian Sargon the Great conquered Sumar and made it a vassal state. In this new world, women began to lose the freedoms they had previously enjoyed. As historian Dr Amanda Foreman notes in the BBC series *Ascent of Women*, women's "participation in the economy was restricted; they were shut out from education in their professions. But most important of all, women began to be excluded from positions of power and public space" (Foreman, 2015: online).

While this has changed to some degree, thousands of years later, patriarchy still dominates, and it seems that women's relationship to this construct has become a complex one of survival and compromise. Many women still accept their status as second-class citizens and conform to the "demands of patriarchy in order to gain some benefit, be that financial, psychological/emotional, or social" (Kandiyoti, 1998). Bargaining with the patriarchy can take different forms: women are expected to be a combination of sweet/childlike, sexy and motherly – "conformity to one or all of these standards can bring both patriarchal sanction and reward for women" (Fhlegar, 2015).

My frustration lies with the fact that women would not need to make these "bargains" if they were regarded as equal to men. I contend that by the very nature of the imbalance of power in these transactions, the representation of the female image in its entirety has been distorted beyond recognition, and this distortion is reinforced through social media and technology. This is dictated by our predominately male commercially constructed world.

blond female character, "Pandomania" is a persona created by an "anonymous artist who believes "that mass produced products are sold via woman's bodies, and that as a result, the female body is at risk of becoming a commodity itself" (Banks, 2017).

I am disturbed by how the female is marketed and how women's bodies are distorted by technology and the digital marketplace, an environment predominantly owned and run by men. Grace Banks, cultural commentator and author of *Play With Me: Dolls – Women – Art*, observes a further complication in the representation of contemporary women and our ability to fight its dominance: "This is a period in time where one's online feminism has turned the movement into a branded hashtag with which to sell things" (Banks, 2017).

n order for patriarchy to exist, women must conform and subjugate themselves to the confines of our socially constructed world. Patriarchy maintains the binary between men and women in order to prevail, and Adrienne Rich notes that "patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms" (in Thomas, 2002; online).

My fierce resistance against patriarchy is deeply personal and evident in my decision to bear and raise a child on my own. I embrace this decision as the ultimate rebellion against the confines of patriarchy. Painting is one of my weapons against patriarchy and a tool Luse to critique its complexities.

Until the shackles of patriarchy are dismantled, no woman is immune from the strictures described above.





WORK PROGRAMME

While housebound for four months during lockdown, I became increasingly aware of the materiality of glass and its reflections. To stay "safe", human interaction became restricted to the digital plane, reflecting our environment on the glass screens of computers and phones, creating a double imaging on their surfaces. This complexity of distance and layering echoes my sense of dislocation within patriarchy.

"Ode to Resistance" parallels this layering and reflecting. I did not confine my work to the traditional stretched canvas surface, but worked on a variety of substrates with mirrored surfaces - aluminium composite sheets, copper plates, perspex and steel plates. These surfaces both reflect and absorb the viewer's image, with the intention of involving the viewer in the discourse. The reflective substrates also function as a mirror in which to contemplate myself while working, offering up a form of companionship during lockdown.

The materials I work with have both associative and emotional connotations. Sandpaper's tactility is sharp and rough, and I associate the act of sanding with exposure and renewal – exposure as one removes the surface layer, and renewal as one allows the integrity of the original substrate to be exposed, similar to Didion's examination of pain to diminish its scariness. I also use acetone to erase dried paint. Acetone has a noxious smell and rising vapours and is not easy to work with, as it is poisonous and evaporates

quickly. I associate acetone with nail polish remover, which is primarily used by women for purposes of beautification/sanction by patriarchy.

These materials allow me to manipulate my subject matter either through erasure or selection of predominance in the composition. My "destruction" of the image mirrors a disruption of the status quo, while spray glue and pencil/charcoal shavings connote the action of masking or hiding. Both materials produce a very fine film on the surface of the work, which allows me to both diffuse the image and integrate elements into the work, while also suggesting the action of evading my "enemy" – patriarchy.

While my methodology draws primarily on the traditions of oil painting, in the act of creating my images I rely on a process that has affinities to a technique called compositing in the film industry, a methodology I utilised in my career as a film visual effects artist. In compositing, visual elements from separate sources are combined into a single image, often to create the illusion that all those elements are parts of the same scene. I draw my source material from photographic imagery and my imagination and combine them to create dense, multi-layered images. I disrupt the surfaces of the paintings as an action of "delving below the surface": I meld and dissolve paint by spraying the surface with a combination of liquin and turpentine, and I use spray glue to dissipate the image. I may also burn the canvas or paper and/or sand the dried painting

These methods help me search for meaning in my resistance. In the paper *Research Procedures/Methodology for Artists and Designers*, academic Allan Watson is quoted as saying, "Fine Art by its very nature is 'anti-method', but even anti-method's chance, chaos, randomness, anarchy, etc. is a methodology" (in Grey & Malins, 1993: online). Watson's notion of eschewing the usual methodology feels rebellious to me. I have applied this in my practice by treating the materials with aggression, vigour and disregard, with the intention of expunging the veneer of enticement that patriarchal entrapment thrives on and expressing my disdain for the commodification and commercialisation of the female form and the effects it has on the female sense of self. I express my defiance against the status quo of patriarchy through this anti-method.

Watson's anti-methodological approach echoes author Petra Lange-Berndt's statement that "materials become wilful actors and agents within artistic processes, entangling their audience in a web of connections". She explores how materials can obstruct, disrupt or interfere with social norms, emerging as "impure formations and messy, unstable substances" (Lange-Berndt, 2015: online).

"Ode to Resistance", with my various processes of making and unmaking, explores how patriarchy maintains its power over women, presents my rage at society's gender bias and finds an antidote to its dominance





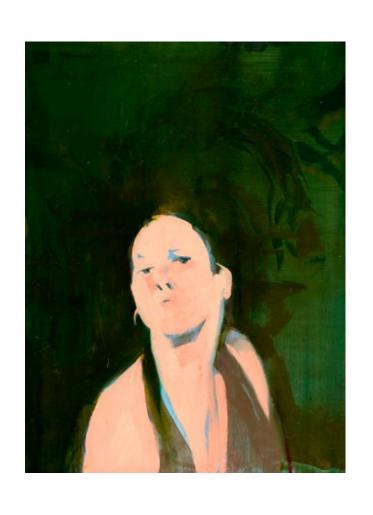


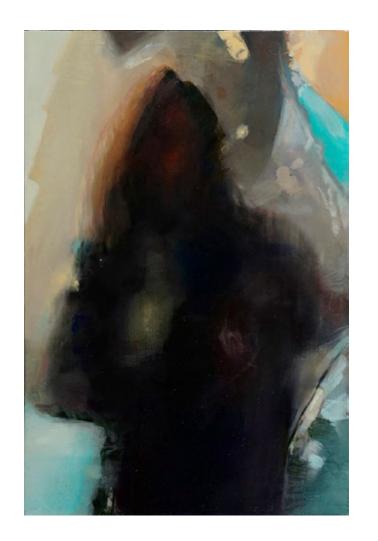








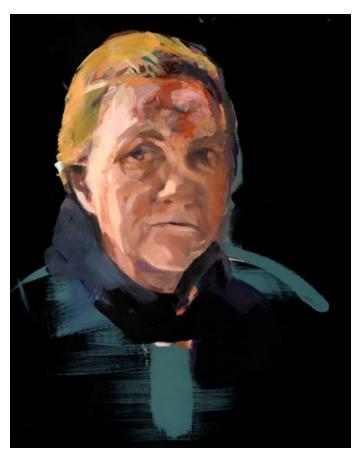












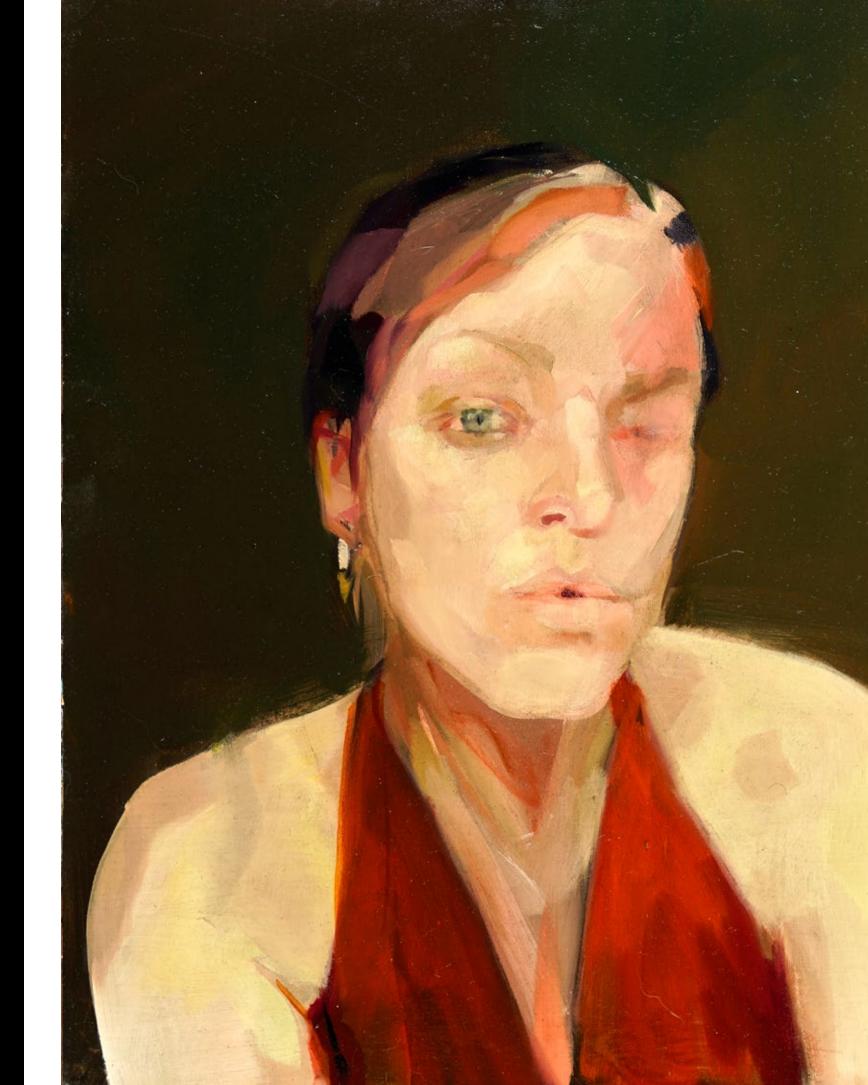
PRACTICE

This body of work began with a series of selfies after I wondered why women feel the need to promote themselves online. I invited a person known to me to take her own series of selfies. The resulting pouting stance, enhanced by the wide-angle lens on iPhones and similar devices, the unusual compositions of body to negative space, and the inward focus of the eyes were unfamiliar to me as a portrait painter. In this form of portraiture, beyond the echo chamber of selfies and social media, lies a quest for identity in the shifting landscape of gender powerplay and politics. It is almost as if the space between the subject and the digital device is the psychology.

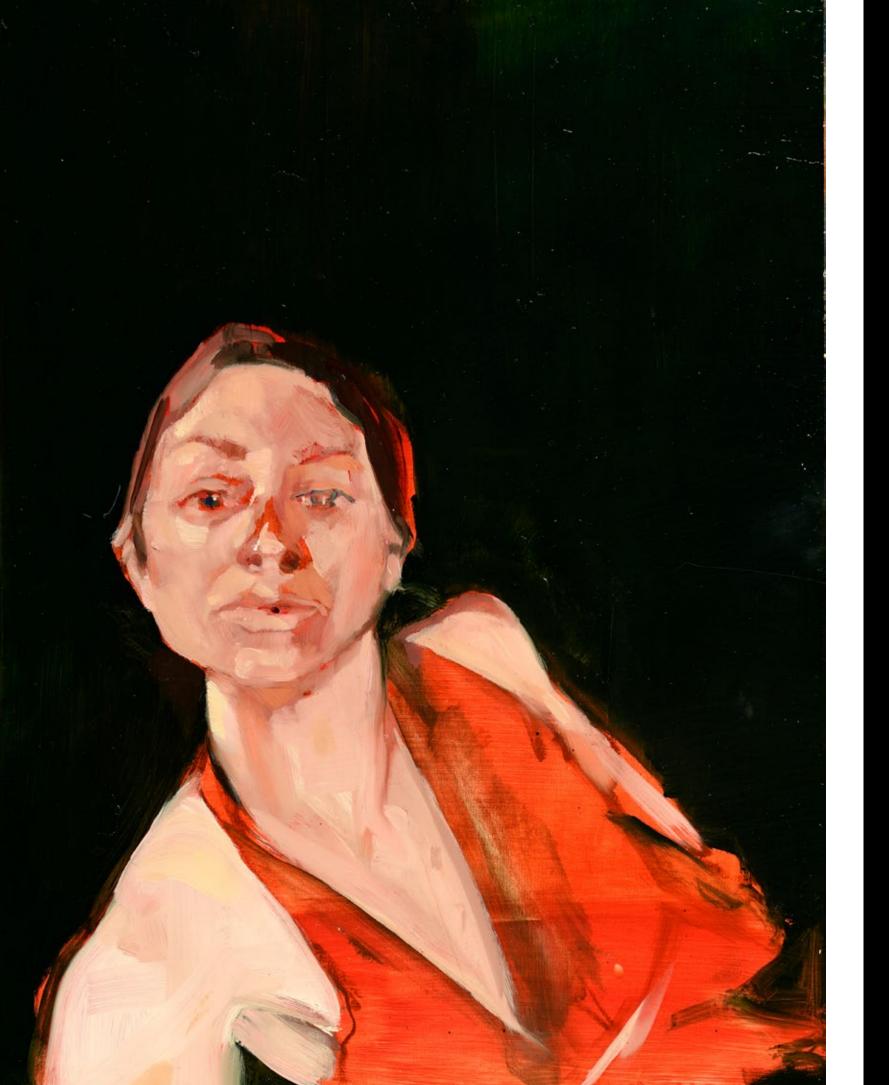
Media historian Elizabeth Losh (2014: online) writes

Although many regard the selfie as proof of the vainglory of contemporary social media obsessions, those familiar with the number of the genre know that its peculiar combination of humanizing individualized self-portraiture that dates back to Renaissance self-fashioning and the detached gaze of the digital technical apparatus that senses rather than sees may actually be uniquely characteristic of more complicated forms of marking time, disciplining the body, and quantifying the self.

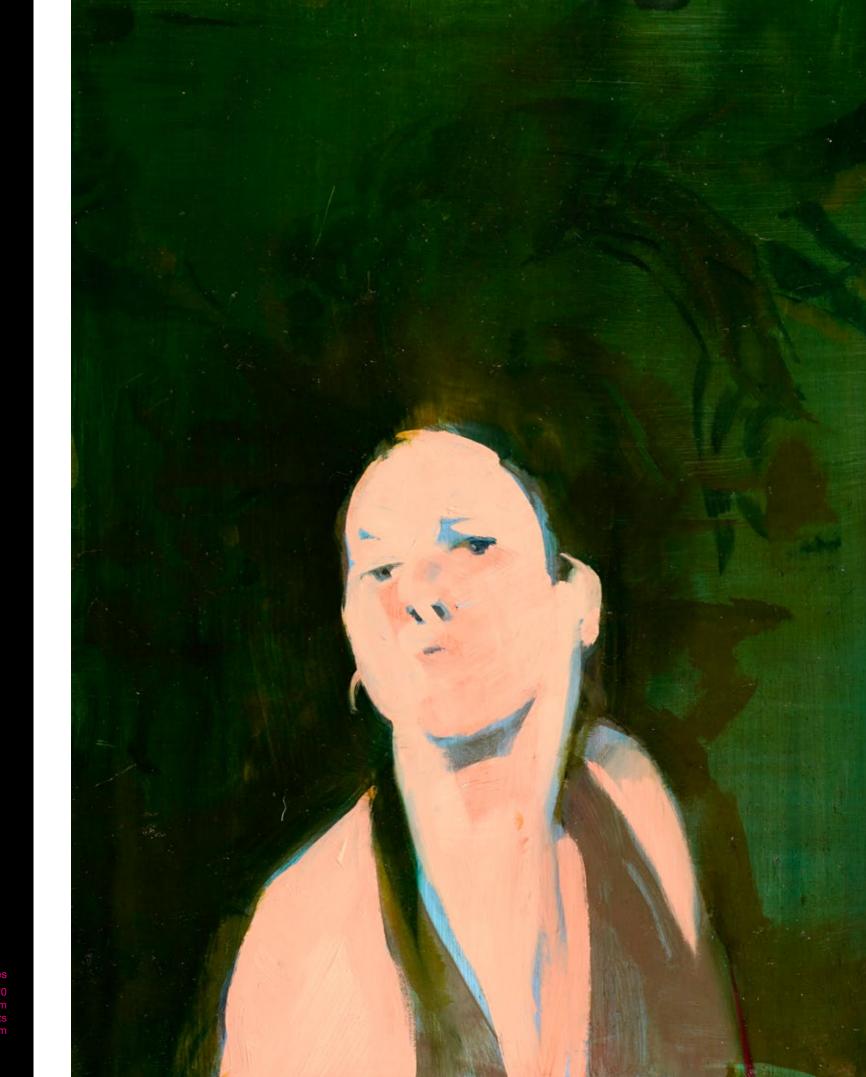
In a traditional painted portrait, the sitter gazes within the composition or beyond, while selfies seem to entangle the viewer with their subject. I suggest that this form of marketing is another form of patriarchal bargaining. I explore selfies as a representation of either extreme self-absorption or, as journalist Mary McGill (2016: online) suggests, "some young women are so drawn to the selfie, thanks to tech, that it is a way to hold on to the reflection in a hope that other people will see what they see in themselves". In parallel to the selfie series, I painted my own series of self-portraits direct from a mirror. I painted self-portraits as a means of scrutinising the self, my view of self, and my physical identity to counterbalance the seductive sense of the selfies. The selfies speak to a generic posing for the purpose of male sanction, whereas the self-portraits are an attempt at a more direct and more authentic representation of myself as the subject. I would add that the use of the iPhone or device used to create selfies has encouraged their abundance and dictated the genre.



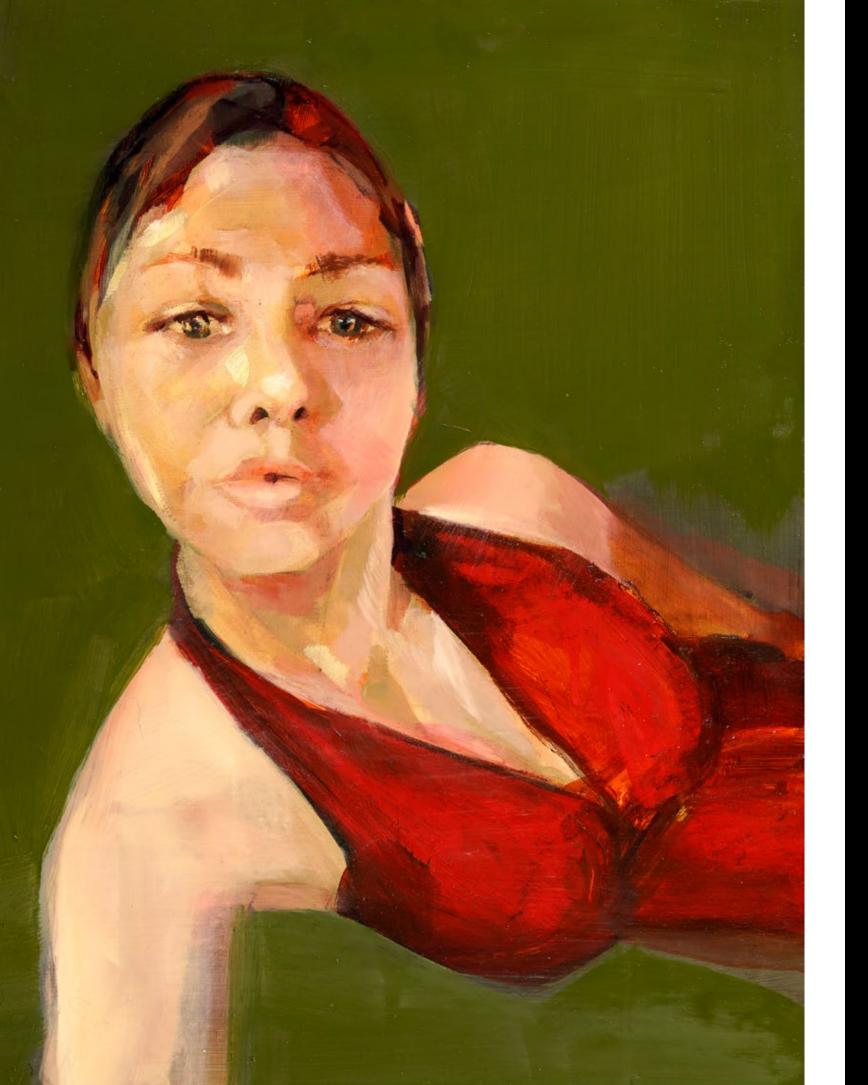
2020
Oil on aluminium composite sheets
30 x 40 cm



selfie series
2020
Oil on aluminium
composite sheets
30 x 40 cm

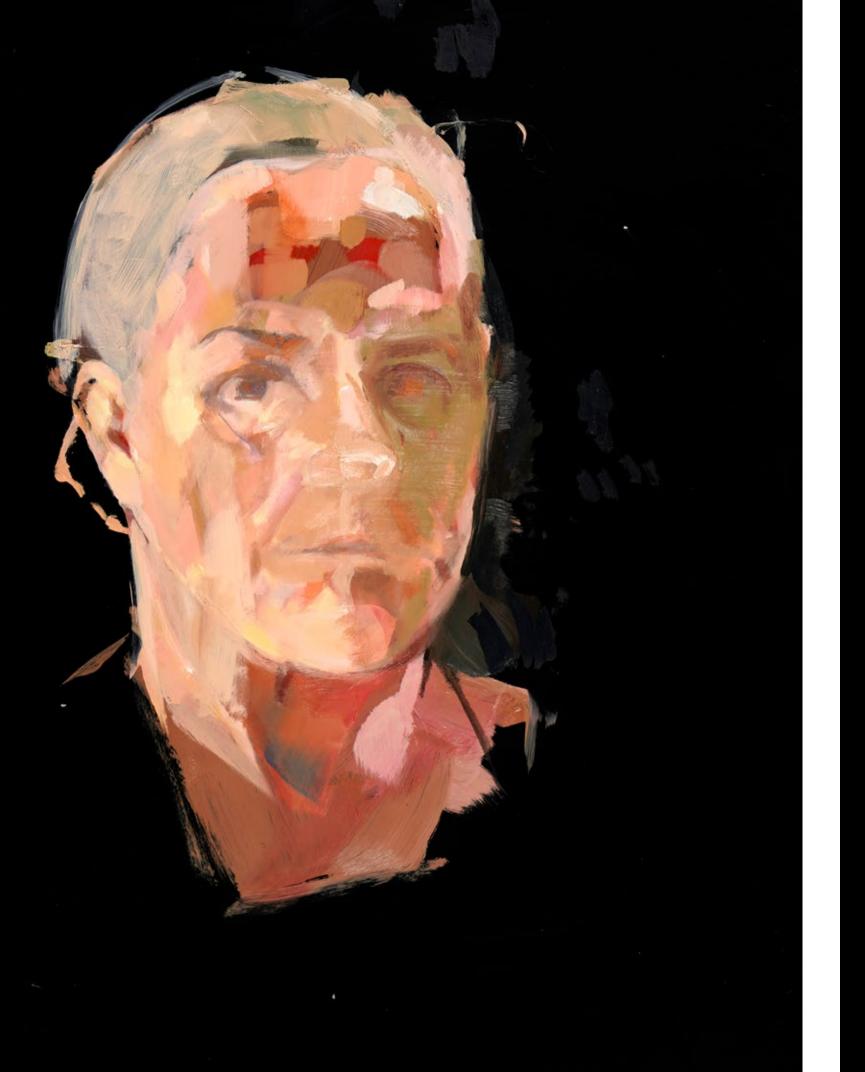


2020
Oil on aluminium composite sheets
30 x 40 cm



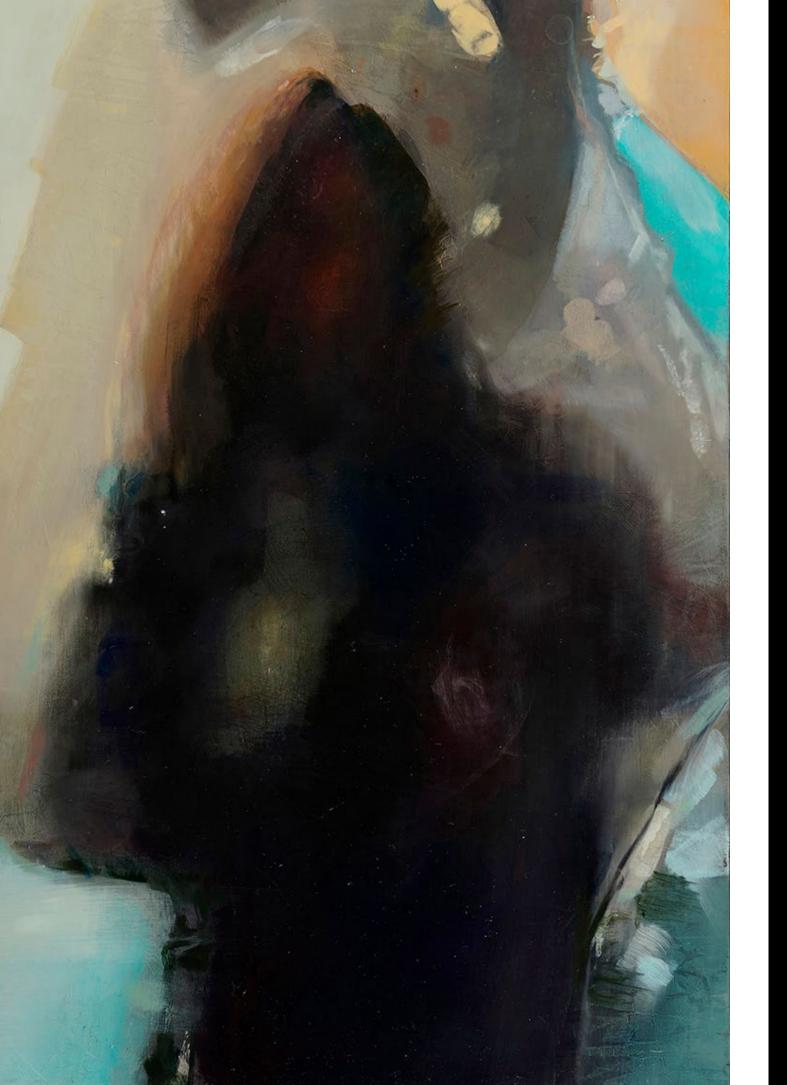
selfie series
2020
Oil on aluminium
composite sheets
30 x 40 cm





self-portraits 1 & 2 2020 Oil on aluminium composite sheets





I, captured in Barbie
2020
Oil on aluminium
composite sheets
60 x 35 cm

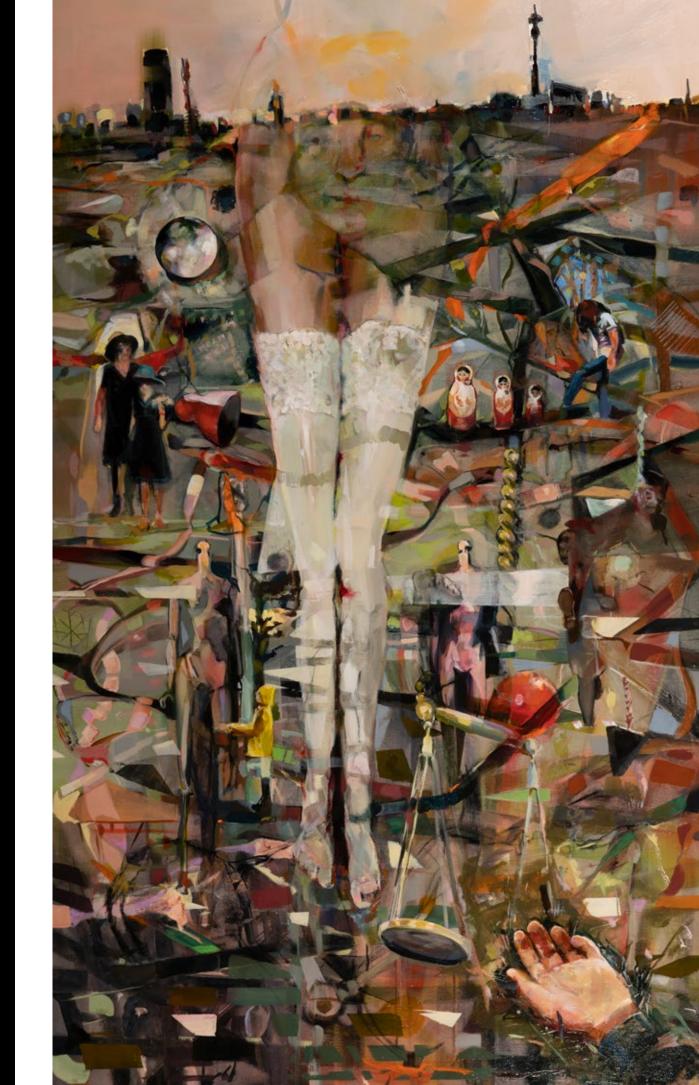
I, captured in Barbie, was a reflection I noticed of myself while I was working on the painting "Badas", which addresses the impact of Barbie and technology on female self-imaging.

onto me by Facebook (see *Badass* below) with the true physical representation of myself reflected on its surface. The amalgamation of these images into one serves to highlight the antithetical nature of the Facebook image.

The painting *Be yourself; everyone else is already taken*, is based on my childhood and is a mind-map of memories both recent and from the distant past, positive and negative, laying bare 53 years of my

Elements in the composition include: a matryoshka doll my mother gave me when I was a child, which I see as a symbol of female intuition and protection; my hand, which represents a moment of aloneness and quest for meaning in 1990; the Gauteng skyline as the locator; and ribbons as a representation of my search for meaning in my suffocation as a young girl and woman within the social product of patriarchy.

The work presents the conflict of my acknowledgment that I have been shaped by patriarchy and my understanding that my resistance lies in my power against it.



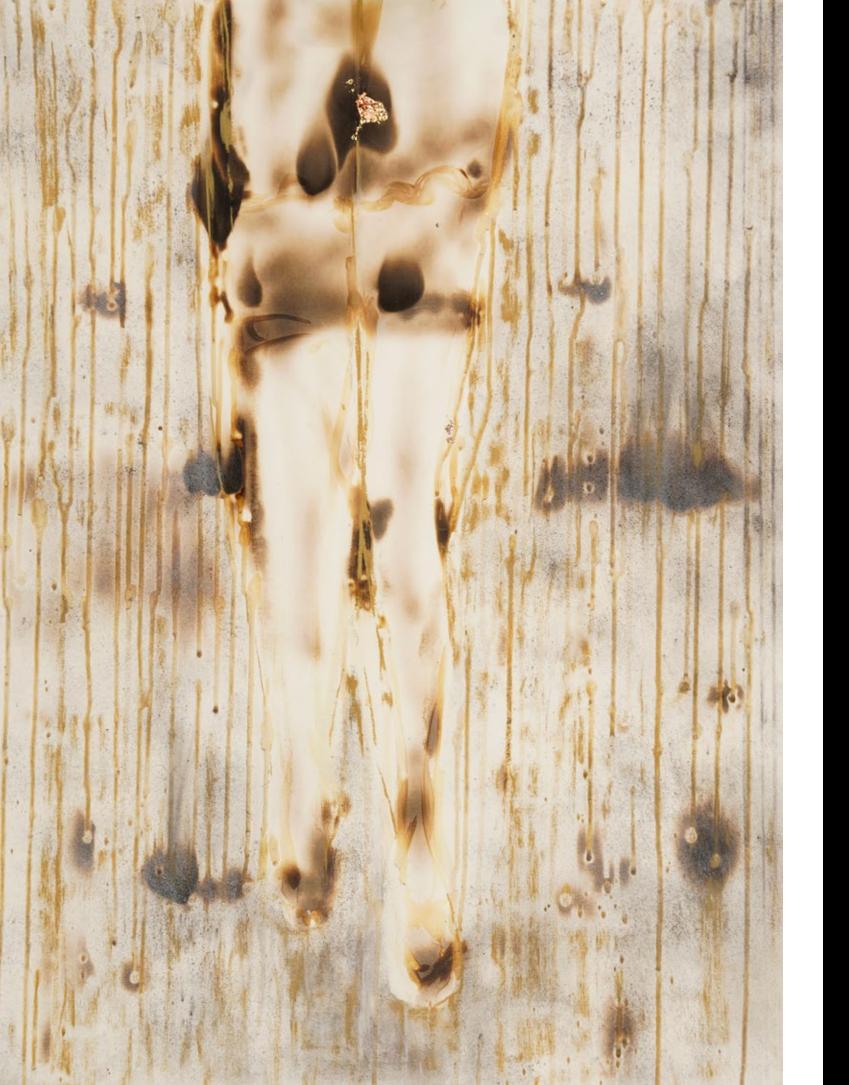
Be yourself; everyone else is taken 2020 Oil on canvas 150 x 90 cm



throphe trope - after, lachapelle 2020 Medium oil on ACS Dimensions 100cm x 75cm *cacophany

2020 Medium oil on canvas Dimensions 150cm x 90cm





burn baby burn 1 2020 Medium Dimensions cm x c



2020 Medium Dimensions cm x cm



Life in plastic, it's fantastic
2020
Oil on canvas

In looking for "culprits" in the representation of women, I was drawn to the Barbie doll and its paraphernalia. *Life in plastic, it's fantastic* explores the dominance and enforcement of unnatural body shaping on women. The Barbie doll literally cannot stand on its own two feet, yet is an icon to many girls and young women – so much so that the "doll ... may have shaped their perceptions of female beauty" (Origianska, 2018: online). Barbie was in fact inspired by the blonde, blue-eyed comic-strip character Lilli, who was created in 1952 and was not originally intended for children. Her emergence in the wake of World War II brings into focus the brutality of the Holocaust and its pursuit of the so-called perfection of the Aryan race. "Barbie's birth stems from a fetish of German otherness that, ironically enough, manifested itself in the plethora of sex dolls inspired by Lilli in sex shops across Germany" (Kotomori. 2019: online).

For this work I found images of discarded Barbies – broken, used and up for resale on Facebook Marketplace. These images segued, in my mind, into the disregard, disrespect, disposability and conscious muting of women.

I sanded, dissolved with acetone and glazed the lower half of the canvas in quinocodrone pink, visually separating the work's composition into two halves to create a sense of unease. The colours emphasise the disconnection between flesh and plastic to symbolise the questionable underbelly of the origin of these products.





"Fuck" is a word of Germanic origin, meaning "to strike" (Sheidlower, 2009). In this sequence of eight paintings, I show a territorial demarcation of my own boundary against patriarchy, while in turn expressing my fear of and resistance to this social system.

Bringing implications of temporality to the canvas, I shot 480 frames in slow-motion (at 120 frames a second) from a bird's-eye view to emphasise my vulnerability, and I selected eight of these frames to distil my message. In further exploring vulnerability, I began exploring charcoal drawings to combine fear and vulnerability with resistance.

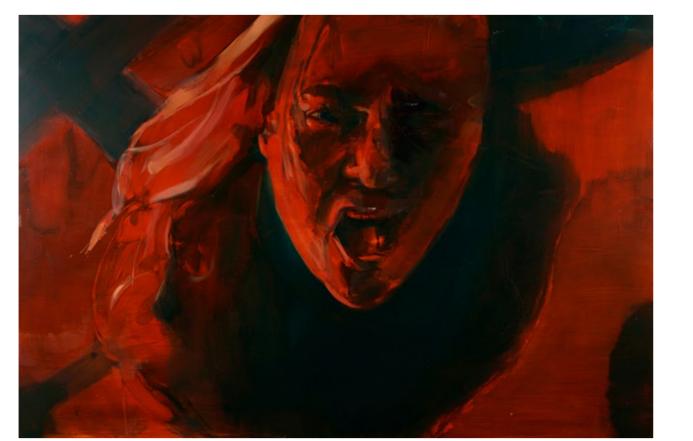






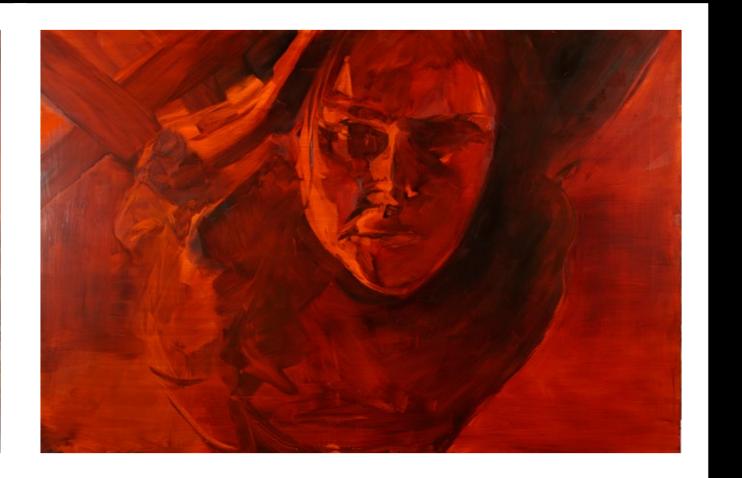










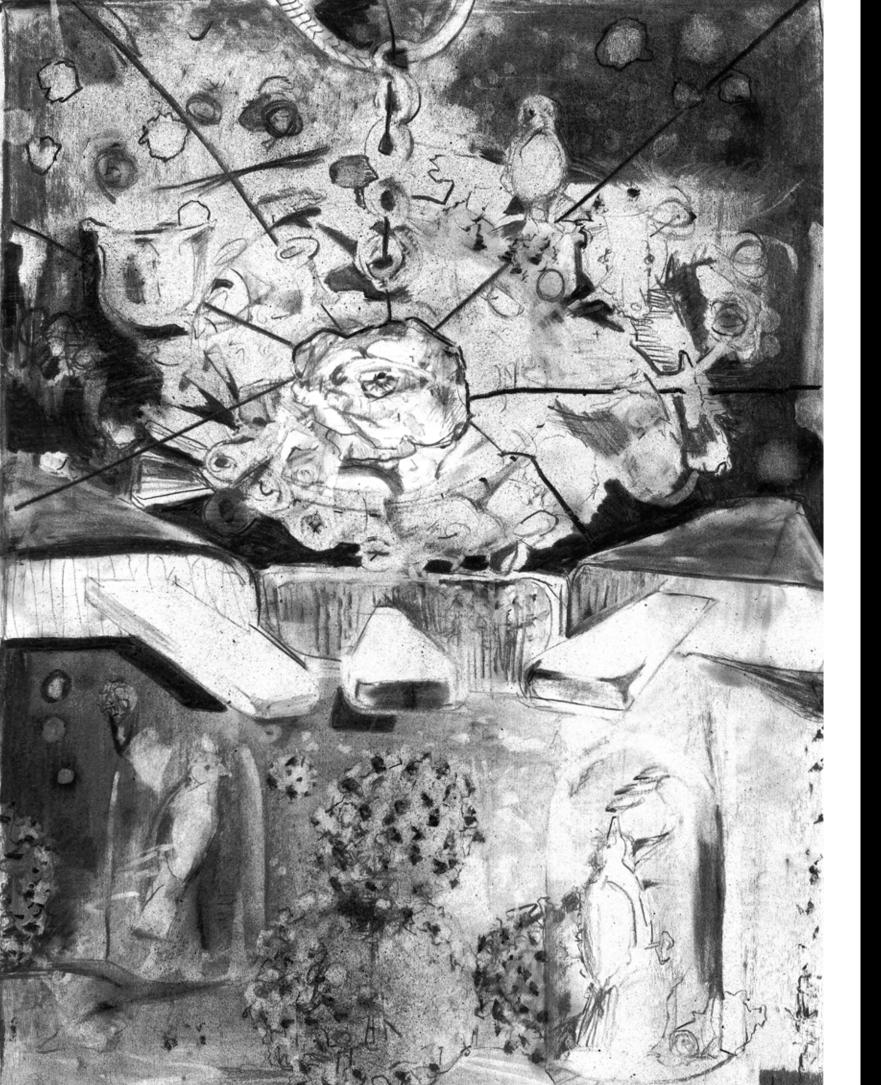






Free drawings series -1,2,3,4 2020 Mixed media

lockdowi 2020 Medium charcoal and spray glue or pape Dimensions 110cm x 80cn



Kink in armour
2020
Medium charcoal and spray glue on paper
Dimensions 110cm x 80cm





nirror mirror 020 ledium charcoal and spray glue on paper imensions 110cm x 80cm The *Free Drawings* series explores the threat of patriarchy, identified as the "Dark Man" in women's dreams, the "natural predator of the psyche" (Pinkola Estés, 1992) and an esoteric methodological device through which to explore my own Dark Man, which I identify as patriarchy and its predation on the female psyche.

The threat of the dark man serves as a warning to all of us – if you don't pay attention to the treasures, they will be stolen from you. In this manner, when a woman has a series of these dreams, it infers that a huge gate is opening to the initiatory ground where her revaluing of her gifts can occur. (Pinkola Estés, 2008).

Like Covid-19, patriarchy can be seen as a virus, and this series of drawings illustrates my quest for a vaccine. While creating these works, I listened to Jungian psychoanalyst and feminist Clarissa Pinkola Estés' "Women who run with the Wolves" podcast, drawing only on my memory and distrust of patriarchy as the subject matter. By allowing the discourse to drive the art, I allowed the work to percolate through her writing.

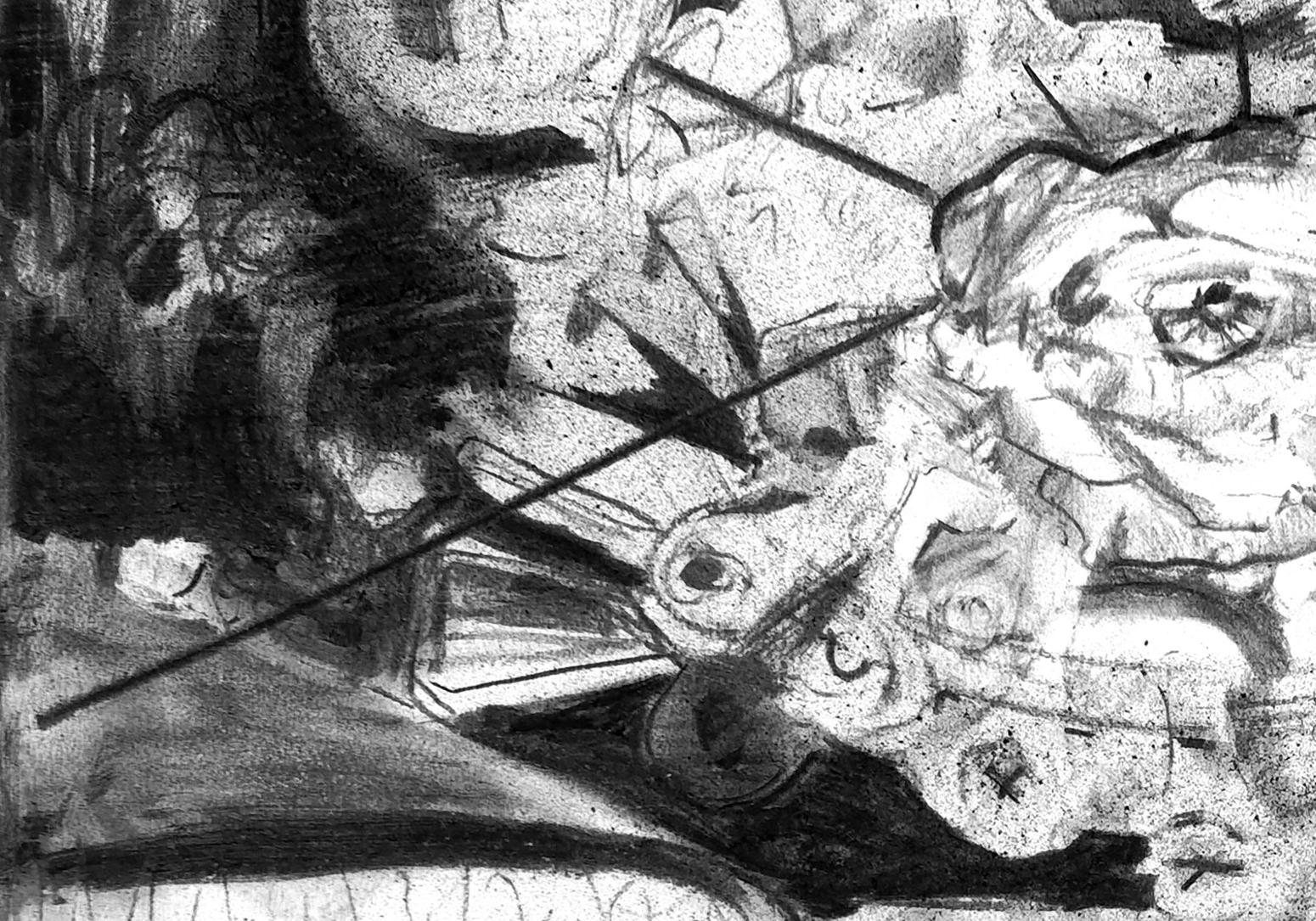
and combined them to pictorialise my personal experiences of patriarchy.

Using this methodology, I unpacked the past to overcome and exorcise my

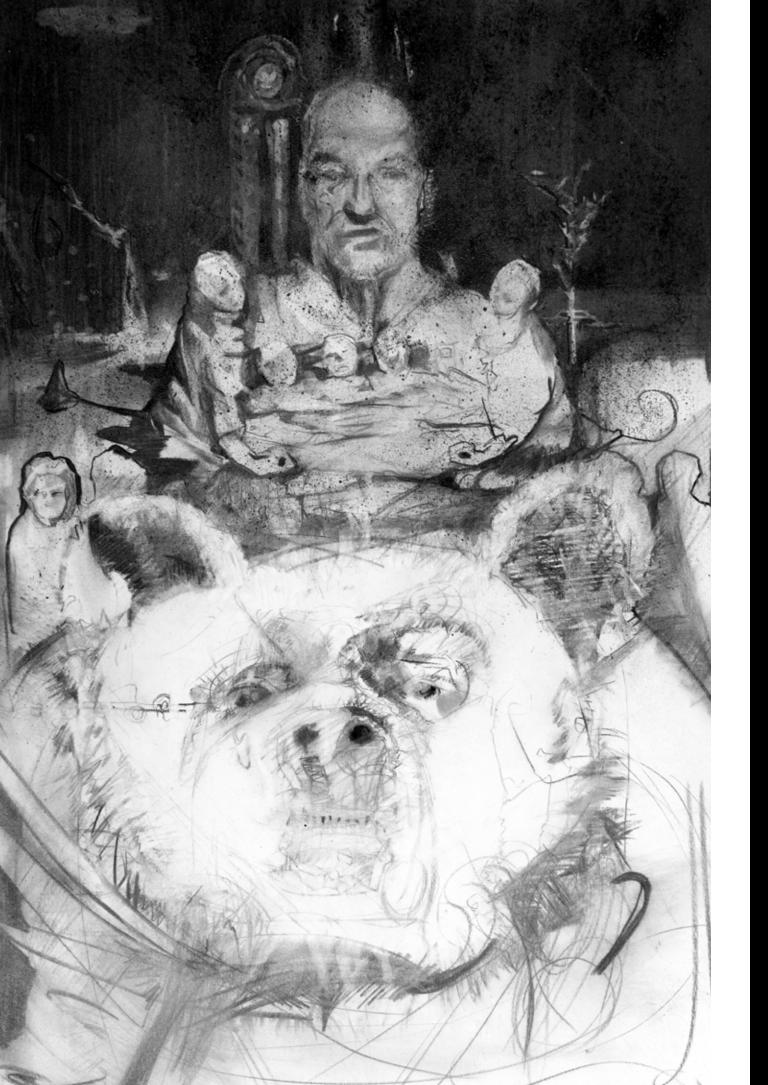
"Dark Man", furthering my search for an antidote to my experience of gender bias. Given my acknowledgement that I fear patriarchy, it emboldened me to explore various images I associate with vulnerability.

The dog in *Beware* represents my reaction to patriarchy. The safety pin, a carefully designed tool to protect babies from being pricked, is symbolic of my fragile childhood. The pin crudely holds me together as I resist the patriarchy (the viewer).









Kink in armour 2020 Charcoal and spray glue on paper 110 x 80 cm Running counter to accepted wisdom, Pinkola Estés (2008) writes:

By classical Jungian definition, animus is the soul-force in women, and is primarily masculine. However, many women psychoanalysts, including myself, have, through personal observation, come to refute the classical view and to assert instead that the revivifying source in woman is not masculine and alien to her, but feminine and familiar.

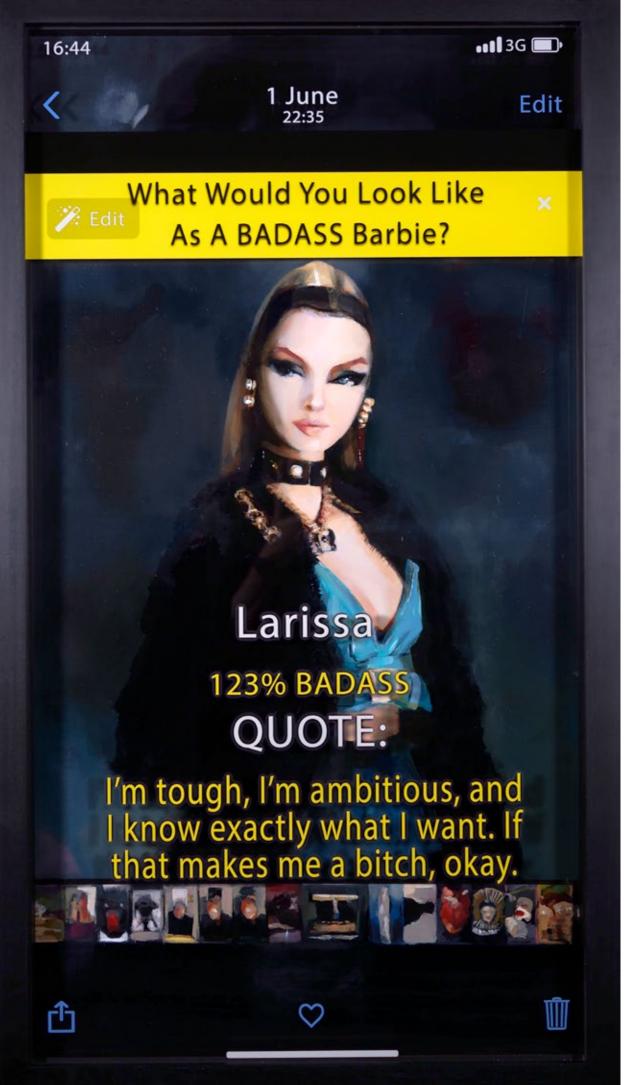
On completion of the drawing, I sprayed spray glue and shaved charcoal randomly over the image to disrupt the smooth surface of the charcoal and connote my agitation/anger towards the antagonist – the viewer.

The subject of this work is the moment of my mother's passing in 2014. As Pinkola Estés suggests, the bear is symbolic of myself and my female intuition. In the foreground, the bear leads the way out of and away from the wasteland/liminal space, from "what was" into "what is next"

Be my wife links the suffocating restrictions of early lockdown, in which it was illegal to leave one's home under threat of arrest, with the suffocation of the rights of the female in a patriarchal system. Painting has become my weapon of choice against this virus.

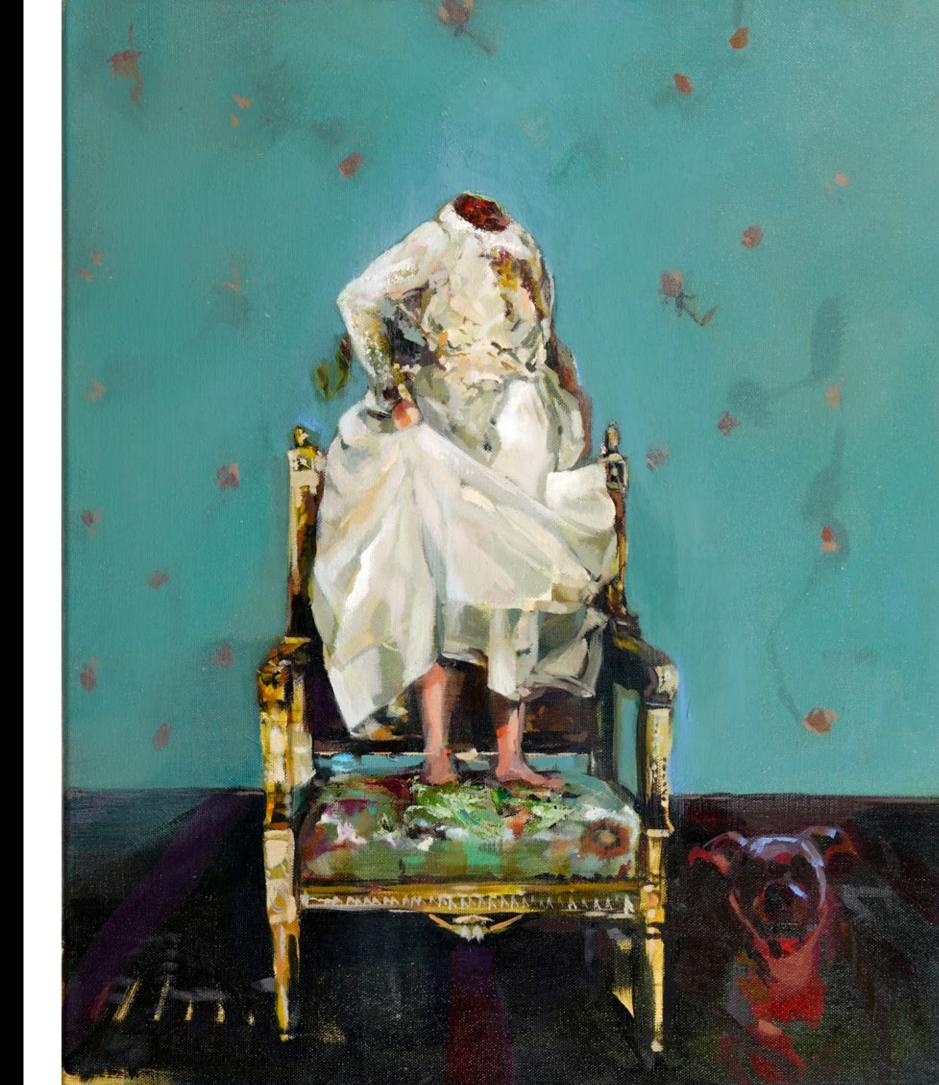
I allowed the materiality of the aluminium substrate to dominate the composition, so that its reflective surface creates a dialogue between the subject and the viewer on the paradigm of patriarchy. The title refers to my attitude to the institution of traditional marriage, which I regard as a form of patriarchal bargaining, to which I believe freedom is not optional.



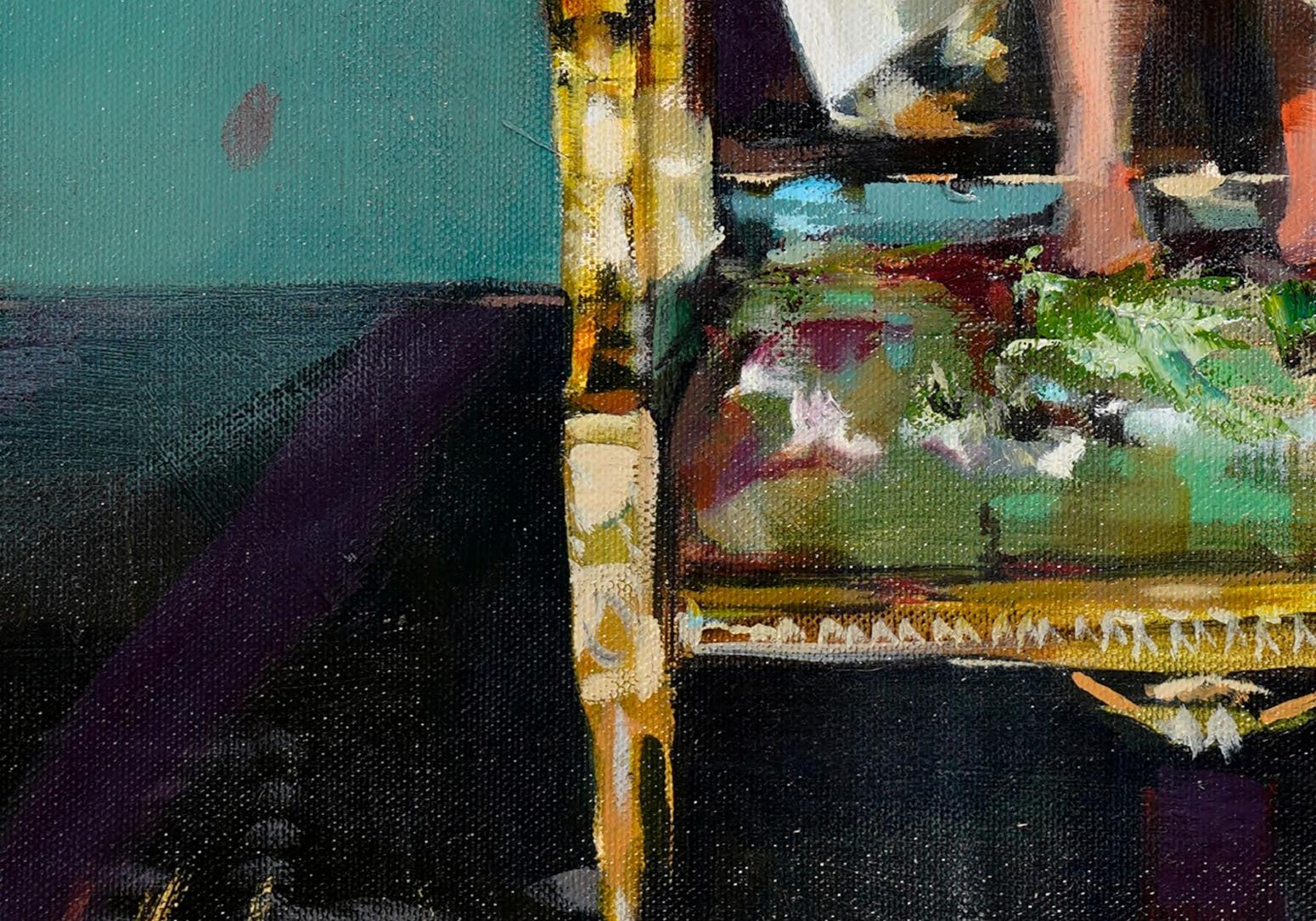


BADASS

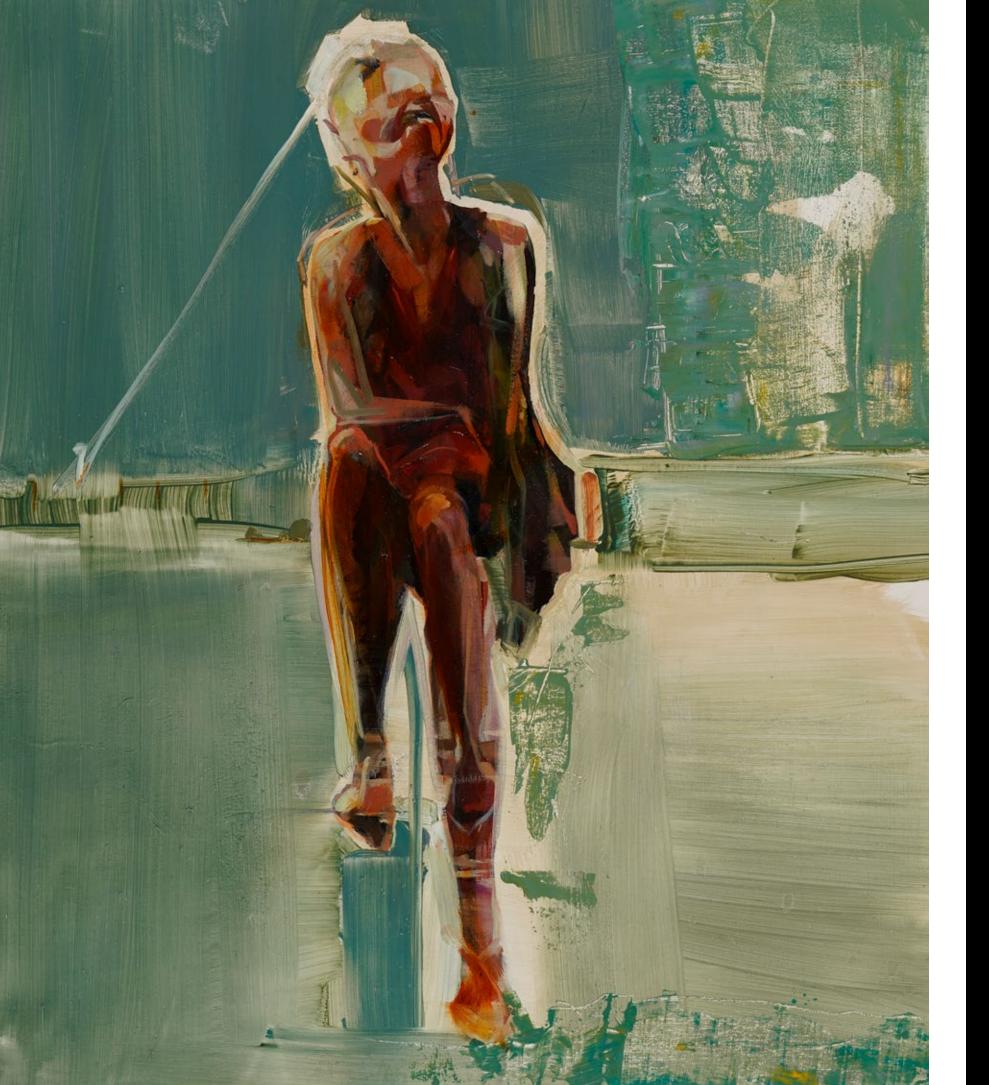
While researching "Ode to Resistance", Facebook sent me "clickbait" based on my personal information and activity on the site, suggesting what I would look like as a Barbie. I have included this as an example of the insidious algorithmic profiling employed by social media platforms online. This piece marries digital marketing and a highly inaccurate self-portrait. I am 53 years old, and I don't wear jewellery or dog collars, so I also question why I am depicted as a commercial product. The text and icons are printed onto Perspex to mimic the cell phone/social media form from which the image originated. *Life is plastic, it's fantastic* gave birth to *Badass*, and this progression is fascinating to me because it was all foisted upon me by social media.



daddy daddy, the dog ate my head 2020 Medium oil on canvas Dimensions 50cm x 40cm







ound
020

ledium oil on ACS
vimensions cm x cm



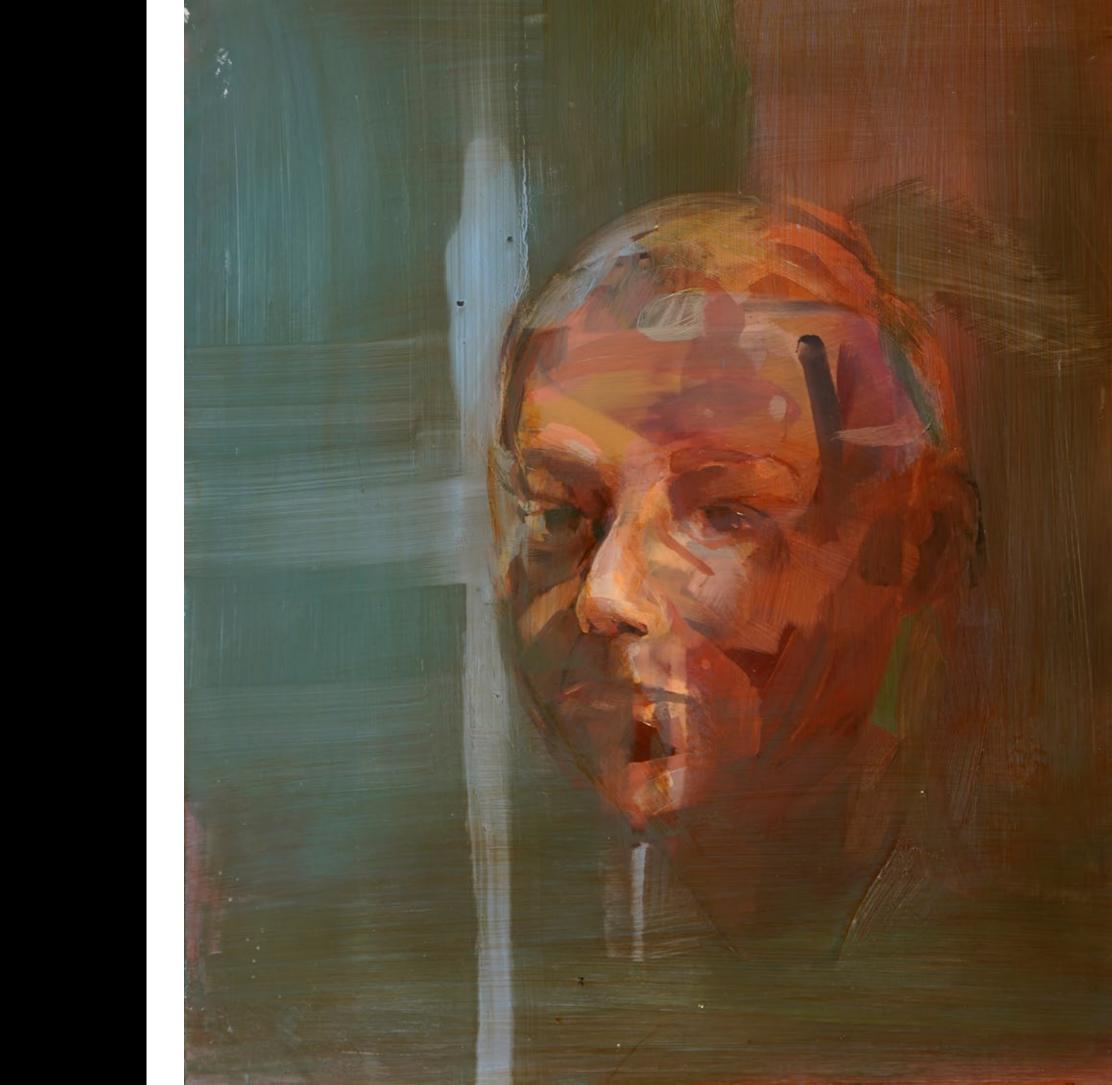
there is neither bond nor free

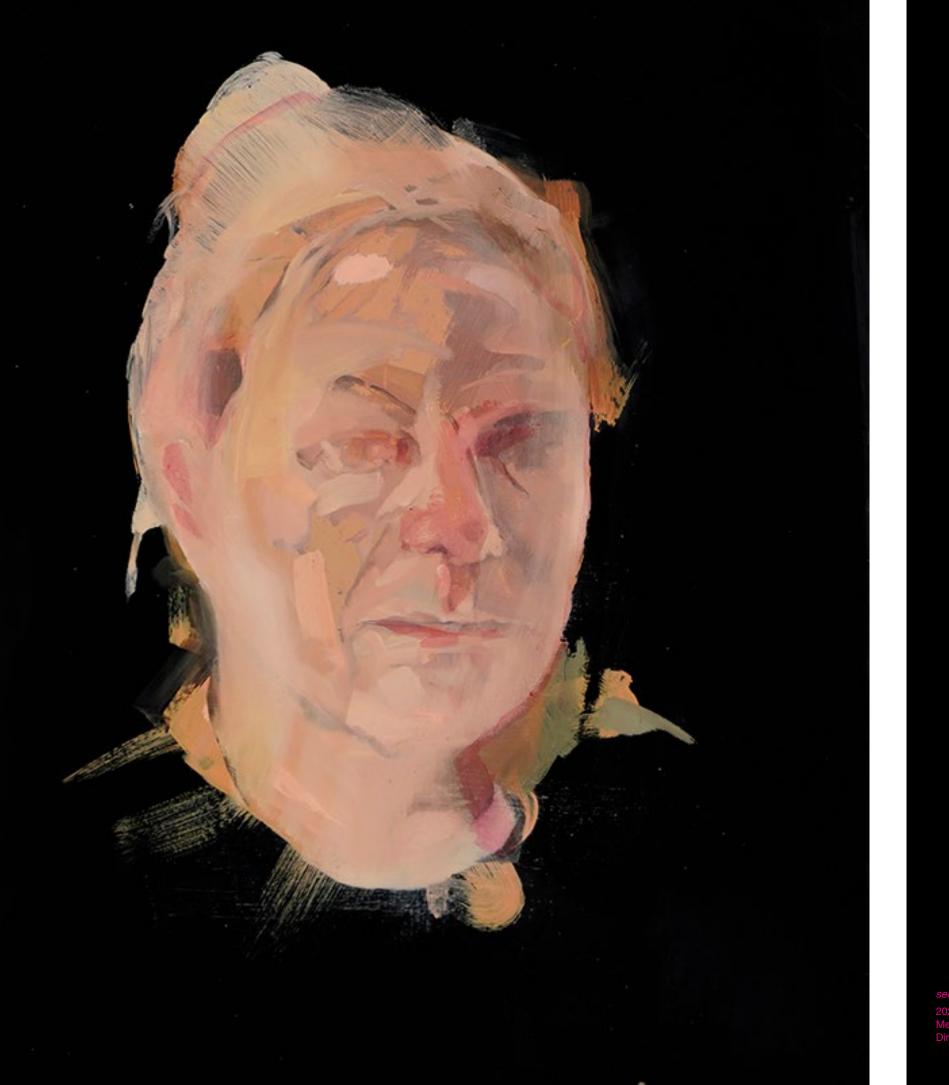
2020
Medium charcoal and spray glue on paper
Dimensions cm x cm



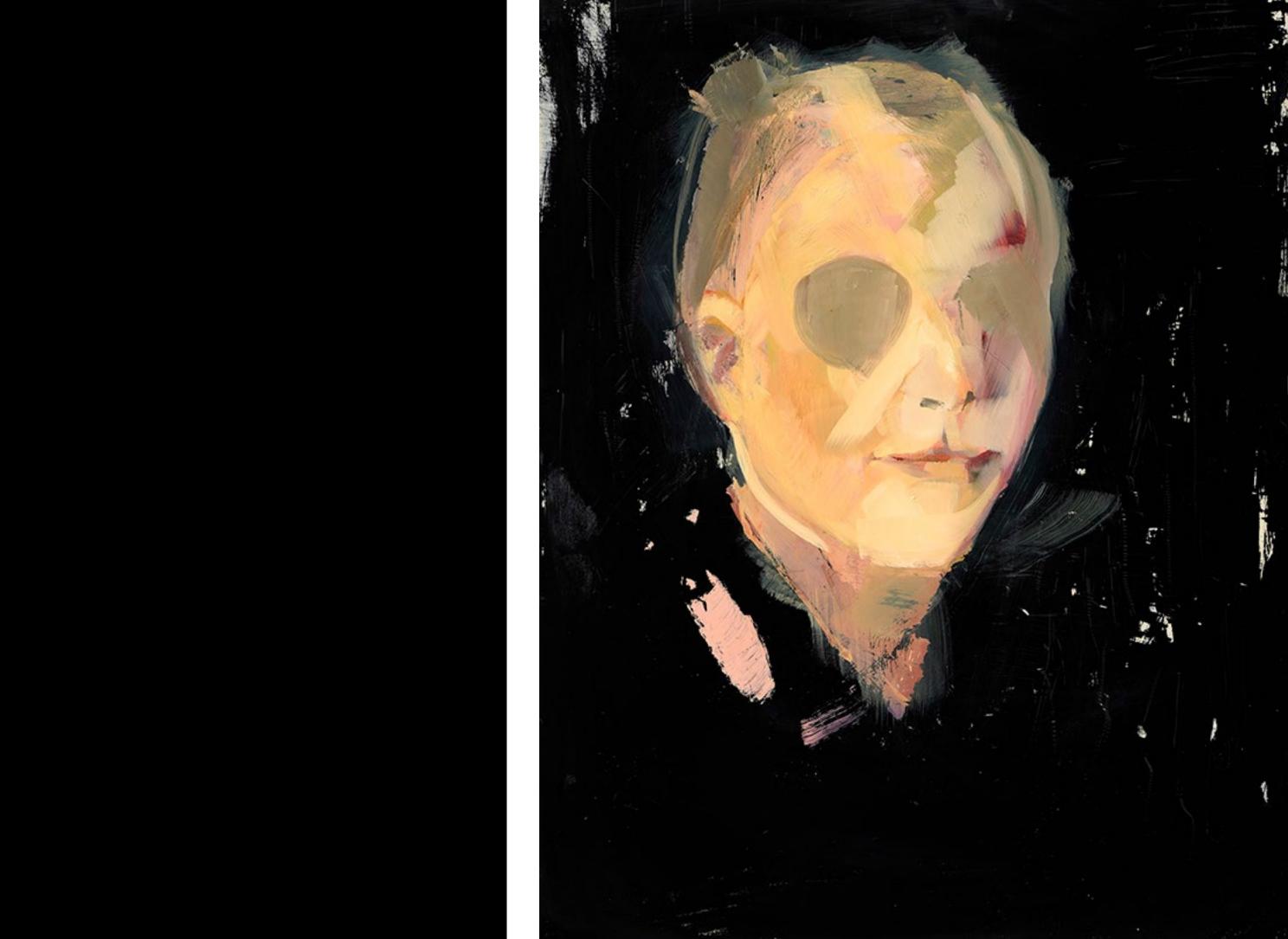








self series 2020 Medium oil on ACS Dimensions 50cm x, 40cm













CONCLUSION

I refer back to Didion's building of boldness through examination. In 2020, I had an epiphany – the greatest emotion I have about patriarchy is seated in the fear of it. I can see that confronting my fear has diminished its threat, and I have created perspective and distance. I find now that there is nothing to fear, and I will continue to fight patriarchy with every morsel of my existence going forward.

Let everything happen to you Beauty and terror Just keep going No feeling is final.

Rainer Maria Rilke

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They were an anchor in these strange times

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