

## YELLOW HOUSE FUND RAISING SALE

The US and its allies, including Australia and the UK spent trillions of dollars in a twenty-year war against the people of Afghanistan. The number killed is yet to be calculated but could be as much as one million lives. The Russians in their 9-year war killed over two million. Our Yellow House was established in 2009 and has continued to function after the Military withdrawal in 2021. We have a chance to prove that art and communication can win where war has failed. It is time to end the demonising of Afghans and focus on helping their rich culture flourish, as a gift to the world.



In 2022 Hellen and I purchased a building and land in Jalalabad so we can move the Yellow House Project out of the City Centre to a safer location. I will be there through October to March 2024 and Hellen will join me in November.

The Yellow House is funded entirely from the sale of my art. The new Yellow House is situated in the Tribal Area where it will be protected by ancient and respected laws which only allow entry to invited guests. The Taliban and ISIS can not gain access without our permission and that of the Traditional Elders.

Immediately a bore must be drilled for running water, septic tank dug for toilets, solar panels and a generator purchased, internet hooked up, wiring, and plumbing installed and additional construction on the building before it can function fully as an art centre and school. We will need to buy a vehicle and items like tables, chairs, teaching aids like computers, lighting, fridges and stoves.

This sale is a unique opportunity to purchase works at up to 60% less than their established market value. Many of the oil paintings and works on paper were created at the Yellow House between 2011 and 2017 and transported back to Australia. They have the mojo and dust of Jalalabad still on them. Most have the imprints of ancient wooden stamps made and carved many centuries ago by Afghan craftsmen. They have the divine geometry found in the great mosques .

NOTE: All other works, outside this selection ,remain at their full, undiscounted, 2023 purchase prices.

People wonder how I can stay sane and an optimist after witnessing so much war in places like Rwanda, Iraq, Cambodia, Bosnia and Ukraine, but my belief in the human spirit enables me to create

beauty in the face of the destruction that surrounds us. The harsh images I paint from conflict zones are designed for Public Galleries where they can inspire people to work for world peace and end war. The mystical works are full of light and are an expression of my own soul which has survived and remains luminous. Art is a light in the darkness.

It is wonderful to show that art can support art and we do not need to go to Government agencies or other sources for our funds. We are not affiliated, through funding, to any organisations that could be of concern to Afghans after 20 years of unproductive foreign occupation.





Our Yellow House looks out on Spingar Mountain which is a sacred spiritual place of pilgrimage and borders on the remaining ruins of Buddhist temples. It is adjacent to the Newly constructed University and most progressive High School where Girls are still able to attend classes.







# YELLOW HOUSE FUND RAISING SALE







## ARTWORK LIST

No	Name	Image	Size	Price
	<b>Lovers Series</b>			
1.	WERRI (2019)  Oil on Canvas		213 x 183	Price available on request
2.	PABLO AND FRANCOISE (2017)  Oil on Canvas		122 X 122	Price available on request
3.	DOORWAY TO THE OTHER SIDE (2018)  Oil on Canvas		153 x 122	Price available on request
4.	HIDDEN LOVE (2017)  Oil on Canvas		153 x 122	Price available on request


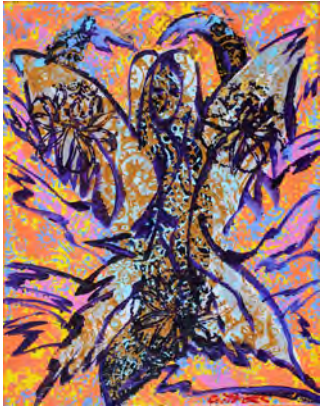

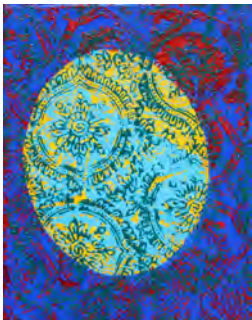

5.	SPARKLING SUFI (2015)  Oil on Canvas		198 x 152	Price available on request
6.	APHRODITE – VENUS (2018)  Oil on Canvas		122 X 92	Price available on request
7.	HELEN (PORTRAIT OF HELLEN) (2017)  Oil on Canvas		122 X 92	Price available on request
8.	ISHTAR (2018)  Oil on Canvas		214 X 183	Price available on request
9.	MY PARADISE DOORWAY (2017)  Oil on Canvas		25 x 20	Price available on request




10.	<p>PARADISE DOORWAY (2018)</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p> 		40 x 40	Price available on request
11.	<p>ST PETERS GATES OPEN TO ALL (2017)</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p> 		40 x 40	Price available on request
12.	<p>DIVINE GEOMETRY (2017)</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		180 x 160	Price available on request
13.	<p>DOORWAY TO PEACE (2023)</p>		92 x 122	Price available on request
14.	<p>Free Spirit (2023)</p>		76 x 92	Price available on request




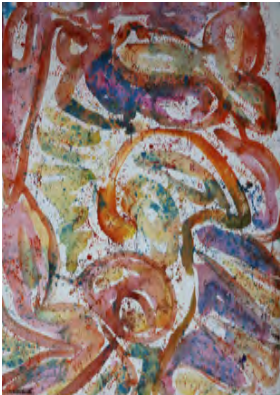
	Werri Series			
15.	<p>MYSTIC BEAST OF CONTRADICTION</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		180 X 160	Price available on request
16.	<p>PORTRAIT OF DAVID GULPILIL</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		122 X 122	Price available on request
17.	<p>VIEW FROM MY STUDIO</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		45 x 35	Price available on request
18.	<p>SPIRITS OF THE SEVEN MILE (2020)</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		300 X 197	Price available on request
19.	<p>EASTERN GREY AT SEVEN MILE (2019)</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		265 x 195	Price available on request
20.	<p>LOVE IS THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING (2017)</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		169 X 137	Price available on request




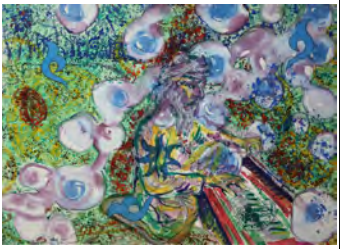
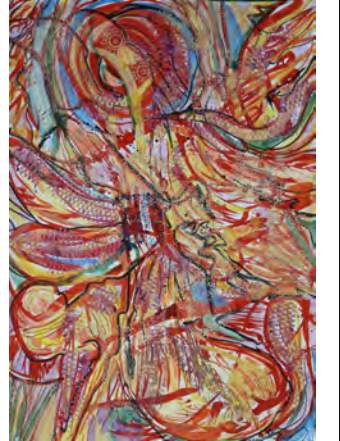




21.	INVISIBLE ROAD (2017)  Oil on Canvas		198 X 153	Price available on request
22.	GUARDIAN ANGEL (2022)  Oil on Canvas		45 X 36	Price available on request
23.	PARADISE GARDEN (2023)		45 x 36	Price available on request
24.	UNTITLED (2022)  Oil on Canvas		45 X 36	Price available on request
25.	UNTITLED (2022)  Oil on Canvas		40 X 30	Price available on request






	Sufi Series			
26.	SUFI - BLUE  Oil on Canvas		120 x 80	Price available on request
27.	SUFI - AS SONG CATCHES FIRE LOVE DRAWS FLAME  Oil on Canvas		280 X 154	Price available on request
28.	SUFI - YELLOW HOUSE SUFI SONG  Oil on Canvas		213 X 152	Price available on request
29.	115 YEAR OLD SUFI (2007)  Oil on Canvas		80 X 40	Price available on request
30.	SUFI SINGING IN THE FIELDS  Oil on Canvas		91 x 76	Price available on request




31.	<p>OLD SUFI SINGING A RUMI LOVE SONG</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		80 x 60	Price available on request
32.	<p>SUFI SUNSET JALALABAD</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		20 x 25	Price available on request
33.	<p>115 YEAR OLD SUFI</p> <p>Oil on Canvas</p>		20 x 25	Price available on request
	<b>Yellow House Watercolours</b>			
34.	<p>SUFI AND THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES (2015)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour</p>	<p>SIDE A</p>  <p>SIDE B (HALF DREAM)</p> 	76 x 105	Price available on request

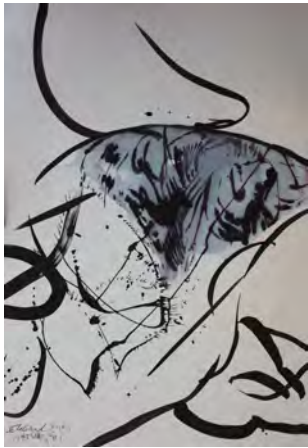



35.	<p>SONG TO BLESS THE HARVEST (2015)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour</p>	<p>SIDE A</p>  <p>SIDE B</p> 	105 X 76	Price available on request
36.	<p>SUFI PRAYER FOR THE YELLOW HOUSE (2015)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour</p> 		105 X 76	Price available on request
37.	<p>THE OWL IN THE YELLOW TREE JALALABAD (2012)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour</p>		77 X 111	Price available on request
38.	<p>SUFI DANCE JALALABAD (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour</p>		102 X 66	Price available on request
39.	<p>SIMURG JALALABAD (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour</p>		76 X 105	Price available on request








40.	WAR OF THE WORLDS JALALBAD (2011)  Works on Paper - Watercolour		76 X 110	Price available on request
41.	JALALABAD BUTTERFLY (2014)  Works on Paper - Watercolour		105 x 76	Price available on request
42.	YELLOW LADY (2011)  Works on Paper - Watercolour		76 x 105	Price available on request
43.	RIVER WOMAN (2011)  Works on Paper - Watercolour		76 x 109	Price available on request
44.	WOMAN JALALABAD  Works on Paper - Watercolour		76 x 109	Price available on request

	Woman Series			
45.	GHOST WOMAN (2011)  Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour		75 x 109	Price available on request
46.	BLUE WOMAN (2011)  Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour		75 x 109	Price available on request
47.	BLUE WOMAN #2 (2011)  Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour		75 x 109	Price available on request
48.	WOMAN #2 (2011)  Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour		75 x 109	Price available on request



49.	<p>WOMAN OF SPINGAR MOUNTAIN (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour</p>		75 x 109	Price available on request
50.	<p>ANGEL OF JALALABAD KNEELING IN PRAYER (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour</p>		75 x 109	Price available on request
51.	<p>WOMAN IN THE LANDSCAPE JALALABAD (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour</p>		75 x 109	Price available on request
52.	<p>LOVE CITY (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour</p>		75 x 109	Price available on request

53.	<p>WOMAN OF THE FIELDS (2011)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour</p>		75 x 109	Price available on request
54.	<p>ARTIST AND SUBJECT (2008)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Black Ink and Watercolour</p>		109 x 75	Price available on request
55.	<p>CHICAGO SWAN LAKE (2018)</p> <p>Works on Paper - Watercolour and Acrylic Spray Paint</p>		97 x 127	Price available on request
56.	<p>PSYCHE AND THE FAWN (2023)</p> <p>Fine Art Print</p>		42 x 30 (A3)	Price available on request
57.	<p>PSYCHE BEING CARRIED AWAY BY THE ZEPHYRS (2023)</p> <p>Fine Art Print</p>		42 x 30 (A3)	Price available on request



## GALLERY

1.

WERRI (2019)



213 x 183



2.

**PABLO AND FRANCOISE (2017)**



**122 X 122**



3.

**DOORWAY TO THE OTHER SIDE (2018)**



**153 x 122**



4.  
**HIDDEN LOVE (2017)**



**153 x 122**



5.  
**SPARKLING SUFI (2015)**



**198 x 152**



6.  
**APHRODITE – VENUS (2018)**



122 X 92



7.

**HELEN (PORTRAIT OF HELLEN) (2017)**



**122 X 92**



8.  
**ISHTAR (2018)**



**214 X 183**



9.

**MY PARADISE DOORWAY (2017)**



**25 x 20**

10.

**PARADISE DOORWAY (2018)**



**40 x 40**

11.

**ST PETERS GATES OPEN TO ALL (2017)**



**40 x 40**



12.

**DIVINE GEOMETRY (2017)**



**180 x 160**



13.  
DOORWAY TO PEACE (2022)



92 x 122



**14.**  
**FREE SPIRIT (2023)**



**76 x 92**



15.  
**MYSTIC BEAST OF CONTRADICTION**



**180 X 160**



16.

**PORTRAIT DAVID GULPILIL**



**122 X 122**

17.

**VIEW FROM MY STUDIO**



**43 x 35**



18.

**SPIRITS OF THE SEVEN MILE (2020)**



**300 X 197**

19.

**EASTERN GREY AT SEVEN MILE (2019)**



**265 x 195**



20.

LOVE IS THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING (2017)



169 X 137



21.  
**INVISIBLE ROAD (2017)**



198 X 153



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**GUARDIAN ANGEL (2022)**



**45 X 36**

**23.**  
**PARADISE GARDEN (2023)**

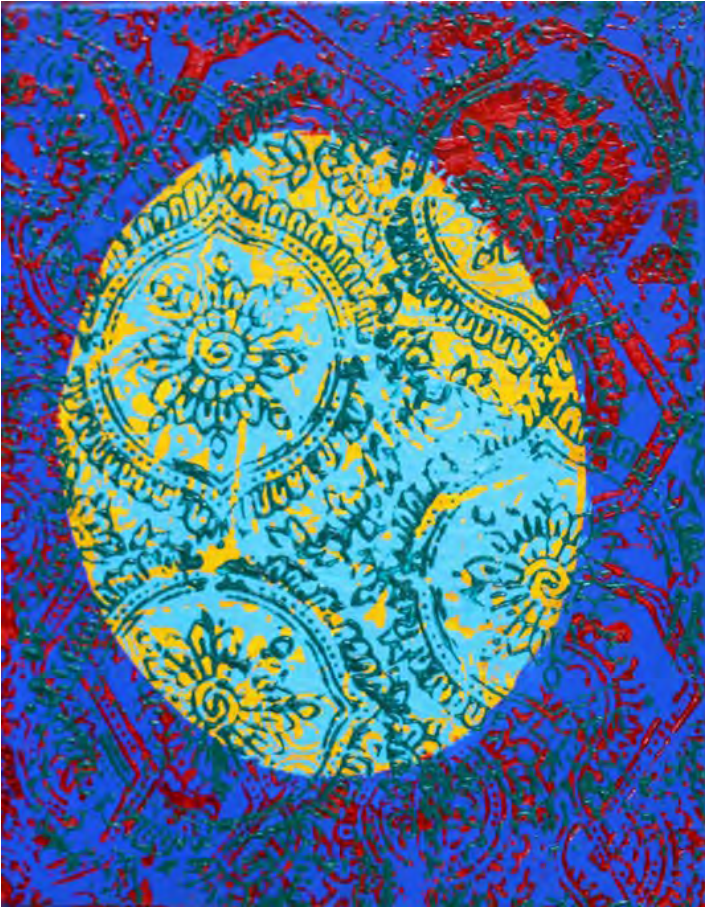


**45 X 36**



24.

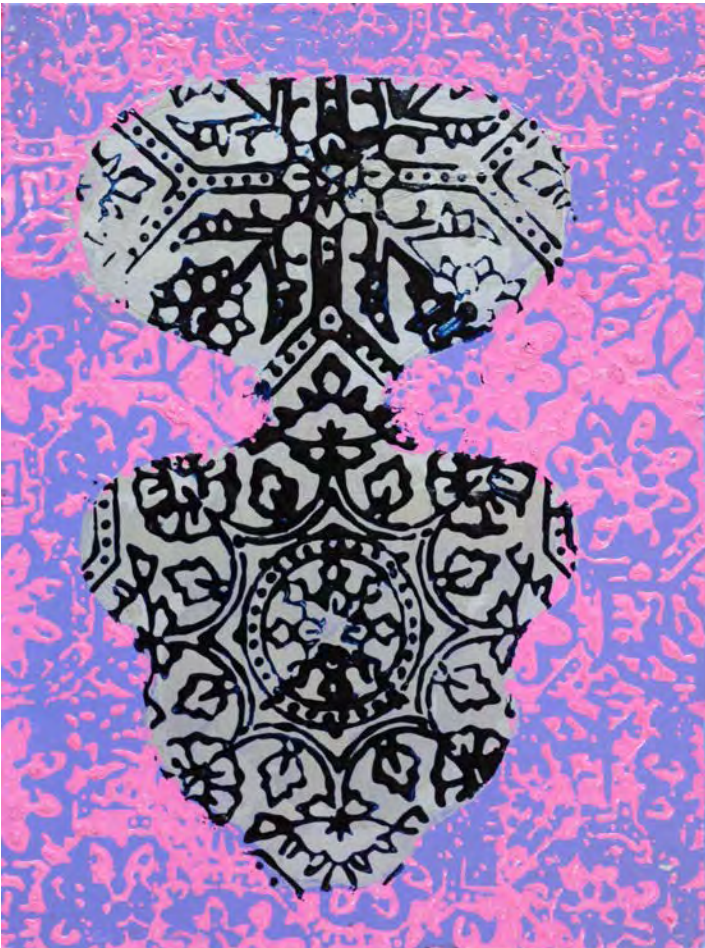
UNTITLED (2022)



45 X 36

25.

UNTITLED (2022)



40 X 30



26.

**SUFI - BLUE**



120 x 80

27.

**SUFI - AS SONG CATCHES FIRE LOVE DRAWS FLAME**



208 X 154



28.

**SUFI - YELLOW HOUSE SUFI SONG**



**213 X 152**



29.

115 YEAR OLD SUFI



80 X 40



**30.**  
**SUFI SINGING IN THE FIELDS**



**91 X 76**



**31.**  
**OLD SUFI SINGING A RUMI LOVE SONG**



**80 X 60**

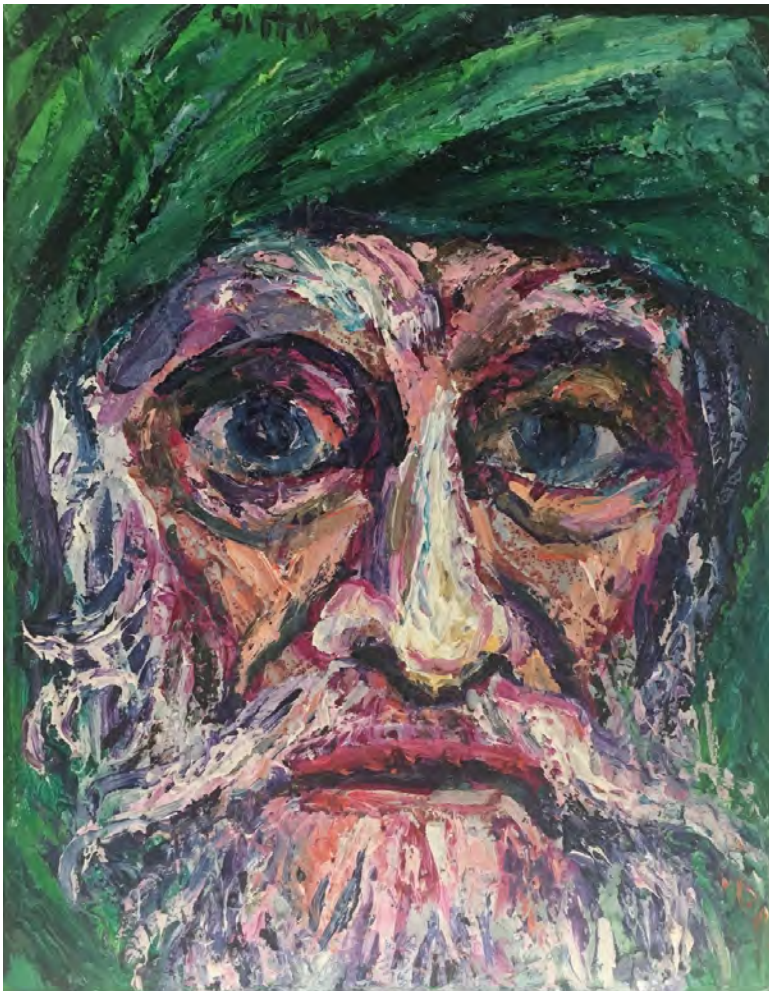


**32.**  
**SUFI SUNSET JALALABAD**



**20 X 25**

**33.**  
**115 YEAR OLD SUFI**



**25 X 20**



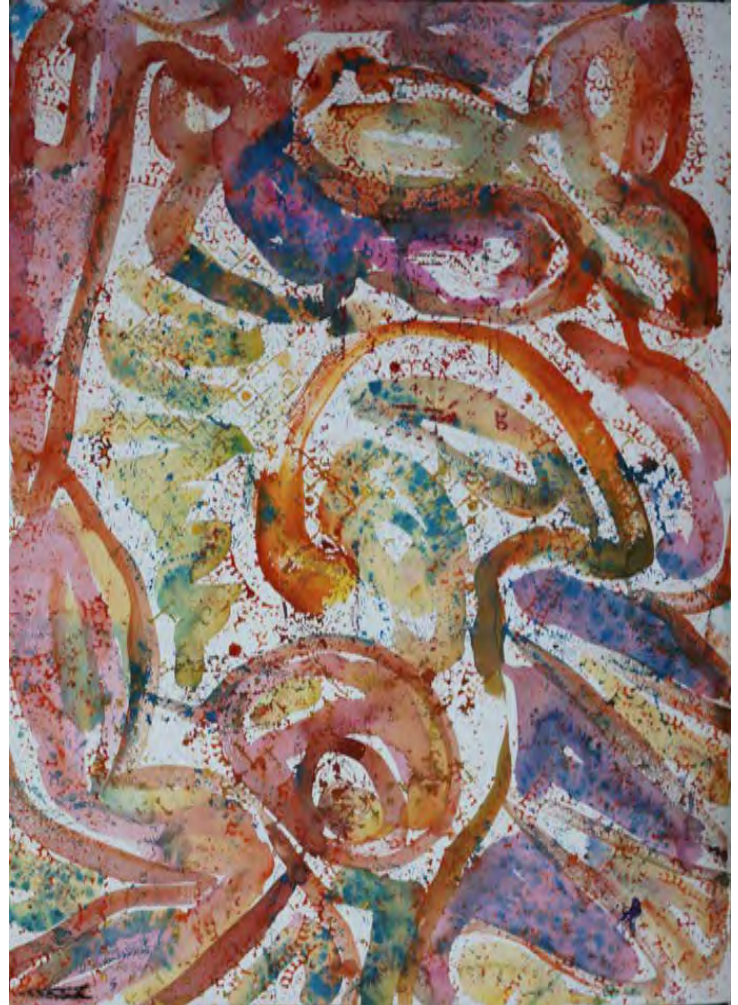
**34.**

**SUFI AND THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES (2011)**



**SIDE A**

**105 X 76**



**SIDE B (HALF DREAM)**



35.

**SONG TO BLESS THE HARVEST (2011)**



**SIDE A**

**105 X 76**



**SIDE B**

**105 X 76**



36.

**SUFI PRAYER FOR THE YELLOW HOUSE (2011)**



105 X 76



37.

**THE OWL IN THE YELLOW TREE JALALABAD (2012)**



**77 X 111**



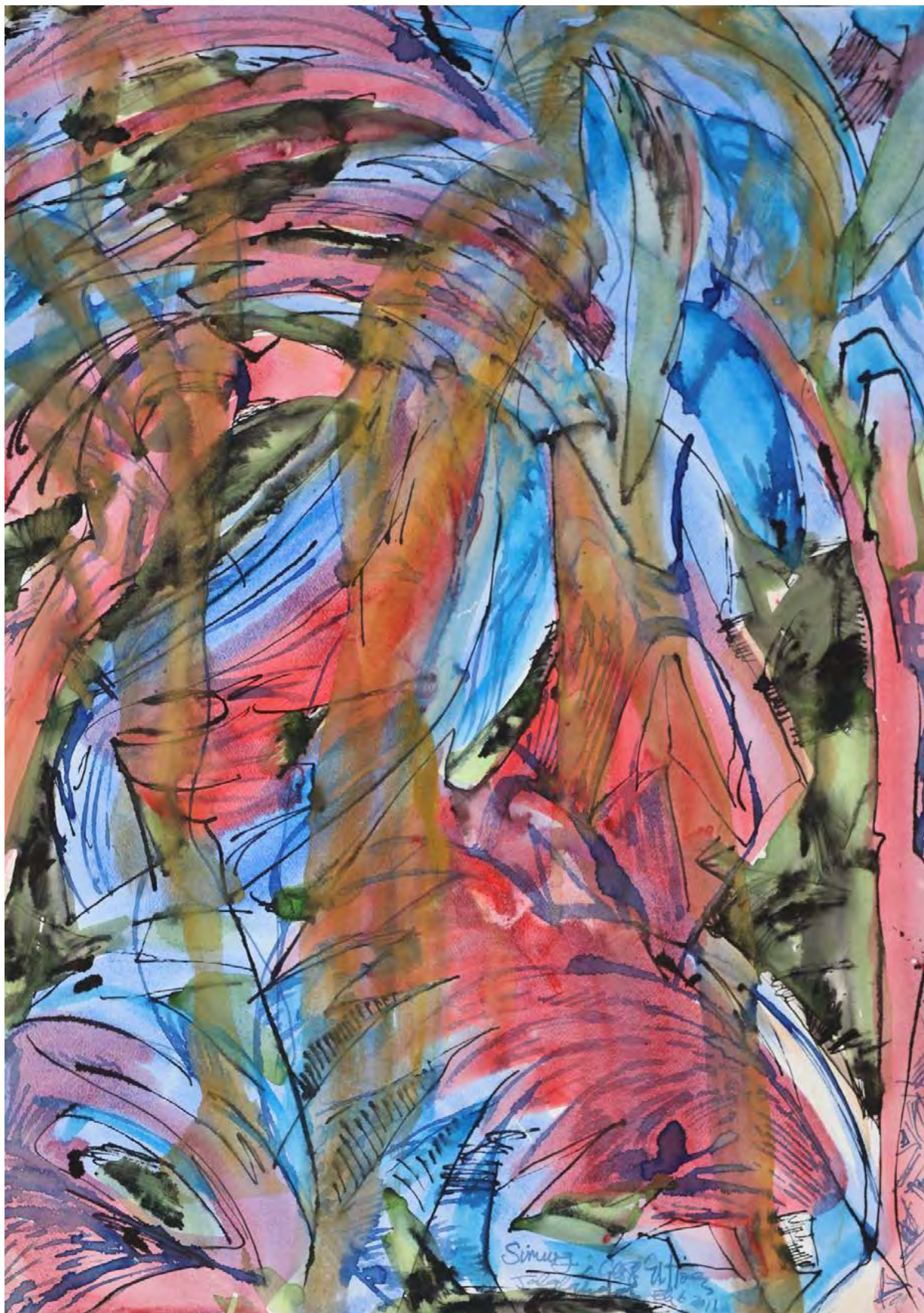
**38.**  
**SUFI DANCE JALALABAD (2011)**



**102 X 66**



39.  
SIMURG JALALABAD (2011)



76 X 105



40.

**WAR OF THE WORLDS JALALBAD (2011)**



**75 X 110**



**41.**

**JALALABAD BUTTERFLY (2014)**



**105 X 76**



42.

YELLOW LADY(2011)



75 X 105



43.

RIVER WOMAN (2011)

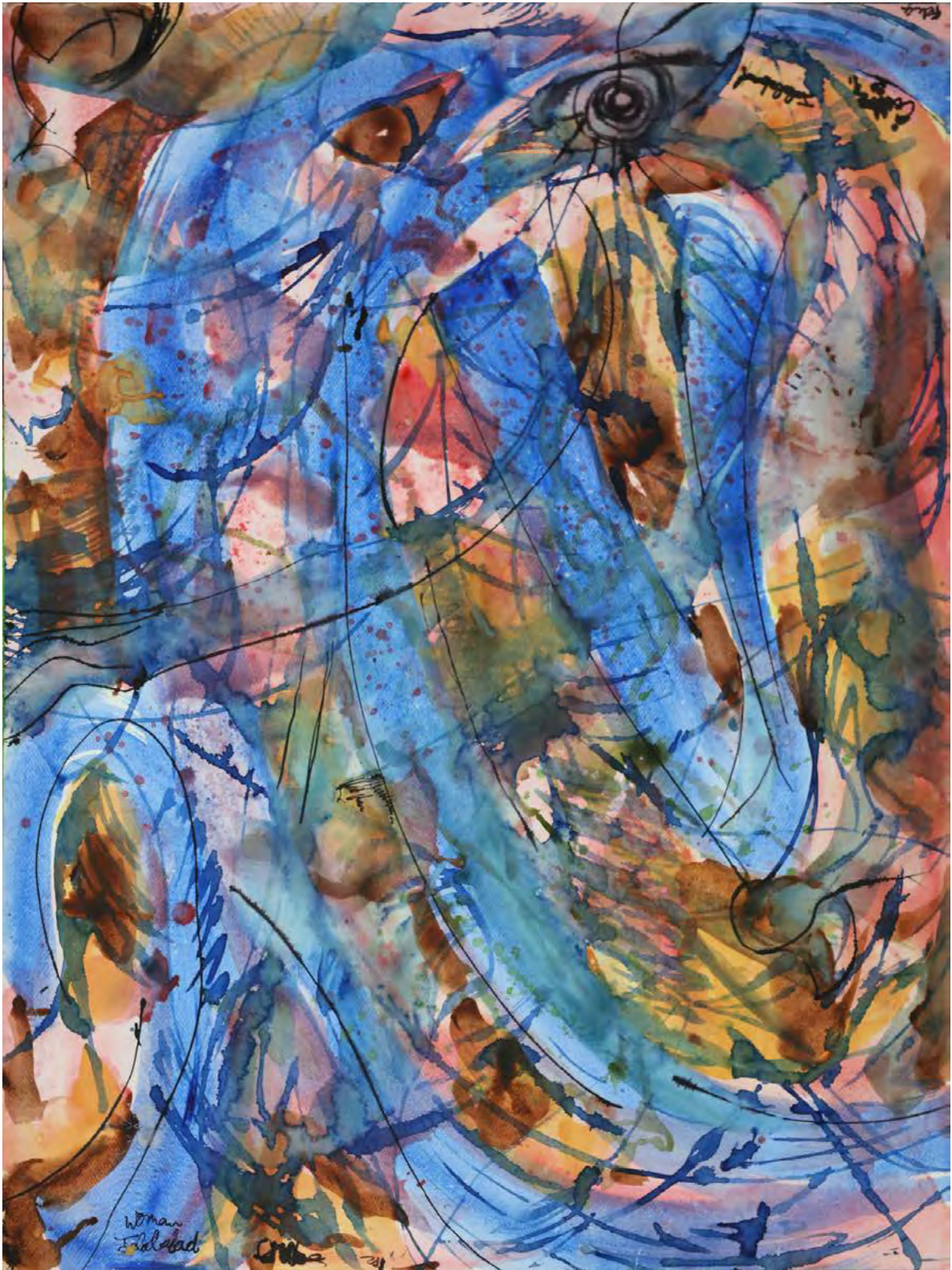


109 X 76



44.

WOMAN JALALABAD (2011)



109 X 76



45.

**GHOST WOMAN (2011)**



**75 X 109**



46.

BLUE WOMAN (2011)



75 X 109



47.

**BLUE WOMAN #2 (2011)**



**75 X 109**



48.  
WOMAN #2 (2011)



75 X 109



49.

WOMAN OF SPINGAR MOUNTAIN (2011)



75 X 109



50.

ANGEL OF JALALABAD KNEELING IN PRAYER (2011)



75 X 109



51.

WOMAN IN THE LANDSCAPE JALALABAD (2011)



75 X 109



52.  
LOVE CITY (2011)



75 X 109



53.

WOMAN OF THE FIELDS (2011)



75 X 109



54.

ARTIST AND SUBJECT (2008)



75 X 109



55.  
**CHICAGO SWAN LAKE (2018)**



97 X 127



56.

**PSYCHE AND THE FAUN (2011)**



**42 X 30 (A3)**

57.

**PSYCHE BEING CARRIED AWAY BY ZEPHYRS (2011)**



**42 X 30 (A3)**





## STAMPS

I first went to Afghanistan in August 1999 to assist the International Campaign to Ban Landmines by taking photographs which documented the victims, as well as pencil drawings which I later developed into oil paintings. I travelled all over Afghanistan and the tribal belt of Pakistan with letters from Taliban leadership, including Mullah Omar asking people to assist with my anti landmine project.

Before arriving in Afghanistan, I had noted, in my diary where I could find the most ancient and famous mosques and was excited by the possibility of encountering them 'in the flesh'. I had built up so much excited anticipation I found it difficult to believe what I was seeing. Through the dusty windscreen of our vehicle where I had expected to see magnificent domes and tiled walls there were only flattened ruins. The most beautiful human heritage creations had been almost destroyed by cannon and rocket fire. Buildings which had stood for a thousand years had vanished as completely as the once standing Bamiyan Buddhas. I had always wanted to see them for real and there they were, shattered.

We stopped our 4X4 near a high Minaret which was all that remained standing, the rest had been turned to rubble. The one standing Minaret's ceramic surface had been peppered by bullets and there were a few large holes from rockets. My driver turned to me, seeing my eyes well with tears, and said, *"These mosques were constructed from unfired mud bricks. The glazed tiles made them look more stable than they were. They have gone back to the earth."* I opened the car door and all around me were fragments of tiles. Shards of beautiful broken patterns scattered like butterfly wings, their rich blues contrasting with the nondescript ochres of the dirt and dust.

Later we stopped at a village and, it being Friday, my driver went to mosque. It was small makeshift mosque for the displaced population. But in its entrance, I encountered a work of such magnificence it has remained one of the most important influences on my art. Villagers had collected fragments of the broken

tiles and reset them on the walls with no attempt at matching them to their original geometric patterns or even bringing like styles together. This should have looked like a disagreeable 'hotch potch' but was rivetingly amazing.

To me this 'hickeldy pickeldy' mosaic represented the way humans try to reconstruct their lives and their world after the mad destruction of war. It was 'my mine victims with their home made, substitute legs and arms'.

Such patterns have now become a feature of my painting but derived from wooden stamps used by women to decorate fabric, rather than ceramic tile patterns, but the designs are the same. I describe these works as 'beauty in the face of everything'. Perhaps the use of these wooden fabric stamps is me trying to reconstruct myself after a life of seeing too many wars and too much death and suffering.

During the American invasion of Afghanistan, when George Bush needed to show Americans there was some way to punish others for the 9/11 attacks, I joined up with Medicines Sans Frontiers and once again travelled all over Afghanistan documenting refugees from the war. During one phase of the journey I made friends with a former French Legionnaire Officer who had signed up with MSF as a way to deal with the memories of his days following orders to kill, as a soldier. He was one of the toughest men I have ever met but he was also an aesthete and loved to collect beautiful things. After finishing my work in Afghanistan, I met up with him again, by chance, in the ancient market of Peshawar, Pakistan. He was scouring antique shops in search of carved wooden stamps. That is how I discovered the stamps, a hardened soldier led them to me. They were quite expensive, so I only purchased two. Something I regretted as soon as I got back to Australia and realized I could use them in my paintings. The first painting I used the stamps in was *Disney World Afghanistan* which features two Afghan fighting dogs and other fragments of my journey. The *Disney* part of the title comes from the main road, Disney Drive, around the Bagram Air



Base, built by the Americans outside Kabul. Disney was the surname of one of the first American Soldiers killed in what they were calling a war, and which has lasted over 16 years.

I have gradually collected hundreds of these stamps, saving many of them from destruction as fire wood by the poor people who owned them but no longer having use for them since Chinese printed synthetic fabric could be purchased cheaper than raw cotton weave. Peshawar University has dated some of my stamps as being over 1,000 years old and many others between 400 and 800. At some point I will donate them to a museum but for the moment they are far too important for my art.

When using them with watercolour I just have to wash the paint off them when I have finished but with oils I have to be much more careful. I coat them with latex before use. The latex works like surgical gloves protecting the ancient wood. When I have finished I tear it off leaving the carving clean and undamaged.

The stamps were used to decorate fabrics, mainly women's clothing and to make table cloths festive for weddings and the celebration of Eid. However, cheap Chinese imports have killed off this practice. The Chinese sent scouts into Pakistan and Afghanistan to copy traditional Islamic patterns to take over the local fabric market with their imported goods.

I was fortunate enough to see the process before it disappeared. A piece of silk would be stretched over a sponge making a large stamp pad which was saturated with colourful vegetable fabric dyes. The stampers, all either women or children, would work with great precision joining the repeat patterns to make larger geometric constructions possible.

When I began the first film workshops in Jalalabad, Hellen and I were staying at the Spingah Hotel which we used like a vast film studio. Commandeering most of its space and extensive gardens to make our series of Pashtun dramas based on love stories.

One day I walked into an antique shop which also supplied paints and artist materials. On a very high top shelf I spotted some thick reams of paper. They were squashed under the engine of a car which meant they

could all be ruined by leaking sump oil. The antique dealer was reluctant to move the heavy motor. To get them down he needed the help of his son and two borrowed ladders.

What we found was a treasure to any artist. Thick 300 to 500-gram French, handmade watercolour paper and only the first 5 sheets had been destroyed by sump oil. This paper must have survived since the modernising days when Afghanistan was ruled by a liberal minded King. The shop owner was also able to unearth several boxes of high quality Winsor and Newton watercolour tubes, of similar vintage. In my leisure time, after working long days on the Pashtun movie dramas, I began painting watercolours and incorporating the stamps.

When we moved into our Yellow House the watercolours continued (the Antique Dealer kept finding more paper now he knew he had a customer willing to pay American dollars for it) but I was, also, able to start making oils on canvas.



I see these oils, especially the small ones, as fragments from our Secret Garden. We call our Yellow House garden, with its small café the, Secret Garden because it is where men and women who love the arts can meet and collaborate. There is nowhere else like this in the city where strict separation of the sexes prevails. The small oils, especially, take me back almost 20 years to

the original experience with the broken fragments of tiles reconfigured on the entrance walls to a roughly constructed mosque where a refugee community were rebuilding their lives.

In 2018 too many people live in a broken world but what can be made from fragments can still be very beautiful.

**George Gittoes**



## **INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FOR EACH WORK ON REQUEST. THE FOLLOWING ARE SAMPLES:**

### **Hellen (Portrait of Hellen)**

I first met Hellen at the Gunnery (an artist run space) in early 1990 when she was rehearsing one of her exotic cabaret shows. There was an instant attraction, but I was married with two young kids and she was a generation, 14 years, younger.

We have been together for 10 years and I have never found a way to paint her until now. As a performance artist Hellen always finds the best way to depict herself and while I may take the photo she is her own invention.

Hellen lives half in the world of fairies and fantasy and the other half is solidly grounded in this world. To show her existence on two planes I have her looking out through a circular window that is also a Cocteau-like transforming mirror. Hellen's left arm and shapely backside and legs are outside. I have painted her body reminiscent of a Modigliani caryatid.

My mother was always proud of her legs and as soon as mum met Hellen she whispered to me approvingly, in an aside, "She has got good legs."

The mythical Hellen is the embodiment of a marriage between Love and War. She was the daughter of the God Zeus and a mortal woman, Leda. Her legendary beauty was divine. She chose to marry Menelaus, King of Sparta after rejecting many other suitors. Her abduction by Paris, son of the Trojan King Priam, led to the Trojan War described by Homer in the Illiad. After the war, when Menelaus took her back he was about to kill her out of revenge, but she took him to bed and her disrobing and her beauty softened his heart. They returned to being lovers.

The first night Hellen and I got together was after I had separated from my wife. We drank vodka at her performance space and apartment in Surry Hills and listened to AD/DC's Highway To Hell. It will always be our special song.

I have never taken anyone to war as it is too dangerous for others to risk their lives while I improvise on a deadly tight rope. But Hellen points out that, "I can not think of you bleeding out on some pavement and no one there to hold you."

Recently, when driving down the road to Jalalabad we had just seen the Mad Max Fury Road film on the plane and Hellen quoted the line from its on the plane and Hellen quoted the line from its heroine, "If I am going to die - I want to die historic!" She has now risked her life many times to come to war with me.

In the painting Hellen's face is magnified and looks out as if through a mist or veil and seems to be saying, "Don't judge the temptress lest you be judged." Hellen is a blue blood bohemian.

Circus needs to be with circus and we are both circus, but I have taken our caravan on a very difficult road.



## **Secret Garden**

Our documentary Love City was about forbidden love. The little Secret Garden café in the walled off grounds of our Yellow House garden in Jalalabad was the only place where men and women could meet freely without chaperones. Between the monkey cage and the café, I created a lattice screened pagoda that gave more privacy. I painted it green out of nostalgia for the green lattice that covered part of my childhood garden in Villiers St, Rockdale.

I would glimpse young couples drinking tea and chatting romantically through the cross pattern and realized that it was not enough to make a film without someday doing a painting about the many veils this society causes to hide true love.

Pashtun society does not allow love marriages. When young lovers run away together they are usually hunted down and killed. Whenever men are together chatting sociably (and Hellen informs me it is the same with women they always end up sharing their own personal broken-hearted love stories from their youth. The danger of discovery makes the love even more intense. It is the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet over and over again. Those that survive never end up with the one they truly love. Their official wife or husband is chosen by family and paid for with a large dowry and is almost always a cousin. Being forced to forget the one they loved leaves a tear in their hearts. In Secret Garden I have painted this tear that remains part of the inner beauty that still resides in their secret garden of memories.

These Lovers paintings began with the watercolours I made in our Secret Garden in Jalalabad. After all the years of painting war our Secret Garden made me begin creating what I refer to as works about "Beauty in the face of everything." There is no more important freedom than the freedom to love and be with the partner your heart chooses.

To send the message of love to Jalalabad I had a billboard made up with LOVE CITY in bold letters in both Pashtun and English and we drove it through the city on the back of an open rickshaw with the Actor Amir Shah and myself hanging off the sides. Hellen sent us on our way with the song All the World Needs is Love. It is a largely Taliban controlled fundamentalist city, so we never knew if we would survive this renaming. But people loved it, even strict Taliban Mullah's gave us the thumbs up. To them the message was clear, we were saying NO MORE WAR AND KILLING - LET LOVE BE THE WAY.

They all want peace after decades of conflict and that is the Secret Garden sanctuary they all pray for.

## **Aphrodite - Venus**

In Imperial Rome Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and luck was renamed Venus. Her name was given to the second planet from the sun. The goddess Venus is said to have sprung from the foam of a wave and in the Botticelli painting she is like a pearl of beauty rising out of a large shell.

In my painting her form ripples like a golden reflection in small wavelets.

The famous statue of her in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence was always held up by the classicists as the pinnacle of female beauty. It is supposed to date from the time of Augustus who proclaimed himself a god and nominated Venus as the mythical mother of Rome. The marble sculpture was dug up in eleven pieces in the garden of Hadrian and reassembled for the Medici Palace in Rome.

My image of Venus is fractured into similar pieces but not by war or time but by the gentle movement of the ocean and sunlight.



## Ishtar

I first found out about Ishtar from reading The Epic Of Gilgamesh when I was in school. I loved that book and have never forgotten it, especially the battle in the Cedar Forest and Gilgamesh's quest for the elixir of eternal life, which he got from the children of Noah but had it stolen by a snake which only left him with the skin it shed.

Ishtar was the first goddess of love. Venus and Aphrodite have their origins in her. She was around before the Mesopotamians and Assyrians and has earlier goddess names. Modern day Marvel Wonder Woman is largely based on her. She went to visit the underworld but the queen of the underworld set her up and killed her. She was reborn but when she came back her lover Tammuz was not grief stricken or in mourning. The deal she had made to get back was to replace her own spot in the underworld with another life. Tammuz was living the high life, happy to be without her around, so she killed him, and that murder became the ticket for her own reentry into life. The great epic hero Gilgamesh also disappointed her. Gilgamesh was two thirds god and the greatest of all heroes and incredibly oversexed, he always insisted that he sleep with the bride of his subjects before the groom got a chance. Whenever there was a wedding he was the first to take the bride. This god/man Gilgamesh, however rejected Ishtar's advances so she sent the divine bull to kill him. but he killed the bull and that created a chain reaction of violence and retribution which continues today.

My painting has both her lovers, King Tamuz with his crown (top right corner) and Gilgamesh with his face closer to hers.

The stories of Ishtar are regarded as the first works of true literature written in cunic on tablets.

When I was in Iraq during the rule of Saddam Hussain I visited Nineveh and Babylon. Saddam had spent a fortune to restore and preserve these wonderful ancient sites. He saw himself as a modern-day Assyrian king rebuilding the ancient pride of the Iraqi people. There was an amazing moment when I came upon a crowd which had formed in the ruins. They were terrified of George Bush's threat to "shock and awe": with his US bombs and missiles. They had come to the ruins of Babylon to say a collective prayer that the Americans would not succeed in destroying their ancient civilization. A small boy was hoisted above their heads in a scene like Goya's painting of the Celebration of the Sardine. The boy was an amazing orator and spoke out to the crowd like an oracle. It is an image I can not forget.

The Americans did not directly destroy these archaeological treasures, but ISIS did. They bulldozed them when they took Mosul. They smashed the sculptures with sledge hammers and filmed themselves doing it, looted the museum destroying and defacing anything too large to carry away. All the small artefacts were stolen to sell illegally on the antique market.

It was a huge loss to humanity similar to what they later did again in Palmyra. These ancient works belong to human history! Perhaps the little boy oracle could see this destruction coming. Indirectly, it was the Americans as it was American stupidity and mismanagement that gave birth to ISIS. Without the American invasion ISIS would not exist and Nineveh/Mosul would be preserved.

I am sure American and Coalition bombs during the battle for Mosul have finished off what ISIS started. The invasion of Iraq took the world into an underworld of death and the vengeful side of Ishtar has come to the fore. Goddess of Love and War, what a contradiction but strangely Appropriate.

I have felt an absence in my heart since first seeing the barbaric ISIS destruction on TV. It has really hurt as I have loved Assyrian/Babylonian art and culture since I was a kid with an ongoing passion for ancient epics and archeological discoveries. First experiencing Assyrian Sculpture in solid granite at the Metropolitan Museum of Art when I went there as an 18 year old. The first two items I wanted to see when travelling from far away Sydney were Picasso's Demoiselles De Avignon and these Guardian sculptures from Nineveh. I visited both on my 19th birthday.

I visited the MET recently when in NY. I only spent time in the Assyrian wing, sharing them with Wagar who experienced the wonder I first felt back in 1968. The MET is full of wonderful art, but I wanted to just absorb and be reminded of what these great figurative works tell about humanity. The MET has



the huge curly bearded winged men with lion/bull bodies and five legs which guarded the gates into the city. We do not seem to have gone very far since the Assyrians in terms of civilization. In the past I would sit in the MET and think how wrong it was that an English diplomat felt it was OK to take them away from their original placing and site in Iraq and send them to collections in the US and London but now I am glad he saved them from ISIS.

Doing the painting has filled this gap in my soul, to some extent .... Creating in the face of destruction.

The MET visit determined me to finally finish my Ishtar painting but I also needed the spur of the Brisbane Lovers show to force me to face the technical problems it posed.

Ishtar has proven to be one of the most difficult works of my career - something I have been working on in my diaries and drawings since Iraq in 2002. The canvas has been sitting unresolved and partially finished for years. have only been able to achieve it with the technical skills I have developed for Lovers - it needed to be decorative like Matisse but fucked up like Bacon.

It was a touch and go process in the painting - for a while I thought it had gone pear shaped and belly up - but then I realized I was so frightened of failure on such an important work that I had spooked myself.

## **Pablo and Francoise**

While lost in the embrace of a lover time stops and we glimpse eternity.

Pablo and Francoise is very similar in technique to my most shocking Rwanda paintings such as the cut face painting Eyewitness. But because the subject is lovers the emotional content is totally the opposite. Creation and love triumph.

Of all the paintings Pablo Picasso did of his lovers, those of Francoise were his most sensuous and beautiful. The wonderful book Picasso and Portraiture edited by William Rubin shows how Picasso used the women he was with, almost sucking them dry for inspiration, very much an artist and muse situation. With each change of woman, the style and content changed. Dora Maar was at the time of Guernica and reflects his most disturbing and tortured period. Dora was a complex and anxious woman who created turbulence in Picasso's life to coincide with the oncoming war, his crying woman with nails for tears is one of his most passionate works.

When he was with Olga, his first wife, the paintings became classical to reflect the influence of having a classical ballerina with Russian discipline and training in his life and very bourgeois values. My favourite Picasso painting is Woman in an Armchair which he painted while his greatest spiritual love, Eva Gouel was dying. It is a testament to both his love and grief at this tragic loss .... something he never quite recovered from.

Those of the young Marie Therese with her blond hair and athletic body represent his happiest times, when he was in his prime and enjoying fame and fortune with less than the usual troubles bothering Him.

Picasso saw himself as a Minotaur, half man and half bull, Torus. Pablo and Francoise could also be titled Gittoes and Hellen.



## Circe and Odysseus

When I was 11 years old the first book I really got into was Homer's Odyssey. It was the last year of primary school and I was quarantined at home with glandular fever. My mother found an illustrated version in the style of Greek vase paintings at Rockdale library. Influenced by it, she decorated her own vase which won the First Prize for the whole arts pavilion at the Royal Easter Show. Seeing her blue ribbon in the showcase made me realize real possibilities existed for our family in the arts.

When looking through the book mum paused on the section about Odysseus with Circe on her enchanted island of Aiaia and commented, "Why do enchantresses always get a bad rap." I will never forget that because my mother was a true bohemian and more than a bit of a witch. She had her own studio where she made pots and ceramic sculptures and had dozens of jars of rare chemicals for creating her glazes. No one will ever believe me but there were times when I saw mum levitate.

Puberty was on the way and the lines from the Odyssey made me begin to wonder about girls in a new way:

"Without a word, I drew my sharpened sword and in one bound held it against her throat. She cried out and then slid under to take my knees, catching her breath to say in her distress. Put your weapon in the sheath. We two shall mingle and make love on our bed. So mutual trust may come of play and love. A hero being seduced by a temptress and being diverted from their quest is in most myths from Beowulf to the Holy Grail and as mum pointed out the witches are always painted in a bad light.

This painting shows Odysseus on the left of Circe who sits majestic on her throne of magic. It is the moment when she knows he is itching to resume his journey and she suggests he descends to the Underworld to ask the blind clairvoyant sage Teiresias to predict what his fate will be. Among the shades he learns he must find his way back home and leave Circe. Of course, she already knows this.

I think Circe was the first character in literature to come up with the suggestion "make love and not war."