

An abstract painting with a vibrant color palette of pinks, reds, oranges, and yellows. The composition is filled with organic, flowing forms and textures, suggesting natural elements like leaves or water. The top edge features a horizontal band of yellow and green. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and natural beauty.

GAIA'S EMBRACE

EXPLORING OUR BOND WITH LIFE AND NATURE

Catalogue of work exhibited
at the [gallery@oxo](mailto:galleries@oxo.com)

November 2023

by **Simon Jones**

Gaia's embrace, exploring our bond with life and nature.

Simon's exhibition uses the lived experience to explore the necessity for "hope" and quest for personal significance within our connections to "sustainability."

Sustainability is an elusive concept, with humanity assuming the central role in a self-constructed drama of inherent paradoxes and confounding contradictions. Yet, confronting these challenges with denial or despair does little to nurture our spiritual well-being. The work in this exhibition acknowledges "hope" as not merely intertwined but indispensable to our relationship with "sustainability."

Around 11,500 years ago the last cave painter* was drawing a line under a 20,000-year-old art tradition, perhaps the greatest ever known. The estimated annual sea rise was, like today, between 23mm and 40mm. There isn't a definitive answer as to why this art tradition ended. However, the environment likely played a central role in shaping and changing cultural practices.

"It's not about grand truths that are meant to make sense of everything – an ideology. It is about the truth that moves us in the world." (V. Havel)

"Gaia's embrace" refers to our ongoing attempts to make sense of sustainability and our dependence on, and place in the world. "Gaia" is the personification of the Earth, the eternal mother responsible for all life's creation. It encapsulates a worldview, running from Greek mythologies to modern thinking.

James Lovelock's 1979 work, 'Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth,' serves as a contemporary sustainability narrative. While it indirectly addresses the impacts of human activities on Earth's systems, its portrayal of humanity remains somewhat ambivalent, refraining from a deep exploration of the nuances and influence of human nature.

"No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path." (Buddha)

In contrast, the Greek Gaia myth offers a rich exploration of human nature, revealing an interconnectedness that can manifest as benevolent, malevolent, or capricious. This myth delves into the themes of hubris, the consequences of one's actions, and the inescapable grip of fate. Within its narrative, elements of tragedy unfold as characters confront adversity, suffering, and ultimately their own downfall.

He uses colour to respond to the complexities of sustainability and reflect on the paradoxical human endeavour to impose control and order upon a world that is inherently intricate, entropic, and ever-changing.

Much like in Greek mythology, we often craft narratives to justify our desires, embracing absurdities and evading paradoxes. This applies in our pursuit of sustainability, for instance while electric vehicles are promoted as environmentally friendly, the equation becomes considerably more intricate when we account for emissions linked to lithium extraction, battery manufacture, and the generation of electricity for charging; let alone the impact on communities where mining takes place.

Faced with this complexity, humanity grapples with the quest for straightforward solutions, frequently leaning on ideology and, at times, falling for the rigid confines of dogma. The paintings in this show respond to prevailing social and psychological polarisation. They recognise interconnectedness, our human biases, and the role of art in illuminating and navigating this struggle.

"Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter do good things." (E. Degas)

Through my practice I seek a serene space and use colour as an extolment of this space. This is about "not knowing" and responding to unfolding questions that take me on a journey. I try to depict a truth that goes beyond intellect and words, producing something simple, personal, and real. I want to liberate a fundamental and uneasy beauty.

My work is not a campaign, symbol, or depiction, it doesn't even tell a story. It's an emotional reaction to our paradoxical struggle to impose control and order on an entropic world. It offers an intimate response to our flawed world by seeking to capture the essence of poignant and beautiful moments that I encounter during my journey through it.

*[*S. Mithen 2004 "After the Ice: A Global Human History, 20,000 - 5000 BC." Pheonix]*

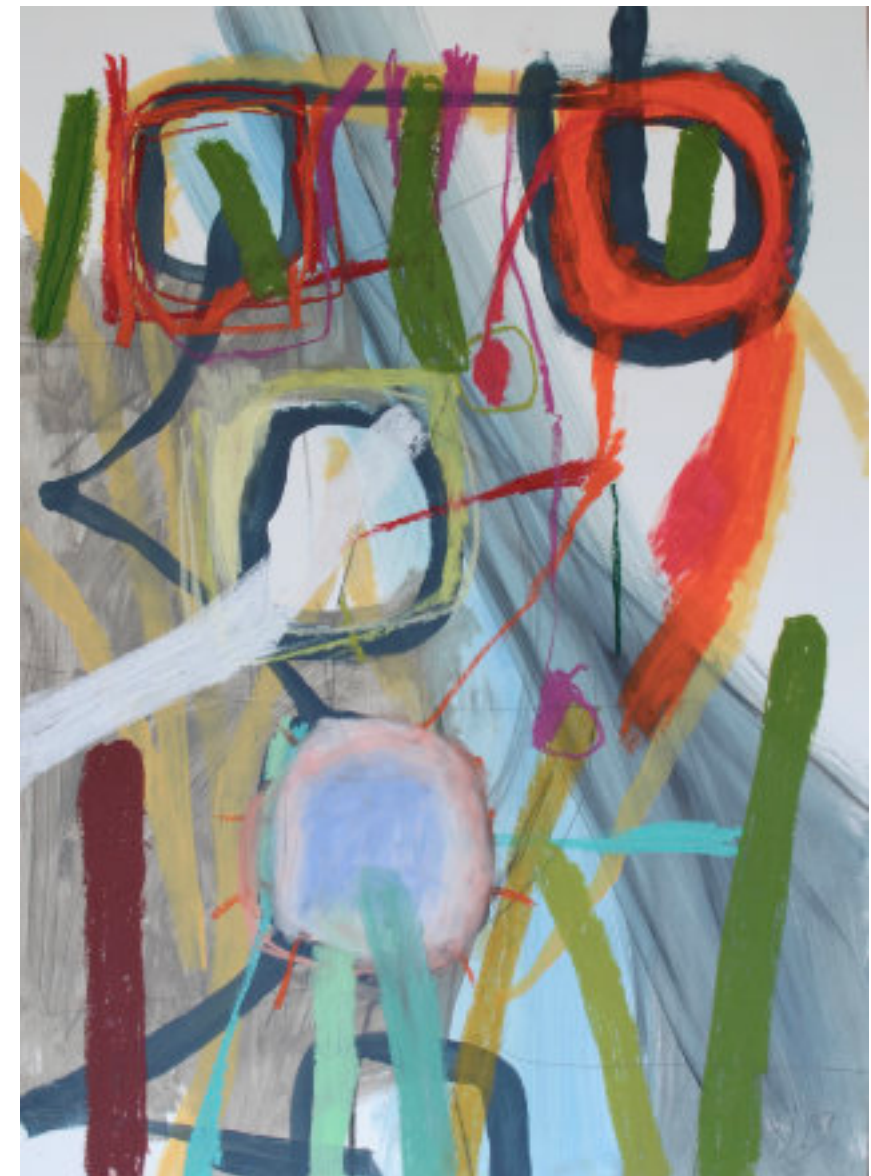
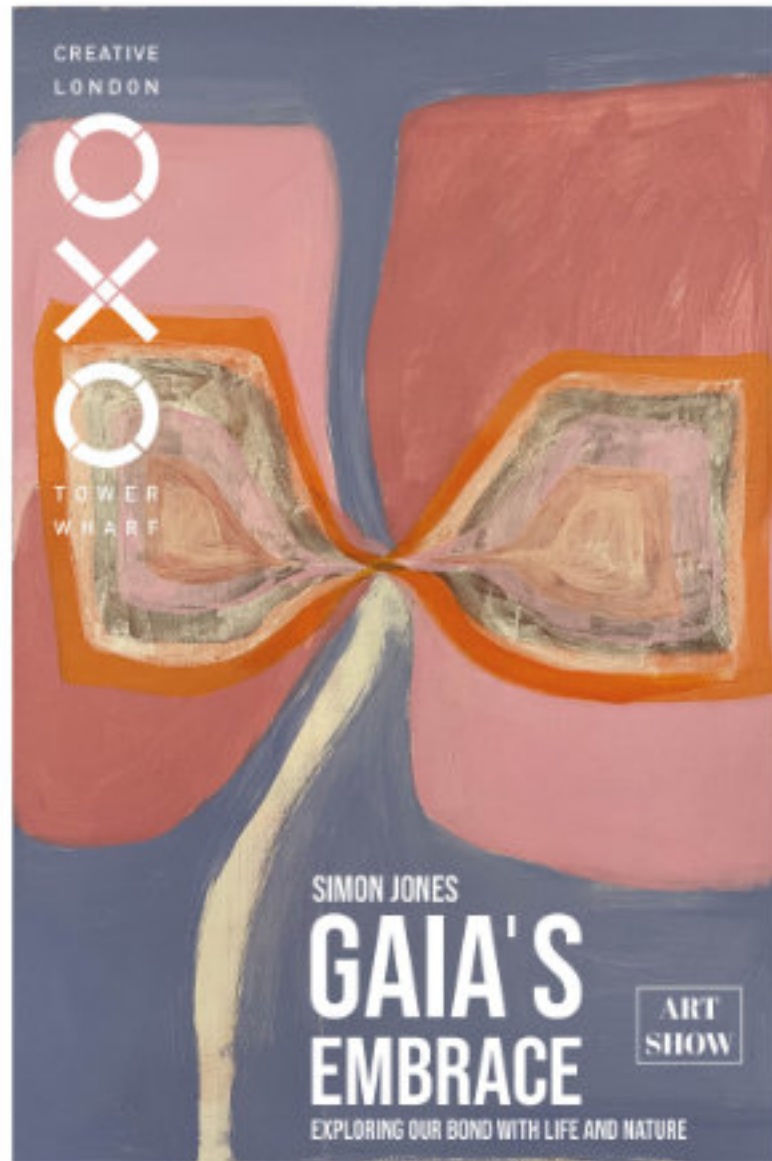
[Havel V (1978) "The power of the powerless." Vintage Classics]

[Tavris C and Aronson E (2007) "Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me)." Harcourt]



Twenty years ago, my MA research paper in Systems Thinking was published.

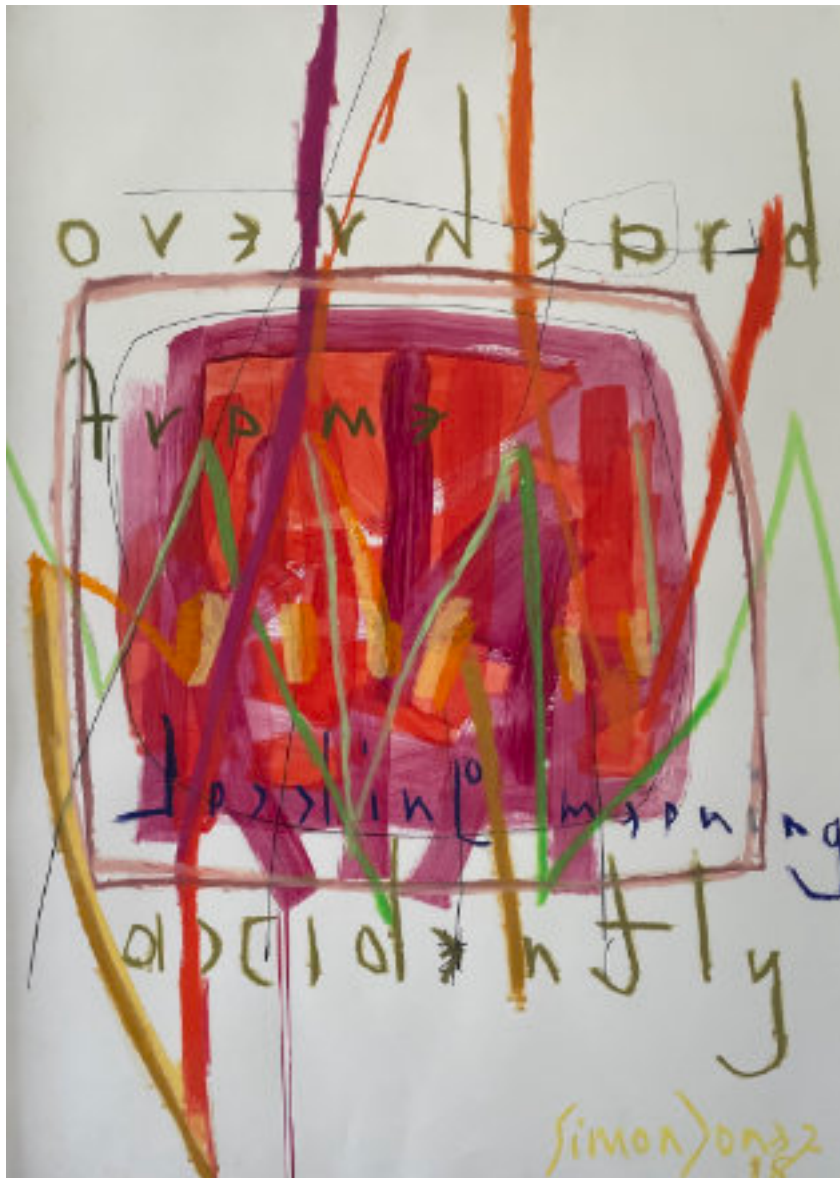
It looked at approaches to sustainability and attempted to understand the fundamental differences.



"Walking through gardens in the rain." Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (70x50 cm) 2019

I grappled with the evident contradictions and the intricate methods employed to manipulate situations.

I concluded humans are central to sustainability but often rationalised out of the debate for other ends.



“People talking on the bus.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (75X60cm) 2018



“Building in the City.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (70x50 cm) 2018

The work in this show revisits the theme of sustainability and the intricate web of our contributions.

It offers a fresh perspective and a new frame of reference.



“Shrine.” Oil paint on canvas (90x115 cm) 2019



“Rehab chic.” Oil paint on linen (90x115 cm) 2019

When I begin a new piece, I think I know how it's going to look, but when I start it all unravels.

As I immerse myself in my practice, surprising things happen, and I am taken to exciting and unexpected places.



"Knowing something is going on." Acrylic and oil on linen (90x80 cm) 2023



"Concrete." Acrylic on paper (78x56 cm) 2023

Some works are resolved relatively quickly (though rarely in one sitting,) others range over years.

I work on several pieces at once and there is a lot of looking and agonising.



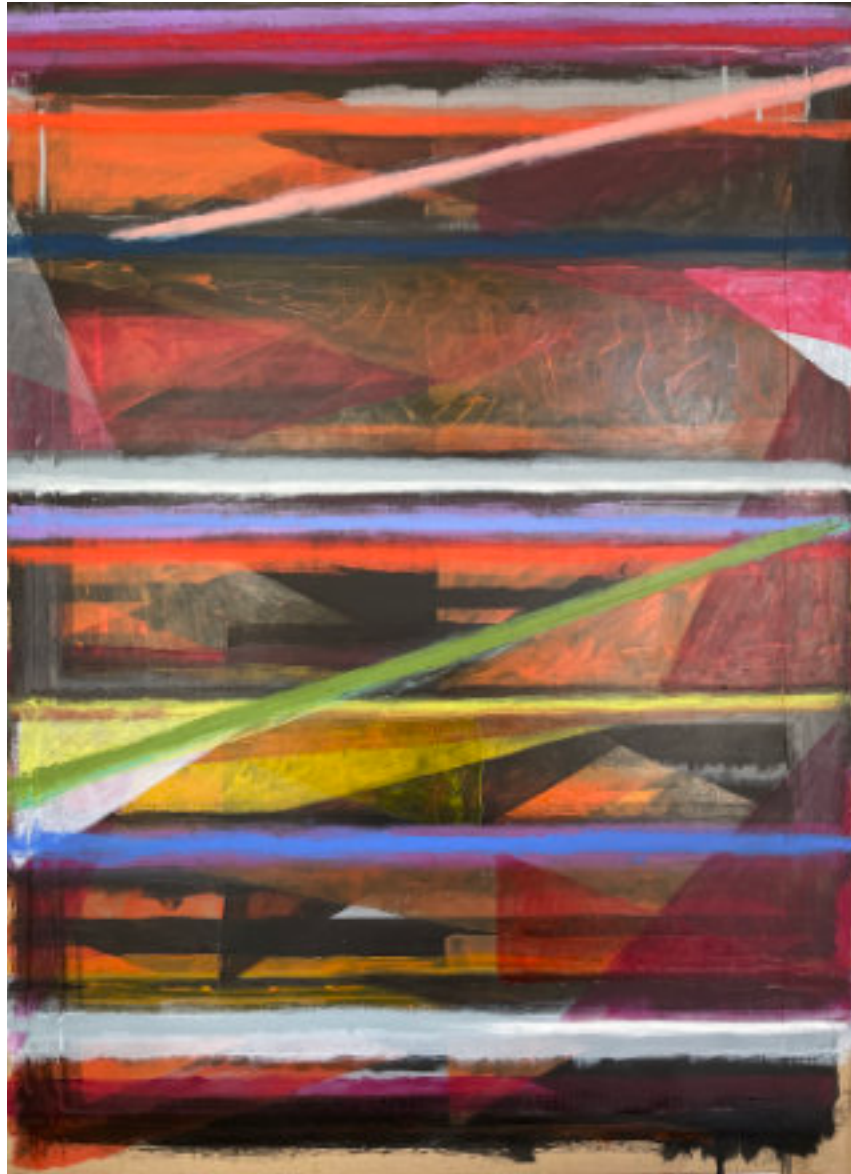
“Unfinished stories.” Acrylic on paper (78x56 cm) 2023



“Degrees of change.” Acrylic on paper (78x56 cm) 2023

When I hit a wall, I walk over to another painting and get on with that.

I know it's finished, when adding even a single additional mark would necessitate its transformation into an entirely new painting.



“The dark waters of the boat yard.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (78x56 cm) 2022



“City Heat.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (78x56 cm) 2022

Sometimes it goes completely wrong, and I must paint over it.

Painting for me is an act of meditation on place and time, a reaction to the world viewed through paradoxical lenses.



“Heat over the river.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (78x56 cm) 2023



“Geological histories.” Acrylic on paper (70x50cm) 2023

The work is not capturing a single moment but encapsulates the amalgamation of time and context.

Their purpose is to create a space for reflection at the centre of the action.



“Small truths.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023



“The price of optimism.” Acrylic on paper (78x56 cm) 2023

I am fascinated by the intimate nature of art and how it can access the depths of human experience.

For me the immediacy of the creative process is marked by the apparent “artist's touch.”



“Urban summer haze.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (78x56 cm) 2023



“The kiss of desert rain.” Acrylic and oil pastel on paper (78x56 cm) 2023

This embraces imperfections and offers glimpses directly into the heart of the creative space.

Through my painting practice I continually push boundaries to confront new challenges.



“Colours of your soul.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023



“The allure of apathy.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023

While it's gratifying if my work resonates with an audience, I don't create for their approval; I just paint.

My practice liberates my mind, it demands a balance between freedom and discipline.



"Listening to the earth." Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023



"Thinking about spring." Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023

Focused attention allows me to wander in surprising directions and follow meandering paths.

I am constantly switching perspectives and connecting divergent concepts.



“Machine.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023



“New beginnings.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023

Through my work I try to capture a truth that transcends the confines of intellect and language.

I synthesise to access a pictorial space, using colour as a celebration that goes beyond the mundane to manifest hope.



“The sun's blush.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023



“Unbalanced.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023

When I'm immersed in painting, I am not creating depictions of narratives instead my thoughts wander to entirely different realms.

Ideally I prefer to let my work speak for itself. Words emerge afterward and are laid over the work.



“Abstracting the world.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023



“Time's shadows.” Acrylic on paper (70x50 cm) 2023

Jeopardy is at the heart of my creative journey.

I love the beginning of a new work: there's an exhilaration in the vast potential of a pristine surface.



"Times' mutations." Oil on linen (90x80 cm) 2023



"20th century boy, 21st century man." Oil paint on canvas (90x115 cm) 2020

I'm excited by the arrangement of my palette and the luxurious texture of paint, the shapes of brushes, and the intensity of pigments.

Even the scent of turpentine is reassuring.



"Aqua vitae." Oil on linen (90x80 cm) 2023



"Progressing to chaos." Acrylic and oil on linen (90x80 cm) 2023

The anticipation intensifies as I make marks.
With each stroke the process unfolds, and
challenges emerge, demanding decisions to be
made.

The artwork may initially hold promise but
lack clear resolution.



“Unions of time.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019



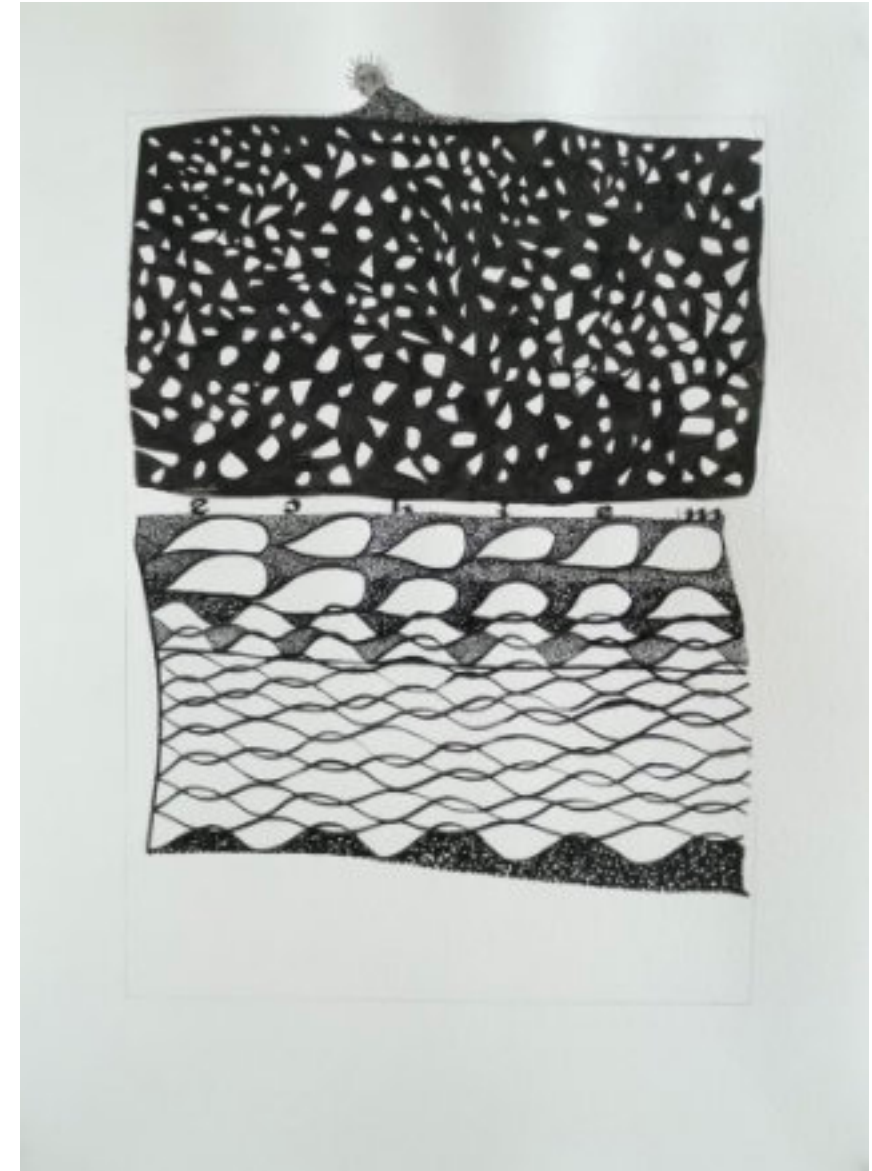
“Hope.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022

This tension compels me to apply more marks and colours.

This can be thrilling but is also fraught with the menace of diluting the magic.



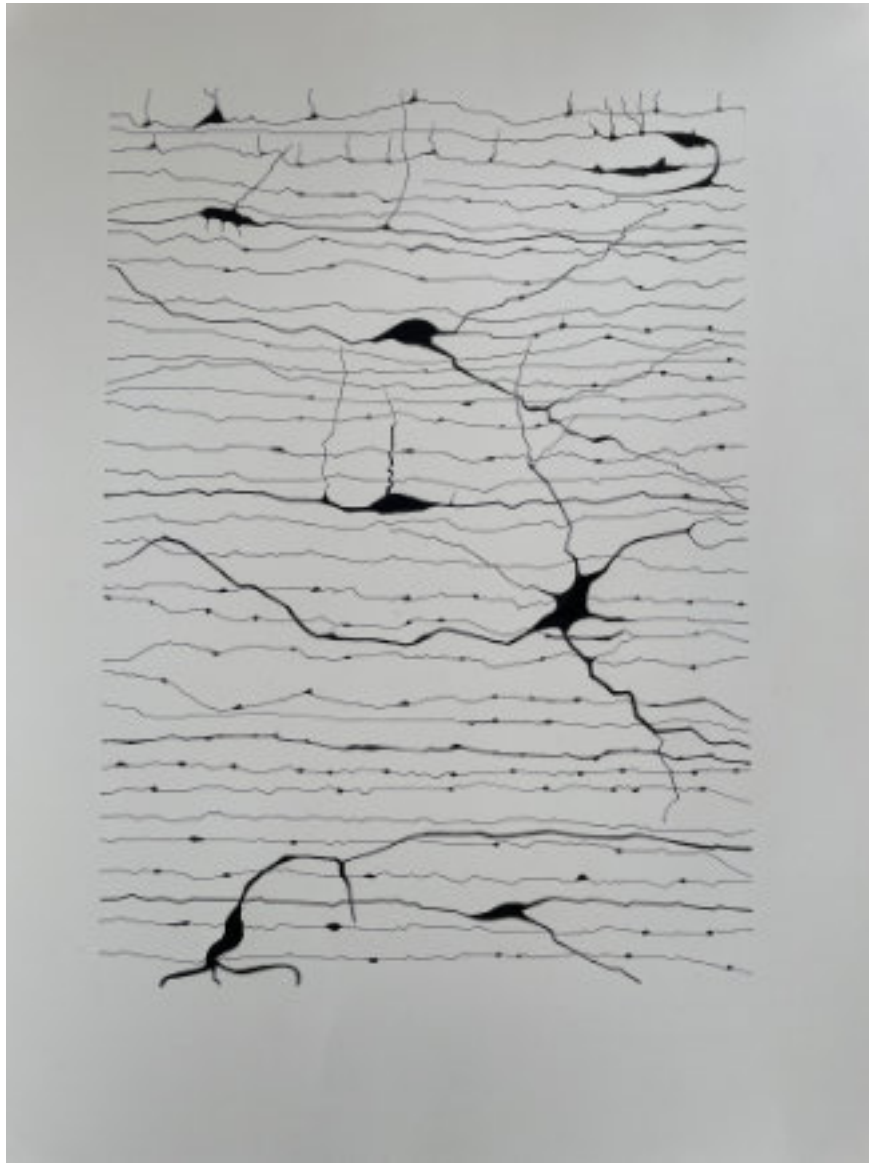
“Making oil.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019



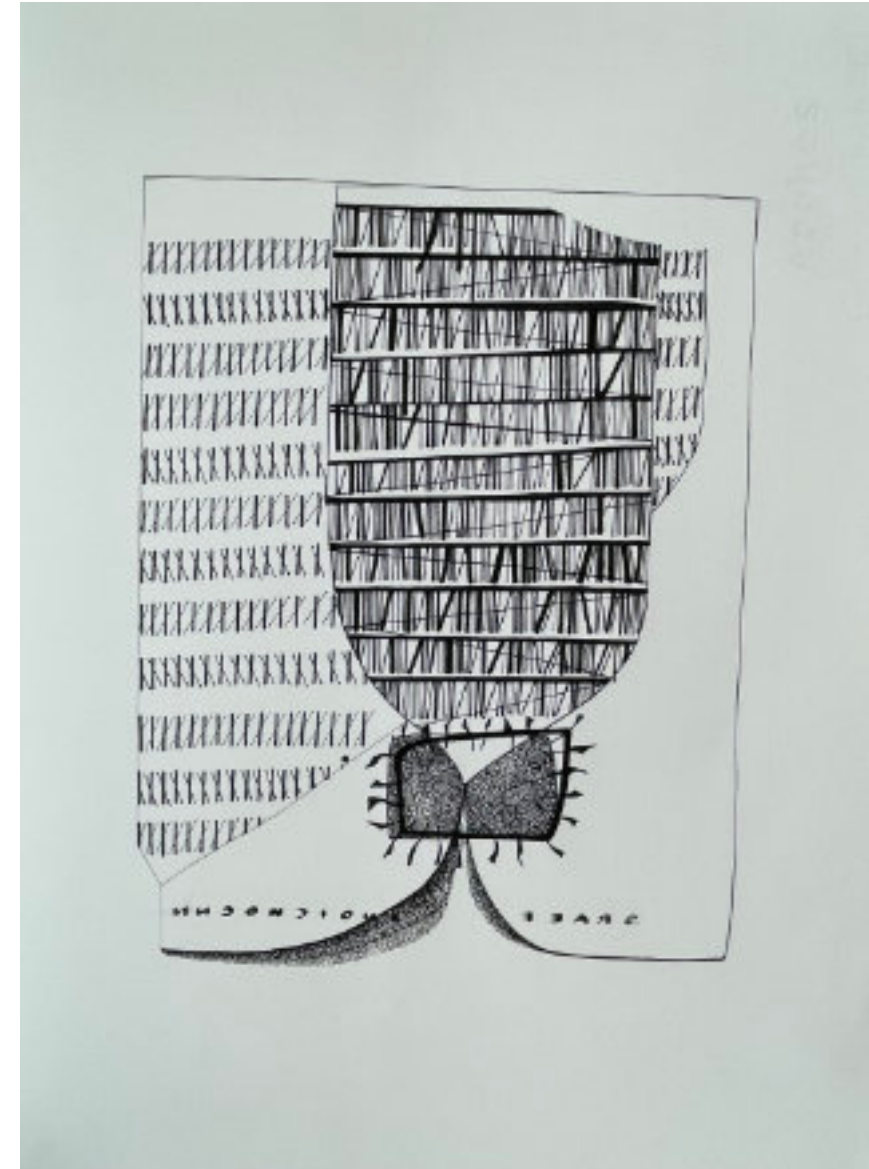
“Agreement.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022

This creates a fragile space between exhilaration and discouragement.

I get satisfaction toward the end when the work is resolving.



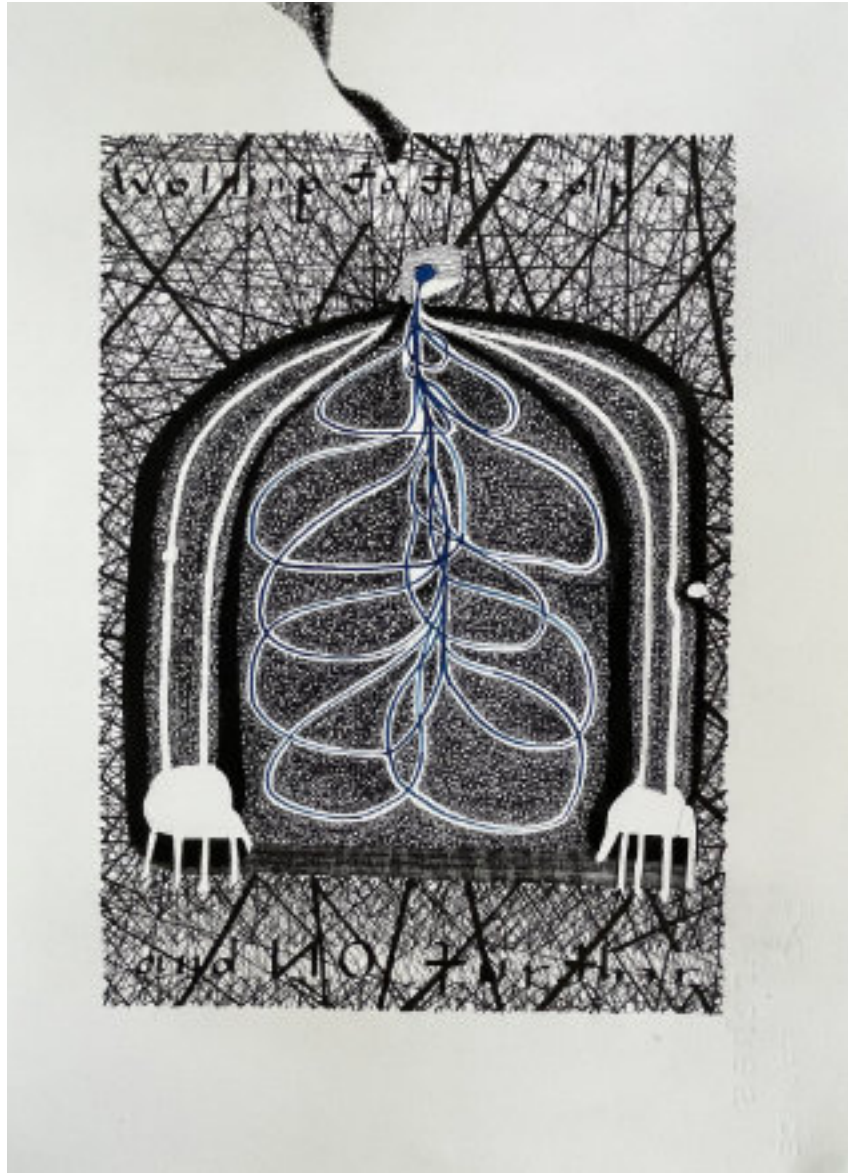
“The ruins of decay.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019



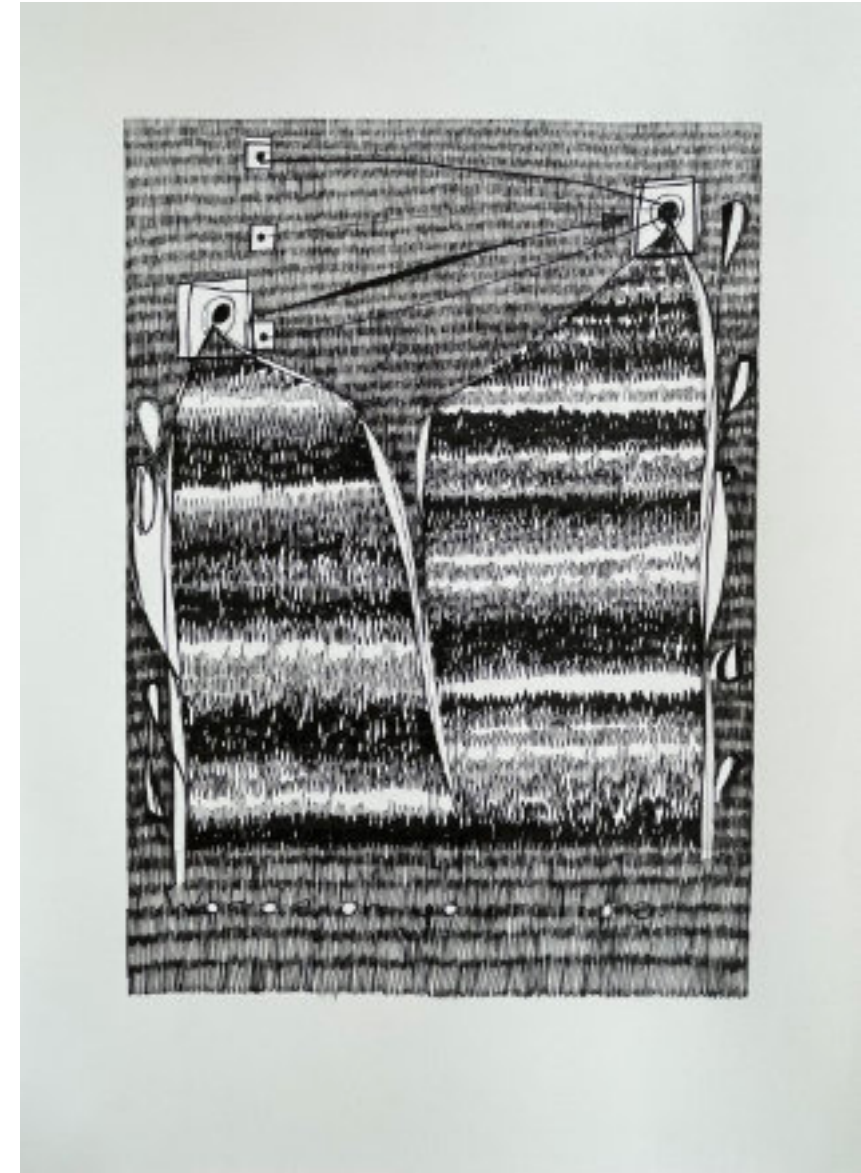
“Life giving.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021

However, it's precarious, a single choice can disrupt the delicate balance and there's no going back.

Each work is a deeply personal and a distinct response to my world.



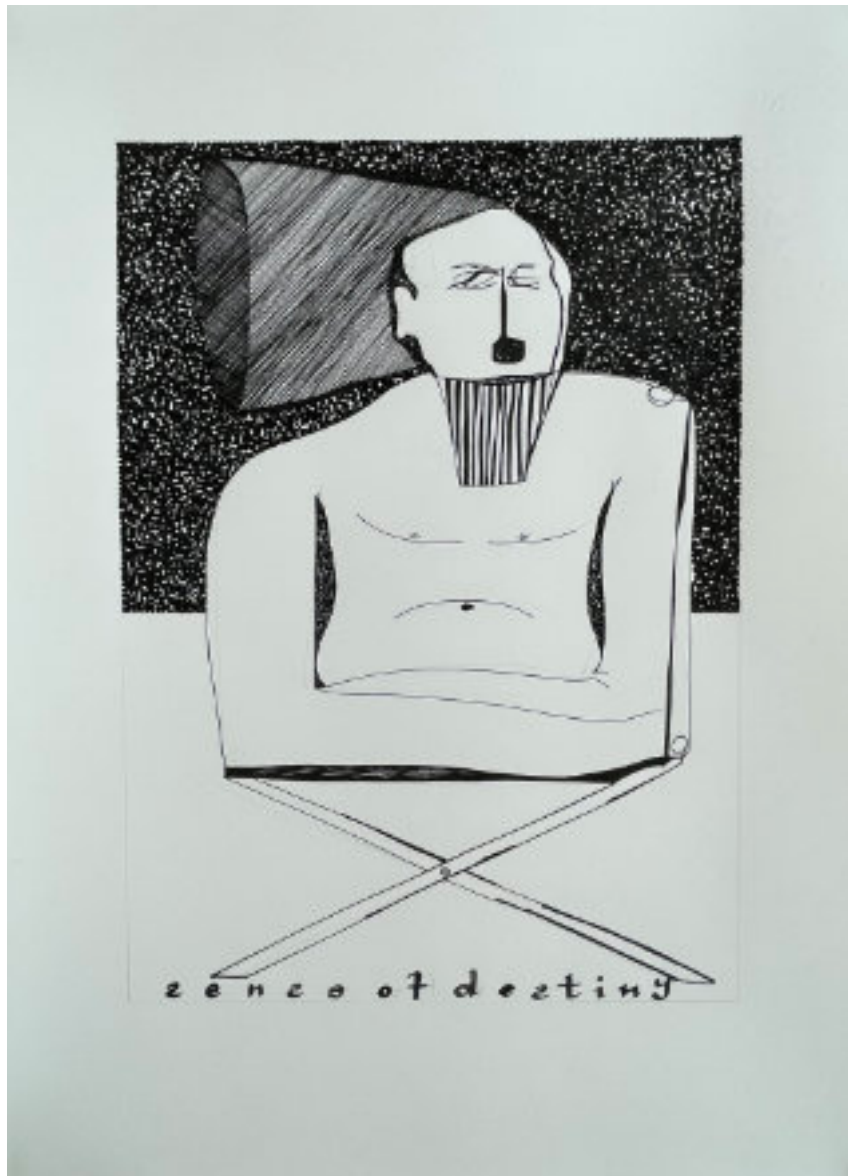
"Only part of it." Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2020



"Alone together." Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2023

For me the work's value is in this uniqueness,
the challenge and effort of my practice.

It also provides glimpses into a space
beyond the rational.



"In control." Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022



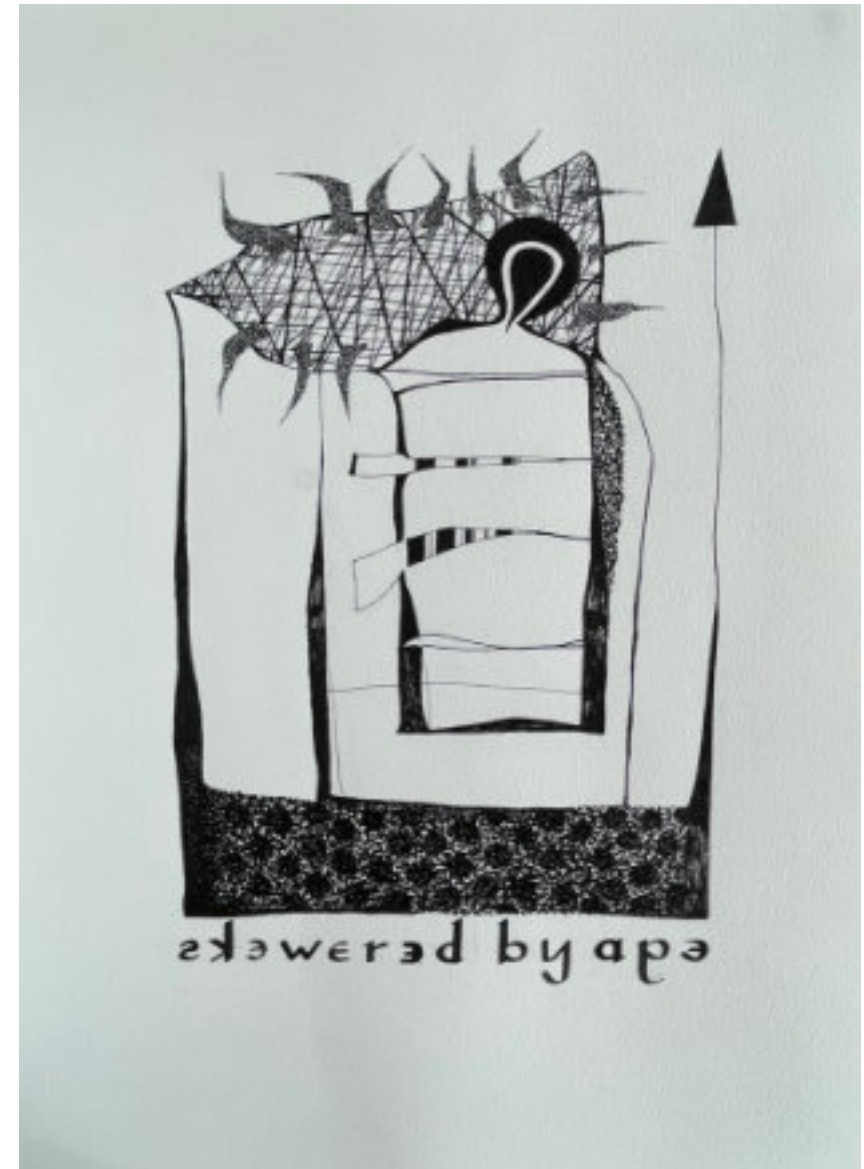
"Seeing the symmetry of man." Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019

The drawings are an intimate reflection on the profound impact of the Covid era on my personal journey.

I navigated the challenges of the pandemic with a heightened awareness, fully immersed in the experience.



"Greatest pleasure." Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021



"Happy birthday?" Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021

For instance, the evocative symptoms of breathlessness and fatigue left an indelible mark.

This prompted a newfound appreciation for the intrinsic value of each breath.



“Nature lover.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019



“Easy lies.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019

This revelation led me to explore the positive dimensions of meditation and focused breathing.

It allowed me to appreciate the pivotal role they play in promoting overall well-being.



“Rising tides.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2020



“Charioteer.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021

From a purely personal lens, the pandemic acted as a catalyst for a profound shift in my perception.

It urged the contemplation of fundamental aspects often taken for granted.



“Being alive.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2023



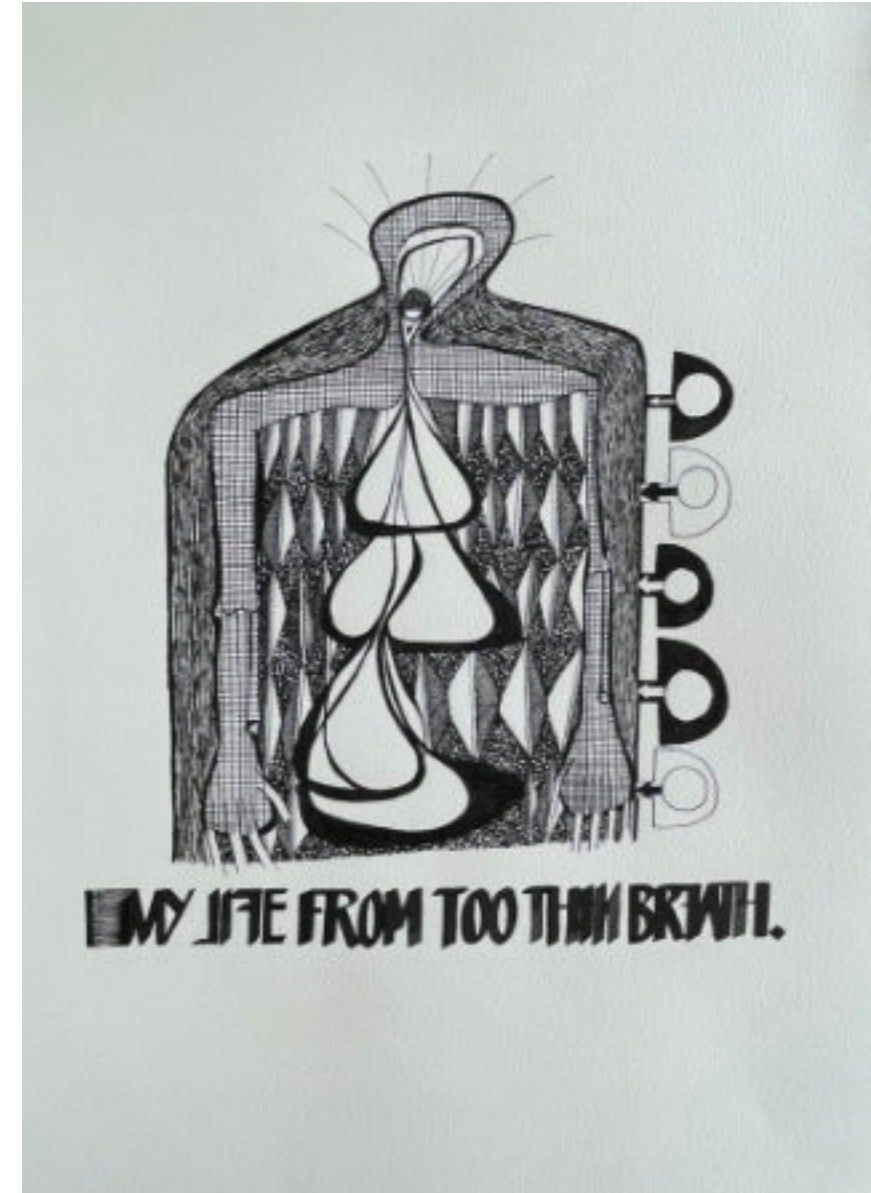
“Limited thinking.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021

This introspection extended beyond the global context, delving into the realm of personal sustainability.

The experience prompted reflection on a world turning inward.



“Feeling the spirit.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2023



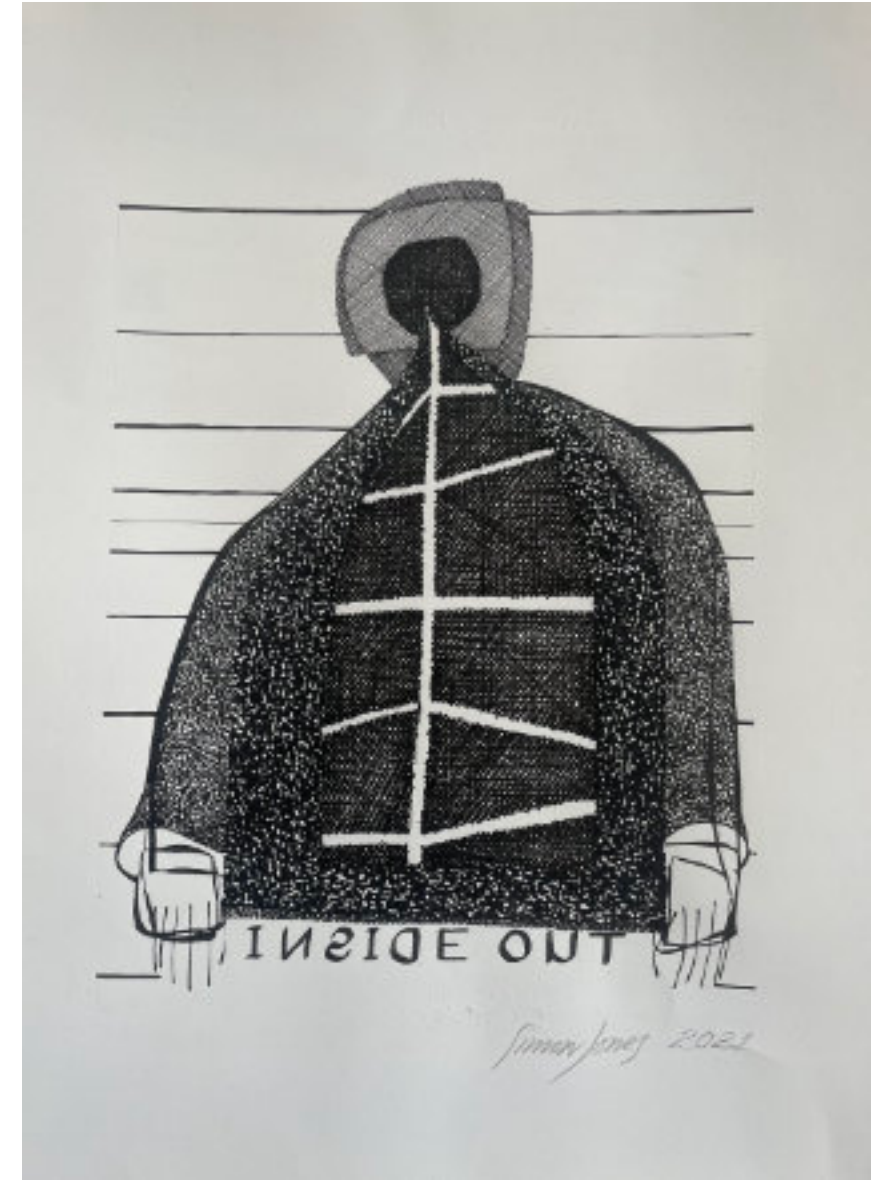
“Suffering from Covid.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2019

The focus became an increasingly self-centred and mundane.

The artworks are a contemplative exploration of mortality— not in a theatrical manner.



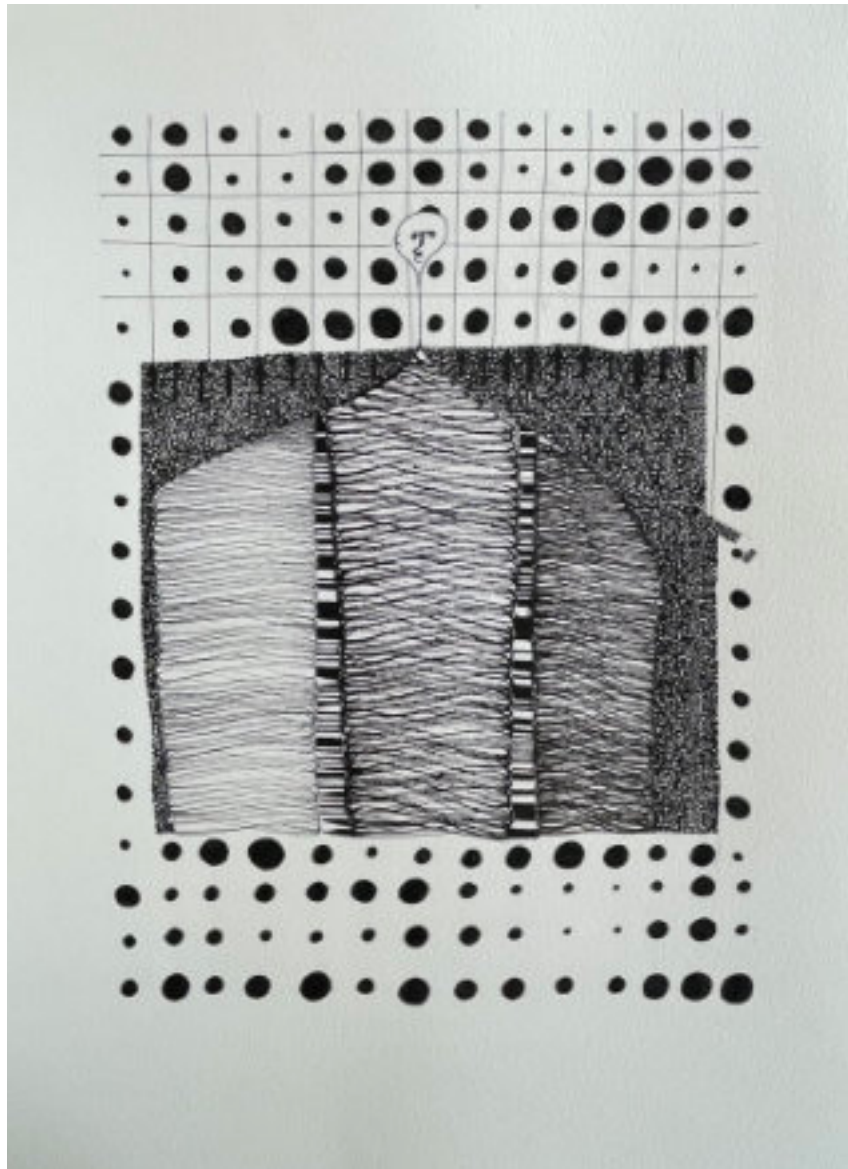
“Intransigence.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021



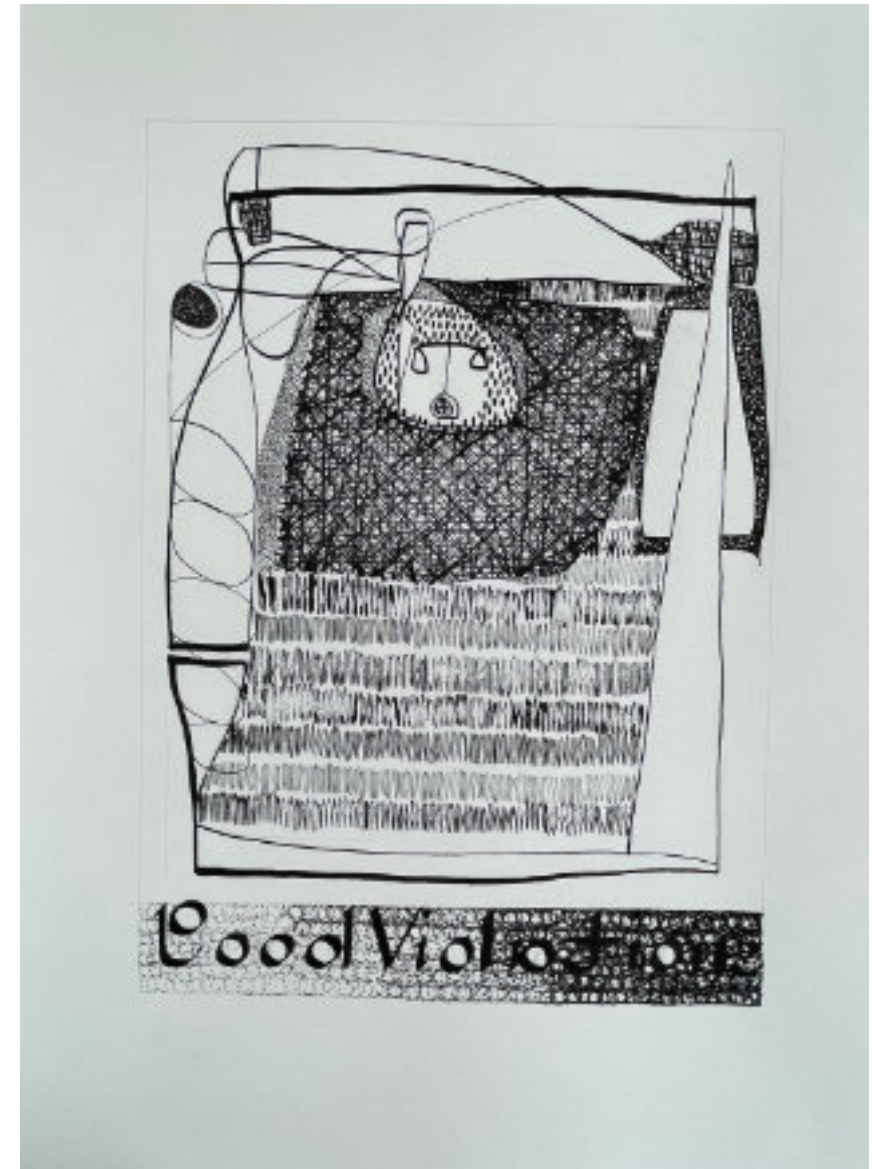
“Nuclear insights.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021

They are an examination of the inconsistencies and paradoxes surrounding the notion.

These pieces are visual reflections on the fleeting nature of life.



“Hero in our time.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022



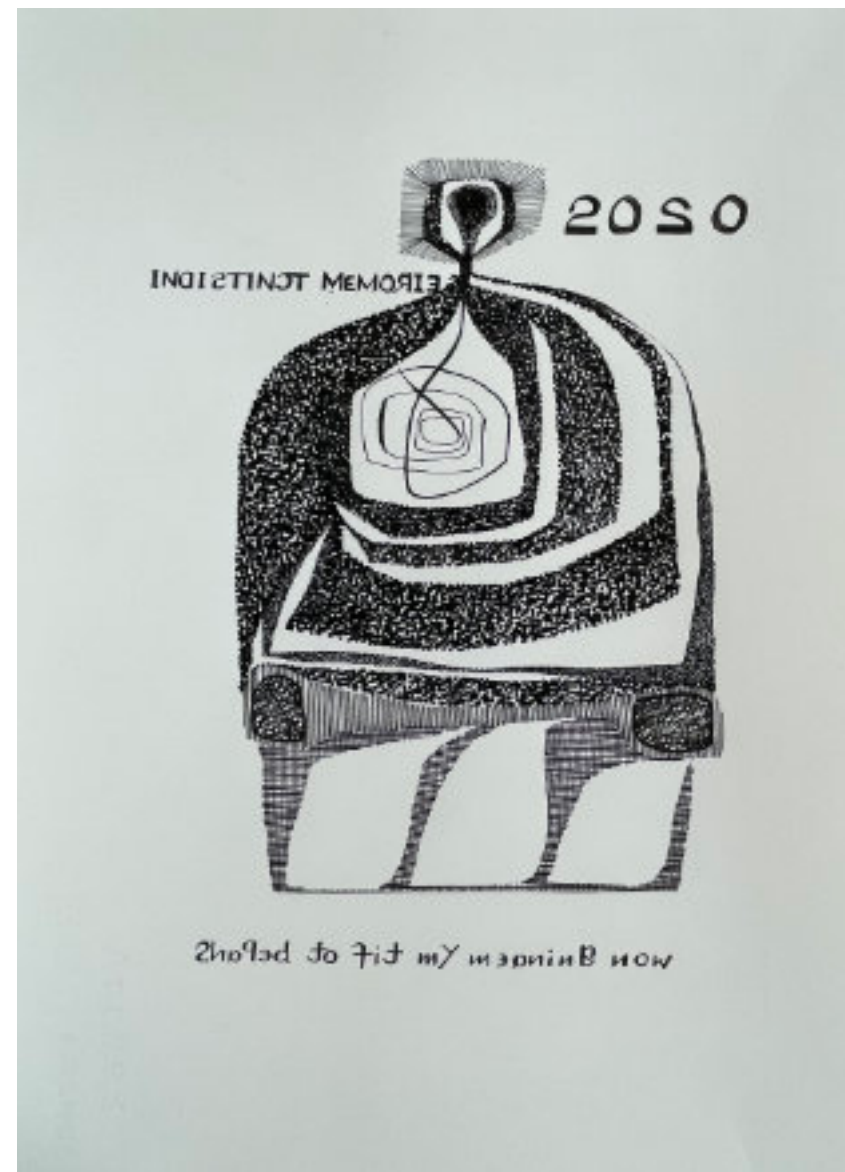
“The relativist.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2020

They invite deliberation around the delicate balance between mortality and immortality.

The show expresses hope by reframing the futile struggle to resolve the dichotomy between life and decay.



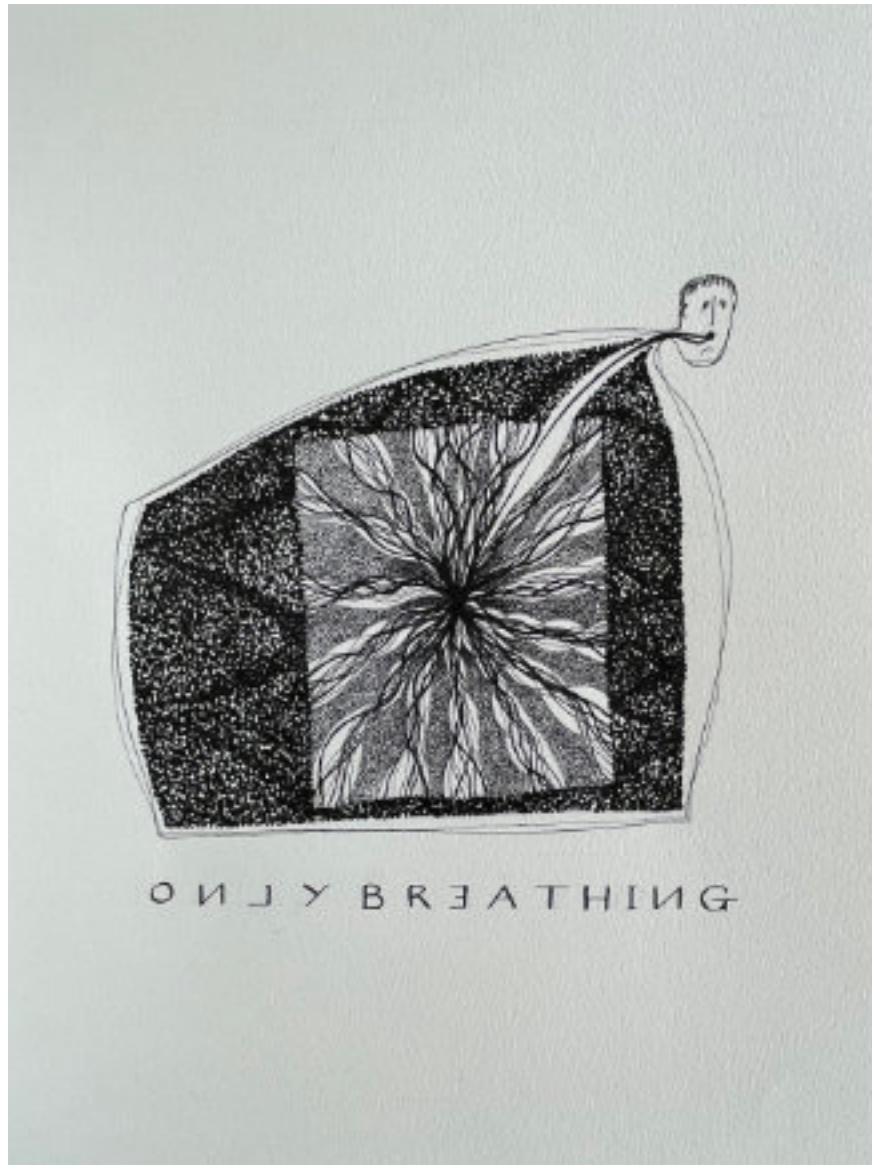
“Hard decisions.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022



“Looking forward.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2020

It reflects the harmony achieved by perceiving them as the intrinsic and cyclical rhythms of existence.

This is not novel – philosophical, religious, and spiritual traditions endeavour to unravel meaning.



“Simple pleasures.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2021



“Making sense of it.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022

They attempt to provide purpose in the cyclic rhythms of human experience.

This work is a deeply personal exploration stirred by these timeless concepts.



“Small breaths.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2020



“What's real.” Ink on watercolour paper (28x38 cm) 2022

Simon has painted for over 30 years and has lived in UK and Australia. He has shown in solo and group exhibitions and has work in private collections around the world. Simon studied fine art at John Moores University in Liverpool, graduating with a BA Honours and has a MA in Systems Thinking from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. He currently lives in London.



Exhibitions

- Gallery@oxo, London, UK, 2023
- Hove Street Art Gallery, Hove, UK 2022
- G11 Gallery, Oxo Towers, London, UK, 2016
- Trevisan International, Gallery De Marchi, Bologna, Italy, 2014
- Vienna Showcase Art Fair, Austria, 2013
- Broadway Gallery, New York City USA, 2013
- Menier Chocolate Factory Gallery, London UK, 2012
- Nolia's Gallery, London UK, 2009
- New Realms Gallery, Joint Exhibition, London UK, 2005
- Artefact Galleries Group Show, Melbourne Australia, 2000
- Wandsworth Community Arts Solo Exhibition, London UK, 1995
- Group Show, Calver and Pound Studio, London UK, 1992
- Group Show, Victoria Gallery, London UK, 1992
- Artists of Promise Auction at Bonhams, London UK, 1992
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- Threshers Open Exhibition, Liverpool UK, 1990

Paintings and prints are held in private collections in the UK, Portugal, New Zealand, Switzerland, USA, Australia and Mexico.



For more information please use QR or
visit www.simonjonesart.com

