

## The Parlour Paintings: A Series in the Making

Towards the end of 2019, Head painted “Shepherd’s Watch” which began a new series of works which he now calls “The Parlour Paintings”.

At 40” x 30”, the size of this painting may seem unremarkable. Head has occasionally made easel sized paintings throughout his long career, but he normally works on much larger canvases. Most of the works from 2018 and into 2019 were nearer seven feet in their shortest dimension.

The decision to adopt this particular format is rooted in Head’s own history. As a student, under the demanding tutelage of abstract expressionist, David Tinker, Head was encouraged to work on canvases of these dimensions. The 30” x 40” has come to signify a state of great struggle, learning and speculation, and now embodies for Head a very direct challenge. Head describes approaching a 30” x 40” as confronting the very question of whether he is able to make a painting at all.

We can know nothing of this when looking at these new paintings, except, for all their modesty of size, Head has clearly worked and re-worked these paintings extensively, pushing himself to resolve each as a unique figuration of personal experience. The series takes us across a vast array of literary and aesthetic histories. Rarely does Head cover the same ground twice.

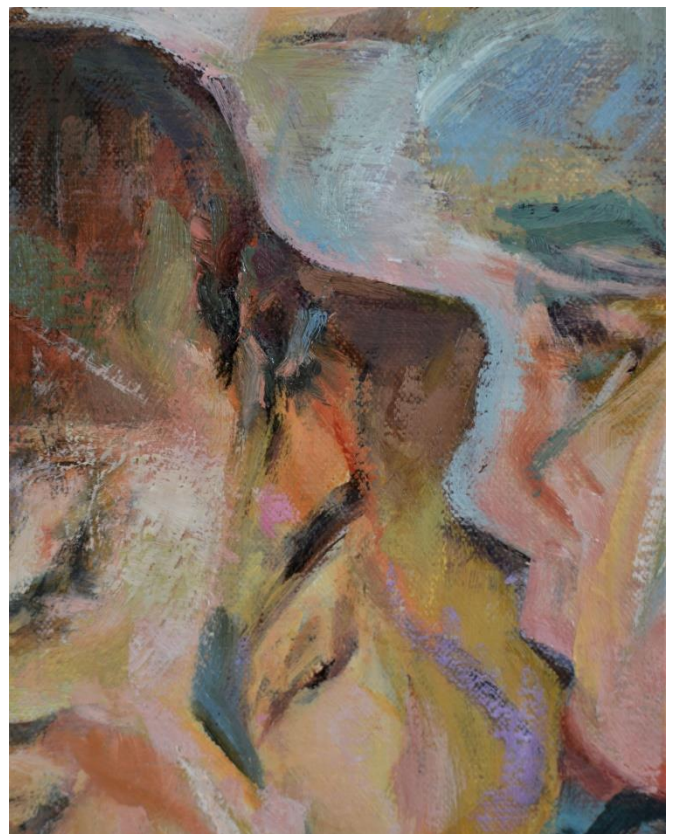
The series is on-going, and liberties have occasionally been taken with the format, but they are all of a size to hang comfortably in a domestic setting. Head’s works are the antithesis of so much visual culture in the modern world. They burn very slowly. They need to be lived with and returned to. They demand an interrogative dialogue with the viewer, not the casual glance invariably given to paintings hanging in a public space. They are rich and seductive in colour and paint handling but will only make sense, albeit of a transrational kind, through being part of our everyday surroundings.

Through an enduring and critical pursuit into the complexities of post-modern figuration, realism and photo-realism, Head has concluded that, for him, painting must resist being overtly complicit with the collective and mechanistic languages readily adopted for contemporary representation. Painting for him, and this is abundantly evident in looking closely at how these new paintings resolve space, form and time, must be a creative and not an emulative proposition. Only through being resistant to the conventions of photography, or the discipline of academic rendering, is it possible to discover a new way of painting which can reveal a multitude of discovered narratives and motifs, which in turn, dissolve and morph into some unexpected theme.

Head is now working on the sixteenth painting in this series; fourteen are reproduced here. Most of these paintings are in the studio racks and he is forever pulling one out, adding a new patch of colour or changing the value of a line. This process of relentlessly adding, refining, overpainting and changing is fitting with a practice that has become almost entirely additive.

“My process has changed so much over the decades. I used to bring a lot of materials into the studio to work from, to take from. There are boxes of thousands of photographs. But I took the decision that, for all the help this material can give me to show how things appear, it compromises my own vision, and it compromises how I want to figure what I see and have experienced. And I didn’t want paintings to be based on decisions about selecting from all this data, this or that thing to depict or reject. Ultimately, that’s a reductive process which puts art in the shadow of life. So, I began to work with and from the act of painting and drawing itself. In the studio that means working with a blank canvas and starting over, again and again and inventing something. They are figurative paintings, and I regard them as being realist because I couldn’t allow anything to stand which didn’t have that status of being authoritative and true, but they are also fictive, lyrical and surreal. Given all that they are attempting to be, and all that they are attempting to refute, their existence is right on the edge between success and failure”

Clive Head 2020



Detail, The Sirens of Hopper’s Crib





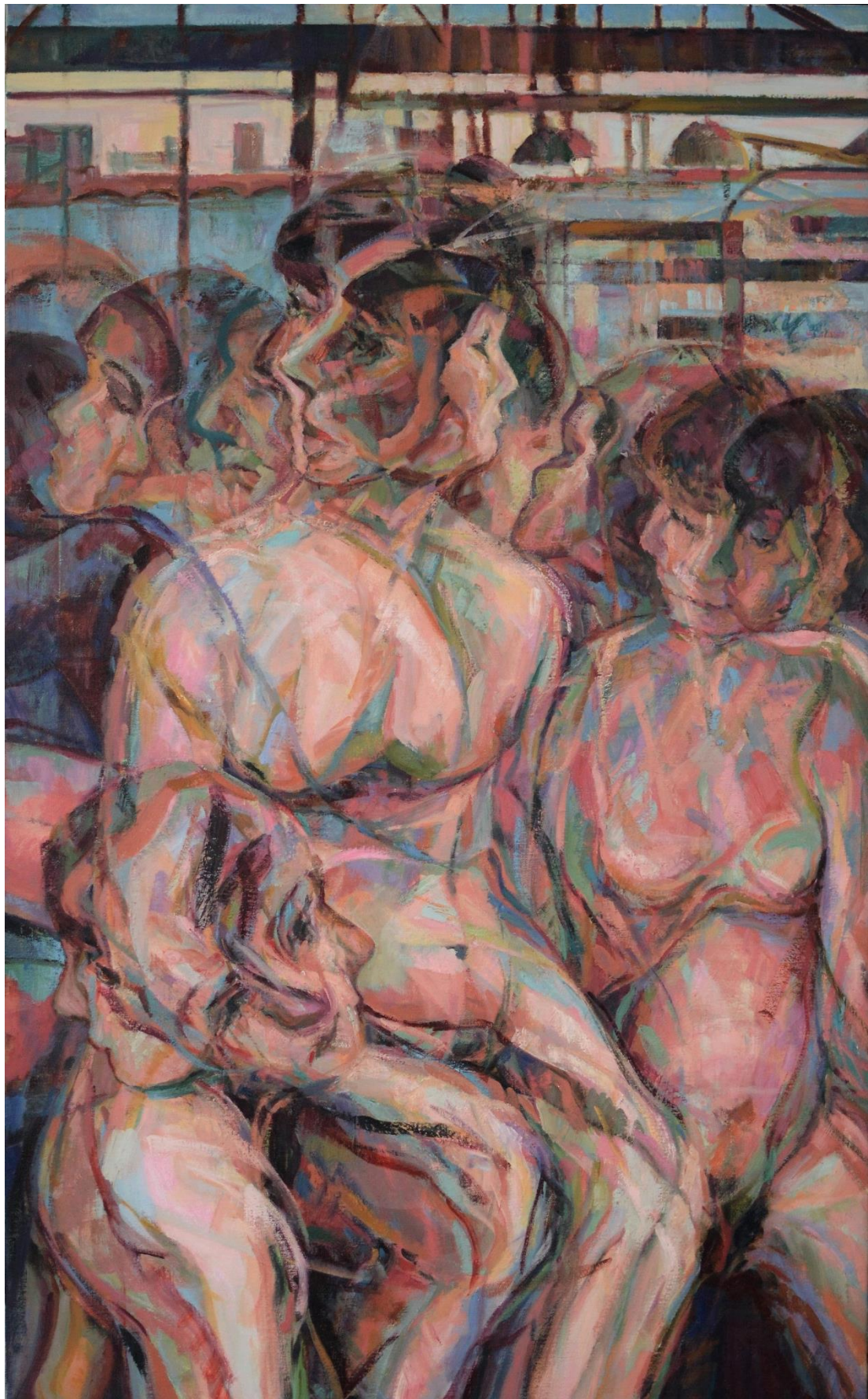
Shepherd's Watch 2019 oil on canvas 40" x 30"





Faulkner's Medicament 2020 oil on canvas 30" x 40"





Fountainhead 2020 oil on canvas 44" x 27"





The Protean Mistress 2020 oil on canvas 30" x 40"





Lover's Leap 2020 oil on canvas 33" x 42"





All the King's Horses 2020 oil on canvas 40" x 30"





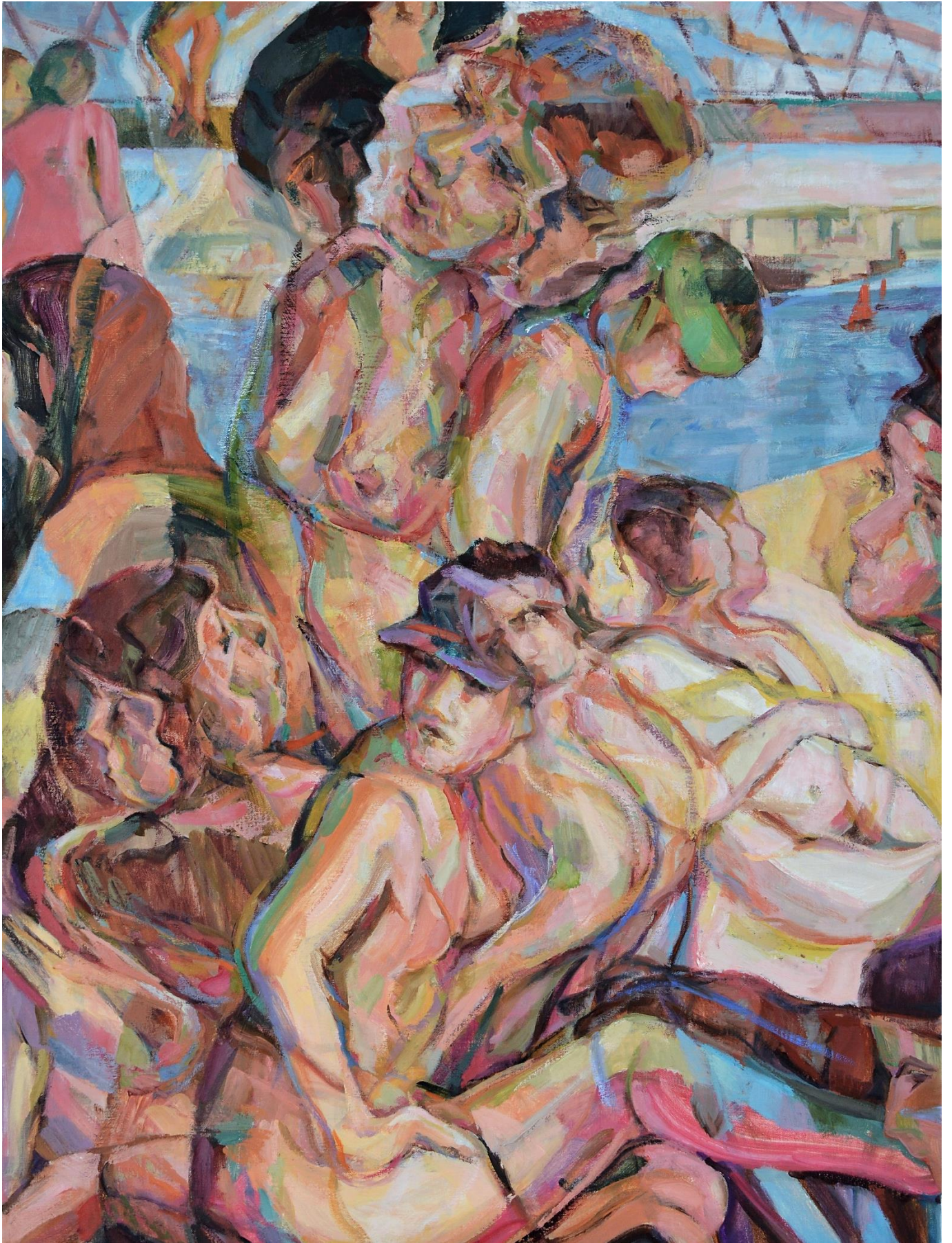
Postman's Knock 2020 oil on canvas 30" x 40"





The Sirens of Hopper's Crib 2020 oil on canvas 40" x 30"





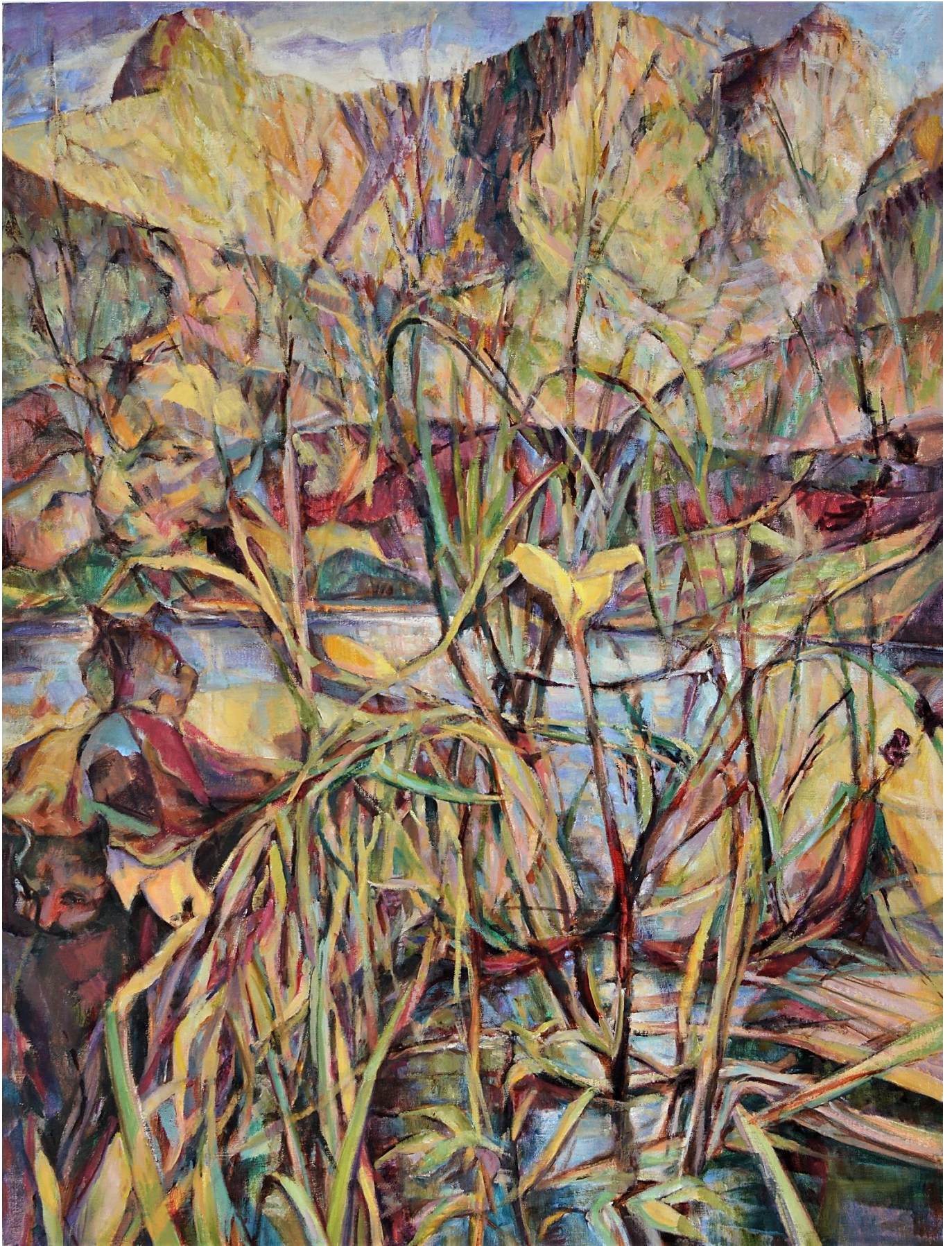
Shore Leave 2020 oil on canvas 40" x 30"





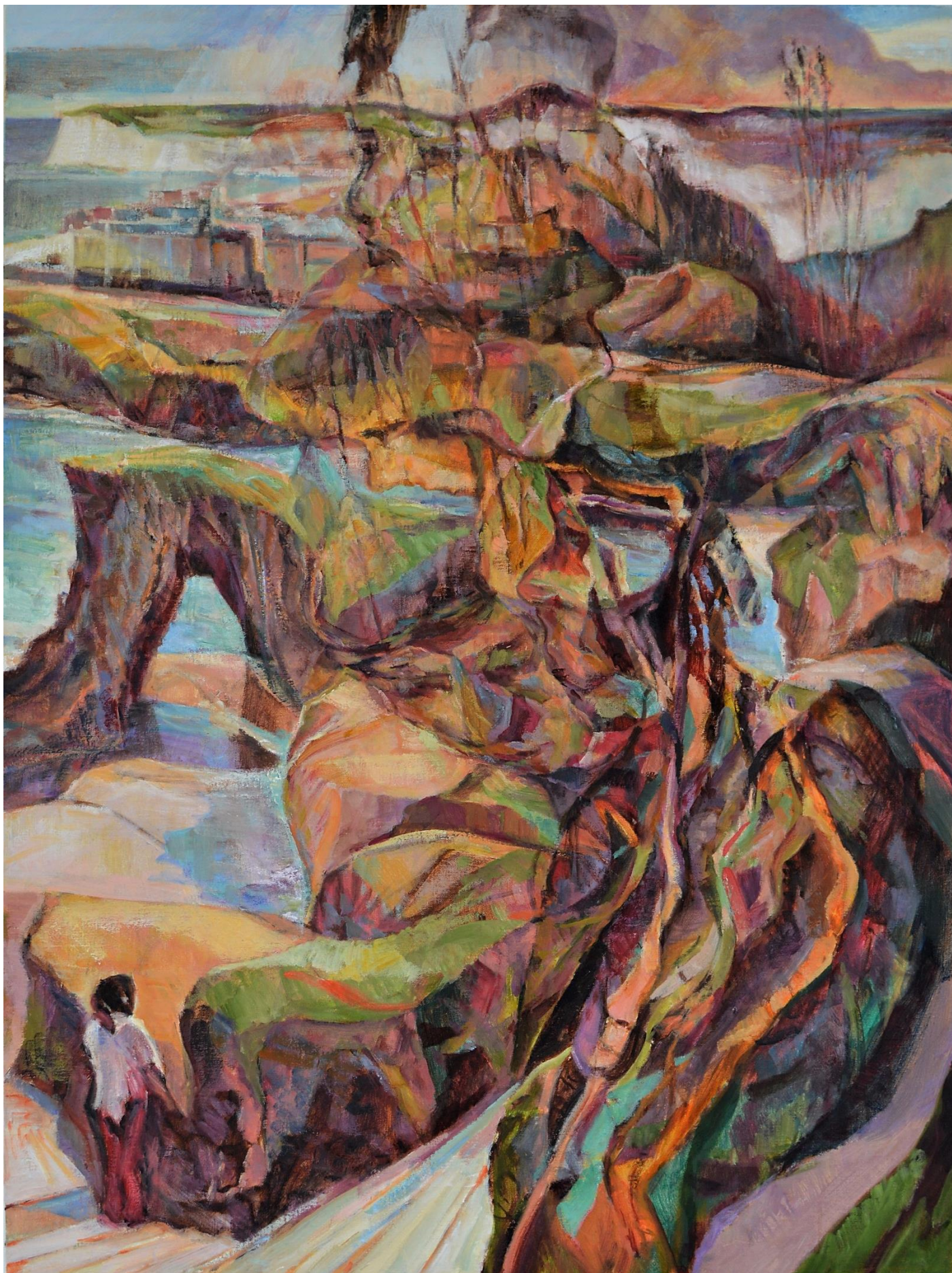
The Marchioness 2020 oil on canvas 47½" x 34¼"





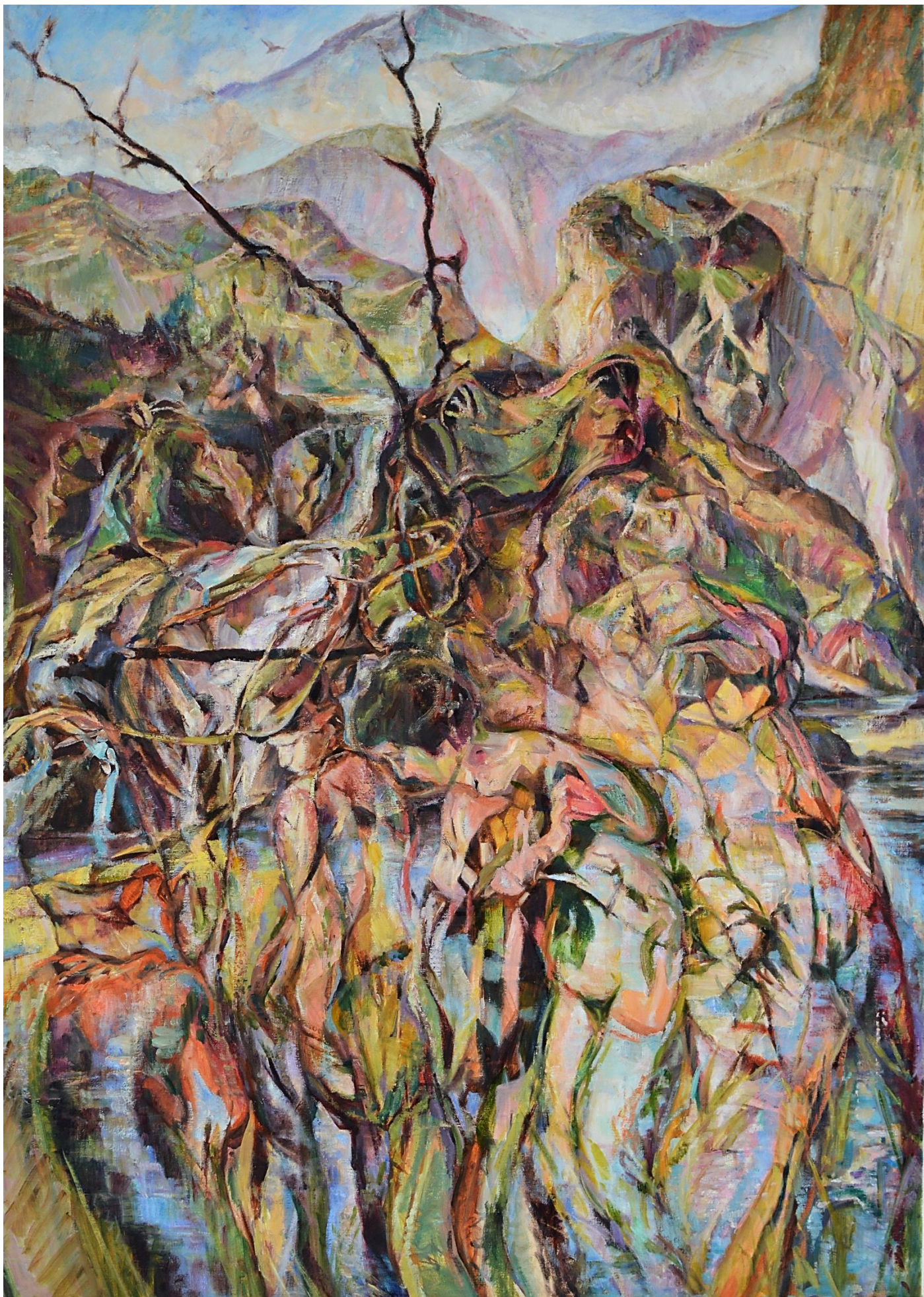
Hummingbird 2020 oil on canvas 40" x 30"





A Tall History of Sussex 2020 oil on canvas 40" x 30"





Playing Fields of Actaeon 2020 oil on canvas 50 ½" x 36"





Canute's Flatterers 2020 oil on canvas 39" x 30"