

Glass is very beautiful but also very fragile. As a result it is one of the richest symbols of mortality. It is associated with many compelling ambiguities. It reflects that which is on the outside but also contains. It reveals and conceals. In an instant it can be shattered, transforming it from a vessel of protection to sharp, dangerous fragments. I have used images of glass in several paintings such as "Glasshouse", "Immortals" and "Timers". The Egg Timer paintings are about time but also about the idea of the existence of a pre-life or after-life. In the paintings you can see the before and after, because both sections of the timer are visible. We cannot see existence from both sides, but that does not mean that there is no such existence. Birth and death are nothing other than the transition from one side of the timer to another. Once all the sand has fallen through the tiny gap the timer is turned over and the whole process can be repeated.

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Left: *Specimen*, oil on canvas, 15 x 15cm.
Right: *Specimen*, pencil, 30 x 40cm..



Glasshouse, oil on canvas, 192 x 400cm.



Immortal, oil on canvas, 192 x 385cm.



Time, oil on canvas, 192 x 430cm.

Images of ladders reflect human aspiration. They are about spiritual longing, but also about ambition and even greed. In one work many figures struggle to get to the top of their own ladders, it is a colossal effort. When a few eventually reach the top they look at one another in bewilderment, because none of them know what to do. In another work a massive field of figures watch as a few isolated individuals climb the few ladders in the field. When I painted this I had in mind the idea of celebrity, and the desires that feed the whole cult of celebrity.

when a few eventually reach the top they look at one another in bewilderment, because none of them know what to do



Left: *Ladders*, oil on canvas, 40 x 40cm.
Right: *Destination*, oil on canvas, 180 x 180cm.



Hierarchy, oil on canvas. 180 x 176cm.



Seer, oil on canvas, 90 x 90cm.

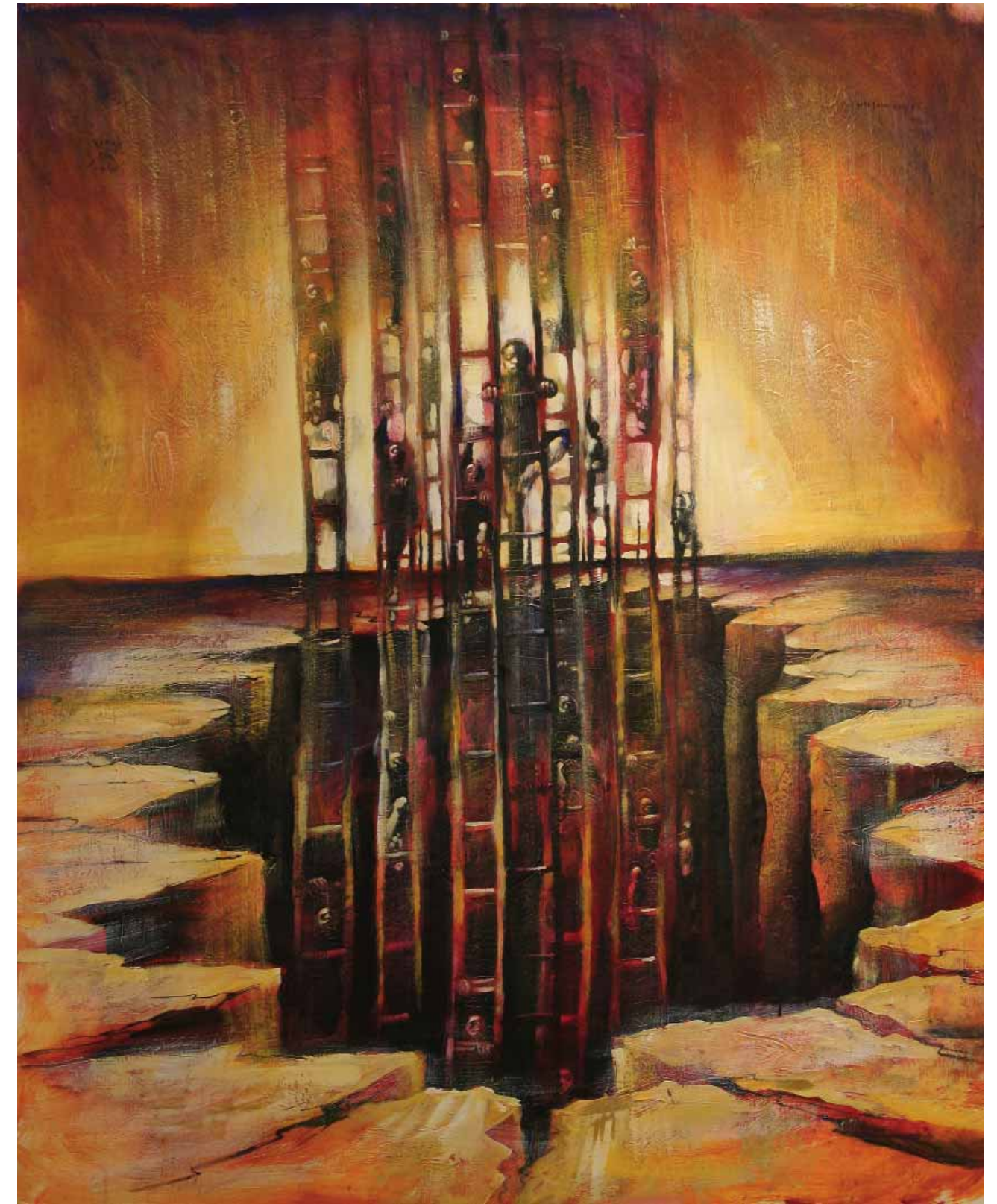


Celebrity, oil on canvas, 154 x 188cm.

ladders reflect human aspiration



Ex-Nihilo, oil on canvas, 170 x 180cm.



Ascent, oil on canvas, 185 x 156cm.

Every layer is a generation. The generations are laid out gently, lovingly, one above the other, pages in a book. The process continues forever. Once the final sheet is laid out I have the suspicion that the whole pile is turned upside-down and the oldest generations become the newest. The paintings of pyramids are about the passing of massive periods of time. But my pyramids are made up of layer upon layer of sheets. And each sheet represents a generation, beneath which a previous generation sleeps. In one picture there are dozens of these pyramids, and on the top of each on a single figure stands, looking across the valleys at other figures on the top of their pyramids. Each one is dwarfed by what he stands on, all the previous generations. But this is of course the reality of life. We are all small figures on our own pyramids that define us, looking across the valleys at one another.

every layer is a generation



Left: *Generation*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Right: *Generations (Veil)*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Generation 1, oil on canvas, 172 x 183cm.



Latest Generation, oil on canvas, 196 x 395cm.



Generation 2, oil on canvas, 182 x 186cm.



Generations 3, oil on canvas, 189 x 185cm.

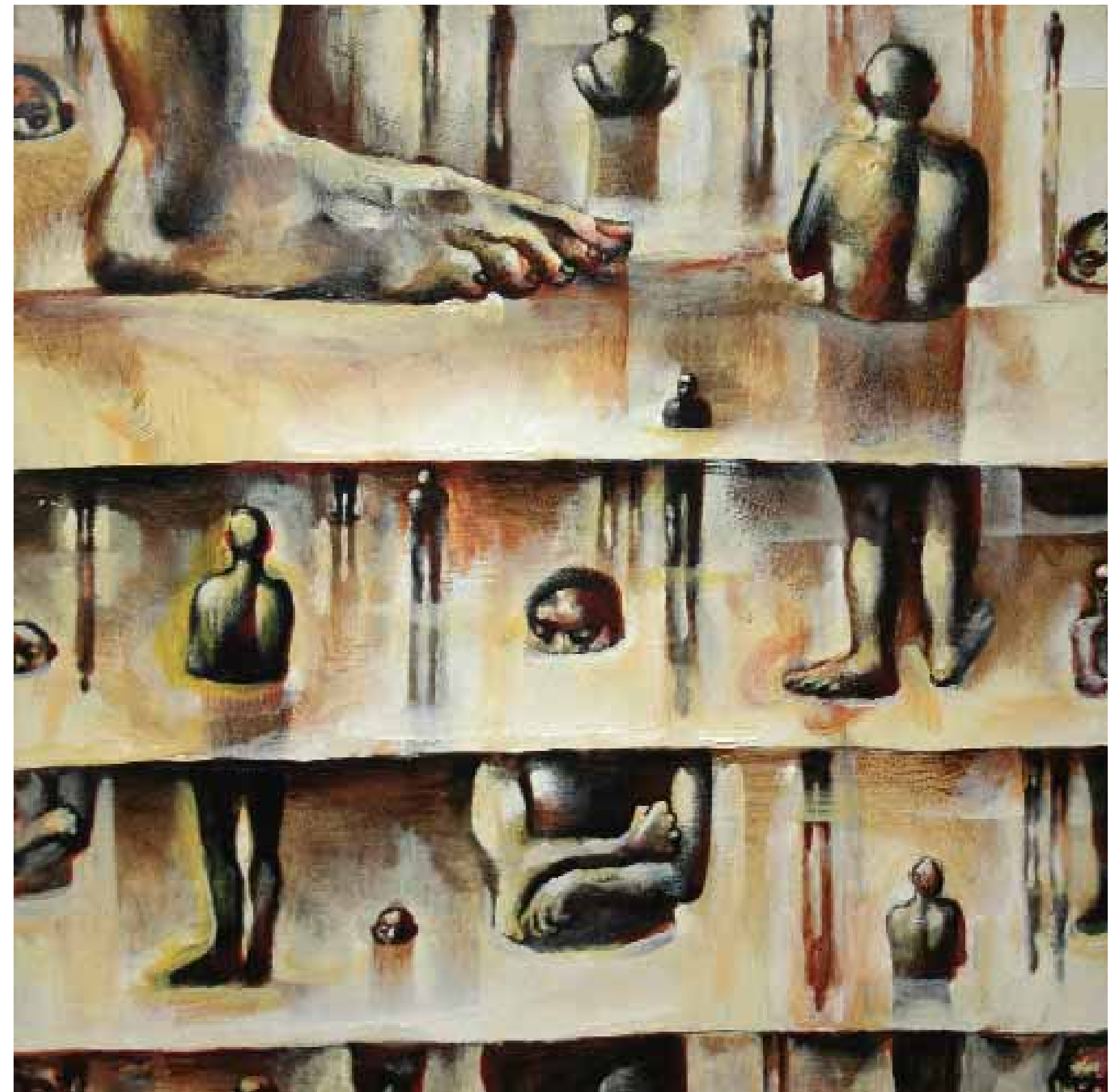
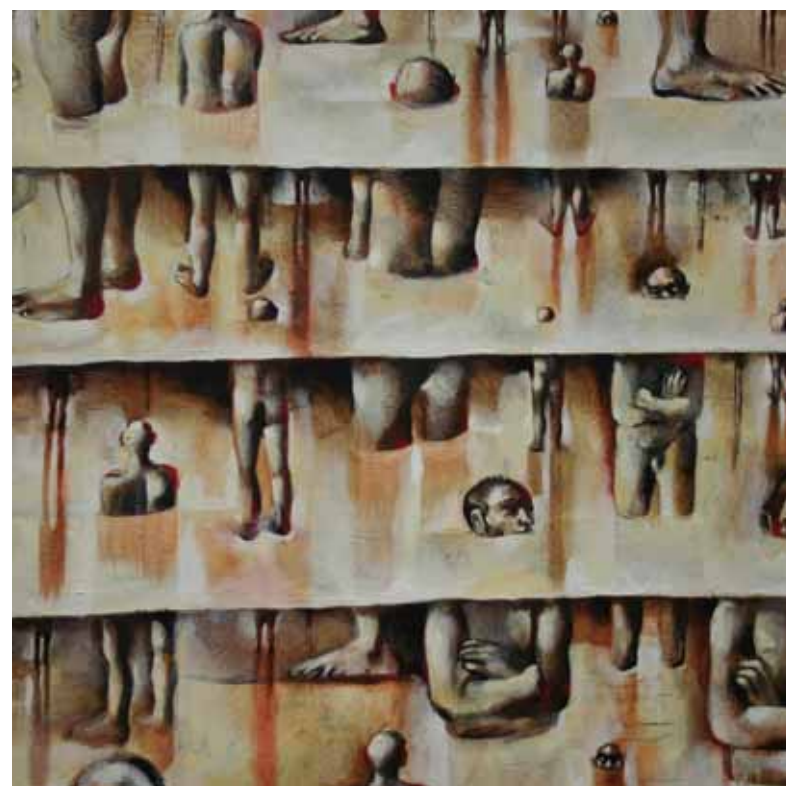


Contemporaries, oil on canvas, 192 x 436cm.

the process continues forever



Left: *Four Generations*, oil on canvas, 60 x 60cm.
Right: *Four Generations 1*, oil on canvas, 60 x 60cm.



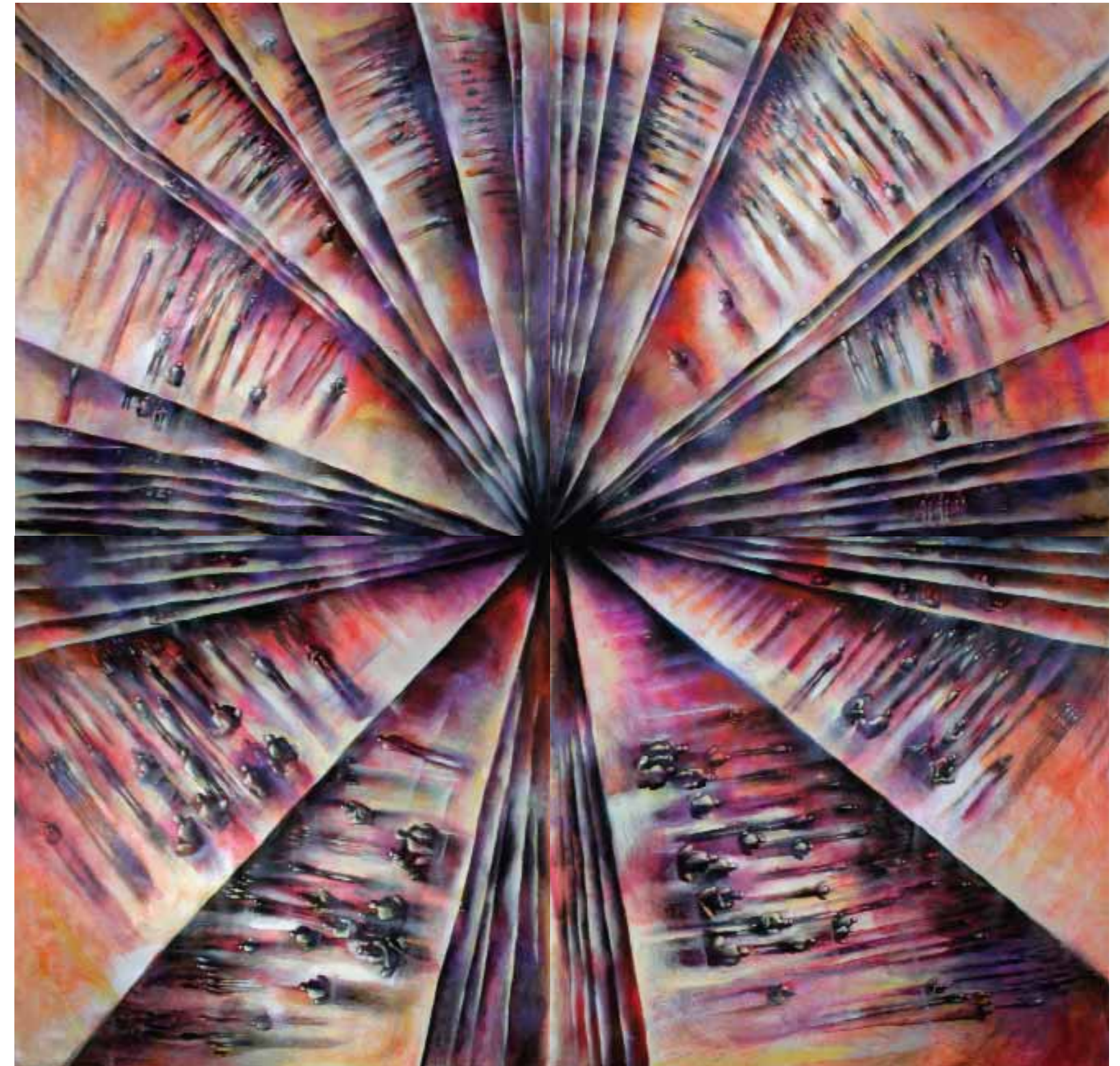
Four Generations 2, oil on canvas, 60 x 60cm.

I love the idea of Gilgul-reincarnation, coming back to life again and again, especially if we did not get it right the first time round. The Cubists tried to define reality by looking at physical space in three dimensions simultaneously. I have always wanted to present time in the same way, not moment by moment, but all at once. To show different epochs in time simultaneously-for example in the "Generations" paintings and in the "Gilgul" paintings. The word Gilgul literally means reincarnation, but it is also the word for rolling. These latter works are an attempt to view life from an outside perspective, to look at existence from beyond life. I want to create compositions that convey this higher reality, this sense of showing that life may just be a small link in a larger process. This metaphysical idea is clearly evident in the physical world. An image is like a note in a piece of music, sometimes the composition requires repeated notes in order to achieve the right pitch and to heighten the intensity of the piece. And of course life has a lot of repetition. Each day we look the same, with barely perceptible changes. But repetition is also a form of search. You may think that you have captured it the first time but whatever you do is never complete, so you have to try again and again. This relates the whole idea to the daily task of producing art.

life may just be a small link in a larger process



Left: *Bulbs 1 (Resurrection)*, pencil 40 x 30cm.
Right: *Bulbs 2 (Resurrection)*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Gilgul, oil on canvas in four panels, each panel 190 x 190cm.; overall 380 x 380cm.

The Generator is a painting I have never seen myself in its entirety because I painted it in eight separate sections over a period of two months from March to May 2004. Each section is around the size of one of the large Project panels (192 x 435cm). The motif of the Generator is a series of womb-like rolls unfurling one upon the other. To me these symbolise the endless process of birth and death. One roll releases its contents, human souls, into the light of day. They exist for a certain time and are then lovingly covered by the next scroll. At the very moment that the roll covers those in its path, it releases new souls from its other side. There is nothing macabre about this process of birth and death, on the contrary, it is beautiful in its inevitability. But it goes on relentlessly, there is nothing that we can do to stop it. In the process layer upon layer of covered souls build up, an archaeological strata. Each person is like a letter or word in a large ongoing script. I felt I had to express this concept on a massive scale because in one way it was my ultimate image, my attempt to express the truth. Furthermore, this composition can go on forever because the process goes on forever. The painting is an endless composition in terms of height as well as width, because the layers represent time. It was important to me that each of the panels should be a successful composition independently as well as a part of a larger whole. And this fits in with the theme of discrete periods of time, each of which is self-contained. The figures cannot see over the tops of the massive scrolls at the other incarnations. But that does not mean that they are not there.



Left: *Study for the Generator*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.
 Right: *Sleepers*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



One panel (bottom, second from right) of the Generator, oil on canvas, 192 x 435cm.



The Generator, oil on canvas in eight panels, each panel 192 x 435cm.; overall 384 x 1740cm.

Each person exists in his or her own small world either alone or in a small group. We are each the centre of our own world. There is no such thing as provincial space. Every place is the centre of the world. Wherever each of us chooses to lie down is the capital, even if it is the most remote place. Spiritually we are all floating boxes. The soul is a vulnerable and naked being inside this box. We put on different sides in order to meet different people or different situations. All these boxes float around, sometimes colliding with one another. The person still has its own inner space. In the large painting "Beginning and End" it looks as if the world might have exploded, but this explosion seems to make no difference, because groups of people sit on their own fragments of rock just as they did before, in small groups. This is a paradoxical image because it looks like it could be the beginning of creation, but also the end.

every place is the centre of the world



Left: *Soul*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm.
Right: *Collisions*, oil on canvas, 60 x 60cm.



My World, oil on canvas, 165 x 200cm.



Beginning and End, oil on canvas, 194 x 380cm.

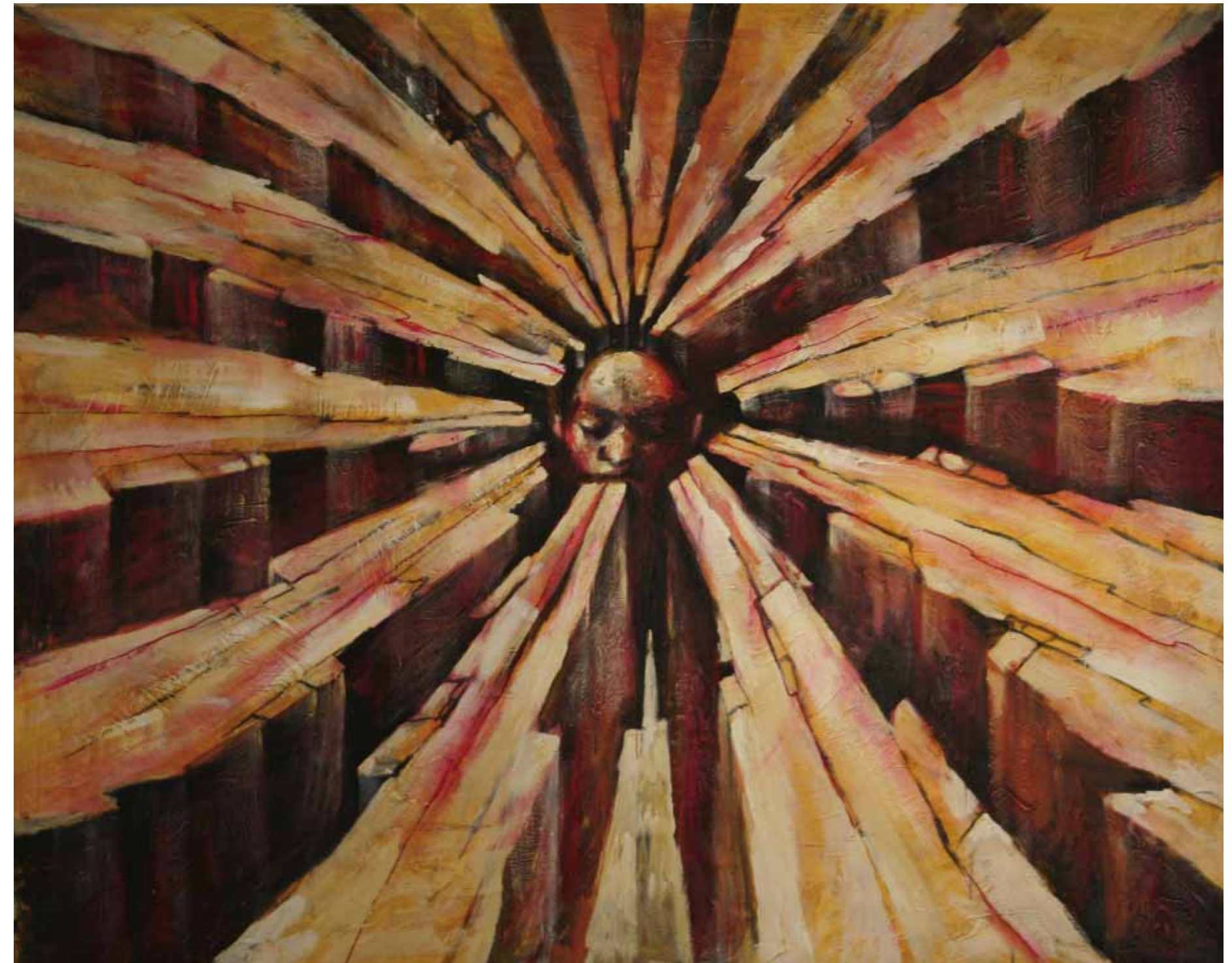
In Project 3 there are many images of cracked earth, of chasms or earthquakes. The earth has a special relationship with man. For me the earth is a metaphor for the human being, especially for the mind. It is a place where plants (and therefore thoughts, according to my system) grow. It can be starved, like a person. My images of starved lands, of droughts, are also images of humans starved of either physical or spiritual nourishment. There are also several pictures of holes or chasms in the ground. In one respect these are almost tragic-comic images of the "void". But these chasms also seem to me to represent the past, ancient history, recent history, prior generations and the like. In one image people emerge out of one of these chasms on ladders. This is a new generation sprouting into life. But it is also an image that connects three levels of reality: underground, ground and sky; past, present future, death, life and afterlife.

The massive diptych "Return" shows a landscape cracking into sections. Walking towards us through this landscape are thousands of people, souls returning back home after they had been sent away. A kind of resurrection. Many images are on the theme of brothers, they move apart but are tied to one another. In "Brothers" (2005-6), two similar figures are submerged in the ground. Only their heads are visible. They each create a massive and very powerful earthquake. They face one another, and the cracks in the land only meet at one point. This work is partly about the difficulty of communication, but also about the power of each and every different mind. It is related to a work in which just one figure inhabits the centre of the composition creating a tremendous earthquake that radiates outwards. I called it "The Philosopher", again reflecting the immense potential power of thought.

the immense potential power of thought



Study for Philosopher, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Philosopher, oil on canvas, 132 x 170cm.

There is an enormous amount boiling beneath the surface. When it explodes it astonishes everybody. Natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions are symbolic of both the human mind, which is primarily comprised of invisible, but extremely potent, living material and history. In history the pressure may build up over time before it explodes. My human lava is also about the act of painting. Because each painting, if you really need to do it, is a kind of eruption. Also, the paint is in flux, is molten initially and then it hardens. Only later can you assess the results of what has happened, which is also true of history and personal moments of crisis. One of the most characteristic aspects of the human condition is the inability to see what is about to happen, even if that happening is of tremendous importance and scale, as in my drawing of a massive wave that crops up whilst the man on the beach has his back turned to it. He hears nothing.



Left: *Eruption 1*, oil on canvas, 40 x 40cm.
Right: *Wave*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Eruption 2, oil on canvas, 195 x 380cm.



Heavy Rain, oil on canvas, 192 x 413cm.



Brothers, oil on canvas, 192 x 456cm.



Ancestors, oil on canvas, 192 x 322cm.



Writers, oil on canvas, 195 x 325cm.



Return, oil on canvas in two panels, each 192 x 456cm.; overall 192 x 912cm.

I set out to produce an iconography of modern life. I wanted simple, distilled images that encapsulated the trials and terrors of our time. Orwell said that if you want a picture of the future imagine a human boot on a face forever. I produced that image but also showed the boot being thrust off. The foot is one of the great icons of the last two generations because it shows domination, oppression. But that subject is also as old as time itself and domination of this kind is not only political, it takes place on every level of human relationships. The past century has been about domination of one kind or another. Shoes, to me, describe the character of a person. They are empty, impersonal, and filled with character. An empty shoe is the tragic image of our times, Van Gogh saw it fifty years before the storerooms of Birkenau. The shoe and the foot are, perhaps, the symbols of our troubled time. One is the victim, and one is the perpetrator. Another symbol of modern times is the tiny figure confronted by the huge figure. That is the image of Tiananmen Square, the student in front of the tank.

the foot is one of the great icons of the past two generations because it shows domination



Left: *Foot*, pencil, 56 x 76cm.
Right: *Family*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Revolution, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



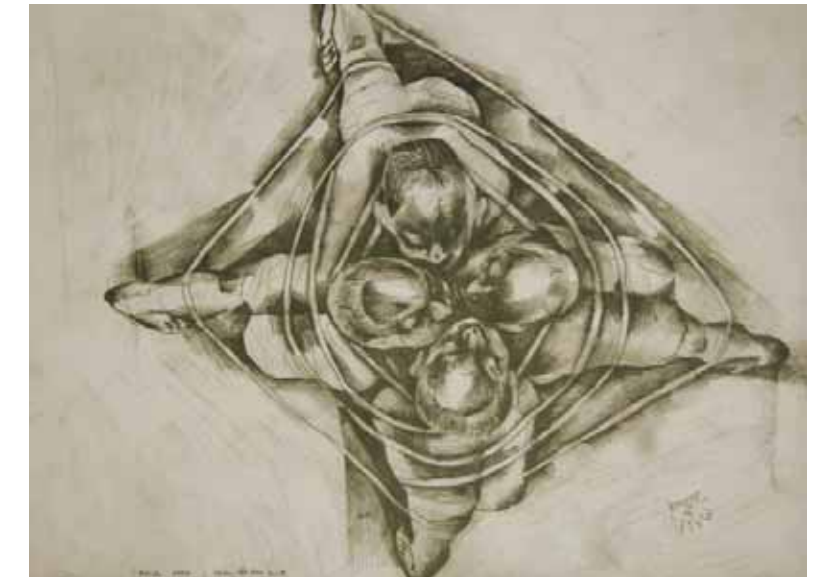
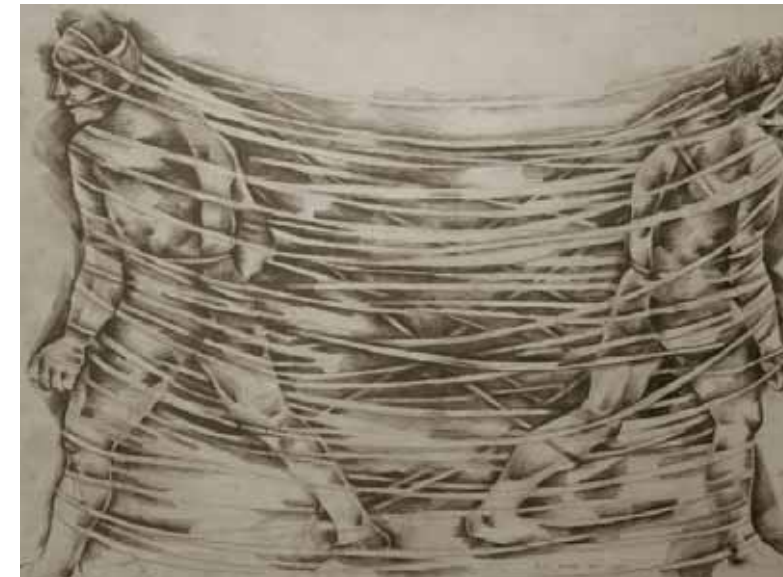
Worship 2, 190 x 275cm.



Worship 1, oil on canvas, 100 x 120cm.

Binding is the connection between the finite and the infinite. It contains and limits, but also delineates and gives something identity. It is both horrific and beautiful. The fathers and sons, sisters, mothers or brothers want to move apart but they are held together by a hundred different strands. Similarly people may want to come together but are held back by unseen forces. Successful communication is always a miracle against opposing forces. I have done a lot of works which feature figures bound together by straps. I was inspired by the phylacteries that I wear every day, which is a form of binding with God. In the large painting "Family" I present a large group of people bound together with strands. Each person is bound to the other in different ways and they are each connected in complex ways despite being separate. These "binding works" are about the possibility or rather impossibility of independence from others, especially family members. I want to make visible the ropes that are usually invisible but are nevertheless palpably present.

I want to make visible the ropes that are usually invisible



Left: *Siblings*, pencil, 60 x 80cm.
Right: *Siblings*, pencil, 60 x 80cm.

Top left: *Brothers*, pencil, 50 x 70cm. Top right: *Siblings*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.
Bottom left: *Boss*, pencil, 30 x 40cm. Bottom right: *Connection*, pencil, 30 x 40cm.



Family, oil on canvas, 192 x 340cm.

Biography

David Breuer-Weil was born in London in 1965. His father, born in Vienna in 1938, fled Vienna with his parents as a small child after the Anschluss. The family were lucky to have found visas into England at this late date. His mother was born in Copenhagen and left for England in the early 1960s. Her father had been killed by the Nazis besides Holte Lake (Furesoe) in 1944. This lake has provided the inspiration for several of Breuer-Weil's most beautiful landscapes. From an early age he was privy to discussions about the traumas of the earlier generation, and these were a clear influence on his artistic vision in later years. He had plenty of inspiration at home from his father, the successful sculptor, painter and jewellery designer who encouraged his talent from an early age. After winning a number of competitions, Breuer-Weil went to the Central Saint Martin's School of Art in 1985, where he studied under Shelley Faussett, one of Henry Moore's chief assistants. Later he went to Clare College, Cambridge University where he soon became involved with fringe theatrical and artistic groups. After Cambridge he was awarded a bursary at Sotheby's and he spent the next year training in different artistic departments and disciplines, starting with Old Master Paintings and ending in the Impressionist and Modern Art Department. In the Evening Standard, which featured one of his early large-scale paintings in 1991, he described Sotheby's as "the greatest art school in the world", and there is little doubt that the years he spent in direct physical contact with works by the masters of the past enhanced his knowledge of both technique and his own artistic direction. During this period he combined working for an auction house with his own artistic practise. Over the next few years he created a large body of small-scale "Neracian" works on paper, many of these were so small that they are stored in stamp albums. It was also during this period that he developed the personal iconography that would culminate in the Project some years later. Breuer-Weil had already conceived of the idea of painting the Project as early as 1989, but it took him several years to achieve this vision in reality, although around that time he painted a series of four or five monumental figural compositions which hinted at the works that would follow almost a decade later. These were exhibited at Sotheby's in 1991. However, the pressures of work soon made this early start on the Project an isolated burst of his monumental ambitions. From 1991 till 1994 he lived in Ramat Efal, Israel, and worked at Sotheby's in Tel-Aviv. Whilst in Israel he experimented with different styles, but the radiance of the light and local colours gave birth to a series of landscapes and abstractions that were painted in primary colours and were exhibited at the Engel Gallery in

Tel Aviv in 1993, 1994 and 1995. In 1994 he started using these colours in conjunction with the more personal figural imagery he had developed over many years in his small, stamp-sized works on paper-his Neracian works. During this period, from 1994-1995 he painted a large series of these brightly coloured works. But their cheerful colours masked the deeply serious imagery of many of these works, as Judith Glass, reviewing the artist's November 1994 exhibition at the Boundary Gallery in 1994 observed: "The titles may conjure up scenes of domestic charm, but this is a compendium of Freudian allegory and interpretation" (November 18, 1994). From 1995-6 he developed this imagery further in a series of brightly coloured oils. During this time he was dividing his time between Israel and London, and many of these pieces use the imagery of layers that become increasingly prevalent in later works. But here the layers seem to represent the aspect of living in two physical locations simultaneously. He started to exhibit a great deal both in London and Tel Aviv and had a number of successful one-person exhibitions at the Boundary Gallery in London and at the Engel Gallery in Tel Aviv. Collectors began to acquire his distinctive works internationally and his art often appeared in the press. Some of the paintings of this time such as "Bomb Head" are clearly political in the sense that they encapsulate some of the prevalent problems of the time, in this case the increase of terrorism.

In the summer of 1996 two important new developments took place. He was now working again in the Impressionist and Modern Art Department at Sotheby's New Bond Street. At the same time he started to plan the physical realisation of the Project. In the evenings he worked on massive canvases based on recent drawings. After executing seven or eight of these (which were never exhibited except for one, "The Staircase", (at Sotheby's in 1996) he reduced the scale, and worked on canvases measuring not more than two metres in length. These became the early works for Project 1. Some of these early attempts display the playful, even naïve charm of the 1994-6 gouaches. But by 1997 their colours and sense of gravitas became notably more intense, primarily under the influence of the remarkable new group of highly finished pencil drawings that he first embarked upon at the time. The period 1997-2001 marked the first intensive period of Project painting, and culminated in the exhibition Project 1 at the Roundhouse in Camden Town, an exhibition for which he was hailed by John Russell Taylor of the Times as a "colossal talent". In 1997 Breuer-Weil left Sotheby's, but his time working as an art expert was not over. He became a consultant expert for the Swiss Art dealership de Pury



David Breuer-Weil in the studio in front of Suburb 2, 2007

and Luxembourg Art . This new position allowed him far more time to pursue his own painting, and the results were immediately clear. The work became richer, more considered, and much more disturbing in content and tone. "Simon de Pury was very much into cutting edge contemporary art and as I was working with him I was exposed to new currents in art on a daily basis. I shared certain pre-occupations with some of the artists, notably Hirst, Gober and Tuymans. It seemed possible to make beautiful art out of an essentially damaged world-view, a world-view influenced by human history, mortality, even evil. But I did not want to do it in a throwaway or photographic manner. I wanted to produce art that encountered, absorbed and immortalised these themes through the more conventional medium of paint and visual symbol. But that is of course no easy task. I was also very, very critical of the way in which contemporary art often seemed to be reduced to the status of mere commodity. I expected and still do expect art to be a great deal more than that. It is a spiritual tool of the greatest power, not merely another kind of bond. In my own work I consciously eschewed the high polish, commercial, slick look of

much of the art of the era. I wanted to produce colossal, un-commercialized images of existential doubt. A lot of my work of that period was definitely painted as a violent response to that world (for example the 1999 drawing "Dealer", which depicts a head covered entirely in dollar notes). And I believe that my sense of opposition fed into the power of my work". In more recent years the museums have begun take a strong interest in Breuer-Weil's work, recognising the iconic and extremely relevant nature of much of his imagery. In 2005 he exhibited with Chris Ofili at "Closing the Door? Immigrants to Britain 1905-2005", a topical exhibition on immigration to Britain to mark the centenary of the Aliens Act that was held at the Jewish Museum, London, and in 2007 The Ben Uri Gallery, the London Jewish Museum of Art, which has often included works by Breuer-Weil in its mixed exhibitions, decided to devote this exhibition to his Project, recognising its uniqueness and significant contribution to the history of British and international figurative painting.



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